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THE WAYS
OF MAN AND BEAST
IN INDIA

by
D. KING MARTIN

WITH 29 ILLUSTRATIONS

Including Two Original Drawings by
GILLIAN KING MARTIN



WRIGHT & BROWN
4 FARRINGTON AVENUE
LONDON, E.C.4.

I wish to acknowledge the kindness of friends who have kindly allowed the use of certain photographs, to supplement our own.

Thanks are also due to the India Office for the use of certain books to verify historical dates.

D. KING MARTIN.

Budleigh Salterton,
June, 1935.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I EARLY DAYS - - - -	11
II THE GANGES DIVISION - -	28
III ADVENTURES IN THE PALAIN AND KHANSUR VALLEYS - - -	48
IV FURTHER ADVENTURES - -	64
V BERAR - - - - -	76
VI BERAR (continued) - - -	93
VII BERAR (continued). IN THE ARMS OF A PANTHER AND OTHER STORIES - - - -	109
VIII A TIGER BABY - - - -	130
IX CHANDA - - - - -	137
X CHANDA (continued) - - -	153
XI BILASPUR - - - - -	167
XII BETUL - - - - -	193
XIII BETUL (continued) - - -	212
XIV NIMAR - - - - -	228
XV NIMAR (continued) - - -	251
XVI THE FORT OF ASIRGARH - -	280

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
My First Tiger Baby - - - -	12
Among the Snows - - - -	12
Camp in the Himalayas - - - -	48
Light and Shade - - - -	48
Skinning Black-Buck - - - -	60
Rustam with Blue-Bull - - - -	60
Pangolin or Scaly Ant-eater - - - -	70
Peepul Tree - - - -	70
A Jungle Camp - - - -	74
Lonar—Volcanic Lake and Temples - - - -	74
Antu, famous Raj-Gond Shikarri - - - -	88
Sloth Bear - - - -	88
Gaur - - - -	124
Ballal Shah and his Queen - - - -	140
Sambhur Stag - - - -	140
Mugger - - - -	144
Balki-Devi, Chanda - - - -	144
Old Temple, Chanda - - - -	192
Ready for Tiger Beat - - - -	218
The Holy Narbada - - - -	218
Mandhata - - - -	230
James and Percy - - - -	230
The Tiger Family when quite young - - - -	242
Old Kanhai - - - -	242
My Last Tiger - - - -	264
Bahadur Khan before Akbar Badshah - - - -	268
Entrance to Asirgarh Fort - - - -	268
Tank in the Fort - - - -	

For the stories of men and of days that are gone,
Of towns now dust, of a vanished race,
Are but old names carved on the dungeon stone
They lived and laboured and left their trace.

SIR ALFRED LYALL.

THE WAYS OF MAN AND BEAST IN INDIA

CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS

I LOOK back now, over nearly half a century, to my first appointment to the Forest Service in India. Sir Alfred Lyall, administrator and poet, nominated me just before his retirement from the Lieutenant Governorship of the United Provinces, known in those days as the North-West Provinces of Agra and Oudh. In October, 1887, I was ordered to report for duty by the 7th of November to the Officer in charge of the Ganges Forest Division, at Kohdwara, the divisional winter headquarters. Kohdwara was in those days an insignificant squalid town tucked away at the foot of the Himalayas, distant some thirty hours by road and rail from Naini Tal, and eighteen miles north of Najibabad. I left Naini early in the morning of the 5th of November to catch the early train which in those days ran between Kathgodam at the foot of Naini Tal and Bareilly, the junction for the Najibabad line. Although nearly fifty years have slipped by it seems but yesterday and "as a dream when one awaketh" since the day when I started out for a lifetime in the Indian Forests—a lifetime on

which I shall ever look back with happy recollections of the jungle and its wild life, and with that vague longing common to the many who have given their best years to the "Land of Regrets".

It was a beautiful crisp morning with that sharp nip in the air which ushers in an early winter in the Himalayas, with at least six months certainty of perfect weather to follow. For the first two miles of my twelve miles trek from Naini to Kathgodam the road is uninteresting, as it zig-zags down the hill, passing through the outskirts of the town to the Naini Tal brewery, thereafter running down the valley of the Bowlia and following its right bank. This stream has for its source the overflow from the Naini Tal lake. The brewery now no longer exists; the greater part of it is buried deep beneath millions of tons of rock and shale, deposited by a gigantic land slide, when half the great hill-side opposite and a thousand or more feet above it came sliding down, flinging itself right across the valley of the Bowlia almost completely wiping out the brewery. The assistant manager and many of the native staff lie buried eighty feet or more beneath the debris. A survivor of the terrible catastrophe who happened, with several others, to be standing on the opposite hill far above the brewery, watching the preliminary slips that occurred, told me the following story. The tearing turbid waters of the Bowlia cutting against the foot of the hill had undermined it, and caused an enormous slice of it to slide down partially. From above the scar left by this early subsidence, great rocks as big as cottages, from time to time becoming detached, came bound-

ing and thundering down the hill, snapping off great pine trees like carrots and falling into the water with enormous splashes. Meanwhile the assistant manager and his men, in the brewery compound far below, were also watching the crashing rocks above. Suddenly, the whole hill-side started to move. Coming on with a rush and a roar like thunder, it burst across the valley, sweeping them all out of life in an instant, burying them deep among millions of tons of earth and shale. They were never found. The whole valley shook, and the concussion raised a dust-laden wind which nearly swept off their feet people standing on the high ground above, leaving them petrified with fear. So great was the mass displaced, that large "chir" pine and other trees growing on it remained standing for months—as if transplanted by a giant hand—only to die later, from shock to their root systems.

A short distance below the brewery, the valley widens out, the high mountains on either bank recede, enclosing a wide expanse of gently undulating ground much of which is terraced for cultivation; little huts belonging to cultivators stand along the road-side. The valley at this point looks as if it had once been a great moraine, through which the stream has carved for itself a deep channel, and I can remember the time when the banks though steep, were densely clothed with jungle down to the water's edge. In those happy days the Bowlia was a rushing stream, flowing between and tumbling over great grey limestone boulders, into bright pools connected by shingle-beached runnels. Except when

swelled by heavy monsoon rainfalls, the waters ran sparkling clear beneath the green shade of great trees growing between the boulders and along its banks, their crowns meeting high overhead. At intervals where mountain tracks led down to crossings, stood little huts housing rough Kumaoni water mills worked by diversions from the stream. Above the sound of the purling water and the hum of the grinding stones rises the sharp tinkle, tinkle, of the merry little dancing clappers. These are small pieces of wood fitted loosely to the grain-bins hanging above, which, as they drum on the rapidly revolving stones shake down the grain from the suspended bins. Blue smoke rises lazily from the huts, to hang in the tree tops, and the shrill laughter of women and children proclaim the presence of man.

Some years before the time of which I write the valley had been ravaged by a tremendous cyclonic rainstorm. Driven by high winds the rain fell literally in sheets and this caused the great landslide of Naini, which resulted in severe loss of life and property. A huge slice of St. Loe hill slid into the lake, carrying an hotel, shops and public buildings with it. The displacement sent a vast wall of water down the lake and over the waste weir, rushing down my peaceful valley, carrying with it whirling shale and many splendid trees. But in my time, though scars still showed where the high banks had been cut away, the trees and the river lay once more in peace, dreaming in the sunlight, forgetful of storm.

Now, a little further on, the valley closes in again and the cultivation ceases abruptly; thereafter, the

bridle path keeping to the right bank of the Bowlia skirts the densely-wooded hill-side with northern aspect. For purposes of gradient and easy going the road now runs along the hill-side, then follows a ridge, and once more overlooks the ravine, a thousand feet or more below, and still in deep shadow. A gentle morning breeze blows up the valley; it carries the sound of rushing water mingled with the cries of countless birds.

The track I am now following turns up a densely wooded and deep side ravine and in these parts, each cleft has its stream, hurrying to join the main river. The trees, roped about with giant creepers, grow up to the very edge of the road on both sides, the taller ones overhang it and almost meet overhead. A troop of grey langur monkeys, black-faced and white whiskered, who are just becoming lively for the day, make the canopy above their highway, and as they bound across, shake down showers of dewdrops, which fall like a cold mist or rain.

Now the sun, glinting through the chir pines, casts great beams of light which stab the blue haze of the early morning, and now the woods begin literally to be alive with birds of every conceivable species. They flit to and fro through the shafts of sunlight, in twos and threes, then in regular showers, the brighter coloured showing up and dimming, as they pass from shade into light and back again. That bright yellow flash was a golden oriole—those sky-blue comets with long tails, the Himalayan blue magpies—that bevy of bright scarlet and yellow gems a family of Minivettes, the little cock birds wear the

scarlet and black, the hens the more quiet yellow and black. The meteoric shower of green is the hill parakeet, and the bird with undulating flight, raucous voice and flaming orange back is one of the woodpeckers—but one might multiply description indefinitely.

Seen from the topmost spur above the river, the great barrier of the opposite watershed towers a thousand feet and more above the stream bed. These hills are steep and craggy and therefore more scantily verdure clad, but even so great pines cling to them in precarious growth, their spreading branches offering nesting places for the regal lammergeier and grim vulture, while on the crags only the Himalayan goats, the serao and guruhel, can find a footing. A deep rift shows between two of the main bastions; it is marked by the darker foliage of sheltered growth. Through it rushes in cascades the overflow from the "Sath Tal" or seven lakes, and the lakes themselves appear like seven pools of dark green ink set deep down in jungle-girt pockets when looked at from the hills above.

Other lakes there are, Bhim Tal and Naukutchia Tal, the lake of nine bays, where in the shallows the pink and white lotus lilies grow abundantly. In this land of mountain tarns the fish run large; the mah-seer up to as much as fifty pounds, and trout to three pounds and over. But I must move on. The road now leaves the heights, and turning down, begins to round the spurs towards the valley. The Kumaoni of these parts is full of folk lore, and some years after, I was pheasant shooting near by, when, stopping to

have a rest and smoke beside a stream I happened to meet an ancient man, by name Ratan Singh. He was head man of the Jaoli-Koti Pergana, and as such claimed the right to cut the throats of all goats brought as sacrifices to the local godlings. This cruel old devil would pass the side of his hand across his own throat, uttering the most frightful gurgling and spluttering sounds the while and would say, while his beady little eyes literally sparkled with delight, how he would like to have the cutting of his enemies' throats in the same way, and I felt sure he would do it without the slightest compunction.

He told me that in ages past, two giant brethren inhabited the hills. Their names were Jaoli and Bhimali, and they survive to this day in the local names of Jaoli and Bhim Tal. They owned two tracts of land adjoining and unfortunately loved the same maiden. Jealousy started a deadly feud and the younger giant decided to extinguish his elder brother. He therefore started out on a visit to his brother, striding over the hills using a huge chir pine tree as an alpen-stock. He found his brother ploughing his land and tired with the day's work. The visitor was all solicitude and offered on the morrow to do a share of the labour. The elder giant relinquished the plough and the younger worked so steadily and so hard that on the fourth day the work was finished. In apparent amity they sat down together to eat their mid-day meal in the shadow of a huge rock, but now the devil entered into the younger giant and he resolved to do the deed. Leaving his brother half asleep under the boulder, he himself went up the hill under pretence of cutting a

big bamboo to clean out the huge water-pipe they were smoking together. Then, getting behind the boulder he pushed it hard, and over it rolled, on top of the unsuspecting giant beneath. He then picked up his pine tree staff and strode back over the hills to his own place, where he married the maiden they both had loved and ruled his brother's land as well as his own. "And the Kala Donga—the black rock—exists to this day, Sahib," said the old man. "Your honour will recall it; it lies below the hill, near the footpath up the Nalena Valley." And I knew it well; it was a landmark for miles—a great ten foot cube of jet-black limestone. The old man then salaamed profoundly, and we each went our respective ways.

The road has now dropped almost to the level of the river, the air is much warmer and the dark glossy green of the sal tree now appears for the first time; so also does the cry of the little red jungle cock who makes his home chiefly among these lovely trees. But with the crossing of an old grey bridge over the water I realise enchantment has given place to every day matters, and I hear the whistle of the fussy little metre-gauge engine echoing against the hills. Temperate and torrid zone meet in this valley; it is a veritable naturalist's paradise, swarming with bird and insect life of every imaginable size, colour, and variety. Living here for a term of years, one would constantly come across new and beautiful birds, gorgeous butterflies and moths, for not only do they come down in winter from the far north, but in summer new varieties are constantly filtering along

the Himalayas from Assam and perhaps even further afield.

Shortly after, I arrive at the station, and there have the good luck to meet J.M.B. who is the officer in charge of the Ganges Forest Division, to whom I have to report myself at Kohdwara; but as he is himself en route for that very place, he suggests I report myself then and there. This, of course, I promptly do, and thenceforward we travel on together. We board the fussy little train, which pants out of the station, whistling till the cliffs in the valley echo and re-echo the sound. The carriages are small and stuffy, and I find them uncomfortably hot, but it is my first experience of the Terai plains since a very early age, so that everything interests me intensely.

First comes the dense jungle of the Terai where I expect to see all manner of wild beasts disappearing into the thickets—but actually none. Then follows mile upon mile of dead level where as far as one can see, is a vast prairie of tall, waving “burroo” grass. It is still very early in the season, so that as yet, this is only burnt in patches, which are carpeted now with a delicate green regrowth, the delight of the spotted chital, most beautiful of all the deer, a few of which are even now browsing in the distance. From time to time, the snorting of the little engine flushes the handsome black partridge. They shoot up into the air like rockets, singly and in pairs, then turning, plane away to settle in the distance. Presently, a small family of peafowl do the same; the cock bird in gorgeous burnished blues and greens and long eye-spangled tail, rises with much flapping of wings

and also planes over the grass. The numerous borrow-pits along the line are full of water which, apparently holding tiny fry, are of great interest to pied kingfishers, for a pair sit, silent and intent, on an overhanging bough, studying every movement of the finny mites in the water below. Further on, two are hovering on rapidly beating wings—the action ceases, and there is a brief pause. Then one drops like a stone, to reappear after an instant with a silver streak in his bill. Yet further still, as we pass through a burnt glade, a stately pair of Sarus cranes strut over the grass. They pause to watch the train go by, magnificent birds, standing well over four feet high, dressed in beautifully-cut morning coats of delicate french grey, with red heads.

Presently the line runs between cultivated fields, and just as the sun—like a great orange globe—dips below the horizon leaving a yellow twilight behind it, we steam into Barcilly station having left the glorious Himalayas sixty-five miles behind us. Here we dine, and afterwards board the Oudh and Rohilkand railway, dubbed by the would-be facetious “The Old and Rotten Railway” for very obvious reasons. This is to carry us westward to Najibabad, and being a very slow train, it stops at every wayside station. The line steadily converges towards the hills again, so that by early dawn, we are once more in sight of them.

The country is a portion of the great Gangetic plain, almost dead flat and intensely cultivated. In the blue haze of smoky dawn, as far as one can see, spreads out the green of many winter crops in varying

shades. There are vivid greens, dark greens, blue greens, with here and there patches of bright yellow which are the mustard fields just coming into bloom. And yet another green is the bronze green of the large mango trees, marking the presence of villages. The train pursues its northerly trend, and, as it were on the edge of the dawn light, there appears, faintly at first, a misty form in blue. It gains in substance every moment, then with the increasing light seems suddenly to take shape and burst into view.

There stand the dark blue foothills of the greater Himalayas; clothed in dense jungle, they rise abruptly from the plain like a huge shadowy wall. But the marvel is still to come. As the light grows, suddenly above the dark buttresses, a rose flushed and gleaming peak lifts up, then another—and behold! two giants of the higher Himalaya, the abode of everlasting snow and ice. The rose flush fades as the sun rises above the horizon and now they stand white and sparkling against the blue of heaven.

Now we draw into the station of Najibabad, a small Mohammedan town of some antiquity, and one which gained a rather unenviable notoriety during the Mutiny of 1857. We descend and trek through the town, past open shops, where the dealers are already sitting cross-legged behind their wares—piles of brass lotahs, mounds of grain, curious vegetables of many colours. A knot of women stand at a street corner gossiping, they wear saris of red, blue and yellow, and the sun winks on the bright water jars carried so gracefully on their heads—"The pitcher going to the well!"

Here is the village school all open to the day, in which the little urchins, even at this early hour, squat in rows, bobbing up and down exactly like so many unfledged parrots, repeating over and over and all together, each line of the lesson read out to them by the master. The sound of the busy querns grinding the daily bread comes from the low mud houses, and from the byres come kine and buffaloes together, driven generally by tiny children. The soft muted sound of their wooden bells is pleasant, and seeing us, the big mouse-coloured buffaloes with wide, sweeping horns and china blue eyes, shoulder out into the dust and lumber off, grunting as they go.

On the outskirts of the town we are led into a large enclosure in which stand the remains of an old Mohammedan palace, and here we make our camp. In front of it, is a grove of fine mango trees, centred by an ancient well which in other days evidently possessed a plastered parapet, and two white pillars with a bullock run show that it was once used for working a Persian water wheel. Moreover a garden once was here, for masonry runnels radiating from the well still exist, though every other trace of cultivation has long since gone.

Under the mangoes are picketed our two Forest elephants, swaying to and fro as is their habit, while leisurely feeding on ber or pipal branches. Their great ears from time to time flap lazily, and their huge tails flick to keep off the teasing flies. There are also a number of camels standing or squatting about, surrounded by camp baggage of every kind; they are being laden to the accompaniment of much

grunting and bubbling. Presently a young female, more perverse and skittishly inclined, rises before the operation is completed, with a grunt and a roar, waving one leg east, another west, and bobbing two yards of neck like a pendulum, meanwhile casting one's unfortunate possessions to the four corners of the field.

While I sit watching this performance which is new to me and therefore interesting, breakfast is announced and we sit down to an excellent meal. This over, the servants begin packing up, preparatory to starting for Kohdwara, leaving a man behind to give us tea and to follow on the spare elephant. Lighting a pipe, I now stroll out to watch the cumbersome elephants being saddled—a much more peaceful performance. This being finished, the bird life with which the grove abounds claims my attention.

Most numerous are the ever ubiquitous minahs (one of the Indian starlings) prying into every hole and cranny, either searching for some luscious grub or in sheer inquisitiveness. A family of big green Indian parrots fly from tree to tree squawking and squabbling for likely nesting holes, this being their time for arranging family matters—giving and taking in marriage; to them the small striped Indian squirrel is a great nuisance, he also peeps into every likely retreat, scuttling off and playing hide-and-seek round the boles and branches, displacing showers of loose bark. There sit also a couple of rollers—so called the Indian jay—in plumage of gorgeous dark and sky-blue; they bow and croak to each other, then one

of them spies some succulent morsel below and immediately dives on brilliant wings to retrieve it. On the ground about the trees are heavily hopping some dark brown birds with queer white eyes. These are often called "The Seven Sisters" because they are so often found together in that number; their proper name is "White-eyed Babbler" and it suits them well. They are now on their perpetual peregrination—every dry leaf is turned over, every nook explored. There is much scandal discussed in undertones, until some slight disagreement leads to a flare up, they depart, and all is still. A pair of lesser Drongos (king-crows) now arrive, wearing well-fitting black tail coats. Exclusive and aggressive little folk these, who from time to time scurry away to harry or score off intruding crow or kite. Then as the sun gains strength as it soars to the zenith, other feathered folk who have been scouring the fields for food, return for shelter—two or three hoopoes, provided with pencil crests which astonishingly open and shut fan-wise, among them. The entire mixed family now go in for a brief shut-eye, and I wend my way back to the Mahal, to find J.M.B. sound asleep in a chair, so I follow his example and that of the birds.

After tea and a pipe we mount an elephant, leaving the boy to follow with the kit on the other one. It takes a little time to get accustomed to the swaying gait of the great beast, but he is an ideal perch from which to see the lie of the land and to shoot small game and para (the hog-deer) which are to be found in these parts. We leave cultivation now, and high grass with clumps of plum bushes succeeds it.

There comes the frequent cry of "Pateloo, Pateloo," constantly repeated. It is the call of the common Indian partridge, which is much given to roosting in these bushes at night or when not feeding.

Gradually the road rises and bends slightly eastward, the tree growth increases steadily in density and height, until eventually we are moving through almost impenetrable jungle. The trees stand in close phalanx, in literally hundreds of species, hung with creepers, notably the Bauhinia, with its dark green leaves shaped exactly like a camel's foot.

All this jungle to me is an absolute paradise, and I sit with eyes intent on every movement of bird and beast. Suddenly our elephant stops with a jerk which throws me violently against J.M.B., and the mahout looking thoroughly excited whispers: "Hazur, jungli hathi ata hai." (Wild elephants are coming, your Honour.) Neither J.M.B. nor I had heard a sound, and I believe the first intimation conveyed to the mahout was through his mount, elephants being peculiarly sensitive to sounds and scents over considerable distances, especially to those of their own kind. Now we both distinctly and for the first time, hear the sound of branches being broken and torn down. Our servant on the other elephant had now come up and the mahouts back their respective charges behind one of the many enormous semel trees growing close to the road-side. The huge buttresses thrown out round the bases of these trees are frequently eight to ten feet deep, and run to as much as fifteen feet up the bole, there is therefore ample shelter for our elephants. Both animals stand per-

fectly still, realising the proximity of possible danger. The crashing and rending of branches comes closer and closer, but we heave a sigh of relief when we locate it as approaching the road just ahead of our retreat. The breeze also luckily blows away from the intruders towards us.

The sound of the progress of giants comes nearer, and we hold our breath. Suddenly from the jungle only a few yards ahead, out stalks a huge mukna—a tuskless male. He stands a few seconds turning his head to look up and down the road, then strides out on to it, followed immediately by a fine young tusker, his ivories gleaming white in the sun; then comes a large cow with a fair-sized calf at heel, another cow finally bringing up the rear. All five seem instinctively to turn their heads to look up and down the clearing as they emerge from the jungle, and on reaching the road begin to dust themselves. Each scoops together a small mound of earth, crooking the end of the trunk. They then grip the dust in the crook and fling it over their backs.

It seems to take some time to complete their toilet to their satisfaction and not until this is done, do they begin to move across the road again in single file. Only after they have been gone some time, and the sounds seem to come from a distance do we venture to move on. Caution is necessary, because one can never be certain how they may act. They might have taken fright and bolted on seeing us; on the other hand, the sight of tame elephants might have infuriated them and brought about a charge. Moreover, they had been, only as recently as the previous

cold weather, much harassed by Khedda operations which had split them up into small herds—and elephants have long and retentive memories.

But evening is closing in, and soon after this adventure we see Kohdwara ahead and make for the bungalow there. After two days we push on to Saneh; my first camp in tents and the real jungle—and here begins forest life in earnest.

CHAPTER II

THE GANGES DIVISION

THE Ganges Forest Division comprises the sub-Himalayan Forests from the Ramgunga river in the east, to the Ganges in the west, and it has a total length of between sixty and seventy miles. It can be reached by the route we followed through Najibabad and Kohdwara as also from Hardwar away to the west. The northern boundary runs along the outer crest of the Himalayas, and here the forests are not deep, but eastward there is a vast stretch of country known as the "Doon Tracts" which includes the Kotri and Chaukham Doon—both a paradise for game and shikar of all kinds—the Sona Naddi, the Khansur and Mandalti valleys also, and here the forests are at least twenty miles deep. The trees are the usual sub-Himalayan species, of which Sal, Ain, and Abnus form the bulk, together with large quantities of bamboo.

At the time of which I write the forests of the Chaukham Doon were being worked on the selection system under a preliminary working plan for Ain which is, briefly, this. Trees are selected which are approaching maturity but which are not likely to improve in respect of their marketable value. They are

therefore marked and set aside in coupes or blocks, and are eventually disposed of standing, to contractors who, after having felled the trees and sawn them up, pay for the resulting timber at so much the cubic foot on its export from the depot at Saneh.

At Saneh, just before I knew it, a rather amusing thing happened, and I hope the reader will pardon the digression. During the working season enormous quantities of timber and bamboos are exported, for which passes are issued and dues received; and in this case a forest guard, who could both read and write, was left with five other junior guards in charge of the depot, to protect it and to complete the export by using the remaining passes necessary for its removal to Najibabad after the rest of the forest staff had cleared out, as they were obliged to do on account of the burst of the monsoon. The jungle in the rains grows apace; all manner of insects and reptiles, noxious and otherwise, emerge from their hidings and come into being; the pigs construct for themselves tunnel-like arbours of grass and bent branches wherein the lady pig brings forth her numerous progeny. Other animals of all kinds, especially the wild elephants seem suddenly and amazingly to have increased in numbers and literally to swarm in the jungle. All through the dry, hot months, they have been tucked away in distant, quiet ravines with fodder and water in plenty. Now that the rains bring coolness to the air, instinct tells them they may wander far afield in search of new feeding, secure in the absence of man—and they become all-pervading.

It was thus quite impossible for the six men left

behind to continue living in huts on the ground, which might at any moment become objects of investigation by pushing tuskers. They, therefore, built themselves a hut high up among the branches of a gigantic huldu tree, at least twenty feet from the ground, and here they lived high and dry in comfort and safety with their few belongings. They even cooked their food in the hut for they had provided it with a mud floor and there they kept a fire going constantly.

"And thus we lived, Sahib, and thus befell the event," said Maghan Singh, chief of the six forest guards in charge of the depot, and this is what he told me. It so happened that the timber depot and their huldu tree lay close to the track by which wild elephants had, probably for generations, marched down the Saneh valley to reach the Terai. One day when all six men were together in the hut, idly watching the drifting rain and the shadowy forms of some elephants moving through the jungle below them, one of them suddenly said: "Brothers, I would wager a good rupee that none of our number be brave enough to clap a forest timber pass on to the black flank of one of the lords of the jungle passing yonder!" Now, Maghan Singh had watched them for days negotiating the steep bank from the track down to the river bed, and had noticed that they invariably did it slowly, in single file, and always at the same spot. He now looked up, smiled a broad smile and said: "Thou art unwise to wager, bhaiya, for I will do it, but each of ye must add one rupee to the bet, for behold!—what are five rupees when a man goes with

his life in his hand?" To this, after a discussion, all five finally consented, and Maghan Singh bided his time while the others looked on. They had not long to wait. A couple of days later, a small herd of seven elephants emerged, marched down the track and proceeded to wander across to the opposite side of the river. It was drizzling at the time and a strong wind was blowing towards the men away from the herd.

Maghan Singh saw his chance. He slipped off all his garments save a "langhoti"—a much attenuated loincloth, armed himself with a forest pass well smeared with sticky paste, softly clambered down the ladder from their tree hut, and waited until all the elephants had passed in front of him. He then dodged from tree to tree until he came close behind them. Then said he: "I waited until the last, a female, had pushed her forelegs over the bank and 'chuter per' (on her beam ends) was sliding down the slope, as is the custom of these beasts when taking a steep place, and then I rushed out from behind my tree, smacked the label on her flank and fled for my life. One great trumpet peal she gave, but fear carried me like the wind up the ladder and I tumbled panting, among my comrades. They though trembling, were also laughing, for had they not seen a great jungli hathi labelled like a cow at a market?—and cheerfully they gave me my five rupees for, said they, a better wager they had never made."

After two days at Saneh, J.M.B. and I went on up the valley, sometimes leaving the track to follow the bed of the stream. Here, on the rockledges above

the deeper pools, lay fish-eating alligators basking in the sun, and below them in the green water, large carp swam lazily about, coming up to breathe or to feed when the fly were tempting.

It is pleasant after a hot day march to see the white tents cool against the background of dark trees, and pleasant after a bath and change to draw one's chair near the camp fire to watch the busy movement of camp life around, till the short twilight shuts down over the smoke of the twinkling camp fires, night closes in, and the big stars come out one by one. A clanking of chains announces the arrival of the two elephants to be fed. They stand in the light of the fire, swinging from side to side while the mahouts set down the two loads of huge chupattis—cakes of unleavened flour—which is their meal. Each man folds one and tucks it into the pink cavern of a mouth open to receive it, and the elephants chump solemnly. This feeding is a nightly ritual which is never omitted, and afterwards the big trunks feel round, asking for anything master may have about him, sugar or bananas being a special joy.

I remember on one such occasion, years afterwards, my elephant who was very fond of me, had wrapped her trunk round me and was holding up the end, cup-wise, close to my knee. I was just finishing a whisky and soda and in sheer puckishness I poured the remainder into it. Instantly she blew it furiously into my face nearly blinding me, and marched off full of sound and fury, nor would she for any persuasion come near me again for days afterwards.

Lying awake at night in my tent, I grew familiar

with all the noises of the jungle—the short yelp of a chital deer disturbed perhaps by a tiger; the belling of a big sambhur away in the distance, and from the thickets near at hand, the bark of the little red khakar, frightened by the camp fires and the talk and movement of the men preparing to sleep beside them.

I remember one night a tremendous crashing of elephants in a ravine below the camp, and in the morning they were still moving among the sal and bamboos when I went out to work. From where I stood, I watched a huge tusker make an incision in the bark of a young sal tree and with jerks of his trunk rip and roll a strip right up to the top of the tree, pull it off and devour it. "Spring medicine to cool the blood," said the old mahout who was with me. Thereafter we saw him come up on to the road, and at some distance from us stop before a bank, and there violently plunge his huge ivories again and again into the soil to clean them.

After some days we moved on to the Chaukham Doon itself and here J.M.B. left me and I spent nearly four months alone. Every sportsman in Upper India knows this marvellous valley set like an amphitheatre in a circle of hills. On the southern face of the plateau is a saucer-like depression which looks as if it had once held water. The water drying in course of time had been replaced by grass and when this was burnt all the deer within miles came to feast on the new spring growth. It was and still is, a perfect paradise of shikar. It is a curious thing, however, that in spite of the good feeding the heads of sambhur and chital I shot here did not compare in

length and thickness with those I shot years after at a much lower elevation in the Central Provinces.

On the southern ridges of the hills round Chaukham and overlooking Sona Naddi, I met and shot the gurhel or Himalayan chamois. To watch these little goats leaping from one dizzy point to another all four feet together, is to watch the most amazing acrobats in nature. Moreover when alarmed, as at myself in a mushroom topi, they would sneeze, stamp their little feet and plunge into what seemed to be an abyss, and as I imagined to certain death, only to reappear almost at once galloping across the side of a cliff a hundred yards and more away. Very excellent sport they offered and if I found them too goaty my Garhwali workmen of whom there were numbers, pronounced them toothsome and were happy.

I was entirely dependent in this place on nature for my food and my skill with the rifle and shot-gun for obtaining it. Every Sunday when the week's work of cutting and burning firelines and various inspections was over, I used to ride deep into the Kotri Doon and there shoot black partridge with an occasional khakar or gurhel in the morning, and fish the deeper pools of the river for mahseer in the afternoon returning to the camp fire at dusk.

Fireline cutting is a very important part of forestry for the lines are the forester's only protection against the huge and devastating conflagrations of the hot weather which sweep roaring over the country on the heels of the wind leaving acres of new growth entirely ruined and the older trees blackened and charred.

These belts or firelines are the outer boundaries of areas to be protected and there are of course, inner firelines also. In the Doon they are fifty feet wide cleared of tree growth, the grass also cut, spread over the cleared surface and burnt. I like to think that all the lines in the Chaukham Doon were made under my supervision and that to this day they probably remain exactly as I first cut them, nearly fifty years ago.

The Doons are bitterly cold and damp in the winter months, and a peculiar feature about them is that after sundown a dense fog or ground mist settles down upon them; looking down from higher ground this has the appearance of a sea of cotton wool above which project, like islands, gnarled and ancient sal trees. The surface of the woolly sea is constantly ruffled and rippled by every wind that blows. I have been standing outside my tent in the Kotri Doon on a bright moonlight night and watched the fog actually forming over the plain around. It grew denser and more dense until one found oneself standing in it but towering above it, apparently for the moment without any connection with one's own feet. At this time of night too, my camp camels presented a still more extraordinary sight, their heads and long necks rising into the sky utterly devoid of any body or understandings. Finally as the mist rose higher, they were altogether blotted out and the weird noises these beasts make when ruminating—their gruntings and squeakings—sounded faint and very far away.

In or around the grassy plain behind my camp lived a couple of jackals. I don't think there were any more, because they never, to my recollection, set

up the shrieking chorus common to most of the tribe at night. But these two would frequently utter the distinctive note of alarm known by the native as "pheeau". The call denotes surprise or fear and is generally given when some big feline is about. More than once, I had taken my rifle and gone out to look for the cause of the cry, but each time had so far drawn a blank. Then one afternoon I was quietly reading in my tent, when from the sal forest to the south-east the "pheeau" sounded loud and clear, so, picking up my shot-gun which was handy, and stuffing a couple of shot cartridges into the chambers, I hurried out to investigate. I sat down behind a bush on a bank above a little jungle path and waited. Presently round the bend trotted a jackal followed by a second. The last comer repeated the cry, and both came on till they arrived at a point immediately below me, when both halted, sniffed the air, and with one accord plunged off the path into the jungle. I sat on for some little time and was just about to give it up and go home, when out stalked a lovely tigress. The suddenness of her appearance and her beauty gave me a start and a queer sensation down the back. But with nothing in my gun but No. 6 I was helpless to all intent, so I sat on in silence. She neither saw, heard nor scented me while I sat, feasting my eyes on her beautiful colouring, and I cursed the luck that made me seize my shot-gun instead of a rifle, and registered a vow never to be without the latter in the future. The tigress passed without perceiving my presence and vanished into the high grass, leaving me, however, with conclusive evidence amply confirmed

later, that tiger are entirely incapable of perceiving an air-borne scent, though they can of course and do, follow a trail-borne scent with the greatest ease.

At the beginning of March, by which time all the firelines round the Chaukham Doon had been cut and burnt, I was sent up to Northern Garhwal to report on the chir pine forests. I was to enter them up on maps supplied to me, with a view to their being reserved for protection and working by the Forest Department; I had also to report on the suitability of the Alaknanda river for floating purposes. Consequently I marched down to Kohdwara and thence up the valley of the Koh to Panni, from which place I turned east along the ridge to Dobri (literally "two big ones") where two peaks rise suddenly above the surrounding hills to over ten thousand feet. It was here that I first became acquainted with the monal pheasant, a truly gorgeous bird, all metallic purple and bronze with a snow white rump and broad chestnut tail. The cock birds, to show off their lovely colouring have a habit, unlike other pheasants, of soaring out from the cliffs on outstretched quivering wings, uttering a loud musical whistle in rising crescendo which, ringing against the cliffs, re-echoes with pleasant effect; the sun meanwhile glinting off the sheen of their feathers as from a shining metal surface.

It was while investigating the charms of the Dobri that I met early one morning, one of the largest Himalayan black bears I have ever seen. I was only armed with a shot-gun and therefore completely at his mercy, but he merely stood a moment and

grunted at me and moved on up hill. This was so unlike the usual methods of his kind that I was most agreeably surprised.

Near the foot of the two great peaks close to the little village of Dobri I came to a seemingly insignificant cave which I was informed was a copper mine, once worked and of considerable importance. On returning to camp, I was met by a deputation of village elders who, doubtless scenting an opportunity of extorting buksheesh (reward), besought me to come and explore the mine. I noticed that they showed an unholy joy when I agreed to do so, and that they evidently had some joke on board. However, I put on the oldest rags I had and we started out. Four men preceded me armed with great bundles of long pine splints heavily charged with turpentine, and we dived into a low passage leading into a large cavern where it was still light enough to see objects indistinctly. At many points round the floor of this huge room, and at several places high up in the walls and roof, appeared inky dark holes which were entrances to various passages, and at each of the higher holes rough ladders stood against the walls. Here my ruffians lighted their torches and choosing a hole proposed that we should crawl into it; they put me in third in the procession with two or three men following me. We proceeded at first on all fours, then as the passage grew narrower, on our tummies; it was pitch dark and a biting cold wind blew down the opening, causing us to be blanketed with smoke from the torches.

Presently the passage opened into another huge

cave, also inky black and pierced with holes in every direction; along its walls and across the roof ran great veins of copper ore. These shone metallic green in the light of the torches, and my escort chopped out two large lumps of the metal for me. We had, by this time, wandered some considerable distance into the bowels of the earth, and still blew that icy wind sucked in from some mysterious opening up in the mountain side. Suddenly, just as I was thinking I had had about enough of this interminable grovelling in the dark and cold, half blinded with smoke, all the torches went out. Then ensued a great gabbling and presently two or three of the men began to hint to me that we might not be able to get out again at all! At this I grabbed the old sinner nearest to me and threatened that if he didn't get going in the direction of the exit at once, I would throttle him. They again began to talk about buk-sheesh, but I said there would be nothing doing in that line until we were safely outside once more, and after some further discussion they decided to return, and eventually we crawled out into daylight again. I was by this time in the most filthy condition of grime and miserably cold; still it was an interesting experience, though not one I should care to repeat. I have the two pieces of copper ore still; I used them for years as paperweights.

In the course of this trip I had frequently to cross and recross large mountain streams, and this had to be done over rope suspension bridges, some of which were of considerable length. Many are constructed on the same principle as our wire rope suspension

bridges, except that they are built of "barber grass"—the species of grass with long hair-like stems which grows in the Himalayas and is extremely strong. The actual footway is about eighteen inches wide and consists of pieces of bamboo tied six to eight inches apart, which again are fastened to slats suspended from the two main cables on either side. The cables themselves are firmly fixed to stout posts driven into the hill-side on either bank and piled high with rocks and stones to prevent them giving way. The unpleasant part about the crossing is that to begin with the way slopes down towards the centre; there, the side ropes grip one, and one has to push one's way through them; having crossed the centre, the crazy path slopes up again. It is dizzy work looking down through the bamboo cross pieces of the footway into perhaps a mountain torrent roaring far below, or a dark green pool. Moreover the whole structure sways heavily from side to side while one hangs on in space. Personally I was always glad to see the opposite side, but my servants were so alarmed that they turned absolutely green with fear, while the shivering cook had several times to be blindfolded and carried across. But worse and far more alarming is the single rope cable to which is suspended a small bed or cradle three feet by two, in which one sits and is hauled across; the local men, of course, propel themselves hand over hand unaided. Still more horrible are the two-cable bridges, one cable suspended above the other; the lower rope is the footway, while the upper one is gripped by the hands, and one walks across sideways. I may as well

admit at once that this feat was entirely beyond me!

During the years of which I write, the European staff in charge of Divisions along the lower Himalaya "recessed" at Naini Tal. By this is meant that they spent the rains there. Since then, I believe the officers in charge of the Ganges Division recess at Lansdowne, a comparatively new military cantonment and civil station established in 1887, lying some twenty miles north of the Chaukham Doon. I remember that, from the hills behind my camp in the Doon, on a clear day one could both hear the blasting and see the resulting dust from the road-making and so on, away to the north.

At the end of my first sojourn in Garhwal, I returned to Naini for the rains, and when they were over, instead of returning to the Ganges Division, I was sent up again for a second tour in Northern Garhwal. I marched by way of Ranikhet to Chamoli on the Pindar river, a stream of brawling water straight from the Pindari glacier. From there I marched down the Alakhnanda to Karanprayag, and by way of Mandagni to Ukhimath where I had to report on the box-wood forests of these parts. This box-wood is not by any means like the little shrub which edges our garden paths at home; it grows here into trees thirty feet high, and is glossy and bright green always, as its name *Semper virens* implies. It yields a very close-grained, hard white wood which is used by engravers for their wood-cuts.

The scenery here was more splendid than any I had seen before, and there were amazing mountain

passes to cross, and valleys to explore, wooded with every kind of tree; spruce and fir, magnificent oak, chestnut and hornbeam. There were also cherry-apple trees on which the little rosy fruit hung in bunches, and everywhere the clean-smelling bracken made a thick undergrowth to the forest. Above the line of tree growth the hills are covered with a beautiful soft turf and in spring the flowers crowd there—banks of purple, sweet-scented violets, primroses, and columbines of all colours, and many others, like jewels flung down on green velvet; one lay there in the sun drinking in the marvellous air. The hill-side cut clean away for a sheer two thousand feet at some points, and to lie flat was the only way to look down on the great chasm below. Narrow thread-like tracks crossing the cliff face gave foothold to the sturdy thar, the shaggy wild goat of these parts; they could be seen as tiny specks to the eye, basking on the ledges below. I have often “coo-eed” and as the call re-echoed from cliff to cliff, they would jump up with a start and peer over for a view of the enemy, then gallop along their precarious highway which they alone of any animal could negotiate. The call would disturb flocks of grey and white pigeon, which would swirl out in the sun; and I have known a great grey lammergeier, the bearded vulture, with salmon-coloured head and a ten foot expanse of wing, to sail just below me, so close, that, as he turned his head for a better view of the intruder, his flashing eye was distinctly visible.

High up in the mountains are two notable shrines, known as Ukhimath and Joshimath, which for ages

have been sacred and set apart by the Brahmins as the summer quarters of one of the gods, but as in the winter they are apt to be snowed up, the Deo in December makes a journey to more congenial climes below. I once happened to be camped beside the mountain track by which the Ukhimath Deo made his descent. I heard the sound of women singing and cymbals clashing far up the hill-side, and my orderly came in to ask me to watch the passing of the godly palanquin.

“Is it a god or a king that comes
Both are evil and both are strong;
With women and worshipping, dancing and drums
Carry your gods and your kings along!”*

Presently the palanquin appeared, borne high on the shoulders of pujaris draped in saffron robes of the religious, preceded by a number of very beautiful Garhwali maidens in veils of brightest gold, green and vermilion, covered with jewellery, their anklets clashing as they went. They passed along singing and dancing before the god, in the age-old ritual of Eastern worship—“The damsels playing on the timbrels”—old even in David’s day. My one regret was that I had no camera and was not a sufficiently good artist to immortalise them.

The Garhwali of these parts is a well-built, cheery highlander, with a curious affinity in his dress to the Highlander of Scotland. On his head he wears a rough cap very much the shape of the Glengarry, instead of a turban, and he wears his blanket as the

*Sir Alfred Lyall.

