

THE
PRIVATE LIFE
OF
AN EASTERN KING

BY
A MEMBER OF THE HOUSEHOLD
OF HIS LATE MAJESTY, NUSSIR-U-DEEN, KING OF OUDE



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CHAPTER XI.

DUELLO — THE RHINOCEROS AND ELEPHANT.

Fighting Camels — The Rhinoceros — His Peaceful Nature — His Manner of Fighting — The Rhinoceros and the Elephant — The Rhinoceros and the Tiger — The Fighting Elephants — *Malleer* — The Struggle — Fall of the Mahout — His Death — The Elephant's Remorse — Another Fight — Danger and Escape.

I HAVE already described the ordinary fights of birds, antelopes, and tigers. I now turn to the larger animals. Nothing more brutal than the contests of camels can well be conceived. They are trained to fighting with each other in Lucknow; but nature intended them to be useful, peaceful animals, not warlike; and when man, endeavoring to change their nature, insists upon their being warlike for his gratification, the sight is odious. It is well known that, like the lama of Peru, the camel discharges a fluid from its throat at its adversary. I have seen those trained to fight bring up one of their stomachs in the energy of their spitting! A horrible sight! Nor was it more pleasant to see one grasp the long lip of the other between his teeth, and drag it off in a brutal way. Such fights end only in lacerating the head and injuring the eyes, the huge bodies remaining untouched.

Naturally, the rhinoceros is also a peaceful animal. Bishop Heber says, that in Ghazi-u-deen's reign the rhinoceros was used in a carriage, and to carry a howdah. I have never seen him so employed. Although peaceful, however, he is better fitted by nature for warfare than the poor camel. His knife-like horn, his skin more impenetrable than a coat of mail, his compact body and huge muscular limbs, all render him a fearful antagonist to the largest animals. When roused, he will soon make away, I doubt not, with a hippopotamus, and is a match for an elephant.

The extent to which these various animals were kept at Lucknow for purposes of "sport" may be conceived, from the fact of the royal menagerie having contained, when I served the king of Oude, from fifteen to twenty rhinoceroses. They were kept in the open park around *Chaungunge*, and were allowed to roam about, at large, within certain limits.

It was usually at this palace, *Chaungunge*, and sometimes at another called *Mobarrack Munzul*, that the fights of the larger animals took place, generally in an enclosure made for the purpose, over one side of which a balcony had been built for the king and his attendants, not unlike a portico in front of a house to receive carriages — structures far more common in Calcutta than in London. Sometimes, however, the fights took place in the open park, where galleries had been erected on substantial pillars. The two rhinoceroses, males — always more ready to engage in combat at particular seasons than at other times, just as the elephants are — were duly prepared by stimulating drugs, and let into the enclosure from opposite sides, or were driven in the park toward

each other by active fellows on horseback with long spears. The first sight of the antagonist was generally enough to cause each to be ready to attack; for they know at once, by their keen sense of smell, whether a male or female is in their vicinity. Rushing against each other, with heads somewhat lowered, they met angrily in the midst, thrusting forward their armed snouts in a hog-like way.

So thick are their hides on the back and legs, that even the short knife-like horn of the snout can make no impression upon it. In the more tender skin of the belly alone, or between the legs, can injury be done. The object of each, then, in closing is to introduce his snout between the fore-legs of his antagonist, and so rip him up; a process which the slight curve of the horn backward renders comparatively an easy one, if the required position be attained.

