

Elephant Catching.

By D. H. WISE.



THE scene of the following description of elephant catching is Perak (pronounced Pera), a native State in the Malay Peninsula. The spot chosen for the drive is well suited by Nature—on the east is a steep spur of the main range of mountains, which forms the backbone of the peninsula and divides Perak from Pahang—a sister State on the east coast; on the west a high hill, with steep sides running roughly parallel with the mountains for a distance of some eight miles, and between them a broad valley about three miles across, and leading at its southern extremity to a large tract of virgin forest which stretches to the coast. Along the centre of this valley runs a bridle-path at a distance of a mile or so from the main range, from which, near the southern end of the valley, abuts a steep spur to within a short distance of the path. It is here that the site of the inclosure, or “kubu,” as it is called in Malay, is fixed.

The elephants, a herd of fifteen, have been in the habit of visiting this valley at intervals for some years past, and the Malay Chief of the District, to whom many complaints have been made of crops destroyed and gardens ruined, at last bestirs himself and decides that the beasts, the destruction of which the laws of the country forbid, shall be captured for the mutual benefit of himself and his people.

A council of the elders is held, and the services of a “Pawang,” or medicine man, an indispensable appendage of every important Malay undertaking, are secured. This worthy, an insignificant-looking person of some years, with a restless eye and an expression full of quiet cunning, is duly admitted to their circle, and the value of his advice and assistance fixed, after sundry phlegmatic attempts on both sides to get the better of the bargain. In this the “Pawang,” whose supernatural powers command deep respect amongst his acquaintances, is successful, and he undertakes, as a great favour to the select body who have availed themselves of his services, to propitiate the spirits who haunt the field of their future labours, for the modest wage of twelve dollars a month. This, it should be stated, is exclusive of the cost of necessary feasts and functions contingent to the undertaking, out of which he manages to

augment his monthly pittance. Nor is the money altogether thrown away, for the “Pawang” is a man of some experience in elephant catching, and his knowledge of the requirements in selecting a suitable spot for the “kubu” is perhaps of greater value than the mysterious qualities which inspire his employers with such respect, and that render the selection when made the best beyond dispute.

The preliminaries having been arranged, and certain incantations performed by the “Pawang,” the building of the “kubu” is commenced. Some fifty Malays and Sakis (the latter are an aboriginal race who inhabit the interior of the peninsula) are employed in collecting ratans and timber for building the fence. These materials abound on the spot, but to preserve intact as far as possible the jungle and undergrowth, so as to avert all suspicion of a trap, they are cut a little distance from the site of the “kubu.”

The inclosure, when completed, is about three acres in extent, bounded on one side by the steep spur already mentioned, and on the other three by the fence, which is about ten feet high, and built of heavy timber posts, planted deep in the ground, and leaning inwards, so as to give the greater resistance. To these are lashed three large horizontal rails, two inside and one outside the posts, and firmly tied at intervals to the trees that grow on the line of the fence, which is thus strong enough to resist any charge that the captured elephants are likely to make.

Long bamboos pointed like spears protrude at intervals of a few inches along the line of the fence, which, bristling as it does with these weapons, looks anything but an inviting obstacle to charge. A light platform runs round the outside, on which are built small huts to be occupied by the watchers, whose duty it will be to stop any attempt at escape.

This is not a matter of much difficulty, for the elephants, even when first caught, have a wholesome respect for a spear point, and a sharpened stick will generally bring a charging elephant to a standstill.

The entrance to the inclosure, which is a track naturally followed by the elephants in their wanderings, is about 20ft. wide, and is closed after the animals have entered by thrusting a couple of bars across it. One side of this entrance is near the foot of the hill, which is inaccessible; upon the other

side is built a long wing or guide to lead the elephants to the door of the "kubu." This guide is usually made of timber, but in the present instance consists of a long wire hawser, a not altogether satisfactory substitute, as will presently be seen.

Trackers are sent forward early in the morning to report the whereabouts of the herd, and the drive commences. A line of some 300 beaters advancing through the jungle, armed with spears and sharp bamboos, is formed. The first move is to get the elephants to cross the bridle-path, as once between it and

spite of several attempts to break the line, are driven across the path, and if they can be kept there the beaters should be able to persuade them to reach their goal to-morrow.

As soon as the first streaks of dawn appear over the mountains the beaters are astir, eager to finish their task. Snatching a few mouthfuls of rice, which is served out along the line, they re-arrange their forces, and the drive is resumed. The trackers, who have already gone forward, report that the herd is within half a mile of the beaters, who are enjoined to approach quietly and keep good order.



From a]

SOME OF THE BEATERS OUTSIDE THE "KUBU" FENCE.

