

THE KING'S MAHOUT

By CASPAR WHITNEY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT LENZ AND THE AUTHOR

HE was not impressive as to face or figure, yet Choo Poh Lek was a notable character. Of his class he was one of the few energetic, and the only ambitious native little man that I encountered in the Far East. And, quite as wonderful, he did not gamble. Unquestionably he came honestly by his active qualities, for Choo was a Sino-Chinese; his father, Lee Boon Jew, being one of many thrifty Chinese to find their way, thirty-five years ago, from the crowded Canton district of China, with its desperate daily struggle for mere existence, to Bangkok, whose half million people prefer mostly to leave the business of life to Chinamen. Lee began his commercial career humbly as a peddler of fruit and vegetables; and he prospered. In the very beginning he had carried his daily stock in two heaping bushel baskets hung from a bamboo pole which he swung from shoulder to shoulder, as, staggering under the really heavy burden, he called aloud his wares through the Sampeng and other narrow land streets of the poorer quarter. In one year he had done well enough to enable him to buy a small dug-out, which he paddled through the klawngs and on the Meinam River, making new acquaintances and new customers, while a plook-pee* compatriot in his employ supplied the already established trade from the baskets. In three years he had a shop in Sampeng and four boats, and in two more, or five years from the day of his landing, Lee Boon Jew had a shop in Sampeng, one on the Meinam, which, in addition to a general stock, did a little trading in bamboo and rattan, a small fleet of boats—and a Siamese wife. In due course a son came to gladden the Chinese heart, always made joyful by boy children, and by the time the fond father was permitted to

pridefully exhibit the gaudily dressed infant in the nearby floating shops, the little son came to be known as Choo Poh Lek, after a celebration which quite dimmed the customary New Year festival.

Meantime not only did the business develop, but Lee Boon Jew, who was now one of Bangkok's merchants, attained to such prominence among his fellows that by the time Choo was fifteen, he had become Collector in the Bird Nest Department of the Government Revenue Service; a post for which he was eminently fitted by both name and nature.

The cares of office did not, however, necessitate abandonment of the trade, grown now to an extent that kept several large boats of his fleet engaged solely in rattan and bamboo, for which they made long trips up river. It was Lee's dearest wish that his son should succeed to the commercial enterprise which so confidently promised to make wealthy men of them both, especially since his most intimate associate, Ho Kee Peck, had been recently appointed Farmer, under the Government, of the Onion, Bees Wax and Rattan Department.

Truth to tell, Lee had dreamed rosy hued celestial dreams of Choo Poh Lek's opportunities, and the possible prosperity that might easily come to a business so firmly established and having two silent partners in the local revenue service. Between the good offices of the Bird Nest and of the Onion, Bees Wax and Rattan departments, how much profitable trade might not, indeed, and readily, be diverted to the boats of Lee Boon Jew & Son!

But Choo proved a sore disappointment to his ambitious father. He had, it is true, given all of his boyhood and much of his young manhood to Lee's boats, and in fact, was accounted among the shrewdest traders and most skilled boatmen on the river. There were even those who thought the son more astute than his non-talkative but deep thinking Cantonese parent. At all events, Choo attained to

* Plook-pee is the poll tax exacted of Chinamen who emigrate to Siam and do not enter government service. It costs four ticals and a quarter with a tax seal fastened about the wrist, or six ticals and a half (about \$3.90) for a certificate instead of the wrist badge. As you may imagine Lee had paid the extra ticals in preference to wearing the visible sign of emigration.



Choo let them bathe and wallow in the river to their hearts content.



Driving the herd in from the river toward the gate of the kraal.

such efficiency that his father sent him frequently up the river on the more important mission of trading for rattan and bamboo. And it was on one of these trips back from the river that Choo crossed the trail of the elephant catchers, and fell under the influence that was to govern, not to say guide, his life's star thereafter and forever more. From that day, it seemed to Choo that boats were the most uninteresting things in all the world, and trading the least ambitious of all professions. He felt the spell of the elephant catchers, the silent mystery of the jungle, the excitement of the chase; and then and there he determined that an elephant catcher he would be. Choo was naturally of an adventuresome temperament, which is decidedly unusual in one of his race. But Choo was an unusual type, as I have already indicated. The humdrum life of the fruit and vegetable boats, of haggling over trades in rattan, and of, between times, pulling a heavy oar, had become iron in his soul long before he found the real trail in the jungle. Deep in his heart had been the realization that life for him lacked the spark which makes it worth while; yet until that eventful day far in the forest, he knew as little of what he really wanted as did his father. On the day he found the elephant encampment, however, Choo found his spark and his vocation.

Now filial duty rules strong in the Asiatic son, and Choo had no thought of deserting his father; but by Oriental cunning he brought it about that the rattan business, necessitating up-country trips, became his chief concern in the firm of Lee Boon Jew & Son, while the vegetable and fruit end of the firm's interest fell to the duty of subordinates. Thus it was that Choo took up the double life of elephant catching and the more prosaic, if profitable, occupation of trading rattan. It must be recorded that he neglected neither and prospered in each; to such a degree, in fact, did the rattan and bamboo interests develop that Lee, the father, found his position in Bangkok raised from a small trader to one whose shipments were solicited by the local steamship company.

