

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_210072

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 799.2761 / B36J Accession No. 39523

Author Baze, William

Title Just elephants. 1955

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

Just Elephants

JUST ELEPHANTS

WILLIAM BAZE

Preface by

HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR

BAO DAI

LONDON
ELEK BOOKS

Copyright 1955 by **Elek Books**

Published by
ELEK BOOKS LIMITED
14 Great James Street
London, W.C.1

and simultaneously in Canada by

The Ryerson Press
299 Queen Street West
Toronto 2 B
Canada

Translated by
H. M. BURTON

Line drawings by
PAUL WYETH

PRINTED AND MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
FLETCHER AND SON LTD NORWICH AND
THE LEIGHTON-STRAKER BOOKBINDING CO LTD LONDON

CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
PREFACE	9
1 BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION	13
2 MY FRIEND, THE ELEPHANT	16
3 THE NATURAL BACKGROUND	32
4 WARRIORS, MATRIARCHS AND JOKERS	42
5 CREATURES OF AFFECTION	62
6 FOOLS RUSH IN	80
7 ROGUES AND VAGABONDS	93
8 BRINGING THEM BACK ALIVE	113
9 HUNTING BY LASSO: FIRST STAGES	129
10 HUNTING BY LASSO: THE CAPTURE	145
11 BREAKING THEM IN	164
12 THE CAMP IN THE FOREST	184
13 MY FIRST ELEPHANT-HUNT	197
14 MY FIRST LASSO-HUNT	218
15 IN CONCLUSION	235

ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Page</i>
Elephants at watering place surrounded by jungle, taking their quiet leisurely bath	49
Mahouts rubbing elephants down in the water	49
Young natives at their toilet	50
Four months old elephant being attended to	50
Working mother with her baby	67
Six months old baby sucking at her mother	67
Youth of the Bahnas Tribe	68
Hill tribe people are often contracted to Teak Firms	68
Village elder smoking his brass pipe	68
Village Beau	68
Chinese Basket maker	68
Hunters and captors from the Emperor's collection 1943	85
A scout	86
Young elephants belonging to H.M. Emperor Bao Dai	86
A fighter elephant with sawn-off tusks	103
The giant of the team	103
Nguyen-Huu-Song, Manager of the Emperor's hunt, with Bac-Let	104
Stowing the capturing ropes	121
Demonstrating the slip-knot in the capturing-rope	121
Wild elephants taken by surprise in the Savannah	122
Spirit house over a tomb	139
Tomb-house showing Annamite influence in its construction	139
On the Trail	140

	<i>Page</i>
Moving into action	140
Lasso hunter in action	141
All ready for the final capture	141
Got him!	142
A captive resigned to his fate	159
A young captive between three trained elephants	159
Typical elephant country	160
A giant tamed	161
A group of newly-trained recruits	161
A mobile camp	162
A permanent camp	162
Teak elephants at work	179
Team of elephants being ridden by mahouts to work	179
Teak bungalows built seven feet off the ground to withstand floods	180
An elephant on the Royal Road of Angkor Vat	180
The author—and friend	213
The Emperor Bao Dai, with one of his favourite elephants	213
A home-made howdah in use at Darlac	214
Fixing a home-made howdah	214
The Ceremony of the Oath at Banmethout	231
Ceremonial buffalo-heads laid out at Banmethout	231
The Ceremony of the Oath at Banmethout: Beginning of the March Past of the Elephants	232

PREFACE

by His Majesty, the Emperor

BAO DAI

I AM happy to introduce to the public this most entertaining book about elephants, their capture and training and their life in the jungle, by my old hunting-companion, William Bazé.

Of the making of books about elephants there is no end, but this one is different. Only William Bazé could have written it. There is nothing technical about it; it is all simple and straightforward. The lively, unaffected, occasionally informal manner in which it is written makes it seem more like a novel—a novel moreover which holds the reader under its spell until he has finished it. We feel we are actually sharing his experiences and taking part with him in the different stages of elephant-hunting which he describes so excitingly.

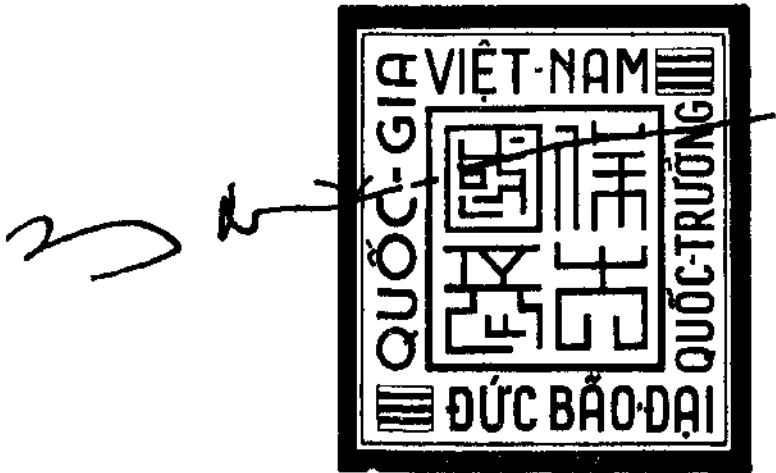
But although the story seems simple enough, its simplicity conceals a profound and intimate knowledge of the ways of animals—and of men. If one did not already know that William Bazé was one of the most distinguished hunters in Indo-China, this book would soon reveal the fact.

Indo-China is a country which offers inexhaustible attractions to the big-game hunter. Its magnificent forests, vast plains and noble mountains are the home of innumerable animals of every kind and species.

I hope this book will inspire its readers with the author's true love of hunting. It is a noble sport. To those who are willing to accept its disciplines it gives the sense

of responsibility, the power to think and act quickly, in fact all those qualities which help to make man the master of his fate and show him the way to a full and complete life.

Dalai, May gotfi, 1950.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

At one time I possessed a fine collection of photographs, some of them a little yellow with age. Every stage of my career was represented and I had been careful to write the date and a few details under each print. But in the Japanese invasion of March, 1945, and the chaos which followed it, I lost most of my precious souvenirs, including a collection—of which I was justly proud—of trophies of the chase, and, of course, most of my photographs.

Through the kindness of various friends, who happened to have kept copies of some of my snapshots, I have been able to reproduce a few of them here; other enthusiastic elephant-hunters have lent me theirs, for which I am indeed grateful.

I also have to thank M. le Gouverneur de Raymond, French High Commissioner in Cambodia, whose willing and eager co-operation has made it possible to include additional illustrations. The photographs of the *Fete du Serment* are reproduced by kind permission of the High Commissioner for Southern Vietnam, to whom, and to the Information Department of Cambodia I am happy to express my gratitude. My English publishers have added more photographs, by Paul Popper, Walt Disney, and *Picture Post*, to whom also acknowledgement is due.

CHAPTER ONE

By Way of Introduction

I HAVE spent the best years of my life among wild animals. I used to live at Xuanloc, a little district in Indo-China near the Annamese border, in the midst of country which was teeming with game, both big and small. But as soon as I found myself with more leisure for exploration I took every chance to push further afield—into the most remote corners of Annam, Cambodia, Laos and the Moi hinterland. My favourite country, however, was the Lagna basin, a vast stretch of grassland interspersed with forests, water-courses and marshes, and crossed from end to end by a majestic winding river. This country, in fact, cast such a spell on me that even now I cannot think of it without that tight feeling about the heart. In the background, the last outposts of the Annamese mountains provided an impressive setting. Towards evening their summits would be clouded with smoke and later, when night had fallen, little points of fire would puncture the darkness, high up there in the sky. In the dry season men would be burning off the grass to enrich their soil, and their fires were like a signal to us below—a signal to show that men still lived in those remote heights, far from the restless vanities of civilization.

"Ah!" an old hunting partner once said to me, "the Lagna's like some seductive mistress whom one has had to leave behind but whom one will never be able to forget."

And indeed there was truth in his comparison.

Like my father and my grandfather before me, I was

a true son of St Hubert. There was nothing I liked better than following up the tracks of a herd of wild animals, whether they were deer or cattle or elephants. If we were stalking a tiger I would lie behind a screen of branches waiting for the beast to put in an appearance and shivering, despite myself, with excitement.

I learnt the meaning of utter exhaustion; sometimes it was after a tropical storm, sometimes after a day's grim donkey-work like cutting a trail through tropical vegetation, sometimes after a normal day's hunting. Whatever the reason, I would collapse like a log on a pile of leaves and branches—having no modern conveniences or divan beds handy—as soon as supper was over and sleep the sleep of the just. Like most people with an obsession, I sometimes went mad, and my madness, I regret to say, sometimes betrayed me into indiscretions which would make the old staggers shake their heads over me. I would listen to them, politely but sceptically, without saying a word—just as the young men listen to me nowadays, in fact.

As I was such a headstrong youngster there were occasions when I found myself in the middle of a herd of wild elephants—quite by accident, I need hardly add. When that happened I sometimes had to kill an unfortunate female who had got in my way when I was chasing an ivory-bearing male. The aggressiveness of the fair sex—in certain circumstances, of course—is well known, and elephants, who go in for matriarchy, are no exception. A difference of opinion between me and the three-ton charmer bearing down on me with fury in her little eyes could be settled in only one way, and that a drastic way.

My hunting technique gradually improved as I widened my experience. I learnt how to avoid the most

frequent snags, how to choose my own ground to attack from, how to decide what conditions would prove most favourable. I had everything to learn and perhaps I was fortunate in having to learn much of it the hard way; certainly the knowledge of elephants I acquired in the end, of their habits and customs, their likes and dislikes, was a reward worth some sacrifice, and the experience—the twenty-five years of true and thrilling adventure—enriched my life and gave it real meaning.

One advantage I enjoyed which I shall never forget: I spent many years with the Emperor Bao Dai, capturing and breaking-in wild elephants in the Buké-Dangur reserve—long before that lovely region was ravaged by war. Whenever we happen to meet, the Emperor and I, we still find ourselves reviving happy memories of the days we spent together—not a very wise pastime, perhaps, since it awakens all sorts of unhappy memories as well. ...

There are still many people who are ignorant or misinformed about elephants, their physical characteristics and their daily lives; I propose, therefore, to devote a chapter or two to what may seem dull or elementary facts, although there will be nothing scientific in my story. My main purpose is to record some impressions and recollections of my many and varied contacts with elephants, either in their natural state or as trained and domesticated servants of man, and I hope to show that these giants of the Indo-Chinese jungle are fundamentally the most attractive and affectionate of God's creatures.

CHAPTER TWO

My Friend, the Elephant

THE Asian elephant is very different from his African cousin. To begin with, he is not so "tall"—his legs are shorter and his general appearance more thick-set. He has a less receding forehead and his ears, compared with those enormous flags which the African elephant waves to and fro, are quite small.

In Africa nearly all elephants have tusks of considerable weight and value; in Asia, although there certainly are elephants worth hunting for their ivory, an elephant with tusks weighing more than sixty pounds is decidedly uncommon. (There are exceptions, however. I did once see, in the home of a wealthy Annamese mandarin, a pair of tusks weighing together about 150 lbs. Their owner—who had himself never killed so much as a sparrow—was very proud of them and told a wonderful story, full of magic and mystery, to explain how he came by them. But that was in the happy days before the Japanese invasion, and the subsequent story, although equally mysterious, is far from happy: both he and the trophy in which he took such innocent pride and pleasure, disappeared completely, washed away by the relentless tide of war.)

The female elephant of Indo-China is even more unobtrusive than the male and has no use for any vain adornment. At the most one will find certain ill-defined stumps on an old lady now and then—and she may be a hundred years old and the acknowledged mistress of the

herd. When I was a boy I used to know old men who were quite mad about these stumps, carving them into boxes to hold their ground betel-nut, which they always took with a flat silver spoon. It was considered a sign of wealth and distinction.

The Asiatic elephant also seems to be more good-natured and easy-going—which does not by any means imply that it is advisable to abuse his patience. Once he realizes that he is being tracked, or rounded up, his anger is terrible.

It is easy enough nowadays to compare the Asiatic and the African elephant, at least as far as their physical make-up is concerned. It is only necessary to visit a zoo. A more interesting problem is whether there are really two types of elephant in Indo-China—the greater, which the Vietnamese call Bo Banh, and the smaller, B6 Choc. For myself, I think there are not. I believe the distinction is just one of those stubborn errors which make regional folk-lore such an attractive study. The smaller types are the ones most frequently encountered; they are not full-grown and they have not yet acquired the essential experience of man and his ways. They are attracted by the crops grown by the villagers, investigate them and find them good to eat. Sometimes their rashness proves fatal, for there are always traps, snares and poisoned arrows waiting for them, but they can ruin the prospects of a year's harvest in a couple of snacks, so it is not surprising that a hostile reception is prepared for them.

As they grow older, these fearless youngsters become more "wild" and learn to hide themselves deep in their jungles; but there are always others to take their place and continue their tricks. The adult and the aged live in parts of the forest where men seldom wander but where

the unlimited resources provide everything an elephant requires. Here they reach their greatest size and their occasional appearances give rise to the legend of the two different species.

Elephants are incurable nomads. At every meal a single elephant consumes an enormous quantity of green-stuff and wastes a lot more. Because of their gregarious instincts they must be always on the move to find all the fodder they require. In a hard year this may mean that they will wander throughout the whole of the Indo-Chinese peninsula, Siam and Burma. Naturally these wanderings are bound to lead to meetings—and to cross-breeding—simply as a result of the accidental crossing of the paths followed by different herds.

' Even if there were two species in pre-historic times, therefore, they cannot still exist separately, since the very nature of their lives insists that their paths must inevitably and constantly be crossing and re-crossing.

Even the white elephant is not a separate species; he is an example of albinism—a phenomenon which occasionally crops up, for instance, in domestic buffaloes, though not among the wild breeds. In Cambodia, Siam, Burma, India and Laos the white elephant is regarded as a sacred Eminence, specially favoured by Nature. In captivity, the exceptional colour of his skin guarantees him the status of a Pasha.

There was one white female elephant in H.M. Bao Dai's collection of wild animals. She was a lovely creature, small and not very energetic, and whenever we set out in convoy she was always tagging along in the rear. Like some goddess fallen from her high estate, she carried out her tasks as reluctantly as an unwilling prisoner doing his stint. Once, on an expedition to the Bac Ruong, she decided quite suddenly to go on strike and stayed all



night, rooted to the same spot, in the middle of a plain which was partly flooded. The wild elephants, browsing in the neighbourhood, trumpeted every time they came near her and the mahouts on her back spent the night waving lighted torches at arm's length and shouting until they were exhausted, to keep the nocturnal visitors from becoming too assiduous in their attentions. Next morning the goddess deigned to rejoin us. The mahouts—who had lost their voices, incidentally—admitted afterwards that they had never expected to see the sun rise.

The last days of this elephant—who would have been loaded with honours in any other country—were as drab and undistinguished as the rest of her life. One stormy night she lay down, never to rise again. We never knew what she died of, but the natives, who had been without meat for months, cut off the end of her trunk and washed it down with generous draughts of liquor. It may have been the alcohol, but at any rate they said it was very tender. This seems to have been the only honour ever accorded this exceptional creature.

The average height of the Asiatic elephant is from 9 to 9½ feet for the male and from 8¼ to 9 feet for the female. These measurements apply, of course, only to elephants in captivity; in their wild state the males are hunted for their ivory and naturally the finest specimens are the most eagerly pursued, so that those who survive to reach maturity are rare, compared with the females, who more often have a chance to live to old age. Moreover the old females, often outstanding in more ways than one, maintain their rule of the herd unchallenged, whereas an enormous male is often vanquished by a smaller, but stronger, rival. He may have the advantage in size but he lacks the necessary vigour and endurance. Once he is defeated he will leave the herd and henceforth lead a

solitary existence. He may be able to find a remote and inaccessible corner of the forest, in which to live out his days in peace, but the lone males are actually the most rigorously hunted of all elephants and it is more likely that he will eventually stop a bullet or else suffer the fatal agonies of poison from one of the natives' specially treated arrows.

H.M. Bao Dai had two exceptionally big males in his herd—a couple of cathedrals nearly ten feet high, called Mot and Hai, who will appear again in this narrative from time to time. I am not sure of Mot's weight, but an elephant nine feet high will weigh about three tons if in normal health. The giant Hai carried his four tons lightly and cheerfully.

The size of the head varies in proportion to the size of the body. In the imperial herd at Hue there was a male, without tusks, presented by King Sihanouk of Cambodia to the Emperor of Annam; this elephant's head was regarded as perfect, but he was a magnificent creature in all respects, comparable with the stylized elephants engraved by the Khmer artists centuries ago in the bas-reliefs of the Temple of Angkor.

The curve of the elephant's back-bone also varies from one animal to another—a detail which even the natives have to take into account because every elephant's saddle has to be made to measure. The different parts must be adapted to the animal's anatomy in order to achieve maximum stability with minimum discomfort. The Emperor succeeded after many experiments in devising an aluminium saddle with inter-changeable parts and a cunning mechanism which allowed it to be adjusted to fit any shape.

The elephant's legs are like massive pillars, although the soles are supple and padded. If for any reason he is

anxious not to announce his approach he can steal up on you unexpectedly and without a sound. A herd stampeding, especially in marshy ground or thick undergrowth, will make as much noise as a thunderstorm; but the same herd, when it chooses, can move about in a most impressive silence. Moreover, if the ground is hard and the weather dry, their tracks will be so light that it will need a professional tracker to follow them.

So sure-footed is the elephant that he easily beats the mule at his own game. An elephant never falls. If he slips, or makes a false step, he immediately stops dead. The calm assurance with which he can climb the steepest rocks or walk along the edge of the most appalling precipice is quite breath-taking. I remember once at Darlac, near the junction of two streams, we came to a ford where the water was running very low. The crossing was so slippery that the men were sliding all over the place with every step they took. My brother George and I had been out with two or three friends bringing in logs, so our elephants were harnessed up at the time and carrying us on their backs into the bargain. Nevertheless they took the ford in their stride and crossed it as though it were not there. We took off our hats to them that day.

The elephant is of course fortunate in that his knees are near the ground, which makes it impossible for him to fall on them as a horse sometimes does. His fore-legs are stronger than his hind-legs. The front feet are rounded, with five bulging nails on each, while the hind feet are rounded and have only four nails. Some beginners who are a little too ready to listen to the natives are firmly convinced that oval-shaped footprints are made only by males—and from that point it is only a short step to the next fairy-tale: that all deep oval depressions must

have been made by some powerful solitary male, probably one with magnificent and valuable tusks. I know all about this—to my cost. Many is the time I have followed the tracks of some animal described to me by the natives as certain to be very valuable because of its deep oval footprints, only to find on catching up with it that it was some poor old grandma. And the natives had always said, with supreme confidence, that they had actually seen him: he had marvellous tusks, as long as this—and they would open their arms wide—and as thick as this—and here they would encircle their thighs with their two hands. I needed no more convincing. ... The jungle is alive with that kind of fishermen's talk.

The footprints of elephants, like those of human beings, are all different. Sometimes the nails are most prominent, sometimes the heel, sometimes the imprint shows a closed foot, sometimes a splayed; everything depends on the way in which the animal walks. These distinct variations make it possible to provide every trained elephant in Indo-China with its own identity-card. Elephant-thieves have acquired considerable skill in changing footprints by cutting the animal's foot about and some of their tricks have led to famous law-suits.

The belief still lingers on in the jungle that the height of an elephant is twice the circumference of its front footprint. This does sometimes work out exactly right, but it is not safe to generalize. Some elephants make very small footprints for their height, others large wide ones. In stony country their feet get worn down; in marshland they tend to get flattened out; it is all too easy, in fact for the hunter to set out, so to speak, on the wrong foot. It is still true, however, that an expert can pick out the tracks of an individual animal from a perfect maze of mixed and confused footprints.

The elephant's body is almost hairless, although there are a few whiskers, as sharp as thorns, growing from the wrinkled skin. They are so sparse, however, that their riders have no difficulty in avoiding them. On the other hand, the eyelids are long and bushy, concealing strange little eyes. On the top of the head the adolescent boasts a little down and the elderly a little tuft.

The tail, which is rather meagre for such a massive body, also ends in a tuft. The hairs grow in a perfectly symmetrical pattern and are thick, long and as black as jet.

There are exceptions, however. The peace-loving elephants who live on the high plateaux and never have to cross big rivers retain their tails intact for the benefit of successful hunters, who pull out the hairs and have them plaited into innumerable bracelets for the delectation of their lady-loves. But the elephants of the plains, who come down to the savannahs of the Lagna when the vegetation is at its thickest, often get their tails stripped while forcing their way through thickets of spiny plants. Sometimes, also, the hairs are pulled out when the herd is crossing the river. If they find themselves being swept away by the current they grip each other by the tail—and an elephant's tail is not proof against another elephant's teeth. Baby elephants often grip their mother's tail so fiercely when they are in a panic that they will even bite a piece off it. Once they are safely in harbour the youngsters may get a severe dressing-down, but that, unfortunately, does not repair the damage, and it is to accidents of this nature that many elephants owe their abbreviated tail. The Moi folk, who are not particularly logical, look on a stumpy tail as a sign of spitefulness in an elephant, but then they find some fantastic explanation for every oddity. Any elephant with a short tail is automatically savage; so is any male elephant without

tusks. If only some hunter will make a point some day of bringing down an elephant with these characteristics who really is savage these old superstitions will be confirmed and will promptly assume the force of laws!

The female has two breasts which are very similar, proportionately speaking, to a woman's. They are situated between the forelegs and seem small in relation to the mother's huge body. However, the secretion of the internal glands must be sufficiently plentiful since they provide enough milk to rear the somewhat bulky infant successfully.

The elephant's skull is triangular, with two marked protuberances at the top, separated by a deep medial depression. Next to this is a pronounced swelling, just where the trunk begins, which hunters call the *bosse-d'attache*.

I remember seeing years ago, at Phanrang in Southern Annam, the skull of an old male which had been shot by a well-known hunter of the day. The animal had apparently attacked without provocation. The skull was furrowed, more or less diagonally, by a channel in which was a pointed stick of iron-wood, which protruded slightly from the skull at each end. A thick cartilage had formed inside the hole and sealed off the frontal sinuses from the dart. From all the evidence, I came to the conclusion that this skull belonged to an elephant which, some years previously, had fallen into a trap set by the Moi. A huge baulk of timber, weighing a ton, to which the pointed stake was attached by a cunning arrangement of ropes, must have been dislodged by the elephant who was knocked out by the blow. He had come round, however, and recovered—with this foreign body in his skull, for all the world like an old soldier carrying bits of shrapnel in his body to the grave. His temper had been

affected by the accident and he had become extremely touchy—which explains the sudden outburst of anger that drove him, to his cost, to charge the hunter. As a matter of fact this poor creature, like others that have at some time or other been injured in the frontal sinuses, undoubtedly suffered a great deal of pain; it is not surprising that he had become somewhat short-tempered.

The elephant's ears are very mobile and can be directed forward when he is listening for something or laid flat against his neck when he is restless, suspicious or unhappy. In young elephants they are quite smooth and clean, but in the adult animals, especially aged females, they are marked by great bare patches and are constantly being frayed by contact with brambles and thorns. The upper part, which is firm and straight in the young, shrivels up with advancing years and finally becomes one of the most distinctive signs of old age. They are extremely sensitive and the oozies find that they provide one of the best "holds". With the *ankus*, or goad, hooked in his ear a tame elephant will quietly obey the man who controls him in this way. The "harpoon" method of catching elephants, used in Cambodia in the rainy season, is based on this same sensitivity of the ear. It is also useful to the men who sit on the elephant's neck and tickle its ears with their toes; by varying the pressure of their toes they can show which way they want the elephant to go.

Elephants have acute hearing and when they are on the alert they can hear the approach of danger from afar. Unfortunately this gift is often entirely wasted because a herd on the feed make such an incredible din—branches snap, roots are torn noisily out of the ground, green-stuff is beaten against the knee or banged on the ground to shake the dirt off it, ears are flapped and smacked, flies

are swatted with branches, and all the while there are the multifarious rumblings of vast tummies and all kinds of concerted shouts and trumpeting. A herd of elephants that have really settled down to a meal can, in fact, be approached quite easily if the wind is in the right quarter.

Their eyes are awkwardly placed. For one thing their lines of vision intersect some distance ahead, like a couple of badly adjusted head-lamps. For another, they are no use for looking sideways. If an elephant wants to look to left or right he is obliged to pirouette on his base. This explains why, when he thinks he is being followed, he seems to dance along, skipping one way and then the other. He can't *see* whoever it is, and he is really quite worried.

The eyes are not in the least phosphorescent at night, like those of the great wild cats, the deer, or the cattle. They are more like those of the wild boar, the monkey or the hare: if you shine a bright light on them in the dark they return only a pale and feeble glow. In other words, by the time you have begun to recognize the elephant's eyes you have already seen the rest of him.

The elephant's teeth cover a considerable area, but their arrangement is quite straightforward. The males usually have two enlarged incisors in the upper jaw which are, of course, the tusks. The remainder of the dental system consists simply of two sets of molars divided equally between the two jaws and renewed ten at a time in two separate stages. The replacements occur always from the back teeth forwards, the old ones being pushed out by the new growths. Females and tusk-less males have only the molars, apart from occasional stumps which do duty for incisors. The surfaces of the molars, which are used for crushing and grinding, are

covered with regular ridges which, to the expert eye, reveal the animal's age.

In the Indo-Chinese elephant the tusks assume various shapes. Some are long and thin, others long and thick, or even short and thick. The arguments advanced by the natives to prove that there are two species of Indo-Chinese elephants are based on these differences in the tusks, but, as we have already shown, the theory is without foundation. The development of the tusks in different males follows more or less the same lines as the development of the horns in the bovines. Some carry ivories which grow slowly but which thicken with age. To try to assess the age or growth of a "kill" by his tusks is a risky business; a small—though fully-grown—elephant may sport a pair of splendid long ivories, whereas a giant may show only small or medium-sized ones, although these latter may be exceptionally strong.

In much the same way young elephants themselves sometimes shoot up like asparagus, their chests and limbs filling out later; or they may grow slowly and steadily—which may be to their advantage in the long run, although there is no guarantee that the leggy youngsters will grow up to be any less muscular than the stocky ones in the end.

Elephants with one tusk are not rare in Indo-China. Either they lose one tusk as the result of an accident in which it is broken off at the root, or, by a freak of nature, they are born with only one. The single tusk is always enormous when fully grown, as though it has absorbed the growth which should rightly have been shared between the normal pair. When it comes to a fight, big males with only one tusk are the most dangerous; all the strength of the beast is concentrated in the one weapon instead of being divided between two, and in any case

the normal elephant usually finds that when he tries to bury both tusks in his adversary's body one seems to prevent the other from going right home. The single-tusked elephant can choose the exact spot for attack—and hit it!

A pair of tusks may be quite unsymmetrical if the elephant is in the habit of using one of them more than the other. Again, some tusks are straight, some curve inwards and some curve outwards. There are even some which cross and so more or less imprison the elephant's trunk. An elephant with this disability is at a great disadvantage in a fight, especially if the tusks grow only a little more in their opposite directions after they have crossed. It is almost impossible to stick them into anything—which is a handicap, to say the least. Nothing is more calculated to give an elephant a real inferiority complex than to have to acknowledge defeat by a rival whose only advantage is a more conveniently arranged pair of tusks.

In all the captive herds that I have ever come across it is the tusks which determine the hierarchy to which every member of the herd is subject. Newcomers take one look at their future companions and make up their minds, after a good look at their tusks, which of them will be worth challenging to a fight at some time or other and which it will be advisable to avoid. Herds in the wild state are doubtless accustomed to the same form of group discipline. Any uppish youngsters who have a fancy to question authority on the subject are sharply brought to their senses and reminded of their position. To avoid trouble in the domesticated herds, however, the keepers know exactly which animals may safely be left to feed together and which must be kept apart. Generally speaking, it is found wiser to keep the more amorously disposed males apart from the herd.

Among some tribes of the Moi hinterland it is the custom to saw off the ends of their elephants' tusks. This makes them less of a danger to their normal companions while they are growing, but it also seems to encourage the growth of the tusks in the long run, so that they are more useful when the animals come to be used for hunting wild elephants for capture.

And finally we come to the elephant's trunk. It is a self-contained organ which takes the place of both the upper lip and the nose. The lower lip is triangular, pendulous and soft. Ivory-bearing males have a swelling, caused by the tusks, where the upper lip joins the lower.

The uses of the elephant's trunk are many and various. It becomes a formidable weapon when it comes crashing down on an adversary; yet at the same time it is the most vulnerable of organs and once it is put out of action the elephant will die. It is sometimes hard to realize that this colossus, the most powerful giant of our forests, is at the mercy of its trunk, which, indeed, governs its whole existence. It is an extremely mobile organ, solid at the base but thin at the tip (which acts as a sort of finger), and prehensile. There are two "nostrils" at the tip, as there are in the noses of other animals, and when the animal is resting these touch the ground.

The elephant uses his trunk to breathe, to drink, to shower himself with water, mud or dust, to chase away flies with a fly-swatter made of twigs, to pick up the various smells of the forest (from edible vegetation to enemies close at hand), to gather his food, dress it and carry it to his mouth, to clear a pathway for himself, to broadcast a sort of purring noise, to show his disapproval by banging on the ground, to test his foot-hold when his instinct tells him there is a risk of its giving way beneath

him, to express his affection (by loving caresses), to seize a tiger, or any other foe, hurl it into space or flatten it to the earth, to smite any other adversary that arouses his anger, and generally to kill and to destroy. It is the trunk which is the most dangerous part of a charging elephant; he carries it rolled up and, when the right moment arrives, he shoots it out straight with incredible force.

But this same trunk may be infected by the claws of some wild beast defending itself to the death; it may be paralysed by a simple arrow or by a charge of buckshot; it may be attacked by the first symptoms of an epidemic disease—the most common misfortune of all. From that moment the elephant is condemned to death from hunger and thirst and becomes the prey of all the biting and stinging creatures of the jungle which it can no longer keep at bay.

I should add that the strength and the vulnerability of the trunk have always been well known to those concerned with the capture and training of elephants. If a young elephant is a little too ready to make passes at his trainer he can be quite easily discouraged by a little prick of a needle, either at the *bosse-d'attache* or on the trunk itself. The pain is nothing serious, but it is enough to restrain the youngster's misdirected enthusiasm.

I hope my readers have not been bored by this little essay on the physical characteristics of the elephant. He is a lovable creature but not a simple one, and it is not always easy to understand his reactions without a fairly detailed understanding of his physical make-up.

CHAPTER THREE

The Natural Background

ELEPHANTS are not only big eaters; they are also incorrigible spoilers, pulling up, trampling, scattering and wasting more vegetation than they consume. This unfortunate weakness of theirs makes life a nightmare for the Moi people, who practise seasonal cultivation in areas carved out of the forest. If a herd should happen to visit a field of maize overnight, the damage they can do is more or less catastrophic. I have seen nearly ten acres of rice reduced to nothing between sunset and sunrise, despite the fact that the wretched farmers had spent the night shouting, beating gongs and lighting innumerable braziers. The banqueters continued their feast, not in the least perturbed; when they detected a note of real abuse in the shouts of the spectators, or gathered from the shower of burning torches thrown at them that they were not exactly welcome, they merely turned and bellowed their disapproval.

They spread destruction indiscriminately in the jungle, the plain, the bush—anywhere, in fact, where there is edible greenstuff. If they happen to strike a spot where the food is exceptionally good they will not be content just to satisfy their hunger steadily; instead they will spread out over a wide area, picking and choosing only the tastiest shoots. These, of course, are soon finished and they become a little less exacting; they end by gleaning odds and ends which they had previously rejected—until, finally, they decide to take their custom elsewhere.

It is said that an adult elephant eats nearly nine hundred pounds of fodder every twenty-four hours—a fair enough estimate for an elephant in the wild state, although when he is kept in a closed paddock he makes do with half that quantity. Even four hundred and fifty pounds may seem a great amount of food for a single animal, but a consideration of the elephant's anatomy explains his enormous appetite. He is just one vast digestive tract working overtime. His main occupation, except during certain periods of the year, consists of making good at one end the losses incurred at the other. His droppings are just great heaps of partially digested vegetation—which explains, incidentally, why they make such poor manure.

A friend of mine who owns a coffee plantation once took four of my elephants as boarders for two months with the idea of replenishing his stocks of manure cheaply. What pleased him most was that at the same time he was solving the problem of transport. He might have saved himself the time and trouble and expense! I never discovered what special plants my elephants found that appealed to them so much; all I know is that my friend's Moi assistant accused *me* of having caused the ruin of a whole nursery of young coffee-plants.

But I did once find a good use for elephant dung. Soaked in turpentine and then dried and burned slowly it keeps away mosquitoes, and I used to fumigate my tent with it in the old days. I can't pretend that it was ideal; still, it is one of those little details of the old carefree days which are firmly fixed in my memory, although it is so long ago and so much has happened since then.

The natural habitat of our Indo-Chinese elephant is the whole of our countryside—forest clearings, virgin

jungle, amazing stretches of bushland, magnificent savannah, mysterious uplands and steep mountains. But he also likes to explore old plantations which have been abandoned to the all-conquering march of vegetation—to say nothing of existing plantations left inadequately guarded. The herds are always on the move and know in advance where they will meet, according to the season and the state of the plants. Their programme seems almost like a timetable and they will return at regular intervals to some favourite spot, using the same tracks and arriving almost at the same fixed dates. They wander slowly from one part of the country to another, picking up as they go along what food they happen to come across. But once they reach journey's end they greet it with shouts of joy and settle down to a real banquet without stopping to say grace.

The professional hunter is familiar with the elephant's habits and gets to know when the bamboo forest will be visited for its young shoots, the stands of palm for the sweet tufts which grow at the ends of the branches; he knows, too, that the great forests, full of tasty roots and fruits, will be most frequented in the dry season, when bush-fires have stripped the plains of their cover and made them dangerous. On the other hand, as soon as the rains begin, the wild elephants will come down from the mountains towards the plains. They will come out at night and feed safely but as soon as the sun appears they will retire to the undergrowth. The grass is tender, but not tall enough to offer any protection; moreover, the sun is hot and there is always the risk of sunstroke. When the rainy season has well and truly arrived, however, and the sun is consistently covered by the clouds, when the rain is falling in sheets and everything smells fresh, when the giant reeds and canes not only provide protection but

keep human beings at a safe distance—then the elephants roam freely over the savannahs and lead a happy, care-free existence.

The savannahs of the Lagna cover an area of about 250 square miles and from July to November they provide an elephants' paradise. From every corner of Indo-China and from all the neighbouring countries the herds meet there. Not that the plains are deserted for long. As soon as the bush-fires have died down and the grass has begun to grow, little herds of ten to twenty elephants begin to find their way back; but from July to November the resident population is so vast that the herds are intermingled and often provide the amazing spectacle of several thousand elephants in one great assembly.

For many a long year it was my delight, every July or August, to descend the Lagna in a canoe, just for the sake of spending a few days "in the land of the elephants". The muddy water flowed between two walls of reeds, from which every now and then shot up a flight of teal or some other water-bird. Alligators, which seemed to be asleep on the banks, suddenly slipped into the water as we came near and we could hear the stampede of wild animals running away into the bush. Here and there we would come across a drinking-hole, pitted with the prints of every kind of beast, especially elephants. One or two of us would run our canoes up the bank, find a tall tree and climb into its branches, from which, to our never-failing delight, we could see vast herds of elephants lord-ing it over the plain beyond the range of our rifles. In July and August the reeds were ten feet high and more, the floods were at their highest and the strip of land between the river and the elephants was impracticable for any man on foot.

