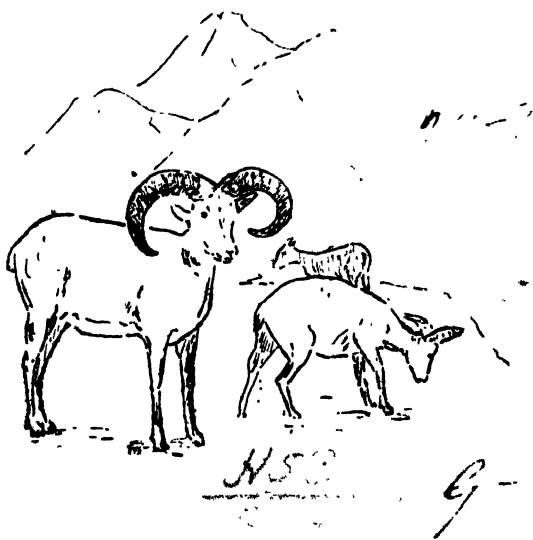




THE SIKKIM STAG

: : STALKS IN : :
THE HIMALAYA

JOTTINGS OF A SPORTSMAN-NATURALIST
BY E. P. STEBBING, F.R.G.S., F.Z.S.
WITH UPWARDS OF A HUNDRED ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR & OTHERS



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TO
MY FATHER
IN MEMORY OF MANY LONG TRAMPS
IN YOUTHFUL DAYS

PREFACE

THE notes on *Stalks in the Himalaya* were, for the most part, written in continuation of those already published in *Jungle By-ways in India*. My intention had been to deal with big game shooting in the plains and hills in one volume. When it became apparent that the material collected and likely to prove of interest was too copious to admit of this treatment, a division of the notes became necessary. The difference in the methods of following the pursuit of big game shooting in the plains and hills is sufficiently marked to have indicated a partition of the notes on these lines.

As in the case of the previous volume, the natural history data and incidents are selected from shooting diaries and note-books, as also the thumb-nail sketches illustrating the text. For the more pretentious of the latter my thanks are due to the far more efficient pen of my wife.

The pursuit of big game in a mountainous region must ever prove a most fascinating pastime to the keen lover of fine scenery and to the sportsman possessed of the stamina essential to enable him to love for itself the hard physical exertion it entails and the often severe calls made upon

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his powers of endurance and the complete harmony in working of head, hand, and eye.

To those so endowed big game shooting in the plains of India, even when that shooting consists of bison tracking on foot or that exhilarating pastime beating for tiger in the noonday heat of the hot-weather season, is not to be compared with days of hard, aye and perilous, climbing up on the fringe of the snows of the mighty Himalaya amidst scenery surely without its equal in the world—with days passed in pursuit of the red bear or the big-horned goats and sheep, whose home is on the sloping parts of the Roof of the World at elevations of twelve thousand feet and upwards.

To the lover of the science of stalking, to the man who does not go out each morn with the idea that the day will have been wasted if he does not return with at least one 'head,' the shooting grounds of the Himalaya can vie with any corner of the earth. The sportsman will never have two days alike. In my experience he will never have two stalks alike. He will not be downhearted if at the end of a long stalk, a stalk to which the greater part of a day of arduous climbing has been devoted, he may have to withhold his fire since no shootable heads are present amongst the animals he has been pursuing. For the sportsman nowadays no longer fires at immature heads and females.

Preface

The greatest hope for the continuance of big game shooting in the Himalaya rests upon the present-day attitude of sportsmen in this respect, and there can be little doubt that this attitude will be maintained. In the great pathless tracts of the Himalayan wilds it is to the sportsmen themselves the community must look to see that the rule is strictly enforced upon others and undeviatingly followed by themselves.

In the matter of the number of animals shot, a word might be offered for areas where restrictions on the subject are not in force. One hears and reads of sportsmen knocking over two, three, or four animals from a single flock, whilst the long-range fire which is indulged in wounds others whom they have no possible chance of retrieving. Of the animals actually killed one may be a good head, possibly two. Certainly all four will not be so. Is not a clever and successful stalk rather marred by such slaughter ?

E. P. S.



INTRODUCTION

OFF TO THE HILLS

OFF to the Hills! What delightful memories these words conjure up to the mind and what pictures to the eye. Visions of mighty snow-clad peaks, the giants of the world, towering up in the blue ether to altitudes undreamt-of by the stay-at-home; of stretches of wind-swept and sun-burnt rock and crag below the everlasting snows; or of eye-restful fir and pine-clad mountains stepping down, line upon line, and crest upon crest, in seemingly endless chains until they drop into the soft, smiling, brilliantly clothed foothills beneath, and so into the great, flat, limitless plains of Hindustan—that great, level, illimitable expanse which stretches southwards for uncounted

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leagues. Here and there some of the spurs of the lower ranges of the great mountains are terraced from summit to base by the industrious hillmen, the little fields so formed clothed with a golden yellow wheat or rice crop, or carpeted with the vivid crimson splotches of the millet crops. Whilst at the foot of all in the narrow winding valleys and gorges, whose steep sides are clothed with the tender greens of the delicate fronds of the maidenhair fern, rush and tumble, roar and gurgle, tinkle and murmur, the ever-melodious mountain torrents, carelessly flowing on their downward journey from the everlasting snows to the far-away torrid plains.

A mighty panorama of snowy peak and dark forest, frowning precipice and bold rocky promontory, softly dipping headland and darksome glen and ravine.

Some such vision will the memory of the 'Hills,' as the Anglo-Indian affectionately designates the greatest mountains in the world, bring before the minds of their lovers.

For we are writing of the Himalaya, the noblest mountains of the earth, in whose mighty shadow race upon race and generation upon generation of pigmy man has lived and fought, loved and suffered, starved and died in the great plains. Around whose untrod snowy peaks, dark forest-clad ridges, and gloomy defiles and corries religions have developed, legends untold have

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gathered, and the depths of whose mighty bowels enfold the sources of the life-giving rivers and streams upon whose continuance countless millions of the human race depend for their existence.

The Himalaya ! Has not the very word itself some subtle attraction and romance about it even for he who has never climbed their stupendous crests, nor set foot on their bonny braes ?

And if for him, what, then, of the traveller, the sportsman, the pilgrim, who has steeped himself in their beauties ? Does he not ever hear their sweet soft voice whispering and murmuring and calling, calling, calling to him to come back and fill himself yet once again with their wild, mysterious, and unearthly beauty ?

What a sense of joy and gratefulness and peace with all mankind pervades one as, reaching the foothills—respectable mountains they, were they dropped down somewhere in England, say on Salisbury Plain or on Laffan's at Aldershot—one commences the ascent towards the coolness above. Behind are the furnace-heated or rain-sodden stifling ' plains ' shimmering and simmering in their pestilential heat, and as the luxurious railway carriage or jolting, jingling two-horsed tonga, the saddle pony or even the humble ekka, carries one onwards and upwards, we commence once again to breathe the air in which we have been bred in our own native clime.

In all probability we are bound for one of the

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numerous hill stations which, clustering in what appear to be most alarming and dangerous positions along the ridge and adjacent spurs of the outer mountains, are to be found dotted at intervals from west to east along the Great Chain.

Usually placed at mean elevations of 6500 to 7000 feet on an outer ridge, or at most but a ridge or two in, the hill stations are approached in a variety of ways and with a varying degree of comfort whose sharp and startling contrasts, whilst appalling the new-comer to India, are accepted by the Anglo-Indian sojourner in the land as one of the inevitables of the East. For instance, if official Simla, summer residence of the Viceroy and the big officials of State, be your destination, you may mount to its cool lofty heights in a luxurious railway carriage, the only drawback to your comfort existing in the fact that owing to the continual alternating sharp curves of the road you *may* feel sea-sick on your way up and, unless you have the stomach of an ostrich, you certainly will feel (or be) so on your way down. All hill stations are not, however, the seat of 'the Supreme Government,' nor are they approached in such luxurious ease.

What glorious spots are these Himalayan hill stations. Simla, the official and aristocratic, with its splendid Viceregal residence standing apart in studied exclusiveness; its fine public buildings and shops worthy of a Western capital; its beauti-

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ful roads and rides round famed Jacko ; and last but not least, its lovely setting of deodars. Mussoorie, with oak-shaded paths and view of the lovely little Dun plateau below—non-official, free-and-easy Mussoorie, loved pleasure resort and *ultima thule* of the Eurasian community. Naini tal, its lake glittering as a jewel at its feet. Gulmarg, Queen of Kashmir and summer paradise of the Anglo-Indian golfer, with little Dalhousie encircled in snowy mountains in far-away Chamba. Darjiling, famed of the tourist, overhung and dominated by the snowy giant Kinchinjunga, whose extensive ice-fields and forbidding, frowning glaciers assume, under autumn sunsets, bizarre and awful beauties not of this world ; and lastly, in the far east little Shillong, nestling in soft pine woods and surrounded by its home-like, green-rolling downs.

Beautiful, beautiful beyond compare are the Himalayan hill stations ; but, alas ! at what cost of temper and bone dislocation does the attainment of your delights so often entail.

Train, tonga, pony, and ekka have been mentioned as modes of conveyance towards the desired bourne, and the traveller is lucky to get one of these. But a beneficent Government, with almost Oriental lethargy and conservatism, or perhaps with some idea that it will assist the official to 'get thoroughly into touch with the people,' permit other and less desirable modes of approach to the cool havens of rest to remain

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in statu quo. At times one discovers that the only means of approach is to be carried thither in a boat-shaped arrangement of canvas and wood termed a 'dandy,' in which pleasurable hours of headache and nausea may be spent, and one can imagine oneself once again on that ocean, now some thousand odd miles away. Or again, the dhoolie, dear to the heart of our Aryan brother, must be requisitioned—a large elongated box with a door at the side in which one lies flat on the back, and after having exhausted one's vocabulary of maledictions, endeavours to sleep away eight or twelve long hours ; what time relays of coolies spin one up the mountain-side at about three miles an hour, to the accompaniment of dirge-like ditties. Finally the light and graceful rickshaw loved of the Simla lady (and not a few men) is at times pressed into the service ; but its grace has vanished years ago—together with paint, cushions, and springs—and as we jolt miserably up the mountain-side we fervently envy the suppleness of our Darwinian ancestor, who, sunning himself upon some rock or perched overhead, grins derisively at us as we pass, racked with cramp and stiffness.

Compensations there are, however, even in such weary hours. As one mounts upwards the fresh cold airs from the snows slide down through the gorges between the great mountain tops to meet one, bearing upon them the sweet voices of

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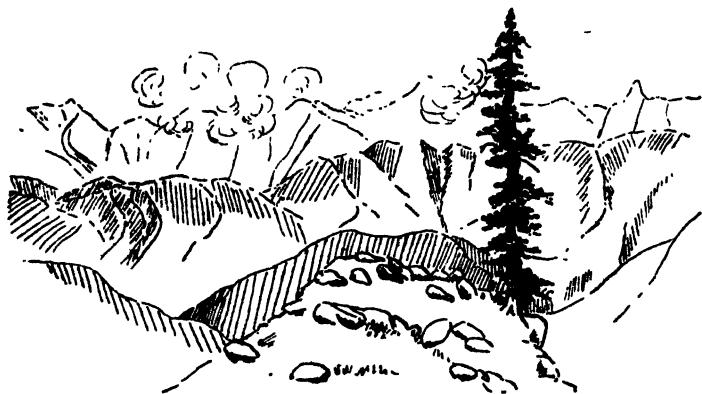
tumbling cascades and the delightful odours of the pines and firs.

What pleasure to feel once again the life coursing briskly through one's being, and to be able to joke over and devour with hungry gusto the dak-bungalow fowl—yclept the spatchcock—but now delving on the threshold, with solitary wistfulness, for that grain which no self-respecting Khansamah would dream of ever scattering for him.

But pleasing as it is to reach the 'Hills' and be in one of the great hill stations once again, what greater joy to say good-bye to the station, to leave behind one the last of the dak-bungalows and to feel that a couple of ranges of the outer 'Hills' are at one's back. What pleasure to march onward until from some rugged crest a semi-circle of the everlasting snows circumscribing the horizon are seen, amongst which in the crystal brightness of the atmosphere one is able to pick out known giant peaks—known, that is, to the Survey folk—but whose mighty glaciers and extensive snow-fields have never felt the impress of the foot of man nor re-echoed to his voice. With what a thrill does one realize that the Land of Promise, the land of the wily mountain goats and giant sheep carrying those record heads of our dreams, lies stretched out before one, and that on our own two feet we must depend to carry us over the mountain crest and through the hot valley, up sheer khud (mountain slope) and down sheerer

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precipice, over smooth and treacherous grassy slope
or wide expanse of snow, to the spot where all will
depend on a cool nerve, steady head and eye, and
—one shot !





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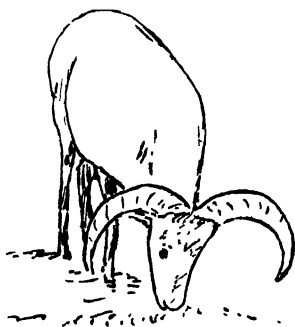
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PART I

THE HIMALAYA
AND THEIR BIG GAME



CHAPTER I

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THE WAY UP TO THE SHOOTING GROUNDS

THERE is something peculiarly fascinating and exhilarating about mountain scenery and mountain air the world over, and especially is this so, perhaps, for the European exile in India. To get away

Stalks in the Himalaya

into the 'Hills' from the torrid or rain-sodden greenhouse-like plains—the great interminable plains of Hindustan—is a blessing which every Englishman amongst us knows full well how to appreciate.

Some are satisfied that the migration shall take them to one of the hill stations perched on an outer ridge of the giant Himalayan Mountains, there to repeat the round of social gaiety and amenities passed through during the preceding cold weather below.

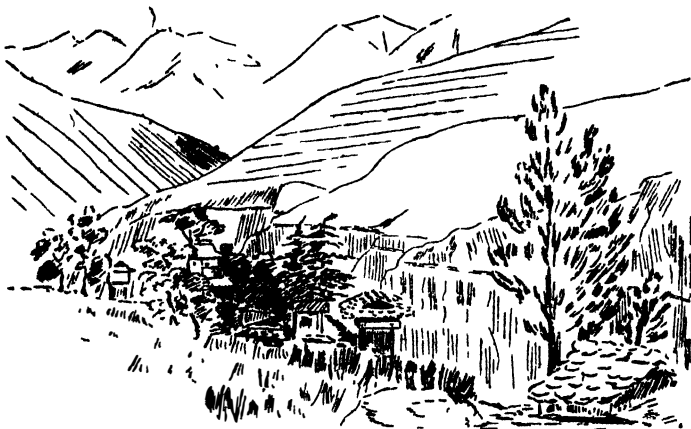
Life in the hill station, however, by no means satisfies the desires or fulfils the longings for wilder and sterner delights of those whose aim it is to make a closer acquaintance with the great hills, and, if fortune smiles, enjoy some of that sport they afford, which has no compeer. It is perhaps as well that we are not all constituted alike, or the peculiar charm and beauty and solitude of the Himalayan valleys and nullahs 'at the back of beyond' would be entirely spoilt for those with minds attuned to appreciate them.

It is only after several days' hard marching from the hill station 'farther in' that one is able to quit what can be still termed a road, winding in all probability up the valley of one of the larger rivers. These rivers cleave for themselves mighty gorges through the outer hills, hurtling down in boiling torrents and swift-flowing rapids to spread out over the plains in those

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broad, bright, silvery ribbons which form such a feature in the landscape of the plains as seen from the summits of the outer hill ranges.

The river roads up the great valleys are very much alike in the Western Himalaya, though they differ markedly on the eastern side of the great range, where the vegetation is of a much more



The slate-tiled cottages of the hillmen embosomed in fruit trees.

tropical character and clothes the sides of the valleys in wild, dense, pathless brakes, intersected with small arched runs, the highways of their wild denizens. On the western side the roads up the valley follow religiously every contour of the hill-side, taking the traveller at one moment down almost to the water's level, at another sending him climbing up several hundred feet above the river. The road is, however, still a 'road.'

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The hills are bare and rocky, cultivated in terraces in parts, with the commodious slate-tiled or wood-shingled cottages of the hillmen perched in clusters, boldly crowning some prominent spur or nestling embosomed in the pleasing shade of apricot, poplar, and willow trees. These two latter, together with the sissu (*Dalbergia sissoo*) and the long-leaved pine (*Pinus longifolia*), will probably form the chief tree growth met with, and may at intervals afford a meagre amount of tantalizing shade on the long hot road. For it must be added that the Himalayan low-lying valleys are appallingly hot in the summer months, and make the journey up to the higher levels an arduous performance. The sissu tree is at its best on the edges of these rocky-bedded rivers, where it occupies the stoniest and apparently most arid positions it can find; growing singly or in miniature woods and copses entirely clothing some riverain terrace.

These natural terraces are a common feature of the Himalayan rivers, the lower ones nearest the river being clothed with the vivid green sissu, whilst the upper are occupied by the long-leaved pine commonly known as the chir.

Here and there the road will run through a stretch of this chir, a red, rough-barked tree which yields a much-sought-for resin and a good house timber. It is wonderful the positions this conifer is found occupying, the barest, craggiest of

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rocky slopes affording it not only a holding ground for its roots, but sufficient moisture as well ; whilst on gentler inclines dense thickets of the young tree will be visible, all naturally sown and of sturdy growth. These pine woods give a home to that small goat-like animal the goral (*Cemas goral*), which has a fairly extended distribution, for it is found up to 10,000 feet elevation in these mountains. We may, if we start before daybreak, often vary the monotony of the long toilsome march up the lower valley by a stalk and shot at this curious little animal. To make sure of success, however, it is absolutely essential to start before dawn, and one must be prepared to face an arduous climb up from the valley road over hillsides made more slippery than ice by the thick carpet of the long dead needles of the pine with which the floor of these forests is invariably covered. The sport must be tried to appreciate the full difficulties attending it, but it is a most fascinating pursuit—and more especially so for the tyro in Himalayan shooting. The little muntjac, or barking deer (*Cervulus muntjac*), is also to be found in these forests and extends up to 7000 or 8000 feet. Higher up, in parts, the curious musk deer (*Moschus moschiferus*) may also be stalked and watched feeding in the grassy dells.



Head of Goral.

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The duration of our march on the road will depend upon whether we intend making for the source of the great river it is following or whether we have in our mind's eye some minor valley or nullah following upwards to the watershed of one of the tributaries of the main stream.



Head of Barking Deer,
or Muntjac.

Recently we had one of these latter in view, where red bear (*Ursus arctus*), black bear (*Ursus torquatus*), markhor (*Capra falconeri*), bharal (*Ovis nahura*), tahr (*Hemitragus jemlaicus*), serow (*Nemorhædus bubalinus*), and goral were said to disport

themselves at the upper limits of the valley in those wonderful numbers which the vivid imagination of one's shikari is so fond of portraying with eager fervour when he is being engaged 'down below'; but which have a monotonous and seldom varying habit of exhibiting an elusive and vanishing quantity the nearer one approaches the Elysian fields.

Leaving the hot main valley road, we braced ourselves for the climb up the offshoot valley which in a few marches was to bring us to the last village this side of a snowy pass. Beyond the village lay the country of our dreams and hopes

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and anticipations, the country where we were to find our game skipping about in a joyous existence (so the shikari said) on those wonderful grassy slopes just beneath the everlasting snows.

Your shikari will tell you, and so will the villager, that a good road leads all the way up to the last village beyond which the 'maidan' (plain), as he terms it, ceases. You very soon discover that the 'good road' is a mere path, usually an excessively stony one; and as often as not carrying a babbling brook, one of the feeders of our tributary stream, coursing merrily down its centre or sides either in its natural bed or diverted there temporarily during some irrigation works of the nearest village. To us fresh from the plains or the broad, well-kept roads of the hill station and the fair road in the main valley, the 'village road' has all the appearance of the veriest apology of a hill footpath, often dwindling away from its six-foot of good intention to a two-foot or less of doubtful reality. As all who have had to make use of these paths well know, the hillman, and the hill beast as well, invariably walks on the outer edge, i.e. the edge nearest the downward slope or precipice. Owing to this peculiarity of the hill animal, both two- and four-footed, a small track is worn out which only deviates from the precipice edge to take a short cut round a corner, when it resumes its original position once again. Now the hill pony and the country-bred pony follow the hill

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animal in this (and other) respects to the extreme discomfort of the traveller, who more often than not finds one of his legs dangling over an unfathomable precipice. One acquires the habit of riding with the foot of this leg free of the stirrup when in such localities. It feels safer somehow.

It is only on our return downwards from the upper heights after much balancing on slippery precipitous crag sides which even the hillman will allow are no longer 'maidan,' that we look with different and appreciative eyes on the village road and wonder that it could ever have appeared 'nasty' to our then untrained eyes. The climb up the feeder valley path consists at its lower end of a series of short zigzags inclined at the steepest gradient at all negotiable and aggravatingly rocky and difficult underfoot. An hour of this kind of thing usually reduces the man fresh up from the plains to a breathless and pulpy mass, if afoot; and walking is infinitely preferable to riding in the Himalaya. But the climb is well rewarded even if undertaken with a hot sun beating down on one's back, the track taking the sunny instead of the shady side of the valley—this being, so far as our experience goes, the usual luck Dame Fortune metes out. Already the air filling the lungs is of a different elasticity, and has become fragrant with hill odours, amongst which the well-loved and fascinating scent of the deodar (*Cedrus deodara*), or God's tree, permeates the hot air.

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Already one begins to feel that heart-thrilling grip of the 'wilds,' and that the well-beaten track of the world we wot of has been left behind ; that we are now face to face with the mysteries of the Great Mountains ; that we are getting into touch with the mighty Himalaya themselves whose whispering voices are softly calling and alluring us onwards.



The air has become fragrant with hill odours.

Having negotiated the bare, rocky, difficult zig-zags, the road leads us past patches of terraced cultivation, now golden with the wheat harvest almost ready for the sickle. The villages are enshrouded in or have hard by little copses of orchard trees, the apricots bearing in due season a glorious crop of orange-coloured fruit, sweet, succulent, and toothsome to the palate of the hot and breathless traveller. Plum and pear tree are

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covered with a promising crop, and by the wayside home flowers meet the eye and speak to us of the green lanes and fields and the bonny woods and heaths and moors of the old country.

The last evening in the world of men is spent at the uppermost village, and here supplies and the



A villager's dwelling in the Himalaya.

coolies required to take us higher up are arranged for. It is also necessary to ascertain the possible places which can be made use of as camping-grounds. Even such small habitations as an 80-lb. tent for ourselves and a shouldari for the servants require some small flat surface for their erection ; in the country we are going up to even that may prove impossible to find unless we definitely as-

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certain from those who know where such spots exist. Of course the shikari should know, but they are mostly a lazy tribe, and he may be inclined to keep us low down when we could get higher. Also to command success one can never take too much trouble in endeavouring to acquaint oneself with all geographical and topographical details of the area in which sport is to be sought.

It is on leaving this last village that the real work of climbing commences. Up above the village the stream is met with again. Climbing the hill from the big valley it has been mostly several hundred feet below us, a sunny murmur far beneath. Now it becomes our constant and at times unwelcome companion.

The path disappears in a mere track winding up to the head of the valley and the snowy pass which, if crossed, will take us down to the abodes of man on the other side.

As we toil up the rocky, sun-baked slope (for the sun can be uncomfortably hot, even at this elevation), a small square erection consisting of heaped-up loose stones is passed by the wayside. Branches of pine or fir, to which small strips of red or white rag are tied, are inserted in the clefts near the top, and, more curious still, projecting from the top are some iron tridents or three-prong forks. This erection is a small temple at which passing wayfarers stop to make offerings and to ensure prayers being said for

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their safety in the dangerous journey ahead of them by tying up strips torn from their garments. As the breeze softly flutters out these tiny flags a prayer is supposed to be offered up to the deity for he who tied it there, a mode of prayer-offering even more facile than the Thibetan prayer-wheel.



The road-side temple.

After an interval allowed for the simple prayers of our followers we proceed onward and reach the grateful shade of horse-chestnut, hazel, willow, and poplar trees, with an undergrowth of fine fronds of bracken, interspersed with ferns of many kinds and our well-loved English wild flowers. Up here the horse-chestnut is still in flower, and very magnificent are some of these great trees, their bark hanging in long pendulous

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strips, for all the world like some great, shaggy, rough-haired monster of prehistoric times. As we climb higher this forest mingles with and gradually becomes merged in the dark pines and firs which, confined up to now to the hill-tops and heights, as we get higher and higher step down from the crests and clothe the abruptly sloping sides of the rapidly contracting valley. And the stream! Narrower and steeper has grown the bed, and the traveller is now accompanied by a regular mountain torrent which foams down the valley, skirting gigantic rocks, left standing in the most fantastic and bizarre positions by the glacier and snow moraine which formerly filled all the valley with a vast, silent sea of snow and ice ; or again, the stream rolls dark and black over flat slabs and sharp-pointed rocks which catch and hold up masses of debris. It is at this point that our troubles will commence, and more especially so should the Forest Department have been at work in the fir forests in days gone by. Then we shall find the narrowing sides of the valley and the stream itself filled with an intricate mass of tree-tops, sections of grand monarchs rejected for hollowness, slabs and odd pieces of timber in the wildest profusion. A deplorable waste, you will say! This is so, but up here we are far too distant from the abodes of man to enable any, save the commercially saleable portions of the trees, to be utilized. It is

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difficult to realize that man has really been in a region so remote from the parts of the world where he congregates in busy throngs, but the evidence of his work is not to be mistaken. Moreover, hard by, rough shanties built of slabs, the former temporary dwelling-places of the woodmen, serve further to impress the fact upon one.

As we proceed upwards the remains of wooden sledge-ways and water-slides, carried for several miles over the most difficult country in the world on ingenious systems of wooden uprights, are to be seen ; down these many thousands of railway sleepers, now spread over hundreds of miles of track in the far-off plains of Upper India, have slid and jumped and screeched and bumped on their journey to the depot on the stream. In the stream itself we come upon small, beautifully clear, mountain swimming-baths, where the water has been caught and held up to form small reservoirs to feed the water-slides. All these and other evidences of man's former activity in this remote region will be visible, now falling to decay since no longer of any use. For it will be many years ere the walls of this little valley ring again to the sound of the axe or hear once again the skree-skree of the saws, and, saddest sound of all, re-echo to the long-drawn swish and deafening crash which tells of the fall and sudden death of some glorious Monarch of the Mountains.

Toilsome will be the march over this chaotic

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mass of wood and rock, but a few miles will carry us up and beyond it. The steep hill-sides become still steeper and rockier and develop into mere walls of glacia-like rock slipping sheer down from the fir forest above, and where these cannot be scaled and the cool shade of the forest be sought in the upward climb we have to take to the edges of the torrent, and cross and re-cross it as one or other side affords sufficient foothold to make progress upwards possible. This passage of the turbulent torrent is no light job, and would be very often impracticable, were it not for the tree stems and branch wood caught up and wedged into bridge-like positions at the lower end of the small pools. The use of these natural bridges shows the natives to be born tight-rope performers, but to one's less steady feet, encased in the boot of civilization, without which the European is as helpless as a newborn babe, the crossing is usually a labour often encompassed only after the submergence of a foot or two, or perhaps, should Dame Fortune be in a capricious mood, of a whole leg—one has gone in up to the ears in the icy water, but that was on another occasion.

It was soon after one of these crossings that on the opposite side of the stream a dirty-looking mass with a white under-cut, looking exactly like a huge section of a sugar-covered cake placed upside-down, was perceived. This was an out-

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post of the snow moraine. Soon we were on a larger one on our side of the stream. Snow and ice it undoubtedly was, but it required some knowledge of those articles to recognize them, for the upper surface was mostly mud-coloured and covered with small, dried fir twigs and needles and debris of all kinds.

These snow outliers require delicate negotiation, since they are apt to thin out in a fashion all their own, especially at the edges overlapping the stream, and at their junction with the land, and the unwary can easily take an unpremeditated drop through, which is not unlikely to result in unpleasant consequences.

At the early hour we got upon it, the snow mass was still hard and firm to the foot, and with good screws to one's boots the walking over it presented no difficulties. It is only later in the day when the sun's rays have made themselves felt, that the surface becomes wet and difficult to negotiate when moving downwards.

The stream now runs through a small gorge with vertical walls of rock, and there is nothing for it but to scale a rocky precipice, since the torrent was still too turbulent to cross and no natural bridge offered a footway. Dropping down to the stream again from the dark fir forest, we saw, over the top of a chaotic mass of boulders, two dark cavernous caves surmounted by a couple of white, beautifully scalloped arches.

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We had come to the end of our friend the stream's above-world existence and reached the snow moraine. The stream seemed to spring into silvery life from the black depths of a cavern, and only the snow arch above served to indicate that its source was away up in the snowy peak, so close above us, and that its course down its rocky bed was now arched over with a great



The snow and ice sweep up to the valley head.

dome-shaped mass of snow and ice. Climbing on to this, one saw that it entirely filled the remainder of the tiny narrow valley, sweeping away up it in billowy waves which grew whiter and steeper and smaller in width the nearer they approached the valley head, and merged into the permanent snow on the mountain-side.

It is up here that one reaches the most beautiful of all the many beautiful spots to be seen in a Himalayan valley. As the roar of the torrent

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gradually drops to a murmur, and this dies away altogether, the silence becomes intense, it might almost be said oppressive. Of life, as one looks round, there is little to be seen. A solitary blackbird hops disconsolately over the snow ahead, searching for the early worm that is not. The black fir woods have now come down and edge the snow with a funereal band. A few songsters are starting their twitterings and rehearsals for their morning *Te Deum*, but the sun has not yet penetrated into the uppermost recesses of the little valley, and all is still gloomy and dull.

Down at our feet the imprints of bears are visible, and also those of tahr, but neither fur nor horn is visible as we scan the silent woods, and then lay the glasses up above on the green, grassy slopes below the snow-line. These grass slopes now lie shimmering golden in the sun's rays, which are lighting up the tops of the silver birch trees and upper firs clinging to the hill-side below the green turf and snow-capped summit.

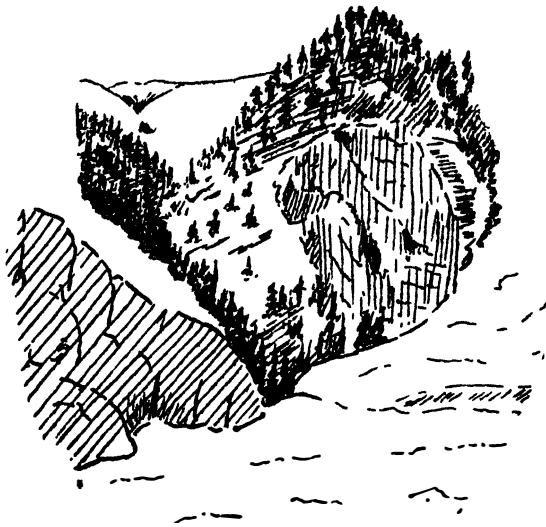
Even, one thinks, should the great promise of sport fall short of our anticipations, it has been well worth the hot, dusty, tedious hours and miles that have to be passed through to reach such a spot as this.

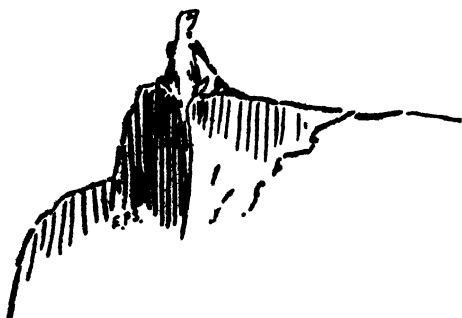
Here, indeed, are we face to face with the inner mysteries of these wonderful mountains. Already the hurry and stress of the workaday

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world has fallen from us, and we seem to feel ourselves a changed being in a new and indescribably beautiful world.

And those sweet-toned, alluring, calling voices are once more at rest.





CHAPTER II

The lizard of the Himalaya—Home—Habits—Appearance when alarmed—Protective colouration—A family party—A cheeky youngster.

THE LIZARD BY THE WAY

HAVE you ever watched the long-tailed, fat-sided, many-coloured lizard who plays hide-and-seek with you as you toil up some sunlit, rocky path with a gradient of 1 in 3? An impudent and corpulent little beggar is he, far removed in appearance and habits from his brother who frequents our bungalows and looks to our wall lamps and their neighbourhood for his sustenance and hunting-grounds.

This gentleman's habitation is the breezy hill-side studded with numerous rocks on which,

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or against which, when heated up to red-hot pitch by the fiery rays of a June sun (scorching even at 7000 to 8000 feet altitude), he will lie flattened out, basking complacently on a spot on which you could roast a mutton chop or do a bacon collop to a crisp turn.

At the approaching footstep our friend will sit up, poising himself at a sharp note of interrogation on his front legs or arms, it is difficult to know which to call them, and with head cocked up at an angle will fix you with a cold, glassy, and most impudent stare, as if to say, 'And what the de'il may your business be?'

As you draw closer, the angle at which the head is held becomes cockier, and then disliking your looks and nearer approach and everything about you, with a whisk he whips over the edge of the khud or disappears into some dark, noisome-looking crack or crevice which speaks aloud of snakes and scorpions and lizards and 'creepy crawlies,' whatever they may be, of all kinds. If to the crack or crevice has been his retreat, you may search for him in vain, for it will probably penetrate far back into the bank's or cliff's recesses, where in a nice hot, baked corner he has his home. Should, however, he disappear over the khud-side, it is worth a peep over to see how far our friend has gone. Not far, you will find, for you will perceive him a foot or two below the edge flattened out against the rock-

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side, and still as death under the impression that he is hid to the world, and by the world forgot, when his great, fat, ugly body and hideous head are the most prominent things in the landscape now before our eyes.

Watch him. Is it not marvellous how the lizard can cling there to an absolutely vertical and slippery wall of rock the very look of which makes your head go round as you cast your eyes down it into space below ?

Our lizard friends are not afflicted with 'heads' nor insides either, and I suppose mountain-sickness is to them a thing as unknown as seasickness. But as you look you will wonder what is happening to our friend ! If he is not going to be sick, he has all the appearance of a near approach to it. His body, from the brown apparel you first saw him in, has now changed to a faint greenish tinge, which is rapidly assuming a sickly, blotchy yellow, whilst he is turning a greenish orange about the gills. You will also realize that he is becoming much more difficult to see against the rock, and this is the wily saurian's object in assuming these bilious shades. He is merely acquiring a colouration as near as possible to that of his surroundings in order to hide himself, and thus protect himself from the danger he believes to be in his neighbourhood. He will try this on, and lie low, as long as you do not approach too close, but once he suspects

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he is detected, a whisk and a flip of the long tail, or short stump, for he is apt to lose his tail at times, and he is away for some secret nook.

The other day, whilst plodding up a real teaser of a mountain-side in Chamba by one of the usual rocky and stony paths, we came suddenly upon a family party, consisting of the paterfamilias, his weaker half, and an unruly offspring. The party were or had been sunning themselves on a flat, smooth, sloping wall of rock above the road, and when we appeared the parents were chasing the youngster, with the object of administering an apparently much-needed chastisement. Paterfamilias was in high wrath, the cheek pouches of his far from lovely head being inflated and distended with anger, and his eyes more than usually protruding and bulging. Whilst he made direct and ineffectual rushes in the direction of his agile offspring, his warier spouse, with feminine wile, endeavoured to cut her young hopeful off in a more crafty manner. The latter was, however, evidently quite used to the game, and frolicked about over the rock face, determined on having a good time as long as possible, since the inevitable must eventually attain him and would have to be endured.

Our appearance upon the scene upset the parental endeavours and unwonted exercise, and mother and father closed up and watched us out of those bright, cold, staring eyes of theirs,

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whilst the youngster kept his upon them. We did not see that much-needed correction administered, as our nearer approach sent the couple scurrying into a crevice, to which retreat the youngster had perforce to follow them, after a last impudent frisk and cheeky stare at us.

Chastisement was badly required in his case.





CHAPTER III

Goral—Shooting in the plains and hills—Essentials for hill-shooting—Fascination of—Distribution of goral—Difficult to 'pick up'—Clearness of atmosphere in the Himalaya—A morning after goral—Beautiful scenery—Put up some barking deer—See my first goral—Wounded—'Nasty' country—Tracking—The goral again—Natives' love of sitting—Give up the search—Beautiful country—The cuckoo's voice—An early morning start—Young deodar—See a flock—A long wait—Goral at home—An awkward situation—A difficult shot—Bag my goral—Another search for goral—An easy shot—The goral disappears—Careful tracking—The treacherous grassy slope—A hurried climb—Safety—Stalking goral—Jock—The stalker stalked—Tally ho!

THE GORAL

HE whose experience of game—I should say large game—shooting is confined to the 'plains' of India, even though he may possess a wide and varied knowledge of the animals to be shot in the extensive jungles of Hindustan, will find himself

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very considerably out of it when he first takes to hill-shooting. The latter is so very different, and the knowledge required and the guiding principles and rules are so essentially at variance in many ways from those which have guided us in our jungle-shooting in the plains.

Two essentials are absolutely necessary for he who would shoot successfully in the hills, omitting, of course, the first one of all—a good eye and decent marksmanship. The two necessities, then, to win success are a good head for heights and a good wind and walking and climbing powers. Shooting in the plains may be enjoyed in a variety of ways. From the howdah or pad of an elephant; from a stationary position in the machan; beating, stalking, or during a quiet stroll in the jungle, etc. Sport in the hills entails, to enjoy even a modicum of success, a vast amount of good, honest, heel-and-toe work often over the most difficult and break-neck country, to which must be added a considerable fund of patience, for blank days are, alas! only too numerous. But then, even many of these blank days are by no means the blanks of our plains recollections, for they are incurred amidst the most glorious scenery the world can show, and in an air which sends us back to our little tent with an appetite only to be acquired in those high altitudes and by such work as we have been engaged upon.

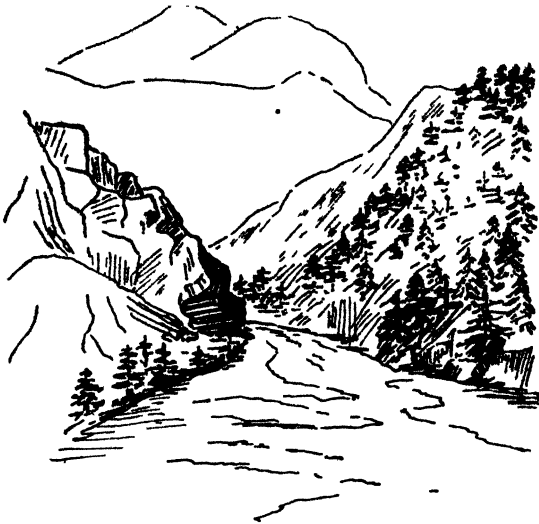
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Who can say wherein exactly lies the fascination pertaining to hill-shooting? That it is there most of us will allow, even those for whom the grandeur of the scenery amidst which it is enjoyed does not appeal with its convincing and subtle power. Men have shot in the plains for years, and then one year curiosity or the glowing accounts of some enthusiastic friend has prompted a visit to the hills to see what this often-vaunted hill-shooting is really like, and they have themselves become subject to the glamour. The plains are given up, and year after year they return to the hills, and all obtainable leave is spent in the pursuit of what is possibly the most difficult and certainly one of the most laborious pastimes in the world.

There is one other unmentioned and yet great advantage pertaining to it. It enables its devotees to escape either the hot weather or the monsoon months in the depressing plains; or, if one is lucky enough to be able to obtain a six-months' leave, both these periods. The hot weather, because anywhere above 6000 feet the climate varies from that of a glorious hot English summer (the English summer our grandparents talked about as having once been customary) to that of the arctic regions; the monsoon, because if you go far enough in, say three ranges, you get into that delectable land the region situated beyond the area into which the great rains penetrate.

