

PZ
7
B754
10

Jones of the 64th

A Tale of the Battles of
Assaye and Laswaree

BY

COLONEL F. S. Brereton

Author of "Roger the Bold" "The Great Airship"
"Colin the Scout" "A Knight of St. John" &c.

Illustrated by W. Rainey, R.I.

BLACKIE & SON LIMITED
LONDON AND GLASGOW

CHAPTER IV

A Hunting Expedition

“**GREAT** guns!” shouted Simpson in Owen’s ear, as they clung to the rail on the poop of the huge East Indiaman, and faced the gale. “And how suddenly it came on!”

“We are lucky to have an experienced captain,” shouted back our hero, as he struggled to gather a breath, for the wind tore past him at hurricane speed. “We were lying practically becalmed, with a cloudless sky overhead, and, so far as I could see, no signs of a storm.”

“Yes, and we were having a quiet sleep, all of us, for the heat was terrific.”

“When we were suddenly disturbed. As a matter of fact, I was just awake, and as I lay in my chair I happened to see the captain coming up the companion from his cabin, which is just beneath us. He looked about him, as he always does, and then glanced at the barometer. Then his face changed, and I thought he had gone mad. He raced up here, three rungs at a time, and seized his trumpet. Then the officers appeared and the crew, while his orders sounded through the ship.

A Hunting Expedition 49

My word ! I never saw men work harder ! They threw themselves into the rigging and fairly tore the sails off her. I saw them cut through many of the ropes so as to save time. Then down they came, and with them the gale. Didn't it howl ? "

"It was terrific," agreed Simpson. "Who would have thought that with only that small piece of rag showing this big ship would have heeled right over as she did ? But you are right. We are fortunate in our captain. I own I was angry at first when they disturbed us, and threw our chairs overboard without rhyme or reason. I saw why a minute later, for had we been in them we should have gone overboard, while had the chairs been left they would have slid and fallen here and there and done some mischief. Where are we heading ? "

Neither could answer the question, for in the excitement of the moment, when the gale had struck the ship, they had only noticed that she had heeled over on to her beam ends, and that then had followed an interval of a few seconds, which to more than one aboard felt like an eternity. Then she had righted with a jerk which threw many from their feet, and, sheering off from her course, had gone racing away towards the east, at a pace which was furious. That was an hour ago, and ever since the passengers had clung to their positions, drenched by the spray which blew aboard, and so filled with amazement at the huge seas which so suddenly surrounded them that they had little thought for anything else. Simpson and Owen had been to-

gether, for ever since the event of the fight they had become close acquaintances, and they had clung to the same length of rail.

Two hours later the ship was a little steadier, and the passengers found their way with great difficulty to the saloon.

"You must make allowances for the gale, gentlemen, please," said the purser, as they took their seats and clung to the tables. "The galley fires have been drawn, for with this sea, and the ship tossing and rolling as she is, it would not be safe to keep them in. So there is water or wine to drink, and cold meat and bread only to eat. I should advise you all afterwards to turn in, as it is so wet on deck and generally uncomfortable."

The ship had indeed encountered a typhoon, one of those sudden upsets in the atmosphere common to eastern seas, and much to be dreaded. And as she was unable to show more than a stay-sail at the most, and could not face the gale, she had to turn her stern to it and run from her course. Indeed, for three days she continued to do so, till the faces of the captain and his officers assumed serious expressions.

"I have never known a gale to last as this one has done," the captain confided to one of the passengers. "When the hurricane struck us, you yourself will remember that it was a furious blow. I thought that, like typhoons in general, it had appeared in full strength, to test our seamanship perhaps, and would then rapidly blow itself out. But it hasn't. It has continued to blow, and blow harder too, so that we haven't been able

even to think of heading up to the wind. We're three hundred miles at least out of our course, and completely out of our reckoning. I shall be glad when the wind drops."

Some hours later there were signs that at last the gale had expended its fury, and when the passengers turned in that evening it was with the feeling that increased comfort was before them. Indeed, the ship rocked far less, and the motion was smoother altogether. And on the following morning they awoke to find the ship almost on an even keel, while overhead was a hot sun, reminding them that they were in the tropics. When they sauntered up on deck they found the officers at their posts, anxiously gazing at a dim line of blue which lay almost directly before them.

"Land, gentlemen," said the captain, coming towards the passengers, "and if I am not mistaken it is the coast of Sumatra. We have worked out the position of the ship, and checked one another's findings, so that I feel sure that we are right. We are at least five hundred miles out of our course."

The information caused the utmost excitement amongst the passengers at once, for there were some aboard who had made many trips to and from India, and not one had ever met with other than a smooth and uneventful voyage before. And on this occasion weeks had passed smoothly since they had left England. They had sailed down the coast of Africa, had rounded the Cape, and had set their course for Calcutta. When

the storm broke they were well into the Indian Ocean, and heading for the Bay of Bengal. And here was the information that they were close to Sumatra, in the neighbourhood of the Malay Peninsula.

