

## HUNTING ON ELEPHANTS.

STORIES FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF A FAMOUS HUNTER OF  
BIG GAME.

BY CLEVELAND MOFFETT.

Illustrated from photographs taken by Peter Burges, Esq., whose experiences the article relates.

THE walls bristled with great horned heads of the Indian buffalo; the floors were spread with tiger skins, bear skins, leopard skins; and from opposite sides of the hall, like ugly sentinels, looked down two skulls of the rhinoceros, most formidable beast of the jungle. This was the home of a quiet English gentleman, Peter Burges, Esq., of Bristol, known nevertheless in India, where the big-bore rifles crack, as a sportsman whose nerve fails him not when the tiger springs and whose gun comes up steady to the rhino's rush. I noticed that there were no lion skins about.

"No," said Mr. Burges, "you can't shoot lions from elephants; most of my trophies have been won in the howdah."

So we talked about going after big game on the back of a lurching pachyderm, as they do it in the tall grass region north of Calcutta.

"People have no conception," continued Mr. Burges, "of the height and thickness of this grass. I have seen it stretching for miles thirty or forty feet high, a dense forest of grass covering the plain. When the beating line goes through it, everything is swallowed up, elephants, howdahs, riders; from a little distance you see only a swaying of the tops. If a man were dropped into this sea of grass, he would certainly die there; he could never force his way out, for the stems of the grass are as thick as saplings, and stand very close together. I went down into it once off my elephant, and the darkness was like the blackest night. I could not even see the sky overhead for the thick interlacing of shoots and leaves. These pictures will give you a slight idea of the character of the grass, but of course I could get no results with my camera in the densest part. This one shows a patch of wild banana

rising well over the head of a native standing on a moving elephant, and this one just shows the top of an elephant's pad-saddle with shoots reaching twenty feet above it."

"Do you find tiger and rhino in this grass?"

"They sometimes rush by us in tunnels far below our level, but we cannot see them, nor even be sure what animal is passing. It is a law of the beat never to fire in the high grass, for a sportsman might shoot one of his own elephants that had bolted. That has actually happened where a new man has lost his head."

"Then where do you get the big game?"

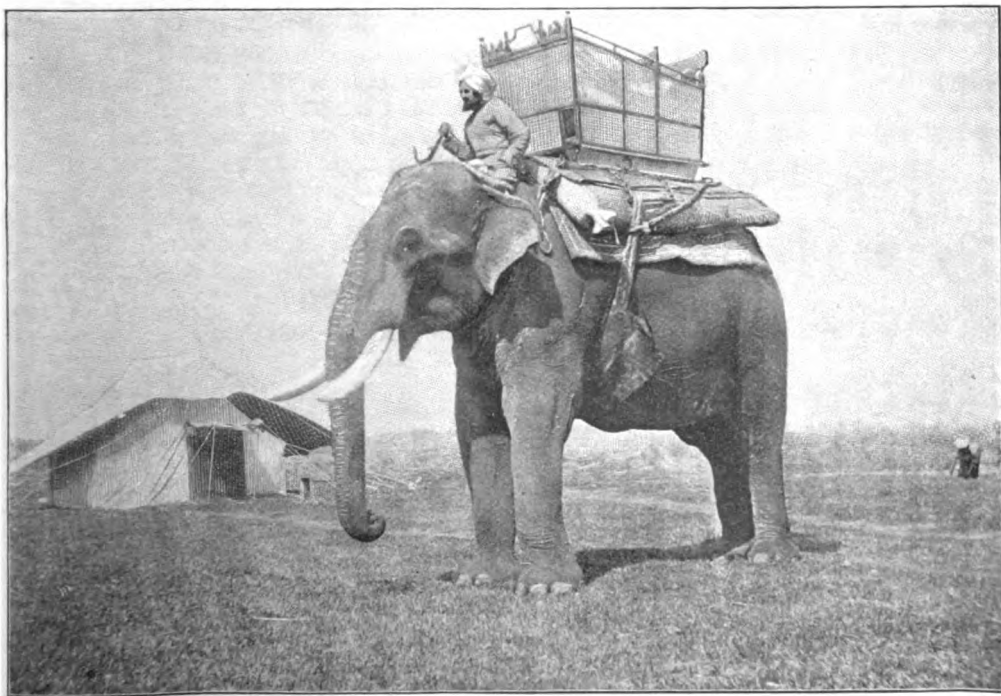
"Nearly always in green patches along a stream or nullah. In dry months the natives burn off the high grass, so that their cattle can get at the tender sprouts as they come up. But the moist ground along the streams keeps the grass there so wet that it will not burn, and this leaves the tigers the very place of shelter they desire, with water to drink and cattle to kill close at hand. So when the *shikaris*, that is, the native trackers, bring word to camp of tiger killings in this or that village, we beat the banks of the nearest stream, and usually drive out something."