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In these notes it is only my purpose to give some rough account of the animals I have met, studied, and shot, or shot at, during the tours I have made in the beautiful Himalaya, and some of the more uncommon or more inaccessible hill animals do not fall within this purview. My



The goral is to be found in the long-leaved pine forests.

wanderings have, however, carried me up to the permanent snow-line both in the east and west of the great range. It must also be borne in mind that animals which spend the summer months just below permanent snow-level are to be found at much lower elevations during the late autumn, winter, and early spring, since the snow-line at these periods of the year is so much lower down.



IN THE WINTER THE SNOW FALL COMES LOWER DOWN THE MOUNTAIN SIDES

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Those of us, therefore, who have had the good fortune to tour in the hills in the autumn and winter have secured opportunities, in comparatively accessible localities, which never fall in the way of the summer sportsman.

I have already alluded to the fact that the little goral is to be found in the forests of the long-leaved pine at the lower elevations in the Western Himalaya. He is also to be shot in the Eastern Himalaya, where you will find him at the upper limits of the Sal in the oak and mixed evergreen forest. He lives practically between 3000 and 8000 feet, the eastern boundary of his habitat being apparently the Naga Hills in Assam. He is also to be found on the upper crests of the Siwalik range, just outside the Himalaya in North-Western India.

The goral is a small goat-like animal, with brown coarse hair and fairly stout legs, the males being much darker than the females, at times almost black. He has a white throat and a pair of small, straight, almost parallel black horns, some 6 inches in length, $7\frac{1}{2}$ being a record. He measures about 27 inches at the shoulder, and is perhaps the commonest animal in the Himalaya, associating in small parties of from four to eight in number. The older males are often found solitary, and the greatest sport is to search for and stalk these. When alarmed, the goral emits a curious hissing sound something between a hiss

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and a cough combined. Only one youngster is born at a time, so the hillmen have informed me, usually about May or June, the period of gestation being six months. Grassy rocky slopes in the neighbourhood of patches of forest, for shelter from the midday sun, with a break-neck precipice



He returns to the neighbourhood of the forest.

handy to resort to when danger approaches, are, in my experience, the favoured spots of the goral, and to watch them going down the precipice after having been fired at and missed is a sight to be seen—and wondered at afterwards.

The goral feeds in the morning until about 8 a.m., when he sits down for the day. He usually returns to the neighbouring forest or to some

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favourite spot where an overhanging rock will afford him shade against the noonday sun and from where he can obtain during this period a good view of his surroundings and any approaching danger. Here he will sit and snooze and dream away the hours, but ever keeping the one open eye for which the dog is so justly famous. The animals commence feeding again about 5 p.m. and browse until dark. It is thus of little use going out to shoot or search for goral in the daytime. Early morn and dewy eve are the times for shooting most things in India, and to the early riser falls most of the good heads and skins obtained.

It has been mentioned above that the little goral is the commonest, as he is perhaps the most fearless, of the Himalayan animals. But do not expect to go out and find him swarming on every hill-side, because you won't do so. Like all other sport, that of goral-shooting has to be worked for, and the goat's general appearance and colour have to be studied and 'picked up' before you can hope to make sure of bagging him. It is astonishing how difficult the goral can be to see. Either he gets into shadow and disappears entirely from the eye, or he walks out on to the open, bare, grass-bespattered hill-side and vanishes likewise from sight as soon as he stops moving. An elusive little animal is he, and so very small, even when seen through the glasses! Up in the Himalaya the air is so amazingly

Stalks in the Himalaya

clear that it is the easiest thing possible to entirely misjudge distances, and not only distances of yards or hundreds of yards only, but of miles also! How often on a march has one caught sight of the little resthouse or dak-bungalow on some ridge or nestling in the dark pine forest? 'At last!' we murmur, with a hopeful sigh. Only



“So very small, even when seen through the glasses!”

a mile or two at most left now. And it has turned out six or eight! We have endeavoured to allow for our road contouring the hill-side in our estimate, but not for the tantalizing deceptions of the Himalayan atmosphere. Again, how many times have we all of us hit the ground yards in front of the animal we aimed at for this reason alone? But we all have to learn our lessons in our own way. I can remember my first morning after goral in the Western Himalaya. 'Swarm like tame goats to

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the north-west, about three miles above the bungalow,' I was told. All I can say is that they did not swarm for me. Nor had the ones I did see much in keeping with tame goats. I noted down the occurrences of that morning, still freshly vivid in my memory, in my note-book at the time, and here they are :

A MORNING AFTER GORAL

The sun has not yet shot up over the neighbouring peaks as we breast the steep, winding path leading to the crest of the mountain. It is a fresh beautiful morning in early June, and at the elevation we are at—between 7000 and 8000 feet—crisp cold. The keen morning air and the stiff climb send the blood coursing merrily through the veins, and one feels in tune with the glorious scene around one. Are we not many, many miles distant from the scorching plains, right up amongst the most glorious scenery the world contains, in the mightiest of mountains, the Himalaya? Around one the beautiful deodar forest clothes the steep mountain-side, the graceful and handsome shape of this beautiful tree giving the woods more the appearance of a well-kept ornamental plantation at home than that of a large forest worked on commercial principles. Here and there as one tramped up the hill a small opening would give one a *coup d'œil* of distant snowy peaks framed in a setting of the tender, green, tassely, pendent

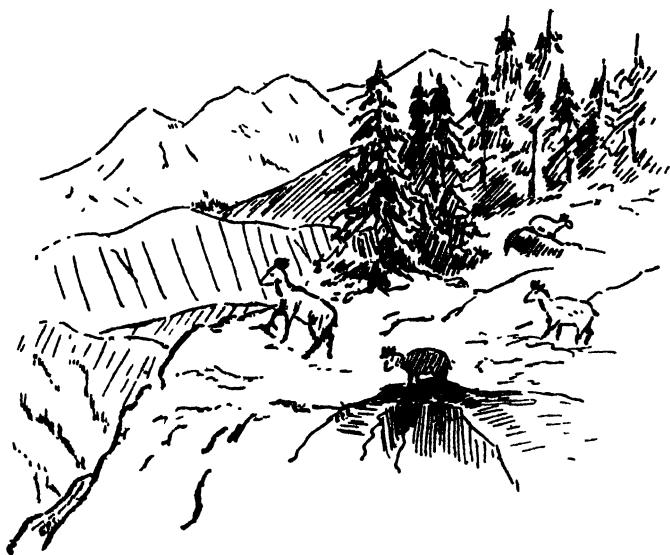
Stalks in the Himalaya

deodar branches backed by the vivid blue of an Indian sky. And we are full of hope, the hope that so animates the tyro, that we shall to-day see a new animal, a beast as yet unmet and unshot—an animal who loves the rocky, sharply sloping hill-side where pockets of green turf afford him succulent grazing.

As we toil up the slope a rush in the young deodar and oak scrub to our right brings the rifle to the ready, but almost before one has had time to try and peer through the growth, a couple of short sharp barks proclaim the animal a barking deer, alarmed and angry at being disturbed in a favourite feeding spot. Will the barks have raised the hill-side, one wonders! Luckily they are not repeated. Farther up two monal pheasants get up, offering a lovely shot, and fly off with their queer piercing whistle. A sudden halt of the shikari and I hurry up, only to find another barking deer, this time down the khud. Not much time would he have allowed for a shot, had it been wished for, for with a whisk of his white scut he is off with his curious heavy gallop. Up, up we climb, and at last reach the crest; every open patch of grass and rocky precipitous slope is searched, but in vain. Either the barking deer have roused them or our eyes are not sharp enough, for no horn of goral appears. After further fruitless search we turn into a narrow footpath and drop down the hill on to a small contour path

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some way below. Just before reaching the crest something had bolted down through the jungle in this direction without our having caught sight of it. After winding along the rocky cut for a mile suddenly the shikari sits down, and I promptly follow suit. 'To the left of the big pine in front,'



"I should have taken them for village goats."

he whispers, and I crawl into his place. For some time nothing can be made out at all; then a minute, blackish-grey blotch, taking a sort of goat-like shape, defines itself to my eager gaze, and one or two other dots I take to be companions. I had never seen goral before, and I should have taken them for village goats had I not been aware

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that there were none hereabouts. I worm along a few yards farther, and then sit up. From here the shot must be taken, for I can get no closer. Had I been above it would have been practicable ; but being on the same level it was too risky, as the animals were on the *qui vive*. Resting my elbows on my knees, I take a full sight for my estimate of 150 yards and fire. The goral gives a great bound in the air with arched back, and appears to spring straight over the khud. Its companions disappear like phantoms. Hit, I was sure; and in my excitement I bark my shins and nearly come a cropper in trying to get hurriedly over break-neck ground. A very short examination shows blood. At first a little and then in patches, and I no longer doubt that I have shot my first goral. Step by step we track it up, and, as is usual with these animals when frightened, it very soon takes us to a place where the hill-side is virtually a precipice. Slowly and carefully I follow my nimble-footed companions. I vaguely wonder how many generations it has taken to give them their easy gait and swinging stride over the rocky khud-side, and how many would be required to give the average-bred Englishman even a fraction of their agility. I plod along, sticking to my rifle and thanking the good star which induced me to put on a stout pair of football boots, which answer here even better than nails. At last we come to sheer slippery rock, and this tries my

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powers to the utmost. However good one's head, one can't walk on shiny rock at an angle of 60 ! I get over, encouraged by frantic pantomime from the Gurkha orderly, who appears on the high road to lunacy and to losing me my goral. In a woeful plight I reach the other side, blowing and shaking, for the last 100 yards or so have been real hard work. After a little time I make out a slowly moving grey speck (the hind leg is broken, so I am told), and steadying myself as much as I can, I fire. The beast stops dead for an instant, I thought preparatory to falling, and then with incredible swiftness bounds off on three legs over a mass of rocks, rounds a point, and is out of sight. A miss, apparently, but I felt sure of my quarry. I did not know the wonderful toughness of these Himalayan goats. The khud had now to be negotiated. The hill from a point some 1000 feet above us dropped down at a sharp angle, but was more or less clothed with trees—deodar, spruce, and silver fir. This growth, however, stopped just above us, and the khud inclined strongly into a practically sheer, rocky precipice, with just a ledge here and there to get along by. Luckily there were tufts of grass in niches, which proved a great help. This lasted to the corner round which the goral had bolted. The shikari proposed that they should go straight, and that I should climb up to the forest and then come along in that, but I was far too keen to go this

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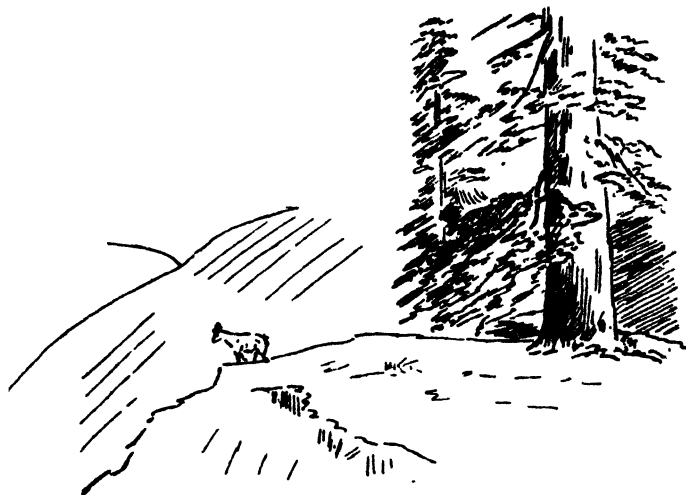
round and signified that I would follow them. All went well except on one or two occasions when I spread-eagled myself (how one gets into these weird positions I don't know—the body and arms seem to tie themselves up into knots!) and had to be hauled out. Twice the men overran the blood in their eagerness and had to try back. At last we got round the corner, and the trail took us up to the tree growth, then round another corner, where a tree had fallen across the ledge we were on. Here we lost the blood and spent some time hunting for it. I had my rifle in the hollow of my arm when—a rush in the deodar growth above, a dull grey shadow shot past me, and the goral was off down the khud back on its old tracks again. He passed close to the orderly, who saw the hanging leg and a large blotch of blood on the quarter. He yelled aloud in his excitement and has not been allowed out shooting with me since. Back again we went, and I made for a big craggy rock projecting from a spur and hanging sheer over a precipice, from which I thought I might be able to see the beast. All below me was, however, quiet and tenantless, the precipitous rocky slope lying bathed in a brilliant sunlight, and as it was warming up by now I had little hope of finding the goral in the open unless he fell. After searching every spot I was able to, I returned to where I thought the men would be and found them right enough,

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sitting down gossiping! Oh! how the native loves to sit! To my excited questions they replied that there was no blood in the direction he had gone, and so it was useless to look for him. I could not make it out at first, but I soon saw that the blood having ceased to flow, the patch on the flank would quickly dry in the sun, and there would be no further stains left. I now began to realize that for the novice at this kind of shooting the goral was not going to be so easy to bag as I had imagined. I had no knowledge of the lie of the land and less of the habits of the beast. I had been told that a wounded or frightened animal invariably made for the worst possible country, and the chance of finding him there is very small. I made the men hunt about for another hour and then had to give it up. It was very annoying, and I could not help thinking of the sufferings of the poor brute, which I thought at the time would never live after the large amount of blood he had lost, we having seen the grass in places quite sodden with it. It was a hot tramp back on what I believe was meant to be a path, but it was entirely overgrown where it did not consist of naked rock. And yet it was enjoyable. The valleys and the glorious mountains all bathed in a flood of sunlight were magnificent, and one felt that the crowded city and civilization were far, very far from one that morning. The mountain air was beautifully fresh, and the birds trilled and

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carolled sweetly on all sides, whilst oft and anon from some woody glen far below the sweet notes of the cuckoo would vibrate tremulously on the hot, fragrant air. Men were sent out to search the foot of the precipice, but without result, and a heavy



Goral on the look-out.

storm coming on washed out all the blood-stains. So ended my first experience of goral-shooting, and the loss of a good head was due to over-confidence, want of knowledge of the elementary principles of the sport, and last, but not least, bad shooting. But the broad road of failure will often show the bypath to success, and this I found later on to be the truth in my case.

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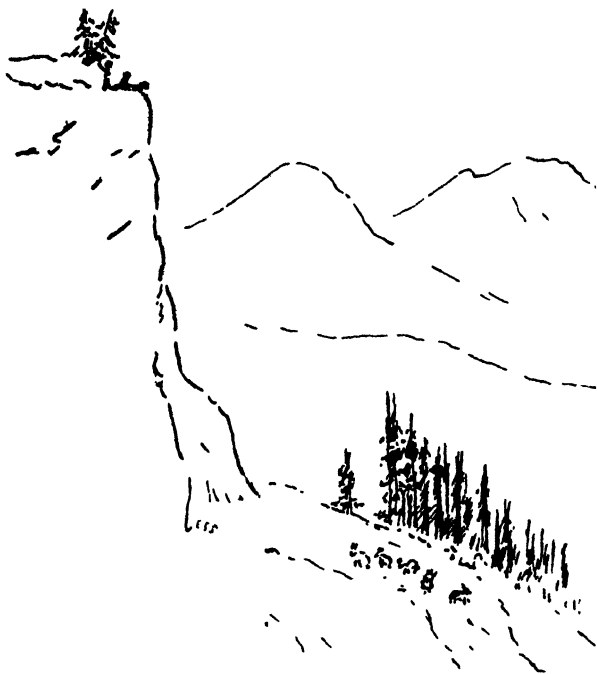
I had better luck on another occasion, though I was far from happy whilst taking my shot.

The sun had not risen as I left the tiny wooden bungalow I was occupying. The semicircle of snowy mountains which closed in and constricted my horizon lay cold and sharp against the pale lemon-yellow sky, and the near forest-clad ranges glowered gloomy and black with the shades of night still upon them. It was early October and bitterly cold, and I was in hopes of meeting a bear on his way home from his stolen repast in the fields. We tramped along the narrow six-foot path for a mile and then turned sharp up the hill-side through some young deodar growth. Beautiful little trees are the young deodar, with their graceful feathery rosettes of bright green needles and their slender, tapering, drooping branches reaching to the ground, forming so many perfect Christmas trees such as would gladden the heart of any English child to behold. As we brushed through them they showered drops of dew upon us, and a cold drenching it proved at that hour in the morning.

Up, up we climbed by a devious way known only to our shikari, and an hour passed in this fashion. As I was seriously meditating calling a halt to recover breath, we suddenly left the tree growth and reached a short, grassy, rock-bestrewn area, which, with a gradual rise, terminated suddenly in a steep precipice. The shikari raised

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his hand and halted. He then wormed his way on his stomach to the edge and made a careful search below him. A move of one hand and I



“ Away below, some thousand feet, I saw some goral.”

prepared to join him. I got to his side in absolute silence and, fixing myself in a good position, looked over the edge. Away below, some thousand feet beneath, was a green grass-covered hill, with scattered pine trees upon it. Amongst these trees

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the man signified that he had discovered goral. I looked for a long time, but could see nothing. With the glasses I was, however, able to pick them up, six in all, but so remarkably similar in colouring to their surroundings that it entirely beat me how the man could have seen them with the naked eye. A whispered consultation was held, the outcome of which was that we decided to see which way they were feeding before we took any further steps to get at them. The hill upon which they were formed a spur jutting out from the precipice over which we were spying, and if they should elect to follow up the spur they would come within 120 yards or so of our position and be directly below us. This is exactly what they most obligingly did.

We lay there for two hours, the goral feeding upwards very slowly and often stopping to have playful butting matches, rearing upon their hind legs for all the world like a lot of tame village goats. Or two younger members would occasionally start a scrambling and leaping match, bounding down the steepest piece of rock face they could find, and climbing up it again with marvellous agility. Daring little beggars, these youngsters, and carry on just like young goats. There was one fair-sized head in this flock, or so it appeared to me ; and one has rather to trust to one's own discernment and judgment in this matter, since the prime object of one's shikari is to endeavour to get you to shoot

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at the first animal which comes within decent range, be it a buck or doe.

At the end of two hours the animals had got right below us, and were preparing to take up their quarters amongst the rocks for the day, in a spot which they were evidently in the habit of passing the midday siesta in. So close to the precipice face had they come that I found that I should have to change my position and lean farther over the edge to get a shot at the buck at all. I tried to do this in two or three ways, without attaining that feeling of ease which I wished. It is extraordinary how alarming such a position feels. With one's chest and both arms projecting over a precipice edge, and encumbered in addition with a rifle that has to be brought to the shoulder, one has the sensation that the whole body is sticking out into space, and a very uncanny sensation this is. You have only to try it yourself at the edge of the nearest cliff to experience what I felt that morning, and have often felt since, though one certainly gets hardened to such positions after a certain amount of Himalayan shooting.

With a strong feeling of certainty upon me that I should miss unless I had extraneous aid, I made the shikari cling on to my legs, he taking one whilst the tiffin man took the other. Thus supported behind I gingerly shoved myself forward, pushed the rifle muzzle over the precipice

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edge, and proceeded to cautiously follow it myself. It seemed to require a tremendous lot of my body to follow that rifle, much more than I had



With the men clinging to my legs I pushed myself out over the precipice.

imagined or at all liked. I think I have had few as unpalatable situations as I then found myself in. Looking over 300 feet or more of sheer rocky precipice, with the only safety against

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a drop being one's trust in two men one had never set eyes upon a week or two before, is no joke, and so I found it. After the rifle muzzle had made several turns round the clock and various signals to the goats below, I just managed to keep it steady for a moment and pulled the trigger. I saw the goat bound into the air, the rest of the flock start forward, and I pushed backwards, feeling at the same time a strong drag upon each leg. I did not take my eye off the goral. The flock made straight for a rocky drop on the western face of the hill, and sprang down that like so many indiarubber balls. How they knew where to place their feet or where they were placing them, at the pace they went down it, I don't know. It was a most wonderful sight. My goat did not accompany them. He lay huddled up between two fair-sized rocks, where he had fallen after his last leap.

I withdrew myself from the cliff edge, and whilst I lay smoking a pipe and admiring and wondering at the marvellous panorama which lay unfolded before me, the shikari went down by a devious route and brought back the goral about an hour later.

Oh, the Himalaya! Can the recollections of such mornings as these ever fade from the memory?

Another occasion remains in my mind, for very different and particularly uncomfortable

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reasons. I had been out on the mountain-side with a couple of men for two hours or more without seeing a sign of the animals I was in search of. I was beginning to think that the morning was to be blank when suddenly as we neared the edge of a piece of deodar growth one of the men pointed ahead. I looked. There, standing on the top of a great rock the size of a cottage, was a black



“There, standing on a great rock, was a black goral.”

goral looking down at us. We had been moving very silently, and were in the shadows of the forest, and so were probably not plainly discernible to the animal. To us at the moment it appeared a marvel that he should stand there and watch us. The shot seemed so very easy as I brought up the rifle and with a hasty and, I fear, careless aim, fired. The animal appeared to leap over the far edge of the rock and disappear. We hurried forward and circumnavigated the rock, only

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to find emptiness; not a trace of the goral, and, after a minute search, no blood. At the far side of the rock we discovered a rocky spur jutting out for a couple of hundred yards, and this we carefully searched, finding, to our delight and relief, some blood near the far side. To have missed that shot, I thought, would have been absolutely disgraceful. The trail went over the edge of the spur, and then came back lower down one side of it, and took us out on to a nasty precipice face, the usual resort of a frightened or wounded goral. We followed slowly over very bad ground, but I hardly noted the difficult going, so keen was I to bring the wounded animal to bag. Suddenly the leading man stopped. He had lost the blood trail, and the minutest search failed to show us another drop—often the case with the small-bore rifles now in vogue. After spending nearly an hour in the fruitless search we tried a long cast forward, and finally came upon a beautiful grassy area of brilliant green turf inclined at an angle of 65° or so. We had crossed about half of this when the men stopped and said that the trail was completely lost, and that it would be of little use to go farther, as there was an impassable precipice beyond. In the excitement of the chase I had not noticed the country we were going over. I looked round and went quite cold. I was standing not very securely on the short turf, and below me, within 25 yards, the

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turf edge ceased—it fell away abruptly in a precipice whose depth I could not fathom from my position. Against the hard-cut edge I could only see the tops of trees on a ridge far below. I suddenly realized that one slip and nothing could save me from a short roll and drop into space. I felt that I should lose my head and go, if I stayed to think about the matter. Without a word I handed my rifle to one of the men, turned



“Others still on their legs.”

my back on the precipice, and went straight up that hill-side, using both hands and feet. Luckily there were not more than 80 yards or so to the top, and when I got up and over the crest amongst the rocks strewn there I lay down and panted my relief.

One other goral stalk lives in my memory, and for a somewhat unusual reason. Have you ever had a stalk spoilt by a favourite and keen sporting dog? If so, you will understand my

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feelings on the occasion in question. It happened in this way.

After several days' constant marching I arrived at a small wooden rest-house standing in the midst of an old forest of long-leaved pine. Jock, a favourite spaniel, and self had done our marches together, and strolled out each evening to pick up a pheasant, if we were in luck. Consequently, when I set out that morning on a goral stalk I gave strict orders that Jock was to be tied up at the back of the bungalow, and not to be brought near me; for I feared above all things to see the look of surprised reproach and appeal with which I knew his eyes would regard me if he saw me set off without him.

We had been out about an hour, and were toiling along the side of a rocky slope covered with sparse pines. Looking backwards as I rounded a large rock, a slight movement caught my eye some hundred paces or so to my rear. I stood still and looked. Surely, I thought, we could not have walked over a goral. No! I could see nothing. We continued on, and again as I came to a jutting rock I half turned, and the dark object again caught the corner of my eye. 'What on earth is it?' I thought. This time I halted, determined to satisfy myself, but I first got on the other side of the rock and peered round it. I must have waited a minute, and then slowly a small, dark form rose up from some

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short herbage, and the point was settled. To my amazement and disgust it was Jock. The stalker was being stalked! I signed to the shikari and he dropped back, his face bright and eager, a look which soon gave place to dismay as he caught sight of the dog. We went back, and in dumb silence but with furious gesticulations signed to Jock to go back home. For a long time he merely crouched with a beseeching look in his almost human brown eyes. At length I marched up, took him by the neck, and propelled him forward in the required direction: and he went slowly, very slowly, but he went. After watching him for some time, we turned and continued on our way. I shot a few glances back now and then, but saw no more of the dog. It must have been an hour or more later when I took an easy and looked about me. As I glanced back I felt sure that I saw a dark shadow drop into some ferns. At the same moment I heard a 'hist' behind me. I turned abruptly and, crouching low, made for the shikari. As I reached him I saw away down the hill-side some dark forms, some in repose beneath a great rock, others still on their legs. With ordinary care the stalk should be an easy one, and we at once commenced it. About half the distance was covered, and now only some 200 yards lay between me and my quarry. Suddenly I heard a slight scrambling noise behind me. Even as I turned

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I realized that our trouble was to be for nothing. Jock was scrambling along the hill-side in frantic excitement. I made an effort to stop him. I might as well have talked to a blank wall. Seeing the futility of it, I commenced a hurried forward movement in the direction of the goral. Barking my shins, swearing at Jock under my breath, and risking a bad fall, I got down about 50 yards of that hill-side, and then a scurrying shadow passed me and gave tongue. 'Tally ho! forrard away'! yelled Jock. But I pulled up. Jumping and rolling, slithering and sliding, that dog got over the most impossible ground in full cry after the goral, a cry which rose to a frenzied shriek as he saw the flock jump to their feet and race off. Long after they and he had disappeared that appalling pandemonium continued, and when we finally joined him it was on the brink of one of those impossible precipices, the goral's favourite retreat. Up and down the edge of this ran Jock, for he could not get down, and that dog was actually crying with rage, vexation, and mortification.

I had not the heart to whip him.





CHAPTER IV

The Himalayan stags—The hangul or Kashmir stag and Shou or Sikkim stag—Beautiful trophies—Confusing nomenclature—Appearance of Kashmir stag—Antlers—Differs from the red deer—Habitat—Habits—Stalking—Best time to stalk—Size of antlers as compared with red deer—Improvement of red deer trophies—Protection of Kashmir stags—Aforetime slaughter—Call of the stag—Feeding—Tracks—The glorious antlered Sikkim stag—The sportsman's desire—Habitat—Antlers—Size—Habits—On the Bhutan frontier—Told round a camp fire—Temptation—Determine to try for the great stag—A Bhutan valley—Luxuriant growth—Mist, miasma, and malaria—Toilsome work—Tracks of the great stag—Fail to see a stag—Retrace our steps.

THE HIMALAYAN STAGS

THERE are two very fine deer in the Himalaya, one the hangul or Kashmir stag (*Cervus cashmirianus*), well known to Kashmir sportsmen, the other the far less well-known Sikkim stag (*Cervus affinis*).

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Beautiful trophies the males of these deer carry, the latter perhaps amongst the finest, if not the finest, to be found in the deer tribe. Weeks of arduous stalking would be royally repaid by such a reward.

The Kashmir stag is commonly known to hill sportsmen as the barasingh, an unfortunate and confusing nomenclature, since the true barasingh is the swamp deer (*Cervus duvaucelli*) of the plains of India. The Kashmir animal is a close relative of the red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) of Europe, approximating to it both in colour and antlers. In the winter season the coat is brownish or greyish, being reddish in the summer months. The hair is thick on the neck, being long and shaggy beneath, and very tough. The horns have six or seven points, eight having been reported. The antler differs from that of the red deer in having a more curved beam with the brow tine shorter than the one above it, whilst the chief tine of the surroyals points inwards. As to measurements, 48 inches was obtained by Colonel A. E. Ward in the Sind Valley, and heads of $47\frac{1}{2}$ inches are on record; 44-45 inches would probably be all that is obtainable nowadays. The plate shows the head of this fine stag.

The hangul stands about 4 feet to 4 feet 6 inches, length 7- $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and weighs about 450-500 lb. It is well known to the sportsmen of



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Kashmir, since its chief habitat is in the mountains of Kashmir, Chamba and neighbourhood.

As is commonly the case with most true wild deer, the Kashmir stag lives in the forest, being found at elevations of 8500 feet to 12,000 feet, coming down lower during the heavy snow-falls in the winter time. At the latter period the stags are to be found in herds with the hinds, whilst during the summer the old stags are usually solitary and very difficult to stalk, the younger ones keeping together in small parties. In fact, the only time to really make sure of obtaining a head is during the rutting season (October–November), and in early spring, in March, before the horns are shed. Stalking in early autumn, just before the rutting season, is fascinating, though arduous and disappointing work, as the animals are at such times only to be found in the thick forest, where it is difficult to approach them. Relatively the heads of the Kashmir stag are proportionately heavier than the common run of the red deer, and it is perhaps a moot point whether the latter would not be greatly improved if a portion of the deer 'forests' of Scotland were planted up, thus enabling the deer to spend a part of the year in tree-covered areas, an environment which their ancestors must have at one time enjoyed.

The Kashmir stag is now closely protected in the Kashmir State, and in Chamba also, and

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there is consequently considerable hope that this fine animal will now escape that fate of extermination with which it was so sorely threatened a short while back. At any rate the appalling slaughter which used to take place during the winter season in the old days is almost a thing of the past ; for before protection came in the villagers used to turn out in their hordes to hunt the stags in winter, when they had descended into the valleys to escape the heavy snow on the mountains, massacring the poor brutes in hundreds.

The proper shooting season now is in October and November, the antlers being shed in late March and April, and the new horns reaching maturity about October. Throughout November the stags may be heard calling, emitting a rather shrill squeal, quite a different note from the deep roar of the red deer, and can be stalked at this season with fair ease. The period of gestation is about six months, being shorter than that of the red deer, a natural history fact which applies to other animals, including insects, in the Himalaya when compared with closely related European species. The youngsters are born in April, and are spotted, though occasionally the spots would appear to be almost absent.

This deer, as I have said, inhabits thick forest, feeding early in the open grassy dells and glades,

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and drinking in the early morn and evening at the tinkling mountain streams. On several occasions I have seen small parties of this deer drinking in this manner, but it has never been my fortune to track down an old stag, though on the few occasions on which I have had the opportunity it has not been for want of trying. The tracks of this deer are very like those of the sambhar, which I have already depicted in *Jungle By-Ways*.

The other deer to which I have alluded is the glorious antlered Sikkim stag. Not many of us have had the good fortune to stand face to face with this monarch, a very king amongst stags. Many of us have looked with envy at the graceful and sweeping trophy which he carries, and sighed a fervent prayer that fate or our good fortune would one day find us on the tracks of this grand stag. I have never had the luck myself to see the animal in his native wilds, though I have been more fortunate than the bulk of Anglo-Indian shikaris in once having the opportunity of trying for him.

The Sikkim stag or shou is an inhabitant of the eastern side of the Himalaya, being found in some of the Bhutan valleys and in the upper part of the Chumbi Valley—now well known, owing to the Tibet Expedition of 1903-4, or

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'Mission,' as it was facetiously known officially. The animal is also found in the San-po Valley, near Lhasa. The antlers are enormous, measuring as much as 54 or 55 inches in length; there are five tines, a sharp bend occurring in the beam at the third, the portion above being inclined inwards, as are also the tips. I show in the frontispiece a plate of this magnificent head. The colouration of this deer is rather similar to that of the Kashmir stag, but it is larger, standing $4\frac{1}{2}$ to nearly 5 feet at the shoulder, and being nearly 8 feet in length.

It was when I was junior in service, new to the Himalaya, and astonishingly ignorant, from a shikari's point of view, of the natural history and habits of the animals which occupy these glorious mountains, that I had my first and, alas! my only chance of trying for the great Sikkim stag. I was camped on a high crest on the frontier of Sikkim and Bhutan. North-east of me the mountain-side dropped away into a deep valley in Bhutan. Sitting round the camp fire one evening with the Forest Ranger and some of the local villagers of a neighbouring Lepcha hamlet, I heard for the first time, from the lips of men who had themselves seen the animal, of the great Sikkim stag. The deer of the plains I had some acquaintance with. The Kashmir stag I knew nothing of, outside a Natural History book, though of course I knew his

The Himalaya and their Big Game

near relative the red deer. From the glowing tales of the men, which lost nothing, you may be sure, in their relation, I gathered that the animal in question was both the most beautiful, the proudest, and the most glorious of all the deer tribe. I had two holidays in front of me. I do not know or say that it would have made much difference if the days had not been holidays. When one is on the far frontiers of the Empire mere mundane affairs do not loom so important as when nearer the centres of government! Also at that period, as is still the case for that matter, neither Bhutan nor its inhabitants had any great love for the British Raj, and the country was *un pays interdit*. I was myself to have a nasty experience with a cross-grained gentleman of this State, but this was a year later. Now, my imagination fired by the tales of the wondrous beauty of the great stag, I determined to have a try for him, two of the Lepchas volunteering the information that they knew where one might be found. I arranged for the packing up of a flying camp and departure at dawn the next day.

By midday we had dropped down into a gloomy tree-filled valley, the trees festooned with giant creepers, orchids, and great ferns, hanging pendent from branch and stem. A dense mist enshrouded everything, and an effluvia rose from the sodden, matted undergrowth crying aloud of miasma and malaria. After partaking of copious draughts

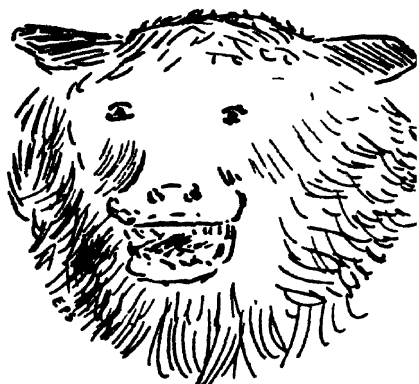
Stalks in the Himalaya

of tea and quinine, I left the men to pitch the tiny camp, and set out with the Lepchas on a wearisome afternoon tramp. It was very thick in the forest, and what animals it contained were only apparent from the snapping of branches and twigs as they took a precipitate departure on our approach. We, or rather I, saw nothing.

The next two days were spent in toiling up hills, forcing our way through matted forest, or climbing up boulder-filled ravines and mountain torrents. On two occasions I was shown tracks of the great stag. I recognized them as deer, and should have taken them for large sambhar tracks. On each occasion we followed them to the bitter end, and long after the Lepchas had given up all hope of seeing the quarry who had left the impressions behind him. But we saw neither hoof nor antler of the Sikkim stag!

On the third day I breasted the mountain-side and recrossed the frontier, by no means cast down with my first experience of that alluring quest—the stalking of the great stag. I vowed to return with time and full equipment for a further pursuit.

Alas! The spirit was willing—the opportunity only was wanting.



PART II
THE BEARS



CHAPTER V

The Himalayan black bear—Charm of marching in the Himalaya—Preparations for march—Engaging bungalows—The Himalayan forest in autumn—An unexpected *contretemps*—The beautiful Tista Valley—Belated travellers—The globe-trotter and his ways—An afternoon climb for a bear—Face to face—We retreat—Death of the bear.

THE HIMALAYAN BLACK BEAR

THE great charm of the Himalaya is that, even whilst on the ordinary marches up to the shooting-grounds, there is so much to interest one. In fact, to many who quit the hill station for a trip into the 'beyond,' shooting is a secondary consideration, or

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may be entirely absent from the itinerary. The marches are undertaken for the pure luxury of being out in the 'Hills,' either alone or with one's own party, amongst their glorious solitariness. It would, perhaps, be difficult to find a higher meed of praise for these wonderful hills. But a tour into the mountains cannot be arranged at a moment's notice. Firstly, a large amount of kit and a considerable number of one's house servants will have to accompany one; next, tents will have to be provided unless there are Government bungalows on the route one proposes going. If the latter, rooms must be arranged for, on some routes weeks beforehand; otherwise one may arrive tired out after a long march to find the bungalow full, the kit piled in a heap outside, and one's servants sitting about with that resigned and crestfallen look which only the Indian servant can assume *à merveille* when he knows his sahib has made a mistake. How many of us have had to face this kind of thing—at one time or another!

Lastly, one must find out what provisions, if any, can be procured on the road in the way of milk, eggs, and fowls or meat, and grain for the servants.

The arrangements for such a tour are delightful, as one has all the anticipation, so often so much more enjoyable than the realization, in front of one. If I were asked, however, to name one form of enjoyment where the realization is as good as the

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anticipation, I think for pure unalloyed pleasure I would name a tour in the Himalaya. High praise, perhaps, but I think I shall find myself in good company in making this statement. One would arrange the route so as to have a march of eight or ten miles a day on each day one moves camp. This will be found quite enough for the



The coolies are despatched.

heavily laden coolies to accomplish. An early rise to see the snows on the circumscribed horizon, cold and grey in the early morning light ; a substantial breakfast, and then the final packing is finished and the coolies despatched. One gathers together the paraphernalia of the march, sees that the tiffin coolie is at hand and not departed in an opposite direction (not an unusual *contretemps* if he should have taken upon himself to think), and

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with pipe in mouth and alpenstock in hand one saunters down the sweet-scented path under the deodars, for a long enjoyable day in the open in an atmosphere which surely contains in it the elixir of life of the ancients, amidst scenery which is, perhaps, the much-sought-after Eldorado of the Middle Ages.

I have alluded to the fact that whilst in the Outer Himalaya, at any rate, bungalows have to be engaged beforehand. If not, there is every chance of finding all the rooms occupied and nothing for you but to sleep in the verandah or on the cold hill-side.

I remember an occasion when I made a double march, determined to risk the bungalow I was depending on for my night's shelter being empty. It was a risk, as I had no tent with me and it was late autumn. I had loitered on, the way, as the deodar forest is very, very beautiful at this season. I had only come up from the hot plains four days previously, and had marched each day since then, my outing being one of mixed duty and pleasure. Monal pheasant, bear, and a possible blue sheep formed part of the 'pleasure' portion of the trip I had in my mind's eye, and as I sat under a deodar tree consuming a light lunch I can well remember the feeling of absolute content that pervaded me.

I was up at some 8000 feet elevation, where the air has all the qualities of champagne. Around me



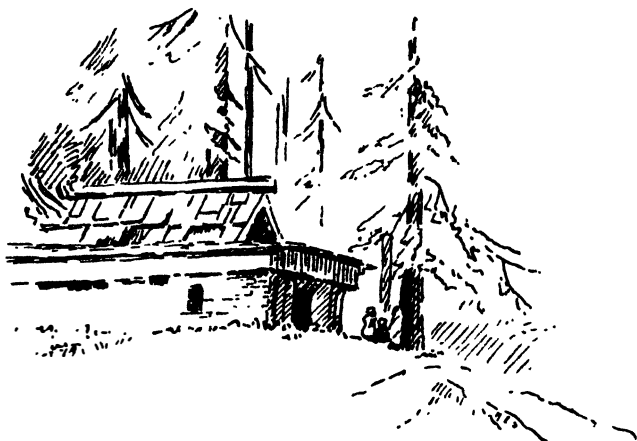
THE GIANT DODAR, OR GOD'S TREE, REARING ITS HEIGHT AGAINST
THE EVERLASTING SNOWS

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stretched the Himalayan forest—the Himalayan forest in autumn—and to anyone acquainted with it at this time of the year it would be unnecessary to explain further. Both in temperature and scenery this region is, perhaps, one of the finest of the Creator's corners of the earth. Around me stood giant deodar trees, interspersed with silver fir and spruce, for we are here near the upper limit of growth of the deodar. Clinging to the trunks of the monarchs is the Virginia creeper, the leaves now turning to brilliant crimson, whilst *rubus* and other undergrowth shrubs and plants have decked themselves in their autumn garb, and every little glade and bare hill-side is studded with the brilliant wild flowers of this season, amongst which well-known home species, such as the sun-kissed ragwort, take one's thoughts away from the beauty of this favoured region to the dear homeland. Through the tree stems great forest-clad mountains tower up heavenward, range upon range, till they finally meet the enormous masses of the snowy peaks. These latter are now veiled by soft, filmy clouds, the aftermath of the rainy season but recently over; this morning they stood sharp, clear, and glittering round a fourth of the horizon like some diamond diadem against a turquoise-blue setting. Can one ever forget such memories as these, or is it to be wondered at that when, tied to one's office desk in some far-distant, stifling, heat-sodden

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kutcherry (office) in the plains, one's thoughts take wing to the dearly-loved, fascinating Himalaya with a feeling of almost reverence? Little wonder that the great hills should have gathered round their aloof, lofty, snow-clad peaks the mysticism and legend and religion of ages!



