

Tricky Traps.

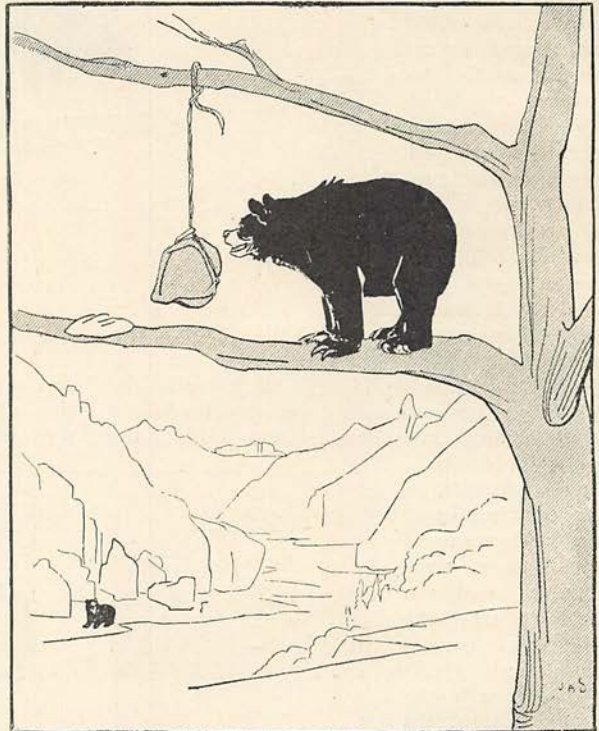
BY A. SARATHKUMAR GHOSH.

PEOPLE do ask such strange questions about wild animals. One would imagine that tigers and lions prowling about like cats in broad daylight in Indian and African villages, and cobras and pythons coil themselves in gay festoons around every door-post and window, and even hang from house to house like so many telegraph wires. No; wild elephants do *not* run into your compound on high days and holidays, and start pulling down your bungalow for the mere fun of the thing. Whole herds of rhinoceri do *not* come charging into every railway station, scatter the passengers about like chaff before the wind, wreck the trains into matchwood, rip up the permanent way for hundreds of yards around, and chew up all the corrugated iron in the establishment.

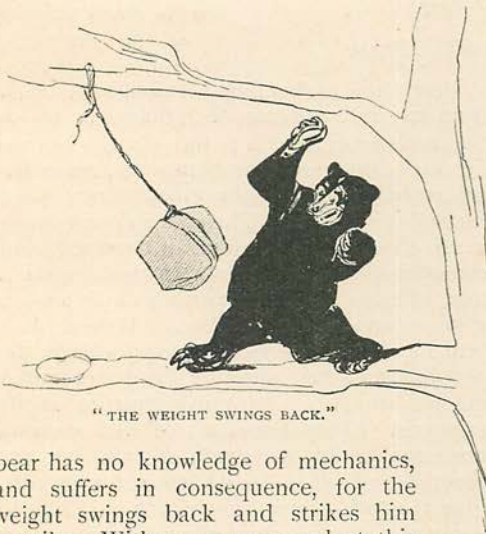
But apart from these exaggerations, the actual devastation committed by wild beasts is bad enough in all conscience. We do occasionally hear authenticated accounts of troops of lions stalking African villages, and of man-eating tigers laying a regular siege on remote Indian villages, from which they carry off scores of victims, till some neighbouring English resident organizes a hunting expedition, and, like a knight of old, rids these unfortunate people of their terrible foes. In fact, official statistics for British India alone show that about 21,000 people and 90,000 domestic animals are killed there every year by wild beasts. Whether the condition of things is any better in other countries it is impossible to say, as there are no statistics to be had. It certainly can be no worse.

Of course the natives do not always submit tamely to these terrible depredations. Without actually waging a perpetual warfare with these dread savages, which they could not, for the want of firearms, they yet have recourse to various stratagems to kill or capture their foes in a manner at once effective and ingenious. Luckily, most wild beasts are kinds of idiots, besides being greedy and obstinate. So the methods employed against them are all very simple, and some extremely ludicrous, as the following will show.

