

A VERY HEAVY TIGER KILLED IN THICK COVER

(See p. 123)

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*Jungle Trails in
Northern India*

Reminiscences of Hunting in India

by
SIR JOHN HEWETT

With 24 plates
and a map



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damage from hail was also caused in the hills, especially in Naini Tal. This was the worst storm of which I had any experience in India. About a month later there was a tornado in Eastern Bengal during which a train was blown off the line. The forces of Nature seem to have been in a particularly bad humour just at that time.

Chapter Eight

THE JUNGLES OF COOCH BEHAR AND THE CENTRAL PROVINCES

IN February 1889, I was asked by the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, Sir Narendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur, to a shoot. The Maharaja was one of the best sportsmen that ever lived. A fine shot, a great naturalist, and a most generous and considerate host, he combined in himself qualities which made him very popular with high and low, English and Indian alike. He had married in 1878 Suniti Devi, the eldest daughter of the religious reformer Brahmananda Keshub Chunder Sen, a most talented lady beloved by all who had the good fortune to know her. The Maharaja died in 1911, and during her life-time his widow lost four of her seven children, of whom two were successively Maharajas of Cooch Behar. Late in life she lived for some years in England, but returned to India in November 1931, dying at Ranchi a year later. A very remarkable memorial meeting was held at the Caxton Hall on November 28th, 1932, largely attended by the many English friends who survived her. Lady Carmichael was chairman of the meeting, which was addressed by, among others, the Dowager Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava.

The Maharaja and Maharani were both enthusiastic advocates of social reform, and the Maharani was intensely concerned in the welfare of India's womanhood. She wrote a

delightful little book of stories, very well told, entitled *Bengal Dacoits and Tigers*. I last saw their eldest son, Maharaja Raj Rajendra, known to his intimates as Raji, in 1911 at the Delhi Durbar. There he looked every inch a chief. He passed away, to the regret of many, in 1913. When leaving India in September, 1912, I had a most delightful farewell letter from him.

The Maharaja had a shoot every year, partly in his own State, partly in the reserved forests at Jalpaiguri in the province of Bengal, or on the Brahmaputra and near the foothills in Assam as far east as the Manas River. He had a fine line of elephants and, himself a great shikari, was assisted in managing his shoots by Colonel Alick Evans-Gordon, the Superintendent administering his State, Dick Bignell of the Bengal Police, his private secretary, and a number of very efficient Indian trackers.

In the shooting parties with which I had been out in Northern India, the elephants carrying howdahs were nearly always females. A good female is very staunch to tiger and very docile. A tusker, on the other hand, might be anxious to take too prominent a part in the fight with the tiger himself, and, when he did so, he would pay little attention to the directions of his driver, or to the difficulties to which the occupant of the howdah might be exposed by his excited charges at the tiger. In the shoots of the Maharaja one might expect to see buffalo, rhinoceros and occasionally a bison, and for these he considered that it was much better to have the howdahs on reliable tuskers. An invitation to a shoot at Cooch Behar was something to talk about. The hospitality of the Maharaja was unbounded, life in the tents the ideal of good feeling and comfort, and, most important of all, the sport was bound to be good. It was the Maharaja's custom to invite a number of friends from Europe every year. He considered that the best line for his jungles should contain

forty pad elephants, with six howdahs, two in the line and four as stops. But, of course, he did not often have so few howdahs as this, as will be realized from the number of guests he invited. On this occasion, among others, Lord Scarbrough, Lord Galway, Lord Leigh, Count Hoyos, Lord Ancram, Count Széchenyi and my old friend Lobby (Sir Henry) Lennard were the guests from Europe. George Irwin (one of my greatest friends), a member of the Bengal Civil Service from the same province as myself, and at the time in the Foreign Office of the Government of India, came with me. A great charm of the Maharaja was that, whatever mistakes any of us made, and most of us did something wrong every now and then, he never showed irritation at his best-laid plans being frustrated. Only on one occasion did I see him really upset, and then in circumstances that would have tempted a saint. Two very large bull rhinoceros got up a short distance in front of the line in which I was at the time. It was of course not for the line to shoot, and no one did. A tusker—Kennedy by name—who was an extraordinary character bought from the Commissariat and, at the time, being ridden by Jogin, one of the Maharaja's best shikaris—got very excited and rushed forward. Jogin manoeuvred him between the two rhinos, who were forced, one to the guns on the right and the other to those on the left flank. There was a fusillade from the howdahs on both sides. The rhinos pursued the even tenor of their way. Then the Maharaja was really annoyed, and no one can say that he had not good reason.

