

THE PRIVATE LIFE  
OF  
AN EASTERN KING

Together with

Elihu Jan's Story

OR

The Private Life of an Eastern Queen

BY

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## CHAPTER XI

### DUELLO—THE RHINOCEROS AND ELEPHANT

Fighting camels—The rhinoceros—His peaceful nature—His manner of fighting—The rhinoceros and the elephant—The rhinoceros and the tiger—The fighting elephants—*Malleer*—The struggle—Fall of the mahout—His death—The elephant's remorse—Another fight—Danger and escape.

I HAVE already described the ordinary fights of birds, antelopes, and tigers : I now turn to the larger and more unwieldy animals. Nothing more brutal than the contests of camels can well be conceived. They are trained to fighting with each other in Lucknow ; but nature intended them to be useful, peaceful animals, not warlike ; and when man, endeavouring to change their nature, insists upon their being warlike for his gratification, the sight is odious. It is well known that, like the lama of Peru, the camel discharges a fluid from its throat at its adversary. I have seen those trained to fight bring up one of their stomachs in the energy of their spitting ! A horrible sight ! Nor was it more pleasant to see one grasp the long lip of the other between his teeth, and drag it off in a brutal way. Such fights end only in lacerating the head and injuring the eyes, the huge bodies remaining untouched.

Naturally, the rhinoceros is also a peaceful animal. Bishop Heber says, that in Ghazi-u-deen's reign the rhinoceros was used in a carriage, and to carry a howdah. I have never seen him so employed. Although peaceful, however, he is better fitted by nature for warfare than the poor camel. His knife-like horn, his skin more impenetrable than a coat of mail, his compact body, and huge muscular limbs, all render him a fearful antagonist to the largest animals. When roused, he will soon make away, I doubt not, with a hippopotamus, and is a match for an elephant.

The extent to which these various animals were kept at Lucknow for purposes of ' sport ' may be conceived, from

the fact of the royal menagerie having contained, when I served the king of Oudh, from fifteen to twenty rhinoceroses. They were kept in the open park around Chaungunge, and were allowed to roam about, at large, within certain limits.

It was usually at this palace, Chaungunge, and sometimes at another on the banks of the river called Mobarrack Munzul,<sup>1</sup> that the fights of the larger animals took place, generally in an enclosure made for the purpose, over one side of which a balcony had been built for the king and his attendants, not unlike a portico in front of a house to receive carriages—structures far more common in Calcutta than in London. Sometimes, however, the fights took place in the open park, where galleries had been erected on substantial pillars. The two rhinoceroses, males—always more ready to engage in combat at particular seasons than at other times, just as the elephants are—were duly prepared by stimulating drugs, and let into the enclosure from opposite sides, or were driven in the park towards each other by active fellows on horseback with long spears. The first sight of the antagonist was generally enough to cause each to be ready to attack; for they know at once, by their keen sense of smell, whether a male or female is in their vicinity. Rushing against each other, with heads somewhat lowered, they met angrily in the midst, thrusting forward their armed snouts in a hog-like way.

So thick are their hides on the back and legs, that even the short knife-like horn of the snout can make no impression upon it. In the more tender skin of the belly alone, or between the legs, can injury be done. The object of each, then, in closing, is to introduce his snout between the fore-legs of his antagonist, and so rip him up; a process which the slight curve of the horn backwards renders comparatively an easy one, if the required position be attained.

But as both equally seek the same advantage, their heads and snouts in the first instance meet in the midst. They strike each other, they push, they lower their heads, they grunt valorously, displaying an amount of activity and

<sup>1</sup> *Mubarak Manzil*. See note, p. 222.