Bears are to be found throughout Asia, from the hill districts of India right up to the snows of Siberia; and though not so fierce or strong as tigers, they are, nevertheless, very formidable foes to encounter when pressed by hunger. They are in one respect worse than tigers, because an unarmed man can always escape from a tiger by climbing a tree, whereas he could not thus elude a bear, who is an expert climber. Hence, if a bear is found prowling near a village, the people sometimes adopt for his destruction a method which is almost mathematical in its principle. They select a tree with a strong horizontal bough some 12ft. or 15ft. from the ground, and place on it—about 8ft. or 10ft. from the fork—something which is likely to tempt the bear, *e.g.* honey or goat-flesh. Just above this bait, and about a foot in front of it, they suspend a heavy weight by means of a stout rope attached to a bough overhead, thus forming a huge pendulum with its bulb covering the bait. The bear, allured by the bait, climbs the tree and walks along the bough to the bait. Noticing, however, the obstacle, he pushes it aside with his paw. But, alas! the



"ALLURED BY THE BAIT."



"THE WEIGHT SWINGS BACK."

bear has no knowledge of mechanics, and suffers in consequence, for the weight swings back and strikes him heavily. With a savage growl at this unwarrantable assault, he pushes it away with greater force than before, only to receive a severer blow. And so this suicidal contest goes on—for the bear is too obstinate and determined a foe to give in—till he is knocked off the tree stunned and desperately wounded, when the natives come and finish him off if necessary.

The following plan is often adopted in Africa—and in India by *domes* and *pariahs*, the lowest castes among the people—for killing pythons and other large snakes: When the villagers notice a snake of this kind in the neighbourhood, they bore a small hole, some 6in. in diameter, at the foot of the wall that usually surrounds their village. On the outer side of the wall, and just op-

posite the hole, they tie up a pig; and, similarly, one on the inner side. The python comes, sees the first pig, and swallows it; then noticing through the hole that there is another pig on the other side, puts its head through and swallows that also. Now, there is a fine fixture; for pig No. 1 is in that part of the body which is outside the wall, and pig No. 2 in the part within the wall, and neither is small enough to go through the hole. Hence the greedy python is unable to advance or to retreat, and lies at the mercy of the natives.

If, however, it is thought undesirable to bore a hole in the wall, or if the village be without one, then the arrangement is somewhat different. In such a case the villagers drive into the ground a number of stout wooden stakes, about 6in. apart, in the form of a square, say 4ft. or 5ft. each way, and about as much high. Then they place a

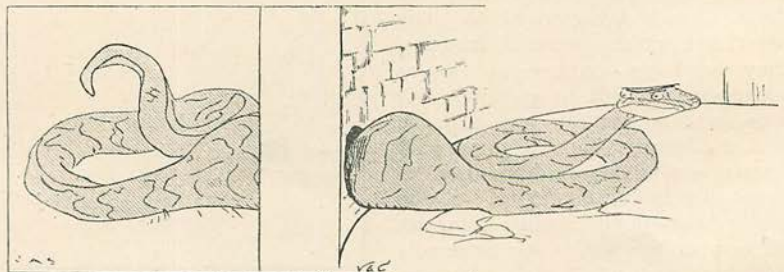
pig inside, and bind the tops together with cross-beams. The whole structure thus forms a miniature hut with the pig within. The python enters between the bars, eats the pig, and is unable to get out again.

This latter method has an additional advantage over the former; for it costs only one pig to kill a python, whereas in the case of boring a hole in the wall,

two are needed, one on the inside and the other outside. But then (I have been told in confidence) in either case, the pig



"KNOCKED OFF THE TREE."



"A FINE FIXTURE."

or pigs, though dead, are not entirely lost to the villagers—if the python be cut open in time! One cannot, however, be quite sure about this; it may be only a libel on the villagers. Besides, in eating the python, they virtually eat the pig. For, as the negro slave in America, when accused by his master of surreptitiously eating his chicken, replied, "Massa has less chicken, but he has more niggah!"

