



A SOUTH AMERICAN LION HUNT

BY CHARLES BULLMAN.

DURING an extended experience as examining engineer of certain mining properties in South America, a great deal of my time was spent in the magnificent forests of that country. Being a keen lover of Nature, and something of a naturalist and sportsman, my work, while frequently perilous and toilsome, was congenial, and I took advantage of every opportunity to study the natives, especially the native hunters, and the countless strange beasts and birds that came under observation.

The Indian hunters and their peculiar weapon, the blow-gun, were perhaps the most interesting novelties of all, and I will endeavor to show what these lithe, cat-like savages can do with a weapon which is simply an enlarged "putty-blower," as used by our boys, and apparently so inoffensive. But, though seemingly so harmless, the blow-gun is a terrible affair in the hands of a skillful Indian; for, unlike the innocent putty ball popular with Young America, it carries a tiny dart tipped with one of the deadliest of known poisons. When I first saw the blow-guns and their little arrows it was difficult to realize that such weapons could kill even small birds, to say nothing of such dangerous game as the "lion," as the natives term the jaguar; but subsequent experience proved the power of the weapon, and a dart from it would, I believe, kill any animal, no mat-

ter how large, if the poison once entered the circulation.

The blow-gun is made as follows: A straight palm, about one and one-half inches in diameter, is cut into a nine-foot piece, then carefully split in half. This is done with a "machete" and stone hammer, and must be done slowly and carefully to get a smooth cut, so that the two pieces may be put together exactly.

The pith, which is a little less than a quarter of an inch in diameter, is then removed. Then comes the really difficult part of enlarging and smoothing the bore. It would be difficult with good tools; but when it is known that the only tools possessed by the Indians for the work are iron knives which they make themselves, tigers' teeth and claws and fish bones, it becomes much more difficult. Most of the work is done with old teeth, especially those which are decayed on one side, and with the claws.

The groove is slowly enlarged until it is three-eighths of an inch in diameter. Finally, the two halves are fitted together and wound round and round with strips of a smooth birch-like bark, bees-wax, or, rather, wasp's wax, being used to cement it on. This bark is cut ribbon-shape, being about half an inch wide, and wound round so that the edge overlaps. A tiger tooth, or something similar, is cemented on the smaller end as a sight. The blow-gun, when completed, varies from seven and a half to nine feet long, and is an inch and a half in diameter at the mouth-piece and three quarters at the small end.

The arrows are also made of palm wood, but of a different kind and of a



Painted for Ouriss by J. Carter Beard.

"IN AN INSTANT HIS POWERFUL JAWS HAD CLOSED ON THE NECK OF THE POOR BEAST." (p. 51.)

harder wood. They are eight inches long, and an eighth of an inch thick in the middle, and they taper to a point at either end. In order that they may closely fit the bore, they are wound at one end with a very fine, silky vegetable wool which grows on trees something like the button-ball tree. The other end is dipped in poison obtained from a red toad. These toads are only found in two localities, on very high mountains, and the Indians make annual trips to these mountains to procure the toad. To get the poison the toad is spitted on an arrow, then tickled with another on the belly. In a few minutes a reddish-yellow liquid exudes from the toad's skin, thrown out in all probability in rage at its tormentors, and the points of the arrows, after being notched so as to break easily, are dipped in this secretion.

During the winter of 1889, while camping on the Condoto River in South America, examining some gold mines, my men, from time to time, spoke of finding the tracks of a large lion; but provisions being difficult to get, as we were miles from any inhabited place known to us, it was not considered wise to waste time hunting lions.

One day my men reported that a "balsa" had passed down the river, and said that in all probability there was an Indian "tambo," or house, farther up the river. This "balsa" is the pith of a large palm called "barrigona," and is used by the Indians for shooting rapids. They insert in it a strong upright handle, then straddling the "balsa," and holding on to the upright, they shoot rapids through which no boat or canoe could pass.

Upon inquiry among the men, one recollected having heard that a family of San Juan Indians had a "colino" near the head of the Condoto. Now, a "colino" means a plantain plantation, and as we were running very short of this very necessary article of diet, I determined to take one of my men and try to find the Indians. Starting with rifle and shotgun, we kept as near the edge of the river as possible with the view of finding some evidence of a path. Our progress was slow, as it was necessary to cut the way through dense underbrush and keep an eye on the watch for snakes at the same time.

Without other adventures than the killing of a snake and encountering a

couple of monkeys, late in the afternoon we saw smoke from the top of a hill, and became sure of not having to spend the night in the woods. Just as night was settling down we reached the "tambo;" and a more surprised lot of Indians could not be imagined. Instead of one family, we found four under the same roof; and although they were crowded we were made welcome, and my "peon" arranged my hammock between two convenient posts. We found the Indians beginning their harvest festival, as their corn had just been gathered. The ceremonies are few, consisting principally of drinking "chica," which is a slightly fermented corn-juice. It is a thick, muddy liquid, made by putting macerated corn in water. Formerly it was ground by being chewed by the Indian women, the pulp being put in large stone crocks with water and allowed to stand until fermentation commences, when it is ready for use.

