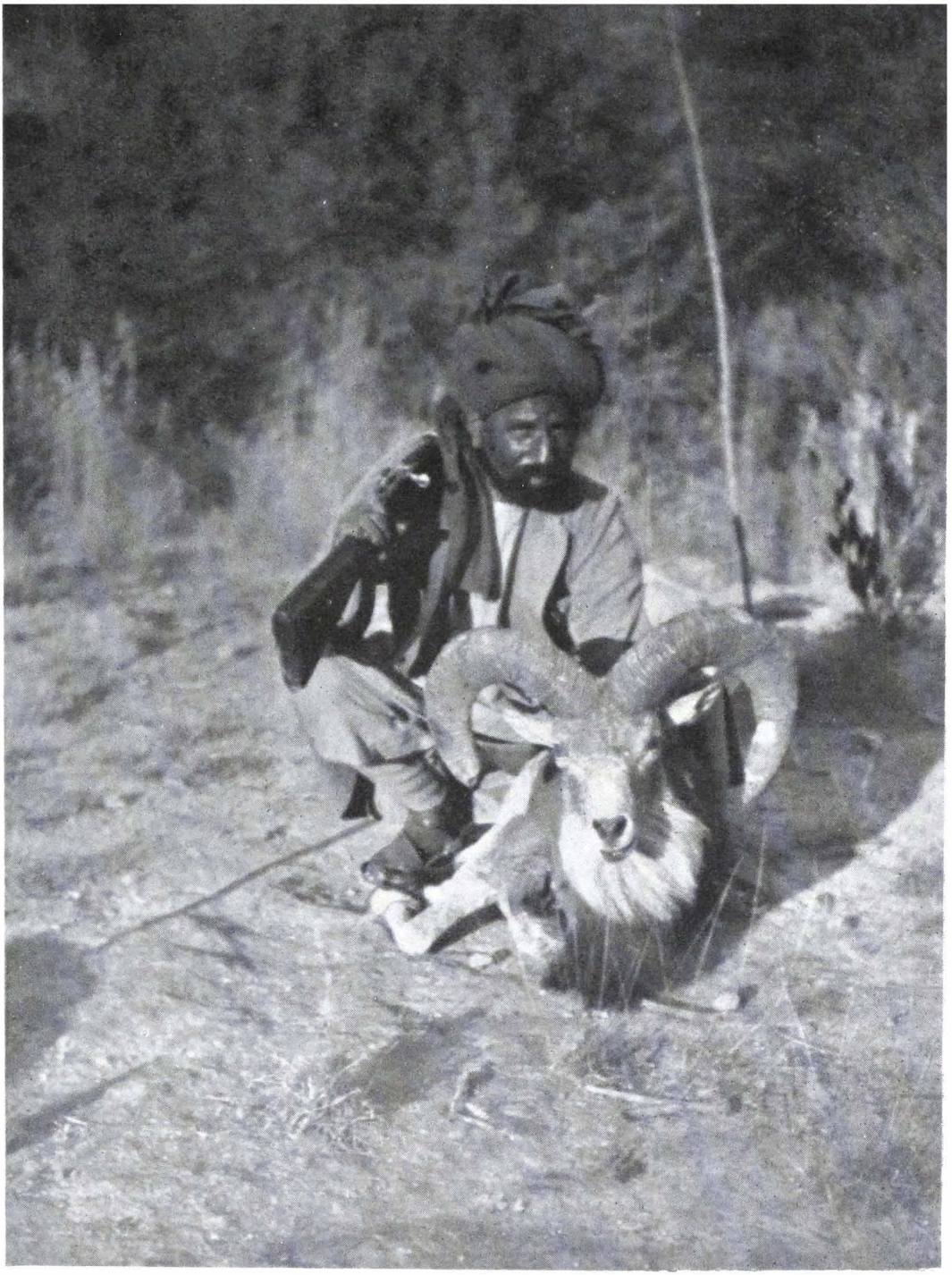
WHEN THE RED GODS CALL

BEING THE BIOGRAPHY OF
A SHIKARI IN THE MAKING

by

RAWDON MALET

Illustrated from Photographs



MOHOMED KHAN

(*Frontispiece*)

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WITH PHOTOGRAPHS

H. F. & G. WITHERBY
326 HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C.

First Published 1934

Printed for Messrs. H. F. & G. Witherby
at Middle Row Place, London

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

RUDYARD KIPLING.

(Quoted from "*The Feet of the Young Men*" by special permission of Mr. Rudyard Kipling.)

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CHAPTER I

DRIVEN DUCK

JAMES CARMODY COLLINSON was the elder son of the Manager of Morgan's Bank in Southampton, and he lived the life that fate prescribes for provincial Bank Managers' sons till he was eighteen and a half years old. And had it not been for the definitely perceptible ripple that the Great War cast on the even dailiness of provincial life, he would have continued without demur in the paths ordained. That is to say, that after six years as a Grammar School day-boy he would have become a clerk under his father, and moving through the recognized stages, from an ink-stained forefinger to a cultured pearl pin, and finally to the managerial white slip, he would pass in the fullness of time to the pensioned ease of a villa on the road from Southampton to Queen's Crawley. But by the autumn of 1917 James was of an age to die for his country, and he departed for a Cadet School on the inhospitable moors of Catterick, Yorks.

Now Mr. and Mrs. Collinson viewed the departure of their first-born not without misgiving. Before the war it would never for a moment have entered their middle, middle-class heads that a son of theirs should have applied for the King's Commission. It was the prescriptive right of a class to which they did not belong: of the sons of the Crawleys, and the Wapshots, and the Huddlestone Fuddlestones, and other

Hampshire worthies, the secret of whose bank balances lay locked in Mr. Collinson's bosom. Families who always showed him the utmost courtesy, it is true, but to whom he was always "Mr. Collinson", and never "Collinson". But now their fears were different. They were afraid that James would be forced to associate with a class of person, who, at that period, was referred to with withering scorn, as T.G's, or temporary gents. For the Collinson's peculiarly British form of snobbery reflected both ways, and none were quicker than they to decry the behaviour of young officers seen walking out with shop girls in the streets of Southampton, or behaving uproariously in the Theatre Royal.

In due course James was gazetted to one of the Service Battalions of that renowned Corps, the Fortieth Fusiliers, in Palestine. Here he soon unlearned (under the tutelage of a regular Colonel, who believed that the best way of winning a war was to inculcate a little of the ray serene of the Fortieth into even the most temporary of its temporary officers) most of the things that he had been taught at his Cadet School. He learnt, for instance, that he must talk about trousers, not slacks; that the Commanding Officer is not the C.O.; that the man in the ranks must never be referred to as a Tommy, but rather as a Fusilier, or, in the unselect corps, as a private soldier. He learnt further that the consumption, in large quantities, of whiskeys and soda (which, incidentally, must never be referred to as "a peg") might be considered a fine feat at a Cadet School, but was not in the Regimental tradition; and finally he found that Thursby, who had spent ten days in Sinai bagging an ibex, was

far more to be had in honour than Wynn, who had passed his leave making amorous conquests in Cairo.

He passed the grilling summer of 1918 with the Fortieth, and he went with them through the whole of Allenby's final push. He enjoyed the two short hours of hard fighting that the Fortieth experienced on the morning of 19th September. And he enjoyed far more the triumphant pursuit to Damascus, the striking of the bivouacs, the daily march, and the line of camp fires behind the outposts. Most of those who took part in that operation, with its hot and dusty treks, cold nights, short rations, chlorinated water and lost transport, vowed that they would never again sleep out of their beds of their own volition. But it left James with a confirmed predilection for camp life. So when, on his way home to be demobilized, he fell in with Peters, of Clarkson's, the renowned Indian wine merchants, who offered him a subordinate position in the firm at Rs.415 per mensem, he accepted with alacrity. He had been just far enough east of Suez to realize that whatever constitutes the White Man's burden in those parts, he is able to delegate many of the minor drudgeries of Southampton life to duskier brethren.

So three months later he was once more in Port Said, on his way to Clarkson's Karachi branch, in a steamer packed with Anglo-Indians reunited to their rather hard-faced wives, and discussing without ending how best to "get back" to pre-war glories—the generally accepted solution being the organization of a series of "weeks", during which the Club band, and the Club bar would never cease their labours. Now James was not

yet sufficiently purged of the influence of the Fortieth to be much interested in the bridge and poker schools whereat the "boxwallahs" sought to wring from each other the considerable fortunes they had made in the war, or even to throw himself zealously into the novices' bull-board competition, or to wish to share the fortunes of "such a charming girl", who had not yet secured a partner for the mixed deck quoits. And, thus, he got to know Colonel M—— of the Welch Rifles, and that completed his conversion to the cult of the Red Gods. Colonel M—— had made an almost international reputation for himself as a shikari, both in Africa and in India, before the war. His reputation during the long years he spent with the K.A.R. had become almost that of a Selous; and many years later when James was in the Quetta Hills he heard one old Khan discoursing to another in tones of hushed reverence, of how M—— Sahib had gone forth and shot the great Chihiltan Markor by the light of the moon.

Colonel M—— divided Anglo-Indians into four closses: shikaris, polo players, pigstickers and poodlefakers; and the latter he considered for ever damned. He saw that there were possibilities in James. And many were the hours that they spent walking round the deck, while James listened to the whys and the wherefores, and the musts and the must-nots of Indian Shikar. He drew so gloomy a picture of life in a Presidency town that James was on the point of setting sail for England by the first available boat. And then, when he began to unfold the possibilities of sport that even the rawest of raw novices might enjoy from them, James felt that he could hardly

endure another day of the voyage, so tantalizingly did it divide him from such opportunities. He spoke of the duck shooting to be had from Karachi; of the Kanara jungles, less than a day from Bombay in the train; of the Bengal boar, most courageous animal in the world, and of the short spear with which the Calcutta Tent Club compassed its destruction. And he went further afield, and spoke of the rewards to be won for shooting a man-eater; and the Ovis Ammon that were to be found in the mountains behind Spiti, and shot for a mere fraction of the outlay involved by a trip to Ladak; of the buffaloes of the Sunderbunds; and the rhinos of Cooch Behar; and many other things; till James' imagination was strewn with noble dead, like autumn leaves in Vallombrosa.

And before they parted M—— said: "I'm going to join my regiment at Quetta; would you care to come down and join a Christmas duck-shoot in Sind?" Now there was nothing on earth that James would have liked more than to have gone on a Christmas duck-shoot in Sind, but his face fell, because he had no gun, and he would not have known how to use it if he had. But Colonel M—— had risen to dizzy heights during the war as an intelligence officer in Palestine; rapid deduction was his forte; he took in the situation at a glance. "I dare say you are a bit shy of starting," he said, "but some of our lads are quite as raw as you. And what's more I'll give you a chit to Walter Locke in Karachi telling him to sell you a good gun cheap."

For the three months that followed James applied himself to the sale of wine. He learnt of Madeira that had been twice round the Cape, and

that which had not. He heard of 1911 Perrier Jouet, and Jubilee Port, and Napoleon Brandy, and just how much of it really existed. He was informed that the primary consideration of his profession was to be clubable, and bonhomous, and hail-fellow-well-met. He was made aware of the fifty and three commoner subterfuges whereby the Babu defrauds his master. And he was shown when to sell bad wine at a high price to rich and teetotal Indians to give to their European friends, and when to sell good wine cheap in the hopes that favour may be found in the eyes of the comptroller to an Exalted Personage. And in between times he went every Tuesday and Friday evening to Walter Locke's yard, where he diligently practised himself in the discharge of his new piece.

"Bring nothing but your clothes and cartridges, and since you are a wine merchant, a bottle of sloe gin", M—— wrote. "I shall be going out in advance. But go to Nattragaon station, and there you will meet Fenwick, Buchanan and Wilkinson. You will probably see them at Rohri." Sure enough at Rohri junction he saw three young men in Jodhpurs, tweed coats and Cawnpore topis. Two of them were arguing with good-humoured vehemence over a large box. "Look here, Roddy," a little ginger-haired man was saying, "this is a duck-shoot, not a gin-crawl. What on earth induced you to tell Sergeant Brown to send out all that drink?" Roddy turned an urbane and cheerful countenance towards James' carriage. "My dear Sandy," he retorted, "You make the usual mistake of thinking that simply because you are going shooting, it is necessary to make yourself

uncomfortable". Meanwhile the third had joined them. He was a tall young man, with a half humorous, half puzzled expression. "Where's Collinson?" he said laconically. James was overcome with shyness and made haste to conceal himself behind the gauze windows of his carriage: in the presence of these very sophisticated young men, apparently so completely at their ease, he had a spasm of the inferiority complex, which had caused an almost unbridgeable gap for half a century between the Manager of Morgan's bank and the Huddlestone Fuddlestones. A minute or two later the laconic one opened the door. "Are you Collinson by any chance?" he asked. James overcame his shyness sufficiently to assent. "My name's Buchanan," he said. "John M—— told us to look out for you." He paused shyly. The ginger-head who had come up to be introduced as Fenwick, seemed almost as shy as Buchanan. "John has gone on in front with Lewis," he said. "By the way, do you play poker?" "Very badly, I'm afraid," James answered diffidently. "What a pity," said Fenwick, "John loves his little gamble". While they were talking the urbane young man they called Roddy arrived. "What a pity!" he echoed, "You mean how providential!" And he confided to James, "You're my only chance of getting back the money these sharks have taken off me". The arrival of Roddy (whose name turned out to be Wilkinson) would have melted the ice at a reunion of Bishops and Bookmakers, and before they had got to Nattragaon, James felt completely at his ease.

Nattragaon was a small wayside station with a

few mud huts, a tank, and half a dozen stunted palm trees, surrounded by miles and miles of bare and sandy plain. "How the old place has changed," was the comment of the laconic Buchanan, as they stood on the platform and watched the train roll away into the blue distance. Meanwhile Mangal, James' bearer, was getting busy. He had been fraternizing with the regimental bearers on the journey, and so impressed them with stories of the Sahibs he had served in the past, of Saul Sahib who had slain duck by the thousand, and David Sahib who had slain them by the ten thousand, that he was now self-appointed baggage-master, and directing the loading of the kit on to the camels which the station-master had provided for them. That worthy was engaged in trying to impress on the ear of Roddy—whose urbanity remained equally unruffled in dealing with a Lieutenant-Governor, a babu, or a Chingangtook—that the camel-wallahs were all *badmarsheri,* that the obtaining of seven camels had been a matter requiring all the tact, learning, resource, courage and endurance of the station-master of the second-class of Nattragaon, aided by his menial staff, whom doubtless their honours would suitably recompense ? For himself he craved only preserved milk for ailing child. "Give him a bottle of gin, Roddy," said Fenwick, "we can spare it".

The second-class station-master was suitably rewarded, the camels were loaded, and garnished with the sign manual of Indian camp life, the petrol tin and the hurricane lamp, and the procession moved off. The five baggage camels were in front, then the Sahibs on riding ponies, and behind them the servants ridiculously perched in

baskets, one on either side of a camel. From behind, Mangal's voice could be heard fading away into nothing, relating how his last Sahib but three had journeyed on a camel from Delhi to Multan . . . or Mosul . . . . . or Mecca . . . . . .

The sun began to sink lower and lower behind them, the air became harder with the first chill of night, and the grass beside the path, which had begun to rise into the hills, began to rustle beneath the rising wind. "Tea," said Wilkinson, "tea, and a woolly waistcoat". They got off, and James found that he was so stiff from riding that he was moving with difficulty. He walked away to where the bearers were slowly dismounting from the camels and looked round for the others. They were loosening their ponies' girths. He walked back as nonchalently as possible to his own and copied their example.

Jehanpur, where the lake lay, was about ten miles further on. They pressed forward into a night that grew inkier every moment. "Hellish dark, and smells of cheese" his companions called it: for Colonel M——, while he considered an acquaintance with the Field Service Regulations might be exceedingly useful to his subalterns, regarded a knowledge of the works of Robert Surtees as an essential. Twice they lost their way, and found themselves on the brink of a yawning crevasse on the hillside, but at about ten o'clock the path began to descend, and they heard in front of them the lap-lap-lapping of the lake on the stones, and better still the chorus of quacks that rose every now and again as some late-coming duck settled among his brethren. On the other side of the lake a light suddenly appeared, and a figure emerged carrying a lantern. "Ohée,

Akram Khan, Ohéeee," called a voice. Akram Khan gave hearty response from the swinging camel basket behind, only too delighted to think he was shortly to be released from his cramped gyrating cage, and wishing he had never left the comforts of his native bazaar.

An hour later James had emerged from his bath, and was seated in the main room of the bungalow, consuming an apparently unending meal. In the middle of the table was a huge plate, piled with what must have been the world's greatest mixed grill, while John M—— and Lewis, attired respectively in shorts *chapalis* and a grey-back shirt, and a poshteen and Gilgit boots worn over pyjamas, hurried round plying them with rum-punch "from a recipe I got off a Russian officer in the Altai". On the mantelpiece were six empty bottles containing candles, giving the room quite an altar-like setting, as Buchanan remarked complacently. James was amazed, after life in a service battalion in the war, at the familiarity with which the Colonel, whom he found in private life was only commanding a company, was treated by his juniors. He had imagined that he would sit at the head of the table, delivering himself on Shikar, while his subalterns sat on his right and left in respectful silence. But it was all John and Roddy and Sandy and Philip, and if you wished to gain the undivided attention of the company, you had to speak very loud indeed. The talk ran on through the usual regimental gambits. Who pulled his weight by keeping rather more horseflesh than he could decently afford, and who did not. How Mrs. Sergeant Evans had told Mrs. Sergeant Jones that she had a mouth like a horsecollar,

and that Amazon's ladylike rejoinder. Would so-and-so get command, or would they give it to such-and-such, or bring somebody in ? Whether the attitude of the other battalion over the vital matter of the Regimental lanyard was in any way defensible, and whether they would climb down ? And so in a phantasmagoria of gossip and Rabelaisian anecdote and rum-punch and chaff, the evening passed like a dream. After three months in the atmosphere of the Karachi Club, listening to heart-rending stories of the rise and fall of the rupee, and the harrowing details of Mrs. Jones' cat having kittened, James had little doubt that life had little to offer him better than this.

The next morning, in the chill and grizzly darkness of 5 a.m., the village shikari, who had shot with many scores of sportsmen over the lake, besides whose waters he and his forebears had lived for longer than memory or tradition could reach, arrived with a couple of dozen braves. They wended their way silently towards the lake, a great harp-shaped sheet of water, about fifty acres big. It was reported to be simply swarming with duck. Six guns could obviously not cover the whole of it, and so M—— decided to put two guns at the bottom of the harp, three at its broad top, while one kept moving about in an ancient dugout to keep the birds on the move. M——, James, and Buchanan went to the top of the lake, which was about a quarter of a mile across, Wilkinson and Fenwick moved off to the other end, and Lewis took the boat. James waded out through the icy-cold water, followed by a villager carrying his cartridges. They forced their way through the rushes amid loud

anatidean protest, and every now and then half a dozen outraged duck would rise and flutter down a hundred yards further on. At last they reached the edge of the rushes and clambered on to a tiny island of reeds soaked to the waist. James' bosom was struggling with a mixture of exhilaration and apprehension. All the excitement that had been mounting up in the three months waiting for the great event battled with the sickening fear that he wouldn't be able to hit anything, and that he would be shamed in the eyes of his new friends. Worst of all he would put a pellet into somebody, a topic which had been the subject of so much badinage the night before. Slowly he began repeating the maxims:—

"Never let a loaded gun,
Pointed be at any one.
All the pheasants in the sky,
Cannot equal one man's ——."

Suddenly to his right there was a shot, and he saw a bird falling plump into the lake, a hundred yards to the right. It was M——'s agreed signal for opening the ball. From the reeds behind him there was a rustle, deepening to a roar, as twenty score of wildfowl rose beside him; in the grey half light a pillar of cloud seemed to be passing almost over his head. He raised his gun and discharged both barrels into the brown; the air seemed to scatter bodies down on him like manna from on high; one—two—three—to his first barrel, one to his second. He paused, lost in wonder and amazement. It was the first time he had ever fired his gun outside the gunmaker's shop, and he had slain four duck. This was too easy. With difficulty he restrained himself from rushing into the water to gather up his victims;

one of whom was flapping feebly in the water about twenty yards away.

Then an absolute volley of shots from either side recalled him to the affairs of the moment and he reloaded and flung up his gun again, and let it off. The birds were higher and faster now. Although in the increasing light there were still many hundreds of them crossing and recrossing above his head from every possible angle, and offering extremely pretty shooting, even an old hand would not have found them easy. But James knew nothing of this. He thought it was only necessary for him to point his gun into the air for a bird to come down—plock !—into the water beside him. Again and again he reloaded and blazed off with absolutely no result. As the pile of empty cartridge cases round him began to grow bigger, he became more and more maddened and shot more and more wildly. Then suddenly for no reason that he could see, for he had "aimed" at it exactly the same as he had "aimed" at all the others, a fat mallard suddenly checked in its flight towards his eerie and came hurtling down into the water beside him. He was overjoyed. He stretched forth a hand as nonchalently as possible, and pulled it towards him, and before giving it to his attendant serf he pulled out the little blue pinion feathers and stuck them into the puggaree of his topi. He felt that at last he must have caught the knack of hitting those rocketing brown and black comets. And again he began his fusilade.

It was now fully light, and to the right he could see out of the corner of his eye that John M—— was doing great execution. The rushes at the base of the lake where they were posted had

decanted every one of the hundreds of duck, which had been in them at dawn, but the birds were still flighting over in profusion as Lewis stirred them up from the middle of the lake, or as they came over from the further end. And above, higher and higher, far above the cannonade, great flights of duck, ten, twenty and forty strong, were circling round and round, and disappearing into the distance. The shooting, too, was growing more deliberate. James had fired at least twenty more shots after bagging the mallard without result, and his gun was hot. He put it down. "Keep calm," he said, "keep calm". Not that he felt calm, far from it. What would his new friends think of his display ? Five duck ! And M—— must have got fifty. "Keep calm," he repeated. He thought of Walter Lock's advice. "You'r aiming, not following through: and miles behind them !" Swing further in front, and swing with them !" Calmly and deliberately he threw up his gun to a teal which was swinging its way down the lake towards him. He allowed a swing royal and let his gun go forward; bang bang; and the teal passed on its way rejoicing. A flight of seven duck passed over his head; again he swung from behind, trying not to let his excitement get the better of his obedience to the instructions of his teacher; again no result. Another flight, packing closely, turned sharp down the lake towards him, as John M—— fired at them; he stood motionless and then, as they passed over him, he swung his gun on to the leader of the arrowhead; the second bird behind fell like a stone. "I'm behind them," thought James, "I'm behind them".

The next two birds he missed clean, and then

he brought a teal fluttering down into the lake fifty yards away and the villager was despatched to bring it in. Down came the very next bird too —stone dead—shot through the head. James walked on air. He *had* learnt the knack of it. He had kept calm. He had remembered his instructions. He had refused to panic. It was all too easy. Then a few more misses and then the birds got further and further out of shot, till finally even the ebullient Buchanan, who, to use his own expression, "liked aiming," held his fire. It was now nearly ten o'clock; the sun had come up and begun to thaw James' frozen body beneath the sweaters and coats which had availed him nothing in the coldness of the dawn, but his sodden feet were like lumps of ice, and in his stomach there was a great void. He surveyed his bag; seven birds; one they had been unable to retrieve.

Then he looked round at the empty cartridge cases, which seemed to be making a continuous circle of red in the black and slimy water all round him. The villager was still looking for the wounded bird. He looked stealthily round to see if he was surveyed, and then began to poke the cartridges down into the water with his stick. As he was doing it he saw through the rushes a little brown duck swimming in solitary silence in the reeds. He surely couldn't miss it sitting ? He remembered that it wasn't the thing to do to shoot things sitting, but with only seven duck —— ! He levelled his gun and the little brown bird crumpled up. At that moment a voice hailed him from behind, and he heard M—— pushing his way through the reeds towards him. "Wounded bird ?" he queried. "Er-yes,"

James replied guiltily, and sank a few more cartridges into the lake. "It's no good going on till the evening flight," said M——, "let's get in and have some food. How did you get on?" "I got seven," said James, "and there's a wounded one". "Jolly good," said M——, and James' cup of happiness overflowed.

Gradually they sorted themselves out on the bank. James produced his seven birds and, though he felt ashamed of it, he couldn't help being pleased that Buchanan on his left had only succeeded in getting six. Roddy Wilkinson had a couple of dozen, and Fenwick ten, though he claimed to have frightened a great many more. Lewis, with the unfavourable position in the boat, had eight. M—— when asked what his bag was, replied that he never counted, it made him take to drink, but the remainder of the party by a process of addition and subtraction, calculated that it must be thirty-seven. In all there were eighty-two birds.

They hurried back to the bungalow; gradually they thawed themselves in front of the steaming wood fire, and with the consumption of sloe gin and whisky macdonalds their tongues became unloosened and everybody talked at once: of the estimated number of wildfowl on the lake and the probable expenditure of cartridges; of the flamingoes which had been slowly seen flapping their pink and white way into the distance in the first rays of the rising sun, and whether or not Lewis had had a shot at them; of the pellets from Fenwick's gun which Roddy swore had descended on him from above like the gentle dew from heaven, and whether he was entitled to charge a rupee a dozen, or only an anna each;

(*Upper*) LEAVING THE LAKE
(*Lower*) SCENE OF THE OPERATIONS

of the callous behaviour of John M—, who when he found the platform of reeds on which he and his bearer had taken their stand was subsiding with all hands into the lake, merely pushed his bond servant into the water and continued to shoot.

Meanwhile baths had been brought and they had changed into every species of garment and sat down to breakfast. Lewis was causing an uproar as he insisted (his supply of dry clothing being exhausted) on having his breakfast in what he described as "Crawley Smallclothes", garments which a hosier would, without doubt, have described as his "winter wovens". James had been present on previous occasions at meals which had seemed to him memorable. At the last guest night in the Cadet School mess at Catterick, when for once the senior officers had relaxed their vigilance for those who were not quite certain with napkins and finger-bowls; and that farewell dinner at Cairo; and the wonderful meal, half-way across the plain of Sharon, when they were reunited to their transport after a two days' separation. But this mixture of luncheon and tea and breakfast, porridge and ducks and marmalade and sausages, washed down with cup after cup of steaming coffee, without doubt surpassed them all. He only wished he could have given Mangal one of his own duck to cook for him, so that he might have the pleasure of devouring the product of his bow and spear, a sort of *spolia opima*.

After breakfast the bag was sorted out into species. There were two big piles on the left, eighteen Shovellers with their long, flat snouts, and twenty-five Mallard, male and female. Next

them were the fifteen Teal, the ten Common Teal distinguished from the Garganey by their little brown heads and the flash of emerald on their wings. Beside them was a neat little row of nine Pintail, a line of darts sticking out from small speckled bodies. And beyond in another neat row were the crests of seven Pochard, and then the half-dozen Gadwall, whose vivid brown wings gave them pride of place as the most beautiful species in the bag. At the end a Spot-bill lay in solitary state, the sole representative of his race. "What shall we do with the Shoveller, John?" Roddy Wilkinson asked, "Chuck them away?" Not a bit of it," M—— answered, "People only turn up their noses at Shoveller because they know what they're eating. I remember once at a guest night in Lucknow I gave one to the Lieutenant-Governor, and he said it was delicious. We'll send them into Quetta by the afternoon train; the troops have no silly notions about such things, and I'll tell Sergeant Brown to send a couple to Bosh, who doesn't know a Shoveller from a Shawk". "Bosh" I regret to say was the Brigadier. M—— had spent the last three years in close proximity to the brassest of brass hats, and did not allow them to occupy too prominent a place in his panorama of life. And as they talked James moved up and down the line, trying to memorize the different species so that he would never again have to acknowledge his ignorance of so important a matter.

Three days were spent on the lake, days following one after the other in what seemed to James to be a paradise of good sport and good fellowship. They passed in a succession of huge

meals before a blazing fire, and duck sweeping down on him from an incredibly acute angle, and duck appearing out of the dawn and disappearing into the dusk, and Aristophanic jests, and rum-punch, and poker, and again flighting duck. James' shooting improved a little every day, and though there were still times when he found himself half maddened by his ill-success, he began to acquire what he most needed—confidence. But on the thirtieth the soldiers had to go back to Quetta for the Proclamation Parade, and after the morning flight the guns were put away and the duck sorted out for the final totting up of the bag. After a dispute royal over the arithmetic of the matter, it was finally agreed that the grand total of the three days and a half was 317 duck of all species. As Mangal loaded up the birds which James was going to take back to Karachi —this time on to pack bullocks—he was loud in his affirmations that never, never before had there been such a shikari as M—— Sahib. Truth to tell, he felt his *izzat* (prestige), and his Sahib's, was much elevated by these outward manifestations of his powers as a shikari, and in subsequent recitals of the glories of the trip in the local bazaar, he let it be understood that the illustrious M—— Sahib had learnt largely on the ripeness of his judgment in making the arrangements for the shoot, at which, so he said, duck had been swarming like vultures round the Towers of Silence.

By three o'clock they were back at Nattragaon station, and the station-master and his menial staff were made happy for ever by what Buchanan described as "the Shoveller not quite poisonous looking enough to give to Bosh". He also was

no respecter of persons. It was the winter rains and when they got to the station they were wet through again for the *n*th time. Despite spirited protests Lewis appeared once more in the Crawley smallclothes, and the five poker players (Fenwick didn't play—"I can't afford to" he said; "that means you can't afford not to," Roddy Wilkinson had answered ——) formed an improvised table of gun cases and yakdans, and a poker session was started. M——'s bearer had boiled up some hot water and made rum punch, and the evening was becoming extremely festive.

Now it happened that in that train there was a certain Colonel on the Staff, by name Revelsby-Robinson, who had served with John M—— on the staff in Palestine, where James had seen him once or twice, a kaleidoscope of red tabs and medal ribbons, the one beginning where the other ended. He had long enjoyed a great reputation in the army for an extreme parsimony, and he had acquired the nick-name of Beggarly Brown. Hearing M—— was on the train he thought it would be rather nice to look in on him and discuss the art of war as practised in the peculiarly successful campaign in which people like Beggarly Brown and Lord Allenby had each played a part. But on entering the compartment he was both surprised and chagrined to find his former colleague arrayed in a patched suit of puttoo, and with a thick stubble on his chin, playing poker and drinking rum-punch with five young men, one of whom he noticed with horror was apparently wearing his underclothes. His horror changed to rage when he was introduced to the company as "my old friend Beggarly Brown", and muttering something about the

carriage being rather full, he hurried off pursued by a bellow of laughter from John M——. But that worthy, as I have pointed out before, was, martially, quite unregenerate.

When they reached Rohri, John M—— took James aside. "Look here," he said, "I'm our Mess President, and I was going to get our wine from Clarkson's anyhow, as we have been poisoned long enough by our contractor. But if it'll do you any good, I'll send in the order through you." James walked on air. His departure for four days' leave at Christmas, when he might have been touting for orders, was now entirely justified; and so as he saw the rest of the party disappear in the Quetta train, and Mangal unrolled his bedding on the seat of his carriage in the Karachi mail, he wondered how anybody could possibly think of stopping in Southampton, when there was a life like this to unfold before him. The Red Gods were calling him all right.

CHAPTER II

VIRGIN EFFORTS

Now a great deal more hinged on that shoot than James' initiation to shikar. In due course Mallaby of the Bombay branch arrived and took counsel with Hargreaves of the Karachi establishment. Neither Mallaby or Hargreaves had taken part in the late imbroglio in Europe, and they therefore avoided the society of the military, men of coarse clay who would ask them from time to time in all apparent innocence what division they had served in. So when young Collinson secured a very considerable contract for supplying so renowned a unit of His Majesty's land forces as the Welch Rifles (whom Mallaby and Hargreaves would undoubtedly and unforgiveably have spelt with an s), he rose in their estimation. It happened that Clarkson's were about to open a branch in Rawal Pindi, that hotbed of militarism, and it was thought that young Collinson would be just the man to hawk their wares among the messes. "Of course he's only a *chokra,*" said Hargreaves (he habitually called any man under thirty a *chokra*), "but we can keep an eye on him, and send up Hari Chand to do the book-keeping. After all he's honest and seems able to sell, which is all that matters". So it was ordained, and early in February James found himself installed in a bungalow in Edwardes Road, with babus, typewriters and

safe, all complete. He was rising in the world. Mangal felt that this was the reward that was their due, and applied for a suit of warm clothing on the strength of it, assuring James that without it his body-servant would surely die in the rigours of the northern winter. Besides it was *dastur*.

James himself took up his quarters in the Club and soon began to find his feet. There were in the station three British Infantry Regiments, a couple of Indian Infantry Regiments, a Brigade of Gunners, an Indian Cavalry Regiment, and trimmings without number. He felt his way among them for the possibilities of salesmanship and shikar, and gradually got to know something of the facts and foibles which make all regiments at once so alike and so different.

The Punjaub Lancers were an old *Sillidar* Regiment. *Morituri te salutant.* They had suffered comparatively little in the war and they were in almost every respect the counterpart of their pre-war selves. They had far more officers than they knew what to do with; brevet lieutenant-colonels were commanding squadrons, and were followed at stables by a trail of majors and captains as they passed down the long lines of beautifully conditioned whalers and country-breds. They carried on in the loose and easy manner of the old *Sillidari,* leaving to their extremely efficient Indian officers the things with which they had always concerned themselves, while they got down to the business in hand, which was the winning of the Inter-Regimental Polo Tournament. Which feat indeed, they shortly accomplished, filling the cup with the best champagne that James could provide them with at a Guest Night which will remain for ever

memorable to anybody who attended it. It was their swan-song. In ill-assorted union the cries for economy and efficiency drove them into outer darkness, and though two of their number still cleave their way through international polo, it has been left to the "ancestral voice" of Yeats-Brown indelibly to record the gay light-hearted life of which James got just a glimpse.

The condition of the two Indian Infantry Regiments, Pottinger's Rifles and the Forty-fifth Punjaubis was very different. They had both been in France, where they had lost practically all their regular officers and most of their men. They had just returned to India; one from the North West Frontier, the other from Persia, with men completely untrained, and a body of officers with small ability to teach them; many of them, indeed, were only waiting for the most favourable terms of leaving the service. The reorganization and the Inchcape "Axe" came to them as a boon and a blessing, for though they resented the loss of their individuality just as much as the regiments on whom Cardwell laid violent hands, they emerged Phœnix-like into the new Groups, with renewed vigour and the strength of old. At this period they were James' very good customers. As Wyndham, of the Punjaub Lancers, remarked to James: "They are the sort of crowd that talks of messing going up so much a bottle".

The Gunners were represented by a Pack Battery—"Mountain" they liked to be called—and a Field Brigade. The pack gunners had served the whole war on the frontier, and had almost the same magnificent personnel as in 1914; lean, tough, hard-working, hard-drinking soldiers, who would do anything on earth for their own

officers, and as much as they thought necessary for anybody else's. Their officers were the pillars of local shikar, and James flew to place himself at their feet, like Paul to Gammaliel. The 89th Brigade R.F.A. had just arrived in India from the Rhine, and were soon to start on the amazing career on the Indian Turf which made their name a power on every race-course from Calcutta to Karachi.

The three regiments of British Infantry offered an entertaining number of variations on the same theme—esprit de corps. The Caithness Highlanders kept themselves to themselves, as the saying is; but the accent in this case was not, as is customary, on the second syllable, but on the first and third. Yet within the charmed circle how delightful life could be. They were intensely Scottish, and their silent reserve, and their capacity for the consumption of usquebaugh without an aftermath, was more like the Scot of light fiction than established fact. To his great regret James never really got to know them.

The Surrey Fusiliers had the reputation of being one of the most efficient regiments in Northern India, but an evening in their mess came as a surprise to James after his experiences with the Welch Rifles. Captains, in the presence of subalterns, were men as Gods, and at their entry the junior officers hastened to remove themselves from the more comfortable chairs, and to ensure that their vile bodies were not transposed between the light and the Olympians. The position was, however, reversed on the arrival of a major or two, when it became the turn of the captains to bow down, sprinkling their conversation the while with a goodly profusion of "Sirs". But

this was as nothing to the orgy of clanking spurs and shirt fronts cracking like pistol shots as the chests beneath them broadened for the arrival of the Colonel, who would make his way to the head of the table surrounded by his contemporaries, while the subalterns would retreat to the farther end and converse in hushed tones till such a time as the port had been round sufficiently often to make it possible for one to raise one's voice. Yet, for all the rigidity of their discipline and the strictness of their mess life, one could not spend ten minutes in the company of the Surrey Fusiliers without being conscious of the worth of their traditions and the efficiency they begat.

The Arden Rangers were another regiment with a deserved reputation for efficiency, but they seemed to James to offer little hope of the delightful companionship he had found at Christmas. As a regiment they were always to the fore in everything that happened in the station: their men were always well-turned out and well behaved, their officers a pattern of the military and the civic virtues. Yet, somehow, there was something lacking. James never thrilled as they marched by as he did when he saw the swinging sporrans of the Caithness Highlanders, or watched the fluttering pennants of the Punjaub Lancers as they trotted past to the Bonnets of Bonny Dundee. "They're a good regiment, but lack a soul," Wyndham, shrewdest of critics, had said.

