

# IN THE LANDS OF THE SUN

NOTES AND MEMORIES OF A  
TOUR IN THE EAST

BY

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WITH THIRTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS  
AND  
A PHOTOGRAVURE PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR

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## CHAPTER XIV

### SPORT IN COOCH BEHAR

A FEW days after the wedding just described I met the Maharaja of Cooch Behar for the second time at a dinner given by India's far-famed "lady shikari," Lady J., of whom it is said that she handles the fan in a drawing-room with as much skill and grace as a rifle in the jungle, and that the tigers that have fallen to her sure aim have reached double figures. And it was thanks in great measure to her friendship with the Maharaja that shortly afterwards I found myself in a noisy and shaky train on my way northward to his little principality for a few days' tiger-shooting.

The journey took sixteen hours, and during that time I had ample opportunity of becoming acquainted with Indian railway carriages, which are unusually wretched and uncomfortable. There is no corridor either from one carriage to another or between the different compartments, and where you have once taken your seat you have to sit until the train is pleased to stop. The fittings consist of nothing but two hard, though broad couches along the outer sides, and—as already

the largest, strongest, and best-trained animals are usually chosen, and preferably "tuskers." They ought to be so well trained that, even if attacked by a tiger or other big game, they will take no notice but stand as firm as a rock. It occasionally happens that at the critical moment they bolt or themselves attack the enemy, but such things are said to be very exceptional.

(2) Pad elephants, or the rest of the *pilkhana*. These, which besides the mahout only carry a broad, stuffed pad on their backs, are generally younger, and sometimes quite untrained animals, which are used as beaters in the line. On account of their lighter load they are able to move more easily and rapidly, and are therefore often used for riding when a long distance has to be covered.

The elephants are distributed in such a way that the ground where the game is expected is surrounded by the "pads," which then beat the jungle in the direction of the "howdahs," posted in a convenient open space on the edge of the ground in question.

But how is the game to be located?

Buffalo, bison and rhinoceros are usually fairly stationary, so that information about their haunts may be had from the native shikaris.

Not so with tiger or leopard, which between sunset and morning roam through the jungle in all directions, often covering a distance of 20 or

were formed into a long, straight line, in such a way that the howdahs were posted at regular intervals, with five or six pad elephants between. The word was passed: "Everything may be shot, from rhinoceros and tiger to hare and partridge." And so the long line moved off in the general direction of the camp.

I stood rifle in hand on my rolling platform and tried as well as I could to keep my balance. Soon I was in amongst the densest thickets, and then Hirām-Pershad had some hard work. It is perhaps on these occasions that the cleverness and wonderful training of the elephants is seen to the best advantage. Now it is a thick branch which stops the howdah. "Break," says the mahout, and the mighty trunk takes a half-turn round the branch, which is flung to the ground with a crash. If he should take hold of the wrong branch by mistake, he leaves go of it at once on being told by the mahout, and tries another until he finds the right one. Now it is a big tree that bars the way: Hirām-Pershad goes quietly up to it, puts his forehead to the trunk, breaking it like a match, and then bends the tree to the ground with one forefoot, to the right, left, or straight ahead, according to the order of the mahout.

Although I know that my neighbours on either side are only a few yards from me, the jungle is here so dense that I see nothing of them. And when I stand upright in the howdah, it is still about

place is taken by a round full moon, and soon we are sitting in front of the tent door with a pipe and a whisky-and-soda, enjoying the fresh coolness of the evening, and discussing the various phases of an eventful day's sport. But later in the evening, when all is quiet in the camp and I walk up and down the broad street of tents alone under the flashing stars of the tropical sky, listening to the nocturnal sounds, I hear now and then a soft purring like that of a cat; this is the tiger stealing round cautiously and treacherously, stalking his prey in the dark silence of the night.

Thus one day after another went by, with varying fortunes, but all equally interesting and agreeable. Altogether we shot during this time one buffalo, three leopards, two wild pigs and four civet cats, besides a number of hares, partridges, woodcock and snipe. One of the three leopards offered a very interesting shot, as he flew like an arrow, trying to get across a few yards of open space between two points of jungle, and was brought down in doing so. This episode involuntarily carried my thoughts back to similar snap-shots at home, when puss has doubled and one stands waiting for her hasty retreat across a narrow forest path.

As will be seen, unfortunately no tiger was bagged. In this respect we really had persistent