

THE MAN-EATER OF CHUNDA.

A STORY RELATED BY CAPTAIN PASLEY, R.A.

ONE very sultry day in the month of May, 1850, I was sitting in my tent, which was pitched on the banks of a tributary of the Nerbudda. Near by was a small village of huts called Chunda by the inhabitants, but which I can find no trace of in any map I have seen; it consisted of a few hovels only, and has probably ceased to exist. My duties as a civilian in the revenue service enabled me frequently to alternate work with pleasure; and the mornings being spent at one's office (N.B. A small tent), the afternoons were generally passed in shooting large or small game, according to the opportunities of the locality and season. At the time referred to I was in a fine tiger country, and it was the hot season, and thus I had every chance of indulging in the favourite recreation of Indian sportsmen.

The river on the banks of which occurred the events I wish to describe, was very narrow, its source being not far distant, and in many places with its bed dry enough to allow a person to cross over from stone to stone. The banks were sandy and steep, and on them grew thick sedgy reeds and a green plant called "jou;" small sandy islands, round which flowed what water there was, possessed the same vegetation. In many places were deep pools tenanted by alligators, which choose these haunts on account of their depth, for they do not dry up, as do the shallows of the river, from the heat of the sun.

My camp was stationed near the above-mentioned locality, and was sheltered by the wide-spreading branches of an enormous banian-tree, whose branches, sending down their hundreds of shoots, formed a complete grove in itself. The pea-fowl roosted in the branches, and their discordant screams were my morning alarm at a little before daybreak, at which time I always rose and refreshed myself after a steaming night by a plunge in the river (the alligators were very tame), or else by making my water-carrier empty *mussucks*—i.e., leathern water-bags—over me until I had enough of it. I then proceeded to

shoot for a couple of hours before breakfast, and afterwards settled to my daily work.

The forest around was bare of leaves—for at the commencement of an Indian summer the leaves fall as in an English autumn—and, with the exception of a few corindia bushes and evergreens, the jungle was but a collection of dried-up trunks of trees. Under any other conditions it would be impossible to get at tigers and large game without great danger, and, as it was, a range of twenty or thirty yards was all that could be depended on.

But, as I have written, I was sitting in my tent nearly fourteen years ago, my *puttawallahs* (i.e., messengers, &c.; literally, fellows of the belts, from their insignia of office) probably dozing outside, when I rushed a bare-headed native—in fact, bare all over, save the smallest of rags suspended by a string round his loins—and, throwing himself at my feet, embraced them, informing me, in lamentable and pathetic terms, that his "*bachcha*" (child) had been taken off by a "*sher*" (tiger), "*admi khanewallah*," a man-eater, and that I was his "*ma bap*," mother and father, and that my greatness should, out of pity, make the tiger, whose grave he defiled, eat my highness's bullets. The *puttawallahs*, having come in, led the creature out re-echoing his complaints, and obtained the further information from him; that his "*bachcha*" was not his offspring, but merely his pet buffalo, whose neck had been twisted and blood sucked by the tiger. It was only an hour before dark, but the cloudless sky was favourable to the light of the moon, and I made speedy preparations for the hunting of the "man-eater." I had been on the track of a man-eating tiger for some time, but lately he had been quiet, and I had no doubt it was my friend, emboldened by past successes; for he had committed in my neighbourhood some half-dozen murders during the previous twelve months.

It may be well to explain that by a "man-eater" I do not mean a particular kind of tiger, but an old one which has, through some

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chance killed a man, and, finding him easy eating for bad teeth, repeats the dose, taking "one at a time" as often as he can. Sometimes the man-eater is young, having come across a man without hunting for him, and killed him, and found him good to his taste. Any animal but a man can scent a tiger some way off, and many an old tiger would probably die of hunger were it not for the easy manner in which men can be caught when wood-cutting and during other forest avocations. Old man-eaters may often be known by the absence of their stripes.

I lost no time in starting with my "shikaree" (Anglice, gamekeeper) for the scene of action, as my guns were always ready. These consisted of a rifle and a smooth-bore and double-barrelled carbine, all throwing the same ball, one of fourteen to the pound. The bullets I kept always ready sewn up in linen patches and lubricated so as to be handy to load with in a hurry. Conical bullets in those days were not generally in use. When I reached the place where the buffalo was killed, I found it lying dead with no further damage than a dislocated neck and two deep wounds in its throat, from which the tiger had taken a hearty drink, and then departed. Knowing it would be useless to seek for my enemy, as it was so late, I selected a tree close by, and with my shikaree's aid made a branch pretty comfortable to sit upon, and settled myself, ammunition, weapons, and shikaree, biding the return of the tiger, as it is his custom to feed off the carcass shortly after sunset. About this time (there being no twilight in India) I calculated we should have enough moonlight to see the animal if he came. I prepared my guns for moonlight shooting by sticking a little piece of white paper to each of the muzzle sights by means of a piece of cobbler's-wax, which I always had for such purposes. This is a necessary plan, as the glitter of the moon-beam on the barrel renders an aim very deceptive. It is soon dark, and now the red disc of the moon looms large in the haze of the horizon, the lowing of the cattle returning home gradually dies away, and all is still, save for the occasional cry of a hyæna or jackal and the barking of the pariah dogs in the distant village.

