THE IBEX OF SHĀ-PING

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TORONTO

SUNSET ON SNOWY PEAK

THE IBEX OF SHĀ-PING

AND OTHER HIMALAYAN STUDIES

BY

LIEUT. L. B. RUNDALL

1ST GURKHA RIFLES

(*Killed in Action, Dec.* 19, 1914)

WITH NUMEROUS PEN AND INK SKETCHES AND COLOURED PLATES BY THE AUTHOR

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CONTENTS

FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

Do you know the world's white roof-tree—do you know that windy rift
Where the baffling mountain-eddies chop and change?
Do you know the long day's patience, belly-down on frozen drift,
While the head of heads is feeding out of range?
It is there that I am going, where the boulders and the snow lie,
With a trusty, nimble tracker that I know.
I have sworn an oath, to keep it on the Horns of Ovis Poli,
And the Red Gods call me out and I must go!

From 'The Feet of the Young Men' in "The Five Nations," by the suggestion and kind permission of Mr. Rudyard Kipling.

MOONRISE

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR TO HIS MOTHER AFTER HIS LAST SHOOTING TRIP IN THE HIMALAYAS.

"*I love the mountains better than I can say, and the sport, if only for watching the game and getting to know them; and the music and scenery of it all. There* is *music in it all, and the composer who has got closest to it is Grieg; but his music does not reach up above the forests and torrents, and even so it is only a poor imitation. . . . The 'music' of absolute silence and loneliness high above forest and water is perhaps the grandest, and is, I suppose, one of the lures of climbing the high peaks. But there is nothing I have ever heard in the works of any composer which does more than barely suggest it—all so unutterably grand and bare, so sad and lonely. And the end of it all?*

How many mountain ranges have faded into sandy plains, and how many sea-beds have been raised into great jagged peaks and snowfields since the world was made? Shouldn't every man be glad to rough it out and test his power of endurance, and harden himself, and sharpen his animal wits in the keen mountain wind, and silence of the forests? . . . Next to my profession I am keenest on sport; not necessarily from the point of view of firing off a number of cartridges and drawing blood, but because I love the mountains for their beauty, their moods, their music, and their absolute eeriness—so like the sea in a way. . . . I have already thought out my future expeditions. One into unexplored Spiti, beyond the hills of Waziri Rupi which run up to about 23,000 feet; several short ones into Chamba, and Bhangal, and then a big one into Thibet. That's the one I want to do most, but it is far away yet."

PROLOGUE

YOU who are wearied with the day's work, and would hear of the wonders of the Himalaya, let yourself float in your imagination, out across the seas, over the parched sand of the desert, across the arid plains of India, and up into the everlasting snows where the chill night winds are sighing.

There, below you, lies my camp ; in the clearing midst the dark pine forests, where the log fire blazes and crackles, and where the silver stream murmurs of the thousand mysteries of the mountains.

Look ! The moon is rising over yonder shoulder, pale and ghostly, glimmering through the deodars. See how the spectral

peaks tower, piercing the very constellations, and how the unearthly light steals over their virgin snows.

Come down with me to my camp. Seat yourself comfortably in my deck chair, and draw it closer to the blaze. Help yourself to whisky—I have nothing better for you, except the ice-cold water from the spring—light your pipe, and listen awhile to the stories which I will tell you, mainly of what I myself have seen, partly of what I have heard from the lips of other shikaris.

There is an attraction about the log fire, made up of a hundred things. Among these, the sweet scent of the burning pine, the sharp tongues of flame which leap and dart, the merry crackle of the dry wood, the hissing of the sap, and the myriad sparks which whirl upwards and soar floating on the wings of the blue smoke. Each but a small matter in

itself but contributing to the cheery glow, and without which it would not be complete.

So it is with the mountain, and its thousand streams, its forests and its lakes, its animals and its birds, its flowers and ferns. Without any one of them it would not be complete.

Listen now to its voice. The wind whispering in the trees and the soft tones of the stream. Now, it is kindly and gentle. Yet the mountain has its moods.

Come at another season, and listen to the grinding crash of the avalanche or the roar of the thunder as it echoes from cliff to cliff, and the shriek of the storm fiend as he rushes wildly among the gaunt pines, bending them till they crack and groan before his icy blast.

Thus it is that, coming again and again, men learn something of the complex spirit of the mountain ; and learning, long to return and see yet more.

So ! I will sit with my back against this log and tell you the story of the Scape-Goat. Look into the red heart of the fire and picture the tales which I relate.

Bear with me, if you can. The stories are true in the main, and " fact is stranger than fiction."

THE SCAPE-GOAT

I

THE SCAPE-GOAT

THE wind sighed and moaned among the rocks as it whirled the little snowflakes across the bleak mountain-sides, driving them in twisting eddies over the open spurs, and piling them in ever-increasing drifts against the grey boulders and in the more sheltered nooks and crannies.

It was late September, and the day was rapidly closing in, its life rendered short by dark snow-clouds scurrying in flying rack across the sky, and now and then surging against the great cliffs of some towering peak.

Oblivious of the biting cold and cutting wind, the old brown bear lay snugly curled up, asleep under a rugged grey boulder which overhung a few sparse bushes of dark green ling, thus forming a natural shelter where he could lie protected from either hot mid-day sun or chill storm.

It had been his favourite resting-place for many years, for although he often hunted in other grounds, this was his chief castle of refuge. It lay at a height of thirteen thousand feet above sea-level, midst stupendous mountains which would make the highest peak in Switzerland look insignificant in comparison.

Far below roared the mountain torrent, foaming fresh from the throat of a huge glacier which sprawled along the steep mountain-sides like some leviathan chained there by Kali, the goddess of all things terrible upon the earth and in heaven. But so far below was the torrent that not the faintest murmur of its roar reached the cave under the rock, for the tearing wind whirled the sound away, mingling with it the wail of its own wild chant.

As the light began to die out of the sky the old bear stirred, opened his eyes, and with a grunt crept out on to a grassy ledge, where he shook himself, yawned, and stretched. He had now grown old in a life generally peaceable but sometimes marked by a red-letter day, when driven by a thirst of blood, he had made a descent upon some flock and carried

off his victim—a pleasant change this from his usual diet of grubs and roots.

The cold was unable to pierce his thick fur and the layers of fat which protected his massive frame, as he stood surveying the scene which lay before him.

Great peaks soared majestically into the grey sky through the sea of flying clouds, and all around the mountains fell sheerly in a series of cliffs and terraces into the mysterious shadows below, where the torrent wound like a white thread. At intervals, perched high above its precipitous banks, three freshly kindled fires glowed and scintillated like sparks. Near the first two huddled large flocks of sheep, and close to the third a couple of tents were just visible, dimly reflecting the light of departing day.

The bear stretched again ; the grey-brown fur on his back rippled, and his two little black eyes closed in anticipation of his feed to-night. He did not feel inclined for blood, but he would go forth and dig near that third fire, where he knew that the roots would be juicy.

He feared neither shepherd nor sheep-dog, for he had learnt from long experience that

neither of them could do him harm or even dared approach him, though both made much unseemly noise whenever they chanced to see him.

The only beings whom he feared were the white men with the rifles, who very occasionally came to prowl upon his domains, and who seem to all forest folk to possess a different scent from the harmless brown men. Once, many years ago, one of these white men had climbed laboriously towards his lair. A puff of wind had brought him the unknown scent, and instinctively mistrusting it, he had begun to move slowly away, when there was a roar as of a clap of thunder, and something had made a long gash in his chest. As he wheeled with the pain there had come a second roar, and something struck a rock by his foot and sang away over his head humming like a bee.

He had then made off at great speed, travelling many miles without stopping till darkness fell. But although he had not been pursued, and his wound had quickly healed, this experience had taught him to be wary of the strange scent, and to avoid the white men and their camping grounds.

There had only been two fires the night before, and this was certainly the time of year when the white men frequented the mountains. He therefore stood gazing at the third fire and the tents in some doubt. The last white flakes of the departing snowstorm swirled around him in a mad elfin dance, and settled upon his grey coat like a swarm of gnats.

At last hunger overcoming suspicion he turned and crept noiselessly down the steep mountain slope.

. . . . . .

Nika, shikari, salaamed to the white man who sat reading in his tent, and the latter nodded in return. Something in the old hunter's manner suggestive of suppressed excitement told him that he had brought news of game.

" Shepherds seen any ibex ? " he asked.

" Hanuman, who is god of this place, shall assuredly give the Sahib many ibex," answered the old man, " but he shall first deliver into our hands the Raja of all brown bears. For the shepherds have seen him this morning digging hard by yonder pool of water, fearing neither themselves nor their dogs. Further-

more, a week since, they swear that he carried off a fat lamb ; and if you give the word, to-night, having taken just such a lamb, we will tie it up at some distance from the flock. The bear will without fail come once more to dig, but spying the tempting bait will be attracted hither by it ; and you, Sahib, shall slay this Raja of brown bears."

The white man, who took everything which a native told him with a grain of salt, nodded again rather doubtfully, and rising, went to the door of his tent to look at the weather. It was not reassuring, and besides, the idea that the bear would be attracted from some far-off lair in that vast arena of mountains by one small sheep did not seem possible. However, thinking the plan over and having nothing better to do, he intimated, rather against his will, that he would try his luck.

An hour afterwards, arrayed in a sheepskin coat, he concealed himself behind some tumbled rocks close to a little grassy terrace, over which wound a tiny stream of crystal water. Except for a few undulating ridges of rock and grass, he could obtain a clear view in every direction. The old hunter huddled

beside him wrapped in a grey homespun blanket, which like its owner had remained unwashen from the day of its coming into the world. The combined aroma was such that the white man longed for a pipe, but dared not smoke for fear of revealing his position.

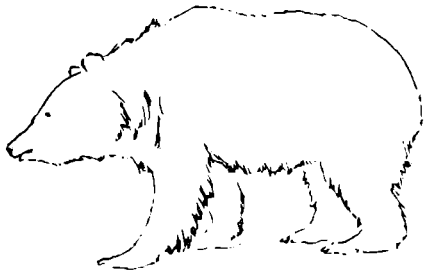
The cold was intense, but the snow had ceased falling and lay in patches round about, outlining the contours of the bleak upland, unspeakably wild and eerie in the twilight, and bare of any cloak of trees or shrubs. Just a succession of steep moorlands rising abruptly into precipitous rock walls.

Old Nika's eyes, which seemed capable of taking in the smallest movement far away in those dark mountain slopes, pierced the gloom which shrouded them and observed every detail. Occasionally he spoke in whispers exhorting his companion to patience. By the stream, tethered to a peg, was a fat sheep, which every now and then bleated piteously for some one to take it back to the flock, and straining at the rope stared round apprehensively at unknown terrors which seemed to be preparing to pounce on it from every rock and hollow.

The flying clouds had become thinner, and all at once the moon rose over the mountains and flooded the valley with an unearthly steel-blue light, throwing every rock and ledge into bold relief. The great white peaks stood out clear and ghostlike against the inky sky, and to the watchers by the stream might have been within a stone's throw of where they lay, though many of them stood distant some two days' hard climbing, and their virgin snow had never been defiled by the foot of man.

The silence was unbroken except by the subdued roar of the torrent, for even the sheep had ceased its plaintive bleating and was gazing round for help. Suddenly the trained ear of the hunter caught another sound, the sound of a stone dislodged from somewhere far above on the hill-side, which he could hear rolling down a short distance and then stop. He clutched at the white man's sleeve and whispered excitedly; then both lay still and listened, trying meanwhile to pierce the shadows in the fold of the mountain above them.

All at once there appeared a shape silhouetted clearly in the moonlight standing on



MOUNTAINS IN MOONLIGHT


BRUNDALL

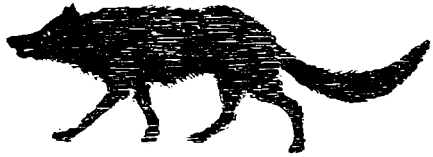
a rock some three hundred paces above them. It seemed to remain there motionless for an age of time to the white man, and he could feel his heart thumping in his ribs and could barely restrain himself from risking a shot then and there, but the distance was too great to ensure a steady aim in that uncertain light. At last it glided swiftly and silently towards the little dell, and as the moonlight fell full upon its huge frame the watchers could see that it was a bear of exceptionally large proportions, a Raja of bears indeed as the shepherds had said.

At a little over a hundred and fifty paces it stood on a small rise and sniffed at the air, and the white man, unable to control himself any longer, raised his rifle to fire. But Nika seized his arm: "No, no," he whispered, "this is no ordinary bear, take no risk, Sahib; it will assuredly come closer."

The bear, overcoming his suspicions, moved down the little hillock and disappeared in the shadows below. "I should be a fool indeed," thought he, "were I to leave this untended sheep, with neither man nor dog to disturb my meal."

He advanced across the hollow and was about to climb the rise which separated him from the sheep, when he caught a new scent on the light breeze, that of a dog evidently moving somewhere close at hand. Mastered by curiosity, the bear checked himself a moment to peer into the darkness. "Why should this dog have come to disturb him?" He would watch awhile concealed among the rocks. A short distance from the bear a gaunt form came gliding through the darkness towards the bleating of the sheep; a savage-looking sheep-dog, crouching low, his eyes glowing a pale yellow, and the ruff on his neck standing up stiffly. He had seen neither the men nor the bear, and had no thought for anything but the taste of fresh blood.

Unknown to the shepherd, his master, he was a sheep-killer. He had never touched a sheep in his master's flock, for he was far too crafty; he set forth on his raids when the fit seized him, and many sheep had he killed, yet all these murders had been attributed to bears. He had seldom met with such a chance as this in the whole history of his dark



exploits, and he knew well that the crime would not be set down to his account.

At this moment a cloud slightly obscured the moon, and the watchers heard a faint sound among the rocks a few paces from the sheep, which dragged madly in terror at the rope. As the moon began to struggle through the cloud once more, there was a rush, and the sheep fell heavily with the big dark body crouching over it.

" Fire, Sahib, fire," whispered Nika, and the white man, needing no bidding, fired into the crouching mass, which crumpled up and lay still. The moon burst out as both men leapt to their feet and dashed forward. The slayer of sheep lay dead at their feet indeed, but not the Raja of brown bears. He was, by now, moving swiftly away across the mountains to happier and safer hunting grounds.

Who can tell whether he still sleeps in his castle high above the glacier ?

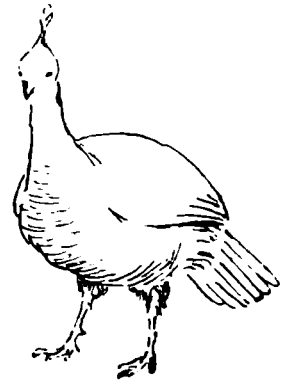
THE EMERALD OF THE FOREST

15

THE EMERALD OF THE FOREST

FEW would believe the artist who is daring enough to attempt to paint the Himalayas in their full glory of sunset.

The sun sinks lower over the misty edge of the plains, which stretch far and wide for hundreds of miles in the shimmering heat, and tinges the great rivers the colour of blood. The towering peaks of snow seem to pierce the dark blue vault of heaven as they stand yet in the blaze of full daylight. But whilst the plains grow dark and the great red sun touches the horizon, a rose-coloured glow creeps up the gaunt shoulders of the mountains and across the wide snowfields, gradually suffusing itself over them and turning them into fairy palaces where man dare not tread. The sky takes on a darker hue of purple, turning the snow on the lower ridges to mauve, which fades into dark blue and merges with

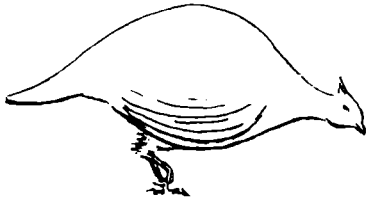


the green-blue tinge of the sombre pine forests stretching far into the darkness below. The mountains glow and blaze in their glory for a short space till Nature gradually draws away the rosy veil, and they become once more the gaunt menacing shapes of white, keeping silent watch over the countless beings who dwell far, far below in the twilight of the valleys.

