



BY J. H. PORTER, M. D.

EARLY in April, when the hot season of India had begun, our party began to move through the Bétúl jungles.

The formation of this party differed much from that commonly seen in that country. It was closed up into a compact mass and there were no stragglers; their baggage camels went with them instead of being sent ahead; and furthermore one large elephant moved in front and one in rear, each bearing white riders heavily armed. Everybody showed signs of extreme fatigue; yet all seemed on the alert—especially the two trackers keeping near to the leading tusker's shoulder.

Assuredly there was need for vigilance when a beast may have been close by, whose deeds would probably exceed belief upon the part of those experience has not taught what a man-eating tiger can do. "Bétúl" (the highlands of Central India), says Captain James Forsyth, "has always been unusually afflicted with man-eaters;" and, as a matter of fact, one such tiger had now closed every highway in that extensive tract lying between the Móran and Gangál rivers, stopped work on the Harbadá Valley Railroad, and kept all those towns which their inhabitants had not deserted, in a state of siege. Up to that time when it became necessary to hunt him down by the unrelaxing pursuit always obligatory when an animal of this kind is followed, he had killed people everywhere: laborers in their fields, travelers by by-paths and public roads, herders with cattle on distant ranges, woodcutters, watchmen at village gates, sleepers who rested in fancied security at home. A reign of terror spread abroad, and the wildest stories were afloat.

It seems incredible, but is literally

true, that this destroyer who ravages whole districts, whose tireless strength and energy rival those exhibited in the mad restlessness of a rogue elephant, should be commonly described as forced to eat men because age and infirmity prevent the brute from hunting other kinds of game. Many tigers are brought up to homicide. Many others have killed one or two human beings, but do not follow up this practice. Moreover, the murderous tiger may be of any age. He is a variation in the way of excess, the most cunning, wary, well-developed mentally, and desperately dangerous being in brute creation.

It is so rarely the case that man-eaters originate among hunting tigers, that any exceptions to this rule are scarcely worth considering; but there is a well-defined class differing greatly from the shy, morose and solitary denizens of forest lands or mountain solitudes—animals that shun man and are unfamiliar with his ways. Those former, the so-called "cattle-lifters," live principally on beef, keep near to herds on their daily journey to and from villages, generally follow when drought causes their transfer to more distant pastures, and in either case become habituated to the presence of human beings.

Moreover, all the tigers do not go away. A certain proportion of them remain, and subsist on game until their accustomed prey returns. It is from this residue that man-eaters are nearly always derived. They have already taken the first and most difficult step toward such a career in becoming familiarized with beings unlike all others, and getting rid of those impressions of strangeness and mystery in which fear is rooted. Probably no two animals begin a pursuit of mankind under precisely the same conditions; but be the initiatory circumstances what they may, when a change such as this takes place, its results are made plain by an

immense mass of scattered, though perfectly reliable, evidence. Governmental records and personal narratives leave no doubt that new adjustments have been made, additional knowledge acquired, an intellectual advance attained, which not only puts these destroyers at the head of their race, but makes a man-eating tiger's presence the most frightful imaginable.

In the last tragedy which had occurred in Bétul before our arrival a tiger dragged his prey down into a ravine, and there Mehndi Khan, the chief tracker, vainly tried to recover a trail lost among bare rocks. This accursed was laughing at our beards, he said. "Why for, unless by magic, had he disappeared? *Ya Allah!* what kind of charms were those which that thief, the priest of Chárkhera, sold me to insure success? Let us descend into the valley beyond, my lords, since now neither man nor beast may endure more. Truly a village is there, of whose inhabitants the tiger has eaten many. It was the will of God. These people are infidels, but, though liars by nature, we may get some news."

That evening a Hindu woodcutter reported having seen the fugitive, and gave his course, which bore toward a range of rocky hills where he had taken refuge before. At dawn everybody was on foot again, for there is no pause or respite for those who hunt man-eaters. The chase must be kept up unremittingly until they are run down. None expected to find any traces of our game in the valley, because tigers will never traverse the heated soil of open country unless forced to do so; it soon blisters their feet and lames them. Along the forest skirts, on its eastern side, however, his trail was picked up again; but it soon turned in, and a party like this could not march through woodlands. The direction was plain, nevertheless, and toward evening, upon rounding a projection of tree jungle extending far out into grassy undulations, the valley's head lay in front, and, near by, a camp of Banjâras—gypsies, perhaps, but certainly vagrants—then in a state of wildest commotion.

Except a few that had been tied up, all their animals had been stampeded. Terrified, vociferating women huddled among clumps of dark spearman, who seemed to anticipate an attack, while a

pack of fierce dogs ramped and raved around.

"*Ul-humd-ul-illa*, praise be to God!" ejaculated Mehndi Khan, piously. "We have found him at last." So it was. The gypsy explained that one of their herders had just been killed among his bullocks; and he was going on to tell how the beast left his prey when the clan gathered, and plunged through a screen of jamal and tamarisk, taking refuge in a fastness among the hills, but Mehndi interrupted him—

"Be not a fool, O man," he cried. "Are there outlets by which this hell-born can escape? Speak, and lie not, for we have no time to hear vain words." There was one opening, it appeared, a difficult and precipitous path. Every where else impassable cliffs shut the place in.