"We are looking for some quiet bay in which to anchor," said the captain after a time, when he was sure that the land was indeed Sumatra. "We have had our spars sadly knocked about, and our sails want refitting. Then the carpenter tells me that she has been strained, probably when the typhoon struck her, and is leaking somewhere well below the water-line. All things considered, I think it well to run into some bay for a time and lie up. We will careen the ship for a day or so, so as to let the carpenter and his mates get at the leak. Meanwhile some of you may care to have a run ashore, though it will be well to make sure that there are no unfriendly natives about."

All were delighted at the news, for the ship had now been at sea for a long while, and the passengers and crew were all feeling the need of fresh water and fruit and vegetables, and also for an expedition on shore. It was therefore with the greatest interest that they watched the pale blue line of coast gradually develop into wooded heights, with mountain peaks in rear, while the line of beach showed itself as a streak of golden sand, bathed in the seething white foam cast upon it by the surf which ran continuously. They steered into a narrow bay, the leadsmen all the while sounding so that they should not run upon the shallows, and finally brought to and dropped their anchor within a mile of the shore, and

within hearing of the surf. At once a hundred glasses were directed at the coast, and an hour later boats were dropped and the passengers prepared to land.

"I can only spare a crew of four to each boat, gentlemen," said the captain, "and perhaps some of you will not object to taking an oar yourselves. I will fire a gun an hour before dusk, when all must return. If natives appear I must ask you to return at once till they have shown that they are friendly."

"And so as to be prepared I shall take a brace of pistols," said Jack Simpson in Owen's ear. "Can you shoot, Owen?"

"A little. The sergeant of whom I have told you was a good hand at most things. He was a splendid man with the gloves, as you know, for I have told you how he fought for me when the farmer was going to give me a thrashing. He was also an adept with the pike, sword and cutlass, and he kept me at practice with the pistols till I could hit an apple perched on a rail at twenty paces."

"By Jove! An apple at twenty paces! That is a mark! How often had you to hit it?"

"Every time," answered Owen with a quiet smile. "And it came wonderfully easy before I had left the regiment. I used to place the muzzle across my left forearm and aim carefully at first. Afterwards I used to make a rapid shot, just as if I were duelling. I would be placed with my back to the fence; then the sergeant would say, 'One, two, three, fire!' and round I would swing, lifting the pistol as I came, and fire the

instant I sighted the mark. I could do it now after half an hour's practice."

"No wonder, then, that you so easily agreed to fight our friend with fists or pistols," laughed Jack. "Upon my word, Owen, you are a fellow to be avoided. You admit you could hit an apple at twenty paces, every time. And we know that you can fight. By Jove, you showed us real science! And there is the Hindustani too, and the other lingo you have been swatting at. I wish to goodness I had not been so idle. But there! fetch your pistols and let us get ashore."

They ran to their cabin, for since the fight the two had arranged an exchange, Jack leaving the cabin in which he had been with two other passengers and joining Owen. Then they appeared on deck again, and dropped into one of the boats which was just putting off. Already two had left the ship, while one had actually landed her passengers and was returning.

"It looks a little risky, one would have thought," said Owen, as they dropped into the boat. "For all we know there may be unfriendly natives ashore. But I confess I know nothing of the country."

"And need feel no alarm," said one of the passengers who sat beside him. "The people are fierce and warlike, but this is the northern end of the coast, and there are none here. Think of the fresh fruit we shall gather."

A quarter of an hour later they were ashore, and within a few minutes the whole party had separated, breaking up into couples.

"It is quite safe," said one of the passengers who had landed in the first boat. "There is not a village nor a hut to be seen anywhere, though I have been to the top of the hill yonder. But I advise that none go too far from this spot."

Meanwhile the big ship was run in a little closer and slowly careened. And as she lay, with her spars slanting at a sharp angle, the carpenter and his mates looked to the leak, while the crew set to work to refit the canvas. And in this manner, the passengers ashore for the most part, and the crew hard at work, two days passed serenely; each evening seeing the passengers return with an abundant store of fruit, while those who had guns found wild pig and a few deer to reward their efforts.

"We shall leave in two days," said the captain that night, as they sat down to the evening meal, congratulating themselves on the fact that the ship was now again on an even keel, for it had been difficult to manage to get about or even to sleep while she was careened. "In three weeks we should be at Calcutta."

"Barring storms and other little pleasantries," laughed one of the passengers. "Well, I shall be glad. I have had my run ashore and want to be moving on."

On the following day, when Jack Simpson and Owen dropped into one of the boats, only a dozen other passengers made their appearance, for it was very hot ashore, and there was little to do but ramble along the coast. Our young friends, however, had managed to borrow a gun apiece, and were intent on obtaining a

little sport. Indeed, an hour later found them a couple of miles inland, threading their way through a forest of small proportions which had attracted them as being a likely place for game. Mulha accompanied them, for Owen had asked permission of the captain, much to the native's delight.

"There will be pig here, sahibs," he said, as they entered the forest. "And we shall find it cooler. If my masters will take my advice they will take their station at the end of the first open glade, and let me beat the forest on either side. Then if there is any beast within it may run to the clearing."

A little later they struck upon a long narrow clearing, where the ground was somewhat rocky, and where a tiny stream trickled through the stones.

