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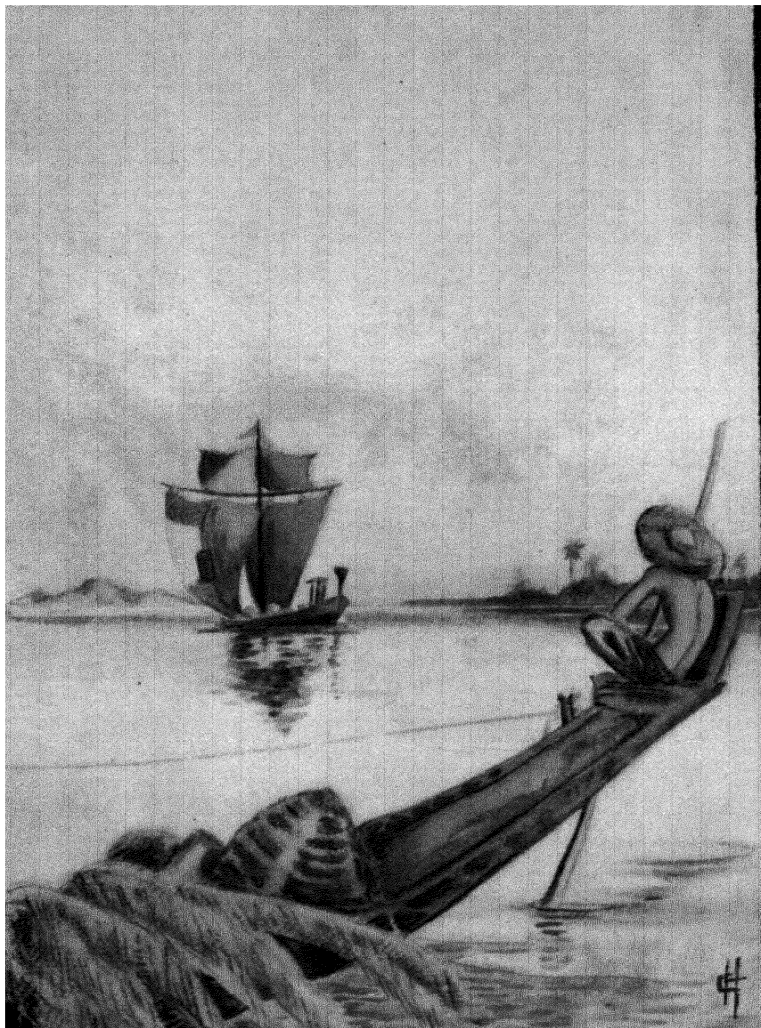
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HUNTER'S MOON



“ I have seen old ships sail like swans asleep.”

James Elroy Flecker

HUNTER'S MOON

BY

LEONARD M. H. HANDLEY

MAJOR, M.C., F.R.G.S.

With Illustrations

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To
“TESSA”
with homage

FOREWORD

IT will be poor consolation for the reader who has invested in this volume—and thrown it aside after one chapter—to know that into its compilation I have put my very soul . . . and thus cast it to him to dissect.

The knowledge and experience of twenty-two years are there; and the yearning desire to express them. But the ink was wrung from my infacile pen, even as the blood drops from the brow of a martyr.

My genii of inspiration were Kipling's "Jungle Books" and Glasfurd's "Rifle and Romance." So obsessed was I with the written magic of these books, that before attempting the writing of "Hunter's Moon," I burnt my only copies. . . . Yet from the ashes of these jungle epics rose subconscious inspiration.

I have striven to depart from the normal account of indiscriminate slaughter, and the incredibly dismal unfolding of the correct paraphernalia, and methods, necessary to outwit the jungle denizens. Striven to interest not only the tyro—eager to absorb jungle lore—but to inflame the average, out-door-loving reader with the glamour and romance of these vast green silences, where only man is vile.

If, in the telling, I can take contemporary and past shikaris just one step back along the corridors of memory, to glimpse the vision of "those dear hills which the hunters cherish, where the hearts of the hunters stay," I shall indeed have drunk deep of the cup of literary success.

LEONARD M. H. HANDLEY

*Hammamet,
Tunisia.*

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	"JUNGLE WISE"	I
II.	GONDIA—THE MHOWA-SCENTED VALLEYS OF LAUGHTER .	6
III.	SMOKE IN THE WIND	67
IV.	THROUGH THE MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO TO FARTHEST TENASSERIM	90
V.	THE MAN-EATER OF DANAULI	144
VI.	TANOY, SIAMESE	160
VII.	ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW	191
VIII.	THE GREAT BLUE HILLS OF RANGA	204
	APOLOGIA	266

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Facing page</i>
“ I have seen old ships sail like swans asleep ”	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“ One small pool lies drenched with moonlight ”	2
Beaters collected for a drive	20
The end of a Jungle Boar	26
Cow killed and finally eaten by a Tiger	28
The murmuring Halon River	28
First steps towards making a Machan	40
The Temple of the sacred source of the Nerbudda	62
“ Sladang ”—Malay Buffalo (p. 103)	62
The birth of the sacred Nerbudda	64
Biblical Winnowing	74
Myself and Friends	78
Abdul Majid	92
Legs drenched with blood, after the nightmare of Leeches	108
The Loogi's house at Telubazar	112
Aboard the Sampan to Victoria Point	136
Erecting a hasty Machan	148
The Man-eater's favourite drinking-place	150
One of the Man-eater's victims	150
My favourite Gond, who was taken from my side by “ the terror ”	154
The terror of Danauli	158
A solitary Rogue in heavy bamboo	170
Tenasserim Elephant Swamp	180
On the track of Tanoy	180

	<i>Facing page</i>
Tanoy's last resting-place	188
The road to the great blue hills	204
One point of view	204
In the shade of the giant bamboos	218
Kurraba and Sholaga trackers, Mysore	236
My virgin effort in Mysore	236
Dedication	260
Elephant camp at the foot of the great hills	260
Map of India and Burma	<i>End papers</i>

“ So, for their sakes I loved, ere I go hence . . .
And to keep loyalties young, I'll write those names
Golden for ever, eagles, crying flames,
And set them as a banner, that men may know,
To dare the generations, burn, and blow
Out on the wind of Time, shining and streaming. . . .”

Rupert Brooke.

CHAPTER I

“ JUNGLE WISE ”

ROUND the nala, a few hundred yards away, lay the kill. The jungle quivered in the noonday haze, and the little party halted in the meagre shade of a mhowa tree, while Ganga scooped up a little luke-warm water from a puddle before turning the bend within sight of the kill.

Significantly the old shikari pointed to a cluster of sal trees ahead, festooned with clumps of vultures and crows, their beady eyes riveted on the jungle beneath, their beaks agape in the noonday glare. The leading shikari dropped back, and his place was taken by the Sahib, finger on trigger, every sense and muscle taut, to catch the first sight of the great beast—black-banded on gold.

Silently the repulsive scavengers in the boughs above watched the approach of man. Some of the more timid crows blinked an eye, and with a loud caw of disapprobation, fluttered off up the nala. Still the slayer below crunched the kill, oblivious of the silent approach up the nala bed, his presence blazoned to the old shikari long before the glimpse of his lean body, camouflaged in the fierce patches of sunlight and velvet shadow, announced that he was once again at his work of destruction.

. . . . The scene changes. Fierce noonday glare has

given place to the kindliness of full yellow moonlight. The Bhimdari nala lies cool and flushed with sleep. All the long day it has simmered in the midsummer glare. One small pool lies drenched with moonlight, and all the banks are scarred with the tracks of deer and pig, which use it to quench their nocturnal thirst.

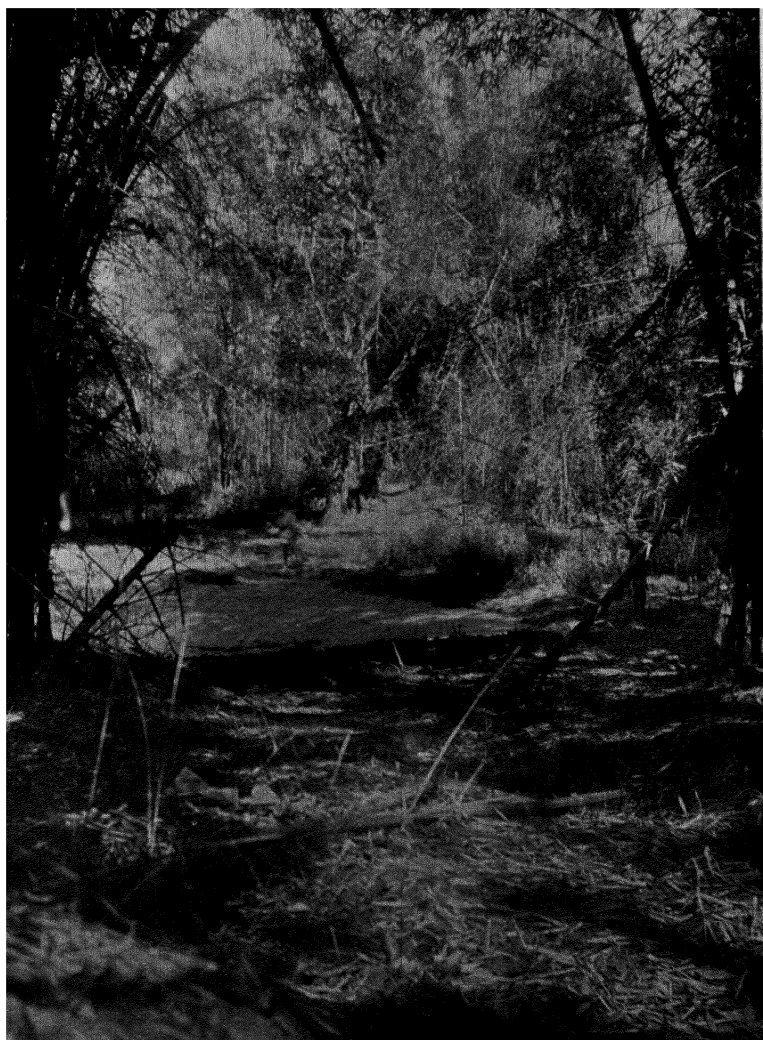
Even now something is cautiously, step by step, approaching through the rustling grass towards the pool's brink. A pause in the velvet shadows which outline the pool, then from the tracery of moonlit branches emerges the faint silhouette of a cheetah hind. Alert, ears hinged forward, piercing the deep silence of the surrounding shadows. A few yards away another form stands motionless in the silvered water. The sentinel hinds precede the herd to water, for well they know the nightly fear of the sudden rush from the lair at the margin of the pool.

There is a sudden scream of alarm from one of the hinds, a rattle of hoofs on the stones of the nala, and in the distance the rush of the herd away from danger. Then all is silent.

A few moments later the silence of the pool is again broken by the return of the hinds, followed by the herd, and the opalescence of the moon-drenched water is agitated with ripples of silver light, as the thirsty family quench their day-long thirst.

When there are pug-marks of tiger at the pool's edge, this precedes every nocturnal drink, and the old hind well knows the ruse to draw the crouching slayer from his lair. . . .

No kindly mhowa throws its shadow over the sun-kissed sand. Dawn creeps up wan and chilly from behind the fringe of palms far south. The foreground



“ One small pool lies drenched with moonlight ”

of rolling desert takes shape, and the hill emerges from the night shadows. The patrol dismounts behind a babul-covered mound, and the subaltern eagerly scans the outline of the hill, bathed in a warm bronze light, as the sun peeps over the rim of the horizon.

“Nothing there yet, Risaldar Sahib, only yesterday’s old dead camel, so get those scouts on to the hill as soon as possible.”

But still the old Risaldar’s glasses rest on the distant hill. The camel killed on yesterday’s patrol sleeps its long last sleep beneath the only shade the hill possesses—a clump of babul trees planted above the decaying tomb of some local saint. His quick eyes, jungle-trained in youth, have picked up the blurs of the vultures in the trees—the kill is deserted—yet what danger lurks in the shadows on the far side of the ridge?

“Better, Sahib, to send scouts wide at first; the vultures are wary of their meal, there is danger on the hill,” warned the Risaldar, risking the denunciation of “cold feet.”

“You’re always over-cautious, Risaldar Sahib,” rapped out “youth,” as he thrust his field-glasses home; “it’s obvious the hill is empty, so send the centre pair of scouts straight up as usual.”

“Apka kushi,* Sahib,” murmured the old shikari, as he moved away to give a timely warning to the centre scouts, whose job it was to gallop the hill straight, while the patrols pushed cautiously round. These were the early days, before patrols had learnt through bitter experience the folly of rash scouting, and the centre scouts mounted with no thought of the significance of the vulture-laden trees.

* So be it.

“ Danger lurks on the hill,” the old man warned them ; “ see that you draw their fire even as the cheetul do at the pool before supping.”

The patrols trotted out, the centre one covering the mile of open desert to the hill at a steady trot. Had they not heard the subaltern's rebuke of the old hand's over-cautiousness, was not the hill verily deserted, and would two good Jat Sikhs turn their backs on a handful of Turks who were obviously not there? So straight up the slope at a gallop, unheeded all warning !

The vultures avidly eyed their interrupted feast, and blinked without interest at the group of men lying in the shadow of the hill. Watched them galvanise into life, and wriggle reptilely forward. From the far side approached two horsemen—a ragged volley, and two riderless horses plunged off down the hill, while two seeming bundles of clothes twitched and lay very still.

A mile away over the sun-drenched desert the subaltern cursed, and sat heavily down to digest his bitterly learned lesson.

“ Dawn—and the night wind softly sighing :
Solemn, and grey, and chill.
Rose in the East, and Orion swinging
Down to the distant hill.
The grass dew-pearled ; and the Mhowa shaking
Her scented petals across the track :
And the herd astir in the new day breaking—
God, how it all comes back ! ”

* * * * *

“ When I'd wake with the dawn and the starlight meeting,
In the solemn fragrance of myrrh and musk :
Peacock and jungle-fowl sounding a greeting ;
And the jungles mine 'til the dusk.”

* * * * *

“ You take me back to the valleys of laughter :
The hills that the Hunters love—
The sudden storm—and the sunshine after :
The clouds—and the blue above.
The morning mists, and the creatures crying,
The stalk in the drowsy afternoon—
Clear-washed eve—and the sunset dying. . . .
Night and a Hunter's moon.”

CHAPTER II

GONDIA—THE MHOWA-SCENTED VALLEYS OF LAUGHTER

“**T**HE valleys of laughter, the hills that the hunters love”—it should be simplicity itself to record memories of these. It is in the fact that one loves them so deeply that the main difficulty lies. Impossible to confine oneself to a mere chapter, when a volume is quite insufficient to record the thousand memories of such blissful months. Year after year—excluding the bitter War period—I was lured back to the cool green recesses of the Central Province forests. I saw them at all seasons—in joy and sorrow ; during the vivid dry months preceding the downpour of the monsoon, when the grass burnt the soles of one’s boots and all Nature lay and panted for the blessed advent of rain ; during the early monsoon months, when the rich young grass was bursting ’neath the early showers, and the nalas and river-beds, wakened from their parched misery, were prattling to one another of the coming flood ; and in the heaven of winter and early spring—a Bernese Oberland climate ; the jungles sparkling as a Vin Mousseux, the mhowa shaking her scented petals across a succession of scintillating days, and frosty star-spangled nights. . . . On such a night I came to Mandla.

The train decanted me and my belongings, orderly and bearer, on a dreary platform long after sunset.

Transferring the party into a still-sleeping tonga, we continued our drowsy way through the darkened bazaar, and out the far side along a moonlit road, deep in the dust of undisturbed ages. These Central Province pseudo-cities are all alike: a very hive of industry during the cool hours of the day—an hour after sunset they assume the atmosphere of complete decay; Pompeii and Herculaneum sleep no more soundly than they. A stepping-stone between the bustle and activity of the railway (the main line of communication with the outside world) and the silence of the great jungles, they brood throughout the long hours of the night in semi-civilised uncertainty. Not wholly alive as the large cities, yet not wholly emancipated from the thrall of the great forests from which they have sprung, and from which they derive their very existence. Half horridly human, half faun—a blending of Babu-ridden officialdom and unadulterated spirit-worshipping Gond.

After a mile or so we drew near to the inevitable “dak bungalow,” the local hostel, where, to my disgust, I was informed by the custodian—flushed from some evil godown—that the only two rooms were occupied by a Deputy-Commissioner and his head clerk!

I had glimpsed the former comfortably ensconced in one of the verandahs. With true “heaven-born hospitality” (engendered by too many years’ autocracy amongst an inferior white community in some mofussil town), he dowsed his light on my arrival, and composed himself to sleep with the comforting reflection that he possessed at that moment four-fourths of the entire European accommodation in Mandla.

These soliloquies were rudely shattered.

It transpired that the Sahib Bahadur—one Tek

Chand—occupied one room and the surrounding verandahs ; two beds (one inside, and the one on the verandah from which he was shortly to be so rudely awakened). His head clerk—shades of a Congress Utopia, Liberté, Egalité, and Hinduism!!—occupied the other room, and the third and only bed.

In pre-democratic days, when India was still the “brightest jewel,” and Gandhism had not yet raised its ugly head above the political horizon, head babus were only tolerated on the bungalow verandah, bare-footed and servient, transacting their master’s business. Despite the Montagu–Chelmsford idealistic conception of an anglo-dravidian equality, I had not yet developed blood brotherhood to the extent of relinquishing the only European bed to the head parasite of a dusky heaven-born.

I asked the chaukidar to open the inner room and give me the spare bed, only occupied by his ebony “Altesse” by day. He replied that it was locked and that the key reposed beneath His Excellency’s pillow. . . . The hurricane lamp beside the bed burnt low. I turned up the wick and fully illumined the bed and its occupant before investigating further—a necessary precaution in a country where slumber is as light as a hair trigger, and a sudden arousing of the sleeper may have dire results for the awakener.

Never awake an Arab or a Pathan from any sleep without having first taken possession of his knife. Likewise be chary of awakening a white man—outside the circumference of city or cantonment walls (away from the sleep-drugging influences of civilisation)—without the previous precaution of illumination. To awake and feel a hand in the dark groping to raise the mosquito net to get full scope for a knife is far from

pleasant. . . . After one such experience I always slept with two nets, one tucked inside the mattress, and one above. Two were more likely to ward off a knife-thrust, and in the untucking, delay sufficient to give a modicum of warning—a sporting chance of not dying in one's sleep.

The light showed the "Protector of the Poor" beatifically composed for sleep. I raised the curtains and tapped him on the shoulder. No sudden awakening, but the gradual return to consciousness of the sleep-drugged town-dweller. I emphasised my urgent need of one of his three beds, and asked for the key of his room—the open sesame to his spare couch.

"But I have engaged all the accommodation for my annual tour; it is Government inspection bungalow," he bleated indignantly.

"Doubtless. But though you be the uncrowned King of the Central Provinces, the reincarnation of Buddha, Mahomed, and Brahma upon earth, yet common decency must prompt you to offer me one of your numerous beds," I murmured, while groping beneath the pillow for the elusive key.

"It is impossible," he replied, moulding a much-soiled pillow to his repulsive head, and preparing to renew his interrupted sleep.

The scent of the jungle—a tide pouring headlong for ever 'neath the stars—clamoured to all that was atavistic in me to smash this emblem of authority, and take what was mine by right of physical superiority—the jungle creed. But the cold breath of sanity prevailed, and told me that such behaviour would not be tolerated in this age of reason—and racial equality! Argument must prevail.

I pointed out that if I could not obtain a bed for the

night, I should be forced to spend it in feasting and mirth-making, so that the long nocturnal hours would hasten to their appointed end. I called upon my faithful bearer to unpack my ukulele and saxophone!!—to prepare the acetylene lamps to convert night into day, and to hasten with the preparation of my dinner so that later he would be free to accompany me on the dhol and sitar (two pleasing instruments, guaranteed to empty any jungle of game and inhabitants more expeditiously than the hungriest pack of wild dog). As I had no intention of disturbing the head clerk from his vermin-infested lair, the only alternative to this night of orgy and horror—to which the third degree would seem a rest cure—was the key to his auxiliary bed. He capitulated and himself unlocked the door. I scattered his spare bed-clothes generously on the floor, and departed to one corner of the verandah, where I dined, washed, and slept noisily, mentally and physically invigorated.

* * * * *

The following day was spent in making all the necessary arrangements for my two months' sojourn in the heart of the Mandla forests. I visited the Forest Officer, and was given a detailed map of my domains—an area of over a hundred square miles of well-watered jungle, of which I was sole possessor. For sixty days the jungles were mine from dawn till dusk to roam at will, unfettered and alone—a goodly heritage.

With no previous knowledge of the block, acting on the Forest Officer's advice, I decided to make my first camp on the edge of the block, at Ramnagar—the headquarters of the range—where lived the ranger who was to provide me with a forest guard and all the latest information. It took the rest of the day purchasing stores and

provisions and arranging carts for the forward move. By the evening, tired but triumphant, we returned to the rest-house—now empty of its over-night encumbrances.

It was eight o'clock of the morning before, the last purchase made and the carts finally loaded, we started out on the twelve-mile road journey to Ramnagar. To those accustomed to the rapid transport of the West, it would appear unreasonable—if not fantastic—to start out on a twelve-mile journey at eight a.m. to make certain of reaching one's destination before nightfall. Twelve miles under Western conditions would be covered in less than half an hour, whereas in the far lands of which I write it takes as many hours.

Away from railways and motor transport, in the great solitudes, the only means of reaching one's destination is by bullock cart. Gradually the more important roads are being liberated from this relic of Dravidian days, but it will be many years before the minor roads and tracks are efficiently served by aught but buffalo and bullock carts. Personally I trust that the roar and bustle of modern petrol engines will never break up the perfect jungle silence of these remote jungle byways. And that all the evil and sordid gangs of oil-reeking efficients, which follow the trail of petrol (more especially in the East), will never penetrate the peace and super-inefficiency of these Gondian labyrinths.

We rumbled into Ramnagar as the shadows were lengthening across the road, having averaged one and a half miles an hour.

I found refuge for the night in an old Gondian fort on the fringe of my domain. Leaving the carts fully loaded on the road, I took sufficient requirements for the night, and settled into a ground-floor ruin, where,

after a bathe, I luxuriated in a deck-chair in an atmosphere entirely after my own heart.

Ruins, to be thoroughly appreciated as links with the past, must be untouched by the hand of civilisation. They must be enjoyed in a solitude where imagination can be stimulated to people them with the ghosts of the past. Else they remain but an empty husk, reflecting naught of their past pride and glory. . . . I found it impossible to continue musing on the past tragedy of Chitor when a sideways glance embraced the dazzling efficiency of Udaipur's new palace. Side by side with the blood-drenched stones and age-worn ruins of this cradle of Rajput chivalry, it acted as a complete antidote to a vivid imagination. Likewise the hand of modern efficiency repairing the dagobas and stupas of ancient Anaradapura. . . . Rather should they crumble to dust and carry their past history with them than be recreated with concrete and lose all semblance of their former glory. This blending of the modern and the ancient is as great a shock to the artistic imagination as the beer bottle I discovered on the head of the Sphinx.

Past history cannot be recreated and imagination stimulated in the atmosphere of tea kiosks, turnstiles—"Pay here to see the ruins"—urinals and other social conveniences. History draws a veil over her frail remnants before the denuding eye of bowler-hatted trippers, eager for a good outing, and blind to all historical romance.

Relics of a bygone Gondian dynasty of over three hundred years ago, these ruins drowsed in the warm evening glow. Untouched by the desecrating hand of man, imagination was charmed back to the days when the last petty princeling bade farewell to the asylum of their walls and turrets. Their history lay shrouded

in mystery. One could but conjecture the sudden flight of their Gondian Rajah before the invading Pindari horde. Since then the encroaching jungle had stretched out a parasitic hand and draped its crumbling blocks with lichen, and hung a trellis of vines across the ageing turrets. Great trees grew from out its battlements, and myriads of bats and squirrels peopled the sightless walls.

Towards sunset, troops of monkeys left the neighbouring lentana and cactus and settled down in the nooks and crannies for the night. As the moon swung high upon its gentle course, every cupola and arch dissolved into a misty contrast of silver and deep shadow. The decay was softened in a moonlit mist. It might have been the fort of three hundred years ago, wrapt at the height of its power in a jungle sleep.

The following morning I explored the ruins block by block. They comprised four sides to a great central courtyard. The south façade over the main gateway was of three stories, and contained the greater number of rooms. The outer three sides were only one-storied, with enchanting corner towers, gazing far out over the surrounding forest. The north façade looked across the river and contained my apartment. The whole—a maze of winding stairways and connecting passages, with double walls and fantastic oubliettes.

I sat in the south façade on an exquisitely engraved stone, warm with the patina of centuries of sunlight—the colour that only time can give—and pictured the Gondian throne. I drew on my imagination to re-people the ruins of the past. . . . Gradually the rooms filled with a misty cloud of nobles and sycophants about the solitary figure seated at my side. Below, the courtyards teemed with soldiery and retainers; the

stables filled with horses and wild animals kept for fighting on festival days. Beside me, the Rajah mused in isolated sovereignty . . . mused on his life's work, devising and fashioning this jungle fastness—on the contentment of his people—the richness of his byres and harvests. . . . Did Providence perhaps vouchsafe him a glimpse of the ruin which was to come forth from the green wall of jungle across the misty fields? Could he have foreseen the present awful lonely decay—the only inhabitants hosts of gibbering apes?

“ The wordly hope men set their hearts upon
Turns ashes—or it prospers ; and anon,
Like snow upon the desert's dusty face,
Lighting a little hour or two—is gone.”

I spent yet another night among the ruins. As the chattering of the monkeys died away, and the first tender moonbeams touched the turrets with silver, there descended a depth of solitude unprobed. A hush as at the world's end. If there exists a spirit-world, surely they communed at this hour upon the ghostly walls.

The monkeys gathered around me as I packed up the following morning, eyeing and fingering every article. The babies were the most curious, and while they peeped into every box, their mothers held them by their silken tails, reproving them when they became overbold and wandered too far from the maternal clutch ; whereupon they cried bitterly and humanly. Some followed us even to the carts, and my last sight of them was a long simian procession winding its way to the river for the morning bath.

The Forest Officer recommended me to move via Gugri to the Airi jungles, a small block lying between the Burmer and Halon rivers, and excellent tiger cover.

There was a kill there two days ago, and he put me on to a good forest guard at Narbeli—a Thakur Rajput. Thence he recommended moving north to the Gorakpur jungles and on to Chabi, trying the Githori caves for bear en route. So I now had a definite plan of campaign—most necessary when one's time is limited.

It was reported that the road to Gugri was fit for carts. But we soon discovered this to be another Gond fallacy, and that the Biblical fiery chariot alone could ever have reached Gugri intact.

Gradually the track became steeper and sketchier and finally petered out in an outcrop of huge boulders. The cartman had abandoned his bullocks with a consumptive cough which indicated an early grave, and squatted retching by the roadside some miles behind. Majid, with his instinctive Jat knowledge of the necessary tail-twists and oaths to stimulate a recalcitrant bullock, had taken charge, and cleverly negotiated the obstacle. We drew out on to the level just before dusk, with no hope of reaching Gugri that night.

Abreast of a small village called Katangi, a most inviting tank with plenty of duck invited a halt ; so we outspanned, and I opened my single box in a vain search for twelve-bore cartridges. It transpired that the Army and Navy Stores had overlooked packing any ammunition with the rest of my stores ! . . . Fortunately I had some ammunition for my big rifles with me—but one solitary twelve-bore.

While the camp was being pitched, I stalked the margin of the lake with my single cartridge. Never were duck wilder. They clung to the very centre of the weed-choked pool, and nothing would rouse them. I had to leave them and pick my reluctant way home through the gathering darkness.

They had made me a diminutive camp-fire—dry wood was scarce—and it did not outlast my dinner. It was bitterly cold, and the water of the tank glimmered—a far-away opal in the light of full moon. I sat wrapped to the teeth in two blankets beside the ashes of the burnt-out fire. . . . At last a long, long way from civilisation—thus at peace with all the world.

A dreadfully cold dawn followed as we struck camp. After a mile we were faced with an apparently unfordable stream. I went in search of coolies to manhandle us across. The only sign of life in the nearest village was a boys' school, whence I enlisted the sympathies of the staff and students (children ranging from five to twelve) to get me off the rocks. They eagerly welcomed such a diversion, and, treating it all as a huge joke, followed me back to the cart, which we literally lifted bodily over the stream. The bullocks gave up the unequal struggle, and the entire outfit, cart, bullocks and staff, was picked up in one large conglomerate mass and transported to the far bank. It reminded me of an army of ants diligently retrieving a dead wasp.

Alas ! this was not the end of our troubles, for some few miles further on, the driver (stimulated by the distant view of Gugri and its arrack-scented air) goaded his bullocks to cross a singularly offensive nala. This proved too much, for the axle broke and the protesting bullocks sank to oblivion in the nala, enshrouded in the debris of the carts and baggage—now reduced to matchwood. We passed this final cup of bitterness some moments later, and only paused to push the owner deeper into the debris—in case he took to the jungles and escaped subsequent restitution.

Coolies were collected in Gugri and sent out to bring

in our possessions from the depths of the nala. They were in by nightfall, and I pitched my camp on the outskirts of the village in the shade of a gigantic peepul tree.

By luck, the following morning the bazaar was full of Gonds from the surrounding jungle. It was the weekly market-day, and they were busy purchasing luxuries which the forest could not provide. Amongst them I found one Koopa—the very father of all Gonds—a very dear old man, grey-bearded and toothless, his body so wrinkled that he might have been grilled over a fire. Full of jungle knowledge, and, for all his half-naked skin, the endurance of an athlete, untouched by years. He was the headman of Latoo village in the depths of the Airi jungles; and recounted to me such tales of the glories of the forest between the Burmer and Halon rivers that I determined to put myself in his hands and move camp there forthwith.

The direct co-operation of a village headman and his myrmidons is worth far more than the assistance of a dozen minor Government officials, whose sole ambition is to squeeze one dry for their own personal advancement. It has always been my aim to leave roads and arteries of civilisation far behind; to plunge into the most primitive jungle—innocent of such parasites as professional shikaris, forest guards, and rangers; to penetrate far from the democracy of the trunk road, where the price of stores and transport is exorbitant, and in many cases their sale to the European prohibited by Gandhism.

Some years ago—when the seeds of non-co-operation were being sown throughout the Central Provinces—in this very district, the villagers in proximity to the main roads and civilisation were exhorted to kill all

their chickens so as to deprive the much-hated touring European official of his much-coveted eggs and roast chicken. The people obeyed the dictate of Congress, and thus were reduced to an even greater pinch of hunger and poverty than before. The official never even knew of this decree—and certainly never experienced any shortage of chicken, as these poured in as presents from the loyal and untouched Gonds from jungle villages not yet affected with the taint of non-co-operation.

The forest guard from Narbeli came to see me in the evening, but I dismissed him on sight as useless. Also, he had admitted to my orderly that he was suffering from a nameless disease, which necessitated a sedentary life! Far better to trust to the Gonds and Gauris of Latoos than to the diseased attentions of this Government parasite whose jungle lore seemed to be limited to the interiors of the Gugri "maisons de santé."

The following morning, soon after dawn, twenty sturdy young Gonds descended on my camp, fresh from the Latoos jungle. They hoisted my baggage and were off up the trail at a run, heading for the great silences still wreathed in the mists hanging about the Halon river. We followed all out, as I well knew the knack of the jungle aboriginal to pitch one's camp in the most unsuitable locality. Once it is established, a change of site entails a lot of trouble and disappointment. We caught them up at the crossing of the Burmer river, which we negotiated safely, with the exception of my clown-like Christian bearer, Michael, who did the splits in mid-stream, carrying my bicycle. We reached the village of Latoos at about ten, and were soon settled into camp—both tents pitched and a "bundobust" established.

For the sake of the uninitiated I will explain this invaluable word. It is the Urdu for "arrangements," and in this case includes all and sundry essentials for making one's camp life run on greased wheels. It included the supply of local produce for oneself and servants, the supply of water and firewood, runners for one's "dak" or post, the acquisition of knowledge on local conditions—and everything that would conduce to the making one's camp happier and life easier. Once this initial "bundobust" had been established, it became a matter of routine. Once it broke down, chaos reigned and life was rendered hideous.

On an African safari the cabalistic equivalent is the Swahili word "shauri." If there is a good entente between master and servant, the two magic sentences, "shauri banao" and "bundobust karo," produce—or rather should produce—the same effect. When everything seems blackest, and one is shrouded in a cloud of non-co-operation, when food and drink seem non-existent, and the path seems sown with every form of abysmal pitfalls, the magic words to a trusted servant, "bundobust karo," will let the blessed sunshine through the darkest cloud. The only reply from the non-co-operator to such sentiments as "It is impossible," is "Bundobust karo." Synchronised with the dignified transference of one's presence to another sphere, one can await in suspended animation the achievement of the impossible. Initially, with a strange servant such behaviour will have no effect, and Hinduism (or passive resistance) will be established.

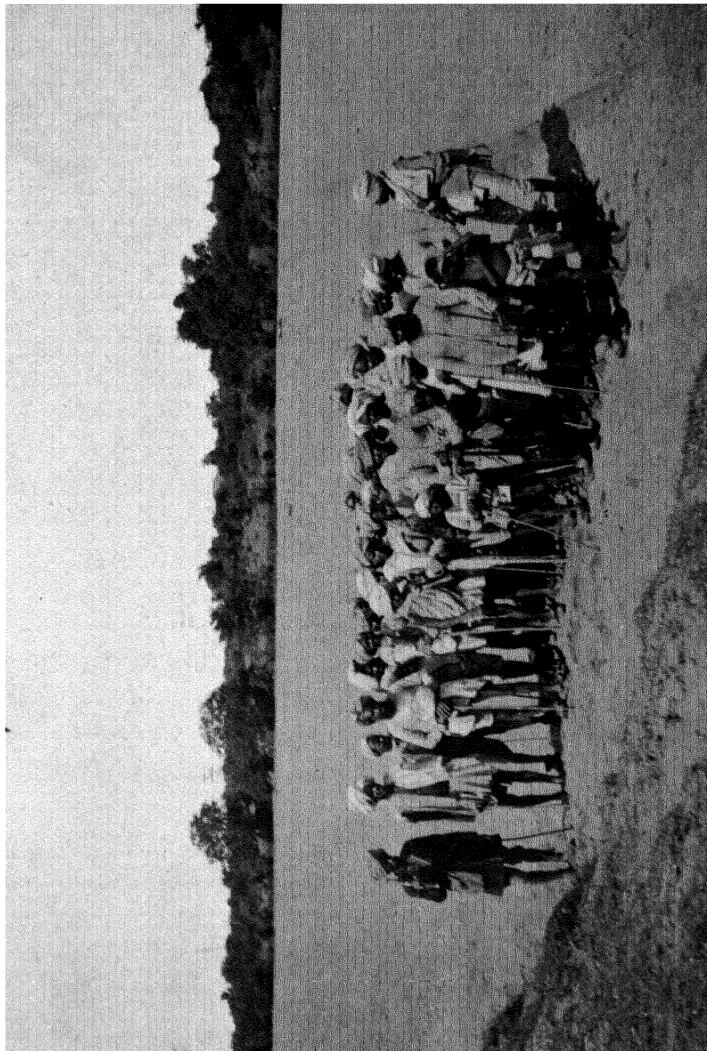
Need I reiterate that the Oriental obeys implicitly a desire or command expressed by a dominant will (whether enforced spiritually—by a stronger mentality—or physically—by the whip). Such a mental or

physical superiority must be gained before the mystic words can be successfully applied. Normally, when dealing with the children of the forest, the desire to please is so marked that merely to express one's requirements is for them to be immediately fulfilled. Unfortunately, with the spread of democracy along the arterial motor roads I have had to break down much veiled hostility before establishing the necessary "bundobust karo" entente.

Latoo will always remain one of my happiest shikar memories: a veritable oasis of kindness and good feeling in a desert of non-co-operation which I had been travelling ever since I left the railway at Manda. The hand of Gandhi and passive resistance lay heavily upon the Central Province roads.

Here in this jungle sanctuary all was friendliness and peace. Koopa placed the entire mature male population of the village at my disposal, for camp labour, and tracking and beating. My camp-fire became the village club—or rather pub—and was never deserted. At all hours of the day there was a small cluster of Gonds about it—trackers, porters, or the tiers-up of baits. All looked upon it as a common meeting-place, to discuss ways and means of assuring me good sport—and a happy sojourn at Latoo. Old Koopa was ever present, helping to collate various rumours of game, sifting the likely from the fantastic, and organising the daily distribution of baits.

I was chiefly concerned with tiger, the hunting of which never grows stale. No two tigers ever behave the same; thus ensuring constant novelty, punctuated with moments of extreme excitement, almost amounting to terror. Thus, the main daily occupation was the tying up of village buffalos (called bodas) for the baiting of



Beaters collected for a drive

hungry tiger in the vicinity. These bodas I had obtained with the greatest difficulty. It is prohibited by the Hindu religion to take life. Moreover, the cow and its issue are utterly sacred to the devout Hindu. To take their lives is considered the greatest sacrilege, and thus these animals are as inviolate as the most cherished totem. Yet, though they shrink from killing even diseased cattle, or eating their flesh after death, they have no scruples in almost torturing them to a natural early death by cruel overworking and under-feeding.

This is one of the many strange paradoxes of this inexplicable religion. Rather than destroy a cow riddled with disease and ill-health, they will let it die of starvation; literally by inches. Before the spread of non-co-operation there had been no difficulty in buying bodas. With the exception of the Brahmins and high-caste Gugars, no jungle Hindu ever refused a bait. But now the ready pretext for refusal was—an offence against their religion. They had undoubtedly been coached in this campaign by professional agitators. It was useless to point out that, once sold, the ultimate fate of the beast was no longer their concern. They insisted that selling the sacred animal to be eaten by a tiger constituted a religious offence, and nothing would shake this conviction.

The local Mahomedans were few and far between, and not the cattle-owners; and the jungle Gonds possessed only sufficient cattle for their immediate wants. The big owners were the very people I execrated—the money-lenders of Gugri, and the local shopkeeping class who waxed fat on the extortion and oppression of the surrounding villages. One such herd I determined to raid by night. Armed with an

electric torch and several lengths of good country rope, Majid and I lassoed a suitable half-dozen one moon-light night. Packed tight in a neighbouring serai, it was no difficult matter to rope six succulent young calves, and hand them over to the waiting Gonds, who hustled them across the river to distant Latoo. Their owner—knowing full well my guilt—came riding a white donkey to visit me next day : a bunia, obese and indignant, wearing the Brahminical sacred thread and glistening with the triple caste-mark of Shiva. I explained my prime need of bodas and my willingness to purchase at a handsome price. As they had not been forthcoming I had been forced to help myself. A little autocratic perhaps, but diamond cut diamond, over his complete lack of co-operation. He attempted to melt me with his tears, and in a frenzy of self-pity confessed, “ ’Twere better that you tied me up than that I should offer these sacred animals for slaughter.” I took him at his word and expressed delight at his generous offer. A far more succulent bait—over 200 lb. of warm oleaginous bunia—than a half-starved buffalo calf. I made instant preparations for his tying up that night in the most-fancied tiger beat. But his nerve failed him at the last, and he withdrew his offer and departed gratefully for Gugri, disillusioned at my lack of faith in the protective powers of the National Congress.

To get back to our bodas. I now had six—ready to start operations—and that evening discussed at length with almost the entire male population of the village the best locality to bait the tiger. The consensus of opinion was the triangle between the Burmer and Halon rivers, well watered, well stocked with game, with deliciously cool lairs for lying up in the

heat of the day ; also lying between two rivers, easy to beat.

“ Dawn—and the night wind softly sighing : solemn, and grey, and chill.” How true these words rang as we awoke the following morning, with the false dawn primrose in a cloudless sky ! It was bitterly cold, and we had literally to disentangle the trackers from the ashes of the smouldering fire. We were bent on a preliminary reconnaissance of our jungle—more especially to look for tiger tracks and decide where to tie up our baits. Until we had exploited the reserve for tiger, I decided to refrain from rousing the jungles by promiscuous shooting. Also I had long outgrown any desire to interrupt the blessed peace of Nature’s sanctuaries. We were carried across the river and placed dry-footed on a small sandy strand, while the Gonds lighted a small fire to thaw their frozen feet. The jungles, a-sparkle with frost, were shrouded in a white blanket of mist. Dawn. . . . I thought of the many millions to whom sunrise was still a mystery, and of the thousands to whom a sunrise spelt the termination of a night’s debauch—a phenomenon viewed through drawn blinds and shutters, in an atmosphere of kippers and stale beer, confronted with the problem of how to reach home in dress-clothes in the critical light of day. . . . Dawn—a premature awakening to the toil which knows no breaking, a routinous flop from bed to breakfast chair, to the Tube and office stool.

This dawn broke as clear as a fresh-cut diamond dipped in liquid crystal. The mist evaporated, and all Nature shouted with the joy of a newly-born day. After five hours’ “ still hunting,” passing from one sunny glade to another, through such cheetul and

sambhur lands as I had pictured only in my imagination, we came at last upon the broad, unmistakable pug-mark of tiger. It has never ceased to give me a thrill—the knowledge that a few hours (perhaps an hour or only a few moments) before, along this very track, the king of all jungle beasts passed in his pride—respected and detested—scent and eye keen for the night's killing. Unfruitful the endeavour to track him once he left the dusty track. Possibly one might find the broad imprint crossing a nala bed, or where he had stooped to quench his thirst by some mid-jungle pool; but the leaves and grassy undergrowth showed no impression of his passing. I selected six places for the tie-up, all close to water where, after killing, he could slake his thirst. All near to good shady cover where he could sleep after his heavy repast. Then we turned our heads for the river and camp.

Two pairs of Gonds, each with three bodas, tied up the baits that night in the selected places. They were tied securely by the feet with good stout rope, camouflaged with mud, and left unsuspecting of danger till the dawn. Old maids, dedicated to good works—devotees of tabbies and Pekinese—members of the R.S.P.C.A., and emasculated humanitarians may deprecate the cruelty of such an act; but from close experience of twenty years of tying up live baits I can confidently affirm that they do not pass a night of expectant horror. The bullock, cow, or buffalo has the same imagination as a block of concrete. Given a pile of grass to chew throughout the night, he feels no sense of isolation or discomfort; nor has he the slightest inkling he is a bait for hungry tiger. The pleasure that he evinces in the morning at seeing his liberators is merely because he is cold and rather stiff from his night in the open. I

cannot say the same of a baited goat or dog, both of which are of a higher mentality (hence a more vivid imagination), and are accustomed to the comparative safety of a home by night.

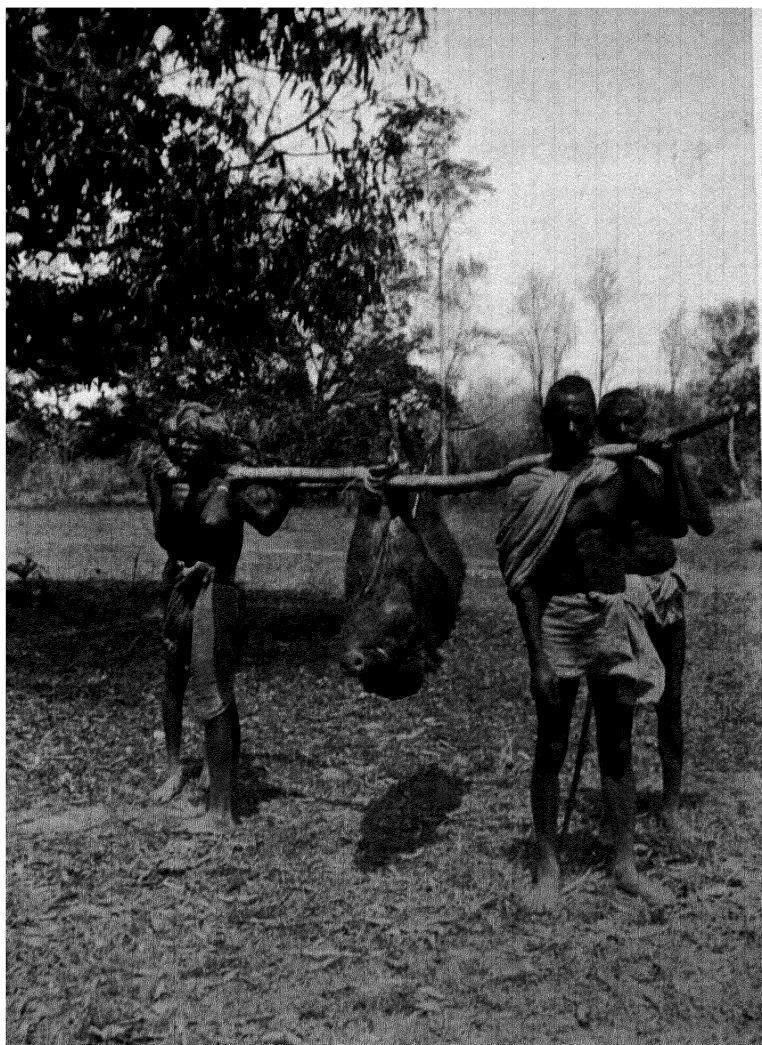
There was a goodly company that night around the camp-fire—old Koopa and the trackers, and the boda-tenders, back from their evening tie-up. Long after my small vocabulary had petered out, they sat telling their jungle legends and swopping village gossip. Attractive children of Nature, unspoiled by the spread of Western culture and education! The younger men were beautiful as a Kanaka, and lithe as a Zulu herdsman, the ebony of their naked bodies relieved by a necklace of coral about the throat. Each had his jungle axe on his shoulder, and the “bloods” were braceleted with silver on both wrists. I sat long after dinner lulled by the murmur of their voices. The last thing before retiring to bed was the arrival of the dak runner (postman) with my meagre mail carried in the cleft of a bamboo stick. He departed into the night with a jingle of dak bells—to scare away marauding tiger—and the glow of his torch was swallowed up in the immensity of the surrounding silence. The fireflies came out and lit me to my jungle bed.

Days drifted along filled with incidents. Nightly the boda men departed, and daily at dawn they returned with no news of the much-desired tiger kill. I roamed my domain from end to end, until I knew the five hundred acres between the rivers like the palm of my hand. Daily we glimpsed the elusive sambhur, and watched the play of light and shade through the trees on the dappled beauty of the herds of cheetul. The leaves were on the ground, the trees were bare, and soon after the dawn-dew had evaporated, the jungles crackled

underfoot like matchwood. Mid-winter, the best season for visibility and perfection of climate—but ruination to a stealthy stalk. One day far from our baits I met a jungle boar, a big grey-beard, and laid him low with a solid '470. The joy of my attendant Gonds was terrible to witness; their jaws slobbered unceasingly as they carried him across the river. That night he fed over two hundred men.

At last we had "khubr" of a kill. After five days the bait at the junction of the river had been taken. Soon after dawn I started out to visit the kill, while Majid was dispatched to the neighbouring villages of Kamaria, Kukunu, Bijora, and Alahi to raise beaters. Accompanied by Koopa and the Latoo trackers, he had orders to raise at least a hundred. I intended to beat round about mid-day, when tiger are at their laziest (more especially well gorged) and reluctant to move. Thus they are more amenable to a beat. I found the buffalo's rope broken and the kill dragged some eighty yards into a bamboo thicket, where the tiger (a big male by the pug-marks) had eaten a considerable portion of the buttock, and had fortunately left to drink towards the junction of the rivers, and thus could be beaten from this direction towards the kill and the thick jungle which lay beyond. Had he left to lie up the far side of the kill away from the junction of the rivers, it would have been useless to beat him towards the rivers, which he would never have crossed—let alone ever headed for under pressure.

On my way back to camp I stalked a small herd of black buck. This sounds a very simple operation, but to be successful against a small isolated herd of buck (unaccustomed like the large North Indian herds of buck to the constant sight of villagers and ryots tilling



The end of a Jungle Boar

the fields) requires a singular concentration of patience and wits. This I was not prepared to vouchsafe, as I was on the way to stalk bigger game. The herd contained one nice buck, and were grazing in the open on the far side of a small patch of jungle. Considering the wind, I approached them from behind the cover of this patch, and was given away by a host of small birds, who set up an alarming din. It proved a fruitless stalk.

