

INDIAN SPORTS.

Formerly, almost all the European residents of India were mighty hunters; but, in the present day, though there are quite enough to keep up their ancient reputation, the slaughter of wild animals is not so general or so absorbing a passion as it used to be, when the company's territories were surrounded by the courts of native princes, who were accustomed to take the field against the furred and feathered rangers of the forest, with all the pomp and circumstance of war. Parties of gentlemen from Calcutta are in the habit of spending a part of the cold season amid the wildest jungles of Bengal; but their *cortège*, though exceedingly numerous, and the havoc they make, though sufficiently great to satisfy any reasonable person, are nothing compared to the displays of former times. The amusements of Cossim Ally Khan, the nawab of Bengal, in 1761, afford a strong contrast to the habits and pursuits of his degenerate representative. The fame of his exploits still survives in the memory of the people, and their scenes are pointed out with no small degree of exultation.

In one of his grand hunting-parties, his retinue, including a body guard of cavalry, consisted of not fewer than twenty thousand persons. The officers of his army and household, and his European guests, were conveyed to the theatre of action on elephants, camels, and horses, or in palanquins. The hunters were armed with spears, bows, arrows, and matchlocks, and they were accompanied by greyhounds, hawks, and cheetahs. The scene of the chase was one of the most beautiful which the splendid landscapes of Bengal can present. Between the Ganges and one of the ranges of hills, which spread themselves along the frontiers of the provinces, there is a wide tract of country, diversified with rocks, woods, lakes, heaths, and rivulets, and abounding with every sort of game; hither the nawab and his party repaired, and, forming an extensive line, roused up the denizens of the field as they advanced, and letting the hawks fly as the wild-fowl sprang up, and loosening the greyhounds and cheetahs upon the deer, the spear and matchlock-men attacked the wild hogs, while others, mounted upon elephants, marked out the still more ferocious animals, and brought them down with a two-ounce ball. The nawab was one of the most active of the party; sometimes he rode in an open palanquin, carried on the shoulders of eight bearers, with his shield, sword, gun, bow, and quiver, lying beside him; sometimes he mounted on horseback, and at others, where the grass and bushes were high, he got upon an elephant. After the diversion had been carried on for three or four hours, and to the distance of twelve miles, the nawab and his guests repaired to their encampment, where a sumptuous repast was served up for their entertainment.

Hunting-parties, upon so grand a scale, are now rare in India, even amongst native princes, and though the imagination can scarcely fail to be dazzled by an assemblage of twenty thousand men, with their picturesque accompaniments of stud and equipage, scouring through the woods, and across the plains, in

search of the noblest species of game, such scenes of barbaric splendour would soon become exceeding tiresome. The truest enjoyment of field-sports is offered to small parties of Europeans, who blend intellectual tastes with the love of the chase; who, while sojourning in the forest, delight to make themselves acquainted with the manners and habits of its wild tribes, and who, not entirely bent upon butchery, vary their occupations by devoting themselves to botanical or geological pursuits.

The period usually chosen for these excursions is from the beginning of November until the end of February, a season in which the climate of Hindostan is delightfully temperate, the air perfectly serene, and the sky often without a cloud. Some verdant spot, shaded by adjacent groves, and watered by a small lake or rivulet, is selected for the encampment. An Indian jungle offers so great a variety of beauties, that there is no difficulty in the selection of an appropriate scene. A natural lawn, sloping down to a broad expanse of water, shaded by palm-trees, whose graceful, tufted foliage forms so striking a feature in Oriental scenery, or beneath the canopy of the cathedral-like banian, stretching its long aisles in verdant pomp along the plain, or in the neighbourhood of a mosque, pagoda, or stately tomb, whose numerous recesses and apartments offer excellent accommodation for such followers of the party as are not provided with other shelter. There is no danger of being in want of any of the comforts and conveniences of life, during a sojourn in wildernesses, perchance as yet untrodden by the foot of man, or so long deserted as to leave no traces of human occupation. Wherever a party of this kind establishes itself, it will be followed by native shop-keepers, who make themselves very comfortable in a bivouac beneath the trees, and supply the encampment with every necessary which the servants and cattle may require. European stores are, of course, laid in by the *khanasamahs* of the different gentlemen, and unless the sportsmen and their fair companions—for ladies delight in such expeditions—determine upon living entirely upon game, sheep and poultry are brought to stock a farm-yard, rendered impervious to the attacks of savage beasts. Every part of the surrounding country swarms with animal life; in the upper provinces, insects are not very troublesome during the cold weather, nor are reptiles so much upon the alert; in Bengal, however, the cold is never sufficiently severe to paralyse the mosquitoes, which are said then to sting more sharply, and to cherish a more insatiate appetite, than during the sultry part of the year. The inconveniences arising from too intimate a connection with lizards, spiders, and even less welcome guests, are more than counterbalanced by the gratification which inquisitive minds derive from the various novelties which present themselves upon every side. The majestic appearance of the trees, many of them covered with large lustrous flowers, or garlanded with creepers, which attain to an enormous size, must delight all who possess a taste for sylvan scenery. In some of the jungles of India, the giant parasites of the soil appear, as they stretch themselves from tree to tree, like immense boa-constrictors, and the

