

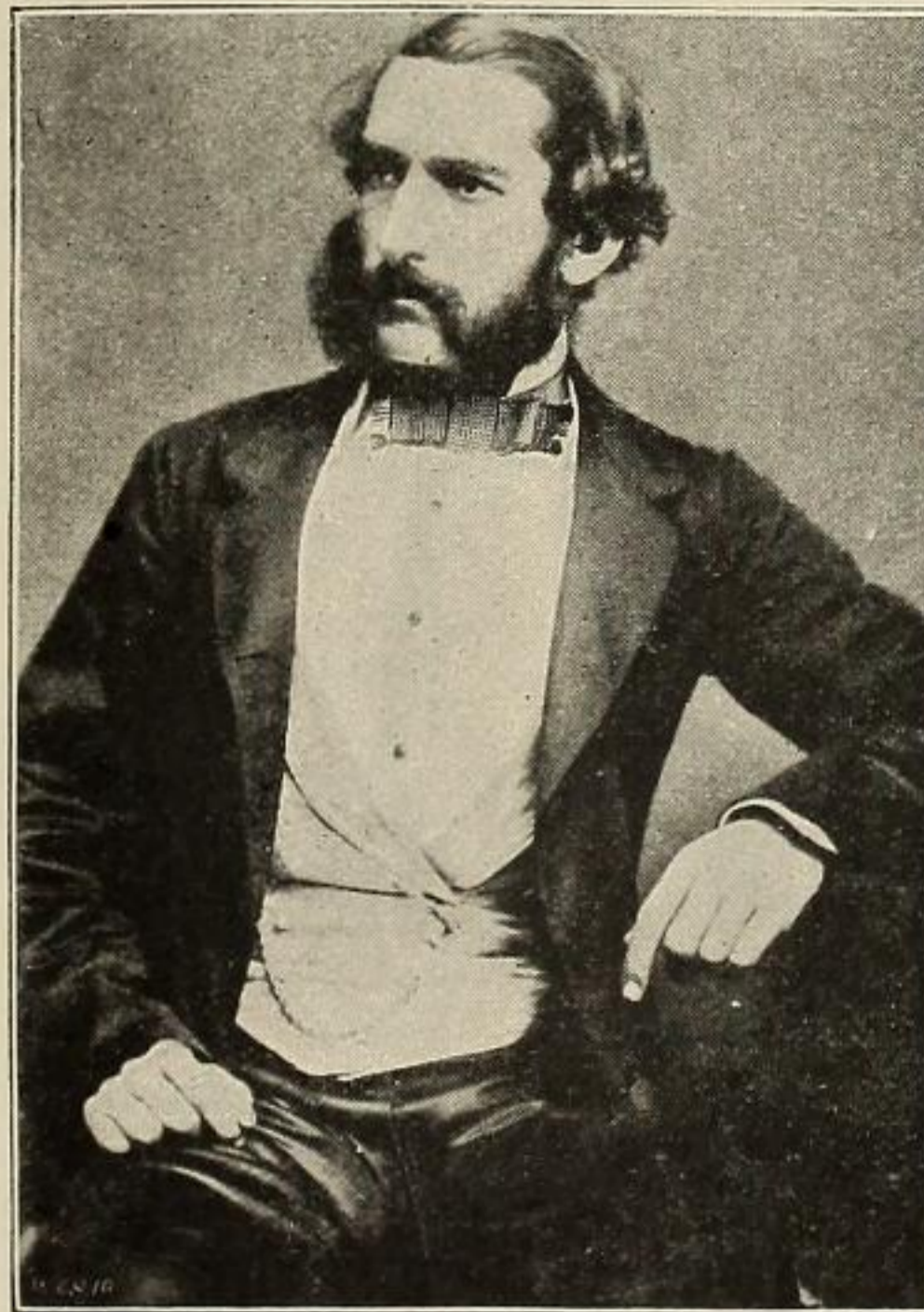
A dramatic, weird, and all but incredible story. Read it and judge for yourself whether this phrase is exaggerated.