One day at the Bau-Dien loop, where the Lagna makes

one of its most spectacular hairpin bends, I had sent one of my canoes across to the other bank and one of my men, to draw the attention of the others, fired a shot in the air. The effect was fantastic. A great herd of elephants came splashing towards us, puffing, growling and trumpeting with rage and curiosity. They set up such a curtain of spray as they blundered through the flood water that every now and then they were completely hidden. Soon they had surrounded the tree we were sitting in, making a wonderful spectacle which we had leisure, for once, to admire. Then one of us had the bright idea of firing another shot into the air and immediately the stampede began again, this time in the reverse direction.

That night we camped on the spot, with a giant ant-hill to give us protection against any nocturnal visits from the elephants; but we could hear them grumbling all through the night, as though they had a good mind to demand possession of their territory and show us just how unwelcome we were.

Next morning we descended the river in a melancholy and ceaseless downpour. All the way down to Vo-Dat, our journey's end, the elephants kept up a steady trumpeting to each other across the river as though this method of seeing us off the premises were their way of asserting that an elephant's home is his castle! I feel as I write these lines that I would give anything to be back on one of those expeditions, and I shall never forget the thrill of that elephants' concert echoing away into the distance.

I once had an opportunity to spy on the private life of the wild elephants when, in the company of H.M. Bao Dai and riding our own trained animals, we managed to mix with the herds without alarming them. The Emperor was convinced that where the wild elephant could go our trained elephants could follow, even in the

flood season, and one day he suggested that we should put his theory to the test. This was our first experiment of this kind, and it succeeded perfectly.

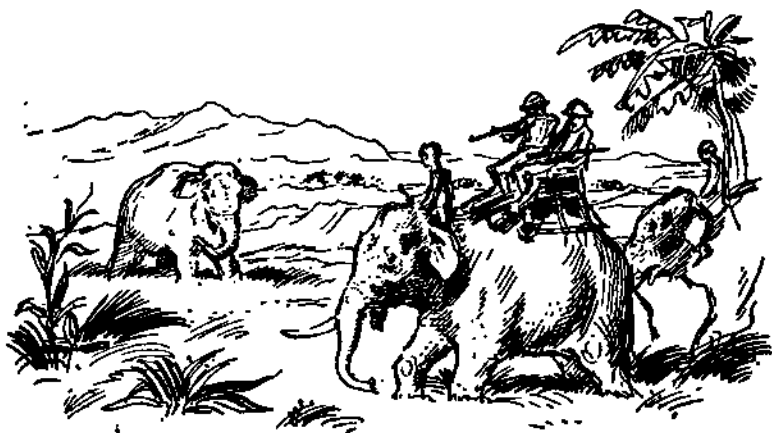
We had previously wandered about the high plateaux together, crossing mountain ranges and negotiating deep ravines in country which was reputed to be inhospitable and dangerous. If only we had had some means of transport which would have overcome every natural obstacle in our way we should have achieved even more. I remember one evening when we stopped in a grassy clearing, strewn with rocks which seemed to grow from the soil, high up in the Lang-Bian mountains. The rocks were all covered with the footprints of animals and the whole scene turned out to be a relic of some remote geological period when these same rocks were still soft; there were marks of elephants, tigers, bears, wild oxen deer, and even peacocks—in fact the whole fauna of the country had passed this way. I dismounted and began by testing the hardness of the stones. I found the wishbone of a wild ox and tapped it with a hammer, but I could not break it. All these footprints had been there for countless ages, defying time, tempest and earthquake, and I stood there lost in wonder at the mystery of it, until I was aroused from my dreams and we set off once more. Very soon we discovered a magnificent natural amphitheatre with a number of wild oxen galloping out of it as we approached. The Emperor's elephant sped the fugitives with a long and fearful trumpeting which set the surrounding valleys a-tremble with its echoes.

Although I have knocked about pretty nearly everywhere, in odd corners of Annam and Cambodia and Laos, nowhere have I see so many elephants as there were in the plains of the Lagna during the rainy season.

We were camping one afternoon in the heart of the forest in a clearing surrounded by giant trees. "Let's go and have a look at the elephants," the Emperor said suddenly, so four of us started off at once on four of the loveliest trained males. The Emperor was riding Mot, his favourite, a giant with an exceptionally long single tusk, who was a devil of a fighter and had never known defeat. He was indeed the Joe Louis of his day! I was on Bac Loi, another colossus, who, although no longer young, still had the heart of a fighter—and also a splendid pair of tusks. M. Maurice Cécicourt, the third in the party and a frequent companion of the Emperor, rode Bac Thinh, a young elephant with the unusual equipment of one perfectly straight tusk and one completely crooked. Bac Thinh was a bit of a lad, and he knew his strength. If he had lived he would be now be quite the biggest elephant in the team, but unfortunately he died from a snake-bite. The fourth member of the party, M. Nguyen-huu-Song, was on Hai, the one with the crossed tusks.

We reached the plain after about half an hour. In the distance the wild elephants were trumpeting and showering themselves with water. Every now and then one of them, after eating the leaves from a bush, would fling the discarded remnant high in the air. We pushed on through the marsh with the tall reeds all around us. Our beasts often had water up to their bellies and were usually hidden in the vegetation, so that only our heads were visible. Soon we came up with the first wild elephants, mostly females with young ones at their side. They could not see us for the reeds, while the smell of our elephants and the stench of the others at pasture made it impossible for any animal in creation to get wind of our approach. We passed within six to ten feet of the creatures, raising

ourselves as high as we could in our saddles to identify them and to see whether they were mainly males or females. Altogether we counted 175 adult males in two hours; the young ones were so often hidden by the long grass that it was impossible to include them in our census.



We ended up on the bank of a backwater in the middle of which a group of elephants were having a bath, and at this point we were obviously spotted. At any rate the bathers began climbing the opposite bank and one colossus, presenting a vast rear in our direction, went lumbering and swaying out of the bathing pool. That figure could belong to none but a very old female! Imagine our surprise, therefore, when the mighty monarch stopped and turned round to see what was going on

and we beheld him in all his glory, with a superb pair of tusks—long, strong and gleaming white. It was no time for standing still and admiring. The Emperor raised his elephant-gun and with one well-aimed bullet brought him crashing down in a heap.

Immediately there arose from the plain a chorus of protest. There we were, surrounded by elephants, some unable to make up their minds, some angry, some obviously worried without knowing why. Above the reeds waved a cloud of trunks, sniffing the air to find out where on earth we were hiding. Mothers shouted to their offspring, who were running about crying; the old female leaders and the males were holding loud conference; the noise grew louder and louder.

Suddenly, on the word of command, the racket was over and the herds began to scatter in all directions. Some of them, with their heads lowered, brushed against our animals without even suspecting the presence of human beings. Soon there was not an elephant in sight, although we could hear them away in the forest, still keeping up their vigorous protests.

One baby elephant was left alone in the backwater, bellowing in despair. Although he was quite a little fellow he already had a voice like the bull of Bashan. When we came up to him he seemed disposed to make the best of a bad job and follow us, but unfortunately Bac Loi sent him flying into the reeds with a well-aimed kick, and he started bawling louder than ever. His mother would almost certainly come back and look for him after we had gone.

We had a thoroughly enjoyable journey back to camp, the Emperor and I riding side by side exchanging impressions of the day's adventures, while around us we could still hear the noisy demonstrations of the elephants

we had so rudely upset. Even the sun seemed to smile on us as he parted the clouds for a brief moment before disappearing behind the mountains on the horizon.



CHAPTER FOUR

Warriors, Matriarchs and Jokers

FROM the most ancient times elephant ivory has excited men's greed. Articles of luxury, carved knick-knacks and amulets, all dating from pre-historic ages, have survived to show the antiquity of this love of ivory, while to-day modern jewellery, inlays, necklaces, and even the ear-ornaments of the great Pnom chieftains prove that it has not lost its appeal.

Yet the "harvest" of this precious material must have been much more restricted than it is to-day. When the hunter's equipment included nothing more than spears or poisoned arrows there were few who dared to get among the herds of wild elephants to bag the biggest tusk-bearers. Those few were dare-devils—and they seldom had many disciples. The pursuit of a wounded animal demanded sustained courage and plenty of patience, as death might be more or less delayed according to the amount of poison on the fatal arrow. Generally speaking, so long as men were restricted to primitive rule-of-thumb techniques of hunting, the male elephant was hardly in any greater danger than the female and was therefore no more ferocious.

The invention of gunpowder upset the balance in favour of man. Even with the first flint guns man knew that he was in a position to deliver the decisive blow at the moment of his own choosing, so long as he kept his head and refused to be hurried.

In 1922, in the course of my wanderings, I met three hunters from Laos who were quite extraordinary. They had a home-made pop-gun with a villainous recoil, which they solemnly loaded via the muzzle. A steel bullet was rammed home—more or less—and a wick protruding from a rough and ready powder-hole completed the set-up. The Three Musketeers invariably managed to track down a valuable tusker—a victim worthy of their attentions. They would approach within a few yards of him and then one of them would ignite the powder with a stick of incense—already prepared—at the same time holding up the tripod on which the cannon was mounted. The toughest of the three would adjust the sights while the third villain would help to prepare for the recoil. If the elephant happened to move while this was going on it was just too bad! Not that it mattered very much. The bullet might not hit exactly where it was intended to, but it was so big, and delivered with such force, that the shock was quite enough to kill, and the victim usually passed out not too far away from the scene of battle.

The recoil of this weapon often laid the gunners flat on the ground, whereupon they would pick themselves up immediately, like trained acrobats, and swarm up a nearby tree (which they had specially noted before starting operations) with incredible speed and skill. Whenever possible they would pull the cannon up after them by a rope tied to the butt; but if they decided that the moment for this operation was inopportune they would leave it on its emplacement and call upon the spirits of their ancestors to preserve it from the trampling feet of infuriated elephants.

The sequel never varied. The animals, in due course, would withdraw, whereupon the Three Musketeers

would follow in their footsteps until they came up with the corpse of their unhappy victim. Then they would help themselves to the ivory, go and sell it at the nearest possible settlement, and set off in search of another male elephant. They had no other job, but were tireless in this one. Once they followed a wounded giant for twenty-eight consecutive days, killing it in the end on the edge of a field of soya belonging to a Chinese. He bought the tusks, but made due allowance for the fact that the animal had fallen on his land—a stratagem which enabled him to offer a ridiculously low price.

As weapons improved more and more of the finest ivory-bearing males were pursued and killed. It was unnecessary for the hunter to approach so close to his prey, nor was he forced to rely on a single shot; in an emergency he could fire a second or even a third time at the same elephant. As the number of hunters increased and their weapons improved, the tuskers began to realize their dangerous position, and it is a tribute to their intelligence and their ability to profit by—and pass on the fruits of—bitter experience, that they gradually changed their habits; they now showed themselves more ready to fight for their lives whenever necessary, and the herds as a whole supported them in their new-found aggressiveness. Male elephants over a certain age began to surround themselves with precautions—an operation in which they enjoyed the whole-hearted encouragement of their wives. When the herds were on the move the males were in the middle, anxiously surrounded by the females. Sometimes they used a path parallel to that followed by the majority of the herd, with two or three hefty females in front and a few more behind. They would stay in the least vulnerable positions at the edge of the wood when

the herd stopped to feed on the plains, or else remain in the very centre of the party. Only in the rutting season were these precautions neglected, and then a lucky hunter might happen on a really valuable specimen; but this has always been regarded as the kind of windfall which occurs only once in a lifetime.

The oldest females—many of whom attain monumental proportions—are usually the leaders of the herd. Since they are lucky enough not to interest the tusk-hunters very seriously they have led a comparatively untroubled life. They have never had to fight for the leadership and their authority has gone on growing steadily until they have become, in more senses than one, practically immovable. The dignity of years puts these great dames beyond the chances and changes of this mortal life and automatically confirms them in the exalted position they have assumed. The fate of the elder males is, as we shall see, a great deal less enviable.

The wild herd, therefore, is ruled by a matriarchy. The old lady summons her Staff with one blast of her trumpet and the herd assembles to discuss a plan of campaign. One elephant is detailed to take charge and the herd will withdraw or stand fast according to his or her decision. When it comes to a frontal attack it is the old lady herself who assumes the leadership and is first in the charge.

The attitude of the males, if and when they reach old age, is bound to be different from that of their women-folk. For one thing they are exposed to special dangers of their own; in their case, old age brings no confirmation of any authority they may possess; on the contrary, old age and failing strength mean, for them, ruin and humiliation. Like athletes at the end of a triumphant career, once popular idols but now "slipping", they are

obliged to give way to the eager youngsters coming along to take their place.

As soon as the growing lads of the herd begin to show some interest in the ladies they find themselves in competition with their elders. Any advances they may make towards the young females are strictly illegal. When they are a little older it is not only the elders that they are up against: they now encounter fierce competition, with no holds barred, from rivals of their own age. A youngster once embarked on this career of conquest gets a little swollen-headed after a few victories; his star is rising. At first, however, he is careful to avoid the old male who, in the fulness of his powers, is still entitled to some respect—well seasoned, incidentally, with fear! But among the young adult males themselves a recognized hierarchy is established quite easily, for the simple reason that it is based on brute strength.

However, the years go by and the young males grow older. The more they become aware of their own powers, the more self-assured they grow. The old tuskers gradually lose their halo, their aura of greatness, while the youngsters get bolder and more insolent, defying their seniors as they please. The strongest of the new generation, having already made himself master of his contemporaries, in due course challenges the ancients. One by one he settles their account until finally he confronts the Grand Old Man himself, the champion tusker of the herd, the adored Don Juan, the giant at whose approach he had once thought it advisable to make himself scarce.

The first clash may be decisive for the young upstart; often enough it is the last clash too, for him, at any rate for a time. But from that moment the old male is given no respite. Time and again his enemy will challenge him until the day will dawn when the youngster feels sure of

himself and decides to go all out for a decision. For the veteran it will be the fight of his life; if he is beaten there will be no chance of a come-back. He may be a giant and his tusks may be the finest pair in the forest; but his strength and his staying-power will gradually decline and his reflexes will become slower and slower. He will at first merely take a back seat, studiously avoiding his successful competitor and becoming steadily more short-tempered with the other animals. Then as time goes on he will wander further and more often from the herd, finally detaching himself altogether, to wander alone and apart for the rest of his days in the tropic jungle. He will become one of the old solitaries who haunt the hunter's dreams—from every point of view an exceptional specimen for anyone to find at the other end of his rifle.

The young Don Juan who has supplanted the old will in his turn experience the same giddy period of ascendancy when the ladies will make a great fuss of him as they did of his predecessor—but he will also suffer in the end the same bitter changes of fortune. He may of course meet an early death by accident, or he may be shot by a hunter; but if he lives, the time will inevitably come when he too is challenged by some upstart, when he too will be defeated in single combat, and when he too will become a lonely old rogue. For the elephant, as for man himself, life is a wheel for ever turning. ...

If you are lucky enough to observe them in their wild state, elephants are fascinating creatures to watch. There was a drinking-hole I knew on the bank of the Lagna river where an enormous tree grew out over the stream. At the top of this tree I had built a very comfortable "hide" about ten feet square, with parapets and a good thatched roof. I would occupy this arboreal residence for

two or three days on end during the best time of the year. There was a mattress, a mosquito-net, some bedding, a change of clothing and a stock of food and drink. To make it really habitable I also added a little collection of books. A bucket on a rope allowed me to draw water from the river some fifty feet below, and provided incidentally a water-born sewage system which never broke down.

Occasionally a friend or two would come and share my Robinson Crusoe existence.

From my lofty perch I commanded the whole circle of the horizon. Wild animals roamed at liberty for my delight, some visible with the naked eye, some with the help of binoculars. There were marsh-deer browsing in herds of fifty to a hundred, roe-deer in pairs, except when they had a baby with them; wild pigs were digging in the soil and then raising their dirty snouts to heaven; buffalo were wallowing in the mud; wild oxen would be there at day-break but would return to the shelter of the thicket as soon as the sun began to climb; and as for the elephants—wherever one looked, there they were, steadily feeding. I have omitted the birds because they were so numerous and so varied, from the lapwing to the marabou stork and the flamingo, that it would be hopeless to try to mention them all. The fish, too, kept up a continuous plopping and splashing in the river, where alligators were swimming about with only their snouts showing before retiring to stretch themselves on a little sandbank in the middle of the river.

An ever-changing crowd of animals visited the drinking-place, almost directly beneath me, in the course of the day, the peaceful ones always carefully managing to avoid coinciding with the aggressive ones. At different times I saw a bear, two tigers and a panther—all separately



Elephants at watering place surrounded by jungle, taking their quiet leisurely bath.



Mahouts rubbing elephants down in the water.



Young natives at their toilet.



Four months old elephant being attended to.

at dusk. But in the night I often caught these and other wild animals in the beam of my torch. They usually identified themselves by the note of their purring or by the amount they drank; in fact I learnt to recognize an animal by his table manners at the drinking-hole.

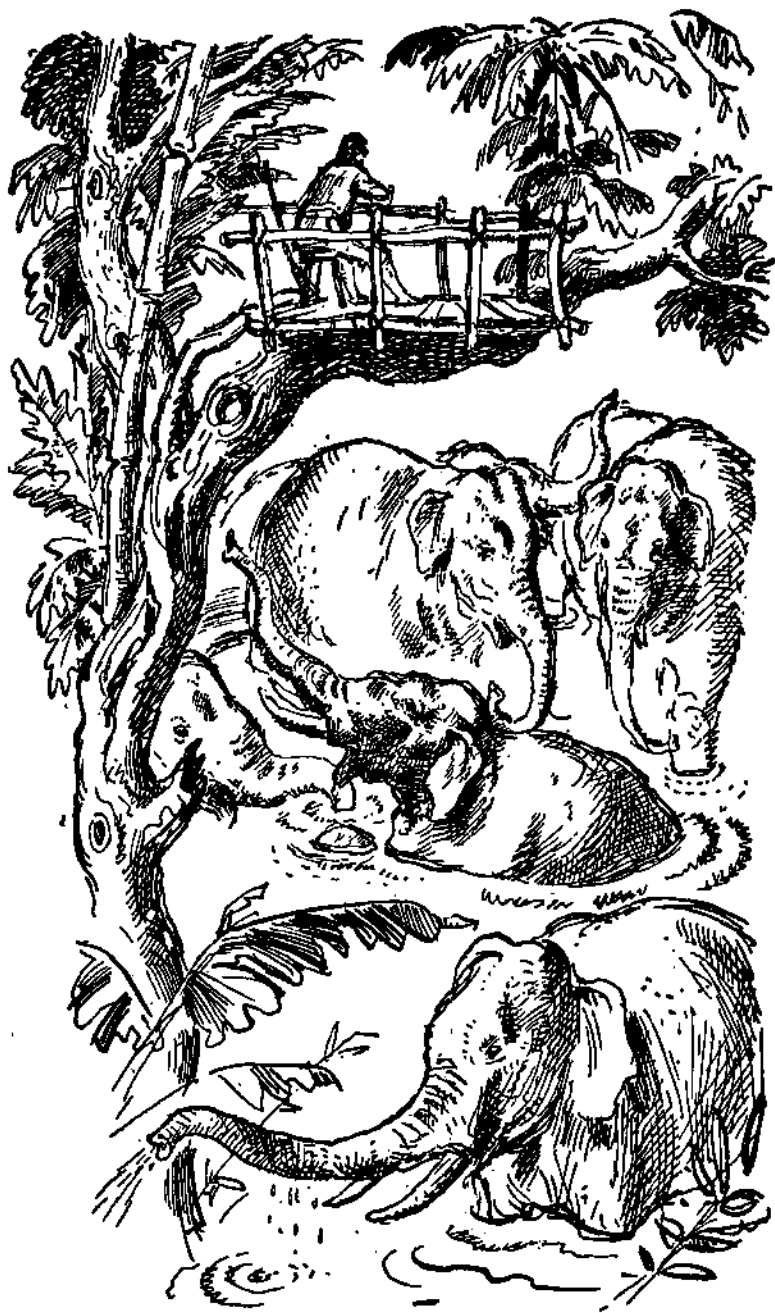
The rainy season had started and every afternoon the flood-gates of heaven opened. I remember one evening, after a day of violent hurricanes and water-spouts, when the storm was wilder than ever. My tree trembled and groaned as if in agony and I had a hard job keeping my balance in the middle of my eyrie. Visibility was down to thirty feet or so and the sky was full of thunder and lightning. I felt stricken to the bone with cold—that bitter cold which comes before the crisis in an attack of malaria and which every old bushranger knows only too well. I sat there all shrivelled up, listening to the elephants trumpeting all around; they were really enjoying it all and wanted to tell the world.

The storm raged for three hours; then the weather cleared rapidly and the countryside was visible again. Apart from the buffaloes, the animals had all disappeared, driven to shelter by the buffeting of the wind. Even the elephants were out of sight, although I could still hear them. Suddenly there was a deeper bellow than usual, the bushes were parted and out came an enormous female. She sniffed the air with her trunk to make sure there were no unfamiliar scents and then, obviously reassured, stepped out boldly. She was followed by a herd of about forty. The majority were big females but there was one male tusker, with three younger males and a crowd of other elephants of all sizes. They were in no hurry; they just dawdled along, stopping for a snack here and there and wandering away from each other. But it was soon quite obvious that they were all making for the

drinking-hole, despite the floods of rain which had only just stopped. It was a picture of unrestrained *joie-de-vivre* and contentment. Mingled with the general hubbub I could hear single trumpet-blasts, deep purring noises and loud yapping. (Some males really can bark exactly like dogs.) When they reached the water the demonstration became even more entertaining; to the other noises were now added those of boiling kettles, suction pumps, gargling, snorting and tummy-rumbling. Nor had they come down just for a drink; one after the other, in Indian file, they marched into the water, where they woke the furthest echoes with their happiness. Some would disappear completely under water every now and then and come up rolling over and over; the big male was submerged altogether, apart from the tip of his trunk and the top of his head, and his tusks just below the surface looked even bigger than they were; the youngsters were seeing who could make the best shower-bath, squirting water first down one side and then the other; while the mothers were rubbing down their babies or pushing them forward with the idea of teaching them to swim—an idea which made them scream with apprehension.

I lay on my stomach with my chin resting on my crossed fore-arms, enjoying the picture spread out before me. It was not the first time I had seen it, but what difference did that make? Every time was as exciting as the first. One thing I am certain of: no holiday-maker on our summer beaches in France was happier than I. It was such an idyllic picture—a display of unclouded and care-free joy such as only little children, and animals in their natural state, can fully know.

Hearing a new chorus of trumpeting from the direction of the plain, I looked up and saw a second herd making for the drinking-hole. The big fellow I had seen



wallowing in his bath swam to the sandbank in the middle of the river, climbed nonchalantly out of the water and let out a shrill blast towards the newcomers. They stopped in their tracks for a little pow-wow and then, without the least fuss or bother, half-turned away. Down in the river the great lady who had led the first procession into the bath gave a few short sharp cries, made straight for the bank and began to climb it by a rather steep path. The bathing-party followed quietly and climbed up in her wake. Soon the whole herd had re-assembled and begun to march along the bank of the river; when they came to the next bend they disappeared in the giant reeds, from which a few trumpeting could still be heard although there wasn't an elephant to be seen. As soon as they were out of sight the second herd turned about and began to walk towards the drinking-place; the first party had obviously announced that it was all theirs.

For a moment I had had the big tusker in the first party at my mercy when he was on the sandbank. But he was a king among beasts, and in any case it would have been a sacrilege to rob the herd of their prize male and at the same time destroy their happiness. If I have often patted myself on the back for my self-control it has not been without a sigh of regret at the loss of such a magnificent pair of ivories. I'm afraid I have not always been so magnanimous.

Once in 1944 I was near the Lagna river with two or three friends when we saw another elephants' bathing party at eleven o'clock in the morning. The sun shone fiercely from a bright blue sky as we approached the drinking-hole on our trained elephants. From a distance of about fifty feet we watched the antics of a fine herd,

which included eight males, without their suspecting our presence. (I should add that the wind was in our favour.) One of my friends had told me that he was anxious to complete his collection of trophies, and I picked out a fine tusker for him in the middle of the river; he brought it down with one shot. The rest of the herd started towards us, growling unpleasantly, but we rode away calmly up the slope. On the way I happened to turn round and see another tusker—an absolute giant—so I asked my companions to turn back. We had reached the centre of the herd when an old female spotted us, a most unattractive old giant with a cracked and wrinkled skin. With an angry cry she bore down on us, leading twenty or so of her followers into the charge. Others seemed to be closing in on us from all directions, all of them just as furious. Even if we had tried to shoot it out we should not have been able to stem the avalanche. We swung our own elephants round in a half-circle and tried to run for it, but it was no good. The old Boadicea was only about six feet away and her curled trunk was just preparing to strike when my friend let her have an Express 475 bullet plum in the chest. She crumpled up all in one piece and in her fall held up the others who were too close on her heels. They were all so amazed that for a moment they stopped dead, and we were able to snake in among the reeds and make good our escape, without bothering to see what was going on behind. The infuriated animals soon pulled themselves together and stormed on to the plain in search of us, but by this time we were at a safe distance although we could still see the indomitable old leader. She had picked herself up and was making for the forest as fast as she could go. For our part, we decided to cross the river and find a strategic corner where we could withstand a concerted attack if necessary. The wild

elephants took some time to calm down and the last of them kept it up until between four and five o'clock that evening. Only then was it safe for us to return and take the tusks from the dead male lying in the water. When night fell, the Moi villagers from Vo-Dat came down to cut out the elephant steaks, which are one of their favourite dishes.

Male elephants will attack on sight during the rutting season, and even females are aggressive when they have a baby running at foot. But normally they run away, even if it means leaving their dead behind them, though they may return when they think the coast is clear. On the other hand, if one of the herd is wounded they will give him a shoulder, so to speak, and help him away from the scene of his misfortune. Two or more of them will close up and support a wounded comrade from the field of battle.

Sometimes in dense jungle a hunter will mistake for a charge what is actually a headlong flight. A herd covers a very wide area when feeding and if the leader summons them all to a certain spot for a conference—especially if the summons conveys a note of alarm—they immediately converge on her at a brisk trot, breaking down everything in their way *en route*. They make a fearsome noise and they certainly look aggressive, but the hunter who keeps his head, and who has learnt how to plant himself behind a tree and watch, soon discovers that the attackers are after all only fugitives—albeit fugitives whom it is wiser not to try to stop.

The ill-tempered and sustained aggressiveness of the herd from which my friends and I so fortunately escaped was not by any means normal. The old female who was

so anxious to catch us, like the others who were backing her up—all of them getting on in years, by the way—had almost certainly become irascible as the result of some cruelty or other suffered at the hands of human beings. They might have been rounded up and driven towards a quicksand or marsh where they would have been in danger of drowning; or they might have found themselves suddenly in the centre of a circle of burning grass—the actual form of cruelty is immaterial (as it is unforgivable); elephants never forget or forgive that kind of treatment and our assailants probably went for us on the mere instinct of self-preservation. (The villagers' cruelty is sometimes defended on the grounds that their crops and huts are constantly being destroyed; but the Moi are not so logical or so considerate as to confine their "revenge" to any particular herd. If the sorcerer says: "There are a number of big females with little tails conspiring against us in such and such a field", that is enough. No questions are asked and no further justification is considered necessary.)

Elephants move at an average speed of two to two-and-a-half miles an hour, waving their heads from side to side as they go and all the time pulling at tasty bits of greenstuff, which they eat on the march. They never gallop—in fact it would be practically impossible for them to do so since they move both legs on one side together and then both legs on the other side. This ungainly method of locomotion becomes all too obvious when you are riding on an elephant's back; however comfortable your saddle, you still find yourself tossed about in a most peculiar manner.

It is equally untrue to say that elephants trot, in the ordinary sense of the word. What they do when they are

alarmed is to lengthen their stride until they reach a speed of which one would never have thought them capable. They seem to be ambling along yet, given time, they will outstrip a horse at the gallop. In the bush a charging elephant seems to move faster than he actually does; tall grasses and shrubs—especially the thorny ones—which we are accustomed to regard as considerable obstacles offer him no resistance whatever.

Despite the elephant's great natural strength he is strangely short-winded. His life is easy and relaxed and he seldom has to move quickly—either to attack or to run away. Even if he does, after a mile or so he eases up and resumes his placid tempo. This short-windedness is in fact one of the weaknesses most exploited by those whose job is capturing wild elephants. A well-trained hunter is not only faster than his wild cousin but he has the advantage of being able to use the paths through the bush which the other, in his headlong flight, has just made. The success of any hunt depends, of course, on a number of factors, but one of the most important is certainly the superior staying-power of the trained elephant. H.M. Bao Dai had three elephants—and I had a fourth—which could maintain a speed of over four miles an hour on a normal march. It was a magnificent achievement but was only achieved after years of patient training. If we gave them a month or so off they soon lost their speed and their keenness and we had to take them severely in hand again every time.

I have already spoken of the unique and unrivalled sure-footedness of the elephant. When they are climbing a steep slope they actually walk on their knees, and stiffen their back legs. Coming down, however, they plant their fore-feet firmly to take the strain and let their hindquarters follow as best they can. Occasionally they

slide down on their rump—an agreeable method of progress for the rider, who naturally prefers a mount that does its best to keep its backbone as nearly horizontal as possible.

When on the move, elephants rely to a considerable extent on their sense of smell. They generally run into the wind so that they can detect the enemy far ahead and, if necessary, take evasive action. If they are alarmed while feeding they will raise their trunks above the high grass and sniff the air, like so many submarines pushing up their periscopes to allow the look-out to sweep the horizon, or like so many cobras waving about in mid-air. They can pick up every scent from every point of the compass. So keen is their sense of smell that without turning the head, without even looking, they will infallibly avoid a python curled up in the long grass or a wild animal lying hidden anywhere near their path. I have known a nervous herd scent a man at a distance of more than a mile.

The Emperor's elephant, Mot, was as good as any dog at following the spoor of a wild ox. As soon as he got the scent he would stop and "point" with his trunk. All we had to do was to rely on his sense of smell and every time we came upon a herd of wild bulls we had the advantage of surprise on our side. Mot was a wise old devil, who always knew if the ground was firm or if it was treacherous. If Mot refused to follow a path after he had tried it, we could be sure he knew what he was up to.

Elephants can be absolutely quiet when they want to be—as quiet as stones, in fact—and they sometimes combine this gift with a sort of mimicry. South Annam is strewn with large black rocks, and an elephant who is anxious not to be seen can "disguise" himself perfectly as one of these rocks; I have often found myself within a few feet of one without having spotted him.

Finally, they are excellent swimmers, although in the dry season, when the water is shallow, they prefer to walk on the river-bed, leaving only the trunk above water to breathe through. The actual method of swimming varies from one individual to another. My men had trained my animals to cross the Lagna in such a way that my saddle remained on the surface and the top of the elephant's head was above water. The men were able to manage with this slender foothold when crossing from one bank to the other, maintaining their grip with the aid of the collar round the animal's neck and leaving him to swim with the current.

One of the Emperor's team used to turn on his right side when the water reached a certain depth, and one day Prince Vinh Can, who had not been warned of this habit, had an unexpected bath. He took it all in good part and some time later played the same trick on another distinguished guest.

I also had a whimsical joker whose chief amusement was to dive under water without warning, re-surface at once and then proceed to swim about like a two-year-old. I must admit that this forced bath was most unpopular and hunters who were treated to it had to spend a few hours drying in the sun or, if it happened to be the rainy season, shivering in every limb. Better still, when my joker found he could not swim fast enough by using just his legs, he would bring his trunk into action as well—and then proceed to shower his rider with the water he had sucked up in it! Sometimes he would get a bright idea and play at being a whale until we were all soaked by a series of "spouts". I was never able to cure him of his weakness for practical joking, but after all he was only twenty and he was enjoying himself as one does at that age. He was a gay dog in every way, with an extremely

attractive personality, and although he could not know it he was wise to make the best of life while he had the chance, as he was to suffer great sorrow and tribulation under the Japanese occupation. Early in 1946 he was surprised in the military zone by one of our commandos while transporting suspected contraband and was shot by a salvo of rifle-fire. He greeted the armed men who came running up to him with the same old good humour and purred with happiness.

He died without the slightest notion of what it was all about.



CHAPTER FIVE

Creatures of Affection

IN normal times peace and serenity reign unbroken in the bosom of the herd. The males are aware of their own strength and have a shrewd idea of that of their fellows. Everybody knows his (or her) place. The animals, as a herd, are prepared to live together in perfect harmony—except when the physiological upset of the rut is at work—and although some are more easy-going than others and some more difficult, a general willingness to give and take ensures that peace is maintained. There may be some who are apt to lose their temper suddenly, but the sweeter-tempered ones patiently bear with them.

It is always entertaining to watch the young males at play; they interlock their tusks and try to tip each other over, or butt each other with just the right degree of violence for a polite exchange of civilities. They get down on their knees, wrestle, break it up, start again, and so on until they suddenly decide to try something else—or to go and have a snack. In short, they live together in an atmosphere of real friendship and one nearly always finds young elephants of approximately the same age feeding together—which is clear enough evidence that they get on quite amicably.

Unfortunately, as soon as the young and flirtatious females appear on the scene, this delightful state of affairs is liable to give way to jealousy and discord, although the trouble is only temporary. The youngsters are easily led

astray and may be seen slipping away with their chosen partners after a brief chat to "get acquainted"; but as soon as their passion is spent they return unobtrusively to the stag party.

In my thirty years experience I have naturally had innumerable opportunities to take notes and make observations, but I am still unable to say with any confidence how long the elephant's courtship lasts. To tell the truth, I doubt whether they have fixed periods of heat, as dogs have, for example; everything seems to depend on circumstances, such as the mutual attraction of the partners. I have so often had trouble with elephants on heat at unexpected times of the year that it could not always have been due to an exceptional freak of nature. In my hunting diaries the most frequent records of matings occur from November to January inclusive; the curve tends to drop from February to May and is at its lowest during the remaining months.

Of all the animals in creation the female elephant must be easily the most chaste. Once she has chosen her partner she will refuse the advances of all others, and not until well after her baby is born will she accept the advances of another suitor. By that time her fidelity will have lasted throughout the whole period of gestation and for some months afterwards—in all, an average of three years—so who shall blame her if she begins to look around for a new mate?

The lovers manage to hide themselves discreetly and actual mating never takes place in public, so to speak. They disappear from the herd as though they are on some secret errand of mischief—and so they are, in a way; but they are determined to avoid the possibility of being spied on by importunate old greybeards. The amazing thing is that these couples, after enjoying their love

affairs in private, always manage to rejoin the herd, and however far the main body may have moved meanwhile they never fail to find it. They seem to know instinctively which direction to take and are especially careful to keep clear of any strange herds.

In the male elephant the approach of the rutting season can be detected by a characteristic sweating, accompanied by a reddening of the eyes and an increasingly anti-social disposition. He arches his back at the least vexation, flattens his ears and bellows wickedly—in fact he is thoroughly aggressive and obviously determined to pick a quarrel with anybody and everybody.