[Photograph.

the main range, the area over which operations have to be conducted is greatly reduced. But the beaters make a fatal mistake, for, advancing with shouts and yells, they terrify the beasts, which stampede and rush right back through the line, most of the men at the point charged forgetting for a moment their brave resolutions, and displaying an agility in tree-climbing that would do credit to a cat.

It is too late to-day to begin the drive afresh, and the beaters retire for the night, resolved to profit by their lesson and make a steadier advance on the morrow. This time success awaits them, for after a hard and anxious day's work the elephants, in

Along the right and centre of the line where the ground is flat this is easily done, but the left wing, which extends some distance up from the foot of the main range, has more difficult country to travel over, and it is here that a break-back is most feared. Once, indeed, the elephants in their haste scramble up a steep ridge and, wheeling round, rush back upon the extreme left, but a couple of men sent ahead observe this movement in time, and the left wing falling back just manages to keep them in front. An hour later the herd is within half a mile of the "kubu" and making straight towards it, and the excitement of the beaters is intense.

The scene at the "kubu" is a very different one. Here the excitement of the men in charge is no less, but not a sound dare they utter lest the elephants should turn and break back again. Some half-dozen Malays are on a small platform in a tree, near the gate, over which presides a grey-headed chief in charge of the entrance, which is cleverly screened with bushes. The elephants are now close to the door, and come crashing through the thick undergrowth, while the beaters, losing all control over themselves at the last, rush forward yelling like fiends. The veteran in charge of the doorway manages, however, to keep his little band in better order, and presently we see the head of the first elephant (a big cow) emerge from the covert. But this beast hesitates and stands still for a moment, lifting her trunk in every direction, and evidently suspecting danger. The beaters have now closed up behind and the right wing has lined the wire guide, and the excitement and din increase. With a rush the leader bolts through the doorway. "One, two, three," counts the old chief, as the herd passes under his hiding-place, shambling along and almost knocking one another over in their clumsy haste—for once their leader is inside they have no further thought of

turning back—until twelve have safely passed the entrance.

But the other three which complete the herd are behind, and it is not until the twelfth has got well inside that the white tusks of a large bull appear through the bushes. Behind him is a smaller bull, also a tusker, followed by a third beast that is almost hidden in the thick undergrowth. The big tusker evidently thinks his wives have made a mistake, and, unwilling to share their misfortune, he gives vent to a shrill trumpet, and curling up his trunk rushes straight at the men who line the wing on his right. There is no resisting such a charge; and in a moment the wire hawser is carried away, and these three fortunate beasts make off at the best pace they can, leaving the astonished beaters to regret they had not built a fence that the elephants could have seen, and which would have turned them, instead of an invisible line incapable of standing such a mighty weight. All this takes place in a few minutes, and no sooner are the fifteen beasts accounted for than the door is hastily closed, the timbers firmly lashed with ratans, and the day's work is completed.

The captured elephants, meanwhile, have



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CAPTIVES IN THE "KUBU."

[Photograph.

rushed straight on until confronted by the fence at the lower end of the "kubu," where they wheel rapidly round, inspecting the whole length of their prison wall.

Suddenly a big cow stops within a few paces of the fence, and charges straight at it. Crack! goes the huge head against the fence, the timbers spring and bend under the heavy weight, but not a tie is loosened; and, thinking it useless to repeat the experiment, the beasts make for the centre of the "kubu," where they stand huddled together, and occasionally low, guttural murmurs are heard proceeding from their hiding-place, which in a few days will be trampled clear.

A number of men are posted in the huts outside the inclosure to guard against any attempt to charge, or pull down the fence. During the night the elephants make frequent attempts to escape, and charge again and again right up to the fence, only to be driven back by the spears and torches of the watchers, but for whose vigilance they would probably escape.

The "Pawang" now orders a respite of three days, during which the elephants are given no food except what they can find in the inclosure, and this is soon demolished. Of water they have plenty, for a stream runs right through the "kubu." The preliminary work of catching, then, is over, and arrangements made for removing them to the "chelong," or stocks, where the tedious though interesting process of taming and educating them has yet to be performed.

The beasts must be secured by means of heavy ropes. To effect this, one end of a rope is made fast to a tree inside the "kubu," while a running noose, tied at the other end, is laid on the ground between two trees some 15ft. apart. Between these trees, and at a height of 20ft. from the ground, is suspended a platform, on which are stationed a couple of men, holding in their hands light lines attached to the noose, which they are thus enabled to lift off the ground.