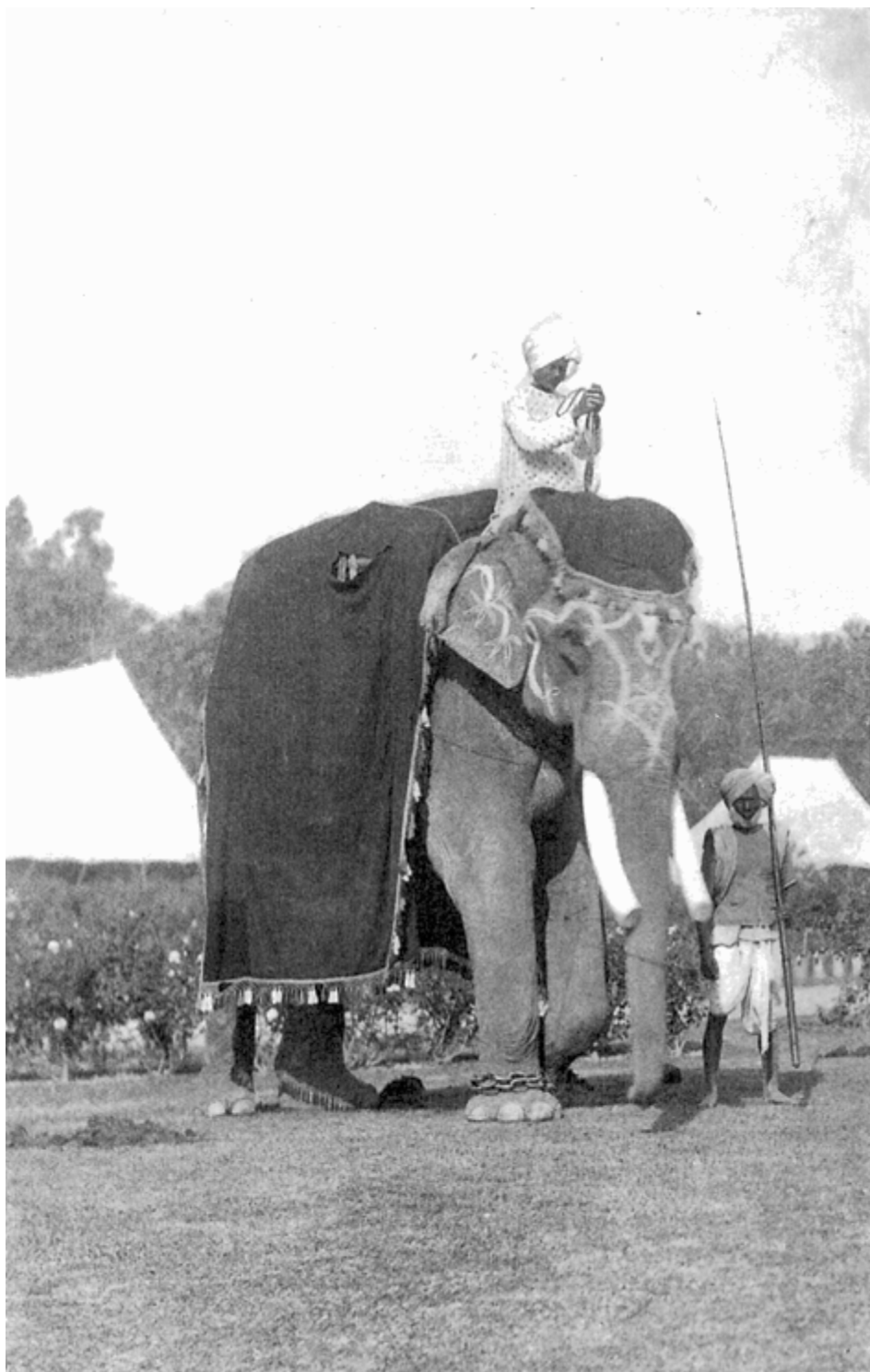
Meantime the son rose from one of the half hundred beaters employed in elephant catching to mahout, for which he seemed to have marked aptitude, showing immediate and sympathetic understanding of ele-

phants, together with a comprehension of management which convinced the head man, who had served the king for twenty years, that in Choo he had found a mahout of exceptional promise.

It came to pass one day that Chow Chorn Dumarong, who was a cousin of one of the children of one of the forty-seven wives of the king, and something or other in the War Department, chanced to be at the encampment of elephant catchers and a witness of Choo's really remarkable handling of a tame tusker that was just ending a period of "must,"* during which it had been particularly difficult of control. Choo's work astride the neck of the unruly bull, which he had finally subdued, had been so courageous and so intelligent, and had so much impressed the king's cousin—by marriage—that he forthwith commanded Choo to be regularly engaged in Government service. So it came about that Choo did more elephant than rattan hunting, increasing his prowess and reputation in one as his activity in the other decreased, much to the mental anguish of his father, Lee Boon Jew, who, although waxing wealthy between his own post in the Bird Nest Department and the silent sympathy of his wise and understanding friend Ho Pee Peck, the Onion Farmer, was aggrieved to the depths of his frugal Chinese soul by the unexplained falling off in the rattan and bamboo branch of his up-river business.

But one day, after two years more of mental perturbation, and gradually diminishing rattan profits, the father's heart thrilled under the word brought him at Bangkok, that Choo had been summoned into the presence of Krom Mun Monrtee Deeng—another one of the king's multitude of cousins, as well as a high man in the Interior Department—and regularly enrolled as one of the king's mahouts who drive in the periodical elephant catch or parade on festive occasions, or take charge when one of the several dozen of the king's children goes forth on an official airing. And so ended the double life of Choo Poh Lek; for henceforth, of course, there was no further pretense of his attending to the rattan business. Choo's soul was freed from trade bondage. Incidentally I should

*"Must" is the temporary madness which now and then, though not invariably, overtakes the male elephant when kept apart from his mates.



A rogue elephant of India which ran amok and had to be shot four times before subdued; the "express" bullets remained in its body, with no apparent inconvenience to their bearer, when this photograph was taken.



Enjoying themselves.



Sometimes an elephant makes a short rush from the herd to reach a human tormenter.



Drawn up in review at a native

like to add, however, because I became much interested in Lee, quite a character in his way, that the reflected honor attaching to the old man through the appointment of his son to the royal household of elephant drivers, and the employment of a capable man to look after the upcountry rattan interests, which really had been lately neglected by Choo, combined to place the name of Lee Boon Jew & Son among the foremost traders of the city.

I knew Lee weeks before I knew Choo; and the first time I saw the latter was in

the royal stables within the king's enclosure where I was giving rather disrespectful scrutiny to the sacred white elephants, which, notwithstanding surroundings and attendants, impressed me only because of seeming insignificance in their washed out hide and pale blue eyes. I immediately lost interest in the elephants on discovering Choo. Even had his obviously at home air failed to attract my wandering gaze, his dress would have arrested my eye, for it was the most resplendent thing in the way of native



Pad elephants of the Maharajah of Durbungah (India)