Gael wears his plaid, across his left shoulder; and it is fastened not indeed with a brooch, but with a round chain buckle having a big brass pin stuck through it to keep the folds secure. His sturdy, well-shaped brown arms and legs show pleasingly free under the folds of the dark brown plaid. He generally carries his few belongings in a kilta (basket) shaped like a candle extinguisher with a flat bottom, and this or any other heavy weight—and he is an excellent porter—is slung on his back by woven loops round each shoulder blade. He also carries a T-shaped stick, about two feet long with an eight inch cross bar, for use as a walking stick to help him up hill, and when he is tired, he sits on it as we do on a shooting stick. Lines of them may be often seen drawn up on a mountain pass, each sitting on his T-stick, laughing and cracking jokes while the roughly-made leaf pipe or perhaps even a chillum passes from hand to hand down the line, great clouds of smoke issuing from the mouths and noses of those who have just passed it on. These people very often spin as they go along, giving the spindle a twist by a rub of the palm of the hand on the bare thigh, and thus is made the yarn for their dark brown blankets.

Eventually, turning south I followed the Alakhnanda river again to Srinagar (Garhwal, not Kashmir) and from there to Hardwar. Srinagar is very old, incredibly dirty and swarming with scorpions, but it had in my time, one treasure; a fine old palace built entirely of stone with masses of carving everywhere. Even the heavy girders supporting the upper story were of stone, and at the corners they rested on

heavy stone brackets, each bracket carved into the likeness of a single massive elephant. Since then this grand old building must, I think, have been swept away by the floods caused by the bursting of the Goona Lake about thirty years ago.

While I was at Srinagar I met a Captain Gopi Singh, a very interesting and charming person who came to call on me. He was a Garhwali by birth and was at that time an A.D.C. or Sirdar of H.H. the Rana of Dholpur. The Brahmins were holding high festival at this time, he told me, and there was to be a "Women's Praying" in the temple court that night, and he offered to take me to see it provided I put my shoes from off my feet and trod in socks upon the holy ground. To this day I cannot imagine how he squared the temple priests, for the ceremony was unique of its kind and as such would be fiercely guarded from European eyes.

We started in the evening after dinner, I cast my shoes outside the inner enclosure of the temple, and we entered very quietly. In the middle of the fairly large court, facing the temple itself, was a huge image of the sacred Bull of Shiva in shining brass. Round it stood, in circles about three feet apart, young and comely women, their arms and shoulders bare, their hair hanging loose about them. These were they from whom the gods had withheld the supreme gift of sons, and they had come on pilgrimage from far and near to do homage to Shiva and beg their heart's desire. They held their hands cupped before their breasts, the palms plastered with mud, and in them rested a chirag (earthenware lamp) filled

with oil in which floated a lighted wick; I saw too that both wrists were tied together, so that in the long weary hours the hands could not fall apart. Behind each woman stood either the mother-in-law or some other woman relative holding a vessel full of oil to replenish the chirag when the flame burned low. Gopi Singh whispered to me that the vigil had begun at sunset, and was to last until the dawn. Those who fell asleep or stumbling from weariness let fall their lamp, would show themselves unworthy of the favour of the gods and be at once led away, but to those who stood bravely keeping their lamp alight until sunrise, the gods would return a blessing. At dawn they would be blessed by the priests and dismissed, and after ceremonial bathing allowed to go free in the city; this holiday, Gopi Singh assured me with a perfectly expressionless face, being absolutely necessary to the fulfilment of their prayers!

We stayed some little while watching the scene; there was silence save for the breathing of the women and an occasional muttered prayer; the many flickering lights were reflected on the shining flanks of the great Bull, and there was no mistaking the look of genuine devotion on the faces seen dimly in the wavering light. And once more it was brought home to me how truly the East is the source of all religion, since, but for the fact that these women had an earthly bridegroom already, the living illustration of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins lay here actually before my eyes.

After this I left Srinagar, and went on down the valley where the cliffs close in, and the river runs like

a stream of dark green metal between them; pigeons circle above it literally in thousands, on their way to their feeding-grounds in the plains below.

And so I reached Hardwar—Hari-dwara, the gate of Hari—where the river henceforth to be known as the Ganges—Ganga mai, the Mother who washes away sin—finally leaving the hills, enters upon her long and sacred journey through the plains to the sea. Hardwar is thus the holy of holies of the Hindu religion, and here it is that every twelve years is held the gigantic “kumb-mela” or fair, where as many as five hundred thousand pilgrims congregate, and whence, despite every sanitary precaution on the part of Government, cholera is bred, and far and wide throughout Northern India, is spread by the dispersing crowd of pilgrims.

CHAPTER III

ADVENTURES IN THE PALAIN AND KHANSUR VALLEYS

THE following camping season I was again in the Ganges Division and here I shot my first tiger, always the thrill of thrills to the sportsman.

I was camping in the Palain valley in the middle of the hot weather; the only fairly cool and shady place I could find was on an island in the middle of the wide shaly and rocky bed of the Palain river. There were trees here, and clear water ran on either side of the island. I had been here about a fortnight, my sleeping and dining tents at one end of the island, my servants, dogs, and the goats I kept for milk at the other, when I was awakened one night from a sound sleep by the servants coughing loudly to attract my attention, and the goats and dogs giving tongue. There seemed great activity and a general stoking up of fires. I called to the men, and they told me with much excitement that some large animal had jumped down the opposite bank and prowled past the camp alarming the goats and dogs whose frightened cries woke them up. The men could not be induced to sleep again and spent the rest of the night round blazing camp fires fearing another visitation. As soon as it was light enough I started out on my day's work

which lay up the valley, and when I got on to the path leading upstream, sure enough in the dusty track were the clear pug marks of a large tiger going the same way. My men and I followed the trail for about two miles, until it left the path and turned up into the hills. I went on to work and thought no more about it until I was returning about midday, when some villagers from the hills opposite met me, shouting that a tiger had killed one of their plough bullocks, had dragged it down the valley under their very eyes, and was even then feeding on it. They begged me to go at once and shoot it. However, I knew it would be useless my starting then, because long before I could reach the place, the tiger would have eaten his fill and gone to drink and lie up for the day. I told them I would sit over the kill that evening, and meantime I sent one of my men to see that it was not disturbed, and to keep away vultures.

After tiffin I went out to prospect and found a huge bullock had been killed close to the village, and thereafter dragged down across the terraced, cultivated fields into some waste land where it lay, partly eaten, in a slight hollow. There was no tree suitable for a machan close by, but about seventy yards from the kill stood a great mhowa tree which had a hollow in its bole and a branch growing out almost at right angles beside the hollow, about fifteen feet above ground. I chose this for my perch and decided to sit on the branch itself without a machan, as it was a difficult tree to build one in and there was no other available. In the hollow beside the branch I put my old shot-gun loaded with ball, a rifle, a packet of

food and a rug and decided to come back after tea. Returning at five o'clock, I made some of the villagers drag the kill till it lay just below my branch, on to which I climbed by the aid of a primitive ladder they had brought. The men then left me to my lonely vigil, and I fell to wondering how I was ever going to make a night of it without dropping to sleep and probably falling off the branch on top of the tiger dining below. I was very much a novice at night shooting in those days, as so far, I had only shot panther which usually return to feed sufficiently early to be bagged by daylight. Very much keyed up, I sat holding my rifle—a single barrellled .450—with my shot-gun in reserve. Distant noises—the barking of dogs, the peculiar whine of the buffaloes returning to the village with the kine, whose wooden bells tinkled tonelessly now and then—reached me as I sat listening intently.

Presently I heard the heavy tread of some animal coming down the hill behind me. Very cautiously I peered over my right shoulder, and there, looking down and apparently at me, sat a large tiger. I never moved a muscle though my heart began to beat so loudly that I felt he must hear it. We looked actually into each other's eyes and then quite suddenly he got up and silently moved away, and I feared that he must have really seen me and would not return again. Nothing further happened for some time; only the roosting call of peafowl and the whooping of some langur monkeys in the trees around broke the silence. Suddenly I saw a large animal moving in the distance, and the monkeys took fright and crashed

away with great commotion. Then I saw with excitement that it was the tiger; he came on and disappeared into the hollow where the kill had first lain. From there he moved steadily along the drag, head down and tail standing out stiffly behind him, until he arrived within thirty feet of the kill, when he stopped and looked up. Once more I stared straight into his yellow eyes, while the wind shivered in his fine outstanding ruff. Mercifully I had the sense to sit perfectly still and apparently he did not realise that I was a living creature, for he turned quietly to the left and as he looked away I fired at the spot just behind his shoulder. He rose in the air and lurched forward grunting, and half dragging himself along down the hill-side, he seemed to fall over the edge of a small nala, out of sight. It had all happened so quickly that I had no time to reload the rifle or pick up my shot-gun. I listened, but could hear nothing—no sound of struggling or groaning—all was quiet. Presently I whistled and shouted to my men who appeared on the bank above me, and hearing that I had hit the tiger, and that it had gone down the ravine badly wounded, hurried up with the ancient ladder and a still more antique lantern, and got me down.

It was now dark; by the aid of the lantern we tried to look for blood but could see none. We followed the direction and even peered over the side of the nala, but could see nothing. I heard one old man whisper: "He's only a chokra!—what can he kill? He must have fired at its tail." This annoyed me and I said: "The tiger will never kill another bullock of

yours, Buddha; to-morrow you will see!" They grinned and said no more. We straggled back to the village and I spent a wakeful night wondering where he was—whether I had after all canted the rifle, yet certain all the time that I had hit him fairly. With the first streak of dawn the villagers turned up again and I could see that they were just as anxious as I was, wondering whether we should find him dead, or alive and full of fight. When we arrived at my tree we followed again the direction he had taken. There was no blood, although the leaves showed where he had fallen and dragged himself along. Going very warily we reached the edge of the nala and looked over, and there to my amazement, he lay stone dead, not twenty feet from us as we had looked over the night before.

My following absolutely capered with delight, and soon the whole village, women, children, and old men, arrived to examine my prize. One of the elder men took my rifle from me, dipped the muzzle in the blood and rubbed it on the sole of my boot. "So may your Honour deal death to many tigers in the years to come," said he smiling. The beast was a well-grown male and taped nine feet seven inches, and though I have shot many since then, this first adventure was the finest of them all. A point of great interest also was the fact that the tiger had followed the scent of the drag just as a sporting dog would have done, nose to ground and tail erect, and in later years I have watched others of his brethren do exactly the same.

Soon after this incident my chief, B.B.O., came

round on inspection, and together we camped at Semel Parao, an ideally beautiful spot. The tents were pitched in a clearing among giant semel trees whose great buttressed silver-grey boles stood out in bold relief, while their crowns starred with flat crimson flowers towered into the blue. Smaller trees there were growing among the semel, these were the Palas, or Flame of the Forest. They bore clusters of fire-coloured butterfly-like blossoms, and the marvellous buds, looking like dark green plush opened to show a spurt of flame, were perhaps even more lovely than the flowers themselves. The nectar in the bloom of both trees attracted hundreds of bees, and from one or two branches of the semel hung what looked like great dark velvety curtains; masses of the *Apis Dorsata*, the ferocious wild bee of India, clotted on their pendent combs. The scent of warm honey drifted in through the open tent; outside the shrunken river slipped by, purling round large stepping-stones placed by thoughtful guards for master's convenience.

Idly looking out one morning, I saw a solitary figure crossing to the camp. He ignored the stepping-stones and came wading heavily through the water. Rushing up the bank he threw himself down in front of us wailing: "Me margaya, me margaya" (I am killed, I am dead.) For a few moments both of us wondered what "zullum" the subordinates or perhaps the mahout or camel men had been up to, but presently we got him to explain his troubles.

Sobbing bitterly, he told us he had been sitting on a high bank watching his herd of five bull buffaloes/

grazing peacefully in the river bed. Suddenly like a thunder-bolt a huge tiger rushed out from a side ravine, and in raging fury laid low, one after another, the three finest of the herd, chasing and striking at the fourth which he failed to bring down. With equally incredible suddenness the tiger disappeared, leaving the fourth victim dead lame, while the fifth had in the meantime bolted in panic. B.B.O. on hearing the tale, ordered up the two elephants and we at once went out to investigate. Just over a mile from camp we found them lying stone dead; three fine bull buffaloes, all within a distance of sixty yards, the fourth we passed on the way dragging a dislocated hind leg.

From the back of the elephants we could distinctly see the big round pad marks of the tiger as he had galloped from one to the other, striking them down. The trail led up to a long pool in the drying river bed, and it was evident that he had swum or waded across it, and entered a side ravine opposite. My elephant was leading, so I followed up the pugs through the ravine which went straight for about thirty paces, and then turned sharply to the right. It was narrow, and the bamboos and bushes growing alongside almost met over my head, and I was on a tall elephant. We came to the bend and rounded it and there to my amazement, lay the tiger, full length in a pool of water. At sight of me he rose immediately, and for a few seconds his great round head stared at me, the water streaming off his heavy ruff, and then with one bound he was gone. I don't think I have ever seen a finer sight. I turned to B.B.O. who was just behind

me and said: "He's off!" and the mahouts made the elephants kneel and we dismounted. We followed him up, B.B.O. taking the right and I the left bank of the ravine. We had been separated and climbing our respective ridges for about ten minutes, when I heard my companion fire. I halted at once and presently he shouted: "I've hit him, don't come till I call!" This he did very shortly, however, and I ran up to where he was.

The blood trail was easy to follow and we went along slowly side by side. We must have been going nearly an hour, nerves very much astir and weapons held ready, when suddenly the ravine widened out, and to our great astonishment in the middle of it stood a fine young wild elephant with gleaming tushes, feeding peacefully on the bamboos around him. As soon as he saw us he was all commotion, striding up and down trying to get out of the cul-de-sac, making a curious grinding noise with his teeth like the squeaking of a nail drawn over glass. We hurriedly retired up one side of the cutting, and eventually he worked a way out for himself up the other, and departed, tail on end. The trail showed that the tiger had come out of his way to avoid the elephant, but how he had ever managed to pass without the tusker winding him was a mystery to us.

Again we followed the blood until the evening light began to fail. We were by this time thoroughly done, and the cover had become too dense to negotiate, so we very reluctantly decided to give it up and return to camp. We offered a reward at once to any bamboo

cutter or forest worker who could give news of the tiger but we never heard of him again.

There is nothing more distasteful to the good sportsman than to leave a wounded tiger to die at large, but in this case we could do no more, and it was his Kismet. Lucky for us that ours was not to meet him in the ravine, for we were both young, inexperienced and too lightly armed; B.B.O. with an old double-barrelled .450 with copper-tubed bullets, and I with only a shot-gun firing Meade shell; both entirely inadequate to meet the charge of a wounded tiger who is literally a devil of flame and fury and whose strength seems to be actually augmented by the near approach of death.

I do not propose in this book to discuss at length the armoury necessary for the sportsman in India. I would only say in passing that no weapon incapable of giving the knock-down blow so essential to allow him to put in a second shot, should ever be used against Indian big game. The aim may be perfectly accurate, but the risks are definitely too great with any weapon below a .450 cordite, or a .577 rifle, firing solid bullets. On no account should copper-tubed bullets be used.

Everyone with a knowledge of natural history knows the ordinary Indian cobra and of him many stories are told. But his less known, more aggressive and handsome brother the Hamadryad or king-cobra is not nearly such a public character. This snake runs to as much as fourteen feet, though I personally have never seen one longer than ten. He is shiny coal black, with orange yellow bands three

quarters of an inch wide and three or four inches apart, from his neck to the end of his tail; his head is all black and the under surface of the body yellow. There is also I believe a dusky variety, but I have never seen one myself, but of the family as a whole it is said that they are as aggressive as the black mamba of South Africa.

The king-cobra occurs all along the Himalayas as far west as Dehra Dun, and up to about four thousand feet; he also occurs in Assam, the Eastern Ghats, Burma and the Malay States. Fortunately, when he is found he is not a common snake, possibly owing to the fact that he preys on other snakes and, it is said, even on his own kind which is a laudable trait in his character.

I first met him in the Himalayas while I was out shooting one morning. I heard cries of distress coming from the road in the valley below me, and hurrying to see what was wrong I came upon a line of three or four grain-carrying Banjara ponies whose owner-drivers were being held up by a large snake which lay half across the road, hissing at them, and could not be induced either to move on or go away. I at once shot it, and found that the reason why it would not or could not move, was because it was actually engaged in swallowing another snake. It was my first introduction to the Hamadryad, for the vivid orange and black colouring told me he could belong to no other tribe. He was, I should say, about ten feet long, and his victim about five; the latter seemed quite dead when pulled out of the jaws that gripped it and I rather think it was a rat-snake or dhaman.

The king-cobra was a fine specimen, and I came to know him better as time went on.

Then one morning, I was out shooting in a valley, and sitting for a while beside a stream listening to the rushing of the water, I heard a plaintive cry. I looked in the direction of the sound, and saw an otter swimming upstream, towards a partially submerged rock, carrying in its mouth a fair-sized fish, which wriggled, and shone like silver in the morning sun. I kept very still as I knew it might be a female with young near-by. She scrambled out on to the rock, looking black and oily in her sodden coat and once more uttered the plaintive call. Almost at once three baby otters appeared on the bank and swam out to the rock, but just as they reached it and were in the act of climbing up to the mother she uttered a shrill whistling note of alarm, and the whole family disappeared into the water with a splash and a swirl. Hardly had they dived to safety, when with a great rushing sound of wings, that arch marauder the fish-hawk, who had spied them from his perch in a neighbouring tree, swooped down to snatch the fish from the parent otter's mouth. The great greedy bird, having missed his booty, rose from his stoop with flapping wings, and, screaming with anger, wheeled round to return to his perch whence he would presently take off once more in search of a likely meal.

After this I got up and went on, my two setters following me in leash in charge of my orderly and their dog boy. Presently they showed signs of excitement indicating the presence of pheasants or

jungle fowl. I released them and they soon put up a number of khalij pheasants of which I bagged a couple, one dropping below the road into some thick creepers near the edge of the stream. The orderly and boy followed the dogs to look for the bird, and as they seemed to be taking some time to find it, I strolled on, crossed the stream and turning a corner, sat down to light a pipe and wait for the men.

I had just lighted up, when I heard unearthly yells of "samp! samp!" (snake). Picking up my shot-gun, I ran back to see what had happened, and just as I was preparing to cross the stream again, I saw lying in the middle of the road on the other side of the water a huge black and yellow snake with its hood expanded and head raised quite eighteen inches, facing the men, holding them up and preventing them from passing. My friend the Hamadryad again! I saw that the boy had had the good sense to re-leash the dogs; for they would have inevitably attacked the snake and I should have probably lost both, as the cobra would with equal certainty have bitten them. As I ran up I shouted to the men to get to one side and give me the chance of a shot, but as they moved, the snake suddenly lowered its hood and turning took to a pool, and it was while swimming up this that I shot it. We fished it out with a long bamboo and hitching a piece of string round the neck dragged it into camp. I measured it there and the length was nine feet ten inches. I cannot say whether the snake would actually have attacked the men, or whether it was only surprised at being suddenly confronted by them, and was trying to

frighten them away; but there was certainly plenty of room for it to have avoided them altogether by slipping off the road. In any case, it looked extremely aggressive and very dangerous indeed.

A fortnight after this and almost in the same place, I met another of the breed. I saw a muntjac (barking-deer) and thought I would have a shot at him and ran up a little knoll after him. He was nowhere to be seen and I stood listening and looking about me. Presently a long shining streak caught my eye, moving over the fallen leaves of the sal towards me. The orderly was coming up too, and as I called to him to stop the snake immediately stopped also, and erected its hood which I noticed was more oval in shape than that of the ordinary cobra. The throat was pale yellow at first but appeared to flush pink as the brute quivered and obviously became more angry. I had a shot at the head as it swayed; I hit it but it was a bad shot. The bullet passed through one of the flanges of the hood and not in the centre which would have killed it. It dropped at once and turned like a streak, and although I ran after it as hard as I could, reloading as I went, it reached a great pile of rocks before I could fire again and disappeared into a hole, beneath them.

Wild pig are said to devour the ordinary cobra and a friend of mine assured me that one morning when he was out on his elephant in the Terai, a sounder of wild pig passed him, and he distinctly saw a boar get hold of a cobra in the grass. The cobra appeared to strike the pig repeatedly, the latter did not seem in the least to mind it, but simply chewed up the snake

and went his way. Whether the bites took effect later on the pig, my friend had of course no means of knowing. I have myself in later years come across the remains of Russell's Vipers which it was quite evident, had been bitten to pieces and even partially devoured by wild pig, but whether the pig had taken the snake alive, or finding it dead had chewed it up, I cannot say. From the toughness and tautness of the hide of the wild boar and the apparent absence of blood in the epidermis, it seems to me quite possible that even if bitten, the venom might not take effect, and it is more than likely that the bristles of the pig would prevent the poison-fangs from reaching and penetrating the flesh.

In the Khansur valley elephants were very frequently to be met with. Many of the forest bungalows in this part of the world have moats dug round them to keep the elephants from stripping off the roofs as they would strip bark from a tree. There are draw-bridges also for better protection, and when the forest officer vacates a bungalow at the approach of the rains, this is left drawn up until he returns. Even so, many of the deer and even tiger and panther get into the verandas for shelter from the showers. They all leave unmistakable signs of their presence there, and the walls are darkened by the rubbing of hides, and sometimes even window panes are broken by the points of the antlers.

In my time a solitary old bull elephant used to inhabit the valley. The most ancient villager knew him to be of incredible age; he was extremely massive, and of his tusks only one—and that a very fine one—

remained, and he possessed only the stump of a tail. The villagers called him "Burhao Baba", the old father, and he was perfectly harmless though a trifle awe-inspiring to come across suddenly. For some obscure reason, he liked feeding round my camp at night. I would hear him crashing about in the distance, coming nearer and nearer, until he was just behind the tent. My fellows became very uneasy at this, and started frantically to stoke up the camp fires, coughing loudly the while. I kept at that time a very large bull-mastiff named Jumbo, who was chained to a corner peg in my tent each night; he had a voice as large as himself. Whenever the tusker came into camp the noise awoke old Jumbo. He would begin to growl, then to bark, and finally the bark swelled to a rumbling roar. It was too much for the "Old Father"; he would stop feeding, listen awhile, and presently depart at a trot, crashing through the heavy undergrowth until the sound died away into the night, and we all slumbered once more.

I was out one evening on my pony, ambling quietly along a track leaving everything to him and hardly holding the reins. Turning a corner I felt him shudder and give at the knees under me, swerving so violently that I was nearly thrown. There, not twenty feet away and towering over us both, stood the old tusker, his great trunk raised above his head. He had been dusting himself in the middle of the road, and must have heard us coming, for his trunk was raised to catch the scent of the intruders. Providentially the pony did not throw me when he

swerved, for I should have fallen literally under the elephant's feet. We galloped away, and he followed us round the corner of the road. I looked back and seeing him standing there, in sheer bravado, turned the pony round and walked towards him again. Twice I did this much to the pony's disgust and each time the "Old Father" followed us slowly. Finally, getting tired of the game, he gradually edged off into the jungle tearing down branches as he went to demonstrate his strength. I never saw him again. The curious thing was that the one great tusk for which he had been so long famous had gone—it must either have dropped out recently or somehow have broken off. His great size and the stumpy tail alone remained to mark him as the famous solitary elephant of the Khansur valley.

CHAPTER IV

FURTHER ADVENTURES

ON a very sultry evening one April I shot my first panther in the Khansur valley. I had gone out with my orderly, and we were stalking quietly along when I stopped to watch the antics of some langur monkeys playing about with their youngsters under the trees. Suddenly they uttered their curious coughing bark of alarm and rushed helter-skelter up into the branches. I could not see any cause for their fright, and yet I knew nothing short of a tiger, panther or huge snake would stampede them. So I ran towards the high bank of the stream to look over, and as I did so, put out my hand to the orderly for my shot-gun. The man came after me and I saw him put his hand in the cartridge bag; presently he pushed the gun into my hand and I naturally concluded that he had loaded it, so I grabbed it and ran on. There came a pitiful screaming from a tree to my right, and looking up I saw a panther fully forty feet up in the air among the branches of a smooth-barked sirrus tree. He was spread-eagled between two swaying arms, doing his best to seize a monkey which seemed to be glued to the branch above him. I put up my gun and pulled both triggers one after the other. The ham-

mers dropped with a loud click but there was no report. I thought it was a double missfire until on opening the breach, I found it empty; the miserable orderly had never loaded it!

Meanwhile the panther had either heard the double click of my gun or my movement caught his eye; at all events he slipped down the tree within ten or fifteen feet of me, for all the world like a big cat detected in stalking birds. I read in a book written not long ago by another forester that a panther will walk down a tree head first. I have seen many panthers in my time under all conditions, and never have I known the animal descend a tree, always supposing it approaches the perpendicular, in any other manner than does the common domestic pussy—head up and tail down, clinging on with all four paws. However, I quickly took two cartridges from the orderly, loaded in haste and ran after the beast in the direction of the road, and as I came on to a small, temporary wooden bridge made of logs thrown across a little stream, and covered with brushwood and earth to form a roadway, I heard a rustle in the dry leaves below me, and there I saw the panther crouching behind a small boulder in the dry stream bed. His head was hidden by the rock, but the whole of his body was exposed and like the immortal ostrich, he thought I could not see him. I fired promptly and got him in the back, and then put in a second shot as he was trying to come at me, which finished him.

Panther are exceedingly keen on a diet of monkey; in many places they eat practically nothing else, and

many and varied are the ways in which they are brought to bag. They go after them as did the one I have mentioned, into the trees, and in sheer terror the younger monkeys will often drop straight into the mouth of the slayer below. Occasionally they are stalked on the ground, are taken unawares, rushed and caught before they can reach safety. Sometimes the panther will deliberately show himself and disappear, repeating the manœuvre several times until the monkey, overcome by curiosity, and partly to keep his enemy under observation, will descend to see where the feline has got to and be bagged in his turn.

Pigs are always a certain draw to both panther and tiger, and often both animals will have a hard struggle to get the better of an old and seasoned boar. I intervened one morning in a combat between the two. I heard a cry as of some animal in distress, and I thought it came from trees near-by in which were nests of the white-breasted hawk-eagle—great globular piles of sticks. A pair came swooping and screaming out of the blue as I looked, and I saw the young birds moving in the nest. The cry was repeated and I then found it came from some thickets ahead. Taking my rifle I went to investigate, wriggling my way through the thorny cover until I got close up to the trouble. A violent life and death struggle was going on; the bushes were shaking and tossing about and every now and then I saw a black tail-tip wave in the air, and concluded a tiger had got hold of a boar and was killing it. Then I caught sight of a patch of spotted skin and realised it was panther ver-

sus pig. When next I caught a glimpse of spots I fired, but as I did so, the animals must at that very moment have changed places, or the bullet was deflected by twigs, for at the shot a fine panther sprang out of the bushes and stood facing me for a second with its head and chest covered in blood. Unluckily I was using a single .450 and while I was reloading the beast bounded back, and I missed it as it leapt over the bushes. I then pushed my way on to see what had become of the other combatant. A young boar lay there stone dead; I had shot him in the head, apparently while in the panther's jaws. He was terribly torn about the throat and the clefts of his hooves were split evidently in fending off his enemy's grip. Fortunately for the spotted antagonist, his tushes were undeveloped or it might have been another story.

A short while after this I was transferred to Jhansi, a station and military cantonment in the United Provinces where the climate and forests were in all respects totally different from those of Garhwal. Jhansi at one time had been a tiny independent state of Bundelkhand, but for want of natural heirs it had been taken over by the British Government. At the time of the Mutiny of 1857 it was garrisoned entirely by sepoys and these caught—in the words of John Lawrence—"the prevalent mania", and revolted. The Europeans in the station, about fifty-five in all, took refuge in the Jhansi fort. The local Rani, widow of a former chief now took a hand, and sent men and guns to help the mutineers. She chose to consider that she had a real grievance in not hav-

ing been allowed to adopt a son and through him to gain control over the little State, and saw in the revolt a heaven-sent chance to revenge herself on the hated British. Knowing the refugees in the fort were short of food, and on that account bound to capitulate in a few hours, she took a solemn oath that if they would surrender, their lives should be spared and they should be sent under safe escort to another station. The Cawnpur tragedy was repeated here; the prisoners, full of hope, agreed to her terms and left the fort, two by two. Instantly they were seized by the waiting sepoys, bound and butchered—men, women and little children—at the command of the Rani. She later suffered the due reward of her deeds. Sir Hugh Rose besieged her in the fort of Jhansi not long after, and the lady fled into the country. She fought on the side of Tantia Topi the same year, dressed as a man, taking her part with the sepoys. A British trooper killed her, and only after death was her sex and rank discovered.

Jhansi is a place of tanks, and these literally swarm with duck and wild fowl of all kinds; I got marvellously good shooting there. Nilghai—the “blue-bull” of India which is not blue at all but dark grey—is found, with black-buck and chinkara in numbers on the plains. These are all good shooting, and good eating also. In the land where the chief fare is the eternal moorghi disguised in various ways, or stringy goat masquerading as mutton, it is distinctly pleasant to vary the menu with venison or nilghai tongue.

The Jhansi district is very hot and generally flat, though low hills appear here and there. The odd

thing about these hills is that they appear to have a central core or backbone, of white crystalline granite which rises in a ridge along and above them sometimes to a height of several hundred feet; it shines pure white in the morning sun and can be seen for miles around. The forests are rather uninteresting and there is not much game in them, though panther are to be found everywhere. The Dukwa Sukwa block of forests, however, held sambhur and chital in my time and the heads of the stags were quite remarkably good.

I saw an unusual thing in this block one evening. I had been out after duck to one of the many tanks, and was leisurely riding home ahead of my men with the guns. Crossing the boundary into Dukwa Sukwa I began to canter along the narrow sandy track winding through the forest; the tree growth here was low and scanty and there were grassy glades. Turning a bend I glanced ahead, and thought I saw the tail of an animal disappear into the bushes. I pulled up and walked the pony, keeping an eye on the spot. As I got up to it, there in a tiny clearing between the bushes, and not twenty feet from the edge of the path on which my pony stood, were a pair of magnificent panther in the very act of mating. They looked up with a start then glided apart instantly, and melted away between the bushes, but not before I had had a good look at them. The pony gazed at them shivering a little, but never attempted to bolt. I have seen and shot scores of panther in my time, but the brilliant black and yellow of these spotted hides I have never seen equalled.

I had never shot any antelope before I came to Jhansi—they do not exist in mountain districts. Probably owing to the nearness of the Jhansi cantonment to their haunts, they were extremely shy, and wary to a degree. I recall with amazement the countless hours I spent morning and evening, trying to circumvent and bring to bag my first few chinkara. I stalked and stalked to get within reasonable range, and then invariably missed when I had succeeded in doing so. The process was repeated next time and times without number; the amount of shots I missed to begin with was simply incredible. In fact a friend of mine—a rude fellow—actually suggested the starting of a lead mine syndicate to recover part at least of the metal I had scattered abroad!

Just about this time, my pony and I fell over a blue-bull one moonlight night. This animal, like many ruminants, has a habit after a good feed, of sitting down in an open space to chew the cud reflectively. We turned a corner—the turning point in life or shikar, always a crucial moment!—and the next moment rode right on to a big black object lying in the middle of the road—a large nilghai. The thing floundered up with a snort under my pony's very nose and lumbered off, and we were lucky to get out of the encounter with nothing worse than a bad fright. A big bull-nilghai is a very massive and powerful beast, standing at least fourteen hands high. He is armed with a pair of short horns both thick and straight; they are sharp also, and he knows how to use them. His neck and chest are protected by a stout hide shield over an inch thick, and

in an old bull they are generally covered with scars.

I once saw two bulls start a squaring up of accounts on the face of a hill opposite my camp. I watched the battle for some time in a rapidly gathering thunderstorm which broke, with terrific lightning in sheets of rain, and continued well into the night. The morning came blue and clear, superbly peaceful, but a fine bull lay cold and stiff at the bottom of the hill. The early waking crows had already discovered the victim of last night's strife, and sat cawing above the carcass, pretending to be greatly shocked, in reality trying to attract the attention of men or vultures to assist in making an impression on the tough hide, which their softer bills could not negotiate. I came back to camp one evening from shooting duck with a friend to find splashes of blood staining the fly of one of our tents, blood also on the tent ropes, and the soil all round red with it. The servants told me that soon after our departure in the morning, two nilghai, fighting furiously, had broken into camp, goring and stamping about, getting even among the tent ropes. The villagers finally turned out and dispatched one of the combatants, and when we returned they had already cooked and eaten the greater part of him. The other escaped, but not before the men had badly gashed him with their ferocious little knives.

I shot a bull one morning at the urgent request of my Mohammedan orderly, who begged that "the stomachs of the poor"—meaning his own—"might be filled". He rushed up to cut its throat and had actually put his foot on it, when it sprang to life,

knocked him spinning and vanished. I sent him with some other men to try and find it, but though they never saw it again they returned to me, carrying between them and fastened to a bamboo pole, a fine young python very much alive. They had fallen over the snake while searching for the nilghai and as it seemed disinclined to move, they decided to tie it up and bring it to me. It was very bulbous about the middle and had evidently recently disposed of a fair-sized meal. Here I am afraid, I committed a very reprehensible and cruel act. I had read somewhere that the python is the only snake which can travel straight, that is to say, like a centipede without the wriggling progression of other snakes, and I wanted to see if this were true, and if so, how it was accomplished.

I therefore cut it loose and let it go in an empty room of the bungalow, so that I might see its movements. I found that it really could propel itself along in practically a straight line without any wriggling. It seemed to do this by moving the ribs under the skin with a rippling motion as a centipede does its many legs. Moreover, it had besides, near the end of the tail, a pair of horny protuberances, which are certainly the rudimentary remains of legs; these it also used in driving itself forward. The interests of science having been served I shot it, and when the men had opened it we found inside a full-grown four-spur fowl, beautifully folded up, feathers and all complete. The bird could not long have been swallowed, but even in that short time the bill, claws, and the four little spurs had been reduced almost to a

jelly by the powerful gastric juices in the snake's internal economy.

The River Betwa formed the southern boundary of the Dukwa Sukwa block and my forest bungalow was built on its bank. One morning I heard a tremendous commotion, and cries as of children in distress, and on sending out to inquire the cause, word was brought back that a mugger or alligator, had grabbed a calf by the nose and dragged it into a pool. That evening some of the village fathers came to beg me to shoot the saurian as it had relieved them of several head of cattle at different times. This I promised to try and do, and a couple of evenings later started out with my rifle. I concealed myself among bushes growing between the rocks just above a pool in which the mugger was supposed to live. At evening time his habit was to come out, and bask on the sandy margins of the pool, hoping to catch an unwary calf or an old and diseased cow when the village herd came down to drink on the way home to their byres, as the twilight shadows lengthened into dusk.

I did not know until afterwards that on this special night, the cattle had been watered at another part of the river, since the timid graziers were afraid to face the pool again. So I sat on hopefully, watching the bird life all around me. Presently, as the westering sun drew slanting rays across the river I saw appear, far upstream, between the taller trees fringing both banks, a long line of birds on the wing. The line rose and fell in gentle undulation as the birds changed places in flight, and the sun glinting off the shining

plumage of their backs gave the effect of a silver ribbon rising and falling in the air. It advanced steadily coming down and down, till eventually the birds pitched at the end of the very pool over which I was sitting, and I saw they were a troop of cormorants.

Smoothly and silently the line floated down the pool towards me; occasionally a bird dived, to reappear just ahead of the others swallowing a fish; here it waited and rejoined the steadily advancing line. Gradually more and more birds began to dive as they advanced in perfect alignment, then little streaks of silver skipped out of the water to be instantly snapped up by the birds still afloat. The closer drew the line towards my end of the pool, the greater grew the excitement, until every second or third bird was diving, and soon the water was churned to foam by the quickly dipping birds, snapping furiously at the fish as they leapt out of the water.

Having reached the end of the pool below me the excitement gradually subsided, and the cormorants began to float leisurely towards the right bank up which they waddled in twos and threes, finally scrambling on to a rocky ledge, every bird replete. Here, with much preening of feathers and flapping of wings in the evening sunshine, they passed the time until they were dry enough to proceed; then suddenly, as if someone had given an order, they rose as one bird, gradually falling into line as they flew. The now black, undulating ribbon rapidly faded into the twilight sky as they moved downstream probably to some favourite roosting place. I sat, charmed with the interesting little show, until dark-

ness fell, and it was obvious that all wise muggers had most certainly gone to bed and that I, at least for this night, had no more chance of bagging the village calf-eater. Calling the men, I walked back to camp, watching the stars appear in the warm, sapphire-coloured Indian dusk.

CHAPTER V

BERAR

My next move in 1802 was to an entirely different part of India—Berar. This great district in Central India has always been the scene of endless battles, where dynasty after dynasty arose, played its part, and was conquered again and again. Under Akbar the Great, the Deccan, of which Berar formed part, was divided into districts each under different viceroys, appointed in succession by each reigning Moghul Emperor of Delhi. So that when Asaf Jah, viceroy of the Deccan under the Emperor Auranzeb, descendant of Akbar, defeated his rival Mubariz Khan, neighbouring viceroy of the Khandesh district, at Rohankher, he called the place Fathkhelda, "City of Victory," and proceeded to establish his virtual supremacy over a very large tract of country. He became in fact, the founder of the present kingdom of the Nizams of Hyderabad, and until the year 1853, Berar was part of their territory and administered by them. The reason why the British Government had eventually to intervene in Berar is, briefly, this:

After the year 1803, in which General Wellesley, afterwards Duke of Wellington, finally conquered

the Maratha chiefs—who, incidentally had overrun Hyderabad and Berar, causing great trouble to the Nizam and doing immense damage to the country—an era of comparative peace set in. But the spread of the British dominions everywhere, naturally drove thousands of disbanded and un-needed native troops back into their several States. This occurred in Hyderabad, and therefore a force of Irregular Cavalry known as the Hyderabad Contingent was raised there to keep order in the State, the upkeep of which was to be part of the Nizam's duties. Moreover, as time went on, the State of Hyderabad became the happy hunting ground of adventurers, notably certain English and Parsee firms, who so "farmed" it to their own scandalous profit aided by the Nizam's finance minister, that it was brought to the verge of bankruptcy, the troops were unpaid, and loans were sought from the British Government to keep things going at all.

Eventually these debts to Government amounted to as much as forty-five lakhs of rupees, and as it seemed unlikely that the Administration could ever meet the calls upon it, it was finally settled that six Districts, yielding an annual revenue of fifty lakhs, should be assigned to the British Government, and it is these districts which form the Province of Berar to-day. This assignment was carried out in 1853, and at the same time it was agreed that the Hyderabad Contingent should, in future, be maintained entirely by the British.

Later again, in 1902, during the Viceroyalty of Lord Curzon, the matter was opened up once more

and a fresh agreement drawn up, arranging for the lease of Berar in perpetuity to the British for an annual rental of twenty-five lakhs to the Nizam. The Contingent at this time ceased to be a separate force serving only in Berar, and was thenceforward incorporated in the forces of the Indian Army as a whole.

It so happened that I was posted when first I went to Berar, to one of the cantonments belonging to the Contingent—a little old-world station by the name of Ellichpur. It lay in a great fertile plain stretching away southward for mile upon mile, while due north and only five miles away, there swept from east to west a rampart of splendid hills, the Satpuras, backbone of this part of Central India. Here and there, looking down the great wall, a sharp peak or bastion sprang out more fiercely than the rest. The plain was the home of chinkara and black-buck, and the plateaux and ravines above and among the Satpura hills were full of tiger, panther, and bear; but my charge stopped at the base of the hills and I had no opportunity of doing any shooting in them; actually also, the Satpuras formed a natural boundary to the Province of Berar itself.

Ellichpur had a certain charm; its broad roads were bordered with fine trees and feathery bamboos. It had a garden, to which everybody, civil as well as military, used to come in the evenings to drink the immemorial peg, discuss the day's doings, and listen to the regimental band, which played there twice a week.

But alas for those days of prosperity!—I passed

through the station twenty years after the regiment had ceased to provide its *raison d'être*—and only the beautiful trees were there. The bamboos had mostly seeded and died, the garden was overgrown and deserted; even the bungalows were falling to pieces. Only a tragic wreck, and some English graves remained.

Towering out of the Satpuras to the north-west, is an old mountain fortress. It stands on a great bastion-like plateau with bold, scarped sides, well away from the main ridge of hills, with which it is connected by a narrow neck. This is Gawilgarh, famous through centuries of fierce Indian history; more famous still in our day because the great Duke of Wellington, then General Wellesley, after he had defeated the Maratha forces at Argaon in 1803, turned his attention to this great stronghold, also held in strength for a Maratha chieftain, the Bhonsla Rajah of Nagpur. The fort was carried after ten days' siege but not without fierce fighting. Even now tradition still survives of the struggle for the narrow neck leading to the gateway; of the lane there, choked with corpses, while the blood ran red. "Yea, Sahib, even to the valley below," as an ancient greybeard told me on my last visit there. There was a huge anjan-tree—rather like a silver birch in trunk and leaves—growing on the hill-side about two hundred yards from the ramparts of the fort, and the same old greybeard told me that Wellesley was standing under this directing operations, when a round shot from the fort passed so close to him that the wind of it took his hat from his head. It may have been only one of the

many legends that grow round the figure of a great commander, but the tree was certainly a magnificent one, and an anjan of such size would be at least two hundred years old, so that this particular specimen could have been a large tree even in Wellesley's day.

The outermost gate of the fort had some very singular carvings, rude, of course, but interesting. On each side there was an extraordinary tiger holding a mouthful of no less than five elephants, and above these a double-headed eagle, which would strike even the unlettered observer as being very much like the double-headed eagle of the Russian Standard; each held a unique animal in its beak. Scholars and historians within the last few years have discovered that these birds are the "ganderbherunda" or the fabulous double-headed eagle of Vijayanagar which lives upon elephants, and that they were the emblems of the first independent king of Berar, who by birth was a Brahmin of Vijayanagar, but who, captured and brought up as a Mohammedan, rose after many years of fighting and adventure to be overlord of this territory. He rebuilt the gateway and showed by these unique armorial bearings, that he was actually proud of his Brahmin descent. There are tanks in the fort, and some curious old guns, a few ruined buildings and an ancient magazine still holding some cannon shot, but for the most part when I saw it, the waving grass was thick over all, and tiger actually laired in the old gateways.