WHILST with my regiment in Secunderabad towards the end of the forties, I became very chummy with W—t, a lieutenant in one of the native regiments. Everybody liked him. He was a good sportsman, and had the reputation of being the very soul of honour. His regiment left *en route* for Jaulna, and shortly after it was reported that W—t had disappeared, and that there were large defalcations in the mess accounts, of which he had been secretary for some years. So high was his reputation for probity, that the mess president, his own commandant, had passed the accounts time after time without going into them.

On the march Major W—r and W—t had a quarrel about getting ordinary fresh stores, and W—t was removed from being secretary and directed to give over charge of the mess to a brother officer—which he readily and cheerfully agreed to do in a few days. W—r had removed W—t in a fit of temper, and was rather sorry the next day he had done so, and meant to reinstate him shortly. His consternation

may be imagined when, on the regiment resuming its march, the adjutant reported that W—t was missing. There were no telegraphs in India in those days, and although every search was made for W—t's whereabouts, he was never discovered; but on the mess accounts being scrutinized, a deficiency of over 4,000 Rs. was discovered, and which Major W—r had to make good. At long intervals there were rumours that W—t had escaped to Bombay in native disguise, and that he was a trooper in the Cape Mounted Rifles, and finally that he had met with his death by an elephant.

So universal a favourite was W—t, that nearly everybody but his commandant was rather glad that he had got away—especially when, some years afterwards, we heard that the sum deficient had been repaid. He was some five or six years senior to me, and was very kind to me when I was a griffin. W—t was never in want of money, and Bunseloll, the soucar, would cash a cheque for him to any amount. His friends would have found the money for him at any time. Why, therefore, should he be a



THE AUTHOR—COLONEL F. T. POLLOK.
From a Photo.

defaulter for a paltry 4,000 Rs., and become a dishonoured wanderer? For upwards of forty years I never heard anything more of him, and, indeed, had almost forgotten all about him.

A few years ago I was residing in a seaport town in the North of France, and during the season, accompanied by my son, a lad of ten, used to go to a village about ten miles off to fish. Occasionally I saw an invalid being wheeled about in a Bath chair, and somebody told me he was an Englishman, believed to be a retired officer, who lived in a cottage near our fishing-place—that he was a great invalid, and associated with no one. Poor fellow! I could sympathize with him, for we knew scarcely anybody, and a new acquaintance would be a godsend. I called on him, but was not admitted. I left my card, but as no notice was taken of my visit I did not repeat it. One day my son was alone and had caught a couple of fine trout, and coming across the invalid accosted him, and asked him to accept one, which he did, adding, “I presume you are the son of Colonel Pollok, who called on me some days ago? Tell him I am not equal to receiving him, but I will write to him some day.”