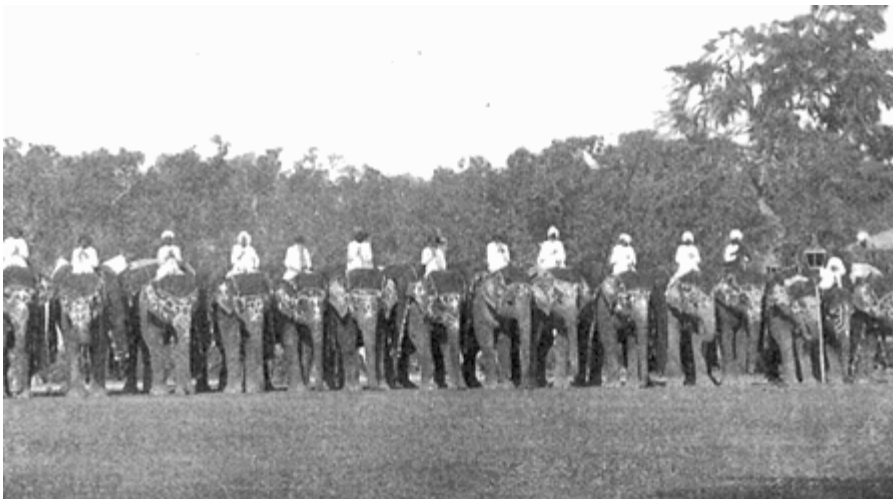
celebration in the Malay Peninsula

costume I had seen outside the royal family. Not that it was so rich or remarkable in itself, but because the average Siamese is poor and dirty and inconspicuously, not to say somberly, clad, whereas Choo was clean and brilliant and well fed. He wore a red and blue check silk panung,* a yellow silk jacket fastened to the chin, with buttons made from silver half ticals; and was bare of head, legs from knee down, and feet.

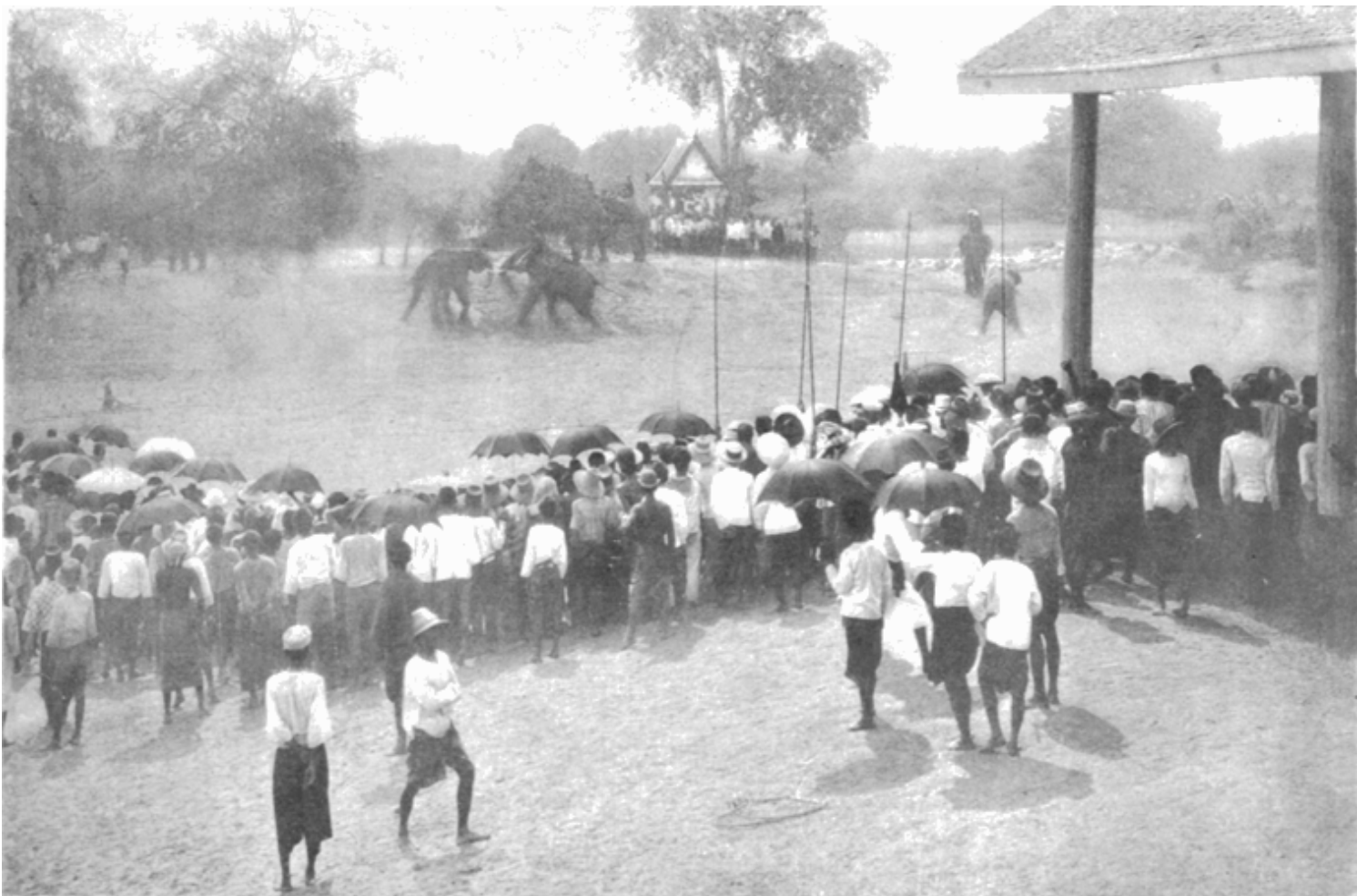
He was an important looking personage; nothing like him in fact had I met in the

royal enclosure, where I had gone seeking the unusual. But my attempt to engage him in conversation was a failure, for he spoke no English.

The second time I saw the king's mahout was a few days later, in Lee's shop on the river, where I was making purchases for my hunting outfit which I was then getting together. Lee knew English fairly well and I often chatted with him, though he had never spoken to me of his distinguished son, so that when I saw Choo walk into the shop and make



decorated for a native festival.



One large female broke from the herd and created considerable commotion before brought to a proper understanding of the situation by one of the trained tuskers.



Noosing the elephants in the kraal.

himself very much at home, I naturally asked about him; then Lee opened his heart, for he was very proud of the boy, and told me the whole story as I have told you.

Choo at once became a very interesting personality to me; on his own account for the unusual type of Asiatic he represented, and on my account because, having seen something of elephant catching in India, I wanted also to see the work of rounding up the elephants in the jungle preparatory to their being driven into the kraal at Ayuthia, the old Siamese capital, for what is called a "royal hunt," but what is really a method of adding laborers to the royal stables.

Lee comfortingly assured me he thought it could be arranged that I make a trip with Choo to the elephant encampment; and sure enough it came about in due course that as his Majesty, Phrâbât Somdet Phra Paramendr Mahâ Chulalongkorn Klou, otherwise and more briefly known as Chulalongkorn I, had commanded a royal hunt, Choo and I in season set out on our way up the river in a canoe, carrying no provisions, for we were to stop the nights *en route* with friends of the firm of Lee Boon Jew & Son.