energy that one would conceive it almost impossible for them to exercise with their unwieldy forms. The snouts rattle against each other as they mutually strike; the horns may come into contact too, and the sound which is produced plainly tells that it is with no child's play that they are thus crossed. At length, in some way or other, they appear to be locked together, horn to horn, snout to snout, head to head—the heads always down defending the chest and the entrance between the fore-legs. Then commences a hard struggle—a firm continuous pushing with all their might. Each throws the whole weight of his huge form into the scale, and with that the enormous strength with which nature has endowed him. They push, and push, and push again with obstinate perseverance. The weaker must ultimately lose ground. He is driven back, at first slowly, step by step, then more rapidly, in a sort of backward trot; the stronger and sturdier pursuing his advantage with implacable ferocity. At length the weaker, finding that he can no longer make head, makes a desperate plunge backwards to release his snout and horns. It is the decisive moment of the combat. I have seen it end very variously. If in an enclosure, and the weaker has no room to withdraw himself, he is almost sure to be ripped up by the impetuous assailant, and to fall very severely wounded or dead; his adversary being driven off by hot irons thrust under him, and spears. In the open park, however, the weaker, if active, sometimes succeeded in detaching himself, and scampering off as fast as possible without receiving any severe hurt. The stronger pursued with hearty good will, and they were soon out of sight. In such cases, all would depend upon the nature of the ground, and the relative activity of the two. If the flying combatant were overtaken by his pursuer, nothing could save his life, for a gaping wound, a foot deep, would soon be made in his chest. On one occasion, however, and on only one, I saw a very different termination of the contest to that which was expected.

The weaker had been gradually retreating, at first slowly,

afterwards more rapidly. It was in the open park. At length he made a plunge backwards to release himself, and succeeded. The stronger brute, evidently somewhat pig-headed, surprised at the action, thrust his snout upwards in an astonished way; his more active enemy saw the movement at once, and, though evidently preparing to fly, checked himself, lowered his head, and had his snout introduced between his enemy's fore-legs in an instant. The stream of blood which flowed from the wounded combatant, and his quick snort of pain, proclaimed the victory of him who, up to this moment, had been losing ground, and hope perhaps. The wounded rhinoceros now turned to fly, losing blood rapidly, and his intestines partially protruding from the wound. His adversary allowed him to turn and run a few paces; and then burying his snout again between his hind legs, gored him severely. He fell in a frightfully mangled way, and the active horsemen with their long spears drove off the assailant—no easy matter. Whether the wounded rhinoceros died or not, I do not know. I probably heard at the time and have forgotten. So skilful are the native leeches, however, in attending these monsters, that I should not at all wonder if he recovered.

The contest between a rhinoceros and an elephant is not nearly so interesting as that between the rhinoceros and the tiger. In the former case it is not easy, in the first place, to make the two animals attack each other, even though the elephant be *must*,<sup>1</sup> and the rhinoceros in a similar condition. Should they take a fancy, however, to try each other's mettle, the elephant approaches as usual, with his trunk thrown up into the air and head protruded; the rhinoceros either standing upon his guard, or also advancing with lowered snout. The tusks of the elephant sometimes pass on each side of the rhinoceros harmlessly, whilst the huge head shoves the lighter animal backwards. If the elephant's tusks trip up the rhinoceros, as is sometimes the case, they are then plunged into him without mercy; but more frequently the contest ends to the disadvantage of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 79, foot-note. [W. K.]

the elephant, by the rhinoceros inserting his snout between his antagonist's fore-legs and partially ripping him up; the elephant belabouring all the time with his trunk, to a certain extent uselessly, however. Prevented by his tusks, the rhinoceros cannot get his snout far under the elephant's body, so that the wound he inflicts is not generally a very severe one.

Between the rhinoceros and the tiger, however, the contest is one of infinitely more animation and excitement. The steady impassive guard of the larger animal; the stealthy, cat-like attack of the smaller—the lowered snout of the one; the gleaming teeth of the other—the cocked horn, kept valorously in an attitude of defiant guard; the bullet head, with its gleaming eyes, together with the brawny claws—were all things to be watched and to interest. The rhinoceros, however, is secure from attack on his back, and when the tiger springs, his claws get no hold in the plate-like covering of his antagonist. Should the rhinoceros be overthrown by the tiger's weight, then the fate of the former is sealed; he is ripped and torn up and gnawed from beneath, as a tiger only can rip, and tear up, and gnaw; I have heard of such results following the tiger's assault, but have never witnessed such.