In certain cases, however, the methods employed for the destruction of wild animals are automatic, and do not need any subsequent intervention on the part of the natives themselves. For instance, in some places which are infested with wolves and bears—e.g., Russia, Siberia, Central Asia, etc.—the

and a stout arrow is arranged on it in such a manner that the string of the bow will be released and the arrow shot out with great force on pulling a trigger (as in a cross-bow). Then a quantity of flesh, or anything else which makes a suitable bait, is placed directly in front of the arrow and tied by a cord to the trigger. In order to prevent the animal from getting at the bait sideways, or from discharging the arrow in any illegitimate manner, stakes are driven into the ground on all sides, except in front. Hence, when the animal comes, it sees the opening in front of the inclosure and the bait temptingly placed there, snatches at it, and receives the arrow full in its breast.

Monkeys are a great nuisance in certain



"THE BAIT."

people take a number of pliable fish-bones about 3in. long, sharpen the two ends, and then, bending them in the form of hairpins, embed them in pieces of fat, which they scatter on the ground outside their village. The wolves and bears come in search of food, and swallow these pieces of fat with avidity. When pressed by hunger, they do not stop to chew them, but gulp them down wholesale, and thus swallow the curved fish-bones as well. When, however, the heat of the stomach melts the fat, these fish-bones spring back into their original position and transfix the animals internally, thereby causing death in most cases. This seems rather a cruel method of killing animals; but the natives justify it on the ground that it is a safe and easy way of getting rid of a large number of these savage beasts.

Another automatic method is sometimes employed when it is intended to operate against some individual animal, e.g., a tiger or a lion, which is seen prowling about the outskirts of the village. A strong bow is fixed in position about 2ft. from the ground,

parts of India. They are a bad lot altogether, being thieves and liars of the worst sort. I mean they are liars in this respect, that they will come up to you with the merriest and friendliest of grins just when they are contemplating the wickedest of robberies. And yet they may be seen in many a town, squatting on the roofs of temples, grinning at the worshippers that pass to and fro, and receiving a handsome *largesse* in the shape of nuts, bananas, and brinjals. Occasionally, one more mischievous and dishonest than the rest will creep down to the stall of some sleeping fruiterer, grab a handful of delicacies, and be off to a neighbouring roof—followed by a torrent of vain curses from the injured owner. Curiously enough, the natives will never kill a monkey; it is a semi-sacred animal, often maintained in luxury in the environments of the holiest temples.

The fact is, there is a legend that Hunumān, the king of monkeys, once helped Rama (one of the *avatars* of Vishnu) to conquer a great demon. Consequently, the

monkey is permitted to remain what he always was—a pampered thief and a general nuisance. I remember the case of a tame monkey, owned by a waggish *ganja* (hemp) smoker. One day the monkey was made blindly, speechlessly intoxicated, and sent staggering into the roadway, amid a crowd of yelling, jeering—but, really, I am forgetting. This is not a story.

