

Blasting Crocodiles with Gunpowder.

AN ADVENTURE IN INDIA.

The following novel sketch is taken from the journal of a British officer who was at the time stationed on the river Rohan, in one of the northwest provinces of India:

Just as the periodical rains were commencing, my neighbor, Mr. Hall, sent me word that he intended paying me a short visit, and requested me to send a "syce" (groom) with a saddle-horse, to meet him at a certain place on the road. The syce, Sidhoo, was a smart, open-chested, sinewy-limbed little fellow, a perfect model of a biped racer. He could run, as is the custom in the East, alongside his horse, at a pace of seven or eight miles an hour, for a length of time that would astonish the best English pedestrian I ever heard of.

Towards evening, Mr. Hall rode up to the bungalow, dripping with water and covered with mud. I saw at once that some accident had happened, and hastened to assist him. As soon as he got inside, he said, in answer to my bantering about his "spill"—

"I am in no humor for jesting. Your syce is lost."

"Drowned?"

"No: eaten—by an enormous crocodile!"

He added that, on arriving at a small nullah about two miles off, he found it so much swollen by rain, that he had to swim his horse across it, holding one end of the cord, which Sidhoo, in common with most Hindoos, wore coiled round his waist, and which was used in drawing water from the deep wells of the country. Hall got safely across, and then commenced pulling Sidhoo over by means of the cord. The black face, with the white teeth and turban, were bobbing above the muddy water, when all at once the groom threw up his arms, gave a loud shriek, and sank below the surface. Mr. Hall, who had doubled the cord round his hand, was dragged into the water, where he got a momentary glimpse of the serrated tail of a mugger, lashing the water a short way ahead of him. In his efforts to save himself, he lost his hold of the string, and with much difficulty clambered up the slippery bank of the nullah. All was now still. Only Sidhoo's turban was to be seen floating loosely a considerable way down the stream. Hall ran towards it, with the sort of feeling which makes a drowning man catch at a straw; and, by means of a stick, he succeeded in fishing it out, and brought it with him, as the only remnant of Sidhoo he could give an account of. Bad news soon spreads in an Indian village, and Sidhoo's fate was soon made known to his wife; and in a short time she came crying and sobbing to the bungalow, and laid her youngest child at our friend's feet. The tears glistened in the poor fellow's eyes as he tried to soothe and console her; which he did by promising to provide for her and her children.

Although Hall was generally overrunning with fun, we smoked our cheroots that evening in silence—except when we proposed schemes for the annihilation of the crocodiles. A great many plans were discussed—but none that offered much chance of success. The next day, after breakfast, I was showing my visitor a galvanic blasting apparatus, lately received from England, for blowing up the snags (stumps of trees) which obstruct the navigation of the river. I was explaining its mode of action to him, when he suddenly interrupted me with—

"The very thing! Instead of snags why not blow up the muggers?"

I confessed that there could be no reason why we should not blast the muggers. The difficulty was only how to manage it; yet the more we talked of it, the more feasible did the scheme appear to be. The brutes keep pretty constant to the same quarters, when the fish are plentiful; and we soon ascertained that poor Sidhoo's murderer was well known in the neighborhood of the nullah. He had on several occasions carried off goats, sheep, pigs, and children, and had once attempted to drag a buffalo, which he had caught drinking, into the water; but, from all accounts, came off second best in this rencontre. There not being enough of water in the nullah to drown the buffalo, the mugger soon found that he had caught a Tartar; and after being well mauled by the buffalo's horns, he was fain to scuttle off and hide himself among the mud.

I had observed, when blasting the snags, that the concussion produced by the discharge had the effect of killing all the fish within a range of some twenty or thirty yards. After every explosion, they were found in great numbers, floating on the surface of the water with their bellies uppermost.

It now occurred to me, that if we could only get within a moderate distance of the mugger, if we did not blow him to pieces, we would at all events give him a shock that would rather astonish him. An explosion of gunpowder under water communicates a much severer shock to the objects in its immediate vicinity, than the same quantity of powder exploded in the air—the greater density of the water enabling it, as it were, to give a harder blow.

Having made our arrangements, Mr. Hall, my brother and myself got into a small canoe, with the blasting apparatus on board, and dropped down the stream to where the nullah discharged its waters into the Rohan. We then got out and proceeded to a village close by, where we obtained, for a few annas, the carcass of a young kid. A flask with about six pounds of gunpowder, and having the conducting wires attached, was then sewn into the kid's belly. Two strong ropes were also tied to this bait; and, to one of these the conducting wire was firmly bound with small cord. The ropes were about thirty yards long, and had each attached to its extremities one of the inflated goat skins used by water carriers. Hall, with his goat-skin under his arm, and a coil of loose rope in his hand, took one side of the

nullah, while my brother, similarly provided, took the other. My brother's rope contained the wire: so I walked beside him with two coolies, with the battery ready charged, and slung to a pole which rested on their shoulders, accompanied me. A small float was also attached by a string to the kid, so as to indicate its position.