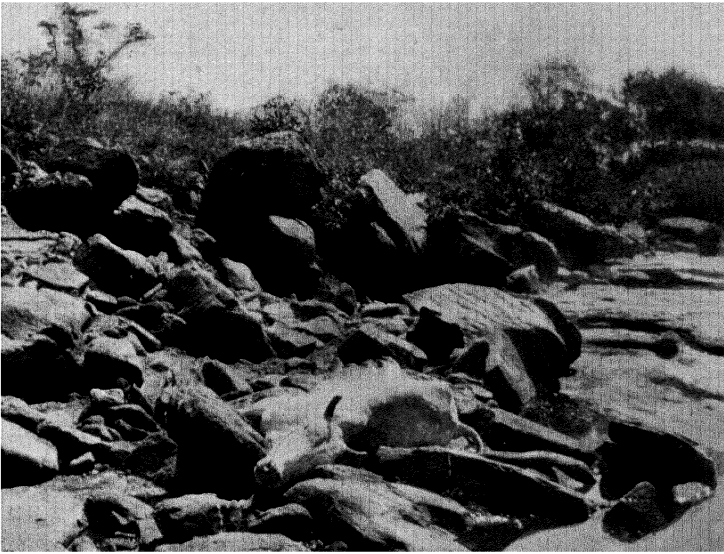
The camp was alive with beaters on my return; squatted in clumps on the ground according to their various villages, there were well over a hundred—all youngish Gonds, with a small leavening of the city fathers and oldest inhabitants. Close on mid-day we moved across the river, and while Majid and Koopa took the eighty odd Gonds by a detour to where the beat was to start (by the junction of the rivers), I took the remainder to where my machan had been erected, some six hundred yards the far side of the kill—making it a beat of some eight hundred yards. Somewhere in this area drowsed the tiger in the noonday warmth, gorged with his nocturnal meal. It was unnecessary to stop the flanks of the beat which rested on the Burmer and Halon rivers, which I knew he would not willingly cross. It sufficed to place stops up the trees on either side of the machan to the rivers, to confine his movements to a gradually narrowing funnel whose apex was my machan, in front of which I hoped to kill him.

Many big-game authorities advocate the silent beat, wherein the animals (carnivora or deer) are brought beneath the machan unruffled, and therefore at a leisurely pace conducive to a good aim. With any other animal but the crouching tiger or leopard, the theory is most commendable. But I do not consider

it fair to expect the average aboriginal beater to flush a gorged tiger—very reluctant to move in the mid-day heat from his lair—by the mere tapping of an axe or a stick. With a well-trained posse of police, or possibly professional trackers, it might be feasible. But with a horde of semi-simian morons, the noisier the beat the greater the *élan* and courage. Without the accompaniment of drums, empty kerosene-oil tins, and possibly fireworks, the thin “black line” would gradually lose heart and dwindle into mid-jungle air. To test the truth of this statement, walk gallantly in the direction of an invisible crouching tiger armed with nought but a lathi or an iron-shod stick, and the comfort of the reflection that he may be the more frightened of the two. Sometimes—more especially with a gorged belly and a pad blistered with the mid-day heat—he may not be. At such moments a deal of comfort is to be gained from whacking an empty petrol can, or blowing on a cheerful conch.

At any rate this was a noisy beat and started from afar off just as I was ensconced in the machan. It opened with a “rafale” of kerosene-oil tins and drums, followed by a challenging cry which rang along the line of beaters. Then with a tapping of lathis and more hoarse cries the beat commenced. I had selected my machan with a view down a vista of young bamboo clumps, the ground carpeted with dry leaves, which I hoped would herald his approach.

The first intimation of the advent of game was the insistent tapping of the stops posted towards the Burmer river. I knew that whatever was coming was trying to break out of the beat through the line of stops, and they were quietly driving it back. Far more efficacious than to wave wildly and shout—the one way



Cow killed and finally eaten by a Tiger



The murmuring Halon River

to frighten a cornered animal to break out at any cost. Then I heard the crackle of footsteps over the dry leaves down the line of stops, and two cheetah stags and their attendant does stepped out into the sunlit vista. The stops had been exemplary, and the herd, far from being alarmed, were but suspicious of the distant clamour. Now and again they would stop and turn towards it, noses lifted in the air, ears hinging to and fro. A puff of scent from the dangerous direction, a stamp of the foreleg, and they were off at a gallop. The noise of the beat welled up as they passed the half-eaten remains of the kill, and once more died down as it entered the thick belt of jungle leading to my machan, chiefly from want of breath rather than restored courage.

Then came the renewed tapping of the stops towards my right hand, seemingly more frantic than before, and the never-to-be-forgotten sound of the tread of a heavy feline over dry leaves. I have heard it ever so faintly on the stillest of jungle nights, stalking a kill—the same sinister, cat-like tread of a heavy animal, cunningly placing his feet with the minimum of noise. The tiptoeing of a tiger towards one's machan, ignorant of danger, is the sweetest of jungle music. I brought my rifle to the shoulder covering the vista.

Thirty yards away one of the stops is pointing into the shadow of the undergrowth at his feet. The tiger must have passed beneath. He has avoided the open bamboo vista, and is hugging the high grass on my right. No crunching now of dry leaves—surely the grass is waving below that near-by stop. The stop—curse him!—has lost his nerve and is waving his dirty white pugaree—the tiger must be trying to break through. A roar of anger and an answering roar from

the distant beat—a frenzy of drums and rattles. Then out into the open springs a great striped beast, orange and white, ringed with black. Conscious at last of approaching danger, he turns to cross the beat and break to the other side. Cheated of his afternoon siesta, with ears set back and curling tail gently lashing the ground, he looks the epitome of evil—dangerously roused. Even as he eyes the terrified stop my rifle speaks, and he drops to a neck shot and with a last convulsive shiver lies still.

For a few moments the beat rises in wild crescendo to fortissimo—and then silence. From the ground, apparently devoid of human life, rise a myriad forms. Each tree bears its festoon of humanity. Monkey-like the beat has taken to the trees, to escape the fury of a possibly wounded tiger. They are soon reassured, and gather in a happy, sweating band around the fallen jungle monarch. Each and all touch my feet and then the forehead, to signify their appreciation and complete subservience to my will—and more especially their dependence on my generosity.

Leaving Majid to keep a vigilant eye on the carcass, and to frustrate any attempts to pluck the whiskers (a much-coveted panacea for almost every ill), I crossed the river back to camp, killing a juicy jungle porker on the way. Roused from some luscious bower, dazed by the mid-day heat and the roar of the beat, he was wandering in circles protesting against the violation of his porcine integrity; and fell an easy prey to my
·318.

Everything indicated a night of Gond debauchery: my farewell to Latoo, the day's fortunate beat, and the crowning mercy of a succulent pig. I sent off early for arrack, the local intoxicant distilled from the

toddy-palm. Towards evening the brew arrived—twenty gourds-full—and was deposited for safety in my tent, which for ever after reeked like “the Rum-runner’s Rest.” I had invited all and sundry to dine with me, and while I was still at dinner they started to drift in, until there must have been well over a hundred around the camp-fire. Before things got beyond control, and eyes were yet unglazed and minds still human, I distributed the pork. Each village sat apart; and again each “tola” of each village sat separately around its own little fire. The boar was cut up and with the hair still on was divided into a hundred shares. Each man got about six nice pieces, which he roasted over the fire and ate on the spot. Soon the jungles resounded with the echoes of a thousand belches—not pre-eminently the banquet of a gastronome.

The circle reunited around the camp-fire, to which each village had donated its logs. My deck-chair was brought into the midst of the throng, and as I pulled the cork from my first bottle of whisky for over three weeks, the palm leaves were removed from the top of the gourds which were placed before Michael, my Christian bearer. Majid—a stout follower of the Prophet—to whom alcohol spelt anathema, squatted at my feet with the strained look of a Methodist parson at a debauch of bacchantes in Purgatory. He had brought the inevitable huqqah all the way from the village, plus several pounds of gur-sweetened tobacco. As the water gurgled in the pipe, he acquired some small measure of comfort from this apparent purification of the scene with clouds of coarse, acrid Moslem smoke.

The tops were off the gourds, and I signalled my bearer to commence distributing the fire-water. Some had brought half coco-nut shells, but the majority

drank from their open palms, into which Michael splashed the much-coveted arrack. Personally I would as soon have drunk petrol or Castrol oil. The smell alone almost counted me out. They drank from their open palms with eyes fast closed (whether from exhilaration or the anæsthetic effect of the fumes, I know not), and when their hands were empty, they smeared their faces with their glistening palms. As the liquor circulated, tongues loosened and reserve thawed. The entire circle started to talk at once. Old men argued vehemently and were restrained with difficulty from coming to blows. To some the end came quickly and obviously, and they already smouldered lifeless on the brink of the fire. The mukadam (or headman) of Kukaria was singularly truculent, and later completely lost his equilibrium. After taking the most appalling series of tosses in near-by nullas, he was escorted on his homeward way by a crowd of small boys who obeyed him like a pack of curs, getting in an occasional kick to testify to his apparent unpopularity.

Later, up sprang ten stalwart Gonds and started a raucous chorus with dance. The firelight flickered on their handsome, laughing faces, bobbed locks and red bead necklaces, as they gyrated in alcoholic abandon. They were accompanied on the dohl (fashioned of sambhur skin stretched on a bamboo frame), and a local Kreisler made frantic efforts with arrack-stained fingers on the sitar; but overcome by the fumes from his own (or his neighbours') hands, retired early—racked with hiccoughs. The dance worked up to an alarming pitch of abandon. Whereas at first they had started with great reluctance, they now showed no desire to stop. Three times were the coco-nut shells and palms

replenished. Eyes were glazing and speech was thickening. My bearer had long since become a casualty, and several of the older men were smouldering face downwards in the ashes. Budoo (my head tracker) called for silence, and was about to address the multitude on the merits of the "Sirkar"—he had been calling me throughout the evening Huzoor, Maharaj, Jemadar, Sirkar, Malik quite indiscriminately—when without warning he pitched forward, and was with difficulty extricated from the flames. I now rang down the curtain, and signified my intention of retiring for the night. The old men were led off by their sons, protesting that the night was yet young. The younger Gonds who were to move my camp at dawn and carry my baggage settled to sleep round the embers of the fire. The shouts of the human pack—still baying the unfortunate mukadam—died away into the silence. A midnight hush descended. Above the pulse of the forest rose the occasional bell of a startled sambhur from far across the river, calling me back to the jungle paradise between the Burmer and the Halon rivers, which I must leave at dawn—perhaps for ever.

After a fond farewell to the village, we started off, with two dozen Gonds carrying our kit, for Chabi—our next stage before crossing the Rai Ghat. Having settled us into the rest-house (back once more on the main road), they pressed their foreheads to my feet, and to my intense regret departed for Latoo. Dear unforgettable Latoo, dreaming beside the misty Halon river. For nights after I felt a depth of loneliness, and yearned for the companionship of Koopa and his Gonds.

Non-co-operation was again evident, and I had to put the fear of God into the mukadam and khansama of Chabi, who at first said nothing was obtainable in

the way of supplies. I spent hours of the day bargaining with cart-men to take me on to Sakka. They demanded an exorbitant price, as the Rai Ghat has an unsavoury reputation for man-eating tiger. Also they refused to travel alone, but insisted on travelling in company (as a convoy), which necessitated delay. At last one evening they announced their intention of travelling that night; and at about eight o'clock, the road heavy with frost and no moon, we started on our way. Incoming cart-men reported that a man-eating tiger at Haratola on the road had killed a man some fifteen days before.

There are few modes of travel as fantastic, or in my opinion as unforgettable, as a night journey by bullock cart through moonlit jungles. From the moment when the first stars pierced the haze of deepening shadows, until dawn painted pallid fingers in the eastern sky, I lay on my mattress of grass and straw intoxicated by the beauty of the night. The hours passed heedlessly; the moon swung on its silver arc across the far horizon, while I lay drugged with the play of the moon-beams on the silvered bamboo and rustling grass.

My orderly and I shared one cart, and were tucked snugly together in a welter of cotton resais and country blankets. Beneath us the shock of the springless, rubberless wheels was absorbed, in a minute degree, by layers of straw and sweet-scented lemon-grass. Even then we felt every rut and ripple of the road. After a time one's body, realising the futility of further protest, became numbed to all pain, and took its revenge in the morning, when the limbs refused to respond to any awakening, the blood struggling back into the empty veins like a Chinese torture.

There was little room to change position in the

bowels of the cart, as everywhere we looked or felt there were haversacks and water-bottles, gun-cases, shooting-sticks, and a hundred other essentials festooned round the bamboo hood. The driver sat perched above his bullocks, muffled to the eyes in an insanitary blanket, his attentions divided between an evil huqqah and a decomposed melon which he was carving with a blunt hatchet. The bullocks lurched along at a steady one and a half miles an hour. They required no direction or encouragement as they were one of a long string of over twenty carts, and even as a camel follows unswervingly the trail of his mate, so each cart jolted in the wake of its predecessor. Throughout the night each cart took it in turn to lead. This necessitated the leading cart-man keeping awake to goad his bullocks into life. Often I have known the leading cart, drugged with the monotony of the ever-winding road, stop in its tracks, and the entire convoy of carts has slept its fill in the middle of the road. No convoy stopped in which I rode, and I kept awake the whole night through, drugged with the beauty and romance of the never-ending succession of moonlit glades and the utter peace and solitude around me.

I threw off the tangle of blankets and lay with my chin on folded arms gazing out over the bullocks, while Majid and the cart-man snored beside me. Occasional draughts of black coffee from a thermos drove away sleep. We met no other carts, as since the Ghat acquired its evil reputation traffic had practically ceased. We passed through Haratola (the village preyed on by the man-eater) about two in the morning; not even a chaukidar was stirring. Gradually we commenced the climb over the Rai Ghat, and the night grew chilly as the air grew fresher.

Just after dawn there arose a cry of "Tiger," and I sprang down to investigate. The leading cart-man swore that he had seen a tiger crouched above the road eyeing his bullock; he had shouted and the tiger had leapt into the jungle. I halted the carts and took the man back to point me out the exact spot. On a slope, ten feet above the road, there was a distinct form in the sand where the tiger had crouched; and I picked up several hairs. But for the vigilance of the cart-man and the warning shout there would have been a dawn mortality in bullocks. Perhaps, after all, the sinister reputation of this gloomy Ghat was not undeserved.

We arrived at Sakka (the far foot of the Ghat) about eight in the morning, and after breakfast I cast round for local help and tiger intelligence. It transpired from local baigurs (who came to see me) that the Ghat always holds tiger. Attracted by the numerous springs and excellent cover from which to stalk the herds of game, it was also good hunting ground from which they prey on the village cattle in the fields below—a good vantage point from which to watch the kraaling of the cattle for the night, and possibly to pick up a toothsome cow grazing on the fringe of the jungle by day.

Many localities are constantly inhabited by generations of tiger. Some years ago there was a scourge of man-eaters who preyed upon traffic across the Ghat. They were cleverly and audaciously exterminated by an I.C.S. officer, specially detailed for the purpose. Yet there must have been a survivor, as ever since there has always been a man-eater on the Ghat.

The latest "khubr" was that a man was killed and eaten near Kachnari village—one mile distant a horse was mauled—a villager was mauled at Haratola on the

far side of the Ghat and died of his wounds—a dog and a cow were recently taken at Rai village, high up on the Ghat itself. This latter looked like the work of a panther. These had all occurred within the last week, and indicated the work of several tigers, including at least one man-eater. There is no doubt that the “breeze is up” in the neighbourhood; traffic is dislocated over the Ghat, and the post-runners threaten to stop work.

I decided to camp at Sakka and try my hand at lightening the oppression on the Ghat. I engaged two good men (both local aborigines). One, Allahi from Kachnari village, who promised me two bodas; and the other—the mukadam of Rai. I raised two more bodas from Banjartola and tried to get more from Banhera, a Thakur village which proved non-co-operative. However, four were enough to start with, and we spent the remainder of the day settling into camp.

I pitched my tent in the shade of a mango grove, a tentacle of the jungle stretching down almost to my tent door. Far away the Ghat rose a sinister blue on the distant horizon. Through glasses I could just distinguish the white riband of road winding upwards from the valley. The sun sank to rest beyond the plateau, and the evening breeze died down as night descended—cerily—even as the words of Rupert Brooke—

“ And the air lies still about the hill
With the first fear of night ;
Till mystery down the soundless valley
Thunders, and dark is here ;
And the wind blows, and the light goes,
And the night is full of fear.”

That night I slept once more in the open, beneath the mangoes, to keep off the heavy dew. After turning

out the light I lay a while in bed wrapt in a hush as at the world's end—the only sound the collapse of a little wood ash in the fire. What excitements were in store, in the depths of the sinister Rai Ghat, the morrow would tell.

I was off at dawn on a full reconnaissance of the valley in the vicinity of the Ghat road, as the local dak runners insisted that the tiger preyed more especially on the bullock-cart tracks. The trackers showed me all the places they had selected for baits: all excellent localities on the intersection of game-tracks—water near by and good cover. Also good stout trees for machans. A series of deep re-entrants running up on to the plateau with heavily forested spurs—natural debouches for tiger leaving the upper grasslands for the valley. There is no doubt they walk the cart-track in search of food most nights, as the cart-men and runners have constantly encountered them and had many narrow escapes.

I decided on places for baits, and on my homeward way visited Kachnari—the scene of the man-eater's latest crime. The victim was sleeping with three other men in a field on the plateau above the village. It was a frosty night, yet the fire was dead when the tiger crept from out the jungle across the open fields, and took him out from among the sleeping group. He was dragged a hundred yards to the shelter of the forest and devoured within a few hundred yards of the sleeping village. I was shown the scene of the tragedy in detail: the ashes of the fire, and leading from it across the garnered fields the dried pools of blood every twenty yards where the tiger had crouched to drink his fill. A hungry and fierce tiger who would take his victim from a camp-fire circle and quench his thirst in the open, within a

hundred yards of the shelter of the jungle. Down the hill towards the village we could see the remnants of the body, picked clean by vultures ; but of the skull there was no sign. Being a vagrant—and not a member of the village—no one had troubled to commit his poor remains to the ground.

That evening the four baits were tied up, and a violent storm gathered above the plateau and threw its tentacles over my camp. An angry sunset was followed by a violent cyclone of rain and lightning. I woke out of a sound sleep in pitch darkness (I had moved my bed into the tent), the lightning crackling about me, and an incessant roar of thunder as the veritable wall of rain lashed my quivering tent. At any moment the tent would collapse, and I could not find the matches—one never can ! I had to face it in the dark—or rather by the almost constant lightning, which lit up the tent roof like the flicker of firelight on a ceiling. For half an hour I strained my every sinew supporting the centre pole—and suddenly the tornado passed, and the only sound was the drip of the mango trees, and the sob of the storm as it swept away over the jungle. ✓

During the night I awoke, stinging with pain, to find my bed alive with red ants. Several of those I had overlain had in their death-throes buried their heads in my flesh. The floor was a veritable carpet of ants whose more inquisitive members had already climbed the legs of my bed. My rest was ruined for the night. Fortunately the storm had stopped, it was a starlight night, and I continued my interrupted rest in the open, vowing a vendetta on the entire ant family.

Daylight came only too soon, and I found the ground beneath the trees red with ants and covered with their leaf nests. The storm had stripped the trees of leaves

and ants. The survivors were already carrying away the dead; and by mid-day they had all migrated elsewhere. Their homes destroyed in a night, yet, with tireless energy, they would soon start all over again—only to suffer extinction in the next storm.

An hour after dawn an excited Gond brought news that the Maogaon boda had been killed. Taking two trackers I crossed the fields and entered the jungle leading up the re-entrant in which the kill lay. The ground around the kill was very hard and no pug-marks were visible. The rope had been a strong one and every effort had been made by the slayer to break it, as it was pulled absolutely taut, with the dead boda stretched, as on a rack, beside it. This would undoubtedly increase suspicion in an already uneasy tiger—the inability to drag his victim into thick cover to devour it. It was the work of a tiger, and most of the hind-quarters had been eaten. The trackers showed no eagerness to approach the kill, and clung together in a clearing, some fifty yards away, suspiciously eyeing the surrounding forest. This was undoubtedly the work of the Kachnari man-eater—the other baits were untouched. I should think the Haratola tiger is a separate one, and the Rai killer probably a panther.

At mid-day I had the machan made as quietly as possible under my own personal supervision. It consisted of three poles, laid triangular-wise, on which was lashed my charpoy—the whole screened with fresh tree branches. It was rather too low for my liking—only about ten feet from the ground—but there was no alternative tree. The hill sloped down immediately, behind the machan, so that any tiger electing to approach the kill from that direction would at a certain point be



First steps towards making a Machan

on a level with the machan and within springing distance. However, from observation of the kill and the surrounding cover and water, I did not anticipate his advent from this unfortunate direction.

On my return to camp I found a breathless dak runner with a tale of woe. A tiger had sprung out on him near the forty-fourth milestone and followed him for over a furlong down the Ghat. Everyone is terrified of the Ghat and sees tiger everywhere. I had no doubt that he saw the tiger in the distance, but the rest was an exaggeration.

As I imagined I had a bold, hungry tiger to deal with, I decided to start sitting up early; also the sun left the valley early and set behind the plateau. The kill had enjoyed complete solitude since the machan-builders left soon after mid-day, so I approached with every degree of caution, alone, finger on trigger, hoping to find him back early to his meal. The corpse was as we had left it; but more fly-blown and offensive. I gave it a wide berth as I climbed cautiously up the rope ladder into the machan. The tracker placed beside me haversack, thermos, and bedding for the night, my hollow bamboo for the purposes of nature, and the electric-light outfit. I pulled up the ladder, and they departed as quietly as they had come.

It was three o'clock of a drowsy afternoon. Too early yet for all Nature to wake to the freshness of a jungle evening—the prelude to the nightly occupation of hunting and killing, or seeking their food less harmfully in the grazing lands. The tiger was experienced, and I was rather sceptical of his return, as the rope was unbroken and his suspicions aroused.

That one can never legislate for the behaviour of the hungry carnivora is simply proved by the light of

subsequent events. The popular hour—one cannot use the word usual—for the return of the tiger to his kill is just before sunset, when he has slept off the effects of the over-night gorge. He naturally likes to have a look at his meal before the last light has left the jungle, and before he settles down to a serious meal in the hours of darkness. If he does not return then he is probably an experienced tiger—aware of the fatal results of a daylight return to his kill—and will most likely not return until about three hours after sunset, when the birds and monkeys are asleep and will not broadcast his presence to the surrounding jungle.

It is impossible to lay down any hard and fast rule for the carnivora, and experience of over twenty years sitting up for tiger and panther has taught me the impossibility of graphing mathematically the usual hours of their return. Again, I have known several tigers return at dawn. It all depends upon the quietude of the locality—the more secluded it is the more likely he is to return at early sunset—likewise his degree of hunger. If he does not like his food *réchauffé* more than one night, he will try for a fresh victim, and, unsuccessful, will return to his old kill—*faute de mieux*—at early dawn. Again I have known many tiger never return again to a kill after the first meal. These have bought their experience bitterly at the hands of some hidden shikari, and avoid all subsequent revisits. Some cattle-killers stalk a bait from a distance, and whether instinct warns them of danger, or whether they spot the rope and the general atmosphere of unreality warns them, they approach no nearer than a comfortable scrutinising distance.

Others kill the bait, and if the rope is too strong and they cannot break it to drag their kill, they will eat what

they want and never return. Here then lies the insoluble difficulty. Should the rope be weak and easily broken, so that the tiger can follow his natural instincts and drag his victim from the scene of the crime into dense cover ; or should the rope be strong enough to prevent this—thereby rousing the killer's suspicions ? Nothing is more annoying than to find the kill dragged into cover, offering no possible position for the machan. Yet personally I have always felt that this eventuality must be risked, and the tiger must be allowed to drag in a natural carnivorous way.

If the kill has been hidden in an unget-at-able place, it will have to be dragged under a suitable tree, and the risk taken of the tiger taking fright at the handling of his kill. Personally I have found one can take any liberty with a panther and can drag his kill all over the jungle ; but that usually tiger are very wary of a handled kill—equally as wary of a strongly roped one. So, as I said before, there is no hard and fast line of action, and the problem is insoluble ; no two tiger ever act alike—hence the untiring charm of their hunting.

The shadows lengthened over the sinister glade at my feet as the sun sank towards the line of the distant hills. The only sound for the last two hours to break the drowsy hush of the jungle had been the droning of the flies and insects on the bloated corpse of the unfortunate bullock. No hungry vulture had yet pierced the screen of leaves with its baleful eye. Several soared expectant high above ; but carrion birds ever swung above the Rai Ghat—so sinister was its reputation. The shadows crept across the glade and stretched grey fingers over the kill. The tips of the trees were dyed with a sunset mist, and with a roar the evening ovation of the cicadas broke the drowsy silence. Far away to

my left up the hillside the sudden chatter of the Seven Sister birds—as they rose from the ground to the shelter of the branches—sent my every pulse racing. Something was afoot and was approaching the kill. A barking deer leapt up in the shadows and called in alarm. The last glow faded from the tree-tops, and the roar of the cicadas died down as the chilly breeze stirred the gruesome object at my feet.

I heard the distant but heavy and unmistakable tread of tiger on the dry jungle leaves, the tinkle of a pebble as he crossed the nulla, and I peered—pulses drumming—through my screen of leaves to glimpse him coming on to the kill.

The sound of the heavy pads cautiously placed on the dry carpet of leaves, and moved ere the weight of the body had sunk to rest—the equivalent of tiptoeing—grew gradually nearer and nearer. Approaching from the direction of a dried water-course which was separated from the kill by some twenty yards of short dry grass—he had followed this from his day lair, so that the return to the kill might be silent and undetected. The footsteps stopped, and I heard the sound of a heavy body being lowered gently into the dry grass, as he crouched to scrutinise his prey. Almost imperceptibly the sound of heavy, restrained breathing came to me on the tense evening air. He was suspicious and was crouched, making every use of sight and scent. I had not as yet set eyes on him, although in full view of the long grass in which he lay. Would his hunger prove stronger than his common sense?

I lay in my machan as one dead ; even restraining my breathing, for fear it—coupled with the wild drumming of my pulses—should be heard by the great striped murderer in the grass below. My fingers closed on the

switch of the electric light, and as it was yet daylight I tested the light over the kill. Another ten minutes or so to darkness—it seemed quite impossible to remain such an æon of time in this exalted state of acute suspension. The shadows gathered round the glade and united into a velvet wall of darkness. The kill, up to now a darker blur against the grey jungle background, merged into the surrounding gloom. Now was the time for the killer to approach his meal. Inch by inch I shifted on my elbow and pushed the muzzle out into the direction of the kill. Finger on the electric-light switch on the butt, I lay, my nerves and senses quivering with excitement.

A deep rustle from the grass as a heavy body lifts itself from its form—again the padding of heavy, cautious footsteps, but this time away from the kill—the tinkle of pebbles as he crossed the nulla bed . . . then deep, death-like silence. The sense of crushing disillusion. His suspicions had mastered his hunger. I laid out my mattress and bedding, had a draught of hot coffee, and composed myself to chew the bitter cud of disappointment till released at dawn. Night descended around me, and all the nocturnal rustlings of the jungle animals seeking their daily food. Pig rootled all round, and monkeys noisily sucked the luscious “ber fruit.” As I was sinking into a lethargy (no longer able to concentrate on the kill below), a frightened sambhur belled throatily on the slope above. I should have recognised the proximity of tiger, but my senses were drugged with the narcotic influences of the jungle night.

I slept—noisily and unrestrainedly.—A tree-mouse clattered into my biscuit tin ; I awoke and evicted him ; he watched me from the end of my gun-barrels. Around

me was the utter silence of the very far-away places. I fancied I could distinguish the very pulse of the forest, the rising of the sap in the trees. Even the roll of a dewdrop from a leaf seemed to break up this stupendous stillness of the night. The kill lay in the deepest shadow, sinister and untouched.

I slept once again ; the rifle pointed out through the screen of leaves, the butt resting on the floor of the machan. I lay feet on towards the kill so that I could rise straightway into an aiming posture. I woke with a sudden start. My heart stood still—then turned over as in a dream. A half moon was setting on the distant line of the Ghat ; its pallid light filtered through the trellis of leaves. Something was coming down the slope through the jungle straight behind me. The heavy, unmistakable sound of a feline. Not nearly so cautious as the sunset visitant. Could it be yet another tiger—the mate—or one of another family altogether ? I crouched up into a sitting position, lifted the butt of the rifle off the machan, and covered the dark blur of the distant kill ; at the same time my finger found the electric-light switch on the butt, and again my pulses threatened to burst their way through my resisting skin.

Unhesitatingly, almost noisily, the tiger approached my machan from behind.

He must be on the level with me now and only fifteen feet away, within easy springing distance if he winds me. Suddenly the footsteps cease ; then comes the sound of a heavy body lowering itself to the ground ; he is suspicious. Has he scented or seen me, or is it natural wariness to have a good smell round before he comes to the kill ? Twice in one night !—I cannot bear this dreadful suspense on the edge of the kill : the

knowledge that one is possibly being watched, and that the first suspicious movement will bring the man-eater in one spring—fangs deep in one's throat. The evening scare was child's play to this—vitality at its lowest ebb, imagination at its crest, and the first movement to look over one's shoulder at the threatening danger a sure invitation for sudden death.

I lay head buried in my arms, drugged by the measured breathing from the slope behind me. Once he emitted a long growl, almost a snort, as if mentally he snapped his fingers at any effort to keep him off the kill. After some five shattering minutes of suspense he rose and moved directly beneath my machan, into the open, on to the kill. He stepped from shadow into shafts of pale moonlight, and down went his head straightway to sniff the kill. A movement of mine as I pushed the muzzle further through the gap in the screen of leaves brought his head up from the kill, but not in my direction.

Hunger had over-ruled his natural suspicions, and he lay between my sights—eating his last forbidden meal. I switched on my foresight light, taking careful aim on the blur beneath, and simultaneously pushed forward the switch of the light on the kill. The scene was illuminated as brilliantly as a stage; beyond a radius of some ten yards lay inky darkness. He heard my safety-catch click forward and lifted his head full in my direction. His eyes flashed emerald green for a startled moment. Then the jungle silence was shattered by the roar of my '470. The light went out in his eyes, and he sank with a gurgling groan on to the body of his victim.

Within two minutes lights appeared in the distance, and a goodish company with swords and staves shouted

to ask if he was dead, and could they approach the kill. They had been eagerly awaiting the sound of my rifle in the village of Kachnari—a mile away. What strange, fantastic shadows were conjured up in the flare of the torches ! The shades of gigantic bamboo clumps rose like evil genii into the vault of stars. A thousand Dantesque shapes marched beside the torch-bearers, and played hide-and-seek with the fitful moonbeams. What excited chatter as the torches disclosed the great striped body, crouched upon his miserable victim ! “ Truly,” they said, “ no other than the Kachnari man-eater ; this has been his very beat for many moons.”

I had my doubts, and shall never know for certain whether I was visited that night by two separate tiger (the first the actual killer of the bait, and the more suspicious of the two—the second a prowler who had by chance happened on the kill) or twice by the same tiger—his second visit emboldened by hunger. I can offer no solution to the problem.

I continued to bait for the remainder of my stay, but my movements had been broadcast among the tiger community, and I had no further kills. Daily I explored the nullas leading up on to the plateau in a hopeless quest for fresh tiger pug-marks. Old tracks of before the heavy storm were plentiful. The rain had filled all the mid-jungle pools, and water lay plentifully in the nullas ; thus tiger were far more difficult to locate than when limited to one or two perennial springs. I explored daily the likely drinking-places, Kundar Pani, Jampani, Chitar Pani, and Bagheera—literally the “ place of tiger.” Old tracks led to the water, their edges all caked with age. No signs of the unforgettable, freshly powdered tracks, sometimes still bloodstained from the nocturnal killing.

Climbing from the depths of the Domuhana nulla one day, only half a mile from the cart-track itself, we came suddenly on a freshly killed sambhur doe, evidently the work of one of the Rai panthers. Tracks of two full-grown panther led away from the kill going east towards the road. The latter lay in a small dry nulla down which the killers had stalked and surprised her while drinking from a rain-pool. I expected them to approach from the direction in which they had left, at right angles to the axis of the nulla. My machan was built by mid-day and heavily screened—as the tree was bare and rather isolated.

I returned to the kill about four. The nulla was still flooded with sunshine and nothing was yet afoot. I ensconced myself well covered with a screen of leaves, and was watching a few crows picking the carcass, when the first vulture arrived—from an empty sky. . . . Then it rained vultures. . . . With their natural wariness they settled themselves in the tree-tops, which formed a natural amphitheatre round the kill. Soon every branch was festooned with these loathsome scavengers. Like hideous ghouls at a graveside they watched the kill with hungry eyes, eager to anticipate the panther's return for his evening meal. Gradually one or two of the bolder ones descended and approached the kill. Ever so warily at first, but as the smell of decomposition became too tempting, they literally hurled themselves on to the carcass before my very eyes, and started their hideous meal.

I made frantic threats from my machan, but nothing short of a shot (which would have ruined the chances of the return of panther) or actually getting down to drive them off their feed would have kept them off the kill. Once communal feeding has started with either

vulture or a hungry wild dog-pack, nothing will deter them. I might as well have tried to dam Niagara. The trees discharged their revolting freight like a cloud of locusts. Not even the Kavirondo on Albert Nyanza (bolting hippo meat) ever presented such a loathsome sight. There was not room for more than some twenty on the carcass itself, so the remaining hundreds clambered on these twenty's backs—layers deep—until the lower testudo was crushed flat into the decomposition beneath. From the slobberings, gibberings, and hoarse, insistent croak, one would have thought the very lid of hell had become unstuck.

Every now and then a livid-pated, blood-red-necked atrocity detached itself from the welter of decay with a gobbet of entrails in its beak, and was immediately attacked by some twenty more, and a tug of war ensued for the lump of putrefaction. My time was fully occupied keeping them from roosting by my side to digest their disgusting fillets. Within two hours the carcass was picked bare—as gaunt in its nudity as the wreck of some derelict galley. The ghouls winged their bloated way to roost in the neighbouring trees.

One incident brought a smile to my lips. A crow (too crippled in this orgy to wing his way to roost) hopped on to the back of a gorged vulture just as he was taking off, and was thus transported skywards—much to the annoyance of his unwilling benefactor.

The sun had set. The reflection of its afterglow lingered in pools of amber light on the pebbles of the nulla bed. Raising my eyes from the kill, I saw two full-grown panther coming straight down the nulla bed, treading warily the mass of boulders, keeping well within the shadows which clung to the western bank. There was a sufficient dying glow to distinguish the

spots—otherwise the shooting light was of the worst. It seemed unnatural that they should not perceive my obvious machan; as, although they did not gaze directly upwards (few feline do), they could not avoid embracing my perch in their normal range of vision. I lay as quiet as the dead, yet so heavily was I screened that no room had been left for even the muzzle of my rifle to protrude without disturbing the screen of leaves. Yet something must be done, else I could not get my sight on the panther approaching down the nulla bed. The orgy of vultures had obsessed me to the exclusion of such obvious precautions as preparing my machan for all emergencies.

Slowly they advanced down the nulla, and while I never actually stared them in the eye, I was conscious of their every movement and every spot; the while I fumbled feverishly to break a branch which firmly resisted the passage of my rifle-barrels. At last it yielded with a snap, which froze them tense with suspicion twenty yards from the kill. I glanced up . . . for a moment our eyes met. I thrust my barrel through the gap in the leaves. Too late. . . . They were already leaping the nulla bank, and with a tinkle of pebbles were lost to sight.

Thus bitterly one buys jungle experience, and my hours of careful preparation were ruined by the frond of a jungle leaf.

Jungle experts bursting with theoretical knowledge will say: "Serve him right! Why place the machan facing the animal's line of approach?" Too true—as in these cases any animal will embrace everything at a distance within sixty degrees of his normal vision without having to raise his eyes; but these jungle "Einsteins" overlook the fact that carnivora seldom,

if ever, approach the kill from the same direction—*i.e.* the direction in which the tracks are seen leaving the kill. How then can one legislate for the exact placing of the machan? In this case their tracks led away from the kill exactly at right angles to their subsequent axis of approach. Hence the unfortunate sighting of my machan. . . . Truly one lives and learns.

The approach down the nulla bed—the perfection of feline grace—beautiful as a slow-motion picture of a race-horse, will be added to my quiver of beautiful jungle memories.

Drugged with the silent beauty of the night, I lay on till midnight, listening to the jungle noises around me. The scented petals of freshly fallen mhowa lay like starlit lotus in the gloom. Through the traceries of moonlit jungle the Kirwar Pani pool scintillated, a canopy of diamonds. Ripples of silver light and constant little dripping sounds showed where the deer were slaking their nightly thirst. Innumerable smaller animals had their starlit bath, and a small owl came from out the bole of my tree and shared my jungle solitude.

The night scents of the untamable forest rose all around and smothered me in a pharisaical ecstasy that I was alone, and not sharing this perfect night with a thousand or ten thousand standard Norms—who would translate this solitude into terms of boredom, and scream for all the Norms' constant satellites of noise, radio, cinema, and jazz, for all the many hideous equivalents which have turned the bulk of the human race into sheep-like morons; who are unhappy unless collected in vast circles or groups (the lower the mentality the greater the herds); whose crime against intelligence is

the same (whether they make up a middle-class "party" or join a proletariat procession)—the hideous desire to avoid all individuality and self-expression, the same fear of appearing unpopular if out of a crowd, the same ultimate obedience to the herd instinct. . . . I was utterly alone, and shared these un-Christian-like sentiments with a tiny grey owl in a mhowa-drenched jungle, uninfluenced by the hideous garbage demanded by the millions of the B.B.C. and the popular Press.

I climbed down about midnight, and left the heap of glistening bones to the tender mercies of the jackal and wild dog. Although the kill was picked practically bare, I found the following morning that the panther had returned between midnight and dawn, and scattered the bones and gambolled about in the sand of the nulla bed. There were several forms where they had lain and played with the remnants of the kill. Such are the vagaries of the leopard tribe, who obey no fixed jungle code; or had they perhaps been ignorant of my existence and frightened merely by the sound of the breaking of the twig in the machan? . . . I shall never know.

Days drifted dreamily along, yet crammed with jungle incidents. One day I built a ground machan near a small pool in the Moti Pani nulla. The jungles fringe the margin of the wild-iris-decked water, and my shelter of branches and bamboo overlooked a stretch of cool black rocks sloping down to a cool, sandy beach, cicatrised with the tracks of countless deer and wild pig, peacock and jungle-fowl. Over all lay the fresh night pugs of tiger, and I hoped that he would come in the heat of the day to drink or luxuriate on the inviting cool black terrace. Nothing came throughout the stifling hours of sunlight, but I was rewarded

towards evening by the arrival of about twenty langur, who came to quench their evening thirst.

I will willingly embrace any religion which will reincarnate me as a langur monkey. I can imagine no more perfect existence. A full twenty-four hours' Nirvana, care-free and inconsequent. Immune from the persecutions of man and beast—the ever-present jungle fear. Deified by the Hindu in the symbol of Hanuman, and venerated accordingly by all whose feet tread the forest ways. I watched their antics until the setting sun warned me of the approach of night. They sat as any human family or gathering clusters for a picnic. The father monkey (a huge grey-bearded veteran) sat aloof with an eye for ever cocked on the surrounding jungle. The mothers sat around gossiping like so many housewives relaxing after a day's work. The baby apes gambolled on the rocks, chasing each other's tails and leap-frogging with the excitement of their freedom. Occasionally a weeny mite would stray too far and be jerked back to the maternal fold by his silky tail. The old man had his suspicions of my machan and eventually turned my flank and nosed me out. Long before this he gave his family the tip, and clutching their families to their bosoms, they beat a stately retreat into the jungle with much chattering protestation and waving of tails.

Three peacock in full winter plumage tiptoed on to the ivory sand—the picture was complete. Solemnly and majestically the male spread his sweeping tail and danced before the attendant hens—squatted in the sand drably domestic. Inflamed with the beauty of the shafts of evening sunlight illuminating his gold-and-turquoise train, he ruffled his chest and uttered strange little crows of satisfaction.

I left this scene of domestic bliss as night was closing down and the shadows were gathering in the depths of the Moti Pani nulla. . . .

The hoarse cry of a startled sambhur broke shrilly from the bend of the nulla ahead, followed by screams and a great noise of scuffling and panting. The hoofs of the rest of the herd rattled away over the boulders. I knew only too well the cry of a sambhur in the hands of a killer, and raced for the angle of the nulla, some four hundred yards ahead. I turned the corner—there was no sound now but the murmur of the stream over the pebbles—and in the dying light I searched anxiously for clues to this jungle tragedy. In the heaviest shadow under a jamun tree lay the unfortunate stag, still bleeding from the great fang-marks in its neck, the head twisted completely round—the neck scientifically broken. Over the fresh sambhur slops in the ooze of the drinking-pool lay the pug-marks of a gigantic panther. He had waited for the herd to drink, picked out his quarry, and with unerring decision leapt and pinned it against the jamun tree—to which blood and fur were still adhering. . . . Poor beast caught at its one unguarded moment, slaking the all-day thirst! Shame to the attendant sentinel does caught napping. Blood tinged its antlers, so the panther had not had it all its own way, hence the sound of a protracted struggle.

I “hallalled” in true Mahomedan fashion its poor crippled neck (good sambhur freshly killed is not to be despised), and urged by my attendant Gond climbed straight on to a tangle of rocks above the kill. The moon would set at midnight, and the temptation to get on terms with this killer was too great. The pool was known to the Gonds as Tota Murka and had a sinister reputation for panther kills. The ~~wind~~ was

all the wrong way at first, but it dropped at nightfall, when peacock in full plumage came timidly to drink; also jungle-fowl and quail. A kingfisher and a green parrot indulged in an evening dip—so there was plenty of incident to soften the agony of my intense discomfort. I was seated between two large blocks of boulder with a third in front as a rifle-rest. There was nothing at my back, and in case the panther elected to come that way my tracker, before leaving me, had thoughtfully placed a screen of light thorns, which only added to my already overflowing cup of discomfort. I could not lie flat, but was constrained to adopt a crouched expectation, ever conscious of the vulnerability of my back—which engendered finally a continuous creeping of the spine.

Just after dark, in a half moon, my heart gave a leap as a dim shadow slunk down the nulla bed, peering into the clefts and crevices of the rocks; but did not approach the kill. When my heart-beats subsided sufficiently for me to focus with clarity, I recognised the head and shoulder of a gigantic hyena. He came to within several feet of my machan, and when the smell of his fœtid hide became too overpowering, I gave him a beam of my torch, which set him off snorting and snuffling. There were almost constant nocturnal sounds of drinking from the pool below. Many small animals snuffled all around me, nosing amongst the boulders in the darkness. Every now and then I protected my anatomy (from a defensive bite from the little creatures) with a beam of electricity which revealed all sorts of nocturnal life—chiefly mongoose and porcupine—while in the background countless pairs of points of light winked at me from the jungle depths. A bear passed noisily and snufflingly on his way.

The moon set, and I restored my arrested circulation and clambered down into the nulla bed. I whistled up the trackers, who, tying the kill to a jungle branch, shouldered it and led the way back to camp.

A midnight mid-jungle meal, after eighteen foodless hours in the open (I had left at dawn). An appetite whipped to hungry ecstasy with sunshine and excitement—a rare and exquisite gift of the gods—one of the very few delights which still remain the reward and heritage of a healthy pagan existence. A gift—and not a commodity at the beck and call of the fortunate amasser of modern wealth. One sickens of the repetition of the banality “money will buy anything.” . . . Nearly everything—but the one essential key to happiness—health—represented by normal appetite. The power to appreciate a simple meal.

How many sleek-bellied plutocrats would willingly barter what they pay in their super-tax for an unimpaired digestion? Yet here in the depths of these Gondian jungles lay the secret to their great conundrum. My meal to-night had cost me fourpence. A fresh venison steak with sambhur liver and kidneys, two rashers of bacon for fourpence, and sweet potatoes and peas—a gift from the village. Fresh mangoes washed down with crystal water from a neighbouring stream. My conventional bow to the modern food inventions was the inclusion of the bacon—imported from Wiltshire.

Wherein lay the secret to my health and happiness? Initially eighteen hours of sunshine and solitude, followed by the simplest of meals—and more solitude. Digested in one’s own time, and alone. Unaccompanied by the cacophony of popular music engendered by the “crashbangococcus,” and the incessant meal-time chatter of one’s fellow “Norms,” guaranteed to

torture the most normal gastric juices to ultimate revolt. Try this treatment, you epicurean malades imaginaires, for your fancied indigestive systems. You might bear it for a day (possibly for two), then you would run screaming from the isolation back to your herd ; in spite of its claims upon your digestion.

For the key to health and happiness in this jungle paradise is the power to enjoy isolation ; happy to enjoy eternal sunlight ; in a happy place there is no room for man with the modern herd instinct—" long since turned out of Paradise." If he would cleave to the society of his fellows the jungle will hold out to him no welcoming hand. Pan cannot breathe in the Babylon built by modern civilisation.

Yet,

Pan is not dead,

And in every wood, if you will go with the spirit properly prepared,
You shall hear the note of his pipe.

And now my jungle days were drawing to a close. It behoved me to contemplate the great trek eastward to the railway once again, and the ultimate gathering of the normal threads of life—and the horrors of modern civilisation ! Yet I must fain have one full span of twenty-four hours far from the hint of civilisation, where even no village cries would break the web of jungle isolation and remind me of the communal obligations which lay beyond the railway—so very few days distant.

Taking enough food for the full twenty-four hours, I plunged with one aboriginal Gond (armed with bow and arrow) into the welter of jungle north of my camp. I intended to explore the northern area (as yet untouched), and as evening fell to come back and say farewell to my old haunts, and spend the night over a

live bait in a last vain hope of bagging the big Tota Murka panther.

But for the mid-day hours when I rested and consumed my meagre meal, I meandered all through the long day—"the valleys of laughter, the hills that the hunters love"; all mine from dawn until dusk. There were glades and recesses, babbling streams and mid-jungle tarns, sweeping grasslands and purpling hills, which no man owned or knew. They were all decked with sunlight and peopled with the beasts of the forest for my delectation. I walked unarmed—fearing the temptation of the inherent lust of animal slaughter (bred in every son of man from early paleolithic times). The necessity no longer exists, but the blood-lust remains unabated and cloaked under the misnomer "sport."

Towards evening of this wonderful day—dedicated to Pan—the sun's rays slanting across the nullabed reminded me of the inexorable passage of the sunset hours. Hours as irrevocable as those vouchsafed to Rafi and Pervaneh so poignantly painted in "Hassan"—"Behold the sunlight changes on the wall from white to gold—the wall reddens."

Even so—the sun measured my span of happiness, and darkness brought me to Siu Pani pool, where my unsuspecting bait was tied.

The nulla was broad and stony, and my machan was up a tree immediately above the kill. There were fresh day tracks of the big panther all down the nullabed, and he had drunk at mid-day at this very pool. There would be a hunter's moon, so I composed myself comfortably for an all-night vigil.

The sun sank behind the western jungles, and the full moon—orange as a gigantic Chinese lantern—

sailed into a cloudless sky, turned to silver, and crept on its peaceful way. All around me the peacocks slumbered fitfully in the trees and called incessantly to each other throughout the night. I could not have slept had I wished, so brilliant was the flood of light.

Soon after what I judged to be midnight—I carried no watch in the jungle to tick the inexorable passage of my happy hours—I lowered my rifle to the ground, and followed it down into the shadow of the nulla-bed. The bait chewed contentedly and seemed pleased to see me. Once again my luck appeared out ; so I composed myself to slumber in the lee of a large boulder, shaded from moonlight, within fifteen yards of the bait.

I awoke with a start ; some atavistic sixth sense had awakened me. As there was no sound, smell, or vision which could have stirred me, instinct told me that there was danger afoot. I rose almost imperceptibly on one elbow and faced a full-grown panther—crouched in the moonlight within twenty yards of the kill ; ready to spring.

Though I hang on with senile fingers to this travesty men call modern life for a full hundred years—God forbid !—I should never forget the beauty of that crouching figure. Drenched in the ghost light, it crouched the embodiment of benevolent grace. Poised for its fatal spring, every muscle rippled beneath the beautiful silver body. The eyes flashed emerald, and the whole figure seemed as though poured from some gigantic ladle of molten silver.

I recovered my wits, and even as it sprang on to the neck of the unfortunate quarry, my rifle spoke with both barrels. It was verily the king of panthers. The murderer of Toṭa Mūrka, Domuhana, Goya Pani,

and the host of unpunished tragedies at countless drinking-pools.