But as both equally seek the same advantage, their heads and snouts in the first instance meet in the midst. They strike each other, they push, they lower their heads, they grunt valorously, displaying an amount of activity and energy that one would conceive it almost impossible for them to exercise with their unwieldy forms. The snouts rattle against each other as they mutually strike; the horns may come into contact too, and the sound which is produced plainly tells that it is with no child's play that they are thus crossed. At length, in some way or other, they appear to be locked together, horn to horn, snout to snout, head to head — the head always down defending the chest and the entrance between the fore-legs. Then commences a hard struggle — a firm continuous pushing with all their might. Each

throws the whole weight of his huge form into the scale, and with that the enormous strength with which nature has endowed him. They push, and push, and push again with obstinate perseverance. The weaker must ultimately lose ground. He is driven back, at first slowly, step by step, then more rapidly, in a sort of backward trot; the stronger and sturdier pursuing his advantage with implacable ferocity. At length the weaker, finding that he can no longer make head, makes a desperate plunge backward to release his snout and horns. It is the decisive moment of the combat. I have seen it end very variously. If in an enclosure, and the weaker has no room to withdraw himself, he is almost sure to be ripped up by the impetuous assailant, and to fall very severely wounded or dead; his adversary being driven off by hot irons thrust under him, and spears. In the open park, however, the weaker, if active, sometimes succeeded in detaching himself, and scampering off as fast as possible without receiving any severe hurt. The stronger pursued with hearty good will, and they were soon out of sight. In such cases, all would depend upon the nature of the ground, and the relative activity of the two. If the flying combatant was overtaken by his pursuer, nothing could save his life, for a gaping wound, a foot deep, would soon be made in his chest. On one occasion, however, and on only one, I saw a very different termination of the contest to that which was expected.

The weaker had been gradually retreating, at first slowly, afterward more rapidly. It was in the open park. At length he made a plunge backward to release himself, and succeeded. The stronger brute,

evidently somewhat pig-headed, surprised at the action, thrust his snout upward in an astonished way; his more active enemy saw the movement at once, and, though evidently preparing to fly, checked himself, lowered his head, and had his snout introduced between his enemy's fore-legs in an instant. The stream of blood which flowed from the wounded combatant, and his quick snort of pain, proclaimed the victory of him who, up to this moment, had been losing ground, and hope perhaps. The wounded rhinoceros now turned to fly, losing blood rapidly, and his intestines partially protruding from the wound. His adversary allowed him to turn and run a few paces; and then burying his snout again between his hind legs, gored him severely. He fell in a frightfully mangled way, and the active horsemen with their long spears drove off the assailant—no easy matter. Whether the wounded rhinoceros died or not, I do not know. I probably heard at the time and have forgotten. So skilful are the native leeches, however, in attending these monsters, that I should not at all wonder if he recovered.

The contest between a rhinoceros and an elephant is not nearly so interesting as that between the rhinoceros and the tiger. In the former case it is not easy, in the first place, to make the two animals attack each other, even though the elephant be *must*, and the rhinoceros in a similar condition. Should they take a fancy, however, to try each other's mettle, the elephant approaches as usual, with his trunk thrown up into the air and head protruded; the rhinoceros either standing upon his guard, or also advancing with lowered snout. The tusks of the elephant sometimes

pass on each side of the rhinoceros harmlessly, while the huge head shoves the lighter animal backward. If the elephant tusks trip up the rhinoceros, as is sometimes the case, they are then plunged into him without mercy ; but more frequently the contest ends to the disadvantage of the elephant, by the rhinoceros inserting his snout between his antagonist's fore-legs and partially ripping him up ; the elephant belaboring all the time with his trunk, to a certain extent uselessly, however. Prevented by his tusks, the rhinoceros can not get his snout far under the elephant's body, so that the wound he inflicts is not generally a very severe one.

Between the rhinoceros and the tiger, however, the contest is one of infinitely more animation and excitement. The steady guard of the larger animal, and the stealthy, cat-like attack of the smaller—the lowered snout of the one and the gleaming teeth of the other—the cocked horn, kept valorously in an attitude of defiant guard, and the bullet head, with its gleaming eyes, together with the brawny claws—were all things to be watched and to interest. The rhinoceros, however, is secure from attack on his back, and when the tiger springs, his claws get no hold in the plate-like covering of his antagonist. Should the rhinoceros be overthrown by the tiger's weight, then the fate of the former is sealed ; he is ripped and torn up and gnawed from beneath, as a tiger only can rip, and tear up, and gnaw ; I have heard of, but have never witnessed, such results following the tiger's assault.