Into this world of Horse Shows and Club Dances and Guest Nights; and gossip as to who had clubbed his company on the Brigadier's inspection, or who was "wimpoled" (a word coined by the Gunner subalterns) at the practise

camp; of complaints of guards handed over in an insanitary state; of grouses of the scurvy way in which the Staff treated the regiments; and delighted recitals of how we had finally scored off the Staff with a memo which was a masterpiece of acid repartee, James found himself gradually carving out a niche for himself. But about the beginning of April a creaking line of bullock carts removed his kit and his furniture, his ledgers and his typewriters, his samples and his clerks, to Murree for the hot weather, to say nothing of a stranger or two from within his gates who persuaded Mangal that they should be allowed a free ride.

James was soon bored in Murree, and the first thing he did after getting there was to spend two hundred and fifty rupees that he had saved on the purchase of à .375 Mannlicher Schonauer Rifle. He was lost in wonder, love and praise at the sight of this small and finished little weapon, nor could he conceive that Holland or Purdey could ever have turned out anything more perfect. He used to ride down in the evenings on a flea-bitten grey tat to the ridge beyond Lower Topa, and practise shooting at empty bottles, a form of target of which his professional activities provided him with an unending supply. He was positively thirsting for blood.

So when one day he met an aged villager in a state of great excitement, who told him that one of his goats had been slain by a *chota bagh* (panther), his delight knew no bounds. He sent back a messenger telling Mangal to bring out some food, and went off without more ado with the ancient. They passed on down the main road to Kohala for about six miles, leaving behind them

the pines and the deodars of the hilltop, and descended into a region of stunted trees and tiny villages of mud huts, with little patches of cultivation carved out one above the other on the hillside. At the end of six miles along the hot, grey road, covered with the dust of cars heading for Cashmere, they came to a little bazaar, and turned off from the main road into the valley. For three thousand feet they followed the track down till they had almost reached the stream rushing down to join the Jhelum, and then the ancient lead him on to the flat roof of a hut in one of the villages. A chatti full of water was brought, which James lapped down avidly, and a *charpoi* (bedstead) was placed on the roof for him to sit on, while the entire population came out to view him, and stood round in an admiring circle.

He was beginning to feel tired and hungry, but his blood was up, and in a few minutes he was off to inspect the corpse. There certainly was a goat's corpse on the hillside, more senses than one made them aware of that fact; and that was enough for James. A *charpoi* was slung about six-foot up in a tree—it was impossible to get it higher—and they climbed into it. The sun went down and the moon came up, and James sat on and on in the enchanted stillness of the summer night. It was his first night alone in the jungle and he was enthralled as many another had been before him, by the moonlit hillside, the low continuous hum of a myriad insects, the distant splashing of the stream, and the absolute stillness that was never for a moment still. Behind him, immobile, sat the ancient ,and had it not been for the perceptible odour of garlic that he exhaled,

James would never have known that he was there. Hour passed after hour, and James gingerly shifted his position, for the bedcords were cutting into his thighs; midnight had passed, and the moon went down, and the balmy summer air began to chill a little, and the distant barking of the village pie dogs was quieted. James' head nodded on his chest, once, twice, and again, and then he fell soundly asleep.

He woke with a guilty start in full daylight. He felt thoroughly ashamed. "*Né aya*" (he did not come) said the ancient, who was still sitting in impassive silence in the same position. It was five o'clock. Silently they wended their way back to the village, where to his extreme relief James saw Mangal established on a roof-top on the best bedstead in the village and directing the youth of the neighbourhood this way and that about his business. James fell upon his breakfast and devoured it greedily. Meanwhile, the ancient was proposing that they should beat for that panther. If he had suggested pursuing it on skis James would have fallen in with the idea. After all, nobody would be any the worse off if he did cut the office for a day, and he didn't care a damn if they were.

Accordingly, the fiery cross was sent forth, and by ten o'clock a couple of dozen beaters were collected up. There then ensued an endless argument between Mangal and the ancient. The ancient stood out for twelve annas a head; Mangal affirmed that the limit of the Sahib's liability was eight annas, with a small baksheesh if a kill resulted. The ancient held forth on the worthiness of the labourer for his hire; Mangal retorted with historical allusions to the sums that

infinitely richer Sahibs had paid to considerably better beaters. Finally, the matter was compromised, and they moved off to the other side of the valley, where the ancient was certain the monster was lurking. The beat that ensued defied nearly every known rule of shikar. James sat in a uselessly exposed place; and one where the panther, had he been so minded, could have easily got at him; there were no stops and no flankers, and the beaters, who started much too far back, made a great deal of noise when it was not necessary, and not nearly enough when it was. James sat beside a rock with eyes strained and heart beating, supposing every bush a bear, with his finger on the trigger he was expecting every moment to pull. And, to his extreme chagrin, nothing happened.

By now it was two o'clock in the afternoon and piping hot, for they had left the salubrious hillsides of Murree and were now but a few hundred feet above the level of the plains. James lay underneath a rock, and ate his hard-boiled eggs, and drank the lukewarm water from his water bottle. He felt absolutely beat. But at three o'clock the ancient appeared and suggested a move to pastures new: and if the panther was not there to be found let his face be blackened for ever. Neither contingency occurred, but the ancient was as loquacious as before. To-morrow

. . . . . .

The sun was now sinking behind the hills, and the whole party descended to the river bed. It was Muhurrum, and none of them had touched water since dawn, though they had been forcing their way through the scrub on the hillside for seven hours. As the sun set they rushed down

to the stream, like the Priests of Baal, and lapped up the water with cries of pleasure. James was really impressed. He felt that he really was beginning to see the free life of the great open spaces.

That night they again sat over the goat's decomposing corpse, and again drew a blank, but James was so exhausted that he slept the sleep of utter exhaustion with his head on the tail of the ancient's tattered coat, nor would the arrival of a panther or a tiger or, indeed, Gabriel with his trump have awakened him. The next morning he and Mangal left shortly after four, and reached the bazaar on the Cashmere road by seven. There they got tats, and were back in Murree by half-past nine, and James was at the receipt of custom by ten-thirty.

From that moment till the monsoon broke in mid June, James rode away from his office every Saturday evening, down the road to Jikka Gali, with its little parties of soldiers bargaining for brass and needlework in the bazaar, out past the little cemetery at Topa, grim relic of two cholera epidemics, down to the spot where the path led him into the valley below. But never once did he see as much as a whisker of that panther. The explanations of the ancient grew more and more specious, and Mangal's scepticism became greater and greater. But James never relaxed his efforts, though by now they were the standing joke of the Murree Club. To do the ancient justice, in all probability there *was* a panther on those hills; but at the same time James' visits with his purchases of eggs and milk, the tribute to be levied on the beaters' pay and the ancient's personal emoluments, must have kept both him

and his numerous dependents in considerable comfort during that hot weather. In after years James used to marvel at the youthful zeal which made him ride seven miles, descend four thousand feet of khudside and, after scouring the hills all day, climb sleepless back to his office at nine o'clock on a Monday morning, all for a panther of which he had long lost any genuine hope of circumventing.

By the middle of August he was becoming very bored with life in Murree during the monsoon. He had definitely graduated as a *jangli bandar* (as opposed to a parlour snake); badminton and *thé dansants* held little charm for him, and the exertion required to win the favourable glances of the only two unmarried girls in the station was about ten times as great as that needed for a week-end after his panther. So greatly daring he put in for three weeks' leave. Hari Chand, he assured Mallaby, could look after the business; he, himself, was feeling a little jaded; he was thinking of heading towards Cashmere. Mallaby was delighted, for he pictured his "*chokra*" getting busy with his order book in Gulmarg. But, truth to tell, James' "heading towards Cashmere" was a straining of the truth to its utmost limit; for on the advice of one Battye, who had been shooting in Northern India before James was born, he had decided to go off to Punch in pursuit of a black bear and, after much correspondence, permission had been obtained from the Raja.

He would much rather have gone to Cashmere to try for a barasingh, but his finances were exceedingly low, and that was out of the question. Indeed it was only with considerable ingenuity

that he was able to persuade Mr. Griggs, the Bank Manager, of the necessity of lending him three hundred rupees, which was the sum he budgeted to spend on the trip.

For a week before he started James was entirely preoccupied with the making of lists, and their revising. Tinned food must be cut down to a minimum; it was expensive and it had to be carried. Enamel ware and cutlery had to be bought, and Yakdans (leather travelling boxes) to carry them. He purchased a skinning knife big enough to flay a brontosaurus, and a khud stick like a battering ram. He bought *chapalis* in the bazaar, and for four days before he left Murree he paraded himself in them up and down the Mall. And at the back of his bungalow lay the two eighty-pound tents he had bought and a heap of vegetables and cooking pots and petrol tins and, finally, two or three chickens tied by the leg to his camp furniture.

One Saturday evening he descended the hill to Sunnybank and embarked on the mail car, which was going to take him as far as Kohala. From here he proposed to strike off right-handed to the slopes of Gungachoti. Mangal with the kit had departed earlier in the morning. All went well till they reached that very bazaar whence James had descended so often after his panther. Here the car decided quite definitely to go no farther. The driver lay on his stomach and gazed into its innards from below. The mechanic opened the bonnet and lay pendent upon it surveying the sparking plugs with passionate intensity, and the inferior passengers scrambled out of the large birdcage behind in which they had been cowering and joined the small boydom of the neighbour-

hood to form a large circle round the car. From time to time Priests and Levites in large cars with bundles of bedding tied to the dashboards shot passed covering them with dust, but at seven o'clock the driver turned the crank with a last despairing twist. James now found himself on the hillside ten miles from Murree and fourteen miles from Kohala with nothing more than the clothes he stood up in. It was a dismal prospect. The driver, however, was fertile of suggestion. There was a dak bungalow somewhere near he knew; quite how near he couldn't say, but somewhere over there, and he pointed a vague hand up the mountain. A small boy was produced with a hurricane lantern. For the sum of eight annas he contracted to lead James to the bungalow at Aussia, on the old posting road.

They climbed off into the gathering darkness up the mountain side, and soon for all James could make of his whereabouts he might have been in Kamskatchka. But his guide had the one supreme merit of guidance, and he held on his course without a sign of uncertainty. They tumbled over boulders and into cactus hedges, till at last they topped the main ridge and saw down below them the welcome glimmering of a light. "*Dak bungalow hai* ?", asked James, at whose vitals a fox was gnawing. "*Ahh, bungalow hai*" answered the guide in a stolid I-was-right-all-the-time sort of voice. James mentally increased the reward to twelve annas and pressed on.

The trade and importance of the dak bungalow of Aussia had shrunk almost to nothing since the construction of the new Cashmere road dried up the stream of galloping ekkas which once carried

the mail along the old posting road past its doors. Akram Khan had been Khansamah there for many years, as his father and grandfather had been before him. His elder brother was the acknowledged suzerain of the village; a second brother was Subadar Major of the Thirtieth Punjaubis, and a third held the Viceroy's commission in the Hazara Pioneers. He was a tall grave man with a handsome impassive face. He made James welcome without comment, provided him with blankets and a bath, and in half an hour had placed before him a meal of five courses, which only the squawking of a chicken shortly after his arrival betrayed as not having been on order for weeks.

James rose at dawn and started with the grave benediction of Akram Khan, who had already told him of every traveller that had passed through Aussia on his way to Punch for the last twenty years. By noon he had reached the bottom of the old posting road, and was tramping down the highway into Kohala in the damp and stifling heat of an August day in the plains. He realized for the first time something of the true significance of the "Asian Solar Myth". Mangal he found on the verandah of the dak bungalow sunk in a sleep that the loss of his master seemed to have done remarkably little to embarrass. He sprang from his roll of bedding, however, and explained that the night had been passed in organizing a succession of search parties to scour the countryside, and that he had only at the very moment of the Sahib's arrival sunk exhausted into a much needed sleep. James passed into the bungalow and, placing himself beneath the dilapidated punkah, tried to

compose himself to his midday siesta. Before an hour had passed he found himself waking at regular intervals to curse the punkah coolie with all the choler of an old *quoi-hai.*

That afternoon they set off up the hill opposite into Punch. The ten coolies had been sent off shortly after James' arrival, and he could see their tiny figures moving slowly on the mountain a thousand feet up on the other side of the river. He marvelled at their endurance, for he had seen them loaded up to sixty and eighty pounds, and then, as they were about to start, Mangal would thrust a bottle of oil, or a live chicken, or a hurricane lamp into their hands as a sort of final *bonne bouche.*

He crossed over the bridge, followed the path for about half a mile, till it turned slowly up the bare hillside. Up he went and up, and as they crossed the lip of each re-entrant James felt that the summit must at last be visible. He passed Mangal exhorting the sweating line of coolies to further effort; praising, abusing and cajoling as the occasion demanded.

The sun was sinking behind the hill above them, and the shadows were creeping up and up the opposite side of the valley. By half-past six James reached the top of the ridge, turned across it, and found himself in a small village. His arrival was very well received. A charpoi was immediately brought for him to sit on; water was brought, and dried apricots and corn cobs, and a large and admiring crowd gathered round. James was still very young, and his pink and white complexion and bronzed knees were the admiration of all the village. His appearance was everything that they considered a white

man's ought to be. He was famishingly hungry, but the corn cobs were only half ripe and the apricots more than wholly dirty. However, he ate them with a stage relish that was much appreciated, and called for the *lambadar* (headman). The *lambadar's* arrival caused much excitement among the villagers because it was felt that he would be able to do the honours of the occasion with a fitting grace; this as he explained himself was due to the fact that he was the friend of Sahibs, and in proof of this he drew a flannel case from his bosom, and produced with great care and evident pride a tattered "chit" given him by a subaltern in the Rifle Brigade in 1895. James took the chit, and the village held its breath.

In that remote spot, that edge of a seldom visited and unimportant native state, a chit was not a thing that could be hired in the bazaar for a few annas. It was a sign manual of the favour of the Sirkar, an Ark of the Covenant of Probity, the opener of many closed Sesames. But before James could show his approval of this final proof of the lambadar's greatness Mangal burst into the charmed circle. The spell of Arcadian simplicity was broken. Mangal was a man of great endurance; he was also a man of action; further he believed in decentralization. Before they hardly knew what had happened one man was going off for eggs, another was milking a goat, a third was hewing wood, a fourth drawing water. The lambadar under the threats of pains and penalties indescribable was being harangued on the necessity of finding a dozen coolies for the morrow, capable of infinite endurance, and willing to work at a reasonable rate.

It was now almost dark; one by one the coolies were topping the ridge and breaking almost into a run as they saw the village in front of them. They tottered down the path and dumped their loads on the camping ground with a cry of relief. As each load arrived Mangal seized on it and pulled forth its contents and started to cook dinner over the pair of stones between which a fire was being induced to burn by the Herculean puffs of a small boy. Meanwhile, this man was busy plucking a chicken, and that one putting the camp bed together under a hurricane of instructions. Finally, the eighty-pound tents, the heaviest load, arrived just as night fell, and with a heaving and creaking of tent poles they were pulled into place. It was James' first camp, and a first camp is a most memorable experience to any right-minded young man. The flickering of the fire light, the bubbling of the little stream, the stars shining through the trees (they were back among the pines now), the low voices talking to Mangal, and the exhilaration of a deserved fatigue left an impression that was one of James' most vivid memories through life.

For two days they passed through the pine forests, across grass slopes covered with a thousand simple flowers, by slow and hardly used paths to Gungachoti. James' map (1 inch: 1 mile) gave him little assistance. The villages were generally impossible to locate and, when questioned, the aboriginals invariably agreed to any name for their hamlet that he cared to suggest. The oriental desire to give simple pleasure can be carried too far. He had measured the distance from Kohala to Gungachoti as roughly twenty-five miles, and imagined that a

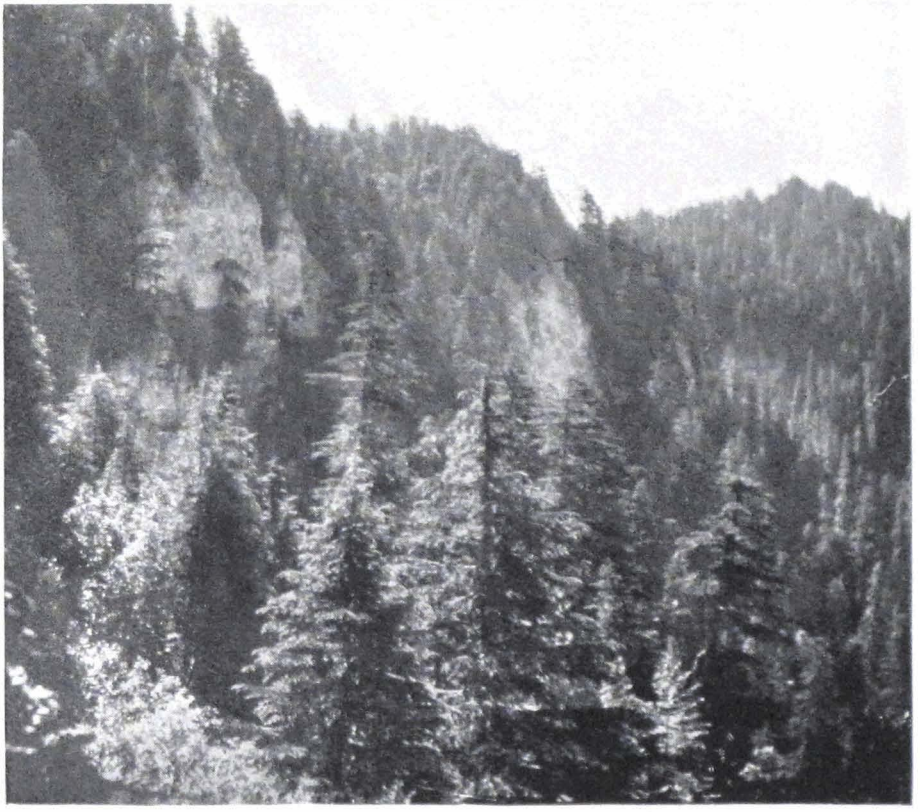
day and a half's marching would bring him to his goal with ease. But it was not till the evening of the third day that he found himself emerging from the forest on to the great grass slopes which rise to the summit of Gungachoti.

He arranged that the next morning should be spent in the making of arrangements, the collection of *khubbar* (information), the engaging of a shikari, and a general straightening of the camp. As they were there for a fortnight there was much to be done. Mangal wished to build a fireplace worthy of his culinary skill; and James wished to pitch his tent in the lea of a vast pine commanding a wonderful view down the valley, and over the trees to where the plains were visible through the haze a good twenty miles away. The shikari whom they had summoned did not, however, arrive, and the whole day was spent in inactivity. James began to work himself into a frenzy of impatience, and harried Mangal at half-hour intervals to despatch one of the loiterers from round the camp to hurry him. Really, they might think his leave was indefinite by the way they were carrying on. By now he had reckoned on having shot one and possibly two bears. It was intolerable. He didn't want to spend his leave sitting on his hunkers; he could do that very nicely in Murree. Mangal suggested shooting a jungle fowl ? James derided the suggestion. He was not going to scare away the bears from round the camp by the slaughter of a thing like a barndoor rooster. Not he.

Late that night as James sat trying to possess his soul in patience the shikari arrived. James hailed him much as a sail is greeted in Tristan da Cunha. He was a small and wizened little man

with a deeply lined face, a scraggly black beard, and deep brown eyes like a dog's. He assured James that to-morrow at dawn would assemble the most trusty of the village braves, and they would set off and pursue a bear which, by the beard of the prophet, would infallibly mature. Next morning James sprang out of his bed the moment he was called, and looked out of his tent door. There was the shikari all right, and there seated round him in a circle were the braves, and beyond them a heterogeneous collection of hangers-on. They were the most motley collection that he had even seen, about forty all told. To his horror he saw that some of them were carrying a variety of antique weapons; queer muzzle-loading blunderbusses, cut down Sneiders, and one or two black-powder guns of crude design. This was not at all what he had bargained for. *He* was going to pay the piper, and *he* intended to choose the tune, or in other words shoot the bear. He explained his views to Mangal. Mangal passed them on to the shikari *con brio*. The shikari harangued the mob *fortissimo*. The mob were delighted. They would do exactly as the Sahib wanted. These weapons of offence were merely the outward and visible sign of the hunter. James let it be known that anybody who failed to hold his fire till the Sahib had had a chance to do his worst would be in danger of the Council. The mob agreed in a chorus that he would be in danger of hell fire.

They moved off over the ridge and passed into the pine forest, to the head of a broad nallah which dropped down at an impossible angle into the valley below. Slithering and slipping they began to descend. The braves shook out into a



(Upper) VIEW FROM THE CAMP
(Lower) A PATHWAY IN PUNCH

sort of extended order, and shouting and yelling began to force their way through the bushes. James had a feeling that it was all wrong; it seemed so noisy and amateur. Yet somehow he didn't know what they ought to be doing, or how to set about quenching the enthusiasm of the braves. He had an idea that people shot bears as they (the bears) climbed into mulberry trees in the evening. It was all very disconcerting.

They had gone down for about half a mile and had swung right-handed over a little col into another nallah, and were beating noisily along it when they reached a great patch of thick undergrowth. Suddenly the tumult stopped and then redoubled to a positive frenzy. "*Maro* !" shrieked the shikari, his dog's eyes blazing with excitement. "*Maro* ! *Baloo* !" James raised his gun and prepared to sell his life dearly. He was fully expecting a huge bear to dash out of the undergrowth at him on its hind legs. Then the bushes parted and a small, black form hurtled out, and rushed terrified down the *khud*. It was so different to what he had expected that he did not shoot. "*Maro* ! *Maro* !" cried the shikari, and turning to the braves roared "*Maro mut* !" which broadly interpreted means, "let the dog see the rabbit". James fired. The bear let out a long and piercing howl and scuttled on, but in a moment the howl was drowned in a roar of musketry. The ardour of the braves had been too much for them. The bear toppled over, and rolled head over heels for twenty yards, and plopped over a little precipice into the dry bed of the stream. James was overcome with alternating rage and delight. First and foremost they had got the bear, there was no doubt about that;

and he'd certainly got in the first shot. But then it was equally clear that the bear had been finished off by the braves, who, apart from robbing him of the pleasure of feeling that it was wholly his, had probably made his pelt a positive sieve.

He scrambled madly down to where they were crowding round the carcass. It was a small she-bear. James stopped to survey the furry black body with its thin white arrow head on the chest, and elation finally and definitely got the better of chagrin. It was the first animal that he had ever slain, or at any rate assisted in slaying. And after all, as he said to himself, who knows that it was not already stricken to the death ? Oh ! yes, it was undoubtedly " his " bear. The shikari called one of the braves, a vast man with a gay and jaunty carriage. He made a low salaam to James, and produced a small and dirty-looking knife, the sort of instrument that the jobbing gardener used for removing weeds from the Collinson's garden in Southampton. James called for his cartridge bag, and removed from its recesses the fearsome looking weapon he had bought in Murree, double-bladed and a good foot long. He handed it to the skinner, who handled it gingerly, passed it back, and then proceeded to do the job very efficiently with his own weapon.

Triumphantly they returned to camp. Even Mangal was impressed. Soon the braves were lined up in one row and the hangers-on in another for payment, while a tumult arose among a section of the hangers-on, who wanted to be included among the braves. And in the meantime Mangal was busy with the tent hammer frightening away a number of passers-by, who

saw no harm in joining, at least, the hangers-on for the period of the largesse. Finally, James paid the lot; twenty-nine rupees, eight annas. It had made a fair-sized hole in his resources, that bear.

The skin was pegged out, and scraped, and turned over in the sun to dry, and covered with wood ashes. It was riddled with holes of every shape and size. James retired to his tent and composed himself to writing letters. The ones to Southampton were frankly and openly jubilant; already he was visualizing that skin stretched in the Collinson hall. But to his friends in Murree he adopted a more sophisticated tone. After a couple of pages describing the weather and the scenery he mentioned casually that he had got a bear that day, not a good one, but he had hopes of better things in the future. And ever and anon he could not restrain himself from going out to gaze at the skin round which a number of villagers were seated in respectful and contemplative silence. For the black bear spares neither crops nor fruit trees, nor man himself, and his destruction is greatly to be desired.

James stopped on at Gangachoti for another thirteen days; twice he moved his camp, but never again did he see even the trace of a bear, despite a series of alarms and excursions. He scoured the hillside alone; he scoured them in company with the braves; he sat out at night in the cornfields; he lurked at sunset near favourite fruit trees: but without success. As day followed day, and his leave grew beautifully less, he became more and more despondent. The flavour had departed from the dishes that Mangal set before him; the zest was gone from the daily

setting forth in the sharp morning air, and returning at night in noiseless procession to camp. Every day he felt that the luck must change. Surely he would get just one more chance ? The last day came and they started before dawn and quartered the hillside till after dark. Surely the luck *must* change ! It was absurd to get a bear in the first three hours and then never even smell another. By the Law of Averages . . . . ! But, finally, night fell and he was back again in camp empty-handed.

Three days later James was back in Murree, slightly fitter, and slightly more confident in his assertions about shooting. After all he could now preface his remarks with such a statement as " I remember a curious thing about a bear I shot in Punch . . . . " with the best of Anglo-Indians. And the zeal for shikar was burning more brightly in him than ever. Secretly he was disappointed at the result of his shoot, despite the congratulations of his friends. Old Clive of the Pack Gunners had so often impressed on him that young men who went to Cashmere for flirtation and the slaughter of a black bear in the Sonamarg area were beyond the pale, and that men of proved ability, like the major of the cigarette advertisements, looked on black bears as hardly worthy of notice; they occupied themselves with the destruction of the less accessible goats and sheep.

But the experience had been invaluable. He had learnt the first elements of camping, and what expenses were necessary and what were not. He had learnt that the colossal " medicine chest " which he had collected against every possible illness was much too large for a three weeks' trip; that personal clothing could be reduced to a

couple of changes of raiment; that economy in bedding was not worth while; and that if you take all the gadgets out with you that writers on Himalayan sport advise, you will never move at all. He learnt, too, what marches one can expect coolies to do in one day, and when to give them the neric rate of pay and when not to. He learnt—I blush to repeat it—to regard the perpetual boiling of water as rather an irritating pastime, and to drink without a qualm from any stream that was not too obviously the village drain. He began to learn something of the difference between *khubbar* that was bad, and *khubbar* that was less bad. (There are no other sorts of *khubbar*.) He learnt to rise early and march off ahead of his transport, and then let it pass him so that he could arrive at a camp already pitched. He learnt to make himself extremely comfortable, when comfort seemed impossible of achievement. He learnt when to cajole the village notables, and when to threaten, and when to blandish. And finally, he learnt that when a European leaves the beaten track he finds a new and wonderful India, in which he must bear himself in a manner suitable to the veneration he incites.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCING MOHOMED KHAN

THAT winter there was a change in the regiments in 'Pindi. The Arden Rangers departed for Bangalore, and the Welch Rifles took their place. This was a pleasant surprise for James, and throughout that winter every Sunday found him tramping the Khanna snipe jheel with Roddy Wilkinson, or Pat Lewis, or John M——, under the supervision of old Gulab, the doyen of the local shikaris. They were good days that they spent in his company, ricketing out in the dawn in a creaking tonga, and wading backwards and forwards in the jheel till evening. And when James left 'Pindi, and he and Gulab parted, the tears were equally genuine on both sides.

In January the troops moved out to Sohawa to camp. Sohawa lies thirty-five miles south of 'Pindi on the Grand Trunk Road. Before they left, Roddy Wilkinson suggested to James that he might come out one Sunday, and they would go off into the hills after oorial, a species reputed to flourish there. James was delighted, and one Saturday evening he found himself dressing for dinner in Roddy's tent. From over the way could be heard the low and sentimental voices of the troops raised in harmony, and a strident voice nearer by calling out the winning numbers of a game of "House", and just outside the challenge of the sentries on the quarter-guard

and the badinage that was being shouted from tent to tent in the officers' lines.

The next morning in the piercing chill of a Punjaub winter's dawn, they set forth with a local shikari, Bostan Khan by name. Pat Lewis had gone off also to the other end of the line of hills to see what he could do. All the morning they toiled without seeing the trace of an oorial, and at eleven o'clock it had become exceedingly hot; they sat down under a tree and ate their lunch. By twelve they were both sound asleep. Suddenly from a point on the ridge about a mile away a burst of fire was heard. "That's Pat" cried Roddy. Each seized his rifle and rushed to a little ridge where an all-round view could be obtained, one facing each way. Suddenly Roddy fired four shots in rapid succession; James in a fever of excitement lest he should be left out of the fun ran over to join him. Disappearing round a bend he saw three oorial galloping for dear life, and there lying on the ground three hundred yards away were two corpses. "Are they big ones?" gasped James, half pleased at their success, half chagrined that he hadn't shared it. "God only knows," said Roddy, with his bland smile, "but I wasn't going to have my eye wiped by Pat if it did mean browning the herd. It was an absolute fluke anyhow, as they were going a thousand miles an hour". They descended into the nallah. Lying before them were two oorial, an exceedingly small male—and a female. They looked at each other guiltily. "I think we'd better bury it" said Roddy, after a pause.

They pulled down an overhanging jut of earth on to the female; they had barely covered the

last of her when a voice hailed them from afar. It was Pat Lewis. Clad in an antique puttoo suit with a darned grey sweater, and a girdle filled with skinning knives, he looked like the hunter of the films. "Hullo, Mackumazan," said Roddy. "Hullo," Pat answered. He, too, looked rather diffident. "What have you shot?" "Quite a small one," Pat answered carelessly. "Smaller than this?" asked Roddy. He was not the man to beat about the bush. Pat looked at the ram and grinned broadly; he seemed much relieved. "About the same size. They're hardly Rowland Ward specimens are they?" "Did you get a shot?" he asked James. "No," said Roddy quickly, "we only got one".

That night they dined off oorial; it must not be concealed that there were those of the Welch who condemned this slaughter of the innocents, which had, truth to tell, violated almost every principle of shikar. But, as Roddy remarked, that did not prevent them eating them with every appearance of relish. Roddy and James kept the secret of the slaughtered female for three years, and they both shared many private jests about it; and it was not till a final Club dinner before the Welch Rifles left 'Pindi that the truth was allowed to out amid considerable hilarity.

The sight of that little brown ram with its beginnings of a beard and the half curve of its immature horns fired James with a determination to shoot something better, and he accordingly applied for six days' leave and for permission to shoot in the reserved blocks under the control of the Deputy Commissioner for Attock. Both were granted, and the former by an adroit manipulation of the Sabbath was extended to eight days.

And so a February noon found James and Mangal decanting themselves from the Kohat Mail on to the station at Fateh Jang. Walking towards them came an elderly and dignified Indian, his black beard faintly dyed with red, dressed in twill breeches and puttees (the gift of a previous employer) and a long khaki coat and puggaree. It was Mohomed Khan, the doyen of the Salt Hill shikaris, to whom they had telegraphed to meet them. He sized up James in one proud and flashing glance, and salaamed. In that glance he had taken it all in; the youth and inexperience and keenness and powers of endurance. It was seldom that he had seen a Sahib quite so young, and he took him under his wing from then on.

In the courtyard were three grunting camels, and they were soon moving off through the sandy scrub towards the hills. To James, surfeited with the works of MacIntyre and Kinlock, and thinking it impossible to shoot a wild sheep unless you were hanging over a precipice, the little line of hills, a mile broad and then disappearing again into the plains as they fell away towards Hassan Abdal, was singularly unimpressive.

The next morning they were up at dawn, and moving northwards through the hills. They had been going for about an hour when suddenly Mohomed Khan stopped and motioned to James to hand him the glasses. Shaking with excitement James handed them over. With maddening precision Mohomed Khan took them up and examined them. Having satisfied himself that they had all the screws and cogs which he expected he focussed them on the plain below

and then turned them down the ridge. Then he gave a grunt, a grunt that dismissed what he had seen from further consideration. James seized the glasses, and after a great deal of what he had learnt to call in his Cadet Battalion days "Indication and Recognition" (an art he had never found time to practise on the field of battle), he detected five little brown dots at the bottom of the hill. "*Teen mardeen, do chota nur*," said Mohomed Khan. (Three ewes, two small rams.) Gradually James got his glasses into focus. Viewed through them even those little twenty-inch horns seemed very magnificent. Surely half a loaf was better than no bread? James positively thirsted for the blood of those oorial. But Mohomed Khan had other fish to fry, and they passed on. An hour later they spotted some more, but this time Mohomed Khan was satisfied. The herd of ten contained two heads, one of about thirty inches, and one a little less.

They were feeding quite peacefully about four hundred yards away from them, and there was every possibility of getting closer unseen. The wind, too, was in the right direction, blowing right in their faces. (When James got to know the Salt Hills better he could never understand why, when the prevailing wind was easterly, the herds were invariably to be found to the east of the main ridge, even granting the extra cover they found there.) Slowly they advanced down a side nallah and up a little rise not more than a hundred and fifty yards from the oorial. James peered round a rock; there was the largest ram broadside on to him and sublimely unconscious. With his heart hammering like a piston he drew

a careful bead and fired. Quite distinctly he saw a little spurt of dust two feet above the oorial. For one startled second the herd surveyed them and then with a clattering of falling stones they bounded off up the hillside, over the ridge and away. No words can describe the awful despair of that moment. James felt certain that that was the only oorial he would ever get a shot at, and it had escaped him. He remembered the bear; chances didn't come twice. And it was the easiest of easy shots. His cup of bitterness was so overflowing that even Mohomed Khan turned away to spare his feelings.

It was now eleven o'clock; the sun was up, and every self-respecting oorial was taking his siesta. Mohomed Khan called a halt, though James was eager to press on. So they sat down in the shade of a rock till three o'clock. As they moved off down the ridge again Mohomed Khan pointed to the sky. Above them high up there appeared a great vulture, hanging in the sky, and away down the ridge, one, two, three, the little black spots were swimming up out of the distance. They were not the only people waiting for the death of an oorial that day. At about five o'clock they sighted another larger herd: there must have been about fifteen oorial altogether, two or three shootable rams (i.e. over twenty-five inches), some smaller rams and a number of ewes and youngsters. Once more the scene was laid for a favourable stalk, and Mohomed Khan brought James to a spot not much more than a hundred yards away from them. He peeped at them from behind a bush with an air of impish triumph, his old black eyes beading with delight like a small boy who is going to bring off a practical joke.

James pulled back the safety catch of his rifle. Then he looked round the corner of the bush. The herd were slightly restive; the sentinel females were obviously suspicious of something, but having given a false warning on previous occasions, they weren't going to give the alarm till they were certain. Two of the bigger rams were obscured by females, and the third was half hidden in the bushes. For five minutes he waited; in that time the steely calm with which he had intended to see through the operation had dissolved, and he was in the most advanced state of buck fever. So that when finally the ram exposed himself James made another complete and absolute miss. Like most inexperienced shots shooting downhill he was going high.

The herd bounded away for fifty yards, and then paused for a moment to look back at the cause of the commotion. With a homeric effort James beat down the rage and misery that was surging up inside him. He had seen his bullet strike, and he knew he was going high. He took a little less foresight and aimed at the shoulder of the same ram, who was standing outlined in the rays of the setting sun. Plump ! The oorial dropped in its tracks with a thud, and lay there stone dead. James was amazed. He hadn't imagined that an animal dropped like that, like a shot rabbit. Never was there such a change from despair to joy. Wave after wave of elation swept through him as he gazed on his victim. But Mohomed Khan had no time for delightful sentiment. He was heading downhill at a steady trot to perform his *halal.* The oorial had really been dead for five minutes before the old man reached him, thus rendering him unfit for con-

sumption because his throat had not been slit by a follower of the Prophet while there was still breath in his body. But who after all would want to rob a man of his bit of meat by pointing out that a newly-dead oorial had, in point of strict fact, given up the ghost five minutes before the *coup de grâce* was administered to him ?

James stood over his victim in silent amazement. He looked at his two arching horns, thirty inches as spanned by Mohomed Khan's palm, the great black beard, the patriarchal face. He saw where the bullet entering just below the spine had turned down sharply to the heart, and he could hardly believe that he had brought this thing to pass. In a very few minutes Mohomed Khan had the head off by the neck. Then he climbed on to a neighbouring rock and lifted up his voice; two, three, four times he shouted, and then from the middle of the plain beyond an answering voice came back from the remote distance. It was a couple of camel men driving their beasts home from grazing. Twenty minutes later they turned up, and were loaded rather reluctantly with the head and a couple of haunches of that oorial. The liver and kidneys Mohomed Khan had extracted and wrapped up in a not too clean handkerchief.

The march back to camp was very triumphant. Stumbling through thorn bushes and over rocks in the darkness was positively exhilarating, and as they plodded on Mohomed Khan was moved to the recital of a whole host of absorbing anecdotes. He told of the last Deputy Commissioner but two, who after a succession of seven misses had slain an almost indecently small oorial and gone on his way rejoicing. He told of the record

oorial that had been killed years ago almost within sight of 'Pindi itself, and of the even greater one that he believed to be skulking in the reserve of a local Nawab. And he mentioned his son, a peculiarly smart havildar of police, who was hiding under the bushel of Campbellpore talents that richly deserved the scope that was offered by promotion to Hassan Abdal. Doubtless the Sahib knew the Inspector Sahib in 'Pindi ? In a very few minutes after their arrival the liver of that oorial was sizzling in the pan, and its head was decorating a neighbouring bush; and an hour later James was sleeping the sleep of utter and delightful exhaustion pursuing greater and ever greater oorial across the asphodel of his dreams.