I passed one of the small temples, or 'deotas.'

Much tobacco was offered to their sacred shrines before I bethought me that I had yet some miles to tramp, and with a sigh for the peaks that would be no longer with me for some days to come, for I was to descend into a valley to be lost among its devious windings during the next few marches, I set out on the interminable drop, drop, drop of the descent.

On my way down I passed one of the small temples, or 'deota' as they call them, of the

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hillmen. Quaint little places these, often embowered in giant deodar trees, a fit and grand setting to a place of worship.

The sun had dipped below a lofty ridge before I reached the valley, and night had fallen ere the twinkling of a small light told me the welcome news that the bungalow was near. I had completely forgotten that I had not secured a pass for one of the two rooms it contained. Tired and weary I was anticipating the pleasures of the bright fire and steaming cup of tea so soon to be mine.

The bungalow stood on a little cliff above the river, from which a thin white river mist was rising. As I approached I made out two fires in front of the house, and distinguished several figures moving about. My heart sank within me. Surely there were not other travellers here! Many must know the feelings of disgust which invade one at finding others occupying the bungalow one had hoped to have had to oneself. Persons who may wish to talk and be 'hail-fellow-well-met' with one and all that sort of thing, when all one wants is to be left alone to eat in one's own way, smoke in one's own way, and perhaps arrange or write up notes and impressions of the past day. Too soon on this occasion were my fears to receive confirmation.

'Two mem-sahibs and three sahibs in the bungalow, sahib; they say it is theirs, and they have a

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parwana from the district sahib for to-night.' Thus my Bearer with a note of evil joy in his voice. 'As if it mattered whether they have or have not a pass at this time of night,' I muttered. 'They're in possession, anyway. Bring some tea,' I briefly ordered.

'There is no hot water, sahib, and nothing is unpacked. We waited for your honour to arrive to tell us what to do.' Such is their aggravating way! 'One of the sahibs had a small tent pitched for you, as I told him you had not one with you,' he volunteered.

'Why the d—l didn't you put my things into it, then, and get dinner ready, you thundering idiot?' 'There was no *hukm* [order],' was the sulky reply!

The maddening answer of the East. When young and hot-blooded and foolish one kicks and rails against it and wastes a lot of good energy. As we grow older and acquire more experience, we learn, if wise, to be a philosopher.

I crept stealthily round to the tent, having no intention of announcing my arrival to the inmates of the bungalow. $3+2=5$, in a tiny two-roomed hut, about 18×12 all told! I sat in meditative silence in the little tent listening to the rain, which had come on, pattering on the outer fly of the roof, till the much-desired cup of tea made its appearance, vowing, not for the first time, that I'd take no more risks of this nature.

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On another occasion matters were reversed. It was in the beautiful and justly famed Tista Valley in the Eastern Himalaya, and I was in one of my own forest bungalows. The night had come on dirty and stormy and half a gale of wind drove up the river, rattling the corrugated iron sheeting of the roof and moaning round the sides of the house. It was bright and comfortable inside, and I was at dinner when I suddenly heard a well-known thud in the verandah—a coolie dropping his load. Then a clear English voice sounded aloft above the noise of the storm and the surging of the river. Confound it! Travellers, and at this time of night! The bungalow only contained two rooms, and my things were naturally littered over them both. I went out. Three dripping figures sat on three depressed hill ponies in the pouring rain, whilst half a dozen brawny, but appallingly odorous coolies were dumping their loads down on the verandah. The taller of the figures explained that they thought the bungalow would be empty, and so had come on from the one above, so as to do a double march. Could I take them in, or could I tell them of another bungalow to which they could go?

‘The next is nine miles down the river,’ I dryly remarked, ‘and on a night like this you’d probably find yourselves in the river before you got another mile.’ I had soon recognized my new arrivals for globe-trotters. No Anglo-Indian would have

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marched with the sky as ominous as it had been that afternoon, unless dire necessity compelled the step. The tiniest of tiffin baskets and their bedding rolls plus immaculate leather dressing-cases, kit-bags, and gun-cases, was all that had accompanied them, so far as I could see. There was no sign of the most important part of the kit (to an old traveller)—the cook and cooking-pots and his boxes of stuff. 'Where are the rest of the men?' I asked of one of the coolies. 'Oh, they are a long way behind, sahib, and won't be here for hours yet.' 'No, nor at all to-night,' I retorted.

Knowing the coolies of these parts, as I did, I felt pretty sure that they were at the present moment seated round the fire at the half-way drinking bothy, eating, smoking, and drinking, whilst their sahibs' things were piled up in an outhouse somewhere, to await fairer weather in the morning for further transport. And who could blame them on such a wild night!

I took my new acquaintances in, and as is always the case, once one has got over the feeling of insular aloofness and preference for one's own company to that of strangers, characteristic of our race, we had a very jolly evening, the cook, as is ever the case in India, rising to the occasion, and supplementing my own dinner in the marvellous manner they appear to be always capable of in the East. My visitors consisted of a man of some

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repute from home, a friend of his and his English valet. Why will men bring English valets to India? On this occasion he and his valet had to occupy the same room, and the same bed for aught I knew, for there were but two beds in the bungalow, and I took the other man into my room.

To the Anglo-Indian, it is a source of never-failing amazement the way the globe-trotter (or some globe-trotters) goes through the country, expecting to find inns and hostels at every ten miles or so, as at home. The questions put to me that evening roused me to a pitch of incredulous surprise. The party were firmly under the impression, or appeared to be so, that the people in Darjiling had been yarning on the difficulties of the trip they proposed doing, and they had steadily refused to believe that they would not be able to buy as much to eat in the way of meat, fowls, eggs, and milk as they wanted to, *en route*. As they were going to climb some of the mountains in my own district, I was able to finally open their eyes on this point.

Another fact I have already mentioned is the awful nuisance a European valet is in India, when the beaten tracks of the hotels are left behind. Once out in the jungle he is usually merely an encumbrance. He must be given a room or tent, or share one with one of the party. Unless you are prepared to have a separate table for him, he must also sit at table with his master. In camp one has

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not usually time for a double set of meals, and the sahib, even though he be a servant, has to be served and attended by the native servants in a similar manner as his master, because he is a sahib. The native servants cook each his own meal, and they live in separate outhouses of such a nature that no sahib—though a servant—could occupy them.

Since an excellent native valet can be picked up in India and one who will be of real use, as he will know the language, it seems the acme of stupidity to bring an English servant into the country at all, and certainly is so if any camp work is intended to be undertaken.

Another trouble these particular visitors left me was due to their coolies. In order to do the double marching they had offered their coolies two rupees a day, the rate being a fourth of this amount only. Consequently after they had left next morning a deputation from my own men arrived, pointing out that they also wanted two rupees, or they would be leaving for their homes. The Majesty of British Law had to be put into force ere I brought them to a reasonable frame of mind, but it falls hard on the Indian official to have his daily work upset in this manner, owing to a little thoughtlessness. I must say, however, that one gets a great deal of pleasure out of the globe-trotter at times, and when one does meet them, and gets to know them out in

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camp, what a glorious fresh whiff of the Old Country it is they bring with them, and how nice to talk to those who have left its shores but a few short weeks before when one may have been absent several years !

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Following on my discomfiture at finding the little bungalow full, as above described, I spent a comfortable night in the little tent. It was a rainy one, and I was luckier than the three men in the bungalow. Their room leaked like a sieve, and two of them passed most of the dark hours hauling their mattresses round and round in an unavailing effort to escape the persistent drip, drip from the roof. The third man, he who had kindly pitched the tent for me, had better luck ; he had won the only bed (they had tossed for it), and slept in comfort beneath it !

After several days' marching in the valley, I arrived about midday at a bungalow situated in a beautiful deodar forest. The wood dropped down a thousand feet below the bungalow to a ravine, and then ascended the opposite mountain-side, giving way on the upper slopes to silver fir and spruce. Above this latter the hill rose bare to the crest, and some newly fallen snow lay upon this bare patch. In the afternoon I was engaged upon some work, when an orderly rushed in and excitedly said that they could see a bear

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on the hill-side. Seizing the glasses I hurried out into the verandah. The men appeared to be keenly scanning the forest opposite.

'There, sahib, there he is,' and they pointed across the ravine. I looked, but could make nothing out of the dense forest. 'Above the jungle, sahib. Above the jungle in the snow.' I gazed up to the crest and made out a tiny black speck on the white expanse. 'That can't be a bear,' I exclaimed! But, sure enough, as soon as I brought the glasses on him, a bear it proved to be. The wonderful power of the human vision as possessed by the hill-men has to be tested, on an occasion such as this, to be believed, for no city-bred man could have made anything out of the black speck I was now again looking at. I took out my watch. Half-past two. There would be just time to get up there before dark, if we made a push for it, and though I had come a good many miles that morning, I determined to have a try for that bear.

We were off in two minutes, and ran down the thousand feet to the ravine, by a devious footpath, as fast as our feet would take us. The climb up the opposite mountain-side was a stiff piece of work. In the thick forest we could see nothing, and we had nothing to guide us, save our knowledge of the altitude at which the different species of tree grew. At the bottom the deodar were mingled with the long-leaved pine. On leaving these, we went up through almost pure deodar, with here and there

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a beautiful light-foliaged blue pine. Glorious was it in the scented deodar forest, with the afternoon light glancing through the foliage and throwing chequered patches on to the autumn-tinted undergrowth. No time had we, however, for observations on the beauty of our surroundings this afternoon. It was hard heel-and-toe work, straight up the hill-side by the shortest tracks we could discover, and a very long hour it seemed before we left the deodar behind us and got amongst the upper silver and spruce. Here caution was necessary, as the bear might have left the snow and come down into the forest again. We had given up the question as to what he could have been doing on the snow at that hour. Digging for roots or some tasty morsel unexpectedly covered over by the snow, I imagined.

As silently as our shortening breath would allow, we approached the last straggly trees and looked out. The snow was still above us, and, what we had not calculated upon, since it was invisible from the bungalow, there was a swelling in the open ground, preventing our seeing the lower edge of the snow. Carefully we scanned the bare hill-side in front and to left and right. Nothing in the shape of a bear was visible. We climbed carefully and gingerly upwards, and before reaching the top of the swelling turned to see if the bungalow was visible. We had left orders that a white sheet was to be waved at about the time we should reach

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the upper edge of the forest if the bear was still visible to them. The bungalow was not to be seen, however, as we were not high enough ; so we had to do without that assistance. Leaving the third man behind, the shikari and myself crawled up in line till we reached the top. The ground fell away here into a little channel or deep furrow, and rose again beyond, but nowhere on the snow on the other side could we see the bear.

The shikari maintained that we had borne too much to the right. I held the opinion that we were too much to the left, but I deferred to him and was rewarded. We dropped into the depression, and moved to the left along it and then crawled up slantingly on to the crest. The light was rapidly going, and looking back the forest below lay in darkness. Our elevation and the snow were responsible for what light remained. Looking over the edge, we got a sudden shock. We were not yet on the crest, the latter was still some forty yards on, and between it and us, not twenty yards away, was the bear, with his back to us, looming enormous in the fading light, and delving and scratching at something in the ground, the snow being heaped up all round him. What he was endeavouring so earnestly to get at we were destined never to discover.

Glancing at my companion, I saw him unloosing his kukri, and I took a sight on the bear without more ado and fired. He appeared to

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spin round on the instant, and raised himself with a snarling growl on his hind legs. I had rapidly recharged the Lee-Metford, and, aiming at the neck, I fired again. The bear fell forward, and half rolled, half tumbled down the hill towards us. We had only time to spring apart as he went between us. The shikari aimed a blow at him with his kukri, but missed. As I sprang back I stupidly fired again and missed him clean, the bullet hitting a piece of rock and ricocheting off with a hum. I turned and ran up the hill, reloading as I went, the shikari making off in the opposite direction. The bear had brought up a few yards from where we had been standing when I first fired, and was growling ferociously, spinning round in an apparently vain effort to catch a hind leg in his mouth. Having got about twenty paces away, I turned and watched Bruin, under the impression that he was done for. Suddenly he sprang to his feet and getting on to his hind legs, and still growling, came for me open-mouthed. I had time to see that a bullet, probably the one I had thought was a clean miss, had broken the poor beast's lower jaw, which was hanging down. He dropped to his four feet again to my shot, and again I bolted up the hillside, puffing and panting, and nearly at my last gasp. On the crest I turned with the sudden and uncomfortable remembrance that I had now come to my last cartridge, for I felt sure there could not have been more than five in the magazine.

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Luckily I was spared the penalty of this stupidity, for Bruin lay still and black on the snow, and after peppering him with a few snowballs, we went up and stood over him ; for the shikari rapidly rejoined me, as soon as he saw the beast drop. He was a fine big bear, with a good coat.

It was by now rapidly getting dark, and, whistling for the other man, we quickly piled snow over the carcass to protect it till the morning. It was a bad tramp back, and I was dog-tired when I reached the lighted bungalow and a blazing fire. I took a vow once more, on my way back, that I would never face bear again with a Lee-Metford. The weapon has no stopping power in it, and is useless for bear. Only the soft-nosed bullet, which I luckily had with me, probably saved me from a mauling from this gentleman, and I considered that I was well out of the affair.





CHAPTER VI

Shooting black bear—Bad luck with bear—Habits—A crop depredator—Eavesdropping—A family party—Flight of materfamilias and offspring—Gluttony rewarded—Appearance of bear—Powers of sight, smell, and hearing—Fierceness of—Methods of shooting—Distribution of.

I DO not think I know any other animal of the Indian fauna about whom men, shikaring men, hold such different opinions as the black bear (*Ursus torquatus*). Some say he is an arrant cur, others think him plucky enough. Some will tell you that he is the easiest of all animals to find and to shoot when found, others hold diametrically opposite views, and maintain that the beast is fierce and savage, and will charge home when wounded. Perhaps a proportion of these very contrary opinions may be held to be due to luck, that element of chance

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which enters so largely into sport, and, in my experience, into bear-shooting in the Himalaya as much as in any other department of hill-shooting. Also, so much depends on how you tackle him! Certain it is that some men have the most extraordinary luck with bears, I mean both in seeing and in bagging bears, whilst others, and good, keen shikaris, seem to be cursed by a fate which leads them into areas where bears have been, but have left before they arrived.

We must all of us have noted this curious fact about bear-shooting. I know a friend of my own who worked hard for several months, spending all the odd hours he could get (he was a soldier-man, out of the station), sitting up whole nights on the look-out for bears, and to my certain knowledge he did not get a single bear that season. And yet he was no mean shikari—certainly his luck that year was exceptionally and astonishingly bad. An adverse fate, combined with the cunning of those bears, which was something wicked, dogged his footsteps and sent him back empty. He saw bears, but never more than a passing flash in the undergrowth of the tall oak or deodar forest, or in the scrub jungle.

To quote two instances. After a good large tea he took a flask and some cold provender, and set off down the hill to a village below, near where he was told a bear, or perhaps two, would come out to feed on a crop in a tiny terraced

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field. He took up his position, sat in the dark for a couple of hours, and then the moon rose, and he spent the night in that little field—a glorious June night in the Himalaya. And they are so wonderful at night, these mighty mountains. The silence, save for the occasional chirrup of a tree cricket or other insect, the humming drone of a heavy, night-flying beetle, or the sudden squawk of a night bird, is so impressively intense, and the snows beneath the pale rays of the moonlight look so majestic and yet so remote, as to cause the least thoughtful man among us to pause and marvel at the wonderful mysteries nature can unfold to those who care to go and seek them. My friend saw no bear, but enjoyed his long vigil. The very next day word was brought us that a bear was in the jungle below. We seized our rifles, ran along the path beneath the deodars, and then dropped down through the undergrowth, and stationed ourselves in such positions as to be able to command each a narrow path running through the undergrowth. There we stayed for nearly two hours watching the bird life and the insect life and the small animal life around us. Squirrels played about in the trees, the shy woodpecker encircled a deodar stem near myself and sounded the bark up each side, to see if there were any wood-boring grubs beneath it, whilst gaily-coloured butterflies floated in the sunny glades

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on brilliant, diaphanous wing. My companion was one of those men who thoroughly enjoy the jungle and all and every kind of life it contains. Though this had all the appearance of another blank, he was perfectly happy watching and taking in all the beauty of life around him. At



He gets up into the forest trees.

the end of our long vigil an orderly came up and said that he had met a herdsman who told him that he had seen the bear pass up the hill just before the sahibs had taken up their position. We could not verify this statement, as the undergrowth was too thick to have permitted him to have left any of his tell-tale tracks behind him.

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The Himalayan black bear is an omnivorous feeder and a real curse to the villager, whose fields of maize and buck-wheat and other cereals he pilfers nightly as they come into bearing, and whose mulberry, apricot, and walnut trees he climbs to help himself from in season. At other times of the year he gets up into the forest trees and devours their fruits and berries and seeds, and it is common to find him in oak trees when the acorns are mature. In fact, the lucky men are constantly potting him in such positions—for he is an expert climber, his claws being more fitted for this purpose than for digging like his cousins, the red bear of the higher hills and the black bear of the plains. But he is not only a fruit and seed eater. Many wish he confined his depredations to this kind of food or to the insects, termites, ants, beetles, and the like, even scorpions, which do not come amiss to him. He is a carnivorous animal as well, and will kill sheep and goats and deer, and even a cow or a pony at times, when he is more than usually ravenous. It is this propensity, combined with his other thieving habits, which makes him so heartily loathed and hated and feared by the native. He will eat carrion, and, of course, loves honey. Another thing, he is a great roamer or traveller, and changes his home with the variation in the position of his larder. When the succulent crops his soul loveth are ripening he makes his

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temporary habitation in some neighbouring copse or thick piece of forest, or in a cave, should one be handy.

Similarly he will select his position when the fruit trees of the village are bearing their sweet loads. In the autumn, as the seeds and fruits of the forest trees ripen, he seeks the larger forests, and gorges himself on them ; for he is a gross feeder, and crams himself to distension whenever he gets the chance. It is this habit of gross stuffing—which has an analogy in the small school-boy, by the way—which makes him leisurely in his movements on his way back from his meal. I have noted that he is by no means so slow when going to the feast. Perhaps he always has at the back of his mind the haunting fear that another of his kind will be there before him, and he knows the gluttonous habits of his species only too well !

It is also well known that Bruin resents being disturbed, and more especially when on his way back to his noonday siesta. It is on such occasions that the wretched, usually unarmed native, meeting him on a narrow path in dense undergrowth, has such a poor time of it, and is probably left behind on the path for dead after a very rough handling. It is also usually in such situations that the shikaring sahibs who have been mauled and at times killed in the past have met their fate. Whether this may be the case or no,

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I am not one of those who preach that Bruin is an animal to be despised or who can be shot as easily as a tom-cat on a garden wall. Of course, if the hunter is in a safe situation, where the bear has not a dog's chance of either getting at him or of getting away before his opponent has had several pot shots at him, allowing for a miss or two, there is nothing to be said, save the natural question, perhaps, is this sport and do poor Bruin's actions reflect seriously on his character? And with all his pilfering habits, and perhaps because of them, he is such an amusing animal to watch! He is so desperately earnest about it all, and knows so well what he wants.

Have you ever followed him from his siesta spot in the forest down to a field of maize, or to an apricot tree full of ripe fruit? I eavesdropped on a bear once, and it proved a most entertaining and interesting sight. He leaves the copse or piece of forest in a casual manner, without any of that preliminary 'scouting and scenting' which you will see many other wild animals indulge in. Neither tiger nor leopard will march out into the open without first carefully scanning their surroundings. Not so Bruin. He blunders out of the jungle as if the whole place belonged to him, or rather as if he did not much care whether it did or did not, as long as he was left alone to carry out his object.

He rolls down the hill with that curious,

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lumbering, ungainly action which has such a tendency to make one laugh aloud. Now he turns aside and pushes his snout beneath a rock, and takes a few deep breaths to see whether there is an ant-heap there from which he can take in a succulent mouthful. Almost with a sigh for the dainty that is not, he pursues his way, making scarcely any noise, for all his ungainly method of progression, save when he rustles through a more than ordinary dense piece of undergrowth. Now he halts, and his head sways from side to side in the manner you may see a bear perform in his cage at the Zoo for minutes at a time. Is he nosing the air for foreign and inimical scents, or is he merely endeavouring to catch a whiff of his favourite food whose near vicinity he is aware of?

Suddenly he stands upon his hind legs and looks around for a few seconds. Why he did this I could not say. That he was unaware of my near proximity I was prepared to vouch for. I had studied my ground much too carefully beforehand to have any fears on that head. My whole object was to watch, not to interfere with him in any way, and though I had a rifle with me, I had no intention of paying for the knowledge I wanted with a bullet, if it could be avoided. My friend dropped on his feet again, sighed noisily, and rolled on, reaching, in a brief space, a low wall surrounding the little ter-

The Bears

raced field of maize. He was too near now to bother about further prospecting or to care whether there was another of his kind near or not. He sprang or rolled over the wall into the field, an eight-foot drop, with incredible lightness, and with scarcely a sound, and was in the midst of his loved food. The stuff was thick, and I lost all but the top of his back in it,



He came to a low wall.

so I in my turn crept to the wall and knelt behind it with my head raised so as to just look over.

I heard noise enough now. Something had evidently gone wrong, for Bruin appeared to be smashing down the big thick stems of the plant at a much faster rate than he could possibly eat the cobs. Then I heard a growl, and made sure that I had been seen. I brought up the rifle on to the top of the wall and gazed intently into the maize. The row still went on, and a

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violent commotion appeared to be taking place amongst the stems near the centre of the little field. I was wild to see what was taking place, and was seriously thinking of dropping over the wall and crawling through the stalks, when suddenly a round black ball lurched out of the crop, ran itself violently against the base of the wall, yelped, turned sharp to the right, and made off for all it was worth along the base of the wall, and disappeared over the crest of the hill-side.

By this time I was shaking with laughter, for the round ball was a young bear, and his look of surprise and disgust as he rebounded after his hard contact with the wall was as ludicrous as was my astonishment at his quickness in grasping the situation and making off along the base of the wall, instead of trying futilely to climb it. I glanced to the right, and I was still further from an explanation. Up out of the field, some 50 yards away, a bear was climbing, seemingly in a great hurry, and still farther to the right a second black ball was making off quite mute, and going at a pace which made me open my eyes. Whilst I was still wondering a loud sucking noise came from the field below me, and I jumped to the only conclusion I have yet arrived at as to the solution of the tableau I had had the luck to assist at. A mother and her cubs must have been dining in the maize patch when my friend rolled off the wall into it. He,

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after the gluttonous fashion of the bear (and other animals), when he finds a large amount of succulent and favourite food round him, grabs a bit here and there till he arrives well in the middle of the feast, at least I have seen them do this on the occasions I have had the opportunity of carefully watching them, and this is what my friend appeared to do. Suddenly he ran up against and discovered the presence of the family party, perhaps his own family, for all I knew. Anyway, on this occasion he did not wish for companions at this particular feast, and must have made his wishes pretty plain by the rapid manner in which the family beat a retreat. I fairly ached with silent laughter as the position of affairs dawned upon me, and I watched the mother bear slowly and lugubriously betaking herself up the hill-side to the jungle above with a mournful look back every now and then. My friend was making hideous noises, indicative of great gastronomic delight, in the field, and there I left him as the west was flaming red and the shades of night were falling.

The young ones, two in number, are born generally in the spring, and are blind for a couple of weeks or so after birth, the period of gestation being about six months. The youngsters stay with their mother till full grown, and even beyond this period, so that the mother may be occasionally accompanied by four offspring—two full

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grown and two cubs. The former two will not however stay with her much longer.

The full-grown bear is a glossy black in colour, with fur of medium length. On the under side of the neck is the well-known inverted white V-shaped mark, the chin being also white. The claws are black in colour, and short, strong, and



The mother bear slowly and lugubriously taking herself off.

curved, and, as we have seen, are peculiarly well adapted for climbing. The hair on the shoulders grows longer in winter than that on the other parts of the body. The eyes are small, but Bruin's sight is quite good, as are his powers of hearing, whilst his scent is remarkably good.

The Himalayan black bear is very tenacious of life and is remarkably hard to kill. Beginners at bear-shooting cannot take this fact too greatly to heart, as most of the so-called accidents when

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out shooting are due, firstly, to a stupid contempt for one's quarry, and, secondly, to a surpassing ignorance of its habits and its capabilities of charging home savagely when sorely, perhaps mortally, wounded. I have dwelt on the point that all shikaris are not at one in the matter of the ease with which bears are killed. My own opinions on the subject are not based upon the behaviour of the animal in beats. I, in common with probably many Anglo-Indian shikaris, have been present at bear-drives in the Himalaya, and I do not deny that they are quite justifiable when one wishes to kill off a bear or party of bears which have been devastating a particular village's crops, besides annoying the villagers themselves. But personally I do not care for this particular form of sport. It does not appeal to my own views as to what constitutes sport. Most of my acquaintance with bears has been either a bowing one on the hill-side, each with his feet on his native heath, so to speak, or when Bruin has been about his own affairs, and I have surreptitiously eavesdropped upon him, to find out at first-hand what those affairs were. In this way I have come to form and to hold a perfectly respectful admiration for the black bear of the Himalaya, and more especially so for those of the species who live at the upper levels of their habitat, just below the snow-line and the grassy areas occupied by

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their cousin of the red-brown pelt. For I think there can be little doubt that some black bears live entirely in the upper forest, and rarely go down to the lower levels which the majority of the species inhabit. It is this animal which provides the best stalking, for he does not appear so accustomed to man as the beast of the lower levels, and his high qualities of sight and hearing, combined with his great powers of smell, make him difficult to get near. The Himalayan black bear stretches throughout the Himalaya, from the western limits of Baluchistan to Assam. His size and weight vary a great deal. Burke gives 6 feet 7 inches as the largest skin, whilst Blandford mentioned 6 feet 5 inches from nose to rump; 5 feet 6 inches would be an average skin, and they are smaller. His weight goes up to nearly 300 lbs. in the case of a very big animal, but is generally nearer 200. He is usually larger and heavier than the plains bear.





CHAPTER VII

Black bear concluded—Delightful uncertainties of marching in the Himalaya—The hillman's idea of distance—The City in the Mountains—The valley road—Unstable bridges—A pleasant lunch—A bad road—Uncertainty—A disheartening climb—The 'last village' at last—Continue the march—The snow moraine—The bungalow—And its chairs—Khubbar of bear—An early start—A cold journey—The khubbar proves faulty—The bear caves—Tracks—A lengthy search—Back to the heights.

THE traveller in the Himalaya away from the ordinary beaten paths of the hill station must look to have some curious and at the time probably uncomfortable experiences—experiences of that class

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which one looks back to with some pride perhaps, but also with amusement. At the time they are undergone, however, amusement is far from the thoughts; for the disagreeables quite outweigh the comical side of the situation.

It was during a tour with my wife in the Chamba Himalaya that one of these rude buffets of fortune befell us, and, amusing as the experience may seem now to look back upon, and perchance relate to our stay-at-home acquaintances, amusement was very far from both our minds before that day was over.

The hillman of the Himalaya has a very good sense of direction, but absolutely none of distance, as measured in miles or leagues, or any other unit of lineal measurement you may put to him. He measures his distance by the journey *he* can make in a day, using all sorts of short cuts as is his custom, whilst doing it.

On the day in question we set out from the bungalow we had arrived at the night before for another, the name of which I had been given, as also its approximate position on the map. The rough itinerary of the march was that we had to proceed up the main valley for, I was told, six miles, then strike straight up a mountain up a side valley for some four miles, when we should reach, so we were assured, the bungalow. Unfortunately, the bungalow we spent the night in had, for coolness sake, been built a mile and

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a half up the hill, on the opposite side of and above the river. Perhaps still more unfortunately, there was a small mountain path running from the bungalow along the hill on this side of the river, direct, so we were told, to the bungalow we were making for ; the offshoot valley in which it was situated being on that side of the main valley. This mountain path was quite unfit for a pony to proceed along, and as my wife was riding, it was out of the question for us to risk taking it. We were informed that it saved several miles, and so the coolies were allowed to go that way—all save the two luncheon-basket coolies, who were ordered to remain with us.

We left early, soon after dawn, and were in good spirits at the thought that at last we were to get out of the close, hot main valley and be up on the mountain-top once more. We had lived in the valley since, dropping down from pretty little Kajiar several days before, we had first set eyes upon Chamba town, or city, as it should be styled.

Have you ever heard of this wonderful capital of the Chamba State ? Our first view of it was one we are unlikely to forget. We had called a halt for lunch under an old horse-chestnut tree at the side of the road, where there was one of the usual small Himalayan all-sorts store, where the hillmen and coolies bought grain and, I believe, strong drink. A smart shower was falling, but

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we could see the valley below filled with sunlight, and we went to the top of the road a few yards on and looked down into it. There, far below, across a great gorge or narrow valley, was a large city nestling against the base of a giant mountain on a flat terrace, which appeared to jut out from the mountain edge, and then drop again sheer



There was a large city nestling against a giant mountain.

to the river, although we could not see the water from our position. A great white edifice rose in a commanding position above the surrounding buildings, the palace of the Raja of Chamba. To the left several conical-looking, queer-shaped towers were, we were informed, the sacred temples of Chamba, whilst round their feet and the base of the palace spread a sea of buildings which ran up behind the palace, and appeared to perch on crevices in the steep mountain cliff behind; in

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front a green ribbon stretched along the cliff edge overhanging the river. We rubbed our eyes and could scarcely believe that we were looking on an Indian city, and, what is more, a city in the mighty Himalaya. Rather could we have imagined that we were gazing upon some town near the base of the Italian Alps, so European did the aspect of the city appear from our elevated position. Those who have had the good fortune to look down upon the capital of Chamba will remember the feelings of pleasure with which this beautiful and curious Himalayan city filled them.

But this was several days previously. It was a glorious morning in early summer as we took up our last march up the main valley, and, tramping along in the morning freshness, either alongside of or ahead of the pony, as the width of the road permitted, one ruminated on the possible chances of the promised sport above. After some five miles had been passed over, we came to one of those curious, most unstable-looking, semi-cable, semi-wooden erections which do duty for bridges in most parts of Chamba, where you are lucky to have something more than the rope-cable, with a sling to sit in. I knew we had to cross the river somewhere or other, and this, I thought, must be the spot. But the bridge appeared a poor sort of structure to take a pony over. I crossed to make inquiries at a

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small hut on the other side, and the thing swayed to my every step. After careful and lengthy



Those unstable erections which form the bridges over the rivers.

questioning of a small urchin in my slowest enunciation and best Hindustani, I was told that this road led to a bungalow which I knew by name as one I was to visit on my way back.

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We continued up the valley, and in another three miles arrived at a building planned on the lines of a Persian caravanserai. I had seen plenty in Baluchistan, and so did not need to inquire its purpose.

'Yes,' was the answer, 'this is —. The sahib is staying the night here. I have made the arrangements.' I glanced at the nasty, dirty-looking place, and was very certain that the sahib was doing nothing of the kind. 'But the next bungalow is a very long march ahead, and you will never get there to-day.' 'The coolies have gone by the path across the river. How far to the bridge?' I asked. 'Four miles,' was the reply.

It was then that I began to have my suspicions that we were in for a bad time, but my men assured me that it was all right. We went on, and it proved nearly four miles to the bridge. It was slightly larger than the last I had passed over, but it swayed ominously as we crossed, and I had to go back to help the syce with the pony. Wallflower was a good little C.B. mare, and, beyond showing her sex's curiosity as to why the water flowed so fast and uproariously below her, she fetched over in safety. The road on the other side lost its semblance of a road, and degenerated into a six-foot path of the rockiest where it was not loose shale, and the pony was relegated to the rear. After some three miles of this, and careful inquiries from the one or two

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hillmen met with, I felt sure we must be near the offshoot valley, and we halted for lunch. The two coolies with the enormous tiffin basket (which carries lunch, plus tea, dinner, and chota-hazri for next morning besides—for rude experience has taught me to march thus equipped for emergencies in the Himalaya) arrived in about an hour, and we whiled away a pleasant two hours sheltered from the sun beneath a large projecting rock, and with the soothing roar and gurgle of the river flowing below us. I perfunctorily asked the one or two hillmen who passed during this period whether we were all right for the bungalow, and received satisfactory assurances. A smart shower of rain disturbed our happy serenity, and we ordered a pack-up, with the idea of getting in early and having a stroll about after tea. *L'homme propose!*

We had covered nearly another long weary three miles over shaly slips on a narrow road where riding was impossible, and in more or less heavy showers, before we reached the side valley. Matters were turning out badly! At the junction of the side valley stream with the main one a party of coolies were seated beneath a gigantic mass of overhanging rock, which was blackened on its inner face by the fires of generation on generation of travellers who had used this place as a nightly camping spot. With the help of an orderly I made careful inquiries of this party. At first

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they all by mutual consent agreed to differ both as to the existence of a bungalow at all, which some declared to be a myth, and also as to the distance. I began to lose patience.

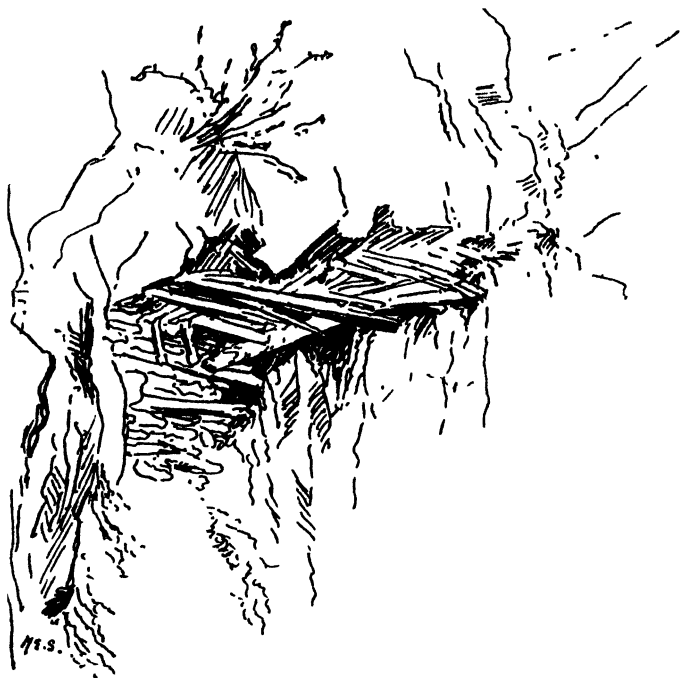
‘But the — village,’ I said angrily; ‘I suppose that exists?’ ‘Oh yes, sahib; that’s up there.’ ‘How far?’ And then came the deluge — any distance from two to twenty miles, so far as I could make out. I waited patiently whilst they wrangled amongst themselves and ceded that point. ‘And the bungalow? I know there’s a sahib’s bungalow at the place. It’s on the nuksha (map),’ and I spread it out before their respectful gaze. I’m afraid this was a fib, but it reduced them to silence. An old coolie upon whom I had had my eye, and who had not yet spoken, uplifted his voice, and the bolt fell.

‘The bungalow’s there, sahib, but it’s two miles above the village.’ ‘Two what?’ I shouted. ‘They all told me that the village was the last one this side of the snow pass, and that the bungalow was at the village.’ ‘It’s two miles above, sahib,’ said the old man, unmoved. ‘Does not Budhoo, the son of Sher Bahadur, my father’s uncle’s brother, live there, and does he not look after the bungalow for the Sirkar [Government]?’

That was sufficient! Another four miles, and all straight up. At least 3000 feet to climb, and more like 4000, and with a lady in the party.

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I turned away, and we faced the abominable zig-zag which forms the road up out of the valley for the first few hundred feet. This road was simply appalling, both in its nature and width,



Precipitous places were often roughly built up with poles and slabs.

and the rain had made it so slippery that there was a good chance of going over the khud-side if one made a false step. To ride it was impossible, and my wife had perforce to walk. It was a good mile and a half, almost straight up, and even with the halts it was fearful work for a lady.

The Bears

The path then improved somewhat, but took to a switchback mode of progression infinitely trying to tired legs. Precipitous places were often roughly built up, after bad slips, with loose poles and slabs from fellings in the forest, as shown in the sketch. The tiffin-basket was miles away, for all I knew, the men having lagged in the rear, and had it not been for the flask I luckily had on me, we should never have reached the first village. Here we rested, and there I learned that the village—our village, the last this side of the snow pass—was still above us.

We toiled on, and as the sun had nearly approached the great mountain crest bounding the horizon, so close ahead now, we came to the village. My wife sank down on a charpoy—native bedstead—which the innate courtesy of the village elders at once produced on seeing a mem-sahib, and vowed she could not go a step farther, and would, if needs be, sleep there.

‘What is the road like?’ I asked. ‘Can the pony go?’ ‘Oh no, sahib! No pony can go beyond this. The path is all steps, and there is a snow moraine to cross!’

This information I kept to myself. More rain was pending and would fall during the night, and none of the village houses looked inviting enough for a night’s sojourn. And besides, I had by then made up my mind that we would get to that elusive bungalow at all costs. I be-

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thought me of a well-known dodge for improvising a rough dandy, and asked that the cleanest charpoy they had should be brought out. Getting a couple of stout poles, these were bound one on either side. This made an excellent form of stretcher, but it took time, and the shades of night were lowering perilously near before the heavy bribe I offered tempted four fine sturdy hillmen to agree to carry my wife the remaining two miles upwards. After seeing that arrangements were made for the comfort of the pony, in the way of bedding, grain, etc., we set off. As it happened, I subsequently discovered that I need not have wasted this precious time, for that pony spent nearly a week in the lap of luxury, with a score of willing and eager attendants to anticipate every want. I believe the younger members of the community would have undertaken to flick her tail for her, to save her the trouble of doing it herself ; whilst the syce waxed corpulent, lazy, and, consequently, insolent, after the manner of his kind.

That last two miles ! I watched the men pick up the charpoy and elevate it right on to their shoulders, to my wife's dismay, and I prepared to set out in their track. Many a long march had I done in the hills, but never did I feel two miles as I did those. Up, up we climbed through silver fir and spruce, horse-chestnut and other trees, whose dense shade darkened the path

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to a tenebrean gloom, up which I stumbled, guided by the voices of the men ahead, who were carrying their burden at a jog-trot, jumping from stone to stone like mountain goats—so I heard afterwards from their bone-weary charge. A lightening in the gloom ahead, and we reached a small offshoot valley, blocked with a snow moraine. Over this mass, slushy and heavy, and having but little semblance to snow or ice, we toiled, and then up, up again, until suddenly the forest appeared to open against the sky above, and we reached a tiny clearing with a little bungalow at the far end. We had arrived!

As we stood in the verandah a man was wrenching open a door. We went in. It was the tiniest two-roomed wooden hut imaginable, with, in the room we had entered, a rough wooden table and two hard wooden chairs—table and chairs thickly coated with dust. But the chairs were *chairs*, and we dropped into them!

It was a couple of days after our arrival at the little bungalow below the snow pass that two villagers arrived and squatted down outside the house. I heard the orderly questioning them, but paid no heed until I suddenly caught the word 'bhalu' (bear). I went out. 'Salaam, sahib,' and they raised their hands to their foreheads. 'Salaam. What is it?' 'Bhalu,

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sahib. We know where there are two large bears.' Questions elucidated the fact that these bears were feeding nightly on their crops, and were something out of the ordinary as regards size. 'If the sahib will come early, very early, he will get them as they return to their caves.' After finding out the distance I said I would go next morning, and arranged that they should meet me at the village down below us—the same where we had improvised the litter a couple of days before.