One fine building remained. On the highest point of the fort to the southward, where the rock face falls away almost sheer for two thousand feet, a

Mohammedan king of old time built a very splendid mosque. Arched cloisters led up to it, and through them the eye travelled out over the blue levels to the far blue hills in the distance. Tragically, half of the western side of the mosque had crumbled away with the crumbling hill-side, and of the roof set with many domes, half at least I think, had perished when I saw it last. But my inner eye, as I sat dreaming in that high place, saw the many-coloured pageant of the weekly Friday prayers—the Founder King, blackbearded, going before, the sunlight glinting on his jewelled sword; the crowd of scented courtiers in bright colours, stiff brocades, many-hued turbans, curled-up shoes. And I heard the deep voice of the moulvi ringing far out into the sunset in the cry of faith: "There is no God but God"—a ghost of the living voice which once must have made the old stones echo and thrill again and again.

There is on the plateau behind the fort, a small hill station called Chikalda. Hither come the heat-weary officials of Berar with their families, when the hot winds make the plains almost unbearable. It is a charming little place, all set about with fine trees, and so cut into with deep ravines that there is no really long stretch of road in any one direction. But there are views all round of apparently limitless ranges of hills and towering peaks, the climate is cool, and the autumn there is an English autumn with dahlias growing in the gardens, and masses of "Old Man's Beard" everywhere.

The fact that it is quite an ordinary thing for a tiger to pass through a garden at night, that one has

been known to kill on the Club tennis court and to be actually shot there over the kill, in no wise detracts from the place, but is rather an added charm. And I have myself sat at dinner in a friend's bungalow, and seen a grey shadow slip through the grey dusk of the garden, and realised with a pleasant shiver, that the spotted pard was afoot and passing on his evening rounds. One motors down now from Chikalda to Ellichpur by the winding road once used, perhaps, by the kings of old time to reach their mountain fortress; by this same road most probably, the guns were brought up to batter the rock of Gawilgarh.

After some time at Ellichpur I was sent on to the Akola Division, a very large tract which, actually taking in a corner of the Melghat Division on the slopes of the Satpura hills, swept to the southward across the great cotton plains of Berar up to the crest of the Ajanta Ghats. The soil, here called "Black Cotton" is wonderfully rich, and, given a moderately well distributed rain-fall, produces magnificent crops of cotton and millet, the latter known locally as jowari. Large as the district already was, the forests of the adjoining district of Buldana were presently added unto it, so that parts of my charge actually reached the Hyderabad boundary itself. In such a country as this, rich of soil, and well watered in normal years by many rivers and streams, there was naturally a plentiful food supply for wild life of all kinds. The more extensive and therefore important hill forests lying to the north, as well as those along the central hilly parts of the country, held fine sambhur, largest of all the deer; and the Gaur or Indian

bison, with his four white stockings, china blue eyes and massive head carrying a boss of curly grey hair between the horns, roamed the northern hills together with tiger, panther, and the sloth bear.

On the great Central and Southern plains lived perpetually shifting herds of black-buck, with chin-kara and nilghai. Chital deer were to be found in the groves of babul trees and the stags in these parts carried very fine horns. Among the babul thickets near the banks of the Purna river lived a big herd of wild cattle. These were ordinary village cattle which from time to time had left their byres for the open jungle and by reason of the free life and the excellent feeding, had grown to an enormous size. They were as wild as the bison though not in the least aggressive, and their colour was a strong red as well as white and piebald. They had not developed anything unusual in the way of horns, but from sheer bulk alone they were distinctly impressive.

In the Akola district near the Ajanta Ghats still lived and bred the hunting-leopard or cheetah. He is an interesting beast and though he is still to be seen in zoos, he is not well known to sportsmen as a whole. His head is small and round, with curiously gentle eyes, and there is a dark line running from the inner corner of each eye down past the mouth, and this gives him a somehow wistful expression. He stands high on his legs and is altogether slender and built for speed, unlike the jungle-dwelling, short-limbed and much more heavily built panther. The cheetah wears a coat of single spots not rosettes like that of the panther, and his claws are those of the dog, always

visible, not retractile as are the talons of the other big cats. Moreover he is no cattle killer like the tiger, nor does he prey on chital and other deer like his brother of the forests. But he lives solely on the black-buck and chinkara of the plains, and depends on his amazing swiftness to bring them down.

This hunter lairs among the rocks on the low hills scattered about, and lies for choice in the sunshine on the sloping branch of a tree. From there he watches over the moving groups of game, his eyes blinking and shifting as they peer at the quarry. I never shot him, he is far too uncommon, and although there is no price on his head as on that of the tiger and panther one fears that in time he will become altogether extinct. The neighbouring villagers, now so well provided with guns, are always his enemies, and in my time and quite possibly now also, up-country rajahs used to get special permission to come down and trap him and take him away to use in captivity for their own pleasure and sport. There was much small game in this rich cultivation; the francolin or painted partridge, the grey partridge, the sand grouse, blue rock pigeon, two or three kinds of quail, occasionally the florican, and sometimes even the great bustard were to be found, and hare were also there in numbers.

The people of Berar have always been thrifty as to their daily bread, though prodigal in their expenditure on marriages and entertainments. For centuries they have been at the mercy of kingly and other invaders; their grain and foodstuff the spoil of any who could take them by force. They therefore evolved a

quaint way of storing their jowari and millet—when a particularly good rainfall had produced a bumper crop—against trouble and famine when their need might be very great. They excavated great underground bins in the shape of a full-bellied bottle with a wide neck, plastering the interior all over with clay which they fired to make it damp proof. The grain was stored in these, sometimes for very many years; but of course when first opened they were absolutely unapproachable by reason of the poisonous gas generated within, but after this had cleared away, the grain was brought to light and sold and eaten all over the country. These curious bottle bins were known as “peos” and they ranged in size from six feet in diameter to that of a fair-sized room.

Of course the forests have always greatly suffered at the hands of invaders. Generation by generation the trees have been cut down as fuel for the armies of conqueror and conquered, so that nothing but the most indifferent growth has been possible over centuries of time. It is roughly, only within the last fifty years that careful forestry has begun to bring about improvement in the size and quality of the trees, and the same careful conservancy will be needed for many years yet, since the severe droughts to which the Province is periodically very liable, are and always will be a great set-back to the young growth, so that not for many a day if ever will any trees of great size and age be attainable.

After the Moghul came the Mahratha, after the Mahratha the Pindari robbers; hence the land has never known lasting peace, and the villagers were

forced to prepare for emergencies. Centuries ago, each little settlement built itself a fort of grey "pandri mathi", a cement-like clay so strong that it has withstood all ravages of time and weather. These forts were usually square, with bastions at the four corners and large enough to contain all the villagers, their flocks, herds and grain. At the first hint of an advancing force, or a raid by the wild robbers of the hills, the whole community gathered up its garments and fled into the fort, barricading and defending itself until the visitation had passed and it was free to till the fields once more.

On his way to Gawilgarh, Wellesley must have passed just below another old fort—that of Narnala, almost equally fine, and in its day equally celebrated. It is really three forts linked together in one, and contains a perfect gem of a gateway which, in the words of Haig: "Is the most beautiful piece of Pathan architecture in Berar." Unlike the severe buildings which surround it, it is most ornate; built of white sandstone with lovely carvings of lotus flowers, cornices deeply cut and ornamented, and decorative Arabic inscriptions. There are hanging balconies with lattice work, like fine lace, filling the windows; altogether a singularly beautiful piece of work and, through its inscriptions, a mine of information to the Arabic scholar. There is a "Bloody Bastion" in the fort—the name is somehow reminiscent of the Tower of London—from which in the good old days criminals sentenced to die, were trussed up and pushed over the edge; a not by any means pleasant form of death but one essentially Eastern. It is known, how-

ever, that Narnala was never captured by Wellesley, nor did the enemy ever hold it at that time; yet there is one Christian grave in the fort, marked with a cross, and it is said that Wellesley left a detachment there in charge of a British officer, whose resting place it is. But the truth will never be known now, for the name has gone from the tomb and there is no other record; and so it is that all India is sown with graves long forgotten and un-named.

The fields below the fort are a marvellous sight at harvest time. They swarm with busy men in white loincloths cutting jowari, while women and children in saris of blue, green, yellow and red, move to and fro collecting the round cobs which they pile up in heaps. At cotton time, they work among low bushes hung with bolls; each one, if perfectly ripe, open to show four fingers of apparently pure white cotton wool. Great yellow or snow white heaps indicate the result of these labours in jowari cobs or heaps of cotton, and carts piled high with the spoils go creaking and whining across the rough tracks to the villages.

I had been marching over the district through the forests on the Ajanta Ghats, thence up to the Balaghat plateau, which is not level at all but a country broken up by ravines and ridges, and intersected by cultivation, when I came at length to the rim of a huge amphitheatre and looking down saw a lake of shining water lying dark and polished nearly four hundred feet below me. It was circled all round with feathery tamarind trees of great age, and in among the trees were the dark remains of carven temples, where

who knows what strange cult or ritual may in past ages have been practised. A spongy beach stretched from the trees and the temples to the water and a heavy sedgy smell hung over it all.

This was the Lonar Lake and it has for the native a wonderful origin; though actually, according to science, it must have been formed by some gaseous explosion far back in the fiery beginnings of the world. Indian folk lore says that long and long ago it was the den of the demon Lonasur. He was a giant also, and had caused such terror to the people far and near, that in answer to their prayers, the great god Vishnu in the likeness of a beautiful youth came to earth to deliver the victims. Vishnu, by the aid of the giant's two sisters found his hiding place in what is now the hollow of the lake, deep down in the earth. The god gave one kick with his toe to the lid of the den, and finding the demon asleep on his bed beneath, slew him, and the blood welling up has filled the hollow ever since. The lid, meanwhile, so mighty was Vishnu's kick, sailed away for over thirty miles, where it settled down point upwards, and has been a perfectly quiet and solid hill every since.

The water of the lake is very brackish and loaded with mineral salts. In the rains when it is deep, divers bring up great lumps of crystal, but when the water dries away in the hot weather, the surface of the hollow is covered with a layer of some fine crystalline deposit. It seemed to be a spot beloved of flamingoes, for whenever I was there eight or ten of these great rose-pink birds were to be seen, wading peacefully in the shallows; pausing to feed after the

quaint fashion of their kind, turning the head upside down in the water, presumably to filter through their bills the plankton, or whatever tiny floating weed they use for food.

On the southern face of the lake a stream of sweet water breaks from the hill; the Brahmihis say it comes straight from Holy Ganga, and have set it about with temples and made it a place of pilgrimage. The curious thing is that this pure water does not reach the lake at all; it disappears or soaks into the ground at some distance from it. The whole place however, is sacred to common people and Brahmims alike, and its history is as mysterious and dim as the light filtering into the old, old temples among the trees.

And so I wandered over this interesting country for several years amid peace and plenty until suddenly, in 1899, the monsoon rains failed completely over the whole Province and the greater part of Central and Southern India as well, and famine stalked the land. In Berar we had had no noticeable rainfall for fully twenty months, and crops failed completely, because those standing, withered and died and no fresh seed could be sown. Streams, tanks, and wells dried up and great distress prevailed. Government as usual came to the rescue by opening extensive famine relief-camps all over the Province, whereby suffering and distress was reduced to a minimum and very few, if any, deaths occurred from actual starvation, except at the beginning of the famine in out-of-the-way parts. Reserve forests were thrown open to the wholesale export of grass as well as for grazing, but in spite of every concession thousands of cattle died,

more from lack of water than food, and wild animal life also suffered enormously. In fact in some parts certain species disappeared entirely—such as the fine sambhur living all along the Ajanta Ghats. Black buck, chinkara, sambhur and nilghai even, were found dead in wells, where they had come in the night to try and find water. Even tiger and bison were discovered dead in the pot-holes in river beds; they had evidently been trying to reach the stagnant water at the bottom.

Several seasons of short rainfall succeeded each other rather closely, and resulted in a very serious fall in the sub-soil water level, and this had dire effects on the forests and growth generally, throughout Berar, and even in the Central Provinces as I subsequently observed. Although in forest tracts the trees did not die down completely, they became “stag-headed”—that is, the upper branches died into sticks which stuck out like stag’s antlers—and this naturally detracted greatly from their value, and caused them to be prematurely felled in the hope of obtaining regrowth through sound coppice. It was a remarkable thing that trees growing along the banks of rivers, tanks and streams, were the first to show signs of distress and actually to perish; the reason being that they had so far led a pampered life from the perpetual presence of water, and were unable suddenly to adapt themselves to short commons when the water failed.

In very dry tracts, the only methods by which certain species such as teak, saj, anjan, and a few others could hope to regenerate themselves from seed was

for the young seedlings to take several years to establish themselves. Germination in these trees takes place with the first showers of the monsoon except that with teak, the seed lies for several years quiescent in the soil before it attains a fit condition for germination. The rest sprout the same year, and all throw down or develop a vigorous tap root, while the growth above ground is insignificant and dies down to ground level each dry season for several years. Meanwhile the tap root bores steadily downward until it has reached suitable moisture; it then throws up a strong leader above ground and thereafter forges ahead. With the anjan, the process is particularly marked. I have carefully dug up seedlings in November which had only germinated the previous June, and in the short time of five months, although the growth above ground was only three to four inches the tap root had gone down over twenty-three inches. These were actual measurements, and even then quite possibly I may have broken off a portion of the growing point.

Yet others, such as the neem and mohwa, develop enormous surface-feeding roots which enable them to cover a large area within which they are almost certain to strike a supply of moisture; I have seen such roots reaching out fifty to sixty yards from the bole. The anjan is probably the most drought-resisting of all trees. I remember an old tree which grew on a bank fully seventy feet above the river bed below. The stream had cut away the cliff, leaving the tree standing at the top, to which it was held by a side root; the long tap root left exposed, came wrig-

gling down to disappear into the sandy bed of the stream, where it still measured three to three and a half inches in diameter; this meant that the root must continue for at least another thirty to forty feet below ground.

That old tree must have possessed a tap root well over a hundred feet in length; is it any wonder, therefore, that the anjan is a marvellous drought resister?

CHAPTER VI

BERAR CONTINUED

I MOVED to and fro across the Division from the hills to the cotton plains and back again, along hilly regions and through forests—always changing ground—for the district was at least six or seven thousand square miles in extent and there was much to see.

In the Melghat hills—part of the larger Satpuras—to northward, there was a good deal of land held “in jaghir” by the heads of certain influential Korku families. This land had been granted under “sanads” or in reward, by the Nizam of Hyderabad to their ancestors in former times, for keeping watch and ward over certain passes in the hills much used by robber gangs in those bad old days. These jaghirdars had been given the courtesy title of Rajah, and so it came about that my ancient friend the Jaghirdar of Rohankhirki was known as Rajah Manghal Singh. He was a pleasant, inoffensive old man, much emaciated from fevers, too much mohwa liquor, and probably drug taking also, but he was decidedly a character. On my entering his jaghir, he would come to pay a ceremonial visit, dressed in a khurta and dhoti, both of which had long since ceased to be

white; a rope-like red pagri was twined round his untidy old head and his bare, skinny legs protruded from under a red embroidered kashmir shawl, which helped to cover up the grubby garments underneath. However, as a sign of his chieftainship, he carried a ceremonial tulwar—a heavy sword.

There were quite a number of Rajahs like Manghal who had holdings in the hills around, and I was told that some years before, a certain Colonel whom we will call Von Stromboli, was transferred to Berar as Chief of the Forests. This good gentleman, it was said, had a penchant for pomp and circumstance and never lost an opportunity of enforcing it, so that on assuming charge, and hearing that several real Rajahs had estates within his jurisdiction, he caused orders to be sent them to meet him at a formal Durbar, or court, at a certain time and place. The day came and he duly got himself into full military kit complete with orders and what-not, and waited for the chiefs to arrive, sitting in state to receive them. One by one they straggled in, dressed in their ragged garments and dirty old shawls! Unfortunately history does not say how the great Durbar proceeded, nor, what is more important, how it ended!

Old Manghal Singh, as I have said, was given to looking on the wine when it was red, and in his cups used to imagine that the Forest Department had stolen a part of his jaghir and included it in the Ambabarwa Reserve. It was perhaps natural that the old man in his muddled state should look enviously on the well-wooded, bamboo-clothed hills in the Reserve adjoining his jaghir, beside which the denuded,

overworked condition of his own forests showed such a miserable contrast. So he sent for the village scribe from Sonala, and commanded him to write a petition to Government complaining of absorption of a portion of his estate.

In due course this document filtered down to me for inquiry and report and I went out to Rohankhirki and sent for the old man to meet me and show me the scene of the imaginary theft. He arrived with a rag-tag and bob-tail retinue of which I told him to shed half as I loathed a crowd. We then started out, he galloping on ahead at a great pace, and eventually he pointed at a high bluff up which the boundary ran in a great sweep at least five hundred feet above. Arrived at the crest, he waved his arms at the opposite valley and said his boundary started there. I then asked if he could show me any landmarks to justify his claim. "Nahin, Sahib," said he. "There is no landmark, but fifty years past my father, now with the gods, told me it was his land, and surely the Sirkar will give me back my own?" However, I got him to believe at length, the testimony of the four-inch maps, which showed his boundary very clearly marked, and presently he began to admit he was in the wrong and the Sirkar his father and mother, and his only hope.

After some further talk we started back, and as we came to the edge of the great bluff and looked down the sweep of clean burnt fireline below, I suddenly saw a hare feeding and skipping about on it some way down; it disappeared in the middle of the line. I kept my eye on the place and when we came near it,

I spotted a hole in the ground caused by the burning back of a root, and into this I felt sure that the hare must have retreated. Walking up to it I said: "Rajah Sahib, is me shikar hai!" (There is sport in here.) Manghal Singh's men and my subordinates looked at each other in astonishment, evidently thinking I had gone quite dippy, and the old man exclaimed: "Kabbi nahin, Hazur!" (Never, your Honour.) "Well," I said, "look and see!" At this, one of the men pulled up his sleeve and stuck his arm down the hole. Of course he felt the hare which squirmed under his hand, whereat he shouted in great excitement: "Hai, Sahib, hai!" (It is here, sir.) And presently drew out the quaking little beast. "I told you so," said I, and they marvelled at my jadu. Immediately the old Rajah unsheathed his huge tulwar, and my Ranger, Ram Singh, his hunting knife in order to "hillal" or cut the throat of, the trembling thing which the fellow held ready for execution. "Oh no!" said I, "it's my shikar, and I must have the honour of holding it for hillal"—to which of course they all agreed. I then took hold of the little chap and held it by the ears with its head back, and the old Ranger hurried forward with his hunting knife at the ready.

But just as he was about to apply it I, as if by accident, let slip the hare, and away it fled, skipping off down the line, and after it tore the Rajah, my Ranger and the whole motley crowd. Of course it was out of sight in an instant, so presently they all returned, panting and blowing, looking at me in a very deprecating way as being a poor creature to have let it go at all, and the Rajah indignantly said:

“Dekho, Sahib—adh seer ghosht jata reya!” (Look, sir, a pound of meat gone west!) I was perfectly speechless with laughter, and it began to dawn on them at last that I had let it go intentionally to take a rise out of them, and then they started to laugh and slap their sides, and finally we all chuckled together in great amity and good fellowship.

Thus ended Manghal Singh's petition about our supposed theft of his land, of which I never heard another word from that day onward; but he never forgot the hare, and whenever I saw him afterward he would split his sides with laughter and come very near to digging me in the ribs.

In the Bhongaon Reserve, the chital deer had been shamelessly shot out in the course of many years and to protect them, a system of shooting permits issued by myself, was instituted; these were only given to genuine and recognised sportsmen, and there was a limit set to the number they were allowed to shoot. To my joy, after some years of this protection, the head of chital had so enormously increased that there were literally hundreds in the Bhongaon Reserve; the stags too carried magnificent horns and heads touching thirty-nine inches with a fine wide spread were quite an ordinary occurrence.

Pig, of course, were always looked upon as vermin, so were nilghai, and regular battues for them were sometimes permitted, and there was no restriction on the number allowed to be shot. Even so, the increase in their numbers was far too great, and netting and spearing was introduced, and permission given to villages specially harassed, to do this under my per-

sonal supervision. The men would set up stout cord nets, eight feet high and perhaps sixty feet long, across the line of retreat taken by the pig when beaten; they were loosely propped by tall bamboos to keep them open. Armed with broad-bladed spears, the villagers concealed themselves behind the nets or in the trees above them, and waited for the onrush. The pig when driven came charging blindly along at a great pace and rushed into the trap, when of course the nets fell in on them and held them in their folds; the men then ran in and slew them with their spears. I am afraid there was a certain amount of carnage here, but the thing was very quickly done and with the minimum of suffering. These nettings had an admirable effect on the porcine mind; after a few had been held the pig would desert the forests and would not return for at least two or three years, much to the delight of the villagers whose crops at last had peace. Of course other animals occasionally came along with the driven pig, and I once shot a panther in mid-air as he rose to clear the net in a splendid bound.

Pig-sticking was a great game, and I have had marvellous sport in my time with other devotees of the spear. I recall one particularly epic day arranged by the Deputy Commissioner of Akola, who was a great sportsman and a wonderful rider.

The evening before, four of us rode out to a camp pitched under some mango trees about a mile from the Bhongaon Ramna (grass reserve), where the pig stick was to take place. It was hot to a degree, and we slept out under the trees. I awoke towards dawn

to hear the thud of ripe mangoes falling down around me, so I crawled out from under my mosquito net and went to retrieve a few. A voice suddenly said: "Don't eat that rubbish, Martin, try one of my iced mangoes in a minute"—and I looked round to see the pleasant face of the Deputy Commissioner protruding from the net of the bed next mine. Presently appeared his bearer with tea, toast, and the real thing—marvellous mangoes from Bombay, large, juicy and gloriously cold—and thus fortified, we began the day.

News came in shortly of several stout boar marked down in the Ramna, and at eleven o'clock we rode out, and soon after, were going hell for leather after a fine pig turned out in the first beat. We had three exciting runs and in the fourth, two other men and myself were close on the pig when he jinked from the nearest spear and ran on to mine. We were going at such a pace that I never felt the slightest resistance although the spear had passed clean through him; he stumbled and nearly wrenched it out of my hand, but I managed to withdraw it as I tore past. Later in the same day, a pig which had been stuck, charged me as I approached. I put down my spear to receive him and got him on the frontal bone of the head; he fell backwards, then jerking himself up, was off again. I followed, and coming up with him lunged once more and caught him on the rump; this time I felt a tremendous jar which nearly had me out of the saddle, and looking at the spear I saw that quite an inch of the point was broken off, and I guessed where we should find it—in the head of the pig—and there,

sure enough, we did find it when we examined his corpse later. We laid out five good pig that day.

One hot weather, two old friends came up to shoot with me, and as both tiger and panther declined to have anything to say to the baits I put out for them, we decided to go to Ambabarwa for sambhur and bear. We had hardly arrived there when some bamboo cutters came in to say they had just been charged by a couple of bear, and as it was their third encounter with the same pair they begged us to shoot them forthwith. The sloth bear is a poisonous animal; with his greyish-white face, slobbering lips and tiny red eyes, he looks as if he never spent a night in bed; and his disgusting habit of charging, biting, and clawing the face off his victim, makes it a duty to shoot him whenever a chance presents itself. Beside him the tiger is definitely a gentleman.

My old Ranger Ram Singh—and by the way, he claimed to be a descendant of Beni Singh, Rajput, who defended Gawilgarh Fort against Wellesley in 1803—soon arranged a beat and we started out. C. and myself elected to walk, but W. preferred to have the Ranger's pony in reserve. It was appallingly hot, as only Berar knows how to be, in spite of the fact that we were at least a thousand feet above the plains, and we blasphemed and perspired alternately while the air shimmered and danced with heat all round us. There was, too, hardly a shred of shade, for the leafless trees stood quiescent awaiting the monsoon, and a choking dust arose from the dry grass as we waded through it.

Always climbing, we finally reached a ridge overlooking the main valley below, and here poor W. had to part from his pony—for there was worse to come. Stumbling and struggling over the rocky ground, we eventually arrived at the ultimate crest, and saw below us a densely-wooded ravine wherein rested the bears, and from whence they were to be driven up to a narrow neck of land on our right. I was for standing behind some low bushes to await their arrival, but my friends would have none of it and insisted on being pushed up into trees, which after some difficulty was finally accomplished. C. was on the branch of a tree overlooking the ravine, while W. was in a low tree fifty yards to his left, and I stood just below his perch.

The beaters then dispersed round the ridges on either side and down into the valley, and presently we heard the opening shouts of the beat. Suddenly a "stop" in a tree to our left shouted that he could see the bear trying to break back over the opposite ridge. I ran up to him and saw them following each other, and just about to top the crest a hundred and fifty yards off. I had a long shot at the leader and luckily hit it, with the result that they both turned back into the beat, and I returned to my stance beneath W.'s tree. Presently there came a shot from C's direction and the bear passed under his tree but obviously unwounded. Then he shouted that the second was coming but that he could not fire, and suspecting that it was the bear I had wounded I let it pass me and then tore after them both. I soon caught up with the wounded "balu" which I dropped with a

single shot, then I scrambled, ran and rolled, down the most awful broken ground after the other, which was bumping along at a great pace down a glade well over a hundred yards away. I missed it with the right barrel but got it with the left at the base of the neck, and it dropped like a stone and never moved again.

By this time I was smothered from head to foot in the black dust given off by the plant *Strobilanthes*, which grows in quantities in these parts and I looked more like a coal heaver than anything, the rifle was so hot I could not touch the barrels and I was almost dead for want of a drink. However, after a rest we went slowly back to camp and presently a line of jubilant beaters appeared carrying the two "balus" each slung on a pole. No animal is capable of so much variation in size as the sloth bear, and as one of these skins was so much larger than the other, I made the two friends cast lots for them. W. who lives now in Scotland, has still, I think, the larger and will doubtless remember the whole episode.

Walking back to camp, one of the men stumbled over a shed sambhur horn lying in the grass, and as I looked at it I felt absolutely certain I had recently seen its pair. The villagers had lately brought in a mass of cast horns to be inspected and in the evening I looked through them again. There, sure enough, was the exact pair to the antler we had found, tangled up among a mass of others. Before my time it used to be the custom to auction the right to collect shed horns, but afterwards a system was introduced by which Government bought them in and sold them

later in bulk, by tender. This method gave the forester a clue to the district where poaching was most prevalent, as the horns of all slain animals have to be cut from the head and cannot therefore be mistaken for horns naturally cast; further it gave me a very good indication of where the best heads were to be found, which was excellent from the point of view of shikar.

Later on C. came to stay with me again to try once more for the tiger which had refused to kill for him on his first visit. The animal behaved well this time and quickly took one of the baits; he lay up in a long and narrow ravine, and we knew he was near the kill because the hungry vultures sat on the trees all round, but would not venture to drop down on it to feed. An enormous sirris tree grew in the centre of the ravine, and here the tiger was expected to break, and as the tree most opportunely had a stout branch growing out on either side, a machan was built on each and we sat almost on the same level. Now C. was always inclined to be impatient in beats, and this time I implored him not to fire till the tiger came right under his seat, which I was practically certain it would do. But the beat turned out a long one, and took some time to come up, and although I knew the beaters were coming on well, the little man was sceptical and started to fidget. So I broke a twig and when he looked round, I motioned to him to sit still and wait and by signs assured him that all would be well. Just then a peacock rose with a flurry and sailed overhead, and I signalled: "Be ready, he's coming!" Almost at once we saw a great orange

head peer over a bank, and the tiger started to come on at a smart trot.

No sooner was he clear of the sheltering bushes and coming briskly towards us—though still fifty yards off—when C. fired. I saw the tiger lurch, then bounding forward, come on at a great pace. C. then loosed off his second barrel; it only kicked up dust behind the beast which promptly swerved and came across my way. Just as he was passing me going all out, I got him in the neck, and he rolled over like a shot rabbit, stone dead. He had been going so strong and showing no sign of being wounded that I quite thought C. had missed him with the first shot and so did the little man himself, for he began to curse and to swear after the Scriptural manner and damn his own impatience. When we got down and examined the animal, however, we found to our great delight, that his first shot had hit it in the shoulder, inflicting a flesh wound only and breaking no bones—the inevitable result of using copper tube bullets. But at least he had drawn first blood and the very nice skin was his to my great satisfaction.

Here, in Ambabarwa, I first encountered the Gaur, as the natives call the Indian bison. This lordly bovine is a most dignified creature; he stands at least eighteen hands high, and has been known even to touch twenty hands in Southern India; with his massive but not wide horns and frontal boss of greyish, curly hair, his fine head is worth a struggle to attain.

Bison lived in comparative peace in Berar until the great famine of 1900 drove them out of their strongholds to seek food and water at all costs else-

where, and not only did numbers die from starvation, but many met death at the hands of men who otherwise would never have had the chance or the pluck to shoot them. Government also unwittingly helped in their destruction for, at that time, the forests were opened to herds of domestic cattle, and with them entered rinderpest and divers other diseases so that all bovine wild life became tragically infected, and the beasts of the jungle died in numbers as well as the beasts of the field. Of course in the mid-nineteenth century when there was very little restriction on shooting, a very heavy toll was levied on the bison by both native and British shikarris, but in my time rules were tightened up so much that in the whole of Berar only one bison might be shot in a year, and even then the permit was only given to approved sportsmen. There has, of course, always been a fine for shooting a cow, but many think, and I am one of them, that the present fine of Rs 50 is miserably inadequate, and that it should be raised to at least Rs 100.

I had myself to get special sanction to shoot the one bull allowed annually in Ambabarwa; it was the first of the only two bison shot by me during all my service, and I knew of a fine solitary bull there, and decided to bag him if possible.

One evening after a heavy thunderstorm had rolled off leaving the sky new-washed and clear and the air light and cool, it seemed to me that the ideal evening had come to try my luck, and as I knew every inch of the ground, I went out to do a quiet stalk all by myself. I took my .577 with solid bullets; copper tubes

by this time I had entirely foresworn. Suddenly the sunlight through the leaves showed me a huge footprint crossing the soft, moist earth of the path I was on—the first hint of the presence of the old lone bull, and carefully I began to follow up the spoor. It led me through an open glade, and on through feathery bamboo cover into a narrow ravine with steep sides—typical bison country. Just as I was wondering whether I could bring off the encounter before the sun slipped down and dusk overtook me, I heard the snapping of branch-wood just ahead of me and realised that the bison was very near. Almost at once I saw him climbing up a stiff bank, browsing as he moved slowly along. After nibbling at the leaves within reach, he reared up on his hind legs, threw his great bulk against the smaller trees, and bending them down appeared to walk over them, stripping off the leaves as he went. If the tree was brittle he snapped it off altogether and fed off it as it lay. I watched him for a long while and then cautiously stalked up to within sixty yards of him as he fed on the bank above me. I was considering the best spot to fire at when he suddenly stood up on end again. This gave me a splendid view of his head and neck, so I planted a bullet just behind the ear. He nearly fell backwards then but recovered his balance and came plunging and stumbling past within a few yards of me, and I gave him the second barrel in the neck once more and all was over; his great bulk came crashing to the ground.

After all, the joy of shikar is in the pursuit of the game; the effort bodily and mental, of pitting oneself

against the strength of the quarry, be it tiger, bison, or wild buffalo—the hard work it entails. But once the fatal shot is fired and the life is ended I have never been able to rejoice, but only to feel that one is perhaps something of a butcher to kill for sport and not for food. In short, I have always sympathised entirely with the sentiments of the “Melancholy Jaques!”

Lying there, this great fellow looked a perfect mountain of bone and muscle; he must have been at least seventeen hands high at the dorsal ridge, which in these animals is very curved and prominent, and his fine horns were much worn at the tips—typical horns of an old solitary bull.

It was now late and getting very dark; alone in the jungle at night I have always had a little creeping thrill along the spine, a legacy perhaps from early man the hunter, who in dark British forests went in fear of his life from un-named terrors, whose dreadful green eyes glared at him among the trees. Now I hurried to find the path I came by, before the shadows blotted it out entirely. Arrived in camp at length, I found my entire staff getting ready with lanterns and staves to go out and retrieve me from some unhappy hole into which they felt sure I must have fallen. Next morning we all went in a body to bring in the head and to skin the bull; luckily nothing had touched it during the night, although the ubiquitous crows had already found it, and in company with a vulture or two, were doing their unavailing best to break the skin. The removal of the head and the skinning took some time, and it was not till past

midday that the men struggled in with the heavy load. The hide, when pegged out, was enormous and would have made a carpet for a fair-sized room.

The sad part about it all was, that at first I could get no one to touch the meat. Even the aboriginal Korku declined on the ground that he was a Hindu, and that it partook of the nature of the Sacred Cow—forgetting that at other times the sanctity of a juicy young buffalo was by no means so apparent to him as it should be! Moreover as the bison's throat had not been ceremonially cut, no Mohammedan would eat it. They are a strange people. However, I eventually sent down word to some Mahar Untouchables living in a village near-by, and they came hurrying up in force and presently retired to their fastness, carrying gory steaks and limbs, and roped with dreadful and fantastic scarlet tit-bits.

The skin I found a great worry and eventually gave it away, discovering too late that it might have made me several suit-cases or perhaps a couple of what I once heard a maid call "porkmantles", which would have outlasted generations of the indifferent contraptions and valises we cumber ourselves with at preposterous expense to-day.

CHAPTER VII

BERAR CONTINUED

IN THE ARMS OF A PANTHER AND OTHER STORIES

I FEAR this heading may sound distinctly tall; it is none the less entirely true.

One week in a very hot May I was camped at a village called Dhaba, and thankful for the beautifully dense shade of the spreading mango trees under which the tents were pitched. Round about were the cotton fields, cleared of crops and ready for re-sowing in the coming rains, and in the distance low hills, lightly wooded and topped by a ridge of rocks showed a covering of short grass now dry and yellow under the brazen sky. I sat one morning eating my late breakfast, watching through the open tent door the heat haze quivering and dancing in the distance, when suddenly two wild-looking Banjaras came running into camp with the news that they had marked down a panther in the ridge of rocks opposite. They had also left a man perched up in a tree to watch his movements. I ought to say that, while on inspection the evening before, I had caught out these same people snaring game in the Reserve and had bagged their nets. They were in a great state about it, and I said I might consider letting them go if they showed

me some panther shikar—an offer at which they naturally jumped. All this was bribery and corruption of the worst I know, but as they had caught nothing no harm had been done! Meantime, they had come to fulfil their promise, and their snaring nets lay under the eaves of my tent. I shall have more to say about Banjaras presently; they are an amazing people and one of the most interesting tribes of India.

After a pipe, the procession formed up; the two Banjaras in the van, then master, with Usman the orderly bearing the rifle, finally a guard rattling and clanking with water-bottles without which I never went abroad. From the foot of the hillock I could see the patient watcher in the tree marking the panther as he lay asleep, so leaving the men to wait, I took the rifle and proceeded to walk up to the marker. When I got near him he pointed along the ridge, and cupping his hands, described that the panther was lying under the rocks, so I walked on slowly kicking a shower of gravel and small stones to start up the beast. Finally, just as I was looking back once more at the marker to see whether I was “getting any hotter”, out jumped a large panther from behind a small rock, and I fired at him as he bounded off downhill. I had hit him rather far back and he dropped and began to drag himself away, and fearing I might lose him among the boulders and also to put him out of pain I jumped down after him. I never dreamt of a second! As I jumped, a big panther burst out like a yellow comet from behind a clump of rocks, and we literally ran into each other’s arms. I felt a smack on

my right side as his paw struck me and I saw his head appear under my left arm—mercifully he did not bite, though every instant I expected his teeth to meet in my left thigh. The impact made me reel and almost lose my footing on the rocks, but I hung on and clubbed the beast hard over the head with the butt of my rifle. He bounded away and I missed him clean as he went—under the circumstances hardly surprising perhaps! I forgot all about my leg and rushed on to finish off the first one and finding him lying in a bush, gave him another shot which finally put him down.

I was by this time becoming conscious of pain in my right thigh, and looking down, saw my breeches all torn at the side and stained with blood. This alarmed me, because bites or claw wounds of either of the great *felidæ* are very apt to cause blood poisoning, but on further examination I found three large scratches which though bleeding freely were luckily not deep. By this time the men had come up, quite pale with concern and to my surprise, one of them, a young Banjara, offered to suck the wounds clean for me. As he seemed healthy and clean enough I let him do it, then tied a clean handkerchief round the place and started back for camp where I washed the whole thing out with a strong solution of permanganate of potash. By evening the scratches began to look very angry, and I left for headquarters with all speed to get them properly seen to. However, they cleared up quickly and nothing happened, but had the beast bitten into my thigh as he so easily might have done I doubt if anything could have saved me.

Now about the Banjaras; they are a wandering tribe, mentioned by Arrian so long ago as the fourth century B.C., as leading a nomadic life in tents and letting out beasts of burden for hire, and it is still their calling to-day. There are three clans among them, the Mathuras, the Labhanas, and the Charans, and these three are again divided into six divisions, of which four are Hindus and two Mohammedans. The Labhanas and Mathuras consider themselves superior to the Charans; their men wear the sacred thread of the twice born and claim Brahmin descent, and their married women wear saris or veils.

The Charans are said to be descended from the Chauran caste of Rajputs, and the women wear pleated skirts which full out gracefully as they walk, and the arms of the wives are covered from the wrist almost to the shoulder with white bone or ivory bangles. Also, their custom is to sleep entirely naked—and this is how I know! I was camped one night at Iswi to shoot panther which abounded there, and a "tanda" or collection of huts in which these curious people live, caught fire one night and blazed up furiously. I, full of zeal, was for rushing out to help them save their animals, but stopped short at the sight of my old Ranger's horrified face. He put his hand on my arm and said darkly: "No place for your Honour, you must not go there—quite impossible." I said: "Why not, Tota Ram? We can't leave these poor devils to burn, perhaps, without help." "Oh, Sahib," he said, and I feel sure the old dear was blushing furiously inside; "The women will all be running about naked! They sleep like that; it

is Banjara custom!" Of course I was not to be put off by that, and out I went to the tanda, the men were getting the blaze under by flinging pots of water over the flames, and yes! there surely were a number of dames skipping about in the distance attired in nothing at all but their silver head-dresses. It was enough! I returned to the scandalised Tota Ram, who was certainly not at all pleased with my inquiring mind. At this same place my Banjara shikarri, Chowanu, one day had a fearful squabble with another man. They cursed one another loudly and long and finally the man rushed up, thrust his face close to Chowanu's and bit his lower lip clean off. He went to gaol for six months, and Chowanu went to hospital, from which he emerged with his lower lip contracted to a little hole, which gave him a most singular appearance.

The Mathura women wear a stick in their hair over which they drape the sari—after the manner of the high Spanish comb and mantilla—it looks quite picturesque and attractive. The Charans—and I have seen more of them than of the other clans—are by far the most sporting people of them all. They first came to the Province trekking down from Upper India, under their famous leaders the Naiks Bhangi and Jhangi with the army of Asaf Khan during the conquest of Berar by the Emperor Shah Jehan. At that time the two Banjara leaders had with them the stupendous number of one hundred and ninety thousand bullocks, and these carried the supplies for the armies, and in order to keep them well up with his forces, Asaf Khan issued an order en-

graved in gold lettering on copper and it ran thus :

“Ranjan ka pāni, chappar ka ghās,
Din ka tin khūn muaf,
Aur jāhan Asaf Jan ke ghore
Wāhan Bhangi Jhangi ke bail.”

Which being interpreted is, roughly, this :

“If you can find no water anywhere, you may even take it from the ranjans (pots) of my followers ; grass you may take from the roofs of their huts, and if you commit three murders a day I will even pardon this, provided that where I find my cavalry I can always find Jhangi Bhangi’s bullocks.” Wellesley also employed these people regularly as part of his commissariat staff, so they have an interesting history behind them.

As I said before, they live in community huts called tandas, and these are always set well apart from ordinary villages, and well away also, from their ordinary water supply. They are thus pioneers of elementary sanitation in this respect, and are the only Indian tribe who have any instinct at all for such a common precaution. They are a sporting people, madly fond of pork as provided by the wild pig, and him they hunt with dogs and spears. These dogs are a special breed, large and heavy and immensely fierce except among their own people ; all have their ears clipped in puppyhood to sharply pricked points, so that when they fight—and they are always at war—there shall be less ear for the opposing force to rend to ribbons. I did a service once for an old Banjara, a naik or head man of a tanda. I caused a small piece

of high-lying waste land to be disforested for the use of his community, but after disforestation it passed out of my control, and the handing over of the plot was needlessly delayed for nearly two years by petty revenue officials who doubtless thought they could squeeze something out of the old naik. He came to me in trouble at the delay and I managed to get matters straightened out for him. He never forgot the small service, and would come miles to see and salaam me. He was a fierce-looking old warlock with black, flashing eyes and huge moustaches which stuck out like buffalo horns, and his face and body were seamed with scars which he declared had been caused by a wild boar he had once stuck. They looked to me far more like tulwar wounds acquired in some darkly mysterious affray or other, and so I told him, but he only shook his head, and added a little more colour to the story of the wild boar.

About this time began the horrible career of the famous man-eating panther of Pathur Ghat. Chawanu, Banjara, my shikarri, had a small daughter about four years old, she had been playing outside her father's hut just as night was closing in. The parents heard a little cry, but as it was not repeated they thought nothing of it, and it was not until it became quite dark and she had not come in, that they went out to call her. There was no sign of her, and she was never seen again; it was always supposed that a panther had taken her, for from this time dates the long succession of human kills, which ended in my being brought into the story.

The next kill which followed soon after the loss of

the babe, was that of an old man, also a Banjara. He often used to wander in the evening through the Reserve to Iswi, to get his supply of drink at the liquor shop there. On this his last night alive, the old man left the shop with a well-filled bottle under his arm, and it was supposed that he refreshed himself so often on the way home that he finally had to lie down, overcome by drink, and lying thus fell into a deep sleep. I always hoped that his death came swiftly while still the liquor bemused his brain, for there the panther found him and killed him in the night, and in the morning nothing was left but the poor old head, the hands and feet, the turban and the blood-stained garments. The partly finished bottle of the fateful "daru" lay close by.

This man-eating fiend pursued his career for nearly two years, and in that time devoured no less than twenty-seven people, and all these within a radius of ten to fifteen miles with Pathur as the centre. I was at the other end of the Division when the second kill occurred, but old Tota Ram Ranger gave me all the details. The rains broke before I could get back there again, and during the next few months the slayer claimed several other victims.