Guests kept going and coming and the shoot went on for more than a month. The bag was 9 tigers, 2 leopards, 8 bears, 9 buffalo, 5 rhino, 1 bison. The bison was just under 17 hands 3 inches, and the biggest of the buffalo and rhino each measured 18 hands. Two of the tigers and a tigress gave very good sport. The tigers were fine animals—9 feet 9

inches and 9 feet 8 inches. Both succeeded in charging home and mauled two elephants in the line, one the great Kennedy, the other a female, rather badly. The tigress, which was just over 9 feet, also made matters very lively. These two male tigers were found in the same cover. This is unusual and we made them out to be brothers. The biggest bull rhino was shot by George Irwin and Széchenyi. The Maharaja lent the former a 4-bore rifle with a very heavy charge of black powder. When Irwin fired at this animal he took a toss into the back part of the howdah, to the rather unfeeling amusement of the rest of us, but the shot knocked the rhino over all right. One incident of these shoots, which was not negligible, was the everyday luncheon. We began shooting early in the day and after four or five hours' hunting had our lunch. It was a ceremony at which on every occasion some wonderful curries were served.

I was to be lucky enough to get another invitation to the Maharaja's shoot in 1894. This took place almost entirely in Assam. In the party were Bill (Lord William) Beresford, Mr. Lowis, Commissioner of Patna, Lord Wolverton, Lord Dalrymple, Count D'Harnoncour, Count Scheibler, Sir Benjamin Simpson and, of course, Alick Evans-Gordon and Dick Bignell. We were encamped part of the time on the Brahmaputra and did a lot of beating in the islands in the river. There were also on the mainland at Samerdanga some very difficult jungles, full of very thick wild-rose bushes. We beat them for rhino but it was almost impossible to work them properly. The Maharaja shot a very large tiger (10 feet 3 inches) which weighed 487 lb. The bag of the party was 8 tigers, 1 leopard, 5 rhino, 16 buffalo, 1 bear, and a miscellaneous number of deer and some pig. I had the good fortune to get a very fine bull buffalo with a splendid head, the horns being a perfect copy one of the other and the sweep very good. I was using a 12-bore rifle with a solid bullet and six drams

of powder which the Maharaja had lent me. The buffalo was hit through the heart and went on 400 yards before he fell dead.

Alas, there were to be no more shoots for me in the Tarai with Mr. Macdonald. When I could next go there (in 1893) I was Magistrate of Bareilly. C. H. Roberts had succeeded Mr. Macdonald, when the latter died in September 1890, as Superintendent of the Tarai. My district adjoined his. At Kichha, the river divided our boundaries and the bungalow, where Roberts asked me to join him for a shoot, was only about a mile north of the river. Whympers and Carswell, the latter of whom was in charge of the canals at Ramnagar, were with him. We were out for a week, and were very lucky in getting good sport. We got a fine 10-foot tiger on April 11th: one of 9 feet 10 inches on 12th, and one, 10 feet 5½ inches (the biggest I ever measured), shot by Whympers on the Kakrala stream. We also got three leopards: one measuring 8 feet 1 inch was the only leopard of 8 feet that I ever shot.

In April 1895 Mr. Alan Cadell, then acting as Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, kindly asked me to join his shoot in the Tarai. I was also out there again in 1896. In those two years we got ten tigers and one cub, and three leopards. Among them were two good tigers, one that Whympers got at Nagla, where there was a canal bungalow on the road between Bareilly and Kathgodam, and another near Unchagaon. There was rather a curious incident in connection with this tiger. We ceased shooting at Bangajadha just below the forest fire-line and got on our pad elephants to go to camp. Bangajadha was, when in my younger days I was serving in the Tarai, an unbeatable swamp, and I once saw a tiger walk from a little distance in front of us into it without being able to follow him. We also, on this occasion, got a tiger in the Jalpaniya swamp near Satarganj,

for a very long series of years, and known as a 'baghaut'. The pile commemorates the death of some poor creature years ago killed by a tiger. Each stone added to the pile carries a prayer from the person adding it that he or she may be saved from such a death. Wyndham's figure testifies to the size of the pile. It is ages since there was a tiger on the spot where the original crime took place.