The next morning we were off at crow's dawn, and dropped at a smart pace down to the village below. The sun was not yet up, and it was dark still in the path beneath the trees, and chill and grey as we crossed the snow moraine. No inquisitive lizards played hide-and-seek with us as we went along. They were curled up snug in their beds, from which only the bright warm sun would lure them. Only a feeble twitter or a squawk from a starling proclaimed that any bird life was near us. The village too, as we approached it, betrayed no sign of life. A little filmy grey smoke hung faintly over the roofs, showing that inside some early housewife had started the fire for the preparation of the morning meal. Otherwise all was still, save for the voice of an infant uplifted in sharp protest at life as it at present envisaged it. Beneath the wide eaves of the village headman's solidly built house a bright fire of sticks was burning, and seated round it were my two villagers



Tracks of the Himalayan Black Bear (about 1 12th nat size)

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of yesterday, with the local shikari (so called). Grunts greeted our appearance, and the three forms got up and moved down the path, each enveloped in a thick blanket worn over the head and shoulders, one end being pulled across the neck and thrown over, so as to hang down the back. None of us were in a talkative mood, for the wind off the snow, so close above, was keen and bitter. I could hear the Gurkha orderly cursing and grumbling to himself at having been made to turn out so early. He would be keen enough as soon as we drew near the scene of the fray. Just now he was better left alone.

We went down the path, the same one we had toiled up in such distress so shortly before, for a mile in silence, and then the leader turned and began to drop straight down the khud in the direction of the stream, whose murmur arose to us faintly from its bed some 1500 feet below. Our way led us through terraced, cultivated lands, and it was from them I understood that Messrs. Bruin took their nightly toll. The ravine still lay in darkness, but the crests far above us had lightened and were turning yellow and orange in the rays of the sun, which they had already caught. After we had dropped down about 500 feet or so, the men halted and we had a parley. About here, apparently, we were to have been met by another man, who was to have given us information as to the whereabouts of our quarry. But no

The Bears

one was visible, and a sharp whistle failed to unearth him. We dare not delay, as it was imperative that we should get to the caves before the bears did. After a careful inspection in all directions, we continued on our way, the only alteration being that I now carried the '500 Express, into which I had slipped a couple of cartridges. A previous lesson had taught me to eschew the small bore when out after bear !

We left the crops and got into a rocky piece of ground overhanging the last 500 feet down to the stream. I now saw that the torrent here flowed through a stretch of rocky gorge having various openings and fissures in its sides, and a cursory look at the neighbourhood made it apparent to me that the chances were all in favour of the bears, unless my good fortune should lead them to return home right on top of me. I pointed this out to the orderly, and asked him to inquire from the men what route the bears usually took to come home, and which were the caves they occupied. One of those long, wearisome harangues the native appears to love, and certainly excels in, now took place. It was impossible to nail the men down to any one definite statement, they shifted their ground constantly, and as the outcome of it all, I gathered that the bears sometimes took one road and sometimes another, that they had been seen to come this way—once ! Old tracks had already told us this, and a scratched

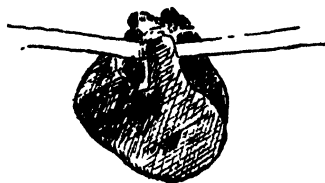
Stalks in the Himalaya

and barked tree or two ; finally, that they did not appear to constantly occupy any one particular place, or at any rate did not enter by any one particular entrance. In fact, the light being now strong, we could see that for about a quarter of a mile the whole side of the gorge was honey-combed with openings and fissures leading into what had the appearance of being ideal citadels for Bruin's summer residence.

The moment I had fully grasped the situation I sent the shikari to perch himself upon the highest pinnacle he could find, from which he could command a good stretch of the khud-side, and we set patiently to work to examine each opening for fresh tracks. I will say one thing in extenuation of the villagers. The bears were there right enough. Their tracks crossed and recrossed each other, faint imprints and boldly impressed recent ones. Here in a little sandy depression a sportive gentleman had rolled upon his back with his front paws held on his chest and his hind ones kicking in the sand. Hard by he or his companion had scarred deep down the bark of a young tree, either for fun or to cause the sweet sap to exude. But the more we investigated the spot, the more hopeless did the position assume. If the bears had returned home before dawn—and we found no evidence of this—any attempt to smoke them out would be useless. Crackers I had none, but they too would have been of no avail. I turned to the orderly.

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‘Why didn’t you find out yesterday exactly what the ground was like? We ought to have got here in the middle of the night to have had any chance of seeing the bear. They’re laughing at us for children.’ A grunt of disgust was the only reply. Two mortal hours did we spend climbing amongst the rocky caverns of the gorge, and then I gave it up. The sun by now was well above the mountains. The terraced fields above us lay bathed in a flood of sunlight, and the narrow valley, at the bottom of which we were groping, seeking for Bruin who was by now safely ensconced in his cool cave retreat, had already a hot and stifling feeling about it. Far up above waved the dark, cool greens of the deodar forest, and I felt that I wanted to smell once more their spicy odours. There was no use waiting down below here, for it to get hotter, with a climb of between 3000 and 4000 feet before us, so relinquishing the rifle to one of the men with a sarcasm concerning the size of the bears which fed upon the crops hereabouts, I started to face the climb. It was not the first time, and would not be the last I surmised, that I should come upon a wild-goose chase, after that most elusive (when wanted) animal, the bhalu!





CHAPTER VIII

Red bear—A future ambition—Habits—Powers of sight, smell, and hearing—Appearance—Food—The home of the red bear—The last bungalow—*En route* for the snows—A pretty march—The last village—Under canvas—Lateness of season—The shikari—The last march—Chukor and blue rock—Replenish the larder—A tiny Himalayan upland—The beauties of autumn—The camp—Out after red bear—Sunrise amongst the snows—See a red bear—A long stalk—Interest of stalk—Come up with the bear—The bear disappears—The change of wind—Many's the slip.

RED BEAR : A HAPPY HIMALAYAN MEMORY

IT has never been my fortune to bag a red bear. His tracks I know well, as also his personal appearance. Likewise I have a very passable acquaintance with his abode, surroundings, habits, and, in fact, with the manner

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in which he leads his very pleasant, if somewhat sluggish, existence. But the fact remains. He has never fallen a victim to my rifle, and therefore, as is, I think, the case with all sportsmen, he remains an object of my ambition and looms large in my itinerary of a possible 'future.'

The red bear (*Ursus arctus*), unlike the black bear, hibernates through the winter from about late November to March or April, and it is probably owing to this fact that his eyesight is not nearly so good as that of his cousin; in fact, it is very poor, as also are his oral powers; his sense of smell is, however, superior to that of the black, and is very acute, and this point has to be remembered and reckoned with when you are stalking him, for if he gets the slightest whiff of you, good-bye to your chance of obtaining a shot.

The animal is a large bulky one, known to the hillmen as *Lal bhalu*, or red bear, which latter is the term he is usually known by to sportsmen, though his colour is really a pale or at times a dark brown. The claws are white instead of black, as in the Himalayan black bear. The fur of the skin is beautifully thick, long, and woolly, and very soft, that on the back being as much as $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length. The height at the shoulder is 3 feet, and Burke gives as the record length 7 feet 8 inches for the skin of a Kashmir red bear. Probably the average would be about 6 feet. The red bear rarely feeds on flesh, though he has been known to

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do so when he has killed for himself. Rarely he may feed on carrion. His principal diet, however, is roots, grass and herbs ; also fruits and seeds, nuts and various grains. He is not so pugnacious as the black animal, and I believe rarely attacks even when wounded. He lives throughout the summer on the beautiful grassy slopes beneath the snows, being found lower down in the early spring and autumn, at which season he is on his way back from or going to his hibernating place. It is doubtless owing to the fact that he passes so much of his time above tree elevation, or perhaps I should say above the real limit of large tree-growth, that he is not in the habit of climbing trees. As I know to my cost, he can get over the ground at a wonderful pace, considering his great bulk.

One of the trips I made with red bear amongst other things as an object remains as one of the happiest of my Himalayan memories.

I had been marching with occasional halts of a day for some three weeks, the last week being spent on a valley road provided with forest bungalows at intervals ; comfortable, little wooden houses of the Swiss chalet type, with corrugated iron roofs, and in some cases sweet little pieces of garden round them, and glorious views of snow peaks from their pretty rose-covered front porches.

The last bungalow had been left behind, and the rest of the trip was to be passed under canvas.

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It was late autumn, almost too late for the spot at the foot of the snows I had in view as my objective; but I had determined to risk it, having come so far.

It was a bitterly cold morning on which we left the last bungalow, and the servants by no means appreciated leaving their snug quarters to accompany the sahib on what they considered a wild-goose chase, and a dangerous one to boot. However, they resigned themselves to the inevitable, with the characteristic fatalistic resignation of the native of India.

We had a longish march to go, and soon came to the end of what had been a semblance of a road, and climbed up the stoniest and rockiest path it had been my fate to negotiate for some time. A couple of miles of barren mountain-side brought us to the grateful shade (for the sun was now well up) of walnut, plane, chestnut, and spruce trees. The broad-leaved trees were in their full autumn garb, and most beautiful was the vivid colouring. Soon we dropped down again to the river, through terraced cultivation red and gold with the millet and the corn. The views of the snows were glorious. The great peak which had been in the distant scape for days, one which we had often gazed at with longing eyes from the far-away plains, and for whose upper base we were making, was now in full view, flanked to the left and right by other snowy giants. Across the

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stream a little village appears, consisting of some twenty odd well-built stone houses with the usual slightly sloping slate-topped roofs. It is situated on the hill-side some 50 feet above the river, which is here crossed by one of the curious wooden cantilever bridges so often seen in the Himalaya. This is the last village but one this side of the snows, this last being the one we are now bound for. More ups and downs over watercourses and rocks, and we drop down a couple of hours or so later through another little piece of terraced cultivation, and walk over this to a large walnut tree from which and its fellows some villagers are engaged in knocking down the nuts. Under the great tree we find the little camping site, and a very pretty one it is, overshadowed by hollies, bird cherries, and spruce trees, in addition to the walnuts. A rocky path leads down to the river and a fine wide cantilever bridge of rude but strong construction. After fixing the spots for the tents, a proceeding rendered necessary by the peculiarity and fondness the native servants invariably evince for pitching their tent and the cook tent right in front of one's own front door, I went down and on to the bridge. A most lovely view is here obtained up the much shrunken river, for though still impossible to ford, owing to the great rush of water, it is now but a fair-sized mountain torrent, to the great snow mountain which has been before our eyes for so many days on our way up. At the foot

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of its snows our next march is to terminate, and there I hope to make an acquaintance with the much-sought-for red bear, and, should fortune favour, with the blue sheep.

Up above on the opposite side, some 200 feet above the river, is perched the last village, occupied, I could vouch, by as hardy a handful of the human race as the world holds. For who else could live at this elevation and spend their days wrestling with the inclement elements, taking their chance of annihilation from avalanches, whilst wresting a livelihood of the sternest and rudest from the stony, poverty-stricken soil. Solidly built and solidly roofed is the village, and sufficiently large, I am glad to note, to provide me with the men I require to carry my camp up to the upper level; for upon their undertaking this service for me my future movements are entirely dependent.

I lunched on the simple fare one is content with during mountain expeditions, and on its arrival set to work to get the camp pitched. A heavy shower came down during the proceeding, a shower which caused me some uneasiness, for rain at this late season, and for such an expedition as ours, was the worst thing that could happen. Rain here meant snow higher up, and that would effectually settle the forward movement of our expedition. The shower passed off, however, and we were all soon intent on collecting firewood. Large blazing

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fires are the panacea for many of the ills of camp life. Good roaring fires having been started, and a store of wood collected, I went for a stroll, and came across a most beautiful little waterfall, dropping some 90 feet down a cliff, the sheer side of which was clothed here and there with climbing shrubs in gorgeous autumn livery of red and gold. An exquisite little picture with its setting of dark black firs.

On the way back to camp I was accosted by a wizened, dried-up little old man. In his hand he held a very soiled and broken cardboard chocolate box, which had once graced the shop of some West End dealer. From this he produced a horribly dirty piece of linen, and unfolding the latter he extracted a bundle of 'chits,' which he presented to me with a salaam and the intimation that he was a shikari. I examined a few of these chits, notes given to him by my predecessors, in the course of a long life of providing or not providing sport for the sahibs. He had good ones, though others spoke of him (of course he could not read them) in a language and spirit far different from that in which he fondly hoped—and still hopes, for all I know—they did. With a brief request that he would come to the camp at dawn, I went on my way in search of a hot cup of tea. Later on I received a formal call from the village elders, and learnt many things I wanted to know, and others which

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I did not. The elders gravely intimated that they had awaited my arrival for many moons, and that the whole village would be only too glad to escort me to my destination, and remain there with me for the whole of my stay—for, of course, a consideration, at so much per head. I politely thanked the village elders for their graciousness, and asked them to be present at dawn the next day with the village, when we would see how many 'head' were required.

As I sat in front of a glowing camp fire and ate my dinner, cold as the mountain air was, that curious feeling of being under canvas once again in the Himalayan solitudes filled me with exhilaration.

It was bitter next morning. The great snow mountain lay grey and cold against the faint greenish-yellow sky of the coming dawn. A cutting air was blowing down from the snow fields, and what with it and the stream meandering through the camp itself, the great volume of icy water flowing but a few feet below us, and the dense shade of the trees and mountain ridge immediately behind, it was about the coldest spot for a camp I had ever struck. The large fire appeared to give no heat at all, as I stood over it with a steaming cup of tea in my hand, and discussed matters with the village elders, who must have been accompanied by the whole village, man, woman, and child, all waiting to

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get a view of the mad sahib who wanted to go up to the snows at this time of the year. The head of the elders, a venerable old rupee-looting sinner, but a perfect gentleman, talked much, and said the road we had in front of us was very bad and chin-high (so he expressed it, putting a hand to his chin) in great boulders, and therefore would The Presence have his loads for the villagers made very small. Such a transparent device, as then all the village could go! I had not, however, come more than 100 miles, over bad country too, to alter my loads at this stage, the last one on the outward trip, and how divide boxes which existed?

Politely I explained that all my loads were very small ones, and that the villagers who took them would make light of such women's work. After considerable dignified haggling, an agreement was come to, and the village elders promised on their heads to take me up, send me up supplies of rice, etc., as required by my servants, and, most important of all, bring me down at a day's notice, should the snow come, an agreement they—fortunately for me—most faithfully adhered to.

Seeing that things were ship-shape for the start, I crossed the cantilever bridge, accompanied by the elders, wished them farewell, climbed 100 feet up the hill-side, and was in the sun and comparative warmth once more. Our way took us slantingly up a great stony slope

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which opened out to view snowy peak upon snowy peak, as we went onward. One had a feeling that the whole snowy range was advancing to meet us. Some three hours or more were spent on this hill-side, and some very pretty chukor (the hill partridge) and blue rock pigeon shooting was indulged in. I looked upon the presence of these birds, and both were plentiful, as nothing short of providential, as it had not been possible to procure a sheep at any of the last villages we had passed, and I was almost dependent upon tinned stores. After making some egregious misses at easy birds, in my eagerness to replenish the larder, Jock and self settled to the business seriously, and a couple of brace of chukor and six couple of pigeon were the reward of two hard hours' climbing work over the stony mountain-side. We were both warm enough at the end of it!

The chukor, which is alluded to later in these notes, is a most fascinating bird to shoot. So are the blue rock, for that matter. Up here the villager is glad to have the numbers of these latter thinned out, if the sportsman will take the trouble to devote a few hours to them. Not that he is at all likely to do much towards lessening their numbers, for they swarm in these Himalayan upland regions, nesting in the faces of inaccessible sheer cliffs, and descending in great flocks into the small fields of the villagers at

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harvest time to devour the grain. Fat and juicy are they at this season.

With the larder replenished for a day or two, I went on my way rejoicing. The great hill-side suddenly dropped into a series of little ravines clothed with oak, chestnut, pine, and fir copses, resembling little woods in far-away England. Streams, tributaries of the main river, of the brawling brook order, were numerous, and had to be crossed dry-shod if possible, or a cold douche faced with equanimity. After this up-and-down business had continued for well over an hour, we commenced the last ascent to the tiny upland plateau or 'dun' we were making for. Whilst on the stony mountain-side, the shikari, my little wizened friend of over-night, who had, of course, taken his engagement for granted, had pointed out the little 'maidan.' It lay at the junction of what were evidently three valleys, the main stream coming from whichever we chose to consider enclosed its source. From the junction of the three valleys, the snow-clad mountains rose straight up, their moraines forming the heads of the valleys with the perpetual snow above them. The little plateau consisted of two portions, one higher than the other, each containing patches of dark silver fir mingled with the silvery birch. Sweetly pretty it looked, as it lay bathed in the autumn sunlight.

On reaching the lower portion of the little

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plateau, it was found to be boggy, and this was the reason for our having to go higher, or it would have otherwise formed an ideal and sheltered camping-ground. Crossing it, we reached the beautiful silver birch forest, the tree here met with for the first time as one of considerable size and girth. The birch comes at the upper limit of tree-growth in the Himalaya, and it has to bear the full brunt of the snow avalanches as they sweep down the hill-side when the snow begins to melt on the higher slopes in the spring-time.

Climbing up through the birches, winding in and out of the rhododendron clumps, we suddenly emerged on a tiny and exceedingly lovely plateau of some two hundred feet long by sixty to eighty feet broad. Giant mountains bounded it to the north and west ; on the east the stream flowed in a silvery blue, rippling current, like a purling trout stream at home. On the far side a thick black belt of wind-blown silver fir stood dark and forbidding, its sombreness, however, relieved by the graceful stems of some silvery birch and a fine orange-foliaged chestnut, whilst beneath the trees was spread a carpet of brilliant gold and red. As a background to this little forest, snow peaks glistened and glittered, the mountains below the snow-line all shades of browns and reds or brilliant golden with the autumn-coloured turf. A fairer scene it has scarcely been my lot to look upon.

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If there was a thorn in the rose-leaved bed, it was the icy wind from off the closely adjacent snows. But one cannot expect only honey, and the autumn tints were well worth the cold. Very lovely must it be up here in May and June, for an Alpine upland is ever beautiful in the spring-time, with its carpet of lovely-hued flowers ; but the autumn tints against the silent black-foliaged firs and the spotless white of the snows once seen remain a delight to dream of.

We had outpaced the lunch-carrier, and seeking the lee of a sheltering rock, Jock curled himself up to sleep, whilst I sat and feasted my eyes upon the scene. As can readily be imagined would be the case in the midst of the avalanche area, the sides of the little maidan and the maidan itself were studded with rocks of all sizes, some as big as fair-sized houses, and many of these rested in the most fantastic and tippety positions, some looking as if a touch would bring them crashing down into our midst.

Before I had finished lunch, the clouds settled down and blotted out the snows, and behold we were on a little plateau, with the lower slopes of the hills walling it in on three sides, rearing up and disappearing in voluminous masses of soft fleecy cloud.

The camp came up in driblets, for time to the native mind does not exist. Sufficient for the *moment* is their motto. I was anxious to get

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the tents up, and was congratulating myself that mine had wholly arrived. So it had all but one of the most essential parts—the ridge-pole. And we had to sit in a biting wind for half an hour for that pole which finally emerged slowly out of the mist. At last the tents were up and



The little tent was pitched at the foot of the Himalayan snows.

roaring fires going, and a hot cup of tea put me into a better frame of mind. It was not destined to last, however, as I was soon given a real fright by a heavy shower of sleet coming on.

At this season I was quite aware that the weather might break at any moment, and the place we were now in—at the foot of the Himalayan snows—was no place for bad weather. Fervently I offered up prayers to the gods of

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the mountain weather to refrain from despotism for a few days more. The sleet shower passed over, the shades of night descended, the clouds rolled off, and the wind veered round and blew from the north clean off the snows, which looked ghostly and beautifully white beneath the starlight, and so close that they seemed to be tumbling down upon the camp.

The fire glowed and crackled merrily outside, as I laced up the tent opening and turned in to dream of red bear and endeavour to forget how cold it was.

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We were off long before dawn next morning, and red bear was our object. It is in the early morning and late evening that these animals must be sought for, and at their feeding-grounds. We had determined to make for the nullah to the east, where we had been told a red bear had been recently seen by a traveller who had come through that way. Crossing the stream by a curious natural rock bridge, we climbed up through a piece of silver fir forest and got amongst the birches. Proceeding cautiously through these, we emerged in half an hour on to the lower part of the moraine, which filled the valley head, and pushed our way up this over the most awful chaos of rocks. A mile up it would be, the shikari, who knew all the locality well, had told me, and surely no lineal mile had

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ever stretched so far before. I felt as if I had done a good ten before we got to the end of those rocks. It was still dark, and I could ill see where we were going, but we suddenly changed our direction, as I felt by the wind on my cheek, and soon left the rocks behind, and got upon smooth, short grass, heavy and wet from the night mist. Another quarter of an hour passed, and then the shikari halted and signified that we would wait here till dawn. I was glad of the rest, for I was panting after the climb in the rarefied air. I looked about. Already I could make out a grey peak over what appeared to be a low black crest on the far side of the nullah we were in. Nothing else could I distinguish for a while. Then my surroundings gradually began to leap out of the obscurity. We were some distance up an offshoot nullah from the great peak, and I could see that it swept round in front straight up to the lower base of the giant. We were on short turf, but not far above us the snow began, and I could perceive why we had come here. From our present position, both the upper sides of the nullah ahead would soon be visible, and if a bear was on them we should be able to see him whilst having the wind in our faces.

We stood stock still and waited in the keen, icy morning air. I had taken out the glasses and commenced to sweep the snow

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and grass beneath it, but the light was yet too fitful. I looked up to the peak. One edge had caught a gleam of the rising sun, and shone a lambent, yellowish pink—a beautifully cold and pure colour against the dark, black crest beneath it. This ridge dropped almost sheer to the bed of the valley we were in, and but little snow rested on it. Did it contain the home of the bear we had come to seek? I wondered. A glance at the shikari—his eyes were fixed on a point up the valley. I looked in the direction, saw a black speck, and hurriedly focussed the glasses on it. It was a rock. I had forgotten that we were not out for black bear. I now again commenced to patiently search for red bear, and turned the glasses on to every available spot. I looked all the harder perhaps, as I did not feel at all sure that I should be able to spot an animal, if I did put the glass on to it. I had not seen the red bear in his natural environment, and knowing how very difficult it is to ‘pick’ up an animal *chez lui* until one has met him a few times, and the eye has learnt what to look out for, I had but scant hopes of my search being rewarded with success. A glance at the shikari. He evidently had seen nothing yet, but was still at work.

I commenced to work systematically, and laid the glass on everything in the way of a dark lump or projection on the area in front of me. This necessitated constantly moving the field

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of the glass, and in making a wide sweep to pick up a tiny black object I had seen on the opposite side of the valley—a curious image passed for a second across the field of the glass. I got on to the black speck. Another rock with a little snow on its top. I suddenly bethought me of the curious thing I had seen in the sweep of the glass, and thought I would see if I could pick it up. I tried, and failed several times, and was about to give it up when I suddenly caught it again. An indistinct dull-coloured mass, very small. I looked, and my heart leapt to my mouth. Surely it moved. I kept quite still and looked my hardest. Yes, there again—it must be a bear—perhaps a red bear—perhaps *the* bear we were in search of. The thoughts swept through my brain and I turned to the shikari. He was looking fixedly at the opposite side of the valley, his hand shading his eyes. I touched his shoulder and turned to the point I had been watching. I looked, but could see nothing. Another search, and, much mortified, I put up the glasses and swept the spot again and again. An absolute blank. I pointed out the direction to the shikari, and said I thought I had seen a bear there. He looked and shook his head. Then looked again, and his gaze suddenly became fixed and his body stiffened, and he smiled, or his wizened face tried to smile, I suppose. The result was hideous distortion—but to me beautiful.

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He took the glasses, glanced through them, and said, '*Lal bhalu!*' He then sat down, and I followed suit and watched him. He gazed all round and snuffed and nosed the wind, just as I have seen deer do before leaving the jungle for the open to feed. Then, apparently satisfied, he got up and we moved ahead. He did not seem to have any fear that the bear would see us from that distance, and made no effort at concealment. So far as I had seen, the bear was on the snow just above the grass at the time I had picked him up, and had apparently moved its position when I had turned to the native, as though I could not again pick him up, he had seen him all right. We tramped along quietly for a quarter of a mile, and then came to a deep cleft in the side of the hill we were on—the opposite one to the bear. It was not going to be so simple a matter to get up to him as I had thought.

We climbed down amongst the rocks and boulders, and went up slanting wise in a direction opposite to that of the bear. I touched the shikari, and pointed towards where I thought the bear was. He nodded his head and continued on. I followed, rather mystified. We walked for half an hour, and then came to another narrow ravine which appeared to run in a north-easterly direction. The shikari took this, and I saw that he must have known of its existence. If we continued in this direction I thought it should bring us close

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to and above the bear. But how about our wind? The breeze, though faint, now appeared to be behind us. Would it change, and was the man calculating on its doing so? To me it was an intensely interesting stalk, as I was fully aware that up here the wind would be likely to be of the trickiest, and the shikari was evidently pitting himself to beat it. About three-quarters of a mile we proceeded in silence and then my companion handed me the rifle. I was shaking a bit, and sat down for a couple of minutes to get my breath and my steadiness back. I saw the upper part of our nullah, or what I took to be it, ahead of us, and we advanced cautiously; just before coming out into it, there on the opposite slope I saw a bear—a great, dull, brown, shaggy mass, that looked enormous against its pure white snow background. He was moving slowly forward, and was something a little under 100 yards away. I felt inclined to fire at him at once, and the shikari probably divined my purpose, for he touched my arm, and as I looked the bear disappeared over a small swelling in the hill-side.

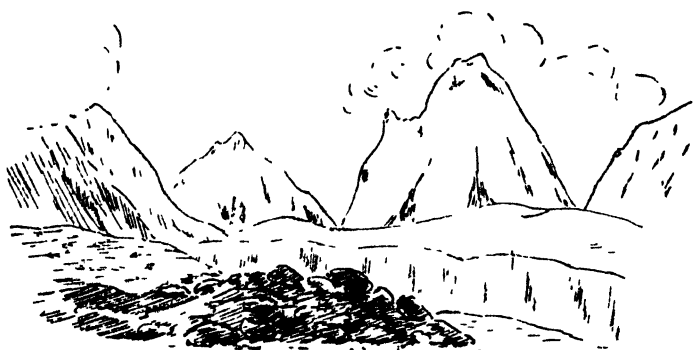
We now advanced rapidly, I feeling confident that I was about to bag my first red bear. We crossed the upper part of the moraine, got on to the grass on the far slope, and then reached the snow. It was powdery, but not frozen hard, and we made no noise as we went over it. The shikari had started to run, and I followed, though

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loth to do so, as I did not want to get blown, and so unsteady again. Nor could I see the reason for the hurry. The bear had been going very slowly, and had evidently no notion that we were near. Now we reached the spot where we had seen him. There were his great, broad, splay tracks in the snow, looking enormous in the soft substance. I looked at them curiously. Bigger, but very like the black bear's, I remember thinking, as we hurried along. Now we were close to the top of the swelling over which the animal had disappeared, and we proceeded cautiously and looked over. I saw nothing at first, and then the shikari seized my arm. I turned to him angrily, saw his fixed stare, and looked in the same direction. There was our bear, about 300 yards away, and going hard for the rocky part of the precipice I had noted on our way up. The wind had changed, the shikari had noted it, and therefore his haste.

It is the only red bear I have got within decent range of!





CHAPTER IX

A climb to the glacier—Threatening weather—Send down for the coolies—An early start—A natural bridge—The birch forest—An upland meadow—Wonderful scenery—The great moraine—The glacier—A playground of giants—The river's source—The untamed forces of the world—The mighty snow peaks—Upon the glacier—Commences to snow—The snowstorm and journey back—Reach camp—Autumn changed to winter—At the foot of the snows at night—A wonderful scene—Strike camp—The last of the little 'maidan.'

A CLIMB TO THE GLACIER

IHAD had no fortune whatsoever with the red bear, but I determined, before retracing my steps downwards, to devote one day, or as much of it as the clouds would permit, in a climb on to the glacier of the great snow mountain we had camped upon at so high an elevation. I dare not risk stay-

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ing up here any longer, after the unmistakable warnings the weather had given us that it was about to break up into winter. Overnight the marching instructions were issued, eliciting a buzz of delighted satisfaction from the men who took no pleasure in our exalted elevation and the grandeur of the scenery, nor evinced much interest in the habits of the red bear.

The morning broke clear, sunny and beautiful, chasing away all last night's black fears about the weather. I was not to be put off, however, by this fair promise, and did not regret having issued orders for men to go down to the village and warn the villagers to be at the camp early on the morrow, to carry us down again on the homeward trek. Lucky was it that these orders were issued, as the sequel will show.

We left camp long before dawn, the shikari, a Gurkha orderly, and myself, a man having been sent out an hour before to prospect on the off-chance of a red bear being anywhere in the neighbourhood, a contingency I had but scant hopes of seeing realized. At the head of the little maidan there was a curious natural bridge of solid rock under which the main stream, whose source we now set out to reach, foamed and rushed before dropping to its peaceful passage across the little plateau. Crossing this, we climbed through the upper ridge of the patch of silver fir and dropped down the far side into the lower

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end of the centre of the three valleys, whose streams, debouching close together, join before reaching the natural rock bridge. The central valley is the larger, and runs in a north-easterly direction straight up, terminating at the precipice-like foot of the great snow mountain, the tallest peak hereabouts. The little upland meadow we were now on was of considerable size, for this elevated part of the world (some 16,000 feet) ; its lower portion consisted of a golden turf in which the withered remains of the summer wild flowers stood out as a reminder that the late autumn was with us. A few straggling snow-broken birch were still visible, but we were up above the tree limit. The river wound through the meadow in the form of an ordinary brook. Its waters were, however, icy in temperature, and the fisherman's eye could detect no members of the finny tribe sheltering under likely-looking banks, where a rise would be a certainty on a home stream.

The hills to the south are all snow-covered from yesterday's fall. A great spur about a couple of miles to the north is still golden, where the turf alternates with its rugged, rocky barrenness, a feathery sprinkling of snow here and there being visible. Straight in front the meadow terminates in the great mass of the snowy mountain. For a mile the going is easy for this part of the world. We then reach the rocky spur to

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the north, and commence to climb over its shoulder. On arriving at the crest a wonderful panorama bursts upon our wondering gaze. Straight up to 26,000 feet rears the great snowy mountain, scarce two miles away to our right front, whilst directly ahead are several other snowy peaks. The more precipitous upper parts of the great mountain trend downwards into an extensive glacier, from whose lower edge the upper part of an enormous moraine projects downwards to a curious, small, abrupt cliff edged with snow at its summit, the vertical wall having a queer greyish marble appearance, with bands and streaks in it. The surface of this moraine is yellow-coloured or black in parts, consisting evidently of a mass of detritus and boulders. This great stretch of tumbled rock and detritus, with above it the newly fallen snow which ran right up to the summit of the great mountain, save for black, frowning areas here and there marking sheer cliffs where no snow could lie, or for shining gleams of the great glacier ice, was a stupendous sight. The great mountain dropped away to the north in a mass of snowy peaks of less height (much less they appeared from here) than itself. As I gazed upon the marvellous scene, and it was not yet eight o'clock, I noted to my disappointment that clouds had begun to gather at the back of the giant. There was no time to tarry.

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We scrambled along the hill-side and dropped down on to the outlying boulders of the great moraine, and commenced a very arduous climb over or round these. We were traversing a playground of giants. Boulders from the size of a cottage to the dimensions of a first-class London hotel were lying about promiscuously, occasionally balanced on an edge in positions most perilous to behold, and in a state of absolute chaos such as one would expect to be assumed by a cartload of beach shingle, if turned over a hill-side and allowed to come to a position of rest below. But the cruel part for us was that the lower slopes of the moraine lay in transverse ridges and valleys, up and down each of which we had to climb, this greatly retarding the rate of progression. The deceptive clearness of the Himalayan atmosphere was another factor to contend with. After two hours of terrifically hard work, we reached the last crest, and looked down upon the curious grey-looking cliff I had noted as terminating the glacier and upper part of the moraine. It turned out to be a wall of solid ice, but bearing a most perfect resemblance to marble, as so beautifully delineated by Alma Tadema. From a chasm in the base of the cliff, when we had reached it, we found our stream issuing. This, then, was the source of the mighty river followed for so many days in the hot valley, now so far below us !

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I looked upward to the great peak. No intervening mountain crests or valleys now stood between us. There it lay in grand, silent majesty, just the last sweep upward to its top, white and pure and beautiful. Clouds were gathering round its lofty summit—filmy clouds only, but still clouds. My objective was to get on to the glacier and climb over it to what was the upper base of the mountain. From that point further climbing without ropes and ice-axes, to say nothing of experienced guides, would be impossible. That was beyond me this trip, but I wanted to get as far as possible.

We climbed down to the stream and the ice, and the sight from here was worth enduring many fatigues and journeying many miles to witness.

On the right above the ice cliff reared the snowy giant, towering upwards, its head now enveloped in filmy zephyrs, the pure white base almost at our feet. Straight in front was the upper part of the moraine, chequered dirty yellow, or pure white with fresh-fallen snow, from whose rough, billowy surface giant granite boulders stood up like great sentinels, watching over these wild fastnesses. Over the crest-line of the moraine rose three snowy peaks or separate masses of snowy peaks, their summits still free of cloud, standing sharp and clear against a glorious blue sky. To my left a great mountain-

The Bears

side of mingled rock, snow, rubble, and ice dropped and joined the moraine, an offshoot from the great peak. The rocks in the bed and at the sides of the stream were coated thickly with ice, and from every point possible, beautiful, pendent icicles of the most fantastic shapes hung like glittering jewels.

I stood in the playground of the untamed forces of the world, and their nursery was one chaotic wilderness of snow, red and brown rock, yellow moraine, giant, pinkish, granite boulders, river ice, and rushing water, above which serenely rose the white-clothed monarch dominating all in austere aloofness.

Words fail to paint such a scene. Almost does the mind call a halt, dazed and stunned before so silent, solitary, and awe-inspiring a picture—before the power and in the presence of a nature such as this.

A movement of one of the men and I roused myself to note that it was snowing slightly. There was no time to be lost, and crossing the stream, we negotiated the last part of the moraine and climbed upon the glacier. Very little fresh snow had fallen, I was glad to find, and proceeding with great caution, we pushed onward for another hour. Close to the precipitous upper portion now—I estimated another half-mile at the utmost. But we were not to get there! Suddenly a great crevasse opened before us, stretch-

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ing to right and left, and some 25 feet or so across. It was impossible in the falling snow to see how far it extended on either side, and there was no time to search. Already the clouds were half down the side of the peak, and with a sigh for the unattainable I, with a last glance round, faced backwards. In that glance I noted that the clouds were settling on the other snowy peaks to the north, with whose summits I now appeared to be on a level, whilst down below me that awful moraine looked as flat as a pancake, sprinkled with small, upstanding currants. Away beyond, with misty clouds dropping on to them, I could see successions of snowy peaks stretching into infinity.

We scrambled down the glacier, often in a sitting position, in far less time than it took us to get up, breaking, I fear, more than one rule of the Alpine Club. Before we reached the bottom the great peak had been blotted out by clouds, which were rapidly dogging our footsteps. My two men were reduced to a mass of chattering teeth—fear as much as cold, I fancy—and I did not like the aspect of matters at all. Crossing the stream, we started homewards, with our best foot foremost, and none too soon, for the snow came down in earnest.

That journey back over the great moraine remains in my memory as a horrid nightmare. The boulders were now thickly coated with ice, a

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bitter wind was in our teeth, and so thick had the snowstorm become, that at times we could scarce move forward at all. Up and down we climbed, over and round the boulders, until my hands were numbed and torn, and useless as aids to progress. I did not time that journey over the big moraine, but if I had been asked on arriving at its lower end, I should probably have said we had spent anything from six to eight hours over it. At the lower end of the little meadow we picked up the man who had been sent out to look for bear. I had forgotten all about him in the scene I had witnessed, and I was by now too weary and cold to care what his news was. My luck here had remained constant, however, as I heard afterwards that he had seen nothing.

By the time we got back to camp the snow had thickly coated all objects and was still falling fast. I was beyond bothering about the snow, however. Food, drink, and warmth were all I craved.

An hour later, by nightfall, when I turned my attention to things external again, the little maidan, the forest, and rocks had lost all their glowing autumn tints in a thick white mantle, which had transformed our little camp and its setting into fairyland. It was a most wonderful transformation scene, but a bitterly cold one.

The servants were at their lowest ebb of misery, shivering, and hopeless of ever getting out of

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this place. One man only bore up and did the work of the lot—as stout-hearted a fellow as I have ever had with me on my travels. May we meet again some day on the far bank of Charon's dark river!

It was high time, evidently, to get out, and I became anxious for tidings of the men sent down to the village in the morning. My little tent was sagging in an ominous manner from the weight of snow upon it. This however was soon temporarily remedied by scraping the heavier masses off. The large log fire in front of the tent was the most curious sight imaginable. It had been piled high with huge logs, and the upper parts of these were now buried in a thick, dome-shaped mass of snow three or more inches deep, whilst below, in the heart, the fire was red-hot and glowing. What the temperature was I should not like to say. I had every garment I possessed upon me, and yet was horribly cold. With the heavy, steady fall of snow, the wind had dropped—a crowning mercy!

Soon after dark the men returned from the village white from head to foot with snow, and with the welcome news that the villagers were on their way up to extricate us. With feelings relieved of considerable anxiety, I sat down to dinner on the edge of the camp bedstead in the little tent with a couple of blankets wrapped round my legs and another round my shoulders.

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The snow ceased during dinner, and by the time I started a meditative pipe it was bright starlight and freezing hard. The clouds still lay heavy and thick on the mountains round. My word! it was cold, though, and I tramped round and round the fire in an effort to restore a little circulation. A vain effort, and I turned in in the vainer hope that my weariness might overpower the cold and send me to sleep. It was hours before that hope was fulfilled.

A brilliant sun was shining when I woke next morning, having overslept myself, as had the camp generally. On looking out, a scene of dazzling splendour met my gaze. It was really like a plunge into that fairyland of our childhood one gazed into on the old Christmas card. One felt as if one were at the bottom of a small white cup, the sides being represented by the gigantic white mountains on all sides, save for the small opening to the south. Snow, snow everywhere, pure and white and dazzling—on mountain peak and slope, on fir, birch, and chestnut, on boulder and rock, and covering in a white shroud the withered wild flowers of the past summer.

In less than twenty-four hours we had plunged from a glorious autumn into the depth of winter. Gone were the beautiful orange and red and gold tints on the broad-leaved trees,

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scattered amongst the dark, silent firs, and be-decking the undergrowth and floor of the forest. Even the dark firs themselves were turned to a mass of glittering silver, whilst the crowns of the birch trees were a delicate white feathery tracery—their leaves changed to glistening jewels. In the undergrowth the leaves of the rhododendrons were each little dome-shaped ellipses of white. The little maidan, so bright and gay yesterday, now lay a pure virgin sheet of white, up out of which the large rocks and boulders stood black and forbidding. The brook, from a blue and white gladsome stream, was now a swollen, dark, and dirty-coloured torrent, flowing between whitened banks, glittering with icicles. On the mountain-sides the reds and browns and ever-varying shades had disappeared under the universal white mantle, save where a black, sheer precipice frowned out like some dark, forbidding window from a fairy castle.