One morning we were fishing in the Lo-Ol when one of our men came to tell us that a fine tusker from the near-by forest was making advances to our females. We immediately took three of our trained males and went to meet this intruder. The rest of our animals were hidden in the long reeds, so we decided to inspect them one at a time. Suddenly we saw, just in front of us, an enormous head and a pair of tusks appearing over the tops of the reeds, followed by a trunk. H.M. Bao Dai had already got the elephant in his sights when I shouted: "Don't shoot! It's Môt!" It certainly looked like Mot to me and I was anxious to prevent the Emperor from doing something he would bitterly regret. As I recovered from my surprise I saw the animal dashing away as quickly as he could and disappearing in the bushes: it was not Môt after all but the tusker who had interrupted our fishing. He had had the nerve to come looking for a girl friend in our camp, although he must have known there were a number of us sitting only a few yards away.

Experienced elephant-men are past-masters in the art

of pacifying their elephants during this difficult phase. They watch them very closely and know just when to interfere. The medicine they use is a mixture of ingredients known only to themselves—in fact the formula is a secret handed down from father to son, more especially in families which have followed the profession for generations. The mixture, which has the effect of a bromide, is given to the animal in bananas, so that he never suspects that he is being given medicine.

Not that they rely on medicine alone; they also keep the elephants continually on the move. They take it in turns to march them up and down, if necessary all night long. A fortnight is all that is necessary as a rule; at the end of that time even the most recalcitrant has calmed down and recovered his sanity.

Many quite ridiculous stories are told about the elephants' mating, but there are innumerable old wives' tales about elephants, and there always have been. I remember one which says that when an elephant is fully grown he can no longer lie down. When night comes and he feels sleepy he has to find a big tree and lean up against that! So the wily hunter, having carefully noted the elephant's favourite tree, saws nearly through the trunk close to the ground so that the tree will collapse under the elephant's weight. In due course along comes Jumbo, yawns hugely, closes his eyes and subsides gently against his tree-trunk—which immediately snaps. Down falls the indignant elephant and there he lies, unable to get up again. All the hunter has to do now is to finish him off with a spear. (One would think our elephant is a may bug, or a turtle!) According to another of these fairy-tales, big tuskers have to impress smaller elephants to walk in front of them so that they can rest their tusks on the backs of these unwilling auxiliaries. On the day the

youngsters go on strike all the big tuskers will be immobilized—or, if they want to eat, they will have to walk backwards. In any case they cannot go forward because their enormous tusks keep digging into the ground!

Yet another legend, possibly from the same fertile brain, maintains that, in coupling, elephants imitate human beings, with the female lying on her back—although she is unable to get up again without the assistance of her consort. This legend is embroidered with many other lurid details much too coarse for a respectable book like this.

I have only one contribution to make to the discussion, but it is authentic. Well concealed in the bush and perched high enough to be beyond the range of their keen sense of smell, I have several times watched elephants at their amorous antics, and I hereby certify that they have discovered no new tricks; they do just what all other quadrupeds do. But where other animals appear to rush the whole thing, elephants are more sentimental, more tender. They use their trunks to caress each other and to seal their affection. The female usually holds hers above her head, pointing backwards, and the male grasps the end of it with his own, but this little embrace can equally well take place side-by-side if the lovers prefer holding hands that way.

During the honeymoon the male is full of little attentions for his bride, accompanying her everywhere, overwhelming her with little kindnesses and whispering a thousand sweet nothings in her ear—although "whispering" is, perhaps, not quite the appropriate word.

I have never been able to fix the average length of the courtship. According to my notes, the most uxorious of my animals continued his amours for three whole months. He seemed to prefer the dark, and it was often



Working mother with her baby.



Six month old baby sucking at her mother.



Youth of the Bahnas Tribe. Alcoholism and inbreeding take their toll.



Hill tribe people are often contracted to Teak Firms.



Village elder smoking his brass pipe.



Village Beau.



Chinese
Basket
maker.

during the night that his passion got the better of him. But there came a day when his partner refused him her customary favours, whereupon he dropped her with contempt and refused to take any further interest in her. When in due course her baby arrived it never entered his head that he was now a father. One day he happened to stroll a little too near the infant and the outraged mother dealt him a smart blow with her trunk. He took it without turning a hair and marched off confidently, and with great dignity, like a philosopher who had had much more than that to put up with in his time.

The Moi believe, for what it's worth, that the length of the courtship depends on the temperaments of the partners and their ability to establish complete mutual understanding.

Elephants carry their young for twenty-two months, dating from the last day of the courtship—at least that is the figure I have arrived at after my observations of a fairly large herd. Hunters who have estimated twenty-four months must have dated the period from the beginning of the affair, which they reckon at two months. I have a note of one gestation which lasted only twenty months but on that occasion the baby lived only a few minutes.

For many years I was puzzled to understand why the hunters from Darlac—and indeed from several other parts of Indo-China—were careful to see that the females in their trained herds never mated. When finally I asked their leaders I was told that if a trained elephant had a baby she brought bad luck on the village where her owner lived. Although he paid heavy fines and increased his offerings to the local genii, he was still held responsible for any misfortune that befell his neighbours. It was

enough to make any owner think twice and the only thing to do, in default of a chastity-belt, was to keep a watch on the behaviour of the females at the critical time. He not only detailed a keeper to follow them about but kept their hind-legs shackled instead of shackling their fore-legs in the usual way.

When I had the good fortune to become an elephant hunter myself I discovered the real reason for this ban on the mating of trained elephants. The sorcerers and magicians played on the superstitious fears of the villagers in imposing a taboo which they were compelled to observe, but they knew what they were doing. In a herd used in the capture of wild elephants every individual has his or her recognized place, like the members of a football or basket-ball team. Some slight temporary re-arrangement because of illness or accident can be provided for but it tends to upset the plan of campaign. A female who has a baby becomes a dead loss to the team, and the loss is especially serious if she happens to be one of the best trained. She becomes for years a slave to her baby, from whom she cannot be parted, and she has to stay idle. Moreover the youngster is of no use to the owner for normal duties for another twenty years, so he loses the services of the mother without getting anything out of her offspring by way of compensation—and who knows what may happen to him in twenty years? Finally there is no earthly reason why we should breed elephants in captivity, more or less for the benefit of the next generation of hunters, when we can capture all the wild elephants we are likely to need. The savannahs of the Lagna, the marshes of Plao-Xien and of Bih, the forests of Cambodia and Laos, all these are inexhaustible reserves, capable of supplying enough adult elephants every year to meet the country's requirements.

A pregnant elephant seems in no way put out by the burden she carries. She gets through her stint of work and any necessary route-marching without breaking down or even showing the least sign of extra tiredness. I have seen females within three months of their time take part in a long and difficult chase over broken country after a wild herd which gave the pursuers no respite. I had noticed that they looked somewhat "heavy", but I had not been told how far gone they were, and it would have been a very knowing customer who suspected how near they were to their confinement. They were as tough as Old Nick and refused to be beaten.

In this connection I remember a female in the Emperor's herd who kept up with us from six in the morning till five in the evening, with only three hours break for the siesta. At sunset a wild herd came out of the wood and we made up our minds to capture a very fine male we had spotted. Our young female showed herself to be one of the most energetic in the team and helped us enormously. (We came back by torchlight as I had had no idea that we should be out after dark and had not brought my electric torch.)

I knew the young lady in question was in a certain condition as her keeper had told me so, but she ran so fast and was so courageous that I had no suspicion that she was anywhere near her time. However, she had her baby at the end of the following month.

Actually this story ended in tragedy. The mother had been penned in a marshy enclosure by some thoughtless workman and could not get out; so she laid her precious burden on a patch of grass which was already being lapped by the water. Then the floods came and the baby was drowned. Her sorrow was painful to see—in fact

their attachment to their young provides one more characteristic which endears these animals to us who have lived and worked with them for years.

Normally the elephant mothers are restless before their baby is due to be born and sometimes towards the end they grow listless and depressed. I remember an enormous beast in the imperial herd at Hue who became completely helpless on the night before her great day—obviously a bundle of nerves and quite pathetic to watch.

I have pointed out the lengths to which owners of trained herds will go to prevent their females from mating, but this applies only to those with whom the capture of elephants is a professional concern. The Emperor's herd, for example, were subjected to no such discipline. On the contrary, in his desire to collect all the information he could about elephants he allowed his herds all the liberty they would have enjoyed in the forest. I treated my own teams in exactly the same way; they could take their chances without reserve or restriction and make advances to any elephant that took their fancy.

An attendant chosen for his carefulness was responsible for preparing a good litter for the animal whose accouchement was in his hands and he had to know how to protect her modesty by finding her a discreet corner out of the way of troublesome spectators. My good Hien, chief mahout of the Quang-Tri (whose services were put at my disposal by the Emperor) was particularly good at this job—and a first-class hunter into the bargain. In the natural state the females instinctively find the best place for their lying-in, a spot well sheltered from the elements where they make their bed to their own liking, taking particular care to ensure that no tiger will be able to steal up on them without warning. The tiger has a weakness for nice tender elephant-meat and will lie in wait in

a corner, crouching almost flat on the ground, watching the coveted prey. He will take advantage of the slightest relaxation of the mother's vigilance, the first sign of a momentary weakness, to pounce viciously on the baby and kill it with one blow. He will then slip away, wait till the elephant has disappeared, and return later to devour the already putrid little corpse. If the corpse has been buried he will dig it up. Or he will observe a herd feeding some way off and steal up to watch the yearlings or any undersized youngsters who have only to make one false step. A silent, stealthy step, a leap—and their account is settled! The rest of the story is as before; the tiger retires post-haste, he waits until it is safe to move, at the first favourable opportunity he returns—and settles down greedily to a meal. It is all quite normal and natural, of course—the Law of the Jungle.

But the elephants also know the Law and combine to guard against it. This is where the marvellous solidarity of the herd comes out so splendidly; the elephant that allows himself to be caught unawares by a tiger is, after all, the exception.

When a female is ready to give birth, her companions in the herd are usually aware of the fact. They form a circle in the bush, some distance from the lying-in, keeping constant watch and calling to each other, like sentries on guard around a fort, if they hear anything the least bit suspicious. The leading female and her chief assistants hold themselves in readiness for anything that may occur and rush to help the mother the moment she calls. No tiger will try to penetrate defences of that nature unless starvation has made him unusually reckless.

Females that are normally fit and strong can go on producing young for about sixty years, their attractions for the male beginning when they are twenty, or even

younger. How many infants does a female bring into this world between her first affair and her retirement? It is a matter on which opinions differ. Some of the old Moi chiefs have told me that a normal female has eighteen children in the course of her life, say three every ten years. This figure seems to me a little inflated since it implies that one pregnancy is begun while the mother is still nursing her latest infant. To anybody who has seen the touchy, almost pathological pride of the mother elephant in her offspring, the incurable possessiveness with which she watches his every step, it seems impossible that any young male could force his attentions on her, even if he were an Adonis. A hunter from Laos, on the other hand, once told me that the number of pregnancies was two every ten years. In his view, a normally prolific mother has ten babies in the course of her life, which seems a more reasonable estimate. A Buddhist priest in Cambodia fixed yet another average for me—though how the devil he knew is something I have never discovered. "Before bidding farewell to the pleasures of love," said this learned man, "an elephant produces between three and ten offspring." The wide caution of his estimate suggests that the holy man was clearly determined to avoid any possibility of error!

One fact is obvious to any hunter who knows the Indo-Ghina forests; a female elephant can often be seen with two or three infants around her. The difference in their sizes shows that the three brothers—or three sisters, as you prefer—were born at different times with only short intervals between them.

I am not sure whether elephants have twins. One night in Dakir I certainly heard an old bore talking about elephant twins, but he had been having too much to drink. And there was a butcher in Co-Hen who had also

been bending the elbow pretty freely and who told a rambling story about his having seen *two* pairs of twins. (He was rocking backwards and forwards on the special block they sit on during these drinking bouts, when he slipped and nearly swallowed the six-foot long ceremonial tube he was drinking through. When he spoke his voice still had a hoarse rattle about it, which was quite amusing but made it impossible to catch what he was trying to say.)

I have sometimes seen a female elephant in the bush with one youngster in tow accompanied by another little one almost the same size as her baby. This may seem improbable but there is a quite simple explanation: one of the two was an adopted child. If a nursing mother is killed, her baby will stay with the herd following the other mothers around until, through sheer persistence, it finds one more sympathetic than the rest who is prepared to be its second mother. If she has a baby of her own, the youngsters grow up together and become inseparable companions.

The elephant is less lively at birth than the fawn, the kid or the foal. He is lighter in colour than his mother and has a few widely-spaced red hairs on the top of his head and a tuft already formed on the end of his tail. He is blind, and can hardly stand, and he gives the impression of being dazed and very immature. But none of this can be attributed to any violent shock suffered at birth, as his mother has made his entry into the world as easy as possible for him by lying down and stretching out her legs behind her.

Presently the mother picks up the baby with her trunk and sets him on his feet, where he remains for some hours with motionless ears and with his trunk hanging down limp and listless. It is as yet a poor little appendage,

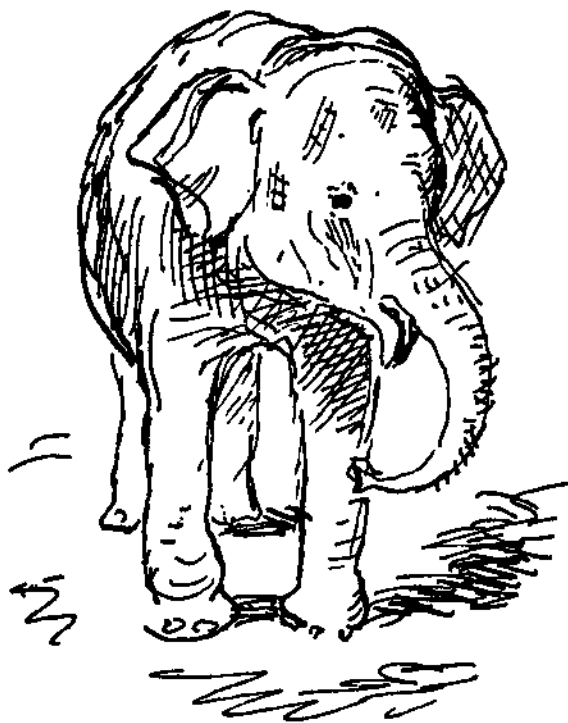
ridiculously feeble and short. The flies, attracted by the vast placenta lying on the bare earth, seem not to trouble him at all; he feels nothing. In the bush the mother elephant moves away, leaving the after-birth lying there, as soon as her baby can walk a few steps with her support; when captive elephants have given birth it is usual to bury the placenta some distance away or to throw it into the river. Lime is spread on the ground to keep away flies and other insects.

A newly-born elephant is all out of proportion and looks like a mechanical toy made by a clumsy workman. As he cannot reach his mother's teats he is unable to feed for forty-eight hours, but as soon as he has grown the necessary inches he moves his stiff little puppet-legs more easily and raises himself as high as her groin. At last he can start feeding, with his trunk held to one side. (Although adult elephants drink through the trunk the baby uses its mouth.) He attacks either teat, at first hesitantly, then with gusto, soon becoming very skilful at the job. As the days go by the youngster grows rapidly and at the end of five weeks has developed quite a confident walk; he can also lengthen his stride when it comes to running to his mother for safety!

The herd meanwhile waits until mother and child are ready to move off on the ceaseless trek; but they will go by easy stages at first for the sake of the new recruit—another example of the astonishing and rather touching spirit of solidarity in the wild herds.

The baby is about three feet high at birth and weighs from one hundred and sixty-nine to two hundred and sixty pounds, these being the average figures for a number of infants. I remember registering the birth of one at Xuanloc which was exactly two hundred and twenty pounds—a figure which my friends were inclined

to doubt. But the mother weighed every bit of three tons, which gives a ratio between mother and child of thirty to one. This ratio is reduced to fifteen to one in human beings, since a woman of about nine stones usually has



a baby weighing about eight pounds. If anybody has a grouse in the matter it seems to be the human, rather than the elephantine mother!

The Xuanloc baby played his part in a happy coincidence in my own life. It was in 1944, at a time when the victorious Japs were becoming really intolerable. They were puzzled by my habit of riding about the forest on an elephant and lost no opportunity of interfering

with my movements, although they were always polite enough on the surface. I should never have remembered any particular date (I had far too much on my plate just then) if the youngster had not taken it into his head to be born on the same day and at the same time as I had been—seven o'clock in the morning on the 7th of August. After that we always used to celebrate our birthday together whenever we had the chance.

For more than six months a baby elephant lives entirely on his mother's milk. At eight months he begins to eat, but only a little, and his mother has to find the tenderest shoots for him. Mother's milk and solid food make up his menu for his first year or so until his mother begins to feel the urge to look around for another mate.

Elephants grow very slowly and do not reach physical maturity until they are nearly forty, although a few prodigies manage it by the time they are thirty-five. In captivity they begin working at the age of twenty but it is after twenty-five that they give best service. On the average they live to be a hundred, the oldest recorded elephant having reached a hundred and fifty. In the Court of Hue the old mandarins—or such of them as have survived—are very ready to talk about a unique case of longevity in which they themselves take a certain pride, since they have themselves been "starring" the elephant in question for years. This was an aged military elephant belonging to his late Majesty Gia Long,* with silver rings on his tusks, who was seriously wounded in battle. Having taken to the bush he treated himself with herbs known only to elephants, apparently, and succeeded in curing himself. On the death of his august master he was inconsolable and retired to the Annamite

* The Emperor Gia-Long, one of the makers of modern Indo-China, died in the early part of the 19th century. (*Translator's note*)

mountains, where he has lived the life of a hermit ever since.

Once a year, however, on the anniversary of the day of his master's death, he comes down from the mountain and makes a solemn pilgrimage to the grave of the deceased Emperor. The disasters of the last ten years or so have in no way diminished this faithful creature's pious devotion to the memory of the Emperor whom he had the honour to serve. It is said that, although his tusks have by now shrunk somewhat, the silver bands are still in position.



CHAPTER SIX

Fools Rush In

ELEPHANT-HUNTING usually takes place on foot. There are still some who shoot them down from a hide near a drinking-hole or by a small plantation which the elephants are known to visit at nightfall; but this is hardly a sport. The hunter is completely safe in his little post high in the trees; he watches for his victim, and takes no risk, and gives no chance. There may conceivably be times when this technique is excusable, but as a normal procedure it is not far short of murder. The Moi, with their primitive weapons, may be justified in applying summary justice of this kind to an elephant who has been stealing their crops, but there can be no such justification for the well-equipped European.

Hunting on elephant-back, which I have already mentioned, is not within the reach of everybody's purse. It seems at first to be less dangerous than hunting on foot, but actually it involves more risk than one would have imagined. A charging elephant may put the hunter at the mercy of an infuriated herd by knocking over one of the trained animals. If that happens—especially if it happens in very tall grass—the hunter can only commend his soul to God—or to the devil! Nothing short of a miracle will prevent what began as an accident from ending as a tragedy.

For many years I believed that a trained hunting elephant was a kind of invincible tank. I used to ride about the forest haphazard, mixing with wild herds on

the least aggressive of all my team, showing a disregard for danger which nothing but an ill-informed faith in myself could justify. "Fools rush in ..." people used to say to me—and how right they were! My unshakable faith in the reliability of my mount would certainly have brought me sooner or later to disaster if a domesticated elephant, magnanimously playing the part of a wild one, had not taken my education in hand.

In preparation for a capture which we hoped to make at the end of the week, H.M. Bao Dai, the local Resident and I were out prospecting in open country one afternoon. We were anxious to find out whether the great herds from the borders of Tra-Cu, Bac-Ruong and Mi-Pou had moved up close enough to us, as it is much better not to capture young elephants too far from one's base; it saves trouble, if nothing else. The great plain opposite our camp, where we always hoped to meet our victims as it gave us so much space to move about in, was hopelessly deserted. The herds we were after had not even crossed the river. We were retracing our steps, feeling rather disappointed, when the Emperor pointed to a cormorant having a wash and brush up on a bush and stretching its wings in the last rays of the sun to dry them.

"What about a shot with the .22?" the Emperor suggested.

The Resident happened to be carrying the gun at the moment. He was a little in front of us on a fine-looking female, while the Emperor was riding his favourite M6t and I was comfortably sitting on the youngest male of the team. We asked the Resident to wait for us and rode up to get the .22, Mot advancing with his usual long strides with my male on his right. Hardly had we reached the female when my youngster began to make advances to her, getting bolder every minute. As soon as Mot saw

what was going on he was smitten with jealousy. He stepped back with a speed of which I should never have thought him capable and with his enormous tusk—it will be remembered that Mot was a single-tusker—lifted the cheeky young gallant and set him flying at least ten feet, to land sprawling on his back. My poor beast might have been a mere bundle of straw! He had just had time to give one bellow of indignation, and Mot's rider had to apply the needle to his ears ("crochetting" we used to call it) to prevent him from finishing the job. As for my man, he had suffered the same fate as I had—we had both been thrown immediately, flying through the air in a dive which was neither graceful nor pleasant. The female who had been the cause of this brutal and unexpected assault in defence of her honour was not particularly impressed. On the contrary, she quickly turned away and walked off like one of those prim coquettes who just can't stand all this nonsense!

The cormorant folded his wings, rose on his branch and stretched out his neck, determined not to lose a second of this amusing entertainment. Then, reassured and no longer interested, he resumed his toilet while I set out to retrieve from the neighbourhood everything that had been flung with me into the long grass—my Express 577, my Mauser 9.3, my cartridge-case, my field-glasses, my photographic materials and my torch. Just as we were setting off again, having repaired the damage as far as possible, the Emperor said, with a laugh: "That cormorant's still there. He nearly cost us a packet!" The bird did indeed look as though he was laughing at us. He had adopted his heraldic pose again and we thought he was worth a shot. Fortunately it missed; still, it passed close enough to him to teach him that the best jokes are the shortest ones. It shook him rather rudely out of his



day-dreams and he headed straight for shelter in the nearest corner of the forest.

On the way home we discussed at length the disparity between the respective strengths of our elephants, although I must admit it was a somewhat delicate subject. We agreed that if my young male had received the same prompt discipline in the course of a hunt or during a battue, neither I nor my man would have still been alive to tell the tale. But I had learnt my lesson. Ever since then, if I have had to choose a slow elephant for my mount I have been careful to choose the most powerful slow one; on the other hand, if I get a light one then I make sure it is a speedy runner. My principle has been, in fact, to be adequately equipped either to fight on equal terms, if necessary, or to be able to escape in time from an uneven combat.

Hunting by canoe is a different matter. It is most enjoyable during flood-time, when parts of the savannah are turned into lakes and the game is more or less penned into a few reserves of land which have stayed above water. But even in the dry season, drifting downstream with the current, I have often rounded a bend and surprised a herd of elephants enjoying a cooler, with the water well up to their middles. I would come up quite close to them and watch them retreat, furious at being disturbed. At Da-Tol I was lucky enough in this way to bag one of my finest tuskers; two females made as if to charge me but were stopped by the curtain of spray they kicked up, which soon blinded them.

But I have allowed my memories to tempt me into too many digressions; let me return to the subject of elephant-hunting on foot.

As a sport—the most dangerous I know and, with the hunting of wild bull, the most exciting—it combines the fascination of the trail with the thrill of the chase. (Those who have no object but the acquisition of the finest pair of tusks in the shortest possible time and who are quite prepared to kill off any number of females in order to get at the males, will probably not agree with me about the excitement or the danger.) Success depends every time on complete self-control—which is not acquired in a few minutes.

If the hunter is able to win the co-operation of the local people he will find it possible to acquire all the information he needs and will get off to a good start. He selects a favourable spot to camp so that when night comes he is able to hear the elephants feeding and so discover the best direction to take in the morning. If by any chance they are silent during the night he will still have his local information to guide him, although it is



Hunters and captors from the Emperor's collection 1943.



A scout.



Young elephants belonging to H.M. Emperor Bao Dai.

impossible to be certain of anything without fresh tracks to follow.

The hunter who can make a bee-line for the herd first thing in the morning, without casting about for tracks, saves valuable time—although this generalisation, like all generalisations about the jungle, is subject to exceptions. I have sometimes been deceived and misled by a herd which had kept me awake until cock-crow with its trumpeting, while on the other hand I have come too suddenly upon wild elephants—knowing from local intelligence nothing more definite than that they were "somewhere about"—who must have preserved absolute silence all night. Both types of incident were admittedly unusual, but they happened more than once. As soon as fresh tracks are picked up, of course, time is no longer the most important factor; all sorts of other intangible conditions come into play, some of which may lead to disappointment, some to success.

Despite my many years in the bush, despite my eagerness to learn and my unremitting zeal, I was never more than an indifferent tracker. I can overtake a herd if they have left a clearly defined track and I can find a wounded animal; but I have never been able to read nature like an open book as my professional trackers could. I very much doubt, in fact, whether a European ever could reach their degree of skill even if he lived all his life in the jungle; he would always lack that primeval instinct which the native hands down from father to son and which can only be compared with the scent of the hunting-dog. My chief tracker, Xa-Lang, would translate into words as he went along the signs which only he could read on the ground. "There are so many elephants in this herd. ... They are ahead of us by so much (say, half an hour) ... Wait! Something disturbed them just

Je F

about here. ... It's all right; they calmed down. ... Steady now; we shall be on top of them any minute now. ... It's no use; you can pack up; we shan't get 'em this time."

A single footprint clearly outlined at the toes or flattened at the heel, chewed grasses, broken branches, plants torn up by the roots, stripped and snapped, the colour of the droppings (varying according to whether they are in the sun or shade), swarms of flies and other insects close to the ground—all these are valuable clues. A European will miss some of them, at least; the Moi hunter will see them all—without having to stop and look for them. The temperature of fresh droppings is an extremely valuable clue when the herd happens to be maintaining silence; they do not keep hot for long and if they are still warm it means that the herd is near enough to be "listening-in". By fanning or flapping divers parts of their anatomy to keep off the flies a herd of elephants playing the silent game often give themselves away. Some, again, blow dust over themselves through the trunk, or slap their hind-quarters with their tails, or flop their ears. All these noises, being easily recognizable, can be of great help to the hunter and may save him from blundering into a situation which may prove highly disagreeable.

If the elephants have doubled on their tracks or got mixed up with another herd the game becomes more exciting, and it is here that one most appreciates the experts. Some seem to make up their minds without a moment's hesitation; others have one or two goes at it before unravelling the pattern and separating out the different threads of the criss-cross. Xa-Lang was an absolute wizard at this. He would take one look at the ground at his feet, then leave the maze of crossed tracks

and go ahead a little, invariably picking up the track further on. If he knew the country well he was never at fault because he was always conversant with the habits and tracks of all the local fauna. In unfamiliar country he might look at first as though he were bound to fail; he would select a point and make a wide sweep to left or to right, according to the signs; but his method always brought him to the track he was looking for in the end. He would pounce on it like a well-trained hound and proceed to follow it with complete confidence.

Tracking is thrilling work for the hunter who likes to take his elephants in the forest by surprise; it is also highly educational and calls, in turn, both for knowledge of the rules and skill in applying them. Once contact with the herd is established the second stage of the game begins—the approach, with all its unforeseen dangers. It usually takes place in a restless, seething forest, thickly strewn with heaps of elephant-droppings, all giving out their characteristic smell. The seasoned hunter quickly decides whether the general situation is favourable. If it is not it is wiser for him to wait patiently until the animals have reached a sector of the forest which offers him every conceivable advantage. The ideal setting for the job is an area of giant trees with sparse undergrowth. He edges forward, taking advantage of every tree-trunk, and has a good look at the herd. He must not be alarmed if one or two of them brush against him as they walk past. If he is spotted he must kill—there is no alternative, and he must not be unnerved by the infernal din which will undoubtedly break out. There will be bellowing, bugle-calls, trumpeting, barking, growling and snarling and the metallic sound of trunks beating the earth—the whole orchestra, in fact, at top pitch. This may well be the moment chosen by the male to make his first appearance.

If so, the hunter must not hesitate for a second. A well-placed bullet will settle the tusker's account and at the same time persuade the rest of the herd that they would be well advised to withdraw. It usually takes very little to make them scuttle off amid a frightful crash of broken branches and a thunderous roar of angry voices. If, on the other hand, the herd is aggressive and decides to charge, the hunter must keep his head. A charge of elephants is such a haphazard affair that they are quite likely not to see the hunter at all. I have more than once been caught in a charge like this in the forest. One evening I had to shoot the leader and take refuge between her legs, crouched up close to her body while it was still warm, a position in which I was not particularly vulnerable except perhaps in front and possibly from the side.

Every hunter has his preference, based on his own personal experience, where guns and ammunition are concerned and I find it hard to advise. For my part I have a weakness for the double-barrelled Express, although I had my greatest successes with a Westley-Richards 450-400 which I also used against wild bull and wild buffalo. When capturing elephants I used a Verney Carron 475 or a Christophe 577, both of them shock-weapons rather than killers. The other rifles in my armoury were Mausers—9.3, 10.75 and 404.

When I first began elephant-hunting I had nothing but a humble African Lebel. I had bought it second-hand and it was all I could desire as I was extremely hard up in those days. On the other hand, ammunition cost me very little; I had relations in the right places! One morning I surprised a wild ox on the hill-side; it had been wounded the night before and when it saw me it charged without stopping to give notice. I let him have a bullet

foil in the head, but unfortunately it was a little high and did not seem to check his fury in the slightest. He was on me before I had even ejected the empty cartridge-case and there and then I learnt what it feels like to be knocked out. If I had passed out of this world altogether it would have been a blissful end. I came round to find my brother George looking anxiously at me and shaking his head. He was obviously fishing round for something comforting and encouraging to say. "I'm not surprised," was the best he could manage. "It was bound to happen to you in the end."

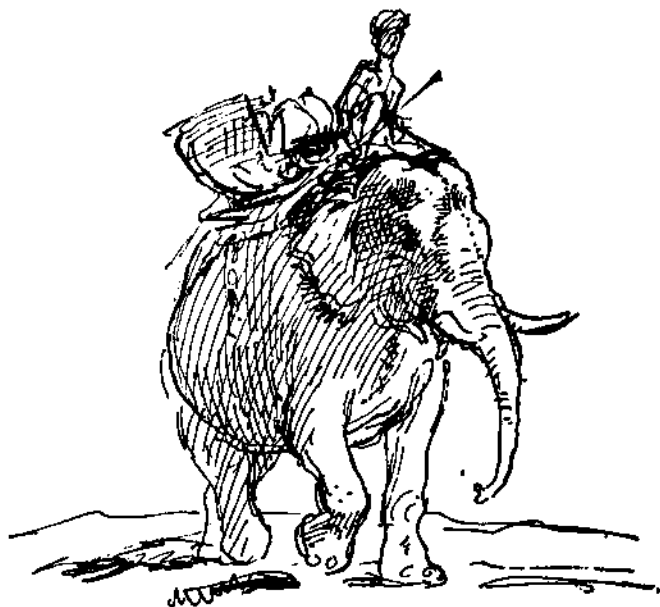
It dawned on me in hospital after the doctors had patched me up that a small-bore rifle in an emergency like that is just a bad joke; and the suspicion that first raised its head while I was lying there convalescing became a certainty very shortly afterwards in the River Luy country. I was walking up to inspect a solitary male elephant I had just knocked out first blow when, to my horror and amazement, I saw him get up and proceed to charge straight at me. I beat a hasty retreat, hopping from tree to tree, and it was not until my fifth shot that I finally settled his hash.

My preference for the Express rifle, with its bigger bore, dates from these two encounters, in both of which I nearly saw my number come up—as in roulette, but not exactly with the same degree of pleasure. The wild bull's skull, together with the leather belt which his sharp horns ripped from my back, and the tusks of the elephant which my somewhat ragged fire had only partly put out of action, are among the few trophies I managed to save from the Japanese invasion and its ensuing disasters. They might both have easily cost me an untimely trip to the next world, yet I am greatly attached to them because they stand for a whole period

of my life and recall certain loved faces which have forever disappeared. As for the spectre of Death, although I have twice looked into his eyes I am still unable to paint him as he is.

The years have given me some unhappy souvenirs, in one way or another, and yet, out of all my battles with life, memory seems to retain only this engaging picture of the bush in which I wandered as a youth, free as a runaway horse, and acquiring a youthful contempt for every kind of obstacle.

Ah well! When all's said and done, it was a good life.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Rogues and Vagabonds

IT is usual to hunt elephants by day, when there is light enough even in the jungle to allow one to take careful aim and to shoot straight. In rainy weather it is none too easy to see the foresight on one's rifle, especially after sunset, or if one has moved suddenly into the shade. At all times the closest attention to detail is essential for success—or even for safety—but with reasonable luck it can be a rewarding pastime, especially if one brings back a valuable load of ivory! Hunting the "solitary" may not be so hazardous as a mass attack on a herd, but it is always more exciting, ivory or no ivory.

But hunting by day is not the only kind of sport. In my youth I had hunted deer by night near my home, sometimes on long treks lasting for days, and even then I used to think how marvellous it would be to hunt elephants by night. I had an acetylene lamp, complete with magnifying lens, which I was very proud of as it threw a concentrated beam nearly eighty feet. I would often pick up some animal's eyes in the beam of my lamp, but to decide at eighty feet what sort of animal they belonged to was mostly guess-work. However, one thing leads to another, and my youthful guess-work was just the thing to lead me to further investigation and experiment. I had heard, for example, that an elephant's eyes are not very bright and that by the time one can recognize their dull red gleam, five or six feet above the ground, one is near enough to recognize the whole body. Other experts had told me

either that elephants would charge at night or else that they would run away; the experts seemed to be undecided on the matter. But obviously there were things here which urgently needed investigation.

To cut a long story short, I decided one Christmas to go and investigate them. *I* had been told of a splendid male, somewhat lazy and easy-going, who had recently set up his headquarters in a wood adjoining a near-by rice-field. He would lie up there all day long and come out by night to help himself to as much rice as he wanted. He damaged even more of the crop than he ate and the villagers were getting desperate.

I had a snack supper with the mayor, surrounded by a crowd of rice-growers, each of them more long-winded than his neighbour. What they were trying to tell me was the sort of story one can hear from one end of the country to the other, but I listened patiently in the hope of picking up some useful information. Suddenly a deep and sonorous bellow from the direction of the wood silenced the circle of wagging tongues. Our visitor had announced his arrival in the rice-field.

I came outside into a dark night, with only a few stars. As I strained my ears I could hear the elephant pulling up the rice-plants in great bunches, banging them against his knee to shake off the mud and chewing them for a second before moving on and starting all over again. I went back into the hut, where I lay down on my camp bed and was soon asleep, having arranged to be called when the elephant had come a little nearer to the village. Towards midnight my worthy trackers judged that the time had come. I lit my lamp, which was inclined to spit and splutter a little before it settled to its normal flame, then set off with my Express 577.