Choo's journey to the jungle resembled the triumphant march of a popular toreador. 'Twas fortunate we had given ourselves ample time, for we tarried often and long; not that I objected, because I am always on the lookout for human documents, and this trip was full of them, many of them not altogether agreeable, but interesting; for these were the real people of Siam that I was seeing. Now, the real people of Siam are not always pleasant to live with; too many of them are poor, and dirty, notwithstanding the river flowing past the door; though, speaking of dirty things, it would be difficult to find water farther from its pure state than in these rivers which serve to sewer and to irrigate Siam. Also the houses as often as not are in wretched condition, for it seems to be traditional with the Siamese not to repair them, but when

*The panning is a strip of cloth or silk three yards long and a yard broad. It is put on by a turn about the waist, the end being then carried between the legs and up through the waist and down through the legs again before fastened finally to the waist, to thus make a pair of loose, baggy knee breeches that, however, open up the back of the leg as the wearer walks. Fashioned in this way, the panung is worn by both men and women.

they have tumbled about their ears, to vacate and build another; not a particularly expensive plan, since the house consists of loosely put together bamboo raised on stilts six to eight feet; and bamboo grows at everyone's back door in Siam.

Siamese food principally consists of dried, frequently rotted fish, and rice, done into curries which comprise a little of about every kind of condiment, and especially a very popular sauce called namphrik, a chutney-like and thoroughly mixed thing made of red pepper, shrimp, garlic, onions, citron, ginger, and tamarind seeds. The only reason for the fish being putrid is because the natives like it so, for fish are plentiful in the rivers and fishermen numerous, though their ways of catching are rather amusing and antique. One favorite method, borrowed from the Chinese, is beating the waters with long bamboo sticks to frighten the fish into an eight or ten foot squarish net which is lowered into the river from a framework on the bank by a system of wheels and ropes and pulleys, and hoisted up again when the catch is complete. I must confess that when the fish in the curry chanced to be dried instead of decayed, I found the concoction decidedly toothsome. In fact a really good curry is in a class apart, and one must go to India or the Far East to get it at its best. Sometimes the natives eat pork and oftentimes chicken, but for the most part, rice and the fish curry constitute their chief diet, supplemented by the fruit of the country, of which there are many kinds—mangosteen, mango, pineapple, banana, orange, bread fruit, and that most healthful and serving of all Siamese fruits, the papaya, which grows back from the water and is a greenish oval melon that suggests cantalope when opened.

We did not get really outside of Bangkok the first day of our up-river journey, as we spent the night at the home of one of Choo's admiring friends, in the center of a little floating community, where a "poey" was given in honor of The King's Mahout. Now a poey may take several different directions of hilarity, but is always an excuse for eating and gambling. The poey in honor of Choo appeared scheduled to include about everything on the entertainment catalogue. First was a feast which overflowed from the house of Choo's friend into adjoining ones, attended by two dozen men and women who



The tame tusker sometimes plays the role of bouncer.

sat in groups on the floors eating a loud smelling fish sauce with gusto—and with their fingers; neither wine nor spirits were in evidence—the Siamese as a rule sticking to water. Then came adjournment to the river bank, where on a raised platform, roofed, but open on its four sides, three girls danced and posed after the gracefully deliberate Siamese fashion, accompanied by the melodious, always quick time, though

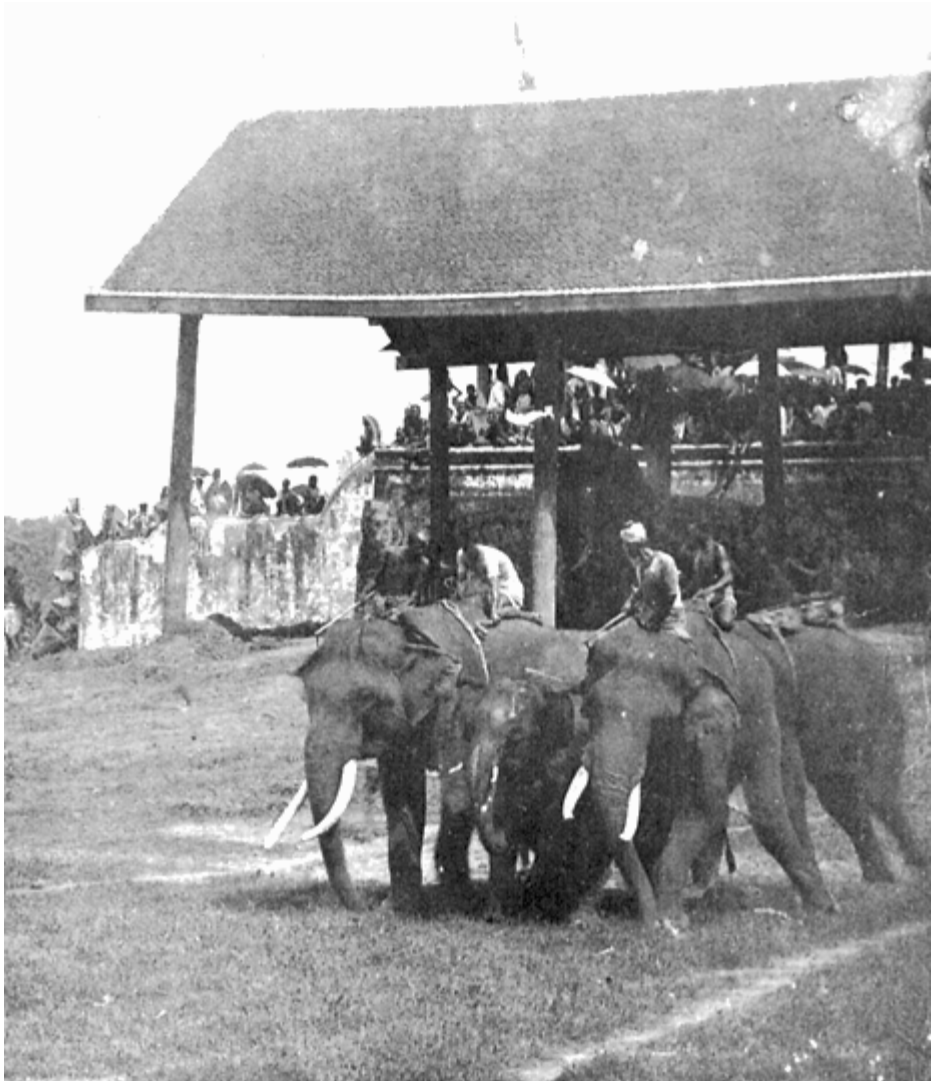
dirge-like music of a small native orchestra. Nearby, and attracting at least an equal number of spectators was another platform level with the ground, where gambling proceeded industriously.