He stayed on another seven days at Fatehjang, and got some quite good shooting; partridge and chakor and a few duck. He also managed to bag a chinkara, and was lost in admiration of the delicate and beautiful little animal. Its deep and lovely gazelle's eyes and perfect little body made it seem a sin to shoot it. But he could not pursue the oorial any further as his license only permitted one to be shot.

That shoot was the beginning of a long and intimate association with Mohomed Khan and the Salt Hills. In the four years in which he was in 'Pindi he was out in the Salt Range half-a-dozen times each cold weather, till they were able to work together with the most complete understanding. Mohomed Khan was the best and most loyal of friends, and he watched with a benign paternal satisfaction as he saw James' shooting education proceed. Now and then he would come into 'Pindi to pay him a visit, and he would

survey his increasing collection of trophies with respectful attention. Sometimes he would enquire a little wistfully of the other shikaris who had helped James bag these heads, and James would hasten to reply that though there were many good shikaris in Hindustan there was only one Mohomed Khan. And when he eventually steamed away from 'Pindi to the south, there was nobody from whom he parted with more genuine regret than the very delightful friend who had given him his first lessons in stalking.

CHAPTER IV

HAPPY HUNTING GROUND

DURING the eighteen months that James was in 'Pindi, Cashmere had been the Mecca to which he had been preparing his pilgrimage, the goal on which his every thought was fixed. But Cashmere meant money, and that was a commodity of which James was unfortunately short. Gone for ever were the days when a subaltern could spend three months in the Happy Valley, and save enough for his passage home, though it is still possible for a poor man to shoot there by exercising care and forethought. So James began to save. He gave up smoking; he gave up drinking, save when his professional duties demanded it; he scrutinized the utmost anna of Mangal's monthly bill. But by August of that year—just twelve months after his return from Punch—he had only managed to hoard eight hundred rupees. There was the question of leave to consider also. His firm allowed him two months' leave in every year, "in addition to such short occasional periods as may from time to time be granted". This meant that the ordinary young man saved up six months' leave, and then went home. But there were no ibex on the shores of Southampton Water, and James applied for two months' leave in India. This was rather grudgingly granted, for James' passion for shikar was now the subject for deprecatory comment by his superiors.

There was still another four hundred rupees to

be raised of the twelve hundred that he had budgeted for as his minimum expenditure. James was constrained to consult his head clerk Hari Chand. Hari Chand was delighted. He had a friend the dream of whose life had been to lend James money. James enquired a little nervously what interest he would need. Hari Chand shrank from the suggestion with horror. His friend would no more think of charging the heaven-born interest than he would slay the Temple bull. So the money appeared, nice new shining notes, but from quite where James was never told, nor did he enquire too closely. He knew well enough that he was breaking every rule of the firm by borrowing money through a subordinate, but provided it didn't come out of the till he asked no questions. A lamentable lapse, no doubt, but one that a just chronicler of James' sporting experiences cannot fail to record.

He had decided to go off to Baltistan to try and bag markhor and ibex. He had long been turning over in his mind a sort of Cook's tour, embracing most of the country between Gilgit and Leh and enabling him to shoot every species mentioned on the license—which in those days still only cost sixty rupees. But time and space proving inexorable he had been reduced to a more modest expedition to Baltistan (an expedition sounds so much better than a trip) with the possibility of picking up a barasingh and a black bear on the way home in Cashmere proper. He was advised to make for the Shigar Valley, the Happy Hunting Ground of Heaven knows how many first shoots, where the novice can have reasonable hopes of bringing an ibex into the bag, and probably a sharpu as well. But markhor in

the Shigar Valley there were none. (That is not strictly true; there were some, and probably still are, and their habitat is known to the elect: but that is another story.) At any rate you were not allowed to shoot them.

Sharpu, James didn't give a dam a dozen for, the sharpu being merely a cousin, and as some said, an inferior cousin, to the Punjaub oorial. But markhor—that was quite another matter. The markhor—had not every writer on the subject smacked his lips over the phrase ?—was the "blue ribbon of Himalayan sport". And there were markhor in Baltistan beyond a doubt. That, therefore, he should go to Baltistan and not shoot one was unthinkable.

In Baltistan there were, and I believe still are, six nallahs where markhor could be shot, Alchori, Nurh, Ghoru, Turmik, Tsurri and Bagicha, all beyond Shardu. These were allotted twice in one year. Once in the first leave and once in the second. In the first leave—till 15th July—on the first-come-first-served-run-for-the-nallah principle; and in the second they were allotted to the first applicant after the first of January, and James had failed to apply early enough. The second and only remaining alternative was to make for the three unreserved nallahs which lay beyond the reserved ones, Tak, Belchoo, and Badlooma, which were seven days' marching from Skardu, the capital of Baltiston, and fourteen from Srinagur. There was no restrictions to the number of sportsmen who might enter these nallahs in a year, and so by August they were usually thoroughly well disturbed. Moreover, August was as unpropitious a month for shooting as could be. As the sage advisers of the club

informed him, hunting the markhor in August was looking for a needle in haystack. Now, in April; when the snow kept them low —— ! But in August you'd be lucky if you found a shootable head under 18,000 feet. "Leave the markhor alone, my boy," they said, "and stick to the Shigar Valley." James, however, was adamant. He was going to shoot a markhor, and there was nothing more to be said.

On the advice of John M——, who incidentally had told him that he must work out his own salvation as regards nallahs, he wrote off to Mohomed Baba, an agent of Srinagar, and told him to engage servants for him, and prepare the necessary trimmings for a poor man's shoot, and Mohomed Baba had replied that all things should be according to the ordaining of order; and he arranged to share a car to Srinagar with Lance Fenwick of the Welch Rifles, who was also going up to Baltistan to shoot, which represented a highly desirable preliminary economy.

They eventually got away on the 14th August. The antique Buick was loaded to the last pound of its capacity; every inch of the dash-board was covered with gun cases, rolls of bedding and other oddments, and in the front seat Mangal and Karim (Fenwick's bearer) sat squeezed together like a couple of trussed fowls. They slid down the road to Kohala and over the bridge into Cashmere. Here James was disappointed. He had imagined that he would step straight into a land enchanted. But though the Jhelum rushing between its high banks was rather impressive, there was nothing to distinguish the scenery from the lower slopes of the Murree hills in mere prosaic British India. But by three o'clock, after five hours of ricketing

round corners, careering past three hundred-foot precipices and hair-breadth shaves with oncoming cars, they began to reach more open country, where grass replaced scrub on the mountainside and where there were pleasant and romantic wooden houses instead of the mud huts of the plains; and by seven o'clock they had passed into the broad expanse of the valley and were scudding down a succession of poplar avenues such as Hobbema never dreamed of. Just before dark they reached Srinagar.

Srinagar, like most towns whose main thoroughfare is a river, is imposing enough as viewed from the Jhelum, but its back streets are sordid. As the car drove in they were at once surrounded by all sorts and conditions of men noisily hawking their wares upon them, till finally they pulled up by the edge of the bund and were positively mobbed by a whole host of touts, anxious to do anything from arranging a trip to Ladak to selling them a papier-mâché paper knife. However, Mohomed Baba's minions quickly bore them away, and they were soon sliding down the river to their houseboats in a shikara, " the gondola of Srinagar ", to use a phrase that has an irresistible fascination for writers on Cashmere.

Next morning appeared the invaluable Mohomed Baba himself in his long pashmina smock, and lead James off to the shop on the bund, which was gutted by fire a year or two later. Here James learnt of the arrangements that had been made for him, and was introduced to his shikari. Ahad Malik had been a shikari all his life, as his father had been before him, and as he was training up Habiba, his son, to be also. He was an immensely powerful man of middle

height, with a heavy, almost bucolic expression. His features were straight and regular, but too heavy to give his face beauty, like a classic coin of a bad period.

Habiba was with him. He was large and fat and heavy. He had a hooked, almost Pathan nose, and his full heavy face was only saved from stupidity by a pair of expressive black eyes of surpassing brilliancy. They had brought with them a cook (he called himself a khansamah, or caterer, of course), and a couple of coolies. Now James had already decided not to have a Cashmere cook on grounds of economy, but to take Mangal, and further, he did not mean to have a chota shikari. Ahad Malik had figured out the exact opposite. He pointed out that all the best Sahibs had chota shikaris; that Habiba's merits as a chota shikari had been testified to by a whole host of Sahibs, in token of which he produced documentary evidence; that the wiles of the markhor were such that not two but twenty shikaris were needed to outwit them; and that as to the question of a cook it was known that when Sahibs took plainsmen, and Hindu plainsmen at that, into mountain places they invariably died, thereby putting the Sahib to great inconvenience, and the expense of getting rid of their useless carcasses. James restated his case with what he hoped was simple, yet forceful dignity, and added that it would indeed be a steep mountain that expelled the breath from Mangal's useless carcass. Eventually Mohomed Baba compromised the matter for them. The cook, who turned out to be Ahad Malik's brother-in-law—nepotism is Cashmere's most flourishing industry—was dispensed with, Habiba was to go

at tiffin coolie's wages, and only one camp coolie was to be taken. He also proved to be a hanger-on from Ahad Malik's village near Bandapore. Thus, James had escaped the first pitfall that yawns at the feet of the young shikari by taking too many servants with him. John M—— had often impressed on him that a cook, a shikari, and one other Cashmeri was quite enough, though at a pinch a chota shikari could be thrown in. But that dak coolies, tiffin coolies, and camp coolies toil not neither do they spin, and should be dispensed with.

Meanwhile Mangal had arrived and was checking up the supplies that Mohomed Baba had provided—everything from baking powder to a measuring tape—and James was being fitted with chapalis and puttoo boots, and trying to raise up courage to ask Mohomed Baba how much money he had spent already. But before the evening everything was ready, and he set forth down the Jhelum in his houseboat. It was enchanting to lie and slide slowly past the ripening corn fields and great chenars, while the fort of Srinagar and the hill called Solomon's Throne disappeared into the distance. From the stern of the boat he heard the voices of his servants mixing with those of the boatman's innumerable progeny, and now and then Lance Fenwick would hail him from his boat behind. It was a halcyon evening.

One can approach Baltistan either across the Zogi La Pass, which leads from the basin of the Jhelum to that of the Indus, or across the Deosai plateau. The former is passable all the year round; the latter, which is several days shorter, can be negotiated only from the middle of June to the end of September. James and Lance were

using the shorter and cheaper route, and when James woke next morning they were arriving at Bandapore, their jumping-off place. Mangal brought in his shaving water, but he bid him be gone; he had no intention of putting a razor to his face for two months. He meant to be in the grand tradition of Himalayan sportsmen and grow a beard; all Himalayan sportsmen had beards. To shave would be a sacrilege almost amounting to simony, since the hair on his head was dedicated to Diana.

Lance Fenwick had already arrived, and before long they had loaded up their kit on to fourteen ponies and started off. They passed out through the township of Bandapore and into some of the loveliest scenery in the Happy Valley, till they reached the foot of the Randiangan Pass, a distance of about five miles. Here Ahad Malik and Razak Khan, Fenwick's shikari, called a halt. Try not the pass was the order of the day. Lance and James were indignant, but a number of reasons were brought forward, so forceful and so cogent, that there was nothing to be done. The fact that their servants' villages were nearby was not of course mentioned.

But next morning they started off at dawn, and Lance and James soon found themselves outdistancing their transport. Up they toiled and up; mile after mile and hour after hour. Gradually they began to tire, each longing to rest yet both determined not to give in before the other; Lance not wishing to bow the knee to a beggarly civilian (had not the Welch Rifles covered forty-two miles in nineteen hours in the retreat to Corunna ?) and James resolved to show that he could foot it as well as any rifleman. Finally, they reached

the Tragbal bungalow without having halted, and by mutual and unspoken consent they threw themselves down on the grass. Neither had given in; honour was satisfied. All the time they had been ascending clouds had been drifting round them, but at noon they lifted and gave them one last magnificent view over the Woolah Lake, reflecting the unclouded blue of the sky, and the Jhelum stretching away like a ribbon into the haze, and the grey line of the Kaj-i-Nag in the distance.

By half-past two the ponies were up to them, patient, sturdy little beasts, destined to a life of overloading and underfeeding, for the Cashmeri is not merciful to his beast; and by half-past four they had reached the rather bleak summit of the pass. Here the head pony man, a rat-faced, pox-bitten little creature, refused to go any further, but Razak Khan, Mangal, and Ahad Malik united to fall upon him with so forceful an eloquence as to drive him four miles further on down the road, and incidentally laid the foundations of a friendship between Mangal and Ahad Malik, each having to admit that a co-religionist could hardly have displayed greater powers of *bandobast.* It had been a seventeen mile march, mostly stiff climbing, and James and Lance were both nearly played out.

The next day they reached the small and flourishing township of Gurais, the headquarters of the local Tehsildar, to whom they had telegraphed for ponies. He was that type of Indian, however, who has the epidermis complex, and does nothing more for a white man than the regulations compel. Angry words ensued, especially from Lance, who had been brought up in the British Infantry

tradition of standing no nonsense from the subject races. But they came away sadly fearing that no ponies would arrive on the morrow. What then was their surprise to find, the next morning, a crowd of stout and unusually well-fed ponies outside the bungalow. They loaded up and went on their way rejoicing, but it was not till they were well clear of Gurais that the reason was revealed to them. Their servants had visited the office of the Tehsildar and told his Babu that their masters were members of the Commander-in-Chief's staff hurrying to Gilgit, where the great man was touring at that time.

The next day they passed Burzil and the line of cultivation, and marched on to the Deosai Plateau, as cheerless a region as one could wish to avoid, and for four days they marched across the plateau without seeing a human habitation. Occasionally they would pass a shepherd and his flocks, and once they passed another returning sportsman and stopped to admire his ibex heads, and listen with fitting reverence as he discoursed with the assured authority that a month in Baltistan had vested him with. Beyond this the plains were without a sign of life except for the scores of marmots which are to be found there, and which James amused himself trying to bag with a shot gun when the march was over. He wished he had taken John M——'s advice and taken a .22 rifle with him for the purpose.

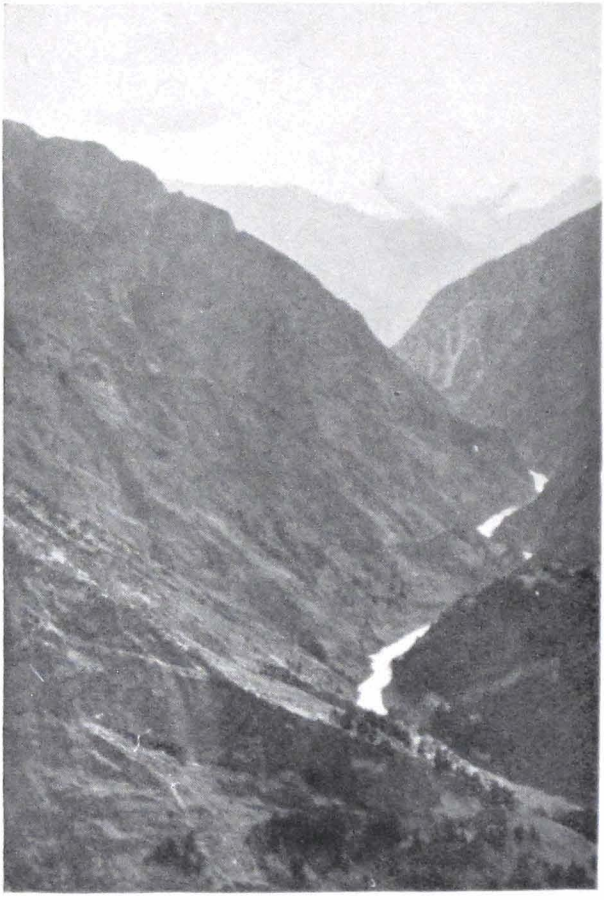
The marmot is a jolly little red animal, not unlike a squirrel, and he sits outside his hole like Old Caspar, till he sees the sportsman approaching, when with a scream of rage and alarm he disappears below decks. The sportsman then sits patiently near the front door waiting for the

marmot to reappear. His victim, however, is not devoid either of guile or a sense of humour. He passes by means subterranean to the rear of his pursuer, behind whose back he shortly jumps out, to utter an ear-splitting scream and disappear again.

They were not sorry when, nine days after leaving Murree and after six days' marching, they passed between two little tarns, up over the last snow clinging to the Borgi La Pass, and turned down into the cavernous gorge which leads into the Indus Valley. After descending for about an hour they reached a line of stunted trees, and then further below they got their first view of the Indus Basin, broad just here and bare and sandy, the villages springing up like little green oases, with their patches of cultivation and tall sentinel poplar trees; and as they looked a sand storm blew up from across the Indus and swept over the plain. They hurried on as hard as they could to where the fort above Skardu stood outlined in the plain through the little villages with their first apricots ripening on the trees.

The Balti, be it here said, is a very different person from the Cashmeri; a cheerful *dolci far niente* sort of fellow with a distinct Mongolian touch to his features. He wears a long toga-like garment, and a little flat hat with a rolled brim in which, as like as not, he has put a bunch of marigolds or forget-me-nots, and from under it his black locks fall down crimped like a cavalier lady's. The Sahib, too, is sufficiently a rarity in Baltistan, and also sufficiently a source of income, to ensure that he is greeted with the lowest of low salaams and other feudal tokens of respect.

To James and Lance the Skardu bungalow



(Upper) THE INDUS VALLEY, NEAR SKARDU
(Lower) A CASHMERE GORGE

seemed very luxurious after the Deosai Plains, and they made as merry as possible on the last night before they parted, James down the Indus to Rhondu, and Lance up the Shigar Valley. James had heard in the way that all the world's business is known in every bazaar within two hundred miles, that the best unreserved Markhor nallah, Badlooma, was occupied by a couple of American ladies who had been trekking round Cashmere for some months and performing amazing pedestrian feats. So he had to content himself with Tak nallah, a day nearer but with a far less desirable reputation.

James parted from Lance Fenwick with infinite regret since marching with him day by day could hardly fail to be a pleasure to anybody, as he possessed a remarkably independent mind which he expressed with a great deal of freedom and vivacity. The Indus was so flooded with the summer rains that it was impossible for them to cross by boat and they had to go some miles downstream to a *djula* or rope bridge. That night they reached the village of Kutsurah, and camped by the banks of a long and placid mere in which fish were rising. It was an ideal camping ground with the sound of rushing water lulling one to sleep, and the huge cliffs on the other side of the Indus flickering in the moonlight like a castle in Grimm's fairy tales.

The next day they crossed the *djula*; it was a rather terrifying experience, as it hung forty feet above the torrential waters of the Indus and ascended very steeply to the opposite bank. The bridge itself consisted of a single-plaited tight-rope of twigs on which one walked, supported by

two similar handrails. For the prestige of a dominant race James launched himself on to it with all the nonchalence he could muster, but he felt extremely frightened, and it was with intense relief that he eventually threw himself down on the opposite bank. There they picked up the track along the north bank of the Indus which is notoriously one of the worst in Cashmere, being quite impassable for ponies, and negotiated by coolies only with difficulty. On the day following the passage of the Indus James marched all day, but was only able to reach the hamlet of Baghicha, twelve miles further on, by evening. Baghicha lies stuck between two immense cliffs like a raven's nest in a tree fork, and the descent to the village from the wearily gained heights above was a matter for hands and feet and elbows, and at times they even had to resort to rickety ladders.

For six days they pressed on over the bare and dusty tracks relieved only by the villages that would spring up by the way as little patches of pleasant greenness in a barren and dry land. Everywhere he was received with the greatest respect and with gifts of apricots and grapes which were growing in profusion. In the evening the infirm and sick of the village would be brought out with a request for a pill, the panacea of the east, and James would lave and bind their festers and abrasions as well as he could; and on these occasions he always felt that a solemn incantation would add greatly to the dignity of the operation and the efficacy of the cure. By this time Mangal and Ahad Malik had completely sunk their religious and racial differences, and once free from prying eyes they took their even-

ing meal together with perfect good humour. So much so indeed that they combined to point out to James that *dastur* compelled him to buy a sheep for these his servants, who were wearing themselves to shadows on his behalf with marches of unparalleled length and severity.

On 1st September, more than a fortnight after starting, James reached Tak Nallah. It was a long nallah, rising from green slopes and villages at its bottom through a fringe of pine woods to the glacier at its top eating its way into the heart of the snow mountains more than twenty thousand feet high. They engaged a couple of Balti shikaris with an expert knowledge of the ground, who spoke not too encouragingly of the prospects. Ibex there were and markhor, but the season was far advanced and they were risking no prophecies; other Sahibs there had been this year who had gone empty away. . . . .

The following day they moved to the very head of the nallah and pitched their camp among the fir trees near the glacier, and that evening James and Ahad Malik ascended the hill above the camp, and sat surveying the mountain side through glasses. After half an hour Ahad Malik gave a little grunt of satisfaction. He had seen ibex more than a mile away on the other side of the valley, but whether they were large or small he could not say. James, strain he his eyes never so hard, could see nothing, and he had to return to camp slightly chagrined, but with his heart bursting with hope.

The next morning they got up at 2 a.m. and climbed in the moonlight on to the glacier. James was wearing grass shoes and *puttoo* (felt) boots for the first time, and the rope which held

them to his feet, and passed between his great and lesser toes cut him dreadfully. It was hard going over the moraine, and harder still as they reached the mountain side and began to climb. There was nothing of the comparative ease of the Salt Hills in this expedition.

The sun was beginning to rise and gild the summits of the snow mountains with an ever-changing succession of opalescent tints. As they climbed higher and higher they were able to see the peaks rising from beyond the confines of the nallah, till finally Nanga Parbat swam into view, the queen of the surrounding snows. But James had little time to admire the scenery for Ahad Malik was busy with his glasses. Suddenly he put them down, took off his puggaree and revealed a completely bald pate. This, as James was to learn, was his first preliminary after the sighting of game. James was bursting with excitement, though quite *what* it was all about he didn't know—ibex, markhor, or a combination of both. He looked gingerly in the required direction. There he beheld two small dark grey animals, females obviously. They were the sentinels of the herd. Then Ahad Malik took a little handful of dust and threw it in the air; it blew back in their faces alarmingly. Approach from that direction was obviously impossible. Nor, equally clearly, was it possible to move up from underneath. Their only other means of approach was a *détour* from above, and that Ahad Malik didn't seem to like. The remaining alternative was to stay where they were till something happened, and this course he favoured, for he disliked undue haste. But such a purely negative policy seemed to James to be absolutely

intolerable, and so in five minutes they were all climbing up the mountain side again. On they went and on, till finally after an hour's climbing over rocks that slithered away beneath their feet and smooth wet grass on which they slipped as if it had been ice, they reached a position overlooking the nallah on whose lip the sentinels had been standing. James cautiously peered into it, finger on trigger. There was nothing there. From behind Ahad Malik gave a grunt and pointed over the hillside. Half a mile away was a little procession of seven, moving steadily over a distant ridge; one by one they reached the top, and then the great scimitar horns of the two males were outlined for just a moment against the sky before they gave a jump and disappeared with effortless agility beyond. James had taken his first lesson in wind.

It was now ten o'clock and they had been on the move for nearly eight hours. James was only too conscious of an extreme hunger and fatigue; the tiffin basket arrived, lunch was devoured and James lay down to sleep on a one in three gradient. But at two o'clock in the afternoon they were on the move again, and searched a side nallah running up to the snow-covered coll which divided them from the main Turmik nallah to the east. They cast forward again and again without result, pausing from time to time to scan the mountain side. And then a mile away, below the coll, they saw the seven black dots moving up on to the snow till they topped the ridge and disappeared from their ken. Slowly and sorrowfully Ahad Malik gazed at them; Habiba's dark black eyes followed them as a lover's might watch his lady close the nunnery door behind her; and

even the Balti shikari seemed moved by the poignancy of the occasion. As for James his heart was overflowing. He had caught just a glimpse of his first ibex—and they had gone for good.

They made their way back down the side nallah and over the glacier, and when they eventually arrived back in camp long after dark he was so overcome by fatigue that he had hardly the energy to take off his clothes.

After that James had two more blank days, and then Habiba, who had been sent to scout the western fringes of the nallah, came back to report that he had seen ibex at quite a low level. Next morning James was up early palpitating to be off, but as luck would have it they were kept in camp by a heavy fog and it was not till after lunch that they were able to set out. They moved about a mile from camp and there sure enough were the ibex, three males, two of them shootable, sitting in repose upon a little rock, scratching their haunches now and then with their horns and rising at intervals to browse. The place where they were sitting was unapproachable from below, and on their right they were protected by a chasm four hundred yards wide. On the left the ground was easy, but the wind was contrary. The position had been chosen with skill. Once bitten twice shy; James was not going to force the pace again. He would sit and wait till something happened. This he did for five agonizing hours, and at the end of it he had to leave the ibex still holding their eerie and return to camp.

They had now been in the nallah a week without result, and James' young bosom was rent with fears and forebodings. The prospect of

leaving empty-handed was one absolutely impossible to contemplate, but one which nevertheless was becoming probable. He was indeed getting desperate. They rose early next morning, and dawn saw them surveying the ledge where the ibex were last seen. It was empty. They moved on again and searched the tract of ground above it, again with no result. James was filled with a dull fatalistic certainty. He wasn't going to shoot an ibex here or anywhere else. The whole trip would be a fiasco. Suddenly Ahad Malik sunk behind a rock and removed his puggaree. His eye glistened and he pointed meaningly up the hillside; James cowered behind him and likewise gazed at a little patch on the mountain two hundred yards away. From behind a rock an ibex had appeared and then another and another. It was yesterday's trio. "Which one ?" whispered James. "The middle one." Slowly the ibex fed towards him sublimely unconscious. After the trials and disappointments of the previous days it seemed incredibly easy. Finally, James could bear it no longer; they were less than two hundred yards away, and the head he had marked down was broadside on. Gingerly he insinuated himself round a rock, and fired. The ibex staggered for a moment and then careered madly down the hill, while his two companions vanished from the ravine as it seemed with a single bound. "*Lagga,*" cried Ahad Malik triumphantly, "*Lagga*" (hit). James reloaded and fired another fruitless shot, but it was not necessary. The ibex had only gone fifty yards down the hill when he stumbled in his tracks, rolled over, and then sliding in a mass of falling stones for twenty yards, lay still. James

had killed his first ibex, a head of just forty inches.

Two more days they spent looking for ibex, but James did not get a chance to find a companion to the pair of horns that were so proudly decorating his camp. He could not resist going to measure them again and again, and to stand and admire their graceful symmetry, and he was more than relieved when he had satisfied himself beyond a doubt that they reached the limit of forty inches whereat John M—— had told him that self-respecting persons commenced shooting ibex. Nor had Mohomed Baba supplied him with one of those tapes frequently carried by Cashmere shikaris, which have a special size of inch giving results highly gratifying to the Sahib at the time, but which is liable to cause subsequent disillusionment when candid friends get busy with a more standard unit of measure.

Meanwhile Habiba had been off again for two days on to the markhor ground for news of the greatest of all goats. He returned hot foot to say that the shepherds in that part had viewed a shootable head, and so it was decided to set forth at once. Owing to the inaccessibility of the mountain James decided to leave Mangal behind and sleep under a servants' shelter for four nights. Habiba volunteered to cook, and as James consolingly reflected it is always possible to live on hard-boiled eggs for four days. They climbed up and up across steep grassy slopes and almost unscalable precipices, pulling and pushing till finally they reached a tiny plateau which was the summer headquarters of the village shepherd lads, who had built a walled enclosure there for their flocks, and a little shelter for themselves. In the evening the sheep and goats would be

driven in in their hundreds, and passed one by one through a little wicket in much the same way as the Cyclops had brought in his flocks. And to give the final touch of Arcady to this pastoral scene one of the shepherd lads would play from time to time on a thin and reedy lute.

It was comparatively hard living on that mountain side, sleeping on the ground and feeding off *chapatis* and bully beef, and the nights, even in August, were cold. But James was still young and enthusiastic enough to enjoy every minute of it, and in the next two days they climbed over slopes so steep as to make their previous efforts on the ibex ground seem like a pleasant country walk. But markhor they saw none. Ahad Malik shook his head despondently. By now the season was too far advanced. The old bucks had gone off to air themselves in some remote mountain fastness. Only the women and children remained at a reasonable level. On the third day they were moving along a little goat track when suddenly Ahad Malik stopped and subsided gently behind a rock, and peered cautiously into the ravine beneath. Long and anxiously did he look while James held his breath, hardly daring to move. Then he shook his head despondently. James took a peep. Two hundred feet below he saw about a dozen markhor, five or six females, a few kids and three or four full-grown males, the biggest of which had horns approaching the second twist, probably of about thirty inches. James sat watching this peaceful and domestic scene for nearly half an hour, while the unsuspecting herd went about their business. And then suddenly from down below the faint sound of voices drifted up to them. It was the shepherds

calling to their flocks. The markhor were up in an instant and filed slowly away and disappeared from the ravine. But James' thoughts were with the grandfathers on the mountain tops, and he hoped, a little maliciously, that the young bucks were indulging in some illicit flirtation with their step-mothers, just to teach the patriarchs to keep out of the way.

When they got home they found that Habiba was the bearer of joyful tidings. A buck markhor —buck is a technical misnoma, but whoever talked of a billy markhor ?—had been sighted on the other side of the ravine from where the camp was. This meant climbing down about three thousand feet and then up again to reach a spot not more than half a mile off, and as it was impossible to negotiate the climb before dawn they didn't reach the other side of the valley till nearly nine o'clock. By that time the sun was up and all right thinking markhor were preparing for their siesta. But they pressed on to the spot where he had last been seen. And there sure enough he was, half a mile away in the shade of a little cliff, seated in calm and dignified contemplation—alone, remote and magnificent. The atmosphere was positively electric. Even Ahad Malik's usual phlegm seemed to be dissolving under the stress of the occasion, and James was so excited as to be hardly conscious of his own actions. They were able to move under cover till the markhor was only three hundred yards away, and then they found the only hope of getting any nearer was to make a considerable *détour* to a small clump of rocks, where they would only be two hundred yards from their quarry. They made all haste up the mountain

side, breathless with excitement and exertion. Every time a stone slipped beneath their feet they stopped in an agony of apprehension, feeling that they must undoubtedly have scared the monarch from his lair. Finally, they reached the rocks without apparent mishap. Ahad Malik signalled to James to lie still till he had regained his breath, and after a minute or two he slowly pushed his rifle forward and looked down the hillside. He was still there. James fired.

"*Lagga,*" cried Ahad Malik. The markhor hardly moved. Two, three, four seconds he stood there, and then before James had the wit to fire again he bounded away over the ridge. By the time they had clambered down the nallah and up the other side a good ten minutes had elapsed, and there was no sign of him to be found, but—and James' heart leapt again—there was a thin track of blood.

James was all for setting forth in immediate pursuit, but Ahad Malik said "No". He would go on till he dropped. On the morrow they would mobilize the shepherds, and the gathering of the eagles over the corpse would lead them on. And so in a state of bewildering uncertainty they returned to camp. The next morning they set off very early with the shepherds, and divided north and south of the ravine where they had seen the markhor. To anyone finding the corpse James promised a King's daughter in marriage. On they went and on, passing from viewpoint to viewpoint, yet without success; but as they descended the hill that evening with a heavy heart, Ahad Malik pulled out his glasses and surveyed the camp. There sure enough was a little crowd of shepherds, and in the middle of them by

all that was miraculous James saw the curving spirals of his dreams. Habiba and his party had found the markhor being devoured of vultures, dead with a bullet through his entrails. It was a fair head of forty-five inches, and though the head skin was gone there was still a certain amount of flesh adhering to the mask.

In after years James often wondered whether or not he was "planted" with that head. He learnt to know that a very large percentage of the "wounded" animals that are recovered for Sahibs, sometimes several days after they have been shot, were really the heads of animals picked up dead off the hillsides, or removed from the graves which they are so often put to adorn. The old trick of hanging a blanket in a mulberry tree by night, and letting it drop when the Sahib shoots at what he imagines to be a black bear, and of later furnishing him with a bazaar pelt, is probably played out. But owing to their inexperience most young sportsmen are sufficiently dependent on their shikaris to accept without suspicion any wounded head that may be produced. Sometimes a young man more discerning than the majority will turn down a skull without a headskin on it, but even that is not foolproof, as more than one head in perfect preservation has been shot in the winter with a village gun, and been kept in the ice and snow. And once certainly when the Sahib demanded to see the bones which the eagles were supposed to have plucked white, his food was doped sufficiently to keep him in camp for several days after. But in spite of this, James never could persuade himself, even in later years, even in the most rigorous self-analysis of his shooting experiences, that Ahad

Malik, who was to show him four years of first-class sport, had palmed off on him a markhor that he had not really shot.

The next day they returned to the bottom of the nallah to receive the respectful congratulations of an awaiting village. Ahad Malik was now convinced that this nallah now offered them little more. They had been there for a fortnight and more, and he suggested trying for another ibex nearer Skardu. James found that leaving a nallah was rather more difficult than making a getaway from a continental hotel. Lambadars fawn on one side, coolies of every grade on the other, and anybody who has ever been within twenty yards of the Sahib expects a tip. This one hewed wood; this one drew water; this one found the markhor; this one lead James to it; and this one held his hand while he shot it.

However, everything was at last accomplished and they set off to Skardu. The road back inevitably lacks some of the excitement of the road out. Instead of hoping it will be flat one knows that it will not be; and the first few miles which seemed such an eternity at the end of the outward journey pass like a flash, while the last half-dozen which were formerly covered so quickly, drag horribly. Five days later he was in a nallah near Komara where he stayed three days, almost in sight of Skardu, but he was only able to bag a thirty-eight-inch ibex after a stalk that was so simple as to be positively un-exhilarating.

By this time his supply of ready money, save he never so carefully, was beginning to run short. Ahad Malik said it would be possible to cash a cheque in the bazaar at Skardu, but as the state

of James' bank balance did not permit of his drawing on it for more than two hundred rupees this only offered a temporary paliative. So a period of the greatest financial stringency was proclaimed. Mangal was restricted to the uttermost farthing and the last egg; Ahad Malik was told to cut down the coolies to the last legitimate pice; James limited his fare to the most Spartan limits; and as a further measure of economy it was decided that they must return to Cashmere over the Deosai plains and not over the longer and more expensive Zogi La route, despite the lateness of the season. It is a striking commentary on the honesty of British sportsmen that James was able to negotiate his cheque at a trifling discount in the Skardu Bazaar, where he had never been heard of before and, where in all probability, he would never appear again.

They were back on the Deosai plains on the 24th of September, and their passage was very grim. The cool breezes of six weeks before had changed to a chill and icy blast, and the heath over which they tramped was blasted to the last degree. Their first camp by the clump of rocks rejoicing in the name of Ali Malik ke Mur was as cheerless as could be, and so cold that James could hardly bear to drag his shivering body from out of his sleeping bag at dawn. He marvelled at the hardiness of the pony men who camped quite happily with no other covering than that offered by a stone wall. Three days they spent on the plateau, and when at last they turned down to the bungalow at Burzil, with the comforts of blazing fires and a tin bath, they felt themselves in paradise.

Two days later they had reached Gurais, where

only a fortnight before the Commander-in-Chief had stopped on his way from Gilgit. James expected to find the bungalow much altered, nor was he mistaken. New chairs, new shelves, new tables, new beds. The walls had been white-washed, the floors scrubbed, the windows mended. Even the lid of the commode had been given a new coat of varnish; and the Rest House flea had entirely disappeared; not it is to be hoped on the person of the Great Man. So that if this particular tour bore no fruit other than that, it could at least be said that it had rendered habitable every bungalow between Gilgit and Bandapore, in a way that a decade of witicisms in the complaint book could not have hoped to do.

James and Ahad Malik decided to stop for the remaining fortnight of his leave in the Gurais Valley to try for a barasingh. The Gurais Nallahs were not really the best for barasingh, but expense entirely ruled out their moving to the more favoured Sind or Liddar Valleys. However, at this time there were always a certain amount of stag on the move from Gurais into the Jhelum basin, and Ahad Malik was quite sanguine.

There was now a new Tehsildar in place of the one with whom James and Lance Fenwick had quarrelled so bitterly, a spectacled and smiling gentleman who arrived to enquire after their comfort, and assure them that he had let it be known that anybody who failed to minister thereto should be visited with the direst pains and penalties. He was in a state of great exaltation at the time and kept informing James that " His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief in India shook me with his own hand ".

