

PICTURESQUE BURMA

PAST & PRESENT

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ago, is identical with that given of it by every traveller since: for he says, "In taste and goodness it excelleth all kinds of fruit, and yet when it is first opened it smelleth like rotten onions, but in the taste, the sweetnesse and daintinesse thereof is tryed." If one can become reconciled to the odour of rotten onions, the dorian is acknowledged to be "beyond question the finest fruit in the world." In appearance it is like a large melon covered with spikes, so that it resembles a hedgehog.

Great as are the wonders of vegetation in the forests of Burma, the animal life with which they abound is still more astonishing, for here the wild elephant of colossal size roams at will, the man-eating tiger makes its lair, the monstrous rhinoceros wallows in lonely pools in the cool of the evening, and herds of buffaloes and deer find illimitable grazing-grounds. Here monkeys in countless crowds chatter among the trees, gorgeous parrots scream, gentle turtle-doves coo, the solitary tucktoo calls, and the hungry vulture watches for its prey. Here the deadly cobra lies in wait for its victim, and the hamadryad rears its head to strike and kill, the chameleon changes the colour of its coat unobserved, and the deadly pangu spider strikes the serpent with its poison fang, and outvenoming the most venomous in hate, sucks the brains of its victim. Every spot is filled with beautiful, terrible life, and it is not surprising that to the imaginative Burman the forest glades are peopled with demons and fairies, and that even the double-headed serpent is to him an object which he believes he has seen with his own eyes.¹

The elephants which abound in the forests of Tenasserim, Pegu, and Bassein are said to be larger than they are in any part of Asia. They are held in so much veneration, that if a baby elephant is captured and brought in, it is considered honourable and an act of "merit" for the women to suckle it

¹ King Mindohn promised Colonel Phayre to send him the bones of beloos (ogres) from the forests.

inclined to agree with Major Leveson that they have a limited but well-defined language. A shrill whistling produced by blowing through the trunk denotes satisfaction; alarm or surprise is expressed by a sound like "pr-rut pr-rut" made with the mouth; if angry, a trumpeting noise is produced, which becomes a hoarse roar or a terrific scream when charging an assailant, and if dissatisfied or in distress, as when tired, hungry, separated from the herd, or overloaded, the elephant repeatedly makes a sound like "urmph, urmph."

The man-eating tiger is common in the forests of Burma, and is the terror of the inhabitants of the jungle villages, so that tiger-shooting on foot, a sport of real danger, can be enjoyed by those who like the excitement of risking their lives in this particular way. The tiger is often accompanied in his nocturnal expeditions by the wolf-like jungle dog (*Canis rutilans*), with which it shares its prey.

Ponderous rhinoceroses wander through the glades; in the daytime they seek high ground, and at night they descend where there is a pool in which they may wallow. The rhinoceros of Asia differs from that of Africa by the presence of well-defined incisors, by means of which the bark is stripped off trees and plants uprooted for food. The one-horned species or *Rhinoceros unicornis*, the unicorn of Scripture, is also found in Burma. Its horn was highly valued as a sovereign remedy against poison, and merchants used in the olden days to come to Pegu to barter with the King for this commodity, "whereof the King onely hath the traffique in his hands."

Herd of buffaloes wander at will; the male leader is a fierce and courageous fighter; not only will he charge a man, but it is said that a herd will surround and kill a tiger. In the open spaces of the forest immense herds of deer may be encountered, particularly the large-horned *Cervus frontalis*, peculiar to Burma and Manipur. The natives kill deer, not by shooting or chasing them in the ordinary way, but a party