In nine cases out of ten, the rhinoceros gains the advantage; the tiger springs, and springs, and springs again, still baffled by the voluminous armour-like skin of his antagonist, until, at some moment or other, the rhinoceros seizes his opportunity, and succeeds in inflicting a severe wound with his formidable horn. The tiger then declines the combat, and easily escapes its unwieldy enemy, should the rhinoceros take it into his head to attack.

There is no other animal, perhaps, so utterly impervious to attack as the rhinoceros; there is certainly none other that takes all attacks with such perfect coolness and self-possession. Shut up in a comparatively small enclosure with a ferocious tiger, he seems to be not in the least disconcerted—not even to find his situation uncomfortable—but, with wonderful phlegmatic ease, stands prepared for all

contingencies. His coat of armour is, of course, his chief defence ; but the shape of his head contributes much to his safety. It curves inwards from the snout to the forehead ; so that the eyes are deeply sunk and securely wedged into a concave bone where they cannot be easily assailed—the short pointed horn forming an additional defence to them, and one of the most formidable weapons of offence too, possessed by any animal, when the strength of the rhinoceros is considered. There is something surprising, notwithstanding all this, in seeing this pig-like animal withstanding or conquering the largest tigers and elephants. I have never seen the rhinoceros pitted against the lion. The king of Oudh had but three or four lions, and he reserved them for very special occasions ; but a contest between the two would but be similar, I doubt not, to that between the rhinoceros and the tiger. Indeed the lion fights so exactly like the tiger, that a contest between two lions is precisely similar to that between two tigers. There was no lion in Lucknow a match for the largest tigers there ; doubtless the few found in the north-western Himalayas, and in Asia generally, are not equal to those of Africa ; but I very much doubt whether the Bengal tiger is not the more formidable animal of the two. I have never seen any lions in London or Paris equal in size to the largest tigers at Lucknow.

Of the hundred and fifty elephants possessed by the king of Oudh, there was one with one broken tusk, that had been victor in a hundred fights. His name was *Malleer* ; and he was a great favourite with the king. His tusk had been broken off bit by bit in several encounters ; the elephants rushing against each other with such force, as sometimes to snap off a portion, or the whole of a tusk. *Malleer* had lost his, as I have said, gradually. He was a formidable black fellow, very terrible when in that excited state called *must*. During the visit of the commander-in-chief it was determined that a fitting antagonist should be found for *Malleer*, and that he should once more make his appearance on the stage as a gladiator. It was fortunately the proper season. *Malleer* was *must* ; and another gigantic

elephant, also black, and of course in a similar state, was selected to be his antagonist.

When in this excited state, two male elephants have but to see each other to commence the combat forthwith; there is no incitement required. Each has its own keeper, or *mahout*<sup>1</sup> as he is called, seated on his neck—the only person who can safely approach the animal at such a season. In the mahout's hands, however, even then, the monster is generally docile as a child.

There is no preparation required for the combat but the passing of a secure string from the neck of the elephant to his tail—a string by which the mahout holds on and retains his position during the combat. It may be easily supposed that the poor man's situation is by no means a comfortable one during such a contest; but so jealous is each of the good fame of his beast, that he would rather have his own selected for such sport than be excused. It is an honour paid to him as well as to the gigantic combatant whom he guides. Should he be thrown, the elephant opposed to him would certainly destroy him if he got an opportunity. He therefore clings to the string with all the tenacity of a man grasping a plank after a shipwreck.

On the occasion on which Malleer's services were required for the amusement of the British commander-in-chief, and the king and court of Oudh, we were in one of the king's palaces, situated on the banks of the Goomty. A terrace built on the water side overlooked the river. An open park was on the opposite side of the stream; and on that bank it was resolved the contest should take place, we inspecting it from the balcony. The Goomty at this place was not wider than Fleet Street in London, and the terrace projected over the water, so that we were quite near enough to see the encounter well. The opposite bank was covered with grass; there was nothing to impede the vision for a considerable distance.