Next day they ascended the western side of the valley past the stubble fields and the little wooden villages into the great pine woods of the mountain side. It was indeed a change from the barren brown mountain sides of Baltistan. They pitched their camp in the pinewoods at the foot of a long grassy slope which rolled away a thousand feet above to where the skyline marked the divide separating them from Cashmere, and for two days they searched the forests and quartered the hillsides above them. Ahad Malik, who at one time had been extremely jubilant and confident of success, was now sunk in gloom. He had expected every night to hear the stags belling in the forest, but so far there had not been a sound. James was much depressed by this unexpected pessimism, for previously his shikari had been so patient in adversity. And he cursed the poverty that forced him to seek his prey on these barren slopes.

On the third day as they were setting out in the early morning they found the fresh tracks of half a dozen stags in some soft ground above the camp. Their spirits began to revive, and they followed up the hillside, stopping from time to time to spy out the land. On and up they climbed till they reached the watershed, and there they found fresh footmarks and droppings disappearing into the Valley of Cashmere. Their prey had passed from their ken. But that evening as they were going back to camp as dispirited as they could be, a low unmusical roar floated up from the forest. Ahad Malik's stolid face lit up with a positive radiance. Had he just brought the search for the Holy Grail to a successful conclusion he could hardly have appeared more

delighted. It was not at all the deep and melodious belling that James' fancy had imagined, a sort of cervidean version of vesperal bells echoing across a Hampshire valley, but had it been Albani or Patti it could have hardly have appeared more beautiful to him.

Ahad Malik was convinced that the next evening the stag would emerge from the forest to sun himself on the slopes above, and that then they would be able to lay him low. So it was decided that James should stay in camp till lunch time. While he was partaking of that repast Ahad Malik suddenly hurried in from the hillside having viewed a stag quite close to camp. James girded up his loins and ran. It was not long, however, before the run became a walk, and the walk became a crawl, for that stag had chosen the most inaccessible spot on the mountain to parade his sultanas. After about an hour they reached the spot where he had been located. The atmosphere was electric. They peered into a tiny dip. They advanced and peered into another dip beyond. Again nothing. Out came the glasses, and just as Ahad Malik was beginning to focus them there suddenly sounded a low base note, rather like a cow, and about four hundred yards away a clump of bushes was seen to be slowly moving, and from behind there emerged a stag and six hinds. It was too far to risk a shot—John M—— had impressed on James' virgin mind that while long shots may be permissible to Walter Winans and others of like powers, they are quite taboo to the aspiring novice—and so there was nothing to do but sit still till the stag moved. And sit still they did, cramped and stiff and hardly daring to move for three-quarters of

an hour while the stag and his consorts nibbled at a patch of grass hardly bigger than a cricket pitch, till, finally, they filed slowly off into the next dip. Fortunately, the wind was right so they immediately gave chase. The intervening quarter of a mile seemed like seven leagues as they hurried across it, with every breaking twig a pistol shot and every rolling stone a thunder clap. They topped the rise and crawled into view.

There he was, a hundred and fifty yards off. There was no possible rest for his rifle, so James put it on Ahad Malik's shoulder and fired; the barasingh stumbled, and James fired again: the first hit him in the shoulder, the second through the fleshy part of the neck. Then he charged away down the hill and lay hidden in a patch of scrub, pursued by three fruitless shots from James, who was now in a state of frenzied excitement, and who was being goaded by a series of prayers, exhortations and possibly curses, in Cashmeri, from Ahad Malik. James rushed down the hill, and as he approached the barasingh made away again and lay down a hundred yards off; breathless and palpitating James fired two more wild shots before he had the sense to steady himself and take a good aim behind the shoulder. The gallant beast rose, staggered a little and galloped madly down the hill, to fall fifty yards further on almost at the feet of Habiba, who was just in time to perform a legitimate *halal.*

It was a fair head of thirty-nine inches, and ten points, but they had little time to linger in admiration, for it was now almost dark; so they left Habiba to see to the skinning and returned to camp, followed an hour later by the skinners,

who had made for themselves improvised torches which flickered about the hill like so many will-o'-the-wisps.

The next day they moved camp to another branch of the nallah, and an hour or two after the tents were up a heavy snowfall began. It was then the 5th of October, and the season was fairly far advanced, so James decided to stay three more days to try and get another stag (his license allowed him two), and then return to Cashmere.

The next day as they were working up a ravine about a mile from camp Ahad Malik suddenly froze; there just opposite them, two hundred yards away, was a fine stag followed by two or three hinds. The two parties stood motionless eyeing each other. James did not dare to change his position for he feared that any movement would send them galloping off, but he remained standing, and came up slowly into the aim. He fired, but even as he pressed the trigger he knew that he had missed, and in a few seconds the stag and zenana had disappeared back into the forest. James cursed himself heartily, for it was a bigger and finer stag than the one he had shot, but he had learnt yet another lesson as to what shots can reasonably be taken and what can not.

The next day snow fell from dawn to dusk, and James was camp-bound, and when he started out on the last morning of his stay, the whole hill was six inches deep in snow. There was not enough grazing for a fair-sized rat, let alone a barasingh. So they struck camp and made all haste back to Gurais. Just as they were starting Habiba came and told James there was a cock monal roosting higher up the gorge, and James told him to beat

it out over him. This he did very successfully, and it came rocketing down the gorge in all the splendour of his purple and gold, in a manner that Elveden could hardly have improved on. James thought he had never seen anything so noble, and his chagrin was extreme when he missed him very emphatically with both barrels. Nor was he wrong in regarding him as the King among pheasants, for surely even a Lady Amherst in full plumage can hardly equal him at his best.

Three days later he crossed the Randiangan Pass again. On the night before he made the pass he fell in with the first European he had met since he parted from Lance Fenwick on 25th August, an Indian Army major returning from Gilgit, a cheerful and companionable soul. The pair of them were both delighted to let their tongues wag till the cows came home, and they broached James' flask of medicinal brandy with as much good cheer as if it had been a bottle of Clarkson's finest madeira.

The last three days of his leave James spent near Bandapore in lazy pursuit of black bear. He felt he owed himself the rest. And rest indeed it was, to potter gently round the villages which might have sprung straight from a Constable landscape (though it must, alas ! be recorded here that a closer inspection revealed them as entirely sordid). Ahad Malik's village was quite close, and great honour was done to James by every variety of relation from an aged parent to a great nephew hardly able to walk. The whole neighbourhood was busy at that time with the story of a black bear who earlier in the summer had attacked a Sahib lying in wait to compass his destruction. The bear all but accounted for his

pursuer, and then turned upon the shikari who was waiting behind with a gun charged with lethal bullets; next he rounded up the tiffin coolie who was crawling away down a hedge and clawed him in that part of his anatomy most prominently presented; and finally departed "carrying the rifle like a Sahib". It was not recorded whether he took out a license or not. How far it was all true it would be difficult to say, but it was at least a fact that the Sahib was lying in Bandapore Hospital at the time.

They sat out two nights for the monster or any other of his species presenting themselves, but with no result, and then embarked on the last lap of the Odyssey, the return trip up the Jhelum to Srinagar, past the stubble fields and the Chenars and the red roofs, with the cries of the boatmen tugging at the tow ropes, and with the children on the bank bathed in the sunlight like the little amorini of an English rose-garden.

On arrival in Srinagar James found a letter from Hargreaves to say that he was arriving in Murree on 14th of October, and that he would be able to go through the accounts with him before he moved down to 'Pindi for the winter. This meant that he could not afford to overstay his leave by even a few hours, as Hargreaves was the last man on earth whom one could persuade that it was more necessary to shoot ibex than sell wine. Moreover, James did not intend to discuss the subject of his leave with him at all. He merely intended to say that he had had a good time in Cashmere, and leave him to draw the conclusions that a good time in Cashmere would inevitably suggest; lawn tennis at Galmarg, moonlight picnics in the Shalimar Gardens, and for those

greatly daring a week's camping in the *terra incognita* round Sonamarg.

So when he met Lance Fenwick, who incidentally had shot two ibex, two barasingh, and a black bear, and heard that the car they had arranged to share had fallen through (owing to the fact that His Highness of Patiala was moving his establishment to the plains that day and had commandeered every available vehicle), the prospect was rather grim. For get back he must. Nor was the plight of Lance Fenwick any better, as his sixty days' leave was up, and unless he appeared on parade at Kuldana in two days' time he would undoubtedly have overstayed it. Moreover, when the news went round the bazaar that there were two Sahibs to whom the immediate supply of a car was imperative, prices soared accordingly. However, eventually, they were able to find the driver of an ancient Studebaker who promised to land them in Murree that night for two hundred rupees. So far so good, and amid a chorus of farewells from their shikaris they set off. James was really sorry to part from Ahad Malik and Habiba. One cannot live alone with a man for two months without finding out something about him, and though there was little of the flowery graces about Ahad Malik, he was a loyal and devoted servant, and beyond doubt a first-class shikari.

Down the road they sped, the miles positively flying past, and when they reached Kohala by six o'clock they felt that all would yet be well. But the sun was sinking, and the bullock carts which are only allowed to move by night were getting into the road, and the driver dug his toes in and refused to go further. Neither threats nor en-

treaties, blessings, bribes or curses would deflect him from his intention. He refused to go on. The law closed the road at night, and who was he to defy the law ? Now both James and Lance had to reach Murree before dawn. Had they been ten years' older they would have spent a comfortable night in the bungalow at Kohala and damned the consequences, but then the prospect of being a few hours late from leave seemed remarkably terrifying. So they set off to walk up the hill, and by midnight they had reached the bungalow at Aussia where James had spent the first night of his trip to Punch. Akram Khan made them welcome, and in half an hour a repast was provided. He also managed to get them ponies from the village, and by four o'clock, faint yet pursuing, they had reached Jikka Gali. Here they parted, James to ride into Murree, Lance to Kuldana.

When Hargreaves arrived at ten o'clock he found James poring over the ledgers with a praiseworthy diligence. "Had a good time on leave ?" he asked. "Topping," said James. "You're looking a bit washed out," he continued, "late nights I presume ?" "Just a bit," said James, and winked knowingly. "You can't burn the candle at both ends, boy," Hargreaves answered. "Still I mustn't complain. I suppose its good for trade." "Of course it is," James answered, and this time the wink was purely mental.

CHAPTER V

LADAK AT LAST

As James' reputation as a shikari began to grow, and aspiring novices approached him for advice on hill shooting, he would make answer, with the enigmatic pointlessness of one of the "sayings of the week" in a Sunday paper, "take a dog". In hill shooting it is rarely practicable to take another Englishman with you. The difficulties of sharing a nallah and frightening each other's game, to say nothing of the smaller jealousies to which even the nicest of us are prone when we shoot nothing and our friends shoot head after record head, usually make it advisable to shoot alone. And, after all, two months' solitude is a most salutary contrast to the enforced intimacy of the life of an Indian Cantonnement. But a dog is different. It is there to greet you just the same on your return to camp whether you have slain nothing at all, or a record head or, in a fit of rage, your shikari, and at best it can offer a companionship to which few men can aspire. So "take a dog" became James' final word on Himalayan sport.

During the winter that followed his first Cashmere venture, he had to go down to Kalanpur about an order for wine for the wedding of the Maharaja's daughter. He had hoped to wangle a few days' shooting out of one of the great man's great men, but this did not materialize. But he did make an acquisition that he ever after re-

garded as one of the most important of his life. The Kalanpur kennels were at that time the most notable in India, and they swept the board at every dog show from Peshawar to Cape Commorin. The Maharaja, in recognition of James' devoted services to the Royal House, let it be known that the young man could have a present from the kennels of one of the dogs not needed for breeding. James walked slowly along the long lines of terriers and spaniels and retrievers, dalmatians and bulldogs and mastiffs. Almost he fell for the deep brown eyes of a cocker, and then almost he had decided on an Alsatian more imposing by far than any wolf, when suddenly his mind was made up for him. He looked into the yard of one of the kennels, and saw stretched in dignified repose on the straw a black Great Dane bitch. "You could have her if you like," said the kennel manager, "she's just a shade small, but her head's perfect." James looked down at the dipped black back and the straight fore paws, and the white *jabot* on her chest more perfectly marked even than a black bear's arrow. She was sitting with her legs crossed in front of her entirely oblivious of the world around, and there was something very noble in her serene detachment. Then she turned her brown eyes on to James. Some spark of intimacy was fired between, and she thumped two or three times on the ground with her great tail. "I'll take her," said James, and thus it came to pass that Bellatrix of Elson, by Rouvray of Bellary out of Boadicea of Elson, came to share his shooting experiences of the next six years.

James was not the first person to give his heart to be torn by a dog, nor was Bella (as she soon

became) the first dog to set up a human being as her God, but between them grew the deepest and strongest of affections. Dogs have many fine and noble qualities which endear them to their masters; courage and loyalty and intelligence and beauty. But as Bella's character developed (she was barely a year old when he got her) the trait that singled her out from the common run of dogs and made her more important to James than any other living being was her capacity for devotion. She would lie beneath his office table for hour after hour with her paws crossed and her head on her paws, happy enough as long as she was looking at James. If he went to pay a call, she would lie down outside the door into which he had disappeared and there remain motionless till he returned. More than once when he first got her she would be found hours after he had taken his departure by a side entrance still waiting at the front door, and refusing with polite yet firm resolution to pay heed to the efforts to persuade her that her master had gone. And when he had been out shooting and returned in the evening to camp she would bound out at the first sound of his footfall to cover him with rapturous embraces.

But she was not a one man dog in the sense that she ignored all other human beings except her master. She was a general favourite, and greeted all men with the same detached politeness, for she was indeed pleased to pass the time of day with anybody, so long as it didn't interfere with her worship at the shrine of her own particular God. And to the very loyal and understanding friend that looked after her for eight months while James was in England she gave much of

the devotion that she normally lavished on James, though all the time she was telling herself that her master had promised that he would return, and that he must surely come. That she understood everything he said to her James never doubted. Were he to go away for five days he would tell her so, and for four days she would lie passive; but on the fifth she would be up at dawn and waiting eagerly for the raptures of the home-coming.

Mangal regarded Bella with the greatest favour. She added to their establishment a touch of real dignity. What other Sahib had a dog like that the size of a small donkey ? Moreover, he delighted to see her obey his commands, for the ordinary Indian treated her with a terrified respect, and thought that Mangal must be dabbling in the black arts to be able to control her. Not that she was savage—far from it—though at a word from James she would sally forth from his verandah with a rush, and giving a couple of deep woofs which were guaranteed to make any unwanted caller run for a couple of miles from James' front door; after which she would give a few delighted pirouettes down the garden to show her satisfaction at her own cleverness, and return to flump down again on her rug.

Her life was James, and James was her life, and when she passed to the happy hunting grounds it was in his arms, and with her eyes fixed on his, and her tail giving a last feeble tap to let him know that in life and in death she had but one allegiance. Brave, loyal, great-hearted Bella ! She came to James at the moment when he only needed a companion to add the final zest to his expeditions, and she gave him a fellowship

whose worth cannot be measured in words.

James' one consuming thought now was to return to Cashmere and go off on a three months' trip to Ladak, but it appeared that this was going to be very difficult to do. He was entitled by the terms of his contract to five months' leave at the end of two and a half years in the country, but he had already used up two months of this the previous year, and a hint to Hargreaves that he wanted to spend three months' shooting was not at all well received. Hargreaves quite admitted that it takes all sorts to make a world, but to want to spend three months which one might be saving up to go to England in roaming round the borders of Tibet seemed to him to be an eccentricity bordering on idiocy.

Then occurred an act of Providence which offered James a solution of his difficulties. Young Marks of the Delhi Branch fell sick and was ordered three months in a hill station. He was sent to Murree, and, as James pointed out, his place in Delhi was already filled, and there wasn't room for two of them in Murree. So on the first of May he was back in Srinagar. He was greeted on arrival by Ahad Malik and Habiba whose delight knew no bounds, for the *izzat* of a Cashmere shikari is greatly raised when his Sahib returns to him year by year. James had decided not to take Mangal with him on this trip, and that worthy had begged for a period of leave in which to visit his village, assuring James that this was in nowise due to the rigours of Ladak, but to a series of unparalleled domestic catastrophes in his family circle. So Ahad Malik's brother-in-law was called in, an aged and stooping old fellow with a

straggly beard, who was able to conjure up a meal at a moment's notice out of nothing in particular, and march incredible distances without faltering. This, with last year's camp coolie, brought the size of the party up to four.

James hurried off to the Game Preservation Department, then under the admirable guidance of Major Wigram, to see about a block. In Ladak there are eight blocks open to sportsmen, which are allotted, like the Baltistan Nallahs, twice a year. James was just in time; seven had already gone, and he got the eighth, No. 4, Hanlé, the furthest from Leh. He also succeeded in getting a pass for the Ghangchemno (of which only three are issued bi-yearly), which is the home of the Tibetan antelope, for it was his intention to try and pick up everything on the license—Ovis Ammon, Bhurrel, Sharpu, Tibetan Antelope, and Tibetan Gazelle. He was now far more sophisticated, and he was able to adjust the preliminaries of the shoot with far greater self-confidence and speed than a year before, and without leaning on anybody's advice. In half an hour he had decided which of the cook's demands were reasonable and which were not (that worthy was of course extremely anxious to take enough delicacies to show off his art to the full), and had disposed of a dozen matters that would have caused him hours of mental indecision a year before. Speed was to be the keynote of this expedition, and in five hours after reaching Srinagar James was on his way to Ganderbal in a *dunga* (native houseboat).

Ganderbal was at its loveliest next morning when they arrived. The long sweep of poplars

was fresh with the greenness of spring, and the great stretch of turf was covered with a mass of blue and white iris, and Bella leapt from the bows and galloped madly up and down the first stretch of springy English turf she had ever encountered. They lost no time, and loaded up on to ponies, and started off up the Sind Valley. Three days later they reached Baltal, at the foot of the Zogi La Pass. The Zogi La is quite a low pass, and one that can be negotiated at any period of the year, and it does not in all probability merit the evil reputation that it enjoys. Nevertheless, the frequent avalanches while the path is under snow, and the biting winds that roar across it render it a much more formidable obstacle than many much higher passes. It is not officially open till the fifteenth of May, and James reached its foot on the eighth, so he had to make his own arrangements for coolies which are arranged for the journey Gond—Dras, to cover the whole forty odd miles.

It is essential to make the pass early, as later in the day the snow melts under the sun and the avalanches begin, so they rose at half-past three, and four o'clock found them passing on to the snow by the light of the moon. The snow itself was soft and powdery on top, but below it was frozen hard, and walking was easy. The thermometer stood many degrees below zero, and James in his many changes of raiment followed slowly in Habiba's footsteps as he breasted the slope. Bella had never seen snow before, and rushed up and down like one demented, but as they mounted higher and the path became steeper she saw that they meant business and settled down to pad along in James' footholes. The

weather favoured them; they reached the summit of the pass under a calm unclouded sky, and shortly after were breakfasting in the mail runners' shelter a little further on. By noon they were clear of the pass, which was just as well as they could hear the rumble of the snowfalls behind them, and they were sheltering in the Machoi bungalow. The fire that the chokidar had lit for them was very inviting, but James pressed on—with so much to be done in a bare three months no time could be lost. A mile beyond Machoi he was clear of the snow, and when at five in the evening the coolies reached Matayan they had earned their pay—seventeen miles, the majority across snow, and a start some hours before dawn.

When James woke next morning he found that he could hardly open his eyes; he had crossed the pass without snow goggles and was partially blind. Bella, too, was rubbing her head with her paws, and turning her blood-shot eyes to James to ask how these things came to pass. However, in an hour's time this began to mend, and he was able to complete the short march to Dras, and here they paid off the coolies. Four rupees eight annas didn't seem very much for the long march from Gond, but it was accepted with so much good will that James felt that he must have overpaid them.

The route from Srinagar to Leh is a highly organized one. Coolies and ponies are always forthcoming, and the rates of payment are fixed; the bungalows, too, are carefully organized and, when one considers the difficulties of maintaining them, extremely comfortable. Their visitors' books formed a valuable commentary on the travellers who had used the road in the last twenty

years. Anglo-Indian Colonels who had crossed the Zogi La yearly since '95 ("except '97 when I was up the Khyber"), invariably stigmatized the bungalows as filthy, and the chokidars as disobliging, occasionally adding a short disquisition on native states in general or the iniquity of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. Younger and more unsophisticated travellers would nervously suggest that "fuel is *very* expensive", or sometimes even venture on a little nervous commendation; and occasionally somebody would append a few libellous remarks about the behaviour of a fellow traveller.

James stopped for lunch in a grove a few miles south of Dras the next day, and here he found the camp of Middleton of Pottinger's Rifles, who had got across the Zogi La early, and had been rewarded by bagging a very decent ibex six marches short of Skardu, nearer Srinagar than which it is generally considered they cannot be obtained. Middleton was on the hillside, but his bearer made James welcome, for every servant in 'Pindi if he didn't know Collinson Sahib by sight at least knew Collinson Sahib's dog.

Five miles lower down they came on to a Balti polo ground where a match was in progress. There was a vast concourse of locals with a number of the ordinary pack ponies, the same as James was using for his baggage. Their sticks were large and massive, and rather like home-made hockey sticks, and the ball varied between the oval, the oblong and the spherical according to how it was hit. The ground was a small clearing about seventy yards by twenty between the hill and the Dras river.

The game started off in great style, every

player charging down the ground about sixteen annas to the rupee, but it soon slowed down to a half-hearted trot, rising at times to an indifferent canter. The sandy ground, the sticks, the ponies, the very ball itself, made it extremely difficult to keep the game moving, and it soon resolved itself into a melée which formed and reformed every time the ball moved. There were no chukkers and no rest of any sort, but when from time to time one of the players felt that he had had enough he just pulled out to the side, and rested for a minute before he hurled himself back into the fray. However, the Baltis seemed to extract a lot of fun out of the proceedings, and the shouts and shrieks which rent the air were in the best vein of a 'Pindi tournament when the Punjaub Lancers were getting home after extra time, after being three goals down at half time. The play continued till light was beginning to fall, and when it was no longer possible to see, everybody rode off in the utmost good humour on their exhausted steeds, and James hurried on to the bungalow at Kharbu.

Ten miles below Kharbu there is an imposing suspension bridge, and here the road forks right and left; right to Baltiston, and left to Ladak. From here on the country becomes daily more Mongolian in character. They began to meet Lamas in their sacred robes of red and yellow, and old men everlastingly turning their prayer-wheels, and women with their babies strapped to the baskets on their backs, and wearing their dowries of turquoise matrix on their high hats, or *perags*, dowries which are not inconsiderable, for the Ladaki is a polyandrist. And beside the road were the long "mani" walls, with

"chortens" rising up at the end like great squat pepper boxes, every stone of which was a prayer to Buddha. These walls had to be passed right-handed, for otherwise the soul instead of being so many prayers nearer heaven was put back a corresponding number; and beside them fluttered pennants whose every turn moved the pious soul who had hung them out a few steps nearer heaven on his spiritual journey. He passed the monastery of Lamarayu, most picturesque of the Ladak monastries, perched on a rock like a jack-daw's nest, and descended from it into the great gorge that leads to Kalatse and the Indus. It was most impressive descending between the huge cliffs rising hundreds of feet above on either side, making one feel like a character in Pilgrim's Progress descending into some particularly gloomy hell.

They were covering ground now at a great pace, and James footed it every inch of the way, as he was anxious not only to save the money most Sahibs spent on riding ponies, but also he wished to be as fit as could be when he started shooting. But the marches through this new and fascinating country with Bella to share its novelty had become an increasing delight, and he took a naive pleasure in outmarching Habiba and Ahad Malik, who, like the psalmist, delighted not in any man's legs. And on 17th May, fourteen days after they had left Srinagar, they reached Leh, which was a creditable but by no means remarkable pedestrian performance.

Leh, standing as it does on the Indian Gateway to the Karakoram route is a trade centre of some importance and immemorial antiquity. It is much larger than the first sight of it gives one

to suppose, and it stands back on the hills about five miles from the Indus, a strip of cultivation four miles in circumference clustering round a monastery-crowned hill. Beneath the monastery is a huge building, half palace, half fort, which was formerly the residence of the Kings of Ladak. In the centre of the town is the bazaar, where Bella made a sensation that a film star would have envied, which is crowded with every imaginable race and nationality; traders from Turkestan and Lhassa, Gilgit and Kabul, Gartok and Skardu. In the shops were little china cups from Lhassa and Pekin, and big garish bowls from the factories of Imperial Russia; there were great wrought-iron urns and samovars, inlaid with silver and copper; and embroidered robes that would have been the envy of any London drawing room, and rugs from Teheran, and snow leopard skins from Kashgar. Beyond the bazaar were the bungalows of the Moravian Missionaries and the doctor, and the hospital. The imposing domicile of the British Joint Commissioner, who only came up for two months in the summer, was in a grove to the east of the town, which was so severely aloof as to be almost a park.

James spent a day in Leh replenishing his supplies and resting his own and Bella's weary legs, and forming a base camp where he could leave every ounce of baggage not actually needed. Ahad Malik seized the opportunity to prevail on him to buy his servants a fur-lined waistcoat apiece. They also purchased seven dozen eggs, as beyond Leh they were unobtainable, and the rarefied mountain air would preserve them better than any water-glass. James had half decided to stop a few days in a nallah near Leh, where

rumour had it there was a forty-five-inch ibex, but he eventually changed his mind as there was talk of other sportsmen heading to blocks north and south of his own, and he wished to reach his quite undisturbed. In the early season before the game is disturbed, and while weather conditions restrict movement, Himalayan shooting is about seventy-five per cent. easier than in summer, and the sportsman has to make up his mind between enjoying first-class sport under rigorous conditions, or indifferent sport under ideal ones. Ahad Malik, the dread of whose life was that James would be forestalled by some other shikari's Sahib, was all for pressing on to Hanlé as quickly as possible. Accordingly they set off.

Hanlé lies seven marches from Leh right on the border of Chinese Tibet, over which frontier James had been required to give a solemn undertaking not to pass by a Government which had as yet failed to demarcate it. At every march the country became more and more barren, and the mountains merged into what the elementary technique of a sporting writer insists on describing as "wind-swept uplands". At night James and Bella cowered together in their tent as it creaked beneath the wind, and low though his funds were falling he could not regret the fur-lined waistcoats which were protecting his dependents from the blast. They had passed beyond the line of villages and trees and their rate of progress was somewhat slowed by having changed from pony to yak transport. There are now no wild yaks in British India except in the northern part of the Changchemno, where they are strictly preserved; but his domestic cousin is found all over Ladak. He is a noble animal; he

eats very little and he carries a great deal, but though sure he is exasperatingly slow.

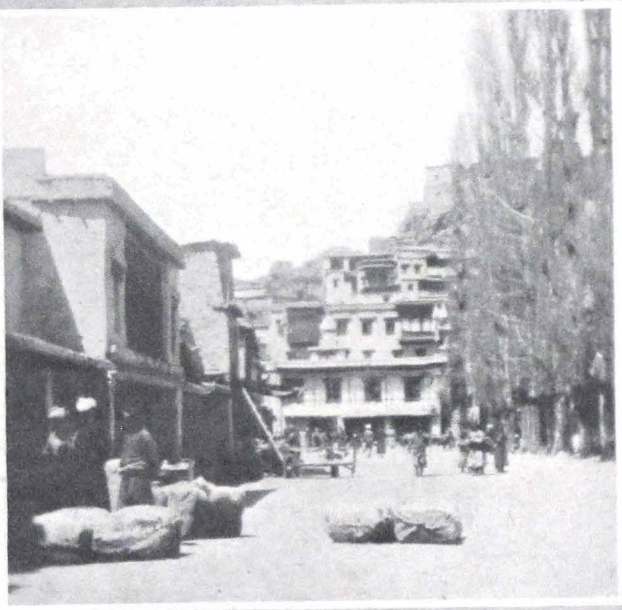
They began also to come across small herds of Kiang or wild horses, an interesting and quaint looking animal somewhat recalling an unstriped zebra. Occasionally, too, they met a shepherd and his flocks, usually with the rams carrying his household goods strapped to their backs, and one day Bella chased and slew one of these sheep. As she tried to explain to James she was only running it for the good of its health—sheep have notoriously sluggish livers—and when she gave it a playful bite it just fell down dead to spite her. But James hardened his heart and beat her till his arm ached. The shepherd was given three rupees and the sheep's carcass, but as he had never apparently seen money before they might have kept it for all the use it appeared likely to be to him.

On 26th May after sixteen days' marching they reached Hanlé, a few scraggly huts nestling under a hill on which the monastery stands. The news here was good, as the local shikaris reported several herds of ammon and bhurrel in the vicinity, and James after travelling for nearly a month towards his goal was burning with enthusiasm.

The next morning they were up at dawn, and climbed up on to the plateau to the west of Hanlé. They had not been going long before they spied a herd of six or seven ammon. James was as excited as ever, but he had learnt to greet these events with a sophisticated calm. He unshipped the telescope he had recently bought at a sale of surplus Government stores (binoculars are all very well for raking a hillside, but they will not

tell you how big a head is when you have spotted him) and began to contemplate them. On closer inspection, however, they proved to be inconsiderable heads, and so they forged ahead to the other side of the plateau. Here the ground dipped for about two miles till it rose again to a ridge beyond, and in this dip there were several herds of kiang and two herds of ammon, each containing small heads. But small though they were they were extremely impressive to James, who had once thought the Punjaub oorial the most magnificent of all sheep. Standing as they did a good ten hands at the shoulder and with horns as much as eighteen inches in circumference at the base they were indeed a fine sight. As they were sitting watching these ammon James spotted a herd of six which had so far escaped Ahad Malik's vigilance, and among them he marked down two considerably larger heads. It was with feelings of hardly concealed delight that he pointed them out, for he felt that now he was becoming much more the undisputed leader of the expedition.

After they had watched this herd for about twenty minutes it suddenly moved off across the ridge, quite why was not apparent, though possibly because some tiny puff of their wind had been carried across the intervening space. They immediately gave chase, but when they reached the ridge they were nowhere to be found. They cast forward two or three times without success, and then just as the sun was sinking they marked them down moving into a tiny corrie, about a mile further on. It was too late to attempt the stalk that night, so rather regretfully they returned to camp, though Ahad Malik assured James that the



(*Upper*) OVER THE INDUS
(*Middle*) LEH BAZAAR
(*Lower*) THE ROAD TO LADAK

ammon were making for the corrie to pass the night under the protection that it offered from the winds. Much to James' surprise they found the camp had been moved close up by the elderly cook (who, incidentally, had footed it all the way without a sign of fatigue), and Bella was waiting, like Jeptha's daughter, to rush out and welcome him.

The cold when they awoke at dawn next morning was intense, and all night long a gale had been shaking the walls of the tent to its foundations. James muffled himself up till only that part of his nose essential to respiration was exposed, and set off. They were soon on the edge of the corrie where they had last seen the ammon, and there, sure enough, they were cropping quietly at the grass in the centre of it. The corrie was an almost perfect saucer, about eight hundred yards across, and as things stood it was impossible for James to get nearer than four hundred yards to them; and the wind was blowing steadily from the east, which restricted his field of movement to the west side of the saucer. They watched them for about twenty minutes, and noticed that they were gradually feeding upwards towards a point a quarter of a mile to his right. So they backed away from the lip of the corrie, crept down the hillside, and hurried round the edge of the saucer to the spot in question. But even there they were a good three hundred yards from the ammon. Meanwhile, Habiba had noticed a tiny dip, running like a segment across the radius of the circle, below which was a heap of rocks. If they could make that heap of rocks they would be only a hundred and seventy yards from their quarry. Back they went and crawled to the

entrance to the dip, and slowly moved down it. Only Ahad Malik and James took part in the final advance, as the party had to be made as small as possible. Habiba and the village shikari were left, apparently in prayer, on the hillside behind.

When they had crawled down this dip for forty yards they were only ten yards from the rocks, whence a view of the ammon could be obtained. From where they were there was nothing to be seen except the top of a convex slope. Hardly daring to breathe they wriggled forward on their stomachs, and as they did so they saw down into the valley below. There were the ammon. Surely they must see them. Surely. Five more yards only. Now they were there and unseen, and as they reached the rocks even the stolid features of Ahad Malik wore an air of triumph. James rested a minute to get his breath, and then peeped at the herd. There were four males, and choosing what appeared to be the biggest—and judging a wild sheep's head is one of the most difficult things in the world—James fired. Down came the ammon, a mass of brown body and kicking legs. For a moment the rest of the herd paused, and then galloped off for fifty yards and stopped again. James fired again and, as he thought, hit, and the herd cantered away up the side of the corrie, and made their way over the top and disappeared. But as they went one of the rams fell rather behind, obviously wounded, so James fired three more shots till he, too, had gone.

Meanwhile, the original ram had struggled to its feet, tottered twenty yards and then flopped down into a little dip. James hurried after and found the gallant beast, though stricken by a

bullet which had shattered his off fore shoulder and then turned down into its intestines, still struggling on. With a shot that raked through his entrails from behind he put him out of his misery, and as he fell in a last convulsive struggle Ahad Malik was upon him to perform his *halal*. He was an enormous animal with a splendid white ruff, and his horns, which, as is generally the case with ammon, were well broken at the points through fighting, taped forty-one inches. In the meantime Habiba and the village shikari had arrived much elated at this success, and in a thrice the ammon's head was off, and it was despatched to the camp with a gobbet of flesh for Bella's dinner.

They now set off after the wounded ram, which they found was leaving a copious blood track behind him. When they reached the top of the main ridge they saw, or thought they saw, the herd moving steadily across the valley on the other side of the stream by whose waters their camp stood. James got out his telescope, and sure enough it was they, for there, three hundred yards behind, was the wounded ram following stiffly in their wake. All that day they followed without catching up, and finally they had to abandon the chase when benighted a good eight miles from camp. They eventually got back shortly before midnight in the most icy cold, to find the old cook in a great state of excitement and preparing to organize search parties. Only Bella's confidence in the eventual certainty of her master's return was unshaken, and she titupped round licking her chops for the last piece of ammon meat adhering to them.

James was so exhausted that he didn't leave camp till nearly noon the next day, and half way

to the spot where they had given up the chase the day before they met the yak men who had gone off with Habiba to look for the wounded ram. They had found him four miles further on, with his entrails hanging out. Already the eagles had gathered to their gruesome work, the headskin was spoilt and the eyes pecked out.

James had thus got the only two ammon his licence permitted rather quicker than he had bargained for, and so he now turned his attention to bhurrel. They spent two days in the same locality without finding any; very possibly the firing of a day or two before had frightened them off. Then they moved camp to the banks of another tributary of the Indus about five miles off, including a flock of six goats which they had hired in Hanlé to provide them with milk, whom Bella spent a lot of time dragooning into what she considered goatly behaviour. The next evening as they were topping a steep eminence at the head of the valley where their camp was, they sighted a herd of bhurrel, and further on another herd with some very big heads in it, seated composedly beneath a little precipice. They carefully withdrew and made for a point between the two herds which was also down wind, a proceeding which involved a détour of about a mile and a half. They had just completed the stalk and were crawling forward to a favourable position for a shot, congratulating themselves on their prescience, when suddenly from behind a heap of rocks, fifty yards away, half a dozen bhurrel which they had not previously seen got up and galloped noisily down the hillside. Ahad Malik turned his eyes to heaven in an agony of reproach to Providence, but there was nothing to be done.

The herd whom they had been stalking were now roused, and began to move slowly across the shale of the hillside, stopping to crop the grass as they went. The hill was quite devoid of cover for a good mile, and the sun was beginning to sink, and Ahad Malik kept on whispering that they were the father and mother of all bhurrel.

James therefore decided to try a stalk across the open. Leaving the shikaris behind he crouched low and made as much haste as possible over the plain. The herd fed slowly on without taking any notice of him at all, but when he was about five hundred yards off took fright and trotted off over a rise into the bed of a stream. As soon as they disappeared James doubled after them, and reached the rise as they were beginning to ascend the other side of the hill from the stream about three hundred yards off. Though apprehensive they were not unduly alarmed, and they kept stopping to have another look at him. He was in a state of great excitement trying to single out which of the rams was the biggest, for to him they all seemed exactly the same: he wished Ahad Malik was at his side, for he always knew the relative size of the heads to the nearest half-inch. However, this was no time for indecision, so he singled out the last bhurrel but one, as he stopped for an inquisitive stare, and let drive. The bhurrel fell slithering and kicking down the shale of the hillside, and he was certain that he had got him; meanwhile, the sound of his shot was reverberating round the valley, and the rest of the herd was making off up the hill, and as they went he put in another shot after them, which proved to be a clean miss. As he was reloading he noticed that the stricken bhurrel was

on its feet again and making its way up the hillside, which was bathed in the bright light of the setting sun. He thought of the pursuit of the wounded ammon and began to fire; shot after shot he put in as the ram struggled further and further up the hill, five hundred, seven hundred, a thousand yards away. He could see his bullets striking all round it. Finally, when the bhurrel was only a short way from the top of the mountainside he fluked a shot between its shoulders and brought it rolling down till it caught in a rock a hundred yards below. From the point of view of sportsmanship the fusilade was perfectly justifiable as he was in honour bound to finish off a wounded animal; but it may not have been very advantageous from other angles, as those two large herds of bhurrel passed rapidly and forever from his ken. It was a fine head of twenty-eight inches, but Ahad Malik regretfully informed him that the patriarch of the herd had got away.

