



FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

THE STORY of A PET TIGER

BY COLONEL F. T. POLLOK

The story of a pet tiger, acquired by an officer in India under exciting conditions. Twice the handsome and faithful creature saved his master's life, but the second time it cost him his own. Selim, the pet tiger, was buried in a pathetic little grave, with a headstone bearing an appropriate inscription.



SOME thirty-five years ago I was wandering about in search of game in the South Mahratta country, my sole companion being an aged Musulman shikaree. About tiffin-time we came to the remains of what had formerly been a cantonment, for there were portions of bungalow walls still standing. The ancient roads and the compounds were now all overgrown with jungle and spear grass, excepting a small inclosure, which was tolerably clear, and in the centre of this space I noticed a grave. I asked my attendant whose remains it covered, and who looked after it and kept it in repair in the midst of such a howling wilderness.

"Sahib!" said he, "it is the grave of a tiger, who saved the great Lord Sahib's life by sacrificing his own. It is in my care."

"A tiger!" cried I; and leaping over the low wall I examined the sarcophagus with much interest. One side had a marble

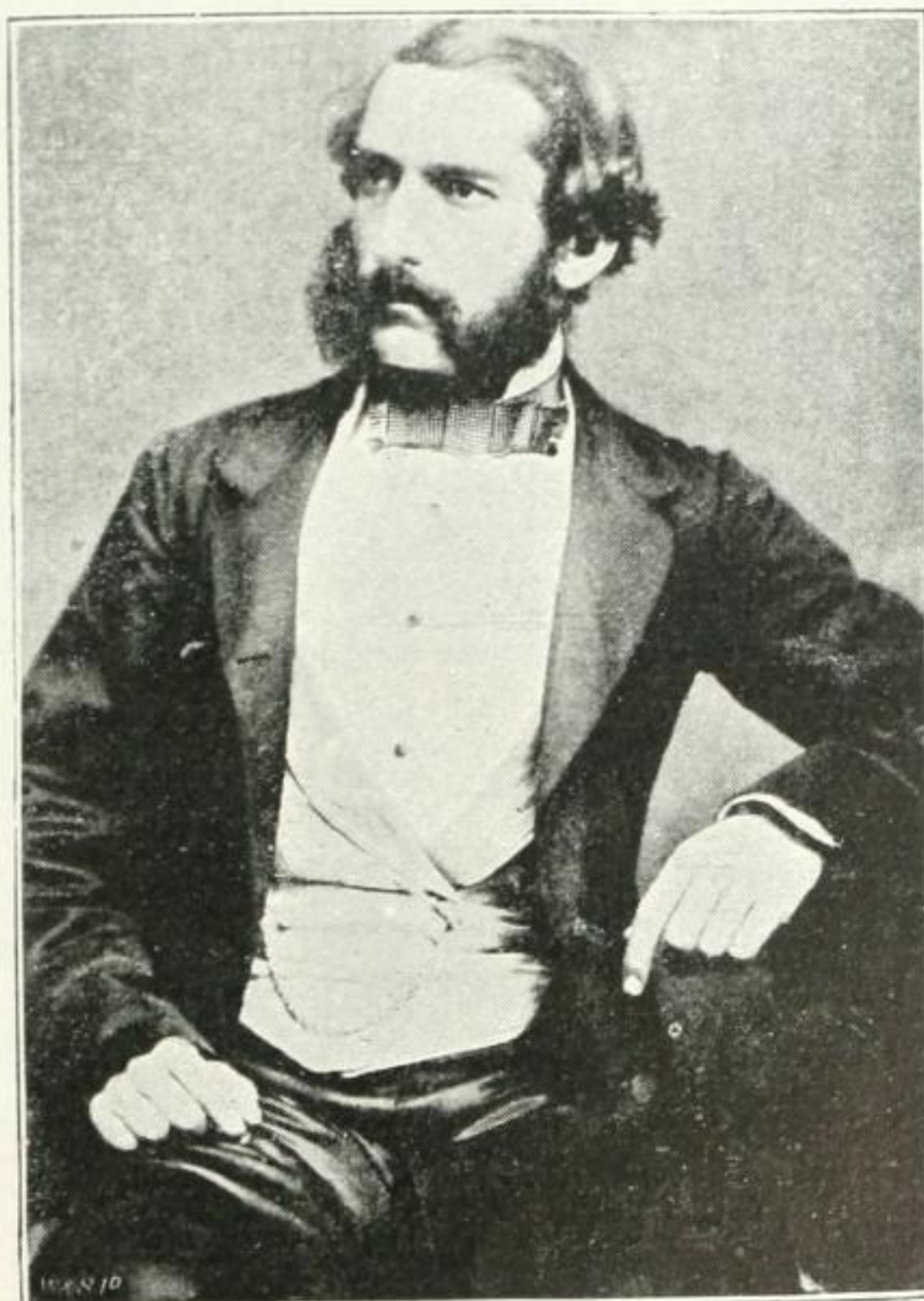
slab and an inscription in Hindustani, Mahratti, and English:—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF SELIM,
A TIGER,
WHO LOST HIS LIFE IN THE DEFENCE OF
HIS MASTER,
J. O.

