

## A PANTHER HUNT.

**B**ARKING and yelping, with noses close to the ground, three noble hounds of rare breed rushed through the thickly-grown wood, sometimes losing the track amidst the withered leaves, then, snuffing about the decayed and prostrate trees, they would once more resume the chase in full cry—a sure sign that their pursuit was of the bear or panther, and not the nimble-footed stag which, if it did at times lure them for a brief period from the path, never rendered them wholly untrue to it.

They had now reached a spot where their foe had evidently been for a time, and must have crossed their road; for, stopping for a moment, they sought, whimpering wildly, more eagerly than ever through the closely-hanging parasitical plants which, like a living wall, encircled the place, then returning again and again to the centre, renewed their howls and lamentations as before.

Suddenly the bushes parted, and a young man on a small black Indian pony, cutting by one

vigorous stroke, with the broad hunting-knife he held in his hand, the creepers which threatened to drag him off his horse, leaped in directly between the hounds, who, delighted at his appearance, fawned upon him for an instant, then, urged to redoubled zeal by the neighborhood of their master, proceeded anew in their search.

"So! so! my brave dogs!" cried the young hunter, stopping to replace his knife in its sheath, and laying the rifle which he carried on his shoulder on the saddle before him. "So! right! seek! seek you here, on the road, and this time I think we shall succeed in nabbing the pig-stealer that has escaped us so often. Hurrah!" shouted he, raising himself in his saddle, as he saw the oldest of the dogs taking the lead, and, followed closely by the others, plunge at once into the thicket. "Hurrah!" And throwing his gun again across his shoulder, as he seized the reins in his right hand and pressed his heels against the pony's side, he flew in wild bounds after the dogs. On the way lay trunks of trees, overgrown bushes, marshy sloughs, and slimy channels, but nothing could repress their ardor. Onward and onward still they went, followed by the black pony snorting and foaming, and its rider huzzaing loudly with delight. Once more the hounds stopped, but this time from no uncertainty as to the path their enemy had taken, for, barking and howling, they sprang at one of the mightiest oaks on the upland, gnawing with rage the roots and bark of the noble tree which had afforded shelter to their foe, and thus hindered their pursuit of him. The hunter now arrived at the chosen spot, and without staying to check his horse, he leaped in one bound, which almost overset the animal, from out his saddle, and began with eager glance to search throughout the thick leaves of the tree, round which the dogs were jumping in so much exultation; and soon espied 'twixt two of the branches the form of some living creature which, clinging closely to the boughs, seemed to deem itself altogether unnoticed and concealed. It was, indeed, sufficiently dark amidst the shade of the thick foliage for a less practiced eye than that of our young habitant of the forest to have remained some time in doubt as to the description of animal which so earnestly sought to shun his observation. But Weston's eagle eye soon recognized, in the crouching figure and long tail, which it could not perfectly conceal, the panther's cub, and raised his gun to fetch it more certainly from its height, while the dogs, breathless with expectation, looked, now toward the rifle from which they momentarily expected to see the flash, and now toward the summit of the oak, in whose branches they knew their enemy to be. But in vain was the low whine with which they hoped to hasten the proceedings of their master; he seemed suddenly to change his mind, and, laying his gun aside, he commenced once more a cautious and attentive examination of the tree. Reassured at length, apparently, of that which he desired to know, he unbuckled the belt in

which his knife and tomahawk were stuck, and taking off his hunting-shirt, again returned toward the oak, from which the dogs, though anxiously observant of his every movement, had never once removed their eyes.

"I will try," he murmured to himself, "and take it alive; for if I bring a young panther to Little Rock, I shall readily obtain my ten or fifteen dollars for it; but if, on the other hand, I shoot it, its skin will be worth nothing. The old one must have left it, as I can not see it any where in the tree, and, for ten dollars, one may for once bear a few scratches from the young chap. So look out, Master Panther! I'm coming!"

With these words he went to his pony, which was grazing quietly hard by, unslung a rope from around its neck, buckled on his girth again, in which he replaced his knife, but left the tomahawk behind, and began to ascend the mighty tree; drawing the rope three times round the stem, which he could not firmly clasp, and, fastening the ends together, he seized it sometimes with the right and sometimes with the left arm, and by its assistance cautiously mounted up to the top; while the hounds, comprehending instantly what he meant, jumped with delight around the oak. Slowly then, indeed, but surely, he climbed nearly forty feet up the slender body ere he arrived at the first branch; when, stopping for a moment to rest himself and take breath, he felt if his knife was still secure, and looked up toward the young panther, which remained almost motionless, and clinging to the same branches as at first. Weston then slung the rope, which he no longer needed, round his shoulder, and, making use of the twigs as rails for his natural ladder, he ascended quickly and lightly toward the cub, which, though it did not move in the least, still kept its fiery eyes fixed on its approaching foe. But yet wilder glances were watching the progress of our hunter, who was wholly unconscious of the proximity of so grim and dangerous a foe—none other than the mother of the cub, who lay, with tail gently waving, in one of the withered trees that stood beside, with branches interlaced in that in which he was, ready for the spring, and seeming but to await his nearer approach ere, with a vigorous bound, she threw herself, tooth and claw, upon the audacious man who would dare to seize her offspring. Carelessly, then, swinging from bough to bough, Weston was now close under the young one, who, raising itself gently, after the fashion of a cat, with its back up, stood upon the branch and looked down upon the hunter as if not perfectly comprehending the danger to be apprehended from him.