Anxiously and patiently I waited for two

or three hours, and the moon shone more brightly, when my shikaree, who had the eyes of a lynx, touched my arm. I was too old a sportsman to move, but, looking steadfastly, saw something creep between two small bushes, and presently could clearly distinguish a tiger's head. My suspense was increased by its withdrawing. Again I waited in silence, and my patience was rewarded by seeing the animal walk out into the open space by the dead buffalo and proceed to the body. I was so interested in watching him that I did not fire at once, and I was to a certain extent interested and satisfied by noticing the manner in which he acted. First he sucked at the throat and seemed to lick his chops, then he familiarly put his paw on the carcass as much as to notify that possession was nine points of the law, and he certainly looked a very dangerous customer to quarrel with concerning his property. When thoroughly satisfied that he was alone with his prey, he began to tear it with his teeth and claws. These latter weapons are far more effective than is generally known, and without their aid the feline race would have hard work in preparing their food. A few strokes of a tiger's claws will tear out the entrails of a cow or buffalo, and the belly is, I think, the first part that the animal would attack after drinking the blood from the throat. I was on the point of firing, when, to my intense disgust, the tiger uttered a growl and sprang away. Two pariah dogs had approached, attracted by the smell of the dead body, and the tiger made a rush after them, and I bitterly regretted having spared him while I had the chance of killing him with ease; but my shikaree whispered to me, "Never fear, sahib, the *jānvar* (animal) will come back; he has not gorged yet."

No one who has not been perched on a tree for a night can comprehend the utter discomfort of sitting astride a branch and not daring to move. Although I had settled myself to the best advantage, I was in great pain from being unable to stir; and my attendant did not relieve me by whispering, as he did, "Sahib, yih bahut atcha jhar hai; sarhe rāt idhur baithenge" ("Sir, this is a very good tree; we can sit all night in it"). Whether I should sit all night or not was soon decided. The tiger, having put the

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dogs to flight, returned to the carcass, and, before he had time to eat a mouthful, I fired right and left from my rifle, and had the great satisfaction of seeing the mighty brute spring high in the air and roll over. Before I could fire again he had recovered his feet and rushed off uttering the most terrific roars, that made, I doubt not, many a quadruped and biped shrink closer to their

nightly dwelling-place, and which certainly caused my heart to beat some pulsations quicker. My sport was concluded for the night; I could not hope to see the tiger come again, and, from the thud of the balls, I had heard that they both had given him an unpleasant reminder of his dinner on buffalo hump.

I waited till I fancied I could beat a re-



Wounded, very sick

eat with safety, and then descended from my elevation stiff and cramped; and with both barrels of my gun cocked, and with my carbine in charge of my trusty shikaree, I went cautiously towards my tent, which I reached without further adventure, unless I mention a slight start which I got from a hyæna that I fancied was my friend the tiger. I never fired at a hyæna while there was a chance of higher game, and so I let him go by, and went to my couch to sleep away the few hours before dawn, leaving my shikaree to make all the arrangements for the following day, and to warn the cattle-drivers that the tiger was wounded, and that danger was to be apprehended if they went in his vicinity. Had I not known he was wounded it would have been useless, after firing at him and missing, to fancy he would

be in the neighbourhood. A tiger will travel, it is said, as much as eighty miles in a night if not wounded, and even a distance of five or six miles in a jungle such as we were in is sufficient to place an animal in comparative safety from your search. However, I fancied somehow that the man-eater had got it rather smartly, and was not likely to go far.

I told my shikaree I would start at day-break, and desired him to get the assistance of a very good puggee whom I knew in the village close by, and we would try for the buffalo-destroyer early. A "puggee" is a man who can track animals by their foot-prints, or pugs, and by other signs which escape the uninitiated. In Guzerat the puggees are so expert that they can tell the track of a tiger over hard, clean, black rock

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where a European could discover no sign; and their expertness was formerly—and, for all I know, may be at the present day—turned to good account. When a robbery took place, a couple of professional puggees were put on the track of the robbers' footmarks, and they followed the scent until they ran the thieves down into some village, and if the footmarks could not be farther traced, the municipal authorities, such as they were, were called upon to produce the offenders. They either did so or the village was put under a contribution of such an extent as should punish them and also remunerate the robbed or their heirs, executors, and assigns for the expense incurred in replacing the missing goods and chattels. One district that I know in Guzerat was formerly independent, and had a treaty with the British Government for the protection of British travellers. On one occasion an English officer's baggage was robbed in transit through this province. Compensation was demanded and paid, and in addition to the money a present of three men's heads in a basket was sent to our political agent before whom the case came. This was compensation with, literally, a vengeance, and on my inquiring if they (the bearers) fancied the men's heads represented the robbers, I was informed, "It does not follow; if they did not do this, *bad kām*, and dacoity, they did some other—their village gave them up, and the rajah sahib sends them with his respects;" and finished by saying that it was no business of theirs, as it was all written in the rajah's letter to his excellency.