In nine cases out of ten the rhinoceros gains the advantage ; the tiger springs, and springs, and

springs again, still baffled by the voluminous armor-like skin of his antagonist, until, at some moment or other, the rhinoceros seizes his opportunity, and succeeds in inflicting a severe wound with his formidable horn. The tiger then declines the combat, and easily escapes its unwieldy enemy, should the rhinoceros take it into his head to attack.

There is no other animal, perhaps, so utterly impervious to attack as the rhinoceros; there is certainly none other that takes all attacks with such perfect coolness and self-possession. Shut up in a comparatively small enclosure with a ferocious tiger, he seems to be not in the least disconcerted — not even to find his situation uncomfortable — but, with wonderful phlegmatic ease, stands prepared for all contingencies. His coat of armor is, of course, his chief defence; but the shape of his head contributes much to his safety. It curves inward from the snout to the forehead; so that the eyes are deeply sunk and securely wedged into a concave bone where they can not be easily assailed — the short pointed horn forming an additional defence to them, and one of the most formidable weapons of offence too, possessed by any animal, when the strength of the rhinoceros is considered. There is something surprising, notwithstanding all this, in seeing this pig-like animal withstanding or conquering the largest tigers and elephants. I have never seen the rhinoceros pitted against the lion. The king of Oude had but three or four lions, and he reserved them for very special occasions — but a contest between the two would but be similar, I doubt not, to that between the rhinoceros and the tiger. Indeed the lion fights so exactly

like the tiger, that a contest between two lions is precisely similar to that between two tigers. There was no lion in Lucknow a match for the largest tigers there: doubtless the few found at the foot of the Himalayas, and in Asia generally, are not equal to those of Africa; but I very much doubt whether the Bengal tiger is not the more formidable animal of the two. I have never seen any lions in London or Paris equal in size to the largest tigers.

Of the hundred and fifty elephants possessed by the king of Oude, there was one with a broken tusk, that had been victor in a hundred fights. His name was *Malleer*; and he was a great favorite with the king. His tusk had been broken off bit by bit in several encounters; the elephants rushing against each other with such force as sometimes to snap off a portion or the whole of a tusk. *Malleer* had lost his, as I have said, gradually. He was a formidable black fellow, very terrible when in that excited state called *must*. During the visit of the commander-in-chief it was determined that a fitting antagonist should be found for *Malleer*, and that he should once more make his appearance on the stage as a gladiator. It was fortunately the proper season. *Malleer* was *must*; and another gigantic elephant, also black, and of course in similar state, was selected to be his antagonist.

When in this excited state, two male elephants have but to see each other to commence the combat forthwith; there is no incitement required. Each has his own keeper, or *mahout** as he is called,

* Pronounced *ma-howth*.

seated on his neck — the only person who can safely approach the animal at such a season. In the mahout's hands, however, even then the monster is generally docile as a child.

There is no preparation required for the combat but the passing of a secure string from the neck of the elephant to his tail — a string by which the mahout holds on and retains his position during the combat. It may be easily supposed that the poor man's position is by no means a comfortable one during such a contest ; but so jealous is each of the good fame of his beast, that he would rather have his own selected for such sport than be excused. It is an honor paid to him, as well as to the gigantic combatant whom he guides. Should he be thrown, the elephant opposed to him would certainly destroy him if he got an opportunity. He therefore clings to the string with all the tenacity of a man grasping a plank after a shipwreck.

On the occasion on which Malleer's services were required for the amusement of the British commander-in-chief, and the king and court of Oude, we were in one of the king's palaces, situated on the banks of the Goomty. A terrace built on the water-side overlooked the river. An open park was on the opposite side of the stream ; and on that bank it was resolved the contest should take place, we inspecting it from the balcony. The Goomty at this place was not wider than Regent street in London, and the terrace projected over the water ; so that we were quite near enough to see the encounter well. The opposite bank was covered with grass ; there was nothing to impede the vision for a considerable distance.