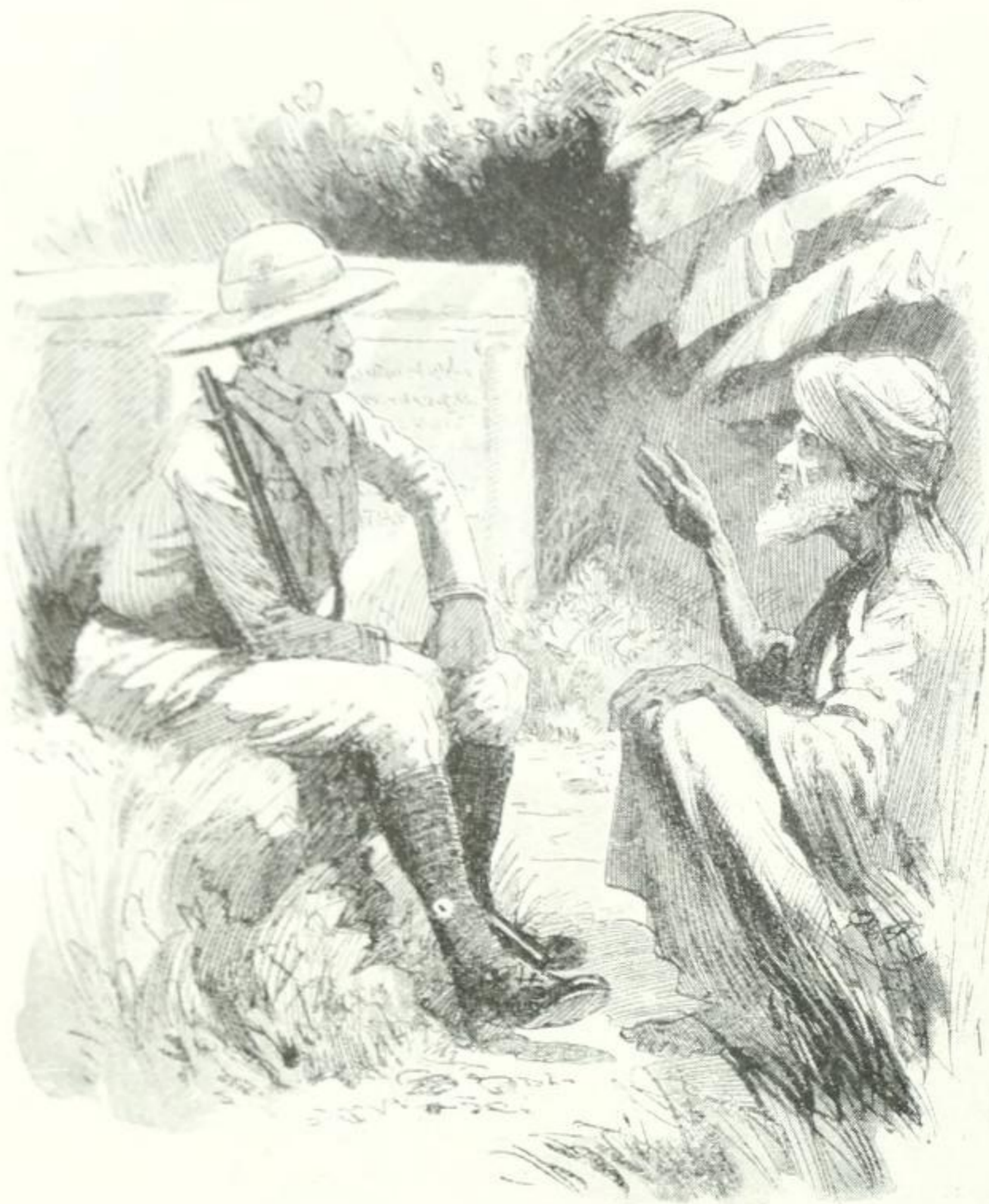
"FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH."