Some plantain stalks are now laid on the ground in front of the noose, and the herd is driven in the direction of the trap. The bait proves only too attractive after their three days' fast. No sooner has one of the beasts placed a foot inside the noose, than it is drawn up, and the elephant bolting off, tightens the rope and is brought to a standstill. The annoyance at finding himself inside the fence of the "kubu" is nothing compared to the rage of the poor brute on feeling this unaccustomed restraint. Throwing himself forward he falls heavily to the ground, only to rise and

renew the fight, and the struggles of his huge frame are a sight indeed as, twisting and rolling about in all directions, he roars with rage and tears at the rope with his trunk, till finally he lies down exhausted and bemoans his fate with subdued groans, which cannot fail to arouse the sympathies of the onlooker.

While this is going on the remainder of the herd are kept at the far end of the stockade, and evince but little interest in the fate of their comrade.

The tame elephants are now brought into the "kubu," and with their assistance the captive is approached and the other three legs noosed, and the ropes made fast to trees. The forelegs of the captive, who has now risen again, are stretched a little forward and tied in that position to prevent him from collecting himself for a struggle, which often repeated might result in breaking his bonds and possible injury to himself.

The tame elephants of Malay are not trained to this work like those of India and Ceylon, but they are wonderfully clever nevertheless, and with their assistance the wild elephant is easily approached, the men who tie the ropes being either on the ground, under shelter of the tame elephants, or on the backs of the latter, in both of which positions they can work in comparative safety.

The captive is now left for the night, and next morning the tame elephants are again ridden into the "kubu" and take an important part in the operations. A heavy rope of plaited ratan is fastened round the neck of the captive, a second round his body, behind his forelegs, strong rope breeching is attached to this, and finally a rope is passed round the base of the trunk and made fast on either side to the collar round his neck. Tying these ropes, especially the last, occupies some hours, as the beast lashes out violently with his trunk, and must be approached with caution. He struggles whenever the ropes touch him, but hemmed in between the tame elephants, who appear quite to enter into the spirit of the game, he is unable to escape, and when at last his tormentors have succeeded and the last rope is tied, he lies down, and every means employed to get him on his legs proves useless. The "Pawang" is now called upon to exercise his wiles, and stepping forward, spits a concoction of chewed herbs into the beast's eyes and makes sundry passes over the prostrate body, muttering half-whispered incantations the while.

The result is hardly electric, for the beast



From a

THE SMALLEST OF THE HERD.

[Photograph.]

lies still in sullen prostration ; but it is certain that he will not remain there for ever, and when at last he sees fit to rise the credit of persuading him to do so is attributed to the mysterious powers of the "Pawang's" craft.

Now he must be taken to the "chelong," built on the bank of a river, over a mile away, and there is no time to be lost if he is to be lodged there to-day. A tame elephant is harnessed to the captive, who is dragged along by rope traces attached to the base of his trunk, and for the first few yards, taken by surprise, he starts off as if trained to it. But he soon realizes the position and becomes restive, and, stopping short, gives vent to an angry scream and makes off sideways into the jungle, dragging the tame elephant after him. The Malays in attendance seize the leg-ropes, which have been purposely left to drag along the ground, and give them a few turns round the trees close by, which effectually stops any further attempt to bolt. It is decided to try one of the other tame elephants, for this beast, though larger than the captive, is wanting in pluck, and refuses to lead its charge any farther.

As the harness is being rapidly transferred, a commotion is heard in the jungle close by, and one of the three beasts that escaped from the "kubu" during the drive, and has

been in the vicinity ever since, comes crashing through the jungle, and a general panic ensues. Most of the Malays bolt, the tame elephants become unmanageable, and the captive makes several vain attempts to break away. It is a critical moment, and but for the presence of mind of two or three Malays, who show a bold front, and after some manœuvring succeed in driving the tusker off, there would certainly be trouble. He returns once or twice, only to be driven off again, and finally, thinking it best to run no further risk of meeting with a similar fate, he leaves his late companion alone, and retires into the forest, much to everyone's relief.

Order is restored, and the captive, harnessed to his new leader, starts off again, the other two tame elephants marching one on each flank, to prevent any further attempt to leave the path. After some resistance and one or two falls, occasioned by the violence of his struggles, he finds himself at the "chelong," which will be his lodging for the next few weeks.

The "chelong" consists of a heavy cross bar on upright posts, some 15ft. high, underneath which are separate partitions or stalls, and into each of these an elephant is placed. The floor is raised a few inches from the ground to give a dry standing place,

and in front are two perpendicular posts, which are opened wide apart from the top to admit the elephant's head, and closed on to his neck on entering, after which he can move neither forward nor back. A beam under his chest prevents his lying down, a heavy bar on each flank keeps his body in position, and leg-ropes and hobbles render him completely helpless.

