

The LAND of the GURKHAS

OR

The Himalayan Kingdom of NEPAL

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CHAPTER XII

Sports and Diversions

THE Nepalese are fortunate in having in their own country what may truly be described as a sportsman's paradise. For as a haunt of big game, the Terai, composed as it is for the most part of swampy tracts and overrun with tall grass and rank vegetation, is probably unequalled in the world. This is the abode of such animals as sambhar, buffalo, chital, hog-deer and swamp-deer, while among the larger animals, elephants, rhinoceros and tigers are found in larger numbers, it is said, than anywhere else in the world.

Herds of elephants roam in its dense jungles, emerging in the rainy season to do considerable damage to the crops. The rhinoceros in turn, which is practically extinct in India, save in Assam and northern Bengal, lives chiefly in the large tracts of level country covered with dense, high grass jungle that lie in the Chitawan district, and although many are shot annually, no appreciable diminution of their number has apparently been effected, nor has it become any less of a terror to the villagers in the rainy season, when it wanders forth seeking how much of their rice crops it may devour.

Thus it will be seen what opportunities are available to devotees of sport among the ruling classes of Nepal, and the enormous "bags" of tigers, rhinoceros, bears, leopards, etc. which fall to the guns of the Prime Minister's relatives and other members of the aristocracy who organise shooting expeditions during the cold weather in different parts of the Terai, will be readily understood.

On special occasions, such as the visit of some foreign royalty or other exceptionally eminent personage, shooting expeditions are indeed organised by the Prime Minister on a truly prodigious

scale, necessitating weeks and even months of careful preparation, and entailing a correspondingly large expense. Two such expeditions which will long be remembered were the one organised by Sir Chandra Shumshere at Kasra in honour of His Majesty the King in 1911, and that organised, again by Sir Chandra, for the Prince of Wales during his visit to India during the winter of 1921.

On special occasions such as these, an area which may measure some thirty or forty miles in length and ten in depth is selected in a favoured district—often that of Chitawan—in the Terai, and into this chosen area are driven rhinoceros, elephants, tigers, wild boars, bears, leopards and other smaller game by an army of beaters who have been employed for weeks or months beforehand in combing the warm, damp jungles of lower Nepal. Ultimately a vast number of animals are concentrated within this area and allowed to grow accustomed to their new surroundings.

As to the actual manner of hunting there are two different methods practised. In the one case "kills" are tied up, and on news being received of the presence of tigers or some of the other beasts that have been beaten in, the game is either stalked or ridden down in the open.

The other system—and this is the method with which the Nepal Terai is chiefly identified—is that of encircling the tigers or other game by an enormous ring of elephants. In this case, the tigers discovered and reported from the various "kills" are surrounded by the elephants and kept penned in in this way until dawn and the arrival of the guns. The ring is then gradually contracted until the tiger is eventually completely shut in by a living wall of elephants—there may be as many as two hundred and fifty—through which escape is practically impossible.

Next, in order to get the tiger out of the particular patch of jungle in which it is hidden, about a dozen elephants, specially trained for the purpose, are formed into line and marched direct upon the beast's lair. This constitutes, naturally, one of the



[Photo by Sir F. O'Connor.]
MOVING UP INTO POSITION AT A TIGER SHOOT.

[Photo by Sir F. O'Connor.]

A FINE TROPHY.



most exciting moments of the proceedings, and though the tiger will contrive on occasion to evade the search in the most astonishing manner, it is, of course, almost invariably dug out eventually and compelled to break loose and runs the gauntlet of the waiting rifles in its dash for liberty. His chances, however, are small, as may be imagined, and even a moment's halt or hesitation will almost certainly prove fatal to him.

On the other hand there are occasionally times when he does manage to escape. Thus he may charge the ring of elephants, and by so creating a momentary panic amongst them succeed in breaking through and getting away. I recall this happening, indeed, actually twice in the course of a shoot given by Sir Frederick O'Connor, British minister in Nepal at the time. The undergrowth was, however, very thick, and the grass particularly high on that occasion, thus making visibility difficult. Also, in a private shoot of this kind such as the British minister is accustomed to give from time to time during the cold weather, the number of elephants employed is much smaller than on the occasions of the big government shoots for royalties, etc., so that the ring is less compact and much more easily broken through.

Sometimes again a tiger will spring upon an elephant's head and manage to effect its purpose in that way. It may be noted, however, that an elephant, though in such a case as this it will naturally not escape a severe mauling, is as a rule quite capable of dealing with a tiger, and curiously enough, much smaller animals such as leopards, or even jungle cats, will often cause more alarm to elephants than the larger kinds of game.