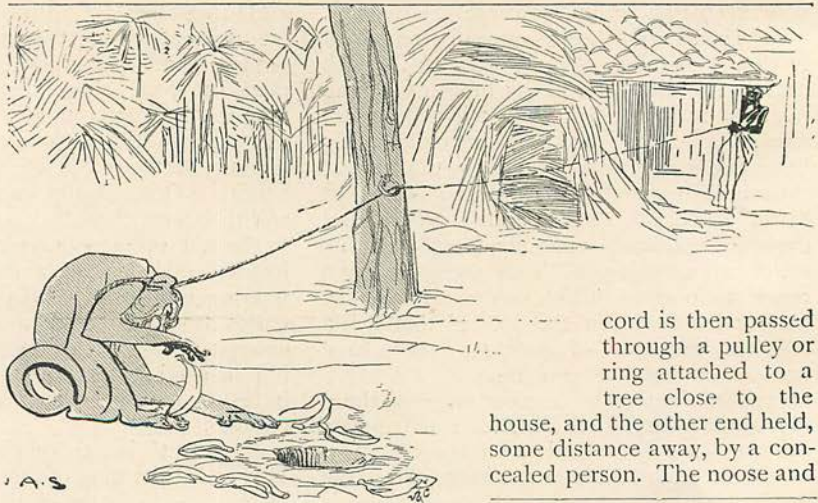
So monkeys are an unmitigated nuisance—especially in the country. I have often come across in the jungles adjoining the villages of Northern Bengal whole troops of them, whose depredations on the fields and orchards were the despair of the unfortunate villagers. These troops always consisted of one huge male and about a hundred females. The fact is, when a little monkey is born in the pack, it is suffered to live if a female, but instantly killed by the father if it happens to be a male. The mother, however, sometimes manages to hide the little one till he is able to get about, and then send him away before the big male catches sight of him. In this way, it often happens that individual males are to be found living by themselves in single blessedness. Now, getting tired of solitude after a time, and perhaps believing in union as a source of strength, these bachelors often join together and form a pack of their own—as a sort of a club. Then the fun begins. They want wives—very naturally. But how are they to get them? All the female monkeys of the country belong to the harem of some big brute or other. Clearly, the only solution is to attack such a harem, kill the *gotha* (the afore-said big brute), and then divide the spoils. So an ultimatum is sent—and rejected. War is declared. The battle is a fierce one and often lasts several days. The party attacked always tries to retreat, and often traverses several jungles, fields, and even villages. But the pursuit is hot and vigorous, and a last stand has to be made

—sometimes in a village green or even an orchard of some country mansion. In the actual fight the females generally remain faithful to their lord and master, and help him fiercely against his numerous assailants. But the result is a foregone conclusion, and the several widows, after a very short period of mourning—usually manifested by a show of ill-temper—are consoled by the victorious males.

Now, these battles cause sad havoc to the fields and orchards of the country, and often prove a positive danger to the people; for, though monkeys seldom attack men, woe to the luckless one who ventures to come near them in their deadly struggle. Moreover, when pressed by hunger these packs are not to be trifled with. You may not mind even the damage done to your orchard by hundreds of monkeys gobbling up everything they could lay their hands on, but it is quite a different matter when you have to shut your doors and windows, and stay in for days at a time, because of the army outside.*

Consequently, the object of the natives is to break up these packs by capturing their leaders. Killing is against the dictates of conscience, but capture is not, especially as the monkey is liberated in a short time—as will appear presently. So when a pack is about, the natives employ the following method.

Close to an orchard, a bit of level space is selected and a hole dug in it, about 2ft. deep and 6in. or 8in. in diameter. A noose is made at one end of a long stout cord, and placed over the mouth of the hole. The



"A TEMPTING BANANA."

cord is then passed through a pulley or ring attached to a tree close to the house, and the other end held, some distance away, by a concealed person. The noose and

* The writer himself has had to stand such a siege in an isolated mansion.

about 10ft. or 15ft. of the cord are covered over with sand. Then a nice tempting banana is placed in the hole, and a number of rotten ones—covered, however, with fresh skins—are strewn all over the ground near the hole.

When the pack comes, the females are too shy to venture out into the open space near the house. But the big *gottha* is a brave fellow. He sees the bananas on the ground, leaps down, takes up one—throws it away in disgust. Then another—with the same result. Suddenly he notices the nice tempting one in the hole and plunges his arm in—immediately the cord is pulled, the noose fastened on the arm close to the shoulder, and the monkey dragged willy-nilly to the tree where the pulley, or ring, is attached. Then the hiding shikari comes forth, and, circling round and round the tree with the cord held tight in his hand, binds the unfortunate monkey safe and fast, all but the head. The pulley or ring is introduced not merely to bind the monkey to the tree, but also because it would be highly dangerous to drag