The "solitary" let out one trumpet-blast and, for the

next five minutes, kept completely quiet; then he began to feed once more. I crept slowly towards him, trying not to show too much light but shining the lantern straight into his eyes every now and then in the hope of dazzling him. This technique seemed not to disturb him in the slightest and he allowed me to get within point-blank range. He had stopped eating, and now, when I shone the light on his head, I could see one red eye hung in space and, at the same time, the vast grey bulk of his body. He swayed about for a moment, obviously unable to decide what line to take, moved his ears gently and slowly raised his trunk. He was completely at a loss. Finally he turned partly away, his head facing the wood to which he clearly thought of returning. I could no longer see his eye, but I aimed at the hollow of his ear. I had to shift my aim several times as the target became blurred and indistinct every time I prepared to fire. As soon as I pulled the trigger there was a succession of growls that sounded like thunder and the sound of crashing and of pounding footsteps moving off into the night. I was glad of a breather as my lamp had been extinguished by the recoil of the Express. After I had lit up again and waited for the flames to settle, I could see that the ground in front of me was silent and empty. Where my elephant had been standing there were signs in the damp soil of a painful and unsteady departure, while thirty feet or so further off the paddy was red with blood. I decided to go back and wait until the morning to find out the result of my shot. The villagers were quite certain they had not heard the elephant return to the thicket, and indeed they were right; he had collapsed half-way between me and the wood. My bullet had hit a little behind the point I had aimed at and his neck had taken the shock. He had walked for a little while more or

less mechanically, moving by reflex action until he had fallen in a heap. I have never understood why the noise of his fall did not reach me across the silence of the night although I must admit that my ears used to ring for minutes on end every time I fired the Express 577.

It was a lucky start, and it encouraged me in my nocturnal experiments, in the next of which I found myself in the centre of a whole herd which, far from running away, completely encircled me. I could feel an absolute river of cold sweat running down my back, but fortunately I found a tree—a fine solid tree, with a reassuring bulk and accessible branches. Despite the encumbrance of my rifle, which I had seized by the sling, I hurled myself into that tree and climbed it with a speed which even a monkey might have envied, while all around me the elephants set up the hue and cry. Once I was out of danger and comfortably wedged in a fork I was free to watch them closing in on me. My lamp was still alight—which was itself something of a miracle—although the branches of my tree rather spoilt my view. A great sea of clumsy grey shapes surged about me restlessly and washed against the foot of the tree, but not one could I single out with sufficient accuracy to justify a shot. After about an hour of this I tried firing my rifle into the air, whereupon a whole orchestra of fury broke out; but the elephants showed no sign of going home. I knew this herd; I had never succeeded in getting very near them in daylight, but they had the reputation of being very wild, and of running away as soon as they smelt a human being. Apparently they had not smelt me yet. Just as I was beginning to get thoroughly bored in my tree I saw some natives with lighted torches at the far end of the path I had come by. The elephants trumpeted, the Moi shouted—and this exchange of compliments might have

gone on indefinitely if a pack of mongrel dogs, bred for chasing porcupines and other small game, had not suddenly burst on the scene. These jungle packs can often be seen, with ears and tails erect, chasing their prey with tireless ferocity and courage. There were about twenty of them on this occasion and they rushed towards the elephants, barking at the top of their voices and for once ignoring all the smaller game that happened to cross their path. The great cowardly elephants shrieked with fright and turned to run back to their jungle as fast as they could go, with the mongrels close on their heels. The whole rout disappeared so rapidly that soon we could not even hear them. It was a first-class show for the Moi, who declared I might easily have had to spend the whole night up aloft.

For the next few years I managed, more by luck than skill I fear, to keep a whole skin, but I began to realize that this elephant-hunting on foot by night—even with an acetylene lamp—was a mug's game, so I decided to give it up. Then the electric torch came in and the mug's game took hold of me all over again. The electric torch was certainly a great advance, but my trouble was that I still had to solve the problem of transport. I might have at my disposal the latest thing in searchlights, but I still had to move around on my own two feet—which was quite a handicap for an enthusiastic and ambitious elephant-hunter who liked to think he was up-to-date if not exactly a pioneer!

For ten years my paths and the elephants' did not cross after dark; then, after I had learnt the joys of hunting on elephant-back in daylight, I was invited by H.M. Bao Dai to join him in night attacks on the marauders *who* were raiding the village crops. For this kind of sport the Emperor, who incidentally had a more powerful

torch than mine, would take his strongest elephants, while I rode a colossus with crossed tusks—in fact the size and strength of our team reminded one of impregnable fortresses. The wild elephants would rumble and grumble all round us as if trying to scare us off, but we never worried. Why should we? A word to the fifth-columnists we were riding would have been enough to restore order.

Before the Japanese attack in March 1945 I had rigged up a battery of six-volt accumulators at the back of my saddle so that I could sweep the forest at night-time with a 150-candle-power beam. I never ceased to marvel at the teeming life of the jungle during the hours when we human beings are asleep. I would locate a herd of elephants some distance away and approach them gradually, at first with my light dimmed, then with it reduced to a glimmer. As soon as I reached a really good spot I would switch on full, and, hey presto! there were the elephants! They seemed to be bewitched as they stood there as plainly as if it were broad daylight. That is the effect of a 150-candle-power beam: every animal is at once rooted to the spot. Even the wild elephants could find nothing to say and were as flabbergasted as all the other animals around them in the rays of this ghostly light.

As a rule I used to take my 150 candles out with me at night more for the love of the game than with the intention of killing anything—except that I was always ready to kill a tiger or certain other wild animals and I sometimes had to shoot a deer to feed my men. I have such wonderful memories of those nocturnal idylls that I can recall them in every living detail whenever I think about them.

The Emperor's biggest animals were used for boar-hunting, as well as for night expeditions, the capture of wild elephants and sundry other great occasions. We would pull up at the edge of a wood in the evening and let the elephants feed quietly whilst we waited for the boar to put in an appearance. (We knew from the trackers' reports at what point they would probably cross the plain on their way to the plantations.) There was no need for us to keep a look-out: our elephants did the job for us. Long before we could hear the boar we were advised of their approach; our elephants would grow tense, their trunks raised and "pointing" towards the wood. First we would hear furtive footsteps, then various deep grunts, then the sound of plants being disturbed or even torn up by the roots—until finally a three-year boar, or perhaps an old sow, would appear, leading a procession of individuals of all shapes and sizes in single file, with striped and humped-backed youngsters gambolling about their mothers. We would quickly select a victim and over would go one big boar, then another, and another, until we judged the needs of our camp larder were satisfied, and the survivors had turned and scampered away without stopping to count their losses.

Our duralumin howdahs were fitted with an awning, and if the heavens opened while we were out on the plains we would pull up to draw the awning over our heads. Behind, it was fixed to two movable stanchions, while in front the oozie held it where he wanted it and actually managed to keep quite dry because his seat was lower than ours and the rain was less inclined to beat in on him from the side. There we would sit dozing, while our elephants—not so anxious as we were, possibly, for it to stop raining—gratefully accepted the chance of an



unscheduled meal. If we had no awning we would sometimes use palm leaves as a substitute—in fact the Emperor preferred them because they were lighter, more water-proof and less liable to hold the rain in a threatening puddle just over one's head. After the storm, all tracks would have been washed away and little rivers would be running in all directions. The animals, that had sought shelter from the storm by running into the wood, would come dashing out again, fleeing from the attacks of a new army of flies and leeches. As far as the eye could see, the earth would be teeming with new life.

There was a bull, I remember, which the Emperor had shot one day—a fine fellow with magnificent horns. I was riding the elephant with crossed tusks that day and I began to walk him up towards the bull.

"Here's a chance to see how he can finish off a bull," the Emperor said, and turning towards my elephant he shouted "Ma!"

Ma seemed to make no effort, but suddenly the crossed tusks took the bull in the belly and tossed him lightly a dozen or so feet away. ... That bull weighed a ton.

As a change from big game hunting we were often asked by the villagers in jungle country to help them by driving away certain elephants in their neighbourhood who had been making the farmers' life more difficult than usual. As a matter of fact young elephants will often amuse themselves like a gang of young toughs, throwing their weight about and doing quite a disproportionate amount of damage. Like other young toughs they often failed to realize their own strength, and although, more often than not, they were "only playing", the results were no less discouraging for the farmers, especially when repeated over and over again in the same fields.

Down in Southern Annam, between Dong-Me and Krong-Pha, there were a number of herds of wild elephants which had taken it into their heads to demolish all the telegraph poles, bridges and isolated forestry stations they could find. They pulled down miles of wire and bent and twisted it to their hearts' content, so that the repair-gangs had to unravel vast skeins of it and search for the rest in the bush before they could begin to put the lines into action again. As fast as they repaired the system it was damaged again, and as the months went by the unbroken rhythm of damage—repairs—damage

—repairs became intolerable. Bridge-rails were twisted or pulled out, mile-stones over-turned and shifted, forestry huts robbed of their roofs and doors, barrels of cement or of coal-tar belonging to the Public Works Department were rolled along the roads and hidden all over the place—until it had gone beyond a joke and everybody had had just about enough of it.

I had little sympathy for these practical jokers and as they included some worth-while males I shot a few—*pour encourager Us autres*. After that the neighbourhood enjoyed several months peace, but as soon as the rains began again so did the fun and games. Once more I was summoned to deal with the situation, but this time, fortunately, a few rounds of shot fired into the air was enough to drive the elephants away.

The whole of this district was infested with tigers and I made use of the carcasses of dead elephants for bait. Even a half-starved elephant, deprived of his ration of rice and maize by the vigilance of local farmers, makes an irresistible bait if it is putrid enough, and I killed several adult tigers when I visited the carcasses at night with my lamp. These tigers had not been hunted very much recently and had become unusually bold, so I had plenty of chances for the double event—the troublesome elephant and the even more troublesome tiger.

I was lucky enough to shoot three male elephants one morning at Lagi, one of them falling almost at my feet, the other two disappearing in opposite directions into a young wood. I tracked down the one that had made off towards the river and found it lying dead on a sand-bank; the other was lying at the entrance to a forest of palm-trees five or six hundred yards away. My bag was only five tusks, as one of the three victims had only one—and that rather short, although abnormally thick.



A fighter elephant with sawn-off tusks.



The giant of the team.



Nguyen-Huu-Song, Manager of the Emperor's hunt, with Bac-Let.

During the course of the following week I heard that the tigers were having the time of their lives on the meat I had kindly provided. I went back and cut a circular path connecting the three corpses and that night I made a tour of them. There was a tiger comfortably installed on each elephant and one or two others sitting quietly near by, awaiting their turn to come to the table. I shot one—an average specimen—at the first elephant and the watchers took to their heels. At each of the other corpses it was the same and I could have kept revisiting my three elephants all night if the mosquitoes had not forced me to give up. By next morning the skin of the first tiger was already ruined by black ants.

Despite their advantage in size and weight, all elephants, wild or domesticated, are fundamentally afraid of tigers more than of anything else. But it is only the solitary wild elephant who gives way to his fear; the herd back each other up and if anything it is the tiger who is more afraid. I used to notice that the herds grazing on the Lagna plains would get very aggressive if they so much as smelt a tiger, beating about among the bushes until they had chased the intruder out. I have often "raised" a tiger in this way and chased him for miles across the plain, yelling with terror as he realized we were gaining on him. We would either let him have a charge of buck-shot or let him go, according to our programme for the day. There was not much point in frightening any elephants we might be chasing by letting off a firework display, however much we might regret the loss of a handsome tiger skin.

One of H.M. Bao Dai's young elephants—an impetuous and obstinate beast—once over-stepped the limits of prudence so far as to get himself stuck in a bog. He was running about here and there like a lunatic and when he

found himself sinking in the mud (which was concealed by grass and shrubs) he went into a panic and roared—and roared! The more he thrashed around, the deeper he sank. We had to fell a tree across the swamp to give him a foot-hold and he finally dragged himself out with the aid of his tusks and his trunk. I mention this, by the way, as an exceptional case because, as I have said, elephants are usually very sure-footed and will never set foot on dangerous ground without testing it carefully. Nothing short of absolute panic would prevent a herd from exercising all the usual precautions.

This idiotic youngster of the Emperor's reminds me of an enormous female I once owned. We had left our normal camping-ground on the Lo-Ol for a week to try our luck in the Mi-Pou area. The trek would be a long one and H.M. Bao Dai advised me not to take this female as she was pregnant, so I duly left her behind. When we got back at the end of the week we were informed that on the night we left she had pulled up the tree to which she was chained and had disappeared with fifty feet of chain dragging behind her. Naturally we questioned her keeper.

"Well," he said, "she grouched a bit when she felt she'd been left behind—and she refused to eat anything." It was obviously one of those fits of the blues that even elephants indulge in now and then.

It was August and the rainy season. Night and day it poured in torrents, with only an occasional break, and the river was running bank-high. She would probably have the sense to stay on the bank as the current would have swept her away if she had attempted to cross, but I could not help thinking about that chain fastened to her hind leg. Just as I was trying to make up my mind which Saint to start praying to, the Emperor's Laoan hunter

came to ask my permission to go and look for my missing elephant. He was wearing a sarong, had some cooked rice and dried fish in a tiny basket on his back and carried a small matchet in his hand. He was apparently either mad or insolent, I was not sure which.

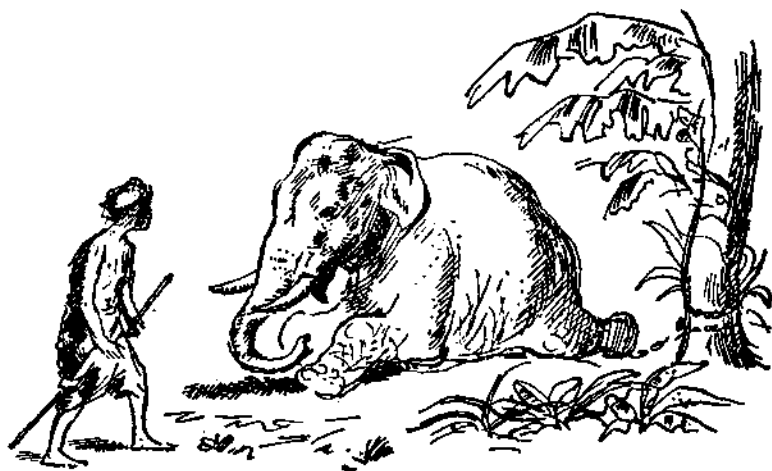


"Let him try," said the Emperor; "he'll give you quite a pleasant surprise!"

At a nod from his employer the Laoan vanished. There were herds of elephants all over the plain, and my fugitive, after following some of these, had made straight for Vo-Dat, across country she knew quite well, and reached

Xuanloc, where I used to keep her in the intervals between hunting expeditions. He had somehow managed to pick up her tracks—aided to some extent by the marks of the chain she was still dragging—and found that she had, after all, crossed the river. He then cut down some bamboo trees growing near by and made a raft on which he also crossed, landing finally at a point some thousand feet down-stream. Here he left the raft to float away on the current and explored the bank of the river in both directions until he picked up the tracks again. The wretched animal, still encumbered with her chain, had had a struggle to make the crossing and had landed still further downstream. The Laoan took up the chase afresh and every now and then climbed a tree to scan the horizon; if he saw any wild elephants he waited for them to move off before continuing his chase. He spent two nights in the rain, sleeping in the forks of trees and tying himself to the branches with ropes made of creeper in case he should fall off while he was dozing.

When he eventually found the runaway near Vo-Dat he went up to her and fastened her chain around a tree-trunk. He then introduced himself to her—never having ridden her before—gave her a new rattan collar, pricked her ears a little, passed the chain over her back and told her to kneel down. As soon as he had mounted her he turned her round and began the long trek back. They crossed the plain in a series of forced marches, they made skilful detours to avoid meeting wild herds, they swam the river (which had swollen still further by this time) and in due course returned to the fold. When I saw them coming back into the camp I could hardly believe my eyes! For the hunter, it seemed, it was all in the day's work. I tried to make him understand that he had done something extraordinary and that I was willing, and



anxious, to pay him what he deserved; but he refused. He was only doing his job, he said; wasn't that what he was paid for? I persuaded him to take some quinine, but he took it mechanically, like a soldier obeying an order. In the end, having almost given up hope, I offered him an old forage cap and a waterproof cape—which he accepted with a smile. An hour later I found him busy with his routine work on the hunting-ropes.

This particular Laoan had enough pluck for a dozen, but he was a morose and silent sort of fellow who usually spoke only in monosyllables. All his colleagues adored him and so, apparently, did his elephants; at any rate not even the most obstreperous of them would dare to stand up to him. Capturing wild elephants was his trade and when it came to breaking in a stubborn beast he had

an innate gift of anticipation which seemed almost like a sixth sense. He had not been at all surprised by my elephant's sudden flight—he had had worse situations than that to cope with in his time.

When they are going through their musth, or rutting season, male elephants are just as liable as the females to these sudden disappearances. If they are domesticated elephants they will follow a wild herd and if they are not accepted freely they will force themselves on their unwilling hosts. Then they will choose a mate and slip away to enjoy love's young dream for a spell. When their passion is spent they will rejoin their own herd, but that may not happen for some weeks, or even months. If they decide to "go native" for longer than this they are not easily recaptured—in fact they may be lost for good; but it is usually only the badly trained or ill-tempered ones who wander off like this, or those who have perhaps been ill-treated. As a matter of fact there were a number of trained elephants in our excellent Laoan's team which had run away to the forest and been written off as lost, but which he had managed to bring back to the straight and narrow path. He saw nothing remarkable about that, of course; if his was a dangerous trade he certainly seemed unaware of the fact.

Elephants are admittedly subject to fits of irresponsibility, but if they belong to a team where they are well looked after they can usually be made to toe the line with fairly good grace. And if an elephant kills his keeper—as he sometimes will—it is not necessarily he who is in the wrong.

In the Botanical Gardens at Saigon there used to be an honourable old gentleman—the illustrious Toby—to whom visitors would throw a coin every time he made obeisance to them. Toby used to pass the money conscientiously up to his keeper, who would give him a banana

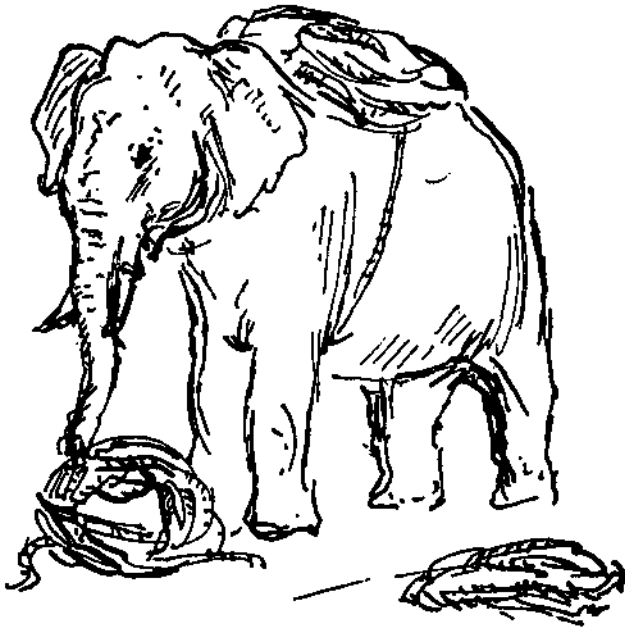
or two in exchange. But the keeper was a heartless fellow who considered his charge as no more than a money-making concern; moreover he beat the animal, in and out of season. Toby grumbled—but paid up. Then one day it dawned on him that he was handing over more and more money and receiving fewer and fewer bananas. That, he thought, was too much of a good thing. Being ill-treated was bad enough; but being robbed into the bargain was something no self-respecting elephant would stand for.

One afternoon some visitors happened to notice what the keeper was up to and somewhat indignantly spoke to him about it. He was both ashamed and angry. He blamed the elephant, of course, went into his enclosure and ordered him back into his cage, where he proposed to lock him up for the night. Toby, quite unmoved, simply refused to budge. The keeper picked up his *ankus* with the idea of pricking the elephant's ears, whereupon Toby, as quick as lightning, hit him over the head with one flick of his trunk. The keeper's head cracked open like a broken coconut and the executioner nonchalantly retired to his private apartments. The onlookers shouted for help, but when the police arrived their verdict was entirely in Toby's favour.

If a wild elephant in the jungle loses his patience and attacks another he knows what the consequences will be and is prepared to take them. He may be naturally a touchy individual and there may be extenuating circumstances, the behaviour of some irritating female, for example. In a moment of anger he commits murder, but as soon as he realizes what he has done he knows there is only one course open to him. He leaves the herd and hides from his fellows for ever.

Toby had no chance to sentence himself to this or any

other punishment. Every reasonable argument was in his favour, but he was forced into a corner of his cage and shot. That was the price he paid for his single rebellious gesture. "Nobody has the right to take the law into his own hands," says the law—and the law makes no exceptions, even in favour of elephants with a just grievance. His murderous cousin in the jungle, no less guilty, lives on. One law decrees that Toby must die; a different law permits his wild cousin to live, a law that says: "Let no man attempt, on pain of death, to seek me out. Let no man attempt to take me, dead or alive."



CHAPTER EIGHT

Bringing Them Back Alive

THERE is nothing new about the practice of capturing wild elephants; it is apparently as old as the most ancient history. In those days African elephants were as much sought after as Asian, each continent having its own specialists with their own techniques. The Africans seem to have lost the art in recent times, while the Asians have preserved it, even among primitive tribes, as a jealously guarded profession.

In the year 281 B.C. Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, defeated the Romans at Heraclea and again, in 279 B.C., at Ausculum, with the aid of an army of picked war-elephants—apparently the first elephants to be brought to Europe from Africa. It must be assumed that vegetation on and near the battlefields and the lines of communication was more luxuriant than it is to-day or alternatively that the commissariat was exceptionally well organized, since the elephants must have required literally tons of green food every day to keep them going. The Carthaginians also used trained elephants, and everybody has heard of Hannibal's crossing of the Alps in 217 B.C. He crossed the Mont Cenis pass and met the Romans on their own ground, his elephants having been trained both as transport animals and as an attacking force, before which the Roman soldiers fled in terror. On the vital question of the feeding and maintenance of Hannibal's elephants during this astonishing campaign, history is unfortunately silent.

Trained elephants were also used by the Prince of Ethiopia who, in the dim distant past, besieged Mecca.

In India the great Rajahs have always regarded the possession of big male elephants with impressive tusks as a symbol of their power and authority. On every State occasion they show themselves to their admiring subjects mounted on these spectacular creatures and moving in gaily decorated processions. The best-trained of the elephants are used on tiger-hunts in the Rajahs' wide estates; the royal guests are accommodated in howdahs large enough to seat three or four and are given the honour of administering the *coup de grâce*.

The Siamese have also had their trained elephants, for war and for amusement, for as long as their records go back. As recently as the nineteenth century there were a thousand or so in Government service, while the archives show that in the seventeenth century the number was far greater. In Cambodia and Laos elephants have always been—and still are—almost the normal beasts of burden for both work and pleasure. In most of these countries white elephants are treated as sacred, endowed with the title of Prince or Princess, and given all the respect and deference traditionally attaching to their rank.

The Cambodians immortalized the memory of their war-elephants and fixed them for all time, in all their various poses and attitudes, in the stones of Angkor for the tourist of to-day to gaze upon with wonder and admiration. The ancient Emperors of Annam, like the Indian Rajahs, were devoted to their war-elephants; they surrounded them with every attention and sometimes even bestowed titles of nobility on them. At every national ceremony these splendid creatures, richly caparisoned, were presented to the people. The cult of the elephant was kept alive and encouraged by the arts, and

there are elephants among the stone figures ranged about the lily-pond in the Hall of the Tombs. According to the legend, these figures come to life at night-fall, but they must all resume their stony immobility long before the day returns.

But the imperial herd at Huê was allowed to deteriorate under several successive Emperors; elephants who died or disappeared were not replaced and it was left to the Emperor Bao Dai to revive the ancient tradition. He had built up a magnificent collection, of which he was justly proud, by the time the Japanese arrived in March, 1945.

Many of the Indo-Chinese tribes have maintained an intelligent interest in the study and capture of elephants and are as keen and expert as their ancestors must have been. They have remained aloof from western civilization and have stoutly resisted its blandishments—and its evils. As their reward, the elephant-hunters of the hinterland lead a healthy, active life, free from the thousand and one anxieties of our modern prefabricated civilization.

Not so very long ago it was not unusual to see trained elephants employed as Lord High Executioners to crush the skulls of condemned criminals, and one can still see relics of this sinister custom at country fairs or in itinerant circuses. The elephant in the ring will raise his hind foot, as though about to perform the grisly duty, and hold it poised over the head of the man who is lying beneath it.

Apart from ceremonial occasions and a few strange roles like the two I have just mentioned, the elephant has for centuries been useful to mankind whenever there has been important heavy work to be done, and the interesting thing is that he (or more often, she) still is. Tanks and

tractors and bulldozers may seem to have relegated these powerful friends of man to second place, but there are still places and occasions in which the best mechanical aids are inadequate. Great baulks of timber cut and squared on the mountain side, great logs felled in places inaccessible to caterpillar tractors, and various other products of a flourishing forestry industry—all these would rot where they lie if it were not for the elephants trained to deal with them. The trained elephant, in fact, is still a very long way from becoming a back number.

There is a popular belief that wild elephants can only be caught in one way; actually every country, every tribe almost, has its own peculiar method which varies with the nature of the country. I myself know of three methods although I have never had a chance to try more than one. These three are:

1. Driving the elephants from cover, and penning them in a large enclosure surrounded by a strong palisade. This method is used in the dry season.

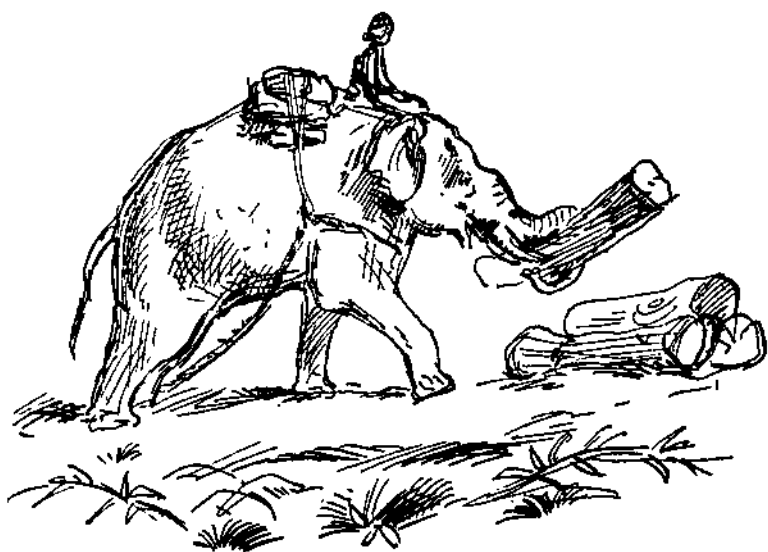
2. Harpooning—a method employed in the rainy season in Cambodia, especially (and almost exclusively) in the province of Kompong-Thom.

3. Lassoing—a method which is only possible on the plains of Darlac and the Lagna and which necessitates hunting the animals until they are more or less exhausted before capturing them.

This last method, the one most favoured by the Emperor Bao Dai, is a dangerous and violent sport but so thrilling that I have dealt with it more fully than the others in these random recollections of mine. Before I come to discuss it in detail, however, I should first like to give a brief account of the other methods.

The battue, or elephant-drive, most popular in Siam,

requires the co-operation of several villages since hundreds of beaters are needed to surround the area in which a herd of wild elephants has been located. They use every possible means of frightening the elephants into moving off in the required direction—shouting, gongs, drums, even fireworks. The operation seldom runs smoothly; some of the old females will often lose their tempers; so occasionally will a bad-tempered male. After one or two attempts they manage to break through the ring and regain the forest. Provided their rebellion is not likely to upset the whole herd, it is not a bad idea to let these awkward customers go; the others, deprived of their leaders one after the other, are more likely to push on in a body, like a flock of giant sheep. Finally they reach the



enclosure which has been made to receive them. A sliding trap-door falls behind the last of them and the herd is safely imprisoned.

All round the palisade, on top of the stakes and beyond the reach of the longest trunk, runs a kind of track from which patrolling guards keep an eye on the captives to pick out any who seem determined to make trouble. When it comes to the actual weeding out, any old females or big males that are obviously past their prime, vicious or unteachable are released. The useless ones are skilfully edged towards the only exit from the enclosure, and the trap-door is lifted at the right moment to release only one of them at a time. Usually they show no disposition to hang about, but should any of them do so they are driven off unceremoniously; the sight of a free elephant roaming about outside the prison walls tends to upset the unfortunates inside.

After the rejects have been withdrawn, the others begin a period of fasting—a necessary stage in the process of breaking them in. Then, one at a time, they are led out of their prison, but not until a competent authorized trainer has decided that each one is ready to be removed.

Capture by harpooning requires the co-operation of even more assistants than the battue. It involves hundreds of beaters, innumerable elephants for use as guards and beaters, harpooners with a considerable fleet of canoes, workers specially taught to make the various pieces of equipment used in breaking the elephants in, and finally a whole army of men and women to keep a force of this size adequately supplied with food and drink and other necessities. In addition to all these there is one other helper to be enrolled, one who can make or mar the

whole expedition—Nature herself. It is no use embarking on a harpooning hunt without the co-operation of Nature, which means, in this case, bank-high rivers, floods—and torrential rain. The best time is late August and most of September.

In the first place the wild herds, which have come down from the forest and will undoubtedly wish to return there as soon as the sun gets hot, must at all costs be kept down on the plain. Look-out posts are established on all their known routes and night and day the watchers strive to overcome one of Nature's strongest forces—the migratory instinct of animals on the move from one feeding-ground to another at a certain season of the year. Perched in little cabins built high in the trees they can survey a wide area and give the alarm as soon as they see wild herds in the distance. They have gongs, drums, trumpets, conch-shells and fireworks but at night they also have pitch-pine torches, partly as a protection but also to enable them to signal to each other from post to post.

Down in the plain the elephants grow more and more restless as the floods mount. The more the water gains over the land, the more frantically they try to get away. They seem somehow to sense that they are surrounded by something unusual; they know that they should be out of here, that danger is in the air, yet at the same time instinct tells them that they will never make it, that they have let themselves be penned in. The bolder spirits are reluctant to admit defeat and will suddenly begin bellowing and trumpeting with anger or will make a dash towards one of the paths that lead to safety. At this point the look-outs call up the shock-troops. Very soon the recalcitrant animal finds himself face to face with men on trained elephants, who force him by various means to

turn back. The meeting is usually stormy and the exchanges far from polite, but in the end numbers tell and the fugitive returns to the herd, cursing the plains which he had hoped to leave behind.

Night encounters are the most unpleasant, as wild elephants know how to take the utmost advantage of the dark. The hunters, however, have devised their own technique for preventing escapes by night, including lighted torches—some held in the hand, some fixed to the top of tall pikes—burning braziers all round the enclosure, and an almighty din from their outlandish assortment of instruments. The seasoned old hunters have their own way of dealing with any bad sleepers among their captives. They rush towards them with lighted torches whirling like windmills, and long strings of crackers tied to poles, and if necessary they jab a pointed bamboo-stick into the ribs of the toughest customers. This is usually quite enough to put a stop to all argument; even the wildest elephants begin to realize, however reluctantly, that resistance is futile and there is nothing they can do against enemies who have so firmly made up their minds not to let them escape.

The most profitable type of country for harpooning is the wide grassy amphitheatre which includes stretches of lower land flooded to a depth of five or six feet. In places like this the trees are subjected alternately to forest fires and deep inundations, so that they grow immensely strong and shoot out giant branches in all directions. Platforms are built in these branches before the hunt begins and in each tree is stationed a guard, brought in hurriedly from the outskirts of the "field", whose job is to look after a harpooned elephant—usually only one elephant to each tree.

The main operation begins when the flood is nearly at



Stowing' the capturing ropes,



Demonstrating the slip-knot in the capturing-rope.



Wild elephants taken by surprise in the Savannah.

its highest point. On the morning of the great day large herds of trained elephants from different parts of the country assemble at the starting point, each carrying two or three hunters. As they are carrying no saddles or howdahs the hunters have to hold on tight to each other, the one in front being able to grip the cane band which every domestic elephant wears round his body. The oozie is in his usual place on the elephant's neck.

The imposing caravan moves off, but its first task is no more than the collection of information. Each look-out is visited in turn for the latest news—the surest method, since any wild elephant which has slipped unobserved past one post is almost certain, sooner or later, to have come under the observation of another. Although they may be hidden by the long grass they give themselves away by the bundles of green-stuff they toss into the air, by the birds which settle for a moment on their backs, and by their own peculiar rumblings.

The trained herds then take up action stations, deployed over a very wide front, and begin to advance in a semi-circle, ready at a moment's notice to seal off any line of escape. As beaters they are skilful and indefatigable, and every would-be runaway is driven back towards the main body of captives—which, thanks to the expert handling of the chief huntsmen, now includes a number of different herds. If the chief huntsman signals that some old female or some other colossus is to be allowed to slip through the cordon, it is generally understood that he is merely getting rid of a few ugly customers who are likely to prove of little use and who may even upset the whole operation.

Needless to say, all this beating and driving is not exactly a silent affair. When the wild elephants find themselves being pushed steadily towards the middle of a

lake which gets deeper with every step they naturally raise objections. Mothers trumpet shrilly, babies bellow fretfully, and hundreds of human beaters are shouting all the time, while gongs, hollow tusks, shells and other garish instruments provide the accompaniment for this demoniacal concert. The noise swells in a *crescendo* every time one of the wild elephants makes a dash for freedom and maintains its *fortissimo* until the fugitive has been turned back.

One by one the captives lose their foothold and start to swim—the babies first, then the adolescents, finally the adults. In the deepest parts hundreds of elephants are swimming here and there, desperately trying to decide which way to go. Meanwhile the hunting elephants have been halted, only their heads and backs showing above water, with their trunks held straight out towards the enemy. This is the moment when the canoes move into action, bringing the harpooners and their equipment. They have been drawn up on the edges of the floods for some time waiting for the signal to advance, and as they pour in from every direction at top speed they make a thrilling picture.

The offensive now passes from the trained elephants to the canoes. The driving and encircling of the victims goes on uninterruptedly, but now the actual capturing is beginning. There is one team to each canoe, and as they all close in each team selects its victim, draws up close to him and harpoons him—as nearly as possible through the thickest part of the ear-flap. The harpooned elephant is led or driven to one of the trees I have already mentioned with a guard in its branches, where he is moored by a chain. If the harpooner got him through one ear-flap, he is given another through the other ear, but even if the first shot went home elsewhere on his anatomy he is



still given a second. A second chain is also used to fasten him to a branch above his head. All this is repeated for every elephant that is harpooned. Some put up a fiercer resistance than the rest and have to be handled with more skill and circumspection, but otherwise the technique never varies.

In an efficiently managed operation scores of elephants are captured within a very short time. A Cambodian friend of mine assures me that in some years from a hundred to a hundred and fifty elephants are taken in the province of Kompong-Thom alone in the course of one campaign—and my official records suggest that this is no exaggeration. Naturally a campaign of this importance is seldom carried out without accidents or *contre-temps* of one kind or another—canoes overturned and smashed, hunters injured, baby elephants drowned, adults breaking their chains and resisting to the last minute, others getting away with a harpoon stuck in their ribs or their ears, and so on. But when all's said and done there are very few accidents which prove fatal to the human beings, which is a testimony to their skill and courage, while only the barest minimum of suffering is inflicted on the elephants.