At a signal given by the king, the two elephants advanced from opposite sides, each with his mahout on his neck; Malleer, with his one tusk, looking by no means so formidable as the huge black antagonist whom he was to fight, and who was well furnished with ivory. The moment they caught sight of each other, the two elephants, as if with an instinctive perception of what was expected of them, put their trunks and tails aloft, and shuffled up to each other with considerable speed, after their unwieldy fashion, trumpeting out loudly mutual defiance. This is the ordinary attitude of attack of the elephant. He puts his trunk up perpendicularly, in order that it may be out of harm's way. His tail is similarly raised from excitement. His trumpeting consists of a series of quick blasts, between roars and grunting.

Malleer and his foe rushed at each other impetuously. The sound of their huge heads coming into violent collision might have been heard at the distance of half a mile. This may sound like an exaggeration. It is not so. When the reader only thinks of the bulk of the elephant, the great weight, the momentum acquired by the rapid motion, and then the concussion of two such bodies coming full-tilt against each other, he will not be surprised at it. More than once, on such occasions, have I seen the tusks snapping short off, and thrown up into the air with the terrible force of the collision.

The first blow struck, both elephants now set themselves vigorously to push against each other with their broad foreheads. Head to head, both trunks still elevated into the air perpendicularly, their tusks interlaced, their feet set firmly in massive solidity

upon the ground, did they push and push, and shove and shove, not with one resolute long-continued effort, but with repeated short strokes of the unwieldy forms. The heads were not separated for a moment; but the backs were curving slightly and then becoming straight again in regular succession, as each shove and push was administered. The mahouts, seated on the neck, were not idle the while. They shouted, encouraging each his own warrior, with hearty goodwill, almost with frantic energy, using the iron prod, employed in driving them, freely upon the skull. It was a spectacle to make one hold in the breath with earnest gazing—a spectacle to make the blood come fast and thumping through the veins—as the two huge combatants pushed and shoved with all their might vehemently, and as the two mahouts exerted all their powers to encourage them.

It is evident in such a contest, as generally happens with these wild animals, that the stronger combatant gains the victory. Instances *do* occur in which superior agility causes the weaker to bear off the honors of success; but such instances are rare—in the case of two opposing elephants rarer, perhaps, than with other animals. But what is the end of this pushing? you ask. If the stronger succeed in overthrowing his adversary, the death of the vanquished is the probable result. This sometimes occurs when great violence is used, and the weaker can hardly retreat quick enough. He loses hope and strength together, turns awkwardly to fly, is pushed as he turns, and falls. The end is then soon seen. The victor plunges his tusks without mercy into the side of his foe, as he lies helplessly on the ground, and

death follows. If the weaker, by great agility, succeed in turning and running away, a chase is the result, which ends either in the escape of the fugitive, or in his being sorely belabored by the trunk and galled by the tusks of his antagonist.

But Malleer and his foe are shoving heartily all this time, while I am discoursing of other things—ay, and the king of Oude, the British commander-in-chief, and the resident, are gazing intently on them from the balcony as they *so* shove; gazing intently, so that the balcony is absolutely without noise or sound.

At length the redoubted Malleer, one-tusked though he was, began to gain the advantage. The fore-leg of his antagonist was raised as if uncertainly, one could not tell whether to advance or retreat, as he still stoutly shoved with all his might. But it was evident very soon that it was not to advance, but to retreat, that the leg was *so* raised. It had hardly been set down again, when the other was similarly raised and lowered. The mahout of Malleer saw the movement, and knew well what it indicated. He shouted more frantically than ever—almost demoniacally, in fact—striking the skull with his iron prong in a wild excited way. But Malleer needed no encouragement. He was too old a warrior not to feel that another victory was about being added to his laurels, and his strength seemed increased by the conviction. He and his mahout together became more and more excited every instant.

At this time they were only a few yards from the bank of the Goomty, a little to the left of our balcony. The retreating elephant gave way step by step, slowly,