The next day they tried lower down the valley towards Hanlé and late in the afternoon they spotted a huge herd of bhurrel resting on a steep hillside. The stalk was a simple one, though it involved a long détour up a very high hill, just under the crest of which the bhurrel were taking their siesta. James found in that rarified atmosphere climbing took a great deal out of him, and any effort to quicken his pace was impossible. He then edged his way slowly into view, and found himself, as it seemed, absolutely surrounded by bhurrel. During the stalk the herd had moved slightly higher up the hill. But before they had time to recover from their surprise he had managed to drop a very sizeable ram. He ought

to have got another or possibly two as they scuttled away, but his rifle jammed somehow and before he could get it straight the herd were half way down the hill; and he could only assuage his vexation by firing two fruitless shots after them, a thing he ought to have known better than to do. It was a fair head of twenty-four inches, but the whole herd was definitely smaller than the ones he had seen the day before.

It was now the third of June and more than a month of his leave had expired, so he decided to spend a few days in the low ground to the west of Hanlé to search for a Tibetan gazelle before he moved off to the Changchemno. The winter before had been an extremely severe one and a great many of the gazelle had perished, and though they were usually to be found on the sandy expanses of the river bed in fair numbers, in that year of grace they were few and far between. For two days they saw nothing, and Ahad Malik was very anxious to hurry on to the Changchemno. But James was determined to bag every species that he could, and as this was the only locality in which he would be able to bag a gazelle he insisted on stopping on a few more days. They were out again at dawn the next morning, but when by nine o'clock they had seen nothing they were about to call a halt till it was time for the evening stalk. Suddenly a gazelle darted out from behind a little hillock in front of them. It galloped for about four hundred yards and then stopped and grazed. apparently quite unconcerned. James and Ahad Malik sank to their stomachs, and began a dead slow stalk towards it. Now crawling on your stomach for even ten or twenty yards is not the mode of pro-

gression of the average man's choice, but crawling for four hundred yards is positively agonizing. Almost James was persuaded to rise up and chance it, but when they had gone two hundred yards the gazelle got up and made into the hills about half a mile away.

They set off across the sandy plain to pursue, and as they drew near they saw the gazelle was there sure enough sunning himself on a hillock. Again they got down on their stomachs and began to worm their way forward, for there was no other alternative except a stalk across the open. They were beginning to get excitingly near when suddenly there appeared behind them a Ladaki who had been sent off to reconnoitre in the opposite direction. Seeing James and Ahad Malik he raised up his voice in a frenzy of excitement and bid them make haste to slay the *goa* (gazelle) he had located. Upon which their gazelle immediately decamped. James gave the Ladaki a few winged words, but his sarcasms as to whether the messenger thought he and Ahad Malik were crawling about on their bellies for fun were quite wasted; so they made the best of it and set off with the now rather subdued Ladaki.

Sure enough he led them to a spot about a mile and a half away, and there they saw three hundred yards off a *goa* sunning itself on the sandy bank of a little rise, its pale fawn body harmonizing so closely with the sand as to be almost indistinguishable. They made a long détour and then began to crawl forward again till they reached a hummock of sand about a hundred and fifty yards from it. They had now been crawling about on the sand for nearly four hours under a baking sun and were beginning to

feel the strain, and so, as James peered over the hummock, it was with feelings of infinite relief that he saw that the *goa* was still there. He took careful aim and fired, but the target was small, and he was out of breath, and indeed all those thousand and one other excuses that make missing possible, and, therefore, shooting pleasureable, and he put a bullet a foot over its back. The gazelle sprang up and stood for a moment motionless. James kept his head. He took a steady shot and dropped it dead.

Great was his jubilation. Strangely enough he was more pleased at having shot this tiny gazelle than the far more imposing and more greatly-prized ammon; the pursuit had been so long and arduous, that his exhilaration came as much from physical relief as from pleasure in success. In spite of the fact that James had been pursuing those two gazelle for more than four hours, the whole stalk had taken place on an area not much bigger than Kensington Gardens. Ahad Malik was deeply impressed. The Sahib had taken control of the stalk from the very first, and had got his head. He realized that James had passed for ever out of his novitiate. Yet when James walked up to his victim remorse not pleasure was his dominant feeling. The gazelle lay there except for the little patch of blood at the shoulder as if it were asleep. The little fawn body was so soft, the eyes so gentle and appealing, that it seemed a crime to have taken its life.

The day following they set off for the Changchemno, and crossed the Indus which was now flooded by the first melting of the snows, swimming their yaks across the river to do so. Bella, too, cast herself in behind James' yak and

breasted the flood like Horatius. Three days later they had passed through the village of Saspul, the first village they had been in for a fortnight, threaded their way past the vivid ultramarine of the Pangong Lake, and reached the tiny village at the foot of the Mersemik La. Beyond this there is no further human habitation, only the arid plains devoid of life and vegetation stretching away into Tibet. Here they formed a base camp, leaving behind everything except the bare necessities of a week's trekking, as they intended to bag their antelope with the greatest possible speed and return whence they came. Hanlé had hardly been a hospitable neighbourhood, but there was even less about the Changchemno to make them wish to linger. James decided to leave Bella at the base camp, as the long marches were beginning to tell on her, and she was left behind with the tiffin coolie, though not without misgiving.

The passage of the Mersemik La (18,200 feet) proved to be less formidable than they had expected. They camped below the summit in the most intense cold, and crossed at dawn over the two miles of frozen and rather slippery snow. Once across the pass they continued northwards for about five miles and then turned east, marching for the next two days through country where they could hardly scrape up enough grass and twigs to light a fire. On the third day out they saw a couple of small herds of antelopes, and James was lost in admiration of these graceful little creatures as viewed through his telescope. They could not get up close to them however, and the Ladaki they had brought with them urged them not to dally as these were mere dwarfs

(*Upper*) LAMARAYU
(*Middle*) AT THE FOOT OF THE GLACIER
(*Lower*) TIBETAN GAZELLE

compared to the heads he was going to show them on the morrow. That evening they pitched camp in a sheltered corner of the hills, on a spot round which their Ladaki assured them that antelope swarmed like sharks after a buck nigger. There appeared to be some truth in this as within an hour of pitching camp, two large herds were feeding on a broadish plain not more than half a mile from camp. These they sat and watched for nearly two hours hoping that they would move towards them as a stalk seemed impossible. The tedium was relieved, however, by the advent of two wolves, one grey and one black, who came and played not far from them till the flash of James' glass sent them scampering away up the hill. In the meantime a couple of kiang had come up quite close to them, and suddenly getting their wind galloped madly off between the two herds, who also took fright and sped away across the plain with extraordinary grace. One herd passed close to their front, and, the devil entering into him, James fired two or three fruitless shots at them before they disappeared at full gallop over the hillside. He returned to camp under the unspoken reproaches of Ahad Malik, cursing himself for having roused up the neighbourhood obviously to no purpose.

Next morning they moved over the divide, which separated them from the next watershed, and as soon as they had crossed it they saw several large herds feeding quite contentedly below them. The first sportsmen to enter the Changchemno every year usually have little difficulty in finding antelope, as their habitat is so little visited that they are very unsophisticated, though once alarmed they are extremely sensitive

to man's approach. The herds were right out in the open and they sat and watched them feeding for about an hour. Then one of them browsed its way slowly behind a rise, and the Ladaki immediately jumped up, and motioning them to follow, retreated quickly behind the top of the divide. He lead them up a little side ravine into a nallah beyond, and then up under its further lip, and with much gesticulation he made it clear that the quarry was at hand. As James crawled over the hill he found to his surprise and pleasure that the wind which had been blowing from behind them where they had first viewed the herd, here seemed to be coming straight into their faces, although they had only moved from north-east of the antelope to north of them; but the winds of Ladak are so variable that this phenomenon signified nothing. The herd were only fifty yards off and feeding towards them. It was the most admirable bit of stalking, showing an unrivalled patience and knowledge of the ground and wind on the part of the Ladaki. James had no difficulty in singling out the big buck of the herd, and he dropped him dead, and he also had time to lay low another smaller one before they took to their heels. The bigger buck had a good head of twenty-five inches, and the smaller one a head of twenty-one inches, and there was general jubilation.

Ahad Malik now wanted to return to camp, but James insisted on going on to get the third head allowed on his licence. So they left the tiffin coolie and Habiba to skin the antelopes and set off. Tiffin coolies were a breed whose duties when there was a day's stalking always reminded James of the regimental transport of his Palestine

days, who hung about at the back till the shooting was over, and were then supposed to turn up from quite where they didn't know and provide food.

About an hour later they spotted another herd of about six, and James was able to work his way up a side nallah, and get to within about fifty yards of them. But after the alarms and excursions of the morning they were now thoroughly alarmed and they galloped off for about two hundred yards before he was able to get in a shot. James levelled his rifle and lay still, and sure enough the herd stopped to take stock of the queer object which was causing them this possibly unnecessary alarm. He took careful aim and brought down a fine buck of about twenty-four inches. It was a creditable shot, but then success is the most certain means of improving one's marksmanship.

As he was walking over to his victim he saw another small buck lying down on the hillside about three hundred yards away. He was rather at a loss to account for this, but he finally concluded that his bullet must have passed through the dead buck and struck another one behind, which indeed was the case. He immediately set off in pursuit, and the buck rose up and made away with an obviously broken foreleg. James continued in pursuit and managed to hit the poor beast far back in the stomach, which only made it renew its efforts to escape. Every time they were getting up to it it would rise up and speed forward to lie down another quarter of a mile further on, pursued by a fruitless bullet from James. His shooting was getting more and more erratic, partly from vexation and partly from the

effects of trying to run at that high altitude. He had fired seven of the eight cartridges he had with him when he began the chase, so he was compelled to hold his fire till he was certain of hitting, and he had to follow that stout little buck for three miles before he could administer the *coup-de-grâce.* Everybody was delighted with the day's results: the Ladaki because his *izzat* was much magnified; the Cashmeris because they would be clear of this barren and dry land sooner than they expected; James because he had slain good heads; and the yak-men because they had meat in abundance.

They now started back to Leh where James was going to bag a couple of sharpu and perhaps another bhurrel before he went on to the Hemis festival, the great Ladaki religious revival that takes place at the Hemis Monastery near Leh on the tenth day of the fifth Buddhist month, which falls at the beginning of July. They crossed the Mersemik again without difficulty, and parted with sorrow from their Ladaki, who was the most intelligent local shikari James had ever met, or ever was to meet, and here they had a reunion with Bella of the most devastating nature, for her faithful heart was wondering where her master could have got to. By 20th June they were at the foot of Chang La, the pass which separated them from the Indus Valley and Leh, and in a land which was in comparison to the regions they had just left positively flowing with milk and honey. The hillsides were the home of innumerable marmots, and one of these venturing too far from its home was caught and slain by Bella, who stalked up behind a rock, and charged out on it before it had time to get back to its front door.

Remembering what had happened to her when she ran a sheep she walked exceedingly warily, but when she found her efforts won her commendation she spent the rest of the day fruitlessly scouring the hills to increase her bag.

The ascent of Chang La was a long and weary one. They started at dawn, and by midday James was expecting that every minute would reveal the summit of the pass, but it was not till two o'clock that they were crossing the three miles of unbroken snow at the summit. It was difficult work as the snow was melting and the ponies were soon struggling up to their hocks in snow. Then suddenly they turned on to a snow-covered river bed, and before they knew what had happened they were up to their bellies in soft snow, only the loads on either side preventing them sinking deeper. There was nothing for it but to unload the ponies and manhandle the loads up to the top of the pass. This they did laboriously enough, but even then their troubles were not over, for the afternoon sun had melted the snow on the further side of the pass which was a sheet of running water. However, by five o'clock they were clear of it, and found themselves descending at a great rate by a good path.

Suddenly, from below them was borne up the enchanting melody of bells. Nearer they came and nearer, ringing out clear and rythmically as they approached, till finally James rounded a bend and saw below him the imposing cavalcade of a party of Lamas setting out for Lhassa. Each of their mules had tied round his neck a beautiful little silver bell, and below it hung a great red plume. They were fine mules, too, finely groomed and caparisoned, and their appearance

and condition would have done credit to any pack battery. The Lamas passed James in gloomy silence, but the drivers saluted him genially enough as they strode away into the hundreds of desolate miles between them and the end of their pilgrimage.

It was almost dark when they reached the foot of the hills, and there was still a considerable stream to be forded, and the camp was eventually pitched on the edge of the first village in pitch darkness, and with men and animals absolutely exhausted.

James had been allotted the Igu and Chimré blocks for sharpu, and here he spent the next nine days. So far the trip had gone with a swing throughout, and everything had turned out according to plan. James was becoming extremely self-confident. It is rarely wise to provoke the Gods; they immediately withdraw their favours. For seven days James quartered those two long nallahs, and drew absolutely blank. Not once did he see the smallest trace of a bhurrel, the remotest vestige of a sharpu. He grew in turn angry, despondent and hopeless. He felt that the luck must turn if only he went on, and then at the end of a fruitless week he came to that hopeless state of mind when he set out in the morning expecting to return empty-handed at night. On the evening of the eighth blank day (when to his extreme annoyance he had to buy a sheep, because he was unable to supply himself with meat) he was wending his way wearily towards camp, when he met a youth who told him that he had seen a herd of forty bhurrel on the low ground near the camp. James was sceptical, as it was obviously not bhurrel ground, but he

told the youth to lead him to them. This he refused to do, affirming that were he to leave the ponies he was grazing for a moment ravening wolves would descend out of the mountains and devour them. However, an offer of eight annas was enough to make him abandon his charges to the wolves, and they set off over the hill.

When they had reached the top it was almost dark, and they were just thinking of giving up the chase when suddenly they saw in front of them a large herd of sharpu, which despite the contrary assertions of the naturalists were his Punjaub oorial to the last detail. James motioned to Ahad Malik and Habiba to stay where they were, and started to work his way forward. It would be dark in another ten minutes, so that there was no time to lose. The herd spotted him at once, and were watching in questioning surprise, and so without more ado he picked out what he took to be the biggest and fired. In the darkness and the excitement of the ensuing stampede he could not see the result of his shot, but he was convinced that he had not missed. But Ahad Malik was convinced that he *had,* as he had seen nothing from where he was waiting behind, and the best he could suggest was that perhaps James had wounded one. Great, therefore, was their jubilation when they walked across to where the herd had been and found a large sharpu lying dead. It was a very good head of a fraction under thirty inches, which in those parts was considered most reputable.

The next day they were back early on the hills, where they had last seen the sharpu, and here they encountered yesterday's shepherd lad, and a friend of scarcely greater intelligence, both thirst-

ing for further tips. They blithely informed James that they had been out and seen the sharpu, who, on their appearance, had decamped. Surely that was a bit of information worthy of reward ? James cast them forth, but the damage was done, and the sharpu had disappeared for good.

It was now time to call a halt to shikar for a few days, and to mix with his fellow men again, as the Hemis festival was about to begin, and after the rigours of the last two months he was not sorry for the prospect of a short breather.

CHAPTER VI

A FESTIVAL AND SOME FOOTSLOGGING

THE monastery of Hemis is the most important monastery of Indian Tibet, and its festival is the lodestar of every Ladaki within five hundred miles, a sort of Ascot, and Cup Final, and Oberamergau, and Eucharistic Congress rolled into one. James prinked himself up as well as he could at the prospect of seeing Europeans again for the first time for nearly two months, but his beard he refused to trim; it was just reaching a glossy black maturity, and he would not have removed it for the Viceroy himself. As he turned up the gorge in which the monastery stood, he found himself among scores of pilgrims leading in ponies laden with fodder and provisions, and pushing and struggling forward so as not to be late for the opening scenes of the festival. His tent was already pitched by the old cook in the charming garden which had been allotted to the Europeans (a garden in Ladak denoted a nice grove of trees where the grass is lush and cool—the English significance of the word does not apply), which was at that time very fragrant with real English dog roses. James' modest encampment looked remarkably shabby beside the pavilions of some of the European visitors, which would have made a very creditable showing, he thought, at the Field of Cloth of Gold; but he had little time for galling comparisons, as he and Ahad Malik hurried off to the monastery which

stood back, tier on tier, in the dark recesses of the gorge, held against the cliff as if some unseen hand were drawing it back.

James was shown into the European Gallery, and Habiba and Ahad Malik were taken off by a Lama, looking rather self-conscious as James was amused to note, to the places reserved for servants. The scene was an amazing one. The monastery courtyard, which was the stage, was surrounded on three sides by a line of low out-buildings, and the fourth side opposite the gallery where they were sitting was formed by the main monastery building. Leading up to the great door in the middle of it was a huge flight of steps, which was the entrance and exit of the performers, and above it was a great silk banner with a colossal Buddha woven on it, hanging right down the whole length of the monastery wall. On every roof, in every window, and crowded in a dense and ever-thickening throng about the courtyard and up to the very steps of the monastery, were hundreds upon hundreds of country people, dressed in their best, the women with heavy *perags* gay with turquoise matrix, and the men in their long grey smocks as often as not turning a prayer-wheel. Their pleasant, smiling faces, the chatter and laughter and animation were so different from the rather sullen Indian crowd that James felt he could have gazed quite contentedly at them for hours without even looking at the pageant. It was indeed a most superb setting, with the huge cliff rising behind like a backcloth, and the bright turquoise of the sky above. It was an effect that no English stage manager with ten times the means at his disposal could have achieved, so absolutely

"right" did the thronging people and the group of red-robed Lamas on the steps and the fluttering flags seem. Yet the whole was extremely oriental, half finished and hugger-mugger. There were no concerted entrances or exits, the masks were ill-adjusted and plainly revealed the faces beneath, priceless silks were worn over shoes without soles and with cheap and tawdry gloves full of undarned holes, and at the most solemn moments of the performance a pair of clowns would be fooling round the edge of the stage keeping the audience at one end of the arena in roars of laughter. Yet, who would have had it otherwise? For efficiency and stage management would have robbed it of half its charms. It was what Mr. Aldous Huxley noted at the Indian National Congress he attended. The young men of Thermopolyæ never do *anything* properly.

James glanced round the gallery. It was a queer assortment of visitors. At one end was a little group of European Buddhists watching the performance with a mixture of reverence and self-consciousness: reverence because this was an outward and visible manifestation of their Faith; self-consciousness because they knew that the solid phalanx of orthodox European opinion at the other end of the gallery was regarding them as cranks and hypocrites, and were asking themselves what their compatriots could see in a religion whose outward and visible manifestation was a mumbo-jumbo like this. The Buddhists gave back a half defiant, half pitying look at the hearty brigade, a more in sorrow-than-in-anger regret that the true inwardness beneath should be lost on these blunter intelligences. Fortunately, the opposing factions were separated by a small

group of foreigners; a Swede with a long blonde beard, a great Viking of a man who could speak no language except his own—Heaven knows how he had managed to get as far as Hemis; a little Frenchman who looked like a barber's assistant, and who, when asked his opinion about anything he had experienced in India from the Viceregal Ball to the climate of Ladak, replied that it was "bien joli"; but it is uncertain whether this was a statement of his feelings, or the outcome of a native civility, or merely because he considered it was the only answer likely to be intelligible to people who addressed him in Public School French. There was also an American and his wife with a ciné camera, the latter more Hollywood than anyone could have dared to hope, in Jodpur breeches, a silk riding coat, and a Lincoln Bennett hat; nor had a supply of cosmetics been omitted from her very extensive travelling arrangements.

James ranged himself with the full-blooded hemen at the further end of the gallery. There was a captain of Sappers from Roorkee, that goodly training ground of shikaris, who had come up from Simla over the Sutlej route, getting a forty-five-inch ammon on the way; the wife of the mission doctor from Leh; a gunner major, just arrived from Dras where he had shot a red bear of which he was inordinately proud; and a tall handsome English woman with a younger girl who had braved the journey from Srinagar alone and unattended. About ten minutes after James had arrived the two ladies were joined by a rather unprepossessing little man with a vivid red beard, whose garments, James was relieved to see, were even more creased and maculate than

his own. James settled down next the major, and he soon found that that worthy was not the strong, silent brand of warrior. He was subjected to a hail of conversation, but he discovered before long that all that was required of him was to punctuate the account of the zeal, perspicacity and endurance with which the major had outwitted the most cruel, cunning and treacherous of red bears, with "did-you-reallys" and "how-interestings", while he himself enjoyed the spectacle below.

"You know what its all about?" he asked James. James was foolish enough to say no. The major's eye kindled; he changed into his conversational top-gear and shot off. "The motive of the whole thing is a sort of propitiation of evil spirits, and their exorcism"—he was rather proud of the word—"in order to ensure good for the coming year. The whole thing is symbolic of the life of the soul after death, and it shows the evil spirits that assail it on its journey". At that moment the band of four cymbals and a dozen drums from under their balcony burst into a tumult of music, and temporarily stilled the major's flow of eloquence. Down the steps came two Lamas wearing huge heraldic looking hats, and swinging censors of incense, and behind them followed thirteen dancers in beautiful silk robes of red and yellow and purple, and wearing broad-brimmed hats above which rose a tall crown, eighteen inches high, on which a skull was outlined. They danced sedately round the ring to the slow and wailing music, till finally, they made exit in pairs up the steps; and as each pair left the arena one of the Lamas sounded a fanfare on the trumpet. "That's a sort of opening ballet,"

said the major, "you missed the first dance; before the *Shusog*", he added with relish. Some people would have called him the Abbot, but it is not every day that one gets the chance of airing your knowledge of the vernacular. "But the next turn will be on in a minute," he continued, lowering his voice, "and I'm sure I don't know what the ladies will say to *that*. Somebody ought to ask the *Shusog* to make them go out. Still, let's hope they won't understand", and he dropped his voice a tone lower to explain (entirely incorrectly) what it was that the ladies wouldn't know what to say to.

At that moment a roar of laughter came up from the arena. Down below the stage was held by a couple of clowns, who were mimicking one of the little incarnations (children born in the monastery for whom it is claimed that they are re-incarnations of Buddha, and who are brought up to fill the great and holy places of monastic life). The child hurried rather frightened up the monastery steps with his attendant Lama, and the clown returned to an unfailing stock-in-trade and started a vigorous search for fleas in the hat of one of the spectators, a piece of realism that was received with rapturous merriment. Meanwhile, Lamas were hurrying about the arena to purify it both in the spiritual and corporate sense before the next act. The major's eye glistened. "This is the turn," he said, "do you think I ought to speak quite bluntly to one of the married women?" But before he could resolve this problem the crowd round the monastery steps parted, and sixteen dancers entered, bearing with them a tambourine and a bell to frighten away evil spirits. They moved slowly round the stage

one after another in three-four time in a dignified and stately series of evolutions, and passed in pairs like the figures of the previous act up the steps. James looked enquiringly at the major. He could see nothing there to arouse even the most British pudicity. "I remember now," the major whispered back, "the programme's been altered since the new *Shusog* came; it'll be the first turn after lunch. I'll tell the women not to come up."

The beginning of the next act was heralded by the entry of a Lama carrying a long brass pot, followed by other Lamas swinging censors and carrying immense shawms. Behind them came as strange a procession as could well be imagined. Eight venerable and portly figures in fantastic masks descended the steps, and with a solemn portentiousness entered the arena. They were dressed in the most superb embroidered silks hanging in ample folds down to the ground, such as would have made a sensation in any London drawing room. The heavy features of their masks were fixed in detached and cynical grins, with just such an expression as the gods they represented might be expected to survey the affairs of mortals. James noted with pleased satisfaction that one of them was Winston Churchill to the life. Leading this procession was the Chief of the rulers of the spirit world, above whose head a royal canopy was borne aloft. Slowly, with benign and majestic mien the eight figures twisted and turned round the court, and in their wake followed two devils or demon kings, each with a third occult eye clasped to his forehead. Next there entered sixteen heavenly beings of secondary rank, majestically, but less

majestically, clad, and without masks, and they, too, joined in the dance, till the whole arena was full of gyrating figures.

Then the dance came to an end, and the eight gods, and the sixteen lesser deities seated themselves in two opposing rows at right-angles to the gallery, and at each end of the row of gods sat one of the demon kings. As the ceremonial and the symbolism became more and more involved the European visitors, and very probably the majority of the Ladakis, gave up trying to understand it, and contented themselves with enjoying the effects which it achieved. When the gods were seated there came in two small boys, one carrying a plate on which was a small clay model of a generatory organ, and another with a plate on which there was a shell, and these they laid before the gods. It was the act of primitive symbolism that had so aroused the major's curiosity, but as neither he nor anybody else in the gallery realized what the boys were carrying he might have spared himself his fears for the blushes of the ladies. In point of fact during this part of the performance he was busily engaged in talking red bear to the neighbour on his right.

Meanwhile, two imps of mischief, two breakers of the soul's peace, had tried to disrupt the repose of the heavenly beings, and were hovering rather faint-heartedly round the edge of the arena, and the lesser dignitaries had risen and recommenced their *pas seuls*. Gradually the music worked itself into a frenzied crescendo, till at last there rushed down the steps two demons robed in light blue, each running with frenzied screams this way and that between the gods, till they joined in turn with each of the devil kings in a frenzied

THE HEMIS FESTIVAL, WITH THE MASK APPARENTLY CARICATURING MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL IN THE FOREGROUND.

final dance, and the gods and devils and spirits and attendants danced their way out of the arena.

That finished the morning's performance, and the Europeans rose in a body to return to their grove for lunch, amid a chorus of admiration and much speculation as to what it was all about. James, himself, was completely at a loss, and even the major's glib explanations were wearing a little thin; he was still, however, confidently asserting that what he imagined a normal young man would regard as the *bonne bouche* of the performance would take place after lunch. "Mind you're in plenty of time," he cautioned James as they entered their tents.

The preliminaries of the afternoon performance consisted of an opening ballet very much the same as that of the morning. Then the stage was cleared, and a group of Lamas entered and placed two small carpets in the middle of the arena, a triangular dark blue carpet to represent heaven, and a square tiger skin with a red border to represent earth. On the heavenly carpet was placed a small veiled object. James glanced at the major for interpretation, but that worthy having had a talk with one of the mission doctors and having found out that he had missed the very incident that he had been so busy advertising was hotly engaged in talking shikar to the sapper. Behind these Lamas came more robed figures carrying a large silver vessel like a coffee pot, and a plate of barley and a cup. With due solemnity the wine was poured into the cup, raised to heaven, and then with an incantation thrown away. As soon as this was finished there leapt into the arena two weird and fiendish ghouls dressed as

skeletons who danced across the stage, backward and forward, up and down, rather like the cross movement in the Swedish Dance of James' youthful children's parties. Suddenly they paused in their mad career, held themselves poised, and rushed forward to seize the cloth from off the veiled object, revealing a small clay figure lying on its back, and then they dashed out of the arena. No sooner had they gone than their place was taken by a procession of demons, or such James took them to be, followed in turn by further reinforcements of evil spirits dressed in skeleton clothing, and in the skins of leopards and tigers. The leader of this procession seized up a wheaten loaf, and going north and east and south and west he threw a piece of bread to each of the four points of the compass, and then he turned and chopped the little clay figure into a thousand fragments, while the accompanying demons rushed madly to and fro till at last in a last spasm of delight at the destruction of the image, they flung themselves from the arena leaving the audience in a state of mystified amazement.

This was the end of the afternoon performance, and as they were preparing to leave, the Grand Lama made his exit from his gallery across the courtyard. As he passed up the steps with his attendants the country people rushed forward to touch the hem of his garment, and threw themselves on their knees in his path. It was a singularly impressive scene.

The major was giving a small tea party to the more exemplary English visitors. This meant that the English Buddhists were excluded, of course, for as he, himself, said, "Damn it all,

Mrs. —— (excuse my language but I feel strongly about it), they've got a lot of Lamas with incense in their tents now. Its making the wogs think they're as good as we are. I'll write to the British Joint Commissioner about it." James, however, was honoured with an invitation. He found china tea cups, and a large camp table with a white table cloth, and plum cake and lump sugar; it all seemed very luxurious after the rigours of the last few weeks.

After tea he was taken off for an interview with the Grand Lama. He was led up long flights of gloomy stairs and through unending stone passages to a room at the very top of the building. Here he found the Grand Lama, a dear, fat, kindly old gentleman, sitting in the window in a high-backed chair, wearing a faded red robe. It would be overstepping the truth to invest him with either the beauty of holiness or the glamour of the contemplative life, for to James he seemed no different to any other fat and kindly old gentleman. They conversed together for a few minutes through an interpreter, for the Holy Man had but little Hindustani, and James' Ladaki was equally limited. After James had assured the Grand Lama that attendance at this most wonderful of festivals had ever been the dream of his life, and when the Grand Lama had replied that the success of the festival was in no small measure due to the presence of the heaven-born, the Holy Man asked a few pertinent questions about Bella, stories of whose size and beauty, suitably magnified, had come to his ears. He also enquired as to the truth of rumours that kept reaching him of the invention of a flying machine, of which he was frankly incredulous. James having answered

this as well as the interpreter would let him the conversation showed signs of languishing, and he made his farewells, but not before one of the household had buttonholed him in the passage, and explained that the one thing that would make the Grand Lama's life for ever joyous was the possession of an electric torch. Perhaps he would send one from Srinagar ?

The next morning they were up early to see the last half of the performance, but with characteristic oriental lack of arrangement nothing happened. After a wait of four hours there was a re-representation of some of the dances of the day before, and then the Europeans dispersed rather disgruntled to lunch, though the Ladakis who were not bound by the same fantastic devotion to punctuality and order, remained as good-humoured as ever. Europeans were not allowed to attend the afternoon performance, which was the local equivalent of " for adults only ", and so James packed up his belongings to depart, but not before a slight toll had been levied on him for the monastery funds. He went off down the gorge again, leaving behind the scene of one of the most remarkable spectacles it had ever been his good fortune to see.

It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and James' patient attention to the major's stories bore its reward. Before he left, the major informed him that after his experiences with the red bear, shooting sheep would seem very tame, and that he, James, could have his sharpu nallah, almost next door to Hemis, if he liked. James stifled a desire to tell the major about bears and sheep and the respective merits of those who slew them, and accepted with alacrity; in-

deed he was so far mollified as to promise the major to go and see the famous pelt in Mohomed Baba's workshop when he got back; when it proved to be a very indifferent specimen if the truth be told. So he left the major hinting darkly at unseen depths of pornography in the afternoon's performance, and spent three days in his nallah trying to pick up the other couple of bhurrel allowed him on his licence. But there was nothing at all sizeable, and though he found several herds with small rams he let them be. But on the lower ground at the mouth of the nallah he walked straight into a herd of sharpu on the very first morning of his stay, not five hundred yards from his camp, a striking contrast to the luck he enjoyed during his stay at Imré. It was a simple stalk for the wind was with him, and the herd was grazing on the lower slopes of an easy ascent, and he brought off a right and left, two rams of twenty-seven and twenty-five inches dropping stone dead. They were not difficult shots, but James was delighted with his marksmanship, and felt that he could now really count on his shooting, though in point of fact he ought to have been thoroughly ashamed of himself: firstly, because he was shooting to gratify his marksmanship, and secondly, because he had shot one sharpu more than his licence permitted.

There was now nothing to keep him in Ladak, for he had shot everything on his licence, so he set off back to Cashmere where he promised himself a rest after the exertions of the last two months. On his way he paid a visit to the legitimatist King and Queen of Ladak, whose dynasty had long since been deposed. They were just a pair of delightful Ladakis, obviously people

of breeding, but entirely devoid of any of the trappings of royalty, actual or deposed. He took them a present of turnips, with which they were delighted, for turnips were a rarity in Ladak, and the Royal Pair were reported to be as poor as church mice. Their house was charming, and built, after the Ladaki manner, on exactly opposite principles to English houses, the bottom rooms being small and squalid to a degree, and the higher up the house you went the more palatial did the rooms become.

James returned to Cashmere as fast as his legs would carry him, and covered the hundred and fifty odd miles to Dras in seven days, which was very creditable marching. His finances, as usual, had sunk to a very low ebb, and he had to practise every possible economy. He scoured the hillsides in the evening for chakor to reduce the butcher's bill; the pony loads were reduced to five now that most of their stores were consumed, although they were carrying in their place a fine collection of heads, to the admiration of those they passed on the road, and James' intense secret gratification; and to save the trifle that the use of the bungalow cost them they camped every night in the villages. On the night they stopped at Kalatse he went to call on the Moravian Missionary and his wife, two delightful Yorkshire people with all the charm and exquisite manners of those who live very simple lives. They were making few converts, and their presence was much resented by the Lamas, but their medical work, and the example of their lives was of great value, and it gave James much food for thought when he considered how these people devoted the twenty best years of their life to living in a remote

corner of the earth where for whole months in winter they never saw another European, and where they had in summer, perhaps, a dozen visitors. In their own words they lived in winter on the memories of the summer. Once every six years they returned to the din and hustle of civilization to find themselves in a short time quite worn out, and anxious to return to Ladak. They made James very welcome, and so seldom did they see a fresh face that they were loth to let him go. James left Kalatse more deeply impressed than he would have cared to admit.

He reached Dras on 15th of July, and stopped there for three days to try and get news of a red bear. Truth to tell he was anxious to wipe the eye of the loquacious major. But by the middle of July all the red bear are off to their summer quarters, probably on the Deosai plains, so he hurried back over the Zogi La to Cashmere. The Zogi La was a very different place now, with fresh grass everywhere and scores of simple and delightful flowers in primitive reds and yellows. The pass seemed so gentle—there was not a vestige of snow on it—that he did not realize that he had crossed the divide till he found himself following the downward course of a stream. As they began to descend the change between Cashmere and Baltistan became visible; trees began to spring up, and the grass seemed greener and the flowers more profuse. And then suddenly they rounded a bend and the Sind Valley was beneath them, green hills, giant pines, and sparkling river. It was, indeed, a sight for tired eyes after ten weeks in Ladak. James passed down the hill feeling extraordinarily exhilarated. He was returning to the land flowing with milk and

honey, nor was he returning empty-handed.

Half way down the hill he met two immaculate youths, who turned out to be subalterns in a famous regiment of the Line, wearing suede shoes, tartan stockings, delightfully creased shorts, and silk shirt open at the neck. They looked at James' black beard, torn khaki shirt and crumpled shorts, at his stockings cobbled together by the cook with twine and yak's wool, and at his battered and crumbling *chapalis,* as if he were a peculiarly unsavoury Chingangtook. They had camped the night before at Baltal, and were ascending the Zogi La (so that they could say that they had cast their shoe over Edom) in much the same spirit as Burton entered Mecca. James described to them in a few glowing phrases the glories of Ladak and the hardships a number of the weaker sex had endured to get there, and having completely pricked the bubble of their aspirations, and taken all the savour out of the stories they were preparing for a mess new to India, he passed on his way. Sad to say he was becoming a shooting snob. He reached Sonamarg that evening, which he found like Epping Forest on a Bank Holiday. There were half a dozen married encampments complete with gramophones, tea baskets, and lovely ladies in resplendent garments. It was no place for him, with his outfit growing more and more meagre and shabby every day, so he camped below the village as unostentatiously as he could.

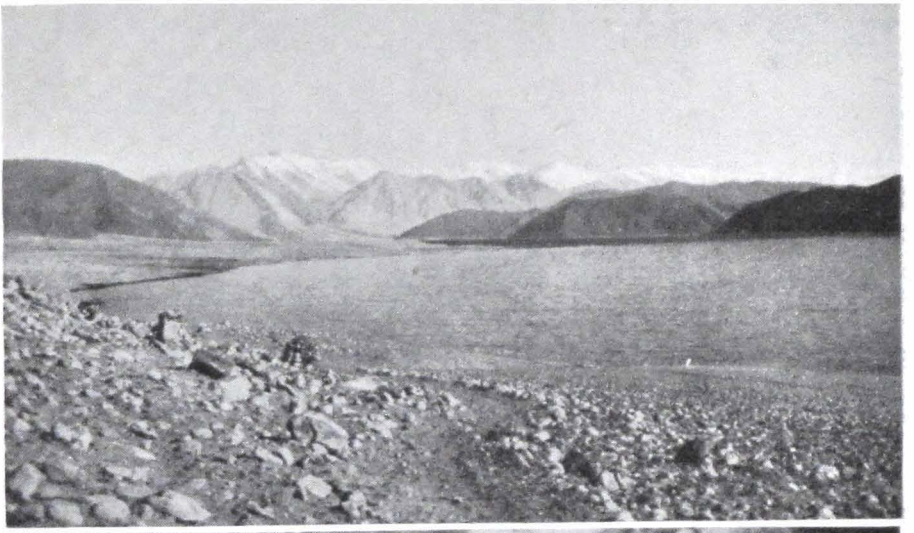
The next day he moved to a little village on the west bank of the Sind, a couple of miles below Gond, where he stopped for the last week of his leave, eight long lazy days of walks with Bella, and visits of inspection to the mills and the

threshing floors and the villages round about, and bathing in the ice-cold waters of the Sind, and late mornings and lazy sun-drenched afternoons. After his efforts of the previous ten weeks he felt it was deserved, as he sat at his tent door and watched the long procession of summer tourists passing up and down on the opposite bank.