"Plenty of beasts come here," Mulha pronounced, as he stepped along the glade. "You can see their marks between the stones. If the sahibs take post here they should have sport. I will go to the right first, and afterwards to the left. Thus you will know my position, and will not fire in my direction when the beasts bolt."

It took but a few moments to arrange their positions; then Mulha disappeared. Owen threw himself down behind a huge boulder, over which a cool shade was thrown by a tree near at hand. Jack posted himself behind another boulder, on a level with the one where his friend was stationed. Both looked up the full length of the grove, with their guns turned to that side to which the game, should there prove to be any, would

be driven, and away from the forest where Mulha was beating.

Crash! They heard his stick as he beat the under-wood in the distance, and waited expectantly, their hearts pulsating a trifle faster, for neither had had an opportunity of shooting before. There was another crash in the distance, a streak of brown bounded into the grove from the trees, alighted on all four feet, and leaped high again with such swiftness and with such momentum that it was across the glade before either could have thought it possible. Owen's gun went to his shoulder with the rapidity of lightning. His training with the pistol helped him to sight the disappearing mark, and long before Jack had gathered his wits, or had awakened to the fact that an antelope of large proportions was on the point of disappearing, the weapon cracked, and the animal fell huddled up at the very edge of the clearing. Owen turned to his friend with a gleam of excitement and triumph in his eye, while he hastily rammed down another charge, ran a wad upon it, and dropped in his bullet.

"One," he said quietly. "Look out for others."

"My word!" gasped Jack, "that was a lightning shot."

"Look out!" shouted Owen.

This time he held his fire as a wild pig scampered into the clearing, and coming to a sudden halt lifted its head and stared in their direction while it listened to the sound of the beater behind. It was Jack's turn, and he levelled his weapon with unsteady hands, for excitement told upon him.

"Steady," said Owen in low tones. "He's standing for you. Take him full, half-way along the body."

A shout of triumph filled the air and set the forest ringing a second after the gun had sent out its bullet, for Jack had hit his mark. At his friend's words he had waited, steadying himself, and then, when he felt that he was full on his mark, he had taken a deep breath, wedged himself closer to the rock, and had firmly pulled the trigger. And now he was dancing with delight, for the pig, as the sound of the shot crashed out, had started forward at a gallop, till Owen covered it, fearing that it had escaped the bullet. Then it suddenly toppled over, and rolling amidst the stones came to rest with its feet in the air.

"Shut up! There may be more," commanded Owen. "There!"

Another of the animals darted into the clearing, heard the sounds beyond, and raced toward the forest. But he ran only a few feet, for Owen proved to be as dead a shot with the gun as with the pistol. A minute later Mulha appeared, within a few feet of them, and advanced with smiles of pleasure.

"The sahib is a fine shot," he said. "I am no shikaree, but the first beast was hardly in the glade before it had darted out. And see where the bullet struck. It is hit through the chest, and on the very edge of the forest. In another instant it would have been gone. Now let the sahibs take their places again, and I will beat on the far side."

He plunged into the forest again and was lost to sight.

But after a few minutes had passed they heard his blows again, as he beat the underwood, and gun in hand waited for another shot. On this occasion, however, they were not so fortunate. A few birds broke from the wood and went screaming aloft, while a little later a troop of monkeys, disturbed by the intruder, went chattering across the glade, running on all fours, and some swinging themselves from branch to branch.

"We will move on to another part, then, sahibs," said Mulha, as he appeared again. "There is plenty of game here, both big and small, and you may hope to make an even finer bag. Tread carefully now, and make no noise, for these beasts hear at a great distance."

Putting their weapons at half-cock, so that there might be no accidents, they followed their native shikaree through the forest, ascending as they went, for in this corner of Sumatra the land rose swiftly and steeply from the coast. And presently they emerged into another clearing, some two miles in extent, which was almost bare of trees and undergrowth. Here and there there was a tree of huge proportions, outgrowing its fellows of the forest, for the simple reason that here it had an abundance of light which was denied to them, and in consequence had shot up with greater strength and had made far bigger growth. Then, too, there were some large patches of grass, towering some eight feet in the air, and waving gently to and fro in the breeze. Owen and his friend had never seen the like of it before, and looked with amazement at the huge green stems and the broad blades which overtopped their

heads. And in amongst the sparse trees and patches of grass were rocks and scattered green patches of sweet grass, where the marks plainly told that many animals were in the habit of grazing. Now, however, the place was deserted, though they pried into every corner.

"There may be some hidden beast yet, sahibs," said Mulha, as they toiled across the space, for the heat was very great, and they were unused to much walking. "We will go quietly still, and keep a careful watch."

"Steady! I thought I saw something over there," exclaimed Owen suddenly.

All looked in the direction to which he pointed, but there was not a movement, not a sign that there existed anything but a knotted tree, which had the appearance of having been blasted by lightning, and a wide patch of waving grass.

"Still, I am sure that I saw something which looked like the tail and hind quarters of some beast. We will go carefully, and it will be as well to have our guns ready."