These arrangements being made, we commenced walking up the nullah, dragging the carcass of the kid in the stream, and moving it across from side to side, so as to leave no part of the bed untried; and as the nullah was only about twelve yards wide, we felt pretty confident that if the mugger were in it, we could scarcely fail of coming in contact with him.

We had proceeded only about a quarter of a mile, when the float suddenly dipped. My brother and Hall threw the loose coil of ropes they carried on the water, along with the inflated skins. These made it soon evident by their motion that the mugger had seized the kid. He was dashing across in a zigzag direction down the stream. I ran after him as fast as I could, and paying out cord from the reel when I found it impossible to keep up with him.

On reaching a place where the banks were steeper than usual, he came to a stand-still. Presently my brother came along, and brought the battery to my feet; a good deal of the acid had been spilled, but with the aid of a bottle of fresh acid we had brought along with us we soon got the battery up to the requisite power.

Everything being now in order, I commenced pulling up the rope with the wire. I proceeded as cautiously as possible, for fear of disturbing the mugger; but, in spite of all my efforts, the inflated skin, in coming up the bank, dislodged some loose pieces of earth, and sent them splashing into the water.

Fortunately, however, the mugger had made up his mind to digest the kid where he was. I could not help chuckling when I at length got hold of the end of the wires. While my brother was fastening one of them to the battery, I got the other ready for completing the circuit; the mugger all the while lying still at the bottom of the nullah, with, most likely, a couple of fathoms of water over his head, unconscious of danger, and little dreaming that the two-legged creatures on the bank had got a nerve communicating with his stomach, through which they were going to send a flash of lightning, that would shatter his scaly husk to pieces.

Everything being now ready, I made the fatal contact. Our success was complete. We felt a shock, as if something had fallen down the bank—a mound of muddy water rose, with a muffled, rumbling sound, and then burst out to a column of dark smoke. A splashing and bubbling succeeded, and then a great crimson patch floated on the water, like a variegated carpet pattern.

Strange-looking fragments of scaly skin were picked up by the natives from the water's edge, and brought to us amidst a very general rejoicing. The exploded mugger floated down the stream, and the current soon carried it out of sight. We were not at all sorry, for it looked such a horrible mess that we felt no desire to examine it.

Our sense of triumphant satisfaction was, however, sadly damped about a week afterwards, when we received the mortifying announcement that Sidhoo's mugger was still alive, and on his old beat, apparently uninjured. It was evident that we had blasted the wrong mugger! We consoled ourselves with the reflection that if we were not Sidhoo's murderer, it was very likely he was not wholly innocent of other atrocities, and therefore deserved his fate.

Of course it was impossible to rest while Sidhoo's mugger remained alive, so we were not long in preparing for a second expedition. This time we took the precaution of not charging the battery until we were certain that the bait was swallowed. The acid, diluted to the necessary strength, was therefore carried in one of those brown earthenware jars called graybeards, which had come out to us full of Glenlivet whisky. We commenced dragging the kid up the stream as before; but, having walked more than a mile without getting a bite, were getting rather disheartened, and sat down to rest, struck a light, and smoked a charoot. Hall lay down, having manufactured an impromptu easy-chair out of his coil of rope, with the inflated goatskin placed above it. My brother was not long in imitating his example, and I lay down under the shade of some reeds, near the water's edge. The heat was oppressive—and we were discussing the probability of getting a bite that day, and lamenting that we had not brought some pale ale along with us—when, all at once, I got a sharp blow on the leg, while my brother came spinning down the bank like a teetotum—a companion picture to Hall, who was revolving down the opposite bank. The ropes and skins went rushing down the nullah at a tremendous pace. As soon as we recovered from the laughter into which we were thrown by this droll scene, we set off in pursuit, guided by the track which the inflated skins made in the water.

Leaving my brother with the coolies in charge of the battery, I ran on to where the bank was more shelving. I had not waited many minutes before the skins came floating round the corner, to where I was standing. I seized the one to which the wire was attached, desiring my brother to charge the battery, and bring it down. This he did much sooner than I could have expected, for as the battery was empty, one coolie was able to carry it upon his head, while my brother took the jar of acid in his hand. As no time was to be lost, I made the connection with the battery with one of the wires. In an instant the circuit was complete, and the mugger's doom sealed.