Full three inches of snow had fallen, and turning to the tent I saw that the outer flap had sagged badly under its heavy weight. After the snow had ceased it had frozen hard. This I had noted during the night ; for once curiosity and cold had impelled me to get up and look out. The tent appeared to be illuminated by a mysterious white light, and yet I had no lamp burning. This light seemed to come from outside. I got up, or rather rolled out of my low camp cot, blankets

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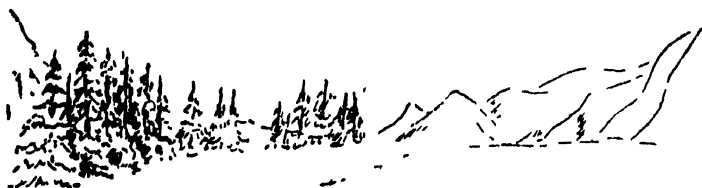
and all, unlaced the tent flaps, and looked out. It was brilliant starlight, and under the influence of this light everything around was of a soft sub-brilliant whiteness, so bright that I felt as if by putting out my hand I could touch the great mountains in front and to the north. All was absolutely still and silent, save for the murmur of the brook. It seemed to me that I was in some new and unknown world, a world watched and guarded by the giant peaks around me. I stooped down. The surface of the snow was as hard as ice, and my breath seemed to drop in tiny crystals; it must have been freezing many degrees. Even the short instants I spent looking at that fairy scene reduced me to such a state of abject numbness that I could not feel the eye-holes, and lacing up the tent proved a matter of some difficulty.

And now the sun had overtopped the peak, and the rays felt comparatively warm, whilst the servants were several degrees removed from their yesterday's comatose state. A bitter wind, however, blew down from the peaks, and tended to mar somewhat the orb of day's attempts at friendliness. Not a cloud was visible, and I felt greatly tempted to delay the move and revisit the glacier. Had the men been sufficiently and properly clad, I have little doubt that I should have done so, and the difficulties of getting out of our present position would have been doubled.

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It was after 9 a.m. when the first coolies began to put in an appearance, but with the conditions as they were this did not worry me. Never was the camp more expeditiously broken up and packed during the whole of that trip, and I saw the whole lot move across the little maidan, beating out a hard, narrow, and devious path across it, and disappear over the edge to the south before I prepared to start myself. It was with many a backward glance that I left the site of my home of the past few days, into which so many and varied experiences had been crowded, and in my turn dropped over the edge to the south, down the hill-side to the first patch of forest and the comparative civilization of the 'below.'

Once more was the little plateau, with its murmuring brook, left in solitude in the shadow of its grim guardians ; to face in a silence as of death a long cruel winter, until the first breath of spring should reawaken it to the world of life, and it should reattire itself in its delicate garb of beauty.





PART III
THE CATS AND OTHERS



CHAPTER X

Tiger and leopard—Tiger in the Himalaya—Ascend high up—The last man-eater—The leopard and panther—Distribution—Habits and food in the Himalaya—Shepherds' tales—Panther and villagers—More daring in hills than plains—Panther and dog—The sahib's dog—Panther tales—Dibs—Dogs' attitude towards panthers—The snow leopard—Distribution—Description—Habits—Where to find—Difficult to find—The clouded leopard—Distribution—Appearance and habits—Killed in the beat—Smaller cats—The marbled cat—Habits and description—Hunting—The leopard cat—Distribution, appearance, and habits.

TIGER AND LEOPARD

TO those unacquainted with the Himalaya and the animals which frequent these great mountains, it will seem curious to include the tiger and leopard in a work which avowedly deals with the Hima-

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layan Fauna only. The initiated, however, are well aware that both tiger and leopard must be included amongst the animals to be met with, for both the plains species ascend the mountains to a considerable elevation.

The tiger (*Felis tigris*), whom we have already dealt with at considerable length in *Jungle By-Ways*, is to be found rarely in the Western Himalaya almost up to the line of permanent snow, or perhaps it were better to write was to be found. Probably few exist in this region nowadays. Those that do wander so far come from the submontane hills clothed with thick sal forest and grass which form their chief retreat, or one of them, in North-West India. The only real Himalayan tiger, for he apparently lived wholly in the hills, whose life-history I am to a certain extent acquainted with, was the old man-eater shot in the Jaunsar Himalaya by Mr. B. B. Osmaston, of the Indian Forest Service, in 1891.

The account of this incident has already been ably told by Mr. S. Eardley-Wilmot, C.I.E., in his interesting book, *Forest Life and Sport in India*. I have examined the ground of this exciting episode, for it nearly resulted in the loss of human, European human, life, the terrain being a gloomy ravine in dark silver fir and spruce forest. One could scarce wish for a more funereal setting to a thrilling shikar episode. It was somewhere about 8000 feet elevation that the man-eater met his

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fate, and no tiger has to my knowledge ever been recorded from this locality since—good proof that this one was out of the ordinary range of the species, since the common experience in the plains is that as soon as a tiger has been killed his particular beat is speedily occupied by a fresh one. A board nailed to a fir tree, stating that the last man-eating tiger of that part of the world was killed on such and such a date, now marks the position of this exploit.

The leopard or panther (*Felis pardus*), on the other hand (with which I have also dealt in *Jungle By-Ways*), is as much at home in the Himalaya, both West and East, anywhere below snow-line, as he is in the plains, and as shy and treacherous and difficult to pick up here as he is 'down below.'

The difference in locale in the animal fauna and in the habits of the human denizens of the mountains naturally accounts for variations in the habits and food of the hill panther. His chief food is in all probability taken from the flocks of the herdsmen and from their dogs, or the village dogs, when he can secure either. Owing to these habits the leopard changes his quarters in winter and summer with the change in feeding-grounds of the flocks, going high up in the summer and coming lower down in the winter.

Many is the tale the simple herdsmen will tell you of the wiles and cunning of the hill leopard,

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and not only of the cunning alone but of the daring also—for the animal would appear to be braver in the hills than in the plains, or is it that he is more often hungry or has to go for longer periods without being able to satisfy his appetite? I know not, but I think many of us will have formed this opinion of the cat. At any rate, sitting up for the pard in the hills appears to be a useless proceeding. Oft-times did I try for him in this way in Sikkim during my salad days, but never secured a skin for my pains.

It is astonishing, too, from what places he will carry off his booty. I remember a recent occasion in Chamba. We had arrived a day or two before at a little bungalow in deodar forest, situated at the foot of a steep forest-clad hill. In front of us lay a tiny upland valley, about 200 yards or so across—the hills rising crowned with thick forest on the far side. A village of a few houses was situated in the clearing, with some small fields, and hard by a large stout zareba, some eight to nine feet high, composed of a wall about four feet thick, of thorny shrubs and bushes. Into this the cattle were driven every evening and shut up for the night. One morning I was passing the place soon after dawn when a shepherd came up in great tribulation. A leopard, he said, had jumped the zareba during the night, got in amongst the sheep and goats and carried off a fat sheep, jumping back out of the zareba with the animal in its mouth.

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It was a difficult tale to believe, considering the size of the place, but I went thoroughly into the matter and there could be no doubt as to the truth of his statement. Blood and wool were found on top of the thorny wall, blood on the ground on both sides of it, and the leopard's pugs distinct.

Now the leopard could not have rested on the wall ; he would have spiked himself badly had he done so, and his weight would have broken and pressed it down at the spot. There was no such evidence at the place where the leopard and his prey had left the zareba. We followed the blood trail into the forest, but soon lost it in the thick undergrowth, and though I spent several hours on this hunt we never found a trace of that leopard.

Many another tale of the daring of the leopard could, and does, the shepherd of the hills unfold if you can once persuade him to talk at all, and this you will certainly not be able to do until you have gained his confidence. In the village, again, you will hear plenty of talk on the subject of the local panthers and their doings, for the villagers are well acquainted with their neighbours and have a very respectful fear of them. When pressed by hunger the panther will calmly enter a village and even a house and carry off a small child or dog if he finds one at his mercy ; and he has even been known to do so from a room occupied by adults and to escape with it in spite

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of the blows rained down upon him with such missiles as could be seized at the moment. It is owing to the extreme daring of this animal that the villagers keep a powerful type of dog in the village and provide him with a stout, broad metal collar, thickly studded with sharp spikes on the outside. Such a collar has saved many a dog from the spoiler, for a mouthful of sharp spikes instead of soft hair and flesh is apt to choke off the



The panther will stalk and carry off a dog.

most enterprising panther, causing him to retire crestfallen to his haunts in the neighbouring jungle. It is an undisputed fact, however, that the annual mortality in children and dogs carried off by panthers in these hills is something considerable—the major part due to the fatalistic carelessness, for it is not ignorance, of the native. Fate decides all, he thinks, and trusts to luck, and that luck is eminently favourable to wily Spots, who of a certainty knows the ways of the native as well as, if not better than, they know his.

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But the shepherd and the villager are not the only types of the human race upon whom the hand of our friend the pard falls heavy. The sahib, and more especially perhaps the sahib in the hills, has also his tale of woe to relate. For the sahib's dog forms the panther's dainty of dainties. It would be of considerable interest if one could ascertain even roughly the number of hours of its life an average-lived panther spends endeavouring to stalk the dog, and more especially that tit-bit the white dog of the sahib. Few probably suspect the fact, but all unknown to ourselves, though possibly not unknown to the dogs themselves, panthers must be continually about the bungalow in the small up-country stations and round the rest-house or tents out in camp. How often of an evening are we suddenly roused by the low growl of the dog, or the frantic excitement of the whole community if we have more than one ! Or in the broad daylight of the afternoon the dogs will run out barking and make for a certain piece of jungle perhaps, without however entering it. A leopard was there, and had one of them gone close enough, as the pluckiest so often do, he would have had it. As it is, he slinks off defeated for that time. But he will be back again, and that before long. It is perhaps not too much to say that in many localities throughout the hills and throughout the country as a whole where leopards abound,

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there is always one leopard at least prowling round the bungalow or tents, and it may be taken as certain that that animal will devote hours of the period of your stay studying your movements and habits and those of your dog. Yours he studies to find out when you will be out of the way—those of your dog in the hope that he may catch him napping in an unwary moment ; and if he does you will never see that dog again.

Certainly the larger proportion of dogs taken by panthers every year in India are lost solely through the carelessness and ignorance of their own masters. It is a bitter experience to learn one's lesson through the loss of a favourite companion, a companion who means so much to one when alone in camp. But many of us have only learnt that lesson in this particular way, and have sacrificed the life of a friend for whom we would almost have given our own simply through sheer stupidity and ignorance of the habits of one of the cleverest and most cunning of the cat tribe.

A year or so after my arrival in India I made the acquaintance of one of the smartest and most ' alive ' little terriers I think I have ever known. He did not belong to me, but I loved that little dog and broke a certain commandment whenever I saw him or thought of him. I can see him now as he used to fly out and hurl himself at me with shrieks of delight when I paid a visit to his master.

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I believe there was nothing on earth that dog would not have fought or gone for, or have endeavoured to have fought. His master was not a great shikari, but he used to say now and then that he feared 'Dibs' would be taken by a panther some day. I did not know the animal as I do now, and so the feelings of uneasiness which this remark used to arouse in me were short-lived only.

One afternoon we three went for a tramp, gun under the arm of two of us, Dibs as usual frantic with delight and bursting with life and the enjoyment thereof. We did not expect to get a shot at anything, and the guns were taken from habit more than anything else.

We had been out an hour when a sudden sharp cry, followed by a fierce yelp, proclaimed that Dibs was in trouble. The noise came from bushes down the khud, into which he had rushed but a few seconds previously. We both jumped off the road and ran down the hill to the spot. There was no dog and not a sound. We separated and whistled and called, I still without a thought of danger to the little beast. I only thought he was running mute on something, as I had seen him do so often before. Suddenly I heard a voice exclaim, 'Oh, my God!' I hurried up and saw my friend holding in his hand a portion of a dog's collar stained with blood—Dibs' collar and Dibs' blood!

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We searched every inch of that scrub jungle for half a mile round, sent for coolies and lanterns and searched an area of some two or three miles' radius, retiring to the bungalow worn out in mind and body at about 2 a.m. We found no further trace of Dibs. As loyal a little heart as ever beat in a dog's bosom was at rest for ever, gone may we hope to as happy hunting-grounds as those in which he spent his joyous life on earth.

It was a panther. Between us we spent the best part of two months, working together and separately, to avenge Dibs. My friend once saw the panther, I never got even a glimpse of him.

Very few of us but can, I expect, tell of a similar experience. I never lost a dog of my own, but I was often laughed at for being over cautious. But when one has once drunk deep of the cup of bitterness one is likely to become over cautious perhaps. It must be borne in mind also that the dog, and especially the plucky English-bred dog, is apparently defenceless against the most dangerous animal in the jungle, so far as he is concerned. For some peculiar reason, which I have never seen explained or adequately explained, the dog—I should perhaps say the British-bred dog—appears to be entirely defenceless against the panther. His instinct seems to be entirely at fault in the case of this animal. If he thinks a panther is about he rushes wildly out barking and, if a true-plucked

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one, advances into the jaws of death without apparently the faintest warning sense that he is throwing his life away. For he has not the remotest chance against his adversary. With a bound the panther has him by the neck. A sharp yelp or two and all is over. It is difficult to understand why the dog, the domesticated dog, who has retained much of the intelligence and wild instincts of his former wild parents, should have so utterly lost the sense or instinct which would and does instinctively teach a wild dog, or bitch for instance, to keep out of the way of the panther or hide her young from such animals. That our dogs have lost this instinct or sense we know, but why?

THE SNOW LEOPARD OR OUNCE

The snow leopard or ounce (*Felis uncia*) is an inhabitant of the high mountains, living up above 9000 feet (about), although it may possibly come lower down in the winter. It is said to be more abundant on the Thibetan side of the snowy range, and it is met with on the upper Indus and upper waters of the Sutlej, and is said to be fairly common in Gilgit.

The snow leopard, however, for all its reported abundance or commonness in certain localities, is not an easy animal either to see or to come across. At least I give this as my own personal experience, and shall have many to corroborate it. Whenever

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I have been in a locality where there was the remotest chance of my coming across one of these much-coveted animals I have worked hard and long for the beast. And yet my bag of snow leopards has been *nil*. The animal preys, too, on animals which the sportsman goes out to find, for its chief food consists probably of ibex, markhor,



A young leopard in the Himalaya.

and tahr. This habit of his, known as it is or should be to the sportsman, often raises hopes of meeting him when one has drawn a nullah blank of goats for several days. If they have gone, one surmises it may be because they have become aware that a snow leopard is about. That one has often been in the neighbourhood of this latter is more than probable, but as I have said, they are not the easiest of animals to see,

The Cats and Others

living and sneaking about amongst rocks as they do.

A beautiful skin has the snow leopard, the most handsome of the many beautiful ones possessed by the various cats. He is smaller than the panther, with a longer tail in proportion to his length—the tail, too, is thicker and bushier. The black rosettes on the skin are of larger size and more open than those of the leopard. The general colouring of the animal is pale whitish grey, with at times a yellowish tinge, above and pure white below. The whole animal is spotted with black, but the rosettes only appear on the back, sides and tail. The fur is long and very soft and downy to the touch. The length is about four feet four inches, with a tail of about three feet.

I remember most vividly one of the many occasions on which I have set off from camp with high hopes in my heart that I should at last wrest this prize from Dame Fortune's grasp. We had left camp before dawn and had tramped for an hour before the sun rose flooding the snowy peaks to the north-west with a mass of soft, indescribable tints, whilst the mists below writhed in slowly moving masses of vapour which gradually rose and disappeared. We had scarcely begun to look about us in earnest when my companion, pointing to a height above, exclaimed 'Ibex.' Now I had not shot an ibex and I much wished to do so, but then neither had I satisfied a far

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greater ambition which was connected with the snow leopard. After a very short struggle I determined to stick to my present quest and make for the spot we had had in view when we left camp.

We ultimately reached the nullah, explored it inside and out, saw nothing, and arrived back late after an extremely arduous day. My companion thought I ought to have regretted having given up the ibex. I did not then, however, nor do I now.

THE CLOUDED LEOPARD

There is another very beautiful leopard to be found in the Eastern Himalaya, Sikkim, Bhutan, and neighbouring tracts stretching away through the Assam Hills down into Burma. I allude to the clouded leopard (*Felis nebulosa*). He does not go high up into the mountains, 7000 to 8000 feet being about his maximum, and he is to be found much lower down. Just as the snow leopard forms the lode-star of the shikari on the upper heights in the Western Himalaya, so does the clouded cat constitute the aim and ambition of man in the eastern mountains, and more especially of the tea-planters and shikaris inhabiting the Darjiling Hills. It is there that I first saw this beautiful cat, though I was not the fortunate man on that memorable day—not that there was much in the way of real sport connected with its bag. The beast came out in one of the beats we were having

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on the hill-side for pheasant and barking deer, and was tamely shot by one of the guns. But I can remember now my feelings of delight at the beauty and symmetry of that leopard as he lay stretched out on the mountain-side. Of about the size of a small leopard, in colour, when newly shot, he is of a greenish or greenish-brown tinge, varying to yellowish brown; the lower parts white or whitish tawny. The whole animal is spotted and barred with spots and stripes or patches of black or dark colouring, forming in parts ovalish blotches interspersed with narrower, paler bands. Underneath only the black spots are present. The tail has series of black rings along it. The length may be taken at a little over three feet, with a tail of two feet three inches to two feet six inches.

If keenness could have done it, it might have been my fortune to bag a clouded leopard during my stay in Sikkim. I had not the knowledge however then which might have rendered my chance a better one, and the luck of the griffin, which that capricious jade Fortune metes out to some, never came my way.

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THE SMALLER CATS

THE MARBLED CAT

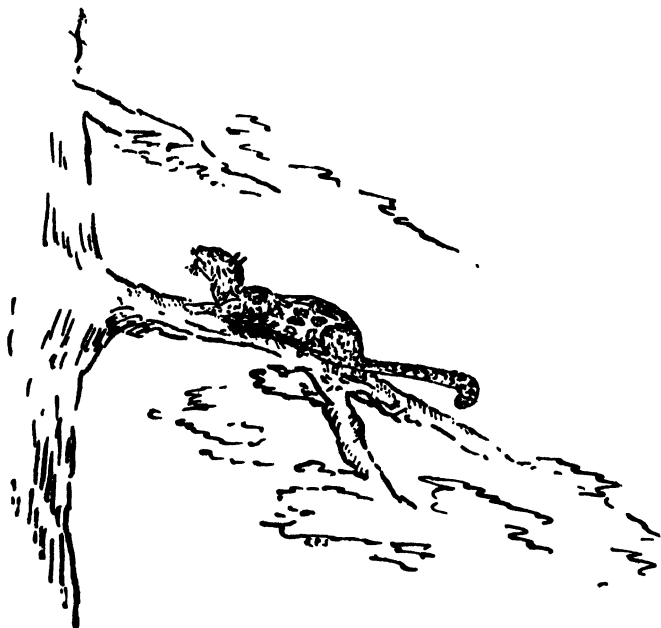
There are two extremely handsome little animals amongst the numerous species of smaller cats to be met with in the Indian jungles—the two in question being Himalayan animals, although one has a much wider distribution.

One of these, the beautiful marbled cat (*Felis marmorata*), occurs in Sikkim and throughout the Eastern Himalaya, stretching down into those fascinating (to the student of Fauna distribution) regions the hills of Assam, Burma, and the Malays. I had the good fortune to come across this shy cat twice, and on one occasion I was lucky enough to shoot the animal. Had I not had this piece of luck I should never have been able to place this cat in its surroundings as I have since been able to do.

Both the animals I saw were in trees, and one had all the appearance of being engaged in stalking some birds perched on twigs above it. The animal was creeping along a branch in the manner many of us have observed our domesticated tabby perform the same feat in a home garden. I watched him for a short time, but not knowing what he would do if he missed his quarry, and fearing to lose him, I brought his stalk to a sudden termination with a charge of shot, and saved the feathered songsters for that occasion.

The Cats and Others

The marbled cat is of somewhat larger size than the ordinary house cat, with a long, thick tail which does not constrict to a point. The fur is beautifully soft, with thick under-fur, the colour being a yellowish brown, rather bright



Engaged in stalking some birds.

above and paler below. The back has long, dark patches separated by lighter lines of colour, the sides also having large dark patches of colour similarly separated by light lines. The legs and tail are spotted with black. The animal has a small, well-set-on keen head, and my specimen was some

Stalks in the Himalaya

20 inches with a tail of 13 inches in length. They grow to a slightly greater size, however. Altogether, he is a beautiful little cat and makes a very handsome little skin.

THE LEOPARD CAT

To conclude with the cats, I will mention one of the commonest which we must all have met often—both in the hills and plains—the little leopard cat (*Felis bengalensis*), a cat of the size of a small average domestic cat, but with longer legs.

He is common in the Himalaya and extends down into Bengal, Assam, Burma, and the Malays, etc.

He varies a great deal in colouration, from light yellowish brown, or greyish, to rufous above and white below, the whole being spotted with elongate, squarish, or round spots of varying size (smaller on legs and beneath than above), black or brown in colour, or each may be partly black and partly brown.

This little animal lives mostly in trees, where it spends a happy existence stalking birds, the small grey squirrel, and other small mammals. Its home is in small caves or at the back of much-overhanging rocks, where the mother brings up her young of three or four in safety.

An ideal existence this cat lives in the hills, untormented, as its cousin the domestic variety, by

The Cats and Others

the quips and cranks of its owner, who resents having his favourite blackbirds and thrushes stalked along the boughs of the cedar tree on the lawn.





CHAPTER XI

The Indian marten—Appearance—Habits and food—Hunting in the forest—A beautiful coat—How to study animals—The musk deer—Description—Hornless—The musk—Manner of moving—Abundance—Habits—Persecuted by natives—The Himalayan crow—His interests and food—A lunch siesta—Appearance of a monal cock and harem—Antics of cock—Colouration—How to find monal—Abundance—Other Himalayan pheasants—The cheer pheasant—Appearance—Koklass and its plumage—The white-crested kaleej—A determined skulker—Where it lives—And how to get it—Appearance of kaleej—Good eating—A deodar-scented path—The Himalaya in the spring—Home flowers—Fitness after tramping in the hills—A good march.

MARTENS AND MUSK DEER

HAVE you ever watched the little Indian marten (*Mustela flavigula*) in the forest? A dainty and beautifully coloured little animal is he, glossy and brilliant, the whole of his upper parts being glossy blackish brown with the throat and breast

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deep yellow or orange-yellow, whilst the chin and lower lip are white. A graceful little animal, with his small head set on a slender columnar neck, his slim body and long tail forming a *tout ensemble* of graceful symmetry.

But, in spite of his looks, he is a cold-blooded poacher who brings ruin to many a home to satisfy his hunger or that of his brood. For he feeds chiefly on birds' eggs, and is also said to kill the young of Kakhar Deer or Muntjac when he comes across them in their forms. When such are not in season he is useful to humanity, as he makes his meals off rats, lizards, and snakes.

He is usually to be found in pairs, or in larger parties of as many as half a dozen together. We were walking one morning along one of those deodar-shaded and scented paths so common up in the Himalaya, when we suddenly spied a couple of these little animals. They had not seen us, and we stopped dead and watched them. It was in the spring-time, and the pair were evidently searching the floor of the forest for eggs. They were quartering the whole area in the most careful fashion, like a couple of well-trained pointers, thrusting their little noses into every likely cranny, and now and then standing up, nose elevated in the air to snuff the wind. It was a pretty sight, though it had its cold-blooded element about it.

Their procedure seemed to be to start from a

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given point and each examine a small area, turning inwards so as to reach their first point of departure again. Here they would appear to confer, and then running forward a short distance, again commence the same tactics. We watched them for a half-hour or so, but in that period they had no luck. As we moved forward abruptly they looked up startled, stood up on their hind legs, to make out plainly what the danger was, and then made off, but without any appearance of undue haste, the one following in the tracks of the other, as I have often witnessed them doing on more than one occasion.

The fur of these little animals is much darker in the summer than in either the spring or late autumn. It is soft, and they make rather handsome, soft, small skins. They are quite easily killed with a charge of shot, and I shot a few when I first went up to the Himalaya, as much for study as for any other purpose. If the naturalist wishes to learn the appearance of the animals he watches, so that he may subsequently correctly classify them whilst in their own surroundings in the forest or on the open mountain-side, it is essential that he should commence by killing a few. He will soon rather watch than kill, once he is thoroughly acquainted with their appearance and characteristics. So it was in my case. This little marten is chiefly found in the valleys of the outer ranges in the

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cold weather, but ascends up to 7000 to 9000 feet in the summer, and many will doubtless have come across it as we did that morning, silently hunting through the brushwood or over the little mossy dells and glades for its food. The clever and graceful little creature will always repay watching, whenever you can do so without being seen.

THE MUSK DEER

It is up at these elevations and in similar situations in the forest or in the little grassy dells and glades or out on the hill-sides close to



Head of Musk Deer.

the forest that you will find that curious little denizen of the hills, the Musk Deer, one of the smallest of the deer tribe. He hardly comes within the province of game, for he is easy to

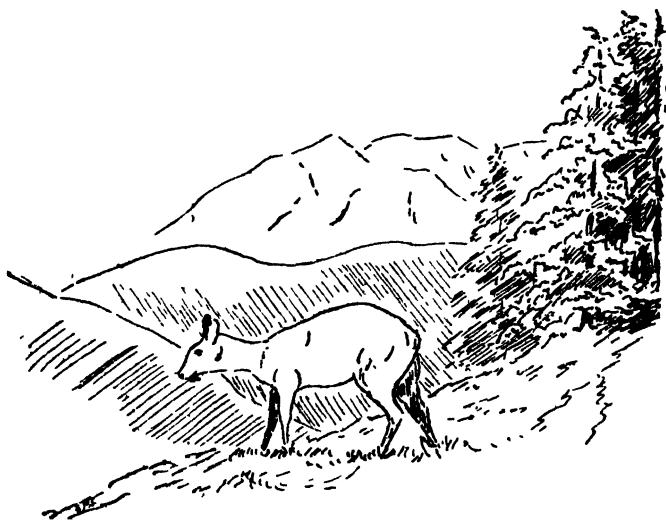
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get near and kill. The only difficulty about him is to distinguish the males from the females, as this can be only done with certainty by looking for and seeing the long, curved, canine teeth which the males possess, and you require to get pretty close to be able to do this, even with glasses. These canines curve downwards from the upper jaw, are three inches in length, and as thick as a goose-quill. In colour this little deer is usually dark, greyish brown, paler beneath the body and patchy on top, the hair being long and very coarse and thick on the body ; the ears are large and thick, the tail short. The male is about three feet in length and about 23 inches in height. The legs are long and slender, with long and pointed toes, and the false hoof almost touching the ground. Neither male nor female have horns. The young are spotted with white. The rutting period is in the winter, and one or two young are born which are said to be able to shift for themselves in six weeks. The tail of the male of this deer has a peculiar gland, the secretion from which glues the hairs together, the major part of the tail being bare. A fluid of peculiar odour is secreted here. The true musk-bag is situated, however, towards the base of the abdomen. It is globular, about one and a half inches in diameter. The musk when fresh is soft, and has been likened to new gingerbread. A good musk-pod has a considerable

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value, and the animal is much sought after by natives and slaughtered for this reason.

This little deer is very sure-footed, and gets over the ground, considering his peculiar mode of progression, in a wonderful manner. They usually emit a queer kind of hissing noise when



You will find the musk deer on the grassy slopes.

alarmed, and make off in bounds, jumping along on all four feet. The musk deer is a forest lover, and is found in summer from about 7000 feet (according to aspect) upwards to near, or above, the tree limit. In the early morning you may find him out on grassy slopes (or on the snow at high elevations), and there are some such grassy spots at fairly low levels in this region (about

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7000 feet that is) in the Western Himalaya, where he is fairly abundant and may always be found. Taking him all round he is a sober and inoffensive little animal, not given to the antics and capers of many of his Himalayan confrères, and in this respect rather resembles his little companion of these hills (and the plains below), the Kakhar or barking deer. Like this latter animal the musk deer are solitary in their habits, being found usually singly, but occasionally in pairs. They lie up in the forest in forms in the grass or moss of the forest floor. Owing to his thick hair the musk deer is often found as high up in the mountains as the snow-line or in the birch forest just below it, and the animal appears to be impervious to cold.

Grass and leaves and flowers form its food. Kinlock alludes to a native idea that the animal eats snakes, but I have never myself been able to find a first-hand authentic account of this deer being of such use to humanity. The musk deer doubtless owes a good deal of its immunity from slaughter and persecution to his colouration, which is so similar to his surroundings that he is most difficult to pick up; and as, added to this, in areas where he is much hunted by natives (who shoot him in order to procure the musk for sale), he is very shy and easily alarmed, he is not so easily killed, as is the case in localities remote from the native shikari.

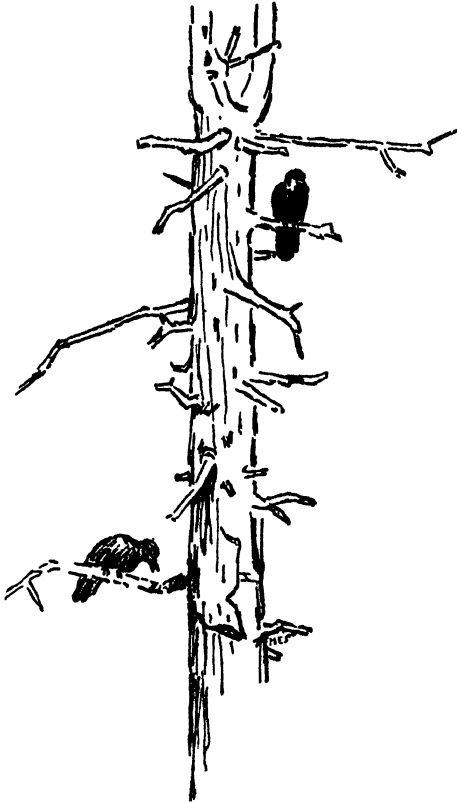
The Cats and Others

It is curious that an animal carrying such a disagreeable odour as musk about in its anatomy should at the same time have such an excellent-eating flesh as this deer possesses.

As we sat at lunch on a grassy bank beneath the shade of some fine deodars, another denizen of these beautiful mountains made his appearance and, perching in a neighbouring dead tree, politely swore at us during our meal. This gentleman was a species of the Indian crow, but a far different bird from his dirty-looking, bedraggled, and unkempt cousin of the plains below. This Himalayan crow is a respecter of cleanliness, and his coal-black plumage positively shines and glistens in the sunlight, and though he cannot be termed prepossessing, there is at the same time something clean and strong-looking about him. Watch him as he sits and eyes with longing the tempting viands outlaid on snowy cloth, so closely adjacent to him. His head is jerked now on one side and now on the other. Then he cocks an eye at us and squawks, a proceeding followed by his companion. And there they sit, with a touch of the patience surely caught from the East, knowing that they have but to wait till the two-legged mammals have gone, to find a plentiful meal for themselves. These crows of the

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Himalaya are by no means the foul-feeding birds of the plains. Their food consists principally of slugs, snails, and grubs, also of fruits and berries.



Perched on a neighbouring tree, politely swore at us.

Whilst enjoying a post-prandial pipe we had the pleasure of seeing another of the bird-life of these hills, and one of the handsomest—the monal

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pheasant (*Lophophorus impeyanus*). On a great rock shielded by a dwarf tree a fine cock-bird suddenly appeared and began stepping round, ruffling his plumage and generally showing himself off in a manner which the males (of more species than birds) only adopt when they have the females in their near neighbourhood. And sure enough in this instance we soon made out three or four soberly clad hens near the back of the rock, and in a much lowlier position. The cock-bird had got above them to show off the full beauty of his plumage, and truly he is a very handsome bird. The crest and head are bright metallic green, neck brilliant copper at the back, the greater part of the back white, whilst the upper part of the back, rump, and tail coverts are purple. The tail is chestnut and the under parts black. Did you ever picture to yourself such a gaudily bedizened game bird? And he is as fine-looking as he is gaudy, and as clever and cunning as he is handsome. His spouse (one of them) is by no means so brilliantly coloured, her plumage consisting of sombre black, relieved with touches of rufous here and there, and a little white. The monal is by no means uncommon in these mountains, but many is the blank day we have had in search of him, even when accompanied by Jock, the spaniel. Early morning and late evening is the best time to find him, so the hill-men will tell you, and he appears to be more

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addicted to occupying the same localities than the other pheasants of the Himalaya. At any rate, I have had this proved to me by men telling me we were sure to find monal at particular places ; the spot usually meaning an appallingly hard climb, often in the dark, to get to the place in time. I have only once, to my remembrance, failed to secure a reward by finding the birds, though my object was not always to shoot them.

Other pheasants afford much sport and amusement, amongst the commoner in the Western Himalaya being the cheer pheasant (*Catreus Wallichii*), found from Nepal to Chamba from about 3000 to 10,000 feet. This is a handsome pheasant, the male brownish in colour, with the throat and neck-ring white and the plumage barred with black in parts, the rump being chestnut-coloured and the lower plumage and tail coverts buff. He is good eating. Then there is the koklass (*Pucrasia macrolopha*), found from Kashmir to Kumaum (3000 to 8000 feet), in which the male has a glossy black head, with a patch of white on each side of the neck. The plumage above and sides ash-coloured, streaked with black ; the breast and belly are rich chestnut, whilst the wing-quills are brown and the middle tail feathers chestnut with grey tips. The female is rufous streaked with black, with a white throat.

Another common bird is the white-crested kaleej pheasant (*Gennæus albicristatus*), one of the most

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plentiful, perhaps, of all those I have named, and yet an inveterate skulker. He lives in thick bushes, especially near cultivation and water, and skulks there. The other pheasants, when badly pressed, will come off the hill-side at a good round pace, often offering a tall shot. Not so our friend the kaleej. If he must rise he will get as near the edge of the jungle as he can, and then get up with a tremendous flutter, skim over a few bushes and dive to ground again ; or if forced to cross the road will do so as near to you as he can possibly get unobserved, and be in cover again before he has got fifteen yards away. If, taken unawares, you hurriedly fire, your cartridge goes past him in the fashion of a bullet, or should you perchance hit him, you blow him to pieces.

A most difficult bird the kaleej to keep your temper with !

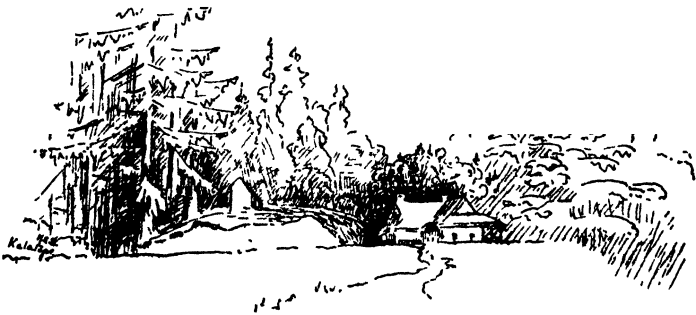
He fears a dog, though, like poison, and usually scrambles into a tree to avoid him. Your dog remains baying at the bottom, and when you approach, refusing to fire at the bird sitting in the tree, he leaves hurriedly on the opposite side, taking care to keep the tree-trunk between you and himself. A most unsatisfactory bird !

Withal he is handsome, the male with a white crest to his blue-black head, neck also blue-black ; the rest of the bird black on back, rump and tail, the breast and belly greyish white or speckly, turning to brown lower down. The female is

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brown in colour, with grey throat and glossy black tail.

As we marched along a deodar-shaded path to the bungalow in the afternoon many plants well known in the woodlands at home starred the dells or nestled in the mossy banks. Anemones,



As we marched to the bungalow.

white and delicate shades of pink and blue, carpeted the forest floor in masses, whilst the graceful columbine stood out of the banks in a natural setting of delicate maidenhair. At intervals the arums reared up their curious-shaped flower spathes from secluded nooks, whilst the ground orchid was to be found if searched for. And even more pleasing perhaps, because so marvellous, the rocks were covered with the fine green leaves of the saxifrage which later on would

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be thickly studded with the great flower-heads of these beautiful plants. Often have we stopped to examine the positions in which these saxifrages grow, for it is nothing short of marvellous how they manage to find the grip and purchase on the sides of flat, solid rock to enable them to bear the weight of the great glossy leaves, and the heavy heads of flowers which they support in due season. Very, very beautiful are these deodar-scented paths in the Himalayan spring and early summer in a climate that can be beaten nowhere in the world.

It was Kinlock, I think, who commented on the fact that at the end of some weeks' tramping and climbing and shooting in the Himalaya one becomes so hard and in such good condition that one can undertake without discomfort feats of endurance which would be almost, if not quite, impossible under ordinary conditions of life. Many of us will have proved this times without number. I will quote an example here. I give it with no idea of self-emulation, but merely because I think it affords a good instance of the powers of these wonderful mountains. I had reached Deoban after six or seven weeks of hard marching in the mountains in the beyond, and I determined to try and carry out an ambition and walk in from there to Dehra Dun via Mussoorie in a day. Deoban is situated about 9300 feet elevation, a few miles up a vilely stony track

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straight above Chakrata, a military cantonment situated some 37 miles or so distant from Mussoorie. To reach this latter place from the cantonment the road drops into a hot valley to the Jumna River, which is crossed by a bridge at about 2500 feet elevation. The road then climbs the opposite mountain-side to Mussoorie 6700 feet, 12 miles of as hard a pull up as any lover of hill climbing could want. A mile along the level and the road descends for six miles to Rajpur, at the foot of the mountain, from where a straight six miles on a gentle down-gradient takes you to the post office in the Civil Station of Dehra. The distance, keeping to the road and taking no short cuts, is about 57 miles from door to door.

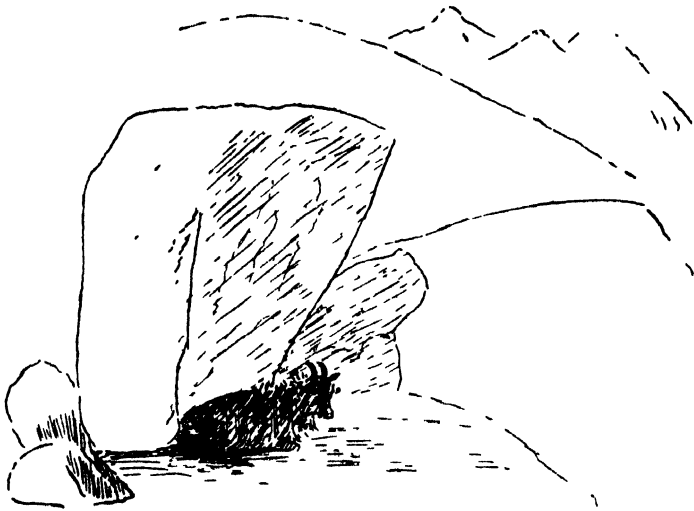
The great difficulties facing me consisted in making provision for food and in arranging for a man to accompany me. For the first, there is one dak-bungalow at the end of the first 16 miles, where I arranged for a very early breakfast. For lunch I sent a man off two days before with a lunch-basket, with orders to await me on the other side of the Jumna Bridge. My personal attendant was a more difficult matter. As I intended to leave at 2 a.m., and it was the middle of November, it would be necessary to start with an extra muffler or two. Later on in the day I should wish to dispense with them, as also my coat. In the event I

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changed my man six times during that march the delay on two occasions in finding a man to replace he who refused to go forward another yard with the mad sahib, resulting in a waste of two hours. I picked up my hot breakfast at the dak-bunaglow before the sun had risen over the mountain crests ; and put up barking deer and kaleej pheasants and chukor, the birds presenting the most tempting shots as I had no gun, on my way down to the Jumna Bridge, which I reached about 11 a.m. The 12-mile pull up to Mussoorie was the worst part of the walk, and I halted for lunch after eight miles of it. Once in Mussoorie it was all plain sailing, and I did the first four miles between Rajpur and Dehra in fifty minutes without any discomfort. I was not out to create any records, and ended my march at 6.30 p.m., fatigued, of course, but quite fit. It is really astonishing how hard and fit the wanderer in the byways of the Himalaya becomes after a few weeks.