At a signal given by the king, the two elephants advanced from opposite sides, each with his mahout on his neck;

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced *ma-houth*. [W. K.]



Malleer with his one tusk looking by no means so formidable as the huge black antagonist whom he was to fight, and who was well furnished with ivory. The moment they caught sight of each other, the two elephants, as if with an instinctive perception of what was expected of them, put their trunks and tails aloft, and shuffled up to each other with considerable speed, after their unwieldy fashion, trumpeting out loudly mutual defiance. This is the ordinary attitude of attack of the elephant. He puts his trunk up perpendicularly, in order that it may be out of harm's way. His tail is similarly raised from excitement. His trumpeting consists of a series of quick blasts, between roars and grunting.

Malleer and his foe rushed at each other impetuously. The sound of their huge heads coming into violent collision might have been heard at the distance of half a mile. This may sound like an exaggeration: it is not so. When the reader only thinks of the bulk of the elephant, the great weight, the momentum acquired by the rapid motion, and then the concussion of two such bodies coming full tilt against each other, he will not be surprised at it. More than once, on such occasions, have I seen one or more tusks snapping short off, and thrown up into the air with the terrible force of the collision.

The first blow struck, both elephants now set themselves vigorously to push against each other with all their might. Mouth to mouth, tusk to tusk, both trunks still elevated in the air perpendicularly, their feet set firmly in massive solidity upon the ground, did they push and push, and shove and shove, not with one resolute, long-continued effort, but with repeated short strokes of their unwieldy forms. The heads were not separated for a moment; but the backs were curving slightly and then becoming straight again in regular succession, as each shove and push was administered. The mahouts, seated on the neck, were not idle the while. They shouted, encouraging each his own warrior, with hearty good-will, almost with frantic energy, using the iron prod, employed in driving them, freely upon

the skull. It was a spectacle to make one hold in the breath with earnest gazing—a spectacle to make the blood come fast and thumping through the veins—as the two huge combatants pushed and shoved with all their might vehemently, and as the two mahouts exerted all their powers to encourage them.

It is evident in such a contest, as generally happens with these wild animals, that the stronger combatant gains the victory. Instances *do* occur in which superior agility causes the weaker to bear off the honours of success ; but such instances are rare—in the case of two opposing elephants rarer, perhaps, than with other animals. But what is the end of this pushing ? you ask. If the stronger succeed in overthrowing his adversary, the death of the vanquished is the probable result. This sometimes occurs when great violence is used, and the weaker can hardly retreat quick enough. He loses hope and strength together, turns awkwardly to fly, is pushed as he turns, and falls. The end is then soon seen. The victor plunges his tusks without mercy into the side of his foe, as he lies helplessly on the ground, and death follows. If the weaker, by great agility, succeed in turning and running away, a chase is the result, which ends either in the escape of the fugitive, or in his being sorely belaboured by the trunk and galled by the tusks of his antagonist.

But Malleer and his foe are shoving heartily all this time, whilst I am discoursing of other things—ay, and the king of Oudh, the British commander-in-chief, and the resident, are gazing intently on them from the balcony as they *so* shove ; gazing intently, so that the balcony is absolutely without noise or sound.

At length the redoubted Malleer, one-tusked though he was, began to gain the advantage. The fore-leg of his antagonist was raised as if uncertainly, one could not tell whether to advance or retreat, as he still stoutly shoved with all his might. But it was evident very soon that it was not to advance, but to retreat, that the leg was *so* raised. It had hardly been set down again, when the other was

similarly raised and lowered. The mahout of Malleer saw the movement, and knew well what it indicated. He shouted more frantically than ever—almost demoniacally in fact—striking the skull with his iron prong in a wild excited way. But Malleer needed no encouragement. He was too old a warrior not to feel that another victory was about being added to his laurels, and his strength seemed increased by the conviction. He and his mahout together became more and more excited every instant.