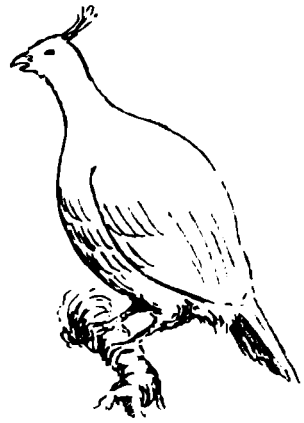
Under a giant spruce pine stood the monal pheasant, his glistening plumage rivalling the colours of the magnificent scene which flamed around him.

An old cock bird, cunning above all the pheasant tribes of the mountains; as he stood, the light flashed emerald, topaz and amethyst from the wonderful feathers of his body. His neck gleamed bronze and ruby, and the long crest of emerald plumes glittered on his head as the light breeze caressed it.

One by one came six hen birds creeping noiselessly through a covert of mauve rhododendrons to join their lord, occasionally stopping to scrape away the soft moss or dead leaves and pick up some fat grub. Their plumage was of a humble russet hue, and



HEAD OF MONAL PHEASANT



would not bear comparison with the metallic splendour of the cock pheasant.

Springing on to a fallen tree the old monal flapped his shining wings and began uttering those long plaintive whistles with which his tribe salute the advent and the passing of day—a sound which blends in perfect harmony with the general tone of those great solitudes.

As if by magic, there came answering whistles from other coverts, and from somewhere below the hoarse crowing of a kuklas pheasant. And the forest echoed with the sound as the glow on the mountains faded to white and gradually died away.

His paean concluded, the old pheasant flew up on to a gnarled pine branch, and his harem followed suit amongst the neighbouring trees, where no prowling fox or marten could pounce upon them.

An owl, bird of ill omen, floated noiselessly past, and as silently swooped to the ground in a little clearing below ; there was a tiny scream and all was still again, as the owl, rising once more into the air, bore away its prey, a little shrew-mouse.

Not a sound disturbed the silence except the wind in the tree-tops, a murmur like the far-away beat of waves on a sea-shore.

As the birds of the forest settled themselves to sleep, the cold stars stole out into the cloudless sky and glittered like great lamps.

. . . . . .

As the first pearl light of dawn crept over the sky, the old monal awoke and fluffed out his plumage. The morning mists changed from grey to primrose, and now deepened to green and orange, then merging into soft carnation, they gradually flamed into scarlet and fine gold.

There was a nip of frost in the air, and the grass and ferns below were outlined with glistening white. It seemed as if the fairies had strewn them with the dust of diamonds during their wild revelries among the dark tree-trunks.

The monal bent his head and sharpened his long beak on the twisted branch, and then proceeded to preen his feathers, his morning toilet. As the sun turned the summit of the highest peak to molten gold, the old pheasant sent his shrill call echoing clear from the

SUNRISE

stern grey cliffs, like a bugle sounding reveille. In a moment he was answered by his kindred among the neighbouring hills, and the approach of day was heralded right royally.

The monal spread his wings and sailed noiselessly to the carpet of ferns and flowers, where he was soon joined by his six wives. Together they began picking their way up the steep side of the hill, now creeping beneath the twisted branches of some rhododendron cover, now crossing some little terrace carpeted with anemones. Turning up the dead leaves in search of food, they made their way to a tiny spring, where the water bubbled crystal clear from between moss-grown rocks. After a few sips of this ice-cold nectar, they turned and ascended to the crest of the ridge, where the trees grew more sparsely, gnarled and bent into many weird shapes by a thousand storms.

In a short time the birds became separated and their leader made his way to a little dell where the sunbeams had in some measure plucked the frost diamonds from the grass. Here he found his fill of food, and was beginning to feel drowsy, when a far-away sound,

the mere cracking of a stick, attracted his unerring sense of hearing. Running up a little slope towards the direction of the sound, he raised his head cautiously above some fronds of bracken and remained immobile, searching the woods with his keen eyes.

In days gone by his ancestors had been so hunted for their gorgeous plumage that the instinct of self-preservation ran highly developed through his veins, and any suspicious sound put him on his guard at once.

All at once two figures showed for an instant far below between the tree-trunks, and were gone almost immediately.

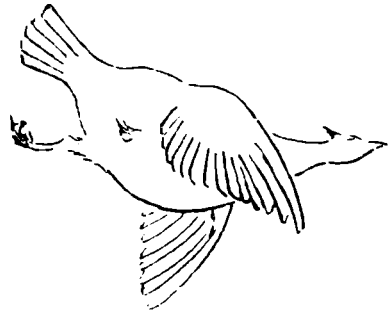
Not a feather of the big pheasant moved, and he was almost invisible among the bracken. The minutes fled before a figure again came into view, creeping among the rhododendrons full two hundred paces away.

The searching glance of the monal, however, took in every detail. This was no shepherd or woodman, and as he raised himself over a fallen log, something glittered in his hand, and that something was unmistakably a gun.

The monal needed no further warning ; he

had many times seen his kin felled by such men as these, and running on to the crest of an overhanging rock, he hurled himself into space, and with shrill screams of warning, shot downwards and away from the terror, with the speed of an arrow. Swinging round a spur with a rush of air in his wings, he sailed onwards with incredible velocity across a deep ravine, the sun flashing from his wonderful feathers and turning him into a living emerald. With a final upward swoop he alighted in an old pine on the farther side, whence he challenged the perplexed sportsmen with mocking whistles. He was joined by four of his wives a minute later, and then a fifth came sailing into view and alighted on the ground, twittering with rage and turning to hurl abuse at the strangers who had disturbed her meal.

More shrill screams announced that the last wife had taken the alarm, but the sound was followed almost immediately by the sharp report of a gun. As she swung into sight over the deep ravine she was swaying from side to side ; finally she seemed to crumple up and, rushing at a terrific speed, she hurtled



downwards through the air, crashed among the branches of an oak tree, and fell to earth with a dull thud.

A lean wild cat crouching among the holly bushes had noted every movement in the drama with her pale icy green eyes. When the bird fell she slunk noiselessly through the jungle, seized it and bore it away to her family, a welcome meal to appease the hunger of her four fierce little kittens.

Meanwhile, the five remaining hen pheasants disappeared up the hill-side ; and one, flying into a tree, kept watch for foes descending from above.

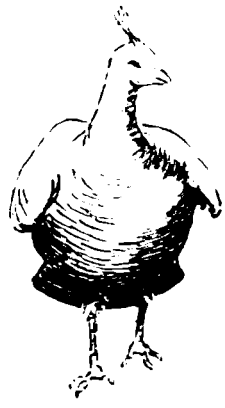
But the danger was not from above. Creeping stealthily below, and flitting like a shadow from tree-trunk to tree-trunk, came a little man with a hard, keen face, and two slits of eyes. He was a Gurkha soldier out for a few days' leave, and he knew the ground like a well-read book ; what was more, he knew this particular monal and owed him an old grudge. For had he not been outwitted by this same bird many times ? Fate now offered him another chance of paying off old scores. Nearer and nearer he crawled, till

suddenly a twig cracked under his knee and he froze still as a piece of dead wood.

The cock monal started round and gazed intently at the ground below, and without another move sat watching and listening, all his muscles tense for another dive through mid air. Thus he remained for fully five minutes, but still unsatisfied, he shuffled up the branch, and giving vent to a series of little twitterings of annoyance, flew on to another branch on the farther side of the tree. Then, stretching out his neck, he looked back round the tree-trunk; for the Emerald of the Forest takes no risk.

Insects droned lazily among the flowers, and from some clearing below came the muffled sound of a shepherd calling to his flock. There could be no enemy among the trees below, for there was nothing which moved or made any sound. Yet the monal was certain that he had heard that suspicious crack of a twig.

All this time the little man had remained motionless, but carefully noting everything. One important fact had not escaped him; the other sportsmen were coming across the hill-



side above, and he realised that they would descend, and might give the alarm before he could approach close enough to the monal to enable him to fire, so that time was precious.

In fact, they had already begun climbing down towards the birds, when the old pheasant, at last satisfied that there could be no danger below, withdrew his head behind the tree and the soldier crept forward again. But he was now faced with a new problem ; his way was barred by a belt of rhododendrons through which he could not force a path without making a noise and disclosing his presence. If only the pheasant had remained on his side of the tree, he could have seen clearly to shoot it with the miniature rifle he carried. The Adjutant sahib had lent him the little weapon, a great honour, and this had made him determined that he would not return empty-handed.

Ah ! the alarm had been given, and away went one of the hens from above, followed by two more at intervals. Any moment the great glittering bird hidden behind the tree-trunk might follow his wives. The seconds

seemed like hours to the little man as he lay crouching under the bushes.

Finally the two remaining hens, alarmed by the close approach of the enemy from above, went sailing past, shrieking warnings to their lord and master. However, the old cock bird, pleased with the success of his last ruse, determined to put it to a second trial.

Just as the two men appeared in an opening among the trees above, he sprang down upon his first resting-place, and from that to another branch completely hidden from them, and looked cautiously round the tree-trunk to watch what they would do.

There was a sharp crack from the bushes below as the little man pressed the trigger, and the big gleaming pheasant fell fluttering to the ground. A merciful knife-thrust through the brain soon ended its agony, and the soldier lifted his glittering trophy and disappeared silently among the trees.

The Adjutant sahib should see that he had not hunted in vain.

THE IBEX OF SHĀ-PING

THE IBEX OF SHA-PING

MANY marches from the rush and tumult of the habitations of man, in the midst of a vast sea of mountains, there lies a certain valley, known only to one white man, who occasionally pays it a visit in the interests of sport.

The valley takes its name from a sharp peak (the birthplace of a famous river), a stupendous mass of rock and snow which soars to an altitude of some twenty-three thousand feet. We will call this peak Shā-ping, because it is the name of one of the many shepherd huts which nestle among its folds, and it would be a pity to give away its real name.

. . . . . .

The morning sunlight crept steadily down the eastern flanks of the mountain, turning the broad grass slopes to gold and making the

dark rocks glisten as the frost melted and ran down their steep sides.

A little party of ibex came into view close beside a waterfall which splashed into a deep pool, churning its waters milky white as the bubbles whirled among its depths. The animals were slowly making their way across the hill-side for their morning drink and kept looking suspiciously about them as they approached the pool, always on the watch for any prowling foe.

There were four does and three little fawns, which capered and frisked beside their mothers. The former were well built and sturdy, with curving horns sweeping in graceful semicircles over their backs. The short hair which clothed their muscular frames was reddish-brown in colour, but grew long and of a darker hue from about their necks. A contrast were the little yellow fawns, slender and lively as crickets. They seemed to have no cares, and were enjoying to the full the warm sunbeams and crisp mountain air, and, running across the steep rocks, were challenging their playmates to come and turn them off their precarious perches.

The pool was reached in safety, and, while one stood guard, the ibex drank deep of the icy water and nibbled the sweet grass which grew about its edge.

When all had drunk their fill, they made their way slowly across the mountain-side to a grassy terrace where they intended to pass the heat of the day.

The appetite of the little fawns was soon appeased, and they began their game of who could be " king of the castle " once again. A pointed rock stood conveniently for this exciting pastime on the very edge of the terrace, overhanging a sheer drop of about five hundred feet. And while their mothers stood grazing, the three fawns, as if by common consent, made a dash at it to see which could get there first.

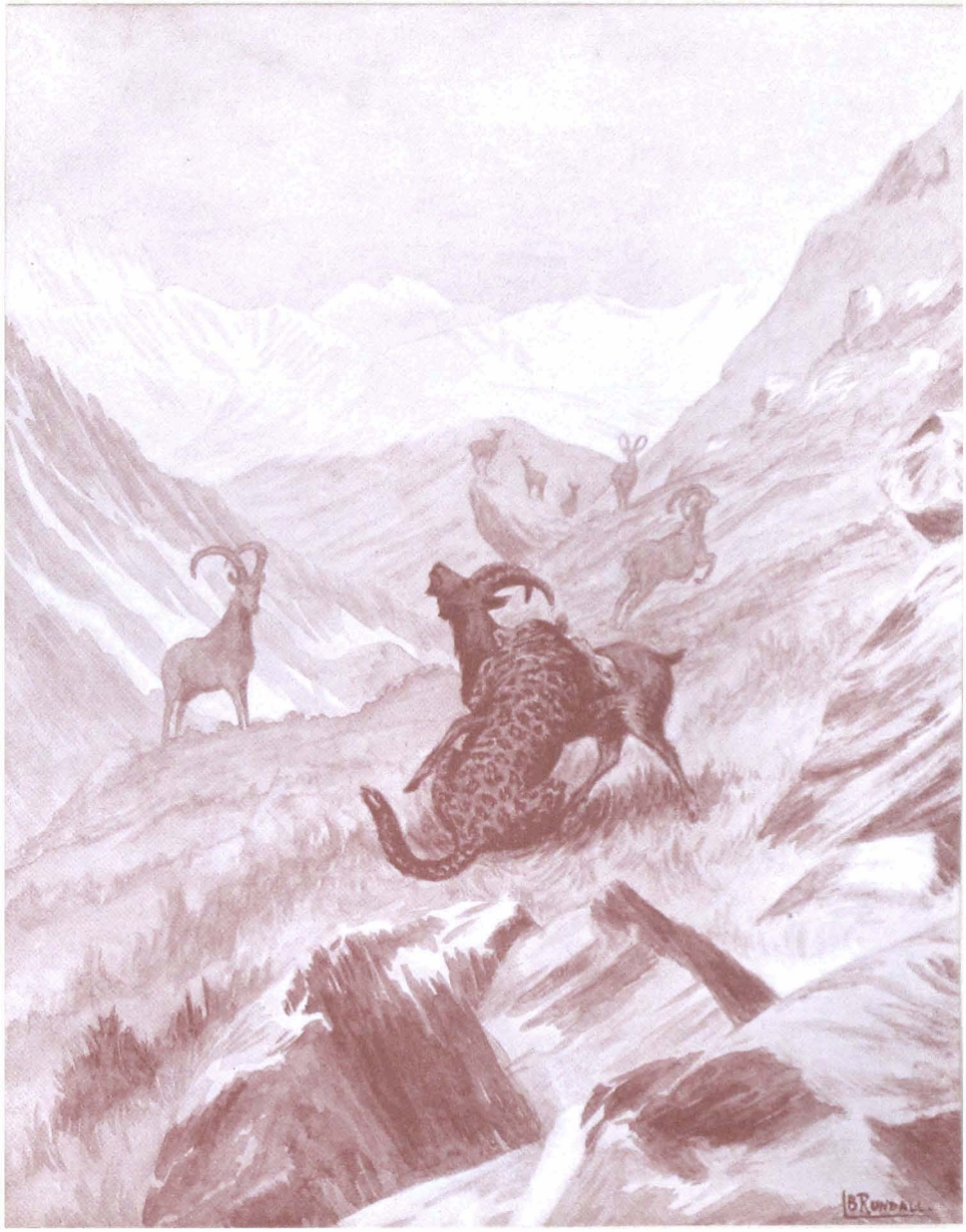
One of them, more fleet than the others, managed to win the point of vantage, and with lowered head prepared to receive the onslaught. The second attacked him a moment later, and a butting match ensued. But the first comer succeeded eventually in pushing him down to the grass, and went springing back to the top of the rock in great delight.

It was now the turn of the third fawn, a sturdy little beast with a defiant look in his big green eyes. He advanced cautiously up the rock, but was met by a resolute charge from the " king of the castle," and was forced to his knees as their heads met. However, not to be outdone, he scrambled to his feet and pushed with all his might.

Neither gave way an inch for some time, till finally the power of the attacker began to win the day, and the " king " was gradually forced back to the crest of the rock. It seemed as if nothing would now save him from being driven over the edge into the depths below, but at the critical moment his mother looked up from her grazing and gave a low bleating call. Both fawns stopped their game and looked round, and the erstwhile king of the castle gave a bound into the air, and, touching the slippery side of the rock with the tips of his feet, sprang back to the grass, and ran to his mother.

The usurper seized the castle in triumph, and held it gallantly against every attack. But it was not long ere the game was cut short by a dire tragedy.

SNOW LEOPARD EFFECTING A KILL


J.B. RUNDALL.