PART IV
THE GOATS



CHAPTER XII

The serow—Frequents bad ground—Appearance—In the Eastern Himalaya—Khubbar of serow—Forest scenery of Eastern Himalaya—Kinchinjunga—Flora and fauna—The serow appears—A hurried shot—The planter's rebuke—Excitement of the griffin—'Keep cool'—Climbing powers of the hillman—Find the serow—My first Himalayan trophy—Description of male serow—Distribution—Fierceness of serow—Days after serow—Drinking and climbing—Put up a serow—Peculiar cry—A stiff climb—An unpremeditated intrusion.

THE SEROW

OF all the hill animals I have met, I would give the palm to the serow for frequenting some of the worst country, and getting over it in the most marvelous fashion. And this in spite of its curiously awkward gait, which reminds one more of the

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Nilgai or blue bull of the plains of India than any hill animal I know. The serow is itself of ungainly build, and has been likened to a cross between a cow, donkey, pig, and goat. And one can scarcely conceive a worse mixture than a type made up of these four. The animal is much larger than the tahr, the other goat approaching it in appearance, being longer in the leg and far more powerful. Neither has any resemblance to the little goral, the goat already considered.

I can well remember my surprise at the size of the beast, and the great, indefinable sense of power it gave me when I first set eyes on one. I was enjoying my first experience of Himalayan shooting, being stationed at the time in British Sikkim, on the east side of the great chain. From the most hospitable race of men on the face of the earth, the Indian Planters, I had been drinking in with avidity tales of this and other Himalayan game, and perhaps in the light of subsequent personal investigations, all that the tyro was then told has not been found to be in entire consonance with facts. But the temptation to pull the leg of a griffin so athirst for information must have been irresistible!

I was staying under one of these hospitable roofs, and we were at breakfast one morning when one of the servants entered, and stationing himself behind his master's chair, said, with the imperturbability of his race, "The jemadar

The Goats

(overseer) says there is a serow in the tea, not far from the tea-house, sahib." I jumped up and sat hurriedly down again. I remembered that I was a guest. My host, who had shot serow before, and would assuredly not have moved from his comfortable table, looked at me good-humouredly and said, "Shall we go?" My face must have given him the answer, for he rose from the table, and very shortly we were following the jemadar down one of the paths through the tea. Questions elicited the fact that a coolie, coming along a footpath through the tea, had suddenly seen the animal, so he avowed, browsing on the tea shoots. He at once stooped down and quietly retraced his steps, and hurried with the news to the jemadar. It happened to be the weekly bazaar day and so a holiday, and the jemadar was at home. He apparently received the coolie's news with disbelief. But the man was so much in earnest about the matter, probably in the hope of meat, I suppose, that the jemadar agreed to go and see for himself what truth there was in the statement. Sure enough, on cautiously approaching through the tea, they came upon the serow in much the same place as he had previously occupied.

As we went along, my friend told me that the animal must have strayed several miles from his usual haunts, and he mentioned a place which I knew by name as being in the Reserved Forest

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in my district, though, being new to this part of the world, I had not yet visited the spot. What could have induced the animal to have wandered so far and into the comparatively well-frequented tea lands, he could not say. In fact, he would have scouted the idea of it being a serow at all, had not his jemadar seen the animal. This man was quite a fair shikari, in addition to his many other excellent attributes, and his master did not dream of doubting his word.

About a mile and a half away there was some broken rocky country, covered with low scrub jungle, and I was told the serow would certainly make off in this direction if disturbed. As we reached the plot of tea in which the animal had been marked down, the question of how best to approach it was thoroughly discussed. The shikari was all for stalking it in the same fashion as he and the coolie had done. Perhaps my friend would have agreed to this had he been alone, and done it successfully. As he wished me to take the shot, and was aware that I had never seen a serow in my life, he probably thought, and rightly so I now think, that I should make a muddle of the thing, and perhaps startle the animal before I saw it myself. Anyhow, though he did not give me his reason then, to my disappointment he decided that we should make for the edge of the broken rocky ground, the two men receiving orders to move quietly into the tea when they

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had given us sufficient time to get there, and endeavour to let the serow know of their presence without absolutely frightening him. This, my friend calculated, would result in his making for the rocky ground, but at a reasonable pace.

After three-quarters of an hour's tramp, the latter part through scrub jungle, I was placed on a small rock, which enabled me to see above the jungle to some extent, and my friend disappeared to take up a position within fifty yards of my own.

It was a hot, cloudless day in midsummer, one of those sunny, brilliant days a break in the rains produces, and as I stood silently in my stand, I gazed round on the, to me, still unfamiliar scene with that feeling of indescribable delight and pleasure the new-comer to the Himalaya, if a sportsman and a lover of nature, must ever experience. A myriad insects, whose names I was ignorant of, but some of whose forms I was able to recognize from having seen them depicted in books or set out in museums, hummed and hovered and sailed around me. Birds of unknown names and brilliant plumage twittered in the trees and bushes, whilst beautiful ferns and the curious, dried-looking foliage of orchids clung to the bark of some trees which stood in a clump at the edge of the drop. Over the top of a shoulder of a hill the giant Kinchinjunga reared up snowy white against the brilliant

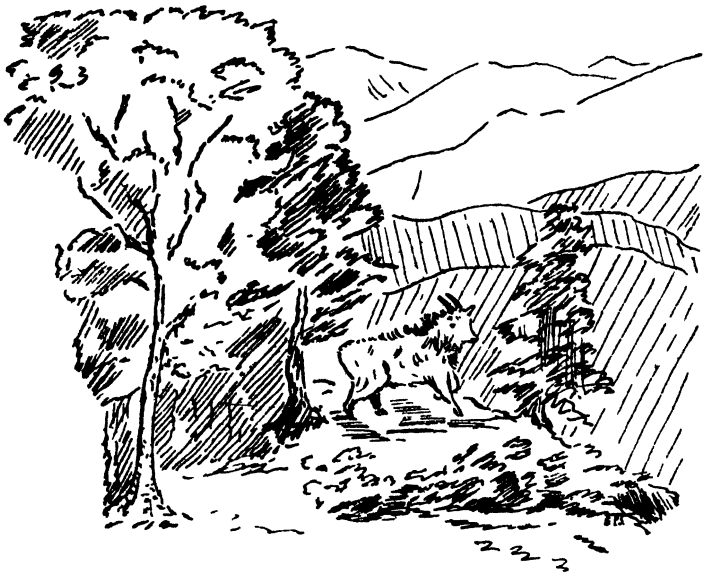
Stalks in the Himalaya

blue sky. Each rock in my neighbourhood appeared to have its own little rock garden enshrouding it, whilst curious jungle plants and thick-foliaged trees combined to make up a vast unknown amount of jungle life which at the time was a sealed book to me. I suppose we each one of us have looked round with feelings of wonder on our first arrival in the Himalaya, and more especially in the Eastern Himalaya, where, owing to the far greater percentage of moisture in the atmosphere to that of the western parts of the great chain, the jungle has so much greater a variety of tropical luxuriance about it, and the small fauna life appears to have so infinitely greater variety. I can well remember on that afternoon, as I stood awaiting the appearance of the serow, being overwhelmed with a feeling almost of despair that I should ever be able to claim acquaintance with a tithe of the new fauna and flora that surrounded me.

Suddenly a faint rustle caught my ears. I glanced at my friend, and turned my gaze to the part of the jungle he was looking at. Before my eyes had reached the spot, without any warning, something hairy rushed through the jungle and came to a halt about thirty paces away from me on the very edge of the drop into the broken ground. I do not know now what I expected to see, but the apparition that faced me left me in such a state of wonder, that for a few seconds I re-

The Goats

mained looking at it spellbound. This is not like a goat, I remember thinking, this great, black, uncouth-looking beast. Then I bethought me of my rifle, and raising it I aimed hurriedly and fired. The black shape turned completely round and then dropped.



Something hairy came to a halt about thirty paces away.

“He’s down!” I shouted excitedly. “He’s hit.” I was only armed with a Martini-Henry carbine, and in my excitement I committed the common mistake of the griffin, and forgot all about reloading. I leapt from my rock, and was starting in the direction of the serow, when a voice

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from the position the planter occupied roared out, "Stay where you are, you young idiot. He's not dead." I pulled up and tried to look through the branches of the scrub jungle. I heard something struggling, but could see nothing. I was too excited to feel mortified, but I returned to my rock.

Suddenly a shot rang out, followed by a second. My friend jumped down from his position and made towards me. What had happened? I had apparently only wounded the animal, and after struggling on the ground for a short time, it got on to its legs and sprang down the drop, and was making off when my friend fired. He could not see whether it had dropped to his second shot, but thought it had. We cautiously proceeded to the place, and I was told to look out for a charge and 'keep cool.' The latter advice was useless. I had not yet learnt that necessary art, and I was trembling with fright that perhaps I had not after all hit the beast, and that it would not therefore be mine. The thought of a charge did not bother me. I was much more fearful that the beast would get away if not already down.

Proceeding very slowly, much too slowly, I thought, with a feeling of some scorn for the older hand's careful procedure, we arrived at the spot where he had last seen the serow. Nothing was visible, but an examination of the

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undergrowth showed blood, red blood, quite fresh on the twigs and leaves. "He's hit all right," he briefly remarked, and he put his fingers to his mouth and blew a shrill whistle. When the sound had died away, we heard the bushes part not far behind us, and the jemadar and coolie soon came up. "What do you make of that, jemadar?" his master asked him. The old man stooped down, looked at the blood, examined the ground carefully all round, and went forward for about twenty paces, and then returned. "He's hit, badly hit, sahib. We shall get him." We took up the trail, the jemadar and coolie going ahead. Blood there was in plenty, and the tracks led straight down the hill. My friend pointed them out to me, and I examined them with curiosity and intentness, as I wished to fix their appearance in my memory for a future occasion. Very small and sharp they seemed for such a large animal as the serow had appeared to me. One would have expected him to have had great splay feet to carry that heavy body.

The ground soon got vile, and to my unaccustomed feet there appeared to be little room to place one's boots, much less get a purchase. I struggled on behind the planter, and clung tenaciously to my rifle, though he advised me to relinquish it to the coolie. In the end I had to do so. We got to a spot where the drop ended

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in a precipice, and it was here I was told that the serow would be, for it was unlikely it would get very far, badly wounded as he was. I peered over the precipice, and did not like the look of it at all, nor could I imagine how it would be possible to get down it. Not even a goat, I thought, would attempt that. But I had a lot to learn! We went along the edge for about a quarter of a mile, and then the jemadar girded up his long, loose coat, and tied it above his legs, so as to leave these latter quite free. Having arranged his garments to his satisfaction, he let himself down over the edge, and was soon climbing down with that ease which we have all watched, and how often envied, in the hillman. He went right down some 500 feet to a small shaly incline which sloped abruptly up to the foot of the precipice. We watched him get on to this and cautiously proceed along the upper edge of it. Suddenly he raised his hand. My friend covered him. The jemadar continued, and then pointed down the hill to a spot in some low bushes. He shouted something and signalled to the coolie to come down to him. The man went, and we soon understood that he had found the serow dead.

I much wanted to get down somehow or another and see the animal where it had fallen. I thought then, and have always thought since, that there is much to be learnt by seeing an animal

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lying in its natural surroundings, even if the animal is dead. On this occasion I was told it was impossible. "They will want a great many more coolies to get the beast up out of that. We had better be off to send them," and he shouted this and waved his arm to the men below.

The serow was brought up to the bungalow that evening, and the mystery, if there was a mystery to anyone but myself, which I doubt, was explained. My bullet had hit the beast at the base of one of the horns, which it had splintered. The shock had knocked the serow over, and evidently stunned it for a short time. My friend's bullets had both got home, one almost raking the animal, but the game, tough beast had got down the precipice before succumbing. On the plea that I had hit it first, generously advanced by my friend, not (except mentally) by myself, I was given the head, and very proud I was of my first Himalayan trophy.

Have you ever had the chance of critically examining a large male serow on the mountain-side? It is his large head and ears and great, heavy body which give him his curious appearance, that and his peculiar colouring. He is black or greyish black on the back, with the head and neck black; the sides and the insides of the legs are red, whilst the muzzle, chin, and

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belly are a dirty white. He stands about 38 inches in height at the shoulder, and weighs something over 200 lbs. The horns are, of course, black, thick at the base, and annulated to the tips. They curve backwards, and average about 10 inches, the record of 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, with a girth



Head of Serow.

of 6 inches, being held by that well-known sportsman, E. C. Stuart Baker.

The fierce appearance which the serow certainly has, as I discovered to my surprise at my first interview with him, is partly due to the coarse hair, with which the body is covered, standing up on the neck and shoulders in the form of a bristly mane. A curious and unusual fact about this animal is the very slight difference that exists

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between the sexes, the female having horns which, save in the very old males, are of the same size and appearance as those of the males.

The serow is found over the whole of the Himalayan region from Western Kashmir to Assam. It is a solitary animal, and by no means numerous or easy to find, save in certain spots or on certain hills. There are one or two hills known to me which seem to always contain a few of these animals, whilst on wide stretches of mountain on both sides scarcely any are ever seen. This peculiar distribution of the animal has never been accounted for. I have already drawn attention to its partiality for the most inaccessible of rocky precipices, and how it loves to rest in the daytime either under an outlying rock, in a small cavern, or in the shade of some tree. I have noticed, and Kinlock drew attention to the fact, that the animal apparently loves to live in the same locality, and to repair to the same spots to rest in. That this is the case is abundantly proved by the heaps of its droppings to be seen in such places. In many of its characteristics the serow resembles the Indian bison or gaur, for it is very shy and difficult to come across, but when wounded it turns into a fierce and dangerous customer to deal with. It was this knowledge that frightened my friend the planter when I started to look up the animal I thought I had knocked over. The peculiar harsh, shrill

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sound which the serow emits when frightened or disturbed is like unto nothing that I have heard any other animal produce. It has been likened to something between a railway whistle and a snort, and this perhaps reproduces the sound as well as any other description. It is certainly a most peculiar, uncanny, and nerve-disturbing noise when suddenly and unexpectedly heard close to one. The period of gestation is about eight months, one young one being born at a time.

In some parts of the Himalaya I think the serow is found down to 5000 feet ; in the hills, to the north east of Dehra Dun, for instance, though probably only shikari men stationed in that lovely little station would know where to find them, or have much chance of bringing them to bag. Its upper limit is about 12,000 feet.

Many a climb have I had in these localities for the serow, and as I look back many pleasant experiences and episodes crowd on my memory. One often reads in sporting books that 'one stalk is like another,' and having given one illustration of how an animal was bagged, the narrator says 'I shot several others, but one stalk is very like the rest, and repetition is not needed.' I have never been able to see this in the same light. Whatever the animal I have been out after, the day seems to stand out bright



HEAD OF GURAI



HORNS OF SORROW



HORNS OF FAIR

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and vivid with a series of incidents and scenes which stamp it with an individuality all its own. It may have been a blank day, many days have been blank so far as the mere securing a shot or bagging an animal went, but the jungle or the bare hill-side has always a voice of its own and a fascination of its own which speak with a message of their own to the true shikari.

AN UNPREMEDITATED INTRUSION

It was after several fruitless days so far as securing a head went that I started out on my last morning to try to circumvent the shy serow. I wanted to obtain a head with a perfectly symmetrical pair of horns, and had been trying for this for a year or more. Consequently I by no means went out each morning with the idea that I should fire at the first male serow I saw. The study of the animal in its own home had exerted a great fascination on me, all the more so that I had on so many occasions only had the opportunity of studying it *chez lui*, in the absence of the owner. I knew for certain that there were two or three of the animals in the rocky, precipitous part of the hills I was in, a hot network of sheer rocky slopes and narrow, deep ravines covered with a short, mixed, oak scrub facing due south—about as hot a part of the Himalaya as could be found for this kind of work. But I was used to heat and climbing

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by this time, and bison-tracking in the hot weather in Central India had taught me to do without drinking whilst climbing in the sun. This latter, by the way, is perhaps worth commenting upon.

Before I first sailed for India I was given a piece of advice by an old, experienced Anglo-Indian shikari. It was this. 'Try and accustom yourself to do without drinking when out shooting in a hot sun. You will find it very difficult at first—almost impossible—but by degrees you will accustom yourself to it, and you will find it enables you to go through a long day in the heat with much less fatigue than would otherwise be the case.' I put this advice into practice when bison-tracking. At first I found it impossible to carry out. Now everyone knows that to drink and immediately afterwards take exercise in the hot weather results in the liquid coming out in the form of a profuse perspiration. The constant repetition of this when climbing up and down hill is not only unpleasant, but annoying, and gradually I avoided both by refraining from drinking at each sparkling stream I came to. Soon the wish to drink left me altogether. On one occasion I accomplished a 24-mile walk at the foot of the Nilgiri Hills under a hot sun in August, on half a pint of water, starting at 9.30 in the morning, and after this felt that I had put into practice the

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advice so opportunely and kindly given me by my friend. For those who are physically constituted to carry it out, I willingly pass on the admonition.

We had been out almost a couple of hours, and I was examining some old tracks of serow, and wondering, as I have often wondered, at the peculiarly neatly fashioned hoof of the ungainly animal, when a piercing whistle and heavy crash in oak scrub just above electrified me. I dashed forward and saw an animal disappear over some rocks ahead. We pushed forward rapidly, and reached a point where we could see down a long, rocky slope bathed in sunlight, and covered here and there with patches of scrub.

Some 500 paces down the slope a serow was going full tilt, evidently making for a deep ravine we had prospected in the day before. He barely seemed to touch the ground at the pace he was going, and finally turning round a bend, was lost to view. I had not seen his head, but he appeared a big beast, and was evidently an old one. As he seemed really frightened, it was no good following in his tracks, so we retraced our steps for some distance, and then set off straight up the hill-side. My word, that was a hot climb! The hill-side was bare save for patches of scrub. The sun beat down with a fiery directness on our backs, and save when we paused for breath,

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and I turned round to see the Dun shimmering in a heat haze far below, there was little to catch and rivet the wandering gaze. Life was represented by lizards, who played in and out of the sun-baked rocks, or sitting on top of one, cocked an inquisitive and cheeky eye at us as we toiled onwards. A blue jay, also apparently impervious to the heat, screamed at us now and then, but that was all.

Near the crest of the hill I had noticed a large rock, its face fronting us, vertical, bare, and sun-baked. A small tree grew close to one of its sides, and I marked it down as the spot in whose shade I should rest when I had got to the top of this awful hill. I had gone up quicker than the two men who accompanied me that morning, and being in rope-soled boots, I made no noise. I was near the top now, and as I bent nearly double to the ascent, my hands locked behind me with the rifle between them, I could almost feel the coolness which was so near. I turned quietly round the rock, and—almost walked on to a fine serow! He was dozing away the hot hours in a cool retreat under the rock, which was completely overhung on this side. I had one second to take in the full size and appearance of the beast, who was lying with his chin on the ground. He threw up his head, and I almost quailed before his fierce gaze. But he was as much frightened as I was startled,

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and I think interested, for with a rush he was off into the thick jungle which clothed the north side of the hill, and once more that screaming, piercing whistle resounded over the hill-side. The rifle was still behind my back as he started off. I had no thought to throw it forward, and I doubt if I should have fired if I had, for the truth was that I had been so intent on studying the natural history of the animal during the past few days that I had almost forgotten the rifle. I was roused now. No sportsman can see a fine specimen of his quarry so close and not be filled with the desire to secure it as a memento of the occasion. I worked hard during the rest of the day for that beast, but saw neither him nor the first we had put up.

Nevertheless, I returned to the station well content with the results of my outing.





CHAPTER XIII

The tahr—Distribution—Miss a good head—Description—The home of the tahr—Ghastly nature of the country—Marvellous performances—Stalking tahr—A first stalk in Sikkim—The snows of Kinchinjunga—On the tracks of a tahr—We come up with our quarry—A bad mistake—The Western Himalaya—Through the hills to Simla—Beautiful views—A curious pass—The walls of Windsor Castle—The miller of the hills and his domicile—The land of regrets—Stalking tahr again—Beware of the youngsters—Early spring in the hills—Find the herd of males—A large herd of females—Council of War—Put up the old males—The clouds of the mountains—A long trek—A pestilential youngster—Find the herd again—Where are the old tahr?—The herd alarmed—The old tahr appear—A day's reward.

THE TAHR

THE tahr (*Hemitragus jemlaicus*) is another of the Himalayan wild goats, and is even more widely distributed than those already alluded to, since he is found throughout the whole of the great range from Western Kashmir to Bhutan.

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Have you ever seen a fine old tahr standing at gaze on a rocky hill-side? With his short, sharp, heavy triangular horns and great ruff reaching the knees, he is a fine-looking beast and has been the *raison d'être* of many a sporting trip of the hill-loving Anglo-Indian shikari. Misfortune has dogged my footsteps where this animal has been concerned, and I have never secured a really good head. Once such an opportunity was mine, and I can hardly yet bear to look back at that piece of stupidity, as I now call it. In endeavouring to make quite sure that it was a good head, whilst at the same time securing the pleasure of watching the animal for some time longer, I tried to get too near, was discovered, and that tahr, possessor of a glorious head as I saw too late, disappeared down a precipice which not even a cat could have got down, leaving me anathematizing my folly and—two misses.

The tahr is a large animal, standing nearly forty inches at the shoulder, and weighing over 200 lbs. The body hair is long, forming a heavy mane reaching to the knees and gathered into a thick ruff round the neck; the knees and breast are callous. The head, which is clothed with short hair, is long, narrow, and straight, with a sharp muzzle, having much the appearance of the old billy-goat of which we stood in considerable awe in our childhood. The colour is a fine reddish brown above, which deepens on the quarters, the

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under-parts being paler. The females are lighter coloured and so to some extent recognizable, but the shades of colouration vary a good deal in this animal. The face is always dark, nearly black, as are the legs in front. There may be in old males, in addition, a median dark band down the back. The horns are unlike those of the other goats we have considered and certainly form a finer trophy, though, of course, they cannot compare with the markhor and ibex. For one thing they are longer than those of the serow, measuring from 12 to 15 inches round the curve, with a girth at the base of 9 inches and a span of about 10 inches. It is not, however, so much the length which gives them their handsome appearance, as their peculiar shape, which is triangular, the sharp edge pointing forwards. The horns are very thick at the base, where they nearly touch, compressed and flattened at the sides, slightly wrinkled, and taper sharply to a fine point at the end, curving greatly, so as to almost lie on the neck. The record head for this goat belonged to 'Mountaineer,' a well-known Indian shikari, and measured 16½ inches, with 11½ inches in girth; 14 to 14½ inches would now be considered very good. The female is much smaller than the male and has short horns, about 9 inches or thereabouts. She is light reddish in colour, with often a dorsal band down the back. The period of gestation, the hillmen say, is from five and a half

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to six and a half months, the kid (usually one only) being born in June or July.

The tahr is a forest animal and loves to pass its days in thick scrub, preferably clothing inaccessible steep slopes, or tree-covered slopes. In fact, tahr ground would very often be an impossibility for the average Anglo-Indian shikari, were it not that the precipices it occupies are covered with scrub and bushes, which one can hold on to and make use of in getting along. Personally I should be very sorry to go over some of the ground the pursuit of this animal has led me on to were it to be suddenly denuded of bushes, which have the double assistance of, firstly, affording a purchase, and, secondly, of preventing you seeing to the full the ghastly nature of the precipice you are endeavouring to make good a precarious foothold upon. Steep, rocky hill-sides, covered with oak scrub or short bamboo growth (the ringal varieties), are the places to search for the old males, as here they lie up in the shade of some stunted tree or projecting rock, which keeps off the rays of the hot sun and enables them to doze away the hot hours of the day till such time as the slanting rays and deepening shadows, with the whispering of the evening breeze, shall warn them that the time has come when they may once more browse in cool comfort. Occasionally the old males are found on the summit of some rocky crest, and

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the females may be seen fairly frequently in the open ; but this is only an instance of the aggravating ways of the sex, because the females probably know that the sportsman has become chivalrous nowadays and spares the sex, no longer considering that the success of his shooting



The old males lie up in the shade of some stunted tree.

trip depends on the number of head—poor, indifferent, and bad—which he can knock over.

Many sportsmen have written on the subject of the ground a tahr can get over, and some of the places where he is not only at home but can go down at express speed are so incredible that it is almost useless endeavouring to describe them, since belief is only possible for those who have watched the performance for themselves. I have

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purposely refrained from firing in several instances at animals whose heads were nothing out of the way, preferring to see this exhibition and endeavour to understand how anything living could have arrived at such a marvellous, unerring combination of foot, eye, and brain as this animal has undoubtedly reached. Instinctive it may be, but the word is a large one and is scarcely definite enough to account for this miracle in agility.

Tahr are often, perhaps usually, found in herds, or you may come upon several old males together. The early spring, when both grass and leaves are difficult to get, is one of the best times to stalk the animal, and another is in the rutting season, when the old males are more often found in the open. But to my mind the most interesting way is to stalk the old males when they are lying up solitary in some scrub-covered precipice. It is hard work, difficult work, and trying to the temper, as one is constantly moving through jungle, and the noise more often than not puts up your quarry; all you hear is a rush ahead, and that animal has probably gone for good; or you may get a fleeting glance at him, as he dashes down the khud, and your snap-shot, if you have even time for that, is almost certain to be a miss. For it is astonishing how rarely, how very rarely, those wonderful shots at animals going full speed, and seen but for an instant, come off in actual practice in the stern reality of things as they are.

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I do not intend to be understood to say that they never come off. They do on rare occasions, and when it is a griffin (a beginner) who has had the so-called luck, it probably ruins his chance of ever becoming a good shikari. For in my experience the real shikari becomes what he is in the school of adversity of blank days and missed chances, which only incite him to greater endeavours and induce a realization of the fact that he *must* know the habits of the game he is after, and *must* learn how to pick it up in its natural surroundings, before he can hope to bag it in the only manner satisfactory to the true sportsman.

But with all its difficulties tahr-stalking is a most fascinating sport, and may be easily made to stand in the forefront of a shooting programme of those who this year cannot get enough leave to go further in and try for that great ambition of all Himalayan shikari men, the markhor and ibex.

A FIRST STALK IN SIKKIM

It was in the ringal bamboo-covered mountains of Sikkim that I made my first acquaintance with the tahr. It was a brilliant morning in late autumn, and beneath a pale blue sky the snows, the great snowy masses of the famed Kinchinjunga range, stood out with startling vividness, looking so close as to lead one to imagine that a days' march would take one to their feet. Alas! those who have tried know about how many

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days' marching this would entail, and also something of the wild, pathless, semi-tropical, matted forest which would have to be negotiated on the road. And yet to climb mighty Kinchinjunga! How oft has one lain on the hill-side and taken in her full beauty, the snowy purity of her vast, trackless ice-fields and glaciers, measured with the eye the depths of her black, frowning, precipitous ramparts, where no snow may lie, scanned the more softly-graded ravines, and speculated as to the probabilities of a way upwards lying through them. Dreams! Dreams! Those who have dwelt in the shadow of thy lofty peaks must perforce dream of thee, Kinchinjunga; but, alas, dreams are they likely to remain.

With thoughts dwelling on this bewitching sunny giant, I was forcing my way slowly and carefully through the ringal scrub, following a trail which I was told had been made but a short while previously by a tahr. I took this on trust, as the whole business was completely new to me, and I had never seen the animal out of zoological gardens and natural history books. We reached the top of the crest without putting up anything save a couple of pheasants, and then proceeded along it to a point where it dropped suddenly in a sharp, rocky slope. The bamboos ceased here, and we sat down and studied the slope carefully. With the tyro's keenness I was eager to be the

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first to see a tahr, if tahr existed on the slope, and strained my eyes into every dark nook and cranny, but without avail. The slope was a comparatively easy one to negotiate, and the shikari soon rose to continue our search. I knew that this meant he had seen nothing, and we dropped down the hill-side and entered a jungle-covered ravine and climbed up the bed of a clamouring hill stream, the rocky sides of which were hung with delicate maidenhair fern. This was rougher work, and I was soon glad to call a halt and ask the shikari where the tracks were. He pointed to a mark just in front of me. I looked at it. It was only a slight scratch in the soil, where it met a sloping mass of rock. I was not satisfied, as I did not see how it could possibly represent the hoof of an animal. I made a remark to this effect to the man. He smiled, and sticking out his leg passed his finger down the right edge of his boot. I looked again, but still could not see that the mark represented anything that could be left behind by a hoof. However, I thought I would be even with the shikari, and taking out a notebook I made a rough sketch of what I saw on the ground. In the light of later experience I have often looked at that sketch, and have learnt a good deal from it. The man was, of course, right, and the tahr had left the mark not long before. It is, I have often thought, a wonderful trait in favour of these men that they put up so well and are, all things

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considered, so patient with the colossal ignorance of jungle lore exhibited by many of the sahibs who engage them as aids in seeking out game. But then they must always know that they have the whip hand. Certain it is that a shikari out with a sahib who knows something of jungle lore, and the shikari finds it out before they have been on the tramp in the jungle an hour together, is a very different man from he who takes out the sahib who is merely keen on killing, and cares nothing about the habits of the animal he is seeking, and less still of the jungle life around him and all it can teach.

We pursued our way, and the tracks soon left the watercourse and descended a scrub-covered hill. We went very slowly now, and I could see by the shikari's manner that he thought the tahr must be somewhere near. He peered into every bush and at every rock, and diverged whenever he saw a tree standing above the scrub in front of us. We had progressed in this way for about a quarter of a mile, when my companion motioned to me to stop, and he went on, gliding through the bushes with the ease of a panther.

I spent the time watching a large ant-heap. The top was as busy a mass of life as could be found in the same area anywhere in the world, and a double stream going two ways led to and from it. The exit stream led away into the jungle in a broad, black line, whose well-ordered

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sequence was occasionally broken by returning ants who, loaded with their burden, endeavoured to force a way through the outward tide with more perseverance and persistence than the necessity seemed to require. The other and main stream consisted of a mass of tiny ants weighed down with the enormous burden of a feathery seed apiece, twice their own size, gathered from the neighbouring jungle. These seeds were being deposited in a rapidly growing heap near the chief entrance into the homestead, and were evidently being laid in as provision against the coming long and cold winter. It was an example of well-organized, responsible labour, without the unnecessary intervention of middlemen to tell the workers how to go wrong.

The shikari's low hiss took my eyes abruptly from the ants. I moved slowly forward and saw him standing motionless, with a finger pointed forwards. I hurried, my eyes fixed on his finger, and a twig snapped loudly beneath my foot. A rush followed by a series of rushes, sounding just like a flock of goats in a copse at home, and I dashed forwards in the wake of the shikari. I saw one or two dim forms, and hurriedly raising the rifle I fired at what looked the largest, or the one I could see best. I have no very clear recollection of which it was. It went down and I dashed on, wild exultation in my heart at having bagged a tahr. I had done so. It lay kicking on

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the ground in its death throes ; but—it was a female. I have never again fired at tahr in thick jungle.

THE LAND OF REGRETS

It was some years after I had had the fiasco with the female tahr. Before leaving Sikkim I had secured one or two heads, but nothing of remarkable size. The next few years I was stationed in the plains, and my whole attention was absorbed in my surroundings and the glorious and interesting jungle fauna they contained. I heard at times, as all who have once been in the 'Hills' inevitably hear, the voices of the mountains calling and enticing me back, but for the time I resolutely turned a deaf ear to their allurements. Then came a transfer, and the Himalaya lay open to me once more, but a different Himalaya to the part of the chain I was acquainted with. I was now to commence my connection with the western portion of the great mountains, a part which to me appeals with an even greater power of attraction than the east. Why, I know not ! Both are very beautiful, and the subtle fascination and wonderful beauty of the giant Kinchinjunga has something alluring and majestic about it. But those who have visited the glorious deodar forests of the west, who have once wandered beneath their scented shade and have seen the lofty snows vignetted in lovely *coups d'œil* through their feathery foliage, will ever experience the wish to

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revisit their beautiful home and repose once again in their fascinating scented shade.

I was marching across the hills over a pass which would finally lead me to Simla, which was



The lofty snows vignettted in lovely *coups d'œil*.

my objective. The route had many ups and downs in it, and the change of scenery, at one time up at 9000 feet in the dark and gloomy silver fir and spruce forests, at another thousands of feet below, marching through the open terraced cultivation at the bottom of some narrow valley, was

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as varied as it was interesting. And there was always the additional glamour which the chance of sport throws around such an expedition.

One of the marches of this trip stands out vividly in my memory, as vivid almost as the notes on it I jotted down at the time.

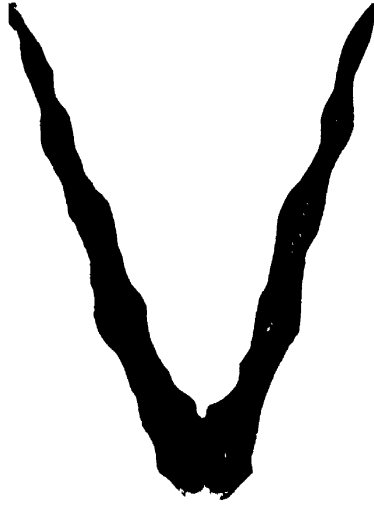
As I awoke in my little tent the sun's rays were just glinting through the deodar branches outside, over a high range of hills in front. I was up and had chota hazri outside, whilst the men struck the tent and packed up. The camp had been in so late on the last few marches that I had determined to see the whole lot off before me to-day. I had a most glorious walk, with some of the finest snow views I had had, whilst during the whole journey a great black mountain crested with snow lay close to me on the right. We climbed from 7000 to 10,000 feet, from the region of the deodar up through the dark silver fir and spruce forest, and higher still into the kharshu oak (*Quercus semicarpifolia*) and yews, some of the latter aged, gnarled, blackened masses many centuries old. What tales they could unfold, one thought, if they could only recount them! The peeps of the more distant snows were very beautiful, just softened by a slight haze and gleaming soft satiny white in the pellucid atmosphere. The view as we saw it from the top of the pass was entrancing. This pass was itself remarkable. It had all the appearance of a fortification built by man, great but-

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railing. My curiosity was roused, and I strolled up. At one end of the little mound was a stone—a headstone, and on it I read, 'To Elsie Rachel. Born June 18. Died December 18,' and beneath, 'Suffer little children.' So ran the simple inscription. As I stood at sunset bareheaded before this tiny grave of one of my own race in the shadow and solitude of the mighty Himalaya, the effect it produced was a strangely moving one. Five years old! How terrible for the parents to be obliged to leave a little loved one alone here amidst a strange race, in an uncared-for and untended grave in the Himalayan wilds. And yet not quite uncared for nor untended, for the birds and the winds had sown seed on the little mound, and it was bright with wild flowers. Five years old! She would have now been twenty, in the first blush of womanhood. Truly Thy ways are inscrutable.

A LONG STALK

When you are stalking a flock of tahr, beware of the females and young ones, especially the young males, for on occasions they or their curiosity and frolicsome ways give a lot of trouble. I lost a good head on one occasion entirely owing to the inquisitiveness of one of these gentry, and on several other occasions have had a lot of trouble with them. The time I thought I was at last to get a good head furnishes an apt illustra-



HORNS OF SUIMAN MARKHOR



HORNS OF BHARAL

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tion of the manner in which a herd of these animals behave, and is thus perhaps worth narrating in the interests of those who may some day find themselves in my position.

We had gone out before sunrise so as to get to the crest of a precipitous cliff before dawn. It was still early spring and the weather was raw and cold, hail and sleet showers having been numerous during the past few days. Clouds hung on the higher snow-capped mountains as the sun rose, and down below us the valleys were filled with opaque masses of white cloud, giving the hill-tops the appearance of rocky or tree-covered islands standing up out of a white sea. There was no wind, and these cloud masses lay like great dense blankets on the hill-side. As the sun rose over the opposite mountain-top our precipice began to take on red and golden and brown tints, and we scanned it eagerly for the animals we had come in search of.

Previous experiences in this locality had led us to hope to find a herd of eight old tahr, two of which had exceptionally fine horns. Our eager scrutiny soon disclosed the herd feeding on a small grassy ledge on the cliff far below us. To get to them in their present position would have been an impossible feat for me, though doubtless either of the men with me could have accomplished it. They admitted, however, that the place was a 'nasty' one, and when the hillman

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admits that there is usually little hope for the sahib.

As we sat wondering what to do the shikari Buddoo suddenly spied a large herd of females, with a young male or two, much higher up, and to the right of us, we having passed them in the dark on our way to our present position. The



One would throw up his head and stand on the *qui vive*.

following plan was then conceived and carried out. I lay looking down the precipice with my eye on the old tahr, whilst the men went back in order to climb down the khud on the far side of the females, with the object of startling them. Our hope was that they would make in the direction of the old tahr, disturb them, and thus cause them to forsake their present inaccessible position.

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An hour passed. Three of the old animals lay down in the shelter of rocks, but the others still continued to feed. Magnificent shaggy old fellows they were. Every now and then one would throw up his head and stand on the *qui vive*, as if cast in bronze. Then, satisfied, down would go the long head, and he would graze. With the glasses I could pick out each wrinkle on the horns and see the piercing eye as he cropped eagerly the short, tender grass of spring-time.

Suddenly a rattle of stones below me. I moved my head. Yes, here came the females, and they were quite sufficiently alarmed now, I thought. The men must have bungled their job. Some of the youngsters were bounding along the side of the precipice not 80 yards below me; but the females were lower down, and were making straight for the old males, whose proximity they doubtless were unaware of, although of that I was not sure. I turned to the old males. The whole eight had faced towards the sound and stood like statues. Then one turned sharply and sprang down a drop of 20 to 30 feet or more, I should not like to say what that drop was, alighted on a sharp pinnacle of rock, or so it appeared to me, and then dropped down another incredible distance, alighting on another impossible tooth of rock, and then continued downwards at racing pace. Each of the eight took the same two jumps to start with, following each other like automatons,

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and had I not seen it with my own eyes I should have said that it would have been impossible for eight animals as heavily built as they were to have taken those leaps with safety. Perhaps it was the only way out downwards from that succulent feeding-place, and they knew it and had often practised those very jumps before. I know not. I could see no other outlet, but then I had not seen that one as a possibility, and had never thought of the animals making off down the khud. I think of all the astounding feats I have seen the Himalayan goats perform this remains in my mind as without a parallel, and the mere description of it in words fails to convey the magnificent, seemingly impossible nature of the performance. As soon as the females perceived the direction taken by the males they changed their course, each one taking her own line and cutting out her own work. And the tiny ones seemed to enjoy the pastime, their little scuts flicking backwards and forwards as they went down that rocky precipice, as if it was the greatest fun they had had in their short, happy lives. Disgusted as I was, for I thought that I had seen the last of the old tahr, I could not regret having witnessed this exhibition.

When the last had dropped over the edge of a rocky crest far below I lay and watched the cloud masses slowly writhing and swirling in uncanny movements, as they felt the melting

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heat of the sun's rays upon them. Have you ever watched the curious movements of the clouds as they lie in thick palls over the hills at the end of the monsoon? Never still for a moment, are they? Continually in motion, they change their forms and shapes and colouring in a complex and wonderful fashion, which it is an ever-recurring pleasure to lie and watch and marvel at, be it the early morn when the sun's rays are first making themselves felt, and the shroud of night is lifting; or at midday, when the cumuli roll in voluminous masses, seething in seeming agony, torn by vast unseen internal forces; or again in the red and pink evening light when they lie once again in soft, filmy, peaceful zephyr masses, streaked across the hill-tops, or filling a dark, deep glen with their fleecy pall. Beautiful, very beautiful are the clouds of the mountains and far removed in character from their sisters of the plains.