Choosing a spot, I sat down and begged my companion to relate all he knew. He vouched for the truth of the following narrative, which I here repeat as if it had been told in the first person singular by the very officer whose life the pet tiger saved; for, although the shikaree brought out the main features clearly, he wandered a good deal in relating this extraordinary narrative:—

"When I was a subaltern, I was stationed at Dharwar, Kolapore, and other places in the Southern Mahratta country. Being fond of shooting, I explored the whole country, and in time got to know almost



COLONEL POLLOK, WHO CAME ACROSS THE
TIGER'S GRAVE. [Photo.]



"I SAT DOWN AND BEGGED MY COMPANION TO RELATE ALL HE KNEW."

every inch of it. I had in my employ a young Mussulman shikaree, named Mohammed Esuff." (This man was the actual narrator.) "He was about my own age, and in time we became inseparable.

"One day I had been out shooting in a hilly and rocky district. I did not expect to come across any larger game than pea-fowl, so I was carrying my smooth-bore, loaded with No. 2 shot, whilst the shikaree carried my double rifle. I had just rounded a sharp bend in a narrow pass, when I came suddenly face to face with an immense tiger, who was worrying a little one of his own kith and kin. On the impulse of the moment I let fly, point blank into the big fellow's evil countenance. The unnatural brute dropped the youngster, and with many a ricochet against rocks and boulders (showing that his ocular powers were the worse for my visitation) he disappeared before I could get hold of my rifle. I found one youngster dead, but the other—a male—whom I had rescued, was only slightly wounded. Him I picked up; he was then the size of a spaniel pup of six months old.

"As it was getting dark just then, and the place was by no means favourable for an encounter with an enraged tigress should she return to the scene and find one of her hopefuls dead and the other a captive, I beat a hasty

retreat. I took the little brute home. He was too dazed with the mauling he had received to bite or scratch, but nestled up to me in a way most unusual with even the smallest of felines. I had his wounds carefully attended to, and put Selim (for so I christened him) in among a litter of puppies belonging to one of my Poligar dogs. The other four pups were smaller than the stranger, but as they clustered together in their bed of straw I put Selim between them. He went to sleep at once, and two of the puppies crawled right on the top of him. When the mother returned, she did not notice anything unusual. I was rather fearful of the result of my experiment, as she was particularly fierce, and I half expected that she would rend the poor little stranger the moment she saw him; but I did not know what else to do.

"When I entered the godown early next morning I was delighted to find that the big dog had been licking the little tiger's wounds, and that all her youngsters were amicably disposed towards their new foster-brother. The mother seemed to single out the little feline, either on account of his superior size or his stripes (she herself was brindled), I couldn't tell, and to bestow more care on it than even on her own progeny.

"When Selim's wounds had healed and he had been weaned I took him into the house and fed him principally on bread and milk. He used to sleep on a mat in my room, but very often, I fancy, he missed the warmth of his foster-mother, and would creep into my bed and nestle close up to my side. Thus time went on, and in the course of a couple of months he would follow me about like a dog. He and the pups would still have grand games together, and, of course, Selim would knock the others about, but not viciously.

"As he grew bigger I found him rather a nuisance in bed, and tried to tie him up, but he whined so piteously I could get no sleep, and had to let him loose. In time I got him to sleep at the foot of my bed, instead of alongside. When he was about nine months old my detachment was relieved and I was ordered back to Poona. As I rode at the head of my men Selim trotted alongside, he and my Arab horse being fast friends. On arrival at our headquarters the rumour had gone ahead that I had a tame tiger, and a great crowd of natives assembled to see us march past.

"For some time after my arrival at Poona no

restraint was put upon Selim; but at last the Brigadier wrote that he had heard I had a dangerous pet, and ordered me either to destroy it or fasten it up. Destroy my loving Selim I would not, and to tie him up was almost impossible, but I barred up the old zenana part of the bungalow, and in it during the day poor Selim lay in durance vile. But on moonlight nights, when everybody was asleep, many a gambol had I with the tiger, my dogs, and my horse, all together.

