

*LIFE IN THE MOFUSSIL ;*

OR,

THE CIVILIAN IN LOWER BENGAL.

BY

AN EX-CIVILIAN.

*VOL. I.*

LONDON :

C. KEGAN PAUL & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE.

1878.

and by ten o'clock I was once more *en route*, and furnished with provisions for the day.

The speed and endurance of these Behar "palki bearers" is extraordinary. By 4.30 p.m. I was at the entrance of the Patna bazaar, some nine miles in length, and thirty-three miles from Barh; thus they had brought me at an average rate of over four miles an hour, including a stoppage of over half an hour for their midday meal. It is true, I was a light weight; but I once with a friend tried to carry an empty palki, and found it so galling to the shoulder that I could not get beyond a few yards, while these men, who lived on little else than rice, could carry a loaded one over forty miles, at the rate mentioned above. There were sixteen of them, and four at a time carried the palki, the remaining twelve resting themselves, if so it may be called, by running along side it.

Extraordinary as this may appear, people get so accustomed to the fact, that they look upon the palki in the same light as any other conveyance, and show little consideration for their human beasts of burden. Indeed, I have known young officers put a stone or two of ammunition in addition to the other necessary articles they had with them into the conveyance, on the chance of sport by the way side. The skin on the shoulders of these men becomes thick and hard like that of a rhinoceros.

The last portion of my journey through the bazaar was anything but pleasant; the dust was choking, and the stench of oil and rancid ghee was overpowering. It being the cold weather too, a great number of wood fires were lighted, the wood being by preference damp, and emitting

to me that my work in office was heavy enough to turn my thoughts from the sad scene.

They were away three days or so, and as (it being now about the end of March) a tiger party in the adjoining district of Bhaugulpore was about to make a start, and I had received an invitation to join it, I thought it a good opportunity to let them be alone in the house for a day or two on their return. There were also some native holidays coming in most conveniently, so the day before their return, on going into Court, I ordered all the mookhtyars and legal agents present to come in, and I said, "Now I have worked very hard for a long time, and I am going away for three or four days' 'shikar' (sport), and I shall expect you all to behave well, and to have no riots or heavy cases in my absence. If any of your principals have any such case, I shall look upon their mookhtyars as bad men."

They all promised to be good, just like children; and as I knew most of them would be glad to visit their friends and relatives in my absence, I felt pretty confident.

That night I started in a palanquin, and the next day reached an outlying indigo factory, where I found a friendly planter, with an elephant ready to go on. After a couple of hours' rest, for bath and breakfast, we started, and had a long and weary night on the back of the elephant. It was not possible to sleep for one second, for fear of falling off, as we had only a "guddee," or cushion, no "howdah" (framed seat). It was very tedious, and we talked "de omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis," about land tenure, indigo-planting, law of evidence, native marriages,

sudder distilleries, on which point he quite agreed with me, etc., etc. My companion was very intelligent, and I got a good deal of information from him. At length, about 5 a.m., we saw the white tents of the encampment, on the borders of the broad stream of the Coosee river, and in an hour and a half, refreshed by a cheery welcome and a cup of coffee, we were on our way to shoot.

The Coosee runs down from Nepaul, and is bordered on its northern bank by the primeval forest of the Terai; on the other bank, the land is cleared and cultivated, while in the stream itself are numerous islands, covered with long grass, to which thousands of cattle are swum across for pasture. The tigers swim across from the other side to feed upon the cattle, and the annual loss to the herdsmen is very great. To the sportsman, however, the place is a paradise. There are plenty of deer, florican, and partridge, with an occasional rhinoceros. Our party was a large one, and included several ladies, who, after we had forded the river and formed line, were placed in the centre, on two of the steadiest elephants.

The first day we got some deer, and I shot my first florican—a beautiful bird, and very good eating. We saw traces of rhinoceros, but did not come across the animals themselves. On our return, we found a crowd of Brahmins feasting at the approach to the only practicable ford, and as the feast was spread on the ground, we could not pass through without disturbing them. We did our best, but some of the rice got scattered, and an elephant or two took a mouthful; and I heard the Brahmins cursing us and our female relatives as we moved off, and praying their

gods to give us bad sport. We dined in a large tent, and the ladies sang, and made the evening pleasant; though I am not sure that my bed was not the sweetest thing to me.

The next day we visited another island, and had not been beating for more than an hour, when (despite the Brahmins' curse) the sportsman next to me in the line shouted, "Tiger!" and fired. I just caught a glimpse of some red and black stripes disappearing through the long grass, and fired also. The order to chase was then given, and the whole line moved on as rapidly as possible, the elephants all trumpeting, and everybody peering into the grass in front in a state of keen excitement. Presently, at a small open space, we came on some spots of blood, and while deliberating in which direction to go, I became sensible of a roaring, crackling sound behind. But the roar was not that of an animal; and looking round, I saw a vast sheet of flame and smoke advancing towards us with the rapidity of the wind. "To the river," shouted our leader—planter and sportsman of old-standing; and away we went at right angles to the fire, the island, fortunately, being very narrow, and stood in the shallow water, while the flame rushed over the spot we had recently been beating. There was a strong west wind blowing, the dry wind of this season; and the grass, set on fire probably by some herdsman's pipe at the other end of the island, had ignited like tow all along. It was exciting to see the cattle all rushing into the water; but I was surprised to observe no wild animals, except one or two deer.