One attack was specially daring. Two cultivators, sitting up at night on a platform made of a bed raised about twelve feet from the ground on four poles, were trying to protect their crops from pig and nilghai. It was raining and they sat huddled up together under the flimsy roof. They had been shouting to scare away pig rooting among their crops, and now sat quietly smoking and talking together. Suddenly

there was a violent shock and the machan began to rock from side to side; something seemed to be clinging on to the bed, and with a loud shriek one of the men disappeared over the side. His friend shouted and screamed for help, gazing into the dark night, afraid to get down; but there was no sound—only the patter of the rain on the leaves and the hammering of his own heart. The poor fellow spent a dreadful night alone in the dark, full of dread of some fresh horror; and when the dawn came at last, he saw below the machan a blanket stained with blood, and from it led an ominous drag, over the wet earth through the tall stems of the jowari. Again he called for help and when at length his cries were heard and other villagers came running to help him down, they tremblingly followed up the drag and came upon the poor remains not a hundred paces from the machan. Of course, during these weeks of terror native shikarris from all round had tried for the beast, but they had had no luck at all, and the terrified people were at their wits' end. Eventually, in the course of my peregrinations I arrived again at Iswi, and from now on took a hand in the game.

The very morning after my arrival loud-voiced villagers came rushing into my tent to say that a young woman traveller, passing through a village close by, had spent the night in the "chowri", or village rest house there and had been killed and dragged away by the panther. I hared across to the village to see what had happened. The rest house was raised about three feet above the street level, and the brute must have gone in and choked the girl,

for not a sound was heard by the other occupants of the chowri; he then dragged her out and down a flight of steps into the village street and round several turnings, as the bloodstains testified—finally across a field and through a nala into a ravine at least two hundred yards from the village. Here he made his horrid meal and left, as in the case of the old Banjara only the head, both arms, and two feet. I decided to sit over these that night and if unsuccessful, to beat the whole ravine next morning. I got into the machan, devoutly hoping for the best, and trying not to see the poor dark face with its staring eyes turned towards me in the evening light. The men had only left me a little while when between the persistent cry of the brain-fever cuckoo and the monotonous “koturu, koturu” of the green barbet, I thought I heard the stealthy approach of some heavy animal padding over the fallen teak leaves behind me. (It takes a feline to walk softly over these enormous plate-like leaves—any ordinary individual sounds as if he were walking over empty tin boxes.) The sound was very slight, so slight that I got a tremendous start at the sudden appearance of a brightly-spotted yellow and black head visible below the meshes of the string bed on which I sat; I watched it with fascination. The beast stood looking about, now and then nosing the ground and the leaves and twigs lying there—shaking his head too, as if in disgust at the scent of human footprints all around. I longed for him to advance only a little further from beneath the machan, so that I might drop him with a well-placed shot at the back of the neck. Instead, he

backed and disappeared with a grunt; he had evidently savoured the trail of the men and myself and declined to come any further. There was now no likelihood of bagging him, so I whistled up the men and went home, after giving orders that they should bury the remains of the victim. The next day with nearly a hundred men I beat the whole ravine, but as many of the men were nervous—and one could hardly blame them—he slipped through their line and was gone once more.

I then laid myself out for the systematic destruction of all panther round about, hoping in this way to gather in the man-eater with the bag; but I had no luck, although I killed no less than six, two of which were fine old males. The natives would have it that among these was the "adam khor" (man-eater), but I knew better, because by this time the killer was known to have both upper and lower canine fangs missing from the right side of his jaw, as he had left his mark on a victim whose corpse had been recovered. As not one of the six I had shot was labelled in this way, further perseverance was indicated. I had spies all over the place. They used to go out at night and post themselves in high trees or on spurs overlooking valleys opening on to the plains below, for panther prowl at night in quest of prey and having killed and eaten a full meal, return in the early morning to the hills to lie up for the day. In this way they could be easily spotted by the men perched on trees or on high ground, and even the position of their lair be noted if the following up was cautiously done. One man remained behind to see that the beast

“stayed put”, while his fellow spy came running to me with khabbar (news). In this way I shot dozens of panther in the open Ajanta Forests during the years I spent in Berar.

Old Tota Ram my Ranger had a marvellous country-bred mare which had twice in her career given birth to twin foals. The latest twins were at this time almost full-grown ponies, and after I had left Iswi, Tota Ram had news one day that a panther (and they would dare anything for pony flesh) had killed both foals in one night. The old man came to me, stuttering with fury, and begged me to shoot the thief; the ponies had represented quite a nice little sum of rupees to him and he wanted the blood of the killer. I sat over what was left of the twins by the light of a brilliant moon and watched a jackal prowling near the kill. He suddenly retired, looking apologetically over his shoulder and I knew the panther must be coming. Almost at once I saw one slipping along in the shadow of the hill not twenty yards away. While I was thinking that it must surely have been impossible for a beast so small to have killed the ponies, a fine big male came boldly up to the kill, and I abolished him with a single shot. From my machan I could actually see my fellows warming my meal on a fire near-by; they were all excitement at sound of the shot and when I whistled came running up. I told them to carry the carcass quickly away, leaving me in the tree, as I thought the first small panther might still be about. Sure enough, some twenty minutes after they left he did come up, and was shot in his turn. Eagerly we looked for the tell-

tale mark in both—but no luck, neither of them was the man-eater.

After this I shot several more, big and small, including a small female which had got into an enclosure surrounded by a fourteen foot wall where village goats, buffaloes, and cows were tethered. This animal had climbed the wall to enter the enclosure. Once inside she killed a goat, jumped with it to the top of the wall, whence apparently, she had allowed the body to drop outside. She then jumped down, seized her prey and dragged it quite two hundred yards further on, and there fed upon it. The following evening she came up to the kill and I duly shot her. She turned out to be quite a small animal, and I was amazed at the feat of strength and cunning so cleverly carried through; we had to redouble our efforts, however, for she too was unfortunately not the man-eater.

Once more I had to move on to other parts of the Division and again the human kills continued. By this time Government had proclaimed the man-eater, and there was a reward of Rs 200 on his head. Returning in the hot weather for one last effort to bag this fiend, I had rather a hair-raising time, as it was so hot one simply could not sleep in a tent and there was nothing for it but to sleep outside. But the idea of being in the open at night, actually in the very haunts of the killer, with no protection whatsoever from his attack, was hardly amusing. Of course I was armed, but it was not of the least use against such a velvet-footed enemy, and I felt that I or any of the staff might wake up, like the Irishman, to find

ourselves dead, or at least being dragged away, before a shot could be fired. My four dogs, a retriever and three bull-terriers, were our very trusty friends during these dark nights—for the lack of moon added to the danger. I had them tied about the camp at different points, and they gave us a certain amount of security, for I knew they would scent the killer and give tongue long before anyone else knew he was about. It may have been because of their presence that he did not come our way, but at any rate, luckily for us, there was no sign of him all through the moonless nights.

His career, however, was drawing to a close. Prowling about the village of Dhadam, he entered a hut there early one morning, seized a very old woman sleeping inside and dragged her out by the knee. But her screams roused her neighbours who raised such a din that the animal dropped her and made off. No doubt he was hungry and this was his undoing, for almost at once he killed a bullock in a nala just outside the village near a patch of green cover. Even now he could not feed, for the noise of the waking village frightened him and he left the kill almost untouched and went away to lie up for the day.

I waited in a fever of anxiety and excitement till it was time to go and sit up, hoping against hope that I should finish him this time—that he would return to the kill before nightfall. While I sat in the machan a large jungle cat appeared and evidently longed to feed from the kill, but as evidently, was nervous about the rightful owner's return, for it kept on coming up and slipping back into the shadow of the bushes till

finally, with a loud squall, it bolted in a great state of panic, and I saw a large panther coming up very cautiously. He stood looking in the direction of the kill, then flattened himself out of sight. My heart missed a beat at this, I was so afraid he had vanished altogether; but no, he stood up again and came slowly on. What with the suspense and excitement I seemed to be shaking all over, and the machan with me. The moment at last!—he paused above the kill, I held my breath and slowly pressed the trigger. The bullet hit him fairly in the neck and he went down to the shot. I instantly stood up in the machan and gave him another where he lay, but his day was done, he never moved again. My men came tearing up and we ran to examine his mouth. This time it was all right; the upper and lower canines were missing on the right side of the jaw; the man-eater had paid in full at last for his many crimes. The villagers were quite crazy with delight. “Yehi adam khor hai,” they yelled in chorus. “This is the man-eater!” and they bore him off in triumph and for miles round the country people poured in to see him.

I somehow think that a small female panther I shot a short time before, which crept cautiously round the kill, coming and going in the shadows, was the mate of this old fiend. She showed the furtive tactics of the evil-doer and was old and very pale in colour. Quite possibly they shikarred together, and I believe that she probably led the adventure, while he did the actual killing, and together they shared in the spoil; certainly after her destruction the old male fell an easy victim, and it was with a thankful heart

I realised the unholy partnership was ended for ever.

I shot a magnificent tiger soon after this in the Sind Ban nala near Chunkheri. So lovely a spot was it, that at the risk of boring my reader I should like to talk about it.

This nala carried the head-waters of the Utaoli Naddi (river) which during the monsoon meant a large body of turbulent water which plunged and tumbled over a sheer drop of well over a hundred feet. Its action had cut out a great basin among enormous boulders as big as good-sized cottages, and between them lay great heaps of silver white sand. Now, in the dry season, a much-attenuated stream of water trickled over the protruding lip of the ledge and down the receding face of the cliff, to splash musically on the boulders, while ever-widening eddies ruffled the surface of the clear pool below. Looking down on this lovely pool through the fringe of delicate maidenhair fern edging the lip of the fall, one looked into a cool, green cave, lit up by green sunlight striking through the green leafage overhead. The cliffs below receded on either side, and arch-wise, formed a great hollow bowl. To left the drop was sheer and darkly overhanging and the ledges were nesting places for blue-rock pigeon; their echoing coo reverberated like soft thunder from the surrounding cliffs. On the right the bank though steep, fell away more gradually, allowing a great creeper to cling to the jagged surface, and it was up here, aided by the stout rope-like stems of the creeper, that tiger were wont to climb to and from the cool



BALLAL SHAH AND HIS QUEEN

grotto below. This was shown by the marks of their great claws which I myself had seen time and again. Loose piles of rocks crowned the top of the fall and fantastic cacti grew there, their candelabra-like branches giving the grotesqueness of a Doré picture to the place.

I had had baits tied out for a tiger but he passed them by; then suddenly one night the sambhur began to speak in the ravine and hills round my camp, and as this sort of thing has only one meaning, I was not surprised when in the morning my men said some big feline had passed quite close to us in the night, and that soon after dawn they had seen a large beast moving among the dead teak leaves on the opposite hill-side. Walking out early to investigate, I found the pugs of a large tiger on a forest path leading past the village. My work led me in the opposite direction, but I told a young Brahmin orderly I had, to take a couple of Korkus and follow the trail to see if it led into the Sind Ban nala—as I felt certain it would do. When I returned, they were waiting to tell me the tiger had certainly gone into the nala, and I knew from experience that, once in that place of cool water and shade, he would remain couched for the day, and I instantly decided to beat it.

I could only raise nine men in all, two or three from the small village and the rest from my staff. With them I went down the nala to the lip of the fall. From there I showed four of the men, who were to act as stops on the right, where they were to take their places, and instructed them to begin talking loudly as soon as the beat started. The other five

were to go round and climb down into the ravine below and to shout and throw stones as they moved slowly upwards towards the fall. As there was no tree handy and the cacti impracticable for a machan, I found a place between two rocks on the edge of the nala a few paces from the lip of the fall. I had been waiting nearly an hour when I heard the first cries of the beaters below, and shortly after, I distinctly heard one of the stops on the right shout, "bagh hai," (here is the tiger,) and then I thought I heard the sound of heavy breathing. It grew louder and nearer and presently a great yellow head appeared above the ledge and a huge tiger clambered up into view.

He was a perfectly splendid sight as he stood for a few seconds—for he was very blown and breathing heavily—his full orange ruff shivering in the strong wind blowing up the ravine, his tail lashing from side to side. I shall never lose that picture, it is photographed on my mind. He then came on in great angry strides, and when not more than ten paces away, I fired at a point where the neck joins the shoulder, and he went down without a sound. Only his jaws opened and closed once or twice on some small stones which had entered his mouth as he fell, crushing them to fragments, and his tail quivered slightly; that was all. I was sitting down admiring him when the men came up, and they told me how, when he had waked from his sleep in the cool shadows, he had bounded on to a rock and roared at them, then had turned and made for the stiff climb up the creepers on the face of the cliff. There were some bamboo-cutters in the offing who, hearing the

shot, hurried up to see if there was any chance of meat; these cut poles for a litter and helped my men carry the great beast back to camp. He was an enormous weight, quite five hundred pounds I should say; he taped nine feet nine inches between perpendiculars and was the largest and heaviest tiger I ever shot.

I had rather an absurd experience one night after another tiger. I had sat over a kill but the beast refused to return to it, and my people thought the best thing to do was to tempt him the second night with a live boda (small buffalo), as well as the remains, nicely seasoned by then, of his first kill. I climbed into the machan built in an old mowha tree with a sloping trunk, just before sundown. The men then dragged the first kill to a spot just below me, and the live and very unwilling little buffalo was tied up near-by. It was a moonlight night and I determined to do all I could to finish off that tiger before he could slay or maul the boda. I sat silent so that the little buff would not know anyone was near him, or he would certainly be dumb and the tiger might not spot him; at a given signal also the men left, talking for all they were worth. A gentle breeze blew over the ravine while I sat watching and listening to the spasmodic grunts of the little boda, now very dismal at the departure of his friends.

Bird life, as always, there was in plenty, and just before dark several sambhur hinds came past on their way to water; a muntjac too came to the edge of the clearing and barked loudly, indicating his displeasure at the presence of the boda and his suspicions of the

kill. Presently the moon came up and flooded everything with her silver light; I sat expecting every minute to see the tiger. At midnight there was no sign of him, the pleasant breeze died down and immediately my troubles began. The odour from the remains of the now two days' old kill became so overpowering, that at last I knew I should be violently ill if I attempted to sit over it any longer. Something must be done—but what? There were no men within call; the only thing to do was to try and get down by myself. I threw my shoes down, one by one; I tore off the leaf screen arranged in front of me and unfastened the string on which it was hung—luckily it was strong. One end of it I tied to the trigger-guard of my rifle and gently lowered it to earth; thereafter I clambered down the sloping trunk of the old tree and landing softly, retrieved my shoes and put them on. Finally I picked up and loaded my rifle.

At sight of me of course the little boda started a perfect hurricane of grunts. He looked so miserable standing there, with his queer light blue eyes fixed on me, I had not the heart to leave him perhaps to be killed, so I walked up to unloose him from the post to which he was tethered. I cannot imagine what startled the little beast at that moment, unless it was the tiger which he could see and I could not; anyway he went off the deep end just as I had laid my hand on the rope, and began to rush frantically round and round till I was as effectually tied up to the post as he was himself. I make no bones about it; I was in a blue funk and the deuce of a fix besides. Suppose the

tiger had come along! It seemed ages before I could pacify the terror-stricken little brute and get him to go round in the opposite direction and release us both—he seemed to have the strength of half a dozen buffaloes.

At last after much struggling we got free and by that time I felt distinctly shaky; however, picking up the rifle I started for home attended by the now chastened boda; he required no leading, he was glued to my heels the whole way back. About half-way, the path led through tall burroo grass nearly ten feet high and very dense. We were walking along in the moonlight preceded by our two grotesque black shadows, when suddenly—dthank!—a sambhur let off a bellow apparently at the back of my neck! It gave me such a shock I jumped sky-high and so did the boda, and we both made very nimble going along that path till we were out of the thick grass and in fairly open country once more. At last, thank goodness, the roof of the bungalow showed near at hand, and in answer to my shouts the servants came running, surprised to see me arrive at one in the morning when they had thought me safely anchored in the machan till daybreak. I was too tired to talk—a whisky and soda was more in my line just then than explanations!

CHAPTER VIII

A TIGER BABY

SHOOTING a tiger gives one very mingled sensations; pleasure and distaste; bringing up a baby tiger is a delight all the way though. Berar gave me my first experience of this and it befell in the following fashion.

Among the foothills of the great Satpura mountain-barrier, where the helmet-shaped peak of Gaungia Deo lifts up, and the seven needle points of the Sato Sila stand slim beside the fort-crowned bluff of Pimperdol, lies the village of Wasali. Here I was camped one pitch-dark night, and it seemed that the world held only my small camp, the belling sambhur in the jungle around and the eerie booming of a great mountain owl, so intense was the stillness. The night seemed to hang like a cloud over us. Suddenly, soon after midnight, pandemonium broke loose in the forest, and the deep and terrible roaring of fighting tigers came down to the village. The inhabitants were instantly awake and my people with them, and we all listened with a certain amount of apprehension to the sounds of the conflict which seemed to come nearer and nearer. On such a still night the air vibrated and shook in the volume of sound from those brazen, furious throats. After some time it lessened

gradually, as the tigers evidently retreated up the valley.

Nothing could be done at that time of night, and I gave orders that no one was to venture in that direction unless I went out also. In the early morning we started for the ravine, and were just getting near the deep cover, when we suddenly came upon my Ranger and his men, carrying with them a fine young tiger cub; its cloudy blue eyes were evidently only just open, but it was in splendid fettle and entirely unhurt. It appeared that the Ranger and men, on their way to me, had camped that night on the fireline just above the fray, and in much fear and trembling had listened to the frightful roaring, which had kept them awake the greater part of the night. In the morning they started for Wasali, keeping well together, talking and shouting to scare away any dangerous beast which might be on the prowl. Turning a corner they came upon the remains of a young tiger cub lying beside the footpath, and a little further on, found another quite dead and badly mangled, while all around were marks of a tremendous battle, plain enough to their eyes practised in forest lore. While they were looking at these, the Ranger saw something moving in the grass, and going to look, found a third small cub quite unhurt, which by some amazing chance had escaped the slaughter. They picked him up and were bringing him to me when I met them. We could not tell what had happened; it may have been that two tigresses had met and fought, and in the *mélée* the two cubs had been killed, or again, the male tiger may have met the

tigress with her cubs, or come suddenly upon the place where she had hidden them, and there possibly the mother may have attacked him in an effort to save her young. The male tiger parent is not to be trusted with his progeny until they are out of babyhood and know how to behave, and a rival tigress may also make short work of another's cubs should she suddenly come across them in the jungle.

Eventually we got into camp, the little chap remaining quietly in the man's arms, not scratching or biting—but a Sahib as he always was. In those days I liked goat's milk in my tea and coffee, partly because of its pleasant foaming whiteness, more obviously because I knew it to be reasonably uncontaminated—though I have seen my bearer dust out the inside of the milk jug with the tail of his shirt—but no matter! My progress from camp to camp used to be rather after the manner of the Children of Israel on the march, for I was accompanied by flocks and herds made up of goats, cows, and one large-sized buffalo. The tiger baby was very hungry when we brought him in, and I put him straightway to an old nanny goat—he took to her almost at once and she to him quite cheerfully, and his welfare was, most luckily, at once assured. I next had a large round wattle basket made for him which, with straw at the bottom, made a safe and comfortable home, and in it he travelled many a mile over the greater part of the Akola District carried on the head of a special man.

Old Kwaja Buksh, a Mohammedan from Upper India, was my orderly at this time; he took a great fancy to the tiny tiger, I put him under the old man's

special charge, and the two became almost inseparable. His nanny also became so fond of her foster child, that she would stand and allow him to drink from her without being held, and later when she could not give him enough milk and a second goat had to be brought, she showed no jealousy whatever or attempted to butt or hurt him in any way. He on his part soon got to know them both well, and as soon as he heard them bleating, would make tracks for them, uttering the while the tiger's peculiar grunting purr, which sounds like the soft whickering of a horse at feeding time. He would stagger about heavily on his disproportionately huge paws, in and out of the tents in his search for the nannies, invariably hugging the walls, and these he was always loath to leave for any open space; thus early displaying his inherent instinct for stalking.

On my wanderings I presently met General Sir Montague Gerrard, a noted sportsman in his day who had been shooting near-by. He was fascinated with the cub and said he had never seen a finer, and he gave me a piece of valuable advice which I carefully followed. He said no cub should be put directly on to raw meat when he began to refuse milk, but should be given partly cooked food first. The reason for this was a very sound one; in the natural state the tigress never allows her family to feed direct from the kill until their canine teeth are grown. When she has weaned them, she first feeds from the kill herself, partially digests the meat, and then regurgitates it for the benefit of her offspring, as swallows do for their young.

Tigers are wonderfully clean in their habits, and this one would go out and always cover, or attempt to cover, his tracks after the manner of the domestic pussy. He would go to sleep full length along the wall of my bedroom choosing the same place night after night. Once asleep, he would lie peacefully till daybreak, but let anyone disturb him, and he would get up on to my bed and stand over me, gently mouthing me and purring to himself. Never was there a more charming pet or a greater gentleman; always a pleasure to watch by reason of his perfectly graceful movements, always gentle and kindly too, for he was never chained or confined in a cage. The photograph shows him as he was at four months old, lying on a black-buck skin on my table. Old Kwaja Buksh was twitching the corner of the skin to keep the cub amused, and distract his attention from the photographer who was, as I remember, a little shy of his client.

The cub had one or two most quaint little quips of his own. If he were too rough, and I cuffed him, he would walk away with dignity and funny sidelong glances to some distance, then suddenly turning, would double back like a happy child and get hold of me with his gentle but strong paws. If he were given a smack on the face or if he bumped into anything, he would invariably close the eye on that side, and walk about with it tightly shut for quite a time; and if hit fair in the face he would close both eyes immediately and come altogether to a standstill. Certain smells displeased him greatly and if ever he met one, he would utter a soft noise something like "caah",

putting out his tongue and making the most absurd wry face, disgust written on every line of it. All tigers love water, and his large bowlful of it was a huge delight to him. He would drink, and then stick his great paws in the fluid and churn it up, tip the whole thing over and with every appearance of delight lie flat in the pool thus made.

All too soon he grew too big to be carried about in the basket, and I had to leave him behind in the bungalow with his familiar, Kwaja Buksh. On my return after a rather long tour I found the old man in a terrible toss. The cub's face was so swelled on one side that no eye was to be seen; it had suddenly come up in the night, and we began to fear he was smitten with some fell disease, especially as he was off his feed. The next day, the other side followed suit; he looked most terribly "mumpy" and I could not imagine what on earth was to be done. I opened his mouth, and poking about, suddenly felt a tiny point pushing through the gum—his canines! Of course the infant was teething! "Wah, wah!" said Kwaja Buksh shaking his head: "It was not thus my son's first teeth were cut; none the less I am a mud-head not to have considered this matter!" And he beamed with delight and went to prepare a posset of some sort to tempt the very dismal baby. The teeth came through rapidly after this and he was soon well again.

By degrees he got on to a meat diet and the nannies were forgotten. He began, also, to take a more lively interest in things living and moving. What that cub cost me in plates, dishes, and glass, I tremble to think. He would throw himself down under the

table, then with his great paws get hold of the tablecloth and haul everything off. When the crockery came crashing down all round him, he would fly for his life, hide, and sit quite still for some time. He also began to stalk moving objects, notably the pony in a dog-cart driven past every day by the Deputy Commissioner's wife, a Parsee lady, on her way to the Club. She complained to me, and I realised with a dawning sense of trouble that the cub was too old to be any longer at large—or tragedy might befall. It availed nothing that I was given a big price for him, that dealers waxed almost poetical over his shape and colour. I lost for ever the dearest pet in the world, and when I heard his loud and indignant roars as, caged, they took him away, I went into the bungalow to hide the tears that were in my eyes.

CHAPTER IX

CHANDA

AND so from Berar to Chanda—"the great, the walled city—the city of an hundred elephants and twenty thousand horses and cattle past counting—the city of the King of Twenty Kings".*

Out of the maze of ancient legend, the history of long dead kings, and religions past and gone, emerges the great dynasty of the Gond Rajahs of whom, one Khandia Ballal Shah, the tenth of his line living from 1437 to 1462 was the founder of Chanda as it was, and still is to-day—a perfect enclosed city having the entire encircling wall, gateways and bastions, almost intact. Of course, in such a mystical land as India, any place so fine and precious would naturally have an unusual origin; so, for what it is worth, I here set down this story.

Ballal Shah, the founder, had been for many years a sick man; he suffered from incurable ulcers, and all his soothsayers and court physicians between them could not give him an hour's relief. Hunting one day near a fort he had built—called after him Ballapur of which the ruins remain to this day—he became thirsty, and rode up and down the dry bed of the

*Kipling.

Jharpat river looking for water. At last he found a small hole full of it and drank greedily, afterwards bathing his face, hands, and feet in the cool liquid. That night was his first of peace for many years, and in the morning his Queen saw that his hands and feet and his face where the water had touched it, were free from the loathsome sores. Full of hope they started out next day for the river, a brilliant glittering cavalcade, picking their way in the river bed, looking anxiously for the tiny pool. It is to be remembered that they were all good Hindus, worshippers of the Sacred Cow, so that what happened was to them a miracle of miracles.

The pool was found, and on clearing away the grass and sand, they saw with reverent eyes five footprints—clean-cut hoofmarks of a cow—sunk in the solid rock; and the wonder grew when it was found that the more the water was drawn off, the more quickly it welled up into the five small pools. Thus was discovered the holy place of Achaleshwar the Immovable, whose mother had sealed him with the print of the cow's hoof, fixing him for ever on the banks of the Jharpat and of whom this mystical story had for ages been cherished in early Hindu writings.

The King was bathed in the water and became whole from that hour, and in a dream that night, the god appeared to him speaking words of comfort. The wise Queen thereupon suggested that a temple should be built over the cleansing waters, and at once skilled workmen were called to begin the enclosing shrine. It still remains—a typically Hindu building, with the high, four-sided, and heavily-carved dome.

Daily Ballal Shah would ride down on his favourite charger to watch the small beginnings grow into springing walls, and in this wise befell the actual founding of the city of Chanda, for a wonderful thing happened. One day, a hare rushed out of a thicket and started in pursuit of the King's dog which, as promptly, fled. Amazed, his master turned his horse and followed to see what they would do. The dog ran in a large circle and the hare took short cuts to catch it; it even came to grips with the dog which shook it off, and rushed madly on. Coming at length, full circle, to the place whence the chase had begun, the dog suddenly dashed at the hare and killed it, and at that instant the King saw on the hare's forehead a distinct white spot.

Considering these grave matters he returned to his Queen and asked what they might portend. That pearl of wisdom was never at a loss; she advised that a city fortified and strong, should be built inside the circle of the chase; that its walls should actually follow the track of the hare, and that bastions should be built on the exact spot where the hare tackled the dog, and where eventually the dog killed the hare; for, said she, these would be places of danger and weak spots in the wall of the future city. As she had said, so it was done. The artisans cut a trench along the curving track of the King's horse whose hoof-marks showed exactly how he had followed the windings of the hare, the gates and bastions were planned, the whole marked out and the work begun. Thus was founded the splendid City of Kings past and gone—Chanda, the City of the Moon—"Chand" being the

moon in Hindi—but the common people see the origin of the name in the white blaze (Chandar) on the forehead of the miraculous hare.

The city then, lies within a continuous line of battlemented walls seven miles in circumference. There is a heavy crenellated parapet at the top, and the actual walls are ten feet thick. A broad rampart runs within the thickness, and though in places it has given way, on the whole after so many hundreds of years it is still in wonderful repair. Between the walls and the city buildings quite a large space is given up to cultivation, and there are many open places where paths run under splendid overhanging trees; this gives the effect of width and dignity and adds very much to the charm of the old place. Close up to the wall, in a separate enclosure still stand the tombs of the old Gond Kings, a line which ended, as so many others did, with the ascendancy of the Mahrattas in the eighteenth century. Moreover in the huge district around the city there are still to be found the remains of temples of all religions—not only Mohammedan and Hindu but traces of faiths far older, Buddhist and even Scythian.

Chanda is a land of forests; they extend almost unbroken for thirty miles to the north, twenty miles due east, and another thirty due south-east of the Civil Station. My own bungalow was beautifully set among grass and trees, and I could step from my door into dense jungle, and go on and on for miles without ever once leaving the forests. My trees were to me much more than the remains of many temples, and there were literally hundreds of species—in-

teresting though comparatively unimportant—besides fine teak, saj and so forth, with great quantities of bamboo. The custom of the bamboo is to seed and die in masses—or gregariously, as we say in forester's speech—every thirty years or so. This happened in no less than three of the Forest Ranges during or just after the great famine of 1900. All the bamboos seeded and died simultaneously with the result that when I took over the forests, the revenue they had so long brought in ceased almost entirely, so that there was a loss of from Rs 15,000 to 20,000 a year. Although the ground almost at once became carpeted with a splendid regrowth of seedlings, it required at least ten years before they could produce exportable bamboos, so that during my time it was simply a case of conserving their growth.

This wholesale dying down of their cover, was a serious matter to the bison which roamed these forests; at one stroke they were deprived of their principal source of food as well as the deep feathery shade and protection of the bamboo thickets. They were driven to all manner of places in search of food and shelter and of course became far more easy game for sportsmen. Judging by an enormous crate, at least six feet square, crammed full of bison heads which I once saw at Chanda station, "for export" obviously; I imagine some gunner had "seized the skirts of happy chance" with excellent effect. So easily were bison bagged that on two occasions, friends of mine who had left my bungalow for the jungles at dawn, returned in time for breakfast having shot quite good specimens, though one

poor fellow shot a cow and had to be fined in consequence!

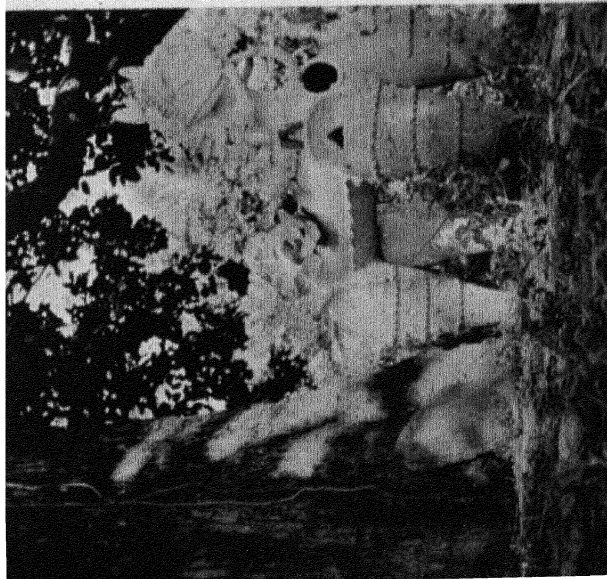
Nearly the whole area of three very large Ranges in this Division had been brought under an elaborate system of fire conservancy, by a means of an almost perfect arrangement of exterior and interior firelines, with the result that quite phenomenal success was obtained. During my time I had only one disastrous fire and this was brought about by devilment on the part of some Gond urchins. It was bazaar day in the villages and all the inhabitants had left, save the very old and the young children. In the hamlet of Pimpalkut, where there were only three or four huts, an old woman was left alone in one dwelling and three boys about six or eight years old in another. These infants went down to the Andhari river and caught some minnows; returning, they proceeded to fry them for supper by the simple expedient of putting them on the fire and pouring oil over them. Of course the oil went up in a gout of flame, burnt their hut and all the other huts, save that of the ancient dame which lay to windward. The strong wind blew the burning fragments of grass across the broad fireline, and the forest of the Reserve at once took fire and blazed up. The boys, in the meantime, bolted into the jungle whence they were eventually retrieved by their scared relations when they returned. The wonder was that—apart from the chance of being burnt to death—the boys were not killed by carnivora, but luckily all the animals within miles had been driven out by the fire and frightened into other cover.

I personally was camped at Mahorli, the headquarters of the Range of that name. It was a terrifically hot day with a tearing hot wind blowing. I came out of the bungalow on the bank of the lake to look at something which caught my eye on the shining surface of the water. Casually looking east, it seemed to me the sky there was very dark, and sending for old Tahwar Ali, I said: "Ranger Sahib, is that a cloud or smoke I see over there?" I saw an expression of alarm cross his face, and at once he sent off fire-watchers to climb the tallest trees around, but before they could settle the matter two others arrived, breathless with running, bringing fire alarm notices of a large fire away in the direction of the smoky cloud. All was excitement; the Ranger started off at a gallop on his pony and I followed soon after. We had a grilling trek of fifteen miles or so, but long before we had arrived the driving wind had put the fire quite out of control, and it was now blazing furiously and well on its way to destroying the whole block. Mercifully the other firelines had checked its progress to north and south; but by nightfall all was over, and at least ten thousand acres of forest which had been successfully protected for nearly eight years, had been burnt black, all the advance growth destroyed and the larger trees badly charred. Little remained of what had been fine timber only a few days before, when I had passed through the block on my way to other inspections.

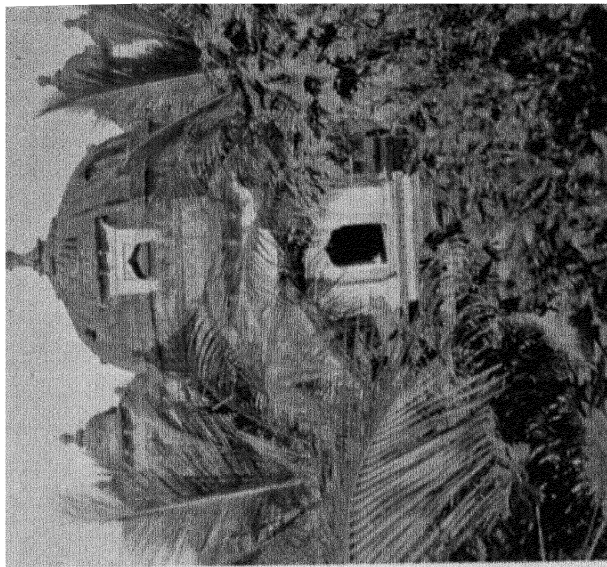
My elephant in Chanda was a small female, round and black, with a curious funnel-shaped hole in her forehead which appeared to lead right into her

trunk-passage. This she was supposed to have got, when she with many other wild elephants were herded into the Khedda at the time of their capture. A wild tusker must have driven his ivory into her head, and though the wound had healed, it had left this deep and lasting scar which decidedly spoilt her beauty. In her way she was a character, very friendly with humans, very nervous of dogs, especially white ones. Her stable was about two hundred yards from my bungalow, and one day H., an engineer, came to breakfast with me and suggested that we should go and talk to the elephant afterwards. He had a white terrier with him and I said: "What about your dog—she doesn't like them." He replied: "I don't suppose it will go near her," so I said no more. As we came up she was leisurely chewing branch-wood and shifting from foot to foot, and I noticed she broke off a fair-sized piece and "hefted" it, as it were, in her trunk and played with it—her eye on the dog. That animal came gambolling up, and I had only just time to shout: "Look out!" when the elephant swung the heavy stick with tremendous force and only missed the dog by a few inches. Said I: "A darned good shot!" Said H.: "By gad, she doesn't like animals does she, I think we had better clear out!" and they did.

She was very fond of her mahout, a Mohammedan, and simply loathed her char-cutter who was a Gond. He on his part was terrified of her, and she knew it and used deliberately to frighten him into fits whenever she had a chance. The mahout always sent this man on her back to cut and bring in her fodder—a



BANI-DIAL
CHANDA



OLD TEMPLE
CHANDA

great load of branches. More than once when she was coming through the trees near the bungalow, I have seen her stop and violently shake herself (and an elephant shaking is rather like an earthquake!) simply to dislodge the poor chap from his uneasy perch on the loosely piled mass of branches—squealing all the time. He, in an agony of fright, would begin to bawl, and the more he bawled the louder she squealed, till finally the mahout came running to see what had happened, and, shouting abuse at her, the noise would cease.

She had to have her baths of course, whenever we were camped near a tank, and it would fall to the lot of the unhappy Gond to take her into the water and he would always violently protest. Said the mahout: "Thou fool!—why doest thou take her into the deep water; keep her to the shallows and no harm will befall thee!" But no luck for the poor Gond; no sooner was he on her back than she would trundle him straight into the deepest part of the tank, and there stride up and down, the water awash along her sides, trumpeting and squealing to beat the band, doing her best the while to dislodge him, until the mahout hearing his cries of "I am drowning! I am dead!" would once more come running to restore order. She thoroughly enjoyed this game, and one could see the mirth in her wicked little eyes. As a further diversion after bathing, she would be allowed to go into the water alone. This more often occurred at the tank near Mahorli village, where the entire population, old and young, would line up on the bank to watch the show. Delighted with herself, a

fat smile upon her face, she would sit heavily down in the shallows, propped on her sturdy forelegs, and, looking exactly like the fat, seated image of Ganpati, the Hindu elephant-god, benign and merry, would thresh to and fro in the water with her trunk, squealing with joy, and flapping her huge ears, while the village stood round in rows and shouted their applause at her absurd antics.

Tahwar Ali, my Range Officer at Mahorli, was inordinately proud of some fine ducks he had reared—for nothing so common as eating, but rather for show. They were accustomed to paddle about in the shallows of the tank near the Range Quarters. There were eight of them, and for months they had pursued an untroubled existence, growing fatter and fatter. Daily the drake led his harem to the water, till one evening only seven returned and the Ranger pulled his beard in bewilderment. A few days after, seven went down and only six came back—and things began to look serious. Tahwar Ali searched the place for the cause of the trouble but could find and see nothing. Finally the time came when only three returned, and the next day when the lonely trio were paddling to shore, a loud quacking was heard. The Ranger rushed down just in time to see the drake being dragged under water in the jaws of a mugger. The brute had quietly waited his chance for days, and had bagged each duck so quickly that it had had no time to quack. This time however, he slipped up—the bird uttered the alarm, and the marauder was discovered. Yet he bore a charmed life; for though every gunner in the village had a try for him, he

evaded them all, and in the end Tahwar Ali's ducks went unavenged.

The pangolin, or scaly ant-eater, is a curious animal and he was to be found in Chanda, though not common there, or anywhere else for that matter. Very many people know him as the armadillo, though actually he is no relation to that gentleman whose habitat is somewhere down in Rio. The first time I saw one was in Akola, where the Deputy Commissioner sent over to ask me to come and have a look at a strange beast some villagers had brought in as a gift to him. These people had found it in the jungle, and seeing the wide, hard scales said at once: "Arrél Barra machi!" (Here's a big fish) and promptly popped it into a fair-sized water tank, where very naturally it immediately sank to the bottom and gave up the ghost. Priceless folk!—when they turned it out for us to see, they looked at the corpse with large round eyes, and turning to us smiled sweetly and said: "Kya! murghia?" (You don't say it's dead?)

In Chanda one would come across their "earths"; they could always be recognised by the almost polished smoothness of the soil around the entrance. I never actually saw one moving in the jungle, but a big fellow was brought alive to my bungalow one day, and, not knowing the ways of the family, I let it go in my sitting-room which was a large room, practically in one with the dining-room; the floor of both rooms was covered with matting and this again with a large carpet. In a trice the creature had dived under both, and proceeded to forge its way across the

room, attended to my horror, by all the symptoms of an earthquake. A chair would heave up and crash to the floor, tables fly in all directions; finally it got under the heavy sideboard and heaved the whole outfit over. It was the last straw; I had to send for the men and together we dragged out all the furniture and rolled up the carpet to get at the beast. When finally we reached it, we found that, after the manner of its kind when alarmed, it had rolled itself into a tight and scaly ball. It struck me that the Natural History Society's Museum in Bombay would be a good place for it, and pending the construction of a crate, I had it heaved into a large box, and on top of the lid my fellows rolled a really heavy rock—the animal had turned over the sideboard like a saucer, but having no purchase in the box I thought it could not possibly do anything about the rock.

I had forgotten that all Gonds are madly fond of pangolin meat—they say it gives them great strength—and I had a Gond orderly; a small person with a wizened monkey face and glittering eyes, who rattled about inside his uniform like a nut in a shell—he was so thin. Whether the idea of a super-feed got the better of this fellow I cannot tell; at all events in the morning when I went to look at the prisoner in the box, it was not there! The stone was on the floor with the lid of the box, but of the pangolin no trace at all, save the most appalling odour, the like of which I have never smelt before or since—the quintessence of all fearsome smells! I strongly suspected the little Gond from that time forth, and with greater reason because I caught him out in something else not very

long afterwards. I had a fine bull-terrier lady, and I could not understand why she would disappear for hours at a time and come home flecked with blood and thoroughly exhausted. At last I discovered that this man used to take her out to hunt iguana lizards for him. She would chase them into their burrows and he would dig them out and kill them. He got many toothsome meals in this way, but the habit caused the dog's death, for later she took to chasing cobras to their holes, and one day a big snake turned on her and bit her on the head. She tore it to pieces in her pain and anger, but the damage had been done, and she staggered home to die in my arms too late for any remedy to avail.

I met a badger one day in the forests; he was almost exactly like the British "brock", but his name in Hindi is "Bidju", the grave-digger, because of his enormously powerful claws. I was walking down a fireline with quite a retinue behind me—the Range Officer and guards and a big elephant in the van—when turning a corner we came upon a badger walking very slowly and proudly in the middle of the track towards us. I had always heard that all "badger-log" (people), were very deaf and partially blind, so I stopped to see what he would do. He must have been amazingly deaf, for we were all talking loudly and he never turned a hair, and equally blind, for the huge elephant literally towered over him and he never realised her presence. Leisurely he came to a halt, leisurely he raised his head and snuffed the air loudly and apparently his nose conveyed a warning, for at last he turned his back upon

us and slowly, ever so slowly, walked up a bank and away into the jungle.