As the various cavalcades passed the camp their shikaris would drop in to see Ahad Malik and hear the news of how the other sportsmen were faring. And Ahad Malik's old eye positively kindled with enthusiasm as he showed them James' twelve heads, and Habiba was able to adopt an air of great condescension to Chota shikaris whose furthest ventures was a short trip up the Shigar Valley, or a month in Kistiwar. It gave Ahad Malik especial delight, for Cashmere shikaris are a race of snobs. Sometimes they get a Lord Sahib (was not old Razak Khan shikari to the Duke of Connaught ?) or an American, which means money, more money, and still more money, and then they are very content. Failing this, there is sometimes a Commissioner Sahib, or a Chief Secretary, a great man in his province, who treats them with scrupulous politeness, and give them a liberal but not prodigal largesse. And in default there is the great run of the Army in India. Cavalry officers they would have for preference (a liking shared by young ladies at County Balls), and after these there is the mass of the infantry and gunners: a "*ghora paltan*", of course was to be preferred to a "*kala pultan*", for a white man commanding other white men, even humble white men, was obviously more impressive than one commanding such as they. But James was a mere unknown box-wallah, a

vendor of goods, and as Ahad Malik understood it, a member of a caste that other Sahibs despised. Taking such service laid one open to the condescension of shikaris with richer or more imposing employers. But with the heads to decorate their camp it was a different matter. He and his Sahib could show results that a Major-General would have been pleased with, and that a Lieutenant-Governor would not have cavilled at. So his *izzat* rose accordingly, and *izzat* is the Alpha and Omega of everything to the Oriental.

In the evenings they would go out and search the mountain sides for black bear, padding silently through the great forests, or lying in wait by the village fruit trees. One evening they come to a huge clump of bushes when suddenly the placid Ahad Malik became almost livid with excitement, and pointed to the bushes in a frenzy of gesticulation; evidently the monster was within. The Cashmeri has a natural fear and hatred for the black bear. For generations it has played havoc with his crops and his fruit trees, and on occasions it has left his relations with scars that they have borne for life, so it was not surprising that Ahad Malik, who kept his wise old head far better than most Cashmere shikaris in the presence of game, should lose his self-control. For a minute they stood there; there was something moving in the bushes, not more than twenty yards off. Then a black nose poked furtively from the bushes, and finally a huge black bear ambled down the path towards them. James threw up his rifle and fired. So close was the monster to them that it seemed impossible that he should miss. The bear turned tail and dashed down into the under-



(*Upper*) THE PANGONG LAKE.
(*Middle*) RIGHT AND LEFT AT SHARPU.
(*Lower*) BHURREL GROUND.

growth of the hillside. James was speechless with rage and indignation. Had this happened a year ago he would have accepted it with calm and meekness as due to his own inefficiency. But now —— ! That he, who had bagged the greatest of all sheep, and brought off a right and left at sharpu, and slain two antelope with one shot, should have missed this colossal target (for this bear made the bear of his expedition to Punch seem positively puny) at fifteen yards seemed impossible. He refused to believe it. The bear must be lying dead down the hill. His rage was not due, as it would have been formerly, to disappointment, but to injured pride, and it was not till he returned to camp that his sense of humour reasserted itself.

Two days later they did succeed in shooting a bear. One of the villagers had marked down a path by which the marauder was supposed to descend every evening, and here they lay in wait. They sat for an hour, when suddenly James saw Ahad Malik stiffen. He strained his ears, but it was not for another ten minutes that he was able to hear anything, and then suddenly there was a stealthy movement quite close to them. In the gathering gloom he was able to distinguish a black form a hundred yards off. Despite the muffled entreaties of Ahad Malik, James held his fire till he could get a proper shot, and in another minute the bear emerged through a gap in the bushes. James fired and the bear rolled over into the undergrowth below. He approached with all caution and found it dead, a very fair she-bear, but with an indifferent summer coat. She looked peculiarly harmless as she lay there with her eyes closed and her great paddy paws flopping in the

bushes. James was secretly delighted, but he pretended to take the slaying of a black bear as something scarcely worthy of notice, for, as has already been said, success at that period was bringing him dangerously near to being a sporting snob, and they returned to camp amid the frenzied plaudits of the villagers who were in as great a state of excitement over the death of the pillager as an Irish henwife over the death of a notorious old fox.

On 29th of July James regretfully packed up his camp and moved back to Srinagar. His funds were almost exhausted now, but he worked it out that if he incurred no unforeseen expense they would just hold out. He had used up all the stores he had brought from Srinagar, and was living on a diet of pigeon, chapattis, dried apricots, and wild honey. On the last day before moving into Ganderbal he was sitting in his tent stark naked except for a pair of shorts rather stained with gun oil (for it was very hot), eating chapattis and honey, and drinking tea out of a battered blue enamel teapot that looked as if it had been picked up off an ash-heap, when the two youths he had met on the Zogi La arrived in his camp as immaculate as ever. Ahad Malik was out visiting his friends, but they were ushered into his tent by the venerable cook, who was not spruce at the best of times, but at this juncture looked peculiarly villainous, as his appearance and clothing had quite failed to survive the junketings of the last three months. James made them welcome with a wave of the teapot, and pressed them to a chapatti. He was delighted at his self-possession. A year ago he would have been frightened out of his wits by these young

fashionables. They gave him one glance in which fright and disdain were equally blended, a flash of silk shirt and check stockings, and then they hurried on their way muttering something about just coming to see how he was getting on. They increased their pace almost to a run as Bella woke up, stretched herself on her rug, and seeing casual callers taking their departure gave a couple of friendly woofs. Had James suddenly sprouted markhor horns from behind his ears, or produced a tent full of black wives, their surprise at the whole extraordinary outfit could hardly have been greater.

Two days later he was in Srinagar receiving the respectful plaudits of Mohomed Baba, and visiting the Game Preservation Agency to try and get some information for his next year's shoot. Then he paid off his servants, whom he tipped as generously as he was able, and bade them an affectionate farewell, promising that next year would see them in Astor or the Kaj-i-Nag or back in Baltistan.

Ahad Malik was not a "character" in the source that Mohomed Khan of the Salt Hills was one, but he and Habiba were James' very devoted servants bound to him by ties that grew stronger every year, and by the knowledge that they would be shooting together again at the first possible opportunity. It was the most extensive single trip that James was ever to carry out. He had travelled a thousand miles on foot, shot thirteen head of big game and five new species, seen a country as different from the India he knew as well could be imagined, and returned having found complete assurance in himself as a shot and a stalker. It was definitely

the turning point in his shooting education.

The trip had not been a cheap one, but the price was not beyond the pocket of any ordinary young man prepared to make some sacrifices to carry it out. His final reckoning brought his "all-in" expenditure to Rs. 2,000, from the daily accounts he had kept with an almost religious zeal. In detail it read as follows:—

Licence	Rs. 125.
Quilted boots and socks ...	Rs. 24.
Gloves	Rs. 3.
Axe	Rs. 2.
Clothes for servants ...	Rs. 38.
Tiffin coolie's basket ...	Rs. 6.
Stores	Rs. 124.
Candle lamps	Rs. 5.
Hire of tents, etc.... ...	Rs. 37.
Car (both ways)	Rs. 150.
Leatherman's bill ...	Rs. 120.
Shikaris' rations	Rs. 78.
Expenses on road ...	Rs. 50.
Alum, grass shoes, etc. ...	Rs. 14.
Cooking pots	Rs. 10.
Bungalows	Rs. 16.
Telegrams and stamps ...	Rs. 12.
Local shikaris and coolies	Rs. 60.
Food, including dog ...	Rs. 199.
Transport	Rs. 384.
Miscellaneous	Rs. 21.
Servants' wages and tips*	Rs. 409.
Srinagar. Houseboat, etc.	Rs. 48.
Clothes for servants. (Leh)	Rs. 20.
	Rs. 1,960.

Or £145 at Rs. 13.8 to the £.

**Tips.*

Shikari ...	Rs. 75.	Cook	Rs. 25.
Chota shikari	Rs. 25.	Coolie	Rs. 10.

It was with a heavy heart that he and Bella sped down the road past the familiar line of Dak bungalows till they found Mangal waiting to welcome them at Sunnybank. And though next morning he and Hari Chand sat together talking of invoices, and freightage, and unpaid bills, and broken contracts, his mind was wandering back all the time to the happy valley, and away over the Zogi La to the great bleak uplands where the wild sheep dwell.

CHAPTER VII

THAT HEAD OF HEADS

LESS than a year had passed before James was preparing to set out for Cashmere again. He had determined to have one more shoot before settling down to accumulate enough leave to go back to England. He had been in India for three years, and it would be another three before he could get home, but truth to tell such fleshpots as Southampton had to offer tempted him but little. As Mr. Kipling has very justly observed India is the Paradise of the Middle Classes, and more than ever so since the pre-war standard of the decencies has become so far less easily supported in England. So to a young man like James with few intellectual pretensions, and a natural flair for camp life, the plains of Hindustan had far more allure than the Southampton lawn tennis club; and he found the ministrations of a row of obsequious blackamoors infinitely more satisfying than the rather grudging attentions of a Hampshire cook-general.

Fortunately for James, Hargreaves had been promoted to higher spheres, and his immediate superior was now one Templeman, newly arrived from Calcutta, who was an ardent devotee of shikar; and when, therefore James hinted with the utmost delicacy that the affairs of the 'Pindi branch of Messrs. Clarkson might again be trusted to the hands of Hari Chand for a couple of months, he assented with a degree of en-

thusiasm that was positively staggering. James was determined to get to Cashmere early to ensure getting the pick of the nallahs, which were allotted in the first leave by priority of arrival in Cashmere territory; and further to ensure finding the game without difficulty while the snow kept the herds low. He wanted to bag a really big markhor and ibex, not a paltry head just over the recognized limit, which he had regarded as the alpha and omega of sport on his first shoot, but something that would look well in Rowland Ward's window. He wanted to break fresh ground either in the Kaj-i-Nag or Astor, where he hoped to bag a good markhor, and then make a dash in record time for the Shigar Valley for a big ibex. He knew quite well that this would not be an easy programme to carry out according to accepted calculations of time and space, but his experience had shown him that by cutting down the so-called " necessities " to a minimum, and by firmly opposing the accepted formulæ of *dastur* —that curse of Cashmere shikar—it was possible to move about twice as quickly as was generally calculated. All that was needed was a certain amount of *bandobast* (arrangement), to use a word beloved of Anglo-Indians.

He could not complete his plans till he had reached Cashmere and found out what nallahs were available, but he viewed this uncertainty with greater calm than usual owing to a recent improvement in his finances. He was about to receive a rise in status in the firm that would place him on a half commission basis, and with the money he had raised on the strength of this, and such further sums as he had managed to save (most of his savings had gone on paying off his

last year's shoot), and with a trifling assistance from Hari Chand's obliging friend he had Rs. 1,600 in hand which he budgeted would amply provide for a two months' shoot.

So on the 6th of March he and Bella were speeding down the Cashmere road again, being welcomed by the Dak Bungalow keepers with every symptom of delight, as the first heralds of the approaching tourist season. He found Ahad Malik waiting for him on the bund and with him a small great-nephew who, as a supreme treat, had been brought up from Bandapore to see Bella, whose reputation had been magnified in Ahad Malik's village into that of a sort of a hound of the Baskervilles. Habiba was not coming with them this year. A chota shikari was now obviously a superfluity, and as he had graduated with such success in the two previous years, James had been able to get him the job of first shikari to Roddy Owen who was going to Baltistan for two months in April; and so James was more than ever regarded as the benefactor of Ahad Malik's family. The staff of his own expedition was reduced to the old cook, Ahad Malik, and one coolie for the camp.

When they called in at the Game Preservation Agency they found that James was the first European to arrive in Cashmere that year, but, unfortunately, two British residents in Cashmere had got in first and booked the Mozi and Libha Nallahs in the Kaj-i-Nag, the mountains on the southern side of the Vale of Cashmere, which are the home of a distinct species of Markhor, whose straighter horns lack the sweeping spirals of the Astor and Baltistan variety. Apart from these two famous and sought after nallahs, the shooting

in the Kaj-i-Nag was not good, so James decided to try for his big markhor either in Astor or Baltistan, and eventually decided on the latter, largely owing to the transport difficulties of the Astor route. He would have had great difficulty in crossing the Burzil and Randiangan passes at that time of year, and he would have probably have had to hire coolies in Cashmere to go with him for the whole trip; which would have added enormously to his expenses. Moreover, he stood no chance of getting a big ibex in Astor. So he decided instead to choose one of the reserved markhor nallahs in Baltistan, and on the advice of Ahad Malik took Tsurri, where that worthy had shot once before in April, when apparently markhor were to be found airing themselves down the village street. He then completed his modest arrangements, which by now were a matter of routine, and packed himself and Bella and his servants and his stores into a couple of tongas and drove out to Ganderbal.

The shooting regulations did not permit, however, of his entering his markhor nallah till 15th of April, so as he had a lot of time on his hands before then, he decided to spend a few days in the Sind Valley looking for a barasingh. The winter shooting season continues in Cashmere till 15th March, and so if he shot a barasingh it would mean that he had to take out a winter licence. This he did not intend to do till he had actually shot his stag, which he would only do if the monarch of the glen itself made its appearance. They pitched camp near Kangan at the mouth of the Sind Valley, which in the rain and mists of early spring in no wise resembled the pleasure ground where he and Bella had disported them-

selves nine months earlier. On their first day out they viewed nothing, but on the second day they got quite close up to a small herd in the forest, but they were strangely restive and James was not able to get a shot. The reason for this soon became apparent, as they found a leopard's pug marks in the snow behind them. But on the third day they moved across to the other side of the valley, and while they were climbing up the steep slopes into the forest they suddenly saw three stags come bounding towards them over the snow of the upper slopes, and disappear into the woods about half a mile away. They made all speed to the spot where they calculated they would be; but they calculated rather too well, for they suddenly found themselves right on top of them. They sunk on to their stomachs, and the three stags continued to advance unsuspectingly towards them. All three had small heads, two with ten points and one with only eight, no bigger than the one James had already shot, so he held his fire. Nearer they came and nearer, and when they were only ten yards off the leader saw James and Ahad Malik prostrate before him on their bellies. He stopped, struck dumb with amazement, surveying them with his great cow-like brown eyes, and then with a toss of his antlers he galloped off into the forest with his fellows. James roared with laughter at their discomfiture, but Ahad Malik, whose sense of humour was not occidental, could only wonder why the Sahib, whose behaviour in the presence of game was usually so exemplary, had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

James decided to spend no more time looking for barasingh, but as there was a spell of fine

weather to hasten over the Zogi La before it broke, and try for his big ibex—nothing under forty-five inches !—in the Shigar Valley. Two days later he arrived at Sonamarg, and eight miles before he reached it he found himself marching over snow. However, the weather was still holding and he found it easy marching in the early hours of the morning, while the snow remained hard. But that night the weather broke, and when he woke next morning heavy snow was falling. He waited till eight o'clock in the hopes that it would clear, and then decided to start as it was only a nine-mile march to Baltal. At first they progressed well, but as the snow grew thicker and thicker they found they were only making a mile an hour, and finally they waddled into Baltal through two feet of soft snow at three o'clock in the afternoon, having been on the move for seven hours without a halt. The bungalow was snowed up to the eaves, but when it loomed up through the snow the prospect of a tight roof and blazing fire made it as welcome to James and Bella as if the Ritz had suddenly appeared in their path. It was still snowing heavily the next morning, and a strong gale was blowing down from the pass, and as it was obviously impossible to move, the day was spent in the bungalow with nothing better to do than watch the magnificence of the sun gilding the snow, when the storm stopped about midday.

They decided to stop at Baltal yet another day to give the newly-fallen snow a chance to harden, and then to try the crossing the day after. James rather chafed at this delay and wondered what John M—— would have to say to it, as it was one of his *obiter dicta* that the pass does not

exist that cannot be crossed at any time of the year, provided supplies and transport are forthcoming on the other side, and you are prepared to wait for fine weather to cross it. However, on the third day they rose at 4.30 a.m. and started off with the most intense gale battling round them and great gusts of snow blowing into their faces. As they left the shelter of the trees round the bungalow they were hardly able to move, and after going about half a mile they took shelter with the sodden and shivering coolies in the dak runners' hut. Three times James urged them on up the pass, for he was determined to get on at any price, and three times they were literally driven back by the gale, and in the end they had to put back to the bungalow. James was extremely chagrined at this delay. To spend three precious days of his leave cowering in a dak bungalow was positively criminal, and he made up his mind that next day they must get over the pass or perish in the attempt. He persuaded himself that if he was only sufficiently insistent his servants would bow before his will. However, harsh measures were not called for and the next morning dawned calm and cloudless. They made good progress up the snow-bed, which was frozen quite hard, for though it was not easy going it was a good deal easier than James had expected after the trials of the day before. By nine o'clock they had reached the summit of the pass. Then the fun began. The snow had begun to melt, and they found themselves sinking down a foot or so at every step they took, and to add to their troubles fresh snow began to fall, so that soon they could hardly see ten yards in front of them. By twelve o'clock

they had reached the dak runners' shelter where they sat and shivered, quite exhausted. After an hour's rest they started off again, and now a biting wind had risen to add to their difficulties, and the driven snow was swirling up in their faces. They were certainly not doing more than half a mile an hour. Finally, at four o'clock in the afternoon the dak bungalow at Machoi loomed up in front of them, and raising the necessary effort to carry them up the little hill on which it stood, they reached its shelter with the greatest thankfulness. It had been an experience that none of them were anxious to repeat.

It was obviously impossible for them to reach Dras the next day, and so James, who rather scoffed at a mere seven-mile march, suggested camping on the roofs of a village a few miles short of it. But as the event proved the seven miles to Matayan took them seven hours to cover, and at the end of it the question of camping in villages was not referred to. Fortunately, the spell of bad weather was now over and there was brilliant sunshine, though this tended to make the going more difficult. The day following was probably the most trying march of all; it is only twelve miles from Matayan to Dras, and as they were clear of the pass they looked on the worst of their troubles as over. But for all those twelve miles they were plunging under a brilliant sun in deep and melting snow, till the sweat was pouring off them under the labour of it. The snow was rarely below their calves and sometimes they were struggling up to their waists, and they did not reach Dras till six in the evening. James' cheeks and lips were blistered and cracked all over, and his face was the colour of a poached egg, save

where his snow goggles had left two enormous white circles. The ancient cook tottered in with hardly a kick left in him, and Bella was very sorry for herself, dragging one foot wearily after the other. Even Ahad Malik appeared to be feeling the effects. The coolies were in the last stage of exhaustion. Although they had been specially lightly loaded it had been a great feat on their part to have got across, and James did not grudge them an anna of the high pay they demanded. Under really bad conditions the Cashmere coolie reveals himself as an exceedingly stout fellow.

The following day (20th March) they completed the long march to Karbu. Five miles below Dras they were on a beaten track, and by the time they reached Karbu they were clear of the snow that they had been plunging through for seventy miles, and were bowling down a good road with an infinite sense of relief. James realized that the early bird may get the worm, but he has to face the dawn vapours to do so.

Below Karbu they came to the Karal suspension bridge, where they had turned off to Ladak the year previously. They crossed the bridge, turned down the Dras river and after twelve miles of pleasant walking arrived to spend the night in the dak bungalow at Othilthong, surely the most unprepossessing rest house in all Cashmere. (The Dras-Skardu road is not a state-maintained route like the Leh road.) Four days later they reached Gol just below the confluence of the Shyok and the Indus, and a few miles beyond was the village of Narh where they were to essay the passage of the Indus on skin rafts. The stream here, reinforced by the Shyok, was quite con-

siderable, and the passage was very perilous as the raft could not be propelled in a direct line from shore to shore, but had to be floated across in a slanting diagonal. Moreover, as the raft consisted only of a few boards supported on inflated skins any movement rendered them liable to immediate immersion. And when James was crossing Bella took it into her head to go prancing about on the raft and all but put her great forepaw through one of the skins, and James as near found himself swimming in the Indus as makes no matter. However, eventually they were all across and safely camped in Shigar.

They now had to decide on their plan of campaign. The Shigar Valley divides into two forks half way up its course, one leading to Arandu and the other to Askole, though Askole is at least three days the further off of the two, lying at the foot of the Mustagh glacier made famous by Younghusband forty years before. Ahad Malik was of the opinion that although perhaps a bigger ibex would be forthcoming at Askole, it would be better to make for Arandu to allow more time for shikar and to obviate transport difficulties. The local shikari was then summoned to give an opinion. He was a nattily dressed little man in a new puttoo suit and hat and neatly rolled khaki puttees, and he had evidently converted the rewards of his many employers into turning himself into the local nut, or masher, or champagne Charlie, or whatever equivalent phrase held sway in the Shigar Valley. He was of the opinion that there were very big ibex in both localities, but he favoured the nearer as it would give them longer to search out the nallahs and mark down their head. So James rather regretfully decided

on Arandu. As things turned out he would probably have done far better to have gone to Askole where there are probably one or two heads of nearly fifty inches to be shot, though in those days good heads were a great deal more common in Cashmere than they had been for forty years, owing to the long rest afforded by the war.

They were going to work up the western side of the Shigar Valley and halted that night at Golapur. There was a large herd here in the nallah, and they watched them for a long time through their telescope, but they decided that there was nothing there of the forty-five inches to which James had mentally limited himself. So they struck camp, and moved on to the junction of the Basho and the Braldo where the Shigar Valley forks. In the village here was a delightful hot spring, with a bath surrounded by a gallery and lined with a floor of stone which was reserved for the local notables. When James went down for a bath he unfortunately found in possession a Holy Man of some standing in the neighbourhood, who was much put out at being found in a state of nature. But on his departure James was able to indulge in such a bath as a Roman Emperor would not have sneezed at.

They stopped here for two days watching the ibex in the nallahs on both sides of the river. There were quantities of them on the hillsides, and James and Ahad Malik spent hours trying to pick out a good head, but there was nothing that stood out in any way, and so they determined to press on to the foot of the Kero Lungma glacier, which was as far as they could get. It was a very different state of affairs to his shoot of two years previously, when after scaling to dizzy heights for

many days in succession, he thought he was very lucky to see the tails of a few ibex disappearing into a neighbouring nallah. There was certainly no shortage of them here.

The road up to Basil, where they were to camp, was a very bad one, and the march was made no pleasanter by heavy spring rain. But in the afternoon it changed for the better, and when they were three miles short of Basil they were able to start work again with the telescope. They had not been watching very long when they saw a herd of about thirty feeding right up below the snow-line above them, and as they watched them they began to descend the slope. And without doubt one of them was a passing big ibex. "How big ?" said James. Ahad Malik took the telescope, focussed it laboriously—the internals of the telescope were always so much black magic to him—and surveyed them. For a moment he chewed the cud of calculation. "Forty-four," he hazarded. Unlike most Cashmere shikaris he disliked over-estimates; it was a form of sin that was liable to find you out. "Only forty-four," said James, who had more or less made up his mind to have a try for it already, "You know I'm not shooting anything under forty-five". "Sahib it's a very big ibex. There is not a Sahib in Hindustan that would not be pleased to shoot that ibex". "Nothing under forty-five," said James, and shut up the telescope. "Sahib, who can tell to the last inch ? Perhaps he is forty-five inches, perhaps a little more". James smiled into his beard. He had been expecting this. "So be it," he said, and they set off, much to Ahad Malik's relief. To have let that ibex go would have been to him the sin against the Holy Ghost.

There was no question of an approach under cover as the ibex were descending the hill directly above them, but by dint of making use of the boulders on the hillside they were able to get near enough for James to get a shot. The herd was moving very slowly towards them, and the big ibex was fully visible, but James' coin of vantage was cramped and awkward, and he had to take the shot at a difficult angle. Which is very obviously a prelude to saying that he missed. The whole herd made off, but as luck would have it they were on a very steep bit of the mountain, and to get away they had to cross a small precipice about two hundred and fifty yards off, in single file and along a narrow track. One by one they threaded their way across with extraordinary agility, and disappeared with a shake of the tail up the hill. James settled himself down comfortably, brought his rifle into the aim, and waited till the big ibex appeared and began to cross. Then he fired. The ibex staggered and tried to go on but he could not. James quickly put in another shot, and the ibex' forelegs crumpled under him, and he fell on the ledge. For a moment James wondered however they would be able to retrieve the body from that inaccessible spot, and then the ibex rose in a last effort and rolled down from the ledge, over and over in a series of gigantic somersaults. He thudded down from slope to slope, till finaliy his career was broken by one of his horns catching on a rock from which he lay hanging several feet above the ground like Absalom. It was an extraordinary sight and one which nobody who had not seen it would have believed possible. But if anything it was even more strange to find that

(*Upper*) THE HAPPY VALLEY, EARLY MARCH.
(*Middle*) ABSALOM THE IBEX
(*Lower*) BALTAL BUNGALOW UNDER SNOW

pushed up without his noticing it. No wonder his shots were going high ! Quite how big the two big heads of that herd were James would never know, but they were certainly very big, the biggest ibex he had ever seen or ever was to see. Human nature, being what it is, the head that we lose is always the monster of monsters, yet even in his most dispassionate analyses James was led back to the conclusion that those two ibex were nearer fifty inches than forty.

The next day they set out after the other of the two herds they had seen, which had decamped higher up above the glacier after yesterday's fusilade. They soon marked down two herds, one large and one small, and both containing good heads. The smaller appeared to offer better opportunities for a stalk, and so they decided to give chase. But, unfortunately, the herd had moved for their siesta on to a little plateau on the other side of a deep ravine. The position was well chosen and they had to call a halt till such a time as the ibex should move off for their evening feed. James spent a very entertaining two hours watching them through the high-power eyepiece of his telescope, which, in that crystal clear atmosphere, showed up their every movement with the greatest possible distinctness. He could see one elderly male sitting with his feet crossed in front of him exactly like Bella, and he watched a crow descend on to the back of another and peck appreciatively at its rump.

At three o'clock they dropped down a thousand feet to a bed of the stream below them, and laboriously climbed up the other side. Everything turned out according to plan. The ibex—there were three of them, two big males and a

smaller one—were feeding unsuspectingly on the further of two parallel ridges. The wind had dropped practically to nothing. James ascended slowly and deliberately under the cover of the nearer ridge. It was one of those delightfully easy stalks that makes one wonder why ibex shooting is ever thought difficult. With his first shot James sent one of the big bucks sprawling down the slope. The other two leapt away on to the ridge, and stood for a moment outlined against the sky. James covered the big one and then for some inexplicable reason he had two missfires. He glanced down to see if the caps of his cartridges were struck—which they were—and in that time the bigger of the two ibex had skipped away over the ridge, and his place on the rock where he had been standing was taken by the smaller one. But James had not seen this happen, and in the excitement of the moment he drew a bead on the figure occupying the spot where the giant had last been standing. It was only when he had brought him down stone dead that he realized that he had slain the Benjamin of the three, and that his big brother was the receding figure making its way up the mountain and already nearly a quarter of a mile away.

They turned to the first ibex who had been forgotten in the excitement of the moment. He had rolled down the shale, slipped over the edge of the precipice, and crashed into the stream six hundred feet below. James hurried over to the ibex lying on the rocks in front of them. One look sufficed. It was a paltry head of forty inches, mere dross to James' lordly ideas. With a bosom seething with rage he turned down the hill. "After all," he said to himself, "it's a thing that

might have happened to anybody," but his heart railed against Providence for having let it happen to him; there were plenty of other people in the world to foist low tricks like that on to. Very slowly they descended the hill, step after well-placed step, for the slope was Gadarene. When they reached the bottom they turned up the rocky bed of the stream to look for the ibex. He was lying on a snow bed by the side of the stream with his horns absolutely smashed to atoms. They must have been big ones, however, for at base they measured a fraction under ten inches.

This was a bitter blow to James, for he had now shot the three ibex allowed on his licence, and those three did not include the head of his dreams. It was indeed a piece of shocking bad luck, because when he seemed to have two really good heads in his grasp one shattered its horns to smithereens, and the other dodged him owing to a missfire. However, he was able to come to an agreement with his conscience that such a series of catastrophes must justify him shooting a fourth ibex, whatever His Highness might say. After all, his rules governed the conduct of man-made conventions, and not such divine interventions of Providence as these. But if he was so far to transgress no further risks must be taken; it was to be the ibex of ibex or nothing.

They spent two more days at Basil, but though they saw other ibex, there was nothing as big as the one they had already shot, and so they regretfully decided to move back down the Shigar Valley again, for they wished to be at Tsurri by the fifteenth of April. So they struck camp and marched off, this time choosing the eastern bank, stopping as they went to survey the

nallahs. But though they saw (literally) scores of shootable ibex they did not find anything as big as the one they had got at Basil. The Brummel from Shigar was loud in his lamentations, and Ahad Malik's long silences were even more pregnantly dolorous. However, the march down was very delightful in the spring weather, camping in closes of blossoming apricot trees, and the rigours that they had experienced on the Zogi La seemed remarkably far away. At Shigar, however, their Brummel was certain that they would be able to shoot the King of ibex, that he had known for many years to be lurking in the private preserves of the Raja of Shigar, who for a trifling tribute would give them leave to shoot it. The old Raja himself was sick, and they only saw him for a moment, but the necessary leave was obtained from his son, a pleasant-spoken, well-mannered young man who was himself something of a shikari, an inherited talent, as in his day his sire had been a mighty hunter before the Lord.

The following day they moved into the Raja's nallah, and in the afternoon they spotted the herd, whose leader the monster was reputed to be, high up above them on the hillside. This being a southward facing slope it was much more clear of snow than might have been expected at the time of year. The ibex were in a strangely high position, right up under the snow line. James was determined to take no risks. He made a very long stalk indeed which took him up wind of the herd and above them. They then conducted a Dutch auction over the length of the big ibex' horns, and finally decided that they were forty-four inches, though the outward span was the

most remarkable James had even seen, and must have been nearly thirty inches. James was still debating as to whether he was going to try it, and no doubt valour would have got the better part of his discretion, when the herd decided for him, by huddling together in a strangely nervous manner, and then making off at full speed through the snow, over the divide and into the nallah beyond. There was evidently something wrong, and so as to satisfy themselves they descended to the spot where the ibex had been. The reason was not far to seek. Three hundred yards below they came across the tracks of a lynx. So James had to abandon his fond hopes. Ibex of over forty-five inches are few and far between, but they do exist, and for months his dreams were haunted by the most thrilling of stalks after the hugest of ibex.

The next day he crossed the rickety bridge over the Shigar, off which one of the coolies managed to fall, thereby turning the sugar supply into a super-saturated solution, and camped at Komara. And then he passed the rope bridge on which he had shivered three years before in the far off days of his initiation to Cashmere shooting, and pitched camp at Tsurri. Tsurri is, or was, probably the most sought after nallah in Baltistan, but there is nothing about it to suggest that it harbours great markhor; in fact the conventional term of nallah hardly applies at all. It merely consists of a few miles of cliffs towering back towards the Indus with two or three little ravines piercing through them. But one of the characteristics of the markhor is a curious faithfulness to his favourite surroundings, and he reappears year after year in the same spot; though the first sign of a dis-

turbance, an injudicious camp fire, an unwary glass flashed from over a mile away, will frighten him away from it.

On their first day at Tsurri they set forth by the light of the moon, and made their way down the Indus for about five miles. Soon after dawn they sighted a few small markhor on the hills above, and a couple of hours later some bigger ones high up the hillside. There then ensued the most terrific climb of all James' shooting experience. They had to work their way up an almost perpendicular nallah bed, feet and hands, pushing and pulling, and all the time fearful that they would dislodge a boulder and frighten away their quarry. After climbing for about three hours they at length reached a place whence they hoped to see the markhor. Praise God ! they were still there. There were three big bucks, all shootable heads, about three hundred yards off, and as they watched them they disappeared slowly into the dip beyond. James needed no prompting from Ahad Malik to realize that this was the chance of a lifetime. These were the big markhor of the nallah, and if they lost them their only chance would be gone. So they ran—Heaven only knows how it was possible to run, but they did—over the intervening space to the other side of the dip, and then with racing heart James ventured a glance. He was trying to keep an iron control over his excitement, for no mistake must be made. There they were, not more than seventy yards off, two really big ones with the third twist to their horns, and a smaller one, all magnificent patriarchs with long flowing beards.

James gingerly let himself down behind the wall of rock behind which they were sheltering.

Ahad Malik and the village shikari were crouched behind it, hardly daring to breathe. Ahad Malik looked at James. James nodded at him significantly, and very cautiously he raised his old bald head above the rocks. For full thirty seconds he gazed at those markhor as if a glimpse of the Holy Grail had been vouchsafed to him, and then he withdrew his head. A bead of sweat rolled off the end of his nose. "*Maro Sahib*", he hissed, "*juldee*". It was not often that he tried to hurry his Sahib into taking his shot, but the strain was becoming unbearable. James held up an admonitory finger. He must show that he was calm and unruffled, setting about his work decently and in order, and that he was not to be hurried; though in point of fact he was a prey to the most lively agitation. He pushed forward the safety catch of his rifle and looked round for a place to shoot from. The wall of rock behind which they had taken cover was five feet high and offered no foothold of any sort.

So the Balti was made to kneel, and James got the required elevation by standing on his back. Just as he was bringing his foresight to bear on the nearest markhor the Balti saw fit to move his position. James slipped, his rifle went off, and the three markhor ambled off apparently not much alarmed. Under the shadow of the rock James and Ahad Malik hissed forth threatenings and slaughters against that Balti; it would have been difficult to say whether they would rather have had his blood or the markhors'. But this was no time for recrimination, and so they pulled themselves over the ledge and rushed to a heap of stones twenty yards beyond. The markhor had stopped to survey them, and were standing

one below the other outlined on the ledges of the cliff, for all the world as if they had been on the mappin terraces of the Zoo. James fired at the highest of the three. He hit him far forward, and he stumbled and disappeared behind a rock. He turned to the other two. The smaller was scrambling up the hillside as fast as he could go, but the second of the two big bucks was walking very sedately and with solemn pauses across their front. James took careful aim and he came tumbling down the hill as fast as he could go, apparently dead. But he got up again and disappeared behind some rocks. James hurried up to the spot where the first markhor had fallen; he found him a few yards further on breathing his last, and a bullet through the head finished him off. (His horns afterwards proved to measure fifty-two inches.) Leaving him they hurried after the other. He was nowhere to be seen and James was fearful that he had escaped them. They mounted to a vantage point to see if they could see him, when suddenly the village man put him up, and he scampered away down the hill again and lay down. James followed cautiously for he realized that, although he was bound to get him in the end, he was still capable of giving them a prolonged chase, and possibly going off to die in ground inaccessible to them. He crept up to the rock behind which the markhor was lying, peeped over and saw him sitting there apparently without pain, his eyes fixed in dignified repose on the other side of the valley, as if nothing whatever had happened. It was a remarkable sight. Then James ended his troubles for him with a bullet through the brain. He was another fine specimen; his left horn was fifty-one inches, but his

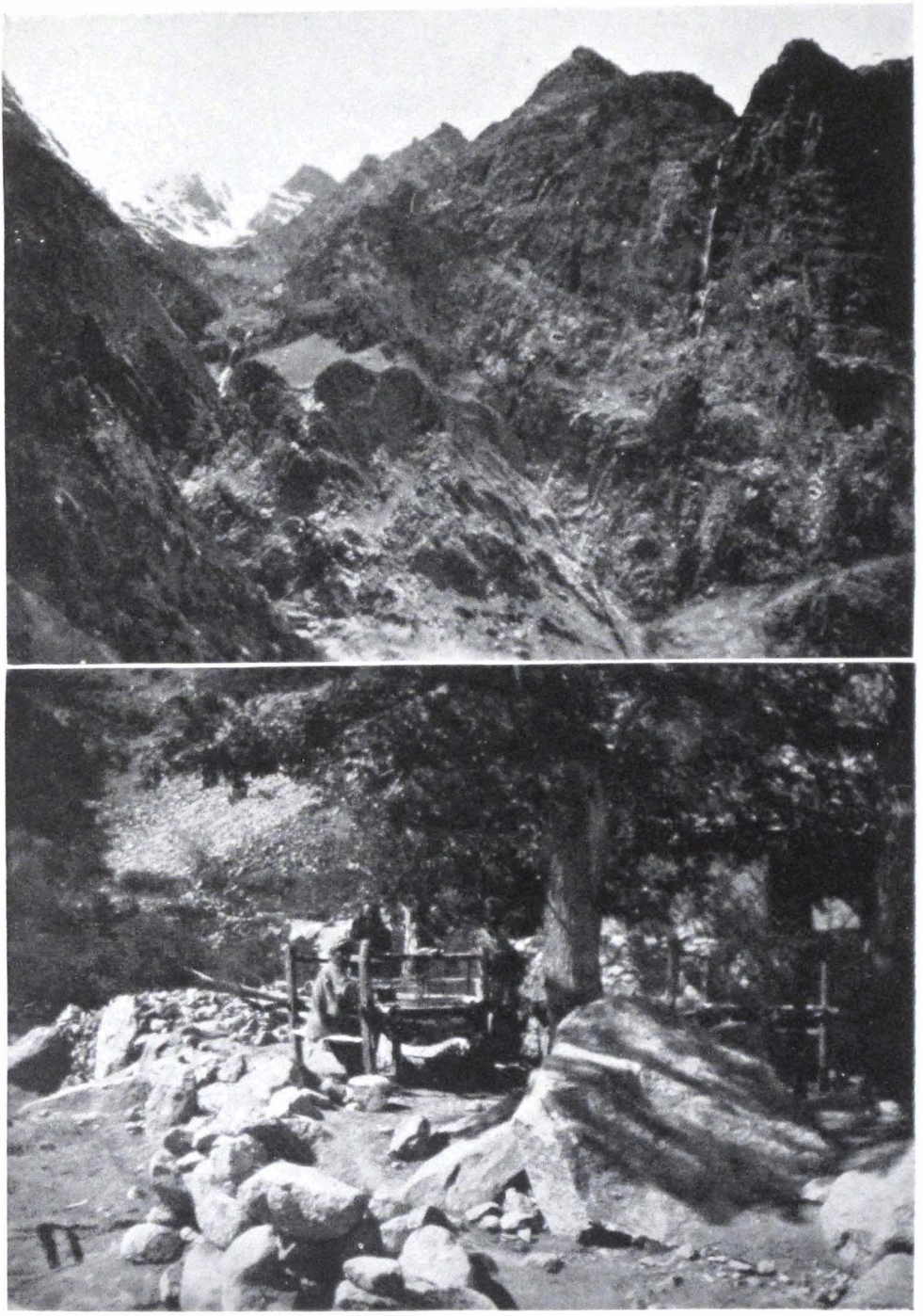
right horn was broken off at the second twist.