Chapter Twelve

VISITS TO NEPAL

NEPAL, being foreign territory, was not part of the country which Mr. Macdonald directed me to hunt every year, but it was the Mecca of all military and civil officers fortunate enough to be stationed near its boundaries and able to obtain a pass and to arrange for elephants. The visit of Evetts, Bunn, Fell and myself in 1888 has already been referred to. We had passes in Hindi allowing us to shoot several tigers, with strict instructions in them not to shoot either rhinoceros or buffalo. However, we were not likely to see either of these animals in the western part of the Nepal Tarai, though time was when they could have been found there. In Oke-den's day, buffalo were not uncommon in the Nepal, and even in the Kumaun, Tarai. When Mr. Macdonald joined up in the Kumaun Tarai, there were still a few buffalo. But when I went there in 1881 they had long ago ceased to be found in Kumaun, and I never heard of them being about in the western end of the Nepal Tarai. The last rhinoceros obtained in these parts was shot by the Hon. R. Drummond, I believe, near the boundary of the Pilibhit district in the early seventies. Parties for the Nepal Tarai used to start from Bareilly, where at that time it was easy to obtain the loan of good elephants from the Rampur State, or to hire them from the headquarters of the Commissariat Department there. The passage across the Sarda from Bareilly could be undertaken by Mela

Ghat in the Tarai district or Mundia Ghat, a little to the east, in the Pilibhit district, usually the latter. Other parties used to enter Nepal from Oudh, where the Maharaja of Balrampur had a good stable of elephants, and it was the practice of a number of other talukdars to keep a few elephants.

The Nepal Tarai is a narrow belt, varying from ten to thirty miles to the foothills. Permits to shoot are not given except within portions of this narrow belt. It consists partly of thick forests and dense undergrowth, but in other parts are open spaces and again heavy swamps with high grass. This latter type of country is more extensive to the east where Nepal adjoins the province of Bengal.

There are necessarily many small matters, among them the frequent extradition of accused persons from either side, in which the Nepal Government and that of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh do their best to assist one another. Between 1903 and 1929, when he died, Maharaja Sir Chandra Shamsher was the Prime Minister and Marshal of the Nepal State. The Maharaja of Nepal, who is the titular ruler of the State, exercises no power, which is centred in the hands of the Minister. Sir Chandra Shamsher was a most enlightened man, who has left a great record of work done for the people of his State. I had the pleasure of meeting him at the Durbar held in 1903 to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII, and our acquaintance was renewed when I came to the United Provinces in 1907. Among other acts of courtesy, he always sent me a most beautifully decorated Christmas card, usually depicting some scene from Nepal. We naturally got into communication soon after my arrival in the United Provinces in 1907, and Sir Chandra Shamsher was, during my five years there, most kind in giving me invitations to shoot in Nepal and to bring my friend the Maharaja of Balrampur with me.

The latter's adoptive father, Maharaja Sir Digbijai Singh,



MAHARAJA SIR CHANDRA SHAMSHER

had been one of the five talukdars of Oudh who remained loyal throughout the Mutiny and was a great friend of Jung Bahadur of Nepal, who brought troops to our assistance at the time.

The Nepal Tarai east of the Sarda River and north of Oudh had been ceded by the Nepal Government under the treaty of 1816. In consequence of the assistance given by Jung Bahadur with Nepalese troops to the British Government during the Mutiny, the Government of India, by a treaty concluded in 1860, restored to Nepal the country at the foot of the hills on the frontier of Oudh. In his book, already quoted, Sir Edward Braddon criticized Jung Bahadur on the ground that he treated this Nepalese Tarai as a close preserve and discouraged human settlement. He wrote: 'In the broad belt of country between the hills and the Oudh frontier, cultivation was conspicuously absent.' This is all changed now: the country has been tapped by extensions of the Bengal and North-Western Railway to Nepal from the neighbouring districts of Oudh. Large areas have been brought under cultivation, and the process is constantly extending. The forests at the foot of the hills have provided very large amounts of timber, and particularly of sleepers, for export into British India.