The men came up and I inquired why they had not been more careful, so as to ensure the tahr going in the required direction? 'But they have done so,' was the reply. 'What, down there?' I said. 'I'm not a bird or a tahr.' 'We shall find them all right, sahib, later on,' said the shikari, and inquiries showed me that we had a very hard day's work in front of us.

The animals, so I understood, would now leave this particular precipice for the day, and we could

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hope to find them in 'sahib's ground,' as the shikari expressed it, in the afternoon. I did not like the expression 'sahib's ground,' for though the Anglo-Indian shikari cannot expect to emulate the feats of the Himalayan cragsman, yet provided he has been blessed by nature with a good head, that curious anomaly which is most certainly born in a man, and can never be acquired in its perfection, he can by practice do very creditably even in the eyes of his Himalayan companion. I do not mean to say that it is essential that one should have this good head naturally, if one wishes to shoot in the Himalaya. Practice will produce a very good imitation of it, but one cannot, I suppose, expect to feel as much at home or be in the same state of comfort. Kinlock freely confesses that he never possessed a natural good head, but that did not prevent him from becoming a first-class Himalayan shikari and from getting along over most places into which the ardours of pursuit led him. So in the present instance I for a moment resented the expression 'sahib's ground' ! But I had been out with my present man on many a rocky precipice, and had not as yet disgraced myself in his eyes, and I had not, at this time, been through that experience which has taught me that even he who prides himself on his good head, may sooner or later find that there are occasions and places when even it will not stand the unexpected strain without a

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quiver. We started off and spent the next six hours in a long and wearisome flank movement, which was to bring us to a crest from which we should be able to look into a ravine, where the shikaris felt certain we should find the sheep.

That was a tramp! In a way it was almost a record, for we did not see a single animal of any kind during the whole six hours, and it was mostly on treeless and low scrub-covered slopes, though we did have the grateful shade of a small patch of forest growth here and there. It must have been somewhere near four o'clock when we approached the summit of a low rocky spur. We were within about thirty yards of the top, and I was beginning to think of a reward for this tremendous trek, when the shikari lay down on his chest (we were bent double at the time), and I followed suit. For half a minute I did not move. I was only too glad of the rest. Then I slowly raised my head. There in front of us stood a young male tahr—quite a *buttcha* (youngster). He was not looking our way, but down the slope the other side. We had nearly run into him, and had not the shikari seen him first, we should have had our trouble for nothing. Now and then he emitted a short yelp as we lay and watched him, and seemed to be challenging another of his kind to come up and try conclusions with him. Ever and anon he stamped his little hoof on the rock and flicked out his little tail and quivered

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with eagerness or childish rage. It was very amusing to watch the little chap, but I wished he would give over his antics and go.

That youngster kept us there fully half an hour, scarcely moving from the spot we first saw him. Then, without warning, he jumped off his rock and disappeared. We waited to see if another or he himself would reappear, but all remained silent and we proceeded to crawl up the thirty yards.

I was quite steady now. I had to thank the youngster for that, and I felt confident of hitting should the old gentlemen be on the other side. I had forgotten one thing, however, and that was the certainty of finding jungle on the far side of the crest. As I looked over I saw it; the ravine was filled with oak scrub, the rocks showing up through it here and there. And on many of these rocks were tahr, either standing erect on the watch or seated half asleep, or apparently so. But I ever distrust the seemingly sleepy tahr.

At first I could make nothing of it. Certainly none of the animals on the rocks were old tahr. I glanced on the opposite side of the ravine and caught sight of a movement. I looked again; and suddenly saw the head of a tahr in a small opening of the bushes. And he was a big one. I lay still and strained my eyes and gradually made out horns or parts of five others. I could not find seven and eight, try as I might.

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The old tahr were about 300 yards off, and how to get near was the problem. There was no means and no time to execute a flank movement now. We simply had to wait and trust to the animals moving, and we waited a good hour longer before the females showed any signs of leaving their position. They were all grazing by then, save for two young males, who were quite close to me, and had been engaged in a ramming match. They must have necks of iron, these goats, for the manner in which these youngsters banged their heads together, getting up on their hind legs and going for each other full tilt, would have dislocated the neck of any ordinary mortal or animal. Gradually all the females moved off down the ravine, some commencing to climb the opposite side, whilst the old males were also moving down their side of the glen. Now would be our chance, were it not for those pestilential youngsters. They had given up their butting business, but were now both fitfully grazing and browsing and moving about in such an erratic fashion that one had come within fifteen yards of us before he turned.

I was beginning to think that I should have to risk them and make a start, when they suddenly bolted down into the ravine. They did not make much noise, but we at once started to run obliquely down the other side of the crest towards the old males. We had not

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proceeded far, when out of the jungle to our left rear dashed a male tahr. He went too fast for me, and I could not even swing the rifle on to him, before he had disappeared in the jungle. The rifle was still at the shoulder when another rush from behind, and a second tahr appeared. A light broke in upon my mind, and I fired hurriedly, getting in my second barrel as the animal bounded in the air and disappeared. We rushed forward through the jungle, tumbling over the rocks in our excitement, and came upon a tahr struggling on the ground. As he saw us he rose to his feet, but dropped to a bullet and moved no more. To my disappointment the head was only a fair one, and must have been one of the smallest of the herd of eight I had looked at so long that morning. For we had come up to them all right, and but for the fact that two of them had remained hidden, and had not moved off with the others, I might not have even bagged one of them. And all owing to those foolish youngsters !





CHAPTER XIV

Markhor and Ibex—Distribution of markhor—Horns—The different races or varieties of markhor—The Baltistan and Astor markhor—The Pir-Panjal race—The Cabul and Suliman varieties—Appearance and length of horns in different races—Habits—Markhor country—The ibex—Distribution—Appearance—Horns—Habits—The Afghan frontier—A wild country—The trials of the stalker on the frontier—In search of markhor—The snake-eater—Fresh tracks—A wild defile—A hot walk—A fine markhor—Miss the markhor—A marvellous performance—Disgust of the Sherani—Three old males appear—An easy shot—The Takt-i-Suliman—A cold bivouac—Early khabar—Fire at a markhor—A charmed life—Death of the youngster—A last leap.

THE MARKHOR AND IBEX

IT has never fallen to my lot to be able to make a trip into the real markhor and ibex country. If you will follow me on a map, you will see the localities which form the habitat of this the finest of all the goats, for none other yield a trophy that is at all comparable

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with that of the spiral-horned goat. Roughly, the markhor is to be found in the Pir-Panjaj range, which forms the outer boundary of the Kashmir Valley, the upper waters of the Chenab River forming its eastern limit. It extends into Baltistan, Astor, and Gilgit to north and north-east of the Kashmir Valley, and also inhabits the Hazara Mountains, the mountains of Afghanistan, and the northern part at least of the Suliman range in Baluchistan.

The horns of this goat are placed close together at the base and are spirally twisted, having a keel both in front and behind. The front keel tends to become rounded in old males, and at first turns outwards in each horn, the sharp back keel twisting forwards to form the prominent front ridge of the first turn of the spiral.

Owing to the great difference in the appearance of the horns of the markhor a great deal of discussion has taken place amongst naturalists as to the number and names of the animals bearing the various varieties of horns, from the exaggerated backward-curved one to the straight, erect horn. It is now, I think, commonly accepted that the whole of these animals belong to the one species *Capra falconeri*, of which at least four distinct races, according to Lydekker (Blanford, in the *Fauna of British India*, calls them varieties), are recognizable as follows :—

1. The typical Baltistan and Astor markhor, in

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which the horns sweep backwards in a beautiful curve and have a very open spiral which never contains more than one and a half turns. The horns are extremely massive, attaining a great length. Specimens have been measured 56 and 60 inches in length along the posterior keel. A



The Pir-Panjäl Markhor.

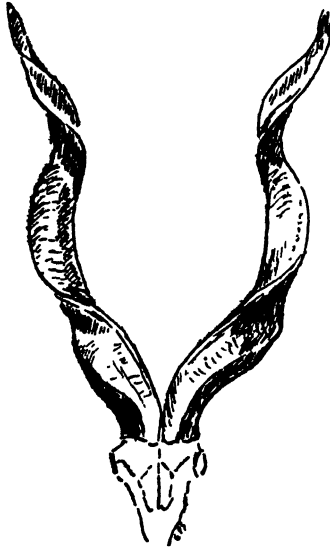
63-inch recorded head probably belonged to this race.

2. The Pir-Panjäl race. The horns are still curved backwards, and the spiral is less open, and may form one or two complete turns. This race is said to extend across the Jehlam River into the Kajnag range, and thence probably into Hazara and Gilgit, where it passes into the third race; 56, 59, and

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even as much as 63 inches along the curve have been recorded.

3. The Cabul variety, in which the horns are almost straight but still have a slight spiral with two complete twists; 35 to 41 inches measured



Horns of the Cabul Markhor.

straight, and not round the spiral, have been recorded.

4. The Suliman range (in Baluchistan) race has the horns quite straight, the front and back keels being wound round in a sharp spiral, which may form two to three and a half complete turns, as is seen in the head of this race depicted on

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page 246. I shot a young one, under, I should think, two years old, in the neighbourhood of the Takt-i-Suliman. As shown in this head, on page 254, the horns have already one and a half spirals.

In the largest recorded horn the length in a straight line is $48\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

This race is smaller in size than the others, and has a smaller beard.

The Kashmir and Astor male markhor stands about 3 feet 5 inches at the withers, and may even reach 3 feet 8 inches. The beard is very long, extending down on to the chest and shoulders, and in old males reaching nearly to the knees, being black in front and grey behind. In the females and young bucks the beard is only present on the chin. The feature of the animal, and the one which confines it to lower ground than that occupied by the ibex, is the fact that the hair has practically no pashm in it. The colouring is red-brown in summer and grey in winter, being paler on the belly. The very old males are whitish in summer.

The various races of this goat differ to a considerable extent in their habits, this being directly due to the different nature of their habitat. The first three races are to be found in the elevated fir-clad ranges below the snow-line. The Suliman variety, however, occupies the often barren, rocky, sun-baked slopes of the Suliman range, living at elevations far lower than those of the

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other races. They all occupy country which is often extremely difficult to negotiate, owing to its appalling nature. Crumbling, shaly slopes, affording an extremely precarious foothold, or in places none at all, are only too often encountered during the pursuit of this wily goat. To those who have hunted the animal, it appears to be more than probable that it may be the nature of the ground it inhabits which accounts for the occurrence of one-horned animals. The hillman makes a mistake occasionally in these localities, and disappears, probably for ever, from the eyes of man, and even the goat may be at fault at times. These one-horned animals often appear to be more than ordinarily sagacious, and this may be due to their having once made a mistake which cost them a horn, and might well have cost them their lives. Such an animal soon becomes known to the hillmen, and as time goes on and shikari after shikari and sahib after sahib tries for and fails to bag him, he becomes endowed with super-human qualities, and the superstitious hillman considers he is protected by the spirits or gods of the mountains ; that he is, perchance, the present abode of some good or evil, probably evil, spirit. I remember one such occupied the energies of successive individuals until he was brought to book by a more than usually determined officer. At least 70 inches had become the length of that solitary horn in the fables which had grown

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around it. The result did not bear out these anticipations.

The markhor breeds in captivity freely, the number of young being one or two. In Astor and Gilgit the young are produced in May or June. The animal will interbreed with domestic goats. This animal is one of the oldest types of goat, fossil specimens, which have not been distinguished from the living ones, occurring in the Siwaliks.

I have alluded to the Himalayan ibex (*Capra sibirica*). This animal has a very wide range, existing throughout the mountainous ranges of Central Asia, from the Himalaya to the Altai, and from the neighbourhood of Herat on the Persian frontier to Kumaun. It is found both in the precipitous mountains and also on the open Pamir country. This ibex is not known to occur in the Himalaya east of the Ganges, and is unknown in the Pir-Panjaj. It is thought possible that the species may occur in the neighbourhood of Lhasa. Blanford states that he obtained information of an animal, probably this species, inhabiting mountains north of Shigatze, and during my stay in Sikkim I had the opportunity of questioning Thibetans, who said there was an animal in the mountains with horns resembling those I depicted for them.

This animal is of heavy build, with short legs, the male having a heavy beard confined to the

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chin and a ridge of coarse dark-coloured hair along the back. This hair is coarse and brittle, and has a thick, soft, woolly coating of under-fur in winter, termed pashm. It is the presence of this that enables the animal to live at the great elevations he occupies. The colour is brown in summer, old males being chocolate, with patches or saddles of dirty white on the back. In winter the colour is yellowish grey, with a dark band on the back. The band and tail dark brown. The height is about 40 inches at shoulder, the females being 26 inches. The horns are curved backwards, scimitar-shaped, those of the bucks having very large knobs placed at fairly regular intervals along them. These knobs do not indicate the annual stages of growth, these being marked by the fine striæ on the sides of the horns. An average horn measures 40-45 inches along the curve. Specimens of 56 and even over 57 inches are known ; 54 inches is not rare. The big heads, however, come from the Tian Shan Mountains. Like the markhor, a number of geographical races of this animal are now recognized. The Himalayan ibex, like the Alpine one, inhabits the precipitous slopes and upland meadows at or near the snow-level, coming down lower in the winter time. Owing to the warmth of their under-fur they never come very low, choosing in winter the precipitous faces of precipices where the snow does not lie, the males and females being together at this period.

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According to Kinlock, the males leave the females in the spring (May, June), when the latter are nearly ready to give birth, and ascend to the most inaccessible places, sleeping during the day above the limits of vegetation, and descending long distances to feed in the mornings and evenings. This sportsman says that, although excessively wary, the ibex is not difficult to get near, as he occupies such broken ground that stalking, so far as getting near the animal is concerned, is not difficult—the difficulty lies in getting over the ground !

A DAY IN THE SULIMAN RANGE

The Afghan frontier ! It is a fascinating borderland. A region of wild, tumbling, bare mountains and ridges, intersected by narrow gloomy defiles, and separated here and there by comparatively level areas of greater or less extent of desert sand and rock. The road in these parts is as often as not the bed of a watercourse, sandy or rocky as the case may be, where the straggling oleander, bearing pretty pink flowers in their season, is the chief growth present, the watercourse flanked by rocky gloomy cliffs or steep-sided hills, fit place for one of those ambushes so dear to the heart of the Afridi marauder.

As I stood on a crest one early morning surveying this wild country, away to the north-west, and looking but just below me, lay the hills of

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Waziristan, with the Gomal and Zhob valleys, names that have become almost household words in our language from the frequent so-called little wars of the frontier. Little they may be termed by those who have not seen the kind of country they are conducted in—the most arduous of all



Head of Suliman Markhor.

campaigns a soldier has to take on for those who have.

I had with me on this occasion a Gurkha orderly and one of the local tribe, the Sheranis, with somewhere in the background the escort of Zhob Levy Corps men, which the frontier rules lay down must accompany the sahib in this part of the world. A frightful nuisance is this escort to the man who wishes to stalk the wily markhor.

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Fancy stalking in the Highlands with an escort of six men in ammunition boots, each frantically keen on the success of the stalk in the hopes of a meat orgy for himself, but each in his excitement practically ensuring its failure. Rules or no rules, the escort must be 'dropped' if one wishes to secure a markhor in this country.

The glasses, assisted by the keen-eyed men with me, failed to show any trace of the goats from our present position, and we turned northwards just below the crest-line, since we had no wish to advertise ourselves to the wide-awake goats by keeping along the summit where every two- and four-legged animal in this country of long sight would easily see us within a radius of several miles. I asked the Gurkha to inquire of the Sherani why the animal was called markhor, which, translated, means 'snake-eater.' The man answered with the usual statement of the hillmen that the goat eats snakes, and that these latter are abundant on these hot, stony hill-sides. I saw very few myself during my stay in this part of the country, but I have no reason to doubt this part of the answer. The locality has a more than usually snaky look. But as to the goats eating the serpents I was and still remain extremely sceptical. Kinlock, I was aware, had accepted the theory, or at least saw no reason to doubt it. I have never heard, however, any authentic account of the truth of the statement having been substantiated.

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It was already beginning to warm up as we left the ridge and commenced a descent into a rocky ravine. A few bushes grew here and there on the barren hill-side, whilst a stunted chilgoza pine tree managed to eke out a precarious existence, and looked with its beautiful silvery bark and feathery, tassely foliage curiously out of place in its wild surroundings. Reaching the ravine bed, we searched in the sand for tracks, and after some time the Gurkha pointed out what proved to be fresh tracks of a large animal. They took us up the defile for some distance, and then, apparently, left it to the right. The sun had by now got powerful, and I was glad to rest under a rock whilst the Sherani climbed the precipice with the ease of one of the goats themselves, to see if he could make certain that the goat had gone that way.

Wild and cruel in aspect was the ravine. Of life, save the ubiquitous lizard and the chuck of the chukor, I could see and hear none. The colouring around was hard and crude. The naked rocks blazing in the sunlight, the barren, coarse sand offering neither pasture nor hope of water to man or beast, the steely blue of the heavens above. Little wonder, I thought, that such a country should breed the type of man who inhabits it, cruel, treacherous, and vindictive. The hand of the elements and the earth against him and his against all mankind.

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A light form leapt down beside me, and my hand went instinctively to the revolver in my breast-pocket. It was the Sherani returned. In a breathless whisper he said we should continue up the defile, and we set off. From his manner I was under the impression that he had seen the markhor, but a two hours' tramp, which landed us near the summit of a ridge, was passed without a sight of a goat of any description. What with the heat and the rocks and the slippery shaly slopes we had had to negotiate, these latter forming the favourite ground of markhor, and proving the greatest obstacle to their successful stalking, I was pretty well done up.

I lay and panted just below the crest, but not for long, as the Sherani's actions soon left me in no doubt that our quarry was at last in view. I crawled up to him, looked over the edge, and away down the precipice at something within 150 yards' distance, I saw a markhor standing on the lower part of the trunk of a chilgoza pine, which projected out from the rock face for some distance before assuming a vertical position. The sight almost made me dizzy, for the animal had nothing below him but space, and the drop was several hundred feet and very sheer—or at least so it appeared to me. I lay and watched him, and could not for the life of me see how the animal had got to his present position, or how he would get out of it. My companion motioned to

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me to fire, and I sighted on the markhor, when it occurred to me that if I killed him he would drop off the tree into space below, and almost certainly smash his horns in the great fall.



I saw a markhor standing on the lower part of a chilgoza tree.

I brought back the rifle (we were leaning over the edge of the precipice), and in pantomime explained this to the man. He got very excited, however, and signified that the animal would escape unless I fired. This I did not believe, being also well aware that all he cared for was the meat. However, his meaning was all too soon

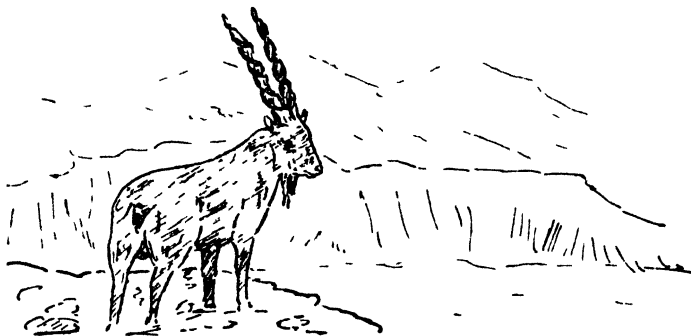
The Goats

vindicated, for the goat suddenly turned round and leapt off the tree trunk on to what I could just see was a narrow ledge, and as I brought the rifle to bear on him, another leap and I lost sight of him beneath a projecting rock. As soon as he appeared beyond this I fired, for I was now frightened myself. I missed, and the animal appeared to project himself into the air and drop like a stone. I was covering him at the moment, but was quite unprepared for such a movement and consequently missed badly again. I now watched the animal in sheer amazement, and for the moment forgot to be mortified at my misses. The goat, with a monotonous regularity, appeared to be letting himself down (only so can I express it) in a series of long drops from ledge to ledge, for I suppose there were ledges of some kind or other, until he got clean down the precipice on to a shelving slope of the usual shale, I guessed, and then went down this diagonally at racing pace. I lost him for a time, just before he got on to the shale, but I had the glasses on this, and saw him go across it and disappear. It was an astounding performance, and I shall probably never see the like again. The Sherani was furious, his eyes blazed with anger, whilst his face took on such an evil look that I was glad the rifle was in my own hands, and also loaded. I rose and, turning to the Gurkha, said briefly, 'Home.' We started, and I was glad later on to be able to appease

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both men, for the Gurkha was as sulky as a bear after hearing the Sherani's version of the affair—doubtless a true one, for, of course, to him I had behaved like a fool in not taking the easy shot at first offered.

About a mile from the tents we suddenly spied three old males, moving diagonally up a slope towards us. We dropped and sat still,



I got an easy shot at one and dropped him.

and after half an hour I got an easy shot at one of these and dropped him. He rose, but fell to a second shot, never to rise again. His horns were not very large, 29 inches only in a straight line, but I was and am very proud of the trophy, as one is of one's 'first.'

I tramped many miles after markhor and gadh during the time I spent, on two occasions, in the Suliman Mountains, but I never secured or even saw anything like a record of the former animal,

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I think. The young head I show overleaf was shot under rather exceptional circumstances. I was camped, with the Political Officer and two companions, in late November, just beneath the final swelling of the great mountain, Takt-i-Suliman, one of the highest of the peaks of the Suliman range, and the most sacred of them all. One of the objects of the party was to climb this peak and visit the little shrine there. We had come up to this our final camp very light, as most of the mules were required to carry up water for us, none of that commodity existing in this wild part of the world. Our home, during our stay up here, was literally the 'cold, cold ground,' for neither bedsteads, chairs, nor tables could be brought up with us, and we slept on the ground and ate our meals seated round the blazing camp fires.

The faint dawn was just breaking one morning when one of the sentries pulled aside the flap of our tent and said that they had seen a markhor close by. It was so bitterly cold that we were both awake, and the Political Officer said, 'You go if you care to ; I'm not going to turn out. It would be a charity to give the men some meat.' We slept in most of our clothes, and so it was not long before I crawled over his mattress and himself, pushed through the flap, and stood erect. The piercing wind cut me like a knife, and my teeth chattered so that I could scarcely ask the direc-

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tion. A pale lemon-yellow streaked the sky, and the upper ridges were disclosing their stony, barren faces, whilst to the east the dark pines on the lower part of the Takt lay gloomy and black. For once the men were right as to the distance. I had gone 300 yards at most when, on the other side of a deep



Head of young Suliman Markhor.

chasm on a narrow ledge in the face of the precipice, I saw a grey shape. The light was still bad, but I was as excited as the men with me, and I believe there were at least five, squirming at various distances along the ground, their eyes glowing like coals at the thought of roasted steaks. I fired at the shape, rapidly recharged the rifle, and fired again. 'Hit, sahib, he's hit,' I heard

The Goats

behind me, but the goat leapt several feet up on to a tiny niche, and from there down on to the ledge ahead again. I fired just as he took the second drop, and missed. I then hit him twice, and he turned a corner and disappeared.

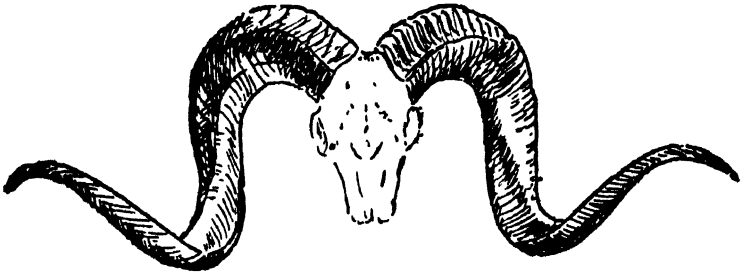


He went down into the abyss, game to the last.

‘It’s all right, sahib, we’ve got him, sahib,’ shouted the men, their knives already loose in their hands and glee on their faces. We hurried forward and opened out the ledge again, and there was the markhor, and I could see now in the stronger light, quite a small one. He was slowly walking along the ledge, and to all appearances unharmed, and

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yet I knew he was hit, and hit hard. Two more shots did I put into that markhor. The first, save that he stopped for an instant, apparently had no effect on his charmed life. The second, fired as he reached another point in the ledge, from which the only egress was a jump up, also reached home. He took his jump, however, but it was not upwards but outwards. It was his last leap, and he went down into the abyss below, his four feet sticking straight out and head erect, a game animal to the last, but, I hope, dead, with that last spring.



PART V
THE SHEEP



CHAPTER XV

The bharal—Pamir and Thibetan sheep—Appearance of bharal—Habits—Difficult to 'pick up'—Sudden falls of mountaineers—Under canvas at the foot of the snows in late autumn—A wonderful sunrise—The nullah to the north—See a flock of bharal—The sulky Gurkha—Watch the bharal—The bharal disappear—Set off in their tracks—A stiff climb—Drawn blank—The mighty snow-peaks—Another disappointment—A perilous eyrie—Nearly lose my head—A difficult descent—The camp once more—Another try for bharal—An easy stalk—Death of the ram—Speed of the bharal—*Dolce far niente.*

ON THE FRINGE OF THE SNOWS AFTER BHARAL

THE Himalayan sportsman who has not seen and stalked a bharal (*Ovis nahura*) in his native wilds has missed one of the greatest treats the whole great mountain range can provide. Shikari men who have had the luck to see and kill them will tell you that the markhor (*Capra falconeri*),

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Himalayan ibex (*Capra sibirica*), the great Pamir sheep (*Ovis poli*), and the great Thibetan sheep (*Ovis hodgsoni*), produce far better trophies, and this I grant. To secure them, however, means a long and arduous expedition far beyond the outer hill ranges of the great chain. The sportsman must be prepared to march for days on end, until he gets into Gilgit and Ladakh or Thibet to get the last two named sheep, and this is a costly business, and requires a good deal of leave into the bargain. The blue wild sheep, as the bharal is often called, can be secured during a far shorter period of leave than is required for the others, and yet the conditions and scenery under which it has to be sought resemble to a great extent those surrounding the haunts of the above-named animals. Its habitat stretches from Baltistan eastwards, the animal being seldom seen below 10,000 feet, whilst in summer it has to be sought for at elevations of 14,000 feet and upwards.

Bharal have all the appearance of sheep externally, though in other respects they are as much like goats as sheep. The animal has shortish, uniform, brownish-grey hair, with no mane or ruff to the head, the lower portions and base of tail being white. The horns are rounded at the base and fairly smooth all the way up to the tips. The females have short horns, which are slightly curved upwards and outwards. The males can be distinguished from the females

The Sheep

by the larger horn and the black markings on the face, chest, and sides.

The blue sheep is to be found on undulating hilly ground, is very fast when alarmed, and climbs the most inaccessible precipices with aggravating ease. It feeds early in the morning and in the late afternoon and evening, lying down in its feeding-grounds in the open during the day. It never frequents scrub jungle or forest, but is protected from view to a most marvellous degree by its colour. When lying amongst stones it is one of the most difficult animals I know to pick up, either with the glass or naked eye, and it will be found equally difficult to see against the autumn-tinted grassy hillsides. The flesh is excellent eating, save in the case of the old rams, which are, perhaps naturally, exceedingly tough and leathery. The animal, unlike the urial, never breeds with tame sheep, though it is easily tamed by the hillmen, and breeds freely in captivity. The period of gestation is about five and a half months.

My first acquaintance with the blue sheep was a most memorable one, if for the sole reason that my ardour led me into as nasty a place as I have ever stood in, and I was within an ace of losing my head, an event which, had it taken place, would have resulted in these lines never having been penned. One often reads of sudden falls, ending in extinction, taking place amongst moun-

Stalks in the Himalaya

taineers, but the reason for an experienced hill-climber suddenly coming to grief can rarely be placed upon record. My own experience has taught me a little of what may have proved the cause of this sudden loss of foothold and drop.

I was camped in the late autumn in a tiny tent on a little maidan at the foot of the snows not far from the Thibetan frontier, and had arrived there with the fixed determination of seeing, and, if possible, of bagging, a bharal. I had had a bitterly cold time of it, but worse was in front of me. I take the following extract as noted down at the time in my shooting diary :—

Cold was not the word for it this morning when I had to turn out, but as soon as the sun topped the snows in front matters began to mend. The view as it rose was of the most gorgeous description, the little maidan being almost encircled with mighty snow-clad peaks, which had received a fresh white covering during the night. Leaving camp, we set off for a nullah situated a mile or two away to the northwards, intending to explore this first. The bottom of the nullah consisted of a small grassy plateau about 150 yards wide, across which the stream meandered or dropped frothing over tiny falls. The little plateau or alpine meadow, as it was in reality, was covered with short turf, amongst which the withered remains of the summer wild

The Sheep

flowers were scattered ; whilst enormous boulders, and rocks of all sizes, rested in the positions they had taken up after their rapid descent from the adjacent hill-sides. The far edge of the little meadow led up to the snow-line, and we were half-way across when suddenly the shikari dropped like a stone, and I followed suit, falling flat on my chest in a nasty, cold, icy bath. There was a heavy frost last night, coating thickly the longish grass and dead wild flowers in the meadow. Under the sun's rays this had commenced to melt in places, and into one of these I had dropped. I looked in the direction of the man's gaze, and there to the west, on the lower slope of the hill-side, were two bharal. How my heart jumped ! A careful survey satisfied me that we had been seen, but the sheep did not appear certain as to whether they were in danger or not.

I looked carefully round for my Gurkha orderly and the rifle. Alas ! he was some fifty yards behind, and did not appear to have seen the animals, or noticed that we were down. Bitterly did I regret not having carried it myself. The man was much too intent on his own misery at the great cold to be thinking of me or sport ; and a sulky Gurkha is the slowest walker I know. There was nothing for it but to wait his tardy advent, and I turned my eyes to the bharal again. The two had increased to four, and as I looked others disassociated themselves from their environment,

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and I was able to see that we had disturbed a good-sized flock of them. As we watched they commenced to move off slantingly uphill, and I saw that there were at least three good rams amongst them. The two we had first spied were then about 150 yards off, and afforded a shot well worth trying. By the time I got the rifle the good rams were over 200 yards away, moving slowly up the hill-side. The flock did not hurry, however, and having decided not to fire, as the shikari said that he could take me to a place where we should probably find them lying up for the midday siesta, we stayed quiet and watched them. For over half an hour we lay in our cold, wet forms, as one after the other the sheep climbed that great mountain-side and disappeared over a neck at the top. Had one not followed them all the way up, few eyes would have seen them disappear over that col as the yellowish forms merged into the golden grass in a most tantalizing manner. As soon as the last disappeared our job commenced, for I was determined to leave no stone unturned to secure one.

Leaving the Gurkha below with instructions to whistle should the sheep reappear on the skyline, we made straight up the mountain-side, terribly steep though it was, to the base of a wall of rock, which fell sheer from the summit, and then began to worm our way along towards the

The Sheep

neck. In so doing we had to follow every indentation and gully of the hill-side, going down and up, and up and down for what appeared to be an interminable time. When it is noted that the hill-side was for the most part covered with a short dry turf as slippery as ice, the difficulty of this climb and crawl can be imagined. It took the best part of two hours to reach the neck, and then the stealthy look over showed us nothing but a farther space beyond dropping sheer some 500 feet or more into a little ravine. We wormed our way to this spur over some of the worst ground it has been my lot to negotiate. Even the shikari, my sole companion, took off his grass shoes and trusted to his bare feet. I had to relinquish the rifle, as it required the use of both hands and feet, including the proverbial eyebrows, to enable me to reach the spur.

Having gained our lofty and perilous eyrie, we looked down into a beautiful little green cup some 150 yards across, leading up to a higher rocky saddle-back. But the little green dell, where the shikari had felt confident of finding the sheep, was empty. It was now past midday, and the sheep were evidently more disturbed than we had thought. We held a whispered conversation, and as the outcome the shikari disappeared, clinging like a fly to the face of the precipice, to look up one last possible spot beyond, whilst I lay in my little eyrie and looked

Stalks in the Himalaya

at the drop on either side of me with no great satisfaction, but with the keenest relish at the magnificent snowy panorama outspread before my gaze. To the south a great spur jutted out at some distance, and prevented me seeing farther in that direction, this contracting my horizon to one of great snowy peaks which rose so close around me that it looked as if I could have thrown a stone across on to them. To the north-west a great moraine filled the valley, merging at its upper end into the snow-line on the mountain-side, snow-level and moraine now far below; whilst in front a series of six peaks flanked a great moraine to the north-east, and right below lay the little meadow where we had lain in our chilly forms earlier in the day. I could perceive now why the bharaI had seen us so easily. Every rock and stone stood out as clear as crystal, and we, flat on our stomachs though we were, must have been fairly obvious to them. In fact, the only confusing item about us must have proved our khaki clothing, so similar in colour to our surroundings, and we probably owed it to that that the sheep had not stampeded away as soon as they had perceived us. Even now, in the clear light of midday, look as I would, I could not make out the Gurkha, and my gaze returned to the Giants of the World amongst whom I lay. It was a sight to live for in the present, to dream of in the future, unimaginable

The Sheep

for those who have not seen it face to face, unforgettable by those who have.

The shikari returned, having seen no further trace of the sheep, and we then commenced a flank movement to get round a spur to the south-west. After some slow climbing we finally gained a spot from which we commanded an extensive view of two sides of the nullah, and they were both blank. There was not a sign of the bharal, and we did not see them again. As we looked and searched, the clouds commenced to gather round the great snowy peaks hard by, and the shikari said it was imperative to start down—a most patent fact, even to my less experienced eye, now that the keenness of the chase was past. But to get down was no easy matter from our present elevated position. We were in a nasty corner, with precipices on two sides, and only one way of getting out, and that the way we had come.

Now one can get over all sorts of bad ground when led along by the excitement of the chase, ground which proves almost insurmountable when that excitement has left us. We have all found it so. Such was my present case. We had to get down an almost sheer hill of the short slippery grass, a slope that dropped at an angle of about sixty-five degrees to the little meadow. As the full difficulties of the position we were in were borne in upon me, I suddenly pushed the rifle which I was carrying into the hands of the

Stalks in the Himalaya

shikari, clung to a sharp pinnacle of rock and shut my eyes. A feeling of vertigo seemed suddenly to seize me, and I felt as if I must let



The slope dropped at an angle of about sixty-five degrees.

go and roll down that precipitous slope. The sensation lasted perhaps half a minute, perhaps longer, and then I was able to conquer it; but it must be experienced to understand its full

The Sheep

unpleasantness, and the great jeopardy it places one in while it lasts.

My companion, a small, shrivelled, wizened hillman, whose age must have been close upon threescore years, and who was more at home in his present position than he would have been on the shady side of Pall Mall, exhibited considerable uneasiness at my sudden attack. I was able to reassure him, however, and telling him to catch hold of the collar of my shooting-coat, I gingerly let myself down into a semi-sitting position, and unlaced and took off my boots. With them on I felt there was no feeling of security for me. With stockinged feet one can get a much better purchase of the ground, even though one may not hope to emulate the native in using one's big toe for grasping purposes.

Sending the shikari to the front, we moved diagonally down for some fifty yards, I keeping my eyes immovably fixed upon my steps, and then there was nothing for it but to face the sheer drop, and go down it in a straight line. I had been clinging to tussocks of grass, where such were available, and I now seated myself upon one, took a firm purchase, and turned my eyes downwards. Far below lay the little meadow softly shining in the sunlight, boulders I knew to be of the size of a large house looking like small stones. But I was steady again now, and I went down two-thirds of that hill-side

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in a sitting position, the most arduous and tedious piece of work I had done that day. Save that the soles of my shooting stockings practically disappeared, and the seat of my khaki shorts shone with a resplendent sheen at the end of the journey, we came out of it not much the worse. It took us nearly one and a half hours to get down to the little meadow, though, and the strain was somewhat severe, as the false placing of a foot meant a roll and almost certain death.



We did not see those bharal again.

I was glad to feel my foot on the turf of the little meadow again.

If I were asked for the opinion, my advice would be: Don't go up on these excursions without a couple of hillmen with you. One is not sufficient, and the second can always be dropped behind when you are approaching the particular spot where you hope to find the game.

It was on this trip that I eventually secured a good head. It is an instance well worth relating, since it is typical of the great vicissitudes which

The Sheep

attend all shooting, and hill-shooting, perhaps, more than any other.

We left camp before dawn, as we had a walk of some five miles in front of us to reach a small arm of one of the larger nullahs, where, according to the shikari, our luck would be very ill if we did not find a decent head. Up to then we had worked very hard, being out all day, and had very little to show for it. Sheep we had seen, but either they had caught sight of us as soon as we had of them, or our long, circuitous stalks had ended in finding blanks where we expected to obtain an easy shot, as the result of our labours. Youngsters and poor heads we had seen, but the days of indiscriminate slaughter, the days when the sportsman was as proud of shooting a female as of bagging a male are gone, never—all good sportsmen hope—to return. Consequently my luck was out.

Now in my experience the worse the luck the true sportsman has the harder he works, and it was on this principle that I had determined to undertake a tramp that might in all probability give me the hill-side for my bed, dinner, and breakfast. To such I had made up my mind.

We left camp, as I have said, before dawn, and tramped along in silence. The sun rose in great glory, gilding the snows and chasing the shadows from the dark bottoms of the nullahs and ravines. When fully light the glasses came

Stalks in the Himalaya

out of their cover, and we carefully scanned each part of the nullah and surrounding hill-sides. I went over the whole place twice, but could make nothing of it. I then passed the glasses to the shikari and waited the result. From eager hope his face gradually settled to disgust, and he was apparently just about to lower the glass when he stiffened, looked again, and pointed to a distant slope. It was some minutes before I could pick up the point, and even then I should never have taken the object I was looking at for a bharal—a mere shapeless, yellowish mass, all but indistinguishable from the rocks and grass around it. I thought I saw a movement, but could not be certain. I did not doubt my companion, and we set out on the mile stalk it was necessary to make to get up to it. This we accomplished with ease, and looking carefully over the slight rise between me and the point, there before my eyes stood a fine old ram, the dewdrops still glistening on his coat, whilst a few yards off three other smaller heads grazed quietly. My hand shook from eagerness, as I pushed the muzzle of the small-bore over the crest: a few seconds, to steady the aim, and the ram gave one magnificent leap into the air and fell dead. His companions threw up their heads, glanced in a startled and terrified manner at the fallen ram, and as he touched the ground they bounded towards us. 'Shoot, sahib, shoot,'

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muttered the shikari, but I wanted no more. I jumped up, and the sheep with one accord wheeled to the right-about, and were racing up the opposite hill-side within a very few moments of my appearance on the scene.

We were back in camp by midday, and I indulged in a lazy afternoon, whilst the men skinned the ram, measured and remeasured the head, and prepared themselves for a heavy evening's meat feed.





CHAPTER XVI

Leave Simla—The Himalaya-Thibet road—Upper waters of the Sutlej—Queer roads—Game preservation in the Himalaya—Bharal country—Horns of bharal—Feeding-grounds—The idiosyncrasies of the native shikari—How to deal with him—A scene of wild grandeur—Telescopic eyesight—Curious village houses—Hard work—Come upon a flock of bharal—Youngsters at play—Alarm of sheep—They file off—Retrace our footsteps—A careful stalk—An easy shot—The flock stampede—Toughness of the ram—His last leap.

SUCCESS WITH BHARAL

I MARCHED one year up the beautiful Himalayan-Thibet road from Simla, to the Thibetan frontier. Many will know the first few marches out of Simla to beautiful Baghi hidden away in the forest, and few there

The Sheep

are who have done these marches who do not look back to them with the pleasantest of memories. Simla, the heart of India, so to speak, for so many months in the year, is an entrancing place, entrancing as it is beautiful. But how exhilarating to lay aside the garb of fashion, don once more the old shooting-coat, and start out into the beyond! Those with a love of the hills know full well the feeling.