There were many lakes in Chanda, of which Taroba, fully a quarter of a square mile in extent, was the most beautiful. The water there was very deep and clear, and the spot like all unusual places in India was beloved of water-fairy and godling and had a history all its own. Long and long ago it is said, a marriage procession came down through the hills to the west. Tired, hot and thirsty, the travellers looked for water and found none, when suddenly appeared an ancient man who suggested that the bride and bridegroom should join in digging for a spring. With happy laughter they began to turn the soil and soon clear water came welling to the surface. All joyfully bent down to drink, laughing and talking and fearing nothing, but the cruel flood rose and covered them all, spreading at once into a shining lake. Far in the depths fairy hands built a temple, and there the spirits of the boy and girl and their attendants dwell in peace. But old folks say that on a quiet night, softly at first but louder as they come, can be heard the music and song of the bridal procession, the clashing of the anklets on the feet of the slender maidens. And when the level of the lake falls low in the hot weather, those who have eyes to see can catch a glimpse of the golden dome of the fairy temple, far and far below in the depths of the green, sunlit water.

After the lake was formed, there grew up on the bank a wonderful palm tree, which only appeared in daytime and sank back into the earth at night. One

morning a weary pilgrim sat down among the spreading leaves, and the whole tree rose up with him and bore him into the skies, where he was consumed in the light of the flaming sun. The palm then dried into dust and in its place an image appeared upon the bank—the spirit of the lake—which ever since that time has been worshipped under the name of Taroba. In earlier days too, the gods were kind to the many pilgrims at the lake, for at their prayer all manner of drinking cups and cooking vessels arose from the water for their use, which after being cleansed were thrown back again to the holy ones below. Great was the favour shown to all for many years, until at length one unregenerate fellow, quietly collecting his cups and plates, bore them off by night to his home. They vanished; but the gods were angry, and no more pilgrims were fed from heavenly platters thereafter.

Flocks of duck visited the lake from time to time on their migration flights, but they never seemed to stay for long, and this I think may have been due to the fact that alligators swarmed in the water, or else it was that the special weed they used for food was wanting at Taroba. Elsewhere, the tanks of the Division, especially those in the open country, literally teemed with waterfowl of all kinds; the pintail, gadwall and shoveller were there, and the white-eyed and pink-headed pochard, as well as the common and cotton teal, whistling teal of two kinds, the nakta goose and many others.

Taroba was a paradise for game. I built a forest bungalow on the bank there, and sitting in the veran-

da could watch all day the different jungle tribes coming down to water. The spotted chital would come at all times—that is, whenever his nerves, always alert for the possible presence of tiger or panther, would allow him to drink in peace. Later came the sambhur—the big stags alone, the hinds and their young together—perhaps standing in the shallows listening, tail up, one large ear cocked forward, one foot upraised—the attitude faithfully copied by the small calf at foot. Later still when evening was falling, great dark forms would wade out into the water—bison, the largest of all horned game in the jungle.

No one who has not slept out under the stars has any idea of the perfect beauty of an Indian night. The sky is so serene, the great planets so wonderfully brilliant, the lesser stars like diamond dust sprinkling a heavenly robe. I used to lie and watch them all from my bed on the bank above the water, and as if these eternal wonders were not enough to fill the eye with beauty, one year, a great comet like a spray of diamonds blazed above the rim of the western hills. When I awoke before an early march it was still there, and remained, gradually growing fainter with the stars as the pale green sky of early dawn gave place to the pink flush and golden light of sunrise.

CHAPTER X

CHANDA CONTINUED

SITTING outside the Taroba bungalow one day, I spotted through my glasses a large mugger lying on a spit of sand, just where the bank, running out into two little promontories, formed a bay. It appeared to be patting the sand, as it were, with its tail which it lifted slightly and brought down with a flop. I walked round quietly and had a shot, but missed, and it slipped off into the water at once. Then I went to see what it had been doing and found a small mound, slightly raised and smoothed over, and taking a stick I poked it, and presently to my surprise unearthed an egg. I poked again and found a second, and after a while with careful digging laid bare the whole nest. I picked up half a dozen and gave them to the orderly to carry back ; they were white, in shape a long oval and the hard shell was deeply pitted with pores. The orderly by chance dropped one on the veranda ; it cracked, and out popped a young alligator, a perfect miniature of the full-grown reptile except that it was yellow in colour with beautiful black markings, and the tail much more sharply serrated than that of the older beast. The extraordinary thing

about it was, that it seemed to grow perceptibly the instant it emerged from the egg. I eventually preserved all six little saurians in spirit and they were much admired.

Although I shot no tiger actually at Taroba, I shot several in the ravine which crossed the overflow from it. I remember a beat I had there one day, ended within a few yards of a deep, dark pool of water. I sat down and had a drink, mercifully, from my own water bottle, examined the tiger, and afterwards strolled up towards the pool where the beaters were already busy drinking—cupping up great handfuls of the cool water and evidently enjoying it thoroughly. Presently it seemed to me an appalling odour was diffused around. I said to the Range Officer and old Antu, my shikarri: "There is a very bad smell here, is it the tiger?" "Nay, Sahib," they said. "We smell nothing." But before long they too got a whiff and after many sniffs and much investigation they located it as coming from the pool. Suddenly one of the men caught sight of the hoof of a deer sticking out of the grass to one side. He dragged at it, and there appeared the best part of a full-grown sambhur hind, very dreadfully dead, which had been lying in the pool, evidently the prey of a mugger. The men's faces were a study! It is not often that the Indian worries about his water supply, which is always "meta pani" (sweet water) however foul the source, but this was too much even for them, and as I could not assist in the matter since they had already drunk so much, I beat a retreat and left them to it. No ill effects resulted apparently, at all events I heard

of none; the native is almost immune from such things as enteric or internal poisoning.

Another evening I had stalked, in company with a young Gond Forest Guard, round the lake, hoping for a shot at a mugger. Coming to a little cape between two bays, I made him sit down on the grass and told him to watch the opposite bank, and signal to me if a mugger appeared. I wandered further on and sat down at a point whence I could clearly see him and he, me. We had been silently watching for some minutes, when looking back I noticed a fine sambhur stag stalking solemnly down the interior fireline, towards the place where the boy was sitting, and I signed to him to crouch lower in the grass, which he instantly did. The grand stag came on quite unconcernedly, probably intending to visit a "salt-lick" near-by the guard's hiding-place. At about fifteen yards he must have spotted the top of the turban, for his tail went up and he lowered his fine head, still moving forward, evidently trying to wind the mysterious object—but the breeze was in the opposite direction. I, an intensely interested spectator of all this, should I suppose have warned the lad; but I did not and he sat quite unconscious of the great beast behind him. Nearer, and nearer came the stag, swaying from side to side in his frantic endeavours to get the scent, and I tardily awoke to the danger of a charge and stood up in alarm. At once he saw me, and flung up his head, uttering a thunderous "dhank!" It must have sounded like the crack of doom to the boy who promptly threw up his arms and fell over backwards. The deer turned, and

to my relief, went off at a gallop—head up and tail erect—until he reached the edge of the line where, putting back his head so that the antlers lay each side the neck thus offering less resistance to the undergrowth, he plunged into the forest. His beautiful horns, I saw, were almost black and the tips shone white as ivory—a sure sign of a mature stag. The Gond meantime, had picked himself up and now said to me: “Verily the world split over my head, Sahib, and I thought my day was done. Well for me that your Honour was by to save me!” But I said nothing, for it struck me my fright had been greater than his.

Another evening crossing one of the wide bays of the lake after dark, I, quite by chance, cut off from their line of retreat to the forest, half a dozen bison which had come down to drink and were standing knee deep in the water. Up went their great heads and they snorted in alarm, and then came thundering past me like a squadron of cavalry at the charge. They crashed away into the darkness and I waited till the noise of their progress died down and all was still once more.

The Civil Station was so closely surrounded by the forests, that all the great beasts of the jungle lived within a stone’s throw of everyday human life. After dark, the station was invaded almost every evening by sounders of pig, and it was quite a common thing, driving or biking—no motors then!—back from the Club before dinner, to meet numbers of them crossing the road, so that one had to be careful lest they should frighten the pony or send one flying out of the saddle under their feet. From the upper story of my

bungalow-cum-office, which was the wing of an old Gond palace, I have often looked down on to grey backs of massive boars, feeding quietly below me in the moonlight. So casual too, were the great carnivora, that one of my predecessors coming out on to his veranda in pyjamas one morning, had a splendid view of a large tiger strolling past at the lower end of his compound. No one was greatly surprised therefore when a tiger began taking toll of cattle within a mile of the station. The Deputy Commissioner, policeman and myself were in camp at the time, but the padre, P.W.D. and railway engineers at once organised a beat to go and slay it. The padre, who, by the way, had been several years in Chanda and should therefore have known better, possessed only a shotgun for which he had never acquired any ball cartridges; but he none the less joined in the beat taking as his only arm, this gun, loaded with "cut-shot" cartridges containing No. 5 or No. 6 shot—a piece of lunacy for which other people might easily have paid dearly. Apparently, however, no one dissuaded him, and as ill luck would have it the tiger broke out under his tree. He instantly pumped away with his gun, the immediate effect being, of course, to create an angry tiger which galloped away with a loud roar and a charge of shot tingling in his loins. Luckily he met no beaters on his way or there would have been casualties; as it was he deserted those hunting grounds and went into the Mahorli Range some miles away.

And now the sequel. Three months later I was camping in that Range and Antu, my shikarri, as usual had baits tied out, and there was a kill which we

beat. As the line came up, I heard a stop to my left, tap, and there followed immediately a terrific roar, then silence. The tiger, therefore, was in the beat, but where? The beaters were steadily coming up and the same uncanny silence prevailed; so close were they that I could even hear them asking each other what had become of the "bagh". Suddenly there was a deafening roar, followed at once by a second and third, and I caught a momentary glimpse of a bright yellow and black form flashing between the bamboos. The beaters scattered in all directions and everything was suddenly quiet. Then stops away on the left shouted: "Nikal gaia, nikal gaia!" (He's gone), and an excited babbling at once broke out. Antu and the Ranger, always well ahead in the line, shouted to the beaters: "Are any hurt?" And when all answered no, I blessed my stars. We all conferred, and they decided that this was undoubtedly the padre's wrathful tiger going strong and full of fight. A few weeks later, exactly the same thing happened in another beat a few miles off, and afterwards old Antu headed a deputation of the beaters to tell me that: "This tiger, Sahib, is a veritable shaitan (devil); we have had no fear of tigers, for many have we beaten, but this beast is 'pagal' (mad), and will have the blood of one of us yet in his anger;" and I felt they were right. Later I had a third kill on the banks of the Andhari river, and instead of beating, I sat over it, but he was not to be caught that way. I knew he was moving about in the thickets around me but he declined to come anywhere near the kill. Next day we held a council of war; Antu and the men agreed

he was a public danger and must somehow be destroyed, and they all appeared ready to beat once more. Now I ordered that four beaters were to be armed with my two shot-guns and two blunderbusses from the village, and that as the beat must start from the river behind the kill they should fire shots at the beginning to rouse up the tiger and make him believe the dangerous quarter lay behind him, and thus get him well on the way to my machan; they were again to fire when half-way through the beat.

I was sitting well inside the forest and a jungle path ran across just in front of me—I heard the first shots fired on the river bank, and the faint shouts of the beaters. On they came, and according to plan, fired another volley while still some distance away—but so far not a sound from the stops in the trees. My eyes glued to the bushes around, I distinctly saw the tiger's feet through the undergrowth, moving across my right front, so I faced in that direction and waited, expecting him to break cover any moment. Nothing showed and there was not a sound, meantime the beaters were coming steadily up and I could even see them through the trees. Then all at once there was a flash of yellow on my extreme left, and the next moment out came the tiger, tail well up going for all he was worth. I fired, and he pitched on his head and rolled over, then picked himself up and started in the opposite direction. I fired again, but must have missed as he showed no signs of being hit, and on he went at a gallop, with the stops shouting: "Yehi gaia! yehi gaia!" (There he goes) all down the line. Then silence again and I knew the same thought was

in every mind—a wounded tiger, and the devil of a place to follow him up. The beaters walking very delicately, came out of cover, and the stops from their trees, and we conferred once more. I had no elephant at the time, nor would one have been of any use among the thick bamboos. We tried to get buffaloes to put in; the females of the herd, for these will pick up the scent of a tiger at once, and, fearing their young may be in danger, charge blindly through the jungle till they trip over the tiger and trample him to death. There were none within miles, and therefore nothing to be done but follow up on foot, since one could not leave a wounded beast at large, a terror to all around. So with Antu and the Range Officer on either side of me each carrying a shot-gun loaded with ball, and two trackers armed with spears, we started out on the adventure.

The bamboos were thick and feathery and one could not see any distance ahead; tracking was slow and nerve-racking, and my breeches and gaiters were soon covered in blood. We passed places where the tiger had evidently rolled in agony, but all was quiet save for the occasional distant cry of a peafowl. We went on until the light began to fail and then had to return for the night which, as it happened, was an unquiet one, for there arose at midnight one of those sudden, casual, and violent gales which seem to come from nowhere and blow everything before them. Very early we again took up the trail, and I know we must have often been quite close to the tiger because of the very fresh bloodstains on grass and leaf. But hour after hour of anxious tracking

passed and he never showed a sign and we were at last so absolutely cooked that we decided to give it up. I had that piece of forest carefully watched for a fortnight but the tiger must have died within it, for he was never seen again.

Old Antu, my shikarri, was a splendid old fellow, a man of few words, and those few always truthful—also a man of deeds. Concerning shikar, he would come in and standing behind my chair, would say quietly: "Hazur, bagh hai; bahut kherke millenga," (Sir, there is a tiger here, very possibly we shall get him,) and it meant a certainty, provided one shot straight and to kill.

All foresters, whether officers or subordinates, live closer to nature by reason of their calling than any other official, and though at the beginning, loneliness is their constant companion, afterwards, intense interest and even enthusiasm takes its place; the trees, beasts and birds become their friends, and the jungle holds them as the giant creepers hold the trees. Certain of one's subordinates always stand out from the ruck as being men of simple, honest life, on whom the untroubled silence of the forests and the wide spaces have left their mark; of these were Antu, Tahwar Ali, and one other who will appear later—good men all, now with the gods; I like to think of them.

And one other thing I should like to record here, a kindly act of the Civil Surgeon during his time and mine in Chanda. Cholera was terribly bad one year during the rains, and the villagers all round were dying like flies. News came in that the wife of a poor man living in a tiny, leaky hut across the river—then

high in flood—was in danger of death. F. the doctor never hesitated. He piled his clothes and his medicines in a bundle on his head and swam the flooded river, stayed the night in the tiny hut, saved the life of the woman and returned the next day; surely a great deed and worthy of remembrance.

At the corners of village roads near the borders of the forest one would often come upon the most unique of godlings—huge horses made of baked clay, grotesque and bloated with open blaring mouths, and fat legs shining in bright coarse colours. These were the Balki-devi, the bullock man's gods; they originated in some legend down on the west coast, and they are not found north of Chanda. Their mission was to ward off tiger from the village herds, and a marvellous game it appeared to be. The tiger would come along at night, thinking of the well-filled byres wherein reposed the cattle of his fancy, and move in that direction. He would turn a corner—and what need to go further? Behold a horse!—a toothsome meal all ready for the killing. He would dash at the prey and when he had leapt on its back, the fairy horse would suddenly spring to life and gallop off with the tiger still clinging on behind until it had carried him far from the village herds and could drop him in a strange jungle. Having done this the horse returned, and in the morning would be back in his place, guarding the homestead for all the world to see; the huge open mouth and fat body gaudily bright in the morning sun. The village Bhumak was the pujari or caretaker of the godlings, he it was who repaired the horses when they suffered damage pre-

sumably on their furious rides; and the grateful villagers gave him his grain and foodstuffs in return, for the simple Gond is a pious and kindly fellow.

With Antu I went out stalking sambhur. It was an all day affair, and taking food with us we started very early in the morning. The day opened hot and there was hardly a breath of wind in the forest. We trudged on for miles but never a "warrantable stag" did we see with a head worth taking and I let them all go by me. Returning rather weary, we stopped on a little knoll and I said to the old man: "Kuch umedh nahin hai aj, Antu!" (No hope to-day, Antu,) and he replied: "Aj shikar tagdir mē nahin hai, Hazur." (Sport is not in your luck, sir.) We stood talking and while he shaded his eyes with his hand and looked across the valley, I turned round and idly looking about me, caught a sudden glint of light on the points of two huge antlers which upreared themselves about seventy yards away above the tall grass and brushwood. Judging his height by what I could see, I knew a fine sambhur stag was standing there quietly watching me. Antu was still intent on the distance, so I softly put up my rifle and fired at a point below the antlers where I judged the neck should be. At the report, the old man nearly jumped out of his skin; he turned round with a terrified face as if he thought I'd shot myself or the gun had gone off accidentally. I said: "Khali sambhur per goli chalia," (I only fired at a sambhur,) as we ran up, and to my delight found a perfect stag lying in the grass; his horns dark, symmetrical and massive—a fine head of forty-four inches.

An extraordinary story was told me by an old

Gond before I left Chanda and I tell it here, as nearly as possible in his own words, for it forms an ending to this chapter and to the varied patchwork of my days in Chanda.

“It is many years ago now, Sahib; I was then a young man, and this my eldest son who is now a father was then but a few months old. Our village was one of three lying on the outskirts of the Reserve forest and ours was the only labour available, so it fell to us, as you know, Sahib, to do the usual forest work—cutting the boundary lines, fireline burning and road repairing; and these things were divided among our three villages according to their size.

“We usually completed such portions of the work which lay nearest the village by going out in the morning and returning to our own homes to feed and sleep, but when the distance became too great, we chose a centre and there we built ourselves a hut, and to this we went at night to cook our food, and there we slept till dawn. We built this hut on a river bank—a large hut it was, open at both ends; the stream passed down beside it and turned up sharply to the left, some way beyond the hut. There, the floods in the wet weather had silted up the fine white sand, until it formed a carpet, smooth and silvery, below the bank. Out of the jungle behind our shelter a narrow path ran up and passed down through the middle of the hut and not outside it. It led on to the river bank and from there down on to the silver sand.

“Sahib, we knew a tigress had for many months haunted our villages and several times she had killed man, but so long was it since she had been seen, that

we grew to think of her as a goddess and worshipped her with offerings and sacrifices after the manner of the Gond people. Then the spring came, and with it Holi time, and this we spent in the jungle sleeping at nights in the hut, and we prepared to be happy and merry, for our 'devi' (goddess) had so long spared us, we thought peradventure she had no further need of us. So we built fires at each end of the hut and cooked our food, and after much singing and foolish talk together as is our custom at this time, we lay down in the hut to sleep, in two lines, our heads under the eaves and our feet towards the centre, the jungle path passing down between us. That night the moon made all as bright as the new day, and the sand lay out like a white carpet below the river bank.

“Two brothers lay down side by side and they were friends of mine, Sahib; their names were Sapru and Dumru, and only that morning they had offered a white goat in sacrifice to our devi, and its blood was still reddening the stones outside. All fell asleep quickly that night for we had eaten well, and perhaps we had also drunk a little—and now our fate came upon us. At dead of night the tigress returned to seek a sacrifice and her choice fell upon Dumru. She must have passed between us down the path; can you not see her, Hazur?—her fierce eyes gleaming in the dark of the hut as velvet-pawed she stalked among us? She paused by the brothers and her hot breath played about them; her eyes sent out their message and Dumru arose and followed her. Sapru, sleeping also, arose and followed at a distance, drawn by the power of her eyes to witness the sacrifice.

“Pacing slowly down the path, she passed over the bank and on to the silver sand and there her three cubs waited on her coming. At once the tigress sprang at Dumru and pulled him down, and at that moment Sapru on the edge of the bank, awoke out of his trance and saw it all. He watched the tigress play with his brother as doth our village cat with the rats in the corn bin, letting him run a little but ever dragging him down again, while her cubs watched her, learning their lesson. At last, Hazur, they killed him, and after feeding dragged into cover all that they had not eaten. But Sapru sank to the ground in fear and lay as cold and as still as a new-made corpse. When dawn came we in the hut awoke, rubbing our heavy eyes and looking about us; we saw the gap in our line where the two brothers had lain, and, Sahib, we saw with starting eyes the print of the heavy paws, and the track of the men behind them. Fearfully we followed the trail leading down to the bank, and there we found Sapru grey and still, speechless, and as it seemed to us, altogether without life.

“Of the other, nothing remained save his blood upon the sand; and the footprints of the devi and her children told us what had befallen him. Sapru we carried away to his village, and chafed his hands and rubbed his limbs, and brought him back to life, but only after many hours could he tell us what he had seen. But the goddess spared us thereafter—never again did she smite us, and lo! Sapru himself is still living, and he will tell you, Hazur, that I have not lied.”

CHAPTER XI

BILASPUR

I DID not take long leave at home till 1912—being an unattached person, and perhaps too content with my jungles, but after a short time in Nimar—to which place I was to return later with my wife for some years—I went on furlough to look up old friends at home.

I recall a particularly golden autumn in Somerset, where the leaves clung to the trees until the first days of December, and a spring in Switzerland, when I went with my wife to see the Forest of Sihlwald where the beech and spruce grow to a great size and in abundance, and where the entire working of the timber is highly scientific. The name of that forest should have been “Aornos”; it was as birdless as the drear region Virgil sings of in the *Ænead*—for not a single feathered fowl did we see in all the length and breadth of it. For days too I pursued a solitary roebuck which at length allowed me a glimpse of his rufous hide, and he and a large black hare were apparently the only living things to be found, if I except the enormous slugs—red and black—which crawled on every path, to our great disgust. Summer was spent again in the West Country where all

seemed so peaceful, so altogether secure; where the old order still prevailed and life still had a certain dignity and restfulness about it. It was the year before the Great Change—the year before the War; and I shall always be glad that I was at home to see England as she was at that time.

Returning to India in September, 1913, the first thing my wife did on landing in Bombay was to break her hand mirror on the back of a colossal cockroach—one of those ghastly insects, large, black and spotted with yellow, which appear suddenly with the express purpose of giving one a fright. We expected the usual seven years' bad luck at the wreck of the mirror, and on the whole, I think we got it.

As a first mark of the wrath of the gods I was sent to the hottest and most easterly Division of the Central Provinces—Bilaspur—and when I say it was lovingly known as Blastedpur by all who had had the ill luck to go there, "I've sure said a mouthful." The Civil Station was a poisonous place on the bank of the Arpa river, never briskly cold in winter, hot and steamy all through the rains. Only one official kept a car as the roads were so terribly bad, and I remember coming home after a dinner-party one night in the monsoon, when we had to leave our bullock-tonga at the bottom of the long drive as the night was so pitch dark, and walk up to the bungalow by the light of a lantern, wading ankle deep in a torrent of water, which poured down the sloping road as if a dam had suddenly burst above us.

On the boat coming out I had been seduced into

buying a buggy and pony for my wife to drive—a horribly rash thing to do when one trusts only to luck and the honesty of the owner! The buggy when it arrived was really rather a find and we waited anxiously for the pony which was to come by a different train. The owner had told me he constantly rode the animal on parade, so I suppose I ought to have expected the worst! Anyway, I heard a cry from the veranda where my wife was watching for the sais who had gone to the station to fetch it. I came out to see him running up at a jog-trot with a fourteen-hand pony trotting beside him—a weird little beast, covered in a huge horse cloth that trailed on the ground all round. “What an animal!” ejaculated my wife as the sais whipped off the clothing and the “charger” stood revealed—a little blue roan, covered with bald patches and very moth-eaten generally, especially as to his tail which was hogged and had only about five hairs upon it. I said to the sais: “Thora buddha dicta?” (He looks rather old.) “Buddha!” said the sais disgustedly. “Bilcul zahif hai!” (Old, he is absolutely doddering!) The look of him and his dismal countenance was so funny, we could only laugh consumedly, while the sais dragged him off to the stables none too pleased with his charge.

The Bilaspur jungles were absolutely stiff with tiger and panther; I had never been in such a perfect district for shikar. The beaters also were plucky and keen and had we been longer in the place I should have laid out a good many tiger. As it was, I shot two beautiful beasts and a very large panther, one of the

finest I have ever seen; he taped seven foot nine between uprights.

My wife, at this stage of her experience, was perfectly panic-stricken in the jungle—or so she said, although I never noticed it, and used to expect a bear behind every rock, and a tiger in each bush, as well as a probable visit from a panther any evening after dark. As it was, she woke up one night to the sound of tearing and scratching near her bed, and pulling up the mosquito-net beheld, under the edge of the tent, the fore-paws of a pard digging away lustily, with a view, I suppose, to getting inside and bagging one of the dogs. I can't think why the animal didn't try the tent doorflap—so much simpler! However, she yelled for me, but by the time I had staggered out, majestic in striped pyjamas and more than half asleep—a lantern in one hand and a rifle in the other—the beast had very naturally retired discreetly to a safe distance.

I shot the big panther soon after this; we picketed a white goat with a powerful voice just between our machan and his stronghold, which was a tall hillock of tumbled boulders of black basalt, with here and there tufts of green bamboo showing between them. The goat cried aloud its desire to be gone, but for a long time the panther turned a deaf ear and I at length whispered to the mem: "I wonder if he will come at all!" At that very instant she saw him come out of the rocks, and murmured softly: "Look! there he is!" and together we watched him delicately stepping down from rock to rock until he disappeared into the green growth at the foot of the hillock. There

was a pause, and my eyes adjusting themselves to the dappled shadows there, saw him crouch, his eyes on the goat; saw him settle the poise of his limbs, balanced as for a charge—and I raised my rifle. Out he came in long low bounds, but the bullet got him fair in the head and turning a somersault, he knocked the goat completely over and to add insult to injury, lay upon it. We waited; presently the goat began to heave itself from beneath the panther, and finally struggling up, pulled to the end of its tether and tried to get away. All was well; the guards came bustling up and another very nice skin was added to the bag.

Marching on to the foot of the hills we turned in to a camp called Rajak; there the tents were pitched on a ledge above a nala, down which a thin stream of blue water slowly trickled. Away above us to the north rose the hill-barrier, of which the crest overlooked the Indian state of Rewah. The Prince of this State is a Baghel Rajput by descent—or in other words, descended from a Sacred Tiger; no one therefore is permitted to shoot the great cats in his realm with the exception of himself and any other chosen he may specially invite. This is probably the reason why tiger are so numerous in Bilaspur, as their breeding places are in the high hills and they come to and fro across the border. There is known to be also a special breed of white tigers in Rewah, and some years after this, while I was visiting the State on business, I was shown a magnificent living specimen in the zoo there; his fur was a very pale cream in colour against which the velvet-black stripes showed

up very beautifully. The tiger was not an albino freak, for his eyes were not pink but the usual topaz yellow, and he was an altogether quite gorgeous beast and in perfect condition.

Shortly before we went to Bilaspur, one of these white tigers had been shot in the jungles there; as none had been heard of before in that Division, he must have come down from over the Rewah hills.

At Rajak, Raju, my Gond shikarri had baits tied out all round, and the first night my wife and I were awakened by a frightful roaring which seemed to split the night in two. On the opposite bank a community of gowlis (herdsmen) had their camp, and we heard them shouting at the tops of their voices, while their buffaloes had evidently been stampeded and were rushing wildly about. A series of coughing roars came from the tiger and the whole thing sounded as if it were just outside the tent. My men yelled to the gowlis "Kia hua?" (What has happened?) And they bawled back: "Bagh hai; bhaisa per ghira." (It is a tiger, it fell on one of the buffaloes.) After a while things quieted down somewhat and the rest of the night passed peacefully. In the morning we found a big tiger had charged the herds and had managed to maul one of the bodas about the neck, but the other buffs and the gowlis themselves went for the intruder and drove him off, growling, into the night. I followed the huge pugs for some time, and saw them making up the ravine and straight for the hills above Rewah. Coming back, there was the wounded boda, wearing a huge pink neck cloth of boric lint; the gowlis all standing round it, wagging their heads and

saying: "Wah! wah! dekho, Memsahib ne kia!"
(The Memsahib did it.)

I also found khubbar had come in of a kill and after breakfast we started for the beat. Arrived at the place—a glade of bamboos and light timber—we suffered a reverse, for the tree the men had chosen for the machan was occupied by battalions of red ants, and another had to be found. There was none large enough and so the bed was tied between three light saplings, and on this we sat swaying giddily with every movement. My wife saw the tiger first coming slowly up between the bamboos, dipping down into a small nala, climbing heavily out again. He paused, looking back, and then crouched behind a bush listening to the yells of the beaters, disdainingly to move till the very last minute. When they were almost on him, out he came with a roar going past us literally *ventre à terre*. The first shot from the .577 only seemed to hurry him up, but as he was disappearing into the bushes I saw the patch of white rump below the tail and fired at that. The bullet raked him as we afterwards found, from end to end, the first having also passed through him, and after galloping on through the undergrowth he collapsed and all was quiet. Moving cautiously on the elephant to look for him, it was interesting to see how gently and carefully she pulled aside with her trunk every branch and spray of leaves obscuring her view, until finally she stopped abruptly, her trunk held out, inhaling the scent of the enemy lying dead in the grass almost at her feet. Leaving camp next morning we had hardly covered a hundred yards when

deafening roar came from a thicket a few yards from our path—the mate of the tiger we had killed perhaps, hurrying us on our way.

Achanakmar, our next camp was a quite charming spot, and here I covered my Ranger—a very prim and proper person—with confusion and blushes by saluting him with “Good morning, darling!” as I came out of the tent after breakfast. It was a case of temporary “mental aberration”, a high sounding phrase which has always amused me, but the poor man looked shyly down his innocent nose and said: “Oh yes sir, yes sir,” in a very loud voice while I heard chuckles of delight going on behind me in the tent.

The forest in these places was all cut up by nalas and made interesting by large and beautiful thickets of bamboos. In one of these deep nalas a tiger killed two or three miles from camp and we went out before sundown to sit up. The mahout was ill and the elephant had to be driven by her char-cutter, and I knew she loathed him and disliked obeying his orders. In short, I anticipated trouble, the more so as the nala was filled with very deep soft sand, so that going beyond a snail’s pace in it was almost impossible, as the elephant’s weight caused her to slip back a little at every step she took. The machan was a high one and we had to get into it by a ladder from the hathi’s back, but the kill lay out in full view in front, while to our right, the nala bank lay in deep shadow below our tree. The nala forked sharply just ahead, and before the sunlight had faded a fine red jungle cock strutted across the open space, scarlet hackles and

curving bronze tail all complete, a perfect little model of the British farmyard cock.

The sun faded and with it the cries of the birds, only the roosting call of the peafowl broke the stillness now and then. After long waiting the moon came up and flooded the nala with silver light and, while gently shifting a rather cramped position, we heard in the distance a roar. I bethought me that it was very unusual for a tiger to speak when coming up to the kill, and that as a rule it means only one thing—a tigress with cubs. It is her custom to ward them off the kill by roaring, and to warn other animals of her presence as well. I therefore had my suspicions, though of course a male tiger will sometimes roar to call his mate up to the kill to feed.

After some time a shadow passed through the trees on our left, and slipping into a patch of moonlight showed up as a silver tiger barred in black, rather small and lightly built. It melted away into the trees again, evidently I thought, about to approach the kill from the shadows behind us. We sat on with thumping hearts and then, suddenly—amazingly—the tiger was there, just below us on the bank, and what was more, it actually sat down there and remained, gazing up into our tree. I could do nothing; we sat absolutely still, breathlessly watching the great cat as it sniffed the air and stared seemingly into our faces—without actually spotting us, I feel, for it remained quite a long time.

At last I thought “now or never” and very slowly and cautiously I began to raise my rifle. Like a flash and without a sound the tiger was gone, and

only the waving of the bushes showed where it had passed. We waited another hour, and then I whistled for the elephant; she was very long in coming and we saw the char-cutter hammering her viciously with the goad to get her along. She stood, shifting about nervously in the sand below the machan, while the ladder was once more set up on her back and we prepared to descend. My wife had just got down on to her back when there came a loud roar from the bushes close by. The Range Officer and some guards standing about with the two rifles took cover behind the elephant fearing a charge, but she, being without her trusty friend the mahout, started off with a jerk just as I fell anyhow off the ladder on to her back—and there came another roar!

We were all rather rattled by now and I yelled to the men to hand up the rifles, which eventually they did, keeping well to leeward. The elephant wished to bolt and was only restrained by the sand; she floundered in it, slipping back a little at each stride, making very poor time in spite of her efforts; the men equally keen to get away floundering too, while my wife and I, pitching to and fro, wondered how long it would be before we fell off or the tiger charged us.

It seemed a day's march to the end of that nala but at last we struggled up on to firm ground, and to my relief the roaring came more faintly now, and definitely behind us, where the tigress—for they found the tracks of her cubs in the sand afterwards—was evidently covering the retreat of her family.

Since Mr. Kipling immortalised the charming

Rikki-Tikki, I suppose everyone who could has kept a mongoose as a pet. All my Range Officers had been for some time on the look out for a female, partly tamed, and soon after our adventure with the tigress one was brought in to camp one night in a little iron cage just as we were sitting down to dinner. They told us she had lived with humans, but had never been handled at all, and she would not now allow us to lay a finger on her, but she was evidently ferociously hungry for her little eyes burnt like red coals at the scent of some roast teal which had just been brought in and all her fur—light pepper and salt in colour—fluffed up until she looked like a huge brush just ready to use. She had a little chain round her neck and a string attached to it, and in an instant she had twitched herself free of the servant holding her, jumped on to the table, collared the teal on my wife's plate which was nearly as big as herself, and had dragged it across the floor to the door of her cage, growling angrily. The camp clerk, one Mohan Singh, a Rajput of the best, now asked leave to try his hand and persuade her to go into the cage and abandon the prey. But no; the next minute the little man himself was hopping round the room, sucking his finger which had received a gash from Rikki's razor teeth, murmuring reproachfully: "Oh, sir! She is indeed a very terrible!" The Mem with laughter bemoaned the loss of her dinner, but Rikki had the time of her life and having gorged her fill, retired to her cage where she kept up a ceaseless "chirring" well into the night. At about two in the morning, perfectly maddened by the row, I got up and pushed

the cage into the bathroom, let her go there and shut the door. It was the worst thing I could have done; she upset the soap dish with a clatter, banged against the bath, jumped up on to the window ledge and tore down the curtain and reduced us to despair. Once more, I caught her, shoved her into her cage and returned to bed; she simply sat there "chirring" away like an army of crickets. Altogether a thoroughly disturbing and restless night.

After a few days she got to know and love us all, but so intensely was she interested in every fresh camp that it became a difficult matter to get her into her box at night; once in it, however, she snuggled under the straw and in this way travelled happily with us on the back of the elephant each day and if she got restless on the march, the Mem would put her hand in through the bars, and Rikki would hold a finger between her tiny paws, gently lick it and go to sleep again.

At each halt she made a fresh investigation of tents, bedding, boxes, garments and all my office kit, scuttling to and fro and digging in my papers. The clerk coming in to read the vernacular letters, leaving his shoes outside, would feel a toe gently held—never bitten—and going out again would find her popping in and out of his footgear pretending to nip his toes as he tried to put them on. Finally, tired of play she would climb up into my wife's lap and go to sleep or else jump on to her shoulder, dive in under the neck of her jersey, and so crawling down inside her sleeve would lie along her arm, with only the little pointed head and bright eyes showing outside the cuff—

watching every movement around, ready to start off again on the hunt.

Scorpions were to Rikki real "delicatessen"; I have seen her turn over the stones under which they were to be found and having flushed one, seize it by the poison bag at the end of the tail and crunch it up like a crisp biscuit with every symptom of delight. Nor did it appear to worry her if she were stung on the nose as sometimes happened; she would merely shake her head and look for a fresh victim.

The story that a mongoose is immune from snake bite is, I am sure, a myth—merely one of the Indian "tall stories". But undoubtedly they are amazingly cute in their methods when they fight a deadly snake. They lunge and feint and cause the reptile to strike repeatedly, all the time being careful to keep just out of range themselves, slipping under the coils as the snake makes its return stroke. Eventually the cobra or karait becomes so thoroughly exhausted, it can do no more and the mongoose rushes in and paralyzes it with a bite at the back of the neck which leaves the snake at the mercy of its enemy, who then proceeds to eat it up. Curiously enough the pine-marten employs exactly the same tactics in pursuit of a meal. Our Rikki had rather a casual way with reptiles herself, and when she had become used to bungalow life in the rains would often appear with a karait of quite useful size in her mouth, and take it straightway into our bedroom where she would sit glowering under the bed with the snake between her paws—her eyes like two points of fire—before biting it into pieces and embarking on a heavy meal. As karaits

are as deadly as any snake in India, we used to watch these proceedings with a certain amount of alarm.

All mongooses love eggs, and we were so entertained at the way Rikki used to break them up that we sometimes gave her one for the sheer pleasure of seeing her dispose of it. She would roll it carefully along till it lay in front of some big stone, or perhaps the bungalow plinth or step, and catching it between her front paws send it spinning backwards against the hard surface, giving at the same time a little skip as it passed between her hind legs. Once she had cracked it the rest was easy; she would lick up the very last drop, but she always went all "bottle-brushy" when feeding, and growled like a little fury. She made a little nest for herself in the roof above the bungalow pantry, and from there would look down on us poor devils below, and she developed a jack-daw-like attraction for anything glittering, such as silver teaspoons, which she often took up to her eyrie. Even my wife's gold wrist-watch was well on its way there also when she was luckily caught, scuttling across the dining-room with it dangling from her mouth.

Everyone knows the Ganges—Ganga Mai, the Mother—but not everyone knows that the Narbada is a river of almost equal sanctity, and it rises just outside the borders of Bilaspur on the high bluff of Amarkantak. Here the great range of the Satpura Mountains ends at a point over four thousand feet in height, and it is always green and cool on this plateau, because, unlike other parts of India, the rain rarely ceases except perhaps for a few days at a time,

all through the year. Forsyth's description of the place is so charming, I cannot do better than quote it here.

"The infant Narbada bubbles forth at the feet of the observer, enclosed by religious care in a wall of masonry, and surrounded by Hindu temples, and thence meanders for some miles through a narrow glade, carpeted with beautiful grass and fringed by forests of sal; at first a tiny burn but growing rapidly by union with others, till some three miles from the fountain, it leaps over the edge of the plateau in a clear shoot of about thirty feet. Seven hundred and fifty miles further on, it rolls, a mighty river, into the waters of the Arabian Gulf."

A very beautiful place it is, remote, sacred and high above the world and many Brahmins serve the temples there; and since India is a land where the unexpected always happens, the following tale is not so impossible as it sounds.

A man I know had made pilgrimage there and wished to return with many photographs. He was arranging his tripod with an eye to the best view, the best angle, the best light and shade, watched by several priests clothed in the sacred yellow standing in the background. Suddenly one of them stepped forward and said with a smile, in excellent English: "I think if you will let me arrange your camera for you, sir, I can show you a better place to take your photograph." My friend was so surprised, he nearly dropped the plate he was holding and said: "But, guru-ji, how on earth do you know anything about it and how do you come to be here?" "For many years I took photographs for a large Bombay firm," said

the priest composedly, "and now I come to serve the gods in peace before I go hence." They talked together quietly and the picture was duly taken—there, in one of the most sacred places in India, a very stronghold of Brahminical culture. And some years later, on the banks of the holy Narbada, where as a stately river it washes the feet of the Vindhya hills, the same man met an ash-smear'd Saddhu, wild-eyed, unkempt, yet with a certain dignity of bearing as these strange beings often have. And again to his amazement, he discovered an English scholar, for all that the Saddhu's entire outfit consisted of a rope waistcoat and a narrow bootlace, the latter having in this case nothing to do with foot-gear. So strange a land of contrast is this India we British have served.

I saw in another part of my District, an exceedingly ancient city which once had been the capital of a Rajput dynasty—Ratanpur the City of Lakes, for there were literally hundreds of them, great and small; some half hidden by dark trees among which temples showed like old ivory; others, clear under the blue sky, where crimson lotus flowers looked up from among their broad green leaves. And here I met Porphyrio, whose other name is Jaçana—skimming over the lily pads on his immensely long-toed feet; his feathers of a metallic blue-green were overlaid with purple bloom, and they glistened as shot silk will do when the light plays upon it. Bilaspur had some pleasant places and this was one of them, but the picture had another side and we were soon to see it.

Part of my charge lay nearly forty miles from head-

quarters, across the Seonath river, which as anyone can see by the map, is a tributary of the great Mahanaddi, flowing east into the Bay of Bengal. The Mahanaddi is a very sacred stream, so also is the Seonath, and on arriving at Seorinarayan, a native town on its banks, all my staff—that is, all the Hindus—rushed off to bathe and do poojah and rid themselves of accumulated sin. We then pushed on over the shrunken river which in the rains would become a roaring torrent racing between high banks, until we reached the forest of our destination, Sonakhan.

Water in these parts was all brought from tanks; it was scanty and terribly bad, so that the Mem and I had to bathe in what looked like muddy coffee. There was nothing else to use for tea or for drinking water either, but I provided for that emergency by going about with carts piled high with boxes filled with bottles of soda water, which followed us wherever we went.

The forests were interesting and there was much bamboo mixed with teak and other species, and on the south almost pure sal. There were tiger and panther in numbers and also wild buffalo but they had been placed in sanctuary, owing to excessive shooting in the past, so that I was not able to bring back a head, and indeed was not lucky enough to see one of the great beasts the whole time I was in their country as I had to cut short my tour on account of incessant fever.

The Sonakhan Range was an evil place for storms. Even in March when normally no one thinks of gales

or rain, a "tufan" would come up almost every night, and often we had to sit for hours dressed and ready to rush out from the tent and get into the carts for safety before the winds blew everything to Hades. It was a lively time. On one such night, my wife and I had just begun to eat dinner when a storm burst with a crack of thunder and a howling wind hit the tent with a smack, and in a minute had blown the cooking pots and dinner into space, our fish off the table and ourselves out of the tent. The darkness was intense and the air full of choking dust, and to crown everything the elephant got loose and stampeded about the camp, her chains clanking as she went. Even the carts were impossible that night and I be-thought me of the police thana on a ridge above the camp. Thither we struggled in the pitch dark with only the glimmer of a hand lantern to guide us; the Mem lost her slippers in the mud of a small stream we had to cross, but eventually we got there and the police put us into the prisoner's cell for the night! At one in the morning arrived our bearer, the invaluable Katoo, carrying the mongoose in her box and the only provender he could lay his hands on—half a bottle of port and an unopened tin of Sanatogen!