At this time they were only a few yards from the bank of the Goomty, a little to the left of our balcony. The retreating elephant gave way step by step, slowly, drawing nearer to the river as he did so. At length, with a sudden leap backwards, he tore himself from his antagonist, and threw his unwieldy form down the bank into the river. His mahout clung to the rope over his back, and was soon seen safe and sound on his neck, whilst the elephant swam off to gain the opposite bank. Malleer was furious at this escape of his antagonist. His mahout wanted him to follow ; but he would not take to the water. He glared round, wild with fury, to see what he could attack. His mahout, still urging him, with no gentle strokes and with wild shouts, to pursue, at length lost his balance in his excitement, as Malleer turned savagely about, and fell to the earth ! He fell right before the infuriated beast whom he had been rendering more and more wild and ungovernable. We were not left in doubt as to his fate for a moment. We had just time to see that the man had fallen, and was lying on his back, with his limbs disordered, one leg under him and the other stretched helplessly out, whilst both arms were raised aloft, when we saw the huge foot of the elephant placed upon his chest, and heard the bones crackling, as the whole body of the man was crushed into a shapeless mass !

There was hardly time for a cry ; the swaying of his form on the elephant's neck—his fall—the sound caused by his striking the elastic turf—the foot placed upon him, and the horrid crushing which followed—all was the work of an instant or two. But this did not sate the enraged

animal. Still keeping his foot on the man's chest, he seized one arm with his trunk and tore it from the body. In another moment it was hurling high up in the air, the blood spirting from it as it whirled. It was a horrible sight. The other arm was then seized, and was similarly dealt with.

We were all horrified, of course, at the untoward result of our sport, for which nobody was to blame but the huge beast; when our alarm and horror were increased at seeing a woman rushing from the side whence Malleer had made his appearance, rushing directly towards the elephant. She had an infant in her arms, and she ran as fast as her burden would permit. The commander-in-chief stood up in the balcony, exclaiming :

' Here will be more butchery, your majesty. Can nothing be done to prevent it ? '

' It is the mahout's wife, I have no doubt,' replied the king ; ' what can be done ? '

But the resident had already given the order for the horsemen with their long spears to advance and lead off the elephant ; given the order, it is true, but the execution of those orders was not an affair of a moment. Time was lost in communicating them—the men had to mount—they must advance cautiously, five on each side. By means of their long spears, they conduct the *must* elephants about, directing the spears against the trunk, which is tender, if the animal be wayward. They are, of course, expert horsemen ; and must be prepared to gallop off at a moment's notice, should the animal slip past the spear and advance to attack.

Whilst the spearmen were thus preparing to lead off the elephant, that is, mounting, and then advancing cautiously from either side, the poor woman, reckless of consequences, was running towards the elephant.

' O Malleer, Malleer ! cruel, savage beast ! see what you have done,' she cried ; ' here finish our house at once. You have taken off the roof, now break down the walls ; you have killed my husband, whom you loved so well, now kill me and his son.'

To those unaccustomed to India, this language may appear unnatural or ridiculous. It is precisely the sense of what she said ; every word of it almost was long impressed upon my mind. The mahouts and their families live with the elephants they attend, and talk to them as to reasonable beings, in reproof, in praise, in entreaty, in anger.

We expected to see the wild animal turn from the mangled remains of the husband to tear the wife and child asunder. We were agreeably disappointed. Malleer's rage was satiated, and he now felt remorse for what he had done. You could see it in his drooping ears and downcast head. He took his foot off the shapeless carcass. The wife threw herself upon it, and the elephant stood by respecting her grief. It was a touching spectacle. The woman lamented loudly, turning now and then to the elephant to reproach him ; whilst he stood as if conscious of his fault, looking sadly at her. Once or twice the unconscious infant caught at his trunk and played with it. He had doubtless played with it often before ; for it is no uncommon thing to see the mahout's child playing between the fore-legs of the elephant—it is no uncommon thing to see the elephant waving his trunk over it, allowing it to go a little distance, and then tenderly bringing it back again, as tenderly as a mother would.