While the captive is chained to his tree he must go on "treading water" or he will sink, and this continued exercise helps to tire him out and break down his resistance. The man in the tree chooses the right moment to come to his assistance by passing a loop around his belly and cradling him, so to speak, in the branches. He hangs there, a pathetic spectacle, for a time, getting more and more hungry, and more and more subdued. Finally the captives are released, one by one, from their uncomfortable situation and, completely hemmed in by the trained elephants, they are led to dry ground and gradually

introduced to the traves or "stocks" which have been prepared for the first stages of their education. This movement of the captives from the trees to the training-ground can be the most dangerous part of the whole business and involves yet another combined effort on the part of the canoes and the hunters.

Harpooning in deep water, and the drive into a prepared enclosure on dry land, are by common consent regarded as mass operations where elephant-hunting is concerned. In the former a "bag" numbering half of all the animals rounded up is considered satisfactory, and often the figure is as low as one-third, the results being dependent on the endurance of the human hunters more than on any other factor. By continuing to round up stragglers and by allowing the most difficult elephants to go on swimming about until they are exhausted the hunters could easily account, in time, for every elephant they have rounded up, even if it meant working in relays; but there comes a time when they have to decide, through sheer exhaustion, to call it a day and allow any that have so far eluded capture to get away with it. The other mass operation—the drive on *terrafirma*—can show results which are at least as good. Whole herds are driven into the enclosure and the only ones to escape are those that are deliberately set free—either because they look like being trouble-makers or because, for various reasons, they would not be worth the trouble to train. There is, after all, no point in trying to train an elephant who is already too old for work or who shows signs of being a "rogue".

There remains, finally, the lasso method of capture, the method which the Emperor Bao Dai preferred to all others (as I did myself). Strictly speaking it is not such a

profitable method as the other two, even when it can be practised on a big scale; it is more of a personal and individual affair than a case for combined operations. On the other hand, as a sport it is unique of its kind and singularly exciting. The Emperor usually took a team of no more than fifteen trained elephants on these lassoing hunts and we were usually up against anything from fifty to two hundred wild elephants. Obviously the risks were considerable and we could outwit the enemy only by well-laid plans carried out skilfully and accurately. Even our most careful precautions sometimes let us down and we were occasionally within an ace of disaster—or rather, to be honest, of suicide! Fundamentally, of course, it was the danger, the knowledge that the odds were against us, which was the attraction. There was so much to think of—getting the wind in our favour, choosing the best place for our attack, sealing up the escape routes for the runaways, standing up to the fighters, meeting a combined charge, being prepared for a hundred and one emergencies—and everything happening more or less at once, with no respite.

But if the dangers were great, so, in the end, were the compensations. Life had few greater pleasures than to come home worn out after a tiring expedition and admire the splendid new recruits we had captured, each one firmly chained to one of our own trained elephants. Our elephant-men would make a feast-day of it and get themselves a gargantuan meal, while the Moi helpers—without asking our permission, I may add—would merely get drunk.

CHAPTERNINE

Hunting by Lasso: First Stages

THE first essential in elephant-hunting by lasso is absolute accuracy in planning, down to the smallest detail. The preliminary staff-work must be given priority over everything else and no single detail must be overlooked.

The selection of the team of elephants to take part in the hunt is of primary importance and they should all be familiar with each other. They will have to work together, and efficient teamwork will be out of the question unless they can show complete mutual understanding and cohesion. One of the Emperor's hunt-managers, M. Nguyen-huu-Song, possessed a marvellous gift for summing up an elephant's possibilities at a glance and experience seldom proved his judgment to be faulty. He would look over a mixed lot of a hundred elephants and pick out, almost without hesitation, those which would be worth trying out. He would have these brought to him, mount one of them and proceed to fire several shots into the air, making careful note of each animal's reactions. This test knocked out a few of the competitors who showed themselves unsteady under fire. Next came a speed-test, then a test of the swiftness with which the elephants responded to words of command or to the *ankus*—there are "hard-eared" elephants, seemingly unresponsive to the goad, or *ankus*, just as there are "hard-mouthed" horses that will not learn to answer to the bit. Both can be a nuisance if they are frightened and run

away, and although the "oozies" learn to flatten themselves along the elephant's back when they come to overhanging trees it is rather a different matter if the elephant is carrying a saddle with three or four passengers.

An elephant who is liable to bolt when frightened may occasionally be a very useful animal in a hunting-team, despite this weakness—too useful to leave behind in fact. In that case he can be included in the team, but with an extra chain to act as a brake. One end is fastened to a hind leg, well below the knee, and the other to the neck, so that if the rider suddenly gives a vicious tug to the upper end at the exact moment when the hind leg is lifted off the ground he more or less trips him up. Naturally the jolt is not enough to bring the runaway down, but it gives him something to think about. However, it is hardly a pleasant business, and if it is used too often it tends to make an elephant permanently bad-tempered.

All the individuals in the Imperial collection—and all of my own team, which came from the same collection—had passed through the hands of the manager Nguyen-huu-Song, and with the exception of one little white female they were all first-rate elephants. Like all hunting elephants they bore the sign of their vocation on the rump—a small patch of skin a little lighter in colour than the rest. This mark is made by the assistant-hunters, running along behind each elephant to make them run a bit faster and hitting them repeatedly on this spot with a wooden mallet. It is doubtful whether the elephant feels any pain, but the constant whacking bruises the hide and after a succession of bruises and healings it finally takes on this lighter shade, which is an infallible trade-mark. There is never any difficulty in recognizing a hunting-elephant, or even one which has



been enrolled in a hunting team temporarily to make up the numbers; in fact most elephants which have at some time in their lives been members of working teams can be identified ever afterwards by light patches of skin marking old wounds or bruises, usually where chains and fetters have rubbed and made scars. These trade-marks sometimes come in very useful.

Our elephants had two jobs: they were both hunters and captors, which meant that among their other accomplishments, they had been trained to stand still when a gun went off. The best of them, in fact, had learnt not to bellow at random or to make a sound of any kind when approaching the quarry. At the crucial moment they would stop eating and keep their ears, trunk and tail absolutely still. The Emperor's favourite, Mot, once he had been turned three-quarters on to the target, would even hold his breath and stand like a bronze statue when he received the signal that his master was ready to fire. As soon as the shot had been fired he would turn towards the prey, his one tusk thrust forward aggressively, ready to take on anything or anybody—and all without a single word of command. Mot could lengthen his stride and run away from trouble if necessary, but he held all wild animals in contempt. In his time he had had many a tussle with tigers and he had always come off best, but the one thing he could never stand was a sudden unexpected attack from a tiger in hiding.

One morning we caught a tiger in a steel trap not far from our camp and M. Mahe went and shot it before breakfast. A little later we went to inspect the body, accompanied by a few Moi with their knives, ready to cut it up. As we came near, the Moi suddenly scattered in all directions, like so many sparrows. H.M. Bao Dai went forward on Mot and found the "dead" tiger on its feet,

roaring and tugging at the chain of the trap. Without batting an eyelid Mot picked up a clump of earth in his trunk and threw it with such force down the open mouth of the tiger that he choked it. Amid general laughter the tiger lay down and eyed us, obviously feeling insulted, until a shot finished him off—this time for good.

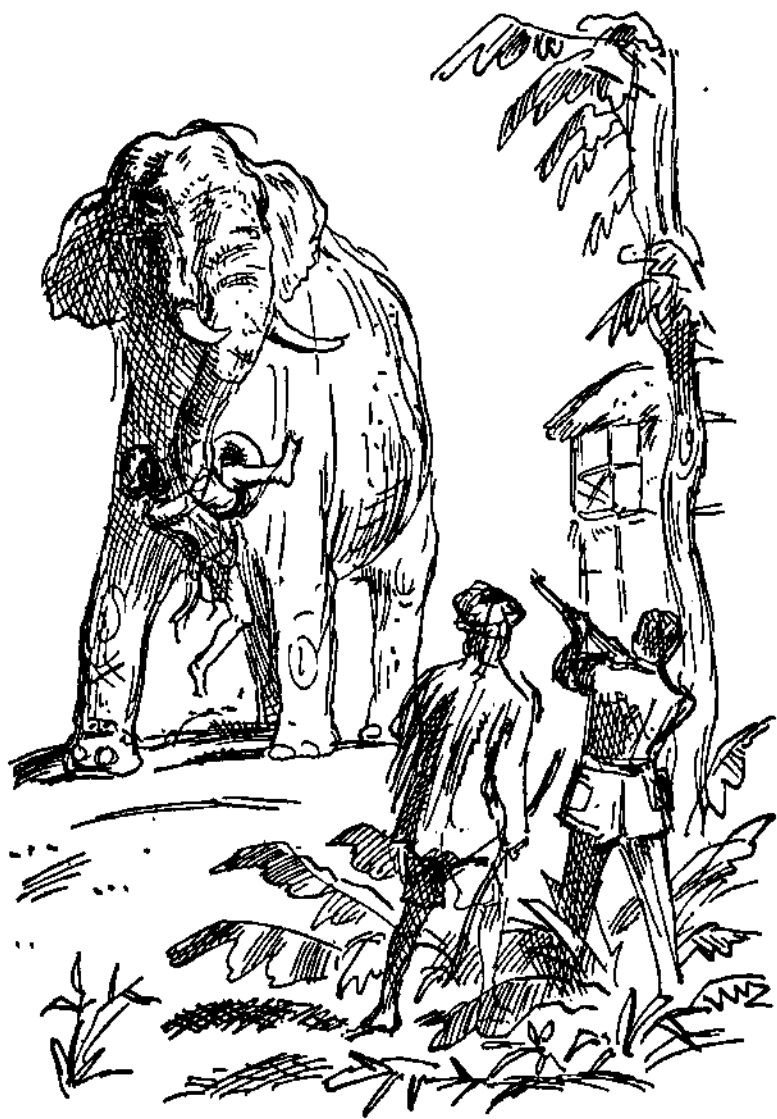
Later in the same week we had quite a different kind of experience, which nearly ended in tragedy. We had just added two more wild elephants to our batch of prisoners when one of our men was seized by the leg by another infuriated beast. He undoubtedly owed his life to the Emperor, who rushed to his aid and shot the animal through the head with a .404 from about six feet. The man was released from the trunk that held him aloft and the elephant fell stone dead. A second later M. Maurice Cécicourt was thrown from his mount into a patch of long reeds and to our horror we saw yet another wild elephant bearing down on him. Once again it was the Emperor who came to the rescue, and this time he secured a fine pair of tusks as a reward.

The equipment required for a lassoing expedition never varied. It included goads, clubs, whips (weighted with lead), mallets, axes, matchets, knives and chains. In addition, two elephants were always detailed to carry provisions for the party and tents for our camps. Our pack-saddles were made of the lightest duralumin, with a compartment on each side to take a rifle and pockets to hold spare provisions, photographic apparatus, a thermos and field-glasses. Our ropes were chosen with particular care as it was essential that they should be a hundred per cent reliable. They were made of buffalo- or ox-hide, carefully selected, were about as thick as a stout chain

and were severely tested at every stage of their manufacture. The Moi possessed the secret of making them but as far as I could see they were made of long strips of leather which had been twisted tight—always in the same direction—before drying. The result was a stout rope, supple enough to handle easily but strong enough to hold an elephant. They were expensive, but they were worth the price. At one end of the rope was a loop on a slip-knot which was so skilfully tied that the rope never seemed to get snagged up and the loop never slipped or lost its grip.

To lasso an elephant needs some twenty to thirty yards of this rope, which we carried coiled. It made a heavy bundle, but it never came unrolled as it was tied together with short strings which could be cut in a second when required. The coil was fastened to the elephant's back by two cane bands passed round his body, one passing under his front "arm-pits", the other under the root of his tail. Even when the elephant was moving at speed the rope would stay put—a tribute to the skill with which it had been coiled and stowed—as indeed it had to if the man detailed to "play" the lassoed elephant was not to get all tangled up at the crucial moment. The Master of Ceremonies in the Imperial team, by the way, was that same monosyllabic Laoan who recovered my runaway elephant. He always prepared several coils of rope himself besides supervising the preparation of the others.

The coiled rope lay between the hunter and his assistant. In his right hand (or his left if he was left-handed) the hunter carried the noose fixed on the end of a ten-foot pole. With this he would make the kind of swooping movement that a butterfly-collector makes with his net—only in the reverse direction, upwards. When his own elephant was so close to the animal to be captured that



his head was more or less touching the other's rump, the hunter would wait until the victim's hind leg was raised high enough and then slip the noose around it, as high up the leg as possible—the right leg or the left, whichever was more convenient.

The elephants are ready; so are the ropes and all the other equipment. Now the last stage of the preliminaries begins.

The trackers, who have been out on the plains for days spying out the land, return with their reports. We now know the position, the size and the latest movements of the herds. At night, watchers are sent out to listen and to keep in touch with the herds. Their last trumpeting before day-break may well convey to the experts information which will avoid much waste of time; if the wild herds have been silent all night—as does occasionally happen—then we shall have to rely on the information supplied by the scouts. The watchers on the listening posts work in relays like soldiers changing guard on active service; no slacking is allowed and discipline is strictly maintained.

But even now the expedition cannot set out until certain preliminaries have been fulfilled; there are guardian spirits in the Annamese jungle who must be propitiated—or at least consulted. Some days are propitious, others must be avoided at all costs. It is no use trying to argue the matter; in the hearts and minds of the people these things are so, and that is all there is to be said. To attempt to capture elephants on an unpropitious day would be an affront to the spirits and even to the elephants themselves; what would be the point of courting disaster merely to save a day or two?

The local sorcerer is naturally the one who chooses the

appropriate day. He gives himself up to long and deep meditations, preceded by endless invocations and prostrations; he studies the footprints of hens in the dust; and finally he announces the day and guarantees it free from every malign influence. Every oozie, every hunter, every assistant crowds around the sorcerer to hear his decision, determined not to miss a single gesture, a single word. The sorcerer, for his part, knows exactly what he is doing and delivers a verdict which is sure of a warm reception: the hunt is already more or less "in the bag". He recovers his nervous energy with a good square meal washed down with several glasses of wine of a choice vintage. Should the results of the hunt exceed expectations, so much the better; he will accept a few more drinks without complaining and will probably explain, at great length, how he knew the expedition would be specially favoured by the spirits. If on the other hand the expedition is a failure, partial or complete, he will lecture the culprits (there is always somebody to blame, of course) and overwhelm them with advice and warnings for next time.

It is easy to laugh at these superstitions, but the influence of the local magician is strong and his prestige unassailable. After all, his prognostications give a certain self-confidence to his hearers and they make up their minds, however unconsciously, to ensure that his prophecies are fulfilled. It would be unwise, in any case, to challenge or to ignore the ancient beliefs and customs of the native hunters.

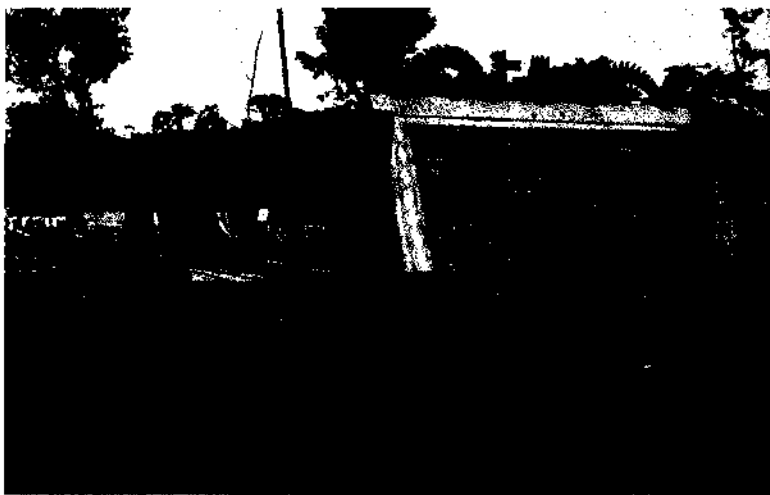
And now the preparations are complete and the propitious day is fixed; but there still remains one ceremony before we can start. In the centre of the camp an altar is built, flanked on either side by a pair of symbolic tusks. It is covered with a red and gold cloth and on it stands

an incense-burner full of joss sticks. The members of the expedition—mostly Vietnamese from Quang-Tri—approach the altar, dressed in full hunting costume, and prostrate themselves before the tutelary spirits. Each one in turn makes three profound obeisances, lights a joss-stick and places it in the incense-burner beside the others. The smoke rises in fragrant spirals to a deep dark sky, thickly strewn with stars. At two in the morning the Mass of St. Hubert is celebrated. It is a moving and unforgettable sight. Behind the altar a great camp fire is lit, fed continuously by the elephant-men with such enormous tree-trunks that the flames leap higher than their heads. The trained elephants are now led up and arranged in a circle around the altar, and the scene, here in the heart of the forest beneath the stars, is both convincing and impressive. The elephants stand still, as if on parade, while the sorcerer takes a bundle of tiny wax candles (made from the combs of the forest bees), passes from one to another round the circle and fixes a lighted candle on the end of each tusk. Then he issues his orders, informing the elephants, one by one, male and female, of the roles which have been assigned to them. "*Ton* will intercept the fugitives, and drive them back to the plain. *You* will pursue the elephants to be captured until they are exhausted. *Ton* will come to the assistance and protection of your helper if he, or she, is in worse case than yourself. *You* will overpower any opponent that shows signs of resistance ..." and so on, to the end. Each elephant listens to the sorcerer's instructions and seems to understand them fully. Aware by now of the importance of their allotted tasks they blink their agreement—though it must be admitted that the smoke of the camp fire may have something to do with this last touch.

The Mass is drawing to a close. Elephant-men, hunters



Spirit house over a tomb.



Tomb-house showing Annamite influence in its construction.



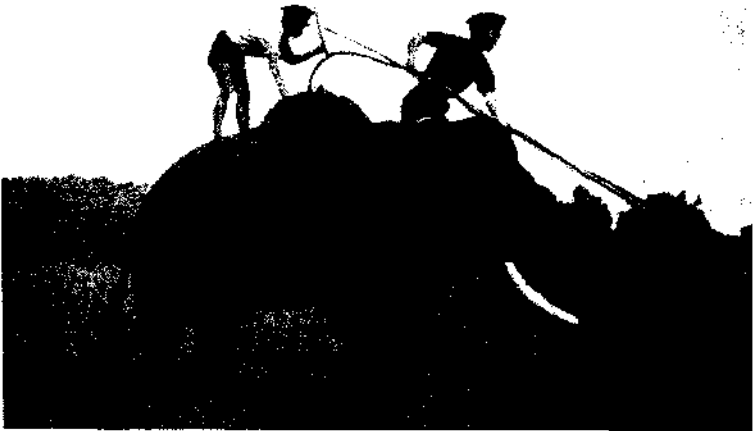
On the Trail,



Moving into action.



Lasso hunter in action.



All ready for the final capture.
(The role taken on this occasion by a male is usually allocated to a female.)



Got him!

and helpers line up behind the sorcerer facing the altar and the whole company, in perfect unison, bows for the last time. Then the men return to their elephants and get ready to lead them off, while the sorcerer comes round and removes the candle-ends from their tusks. The great beasts withdraw to doze away the rest of the night, which, by contrast with the circle still lit by the blazing fire, seems darker than ever.

The Pnomh natives of Darlac practise an entirely different ceremony. A young tame buffalo is sacrificed on the altar in conditions of appalling cruelty, and the ceremony is accompanied by much beating of gongs and much drinking of alcohol. Every district has its own customs, but the principle underlying all these "Masses of St. Hubert" is the same; nobody rushes into a lassoing elephant-hunt without first making sure of the blessing and protection of the gods of the forest. ... Well, there can be no harm in asking a favour! In any case it would be quite useless to ask the men to set out on a day that was not propitious; even if they went they would have no heart for their work and things would undoubtedly go wrong from the start.

The first cock-crow arouses the camp, and these birds that salute the sun-rise are our travelling companions. There are more of them when we start but our cook reduces their number every morning. Even the most faithful of them will come to the same end before our expedition is finished; they must all be treated the same, without fear or favour.

Here and there little fires are already burning and by their light and their warmth the riders and the hunters are harnessing their charges. As daylight grows the whole team is ready. The night watchmen have come in with the latest information. At five o'clock a herd of wild

elephants were trumpeting over by the great Bau Gat lake. There is nothing to do now but to get after them.

And so the great adventure begins.



CHAPTER TEN

Hunting by Lasso: The Capture

IN the Lagna plains visibility is never very good at daybreak. In an ordinary shower things are not too bad, but as the rain gets worse every object steadily vanishes in the general downpour. On a fine morning the country is shrouded in white fog as the last stars go out—a phenomenon which is not uncommon in countries where constant evaporation from marshland causes a very high degree of humidity in the air.

As we set off in the early morning for the great capture we soon become a collection of giant black silhouettes, silently crossing the plains like blurred figures seen through a diaphanous curtain. The long file of our elephants winds slowly in the direction laid down for us by the night watchmen or by the previous day's scouts and soon the reeds close behind the tracks of the last to leave camp. The men are amused to see only the upper halves of their companions floating above a sea of grass; they wear little clothing and before long they are soaked with dew.

Our elephants have set off in three sections: the beaters first, then the fighters and last the captors. With fifteen elephants we make up five teams and theoretically we should capture five elephants at each sortie. In practice we have never captured more than three. The difference may be due to the inexperience of our younger elephantmen or to the fact that they so frequently have to go to each other's help. The herds we usually go after are fairly

fierce animals, and if they see one of their brothers or sisters in trouble they seldom think twice before coming to the rescue. As three trained elephants are just sufficient to take on two or three wild ones, the nearest hunter will often abandon his own intended victim in order to assist his colleague.

Our expeditions are timed to coincide with the months when there is an abundance of food for wild elephants and the wide open spaces of the plains are teeming with them, moving slowly and steadily forward and eating as they go. If the scouts have been able to give us precise directions the night before, or if we have been able to fix the herds' whereabouts more or less accurately by listening to the noise they have been making all night, our men have only to cut straight across the plain in the given direction and they are bound to strike the trail. The tracks are at most only a day old and are easy to follow. From the moment we strike fresh piles of droppings we have to advance with the utmost caution; even if the elephants have continued in the same tracks they cannot be far away, while if by any chance they have doubled on their tracks they may be nearer than we know, perhaps on a parallel course. The best plan is for one of the men to climb a suitably placed tree and scan the neighbourhood with binoculars. If the fog has lifted one can see for a considerable distance and sooner or later one is bound to spot them. In normal vegetation the only parts visible above the reeds and grasses are the top of the head and the curve of the spine of the big adults; the average specimens and the babies are completely hidden. Occasionally one can see aigrettes or herons with their wings folded riding along the tops of the grasses like toys on a moving wire. The elephants who have kindly offered them a ride may themselves be out of sight but their

temporary passengers have all unintentionally betrayed their presence.

In the most humid areas, which are also the most frequented, the reeds and grasses grow so high that even the biggest elephants remain invisible. These are the areas requiring the longest scrutiny. Sooner or later a bundle of half-eaten greenery will go flying through the air—and that's that! There *are* elephants there! And, occasionally, quite a moderate little bellow will betray their presence when one least suspects it.

The tree-top survey may not always be successful at first but it is worth repeating again and again until it is. At the first few attempts the wild herd may have been passing behind a belt of forest but sooner or later it is bound to emerge into grassland again, it may be five or six hundred yards further on, and be spotted by a different tree-climber.

The great advantage of actually seeing the elephants one is chasing is not only that it saves time but that it gives one the chance to approach them against the wind, by changing course if necessary—a thing which would be quite impossible if one had to rely on following tracks on the ground all the time. Tracking is obviously the more dangerous procedure as it may bring the hunters suddenly face to face with the hunted, which might either frighten the wild herds into running away or incite them to charge.

Once a herd is discovered, the captor elephants get ready to close in either immediately or as soon as a more suitable spot for the attack is reached. Only the observer in his tree-top can decide with confidence on this last point and sometimes he recommends a slight delay and concentrates on keeping the enemy in sight. To test the direction of the wind, by the way, we had a choice of two methods. One was to inhale a good mouthful of cigarette

smoke and blow it upwards; the other was to hold up a bag of flour with a red-hot cinder from the cook's fire inside it and watch the direction of smoke. This latter was the favourite method of H.M. Bao Dai and a bag of flour for the purpose was always regarded as an essential item of equipment.

The approach up-wind takes place swiftly and silently but it requires the co-operation of the watchers in the trees—to estimate the size of the herd, its disposition on the plain and its probable line of retreat. A small herd of about fifteen to thirty can be attacked from the front, but with the larger herds of a hundred, two hundred, or more, to attack head-on would be to court disaster. Both common sense and experience suggest that any large herd should be attacked on the flank, either in the van or in the rear according to the direction of the wind.

Once the point of attack has been decided upon battle is joined, and each group of elephant-men is allowed to choose its own private victim. The Emperor and I often approached so silently that we found ourselves face to face with the wild elephants before they were even aware of our existence. They had vaguely suspected something unfamiliar in the neighbourhood and had turned round to find themselves looking straight into the eyes of our own animals. What a moment for the elephants, tame and wild, for all, hunter and hunted! We would recover first and go for them before they had time to get over the shock, and if they simply ran away without stopping to argue the toss it was an easy matter to detach them from the main herd; but if they took it into their heads to give the alarm the word would rapidly be passed from one to the other and our position would become more delicate. I will explain presently how we dealt with such a situation, but for the moment I should like to say something

more about the duties of the three types of elephant in each team—the beaters, the captors and the fighters.

The beaters are the swiftest animals, females or young males, and their size and strength are minor considerations. Like their colleagues they have two riders, the driver or oozie on the head and his assistant on the neck. Their job is to pursue the elephants marked down for capture, cut off their lines of retreat and if necessary shepherd them back to the plain—the only place where capture is reasonably possible. As soon as a wild elephant is aware of danger his first instinct is to make for the jungle. If he can reach it he is safe, as the men perched up on their trained hunters cannot follow without the risk of decapitation by overhanging branches. These well-trained beaters intercept the wild elephants, jostle them quite calmly in the required direction and then lead them back to the plains. The wild elephants, for their part, are by this time quite panic-stricken and are usually content to follow the beaters, obviously confident that they are leading them out of danger!

When the job is done, the beater relaxes, steps aside and allows the wild elephant to take up the running, while he trots happily along behind. As soon as the wild elephant shows the least inclination to turn back, however, the beater starts the whole proceeding over again, since the actual capture must at all costs take place on the plain where there is most room for the hunters to manoeuvre.

The tall, thick grass is a terrible handicap to the hunted elephants, slowing them down rapidly. Although they started off at the speed of a galloping horse they are soon reduced to a walk, growing more and more weary with each step, while their pursuers, fresh, strong and in perfect training, follow comfortably along the paths opened

up by their victims. By now, in fact, the speed of the whole operation has been reduced to the point at which the actual capture can begin. The beaters withdraw and the captors take up the pursuit.

Each captor now has his forehead pressed against his victim's rump while his rider prepares the lasso. Although the noose is fixed to the end of a pole, as I have already described, the skilled hunter prefers to dispense with the pole in open country, where there is less chance of the rope becoming entangled. In either case he chooses his moment and in a flash the noose is around the elephant's leg. Immediately he gives the agreed sign to his assistant sitting on the captor's neck, who begins to pay out the rope, itself a job requiring perfect balance and control if the rope is to unwind evenly and to be kept free of kinks and knots. With a rope round his leg, the captive gets slower and slower; he begins to stagger a little and wonders which way to go next.

Now is the moment for a change in tactics. Hitherto the captive has been driven away from the forest but now he is led back to it. The rider selects a big strong tree and allows the captive to pass beneath its branches; as soon as he is a respectable distance from it, however, the assistant on the captor elephant slips quickly to the ground. He seizes the free end of the rope and passes it swiftly and securely around the tree. At once the captive, feeling the jerk as the rope tightens, turns furiously on his enemies—and this is where the third specialist, the fighter elephant, comes into the picture. He immediately places himself between the captive and the assistant, giving the latter time to retreat, and if necessary he stays on guard to suppress any sign of rebellion or aggression.

The fighters are the toughest and the most heavily

armed elephants in the whole set-up. Wherever there is a ticklish job to be done it is the fighters that are sent for and they seem to be able to subdue the most unpleasant customers merely by looking at them. Sometimes, however, they are really tested; a wild elephant may happen to see one of his comrades tied up and decide to come to his assistance and a tussle may follow. The fighter elephants sometimes have to take on two or three would-be rescuers, but in such cases another fighter whose captive may be safely left for a few minutes will go to his comrade's assistance.

Often a number of Moi villages agree to pool their resources and bring out such a crowd of elephants on their hunting expeditions that they easily outnumber any possible enemies; we were never in such a position as we could never command enough fighters. There were times, in fact, when we were nearly overwhelmed and had to use our rifles. Sometimes a few warning shots were all that were necessary, otherwise we had to make an example of the most aggressive of our attackers. The others usually found that quite enough; instead of continuing the fight they preferred to turn quickly on their heels and make themselves scarce.

H.M. Bao Dai had five male elephants trained for fighting. They were, in order of merit, Mot, with the single tusk; Hai, with crossed tusks; Bac Loi, with tusks shorter than those of his colleagues but very thick and strong; Bac Let, with straight tusks, although they looked as though they would cross as they grew; and Bac Think, since dead, a young colossus with one straight tusk and one that curved outward. I had a male who was by no means out of his class among these giants and had a promising future. He was a big fellow, a bonny fighter and always ready to measure up to any number of the

enemy, but I never heard what became of him after the Japanese *coup* of March 1945.

I have already told how the Emperor saved the life of one of his men who had been seized in the trunk of a wild elephant in the course of one of these encounters. On another occasion we had decided to collect our whole team in a bunch in the hope of making an impression on a wild herd which was a little too aggressive for our liking. The result was a pitched battle in the course of which our fighters gave a most impressive display, each one keeping his opposite number engaged while at the same time guarding his rider. It was a battle of the giants indeed! Tusks met and interlocked with a clash, and trunks beat against each other like enormous clubs with a dull heavy thud. Our elephants aimed blow after blow at their opponents' heads but still managed to parry the blows aimed at their riders with a speed and skill which would have been the envy of the finest heavy-weight boxer in the world. As for the men, it is difficult to find words. Thrown about, shaken, in danger every moment of being killed, they seemed actually to enjoy these fights and their chief anxiety was to find the chinks in their opponents' armour.

One evening His Majesty was fishing in a bend of the Lagna and I took over the command of the team, leading them towards a part of the plain where I had heard elephants bellowing at high noon. Just about sunset I saw a herd of about fifty leave the wood and make for the middle of the plain. With the wind in our favour we were able to take up our position between the wood and the elephants. There was no time to lose and I set the attack in motion without delay. This herd had a bad reputation and the female leader at once gave the signal

to charge. Before we knew where we were they were upon us, with trunks curled ready to strike. We had not yet split up into separate teams as we usually did on these occasions, and this was our salvation. Five of the herd had fallen in behind their leader but the majority seemed undecided and came on more slowly. Hai, with his crossed tusks, held his ground and awaited the charge, flanked on either side by the rest of our fighters and with the beaters and captors drawn up in our rear. As soon as the female was within range, Hai stopped her with a direct blow with both tusks full in the chest—a blow so fierce that the force of it brought him down on his haunches. The female fell on her knees and then staggered to her feet with two great holes in her chest. All the fight had gone out of her and she turned at right-angles to escape. Another direct blow to her left shoulder floored her completely, but she picked herself up and made off, limping badly. Our other fighters took on her supporters until they all followed their leader in retreat, but not before they, too, had been roughly handled. Hai then made for the rest of the herd and gave six of the more aggressive of them, one after the other, such a lesson that defeat was soon turned into a rout. Even then Hai was not satisfied until he had helped the stragglers on their way with a few hearty nudges in the rear with his head!

In the course of the fight a small male had somehow got separated from the wild herd. He was beautifully proportioned and proudly sported a nice little pair of ivories. It was no easy job capturing him because he was obviously excited and was quite ready to take on any of our elephants, regardless of their size. He had already wounded one of our females in the side and it began to look as though the joke was going on a bit too long. However, Hai settled it. With one blow of his trunk he laid

him flat on the ground. The gallant youngster picked himself up, obviously impressed, and apparently decided that he would be well advised to come quietly. We had no further difficulty with him and were able to put the usual bonds on him and lead him back to the camp.

Our report—not entirely unembellished by the men—pleased the Emperor mightily and he began to regret that he had not been with us; however, his regrets were somewhat modified by the fact that he had caught an eighty-pounder, which had taken him an hour to land. We decided there and then that if Hai continued to play the hero on anything like this scale he would have to be promoted.

But the amiable giant lacked the gumption to take advantage of the Emperor's good intentions towards him. Barely a week after the display which had made his reputation he took it into his head to play the spoilt boy. In the course of another expedition he behaved abominably, refusing fight, breaking ranks and even taking himself off for a quiet feed and deserting both his duty and his comrades. The Emperor decided that so temperamental a servant hardly deserved a reward of any kind, at any rate until he had completely reformed. It must be admitted in Hai's favour that there were extenuating circumstances. On the evening of his triumph he was being ridden by one of the best of our mahouts—certainly the best of our capturers—while on the day of his misbehaviour he had only a feeble and indecisive beginner on his neck. Elephants are like horses in this matter: they only respond when they can feel complete confidence in their riders. I have seen this sort of thing happen so often that I have come to the conclusion that elephants are even more "choosy" than horses where their riders are concerned.



Hai never changed in this respect; he remained magnificent when well mounted and useless in the hands of a feeble or clumsy rider. He was never again proposed for any promotion or reward, although he acquired a passion for a tit-bit of any kind if he had done a good job of work—lumps of black sugar, peanut cakes, or unlimited quantities of salt. He was, in fact, an incorrigible *gourmand* and the terror of the Moi if he got anywhere near their maize crops. The Emperor spent his time compensating his own subjects or paying for damages to their crops—until he began to realize that his generosity was encouraging them to blame every crime, real or imaginary, on poor Hai. These opportunists used to gather in their crop, turn Hai loose in the field they had just cleared, take a deep breath and shout for help! It was all so circumstantial that poor Hai never had a chance to prove his innocence. One night, however, when everybody was more drunk than usual, the tongues wagged too freely and somebody let the cat out of the bag. As a punishment the Moi were conscripted into our hunting parties and whenever they met any of us they would blush all colours of the rainbow. Nor were they particularly proud of themselves when the regular elephant-men used to tease them on their return about their conduct in the field. At any rate they gave up accusing Hai right and left for crimes he had never committed.

I could fill volumes with stories more or less relevant to my subject, but I must return to the actual field of battle.

I left the captured elephants firmly tied to trees; before they are ready to be led back to camp they must be calmed down still more, because as soon as they recover their breath some of them will lose no time in demonstrating that they have recovered their bad temper too.

The most difficult part of the operation is passing a collar round their necks. This collar is made of the same kind of leather as the ropes, with a swivel-hook made of ox-horn above the neck. This hook is so contrived that it makes it impossible for the rope by which the elephant is tied to the tree to become twisted or to break.

The captive does everything he can to prevent the collar from being put round his neck, warding it off with his trunk and knocking it aside. Sometimes he will seize it in his mouth and crush it with his teeth. It becomes simply a matter of time, patience and cunning, but if all else fails one of the trained elephants can be used to help. He will use his own trunk to hold down the captive's while the man slips the collar round the latter's neck. The new recruit is then attached to a captor elephant, stronger than himself, by the rope which is already round his own neck. A very intractable captive may require an additional rope, fastened to a second captor on his other side, in which case the two "keepers" walk along with the captive between them and combine to keep him in order.