The royal game *par excellence* in Nepal is, however, the rhinoceros, for permission to shoot which the direct permission of the State must be obtained. The killing of a rhinoceros in Nepal is, moreover, a more important event than that of any other animal, for amongst the superstitious shikaris (hunters) of the jungle there are many half-magic uses to which the carcase of a rhino may be put. Magic properties are, for instance, credited to a rhino's horn, from the scrapings of which an

aphrodisiac is composed, and there are other occult purposes for which it may be used, making it a most coveted object to secure.

Again a little blood from a rhinoceros smeared on the head of a dying man is supposed to ensure him a happy reincarnation; and these are only a few examples of the part magic plays where a dead rhinoceros is concerned. The Duke of Windsor, then Prince of Wales, accounted, I may add, for one rhinoceros at the big shoot organised in his honour in December, 1921.

There were no fewer than four hundred and twenty-eight elephants collected on this occasion, while the total bag consisted of eight rhinoceroses, eighteen tigers, two leopards and two bears. Yet even this pales into significance when compared with the royal shoot at Kasra ten years before. On that occasion the number of elephants—including a certain number borrowed from India—amounted to over six hundred, while the total bag was thirty-seven tigers, eighteen rhinoceroses and four bears, out of which twenty-one tigers, ten rhinoceroses and two bears fell to King George's own gun.

If elephants are not unduly frightened by tigers, they generally go in deadly fear of rhinoceroses, and almost invariably bolt when they hear the latter's peculiar grunt, resembling that of a bear, as they approach.

While on the subject of elephants in Nepal, mention must not be omitted of the great elephant-catching operations known as the kheddah. For many years the Nepalese employed the methods that obtained in northern India, whereby a herd of wild elephants was run down with others especially trained, and the particular elephants required were separately secured and tamed.

This method proving costly, however, and often entailing damage to the animals so secured, the Nepalese decided to introduce the kheddah system that has for many years now been in vogue in southern India. Under this system the wild elephants are rounded up by specially trained elephant-catchers, and finally induced to enter an enormous stockade composed of immense tree trunks where they are—by no means unprotesting, of course

—one by one tethered to trees and so made ready to begin the long period of training that awaits them.

Jung Bahadur, the famous Prime Minister to whom I have referred elsewhere, used to capture elephants himself single-handed. Mounted on a specially selected tame elephant, he would, on coming upon a herd of wild ones, lasso one of them, after which, by fastening one end of the long rope to a large tame elephant which went in front, leading the way, and the other to his own which followed behind ready to administer a prod or push with his tusks should the captive jib or protest too violently, he would return in triumph to his camp.

Jung Bahadur was indefatigable in pursuit of any game. Thus, if he heard of a large elephant that he was particularly anxious either to catch, he would be off at daybreak and follow the track over the worst ground, often on foot, all day and all night perhaps without any food but a little fruit. His courage too knew no limits.

On one occasion when he was present at a duel between elephants—he delighted in witnessing such fights—one of the mahouts was thrown off. The elephant, however, was not riderless for long, for the Prime Minister without hesitation took the mahout's place.

Tiger and rhinoceros shooting was Jung Bahadur's favourite sport, and anything less than a deer he used to refuse to classify as game at all. Small game such as snipe, partridges, parrots or pigeons he considered quite unworthy of a sportsman's attention, nor could he ever understand why some birds were dignified with the name of "game" and others not.

The sagacity of elephants is well-known, but it is not until one has had first-hand experience of them in such places as the jungles of the Nepal Terai that one can appreciate it to the full. The wonderful skill which they exhibit in removing all obstacles from their path, and the cleverness with which they pick their way up and down the steepest banks, often overgrown with jungle, must be seen to be believed.