There was no doubt that James had more than his share of luck in bagging those markhor, as even allowing for the earliness of the season such unsophisticated behaviour could only have been expected once in a hundred times. As Kinloch, whose book remains the best of authorities on shikar, has said, one fair shot at a markhor in fourteen days is a good average; and though since then rifles have improved enormously, yet conversely game is far less abundant, and leave is considerably curtailed.

The descent of the cliff side on which they had been perched proved even more difficult than the ascent. They had to let themselves down hand over hand, and at every step they were frightened of being carried away in a rush of falling boulders. They were four hours climbing down the hill, and when at last they reached the bottom they were much relieved to find themselves there with a whole skin.

James had shot his two markhor a week in advance of the time he had mentally scheduled out for himself, and he was now left with a spare six days on his hands and no way of filling them in. He wished with all his heart that he had essayed the longer journey to Askole for his ibex, but the factors of time and expense now ruled a dash to that spot quite out of the question. So he decided to set off back to Cashmere again with the possible hope of picking up a red bear or a serow, two species which he had so far failed to bring to book.

They were back in the dak bungalow at Skardu by 17th of April, and he found it exactly the same as when he and Lance Fenwick had stopped there,



(*Upper*) IBEX GROUND IN THE SHIGAR VALLEY
(*Lower*) SPINNING IN A BALTI VILLAGE

pulsing with expectations of the unknown, two years before, though, he felt as if all the water in the world had flown under the bridge since then. Skardu was *en fête* that day as there was a polo match of some importance in progress, and an enormous crowd had gathered. The play was of a higher standard than he had seen the year before at Kharbu, but the game was equally hugger mugger, not excluding the clothes of the performers, who managed to do some spirited riding off with their legs protected by nothing better than cotton pyjamas. A pleasingly individual note was struck by the Wazir-i-Wazirat, a local dignitary, who justified his rank by sporting a white topee, grey flannel trousers, and a pair of indiarubber gumboots garnished by slightly drooping spurs, which would have done credit to Tom Mix. On a goal being scored in Balti polo it has as it were to be touched down, and the player jumps off his horse, seizes the ball, and gallops amid a rain of blows from the sticks of the other players, *ventre-à terre* down the field, till he reaches the goal at the other end, when he throws the ball in the air, and smites it through the goal as it descends.

The march back from Skardu to the Zogi La was ordinary in every way, covering ground as fast as relays of coolies could be persuaded to go, and camping in delightful closes of apricot blossom. As they went down the road they began to meet the first of the mid-April rush to the nallahs; hard bitten old shikaris returning to try conclusions once more with some record head that had been eluding them for twenty years; and anxious novices pulsing with enthusiasm and lack of experience. James stopped to exchange the

usual comments with them on the temperature in the plains, the iniquitous price of coolerage, the state of the Zogi La, and the fatuity of the Government of India, and to give them what news he could from the nallahs. Then they passed on with envious glances at his heads, but hailing him as an evangelist of like things for themselves.

The return trip over the pass looked as if it might be difficult, as heavy snow was falling when they reached Dras. However, they found the next morning that it had frozen quite hard and they were able to make Matayan without much difficulty. The chokidar here was an old friend, and he greeted them with great delight; he regarded Bella—a dog of whose size he had never before seen the like—with a veneration bordering on worship. Machoi was reached with considerable difficulty owing to fresh snow, and three men without loads had to be hired to march in front and tread down the snow, but the actual passage of the pass from Machoi to Baltal proved to be quite easy, as it was a calm and unclouded day with the snow frozen as hard as asphalt. On the way over they met an elderly major of the Indian Army and his wife, the latter regarding the journey as very much a matter of course. She had been following the drum sufficiently long to make the crossing of a one-horse pass like the Zogi La in April very much a matter of routine.

James had hoped to get news at Revil (below Sonamarg) of red bear, a limited number of which are to be found in the Sind Valley at the early part of the season. But there was nothing stirring there as early as this, and so they moved on to Sambal, the village where they had camped the

year before. There they were assured that red bear had been seen, but both James and Ahad Malik were suspicious. The presence of a Sahib in the purlieus raises the sale of chickens and eggs in a village to the most gratifying extent. On the first day out, however, they spied a black bear greedily digging up the roots on the open side of a ravine. He was a fair-sized black bear, but with a magnificent spring coat. As this was the area where the red bear was supposed to live and move and have its being James refused to give chase for fear of disturbing the more desired species. He was becoming very lordly in his ideas. However, no red bear was forthcoming, and they returned to camp with no greater satisfaction than having watched the bear gorge itself unsuspectingly for an hour, and then amble off into the woods.

There then ensued two days when they were completely rain-bound in their tent, watching a continuous downpour outside, which gradually turned the whole canvas into a moist and fœtid frame, and brought unsuspected runnels of water pouring in on them in the night; during this time James had perforce to exist exclusively on a diet tasting of mixed smoke and rain water, and he and Bella sat and surveyed the hopeless prospect with a complete lack of appreciation, wishing for the first time that they could exchange their eighty-pound tent for the comfortable security of the bungalow in Murree. Indeed the only relish that they could extract from the situation was the thought that the rain falling at Sumbal was a blizzard on the Zogi La. But at the end of two days the sun shone again, the swirling clouds lifted from the pine trees and they were able to

dry their steaming belongings, and get about their business. Three days were spent in pursuit of the non-existent red bear, and two looking for the equally elusive serow, which though common enough in the eastern Himalayas is quite a prize in Cashmere.

And then on the last day James felt that he must have a crack at something, and repaired to the hillside where he had seen the black bear feeding. Lordly ideas have a habit of evaporating in the face of ill-success. He was not disappointed. Within half an hour of his arrival the same bear emerged from the forest and began to feed. James started to pursue. They descended the hill into the ravine which separated them, and began to spy out their next move. "Which way ?" he asked Ahad Malik. "Up through the forest and out on top of him." "But that's absurd," said James, "it'll take a good hour and he'll probably be gone when we get there." He was always rather inclined to laugh at the exaggerated deference which Ahad Malik paid to black bears. "As the Sahib likes," Ahad Malik replied, "but this is not an ibex. Ibex haven't got claws." "Well don't come if you don't want to," said James impatiently, and the next moment he could have bitten his tongue off for it. Ahad Malik affected not to notice. "Where the Sahib goes I go," he answered.

So it was decided, although James in his heart of hearts knew that he was breaking one of the cardinal rules of shikar by approaching a bear from below. He found that the hill was very steep and that they could only move with difficulty and, although they were up wind as they ascended they became more or less exposed to

view; however, this was a risk which James persuaded himself that it was permissible to take, as though the bear has an acute sense of smell it has but poor eyesight. When they were about three hundred yards away from him and still below he stopped scratching at the roots, and became restive. Ahad Malik was excessively agitated now, and James, too, found that his heart was racing. It would certainly be very awkward if he took it into his head to charge at that moment. The bear in the meantime was looking fixedly in their direction, whether as preliminary to a charge or to making off James was unable to say. Under either circumstances action seemed imperative. "*Maro Sahib,*" exhorted Ahad Malik. James fired. The bear let out a long and piercing howl and straightway charged down the hill at them. James reloaded and fired again. He saw his bullet strike about two yards high. The bear was now about forty yards off. James reloaded and fired again. The bear stopped in his course, turned head over heels, and rolled and slithered forty yards till he caught in the foot of a small bush—stone dead. James' last shot had gone through his right eye. It was a fluke, but an extremely fortunate one. Ahad Malik who might have indulged in a hundred I-told-you-sos kept a face as expressionless as ever. "*Shabash Sahib,*" he cried, and then his face broadened into a smile and he patted his heart to show how it was beating. James felt supremely elated and not a little relieved.

It was his first episode with dangerous game of a moving picture nature, the sort of thing that the expression "big game shooting" connotes in

Southampton. He was very pleased with himself for having kept his head, although as he had to admit there was very little else that he could have done, and as to the actual slaying of the bear that was a matter of luck, pure and simple. They went over to the bear. He was only middle-sized (to take the children's story precedent of dividing bears, like Gaul, into three categories), but his coat was magnificent; it must have been a good five inches deep. By the time they had reached the village the story had gone round with embellishments, and James was given a reception in which respect and enthusiasm were equally mingled. He received these plaudits with the detached calm of the man to whom such events are the mere incidentals of life, but he was secretly delighted at having an eminently tellable story with which to arm himself for any after dinner battle of opposite improbabilities.

It now only remained to settle up for the shoot and return to Murree with all haste. After the usual calculations it transpired the expedition had cost Rs. 1,700, a great deal of which was represented by the expense of getting over the Zogi La.

The following year James was unable to take any leave, and he was faced with the prospect of no more shooting than could be had in an occasional visit to the Salt Hills, or a week-end in pursuit of that time-honoured phantom of the Murree hills, the Dunga Gali bear. He was busy trying to accumulate enough leave to take him back to England, for while in the days of old, seven or eight years in India at a stretch was a common enough occurrence, since the war the most notable feature of Anglo-Indian life has been the habit of an almost annual exodus to

England for periods as short as three or even two months.

But at the end of January, Templeman told him that he could go away for a spell of ten days, which he was able to stretch to twelve by means of a flying start, and judiciously arranging to return on a Saturday—for what man professing Christian principles sells wine on the Sabbath ? He decided to make a dash up to Cashmere for a barasingh. The stag that he had shot two and a half years before was anything but a museum piece; moreover, the previous September John M—— had been off to Kistiwar and come back with a magnificent twelve-pointer of forty-six inches, which had filled James with envy. So he wrote off to Ahad Malik and told him to scour the hills from the Liddar Valley to Bandapore, till he had marked down the biggest of all barasingh, whereupon, he was to summon him to shoot it. With a maximum of eight days' shooting at his disposal he could not afford to take any risks; all the preliminaries must be done before he arrived.

In due course a letter arrived from Ahad Malik, or rather from the professional scribe of his village, who after compliments and enquiries for the health of the Sahib and "dog Belly", let it be known that Habiba had faced untold hardships upon the mountain heights and had marked down the biggest of all barasingh.

As ill-luck would have it the Murree hills were blocked at that season by snow, and James had to make the journey through Abbotabad, thereby losing half a day, but he eventually got to Srinagar and found the whole valley more or less under snow.

Ahad Malik and Mohomed Baba were waiting for him, and without more ado the tongas were loaded up and he drove off down the Bandapore road to the nallah where Habiba was keeping a watchful eye on that biggest of all barasingh. They camped that evening about twenty miles out of Srinagar in falling snow, soaked to the skin and very dismal, and even Bella refused to be comforted, and sat huddled and bored on her rug. But the next day dawned bright and clear, and though the countryside was inches deep in mud they were at least able to enjoy the sunshine and the keen morning air. They were marching now parallel to the Jhelum, which, in winter, is bordered by a long line of swamps and small lakes, literally black with wild-fowl. But James had no time to dally with such delights.

They reached their nallah that evening and were greeted by a very doleful Habiba. The monarch had disappeared three nights before. There were several lesser heads; a twelve-pointer of forty-inches and two ten-pointers of a like size, but nothing approaching what James had come to find. It was no good crying over spilt milk, but James was extremely chagrined. The whole basis of the expedition was to have been that the preliminary spying was to have been done before his arrival, and now they were back at the beginning again. But there was no time now to go treking off to the Sind or Liddar Valleys; they had to find their stag on the hills in front of them.

That there were barasingh there in plenty they soon found out, for the next morning they saw two vast herds out on the hills. They were soon on their track but they all three regretfully came to the conclusion that there wasn't a stag among

them bigger than the one James had already shot. They moved on to fresh ground the next day, and the next, and the next, but though they continued to see hinds and small stags that was all. By this time they had moved to within a mile or two of Bandapore itself and were camped in a little nallah quite close to Ahad Malik's village. Here they got news from a posse of anxious relatives, only too anxious that the family prestige should not be lowered on their native heath, that a large stag had been seen the day before, and they were shown tracks that were indisputably impressive.

Yet with only two days of his leave left the omens were not particularly propitious. But that day, while he was having lunch in his tent preparatory to moving off to another part of the hillside, a messenger arrived in a state of supreme excitement and announced that the biggest stag that had ever been seen was swimming in the lake. James was frankly incredulous, but he went out to have a look. The Woolah Lake was separated at that point from the hills by about a mile and a half of bare and muddy fields, entirely devoid of cover of any sort, and it appeared improbable that any stag would have ventured out so far from its natural habitat. However, James hurried across the mile that separated him from the lake, and as he approached he saw that sure enough there was a stag swimming about fifty yards out in the icy waters of the lake. Standing round the edge were half a dozen Cashmeris trying to shoo the poor beast further out into the water, at the same time loudly exhorting James to make haste to shoot it. And as he got nearer he saw that it was a very sizeable head.

This raised a tumult of conflicting thoughts in

his bosom. All the precepts of sporting honour rose in his gorge and told him that he would never never be able to hold up his head again if he slew a barasingh while it was swimming fifty yards away from him on the waters of the Woolah Lake. On the other hand the voice of logic told him that the odds were no more unduly weighted against the barasingh if he slew him bathing in the Woolah Lake, than if he had crept up to within ten yards and slain him while he was making love in the forest. And yet another voice, that of personal vanity, was telling him that his reputation as a shikari would be gone for ever if he returned to 'Pindi empty-handed. After all he needn't *tell* people how he'd shot it. (James was no less human than the rest of mankind.) However, the matter soon settled itself as the stag rose like Venus from the waters, splashed through the shallows, and cantered off towards the hills pursued by the execrations of the Cashmeris, and could be seen growing smaller and smaller in the distance, till, finally, it disappeared into the hills and was no more seen.

Nothing more was seen that day, and when the last day of his leave dawned Ahad Malik swore that he would find a barasingh before nightfall or perish in the attempt. They made their way up a nallah behind the camp, a foot deep in snow, and they had not been going far before they found traces of a large stag in the snow. They followed them as far as they were able for a couple of hours, but they kept on crossing and recrossing other tracks, so they gave it up, and started to ascend the hill to a vantage point from which they could view the surrounding countryside. As they were toiling slowly up through the

snow, a clump of bushes above them became violently agitated and a large stag emerged. James had no time for calculation of the size of the horns, or the number of points, though he saw at a glance it was a big stag. The poor beast was floundering up the hill in the snow only fifty yards away, offering an easy shot and James brought him down with a bullet through the shoulders. The luck was with him. It was a fine beast of forty-three-and-a-half inches and twelve points. It must, however, be admitted that the twelfth point (the fork of the right-hand surroyals) was barely perceptible; still tradition says that where a ring will hang there may a point be counted, and this was therefore a twelve-pointer. The corresponding tine in the right-hand antler was fully developed which just broke the symmetry of the horns' outward curve though brow bez and trez tines were absolutely regular.

Before setting back to Srinagar by relays of tongas and ponies James had time for an evening's duck shoot. At dusk the birds were coming over quite literally in hundreds, and snow was beginning to fall, which though it made shooting no more pleasant brought them down considerably lower. James' shooting had improved a lot since the memorable duck shoot of four years earlier, but even so he was only able to show nineteen duck to nearly a hundred empty cartridges and he was pleased enough with that. Then just before dark the deep "honk honk" of the geese came up from the north, and James managed to bag a couple from the long grey regular flights, the first he had ever shot, before it got too dark to shoot.

When he said good-bye to Ahad Malik and

Habiba they were much affected, for James could promise them no certain date for his return. With a mournful face Ahad Malik had remarked, "The Sahib will not return: there is nothing left for him to shoot". In point of fact this prophecy turned out to be true, at any rate for a number of years, as in that year James was promoted to Calcutta, where, as Hargreaves remarked, he would be out of harm's way—"there's nothing to be shot there except angry husbands"—and his Cashmere ventures were at an end. But through the medium of the village scribe he continued to hear news of his servants, and the Sahibs with whom they had shot, and the heads they had got, and of how they were counting the days till his return.

Ahad Malik was not one of the showier type of Cashmere shikaris and his virtues were of the type that become more and more apparent on a closer acquaintance. He spoke little, and unlike many of his race he spent no time extolling his own virtues. The Cashmeri is definitely antipathetic to the ordinary Englishman, who detects in him none of those half-savage, half-sporting qualities which he so admires in the Pathan or the Punjaubi Mussulman. But the Cashmere shikari for some reason, real or imagined, is different. Whether this comes from the freer more active life of his calling, or from association with the better type of Englishman, it is difficult to say. Suffice it to record that more friendships endure between Cashmere shikaris and their Sahibs, than the ordinary non-shooting Anglo-Indian would believe.

It would, of course, be absurd to pretend that at first acquaintance Ahad Malik was anxious to

show James sport for other reasons than that his professional *izzat* and subsequent reward depended on it. Perhaps, also, James' obvious youth and inexperience gave him a certain sentimental interest in undertaking his shooting education. But as their association lengthened he found out more of his personal and professional characteristics. He had an unrivalled knowledge of the habits of game; he had hawk's eyes; he refused to be hustled; he never panicked or stampeded; and above all he was not continually urging his Sahib to take long shots. Moreover, he was willing to make extraordinary long marches at James' demand, and as they got to know each other better he was willing to forego the minor comforts of the camp to help conserve his master's slender resources. Can it be wondered that James parted from him with infinite regret ?

And when he passed for the last time along the familiar line of bungalows—Uri, Chenari, Gharri, how well he knew them—he carried away a host of happy memories of breathless stalks, and long marches, and peaceful camp fires, closing a chapter in his shooting education.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO MEN IN A TREE

CALCUTTA at first sight seemed to offer little scope for James' prevailing passion, the amassing of filthy lucre being the main object of life in that second city in the Empire. It was an aristocracy of wealth pure and simple, where the wife of the forty thousand rupee man automatically takes her place behind the forty-one thousander, in a way which even New York would consider a little crude. Art, Sport, Virtue, Breeding, and Intellect, each in its sphere form a snobbery of its own, but in Calcutta each and all of these social assets are, at times, subordinate to Mammon. The financial loaf is slightly leavened by a small official world; the military in their riverside keep (dismissed with a gesture as " the Fort people "), and the Bengal Government centring round Government House (referred to with greater unction as " G.H.").

In this pulsing commercial community James found himself rather at a loss, and of course completely ignored. The young " box-wallah " is kept in his place by the senior money makers much more rigidly than the subaltern, the medical student, the deacon, or the gunroom officer. Not for him the members stand on the race-course, or the sanctified silences of the Bengal Club. But if he longs for woman and wine he can share the delights of the Saturday Club, known to the good folk of Calcutta as the " Slap and Tickle ", or colloquially as " the Slap ". A brief exploration

of these pleasures was enough for James, and he soon began to explore the possibilities of shikar. When he made enquiries in "the Slap" he was greeted with incredulous stares, or told quite openly that there was no shooting to be had from Calcutta, and that what there was was not worth having; the desired inference presumably being that having tasted the delights of Warter Priory and Six Mile Bottom his informant could hardly be expected to put up with six couple of snipe off a bog near Sonapur. But he found on pressing the point further that the majority of his fellow citizens had got it into their heads that India began at Tollygunge and ended at Barrackpore, so he was not unduly depressed by this advice.

One thing, however, was quite clear. His efforts in the next two years must be confined to the shortest of expeditions, if he was ever to accumulate enough leave to take him back to Southampton again. He was as green about plain shooting as he had been about stalking five years earlier—with this exception—that he had become an avid reader of literature on the subject, and he lost no opportunity of picking other people's brains. Moreover, the whole question of the organization, of the *bandobast,* of a shooting expedition had become as simple a matter for him as a week-end to Brighton. Departures into the unknown had no terrors for him.

He had not been in Calcutta long before he made friends with a young man called Barclay, sufficiently lately from home to be locally classified as a "griffin". He was an infinitesimal cog in the giant organization of "Imperial Guano", the world famous organization of which Sir Adolf Heinemann is the head, and whose proud boast

it is that they use only Empire products to assist Empire production. Barclay had a big brother who was a forest officer in Assam, and together they conspired to explore every avenue of nepotism. In the autumn of every year there comes a period known as the "Pujas", when Calcutta empties itself, to Ranchi, to Puri, to Darjeeling, or to Shillong, to tune up exhausted nature after the strain of the summer, and to gather strength for the social adventures of the cold weather. Accordingly Barclay senior was instructed to mark down a few tigers for destruction in November by his brother and friend. To this end James mortgaged the best part of a month's pay in the purchase of a double-barrelled .450 high velocity rifle by Holland and Holland. In big game shooting almost every economy is possible and often desirable, but for those who propose to follow dangerous game economy in fire power is not to be advocated.

One evening early in June when Calcutta had reached its maximum beastliness of moisture and prickly heat, James was taking Bella for their evening outing round the ramparts of the Fort; she had an especial liking for the ramparts as they were the home of innumerable tree rats whose pursuit was one of the things that made life in Calcutta bearable to her. Suddenly, from the direction of Chowringee there appeared a figure approaching on horseback at great speed. As it came nearer it resolved itself into Tom Barclay on his aged mare Adelaide. He waved a telegram in his hand. It was from his brother. "Villagers mattra gulgaon station complain tiger killing cattle can you go barclay." They looked guiltily at each other. Neither needed to be told

(*Upper*) THE CAMP
(*Lower*) BELLA

the answer. It was not a question of if they would go, but how they would get away. So they repaired to Tom's "chummery" in Alipore, and a long counsel of war took place. Feigned sickness, business in Shillong, the sudden illness of a relative, were all discussed as a possible reason for demanding a week's leave. But they kept returning to their original starting point, and finally decided on trying the truth. Virtue was rewarded. It worked.

Next evening they were in a coupé of the Assam mail, while in the servants' compartment Mangal was busy explaining to Tom's bearer exactly how great a shikari his master was. They had to change in the middle of the night in that cross between Inferno and Babel, a station in Upper Bengal on the arrival of the Mail by night; then they started off in the atmosphere of hermetically-sealed dust of ages that distinguishes the seldom used first-class carriages of an Indian local train. They passed slowly through a baking country-side enlivened here and there with a sun-dried village or a clump of withering trees, and arrived at Gulgaon that afternoon. They found waiting for them a small and mildewed-looking forest guard and a line of bullock carts of immemorial antiquity. The mildewed one assured them that the biggest tiger that had ever been seen had been working havoc among their cattle, and that the Sahibs would be hailed for all time as the one and only genuine protectors of the poor, if they could lay it low. They then retired to the P.W.D. bungalow where they spent a sulphurous night.

They started at two the next morning to avoid the heat. Chattra was only fourteen miles from the railway station, and four miles after starting

they found themselves in a thick bamboo jungle. There was a track thick with dust which was quite easy to follow in the moonlight, and soon, accompanied by the mildewed one, they had left the bullock carts far behind. The jungle was absolutely silent save for the continuous faint hum of insects and the occasional call of a night bird; and once a couple of hinds darted nervously across their path, and they felt their hearts quicken, so easy is a bush supposed a bear. James and Tom passed silently along, or conversed in whispers as if in church. By six o'clock the sun was up and it began to get unpleasantly warm, and when they arrived at Chattra bungalow with every footstep raising a cloud of dust powdering behind them a great deal of the edge had been taken off their enthusiasm. At the bungalow they found Barclay's brother's clerk. He informed them that there was "without doubt one full-sized tiger in neighbourhood" and further that he had "procured them four young buffalo calves for most reasonable price". However, when camp was pitched and thirst slaked, life began to be a little more rosy.

That evening there appeared from the village an elderly edition of the mildewed one, who was apparently deeply versed in the ways of this particular tiger, who incidentally had killed only half a mile from the village only two days before. They engaged him as shikari and went out with him to tie up the buffalo calves. After that there was nothing more to be done but wait till one of the baits was taken, and then sit up over the corpse hoping for the tiger to return. Fortunately, the summer drought was such that it localized the tiger's movements to the bed of one of two

streams. This made it far more difficult for him to feed, and it ensured that in all probability he would return to any kill that he made for a second meal. James suggested beating, but both the mildewed one and the mildewed one's earlier edition proclaimed loudly that it was impossible. Cross-examined they explained that such a thing never had been done, and therefore, obviously, never could be done. At the same time they murmured something about elephants. James and Tom pricked up their ears. Elephants sounded extremely Viceregal. But, apparently, it would take four days to collect them, and then only with the consent of the local Commissioner, and as they were uncertain how far nepotism might be carried they pressed the matter no further.

That night they went out at six in the still calm of a hot weather evening, with its sense of exquisite relief, and tied up the four young buffalos. They seemed quite oblivious of their mission in life, and they cropped at the grass contentedly enough. In all probability their rôle causes them little, if any, mental suffering and their death is immediate. Then, over two of the buffalo were constructed *machans,* and into these at about half-past six James and Tom climbed, and sat straining for the tiger, smothered in bamber oil to keep off mosquitoes, and armed with various electrical devices to illuminate the kill at the critical juncture. But when the pale first light of dawn lit up the sky the two calves were still feeding contently away: the monster had visited neither of them. Truth to tell James and Tom had both dozed off in the middle of the night to wake with a sudden jab of conscience

when the sun rose. At breakfast they compared notes and each of them rather shamefacedly had to admit his dereliction from duty. Accordingly, they decided that night to share the same machan, and keep alternate watches to make certain that the tiger should not approach undetected. Then they visited the other two buffalos but they, too, were undisturbed.

The spot they had chosen for that night's activities was just beyond the bank of a small but almost stagnant stream where the mildewed one assured them the tiger often came to water. Unfortunately, there was no tree of any size within four hundred yards of the spot, and the highest they could get the machan off the ground was eight feet up; and it is a cardinal rule of shikar that a machan should be at least sixteen feet high. However, they felt that with the additional safeguard of a four-foot deep stream between them and the jungle they should be well enough secured. At dusk they were put into the machan by Mangal with the necessary food and cushions (for they had suffered severely the night before from sitting on the cords of the machan, which had embossed their flanks with a neat cross stitch) and began their vigil.

James was going to keep watch till midnight. He sat on and on while Tom slept beside him, and at midnight when he woke him the moon had risen and began to shimmer in the stream below. James was soon asleep, but at two he was wakened in his turn feeling as if he had only been asleep for ten minutes. About half an hour later he became conscious that the jungle had become strangely still and then, suddenly, without any apparent warning the buffalo gave a little snort

of terror and pulled madly at the restraining rope, and with a bound a huge tiger was out before him in the open. It stood crouching as if about to spring, and James expected that every moment it would seize the poor beast; but no—the tiger started to titup up and down in front of it, boxing with its great forepaws for all the world as if it was giving a first lesson with the gloves, and the buffalo was, apparently, none the worse for the experience. This tiger seemed to be showing a great deal more of the felix than the leo. Then he paused suddenly and leaped upon the wretched beast's throat, and they went down, a struggling, kicking mass of black and yellow. James fired at his exposed shoulder as they did so. In a flash the tiger left the buffalo, who was still kicking, and charged straight through the river in a cloud of spray at James' *machan*. James fired again just as he emerged on the opposite bank. In the meantime Tom Barclay had woken, and taking in the situation with lightning rapidity he fired both barrels of his ancient black powder weapon just as the tiger leapt at the *machan*. It hit the tree about three feet below them (they found its claw marks the next morning).

Exactly what he did next they couldn't see, for they were enveloped in the cloud of black smoke which was the aftermath of firing Tom's piece. But by the time that James had reloaded and the smoke had cleared away the tiger, who was obviously hit, had fallen back on to the ground and withdrawn about twenty yards to a huge clump of bamboos. They could hear him moving about and muttering to himself. It had all been too sudden and breathless to be frightening, but now they had time to take stock of their position.

It was not a pleasant one. They were twelve feet above an infuriated tiger, who had already been within three feet of them and was probably able and anxious to get a good deal nearer. At this moment the moon went in. As with a simultaneous thought they looked at the upper branches of the tree. Without a word being spoken they slung their rifles and pulled themselves up, perching as high as they could like a pair of forlorn crows. It was not exactly comfortable, but at least moderately safe.

They sat on and on in cramped and agonizing silence waiting for the dawn, while down below they could hear the tiger moving. Finally James tried the effect of a little indirect fire, and put three shots in the direction of the movement. There was a pause and then they heard him move into the river with a splash, and make off up the hill on the other side. Three o'clock came and four, and by half-past four it was light. They could see from their perch that Mangal and the mildewed ones were approaching them very gingerly from the village. Behind them was a miscellaneous collection of villagers panting to find out the result of the fusilade. By unspoken consent they descended from the branch to the *machan* again. They knew well enough that common sense had dictated the strategic retreat up the tree; still they saw no reason for explaining their motives to the subject races. Once back in the *machan* they called up the mildewed one, who arrived, walking warily, with his supporters. They explained the situation and forbade anyone to cross the stream on pain of instant death and a fine of four annas. However, nobody seemed particularly anxious to go.

Still the tiger had to be finished off; there was no doubt about that. In the first place it was a point of honour to do so, but apart from that they were both thirsting for the blood of their first tiger. There were three alternatives open to them: to pursue on foot; or to try and drive the tiger out with village buffalos; or to send for an elephant. The second alternative was at once ruled out as it would take them twelve hours to collect the necessary number of buffalos. So they debated the third. The mildewed one assured them that the divisional forest elephant could be on the spot in about two hours, and so a messenger was despatched post haste to bring him.

Meanwhile they searched in the bushes where the tiger had lain all night. There was a lot of blood there, and the track lead away into the stream, and they could see pug marks on the opposite bank. They followed the blood track for a few yards to see which way the tiger had gone, and then as the ardour of the chase began to goad them on they went forward. In front the mildewed one hopped from track to track, finding here a broken twig, and there a tiny splash of blood on an upturned leaf.

Meanwhile, Mangal had wandered off to a flank with Tom's bearer on a mission of his own. Twice they called them back, and twice they went off again. And then suddenly Mangal called out in a still small voice, "Quickly Sahib, quickly"—and then his words were drowned in a roar as the tiger charged out. James and Tom stood their ground with their rifles levelled, determined to sell their lives dearly, while the mildewed one reached the upper branches of a tree in record time. A second later to their great relief they

saw Mangal swing himself up into a tree top, and they could just see the expression of delight on his old face at having baulked the tiger of his prey, like a small boy who has brought off a practical joke. There they stood waiting, a pair of Roman sentinels. Nothing more happened. Then they heard Mangal's voice again. "You can see him from here Sahib. He's in the bamboos."

It was all very well for Mangal in the tree, thought James; it was quite another matter down there below. Cautioning Tom to stand and cover him as he advanced he threaded his way noiselessly across the space between him and Mangal's tree. His heart was hammering with excitement, and his hands were shaking as he clutched his rifle. That minute seemed an eternity; that forty yards an infinity. But at last he reached Mangal's tree and sprang up into the branches with an agility that he never thought he possessed. And someone had once told him that tiger shooting was dull !

Mangal was in a frenzy of excitement. He had at last got such a story as would command the attention of the bazaars for years. "There, Sahib," he said, "there". James could just see a blaze of black and yellow stripes moving in the trees: he unslipped his rifle while Mangal held him by his belt, and thus he stood swaying on a branch and took an unsteady aim. Slowly he pulled the trigger, and the next thing he knew he was lying dazed and winded on the ground, having been shot out of the tree by the recoil. Stunned though he was he had sufficient control of his faculties to be back in the tree almost before he knew what had happened. He wasn't going to

lie about with a wounded tiger twenty-five yards away. As Tom remarked in subsequent descriptions of the episode, " he came back first bounce ".

Mangal held him dizzily on the branches of the tree, with the rifle lying open below them, much too scared and relieved to speak. Then Tom called out " He's gone off up the hill a little bit. I can't see him now." They descended cautiously from their trees, picked up the rifle which, fortunately, was undamaged, and then withdrew silently to the stream and held a counsel of war. After a long discussion with the mildewed one they decided to wait for the arrival of the elephant they had sent for, and which was expected in half an hour. In due course it came lolopping along with the lumbering effortlessness of its kind. Then to their dismay they found that they had no other way of attaching themselves to the vast dome of its back than a small pad. They questioned, they expostulated, but it was that or nothing, so they climbed up and jolted away into the jungle. They had not gone far, however, before they realized that clinging on to the back of the elephant they stood no better chance of a steady shot than being supported by Mangal on a branch. The mahout said that he could get a howdah in about three hours, so they sent him off, and sat down again and waited by the stream.

They had been after that tiger since two a.m.: it was now ten o'clock and they had had no food since the night before. It was also unpleasantly hot. What with excitement and exhaustion they were almost spent. They had reached that most dangerous stage when anxiety to be finished with the business dispels caution. After waiting for ten minutes Tom got up. " I'm sick of this," he

said, " there's no point in waiting here in this heat, when the tiger's probably dead up the hill all the time. Let's go and rout him out." James needed no persuading. They went slowly forward past the tree from which James had fallen and on into the baking jungle. As they advanced shoulder to shoulder with their rifles at the ready, the mildewed one and another villager were scaling trees out to the flanks to spy out the ground over which they had to advance. When they had gone about three hundred yards the mildewed one was seen gesticulating at a clump of bamboos in front like one demented. James and Tom retreated and climbed with alacrity into two trees. There was nothing to be seen as a small bump obscured the bushes where the tiger lay. Then Tom advanced slowly across the intervening space while James covered him as he went. He went on for twenty yards and then pulled himself into a tree. It was now James' turn. With a peculiarly prickly hedgehog in his bowels he crept forward past Tom's tree, and ventured on into the unknown beyond. He could see the bushes now, twenty yards from him; and ten yards further on there was a tree for which he made. Step by step he tiptoed forward. At last he reached it and heaved himself into its upper branches with a sigh of relief. Then he looked round. There was the tiger. He was sitting at the foot of the bushes in a little hollow looking as if he had just woken up from a peaceful after-dinner siesta. There was nothing about his appearance that suggested the snarling thunderbolt that had hurled itself at their machan at two o'clock that morning. James raised his rifle, took careful aim and put a bullet through

his eye. His head dropped, the great body gave a convulsive struggle and then he rolled forward and lay still. James fired one more shot to make certain, but there was no doubt that the monster was dead. He descended from his tree, feeling as if a terrific load had suddenly been lifted from his shoulders. Strain and fatigue had almost brought him to the end of his tether, but now he was walking on air.

The tiger was a huge beast, the biggest probably that either of them would ever see, with great massive shoulders and a huge back. They turned him over and pulled him out to tape him, putting a peg in front of his nose and at the end of his stretched tail, after the approved manner, then measuring the distance in between. He was nine feet four inches, but this gave no indication of his real size, as he had an unusually stumpy tail. He was certainly possessed in all other respects of the proportions of a ten-foot tiger, an animal that is so often talked of but so rarely encountered.

On close examination they found that James' bullet fired from the machan had passed through the ribs behind the heart, and that Tom's had shattered the near fore paw about six inches below the shoulder. Buried in the tiger's chest was a small bore bullet, completely flattened out, which had passed through a wound in the shoulder, since completely healed up. No better proof could have been afforded them of the fact that small bore weapons and tiger shoots are not the happiest of combinations.

They then left Mangal and the mildewed ones to see to the skinning, with special instructions to preserve for them the "floating bones", which

are considered very lucky, and to prevent the locals pulling out the whiskers, which they prize greatly and grind into a powder highly spoken of as an aphrodisiac. Once back in the camp they wolfed down a meal and were soon sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion. Two days later they were back in Calcutta, and when the pelt was exhibited, even non-shooting Tuscans like Hargreaves could scarce forebear to cheer. It went to James by the law of the jungle which says the trophy goes to him who gets in the first shot, fatal or not. However, Tom was able to show some sort of a memento of the adventure, as James gave him the tiger's skull, which suitably polished and mounted makes a very handsome trophy.

So ended James' first essay into plain shooting; an episode exhilarating and exciting enough, in which he and Tom fell into most of the pitfalls which yawn for the feet of the novice, but which left him thirsting for further and still further adventures.

