

INDIA

AND ITS NATIVE PRINCES

Travels in Central India

AND IN THE PRESIDENCIES OF BOMBAY AND BENGAL

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CONTAINING 317 ILLUSTRATIONS AND 6 MAPS

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CHAPTER IX.

BARODA—(continued).

The Haghur.—Fight between Elephants, Rhinoceroses, Buffaloes, &c.—The Wrestlers.—The Nucki-ka-kousti.—The Disobliging Astrologers.—A Misadventure.—The Royal Train.—Antelope Hunting.—Leopards for Hunting Purposes.—“Pig-sticking.”—The Guicowar’s Birthday.—Tiger Hunting.—The Plains of Goojerat.—A Night on a Tree.—The Royal Menagerie.

TOWARDS the end of June the rains gave us a little respite, and the Guicowar availed himself of this break in the season to commence the series of fêtes he had promised to give us. These consisted of hunting-parties, tilting-matches, and combats. Every day brought a new programme.

The Court of the Guicowars is the only one in India that has preserved, down to the present time, the customs of the Middle Ages in their primitive splendour. The impoverishment of their estates has compelled most of the other rajahs to despoil these great ceremonies of a considerable portion of their former luxury, and amongst some of the others English influence has introduced European habits, higher objects, and better tastes. Here this mixture is never seen; everything bears the impress of the Hindoo character, and displays the originality of past times.

The contests of athletes and animals are what the Guicowar prefers to all other entertainments; and he spends enormous sums upon them. Of an ardent and somewhat truculent character, he is passionately fond of these exciting and cruel sports, in which the lives of men are endangered. He personally superintends every arrangement that concerns them, and indulges in a liberality that borders on extravagance in their promotion. His parks contain numbers of elephants, employed specially for combats; and rarely does a week elapse without one of these spectacles. The elephant, which is in general an animal of a most gentle disposition, can be brought by a system of exciting nourishment to a state of rage which the Indians call *musth*. He then becomes furious, and attacks whatever comes in his way, men or animals. The males alone are capable of becoming *musthi*, and, to bring them to this state, it is usually necessary to feed them with sugar and butter for three months.

The Guicowar one day informed me, with evident good-humour, that all preparations had been made, and on the morrow would be held the first combat of elephants. We went to see the two animals which were to fight, and upon which many wagers had already been staked. These immense brutes were loaded with iron chains of considerable weight, and shut up separately in strongly fenced enclosures. A dense crowd was pressing round them, praising and criticizing the good qualities or defects of each. The king went to and fro in the midst of the courtiers, like a private individual, gesticulating and shouting like the others. The betting was carried on with spirit; and I laid wagers with the king,

Bhao, and several others, merely for the sake of following the general example, for I should have been puzzled to decide on the merits of one animal over those of the other.

Next morning, Harybâdada, the grand-huntsman, came in a carriage to the Motibaugh, to take me to the Hâghuroo, or elephants' arena. A fine portico leads into a spacious court, surrounded by brick buildings faced with carved stones, the whole bearing a great resemblance to the style of Francis I. We passed through some dark and deserted rooms, and entered the king's box, where the principal officers of the Court had already assembled. Three arm-chairs had been placed for the king and ourselves, and cushions for the nobles. The arena, of which we commanded a complete view, is in the form of a vast parallelogram, about three hundred yards long by two hundred wide. It is entirely surrounded by thick walls; a great number of narrow doors allow of entrance or exit to the attendants, without permitting the elephant to follow them. The summits of the walls are provided with balconies, open to the public, who seem passionately fond of spectacles of this kind. The roofs of the neighbouring houses, even the trees, are covered with a motley and, as usual, noisy crowd. On an elevated mound are placed the female elephants, and these, it appears, have a decided taste for such sights. In the arena itself are the two males, each chained to one of the extremities; expressing their wrath by trumpeting, and fiercely digging their tusks into the sand. By instinct the elephant always recognises his *mahout*, or driver, and allows him to approach him even while in this condition. Gracefully formed young men, nearly naked, are walking about in groups. These are the *sâtmarî-wallahs*, who play the same part here as the *torcadores* at bull-fights in Spain, and whom I may be allowed to call *elephantadors*. They wear nothing but a light, coloured turban, and a scanty, tight-fitting pair of drawers, which give the elephant nothing to lay hold of. The most active carry only a horsewhip and a veil of red silk; others are armed with long lances; and, lastly, a small number have only a fuse fastened to the end of a stick, and a lighted match. These last have the least showy but the most important functions to perform. They must post themselves at different points of the arena, and run to the rescue of the elephantador, when in danger. Rushing in front of the infuriated animal, they flash their fuses in his face, when he recoils in terror, and they succour the wounded. But they are not allowed to have recourse to this stratagem unless there is real danger. If they make a mistake, they are reprimanded; if they allow the matador to be killed, they are severely punished. They are all selected from among the handsomest and best-made men that can be procured, and are endowed with wonderful agility.

