



TIGER HUNTING IN INDIA.

By Dr. J. H. Porter.



THE icy wind of death blows upon him, Sahib. Oh, Prophet! on whom be blessings and peace, his spirit is even now upon his lips."

No icy wind blew.

The fitful land breeze of an Indian night swayed the tent flaps and mourned in the forest, but the death sweat had gathered on Sikunder Singh's brow, tremors shook his limbs, and his eyes were darkening. No

man could have such wounds and live.

Last evening he stood before us, looking like a lean, black wolf, and said that the tiger was found, that he had tracked him to his lair. This man's words were always true. Therefore, we counted meeting with this beast as a certainty. Sikunder Singh was a monomaniac about tigers, but others beside native shikaris are infected with the spirit of this grim sport, and drink in the excitement of its tremendous scenes.

That night we consulted. Our ma-

houts said their elephants were very fit; and each swore that his own charge among those giants whose dark forms loomed in the flare of an uncertain fire-light was staunch and true, and would stand though a tiger tore his vitals. They perjured themselves fluently, not desirous of misleading us, not expecting to be believed, merely as a matter of course—because they were Hindus.

There was no need of hurry. Where a cattle-lifter establishes himself, there he stays as long as supplies last. A true *Lodia bagh* takes toll from these natives like some powerful Dacoit chief, and seldom makes it a practice to kill his tributaries so long as no man interferes with him, or intrudes upon his presence. Then, of course, it is different.

When the village herd comes home at evening, and it is found that an ox belonging to Gampa the Shaivite has gone, that individual curses his destiny; but his neighbor Selim, who is a Sind, thinks this is what might have been expected to befall an infidel.

If his own steer goes to fill the tiger's maw he says it is the will of God! Neither do anything for themselves or each other. They cannot combine. Race, religion, caste, sever them utterly, and they have nothing in common. Those who live in the next village, set by itself amidst jungle traversed only with foot-paths, look after their own concerns and care no more about what comes upon an adjoining community than if it were situated in another sphere.

Under this state of things a tiger prospers until drought comes, and cattle go off to distant pastures. Then he either emigrates or eats human beings, for it may be said that a cattle-lifter never reverts to the state of a hunting animal. A reign of terror is established, and when things have got to that pass at which they cannot be worse, some stranger comes and kills him.

Where was our tiger about ten o'clock next morning? Laid up in a nala where karinda grew thick, and only stray sunbeams found their way. There the great fierce creature lay in his light sleep, moving a limb now and then, from time to time sighing deeply, half-opening those brilliant eyes and baring the teeth with that pleasant grin of his. It is safe to say he was doing this, seeing that it is what all this species do

when the sun is high and nothing interferes with them.

About the hour spoken of, however, dark figures glided along adjacent ridges and climbed trees. Immediately afterward our elephants moved in line up the ravine, blocking it completely. We hoped he would fight, but could not tell. Nobody can ever tell what a tiger will do until the beast is encountered. There are books in which his conduct upon all occasions is set forth authoritatively; but it will be found upon comparing the statements said to be based on observation that they do not agree; and many of their authors never saw a loose tiger or they would not have written the nonsense they have put in print.

In this instance "Stripes" bolted, and knew perfectly well where to go, only instead of going as he usually does, cautiously and quietly, stealing from place to place with a skill that, aided by his protective coloring, makes this large animal almost invisible even in the open, he set off up the gully, galloping like a horse with muffled hoofs.

To anyone who knows what an astute being a tiger is, the reason for this sudden departure seems plain. Nothing had thus far happened to enrage him, so that his judgment was unimpaired by passion. Quietly as we had come he knew how strong our force was, how weak his own line of defence. More than this, being an excellent topographer he was acquainted with a whole system of gulches and glens near by that offered a much safer retreat than the one in which, not expecting invasion, he had for the time being ensconced himself. It is true that in order to exchange positions a plain must be crossed, but it was heavily overgrown with grass through which his way could be made unseen. The distance was not great, and he felt perfectly fresh. There is no doubt that to go was good tactics.

Our lookouts marked his course and we knew the line he would take, in case he stirred at all, beforehand. Tigers move easily where elephants can scarcely follow, though their powers of getting over broken ground are far greater than is generally supposed. That in front was, however, impracticable, and in order to get out upon the plain it was necessary to go back.

It was intensely hot there. Dust and

the particles of brittle grass rose in a stifling cloud as we stood in our howdahs while the immense beasts we were mounted upon slowly rolled along. An Indian sun is deadly, and despite pith helmets wound with linen strips the scene turned dark before the eyes of some, and an overpowering sense of confusion and faintness momentarily cooled their ardor in this chase.

Fortunately shade was gained before long, and a troop of monkeys indicated the way our game had taken. These often aid a tiger hunter, and the royal robber, no doubt, entertains sentiments towards them on such occasions which are worthy of himself. They do not fall into ecstasies as at the sight of a leopard, because intelligence teaches them that, in this case, trees are safe situations; still they detest tigers, and as soon as a monkey sees one he begins to "swear." This expression is sanctioned by common use in India, and it perfectly expresses the apparent tenor of their vociferations. Each little creature capers with excitement and vents all the execrations of which it is capable. The band accompany his steps with revilings, and when he looks up it seems as if they would go out of their senses.

Our tiger got rid of his escort by crossing a treeless ridge, and in so doing he also scattered us. Gordon kept on to the chur where these lower nalas met. The Major went after him with a tracker at his elephant's head; the other two separated right and left into flanking ravines.

