

COLONEL TIMLER'S DIARY IN INDIA

The following is a continuation of the *Pioneer's* translation of Colonel Timler's Diary :—"Every Raja has several scores of elephants : the Maharaja of Cooh Behar keeps about seventy ; and, as the average price of an elephant is about Rs. 5,000, the possession of so many of these animals signifies the ownership of considerable capital. The number of elephants employed on shooting is generally eleven with the shooters, or one for every rifle, and twenty-two others are used as beaters.

"The country chosen for our shooting party was the jungle which stretches along the foot of the Himalayas and which covers a vast area of country. This jungle consists of grass and reeds, usually of such a height that a man mounted on an elephant only shows half his body ; but in some places the vegetation is so high and thick as to tower to a height of more than 3½ feet above both man and elephant.

"In spite of his great size and strength, the elephant is a very timid animal : indeed he sometimes displays cowardice. Thus on the slightest movement in the grass he begins to show alarm, and those on him feel his gigantic frame quivering with a feverish tremor. But this uneasiness only lasts whilst danger is unseen, for as soon as the particular object appears in sight the elephant at once pulls himself together, and if the tiger or other animal bounds off he boldly follows in pursuit. To me, therefore, it would seem as though the elephant possesses what the French call *le courage du poltron*.

"At the appointed hour on the day following our arrival in the Maharaja's camp we got up on the elephants in readiness for us, and started off with the rest of the shooting party. The weather was magnificent and everything had the charm of novelty for us, whether the method of progression or the character of the surroundings, and everything, therefore, excited in our minds the liveliest feeling of interest. On arrival at the appointed place the person in charge of the shooting expedition allots to each of the shooters his own place, and then starts off the beaters.

"According to the rules of Indian sport, that shot is held to be the successful one which first wounds the beast, however slightly ; and when any of the sportsmen notices that the wounded animal, which is the particular object of the chase, has broken through the line of beaters, he is obliged to follow it up and, if possible, stop it until his companions come up. On this particular occasion, after waiting for about half an hour, a shot was fired, and then all was again silent, when the non-commissioned officer, who was sitting in the howdah behind me, cried out : 'Sahib ! look, there is a buffalo.' and certainly there rushed past, about 50 paces to the left of me, a magnificent specimen. I was too late to get a shot but started my elephant off in pursuit, when my nearest companion caught sight of the beast and fired. The shot apparently took effect, for it caused the animal to make for some dense overgrowth. Soon after this the other sportsmen came up and surrounded the spot. Nothing could be seen except a slight movement in the grass. The person who was nearest to this having fired, the non-commissioned officer, who was on my elephant, called out that the beast had been hit. As soon as my mahout had urged my elephant forward, the buffalo sprang to his feet and charged, and having pushed the elephant back then tried to rush in every direction and finally went for Colonel U's elephant. The Colonel with his first shot smashed one of the beast's horns, and with his second, delivered almost at arm's length, brought him to the ground. The buffalo was then found to have received fourteen wounds, and Colonel U's elephant was also slightly wounded. I do not now remember the exact size of this buffalo, but the experienced sportsmen, who were present at the time, assured me that the animal's horns were of a size that is seldom seen, and they all regretted that one of the horns should have been accidentally struck by a bullet and in this way spoiled.

"It is the invariable custom on these shooting expeditions to take the measurements of every slaughtered animal : thus they measure the horns and height of a buffalo and the length of a tiger from the end of the nose to the tip of the tail before the carcass has stiffened. In the case of a **rhinoceros** the height and length are measured. All such measurements are carefully recorded on the spot in a book which is kept for the purpose, and every day such information is transferred to a diary of the sporting expedition, in which is also noted every detail relating to both beast and bird. On this occasion the day's sport consisted of several buffaloes and gazelles. The skin of a wild buffalo is rarely removed ; but they cut off the head and hoof and leave the rest of the carcass to be devoured by the huge vultures which daily accompany a shooting party sitting as close as possible, and on the first favourable opportunity swooping down in the twinkling of an eye on the repast left to them.