There was a momentary pause—owing, I suppose, to some slight loss of insulation in the wires—then came the premonitory shock; then the rumble, the smoke, and the sparks, and a great bloated mass of flesh and blood rose to the surface of the water. Hall called out to us to drag it ashore, and see whether we could get any

trace of poor Sidhoo. We tried by means of a bamboo pole to pull it to the bank, but the glimpse we got of it as it neared was so unutterably disgusting that we pushed it off again, and allowed it to float away with the current.

[Agricultural Division of the Patent Office.]

MODE OF EXTRACTING TALLOW FROM THE TALLOW TREE.—A few days ago a gentleman residing in Texas, addressed the commissioner of patents in regard to the tallow tree, and desired to be furnished with the best mode of extracting the tallow. We copy the method recommended by this office:—

"The seeds of the tallow tree (*Stillingia sebifera*) are picked in China at the commencement of the cold weather, in November and December, when all the leaves have fallen. The seeds are, in the first place, taken to the building where the process of making the tallow is carried on, and picked and separated from the stalks. They are then put into a wooden cylinder, open at the top, but with a perforated bottom. This is placed over an iron vessel (about the same diameter, or rather larger than the wooden cylinder, and about six or eight inches deep) containing water, by which means the seeds are well steamed, for the purpose of softening the tallow, and causing it more readily to separate. The furnace has four or five iron vessels in a row, about three feet high, four or five feet broad, and eight or ten feet long. The fire is placed at one end and fed with the husks of the rice, dry grass, and such like cheap materials, which make a great flame, and the flue is of course carried directly under the whole of the iron vessels.

"When the seeds have steamed ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, they are thrown into a large stone mortar, and are gently beaten by two men with stone mallets for the purpose of detaching the tallow from the other parts of the seed. They are then thrown upon a sieve, heated over the fire, and heated, by which process the tallow is separated, or nearly so, although they generally undergo the process of steaming, &c., a second time, that nothing may be lost. The other part of the seed is ground and pressed for oil.

The tallow now resembles coarse linseed meal, but with more white spots in it, and derives its brown color from the thin covering over the seed (between it and the tallow) which is separated by the pounding and sitting. In this state it is put between circles of twisted straw, five or six of which are laid upon each other, and thus forming a hollow cylinder for its reception. When this straw cylinder has been filled, it is carried away and laid in the press, which is a very rude and simple contrivance, but which, like everything Chinese, answers the purpose remarkably well. The press consists of longitudinal beams of considerable thickness, placed about a foot and a half or two feet asunder, with a thick plank at the bottom, forming a kind of trough, and the whole is bound together with iron. The tallow is pressed out by means of wedges, driven in very tightly with stone mallets, and passes through a hole in the bottom of the press into a tub, which is sunk there to receive it.

It is now freed from all impurities, and is a semi-fluid of a beautiful white color, but soon gets solid, and in cold weather is very brittle. The inside of the tubs which collect the tallow is sprinkled or dusted over with a fine red earth, well dried, which prevents the tallow from adhering to their sides. It is thus easily removed in a solid state from the tubs, and in this condition the cakes are exposed for sale in the market. As the candles made from this vegetable tallow have a tendency to get soft and melt in hot weather, they are commonly dipped in wax of various colors, as red, green, and yellow. Those which are intended for religious purposes are generally very large, and finely ornamented with golden characters.

The cake, or refuse, which remains after the tallow has been pressed out of it, is used for fuel, or to manure the land, and so is the seed from the other part of the seeds from which oil is extracted."

It may be remarked that this tree has been cultivated in South Carolina for more than a hundred years, and appears well adapted to the climate.—[Ex.]

USES OF THE TURPENTINE TREE.—The State of North Carolina contains upward of two million acres of wild swampy land, which is covered principally by a heavy growth of rich pine timber. The trees are generally of great size, and extend in unbroken forests for miles and miles. These forests are more valuable to the State than all its mines of golden ore, for they produce immense quantities of tar, turpentine and resin. The juice of these trees is produced and manufactured in this wise:—

A cavity is cut in the trunk of the tree near the ground capable of holding about three pints. Above this, in various places, incisions are made in the tree, and a shallow groove is cut in the bark leading from every incision to the hole, so that all the sap escaping from the wounds will flow directly down to the reservoir designated for its reception. The process of chipping is repeated every week or two, to give a fresh surface from which the juice exudes, until after a few years the trees are blazed on every side to a height of ten or twelve feet.

Large forests of dead trees are constantly seen standing, tall and erect, without branch or bark, resembling a large ship yard filled with tall, dismantled masts. Into the boxes near the ground the juice—a crude turpentine—begins to flow about the middle of March, slowly at first, but more rapidly as the warm season advances, and slowly again in autumn, until it ceases altogether in winter.