All three advanced on tiptoe, the native a few feet in front, and the two young sahibs side by side. They reached the tree and the edge of the grass, but without seeing anything. Then Mulha slipped upon hands and knees, and crept round the edge. Scarcely a second passed ere the tall grass which hid him from Owen's eyes parted suddenly, some few feet to the right, while a huge beast burst its way through, its head low down close to the ground, and its evil eyes fixed upon the intruders. There was not a sound but that made by

the grass as it was swept aside, that and the deep gasping breaths of the animal. But though there was no warning noise, Owen and Jack guessed the unfriendly intentions of the animal in an instant, for its rolling eyes were fixed upon them while it charged in their direction.

“Jump aside, sahibs!” they heard Mulha shout. “Jump for your lives! It is a rhino!”

“Leap!” repeated Owen at the top of his voice, at the same instant hurling himself as far to one side as he was able. Then he turned for one instant to see whether Jack had done the same. But his comrade was less active, perhaps, than he, and more than that, he lacked the training which Owen had had. In a hundred little ways he had shown already that he was slower to obey an order or to follow out an idea than our hero, and now, at the most critical moment in his life, he hesitated for a second. The onrushing beast fascinated him. He paused, gave vent to a cry of dismay, and then attempted to leap aside. Owen shouted and lifted his gun, for what he saw brought his heart into his mouth. Jack’s hesitation had proved his undoing. His foot slipped as he leaped, and in an instant he was flat on his face on the ground, while a dull thud told that his head had struck heavily against a small boulder lying on the grass. And within a few seconds the rhinoceros had reached him. Owen saw the beast’s head drop a little lower, while a squeal of rage escaped from it. Then it galloped over the prostrate figure like a whirlwind, missing its mark by a happy chance, and failing to get its horn beneath the young fellow who lay so

helpless. Carried on by the impetus of its charge it tore along some half-dozen yards, and finally was brought up with a jerk, its horns having become entangled in the root of a small tree growing at that spot. It was an opportunity, and Owen made the most of it.

"Get me the other gun, Mulha," he shouted. "Bring it as quick as you can, as I may miss him with this."

Dropping on to one knee he put his gun at full cock and levelled it at the beast, which was struggling frantically to disengage itself. Aiming just behind the shoulder, he waited for a few moments till it stood still to gather its energies, then he pressed the trigger. A fierce squeal rewarded him, and as soon as the smoke had cleared away he saw that the beast was still far from dead, and that its rage had been increased. Worse than that, the horn was now almost freed from the root, and at any instant the charge might be repeated.

"Into the tree!" he shouted. "Quick, Mulha, up you get. I will hand up my friend. Don't argue. Up you get."

There was no time for the native to remonstrate with his young English friend, though he would have liked to have done so. Instead, therefore, he slung the gun across his shoulders in a flash and swung himself into the lower branches of the tree, which had the appearance of having been struck by lightning. Owen meanwhile ran to Jack's side, and bending over him lifted him in his arms. Then he half carried, half dragged him to the tree, and as Mulha leaned over, helped the native to haul him up.

"Take him higher," he called out, "and then get the gun ready. I must have mine."

He had left it where Jack had fallen, and turning at once he ran back to the spot. There was little time to be lost, that he could see for himself, for the horn was all but disengaged now. Still, without a weapon, where would he be? Without hesitation, therefore, he picked up the gun and ran back to the tree. Clasping the lowest bough, he was in the act of swinging himself up when Mulha gave a warning shout.

"He is free, sahib!" he called out. "You will not have time. Drop to the ground, and put the tree between you."

It was excellent advice, and Owen made the most of it. He leaped to the ground, and ran to the far side of the tree. And he was just in time. Maddened with rage and pain the rhinoceros charged full at his disappearing figure, and heedless of the tree dashed headlong into it. But even such a terrific blow failed to stun the beast. It backed a few paces, snorting and squealing, while its wicked-looking eyes searched for its enemy. Then Owen did a plucky thing.

"Climb now, sahib. Drop the gun and climb. There is time. Come, I beg you!" called out Mulha.

For answer Owen raised his weapon swiftly and pushed it round the side of the tree. Then his arm and shoulder followed, till the gun was pointed at the rhinoceros. Its head went down, with a hideous squeal of rage, as it caught sight of him, and considering his youth and inexperience it was wonderful that he did not

follow the native's advice promptly. But our hero had shown before that he was made of the right stuff, and was not given to panic. He moved the weapon ever so little, and was just about to pull the trigger when another shout stopped him.

"It is empty, sahib! You have fired already."

In the excitement of the moment he had forgotten that, and for the brief space of a second Owen was disconcerted.

"Drop yours down, then," he said hoarsely. "That's the way. I'll catch it as it comes."

It took very few moments to make the exchange, and during that time the beast stood its ground, for it had again lost sight of its enemy. But very soon a squeal told that it had spied him again. The head went down, and it moved forward to charge. Owen aimed for a spot at the root of the neck and pressed his trigger firmly. Then he swung the gun over his shoulders, did the same with the weapon lying at his feet, and ere the smoke had cleared away was clambering into the tree.

"Look at his heels, sahib," cried Mulha triumphantly, a minute later, as he pointed below. "He is in his death-struggle. It was a bold shot. You stood fast to your post like a tried hunter. It is true what they say on the ship, that Sahib Owen Jones will make a fine officer. Truly it was boldly done, and the young sahib has abundant courage."