The following day we left our jungle paradise and turned our heads for civilisation. Of all that befell us on our way, and the epic of Bajag, I have told in another chapter. Day after day we trekked by stages of twenty miles, through jungle and pasture-land dotted with Gondian hamlets, from Lakampur and Karanjia, until we abandoned the bullock carts and, handing our baggage to some twenty Gonds, commenced the steep ascent up on to the Amarkantak plateau.

We camped at nightfall in the midst of the great Rewa jungle, famous for tiger, above the source of the river Nerbudda, around which clustered the shrines of sacred Amarkantak—half as old as time.

Second only to the Ganges in sanctity, the pious Hindu regards a pilgrimage to the Nerbudda shrines as a religious obligation. My trackers wandered off to explore the surrounding ruins and temples; and were put to flight by an ash-smearing sadhu, naked as the day, who crept from out a small wooden hut in a solid rock and made hostile demonstrations. Rather than risk another such visitation, they remained glued to the comfort of the camp-fire for the rest of my stay.

Subsequently I had conversation with this aged holy man, who it transpired was the keeper of the actual shrine at the initial source of the Nerbudda—some four miles distant in tiger-infested jungles. He lived in complete isolation in a small temple, with the comforting reflection that three of his predecessors had been eaten by a man-eating tiger. He had a sublime Buddhistic outlook on life, and spent most of his hours when not asleep in a state of complete suspended animation, into which I felt sure no tiger ever intruded.

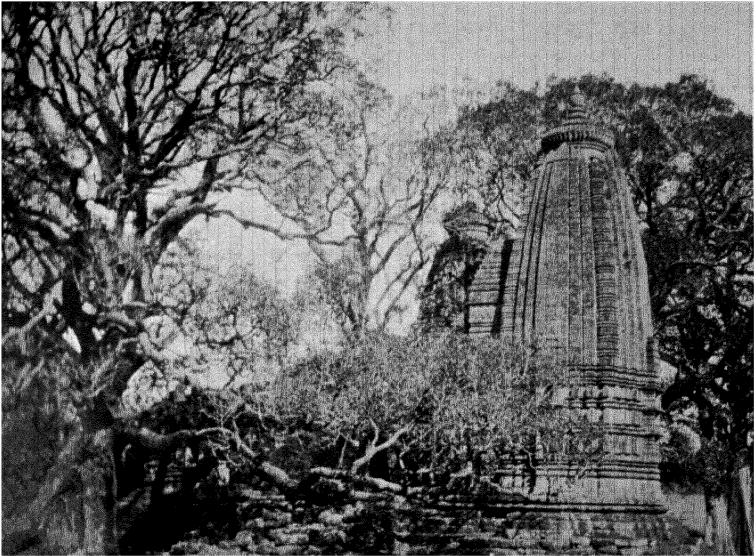
He was eaten some years later.

He had the head of a Passion Play Christ—had the vermin of the shrines not made their lairs in his beard and hair. This latter was copious as the wig of any Pharaoh, and was matted with beastliness. His complete nudity was accentuated by a copious coating of whitewash applied to portions of his anatomy, commonly designated "phallic."

I wandered at sunset amongst a tangle of ruins reminiscent of the tombs on the Appian Way. The majority were great black voids of decay, echoing with the incessant whispering of hosts of bats which clung like velvet fungi to the dripping walls—a labyrinth of shrines and age-worn temples. Some shrouded in deepest jungle, almost covered with a trellis of jungle vines, must have been fashioned in far Dravidian days. As lonely and sinister as the mid-jungle ruins of far Angkor Wat. Age-worn steps—smooth as the well-oiled skin of a Brahmin—led upwards to the inner recesses of more secret shrines, whence the yellow glow of gutting tapers occasionally glinted on the tinsel and gold of some phallic idol. The air was fœtid and redolent of evil.

Before one shrine of Kali, the destroyer, the stones were clotted with the dried blood and fat of sacrifices. Wreaths of decaying marigolds gleamed in the light of the torches, and the air was heavy with the scent of jasmine. The very Holy of Holies of Shivite worship; as sinister as the most primitive worship of Baal, Moloch and Astaroth.

Before one such shrine, a wild-eyed mystic wrung his hands, and swayed in hypnotical devotion before a mangy white cockatoo begarlanded with jasmine; while from the inky depths of a neighbouring shrine



The Temple of the sacred source of the Nerbudda



“Sladang”—Malay Buffalo (p. 103)

two emerald-green eyes glared in benevolent fixity. Whether human, animal or idol remained yet another temple mystery. From a very far distance came the discordant clanging of a savage bell. And over all—the overpowering atmosphere of brooding evil—unlike the sense of religious benevolence in a Moslem mosque.

Down by the sacred tank itself, fed by the waters of the holy Nerbudda, the shrines gathered even closer and jostled each other for room beside the stagnant waters. A fœtid miasma rose from the pool, where olive-tinted scum blended with the faded saffron robes of the priests and temple attendants, swarming upon the sacred steps. Fakirs and sadhus everywhere. Naked and wholly unashamed. Ash-smearred, with hair matted with age and putrefaction. Faces disfigured with the caste-marks of their sect. Eyes inflamed blood-red with opium and charas. Wild human animals (not to be confounded with the more genuine yogi), hiding their bestiality 'neath the cloak of religious mysticism. A community of religious charlatans—a large percentage recruited from fugitives from justice, murderers and thieves, hiding their identity beneath a disguise of wood-ashes and flowing hair. Always certain of their daily food and alms, and the protection of their newly embraced religion to further their libidinous desires. Sensual to the point of depravity, these Hindu “Rasputins” pursue their unholy way from “Mela” to “Mela.” Human stallions, endowed by the great god Vishnu with powers of accommodating the barren wife, and ensuring the production of the much-coveted male issue in childless marriages.

Under cover of darkness, the barren wife is invited

to the temple to sleep beneath the all-comforting shadow of the "Preserver." If the midnight immaculate copulation is followed by an equally immaculate conception, so much the better. There is a mutual backslapping of gods, sadhus, husband and barren wife. If the midnight fumble with the gods is abortive, no one is the wiser—and the sadhu departs filled with religious sexual satiety. At any rate the woman cannot be robbed of her memories of this "one night of love"—her communion with the Hindu trinity—represented on earth by a decomposing fakir. . . . Let us trust her illusions are drugged by darkness, and the cloying scent of jasmine and general decay.

Many of these "holy men" were crippled with self-inflicted mutilation and contortions. Some sat on sharp-pointed nails, eyes glowing with fanatical self-pity. Others, twisted in strange contortions, sat or lay in suspended animation for weeks on end. Before each lay a begging bowl filled with copper alms (the *raison d'être* of their apparent religious dementia). In niches some lay dying on their rags, their feet lapped by the sacred waters of the Nerbudda, their eyes content with visions of their certain reincarnation. Soon they would be floating to Nirvana down the hallowed waters, while the turtles and sacred crocodiles snapped for what remained of their charred decompositions.

Night blotted out the horrors which clung to the banks of the fœtid tank. I climbed the slope back to the solid comfort of my camp-fire. A jungle breeze ruffled my brow and helped to dispel the memories which lurked in the sinister valley below. I was lulled to sleep by the far-away clanging of a temple bell, as insistent as the heart-beat of some great jungle beast.

Our way next morning took us through the maze of caravanserais, used by the pilgrims twice yearly for the Puja—or religious pilgrimage. Well over two million people tread the path yearly to the sacred source. No wonder epidemics of every form of plague and disease, engendered by dirt, arise. Everywhere was unbelievable filth left months before by the last pilgrims. There was no effort at sanitation. In one caravanseraï a month-old dead pilgrim lay side by side with the rotting carcass of a sacred cow. Both were equally certain of reincarnation. Even as the Hajji's certainty of Paradise, dying on the sacred way from Mecca.

For three full days we trekked until the dawning of the fourth, when we sighted the distant line of railway. Winter was now past, and its freshness tainted with the menace of approaching summer ushered in with a wind passing over burnt forest. The last two days I lay comatose, racked with jungle malaria. I was paying the price demanded by the guardians of the mosquito-haunted pools and swamps, whose privacy I had violated too often. Two nights and the whole of one scorching day I lay drenched with sweat, with a temperature of 104 degrees. Determined to reach the railway and the creature comforts (now necessities) of ice, the kindness of cool sheets, and fan-induced breezes, I struggled to my feet, and, helped by my orderly and Muntu (a trusty Gond), commenced the last stage to the railway. It was seven miles of recently burnt jungle, shadeless and white-hot. My rubber soles were burnt almost through and I was consumed with waves of deadly nausea. With occasional rests in small patches of shade beneath the overhanging bank of parched nullas I lessened the distance to a couple of miles, and then collapsed into kindly oblivion.

They carried me to the train, and I regained consciousness some hours later, with the application of many pounds of ice to the head and spine. The last two miles of this "via dolorosa" will ever remain as hideous a memory as the blood-stained, leech-infested way to Telubazar in far Tenasserim.

Even as the sun sank towards the distant line of the Amarkantak plateau, my fever left me. The evening breeze, fresh with the welcoming perfume of mhowa, ruffled the great bamboo clumps and spoke to me with a voice "that fills the soul with longing for dim hills and faint horizons." The last few days of fevered misery had softened the inevitable pang at leaving my jungle paradise. But now tree whispering to tree, and all the sounds of the sunset awakening, drew a regretful knife across the half-healed scars of memory—and a great wave of nostalgia for the jungle engulfed me with a longing to return. This passed in time as night descended and blotted out Nature's passing loveliness, and a certain jungle odour on the wind was drowned by the civilised exhalations of my fellow-passengers

"In the dawns when thou shalt wake
To the toil thou canst not break,
Heartsick for the Jungle's sake."

CHAPTER III

SMOKE IN THE WIND

“ You should have heard him speak of what he loved ;
of the tent pitched beside the talking water ;
of the stars overhead at night ; of the blest return of morning.”

R. L. Stevenson.

IT has been written, “ Of all the jealously guarded habitations of the world—guarded by the deliberate wish and policy of those who live within them ; closed whether from piety, superstition, jealousy, or perhaps above all from mistrust of the European—the isolated villages of rural India, uncontaminated by the hand of City or Cantonment, offer perhaps the most perfect examples. . . .”

* * * * *

Half an hour out of Rewari Junction, the Hissar train jolted itself to a standstill alongside the little wayside station of Jatusana, which was to be my home for the next few weeks.

For the last two years, isolated in a far-away Burmese police outpost, my sole link with civilisation (excluding a Gurkha platoon) had been my faithful young Mussulman orderly !

Night after night as the rain pattered down on the iron roof, and the mists swirled up from the plains six thousand feet below, we had drawn our chairs closer to the fire, and as the flames licked round the damp jungle logs, had pictured the day when we would return home : the only home I had known for the last twelve

years—India. And from these pictured castles in the flames, the brightest reflection in the eyes of Majid Khan, was Jatusana—whence I had recruited him, some seven years before. . . .

Seeming bundles of decayed resais * galvanised into life, and camels gurgled in the shadows, as we alighted on the empty platform. It was close on midnight in early December, and the whole countryside had been wrapped in slumber for several hours. Nevertheless, the male portion of the family had turned up in strength, and, after much throat-clearing and gathering of chaplis and lathis, † were endeavouring to show some interest in the repatriation of their kinsman and his Sahib from the other end of the world.

The train jolted on its way, and I was left with the pleasurable thrill that the last link with civilisation had been severed. As the night was chilly, I set out to walk the mile of moonlit jungle which lay between the station and the sleeping village. The cavalcade followed silently in my wake. Majid had gone ahead, as it transpired that at the last moment the house reserved for me had been claimed by its owner, who had returned unexpectedly over-night. There was therefore nowhere for me to lay my head until daylight.

The pariah dogs, lurking ever wakeful in the shadows, made the night hideous, as we passed from the moonlit fields into the gloom of the sleeping village.

In a small moonlit alley, beneath a dingy mat-roof, we parked our camels, and over the embers of a dying fire, to the burble of the inevitable huqqah, awaited the allotment of my billet for the night.

An hour later I was installed in a hastily vacated

* Quilts.

† Sandals and staffs.

bunia's shop, fronting on the village main street. A string charpoy, several feet too short, and a wick burning in a small oil bath were the only decorations.

Lulled by the pariah chorus in the slumbering street, and stifled by the Stygian gloom, I sank into a troubled sleep.

Few people who profess to have got to the heart of our Aryan brother elect to probe the mysteries which surround his home life. I have met men who professed to sixteen different Indian dialects, and had edited tomes on folklore and rural life, yet had never crossed the threshold of an Indian village. The little knowledge gained by the average soldier or civilian official in India has been gleaned either while out shooting, or during a cold-weather inspection tour. Then, camp has been pitched on the village outskirts in some shaded garden, or in the Western comfort of the local rest-house, where the only link with the hidden mysterious life of the village has been the ceremonious visit of the lambadars and patels to render their account. Or, in the case of the soldier, a rapid glance at the insanitary lanes and habitations as he rode past, and an equally hasty departure to the nearest railway station.

With the one exception of the Head of the District, visitations by outsiders are not encouraged. They entail trouble for the village worthies—the descent on an already impoverished community of a host of menials, each of whom takes his full toll of food and bribes. The sightseer or tourist, out to get to the heart of India—and study village uplift—is not even tolerated, and would be dismounted from his camel at the threshold of the village—lest he see above the purdah walls—and led round the outer perimeter, and sent on his way discomfited, if not unchristianly cursed.

To sojourn for even the shortest time the only passport is the close friendship of one of the inhabitants, who is held responsible for one's future behaviour. Thus only will one's presence be tolerated. Also one must be scrupulously careful not to offend caste or class prejudices, to submit to village rules of life, and to suffer a certain amount of humiliation from the petty jealousy of neighbouring mohullas,* which, like the best of cathedral towns, have their inevitable clans and cliques.

The first year I was a great novelty, and did not stay long enough to experience the birth of jealousy. The second year, familiarity had bred, not contempt, but a veiled hostility. There was no third year, as I realised that subsequent visits would only bring jealous retribution into the home of Majid—my second visit having sowed the seeds of jealousy in the adjacent mohulla, in the heart of one Imrat Khan.

No Oriental really understands the Western meaning of true friendship. In their view for all friendship there must be an underlying reason or a subsequent advantage to be gained—so well described in Urdu by the one word "mutlab." No one could understand my preference of a bunia's humble shop to the comfort of a Government rest-house or the hospitality of a common sepoy to that of a lambadar † or a pensioned Indian officer. As in Africa, where one's importance is judged by the size of the safari, so was I judged by my habitation and friends.

Imrat Khan was a true Oriental. The morning after my arrival he garlanded me, and having thereby expended at least four annas on impregnating me with sickly jasmine, invited me to share his brick-and-

* Parishes.

† Headman.

mortar home. Already his mind was aflame with schemes of much subsequent advantage.

Quite useless for me to explain that I preferred the mud-and-wattle hut in the mohulla of Abdul Majid, my constant companion in the loneliness of the past seven years. Thus started pin-pricking persecutions. The following day, several hours before dawn, I was awakened by the burble of a camel, crouched before my verandah where I slept. Dazed with sleep, I watched the removal of the blanket stretched as a screen before my bed. Knowing it to have been borrowed from a friendly camel-driver, I presumed he required it as a saddle-cover before starting on the day's work. Daylight came, and with it Majid, much incensed at the removal of the only screen between my bed and the hum of the village street. I explained the early morning interruption, and was given his own Eastern interpretation, which followed thus.

The owner of the camel-blanket, of the mohulla of Imrat Khan, had without doubt stolen his own property. Had I remonstrated with him in the night hours, he would have pointed out his necessity for it, before starting on an unforeseen journey. As apparently I had slept through its removal, he would disclaim all knowledge of the event, and recover from me its value, assessed at six times its worth. Subsequent events proved this theory correct. The owner disclaimed all knowledge of the theft—yet it was brought to light in his own house, by Majid, who carried out a surreptitious search.

This and subsequent persecutions, all invented by a twisted Oriental mind to alienate me from Majid, produced the desired effect of divorcing me from love of village life.

To one's face they were suave and smiling, but one never knew what persecution they were not hatching in the shades of their twisted alleys and in their gloomy naurahs.*

The shop in whose bowels I had fixed my abode opened with a small verandah on to the village main street. At dawn and before sunset, the cattle of the entire village were driven lazily past on their way to and from pasture. Clusters of small urchins continually haunted my verandah, whence periodically they were driven away by the younger members of Majid's household, who considered it their own private preserve.

Yet some evenings I gathered my own special friends—camel-drivers, goat and cattle herdsman, gypsies and nondescripts—and whiled away the hour before the stars crept out and the last wisp of ever-swirling dust had fallen to rest in the shadows of the hushed street.

There were other evenings when my charpoy was placed in the naurah, beneath the shade of a leafy peepul tree. There I would lie till well after sunset, when the last of the cattle had been kraaled and the smoke from the countless cooking-fires had lost the reflection of the dying sunset, and clung in a misty shroud above the roof-tops. Gradually the circle would increase till the air grew thick with the acrid huqqah smoke. Each family brought its own, which each member took it in turn to replenish, with tobacco from the wallet at his girdle.

Constantly the Hundi wallahs † went in quest of fresh charcoal, to kindle the dying "chilms." Fierce waxed the conversation on village affairs—prospect of the crops, pasturage, cattle sickness, birth, marriage,

* Meeting-places.

† Servants.

and deaths, and all the trivialities dear to the heart of the countryman all the world over.

I lay and listened and groped for knowledge, as the dialect of the "Dihat" is as far removed from Urdu as that of the wilds of Dorset from the verbal purity of Oxford.

Some nights I gathered around me old army pensioners, and lads on leave from their regiments. Long after the last village worthy had tottered off, having regained my linguistic feet, we resurrected, in good Urdu, war memories, ranging from Mutiny days to the devastation of the last war years.

Early one morning, while still abed, I was brought to consciousness by the appearance of an apologetic bunia, who asked if he might remove something from his inner room—my day-cell. I watched with interest, while he squatted on the ground and feverishly commenced to claw the earth, emulating a terrier at a rat-hole. A few minutes' rattling brought to light a tin box, which he clutched to his bosom, and having carefully re-rammed the earth, unobtrusively departed.

Curiosity took me instantly to examine his burrow, and just as I was elbow-deep in his treasure place, he returned to collect his forgotten keys. Covered with confusion, I completely failed to convince him that I made a daily habit of an early morning sand-bath.

Days drifted peacefully along. When not out shooting, I immersed myself in village lore, visited* the local dispensary, where I watched with interest the Sub-Assistant-Surgeon try his best to suffocate a village lad with an overdose of chloroform, administered in a grimy paper bag. Youthful desire for life triumphing over medical skill, he made a second

criminal effort by extracting a sound appendix with a septic penknife.

A visit to the local mosque—where I inscribed my name on the moulvi's prayer list, after a suitable remuneration—prize-giving and the donation of a half-holiday to the village school, and a peep into the cells of the local outlaws, all helped to pass the mornings until the gargantuan midday meal, served by Majid and his brothers on my outer verandah.

This was part and portion of their own midday meal, cooked by the mother, the head of the household. It was oft-times of such generous proportions that rather than disappoint their culinary generosity, I had to throw the greater portion of the meal over a handy wall, until I discovered that it fell like manna from heaven upon the open hearth of Imrat Khan—whom Allah swiftly send below!

Some afternoons before the village shook itself from its midday slumber I would climb the age-worn steps from my day-cell to the roof, and, contrary to strict injunctions, glue my eye to a crack in the carefully boarded window, overlooking the adjacent mohulla of friend Imrat. It is strictly against Mohamedan village laws to occupy the house-tops by day, as each roof overlooks the neighbouring courtyard, which in the hot noonday hours is invariably used by the zenana.

Curiosity drew me irresistibly to this vantage point. For several days the panorama of Imrat's zenana life unrolled itself blissfully at my feet—a point gained on friend Imrat I jealously coveted in the light of subsequent persecutions. What impressed me most was the attitude of the women of the household on the entrance of a male visitor. Lucifer himself could not have inspired greater terror. Leaving their various

occupations, each one, shrouding her face in her "orni," crouched in the corner until his departure. Convention demands that a woman veil before even her own husband's male relatives, if older than herself.

Majid, on his return from Burma, after three years' absence, could not see his wife's face, nor converse with her, until after nightfall, as his house was thronged with male relatives and friends, before whom any visible sign of affection or unveiling was taboo. Yet in the masjid * of this very village I conversed at length with a venerable Saiyid who proposed a mission to mohamedanise England. "We anticipate no difficulty," he confided to me, "except possibly a delay in the introduction of the purdah system"!

When the shadows were lengthening in the little streets, and the first cattle were drifting home, I would stroll through the breast-high crops, and wait for the return of the blue rock pigeon to a disused well.

On my homeward way I would stalk the wily peacock feeding in the crops. He is protected by Hindu sacred laws, so cannot be stalked within sight of the village. One must perforce wait for him to leave the fields and roost in the adjoining jungles. Hunt him thus, feeding before sunset, and you will appreciate the saying that there is an eye in every feather. He will spot you lying up at an incredible distance, turn tail, and streak for sanctuary for the night in the branches of the only tree in the very heart of the village.

There was a stir in the mohulla as I returned in the short twilight of an Indian evening. A flutter amongst the small boys, who, with the starved pariah dogs, infested my verandah—the same excitement that per-

* Mosque.

vades an English village on the appearance of the first posters announcing the advent of the annual circus.

A strolling company had arrived, and there was to be a nautch in the police thana that very night.

Long after dinner, when the moonbeams lay in silver bars across the deserted alleys, and the camels gurgled in their dark serais, preceded by my chair, I sought the clamour of the police thana.

No need to inquire the direction : every alley debouched its ghostly inhabitants, muffled to the ears in coarse country blankets, and armed with steel-shod lathis, without which no true Rangar ventures abroad at night.

In one corner of the courtyard, lit by the flare of a torch socketed in the angle of the walls, they pitched my chair. A lane was cut through the dense crowd of spectators up to the stage, with the twofold object of allowing me an uninterrupted view, and to enable the dancers to approach me for subsequent largesse. There must have been well over two hundred villagers in rows around the dance "chabutra."

Not a woman to be seen, but the clink of an anklet betrayed them in the shadows of the surrounding roofs.

The performers and band were squatted to one side of the stage, the latter warming the "dhols" * before a small fire. The two dancers, smoothing out their tarnished finery, were taking alternate pulls at a rather squalid-looking huqqah. They were boys—nautch girls, a rarity in this unemancipated country, are too expensive for the average pocket—the elder about eighteen, with a mature male voice, the other a lad

* Drums.

some three years younger, with a clear treble voice. Dressed in the pleated "langan" breast jacket and gaily coloured "orni," with eyes heavily lined with surma, both were difficult to distinguish from the everyday Jat or Ahir woman of the district.

The band—tenor and bass dhols, a sitar and pipe, commenced the overture, and the two figures, lit by a torch-bearer at each corner of the stage, mounted the raised dais.

They danced and sang in turn, chiefly love ballads, Rajput in character, as the village was Rangar in element—Rajput forcibly converted to Mohamedanism during the Mogul invasions.

As the night wore on, the purity of the ancient sagas of Rajastan became somewhat tarnished, and deteriorated into the wild, unlicensed ballads beloved by all followers of the Prophet. The love-songs of Pritvi Raj gave way to those conjuring up the houri-haunted Paradise of the true Mohamedan.

The singer descended from the dais, and beneath the glare of the torch, carried above his head by the attendant, went the entire round of the spectators, posturing and singing before individuals until rewarded by a few coins. All to the accompaniment of much laughter and ribaldry as the singing became wilder and luder. Before the special guests, or those with long purses, the ritual was lengthier.

As the lad approached the lane leading up to me through the crowd, he was exhorted in my direction, and the crowd awaited this novelty with eager expectation. Tired-eyed and tired-limbed, he postured mechanically before me, with a show of simulated passion. Then, to the delight of the audience, seated himself firmly on my knee, and to the continued cries

of "Rhumal Dalo," threw the handkerchief over my head and shoulders—the Jat symbol of final surrender.

Majid tells me that the naurahs still ring with the tale of this dance, and my surrender to the spirit of the crowd. It remains one of their brighter memories, and will never be forgotten. It will always be indelibly traced on my memory. I have only to hear the throb of a dhol nowadays, to close my eyes, and see once again the thana walls, moonlight and velvet shadow, the circle of lean faces tense in the torches' glow—to hear the gurgle of the huqqahs, and the clink of the "gungorous" * as the slim, bejewelled figure postured and twirled, to the wail of the sitar and the muffled throb of the drums.

Long after midnight, while the evening was yet young—these dances last until grey dawn—I threaded the rabbit warren of inky lanes home, and fell asleep lulled by the song of the villagers at their never-ceasing task at the wells.

Most days of the week I was out soon after dawn, away across the fields after black buck and chinkara. A single saddle camel for myself, and one double-saddled for Majid and the camel-man. There was ample room on the back of mine for two buck.

Food we carried none, as well we knew the hospitality of the outlying villages. Two "bowrias" † ran at our heels. These were Majid's special gillies, the poachers of the mohulla, who kept the people in feathered and four-footed food, in return for their keep—a percentage of the monthly crop. Each mohulla possessed its own especial menials—barbers, sweepers, dhobis, bhistsis, etc.—who gave their services

* Anklets.

† Gypsy shikaris.

to the community in return for their daily bread. As in English feudal days, their huts clustered round their master's habitation—they belonged to the "sudra" or depressed Hindu class. . . .

Far away on the edge of an emerald patch of gram, enjoying a hearty feed—the curse of every cultivator—my glasses would pick up the long-sought herd, who, having fed all night, now with the advent of dawn, full-stomached, were taking indolent stock of their surroundings. Never left long undisturbed, they are chivvied from field to field by the enraged ryots—as a large herd can eat a field of gram flat in a night.

Night is their ideal feeding-time, as until the crop is near the full the ryot can seldom spare the time to guard his fields during the hours of darkness.

On the edge of the herd, a full-grown buck, black as night, with horns laid back along his ebony withers, playfully chivvies a portion of his harem. The sentinel does, noses out-thrust, ears hinging to and fro, await the first scent of danger.

Free of suspicion—were they not seen every day?—the camels would approach the unsuspecting herd; never directly, but gradually, on an ever-diminishing circumference. One eye on the buck, I would prepare to slip off on the blind side, ever urging my camel towards a handy tree within two hundred yards of the herd. Once there, handing the nose-rope to Majid, I would drop off while the camels went lurching on, watched by the sentinel does, still unaware of my proximity. . . .

A few minutes later, Majid, waving his hunting-knife, was running across the fields to complete the "hallal" or gralloch, without which no true Mohamedan will partake of, or even handle, any flesh.

This must be accomplished before the breath has departed—hence his precipitate flight.

The buck strapped to the saddle, we cast longing eyes across the now simmering fields to shady Lalla.

Such was my first acquaintance with this drowsily peaceful Jat village, where we were welcomed with lotas full of hot milk, laced with fresh sugar-cane spirit; meanwhile the village elders gathered round and regaled us with local gossip.

It was all very delightful, dreaming away the midday hours, shaded from the white-hot glare of the streets, lulled by the gurgle of the huqqahs and the munching of the resting oxen.

Later this was somewhat disturbed by the arrival of a rather truculent educated lambadar—a youngish Mussulman, full of his own importance. There are two types of Aryan to avoid: the cringer, who proclaims you as his father and mother and protector of all the poor and outcast; and the man who is too sure of himself, and treats one with familiar equality. There should be no servility, yet there can be no question of equality, which ultimately leads to lack of respect. All such offenders must be brought to heel almost at once.

In the light of subsequent events I fear I was too friendly with the Lalla lambadar. We sat cheek by jowl and watched the village wrestlers he produced for me; and, after giving an exhibition of target-shooting with my '318, we departed with much backslapping, with an invitation to an all-night play and nautch the following night.

Soon after dinner, mounted on a diminutive Arab pony, my feet trailing along the ground, I set out along the starlit track to Lalla. I soon outdistanced the cavalcade following on camels, and was wondering

what a distant fire kindled across my track portended—all on a winter's night, when all good Rangars were abed—when the embers were suddenly scattered, and several muffled figures melted into the obscurity of an aloes hedge alongside the track. I broke into grand opera, interspersed with a monologue in fluent English, and continued on my solitary way, my throat itching with expectation of the thugee silken rope.

The track between Lalla and Jatusana had an unsavoury reputation for highway robbery, especially on such nights when a nautch drew people from near and far.

However, I passed unmolested on my way, to the undoubted discomfiture of the lurking thieves, who thought Allah had sent them at least a fat-pursed bunia.

On the outskirts of Lalla I was received by the lambadar, already three parts drunk, and handed half a coco-nut shell, into which he splashed whisky from a bottle labelled "Seven Fairies Whisky—Product of Bulandshahr." Overcoming a violent shudder of nausea, I was about to sacrifice my future health, when a violent nudge from Majid made me put down the proffered poison, untasted. It turned out to be pure arrack. This did not help to promote a subsequent entente.

The square was thronged with villagers, gathered round the stage erected beneath a gaudy shamiana. The roofs were festooned with gaily attired Jatnis, unveiled and bucolically happy.

I was conducted to a charpoy in the front row, and the lambadar, complete with bottle and stirrup cup, seated himself unsteadily at my side. I was out to enjoy myself, and, as the headman's guest, was not

prepared to stand on my dignity. Majid's sense of the fitness of things, however, did not coincide with mine. Knowing the Indian mind too well, he realised the hair's breadth dividing respect from familiarity. Through his action I undoubtedly retained my self-respect, but lost the spontaneous fun of a real night out.

Majid leant forward, tapped me on the shoulder, and indicated a solitary chair a few yards away. Never doubting his line of reasoning, I changed my seat, and from that moment gained the antipathy of the lambadar.

It may have been too obvious, but Majid told me after that the familiarity of the headman in sharing my charpoy savoured too much of disrespect. I really could not blame him for his subsequent behaviour. Having once admitted his right to the same charpoy, I should have continued to accept it. *Quien sabe?*

Thoroughly incensed, he glowered at me and continued his solo act with the arrack. Word was passed to the dancers to ignore the guest of the evening, and throughout the whole performance, much to my relief, attention was riveted on my alcoholic rival.

The village lost much money that night, had they only realised it, as my pockets bulged with undisbursed wealth.

Intensely interested, wedged tight in a deck chair, shrouded to the lips in a British warm and two blankets, I never moved my position till just after dawn, when Majid hustled me away, while the lambadar, supersaturated with the "Seven Fairies," snored head downwards on the charpoy.

According to Majid, it had been a night of studied insult. Nevertheless I had enjoyed it to the full.

As my stay was drawing to its close, word went forth that the Head of the District was on tour and would be putting up at the local rest-house the following night. In fact his advance peons and servants had already arrived, and the lambadars had been sent for to make the necessary arrangements for his stay. The members of the jealous mohullas told Majid that my presence at the dak bungalow would not be acceptable to the Deputy-Commissioner Sahib Bahadur, who moved in circles far above that of an impoverished soldier who eked out his leave in common "bustis."*

However, much to their discomfiture, I spent the entire afternoon chatting on the verandah of the rest-house, while lambadars and their myrmidons, crouched in one corner of the compound, awaited the crumbs of generosity to fall from the table at which we subsequently dined.

The bribery and corruption of the staff and servants on the occasion of these inspections were to me a complete revelation. The theory was that the head lambadar provided the day's requirements, such as half a dozen eggs, two chickens, flour, vegetables, etc., and common food for the servants. Menial labour was also supplied, and the whole proportioned equally between the various mohullas. In practice the servants terrorised the village and demanded six times these requirements. Moreover they extorted money, with threats of reporting non-co-operation to their master. This would reflect—so they said—on his subsequent treatment of the village.

Naturally none of this ever came to the ears of the D.C., who prided himself that the people welcomed

* Huts.

him with acclamation. The true state of affairs was only apparent to one who shared their daily life and heard their burden of complaint when the huqqah was passed round the evening gathering.

For the next few days I wandered with the D.C. from village to village, camping nightly in the comfort of some leafy garden or beneath a spreading peepul tree. And there, hour by hour, he tried to hear the heart-beat of the village. He was much loved by his district, to which he had devoted the best days of his life.

One realised to the full what comfort—apart from the petty inconveniences I have already mentioned—the Head of a District could bring to his people by showing himself to them, if only once a year.

Propaganda and notices on Government paper may issue incessantly from “zila” or “tehsil,”* but the peasant needs the personal contact with the D.C. to realise that the British Raj still exists, and cares for its myriad subjects: of equal importance to-day as the daily “nishana,” or showing at dawn of the Great Mogul to the assembled multitude—a sign that the King still lived, and that law and equity still walked in the land.

Yet with the gradual indianisation of the Civil Service, villages are growing yearly to look in vain for the advent of their Indian Commissioner, whose antipathy to the discomfort of touring and camp life is only too apparent.

The Commissioner is—as acclaimed by his district—the father and mother of his people. They know no other authority, and have no other link with the great British Raj. They are content to leave their entire

* District or County.

welfare in his hands. In this case their trust was not betrayed, but repaid a hundredfold.

At the entrance to each village we were met by the entire population ; in some places prostrate on the ground, so that we had to dismount from our horses. The lambadar would meet us and press a rupee into the outstretched hand. This was touched and returned ; not retained—as Majid would insist was the obvious custom. This was a relic of the tribute paid in Mogul days and signified loyal submission to the Raj.

The village maps of land assessment and grazing rights were produced and the “ patwaris ” * were cross-examined on minor disputes.

It is the patwari's job to draw up the maps of the fields and assess the value of the crops, from which Government statistics are compiled. I remember one aged patwari being asked, “ To whom do those bullocks belong ? ”—a deserted well being indicated, and his immediate answer, “ To Chaudri Singh Lambadar.”

This proof that he could not see clearly across fifty yards of field cost him his job.

As evening fell, the village would sit at the feet of the sirkar and pour out all their hopes and fears, aspirations and troubles. A hundred subjects were discussed—agriculture and improvement of instruments, manuring of fields, improvement in cattle-breeding, village thrift and education, abolition of marketing of wives, fixation of marriage dowries, inoculation against plague and cholera, and a myriad other things.

One incident left on me a deep impression, a mere

* The local land bailiffs.

passing glimmer of the tangled depths of the Oriental mind ; so easily probed to its depths, and understood by the touring politician !

My friend's great ambition was the introduction into each village of the steel plough, in supersession of the wooden plough, which scratched from time immemorial an inch-deep furrow. I speak simply from the experience of my own village—Jatusana—where, after many weary visits, he induced the villagers to buy one plough for the good of the community.

Special demonstrations were given of the great depth of furrow and the ease and increased speed with which it could be drawn by oxen and buffaloes, and even by a diseased camel.

The following year I noticed the steel plough lying derelict on the village midden, and was told that from the day of its purchase it had never been used.

“ Why then was it ever bought ? ” I asked uncomprehendingly.

“ We have our own ploughs which have tilled the fields for generations,” was the answer. “ What do we know of this new invention ? The Sahib has gained his commission on its sale, thereby have we acquired merit ! ”

To disillusion them was mere waste of breath.

On my last night of freedom I staged a private dance for my own mohulla. Majid arranged for a wedding troupe, and erected the platform in the naurah. This opportunity for a final unpleasantness was too much for Imrat Khan. The dance was in full swing, the naurah packed with row upon row of tense faces, when up sprang a Rangar in the glow of the torches and cried truculently to those around him, “ Come,

brothers, this is poor entertainment ; we were better in our beds." At once well over half the audience rose, and gathering their blankets round them left in a noisy throng. I had only invited my own mohulla, and had wondered at the size of the crowd. It was a deliberate insult, and Majid sprang straightway to his feet, all his Rangar blood afire, and but for my restraining arm would have cracked their spokesman's head with his iron-shod lathi. As it was he used violent unparliamentary language, for which on the following day he was reprimanded before the village punchayet.

This time I determined not to let the insult pass unnoticed. The following morning I discarded the velvet glove of friendliness, and became official. Heavy with the responsibility of the protection of white prestige I summoned the village Thanedar,* who within a few minutes stood obsequiously before me. I demanded the person of one Nabi Bax—the overnight interrupter—for summary punishment.

He had fled the village !

So be it. If he was not forthcoming within twenty-four hours, the Thanedar would be reported to the highest authorities, who were all my intimate friends—in fact, blood relatives ! A bluff—as such behaviour as the night before carried no official recognition or punishment.

Within half an hour the offender was standing before me in the village thana, the outer street humming with expectancy.

The spectacle savoured somewhat of a Roman holiday, and would not have been applauded by the promoter of racial equality. But after twenty years' analysis of the Oriental mind, I knew the antidote.

* Police-sergeant.

After grinding the delinquent's face into the dust with my foot, I turned him over to the heaviest-handed policeman for summary castigation. After an abject apology, both to myself and to the British Raj, I swept majestically out and made hurried arrangements for my departure on the morrow—ere, with my increasing popularity, I was accorded a civic farewell!

Reluctantly I decided to sever my connection with a community who failed to understand my motives for selecting their village for a mental rest cure. At long last I had to admit the eternal truth of Kipling's line—

“ Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.”

In fact, when looking back on those days with present-day sanity, I scarcely understand them myself. I can only account for them as a gnawing desire to escape from the confinement of cantonment walls, out beyond the last link with civilisation—the terminal sign-post on the Mall, indicating the road to bondage. To flee the petty monotonies of a badly Westernised East, and get far beyond the sunset, where throbbed the pulse of a mysterious continent, unknown to minds sunk in the rut of cantonment routine. . . .

Many years after—no longer lonely and seeking distraction in the little-known—we revisited Jatusana and luxuriated for a week in the much-despised rest-house.

Gordiani, the adjacent village, was almost our Waterloo. Late at night, after a journey a tank would have looked at twice, we essayed the passage of the main street, as they said the outer track was heavy sand. It was pitch dark, and the running boards of our long-suffering car touched the shops on

either side of the narrowest bazaar I have ever penetrated. Had we the elasticity of a caterpillar, we might have accomplished the right-angled turn we attempted. As it was we stuck, and had to be bodily lifted out on to the straight. Our lights had failed us, and the only illumination was a torch held in the gloom of a narrow alley-way by a veiled woman in a blood-red sari.

The colour blended with our mood and subsequent language. We spent all day on our camels—resting during the heat of the day in one of the outlying villages. The evenings we climbed the near-by hill, and lay and watched the blue smoke wisping from the roofs, and listened to the hum of the village die down as the cooking-fires twinkled in the deepening shadows.

But we never lifted the veil shrouding the face of the village, nor invoked the spectres of the past which lurked for me in the distant mohullas.

Never again would I listen to the gurgle of the huqqah in the naurah, the throb of the dhol in the torchlit thana, wake to the padding of the cattle past my gloomy verandah, nor be lulled to sleep by the shouts of the watchers on the crops.

The twilit shore of evening merged into the ocean of night. As the last peacock—a flash of turquoise and gold in the dying sun—rose to roost, we turned away to the solitude of our little rest-house—with no regrets.

CHAPTER IV

THROUGH THE MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO TO FARTHEST TENASSERIM

“ Ah, for the cabined sampans, floating free,
Ah, for the tropic moonlit nights, that fling
Unnecessary silver on a sea
Itself with phosphorescent light aglow.
Ah, for the waving palms along the shore.”

Laurence Hope.

IT has for years been my ambition to eschew civilisation and get back to Nature ; to throw off the many cloying tabus and obligations of Army life ; to rise and leave my friends and go if needs be to the world's very end ; if I could only get back to Nature—untouched and unadorned.

There is no need to seek the world's end, nor to travel a road even a fraction so far. If you weary of your fellow Norms and seek a solitude unprobed—Nature as primitive as the Biblical Eden (and just as beautiful)—you must take the fortnightly boat from Rangoon, sailing south towards Tavoy. After many blissful days' drifting through the Mergui Archipelago, land at Victoria Point and follow the dreamy Pakchan river to its junction with the Maliwun Creek.

Here, in the depths of the most primitive forests, one can indulge one's atavistic whims to one's ultimate satiety, and return to a paleolithic state compared to which the Heidelberg man was positively urban.

So at least I discovered during two memorable

months, which culminated in my being refused entrance to a Chinese joss-house—as an undesirable—and in the complete destruction of my desire for the primitive, and, by contrast—a positive yearning for civilisation.

* * * * *

The sun was rising blood-red out of a bank of mist as we weighed anchor and slipped away from the murk of Rangoon, downstream, with our course set for farthest Burma. The coldness in the air and the dense fog enshrouding the river imparted an impression of Tilbury, or any equally drab English river scene—only dispelled by a glint of pure gold where the sunrise caught the Shwe Dagon pagoda's distant spire in a "noose of light"; and the occasional glimpse of a sampan slipping through a rift in the fog. After dropping the pilot, we left the mouth of the Rangoon river and struck across the Gulf of Martaban for Tavoy—our first port of call.

The monotony of a day spent out of sight of land was relieved unconsciously by my young Indian orderly, Abdul Majid. I had ordered him better food than that supplied to the menials, and had so impressed the head steward with my insistence that he was a soldier (and not a servant) that he produced a full sit-down five-course dinner.

Majid, accustomed as all Orientals to using his hands at meals, nevertheless endeavoured to do full justice to the menu. After over half an hour he had managed to convey to his mouth, by aid of knife and fork, a few whole potatoes and a portion of jelly; of which more anon. He had also grappled successfully with a chicken wing, which he seized in both hands in the butler's absence. He was thoroughly mystified by the jelly—raspberry—which he ultimately identified as

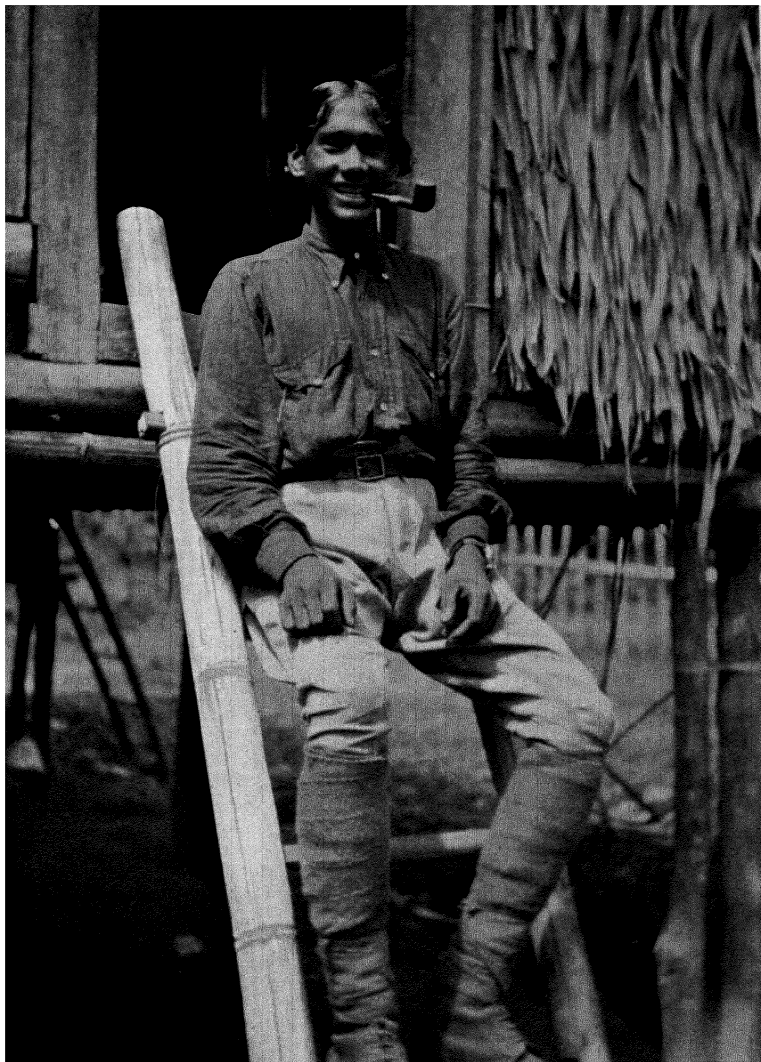
sea anemone—an old friend washed up on the shores of the Gulf of Aden—his last station! To fill the aching void, I obtained for him two loaves and five oranges, with which he retired for the night into the bowels of the ship.

The following dawn found us just entering the Mergui Archipelago. It broke with a delicious coolness in a blaze of sunrise. One by one the surrounding islands detached themselves from the morning mists. The mainland, covered in dense tree jungle and palms, rose steeply from the sea. Moskos Island, clothed with cedars, lay lapped with shoal water creaming the coral reefs about its feet. Occasionally a turtle floated lazily past. As the sun rose above the great forest-clad hills the Maungmagan beaches gleamed white on the distant shore.

We steamed between southern Moskos and the mainland, passing between Cap Island and Tavoy Point. Almost smothered in luxuriant jungle and palms, where emeralds, jades and lime-greens contested their magnificence, two small pagodas with gold-rimmed spires peeped out. Beyond lay the Hypoongi Kyaungs—the habitations of the priests. Far beyond, buried in the jungle, lay the village of Kyetthet, the first Burmese settlement on these shores.

Still further on we passed a solitary pagoda called Kathaymagyin—the Chinese woman's island. Having transferred passengers to the Tavoy launch, we sailed down the estuary, and headed through the islands for Tavoy. Towards sunset we passed Canister Rock, called Fair Island by the Burman, and anchored at dark off the mouth of the river leading inland to Palau.

By night the waters showed in their depths a gleam-



Abdul Majid

ing metropolis—a very fairyland of gold and amber phosphorescence—great bands of light as the water washed along the bows, and every fish left a streamer of opalescent fire. As the moon rose the phosphorescence died away, and the dark line of the distant wooded hills was outlined against a clear moonlit sky. All around were the dark silhouettes of the great bamboo fish-traps. An occasional pearling junk floated silently on its way.

Soon after a pearly dawn we set sail amid a maze of wooded islets. The sea lay studded with small coral reefs, dangerous to navigation. Towards midday we anchored in Mergui Harbour, passing between Kala Island and the mainland. Locked within a Sinbad cove, the town rose steeply from the far shore, crowned with a golden pagoda. The moment we dropped anchor a fleet of sampans raced each other for the ship. The arrival of the mail in Mergui is the week's event, and to-day the northward-bound mail from the Malay Straits slipped into her anchorage shortly after our arrival.

I awoke before dawn and watched the sun come up behind the golden pagoda. My first impression was a jet-black cone gleaming with spirals of light, while below the town and harbour lay hushed in sleep. Gradually the sky turned to silver with sombre bands of cloud, the lights on the pagoda lost their radiance, and its slender spire, silhouetted against a silver sky, turned every shade of colour, from palest turquoise to flaming bronze, until the sun burst above the rim of the horizon, and the pagoda gleamed like plates of beaten gold.

We sailed soon after seven, and turned south through Fell's Passage between King's Island and

Kala Island. Both shores rose steeply from the sea, and in places the banks seemed almost to bar the passage of the ship, so narrow was the waterway, indented with delightful pirate creeks and smuggler coves, and lapped with sapphire and snow, where the ship's waves tumbled on a silver beach. Far beyond, tier upon tier of purpling hills. An occasional village on piles peeped from out the forest.

The whole day we threaded our way through a maze of dream-like islets—emeralds crushed upon a canopy of sapphire sea. From passage to passage, each more wondrous than the last, and now and again out into the open sea. By the chart the whole sea was strewn with shoals and rocks; but we threaded them with no apparent difficulty. We were sailing in a sea of romance, far from the drab and conventional atmosphere of even an Eastern highway. A glimpse at the chart showed us sailing in a world which had still retained its romantic nomenclature.

Through Mermaid Passage, past the Elephant Rocks and Whale Bay, into Investigator's Passage, Lalla Rookh Island and Alligator Rocks.

All around hovered the spirit of the original explorers. We travelled over waters untraversed by ocean greyhounds and floating gin-palaces; where time-tables from port to port were non-existent, and punctuality not a matter of moments, but of days, perhaps weeks; where the shades of the early investigators—who gave their lives to make navigation safe in these tortuous waters—must have raised a grateful sigh to Heaven that but one ship a month disturbed their last lonely sleep.

One day—I forget which (time drifted across one's conscious memory as a series of sunrises and moons)—

we passed the boats of a strange people called Salauns. For about a month in the year they live ashore cultivating one small patch of rice. The remaining months they live on their fishing-craft—primitive boats with grass sails. They occasionally land at Mergui or Victoria Point, otherwise they are never seen except at sea. Gradually dying out, they now number barely 2500 souls. Their general appearance is rather more debased than the public's conception of early Neolithic man—popularised by recent fiction as "cave man." The women, naked to the waist, clutched semi-human litters to their almost simian bosoms, and chattered like a family of outraged baboons as I manœuvred to take a photo.