A sinister form had come slinking among the rocks above the little herd—a hungry snow-leopard creeping stealthily up-wind, with the intention of stalking one of the sleek ibex which stood cropping the grass on the terrace. His beautiful skin was a clouded whity-grey in colour, mottled with big black spots. The powerful muscles rippled as he stole nearer to his quarry, and a fire smouldered deep in his smoke-blue eyes.

Nearer and nearer he came until he was crouching within a few paces of the fattest doe, which was preparing to lie down unsuspiciously under the shadow of the very rock upon which her enemy lay. She was the mother of the fawn which had won the castle with such prowess, and who was now standing, his four little feet together, challenging his playmates to another attempt.

Gathering himself together, the big cat suddenly shot down upon her like a stone from a sling, and bearing her struggling to the ground, bit savagely through her neck.

The remainder of the herd rushed away in wild confusion, leaping and bounding across a stupendous precipice upon which it seemed

hardly possible that they could find foothold. Away in mad terror, across grassy slopes and boulder-strewn watercourses they fled, scarcely pausing to see whether they were being followed or not, till they halted, with heaving sides, a mile from the dread spot where the leopard lay gorging himself.

The poor little motherless fawn went up enquiringly to each of the does, but suddenly realising that his mother was not there, ran bleating piteously in search of her.

However, the fourth doe, which had lately lost her own offspring, took the little fellow under her care, and in a few days he had soon attached himself to her heart and soul.

The herd moved away many miles to another branch of the valley and were no more molested by the leopard. The fawns soon grew big and strong, but the motherless fawn was the sturdiest of the trio. After a while two little spikes put in an appearance on the top of his head, the rudiments of what would one day develop into two great curving horns, the envy of the one white man who hunted in the valley.

At last the time came when the little fawn

had grown into a fine, well-built animal, standing a hand taller than either of his former playmates. And one day he went forth alone to fight his own battles and taste the bitter and sweet of the world.

. . . . . .

Several years had elapsed, and the young ibex had come to the flower of his age.

He was standing motionless upon a jagged point of rock, gazing into the deep ravine below, preparatory to lying down after his morning feed.

A veritable ocean of tumbled mountain peaks and ridges stretched as far as the eye could reach, gleaming white against the violet-blue sky. Even down to the level where the ibex stood little patches of snow were lying, crisp with the night's frost, and sparkling in the sun's rays with the flash and gleam of brilliants.

The opposite ridges and the bottom of the valley three thousand feet below lay cold and still in the shadow, and it would be long ere the sun veered round sufficiently to warm them.

To the left, five minor glaciers met and

formed into one great mass of ice, crawling slowly downwards to the point where it broke up into crevasses and bridges of ice, under whose green arches the torrent rushed in many a waterfall and cascade, winding down to where the land of forests began, a dark mass far below, to the right.

Two magnificent horns swept backwards in a wide curve from the broad forehead of the ibex, and his well-knit frame showed exceptional strength. The red-grey hair of his summer coat was still short, but the mane grew long on his massive neck and his beard stirred in the light breeze.

The years he had spent on Shā-ping had flown by rapidly as all good times fly. In the winter-time he descended into the valley, as the snow-level forced him to seek lower pastures. The summer found him among the desolate peaks, high above the moorlands where the shepherds tended their flocks, and it was not until the cold had driven them down to the forests that he again approached the better grazing-grounds.

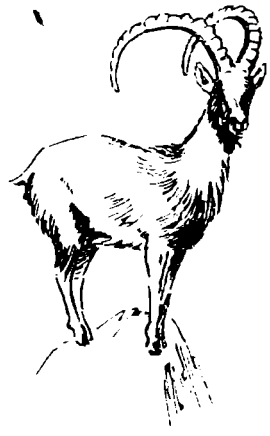
His great strength had yearly secured him easy victories over those ibex who were daring

IBEX

enough to challenge him for the possession of his harem. Hitherto nothing had come to molest him with the exception of an occasional snow-leopard, whom he had each time outwitted.

Once he had witnessed the stalk of some of his kindred on the farther side of the valley, and had taken in every detail with those piercing green eyes. He had watched the two strange figures creep nearer and nearer to the unsuspecting animals, and lie crouching for a few moments among the rocks close by. Suddenly the herd scattered broadcast, leaving one of their number kicking on the ground. Then came a dull roar, like the far-away sound of an avalanche—the report of the deadly weapon which the men carried.

Upon only one other occasion had he seen these marauders. He had been watching a brown bear picking its way slowly across the hill-side below, intent on reaching a certain grassy slope where it had been digging for roots the evening before. As it neared the slope, there appeared two men lying right in its path. The ibex had not noticed them before, and felt a wild terror grip his heart;



yet curiosity proved too strong, and he stood watching to see what would happen. The bear lumbered onwards straight towards the two men, not suspecting any danger. He reached a little spur close to them and began to cross a watercourse which separated him from his feeding-ground. As he turned broadside there came a loud report, and the bear lurched forward and fell rolling and crashing down to a glacier some eight hundred feet below.

The ibex gave a snort of terror and dashed wildly up the mountain-side. He had learnt the great lesson, that men folk are not to be trusted.

He was now wondering when that last flock of sheep would make its departure and enable him to descend to the better grass-lands.

Close behind him, lying in the long yellow grass, were two more ibex, who seemed to follow him wherever he went like two esquires with their knight. They were fine, strong beasts, but smaller in frame than the big ibex on the rock, and their horns were several inches shorter. They had eaten their fill and were now basking, half asleep, in the warm sunlight.

THE IBEX OF SHĀ-PING

Down by the edge of the great glacier, in the depth of the shadow cast by the opposite ridge, three men huddled, shivering. They were all gazing intently at the broad, sunny slopes across the ravine, spying out the land. One of them held a pair of prism binoculars which showed him every rock and stone as if they had been only a few yards away. But they had not yet detected the motionless ibex.

The big animal stood gazing into space for a few more minutes and then turned his head to search the hill-side above, before he himself lay down to rest.

The sun flashed from his horns as he turned, and in a moment his whereabouts had been revealed to the watchers by the glacier. He who held the glasses looked long and intently at the big head, and made up his mind that the horns must measure at least forty-five inches, worthy of a careful stalk indeed. He watched the big animal step leisurely down the rock and then settle himself comfortably on a grassy ledge. Then he saw one of the companion ibex lying close beside the big beast, but the third animal,

which was lying end on, entirely escaped his notice.

He laid down his glasses, and taking a note-book from his pocket made a rough sketch of the hill-side, marking in all the prominent features, and finally a dotted line, showing his proposed line of stalk. He was taking no chances.

An hour afterwards the three men had crossed the glacier at a point high above where they had been lying. At the end of a second hour they were climbing a steep snow-slide, within a few hundred yards of their quarry. They intended to cross the intervening ground at a level slightly above the animals and come down close to them, behind the cover of some rocks.

All three men were excited at the prospect of securing so fine a prize, and it may have been this excitement which acted telepathically upon the mind of the big ibex, for he distinctly felt that some danger lurked near by, and more than once rose to his feet and gazed round uneasily.

At last he could stand it no longer and made up his mind to go a short way down the

hill to a better point of vantage, whence he could search the whole length and breadth of the valley. So he climbed down out of sight of his two esquires and mounted a rock which jutted out over the edge of a huge precipice. Here he stood gazing round and listening intently. Meanwhile, the men were climbing ever nearer. They had reached a sharp wall where there was scarcely any foothold and sat down to take off their boots. These they hung over their shoulders and went forward barefooted. As they reached the middle of the rock wall, one of them slipped, but saved himself from falling by clinging on with both hands. However, the lace of his boots snapped with the jerk, and they went spinning through the air, bounding from ledge to ledge, and finally vanished from sight over the edge of a snow-slide below.

The noise they made in falling echoed like so many pistol-shots through the deep silence of the mountain. The big ibex heard it, and put it down to one of the many falling stones broken off their parent rock by the action of frost, yet it seemed suspicious, and he stood still watching the place below where

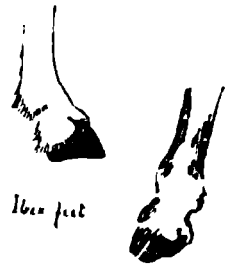
he had heard the sound ; he was out of sight of the ground above, but he knew that his two esquires would act as sentries in that direction, and felt it his duty to keep guard below.

Meanwhile, his two companions had also heard the sound, and one had risen and was making his way slowly to join his knight, while the other lay watching the hill above.

A full minute passed and then a man's head appeared slowly between two rocks a hundred yards above the ibex.

There were the two ibex, sure enough ; both animals had good heads, but as the one which was lying down was looking up at him, it was impossible to judge the length of the horns in perspective, and he mistook it for the big beast, which stood out of sight on the rock below.

Cautiously he worked his rifle into position, and pressed the trigger. The first ibex rolled over stone dead and the second ran forward in perplexity. A moment later a bullet from the left barrel crashed into its side, and it stood coughing a few seconds and then collapsed.



The men ran forward and examined the trophies. Fine heads indeed, but certainly not the big beast which had been the object of their stalk.

A hurried examination of the tracks on the ground soon made all clear to them. They saw how he had recently made his way down to the rock ; they saw the deep indentation of his sharp feet as he sprang back to the grass at the sound of the shot, and the fresh tracks as he had bounded away far out of range of their weapons.

Then they spied him half a mile away, springing across a sheer precipice until he vanished from sight round a sharp bend. And, like all men, they were ungrateful for what they had secured.

. . . . . .

The years had once more rolled by and the old ibex lay alone, high above the pleasant valley, amid the gaunt crags and piles of loose rock and slate below the giant peak of Shā-ping. He felt death close upon him and had stolen away to die in peace.

For he preferred to face his end far away from his kindred and from the sights and

sounds of the pastures which he loved so well. He would rest his bones in the silence of the great mountain upon which he had spent his life, and upon which his descendants would continue to live far into the unknown future.

Not a sound disturbed the solitude of that wild land of precipice and snow ; and in the cloudless sky, deep indigo at that great height, the sun seemed to have no power to warm his chill limbs.

All at once there appeared a shadow, moving swiftly across a dazzling snow-field below ; and a big vulture, coming out of nowhere in response to the mysterious call of death, settled on a pinnacle of rock close above the old ibex.

Then came another and another of these loathsome scavengers, till some twenty or thirty sat watching the dying animal with a cold stare, until the time came when they should pounce upon him, fighting and hustling each other in their ghouls' feast.

The old ibex struggled to his feet and stumbled slowly forward, determined to escape the foul creatures who would soon be tearing

out his eyes ere he could close them in death. But they followed him doggedly, hopping and fluttering from rock to rock.

His strength was well-nigh spent, and he twice fell to his knees, but still tottered forward he knew not whither. Finally he came to a great snow-slide, and slowly made his way across, while the vultures circled above him. Half-way his strength failed and he fell on his side. The nearest vulture made a swoop at him, but with one final effort he again stumbled to his feet, head lowered as if at bay, and the bird swerved and rose into the air again, flapping its wings.

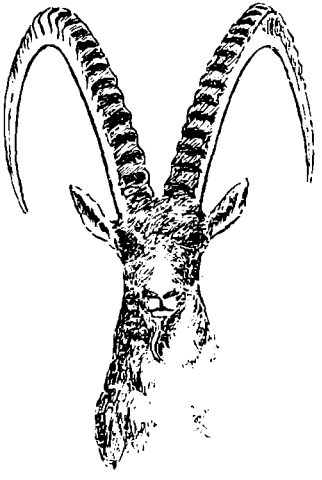
Thus he stood for a minute, swaying slightly and trembling in all his limbs, when there came a thunderous roar above, and a huge avalanche came tearing down the mountain-side.

The old ibex lurched forward dead, and next instant the irresistible torrent of snow and rock had swept him far out of sight, down towards the five glaciers below. And all that remained of the Ibex of Shā-ping was buried deep under a huge white mound, on

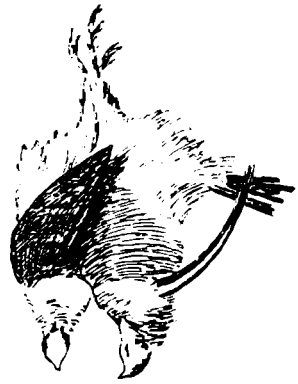
to which the last streams of the avalanche poured in ever decreasing rivulets.

. . . . . .

In one of the wild little huts of the village at the mouth of Shā-ping valley there is a single large horn, measuring over fifty inches on the outside curve. It was found at the foot of the mountain by an old shepherd, who could tell you many a story of the great ibex to whom it once belonged, and how often it had outwitted the one white man who came to hunt in the valley.



MOUNTAIN SPRITES



MOUNTAIN SPRITES

SOLITARY and intensely desolate lay the mountain lake in the midst of a huge amphitheatre of sharp peaks. Its waters, a cold grey-green, seemed to conceal some terrible secret in their icy depths, and not a ripple disturbed their glassy surface.

Few men had ever seen it; but those hardy shepherds who had climbed the mountains in search of some lost sheep held that it was so deep that it had no bottom, and shunned it with superstitious dread.

Round about the lake lay great moraines of grey rock, and huge boulders strewed the ground, some perched and tilted at extraordinary angles, like the ruins of a primeval city hurled down by some earthquake. Scarcely a blade of grass was hardy enough to grow at that great height, but the stones

were dappled with green lichen, which seemed to have spread over them like a blight.

The jagged peaks and ridges were incrusted with a *chevaux de frise* of sharp rocks, as if in defence of this banned spot, and there was but one narrow entrance between them, which wound among steep cliffs worn smooth as slate by the action of snow and rain.

In no place was this " Devil's Caldron " broader than a mile, and the view was limited to the circle of mountain-tops forming its rampart, which looked like a ring of huge witches brooding over their evil craft.

Grey, everywhere cold grey, from the leaden sky to the tumbled rocks upon the peaks, which stood only a few hundred feet above the lake.

A silence that could be felt reigned supreme over the scene. Not even the hum of an insect or the chirp of a bird came to break the spell. No one who has not experienced the Great Silences can fully appreciate the wonderful charm which they cast over a man's heart. Out of it all seems to come the great voice of Nature more distinct and more real than when it is heard in the song of the wind

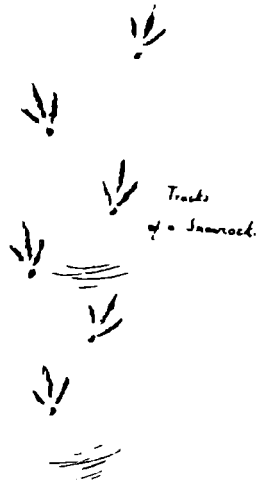
SNOW COCK AND MOUNTAIN LAKE

in the trees, the roar of the torrent, or the blend of the thousand voices of the forest folk.

Great composers have endeavoured to capture all these more varied modulations of the voice of Nature, and to express them in mighty chords and subtle melodies. Yet how far short fall their best efforts. No music could be written which would adequately express the feeling of the great silences of the mountains. They strike such a deep and melancholy chord that it is only the heart of man which can in any way grasp the majesty of its height and depth; "there is neither speech nor language, but their voices are heard among them."

It is the inexpressible charm of this which acts upon mountaineer and sportsman alike, continually calling him back from the cares and tumults of the world below.

But despite the silence and utter loneliness of the place it was not entirely deserted. Creeping among the great boulders high above the lake were eight big grey birds, not unlike large partridge. These were snow-cock, aptly dubbed the Sprites of the Mountain. For



their general appearance, their curious actions, and their eerie call are so exactly in tune with the tone of those great solitudes that they might well be mountain elves or goblins. One of their number preceded the covey, acting as sentinel, whilst the remainder scratched up the hard ground in search of food. Each bird was a dappled grey in colour, with a white neck and black V-shaped mark spreading from a point on the throat to behind the eyes.

The covey was very high up for the time of year, for winter was already drawing on apace, and in all probability the first snow-storm would drive them down to better feeding-ground.

As the morning passed, the sky grew darker and little flakes of snow began floating through the air. Then a faint ripple stirred the glassy surface of the lake as the first chill breeze, herald of the coming blizzard, fanned the water with its light wings.