The captives are now all securely attached to their gaolers and the procession moves off, not without loud protests from the prisoners. If one of them tries to run on ahead he is politely requested not to put on airs and to rejoin the ranks. If necessary a little persuasion applied in the appropriate place by the trunk of one of his guardians is enough to teach him obedience. The same discipline is applied to any who try to move too far to either side or to tug too persistently at their ropes. A sharp whack on the rump rebukes a prisoner who tends to lag behind or who refuses to march. In short, no slacking of any kind is allowed, and the new recruits soon accept the situation; they follow the animals whose duty it is to bring them in like so many offenders "coming quietly"

with the policemen to the station. Should there be any signs of resistance they are quickly suppressed. The captor elephants are not always disposed to be gentle; they may try what persuasion can do at first, but once their patience is exhausted they will adopt sterner measures.

When they reach camp, every newcomer finds a tree prepared for his reception—a kindly thought which, it must be admitted, does not always seem to be appreciated. The rope attached to the back of his neck is stretched upwards and fastened to an over-hanging branch so that he is unable to reach anything he might take it into his head to attack either with his trunk or with his jaws. The horn swivel allows him to move his head in any direction without breaking the rope, but in the end he gives up wriggling from sheer fatigue and after twenty-four hours without food or water he is more or less beaten. They all receive exactly the same treatment, although naturally some resign themselves to the inevitable more quickly than others.

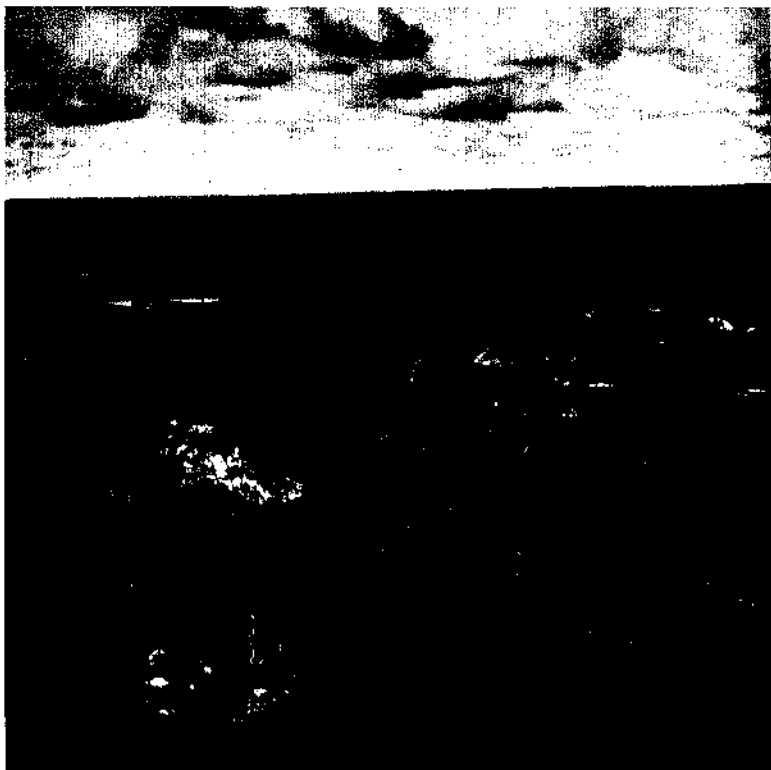
On more than one occasion an elephant we had captured actually committed suicide. One evening, at a village called No Lu, which lies very near an enormous forest, we had tied up our captives as usual and retired to a neighbouring house for a meal, when one of the Emperor's men came in to inform him that a female elephant was dead. We followed him out and we could see quite clearly what had happened. The poor creature—who that afternoon had allowed herself to be tied up without protest—had voluntarily tightened the rope about her neck by walking round and round the great trunk and then, when it was as tight as she could get it, had thrown herself forward on to her knees and strangled herself.



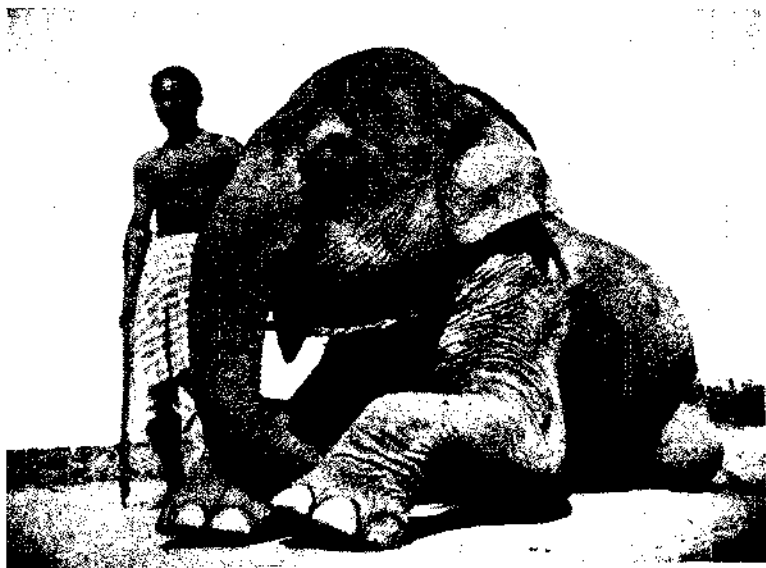
A captive resigned to his fate.



A young captive between three trained elephants.



Typical elephant country.



A giant tamed.



A group of newly-trained recruits.



A mobile camp.



A permanent camp.

Later we had a similar case, although this elephant was partly tamed and had reached the stage when she was allowed to move around with her hind legs shackled. She used to stand bellowing every night with her trunk straight before her, pointing towards the plains from which she had come as though the wind brought her the scent of her own familiar herd. Although she was always good tempered and easy to handle she was clearly becoming a nervous "case". Then one day she walked down to the river—at that time thirty feet deep at least—and just threw herself in. Her chains prevented her from swimming and after coming to the surface once or twice she finally sank.

There can be no doubt that some highly sensitive elephants in captivity suffer so acutely from nostalgia for their lost horizons that they never recover their normal high spirits, but fortunately they are the exceptions. ...

On the return of a successful hunting party, the camp is a scene of feverish activity and the men rush around replacing any part of their equipment that has been lost or damaged and repairing anything that can be repaired. The next job is the training of the wild elephants that have been captured so that they will become docile, manageable and able to carry out the work to which they will eventually be assigned.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Breaking Them In

WE have reached the last stage—the stage which will finish the process of changing a fierce and savage animal into a well-behaved servant of man, ready and willing at all times to do his bidding. The training of the elephant illustrates the widely different meanings of what we loosely call power. The elephant's is the unrivalled power of brute strength; man's is the power and resourcefulness of the human intelligence. So the mammoth of three tons, as if it were a pet dog, comes to obey the word of a man of about one-sixtieth of its own weight. This domination of beast by man, this respect of the mighty elephant for the insignificant human, is not of course peculiar to the elephant-farms of the East; it can be seen in every menagerie, every circus in the world, where the trainers are able to make their animals perform tricks simply because they do not dare to refuse.

If a man and a tiger come suddenly face-to-face on a jungle track it is always the tiger that slips away—unless, of course, it happens to be a man-eater; but that is an entirely different matter. As a rule the animals of the jungle instinctively avoid human beings. The tiger with a taste for human flesh, the wild ox that charges, head down, at sight, the occasional elephant that turns savage and kills its keeper—these are exceptions, and often they have been the victims of some almost forgotten incident in the animal's past. With elephant's more than with any

other animal, the sudden murderous attack is often an act of revenge, of hatred long nursed and concealed. It is as though they have reached the end of their patience and, realizing suddenly the insignificance of these human creatures, they are astonished that for so long they have allowed themselves to be fooled by such ridiculous pygmies! The trouble is, unfortunately, that from the moment of their enlightenment they may begin to get more and more rebellious.

The elephant is, with the dog, the most intelligent and sympathetic of animals, but, as with the dog, it is essential to win his confidence from the first stages of his training. He is at first merely resigned but his resignation soon turns to liking and, if he is well treated, his liking develops into real affection. Sometimes elephants behave like spoiled children, always wanting to be noticed; they are so devoted to their keeper that they seem unable to get along without him and demand his attention as soon as they hear him—or even smell him—anywhere near. If he has to leave them their distress is quite pathetic and they seem to languish miserably, quite unable to transfer to any other keeper the undying devotion they have already bestowed on the last. The more experienced and sympathetic owners avoid this crisis by assigning two men to each elephant, a keeper and an assistant.

There are two methods of training newly-captured elephants, which may be called approximately the "tough" and the "gentle". Under the former the elephant is put to work without any preliminary palaver, fastened by his neck and his hind legs so that he cannot struggle and beaten steadily until he does what is required. This treatment makes him vindictive and surly. The sufferings inflicted on him before he understands what is expected of him leave their mark on his

temperament for life and, as we have seen, it is ill-treatment at this stage which is usually the cause of sudden outbreaks of murderous vengeance later on.

The gentle method is based on an entirely different policy. If training is to follow its normal smooth course both trainer and elephant must share from the first a spirit of friendliness. The captive gradually allows the trainer to come closer and stops waving his trunk about and pawing the ground like a donkey. Once the relationship has begun along these lines it quickly develops. The elephants which have been tied to trees until they have calmed down become quite savage again as soon as they get over their exhaustion. When they see us coming they stand up on their hind legs like rearing horses and hurl themselves towards us with all their weight. Of course they then find themselves half-suspended in mid-air, while the rope, and even the branches, shake under the strain—in fact it has often struck me that if the rope or the branch were to break we should hardly have time to get out of the way. (I mentioned this once to the Emperor and he said, quite calmly, "Well, there's nothing we can do about it! As you say, we should have had it. It's happened to better men than us, you know!" As we stood there a little female was carrying on under our very noses like a naughty child and hurling all sorts of insults in our direction. The keepers, who were crouching down not far off, grinned, but the Moi labourers preferred to keep at a respectful distance.)

If some of the captives are still inclined to be nervous and over-excited it always pays to keep them without food and drink for a little while longer. As soon as they have calmed down they are given a little grass, which they eat greedily and then look for more. Some bundles of fodder have been prepared and the man detailed to

train the particular elephant now brings up one or two of them. The captive usually sniffs at these, makes as if to charge the trainer and tramples on the food in his rage; but he soon realizes that there is nothing to be gained by wasting it, and if necessary he is made to fast a little longer until he is a little more amenable. Next time the trainer comes to feed the captive he has a goad with him. A sharp jab with the goad at the base of the trunk gives the victim something to think about and at every sign of resistance he receives another jab. The trunk gets quite tender before long and the goad has to be used less and less often, but it can soon be dispensed with altogether.

In these early stages the men talk to the captives, repeating over and over again the name which the elephant has been given and accompanying every action that has to be learnt with clear-cut commands which must never vary. There is no need for anything subtle or comprehensive; a small vocabulary is all that is necessary at first and it can be broadened later on.

The three first essentials are that every captive shall get to know his keeper, shall become completely familiar with his own name, and shall understand what he is told. When he no longer looks irritable and worried but begins to accept life with something approaching contentment, he is obviously ready for the next step in his training. The keeper comes a little closer to him every day and touches his trunk. Little by little the stroking and patting are increased, until the day comes when the elephant abandons all show of resistance and allows his keeper to do what he likes to him. Even then, however, the animal has to be watched carefully all the time and it would be foolish to try any tricks on him.

The goad has to be used on elephants who continue the habit of stamping with one of their hind feet. If the

goad fails, they have to be tied in the "stocks" and disciplined until they give way, after which they are given a tit-bit. The main object every time is to make them realize that discipline is not necessarily divorced from, or inconsistent with, kindness. Elephants will always accept punishment without rancour so long as they realize where they have done wrong; they are equally appreciative of a little reward if they think they have done well—indeed, some of them will not hesitate to demand a tit-bit if they suspect it is being withheld without good reason!

From the earliest days of training, a female domestic elephant is attached to every new recruit and the man who will be in charge of the recruit rides the trained animal. This gives the pupil every chance to see, hear and smell his trainer, while the trainer himself can reach the pupil more easily than if he were on the ground.

Every morning and every evening the captive is taken down to the river, attached to his guardian female, where he drinks his fill, is rubbed down and sprayed, and then allowed to play around in the water with nobody to interfere with him or badger him about. This daily bathe is one of the great joys of his life and he will usually bellow in anticipation when he knows it is nearly bath-time.

The attitude of our trained females to young wild elephants depended entirely on whether they were hunting them or training them; they could be alternately hostile and friendly. In the heat of the chase they could be quite pitiless, coming down really viciously on any of the wild youngsters who dared to disobey their orders. They would belabour these wretched captives so fiercely with their trunks that often the men would have to intercede on the youngsters' behalf. On the way back to camp

they would keep it up remorselessly, and sternly order back to the line any captive who tried to break out. But once the expedition was over and the new recruits had been installed, these same elephants seemed to know exactly what was expected of them. Each one had her protege assigned to her and she would try to pacify him if he was angry, restrain his impatience gently with her great trunk, purr all round him and caress him quite sentimentally. Her fierceness in the hunt was nothing compared to her gentleness in the camp and she seemed to be falling over herself in her efforts to show the youngster that things were not so black as they looked.

The captives quickly fasten on to their adopted mothers and, as soon as they are allowed to move about freely, follow them wherever they go. The keepers for their part take advantage of such devotion; as long as the new-comers are happy their training will be easier and they will be more disposed to co-operate in the discovery and development of what native abilities they may possess. So anxious are they to retain the co-operation of the adopted mothers that the keepers go to great trouble to do any little kind deed for them, such as looking after their wounds. The elephant's hide is very thick but it is also very sensitive, so much so that chains, ropes or shackles often leave severe wounds, some of which are difficult to heal. The men have their own private prescriptions and paint the wounds with their home-made ointment, having first cleaned them up and removed all the flies, worms and other foreign bodies. They then apply a poultice of leaves, cow-dung and clay which protects the wounds from infection. (I have seen some captives struggle so fiercely against their bonds that they have done themselves serious injury and the hunters have had to exercise the utmost ingenuity to devise ways

of securing them without aggravating their wounds. Occasionally a captive elephant dies of septicaemia as a result of his wounds, but our men at Buké-Dangur used to prevent complications by treating wounds in their early stages with methylene blue.)

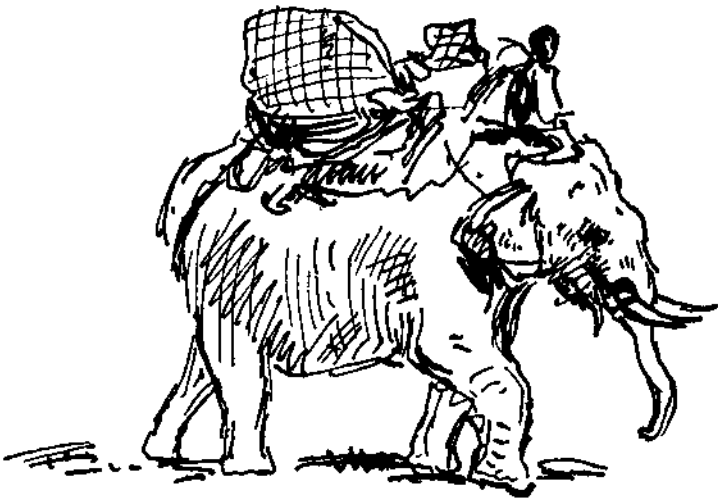
The training goes on steadily—lessons, bathing parades, medical attention, a little fussing and a little chastisement. When the recruits are more or less docile they are shackled in the hind legs—which is not very popular at first—but the chains are taken off after a time to allow them to move about freely. A few days later they are shackled in the front legs; they can now walk much more easily, but they always have to drag a long chain behind them.

The training having reached the point at which the elephant must be saddled and taught to carry a rider, the trainer will begin with only light weights, and even these are never accepted with good grace. But the weight is gradually stepped up until it reaches about 500 lbs., and as soon as the elephant has learnt to tolerate such a load he is given a man to carry. He makes the same protests and, as before, he is given time to calm down and accept the inevitable. This time the encouragement is not quite so sympathetic; strings are passed through his ears (which have already been pierced), one through each ear, and for a time these are used to ensure good behaviour. They are discarded, however, as soon as the animal is fully trained.

As a matter of fact the elephant is not very much use as a beast of burden and will not carry a load of more than 600 lbs. or so. I did once know an exceptionally strong female who was no use for hunting or capturing but who could carry over 1,000 lbs. on her back; but she was an exception. If the lower figure of 600 lbs. is taken it

must be agreed that transport of goods by elephant is not an economical proposition. The animal cannot go long without water, eats several hundred pounds of fodder a day and requires frequent rests, all of which send up the costs. In any case elephant transport is not really fast enough for most business men; thirty miles a day is the average, which is not very much in these days of cheap road and air transport. I have travelled twice as far in a day with H.M. Bao Dai on many occasions, but we travelled only every other day. If we had tried to cover that distance every day we should have killed our elephants.

But as a haulier the elephant is magnificent. Give her a log to pull weighing a couple of tons and she will make light of it. A pair of elephants harnessed tandem, if they have learnt to work together, will pull a load of five tons.



At Xuanloc I once harnessed one of my female elephants to a wagon loaded with three tons of rubber, and she pulled it up a slope with the greatest of ease. This same giant would pull an eight-bladed MacCormick plough. If it hit a tree-stump she had to be stopped, otherwise she would have yanked the whole contraption off the ground with one shrug of her shoulders. She has broken more than one plough-share in badly-cleared ground. This particular animal had been trained when very young—first for transport and later for hauling—and it is generally admitted that elephants can be more highly trained if they are caught young. I remember one youngster who was no bigger than a buffalo but who was very swift and intelligent and did excellent work as a hunter of wild cattle and deer; an animal like that will obviously become extremely valuable when she grows up.

Two of our females were trained to break off branches and pull up trees by the roots. We had only to lead one of them to a tree and point out the branch we wanted broken off, and she would raise her trunk, seize the branch and bring it down with a crash. When it was a question of felling a tree she would lean against the trunk and push hard with her forehead until it was leaning over at the angle she required. She would then raise one foot and press hard until the tree collapsed. The roots she would pull out with her trunk, the biggest first. It was difficult to put any limit to the strength of these two. They never seemed to hurry, never strained themselves unduly, but just got on with the job calmly and steadily until it was finished. There was no male, however big, who could touch them at it.

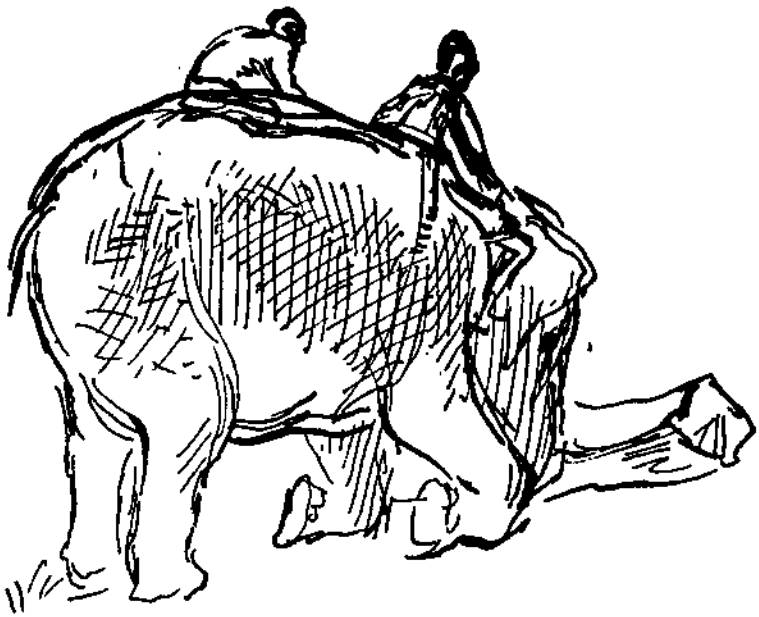
Despite their great strength they were particularly kind to young captives and used to lead them to the feeding grounds as soon as they were allowed out of

camp; but if the youngsters showed any signs of making for the forest they would soon round them up. However anxious they might be to show the youngsters every kindness they were conscious of their duty and determined to carry it out to the letter.

When a rider proposes to take a passenger with him on his elephant he first orders the animal to lie down. This he does, hind legs first, lying on his belly with his fore-legs bent in front. The passenger has only to step on to one of the front legs, grip the elephant's ear and hoist himself into the saddle with the help of the collar round the elephant's neck. But it is unwise to make the elephant lie down and stand up again more than once in a short time as it apparently takes too much out of him. It is also as well to make sure which side to mount him as some elephants are used to being mounted on one side only and the passenger who tries to get on from the unaccustomed side may find himself firmly rejected. The tameness of some elephants is purely relative—a fact one should never lose sight of. There are some elephants who decline to put their bellies to the ground to suit the convenience of a mere passenger; instead, they will hold out one fore-leg as a first step and stretch out their trunk to act as a second; but this method of mounting requires a good deal of practice and agility, and is not recommended for the use of stout passengers. One giant from "the three frontiers" (Cochinchina-Annam-Cambodia) used to stick a hind leg out straight behind him for the rider to hold on to and the rider would find himself propelled on to the elephant's rump; he would then run along his back like a monkey until he reached his seat on the neck. Some elephants are taught to seize their rider bodily in their trunk and to deposit him on their neck—

a trick which never fails to startle visitors from the towns who are unfamiliar with the ways of the jungle. One journalist I knew—whom we had carefully omitted to warn beforehand—shouted at the top of his voice when he suddenly found himself gripped by an elephant's trunk: "Help! Murder! If this is somebody's idea of a joke ..." Later on, however, he had a chance to play the same joke on a colleague.

H.M. Bao Dai's elephant, Hai, used to pick up his passenger and place him delicately in the seat formed by the intersection of his crossed tusks. He would then lift his head and the passenger had a jolly little aerial walk to his normal perch, balancing himself as well as he could against the elephant's rolling walk. It was a treat which used to give passengers the shivers if they had not been told about it; it was not, in fact, their idea of a joke! When Hai wished to set down a passenger, having incidentally given him a good shaking up, he would help him out of his saddle with a good push from his trunk. The passenger would find himself some distance from his mount before he had had time to turn round and say "thank you". Hai always seemed to be enjoying the whole thing in a quiet way and the mahouts shared the joke; so did the Moi. There was one Chief of Vo Dat, an incredible boaster, who had the annoying habit of telling stories about his adventures, although he had never had the courage to go in for elephant-hunting in his district. Hai had the usual little surprise in store for him, but the braggart kicked up such a fuss that the elephant, obviously embarrassed, decided to put an end to the farce and immediately ejected the unpleasant creature from his saddle in the usual way. There was a general burst of laughter and the Chief, wounded in his dignity, realized that if he wished to keep on good terms with his people



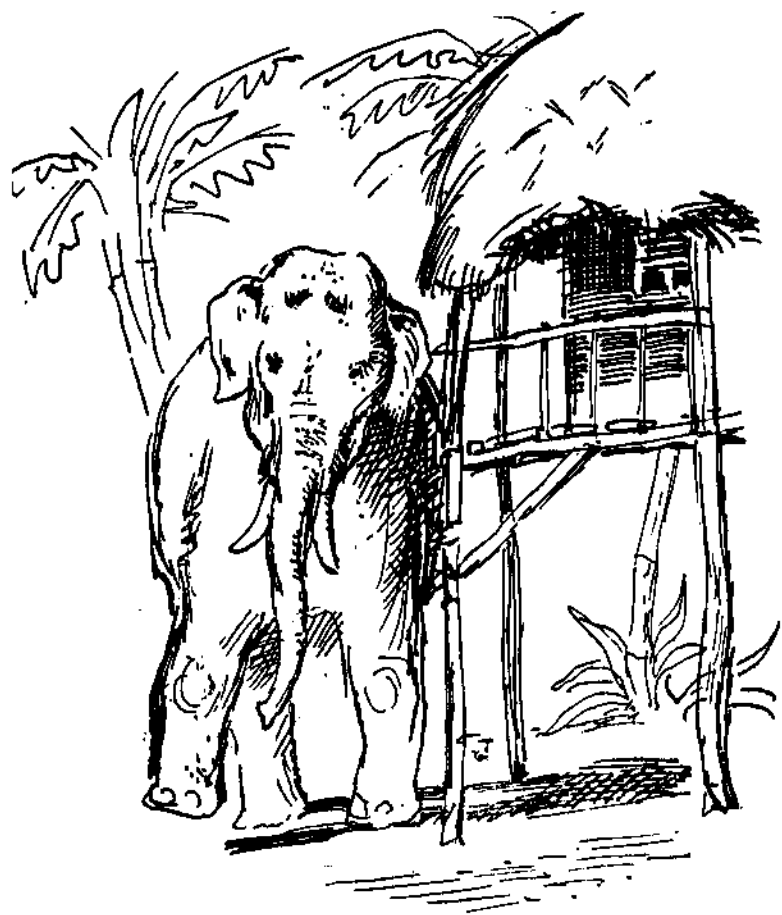
and save face, he had better pretend that he was enjoying the joke as much as the others. But the women of the district, merciless as ever, still tell the story with obvious relish.

The elephant's intelligence is so remarkable that he has been employed on some strange tasks, some of them criminal. Four elephants were engaged for years smuggling contraband across the Siam-Cambodia frontier. They carried plenty of things which were hard to obtain in Siam, but they carried no riders. The human smugglers were far ahead and the elephants had been trained to follow them like dogs, obeying the signals which the leader of the gang gave them from time to

time by blowing into a shell. According to the number and pitch of the notes they heard, the elephants would know whether they were to advance, look out, halt or take cover! If the customs officers were about, the elephants separated and made their way across the frontier by forest tracks, and if the customs officers happened to hear them they concluded that they were wild and naturally kept out of their way. But in the course of time suspicion was aroused by the frequent appearance of the same men blowing more or less the same notes in apparently the same shells just at the times when elephants were known to be in the neighbourhood. Discreet enquiries were made and the customs authorities got wind of the plot. The amazing thing was that these elephants had been so well trained that they would make quite good time on their journeys through the jungle without losing any of their load. It was admittedly well stowed, but the elephants still had to remember not to pass under overhanging trees and to avoid lateral branches which might have knocked their loads off sideways.

After the discovery of the plot the customs authorities, with the help of armed police, set out to arrest the elephants. After a heroic resistance one of the animals was killed and the others captured. One of the captives landed up in the Botanical Gardens at Saigon where he subsequently went "rogue" and killed two of his keepers before himself being shot. What happened to the gang of smugglers I never found out; possibly they gave up their profession in despair of ever training another team as clever as the one they had lost.

I have said that the vocabulary used in training is limited, but it seems to be wide enough for all practical purposes. I was once riding in the marshlands of Bih,



perched on one of those clumsy and uncomfortable saddles used by the Moi, when we came to a spot where the track ran between two trees growing close together. The mahout shouted to my elephant a warning to be careful not to damage her load, and sure enough, she slowed down and negotiated the tricky part of the track perfectly. There was hardly an inch to spare between the saddle and the trees on either side. At the critical moments the mahout tapped the tree-trunks lightly with the handle of his goad as we passed and the elephant knew exactly what to do to avoid touching them. This skill and exactness are by no means uncommon and illustrate the teachability of the more intelligent animals. Some of our captor elephants were so highly trained—and so cooperative—that they would put on their own shackles, leaving nothing for the keepers to do but lock them!

As their trust in human beings grows, the elephants' docility develops into something like cheekiness. After a successful expedition the Emperor's teams used to form up in single file for their tit-bits without waiting for orders or instructions; nor would they budge until they had been attended to. *Noblesse oblige*—and if they had done a good job of work, then they insisted that they were entitled to the usual reward. If one of them thought he had been hard done by he would hang around outside our bungalow until he was sure we were watching him; but the moment we took our eyes off him he would make for the bag of cakes and help himself to what he considered his due. Once he had started, of course, he would take far more than his share and would have to be punished—usually by being made to work on his rest-day. At the end of that day's work, determined to leave nothing to chance, he would claim his tit-bit as usual and the comedy would start all over again.



Teak elephants at work.



Team of elephants being ridden by mahouts to work.



Teak bungalows built seven feet off the ground to withstand floods.



An elephant on the Royal Road of Angkor Vat.

Once when we were camping out on the open plains another of our elephants would come and stand by our tent to watch over our slumbers. One night M. Paul Mahé, completely unaware of his presence, had to leave the tent for a perfectly natural reason and was facing towards the forest, where the line of the tree-tops stood out against the deeper black of the night sky, when this elephant stretched out his trunk and silently caressed the back of his neck. M. Mahé was only half awake, and before he realized what had touched him he dashed helter-skelter back into the tent. He then returned with my torch and recognized this young male elephant of mine—the wag of the whole team, incidentally—who flapped his ears and blinked in a comical sort of way as much as to say, "You needn't have stopped what you were doing, you know!"

I have kept for the end of this chapter the story of a young male which we captured—but only after a great struggle—on the same evening as the fight in which Hai so nearly won promotion by his prowess in the field. This youngster showed every sign of being a real tartar and his general behaviour was exactly what we should have expected from our knowledge of the herd he had belonged to—a fierce and aggressive collection of beasts with a bad reputation. But to our great surprise he turned out to be the easiest elephant we have ever had to train and it took us exactly a fortnight to turn him into as tame and faithful a creature as one could hope to see. At that time we were living in a bungalow built on piles and one evening this youngster came to see us the minute he was free and rubbed his back and sides against the piles, presumably to attract our attention. The whole building was not exactly stable, having been erected on very marshy soil, but our young friend neither knew nor

cared about a detail like that. The bungalow rocked and swayed as if it was being hit by a tornado, all our cups and glasses danced a jig—in fact it was all much too violent for our liking. One of our men rushed out and saved the situation by driving the visitor off, but he went away reluctantly, wandered around the bungalow, and kept coming back, until one of us went down to him with a tit-bit or two and patted him on the head. Only then would he say good-night and go back to his own quarters.

For the first few nights of his captivity he had cried piteously in answer to the calls of his old friends and companions in the forest and seemed almost to be sobbing his heart out. There came a night when no familiar call came to him from the forest and his own timid little trumpeting awoke no echoes. At once he seemed to resign himself to his fate and bestowed upon us the affection with which his heart was overflowing. Never once did he try to slip away; on the contrary, he soon took to sleeping every night at the foot of the ladder leading up to our bungalow. He would flop down on one side, legs and trunk stretched out in front like a corpse, and start to snore like a pig, until we had to get the men to persuade him to remove himself before we could get to sleep ourselves. Two months after his capture he set out for Dalat, where the Emperor was sending him as a present for his children—which shows how friendly and gentle he had become—but he was unable to stand up to an unexpected cold snap and died on the way of broncho-pneumonia. It was a sad loss because, apart from anything else, we always felt that the only thing that elephant lacked was the power of speech to express the unbounded affection he felt for us.

This particular youngster illustrated the risk of generalizing on such a problematical subject as the training of

elephants. The Emperor and I always used to say that the average period required to train a normal captive was three months; some of ours might take less, some more. Our little male, who took only a fortnight, was exceptional in one way, but we had a much bigger male who went to the other extreme. After letting himself be captured so easily that we were almost embarrassed, he then behaved like a lamb and followed the captor elephants as if he had been doing this sort of thing all his life. Yet when it came to training him we found him the most disappointing recruit we had ever had. He was fundamentally a wrong 'un and the staff—not without reason—mistrusted him. After six months' hard work we were still doubtful whether we should ever make anything of him. Some Moi hunters thought they would be able to train him with their somewhat sterner methods and we sold him to them, but I never heard any more news of him.

Elephants vary in temperament and disposition in much the same way as human beings. Every individual is different and it is unwise to make up one's mind about them, collectively or singly, until one has lived with them a long time and got to know them intimately.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Camp in the Forest

WHEN I was young and had just started on my chosen career as a trapper and hunter, I seldom worried much about my camping arrangements. I used to set out with a handful of rice, a few tins, and a little saucepan and when night came I lay down to sleep in the open wherever I chanced to find myself. For drink I had the water-courses, the rivers and, *faute de mieux*, the puddles. In tiger country I practised a somewhat haphazard safety drill; I used to light a fire and my men and I would lie down around it, having previously agreed to take turns at keeping guard and making up the fire. Many a time I have been awakened in the morning by the cold to find the fire out and everybody asleep. The fire-watchers would be very apologetic, of course—after all a tiger *might* have come along in the night and eaten us all up—but they always had the same excuse. There was so much game in the forest for the tiger that there was no earthly reason why he should suddenly decide on a change of diet! As for elephants, they would have made such a din if they had happened to stumble upon us that we should have had plenty of time to wake up and get out of their way. It was all highly illogical, but I must admit that the arguments were never disproved.

In bad weather, especially when it rained for hours on end without a break, I would retire to the Moi villages, where I was always sure of a warm welcome. They would

compete for the honour of entertaining me and I would return their hospitality by going out at night and shooting a few stags, which usually meant that every family was assured of its haunch of venison.

Nevertheless, whenever my luck was in I used to make a point of buying a little camping equipment—first a tent, then another tent, then camp beds, then folding tables, then a variety of folding stools and finally a collection of aluminium utensils. I had had enough of austerity and this new luxury also gave me more independence and freedom of movement. I could pitch my camp wherever I chose and bad weather no longer interfered with my plans to the same extent.

The next stage was the fixed camp from which I could operate in all directions yet never be far from my base with its ample stocks of creature comforts and necessities. One gets wiser as one gets older and I was no longer tempted by the thrills of "roughing it".

About the same time H.M. Bao Dai was making camps which were as sketchy as mine, although, like me, he was not one to insist on luxury, or even comfort. His main concern was to find out where the wild elephants were and estimate the number of useful males in the herds. I passed many memorable days in those early camps of his and I remember to this day the glorious views they commanded and the abundance of game all around them.

But the camp at Buke-Dangur was the one we liked far and away the best for a number of reasons. It had the three-fold advantage of being a centre for big-game hunting, for elephant-catching and for fishing. The game was inexhaustible, while the fishing—in the Lagna, its tributaries and even the scattered lakes—was unrivalled. It was situated in Eastern Cochin-China, near the old

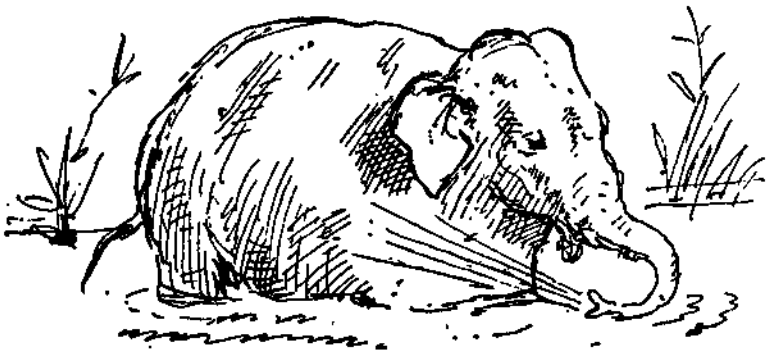
Annam frontier, and took its name from the nearest Moi village. A track about four and a half miles long left the Route Coloniale 20 which connects Saigon with Dalat at the 132nd kilometre mark and wound through tropical forest in an incredible cork-screw till it came out at a point on the Lagna where it is joined by the Lo-Ol; there the camp had been built. In the untrodden jungle the scent of rare blossom mingled with the more familiar smells, climbing creepers wove strange garlands over our heads and on the trunks of rotting trees brilliant orchids hung their lanterns at varying heights from the ground. Rattans and other thorn-bushes grew here and there in clumps.