Gradually from their sedentary life afloat they are losing the use of their legs. Providentially, it may prove only a matter of a generation ere they also lose their powers of reproduction. A more debased community I have never seen.

We drifted lazily on between Kisseraing Island and the mainland, and at dusk anchored off Chedding Point.

Soliloquising over the ship's bows before turning in, I could have imagined that I was afloat once more on the bosom of the Nile. The distant line of shore was clear-cut against the star-studded sky; and from a lonely village the plaintive wail of some stringed instrument disturbed the perfect silence of the night.

At daylight we weighed anchor and steamed across the Chedding flats, and anchored below Silver Island at the mouth of the Bokypin River. In the delightful freshness of early dawn we set out to visit Bokypin village. After half an hour's paddling, threading our way between numbers of fishing canoes from which

the occupants were spearing fish, we entered the estuary of the river and landed at the village.

I wandered the length of the rather squalid bazaar—dreary as all Tenasserim habitations. Built on piles above the steaming decay of mud and mangrove swamps, it lacked all the colour and beauty of more civilised Burma. A debased conglomeration of Malays and Burmans, Salauns and renegade Chinese, bound into one degraded fraternity by the common bond of poverty. Heavy jungle stretched sinister tentacles around the village on every hand, and the distant hills were dark with storm.

The local policeman craved permission to utilise our sampan for the transportation of a Malay murderess and daughter to the custody of the ship. Heavily manacled, the husband-slayer crouched at my feet, and I solaced her with a singularly offensive white cheroot, which I occasionally thrust between her castanetting teeth. Singularly attractive in the fading light, it transpired that she was the uncrowned Messalina of Bokypin.

We up-anchored and drifted down the beautiful Carnac Channel, passing the Marble Rocks and Elephant Rock—a landmark for miles around. On either hand the dense green forests were girt mile upon mile with evil mangrove swamps, intersected with weird, winding creeks. Wrapped in a sunset glow, on the extremity of a rocky promontory, a large and red monkey—a simian Narcissus—gazed at his reflection in the waters below.

As the sun sank to rest over the distant archipelago we came through Forest Strait, to anchor in the harbour of Victoria Point—our destination.

That evening after dinner a small launch came

alongside, to the accompaniment of a certain amount of Malayan chatter interspersed with Anglo-Tenasserim oaths. A burly figure climbed the gangway and entered the saloon, where we were striving to digest the ship's nightly gastronomic insult. I had listened unceasingly to the ship's officers' eulogies of my future host, and consequently quite expected the normal back-slapping rubber-planter cum beach-comber whom one associates with "mangrove swamps—blackwater fever—white cargo, and the inevitable white man's burden." As I was committed to spending at least a month (before the ship returned) with him as my sole companion, I trusted sincerely that he fitted the above description in every detail. For my proposed return to Nature I could have found no more ideal surroundings, and from the earliest impressions (which to me are the only true ones) I found him a man utterly after my own heart.

Old friend, I know you will forgive my imparting my impressions to a public eager to share with me the memories of your never-failing hospitality. Your real personality was not disclosed that night in the gin-drenched saloon of the *Sandakan*. Nor was the impression imparted by your Palm Beach suit and Siamese "feutre" a true one.

I shall always remember you, and paint you to future readers, as I saw you one day threading your way through the Maliwun bazaars. My first impression was of a Chinaman—my second of a Siamese poacher—my last (as you turned to face me) of my one and only S.

A dingy skull-cap perched on a singularly wrinkled brow, every line and crease depicting humour and good nature—lines of knowledge and deep experience

of the sterner facts of life, on which Fortune had not smiled too benignly; indigo jacket, trousers "en Chinois," and feet untrammelled by civilisation's substitute for a naturally hardened sole.

Never shall I forget the moment's anguish when I watched you step, bare-footed, one day on a white-hot horseshoe, carelessly smouldering on the floor of your forge. Nor your remark some moments later (blissfully unconscious of all pain) that "some bloody Tamil must be incinerating his father" near by.

With such a companion I felt at last I *must* get back to Nature, so abandoned myself to his every whim. . . . Known by all and sundry as the "Great White Chief of Maliwun," he gained a precarious living managing some archaic plantations far up the Pakchan River. He also had the Government contract for the transport of the mails from the monthly boat to the denizens of Maliwun; for which he received twenty-five rupees a month, fifty of which he spent during his monthly visit to the ship—on beer—none of which he ever drank himself.

Long after the last light across the harbour had been extinguished, we lay on our mattresses on deck, the only sound the rhythmic sob of the open sea across the bar, and the endless hush-hushing of the waves against the boat's side. There was no moon, just a faint shimmer of starlight. Somewhere below the Southern Cross in the indefinite black welter of forest lay Maliwun—of which that night I heard so many tales from the lips of one who loved it as his home.

We talked of the prospects of rhino-hunting, the chances of elephant and tiger, of Siamese poachers, jade mines and Chinese smugglers; of Malayan juju and rubber, rubber and more rubber, until I relapsed

into unconsciousness, dominated by a dream in which I swallowed a gallon of latex and developed india-rubber intestines.

Soon after dawn we said good-bye to the *Sandakan* and struck off across the harbour for the mouth of the Pakchan River. We had a sampan in tow full of kit on which was perched Abdul Majid, complete with huqqah. S. and I and the mails luxuriated in the launch.

After some three hours we turned northwards up the Maliwun Creek, so narrow that the dim mesh of overhead vines brushed the boat as we passed. On either bank rose a wall of primitive jungle, dim and sinister, the dominant sound, the suck of the boat's wash as the water rose and fell about the mangrove swamps. Over all brooded an atmosphere of menace. Man seemed to have no welcome in this alien and mysterious land. His superior intelligence—which had enabled him to conquer the earth and all its inferior creatures!—meant nothing in the inhuman immensity of this black, brooding silence. Man was not master, but clung to the edges of this great green world, precariously, at the mercy of the forces of Nature.

At last I was getting back to Nature, and as we plunged deeper and deeper into the heart of the primitive, the whole depth of Siam between us and even the hint of civilisation, I felt strangely alone.

Towards evening we came alongside a pile of timber which in the distance looked like a basking crocodile. This resolved itself into Maliwun jetty, where we landed, and in a perfect Malayan dusk sought the habitation of my host : a dreary edifice of many rooms, mostly empty, through which sauntered attractive Tamils of the female species, while several children

of indeterminate colour played listlessly on the door-sill and with the gaunt remnants of the broken furniture. The house reminded me of a cross between a Persian caravanserai and an impoverished Irish castle. The few oil-lamps only served to emphasise the fact that I had been given the *appartement de luxe* and the family four-poster.

My evening toilet was watched with interest by several small Anglo-Tamils through the open window. Later they dispersed, as a series of blood-curdling squeals, as of a pig being violently assaulted, rose on the evening air. Often was I to hear these cries to Heaven of my thrice-daily meal. I found that pork was our one staple food—in fact the only meat obtainable in the local bazaar, which was practically Chinese, and therefore pork fantee.

Until the early hours of the morning we continued the interrupted conversation of the night before. I learnt much of my host and his vicissitudes. . . . The firm for which he was manager, both of the tin concessions and the rubber estate, had paid no salary since the outbreak of war. They had not fallen into liquidation, but simply had been unable to pay salaries, which were theoretically accumulating for payment on a "finer day."

Gradually the employees had abandoned the sinking ship. There only remained the Captain, who stuck to his bridge, whence he directed the labour of the remnant of Tamil and Chinese coolies, who existed on the money obtained from the occasional sale of a few pounds of rubber. Master and coolie were reduced to the same standard of living, and existed on air and the promise of better days.

He had invested his little money in pig, and had

a well-stocked sty. It was the open sesame of all markets, and with the local Chinaman had almost ousted the gold standard. It was to the Chinaman what the cowrie or brass wire is to the Central African—the basis of bargain; one squeaker equalled one bottle of port; a case of whisky, one fat sow with litter.

Soon after midnight the port ran low, and my host led me round to the back, jerked a succulent squeaker from its mother's arms, and together we hurried to the sleeping bazaar. Ah Foo, wakened from his celestial dreams, changed our pig into port—smuggled from across the Pakchan River from distant Siam.

Over the second bottle I heard of his age-long quarrel with the Victoria Point authorities over the vexed subject of rhino-poaching. Every Siamese poacher, when apprehended (to escape the maximum punishment), confessed to acting under his instructions. He became the veritable Al Capone of rhino-poaching. The authorities, in their soft-cushioned content in Victoria Point, were only too glad to find a scapegoat. Although there was no proof whatever of their allegations, they harried him to the point of confiscating his rifles—the while every village “loogi,” and a hundred poachers from across the Pakchan, were allowed to retain theirs.

Recently he only escaped arrest by taking to the jungle—where the authorities still imagined him to be. To support their libellous charges, poachers had buried rhino skulls in his compound, and anonymously invited the police to carry out a search. Had he been the Prince of Poachers, life could not have been rendered more intolerable.

Long after midnight I miscalculated a flight of steps leading down to my bedroom. Port and pork I fear will prove a heady diet. I climbed sadly into bed to find it already occupied by Chinami (my host's second concubine) and child. . . . Could this have been a port-induced error of judgment, or possibly true Maliwun hospitality? . . . A problem I was too weary to elucidate.

With a burning desire to repair the ravages of last night's debauch, I awoke at dawn, and sent far and wide for reliable trackers. Each and every villager was skilled in jungle knowledge, but had his own affairs to attend to—his crops and cattle. At last I found one of S.'s maistris or foremen: a Gurkha from the Chittagong hill tracts, who before his present employment had for twenty years been a shikari, and professed to know the surrounding jungles intimately.

He had also been in the Army and carried a wound from the Chitral campaign; also a finger short—the legacy from a wounded tiger. The main advantage was his knowledge of Hindustani—our common language. Hard bitten and hard drinking, he seemed a useful enough "tough"; and all I wanted were a knowledge of the jungles—rhino wallows and elephant tracks—and a go-between with Siamese and Malays, whose language was to me so much "mumbo-jumbo."

We decided on a general look round the vicinity to get an idea of the habitat of rhinoceros—an animal quite unknown to me—before going farther afield on any more serious exhibition.

This first day's experience of Tenasserim jungles almost finished me. From dawn until dusk, with the exception of an hour's halt—or rather collapse—at midday, we kept up a steady two to two and a half

miles an hour. Thus we must have covered, in the ten hours of daylight, some twenty-five miles.

As the rhino's habitat appeared to be the bed of any stream, where he might luxuriate in the mud and wallow throughout the drowsy, sunlit hours, we followed perforce for the greater part of these ten hours the winding course of every small nala which held sand and water—the natural components of good motion-arresting mud. We squelched our unfortunate way from wallow to wallow, mud to the knees, through an almost impenetrable Amazonian forest. There had been rain in the night and the nalas were full, and the leeches were athirst for human blood. Of fresh rhino tracks and wallows we saw never a one—all were at least five days old. Fresh "sladang" (the Malay buffalo) tracks were abundant.

As the long day wore on, I found it increasingly difficult to extricate my legs from the vicious welter of slime; and after narrowly avoiding several minor quicksands, I faintly pointed in the direction of home, and we finished the last few hours of daylight through a labyrinth of leech-ridden evergreen jungle and thorn.

That these jungles were heavily poached there was abundant indication, and Mahbir Singh advocated leaving the vicinity of Maliwun and going much farther afield. I realised after the day's stalk that this was going to be the hardest shikar I had yet experienced. Not for thirteen years had I travelled such heavy impenetrable jungle; and then not in Asia, but many moons away in Central Africa—the Ituri pygmy forests across the Semliki River.

I abandoned my normal shikar kit and evolved an entirely new one, sacrificing everything for lightness

and comfort. Instead of the usual Cawnpore pig-sticker, I wore a double Terai felt (the sun rarely penetrated these dim labyrinths). Shorts merely provided ample feeding grounds for enterprising leeches, and puttees unwound in every wallow. I therefore substituted khaki slacks worn loosely within long leech-proof stockings of finest texture, drawn up well above the knee.

These latter I borrowed from S., and completed my kit by substituting light canvas boots with rubber soles for the usual leather or sambhur stalking-boot, which soon became sodden with water.

All this to show that rhino hunting in Southern Tenasserim must not be contemplated as lightly as a Christmas camp in the C.P., and should not be considered by sportsmen inclined to weak hearts, arteries hardened by errors of diet!—week-end ale-swilling Nimrods—soft-bottomed howdah lizards—and the many other categories of “rasping good shikaris.”

Tenasserim solitudes will never tempt the shikari out for scalp or horn, and will demand their full pound (in my case two stone) of flesh in return for a fleeting glimpse of its elusive denizens.

The following day I decided to give my long-suffering feet a chance of recovery, and send Mahbir Singh out on a further reconnaissance. With heavily soaped socks, I urged my unwilling feet along the track which led to S.'s power-house, above which lay the local beauty spot. It was reached by a pipe-line extending for about a mile from the power-house to the waterfall—from which it takes its water. Laid along the pipe were singularly offensive greasy planks with no hand-rail, a mere two feet wide, with a perpendicular drop on one side to the gorge 100 feet below. The whole

paraphernalia was evil and did not cater for heavy weights.

For nearly half an hour, dripping with perspiration, I emulated Blondin on the greasy pole, and juggled with death. Once one of the planks snapped in two, dropping me on my chest, and twice again I dropped on to my right knee with my left leg between the cliff and the plank. The tracker who followed in my wake, with much sympathetic clicking of tongue and palate, must have had a mile of thrills. . . .

I saw the falls and some fresh tiger pug-marks ; but the Zambesi and Niagara, combined with all the tiger that ever came out of Tenasserim, would never tempt me within a mile of this death-trap again.

Nearing home I turned the corner on a strange apparition. On the edge of the track, examining one of his bare feet, sat my host—the picture of misery. Garbed in a strange archaic Palm Beach suit, several sizes too small, a medieval pair of sambhur-skin shoes suspended about his neck, he was endeavouring to restore the circulation to his apparently lifeless feet. An evil pair of spotted socks and suspenders lay coiled by his side.

With expressions of extreme disgust, he related how he had been called forth to meet a female missionary, who had chosen to put in at Maliwun on her way to Renong—a distant mission station on the Siamese bank of the Pakchan. His servants had with difficulty managed to head her off the harem, while he dressed in haste in a discarded suit and shoes of one of the earlier, if not the earliest, managers of the estate.

Clad in these relics of an earlier civilisation, he had ambled with her to the creek, where he had handed her over to the boatmen, and forthwith limped into the

nearest thicket to repair the ravages of this hour's torture. Rather than appear discourteous, he had suffered agony, and walked several miles in a pair of shoes at least two sizes too small. To a man unaccustomed for the last ten years to aught but naked feet, this seemed to me the very essence of heroism.

This episode will give perhaps a truer impression of this very gallant gentleman than any eulogistic effort of mine.

We passed our last night together refreshed with more pig and port, and sustained by the prospect of our next meeting—two moons ahead in the harbour of Victoria Point.

* * * * *

At dawn we left the neighbourhood of illicit guns and Siamese poachers, and set our faces westward for the far range of hills that lay towards the sea. Over a hundred miles of unmapped wilderness lay between us and the distant Tenasserim coast, where the sampans rocked to the swell of the Archipelago.

I determined to make a bee-line for the sea and trust to getting a sampan to Victoria Point. To travel light (really light), tentless and bedless, trusting to find a night's shelter in villages on the way. This would take us through the heart of the rhino country, which I hoped to find as yet untouched.

In addition to Abdul Majid and Mahbir Singh, my "safari" consisted of six men. These carried our entire requirements for two months—including all our stores and culinary utensils. We trusted to finding the usual commodities of food in the villages through which we passed. If they were non-existent, then I resorted to chuppaties and rice, of which the coolies had a plentiful supply. Such commodities as tinned

fish and meat, butter and condensed milk—categorized by the “average” shikari as an absolute necessity—I had long since eschewed as unnecessary luxuries. The Fortnum and Mason shikari would find no eager horde of porters competing to carry his bursting tins of gastronomic delights.

With difficulty I raised six weedy, under-sized Tamils off the estate. Mahbir Singh proposed a short trek the first day of nine miles to Telubazar, which lay across the distant hill. This would settle the coolies down for a more serious trek on the morrow.

I had contemplated a comfortable jaunt of about three hours, arriving at the village by midday in time to have an afternoon stalk. It was past five o'clock when we finally struggled into Telubazar, after nine hours' solid trekking, and the distance anything up to twenty miles. As was later only too painfully evident, Mahbir Singh's knowledge of the country was based on his wanderings of many years before. We were only too constantly to hear that “such and such a village or track existed twenty years ago.”

This “*via dolorosa*” needs description. A stiff climb brought us breathlessly to the crest of the highest hill on the map, where we were comforted by the shikari's reflection that we had broken the back of the journey and that the rest was level going. Many a time later I wished I had repeated this violent act on Mahbir Singh.

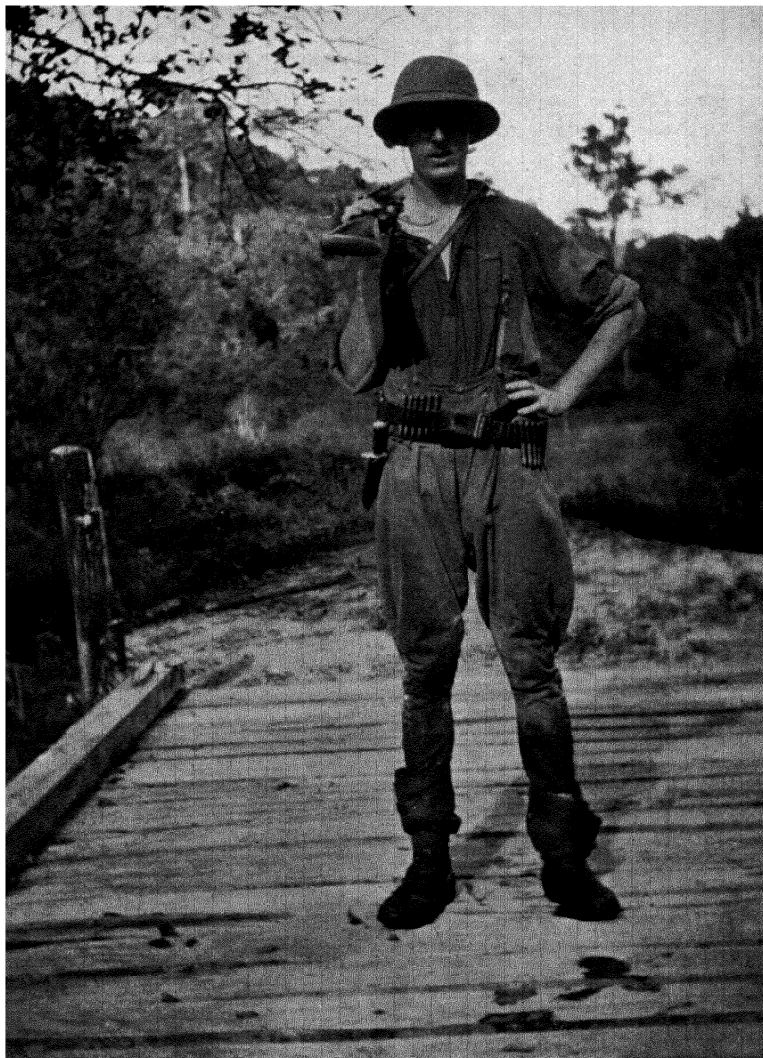
After two hours we were still struggling through heavy jungle, the coolies straggling farther and farther behind. We were losing height every mile, and apparently dropping into the very bowels of a gloomy valley. The track had vanished, and we were

following elephant trails through the dense tangle of undergrowth.

Then the leeches came—of a sudden—a patch of wet bamboo leaf jungle, and from every leaf, leeches waved frantically for nourishment. They must have smelt us from afar—a Lucullan blood banquet not often vouchsafed them in this gloomy valley. At first we halted every few yards and pulled them off. This we soon realised to be fatal; the only hope was to move too quickly for them to cling on. Thus I broke from a walk into a run, occasionally halting on a rotting timber to scrape them off in clusters with my hunting-knife, and pull them out from the folds in my puttees, and the lace-eyelets of my boots. Through every interstice they wriggled their way, athirst for blood.

The coolies, unable to take their hands from their loads, were leaving a trail of blood on the leaves which would not have shamed a wounded buffalo. Some of the leeches had wriggled their unholy way down my neck and throat, and were browsing on my thighs. The moment we put foot to the ground they were on us again. We raced through gloomy swamps; dragged our feet from great elephant tracks, sunk deep in the slime; clutched at thorns as we tripped over jungle creeper. The leeches were telling on our nerves, and we were verging on panic. If this lasted for many more miles we should have to acknowledge defeat. We were intruders in this kingdom of the leech, and as darkness came on apace, the inhuman aspect of our surroundings manifested itself with the deepening of the shadows.

My mind went back to a Teuton with a sprained ankle I had seen removed from the Lac Noir at the foot of the Riffel Alp—sucked dry by leeches. Here one



Legs drenched with blood, after the nightmare of Leeches

would soon become part of the decaying vegetation—one's last resting-place, lost to the outer world. . . . The leeches would wax fat and multiply.

Constant appeals to Mahbir Singh only elicited the reply, " 'Tis but two furlongs—now we are near." He would not admit that he was hopelessly lost, and aimlessly wandering in the hope of finding some way out of this valley of tribulation.

* * * * *

Gradually the jungle thinned ahead, and the ground rose to a far-distant skyline with shafts of warm sunlight. Like Dante's ascent from the Inferno, even so we climbed back to the outer world—to life. To a clear running stream, where we stripped stark naked, master and man, and plucked the leeches from our ravished bodies. From the waist downwards I was drenched in blood, and removed no less than thirty-two leeches. The majority were nicely bloated and fell off voluntarily. There was no pain, but as the stream ran red with blood I felt a general weakness and loathing.

Passing through the fields, we reached the debris of a village "busti," which Mahbir Singh recognised (!) as Pasay Mera. The sun was setting, and the air was golden glass after the horrors through which we had passed. I decided to go no further. As the shikari appeared to have reached a state of coma from which there was no awakening, I seized on the first Malay I met, and by the sign manual implored him to lead us to his house.

After some twenty minutes, spent in evicting a small crowd of people of both sexes and of all ages from the bowels of the shanty, we climbed the ladder and collapsed on the bamboo floor of one apartment—

which had been cleared for our occupation. The owner was a Malay fisherman of the poorest class; his house was therefore indescribably filthy.

Wherever one looked there were festoons of dead fish, from which emanated an odour of superannuated gorgonzola. Only in the immediate proximity of the door was there any glimmer of light; the rest of the room was shrouded in a veil of darkness which increased as the sunlight waned.

The blood still flowing from my bites, I repaired to a neighbouring stream and made the acquaintance of a most hideous bloodsucker—the buffalo leech—four inches long, and green, which clung affectionately to the cheek of my posterior anatomy.

Too exhausted to cook an evening meal, we dined on bread and tea and hard-boiled eggs; then, wrapped in our clothes—stiff with the day's blood—and too depressed to unpack, we gave our aching bodies over to rest. Majid laid his bedding alongside mine, and Mahbir Singh folded himself up at our feet. . . . The much-desired sleep died at its birth. Never have I wooed sleep amidst such an incredible pandemonium. I lay awake the long night through, every nerve ajar with the incessant chorus of dogs, pigs and other domestic pets beneath. These, like their jungle brothers, are night-feeders, and gathered in the darkness beneath to scavenge any food which had fallen through the gaps in our bamboo floor during the day.

Each room appeared to harbour a litter of teething triplets. People were pounding rice, crooning, snoring, talking, and making noisy amatory advances the long night through. The rattle of several fathoms of anchor chain—carelessly released—was a mere

whisper compared to the clatter of loose ammunition in Mahbir Singh's pockets, as he constantly twisted and turned.

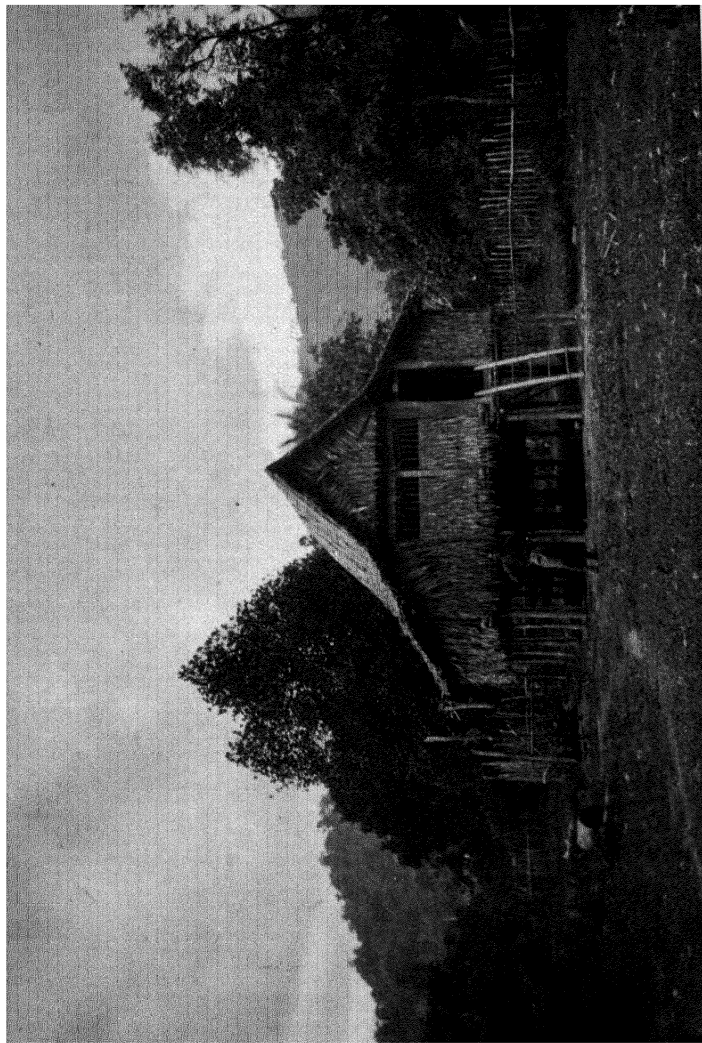
Some indefinite hour between midnight and dawn, the landlord (a victim of asthma) awoke and, lighting a small taper, proceeded to partake of a solitary meal. I watched him with fascination as his meal was interrupted by a violent fight for breath, which extinguished the taper, and he lay sobbing the rest of the night upon a coil of fishing nets which constituted his bed.

Dawn found us all wide-eyed and infinitely weary, but anxious to move our quarters to Telubazar—our proposed destination. After a good five miles, the soil growing sandier and the air more salty every mile, we reached the shores of a deep creek, beyond which lay an apparent arm of the open sea. The shores were fringed with dense mangrove swamps, and the sands were alive with hermit crabs and strange shell-fish, which scuttled into their holes on our approach.

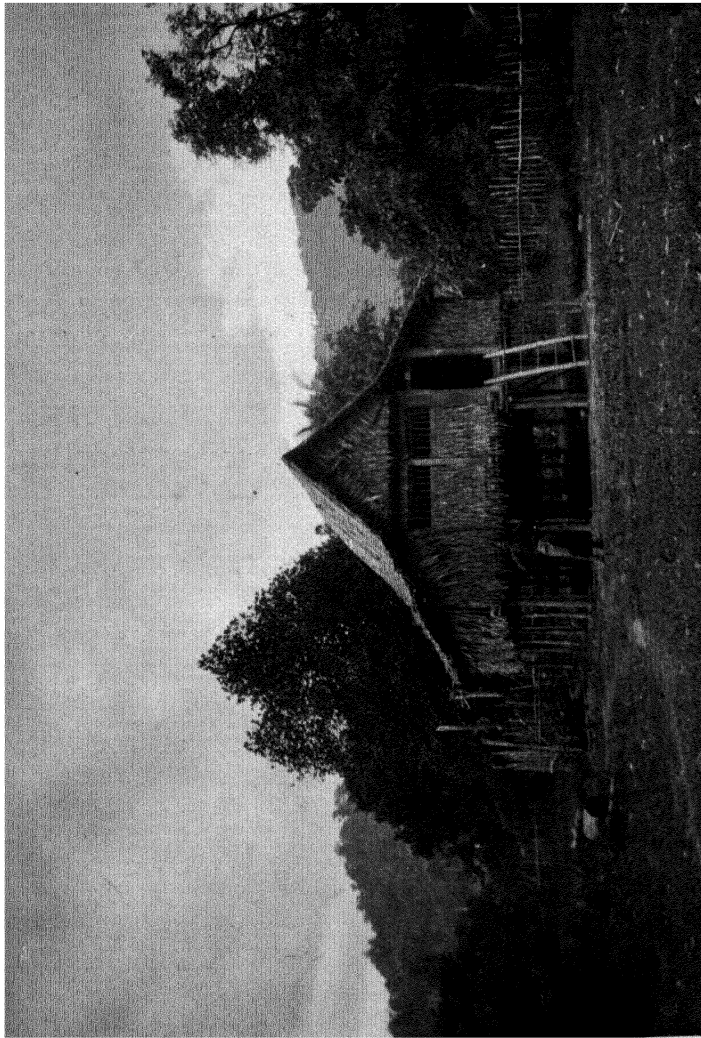
Mahbir Singh, with his usual sagacity, had made no preparation to get us across the creek to Telubazar, and after waiting over an hour for a chance sampan, we sent him back the five miles to Pasay Mera for a boat, while we lazed in the shade of the mangroves, and watched the little spirit crabs and pearly sea-snails gambol on the coral-tinted sands. . . .

The great exhilaration of this nomadic life lies in the fact that there is no tie to any programme (the word alone makes my blood run cold); no obligation to observe time, or obey a set code of civilised regulations.

Modern home life and its worship of the great fetish "law and order," its absolute dependence on an organised time-chart for its daily existence, are every



The Loogi's House at Telubazar



The Loogi's House at Telubazar

elixir ; when there was nothing else to do, nothing to read, no desire to sleep, and nothing even to watch, we prepared a samovar—often milkless, and nearly always sugarless. For Majid, it soon usurped the place of the inevitable huqqah, and I anticipated it as fervently as an opium devotee desires his pipe.

At long last we unpacked our meagre belongings and “ arranged ” them in the compartment which had been allotted us. Majid and I lived together ; Mahbir Singh and the coolies disposed themselves elsewhere. That night Majid, who established himself as cook, produced a sumptuous meal cooked in fish oil. I coveted a meal cooked in “ ghi ”—even as the rich man longed for Abraham’s bosom.

In fact, I have never had the “ ghi ” complex, like ninety per cent. of the upper Anglo strata of Anglo-India. “ Ghi ” in these circles has become a “ tabu,” and the mention of it is looked upon as being as indelicate as the discussion of art or literature at a cantonment dinner-table.

Week-old subalterns pelmanise “ ghi ” and “ wogs,” * even as they inherit the association of Dagos with garlic. The whole community of Anglo-India holds its nose in disgust as the smell of the despised “ ghi ” is wafted across the compound from the servants’ quarters, and will take one mouthful of food—ever so faintly impregnated with this contamination—and with shouts of “ Ghi, by God ! ” rush foaming from the room to insult the unfortunate offender.

If they only knew with what nameless grease their food is prepared when the Cocotine (superior cooking preparation), or last ounce of cooking butter, has

* Golliwog, abbreviated term for our Aryan brother.

been utilised for the beatification of Chinatambi's chignon!

Nevertheless, we had an orgy of fish oil that night, and consumed chicken and hard-boiled eggs, bread and coco-nuts, washed down with whisky and unfiltered water. I was too tired for my nerves to react to the nocturnal disturbances around us, and slept till dawn filtered through the interstices of our jungle home.

Leaving Majid to do some necessary laundry and to put our house in order, I took two local Malay trackers and started off on a hunt for the elusive rhino. All along the first mile of track, fresh in the morning dew, lay the pug-marks of a tigress and a half-grown cub. They must have passed and returned along the track just before dawn.

We had a nasty few minutes with a herd of domestic buffalo, every whit as large and savage as their wild brethren. They rallied as soon as they saw us and advanced in a solid phalanx, horns thrown back and nostrils in air. They followed us thus for some way, and I had an overpowering temptation to run, accompanied by a nasty sensation in the small of my back.

Before striking off into the jungle, the trackers gathered some tobacco leaves, and as a preventive against leeches smeared the juice over their legs. The only rhino tracks we found were two days old, but fresh tiger pug-marks were much in evidence. So were the leeches—but never again in such abundance as on the nightmare track to Telubazar.

After a twenty-minute halt at midday on a log of wood harbouring a peculiarly evil cobra, we turned our heads for home, and at once struck fresh rhino

tracks, which we followed for over two hours. Later these passed beneath the low branches of a tree, some three feet from the ground. The trackers were obviously at fault, and after careful consideration of the tracks, drew unmistakable pictures in the sign manual of an elephant's trunk—or so I interpreted their strange gestures. I was completely mystified, until Mahbir Singh that evening enlightened me that we had been on the tracks of a tapir (a harmless old ant-eater, with an immature trunk), with tracks almost identical with those of a rhino.

* * * * *

We stayed in the loogi's house for close on a fortnight, and daily I traversed mile upon mile of almost inaccessible forest in search of our elusive quarry. I grew to love the sunset return to my humble habitation, where I was certain of a genuine welcome from Majid and my Siamese cronies.

Daily I grew nearer to Nature, and realised the peaceful delights of a semi-primitive existence—the relaxation from all effort. The great world of intensive efficiency, of noise and perpetual agitation, mental and physical, seemed as remote as the Milky Way.

On the days when I vouchsafed myself a rest from the ceaseless tracking, I would lie on my mattress on the bamboo floor, content just to watch life going on around one—not pulsating with Western bustle and efficiency, but flowing steadily and heedlessly as a quiet river. To watch the daily occupations (unchanged through the centuries) of a contented people, domestically peaceful, entirely dependent on Nature's whims and moods for their existence—yet undisturbed by the jealousies and hatreds engendered by the spirit of modern Western competition.

Their faces reflected their peace of mind : as serene and reposeful as any lama's. They would treat my apartment even as the Gonds used my camp-fire : at all hours of the day there was a small group seated in Buddhistic repose, myself the object of their silent contemplation. Never without a quid of tobacco permanently thrust betwixt the gum and the lips, their mouths were one vast cavern of decay, with tobacco-stained stumps of teeth—both men and women.

One grew to accept their constant presence as a matter of course, and to expect privacy only for meals and the hours of ablution and siesta. There was always something for me to watch—does one ever tire of this recreation ?

The young men, crowned with brilliant-coloured " gong baums " and clad in multi-hued sarongs, urged their prehistoric ploughs along the shallow furrow, whilst their women incessantly pounded and prepared the daily rice—and with one hand rocked their coffee-coloured babies. Lucky, the Malayan babe—always with its mother, either clasped to her back in a bright sarong, or rocked (with the feet if both hands are occupied) in a near-by cradle.

When the crops were at the full and the nights were spent perched aloft in bamboo shelters, guarding their harvests, then the days were devoted to wrestling and " chinlong " (the Burmese game of basket-ball), with an occasional cock-fight. Awhile the elders (past active work) sat for ever in tobacco-chewing content, and when weary of contemplation, toppled over and slept.

One early morning when I had decided on a day's rest, a Siamese brought khubr of a tiger kill. A tame buffalo had broken its leg in a ditch and been finished

off by a tiger ; and partly eaten. I found the kill at least three days old and almost devoid of meat. As one can never neglect the faintest chance of a hungry tiger, I arranged to sit up that night till the set of moon.

An hour before sunset I repaired to the machan the trackers had prepared, and plucking away some of the leaves, gazed vaguely away to where, in the fast-dimming light, a vivid imagination might have pictured the kill. The invisible host of frogs, cicadas and all the blood-sucking insects commenced their sunset ovation, and darkness descended—Stygian and complete.

I sat perched over a mosquito swamp, and soon the drone of the anopheles drowned all other sound. They descended on me in their thousands, and as movement was impossible with a tiger in the vicinity, I sat on in silent agony, occasionally brushing a cluster off my face with a restrained movement of the hand. The rest of my body—although fully clad—soon became quite insensible to pain, and was swollen out of all recognition. The nightly agony of the Nile swamps was mere child's play compared to this.

At about ten o'clock something came stealthily on to the kill, and mingled with the drone of the mosquitoes I heard the crunching of bones. Possibly the tiger—more likely a hyena. I had no electric light, and the moon was setting in a dense bank of cloud. It was quite useless to shoot on sound alone, so I stepped noisily down from my machan, unable to bear any more protracted torture. The eating ceased and a dim shape slunk away into the gloom. . . . It took quite a mile to restore the circulation to my swollen body.

Majid was awaiting my return with a smoking repast

of freshly-caught fish, omelet, onions and rice. I had long since dispensed with the luxury of cutlery—ever since my knife and fork had fallen through the interstices of our floor and joined my only tooth-brush in the cess-pit below. Besides, I found the hands far the most effectual way of transferring food from the lap to one's mouth—in the absence of a table. And in all sincerity, who would juggle with the carcass of a fowl with a knife and fork when God gave him a pair of hands?

At first Majid and I sat apart, but as time (the great factor) curtailed the cooking of separate meals we shared the same platter in true Oriental style. Majid would place the food before us—there were none of the interminable waits associated with civilised waiting (pardon the solecism!)—and I would then apportion the *pièce de résistance* (usually chicken or duck) equally, while we helped ourselves indiscriminately to the smaller dishes, of which there were always plenty and to spare.

Rice rather defeated me at first; but memories of meals partaken in my dim Arabian past prompted me to dip a handful into gravy and roll it into a succulent ball. Initially I was all appetite and no dexterity; but by the end of the month would have held my own with the most distinguished Oriental gourmand. Majid in sharing his food with me transgressed no Moslem law, as he cooked it with his own hands, and would partake of no tinned food—nor anything which he had not killed and “hallalled” strictly according to Koranic teaching.

Late that night a tired tracker brought the welcome news that Mahbir Singh was on the track of a gigantic elephant, and that we were to join him the following

day. It did not take long to pack a few necessaries—bedding, change of clothing, a few stores and cooking pots—in preparation for an early start. A final shower—administered by Majid from a kerosene-oil tin through the cracks in the bamboo floor on to my shivering form below,—and within a few moments of stretching my mosquito-ravished body full length in my flea-bag—oblivion—my subconscious mind was exploring the Elysian fields of all true hunters.

* * * * *

We left shortly before dawn, little knowing that we had seen the sun rise for the last time on blissful Telubazar. Incidentally it all but proved my last dawn.

We had been travelling for some two hours along a jungle track, never out of sound of the murmur of the sea; I had just given my rifle over to a tracker—lulled into a false security after a succession of blank days. Suddenly the leading Malay froze in his tracks, and pointed to a clump of mangroves off the track to our right. I moved up alongside him and looked along his outstretched finger. I could see nothing—yet he whispered “sladang.” Then a large mound of glistening mud rose from a swamp some twenty yards ahead and resolved itself into a solitary bull buffalo.

The wind was dead wrong, and only the freshly disturbed mud in his nostrils deadened our immediate discovery. There was not a moment to be lost, so, hastily seizing my rifle and motioning the Malays to follow close on my heels, I turned at right angles to the wind, and started to work round in a semicircle under cover of some convenient bamboo clumps. I hoped to gain his down-wind side while he was still enjoying his wallow.

As soon as I was out of sight and scent I dropped the trackers and pushed on alone, only to find myself confronted by a nasty sticky bit of swamp—the continuation of the creek in which he was luxuriating. My only hope was to encompass this and work round the far bank. It was some ten yards wide, and as I stepped into the pitch-black ooze I sank to well over my knees. The bull had risen, and sixteen hands of glistening muscle towered on the bank of the wallow, eyeing suspiciously the distant clump where I had ensconced the trackers. Horns thrown back and nostrils in air, I only hoped he would not turn his head in my direction until I had encompassed this veritable Styx.

He was fifty yards away, and as I lifted my leg out of the evil slime he turned with a snort in my direction, and I looked him straight in the eyes. There was no alternative; one leg was still bogged, I was anchored, and if I missed him he would probably not be so lenient with me. . . . A nasty muddy grave.

I froze into the semblance of a mangrove root, hoping even yet that his suspicions might be allayed by my camouflaged inertia. He moved slowly towards me to investigate, stopped, and looked across at the distant clump, and again at me and moved a few paces nearer.

My nerves had reached breaking point as I raised my rifle and fired straight at his chest. . . . He came at me like a whirlwind, and my second barrel—aimed quite at random—dropped him in his tracks within fifteen yards of my almost muddy sepulchre. He was far from dead, and it took two more rounds of solid .470 in the heart to still his massive convulsions.

My first shot had smashed the whole of the chest wall

and penetrated the lung ; yet his vitality had brought him on. The second fractured his near fore-leg close to the shoulder and brought him down.

Awhile I lay in mental and physical coma on the edge of the mangroves—the water slowly gurgling into the form wherein my leg had rested, the mud cheated of its lawful prey—and pondered how once before in farthest Africa it was the combination of buffalo and mud which almost ended my chequered career.

* * * * *

After a longish trek we came to a small clearing wherein nestled the inevitable hut on sticks, or rather the debris of a hut, as it stood open to the sky, and the walls and floor appeared on the verge of disintegration. Mahbir Singh sat among the wreckage on the upper rung of the ladder, which appeared the only portion to have retained its virginity. He took us at once to see two deserted bamboo huts ruthlessly wrecked by the tusker ; the cooking utensils and few household belongings trampled beyond all recognition.

Further on we came on the morning's tracks entering a curtain of almost impenetrable forest. A very large tusker—his foot measurement put him at well over nine feet. He evidently visited the banana crops nightly—or what remained of them. The moon was almost at the full, the sky promised to be cloudless. Everything boded well for his return that very night.

I turned ecstatically to Mahbir Singh, and my enthusiasm died at its birth. His face depicted the deepest gloom as he pointed through the trellis of hanging creeper to a derelict hut, half hidden in the jungle, a hundred yards to the right. Tanoy, the great Siamese poacher, had forestalled us and marked the tusker down for his own. Mahbir Singh had only

learnt the bitter news that morning, when he had seen the lean form of Tanoy leave the hut and start out along the trail. It was then too late to stop my coming, and, fearing my wrath, Oriental-like, he had tantalised me with all the prospects of a record tusker—only to dash my hopes utterly to the ground.

It certainly fanned my smouldering indignation against Tanoy and all poachers into a flame. Too often had all my intensest efforts been frustrated by this illicit band. Maliwun and the surrounding forests had been swept clear of rhinoceros by this Siamese renegade, and now he was on the trail of ivory; and I could find no corner of this great lonely land which had not felt the weight of his pestilential hand.

Tanoy was on the tusker's trail, and we would never set eyes on either of them again. Little did I realise that Fate had linked our lives, and that day of supreme disappointment would see the first meshes woven of the web with which I eventually encompassed his untimely death.

Consumed with an unholy hatred of Tanoy, I stalked the hut, finger on trigger, and it would have boded ill for him had I caught his illicit band red-handed.

The hut lay roofless and unoccupied; in one corner smouldered the ashes of a small fire, and a smear of tobacco juice, recently expectorated, showed recent occupation—but the birds had flown. As we climbed disconsolately down the bamboo ladder, the distant report of a gun rang a final knell to any remnants of hope we may have harboured. . . . From that moment I vowed vengeance on Tanoy—Siamese.

In bitter silence we retraced our steps through the

lengthening shadows for home : home represented by our roofless, comfortless hut. An hour ago, in the rosy light of anticipation, it had seemed to me to have absorbed the very essence of the atmosphere I had so long desired. The home of the hunter—the primordial refuge of the “back-to-Nature” lover! With my enthusiasm stifled, it merely looked what it was—a singularly offensive collection of rotting timbers supported on four tottering piles.

After a sunset bathe in a near-by stream, I climbed into my nocturnal eyrie, and as I pulled the ladder up after me and severed all contact with the outer world, I felt the supreme isolation of a balloonist adrift amid the stars.

There was just room for our party of five—all bunched together—a truly democratic fraternity. The tea and bread had given out, so I consoled myself with chicken and rice. Mahbir Singh was racked with a cough, as insistent as the chime of Big Ben, which shook the flimsy structure to its core.

Wrapped in one blanket and with a coat for pillow I lay most of the night, wide-eyed, trying to differentiate the various snores and wheezes which threatened to bring the hut tumbling in ruins about our ears. A three-quarter moon traversed a cloudless sky, and showed me only too brilliantly that I was the sole member of the fraternity denied sleep.

My last cigarette was soon consumed, and after a fruitless rifling of Majid's pockets I unravelled a bundle of “bidis” from the insanitary folds of Mahbir Singh's pugaree. This opiate soothed me into a two hours' uneasy sleep till dawn.

I awoke to find Mahbir Singh, like a chickless hen, searching frantically for his cigarettes. I put him out

of suspense, and explored the recesses of his unfertile mind for a hint of our plan of action. After half an hour of the second degree, he suggested moving to Champong, where he had heard two tuskers were damaging the banana crops. It was some eighteen miles distant through virgin forest—and a return to Telubazar offered no attractions.

I resurrected some cold chicken bones, and fortified by a pull at the brandy flask, struck the trail due west for Champong. It was a solid ten hours' trek before we came at sunset to a collection of huts called Bankichong. Our destination, Champong, had long since been added to the ever-increasing category of Mahbir Singh's "dream villages of the past"—villages which I feel certain existed in some past incarnation, which in moments of great mental strain (such as my recent cross-examination) he re-created for my ultimate confusion. . . . Champong was as elusive as the Lorelei.

I decided no longer to follow his star, and to use him in future merely as an interpreter. . . . Darkness had swept down upon us ere I installed myself in the inevitable loogi's hut.

The khubr seemed promising. One big tusker—an average male—and a cow elephant apparently come into the neighbouring banana groves during the night and leave about dawn. They have no fear of the watchers and approach close up to the fires. The people are terrorised, and many of them have left their huts. It would have been useless to search for these marauders in the surrounding welter of forest. Besides, why waste energy needlessly, if the mountain would come to Mohamed?

I decided to tie up a tame cow elephant we had

brought with us to add to the chances of drawing the wild tuskers across the river, and to await their coming by moonlight in the banana groves.

The following evening there was a half-moon with the promise of a clouded sky. Before dark we tied up the decoy on the edge of the track—along which (so the local Malays averred) the wild tuskers came after crossing the river. I did not fancy the locality at all, as the only cover was a largish tree, right on the track itself, at the base of which they proposed I should take my stand. What little moonlight penetrated the trellis of leaves only made shooting the more difficult. I should have stood little or no chance in the case of a non-vital shot, as the jungle at my back was as impenetrable as a wire fence. We looked for an alternative position, and found an open clearing which I decided was less suicidal, and whence I could get an uninterrupted view in the moonlight as the elephants crossed the open glade.

After the evening meal I sat on the topmost rung of the ladder, and together with the trackers strained my ears in the perfect jungle silence for the advent of the tuskers. The Malays were tense with the excitement, and there were several false alarms caused by the trumpeting of the decoy. Once from far away—in the midst of the mystery of the forest—we heard the rending of a giant bamboo, and a tracker pointed towards the distant sound and muttered, "They come."

Then, growing ever nearer, we heard the unmistakable trampling of the bamboo and the distant trumpet of the night marauders. We were off like a fire brigade for the clearing I had chosen earlier in the evening. Crossing a nala by a rickety bridge, we were met by a mahout, who panted that the tuskers,

having winded the decoy, were coming down the hill to investigate. In that event they would cross the river and pass through the glade—as I had anticipated. Away to our left, across the river, we could hear them tearing down the bamboo and slowly moving towards us.

The mahout led me to the bank of the river, and indicated their probable crossing-place below. Here the banks shelved gradually, and the water shallowed to a ford whose edges were puddled with the massive imprints of generations of elephant. A favourite drinking-place, it glimmered misty with moonlight, twenty feet below.

We took up our position behind two fair-sized trees, and slowly the tuskers moved down the far bank to the river. We heard them drinking and gurgling directly below—two vast, indeterminate grey forms, which clung tenaciously to the shadows on the edge of the silvered water.

Then came diversion, sudden and totally unexpected. We were ensconced in a small isolated patch of jungle carpeted with dry leaves. From far away to the left I heard the pattering of some small jungle animal over the leaves—the night was intensely still. Majid started nervously to shift his position, and several times whispered beneath his breath, “Samp, samp.” I hissed at him to lie still, under threat of direst punishment. Again he whispered, “Samp agaya”; and indeed it almost had!

