

IN THE JUNGLES OF THE GHAUTS.

CURIOUS NATIVE HUNTING METHODS.

By Herbert Hudson.

IN their relative position to the rest of the continent and to the adjacent ocean, the Western Ghauts of India suggest a comparison with the mountain chains of the western border of North America, but there the comparison ends.

Those Ghauts are a range of mountains in the province of Mysore, running down the west coast between Bombay and Calicut, which must not for a moment be confounded with Calcutta on the other side of the country. In height they range from 2,000 to 6,000 feet, and they act as a buffer to the storms which come in from the Indian Ocean. But while screening the inland provinces from the violence of the monsoon, they rob them of the sea breezes which would otherwise greatly alleviate the deadly heat of the plains.

For nine months in the year the climate on the Ghauts is as pleasant as one could desire. It is certainly hot, but the thermometer rarely exceeds 85 degrees in the shade, and there is always a cooling breeze. The three months of the monsoon are less pleasant, for the rainfall averages 100 to 200 inches.

This district is one of the most productive fields for coffee-growing in India, yet it is sparsely populated by European planters, and the native tribes who live in the villages lead much the same sort of existence as their ancestors, the aborigines, must have led, cultivating modest paddy fields, and hunting wild animals in the yet undisturbed jungle.

The hill country of Mysore can boast of some of the grandest forest scenery in the world. Range rises beyond range, each densely clothed with magnificent trees of every variety and shade; delightful, park-like woodlands stretch into the table-land, varied at intervals by swards of verdant pasture. Swift-flowing rivers wind through the valleys, and waterfalls, in some places 800 feet high, dash themselves over the cliffs.

Ancient gold workings have been discovered in these regions from time to time, many of which have been re-opened with successful results; and one might be excused contemplating the possibility that Mysore was one of the places which supplied the ships of Tarshish in the days

of king Solomon, for, with the exception of Ceylon, it is the only country in which one finds side by side "gold and silver and ivory and apes and peacocks."

The Ghaut tribes are essentially of a hunting disposition. From the earliest times they have been accustomed to seek their dinners among the well-stocked jungles which clothe the hills and valleys of their country.

Like most hunters, the Ghauts prefer firearms when they can get them, but they are not particular as to what kind of a gun they have, so long as it will project a slug twenty yards or so.

Very fearful and wonderful are some of their weapons, ancient-looking matchlocks dating back to the dark ages, held together with pieces of grass or string, and, once charged, they cannot be unloaded except by being fired off. Their owners carry them about with an appearance of apprehension, as if never certain that they will not explode unexpectedly.

Those who cannot obtain a gun, arm themselves with a bow and arrows, with which they are very proficient marksmen. The bow is made of well-seasoned bamboo, with the string formed of a strip of the same wood; the arrows are most formidable-looking shafts, furnished with steel points as sharp as a knife. A group of these native hunters resting during the heat of the day furnishes a picture which any artist might desire to paint. The long-bow men, leaning in picturesque attitudes against the trees, the beaters with their quarter-staffs and wood-cutters' knives stuck in their belts, and the beautiful forest scenery, carry one's mind back to the legends of Robin Hood and his merry men in the green glades of Sherwood.

The patience of the native is proverbial; lie will crouch in a tree for hours on the chance of shooting a jungle fowl, and this is his favorite mode of procedure when in search of small game; but when after sambur or jungle sheep lie generally organizes a drive.

A likely bit of cover having been fixed on, the shooters are ranged around it in horseshoe form, while a party of from ten to twenty heaters walk through in

line, shouting and yelling to drive out the quarry.

There are few things more exciting than a beat in the jungle. Though one may have to wait drive after drive without seeing anything, yet one can never be certain that something will not come out, even at the last moment; for though animals as a rule start off at the slightest sound, deer will very often lie very close, and come out immediately in front of the beaters. Then, again, we never know what is going to come out; it may be a barking deer or it may be a tiger.

When the first sound is heard of an animal knocking against the hollow bamboos, one is raised to a great pitch of expectancy; the noise comes in waves which echo and reverberate through the forest. Every now and then it ceases, as the animal stops to listen; then it recommences, gradually coming nearer and nearer, yet its direction is very difficult to locate, and one requires a practiced ear to judge where the animal will come out.

I doubt whether the native hunter derives much enjoyment from the actual sport itself; his main object is to obtain flesh for the stockpot, and he cannot understand how a white man cares to take the trouble of tramping through the jungle simply for the sake of the animal's horns or hide; he could turn the skin to far better use as parchment for covering a tom-tom.

In addition to this method of killing game, the Indian hill-man resorts to all manner of devices to capture his quarry, a favorite way being to dig circular pits 8 to 10 feet deep in which long, sharp stakes are placed. When intimation is received that deer or bison (wild cattle) are near, a grand beat is organized; the animals are hemmed in on all sides but one, and the most demoniac yells and shouting, in addition to the hideous din of tom-toms, awaken the echoes of the forests and drive the terrified animals towards the fatal pits. Sometimes the wonderful instinct of the beasts warns them of the danger, but more often, so skilfully is the trap laid, one or more of a herd fall victims, and after a terrible struggle to escape from the pits are cut up and disposed of.

The most curious method, however, of slaughtering deer is that which is prac-

ticed by the tribes on the Masnagudi side of the Mysore plateau.