"Troubles broke out before very long in the South Mahratta country, and I was able to give valuable information about the remoter parts of the district where the disaffected were assembling; and having a knowledge of Mahratta and Hindustan, I was soon appointed assistant political agent. Through my knowledge of the country and people, I made it very hot for the insurgents, and, before long, I was the best-hated man in the whole province. My life was attempted more than once.

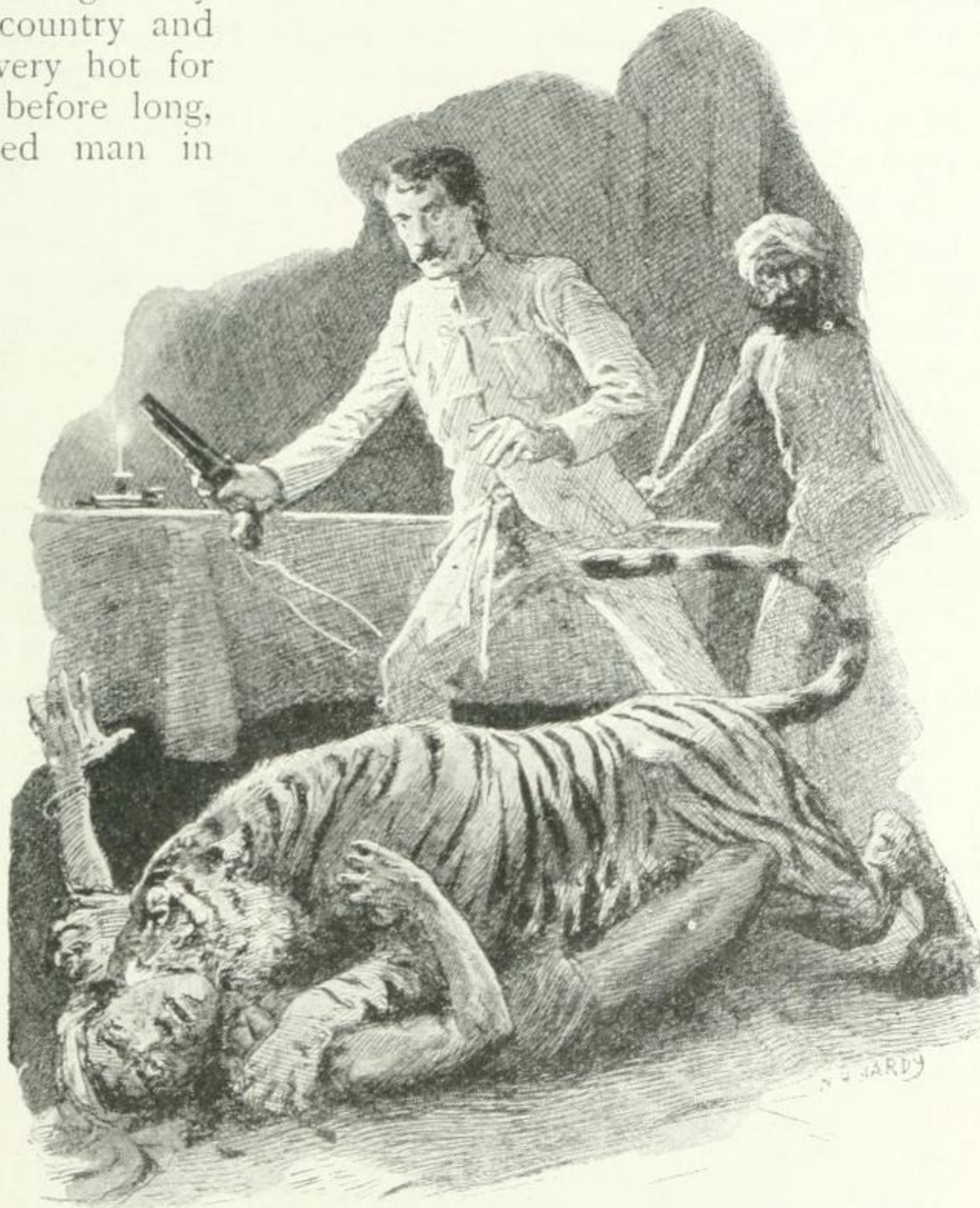
"Selim was now about a year old. In size he equalled a large panther. He had never tasted raw flesh. I fed him on bread and milk principally, and occasionally gave him some well-cooked meat and potatoes in the form of Irish stew. He throve amazingly, and was a fine big beast for his age, with a coat like velvet. He still slept in my room, but no longer on my bed, as he had a comfortable charpoy (native bedstead) for himself.