The drinking commenced shortly after sundown, and all indulged in it, men, women, and children, first one and then another passing it around. Some was offered us, and as it is impossible to get an service from the Indians after once refusing their hospitality, I drank some.

The Indians drank very often; and in order to whet their appetite would, from time to time, lay a pinch of powdered salt and "aji," or red Chili pepper, on their tongues. I tried that, too, and found the burning something indescribable.

During the evening I mentioned the lion's tracks that my men had seen, and it took but little persuasion to arrange for a hunt on the following day.

Shortly after seven we started, there being seven of us—five Indians armed with blow-guns, the negro with an immense "machete," and myself with a carbine.

The woods were still quite dark and wet with the heavy dews, but we went along silently in single file, keeping always a watchful eye on the ground that our steps might be sure, and in order that no axis jerga or still more deadly Verugoso should strike us unawares. Four or five dogs accompanied us. An English or American hunter would have viewed them with disdain, for they were small, currish-looking dogs of no particular breed. They could neither fight nor point a bird, but they would follow the scent of an agouti, peccary or lion,

oftentimes swimming rivers to do it, and hold it at bay when found.

They would also chase the fleet little paca to the river's edge, where the hunters in their canoes lay in wait.

Striking the foot of a very narrow, high ridge, we commenced to climb; for it is on such high ridges that the lions make their home. There was no path, and a way had to be cut at times. Sometimes we would come to an almost perpendicular wall, and then on hands and knees we would slowly creep.

In a short time we heard angry growls mingled with the baying of the dogs. I then advanced next to the leader, and we pushed forward rapidly and silently.

We caught our first glimpse of the lion when seventy yards distant. Where he was standing—his home, in fact—the ridge had broadened out to twenty feet in width, and it was quite clear—a gigantic tree, called "lechero," which had formerly stood on the edge, having fallen downhill.

The open space might have been sixty feet long. We now proceeded very cautiously that the beast might not see us, though I thought there was little danger of it, as the dogs seemed to absorb all his attention. When between thirty and forty yards distant we stopped to take a good view.

The lion was standing in the middle of the clearing, slowly swaying his tail as does a cat waiting for a mouse, while the dogs were on the edge of the little plateau baying, yet ready to run.

The lion would make a move toward one, which would turn tail and run; but the others would then close on his rear.

I raised my rifle to shoot, but the Indian beside me said, in bad Spanish, "Escopit no bueno; si primer tiro no mata, lion pelea," which means "The gun is no good; if the first shot does not kill, the lion will fight."

I had then never shot a lion, and it was with great reluctance that I withheld; but then came the desire to see one shot with a blow-gun, and I lowered my carbine, but left it cocked, ready for emergencies.

We then proceeded, and within a minute I was amply repaid for not shooting, for I saw how the lion catches its prey. One of the dogs had ventured too near; the lion, ever watchful, made a mighty spring, and when he landed,

one paw was on the back of the dog, and in an instant his powerful jaws had closed on the neck of the poor beast. The next moment he raised his head, and lashing his tail violently, gave vent to the first roar. It was frightful; and so he stood when we reached the edge of the clearing. We were not more than twenty feet distant when he first saw us.

An instantaneous change came over him, his tail moved more slowly, and he seemed to be lowering himself for a spring, while his eyes seemed to be first one color, then another.

At this moment the Indian beside me raised his blow-gun. I heard nothing, but saw the little arrow strike the lion right on the tip of his nose.

The moment he felt the dart a more startling change still came over him. He immediately lost all his fierce look; raised his paw and brushed off the arrow, the broken point still sticking in; then rubbed his nose on the ground; then turned tail and ran, but not before two more arrows struck him in the face. The dogs started in full cry, but he paid no attention; we, too, followed as soon as he left the clearing. He kept on the ridge, and we could hear him brushing along. We soon caught sight of him again, but he was then walking, apparently in great pain. He staggered, gathered himself up and walked stiffly along, the dogs nipping his hind legs. Again he staggered, then fell, but he started on still more slowly. Then he fell, and his whole body twitched and shuddered. He tried to rise, but could not; then shuddered again and stretched out; and so we came up to him and found the body warm, yet every muscle stiff and hard. Upon examining his nose I found it very much swollen and of a purplish-red color. The Indians immediately cut out the place where the arrows struck him. Measuring him, I found him to be eight feet eleven inches from the nose to the tip of the tail.

After skinning him, the Indians cut out certain portions to eat, and we then turned homeward. At night I tasted the "san cache," or stew, made from it; but the meat was very tough and had a most disagreeable odor. When the Indians cook game killed with poisoned arrows they put no salt on it, which they explain by saying that the salt brings out the poison. So ended my lion-hunt with the Indians of the San Juan.