THE GREAT MIGRATION

The tigrero, in this case, arms himself with a short spear, the shaft of which is made of a strong hard wood, either a  
guaiacum, or a piece of the split trunk of one of the hardwood palms. The point of this spear is frequently without iron  
only sharpened and hardened by being held in the fire and with this in his left hand, and his short sword in the right, the  
hunter advances with confidence upon his formidable adversary. This confidence has been fortified by a contrivance  
which he has had the precaution to adopt that is, of enveloping his left arm in the ample folds of his blanket serape,  
roana, or poncho, according to the country to which he belongs and using this as a shield. The left arm is held well  
forward, so that the woollen mass may cover his body against the bound of the animal, and thus is the attack received,  
The jaguar, like all feline quadrupeds, springs directly forward upon his prey. The tigrero prepared for this, and, with  
every nerve braced, receives the assailant upon the point of his short spear. Should the jaguar strike with its claws it only  
clutches the woolen cloth; and while tearing at this which it believes to be the body of its intended victim the right arm  
of the hunter is left free, and with the sharp blade of his machete he can either make cut or thrust at his pleasure. It is  
not always that the tigrero succeeds in destroying his enemy without receiving a scratch or in return; but a daring  
hunter makes light of such wounds for these scars become badges of distinction, and give him eclat among the villages of  
the montana. Just such a man was the guide whom our young hunters had engaged, and who, though a tiger hunter by  
profession, was equally expert at the capturing of a bear when one of these animals chanced to stray down from the  
higher slopes of the mountains, into the warmer country frequented by the jaguars. It was not always that bears could be  
found in these lower regions: but there is a particular season of the year when the black bear (ursus frugilegus) descends  
far below his usual range, and even wanders far out into the forests of the montana. Of course there must be some  
inducement for his making this annual migration from his mountain home: for the ursus frugilegus, though here dwelling  
within the tropics, does not affect a tropical climate. Neither is he a denizen of the very cold plains the paramos that  
extend among the summits of eternal snow. A medium temperature is his choice: and this, as we have already stated, he  
finds among the foot hills, forming the lower zone of the eastern andes. It is there he spends most of his life, and that is  
his place of birth, and consequently his true home. At a particular season of the year, corresponding to the summer of  
our own country, he makes a roving expedition to the lower regions; and for what purpose this was the very question  
which alexis put to the tigrero. The answer was as curious as laconic: comer la cabeza del negro. (to eat the negro’s head)  
ha, ha to eat the negro’s head repeated ivan, with an incredulous laugh. Just so, senorito rejoined the man: that is what  
brings him down here. Why, the voracious brute said ivan; you don’t mean to say that he makes food of the heads of the   
poor negroes oh no replied the tigrero, smiling in his turn; it is not that. What then impatiently inquired ivan. I’ve heard  
of negro head tobacco. He’s not a tobacco chewer, is he carrambo no, senorito, replied the tiger hunter, now laughing  
outright; that’s not the sort of food the fellow is fond of. You’ll see it presently. By good luck, it’s just in season now just  
as the bears fancy it or else we needn’t look to start them here. We should have to go further up the mountains: where  
they are more difficult both to find and follow. But no doubt we’ll soon stir one up, when we get among the cabezas del  
negro. The nuts are just now full of their sweet milky paste, of which the bears are so fond, and about a mile from here  
there are whole acres of the trees. I warrant we find a bear among them. Though still puzzled with this half explanation,  
our young hunters followed the guide confident that they would soon come in sight of the negro’s head. The tagua tree.  
After going about a mile further, as their guide had forewarned them, they came within sight of a level valley, or rather a  
plain, covered with a singular vegetation. It looked as if it had been a forest of palms the trunks of which had sunk down  
into the earth, and left only the heads, with their great radiating fronds above the ground some of them stood a foot or   
above the surface; but most appeared as if their stems had been completely buried they were growing all the same,  
however; and, at the bottom of each great bunch of pinnate leaves, could be seen a number of large, roundish objects  
which were evidently the fruits of the plant. There was no mystery about the stems being buried underground. There  
were no stems, and never had been any except those that were seen rising a yard or so above the surface. Neither was  
there any longer a mystery about the negro’s head; for the rounded fruit, with its wrinkled coriaceous pericarp  
suggesting a resemblance to the little curly knots of wool on the head of an african was evidently the object to which  
the tigrero had applied the ambiguous appellation. What our hunters saw was neither more nor less than a grove of  
tagua trees better known as the vegetable ivory. This singular tree was for a long time regarded as a plant of the oycas  
  
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