"One night, as I lay asleep, I was awakened by a loud growl and a spring. I leaped out of bed, and then it became evident that Selim had seized somebody or something, whom he was worrying right royally. My guns were fastened to the bottom of my bed by a chain that passed through the trigger-guards; and the ends of this chain were safely padlocked by a letter-

lock, which no native could pick. I had to take this precaution, for the natives in that part of India are expert thieves, and have been known to steal a sheet from under the sleeper. As the tremendous scuffle went on, punctuated by screams of pain, I lit a candle, and seized a double-barrelled pistol which I kept under my pillow. Then, on looking round, I found my usually gentle Selim with every hair on end, furiously shaking a naked savage who was covered with grease—presumably the better to elude capture after he had done his assassin's work.

"It was no easy task to remove the enraged young tiger, whose blood was now up, and whose glaring eyeballs denoted the passions within. My native guard, however, secured the

would-be murderer, whilst I managed at last to pacify my saviour. And 'saviour' Selim certainly was, for the midnight intruder afterwards confessed he was one of a gang sworn to take my life. But under promise of secrecy and pardon, he divulged the names of his confederates, and I soon had them all in gaol. The man himself only recovered after a long and severe illness from the injuries he had received. He had been fearfully mauled. That was the first time my pet had ever tasted blood, and occasionally afterwards he would stalk an animal on his own account, but would desist if



"I FOUND MY GENTLE SELIM WITH EVERY HAIR ON END, FURIOUSLY SHAKING A NAKED SAVAGE."

sharply spoken to and called away.

"Soon after this sensational incident I raised a corps of Bheels and harassed the enemy so persistently that they gave in, and in six months after my return all was quiet again, so I resumed my sporting habits.

"There were reports of a man-eating tiger. Selim was now nearly three years old, and so