The liquid, about the consistence of honey, as it flows, is removed from the excavations as they are filled, and transferred to barrels, where it becomes a soft solid. The average yield of these

trees is about five gallons each a year. A barrel of this sap usually contains seventeen per cent. of oil or spirits of turpentine, and this is distilled from it by means of a rude distilling apparatus, consisting of a large iron retort, capable of containing two or more barrels. The turpentine is placed in the retort, the oil driven off by process of distillation, and stored away, and resin is left as the residuum.

But the use of the pine tree does not cease with its life. In the trees of the long-leaved pine the resinous matter becomes concentrated in the interior layers of the wood when its vegetation ceases. This dead wood—known in the south as light wood—is then selected for the manufacture of tar. The tree is cut into billets of convenient size which are placed together in a pile and covered with earth, in much the same manner that wood is placed in a charcoal kiln. The stock of wood is built however upon a mound of earth prepared for the purpose, a summit of which declines from the circumference to the center where a cavity is formed connected by a little canal with a ditch which surrounds the mound. After the pile is ready to be ignited, fire is placed in the centre of the top, and a slow combustion maintained until all the resinous matter is melted, running into the central cavity, and from that into the outer ditch, where it is collected—the tar of commerce—and placed in barrels for exportation.

RATTLESNAKE DENS IN OHIO.—On the Scioto river, near Columbus, Ohio, are the celebrated rattlesnake dens, which in the early times were a terror to the neighborhood. These dens were openings in the face of the rock cliff; one was large enough to admit a man in a stooping posture. Here not only the rattlesnake, but many other species resorted for winter quarters in great numbers; and the entrance floor of one of these openings was not only worn smooth, but was quite polished by the gliding in and out of these venomous reptiles.

A correspondent of the Cincinnati Gazette says:—

"I have heard my father say that while engaged in surveying, he had occasion to ascend the river with his party, which they did in two canoes, about the middle of April; it was a warm day with a gentle breeze blowing down the river. When about half a mile below this locality, they were assailed by a most peculiar odor, which as they proceeded increased to so intolerable a degree, that two of the men were taken violently ill, and were obliged to lie down in the bottom of the canoe.

Soon the cause became apparent, for on arriving opposite to these dens, thousands of snakes were seen covering the banks in all directions, and basking in the sun. A pair of bald eagles built their nest in the top of an old cedar tree crowning the over-hanging cliff, and preyed upon these reptiles. The hog is believed to be invulnerable to the bite of the rattlesnake, and in the fall a pen was built around the entrance of these dens, and the hogs confined there intercepted the return of the snakes to their winter quarters, and destroyed great numbers of them.

One hard winter, when the snakes had retired to the inner recesses of their retreat, or were torpid with the cold, an attempt was made to break up this resort; a quantity of gunpowder was carried into the cave, and a train laid; the entrance was blocked up, and the powder fired. Not much was accomplished by the explosion. The charge found vent upon the top of the hill, half a mile away, and made an opening of several feet square along side of the old mill road—proving that there exists a large cavern which may sometime reward the bold adventurer with extraordinary subterranean discoveries. As yet none have been hardy enough to explore it. With the settlement and improvement of the country, the snakes have almost if not entirely disappeared."

THE EDITORIAL PROFESSION IN CALIFORNIA.—

Editorial life in California is described in a vein of extravagant humor by one of the fraternity. Referring to the daily duties which devolve upon the members of the Press, he gives this order of proceedings to be followed by the Editor:

First—gets up in the morning at ten o'clock; dresses himself, puts on his hat, in which are six or seven bullet-holes, and goes to a restaurant for breakfast. After breakfast starts to the office to look over the papers, and discovers that he is called a coward in one of them, a liar in another and a puppy in another; he smiles at the pleasant prospect of having something to do; fills out and dispatches three blank challenges, a ream or two which he always keeps on hand, ready printed to save time; commences writing a leader, when as the clock strikes eleven, a large man, with a cow-hide in one hand, a pistol in the other, and bowie knife in his belt, walks in and asks if his name is —; he answers by knocking the intruder down two pair of stairs with a chair.

At twelve o'clock, finds that his challenges have been accepted, and suddenly remembers that he has a little affair of that nature to settle at the beach that day at three o'clock; goes out, kills his man, and then comes in and dines on stewed grizzly; starts for the office, and while going there, gets mixed up in a street row, and has the heel of his boot shot off by accident; laughs to think how beautifully it was done; arrives at his sanctum and finds an "infernal machine" upon the table; knows what it is, and merely pitches it out of the window; writes an article on "moral reform," and then starts for the theatre; is attacked on the corner of a dark alley by three men; kills two of them, and takes the other to the station-house. Returning to the office at 11 o'clock at night, knocks a man down who attempts to rob him; kills a dog with a paving stone; gets run over with a cab, and has the tail of his coat slit with a thrust from a knife, and two bullet-holes put through his beaver, as he