

REMINISCENCES OF
THE INDIAN MUTINY
(1857-58)
AND AFGHANISTAN
(1879)

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CHAPTER VII

UPPER ASSAM

NOTES ON NATURAL HISTORY

IN travelling up the Brahmapootra River from Goalundo to Dibrogurh the steamers formerly stopped at Goalpara, Gowhatty, and Terpore. At Goalpara there is a fine view extending for many miles over the river and forests. The district on the side of the river opposite to the station was formerly considered the best shooting district in India, and for variety of game perhaps the best in the world, with the exception of Central Africa.

At the time of which I am writing, it abounded with tigers, rhinoceros, elephants, deer, and buffaloes, and I believe the quantity of large game has not greatly diminished.

Gowhatty is one of the most beautiful places on the river, and has been often described. Several small islands are dotted about on the river, and the view at sunset is not unlike that of the Italian lakes.

During the time that I was stationed at Dibrogurh I shot several buffaloes, but never saw a rhinoceros, although their tracks were sometimes met with.

An unfortunate accident happened to a friend, Major K——, at Sudiya. He was beating a dense

patch of jungle in which it was thought there was a rhinoceros, with two elephants, one of which he was riding. The other elephant was sent into the jungle to try to drive the rhinoceros out. The elephant became alarmed from some cause, and in spite of the efforts of the mahout, he rushed crashing out of the jungle, and Major K—— fired at the animal under the impression that it was the rhinoceros. The elephant was so badly injured by the shot that he died a few days afterwards, and I believe Major K—— had to pay eight hundred rupees as compensation. I once nearly underwent an unfortunate experience, not while shooting, but from an elephant joining a wild herd. I was travelling to Luckimpore, about three marches from Dibrogurh, to visit some Government buildings. I had only one elephant for the journey, and he was a bad-tempered, ill-conditioned animal. His tail was of the shortest proportions, and the mahout affirmed that it had been bitten off in a fight with another elephant. The first march was through a dense forest inhabited by wild elephants, and although we did not see any, we noticed many tracks and boughs of trees which had evidently been lately broken by the animals. On the following morning, having struck the tent and arranged the loads ready to be placed on the elephant, I called to the mahout to bring him. He came up holding the elephant by the ear, but just as he reached the packages he turned aside and bolted into the forest, followed by the mahout.

After waiting some hours and hearing nothing of the mahout or elephant, I determined to return on

foot to Dibrogurh, and walked back through the forest, a distance of about twenty miles. The elephant was not caught for three weeks, and after being caught by the commissariat elephants which were sent out in pursuit, and being fastened to a tree, he again broke away and was not caught for two or three days. A reward of fifty rupees had to be offered for his capture.

On another occasion, when riding this elephant through a swamp near Sib Saugor, returning from snipe shooting, he became violent, and with a great shake at a time when I was not quite prepared, he flung me into the marsh with the gun and all I had about me. Shortly after I left Assam the animal had to be shot, as his temper became too violent and he had injured his mahout.

It happened that when I left Dibrogurh to return to Calcutta that one of the commissariat elephants had died at that station the day before, and the carcase had been thrown into the river. The steamer always stopped for the night, to avoid the danger of the snags or trunks of trees which were obstacles to navigation, and just as we were sitting down to dinner the carcase of the elephant, which had been thrown into the river the day before, arrived, floating along and bumped up against the steamer. It was pushed off from the side and continued its journey, travelling with the rapid stream of the Brahmapootra at the rate of four or five miles an hour. On the following evening, when we again stopped for the night, the same thing happened at the same time, and the same uninvited guest came bumping along, giving us the benefit of its unpleasant