The centre of the camp was a square, with a camp bed in each corner and a table in the middle with a bench on all four sides of it. There were racks for our rifles and a hut for a "toilet". For a bath we had a fifty-gallon Chinese jar and a family-size boiler to heat the water. It was not exactly up to date, but it all worked splendidly. For chairs we used the seats from our elephant saddles and we could not have been more comfortable in the best upholstered drawing-room chairs.

We had built verandahs on to our huts at the height of our tallest elephant and all we had to do when we wanted to mount was to have the elephants led to the right spot and just step into our saddles. Under the huts, open to all the winds of heaven, we stored our equipment—bivouac tents for long expeditions, sacks of tit-bits for the elephants, ropes, saddles, and so on. The rear verandahs looked out on the village we had built for our men, in a clearing carved out of the jungle. In front we looked over the Lagna, fifty or sixty feet from our front door, with the Lo-Ol coming in to join it on our left. We were almost surrounded by mountains; at the back they were

quite close, but in front they gave way to give us a glimpse of a distant horizon which sealed off about sixty square miles of plain.

When visibility was good we could sometimes see wild elephants in the distant green marshes, without leaving our verandah. They would leave the tall reeds for their daily bath, and we would watch them giving each other a shower or feeding on the plants that grew in the water. We could hear them telling their friends—who were still hidden from us—how good it was, and inviting them to come along in. On a really beautiful evening every lake and swamp had its herd of bathers, and those invisible to the naked eye could be picked up through the long telescope we had on the verandah. If we saw such a promising sight the night before a proposed hunt the preliminaries went with a greater swing than usual and we set off next morning—assuming, of course, that the day was not unpropitious—with more than ordinary enthusiasm. We would make straight for the place where we had seen the



last herd before sunset and seldom had far to go before making contact.

The permanent residents of the plain included "whistling" stags which the natives called *con huu* and we called marsh stags—charming creatures living in herds of fifty to a hundred all the year round and contributing reluctantly to the basic diet of the tigers. However they quickly filled up any gaps in their numbers and bred at an astonishing rate. They were not in the least put out by the proximity of so many elephants and our own trained animals would often nearly tread on them before they moved. They "lie close", like hares, and communicate with each other by whistling.

Our fishing-station was at the confluence of the two rivers where the fish were so plentiful that there were enough for everybody, from small fry for beginners to giant carnivores. The Emperor had a curious surprise one afternoon when he found his rod bending under the weight of something very heavy. We hauled in the line, as carefully and skilfully as we knew how, and our curiosity was rewarded by a giant soft-shelled tortoise, known locally as a ba-ba. We were not much interested in ba-ba once he was landed, but our men made a hearty meal of him that evening.

The Lagna is also full of caymans but they must be quite harmless since our men, our elephants and ourselves all bathed regularly without mishap. When our men took the elephants down for their daily bath—taking the opportunity for a dip themselves, incidentally—the alligators would quietly retire, the more inquisitive of them poking their heads above the surface some distance away to watch what was going on with their vague and sea-green eyes. I had a poor opinion of these creatures as neighbours at first but I soon got used to having

them around. An old man from the village reassured me. "There's nothing to be afraid of," he said. "There are still plenty of fish in the river and they're a lot more tender than you. If it was the River Ray, now, I wouldn't give much for your chances—there aren't so many fish there. If you *do* get snapped up," he added, "it won't be any use calling me as a witness. I shall have disappeared!" On the strength of his advice I felt it would be safe to carry on. ...

There was always something to do at Buke-Dangur and our morning tour of inspection between nine o'clock and half-past ten was never without its bright moments. If there was no newly-acquired ivory to inspect as a result of the previous day's hunting, there were plenty of wild animals to watch enjoying their liberty. These tours—on elephant-back—started off as just "something to do", but if we happened to encounter a herd of wild elephants in the long grass they became more like work, and we would chase the elephants, if only to collect information. One day when we were wandering in a belt of forest at the foot of the mountains we ran into such a vast gathering of herds that it took us two hours of manoeuvring before we could get clear of them. We were anxious not to use our rifles as there were wild ox about which we had hoped to bag, and a shot would have warned them of our presence. H.M. Bao Dai was riding the tuskless male given to him by H.M. Sihanouk and I was on a speedy but undersized female, so we were in no position to withstand an attack. But whichever way we went we ran into elephants. We wheeled half-right—more elephants! Half-left—elephants again! We decided we had had enough of it and set out to cross a patch of dry reeds where the creatures would find little to attract

them in the way of food. ... Half-way across it we stopped and listened; behind us and on either side we could hear them grunting and growling, but in front, silence. We pushed on, and just when we finally came out again into open country a terrific racket started up about ten feet ahead: another herd was there waiting for us. Fortunately they were seized with sudden panic and fled without another bellow, and at last our way was clear. We took it without delay and rode straight for camp. The wild ox had been completely forgotten, but we were determined not to return empty-handed. A goat innocently offered itself as a consolation prize and the Emperor brought it down neatly with the .22 long rifle—an attractive little weapon which kills almost silently.

Another sport we used to enjoy at Buke-Dangur was alligator-hunting at night by lantern, and I distinctly remember the eerie sensation I felt the first time I took part. There was a storm brewing and it was pitch dark, and all around were wild elephants bawling their heads off in anticipation, as they always do when they suspect rain is on the way. I climbed into a canoe, with the oarsman in the middle and the fisherman in the prow armed with a harpoon and carrying the lantern. The frail little boat skimmed over the water without a sound, no more than a few inches above the surface, and the caymans let it come close enough to touch them. One of them, fascinated by the powerful beam of the lantern, was easily harpooned at the base of the neck, level with the first dorsal vertebra, whereupon the fisherman quickly released the stick of the harpoon and threw it into the boat, at the same time beginning to unwind the steel cable to which the blade of the harpoon was attached. The victim made off at speed, twisting the boat round

violently, dived, re-surfaced and fought till it was exhausted, whereupon the canoe was drawn up alongside and the alligator was forced to push its muzzle up almost vertically out of the water while its jaws were clamped together with a band of wire. It was then landed and finished off with a blow on the head with a hammer. Working with amazing speed the hunter then cut up the body, took the skin and the gall-bladder for himself, pushed the canoe back into the stream and gave the oarsman the order to carry on. The wild elephants were trumpeting so close to us during the skinning of the alligator that I fully expected them to butt in before the job was finished.

During what was left of the night more caymans were harpooned, but some got away. Next morning seven skins were drying in the shade and seven gall-bladders were soaking in a jar of alcohol.

The best season for hunting alligators is also the season when hunting elephants for capture is at its height—when the water in the river is neither too low nor too high. If the river is in flood it is wiser to look for alligators in the many streams which feed the main river.

Between the road to Mi Pou and our camp there was a peninsula, formed by a remarkable loop of the river Lo-Ol, which made an excellent training-ground for our new recruits. There were a number of "stocks" for the difficult customers and near every tree was a look-out post from which the trainer could keep an eye on his charges. The banks of the river were at their steepest and no elephant could possibly negotiate them, while the only entry to the peninsula was heavily guarded day and night; if an elephant did chance to escape that way he would very soon be re-captured.

We were coming back one night from a hunting

expedition when we discovered that a year-old elephant had followed us from the jungle. He had apparently lost his mother in the fight and tagged along behind one of our own females. By the time he realized his mistake we were already in camp. He turned round too quickly for us to catch him in the darkness—which was in his favour. As he moved away, crying desperately for his mother, he seemed to be making enough noise for a grown-up—and then suddenly his cries became more hurried and jerky until they died away in a sort of hiccuppy rattle. We were puzzled by the complete silence that followed but in the morning we discovered the explanation. He had obviously been followed by a tiger, which had leaped on him as soon as he was far enough from the camp. He lay in a corner of the forest, his trunk and half his hind-quarters eaten away.

I guessed that the tiger would return to the bait and next night I lay in hiding for him. He was a beautiful creature and came to dinner quite early, obviously not suspecting that I was watching him. Unfortunately I was unable to shoot him as I found it impossible to take an accurate sight on him and I had no wish to shoot at random. I discovered later on that the trouble I had with my eye-sight that night was due to a course of treatment I was taking for malaria.

Towards one o'clock in the morning, when it began to look like rain, my mahout came out on an elephant to persuade me to return, and the tiger went off grumbling and growling. Hardly had we reached camp when the first drops began to fall and the chorus of tree-frogs started, interminably monotonous. The soloist would "sing" a few notes—always the same ones—and his friends would then take up the eternal refrain. The concert lulled me gently off to sleep.

Next morning I helped with the training of our latest captives. The men made no attempt to teach the animals the Vietnamese language as all our elephants had learnt to obey orders in the Moi vernacular. Obviously the new recruits would have to learn the same words. Elephants will eventually connect a particular action with a particular word, provided they have always heard the same word, and no other, for the same action. If a new word for the same thing were introduced, their education, in that detail at least, would have to begin all over again. For this reason, incidentally, if one is buying an elephant one always asks what language he is accustomed to.

The education of an elephant does not end with his actual training. He has always to be "in training" in another sense to acquire the endurance which wild elephants lack and which will enable him to outpace his enemies in the hunt. The course includes long marches, repeated exercises in climbing and descending hills, speed races—in fact it is a really rigorous course which these recruits have to pass. But it is fully justified in the end. Where a wild elephant will be exhausted after running a mile or so, a well-trained domestic elephant will cover two or three miles at speed before he begins to show signs of fatigue.

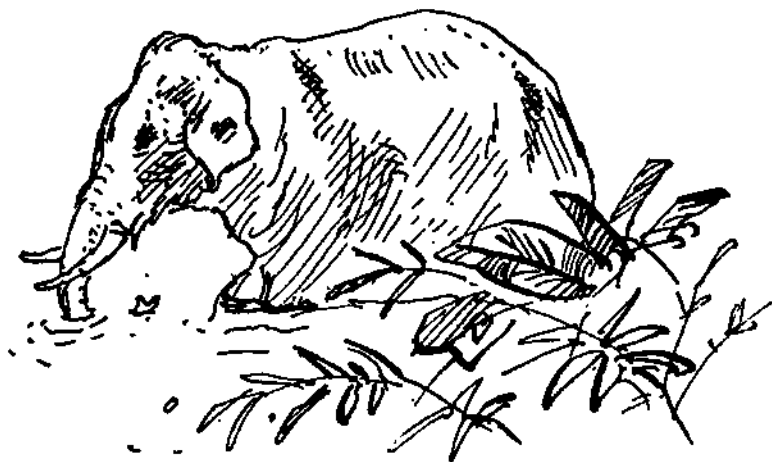
We spent a good deal of time at Buké-Dangur on the making of saddles and packs. The big "crates" which made it possible for us to take so much equipment and so many men with us on our expeditions were made to fit the shape of the particular elephants who would have to carry them. They had a wooden framework, reinforced with rattan, and every elephant had a piece of bark cloth, specially made, to prevent sores where the saddle rested. The saddle-girths, like all the other harness-ropes, were made of rattan, which is the finest material

possible for its purpose. It never "gives", despite exposure to sun and rain, and as it grows everywhere freely in the forest it can be replaced quickly and cheaply. For hunting we used saddles made of duralumin which were adjustable, and therefore interchangeable; and the saddle-cloths to go with them were little mattresses filled with kapok, under the front or the back part of the saddle according to the particular elephant's contour. The girths were all, like those of the transport animals, made of rattan.

All things considered, therefore, we always found plenty to do at Buke-Dangur. The elephant-men, who lived in camp for part of the year, learnt a lot from the Moi and became excellent fishermen and trappers, so that they also had something useful to occupy their time when their elephants were feeding.

The nights in our camp were cold and damp and often when we got up at daybreak our teeth were chattering. To make life more comfortable and healthy for us the Emperor devised an ingenious method of drying the air in our bungalow. He had a large square of bamboo plaited and placed on the floor and on this was spread a thick layer of clayey soil, making a kind of primitive hearth. We then laid bundles of wood on the hearth and lit them in the evening after dinner. The effect was rather gay, as well as being extremely useful; among other things we found that the thick smoke drove away the mosquitoes.

One night our heating system was the cause of a crisis which might have had serious consequences had I not been lucky enough to save the situation. We had gone up to bed, leaving the fire still burning, and were soon asleep. Presently I was awakened with a start by dancing lights which I was aware of vaguely, as though in a

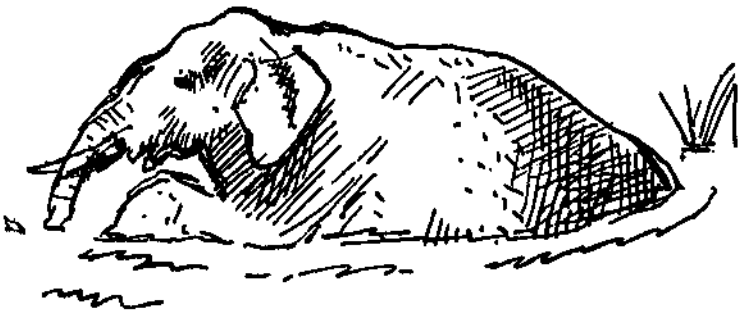


dream. When I finally opened my eyes I found that the floor was already well alight and had partly collapsed, leaving a yawning hole. Apparently the fire had been caused by sparks alighting on the dry planks. I leaped out of bed, flew to the toilet and brought out a saucepan of water, then another, and another. Soon I had the whole building trembling, in fact, with my rushings backward and forward—but the fire was under control!

The Emperor and Prince Vinh-Can inspected the damage. It was obvious that we were lucky to have been awakened in time. In another minute or two we should all have been precipitated one floor downwards—either still in our beds or having been thrown out of them without reasonable notice—into conditions which can easily be imagined. There was nothing we could do there and then but return to our beds without our heating system and leave all the necessary repairs till the morning.

To-day everything has not merely to be repaired: it has all to be rebuilt. The whole of our camp at Buké-Dangur, with its attached buildings and the various other installations we had set up, was burnt to the ground. Here and there the jungle has returned and the great wild elephants trample over the very parade-ground from which we had so often set out to hunt them.

By a strange irony of fate the wild elephants have profited as a result of the war. They have been able to breed and multiply in peace—a fact which holds out great hopes for the future when, under more auspicious circumstances, we can return once more to our happy hunting grounds.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

My First Elephant-Hunt

I ALREADY had to my credit quite an impressive selection of the big game of Indo-China—wild bull, wild buffalo, deer, tigers, panthers and bears—when I decided to add wild elephant to the record. Hitherto I had been confined to areas where elephants were seldom seen and, as I was tied to my job as assistant planter, like a Roman slave to his oar, I had no chance to wander far afield. Everything comes to him who waits, however, and in due course my leave came along—a whole fortnight in which I could do whatever I liked. I had made all my arrangements beforehand and there was nothing to delay me, so I seized my luggage and made for the Phanrang valley. There I met my old friend Cham and we pushed on to Mu Noi, where my brother George was waiting. He had already been there for a week, the whole of which he had spent prospecting in the neighbourhood and finding out where the elephants were. He had discovered that they had been making the usual inroads on the local crops and added, with some enthusiasm, that I should be able to hear them trumpeting from sunset to sunrise. Like me, he had never killed an elephant, although in other respects his record was bigger and better than mine and he was a professional—although that did not prevent him from being as hard up as I was. The African "Lebel" was the best we could manage between us as far as guns were concerned, although we had a plentiful supply of ammunition. But we were young, and

optimistic, and not too proud to walk. (It would have been all the same if we had been; Shanks's pony was the only mount we could have run to.)

The village of Mu Noi lay in a circle of the hills on the river Phanrang, so far from the nearest town that the villagers, who lived on their maize crops, seldom visited it more than once a year. In the centre of the village was the communal house, surrounded by huts so low and so small that they looked as though they had been built for Lilliputians. Yet the people who lived in them seemed to be about as big as the rest of us and were mostly quite fit and strong. They had to slide indoors and crawl out. The communal house was twice as big as all the huts put together—a kind of symbol of law and order. Here, in comparative comfort, was held the monthly village meeting, which seemed to consist of a series of interminable speeches ending in the good old way with a collective "binge". The decisions of these meetings were usually a good deal more sensible, in my opinion, than those of most of our modern Parliaments. The men of the jungle, unlike their "civilized" relations, have the good sense, even when drunk, not to discuss things they do not understand and know nothing about. They may exaggerate, but at least they stick to the subject.

A fire burned in the yard outside the Village Hall and after our evening meal we all gathered round it. The big men of the village who sat down with us took it in turns to tell us elephant stories which were as highly-coloured as they were "tall". The more the rice spirit worked on their imaginations, the more their tongues were unloosed. If one of the Chiefs went a bit too far his colleagues would cough to hide their laughter, whereupon he would pour himself out another drink, blow on it to

restore his self-control, then smack his lips and allow somebody else to carry on with the story.

The most talkative, but at the same time the most dignified, was the local magician. The thieving elephants had so far taken no notice of all his invocations and he was at his wits' end to think of some new formula which would save both the crops and his own reputation. It occurred to him that we might be of some assistance and, not having seen us hunting elephants, he thought his job was merely to whip up our enthusiasm and the rest would be easy. He silenced the gathering with a word and launched out on a thousand reasons why it was to *our* interests that we should slay the elephants that could be heard in the neighbourhood every night.

"There are several herds quite near," he began, "including about ten males, each finer than the next. One old male has tusks as long as *this*"—here the sorcerer stretched his left arm out straight and held his right hand to his chest—"and as thick as *this*"—and he grasped his thigh, which was pretty fat as he was a beefy old rogue. The other males he had seen were not quite so outstanding although they would have been exceptional anywhere but in Mu Noi. They came from the Blue Mountains where no man had set foot, which was why they had hitherto escaped the clutches of ordinary hunters.

The sorcerer was wound up and the record looked like going on for ever, when suddenly the wild elephants began to bellow and roar as if they felt their ears burning. They were leaving the forest and making no secret of their intention to raid the villagers' fields of maize. There were certainly plenty of them and their voices seemed to come from all directions. Nor was the chorus in any sense of the word monotonous; the youngsters were making as

much noise as their elders, and their mothers could be heard calling to them above the general din.

Soon we could hear the familiar sounds—the breaking of branches and pulling up of trees and the banging of bushes to shake the dirt from the roots. They were in no hurry to reach the plantations and we could distinctly hear their heavy feet splashing through the puddles on the road or being lifted out of the mud with a dull, wet "plop". On our right a second herd had obviously continued down to the river. We could hear splashing quite near, then a noise like a hurricane, followed by complete silence. The elephants had crossed the river in shallow water and were now following the cart-track on the opposite bank. Having steered clear of its comrades, this herd was making for the more distant plantations.

There were watchmen in look-out posts in the trees and tall bushes at intervals of a few feet and they were now bursting their lungs with shouting, banging on hollowed tusks and waving lighted torches in wild and exotic patterns. The elephants were silent for a little while, no doubt to make us think they had decamped; then they returned to their feast with renewed zest. The watchers shouted and banged and waved harder than ever until the whole scene was like something out of a play. At about eleven o'clock the stars disappeared and the sky became black with clouds. Soon a cutting rain was falling and the wind was blowing in fierce gusts, but the storm only increased the noisy enthusiasm of the elephants, while the watchers in the trees, exhausted and discouraged, were reduced to giving an occasional melancholy blast on their horns—and even these grew feebler and less frequent. The magician took advantage of a break in the weather to slip away home but the Mayor stayed behind to share his optimism with us.

"We shall be able to track them down to-morrow as easy as winking," he said. "They'll leave prints like sign-posts in this mud!"

In the course of the night the more sophisticated among the wild elephants came right up to the village to sample the crops in the fields adjoining the last of the huts. They were so close that we could hear the flapping of their ears and the astonishing rumbling of their digestive apparatus, the squeaking of the maize roots as they were torn out of the ground and the old familiar whacking of the plants to free them of mud. We could almost hear, or thought we could, the animals loading their food into their mouths and grinding it with their great teeth. One by one we dropped off to sleep on the bamboo hurdles which did duty for camp-beds, without worrying over-much about the elephants.

"Suppose they take it into their heads to attack the village?" we had asked before dropping off.

"You'll know all about it!" the Mayor answered. "As a matter of fact they've never been known to in these parts. What makes you think they might start to-night?"

The remainder of the night was uneventful—at least, if anything happened we knew nothing about it. Even the crowing of the cocks in the morning failed to disturb us and we slept like so many logs. Finally the magician woke us with the beating of his drum, we dressed quickly, had a light breakfast washed down with an aromatic tea made from local herbs, and prepared for action.

The Mayor, in a simple sarong and carrying a cross-bow in his hand and a quiver of arrows in his belt, appointed himself our guide, and three trackers followed him, carrying short knives. Then came George, and I followed a couple of yards behind. The whole village turned out to smile at us—the men half naked, the

women with their bosoms bare, the children in their birthday suits. The magician, who was clearly convinced that it was his intervention that had persuaded us to take up the chase, was happily blowing smoke rings from what was presumably meant to be a pipe but which looked like nothing on earth. As we passed, he honoured us with a sweeping benediction.

We soon picked up the overnight tracks, but they covered an enormous area and disappeared in all directions, confused and intermixed beyond belief. At a signal, like a bird's call, from the Mayor, the four trackers ran forward for their orders. A brief conference was held and immediately the trackers set off confidently northwards to the corner of the forest.

"We shan't waste time trying to disentangle the tracks here," one of them told me. "There are only three ways they can take after they leave the maize-fields and we're taking this one because while you were asleep last night we heard the last trumpeting coming from this direction. If the tracks go very deep into the forest we shall have a job to round the blighters up."

The deductions of the Mayor and his trackers proved correct; a herd of about thirty elephants had entered the forest exactly at the spot they expected and had continued for just over two hundred yards in single file.

"I know this herd," the Mayor explained. "It's the smallest of all the herds who apparently believe that we plant crops entirely for their benefit. The others will have gone that way, that way, and that way"—and he pointed in the three separate directions. "These elephants have got everything fixed up between them. Each herd has its own territory and is not allowed to trespass on the others'. Now I suggest we follow this herd, as I believe the big fellow we were talking about was with them last

night. But if you don't get *him* there's bound to be some other outstanding male; I can tell that from the tracks. Anyway, see if you can get him. If you don't we'll have a shot at another herd to-morrow."

By now the undergrowth was much thicker and the elephants had had to force a lane through an almost impenetrable curtain of creepers and bushes. The sap was still wet on broken twigs and branches, and swarms of flies were settling on fresh piles of dung. We followed in the elephants' footsteps because there was no other path to follow. Had they taken it into their heads to double on their tracks—well, I prefer not to think what would have become of us. We should certainly have been unable to abandon the track either to left or to right.

It was an unpleasant situation to be in and it seemed interminable; on the other hand it was not a situation which made us particularly anxious to catch up with the elephants. At last the thick bush began to give way to the forest proper and we breathed more freely; there was still plenty of undergrowth but it was interspersed with more and more trees, each of which represented a possible escape-route—or at least something to hide behind in the event of an attack. Just when we had reached this point in our assessment of the position we heard the sound of breaking branches not far away. Progress was a little easier now, and we could follow "by ear"; but as we got closer to the noise and were able to locate it more exactly we could hear a great deal of grumbling and growling. The trackers, thinking it would be safer to stick to the tracks we had been lucky enough to pick up, stopped and whispered in our ears that we should run the risk of coming suddenly face to face with the enemy if we advanced blindly, which might prove distinctly awkward. It would be best to stick to one set of tracks,



provided we kept our eyes open for any elephants who had broken off from the main herd for a snack. There were some tender young shoots and various berries to be found in the occasional clearings and plenty of edible roots; in fact the ground was strewn with young trees which the elephants had thrown away after stripping them of everything they could eat. Visibility was still bad, although improving slightly, and even the elephants had to call to each other to make their whereabouts known. For the most part they seemed to be barking more often than bellowing, although every now and then a deep baritone note, as loud as it was unexpected, sent shivers down our spines and started up a chorus which made the whole forest tremble. We made slow progress, carefully examining the ground all around and creeping swiftly from tree to tree, but the sound of bellowing and trumpeting coming from all sides soon convinced us, beyond a doubt, that the tracks we had been following had led us right into the middle of the herd. At any moment now we might see one or more of them approaching us from one side or the other, although so far we had not been discovered. In this thick jungle scents do not travel far because there is no wind, and in any case the atmosphere—for us, at least—was so full of the smell of concentrated pachyderm that no other smell would have had much chance. In front of us a clump of trees looked as though it was being battered by a gale of wind as the tops bent almost double and then straightened out violently; what was actually happening was that some elephants had found their favourite delicacy—a giant creeper that grows wriggling up the tallest trees—and they were nearly pulling the trees down in their efforts to detach it from the trunks and branches. We were being treated to an entertaining performance and we tried to ascertain

whether the entertainers were males or females, but it was by no means easy. There was an enormous silk-cotton tree a few yards away which seemed to offer unexpected shelter, and having crouched down and examined the intervening space carefully we made a dash for it and took refuge in two hollows of its enormous trunk. Around us the herd growled menacingly, and we could see in one direction only—although our view was not unduly restricted in that direction. A few more guests came up to join in the feast of creeper and the clump of trees was soon rocking and swaying with even greater abandon. The youngsters complained, as youngsters will, that their elders were leaving them only the crumbs, but they were busily gleaning all the same. Altogether it made a scene more easily imagined than described—a scene, moreover, which was being played behind a curtain as far as we were concerned, and of which we were allowed only an occasional fleeting glimpse. The Mayor, crouched close beside me, kept pointing in the same direction and soon I could make out a mass of grey moving pillars—which were the feet and legs of elephants. From their bellies upwards they were completely hidden, except for the backs of one or two giants that appeared and disappeared from time to time. We had to guess the size of the elephants from the size of the wandering and disembodied feet. Then we saw two mothers with babies—saw them complete and entire, that is. They were joining up with the group we were watching, having walked right round our silk-cotton tree no more than five or six yards from us on our left. Fortunately we had come from the right, otherwise they would certainly have smelt our tracks. We should then have had to shoot them in self-defence, which would have been a useless murder and would have completely upset the apple-cart. These

newcomers were certainly not expected by the herd but it was difficult to decide whether the noisy welcome they received was to be interpreted as congratulations or protests.

"We must be patient," the Mayor whispered, his lips close to my ear. "When the elephants move off we'll follow them. Sooner or later our luck is bound to change and then you'll be able to take your pick."

George and I had made up our minds to follow our guide in all he suggested, but we could not help smiling at his utter panic when a ridiculously small elephant wandered aimlessly in our direction. Had he not glued himself to the tree he would have fallen over backwards with terror. If the pit of Hell itself had opened at his feet he could not have been more completely bowled over. He let out a cry of "Help!" and it seemed for a moment as if his prayer was to be really justified, as it let loose an explosion of wrath in our direction. Our only hope—and the only hope for the elephants themselves, since we should have had to shoot without hesitation to save our skins if they had attacked—lay in the youngster's inability to tell the others where we were hiding.

The whole range of the orchestra was laid on for our benefit—roarings, barking, trumpet-calls and bellowing. From all directions the animals came running in with obvious fear in their voices, but the assembly took place behind the screen of vegetation which we had been cursing so heartily a few minutes before. This time the screen was doubly useful—for us and for our adversaries. The boldest of them thrust their tusks in our direction but they refrained from coming out to investigate our tree. Suddenly, on what seemed to be a command, the commotion stopped and the elephants, no doubt with their youngsters at their sides, moved off with a certain dignity,

like so many senators, grumbling a little in order to preserve their self-respect. This continued for a hundred yards or so, as far as we could judge, when it was followed by a quite inexplicable and panic-stricken flight which sounded as though the whole jungle were being demolished. For a good twenty minutes there was dead silence, then an occasional cautious cry could be heard and we knew that the panic was over. The sentinels were once more reporting "all clear" and the herd was itself again—so much so that the normal hubbub broke out louder than ever. The scare had been forgotten and the elephants were splitting up again to look for food.

The trackers, who had been smoking a pipe to pass the time, grinned indulgently. They took some leaves from the ground, then rolled and lit cigarettes, saying that they did not propose to move until they had smoked them. Meanwhile the elephants continued to withdraw and their bellowings grew fainter and fainter.

"Splendid!" said the Mayor. "Now we can go and wait for them in a most interesting spot. It's a deep valley and we shall be able to look down on them and identify them one by one as they pass. Let's go."

We set off again, behind the men this time, at a good pace, as we had to gain on the fugitives. This part of the race—and it *was* a race—went on for a couple of hours, but it was not unpleasant. The bush was much thinner now, and the virgin forest, with its enormous trees and its comparative freedom from undergrowth, was an agreeable change. Visibility was also improving all the time and towards mid-day we were moving along the top of a precipice and could see the elephants below us, still breaking down trees. The herd was moving steadily forward towards a narrow defile at the edge of the forest and our trackers advised us to cut them off, at a point where

we should have everything in our favour, not too far up the gorge. We took up our positions by a large black stone that stood up alone among some scattered rocks and was covered with growing plants. About fifteen yards from our ambush was a path, entirely free of all plants or bushes, along which the elephants would have to pass, while trees grew on either slope of the valley—which, according to the trackers, had been carved out by a river which only flowed during the worst of the rainy season. These temporary torrents, which are caused by the heavy rains escaping to the plains, are quite common in Southern Annam and often rise high enough to fill the valleys within a few hours.

The elephants came slowly towards us, making their usual din. We were pleased to see by their obviously leisurely and care-free progress that they had no suspicion of danger and were quite at their ease. The first back-bone we saw was colossal, towering above the tops of the shrubs. The shrubs parted and the leader stood out clearly against the dark background of the trees. It was an old female, at least a hundred years old and without doubt mistress of the herd. A second female, nearly as big, followed, then a third, then a fourth—this last with a baby—before the first male appeared, small, with average tusks. A long file of them had already passed through the gorge and were descending towards the plain when an adult male, carrying a superb pair of ivories, came out of the bush, obviously much occupied with a young female. He was stroking her gently with his trunk and was also, unfortunately from our point of view, partly hidden by her. As they wandered dreamily side by side for part of the way through the defile I began to say good-bye to my first chance of bagging an elephant; then the young gallant stood aside to let his

companion pass and I had all the time in the world to take careful aim and pull the trigger. As he collapsed the herd hesitated, not knowing what to do or where to go; those who had reached the plain began to flow back into the defile, while those in the defile were jostling each other towards the plain. The result was an indescribable confusion in the bottleneck, with elephants pressing each other, head to tail, in panic and uncertainty.

The great chieftainess came lumbering up the gorge, bellowing noisily, and then returned the way she had come, taking with her the elephants that had been wondering which way to go, but a number who had not so far left the bush decided to stay there in hiding. In all this upheaval our trackers had a chance to assess the size of the herd and found that it was bigger than we had at first thought and several lone rangers must have joined them in the course of the trek. The Mayor assured me that the giant male mentioned by the sorcerer the previous evening was among those still in hiding in the bush and offered to lead us to him, leaving his men on the rock. So the three of us set off, the Mayor behind George, and myself a few paces in the rear. It was almost impossible to distinguish one track from another, but we pressed on. After some yards we passed a few great grey bodies, as motionless as statues—females from the rear of the herd who had decided to stay put until it was safe to move, possibly at nightfall. Only one elephant had definitely turned back. We pushed round behind him to cut him off and when we saw him again he was standing at a fork, obviously uneasy in his mind and trying to decide which way to go. George crept up closer to him while the Mayor and I sat down under a tree to admire the clever way in which he was tackling a difficult job. After he had been swallowed up in the bush for some time we saw the

elephant turn round quickly and raise his trunk to sniff the air. He lowered it again and let out a short trumpet-blast, but showed no sign of running away. There was the sound of a shot and he toppled over on his right side; after a great sigh, which sounded like steam escaping from a crack in a bursting boiler, he lay still. We ran towards George, who was standing about six yards from his victim and pointing to his tusks. "It wasn't the one we were after," he said. He had managed to get quite close to the elephant by taking cover behind a great ant-heap and he had been particularly anxious not to miss what he thought was the sorcerer's champion tusker. By the time he had discovered it was not the animal in question he had been discovered. This male was not such a bad one after all, and as he had begun to look dangerous, George had thought it advisable not to give him another chance. ... The rest we knew.

My male had fallen forward and lay with his tusks buried in the ground; my brother's had one lying on the ground, the other sticking up in the air. There was nothing really for us to argue about; we had both killed our first elephant on the same day, in the same district and under the same conditions, and we had both opened our score with a male. But George stoutly maintained that his tusks were longer than mine, to which I answered that my impression was that mine were longer than his, although it was difficult to be certain because my pair were buried in the earth. A few days later our patron saint, St. Hubert, gave judgment: the tusks were almost exactly the same weight.

The Mayor was still anxious to save the face of the village sorcerer, and spoke with all the eloquence he could command of the elephant with the phenomenal ivories which we had allowed to escape. He had actually seen



The author—and friend.



The Emperor Bao Dai, with one of his favourite elephants.

Fixing a home-made howdah.



A home-made howdah in use at Darlac.



it, and if we had kept a better look-out we might have seen it too (although he did not say where or when). It would have been churlish to argue with him and we were content to offer him a little consolation.

"Look," we said, "there's nothing to worry your head over. We shall be coming back, and next time we'll get him. What's more, his tusks will have grown even bigger by then!" Next year we were told that this phantom elephant had moved; he had gone away in a hurry without leaving his address.

What did it matter after all if these hospitable people—the Mayor and the sorcerer particularly—had stuffed our heads with stories in the belief that they were inspiring us with the divine fire? It was hardly necessary, in our state of youthful enthusiasm, when we were ready to believe anything; but they were not to know that. And what did it matter if they tried to exonerate themselves when they failed in the end to show us this wonderful elephant they had dreamed up? They would not have been Moi if they had behaved any other way. The only thing that mattered to us was the result. At our first attempt my brother and I had scored a triumph—in fact, a double triumph. What was more, we had supplied the village with a store of fresh meat and, unless something unforeseen happened, we had saved the village crops from complete destruction. That night we were so happy that we would not have called the King our cousin. Our tusks were quite splendid and there wasn't a beginner in the world who would not willingly have changed places with us.

As my elephant had been killed fairly near the village (which could be reached by cutting across the plain and then through the forest at its narrowest point) we thought it would be a good idea to present it to the

authorities for a feast. While we retired to the communal house for a rest, the villagers stayed up all night and organized a vast procession, with the idea of getting the corpse cut up during the small hours, before the heat of the day. It was an impromptu torch-light procession and it lasted till day-break. The wild elephants must have heard it but they never came near the fields as they had on previous nights. Had they had wind of the death of their friends? Or did some presentiment of danger remind them of the respect due to other people's property? All we know for certain is that after another of the herd had been killed two days later at the edge of a maize-field—a third male—they disappeared from the neighbourhood altogether as if by magic.