#### THE KIND OF ELEPHANTS USED IN THE HUNT.

"How many elephants are used in a beat?"

"Forty or fifty, besides the big ones that carry the howdahs and the guns. When you remember that each elephant is worth from \$375 to \$2,500 and costs about four rupees [about \$1.20] a day for keep, you will see that this kind of sport takes a long purse; indeed, it is scarcely possible for a traveler to engage in it unless he be the guest, as I have always been, of one of the rajahs. We usually went into camp with fifty or sixty elephants, each having its own "mahout" to drive it and its own "matey" to feed and take care of it. Then there are the rajah and his personal servants, the invited guns, each with his own servant, and a corps of cooks, waiters, attendants, and water-carriers; so that, in tents and huts, we were usually quite a hundred and fifty men.

"I will give you an outline, if you like, of a typical day's sport, going back to the 1896 season, when I was with the Rajah of Kuch Behar, up under the hills of Northeastern India. We were six guns in all, mounted on five elephants. Mine was Bheim Singh, and he would go in anywhere, although he was a



THE RAJAH'S ELEPHANT "INDRAJIT," KING OF THE HERD.

The mahout's position on the elephant's head, with his legs hidden behind the ears, his feet in the stirrups, and in his hand the gunga-bar for prodding the elephant, is well shown.

rough-moving beast. The Rajah was mounted on Indrajit, a splendid heavy tusker, king of the herd, and worth \$3,500 in the market. I may say that a certain amount of discretion is shown in assigning elephants to the guns, for a bad shot is apt to let a tiger get at his elephant, which means that the animal may be injured in the trunk and ruined for hunting. You see an elephant's trunk is everything to him; he eats and drinks with it, he fights with it, and if it is disabled, he pines and dies. Two or three clawings by a tiger will spoil even the best elephant for sport; he loses his nerve. The result is that many an uncertain gun has gone through the season lamenting that his mahout 'couldn't get the brute forward,' when it was really a case of the mahout having excellent reasons for keeping at a safe distance. It's all very fine for the man in the howdah to talk about danger, but the chap who has to look out for his skin is the poor devil of a mahout up forward.

"Well, suppose we are starting now from camp some time after sunrise—the hour of starting depends on the distance to the place where a kill has been reported. Our object is to come upon the tiger at about ten or eleven o'clock, when he is lying in the grass

gorged with a heavy meal. An hour or two before we start the howdah elephants have been loaded and sent on ahead, for they travel more slowly than the lighter pad elephants, that carry the guns. How many times as the day was breaking have I watched this process of making fast the howdahs, the great beasts kneeling in silent line before the tents and the nimble-footed natives scrambling over them. Usually it takes four men to get the howdah in place, for the frame is of heavy teak wood and weighs four or five hundred pounds. The howdah has cane sides, but is open at the bottom, and rests on two long roller pads that are strapped on at either side of the backbone. When you shoot from the howdah, you stand on these pads, with a foot on each, and if you look down between them, you can see the elephant's black skin working underneath you. When you sit in the howdah, you rest on a box with your back against a leather strap. In harnessing an elephant the tail girth is usually passed through a piece of iron pipe, laid under the tail, to prevent chafing.

