

DARING DEEDS OF GREAT MOUNTAINEERS

TRUE STORIES OF
ADVENTURE, PLUCK AND RESOURCE
IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD

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WITH MANY ILLUSTRATIONS

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CHAPTER III

ON THE WAY TO SRINAGAR

Mr. Daniell, a noted artist, travels in India, three-quarters of a century ago, in company of a clergyman friend—Through the mountains on the way to Srinagar—The Coaduwar Ghaut—Bad tidings from other travellers met—Mountains on fire—The conflagration extinguished by a deluge—A huge rhinoceros on the path—The artist coolly sketches the beast—An escort arrives from the Rajah of Srinagar—A land swarming with dangerous beasts—Trouble with the Rajah's men—The effect of a sound thrashing—The mountain torrents and their dangers—A man whirled off by one—Palanquins with jointed poles—At the bottom of an awful defile—The stars in broad daylight—A memorable and terrifying thunderstorm—A portmanteau dropped into an abyss—Its plucky rescue at the risk of a man's life—A frail rope-bridge and its terrors—An elk shot—A shooting-party—A bear suddenly appears—Its hostility—“Don't fire!”—A novel plan carried out by the natives—Bear enticed into a tree, then shot into space, as if from a catapult—The tiger country at length reached—One of the brutes reported to be about—A tiger-trap—A fall into the pit—Royal rage of the baffled beast—Desperate attempts to escape—Fearful yells—Seven bullets required to give the tiger his quietus.

It is now almost exactly three-quarters of a century since Mr. William Daniell, a noted artist in his day and a Royal Academician, went on his travels to India. He was accompanied by Mr. Caunter, a clergyman, and the two friends spared no pains to see the great Eastern

TRAVELLING IN INDIA

peninsula thoroughly. They visited many a notable city, but did not neglect the wilder parts of the country. They traversed interminable plains, and threaded awful mountain passes and gorges ; now they were ferried across the wide waters of lordly rivers, and now they were risking their lives in the passage of some frightful mountain torrent.

Not the least interesting of their experiences were those that accompanied a journey to Srinagar, far away among the remotest fastnesses of the stupendous mountains of the north. No reader needs to be told that so far back as the early part of the nineteenth century India was not so well provided as it is to-day with magnificent high roads, fine bridges, wayside inns, and other resting-places for adventurous travellers. Moreover, the wilder parts of the country were often very unsafe, except for a numerous and well-armed company.

As our travellers entered the Coaduwar Ghaut, and thus the mountains proper, they received from men they met a dismal report as to the difficulties of the mountain district before them, and they were especially discouraged by the news that the snow had already begun to fall. Plucking up their courage, nevertheless, Mr. Daniell and Mr. Caunter kept on their way. They had scarcely cleared the first narrow glen when they were surprised and alarmed to see apparently the whole range of mountains before them in a blaze. “The fire swept up their sides to the extent of several miles, undulating like the agitated waves of the ocean when reddened by the slanting beams of the setting sun. It was like an ignited sea, exhibiting an effect at once new and fearful.”

SKETCHING A RHINOCEROS

The travellers could hardly be said to be in any real danger, situated, as they were, at the bottom of a deep ravine, along which tumbled a brawling torrent. They learnt that these mountain fires are often caused by the swaying of the tall and dry bamboos, the violent and long-continued friction at last kindling a flame. The conflagration was extinguished as suddenly as it had begun, a mighty deluge of rain coming on, and drowning the flames with its floods.

An adventure of a different sort soon came their way. They were in a country filled with all kinds of game, and sheltering not a few dangerous animals. Mr. Daniell and his friend had just turned the corner of a precipitous hill, when suddenly they found themselves in the presence of a huge rhinoceros, the brute being separated from them only by the narrow torrent, though it was on a somewhat higher ledge than that on which the men were standing. To the hunter pure and simple this would have been a godsend. And so it was to the artist. Not less plucky than the hunter, he clambered up to the animal's level, and proceeded coolly to sketch the beast. Strange to say, the rhinoceros stood still, showing no signs of either anger or fear. In short, Mr. Daniell finished his sketch with composure, notwithstanding the risks he ran. Then, unwilling to rouse to fury an animal their guns could not damage, they fired a shot only with the view of frightening the brute away. To their great relief, the rhinoceros did depart, but only with the utmost deliberation.

A halt had to be made in the defiles till permission could be obtained from the Rajah of Srinagar to proceed to his capital. The Prince, in reply to the messengers

A TROUBLE SOME ESCORT

sent by the Englishmen, not only granted the required permit, but also sent an escort to protect the party on the most arduous and hazardous portion of the way. Presently, passing a village with a small detachment of troops, they were fairly in the Rajah's territory. This pass, or *ghaut*, the Englishmen learnt, had to be entirely abandoned by the soldiery in the rainy season, the defiles being then infested by an immense multitude of savage beasts which took shelter there—tigers, leopards, bears, hyenas, and other beasts of prey.

Notwithstanding the fact that the attendants and bearers had been sent by the Rajah himself, our travellers soon found they were likely to have some trouble with the fellows. They were a lazy lot, and refused to carry the burdens assigned to them. Before long the majority of them deserted, and left the Englishmen to do as best they could. The situation was a serious one, and the travellers had to supply the places of the deserters without delay. With immense difficulty they succeeded in gathering a few of the country fellows, but what was their chagrin when these also showed signs of defection! Thereupon the Englishmen administered a sound thrashing to the worst of the offenders—a strong measure, and one they were most reluctant to adopt. Strange to say, it had the desired effect, and they were no more troubled by the laziness of their followers, though it was necessary to keep a constant and vigilant watch over them.

The character of the country through which the party passed was such as to baffle description. As they say, "to look down some of the gaping gulfs which arrested our gaze as we passed them required no ordinary steadiness of