There are a number of railway stations, connected with Lucknow, which give easy access to a camp in the Nepal Tarai, and it was as easy to get my daily post delivered to them as to a camp in the Kumaun Tarai, or the Bijnor and Garhwal districts. A few of us went for nine days in May 1908, and in the little outing Houston got a very good tiger (9 feet 10 inches). We also got two tigresses, three leopards and two bears.

We had one day when we had first-rate news of three tigers, but our chances were entirely spoiled by bees. The tigers were in a lovely patch of cane brake but so were the

bees. The latter seem to like cane and cotton trees equally well. They were in a rare temper, the wild tribe (Rajis) who rob them of their honey having been disturbing them in the past few days. We had no chance of dealing with the tigers, and were incontinently turned out of the jungle. I have never seen bees so wild. As they were persecuting my elephant by their attacks, I took it some distance away into the open, dismounted and told the mahout to go to camp. Later on I found a mahout on a pad elephant belonging to the Pilibhit district. He and the small boy with him had been very severely stung. I picked any number of the bases of the bees' stings out of their foreheads. As I had a good bee-net I was myself protected. We went on in order to rejoin the others. On the way we were constantly attacked, as the bees were still more infuriated by the scent of their fellows who had been killed. Eventually the whole party drew up round a large fire and there we stayed all day. Faunthorpe had a miserable thing like a pocket-handkerchief to serve for a bee-net and got badly stung. So long as we kept close round the fire we could avoid further stings, but once we got outside the radius of protection the bees were on us again. We had to wait till they moved off at sunset. Considering the heat of the day (17th May), standing immediately by a large fire for hours, with the neighbourhood heated by a number of other fires, was very trying. When I got back to camp I found my howdah full of dead bees and the barrels of my rifles choked with them. In a published account of this unfortunate day Faunthorpe waxed—and very rightly—merry, saying that, from the pace I legged it off on my elephant, he had anticipated being debited with the loss of a Lieutenant-Governor.

In March, 1909, we were in camp for a few days in the Gonda and Bahraich districts. These two districts, especially Bahraich, had not recovered entirely from the famine of

1908, having a rather scanty monsoon, while other districts had had a bountiful fall of rain. I was anxious to determine on the spot whether further relief was necessary. At Piparia we had a tiger beat to machans. Two tigers were put up and everything was going on well when, half-way up the beat, they disappeared. We tracked them to a cave and left Gordon to sit up. We were glad, from camp, to hear him fire at about six o'clock and he duly accounted for the male (8 feet 11 inches—368 lb.), but the tigress never showed herself. Eustace Crawley and Val Pollok each got a tigress in the Bahraich district. The Maharaja of Balrampur had asked us and our party to go with him for a shoot in Nepal to which the Minister had invited us both. We accordingly moved on from British territory to Kumdhik, twelve miles north of the Nepalganj Road railway station. All along from Nepalganj till we reached camp was close rice cultivation. There were a good many tigers about, but it was rather early to locate them properly. We did fairly well, though we should have done considerably better. One day, when four full-grown animals were in a beat near the foothills, all escaped except one.

The last three days before we returned to Nepalganj Road I was so much occupied that I could not leave my desk. On the twenty-third a tigress with three, possibly four, cubs was found. The Maharaja of Balrampur shot a large cub. The tigress was very troublesome and charged the line before she had been fired at. She was shot (8 feet 5 inches—250 lb.) with some difficulty by Broun, who had to get out of his machan to follow her up. She was very thin and very furious. She attacked and injured three of the beaters. It did not appear that their wounds were at all serious. They were attended to by the hospital assistant in camp, immediately, and sent to the hospital at Bahraich. They went on very well for about two months, and their recovery seemed certain