"With breakfast over, and time for a bit of smoke, we climb up on the pad elephants, mounting by head or tail as each man prefers. I always liked the trick of stepping



WASHING THE SINGLE-TUSKERS.

The single-tuskers are regarded by the natives as sacred animals. One of the Indian gods is represented in the form of a single-tusk elephant.



HOWDAH ELEPHANTS GOING AHEAD TO THE PLACE OF BEATING.

The sportsmen come later, on smaller pad elephants, thus allowing the big tuskers to reserve their strength for the hunt proper. On the foremost elephant is seen one of the mahouts standing and stamping his foot in characteristic fashion.

on the curved trunk and letting the animal swing me up. Some of the pads have guddies on them, that is, little platforms with iron guards fore and aft for the passengers to hang fast to going down banks or over hard places. There we sit, three or four on a guddy, with legs dangling, and the line moves off briskly with thirty or forty beaters in the rear, most of them driven bare-back by the agile mahouts."

"How do they control the elephants?"

"Partly by talking to them, partly with the *gunga-bar*, a sharp iron rod with a blade like a reaping-hook, curving out from one side; it weighs seven or eight pounds, and is a frightful weapon. In ordinary going, the mahouts merely jab the sharp end of this an inch or so into the elephant's head, but at critical moments they swing the hooked blade down with all their might and then haul back hard against the flesh. It is not a pleasant sight, but the animal usually finishes by behaving.

#### A HUNTING ELEPHANT'S REVENGE ON HIS KEEPER.

"That reminds me of an exciting thing that happened in camp one morning just as

we were ready to start. The elephants were ranged in double line in front of the tents, and Ashton, the head keeper, was standing with his back turned, about ten yards ahead of Kennedy, a big elephant that had been nursing a slumbering hatred against him for a long time. Kennedy's mahout got down to fix a strap on the pad, and that gave Kennedy the opportunity he had been waiting for. A shout from the men warned Ashton of his danger, and, turning quickly, he saw Kennedy coming at him with trunk stretched out in a straight line and as much diabolical hatred in his little eyes as an elephant's eye can show. Kennedy meant murder; there was no doubt about that; and Ashton did the only thing possible—that is, started on a dead run for a banyan tree about one hundred yards distant.

"Down the line came Ashton, sprinting for all there was in him, and after him came Kennedy with a lumbering shuffle, but getting over the ground surprisingly. There was no time for help; all we could do was to stand and stare and wonder whether Ashton would reach the tree before Kennedy reached him. For about twenty yards Ashton kept his advantage, and then suddenly went headlong in the dust, his toe

caught in some knotted grass. I turned my head with a sickening feeling, but those who looked say that Kennedy was confused by this happening and lunged clumsily at Ashton, missing him with his tusks, and then tried to trample him with his big feet. His momentum, however, was so great that he stumbled over him with his fore feet, missed him with one of his hind feet, caught him a glancing kick on the abdomen with the other hind foot, and then lurched onward in a cloud of dust. Before he could turn, several mahouts had driven their elephants in between him and Ashton. Then we saw Ashton rise upright, his clothes covered with blood, stagger a few yards, fall headlong, and lie quite still. We thought he was dead, but it proved that he was not seriously injured, the elephant's foot having merely grazed him. Until his last hour comes, though, he will never be nearer death than he was at that moment.

“When it was all over, the Rajah came up in a great rage and scored the mahout unmercifully for leaving his seat. And then he told him to take Kennedy into the open and give old Indrajit a chance at him. It was Indrajit's prerogative, as king of the herd, to punish refractory elephants, and he

took uncommon pleasure in it. There was no elephant of them all that dared stand before Indrajit, for not only was he heavier and stronger than the others, but his tusks were longer and sharper. Round and round in the open went Kennedy, plunging and struggling under the blows of the angry mahout, who dug in his gunga-bar until the blood streamed. Then up came Indrajit slowly, as a cat stalks a mouse, to make the pleasure last. When Kennedy saw him, he lifted his trunk and trumpeted in terror, but he stood quite still, as if fascinated, and watched the slow approach of Indrajit.