Siamese silver money seems to have been fashioned to meet the native passion for gambling. It ranges in value (gold) from six to seven cents up to sixty cents, and in shape, beginning at the sixty cent piece

which is called a tical, from about the size of a small marble with its four sides flattened, down to the size of a French pea. There is, as well, much copper money, also money made of glass and china, ranging to fractions of a cent. The favorite game is a species of roulette and the money is admirably suited to the rake of the croupier. Comparatively recently the government has been issuing flat ten cent silver pieces, and the extent of gambling is suggested by the great number of ten cent pieces coming to one in the ordinary course of the day's business, that have been cupped to facilitate their handling on the gaming board.

After four days on the Meinam we turned off on a smaller river somewhere below Ayuthia, and took a northeasterly direction through heavy foliage and more monkeys than I had ever seen. The first night we stopped at a house dilapidated rather more than ordinarily, where inside a lone old woman sat weaving a varied colored cloth, while outside on the veranda-like addition, which is practically half of every up-country Siamese abode, were a girl and a boy making water buckets and ornaments of bamboo.

I often wondered what these Far Eastern people would do without bamboo. It is



Thus handcuffed the captive is led away to the royal stables—and toil.

everything in life to them. Bamboo grows in groves ranging from twenty to forty feet in height, though I have seen some higher, and varies in diameter according to the height from two to fifteen or sixteen inches. The tender shoots of the young bamboo are good eating, while the tree in its different sizes and conditions of growth provides a valuable article of export, the timber for house making, the fiber for mats, and baskets, and, in hollowed sections, is used for buckets, water pipes, and such things.

Another day's travel on the smaller river brought us to the encampment of the elephant catchers. Here I found about one hundred men, bared to the waist, and a score of tuskers in service, the men divided among a small colony of elevated bamboo houses, and the scattered elephants at graze in the surrounding jungle, wearing rattan hobbles around their feet, and a bell of hollow bamboo about their necks. This was what might be called the home camp, and preparations had been making in leisurely and truly Oriental fashion for the start toward the interior, but on the evening of our arrival all were stirred to a moderate state of excitement by a native bringing in the report, which he had got third hand, of a large white elephant seen in the jungle.

The day was in Siam when the lucky man who discovered a white elephant was raised to the rank of nobility, and in case of capture, very likely was given one of the king's gross of daughters in marriage. In the old days the catching of such an elephant was a signal for general holiday-making and feasting; nobles were sent to the jungle to guard it, and ropes of silk were considered the only suitable tether for an animal entitled to such deferential treatment.

When My Lord the Elephant had rested at the end of his silken tether sufficiently to have become reconciled to his encompassed condition and respectful man, he was taken in much glory to, Bangkok, where, after being paraded and saluted, he was lodged in a specially prepared palace; he was sung to and danced before, given exalted titles, shaded by golden umbrellas and decorated with trappings of great value. In fact the white elephant was once made a great deal of, but never really worshiped, as some writers have declared. It is still very highly prized by

the king because of its rarity, and though capture is unusual enough to create excitement, yet popular rejoicing and honors for the catcher do not nowadays attend the event.

But the white elephant continue to stand unemployed in the royal stables at Bangkok, where western ideas are becoming evident in electric lighting and trolley cars. There were four in the royal stables at the time of my visit, leading lives of luxurious ease. The real local consequence of the white elephant rests in it being to Siam what the eagle is to America, the lion is to England—the national emblem. On a scarlet background it forms the Siamese imperial flag, and gives name to one of the highest orders of merit in the gift of the king.

So while the little colony of catchers in the jungle lost no sleep and missed no fish curry on account of the reported white elephant, which, let me say here, did not materialize, yet the movement toward the interior began on the day after our arrival. We moved slowly—very slowly, for the elephant normally does not travel over about four miles an hour—through heavy, rather open forest, and stretches of thinnish woodland, where the jungle undergrowth grew so dense even the elephants avoided it. Quite the most interesting jungle thing I saw on these several days' of inland travel was the Poh tree, sacred to the Siamese because, it is said, under its shade Buddha had his last earthly sleep.

At night we camped in groups; the mahouts in two, the beaters or scouts, who walked, in a dozen others. The whole formed a large circle, the inner part of which was covered with little bamboo platforms raised four or five feet above the ground for sleeping, while on an outer yet larger circle flamed the fires of each group, first for cooking, later as a danger signal to prowling beasts, and an inadequate protector against mosquitoes, of which there were myriads. Choo and I made a group of our own, and although the mahout did not exactly fill the rôle of servant to me, he did my cooking, and kept the fire burning. Outside the circle of fire in the nearby jungle grazed the hobbled elephants.

The King's Mahout had offered me a seat behind where he rode on the elephant's neck, with his knees just back of

its ears, but I preferred to walk, and was well repaid by the little side excursions I was thus able to make, and the various flying insects and birds, and many closer inspections afforded of small red deer. For a week we continued our northeasterly travel by day and our mosquito lighting by night, slowly drawing closer to the section where the scouts reported wild elephants in several herds; for always as we moved in the day the scouts kept well ahead, prospecting. Finally one night Choo made me understand that our outposts, so to say, were in touch with the enemy.

And now began the, to me, only interesting work of reconnoitering the elephants; of obtaining positive knowledge as to the number of herds, the location of each herd with relation to the surrounding country and to the other herds, the number of elephants in each—their size, and their apparent temper collectively and individually. Elephant catching in Siam differs quite materially in procedure and in difficulties from catching elephants in India, where also its economical value is appreciated. The Indian Government maintains an official department, with men well paid to study the ways of the elephant and the best method of catching and subsequently training them which means training schools scattered over the country. In India no systematic attempt is made to consolidate two or more wild herds, but when the scouts have discovered one it is stealthily surrounded, and held together by a ring of men, two about every forty feet, who keep the elephants intact, as well as in control, by days of exploding guns, and nights of crashing gongs and blazing fires. Meanwhile a log keddah (corral) is building close at hand with all the speed possible to be got out of several hundred natives by a terribly earnest white headman who sleeps neither day nor night. In fact no one sleeps much in the few anxious days between surrounding the herd and constructing the corral. From two to four days are required to build the keddah, which when completed is an eight to ten foot high stockade formed of good-sized logs, one end planted firmly in the ground, and the whole securely bound together by rattan, thus enclosing about an acre of partially cleared jungle, with big trees left standing. Into this keddah,

through a funnel-shaped runway reaching to the human circle, the frightened, scrambling, grunting herd is urged by the beaters on tame elephants; once within, the wild elephants are noosed one by one by the legs and tied to trees by the catchers mounted on the tame elephants. All the while the human circle is in evidence around the outside of the keddah to help on the deception, played upon the huge beasts, that they cannot escape.