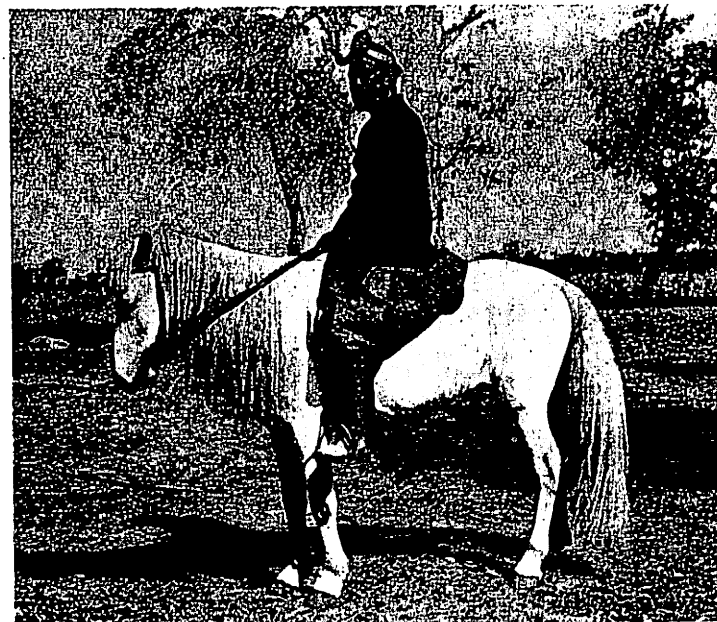
when two of them, to my deep regret, succumbed to septic pneumonia. This was the only instance of any fatal injury to any one that I ever experienced out tiger-shooting.

A very fine tiger (9 feet 7 inches—487 lb.) and tigress (8 feet 10 inches—347 lb.) which had been shot by Hill Child were at the end of the expedition brought in to the Nepalganj station. Bees had always been very prevalent in the extreme west of the Nepal Tarai but we came across none on this outing. We were told that there were many tigers to the north of where we went.

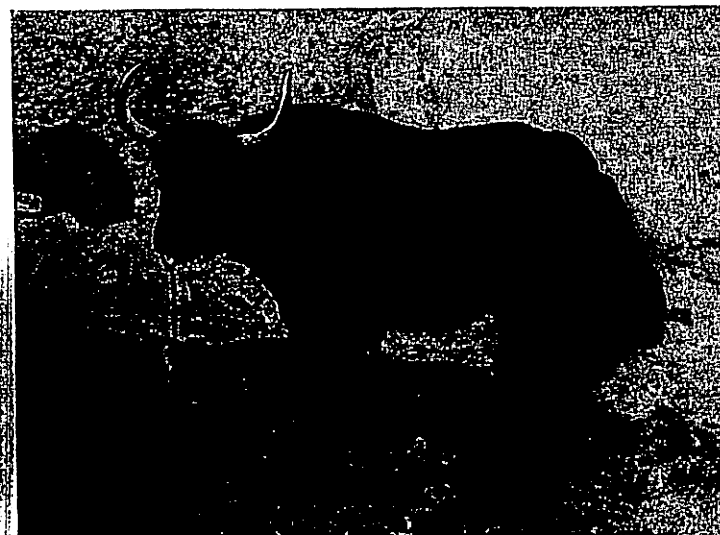
In the following February we paid a short visit to Kumdhik. The weather was very unsettled and we did not do much good, except that Willie Holmes and Rattle Barrett between them disposed of a very fine male tiger (9 feet 11 inches—488 lb.).

On the morning before we were breaking up camp we received news from three places, two within easy distance, the third six or eight miles off. We made the mistake of trying to do too much and the result of thirty-two shots during the day was that a full-grown tiger, two tigresses and one cub escaped, while two cubs were retrieved. This is about the worst day's shooting that I have ever heard of, and naturally we were all much depressed.

In the spring of 1912 we made an abortive attempt to go to the Sarju valley. Sir Chandra Shamsher wrote me a delightful letter agreeing to our going there and sent a pass to Kifa Khan to go on behalf of the Balrampur authorities at the end of January, to the officer in charge at Nepalganj, who was instructed to depute two of his men to go with Kifa Khan and give him necessary assistance. The official at Nepalganj (Colonel Kumar Jung Rana) deputed Chedi Darogha, who had been with me in 1909, to assist Kifa Khan. It was a great concession to be allowed to go to the Sarju valley. No one had been on a shooting expedition there