At the next camp a tiger killed a village buff and we went out to try and bag him. The ground was heaped with the characteristic boulders of black basalt peppered with flecks of white agate, but it looked a likely place and we settled down in a small machan to await events. After an hour or so the strings of that part of the cot on which my wife was

sitting suddenly parted with a loud report, and she began to fold up—knees and chin almost meeting, while her “*derrière*” protruded through the hole. What with the loud crack, and our only partially suppressed giggles, I did not think there was an earthly chance of the tiger’s appearing, but I adjured her to hang on until life became impossible, in the hope of his turning up.

The poor Mem sank lower and lower in the torn bed, and I was just about to shout for the men, when the familiar orange and black head appeared, topping some rocks ahead of us like a full moon. He came slowly up to the kill and pausing there, his eyes seemed to meet ours full and square but, evidently not liking the look of things he turned to go, thereby exposing the shoulder and giving me a very nice shot. He never spoke to the bullet but in one great bound was gone over the rocks and out of sight. To get the Mem out of her hole was rather like drawing a cork from a bottle but eventually she emerged, and getting on to the elephant we started after him. I sent a man up a tree to prospect, as the hathi picked her way slowly through the rocks, and in a few minutes he shouted: “*Dekhta, Sahib, purha hai!*” (I see him lying down.) And soon we found him lying stone dead in a hollow between two rocks, a vulture already hovering above him high up in the sky.

On the homeward journey, at the camp next before our return crossing of the Seonath river, the tents and ourselves were once more battered by a terrific storm of wind and rain. We took refuge in a tiny Range Quarters, where the roof let in a flood all through the

night. Between the peals of thunder and the moaning of the wind we distinctly heard the loud roar of a tiger evidently stalking up and down in the jungle close by. Tigers like storms, the coolness and rain refresh them; they wander far afield when grey clouds cover the sun.

Dawn broke with a crimson glare beneath heavy gunpowder-blue clouds, and the dhak-flower, the Flame of the Forest, blazed in heavy scarlet masses of bloom on the trees all round. Thankful the storm had ceased, for the moment at all events, we started out on the elephant for our twelve mile trek to Seorinarayan. Passing through a thick patch of jungle, the elephant suddenly—and for no reason that mere human intelligence could fathom—emitted a crashing roar, so like a tiger that I almost expected to hear it answered by a feline moving in the grass around us. She seemed very loath to go on, and the mahout repeatedly urged her with the goad; the whole thing was really uncanny, but elephants are certainly endowed with a sixth sense, and that there was danger of some sort lurking near, I have no doubt—but after another roar and much earnest consideration she at length rolled on her way.

Arrived at the river we found our train of baggage carts, which had started the evening before, held up on the bank by the river in partial flood, the drivers huddled hopelessly beside the bullocks, watching the racing water. Freshets after winter storms, often fall as quickly as they rise, and even as we looked, the water seemed to slacken and presently we were able to get over on the elephant. The faithful cook,

I may say, had swum the flood long before so that Master should find his breakfast ready, but the carts and all our change of raiment, remained where they were for hours and nothing would hurry either drivers or bullocks.

Once more we struggled with filthy tank water, and the hard, high road for forty miles, and arrived in station. I mentally resolved that I would do my best to see the last of Blastedpur before many months had gone by. This resolve was strengthened by the fact that I fell ill and so did my wife who had to go to Calcutta at a moment's notice for a bad operation.

Calcutta, lying at the head of the Bay of Bengal, has always been the playground of storms, but for fifty years there had not been such a terrific tempest as broke over the city on the night we arrived there. I saw my wife into her private room in hospital and then had to go to my hotel, just as the storm broke. There was hardly time to breathe between the incessant flashes of lightning and the bombardment of thunder claps; the rain and hail came down almost like a wall of water, carriages were overturned and even pinned against the walls of houses by the force of the gale, roofs went sailing down the streets, and the whole terrific hurricane lasted far into the night. In the morning literally thousands of crows lay dead in heaps under the trees on the Maidan, battered to death by the pitiless hail. The hotel where I was staying had a central court, and many of us had to be carried across it to dinner; it had become a lake nearly two feet deep with masses of white hail stones floating on top of the water.

As for the poor Mem in hospital, it was for her an experience she never forgot. There were only two patients at that time in the private block and apparently no one had realised that a third had come in that afternoon. At all events my wife sat alone in her large gaunt room, which had a door each side opening into the veranda, listening to the pealing of the thunder, the screaming wind and the rip and shiver of glass all round her, for nearly four hours. At long last a Sister appeared, stepping warily over the wreckage in the veranda, and exclaimed in amazement at sight of the small figure sitting alone, "insulated"—as she afterwards told me—on a rubber air-pillow, and very exhausted and miserable. Food, however, was soon forthcoming and the rather shaken night-staff came on duty, and so began a six weeks' sojourn in Calcutta which on the whole I believe my wife rather enjoyed.

When she got well I came down again to take her home, and together we saw something of the beautiful city before we left it. Calcutta was at this time the capital of British India, for New Delhi had not then come into being, and it was the largest city, then as now, in India. Trade at this time was flourishing, though the world stood unknowingly on the brink of war; great houses of rich merchants were built along the bank of the river, and the owners and their belongings took the air in state in the evening, rolling along in august carriages, although they were beginning at that time to use big motor cars as well.

Calcutta is a living monument to the work of the British in India. Founded by old Job Charnock in

1698, from small beginnings, it has grown to its present splendour, and it has been the dwelling place of those giants of the eighteenth century—Warren Hastings, the Marquis Cornwallis, and many more satraps who helped to build the prosperity of the Empire, which our present politicians seem likely to bring down in ruin.

In the early part of 1914, India, though breathing perhaps a little more quickly, had still a fairly quiet pulse. To-day, the breathing is irregular, the pulse "irritable", and there are very definite symptoms of coming trouble. The Hour they say brings the Man, but none has so far arisen out of the ruck of indifferent personalities and politicians—as yet "no power cometh to help us"; political vitality is very low at present. Of what avail, however, to write of these matters; let us return to Blastedpur.

As a lonely bachelor and jungle man, I had not bothered very much about other people in station life, but now through my wife's eyes, I began to see them anew and occasionally derived no small entertainment therefrom.

Standing one evening at the door of the billiard room, whisky peg in hand, waiting my turn at snooker, I was idly watching and listening to the "sweethearts and wives" talking together in the little card-room—"card-room" by courtesy only, for as yet bridge had not seriously invaded Bilaspur. There was a pause, and suddenly one of them, a rather pretty young bride, about to add the only baby to the station of grown-ups, said in a far away and soulful voice clasping her hands and gazing into

space: "Do you know, I think my baby will be born to-night!" All the other women sat up as if they had heard a shot, and there were confused murmurs and ejaculations, while I caught my wife's eye in the background and she exploded with laughter.

The doctor, who was at the billiard table just behind me, looked up with a horrified face and said: "I say, did you hear that? We must get her home! Call her husband—— Oh! there he is! Here, H., your wife should be getting back, I think!"

How they eventually persuaded the lady to move, I don't know; she certainly didn't want to go. But at last she was bestowed in the side-car and the motor-bike started up. Alas, for the doctor!—just outside the Club gates and very near his bungalow, the engine threw in its hand with a jerk and utterly refused to move; there was nothing for it therefore but to ask the lady to "come in and wait" which he did reluctantly, and which, as we afterwards gathered, she was only too delighted to do. The whole situation was bursting with possibilities, but as we felt she at all events, was in quite the right place, we went home chuckling sinfully, and waiting for news on the morrow.

The gods were with the doctor, for nothing happened; the motor after some delay functioned once more; nor indeed was the lady's vision fulfilled at all that night, or for the matter of that several nights afterwards. However, a few days after the infant had arrived, I met the Deputy Commissioner who had a fund of quiet humour and was not always able to stomach the newly-made father's peacock pride.

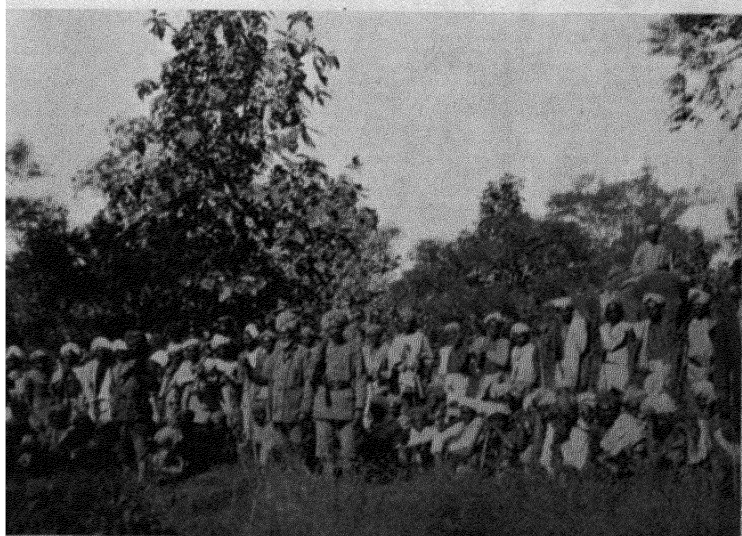
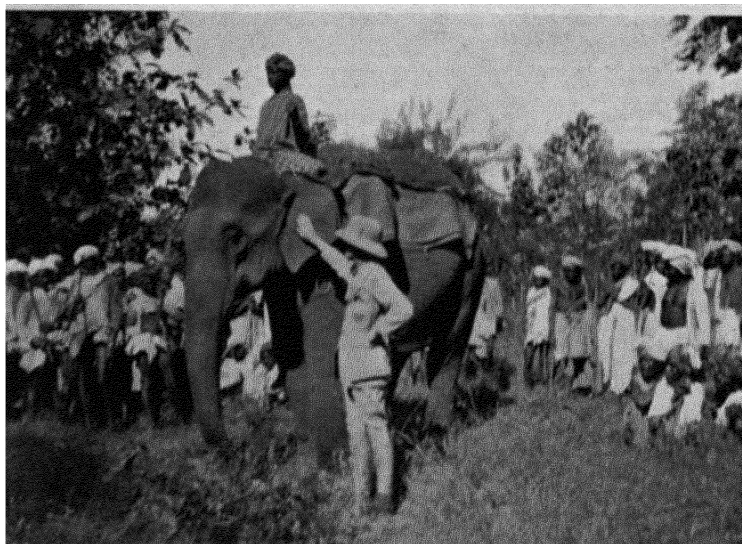
Said he, with a twinkle: "H.'s advertisement was in the *Pioneer* to-day, have you seen it?" I had, and we chuckled in concert and enjoyed the small joke.

Poor man, he himself met a tragic end not long afterwards in the Forest of Achanakmar in this Division. He was never a good shot and would not, I think, have troubled much about tiger had not his wife—a most intrepid woman—been a keen shikarri and anxious to bag as many as possible. They had a beat, and poor B. fired at and wounded a large tiger. Instead of waiting until next day to follow up, both got down from the machan and proceeded to track it at once on foot, B. walking up the dried bed of the nala, his wife on the bank above him.

What happened was almost inevitable—as B. rounded a corner, the tiger lying in wait there, sprang upon him before either of them could fire a shot. He was fearfully mauled, and his plucky wife, half mad at the sight, rushed down the bank and, using the butt of her rifle as a club, beat the tiger over the head until it dropped him and made off without even attempting to touch the brave lady. They brought him in twelve miles to the nearest railway station, and sent for a leech skilled in tackling such wounds as his, but nothing could save his life; the poison had worked too quickly, and after lingering for some hours, he died.

My pulling the hem of the official robe had the desired effect or possibly they got tired of me; for at length to our joy, came the order to proceed to Betul on transfer, and we started off, accompanied by a young sambhur, a mongoose, a beautiful and

tame peacock, dogs, fowls, and very nearly, a tame young python; but this I thought wiser to leave behind me in the bungalow garden, to be an unexpected joy to the incoming and unwary tenant.



READY FOR YOUR BEST

CHAPTER XII

BETUL

WE had no luck with our bungalows at this time, for on arriving at Betul we found the new one then building for the Forest Department was still without a roof, and standing in a desolate plot of ground from which the contractor had carefully expunged everything in the shape of a tree save an elderly date palm. We therefore sojourned for some months, when we were not in camp, in an ancient hole which once had been a rest house, but now was decrepit and swarming with armies of confiding rats, so friendly, that we were afraid to unpack anything over-night lest it should be devoured before the morning.

Badnur is the name of the headquarters of the Plateau Division of Betul and it is described as "plateau" because the elevation is reasonably high—in some places over two thousand feet. But although much has been written about the healthiness and coolness of the district, it was in reality, neither one nor the other, for it kept a special brand of "seven days' fever" which we grew to know very well, and the hot-weather nights were never pleasantly cool and were, moreover, visited by clouds and dusty winds which made sleeping out-of-doors anything but a joy.

Arriving at the end of November we went almost at once into camp and I was rather interested to find that the hunting cheetah still occurred in and around just one spot in this district, a village called Ranipur, through which we passed on our way to Christmas camp; the only place with the exception of the plains of Berar in which I have ever heard of his presence.

That same old friend C., who, years before, had come to shoot tiger and bear with me in Berar, came to us now for Christmas and to meet my wife, but although we camped in a perfect place for tiger and sambhur, we never saw a pug or horn, and this rather confirmed him in the belief that he must be a Jonah in the world of shikar. It was good fun, however, and the Range Officers, unbeknown to me, had clubbed together and provided a "band"—heaven forgive them!—to serenade us, and these minstrels lay in wait on our going out and our coming in, and as soon as we showed a feather, they started blaring "the King" in five different keys and all together, and this not once but many times a day. Indeed, C. complained bitterly that he never got a decent bath, for directly he had lowered himself into a hot tub after a long and tiring day, the well-meaning fiends outside would spot either the Mem or myself and start the Anthem, and C. being, as he said, a loyal man, felt bound to rise and stand to attention! After three days of this I handed out buksheesh and sent them home, and thereafter all was peace.

Later, I continued touring by myself while my wife returned to stay with friends in the station, and I trekked right down to the Southern border of Betul

where it overlooks Berar, and there I came to Muktagiri, renowned for its nest of white carved temples perched on rock ledges in a wild ravine. A waterfall came rushing down over the cliffs where vultures brooded and spread their wings in the sun, and thick green jungle stood up all round, shutting in the temples as with a wall. A legend is told of this pleasant place.

Many years ago a goatherd lived by the hill on which the temples now stand, and his goats, numbering nearly a thousand, browsed all day long around him. One evening it fell out that half the goats were missing from the home-coming herd, and the man went out to seek the wanderers, but, for some time he could find no way up the hill above him. When finally he struggled to the top, he beheld a white and shining temple and in it a golden godling, while all around his happy goats lay about in the sun or found new browsing on the trees and shrubs.

He returned, and proclaimed the miracle, and the Jains in his village claimed the temple and its golden god as their own, and their priests built other temples round the central shrine and thus they remain until this day. I was told that I should be asking for trouble if I visited Muktagiri, as every official who went there had been promptly transferred on his return! The spell, however, did not work in my case but oddly enough, not long afterward no less than three other men in the station went to see the place while on tour and returning, they were all within a very short time sent on to other Districts one after another. When I came back, we moved into the

new Forest bungalow and there not long afterwards our son was born. I planted two gold mohur trees on his birthday as a start to the garden, and I hear they have grown into beautiful trees with the passing years. The "gold mohur" carries great fans of scarlet bloom, the prevailing colour, with yellow, of most of the blossoming trees of India.

"God Almighty first planted a garden," Bacon said, and to make one is, I think, one of the most satisfying pleasures of life. All my staff brought contributions, flowering shrubs already a fair size, and flowers—canna especially—of all colours. I never dared ask where they got them, but I feel sure I was privy to several thefts, for they were dug up at dead of night and stealthily brought into my compound with the first streak of dawn! I grew superb dahlias from seed too, and these plants bore a charmed life, for time and again wild pig rooted them up at night and time and again I replanted them in the morning. Eventually, they flowered in battalions, clinging to life in a miraculous fashion and made a solid mass of brilliant colour all through the rains.

With the first heavy showers of the monsoon, the ground became alive with marvellous little insects made apparently of scarlet velvet and in shape and marking exactly like an Egyptian scarab, though actually I think they belonged to the spider caste, as they owned eight legs and therefore could not possibly be beetles. They varied in size from a pin's head to a threepenny piece; the native calls them "God's cows" or "Deogai", and when he has a fever he folds one up in a lump of sticky brown sugar and

swallows it whole! The Garhwali of the Himalayas does exactly the same thing with the friendly domestic bug; in his case the remedy is always so to speak on the spot, whereas his brother of the plains can only take his dose once a year, and that during the first week of the rains, for the little Deogai disappear as suddenly and mysteriously as they come.

Just outside our gates were two enormous mowha trees and in one of these a pair of lesser hornbills set up housekeeping one hot April. Having together discovered an old knot-hole and made the nest inside it, the hen went into purdah and the cock walled her up with a paste made of some sort of mud, very much the same as swallows use for their nests, leaving only a small hole through which she thrust her beak to be fed. The faithful mate carried on with this duty for weeks on end, and as we lay in bed outside the bungalow, he would pass over me with his curious undulating flight, beginning his labours at sunrise with a beak full of berries for the patient captive. It must have been nearly six weeks before the young were hatched, and although we saw them just after they had emerged from the nest, I was not lucky enough to see the parents actually breaking down the mud barrier round the hole. Ungainly and extraordinary things they were when first they came out; feathered, but with feeble wings, the heads disproportionately large for their gaunt bodies, the curious conk on the bill showing up clearly; not like a box, as in the greater hornbill, but rather as a sort of smaller bill lying just above the other.

In the other big tree, a family of green parrots had

built their nest, and a dhaman, or rat snake used to chivvy them every day, trying to get into the hollow after the eggs. We always knew when the snake was about, for the birds flew round screaming with fury, so we lay in wait for a chance to shoot it. I was in my office when the moment came; the orderly ran to my wife saying that he could actually see the dhaman lying on a branch, coiled up in the sun. The Mem sallied forth with the 12 bore, and she told me afterwards that only a slender fold was to be seen on the rim of the branch at least forty feet from the ground, but taking careful aim she fired, and the snake came tumbling down, cut neatly into two pieces.

A family of four karaits chose to lodge with us about this time and did not exactly add to our peace of mind. We came back from the Club one night to find the children's nurse pluckily beating one to pulp with the head of a golf club—it had emerged from under the side-board and was making tracks for the nursery when she saw it. Not long after this, one was discovered dangling from the veranda roof—it had managed to hang itself in some curious fashion and we found it quite dead. A third kept on playing hide-and-seek with me, also between the tiles of the veranda roof until, getting tired of the game, I cut it in two with a sharp knife.

The fourth nearly did for my wife, and gave us half an hour's keen excitement. We had been dining out and as I finished undressing and came into the dimly-lighted bedroom, a thin dark streak slithered in front of my foot and disappeared under a chest-of-

drawers. We collected all the hand lanterns we could (the rooms in all but the very large stations in India rely on oil for their lighting), and shutting all the doors proceeded to urge him forth with sticks. He whipped out, and in a trice was gone again into a shadowy corner before I could slay him.

He simply had to be killed before we dared get into bed and we hunted high and low. At length, my wife put her hand on the back of a little wicker couch to move it away from the wall and as she did so, I saw something flicker and raised the lantern higher. There, twined in and out of the cane was our friend the karait, the wicked little head with its bright eyes almost touching her fingers—surely as narrow an escape from death as anyone could wish to have! I thrashed at him and brought him down, and with his demise the whole family came to an end, and but for a large cobra which disputed a path with the cook one day and was blown to pieces with my shotgun by that resourceful man, and another which kept the sweeper from his midday nap in his house till I arrived and shot it, we had no more adventures with the tribe of colubrines.

Periodically, the Indian Government replaces old elephants beginning to be past their work by new ones, lately caught in the Kheddass of Assam. These have to be trained to their job, and it requires great patience and kindness on the part of the mahouts.

One of my Rangers, a Bengali named Dutt, who could speak Assamese, was sent to Rajahbhatkawar in Assam, to take over charge of a young female elephant and bring her all the way from there across

India by rail to where I was in Betul. She travelled in a specially built open truck, her mahout sleeping with her and when, after a journey of hundreds of miles, she at length arrived at Itarsi—the junction for Betul and distant about thirty miles from us—she was in a state of complete panic.

I went down to see her transferred from one train to another, but Dutt said he feared there would be trouble if we attempted to keep her any longer shut up, and so we decided she should do the last lap by road. I ordered my old elephant down to meet her so that she should have a friend to talk to, and when she arrived there ensued between them a great palaver with much handling of each other and internal rumblings, and the elder's mere presence seemed to soothe the newcomer. We called her Chanchal Piari, the Swift and Dear One, and she was not at this time more than seven feet high but black as ebony and round as a ball, so round in fact that the old mahouts appraising her in solemn conclave, decided that she must be about to produce a calf.

It takes eighteen months to create a baby elephant and not knowing exactly the state of affairs, we watched her tenderly month by month until the time came for her to be transferred to another Division. The word was passed on to the Forest Officer there and once more she became the object of great interest because a young elephant had so far never been seen in the Provinces and they are, of all young things, the most interesting. Time went on and on and nothing happened though she got fatter and fatter, and at last it was realised that she was only a youthful

maiden in the pink of plump perfection, and interest began, perforce, to wane.

While with us, she was tethered alongside the elder hathi for companionship and also to teach her manners. Often the baby would get restless and emit a piercing shriek. The watchful mahout knew what she wanted—exercise—and climbing to her back, the two would set off, round and round the bungalow at top speed, she with her tail stuck out like a ramrod and her trunk uplifted, screaming with energy and excitement. We could not at first let her out on the roads, for she shied at the least thing, but after a while she would follow behind the children's tonga on their evening drive, and before she left us had become quite well trained and kindly. Ten years afterwards she came back to me in Nimar, the baby roundness all gone; a tall, stately elephant, very black and muscular, staunch to tiger also, for I took her after a wounded animal and finished it off with a shot from her back.

So surely as one grows a creeper of any kind, so surely do small birds gravitate thereto. To keep the glare from my wife's "work-corner" in the veranda I induced some flowering climbers to grow there as a screen, and at once a pair of tailor-birds and sun-birds came and started building. The nests of both are perfectly wonderful works of art. The little sun-bird starts with a long tag of grass and cobweb which he attaches to a twig and at the end of it he hangs a little bag made of anything he can find, such as bits of cotton, fibre, mud, any scraps brushed out by the sweeper from the bungalow; all welded together with

cobwebs till it forms a material very much like thick reddish felt, the rough outer crust perfectly camouflaging the nest. Near the top of the bag is a wee hole leading to the beautifully soft and downy nest within, and over the hole, these marvellous builders contrive to put up a tiny "dripstone" or shelter, to prevent the rain reaching the minute babies inside.

The tailor-bird on the other hand makes his nest inside a large leaf folded over slipper shape, the nest being in the toe as it were; the sides of the leaf are actually drawn together with a lacing of hair or grass, each thread knotted as if by human fingers. I have often seen the little brown bird pulling hard at a hair he wanted in the tail of a pony; the animal kicked up viciously at each tweak to dislodge the bird, but he would not let go until a final tug had given him his sewing thread.

I doubt very much if many people will believe the following story, it sounds so tall; nevertheless it is absolutely true, I saw it happen myself. A tailor-bird was beginning to build in the veranda creeper close to where my wife used to sit every day working. The little chap grew to know her and would carry on his building quite peacefully within three or four feet of her chair. Quietly working, one day my wife suddenly became aware that something had alighted on her head, she could feel little clutching claws and a pull at her hair, and instantly realising what it was, sat absolutely still. At that moment I came to the bedroom door, which opened on to the veranda, and there I saw the little bird perched on my wife's head, tugging away hard at a hair. Unluckily, he saw me

and flew off, but I don't think he had time to get what he wanted, for he never made a second attempt as we hoped he would, and I found after the family had hatched out and flown that the "shoe" had been stitched together with horsehair after all.

My Korku forest-villagers were rather an asset when we wanted fish, for these people are themselves fond of it and have their own quaint and primitive ways of catching it. Murhel is an excellent fish if not too large, when he is apt to be muddy, and the parran, which has a curiously intelligent face and enormous cavalry moustaches, is also quite toothsome. When we were giving a dinner I used to send orders through the Range Officers that fish should be brought in, and on the day, would arrive a wild man of the woods with matted hair and beady eyes, bearing a flat basket made of plaited grass. This he would open, standing on one leg and looking ready to flee into the jungle any instant, and disclose inside a fine murhel, black and shiny, carefully wrapped in wet grass and still breathing after a journey of perhaps twenty miles or more.

The invaluable Katoo, who had been with me over twenty years as bearer and in these latter days lorded it over my kitchen, often kept a supply of living fish in a large balti of water to be used as we needed them. I could not understand why, one day in the rains, all my staff, orderlies included, began suddenly rushing across the compound at top speed, picking up objects from the ground, while kites and crows flew round about, now and again catching up some tit-bit I could not see. Any little thing is of interest to the

“jungli-wallah” so I went out to look. It appeared that Katoo had knocked over the balti and smashed it, and of course the water and the fish all flowed out into the garden. Presently the fish, being left high and dry, started off on their own, all in one direction, making, I suppose by instinct, for the nearest water. It is an absolute fact that at least twenty fish about six to eight inches long, were progressing by leaps and bounds over the grass, assisted of course to a certain extent by the rain, and some had already gone quite a fair distance by the time I arrived on the scene. The men were retrieving them as best they could but the crows snaffled a good many, and the rest had travelled some way before they were caught exhausted and returned to another balti.

There were very fine sambhur in Betul. These great deer can be shot in beats or by stalking; the first method is hardly a sporting one, and it is very rarely that a good head can be got in a beat save by a fluke; apart from which sambhur are exceedingly dangerous to beaters, for when driven they will break back and often badly injure anyone in their path.

The best way to tell if a good sambhur is in the vicinity is to examine their “fraying-stocks”. The stag in velvet wishes to fray off the covering which tickles and irritates as the horns beneath come to their full size. He therefore chooses a tree and bowing his head, rubs the “beam” or lower part of the antlers against its rough bark. In doing so, the points of the tines naturally strike against the tree higher up. One can therefore fairly well gauge the

length of horn from the distance between the actual "rub" and the marks of the tine points above it.

Round about the remains of the old Pindari Fort of Saonligarh, nearly two thousand feet high, I had seen several fresh rubs with indications of very fine antlers indeed. I made a mental note that there seemed every chance of bagging a good head in this part, so I started out one morning very early for a stalk.

It was quite dark when I set out, but star-clear, fresh and beautiful, and as I trudged up the side of the old fort, the dawn came up after me. It was almost light when I got to the crest of the hill and looking down, I saw on a ledge below the fort an old tank now almost dry, and lo! a large sambhur feeding on the green stuff growing round the edge of the tank. I suppose I moved a stone under my foot or somehow made a slight sound; at all events, he looked back, saw me, acknowledged my presence with the usual trumpet blast and started to gallop away. I fired as he went, and again as he was passing out of sight over the brim of the bank; there was a great crashing for a second or two in the jungle below, then all was still. I saluted the sun, which by now was turning all the land to gold and then went down after him. We found him lying in the grass quite dead, and his splendid horns, although not so long as those of others I have shot, measured forty-two inches and were a record in girth of beam, for they measured eleven and twelve inches respectively. The whole head was very massive and darkly corrugated, the tines very pointed and their tips white as ivory.

I tried for another just after this, and took a shot at him from a vantage point on the wall of the old fortress. Just as I pulled the trigger the masonry gave way under me, and I fell backwards with a crash on to the stone flooring behind me—and lost the sambhur.

The Bhangi river in Saonligarh was a good place for game also, and I was doing a quiet stalk up its banks one morning in the half light before dawn, and stopped idly to watch the grey mist rising in wisps from the surface of a long grey pool. Standing there I had a shock; I saw, coming towards me, what I thought was an enormous serpent, progressing up the pool in a series of loops. I rubbed my eyes—in the mist it looked gigantic; too good to be really true, I felt. It came steadily up the pool and then the picture changed. I saw it was a mother otter with five or six small ones following in exact “line ahead” behind. I watched, charmed by the liquid movement of their graceful bodies, and kept very still. The mother came abreast of me before she saw me, then she whistled sharply, all dived, and the whole family swam towards the bank and disappeared into their “holt”. Just as Virgil said: *Ex Africa semper aliquid novi*, so one might say of India: “There is always some new thing.”

I never played golf until I went to Betul—links are rare in the Central Provinces; but I was induced to start, and for a time played as if I had a lifetime of experience behind me. Then my troubles began. Dotted about all over the course were quite a number of very tall palm trees. Do what I would, they stalked

me like fate. I pulled, cut or sliced into them every time, or if I drove without lifting half a ton of soil, the sphere sailed serenely into the heavens and nested in the tuft of leaves growing at the top of each tree. There must be many there still. I offered inducement in the shape of annas and pais to the little dark chokras always on the watch, but after having once tried shinning up the prickly boles, they thought better of it and laughed at me instead.

I saw—and this is another tall story—a curious thing happen one day. The doctor had just played a good ball; it rose to exactly the right height and was sailing beautifully towards the “brown” when down from the skies swooped a kite, seized it in the air and flew off with it! I supposed the bird realised from the “feel” of it that it was no egg or any sort of provender, and he presently dropped it; but the doctor promptly played it where it lay and only took two for the hole instead of his usual four! This same doctor was an excellent shikarri and a fine shot. He laid out, while we were in Betul, the finest tiger with one exception that I have ever seen; it measured ten foot one inch between uprights and was a heavy, well-fed beast. The exception was a perfectly superb animal, shot by a policeman friend of mine; it was, I think, the only one he bagged during his service.

There was a very famous beat in Betul where many tiger had been shot in succession; it was a narrow ravine down which a small stream ran, and as there was practically no room for a tiger to break out, since both sides were always heavily “stopped”, he almost invariably took the centre path up the bank

of the stream which passed directly under a large tree wherein a gun was always posted. It was an almost certain death-trap, and although I did see one very bad shot miss an animal passing beneath him here, it was rarely that the tiger escaped.

The veteran I speak of had lived in and around this ravine for years and because of his great size and splendid head he was known as the "Purana Baba" (old father), and was a celebrity among the villagers round about. I admit I should have liked to have got him myself, but he was not for me. My policeman friend asked if I could get him a tiger, so I instructed the Range Officer to tie out baits in this ravine and wire up to my friend if there was a kill, on which the Ranger was to make the bundobust, as I had to go on with my touring in another part of the District. Rather to our surprise, for he was very wary, the Purana Baba did kill, and on receipt of the wire the policeman, W., and other friends, went down by road in a large yellow Buick belonging to one of the party. W., since the beat was arranged primarily for him, was posted in the old tree overlooking the path in the centre of the ravine. According to plan, the famous tiger appeared, and W. duly shot him.

My wife in Station saw the end of the story—she and the other wives were playing bridge at the Club, waiting for the shikarris to return with the spoil. They saw the lights of the powerful car a long way off and rushed out to the Club entrance to meet it. My wife said, as it drove in slowly under the trees, there was quite a gasp of amazement; the lights shone on an enormous tiger loaded on the front and

bonnet of the car. He was taken off and measured between uprights and he taped ten foot three inches. He was a most massive animal, his paws the size of a small plate and the shoulders loaded with muscle. Drinks, congratulations, and excited talk went on for some time, and he was killed over and over again at dinner!

Just to illustrate the beginner's proverbial luck, here is what happened to C., the owner of the yellow Buick aforesaid.

I took him out to a good place, to get him a tiger if possible, and we had a beat. He was sitting about fifty yards from me on a small hill and I was posted below it. The beat came on evenly but nothing broke out my way and I wondered what might be passing above in his direction, when suddenly I heard four shots fired in quick succession. I thought he was probably pumping in lead quite needlessly, so I shouted out: "Steady on! Don't blow the skin to pieces!" "Skin be blowed!" his voice came back quite cracked with excitement, "I've got three!" And sure enough; I found him dancing among the slain; a tigress and two almost full grown cubs. He had killed the cubs with a right and left, reloaded, and used two bullets for the tigress. Not a bad effort, and all three were very nice skins.

Soon after this came for me, a real adventure. I was in camp alone in the Saonligarh Range, and a tiger killed twice on the banks of the Bhangi river. I had no decent shikarri like old Antu of blessed memory, and could only rely on the local Gonds for help. I couldn't rake up any beaters either, so I sat

over the most likely of the two kills. At about midnight a terrific storm came up and the wind almost blew me out of the machan, so I called up the men and got out of it. Next morning I had to march early, but I thought I would go on the way to have a look at the kill and see if the tiger had come to it after I left. I took a small Gond with me and we started for the place.

The river lay on my right; we walked down the ledge overhanging it towards the kill; to my left a bank sloped up covered with scrub jungle. I was—and am—rather deaf, consequently I heard nothing at all, but ambled peacefully along—the Gond trotting behind—thinking vaguely that it was perhaps as well I had brought my rifle with me, and at the thought, I stopped and loaded it.

The little devil of a Gond at this juncture, heard the tiger growling as we neared the kill, and without a word skipped down over the ledge and legged it in double quick time across the river to the opposite bank, from whence he watched the subsequent proceedings. I never saw him go, and I was almost up to the kill when suddenly a roar burst out full in my face and I saw the tiger rushing down the bank to my left, coming straight for me.

He paused above me not twenty feet away—magnificent fellow that he was in his anger!—and we looked steadily at each other while the thought flashed through my mind that I was certainly for it this time! I raised the rifle and kept him covered, the while he growled and cursed at me. I said to myself: “If he comes another inch, I *must* fire, but

though I'll kill him, he'll roll down on top of me and get me first." And I waited his first move before I pulled the trigger.

I stared, it seemed to me, for hours, into his furious yellow eyes, and shivers rippled down my spine; then, inch by inch, still glaring, still coughing fury, he drew back and suddenly rearing up, swung round and was gone with a bound into the jungle.

Thankfully, I mopped my streaming brow and departed at speed in search of the Gond; when I turned round, there was the faithless little brute signalling to me across the river, grinning from ear to ear! When I reached him I said: "You swine, why did you run away?" Said he with an innocent smile: "Sahib, I heard the tiger growling and I was much afraid, so I ran; and when I saw your Honour raise the rifle, I said: 'The Sahib is a dead man if he fires,' and I looked away. But," and here the smile broadened seraphically, "your Honour is alive, and behold, the tiger is gone! Shall we also go on now?" Stifling a wild desire to kick him, we proceeded.

CHAPTER XIII

BETUL CONTINUED

My Chief with his wife and the E.s, his brother and sister-in-law, as well as other friends of ours, came to us one Christmas camp. He came "mit" camels, as a cart bundobust was out of the question on a very long tour such as his. Camels wear a certain glamour with the chiming bells on their feet—at night the silvery "clash, clash" of their progress into or out of camp fits in pleasantly with the quiet night, powdered with marvellous stars, the glow of the camp fire, the murmur of talk where the servants sit, puffing clouds of smoke into the still air. But in other respects they are loathsome animals, and what with their long bobbing necks, their legs which wave about and slide madly if the ground is the least bit damp, their bubbly swelling tongues and their appalling odour—they frightened my elephant and horses into fits and I hated the sight of them.

The first beat we had for tiger after the party had all assembled, turned out to be rather amusing. The E.s wished to sit together in one machan, because they "had a plan", and "knew each other's play" as well in shooting as at bridge, but as it was the first time they had tried for tiger, I thought a machan

apiece would be more likely to ensure success. However, nothing would move them.

From where I sat I could see the beaters proceeding smoothly up the nala, and presently emerged three tigers, walking solemnly one behind the other in quite unhurried fashion. They crossed over to the E.s' tree, and I waited for the withering fire which should have burst out at once. After a prolonged pause they certainly loosed off several shots, but the animals scattered quite unscathed in all directions, one rushing past me, which I fired at and wounded slightly, and I regret to say that although we followed it up next day, I never got this tiger nor was it ever seen again.

The next minute a second tiger burst into view going like smoke, and the very excited lady sitting with me, shouted: "Look, here's another coming!" in such a piercing voice, that the animal was just swerving off when I put in a bullet and he rolled under our tree like a shot rabbit. The third beast broke out and got clean away, and after getting down I went to inquire what had happened to the E.s and why their "plan", had given out at the crucial moment. I found them looking very rueful and it was hardly surprising that they had missed the whole bang lot, because it appeared their custom was solemnly to count "one, two, three!" in a perfectly audible voice and then loose off—and of course by the time they had finished counting, the game was moving smartly in the opposite direction—and very natural too!

Mrs. E. however, was a good small game shot, and

we all used to go out in the evenings and return with quite a fair bag of partridge, quail and hare for the pot.

On one such night my wife walked out to meet us about two miles from camp. It was hot, and she sat down in the grass beside the track opening in front on to a little clearing where low plum bushes grew, heavy at this time with the small acid reddish fruit. She sat, smoking a cigarette, idly listening to the hum of insect life, when by degrees it seemed the hum became more definite and swelled to a loud murmur, and she sat up in some alarm and looked about her.

Almost at once there rolled out from behind one of the bushes in front, a large black sloth bear! The bear-people are rather blind and quite certainly deaf, and my wife rose quietly and slipped behind a tree. He never heard her, but went on questing and humming from bush to bush; tearing down the branches and gobbling up the fruit at top speed and presently, to her relief, rolled out of sight again. Instantly she set off running as hard as she could down the road to camp, and never stopped till she had put some considerable distance behind her! We passed that way soon afterwards, but he had gone—probably to fresh pastures, for bear will spend whole nights stuffing themselves with plums, gobbling and squabbling till the rising sun warns them to get back to their lairs for the day.

Living thus, a peaceful happy life in the forests, it seemed strange and terrible to think of Europe at war and our splendid fellows losing their lives—and I could do nothing. They took the younger men of my

Service, but the middle-aged were left to run the show, and I was unluckily of those who could only "stand and wait". However, there were two other officials in the Station who for reasons of age or health were in like case with me. We were all on the strength as an Auxiliary Force or some such thing, and had therefore to be drilled and smartened up. So to that end a Sergeant was sent to Betul once a month to put us three through our paces, and to see in addition, if we knew how to fire a rifle!

I was tall and stoutish, the second man was immensely tall and very thin, the third very small and with such a slender waist that, no sooner had he buckled on his regulation belt than it fell down over his knees to his feet. To see the three of us standing to attention must have been too funny for anything, and still funnier to watch me trying to efface my stout form behind an ant-hill on the Station maidan, while the long man dragged his length to cover, piece by piece, and the small man scurried to shelter behind a small stone, urged on by the burly Sergeant who, in a powerful Lancashire accent, adjured us to: "Come doon with a roosh," as if we were a considerable force about to deploy like a wolf on the fold. Excellent fellow that he was, he only enlivened us for about two months and then departed to a more congenial job, while another and younger man came to complete our training, being in his turn sent to the Front before many weeks had passed.

I had heard from a friend that the Indian State of Bhopal wanted a Forest Officer about this time, so it occurred to me to make inquiries, and as it seemed

wiser to do this on the spot, my wife and I went up there for a few days in October, 1918.

Bhopal is in Hindustan, that is in India proper, as distinct from the Central Provinces and the Deccan and the Southern lands beyond them. The boundary is the Nerbada River, which for many miles washes the tall cliffs of the Vindhya Hills. These form a natural partition between the plateau above and the plain below, and it was through and over them that the forces of Akbar and later of his descendants had to make their way when they set out to subdue the various Independent States of the Deccan.

Bhopal is a Mohammedan State, though the population is largely Hindu; at the time of our visit a very famous woman was the Sovereign, as had been her mother before her. It seems likely too that the fourth generation will give a Begum to the throne, for the present Nawab has, I believe, no son, but only several daughters. All the visitors to the State in our time were entertained as personal guests of the Begum; a carriage and pair of horses was always at call, and there was in connection with these, a curious custom prevailing. We could not at first understand why the steeds so constantly broke into a hand-gallop, but presently realised that they were not allowed to walk up hills as horses do with us, but as soon as they felt the least incline they dashed wildly off and never paused till they reached the top. There they were allowed to draw breath before proceeding on their way. The reason for this was, it appeared, that all the palaces and nobles' houses were built on heights, so that a slow and stately walk up hill would not suit

the idea of kingly progress at all—hence the gallant charge, to which we began to get accustomed after a time.

I soon found that it would be most unwise to take on a post in the State; an Indian had been in charge, and things were left in a very muddled and unsatisfactory condition, so I gave up the idea altogether. But H.H. The Begum gave me an interview which was in itself most interesting. She was known all over the world as a ruler sound and loyal; well read and full of knowledge of all kinds; she had also written a clever book of her own life and times, and was altogether shrewd but kindly and pleasant withal. Of course she was strictly purdah, so she received me in the white palace sitting behind a lace curtain, but now and again in the cross light I caught a glimpse of a small, stout figure, talking energetically with all her tiny person, hands waving to emphasise something she had said. She would flow along in English, quick but not too good; then break into her native tongue and chatter faster than ever. My wife, however, saw her face to face, and received the impression of kindly good humour in the rather heavy, dark countenance which lighted up with quick smiles as she talked. Authority also, for as the Mem was taken into an inner room deep in the palace, the little old lady pattered along in her loose slippers, giving orders to all and sundry as she went, twitching her veil from time to time as it threatened to slide right off her head.

Finally they arrived in a very large marble paved and pillared room where a number of charming

fairies sat about, threading beads or doing a little sewing for the soldiers at the Front, and then appeared with two little girls, a perfectly beautiful vision; the wife of the Begum's youngest son, he who is now the ruling Nawab. My wife was fascinated by her. She was tall and beautifully made, with a complexion as fair as a magnolia flower, red lips, and very large dark eyes. She wore the orthodox trousers of satin and an embroidered bodice; a light green gauze veil just shaded her charming head and her jewels were staggering—huge rubies cut *en cabochon*, strung with large pearls between, and she spoke English perfectly.

As it was very hot D. herself was wearing a frock of some thin stuff with transparent sleeves. The two little kidlings were vastly intrigued with this and kept on fingering it. Finally one remarked to her lovely mother in a shrill little voice: "Dekho! ye Mem-sahib machar-dan painta hai!" (Look! the lady is wearing a mosquito net!) They chuckled with glee, and the princess-mother remarked in perfect English: "Oh, my darling, I don't know what this lady will think of you!" D. said the charm of her was like the perfume of a flower; the only thing that marred the picture was the fact that both small children were dressed in ugly straight down cotton frocks, instead of their own naturally charming raiment.