“Step by step the big tusker came nearer, eying Kennedy pleasantly, as if to say, ‘I shall be having some fun with you in a moment, my friend.’ And at five yards he charged, and sent his tusks into Kennedy's flank a good six inches; and when he took them out, there were holes there as if cannon balls had gone in. Then Kennedy ran, and Indrajit after him, and the two mahouts gone mad. It was a hard race, but Kennedy lost in the end and got another prodding, after which they took the big fellow off and left Kennedy bellowing.

“‘Starve him for two days,’ said the Rajah to the mahout, ‘and then put him to



THE BEATING LINE GOING THROUGH A PATCH OF WILD BANANAS.

The elephants invariably pull up a supply of the sweet cane and carry it on with them for eating by the way.



THE BEATING LINE MOVING THROUGH SHORT GRASS.

The picture shows the customary position of a tiger hunter, standing on the pads, holding the front of the howdah with his left hand and the stock of his rifle with his right. The howdah in the foreground is a double one; but only one man can shoot from it, the second man being merely a passenger. The mahout is seen jabbing the gunga-bar into the elephant's head.

work again. Now, gentlemen, on your elephants please.'

'In spite of this constant punishment with the gunga-bars, the elephants suffer little real injury at the hands of the mahouts. Their great heads are made up of soft bony tissue which may be shot through by rifle balls in all directions without harm unless the bullet happens to strike the brain, which is very small, about the size of a saucer.

#### HOW THE ELEPHANTS UNDERSTAND WHEN SPOKEN TO.

'I said just now that the mahouts direct the elephants partly by talking to them, and this is true to an extent that has made me believe the animals must actually understand spoken words. For instance, it has happened more than once that I have dropped a cartridge into the deep grass and told the mahout to get it for me. In such cases, the mahout stops his elephant and tells him to pick up the cartridge. The elephant swings his trunk to the ground, moves it to one side and the other, as the mahout directs—'No, you silly—to the right—further

back—no, to the left—there, now you've got it.' And, finally, up curves the elephant's trunk with the cartridge.

'It used to be a source of endless amusement to me, while lurching along on an elephant's back, to notice the various tricks and peculiarities of the big animals. For instance, they are always eating, and in going through a plantation of wild bananas, Bheim Singh never failed to tear up a great stock, with the sweet sap streaming from it, as a provision for a half hour's sucking in less fruitful regions. Then again, how often have I seen Bheim Singh reach down his trunk, take a half hitch round a tuft of grass, draw it out by the roots, and tipping up his big fore foot, carefully knock the earth off, before putting the grass into his mouth. Then, when elephant flies were swarming, I was always amused to watch Bheim Singh's favorite maneuver for getting rid of them. He would heap up a little mound of dust with his fore feet, lay the end of his trunk beside it on the ground, and with a slow movement fill his trunk with dust. Then, very slyly, so that the flies might have no warning, he would curve his



THE LOADING OF THE GAME.

The bodies of the slain tigers are sent back to camp on pad elephants to be skinned.

trunk around until it was within good range, pause a moment to take air, and, with a great *Pheugh*, send a blinding shower of dust all over himself, to the utter discomfiture of the flies.