Suddenly the storm broke with a blast of icy wind which shrieked wildly among the sharp points of rock. It brought with it a blinding scurry of snow, and driving it in

spectral wraiths across the lake, began piling it on the farther slopes. The ground soon grew white under the mantle which the hand of winter cast upon it, and the snow lay deeper as the wild wind flung it across the ramparts of the amphitheatre.

The snow-cock collected under the lee of a large rock, where they were somewhat sheltered from the pitiless blizzard, and as the snow deepened they one and all began to long for their winter quarters on the southern slopes of the big mountain range.

After an hour or so the wind died down to stormy gusts and the snow fell more steadily. Emerging from their shelter, the eight birds ran across the deep carpet of white to the edge of the steep wall which guarded the south side of the basin. A thousand feet below stretched a broad snow-field, and beyond it the rugged shapes of mountain peaks could be seen dimly through the curtain of driving snow, but the vast plains were completely hidden from view.

After hesitating a short while to collect his covey, the leader flew swiftly downwards and across the snow-field, followed by his

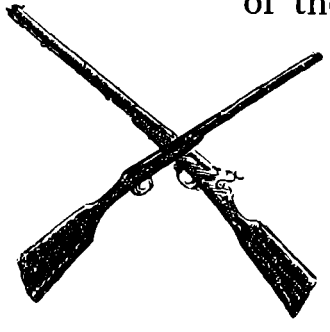
mates, and alighted upon a narrow ledge on the farther side. They ran along this for some distance, and then once more launching themselves into the abyss, they sailed across the precipitous face of that gigantic rock wall, which in places fell almost sheer for thousands of feet.

Swinging onwards and ever dropping lower and lower, they eventually came in sight of their destination, some grassy slopes just above the tree limit, then with a wide sweep they rounded a spur and settled in a steep watercourse.

Very little snow had fallen down at this level; and they were free to make a hearty meal after their long flight.

However, they did not forget to elect a sentry, for they all knew well that dangers lurked around them now that they had approached so close to the forests and the dwellings of mankind.

Thus with one bird continually on the watch for any of their many foes, they wandered slowly across the mountain-side, occasionally catching a glimpse of other coveys of their kindred. And as the evening closed



in, they made for a tall cliff and flew up on to some ledges of rock to roost for the night.

Below stretched the wooded spurs of the range, cold and drear in the twilight, sinking into the depths of a broad valley which swept outwards towards the great flat plains.

As the night crept over the sky, dark and cheerless, more storms drove across the mountains and the weather grew even worse than on the preceding day. Whenever the wind died down among the precipices above, it could be heard roaring and moaning among the forests below, bending the gaunt trees in vain endeavours to snap their giant stems.

Yet the covey of snow-cock slept soundly enough and their thick feathers seemed impervious to the icy wind.

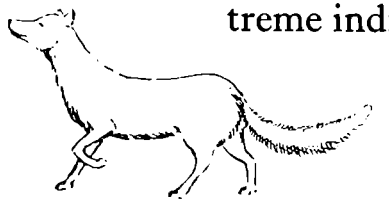
At dawn of day they awoke to find the ground under several inches of snow; the wind had dropped and the snow had ceased falling, but dark clouds still hung threatening above. Nothing daunted, the covey flew down and began scraping under the sheltered side of the rocks where the snow lay less deeply, occasionally stopping to call to other birds. The plaintive whistling cries which they

uttered rang with a bubbling liquid sound across the mountain-side. Their notes were seldom the same and at times might have been mistaken for some weird goblin voice, half-human in its expression.

The sharp peaks stood out gauntly against the grey sky ; and far below, the forests lay silent under the white cloak of winter. Occasionally a light breath of wind would scurry across the broad slopes, sweeping the powdery snow from the rocks in whirling clouds like puffs of smoke.

All at once the sentry gave vent to a shrill cry of alarm, and the remaining birds, filled with curiosity, ran up on to some big rocks to see what danger threatened.

A little grey fox came stepping daintily across the snow, scarcely deigning to look out of the corner of his eye at the eight birds which sat mocking him, secure in the knowledge of their superior cunning. Yet a moment before he had been slinking along with body close to the ground hoping to stalk those same birds. Now, however, seeing himself outwitted, he assumed an air of extreme indifference, and forgetful of the tell-tale



tracks which lay written in the snow behind him, he pretended to ignore the chorus of gibes which those eight "devil birds" were flinging at him, and slowly made his way down towards the forests below in search of other game.

The covey, still enjoying their joke and desirous of seeing the last of their enemy, stood watching him as he grew smaller in the distance, a tiny moving speck of grey over that vast still expanse of white. Suddenly he checked his pace; and next instant swung to the right in a wild gallop and seemed to fly over the snow in his eagerness to escape some unseen danger; then cutting down a watercourse he vanished among the pine trees.

He had seen something which had made him forget both his undaunted bearing and his failure above: he had almost run into two men labouring upwards through the slippery snow with guns in their hands; and without waiting to find out whether it might be a question of his own life or that of the snow-cock, he had fled to cover.

The birds, noticing his rapid retreat, under-

stood that there must be some mutual enemy approaching, and their leader, giving a cry of warning, flew to a position whence he could better command a view of this new menace.

It was now a match between the cunning of man and the cunning of the mountain sprite. Five of the great parallel spurs had been attacked simultaneously, each by two men; and they were going to attempt to keep the birds moving between them, driving them from one spur to another. The two men from whom the fox had fled could see that the snow-cock above had taken the alarm, and understood that their only chance lay in driving them across to their friends on either side; so they still climbed laboriously on their way but no longer troubled to take cover.

Not understanding this strange method of attack across the open, the covey sat and watched.

Suddenly a gun spoke loudly from the spur on the right, and a moment after five little snow-partridge came into view and swung over the men below. One of these men fired and the foremost partridge crumpled up and

fell, rolling down the steep slope, leaving a cloud of feathers floating in the air.

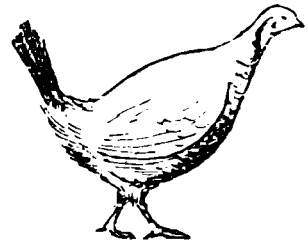
So this was the plan of these men folk. It all became evident to the snow-cock in the twinkling of an eye.

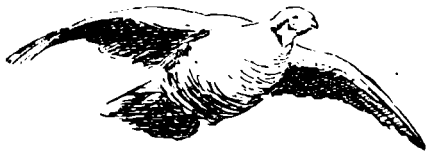
With their leader in front they shot out across the corry on the right and swept round the spur, keeping well clear of the men on it who had first fired at the partridges, and flying across the corry beyond, alighted on a broad snow-slope, talking loudly of these fools who hunted with so little skill.

Sending forward their sentry, they began running up the mountain-side, their tails raised fanways.

Soon afterwards three birds belonging to another covey swept into view and lit among some rocks above. But scarcely had they settled when they were once more forced to take flight. For a man appeared from behind a boulder close beside them, and just as they launched themselves into mid-air he fired. One of their number dropped like a stone, and his body, whirling through space, fell with a thud amongst the big covey below.

They did not stop to look at him but again





flew off, this time back to the left, conversing loudly as they sailed through the air of the foolishness of their unlucky kindred.

Keeping well out of gunshot, they sailed past the first two spurs, and decided to miss the third also for safety's sake.

However, their flight led them a trifle low, and a shot rang out from among the rocks. The second bird felt a sharp twinge in his left side and dropped a few feathers, but the distance was over great for the charge to do any damage, and the covey sailed on elated by their successful tactics. They were about to alight on the spur beyond again when their leader noticed the zigzag tracks of men upon it. Swooping low in his flight, he led his covey straight on and across a broad snow-field to some steep cliffs on the farther side.

As the morning passed, the sound of shots occasionally came echoing to their place of refuge, now loudly from the nearer spur, now muffled from the spurs beyond. A few other snow-cock, not so fortunate, went to their death, while a few fled to the same stronghold as the big covey.

The clouds began to form once more, and

trailing long streamers of falling snow in their wake, swept across the mountains; and the wind renewed its mournful chant among the rocks above and the trees far below.

Two of the men had noticed how a number of birds had taken refuge on the farther side of the snow-field, and they decided to cross and attempt to drive them back again. Making a long detour, they advanced under cover of the veil of falling snow, and climbed across the dangerous precipice towards the spot where they had seen the birds pitch. Climbing grew more and more difficult, and what little foothold there was had become the more precarious by reason of the slippery snow. But they could hear the birds close at hand, and now crawling across some narrow ledge which overhung the giddy depths below, now clambering down some crack in the face of the rock, they finally reached a parapet of stone when they could see the big covey sitting, unsuspecting their approach.

One of the men rested his long-barrelled gun on a rock, and taking a steady aim, fired. The charge struck two of the snow-cock full and killed one on the spot; the other, with

both wings broken, stole away to die. The remainder flew screaming from the great cliff, but the second man, who had a modern gun, dropped two more of their number with well-timed shots, and they fell through the swirling snow-flakes far out of sight.

Both men now ran forward as fast as they could, along the steep rock face, to follow and capture the wounded bird. An exciting chase ensued ; until finally the cock fell half-dazed into a little snow-drift.

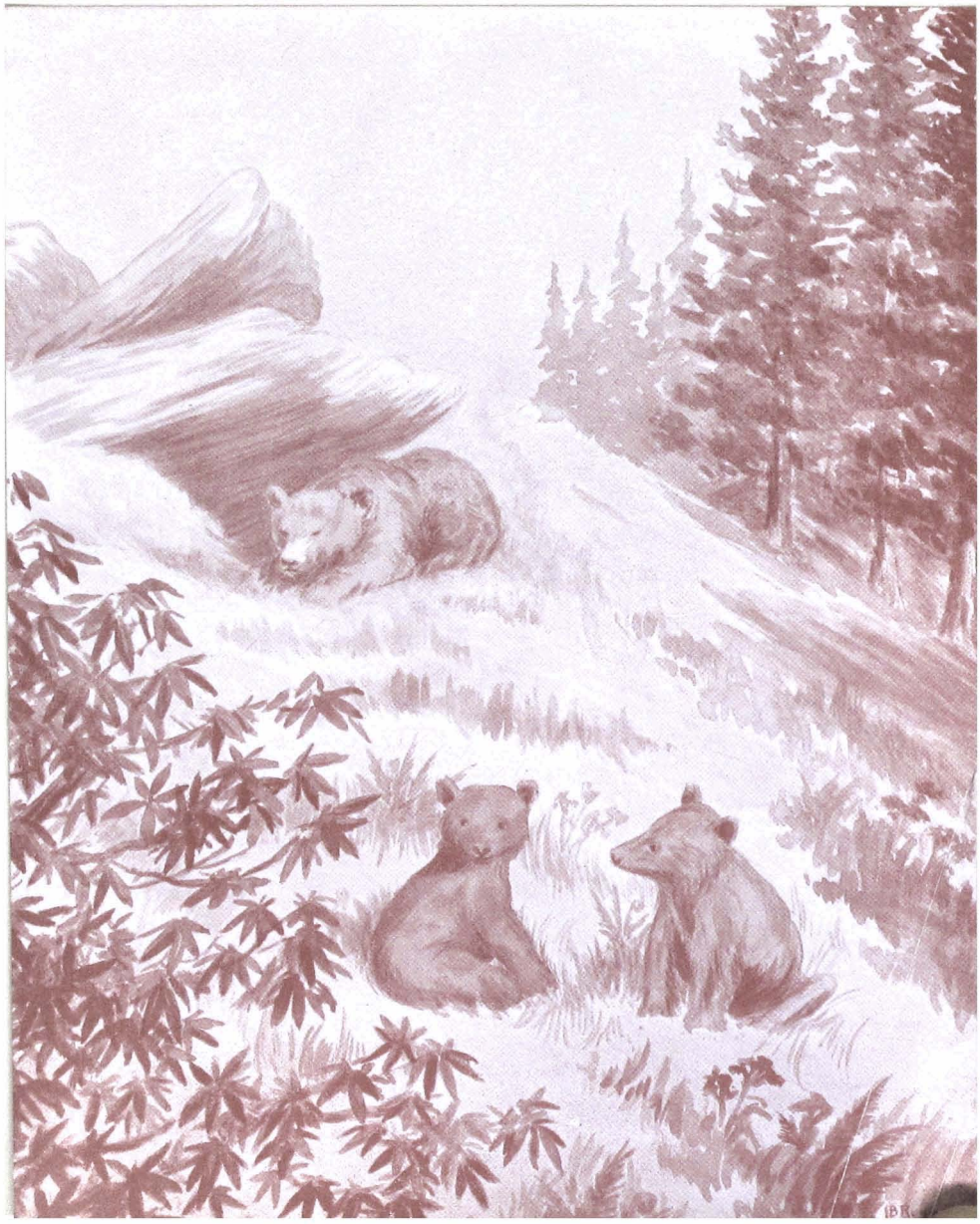
One of the men made his way cautiously towards it. There was scarcely any foothold on the slippery rock, and he kicked away the snow as he climbed, to make certain of where he was putting his feet.

He reached a ledge above the little snow-drift where the bird lay and stretched out one arm to seize it. As his fingers closed upon it, it gave one final struggle and vanished over the edge of the precipice. Grasping at it the man lost his balance, and clutching wildly at the air as he fell, he hung for a moment by one hand from an angle of rock. But with a loud crack it suddenly gave under his weight and he went spinning into the abyss.

His friend turned sick and shut his eyes to avoid the horrible sight.

The mountain sprites had had their revenge. From somewhere far away came their mocking cry, ringing like fiendish laughter across the snow.

THE RAIDERS



BLACK BEAR AND CUBS

THE RAIDERS

MID flowers and ferns on the crest of a long wooded ridge, the two little black cubs were having no end of a time, playing a game of hide-and-seek between the thick tufts of grass and tumbling over and over with shrill squeals of delight. Now and then they would stop their game to chase some elusive butterfly, which flitted hither and thither, but always just out of reach of the tiny claws. Or a gaudy beetle clambering laboriously over a weed would attract their attention. In fact there seemed to be an endless stock of amusements prepared for their especial benefit.

At last, tired by their exertions, they ran back to the old mother bear, who lay dozing in the sun, and rested their weary little bodies beside her.

But after a short time they dashed off once

more and tumbled after each other in a friendly sparring match. Perhaps to-day they had been too energetic, for finally one of them lost his temper and nipped savagely at his little brother, who snapped and squealed in return. The mother bear raised herself and, coming slowly towards them, pushed the first angry cub gently over, so that he went rolling down the hill-side spluttering with rage. He picked himself up and came back showing his sharp little teeth, only to be sent rolling down again. This was too much, and he fairly howled with impotent wrath. Picking himself up once more he climbed slowly back, determined to wreak a terrible revenge, but down he went again as the old bear struck him a trifle harder, knocking all the breath out of his little body. This lesson in patience went on until he had completely recovered his temper, and was wise enough to return humbly. Then the other little cub which had been looking on in great amusement was treated to a similar lesson.

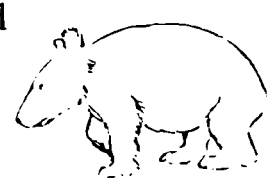
The man who waited and watched behind the rocks had not the heart to shoot, and felt glad when the mother bear finally shuffled off, closely followed by her two children.

The day was growing warm, and she made her way down the hill-side towards the torrent below, whither the sun had not yet penetrated. Through the big pines and deodars the trio trotted till they finally emerged into a clearing littered with fallen logs, thence across steep cliffs to a grassy terrace where a dark hole dropped into the ground, between grey boulders and long green ferns.

A narrow winding passage led into a large cave, where the air was cool and water dripped from a thousand points of rock in the arching roof. The remains of a goat, filched from some flock, littered the floor, and each of the hungry cubs seized a bone and lay down to feast.

Life was good to live in those wooded hills, which seemed to surge like a huge green sea against the flanks of the snow-clad mountains. In the early morning and late evening they would go forth to dig for roots among the forest glens or pluck the ripe berries from the bushes on the banks of the foaming torrent.

Occasionally the mother bear would pounce upon some goat or sheep which had lagged



behind its flock, and drag it back to the inner recesses of the cave in the cliffs.