There is great uncertainty about a tiger's movements as soon as he is pressed. His temper is very short, and that constantly interferes with him, but in the main he thinks very much to the purpose, and is as far from going about under the unreasoning guidance of instinct as any being beneath the canopy of heaven. As Captain Bunsby remarked, "the point of these observations lies in the application of them." That is to say, be ready on the instant; expect him from front, flank or rear; look for no warning, unless given by your elephant, till his roar is in the air, and blood streams under fang and claw. Avoid hollows where undergrowth is thick, and keep clear of banks, otherwise you may suddenly find the beast raging at your side. Above all, do not force an unwilling and nervous elephant

into tree-jungle unless you want to be killed. Feel the way at every step. Sometimes, most frequently perhaps, the animal who carries you will aid a hunter's efforts, but often not at all. Act as if you were blind, and look as if your life, which may well be the case, depended upon keenness of vision. A tiger can hide anywhere. It goes without saying that one easily makes himself invisible in heavy cover, but he is able to do the same in open places where that appears to be impossible; and when he does charge in earnest, rest assured that nothing else in human experience is in the least like his assault.

Sikunder Singh was with Gordon. They were a little beyond the point at which the lower gulches came to an end, and while waiting there in silence, a scout suddenly signaled the tiger's presence and he showed momentarily at the jungle's edge, getting a shot intended to strike him full in the chest, but which ranged high and entered at one side. It only made him more dangerous; still our shikari rejoiced, being convinced from the way in which the brute rolled over and staggered in retreat that the ball had raked its body and inflicted a mortal wound.

Nothing of the kind. For a while partial paralysis followed the shock, but it was soon at an end, and as his trail showed, the tiger recovered and went into the mouth of a nala where he heard the Major's elephant coming up, and at once turned back and climbed down the bank of a dark, deep nulla that lay near on the left.

Gordon had the best shikar animal, old Hyder, and it was decided that he should enter there. The glen was very narrow, and the rest of us would join him farther up, where the ravine widened, beyond its sides were less precipitous.

Hyder objected strongly to this arrangement. He craned his head over the edge as far as he could get it, and then lifted up his voice in remonstrance against going into any such place. But the mahout entreated, commanded, cursed, and prodded with his ankoos, until he sank down behind and, stretching out his fore legs, descended to the bottom after the manner of a land-slide.

Then the beat recommenced, Gordon moving slowly and in zigzags from side

to side, so that he seemed certain to come upon the tiger if it had remained there. No signs of his presence disclosed themselves, nor did the trackers find any trail. When we re-united Sikunder Singh was delivering an allocution. The tiger was dead, he asserted. That defiled wretch had been done for at the first shot, and now lay in a hole somewhere.

Here an awful roar interrupted his discourse, flying figures burst out of the bushes, and every tusker trumpeted. Our quarry had broken back again, and everyone was disgusted, Sikunder Singh the infallible most of all. He swore by Hanuman and Siva and the Avatars of Vishnu that this thing had come to pass solely through the utter depravity of our trackers.

"Let me descend, Sahib," he said, getting up and preparing to go down the elephant's hind leg; "let your servant descend. Dirt have I eaten at the hands of these infidels who never had a decent female relation. Truly I will find this son of the devil myself and deliver him into your hands."

So the man got down and, turning a deaf ear to our warnings, shouldered his remarkable gun and tramped off, while the rest followed in rear.

It was not intended that he or any of the footmen should go further than was necessary to get some idea of the direction taken by our game, and as soon as this was done and it appeared to these skilled interpreters of signs that the brute had simply gone back in the nala and might be anywhere before them, they climbed trees as the jungle began to grow dense, or drew close to our rifles.

Of all things a hunter can possibly do, following up wounded tigers on foot is the most reckless and unserviceable. If there is any cover at all, his life is utterly at the beast's mercy; and in the long roll of fatal accidents which have occurred, most took place under such circumstances. During the bustle of bringing our elephants into position for beating the thicket in front, the shikari's absence was not noticed, and before this could be reached, the elephant on our left flank stood fast and cocked his ears, at the same time slowly waving his trunk to get the exact direction of that taint in the air his delicate organs had already recognized. Even as it became rigid and pointed "dead," there was a

long fierce snarl within the brush, a rustle of some heavy body, and instantly one long, quivering shriek of mortal agony pierced the air. A moment before this the glen might have been the abode of primeval silence. Now it had been turned into a pandemonium.

An immediate recognition of what had happened came upon us all. The drivers goaded their screaming elephants forward with frantic cries, their riders raged at the mahouts our natives went wild in their trees. We burst into the jungle and in a little open space saw the convulsed body of Sikunder Singh in the tiger's mouth, his thin arms tossing as the beast drew back. His victim protected him. No one front could shoot, only Gordon on our right fired at the beast's flank, and its flame had scarcely left his rifle's muzzle before the murderous brute dropped its prey and launched itself on the nearest elephant, tearing it down by the head.

Then as the infuriate animal worried and tore his struggling adversary, and those in the howdah held on for their lives, Gordon came up on Hyder and poured in both barrels. One ball broke the tiger's neck and he collapsed instantly.

No wonder the elephant was brought upon its knees. Think of nearly six hundred pounds weight of bone and muscle like this, possessed by a devil, and tearing at living flesh. It was good fortune and good management that the girths did not burst. For then there would have been worse to do that day than had already befallen.

Our unhappy huntsman was bitten through the body and his spine crushed. He never spoke consciously or coherently again. As with so many of those mortally wounded by wild beasts, a low muttering delirium set in, and it was beyond all expectation that he lived through the transit back to camp.

Poor man, in the spirit of that blind and inveterate fatalism which besets his race, he threw his life away doing what he would have been the first to denounce as an act of madness in another. In a moment of irritation at the ill-success which no one thought of charging against him, he followed a wounded tiger into cover where it could see and he could not, where he was seized without the possibility of escape, and killed as easily as if he had been an infant.