"The next day it was arranged that we should go after rhinoceri, and in the very first beat four of these animals were driven out when a curious episode occurred. Four rhinoceri had fallen in different places, and all the sportsmen had collected round the largest specimen and had got down from their respective elephants to measure the beast, for which purpose one of the elephants was told to turn the carcass of the **rhinoceros** over : an action which the elephant carried out, without the display of any special effort, by rolling with his long tusks the body of the **rhinoceros** as though it were a ball. Then after a long delay Major G., the organiser of the party, took a photograph of the group, and subsequently asserted that there had been five rhinoceri and that one must have got away. As it was near the breakfast hour it was decided that the bank of the stream should be crossed for a short distance only. Accordingly we all again got up on to our elephants and proceeded in some disorder to the spot indicated. We had not, however, gone more than 50 paces when the **rhinoceros** rushed out on our flank and made straight for us : he was then immediately riddled by nine bullets. It turned out that the animal was all the time close to the very spot at which we had all got down from our elephants, and had he then charged out upon us the confusion must have been great, for all our rifles were at that time up in the howdahs, and the elephants would certainly have swerved to one side in their fright, and then some of us might have lost our lives. It seems surprising that the elephants should not have by their powers of scent at once revealed the nearness of the **rhinoceros**.

"It is said that between the elephant and the **rhinoceros** there exists a strong feeling of antipathy. How far this notion is correct I will not take upon myself to say ; but an experienced English sportsman informed me that a **rhinoceros** will sometimes attack an elephant, and will then not only try to inflict a blow at him with his horn, but will endeavour also to seize him in his huge grinders. Notwithstanding his huge bulk and his apparent unwieldiness, the **rhinoceros** can run with some degree of swiftness ; and as he is possessed of great powers of scent, in posting the several sportsmen who are after one of these animals, it is very necessary to study the direction of the prevailing wind.

"The day's sport had come to an end when the Maharaja sent word to us to say that a tiger had been seen not far off. We at once urged on our elephants to the spot indicated, where there proved to be a patch of dense jungle : but no tiger appeared. As the deep shadows of approaching night were now falling, further search was deferred to the next day. By the time we had reached camp it was perfectly dark and the moon was just rising above the horizon.

"The next day, after the tiger had been tracked down, he broke cover in an open space, looked round, slightly moved his tail, and then, having suddenly scented one of the sportsmen, made a tremendous bound and instantly disappeared into the bushes. He had then to be tracked afresh ; but, thanks to an elephant who, on scenting the tiger, trumpeted and raised his tail, his presence was soon discovered. This tiger proved to be a male of enormous dimensions. He was pierced by three bullets, of which the first came from the rifle of my companion, Prince O.

"In the course of the next beat we came to witness a tiger in full flight across an open bit of country. From this circumstance I conclude that the occasions upon which a tiger will stop to defend himself or make an attack upon sportsmen mounted upon elephants are comparatively very rare. In all probability such instances are confined to the case of an encounter with a tiger who has tasted human flesh. Such specimens have generally reached a certain age, live apart from the rest of their species, and are extremely savage.

"After the enjoyment of about a fortnight's sport, we decided upon quitting the camp of our hospitable entertainer and continuing our journey through India, the more so because the Maharaja proposed to continue his sport in another part of the country. Prior to our arrival and during our stay in camp there had been killed eleven tigers, thirteen rhinoceri and eighteen buffaloes, besides other smaller animals. Trusting my own personal impressions, I arrive at the conclusion that shooting wild beasts from the back of an elephant is attended with no sort of danger, and of this fact one becomes assured the very first day one sits in a howdah. All that it is necessary to observe are the rules of the description of sport and the habits of the particular animal that is the object of that sport, so as not to transgress certain recognised precautions. Admitted even that the tiger does throw himself upon the elephant on whose back one is seated, then the chief danger threatens the mahout ; for the shooter, who has ready to his hand several loaded firearms, is always in a position to give the tiger his *coup de grace*. Should the tiger, indeed, make good his charge, the shooter must be in fault. But tiger-

shooting on foot constitutes a sport which is attended by real danger : indeed, during our stay in India an experienced English sportsman, who was out tiger-shooting on foot in the Madras Presidency, forfeited his life in the sight of those who were out with him.

"During the first days of Indian shooting, and until one has got accustomed to its novelty, one experiences the disagreeable feeling lest one should make some *faux pas* under the critical eye of a foreigner : but after a time this sensation wears off. In any case, the time which we passed with an Indian shooting expedition has left in our minds the most agreeable impressions, and our thoughts involuntarily recall the scene even now.

"We left the Maharaja's camp early in the morning ; and, on reaching his capital, we were put up in his palace where we were presented to the Maharani, with whom we dined. We afterwards spent the evening with the wife of the Maharaja's secretary, whose acquaintance we made whilst in the Maharaja's camp. Both the Maharani and Mrs. B., proved very interesting, and they asked us many questions concerning our own country. The next day we returned to Calcutta, where we stayed about three days to transact business and then made our way northwards to the Punjab."

(To be continued.)