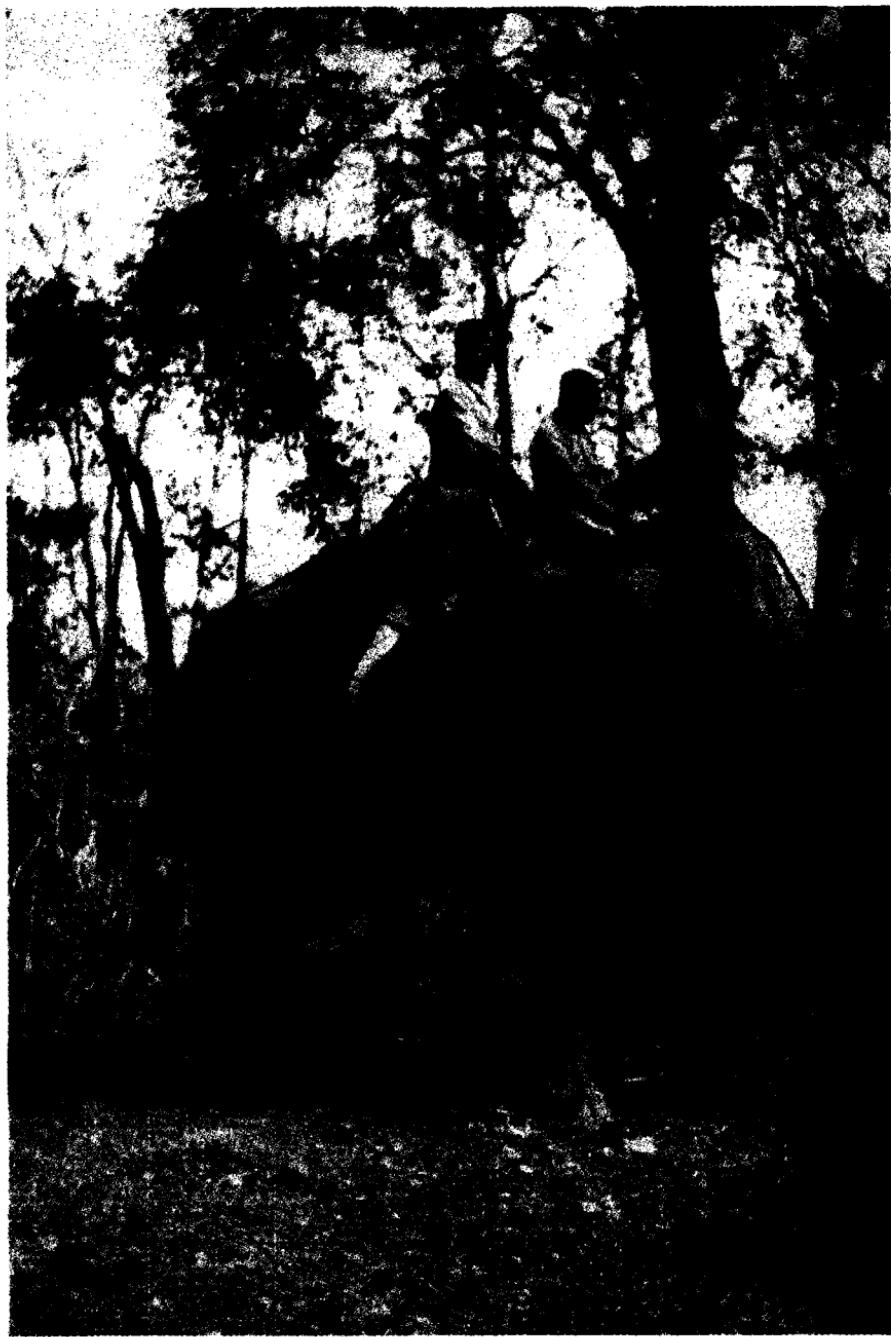
When shooting from an elephant's back, the sportsman is

usually seated in a howdah, in which he is not only comfortably accommodated, but also effectually secured against any risk of falling off. Riding on a pad which is merely a large, stuffed bag strapped to the elephant's back may, however, entail—certainly in the case of the uninitiated—considerable risk of this when the going is rough. But to the old hand one way is just as acceptable as the other. I have myself traversed part of the journey from Raxaul to Kathmandu on both howdah and pad elephants with equal comfort and security.

I had, however, an amusing experience on a pad elephant in the Terai on one occasion. This was when returning from a shooting expedition near Tribeni, that charming spot on the Rapti river and close to the British India frontier, where the British Envoy often has a camp, and the cause of the contretemps was my own elephant, a huge beast rejoicing in the name of Krishnamurti.

Krishnamurti had been displaying the sagacity peculiar to her kind during several miles of the homeward journey when she, or at any rate, her front legs, suddenly disappeared into a nullah, or deep drain, completely hidden in the long grass, that lay right across our path. The suddenness of the shock unseated me from my pad, and I was thrown heavily forward on to the mahout's back, pinioning him face downwards, with the whole weight of my body lying on top of him.

To prevent myself from slipping head foremost off his back down into the nullah I clung desperately to Krishnamurti's huge ears—an edifying snapshot for a photographer had there been one there! Fortunately, however, Krishnamurti did not roll over, but with the assistance of her trunk, and the skilful manipulation of her ungainly limbs, succeeded in completely regaining her balance and successfully surmounting the further side of the nullah. The effect of this last manœuvre was to propel me into a sitting position and on to her back once more, though I was now wedged in between the mahout, now released from my unwelcome presence on his back, and the front of the pad.