I heard the unmistakable slither of a heavy reptile over the leaves almost at my elbow, as I lay crouched to the ground. Majid frantically agitated the end of his pugaree on the leaves to divert the creeping death. My nerves, already strained to breaking point, could

endure no more, and I leapt six feet down the bank into the nala below.

Snakes have always been my jungle aversion—amounting to horror—and combined with darkness, I preferred to face the known danger in the shadows beneath to the unseen horror rustling through the leaves in the forest above. The elephants (if possible) suffered the greater shock of the two, and left the river-bed precipitately with a scream of alarm, and went crashing off through the bamboos on the farther bank.

After an appreciable time I climbed back—rather ashamedly—to safety, to find Mahbir Singh well treed, and Majid anxiously gazing over the moonlit clearing, across which he had just watched a large python glide its unholy way. Our apologies were mutual, and Majid told me how he had heard the distant unmistakable plop as the python dropped off a tree near where we were lying, and how, in petrified horror, he had listened to its approach for close on five minutes, before my ears attuned themselves to its stealthy rustle.

At this very moment an excited mahout rushed up with khubr that a third elephant—a large tusker—was demolishing a banana plantation not a mile away. Away we dashed in his wake. Just past the place where the decoy elephant had been tied up—now represented by a fragment of broken rope—we turned down to a small stream, which we crossed by the inevitable perilous log. I was not out to emulate Blondin, so negotiated this astride—slowly and laboriously—the moon reflected in the water far below.

Up the far bank we came out on top of a grove of bananas, with a small hut in one corner, and two

blazing fires. A frightened cluster of women and children, evicted from their homes by the midnight marauders, whimpered in the shadows. I now drew ahead of the trackers, followed by Majid with my second rifle—a .318 Westley Richards. Of the tusker there was never a sign or sound.

As we groped from one patch of bananas to another, from moonlight to shadow, I anticipated suddenly stumbling on top of a pensive elephant, wary and waiting—with dire results.

A mahout gripped my arm and led me silently forward to the shelter of a fallen tree; here I distinctly saw two luminous eyes watching me from the depths of the trunk—I had snakes on the mind—so I gave it a wide berth, and took up my position behind a fallen charred stump of sufficient dimensions to break up an elephant's charge. . . .

Then I opened both ears and listened. . . . All around was the nameless quiet of the far-away places. Gradually my ears took in the immediate smaller jungle sounds—the rustle of the breeze in the banana trees, the murmur of the stream, the heavy breathing of the orderly and mahout at my side, the throb of my own bursting pulses.

Suddenly from far behind the nearest clump—ten yards away—there came the sound of the rending of a branch, and the deep rumble of elephant—as vibrant as the low note of an organ pipe. If he was eating, then he was not alarmed, and this rumble indicated satisfaction—an elephantine purr—and not anger. I took heart and crouched less abjectly behind my friendly tree-trunk.

Then, slowly, he stepped out into full moonlight, passing from one banana clump to another, and stood

motionless—gigantic as a mastodon, his tusks gleaming with silver light.

Yet another picture graven for ever on the tablets of my undying jungle memories.

I aimed at the shoulder (as I had decided not to risk a brain shot in the failing light), and pressed the trigger. The flash of my .470 completely dazzled me, and as the ensuing darkness wrapped us round like a cloak, Majid followed up with a shot with my .318.

In utter ignorance of results we waited in fevered suspense, my rifle aimed vaguely into the vault of darkness. . . . There were a fearful groaning and noise of struggle, and as the wall of pitch blackness greyed and returned to moonlight, we saw him stagger forward a pace, then crash slowly forward on to his knees against a bamboo clump—then all was still.

I approached ever so cautiously, but there was no movement; he had crashed into insensibility—so I gave him another barrel in the brain, and with one last convulsive shiver the jungle monarch passed to his reincarnation. . . . The first shot had crippled the near foreleg high up, and in falling he had broken both legs.

Many torches now appeared like will-o'-the-wisps from all directions. In their fantastic light we looked anxiously for his ivory, and for one awful moment I thought that I had been deceived in the moonlight, and that my victim was a cow. Then a tracker scratched round the base of the trunk, and delightedly showed the gleam of ivory sunk deep in the earth from the force of his forward fall. Majid's shot had merely grazed the forehead and done no damage; but of his staunchness in the face of dangerous game there was no doubt; and he was ever at my elbow in future crises.

The occupants of the huts crowded round us, full of gratitude. We had ridded them of the local curse, and they could now return and repair the nightly ravages to their crops. . . . I restored my nerves to normal with a cigarette in a near-by hut by the blaze of a massive fire, where we reconstructed in detail every incident of the last hectic hour. How delightful is the re-creating and re-telling of old battles !

Then we took the homeward track through the dense banana groves to the river, where we boarded a rickety sampan, and in a perfect jungle hush drifted along the cool, moonlit creek. After the fierce excitement of the last hour, the insistent drip of the phosphorescence from the paddles lulled me into a deep content—surely not of this earth, restless and tortured with evolution.

Far beyond the flare of the torches, wrapped in sombre shadow, slept the mysterious forest, gazing in sinister tolerance at our ant-like progression. Man is no longer lord of civilisation in these vast, uncivilised lands. King or lowliest beggar—alike intruders—all have to bow to the majesty of the forest. Men fight for very existence with an invisible enemy—powerless against the irresistible forces of Nature.

I encompassed the moon-drenched creek, and, stepping from out the sampan, traversed the mile of forest to the welcome shelter of the hut.

That night (or what remained of it) we held high festival. . . . I opened all that remained of the tinned delicacies and prodigally passed them round, the while we consumed many cups of dark brown, milkless tea and whisky. After this orgy, feeling at peace with the world, we lay in distended suspension—the moonlight filtering through sundry gaps in the roof—and

listened in the jungle stillness to the single note of a near-by sweetly plaintive flute.

I summoned the player, a young Malay, who came with many others out of the starlight and regaled us with the love-songs of his people.

The pipe passed on to a Siamese, who gave us the ballads of his far-away land. The loogi, our host, was the inevitable Grock, and sang some rollicking sagas, inflaming the assembled multitude to a raucous chorus. I almost brought the hut down (actually and not figuratively) by mimicking the first part of the ancient's song—or rather what it sounded like to me—and gave as an encore the only verse of the only typically English ballad I know—"Annie Laurie"—words graven on my memory by the incessant reiteration of this monotonous refrain at generations of regimental guest nights!

A strange party in the flicker of a solitary candle!

We had been joined by a Mohamedan surveyor and some of his following from a near-by camp. They, the loogi, Mahbir Singh, Majid and myself were the principals, while in every available nook and corner lurked the vast, inevitable chorus of Siamese, Malays and mahouts.

For ever the apocryphal background was filled with the hidden whispering of women and children. Later, I lay in rapt amazement, while religious questions, customs, habits and superstitions were discussed around me in Hindustani, Pushtu, Burmese and Malay. I began dimly that night to realise the width of gulf, in thoughts and beliefs, fixed between West and East. We swapped many hunters' stories, and told each other of our homes and countries—knit together by the common bond of strangers in a distant land.

Gradually musicians and singers crept away to bed, and I lay awhile in solitary content to watch the play of the shadowed palm fronds with the moonbeams in the rafters. . . . From far away came the trumpet of an elephant, amidst the mystery of the forest.

* * * * *

Early next morning we removed the tusks of the fallen giant. It took two solid hours to cut them from out their setting of bone. If this is unsupervised, the tracker is apt to mistake ivory for bone issue, and ruin it with the axe.

Before sunset we got khubr of elephant in the far banana fields towards Konsalong. We were off with true flying-squad celerity, only to find them still in dense jungle, where we left them at dusk heading slowly for the banana groves.

Soon after dinner, after several false alarms from inflamed mahouts, we were called out into the starlight to listen to an elephant crashing his way down the slope, on the far side of the river. We waited silently on the far bank for him to come into a thick patch of bamboo jungle, but he passed invisible within twenty yards of where we were standing. Majid and I stood firm and watched the rest of our miserable following melt away into the shadows.

Taking one tracker and sacking the rest, we re-crossed the river and followed close in the tusker's wake. Everything lay wrapped in the deepest shadow, too dense for the newly-risen moon to penetrate. We struck a small game track running parallel with his passage through the jungle, and now and again pushed on ahead and tried to cut in and interrupt him. Time and again we missed him by a few yards, and he passed

us, hugging the dense belt of reed and bamboo in the river-bed.

Close on midnight we halted for an hour on the trunk of a fallen tree, and watched him through glasses, a dark indistinct mass, forty yards away, devouring the bamboos on the river's edge, plunged in the deepest shadow. From far up the hill behind came the clang of a bell, as the tame cow elephant—which had again broken its chains—came ambling down the hillside to keep tryst with the tusker. We were denied the spectacle of this pachydermic mating, as the mahout dashed off to turn her, fearing the over-amorous embraces of the wild tusker.

Once more we took up the trail : over a stream by a fearsome tree-bridge, the moon winking at us in the water thirty feet below.

Again up to within ten yards of the tusker, only to be faced with impenetrable bamboo and thorn. This time he got our scent and was off with a trumpet of alarm. The only hope was to keep him in sight till dawn ; so we returned to the main track at about two in the morning, and sent the tracker off in his wake. No longer able to keep my eyes open, intensely tired and disheartened, I decided to snatch a few hours' sleep till dawn in a derelict roofless hut.

After an hour's fitful sleep we were aroused by an excited Malay, sent back by the tracker, who rushed us all out along the track, through a little slumbering village, round the corner into a small grove of bananas, where with equal celerity he abandoned us. All this with no explanation ; but his obvious reluctance to linger in the vicinity led me to the natural conclusion that there was a tusker, very near. . . . The impression he had conveyed was not exaggerated.

Out of the Stygian gloom, ten yards ahead, came the sound of the rending of banana leaves. Clouds were scurrying across the face of the moon, and no ray lit up the sombre shadows. Inch by inch—Majid at my elbow—we tip-toed towards the sound, until the very clump we were touching was agitated, and through the leaves on the farther side towered the great, black, indeterminate shape of the tusker.

There was not a moment to be lost: at any instant he might get our scent, and one step forward and he would be upon us. With one eye on the clouded sky and the other on the great mass ahead, I waited for the moon to emerge from shadow. . . . It sailed into an open sky, and I fired both barrels into the great shape ahead, where I considered the head should be. The shadows were so intense that it was quite impossible to see which way he was facing.

Without a sound he glided away, and we scarcely heard a whisper of his passage through the jungle. We waited in sorrowful silence for the trackers to join us. It did not seem possible that I could have completely failed to hit him. Wounded or no, why had there been no scream of alarm or pain? I distrusted this noiseless melting into the shadows—like a great grey wraith. Later experience taught me that this was a common phenomenon. The trackers were not encouraging as we groped our way forward to look for possible blood—but it was still dark, and we decided to wait for dawn.

Then from far across the river came a muffled crash. It raised us from depression to the most optimistic heights. . . . Mahbir Singh picked up a twig and snapped it in two—proclaiming to the meanest in-

telligence that the tusker had fallen after his effort in crossing the river.

We found him, at dawn, the far side of the river, lying as though wrapped in sleep. The effort of pulling up the far bank had brought him to his knees—and he never rose again. My bullet (a solid '470) was lodged in his spine, and the passage of the river must have been his dying effort.

* * * * *

In the excitement of the last week I had lost all sense of time—or even days. I had an uneasy suspicion that my days in Bankichong were numbered, and that I was due to join S. at Victoria Point almost immediately. The salt tang of the air spoke to me of the proximity of the sea; otherwise I had no idea of my exact position or distance from Victoria Point. Nor had I an inkling of how to get there.

Then I remembered the surveyor—Allah be praised!—he would prove my salvation.

Knee-deep in trigonometrical survey maps, I knelt at Abdul Rahman's feet and absorbed information. He told me that the day was Thursday, and that I was due to meet S. and the ship (over a hundred miles distant) on the Sunday. Also that there was no sampan on the coast that could cover that distance in the time. That if I missed the ship I should get no other for a month. . . . Yes, there was one sampan—his own—which he would lend me, but it was anchored out to sea, some five miles off by creek, which was only negotiable for two hours after dawn, when it dried up till the next incoming tide.

Once more, sleepless and foodless, we packed our meagre possessions and started off for the creek. The tide was just on the turn as we bundled into the loogi's

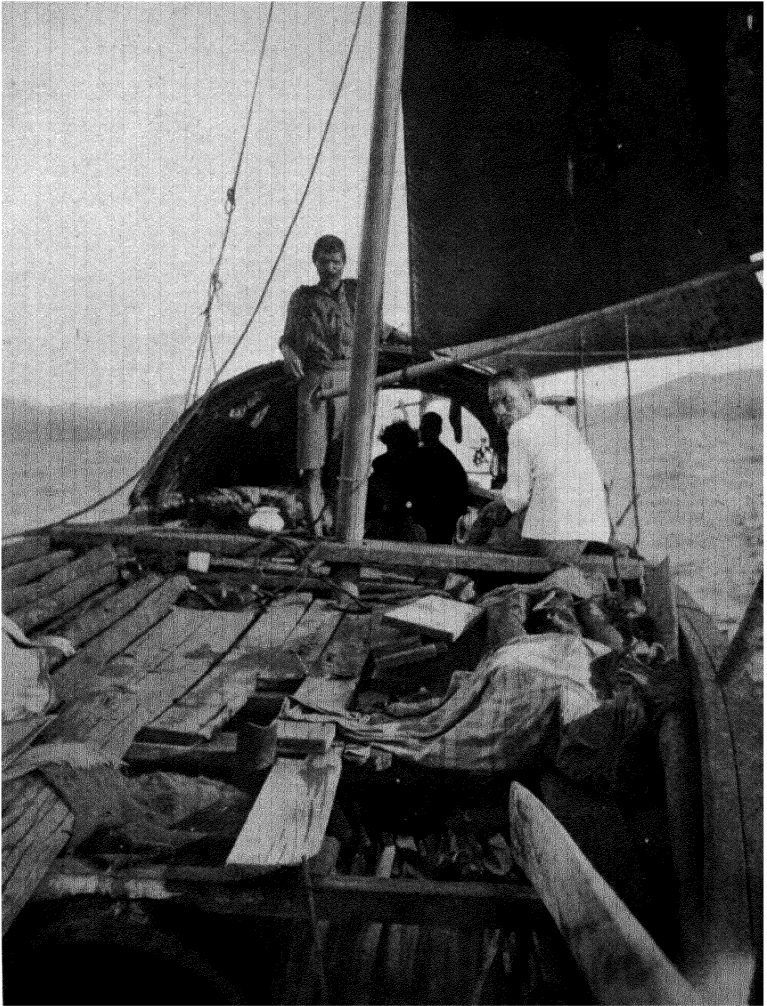
sampan—Majid, Mahbir Singh, and some of the kit. It was almost derelict, and leaking like a sieve. At times we were so low in the water that any sudden movement brought a cascade in over the top. We pushed off with but faint hope of ever reaching the mouth of the river. Majid and I never ceased to bail; yet the water in the bottom of the boat never diminished. At times I gave up bailing, and gripping a precious rifle in each hand, prepared to swim for it. . . . An occasional swirl in the muddy waters indicated the ever-watchful interest of the evil guardians of the creek.

After a full hour's suspense we reached the mouth of the creek, and the surveyor's sampan, to which we transferred with no expressions of regret. Whereupon the derelict drifted a few yards away and quietly sank.

Towards evening we paddled out of the creek; the crew put up a sail, and with a stiff breeze we headed for the open sea. It was a small pearling sampan and had quarters for a crew of three. Of these we possessed ourselves and laid out our beds. There was just room for myself and orderly—as the rest of the unsavoury space was appropriated by festoons of decomposing fish and our baggage. The crew and Mahbir Singh had fain to shift for themselves and sleep *à la belle étoile*.

The sunset hour compensated for all the trials and disappointments of the day. The jungles fringing the distant shore turned from amber to deepest bronze, and the water lapped on the distant ivory beaches like beaten gold. Night came down like a warm black hand as we drew level with the mouth of the creek we believed led to Telubazar.

After many threats we induced the crew, whose



Aboard the Sampan to Victoria Point

heads were set for Victoria Point, to put in towards the shore to pick up the rest of our baggage, which I had left behind—many years ago!—at Telubazar. It took us the best part of an hour to induce a half-wit fisherman to paddle out to us, as we could not get within a hundred yards of the beach owing to the surf. It was now pitch black, but with promise of heavy reward we despatched Mahbir Singh off up the dismal creek to try to locate the missing coolies. I never expected to set eyes on any of them again, as a black storm was brewing, and I did not believe we were within miles of Telubazar, and Mahbir Singh was bringing off his last big bluff, and guessing once again.

We lay at anchor, gently rocked in the lagoon, till eleven, when the tide turned, and the crew awoke as one man and showed obvious signs of setting sail without further orders. I assumed a strategical position astride the anchor, registering my disapproval, at the same time watching with interest a light, like a will-o'-the-wisp, bobbing its way along the distant outline of shore. It was our faithful old Gurkha with a dripping crowd of teeth-chattering Tamils—and the rest of our kit.

They had capsized in the mangrove swamps, and had tramped the last few miles. So eager were they to board the sampan—the outward and visible sign of a rescue from a watery grave—that two of them proceeded to do the splits while changing boats, and were saved with difficulty. As the much-coveted sugar had arrived, we all drank much strong tea, until one by one—coolies, shikari, boatmen and orderly—drifted off into slumber.

I vainly wooed sleep among the festoons of dried

fish, so moved my mattress out beneath the stars. . . . For awhile I sat alone in the bows and watched the moon soar above the distant line of wooded hills. Orion blazed on the faint horizon, and far south a red misty star hung like a distant lantern before drowning in the moonlit haze.

Deep in the translucent water myriads of great luminous jelly-fish floated past, pulsating with a sombre purple glow. Once far down, a massive ray, gleaming a beryl phosphorescence, passed, slowly breathing, upon its way.

Reluctantly I laid myself beside the snoring mass of black humanity. How little they were affected by the glory of the night. Their sleep would have been as sound (if not sounder) in some verminous corner of the heart of insanitary India. Lulled by the gentle swinging of the boat and the endless hush-hushing of the small waves, I fell into a dreamless sleep.

I was awakened by the sun's reflection on the dancing water, and it took some little time to get my surroundings. The breeze had vanished, and I spent the morning—naked but for a red cotton handkerchief—taking turns at the paddles and having unsuccessful snapshots at occasional porpoises.

Only too soon we came into the harbour of Victoria Point, as yet empty of the floating gin-palace which was to re-wed me to civilisation! As I stepped ashore, a glance in a mirror outside the local Chinese store showed me how far from civilisation down the road to "Nature" I had travelled.

Blood-caked, and sullied by many a mangrove swamp, my clothes hung in tatters from the ravages of two months' thorns and creepers. My hair, as long as Absalom's, was tousled and insanitary as that of the

meanest Śadhu ; while my wealth of golden stubble would have out-Cæsared the Borgia !

At first I was refused admittance to the gastronomic parlour of Ah Foo, but by dint of much soap and water established my identity with the ruling colour, and was admitted to the common feeding-room—well below the salt : the salt being represented by local Chinamen and Malays of importance, and Europeans of any shade who basked in the respectability of collar and tie. How I longed for my bowler hat : perfect and irrefutable emblem of British middle-class gentility ! . . . These pampered children of fortune sat apart from the common herd, in little screened compartments, each furnished with an electric fan (there was a wireless station at Victoria Point) and pornographic oleograph ; and dipped their insanitary digits into the choicest Chinese dishes.

I determined to shave, anoint myself with spikenard, and, clad in collar and tie and S.'s most cherished hat, dine that night above the salt—even if I missed the monthly boat—such was my awful thirst to regain my temporarily departed self-esteem and re-establish a superiority complex.

However much the establishment may have doubted our ancestry, there was never any suspicion of our capacity to pay, as they produced food fit for any mandarin. The table was soon covered with small dishes, steaming hot, from which rose such an appetising odour that the corners of my mouth dripped like those of the hungriest hound. For two months I had dispensed with cutlery and used my hands. I now found myself hideously handicapped with chop-sticks. Majid, unable to restrain his appetite, retired like a hungry lion into a darkened corner ; but with the dawn

of my returning civilisation I determined to overcome the natural inclination to use my fingers.

To the ivory rattle of nargilehs and dice from a curtained room, we probed the mysteries of chop suey and fried noodles. Cuttle-fish and sharks' fins, sea slugs and swallow-nest soup—all surrendered their secrets.

For long I was puzzled by the components of a leathery stew, of the consistency of perished rubber; until, unable to swallow a singularly indigestive lump, I expelled it for closer examination, which showed it to be the perfectly formed fœtus of an octopus! . . . A careful calculation, based on time, showed that I must have consumed at least two yards of tentacle!

Refusing the offer of a pipe of opium, I passed the afternoon cracking lichee nuts and defeating the landlord—now my trusted friend—at dominoes.

Towards evening, we drifted down to the harbour in time to greet the "Great White Chief" on his monthly visit to V.P. with the mails. Shaved, bathed, clothed and in my right mind, we sought the glow of Ah Foo's opium palace for the second time that day. The only pretentious eating-house on the water-front, it swam in a garish blaze. Orange lights illuminated blood-red posters with black Chinese hieroglyphics declaiming the night's attractions.

Wafts of amber and incense and burning joss-sticks mingled with the starlit, scented air. Our progress to our screened apartment was as imperial as any Roman triumph; and our meal a mere repetition of the midday repast—at four times the price. . . . *Noblesse oblige*. It was but one step across the threshold of a near-by darkened room, a step from the glare of inartistic modern electricity, into a haze—

translucent as twilight: a world of jade and pigtailed and poppy juice, and a thousand other Celestial echoes. All around the feeble glow of the nargilehs illuminated the faces of dim forms, outstretched in small cubicles; and the air was heavy with the blue, curling smoke of the pipes and the deep sighs of the dreamers.

I sank on to a cushioned shelf. A pipe was prepared and placed in my hand. I had asked for the minutest pill. I can only conjecture that my subsequent dreams were the workings of the super-atmosphere on an over-developed imagination.

* * * * *

I was irretrievably lost and enmeshed in a thousand mist-like veils—grey and white gauzes of witchery. The more I struggled to escape, the deeper was I drowned in an ocean of clinging nets. As they were turning from grey to bronze and black, I awoke, drenched in sweat, in a death-like depth of darkness. Not a sound but the deep breathing of the sleepers—the pipes were silent, and the heat and stillness enveloped me like a shroud. The atmosphere was evil as a Wiertz nightmare. No hint of light to indicate an exit and I groped frantically, hand outstretched before me, for the walls. My hand rested on several upturned, glistening faces before finding a curtain, which moved to disclose a light beyond, and I passed from out this living mausoleum to the freshness of the dawn.

Back once more on the sampan, I drew several deep breaths of salt air and, just as daylight pearly the far horizon, sank into a dreamless sleep.

I awoke to find S. (but recently returned from Ah Foo's) brewing the inevitable samovar; and while we lay among the junks and watched the flying-fish, I gradually removed the taste of death and decay from

my mouth, and swore an undying vendetta against the very name of opium.

Only once before had I felt so utterly ill—after an orgy of “Kat,” an evil aphrodisiac, shared with the Sultan of the Haushabi in farthest Arabia.

An incident before my final departure almost ended in tragedy. In the midst of our last peace pipe, the “Great White Chief’s” face froze suddenly with horror. I looked up, and saw a figure in pale lemon-coloured Palm Beach suit approaching. Every detail proclaimed the “white untouchable” and screamed authority and officialdom! With a cry of dismay I saw my companion tear the floor-boards off and dive into the very bowels of the sampan. I replaced the boards, and turned to meet X—the Deputy-Commissioner of V.P. He was particularly solicitous for news of S., for whom he had apparently a warrant for arrest.

I disclaimed all knowledge of his whereabouts, and we parted with an exchange of the most amiable sentiments.

S. bade me a fond farewell, and handing over the mails, climbed aboard the motor-boat, and lost no time in putting many miles of the lonely Pakchan between himself and the official oppression of V.P.

* * * * *

Already heartsick for the jungle’s sake, I climbed the illuminated companion-way of my gin-palace, which had floated in on the evening tide.

Mechanically picking up one of civilisation’s daily literary broadcasts to its spoon-fed millions, my eye lighted on the following advertisement of a “luxury cruise”—every word an insult to the beauty of Nature :—

“ But no pioneering, please. No roughing it. It must be a civilised expedition, with its headquarters in a perambulating luxury hotel. An expedition where Paris frocks are correct, where life goes smoothly under the hands of well-trained servants. An expedition whose members swim, and dance, and play tennis; and when they explore make that too a game. . . .”

Yes, and the Ultima Thule of this expedition—the final game played in the overheated boudoirs of this perambulating love nest, after a long, healthy (!) day spent in a sexual stalk, culminating in the final approach. . . .

At the thought of such an expedition my heart turned to stone within me and died.

The friendly stars came out, but I could not see them for people. I moved into the bows, and as the ceaseless, futile cackle of the saloon died down behind me, the voice of the jungle crept across the sleeping lagoon and mingled with the cool breathing of the sea.

From somewhere very far away the cry of a night bird floated toward me on the silence.

CHAPTER V

THE MAN-EATER OF DANAULI

“ Each twilight, when the sun burns down
In desert waste, or crowded town,
When shadows fall and night draws near
The dusk brings back the Jungle Fear.”

Laurence Hope.

THE thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, but ne'er so long as the reveries of a wanderer nearing forty. I sit in the most comfortable of camp-chairs, the light placed rightly at my shoulder, tobacco and the bottle at my side, and gaze into the embers of the camp-fire. As the sparks fly upwards, there smoulder in its fiery depths memories of far Siamese jungles, of nights spent on leech-crawling ground, beaten by darkness, with the big tusker still wandering ahead. . . . Memories of chill breezes rising from the cooling sands of Arabia ; of nights in far-away Gond jungles, ever piling log upon log to keep the man-eater from one's tent door.

Infinite memories crowd in until, weary of retrospect, one focuses the mind on the present sense of well-being. . . . Four huddled forms by the smouldering logs indicate the Sholaga trackers, a hunter's moon and attendant star setting above the distant dark line of hills. A glance through the vista of feathery bamboos at the night sky, cloudless and promising for the

morrow. A few more logs added to the blazing pile to stimulate the flow of memories—for in the camp-fire lies the jungle past. The devil take the future! We are back amongst the forest animals, the jungles ours till the dawn. We are once more living utterly! Let me therefore relate you my jungle epic of the Danauli man-eater. . . .

* * * * *

In far-away, little-frequented jungles, half-way between the sacred temples of Amarkantak—the source of the holy Nerbudda—and the old Gondian town of Mandla, between the Nerbudda and Chikrar rivers, lies the forest reserve of Danauli. An offshoot of the large game reserve of Bajag, it runs due north and south, some fifteen miles long and five miles in breadth. Seventy odd miles of well-watered tiger-cover. The slopes are steep and clothed with forest, running up to well over 3000 feet at the highest spur—Bagreli. Throughout its length at about 2000 feet runs the plateau, at this time of the year (mid-winter) shoulder high with deep, unburnt elephant-grass, with occasional clusters of large boulders, forming caves, the natural haunts of the *Felidae*.

At the foot of both slopes, throughout its length, lie small Gondian villages. These are connected by jungle tracks which run up the re-entrants and cross the plateau, and are much used by the villagers in their daily visits to the high jungles in search of grass for roof thatching and wood for their village hearths.

South of the Danauli forest, some 2000 yards across the open fields, lies the isolated hill of Jhapi, dotted with bears' caves and almost inaccessible. Between the two jungles runs the main track from Bajag to Selwar, regularly used by the villagers visiting the Friday

market at Bajag. . . . These were the natural haunts of the local terror—the Danauli man-eater.

* * * * *

Soon after dawn on a February morning, after a twenty-three-mile ride by bullock-cart, I sighted the far-distant line of hills denoting the Danauli Reserve. Crossing the Chikrar Nala, the cart collapsed and lost a wheel, distributing my luggage generously over the river-bed. However, by eight I was installed in my camp on the outskirts of Bajag and closely investigating all the recent depredations of the man-eater. Only yesterday he had killed and eaten a wood-cutter of Mohotarai, on the north-east slopes of the reserve. His more recent kills amounted to a man of Balkoha and a woman of Tarrach in November, three women of Labedah, Ratna and Selwar in December, a blank in January, and he had now recommenced his depredations. He evidently fancied women—possibly as they were more tender meat, but more likely because the Gonds send their female relatives into the jungles for wood and grass whilst they are occupied gathering their crops in the fields.

I plotted out the kills, but could find nothing consistent in his recent movements. Local gossip had it that he frequented the vicinity of the Bajag-Selwar track, which he found well populated, more especially on market days. I therefore drew up my plan of action. . . . This was to camp on the Selwar track itself, the man-eater's favourite haunt, and to bait all the debouches from the south end of the block with young and succulent buffaloes, spending most of the day, after the morning reports had come in, in finding out his pet lying-up places and water-holes.

The normal way of locating tiger in Central Province

jungles and tying them down to a certain spot is, after having found the area of their beat from their night tracks, to tie up several young and toothsome buffalo calves near handy pools of water and shady cover. The tiger, having killed and eaten his fill, drinks and lies down in the vicinity. These baits are tied up at sunset and released at dawn, when, as often as not, one is found killed and partially eaten. The tiger having killed with an object—the satisfying of his hunger—will normally return and eat the kill until only the bones remain.

A convenient tree is selected, a machan erected, and one awaits the return of the tiger for his meal, from before sunset until dawn—a long and weary vigil. His habits are almost without exception nocturnal.

But herein lies the difference of the man-eater's tactics. His cunning and cruel mind tell him he has transgressed the most important of jungle laws—"Thou shalt not kill man." So, satisfying his appetite on his still-warm victim, he never revisits the scene of his crime, as he knows that the whole village will be out to recover the corpse, and to drive him away from the vicinity of their homes. This was the chief difficulty with which I had to contend, as he would neither be likely to return to his victims, nor would he kill a buffalo bait, as he was a confirmed man-eater and only fancied human meat.

I had two alternatives. One was to drive him to cattle-killing to avoid starvation, by prohibiting all Gonds from going into the forest. This was almost impracticable, as jungle produce and wood are a daily necessity. The other was to "tom-tom" the news to every village in the Danauli Reserve that I had come to slay the destroyer, and to offer a large reward for

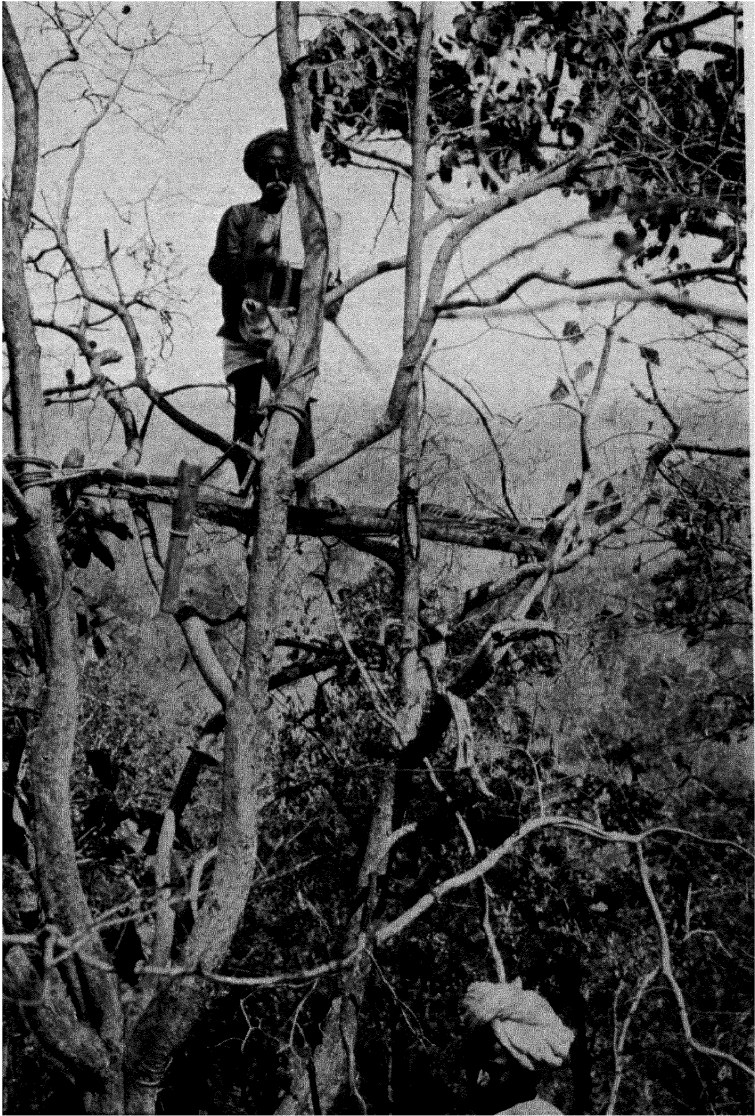
immediate news of a human kill—the fresher the better, as I hoped to track the corpse to where he had dragged it, and if within an hour of killing, to find the tiger still eating his gruesome meal. It was useless in the tangle of long grass and caves on the plateau to hope to find his lair. He had no particular cave, as he had an extensive beat, and killed promiscuously and without system.

I purchased six young buffalo calves and engaged men to tend them, and on the 9th of January trekked twelve miles along the Selwar track to the village of Lakanpur, where I pitched camp in mid-jungle by a limpid stream, midway between the northerly block and the hill of Jhapi, the track running past the door of my tent. Away to the north stretched the great jungle-clad ridge of Danauli, basking ever so peaceful in the midday sunlight—but within its sinister depths lay the man-eater, eager for his next victim. East and west, the fields, waist-high in jowari and Indian corn, drowsed amid the scattered Gondian hamlets. Here and there my Gond trackers were busy cutting large logs of wood for the nocturnal camp-fire.

That evening I selected two stout Gonds and two Baigas as my personal escort, to assist me in my corpse-salving operations.

Long before sunset we started a roaring camp-fire, which I sincerely trusted would blaze until dawn. Just before turning in I left the kindly crackle of the camp-fire to listen for jungle sounds. . . . Far away north I thought I heard the dull roar of a hunting tiger.

The following morning I was out early with my six baits, and chose two places on the "col" between the south end of the block and Jhapi hill, another at Kherpani on the Basanda Nala, and two more places



Erecting a hasty Machan

further east in the Lalpur Nala. The calves were to be tied up here before sunset. They were all adjacent to good water-holes and shady cover.

I was on my way home and was resting for a moment in an open stretch of fire-line when two excited Gonds rushed up with the eagerly expected, gruesome news. I was at last in close touch with the man-eater. . . . He had killed a woman at early dawn near Danauli village, on the west face of the hill, only two miles from his last victim at Mohotarai—east across the plateau. He was still beating the north end of the block. I had little hope, however, of getting to the kill before he had had his fill and made off, but it behoved me to investigate his methods of killing and subsequent movements.

Snatching a hasty meal in camp and packing enough kit for a night out, I was well on the way to Danauli within the hour, and arrived at the small Gond village on the slopes of Bagreli at about ten. It transpired that the victim and a small boy were returning from cutting wood, when the tiger sprang upon the woman and dragged her off, while the terror-stricken boy dropped his all and fled for the village.

This only witness was in a state of complete collapse, and it was only after terrorising the lad into a greater fear of me than of the tiger that I induced him to lead me to the spot where the woman had been seized. Two other men came with the boy to give him confidence, and all were in a deep dark blue funk. The rest of the village resumed their wailing for the dead.

We had been told the kill had taken place in the lower jungles; nevertheless, after half an hour we were still ascending the slopes of Bagreli, in the thickest of jungle. Wet through with perspiration, we reached the top of the ridge, and the boy cast about for his whereabouts.

The only evident clue in this tangle of undergrowth was the pile of sticks dropped by the woman when she had been killed. It will always remain a mystery to me how the boy, convulsed with fear, ever lighted on these in this veritable maze. He cast for well over ten minutes, whilst I stood by, finger on trigger, counting the seconds and listening for any sounds of the murderer. Suddenly he stumbled right on the pile of sticks, the axe and a pool of fresh blood. The trail was now easier to follow, but infinitely more dangerous. The following faded away into the forest gloom, and I was left starkly alone to follow along the blood trail. It led downhill, the undergrowth getting denser and denser. After about a hundred yards of intense fear, I came suddenly on the bloodstained cloth she had been wearing. Henceforth there was no shortage of blood.

The excitement of four years of war and many years of peace in strange climes was concentrated in the next quarter of an hour, until the moment when the man-eater's handiwork loomed, a sinister patch, in the sunlight ahead of me. . . . A girl of about eighteen, stark naked, the complete left leg eaten to the waist, also part of the right leg. The neck broken and horribly twisted, with deep fang-marks on forehead and chest. She had been dragged by the foot and partially scalped. Her expression haunts me even now.

I lost no time in climbing up a leafy tree over the kill. It wanted two hours to sunset, and there was just the odd chance the man-eater would return to finish his meal. I determined to sit up till about nine, when the young moon would set. As I had neither bedding nor warm clothes, and the mere tree-trunk as a perch, it would have been useless to have sat any later in pitch darkness with no electric light. I was a good fifteen

feet in the air and had an uninterrupted view of the corpse.

Far away over the western jungles the sun sank behind the low line of hills, and a chilly breeze rustled the grass about the gruesome object fading into the shadows at my feet. From far below I heard the sound of some animal approaching the kill over the dry leaves, and every pulse in my body throbbed, only to die down as the footsteps passed away uphill. The sun set and I lost sight of the corpse, and a chilly rain pattered down through the leaves. Far below, the blurred lights in the village and the throb of a drum reminded me that I was two miles from home, in a man-eater's jungle, with a clouded moon.

It was distinctly nasty, on the ground once again, and I hastily left the poor thing with its face of horror to a lonely grave and wended my dangerous way downhill, with many a pause to listen to the jungle noises around me.

The man-eater was now lost until he took his next victim, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I induced the trackers to tie out the baits, so terrified were they of the scourge.

There was a subconscious reaction after the recovery of the Danauli corpse. The memory remained an ever-constant nightmare which reacted more powerfully after dark, when my imagination pictured the man-eater whetting his unappeased appetite without the circle of firelight. Every night now I banked up the camp-fire immediately before my tent door, which was carefully sealed after entry. My revolver ready at my side, and the glimmer of a lamp throughout the night brought troubled sleep at length, after an hour of self-torture reviewing the man-eater's late movements, and

wondering what tragedy some lonely nala held for me on waking.

Days passed with no news of a further victim, and I felt that valuable time was indeed slipping by. Daily the bait-tiers returned with no kills, and with no news even of tiger pug-marks near the baits. Much as I dreaded it, I decided to range the plateau for signs of the murderer, and, if he would not come to me, to go and comb him out of his lair.

With everything in one's disfavour, I started one day soon after dawn, having intimidated two Gonds to accompany me. They insisted that I go last, as the man-eater's victim had always occupied this unenviable place in single file.

The top of the ridge was one welter of enormous boulders, screened with clumps of bamboo, thorn, and eight-foot grass. A nasty world of its own, simmering in the midday sunlight, and reeking of tiger, where a rifle would have been practically useless, as one would have been picked out of the queue, neck-broken and dragged away, before even a hint of danger.

Towards evening, nerve-strained and frightened, we came to a collection of Gond huts on the edge of some cultivation, and rather than face the return journey in darkness, decided to spend the night in the open fields. I lay on a native string bed covered by a coarse village blanket, by the glow of a large log fire. It was a chilly night. Around me were huddled four villagers, tired out with the gathering of the day's crop—stacked near by ready for to-morrow's winnowing. The forest lay, a sinister line of shadow, a hundred yards across the garnered fields. For one night—sleeping within this safe circle of humans, protected by a large fire—I let all thoughts of the man-eater slip from my mind.

It must have been after about three hours' sleep that I awoke, every sense alert to intense danger. The fire had burnt low, and three petrified Gonds were crouching to the ground, too terrified even to shout. The fourth man was missing. . . .

The moon had struggled free of cloud and faintly lit the near countryside. Thirty yards away a full-grown tiger was dragging a pitiful bundle of rags away by the arm. Even as I raised myself to a sitting posture, shaking as with ague, it dropped its victim and, crouching over him, tore a lump of flesh from the thigh. I watched this gruesome scene too terrified to move, and vainly trying to remember where I had placed my big rifle over-night—while only thirty yards away the man-eater completed his awful meal. A movement to rise on my part was answered by a snarl from the shadows, and picking up his wretched victim he walked away into the shadows of the near jungle.

I had no further sleep that night. In the morning we retrieved the remnants of the eaten Gond. Only the hands and feet remained. Even the large bones were scattered and the head lay a yard away. The man-eater had had his fill and added one more victim to his ever-increasing bag. What most perturbed me was his apparent complete disregard of fire. No longer were we safe at nights guarded by a fire.

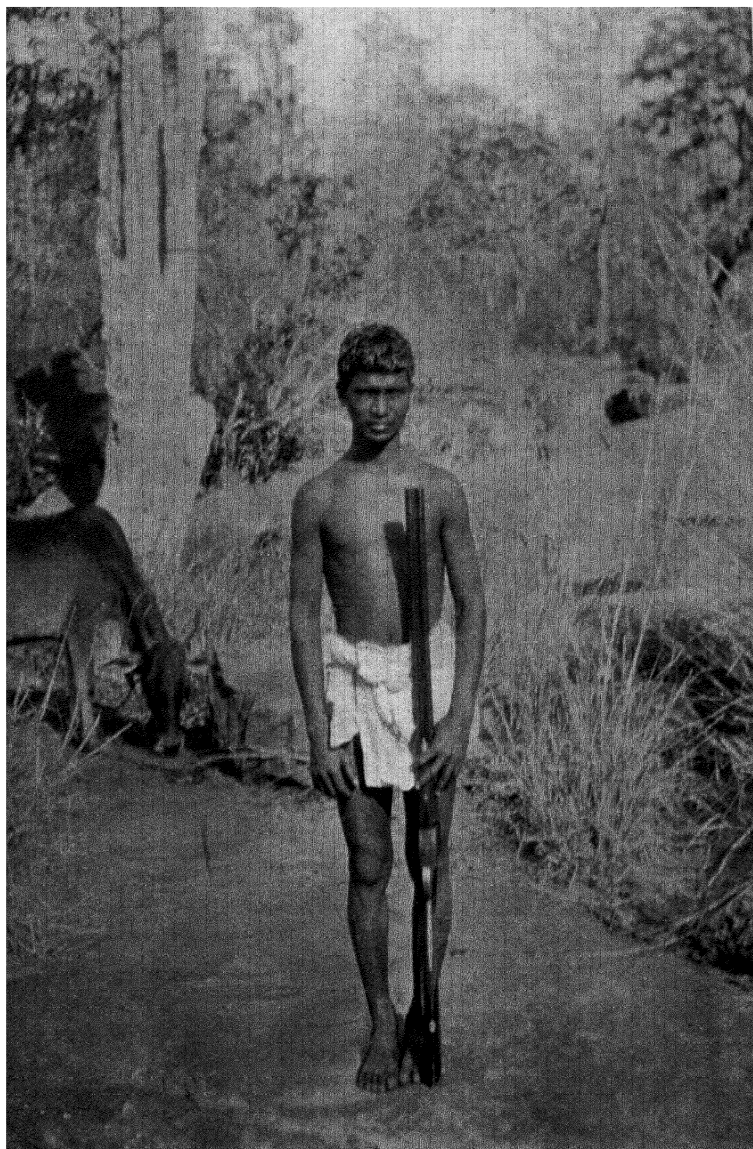
Time was passing apace and things looked desperate. I got once more in touch with the man-eater towards the end of the month, but a very cold and useless scent. Incidents connected with this victim were enlightening as to the mentality of the jungle Gond. So I will touch lightly on the killing of the woman of Chandna.

She had been seized when in company of three others, who had heard her cry and seen the long grass waving as

she had been dragged away into the forest depths. The villagers, armed with antique matchlocks and tom-toms, had bravely returned to the kill and recovered the corpse. On their reaching the edge of the jungle they had met the local Forest Guard. He had neglected to inform his villagers that I was the only local corpse-salvage authority and, fearing my ire, had ordered them to return her to where they had found her. This was too unreasonable even for the local Gond, so they met him half-way and placed her in the fork of a tree overnight, lighting two large fires at the foot of the tree. Thus had he completely defeated my object—the recovery of the body as soon after its seizure as possible, and quite undisturbed.

I went out the following day and examined the place of the kill: a terrible tangle of jungle embracing the Gugri Nala. It would have been a nerve-shattering place for solitary corpse-recovering. The poor old lady, minus the left leg, which was completely eaten, was trussed to a pole and treed. I sent for her relations (she had four strapping sons in the village) to get her down. They arrived (four sturdy young Gonds), and it was only with the greatest difficulty that I could induce them to lay a hand upon her, so superstitious were they of the evil spirits which infest the body of a man-eater's victim after a whole night treed alone. As it was, they let her fall heavily, from far up in the fork of the tree, to the ground.

This so infuriated me that I set about them and told them exactly what I thought of a pack of village curs who sent their mother to gather wood in tiger-infested jungles while they took their ease in the fields. They were too mentally numbed to heed my abuse. Her neck was broken and there were the usual deep fang-



My favourite Gond who was taken from my side by " the terror

marks on the neck. The whole of her left leg had been torn off from the hip, and the face was fearfully contorted. A hole in the ground was dug, into which she was straightway thrown like a dog.

I was terribly impressed by this apparent utter lack of any affection for the poor old mother who had borne them : all owing to her having been left out all night, a prey to the evil jungle spirits. There is a Gond superstition that the spirit, or " bhoot," of each victim rides astride the murderer to act as his guardian spirit, to show him wherein lies his danger. He now had a houseful of eight. . . . I was beginning to ache for a sporting chance with him and not one of these cold trails.

And then, after three days' intense watching at water-holes in lonely places, at intersections of tracks in likely nalas, and after dangerous perambulations in waist-high elephant-grass, came news of the killing of the Gwari bait. The scourge, apparently not satisfied with the one meatless leg of the woman of Chandna, had wandered down the Gwari nala towards the village in the hopes of a meal. Finding no human meat abroad that day, the villagers having at last learnt their lesson, he had suddenly happened on a toothsome bait, with which he had appeased his appetite. I hoped for little from this kill, but I could afford to take no chances.

Midday saw me reconnoitring the kill, once more alone. I could induce no one in the village to approach even within shouting distance of the nala. . . . He had scientifically killed my biggest and most expensive calf, broken the rope, and dragged it twenty yards into a small nala under a gigantic tree. At long last I saw his tracks—the big soup-plate pugs of a powerful male tiger. There was water near by, and the wall of jungle

rose north of the nala and ran right down to the kill. He undoubtedly lay in this, gorged after his large meal—how near I never knew!

It was with the greatest difficulty I got the men to approach the tree to put up the machan. All were paralytic with fear, and mesmerised with the proximity of the forest. After much boot-persuasion I got them up the tree, and stood on guard below on the fringe of the jungle, watching for the man-eater's all too probable return for his human meat ration—to wit, myself. The situation was extremely unenviable, and the half-hour seemed an eternity.

At three o'clock I climbed into the machan, a good twenty feet above the kill, with a good all-round view, and high enough to miss the gaze of the most sophisticated tiger.

The nala lay like an amphitheatre, surrounded on three sides by hills. Soon after four the sunset left the slopes of the valley and a gloom settled down—a peculiarly sinister gloom of its own, subconsciously cast by the proximity of the terror.

For some time I watched three langur monkeys gambolling on the distant hillside. Later a peacock in full plumage crept from out the jungles and lay down a few yards from my machan, before stalking away uphill into the gathering gloom. A barking deer crossed the open glade bound for its sunset drink, and a foul, bare-pated vulture came on to my tree and scrutinised the kill—surely the most revolting of scavengers, with its diseased body, scraggy blood-red neck and dirty grey ruff, a cruel, livid, shaven pate, with a beak as remorseless as a steel hook. It had a gob of decomposition in its mouth and it positively reeked of evil.

Darkness descended on the valley, the kill faded into

the shadows, and I was faced with yet another lonely twelve hours' vigil. I dared not close my eyes for a moment for fear of falling twenty feet, and had to fight to keep awake the long night through, the whole human world slumbering around me. Once in the depths of the night I shook out of a long drowse, hearing movement on the kill, but my electric light displayed naught but a solitary gorged hyena. Towards dawn I thought I heard the far-distant roar of a hungry tiger.

After sixteen hours' vigil, chilled, numbed and sleep-ridden, I descended from the machan and let the vultures on to the kill. The man-eater had scored off me once again.