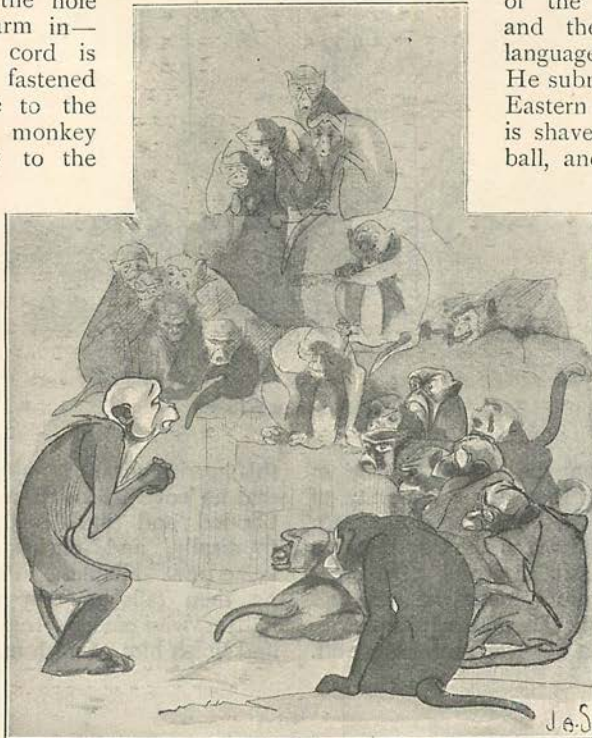


"THEY LATHER HIS HEAD AND FACE."

the infuriated brute right up to a person.

The monkey, however, is not killed. Instead, they lather his head and face, no special care being taken in selecting the finest soap or the purest water. The operation is an interesting one, and a source of great amusement—to the bystanders. The monkey, however, dodges his head about, only to get a good dose of soap into his eyes and mouth. Then he has enough of it, especially as he feels dreadfully achy all over, and the cords cutting into his body every inch—to say nothing of the personal remarks and the highly adjectival language of the bystanders. He submits to his fate with Eastern stoicism. His head is shaved clean as a billiard ball, and the face as well, nice and smooth like a baby's. Then they let him go.

But, alas! such is the vanity of life! His wives will not have him now that his beauty is gone! They disown him completely; cut him dead. Nay, they drive him away from the pack with contumely, with the end of their tails—in the absence of domestic broomsticks.



"DISOWNED!"

And thus, being without a leader, the pack is soon broken up.

Of all methods, however, employed for the actual destruction of wild animals, the following will perhaps bear away the palm, if one considers the grand result obtained and the ludicrous means adopted to obtain it. Fancy "catching tigers with bird-lime!"

It does seem a sensational heading, but nevertheless it is quite true. This is the way it is done. In some parts of Northern India,

when information is received in a village that a tiger has been seen in the neighbourhood, the natives gather a large quantity of leaves from a particular kind of tree which grows in that part of the country; these leaves are about 6in. or 8in. in diameter, and very thick and tough. Now, there is another kind of tree the sap of which, when prepared, makes a very sticky paste. The natives smear the leaves with this paste, and strew the ground with them very close together for a radius of some 50ft. around a tall tree, taking care

that the paste is on the upper surface of the leaves. Then they tie a quantity of flesh on a bough of the tree some 12ft. from the ground, and watch the development of events from a safe distance. The tiger scents the flesh, comes up to the tree and makes a spring for it. He naturally misses it; for a tiger cannot as a rule leap more than 10ft.

vertically, though he can cover at a single bound some 40ft. horizontally. He then tries again—with the same result. Now, perhaps, he begins to notice that his paws are covered with the leaves, and naturally desires to rid himself of these incumbrances before trying again; or else he does not mind them at first, but goes on trying, till they accumulate more and more, and become a positive nuisance. He then wipes his paws on the ground—only to gather a few more leaves. Then he wipes

his paws on his body, with the result that he transfers the leaves to the body; and as soon as he puts his paws down again he catches up some more leaves from the ground. In this way the leaves go on piling all over the body till they get to the face and head. This is done all the more easily, because all animals of the cat tribe have the habit of wiping their paws on their face. Now, when the paste gets to the eyes, it causes a severe pain which drives the tiger frantic. In his blundering stupidity he rolls on the ground to free himself from



"IN MISERABLE PLIGHT."

this horrid nuisance, but with the only result that he covers himself more and more—till, blinded and maddened, he leaps about frantically, and dashes his head against some tree. Helpless, in his miserable plight, he then falls an easy victim to the wily natives, who emerge from their hiding-place, and finish him off with many a spear-thrust.