[Photo by Sir F. O'Connor.]

RETURNING TO CAMP.

This little episode had been enacted in a clearing of the jungle, and after elephant, mahout and myself had, so to speak, straightened ourselves out again, I observed that several other elephants with members of our party had made their appearance and had been interested spectators of the little side-show which I had unintentionally provided. On the nearest elephant to me was my Gurkha orderly Lalsing (who had, fortunately as it happened, my rifle) and a couple of Brahman soldiers belonging to the Envoy's Escort in Kathmandu, most of whom are, through their long experience, an invaluable asset to any shooting expedition.

Lalsing, true to his Mongolian bonhomie, made no effort to conceal his merriment, while even the more sedate Brahmans held discreet hands to their faces to avoid giving full play to their emotions. The day had not been distinguished by any superabundance of sport, and I had, in their estimation, contrived to enliven it by this gratuitous entertainment to no small degree. I could neither speak nor understand the dialect of my mahout on this occasion, and so was spared his version of the little incident, in which, however, I do not doubt that he alluded to Krishnamurti's, and possibly even my ancestors, in no very decorous or endearing terms!

If I have dwelt at some length on the subject of sport in these pages it is because it has always played so prominent a part in the national life of the country and had so large a share in the development of the character of the people.

It is indeed fortunate that the Nepalese have such abundant facilities in their own country for indulging in their favourite hobby, for the amusements open to dwellers in cities are, of necessity, lacking in the little mountain villages in which they live. Thus it falls to the lot of the people themselves to make their village life cheerful or the reverse, and fortunately, the cheery, buoyant nature of the Gurkha enables him to rise to the occasion and to dispense with the ordinary distractions of the outer world.

Dancing and singing play a very important part in the

Gurkha's life. The soldier sings in camp and in the barracks, while the peasant sings as he works in the fields. During important festivals such as the Holi and the Dasehra, they will sing incessantly throughout the duration of the festival, which in the case of the Dasehra, at any rate, means ten days.

To European ears, their songs, by virtue of their constant repetition of the same short refrain, are frankly somewhat monotonous as a rule, although some of them, especially the harvesting songs of the Limbu and Rai tribes in eastern Nepal, have a definitely tuneful and fascinating lilt about them. In any case, whatever the quality of the actual songs, a Gurkha sing-song is a pleasant and exhilarating function to attend, at any rate, for a short time.

There is nothing ominous or mysterious in the distant throbbing of Gurkha drums. It does not, as in some countries, portend warning of coming danger, or some general summons to arms. On the contrary, should you make for the source of the sound you would merely find a group seated on the ground—if at night round the cheerful blaze of a camp fire—singing innumerable choruses to the accompaniment of one or more oval drums and the clapping of their own hands, which beat out the time as they sing, while in the centre one of their number slowly gyrates, his feet beating time to the throb of the drum.

It is only on very rare occasions that the women dance, although in certain parts of the country there is no objection to their joining in the singing. Indeed, at times of festival and on other special occasions, men often dance dressed in women's clothes, and so graceful are their movements that with their smooth Mongolian faces, and bedecked with the jewellery beloved of the Gurkha maidens, they are not easily distinguishable from the genuine article. As regards Nepalese folk songs, a large number are connected, like those of most other lands, with prominent physical features of the country—mountains, rivers and so on. Thus the Kali Ganga (river), the Devi Ghat (ford) and similar well-known landmarks, form frequently the themes of some of the best known examples, a

great many others being woven not unnaturally, round Kathmandu and other places in the Nepal valley. "As I gazed up at the monument, my hat fell off"—runs a popular couplet, referring to Bhim Sen's monument on the Kathmandu parade-ground. Although exceedingly primitive for the most part, many of the folk songs surprise one by the thoughts and feelings expressed.

In the heavens above are more than nine lakhs of stars.
 I cannot count them.
 Thus the words of my heart surge up into my mouth.
 But I cannot utter them,

—is a typical example of the more sentimental kind, while of the humorous variety—for the Gurkha cannot remain sentimental for long—the following may serve as an example:—

After seventeen years of married life a son was born to me
 But unfortunately he was eaten by the cat.
 I searched for him all over the house
 And finally found his head in the pantry.