The butchering of our victims—the first by our villagers of Mu Noi, the second, my brother's, by the people of two other villages, and the third by the combined forces—was an interesting affair. Although the radio had not yet reached this jungle country the news spread with a rapidity which absolutely staggered us. Crowds of men, women and children appeared from nowhere, with baskets on their backs to carry home their share of the booty. The authorities began by giving themselves the biggest and best helpings first (just like home!), then came their friends and relations and the big-wigs of neighbouring villages, and last of all came the people—who were allowed to help themselves. There was so much meat, however, that nobody felt hard done by.

Next morning, we passed happy groups of villagers, with blood all over them and with baskets so heavily weighed down with elephant-meat that the straps were cutting into their shoulders. The men were laughing at the women's jokes and the children were singing. There was for once a plentiful supply of food for everyone and

happiness was in the air. On the day the third male was killed we went to have a look at the first two corpses, but the three-ton monsters seemed to have melted into thin air. The process had been begun by human beings, wild beasts had carried on the work, vultures had come along to give a hand, and finally little carnivorous animals and insects of all kinds had finished the job off. The bones were lying about here and there to show that during the night meals had been served in different parts of the restaurant, but everybody had been able to find something on the menu to suit his taste—and his capacity. The story of elephant-hunting, from beginning to end, always follows the same course—tracking, approach-work, selection of victim, the shot, the results of the shot—and, in the last chapter, the effective co-operation of men, birds and beasts to round everything off neatly.

The elephants of Mu Noi, driven off by my brother George and me, were not seen again in those parts before the harvest and our efforts were just in time to save the crops. The Mayor and his Council knew the value of a good year and when they heard we were at Dong Me some months later they made a special journey to express their gratitude to us. They took the opportunity of telling us at the same time that, in the opinion of the sorcerer, we had been careful to arrive on a propitious day. ...

As if *we* had known what days were propitious, *or* when we should arrive!

CHAPTERFOURTEEN

My First Lasso-Hunt

FROM the day when I first had the chance of discussing the subject with some native hunters in the Moi hinterland, I had but one idea in my head—to go out hunting wild elephants with the lasso.

We arrived unexpectedly one evening at a village where the sacrifice of a buffalo had just finished. The village was *enfete*, but it was difficult to recognize the fact as a thick fog had begun to envelop everything. From the terrace where we were standing we could just see the nearest huts, but they were rapidly growing more indistinct and soon disappeared altogether; only the sacrificial fires revealed a few houses in the distance. While we stood there chatting, the night came down suddenly and covered all the countryside with a thick veil, smelling strongly of smoke.

The headman's residence was a long low building which had obviously been added to from time to time, the number of "wings" corresponding to the branches of his family. Each "wing" had its own hearth. Between the bamboo walls and the roof were the heads of deer, wild boar and other animals killed for food, together with cross-bows, quivers of poisoned arrows and side-arms. Soot from the fires had collected here and there in dark corners, since it could never escape completely through the gaps in the roof. Jars, gourds, gongs, rush-mats and all the usual everyday paraphernalia made up the total stock of furniture, which had been handed down from

generation to generation. In the middle of the centre bay was a squared block of wood used as a table or a seat, as required, while a torch stuck at an angle in a candle-holder just managed to shed a feeble and wavering glimmer of light.

The Chief—who was famous for his hospitality—ordered two hefty young men to bring in a jar of fermented spirit, which they secured to one of the pillars. Then began a studied and formal ritual. One of the youths took a knife and scraped away the special preparation which hermetically sealed the jar and then removed the wooden bung. He next inserted a bunch of herbs, rubbing them skilfully between his fingers, and as a reward he was allowed to plunge deep into the jar the long flexible drinking-tube specially made for the purpose. It is a kind of giant drinking-straw which projects about six feet from the neck of the jar, bending over under its own weight. He sucked at the straw until he had a mouthful of the spirit, and screwing up his face like a connoisseur he swallowed as much as he wanted and spat out what was left through the gaps between the floor-boards. A second taster stepped forward and repeated the operation without waiting to be asked. There were plenty more volunteer tasters and expert opinions were briskly exchanged. Finally, by the addition of a measured quantity of drinking water, a mixture was obtained which received general approval. The Chief, called in to give his verdict on the vintage, solemnly took the "pipe" and drank several deep draughts without stopping; then he smacked his lips noisily and assured us that it was perfect. It was now our turn to drink the health of our hosts.

My friends and I looked at each other doubtfully. My doctor friend seemed worried about the hygienic aspects

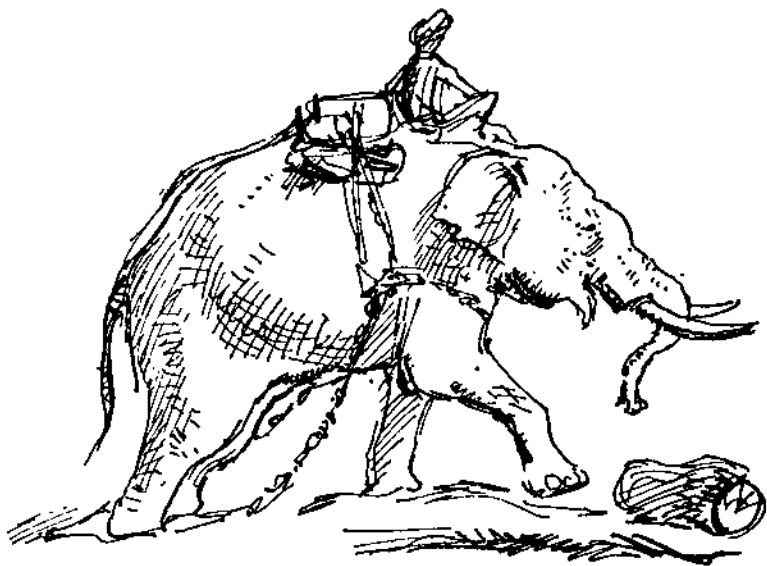
of the ritual, but it was no time to be fussy; one must drink from the jar of friendship when one is invited just as one must smoke the proffered pipe of peace, and to refuse either is to make an enemy of one's host. It suddenly occurred to me that age ought to play its part in the ceremony and, without waiting to be asked, I quickly gave priority to my friends. Whereupon they began to reveal *their* respective birthdays, as there was actually very few months between us. So, in strict chronological order, we got down to business. I felt that, as I was the last to drink, my friends would have swallowed my ration of germs before it was my turn to suck the tube.

The Chief was an old hand and very little got past him. Our idea was to keep the tube in our mouths long enough to make it look as though we were having a long drink and to pretend that we were busily swallowing all the time; but the Chief, without moving a muscle of his face, made it quite clear that he was not deceived and set out to convince us that we were wasting our time trying to get out of drinking our whack. He had the jar filled to the brim and then showed us an ox-horn, which we were to consider the equivalent of a single "dose". The horn was filled with spirit from a different jar (several more jars having been brought into use since the ceremony began) and as the level in our jar fell, the Chief poured spirit from the horn to bring it up to the brim again, and we were not allowed to stop until the horn was empty. This little comedy was repeated several times during the course of the night and the net result, as far as I was concerned, was a heavy sleep with a touch of something not unlike sea-sickness about it!

Between drinks we had talked about the catching of wild elephants and the Chief had been far from enthusiastic over our desire to reconnoitre in a region which he

was disposed to look upon as his private territory. He tried every way he knew to put us off and ended the discussion with an argument to end all argument.

"If you want to come with us you will have to strip to the buff, and you will have to know how to hang on to the neck of a tame elephant. All clothing is a handicap because wild animals can smell it so easily. Furthermore, falling off is forbidden once the hunt is up. If you fall off your elephant you will be trampled on, either by our elephants or by the wild ones. In either case you will have had it!" He paused a moment and looked us up and



down; then he added: "And even then I'm not sure we should have any luck. White men smell of death—oh, damn it! It's all very awkward!"

But he got no further. As he squatted, a little unsteadily, the spirit he had drunk suddenly laid him out as he had hoped it would lay us out. His attendants dumped him in a corner but they were themselves at the staggering stage and, like the rest of us, were beginning to see double. When they flopped down where they stood, we also withdrew to our corner. Only the women and children were left to do the honours and to pass the tube politely from one to another; but there was no longer anything to be afraid of as the spirit was by now so diluted that it would not have made a flea drunk. In the doorway the watchers, with their primitive musical instruments, played the traditional festive chant, with its burden of two notes, always the same two notes, on the same indefatigable gongs. ...

In the morning, each with his own variety of splitting headache, we got up and watched, as in a dream, the preparations for the day's expedition. The Chief lent us five hunting elephants—no doubt old warriors for which he had no further use—and suggested that we might go and kill a fine wild ox in the outskirts of the forest which, as we could see, was not far away. We found the animal he had described but when we got back we did not find our host; he had taken advantage of our absence to slip away with his complete capturing outfit.

Three days later, at the end of a day which had begun badly with mutiny by one of our elephants, who had run loose and upset all our food and belongings, we were camping by a river when, quite by chance, the Chief came by with his hunting team. He apologized for having left us so hurriedly a few days before but there had been

some urgency or other which had made it necessary for him to start early that morning and unfortunately we had gone off after an ox or something!

He had a fine team of elephants which stretched away into the distance in the long grass. It was impossible not to be impressed by such an imposing display and I was more certain than ever that capturing wild elephants by lasso was something that I *must* achieve, at any cost. At the same time I realized that the Chief and his men would do their best to stop us. My friends and I were quite satisfied with our progress so far; we had at least had a chance to get some experience of riding a hunting elephant, even if one of the old veterans had summed us up shrewdly and made an attempt to charge one of us—during the siesta, of all times—before the oozie could bring him under control.

I began to realize that all the arguments the Chief had put forward to discourage us were merely excuses. The fact of the matter was that hunting by lasso required preparation and training down to the last detail (as I have pointed out earlier in these pages), a well-matched team of highly-trained elephants and skilled professional elephant-men. The men, for their part, had to possess a sense of tactics which is not acquired in twenty minutes and any amount of sang-froid in an emergency. All that about riding naked and knowing how to cling to an elephant's neck was pure humbug. It is perfectly easy and normal to take part in an elephant-hunt fully-clothed and riding in a comfortable saddle.

Native hunters have always put forward objections to outsiders' attempts to poach on their preserves in this matter of elephant-catching, some of them even more fantastic objections than those of our Chief, but they vary so much with time, place and circumstances that it

would be impossible to generalize about them. When I told H.M. Bao Dai about the Chief's attempts to put us off, he said that his Vietnamese assistants at Quang-Tri had once been excellent capturers, but, having been refused a chance to join in a hunt since they left their homes, they had completely lost the art for want of practice. When he asked them whether they would welcome the chance of returning to their old love they all jumped at it. It was then that the Laoan (whose exploits I have already described) was given the job of teaching them afresh, with the help of a couple of men whose main responsibility normally was the buying of ropes and the general maintenance of stocks. These three got on with the job so well that one morning at Dalat, when the Emperor suggested that I might like to go out on a preliminary canter with them, we fixed up an expedition there and then and decided to try our luck on the Lagna plains. At that time I possessed only one elephant of my own and even the Emperor had no more than six, which was all too few for the programme we envisaged; but the season was getting on and we might have missed the opportunity to acquire a little experience if we had waited until we had more elephants at our disposal.

Six elephants were sent to Buke-Dangur, where we joined them five days later—which gave them a few days to recover from their journey. We began with a ride round the countryside combined with a little elephant-hunting, both highly successful and full of promise for the main expedition. The Lagna plains are so extensive and so well covered with tall reeds and grasses that they recall the Darlac country, except that they provide much more room in which to manoeuvre. In fact we had the kind of country we had dreamed about and the game we most wanted; it only remained to see how our teams

would shape. With only six trained elephants we could hope to capture no more than two wild elephants in a single sortie.

This was our first attempt at hunting with lasso, and it was a triumph. In the course of one afternoon we captured two small elephants!

We had moved camp to No Lu and it was from there that we set out. In less than an hour we had come up with a herd of wild elephants which had spread itself out over so vast an area that it was impossible to estimate its size. Following the strict rules of the game, we approached against the wind, the Emperor being quite content to leave everything in the hands of the Laoan, who had been put in charge. M. Maurice Celincourt, in his comfortable saddle, was calm and inscrutable. As for me, I freely admit I had little faith in our prospects and I could already see myself getting the worst of a tussle with some furious wild colossus of the jungle.

As usual the height of the reeds and bushes hid many of the animals and we could only guess at their movements by watching the waves that passed over the ocean of vegetation all around us. A few of the biggest heads and backs rose above the surface here and there, but there was no means of knowing whether they belonged to males or females. In any case we were not interested in these giants; they would be too big for us, possibly too old, and probably too unteachable. We decided to separate into two groups of three and move silently around the herd to pick out our victims; but as luck would have it, despite ourselves, we landed up in the middle of them. The Laoan and the Moi knew we had made a dangerous error but, with their usual disconcerting fatalism, they refrained from putting us wise to the fact; if we were determined to stick our noses into a hornets' nest,

who were they to interfere? Obedience came before discretion!

We were able to keep out of the way of the bigger wild elephants since they were unable to see us through the screen of vegetation, but we made a point of examining, as far as we could, every beast that came anywhere near us so that we could decide whether it was worth capturing. I began to think we were overdoing it, as sooner or later the herd were bound to smell us, when suddenly we saw a group of youngsters of assorted sizes in a little island of shorter grasses which grew no higher than their middles. One of our groups swooped down on a fair-sized female; the other made a mess of things, allowed one or two choice specimens to get away and had to be content in the end with an undersized male.

In the course of the chase somebody brushed against a bad-tempered old female and she promptly set up a ceaseless bawling which spread panic through the plain. Trunks started waving like cobras over the top of the reeds as one after the other the wild elephants picked up the scent. The hunters—who were enjoying their comeback—made noises like wild animals and did all they knew to create the impression that there was not just a handful of us but a great angry mob—and they apparently succeeded. The two captives were skilfully led away in opposite directions, which again would have halved our effective numbers if the wild elephants had decided to attack; but fortunately they made no attempt on us, and the area over which they were dispersed was in any case so vast that many of them went on browsing quietly without worrying much about one or two human beings. Those we had disturbed went off quietly and were soon hidden in the long grass, only two remaining behind and trumpeting—possibly the mothers of the two youngsters

we had captured. They stood side by side, with a touching effect of mutual support, and took it in turns to call. Later they must have turned round and made off towards the forest instead of following us, as we heard their voices growing fainter and fainter until we lost them altogether.

The young female we had captured gave no trouble at all, in fact she more or less surrendered without a struggle; the male, on the other hand, was as swift and cunning as the devil and nearly pulled the Laoan and his assistants into quite a dense little wood. Just when he thought he had got away, however, he was finally secured, and although he did his best to call up help from any of his friends who might be hanging about, his efforts were fruitless, so he decided to give up the struggle and come along quietly. The Laoan, who was undoubtedly a specialist, seemed not at all pleased with the afternoon's work as he rejoined us, with his male captive on a lead. He looked no bigger than a shrimp beside the captive female, but beside our trained elephants he looked a microbe! As we waited in the long grass for our team to form up again M. Celincourt said to me, quietly:

"I've a good mind to jump down and change that animal's lead. He looks more like a mongrel dog or a pig than an elephant!"

The Laoan overheard this and stuck up for his protégé.

"Don't you trust him," he replied. "He'd make short work of you."

There the matter rested, as it was time to get started for our camp, but when we went to say good-morning to the mongrel dog (or pig) next day at his mooring-tree he greeted us most cordially—in fact he seemed so eager to embrace us that he seemed in imminent danger of

breaking either his neck or the rope that held him. In the end he had to fall back on mere invective, but he left us in no doubt as to what he would do with us if he could have got at us. If he had been free he would certainly have avenged all the previous day's insults and injuries, for despite the unfavourable comparisons we had been making about his size he was still as tall as we were. It was all very well to look down on him from a height of ten feet or so and say what a shrimp he was, but when we came to observe him face to face at ground level we had no illusions—least of all M. Celincourt, who was quite glad he had not after all jumped down and attempted to change the young devil's lead!

The female we captured that afternoon, by the way, was the one who afterwards committed suicide by strangling herself while we were having dinner.

And that was my first capture by lasso! It was so exciting in its earlier stages and so tame at the end that it upset all my preconceived ideas on the sport as a whole. It was planned without reference to the most elementary rules as laid down by the experts and, from the point of view of safety, it was conducted with utterly idiotic rashness. So simple and straightforward did the actual capture seem that it never occurred to me that at any moment a really dangerous situation might have blown up. Subsequent lassoing expeditions, and the various incidents with which they were often enlivened—some of them not far short of disastrous—corrected my false impressions as time went on. My obsession grew worse, of course, as I began to appreciate the glorious uncertainties of the game.

The people of No Lu had good reason to know some-

thing of the giants of their jungle, as they had had their crops raided for more years than anybody could remember. For generations no one had ever been known to reap a full harvest. It is easy to imagine their astonishment when they saw us come riding into their village on elephants; it was a new experience for them and they pinched themselves to be sure they were awake. But when we announced that we had come to capture wild elephants in their neighbourhood they were even more completely bowled over. Three of the leading men took their courage in both hands and asked us to take them along, so they were hoisted on to the necks of three different elephants. This form of transport was in itself a revelation as the elephants seemed to pass through parts of the jungle which they had always regarded as impenetrable—and pass through them, moreover, with apparently no difficulty at all. But when the animals began to step out these inexperienced passengers began to look a bit green; they were also worried at the prospect of finding themselves suddenly in the midst of a herd of wild elephants and possibly being violently unseated by the sweep of a trunk. As soon as they saw certain grey backs humped above the tall grasses in the distance they threw in the sponge and begged to be set down near a forked tree, which they promptly climbed like three monkeys.

"Look!" they shouted, pointing ahead. "There they are. Crowds of them. Do be careful!"

"Thank you very much," I answered. "And you look after yourselves. Try to get back home before nightfall."

"No, no!" they pleaded. "It's impossible to make it on foot. Don't desert us, *please*"

This was something new for them to worry about. They may have been leading men in the village, but it was now beginning to dawn on them that they had

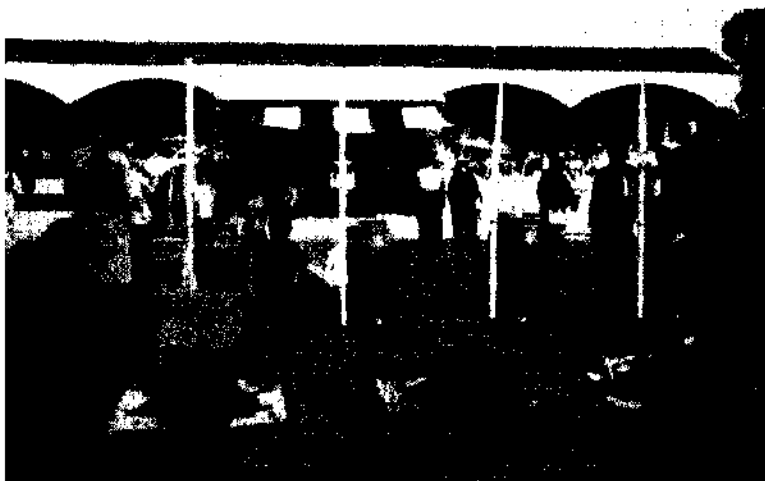
started on this adventure without really thinking what they were letting themselves in for. Now they could hardly decide which saint to pray to! As a matter of fact they hadn't much to grumble at. They had been lucky enough to watch the first stages of an elephant-hunt without danger and without expense, from a seat in the front row. However, when we came along and picked them up on the homeward journey the joy on their faces was a sight to see. They had only to tell their story when they got back—with a few additions, naturally—to become heroes. The others would sit round them in a circle and listen with the silence and deference that they so richly deserved. ...

When we had settled down after our expedition for a well-earned rest and night had descended on our encampment, we had a shock which quite took our breath away. We suddenly discovered that the wild elephants had followed *our* tracks for a change and turned up at our camp in the middle of the night. Our first intimation of this unpleasant and totally unprecedented development was a terrific bellowing behind the house we had hired. This was followed by a second round, after which it was Hell let loose all around us.

Our house stood on short, slender piles and faced the plains on one side; on the other it backed up against the forest. We were quite sure that the animals were, at the nearest, no more than fifteen yards away—an estimate which we were able to confirm next morning. Behind the house they were breaking wood, pumping water, playing with the valves on steam-boilers, banging trunks together, grumbling and growling and snoring and barking and trumpeting and bellowing and what have you. In addition to all this we could hear tummies rumbling, ears



The Ceremony of the Oath at Banmethout: Moi spectators.



Ceremonial buffalo-heads laid out at Banmethout.



The Ceremony of the Oath at Banmethout: Beginning of the March
Past of the Elephants.

In the morning the wild herd melted away at the first cock-crow. The villagers arose and went about their business, but a complete silence settled over the countryside, as though it had been exhausted by the night's excesses. The elephant-men saddled their animals and we took the road to Buké-Dangur. Our little male captive could not, at first, reconcile himself to being dragged along behind us and had to be "persuaded" a little before he would see reason. He was on the left of the elephant who had temporary charge of him, and the forest was on that side. We had thought the forest deserted, but soon we heard a sad little cry, and the sound of heavy footsteps receding through the undergrowth. The little one's mother was taking her breaking heart elsewhere....

Two months later the little chap refused to be parted from us. He had fought bitterly against the very idea of being captured, but from the moment he had heard that last cry of farewell from his mother his resistance had collapsed and he had become our devoted slave.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

In Conclusion . . .

TWICE a year the wild elephants all take part in a mass migration. This movement, which happens at about the same time every year, is governed by a number of factors but is chiefly due to the need for fresh food. Generally speaking, their natural supplies are at their lowest at the times of the greatest drought and the biggest floods. From November onwards the tall reeds and grasses of the river-meadows and the grain-bearing plants of the forest clearings wither and go dry and the great exodus in search of more nourishing vegetation is begun. It goes on steadily until January, when the last elephant leaves. A few have stayed on only because they have taken possession of little isolated patches of greenery, but the increasing number of bush fires eventually drives out even these last survivors and they join the herds which have gone before them to the high plateaux in the heart of the peninsula. In these remote and undeveloped regions they find the food they like—trees with succulent fruits, plants with tender shoots, roots that are tasty and easily pulled up, and various other delights for appetites which are at once hearty and discriminating. But their food grows in scattered patches, according to the distribution of the soil, not in concentrated profusion as it grows in the valleys. There are long stretches which may be well-wooded but which have nothing much that elephants like, and if they are not to starve they must keep on the

go, picking up what they can *en route*. Before they spread themselves out over the vast spaces they instinctively split up into little groups, to reduce the competition for what food they may find, and these groups will often wander over the frontier into Siam.

As the migration proceeds in waves, obeying an instinct as old as the hills themselves, the valleys and plains are burning with the fires which will restore their fruitfulness. These fires sweep through the dried remains of luxuriant pastures and reduce them to wide expanses of blackened cinders. By day great columns of thick smoke rise to the heavens, while flocks of birds swoop madly around after the millions of insects that are seeking to escape destruction by fire; by night magnificent illuminations build moving walls of flame across the horizon. Everywhere the crackling of burning twigs and stalks can be heard against the booming of bigger trees bursting in the heat. ... The annual clearance, which will ensure next year's food supplies for the animals, is well and truly under way.

It is barely three weeks before the cinders are hidden beneath a rich cloak of green, which changes and grows at an astonishing rate to welcome back the creatures so recently driven away. The first to return are the little deer and the wild pigs, followed quickly by the tigers, anxious not to miss their familiar joints, so temptingly garnished into the bargain. These annual fires bring vigour and increase to the vegetation of the plains; but for them, the valley of the Lagna would no longer be the elephants' paradise and they would be forced to emigrate permanently to other, more fruitful lands. By June the crops are ready and the great migration of the herds begins again, this time in the reverse direction. From the high plateaux and the mountains they come streaming

down, more and still more of them, filling the water-meadows and the surrounding woods, until in July they are again building up those great concentrations of herds which I have already described.

These migrations do not follow the same pattern all over Indo-China. In some parts the elephants live in the plains during the wet season and retire to the hills during the great droughts. In others—in Kompong-Thom, for example, and in odd corners of Cambodia—they seek the higher country as soon as they feel the wet weather coming and come down for the hot months, especially to the valleys around the great lakes. It all depends, of course, on the availability of their food and water supplies.

There is one very unhappy aspect of all this. In their migrations to and fro the herds always follow the same routes, and this slavish addiction to habit plays straight into the hands of the native population, who are often quite uninterested in the possibilities of capturing and training elephants and seek only to destroy them. Planks of wood, with sharp darts fixed to their sides, are suspended lightly above the path which the elephants must take, and where they are shaken down by the mere passage of the animals the weight of the beam brings it down on their heads. Giant cross-bows are rigged up in the trees which, by the mere tripping of an elephant's foot against a creeper, will release poisoned arrows. Planks covered with little spikes dressed with curare are cunningly concealed in the path; the poison enters the sole of the animal's foot and eventually kills it.

But there are methods more brutal even than these. A whole village will get together and carefully work out a plan for mass murder. At a given signal they will set fire to a meadow in which a large herd is feeding; such a

fire will quickly envelop a herd and, if the wind is right, will spread with an appalling swiftness.

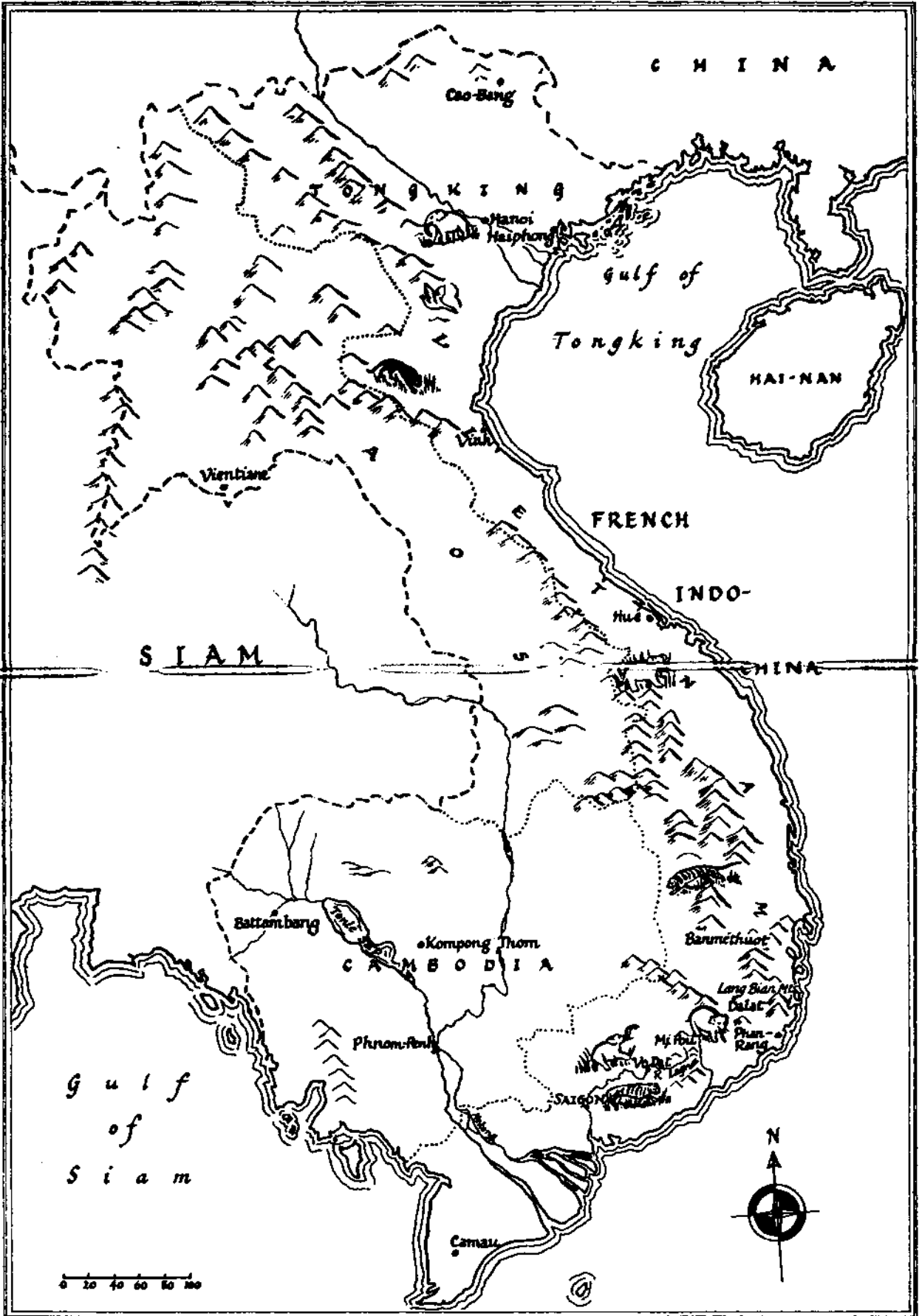
Another method popular with the Moi is the ditch or pit, with pointed stakes planted at the bottom. In a narrow path between two sharp corners a succession of these pits is dug and covered with bundles of wood well camouflaged with earth. When a number of elephants have entered this narrow stretch of track, the look-outs, who have been lying in ambush, rise up behind them shouting and banging on every noisy instrument they have been able to collect. Packs of dogs, chained up a little way off, are released and come to add to the confusion. The elephants are panic-stricken and drive ahead blindly, falling into the pits and on to the stakes in a mad rush. It all ends in useless slaughter, since the chief beneficiaries are once again the birds of prey. As the pits are never filled in, other wild animals are trapped from time to time and as the natives know nothing about them they lie there and die, for the sole benefit of the crows and the ravens.

The same kind of battue is used to drive terrified elephants into marshy hollows or quicksands concealed by thick shrubs and grasses. In their terror the animals have no time to follow their normal practice and test the soil with their trunks before stepping on it; they rush into the hollow and few ever get out alive. It is a slow and cruel death.

From time to time, also, elephants suffer a heavy death-roll when some epizootic disease sweeps through their ranks. They are more resistant, in this respect, than wild buffaloes and wild cattle, but it is none the less true that sometimes they are killed *off* in large numbers, the younger ones being most susceptible. As with all animals, the sick drag along behind the others until they are at

their last gasp, and this no doubt helps to spread the infection. If the disease happens to strike a herd which is feeding in a small but productive area the ground may be strewn with bodies when the survivors of the epidemic have departed.

The different kinds of mass murder favoured by different native tribes, and the periodic attacks of epidemic disease, leave behind them vast accumulations of bones. One or other of these must be the real explanation of the "elephant cemeteries" of which there are so many legends. People with more imagination than common-sense have come across one or more of these piles of bones and have had some fanciful notion of a kind of "City of the Dead" where all good elephants retire to lay their bones when they feel the approach of death. Stories handed down from one generation to another tend to become enlarged and embroidered, as we well know, but it is interesting to note that this particular legend of the elephants' cemetery is common among the peoples of both Africa and of Asia. In neither continent, however, have the people ever *seen* one of these cemeteries; they have accepted the story of their existence told by their sorcerers and medicine-men who, for reasons best known to themselves, have carefully refrained from saying where these cemeteries are to be found. In the course of my wanderings throughout the length and breadth of Indo-China I have made enquiries on this particular point, and I have come to the conclusion that, apart from all other argument, these legendary bone-yards are a physical impossibility. Elephants are nomadic for a large part of every year and in their ceaseless search for food they cover enormous distances. Long after they must have felt the first signs of their approaching death, whether from illness, accident or just old age, they will



CHINA

Cao-Bang

TONGKING

Hanoi Haiphong

gulf of Tongking

HAI-NAN

Vientiane

Vinh

FRENCH

INDO-

Hue

SIAM

CHINA

Battambang

Kompong Thom

CAMBODIA

Baruechuot

Long Bien, Me Dalac

Phnom-Pnom

Mi Fou

Phum-Rang

Gulf of Siam

SAIGON

Camau

0 20 40 60 80 100



still be found tottering along behind the herd, when, according to the legend, they should have been making the best speed they could for the communal cemetery. It is true that they will often retire into an obscure corner of the forest, away from the herd, for the last few hours to die, as it were, in private, but that is a very different matter from trekking half across a wide and difficult jungle. And what about those who die sudden deaths, as from snake-bite?

Still, it makes a good story after a hard day's hunting and before a good camp fire, when the tireless spinners of yarns come into their own. The night beyond the lighted circle is dark, the jungle, full of mystery and of the cries of birds and animals, is looking over your shoulder; everything seems possible, no absurd fantasy can be too absurd, too fantastic! ...

Lying on my back near a camp fire, with the voice of some garrulous Chief droning in my ears, and looking up into the dancing shadows over my head, I have amused myself time and again by drawing up schemes for the protection of my beloved wild elephants. I have persuaded myself that the first essential would have to be something like a Mission—for the conversion of the Moi. A set of rules would have to be drawn up and rigorously applied. Men who lived in the jungle would be allowed to kill for the protection of their crops, but they would have to learn that punishment, severe and inevitable, would descend upon them if they resorted to mass murder of any kind, whether by stakes, traps, fires, drowning or any other devilish practices.

The creation of national parks would be an additional step in the right direction. These parks would be similar to those in America, Africa and Russia and run on the

lines, say, of the Kenya Game Reserves. They would also be an inexhaustible source of supply for maintaining the stocks of trained elephants required by the country as a whole. Their capture would be regulated and the trained elephants would be the property of the various tribes.

The Festival of Allegiance (*La Fete du Serment*) which used to be held at Banméthuot was a typical illustration of the importance of trained elephants in the life of a place like Darlac. This Festival, inaugurated by a former Governor, General Pierre Pasquier, became, after 1933, a traditional ceremony to which all the local leaders, even from the most remote parts of the country, came every year to re-affirm their loyalty. The climax of the ceremony was the march past of all the Moi chieftains, who, each in his turn, as he pronounced the words of the oath, touched the sacred bracelet held by the representative of France. Then came the procession of trained elephants from every village. It was an impressive sight—two or three hundred giants marching as if on parade, and the leaders of the procession kneeling in homage in front of the dais before rejoining their ranks.

In 1950 the presence of H.M. Bao Dai, just back from a tour of his States, conferred a special dignity upon the Festival of Allegiance. The Emperor received the homage of his subjects and assured them of his goodwill and his care for their welfare. The sacred bracelet, touched first by the Emperor and then by the many Chiefs, sealed the oath of allegiance in the presence of the French High Commissioner in Indo-China representing the President of the French Union. The Sovereign and the High Commissioner made the traditional sacrifice,

drank from the communal jar and received the traditional offerings. Large buffalo-heads, laid out on platters, added a note of local colour and the ceremony ended with a faultless march past of elephants which the Emperor, a connoisseur in these matters, openly applauded.

So here I am at last at the end of my story. No doubt many of my friends who know all about my life as a hunter and catcher of elephants will say that I have left out a great deal; but I hope they will understand—and forgive.

Not long ago, at Dalat, the Emperor and I went over the old ground again and cherished the hope that one day in the not too distant future we should be given the chance to show the world, through the medium of a film, the splendours and resources of the wonderful land that has been such an unforgettable part of our lives. We believe the world would be grateful for the opportunity to follow in our footsteps in this way through the inexhaustible jungles of Indo-Ghina and observe the free and unrestricted lives of the animals in their wild state. ... Merely to reflect on these possibilities revives all those nostalgic feelings which are seldom far from my mind.

What I have written does little more than lift one corner of the veil that hides the jungle land of Indo-China, with its mystery and all its teeming life.