The native way of catching elephants both in India and in the Far East, is usually by the simple means of digging pitfalls along their routes to the rivers; for the elephant is a thirsty beast and when in herds makes beaten paths to water, always returning by the same way. Thus easily they fall into the waylaying pits, which are about eight feet wide on the top, six feet wide at the bottom and eight feet deep.

In Siam, catching elephants is a different and an easier game for several reasons; because (1) the region over which they roam is much more confined than in India, and (2) as the so-called hunt is a periodical event of many years standing, large numbers of jungle elephants have been rounded up and corralled so comparatively often as to have become semi-tame. Of course there are many in every drive that have not been corralled, and some that do not take kindly to the king's utilitarian and amusement making scheme. Aside from the white elephant, which is an albino, a freak, there are two varieties in Siam: a smallish kind with tusks, quite easily broken to work if not too old; and a larger, stronger, tuskless species that is not so easily handled, is something of a fighter and avoided in the royal hunt in favor of the smaller, some of which, however, carry ivory of splendid proportion. The Siamese elephant belongs, of course, to the Asiatic species, which in size both of body and tusks, is inferior to the African. Of the Asiatic, the Siamese averages neither so large as the Indian nor so small as the Malayan; and sometimes it has very respectably sized ivory. The largest tusk ever taken from a Siamese elephant measures 9 feet, 10½ inches in length, and 8 inches in diameter at the base, and is now in the Royal Museum at Bangkok. Incidentally I wish to say that almost never are tusks of the same length, one showing

usually more wear from root digging or tree stripping than the other.

So soon as the scouts brought back word of our being in touch with the herds, camp was pitched and the tame elephants hobbled; and then the entire force, spread out so that a full one hundred yards separated one man from another, made a painstaking and wide survey of the country within a five-mile radius. The camp and the scouts were kept some distance from where the elephants had been located, and withdrew from their immediate neighborhood so fast as others were discovered, because the elephant, being mostly nocturnal and hence with its senses of smell and touch very acutely developed to enable it to distinguish the various kinds of trees and shrubs upon which it feeds, would be warned by the man scent and move off. For that reason our advance party, through all the manœuvres of locating the elephants, became a thin brown line of scouts. It was not so difficult to find the elephants, moving casually in herds of varying sizes up hill and down, for they are very noisy and destructive; the difficulty was to escape detection, which, in this preliminary survey might result in frightening them away.

Working in this way the scouts had within two days located one fairly sized herd and two smaller ones, besides some scattered, making altogether about two hundred and forty. And this successful and rather speedy result was not to be credited entirely to their efforts on the present hunt; a large share being due the system in vogue. These men are more or less in touch with the elephants most of the time; in fact, in a measure they are to the elephant range what the cowboys are to the cattle range. In a large way the elephants are practically always under their eyes—not immediately of course, but they know where to find them and the direction of their migrations. Yet some times weeks and months are spent by these elephant catchers in rounding up and heading straying herds preparatory to starting the final gathering for the drive towards Ayuthia.

With the three herds located, perhaps five miles separating the one on the extreme north from the stragglers at the extreme south, the plan of consolidation was begun. For this purpose the thin

brown line stretched its two halves, one across the north and the other to the south of the herds, while the tame tuskers and their mahouts covered the east approach. As the big herd was at the south, the plan was to form a juncture by driving the two smaller ones and the scattering individuals down to the larger. Beginning unobtrusively, it was three days before the individuals had joined the smaller herds, and it took two days more before all these were headed south. Short as was the distance, it required six days longer to consolidate those herds; patient days and anxious nights, for the danger in elephant catching is the beast's nervous, fearful temperament which subjects him to ungovernable fits of panic. Romantic writers to the contrary notwithstanding, the elephant is a most undependable beast. Hence everything is done quietly, with no sudden movements to startle the elephants, or any unnecessary directness of approach. The entire movement in gathering scattered herds is furtive as much as the circumstances will allow. Once the elephants have been got together into one herd, the thin brown line of scouts becomes a circle with a human post and a lurid brush fire alternating every ten yards around its length; but no noise is made except in cases where elephants move too closely to the limits of the enclosure. Elephants have broken through and escaped, but rarely.

Choo's fitness for the post of head mahout was evident from the day of leaving the home camp back on the little river; but only when the drive of the consolidated herd toward Auythia began, did his consummate skill manifest itself. His handling not only of his own elephant, but his executive ability in placing the other elephants, and the beaters, made perfectly easy of comprehension why he had advanced so rapidly among his fellows. Although he was kind to his elephants, Choo never showed them the slightest affection; holding them under the strictest discipline and exacting instant obedience under penalty of severe punishment. A trainer of reputation with whom in my boyhood days I was on terms of daily intercourse, once told me that there are two things you must never do with an elephant if you wish to control him: First, never disappoint him, and second, never show

him any affection, as the animal's own regard for you will be sure to diminish in proportion as you are demonstrative. Certainly Choo achieved brilliant success with just such methods. Often, however, he talked to his elephant, sometimes encouragingly, sometimes sharply, as the occasion warranted, but never affectionately. His usual tone was a complaining one, and though I could not understand what he said, I have heard him for several minutes at a time in an uninterrupted high-pitched oratorical effort, which suggested a rather reading the riot act to a sluggard son. Perhaps it was my imagination—and at all events I don't offer it as a contribution to the new school of animal story-tellers—but it always seemed to me that Choo's mount showed unmistakable contrition in the, as it appeared to me, absurdly abashed expression which came into his face, and the droopiness of the pendant trunk. Often I went into roars of laughter at sight of Choo leaning over the elephant's ear solemnly lecturing, while the beast blinked its uninviting little pig eyes. At such times The King's Mahout included me in the tale of woe he confided to his elephant's great flopping ear. Always Choo wore an amulet of jade and now that he had doffed his yellow silk jacket and, like the others, wore a cotton panung, and, more often than not, bare upper body, I noticed that he also wore around his neck a tiny human image of a kind I had seen Buddhist priests making of tree roots and selling to ease native superstition.