At this time the Begum's two elder sons were alive but in poor health. The second prince was a great hunter and I saw some magnificent trophies of his shooting, beautifully mounted, but unfortunately not well cared for. The famous record sambhur measuring fifty-two and a half inches was in this collection;

a lovely head, not very heavy but symmetrical and well balanced, very different from the next longest, forty-eight inches, shot by a man I knew. This was just like a bent out hairpin, immensely long but thin, and the "two on top" were very small tines.

Sometime after this both elder princes died, and eventually H.H. The Begum abdicated in favour of her youngest son, between whose age and that of his brothers lay a gap of many years. She has herself now passed into the shades; one of the great characters among the rulers of India.

Our week's holiday in this pleasant place soon came to an end, but not before rumours began to circulate of some great "bimari" (illness) which was affecting Upper Hindustan. Then came definite news of the influenza epidemic which by now, was spreading over the whole world, and we returned to Betul to find that it had taken a firm grip on the whole Province, and Betul itself was suffering terribly.

Every man, woman and child in our compound went down with it including myself and the two elder children; D. and the small baby alone escaped it. There were funerals in the bazaar every day, and the poor dead lay by the roadside in many places, for there was none to bury them. Villages were almost wiped out; only infants and the very old escaped. The crops were left standing all round the homesteads; there were no husbandmen left to reap and carry them. The desolation was complete and heart-rending. I bought as much rum as our Club and the local bazaar could provide, and we made a marvellous brew from that and various drugs and doled it out to

all who came for help—and they did come in dozens. The good spirit put new heart into the poor things—for the Indian has a dreadful habit of turning his face to the wall at the least provocation and refusing to live—and others came from miles round to carry bottles of the “potion” away to their brethren. Although I have not the statistics by me, I think I am right in saying that in India itself millions, rather than thousands, died during this time.

Life and death hold hands in the East, and if a man die in the morning he must be buried the same day before sundown.

The Civil Surgeon in Betul who had miraculously escaped the great epidemic, came by a very tragic, and in some ways mysterious end, not long after this. His Inspector-General had come in to see the hospital and he and ourselves were to dine at the Civil Surgeon's house that evening. The doctor, after going down to the hospital to see, one imagines, that everything was in order for the morrow's inspection, arrived about five o'clock at the Club for his usual evening tennis. He was a fine-looking man, tall and broad-shouldered with amazing iron-grey hair growing in ripples very low down on his forehead; he was a good tennis player also and a good shikarri. He played little and said he wasn't feeling too good, and went home very early, repeating that they would expect us for dinner at the usual hour. We begged him to put off the whole thing, but he laughed at the notion, and urged that we were to come along at half-past eight unless we heard otherwise.

No word came from him or his wife so, feeling

rather dubious about it, we set off in the I.G.'s car at the appointed time. Arriving, we found the stage set for tragedy. The poor man was in agony of some terrible kind; sweat stood on his pale and suffering face, yet no doctor had been sent for—either the I.G. himself or even one of the Indian Assistant Surgeons. Dinner was out of the question; we could only stand round him asking for details, and he could tell us nothing. "Was the pain in the left side and arm?" the I.G. begged to know. "No, it was all over him; in no one definite place." There was a thorough examination, yet the state of the heart told nothing; it was apparently sound. Then in the midst of his torture, he flung off all covering and paced the room, frantic, yet seemingly full of life. I don't think any one of the doctors dreamed that the worst could happen, he still seemed far too vital; yet all the while the tearing pain persisted and no morphia had the slightest effect upon him. At eleven o'clock coffee was prepared for us, for we had had nothing for hours, and the I.G. went in with the doctor's wife to have some, leaving my wife and me with the patient, who for the moment seemed a little more easy. Hardly had they left the room than the end came. He struggled up in bed and with a cough, fell back in my arms—dead.

Shocks like these take years off one's life; and to this day I don't believe the actual cause of his death was ever known, but the appalling suddenness and the sense of being so utterly helpless, even with medical skill, to save him, left us all literally stunned.

In all the four years of war, we could not, of course,

get passages home, but just before Christmas 1919 I was told we might reasonably hope to get away the following June, so as a last celebration we arranged a Christmas camp with friends in Betul.

There is always a risk at these times; one never knows quite what a bullet will do or where it will go, and really we got quite a kick out of two beats for tiger. I had a friend, an engineer whom I had known for years; he had never shot a tiger and was madly keen to do so; being an Irishman, with all the happy-go-lucky instincts of that nation, the beginner's luck would surely be his, we felt. And it was. He was using a 12 bore, firing lethal bullets, and I remember he started off for the beat, liting a trifle on his feet and singing some naughty little French song or other.

A tigress came out and he put in a bullet, which, according to him, obviously hit her fair and square, for she blenched and snarled. But she left, going all out and we got down, feeling that the morrow held all sorts of trying possibilities in the shape of following up and so forth. We were poking about, and "Palm", as he was always called, was loudly repudiating the suggestion that he had missed the animal—"Damn it, my dear chap, I hit her in the 'beche-me' (in the middle), what more do you want!"—when suddenly one of the local shikarris gave a cry and picked up from a little depression in the ground, a lethal bullet still hot, with half the metal shot away and two of the steel flanges exposed. I said: "Well, anyway, old man, you couldn't have hit her; the bullet must have struck something and fallen short." He groaned, and we dismally returned

to camp, where he dropped the bullet into D.'s lap as she listened to the story of his woes.

Feeling it, D. said: "That's rather queer. It seems furry somehow. Let me look at it with the magnifying-glass." It was brought and she looked at it in the sunlight and turning to us said excitedly: "Well, it must have hit the tigress and perhaps gone through her; there's yellow hair caught in one of the flanges." And when we looked there was certainly quite a number of hairs, and hope sprang up in Palm's eyes, and he was for going out at once, just as the sun was setting, to see if he could find his quarry dead in the jungle. When morning came, we started off—I can't say I was hopeful, but there was just a chance we should find her. The beginner's luck held, as it nearly always does, and forty yards from Palm's machan we found the lady stiff and cold, the single shot having pierced her from side to side. The bullet had evidently passed through the vital parts, and then had quietly dropped and buried itself in the surface of the ground where we found it. Palm afterwards, had it made into a pendant which the Mem wore on a bracelet for some years.

His next attempt was not so good and nearly landed us in horrid trouble. A big tiger broke out in front of him, and true to his principles and convictions that the "beche-me" was the vital spot, he put in a shell at close range, and folding his arms smiled a large smile of happy certainty upon me, when I came wrathfully up to his machan to say that the beast had gone away wounded and that we were in for trouble next morning. "My dear chap," said he benignly.

"It hasn't gone far; I tell you I hit it bang in the middle, you'll find it dead out there." And he waved a paw vaguely in the direction of the shivering "stops" who had just come off their trees and told me a very different story.

Next morning we mustered all guns and prepared for the fray. There was myself and Palm, J., a policeman friend, and two of his Indian Inspectors whom we armed with my wife's 12 bore and Mrs. J.'s small rifle. We left our respective wives sitting under a big tree on the wide fireline which passed through the jungle at this point; just behind the trees on which the machans of yesterday's beat were still tied. D. told me what happened afterwards.

It was about ten o'clock when our "army" embarked on the stalk, and the two women to pass the time, decided, after an hour's vain and anxious waiting for a distant shot, to have a spot of breakfast. Some little way off a small stream cut across the fireline, and while they were sipping their coffee they noticed a couple of Forest Guards looking about on the ground, finally calling up old Bola, the sais, to take part in the conclave. Presently, one of the guards stepped up and salaamed, looking, D. thought, a little disturbed. "What is it?" she asked in Hindi, and he replied: "Your honour, there is fresh blood on the banks of the nala there, and footprints of some big 'jarnwar' (animal) as well. We think the wounded tiger must have passed there and be lying up somewhere in the jungle close behind you."

Both women looked at each other, but to their credit they managed to put down their cups without

rattling them on the saucer, and it must be remembered I had given their guns to the Inspectors in our party, and teaspoons were hardly adequate! "Atcha," said D., squirming inwardly. "Tell Bola to take the horses as far up the line as he can and go with them yourselves. Doubtless the Sahibs will return directly." When he had departed Mrs. J. said: "There is only one thing to be done, if he comes out you spring for the highest branch of this tree, and I'll try for the other!" And they grinned ruefully, knowing the thing impossible. So there they sat absolutely still, fearing almost to breathe, while the time dragged on and there was still no sign and no shot from us.

As for our brave force; we had pushed on through the jungle after the trail for miles, until we came to a hill-barrier, and here we lost the blood altogether. On the other side lay, I knew, a deep valley of almost impenetrable forest, and as it would have been impossible to track on in such country, we finally turned home—Palm's crest drooping sadly, for he was to leave the next day and the "brace" he hoped for could not now materialise. When eventually we emerged on the fireline I was amazed to see D. step delicately, like Agag, across it, and for the moment, when I heard her tale, I wondered whether there could be any truth in it. Then I remembered the blood trail we had followed so far, and thankfully laughed loud and long and went to inspect the signs which had so scared them all. It turned out that a panther had undoubtedly, only a few hours before, made a kill on the banks of the little stream; its pugs and the blood of the victim were quite enough to

frighten the guards into the belief that the tiger himself was near. But I have often thought since, that, probably in all India, no two women could have felt so utterly helpless and scared as did D. and her friend for the best part of four hours that morning.

Owing to the kindness of a friend in Bombay, I managed to secure passages for us all in June, and two days before we were due to leave we had the rather unusual and weird experience of racing the actual break of the monsoon over Betul. The bursting of the rains was just about due, though up to that very morning the clouds had shown no signs of actually banking up, and we felt secure in taking the children for a long drive in the car of the "Captān Sahib" (District Superintendent of Police), who was doing some inspection of his distant thanas before the rains broke. When we were still at least ten miles away, although the sky above us was blue and clear, there was a sense of storm impending, for it was terribly hot and not a breath of air stirred even the smallest leaf, and from a clear point on the road we saw the whole of the west densely black—a sable curtain rimmed with silver, drawn tense and hard across the arc of the blue heaven. "The monsoon," I said. "Look at that!" It was, however, still some distance away but moving very swiftly, and we felt that at all costs we must get home, for a colossal tempest was evidently about to break.

We all got into the car and hammered along the bad road at full speed, the children naturally all agog, not realising what we might be in for. On came the storm, sweeping momentarily nearer; the mutter of

the thunder became a growl, and in the black heart of the great cloud lightning danced and flickered. There was not a break in its surface from north to south, and it was most weird to see the darkness relentlessly engulfing the serene blue of the sky above us—and still we tore along the road and it became a matter of minutes, seemingly, before the crash was upon us. The lightning flickering in small points of fire made me think of the spear-heads of some huge advancing host.

A mile to go—and the cloud edge almost overhead! Push on harder still and we may just do it! It was immediately above us as the compound gates showed just ahead; one last effort; and just as we drove in and drew up under the porch of the bungalow, the heavens opened in a sheet of lightning and the monsoon broke in lashing rain.

CHAPTER XIV

NIMAR

WE had an amazing start to the voyage home. No sooner had we embarked than a strike developed among the waiters and no evening meal was forthcoming, either for the children on board or for the grown ups. Hardly was it settled, and the ship getting under weigh out of harbour, than the entire staff of stokers and firemen downed tools and refused to work. This could not be settled at all, so eventually many of the passengers volunteered to go and shovel coal, and thus we proceeded; through the huge monsoon seas at half the usual rate of knots, the ship thrusting her nose deep into the towering waves which rolled towards her in solemn procession, and flung her stern high into the air, while the propeller raced and drummed over green hollows and the vessel thrilled to the intense vibration.

Again we made for the West Country, that most beautiful part of all England, and settled once more in Somerset for my leave; and here we left the young family in school when the time came for me to go out again. As I mentioned before; after leaving Chanda I had been sent to Nimar for some months, and I liked the district so much that I was very cheered to

find, when once more we reached Bombay, that I had been posted there for what must now, in any case, be the last few years of my service.

Nimar is the most westerly Division of the Central Provinces. On the north it marches with the Indian States of Indore and Dhar; to the east the Districts of Hoshangabad and Betul are its boundaries, and on the south it overlooks Berar. The country is very varied, for first there are the wild and rugged places where the hills stand heavily clothed with forest, and below them are the wide stretches of cultivated plains; and here, I remember, with what delight, I one day came upon several fields of standing corn, golden under the blue sky. Again there are the river valleys rich in trees and wild life, for the two holy rivers Nerbada to north and Tapti in the south, form almost natural boundaries; complete, save for the Chandgarh Range of volcanic hills which overlap the Nerbada, and the Hathi hills beyond the Tapti river which really are but the southern arm of the larger Satpura mountains.

The Tapti rises in Betul, and the Brahmins say it was created by the Sun to protect himself from his own "tāp" or heat, hence the name, hence also the river's immemorial sanctity. One sees the lie of the land best on the journey up from Bombay, for, on leaving the junction of Bhusawal, the train thunders over the big girder bridge spanning the Tapti at this point, and enters immediately the actual valley of the great river, where to the west the Hathi hills stand up and on the east towers the vast purple wall of the Satpuras.

As dawn creeps over the land and the train draws towards Khandwa, the headquarters of Nimar, there suddenly appears, as if flung down on the plain, a huge buttressed hill, grey, gaunt and rugged. It is the hill fort of Asirgarh, famous since time and the written word first existed for its story of fighting, slaughter and diplomacy under many rulers; for this great stronghold carries the very history of India on its scarred grey shoulders, and even now, alone and sleeping in the sun, is yet the epitome of romance and charm.

When, on my first sojourn in Nimar, I arrived at Khandwa, it was early in November. The rain had fallen heavily for three days, a most unusual thing, and a grey and sodden mist hung over all the land; I thought it the most God-forsaken hole I had ever come to. But I found three cheery men in the Station just getting ready to go out on a foray to Khanapur Beria, thirty miles up the Indore line, where there was a tank much favoured of duck which at this season should have already begun to congregate, and as they had sent tents on ahead, I settled to join them. The tank was large and the duck, in small numbers as yet, were wild and wary to a degree, and we found it impossible to come within two hundred yards of them, for at the first shot they were off and skimming round in circles, melting and reforming high up in the heavens, while we stood below gazing after them in vain.

There was, I remember, that evening, a soft yellow twilight sky when I went in to have a bath, leaving the others outside at tea. I was peacefully splashing,

when suddenly the whole tent was lighted up as if by a magnesium flare, and the others set up a shout of "come on out! Look at the meteor!—the meteor!"—and almost at once there followed a heavy boom. I huddled on a garment and rushed out, but too late to see the enormous ball of fire, which, they told me, suddenly appearing in the sky, had fallen to earth with the dull thud I had heard. But it had left behind it a long dark streak with a red and glowing centre line, as perfectly straight as if painted on the sky. Afterwards the centre glow faded and the streak turned black, and as currents of air caught it, it wavered and melted into light smoke wreaths and finally vanished altogether. Later R., the mathematician of the party, worked out by signs and wonders the probable distance from our camp of the spot where the meteorite must have fallen—roughly sixty miles to the west, he thought—and we sent a letter to the *Pioneer* about it, signed by the four of us. Not long afterwards, another letter appeared from a resident in Indore, saying that the fireball had actually fallen in that State and, what was more, as nearly as possible the exact distance from our camp as had been calculated by R.

For many years I had been careful to avoid shooting a tigress, since one dreadfully tragic day in Chanda when I fired at what looked like a massive young tiger and found it was a tigress with six cubs in utero. The unwitting slaughter of these little things, all perfectly formed and within a day or two of birth, gave me such a jar that I was always on the watch to avoid doing anything of the kind again.

But, in Nimar, I had a marvellous old shikarri, by name Kanhai, and he was always very keen to get me a tiger, and being camped one day at Malor, he came and told me of a kill in the nala nearby. "Khudawan," said he, with joined hands, "burra bagh hai." (O thou blessed of God, behold there is a large tiger!) At which I rejoiced and trotted off to inspect the pugs.

Now the pug marks of a tigress are slightly longer than those of a tiger and not quite so large, and looking about, I failed to see the prints of the "burra bagh" but only of what I considered to be a tigress, and with these were some very small ones which looked to me suspiciously like those of her young. I said: "I'm afraid this tiger is a batchi-walli baghan—a tigress with cubs, Kanhai." "Oh no," said the old devil, who always had one eye on the reward he got if I shot the tiger. "It is a perfectly good bagh; never have I told a lie to your Honour on such a matter." And he went off to prepare the machan. I duly went to sit up, and after the men had left me I heard in the distance the familiar "aughrr" away up the ravine, and I said to myself: "I was right; it is a lady, and she has a family. Kanhai will certainly get a roasting!" and I sat on quietly and waited her coming.

The call came closer as she moved down the little nala towards the kill, warning her cubs away or frightening other jarnwars. A lovely moon had risen and very shortly she appeared, stopping every now and then to look back over her shoulder as if fearful lest the children had followed her. A pool of water

lay at the junction of the small nala with the main stream bed, and she lightly bounded across it, and came on to her kill not more than twelve feet away below me. I watched her for awhile, quietly feeding; saw her tear off great pieces of meat and swallow them, and so watching, grew very thirsty myself, for it was a hot, still night.

A canvas water bottle with a brass spout hung beside me on the tree; I tilted it to let some water into my mouth. It ran in rather quickly, causing me to "gargle" and I looked down expecting to see the tigress vanish. She merely glanced up, however, and apparently taking me for an owl or some weird thing, got hold of the kill and pulled at it hard. The straw rope was tough and would not part, so she lifted the carcass bodily and moved it round, then once more sitting down went on peacefully feeding as before. After a good meal she got up, stretched herself, and strolled away to the pool and there crouched like a cat at a saucer; I could hear the quiet lap, lap, in the silence. She drank deep, then bounding back over the pool once more, went slowly up the nala to her cubs. Doubtless she then suckled them, and the whole family slept contentedly until the morning, when the rising sun would wake them and drive them into deeper shadow. When Kanhai appeared with the men at my call, I said: "You naughty old man, it was a batchi-walli all the time; what about it, eh?" and he, with slanting eyes and humbly joined hands deprecated the very idea that he could have made any mistake.

There is a charming spot in the Chandgarh Range

called Kanheri. It is a camping ground on the banks of a small clear stream, of which the source is a tiny pool set in a clearing hard by among big trees. The curious thing is that there is a very definite ebb and flow twice a day in the pool, while the water is almost hot, and this must be with an internal heat all its own, for the pool lies in shadow for hours together and the sun seldom reaches it directly. Also the water is heavily charged with lime and the stream, flowing between enormous buttressed kahu trees, drops down into the ravine leaving a succession of pools at varying heights, and here the maiden hair fern and small rockplants become petrified by the action of the lime and the pools are fringed with grey fairy forms. The little stream varies in height twice a day with the rising and falling of its source the pool, and eventually runs into the big Kanheri nala along whose banks grow masses of wild oleander, both pink and white, a joy to the eye in a land where wild flowers are so few and far between; they are actually the origin of the name Kanheri, itself.

One season, it so happened that the Felling Coupe of the year lay between these two streams, and I was out one evening, marking up the trees with my Range Officer. We had finished work about sundown, and as the men left me to return to camp, I picked out a minute Mohammedan guard very keen on shikar, gave him my rifle to carry, and we went on down the Kanheri nala intending to come back round the hill.

We had not long parted from the men when, casually looking across the nala, I saw a tiger gazing at me through the green cover on the other side. I

grabbed the rifle from the guard and fired below the head, as nearly as possible where I thought the base of the neck should be. He gave a lurch backward, but the smoke from the black powder of my .577 rifle hung on the still evening air and prevented my taking a second shot. The guard then said: "Lug gaia, Hazur; it is wounded." "I know that," said I, "but where the deuce is it?" He replied that he could see it, so I said: "Very well, I'll hold the rifle, you shall sight it from behind and tell me when I'm on the mark, and I'll pull the trigger." I knelt down and we proceeded on these lines; once more the big rifle roared into the blue, waking a thousand vibrations in the still forest, but not a sign from the tiger. Again the little man declared he could see the yellow fur, so on that, I gave him the rifle and told him to fire it. He sat down, sighted it carefully, pulled the trigger—and promptly fell over backwards, his legs waving in the air, at the kick of it! The tiger, however, remained commendably silent, and as it was getting late and the river bank at this point lined with dense sambalu thickets, it did not seem advisable to hunt up the corpse—if any—so we returned to camp.

As I was drinking my evening peg by the fire, the Range Officer and some men came up to ask what I had shot. While I was telling them I had fired at a tiger and hit it, a very tall, lean old gaoli, who had just brought the evening milk, said: "Sahib, tell me where the tiger fell and I will go and fetch it now—at this moment," and he stood up in the firelight. "How can you find the tiger, when not even I myself, armed with a rifle, would go alone at this hour?"

said I. "Sahib," said the old man, "I have six cow-buffaloes and they are afraid of no tiger, dead or living. Also, with them I am quite safe by night or day. To prove this, send someone with me to show me the place, and I will drive in my kine and find your tiger whether he be dead, or alive and fighting." And he made as if to stride off at once. I said: "Friend, we will go together with the kine in the early morning, but I risk no man's life on a pitch dark night."

So it fell out that while I was eating chota hazri next morning, I heard bells approaching, and presently six fine cow-buffaloes moved, grazing, into camp, and the old man came up and salaamed. We moved off together and I made him drive the buffs quietly along to a place where two streams met, and when I was opposite to the spot where I had last seen the tiger I signalled "In there!" and he and his buffs dived in. Presently I heard him utter a queer cry, as if he had been hurt, and then the buffs set up a tremendous roaring and began careering about with their tails in the air. I couldn't see the man at all and for one awful moment I thought the tiger had got him and the buffs were quite demoralised. Then suddenly I saw him appear, climbing on to a rock or stump of a tree, and from there he grinned at me and called out "bagh hai", and almost at once a big striped form was tossed into the air on the horns of the bellowing, furious cows and all was over. But I feared the body was being battered to pulp, so I yelled: "Call off your beeves! They will damage the skin!" and at the word, the old chap got down among them, gave a

long-drawn whistle, and whacking right and left with his long stick, drew them off just like a pack of obedient dogs.

Crossing over, I found the bullet had struck the base of the tiger's neck in front, and had raked the whole length of the body, probably causing immediate death. But the gaoli was not pleased with me. "Sahib," said he, "the skin should have been stripped and pegged ere this; we have wasted the whole night in sleep when these, my cows"—and here he laid either hand on two dark flanks, while the china blue eyes and sweeping horns turned to him as if comprehending, "could have brought me safely to the corpse ere darkness fell." And he laughed and salaamed.

The northern boundary of this same block is a wide ridge which marches with Dhar State and drops into the Kanheri nala. Along the ridge and in the centre of the fireline which tops it, is an enormous pit about sixty feet across and of unplumbable depth. This, known as Katakua, I have always believed to be the blow-hole of an extinct volcano, and it is said that there is another equally large along the same ridge further up in Dhar. Katakua had always a considerable body of water at the bottom of it, and natives swore that if bran were thrown down, it would appear soon after in the Kanheri stream three miles away. Its rocky sides are the home of hundreds of pigeon, which come from miles round to roost and breed there. So numerous are they that, as one comes up to the rim of the shaft, they seem to roar up at sight of the intruder; the effect of course, of their

loud cooing reverberating from side to side of the huge dark cavern. There is also a continual wheeling and fluttering, a constant coming and going round the great pit, as the birds fly off to feed, and return to shelter; nor does it cease at all until twilight puts an end to their labours.

As I came up to the shaft one day with my Chief, I laughingly said: "You'll be some shot if you can hit one of those birds skimming over the tops of the trees around to drop like plummets into the cavern." He snorted and said: "Rubbish! I suppose I can hit a pigeon, it ought not to be difficult." I said: "Yes, so can I, but you try these, they are very different from rising birds. Watch these dropping, like stones into water." And he fired half a dozen shots straight away and never hit a bird, and I knew he was a good man with a gun for we had often shot together.

Not far from this place was a bamboo glade, known as the abode of the Kala Deo or Black Godling, and all around lay great tumbled masses of smoky rocks, looking as if they had been twisted and subjected to great heat. In a cave on the side of a hill, among the green and feathery bamboos, the rude, carven figure of the Kala Deo was propped against a rock in dark, mysterious ambush, and water, clear as crystal and just as cool, gushed out of the hill-side just below him falling into and forming a large pool, set about with trees. All sorts of fascinating godlings walked this place I feel sure, but the spirit of it all to me was a large turquoise kingfisher which sat long and reflectively on a twig just above the water, until a fish stirred and he dived in a flash of blue, returning to

his place with the prize. He centred the picture of gold and green and brought all details sharply to a point in his own brilliant colouring.

Chandgarh Range contains some of the best forest in the Division; it is the only place in Nimar where really old trees are to be found. Anjan, there, are fourteen feet in girth and at least three hundred years old, and their existence is only due to the fact that successive waves of invading hosts from the north must have avoided that corner of the District as being too far from their trail. Elsewhere, wherever armies have passed, they have left desolation, and since the country has suffered intensely through periods of drought as well, nature has done her best to complete the havoc, man in centuries past began.

At Bharkhera, a camp actually on the bank of the Nerbada, I forded the river one night to sit up for a panther, leaving my wife in a long chair overlooking the water. The river here ran lazily in dark and shining reaches and D. was watching the evening light changing on the water, when she saw what she thought were several large snakes, swimming upstream one behind the other, their heads lifted well out of the water. They neared a long grey rock, and then emerging, disclosed themselves to be cormorants, or snake-birds as the native calls them. They preened themselves, and flapped and spread their wings to the fading sunlight; then one by one slid off the rock and vanished into the twilight. Stars began to prick the sky and a big owl called "hoo, hoo, hoo!" in a tree above the river. I sat, perched on a tall anjan tree gazing longingly at the kindling camp

fires, till finally I called off my vigil and returned across the sleeping river to the quiet camp, leaving the panther to his own devices.

Next morning, I had a coupe to inspect five miles away downstream, and actually on the river bank. My Range Officer suggested we might like to go by water while he trekked ahead at a much earlier hour.

We started, therefore, in a narrow native canoe, just long enough to allow the pair of us to sit, or rather lie, full length facing each other, our toes touching in the middle. A skinny gentleman with matted hair and a primitive paddle squatted in the bow and proposed to direct our progress. Neither of us could swim—how often have we both regretted our lack of proficiency in this!—and every least movement of mine, being rather a heavy weight, caused the boat to lurch sickeningly. More was to come, for I had entirely forgotten the rapids! After skimming along peacefully for a couple of miles, the water shining like polished black glass around us, the sound of the river began to quicken and swelled to a roar, and presently we saw sharp black rocks ahead, while the current, all broken up, hurried like a mill race. The gentleman with the paddle now looked round with a wide smile. "Let your Honour hold on, and the Mem also; rough water cometh," said he, and as he spoke we were in the thick of it. The hissing current pulled the canoe all ways at once, but that man was honestly a marvel.

I saw a black tooth of rock stand up, and it seemed every instant we must be spitted on it, but with a flirt of his absurd paddle he eased us by and the

danger slipped past, till almost at once another crag loomed up, to be passed in its turn. Five rapids we shot in this fashion, whirling through the foaming green water, and perhaps felt just a little battered when we stepped ashore at the end. But, after my inspection, and our lunch eaten under a rock above enormous boulders in the river bed, where in the rains the stream crashed and roared, but now ran black and oily through the chasms between, there was still the return journey to be made! This time we carried an extra passenger, and as a rapid approached, both men got out, and clinging to the canoe and feeling miraculously for firm stones beneath their feet, forced the boat close to the bank and up through the tumbling water. This feat I thought even more clever than the downward passage, but it took us hours to get back to camp and twilight had fallen before we reached it.

A great friend of mine at this time was one of the Rajput Maharajahs of Central India, in whose territory I had stayed for three weeks to shoot panther. His broken hilly country, scattered with rocks and scrub jungle did not lend itself at first to successful hunting, but when once the State shikarris had been initiated into the orthodox method of locating the kill—beating up from behind and setting out flanking stops—we were more successful. One night a lady, a friend of mine, was sitting up with me and a panther came out which she shot. When the shikarris came up to our call, we were rather astonished to see one of the State officials, a charming old Mohammedan gentleman, trotting along with them. He was

so filled with enthusiasm and the ardour of sport and what not, that he rushed up to my companion with open arms, shouting: "Good boy, good boy!"—the only words of English he could manage, and in his excitement nearly took a header over the dead panther and as nearly, embraced the lady and myself also.

With this same friend I sat again another evening over a panther kill—there were no tigers in the Maharajah's State Forests. I was wearing a pair of comfortable, rather ancient, and yellow sambhur leather boots. As I am a long-legged bird I always had to drape my limbs over the side of the machan, unlike those happy souls who can sit cross-legged or comfortably tucked up for hours. We had been silently meditating side by side, waiting patiently for the panther to show up, when all at once I felt that, panther or no, I simply must stretch my legs. Very slowly and cautiously I pushed one out and as my yellow toe came into view, I was alarmed to see my companion quickly raise her rifle and take aim at it! Hurriedly I drew it in again and explained that I was not the pard, and I'm afraid we laughed so much that all chance of shikar that evening vanished like smoke.

I spent a very happy time with the Maharajah, camping luxuriously. Everything was very well done—huge tents, excellent food and so on. His own tent was a mammoth affair, and I was particularly struck with what appeared to be a sort of unofficial throne which went with him everywhere. It was covered in red plush, with wide arms, and in it I imagined he sat to give audience and dispense justice to all who came. I asked one of the suite if this was so, and with a

broad smile he drew me up-stage and whispered: "My dear sir, no; it is H.H.'s commode. He likes to be comfortable and——" But at this point I modestly slunk away, covered with blushes and bursting with laughter.

Later, the Maharajah came to stay with me in Nimar and got a tiger in a beat in which three tiger broke out. The first was his, the second got away but the third was wounded by a lady in one of the machans and gave me a really interesting shot to finish him off.

There was a wide nala holding a good deal of water some distance away to my left, and in it, on a patch of sand behind a pile of big rocks, were the saises with our horses—some five or six of them. Perhaps they were rather indiscreetly in evidence, but it had never occurred to me that a tiger might go that way. This big fellow, however, only tickled up by the bullet, went bounding and galloping down the line and, to my horror, suddenly turned sharply and took to the nala. He half swam, half leapt through the standing pools and then started to climb the pile of rocks in his path. The men and horses were just behind them; it was up to me to finish him somehow. Taking quick aim I got him in the neck at long range, and he fell back off the rock into the water. I don't think any shot I ever fired gave me more satisfaction than this one.

In this same jungle had lived for many years a very fine old male tiger. I used constantly to put out kills on the nala-side, and for ages could not understand why they invariably disappeared without any trace

at all of the slayer. Eventually I found out the reason. The old tiger would kill and then swim with the bait across to the other side of the stream where he devoured it peacefully and at his leisure. There were many alligators in the river, and some months afterwards he suddenly disappeared. The local "bois" or fishermen, told me they had heard a tiger roaring long and horribly one night, and they firmly believed he was bagged by a mugger at that moment while swimming across, for at all events he was never afterwards seen again.

As in nearly all forests in India, so in Nimar, wild-dog were very numerous. Sometimes known as "Sone Kutta" or red dog, this animal is the most wantonly destructive and fiendish pest ever invented to harry the life out of other animals. Deer and lesser beasts he will run down and tear to pieces whilst they are yet alive; he will tree a panther; and even tiger will desert forests when he is afoot and killing. I have heard also of a pack worrying and bringing down a tiger but have not actually met a case in my own experience.

As to the treeing of a panther—I was coming down through the forests one day, when I saw a red dog on the path in front of me. I shot it but as it did not die at once, I told my orderly who had a spear to go and finish it off. He found it under a large tree and killed it and as he did so, a panther dropped down from the branches above, almost on his head, and made off. The forest, thereupon, gave up wild-dogs from every bush around me, they had most obviously treed the panther and were keeping him under

observation, but though I fired at several I did not retrieve any more that morning although I had probably saved the panther's life.

Since the domestic dog, as we know, hunts by scent, it might be presumed that its wild brother would do the same. But I have, personally, never seen red dog running a scent but always hunting to sight. Another peculiarity is that they never seem to hunt at night. I have camped often in forest infested with these fiends, but I have never known them hunt other than in the early morning and occasionally in the evening before sundown.

Passing through Kalibhit, I was drinking early tea one morning when I heard a tremendous hurroosh from the Korkus and all my servants. I ran out of the tent in time to see a large sambhur hind going past at a gallop with a pack of red dog hot on the trail. I saw they were driving it into the river close to my camp and were bound to drop it there for the poor animal was in great distress, and I cursed my luck that I could not hope to be in time to save it. It took but a minute to seize my rifle and run after them, and all the servants and Korkus streamed behind me. There, by the river in a pool of water, lay the poor victim, quite dead. But in the short time that had elapsed, its great ears with their tough cartilage had been eaten off flush with the head, and the Korkus assured me that this was the work of the ravenous younger dogs, kept away by their elders from the more succulent parts of the carcass. I took my toll of the devils, however.

The pack, at sight of me and my following, had

divided, and a number were now on each side of the river; I could see them in the distance. They kept on trying to cross over and I ran and chased them as they came into view. I fired every cartridge I had in my pockets and eventually, with the .310 rifle, slew seven of them that morning, to my great satisfaction.

I remember too, a day in Chanda some years before this, when I took the same small rifle and dropped down into a beautiful green nala close to camp, in the hope of casual sport. Walking up it, I saw about seventy yards ahead, a pool of water. A spit of greensward ran down into it and on the turf was lying, nose on paws and facing me, a large red dog, evidently on the watch. At sight of me it leapt into the air with a yap, yap, of irritation, and at the second leap I fired and got it. At the shot, literally dozens of dogs burst out of cover on the banks above, running in all directions. It was, therefore, perfectly plain how well organised are their forays, for the sentinel dog lay awaiting the coming of any animal to water, on which it would have given the signal to the hidden pack, and they would have at once closed in on the quarry and have either finished it off then and there or have started a long and inevitably fatal chase. The animal I shot proved to be a large female; and my only regret was I could not lay out half a dozen of her friends and relations, but on this occasion they were too quick for me.

I have noticed several times another curious thing in connection with the Sone Kutta. Once a pack has pulled down the quarry, other animals in the vicinity seem to lose their sense of fear. I have seen a pack of

dogs tearing at a newly killed sambhur and fired at them, while two hind sambhur were actually standing a few yards away, tails on end, gaping at them; it seemed as if they understood that for the moment they were safe, and curiosity compelled them to remain and watch the drama.

Red dog exist from one end of India to the other, and in the Garhwal and Kumaon hills, the natives maintain there are two distinct varieties—the larger called the “Bawansa” and a much smaller kind known as the “Quaya”. How far this may be true I cannot say, but I did once see in those parts a solitary dog of enormous size. It bounded across the road I was on and I noticed its fur was uniformly red, and a lighter red than that of the ordinary dog; it lacked also the black tuft to the tail and the characteristic black muzzle of the commoner kind.

The only time I went out after bison in Nimar, a large sounder of pig crossed my bows. There must have been at least thirty or forty of them and they were all going at full speed—all that is, save two enormous boars, which more slowly were bringing up the rear. As these two big fellows came opposite me, one gave the other the deuce of a prod in the side, whereupon the creature, instead of retaliating on its companion, turned, and without more ado, came straight for me! I didn't want to fire just then and disturb the game in the forest, but he had a very nasty look in his eye as he came on steadily with his head well down. So I addressed him as one man to another. “Look here, you blighter, if you come any nearer I'll have to shoot you!” At the sound of my

voice, the pig stopped and our eyes met, and I suppose he saw the same look in mine as I had seen in his, for after due meditation, he thought better of it and retired.

Pig often have a very poor time with wild-dog, and I was walking up a river bank one morning when I saw, well ahead, dogs converging on the river from every direction. Hurrying on, I found a huge wild boar at bay. His "derrière" was stuck in a bush and he had a rock behind him but a dog was baiting him on either side and trying to get him to start forward, while the rest of the horde was standing alert at various points, waiting for him to break away. It was at this point I arrived and spoilt their game. They all scattered, and the pig slunk into the jungle, safe for the moment at any rate; but for a long time after, the frightened pack kept on "cooee-ing" to each other in their efforts to reform their numbers and start again on the hunt.

I want to close this chapter with a story about a cow.

My Chief H., and another man and myself were marching along beside the Tapti river one morning. We had been pottering and fooling on the road, shooting partridge and so forth, when he turned to me and said: "I say, do send on one of your fellows to tell the servants to have breakfast ready for us when we get in; I'm hungry!" So I turned to a Mohammedan Forester walking near and said: "Mount your pony and ride on to camp and say the Sahibs are coming and want breakfast at once."

He called up his pony and mounted and titupped

away along the road in front of us. He could not have gone more than two hundred yards, when we saw his pagri fly in one direction and his pony in the other, and he himself flopped on to the side of the road. "Well, your messenger doesn't seem to have got very far," said H., and then we saw the reason. Round the bend of the road, bellowing like a fog horn and galloping at top speed came the very smallest cow I have ever seen. About a quarter the size of the Forester's pony, she had nevertheless routed him completely, and was now apparently bent on us. Being so tiny, we didn't at first take her seriously, but she evidently meant business and wasn't going to be put off.

The gun-bearers and ourselves were walking in a bunch; she charged straight into the middle of us and scattered the lot. Over went my Chief backwards into the hedge, waving his stick frantically and shouting: "Why, damn the thing, she's coming for me again!" Promptly she put down her head for another charge, but changed her mind and rolled me over instead! I was so absolutely speechless with laughter I could only wave my hands feebly and do nothing; and we all sat where she had put us, watching her wild career down the road. Suddenly she came to an abrupt halt—the two big elephants were solemnly walking up towards her. Faced with these huge grey towers, she put her head on one side and considered them. It was too much; with one wild bellow she turned about, went off the road into a field and across it to the village.

Afterwards we heard she had a new calf somewhere

in the offing, and being suddenly smitten with an urgent desire to attend to it, left food, master, and whatever job was hers at the moment, and made a bee-line across country for it. Result: complete rout of three quiet and respectable officials and their following. As for the Forester; when we teased him about his rather uncertain seat in the saddle, he only smiled amiably and said: "Oh, sir! But I am not a perfect rider!"

CHAPTER XV

NIMAR CONTINUED

THE actual history of Nimar is too complicated to be discussed in a book of this nature, but briefly, one might say that the marvellous old hill fort of Asirgarh, about which I shall presently write more fully, is the centre and focus of the story of Nimar itself.

In addition, Burhanpur, which for centuries had been the old capital city of the Faruki Kings, is a point of interest, for under the Mughal Empire which supplanted the Faruki dynasty, it was the headquarters of the Imperial Viceroy, and so long ago as 1614, a British Ambassador, Sir Thomas Roe, came there bearing messages of good will from James I to the Emperor of that time.

Poor Sir Thomas was not impressed by anything that he saw. The houses were all "mud cottages", he says, and he was given "four chambers in the Seraglio" to live in and, since these were "like ovens and no bigger," he preferred the comparative ease and space of his own tent. He managed, however, to make Prince Parwiz, the Viceroy, exceedingly drunk from the "case of bottles" he brought as an offering of good fellowship, and was not in the least impressed by the state and pomp which surrounded that gentleman.

There are still fine tombs of old Kings and Queens remaining in and around the city, and on the right bank of the Tapti stands what is left of a very old fort. In it was once a palace of some size, and the bathing rooms of the Queens and their hand-maidens with the curious fretted marble cascades still unspoilt, are now used—desecration perhaps—as a dak-bungalow for District officials. These rooms are still charming; one of them is brilliantly frescoed even yet, and in it I one day received the Moulvi of the large Mosque nearby, a Mohammedan gentleman of great personality and charm.

He spoke very pure Urdu, so I raked among my mental outfit to produce the talent laid up in a napkin, and did my best to reply suitably. This man had that curious veiled impersonal gaze, which one sees constantly in Catholic priests and even in good Brahmins of the temple. It is the mark of the priestly caste all the world over—the knowledge of Life, as seen through the minds of men and women.

After some conversation, the Moulvi asked my wife if we had children and begged to be shown their photographs. She fetched the folding case and gave it to him. He looked long at the two young faces, then stood up, and holding the pictures in one hand and raising the other to Heaven, called down all blessings on their heads in beautiful flowing Persian. So simply, yet so charmingly was it done, that we felt quite choky.

Nimar fell on evil days after the year 1800, when the rivalry between the Mahratta princes, Holkar of Indore, and Sindhia of Gwalior, gave rise to nearly

eighteen years of scattered but severe fighting between the two. Khandwa was burnt and Burhanpur wrecked, nor was there peace in the land for many a long day. After the Mahrattas came the Pindaris; companies of bandits making their fastnesses in the high hills, and only descending therefrom to raid and plunder under Chitu, their famous chief. These harried anew the unfortunate country, doing so much damage that British forces had to be sent to end their depredations. But though they were officially extinguished in 1819, one of their leaders survived for some years and carried on successful raids of his own.

Romance has grown round the name of Sheikh Dullah, so that men say that he never dared dismount from the back of his famous black mare; even at night he slept armed and ready in the saddle. Being also a master of "jadu"—sorcery—he would constantly change himself and the mare into a blue-bull and a sambhur if his enemies closed in on him, and thus escape them.

"Niche zamin aur upar Allah,
Aur bich men phire Sheikh Dullah,"

says an old jingle which has survived the years.

"Twixt God on high and earth, see still
Sheikh Dullah wander at his will."

But as so often happens with these soldiers of fortune, he was eventually done to death by one of his own followers. The land thereafter had peace—

more or less—until the Mutiny set every heart beating quickly.

The old fort of Asirgarh in 1857 was garrisoned by native troops known to be disaffected, but a contingent from Bombay arrived in time to disarm and replace them before any serious outbreak had occurred. Certain Europeans also, then living in Indore State across the Nerbada, found it wiser to leave Holkar's territory before trouble arose, and passing through Nimar, were at first protected in the old red-sandstone fort of Punasa which still stands, and near which I have often spent many good days small game shooting. Afterwards they were taken to Asir and lodged more safely in the grey old fortress there. But on the whole Nimar came off well in the "Black Year", and no lives were lost and no tragedies staged.