"And he will want it, too," answered Owen, with a reckless laugh, "for look there, Mulha!"

He pointed to the patch of grass through which the

rhinoceros had burst its way, and there, filing through the gap which he had made, came three more of the beasts, trampling and pawing the grass, shaking their heads and sniffing angrily.

"A siege, I think," said Owen quietly, "and very well for us that we have found such a castle."

CHAPTER V

The East Indiaman Attacked

“A STRANGE position to find ourselves in, sahib! We are cut off from our friends.”

“As surely as if they were a hundred miles away, Mulha,” answered Owen with a laugh, as he looked down at the animals sniffing the air beneath them. “It really is too funny. I can laugh now, you know, for we have come out of it all right. But it was a ticklish business, and my friend had a very narrow shave.”

“And you too, sahib. I trembled when I saw you run to pick him up ; and when you dared to stand below, and the beast charged, I shut my eyes, for I thought that he would run round the tree and catch you. They are cunning beasts, I have heard. I would rather fight a tiger. The squeal of rage which these animals give upsets one’s nerves.”

It was, indeed, a curious position in which to find themselves, and Owen, as he stared down at the beasts, and then at his friend, laughed again, a careless, jolly laugh. For, now that the danger was lessened, a huge feeling of relief had come over him. He was sincerely attached to Jack Simpson and to Mulha, and the sight

of the former exposed to the charge of the rhinoceros had filled him with terrible misgivings. And now they were safe, while he felt, as he reviewed the events of the past few minutes, that he had behaved as the sergeant would have had him do.

"Always try to keep your head, my lad," he had said over and over again, and had done all in his power to train his young charge to decide swiftly in emergencies. As Owen thought of this he remembered the many occasions when the faithful fellow had created sudden difficulties, all with this object in view.

"I wouldn't do it again, I think," said Owen aloud, as Mulha remarked on his action. "It was all so sudden, you see. There was Jack Sahib lying helpless, and the beast had got caught in the root of that tree. It was a piece of sheer, unexpected good fortune, and I made the most of it. I felt awfully inclined to bolt up here though, I admit. But I am thankful I didn't. Ah, he's coming round. Let us look at his head."

"There is a large swelling and a small wound," said Mulha, who all this while had had one arm about the unconscious figure of Jack Simpson. "He will be well within a week, and this bruise will soon disappear. If the sahib will help me I will bind up the head."

Owen happened to have a spirit-flask with him, and he dragged this out of his pocket. Then, having forced a few drops between the pallid lips of his friend, he helped the native to bandage up the wound in the head. And very soon afterwards Jack opened his eyes, shivered violently, and closed them once again. When he looked

about him once more it was with the utmost amazement, while his lips framed the questions which as yet he was too weak to ask.

"It's all right, old fellow," said Owen quietly. "You're up a tree—literally up a tree, I can tell you; but there is absolutely no more to fear. The beast that charged at you is dead, and has made a fine addition to our bag."

That brought his friend into a sitting position, but as he looked down at the ground some yards beneath, and at the animals which still remained at the foot of the tree, the height perhaps, the sight of these fierce beasts and the memory of their attack, and more than all, the blow which he had received, turned him dizzy and sick, and for a time he suffered from horrible nausea. However, within a quarter of an hour he was better and taking an intelligent interest in his surroundings.

"My word, my head does ache!" he groaned. "It feels like a pumpkin and—hullo! what's this?"

"My handkerchief. You bumped your head against that stone over there and the blow knocked you silly. And a good thing too, Jack, or else I fancy you would not be here. Had you tried to rise, and lifted yourself from the ground at all, that ugly beast would have had you. As it was you went down so suddenly and completely that he missed you, and went with a rush clear over your body."

It was news to Jack, and now that the nausea had left him, and he could look down without feeling giddy,

he stared at the unwieldy carcass of the rhinoceros thoughtfully, and then at the others, now engaged in sniffing about their fallen comrade.

"A fine mess he would have made of me," he said at length. "I suppose a brute like that would kill you if he trampled over you. And look at his wicked horns! He has two, and either would be sufficient to gore one to death. How did it happen, Owen? I mean, what kept the beast from returning in time? You see, I was down there. I'm up here now, and the brute is dead. How did you manage it all?"

"I will answer, if the sahib will permit," said Mulha. "This is what occurred, for I watched all that happened. You owe your life to the sahib here."

Very quietly and accurately he described all that had occurred, showing how Owen had fired at the beast, and had then given orders to Mulha to carry his friend to safety. And afterwards how he had stood and killed the rhinoceros. Jack listened to the tale thoughtfully, and looked down at the beasts below. He was a youth possessed of fine spirit, and a most unselfish fellow, and it was clear that his gratitude was too great for words. He turned his head away and felt for Owen's hand. Then he gave it a squeeze.

"Some day, old chap," he said very solemnly, "I shall hope to do something for you, for I do most undoubtedly owe you my life. But it seems quite natural that I should do so. I don't know when it was that I first began to watch you—I expect from the first hour we came aboard—but I remember thinking that

you looked like a fellow well able to take care of himself, and of others. There was such a quiet way about you. You were so jolly with the others, and yet something seemed to show that you had gone through a little more, and had had experiences which few of the subalterns or clerks could boast of. Then came your swatting at Hindustani, the remarks made about it, and the fight. Yes, it all seems quite natural. You have a knack of finding a way out of difficulties, and you've brought us through this one well."