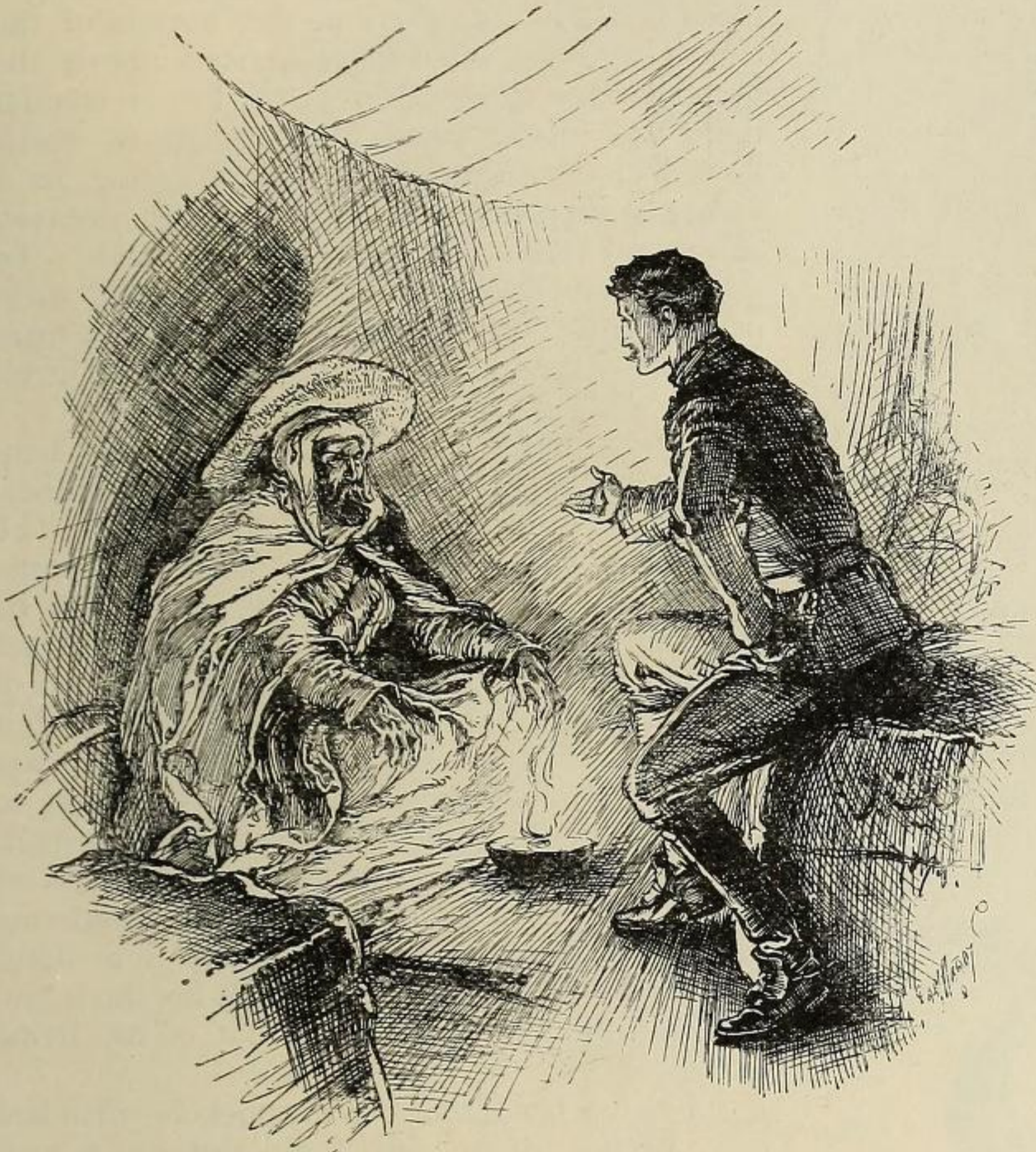
I saw him some time afterwards, but beyond taking off my hat, no intercourse took place between us. I could not help thinking that his face appeared familiar to me, but I could not catch his name; the French villagers distorted it beyond recognition, nor could I think where I had known or seen him, and I heard nothing more till one day I got a letter from a notary requesting me to attend the funeral of Captain W——t, who had died a day or two ago at the village of —— . “W——t! W——t!” I kept repeating. “It can’t be the W——t I knew in India, who disappeared suddenly?” It was no use speculating—a day or two would remove all doubts. I attended the funeral, and asked the notary why I had been sent for. “I have a packet to deliver to you,” he said, and produced a parcel, which he gave me. I lost no time in returning home and reading its contents. Its writer was indeed my old friend W——t, and this is the story he related:—

“I did not like to receive you, P——,” he wrote, “as I did not know whether you would care to renew our old friendship. The poor have few friends, the dishonoured none—and I am both. My sad history is this: I never was in want of money, for I had an interest in a large manufactory, which my father left me, and I was entitled to several hundreds a year, an income which, however, fluctuated. The partners always cashed my drafts, which were never very heavy, and, as I intended to take furlough, as soon as it was due I drew

only a portion of my income, leaving, as I believed, ample funds for home expenses.

“I was very unlucky in the Mole Alley Races, the year I disappeared, and lost over 4,000 Rs. I gave Bunseloll an order for the amount, which he paid over to me at once—he had often cashed cheques for me before, and they had always been met—but this was returned indorsed, ‘Refer to drawer.’ I was astounded; there ought to have been, at least, a couple of thousand pounds due to me. Bunseloll behaved very shabbily, and declared that, unless I paid him the amount, with interest, within three days, he would report me to the Commander-in-Chief. I had a Hoondie for 3,000 Rs. which I was just going to remit to Madras on account of our mess, but there was no hurry for the payment, and in a weak moment I gave it to him, together with the balance in cash, thinking I could easily replace it in three months, and as the mess accounts had only just been audited, I never doubted I should be able to remit the amount to the agents in Madras before the next inspection. I wrote home very strongly, and directed that the whole of the amount due to me then was to be remitted to A—— & Co., bankers in Madras, and that in future all sums that were mine should also be remitted there when due.