gest the idea of baskets of flowers hanging from a festoon : the underwood is frequently formed of richly-flowering plants ; the *corinda*, which is fragrant even to satiety, and scarcely bearable in any confined place, loading the air with perfume, while the *dhag*, with its fine, wide, dark green leaves, and splendid crimson vase-like flowers, contrasts beautifully with other forest-trees, bearing white blossoms, smaller but resembling those of the *camellia japonica*.

So magnificent a solitude would in itself afford a very great degree of pleasure and interest to contemplative minds ; but both are heightened by the living objects which give animation to the scene. Though wild hogs are most abundant in plantations of sugar-canes, which is their favourite food, and which imparts to their flesh the delicious flavour so highly esteemed by epicures, they are also to be found in the wildest and most uncultivated tracts. The roebuck, musk, and hog-deer, conceal themselves amidst the thickest heath and herbage, and the antelopes and large deer rove over the plains. All these animals, however, seek the thickets occasionally, and they are fond of resorting to the tall coarse grass, which attains to the rankest luxuriance in the levels of the jungle, and is the favourite lair of the tiger and the hyena. Panthers, leopards, bears, and the beautiful tiger-cat, are likewise inhabitants of these hiding places ; and in the neighbourhood of Rajmhal, the Deyra Dhoon, the Terraie, &c., rhinoceroses and wild buffaloes are added to the list. Amid the smaller and more harmless creatures which haunt the jungle, one of the prettiest and most interesting is the fox ; its size scarcely exceeds that of an English hare ; the limbs are slender, and it is delicately furred with soft hair, generally of a bluish gray. It has not the offensive smell of the reynard of Europe, its food being principally grain, vegetables, and fruit. The passion of the fox for grapes was by no means a flight of fancy on the part of our old friend Æsop, who showed himself well acquainted with the habits of the Asiatic species. They burrow in holes, and prefer the side of a hill-ock, where the grass is short and smooth, to the wood, and there they may be seen, in the morning and after sunset, frisking about and playing with their young. They afford excellent sport, when hunted ; for, though not strong or persevering, they are fleet and flexible, and make many efforts (by winding in successive evolutions) to escape their pursuers. Jackals are almost as common as crows, in every part of India ; but notwithstanding their numbers, and the great desire which they evince to make themselves heard, there is some difficulty in getting a sight of them, except when the moon is up, and then they seek concealment in the shadows, gliding along under covert, with a stealthy movement, like some dark phantom, or when the prospect of a banquet upon some newly slain victim lures them from their retreat in open day.

However bare and solitary the place may be, the instant any animal falls to the ground, exhausted by wounds or disease, it is imme-

diately the object of the attack : four or five hundred vultures will be assembled, in an incredibly short period of time, in places where they are not usually to be found, whenever a bullock or a deer has fallen a sacrifice to a tiger. Upon these occasions, if the rightful master of the feast should be in the neighbourhood, and choosing, as often is the case, to delay his meal until sunset, the jackalls and the vultures, covering close to the spot, await with great patience the moment in which they may commence their operations, without giving offence, taking care to remove to a respectful distance, when the tiger, who is said to approach the dead carcass in the same cautious and crouching manner as when endeavouring to steal upon living prey, makes his appearance upon the scene.

It is affirmed that whenever tigers roam or couch, multitudes of birds collect and hover about them, screaming and crying, as if to create an alarm, and it is also said that peacocks are particularly allured by the tawny monarch of the wood, and that, when he is perceived by a flock, they will advance towards him immediately, and begin, with their usual ostentatious pomp, to strut around him, their wings fluttering, their feathers quivering, and their tails bristly and expanded. Native sportsmen, who always prefer stratagem to open war, take advantage of this predilection, and painting a brown cloth screen, about six feet square, with black spots or streaks, advance under its cover, which is placed fronting the sun. The pea-fowl either approaches the lure, or suffers the fowlers, who are concealed behind it, to draw near enough to their mark to be quite certain of not missing it. A hole in the canvass enables them to take an accurate aim, and the *ruse* is always successful.