"That's all right, then," said Owen with a smile, blushing furiously red at the compliments paid him. "Now to decide how to get clear of this place. It is early in the day yet, but we shall have to get down to the shore before very long."

"And while these gentlemen are down below, why, it is a little difficult," answered Jack with a laugh, for Owen's light-heartedness was infectious. "They won't move on, I suppose, for the mere asking?"

"Hardly. But we might speak to them in a manner which would be understood. Supposing we try a shot or two."

Owen unslung his gun and calmly loaded the weapon, perching himself securely in the tree meanwhile, for to have tumbled out would have been to have courted a speedy death. For the two-horned rhinoceros of Sumatra is not a beast to trifle with, and when his anger is aroused, as on this occasion, he is, indeed, a terrible foe to have anything to do with. More than that, a fact which surprised all three, and caused them

to alter their opinions, was the unexpected agility of these ponderous animals. They had only to recollect the rapidity of the charge which the dead beast had made to know that a rhinoceros, however unwieldy he might appear, was in fact capable of extremely rapid action. And in addition, as many a hunter has learned ere now, the rhinoceros is an animal possessed of an irascible temper, which makes him an extremely difficult and dangerous enemy to attack. However, the tree in which they had found refuge, though it had been blasted by lightning, was still sufficiently strong to protect them from the beasts below, and Owen made the most of the position.

"Take him at the point of the shoulder, sahib," said Mulha, as Owen put the weapon to his shoulder and aimed at one of them. "They are so close that you should have every chance of killing them."

"And they stand conveniently quiet. I will do my best with them."

Owen had secured his position in the tree by straddling a bough and passing an arm round the trunk. It was not of great girth, so that he was still able to grasp his weapon with that hand, and by bending out a little was able to take aim. He selected the nearest beast and waited till it dropped its head to sniff at its dead comrade. Then he pressed the trigger gently. The shot was followed by a most unearthly squeal, and when the smoke blew aside there was the beast down on his side, kicking and squealing violently. The others lifted their heads, for the sudden shot had

startled them. Then as Owen moved, preparatory to loading his weapon again, they took fright and galloped away into the patch of grass from which they had come.

"Watch them, sahib," shouted Mulha, starting to clamber still higher. "Watch the top of the grass, and you will be able to follow the course they are taking. It would never do to descend and meet them again in the open."

"Rather not," chimed in Jack, with unusual feeling. "We—that is to say, I, personally, have had enough of these meetings with such beasts. But it was a fine shot, Owen. A thundering good shot!"

Following the native to the very top of the tree our hero watched the course taken by the beasts. The waving grass told where they were clearly, and very soon they had galloped through it. Then they took to the open for a while, finally disappearing in some low-lying grass and undergrowth, from which, in all probability, they had first emerged that morning. It was a huge relief to see them go, and the three promptly slid to the ground, Owen with the agility of a cat, and Jack somewhat stiffly, and with unusual care, for he still felt the effects of his fall and the stunning blow on his head. However, he declared that he was perfectly fit for the march down to the shore.

"But what about our bag," he said with a laugh, as he stood over the two huge carcasses, inspecting the horns and the scaly hide which covered the animals. "Supposing we get aboard and tell our tale, who is going to believe us? A precious joke there would be

at our expense. They'd say that I had dreamed it all after getting a crack over the head. No, we must do something to convince them."

"We cannot possibly manage to take the beasts with us," laughed Owen; "and I suppose if we leave them here they will have disappeared by to-morrow morning. Besides, the ship sails to-night, I believe. But I'd like very much to take something just to remind me of my first experience of big-game shooting."

"And of the narrow escape which you and I had. Let's ask Mulha."

They gathered round the two huge animals and discussed the question. For though none had ever set foot in Sumatra before, and all were very ignorant of the animals to be found there, yet they rightly guessed that there would be many carnivorous beasts sheltering in the forests whose instinct or sense of smell would bring them to the food so easily to be obtained, and which ere the morning came would tear the carcasses to pieces. Owen scratched his head, Jack placed his foot on one of the beasts and then clambered on to the massive ribs, while Mulha looked at the rhinos thoughtfully.

"If we were elsewhere, and had others to help us, sahibs, we would skin the beasts and remove the skulls. As it is, we can take the ears and tails, and the feet too if my masters wish it."

"And what about the head and horns?" asked Owen quickly. "That is what I should like. Have you a knife, Mulha?"

The native, who was wearing a rough pair of trousers,

shirt and coat, felt for the sheath in his belt, and produced a heavy knife such as is carried by sailors.

"We could sever the head," he said, "and then perhaps the sahib and I could carry it. But it will be very heavy."

"Let us try it. The trophy would be a fine one, and once we get it on board, no doubt we could have it properly preserved. Give me the knife, Mulha."