“Two months and a half passed. I expected the letter in reply to mine at Jaulna. We were on the march when that unfortunate quarrel took place, and I was removed and directed to hand the mess accounts over to G——. I could not obtain the money where we were, and in a day or two I should be a dishonoured man under arrest, and the result must be exposure, dismissal from the service, and most probably imprisonment. This prospect was more than I could bear. About a mile off our camp was an Arab dealer returning to Bombay with some horses. He was an old acquaintance, and we had had dealings together. I went to him and tried to induce him to advance me the money, but he said he was not a soucar. I told him I should be disgraced if I did not get it within twenty-four hours—still he would not or could not help me. Then said I, ‘Will you help me to escape to Bombay?’ He agreed to do so if I would pay him down 500 Rs. and hand him over my three Arab horses. It was a hard bargain, but I saw no other way of getting out of the difficulties I was in. I had some 300 Rs. of my own, and I took 300 more from the mess moneys. I dressed up as a syce. I could talk Hindustani like a native, and during the night I went off quietly, riding one horse and leading the others—without anyone being the wiser. Within a couple of hours of my departure my steeds, from being



"I SAID, 'WILL YOU HELP ME TO ESCAPE TO BOMBAY?'"

grey, had become bay, chestnut, and black, and I their syce.

"In the hubbub attending the discovery of my absence, no one thought of visiting the Arab dealer, barely a mile away, but search was made for me far, far away. The Arab dealer remained where he was for a couple of days, and then leisurely marched by the regular stages to Bombay. I remained two months in his stables, and then he told me he had sold a couple of Arab stallions for stud purposes for the Cape, and that I could go with them if I wished. I accepted, of course, and no one suspected that Abdullah the syce was the W——t so well known throughout the Madras Presidency. After I had duly delivered over my steeds, I discarded my disguise and enlisted in the Cape Mounted Rifles.

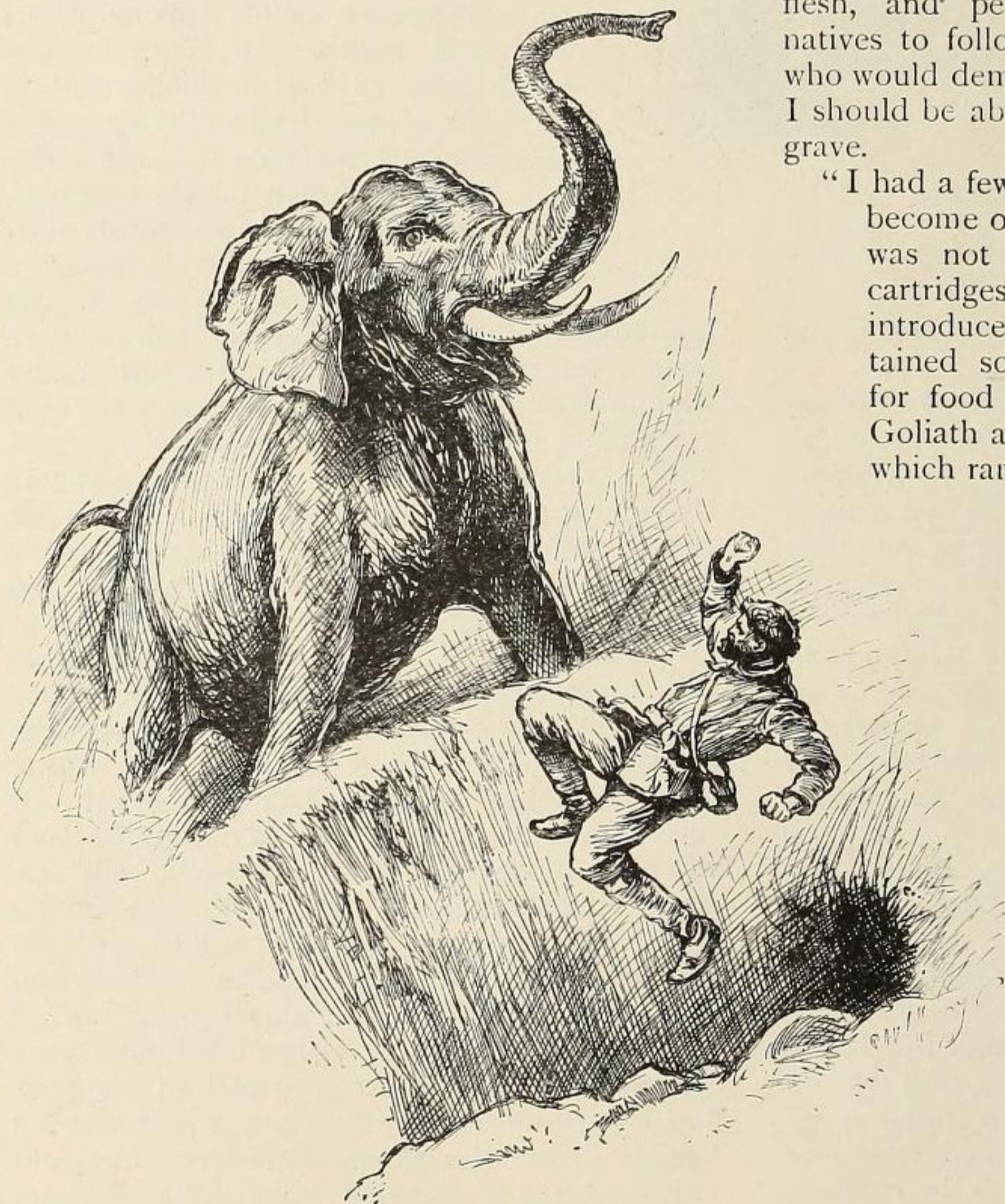
"I remained with them for five years. I then obtained my discharge and returned to England. I found the business that my father had established so firmly in a tottering state, and that no more money had been remitted to India on my account. However, I got sufficient from my partners to repay W——r, and with the balance, some £500, I returned to the Cape. I had