A few minutes after our arrival, the Guicowar entered the box and took his seat between us. At a given signal the arena is cleared for the contest. Each mahout seats himself on the neck of his elephant, the chains are cast loose, and the two animals are in full view. After an instant's hesitation, they approach one another, with their trunks raised, and trumpeting fiercely: their pace increases, and they meet in the centre of the arena. Their foreheads strike together, and the violence of the shock is so great that their fore feet give way, and they remain leaning against each other. They wrestle with their trunks, which they entwine like arms, and the mahouts have sometimes to defend themselves with their goads. For some minutes the elephants remain head to head, until one of them, finding himself growing gradually weak, feels that he is going to be conquered. It is a critical moment, for the creature well knows that in taking flight he must present his flank to the enemy, who may pierce him with his tusks or throw him prostrate. The worsted one, therefore, summoning up all his strength, pushes his adversary back by one desperate thrust, and takes flight. The combat is decided; shouts re-echo on all sides, and

the spectators are occupied more with their wagers than with the elephants. The vanquished one has now to be taken away, and the field left free to the conqueror. A party of men come with great iron pincers, indented, with long handles united by a spring. They skilfully fix a pair on one of the hind legs of each elephant, where, through the operation of the spring, they remain tight. The long handles get entangled with the other three legs, and, as the teeth of the pincers at every step bite a little into the skin, the elephant stops short. He is forthwith surrounded, chained, bound with cords, and, if vanquished, is led by a band of armed men behind the arena. The victor remains alone; his mahout dismounts, the pincers and fetters are removed, and the *sálmari* commences. This is the second act—a combat between the elephant and men. The arena is invaded by elephantadors and fuse-bearers, this brilliant troop, with loud cries, approaching the elephant from every side. The latter, taken aback by this sudden onslaught, stands undecided at first; but soon he receives a stroke of the whip on the trunk, the lances prick him all over, and he rushes with fury on one or other of his assailants. One comes in front and waves his red veil; the elephant pursues him, but, constantly plagued in this way, he repeatedly changes his course, and never catches any one. After a short time spent in useless efforts, he at length perceives his mistake, and changes his tactics: he waits. Then one of the best elephantadors advances, gives him a vigorous stroke with his whip, and springs on one side just as the trunk is on the point of seizing him. But the elephant does not let him go in safety. This time he has fixed on his enemy, and nothing will make him abandon him: all that remains for the fugitive is to reach one of the small doors, and so make his escape out of the arena. The animal, blind with rage, strikes the wall, and, fancying he has at last got hold of his assailant, furiously tramples the soil. He who has not seen the elephant in one of these combats, or in a wild state, can form no idea of the rapidity of his course. A man pursued, and having to run some two hundred yards before he could find shelter, would infallibly be lost. In the first combat at which I was present the elephant resolutely pursued a young man, who was a very good runner, and, in spite of the thrusts of lances with which he was assailed, never lost sight of him for an instant. The unhappy man made desperate efforts to gain one of the outlets; but, just as he reached it, the creature's trunk seized him by the wrist, lifted him into the air, and dashed him violently to the earth. A moment more and the enormous foot, already raised, would have crushed his skull, when one of the fuse-bearers sprang in front of the elephant and covered him with flames, and the terrified animal fled bellowing away.