The native of India resembles very much the animal whose pursuit I am now relating—not bad-looking, can be slightly tamed, but of cruel, vindictive character, which will display itself, and with claws they cannot help showing sometimes.

The puggees who find out robbers are well rewarded, and the natives bear them no grudge.

It is more by signs caused by the passage of an animal than by his footprints that they discover it, and if they lose the track of the spoor they follow such slight indications as a twig turned aside, or dew brushed off. I knew a man pick up a track he had nearly given up by finding a single hair on the side of a stone; before

picking it up he blew on it, and it easily fell off; on my asking him why he did so, he said, "Sahib, if any wind had blown on this hair it would have gone—it blew hard last night—the tiger has just gone by."

To continue my own story, I went to bed and slept soundly. At daylight I was again equipped for the day's sport, and on the spot where I had spent the earlier part of the previous night my puggee at once took up the track, and we proceeded inch by inch to thread the jungle, keeping all our wits as work so as not to be surprised. The blood of the wounded tiger was plain on the track. In his footmark also the marks of the claws were plainly to be distinguished for at least twenty or thirty yards. This was an infallible sign of the brute being hit, as on no other occasion do the talons project in walking; but, in their rage and fear combined, tigers seem to try and wreak their vengeance on everything within reach. I knew a tiger to fly at the trunk of a tree when he was wounded, and leave deep marks of his fangs and claws thereon. Breathless with anxiety, we followed the tracks into the bed of the river, and found that the animal had gone to drink. This was a good sign, as it showed that he was forced, by the pain of his wounds, to go for water close to the scene of his disaster. We now went along the bank on the same side, thinking he had not crossed over, and we looked under every green bush, and into every place we could fancy, but in vain. I saw also a pea cock and hen, which were not apparently alarmed. Now these creatures are very keen and sensible of the presence of wild animals, and always notify the fact by a series of cries, "Cuck, cuck," repeated rapidly and shrilly. This cry is used by them when disturbed by ferocious animals, and is never heard on any other occasion. Presently I found that they were not so stupid as I fancied, for the very two I saw gave the warning cry, "Cuck cuck, cuck cuck," and flew up and across the river. My shikaree started, and, pulling my elbow, declared he could see the animal across the river, and pointed to what I thought was a stone; but he declared it was part of the animal, and that he was lying down. I took steady aim, against my better judgment, and fired; the ball went true to the mark, and flattened on a stone,

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and not a tiger. At the report the real Simon Pure gave a roar within twenty yards of us in the grass behind on our side of the river, but did not come out. Matters now were getting serious; it was folly to walk into the patch from which the roar came, and all we could do was to go round and round it, and try if we could induce the animal to come out. I kept ready while the puggee threw stones in, one of which was saluted by another growl. Of course, we could tell now that the tiger was badly wounded, or we should very soon have discovered the contrary. It was difficult to get any vantage-ground, as the bed of the river was on a lower level than the reeds and jungle, and we could not see a yard ahead if we entered where the tiger was concealed. At length I determined to risk one chance of getting the man-eater out of his concealment, and, taking my carbine from my shikaree, fired both barrels with the nearest aim I could take to where I fancied the tiger was, and instantly seized my rifle, and left the shikaree with my empty carbine and my gun which was loaded. The balls had the effect of dislodging the brute, for almost before I could change my weapons he made a feeble attempt at a charge, and came straight out of the jungle into the bed of the river. Here he was taken so faint from his wounds that he halted and sat up like a dog in the bed of the river, in the attitude I have sketched, and before he had time to lie down I put two more bullets in him, and he rolled over with a deep groan and died. He had received one of my bullets below the shoulder, and another in his hind leg the night before, and could move only with difficulty. His charge

was a last expiring effort, and had I not fired again he would probably have died on the spot he halted at. The news of his death soon spread to the village, and I had willing and eager help to carry his carcass to the tents, where the ceremony of singeing his whiskers, so that his ghost might not haunt the natives, was performed, and I superintended the taking off of his skin—an operation not to be hastily performed, for if the body or intestines of the animal be cut into, the part of the skin that gets stained by the blood is apt to rot, or at any rate to require extra care in its preparation. Some smooth place, which is covered with wood-ashes to keep off insects, is chosen, and the skin is stretched thereon, by the aid of a number of wooden pegs. The hair side of course is downwards, and the fleshy side is well cleaned, to remove all fatty matter or meat, and afterwards a preparation of turmeric and arsenical soap is well rubbed in. A few days' sun is sufficient to cure the skin completely until it can be given to a regular tanner. The tiger's fat is very useful for cleaning guns, &c. The natives prize it for various reasons. As an external application it is good for rheumatism and other complaints, and they fancy that certain doses put forcibly down the throats of their infants is an infallible specific which bestows on the fortunate swallower the quality of bravery. The claws are much valued as charms and amulets, possessing similar qualities to those of the unguent. English ladies who have Indian connexions frequently wear these claws, prettily set in gold or silver, as charms on their châtelines and watch-guards.