Choo's plan of driving the herd was masterful; there was no confusion, not any sign to indicate the task a difficult one. Perhaps a quarter mile area was occupied by the gathered elephants when the final drive began, and it was not possible from one side of the herd to see the other in the jungle. Choo placed four of his largest elephants, two at each opening, as extreme western outposts of the driving line, and somewhat closer to the herd. The remaining elephants were divided among the north and south sides and the rear, with more of them at the sides than in the rear, where on the contrary were the most beaters. So far as I could see, the only apparent anxious moment was in getting the herd started, and that was finally accomplished by half a dozen tame

elephants taking positions at the head of the lot. In fact, Choo kept several of the tame huskers at the head of the herd, throughout the drive to the river. Sometimes the elephants would move right along as though really traveling somewhere; again they fed along leisurely, scattered over the considerable enclosure inside the driving lines. Sometimes several would come against one side of the driving line and be startled into sudden retreat, or stand in questioning attitude before backing into the main body. But always the herd moved on, day and night, though sometimes not over five miles would be covered in twelve hours. It was a leisurely saunter, but never a moment did Choo relax his vigilance.

There was not the amount of trumpeting some of us have been led to believe. Once in a while the shrill trunk call of fear would be heard, but more often the low mouth note, a sort of grunting or questioning sound, and not at all on the drive toward the river was heard the throat roar of rage. It was, in fact, because of Choo's generalship and individual skill, a very well behaved herd of elephants that pursued its snail-like course river-wards without accident.

On the tenth day Choo brought the herd to the jungle at the river's edge just in front of Ayuthia, and early the following morning four Siamese imperial flags floated above the kraal as signal for him to begin the final drive into the enclosure. Instantly the camp was in a buzz of serious-faced preparation for the final, and in some respects the most difficult, stage of the elephant catching; weeks of patient toil and a successful drive might be lost by a mishap in getting the herd across the river and remaining couple of miles. The King's Mahout prepared for the test with the apparent confidence and thoroughness that had stamped all his work on the drive. First he put two men on each of his score of tame elephants, the second carrying a bamboo pole; then he sent three of the tuskers thus equipped into the side of the herd nearest the river. These made their way slowly, never hurriedly, yet always unswervingly among the wild ones, cutting out a group of eight which they headed riverwards. Then two other tuskers entered the herd and began similar tactics; and simultaneously

the tuskers guarding the outer circle, and the beaters crowded forward. Sometimes one of the wild ones, being moved outside of the herd in the lead, would escape and return. Then shone out in bold relief Choo's unflinching grasp of his business. There would be no chasing of that escaped elephant, no hustling movement by anyone to suggest that the unusual had occurred; but three other mounted tuskers would work into and through the herd in apparent aimlessness, yet always toward the truant. The escaped one might shift about among its fellows, might dodge, but sooner or later it found itself between two of the tuskers, with the third at its stern; and eventually it was back whence it had broken away, all without fuss or excitement by either the tuskers or the mahouts on their backs. Sometimes an hour would be consumed returning such a one; but the return was certain.

Choo knew, with the river once in sight, at least half his troubles would be over, for elephants take to water like ducks; so he maintained the arrangement of beaters and the several tuskers in the lead, the lot traveling at not more than a mile an hour, until the bank was reached, where the tuskers slipped to one side and the entire herd was soon in the river, bathing and blowing water through their trunks, to indicate in elephantine way their joy of living. With spectators on the banks and afloat in numberless small craft, the drive out of the river into the wings running down to the kraal entrance is always a critical period, so Choo permitted the herd to wallow and squirt water over themselves to their heart's content; for nearly an hour in fact. Then he placed fully half his tuskers at the head of the herd and with the remainder covering its rear, began the move toward the kraal, less than a quarter mile distant. Happily for Choo the elephants had been made content and moved forward, following the tuskers unhesitatingly out onto the bank, despite the fact that all Ayuthia and many besides were holiday making within a few hundred yards. As the herd swung along ponderously into the funnel-shaped enclosure, which is made of massive twelve foot high posts firmly planted every two feet and leads directly to the gate of the kraal, Choo withdrew from the lead to the

rear all save two of the tame elephants. Still the herd moved along peacefully until a big female, with its little calf walking almost concealed under the mother's stomach, endeavored to break back from the side, and made quite a commotion when checked as she reached the rear guard. Although no general panic resulted, the row appeared to get on the nerves of the elephants, whose questioning, expectant expression of countenance suggested painful timorousness. As the herd neared the kraal, getting more compact all the time in the narrowing runway, the elephants appeared to sense a trap, crowding together and breaking into groups against the heavy posts, so that Choo had to bring up several of his tuskers whose mahouts prodded the obstreperous into harmony. It was pretty much of a rough-and-tumble scramble at the kraal gate, large enough to admit only one at a time. Perhaps a third of the herd followed the leading tame tuskers into the kraal, but the remainder got jammed, and the ensuing scene of confusion and wild endeavor to get somewhere, tested the rear guard to its limits and must have given The King's Mahout at least a few uncomfortable moments. At length, however, the kraal gate closed on the last elephant, and Choo had brought his part of the royal hunt to a successful conclusion.

The Ayuthia elephant kraal was built over one hundred years ago, not long after the seat of the Siamese Government had been moved from this ancient capital to Bangkok. It is an enclosure about two hundred feet square, surrounded by a brick wall averaging perhaps fourteen to fifteen feet in thickness, with a height of nine feet. On each side is a parapet forming an excellent promenade under the shade of some large trees.

About twenty feet inside the brick wall is a smaller enclosure made of huge teak logs, planted firmly, so as to leave about space enough between each two for a man to squeeze through, and standing above the ground full twelve feet. In the center of the kraal is a little house strongly surrounded by logs, which sometimes the superintendent in charge uses to direct the selection of elephants to be caught, and sometimes becomes a house of refuge; and always it serves to break

up the herd rounded about it. Three sides of this great square are reached by steps and open to the public. Along one side of the wall and over the center of it is a covered platform which holds the royal box, and more democratic accommodations for natives of nobility and foreigners. There are two entrances to the enclosure, both guarded by very strong heavy timber gates hung on pins from crossbeams above, which, closed, reach below the ground level, where they fit into a groove. Opened, they make an inverted V, just large enough to permit the passage of one elephant at a time.