At last the trumpets sound, and I see the elephantadors disappear through the small doors. The elephant does not understand the meaning of this sudden flight, and appears to be on the look-out for some unexpected attack. A door opens, and a Mahratta horseman, lance in hand, and mounted on a beautiful steed, enters the arena. Prancing up to our balcony, he gracefully salutes the king. I remark that the horse has his tail cut very short, and I am told that this is to prevent the elephant laying hold of him. The latter runs towards him with his trunk raised aloft, in order to annihilate the creature whom he hates most of all. He has, in fact, a peculiar aversion for the horse, which he manifests even in his gentlest moments. This third act of the combat is the most attractive. The horse, admirably trained, does not stir, save by order of his rider; so that the latter allows the elephant almost to touch him with his trunk before getting out of his way. He attacks the enormous beast with his lance, sometimes in front, sometimes in flank, driving him into a paroxysm of rage. But even at this moment



ELEPHANT FIGHT AT BARODA.

the elephant displays his extraordinary intelligence. Pretending to take no notice of the horseman, he allows him to approach behind; and, suddenly turning round with astounding rapidity, he is on the point of seizing the horse, who only saves himself by a desperate bound. At length the combat terminates; the horseman again salutes us and withdraws, and the pincer-bearers enter, welcomed by the shouts of the crowd, to secure the elephant. These poor fellows have hard work of it, for the elephant charges them, and they have great difficulty in bringing it to a stand-still. The king calls before him the fuse-bearer who saved the life of the sâtmari-wallah, and rewards him with a piece of figured stuff and a purse of five hundred rupees.

Another sort of combat, though not so attractive nor on so grand a scale, is not wanting



RHINOCEROS FIGHT AT BARODA.

in originality; I mean rhinoceros-fights. The two animals are chained at opposite extremities of the arena. One is painted black, the other red, in order that they may be distinguished, for otherwise they resemble each other in every point. When the company is assembled (I am describing a scene of which I was a witness), the two hideous animals are let loose, and start off in an ungainly trot, raising angry cries. They seem to have very bad sight, for they pass one another several times without stopping; but at length they meet, and attack each other fiercely. Horn against horn, they exchange passes, as though fencing with swords, until one succeeds in passing his horn beneath the head of his antagonist, which is their vulnerable spot. The animal, therefore, who finds himself in this predicament suddenly turns, so that the point of the enemy's horn rests against his jaw-bone, instead of