However, the native would not agree to this, and at once set to work to sever the head of one of the beasts. It was not such an easy task as one might have expected, for the skin was wonderfully tough. However, he finally decapitated the animal. Then he gathered a bundle of the grass, and having found some creeper amongst the forest trees near at hand, he tied the trophy up, suspending it from a straight length of bough which he cut down from the tree in which they had taken refuge. A stroke of the blade of his knife then divested both carcasses of the tails, which he pushed into his pockets.

"Then we are ready," said Owen, who was delighted with their work. "It is high time that we were on our way back. Lead us to the glade, Mulha, and we will see what we can do with the other beasts. We might even be able to drag one of the pigs away, or take the head of the deer. Now, up with your end of the stick."

He grasped the other end, and lifting the stick each placed one end on his shoulder. Jack carried one of the guns, declaring that he was now perfectly well again, while Owen had already slung the second over his shoulder. Then they set out through the forest, Jack

bringing up the rear, till they reached the glade in which their first shots had been made. And here a few minutes sufficed to sling a portion of the deer to their stick.

"I hate to have to leave the pigs," said Owen, as they prepared to move off again. "But it cannot be helped. Still, it seems so cruel to kill animals when one does not even intend to carry them away. We will see what the captain says. Perhaps he will allow us to return with some of the men, for fresh meat is always wanted."

The additional burden told heavily upon Owen and Mulha, for the head of a full-grown rhinoceros is no light weight. But the quarters of the deer happened to be of small proportions, so that they were able to stagger along, streaming with perspiration as they went, for the heat was great, even beneath the shadow cast by the trees of the forest. Indeed, so close was the atmosphere that they were forced to rest after a while, and came to a halt beside a stream which gushed out from the undergrowth, and trickled away between the grass and stones at their feet.

"I am thirsty, sahibs," said Mulha. "Shall we rest here for a time?"

He lowered his end of the pole as Owen did the same, and then went down on hands and knees beside a pool of the clear running water. Then, having satisfied his thirst, he strode off into the forest, returning with a huge bunch of bananas, which he offered to his companions.

"I had forgotten food," he said. "There has been

so much to do and so much excitement that I did not desire any. But the work we have been doing has made me hungry. Will the sahibs eat?"

Owen and his friend Jack Simpson were growing lads, and had had nothing since breakfast. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that they eagerly agreed to such a proposal, and having slaked their thirst took the fruit and ate it with the utmost pleasure.

Then Owen and Mulha took up their burden again, and the party moved off through the trees, their road leading them all the time downhill towards the low-lying coast. Occasionally as they went through the forest a troop of monkeys would cross their path, just as one had done when they were in the glade, and would disappear amidst the trees, chattering and screaming, and hurling defiance in their own tongue at the heads of the intruders. Another wild pig scampered across the path, and once, to the astonishment and dismay of the party, they suddenly sighted the flank of an enormous animal, apparently almost asleep beneath the shade cast by the trees.

"Rhino again!" exclaimed Owen, as he lowered the stick. "Get your gun ready, Jack, and what about a tree?"

He rapidly selected a likely one, and at his order the whole party ran towards it. They were in the act of climbing into the lower branches when the beast, hearing their movements, strode from beneath the shade, and disclosed the gigantic proportions of an elephant. He stared at them with suspicious eyes, while he swayed slowly from side to side. Then, as Owen lifted his

weapon, the huge beast turned and went off at a trot, smashing the boughs and smaller trees which lay in his path, and crashing through the underwood and tenacious creepers as if they were merely dried stick which would break at a touch. It was with a feeling of relief that the three hunters listened as he plunged on his way.

"One would prefer his room to his company," laughed Owen, as he turned a somewhat scared face to his comrades. "A rhino was bad enough, but an elephant might be worse. You see, if he had chosen to turn nasty and we had clambered into the tree he might have rammed it down with his head. I have heard of such things happening. Then, where should we have been?"

"It would have been better to have given in to the rhinos," smiled Jack. "We've had an escape and are lucky. Let's push on again. I shall be glad when we are aboard."

There was no doubt that all had had enough of adventures and would welcome the sight of the ship. And for this reason Owen and Mulha picked up their burden with eagerness, and strode on through the forest, Jack following, gun in hand, while he searched on every side for signs of the beast or of others which might happen to be in the vicinity. Once he gave vent to a shout, which brought them all to a halt. But it was a false alarm, and no doubt the condition of his nerves was responsible for it.

"The narrow escape I have had and that crack over the head have put me out," he said, by way of excuse.

I'll be honest. I have got the jumps this afternoon, and imagine I see a rhino or an elephant in every shadow. Push on. Take no notice of me. I am a regular girl to be so scared."

"Hark! That was a gun surely!" suddenly remarked Mulha, lifting his head in a listening attitude. "I even fancied I heard one an hour ago, as we were clambering out of the tree. Why should they fire from the ship?"

"Perhaps they have completed their preparations for sailing and want to get away," Owen ventured. "Or a favourable breeze has sprung up, and the captain wants to make the most of it. Listen! You can hear the wind as it strikes the tops of the trees."

"And there goes another gun!"

Jack Simpson looked at his comrades, who stared back at him doubtfully. All had heard the gun, and had wondered what it could mean. Nor were their difficulties lessened, for as they gathered up their trophy again and pressed downhill towards the shore, a salvo of artillery burst from the ship, while firing seemed to come occasionally from another point away to their left. Worse than that; as they decreased the distance between themselves and the shore, and came to a part where the forest was not quite so thick, they imagined that they caught the far-off sounds of shouting, while Owen declared that he could hear musketry firing, as though men were engaged in warfare.