And now the final reckoning. . . . It had become a duel of wits and daring between myself and the jungle scourge. There was a shade of odds on his side, as he was taking me on in his own haunts, yet I had the advantage of being able to slay at a distance.

Only two more days and I had to say farewell to the jungles. At ten on a peaceful jungle morning two Gonds, hurrying across the vista of fields, awoke me from my gentle reveries. They brought news of a fresh human kill at Sarangpur, south of my camp. The man-eater had crossed the Selwar track one night as we lay abed, passed our camp-fire within scenting distance, and extended his reign of terror to the southern block.

Only two miles away this time, and a kill only an hour old. The Gonds of Tarrach—unaccustomed as yet to the tiger's depredations—were not yet incapable of co-operation. Within an hour I was hunting the blood-trail, which was profuse. Two stout trackers at my shoulder pointed me the way, while I riveted my attention on picking up the kill. The jungles seemed hushed in expectation—no morning hum of insect life

All Nature seemed to be holding its breath to see the terror of the jungles die.

Then from far ahead we heard the man-eater on his prey : that never-to-be-forgotten sound—the gnawing of human bones. Our time had come ; at last the murderer was within killing distance.

The ground sloped upwards, so step by step we made a *détour* to get above him. It is suicide to take on a charging tiger from below. As we moved—this time probably incautiously—he stopped eating and there was an ominous silence. We froze in our tracks, and the gnawing and sounds of tearing flesh recommenced. At last we were on the slope above him, yet still could see nothing. Placing the Gonds up trees, step by step, finger on trigger, I moved down through the undergrowth towards him. . . . Only twenty yards now separated me from a full-grown tiger devouring his kill. . . .

It was easily the most intense moment of my life. Still the terrible gnawing and sucking of blood continued. At last I thought I caught sight of a striped body, crouched to the ground. There was an ominous growl, and with a tremendous effort he tore off the left leg from the hip-joint and started slowly dragging it downhill. . . . At last I saw him clearly—a great yellow-and-black striped beast, looking back over his shoulder at me, the tattered gobbet in his mouth. Resting my '470 against a tree, I aimed for the back of the neck and pressed the trigger, closely followed by a second barrel. . . . He dropped, quivered a moment and lashed his tail, and never moved again. There were eighteen yards between us at the end. And so came swift and overdue retribution to the Danauli terror.

* * * * *

He measured nine feet between pegs. Very heavy

and massive, but very old. One lower canine tooth was missing and two smaller teeth were deficient ; all the rest were very blunt and blackened. There was not an atom of fat on the whole body and he was lean with age.

Unable any longer to hold his own with jungle animals, or even to pull down village cattle, he must have taken to man-killing as the line of least resistance, and this had become a terrible human blood-lust.

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And so the following day I regretfully turned my face east for Amarkantak, and waved a long farewell to the never-to-be-forgotten line of the Danauli foothills fading into the noonday haze.

CHAPTER VI

TANOY, SIAMESE

“ These are my people, and this is my land.
I hear the pulse of her secret soul.
This is the life that I understand,
Savage and simple and sane and whole.”

Laurence Hope.

AT evening, in the smoke of the camp-fire—in the fullness of the moon, silent on a lonely machan—in the hush before a jungle dawn—down the corridors of memory come stalking ghosts of past tragedies that one can never entirely disperse.

There is for me one aspect of a sunset jungle which will ever conjure up such memories: an evening zephyr, herald of the wind which seems to rise always at the dying of the day, ruffling the surface of a swamp; the hoarse, insistent creak of bamboos fringing a lonely pool; the suck and gurgle of the waters round the twisted mangrove roots—such sounds, touching the chords of memory, will always find me straining my ears across the water to catch the last imagined, dying gasp of Tanoy, prince of poachers.

* * * * *

He had come from far across the Pakchan River—from the distant jungles in the southern Siamese Peninsula. Years later I discovered the village of his birth, whence he had set out on the expedition from which there was no return. It lay astride the tracks

leading northwards to Bangkok, and eastwards to where the sea laps the shores of the Gulf of Tongking. From early youth he was a mighty hunter—before his cupidity for the closed rhinoceros lands urged him to lead his trained band of poachers into British India, across the distant Pakchan.

* * * * *

The late spring found me installed in a Malay hut on the outskirts of Maliwun, at the junction of the Maliwun creek and the Pakchan River, which meandered sluggishly westward on its eighty-mile course to the Gulf of Martaban. I had a licence to shoot two male elephant and, most coveted of all, a permit for one rhinoceros—the single-horned variety—as rare in British India as the white rhino in the West Nile province of Africa. Apart from the Nepal Terai (an independent Native State), Southern Tenasserim was the sole habitat of this rare species in the whole vast continent of India. The few which had existed south of the Pakchan River in Siam proper had long since disappeared at the hands of poachers. There remained the few in Southern Tenasserim, between the river and the sea, which owed their immunity to the forest laws and the density of the untravelled jungles. Up to date no expedition to exploit these virgin gamelands had been organised from Siam. But at last there were universal signs that a master hand was combing out the jungle for the ultimate extinction of the species.

The forest authorities at Victoria Point, fully aware of this menace, had drawn a net tightly round the authorised firearms in the preserved area. Villages had been limited to one gun only per loogi (or headman)—all other guns became illegal. Special forest guards and patrols had been appointed, and tempting

rewards had been offered for the apprehension of all poachers.

Yet in our daily wanderings in search of my one legitimate rhinoceros the jungles cried out the fact that Tanoy was afoot. Although no one had ever set eyes on him this side of the Pakchan, his presence made itself felt at every turn. The trees bore the impress of his axe. Too often we saw the blaze of two vertical and four horizontal cuts—indicating a party of four with two guns (both illegal). The swamps cried out the testimony of his passing. The very torch that he had used for night fishing lay beside a charred heap of sticks where he had eaten his midday meal.

But the most damning testimony to his unlawful depredations was vouchsafed us one evening, after an all-day stalk knee-deep in bog combing out a mid-jungle morass where there were unmistakable signs of rhinoceros. We had been visiting one pool after another, ever hoping to find our quarry ruminating muddily in the midday heat. Alongside one such wallow—the mud piled high upon the undergrowth, where he had been dragged from his midday siesta—lay the fresh carcase, stripped bare as the hulk of a derelict ship.

The marauders' tracks led away to the remains of a fire, where, from the débris of bamboo-stems and the charred embers of a gigantic wooden spit, it was obvious that the meat had been boiled down to extract the essential blood and juices.

Herein lies the intrinsic value of the rhinoceros. Peddled in far-away Rangoon to the Chinaman, it is worth almost its weight in gold. Every square inch and fluid ounce spells potency and increased vigour to the sexually debilitated. It is the King of Aphrodisiacs

—the very Elixir of Life—compared to which Nervinus and the host of well-advertised restoratives of lost manhood are mere dilutions ! Thus thinks the Chinaman. So, to pander to his Faustian beliefs, no portion of the unfortunate beast is ignored save the bones. Every atom of meat is boiled down to fat to massage his flagging muscles. Each bristle is chopped up and compounded as a love philtre, those of the tail fetching the most exorbitant price. The blood is drained off into hollow bamboos and drunk as a most cherished aphrodisiac. Even the urine and droppings are not excepted, and are despatched to the Rangoon markets for the ultimate exhilaration of devitalised mandarins. The carcass can be sold on the spot for a thousand rupees ; so it needs no great imagination to visualise its enormous value in the far-distant markets of Rangoon and Mandalay. . . . Such is the lure of rhino-hunting ; and as long as there remains a Chinaman in Burma prepared to pay the price for his libidinous rejuvenation, so long will poaching flourish on the banks of the far-distant Pakchan.

Day after day followed blank. Within a week of my leave terminating I recognised the utter futility of sharing the jungles with Tanoy, and of pitting local Malay wits against all the organisation and untiring energy of his Siamese hunters. He had, moreover, established a reign of terror, and the trackers who had proved invaluable in elephant jungles now showed reluctance in even entering the rhinoceros area which this prince of poachers had claimed for his own.

It was while I was bargaining one evening in the Maliwun bazaar—trading good jungle pork for a bottle of indifferent port (the only obtainable intoxicant)—that a friendly Chinaman broached a course of action

which had repeatedly suggested itself to my mind during my last few fruitless wanderings. . . . If competition with Tanoy and his gang merely induced non-co-operation from all the local trackers and villagers, surely the only alternative was to throw in one's lot with the poachers. Rhinoceros spelt to me a veritable El Dorado, and the weeks spent in constant disappointment and unfulfilled hopes had driven me to a total disregard of all moral considerations. I had come over a thousand miles for one of the species—vouchsafed me legitimately by a benevolent Government—what mattered the means by which I attained my desire?

I played with the idea throughout the long hours of the night, and at dawn, after troubled dreams of flight, arrest, gaol and subsequent extradition, I sought out Kai-Loon, my Chinese tempter.

Over a bottle of port—produce of Maliwun—in the chill of a Malayan dawn we came to the following agreement. That night if possible (as time was short) he would try to induce Tanoy—whose confidence he shared; also his ill-gotten gains—to meet me by the river. In exchange for my influence with the authorities to legalise Tanoy's bastard rifle, he would propose his co-operation to procure my much-coveted rhino. It would be represented that my influence with the powers that be was inestimable.

When dealing with a poacher who had terrorised the district and practically destroyed all game, and was proscribed as a definite outlaw, I decided to play his game—unmoral and unscrupulous though it may have seemed. I hoped to be well out of the country, many leagues distant, ere he realised the futility of my promises. The risk of being placed in the same category as the gang and caught red-handed added

relish to the project. Since when I have never ceased to shudder at the sight of the Forest official stamp on my occasional Burmese mail. But I reiterate I had travelled a thousand miles and within a few days must perforce return the way I came.

That night, long after the last twinkle of light had been extinguished in the Maliwun bazaar, I passed through the sleeping village, threading my way between the myriad corpse-like sleepers spread-eagled on the ground. It was a breathless night. A grey veil of evil mist from the swamp was creeping up to take possession of the slumbering village. It was as though a pestilence had passed its hand over the face of the sleepers. They were so quiet, so grave-like, so utterly unconscious of the creeping miasma.

Down by the river's edge there was the hush of death, disturbed now and again by the ripple of some night saurian in the depths of the creek, or the plop of a fish as it struggled to escape a vicious death. All the world seemed sleeping, yet the jungles were alive with beast hunting beast, and the myriad night prowlers seeking their meat or grazing grounds after the brazen heat of the day. The mangroves crawled with nocturnal-feeding crabs killing among the slime and ooze of the twisted roots.

The trees alone were silent, awaiting the coming of the day, their branches an asylum for countless families of slumbering apes and birds of every hue. . . . It was all primitive—lonely and utterly desirable ; so far from any organised hive of industry and modern civilisation spelling activity, efficiency, and all its attendant horrors of noise, bustle, people.

Here one would never hear in the silence the exhortation to " Come on—we must get to bed, or you'll never

be up in the morning ; breakfast's at nine, and you can't disorganise things " !

Law and Order ! . . . Here, God be praised ! was the emptiness of a non-organised existence, where clocks meant nothing, and one was not haunted by the thought of time ticking ever onward to ultimate extinction at one's very wrist. The movement of the sun and stars told me of the peaceful passage of the blissful hours. The murmur of the stream flowing to the sea beneath the remote Malayan sky emphasised the distance from the nearest port—the focus of civilisation !

Down the misty waters of the Pakchan came the distant sound of paddles. The wavelets rippled at our feet among the decaying mangroves, heralding the approach of our fellow-conspirators. . . .

Tanoy stepped from out his sampan and stood eyeing us distrustfully, with no apparent desire for more intimate acquaintance. In the background hovered his four most trusted hunters, and each was armed with an illegitimate rifle. In the ghostly swamp-light they seemed naught but grey wraiths lurking in deeper velvet shadow, reluctant to disclose their identity to any stranger . . . as wild as the animals they hunted.

I was outwardly unarmed (to establish confidence), but secretly invested with a Colt automatic—as I was not taking too many risks. There was a lengthy conversation between the poacher and Kai-Loon, watched curiously by the sinister shadows in the background. Over these negotiations hung an atmosphere of extreme distrust, reminiscent of the attitude of a herd of sambhur drinking in tiger-frequented waters. One poacher stood gazing intently into the farthest jungle, the sampan rope in hand ready for instant flight.

The moments slipped by. Calm as a Mahatma in suspended animation, I sat gazing across the sleeping river. Really caring little for Tanoy's co-operation or hostility so long as the peace of the jungles—passing all understanding—still vouchsafed me an æon of such lonely, lovely nights. . . . Time flowed as heedlessly as the drifting stream. . . . The strangers vanished into the gloom, and the sound of their paddles was swallowed up in the immensity of the jungle silence.

If Tanoy—chewing the cud of deliberation overnight—regarded my promises favourably, we were to meet the following day and start our nefarious operations. We returned through the glory of the night to bed.

* * * * *

The afternoon of the following day news came to pack sufficient kit for at least two nights in the open, and to be prepared to meet Tanoy in a hut some ten miles away—below the workings of a long-disused Chinese tin mine. So he had accepted our proposal, and I was to be associated with as disreputable a gang of poachers as ever came out of far Siam. I knew that he would definitely resent any hint of even comfort in one's impedimenta, and would refuse the inclusion of any outside tracker in the party.

I decided to take my Mussulman orderly—both travelling light. We were prepared to carry our own comforts, packed in one large haversack, and sacrificed extravagance of bedding and change of clothing to our stomachs, which bitter experience taught must be adequately filled.

Into the haversack we crammed to repletion kettle and cup for the inevitable milkless tea, bread, potted

meat, tinned fish, bovril and bully beef ; also an electric torch, matches and one blanket. This we took in turns to carry, and with a rifle apiece (.470 and .318), my automatic and spare ammunition, we were self-contained for several days. Independent of aught save water and a jungle branch for fire.

* * * * *

At the foot of the steep ascent to the old tin mines Tanoy and one of his fellow-trackers awaited us. He certainly looked every inch a hunter. Bare, but for a wisp of cloth about his waist enfolding the inevitable leather box for the twist of tobacco, betel nut and some old fish-hooks. Over this hung a cartridge belt for the most evil slugs ; also a powder horn from which he occasionally refreshed his fowling-piece. This latter never left his hand, waking or sleeping. I evinced no desire for a closer acquaintance, as a more evil, dangerous matlock—bound with brass wire where the barrel bulged—it would be hard to imagine.

To my intense relief, during the next few days he had no occasion to discharge this perambulating nightmare. But the knowledge that I was walking within a few yards of a hideous death (if the hammer fell) gave my over-developed imagination many an uneasy moment. Like the poor, it was ever with me. My only hope was that the bullet—as generous as a plover's egg in dimensions—would seek the line of least resistance, and escape sideways and upwards through a rift in the barrel. And that at the moment of release I should be in line with the muzzle—in comparative safety.

Yet the owner, entirely trustful of the vagaries of this super-culverin, constantly faced death from wild elephant and crusty rhinoceros with complete equa-

nimity. A charging elephant ahead, and the assistance of Tanoy and his blunderbuss behind as one's alternative to a sticky end, would have seemed the choice of two evils. A fitting subject for a more than usually vivid nightmare.

Tanoy's face and lean figure were as gnarled as a twisted briar root. He had an extraordinary jutting chin, far-seeing hunter's eyes, and a strange way of setting his nutcracker jaw and talking through the gaps in his betel-stained teeth. During the next few days he spoke hardly half a dozen words—or rather commands—and they were in guttural Siamese and wholly unintelligible. Swift and unerring in sight and movement, the jungle was obviously his home and the forest ways his second nature.

There were no preliminary peace overtures. He gave our haversack one searching glance of disapproval, indicative of extravagance. Followed by his henchman carrying an equally defunct fowling-piece, he turned to climb the precipitous slopes above the old tin mines. We followed submissively in single file.

Just as I had reached the conclusion that compared to this the task of Sisyphus was a mere bagatelle, we reached a deserted hut, well over a thousand feet above our starting-point in the steaming jungles below. Tanoy motioned to us to rest or sleep while he looked for tracks.

At our feet lay a vast amphitheatre of virgin forest, uninhabited and untraversed. Through it meandered the feeders of the Pakchan River, and in its pools and swamps we trusted to Tanoy to find us our El Dorado. . . . We were optimists.

We cooked some tea and lay down for an hour or two. From far below came the crashing of bamboo and the

organ-like rumble of wild elephant, interspersed with the scream of some truculent tusker.

Our first disappointment was soon forthcoming. The trackers returned with news of no fresh trails. The hands outspread palms uppermost and the click of the tongue conveyed this gloomy fact. So we decided to have a look at the herd in the valley below.

We soon came on the tracks of a large tusker apart from the herd. As darkness was coming on, and the last flush of sunlight already drenched the tips of the feathery bamboo, we pushed on apace.

From our left, close at hand, came the crack of a breaking bamboo. Tanoy crept into the gathering shadows towards the sound. It was full evening, and amongst the giant clumps it was practically night. By crawling down an ever-darkening tunnel of undergrowth we came to within a few yards of where our quarry was standing. He loomed magnificently in the sombre aisle of bamboo—black as ebony. A dull gleam of ivory as he raised his trunk to strip the tender young shoots of their succulent leaves: ivory almost to the ground—a king of tuskers. All my heart cried out for sufficient light to pick out a vulnerable spot. It was far too risky, so we crept away, and stumbled uphill in the pitch darkness to the doubtful comfort of our evil hut. We arranged everything for an early start at dawn—convinced that a big tusker in the hand (or so we hoped) was worth many a rhino in the mythical wallow.

We left the hut before dawn, and with the first light were on the tracks of over-night. These led us through the thickest bamboo and undergrowth, and had we kept to the tracks conscientiously we would have progressed only some half a mile an hour. Tanoy,



A solitary Rogue in heavy bamboo

with his hunter's instinct, left the jungle and took us over the open, casting and cutting in on to the spoor further on. We thus gained on the tusker, who had a whole night's start of us. . . .

At last the trail grew plainer—fresh droppings and bamboo recently cropped. We strained our ears for any sound of feeding or movement in the solid wall of forest looming ahead. Then in the dim distance we heard the crashing of bamboos, and Tanoy and I went on alone. The tusker was standing almost completely concealed by a gigantic green clump. For the moment he had ceased feeding, and was lazily flicking the flies away with his great ears. Perhaps he was ruminating on the distant sounds of pursuit. Any further movement on our part, however stealthy, was impossible until he recommenced the rending of bamboos.

With just this one generous clump between us (a distance of some twelve feet), I waited, with every pulse drumming, for him to move and offer me a vulnerable spot. Through the interstices of the bamboo stems I glimpsed one massive tusk sweeping towards the ground, heavily encrusted with mud at the extremity; but of the other I could see no sign. . . . Minutes like hours passed with no movement.

From over my shoulder I saw Tanoy walk up a tree and frantically signal to me that the wind would soon be rising, and that I must take a shot. The fowling-piece itched in his hand, and I could see him priming fresh powder from the horn at his belt.

Almost imperceptibly the morning breeze was rising. It only wanted one eddy from us to the tusker to invite a charge or sudden flight—both equally non-conducive to a steady aim. I decided to step from out the kindly shelter of the bamboo into full view, and before he had

galvanised into conscious activity, to get the chance of a fatal brain-shot. It *must* be fatal, as any movement in my direction would bring him literally on top of me before I could regain the protection of the friendly clump.

What I dreaded most were facing the recognition of sudden danger in his eyes and the simultaneous step forward in self-defence. If at this moment I missed a vital spot with both barrels, it would be my last hunt.

We moved simultaneously. As I stepped nakedly into the open he turned tail on and started to move slowly away. There was no alternative, and I took the brain shot from behind with both barrels. He screamed once and fell as if poleaxed; Tanoy fired simultaneously with my .318. I reloaded and went forward to finish him off. To my intense surprise he rose and made off at a tremendous pace. We followed all out, convinced it was only a matter of moments before he fell.

Tripping over fallen trees, through tangled undergrowth and dripping, evergreen forest, drenched with blood where my ear had been torn by a hanging tendril of thorn. Tanoy, always five hundred yards to the good, constantly raised his rifle to take a killing shot. Momentarily expecting a charge round every corner, I followed in his wake, dripping with perspiration.

Gradually the noise of the pursuit grew fainter and fainter, and was swallowed up in the immensity of the jungle—as a cry dies in the silence of the night.

We halted, dead beat, in a gloomy valley and cooked some tea—the unfailing nerve sedative after moments of great excitement and strain. The outlook was gloomy. I had without doubt missed a vital spot. No animal could recover almost instantaneously from a solid .470 bullet and get clean away. He probably

fell in turning or from the shock of a badly aimed graze, and the scream was of pure fear and not of pain.

Tanoy insisted that he was wounded, and that we would continue the pursuit within an hour. After a muttered conversation, his companion vanished along the tusker's tracks on what we imagined was a preliminary reconnaissance.

After only too short a rest, the sun blazing down almost vertically and the jungles simmering with heat, we started out once more along the trail. After some two miles' monotonous tracking, Tanoy motioned us to rest, while he proceeded to do a complete ring of vast circumference. After another hour or so he returned, and we gathered from his gestures and strange Siamese gurglings that the tracks had not crossed the circle. The tusker was therefore still inside it, and within easy range. This circle embraced a grey and sinister valley, into which we descended to look for our quarry.

In this welter of swamp into which we had plunged, the ground cicatrised with elephant trails, it was impossible to say whether or not we were on the tracks we wanted. We were entirely in the hands of Tanoy—our late inveterate rival.

As is the habit of all sick or wounded animals, he had sought asylum in the thickest and gloomiest of jungle recesses, and was apparently wandering aimlessly, still dizzy from what we hoped was a fatal head wound. Darkness was coming on apace, and we were still wandering within the circle, equally as mazed as our unfortunate victim.

As the last belated bird was composing himself for rest in the tree-tops, we stopped in a gloomy nala beside a sinister pool. Tanoy, throwing down the haversack, indicated our slumber ground for the night.

It had been raining throughout the day, and the carpet of leaves was soaking wet. Disconsolately we sat on a fallen tree and watched Tanoy prepare our night's caravanserai : a few armfuls of wet branches, with an upper layer of wetter grass, and a few palm-fronds overhead as protection apparently from the few tender beams of a clouded moon.

The other tracker returned, and with the lighting of a good log fire prospects brightened considerably.

We were unable to remove our sodden clothes, as we had brought no others, but we removed boots and puttees and their attendant leeches, and took stock of our night's resting-place. . . . It was depressingly damp. By the light of our solitary candle we distinguished a long trail of soldier ants already engaged in sampling the remains of our superannuated loaf. There were ants and leeches everywhere, and we had to burn them out with ashes from our fire.

We had been travelling all day in bamboo and ever-green jungle, the happy hunting-ground of the leech. When hungry and anticipating a meal he has the appearance of an inch of bootlace. But let him scent blood and manage to impinge with his sucker on the human anatomy, and he never releases his grip until inflated with blood to the size of a respectable slug. Thus he insinuates himself before distension into the smallest interstices of the boot, or through the cracks in one's puttees. Leech gaiters worn next the skin well above the thigh are the only protection. Even then I have known him, foiled on the ground (his natural habitat), to drop from the trees on to one's exposed neck ; or on to any bare portion of the anatomy. Once he is established and feeding, it is useless to endeavour to remove him, as in the process he will remove a portion

of the epidermis and set up a nasty infection. He must be allowed to drink to satiation ; then he will either fall off or can be picked off after the application of a pinch of salt. In Tenasserim and Siam he literally carpets the ground of all evergreen jungles where there is an abundance of moisture.

Every night on leaving the jungles we used to remove boots and puttees, and "deleech." Outwardly at first one appears to have escaped their attention, but as gradually fold after fold of puttee is unwound, revealing their repulsive bodies gorged on a blood-caked leg, there is a feeling of complete revulsion which takes much acclimatisation. Personally I never overcame the horror of waking with a stream of warm blood flowing down my neck from the attentions of a couple of these night-feeders clamped to the brow.

Silent and almost invisible, equally rapacious by night as by day, as ubiquitous as the house-fly, they ruined all the romance of sleeping *au naturel* in Tenasserim jungles.

This night we threw the swollen bodies into the fire and weeded a few square yards for our communal blanket. It was a dreary outlook, and the ten hours to dawn seemed an interminable prospect. The younger Siamese had returned with a tortoise. Tanoy, producing from the folds at his waist, cotton and a fish-hook—which he bound to a bamboo—proceeded to the gloomy pool, and by the light of an improvised torch (held above his head by his "chela") plucked forth a couple of protesting fish. These he cleaned and smoked between a couple of pieces of bamboo over the fire. We ate them with rice cooked in a hollow bamboo. The tortoise was next put on the boil, and when cooked was removed from the shell, filleted, and offered me on a green

plantain leaf. Fortunately I had wafted it in the process of preparation, and politely but firmly refused this culinary delectation.

Helped out by tea, what the ants had left us of the loaf, and some bully beef, we rolled ourselves closely in the one blanket and wooed the elusive goddess of sleep.

The fire burnt low, and the moon pierced its veil of cloud and gazed benignly down through the trellis of leaves. The Siamese had settled down beneath an overturned tree. I lay with my head pillowed on the root of a tree stump and soliloquised in the light of our solitary candle. The fire was a mere smoulder of wet wood, and the trackers slumbered sonorously. Majid pitched restlessly at my side, flicking off occasional ants and leeches.

My thoughts journeyed the full range of my imagination. . . . Thus slept our ancestors nightly in bygone civilisations—or rather savageries. Thus was born the jungle fear which exists to this day in an inherited distrust of darkness, the fastening of doors and windows at the approach of night, and footsteps hastening homeward on the advent of dusk over some lonely countryside.

We took it in turns to keep awake and rekindle the dying fire. In my rare patches of slumber, imagination peopled my subconscious mind with wounded tuskers, prowling rhinoceroses, and a Medusa-like welter of leeches, snakes and other night crawlers. Towards dawn, Majid at my side enjoyed the unruffled sleep of twenty—as black and unimaginative as his village cattle.

Dawn broke wet and chilly, and found me wide-eyed and miserable, my body racked with damp and lack of sleep. We drank our milkless tea in silence and left

the night's shelter with no regret. I want no meaner, damper resting-place this side the grave.

The younger tracker was sent ahead as we started out along the tracks of over-night—a repetition of yesterday's maze of nightmare swamp and leech-infested bamboo. We came up with him again after an hour. There was a whispered consultation, and Tanoy, putting our haversack on the ground, indicated with upturned palms the futility of further pursuit. He waved a hand westward and upward, signifying the dissolution into thin air of our much-coveted tusker. One might almost have visualised an elephantine ascension.

At any rate, Tanoy was through with any further pursuit; and our efforts to dissuade him were fruitless.

Reluctantly we abandoned the trail and turned for home.

* * * * *

We gave ourselves one day's rest, and then sought Kai-Loon for news of the elusive Tanoy. By our night's pact at the water's edge he was committed to a partnership. Yet here it was broken at the very start. He had taken to the jungle once again and left no trace. For this breach of faith I nursed a bitter grievance, and determined thenceforth on a campaign of retaliation.

Mahbir Singh (my original shikari) was restored to favour, and an appeal made to his professional pride. He had felt very keenly the transference of my patronage to Tanoy, and was bursting to restore his reputation as the local hunter.

A mongrel Gurkha from the Assamese hill tracks, he was out of a job through the closing of the local Chinese tin mines. He had twice been mauled by tiger, had a passion for crude alcohol, and was never too trust-

worthy in the presence of elephant ; but he knew the surrounding jungles by heart and shared my growing hatred for Tanoy and his evil actions.

We decided to have one more look for the wounded tusker and ring him close to where we recently abandoned the trail. I had an idea that Tanoy had marked him down for his own and would be found somewhere in the vicinity. We always hoped, in the course of our wanderings, to pick up a stray rhino in one of the many wallows ; but here again we would be confronted with the active hostility of the poachers.

I ached to lay hands on them and their illegitimate rifles. This obsessed me more than my desire for rhinoceros. . . . Yet but three days remained.

Once again we packed the communal haversack, this time with "swords and staves" (a match for any Siamese raiding party), and took the jungle once again—seven all told.

Our first objective was where we had abandoned the tracks in the sinister valley of swamps. Of the party were two local Malayan trackers, anxious to settle several grievances they had long nursed against Tanoy. These, with Mahbir Singh, soon got on to the tusker's trail of two days ago. As he was considered badly wounded and could not be far away (despite Tanoy's protestations), we decided to do a ring of large diameter. If his tracks crossed its circumference we would abandon the hunt, as he had undoubtedly got his second wind and might cover anything up to fifty miles, and be far beyond our reach.

The ring took to well beyond midday. It proved conclusively that he was still within a radius of some two miles, as nowhere on the circumference of this circle were his tracks to be found. The natural con-

clusion was that he was lying up nursing his wounds within this prescribed area. This in contradistinction to Tanoy's conclusion, which from the first I had doubted—as I had always doubted his sincerity and genuine co-operation.

The suspicion that he had double-crossed me was now confirmed; and there was poor comfort in the reflection that it was a case of diamond cut diamond. Yet I honestly believe that, had he played me fair, I would have made every endeavour to improve his status with the local authorities.

Somewhere within the ring lurked Tanoy and his accomplice—also a wounded tusker. The stage was set for a vivid final curtain.

We pushed on along the ever-freshening trail, conscious of impending tragedy. In this steaming maze of dense vegetation, silence hung in the midday air as a cry. From far ahead the jungle rustled with movement. We froze in the shadow of a bamboo clump as a figure detached itself from the shimmer of haze and resolved itself into the "tortoise snarer"—Tanoy's companion of two nights ago. Too good a prize to be left unmolested. As he passed within a foot of where we crouched, I tripped him up and gathered his rifle ere he had collected his wits. We subjected him to a cross-examination—to which the third degree would have appeared anæmic. He collapsed and confessed the bitter truth. Tanoy from the first had marked this elephant down as his own. It was apparently a renowned solitary bull—a single tusker of great purity and weight.

We came on it purely by chance, and he could not prevent my getting a shot, which, fortunately for him, proved unsuccessful. The tracker owned up to having

gone on ahead in our frenzied pursuit (acting on Tanoy's instructions), to keep the tusker, who was badly wounded, on the move, to obviate my getting the chance of a finishing shot. The elephant was just ahead all the time, wandering dazed and semi-conscious. Time and again the Siamese had awakened him from an apparent swoon. He was within two hundred yards of our fire the night we slept under the stars. . . . A case of ignorance being truly bliss !

The following dawn he had roused him from his resting-place, and left him exhausted within a hundred yards of where Tanoy had suggested giving up the hunt. . . .

Worse followed !

Tanoy, on leaving us, had doubled straight back on his tracks, and within half an hour of taking up the trail dropped him dead—as he stood nursing his wound among the bamboo clumps. True to tradition, he had sought the most impenetrable forest to nurse his wound, but had been unable to shake off this veritable Siamese scourge : as relentless as the leanest bitch that ever led a wolf-pack, killing not for hunting's sake or for his whelps, but for pure mercenary gain—to be traded in the nearest market for the best obtainable price.

Thoroughly cowed, the Siamese promised to guide us to the scene of this latest outlawry. At last Fate was propitious and we were hot on the scent. There was no need now to track our prey laboriously. The terrified Siamese—wrists tied behind his back—led the way with unswerving precision. We had taken the liberty to lightly gag him, so as to prevent any warning shout. Thus, in the wake of our snuffing guide, we pressed forward ere our indignation had evaporated in the midday heat.



Tenasserim Elephant Swamp



On the track of Tanoy

The leading tracker signalled a halt ; and in the great silence—disturbed only by the drone of myriad insects—from a distance came the muffled sound of jungle axes : a common enough sound on the outskirts of some village or jungle clearing, but of sinister import in the depths of this great solitude of swamp and decay. These were no woodcutters, but poachers plying their nefarious trade—relentless and dangerous as a hungry tiger disturbed on his kill.

Somewhere ahead lay our quarry, this time in human form. That he would make full use of his evil firearm I had no doubt. I turned to our prisoner ; in reply to Mahbir's inquiry he raised his fingers, indicating a party of four—the principal and full chorus. Whether armed or not, his Siamese companions presented no grave problem. If surprised, they would probably take an appreciable time to kindle the powder which detonated their abortive weapons. But Tanoy presented an entirely different proposition. An outlaw at bay, expecting no quarter if apprehended, faced with years of captivity—a greater punishment to this free jungle savage than a thousand deaths—he would never consent to be taken alive.

A pretty problem, the necessity for a rapid solution growing nearer and nearer with every step. During the next hundred yards of silent approach I had made up my mind. It was useless to trust to luck and a real dog-fight. I had already experienced uncontrolled fire under like conditions in a Congolese forest, and distrusted the weapons of my friends even as I feared those of our opponents.

I decided to leave the Malay trackers and the “ tortoise slayer ” in the offing, to come to our aid if things went awry. Otherwise to remain in intelligent observa-

tion well out of the limelight and line of fire. To take Majid, armed with my '318, in a silent stalk—deadened by the sound of the axes—to within shouting distance ; whence we would hold the party up while Mahbir (who accompanied us as interpreter, unarmed) made known our terms of surrender.

I wanted no indiscriminate shooting ; and hoped with our two rifles to dominate the situation and prevent any bloodshed.

We bore silently down on the unsuspecting Siamese. Now we were within fifty yards—moving invisibly from clump to clump—passing from sunlight to shadow—imperceptibly closer and closer.

Tanoy, ever clasping his murderous weapon, squatted, directing operations—like the sentinel of a pack of wild dogs devouring an unlawful kill. Two of his companions were plying their axes on the solid bone encasing the solid tusk ; while the third sharpened his axe on a near-by stone. None of them was far from his rifle, which stood propped up against a near-by tree.

Tanoy's eyes never left the distant jungle. Fortunately for us, his gaze was directed towards our recent night's bivouac, whence the danger he sensed was to be most probably expected. I had purposely made a *détour* so as not to approach from this direction. Just as I had always felt a vague presentiment in disturbing dangerous game on a kill, and longed to avoid breaking a perfect jungle silence by a sudden disturbance—the desire to leave well alone—so I dreaded the fatal challenge which would spell danger and obvious strife.

For an appreciable space of time I paused in the shadow of the bamboos, while Mahbir Singh shivered

at my side. Well he knew the reputation of this jungle outlaw. Had it not been a byword of lawlessness on both banks of the Pakchan ?

Then I whispered to him to shout (as had been prearranged) to Tanoy to stand up and lay his rifle on the ground—likewise his friends.

We moved from out the shadows, and Mahbir Singh shouted his challenge. Even as a tiger, surprised on his kill, remains motionless for the space of a few seconds before bounding off into the jungle, so Tanoy and his accomplices froze in their tracks.

I had always foreseen a complete ignoring of our shouted demand, and had been at a loss to form any plan for such a contingency. I could not shoot them down in cold blood ; yet to let them get possession of their rifles spelled failure to my plans.

It is easy to show wisdom and theorise after an event, with calm reflection ; but things happened so quickly that almost before I had realised the danger of the situation, the Siamese had recovered their rifles and stepped into the kindly shelter of the forest.

In civilised, police-inflicted countries, with all the inherited instinct of unswerving obedience to law and order, there would have been an instantaneous laying down of arms on Mahbir Singh's insistent shout. The movies have gone far to inculcate the masses with the dire results of disobedience of the order " Hands up ! " The mother of eight would instantaneously raise her arms heavenward on the injunction " Stick 'em up ! " This has been one of the British Islander's many great heritages from " God's own country "—the knowledge of the exact procedure whereby to preserve one's life when threatened by gangsters, hoboos, bootleggers and other such maggots crawling in the world's (out-

wardly most enlightened) inwardly most corrupt and fœtid cheese.

Unfortunately the law of the gun from Chicago had not yet reached the twilight jungles of Tenasserim; and Tanoy resolutely refused to play the game according to the enlightened dictum of the West. . . . My reveries were interrupted by a deafening discharge and the drone of a heavy piece of metal past my head. From the pall of white smoke which enclosed Tanoy as a cloud, I gathered this was the "shot across the bows, so to speak"—his reply to my summons to surrender. A foolish act—this challenge of a duel between the modern perfection of a high-velocity, smokeless rifle, sighted to 1200 yards, and a cloud-making destructor scarcely effective over fifty yards.

I whistled up the rest of my party, who appeared from Tanoy's rear. At their approach his friends deserted him and fled ere the net drew closer. Taken unawares, I imagine that their rifles were not primed; and before they could prepare them for slaughter our numbers impressed on them the discretion of a *sauve qui peut*.

Tanoy, crouched in the shadow of a giant bamboo, scorning flight, was thus isolated. While the Malays closed in upon him, Majid and I stepped into the open and walked him up—finger on trigger—even as one approaches a badly wounded tiger.

Well might I have known he would never consent to be taken alive. Even up till now I could not grudge him my admiration for his savage and lonely jungle spirit. . . . This was his realm; we were the intruders on his jungle solitude. We represented law and order—his bitterest enemies. Forsaken by his followers— anxious only for the safety of their own skins—he had refused the ignominy of flight. . . . He stood bloody

and unbowed, rifle still in hand ; sublimely conscious that he had not yet been taken.

Impenitent and proud. . . .

How my heart yearned to bind him to serve me : to learn from him the lore and mysteries of these sinister forests ! Never would I meet a finer hunter, a fiercer and more relentless tracker and killer. Yet it would have been more profitable to flirt with the mercenary affections of the leader of a hungry wolf-pack.

Tanoy distrusted civilisation and its fancied advantages ; even as a tiger would fight shy of the banquet of a gastronome.

In a flash he made a bid for his much-coveted freedom. As swift as the tiger's rush he lifted his rifle, and the shot aimed at me caught Mahbir Singh straight in the face. I had been watching his eyes, and caught the glimpse of action telegraphed from brain to hand. As he moved his rifle, subconsciously I stepped aside. Before I could press my trigger, the damage was done. Mahbir Singh, who had moved to screen me, dropped at my side with a gentle grunt of reproach. Tanoy, as swift as the fatal bullet, passed from the sunlight into the shadows of the forest.

Instinctively my finger curved round the trigger of my .318 (which I was carrying in preference to the .470, which would blow a hole through an elephant, and was scarcely suitable for human game). I took careful aim below his waist-line and fired. Tanoy staggered, recovered himself, and with one swift look over his shoulder plunged into the depths of the jungle and passed from sight.

Mahbir Singh lay heaped at my feet. He had travelled his last trail. As the Arab says, " This time he had followed the wrong star." Possibly he was

already exploring new hunting-grounds—the' Gurkha Elysian fields. But he had followed his last rhino, and his hunter's eyes were dimmed to the further sunlight and shadow of his beloved Malayan jungles.

We carried the poor remains into the near-by shade, and covered what Tanoy had left of his head with my handkerchief. Already the flies were swarming. . . . I despatched two men to his home to summon his relations, while the others watched by the body.

Taking Majid and one most tried tracker, I turned—possessed with a cold and relentless hatred—to see if fortune had vouchsafed us aught for the final hunting down of our human quarry. We went straight to where Tanoy had staggered to my shot and had plunged into the forest. That I had winged him I had no doubt. I had aimed between the knee and the waist, and had hoped for a flesh wound which would hamper his movements and eventually bring him to a standstill.

A cry from the leading tracker as he picked up a leaf with just one spot of blood. Enough to tell us all we wanted. My bullet had not been in vain. Where there was one tell-tale spot there must be more to lead us to our journey's end.

Tanoy's sun was setting.

The grass was waist-high beneath the great bamboos which soared skywards like gigantic organ-pipes. Harsh and unyielding, through this the trail read as an open book, where the unwilling grass had yielded to the passage of Tanoy's body. In patches the trampled blades were dyed a vivid red. This increased as we progressed; and in one place the undergrowth was all pressed down as from the weight of a human form. There were great smears of blood upon the trampled grasses.

The tracker was convinced that he was making for water. We must not give him time to lick his wounds or assuage his thirst, or, like the wounded animals that he hunted, he would recover and make good his escape. With the blood staunched and his second wind, he had the legs of any hunter in the length and breadth of Tenasserim.

The jungles were becoming increasingly familiar. We passed from the belt of dry, cruel elephant-grass into the shade of giant bamboo. A great silent world of endless dim green corridors, down which we sped, ever following the vivid trail on the soft carpet of fallen leaves. It was almost dark. The gigantic stems, interlaced far above our heads, creaked in the light evening breeze with harsh insistence.

Then I realised the familiarity of my surroundings. We were returning along our tracks of two days before ; heading for the old tin mines and the desolation of the leech swamps, beyond which lay the river—Siam—and salvation. Tanoy was following the natural inclination of a wounded animal, and making for home.

With a last desperate bid for freedom, he was taking to the mangrove swamps—the short cut to the creek wherein his sampan swayed to the rising tide of the Pakchan. A “*via dolorosa*,” reeking with quicksand, which, with his intimate knowledge of the locality, he hoped yet to turn to advantage against his less enlightened pursuers. But we had with us his equal—the loogi of Bankichong—as inveterate a poacher as he whom we followed. Had he not, night after night, used these very solitudes to smuggle nefarious goods from over the river for the delectation of the merchants of Maliwun ?

Now far ahead we glimpsed a hurrying figure, which

could be none other than Tanoy—whom we hunted—delivered into our hands. . . . No necessity now to follow the dripping, laborious trail. We were running to view.

We raced through gloomy swamps, pulled our feet out of great elephant tracks, clutched at thorns as we tripped over jungle creeper; and gradually and relentlessly shortened the distance between us and our quarry. The air was salt with the tang of the sea borne on the evening breeze. It was a race for the creek—the sampan—and Siam.

We were now but a hundred yards away, and as he glanced over his shoulder his face showed naught of fear; only exhaustion and a great bitterness—the shadow of a doubt that he had looked his last on distant Siam. A fugitive in his own realms; an apt reward for the deepest treachery.

From far ahead came the glint of sunlight on water. A tendril of the main creek where lay the coveted sampan.

He was now almost running, and for the first time I noticed that he had discarded his only loin-cloth (a possible hindrance), and had reverted to a state of stark nature. Yet round his waist was coiled the belt of slugs, and from the waist downward the left leg was caking with dried blood. . . . But for the haunting memory of poor Mahbir Singh's featureless head I might yet have given him a chance; but the horror of his final lawless act stood between me and any consideration of pity.

The sun was almost set, and the arm of the creek lay bathed in an amber glow. The evening breeze ruffled the surface into rosy wavelets, light as the snow-soft plumage of a swan. There was a brooding calm; a



Tanoy's last resting-place

peaceful Malayan dusk descending—sunset dying—as Tanoy stepped into the creek—now so nearly home.

The tracker put out a restraining hand : “ Do not follow, Takein, he will never reach the other side.” . . . We stood beside the rustling mangroves—rigid with a sense of impending tragedy. With the descent of night the mists were creeping up from the river, and the glow-worms and fire-flies gleamed in the forest’s sombre depths.

Tanoy was already nearing the farther shore ; yet he appeared to be making no further progress. Waist-deep in the sunset water, he seemed to be fighting an invisible enemy who was chaining him down.

In a flash I realised the significance of the tracker’s prophecy, “ He will never reach the other side ”—the Siamese was in the toils of a quicksand, and his moments were numbered. Subconsciously I started to his rescue, but my companion, with a wave of the hand, whispered, “ It is useless, and ’tis better so.”

We could only stand and watch his final torment.

Slowly—even as the sun died—Tanoy sank into the merciless depths of the lagoon. One could almost feel the cloying horror of the slime as it welcomed his tired body and the mangrove roots imprisoned him with their livid grey tentacles. . . . There was one long cry of horror and utter despair as the mud closed over his head ; and the glowing waters regained their unruffled calm.

Slowly the last bubble died upon the surface, and night spread its mantle over the unhappy waters of the lagoon.

* * * * *

I sat on heedless of the passage of time : mindful only of my memories of Tanoy. All the incidents of

the past few days processed vividly before my tired eyes—from our first clandestine meeting that dim, ghostly night, with the mists rising from the Pakchan, even as they were now gathering about his awful tomb. Awhile Kai-Loon murmured to me the local superstition that these very swamps were the home of the malevolent forest spirits, and that they who had transgressed the jungle laws were pulled down by chains.

Perhaps the “ Nats ” had claimed a lawful victim ; and he who had waged a merciless war against all jungle life paid the final penalty—ensnared in their relentless chains.

* * * * *

And thus, in after years—as memory casts its cloud about the spirit—an evening breeze ruffling the sunset surface of a mid-jungle swamp will always bring to mind those last few moments of anguish of Tanoy, prince of poachers.

CHAPTER VII

ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW

BY CONSTANCE R. HANDLEY

“ If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: ‘ Hold on ! ’ ”

Rudyard Kipling.

TO end any undue suspense caused by the title of this chapter, let me say immediately that it is not written in the spirit of an S.P.C.A. tract, nor yet from the controversially violent attitude taken up, some little time ago, by two well-known members of society, over the pros and cons of fox-hunting.

Indeed, all it *may* do is to show myself up in one of those excessively foolish moments of existence which we all usually keep locked away from prying eyes, hopefully praying that they will become, in so doing, lost to memory in the limbo of the past.

I *hope*, however, by this sad tale to point a moral—ghastly thought as that may be! My reason is this. Reading through the pages of this book by the light of past experience, I realise more and more clearly the depth of the gulf between those days when I first heard these tales—told and retold for my uninitiated but wildly enthusiastic benefit—and now: the gulf between the ensuing dreams of easy glory—and the awakening.

The gulf, in other words, between what many people believe to be shikar, and what it, in reality, turns out to be.

As a matter of fact, there is more description than usual in these pages of sidelights into the lives led by shikaris on their wanderings—but, as always, told from such a blithely casual point of view, it is hard to realise such descriptions as cold facts.

Everything becomes wrapped in a species of distant glamour, and one is apt to assure oneself airily (from the comfort of an armchair) that “under such circumstances” one would behave just the same. And even to feel slightly patronising of *any* feat of endurance, however great, unconsummated by the final *coup de grâce*.

As I say, for quite a long time, with only the experience of two well-organised and comfortable cold-weather shoots behind me, I always pictured myself partaking with the greatest *sang-froid* in any and all of the adventures recounted in this book. In theory (like many another) no feat was too great for my accomplishment—no trek too long. My enthusiasm carried me mentally on its crest for two years.

My memories of the “two comfortable shoots” grew into positively hair-raising tales of valour and endurance. . . . It doesn't bear dwelling on. Suffice then to say it is to all those who may in their enthusiasm look lightly on all shikar but the final killing; who think the tale not worth the telling if the quarry escape, and who in their ignorance often judge the hunter's worth accordingly, that I dedicate this tale of my own undoing.

Equally as a tribute to all great shikaris—not for the number of trophies which decorate their bungalow

walls, but for the long miles of weary wanderings in those places of the world where civilisation is still unknown—for untold hardships willingly undergone—the untiring patience needed and the too often ensuing disappointments ; all in the day's work, and left behind in the ashes of many a long-dead camp-fire.

No words of mine can fitly describe the immensity of their lightly spoken of, yet monumental, endeavours.

Let me, then, simply describe two days, out of many moons, spent on shikar with the author of this book—and their epitaph—and you shall draw your own conclusions. . . .

* * * * *

It was whilst on leave in Ceylon—living at the time like South Sea Islanders on the outskirts of a tiny fishing village buried in great groves of coco-nut palms ; a veritable “ blue lagoon ” to bathe in by day and night. The water, apart from an occasional shark and many a great lazy turtle, our own. The beach, a stretch of empty silver sand, except at sunset, when the land-crabs swarmed out in myriads.

Into the midst of this peace and contentment one day came Doole—“ Mr. Doole,” I believe, he preferred ! A strange soul, half Cingalese, half Boer—the local shikari, whose knowledge of the near-by game sanctuary was supreme.

These Yala jungles sweep right down to the coast-line of Southern Ceylon, and though it was the closed season at that time (and our guns therefore useless except for purposes of protection), amazing opportunities for photography offered themselves.

Doole had come in with “ khubr ” of two very large herds of elephant, who, as very little rain had fallen

lately, were more or less stationary in the region of some large water-holes near Palatapana.

We decided therefore to start in about twenty-four hours, having made our necessary but frugal arrangements, and go into camp for as long as the dry weather lasted.

Needless to say, the night before we left, a storm swept down from the distant hills, and torrents of rain fell. My ardour somewhat damped by this misfortune, I was really quite prepared to abandon the trip (knowing the miseries of a wet camp). Not so easily, however, could I avoid the hand of Fate; and as we rose at 5 a.m. on a steaming grey dawn, I was encouraged by the information that we'd "just have a look round" on the off chance of getting a good photo or two—and that it would be "a very easy trip."