In about half an hour the fire had ceased, dying out as rapidly as it had blazed up, and we returned to our sport. We found several green patches which had not been burned, and here doubtless any animals that might have been on the island had taken refuge. Among others, our tiger. We beat all these without success; but on emerging from the last, we saw him in the distance, crawling with difficulty over the ground, where the burnt grass was still smoking. He was evidently badly wounded, and we soon came up to him, and finished him. Then one of the elephants was made to kick the body, to see that no life was left in him,—for practically dead tigers have occasionally killed over-rash sportsmen,—and finally we descended from our positions of safety and examined our prey. He proved to be a fair-sized tiger, and I was pleased to have assisted at his death; though it was not admitted that I had been the first to wound him, so I did not get the skin. He had not shown fight at all; but yet it was something to bag a tiger, and this was the first I had seen killed. With much jabbering and hauling he was got on the back of one of the guddee elephants; and as the day was now well spent, we returned to camp.

The Brahmins, who were now in their temple, which we had to pass on our way, looked sullen at the inefficacy of their curse. Before dinner, I saw the tiger skinned. It was a curious sight, and the muscular arrangements of the fore-arm and shoulder showed an astonishing power. One blow from a tiger's paw is enough to smash in the skull of a man.

The next day we tried yet another island, and had

behind were rolled about like peas in a frying-pan. I cast a helpless glance back, and saw that the tiger had broken through the line of elephants, and was bounding away to the rear with his tail up, roaring as he went. A straight shot from some one bowled him over; but it was evidently not a vital wound, for he stood up, having got into a place where the jungle was lighter, and looked at the line of elephants now advancing towards him. My mahout, who was really a plucky fellow, had now turned my elephant, and was with difficulty inducing it to follow the rest. The tiger now came charging down at the line and singled out the elephant of my friend with whom I had travelled. He was a magnificent sight, roaring and tearing up the grass as he came, with his bristles all erect and his tail lashing his sides; but my friend hit him in the foot with a bullet which completely rolled him over. He was up again directly and charged all round till other wounds made him weaker and weaker; and at length I managed, having now come up nearer, to send a bullet into his mouth.

On measurement he was found to be ten feet six, a young tiger, and well marked. He was a grand animal, and had certainly done his best to give us the sensation we sought, for he had attacked us without being touched, and fought gamely to the end. Our captain told me he had never seen a narrower escape, as the brute's paw must just have shaved my face; a few inches would have made all the difference in the result. One of the ladies told me she had got into a drowsy state from the heat, and was roused by the roar to see the spec-

tacle of the animal on my elephant with his head close to mine.

On taking stock of damages, I found that the mahout had had a great gout of flesh taken out of his left arm, and that there were some severe claw wounds in the elephant's forehead. These were, I expect, caused by the claws of the hind feet, which must have been expanded to their utmost, for I could scarcely span with one hand the space between the scratches. I had some brandy and water in the howdah, and washed the mahout's wound, which must have made him smart; but he seemed much more concerned that his "chapkan," or jacket, was torn. This was a matter easily settled, and he pluckily consented to go on beating, though my elephant was very fidgety and timid for the rest of the day, and anything but comfortable.

We rather hoped to get the female of our dead tiger; and in about half an hour after the above, being again in very thick jungle, some animal was observed moving the grass in front of us. We formed a widish circle, and commenced closing in with a keen sensation of excitement, when the animal made a rush out between two elephants, and proved to be an ordinary-sized hog deer. This caused a great revulsion of feeling, and nobody thought of firing at him. After this we took to small game, and finished the day pleasantly enough. The tiger skin was awarded to me on a consideration of all the circumstances, and I was very pleased to get it. The next day being Sunday, I made a start in the evening of this eventful day, and by travelling a weary forty hours in



a long beat without getting any sport. It was fearfully hot, and the ladies were much done up. Suddenly my elephant, who was on the extreme right of the line, began to trumpet and show signs of alarm. It was a small animal, and not really fit to carry a howdah; but I had been unable to get a better, and as it was known to be timid, its behaviour was not thought of much consequence. We were just commencing to descend a slope with grass some sixteen feet high all about us, so that it was not possible to see much, when the elephant on my left also began to trumpet. "What is all that row about?" said our leader. He had scarcely uttered the words when there came a roar like many claps of thunder, and there was a tiger on the head of my elephant. He had got right on his head, and the mahout sitting on the neck was completely under his belly. The elephant was shaking his very best to get the brute off, which of course had the effect of very nearly shaking me out of the howdah. I felt myself holding on with one hand to the framework of the howdah, and trying to hold my gun straight with the other, while I was actually looking down the roaring animal's throat. I did pull the trigger; but with the gun wobbling so it was just a chance where the bullet went, and it certainly did not hit the tiger. At the same moment he fell off, unable to retain his hold, and my elephant ran away. This takes longer to narrate than it did to take place.

There were no trees, so there was no danger; but the shaking was awful, and myself, my guns, and my servant