As the summer drew to a close, the leaves began to change from green to fine gold, and the long creepers which clung about the tall oaks flamed scarlet. Every wind that blew plucked the russet pine needles from the deodars and spread them below the trees in a thick carpet of red gold.

Far below, where the villages of the hill-men clustered, the harvest of maize was ripening, and the villagers sat in their thatched bamboo watch-towers shouting and beating drums to drive away marauding pigeons and crows by day, and to fend off the bears which trampled down the crops and pillaged wherever they could by night.

The cubs were now growing big and strong. Alike as two peas, they were about the size of a collie dog, and with a V-shaped white mark starting from the neck and coming to a point on their chests. The time was fast drawing on when they should leave their mother and make tracks into the world to fend for themselves.

One night the mother bear led them down

past the usual feeding-grounds, through thick bushes, over the boulder-strewn bed of the torrent, through feathery bamboo covers, towards the corn-fields where the village men were making those fiendish noises.

There was no moon and the night was pitch black except where the fires of the watchmen in the towers flickered like dying stars. But the darkest night was like day to the bears, and, picking their way gingerly, they approached the nearest field. All the fields were built in terraces, narrow where the hill was steep, and gradually broadening out towards the bottom of the valley. The breeze wafted up the delicious scent of the maize, and the mouths of the cubs watered and their little black eyes rolled with pleasure. Yet all the time they were very much afraid with the fear of pleasurable excitement, such as a man feels before he starts for a race.

Silently the three black shadows crept out on to the open grass slopes above the fields, and now dropping into a small watercourse, they flitted noiselessly over the tumbled rocks and were soon among the maize, right under one of the watch-towers, within which a man

from time to time gave vent to piercing whistles.

The mother bear stopped to sniff at the flavour of the crop, but, not liking it, set off at right angles, and had soon reached another field where the tall stalks could hardly bear the weight of the yellow grain. None of the fools who shouted and whistled above them had dared to molest them so far, and the cubs soon forgot their fears. They set to work breaking down the stalks and biting off the juicy heads, spreading destruction far and wide.

It was not long before the owner of the field discovered the raiders, and with a yell he sent warning to all his fellow-villagers. A fiendish tumult was raised from every watch-tower around, the shouts and yells mingling with a chorus of drums and rattling tins. Finally one man set off a native firework which exploded loudly like a bomb ; its echo boomed solemnly from cliff to cliff, and melted in a dull roar as it struck the far snow mountains beyond. The cubs ran in terror to their mother, but she scarcely looked up from her meal. She had long since ceased to fear the ruses of these simple folk.

Ignoring the confused hubbub, the bears moved from field to field the whole night long, till they could eat no more, when an hour before the first shaft of dawn pierced the cold stars they turned homewards to their cave in the cliffs.

For the next few days they continued their raids now upon one village, now another, and grew sleek and fat on the plunder. Meanwhile the villagers, roused to action, succeeded in tracking the marauders to their lair and marking the hours of their going and coming. This done, a young man was sent forth to pray one of the white officers who lived not far over the valley to come forth and wipe out these pests for evermore.

Eventually two subalterns were persuaded to come; and these appeared one evening opposite the cave of the bears, escorted by their soldier orderlies and three of the more intelligent villagers. Stalwart, handsome men these latter were, wearing grey homespun coats, girt at the waist by long crimson ropes into which were thrust knives and little beaten silver instruments, used in preparing their coarse tobacco. The upper part of the coat

hung loosely open like a blouse, and the lower part drooped in many folds to the knees like a kilt, leaving the legs bare.

A contrast were the little orderlies, smart and straight in appearance, and each carrying his broad-bladed Gurkha knife, the " kukri," which he uses equally well in battle as in splitting firewood, in beheading a bullock as in skinning an animal.

The party halted on a narrow ledge of rock, and after a short consultation it was decided that both white men should take up their stands upon the opposite side of the narrow ravine to the cave. And waiting until the bear chose to appear, whoever saw her first should fire.

A weary wait ensued, and it was not till darkness had begun to creep over the rolling hills below that the mother bear came forth to drink in the cool, fresh air. She strolled a short way from the cave's mouth and sat up on her hind-quarters like a great black dog. Next instant a bullet crashed into her ribs below the heart, and she rolled over between two rocks, biting the tall grass in agony and tearing at the earth. A second bullet cut a

flower an inch above her head and splashed lead over a rock beyond.

The white men, certain that all was over, came across the ravine and climbed cautiously towards the spot where they had seen the bear fall. But, approaching carefully, they found only a pool of blood and a fresh trail leading straight back to the cave, whither the old bear had painfully dragged herself. From within came occasionally a low growling sob and sounds of laboured breathing.

They stood awhile in silence, rifles ready in case she should charge out.

"This won't do," said Willoughby, one of the white men; "we must finish her somehow."

"We can't go in as we are, without lights," said Stuart, the other; "besides there may be more than one bear in that cave; we had better come to-morrow."

"Very well, then, we'll come to-morrow early and bring rope and lanterns and more men. I hate the idea of leaving her all night like this; still it can't be helped."

Their plans were explained to the orderlies, who seemed pleased at the prospect of a little

excitement. Not so the villagers, who regaled them whilst they descended the hill with blood-curdling stories of men who had ventured near the caves of bears, and with gruesome descriptions of all that remained of these intrepid hunters.

. . . . . .

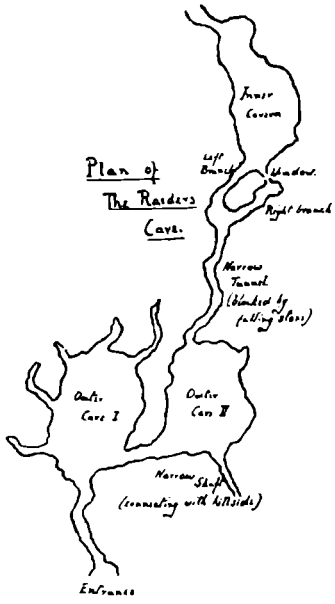
Next morning the descent into the cave was made. Willoughby, carrying a Mauser pistol in one hand and a hurricane lamp in the other, led the search party. All was still as the grave within, and a musty smell permeated the air; after the drop down into the first chamber, a narrow passage wound seemingly into the bowels of the earth. Willoughby, on hands and knees, followed closely by Stuart and three orderlies, crept cautiously forward. The dim light of the lantern revealed nothing but the dripping walls of rock on either side.

Suddenly a huge black shape rushed from the darkness with incredible speed, and neither Willoughby nor his companions had any time to defend themselves before it was upon them, and had swept over them. Only a big bat; but still it set their hearts thumping and made them go forward even more cautiously.

After a short distance the tunnel opened into a large room, with a tiny stream trickling through it, and on every side narrow branching passages leading from it to unknown depths below. The shadows cast by the lantern seemed like weird spectral shapes dancing in and out of these passages and mocking the strangers who dared penetrate into this abode of mountain gnomes.

Willoughby stood guard over the largest of these passages, while Stuart explored the remainder with two of the orderlies, the third having gone back to bring in more men. Most of the openings were not more than a few feet deep, but two or three led in some way, and it was decided to station sentries over these to guard against surprise.

The necessary men having arrived, the search party explored Willoughby's passage, and found blood-tracks leading into a second chamber more lofty than the first, and connected with the outer air by a narrow shaft which ran slanting upwards from the floor. At the farther end of the chamber, concealed by a jagged rock, a tunnel wound downwards, just wide enough to admit the man who would



be rash enough to climb in, feet first. A splash of dark blood at its entrance showed that the bear had taken refuge within.

After listening carefully for some time, Stuart wriggled his way down this tunnel, and was followed closely by the others. Still no sound was audible ; it was even more trying to the nerves than if the bear had stood growling at bay in the darkness beyond.

The air began to grow more close as the tunnel sank lower and lower into the black depths, until finally it widened out and split into two branches. Two orderlies ascended that on the left, which swung round and rose through a narrow slit into a high cavern. Colossal slabs of rocks formed its walls, glistening in the light of the resin torch which one of the men carried. But no signs of the wounded bear were revealed, except those same splashes of blood which they had followed from the outer caves.

Both white men and one orderly ascended the branch on the right, which proved to be connected by a narrow window with the same cavern into which the others had climbed.

This window was too small for them to

pass, but Willoughby standing by it held himself in readiness to cover the men's retreat with his Mauser pistol should they be compelled to fall back. Thus protected, the two orderlies disappeared over the crest of some boulders which strewed the farther end of the cavern.

For some time nothing could be seen but the dancing light of their torch ; and the sound of their hushed voices came echoing weirdly through the dark vault. It might well have been the abode of mountain elves and the red glare of their furnace, as they forged their hunting spears.

All at once came a startled cry, and both orderlies hastened back. The wounded bear had met them in the mouth of an opening beyond the boulders, they said ; they had thrust the torch into its face and had driven it back. Would the sahib come with his pistol quickly.

Stuart scrambled down with his lantern to the junction of the passages in order to enter the cavern, and Willoughby was about to follow, when he saw one of the large bear cubs rush out from among the boulders and

charge straight upon the orderlies before he had time to shout a warning. It upset the torch-bearer, and there was a cry of pain as he fell to the ground. The torch fell from his hand, and describing a semicircle in the air immediately went out, glowing red among the stones and pouring out volumes of choking smoke.

Almost directly afterwards a shot rang out from below, and as Willoughby arrived at the bottom of the narrow shaft he saw Stuart raise his revolver a second time to give the *coup de grâce* to the big cub which lay kicking at his feet. It had attempted to break out past the men, but Stuart had bowled it over as it appeared in the opening above.

At the report of the second shot, there came a roar of falling stone from the narrow tunnel down which they had first climbed from the outer caves, and a piece of rock rebounding from the floor, struck the lantern from Stuart's hand and sent it rolling into the darkness.

Now, both lantern and torch extinguished, the search party was in the pleasant predicament of being walled up in the mountain

with a full-sized black bear, mad with the pain of its wound.

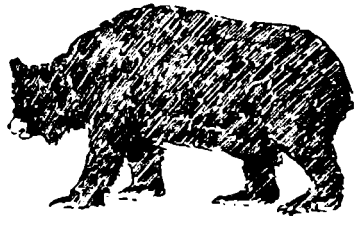
Willoughby felt about for his matches, and shouting to the orderlies that all was well, he first groped his way to where the roof of the passage had fallen in, and struck a light.

A heap of loose slate and mud lay totally blocking the tunnel and cutting off all exit.

He returned to where Stuart knelt groping for the lantern, and lighting several more matches, they found it lying shattered under a rock. Nearly all the oil had been upset, but the remaining orderly tore a piece off his shirt, and soaking it in the kerosene, made a little torch, with the aid of the rib of a goat which he found on the floor.

Then all three advanced to the help of the two men in the inner cavern. Just as they arrived at the narrow entrance, they heard a low growling whine from the wounded bear, which appeared to be advancing to the attack once more.

Crawling rapidly through the opening, Willoughby had just time to see the two men, one lying groaning on the floor, and the other standing guard over him, kukri-knife in hand,



facing the approaching bear. He sprang past them, holding the torch above his head, as the old bear came lumbering up. She raised herself painfully on her hind-legs, and with a savage growl, baring her long teeth, she hurled herself at her arch enemy. Willoughby fired into the white V on her chest, but in falling she bore him down, biting fiercely at his arm. The torch fell flickering to the ground, but by its dying light the Gurkha shore down at the bear's neck with a sweeping stroke, almost carving it through.

Stuart tearing his coat in his endeavours to scramble through the narrow doorway, arrived just as the remains of the torch gave one final flicker and went out.

He shouted to his friend, but received answer only from the orderly beside him, who remarked quietly, " The bear is dead, but I think the sahib is grievously hurt. Also, Karaksing, here, has broken his ankle falling between two rocks."

Stuart, rapidly explaining how that their exit was barred by fallen stone, felt for his matches and lit one. A strange scene met his gaze. Lying unconscious and deathly pale

FIGHT WITH BLACK BEAR IN A CAVE


J.B. Rundall

was Willoughby, with the great tousled mass of the black bear stretched across him, its head half hewn from its body, but its teeth still fastened in Willoughby's right arm, and the blood trickling in an ever-increasing pool from its neck.

Beside Willoughby lay Karaksing, the wounded orderly, groaning under his breath with the pain of his broken ankle.

The remaining orderly climbed into the cavern, and lighting match after match, they discovered the two torches and eventually succeeded in extricating Willoughby's arm from the grip of the dead bear's teeth, and dragged away its heavy body.

Next came the task of removing the two wounded men to the passage without, by no means an easy matter when they had to negotiate the narrow entrance. By the time they had finished, both torches had gone out and nearly all their matches had been expended.

They went back to the heap of rubble which barred their exit and listened intently for sounds of rescue, but could hear none, and were just about to attempt to dig their own

way out, when a noise from the cavern attracted their attention. It sounded as if something was moving and breathing back there in the darkness, and with their nerves now highly strung by the succession of stirring events, they imagined all kinds of weird beings which might be prowling in the cavern beyond, and a cold shiver passed down Stuart's spine.

The sound ceased as rapidly as it had begun, but was shortly afterwards followed by a low growl, exaggerated in the silence and darkness so that it seemed to be at least another full-grown bear.

As a matter of fact it was the remaining cub. He had charged close behind his mother just as she received her death wound, and at the sound of the shot and the shouts of the men had halted, and backing behind the boulders waited until the invaders had retired. He had now come forth to see what had happened. He found his mother lying dead, and a great fear seized him and a longing for the sweet open air, and he yearned to fly the cave and take refuge among the clean pine woods.

Stuart, anxious for the safety of the

wounded men, felt his way back to them, his long hunting-knife drawn, just as the cub came scrambling out. Seeing perfectly in the dark, it fled past him, and Stuart hearing, but not seeing, made a savage lunge at the sound, his blade coming in contact with the rock wall above the cub's head. Dashing past the orderlies it found its way barred by the fallen roof and fled back up the passage on the right, where it crouched staring in wild despair at the closed line of escape.

Stuart and the men held a whispered consultation, and decided that their best plan of action was to sit silent and not irritate the bear, which they still thought was a full-sized animal.

A long, weary wait ensued, until finally they could hear first faintly and then distinctly the sound of men working in the outer caves at removing the fallen rocks. The rescuers occasionally shouted to the imprisoned men, but the latter dared not answer for fear of drawing the attack of the remaining bear upon them.

After what seemed an eternity, enough rock had been removed to allow a man to

look through into the tunnel. It was impossible to describe the relief of the little party within ; however, as they were still in a state of uncertainty as to the size of the living bear and his whereabouts, they enjoined silence upon the rescuers, and whispered to them first to enlarge the opening sufficiently for them to send in help should they be again attacked.

The cub meanwhile sat watching his only way of escape growing larger, and just as the first rescuer had climbed through the opening, he dashed wildly past him, narrowly missing the thrust of a knife. Out and past a crowd of astonished men, working at moving away the piles of broken rock, he sped ; across the chamber and up the narrow shaft leading to daylight. Breaking through a mass of tangled thorn bushes at the entrance, he ran panting across the hill-side and into the friendly shelter of the pine forests ; away, whither he knew not, except that the cave with its terrors lay far behind, and he was free, free as the days when he roamed the mountain by his mother's side.

At last, almost dropping with fatigue, he

lay down by a stream, and a great loneliness seized upon his heart so that he howled dismally.

But Nature finally came to his aid and folded him in sleep. He forgot the mad fear in the cave and the savage men folk who had slain all that he ever cared for, and dreamed that he played once more with his little brother among the flowers on the sunny ridge.

THE DESTROYERS

THE DESTROYERS

HIGH in the midst of a stupendous precipice, on a narrow shelf of rock, overhanging the blue depths of the ravine, was perched a large nest of sticks. It was roughly pieced together, yet strong enough to withstand the assaults of the wildest gale which endeavoured to hurl it from its precarious foothold.

The ugly little heads of two lammergeier eaglets protruded over the tangled wall of twigs, anxiously watching for their parents' return. Their small insides were always ravenous for a new meal, and as fast as the food was brought in, it was devoured. Hideous little beasts they were, all beak and head, like miniature vultures.

