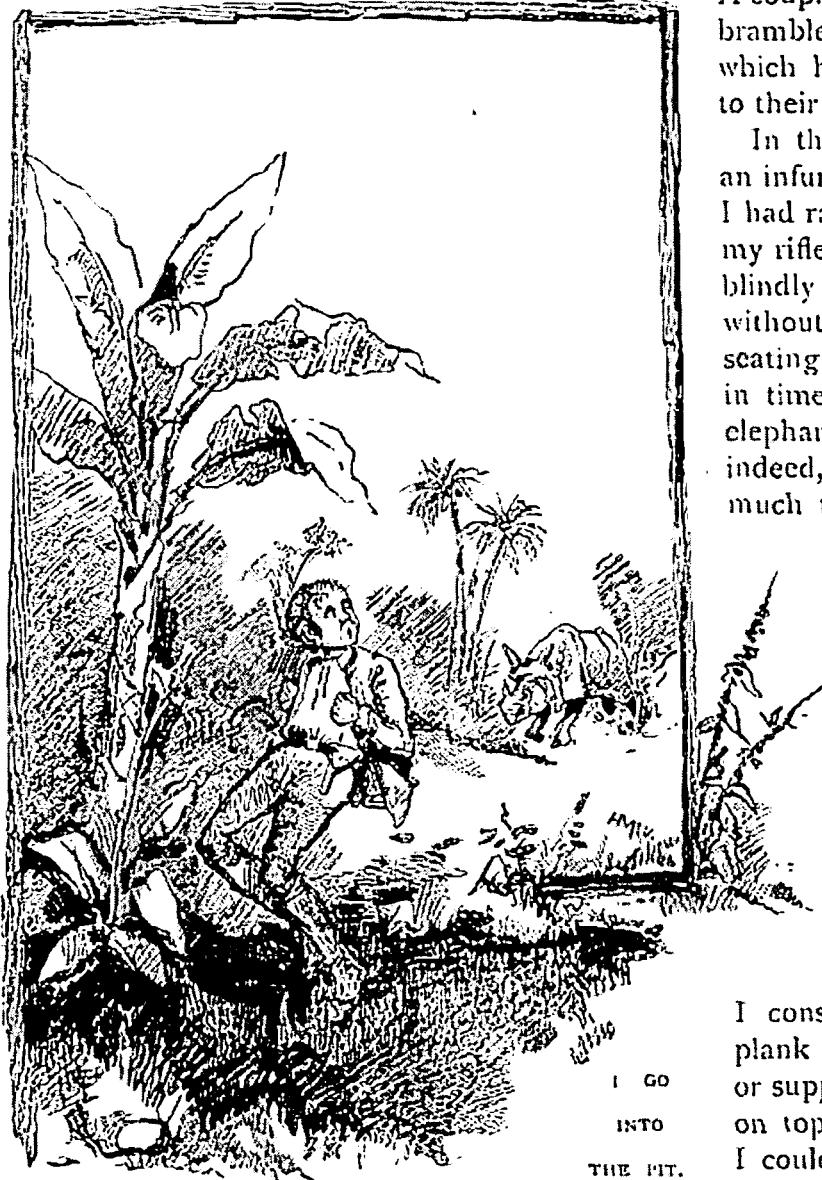


THE MAJOR'S BIG-TALK STORIES. NO. IV.

BY F. BLAKE CROFTON.

A SEE-SAW IN AN ELEPHANT PIT.



I GO
INTO
THE PIT.

SOME miles from the company's trading-post was a four-sided cut in the ground. It was thirty feet long, by twenty broad. In depth it was over twelve feet, and its sides were perpendicular. It had been an elephant pit when elephants were plenty and the ivory trade brisk in the district.

At the time I speak of, it was no longer in use. A couple of planks, covered with withered sods and brambles, were all that remained of the false roof which had served to lure unsuspecting elephants to their downfall.

In this cut I was once forced to take refuge by an infuriated *keilwa*, or black rhinoceros, at which I had rashly fired. I was obliged to throw away my rifle in my race, and had barely time to leap blindly into the pit, whose bottom I luckily reached without any injury beyond a slight shock. Here, seating myself on a pile of broken planks, which in times past had yielded beneath the weight of elephants, I began to reflect. I had enough time; indeed, I feared I might have a good deal too much time for reflection. A wounded rhinoceros is a stayer, and no mistake.

That I could climb out by piling up rubbish seemed likely; but I did n't want to climb out while the *keilwa* was on duty there. That he could jump in was certain; and I fancied I could tease him into risking a leap. But I was far from wishing him to do so, unless I could go up and out *at the same instant*; and this, I thought, was simply impossible.

At last I hit upon a scheme—a dangerous one to be sure, but not so dangerous as waiting to be starved to death. I constructed a see-saw. A strong, unbroken plank made my moving-beam; for a stationary, or supporting board, I put several broken planks on top of one another and bound them, as best I could, with bits of old rope. This rope had formerly served to bind the false roof, and now lay among its ruins at the bottom of the pit.

One end of the moving-beam was immediately under that side of the pit where the rhinoceros had taken his stand. Across the beam, from this end to where its center rested on the fixed support, I tied branches and covered them with withered

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grass—knowing that a rhinoceros is never remarkable for smartness, and is especially easy to deceive when angry.

I then took my seat on the other end of the see-saw, thereby, of course, tipping up the extremity nearest the huge brute, at which I began popping with my revolver. I also, in imitation of the natives, called him various abusive names, and reflected in-

If he touched the see-saw with any part of his ponderous body, I should be shot up—where, I could not exactly tell; if he missed the see-saw, I should stay down, and it would be all up with me.

Bang! came his forefoot on the raised end of the beam, cutting short my reflections. Whiz! up went the lower end, and I with it, like a rocket. I fortunately alighted outside the pit, having been



THE RHINOCEROS
GOES INTO THE PIT.

sultingly upon his ancestry. At last he screamed, or perhaps I should say grunted, with rage (whether at the bullets or the abuse, I cannot say) and withdrew a few steps for a charge. Notwithstanding a slight sinking sensation, I fired my last cartridge and shouted out the name which I had heard was most offensive to a sensitive kerlou. Then I shut my eyes and nervously awaited his descent.

considerably above its brink at the height of my flight.

The rhinoceros was now a captive himself. Indeed, I believe he continues one to this day, for an agent of Barnum's shortly afterward visited our station in search of new attractions for his menagerie, and I sold my prisoner for —, but I must not let out trade secrets.