Without delay a strong force of Banjâras, who really are the only people in India always ready to combine against tigers, climbed up the less inaccessible outward walls, and posted themselves above this exit. A few matchlocks and plenty of stout lances, with good bows, and, more effectual still, an unlimited supply of rocks to roll down, made the path secure, and it only remained to close the entrance. That was done by our own trained men. They lined the crags forming a portal, and it was safe to say no tiger would break through there. Then silence fell, unbroken by so much as a breath of air, as the elephants moved on and were halted within.

"Look at Moolah Bek," said Major F—; "the tiger must be close by." That great tusker stood with cocked ears and slowly waving trunk; a deep tremulous murmur rolled from his mighty chest, and he beat the ground in quick nervous stamps. Dogs would have been invaluable now; but not a gypsy cur would come inside. Bold as these animals are said to be, at the first intimation of putting them in they slunk to heel or scuttled off.

This space was not much larger than a Roman amphitheater, but its area had been almost completely overgrown with scrub; and on such ground, tigers being able to move invisibly, and also knowing their enemies' positions, have every advantage. The ponderous strength of our elephants, however, easily beat down all obstacles, as they quartered

abreast; still it was hunting in darkness, until Banjára yells, scattering shots, and the crash of rocks showed that an assault on the guarded outlet had been made.

It failed, of course, for when men stand fast, a tiger, unlike the lion, will scarcely ever close with them. Hardly had the elephants come in sight before cries of defiance changed to exultant shouts, and the tiger rushed away roaring so as to shake the air. He had been wounded, as scattered blood-gouts showed; and now, hemmed in and desperate, it needed little acquaintance with his race to know that the beast would fight to the last.

In this first rush back he passed through the brake like a whirlwind; yet that was only for a moment or two. Very soon an ominous silence brooded over the scene again, ominous because experience has taught tiger-hunters that, after being hit, one of these brutes generally takes the first opportunity to attack. Under any circumstances this is a serious matter; but where there is no range and sportsmen must depend upon snap shots, the issue assumes its gravest character. The interval of suspense was not long, however, for as our elephants plowed through thick brush to the margin of a little open tract, short, muffled, rapidly uttered roars (the invariable war-cry of a tiger charging home) arose in front, and on came the man-eater wild with rage. He was very large anyway, and in the prime of life. Now his form, dilated by contracted muscles and bristling coat, swelled beyond its natural size, while attitude and expression made him the embodiment of fierce passion and destructive power.

He darted past Futteh Khan, the smaller tusker, and whirling in his course, like a swooping bird, flung himself on that elephant's flank and literally pulled him down. No wonder he sank backward when five hundred pounds sheer weight hung at the root of his tail, and those sensitive parts were torn with tooth and claw. There was a horrible scrambling amidst shrieks, roars, and clouds of dust.

Nobody could do anything except hold on for dear life, because the other elephant had a fit of hysterics such as his kind, even those most stanch, are liable to, and danced about so that his riders could not fire a shot, having all

they could do in preventing themselves from being pitched into the tiger's jaws.

This infernal fracas must naturally have soon come to an end one way or another; it, however, terminated by the tiger's letting go, and springing out of sight within cover. For some time both elephants were demented, and even when their mahouts quieted them, it was plain that neither could be depended upon. Likewise, during this tranquilizing process, which consisted of ankoos-proddings, curses, and the queerest expostulations, another uproar began at the gate. This demonstration ceased almost at once, since the position could not be forced.

Then, having repaired damages, our beat recommenced with an assurance that the death struggle could not be far off. Caution and ferocity are about equally active in a tiger's ordinary moods; but when the beast is long pressed, and especially if wounded, the former gives way, and this beast becomes reckless. Thus it happened then. A puff of wind came, bringing his hot scent to the elephants' nostrils. Futteh Khan stood fast; but it changed Hadji Bek's fear into fury. He wanted to fight, the worst thing possible except running away, as it effectually prevents a man from using his arms otherwise than to secure himself. This big tusker did in fact rush forward a few acres, and then the tiger fastened on his head. Another wild time of frantic strivings ensued; but the companion elephant's steadiness gave an opportunity to fire two shots at short range.

At that distance the heavy balls went completely through the animal. He dropped off and staggered back behind a buttress of rock.

While in such a position nothing could be done with elephants.

It would have been certain death to advance upon that place on foot; the overhanging cliffs prevented any effort being made from above, and there were no bombs to throw in. So we waited, hoping for a change; but without any result. The silence remained unbroken, darkness approached, and not a sign revealed that our grim enemy was so near. At length, some men gathered on the heights above and let one of their number down by a rope. Swinging aloft he saw the tiger stretched out in a pool of blood.



Painted for *OUTING* by James L. Weston.

"SWINGING ALOFT HE SAW THE TIGER STRETCHED OUT." (p. 446.)