"I feel sure of it," he said doggedly, as his companions argued that this could not be the case. "I have heard it so often before at home, and it sounded just like that."

I tell you we are not the only ones who have met with trouble. Those on the ship have been attacked."

"Then supposing they are forced to sail away?"

Jack asked the question and looked at his companions in dismay, while the faces of Owen and Mulha showed that the same fear had occurred to them and that they were uneasy.

"We should be in a hole, that is all," said Owen quietly, after a long silence, during which the firing continued. "But I am sure the captain would never desert us. He would lie off the land, hoping to pick us up later. But what is the use of wondering, when by pushing on we can see what is actually happening. My advice is that we get to the shore as soon as possible, and that we take good care as we get to the edge of the forest that we are not seen, and that we do not expose ourselves. It might, and probably would, make all the difference to our safety and to our escape, supposing the ship has been attacked. Pick up the stick, Mulha, and be careful not to let that gun go off, Jack, or we too might be attacked."

At his words the native seized his end of the stick and they lifted their trophies. Then, with Owen in advance and Jack in rear, they walked on towards the shore, till the forest became far less dense, and they caught a glimpse of the ocean.

"Halt!" cried Owen, who took command for the simple reason that Jack did not venture to do so. "Now wait here while I push on a little and see what is happening. There is a bit of high ground just

in front, and from there I shall be able to see the ship. There go more guns, and—hark!"

"An enemy without doubt," exclaimed Mulha with assurance. "Sahib, I know what is happening. I have not sailed so often across the seas between this and England without learning who are to be avoided. In these parts, within sail of the Malaccan Straits, there are pirates, recruited from India and the Malay States, who waylay the biggest ships. They have attacked East Indiamen very often, and have even matched their strength against war vessels. They must have gained information of the arrival of our ship, and have sailed here hoping to capture her while she was refitting. But push on, sahib. If these pirates are indeed within sight our plight is very serious."

Owen nodded curtly to him, and strode on at once. Little by little, as they had plunged on through the forest toward the sea, and the sound of heavy firing had continued, he had gathered the fact that the ship was being attacked. Then he remembered a warning which Mr. Halbut had given him, and felt sure after Mulha's words that the attackers must indeed be pirates.

"And of the worst sort," he said to himself as he ran forward. "They are the worst lot of cut-throats in existence, so Mr. Halbut said, and are a perfect pest. In fact, something will have to be done soon, for they prey upon the shipping in these parts, and are so bold that they even run up into the path of the Indiamen and make some their victims. Here I am."

He threw himself on hands and knees as he came

nearly to the top of the rising ground, and slowly crawled to the very summit. Then, selecting a low bush he wedged his way into it, and struggling on, regardless of the thorns, finally obtained a clear view through the leaves which clothed the farther side. What he saw brought a low cry of astonishment from him, for the East Indiaman was under sail, and was firing rapidly at a number of large native craft which hovered about her. Then he turned, and backing from the bush waved to his companions. And very soon they, too, were gathered on the rising ground, and were watching from the security offered by the bush.

"It is as you said, Mulha," said Owen at length. "Those ruffians must have discovered the ship by accident, or, seeing their strength, must have gained information of our coming and set out with the fixed intention of making an attack. In either case, they are here, and we are in a pretty plight. As for the ship, she seems to be holding her own. Probably she caught sight of them the instant they appeared, and made preparations."

"And did her best to bring us off, sahibs," added Mulha, pushing his long arm through the bush and pointing to the shore below. "Watch there, sahibs."

All eyes were turned to the point he indicated, and another sound escaped Owen's lips. For he caught sight of the ship's boat, by which they were to have returned, dragged some few feet up on to the sand ; while pushing away from the spot, and just then free of the surf, was a huge native boat, filled with men who were shouting excitedly and brandishing their weapons.

"Poor fellows! They must have been too late, and unable either to return to the ship or escape the enemy," exclaimed Owen, as he caught sight of three limp figures stretched on the sand. "These ruffians must have crept along the coast and come upon them unawares. And now they are off to help the main attack."

"Leaving the boat for our use, perhaps, sahibs," whispered Mulha. "All is not lost for us yet. We might put off as the night comes."

Whether this would be possible it was hopeless to decide at that moment. For the ship upon which they had sailed from England might not make good her own escape. But it looked as if she would; for as the three stared out to sea they saw her, with sails fully set, steering out of the bay. And as she went smoke belched from her sides, for she carried a dozen guns, the shot sometimes striking the water and ricochetting, while some few crashed into the four native craft which hovered about her, drawing excited cries of approval from Owen and his friends. It looked, indeed, as if she would make good her escape, for within half an hour she had drawn away from the enemy, while one of the native craft lay well in rear, her mast having been knocked down by one of the shots.

"She will stand out till she has shaken them off," said Owen at length, "then she will make all ready for a renewal of the battle, and will wait on the chance of our returning. It's getting dusk, Jack. We shall have to make the most of the evening."