COL. KUMAR JUNG RANA



YAK

since the time of Jung Bahadur. It had the reputation of being a lovely valley, with low hills on either side of the stream, and full of game of all sorts, from elephants downwards. Very little was known about the means of getting about. At the end of November, 1911, Sir Chandra Shamsher wrote that he did not think that there was anything resembling a cart road, and gave permission for an overseer of the Maharaja of Balrampur to visit the valley, report about the question of marching, and prepare a rough sketch map showing the tracks and roads there. The Sarju is locally known as the Babai River, and the hilly tract where it enters the plains as Biabaoli. Biabaoli, with its surroundings, comprising an area drained principally by the Sarju and partly also by the Gojea, was at that time quite unexplored. The way we determined to approach Biabaoli was by railway as far as Bichia and then to Botgaurhi, distant about fifteen miles, where the main camp would be located. The Nepal boundary is less than three miles from the railway station. Beyond Botgaurhi the road to Biabaoli is five miles along the east bank of the Sarju and beyond that up the Sarju bed, proceeding from east to west. The Sarju there flows between hills in places almost perpendicular. Our first camp was to be in Biabaoli about eleven miles from Botgaurhi on the bank of the Sarju, and our second camp about ten miles farther up the river. We contemplated taking only a very light camp, with three or four of us to shoot, who would be changed after a day or two, and a good line of elephants. The first of us to start were Eustace Crawley, Ronaldson, Gordon and myself, and we set off in great fettle. When we got to our first camp we were met by two Balrampur mounted men, who brought in good news. We were perplexed by a constant flow of people, who had been working catechu, past our camp, towards the plains. They would not stop to tell us anything, but were evidently in a great fright. When

we got into the jungle we were soon undeceived as to what the trouble was. There were dead bodies lying about, and little groups of three or four sick persons. It was evident that these were refugees from a cholera outbreak higher up in the hills. It was pitiable to see that every one carried a black wooden water bottle and clung to it. They were carrying infection with them in the tainted water. There was absolutely nothing that we could do for these poor people. But we had to determine at once that we must move our camp back to Botgaurhi as soon as possible. It was impossible to clear the mahouts, other camp followers and elephants out till the next morning.

We found numbers of tracks, some of them of very large tigers : and we had two beats and should have got two tigers. One male (9 feet 10 inches) was shot by Ronaldson. It appeared to me that we were a little early (March 5th). The tigers were still living in the hills and visiting the valley to hunt at night. With warmer weather they would live more in the wonderful high grass which filled the valley. We carried out our retreat to Botgaurhi early on 6th March. There O'Meara (Civil Surgeon of Mirzapur) killed a tigress (7 feet 11 inches) before we got back. The task before us then was to retreat to the Bahraich district as quickly and quietly as possible, and to avoid disseminating cholera in any direction. This, I am glad to say, we were able to do with complete success. The precautions taken, under the directions of O'Meara, prevented any trouble. This end to what was intended to be a short but successful exploration of the Biabaoli jungles was a great disappointment to me. Sir Harcourt Butler was more fortunate in 1919. Arriving with his party at Bichiha on March 14th, he went through the Biabaoli jungles and emerged to the east, through the country which we had visited in 1909 and 1911, rejoining the railway at Nepalganj. He had a party of ten, and between 15th March

and 1st April they shot eight tigers and six tigresses. As mentioned in chapter six the tigers averaged just over 10 feet and the tigresses just under 9 feet.

I saw Sir Chandra Shamsher in Calcutta for the last time in 1925, and had a very pleasant interview with him. At the beginning of 1926 I was invited by Sir Francis O'Connor to a week's shooting at Biknatori. I was anxious to get a good rhinoceros, and in this I was successful, being helped to secure it by Sir Thomas (now Lord) Catto. The jungles round Biknatori in the Eastern Tarai of Nepal, to the north of the Champarun district of Bengal, contain far thicker and more continuous areas of grass cover for tigers than I had seen anywhere else. It was in this neighbourhood that the shooting camp of His Majesty King George V was in 1911, and the day it finished Sir Chandra Shamsher wrote to me from the camp to tell me that the shoot had been carried out without a hitch and that His Majesty and party had bagged thirty-nine tigers, eighteen rhinoceros and four bears.

Till I visited Biknatori I had never understood how the art of ringing tigers was carried out and I am afraid that, in my ignorance, I had felt some prejudice against it. It is briefly described by Faunthorpe as follows :

'To ring the tiger numerous elephants are employed in an encircling movement, one group going in a wide arc, silently and in single-file, to the left and the other group in like manner to the right until the leaders of each of the two lines meet and the ring is complete. Then the elephants face inward, their riders begin to make a din, and the host of hunters converges upon the beleaguered animal. The circle becomes smaller and smaller. The tiger has secreted itself in the densest patch of jungle. The fateful moment has come. Two large tuskers are sent in to rout out the