Strange instances of the fascination of animals are recorded, by which it would appear, that, under its influence, the most active and timid rush into the danger, which we should suppose they would be most anxious to avoid. The power which serpents possess over birds, squirrels, &c., is well known, and those who have visited unfrequented places, have had opportunities of witnessing the effect of novel sights upon the shyest denizens of the waste. When the line of march of large bodies of troops has led across sequestered plains, they have attracted the attention of herds of deer grazing in the neighbourhood. When startled by the humming murmuring noise made by the soldiers in passing, they have stood for some time staring, and apparently aghast with astonishment, with their eyes fixed upon the progressive files, whose glaring red uniforms and glittering muskets might well inspire them with fear. At length, in his bewilderment, the leading stag, striking the ground, tossing his antlers, and snorting loudly, has rushed forward across the ranks, followed by the whole herd, to the utter dismay and confusion of the soldiers, the frightened deer bounding over the heads of those files who were taken too much by surprise to halt, and make way for them. Incidents of a similar nature have occurred more than once, and they serve to give inter-

est to the horizon on every side, and are not of unfrequent occurrence, in the thinly-peopled districts of Hindostan.

The birds, in many places, are to be seen literally in myriads ; water-fowl especially congregate in the greatest abundance and variety, their numbers almost covering the lakes and jheels, when resting upon the water ; and forming thick clouds, when, upon any alarm, they rise simultaneously upon the wing. The margin of the stream is surrounded by storks and cranes. The species of both are numerous, and the gracefulness of the shape of many can only be exceeded by the beauty of their plumage. The crested heron, whose snow-white tuft is an emblem of sovereignty in India, and the only feather which the religious prejudices of the Rajpoot princes permit them to wear, is one of the loveliest creatures imaginable ; its eyes are of bright scarlet, and, amidst many competitors in beauty, it shines conspicuous. There are no pheasants in the woods of Bengal or Behar ; but they are found upon the confines of Assam, Chittagong, and the ranges of the Himalaya. In Nepaul, and particularly about the Morung, they are large and beautiful, more especially the golden, the burnished, the spotted, and the azure, together with the brown argus-eyed pheasant. There are several varieties of pea-fowls, black, white, and gray, in addition to the common sort ; and though there are some districts in India, styled for distinction, *More-bunje*, " the place of peacocks," they are so common all over the country, that it would be almost difficult to find a woodland haunt where they do not abound. They are certainly not prized in India according to their merits, either as an ornamental appendage, or as an addition to the board. Some Europeans have only been reconciled to their admission at table, by an account which has reached them of their appearance at the lord mayor's state-dinners in London : Anglo-Indians, generally speaking, being exceedingly unwilling to judge for themselves where their gastronomic taste can be called in question. Nevertheless those who, where native productions are worthy of praise, entertain no absurd prejudices in favour of exotics, are glad to have an opportunity of repeating the justly-merited claims to distinction of the pea-chick, as an article of provender.

High as are the merits of this fowl, however, in its happy combination of the game-flavour of the pheasant with the juiciness of the turkey, it must hide its diminished head before the glories of the florikin ; the slanderer of feudal banquets, and the peacock's early rival at the baronial feasts of the Montacutes and the Courtenayes. The florikin is nearly, if not quite, as large as a turkey, and the plumage on the back is not unlike that which distinguishes the monarch of our poultry-yard ; but the cock is furnished with a much more splendid crest. A tuft of fine black velvet feathers, which usually lies smooth upon the back of the head, can be erected at pleasure, and, when spread out, adds greatly to the noble appearance of the bird. Its favourite harbour is in the natural pastures which edge the

ground, but not far distant from the upland.
In consequence of this choice of situation, and the variety of food which it presents, its flesh acquires a peculiarity unknown to other birds; the legs, which are white, resemble in flavour those of a pheasant, while the breast and the wings bear a similarity to the wild-duck : epicures pronounce the whole to be delicate, savoury, and juicy beyond all comparison. This fine bird is not sufficiently common in India to pall upon the appetite ; it is found in Bengal, and in the neighbourhood of the hill-districts ; but, in many parts of the upper provinces, it will be searched for in vain.

(To be continued.)