made the acquaintance of Gordon Cumming, the famous hunter, and at one time it was in contemplation that we should conjointly make another trip into the interior of Africa. But Cumming changed his mind, preferring to remain at home with his exhibition, but he gave me many useful hints, and, purchasing all I required, I set up as a professional hunter. I bought two waggons and two teams of bullocks, and five good horses, went inland, and traded and hunted for ten years. I was very lucky, and by the sale of ivory, hides, horns, and curios, I made sufficient money to buy myself an annuity which would suffice to keep me in comparative affluence for the remainder of my life. But the devil tempted me to make one more trip before leaving Africa and settling in Western Australia, as I had determined to do. I was luckier than usual—had my waggons full, and I was returning when the fly appeared, and my cattle and horses died off one by one. Forming a camp near water, and leaving

my waggons and men there, I, with a gun-bearer, set out to try and reach a missionary station some sixty miles off, and there get a span of cattle to remove my goods, which were worth fully a thousand pounds. We had a dreary trudge, for people do not walk as a rule in South Africa, and we subsisted on what we shot. We had completed forty out of the sixty miles, and I hoped in another twenty-four hours to be at my destination. The country was hilly, cut up with ravines, and most unexpectedly we came upon a herd of elephants. It would have been as well if I had left them alone. But I was covetous of the ivories carried by several of the bulls, and killed three and wounded a fourth. This one would not die. I had fired some dozen bullets into him, but he seemed to bear a charmed life. We lost sight of him amongst the kopjes, and in tracking him up, he suddenly charged down upon us. I escaped by throwing myself behind some creepers, but my gun-carrier stood in his path and fired both barrels of my heavy rifle into his head. Before the smoke cleared away my poor attendant was a shapeless mass of clay. I now thought only of the death of the monster, and

of avenging my follower—but he led me a long chase. At last, from the top of an eminence I saw him standing near some rocks, evidently waiting for me. I took the bearings, and by walking round some outlying hillocks I hoped to creep up near enough to administer a *coup de grace*. I got to the place I wanted to all right. I was between two rocks, and close by was a deep trench, about 7ft. broad, which I could easily jump, but which would stop any living elephant.