A few feet in front of the "chelong" a small post is planted in the ground. No one but the elephant's attendant may cross between this and the "chelong" under penalty of a

and night, an attention that at first he resents violently. Very often it is necessary to tie up his trunk and his tail, for he lashes about freely when touched, and even the latter appendage is capable of inflicting a severe blow.

After a few days he becomes accustomed to his captors, and quite appreciates the care bestowed upon him, and the goodly supply of bamboo and plantain stalks that are cut and brought daily to his stall.

The poor beast's legs have, by this time, become sore and chafed from contact with



From a

THE "CHELONG."

[Photograph.]

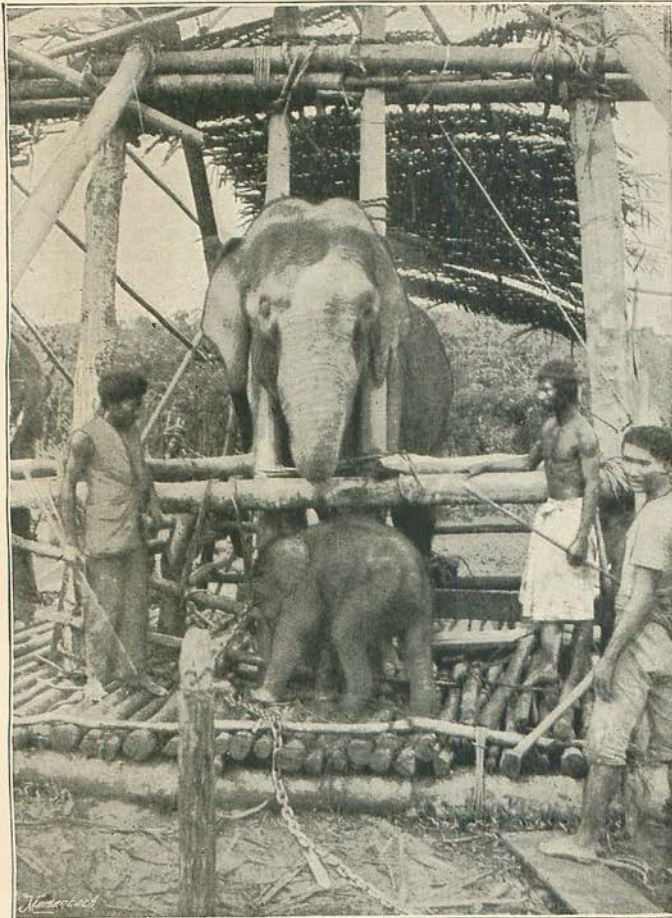
dollar and a half to the "Pawang," who, by means of this and sundry similar fines for breaches of etiquette, is enabled to enrich himself at the expense of the unwary.

The twelve elephants are each in turn brought to the "chelong," an operation that lasts about three weeks, and on arrival each is placed under charge of a couple of Malays, who feed, wash, and educate their charge, the course of teaching varying, according to the docility of the pupil and the attention bestowed by his masters, from a month to eight or ten weeks.

Every morning he is washed all over, and rubbed and handled at all hours of the day

the hobbles and ropes, which cause him to fidget continually, and all day long he will be seen trying to untie the shackles from his forelegs, moving uneasily from side to side, and blowing earth which he picks up in his trunk and mixes with water supplied from his mouth over the wounds. Native medicines are applied to the sores, and the hobbles and leg-ropes shifted as far as possible, and in a few days the wounds heal up.

After about ten days' confinement, the captive is taken to bathe at the river hard by. Attached by a rope to a tame elephant, he is mounted by a "gembala," or driver, who sits



From a)

AN ELEPHANT WITH CALF IN THE "CHELONG."

[Photograph.]

on his neck and gives him his first lesson in the words of command, illustrating their meaning by a slight pressure on the head with his "kwasa," a sharp iron hook used to guide him. Heavy wooden posts are planted at intervals between the "chelong" and the river, and should he bolt or prove unmanageable, the leg-ropes are immediately made fast to these by the attendants. As soon as the pupil

has begun to know the words of command, the services of the tame elephants are dispensed with, and he is taken to the river by the "gem-bala" assisted by a man on foot, who walks backwards in front of the elephant and helps to guide him with a "kwasa" and a spear.

The work of breaking him in being finished, the elephant is taken to his master's village and there petted and made much of until he becomes quite tame, but he is not expected to do hard work for a year, when he is sent to some distant tin mine to carry rice and provisions to the miners, and bring back his burden of the hard-earned metal to the nearest depôt.

Ten years ago a large elephant in Perak would fetch as much as eight hundred or a thousand dollars, but the same beast can now be purchased for five or six hundred, for the advance of civilization has brought with it such improved means of transport that there are comparatively few places where the services of this once useful animal are now necessary.



From a)

THE MORNING BATH.

[Photograph.]