Indeed, at one time, the lammergeier was classed among the vulture tribe, though in many of the hills of India he is dignified by the title of " golden eagle."

This was the first year that the mother eagle had laid two eggs, and she was very proud of the fact, and worked doubly hard to keep her young supplied with meat.

Their nursery was well guarded from every foe which prowled in the forests. Not even a wild cat could find sufficient foothold to cross the sheer wall of black rock upon which it was fixed; and woe betide any marauder who would venture forth across it while the parent lammergeiers were within sight.

Not far to one side, a waterfall leapt from high above, and scarcely touching the side of the cliff in its entire descent of a thousand feet, melted into a cloud of spray which was blown hither and thither by the wind ere it reached the rocks below. Hunting had been poor that day, and the mother eagle still hovered, wheeling in huge circles, gazing downwards with eyes which penetrated into the darkest nooks and crannies of the forest, and noted the slightest movements among the depths of foliage. She had seen one or two likely pheasants, but they had also seen her, and were careful to keep well under

THE REALM OF THE LAMMERGEIER

cover where they knew she dared not fall upon them.

So she was forced to try the higher grounds. Gliding round in great spirals, she rose gradually without a movement of her huge wings, which measured fully twelve feet from tip to tip.

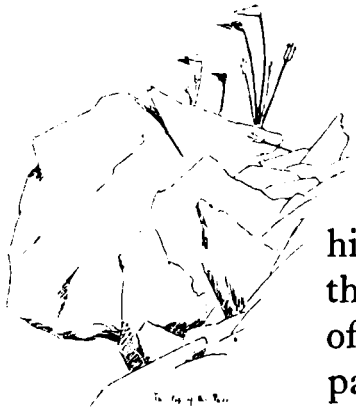
Only the pennons seemed to stiffen to suit the air current, and the broad tail was tilted slightly as she wheeled.

Ever higher and higher she swung; and the only sound which accompanied her silent flight was the plaintive little tune of the wind, which hummed through the rigid feathers, whenever she turned full against it.

Watched from the bottom of the ravine by a timid little wood-partridge, she seemed to grow smaller and smaller until she disappeared in the vastness of the heavens. Yet she could mark every movement of the wood-partridge with those stern, piercing eyes.

Having gained an altitude of some twelve thousand feet, she sped, swift as an arrow, straight towards the bare mountain.

Wending their way downwards to some camping-ground, appeared a little string of

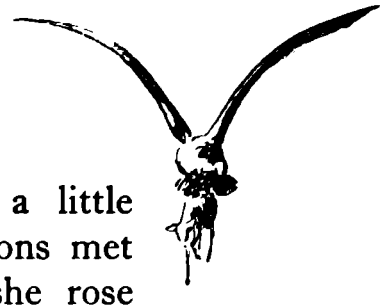


hill-men, carrying their loads of blankets and the wares which they had brought from far-off civilisation. They had crossed the bleak pass in the mountains (where the little coloured flags, offerings to the storm fiend, fluttered in the icy wind), and were now marching homewards by easy stages.

The great eagle flashed over them and coasted along the rugged wall of mountains, past sheer precipices, across tumbled moraines, over stupendous ravines, past deep green glaciers, which were for ever shedding the sharp blocks of ice which fell crashing from their snouts ; ever onwards she sailed searching every square foot of ground.

At last, deep below, she beheld a large flock of goats feeding slowly across a steep upland. There were a number of small kids amongst them, and some of these were gambolling on the outskirts of the flock.

The lammergeier wheeled and hung for a second, picking out her quarry ; then, with a whistle of air through her hard feathers, she swooped downwards, with ever-increasing velocity. When within a few feet of the ground she checked the terrific speed of her



attack, and pounced silently upon a little black-and-white kid. Her sharp talons met in its back, and flapping heavily, she rose from the ground. The kid gave one despairing bleat of terror, but next instant its troubles were ended by a sledge-hammer blow from the powerful beak.

The shepherd shouted in fury, and hurled a stone, which fell harmlessly many feet below the raider. Still beating her wings she soared high into the air, and then glided swiftly down towards the nest on the cliff.

The mother goat ran bleating piteously in every direction searching for her baby, and the shepherd stormed and raged in vain anger, and shook his staff at the retreating speck.

The eagle was an old enemy, and many scores stood unpaid. What was worse, the shepherd knew that it would be highly improbable that they ever would be paid, for the Queen of the Air is no mean foe.

. . . . . .

The days passed and the eaglets in the nest grew rapidly, until there hardly seemed room enough for both on the same ledge. The brethren thought so too, and one day there

occurred a little family difference. The long and the short of it was that the weaker went to the wall, or rather, went over the edge; and what remained of his ugly little body was cleaned up by a stray jackal. His little brother throve on double rations, and at last a day came when he was taught to fly. It was some time ere he would make the attempt while his parents were not at hand. But finally, one morning he determined to venture forth by himself.

His flight was still very unsteady, and he soon decided to take a rest on a point of rock opposite. He was elated by his successful effort, and swelled with pride as he noticed several of the smaller birds scatter in terror among the bushes as he pitched on the rock.

He sat there gazing at his far-off nursery, wondering at his own prowess. He had flown all that distance across the giddy depth where his brother had vanished. He must indeed be a very wonderful bird, he thought to himself.

One or two more short flights he made, and then, feeling a twinge of hunger, suddenly dropped upon one of the little brown birds

which were flitting among the birch trees. His first kill, the proudest moment of his life. He would now return to his rock and finish his repast in the warmth of the sun.

But danger lurked not far from his perch. The shepherd, whose flock had been so often raided, had watched the young eagle cross the ravine, and had marked its resting-place and how it invariably returned thither after its short flights; and he had straightway determined to take his revenge.

He had no gun; only a little bow-shaped catapult, in which he had placed a sharp stone; and he waited patiently concealed in the bushes till the son of his enemy chose to come back.

The young lammergeier soon swung into view again, and descended upon the rock, flapping his wings. He then proceeded to enjoy his kill with evident relish, not troubling to look round for danger. The shepherd raised his catapult and took aim. He was a good shot, and as he drew the bow taut, he remembered a long list of little goats and lambs which he had lost year by year. A fierce anger seized his heart, and his hand

shook ever so little—ever so little, yet enough to make the stone fly a trifle low. It shore away five long feathers from the eagle's tail, and the bird rose into the air with a hoarse croak, and sailed out over the ravine. From that day onwards it was careful to look well for its one enemy, man, ere it settled anywhere.

. . . . . .

As time passed the young lammergeier grew apace, and his shikar became more skilful and daring. He found himself another eyrie on the same rock face as his nursery, for his parents would have none of him after he had learned to fend for himself.

His hunting was confined entirely to small birds, and an occasional pigeon or pheasant. He would not be large enough for some time to prey upon animals, and the altitude of the stream was so great that no fish could live in its icy waters. The rainy season was fast drawing to a close, and the hill-side was deep in a mass of tangled undergrowth, so that the eagle depended upon the bare ground above the tree limit for his hunting.

The day was dark and cloudy, and the mountains were in a solemn mood, towering

SNOWY PEAK IN CLOUD

like a row of colossal sculptures, cloaked and hooded by the first thin snow of autumn.

At a level of some twelve thousand feet a huge sea of clouds stretched as far as the eye could reach, surging against the rugged coast of bare hills and rushing up the steep gullies in steamy jets, like the waves of an ocean breaking on some barren shore. Everywhere hundreds of square miles of grey billows forever hastening towards the great barrier over which they could not rise. Below these strata, there would doubtless be other clouds, condensing into heavy drops, and pouring themselves in a deluge upon the forests and villages. This downpour would swell the tiny streams into rushing torrents, which would speed roaring down towards the great rivers, sweeping away rocks and trees in their mad career.

High above the seething mass of clouds the young eagle soared, his keen eyes searching the mountain-side for any sign of food.

A covey of snow-partridge came into view, feeding on a broad grassy platform, where the ground was scarred by the fresh diggings of a brown bear, giving it the appearance of a rabbit-warren in the distance.

The Prince of the Air floated towards them and swooped headlong. But he was just a fraction of a second too late. The partridges happened to look up in time, and rising with a whirr, they darted down the hill and away.

The eagle rose into the air again, disgusted at his failure, and held steadily on his course, keeping close along the rugged wall of the mountain-side, high above where the billows of cloud were breaking.

Every now and then he passed one of the little tailless hill rats, which disappeared down some hole upon his approach. Then he came up with the brown bear which had been digging where he had missed the partridges. But still there was no sign of food.

Past and over six Thar he skimmed ; large mountain goats with long coarse hair and short thick-set horns curving backwards from their foreheads. There were two grey-black males and four brown females, awkward in appearance, yet climbing unconcernedly across a sheer precipice, where there did not seem to be sufficient foothold for a fly.

At last, rounding a bend, the eagle drifted in sight of a large flock of snow-pigeons feeding

at the base of an old patch of snow. But luck had turned against him, and before he could swoop, the pigeons had seen the danger and made all haste to be away.

Straight down the mountain they flew, the eagle hard after them; the distance was rapidly narrowing, and in another instant he would be upon them. When suddenly, pursued and pursuer plunged into the depths of the swirling clouds, and the flock scattered in a hundred directions in the thick fog, leaving their enemy baffled.

But the Prince of the Air rushed straight on his way; it was too humiliating to be twice outwitted. He would leave the upper air and try for chikore, the red-legged partridge, which lived on a bare hill beyond the forests.

Down and down through the seething mist he sped, till finally he dropped into clear air once more and came in sight of his beloved ravine.

The rain had ceased, but the clouds looked threatening, as it was dark after the brightness of the upper air.

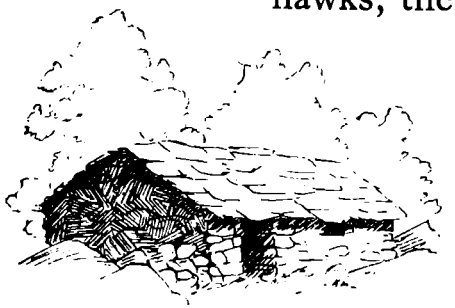
To reach the chikore hill he must pass over a wooded ridge opposite his eyrie, and in this

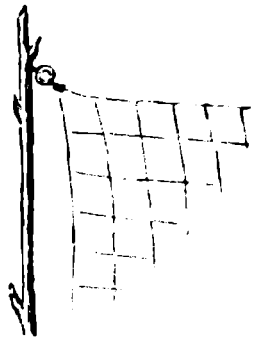
direction he now sailed, keeping a few hundred feet below the clouds.

The jungle grew thick on the ridge which he must cross, but near its knife-edged crest the trees stood more sparsely and there was very little undergrowth. In several places were broad grassy clearings, and upon one of these a stone hut had been constructed — a picturesque little building, overgrown with moss, and with a thick carpet of wild flowers growing up to its very door.

Within the hut a man wrapped in a grey blanket squatted by a wood fire ; an evil-looking specimen of humanity, with sharp features and a beak-like nose, which lent a cruel expression to his dark face. He was inhaling deep breaths from his earthenware pipe, and coughing up the pungent fumes.

He wore a greasy turban wound in many untidy folds about his head, and a thread-bare shirt and long pair of native trousers completed his dress. The air of the hut was thick with the blue smoke of his fire, and upon the mud floor lay several heaps of nets and a pile of dry wood. Upon the latter sat two hawks, the fruit of his trapping on the ridge.





He had put out their eyes, and intended to sell them when he returned to the plains, for he could get as much as thirty rupees for each bird.

For a distance of about a mile along the ridge he had arranged his nets. The top corners of each net were slung to wooden rings, which were in turn bound by a couple of horsehairs to the tips of long poles. The bottom corners were attached to the base of the poles, and thus each net stood about eight feet in height.

Whenever a hawk skimming over the ridge swooped low enough in its flight, it dashed straight into one of these snares. The horsehair snapped, and the unlucky bird lay helplessly entangled till the trapper arrived upon the scene and removed it to the hut, where a red-hot needle deprived it of its sight.

The trapper visited his nets twice a day, rain or fine. It was seldom that he found a hawk, and the nets were continually torn down by the wind or by passing animals, but the great price which he received for each hawk made it worth his while to continue his snaring.

Sometimes this human spider would find a hill dove enmeshed, and this he would take back to his larder, a welcome addition to his meals of coarse flour and rice.

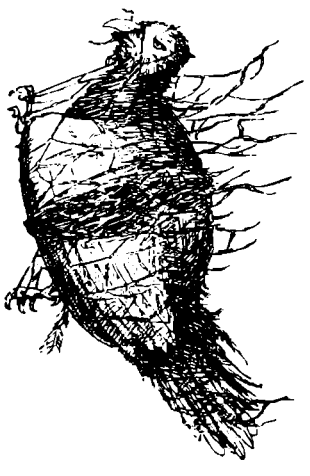
It was time for him to make a visit to his nets, and rising with a grunt, he seized a stout staff, threw a blanket over his shoulder, and made his way out of the smoky hut into the sweet mountain air.

The young eagle sailed straight on his way, making for a gap between two twisted oaks which stood not far above the hut.

He could just see the chikore hill standing gaunt and desolate in the distance, and drifting low, skimmed over the crest of the ridge.

Next instant he was brought heavily to earth, fighting madly with something which seemed to cramp his every movement and bind him helpless in its clutches.

What was this new insult offered to the Prince of the Air ?



He wrenched his head free and struck at the powerful meshes, shearing through one strand, but in so doing lost his balance and rolled helpless into a thorn bush. Here he

became more hopelessly entangled, and fight as he would, he could not break loose.

However, when his first fury had somewhat abated, he went to work more coolly, and succeeded in freeing one leg. With his talons and sharp beak he tore away a portion of the trap and would soon disentangle himself.

Along the ridge came the trapper singing a wild chant in a high falsetto. The nets were all empty so far. The eagle heard the approaching sound and a panic of fear seized him. He struck and tore at the net in his anxiety to escape before this new danger should pounce upon him. A few well-directed strokes might have set him free, but in his agitation he became the more embarrassed by the stout meshes.

Ar bhi Ganga, war bhi Ganga,
Bich men tambu thanna,

sang the trapper, quaveringly in three different keys,

Meri khasi topi wallah.[1]

[1] This is a verse from a native song which begins—

Mathura ki ban men
Meri khasi topi wallah,

"Ah! tera bhala hua! Good luck to thee!" he exclaimed as he spied the entangled bird. The eagle made one mighty effort and, struggling with all its remaining strength, freed a wing. Next moment it might have broken loose, but the man darted down the hill-side and threw his blanket over it, and the bird lay imprisoned in the stifling folds.

So! he had caught a young lammergeier. What should he do with it? Well, it might come in useful. But it was a savage brute, and he would tame it in the usual way.

He collected a pile of loose sticks, and with great difficulty, for they were saturated with

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and, like many native songs, consists of more jingle than connected sense between verse and verse.

The verse quoted in the text may be translated thus :—

On this side also the Ganges, and on that side too the Ganges ;
In the midst to pitch one's tent.
Oh my man with the fine hat ! (an epithet for a European).

The allusion is only obvious to those who have travelled far into the Himalayas, near the sources of the Ganges. In this region, below the snow-clad slopes of those mighty masses known as Kedarnath and Badrinath mountains, innumerable streams flow from under the glaciers, and unite and eventually fall into the Ganges. Such streams are all generically termed "Ganga," *i.e.* Ganges, and are deemed holy, though they also have their own particular names such as Alaknanda, Pindar, etc. On the little peninsula formed by the junction of two streams, one often sees the hut of a Yogi or devotee. He chooses such a spot because he there has "on this side (of him) the Ganges, and on that side also the Ganges," and "in the midst he has pitched his tent," or rather, built his shanty.

rain, he kindled a flame. Then, fumbling in his shirt, he found a rusty needle, and squatted down by the fire to heat it red hot.

After a while, his preparations complete, he went back to where his blanket lay, and carried eagle and all over to his fire. Very deliberately he freed the bird's head and gripped its throat with one hand, so that it soon ceased its struggles and choked for breath. The amber eyes began to dim over and start from its head, and the big horny beak opened and shut convulsively.