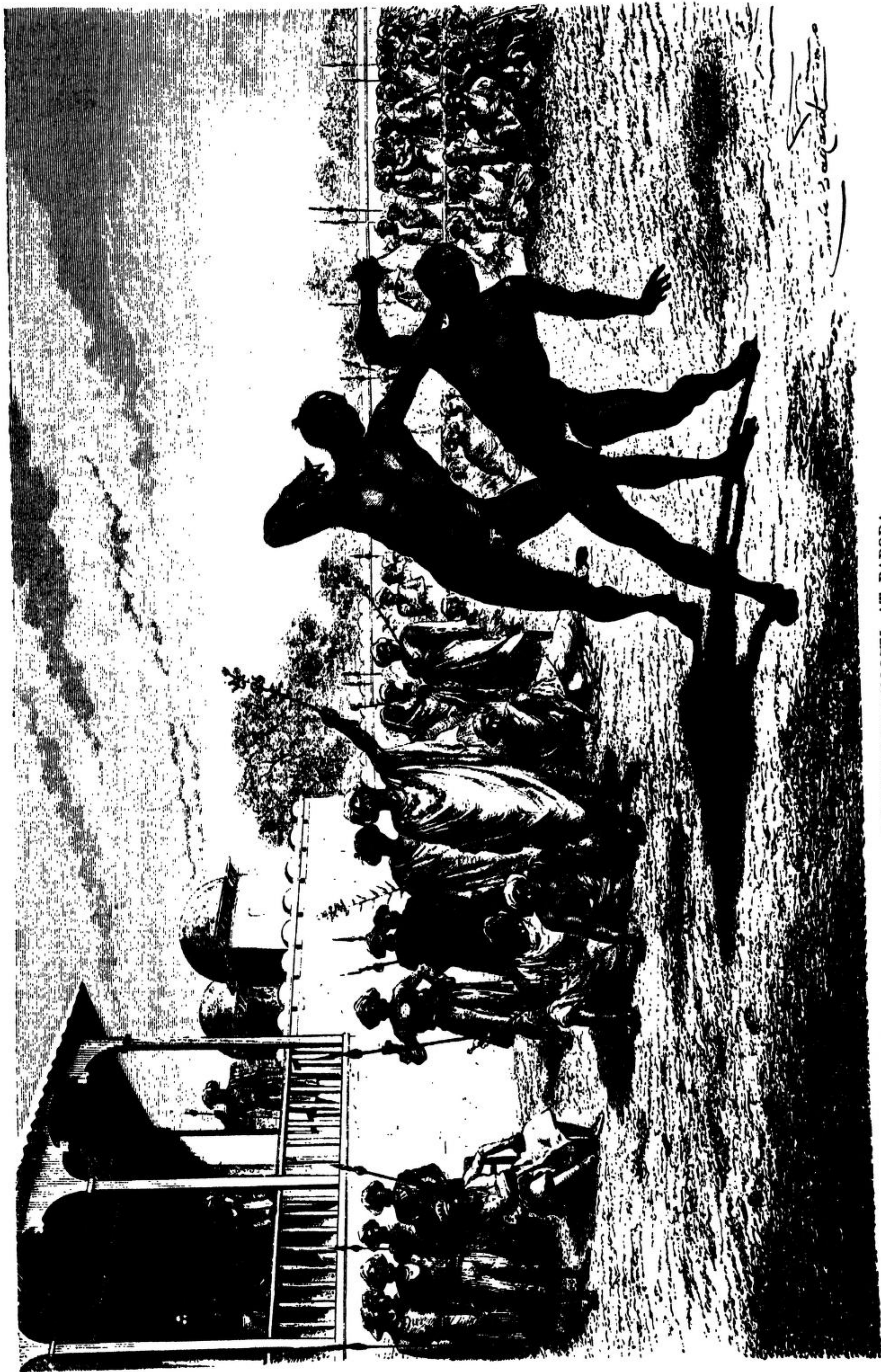
penetrating his throat. They remain in this position, motionless, for some minutes, then separate, and one of them takes to flight. For a whole hour the fight is many times renewed with increasing fury; their horns clashing together with a great noise, their enormous lips covered with foam, and their foreheads stained with blood. Their attendants surround them, and throw buckets of water over them to refresh them, so that they may sustain the combat. At last the Guicowar orders a cessation of hostilities; a fuse is employed to separate the combatants; they are secured, sponged, and led away.

In these beast-fights buffaloes also display a terrible degree of fury. Their vast horns are formidable weapons that repel the tiger himself, and their agility makes them more dangerous than even the elephant. But the oddest of all these contests was one I saw one day, in the *hâghur* at Baroda, between an ass and an hyena, and—who would have thought it?—the ass gained the victory! The sight of the hyena filled him with such rage that he immediately attacked and, by dint of kicking and biting, very soon disabled him. The victor was covered with garlands of flowers, and led off amid the cheers of the multitude.

The Guicowar's passionate love of this kind of entertainment is not limited to combats between animals of every description that can be trained for the purpose. He also keeps at his Court a perfect army of athletes, who are celebrated throughout the whole of India. He, himself, glories in being a *pehlwan*, or wrestler, and devotes himself daily to this exercise. Every morning, after performing his ablutions, he goes on to the terrace and wrestles with one of his *pehlwans*. Of consummate skill as an amateur, he is exceedingly jealous of his powers, and would assuredly be enraged if the wrestler allowed him to detect the least mark of condescension at this game. The latter is therefore obliged to strive freely with the king, and nevertheless, like a good courtier, to allow him to claim the victory. These wrestlers are recruited in all the provinces of India, but they come principally from the Punjaub and Travancore. Brought up from their infancy in the profession, they attain an extraordinary development of muscle. Their diet, their mode of living, and their dwellings are all regulated by the king himself, who tends them somewhat as he does his fighting buffaloes and elephants. The wrestling-day is always announced a long time beforehand; very often the neighbouring rajahs send their *pehlwans* to compete; bets are freely made, and great animation prevails throughout the Court.