At 6 a.m. we left in a bus: a small lorry (1916 model), whose roof came to well below eye-level and precluded all hope of seeing where one was going. Into this contraption of the devil one was literally wedged; amidst piles of bedding, petrol tins, vegetables, bottles of methylated spirit and cooking-pots—and with a lurching crash we were off. I need only say that the narrow road along which we must travel—barely the width of the car, and swimming in greasy mud and water—fell steeply away on either hand into snake-infested swamps; that our driver never dropped the speedometer under forty miles an hour, and that the entire car slid, lurched, righted itself by a miracle, and fled on its convulsive way—fifty unbelievable miles; for the reader to realise even slightly with what feelings one commenced the day.

By Hammantot (twenty miles short of our destination) we had twice run out of petrol and lost a tyre;

and there our driver, an almost naked Cingalese, told us we could go no further, and must get another conveyance. This after considerable difficulty we did. In a car, or what had once been a car—resuscitated from the depths of the bazaar, where it had lain, I am convinced, for years—the habitation of hens and stray pie dogs, its works knowing no other liquid than rain.

The ensuing journey does not bear remembrance. By twelve, tired, shaken, thirsty and hungry, we reached Tissamarama, a small jungle hamlet, where our bullock-carts were to await us. There everyone appeared to have fallen into a midday swoon—including our bullocks, who lay in the traces, their yokes in complete disarray, and refused to move.

I thought it would be nice to have something to eat or drink, and in my innocence said so ; only to be told that if we started immediately we could hardly reach Palatapana ere dark, and that *any* refreshment would be out of the question till then !

By this time the cart-drivers, two dreary forms, had been dug up from some near-by patch of gloom, and were assaulting their sleeping charges with sharp sticks and shrill cries of execration. . . . the while a light but wetting drizzle had started to fall. Only after nearly half an hour of this sort of thing, accompanied maddeningly by the oldest inhabitant's doubts (he appeared a professional Job's comforter) as to whether we would ever arrive at all that night, the *bonne bouche* was reached by the wheelers of our team—but lately resuscitated with Herculean efforts from their coma, and momentarily ignored whilst their comrades were goaded into life—suddenly turning back to front in their shafts, ere they collapsed anew to the ground amidst a rending clatter of breaking wood ;

thus managing to disorganise what was left of their ropes and harness. . . .

We finally set off on foot—closely followed by one of the carts—leaving the other to follow as soon as it could extricate itself from the general wreckage.

After a couple of hours' dust-drenched trudging, our way suddenly left the road, and plunged into apparently impenetrable jungle, and we were forced to take to the doubtful protection of the carts. Now no one who has not travelled by this method can imagine the sensation of hours spent in a strange (and often evil-smelling) enclosure formed by arched matting—the breeding-ground and lodging-place of thriving insect life—a bed of straw beneath one, and all perched hazardously on two large wooden wheels—primitively uneven and ill-fitting; the source of a continual and ear-splitting squeak; precarious, unventilated, and bone-shattering. In this we lay for another three hours, the only interruptions being once when hunger goaded me to eat two pineapples with the help of a wood chopper (my companion, apparently suffering from neither hunger nor thirst, though we had touched nothing since dawn, slept peacefully as a child), and once when our track turned into a morass, and all the bullocks faced different ways and simultaneously lay down. Whereon we found ourselves thrown into the roof of our conveyance as it slowly turned over and lay on its side.

By sunset we were still five miles from our destination and hopelessly bogged in the limitless expanse of a dry, sandy river-bed. We decided to go on foot. This we did through the twilight along a narrow track—jungle on either side—carrying our rifles, but with apparent complete disregard for anything we might

meet ; and apart from the wading of two small rivers, and the sight of a large and very new elephant track across our path, arrived safely before dark.

Seldom have I looked with such delight on any dwelling as on the four three-foot-high walls and thatched roof on poles of the little Palatapana summer-house (I refuse to call it a "bungalow"). There it stands, the centre of a big-game sanctuary ; in the heart of the jungle, an easy prey to any marauding tuskers ; open to the winds of Heaven—as I said, the walls only rise waist-high from the ground—and there is a wicket-gate! But it was home, and not even the news that earlier in the afternoon a solitary bull elephant had attacked and smashed the cart, killing the driver, on the very road we had so lately traversed, depressed me, when I saw the dim outline of two camp-beds in the corner and caught the distant smell of fried onions !

Alas! my lesson had but begun. Scarcely were we installed, when "Mr." Doole, who had preceded us, appeared, in the company of two trackers, and pointed out that, as rain had already fallen, and more was undoubtedly to come in the next forty-eight hours (thus filling all holes, and making it difficult to determine the movements of neighbouring herds), it would be wiser if we made haste to sit up that very night. In expectation of which he had prepared a machan for us over some good water half a mile or so away, and would we "hurry along there now" and install ourselves? At another time his English would have been terribly amusing. As it was . . .

Imagine thus one's feelings. No food (beyond the pineapples), or drink, since dawn. A nerve-shattering car ride, followed by a six-mile walk—three hours'

bone-shaking in the cart—and our final walk (and wade!) in. Soaked to the waist. Unbelievably tired, hungry and thirsty. No hope of a change of trousers, as the carts had not yet arrived. Yet, in twenty minutes' time we were off once more; a certain amount of hot tea, whisky, rice and onions in our insides; clutching our rifles and stumbling along silently behind Doole till our swamp was reached.

Tired as one was, any protest was made impossible by my past protestations of enthusiasm and ardour for the *greatest* hardships; and it was thus, speechlessly, that our tree was reached, and by the help of a rope I dragged my aching body skywards to find our night's resting-place—three boards perched in a fork and disguised with broken branches and leaves. And here we sat down to await the possible coming of a herd of elephant. . . .

The first half-hour, ere the moon rose, we (or rather I) were attacked, I am convinced, by the entire flying lepidoptera of the Ceylon jungles. Horned beetles dashed themselves into my face. A myriad mosquitoes buried incredibly long stings to the root in my uncovered flesh. Giant moths, flying ants, tree spiders—their name was legion—swarmed round us. Still encased in damp- and mud-saturated jodpores, both my legs went to sleep. Nor dared I move them from their cramped position, as silence had been impressed on me under pain of death!

Far away a cheetul called, soon to be answered, quite near at hand, from the gloom of the trees; and once, as the moon rose, we heard the distant squeal of an elephant. Otherwise all was quiet. Nothing came. Everything ached—or rather everything of *mine* ached—becoming, with each dragging half-hour, more and

more intolerable, till the sleep of complete exhaustion about midnight brought a happy release from twenty hours' continual (and to me apparently pointless) effort : afterwards described by my companion as a " picnic " !

Only temporary release too, one might add, as at 2 a.m. I was awakened from a species of uneasy stupor by the rain. . . .

* * * * *

At 5 a.m. a tracker came to fetch us, and we let ourselves gingerly to the ground, and set off to walk our mile homewards. A grey dawn, rain still falling, and long drifts of mist hanging over the distant jheel and pool over which we had sat. We passed silently downwind within twenty yards of a herd of elephant with calves—only to find ourselves up-wind of a large herd of buffaloes, who, getting our scent, started to look very nasty. However, we arrived safely at the bungalow, and after the most gratifying cup of tea (more so, I think, as I had hardly dared to expect it !), we peeled off our soaking clothes and made our way to a small enclosure—six feet by eight feet, I should think—its walls reaching only to the waist, where we were to bathe.

It held a very small tin bath, filled with some three inches of brick-red water—and a portable commode. In the latter a lean, but imperturbable, hen had gone to roost, who made no effort to remove herself on our arrival. Indeed, she continued her ruminations with superb indifference to her ridiculous position, watching us with one broody eye throughout our ablutions.

A further stay in Palatapana seeming useless (there was no definite assurance of any particular water-hole being visited, so much rain having fallen lately), we decided to leave once more for Tissamarama about

11 a.m. Till then we were to have a rest—or rather I was to, my companion, apparently completely fresh, being intent on going out to have a look round.

Clad in a towel, I was just preparing to stagger to my camp-bed, when a certain amount of chat started outside, and Doole appeared with the news that from the depths of the very pool over which we had sat all night an enormous crocodile had appeared. A splendid opportunity for getting a good skin—and would we “come quickly”?

Hardly believing my ears, and with one agonised glance at the camp-bed (on which, one might add, I never once lay down!), I was bidden to hurry quickly into my old clothes—regarded with horror when I suggested unpacking some dry ones—and found myself once more treading the now-familiar mile to our night’s resting(?)place.

Well, it is not for me to describe details of this simpler form of shikar; but, in short, a hundred yards from the pool we spied a very large specimen, about fifteen feet, just waddling into the water. We lay hidden for the following two hours, never seeing more than a ripple and the point of his nostril. By that time it was improbable that he would return to the bank until the cool of evening; and I was just hopefully contemplating a return to the bungalow for at least an hour’s rest ere we started off, when Doole gratuitously offered the information that two miles away was a lake simply swarming with crocodile, and “let us proceed there.”

And we did. Yes! All hope of departure abandoned, a quick decision to meet the carts somewhere en route, and we were off. No thought of breakfast. Two miles over broken ground, through short scrub and

thorny mimosa, and we found ourselves on the banks of a vast salt lake, its shadeless, grey mud banks steaming in the sun : not a vestige of any sort of life to be seen.

Some twelve miles round, we ranged the nearer shores interminably and fruitlessly—or rather they, my companions, did (myself tottering in their wake)—for another hour, and finally installed ourselves opposite a long, narrow sand-spit, running out two or three hundred yards at right angles to the shore, and separated from the mainland by a channel about ten yards wide.

Midday found us still waiting, sizzling in the sun, till a large “ muggier ” appeared at the far end of the sand-spit—and disappeared. My companion’s patience being by that time exhausted, he decided to wade the channel and lie up there for it. This we did, in some trepidation, as at each step one sank well over the ankles in mud, and the water being to my waist and his thighs, we had visions of stepping suddenly on some sleeping saurian.

The other side attained, we lay for the rest of the day under a blazing sky, scorched by a hot, salt wind filled with particles of sand. Nor set eyes on a single crocodile—our fœtid, mud-soaked clothing steaming in the heat, and nostrils filled with the heavy odour of putrefaction inseparable from these swamps.

It was not till sunset, when we were just contemplating a return to the mainland and a search for the carts, that the cataclysm occurred. Quite suddenly, and on all sides, on to bank and sand-spit, from reeds and water alike, literally scores of crocodile emerged. We shot one enormous one, but he writhed into the water, and there was no time to wait for him to rise again. We had ten yards of wading to do through

what now turned out to be mugger-infested water ; and darkness was rapidly creeping down on us.

There is no space here to tell in detail of the end of that "glorious" day. Sufficient to say that in my efforts at a quick crossing of the creek I lost both shoes in the mud ; and, in the ensuing laborious hour's search for the carts, lost to all but the hideous fatigue, hunger, and discomfort of the past forty-odd hours, gave my opinions of such a life, unvarnished, and from the depths of my heart !

The last hours of that journey, ere we camped for the night, were passed by myself in silence, and by my companion in the administration of a lecture in which "conceit, self-satisfaction, lack of guts and premature boasting" (the bitterest pill) were hurled at my head.

Later still, curled up in the straw of a stationary cart, the smell of my mud-soaked clothes begging all description, I realised sadly the truth of much he had said. . . .

* * * * *

Since then much water has flowed under the bridge, and the author and I have seen many a "hunter's moon" together in distant jungles, and known the satisfaction of many a successful stalk. Nevertheless, the tale of those two days in which nothing was shot is still the most perfect example of shikar I can give to those in whose expectations brightly figure such things as comfortable tents, camp-fires, an hour in a machan, and the ensuing decease of a twelve-foot tiger !

As for listening to the tale of those enthusiasts who go into raptures over "the joys of shikar," their sole experience proving to be that of a Christmas shoot,

rosy-hued from countless beers and sloe gins ; a camp of concentrated efficiency ; a saunter forth, one of a large party, and, from a comfortable howdah a “ pot ” at a “ damned fine tiger ” . . . well, I simply cannot bear it!

* * * * *

Epitaph.—Not content with this already cruel tale of my undoing, the author bids me say that the days I mention *were* a picnic ; and that even up to date I have never sampled any “ intense ” shikar !

CHAPTER VIII

THE GREAT BLUE HILLS OF RANGA

“ See! the painted peace of the skies,
Where the rose-hued opal of sunset lies.
Hear the passionate Koel calling
From coral-trees, when the dusk is falling. . . .
Washed in the light of a clear fierce sun,—
Heart, my heart, the journey is done.”

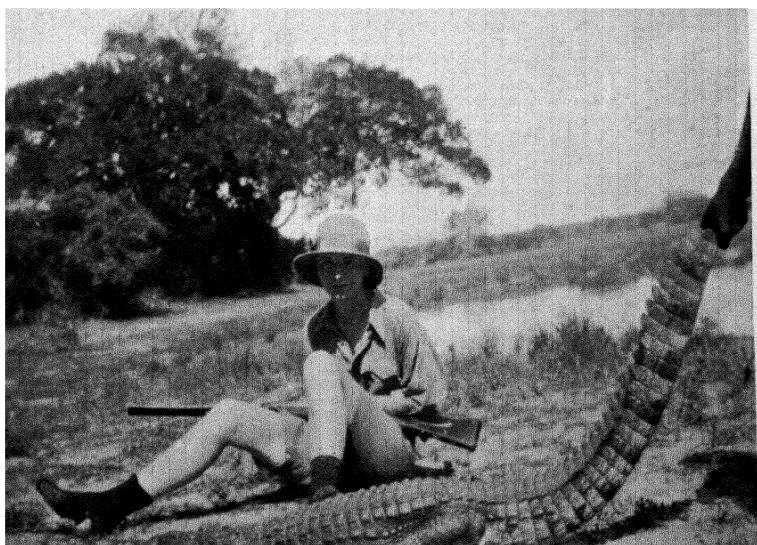
Laurence Hope.

I SAW them first in the chastity of a hot-weather dawn. Unable to sleep in the suffocation of my luxurious tent—one of many serried lines in this canvas caravanserai—(sleeping in the open was as great a crime as violating the sanctity of the white line separating the rams from the sheep, on the slumber deck of a mid-Indian ocean liner), I rose and passed through the hushed bazaars, threading my way through a veritable city of dreadful night, and took the track leading to the upper solitudes of sacred Chamundi.

Far below, Mysore lay like a great black hand, with fingers outstretched towards the east, where the jungles appeared to encroach more closely on the sleeping city. Orange points of light, like myriad glow-worms, stabbed the darkness, where the never-extinguished lamp burnt before some Hindu shrine—otherwise the last light in courtyard and slum had long been extinguished, and master and slave tossed alike



The road to the great blue hills



One point of view

in palace and mahalla and relaxed limbs tortured by the furnace of the day.

The blue gum leaves surged faintly to the first ruffle of the eastern wind, and the flags above a near-by shrine filled to welcome the first stirring of the night-imprisoned air. From below rose the cries of a populace set free from the still horrors of a brazen night.

A gradual paling of the eastern sky—grey to primrose—to copper and molten gold. The light of dawn upon the mountains. Far across a foreground still wrapped in morning mists, high above the dispersing shadows, clear cut against the amber sky, rose the great range of the mystic god Ranga.

And so I saw it at the waking of the dawn, and for ever after—

“A voice, as bad as Conscience, rang interminable changes
 On one everlasting Whisper day and night repeated—so :
 ‘Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the
 Ranges—
 Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you.
 Go!’”

The god Ranga spoke from his jungle Parnassus, and wove his spell upon me from the rustling of that first empyrean sunrise.

I descended to the grim realities of my communal sleeping-ground, and ere dawn had touched the foolish faces of my stable companions I was deep in the pages of Sanderson, who alone had sung the beauties of this jungle paradise. His description is cold and savours of the gazetteer :—

“The Billiga Rungun hills consist of three main parallel ranges due north and south, with various offshoots. The Cauvery River flows round their northern end, whilst they are separated from the

Neilgherry hills at their southern extremity by a gap of about twenty miles of level country. They are about thirty miles in length from north to south, and ten in width. . . . The hills are practically unknown to Europeans. . . . The only inhabitants are a few Sholagas—a wild, uncivilised, but inoffensive race. The Mysore range is lower than the ranges further east. Towards the northern end, in the Yelandoor taluk, is a precipitous mass of granite, facing westwards, named the 'Billikul' or 'Billigiri' (white rock); and from this the whole range is geographically designated.

“ Billi means white in Canarese, and kul, a rock or stone. Giri is Sanscrit for mountain, and the union of a Canarese and Sanscrit word is unnatural. The hills are generally termed 'Shwetadri' by Brahmins, which is admissible as pure Sanscrit, and means 'white mountain.' Ranga is the name of a god.”

Further investigation evinced the knowledge that my newly-found jungle paradise embraced six shooting-blocks, of which only two were at all accessible from the Mysore side. The others were vaguely scattered over the map of North Coimbatore and were roadless, and practicable only to a well-organised expedition. The boundaries of Block Six, for instance, were given as :—north, the Palar River; east, the Cauvery River, and south, the Bhavani River; whilst the western boundary was lost in Mysorean infinity. A glance at a rough sketch of these jungle labyrinths showed such hamlets as Jangamangalam, Indigamatham, Oodara-pooram and Pachaipalamalai, where I felt sure supplies, and the ordinary amenities of a jungle shoot, were as unheard-of as the Dravidian inhabitants were foreign to any nuance of civilisation.

I longed to lose myself on some organised expedition in these aboriginal wilds—the real realms of the original Dravidian inhabitant of India, driven into this tangle of forest and mountain before the invading Aryan host. Yet time—the limitation of leave, the great Army nuisance—set a limit to one's schemes, and I had perforce to concentrate on the two most accessible blocks.

Both were the happy hunting-grounds of elephant and bison, which roamed these forests in vast herds; yet both had been reserved many moons ago. My disappointment was intense, as my chances of ever exploring the mystic ranges, seen at dawn, seemed ever more remote.

My sole anodyne—the only alternative—was the reckless enjoyment of the Mysore birthday week, which was then at its very zenith, and in which up to date I had been a lukewarm participant. Some years before, "weeks" (the shibboleth of the Anglo-Indian amusement-hunter) had ceased to weave their spell about me. I had known too many weeks lengthen into fortnights, and connect up with other weeks into one long, monotonous winter. One met the same people, talked the same dreary professional jargon, sexually exacerbated the same jaded women, and constantly deluded oneself that this was the London season *à l'Orient*—*sans* dress—*sans* atmosphere—*sans* any form of intelligent stimulation, or even Western amenities. Substituted Stiffles and Maidens for the Berkeley, and the Loyal Pumpshire brass band for Taglioni's Tziganes.

Mysore was a mere repetition.

Kashmir, the Punjab, Delhi, Lucknow, and many others were the breeding-grounds of this annual social abortion. It mattered little against what beauty of

background, and in what setting of historical memories, the week was germinated; the immediate horizon remained always the same.

Marquees and "shamianas" viewed normally through the transparency of a champagne tumbler; dust—dreary "maidans" of two hundred yards by three hundred of sun-dried polo-ground—dust; white-railed paddocks and race-courses—and more dust; more rosy reflections transfluent in still more tumblers, followed by dances and receptions and still more liquid meditations.

The infliction of endless scandalous discussions of our fellow-sufferers, anecdotes of polo and races of the last twenty years, of drunks, guest-nights and "beat-ups" (mutual visitations of the militarised herd for the purpose of liquid satiation); alcoholic feats of prowess, and the inevitable rounds of "smutty" stories and limericks.

Scarcely a breath about shikar—the "week lizard" is notoriously no shikari. Shikar spelt isolation from these organised sex encounters. Never a thought of all the beauty and magic beyond the threshold of the tent door.

Open the "shamiana" door, step from out the champagne and sweat-drenched atmosphere into the dewy perfection of a Mysore night. Fill your lungs with the warm, incensed beauty of pagan starlight. Hear the heart-wrenching call of temple and bazaar.

Beyond the city, the jungle holds out beseeching hands, eager to explain the mysticism and æons-old culture of the great south lands, vast and solitary in their isolation from India's weeks and their devotees. All Dravidian India, drenched in mystery, lies, a pearl at their feet; yet they turn away to the unholy comfort

of a nine-hole golf course of evil, sunburnt mud, and the inevitable lure of a scrofulous gymkhana club.

The inherited instinct of planting a middle-class, mediocre West in the midst of the flaming beauty of the East has proved too strong. Besides, who cares?—in fact, it strengthens the Englishman's middle-class homing instincts, and deadens even his fundamental perceptions of Indian life and social conditions. This lack of desire for aught but the immediate amenities of cantonment life will always constitute the flaming sword, preventing a sympathetic understanding between East and West.

Why transform the gorgeous East into a provincialised West?

Winston Churchill, moralising on his early life, writes of G. W. Steevens' criticism of his first articles: "Your philosophic reflections, often acute and sometimes true, are too devilish frequent. Those who want such reflections can often supply them without assistance." Too true—yet the temptation lies strong within me.

Every night was a gala night, and the palace halls sparkled with jewels, flushed faces, and much wit. It was so decreed that we never sat next to the same person twice—with the object of mingling the sexes and giving everyone a sporting chance. In my case this was crucifixion in the first degree, and I awaited the nocturnal meal with feelings verging on social panic. Being one of the junior members of the house-party, I was not fortunate enough to be apportioned a female nightly, and on this night of nights, nostalgia for the forests strong within me, I found myself miraculously sandwiched between two men.

I glanced at my right-hand companion—the dislike

was mutual. My left-hand neighbour looked much more like it. He had the hard-bitten look of the hunter of big game rather than the lizard of "weeks." I noticed he lacked two fingers of one hand, and looked sympathetic. I remarked tentatively upon the beauty of the dawn from Chamundi, then crouched back awaiting the usual glare of blank astonishment, as if I had asked some unanswerable conundrum.

His eyes flashed immediate understanding, and we opened wide our arms in sympathetic delight. My much-coveted mountains had been his home for the last twenty years, and we discussed their every light and shade, to the open disgust of our table-companions, who found no amusement in the fact that in re-creating the atmosphere of his beloved mountains he bared his arms to the elbow.

There were twenty years between us, but a love of the jungles bound us in a close affinity the next few days. We shared a mutual distrust of race-courses, and when the chief task of the day was safely accomplished—the parking of his singularly attractive daughter within the paddock, and we saw her successfully accosted and thus disposed of until dark—we used to wander far and wide for views of the great jungle ranges.

The final day approached, and the afternoon was devoted to a communal picnic (more or less compulsory) amidst the glories of Tippoo Sultan's summer palace at Seringapatam. The immediate horizon remained always the same. Across a polished table set with every luxury (both solid and liquid) we faced the same grim features, were tortured with the same grim inanities—and ever the warm sunlight caressed the age-worn walls, witnesses of bygone centuries of

beauty and horror, the loves and hatreds of Hyder Ali and Tippoo—the man-tigers of Mysore.

I climbed the minstrels' gallery by steps hollowed by the tread of innumerable naked feet, and gazed down upon the tableau "Anglo-India relaxes." Thus must Tippoo have brooded in sinister seclusion, and watched the self-same scenes, unchanged through the ages. . . . What cared they for the romantic antiquity or the exquisite beauty of this sun-drenched bower?

In these early days, I first experienced the truth of the Sitwellian reflection—of "the extent and diversity of the rancorous hatred which the stupid in England (more so Anglo-India) bear toward all manifestations of beauty."

The picnic spelt for the majority merely a progressive step in the sexual approach. . . . When sex deserted them, surely, suicide loomed black on their social horizon.

* * * * *

We drew clear of the amatory crocodile of cars on our homeward way, and as the day was dying, climbed the sacred way of Chamundi—for a farewell to the great hills.

A violent depth of dusk enshrouded the city as one by one the friendly lights came out, and a chain of brilliants, like the vertebræ of some giant serpent, spiralled up the hill to our feet. (Mysore is brilliantly electrified from the distant Cauvery falls.)

Sunset outrivalled dawn.

Beyond the serrated massif of the western Ghats the daylight died in orange glory. Nearer to the eye, the Coorg hills, bereft of light, glowed like distant opals fast deepening into night. Far south, the Nilgiris (the great blue hills) lay lapped in violet haze.

But my eye wandered east across the darkening glory of fields and lakes, small opalescent pools wherein the last light lay drowning, over temple and hamlet whence spiralled the smoke of evening fires, over mile upon mile of shadowed forests—up to the darkening solitudes of the great hills and valleys of Ranga.

The stars came out, and the city below scintillated—a canopy of diamonds.

* * * * *

Time will pass and memory fade, “but I want to remember it, every shade of it, every scent, every star.”

* * * * *

That night I vowed, come monsoon or drought, licence or no licence, I would visit my jungle Mecca this very year.

* * * * *

My only chance of longish leave was at the height of the monsoon which sweeps the Mysore plateau from the south-west from June onwards to September. The jungles, tortured by the brazen hot-weather months, take on a new lease of life, and soon the parched grass and undergrowth have grown to well above man's head. The chance of ever seeing game in these dank, gloomy jungles is remote, and the elephant and bison, to avoid the torture of leeches, flies, and other creeping and flying pests, migrate to the small jungle-clad sholas on the open hillsides, which are lashed with the full fury of the monsoon.

The deeper valleys are choked with evergreen jungles, and the local aborigines—the Sholagas—call these damp solitudes the “Mulay Kardoo,” or great rain forest. These are the depths I decided to penetrate at the height of the monsoon, determined to get

a first-hand knowledge of the jungles I hoped to shoot some subsequent hot weather.

* * * * *

The whole world dripped with moisture as I climbed into my bullock cart at Nanjangud, and, with a bow to the Devadasis who lived in the shadow of the glittering temples, lurched upon my eighteen-mile journey by night to Chamrajnagar—the last link with civilisation.

In a raw and chilly dawn I climbed from my cart on to a horse, and turned my eyes unto the hills. . . . On such a landscape Noah's eyes must have lingered on sacred Ararat. Here was no vision of a dove—only a few bedraggled, protesting crows. The great range was wrapped in a blanket of mist, and never vouchsafed me even a peep beneath her veil. I negotiated the short cut from Punjur up to the first plateau on foot, circumventing several embryo Niagaras. Once on the plateau I trotted many hundreds of miles (!), wrapped in mist, until the approach of night (I had not seen the sun all day) brought me to Bedaguli, my host's coffee estate.

Here was a bright welcome, and with tea before a log fire I soon forgot the damp misery of that phantom ride through the mist. The firelight gleamed on horn and antler, and lit up the profusion of tiger and leopard skins carpeting the floor. Each and every one a jungle memory. I lay that night in bed and watched the firelight play with the mask of a massive bull bison on the distant wall. At last I was in the moist bosom of my much-coveted hills—Mecca attained.

During a break in the drizzle next day we climbed six hundred feet to the upper, hot-weather bungalow, and gazed westward, across an ocean of mist and

clouds, towards far-distant Chamundi. Now and again we peered through a rift, as into a deep sea pool, and glimpsed the deep valleys of the great rain-forests. One of these had been for ever in my memory—Sanderson called it the Keddah gorge; but the Sholagas named it the silent valley of “Dodda Gouda Parlia.” I had a momentary glimpse of it this day; sufficient to whet my appetite for a closer look on the morrow.

It dawned, with all the sparkling clarity of a Thames fog! I left the track and struck off almost due west, towards the head of the great gorge which dropped almost precipitously to the plains. Gradually I left the clouds behind, and sank through a heavy grey pall of mist into the very bowels of the earth. It might have been literally a *descensus Averni*.

No sound but the incessant dripping of the trees and the muffled, far-off roar of a rain-fed torrent—the distant Styx.

Sanderson's description of this great lonely valley needs no embellishment:—

“This deep, forest-encumbered valley is a tract of great interest; and there are many places which I have penetrated where, I believe, other European foot never trod. Wild swamps there are where the strangest forms of vegetation are seen, some found nowhere else on the hills. The whole neighbourhood has a weird character. Aged trees of huge dimensions, whose ponderous arms are clad with grey moss and ferns far out to their points; tough, gnarled, leafless creepers thick as a child's body, growing from one root, whither they mount the tall trees around, and thence spread like the arms of a cuttle-fish in every direction, curled round some trunks, clearing

long spahs in places and often extending for three hundred yards without varying much in thickness—make some of the chief features of the woods in these deep valleys. Few flowers are found; the whole is a damp, gloomy, hoary forest, sacred as it were to the first mysteries of Nature. Game—even elephant and bison—are seldom seen here; the dense foliage overhead prevents grass growing underneath, so there is nothing for them to eat; but they form safe retreats for animals in their neighbourhood when the jungles are burning during the hot weather.”

Step by step we penetrated the mysteries of the gorge. The rank lemon-grass towered eighteen feet above our heads, and we were drenched from crown to sole. The stream, which from a distance had sounded a torrent, passed upon its way, a grey, sluggish tide. We had reached the uttermost depths of the gorge, and paused to take our bearings before probing its latent mystery.

We followed the banks of this stream, passing from vista to vista of the most wondrous tropical profusion. The valley lay like a lost forest Atlantis, and might have slept thus from the earliest Carboniferous age through the centuries of man’s evolution—ageless and changeless.

We followed the windings of the stream, mile upon mile, from the profusion of tree ferns and evergreen jungle to the upper bamboo belt. Here there were signs of elephant and a regular track leading to the higher jungles. In this bamboo we discovered the old site of one of Sanderson’s stockades; known to the Sholagas as “Arnay bungala”—the elephant house. Here lay the grass-grown trench which surrounded the stockade, and the two main posts of the stockade

gate—massive hewn tree-trunks forked to 'take the beam supporting the gate. I had seen the like in the great elephant keddah stockade in Orissa and recognised them at once, though they would have passed the notice of the untutored eye.

We gained the plateau by a small nala at the head of the main gorge, and dragged our dripping and exhausted bodies back to the bright comfort of the Bedaguli fireside.

A detailed description of my wanderings would be tedious, as day after day I returned wet through, having heard naught for twelve hours but the incessant drip, drip of the Mulay Kardoo, and seen no further than ten yards in the enveloping mist.

* * * * *

One day dawned brighter than its fellows. The sun came wanly forth, like some pale convalescent, and rolled the mist away from hill and valley. The jungles sparkled with newly-awakened life and sang for joy.

I was away by dawn for Toombi Betta—which they said was the home of elephant. I had with me two of the finest trackers on the hills—Ranga and Chic (or the little) Sidda—both jungle Sholagas who had never spent one day outside the forests. There were several green adders across our track—sudden death—with heart-shaped heads and evil, green bodies. We found fresh elephant tracks through the shoulder-high grass—sweet-scented as a lemon grove. They were moving somewhere ahead of us in single file (the normal formation), and we could form no idea of the size of the herd, nor of any individual tusker. The trail was obvious, and we set off in pursuit, with occasional halts to listen for sounds ahead. They followed the hill-tops, and

we ran out of the long grass into delightful jungle, waist-high.

Soon we heard the trumpeting of the herd ahead, and also the unmistakable sound of elephant on the trail behind us. We were between two herds. . . . I shivered with excitement—this was my virgin encounter with the king of the jungles.

Suddenly two vast grey shapes flitted across a vista of bamboos, some hundred feet above where we were standing. I lost all sense of discretion, and ran to view, only to be frustrated by a cluster of rocks which rose to the plateau above our heads. Chic Sidda clicked his tongue and pulled my sleeve. . . . Standing out above the rocks, half covered in ferns, were what I took to be three large grey boulders.

They were the backs of three wild elephant.

The wind was favourable, and they were busy grazing. We worked up to within six feet below them, and by standing on tip-toe my eyes came on a level with their feet—and only eight yards away. I had my first clear, uninterrupted close-up of the jungle tusker.

Slowly two turned away till out of sight; the right-hand one—a well-ivoried tusker—continued to tear up ferns by the roots and thrust them into his cavernous jaws. I felt that to linger much longer within actual range of his trunk was playing too closely with fire. I had always read that one could freeze motionless within ten yards of the average tusker and not be spotted, so undeveloped is their sense of vision.

Why not test this possible fallacy at eight yards? I opened my camera, and rose from the ankles upwards—a mid-jungle Ariel. With eyes fixed rigidly on the great shape at my very elbow, regardless of focus or exposure, I snapped the trigger; nor dared I take

more than the most cursory glance as I reeled off number after number, in the endeavour to get another film into place.

Slowly he turned his head towards me, and I gazed the jungle monarch straight between the eyes. . . . I stood as though turned to stone. Surely the change in the outline of the landscape could not fail to attract his attention. . . . We stood thus for several hours—in reality as many seconds—then he turned away and continued to tear up grass, with which he thatched his back, as protection against the flies. I drew a bead on his brain, and in imagination pressed the trigger. I decided to give no errant puff of wind the opportunity to prove his acute sense of smell. We left him undisturbed and clambered back to safety below.

On our homeward way, lured from the track by a honey-bird, we were led straight to a distant tree. While the Sholagas staved in one side of the trunk with their axes, she sat and watched us from a low branch. Ranga inserted a hand and brought it out swarming with small honey-bees. He scraped it clean and thrust it in once again up to the elbow. This time he withdrew it covered to the elbow in bees, clasping great cones of golden honey. They offered me some, separated from the cone, placed on jungle leaves; but one sickly mouthful quenched all further desire. . . . They devoured the lot on the spot.

That evening, profiting by the break in the rains, we set our faces for the hills. As we stepped from the forest on to the open hillside, we passed a great pile of freshly-cut grass. What I had taken for mere jungle cuttings was a "hundi mani," or grass house built by the wild sow preparatory to having a litter.

She was not at home this day, otherwise she would most undoubtedly have charged out to investigate the intrusion.

Clear of the great forests, the Billiga Runguns stretched away, rising gently to the distant skyline : league upon league of undulating, grassy hillside—the valleys filled with dense evergreen sholas, the refuge of sambhur during the heat of the day. These sholas nestled in the hollows even as the shadows of passing clouds.

Far away up the distant slopes a small cloud of vultures wheeled incessantly above a fold in the ground. Jungle lore had taught me never to ignore the gathering of the scavengers, and in the hopes of a recent kill I deflected the trackers to investigate. They seemed reluctant to turn aside, but nevertheless followed me to a vantage point whence we got an uninterrupted view of the distant suspected kill. I searched the hillside with my glasses, which showed naught but a tiny pool from which a host of vultures were slaking their thirst. This was the reason for their gathering, and explained the reluctance of the trackers to turn aside. How typically Dravidian! Rather than trouble to explain by signs, they had allowed me to follow my delusion to this disappointing conclusion.

Passing through several silent green sholas, we reached the final crest of the highest range of the great hills of Ranga. The dawn and sunset hills I had seen from distant Chamundi. Again the vision stretched still further east to ranges of hills blue with the haze of infinite distance. Looking south, my eye traversed mile upon mile of the haunts of elephant and bison, over Minchinguli, across the great malaria-

haunted Moyar dip, to range upon range of deepest forest, culminating in the final peaks of the Nilgiris—the great blue hills.

West lay the sanctuaries of the Chamrajnagar Reserve, jealously guarded by the Maharaja against all intruders. Beyond this the tableland of Mysore,—spread out like a map—the country beloved of Sanderson—with the riband of white road, tree-fringed, winding its weary way through Nanjangud to the smoke-blurred city of Mysore, nestling in the shadow of sacred Chamundi.

On the farthest western horizon, full a hundred miles away, shimmered the gaunt mountain silences of Coorg, and the lonely Wynaad.

A scene to fire the imagination of the meanest observer; but to a keen hunter a land flowing with the milk and honey of adventure, and every hunting ecstasy—a sylvan Canaan—"the hills that the hunters love, where the hearts of the hunters stay."

A sudden squall blew up from the south-west and drove us into the lee of a large rock, named Gertsey Kulloo. It soon passed away, and the sun shone all the brighter in a turquoise sky; but while we were enveloped in the cold blanket of cloud, time might have gone back two years, to when I was lost on Scawfell, groping for the cold descent into Deep Ghyll and the Professor's Chimney.

To-day I learn a few of the surrounding peaks and prominent features. How dear these names were to me later when I grew to know the hills by heart! . . . Nelle-Kathere-Hatte, Katari-Betta, Devera-Kerri, Siddal-Kul-Betta (the lightning rock) and Mara-Kunave (the elephant crossing).

I christened Gertsey Kulloo "the little rock of

dancing," as, when first we emerged from its kindly shelter, the whole landscape was sparkling in the dew of a recent squall, and we climbed the rock and danced a measure in sheer exhilaration of our *bien-être*.

On our homeward way we passed at sunset through the Budega village of Monqui. The Budegas are the cattle-owners of the hills, and build their kraals on the open hillside.

The long day's work completed, a young girl had let fall her only garment—a coarse white blanket—and was stretching her arms to the departing day. A figure of infinite beauty and grace. . . . A Dravidian Astarte invoking the dying sun.

The mail runners—two aborigines, naked but for an attenuated trunk hose—jangled in by torchlight. They carried the mail-bag for Bedaguli (called the "tappal"), slung on a bamboo across their shoulders. The leading man carried a torch, and the bamboo was festooned with bells to ward off mischievous tiger.

Even as the mists gathered about the little Bedaguli hut as night descended, so the war clouds were gathering in Western Europe, to culminate in the world-wide conflagration, lit by the spark of Serajevo.

The 4th of August—when England, to avoid national extinction, identified herself with the madness which tore the soul out of Europe for four hideous years—passed peacefully for us; but full of jungle incident.

Theo Bailward had joined me for a few days from the Regiment, intent on shooting a bull bison; for which he had got a special licence. There was a definite break in the rains, the ground was perfect for stalking, and that morning Ranga had found the tracks of a solitary bull. We had decided that if he raised

the licence and found the necessary tracks we would toss for first shot. . . . We tossed—and I lost.

My disappointment being acute, I decided to plough my usual lonely furrow, and take my diurnal stroll. The moral of this bitter tale—a story with no thrilling conclusion—is that on shikar no words ring truer than the Kiplingism that “he travels the fastest who travels alone.”

Soon after dawn a Sholaga brought in news that a big tiger had killed near Monqui. I offered to go and investigate while B., having won the toss, departed after his record bison. We arranged to meet at Monqui by sunset, and if the khubr was good, to sit up over the kill till an hour after dark.

I repaired to the scene of the crime, and was shown the decomposed remains of at least a three-days-old kill. Fortune's face was not wreathed with smiles for me this day. I continued my gloomy way, momentarily anticipating the distant shot announcing the demise of B.'s record bull.

My reflections were suddenly arrested by a great snail-track across the footpath which I was following. In a flash the trackers were on their knees beside it, and from it Panda picked up some bristles, which might have fallen out of an ordinary clothes-brush. I was still new to jungle ways, and what should have read as an open book was to me naught but a riddle.

This track—as of the dragging of some heavy body—continued towards the edge of a near-by shola. Suddenly daylight came to me. It was the fresh drag of a kill—the very tiger we were after. This drag was as fresh as the morning dew, or even fresher, as the tracks lay across the morning cobwebs; and he must have passed by just a few moments before.

The pug-marks of tiger either side of the drag were now unmistakable, and here was a small pool of undried blood. The trackers inclined their heads in the direction of the drag ; so, cocking both hammers of my .470, and with finger titillating the trigger, I turned to follow the trail. Literally my heart was in close proximity to my uvula, and every pulse was beating a tarantella.

Step by step we followed the drag to the edge of the shola, into which we penetrated, passing from full sunlight to shadow. All was as quiet as the nave of some dim cathedral. Here he had rested awhile, and laid the kill to one side in a dense thicket. There were several pools of blood, as yet unfiled, and a form in the dust of the track where the slayer had lain and rested. From this the Sholagas picked up several tiger hairs.

How far away had he dragged the kill, and was he at this very moment crouched within a few yards, eyeing our every movement ? These and many other equally gloomy reflections passed through my mind ere we continued along the nightmare track.

The drag turned a corner and passed from sight. Here I listened a while, every sense taut with fear—this was my first experience afoot with a hungry tiger—and then peered round the angle of a cluster of gigantic tree-ferns. I remember noticing several leeches athwart my thighs, and wondering whether they would find their unholy way through to my flesh.

A fresh shadowed aisle of shola opened up ahead, and I thought I heard the buzz of flies and insects.

Thirty yards ahead—thirty years of my life—we found the kill tucked away into a thicket, to one side of the track. The blood was still oozing from the

hindquarters, which were freshly eaten (enough to satisfy his immediate hunger).

I have never again, in all my jungle wanderings, come across a similar kill—a jungle boar. He far outweighed his tusk measurements, which were round about 28 inches. A porcine gourmand, who for years had lived on “stolen sweet stuffs, luscious juices,” and must for years have ravished the neighbouring fields. He had put up no fight, and had died from the fang marks in his throat—and fright. He must have weighed well over 200 pounds, and testified to the strength of his slayer, who had dragged him unaided nearly six hundred yards.

The tracks of the tiger led away into the thickest part of the shola—a network of evergreen jungle and barbed tree-ferns. He had probably made for a neighbouring stream, and would lie up and digest his juicy repast. There was little doubt but that he would return with the evening shadows, as pig was not on the normal carnivorous menu.

I selected an adjacent tree, and noiselessly improved the seating accommodation on a suitable branch. I thought I had a sitter, and in my excitement had completely forgotten the existence of B., who was to join me before sunset.

The thought of someone sharing my secret was appalling. Nevertheless at two hours to sunset I met him at the Monqui cattle kraals and told him the tale. With the true Anglo-Saxon spirit of sportsmanship, carried as usual to the point of unselfish lunacy, we tossed once again for first shot. Again I lost.

With every degree of stealth we approached the kill, which was by now crawling with maggots, and climbed into the tree-top, where we sat perched like two gigantic

crows. The sun set over the jungles, and we awaited the tiger's return with mixed feelings. I refused to be deprived a second time of any active part in the day's excitement, and passive though I might appear for the nonce, I had every intention of shooting almost simultaneously with B.

Night descended, and an hour later we also descended, aching in every joint, and quite dead from the waist downwards. The tiger never eventuated. Personally I was not disappointed, and had learnt one bitter lesson—not to shoot tiger in company, even the company of one's greatest friend.

Two days later the anticipated telegram arrived. A Cavalry Division was mobilising from India, and we were recalled instantly to the Regiment.

As we sat our last evening in the quiet glow of the Bedaguli firelight, the flicker of flame caressing the silent trophies on the walls, it was difficult to people one's imagination with the horror of the Western nations battling for very existence. How little we realised—fortunately, perhaps—how soon we were all to be enmeshed in the self-same net; and how in one's saner moments of reflection (rarer than fine gold), in the bitter years of intense boredom and extreme fear to come, memories of the peace of these silent hills would buoy one up with encouragement to strive a little longer! . . .

Two of us three, that quiet night, had had their last stalk, and before the year was out had "followed the wrong star." . . . But perhaps we who are left behind have not even the comfort of a false star to light our feet the way they went. . . .

* * * *

We left at dawn for Chamrajnagar, and the carts to

Nanjangud. F. came with us to the top of the short cut, and waved farewell ere the mists hid him from our sight. . . .

I never saw him again.

* * * * *

Three lean war years passed, as wearily as three incarnations ; until providence—in the guise of some portions of Turkish shrapnel—released me temporarily from a desert purgatory. Not for us was the healing anodyne of leave in the intense civilisation of England. Nor did I covet the Western fleshpots.

My eyes, strained constantly out of focus with searching the desert's dusty face, craved respite ; and my one longing was to get lost in the infinite peace of the great green hills, and hear the murmur once again of running water, and know the heaven of a full night's sleep, untroubled with rumours of sudden death.

Never shall I forget Nature's green unfolding as the train climbed the Western Ghats—an infinite panorama of emerald paddy-fields, asheen with the dew of a passing shower, and the tinkle of the wayside rills as they fell in small cascades to the valley below.

After my convalescence I applied for a month's leave, and raised heaven and earth to procure one or other of the two good blocks. Poor F. lay at peace betwixt the Tigris and Euphrates ; but his successor—who had reserved Block Three for the current year—took me in on his licence, which allowed for two guns.

My dreams were on the road to realisation, and my eyes gladdened one day by the receipt of the necessary licence—to wander at will for a whole thirty days in the Gutialattur Reserve Forest—over 300 square miles of well-watered game sanctuary—the happy hunting-ground of elephant and bison, sambhur, cheetul and

all the carnivora. Three hundred square miles of jungle—mine from dawn until dusk—and throughout the long, velvet, starlight nights.

I should see a whole moon rise and wane, and pass across the face of the great sambhur paradises; and some nights I would shelter from her light in the sombre depths of the great bison glades. . . .

The licence was a lyric in itself: I was restrained from taking the lives of “bee-eaters, woodpeckers, Nilgiri laughing thrushes, ground babblers and pippits”—to say nothing of respecting the integrity of Malabar squirrels, warblers and red robins.

* * * * *

Once again I peered from out the doubtful comfort of my grass-strewn bullock cart at dawn, flushing the highest range of the great hills of Ranga.

There was no friendly smoke rising from the Bedaguli bungalow as I passed. Poor F. ! I felt his presence at every turn of the track, and every shadow cast his spirit across the road.

A hut had been built for me of lemon-grass, and others for the cook-house, servants and trackers. It lay in the shelter of a small shola in the lee of Baidanai-cubetta—one of the peaks of the main range. A small mountain stream ran close at hand, and I had to just dip my glass into this for pure crystal water. A hundred yards south of camp the ground dropped steeply in a tangle of undergrowth and small trees to Minchinguli—the great bison valley of the Billiga Runguns, unrivalled throughout the whole of Mysore.

I had with me three trackers—all Sholagas (the local tribe), Kathar and his son Ranga, and Chic Sidda: all three renowned throughout the hills as fearless professional hunters; an unimposing collection of

scarecrows of the poorest physique, but completely tireless in their own surroundings. I have known them follow a trail continuously for twelve hours without rest or sustenance of any sort ; while I lay exhausted on the ground, they would be nosing round for clues like a pack of terriers. Occasionally, if I called a regular midday halt of several hours, they would dispose themselves for a big meal of one " pan " leaf and a betel nut, which they carried in minute snuff-boxes.

Take them on to a high-road, and one could outwalk them every time. But I was no match for them in their native haunts and marvelled at their magnificent powers of endurance.

Before the sun rose to disperse the morning chills they were enveloped in the strangest collection of rags : old discarded khaki shirts and shorts, belonging to bygone masters—but more often in the soiled dhoti, so dirty as to be quite beige, and unrecognisable from khaki.

The hair was worn in a chignon, and was the natural habitat of creeping things innumerable. Once the sun was up and the jungles aglow, they discarded their extra wardrobe, with the exception of the dhoti, which they coiled into a small loin-cloth, and thus equipped settled down to the serious business of professional trackers. As such they were quite unequalled.

I will not importune my readers with the repetition of countless bison hunts—one very much like another—the kill in each case the culmination of superlative tracking ; but take just one typical day of days—my first big solitary bull.

There are normally two methods of hunting bison. One is the monotonous still-hunting in jungles whose

inhabitants are not versed in tracking. There are few more monotonous pursuits than wandering hour after hour, as silently as possible, in the hope of coming across a shootable bull, grazing or lying up in dense cover in the heat of the day.

I have wandered thus day after day in Orissa (where the local Uriya was no tracker), and seen nothing larger than a barking deer. One has to be carried on the crest of a great enthusiasm of patience and youthful ardour.

The more satisfactory way is to follow the tracks right up to view, just as one does a fox's scent. This requires great capacity for tracking—a gift not possessed by all jungle folk, but the inheritance of the Gond of the Central Provinces and the Sholaga and Kurraba of Mysore.

The big bison heads—normally the elders—like their human counterparts, prefer quiet seclusion to the noise and disturbance of a herd. In fact, they have outlived the bugbear of the herd instinct. They may sometimes be found with a herd, but usually on a visit to one of the local flappers, returning to their normal seclusion when amorously satiated. Often the young bull, on arriving at his prime—again a big head—will wander alone in search of some herd with which to identify himself, with the idea of gaining the supremacy of the herd and ousting rival bulls.

The fact remains that big heads are not to be sought for among herds, and normally will be encountered in solitary seclusion: either a young bull at his prime, or more often a fine old patriarch with well-corrugated horns—and a crusty temper. All this, I know, is well-covered ground, but will help the untutored reader to grasp the principles of bison tracking.

The tracks of a big solitary bull, called in Canarese

“Dod wonti karti korna,” are unforgettable. Great, deep imprints the size of saucers; and, being solitary, they are not overlaid with the tracks of the herd.