“I was thinking of advancing, when the monster evidently got the wind of me and charged headlong. I let him come within 6ft. or 8ft., and then let him have the contents of both barrels, and sprang backwards, intending to clear the trench—but my foot slipped and I fell headlong into it, and in a moment I was in total darkness. I was a good deal shaken, and on recovering my feet I found I was in a living grave. The walls were scarped granite and the aperture above was closed by the huge body of the elephant, who filled it completely. I lit a



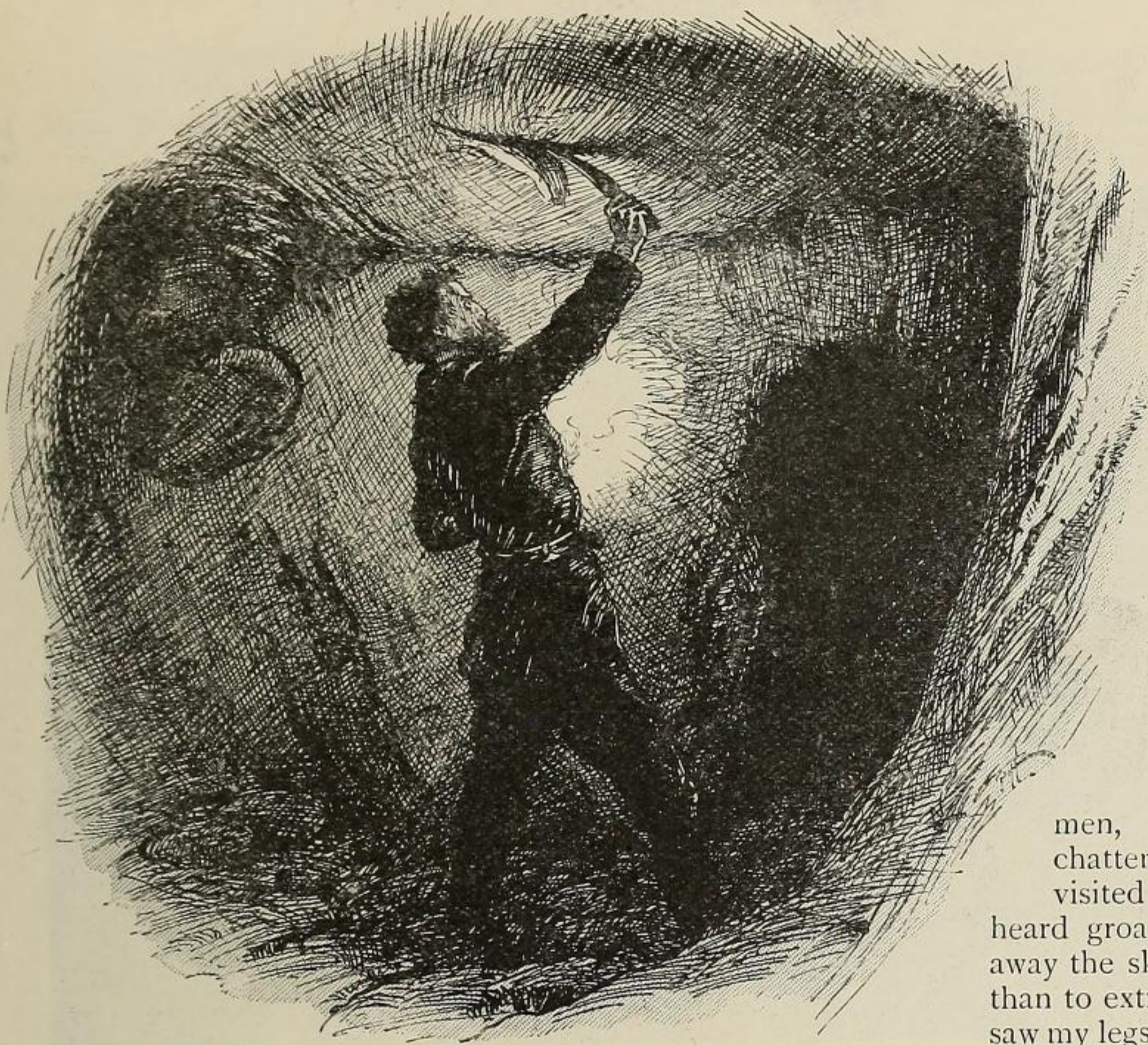
“MY FOOT SLIPPED AND I FELL HEADLONG.”

match to examine my position more carefully—there was a lot of *débris* at the bottom of the trench and an inner cave—raised above the outer portion about two feet. For a wonder there was also a small trickling stream which flowed along on one side, disappearing in a fissure at the extremity. I collected the decayed *débris* and formed of them several torches. To escape seemed impossible—to move that mass of flesh above would tax the strength of a team of cattle—I alone could not have moved it an inch.