Weston stopped, and, taking the rope from off his shoulder, he formed a noose with it to catch over the panther's head; then, settling himself firmly between two branches, he looked up in expectation of the proper moment for attack, and saw, directly opposite and hardly ten paces from him, the glowing eyes of the female as she bent down in readiness for the spring.

Brought up from childhood in the woods, and

well acquainted with the dangers which so often threaten the solitary sportsman, Weston retained in this fearful moment presence of mind enough to place the body of the tree between him and his enemy, ere the latter could divine his intention; and this he fortunately succeeded in effecting just in time, as that instant the dark figure of the panther leaped upon the spot he had quitted, and gazed with fiery eyes on the undaunted hunter, who, with his left arm clasped around a branch, held in his right hand his bare knife, as with every breath he drew he expected to see the enraged animal spring down upon him. She, however, intimidated by the eye he kept firmly fixed upon her, was satisfied to know of the safety of her young, and to lie attentively marking every movement of her foe at scarcely six paces from him. At this moment, Weston first believed that he was lost; for even if able to use his knife, a good stout weapon, against his grim antagonist, still the place on which he stood, and from whence the slightest false step would dash him headlong to the ground, was by no means suitable for so fearful a struggle. But perceiving then that his adversary was content with merely watching him, he swiftly but cautiously, and without any rash movement, which might irritate the monster, replaced the knife in its sheath, and slowly commenced his retreat. The panther, seeing him remove further and further away, followed him leisurely: and often did he feel for his weapon, as he saw her about to take a leap, yet without ever daring to bring himself to an open and eye to eye encounter.

Arriving, then, once more at the last branch, he again fastened the rope around the stem and slid as quickly as possible down it. The dogs, meanwhile, driven almost to despair by perceiving their enemy in the branches without being able to get at her, jumped and howled in a heart-breaking manner about. At length Weston once more regained the firm ground, with clothes torn, blood oozing from his arms, cut by the rough bark of the tree, his knees trembling, and strength exhausted. But not one moment did he allow himself for repose; but hastening to where his gun was laid, he seized and leveled it toward the panther's fancied place of security. Vain, however, were all his efforts to hold the heavy barrel steady for a second—his limbs shook; so he was compelled to throw himself down to rest, yet without withdrawing his eye an instant from the form of the animal, which was now close to the stem, and its young one, no longer apprehensive of danger, with tail uplifted, stretching itself comfortably on the bough beside its mother. Weston soon recovered himself, and seizing once more his rifle, took a long and steady aim, until the distant hills reverberated with the echo of its thunder. The beast, pierced through by the ball, drew itself together, and sprang in furious haste from bough to bough, the branches bending beneath her weight, until she gained the lofty summit of the tree, when, having reached the highest point, and striving to get still further, the slender foliage gave way

and she toppled over, clutching with powerful claws at every leaf and twig in her descent, till, with a mighty crash, amidst the expectant howling of the dogs, she fell at Weston's feet. There was now no further impediment to the capture of the young one, who had followed the mother in terror to the lower branches of the tree—but Weston's nerves had been too strained in his first attempt to admit of his trying the perilous path anew. So reloading his gun, he brought it in one shot within reach of the dogs who flew upon it in fury.

In a brief space the skins were thrown across the pony's back, and away trotted our bold hunter, followed by his hounds, in search of new dangers and fresh prey.

#### A REMINISCENCE OF A BOW-STREET OFFICER.

I AM an old man now, and though my life has been full of adventures, some of a rather odd, and some of a hazardous description, it is very little that has been said about them. It was not near so much the fashion in my time as it is now to let all the world know how the secret and silent machinery of justice did its business. We, whose function it was to work out the retribution due to crime, kept our own counsel, and made no more revelations than we were obliged to make. We could not afford to do so, in fact. We had not the means and facilities that later times have afforded to our successors. Railways existed only in the brains of projectors and speculators, whom the wise world looked upon as madmen; and the electric telegraph had not even got so far as to be laughed at, which I have observed is generally the first step forward of all great discoveries. So, as I said, we kept our own counsel, and made up, as far as we could, by secrecy, cunning, and stratagem for the want of better tools to work with. Fifty years ago thief-taking had not grown into a science, and there was then much more uncertainty in the practice even of sciences than there is at present. Still, we did not let all the rogues escape us; and I am given to understand they are not all caught even now. In deprecation of the present fashion of decrying us old fellows who are laid upon the shelf, perhaps I may be allowed to present the reader with a short sample of my own experience, which will show that we did something, at any rate, toward the capture and punishment of offenders.

It is now between thirty and forty years ago that a tradesman, in a large way of business in the city of Bath, inclosed in a very corpulent letter, directed to a wholesale house in London, a heavy sum of money, amounting, if I recollect right, to little short of £2000 in Bank of England notes. The letter, which was posted by the tradesman himself, never reached its destination. No trace of it could be discovered, upon inquiry at the post-offices, either in Bath or London; but it was found that before any investigation had been set on foot, some days having unavoidably elapsed ere any suspicion