The attitude of a herd when first it realizes that it has been trapped and cannot escape, varies according to the temperaments of its members, and is enlightening, not to say enlivening, at times, to the onlooker. For the herd which without serious opposition has permitted itself to be taken from its jungle and driven, uttering scarcely an objection through days and nights, when once in the kraal, throws off its good manners and becomes rampant. Some fight the posts, some fight one another; in groups they surge against the stout sides of the enclosure, grunting prodigiously, and wherever a venturesome spectator shows a head between the posts, it is charged. Not all the herd are so violent. Some show their perturbation by thrusting their trunks down into their stomach reservoir and drawing forth water which they squirt over their backs; others express contempt for things generally, by making little dust piles which they blow over everything in sight, including their own legs; some utter the mouthing low note; some rap the ground with their trunks, which let out several peculiar rattling crackling high notes. The calves squeak through their little trunks shrilly and frequently.

The programme extends over three days; on the first, after the herd is corralled, the head mogul of the royal stables points out the young elephants to be caught; on the second the selected captives are noosed, and on the third day the remaining elephants are driven out and across the river and into the jungle to wander at will, unguarded until such time as His Majesty issues commands for another royal hunt.

The most interesting feature of the

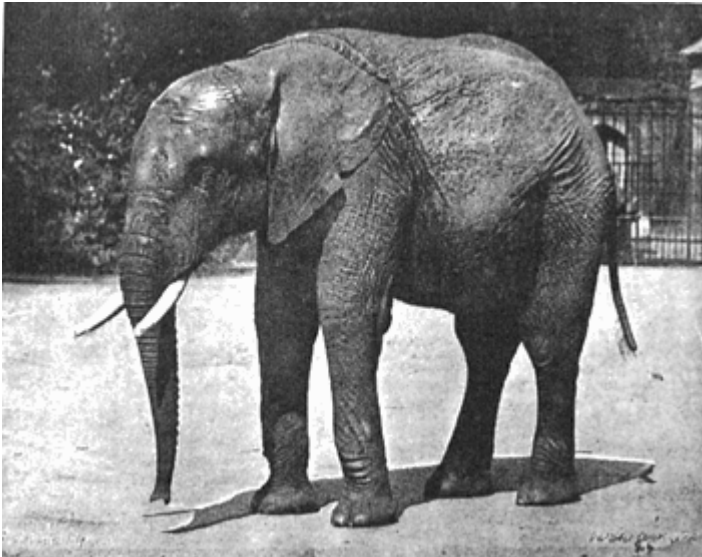
performance in the kraal is the work of the trained elephants. You would never think from the peaceful, open countenance of the trained tusker, that he is in league with the men on his back. He is the most casual thing you can imagine, sidling up to the victim in manner unpremeditated and entirely friendly. It is the same unhurried, unfailing work he did in the jungle under the eye of Choo, who is now no doubt viewing proceedings critically from the covered platform. Sometimes a cantankerous elephant is looking for a fight; and then the tusker is a business-like and effective bouncer, and such "rough house" as results on this occasion you have not elsewhere seen. The tusker moves not swiftly but with overwhelming momentum, and not infrequently an offender is sent quite off its feet surprised and wiser, rolling in the dust.

The actual catching consists in slipping the noose, held at the end of the bamboo prod by the second mahout, over the elephant's foot, when it is at once pulled taut, and the end attached to the tame tusker's rattan girdle let go, to be subsequently, as occasion offers, carried by a dismounted mahout to the edge of the enclosure, where other attendants fasten it to the post, and take in the slack as the captive is pushed back by the tuskers. When the victim is snubbed fairly close to the post comes the putting on of the rattan collar, which is accomplished by the mahouts while two tame elephants hold the victim between them. With the collar lashed on, the captive is butted out through the gate, where he is pinned between the tuskers and fastened to them by the collars they also wear for this very purpose. Then, thus handcuffed, with noose rope trailing and a third elephant behind to keep him moving, the captive is carried off to the stables and securely tied up. And that is the last of that elephant's liberty.

Sometimes the mahout drops to the ground under cover of his tusker and slips the noose; and it is not so easy as it reads. The elephant's foot must be caught off the ground before the noose is thrown, and sluggish as he seems, the elephant kicks like chain lightning; and the kick of a mule is a love pat by comparison. It is a curious but substantiated fact that, while at times there is much fighting, with mahouts, tame tuskers and the wild ele-

phants in mixed mêlée, it is rare that a mahout, so long as he is mounted, is injured. Although the mahouts could easily be pulled off their perch, the wild elephants never make even an attempt to do so in the kraal; but the dismounted mahout needs to look out for both trunk and feet. Accidents are rare, although sometimes when the elephants are being driven out one will break away and require a great deal of prodding and rough handling before brought back into line. Sometimes in little groups of twos or threes elephants will rush at the shifting spectators who crowd near them; for the Siamese are rather fond of running up by way of a dare, to an elephant coming out of the narrow gateway, and dodging its short-lived pursuit before the mahouts head it back into the herd. This is not so dangerous a game as it seems, for the elephant is by no means the swiftest thing on earth and a man can easily dodge it if the ground is smooth and firm. Yet fatal accidents have occurred to the over-confident who did not dodge fast enough. And there have been times, too, when, enraged at their failure to catch the tormentor, the elephants have wreaked their vengeance on nearby fences or buildings or anything happening to be within reach.

The process of elephant catching in India as well as in Siam tends to rather undermine one's settled notions of elephant sagacity, and to create instead the feeling that a lot of sentimental tommy rot and misleading, ignorantly conceived animal stories, have been put forth about My Lord, the elephant. The literal truth is that the elephant, for all its reputed intelligence, is driven into places that no other wild animal could possibly be induced to enter, is, in its native jungle, held captive within a circle through which it could pass without an effort, and bullied into uncomplaining obedience by a force the smallest fraction of its own numbers. Part of this is, no doubt, due to its exceedingly suspicious nature; the other part to its lack of originality, to which latter defect, however, its notable amenability to discipline is attributable. Apropos of amenability Sanderson records mounting and taking out of the keddah, unaccompanied by a tame elephant, a female on the sixth day after her capture; and I saw on the lower coast of Siam an elephant, that had been captured in a pitfall by natives three weeks previously, rowed out on two lashed sampans to a small coasting steamer and successfully made to kneel that it might get through the port door between decks.



The African Elephant.

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