The first contest was held on the 19th of July, and we went to the *hâghur* to witness it. The king and his courtiers had already arrived, and were seated on chairs round an arena strewn with sand. They were only waiting for us, and we had scarcely taken our seats when two men, half naked, formed like Hercules himself, came forward to salute the king; then, taking up their position in the centre of the circle, they fraternally embraced, and closed with one another. The rule at these wrestlings is, that one of the combatants is to throw the other on his back on the ground, or at least to compel him to declare himself vanquished. When, therefore, one holds the other doubled up under him and cannot succeed in forcing him down, he twists his wrist and tries to break it; the other then cries for quarter. But the ardour they import into these games is such that very frequently they prefer to bear the pain than to confess themselves beaten, and it is necessary abruptly to put an end to the combat.

Another sort of combat, much more terrible than those already mentioned, and which is only to be seen nowadays at Baroda, is the *Nucki-ka-kousti*, that is to say, "fight with claws." Here the combatants, almost naked, but adorned with crowns and garlands, tear each other with claws of horn. These claws were formerly of steel, and caused certain death to one or other of the combatants; but they have been abolished, as too barbarous for modern



Amala 2 August 1900

THE NUCKI-KA-KOOSTI, AT BARODA.

times. Those now in use, are, as I have said, of horn, and are fixed on the closed fist with thongs. I was only once present at a combat of this kind, for my heart was so moved by the horrible spectacle that I refused to go again. The wrestlers, intoxicated with *báng*—liquid opium, mixed with an infusion of hemp—sing as they rush upon one another; their faces and heads are soon covered with blood, and their frenzy knows no bounds. The king, with wild eyes and the veins of his neck swollen, surveys the scene with such passionate excitement that he cannot remain quiet, but imitates by gestures the movements of the wrestlers. The arena is covered with blood; the defeated combatant is carried off, sometimes in a dying condition; and the conqueror, the skin of his forehead hanging down in strips, prostrates himself before the king, who places round his neck a necklace of fine pearls, and covers him with garments of great value. One episode, moreover, disgusted me to such a degree that, without any heed of the effect my sudden departure might have upon the Guicowar, I at once withdrew. One of the wrestlers, whom the *báng* had only half intoxicated, after receiving the first few blows, made a show of wishing to escape; his antagonist threw him, and they rolled together on the ground before us. The victor, seeing the unhappy wretch demand quarter, turned to the king to know whether he should let the other rise: but, inflamed with the spectacle, the monarch cried out, "*Maro! maro!*" (strike! strike!) and the scalp of the unfortunate fellow was torn without mercy. When he was taken away he had lost all consciousness. That same day, the king distributed amongst the victorious wrestlers necklaces and money to the amount of more than four thousand pounds.

The Guicowar was exceedingly superstitious. For several days we postponed our hunting-parties because the astrologers had not been able to fix on a suitable day to commence them. Every morning the venerable pundits, adjusting their spectacles, arranged themselves in a circle, and made a pretence of consulting certain tables of copper covered with cabalistic signs. At the end of an hour, one of them would approach us, shaking his head, and announce to the king, with a melancholy air, that the omens were not favourable. What their intentions were in acting thus I could not comprehend, and the pleasantry seemed to me to be carried a little too far. Happily, the king at last showed himself so greatly annoyed, and manifested so keen a desire to follow my advice and leave the astrologers to con over their conjuring-books, that permission was given us next day.

On the morning of the day appointed, the elephants, with their howdahs, were assembled in front of the palace; horsemen came and went, carrying orders to the villages where we were to go, and the crowd of attendants of all kinds were keeping up a famous noise. The king had an elephant to himself; I shared one with Bhao Sahib, and Schaumburg another with Harybâdada. We formed a gay company, with our numerous escort of horsemen and runners, while palanquins accompanied us carrying rifles, ammunition, and provisions. The king, happy to resume one of his favourite exercises, laughed loudly at the jests and sallies which the jesters, perched on an elephant, launched at the crowd or the courtiers. It had been reported that a small wood, close to the village of Courlagaum, harboured a family of leopards, and the king loudly declared that we should certainly carry their skins back to Baroda. This was on the 22nd of July, and the air was charged with a slight moisture, which enlivened the foliage of the trees and the verdure of the fields. The sky, lightly covered with clouds, betokened a good hunting-day. The rainy season is not so severe in these parts as in the south; and, although June and October are very wet, the intervening months are like our summer.

On leaving the village of Binagaum, we found the ground so saturated with the late tempestuous showers that the elephants sank several feet into it, and we were obliged to

abandon them. We mounted on horseback, and then proceeded two or three miles, till we reached a *nullah* (torrent), deep and strong, the passage of which threw us somewhat into confusion, and took us a full hour. When we got to the other side, there was a fresh source of embarrassment: the horses sank up to their knees in the soft soil, and their efforts to free themselves brought us into complete disorder, and many horsemen were thrown. Meanwhile, a fine rain began to fall. The Guicowar was in despair; and, if the astrologers had seen us in this pitiable plight, they would certainly have enjoyed a good laugh at our expense.

There was nothing for it but to give up the chase, and get home the best way we could. The signal was given, and every one exerted himself to regain *terra firma*. The king, with frowning brow, let his horse guide himself. When we were able to take a gallop, I placed myself at his side, and we set off full speed for Baroda. I would not, for a good deal, have addressed a word to him at that moment. We were followed by those courtiers who were best mounted, and every one maintained a profound silence. When we reached the nearest houses of the city I asked permission to retire to the Motibaugh, and left him at liberty to continue his gallop through the streets, together with his band of courtiers. I saw Bhao in the evening, and he told me the king had loudly expressed his vexation. What annoyed him most was our presence in the midst of such disappointment. He asked himself, with much simplicity, what we could think of a prince who, after making us wait a long time, had given us a run through mud and rain instead of a hunt. When I saw him myself on the following day, I consoled him as well as I could; and a few jests from the buffoons, and a promise from the astrologers that the next hunting-party would be more successful, served to make him forget the unhappy incident.

To make up for that bad day, the grand-huntsman received orders to get up a great antelope-hunt in the royal preserves at Etola. The railway would take us as far as the meet; and, before we started, Harybâdada declared he would answer for it with his head that the Binagaum mishap would not be repeated, and that we should find the ground in good condition. Careful preparations were made; and, a special train having been placed at the king's disposal, on the 2nd of September we got into the royal carriage—a present to the Guicowar from the Railway Company, in acknowledgment of his concession to them of the line. It was a rich and elegant saloon, hung with brocaded silks, and sumptuously furnished in the Eastern style; in the centre of which was a throne, intended for his Majesty's use, but which he never occupied. The Guicowar had but little faith in any European inventions. When he travelled by rail, he made his favourite, Bhao Sahib, get on the engine, thinking by that expedient to shield his person against all accidents: but this was a vain precaution. It would only require a bribe from conspirators to send the king and all his Court to a better world; for, in this country, any means of getting rid of an enemy are held good.

We arrived without hindrance at the Etola station, where were assembled the attendants and the horses. None of us had guns provided for us; and, when I expressed my astonishment thereat to the king, he pointed to two beautiful cheetahs, or hunting-leopards. These animals were to carry on the chase for us. Each of them was lying in a palanquin carried by four men, and was secured by a small chain. They had their eyes covered with a little hood of leather, and remained perfectly quiet in the midst of the surrounding tumult. The hunters, or rather the lookers-on at the hunt, are in great force; and they are divided into two parties—one under the orders of the king, the other under Bhao. Schaumburg and I were of the king's party, and were soon on horseback by his side; some Scindian, Mahratta,