“I was in the wilderness. To hope for help was futile—there were no inhabitants. I knew of no hunters living in the neighbourhood. The missionary I was about to visit was a fair sportsman and a lay brother, but he would not be likely to wander in these wilds, as he could get what game he required within a mile or two of the station. I saw no prospect before me but a slow and painful death. The heat was stifling—there was just enough air circulating to keep me alive. Still, I did not quite despair. Vultures would be attracted by the mass of flesh, and perhaps induce some wandering natives to follow them—then there were lions, who would demolish the flesh in a few days, and I should be able to scramble out of my living grave.

“I had a few biscuits in my pocket—what had become of my rifle I did not know, as it was not in the trench with me. My cartridges (for breechloaders had just been introduced) were useless. My flask contained some brandy, and if very hard up for food I could cut a steak out of the Goliath above me. I cleared out the cave, which ran underground about 8ft. I had

to be careful with my matches, for I had only one box with me, and it was hard to distinguish day from night except by the weird cries of jackals, hyenas, and other wild beasts. I could hear the rush of wings, and knew that the obscene birds were collecting in their thousands, but even they with their powerful beaks could make no impression on the pachydermatous hide until decay set in. I was in a sort of stupor. I heard no lions roaring, but the snarling of hyenas was incessant, and whilst it lasted I knew it was night. My biscuits were soon exhausted—fortunately the rill of water was sweet and cool.



"I CUT OUT A PIECE OF FLESH ABOVE ME."

"At last, pressed by hunger, with my shikar knife I cut out a piece of the flesh above me and broiled it in the embers of a fire I lit out of the *débris*, but the smoke nearly blinded and choked me, and the stench sickened me; the meat was so tough and nauseous that I could not swallow it. At last I heard lions roaring, and a report above convinced me that the body, extended with gas, had burst. Now all the quadrupeds and bipeds could devour it; but would they do so in time to save my life? I feared not, for hunger and want of fresh air were slowly, but surely, killing me. Driven to desperation by hunger, I stepped out of my cave into the trench, intending to cut out a portion of the now putrid flesh, when I felt a shower falling on me, and, lighting one of the few matches left, I discovered to my horror that not only was the floor several inches deep covered with maggots, but that they were raining down on me.

"I staggered back towards the cave, and there consciousness left me. When I regained my senses I found myself in bed attended by the missionary and his wife, and it was many days before he would relate how I came to be under his care—for, alas! I soon discovered that I was

bereft of both my legs from the knee down. Then I had a relapse, and lay between life and death for fully three months. I can never sufficiently express my gratitude to Mr. M—— and his wife for all the kindness they showed me, and the care they took of me. When I was sufficiently well to be carried into the veranda, he told me some wandering bushmen, attracted by the chattering of the vultures, visited the spot. They heard groans, and on dragging away the skeleton of the leviathan to extract the tusks, they saw my legs hanging down from the cave. They lifted me from my living grave and carried me

to the missionary station, where it was found necessary to amputate both my legs, for they had been riddled through and through by hundreds of maggots, and doubtless in a day or two mortification would have set in.

"I had been imprisoned eight days, and it was a marvel I had not died.

"It was useless my going to Australia in my crippled state. I had a widowed sister living in the North of France, and, after realizing the money by the sale of my last venture—for the missionary sent for my waggons when I was able to indicate where they were, and where they were found—but no traces of the Hottentots who had been with me were ever discovered, and whether they got back to civilization or died on the way I never knew. They had deserted the waggons. I left the Cape, purchased a further annuity, joined my sister, and have lived ever since where I am now. She died some years ago, and my life has been, indeed, dreary since."

This was the letter handed to me; portions have been omitted, having reference to purely private affairs of others. I have no doubt in my own mind that the writer was my former friend, W——t, who so mysteriously disappeared in 1850.

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