Some hundred miles or more to the north of Simla one begins to reach the upper waters of the Sutlej. The road when you get to these parts is appallingly bad, and has often to be carried along the side of the sheer cliff on supports driven into the rocky face. Some years ago, to save the constant repair-work, stout iron supports were used, driven into the rock at great expenditure of labour. The road lasted for a shorter time than ordinary, however, the hillmen rapidly helping themselves to this generous gift of iron placed by Government so conveniently at their door. Since when wooden supports are once again the rule. The sketch shown here depicts the state of the roads so made after a little wear. Up above the road, above the line of the forest, the snow can be seen on the hill-sides, and a five hours' or so hard climb will take you on to it. Here, if you have luck, you may come upon the bharal, for there is good ground round here, or was, if they have not been all shot out.

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The question of the protection of game in the Himalaya is now being considered by Government as seriously as it has been for some years past in Kashmir, where an absolutely efficient Game Protection Department has been in effective operation and borne excellent results. That it is required, all who have shot in the hills are well aware; and certainly no one is keener on the institution of efficient game preservation in the Himalaya than the true sportsmen who look to these hills for their annual rest and vacation from their routine work.

We have seen that the bharal is a goat-like animal, in fact, he appears to be a sort of connecting-link between the sheep and the goats in habits as well as in appearance. He frequents ground of a most precipitous nature, as I have already shown. Those who have seen the Rogi Cliffs in the neighbourhood of Chini, which drop some 4000 feet to the Sutlej, will have some notion of the ground that this sheep is at home on, ground on which the goat is far more in his element than the sheep. The horns also of this sheep differ from the type of the domestic ram to which all other sheep approximate, as I show here. This sketch is of the horns of a domestic ram I purchased and ate in Tehri Garhwal one summer, and very tough eating he proved. The horns of the bharal are flatter, and have one clear sweep instead of a spiral curve. They

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are heavy, and give the animal a fine rugged appearance, as he stands on the *qui vive*, perched on some inaccessible pinnacle of rock with to all seeming appearance absolutely no means of



Horns of Himalayan domestic ram.

egress from it. Yet, though he looks so imposing, he does not stand as high as the Thibetan sheep (*O. hodgsoni*) (35 inches against 48 inches at the shoulder), having shorter legs and being of thicker build. But it is just this build which enables him to scramble about the awful country in which he delights to roam, in search of some small succulent patch of green turf, situated on a small narrow ledge in some ghastly precipice. The horns are placed very close together at the base, and spread outwards in a curve. In old males the upper part of this curve sweeps backwards and upwards in a beautiful manner. Kinlock says that a good head may reach 30 inches or more, and Blanford records heads of 32·1 and 30·5, with a girth of 13. An average head nowadays would be about 23 inches, with a basal girth of 11 inches. An old head usually has the horns broken or blunted at the base.

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The bharal is exceptional in one way. He is never found in the forest. You may discover him on rocky precipices in the neighbourhood of the forest, to which he has been tempted by those beautiful areas of emerald-green turf we have all noted growing on the small ledges in such places. But he will never go from them into the forest. The animal, like the domestic sheep, is particularly fond of good grass, and this fondness of his should be borne in mind when you are out in search of him. It is the knowledge of where such spots are to be found that your shikari should possess, and that the local villager does possess. The former, if he is lazy, and such areas are not in the neighbourhood of your camp, will in most cases not volunteer it, and the local villager will certainly not come forward unless he has a reason for doing so. Further, if the shikari is not really keen on providing you with sport, and his keenness is often to be measured by your own knowledge, he will take care that the neighbouring villagers shall not give you any information if he can help it.

The very first essential, at least so I have personally found it, is to impress on and prove to your shikari that you are not out for his pleasure, but for your own, and that you yourself have a very passable acquaintance with the habits of the game you are in search of. Until you can impress

The Sheep

this fact upon him, you are unlikely to have much luck, as it is termed. Some men pin their faith to payment by results. I do not myself believe in this procedure. Offer the shikari a small bonus for each head he gets you a fair chance at. Not for each that you *kill*, for he cannot be held responsible for your misses. That is only fair. I



The hill shikari.

have noticed that the sportsmen who offer fabulous sums for each head killed usually pay the shikari at the outset double the wage he should get per day, and if he is at all addicted to laziness, he is content with the wage and will not try to show sport. He prefers to loaf about and draw his pay, to working hard for an additional sum which is only problematical, since it depends on the sahib's killing what he is shown. I am aware

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that in this matter of payment and treatment of shikaris men hold very different opinions. I can only speak from my own personal experience, and I have found my own plan, which is that of many others, to answer excellently. Lazy shikaris we must all meet, but I have observed that they usually waken up when they find that the sahib is bent on stopping out and tramping up and down hill till nightfall, whether they show him game or not. Two or three days of this sort of toil usually results in an early morning find.

On this particular occasion I had some trouble of this nature. The shikari imagined that it would be quite sufficient to take the sahib for an airing, show him a nasty place or two, and then retire campwards. When we finally came to a mutual understanding, I had a most interesting day.

We had left camp before dawn, and marched for about three-quarters of an hour in the dark, before the sun's rays lit up a scene of wild grandeur. We were on a rocky hill-side. Above us, some 800 feet up, lay the snow. In front, scarce a quarter of a mile away, loomed a frowning precipice, black with the shadows of night still upon it. Climbing up into the pale sky, in which a star or two still glimmered, rose the snowy mountains in Thibet, the peaks piled one on the top of the other in front, and stretching

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away to the north-east in echelon. The palest of yellows tinged with red lit up parts of their snows in a wonderful colouring, whilst the rest lay in cold grey or black shades. Filmy zephyrs rose from the alpine valleys and ravines, and lay in fine woolly masses against the abrupt slopes of the great mountains. To the east the hills loomed black and cold-looking, save for a red edging to their crests.

Our destination was the frowning precipice in front, or rather its crest to start with, and the light now being good, we pushed on at a greater speed. Already the shikari was scouring the steep rocky sides with a glance that had in it something of the powers of a telescope, but we arrived at the precipice edge without having seen anything in the shape of a sheep. I had small hopes even with the glasses of picking up a bharal out of that place till the sun had risen over the opposite hill-top, for the animals have the most extraordinary resemblance to their surroundings of any I know. I prided myself on having learnt a little of that wonderful fund of animal lore which the native shikari possesses ; part born with him, part assimilated during youth from his everyday surroundings, or from having spent many hours of each day as herd-boy out on the hills, where he had nothing else to do but pass his time either watching the animals in his vicinity, keeping a look-out for dangerous carnivora, or sleeping away the hot

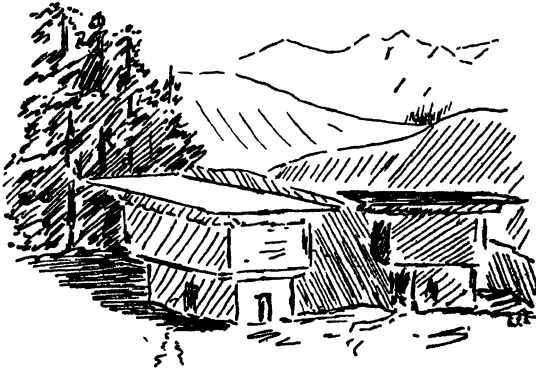
Stalks in the Himalaya

hours of midday in the company of his somnolent flock, well aware that all the animals of the jungle were engaged in the same occupation. The rest of his stock in trade is the result of his taking to the very paying (nowadays) profession of a shikari. But what are the best of us compared with the poorest shikari when it comes to picking up one of the really difficult animals of the Indian fauna in his natural surroundings? And how many of us can make certain of picking out a bharal when he has once lain down for the day? I think the native shikari will himself admit, though much averse to doing so, that even he fails.

The man I had with me this day belonged, however, to a special variety of men, for he possessed a sight which I have never seen equalled. Even amongst his compeers he was renowned. And when renown comes to a man amongst hillmen for this one particular quality at which they excel as a rule, he must indeed have been a marvel. One does not like being treated as a passenger, however, in whatever company one may be in, and however feeble one's own powers may be, either in one's own estimation or in that of one's companion. I therefore spent that morning working very hard. The sun rose higher and higher, and we worked along the upper part of the precipice without seeing anything in the shape of a sheep.

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About ten o'clock I suggested stopping for an hour. I was wearied with the hours I had spent searching amongst grey boulders and shale for the animals who certainly were not on any of the tiny grassy ledges down the cliff-side we had hoped to find them on. The shikari squatted down without a word, and I had some



The village house of the inner hills.

cold breakfast. He and his companion had with them some of those great, thick, coarse, round greyish pancakes, of which he had received a supply the evening before, brought up from his quaint village; for he did not cook his own, apparently, if he could get the work done for him. Have you ever seen those quaint hill villages in the inner hills beyond the monsoon rains? Double-storied to look at, with flat, white, mud roofs and projecting gables, they

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have a not unpicturesque appearance. The harvest, whether of grain or fruit, is spread to dry in the sun on the top of the roof, and the household linen is dried in the same place, which the owners also use as a meeting-place for gossip.

We were under way again within half an hour, and leaving the upper part of the precipice, we commenced to drop down in a zigzag manner, and the ground here becoming for me bad, I had to give up using the glasses, as I required both hands to get along. The shikari walked along unconcernedly, with my rifle on his shoulder, as if a false step with him was out of the question, and I do not suppose there was any more likelihood of his making one than of the sheep we were after. Both are equally at home in these places. We had been marching, or rather I had been crawling and climbing along for about two hours, when the shikari sat quietly down. I thought that he had seen that I was nearly ready for a rest, and so lay down and looked around me.

My eyes naturally went upwards first, since that was the danger zone, there being less chance of animals seeing us from below. Judge of my astonishment when I saw five bhara, about 200 yards away, feeding on a tiny grassy ledge which sloped towards us. We had been toiling along a ledge with a small wall of rock some thirty feet

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high above us, and the shikari had almost left this before he sat down. I had moved up to him before lying down, and so could just see round the edge. I looked eagerly at the sheep. One ram of fair size, another smaller one, and the rest females. I opened out my hand to the shikari. He nodded, and opened his out slowly twice, and then showed me two fingers. I looked again more carefully. I could see nothing but rocks in the neighbourhood of the little grassy area. Patiently I went over the area. I was about to turn to the shikari again, when suddenly one of the rocks I had been looking at got up and leisurely strolled towards the maidan. I rubbed my eyes as one after another six other rocks proceeded to do the same. My rocks were bharal, and the shikari smiled at me in a most aggravating manner.

The old ram took no notice of the approach of the new-comers, but the smaller one resented it. He marched up to the first ram that arrived, placed his head fair and square against the other's, who apparently had no wish for a rough and tumble, and pushed him clear off the grass and down the khud side, getting him on the run till he suddenly swerved and went down on his knees. This brought the first youngster down. The other then, quick as thought, jumped round, so as to get above his aggressor, and it was his turn to have the

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best of it. Both by now had lost their tempers, and kept standing up on their hind legs and bringing their heads together with a resounding thwack. I was being highly amused at the entertainment, of which none of the others took the slightest notice, when the shikari motioned to me to shoot.

He meant, of course, that it was an excellent opportunity to bag both. But firstly I wanted the big one up above, and, secondly, I wanted to see what would be the outcome of the present bout. In this I was disappointed of any exciting ending, as the sheep suddenly desisted in the foolish manner sheep seem to have of acting, and both retired slowly towards the ledge. I was able to note, so close had they come to me, their powerful make, and the short, decided manner in which they placed their feet on the ground when walking. I looked at the shikari, but gathered from the cloud on his brow that the present juncture was not one to whisper a question as to our next move, and so sat still and continued my watch on the bharals' movements. Just before the two young rams arrived at the grass I saw the old one put his head up and look around, a proceeding some of the females at once followed. There was nothing to see, but for some unknown reason they no longer felt comfortable. The shikari, whom I questioned afterwards, said that he had often seen the animals do the same thing on similar

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occasions, when he knew they could neither have seen him nor had his wind. The old ram put his head down, and again commenced to crop the grass, but it was in a short, sharp, irritated manner, and again up it came, and now he looked straight in our direction. A fine, massive, rugged old fellow he looked, and almost fierce for a sheep. In fact, just then, it was difficult for one to realize that he was a sheep. His horns, too, looked bigger than I thought they were.

I suddenly felt an overwhelming desire to possess that head, and almost regretted that I had not broken my rule and tried the long shot whilst he was feeding so quietly. He gazed like a statue for several seconds without moving a muscle, and then slowly turned and marched to the edge of the ledge, and leapt lightly upwards into a niche, where I would have been ready to affirm there could not have been room for a cat to have crouched, and I tried to see with the glasses which I hurriedly laid on him how he placed his hoofs, for it still remains a mystery to me how these animals obtain the purchase they do with a hoof which to all outward appearance is not adapted for the work it has to perform. It is not all balance, but how, when going hard *down* one of those precipices, do they make such unerring use of this 'cloven hoof'?

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We sat still as the flock filed away, and went off up the cliff-side at an angle, the worst direction they could have gone from our point of view, as they took nearly an hour to get out of sight. The shikari then motioned me backwards, at which I felt no surprise. I felt sure our first move would have to be an attempt to get above them. We toiled back over the awful ground we had come by, but it was easier going back, and we spent the next hour in climbing up the precipice. At the end, considerably out of breath and hot, I sat down on the top and took a rest. We then hurried along until we picked up the place where the sheep had disappeared. Cautiously we proceeded till we came to the spot, and then the shikari silently crawled ahead, and I followed slowly and carefully behind. After some minutes of this progression I saw him rest motionless, looking in one direction downwards. I moved quietly up to his side, and peering over, there I saw the old ram standing on a jutting-out niche of rock and looking back in the direction from which he had come. He was evidently still uneasy. The shot was a fairly easy one, something under 150 yards, and I fired as soon as I was steady. Like so many india-rubber balls the herd stampeded down the cliff-side—all but the ram. He gave a magnificent bound forward and upward, and actually took up his position on another ledge, and yet the bullet had touched his heart, as we

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subsequently found. I fired again, and again he jumped forward, lurching as his feet touched the rock, but recovering himself at once in a marvellous manner. He then commenced walking diagonally up the hill-side, jumping from rock to rock. Again I fired, and he stood like a rock.



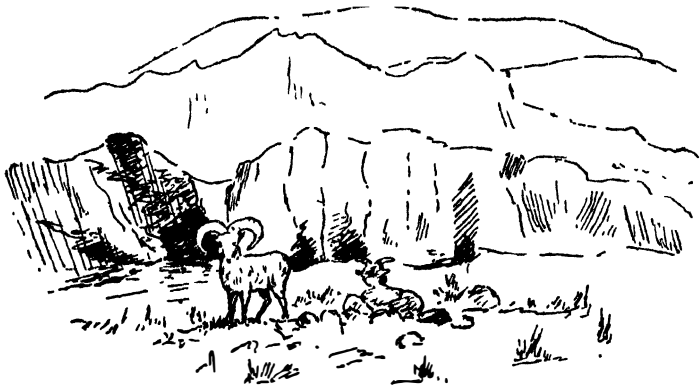
There I saw the old ram.

Once more I threw open the breech and forced another cartridge into the barrel of the Lee-Metford and sighted hurriedly on the animal, but as I did so he tottered, and then with that instinct which seems to possess these hill animals, he took a wild jump and went down the precipice, with his four feet stretched straight out and downwards, whilst his head was thrown back in

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a grand defiant manner. It was his last leap, and the picture of him as he made it remains photographed upon my memory.





CHAPTER XVII

The Urial or 'gadh'—The Salt Range country—Solomon's Mountain and Solomon's Bride—The shapoo—The fiery heat of the urials' country—Hot work without reward—Appearance of urial—Horns—Habits—Kind of country inhabited by urial—A cooler climate—Near the Afghan border—The silvery Chilgoza pine—The Sherani tribesmen—See a flock of urial—Curious movements of youngsters—Discover the old ram—A flank movement—Stalk the ram—Suspicious ewes—The alarm whistle—I dash forward—Futile shots—The Sherani on his native heath—The ram disappears—The might-have-been—Attention to trifles when stalking—Some difficult chukor-shooting—On the homeward trek—'Gadh saheb'—Take on the stalk—Difficult work—A motionless statue—Retreat—Advance again—Sight on to the ram—Over-anxiety—The ram disappears—Vain regrets.

THE URIAL

IT was up in the north of Zhob, in the Salt Range, within view of the Takt-i-Suliman, or Solomon's Mountain, that I made my acquaintance with the urial (*Ovis vignei*), the 'urial' of the natives, or 'gadh,' as they called it in these parts. The Takt-i-Suliman holds the

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site of a famous shrine, a narrow ledge in the precipice face where King Solomon is said to have rested with a fair, newly-wed wife from the plains of Hindustan to allow his beautiful bride a last look at her loved country.

The urial was long thought by some naturalists to be a different species from the shapoo; the latter animal, however, an inhabitant of Ladakh, is so nearly related that it is now merely considered to be a different 'race' of the same species.

Most of the wild sheep known inhabit high mountain ranges, and this is the case with all the Asiatic ones save the urial. Their pursuit is consequently favoured by one much-prized characteristic for the Englishman—the sportsman is always in a gloriously cold atmosphere, up close to, if not right among and on, the snows.

This is not the case with the urial, however, for this sheep is found low down amongst the stony, rocky hills of the Salt Range and the other low, stony hills of the more northern portions of the Punjab, and along the Sind frontier. He thus comes so close to the Himalayan region that he may perhaps claim to a place amongst the animals we are considering in these notes.

The temperature he lives in is, owing to the locale of his habitat, a very different thing from the cool heights inhabited by his confrères. In the lower portions of the Salt Range, and in the

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stony lower hills of the Punjab, the temperature runs up in summer months to a fiery furnace heat, and the hot winds blow with a persistence and burning intensity that must be experienced to be believed. I can well remember the day when I first met this parching furnace temperature, and the feeling of incredulity which filled me that man or animal could exist in it! Yet the country inhabited by these sheep has a peculiar fascination of its own. Wild, barren, rock and desert, the hill-crests cut into a thousand fantastic shapes, sharp and hard as the cruel blue of the sky above them, whilst their sides take on, in the evening and morning, a fascinating medley of crude colouring, browns and reds and yellows. At midday in the gorges and ravines the radiation from the rocks produces a glowing heat which withers every leaf, and search as you may, not a trace of life, animal or insect, save perhaps the ubiquitous fly, is to be seen. Such is the nature of the country inhabited by the urial.

I first visited the Salt Range during June, and made a full acquaintance with the fiery temperature of its lower hills. I tried on several occasions for the sheep, but failed to bag any, nor did I see a head worth shooting. Small females and a few unshootable males I saw, but knowing that good heads were about, I refrained from firing, as I wanted a reward for my arduous, fatiguing, and thirsty work, if reward

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at all was to be mine. My time was not wasted, however, for I learnt how to 'pick up' the animals in their natural environment, and made myself acquainted with some of their habits and little ways of going on—always such a fascinating pursuit for the lover of animal nature.

It was in November that I saw my first good urial, a fine old ram, with a heavy beard on him, a party of females and smaller males being in attendance.

What a fine beast is a noble old ram! Beautifully built is he, both for climbing over the rocky country he frequents and for speed. As he stands scenting danger, there is almost a rugged fierceness in his appearance which is quite contrary to his true character, for he is in reality a very timid animal by nature. A full-grown ram stands about 36 inches at the shoulder, and is a dark reddish colour on the back and upper parts of the sides, paling slightly lower down and on the legs. An old ram has the throat and chest adorned with a long ruff of coarse hair, which hangs down and becomes hoary with age, giving him a venerable appearance. He also has a peculiar saddle-shaped mark on the back. He stands about 31 inches at the shoulder. The horns are like those of the Himalayan domestic sheep, but have only one twist instead of the two possessed by the latter, and when perfect and symmetrical the twist may almost form a circle. The record

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is said to be 39 inches, with a basal girth of $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and 32 inches may be obtained. The more massive horns are, however, usually shorter. The average is about 26 to 36 inches along the curve, with a circumference of 10-12 inches. A curious thing about the eyes of this sheep is the



Head of Urial.

fact that the eye-pits are greatly enlarged, and secrete a gummy substance. The females have very small horns, have no beard, and are much smaller than the males and of a lighter colour, and so are easily distinguishable.

The urial lives together in flocks consisting of a large number, as many as thirty, or in small parties of six to eight or so. The males are to be

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found with the females in the winter, but during the hot weather the rams for the most part lie in parties by themselves.

The ground these sheep occupy is, at times, covered with a low scrub jungle, the stunted bushes and trees eking out a precarious existence amidst the bare, stony and rocky ground surrounding them. This kind of country alternates with the barren, rocky hill-sides, with more or less steep precipices, to which the animals resort. At the bottom of the ravines the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages cultivate small patches of crops, and these are visited by the sheep at night, when the crops are coming up. Owing to their thus living in the vicinity of small clusters of the abodes of man, and to their constantly seeing the flocks of sheep with their shepherds who frequent the hill-sides to crop the scanty pasturage, the urial are not afraid of man in this shape. It is otherwise, however, in the case of the shikaring sahib. The latter finds it by no means easy to get near them, and the least thing to which they are unaccustomed will alarm and send them stampeding off. By forgetting this important fact, I lost a fine ram during a stalk which will be described later. The urial breeds freely with the domestic sheep. The rutting season is September, and the period of gestation is probably about five to six months, one or two young ones being born.

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During the daytime these sheep lie up in some secluded retreat amongst rocks, moving off towards it at daylight. Here they spend the day snoozing away the hot hours within the shelter of overhanging rocks or trees or bushes, and so placed that they command all likely approaches to their position. It is this fact that makes it difficult to approach them in the daytime, this and the nature of the ground, which is so stony and crumbly that to move silently over it is a matter of considerable difficulty.

So I found it during the fiery hours I spent under a burning sun, stalking, as all of us will when it is our first sight of an unshot animal, females and immature males, in the vain hope that a 'big one' might be somewhere near.

On the day I saw my first big ram, the atmospheric conditions were very different. The November sun was hot, or appeared so during a long, arduous stalk, but a cold breeze was blowing off the higher peaks, and the conditions were about as fine as a sportsman with the love of stalking in his composition could desire.

We were up in the hills, not far distant from the Afghan frontier, and after an early breakfast had set out to climb to the top of a high adjacent mountain, a portion of whose sides and top were clothed with the beautiful silvery Chilgoza pine (*Pinus Gerardiana*). Those who have seen this graceful pine in the inner hills beyond Wangtu,

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on the Simla-Thibet road, and elsewhere in the Himalaya, will have a pleasing recollection of its attractive and handsome growth. The bark resembles nothing so much as that of the silver birch of our homeland heaths, and the foliage, though that of a pine, has nothing of the dark, gloomy aspect of the northern trees of this genus, but apes the grace and lightness of the birch. A beautiful tree is the chilgoza when seen in its natural surroundings. In the Himalaya one may observe it rearing its graceful stem and feathery, tasselly crown against a background of snowy peaks, surrounded by the intense blue of the heavens. Or, again, in the wild hills of Northern Baluchistan, you will find it, pluckily growing and hardily covering a rugged, rocky hill-side which glows brown and red under the fiery rays of the setting sun, the white, gleaming stems and slight crowns of the trees looking curiously out of place in their grim surroundings.

On this morning we were on the crest of a rocky spur some way below the forest line, and with the glasses on the heights I was musing on the very different kinds of country in which I had come across this tree, and thinking how well it would look in our English ornamental shrubberies and plantations, when one of the Sheranis (the local race of frontier cut-throats who occupy this tract of the border) suddenly plucked my elbow and excitedly whispered, 'Gadh, sahib,

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gadh!' I sat down promptly and looked in the direction he was pointing. Below us, across a bit of a ravine, a lower crest rose up, rocky and barren, save for a few stunted oleander bushes. Boulders strewed the hill-side amongst the scattered jungle, and for a time I saw nothing. Then the meaning of what I had been accustomed to look for the preceding hot weather gradually dawned upon me, my eye appeared to set itself in a different focus (for so only can I explain it), and quite suddenly I saw two urial as plainly as one can see two sheep on a hill-side at home.

Why does the person of average eyesight pick out these sheep from their surroundings without a thought? Is it not purely a matter of habit and practice? And I found that morning that the experience I had gained several months before now came to my aid. Seeing two, my eye soon made out the rest of the flock. I put the glasses on them. 'Small, all small,' I murmured, and I looked again. Some were feeding, others, the younger members of the party, wandering about with short, quick strides and an inquisitive manner, quite sure that each and every one of its companions had found a more tasty feeding-spot than it could find for itself. The old ewes took the interruptions of the youngsters with an air of patient resignation and meekness, as if to say 'They are ever so, and it's best to take no notice.' A youngster, and especially a male youngster,

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usually acted in a very different manner, and met the intruder with a butt, and a fierce showing-match would ensue, in the heat of which both would forget its origin, and at its close turn off in opposite directions to worry someone else.

Watching these exhibitions, almost human in some of their attributes, it gradually dawned upon me that several of the youngsters had proceeded in the direction of a certain dwarfed clump of bushes, and then turned sharply away, as if they suddenly recollected they had not intended moving in that direction. My curiosity was aroused. What made the bush taboo to their inquisitive prying? A thought crossed my mind. Was there a real head of the flock after all? We moved our position, crawling behind a series of large rocks scattered in echelon along the crest of the hill, until we reached a position from which we could see partly round the clump. One look sufficed. There lay a lordly ram, his massive head resting on his chin on the ground. No wonder the youngsters had steered clear of him.

I had not intended a stalk that day. I had other objects in view, and it was imperative that I should get to the top of the mountain I had started out to climb. Few shikaris however could have resisted the temptation thus placed before me, and it only meant an extra thousand feet or so to climb any way, I reflected, for it was still quite early.



HORNS OF URIAH

The Sheep

We laid our plans, the Sherani wild with excitement at the thought of meat. In fact, he seemed to see his meat dinner far more clearly than I saw the head of the ram gracing my walls. It was useless to even think of dropping down into the ravine and climbing up the opposite side. Firstly, we should be seen going down, as the hill-side was nearly bare, and secondly, we should then be below the sheep, whereas it is imperative that one should stalk them from above if possible ; or, in this instance, at least advance along the crest they were on.

We descended a little way in the direction we had come up, and then started towards the big mountain from which our crest was only an offshoot spur, as was that on which the sheep were. Half an hour and we reached the main hill-side, and climbed straight up into the chilgoza forest, and then turned and went along in this till we estimated we were beyond the sheep. Then, facing about, we started down diagonally, keeping a sharp look-out ahead. The ground on leaving the forest was frightfully rocky, with great boulders scattered about, and we advanced with comparative ease for some time. Then, quite suddenly, the boulders—the large ones that is—ceased. We got behind the last and cautiously looked round. We could see the spur, or the outer end of it, over the edge of the hill-side, and below us still. But no sheep were visible. I looked at the

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Sherani's face. He was still quite confident apparently. We wormed our way along till we gradually opened out the top of the spur and, gradually, a few of the sheep, the younger portion of the community, and an old ewe or two, came into view. We lay still. Those pestilential youngsters were still at it. Most of the old ones were now down, but the frolicsome ones were still disporting themselves, and did not appear to have any intention of resting. We were still some 400 yards away, and had not yet opened up the old ram. I lay there for half an hour, and as the second-hand ticked its way round and round on the watch on my wrist, I began to despair of those youngsters.

By the way, if you wear a wrist-watch, it is as well to cover it up as much as possible when stalking, or you may unwittingly send a helio message of your presence to your quarry, as befell myself on an occasion ever to be remembered, when, at the expense of considerable labour, I had got myself into a position from which I had an absolute pot-shot at a fine stag, and lost it in this unpardonable manner. To go out stalking and carry a search-light to warn your game of your presence is the height of stupidity, and so I felt it on the long tramp home. On the present occasion, had I had the day to give to the business there would have been no hurry, as I could have waited till the sheep moved again in the afternoon, and trusted

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to their feeding up to me or down over the crest of the spur where I could have followed them up. What I did not think of, and I look back at the folly of it with amazement and disgust, is that I might have climbed my mountain, carried out my object, and then descended in the afternoon, and probably found the flock sitting in the same place, or in the neighbourhood feeding. But it is so easy to remember afterwards what one ought to have done, or what one might have said or left unsaid. Are not one's best speeches and *bons mots* thought of when the occasion which demanded them is past ?

What I did was to intimate to the Sherani that he was to remain in his place (to his disgust), and started to stalk those sheep in the open, trusting they would not look up. Had the hillside been fair and smooth I might possibly have succeeded. But it was composed of loose, slippery pieces of rock and stones. Try a stalk on the flat of your stomach on this kind of stuff with a rifle in your hand, which you must hold off the ground to prevent it clinking against the stones, and you will understand the nature of the task I took on. I managed 100 yards, by which time I was shaking like a leaf. I then noted an old ewe steadfastly gazing in my direction. I lay face down, flat against the stones, and panted my breath out on to their hot surfaces. Five minutes or ten passed. I know not how long ! I raised my head

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imperceptibly. The old ewe was carved in bronze. I dare not move. It was a duel. Suddenly she sat down. The youngsters I had given up as hopeless ; but it would be a chance if *they* saw me, as none of them were doing sentry-go. I could see the ram now. He was snoozing peacefully. It was the duty of the fair sex to protect him. With infinite trouble I managed another fifty yards. Two ewes got up and stared fixedly at me and on to me. I repeated my former tactics and lay and panted, but not for long. A shrill whistle and I leapt to my feet to see the flock in full flight heading down along the crest, the foremost already disappearing over the far edge. Perspiration was pouring into my eyes. I dashed it away with the sleeve of my coat. Where on earth was the ram ? Suddenly he shot out of a clump of bushes and bounded along the crest. I whipped the rifle to the shoulder and blazed off the two barrels at him, the muzzle going round like the topmast of a pilot brig in a swell. The animal disappeared over the edge. I rushed down the hill and bolted along the crest. A shadow flicked past me ere I got there. The Sherani was tearing over the ground like one of the sheep themselves, his eyes gleaming and face ablaze with excitement. He pulled up at the crest. So did I ! A few brownish shadows far below represented the sheep, the old ram now in the middle of them. We watched them disappear !

The Sheep

Every stalker knows how essential it is to pay attention to trifles when endeavouring to get up to his quarry. I lost, owing to an absurd trifle, what, in my belief, was the biggest urial I have ever had the luck to see, and that he was somewhere near a record was the opinion of a companion—the Political Officer of the wild district in which I then was.

We had been out all day climbing in the mountains, and were on our way back to camp, or strictly speaking to a hot cup of tea, for my friend, before leaving that morning, had ordered the servants to have tea ready at a point about three miles from camp, knowing full well that we should be more than prepared for it by the time we reached the appointed place. To appreciate the true luxury of a cup of tea—the absolute bliss of it, I was going to write—one must have spent hours climbing about the mountains. Most hillshikaris will, I think, endorse this opinion, men who are not habitually tea drinkers, and would ordinarily scorn the ‘ five o’clock.’

We had dropped down from the stony, barren mountain-side, on which, earlier in the day, we had indulged ourselves with some excellent chukor shooting.

All Himalayan habitues know this strong-legged, strong-winged, burly partridge, and most of us have spent hours, toilsome hours, hot, and at times sulphurous hours—for missing is ever hateful—on

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the khud side, endeavouring to circumvent his wiles and bring him to bag. And we all of us know that to do this takes some pretty straight shooting, and requires one to be possessed of a stout pair of lungs.

Have you ever tried shooting him driven down to you from above? Opinions as to the most difficult shot at birds, are, we all know, very diversified, but if there is a more difficult one than a chukor or hill-pheasant dropping down the khud on outstretched wings—planing down I was going to call it in the new aerial phraseology—I should be glad to see it. At any rate, we both of us lost our tempers over the partridges that day, and we had accounted for a fair number of birds under ordinary conditions during the past few days.

Having left the barren, rugged hill-side on our return down the mountain, we entered a pretty piece of chilgoza forest, and were marching along a little path in the shade of the trees. Behind us, at some twenty paces, tramped the escort of four Levy Corps men, which the regulations of this frontier district rule shall accompany the sahib when away from the station. 'Sahib'—a low voice comes from behind us. We halt and the men close up. To our left the forest thinned out a bit, dropping to a small ravine, the ground, covered with pine trees, rising on the other side to a sharp, jagged crest-line, the

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upper part of the hill being treeless. 'Gadh, sahib,' said one of the men. We looked. At first I saw nothing till I carried my gaze to the crest-line. There, standing on the top of a sharp pinnacle of rock, the highest point on the ridge, stood an urial. He was standing broadside-on, with his head facing our way, and rigid as if cut out of the rock below him. I moved forward a pace to get his horns against the sky. A big one. We sat down and held a short consultation. He had evidently heard something; probably us, as we were such a party. In addition to the escort and an orderly, we had two of the local maliks, fine old Border ruffians, armed with ancient five-foot-long matchlocks, their waistbands bristling with a couple of old horse pistols apiece and an ugly knife, the elder with his grey beard dyed a bright sienna colour.

My friend thought it would be no use trying the stalk, as the animals would be sure to see us. The men, in hopes of meat, thought differently. And so did I. I was not stationed permanently in the district, with the chance of having a stalk at sheep when the humour took me! I should have a good hour to sundown, and off I started, leaving the rest of the party seated in the shade of the trees on the path; and after our long, tiring day, none of them seemed a bit sorry to watch me at the job.

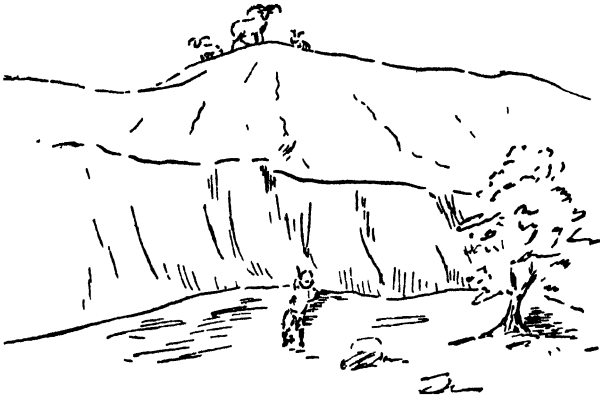
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The start was easy enough, down through the forest into the dry ravine. Then began the climb. I could no longer see the sheep, and had to keep my direction by the sun's position. I crawled silently up through the chilgoza forest, keeping so far as possible from rock to rock. In this way, having rope-soled boots on, I made no noise. It was tiring work, though, the more so that I had to carry the rifle the whole way. At length the trees opened in front of me, and circumspection became necessary. I took my line so as to keep a trunk between me and the open, till I arrived at one on the edge. There were a few stunted trees beyond this, which I hoped to be able to make use of, but I had to ascertain where the sheep were. At first I could not make out where I had got to. I could not see the ridge at all, and yet the trees had appeared to be on the same hill-side. All I could see was the barren hill-side rising up above me, and ending against the sky. As, however, there was no trace of urial, I set to work to tackle this, and went cautiously up it bent double. The stones here gave a lot of trouble, as the hill was a loose mass of rubble. On nearing the crest I saw appearing above it the ridge, and I lay flat and wormed my way a little further upward, and lay still to breathe. As soon as I had got my wind, I raised my head, and at once saw the ram. He didn't appear to have moved since I last looked at him

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from below. I afterwards ascertained from my companions that he had not done so.

Soon after I had left the forest they had caught sight of me, but the swell in the hill-side of course prevented the ram seeing me. He was watching them or their position. There were a number of other urial on the crest, and several ewes I noted were also on the *qui vive*. I calculated that they



As I glanced along the barrel and got the sights on his shoulder.

were still at least 300 yards away, and although the ram outlined against the sky presented a fine target, I had no intention of risking such a long shot after all my trouble. And yet I had to decide on something quickly. The sky to the west was flaming red already, and the ram stood outlined against a beautiful, pale greenish, yellow background. Already the lower parts of the ridge were darkening. Go forward from my

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present position was out of the question. To the left there was nothing in the shape of cover. I looked to the right. Some distance away, and about 150 yards I thought from the sheep, stood a stunted chilgoza tree, and between it and the forest below were a few boulders large enough to perhaps afford some shelter. I slowly wriggled down the hill backwards, and, do what I would, the rifle clinked once against the stones. I could not then see the sheep, but hoped they had not heard the noise. When I had got down far enough, I rose to my feet and moved, doubled up, to the right as fast as I dared go. I did not like the appearance of the ram as I had last seen him, and still less so that of the females. They would not stand much longer in that statuesque position.

As soon as I reached my line I moved up the hill again, getting down on all-fours, and soon afterwards once again on my chest, that irksome position in which the final stage of a stalk has so often to be carried out. All went well ; my rocks served their purpose, and with one eye on the ram, who was still in the same position (so much so that I almost began to think that he must be a stuffed museum specimen, set up thus to tantalise me, or a chimera of my own brain), and the other on the ground, I managed to get to the last rock and squirm round and beyond it. Now to the pine tree, and I am safe, I thought, but instead I

The Sheep

lay flat and motionless. I had suddenly caught a movement on the part of the females, and they were now looking straight at me. I waited, raised my head so as to be able just to keep my eyes upon them, and remained rigid. Had my rifle been in position I would have taken the shot then and there, but I dare not try and move it now. The females looked long and fixedly in my direction, and then turned again to peer down at the forest. With a sigh of relief I slowly drew up the rifle, pushed it forward, and brought it into line on the ram. As I glanced along the barrel and got the sights on his shoulder, I thought it was a most beautiful bull's eye, and I should be disgraced for ever if I missed before the gallery I had below me ; the only time I ever remember having had a gallery, when taking on a stalk, and I most sincerely hope it will be the last. Not that I was aware then that my movements were so visible. I had forgotten the outside world in the intense interest of the stalk. As I pushed back my head to get the sights absolutely in line, the back rim of my topi caught in my neck. A feeling of annoyance took me. I had tried to exchange the topi for a cap an hour before, but the orderly had dropped behind to drink (how they do drink on the march, these orderlies !), and I had forgotten the matter when I started off for the stalk. It was to cost me dear. Feeling that the topi was being raised on

Stalks in the Himalaya

the top of my head, and being so anxious not to be put off again, I raised my left hand, took the topi slowly off, and put it on the ground beside me. I was fully under the impression that I had not removed my eyes from the sheep. I dropped my head to look along the sights and glanced hurriedly up. Not an animal was visible, nor a sign of the ram or of a single sheep. They seemed to have melted away, and so only can I explain their marvellously sudden disappearance. I could have yelled aloud with annoyance. They simply can't have gone, I repeated over and over to myself, but there was no doubt about the fact. I would have lain there in the hopes that they would come back, had it not been for the waiting men below—a mad and totally useless thing to have done, of course, but one is ready to do mad, useless things after such a fiasco.

My companions subsequently told me that they had seen the whole thing. As I raised my hand to take off the topi, slight as the action was, the sheep must have seen it, for their heads suddenly swung in my direction. One or two of the longer-sighted men had seen me place the topi on the ground, and at the same moment the ram took a great bound from the pinnacle down the opposite side of the crest—the rest of the flock bolting after him. The men wondered why I had not gone on to the crest, and I would have been

The Sheep

only too glad to have done so. What we had not seen from below distinctly, but what I perceived as I approached the chilgoza tree, was that the ridge on which the sheep were, dropped almost sheer, though not unclimbable, into a



The Author in Himalayan shikar kit.

deep ravine, and then rose again towards me. It would have taken probably half an hour to have got to the ridge, by which time it would have been dark. To say that I was mortified is to express very mildly my feelings.

Stalks in the Himalaya

Other stalks have I had after this sheep, and heads I have obtained, but the two above related stand out pre-eminently in my mind as of higher interest, owing to their resultant failure, than others, which had a successful, sometimes almost a tame ending.

For the actual killing is not the finest part of stalking.

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