The trapper picked up his red-hot needle with the edge of his blanket, and prepared to complete his cruel work. Next instant he received a blow on the side of the head which sent him sprawling in the long grass, and a tall Englishman stood over him blazing with wrath.

What he said is too lurid for publication, but it was to the point. It may have been none of his business, as he was afterwards told in Court, still it did not worry him very much whether it was his business or no ; he could not stand by and see deliberate torture.

A few strokes of a sharp knife and the Prince

of the Air had been liberated, but he was too exhausted to do anything but strike feebly at his deliverer.

After sitting a while in a dazed manner, power began to return to the cramped muscles, and the lammergeier rose heavily into the air. Then drawing in great breaths of the cool breeze, he soared high and disappeared amongst the clouds.

MOUNTAIN LIFE AT CLOSE QUARTERS

III

MOUNTAIN LIFE AT CLOSE QUARTERS

IN the light of the blazing pine logs Alan was moving busily about, preparing for his day's hunting. His camp wore a different aspect from that usually presented by the camps of other sportsmen in the Himalayas. In the place of skins stretched to dry on the grass, negatives and basins of prints littered his tent. And instead of a rifle, a large camera and stand were placed ready by the door.

His method of hunting was bloodless, and he valued a photograph of a rare animal more than the trophy of that same animal's head or skin. For it requires more skill to approach close enough to a wild animal to make a good picture than to make a good shot.

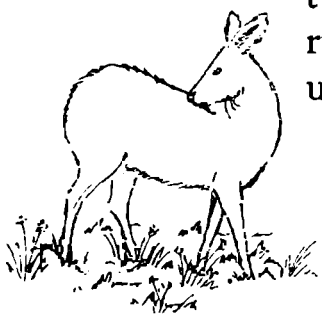
Alan was a crack shot, but he never used his rifle or gun unless it was a case of self-

defence, or of replenishing the larder. He had made the discovery that it is a higher form of sport to secure a photograph of a living animal than to mete out death to it.

His preparations complete he set out, followed by Bharla, a sturdy hill-man, just as the first pearly glow of dawn began to steal across the eastern sky, and made tracks for a broad wooded spur which jutted steeply towards the camp from the opposite ridge.

The air was crisp and frosty and reminded Alan of the freshness of morning in the Highlands of far-away Scotland. It made the blood sing through his veins, and he felt it would be easy to climb to the crest of any of the huge jagged peaks which towered above, on such a day as this.

He was very anxious to secure a photograph of a musk-deer, one of the little animals which haunt the higher forests and the lower slopes of the big, bare hills above the tree limit. Shy little beasts, with great wistful eyes and large bat ears; standing only about twenty inches at the withers and higher at the rump. They are so universally hunted by unscrupulous native shikaris for the precious



musk "food,"[1] that despite stringent laws, which are circumvented by bribery, they are fast dying out in many localities.

Bharla knew the haunt of one of these little deer, and had accordingly built a shelter of leaves and boughs close by, where he and Alan could lie in wait till the time was ripe for the sahib to work the magic box and make a picture. And if the picture was good, he, Bharla, would pouch another silver rupee.

The two advanced over the grassy slopes below the forest, and, crossing a little stream, where the water bubbled clear and crystal among the moss-grown rocks, they gained an offshoot of the spur.

Close by, there was a large flock of sheep just about to go forth for the day's grazing. The shepherds were finishing their frugal meal of chapattis, flat pancakes made of coarse flour, and the blue smoke of their fire filled the air with the pleasant odour of burning pine logs.

The kindred of the forest had begun to salute the advent of day, as the cold stars paled and melted in the rosy light of dawn,

[1] *Food* is a Hindustani word meaning the bag or pod in which the musk-deer secretes the substance known as musk.

and from all directions came the wild cries of pheasant.

Alan quickened his step, so that he should not be late upon the scene, and the two men climbed rapidly and silently upwards through the dark woods.

Just as the first golden shaft of sunlight struck the jagged summit of Tarnei Peak they reached the edge of a clearing among the trees, where the long grass sparkled with heavy dew, and the air was fragrant with thyme.

Bharla pointed a lean finger at some rhododendron bushes on the farther side of the little dell, and intimated that he had constructed their hiding-place amongst them. Alan looked round critically. It was undoubtedly a good place, on what would be the sunny side of the big spur and probably in the tracks of both pheasant and animals. Their shelter had been woven with such cunning that it was scarcely noticeable even from a few feet away.

Alan led the way back, and made a detour round the farther side of the clearing, so that their tracks might not disturb the grass, and entered the rhododendrons noiselessly from above.

After a few minutes everything had been arranged to his taste, and the two men crouched expectantly among the bushes. Tarnei Peak was now in the full blaze of daylight, and the warm sunbeams were steadily descending its dreary slopes towards the forests.

Suddenly, from just below the glen resounded the strident call of a tragopan pheasant, summoning his mate. The two men held their breath, for they knew that the birds would in all probability pass close by them, and a picture of these exceptionally shy pheasant was not to be scorned.

The minutes fled by, and every now and then the little clucking noise which the pheasants made, and the rustling of the dead leaves as they scratched among them, broke the deep silence of the forest.

Gradually the sunlight stole down among the trees and wove a net of gold and green on the soft carpet of moss and leaves, and flooded the little dell with its welcome beams, making the dewdrops sparkle and glitter as the grass gently stirred in the light breath of the morning breeze.

Suddenly the cock tragopan raised his head

over a rock, then remaining perfectly still looked cautiously round the glen. Seeing nothing suspicious he sprang on to the top of the rock, raised his long crest, and again uttered his strident call, a blend of the quack of a duck and the usual note of a pheasant.

He looked a magnificent bird as he sat there in the sunlight. His breast was a blaze of scarlet, and the remainder of his body and wings a rich chocolate brown, marked with black and dappled with snow-white spots. As he ceased his cry he lowered the black and scarlet crest once more and turned to look at his two hens, who appeared among the undergrowth on the farther edge of the clearing. Their plumage was beautifully marked, and mottled with various shades of brown, but devoid of the red feathers which characterised the cock bird.

Alan waited, his fingers ready to press the bulb, until they should be well within the field of his camera. The birds picked their way slowly across the glen and stopped to search for food among the rotten wood of a fallen tree trunk.

HEAD OF THE SCARLET TRAGOPAN PHEASANT

But fortune chose to favour Alan still more. Just as he was about to take his photograph Bharla nudged him, and looking up, he saw the lithe form of a pine-marten come crawling along the top of the dead tree. A pretty little beast with a black back and tail, and yellowish white belly, not unlike a large weasel.

Without a sound it stole to a point of vantage above the pheasant, and gathered itself for a spring. Just before it shot forward Alan secured his picture, and next instant the big scarlet bird was pinned struggling to the ground, while the fierce little marten bit savagely through the back of its head. Both hen birds flew screaming down the glen, and the marten proceeded to drag away its prey, still struggling in the death-agony.

Alan slipped in another plate and secured one more photo ere the poacher disappeared among the pines to enjoy his repast, and Bharla chuckled softly as he thought of the silver rupee which would shortly be his. " Have patience, sahib," he whispered, " may-hap the musk-deer will still come."

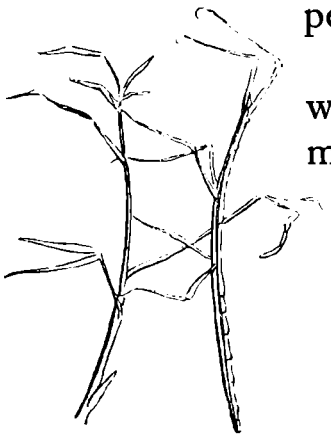
To wait and watch in the depths of the

jungle is a very different affair from killing time in the midst of civilisation. And to-day the mountains seemed to be in a joyous mood, and the forests thrilled with a thousand sounds which put Alan in mind of Grieg's expressive compositions.

The light breeze played soft music among the tree-tops and the subtle odour of pines was wafted across the glen. Not far off a brook tinkled with the sound of a thousand little silver bells, and from away across the blue mists of the ravine the wild strains of a shepherd's pipe came echoing.

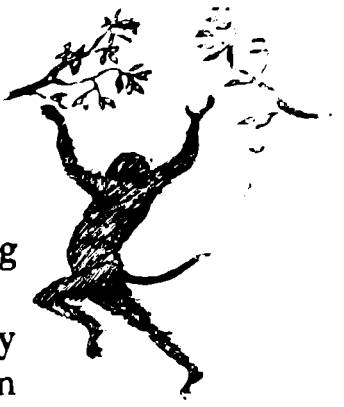
Alan began to wish that he was a primitive man, and that there was no such thing as a stuffy office in the fiery heart of the Punjab.

Climbing with infinite care across a tall stem of grass there appeared a long thin insect, which might have been a piece of the grass itself come to life. Next instant a green woodpecker flashed across the glen, and the stick-insect froze into obscurity, merging perfectly with its surroundings.



The praying mantis.

The woodpecker settled on a big oak, hung with festoons of grey moss, and began drumming on the trunk to drive forth the little



insects which bored with a lazy droning sound into the depths of the bark.

The sun soared higher into the dreamy bowl of heaven and the two watchers began to feel drowsy with the warmth and sweet scent of the woods and flowers. A flight of choughs came sailing over the trees and settled clamouring and cawing among the branches, thrashing out one of their never-ending stock of family disputes. Soon, however, they scattered with many noisy complaints, and a big herd of lungoor monkeys crashed into view, chattering and gibbering at each other.

Some of them were big beasts which must have weighed several stones, and the more slender branches snapped under their weight; but the monkeys only sprang into another tree with surprising agility, barking and cooing with pleasure.

They were big grey animals with black faces ringed round with white, and the fur on their bodies was soft and downy.

Among the herd were a few females clasping their babies to their breasts with one arm, and swinging themselves along with the other and the help of both legs.

They collected all round the two men and for a long time did not see them, till finally one old male leapt from a tree and landed full at their feet. Bharla had been watching some other monkeys, and at the sudden apparition at his side he jumped, and ejaculated, " Lo ! maroor khan,"[1] in his surprise.

The monkey wheeled round and stared. Then making an appalling face, it bounded away across the glen, and, screaming warnings of the hidden peril, it swung from tree to tree down the hill. The herd dispersed in all directions, and then followed the old monkey, till they considered that they were out of danger, when they turned to see who their enemy might be.

One little baby had been left behind in the tree above Alan, and it sat watching him with great interest, sucking its tiny black thumb the while.

The mother monkey soon discovered her loss, and summoning all her courage, she made a dash for the tree, and sprang past the men

[1] *Maroor khan* : in India the men who travel about with performing monkeys invariably call the male monkey they have with them *Maroor khan*, and the female monkey which poses as his wife in the performance *Jehuran*.

and up the tall trunk. Then snatching up her child she leapt down to earth in three great bounds, and fled back to the herd in triumph.

Alan watched her explaining to her baby at great length that men folk are not to be trusted, and feeling it all over to satisfy herself that they had done it no harm. He could not help laughing at the little incident, but admired the old lady's pluck.

Gradually the herd melted away, and the sound of their chattering died down in the distance.

The glen was an exact setting for the revels of fairies and elves, and it did not need a very lively imagination to picture them.

The gap came near to being filled up, when a flight of little cardinal birds came flitting through the trees and settled twittering among some holly bushes. Tiny little fellows with brilliant plumage, the cocks a bright scarlet, and the hens a vivid yellow. Two little grey tits climbed, chirping, up the side of a tall deodar and fluttered among its dark branches in search of food. A myriad insects hummed and darted midst the flowers, and gaudy butterflies flapped lazily across the glen.

Such minute atoms of life upon the face of the gigantic mass of the mountain, yet perfectly in keeping with the harmony of the scene.

No, to a lover of Nature, waiting hour after hour in the forest is not so dull as it might seem. There are always a thousand and one little events taking place which contribute to his entertainment.

Alan was beginning to give up hope of ever seeing the object of his expedition, when suddenly the little musk-deer appeared right before him in an opening in the trees. It gave several bounds forward, light as a leaf before the wind, and then ran behind the fallen tree trunk.

As it ran the little " false-hoofs " behind its feet clicked with the sound of miniature castanets, and it gazed back apprehensively over its shoulder. It was evidently rather uneasy in its mind about something back there in the forest.

Its two slender curved tusks proclaimed it to be a male deer, and the coarse, fibrous hair on its body was a dark brown dappled with a few small specks of chocolate. Un-

MUSK DEER


L B RUNDELL

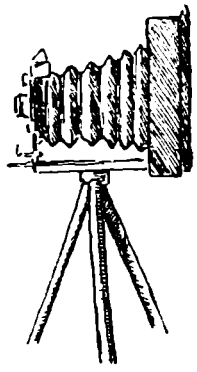
fortunately for Alan, it stood behind the tree trunk, which almost concealed it and made it useless for him to take a picture.

After standing for an infinity of time, it seemed to be reassured about the danger, and lay down to rest. The men could no longer see it, and they knew that it would be worse than useless to move out of their shelter, as the deer would be off and away at the slightest sound.

Bharla nodded off asleep, overcome by the drowsiness of the woods, but as he did not snore Alan forbore to wake him. He found it hard enough to keep his eyes open himself. But some strange presentiment of impending danger kept him on the alert.

After an age of waiting, the musk-deer suddenly sprang to its feet, and with a loud " hiss " of alarm, cleared the fallen log and stood quivering in every limb, its big bat ears raised. It was broadside on to Alan, and staring down the hill, so that he was not slow to secure the much-coveted picture.

But looking up he saw something which sent a cold shiver down his spine. Straight beyond the deer and not in the direction it



was gazing, appeared the head and shoulders of a man, who was just about to draw a careful bead on the little creature with a long muzzle-loading gun.

Alan knew the kind of weapon well, as it is used by almost all native shikaris, and he knew that it would probably be charged with buck-shot ; so that even though the man's aim might be true enough, some of the charge would reach him and his sleeping servant.

He suddenly realised to the full what it would be like to be one of the hunted, and to find oneself face to face with man, the destroyer.

So without hesitating he did the best thing which he could under the circumstances, which was to give a loud shout of warning. The musk-deer sprang forward into the air, and the gun went off with a loud explosion, sending its charge under the little animal and through the bushes within a foot of Bharla's head.

As Alan had hoped, the shikari had swung his gun to the right, as the deer leapt, and the charge had gone wide.

The hill-man woke with a start and hurled

all manner of abuse at the baffled shikari, who seemed even more terrified than the musk-deer, which had quickly vanished into the jungle.

But Alan laughed it off. A miss is as good as a mile. Besides, he had secured his pictures, and the little creature had escaped scot free.

It was of course no use waiting any longer, now that the report of the gun and the sound of human voices had rung the alarm far and wide round the glen.

So Alan collected his photographic belongings and turned his face homewards. Those three pictures meant much more to him than the mangled remains of a scarlet tragopan and a musk-deer.

THE SPELL OF LALUNI

THE SPELL OF LALUNI

" O protector of the poor, I fear that this seraow is guarded by the fairies. Have we not followed it in vain these two days ? And yet you have not even been able to fire at it."

The Englishman laughed and answered that the third time they tried they would be certain to have better luck. But Ardroon, the old hunter, shook his head sadly. His mind was quite made up on the point ; if it was not their fate that the seraow should fall to the sahib's rifle no stalking or careful tracking could possibly pierce the charm which the fairies had woven about the animal.

Two days they had followed it, and by pure ill-luck it had escaped them on every possible occasion.

On the first day, they had been stalking a ghoral, one of the active little wild goats which

inhabit the wooded slopes of the mountains. They had approached near enough for a shot, and the white man had fired both barrels of his rifle, only bringing down the little animal with his second bullet, when, with a loud crashing in the undergrowth, the big seraow fled from under their very noses and before the rifle could be loaded a second time disappeared in a brake of bamboo. He was an ungainly-looking beast, somewhat like a cross between a very large goat and a calf, with long black hair and a white chest. As he ran his two curved horns glinted in the sunlight, and he uttered a weird cry, half bark and half cough.