The trackers, knowing the localities famous for bison, endeavour to locate such a track and follow it right up to the bull itself; or to when darkness compels them to abandon the trail. They then return with the khubr to camp, and by dawn the shikari is led unerringly to the spot where the tracks were abandoned over-night, and placed right on the night-old—some ten hours stale—tracks.

The bull has a big start, as he has been grazing and dawdling all night; but (unless alarmed) he will not move much more than possibly three or four miles in the night—or unless clearing out of a locality much disturbed by elephant.

It is now a question of clever tracking, and the faster the better, considering natural caution not to blunder on top of one's unsuspecting quarry. As the sun gets warmer the bull grows lazier, and will probably make for a well-known lying-up place in thick cover in the heat of the day. The danger is that, once alarmed, he will put many miles between himself and his pursuer before relaxing.

As the trail gets fresher, more and more caution has to be exercised, and it is advisable to move rifle in hand. If spotted, I believe that a snapshot is better than no shot at all; as a wounded bull is a more hopeful proposition than a thoroughly alarmed one.

The actual work of the trackers must be seen to be credited. They are under constant necessity to avoid formidable enemies, and also spend most of their life in jungle, searching for its stores of food—honey, roots and jungle fruit. They are therefore by nature preter-

naturally quick at noting sights and sounds which escape the ear and eye of the ordinary layman.

As Sanderson so aptly writes : " The slight ruffling of the surface which alone marks in hard ground where the tiger's paw has pressed, the horns of a deer lying in the grass, matching so closely with twigs and undergrowth as to be indistinguishable from them by the inexperienced eye. The bee, scarcely larger than a house-fly, entering a bole high in the tree overhead—alike attract the quiet glance of the Kurraba and Sholaga.

" In cases where actual footprints fail, trackers are guided in following an animal by broken twigs, displaced blades of grass, dew shaken from the leaves while others are covered by it, and other signs. They can also judge with wonderful correctness of the date of different trails. When an animal has been moving about in the same locality for hours, and many different impressions have been left, much skill is required to determine the latest. Some may have been exposed to the burning rays of the sun, others sheltered from it. In such cases the latter, though possibly hours older than the former, looks fresher, and would mislead the inexperienced. The necessity of knowing which is which is evident. To follow the one would be to go through the many wanderings of the night's prowling in search of food ; the other leads to where he may be found concealed for the day."

This and many other apparent riddles read as an open book to my little band of experts. Quietly and assiduously, without fluster or even a quickening of the pulse, sometimes working within a few yards of dangerous game, they would unravel the twisted skein, even as a trustworthy hound will nose out a difficult scent.

I wandered from camp that first evening towards the hills and, seated on a pinnacle of rock—Mysore and Coimbatore laid out beneath my feet—I watched the glory of the sun sink in a rosy mist over the distant hills of Coorg. Chic Sidha was with me, and pointed out some sambhur grazing on the fringe of a far-away shola. It was too ambitious for my eyesight, and took a full five minutes to pick up through glasses—a little cluster of black dots, three miles away—mere pin-points in the great expanse of open prairie. They would graze thus until the setting of the moon. Far south and west, the plains glowed like molten gold ere a blue depth of dusk descended with the approach of night. Masses of fleecy clouds ranged in the eastern sky, pearl-pink with the reflection of the sun's dying glow. The *Alpenglüh* of the Bernese Oberland was no whit more beautiful. Here and there a tiny jungle fire glowed in the villages of Bailur and Germalala, and a thunder-cloud trailed a veil of mist across the sleeping valley.

Anon a crescent moon emerged from the shores of a sunset lagoon, and sailed with its attendant star into an opal sky. The night fell swiftly, with no twilight strand, and caught me negotiating the inky shola leading to camp. It was blacker than night itself, and I abandoned myself to the guidance of the Sholaga, who piloted me by the sleeve, emitting encouraging "baa baas" (the call of the Canarese shepherd to his flock).

The rising moon picked out the worst obstacles with friendly silver light, and the fire-flies lit their tiny green lamps to lighten my homeward way.

Ranga and his son had arrived with fresh tracks of a "wonti korna"—a solitary bull—below in Min-

chinguli. We were to be on the tracks by the first light of dawn.

I slept with the cool night breeze bearing me all the night scents of the jungle, across mile upon mile of sweet lemon-grass.

From far away came the roar of a wild elephant from the mysterious depths of Minchinguli.

* * * * *

The day of my first bison had dawned.

“Rose in the East, and Orion swinging down to the distant hill” . . .

I felt far from lyrical, as I had been roused late and had bolted a large plate of curry—a necessary evil in view of a possible twelve-hour stalk ahead, and no nourishment till dinner.

Here at long last were the unmistakable great hoof-marks of a massive bull : as big round as my two fists, and with edges clear cut and fresh from this very night.

We set off in single file ; Ranga, the most experienced, led. Near a small stream we came across fresh froth on the grass, where the bull had chewed the cud. He had not travelled far in the night, and must be very close at hand. With every caution we tracked west of the fire-line, in ten-foot elephant-grass most of the way, the trail ahead as obvious as the passage of the largest pachyderm.

Suddenly the Sholagas froze, and there was a snort of alarm from just ahead. We had come up with him unexpectedly, and he had heard us—or more likely got our wind—and was away with a crash before I even set eyes on him. Unfortunate, as he may go for miles before his suspicions are once more lulled.

Off at seven on the tracks once more. Soon we can

hear him grazing ahead of us—suspicious, but not alarmed; but likely to keep moving. It will be a wearing chase. The great forest of Sal seems to thin perceptibly, and Ranga points ahead. I follow his outstretched arm, but can see nothing. Yes, something moves—a great, indistinct shape passes from one shadow to another, and a ray of sunlight flashes on a pair of horns.

Shaking with excitement, I throw all precautions to the wind and aim into the brown of the great shadow ahead.

The moment of reaching within range of a “dod wonti” is not to be numbered with the more trivial incidents in one’s life.

He gave a groan and galloped off, and I had another barrel at him as he went.

We ran up at once to look for a blood trail. . . . There was none. . . . My disappointment was supreme. There was only the off-chance that he might slow down in the heat of the day and be lulled into lying up in dense cover. . . . And yet how could I have missed that vast shape at twenty yards? Yet there was no blood.

Then suddenly my disappointment vanished as the morning mist, and my hopes soared elated to the clouds. Chic Sidda had whistled, and the others had gone over to peer at something he held in his hand—a leaf with a minute quantity of adherent glue. . . . This was all that they required.

The bull was hit, after all, and the fat had closed over a deep-seated wound, and the hæmorrhage was internal—a more hopeful sign than even profuse bleeding.

Off once more upon the trail.

Never, as with carnivora, give a bison time to stiffen of his wounds. Give him a breather, his wounds close over, and he takes a new lease of life, and says farewell.

We carry the tracks on to a stream, and down the bank where he has paused to drink. His huge footprints on the edge of the stream are filled with water, and here we come across the countless tracks of a herd which came here last night to drink and wallow. The bed of the stream is puddled with tracks, and the bull has followed the path of the herd coming to water.

Out of this welter of hooves the trackers, with unerring instinct, pick out our quarry. We strike off through open glades of short, burnt grass (which to my untrained eye might have been gameless through the centuries), along an invisible track which will lead us to our bull—as unerringly as a bag of aniseed leads hounds to their ultimate objective—whatever that may be!

At times the ground is so hard the footprints fail, and the grease appears to dry up; but the trackers are never at fault. Here a misplaced twig (invisible to the untrained eye) is a jungle finger-post, and the discoloration of a patch of earth from the normal, telegraphs its instinctive message to their jungle minds. We are moving at three miles an hour along an invisible trail . . . then comes our reward for these long, patient hours. High up on a stem of grass there is a wet slither of blood, and soon the tracks are dyed crimson. The wound has opened with movement, and the blood trail has commenced.

The leading tracker is indicating something ahead.

Yes, there he is, on the far side of a small valley, just rising to his feet.

He must be hit badly, or he would never lie down in face of danger. I give him yet another barrel behind the shoulder. He is up and off at an amble. The going is terrific. Long, dank elephant-grass—in places far above our heads—and we trample an avenue underfoot.

It is a race between the bull and us. He is making for the dense jungle-clad hills south of camp, where we will never catch him—he will be lost in the depths of the Mulay Kardoo. We must follow ruthlessly and hope to tire him out before he reaches sanctuary.

There is no rest for us or him.

We come on several fresh forms where he has lain down. There is blood everywhere and the strong smell of a newly opened cowshed. In this grass it is a game of hide-and-seek, with the final odds a shade in favour of the bison, as the rifle is useless until the last few yards.

We are literally tearing an avenue through the grass; it is harsh and insistently dry, and ever so hot. A great, primitive, sinister world of its own, untraversed before by human foot. Twice the bull lurches to his feet twenty yards ahead of us, but we see never a sign of him.

At last a tree. A diminutive owl blinks at us from a dry branch, and flits away, as Ranga walks up it and I fight for breath below. The heat and the close, dank smell of grass and blood are overpowering. He points ahead—far ahead. Will the bull win, after all?

A sambhur doe leaps from her form, and my heart leaps into my throat in sympathy. We are now doing a good four miles an hour, the trackers urging me along tirelessly. For well over an hour I have been carrying



Kurraba and Sholaga trackers, Mysore



My virgin effort in Mysore

my '470 until the barrels have eaten into each shoulder in turn. I can't go on much longer without a rest.

The grass has perceptibly thinned, and through it we see a wall of forest rising to the near horizon. It is the wall of the great Mulay Kardoo, and the intermediate valley lies just ahead. It is now or never, and we burst out of the purgatory of grass and search the valley ahead. There he goes—fifty yards ahead—down into the valley, head set for the hills . . . a vast, coal-black shape, shining with sweat, all of him visible now—even to his white stockings.

But he is never destined to reach his sanctuary. A handy tree acts as a rest and a solid '470 puts an end to his labours.

He has dropped completely out of sight, and the jungle has closed over his head. Only the thrashing of the grasses shows where he is passing to his Valhalla. . . . And if any bull deserved a happy hunting-ground, he surely did.

The sun was almost setting—we had been on the trail nearly twelve hours without a halt. My first bullet had imbedded itself in the near saddle, from which latterly he had bled. My last one found his heart.

I promised, from this my first hunt, to desist from ruthless bison killing once I had got two good trophies. My sympathies throughout these last few hours, once I had found blood, were all for the poor beast I was hunting. The chances (as I have already said) of his turning the tables on me in this welter of grass, and transforming me into a crushed raspberry, were slightly in his favour; yet I was the aggressor, and the trouble was of my making.

I consistently pictured his blind terror on receiving

the wound from an unknown hand, and as he gradually weakened with loss of blood, and felt his power going, hearing his unseen pursuers closing in on him relentlessly through the dry, cruel grass. Every time he lay down for a small respite he must have heard this sinister, invisible approach.

Truly bison-hunting is not for the more sensitive imaginations—it savours too much of baiting the domestic bull.

* * * * *

That night I tried to digest fresh bison kidney and marrow, also soup prepared from the tail; but my inside turned over several times, and I buried these gastronomic delicacies beneath a near-by clump of leaves, in deference to my bearer's culinary susceptibilities. . . . I cannot say the same of the jackals after midnight.

The Sholagas brought the head in that night, under protest. I assured them that they were not required to touch it—merely to carry it. Being Hindus of sorts—worshippers of cows and bulls—touching the skin was defilement. Next day the Madigas (Untouchables) removed the mask, and placed the head in a local ant-heap—the surest way of separating the meat from the skull. During the day they brought in sickening masses of the meat—maggot-crawling and decomposed—and swallowed it all that night . . . very reminiscent of the Kavirondo porters' glut of hippo meat on Albert Nyanza. Tainted flesh is a greater delicacy than fresh!

The following day I decided to pitch my camp in the midst of Minchinguli, en route to Gedasalai (towards the eastern boundary of the Reserve), where I heard there were excellent cheetul grounds, and the jungle much lighter than these great rain forests.

We were off at dawn, and dropped precipitously to the great silent valley. We passed from one herd of elephant to another, avoiding stray cows with calves—by far the most dangerous of all the unwounded jungle denizens. Negotiating a fern-encumbered fire-line, we stumbled right on top of a weeny calf, lying as if asleep, and quite invisible. . . . The parent very often drops her young in a sheltered nook and goes off in search of grazing or water.

We were not looking for trouble, so took great care not to give Mother, whom we spotted grazing near by, our scent.

Once free of the elephant zone, I looked about for a likely spot for camp. The trackers pointed me out a clearing with the débris of a hut—no other than poor J.'s, built and occupied by him last hot weather. I could not bear the sight of it—so poignant were my memories of bygone days. I moved on a mile, and made my camp in mid-jungle alongside a whispering stream. I watched the Sholagas build my hut, which was ready to occupy within two hours.

They first cut several good, stout branches, and collected much grass and jungle creeper. They then forked six branches and placed other branches horizontally, resting in the forks.

The roof was made of cross branches, broken in two, the whole being lashed together with jungle creeper, and the walls and roof thatched with long fronds of lemon-grass, kept in place by long strips of bark peeled from near-by trees.

The whole work was effected with jungle axes. The huts were carpeted with fresh grass; and a bed and table were made of branches, and a mattress of smaller transversal branches, covered with grass.

The trackers' hut was less pretentious, and in it they lit a smoke fire—there was no chimney! Little paths were swept clean of undergrowth, leaves, roots, leeches, horse-flies and other vermin—connecting the various huts.

By sunset I was in possession, seated in my deck-chair weaving jungle fantasies in the smoke of a roaring log fire.

“Sunshine dropped to meet the rush of oncoming night,” and a pale plate of beaten gold rose to mingle with the starlight above distant Devarabetta.

The moonbeams streamed through the trellis of jungle vines, and I extinguished the fire and lay and watched the witchery of silver on the jet-black shadows all around.

Beyond stretched a vista of moon-tipped shola, and the sigh of the wind rustling the silvered grass came to me as the gentle crooning of surf on a distant shore. . . . Far away, on lonely Siddi-Kul-Betta, a jungle fire crept gleaming up the hillside from the shadowed abyss below.

* * * * *

We reached Gedasalai and the cheetul grounds a few days later. Tracking was no longer possible; we had to fall back on still-hunting, from glade to glade at early dawn, while the dew was still on the carpet of leaves; ere the sun had turned the jungles into a vast, crackling tinder-box.

I returned one evening to camp to find a yellow envelope awaiting me. Being war-time, I opened this with distrust. It was to the effect that poor Theo had been treacherously killed by Arabs in Mesopotamia. . . .

Thus ended one of my greatest friendships, and there passed from out my life my one inseparable shikar

companion—whom I never replaced. From this day on I hunted alone, preferring solitude to the doubtful comfort of an indifferent substitute for the ideal companion of my early shikar days.

For the first time since I had left home I felt desperately lonely, and my subconscious mind refused to shake off the deep sense of irreparable loss. He was twenty-three, and lies buried on the banks of the Karun river.

I packed up the following day, unable to bear the succession of the lonely hours between sunset and dawn.

Back again along the very way I had travelled a few days ago. All the well-remembered landmarks of the happy days—while he still lived, tense and strong, and filled with high sensibilities; so keen and joyful to lay the world away—so young.

* * * * *

Soon we passed my moonlight camp, with the ashes of the fire—undisturbed—the ghostly remnants of J.'s hot-weather hut (Poor J. Maturer wine poured out in hypocritical defence of a principle—the protection of a fifth-rate nation, far better destroyed); the sombre shadows of Minchinguli, scarred with the great tracks of elephant and bison; and the emerald beauty of the fern-carpeted fire-line. . . . Memories of three days ago—yet three centuries had passed across my conscious mind in Gedasalai.

* * * * *

I halted for a midday meal beside a murmuring stream, puddled with the fresh slots of bison.

Here Katar, unconsciously Grock-like, boiled my one tin of Army Ration over a fire—without piercing the lid. There was a sudden explosion, and I looked

up to see Katar, in considerable pain, removing festoons of beef, carrots and potatoes (all the ingredients of Army Ration number two), brought to a white heat, from his face.

I regretted the loss of my meal, and Katar, the subsequent disappearance of a certain amount of facial epidermis.

* * * * *

Two nights later I waved farewell to my dear friends at Attikan and descended the short cut to Kathar-devaragudde in a thin veil of mist. They stood above on Farewell Rock, and long after their voices had merged into the jungle silence I saw the distant glimmer of their hurricane lamps—like glow-worms through the mist.

* * * * *

Ten years processed before I saw these hills again : lean years, wherein I dwelt in shadeless seclusion in the deserts of South-west Arabia, and barely existed in many strange, sun-cursed Arab ports—in far-distant Asir and the Yemen ; traversed the pilgrim route from Jiddah, and from a distant Jebel saw the sun rise on the slender minarets of sacred Mecca—years of complete isolation in the farthest outpost in the north-east corner of the Kachin Triangle, in remotest Burma—banqueted with the Mandarins of Tengueh, in Western Yunnan, and gazed across the great Divides of the Salween and Mekong into mysterious China.

From the greatly exaggerated military heroics of the Afghan border, I came at last through the whole length of India, back to the peaceful shelter of the forests—to the silence of the hills—even as a child turns for comfort to the bosom of its mother.

* * * * *

Once more the vision of the distant hills at dawn from Chamrajnagar. Once more the awareness of the indefinable scents of the forest—the perfumed essence of powdered bamboo leaves ; the intoxication of fresh-strewn mhowa petals ; the cool breeze flowing over sweet lemon-grass ; the myrrh of newly-awakened flowers and moss after a passing shower.

It is beyond my modest powers to express in words the restoration of one's spiritual independence, the sense of freedom, of a momentary quenching of nostalgia for a wide, cool horizon ; the well-remembered jungle aura awakening a rebirth of all sense of beauty—as the lotus stirs to the caress of a newly-risen sun : beauty stifled for so long by the parasitic sapping of cantonment walls.

* * * * *

Fresh fields were to be explored.

I had permission to share the much-coveted Dod Sumpegay Block with a planter friend, whom I had known in the old Bedaguli days.

Years ago, from Gertsey Kullo in a storm, I had looked over this block, stretching west towards Coimbatore, and vowed to tread its solitudes one future year. It ran contiguous to the Minchinguli Block, along the great range of hills at whose base lay the elephant and bison grounds ; thinning out east into light deciduous forest, where I hoped to get deer and tiger.

I pitched my camp on the edge of a belt of bamboo, and as there were many herds of elephant reported in the vicinity, placed a rough palisade of jungle bamboo round the hut ; at a sufficient distance to give me some warning of the approach of any midnight marauders. I decided to concentrate on the herds while they were

yet active, and get, I hoped, good photographs. The trackers, however, did not share my enthusiasm, and advised me to leave elephant severely alone. Their dislike of trifling with wild herds is notorious throughout Mysore.

I sent them off to look for tiger tracks, and with one protesting gun-bearer plunged daily into the tangle of gigantic bamboo and undergrowth, after the elusive tuskers. I say elusive, as nightly they screamed and trumpeted within a few hundred yards of my camp; yet daily they removed themselves into a positive maze of impenetrable bamboo, where it was impossible to follow, and where photography was equally out of the question.

Being of an inquisitive nature, they came daily to investigate my fire, as I found the tracks of at least two big tuskers within ten yards of my palisade. They were becoming a nuisance; and one night became so importunately clamorous that I let off a couple of rounds of my .470 over their heads. Babel was let loose, and I got no sleep till one hour before dawn, when utter silence descended—like the closing of a door.

When daylight came, wide-eyed and indignant I set out to move the herd on at all costs. A righteous grievance (interrupted sleep) gave wings to my determination.

In almost impenetrable thorn bamboo I came up with the herd, and leaving the Sholaga behind (paralytic with apprehension), I shouted and waved, and fired several rounds of 12-bore over their heads. They gathered in a phalanx, looking nasty, but thought better of it (or was I punily beneath contempt?), and crashed away up the main nala; with the exception of one cow,

who made small rushes in my direction, her trunk curled in defiance.

I "placed her" with a calf somewhere near, and decided to give her a wide berth, but to keep the herd on the run. She, however, turned and went off at a gallop, and we followed as best we could through the tangle of thorns.

Lying in a small branch nala, close to where she had demonstrated, was the tiny carcass of a newly-born elephant. All around the jungle was a shambles of blood, and the bamboo trampled flat by the cow in her travail. This accounted for the noise of the last few days. The herd had brought her down from the hills to have her young near water and a plentiful food supply of bamboo. . . . It was a piteous sight, and was probably still-born in the night.

I followed up the distant crashing of the herd, determined to drive them well away from camp. At a mid-jungle pool, set in a perfect frame of bamboo, I overtook one of the bigger tuskers bathing. I crept up to within twenty yards, and lay crouched on the far bank of the pool in perfect safety. It was an unforgettable picture.

The jungle giant stood knee-deep in the waters of the pool, and with the utmost relish sluiced great trunkfuls of water over his back and head. He then lay and wallowed with gusto, at times completely submerged but for his trunk. After plastering much mud all over his back and head, he pulled his great feet out of the mud, and ambled away into the bamboo after the rest of the herd. I decided on this pool as a good place to erect an observation machan for elephant—when the moon was at the full. The banks were puddled with their great tracks, and the bamboo

all around was without doubt their favourite feeding-ground.

On our homeward way we found fresh tiger-pugs on the track; they were overlaying the tiny night-tracks of the field mice (so Ranga pointed out), proving that he must have passed at early dawn. We followed them for some little way into dense jungle, where we had to track on hands and knees under singularly offensive, low thorn bushes.

I was on my knees, my rifle held in one hand off the ground, the other hand about to be placed on the carpet of leaves, when the Sholaga behind me seized my wrist in a grip of iron. Where I was just about to rest my palm lay a pile of leaves, singularly shaped in a regular circle. The tracker stirred this with the muzzle of my rifle, and disclosed the flat head and glittering eye of a Russell's viper, coiled in warm malevolence. . . . Immortality within the span of fifteen minutes. . . . He blew its head off within six inches of my outstretched hand.

Desire for aught but a neat brandy being momentarily quenched, we sought the comfort and safety of camp.

* * * * *

The next few days typified many of my adventures with the greater carnivora. I have scarcely ever shot what would be termed an easy tiger. The normal shikari's experience of a sunset return to a first night's kill, or the tiger coming accommodatingly from out the beat beneath the muzzles of the guns, has seldom been my happy lot.

Out of literally scores of tiger and panther kills, the great majority have never deigned to put in a second appearance; and if they have, the conditions of light and position have militated against accurate shooting.

Some people have jungle fortune, while others (more especially the regular seasoned shikaris) have to work with the sweat of their brow—mentally and physically—for every animal which comes their way—mentally, as the mind behind the tiger's system of killing has to be carefully studied and his theory of killing elucidated. The subsequent deduction (from the plotting of his kills) as to where to bait has given me many hours of mental stimulation ; likewise the working out of beats.

The tiger which the Sholagas had located close to camp was to prove no exception to this rule. From observation of tracks, and the Sholagas' knowledge of water and good tigerish cover, I drew up my plan of baits, and that evening had out four bodas (buffalo calves) on the intersection of game-tracks in the vicinity of the recent pug-marks. They were not too strongly tied, so as to present no obstacle to the killer dragging the bait into cover of his own choosing—there were scores of suitable trees for machans all around.

Two days later the northerly bait of the four was killed. The machan was erected noiselessly at midday, and by three I was up aloft. Very little of the kill had been eaten, and the rope was unbroken.

Sunset came and no tiger. Soon after dark a howling gale blew up out of a cloudless sky, and the creak of the bamboos and sighing of the trees around drowned all other noise.

I had a double switch on my rifle-butt—operating a bulb suspended above the kill—and a small pinpoint of light which shone through a hole in a metal cylinder, so as to illuminate the foresight. Both worked from a battery alongside me in the machan. The foresight light was operated first, and when the sights were

aligned on the tiger, the bulb over the kill was operated and the tiger flooded with light. Care had to be taken to camouflage the wire leading to the bulb over the kill, and also to get the light adjusted so as not to throw the latter into shadow.

In the rising gale I could not have heard a tree fall, let alone the muffled approach of tiger. It was a sunset wind, a strange phenomenon of these lower jungles, and I prayed that it would soon blow over. . . . A machan has ever been my most fervent praying-ground.

In a lull in the gale I heard the tiger nearing the kill. He came on steadily and with no sign of stealth. An indistinct shape approached the dark blue of the kill. I focussed my foresight on to the tiger, and followed him with it, waiting for him to settle. After a very cautious inspection his head went down to the eaten end (the hindquarters), but I could not hear if he had commenced his meal for the roaring of the wind.

I gave him time to start eating, then pressed the other switch. The bulb was swinging in the gale, and the tiger and kill one moment were brilliantly illuminated, the next were in deepest shadow. I got one fleeting glimpse of the great beast in the bobbing circle of light—and the gleam of his eyes. . . . Then I neither heard nor saw any more movement until the gale dropped, and the roaring to one another of two tigers came to me across miles of moonlit jungle. It was the season of the spring running, and the tigress was calling to her mate.

As is usual over a tiger kill, I kept awake all night. It seems that the light over the kill is too brilliant, and frightens even an unsophisticated tiger. Moreover, it must be adjusted so as not to swing in the wind. I may have missed the fraction of a second while he was

in full light, but it would have been a very risky shot, and I preferred to have patience and wait a better chance another night.

The kill was yet fresh, and there was every likelihood of his returning the subsequent night; moreover, he should be very hungry, unless he had killed elsewhere between whiles. I took Mada with me this time, as I could not contemplate two sleepless nights; and we would take it in turns to watch.

In the hush preceding darkness, when the last warm ray of sunlight had faded into the sombre silence of another jungle night, there came the pattering of many feet across the crackling carpet of jungle leaves. At first I thought it a troop of monkeys, until I heard the unmistakable whimper of the jungle scourge—wild dog—the enemy alike of both hunted and hunter.

A herd of these jungle scavengers will lay waste an area as ruthlessly as Attila and his invading Huns devastated half Europe. A hungry pack have been known to drive a tiger off his kill. Once they have taken possession of a tract of forest, all game automatically disappears; and with them their slayers—the greater carnivora.

Dusk had descended, but I could just distinguish the pack exploring the kill. The leaders would come on to it first, while the rest scattered to warn them of the approach of tiger. Once the body of the pack had descended on to the kill and communal eating had commenced, nothing on earth would drive them off until gorged. The return of the tiger that night was quite out of the question.

I must at all costs keep them off the kill, and must take the risk of alarming the tiger, who at that moment was probably awaiting complete darkness to commence

his evening meal. I climbed down from the machan and rushed at the leaders of the pack, who scattered before me. I took good care to avoid tainting the vicinity of the kill, but by this time the scent of dog (an overpowering aroma) overcame all other smells. From the shadows came ever the whimpering of the hungry pack, and I knew that nothing short of fire from Heaven would keep them from their food once darkness had descended.

Night fell, starless and tigerless.

Now and again I shone my torch into the shadows and illuminated the eyes of the waiting pack, gradually closing in on their coveted feast.

I slept. . . . Some indefinite hour after midnight I woke with Mada's corpse-like grip on my wrist. Silently I rose to a sitting position and illuminated the kill. In the full circle of light, a heaving mass of wild dog and a hyena devoured the carcase in greedy communion.

The night was chilly ; the clouds had dispersed, and the heavens were powdered with stars. . . . Again, from far away, came the cry of a tiger to its mate.

Below, the unholy chorus rose to a crescendo in dispute over some especial titbit ; and the smell of stirred-up putrefaction rose in waves to my bosky bower. I slept unrestrainedly until dawn woke me with its exultation to yet another day, and the jungles stirred, flushed with sleep.

The carcase had been stripped bare, and lay like the gaunt hulk of a derelict ship. At some little distance lay the bulk of the pack, gorged and content. To one side a cluster of younger dogs was baying a jungle sow, yapping at her flanks and avoiding her jaws. Replete with offal, they were merely passing the time. How

different would have been the attentions of the pack had they been hungry! The pig, tired out with defending herself from four sides, would have fallen an easy victim. The sentinel dogs still watched for the approach of danger. That did not prevent me from disturbing the dawn siesta with a magazine of my '318 Westley Richards. The pack were reduced by two dogs. One never stirred again; the other, shot through the heart, nevertheless galloped away uphill with the rest of the pack, and fell dead after a hundred yards.

* * * * *

After the all-night vigil I lazed in camp, and in the words of D. H. Lawrence "smiled the day away to myself in pure aloneness—which is one sort of immortality." . . . After days' and nights' incessant hunting, scarcely resting even an hour in camp, there is "nothing to be done, but always plenty to do."

The daylight hours are all too short. The ocean of night creeps up the twilight shore, with its narcotic lure, and the sheets lie cool and tempting under the stars.

This very night the moon was at the full, and for twenty years (whenever in jungle) I have never failed to keep tryst with moonlit Nature, from sunset to dawn, on this night of nights.

They had built me a machan where two tracks intersected and crossed the fire-line. There were regular tracks of sambhur and cheetul, and also the fresh pug-marks of panther and the rootling of bear—beneath the machan.

All Nature walks the fire-line on such a night.

Two hours before sunset I climbed the bamboo ladder into my leafy nest. I sat alone, as on such a brilliant night there was little fear of falling asleep.

Above the dark horizon of trees there appeared a faint glow which spread into a glare—as of the reflection of some vast city—as the full moon climbed into a cloudless sky. The jungles, silent with the approach of night, passed from a warm sunset glow imperceptibly into the shimmer of full moonlight. Reluctantly each shadow gave up its secrets, and the jungles lay drenched in the clarity of its silver radiance. Now the forests stirred after the drowsy heat of the day. The passage of each tiny jungle creature was accentuated by the dryness of the leaves ; until the nuzzling of a mongoose was magnified into the cautious approach of a jungle deer.

The night was filled with the warning cry of cheetah and the harsh-throated cry of frightened sambhur. Many tigers were afoot this night, stalking the herds feeding in the moonlit glades ; hunting by sight rather than by scent—which is not over-developed in the carnivora.

Once a stag passed, belling with alarm in the shadows. Her cries were swallowed up in the immensity of the forest. An hour to midnight, a great crashing of bamboos drew my eye to a distant hillside, down which I could just distinguish a dark blur descending, until swallowed up in the lower belt of forest.

I followed its approach with interest, thinking it was a solitary tusker. The noise stopped within a hundred yards of my machan, and a strange rooting started, with deep breathing noises—unlike any elephant I had ever heard. I could no longer stay my curiosity, and determined to descend from my machan and investigate.

The ladder had been removed, for camouflage purposes, and I had to swarm down fifteen feet of

Branchless tree—removing much skin in the process. I had to leave my rifle behind. It was a strange sensation—on the ground, alone, weaponless, in mid' jungle, as bright as day, the night alive with all the mysterious rustlings of the nocturnal prowlers.

Step by step I made my way into the inky blackness of the bamboo labyrinth, to find myself almost on top of an indistinct black mass, nose downward in a gigantic ant-heap: the noisiest night prowler in the jungle: a sloth bear in search of white ants—his favourite delicacy. I left him sniffing ants up his great nostrils, and I could have beaten a drum and he would never have heard me.

I recrossed the silver of the fire-line, and in the distance saw a dim black shape following the track straight towards me. I crouched behind the stem of my tree, and prayed that no eddy of wind would proclaim my presence to the great carnivorous beast which would pass within five yards of me.

On he came, cautiously avoiding any leaf or twig which would proclaim his murderous passage to a suspicious hind. I thought he could not fail to scent or see me. I could have stretched out my hand and touched every spot on his sleek body as he passed, blazoned in the white moonlight. His eye flashed green on mine, and he passed away as noiselessly as he had come.

I swarmed noisily into my eyrie, removing a further layer of my anatomy. I must have slumbered, as I was awakened by the belling of a sambhur almost beneath my tree, and sat up to watch a stag and five does walk the fire-line below.

Dawn came too soon, and with the chorus of peacock and jungle fowl the forests burst into song. The pea-

fowl, which had roosted all around me, left their night's shelter to patter in the dry bamboo leaves, and I shook the night's dew from my body and reluctantly climbed down into civilisation. . . . Once the machan ladder had been removed, naught but a tree-mouse or a roosting jungle-fowl could violate my intrinsic solitude. This I cherished more than life itself, and with my coming to earth I once more trod the world of men, and suffered the compulsion of my immediate superiors. In a tree-top, one lived with the eagles ; afoot, one was merely akin to man—one of many military morons at the mercy of the dictates of a society emasculated by the suffocating code of modern civilisation.

* * * * *

In an open clearing not far from camp I suddenly came on a pack of my bitter enemies—wild dog. In spite of the “ white and excellent night ” they had not killed, and were in single file—still hunting.

I froze in the open, and let the whole pack but one pass, hoping to get a series of shots right down the line and rake the pack.

I moved out into the open, and the last bitch spotted me. Time after time she rose on her hind legs, whimpering, uncertain of whether I represented danger or not ; then she galloped off, alarming the rest of the pack. I killed two outright, and one lean bitch dragged herself and her scattered intestines into a thorn bush, whence she snarled at me in defiance.

There was fresh news of a kill when I got back, so the day's rest I had contemplated was interrupted. The bait on the fire-line, near where the elephant had calved, had been killed : a full-sized female buffalo. She had been dragged two hundred yards into a thicket. The drag was plainly visible, also a patch of blood

where he had stopped and eaten a little. Most of the left hind-leg had gone, and also the off fore-shoulder—an unusual place for tiger to eat.

We tied the kill by the leg, and built the machan with the utmost stealth. Everything boded well; and the moon at the full. They said he was the same tiger—big and old—and had survived ten kills; and this was the eleventh.

I started to sit up at three, and never stirred till dawn—fifteen hours, and no sign of tiger. I can only hope that he missed a night on a full stomach. I slept all day, and decided to give him one more night.

Up once more into the machan two hours before dusk, and in the hush preceding darkness—the most likely hour for the tiger's return—I heard the inevitable whimpering in the shadows, and the lean forms of three wild dogs crept on to the kill. I watched them for about twenty minutes, eating spasmodically and dashing away now and again into the undergrowth. They were thoroughly apprehensive of tiger, and the more cautious, and possibly less hungry, members of the pack sat and whimpered out of sight.

I waited until the three were close together, with their heads down, and then gave them two barrels of my .470. Two were blown to ribbons, and the third dragged himself off into the shadows. I had the doubtful satisfaction of hearing the hell-pack fading away into the distance—but all hope of the tiger's return was utterly dead.

I clambered down into the darkness, jerked on my torch, and dragged the two corpses into a near-by nala. There was an all-pervading smell of a mangy kennel.

I was alone, and had given definite orders to the

Sholagas—even if they heard me fire—not to return until dawn; so perforce must sleep on my eyrie—till released at daybreak.

To avoid the strong temptation to sleep when sitting up for tiger, I took no bedding; so had naught but one blanket and a cushion—to prevent premature decay of the coccyx. With these inadequate soporifics I prepared to sip the waters of Lethe.

Once in the night I awoke the sleeping jungle, in response to the insistent demand of nature. Alas! Mada was not at hand with his hollow bamboo, a most necessary utensil on these all-night vigils, when an inexplicable cloudburst will alarm the most unsophisticated tiger.

* * * * *

An indefinable sixth sense brought me out of a sound sleep—every pulse drumming—at dawn. From below came the crunching of bones: the never-forgotten sound of a powerful animal rending the kill. I parted the leaves and peered into the greyness beneath. A powerful odour of newly-stirred putrefaction and dewy jungle mould rose to my nostrils. . . . In the dawning light I looked down on a large male tiger, crouched, devouring the kill.

Where was the rifle? There, leaning against the bole of the tree. Had I unloaded?—as was usually the case when I closed my eyes to sleep (a loaded rifle is an awkward thing to displace in one's slumbers). I dare not risk the click of the mechanism to see.

Half a lifetime passed as I got my hands round the rifle, pushed forward the safety-catch, and the other half processed as I reached the aiming position and pushed the barrel through the gap in the leaves.

He was hungry, and his head was well buried in his

unsavoury feast—besides, he might have been several hours on the kill, and his suspicions allayed.

He fell to my first barrel, rose and tore the bark from a tree in his agony ; my second barrel dropped him—with a final twitch of the tail—dead.

I give this story as a case in point of the vagaries of tiger, and of the uncertainty of the hour of their return to a kill. No chance of sitting up should be missed, as long as there is a picking left on the carcass.

The less glorified methods of tiger hunting—matching one's skill and patience on foot against the most cunning of all jungle animals—can never equal as a "spectacle" the magnificence of an imposing howdah shoot ; but patience will be rewarded by a thrill a thousand times greater. How can the momentary thrill of seeing the great striped body in the grass pass down the line of guns until posed before the principal guest compare with the hours spent tracking a drag and working out the plan for outwitting him in his very lair.

One is massacre, with no odds in favour of the hunted ; the other—the chances if anything against the hunter.

* * * * *

“Night and the Hunter's moon.”

For sitting up over kills, and for night observation of game, moonlight is obviously of paramount necessity. Also it is far pleasanter to still-hunt the dewy fire-line and game-tracks by its light, when all the beasts of the forest are astir, than to stalk throughout the day, when all Nature seeks the thickest and shadiest cover and the jungles simmer with heat.

The moon was on the wane as, two nights later, some two hours after dark, I set forth with one Sholaga for

the pool in the big elephant nala. Another herd had come down from the hills and established themselves the last two days in the great bamboo belt south of camp. I had intended to place my machan in the midst of a bamboo clump, but Mada intimated this was suicide, and built it, some twenty feet up, in the fork of a gigantic tree.

The moon was just caressing the waters of the pool when I climbed the perilous bamboo ladder into my night's refuge. This was no all-night solitary vigil, so Mada climbed up beside me, and we disposed ourselves comfortably to rest, taking it in turns to keep awake.

Soon after midnight the jungles reverberated with the crashing of the herd coming to water. After the perfect silence of the last few hours it seemed as if the whole jungle was being trodden underfoot. The herd approached, rumbling with the pleased anticipation of water. Out of the shadow of the gigantic bamboo they stepped into the silvered water, and drank avidly, with little squeals and grunts of enjoyment.

The clump I had proposed for my machan was demolished almost at once, and they continued for an hour or more to pour water over each other's backs and reduce the pool to the semblance of a mud wallow.

The herd of forty contained two big tuskers, one of which nosed suspiciously round my tree, like an old gentleman engaged in hunt the slipper. He floored and ate my bamboo ladder, after which he sauntered back to the herd and thatched himself with a thick coating of the most evil mud. The herd departed as noisily as they came, and I slept undisturbed till dawn.

In connection with wild elephant, I shall always cherish a remark of a brother officer—a youth endowed with the usual complement of grey matter and horse

sense (the horse being notoriously one of the least intelligent of animals) attributed to the normal brutal and licentious soldier. In response to his inquiry as to the "best way of getting elephants," I told him that they were very fond of bananas (implying to the average intelligence that a banana grove was their favourite feeding-ground).

The following day, after much undue mental stimulation, he brought the conversation once more round to elephants and their jungle habits. Diffidently, he introduced the problem which had been wrecking his intelligence since last we met. "One thing I couldn't quite understand," he said, with reference to the preceding night's conversation; "with regard to baiting these elephants, how *do* you sit up over a banana?"

* * * * *

I was much intrigued with the superhuman tenacity of a family of ants which had billeted themselves on my meat-safe. Surely the ant is more patient and industrious than even the proverbial spider.

After my efforts to evict them from my food-safe, I placed the legs in tins of water, only to find that the train of ants poured in an uninterrupted procession into the water, and over the drowned bodies of their brethren, to enjoy the delicacies in my larder. I increased the size of the tins and the amount of water, but there was still the same eagerness to tread the martyr's path to a watery grave.

Finally, in desperation, I suspended the safe from the ceiling by a string smeared with gum, and deluded myself that at last I had them outwitted.

I sat and waited their inevitable appearance on the roof. Thwarted on the ground, they took to the wall, and were soon exploring the gummy end of the string.

Several of the braver spirits sought the path of self-immolation, and met a sticky end. The host drew back and gathered in conclave. Then a small cluster of pioneers stepped from out the crowd, and with the calm resignation of *morituri*—with folded hands—dropped the dizzy path to immortality. They landed safely on their objective beneath—then the roof rained ants—I confessed defeat.

* * * * *

Two days later, from the "Kunave" above camp, I looked my last on the little cluster of bamboo huts which had been my home. That evening we climbed the great ranges leading back to civilisation, and at sunset were ensconced in a grass hut in the depths of Hool Patchay Hulla—a well-watered, mid-jungle shola.

Close on midnight I was disturbed from my grassy couch by a whispering Sholaga, who led me to listen to a solitary elephant utilising my water supply. I drove him off, and lit a large fire at the approach to camp, as the newly-thatched roof of my hut might have proved too strong a temptation.

I tied up my last but one remaining bait—a black bullock—in a near-by leafy nala which had an un-savoury reputation for tiger.

Like the very tinkle of the water over its mossy boulders, it was named Nellakathera Hutte, and thither I wandered early one evening to sit up over my last but one faithful black bullock, which had eventually joined the great fraternity of bovine martyrs who feed hungry tigers.

There was no moon, so I carefully arranged the light over the kill, to obviate a recurrence of my last unfortunate experience. It was one of the darkest jungle nights



Dedication



Elephant camp at the foot of the great mts

I have ever known. Heavy clouds covered the sky, to the exclusion of even that faint shimmer of starlight which enables one to distinguish the blur of the kill from the surrounding shadows. It was as black as a mine-shaft, and the green glimmer of a myriad fire-flies only seemed to accentuate the depth of gloom.

I heard the tiger approaching the kill, and the tinkle of a displaced boulder as he crossed the stream. There was utter silence. Then from out the well of darkness beneath came the crunching of bones. I pressed the foresight switch—no answering light—the light over the kill failed me as well. I can remember groping with the tangle of loose wires which clustered about the rifle, and muttering despairingly, “Tragedy, stark tragedy,” and all the while from the darkness below came the insistent crunching of the kill. The wires had jerked loose, and coiled their loose ends fantastically about my hands. Never again would I invoke the aid of science to outwit forest nature.

A tree-mouse started to explore the contents of my carelessly opened tin of sandwiches. . . . The crunching stopped—dead silence—then the retreating sound of soft pads over the rocks—the tinkle of a pebble in the distance. . . .

With a crash the storm broke.

Simultaneously my fury with all inventions—mechanical and electrical—burst, and I hurled the nasty accumulation of battery, wire, switches and connections after the wreck of my lost hopes into the gulf below.

Too late the incessant lightning illuminated the gloomy shola with the intensity of magnesium wire. I slithered down the tree on to the wet carcass, and in torrential rain groped my way to the track, where the Sholagas were sleeping the night. In the glow of an

enormous log fire, stripped to the skin, I dried my soaking garments; while the Sholagas clustered in the shadows, overcome by my plastic nudity.

* * * * *

As we passed through Nellakathera Hutte the following day on our homeward way, we found our inveterate enemies—wild dog—devouring my last bait (which had been tied up on the track). They had not even taken the trouble to kill it, but were tearing lumps out of its quarters—literally devouring it alive.

I passed by and lay up on the far side of the kill in the long grass to await the return of the pack. A lean bitch crept back almost at once, and with a rush the pack swept down. I longed for a Mills bomb to blow them to fragments; but had to content myself with a toll of four.

* * * * *

I spent my last night among my coffee-planting friends: true hospitality, rarely experienced in these economic days. I usually borrowed a spare dinner-jacket, as my wardrobe by this time was scarcely genteel. This night there was a strange phenomenon on the hills, in the person of a master plumber from Madras—who had come to install new English baths. The growing democracy of the East had not yet embraced a social mingling with plumbers, and we were ignorant of their habits and social potentialities. So as not to offend his susceptibilities, we decided to dine unchanged. Our illusions received a sad shock when, instead of the typical Bateman plumber, in corduroys and kneestaps (we had, I feel sure, confused them with dustmen), we were confronted by an immaculate figure in the most conventional of evening clothes.

His disapproval of our exotic *négligé* was as com-

plete as our miscalculation of his sense of dress. I had never dined with a plumber.

* * * * *

At daybreak I took my last long look over the western jungles towards distant Chamundi. A solitary light gleamed in the far-off temple of Dodsumpegay, and was quenched by the growing light of dawn. I turned into the path of the rising sun, not west this time, but east for Trichinopoly and Colombo, and the boat for England—home.

As the great cloud-capped ranges melted into the distant haze and passed from sight, my heart went with them; and I felt as though I had momentarily lost a lover. Momentarily, as I knew that I would return again, and yet again, to the haven of her restful bowers . . . to the cessation of all effort. Sanctuary from the ever-increasing strife of civilisation.

* * * * *

I was travelling grotesquely light in my jungle clothes of the last few days—no bedding, and a water-bottle for my head—as I had no desire to take bedding and my jungle kit to England.

At Erode station close on midnight—a stifling May night—I was speeded on my way by R. (my planter friend), a hospitable bank manager, and C. (the gang overseer of a local dam), whom we roused from his near-by corrugated-iron hut. . . . He had won the Kadir Cup—the Blue Ribbon of pig-sticking—in years gone by; but I gathered that lately the stars had fought against him.

A solitary female figure, crouched on a pile of luggage in true Oriental resignation, watched us dispatch a generous tray of drinks. I noticed that her labels bore the name of my ship—so apparently did R.,

who remarked, "There's a playmate for you on the voyage."

A plaintive voice from the pile of luggage inquired whether we could give her a drink—there were several spare on the tray. I acquiesced, and turned to wave my alcoholic adieux.

At Trichinopoly I learnt she took me for a missionary—apostolically bearded; and at Talaimanaar she insisted on my taking a cushion and rug for the night journey to Colombo.

And thus it transpired that on Erode platform, close upon a midsummer midnight, I found my El Dorado . . . the end of all my lonely jungle wanderings; the answer to my oft-repeated cry to Heaven to point me an object for my continued existence.

The rebirth of faith, and an incentive to renew lost endeavour—shaken by the horrors of the last few years.

* * * * *

A further debt of gratitude to the great blue hills of Ranga I can never repay.

“ And this is our Wisdom : we rest together
On the great lone hills, in the storm-filled weather,
And watch the skies as they pale and burn ;
The golden stars in their orbits turn,
While Love is with us, and Time and Peace,
And life has nothing to give but these.”

Laurence Hope.

Apologia.

I MAY have appeared overharsh on the subject of "herd mentality"; but those who have absorbed the many pages of *Hunter's Moon*, and in so doing have imbibed some of the peace of mind and body which descends on one from contact with Nature's great solitudes, will forgive my revolt against man; and his dependence on the company of his fellow-creatures, and the inevitable turmoil of modern civilisation, for his happiness.

How true the words of Rupert Brooke:—

"How can we find? how can we rest? how can
We, being gods, win joy, or peace, being man?
We, the gaunt zanies of a witless Fate . . .
Who want, and know not what we want, and cry
With crooked mouths for Heaven, and throw it by."

All around, within clasping distance, lies the panacea for all mental ills—Nature's solitude. Within a stone's throw of the busiest way lies a peaceful stretch of river, a roof-top open to the stars, a silent park—yet we drench our leisure hours with jazz, with the exhalations of a thousand fellow-creatures in a crowded pleasure-house—and cry aloud for peace for our tortured nerves!

* * * * *

For forty million long years, man—the mammal—has been a family animal, and the herd instinct dates from the Cainozoic age.

Let me quote a noted historian :—

“ Compare the life of an individual lizard (the Reptilian age) with the life of even a quite lowly mammal. The former has no mental continuity with anything beyond itself—a self-contained globe of purpose that serves its own purpose and ends. But the latter ‘ picks up ’ from its mother, and hands on to its offspring. All the mammals are more or less imitative in youth, and gained pre-adult dependence, and emulation,” etc.

They introduced tradition, social associations, social services (of one of which I am an unworthy member)—and the great tabu that “ it is not good for man to live alone.”

How, then, can we shake off the ever-increasing influences of forty million years!

Perhaps I am a rebel—a relic of the Mesozoic age—a reptilian, self-contained globe of purpose, that desires no mental continuity with aught beyond myself . . . or certainly aught but a chosen few. But I do not suffer gladly the human herd—their inanities and exhalations, and the modern Babylon they have created.

“ Who want, and know not what they want, and cry”

Nature instructs us at all seasons, and cries aloud, in all her loveliness, for our approbation. In dawns and sunsets, starlight, and in the freshness of her flowers and pastures, she beckons us away to solitudes, where alone we can hear her voice.

“ A certain odour on the wind,
A hidden face beyond the west—
These things have called us.”

Shall we for ever pass them by ?

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