Although I fear a sophisticated European audience might consider this last silly rather than funny, it is none the less sufficient to send the more simple-minded Mongolians into convulsions of laughter—so little does it take to amuse them. There are various kinds of songs for special occasions and ceremonies. Thus, in central and western Nepal, the Ramayana, Chalitra and Mahabharata, which are the Hindu classics and mythological songs known throughout India, are considered appropriate for certain ceremonial occasions. Amongst songs unconnected with questions of ceremonial, the Sorati, best described as a kind of Hans Andersen fairy-tale put to music, and the Juwari Kheliako, a song in which a boy and girl take part in question and answer form, are perhaps the most popular and widely sung. The tunes of the old-established songs do not change, but the composition of new songs and tunes is in the hands of professional female singers known as Gainis

who wander from village to village, exploiting their talents in the musical line. In the case of central Nepal, the music for the songs is invariably written in the pentatonic or black-note scale; this is, however, not the case in eastern Nepal, where, as I have already said, the music is more melodious and the effect not unlike European songs.

Apart from those of the simplest form, such as roughly-fashioned shepherds' flutes and the drums for accompanying the songs, musical instruments are rarely seen in Nepal. The few that there are are played exclusively by the professional musicians of the country, known as *Damais*, who, in addition to being hereditary musicians, are also the tailors of the country. Lovers of the art will, I fear, be distressed to learn that the caste of musician is one of the very lowest in Nepal, although it may be noted that the mere fact of performing on an instrument would not seem to be considered in any way derogatory, since the musicians of a Gurkha regimental band in India will often be men of good caste. The bands of the Nepalese regiments cannot be said to compare very favourably with the average regimental band in the Indian army, although the band of the rifle regiment can give a pretty good account of itself.

My reference, a few paragraphs back, to women joining in at sing-songs and the like calls to mind that the Gurkha woman enjoys, in general, a greater measure of freedom than is allowed to her sister in the Indian plains. Unhampered by any trammels of caste, she takes an interest in life and what is going on about her in a manner that approximates more to that of a European woman, herein being akin amongst eastern women, to the vivacious, cheroot-smoking Burmese. Bright and intelligent as a rule, she has the same gift of humour and repartee as her male counterpart; like him, too, she is a great smoker and shares his predilection for rice, beer and any other kind of intoxicating liquor that may be obtainable. In consequence of this exceptional freedom which she enjoys, the married life of the Gurkha woman has little of Oriental submissiveness about it, but may be said to run more on European than on eastern

lines, with the wife enjoying life as well as the husband, but faithfully doing her duty by him and their children, looking after his uniform if he be a soldier, knitting gay stockings and mufflers for him to smarten his appearance, and so on.

For the Gurkha, it may be said, takes a great pride in his personal appearance, and delights to affect bright colours, besides adorning his cap and person with flowers, of which he is passionately fond. He might, in fact, be described as rather vain.

In the matter of the Gurkhas' looks it is difficult for the European to speak to much purpose until he has had sufficient experience to enable him to discriminate between individuals, since, naturally, with their Mongolian type of features, they all look much alike at first. In time, however, one learns to be more discriminating, and then has no difficulty in perceiving that they differ from one another just as much as Europeans, that some are good-looking, some plain and so on, although it must be admitted that not many foreign observers seem disposed to admit as much.

"Little, ill-made and abominably ugly," is how Laurence Oliphant described a regiment which he saw at a review in Kathmandu about the middle of the last century. Oliphant was, however, perhaps more prejudiced than most foreigners against the Mongolian type, for, after seeing a party of Bhotiyas and Tibetans in a temple in the same city, he delivered himself as follows: "Had I been asked to determine the origin of this race, I should have pronounced it to be a mixture of Naples *lazzaroni* with the scum of an Irish regiment"! Similarly, words like "debased" and "squalid" figure in an entirely unmerited denunciation of Nepalese women.¹

Yet, biased and inaccurate in his fulminations though Oliphant might be, he is only one of many foreigners who have been unwilling to concede even a modicum of good looks to the Nepalese, though it should be understood, of course, that reference is made in this connection only to the Mongolian

¹ *Journey to Kathmandu*, Chs. VII and XIII.

hill tribes and lower classes as a whole. The higher castes and the upper and ruling classes, possessing as they do the blood of ancient Rajput stock in their veins, belong naturally to a different category.

And so, too, as regards the women. Like the men, they too disclose individual differences in plenty when one gets to know them, though almost all of course are of the Mongolian type and hardly beautiful, for the most part, in European eyes. Many, however, are not uncomely, and not a few, especially in eastern Nepal, and particularly in Darjeeling, might with justice be called distinctly pretty.