Due north of the District and on the holy Nerbada is one of the most famous places of pilgrimage in all India; Mandhata, the shrine of Siva, built partly on an island in the river and partly on the mainland. Like swallows' nests clinging to the eaves of a house, so do the dwellings, shops and temples cling to the side of the island tier on tier. Nerbada flows deep and silent between the island and the mainland, and in its depths live huge carp—mahseer of enormous size and incredible age—which have to be seen to be believed, for in the world of fish they are quite unique. Generations of Brahmins, priests of the many temples, have tamed these carp, and they will come to their call for scattered grain and crumbs of dough. I was staggered to see hordes of great backs, appearing in such numbers that they actually pushed the

boat almost out of the water as they crowded round and under it.

High up on the side of the island, a local Rajah has his dwelling, and looking down from a window there in the palace, the river seems like a sheet of blue-grey steel, roughened as a copper plate is roughened before the engraver's tool touches it by an apparently motionless current. The worship of Siva is carried on in excelsis in his shrines on the island, and he is not the only god, for once, as I struggled up flights of steps towards the top and turned a corner, I looked straight into the glaring eyes of Kali, goddess of destruction, dripping with painted blood and not altogether guiltless of the real article either on the stones before her shrine. I pretended I had seen nothing and removed myself as speedily as possible, for the priests of Kali are jealous priests and quite definitely not fond of the Englishman. In fact, the cry all over Hindu India to-day is that Kali Mai, the Mother, is hungry for blood, the blood of "white goats" and it does not require a superhuman intelligence to discover exactly who and what is meant by the "white goats".

For centuries, a certain tall cliff on the island of Mandhata has stood as an altar of sacrifice to the gods. Yearly a victim, deadened by drugs and spirit, would leap from the cliff into eternity, dashed to a crimson pulp on the rocks edging the river below. So only could Siva be appeased, the fields bear, the kine bring forth their young and the land prosper. There is a record of the last human sacrifice which took place here in 1824. It was actually witnessed by a British Officer whose name has not survived. He

tells that he himself walked with the man and did his best to prevent him flinging away his life, but it was of no avail, for his mind seemed to be filled with a "wild pleasure" in this last terrible adventure.

The people gathered round him, gave him their small belongings to bless by his holy touch. Says the recorder: "He composedly placed such in his mouth and returned them." Then came the last ghastly moments when he steadily climbed the rocks to appear on the highest point, the stone of sacrifice. Here he called on the gods in praise and invocation and "the next second he burst upon our agonised sight in a most manful leap, descending feet foremost with terrific rapidity until, in mid-career, a projecting rock reversed his position and caused a head-long fall. Instant death followed his descent of ninety feet," and the gods had claimed their victim. Under British rule all such horrors have been stopped, but the fair which still takes place yearly and to which hundreds of pilgrims come—as much to enjoy the outing as to worship—is a wonderful pageant of colour.

Drifting, though purposeful, the crowd sways up and down the river bank, buying and selling; now crossing over to the island to pray at the big temple of Siddnath on the hill, whose foundations rest on a plinth of carven elephants; now timorously feeding the langur monkeys living round the ruined temples, (monkeys so fiercely greedy that they will seize and tightly hold the hand that proffers the grain till every flake is eaten,) now gathering in groups on the island steps to watch and feed the surging droves of carp;

chattering and laughing—the women's saris of gold and green and red reflected like swaying tulips in the bright water—and over all, the blue, blue sky.

Then back to the mainland, where the pujaris sit beside their heaps of many coloured powder, ready for the caste marks that will be painted in after the ceremonial bathing is done. Beyond them too, the silver merchants and sellers of bright brass vessels, the vendors of green, red and blue glass bangles; their wares all take the light like jewels in some Aladdin's cave. And so the day wears on until the daylight fades, and still the happy, busy people wander to and fro. Night brings hundreds of tiny glowing fires as each small party or solitary pilgrim prepares the evening meal.

I saw at Mandhata some of those wonderful people who make pilgrimage from the mouth of Nerbada even to its source in the hills, for the remission of sins, returning once more to its mouth along the opposite bank. In sunshine and rain they go on this journey of sixteen hundred miles; fainting often with weakness or ill health, frequently with nothing to eat but the seeds gathered from "fever-weed" plants growing by the way. It is literally a life work, for many die on that road—but what matter? Faith is all, and the merit thus acquired will surely bring them nearer their final absorption into the light surrounding the Great Light itself.

Along the cliffs of the island are small caves—almost burrows—hollowed out above the water line. These are the abode of gosains, saddhus—what you will; in appearance extraordinary beyond words, with

wildly matted hair powdered with ashes, and ash-pale faces also, out of which stare mad, brilliant eyes. A genuine sannyasi or holy man, is a being to be revered when he is found, but the sannyasis or saddhus of Mandhata have a reputation far other. One of my Range Officers told me, Mandhata was one of the most truly evil spots in India, and, Brahmin though he was, he was under no delusions as to the lives and morals of the saddhus living therein.

I saw on the island ash-smearred creatures bound in rope waistcoats so tight, that it would seem they could hardly breathe; others had an arm or hand completely withered from having held it above their heads for twenty years and more, and some again would lie on a bed of spiked nails which looked as if they would easily pierce the tough hide of a rhinoceros—yet on the skins of these most singular people not a mark would be found.

Certain small impressions of the Mandhata fair have etched themselves on my mind. I can see now the maker of chapattis—thin cakes of unleavened flour—working at lightning speed; kneading the dough to paper thinness, flapping and slapping each cake over one arm to get the large size and perfect shape; then the roasting in hot ash where each cake swelled up to a gigantic puff-ball, and the delicious smell of the newly baked flour. As each one was completed, I remember the maker looked round with a happy smile of invitation, showing his marvellous white teeth.

And in another corner, surrounded by a wondering and amiably indifferent crowd, a missionary of some

Continental Protestant creed, shouting and declaiming at the top of his voice—hot, urgent, perspiring. It gave me a thrill of acute discomfort; in Siva's own stronghold it seemed almost indecent.

We left Mandhata, picturesque, enchanting and evil smelling, with regret; but time pressed and there was much work to be got through in Chandgarh. In this range also, the sloth bear lived in the ravines and fissures of the hills, and I grew to know him and his works better than at any time in my service.

This bear is much more dreaded by the Aboriginal people—the local Gonds and Korkus—than is the tiger, because his small, pig-like eyes are feeble-sighted, and he is in addition, exceedingly deaf. The simple Korku, trotting along through the forest, will often not see him until he is almost on top of the bear, which, turning in a blind fury, instantly goes for the unlucky man.

Bears do not hug—at least this variety does not; he closes on a man, and with his heavily armoured paws strikes him down, claws his scalp over his head, and blinds him with a long-drawn stroke over the face; and when he is down, savages him and in the end reduces him to a disfigured limping thing who must go softly all his days. I saw many examples of a bear's work in Chandgarh, and that is why I shot all bears at sight; they are pests, to be exterminated.

Yet in their cumbrous way, they are affectionate to each other; I have often seen one playfully cuffing another over the head; and the mother is devoted to her cubs and carries them about on her back for months.

Bears vary very much in size, for in some districts the males are enormous, while in other places they are quite small, and this, I think, may be due to lack of proper feeding when young; the cub's birth coinciding with a bad rainy season perhaps. The natives say also that they are more peaceable in some localities than in others, and dread them less.

In the Central Provinces, sloth bears keep to the jungle and do little harm to crops, but in the Himalayas they do a great deal of damage to the villagers' small dwellings. There, in the higher Himalayas, men build their beehives into the fabric of their houses, and when in the bitter cold winter they leave these and go down to warmer places under the hills, bears will often come and tear out the tiles—great slabs of stone an inch thick—to get at the combs and grubs which they so dearly love. They are fond of acorns also, and will tear down branches to construct platforms in the oak trees which abound in those parts, and in these they sit the whole night through, devouring the nuts at top speed.

The bear-people are naturally great climbers, but none the less do they meet with severe accidents. I have personally known two cases where a climbing bear slipped and in so doing, got his paw jammed in the fork of a tree. He hadn't, apparently, the sense to climb up and pull the paw out of the crack, but tugged at it and thus got it so firmly wedged that he eventually died there. I knew, too, of another case, where a bear, while feeding on the small figs in a peepul tree, slipped and fell headlong at least thirty feet and was instantly killed. These cases are rare,

however; bear are on the whole bold and secure climbers.

They have a singular habit of sucking and mumbling over their paws; this, in my opinion, is purely for amusement, and not, as another writer has it, as a salve to bruised feet; for even young cubs will sit for hours sucking and humming over a paw, while a mass of froth rises between it and their slobbering mouths.

I have before mentioned a tiger cub I had in my possession, and I have since had several at different times; but here, in Khandwa, luck was specially kind to me and the story of my tiger family is worth telling.

It was hot weather and I had been camping near Asirgarh within hearing of the mail trains which thundered to and from Bombay twice a day. I had been helping my Range Officer mark up one of the coupes, and there was a Forester also, marking stag-headed teak about eighteen miles away. One evening this man came over, in a state of great excitement, to tell me that, passing by an old Moguli "bowli"—a well, made perhaps in Akbar's day, with steps leading down into it—he chanced to look over the side and there, on the now dry floor, huddled into a corner, he saw four small tiger cubs lying close together. As I could not get to the place at once, I told him to go back and see that no one went near to disturb the family in any way.

Two or three days later when I went out to his block, I found him in a great state—the cubs were gone. Someone, we felt, must have disturbed the

mother and she had removed them. As he had said they were very young, I felt sure they could not be far away, so I called up about forty Gonds and we slowly beat up the forest within half a mile of the old well, but saw no signs of them or the tigress although we went very carefully to and fro. At last an energetic little Gond, seeing my disappointment, suddenly spoke up: "Sahib," said he, "I know of a hollow beneath a large tree not far from here, and to this spot I think they may have, perhaps, been borne. Let us go thither." So we all wheeled about and moved slowly in that direction. As we neared the place, there came from the end of the line a loud roar, and I then for the first and only time, caught sight of a very red-skinned tigress, disappearing through the trees. We converged on that point and there, in a hollow under a large mowha tree, lay, as the Gond had thought, the Babes in the Wood—four beautifully marked cubs all fast asleep. As they were far too small to walk any distance, the tigress must certainly have carried them one by one from the well to this shelter, a matter of at least half a mile or more.

I could not resist these infants—there is something peculiarly fascinating about a tiger baby, so I collected the lot in a basket and brought them into camp. Here they cried piteously for food and I tried putting them to a goat, but as their eyes were open, they refused absolutely to feed from any old nanny, and I was faced with a serious dilemma. In the end, there was nothing for it but to take them in to my wife at headquarters, so I packed them carefully into my

travelling meat-safe which had well ventilated sides, and we started.

D., not dreaming I was anywhere about, looked up in amazement from her long chair to see me stalking in after dinner, with a retinue of smiling guards and grinning Gonds, one carrying the precious meat-safe carefully on his head. It was put down and each little nodding, sleepy cub carefully extracted.

To get them instantly fed was the first thing. I sent two men, who thereafter became literally their slaves, so fond and proud were they of the babies, racing to the bazaar; one to buy a baby's bottle and the other to beg, borrow or steal a goat. While this was in train our spaniel, known as "the Luscious dog", or "Lussus" as the servants called him for short, came up and instantly took them under his wing. He licked them all over with grave attention and they crowded close to the warm fur. The goat arrived, the bottle also; my wife warmed the milk carefully to the right temperature, and to our joy each baby sucked away merrily until his little tummy was all but full. They slept peacefully all through the night covered in a blanket, and awoke full of beans, to stagger heavily about, the dog watching over them carefully the while.

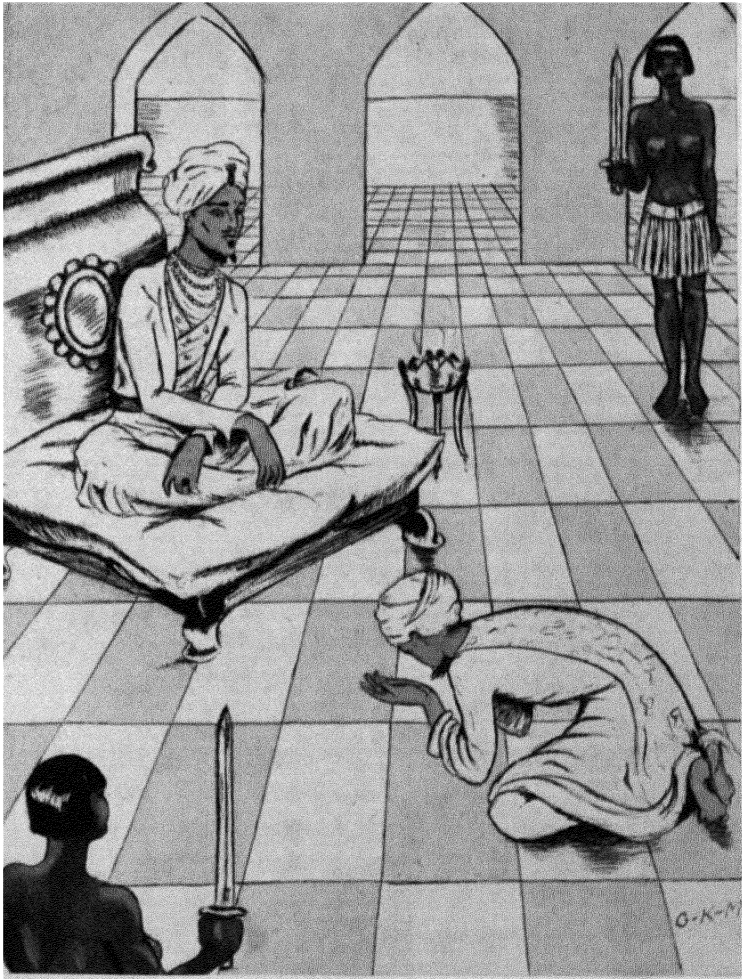
Then began a regular regime under which they flourished enormously. Regularly, every three hours they were fed, just as carefully as human babies, and day by day they grew stronger and more certain on their feet till they could play about like kittens, and we gave up a disused room entirely to them, arranging large boxes there in such a way, that they could

climb up and leap from one to the other and have all the exercise they wanted to keep them fit. Of course they went into the compound as well, walking solemnly one by one behind Rustum, the orderly, who adored them. At night they slept in the empty room; at six in the morning Rustum arrived to let them out.

It was hot weather and D. and I slept outside. We used to wake to see Rustum walking slowly down the garden path with the four cubs all in line, tails well up, behind him. Down they would go to the fields below our bungalow, and having there made their offering to Nature, returned, tails waving, in high fettle. From a distance, they would spot our beds and come on at a trot.

One behind the other they would hop up on to D.'s bed and down the other side, then on to mine and off again as if they were doing a circus "turn", and finally lying on their backs, fascinated with hanging corners of sheet or rug, would cling to them with their claws and strip every shred of bedding off us on to the ground.

At first we thought there were four males and no tigress, so we called the largest and heaviest Fuzzy, because his fur was rather like that; the second James, as he was a sober person and very reflective, the third Percy, for no reason whatever, and the fourth, Battling Butler, because his eyes were not quite right, and he fought to get at the feeding bottle, often knocking off the indiarubber top. Afterwards, James and Percy developed into females and rather disconcerted us, but it was too late then to change



BADSHAH KHAN BEFORE AKBAR BADSHAH

their names as they had grown to know them, so they had to put up with it.

Week by week they absorbed larger quantities of milk, till finally we had quite a flock of goats to keep them going. Then came the cooked meat stage with milk only twice a day, and then for some unknown reason, a ghastly thing happened. They suddenly lost all their hair. Within a week the whole four looked like dreadful ghosts of Pasht, the sacred cat of ancient Egypt, and I thought they were about to pass out. But they continued perfectly fit; only their skins felt and looked like old kid gloves, though the stripes still showed up in dark pigment, and their ears stood out like bats' wings from their poor little shiny heads. D. was in despair, and what to do we did not know. Then a thought struck her. A friend had used a certain green soap and ointment much advertised in the home papers, for her dog which had had eczema, and D. got some of this.

Daily she used to bathe the four, one after the other; and in the heat, this was no light matter. Attired in a very exiguous white garment, she would grip a little tiger by the scruff of the neck, souse him and rub him well with soap, dry him and rub in the ointment. The bathroom door would be opened to let him out, the water would be changed, the second tiger ushered in, and so on till all were washed. They were at this time about the size of large spaniels, very heavy and strong, and the row they made was simply deafening. D. at the end of this function was in a state of collapse, but after a week the red hair began to sprout again on their heads and in a month

they were fully furred and in better condition than ever.

All this time they had never dreamed of using claws or teeth; the servants loved them as much as we did, and people from all round as well as from the local bazaar, used to come every day to watch and admire them.

As they became more grown up they were allowed into our sitting-room, and there they would sit crowded on to D.'s skirt, or close to my coat, purring with satisfaction. Not everyone, however, met with their esteem—approval depended on a satisfactory personal odour! They purred loudly over a young policeman friend, and could not get close enough to him, but on the other hand, refused—having once smelt him over carefully—to come within yards of another man who was most anxious to be matey with them. They used to depart, uttering their curious soft “caah” of disgust, with wrinkled noses and disdain on their faces whenever he came near them—much to his chagrin.

The Mem was writing one day while they lay around her in the sitting-room, and for a little while, being absorbed she forgot all about them. When she glanced up, they had gone and there was not a sound to be heard anywhere. She looked first into their own room but drew a blank there, then went on into our bedroom and finally into my dressing-room. There she beheld a scene of wreckage.

They had discovered an old solar topee of mine and dragged it down, and pieces of the pith were lying like flakes of snow all over the floor. But Fuzzy

stood majestically, like Nero among the ruins, wearing the hat's red satin inner head-band—which in some mysterious way had remained intact—arranged like a collar round his neck!

At eight months old they were eating five pounds of meat a day each, and I feared the time would soon come when we should have to part with them; so, as many of my own snapshots had failed owing to an undiscovered defect in the camera, I asked the local photographer if he would come and take them, sitting all together in the open.

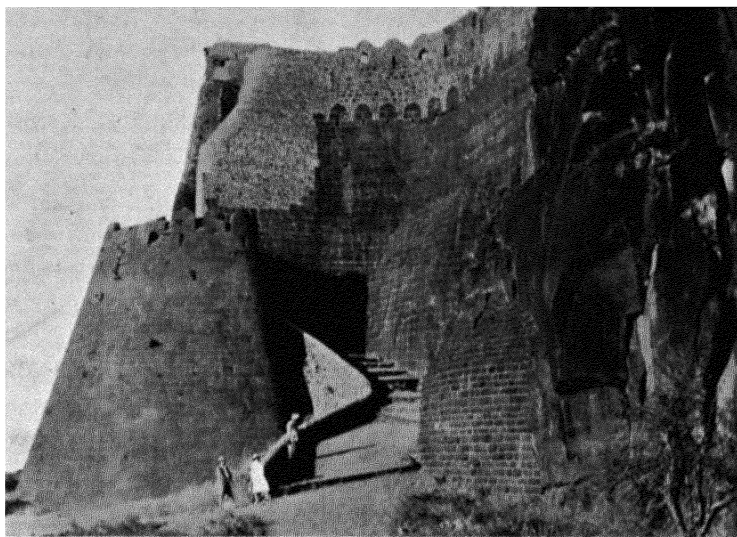
He arrived one evening, very valiant and smiling, complete with tripod, camera, and the official black velvet square. I thought he wilted a little when he saw the four beauties looking very strong and businesslike where they sat together in charge of Rustum, but I said nothing and he got to work. The apparatus was set up and three of the cubs watched him solemnly without moving, but Fuzzy, always keen on investigation, was highly intrigued with his manœuvres. Several times he evaded Rustum and ourselves and set out quietly on his own to take the little man in the rear, and each time we brought him back and posed him afresh.

Finally, the photographer assumed the black veil. Fuzzy's time had come. With a single bound he was out of Rustum's grip and had launched himself at the hooded apparition which straightway flung off the veil with a howl of fear and made excellent time down the drive and out on to the road. Fuzzy, meanwhile, was perfectly happy with the veil which was all he had wanted, of course; but not again was the badly

frightened little man to be tempted inside the gates. His gear had to be taken out to him where he stood shivering behind a tree at a safe distance.

Eventually I wrote to a famous dealer in Calcutta who had purchased two other cubs of mine at different times, and he said he would send up a man to see them and, if perfect, would buy them. One day, therefore, we beheld a vision approaching the bungalow, someone quite different from the ordinary run of Indians; a tall, well-made man with a fine face and a rather aquiline nose. He wore no pagri on his grizzled hair, and was dressed in—of all things!—a pink petticoat, a black alpaca coat, a long, white scarf, and carried on one arm a pillow in a spotless white frilled pillow-case! Mutually we breathed “What on earth is this?” as he advanced and bowed and said, in a charming voice: “I come from Mr. Ezra, sir; may I be allowed to see the cubs?” I indicated them where they were playing round an old carved shrine of Siva, taken from some local temple and set up in the garden by a former occupant of the bungalow many years before. At sight of him they instantly took cover, but with curious murmurings he wheedled them, and soon the yellow heads peeped out again, and they were presently crowding round him—all tails up—purring loudly.

We were fascinated by this extraordinary man, who had the face of an ancient Roman and spoke English perfectly in a cultivated voice and without a trace of accent. His manners, too, were perfect, so that we almost asked him in to breakfast, for we felt he certainly couldn't fraternise with the servants! I



ENTRANCE TO ASIRGARH FORT



TANK IN THE FORT

compromised by offering him tea in the veranda, which he accepted, with a "Thank you so much, sir. Tea is a drink one never tires of." Full of interest by this time, I said at last: "You'll forgive me, but I can't place you. You are neither Hindu nor Mussulman; where do you come from?" And he, with a smile, said: "You are quite right, sir, I'm neither one nor the other. I'm a Jew from Madras. My family is a very old one, but there are few of us left now." And I was the more interested, for the Chosen People in India are uncommon folk and only to be found in scattered communities.

He vetted the cubs, and said he had never seen a finer family; and so the deal was concluded, and I felt I was taking blood money for babes. This time, it was my wife who wept bitterly when the four were caged and taken away, and could not indeed, speak of them without tears for many days. I heard some while after that they had grown into splendid animals, and that a pair had been sent to Melbourne, and another pair to the Zoo in New York.

When H.R.H. The Prince of Wales made his tour in *Renown* and came to India, several of the Officers of that ship went shooting in various parts of Hind. Four of them came to me, and delightful people they were.

I took them to the jungles round Asirgarh as it was near the main line, and the G.I.P. even flagged the mail train six miles from the old fort on their arrival and also when they left, so as to save time for them. Luck nearly always comes to one man of a party with open hands and is niggardly to the others,

and in this case a tiger, bear and sambhur all fell to one rifle. However, one of the others had an adventure which neither he nor the small guard with him will forget, I fancy.

He went out early one morning with the guard who knew the jungle well, taking a small rifle in the hope of bagging a sambhur. They wandered about and saw nothing and came at length to a narrow nala with water in it. Here they sat down near the stream, and after a few minutes, an enormous tiger stalked down the opposite bank not twenty feet away at the edge of the water and looked at them.

I knew this beast from the description; he was wily beyond words and would have nothing to say to all the tempting baits I put out for him at this time. Commander T. looked at the guard and the guard was pea-green—the tiger appeared a tough proposition, and his rifle was only a small bore. Providentially he did not fire, although as he said: "It seemed the chance of a lifetime, and I felt a fool to let it go." But as the beast stood quietly drinking and quite evidently disputed the way with them, they felt it wiser to return to camp by another path. Said the little guard to me—and his complexion had not even then recovered its normal brown: "Sahib, etna burri punja tha!"—holding out his hand with five fingers spread wide to show the immensity of the pugs.

Two of these pleasant visitors left us at night to drive to the railway in a country cart to catch the mail train. One was an enormous man, who had to sit with his legs hanging out of the cart over the tail-board. At night bear would often cross the road by

which they had to go, so they started off fairly bristling with rifles before and behind. As luck would have it, they did run into a pair, squabbling and fighting on the road in the bright moonlight, but as the driver was what my camp clerk called "a very frightful man", he declined to allow them to fire and perhaps it was just as well.

One enters a different world when one visits an Indian State and Gwalior, where we went to stay with friends for a few days, was extraordinarily interesting. The Ruler at that time was a comparatively young man, capable, a good administrator and much beloved. He has since died and his young son now rules in his stead. The Maharajah had a birthday while we were there and held a parade of all his troops which we were lucky enough to see. We watched them wheel and form in the hot sunshine, and I remember specially the silver kettle-drums carried on a fine white Arab stallion, draped in brilliant magenta petticoats which swung and flapped in the wind to his great distraction.

There was also an elephant battery—one of the few still to be seen in India perhaps; and the great beasts, groomed and pumiced to a beautiful ash grey, trundled past; each team as they approached the Maharajah where he sat on his fine horse, blazing in scarlet uniform and medals, curled up their trunks at the word of command and gave the crashing royal salute which surely must thrill the heart of everyone who hears it, since there is nothing quite like it in the world. Two companies of troops passed marching smartly, and heading the first line of each walked his

small son and daughter, both wearing uniform: she, I remember, with her hair loose down her back.

Afterwards we went back to the palace to breakfast and here the Maharajah received all the guests as they came. I noticed the flashing smile which made his face delightful, and then to my amazement, just before greeting us, his hand went to his mouth and in one gesture he disposed of both upper and lower rows of false teeth, slipping them into a side pocket. This was a little disconcerting, especially as the smile still remained, but I was told afterwards that he quite often got tired of his teeth, and would whip them out at any time if they bored him.

We then watched the birthday Durbar—the gathering in the great hall of the palace of all his Feudatories, Sirdars, and Thakurs. We and a few other favoured folk, sat in a small room behind the throne room; a large door in front of us opened immediately on to it and we watched the glittering nobles as they assembled.

The floor of the hall was, I remember, of marble, in large black and white squares, and as each Durbari came in, he took his place on a square. I doubt if one would ever see again such superb silks and brocades. Their coats of orange, green, red, and purple were so rich and so stiff with gold and embroidery that each garment could certainly have stood alone, and every man wore the blazing red and green of rubies and emeralds—many imperfect stones doubtless, but, catching the cross lights from the glass-lined walls and the hanging lustres, imposing enough; and

diamonds blazed in their sword-hilts and in their many coloured turbans.

I have never seen such glowing colour; and as they all rose to receive their Chief, they rustled and clashed in their harness like gallant figures from some ancient story of chivalry. As for Scindhia's pearls on that occasion—they were so wonderful one could hardly believe in them. He wore a great rope hanging below his knees made of seven or eight strands of large pearls. I suppose they were worth a fortune; in any case the accumulated jewels of the Indian princes must be of perfectly fabulous value.

One by one the Durbaris came up, made their offerings, salaamed and returned. One youth I remember, received a fatherly homily for not having behaved quite nicely, but although he came up between two stern sponsors, he left with a smiling face and all was well. In the evening they all dined in hall, with Scindhia squatting in a low silver chair at their head; each man had brought his own cook and retinue, since many were of different castes and must have their own individual food.

From Gwalior we went to Agra for the day and saw that most lovely building, the Taj Mahal. So many people have written about it, have seen it by moonlight, at dawn, at twilight, that I rather hesitate to say anything. But it seemed to me to float like some perfect pearl in the thin blue of the sky, and D., who went in and sat alone for a few minutes near the carved and fretted screen which guards the cenotaphs of Shah Jehan and his love, has never forgotten the curious impression she received, as of

some vague singing voices in the air around her; some trick of acoustics no doubt, but she was quite alone there at the time,—mysterious in any case, and in keeping with the lovely shrine.

And after this, Khandwa again, and my time was now coming to an end. But before I finish this patchwork of mine, I want to say a few words about the habits of the tiger, the finest wild animal in India, perhaps in the world.

For over thirty-nine years I have lived and worked in forest where they were always to be found, and I have been always interested in the opinions of other writers with regard to them, for mine differ considerably from theirs in many ways.

One constantly sees the remark that a tiger will come up to his kill "roaring loudly". In all my experience, I have never known him so to come; he has always been absolutely voiceless. The one exception to this rule, has been the tigress with cubs; she, as I have mentioned already, will almost always roar to frighten away other animals and to keep the cubs back from the kill.

Then, it is usual for a full-grown tiger to kill one sizeable animal at a time, and this will usually keep him supplied for five or six days. But there are cases when a tiger becomes a "freak-killer"; when he will lay out as many as three animals in quick succession. Many people believe this to be simply the prank of a young tiger learning to kill, but my experience has been that it is always a male—and often a heavy well-fed male at that—who, either through bad temper, ill-luck in kills, or sheer in consequence, will gallop

from one victim to another laying them out in devastating sequence. I have given an instance of this earlier in the book, but as a final example, I remember once a friend out shooting with me, sat up over no less than three large full-grown bullocks, and shot the tiger—a heavy cattle killer and not a young animal at all.

Then there is the question of scent. In my opinion a tiger is incapable of following or even of perceiving an air-borne scent. On the other hand he is an adept at following a drag, and of this I give a specially typical example.

One clear moonlight night I was sitting up over a tiger kill, when a large hyena suddenly appeared and started to feed on it. I showered down sticks on his back but they had no effect beyond causing him to sever a whole "ham" with his immensely powerful jaws, and this he dragged away about thirty yards straight in front of me. He then turned sharply to the left and pulled it over the dried teak leaves that crackled like stage lightning; on and on until he was out of sight and hearing, and thereafter presumably hid it in his larder at a safe distance.

It was then midnight and I hardly thought the rightful owner would appear, so I extracted my modest ration of curry "pups", as my cook always called them, and a bottle of cold tea. I was quietly masticating these, when I looked up and saw in the distance some large animal coming down towards me. I dropped the food and seized my rifle as the moonlight showed me a large tiger approaching. He came on until he struck the place where the hyena had

turned left and dragged away the ham. Down went his head and up went his tail and he followed that drag like a dog, nose to ground, and disappeared in the wake of the hyena. I watched him, fascinated, out of sight and hearing, never dreaming but that he would get tired of the drag and return to the kill. But he passed on and out of this story, and I was left lamenting that I had not put in a bullet as he paused, nosing the ground before following the trail. I have often seen also the great felines—panther as well as tiger—follow round the track of a kill which I have had dragged from its original position to a place at some distance more favourable to good shooting.

As to the want of perception of air-borne scent—I have sat within twelve feet of both tiger and panther, with a soft breeze blowing over me towards them and they have never shown, by so much as the flicker of an eyelid, the faintest hint of my close proximity to them.

Now comes the question of the manner of killing. Various writers who should certainly know, state that the tiger jumps on the back of his prey and seizes it at the back of the neck. My experience has not been the same. I admit the method of killing may vary in individual cases, but my belief is that the prey is almost always killed by a bite under the chin. I have inspected hundreds of kills, both natural and tied up baits, and in every case the fang pits were high up under the ears.

Were a tiger, therefore, to grab a bullock in the neck from behind, he would almost certainly be blinded by the horns, and there would be many cases

of the killer being himself actually injured in the struggle. In every case also, it is the cervical vertebræ that are broken—those vertebræ which join the head to the spine—and to do this, I feel sure leverage must be applied underneath the chin, and horns of any size would effectually prevent the tiger getting a grip which would dislocate the neck if he struck the beast from behind. Again, were he to bound on the neck of the victim, there would surely be raking claw marks all down the back, and this is never the case in normal kills.

Only three or four times have I ever seen injuries other than the usual throat wound, and these were in the case of a blue-bull, which, after a terrific struggle, was bitten, hamstrung, and clawed all down the back and flanks, and in one case even the tail was torn off. This was undoubtedly the work of a young tiger, from the small pug marks which made its size clear to any trained observer—an unpractised and imperfect killer therefore. I have known also of a blue-bull which was caught in the neck in the classical manner by a miserably small panther, and unable to shake off the feline, went charging round and round the field, with the panther hanging to its neck, until it eventually died of strangulation.

A brother Officer of mine who had been lucky enough personally to see many natural kills, considered the usual killing method to be after this manner. The tiger would charge up to his prey, deal it a tremendous buffet in the hind quarters, thereby swinging it round and off its balance, at the same time causing it to throw up its head. Then seizing it, with

one paw resting on one side of the neck, a wrench was given on the opposite side with the other paw. The neck was thus broken, and the bite in the throat given at the same time.

My time in India was now rapidly coming to an end. My wife had gone home for good, leaving me for a while alone. A friend came out from home to shoot with me, returning with a bag of six tiger. And so the time wore on until the day when with old Kanhai, best and most loyal of shikarris—who has now himself passed into the shades, murdered by the hand of his own son—I shot my last tiger.

I knew it was my real farewell to this happy life, to the beasts and birds; to the golden sun, scorching though it might be, to the marvellous blue of early morning, to all the many pleasures of an active life—and I saw, as through a mist, the striped body at my feet. It was hard too to say farewell to friends—to those subordinates whose never failing loyalty is still a cherished recollection, and whom I shall always think of as friends.

And what of India? What of the Land of Regrets?

Let it be said at once that the Englishman in India is no more an alien in that country than is the Mohammedan from the north, the Parsee from Persia or even the Hindu himself. The only real "native" is probably the little Gond, living in and around the high lands and mountains of Central India. We, too, are Aryans even as the Hindu is Aryan, and had we not taken over the country the French would have done so, in those far away days of the Eighteenth Century when our occupation first began.

Do they who are now thrusting upon India an unknown future remember these things? Do they remember too, for how long and how gladly generation after generation of Englishmen has shed its blood and given the best years of its life in India's service, for the benefit of her people? What madness, one sometimes wonders, has come upon our leaders.

Just before I left Khandwa, I went down to spend a last night under the shadow of Asirgarh—the old rock whose glory and history began before the coming of Mussulman, Hindu Mahratta or of ourselves, and there I saw visions and dreamed dreams. Come there with me, and say good-bye to India.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FORT OF ASIRGARH

I SAW it first, dark against the gold and blue of early morning; a towering mass of rock rising abruptly from the plain around. Asir, of dim legend and wild Indian story; the stronghold first of Rajputs, then of Moslems, afterwards of the Mahrattas, finally of ourselves. It is the epitome of all Indian history—the change and bloodshed which has torn the country from earliest ages.

This great fortress, a sheer height of eight hundred feet, stands out alone. It is actually a spur of the Satpura Mountains, that spine in the body of Central India; but there is no hill comparable to it within many miles, and its great scarred flanks spring out of the earth with nothing to challenge the natural strength of their grey scarped sides. Approaching it by the road which passes actually beneath the fort, I watched bastion after heavy bastion spring out from the concealing shadow of the main bulk, and could see, too, traces of those outer rings of fortifications which made the place such a problem to military leaders of old time. The great sides were seamed with deep ravines—the abode of bears; there was hardly any tree growth near and very little cover, because for

generations past every stick and pole had been cut down to supply the endless armies passing over and around it like swarms of locusts, devouring as they went.

The rock comes to life first in the chronicles of old Hindu history as a stronghold, and as the shrine of a warrior-saint; later the Chauhan Rajputs embattled and held it until a tragic fate overtook them. For in the Thirteenth Century, the Followers of the Prophet came pouring over India from beyond the northern snows, and penetrated as far south as the land of the Deccan; the first of those successive tides of Moslem invasion which from time to time have overwhelmed India, and have made it impossible for the Hindu ever to live at peace with the Mohammedan for any length of time under the same sky.

As I wandered over the fort I imagined I saw the slender Rajput women peering through the loopholes in the ramparts, watching with terror how the jungle beneath gave up scores and hundreds of hurrying, fierce-eyed soldiers, their huge wickedly curved swords flashing in the morning sun. Day-break brought the creeping fear, night-time the horror of attack. The Rajputs were slain—men, women and children—by the invaders, climbing like cats over the outer battlements, where now only the black-faced langur monkeys find foothold as they swing and whoop in the hot sunshine, or sit in conclave, outlined against the pale green evening sky.

¶ Later still, the Faruki kings of the Khandesh, strong Moslems all, made the great rock their stronghold. They very greatly strengthened the walls and

out-works, and added the lower fort which still forms a complete outer ring and barrier. Here, in the Khandesh and within their capital city of Burhanpur, sixteen miles from the fort, they lived in state and circumstance though not always in peace, for there were perennial campaigns outside their borders and they fought cheerfully among themselves. But ever they maintained the citadel and fled to it for protection when Burhanpur was threatened.

After two centuries a greater than they came marching to subdue the Deccan, Akbar, Emperor of Delhi. This wonderful man, king, poet, dreamer, theologian and almost saint, did actually in his lifetime succeed in bringing under his just rule the many clashing tribes, factions and religions of India. Even the Rajput Rana of Udaipur, the hitherto unconquered chivalry of Hindustan, was in the end subdued, though he could always proudly boast he gave no princess in marriage to the Emperor. Akbar had the innate sense of justice which has so seldom showed in an Eastern ruler; having conquered the Hindu princes or rebellious kings of his own faith, he rewarded them. He gave them high place in his government, made them Masters of Horse, set them to rule Provinces and command armies—his wonderful personality enchained their loyalty. But he showed himself stern to the kings of the Deccan and set out to invade their country.

Bahadur Khan, Faruki king, trembled in his palace at Burhanpur—Akbar's forces were advancing steadily. He should have given, as his father would have done, greeting and an untroubled passage

through his kingdom to the Emperor's armies; instead, he defied him. Thinking of his safe eyrie in the great fort, serene, impregnable, he resolved to isolate himself there and prepare for a siege of possibly endless length. I quote the historian, Ferishta: "He invited fifteen thousand persons, including labourers, artisans and shopkeepers into the place, and filled it with horses and cattle in order that they might serve for work and eventually for other purposes." Heavens!—the fort is only about a thousand yards long and perhaps six hundred wide; a thousand men would be alarming, herded in with cattle and horses, fowls, dogs, and all the indescribable refuse which accumulates in any Indian dwelling—but fifteen thousand! The end was sure and swift. Akbar besieged the citadel; filth, sickness and discontent did the rest. "Nothing could exceed the infatuation of Bahadur Khan," says Ferishta again. "Who, although he had ten years' grain, and money to an enormous extent, still kept his troops in arrears." They mutinied, and the king and his officers gave in without an effort, and surrendered to the Emperor on condition that the soldiery should be spared. This was allowed: "And Bahadur Khan, the last of the Faruki Dynasty, humbled himself before the throne of Akbar Badshah in the year 1600, while the impregnable fortress, with ten years' provisions and countless treasures, fell into the hands of the conqueror." Thus Ferishta, and he is commendably terse.

I tried to picture as I wandered along the ramparts, the scene below the fortress on which the king

must day after day have looked down—too weary to challenge his fate. All round, beyond the low scrub jungle, now seamed and scarred by fire, were the camp lines of armed men; shouting, feeding, perhaps praying on their carpets as they faced the west, sometimes forming up for a charge. Men and bullocks almost as far as the eye could see, for Akbar's forces were counted in hordes and their commissariat was a vast undertaking. Here and there were batteries of heavy guns, and among the elephant lines a bustle could be seen, where the great beasts, their foreheads protected by steel plates, stood ready to lead an attack on the massive steel-spiked door of the citadel—a door which stands even now though some of the spikes have fallen away. And I think the king, and Akbar's courteous general, Abul Fazl, passed through that door together when the siege was done, and, at the head of the steep flight of steps cut in the rock face, whence a path leads to a concealed gateway below, paused a moment, while the king laid his hand, as if in a caress, on the sun-warmed living rock beside him. They passed out of sight and the fort henceforward served new masters.

The Moghuls held it till the Eighteenth Century, when, by treaty, it was handed over to the Mahrattas; first to the Peshwar, afterwards to Scindhia of Gwalior. Still later, Wellesley fighting the Mahratta combine, took the fortress from Scindhia in 1803, though it was returned to him the following year when peace was declared. But Scindhia, always ready to rush into trouble, allied himself sixteen years later with Chitu, head of the Pindari robber

gangs, which at that time were so terribly harassing the country. Once more a British force was sent to take over the fort—and this time it was not given back. Sir John Malcolm was in charge of the forces, together with General Doveton and Colonel Fraser of the Royal Scots. After days of hard fighting, during which Colonel Fraser was killed while leading his men against a sortie of the enemy, the fort was taken and the garrison disarmed.

Since then until 1904, native and British troops had always been stationed there, but in that year all were finally withdrawn, the importance of the old fort from a military point of view having long since vanished. During the British occupation, a road was made up the side of the rock—three miles long and immensely steep. Walking up one day, I remember, a black cobra slithered across my foot and disappeared into the grass. More often, we rode up on the elephant, and as she stood over eight feet high and we sat another three feet above, it was a dizzy view we had of the sloping hill-side and the plain below as we swayed round the sharp curves on the narrow road. We never actually met bears on the track though they were all around in the low jungle and ravines, but in the fort we one day disturbed a big fellow in one of the graveyards, and left in a hurry as we had no weapons with us, unluckily.

There were still winding paths and fine old trees in Asir, but few buildings were left of any kind. I saw the remains of an old Moghuli palace, one exquisite fretted window opening on to the blue distance; but now no pale hands fluttered at the lattice; the queens

and their hand-maidens alike, had gone for ever. Of our occupation little remained save the graves; I think these will in the end be our only memorial in India; we leave them wherever we have sojourned—and passed by.

Shah Jehan built the Mosque which still remained almost intact; he whose queen—immortalized by him in the Taj Mahal—died at Burhanpur not far away from Asir. The graceful minarets still stood, and all around the base of the Mosque the purple bougainvillea rioted and flared against the turquoise sky. Sunset, seen from this height was a marvel, so peaceful was the place—so golden the air, here, far above the world. But at twilight, a sadness as of old ghosts hung over it all; an inescapable regret for lost romance; but a wonderful charm.

Wandering about among the old graves I was always puzzled that Colonel Fraser's last resting place was not to be found among those of his men. The mystery explained itself quite accidentally. Camped one day at a little village six miles from Asir called Nimbola, we were talking on casual matters to one of the Range Officers when he suddenly said: "There is a tomb here, sir, of a British Officer, dead long years ago. Will you go and see it?" We walked with him down to the village and found, set on a high bank above the stream an obelisk-grave in quite a good state of preservation. I bared my head as we read the inscription on the marble tablet, carrying the badge of the Royal Scots. It runs thus—I copied it there, for I had no camera to photograph it:

