

BIG-GAME SHOOTING IN NORTHERN INDIA



A vividly-written article which will enable stay-at-home folk to realize the dangers, difficulties, and manifold thrills of big-game hunting in the jungles of Northern India. The writer has been privileged to take part in several notable hunts, and tells some exciting stories concerning tigers and leopards.

If any one part of the world can fairly be called a hunter's paradise it is surely Northern India. There, in the vast tract of land which stretches along the base of the giant Himalayas, over a thousand miles in length and from twenty-five to fifty miles in width, lurk innumerable beasts of prey, wild animals of a dozen different species, that afford excellent sport for the hunter and excellent fare for the table, and a profusion of game and waterfowl the sight of which would pale with envy the cheek of a sportsman from almost any other clime.

The purpose of this article is to illustrate the manner in which the big game of this huge domain are hunted down, to show something of the difficulties and risks which attend this pursuit, and to depict, so far as one can on paper, the fascination of the open-air life of the big-game hunter in quest of his quarry.

The territory to which the writer's experiences are confined in the present narrative stretches some fifty miles or so along the frontier which separates the independent State of Nepal—the home of those gallant little soldiers who so freely enlist in the service of the British Army and fight so bravely therefor, the Gurkhas—from the British district of Kheri in the United Provinces. The small Mohman River is the boundary line between the United Provinces and Nepal, and it is in the belt of land between this and the Sarda River, some twenty miles or so in width on an average, that some of the best

shooting in this part of the sub-Himalayan big-game region is to be found.

The ground is very mixed in character.



The start, showing

Patches of dense jungle, where lofty trees mingle their branches with thick clumps of bamboo and festoons of trailing, spiked cane, which penetrate everything that comes in contact with them but the thick hide of an elephant, vary with tracts of almost open undulating plain, with here and there clumps of dwarf jungle grass and occasional groves of casuarina trees, where gorgeous-hued peacocks lazily wing their flight from one tree to another. Then come vast stretches of swamp, covered with a dense forest of thick, coarse jungle grass, often rising to a height of twenty feet above the ground. In parts this gives place to a reed-



The Author, with the tiger that gave him some anxious moments.

covered expanse of mud and water, where water-fowl breed in enormous congregations, and which is impassable to all save swimming animals. Such country is suited, naturally, to varying forms of animal and bird life, and it embraces the fierce and dreaded tiger, the hardly less fierce leopard, the Himalayan bear—an ugly customer when irritated—the hyena, the rhinoceros, the wild elephant, the tiger cat, the leopard cat, the wild boar, the nilgau (a large two-horned antelope), the black buck (a smaller species of antelope), the sambur and the barasingha, or swamp deer, two magnificent specimens of large deer, the cheetal, or



the elephants advancing in a more or less regular line.

spotted deer, the barking deer, and the hog deer. These practically make up the bag of big game, but in addition to these a species of hare is to be found, and in the rivers and swamps adjoining them crocodiles of all sizes abound, whilst the feathered life comprises the pea-fowl, hill pheasant, black and grey partridge, quail, jungle-fowl, snipe, florican (a rare and shy bird, and excellent eating), woodcock, the wild goose, and wild duck of many varieties, including mallard, teal, and widgeon.

The king of the jungle is, naturally, the tiger, and here he reigns in undisputed sway—save for the hunter of big game, who alone stands between him and the prey he takes so often in the form of the cattle belonging to the people of the jungle villages, and sometimes the people themselves. The depredations caused by the tiger when he has once tasted human flesh and become a pronounced man-eater are scarcely credible, but it is on undenial record that a single tiger is known to have killed no fewer than a hundred and eight people in the space of three years, whilst another killed an average of eighty persons per annum until he was tracked down and shot. In another instance a man-eating tiger so terrorized a certain district that for a time thirteen villages were abandoned and a tract of two hundred and fifty square miles of land was put out of cultivation, whilst yet another killed a hundred and twenty-seven people, and for a time stopped all traffic on a public road!

Incredible as this may sound, it is not so to those who, like the writer, have tracked the tiger in his native haunts, who realize his opportunities for devastation, and the difficulty of cornering him when he has gained experience in the art of eluding the sportsman eager for his skin. Tiger shooting in the jungles of Northern India is by no means all beer and skittles; it is a highly-exciting pastime, with many risks, needing a cool head and nerves of steel, together with keen presence of mind and extensive powers of endurance. It is, however, indeed the sport of sports, with a rich reward, in which the steady hand and the straight eye of the man are matched against the force, the strength, and the cunning of the animal, and the prize is to the winner. It is, above all things, an experience one can never forget.

From the description I have given of the nature of the big-game shooting ground in Northern India, it will be understood that sport cannot be obtained on foot. There are two methods open to the sportsman—he must either pursue the chase on elephant-back, or he must be transported on the back of an elephant into the heart of the jungle, there to climb into the fork of a large tree, wherein a platform of boughs has been built, and

await there in absolute silence the coming of the spoil, driven towards him from afar by beaters on elephants. This latter method is known as shooting from *machan*, the Indian name for the sportsman's tree hiding-place. A variation of *machan* shooting is to tie up an animal in the jungle near by to attract a tiger or a leopard, and shoot one's quarry as it is about to seize its victim. This is usually done at night.

Shooting from *machan* is very interesting for the marvellous view it affords one of the life of the jungle, as the animals and birds of all kinds that find a home in the jungle, driven from their lair in the hunter's direction, pass by him in silent procession, fear often compelling them to choose strange companions and master their dread of each other in the presence of the greater dread of the unknown. But this is not the method of big-game hunting which most appeals to the heart of a sportsman. Indeed, *machan* shooting too often lends itself to abuse, and many is the well-vouched story heard in one part or another of India of "the man who *must* shoot a tiger" whilst he is in India, and for whom, therefore, a sacrificial beast is prepared in the guise of a tiger, glutted beforehand with many bullocks, so that it is scarcely able to move, but is with much difficulty prodded into the range of fire of the "sportsman," safe and secure in his *machan*, and duly falls a prey to his rifle—if he happens to aim at all straight!

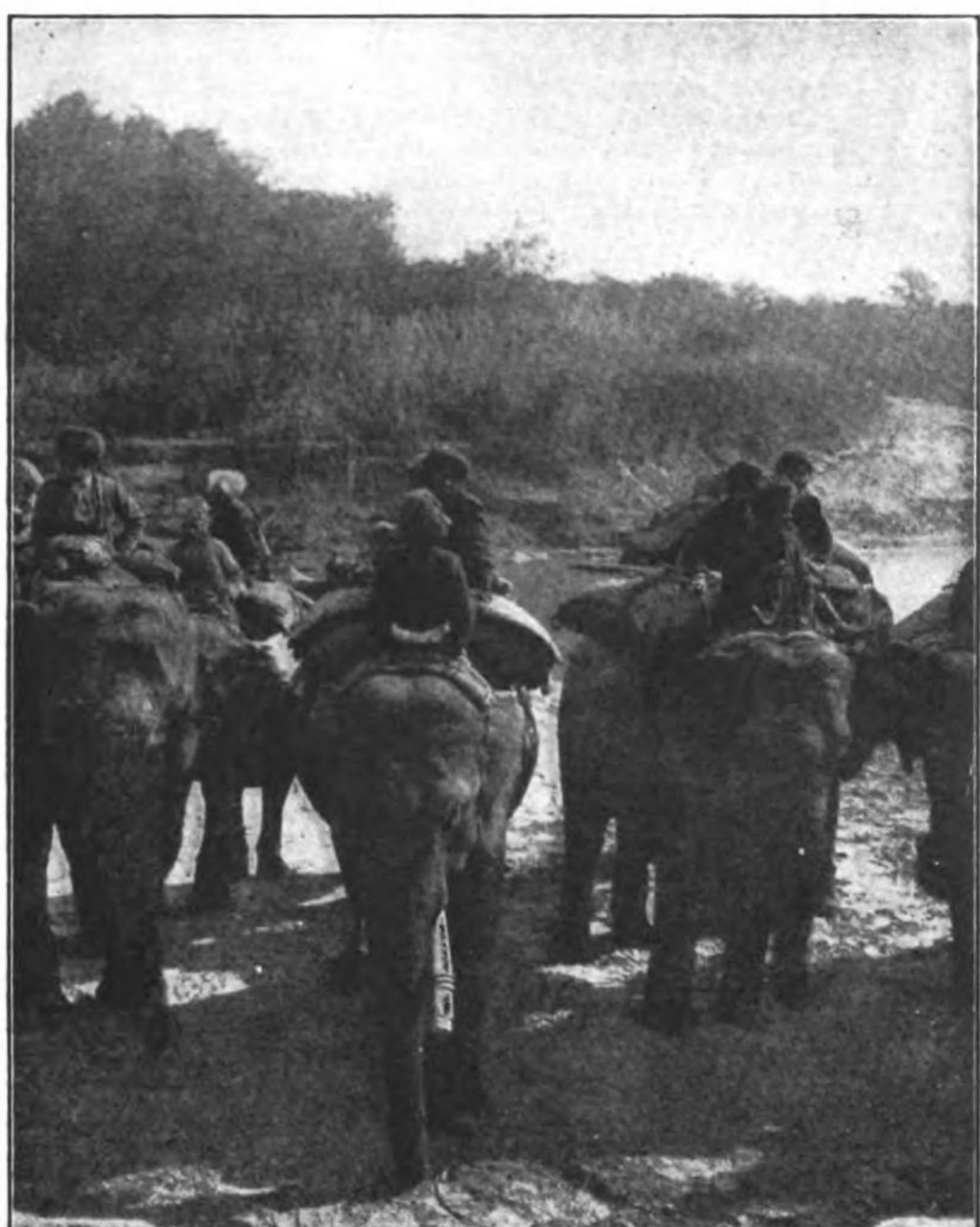
I know personally of one globe-trotting British politician who shot a tiger from *machan* at his first attempt, and who is very proud of his performance; but what the Indian *shikaree* (hunter) who arranged it said about the matter is exceedingly entertaining!

The sportsman loves, naturally, to find his quarry, follow him, and despatch him if possible, and in this fashion the big-game hunter hunts in Northern India, where necessity compels the use of highly-trained elephants, some for the hunter's personal use, to shoot from, others for the use of the beaters. The hunters use an ingeniously-made cane and wooden box-like contrivance, termed a "howdah," which is placed on the elephant's back, with many quilts beneath to soften the jolting, and bound tightly with ropes passed underneath the animal's stomach, like the girths of a horse.

The howdah has two compartments, the front one being for the use of the "gun" and the rear for his "loader," or a non-shooting lady guest. It is furnished with special racks for guns and a pouch for cartridges, and it has padded seats and foot-rests and rails for one to grip when the elephant is in motion. When game is expected, the "gun" usually stands in his howdah, that is to say, he wedges himself

in somehow, in a not very comfortable position, but one which enables him, however, to hold his gun, or rifle (he has, usually, both beside him, and often two rifles), in such a position that he can fire directly he gets a chance, and often whilst his elephant is in motion. The beaters balance themselves on the elephants, seated either on woollen quilts, or on small Indian bedsteads, termed *charpoys*, which, inverted, are fastened on the animal's back. Lest it be thought that the hunter in his howdah is quite immune from the charge of a tiger, let it be known that given a suitable "take-off"—and there are many such in the jungle—a tiger has been known to spring clean over a howdah and its occupants, whilst it often lands on the head or back of an elephant, when inveterate coolness and presence of mind are necessary to avoid a catastrophe. The writer has seen this happen like a bolt from the blue, as it were, and if it were not for the fact that elephants used for sporting purposes are all highly-trained beasts, thoroughly broken in to their work, and often veterans of many fierce encounters, accidents would be much more common than they are.

The elephants are trained to hunt when they are young, and usually only females are selected for the purpose, being, remarkable to relate, much more reliable than the males, less likely to lose their heads when in a tight corner, and not so prone to get wild and break loose on their own account. They are really wonderful creatures, and the more one gets to know them the more one likes them. Affectionate to a degree, marvellously in-



A typical group of sporting elephants. These animals are very carefully trained and are extremely valuable.

telligent, with great powers of endurance, and extraordinary adaptability, they can beat a "tank," in that they can swim as well as traverse any kind of ground, no matter how steep or rough. Moreover, they can and do uproot trees as they crash through the jungle in search of game, and they withstand the onslaught of a tiger or a leopard with Spartan-like courage, and keep their head to the foe when to flinch might well mean the death of the sportsman they carry. It is well said that they never forgive an injury or forget a kindness, and no experienced big-game hunter neglects to reserve for his elephant during his midday meal in the jungle some choice tit-bit, such as a lump of sugar, a piece of sweet cake, or a banana, for the elephant, like a small child, has a sweet tooth!

It is an exceedingly costly business, big-

game shooting in Northern India, for usually anything from a dozen to two dozen elephants are used—so many being required for a good beat, though, naturally, a good deal depends upon the number of "guns," and it is practically impossible to secure the genuine article unless one happens to have a "pull" with a sporting maharajah, or one is a lieutenant-governor, a general, or something even higher up in the official world. To commence with, sporting elephants cost a mint of money apiece, and they are owned usually only by maharajahs and rajahs, whilst apart from Government-preserved tracts of lands most game-preserves also belong to maharajahs and rajahs, and apart from the impossibility of securing, in an ordinary way, sporting elephants and sporting jungles, there comes the cost of a shooting expedition, which is very heavy, when one bears in mind that each shoot lasts usually from a week or ten days to three weeks, and that every article of food (other than the game which falls to one's gun), and all one's camp equipment, has to be carried in bullock-carts, with scores of attendants, for many miles, over rough ground, from one camping-place to another.

The writer is one of the few "humble ones" who happen to be in the good graces of one of the real "lords of sport." He knows the *shikaree* of *shikarees* in Northern India, the hero of far more than a hundred shoots, who probably understands the ways of the denizens of the jungle and the habits of the elephant better than any man living, and who, as the *diwan* of one of the most powerful and popular maharajahs of the United Provinces, is able to give wonderful shoots to his friends, who know him for what he is—one of the whitest men ever made and a prince of good fellows, a sure shot, with nerves of steel, marvellous personal strength, and withal a way with animals and men which both are unable to resist. His name is known to every sportsman of note in the United Provinces and beyond, and many are the distinguished English visitors on a "cold-weather" tour in India whom he has entertained in his inimitable and most hospitable manner in the jungle.

When you are bidden, as his guest, to join him on a hunting expedition you are given the name of a tiny station on a small narrow-gauge railway which runs to the back of beyond in the jungle which skirts the Himalayas. There you will find your host awaiting you with elephants ready for the first day's shoot. You leave civilization in the shape of the aforesaid railway station, and after a day's shoot you finish up some ten or a dozen miles away, find your tents put up all ready for you—and very comfortable quarters too, though in the midst of the jungle—and then, day by day, you will

march steadily away from civilization, on into the jungle, until the time comes when you must all unwillingly incline once more to the way that leads to the haunts of men and exchange the silence and grandeur of the forest for the hum of traffic and the raucous shouting of the city's multitudes.

Here is a typical day's routine—if, indeed, one can speak of anything like routine on a big-game hunt. At 8.30 breakfast (if an early riser you will probably have had an hour in the marshes near by amongst the wild fowls, whilst the mists hover about the countryside and render your approach easier), and then elephants are mounted and a tract of land, somewhat swampy in character and covered with coarse jungle grass, is beaten for swamp deer. These creatures are very speedy, and he must be wary who would add them to his bag. After advancing in procession until the hunting-field proper is reached—the elephants take their toll of whatever vegetation they fancy by the wayside—a regular line is formed, in the centre of which our host places himself, to direct operations by a wave of his handkerchief, one "gun" on the extreme right, another on the extreme left, and others, if others there be, between the centre and the right and left wings.

We will say that eighteen elephants comprise the line and that there are five "guns," including our host. On the thirteen other elephants are perched one, two, or perhaps three skilled beaters, who know just what to do to aid in securing a successful shoot, though, of course, they take their orders by signal from their master in the centre. At the start each elephant is twenty or thirty yards from the next, and the line, it will be seen, is a fairly lengthy one, but as circumstances vary the distance between each elephant is altered and sometimes a few feet only separates them. The advance is made in as straight a line as possible, so as to give the widest range of fire, and soon the cavalcade is advancing with a swinging step through the tall jungle grass, which here, though it does not obstruct the hunter's vision, nevertheless shelters the quarry almost completely.

A loud trumpeting on the part of an elephant, perhaps of two, proclaims the fact that a stag has been sighted, there is a rapid waving of the jungle grass some fifty yards ahead, and at once every "gun" is on the alert. Then some perverse influence leads the stag to half-turn and rush head-on for the line. In a few seconds it has succeeded in getting too near for a shot to be fired with safety, and a second later, more trumpeting from the elephants, and perhaps a swerve on the part of one of them, shows that the stag has got through the line, and away. It may perhaps be observed that the male deer

only may be shot, and excessive caution must be used to prevent the slaughter of a doe; one has to wait for a sight of the antlers and then fire low behind them. Sometimes an animal is hit as he is heading on to the line, or as he is clearing it on the other side, but, as a rule, this is looked upon as a risky procedure and the shooting is confined to shooting along the line, at animals either starting up and running from the line or parallel with it. Many opportunities such as these occur, and some fine heads fall to the bag, varying in antler points from eleven up to fifteen or sixteen, and making excellent trophies of the chase.

At noon a halt is made, and under the shade of some tall jungle tree, tiffin, or lunch, is served, whilst the elephants are given a rest, and then sport is resumed. Before lunch the objective was swamp deer only, the beat being specially undertaken for this; now general shooting is allowed. This means the use of either rifle or shot-gun, as opportunity occurs, and accordingly we now enter small woods, where good pea-fowl, jungle-fowl, and partridge shooting is obtained, with an occasional hare, certainly a wild boar or two, and—if we are exceptionally lucky—some deer of various kinds, possibly a bear or leopard, and even a tiger, if the Fates are very kind, whilst in swampy ground we get some shots at snipe and wild-fowl. Often it is quick change indeed from shot-gun to rifle, and *vice versa*, and one has to be exceedingly "nippy"; moreover, it is none too easy to change one's aim and get one's eye in from a downward aim to an upward one in the air.

Soon after five o'clock the sun begins to get low and the air, which has been quite hot since an hour or so after the start, grows perceptibly chilly. Accordingly we make tracks for camp, exchanging our elephants with howdahs for fast-running elephants, having quilts only on their backs, on which we seat ourselves as comfortably as possible, "and so," as Pepys would have put it, to our night's lodging in the jungle, where now, in the distance, we descry camp-fires blazing. Then follows a bath, a change of clothes, a hearty meal, in part furnished by ourselves, and the sound sleep won by those who have had an arduous day in the open air. We are quite undisturbed by the howling of the jackals and pariah-dogs, the gambols of the monkeys on the tent-roofs, or the occasional deep roar of a tiger or leopard which has roamed into our "sphere of influence."

Some days of a "shoot" are devoted exclusively to leopard and tiger hunting, and for these occasions special arrangements are made and additional precautions are taken. It may be that overnight some jungle villagers have come in and announced that a tiger or leopard has made a "kill"

amongst their flocks and is lying up and feasting himself in a near-by jungle, to which, eager for vengeance on the spoiler of their herds, they have tracked him. In this case the most experienced member of the party, accompanied by villagers, goes as near to the spot as is convenient, notes the surrounding country, and then makes plans accordingly to beat up the beast. But should no *khabar* (news) of a "kill" come to hand, either a certain tract of land which a tiger or leopard is said to frequent will be beaten, or a goat will be tied up in a convenient spot in the jungle overnight to attract master tiger, or leopard, as the case may be. Should he pay the animal a visit and carry off his prey, he will be tracked by the blood, and other signs, to his hiding-place, and hunted therefrom.

A tiger having been spotted, by one method or another, dispositions are made to force him to bolt from his lair. Some experienced beaters on elephants are told off specially to rouse him and get him on the run in a certain direction, where "guns" have been posted so as to cover the line of flight, somewhat after the manner in which "guns" are posted in a game-shoot in this country. If a shot should take effect and wound the tiger slightly, the whole complexion of the business is altered. At once it becomes much more serious, for whereas before the tiger was only too anxious to get away from the huntsmen, possessed by that general dread of human beings attaching to wild animals, now he is angered, his blood is up, and he will show fight to the end. Very great care must be taken now in order that no member of the party is taken by surprise, and at a disadvantage, and the tension of one and all increases. Everyone feels that now he is in for the real thing, that anything may happen, and that it is up to him to see that the happening is to the tiger! A thrill pervades one's frame which I can liken only to that which seizes one when in war one comes under the fire of the enemy for the first time.

The spot where the wounded animal was last seen is approached very cautiously, in a fairly close, semi-circular formation, if such be possible from the nature of the ground, and then the elephants, urged on with cries from their attendants, commence to trample down the jungle with their feet, causing such a commotion that the tiger is forced either to charge at once or run on ahead in the jungle and choose a more convenient spot from which to attack his enemy. From now onwards until the animal is dispatched the moments are full of intense excitement, for danger lurks everywhere. So silent and cat-like is the tiger, moving in the long grass, which often wholly

conceals him, that none can tell when or at whom he will spring. Sometimes the first indication will be a loud snarl directly below one, followed by the shrill trumpeting of

Members of a shooting expedition lined up in a shallow river.



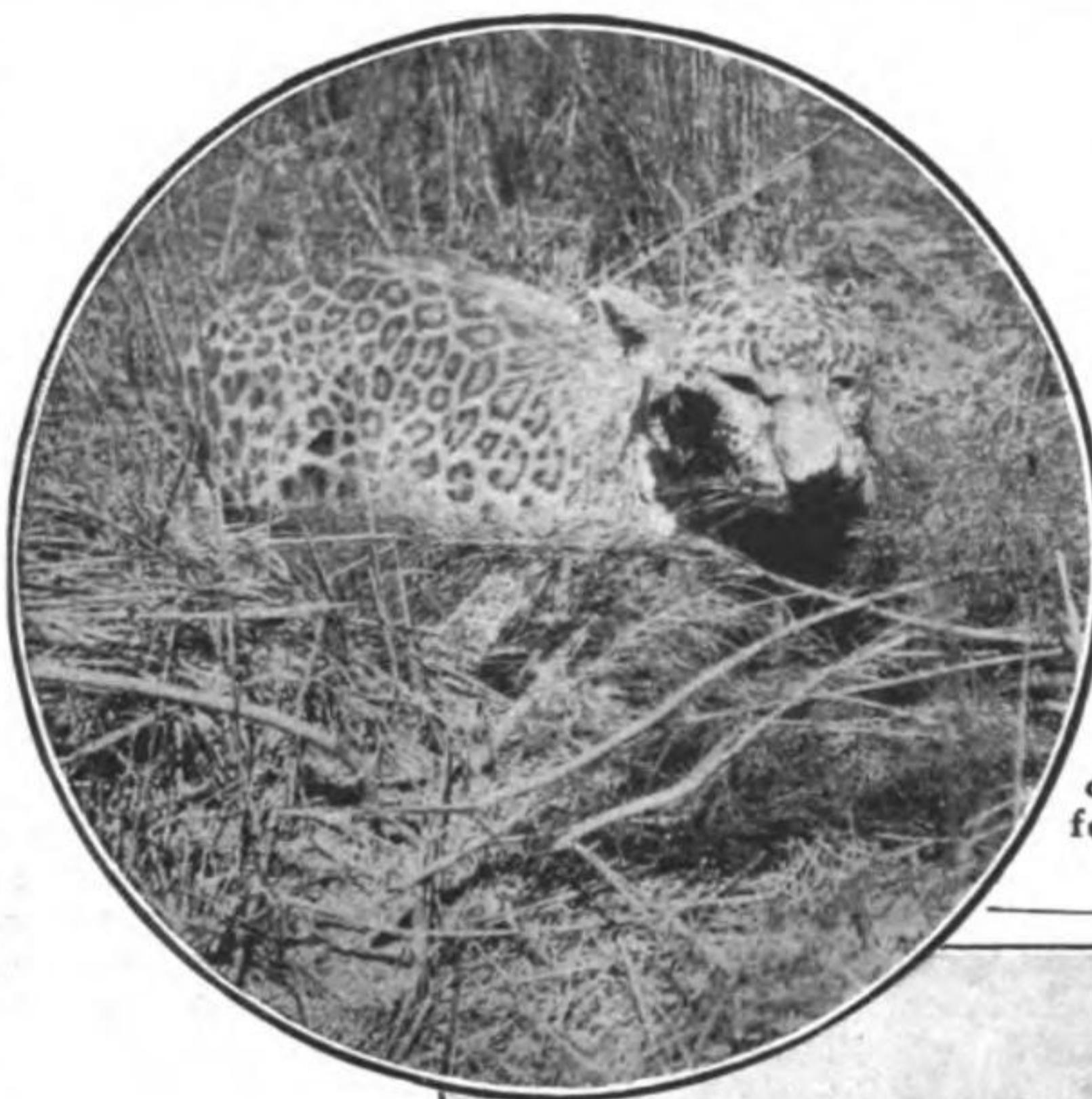
The line swinging round. Notice the height of the grass.

one's elephant, and the next thing one sees, perhaps, is the tiger coming dead on to one's elephant's head. Occasionally, owing to the disposition of the line, it is impossible to shoot at the charging animal and one has to avoid the onslaught, if possible, by turning one's elephant, which is done very dexterously by the *mahout* (driver). At such a time everything depends on the elephant keeping its head, and it is really marvellous how these highly-trained and intelligent animals behave in such disconcerting circumstances. I have seen a tiger charge an elephant and land seemingly right up on his chest, only to be flung off the next second.

like a ball: the elephant doing this with a *sang-froid* and ease alike astonishing, and revealing a strength of muscle one could scarcely credit. It is not always thus, however. I remember one occasion when we had been out for many hours in pursuit of a huge leopard, news of which had been given to us overnight by some villagers. Prior to the shoot, we tracked the

leopard to its lair, a fairly easy thing to do, for a bullock is not dragged along the ground without very visible signs. The leopard had dragged its prey for a mile, such is the wonderful strength of jaw these brutes possess, and we knew from this that it was a full-grown one and probably a fine animal which would do full justice to itself. And it did!

Before long we had rounded it up, got it going, and wounded it slightly. Then it grew very angry and very wily. Four times it charged different members of the party, receiving another slight wound only, so cunningly did it attack, and on one of these occasions it leaped right on to the back of an elephant on which was a howdah with my wife for one of its occupants! The elephant, affrighted, plunged madly forward, the sportsman in the howdah stumbled, nearly causing a terrible accident, but my wife held on bravely. The elephant's swerve, however, though it nearly caused a shooting accident, was of sufficient intensity to cause the leopard to lose its grip and slide off its back and, strange to tell, the elephant was little the worse for wear. For some considerable time after this, its last charge, we were hunting the leopard, and then it ran past me in a fairly open part of the jungle twenty yards ahead and gave me my opportunity. I had a good side-on shot at its head and got



it fairly through the brain, causing it to roll over dead on the spot. When measured the brute was found to go seven feet six inches, a very respectable size. I have him before me as I write, and a fine skin he makes!

A huge leopard that dragged a bullock a mile and charged the hunters four times before he was laid low.



The Author's host mounting his favourite elephant.

The most exciting personal encounter I have experienced was with a wounded tiger — a young, full-blooded animal and full of fight. It was my good fortune to sight it first, at a distance of about a hundred yards, as it was making off at a smart pace across a patch of scrub-covered jungle ahead of me.

Taking a chance shot, I fired, and was fortunate enough to wound it slightly in the off hind-leg. With a snarl it stopped, seemed to raise the wounded limb, look at it, and then disappeared in a thick patch of jungle just by. I was exceedingly keen to follow it up, for according to the rule of big-game shooting it was mine now, whosoever killed it, since I had hit it, but I had to be guided by the director of the ceremonies, my host afore-mentioned, who gathered us about him in conference and then speedily made dispositions which in a very short time bore good fruit.

A wounded tiger will invariably lie up near the scene of the shooting, and it will always show fight. We soon discovered this, for, closing in on the spot where the tiger was last seen, we had scarcely commenced to beat the place in close-elephant formation before there was a loud growl, a shrill trumpeting from two of the elephants, the flash of a beautiful body in the strong sunlight, and the animal had charged the line. A rifle-shot rang out, followed by a very angry snarl, and from my distant post I concluded the business was over; but no, the tiger had only been wounded, and the beat was resumed, now with great caution, and in crescent formation, the cordon being drawn very tightly about the wounded animal, to ensure that it should not remain hidden. This is always done, inspired as much by motives of mercy as those of sport, for a badly-wounded animal might otherwise be left to linger in agony for days.

We had not to wait long before again there was a loud trumpeting from some of the elephants, a growl, two shots this time, and then silence. Again I was lamenting the fact that I had not been able to give the tiger the *coup de grâce*, when I observed the director making signals to me to close in nearer towards a spot indicated, which meant that the tiger had escaped a second time and might be calculated to be in a very ugly temper! Wheeling round, I took a hasty glance at the disposition of the party and saw that as the outside left wing "gun" it was essential that I should observe great caution in firing, should I get a chance to do so, as otherwise I might hit the outside right wing man or the beaters next to him.

I think it was just as this was passing through my mind that I heard a deep growl right ahead of me, which caused my elephant to start and stop almost dead. In another second I saw a striped flaming body rise like an arrow from the dense jungle grass fifteen or twenty yards in front of me, and hurl itself at my elephant. As I wheeled my rifle round and raised it to my shoulder it seemed as if the brute was actually above me and descending upon me. I remember thinking, "Now it is mine!" and, picking out a tawny spot in the tiger's coat, just over the heart, I fired two bullets in quick succession. Without a sound the animal fell dead almost at the feet of my elephant—so close to it, in fact, that I had scarcely to move it in order to take the "snap" of the tiger as it lay in the jungle grass which appears in this article. I was immensely elated, naturally, and soon the other members of the party were about me, congratulating me, but the director gave me occasion to think furiously when, taking me aside, he told me that I had done a very risky thing in facing the tiger, which would certainly have had me if I had not killed it, and I know he administered a severe rebuke to my *mahout* for rashly exposing his elephant, but I relied on the stopping power of my .401 Winchester, with a clip of five expanding bullets, and—it did the trick. All those who witnessed the charge and the fall, however, said it was an absolute toss-up as to who would come off best, myself or the tiger! I may add that only after all was over did I learn that on the occasion of the second charge the tiger had succeeded in getting on to the side of the head of one of the elephants, badly lacerating its ear, and in addition clawing the bare leg of its driver, to whom we now applied first aid! Such is the foulness of a tiger's claws, however, that although the man in question was quite cheerful and experienced little pain a day or two later, we heard that about a week afterwards swelling set in and for a time it was thought he would lose his life, though ultimately he recovered.

As I said before, big-game shooting is a fascinating experience, which one can never forget—particularly if it falls to one's lot to have a personal encounter with a tiger of the nature I have just narrated!