In the meantime the spearmen were now advancing. They were mounted on active horses accustomed to the work. They came up on either side ; and gently touching the proboscis of the elephant with the ends of their spears, indicated thus what they wanted. Malleer flapped back his long ears, and looked threateningly at them. He might let his mahout's wife pacify him ; he was not to be led by them ; you could see the determination in his eye. They touched him again, this time a little more sharply. He threw up his trunk, sounded out a defiant threat, and charged full upon those on his left. They were off in an instant—their horses scampering away with all speed, whilst Malleer pursued. The savage fury of the elephant was gradually returning ; and when the band which he had attacked

had leaped a wall and were off out of sight, he turned upon the other. It was now their turn to fly, which they did as nimbly as their companions, Malleer pursuing as fast as he could.

'Let the woman call him off,' shouted the king; 'he will attend to her.'

She did so; and Malleer came back, just as a spaniel would do at the call of his master.

'Let the woman mount with her child and take him away,' was the king's order. It was communicated to her. The elephant knelt at her command. She mounted. Malleer gave her, first the mutilated carcass of her husband, and then her infant son. She sat upon his neck, in her husband's place, and led him quietly away. From that day she was his keeper, his mahout. He would have no other. When most excited, when most wild, *must* or not *must*, she had but to command, and he obeyed. The touch of her hand on his trunk was enough to calm his most violent outbursts of temper. She could lead him without fear or danger to herself; and the authority which she had thus obtained, doubtless her son would possess after her.

And now that I have given so full an account of the destruction of one mahout, I will describe also the escape of another, whom we all regarded as doomed.

It was in the course of one of these fights, in a garden surrounded by a substantial iron fence, that the incident occurred. As usual, there had been prolonged pushing—a series of incessant pushes—between the two antagonists. When the weaker had given way, he turned abruptly from his foe, and ran round the enclosure, pursued by the victor. The order was given to allow the fugitive to escape. As he left the enclosure, by some accident or other, his mahout fell on the inside. The pursuing elephant did not see him for a little; but, as the monster stood near the only opening, it was impossible for the poor man to escape thereby. It was not long, however—only for a moment or two—that the man remained unobserved by the infuriated animal; and the moment he was seen a chase began. It was

impossible to succour him, for the whole affair was the work of a few seconds. At length the elephant came up with the unfortunate man. For their own mahouts the elephants may have some respect, but towards the mahouts of their antagonists they feel nothing but animosity.-

The driver of the charging elephant did what he could to turn him from the pursuit of the man ; but his efforts were absolutely without avail.

The elephant had his trunk raised ready to attack or strike, when the poor fugitive stood cowering before him in a corner of the iron railing. The elephant thrust forward his head, and pushed with all his might. His tusks projected at each side of the corner in which the man stood, and with his huge head he stood pushing and shoving, with the same short forcible strokes he would have used had he stood opposite to an opposing elephant. The man stood, however—protected by the iron railing against which the massive head of the monster shoved—stood untouched, pressing into the corner, making himself as thin as possible, with his arms stretched by his side.

To us, from a gallery above, it appeared that the poor mahout must have been crushed to death ; we could see only the massive back and voluminous haunches of the brawny monster, as he still shoved with trunk erect ; but we were mistaken. The man, finding himself unhurt in the corner, gradually slipped down into a sitting posture ; the elephant doubtless thinking (for he could not see him) that he was gradually annihilating the mahout as he felt him sink. Once seated the man made his way adroitly between the fore-legs of the huge beast, and thus escaped into the arena. To our surprise we saw him issuing from the feet of the monster, in a stealthy sort of way, not a bone injured, not even a scratch upon his skin. In another moment the man was off, having escaped through the opening of the enclosure; and before the attendants had brought fireworks and a match to drive off the elephant, the man, whom they must have expected to find a shapeless corpse, was safe and sound in their midst.

Strange to say, the most terrible *must* elephant, even when roused to fury by rage, may be thoroughly cowed and frightened by letting off fireworks in front of him. A discharged rocket will arrest him in the midst of the most impetuous attack ; and he flies terrified from a fizzing Catherine-wheel or harmless collection of crackers. It may, therefore, be supposed that fireworks are always kept ready for explosion when danger is anticipated from the elephants, particularly in the season when they are most unmanageable, and most likely to do harm.