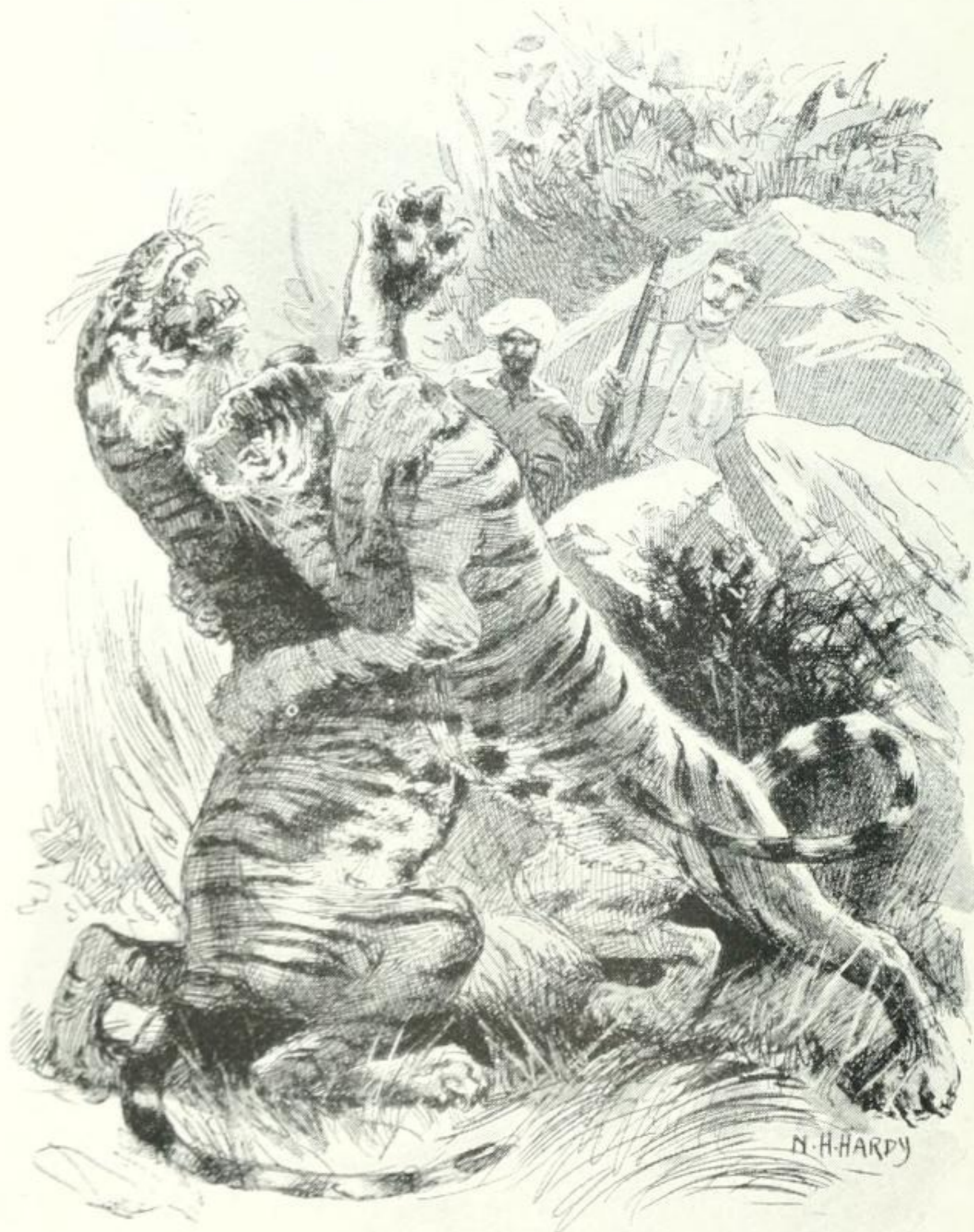
big that one day, not knowing that he was out, and seeing a huge tiger bounding towards me, I was on the point of firing at him. After this I provided my pet with a gorgeous collar decorated with flaunting blue ribbons. I had constantly been on the trail of the newly-announced man-eater, but he had always baffled me. One day I was walking along in the very place where I had rescued Selim. The shikaree and my beautiful pet had loitered behind, whilst I was picking my way amongst the rocks and peering into the bushes. Suddenly I stumbled, and as I did so, some large animal sprang clean over a rock, and would have seized me by the head but for my fortunate fall. As it was, he took the hunting cap off my head! I had fallen on all-fours, and my rifle struck a rock; both hammers were broken off short. I was absolutely helpless. I drew my shikar knife, determined to make the best fight possible against my mysterious foe. The tiger (for it *was* a tiger, and even turned out to be the dreaded man-eater) had been carried forward by the impetus of his spring, but he turned sharply and was making for me, when with a magnificent bound Selim sprang upon the man-eater and seized him by the throat.

Now, the latter was much larger than my pet, but was evidently old, and moreover had but one eye and a partially damaged jaw. Selim, though smaller, looked double his usual size, with every hair on end. He was a creature of extraordinary beauty—clear-eyed, lithe, and with a coat of quite dazzling brilliancy. The struggle between the two tigers was perfectly appalling. I was almost frantic with excitement.

"I called to Esuff to bring up the gun,

and he hastened to me, but the two were struggling so violently, and were so huddled together, that I was afraid to fire for fear of injuring my devoted pet, who was now fighting for my life. Selim never relaxed his first inexorable grip. The older beast struggled desperately, growling and gurgling in a truly awful manner, but the younger was surely throttling him, and he was nearing his strange end. I could hear rumbling sounds in his throat as, with a last expiring effort, the man-eater got his two hind legs under Selim, who was then above him, and, with one vigorous backward kick, ripped up his stomach and almost disembowelled my poor pet. I screamed aloud in utter horror and grief. But, dying though he was, Selim would not let go. He held on with the tenacity of a bulldog, and my usually mild and playful companion was now a fiend incarnate, and would *not* loosen his grasp until the last signs of life had left his foe. And this moment soon came. Blood poured from the man-eater's throat, and dyed his gorgeous stripes. Suddenly he stiffened and, with a last kick of his hind legs, expired. Never for a moment had he a chance of life while that

terrible grip was on his throat. At length Selim let go, and fell over on his side. I told the shikaree to bring water in my hat, and I half lifted the faithful dying creature on my knee, blubbering like a child over him. While Selim feebly licked my hands and face we poured water down his throat, but in less than five minutes his gallant spirit had fled. Poor Selim was dead, after saving my life for the second time. He was indeed 'Faithful unto death.'



"SELIM SPRANG UPON THE MAN-EATER AND SEIZED HIM BY THE THROAT."

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