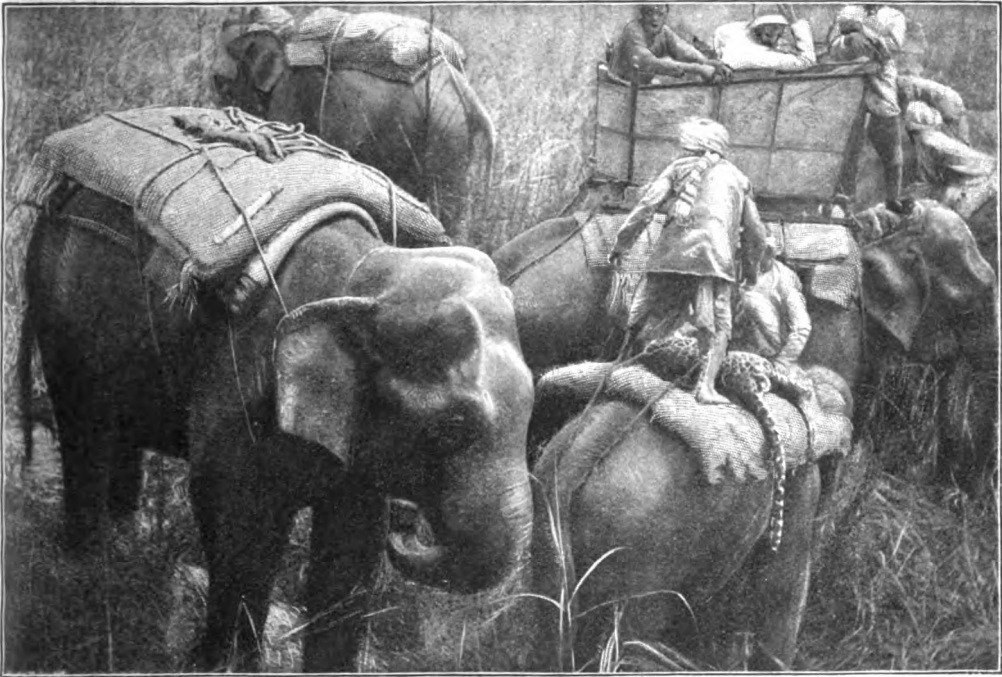
“This annoyance of the flies keeps the elephants swinging their tails incessantly, and a new man will not ride many miles on a guddy without getting such a crack from the elephant’s tail as will make him think that a heavy club has hit him over the shins. I never had any great respect for an elephant’s tail before I rode on a guddy, but painful experience made me change my views, and I learned to keep my legs out of striking distance.

#### CROSSING A RIVER ON AN ELEPHANT’S BACK.

“It is a great sight to see a line of elephants crossing a river with steep banks. They go down slowly, striking the ground with their trunks before each step and never making a slip or miss, although you feel every minute as if you were going to take a header into the water. Then they wade or swim, as the case may be, and they swim beautifully, not hesitating to cross half a mile of deep water if need be. I must say,

however, that the sensation of sitting on the back of a swimming elephant is the reverse of pleasant; you fancy yourself on an enormous barrel that may roll round at any moment and take you under. Furthermore, they swim so low in the water that you are sure of a wetting, which in India means an excellent chance of fever. Having crossed the stream, they must climb to the top of the bank, and this is the most peculiar operation of all. Down on their knees they go, and with trunk and tusks dig out a foothold for themselves, and so, step by step, work their way to the top, their position being sometimes about that of a fly climbing up a wall. As they reach the top, they give a lurch sideways, and shoot one leg straight out over the bank, give a lurch to the other side and shoot out the other leg in the same way, which brings them into the position of a boy hanging by his arms from the edge of a roof. Then they come to their knees, and finally, with a great scrambling and kicking of hind legs, bring themselves to level ground again.

“In spite of these perilous ascents and descents, I never knew an elephant to miss his foothold, although there was a case where one of the herd got stuck in the mud and



"PADDING" A LEOPARD ON A SMALL ELEPHANT.

sank gradually deeper and deeper until only his head and part of his back could be seen. The elephant thus engulfed was Kennedy, the same that tried to kill Ashton. The Rajah ordered ten other elephants brought up, and they were hitched to the unfortunate Kennedy, and by pulling together at a given word, brought their bellowing comrade out of the mud with a plomp like the pop of a thousand-ton cork.

#### TAKING POSITION TO RECEIVE THE TIGER.

"So with chatting and jolting and tails swinging and elephants lurching by the way, we reach the point where the howdah elephants are waiting; where the tigers and rhinos are waiting also, let us hope. First, we take our places in our respective howdahs, stepping up to them from the backs of the pad elephants. The ammunition box is before us, strapped to the front, with ready cartridges. At right and left, with muzzles fixed in the rests, are the guns, an eight-bore elephant rifle for rhinos and buffalo, a twelve-bore tiger gun; two express rifles, large and small, for deer, and a shotgun for small game—partridges, bustard, etc.—when beating home lazily at night.