The deer is a ruminating animal, and chews the cud, as even the most ignorant hill-man knows, and this knowledge has furnished him with a method which he uses against the deer tribe with great effect.

Patient observation discovers a favorite deer haunt, where the animals after grazing their fill lie down and chew the cud at ease. This spot is carefully surrounded by a considerable number of men, each provided with a tiny tom-tom. The object is not to frighten the herd to any great degree, as that would probably end in their breaking through the cordon and escaping. So by a gentle tapping of the drum and an occasional gleam of a torch, they keep the hemmed-in animals in a state of alarm, sufficiently prolonged to prevent the frightened creatures chewing the cud.

The consequence is that after a few hours the herbage consumed by the deer remains undigested, their stomachs swell, and they are prevented from running as fast as they originally could. When the men see that the deer are in this state they let slip their pariah dogs, and arming themselves with bows and arrows, knives, clubs, and whatever comes handy, go for the well-nigh helpless deer and invariably make a good bag. The amount of patience, exposure to the damp, chill air of night and general hardship this mode of killing entails is considerable, and only an Indian hill-man is capable of carrying it out. Of all methods of pursuing deer it certainly is the most original I know.

It seems somewhat incongruous to speak of autumn in March, yet this month is veritably the fall of the year as regards the jungle.

The trees are all bare and brown, dried up and scorched by the blazing sun. The bamboo clumps—like bundles of Chinamen's fishing rods—disconsolately bob and sway, and the fallen leaves lie six inches deep, forming a yellow carpet which crackles to the slightest footfall.

There is hardly a breath of air, and the noises which strike the ear are intensified by the surrounding silence. Hark to that crow of defiance—there struts a lordly jungle cock! He knows he is safe till the rain comes; no one could get within

shot of him on this tell-tale ground. Over yonder, a gaudy woodpecker is springing his rattle on the bole of a feathery acacia, to which the castanet bird replies like an echo.

There goes a flock of green parrots, flashing through the air in a streak of emerald; and presently, with a creaking of branches, and much screaming and scolding, a troop of monkeys come into view, leaping from tree to tree with their well-known agility. Another pause, and then a choir of grasshoppers takes up its plaint, the shrill cry rising and swelling in rasping waves of sound, and gradually dying away again.

As darkness draws on, strange cries come from the depths of the jungle. Anon one hears the curious barking call of the jungle sheep, or the screech of some baneful night bird; and the hollow bamboo clump as we pass it gives forth an uncanny sound, as though some unhappy spirit was imprisoned within its recesses. What wonder that the superstitious coolie, bringing up the mail bag from the post, should prefer to go three miles round by the road rather than take the short cut through the jungle, where "bootahs" and banshees hover round the path, and the souls of wicked men prowl about in the forms of wild beasts.

As the rose opens to the shower, as the ring-dove replies to its mate, so does the jungle answer to the rains. And now I am speaking, not of the heavy downpour of the monsoon, but of the April-like showers which precede it, and which the planter calls the blossoming showers, for they come just at the time when the coffee is in blossom, and preserve the flower from being scorched by the sun before the berry has set.

Every tree is bursting with buds, every bamboo is clothed with delicate greenery. The ground, but a few weeks ago a hard, leaf-strewn surface, is now mantled ankle-deep in ferns, maidenhairs and mosses; here a yellow, crocus-like flower, there a many-colored orchid, otherwise all is green.

I am not very well versed in botany, but I should think that a great many of our garden trees and plants must have been transplanted from this part of the world. That one over there is unmistakably a laburnum yellow with clustering blossoms. Here is a fragrant white jas-

mine, and near it a bush covered with little white berries which we used to call snowballs. Half hidden in the grass is a wax-like stephanotis, and innumerable convolvuli wind their tortuous trailers along the ground.

Gaudy-winged butterflies as large as a man's hand float lazily from flower to flower, or with the independence of a bird sail up far into the blue sky. One magnificent yellow and black species has down on its under wing almost as thick as feathers; another would seem to have stolen its coloring from the turquoise; but the emperor of them all is the Ganesa Swallow-tail, who bears on his velvety emerald wings panels of a metallic hue which in one light appear to be peacock blue and in another the richest purple.

And now, with restored nature, returns the time of the hunting, and the gun of the sportsman is heard again in the woods. With cautious air and crouching gait the shikari passes noiselessly over the soft ground, following the footprints of his quarry with the assistance of one faithful "smell-dog;" keen eyesight is necessary, and sharp ears, for keener eyes are watching, and sharper ears are on the alert for the approach of danger. Many of the big game animals of India bear similar names to those of America, but it is in name only that the denizens of the American forests resemble the wild animals of India. The prairie bison is very different from his Hindoo cousin, who stands fifteen hands high and has a short-haired coat almost as black as the boulders of his native jungles.

The anchorite monk of the desert is represented by a mountain recluse who grubs for his breakfast on the hillsides, and dwells among the wild date palms, rarely, if ever, descending to the lower levels.

Here, too, above all, "circles and sails aloft on pinions majestic the vulture;" lending that finishing touch which the eye requires to enable it to gauge the broad, blue expanse stretching between height and height. Watching his graceful and apparently effortless soaring, we forget for a moment his unpleasant proclivities, and—like the master poet—compare him to

"The implacable soul of a chieftain slaughtered
in battle,
By invisible stairs ascending and scaling the
heavens."