They had not seen him again that day, but next morning they heard him calling near the same spot in a clump of rhododendrons. Approaching carefully with bare feet, in order that they might make as little noise as possible, they stole among the pines to within a few yards of their invisible quarry. Another instant might have brought them in sight of him, but a monal pheasant, which had been sitting concealed in the undergrowth, suddenly rose with a whir of wings and flew screaming

through the trees, giving the alarm, and the seraow slipped away once more.

They followed the tracks of his heavy footprints across moss and patches of old snow until they again sighted him, making his way across an almost perpendicular cliff. In the distance his long black hair and white chest gave him the appearance of a bear, but the characteristic barking call betrayed him.

The men made a long stalk, and success seemed almost ensured when a rock gave under their weight and went crashing down the hill-side, waking the forest for miles, and their seraow vanished once more among the thick pines.

That evening they had again tracked him down, but for the second time a monal disclosed their presence. It seemed as if their luck had completely deserted them, and that some mysterious agency was working against them.

This was not the first time that Ardroon had hunted the big seraow, he knew its haunts by heart; and although for several years he had taken various white men to shoot it, they had invariably been attended by the worst

" kismet " possible; in fact it had been the *bête noir* of his little world.

Therefore the old man offered the one explanation which seemed possible to his mind, that the local deities had turned sulky, and had woven a charm round the beast.

. . . . . .

The Englishman having dined, the two were now sitting by the roaring fire of pine logs, which cast a ruddy glare over the tents and sent the wild shadows leaping and dancing among the trees.

" Yes," repeated the old hunter, " the fairies have surely woven a charm round the seraow, and it is useless to fight against them. Besides, if they become angry, it would be dangerous to cross them." The white man laughed at his simplicity, but Ardroon became more earnest.

" See yonder mountain, O cherisher of the aged! Is it not guarded by fairies? No man has ever ascended to the summit of Laluni, and no man ever shall come nigh unto it. Close under the steep cliff where the white cloud now hovers there is a great hollow, whither the souls of the departed ascend, and

which they cannot leave until their friends have made a pilgrimage once round the mountain, and this hollow is ringed round by evil goblins and ghouls who defend it from the defiling foot of man.

" The sahib who came long years ago to make the maps wished to ascend thither. But the gods of the mountain conjured up great winds and storms so that he was forced three times to descend.

" Since then three other sahibs have attempted to climb. The first met with ill-fortune as soon as he had left his camp. Two of his carriers fell from a high cliff and were killed, and the fairies worked all manner of evil enchantments, so that the others were stricken with blindness and cruel pains in the head, and their way was finally barred by huge avalanches of snow which the gods hurled down at them.

" The second venturer was driven back by a furious storm of thunder and lightning, which compelled him to descend by night at great risk.

" The third sahib was even less fortunate, though he indeed attained a greater height.

I was one of those who made the attempt with him, and so near did we get to the hollow among the cliffs, that in the silence we could hear the wailing of those departed ones like the moan of the wind in the tree-tops, and our hearts turned to water, till we were fain to leave the sahib ; for how can a creature of flesh and bone fight against a spirit? But when the sahib also heard the ghostly sound, he swore that he would see the cause for himself and promised us many rupees if we would still go forward. And the greed of money prevailed upon us.

" It was largely the cold which prevented us, Highness, and when I think of that cold, my soul becomes even as ice and my words freeze within my mouth."

Ardroon stretched out his thin brown hands towards the blazing pine logs, and looked enquiringly at the white man. The latter complied by calling to his servant to bring the ginger wine, an excellent beverage for putting new heart into tired coolies or reviving the memory of old hunters.

The little camp had been pitched beside a roaring mountain torrent, among huge hills,

deep in jungle and forest; but these hills were only the offshoots of the colossal mass of rock and snow which towered up in series of precipices and narrow ledges, till its sharp peaks seemed to pierce the fairyland of stars. "Snowy Peak, No. 13 D," it was called on the map. Only a small spot on the edge of a great area covered with gigantic mountains and broad glaciers. Yet the lowest of the seven sharp spires of rock which formed its peaks was more than twenty thousand feet above sea-level.

The old shikari had called it Laluni, but most probably the dwellers on its farther slopes spoke of it under some other name. After all, what did it matter what the children of men chose to call it?

The servant appeared with a bottle and poured a good stiff peg into the little brass vessel which Ardroon held out. The old man swallowed the wine at a gulp, and his grey eyes sparkled with delight. His tongue was loosened by the warmth of the spirit, and he settled himself nearer the fire to finish his story, and prove his point.

"There were seven of us all told, who

started on this fool's errand: the sahib, his soldier orderly, and five men from my village, including me, your servant.

"We first ascended yonder great shoulder which juts from below the Hollow of the Dead, and after a day's climbing camped for the night in some small caves.

"Next morning we resumed our advance before dawn, and as the sun rose we had reached a spot within a mile of that dread abode of spirits. It was then, far above, that we heard the wailing sound of their chant, and the sahib in his eagerness induced us to go forward. Would we had not listened to him!

"There was not a cloud in the sky, and climbing, which had been very difficult, grew easier. We had been compelled to haul the loads up by ropes in some places, but now we had nought but a steep snow-field to cross.

"Suddenly the sahib, who had brought his gun with him, saw some snow-cock running among a mass of rocks. He followed them and managed to shoot one.

"Immediately there was a roar of falling rock and snow, and half the hill-side seemed

to be descending upon us. Luckily this avalanche poured into a watercourse, and swept past us with a grinding and crashing of stones, disappearing over a cliff far below. But this was the beginning of the end, and our courage failed us and we became as dead men.

" The sahib cursed and threatened us, all to no purpose, and finally agreed to let us rest awhile.

" But as we lay resting, clouds began to form, and floating up, swept about us, blotting out the sun and the mountain-side. We knew them to be the demons which guarded the mountain, but the sahib held that they were naught but mist. It grew colder, and an icy wind sprang up, chilling us to the marrow.

" The sahib ordered us to advance, but it was only by means of blows that he and his orderly could urge us forward. Finally two men dropped their loads and ran wildly down the mountain, stricken with terror.

" The eerie chant had begun again; it seemed close, yet very far, and sometimes seemed to melt away altogether.

" The two other men from my village bore

with it for a few minutes and then both broke away, and were swallowed up in the swirling mist.

" We stood still and listened. At first all was silent, then there came a wild shriek from below and the moaning song of the spirits swelled forth again, as if in welcome of the four new souls which had come to join them.

" The wind rose to a gale, and we were almost frozen with the cold, but still we climbed onwards. After a while, great balls of hail fell hissing about us, stinging and bruising our hands and faces. Then came such a crash as I have never heard before, and the storm which the gods had hurled upon us broke in all its fury.

" How we were not consumed, I do not know. Brilliant lightning encircled us like the thrusts of a flashing sword, and the voice of thunder burst upon us above and below.

" I fell at the sahib's feet and besought him to return, but he was determined to go forward and find out what was making the ghostly sound which had driven my kinsmen to their death. For he held that it was the

ASCENT OF THE HAUNTED MOUNTAIN

Note the weird faces outlined in the clouds, and the hands stretching out at the bottom of the picture.

wind blowing into some caves in the mountain-side as a shepherd blows into his pipe.

" Onwards and upwards we struggled, half blinded and dazed by the fury of the storm, till we reached a broad bank of huge rocks, the very lip of the dread hollow.

" The sahib was leading the way, when he seemed to slip, and fell across a large stone which was perched upon a round boulder so precariously that it rocked to the touch. With all a man's weight upon it, it gave way and rolled together with the sahib among the rocks below. Luckily he fell between two boulders, but even so he was pinned down and his gun bent double.

" We removed the rock as rapidly as possible, and found that the sahib underneath had lost consciousness and his arm was broken.

" With fingers numb and cramped by the cold we made shift to bandage the broken arm with a piece of my turban and the splinters of the gun stock; and, slinging the unconscious man in one of the blankets which we carried, bore him slowly down the mountain-side.

" It would be tedious to tell you of the

difficulties we encountered in the descent. Our tracks had been wiped out completely by the wind and hail, and once or twice we lost our way and were compelled to retrace our steps from the edge of some yawning precipice. It seemed as though we would be forced to stay where we were and die of cold, for the blankets which we carried were insufficient to protect the three of us through a long night on the mountain.

" Still we struggled on, till suddenly on rounding a bend we saw a sight which turned us sick with horror,—one of my kinsmen, lying against a rock, half-buried in the snow. He was dead of fright, and the look of terror on his face makes my hair rise as I think of it now.

" But the fact of finding him brought to my mind that the load of blankets which he had been carrying must be somewhere near by, and we decided to go back and look for them.

" First we removed the man's coat and laid it over the sahib and then dragged the body away out of sight. And having placed the unconscious man under the cover of a rock,

we set off to search for the loads. We hunted in vain for a long time, but whilst wandering about, chanced upon a little cave among some rocks, no doubt in answer to my prayers to Shiva. We then made our way back to the sahib, and carried him to the shelter of the cave. Having made him as comfortable as possible, we went forth again to find the loads, and by the greatness of the gods found one sticking out of the snow.

" In this load were some brandy and a little food, so we were able, after repeated efforts, to bring the sahib back to consciousness and restore a little warmth to his chilled limbs.

" Well was it for us that we found that cave, for the fury of the storm redoubled and we spent a night of misery, a great cold, like the hand of death, upon us.

" How shall I tell the horror of that night, O protector of the aged, it was beyond all words! Besides, you will not believe an old man's story.

" The wind increased, if anything, and as darkness closed down upon us, the orderly and I, watching by the semi-conscious man,

fancied that we again heard the song of the spirits. It grew louder and louder, and seemed to bear down upon us, sweeping past the cave, now like the wind whistling through the chinks of a door, now rising into a howling as of wolves which froze the blood in our veins. It seemed as if they wished to enter our shelter and drag us forth, yet the sound always died away to a far-off moaning just as we thought our hour had come.

" It continued for hours, and it was not till dawn that it ceased and the wind dropped. At sunrise we went forth to find Laluni deep in snow, but not a cloud in the sky.

" We carried the sahib down to camp as tenderly as might be, and after lying ill for a great many days he was able to move down to the villages and returned to his own country.

" Of the remainder of the carriers nothing was ever heard ; either they died of fright like the man whom we found, or fell over some cliff and were dashed to pieces.

" Behold the power of the gods of Laluni. Therefore I say that perchance they have cast a spell over us that we may not shoot the seraow."

The Englishman got up and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"They have evidently got an exaggerated idea of their powers because they gave you such a bad time on the mountain that night," he said; "that is all the more reason why we should show them that we can break their spell."

Ardroon smiled strangely. "The sahib has ordered it," he said simply.

. . . . . .

Next morning both men set off across the torrent and climbed the opposite hill for one last attempt upon the big seraow. As they made their way higher and higher through the sombre forest the camp grew small in the distance, and the tents looked like a couple of toadstools on the grassy meadow beside the stream.

Climbing steadily, they came upon a little cairn set up by some shepherd. It was smeared with red paint, and a few flowers had been thrust into a crevice before a rough image of the arch-devil of Laluni.

Ardroon salaamed low before it, saying, "Only speak the word, and the seraow shall

be ours, and to thee a he-goat shall be offered this very day."

Finally the two men reached a large rock whence they could obtain a clear view of the surrounding forests and hills. They crept quietly on to it and lay still, scanning the mountain-side, and listening intently for the weird barking call. The sunlight was stealing down the gaunt slopes of Laluni and the pheasant had long since sung their morning paean.

From somewhere close by they could hear the characteristic sound of a ghoral, like the far-away stroke of an axe against a tree trunk.

After lying silently for many minutes the piercing eyes of the old shikari caught sight of something which moved among the tall pines several hundred yards away across a fold in the hill. It was some time before the white man could see it with the aid of his field-glasses, and even so it was difficult to say whether it was a fallen log or the seraow itself.

They both watched for several more minutes, when a tiny movement betrayed the animal. He was flicking his ears to drive away some

swarms of gnats which seemed to be troubling him.

The men lost no time, but crept noiselessly backwards off the rock, and made a detour so as to come down to some point of vantage slightly above the seraow, where the wind would carry their scent uphill and in no way disturb him.

The dry leaves and crisp twigs which crackled whenever they took a pace, made it difficult for them to move silently, and an age of time seemed to pass ere they reached a small spur opposite to that upon which they had seen the animal.

The old shikari stole forward without a sound, and raised himself cautiously on both hands to look over a dead tree. Not ten paces from him sat a kuklas pheasant, luckily with its back towards him, scraping among the moss in search of grubs. One slight sound and the bird would have flown screaming away, spreading the alarm far and wide. The seraow was now moving slowly among the trees some distance above the spot where he had first been lying ; he stopped occasionally to crop the sweet grass, but would soon

be out of sight over the crest of the next spur.

Ardroon lowered himself inch by inch, and then wriggled back noiselessly to where the white man lay. He signed to him that they must go back and make a second detour above the pheasant, and both crept away some distance and once more climbed the hill.

Eventually they emerged on to the open hill-side where the ground was too steep for the larger trees to find any foothold. The forest seemed to end at this point, and a series of cliffs fell for hundreds of feet to the rocky bed of the torrent below, where the remains of giant trees, hurled down by many a winter storm, lay white and scattered like the bones of some prehistoric monster. On the farther side, the massive shape of Laluni soared majestically into the dark-blue vault of heaven, and the Hollow of the Dead lay like some old crater close against the three most lofty peaks.

Once more the men descended, and this time were rewarded by seeing the seraow, looking more than ever like a black bear,

lying in an old snow-drift among the cliffs some three hundred yards away.

They climbed cautiously through the long grass and, coming down on a level with the animal, advanced with infinite care towards a spot whence the white man could take a steady shot.

Turning to Ardroon he whispered, " Where are your fairies now ? I fear they are asleep and will be rudely wakened by the sound of my rifle ! "

They were now within a few yards of where they intended to lie for the shot, and the white man was clinging on to the bushes with one hand, for the ground was very steep and one slip meant a short voyage through mid-air to a hard bed of rock, hundreds of feet below.

Seizing a branch of the last bush he peered cautiously across at the snow-drift. Yes, the animal was still there, an easy target. But there came a weird humming noise from beside him, and he looked down at the branch he was holding. His hand was almost resting on a huge, round nest of hornets, and the evil-looking black and orange coloured insects,

each about two inches in length, came swarming forth in a cloud to destroy their enemy.

One look was sufficient for both men, and they ran across the hill-side, leaping from ledge to ledge, over ground which ordinarily they would never have dared to pass. These were no common hornets, but the large insect which lives upon the decaying flesh of dead animals, and about which the fable runs that ten stings will give bad fever and twenty will kill.

They did not run far, for the only way of escape from these hornets is to feign death. Ardroon shouting to the white man told him to throw himself down in the grass and lie motionless.

The hornets had attacked them both, but most had descended upon the white man who had disturbed their nest, and fell to stinging his hat and coat, and the ruksack in which he carried his food. One long sting had pierced his shoulder and one his wrist, and they burnt with a stabbing pain like red-hot needles.

Both men lay still, and the big insects crawled over their prostrate forms to satisfy themselves that they had indeed slain their

enemies. After a few minutes, thinking that their revenge was complete, they began to return to their nest.

When all had gone, Ardroon whispered to the white man to crawl slowly away, and by wriggling through the grass they succeeded in moving out of sight of the big grey nest, and then made all haste to reach the forest once more.

Far away they could hear the barking of their coveted seraow, which was now making good his escape, and the men were compelled to acknowledge their defeat, and sadly turned their faces towards camp.

On their way back they passed the little cairn once more. The old shikari turned towards it and stood gazing at the hideous image.

"Keep thy wretched seraow," he said; "from henceforth thou shalt get no goat or lamb from Ardroon."

FINIS

OUR fire is dying, and the stealthy fingers of King Frost are transforming the pearly dew into sparkling diamonds wherewith he may deck the mountain ere the red sun rises.

You have borne long with my halting efforts, and I thank you for your patience. Drink a parting cup ere you return to your far-away home, and sometimes give a thought to that land of romance, the Himalaya.

It is time I rolled myself in my blankets, for a keen shikari must needs rise early. So good-bye and good luck!

The Peace of the Hills be with you!

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