"The place of beating reached, there follows a consultation as to stationing the guns,

and the Rajah's secretary passes a hat around and lets us draw slips for positions. In beating up a tiger in a nullah, guns are stationed in a U on either bank, while two guns come on with the beating elephants, flanking the line in case the tiger breaks back. And one gun is placed at the head of the drive—that is, at the opening of the U—where he will have a clear shot at the tiger if he breaks into the ravine from the grass on either side.

"Now the waiting guns hold themselves ready, while the beating elephants move up the two banks of the nullah. Every man stands on the pads, holding his heavy rifle by the breech, while the barrel rests on the howdah. What a tension of suspense for an untried hand! How a man looks to his guns, and plans what he will do when the tiger springs, and prays that his nerve may not fail him. The beaters come on and on, nearer and nearer, and still nothing stirs. Word comes from the Rajah to close in from all sides. Only a little bit of grass remains, and the guns are all about it. There may be a tiger lurking there; there may be nothing. We have sometimes drawn in so close that the space at the center was not larger than this room, and we could touch guns from one elephant to another. And up to the very last the tiger made no sign. We



could tell, though, by the trumpeting of the elephants that we were coming on big game.

“And then suddenly, from behind you or before you, sounds the quick *oof, oof, oof*, the barking of the tiger at bay, a terrifying sound that the sportsman does not forget, quite different from the long tiger roar heard in the Zoo. And then a tawny body streaks the air, and the tiger is on you, and you must act. How the bullets fly—*vrtt, vrtt, vrtt*—one gun, two guns, sometimes four or five guns firing almost at the same moment! And you hit the tiger or you do not, and if yours is the first bullet to touch him yours is the trophy, no matter who makes the kill. And this is the law for leopards, too; but not for buffaloes and rhinos; there it is the gun finally downing the beast that gets him. And great are the arguments over a tiger's dead body to decide the question of proprietorship. In all such cases of dispute, the Rajah sits as a court of last appeal and weighs out justice impartially.

“I remember a case where five of us had fired almost at the same moment, at short range, and four of us had missed; a single fortunate bullet had shattered a great hole in the foreshoulder and laid the tiger low. The question was, Who fired that bullet? The Rajah ordered the skin taken off at once

and the bullet given to him. Then calling us about him, he said, smiling: ‘Mr. Burges, do you think you killed the tiger?’

“‘Yes, I do,’ said I.

“‘Mr. P——, do you think you killed this tiger?’

“‘I am absolutely certain of it,’ he answered.

“And so spoke the others. Perhaps it is not quite modest of me to tell of my own triumph, but I was proud enough of it at the time, for the bullet in the Rajah's hand came from a twelve-bore Paradox rifle, and that was the one I had used. You saw the skin just now in the library.

“Speaking of skinning tigers, here is a photograph that is interesting [reproduced on page 145]. It shows a swarm of vultures hovering over the stripped bones of a tiger's carcass given them only ten minutes before the photograph was taken, and in that time cleaned of every shred of flesh. It is most remarkable how these carrion birds arrive almost before an animal's skin has been taken off. They soar at great heights, in intersecting circles, and so are able to cover with their telescopic eyes a wide range of country; and as soon as one swoops down another follows, and then another, and then thousands, until it seems to be raining vultures.



ELEPHANTS GATHERING ROUND A RHINOCEROS THAT HAS JUST BEEN SHOT FROM THE HOWDAH.



AN INSTANTANEOUS PHOTOGRAPH OF A GROUP OF VULTURES.

These vultures have just finished the feat of stripping, within the space of ten minutes, every shred of flesh from the bones of a tiger's carcass.

"I should have said that the skinning of the game is not done on the spot where the game is killed, but at camp, whither the bodies are immediately sent on pad elephants. The loading of the game on the elephants involves a great hauling and straining of ropes before this is properly accomplished, especially if it be a full-grown tiger, which will weigh from three to five hundred pounds. A few hours later, the skins are stretched in the frames drying in the sun, for there is no time to be lost in so hot a climate."

"Is a tiger hard to hit?" I asked.

"Not particularly; that is, for a man who is handy with his rifle and doesn't get into a funk. But hitting a tiger is not killing him, as many a good sportsman has found out to his cost. The foreshoulder is the only sure place to land, and a tiger is always a flying mark. That is why lion shooting is so much easier, for you simply stalk up to your lion and draw on him at rest from easy range. But there is no drawing on a tiger: it is touch-and-go shooting always. Besides, the tiger is just the color of the ground and the dried grass, and you need a trained eye to see him. I remember one case where a tiger came right past a German prince and the prince never fired, although the mahout screamed 'Marro, marro, sahib,' with all his lungs.

"'Why didn't you shoot?' asked the Rajah afterwards.

"'I was waiting to see him better,' said the prince, 'and I wish that mahout would keep still when I'm trying to aim. What does 'marro, marro' mean?'"

"'It means 'kill, kill,' of course.'

"'Ah, I thought perhaps it meant not to shoot,' grumbled the prince, and the Rajah looked disgusted. A gun should know enough Bengalese to understand his mahout."

"What was the most dangerous position you were ever in while tiger-shooting?"

Mr. Burges smiled. "I really believe it was one day when I was flanking the line of beaters driving up a nullah. I was fairly caught between the guns on either bank, and they kept blazing away at a tiger as he darted in and out, and kept missing him. My howdah was just in the line of their bullets, and I couldn't see the tiger to take a hand in the sport, and I couldn't get out of the way. So I crouched down, and listened to the rifle balls singing by."

"Don't the elephants get frightened in a bombardment like that?"

"Sometimes, and then there is danger of their charging into the forest and sweeping off howdah and occupants against the branches. That is when the mahouts show their skill."

We talked next of "rhino" shooting, which, in the opinion of many sportsmen, is even more exciting than tiger shooting.

"Although it was always a rule of the beat," said Mr. Burges, "that all arrangements gave way to news of tiger, there were a number of us, including the Rajah himself, who preferred, by a good deal, the big pigs to the big cats. For one thing, the rhino is much harder to find than the tiger, and much harder to get when found. You see, he is practically invulnerable, and is afraid of nothing. Neither an elephant nor a tiger nor any other beast of the jungle would have the slightest chance against him. There are many elephants that will stand up to a tiger gamely, but the best of them turn tail when a rhino charges. He rips up their legs, you see, with his tusks and his big horn, and the elephants squeal for mercy.

"That is why it is so hard to get a rhino, even when you have him surrounded by the beaters in a big piece of grass (he keeps away from small patches on principle), for his favorite trick is to break back through the driving line, which at once becomes a driven line, and then good-by rhino. As to overtaking him, that is impossible, for he can gallop twice as fast as the best elephant can

shuffle. Your only chance is to catch him with a true shot from your elephant gun, either behind the shoulder or in the neck, where the ball cuts the arteries. But that is about as hard a thing to do as there is in sport."

"Do women ever go out for big game?" I asked.

"Occasionally, but I never knew one to do much good. The recoil of the big rifle would almost knock a woman out of the howdah, and if she uses a lighter piece she is sure to go popping away at deer and little things. Of course it is an unpardonable sin, if you are after tiger, to shoot at anything except tiger. I remember one day we took the wife of the German prince along with us, and she spoiled the drive by letting fly at a partridge or something when we were just getting a tiger nicely cornered. She got so excited she didn't know what she was doing, and we lost the tiger. The Rajah was furious."

We talked about many other things connected with big-game shooting, about feeding the elephants and washing them, about watching them come to camp at night laden with fodder for the herd, about native superstitions, etc., but space is wanting to tell of these. The memories of a big-game hunter are an inexhaustible mine of incident.