CHAPTER IX

MOSQUITO BITES AND BISON

WHEN the "pujas" came in early November James had all his plans ready for a new venture. He had applied to the forest officer at Puri for a block, and his application had been granted. Accordingly at the first possible moment he rushed away from the office and caught the Madras mail. The Puri forest division lies on the Madras border of Orissa, only a night away from Calcutta in the train; the blocks are situate on the low range of hills from ten to twenty miles inland, which finally merge into the Eastern Ghats. They harbour bison in large quantities, a certain number of tiger, and, further inland in the Futuri States, elephant. The Chilka Lake, too, just south of Puri offers as pleasant a duck-shoot as is to be had in India. But as these jungles lack the spectacular appeal of the Central Provinces or Mysore they are comparatively little shot over.

Accordingly two a.m. on 28th October found James leaving the local train at Balugaon station. While Mangal dealt with the kit he and Bella (who insisted on being taken, having been most dolorous at being left behind on the last occasion) forced their way into the local rest bungalow. This was occupied by an Indian official, a village Hampden, who made a spirited attempt to preserve it inviolate to his own use, but after a brisk encounter ingress was effected. The next morning

they packed their belongings into two bullock carts, and made their way along the grey and dusty road which ran across the plain to the foot of the distant blue hills. It was an eighteen-mile march, and only in the last six were they afforded the welcoming shelter of the jungle, and they were not sorry to arrive at the forest bungalow that evening. Here they were greeted by London, the forest officer, a muscular and reserved young man, whose duty it was to look after a forest area rather bigger than a large English county. He was prone to the long and rather introspective silences of a man who lives much by himself, but he had read widely and had an intimate knowledge of the jungle and its lore. He was delighted to see James. "You must stay with me while you're here," he said, "I've got to go into Ranchi for the annual conference, so you'll help me to get into conversational form. Contrary to accepted practise I've been out here all through the monsoon, so I'm even less civilized than usual". "Don't you find it a bit lonely?" James asked. "Yes, I do at times. It generally either turns one into a gin swiller, or a sort of Mowgli with leanings to other people's religions. I have avoided the gin anyhow," he added with a smile. "Do you shoot much?" James enquired. The time had come when he could with decency lead the conversation on to the only topic that mattered. "Very little, a tiger now and again, or a bison just to teach them not to smash up my young trees, and sometimes a hind for the pot. That's the D.F.O.'s privilege," he added parenthetically. "And what are my chances?" "Well, tiger I'm doubtful about. You might get a leopard anywhere. That's always so much a

matter of luck. The difficulty is to get 'ties.' I've told my clerk to do what he can, but so far he has only produced one small buffalo calf. I'll get on to him again. The difficulty is there's so much water about now one can't locate the few tigers there are in these parts. But you ought to get a bison I think. I've got an old man here who's a very good tracker."

Thus heartened James went out with the tracker before dinner and tied up their diminutive buffalo. The tracker was a little man with great deep brown eyes like a spaniel's, and a thin straggly black beard. A man of few words, but in those few he made it sufficiently apparent that he was afraid James knew lamentably little about the placing of baits. James was pleasantly surprised that evening at the quality of the dinner that was set before them. Ice, soda water, fresh fish, even yesterday's copy of the "Statesman", all brought out from the station by coolie that day. The table boasted a white cloth, china, glass, flowers in a bowl.

"It's the only thing to do if it's one's life," said London. "On a three weeks' trek one thinks it's the greatest fun in the world to feed off one tin plate, but one can't keep it up for ever. It ceases to be fun: and anyhow the cost is comparatively small. I regard it as part of the white man's burden." James sat on till nearly midnight listening to the tales London had to tell of the jungle, but at last he made for his bed underneath which Bella was chained. She would have offered a tempting bait to a venturesome panther.

For the next three days they were out at dawn tracking silently through the great jungles after bison. James wore rubber-soled shoes, and they

were able to pass with hardly a sound. Often they came across pig or chitul, and twice they got up to a herd of bison. But the jungle was so impenetrably thick after the rains that they got nothing more than a glimpse here and there of a black body, and it was quite impossible to pick out a cow from a bull; the penalty for shooting a cow being a fine of fifty rupees. James was anxious to make no mistake, and though on both occasions he was within twenty yards of the herd he held his fire. He found it exciting enough moving slowly this way and that trying to get a glimpse of a bull, though of course the bison is nothing like such a nasty customer as the buffalo, and does not as a rule charge of malice prepense, unless he is wounded, or unless a cow is separated from her calf. After a minute or two one of the sentinel cows would get his wind and give the alarm and the whole herd would crash away through the jungle, and in an incredibly short space of time leave it as silent as before. But they found no trace of one of the solitary bulls they were hoping to find. The big bulls are rarely in the herd.

On the second night just as they were returning home they came to a clearing not a quarter of a mile from the bungalow, which was to be the site of a new plantation. They sat down on a little hillock at its edge to watch for what might come. For ten minutes there was not a movement, hardly a sound to break the peace of the evening. Then two peafowl emerged very nervously and began to peck at the grass, only to scurry away as a sow and her litter grunted their way into the clearing, and began to scratch greedily at the roots. While James was watching them, a

cheetul stag trotted into the clearing and began to cross it, not more than forty yards away, the picture of graceful movement, with his head slightly up and his antlers thrown back over his spotted body. As James leant forward to pick up his rifle the stag bounded forward like a flash, and cantered off. James hesitated whether to risk a shot or not, and then his better feelings prevailed and he held his fire. He was rewarded for his forebearance, for the cheetul after going for about two hundred and fifty yards stopped and looked back to see what it was that had alarmed him, offering a broadside shot. James was ready with his rifle rested and aimed; making a slight adjustment for the breeze that was blowing over the clearing he dropped the cheetul dead with a bullet through his heart, a piece of marksmanship which afforded him great pleasure. It was a remarkably good stag, as luck would have it, with perfectly marked coat, the white spots being so clearly and regularly defined on either side as to give the skin an almost machine-made look.

On the day after this, soon after they had left the bungalow in the early morning, they came across a herd of bison crashing about in one of London's young plantations. They crept their way round the thicket. There, sure enough, they could see twenty or thirty blackish forms moving about in the undergrowth, but strain he his eyes never so carefully he could not distinguish a bull. The bulls, he knew, were supposed to be blacker and have larger horns, but, as far as he could distinguish between them, this herd must be all cows or all bulls, and bovine nature, being what it is, he could hardly accept

such a theory. And every time he spotted a head which seemed bigger than another it would remove itself behind a tree, or pass round one of its fellows in the most irritating way. He looked at the tracker. "*Paile wallah,*" he whispered. (First one.) James turned his attention to the *paile wallah.* He could detect no particularly masculine signs about it. On the other hand it seemed no more feminine than any of the others. In vain he looked for an udder; its hind quarters were wreathed in undergrowth in the same way that a Botticelli cherub springs from the middle of a cloud. However, the tracker had dubbed it male and male it should be. He aimed carefully at its shoulder—it was obviously only a matter of seconds till it got their wind—and fired. The bison came down with a phlump, stone dead, and with a crash and bellow the rest of the herd made off through the plantation. In less than a minute all was as quiet as if they had never been there. James hurried through the undergrowth. The bison was lying in the bushes, and he could not see it. He forced his way through the young trees. Yes—No—Yes ! It *was* a cow, very unmistakably.

What on earth should he do ? Here am I, he thought, as it were fouling London's nest at his very front door; and if the metaphors were a little mixed so were his thoughts. What line should he adopt ? Should he treat it all as a joke ? Should he be a creeping thing upon the earth ? Or should he be defiant and complain that he had been provided with a shikari who didn't know a cow from a bull ? He mentally rehearsed his homecoming. "I say, old chap, it's damned funny, but I've shot a queen bison . . "; or "I'm

most awfully sorry, London, but I've shot a cow . . ."; or again, "Look here, London, that tracker you gave me is absolutely useless . . .". He was still choosing a formula when he arrived at the bungalow. The news had already arrived. London emerged with a grin on his face. "Never mind," he said, "these little accidents will happen. It's like having a girl when you wanted a boy." James was much relieved. "I suppose I pay up and look pleasant," he said. "Well I don't think there'll be any need," London answered, "there are far too many bison here about, and you are doing a public service by thinning them out. I think we might say the incident is closed." James' relief was extreme.

The next day London went off to Ranchi, and James decided to move on to Rajin, a thousand feet higher up, where there was a small bungalow. Here he stood a better chance of finding one of those solitary bulls which alone seemed to offer a solution of his particular sex problem. Accordingly they moved off up a track hacked through the jungle, with Bella in a state of great moral indignation, as she was supremely affronted on being tied up to the back of a bullock cart with the buffalo they had been using as a bait as companion. However, as James pointed out to her it is more fun trailing behind a bullock cart than being carried off by a panther, and she had to do it. There was only seven days left of his fortnight's leave so there was no time to be lost. They soon found bison tracks and they spent two blank days following up a large and solitary bull. For long hours they followed the track through the silence of the jungle, sometimes startling a hind, or a sow and her squealing brood; and

though once or twice they knew by a footprint or recent droppings that they were getting "warm", they never succeeded in getting up to him. James was amazed at the skill with which the tracker would keep to the trail over the barest of rocks and across absolutely sun-baked ground, picking up the trail with a broken twig or a turned leaf.

But on the third morning as they were passing silently along in the dawn mists they came on traces that showed he had passed that way very recently. Up the hill they went where the jungle grew thinner, and on and on till the sun was high in the sky, and as they went the tracker motioned to James that he was not far ahead. Suddenly they topped the hill and, there before them, was a huge bison asleep. But as they sighted him he woke and stumbled to his feet. He was head on to James, and as he slipped forward the safety catch of his rifle he wondered in a vague sort of way where he would aim if he charged. But the situation did not arise, as in getting to his feet he turned half right, and James was able to put in a shot behind the shoulder. The solid bullet (James had had the good sense to change from expanding to solid when he set out after bison) did its work well, and the great beast sank to its knees; then he struggled to his feet again in an effort to get to his enemy. But before he could do so James had given him the second barrel, and then, quickly reloading, fired a third and a fourth. The bison lay there struggling to get up, and it was not till he had fired two more shots that his flanks ceased to heave, his eye glazed over, and he rolled on to his side. There was no question this time of his sex; he was an enormous

beast, he must have stood six and a half feet high at the shoulder, and his horns taped thirty-nine inches across and eighteen inches round the base. So James returned to camp very well pleased with himself, and later in the day the skull and horns arrived after him, but not without a certain amount of trouble, as none of the locals (being Hindus) would touch a bison, and they had to send some miles into the jungle to find a primitive tribe who were prepared to perform the obsequies.

James' luck held, and the very next morning as he returned to camp for breakfast after having been in the forest since dawn, a villager arrived hot foot to say that a tiger was eating the buffalo. The man was in a state of gibbering excitement, and James was little impressed by him, thinking that he meant that the buffalo had been taken in the night. However, he set forth at once to investigate, and rather as an afterthought he took his rifle with him. The buffalo had been tied up about half a mile from the bungalow, at a point just beyond a stream where two paths met. James was wearing tennis shoes, and as he rounded the corner before he reached this spot he was suddenly confronted by a tiger devouring the bait. James froze; the shikari froze behind him. The tiger was only twenty yards off and engrossed in its meal, his head right down in the buffalo's haunches, tearing at the flesh as if his life depended on it, fiercely and with infinite concentration. James was absolutely taken aback: he had not expected to find a tiger feeding at nine o'clock in the morning; and, moreover, this tiger was so very much the tiger of Regents Park; somehow, he had never expected a genuine

"wild" tiger to look the same. It might have stepped from the pages of a child's animal book. Its coat was such a vivid red, its stripes so particularily stripey, and it was devouring its meal with all the vigour of feeding time at the Zoo. It was head on, and James did not want to risk a shot at such close quarters, so he withdrew very silently, still facing the tiger, as though in the presence of Royalty. Then he passed slowly out of sight round the corner again.

There was no time to be lost; he tiptoed into the forest, down the bed of the little stream which he followed for a few yards. Then, very cautiously, he pushed his rifle and his head and shoulders out over the lip of the stream. His heart was beating like a steam hammer, for his past experience with tigers had been quite exciting enough to make him realize that if he was spotted things might fare badly for him. However, the tiger saw nothing but his dinner. James slid forward the safety catch of his rifle —at that range he could scarcely miss—and put a bullet behind the shoulder. The tiger gave one tremendous leap into the air with his forefeet stretched out and his tail sticking up like a poker, a Lewis Wain cat to the life, and then bounded away into the bushes. James was speechless with mortification. It seemed impossible that he could have missed at that range. They approached the buffalo. The poor beast had had most of his hind quarters eaten away and was a sorry sight. While James was gazing at the remains the tracker gave a grunt of satisfaction and held up for James' inspection a leaf with a patch of blood on it.

At that they sat down where they were for

half an hour, in case the tiger's wounds should prove mortal, or at any rate to let them stiffen up: then they set off in pursuit, cautiously and inch by inch. In ten minutes they had barely covered four hundred yards. Then the tracker gave a second grunt, even more suggestive of satisfaction than the first, and straightened himself up. He pointed down the hill. Fifty yards further on the tiger was lying motionless at the bottom of a tree. James was taking no risks; he knew that many a "dead" tiger had come to life again, and so he covered it with his rifle and ordered his shikari to throw stones at the corpse. But when a couple of these had struck it on the head without effect he advanced proudly to his victim. Had there been a camera about he would probably have posed with one foot on the tiger's chest. It was a sturdy young tiger eight feet two inches between pegs, and with an exceptionally fine winter coat. By this time most of the tiny community of Rajin had arrived and were in high glee, as this was the first tiger that had been slain in that neighbourhood for many years.

When they got home James had the tiger propped up on the verandah, and then unchained Bella from her *charpoi* within; and her surprise and alarm as she bounded out, and her subsequent attempt (when she found the tiger was a dead 'un) to pretend that she had known that it was a joke all the time, was worth a guinea a minute. In due course the skin was taken off and pegged out in front of the bungalow, and Mangal was able to fill two bottles with tiger fat, which he assured James was sovereign cure for the rheumatics.

That night James determined to sit up over the corpse of the buffalo, or what was left of it, on the off chance of a mother or a brother coming back for a meal. He was feeling a little unwell, but he attributed this to a succession of strenuous days. He duly erected a *machan* and climbed into it at dusk. It was a cold night (Rajin was over three thousand feet up) and he shivered rather. He slept in fits and starts, but nothing came to disturb the kill. But when he got down in the morning he felt extremely unwell. He went back to the bungalow and drank a great deal of hot tea which made him feel better, so he called up the shikari and went off to a clearing about a mile off where Sambhur were sometime on the move. There was nothing there, but it interested James very little. He felt extremely tired and sat down. The sun got higher and higher and as it warmed him he ceased to shiver. He realized that he was very ill, but all he wanted was to lie there in the sun and be left alone. The shikari, meanwhile, kept looking at him and asking him if he wouldn't like to go home. James only grunted. Finally, the shikari came up to him and lead him away like a naughty child, and James suffered him without demur, as he was conscious only of a horizon that jumped up and down like an amateur lecturer's magic lantern slide, and of a throbbing in his head that grew more and more insistent every minute. Next he could see Bella's black figure bounding out to meet him, seemingly jerking this way and that like a ship in a stormy sea. And then as he stepped on to the verandah the whole scene blacked out and he crashed on to the flooring . . . .

He had a peculiarly virulent attack of malaria,

which, instead of meeting with rest and quinine, he had ignored with inevitable results. Later he woke. He was conscious of the flight of time, but whether it was hours, days or weeks he couldn't tell. It was dark. He was very hot indeed, and he threw off the bedclothes with a grunt. Bella came over to the bed and wagged her tail vigorously, and licked his bare arm, and then he was conscious of a figure moving slowly about in the room. It was Mangal with food. The thought of food filled him with rage. He wouldn't take it; he wouldn't. He summoned enough strength to curse Mangal roundly, and drove him from the room. Then he relapsed into sleep.

For two days he lay in the bungalow in a high state of fever. In a hazy way he knew what was the matter, but though he had quinine he had not the energy to take it. He felt as though his body were free of earthly trammels, and that he was floating up towards the ceiling; sometimes he imagined that he was back in Palestine, and by a strange freak of memory sharing a tent again with a sapper subaltern, whose name he had long ago forgotten, whom he had casually encountered on the L. of C. These, he very well knew, were the imaginings of his fever, and they hardly worried him at all. But what caused him endless questionings was whether the familiar objects were really there. He would wake in the night wondering if it was actually Bella's hot breath that he felt against his pillow, and he wanted to know more than anything in the world whether the silent figures that he saw passing and repassing on the verandah were in fact there. On the third day the fever was no better, and he was

hotter and more uncomfortable than ever. He was aware of Mangal standing at the foot of his bed, and speaking in English—he usually spoke in Hindustani.

"Master very ill," he was repeating, "Master very sick man. Master go back to Balugaon to-morrow." James was half petulant, half defiant. "I've come out here to shoot," he answered, "and I'll go back when my leave's up." "Master go back to Balugaon on a *charpoi*; Jemadar Sahib bringing coolies." (The forest ranger.) Somehow James felt too ill to argue. "Oh ! do as you like," he said. So the next day he was hoisted out of the bungalow on a *charpoi* by four stalwarts. Behind came Bella and Mangal, and a miscellaneous collection of hangers-on, who formed a sort of Greek chorus, singing the praise of he who had delivered them out of the hand of the tiger. They reached the bottom of the hill that evening and here there were further congratulations and rejoicings, for it was many years since there had been a tiger slain there.

The next day they completed the journey to Baluagaon, half way on the *charpoi,* and the last twelve miles in an immemorial and ramshackle old ekka. That night James got on to the mail, and after a nightmare journey back to Calcutta he found himself in hospital, where with the aid of doctors and nurses, punkahs, ice, and quinine, a thin trickle of renewed vitality soon began to flow back through his veins. The trickle expanded and increased amazingly, and within a fortnight he was selling wine with as much zest as ever. But the Lords of Liquor looked askance on an outing that had terminated so disastrously, and thus it came to pass that a full year elapsed

before he was able to take the trail once more. And he had to admit that, however impressive the captives of his bow and spear might be, the jungle, ably represented by an anophelene mosquito, had taken the winning trick.

CHAPTER X

TALL BUT TRUE

It was just a year before James wiped the oil off his rifle again. The pujas had come round once more, and his objective on this occasion was the island of Kukri Mukri, which lies at the mouth of the Sunderbunds, the Gangetic Delta. Readers of Indian Sporting literature of forty years ago are inclined to imagine that the Sunderbunds are a Paradise absolutely crawling with game. This may or may not have been the case forty years ago, but the game has disappeared now, and the Sunderbunds are not a locality which one would recommend for a shoot; not so much for the non-existence of game but for the difficulties of its manipulation. Tigers there are, and hence the lesser deer, cheetul, swamp deer and the like, on which they prey, but the plentitude of water makes it impossible to localize them; and the many branches of the Ganges, the thickness of the jungle, and the impossibility of obtaining beaters, all tend to make shooting very difficult.

But James had a particular purpose in view on this occasion. He was madly keen to bag a buffalo, which is beyond doubt the blue ribbon of Indian plain shooting. There is no more magnificent animal in the world than a solitary Indian bull buffalo, standing well over six feet high, with his huge sweeping horns ninety inches across; nor is there any fiercer or more cunning

brute in the jungle. He is still to be found in the Central Provinces and Assam, but in the Central Provinces he is strictly preserved, and can only be shot in some of the native states, such as Bastur.

But on Kukri Mukri James had heard that there was a herd of three hundred wild buffalo who had practically depopulated the island, and as the Civil authorities were planning a scheme of agrarian development they were only too pleased to give leave to shoot there; as they were not quite certain if, when the felling began, the buffalo would swim off in a body like the Pied Piper's rats to another island, or whether they would fight a rearguard action against the encroachments of the foresters. To James the island offered a heaven-sent opportunity of bagging a buffalo in the few days that were at his disposal, and with all the excitement, but with a great deal less of the infinity of labour required to bag a buffalo in the plains, when the solitary bull has to be followed up for days and possibly weeks before there is any chance of getting a shot. The whole island of Kukri Mukri being only three miles by two, the prospects here seemed a good deal brighter than anywhere else he could attempt.

Kukri Mukri was in point of fact the place where distinguished visitors were taken for a mild thrill. Little Willy (the Crown Prince) had been charged there by a perspicacious bull, and just after the war another had lain violent hands, or rather horns, on a Personage of no small importance in the Government of India and tossed him.

At that time there was working in James' office

a young man of about twenty called Albert Cleary. He had just been recruited from home in a subordinate capacity, which meant that he was destined to pass the wine over the counter and not to sell it to his friends in the club. Though not a wit worse bred or educated than Hargreaves, or Mallaby, or James himself for the matter of that, he had been recruited into the non-commissioned ranks of the Calcutta mercantile hierarchy, nor, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, or Job Carnock, or His Excellency the Governor-General in Council, or whoever legislated for these matters, could he ever leave them. Unless of course he made a great deal of money when, of course, matters would be on a very different footing. But till then he was debarred the Saturday Club, and instead of playing golf at Jodhpur he spent his afternoon supporting the fortunes of the Calcutta Football Club, and his evenings in one of the institutions patronized by the considerable European population of Calcutta whose names do not appear in the Government House book.

He had asked James a great deal about shooting, and as he was obviously as keen as he was inexperienced, James asked him if he would like to come to the Sunderbunds. He liked very much. Although this was considered rather a breach of etiquette by his superiors, James' eccentricities as regards shikar were so well known now as to be more the subject for mild badinage than unfavourable comments; and so early in November they started off for the Pujas.

They took the train and steamer to Barisal, where they were royally entertained by the half dozen Europeans who kept the flag flying in that

station, a sessions judge, a deputy commissioner, a policeman or two, and a P.W.D. officer. Here people were far too busy trying to get on with their job to worry about the social distinctions of the Calcutta mercantile community. All they knew was that here were a couple of compatriots arrived at their station, and that they wished to make them welcome.

All was ready for their departure. They were to leave for Khulna that night in the river steamer, and there board a country boat which was to take them out to Kukri Mukri, the farthest out island in the Bay of Bengal. Sheik Ahmed, the most notable shikari of the neighbourhood, had been engaged for them. A day later they were sailing calmly off over the placid waters of the Bay, through the shallows at the mouths of the delta, and out into the unknown. It was a twenty-four-hour journey, and it prolonged itself into thirty-six, as they managed to get stuck on a sandbank for twelve hours. Lying on the deck in the delightful climate of an Indian November, reading, sleeping, and lunching off freshly caught becti (the Indian turbot) was a very marked change from the great majority of James' expeditions, shuffling along over dusty roads, and wind-swept passes. However, they made Kukri Mukri at last, and moored in the creek that ran right up into the middle of the island.

James was delighted with the mixture of naïveté and anxiety not to appear ignorant which young Cleary displayed, for like other people he was not averse to having a neophyte. But he only vaguely perceived that Cleary was almost the exact counterpart of himself as he had set foot in the ancient land of Hindustan. He had

not the perception to see that Cleary's reluctance to admit that he had never handled a shot gun was very much kin with his own desire to conceal a similar fact from old John M—— six years earlier; and when Cleary delightedly decorated his puggaree with the feathers of a diminutive pigeon he had shot, the action seemed to James to be charmingly disingenuous, and he quite forgot the battered old Cawnpore topee in his quarters at Calcutta still decorated with the pinion feathers of his first duck.

It had taken them four days to get to Kukri Mukri, and allowing four days to get back, they would only have two days to shoot in. Sheik Ahmed, a spruce little man in a neck high khaki drill coat and a neat khaki puggaree, had enlisted an incredibly black man in a loin cloth who claimed to have made a life study of the habits of the herd. They had come at the wrong time Sheik Ahmed mournfully observed. The jungle was neck high and thick as a wall after the monsoon. They should have come in late spring when it was much easier to bag a bull, as then they went out for an airing every evening on the grass strip to the south of the island. Not, be it here noted, that it did matter if they bagged any number of cows: the more buffalo that were destroyed the better it would be for everybody.

They set off the next morning. The incredibly black one first, then James with the .450, next Cleary with a .404 Winchester, and Sheik Ahmed behind. They forced their way slowly into the jungle, which was far the thickest James had ever encountered, and with which practically the whole island was covered. Behind them at a respectful distance came a motley collection of

villagers from the one straggling village which bordered the creek where they had moored. They fought their way slowly forward, pouring with sweat, scratched and torn and bleeding, but in three hours they had not covered a mile, and so far there was no sign of life. At noon they halted for lunch, and Cleary was fain to admit that shooting wild buffalos (he always added the "wild" to ensure that his friends didn't think it was the domesticated sort he was after, that one saw in the streets of Calcutta) was more exacting than the journey out had led him to suppose.

After lunch they started off again, and now they made better progress as they were getting the hang of the art of moving quietly through the jungle, of which their retinue were such able exponents. As they followed the incredibly black one this way and that James couldn't help feeling that this was rather a poor initiation for Cleary into shikar, for as far as he could see they were wandering quite aimlessly to and fro. Yet he knew of no improvement of method that he had enough self assertion to insist on.

But about five o'clock, when they were both pretty beat, the incredibly black one suddenly motioned to Sheik Ahmed, and removed himself respectfully but firmly to the back of the column. Sheik Ahmed wiped the sweat off the back of his neck with the tail of his puggaree and advanced. He held himself stiffly, neither exactly looking, nor smelling, nor listening, but apparently exercising some sixth sense. Then he nodded very significantly. They advanced with the greatest caution. After going for about a minute James heard the herd moving about in front of him. He looked in vain. They waited there for one—two

—three minutes. The atmosphere was very tense. The seconds could almost be heard ticking on some mental watch. Then from behind a tree James saw a vast black form move past; and another and another. Sometimes he would catch a glimpse of a great curved horn, and sometimes of a huge black rump, but nothing that would tell them with any certainty of size or sex.

James turned to Sheik Ahmed. That worthy's eye was gleaming with excitement. He held up a cautionary finger; they must let the situation develop. Suddenly there was a snort of mingled rage and alarm, a second's silence, and then with one thundering crash a mass of black bodies hurled themselves through the jungle. There must have been fifty of them at least. As they thundered away the three of them stood and stared at each other with a wild surmise; the remainder of their party had long since disappeared into the tree tops. Rather sorrowfully they wended their way back to the boat, determined to do or die on the morrow which was the last day of their leave.

By eleven o'clock on the following morning they had once more picked up the track of the herd and by twelve they were almost on top of it again. The jungle here was slightly less thick, and in the patches of sunlight filtering through the leaves they got glimpses of the huge beasts moving about. It had been agreed between them that James was to take the first shot. He was in a state of great consternation, trying to balance off the possibility of the herd making off against the need for carefully selecting a head. Finally, an unmistakable bull went past broadside on, and James threw up his rifle and brought

it down kicking and bellowing in the undergrowth about twenty yards off.

Then the whole herd stampeded.

Not away from them, but all round them, charging madly this way and that, while the attendent villagers, positively cœurs-de-lions in their tree tops, cheered James madly on to fresh efforts. Meanwhile, the "buff" on the ground was frantically trying to rise, and James fired half a dozen shots into him to try and prevent this; though his aim was poor as the three of them were lying glued to the ground in a state of great terror. Rapidly the herd made away, and the crashes and pounding hoofs became fewer and fewer, and after a frenzied minute the last of them had gone. As it went past, not more than ten yards from James he gave it both barrels behind the shoulder and it dropped like a stone. The stampede, of course had been prompted more from alarm than from a desire to overrun their enemies, but still it had been a frightening experience, and they were well pleased that it was satisfactorily over, and with the results of the day's work. They examined the corpses; neither were Rowland Ward specimens, but still they were imposing enough, and Sheik Ahmed was loud in his congratulations. Meanwhile, the villages had come up gibbering with excitement. When the babel had sufficiently subsided Sheik Ahmed approached James, and told him that a cow, *with* a calf, had been seen making off on three legs. James was inclined to scoff, but one of the villagers led them to the beginning of an undoubted blood track. Evidently, one of James' shots at the " buff " lying on the ground had gone high and hit the cow as she passed behind.

It was an unpleasant situation, as a wounded buffalo cow with her calf was just about the nastiest thing that could have been devised for them to follow through such a jungle. However, as a wounded "buff" couldn't be left to run amok among the villagers, the situation had to be faced, and they set off as nonchalently as possible to pursue. For, after all, if one comes of a conquering race one must look the part even if one doesn't feel it. As they started James, who would have given a good deal to be shot of the whole business, glanced at Cleary. He appeared quite unmoved, or at any rate blissfully unconscious of danger.

They followed the track for about half an hour: the incredibly black one tracking, then James, then Cleary, then Sheik Ahmed. They came to a tiny clearing. What happened next was the work of about twenty-five seconds though it takes longer to tell. As James emerged into the clearing he saw the bushes moving on his right flank, and he realized that, after the manner of her kind, she had circled round and taken him in the flank. He swung round on her as she emerged with head up and eyes blazing, and at a steady canter, though dragging her off hind leg. She was only fifteen yards off but he immediately gave her both barrels. As it afterwards proved the first hit her below the horn boss, and the second passed through her ribs. She still came on, and James leapt aside hoping to reload after he had escaped the charge. As he jumped he fell straight in her path with his foot caught up in a branch. At that moment Cleary emerged from the bushes. Taking in the situation with lightning rapidity he put a shot behind her shoulder at about seven

yards range, and she came down not two yards from James' feet. There she lay, snorting with rage, her flanks heaving, her eyes rolling in her death agony, while James lay before her like one waking from a bad dream. It was a supreme moment.

It was the sort of thing that would have been considered far-fetched in a work of fiction, and as James used plaintively to say when telling the story afterwards, it was impossible to make any improvements on the facts. It was certainly the nearest shave he could have hoped for. He used afterwards to try and analyse his feelings as he lay there waiting for something to happen. He certainly wasn't terrified—things were moving far too quickly for that. He had been infinitely more frightened in the original stampede. His past life did not flash before him. Nor did any trivial incident fly back to his memory from the long forgotten past, which appears to be the appropriate emotion at such a moment. " . . . . I suddenly remembered that day long ago when I was standing before the Colleoni statue in Venice, and a flock of pigeons rushed down on me from the roof of Giovani e Paulo . . . " or, " . . . . for some unaccountable reason I saw the great gold watch with the turquoise monogram that hung upon my Aunt Alberta's bosom rising and falling with the heavy intake of her breath . . . . "

But James was conscious only of an intense curiosity to see how the situation would develop, and a sense of relief at its outcome, though in subsequent recollection he occasionally indulged in a shiver of horror at the possibilities of the incident; not unlike Sheik Ahmed who said nothing at all, but significantly patted his beating

heart. So, though it is annoying when one's reactions fall short of the conventional, yet the truthful chronicler must record that James indulged in none of the emotions appropriate to such an episode.

CHAPTER XI

A C.P. SUMMER

Six years had passed since James had first set foot in India, and the call of the Red Gods had lost some of its insistence. The call to the flesh-pots of Europe had rather taken its place. However, he had at length accumulated enough leave to go home for six months. Accordingly, his thoughts were reverting all that winter to those pleasures of civilization which so much occupy the mind of the Anglo-Indian; that cut off the joint at Simpson's, the blazing fireside, the sanitary conveniences, the theatres, the seaside.

But at the beginning of the spring he began to ask himself how he would really be able to amuse himself doing nothing in Southampton for five months. The tennis club, the sea bathing, the provincial theatre, the trips to the New Forest or the Isle of Wight—it seemed to offer fewer and fewer attractions. True, there would be lighter moments, like the visit to the Folies Bergéres on the way home from Marseilles, where one can always count on finding the *jeunesse dorée* of Anglo-India on the night after the arrival of a P. and O., or the occasional visits to London . . . .

However, he made up his mind to have one more tilt with the Red Gods, and so when the train bore him away from Howrah, his destina-

tion was not as his friends thought Bombay, but the Central Provinces. He had determined to have a month there before sailing. With this object in view he had quietly applied for a block in the North Chanda District, and had been granted North Wairagarh. As time was as usual an important factor, second only to expense, he had to try for a block reasonably near the railway, and twenty-four hours after leaving Calcutta he arrived in the middle of the night at a small wayside station on the Jubblepore—Chanda branch line. Mangal was with him, but Bella had been left with a trusted friend for six months, after a heart-rending leave-taking.

Here they found an old Ford car and they piled their belongings on to it, and jolted out the twenty odd miles to their block. The Ford car has become very much part and parcel of Indian life, and is certainly a boon and a blessing to shooters in the plains, saving them many days of treking behind dusty bullock carts. James had also taken a bicycle with him on the advice of one Grant, now of Calcutta, but formerly of the I.C.S., who, in his time had slain more than fifty tigers to his own rifle. There are few tracks that a bicycle cannot get along and it saves an infinity of walking. Profiting also by Grant's advice he wrote to the forest ranger of his block several days beforehand, enclosing fifty rupees for baits. The arrival of the money in advance prevents any possibility of that official saying that he was a poor man, unable to make the required outlay, and it created a pleasant enough feeling of the Sahib's financial stability. Time and again a party has arrived in its block to find itself held up by lack of baits.

(*Upper*) IO TRIUMPHE!
(*Middle*) MOHOMED MEIRA
(*Lower*) PAYING OFF THE BEATERS

James further added instructions that the baits were to be put out the night before he arrived, and on reaching the bungalow at 9 a.m. he found the ranger waiting to receive him with a guard of honour of fifty beaters. All had worked according to plan. One of the baits had been taken the night before his arrival. The kill was only three miles away. They prepared to set off at once. Everything in the garden was lovely. It was at this moment that James discovered that some casual-minded gunmaker's packer—may the graves of his ancestors be made into a dung-hill !—had sent him .470 cartridges for his .450 rifle. So James needs must despatch a frantic wire to Calcutta, and fall back on the little .375 Mannlicher that he had first bought for hill shooting. It was an inadequate weapon for tiger shooting, and he knew it, but the idea of giving up the beat was unthinkable. So he and the ranger set off on the bicycle, the ranger riding on the step to the vast delight of the populace, while the beaters followed on foot.

The Wairagarh bungalow stood on the out-skirts of a large village, and was three miles from the nearest shooting ground, and before long James was to thank heaven for his bicycle. When they arrived at the small village at the edge of the jungle where the kill had been, just such a village as gave Mowgli his birth, they found Mohomed Meira, the shikari, waiting for them. He was a tall and sturdy individual, with pleasant squat features marred by rather shifty eyes. His reputation as a shikari stood high in the neighbourhood; indeed he was hereditary shikari to such Sahibs as might come and shoot there.

They went off to inspect the kill; it was an undoubted tiger kill, with at least half the buttocks eaten away, lying about forty yards away from the river that intersected the block, but which was now a succession of pools joined together by a thin trickle of water. It was obvious that after drinking the tiger would have retired into the thick jungle behind the kill. Accordingly, James was quite in agreement with Mohomed Meira's decision to beat inwards towards the kill from the river bed. It had always been impressed on James by old John M—— that it was far better to arrange your own beat even if it did entail missing a tiger or two, as the death of a tiger encompassed by yourself was sweeter a thousand times than that of one which had been planned by a shikari.

Mohomed Meira now led James to the *machan*. The system in beating for tiger is for a line of beaters to force the tiger forward to the machan; as he approaches he enters an increasing bottleneck of "stops", the machan being as it were the apex of a triangle of which the base is formed of the beaters and the legs by the stops. To prevent the tigers heading out to the side the stops tap gently with sticks against their trees to make the tiger move forward, but if he still comes on it is their duty to try and turn him back by every means in their power.

In this case the *machan* had been put to cover the dried bed of a nallah running up into the jungle from the river, but there was no field of vision over its banks. Now at that time of year the jungle was parched and comparatively thin, and from the higher ground on either side quite a good view could be obtained. James felt

certain that the tiger would not come down the nallah; the quiet cul-de-sac holding he knew not what, with its ominous silence after the noise around, would seem too obvious a trap, and James felt his quarry would make for the slightly higher ground which would enable him to view the lines of retreat still open to him. Accordingly, and not without misgiving he altered the position of the machan, much to Mohomed Meira's disgust.

In due course the beaters arrived, and James took care to explain before the beat started that if he blew his whistle (a whistle is invaluable in a tiger beat) they were to take to the trees, as it meant the tiger had a broken back. He then posted the stops and put a man three hundred yards behind him, so that if the tiger got away wounded he could tell which way he was going, and how hard he was hit. Then the beaters withdrew and absolute silence reigned. Twenty minutes later, with blows and beatings, alarms and excursions, the beat started. For a minute nothing happened, and then half a dozen peafowl, the most sensitive creatures in the jungle came hesitatingly out and scurried past the machan. Four minutes later an enormous boar, the stoutest of all stout-hearted animals, came out with his back arched and bristling and his little wicked eyes gleaming, and trotted off with a grunt of annoyance. Then silence again except for the distant noise of the beaters and the stops tap-tap-tapping like a forest full of woodpeckers.

Suddenly James saw through the trees something pale and yellow slouching along: for a moment he thought it was a bullock—why

heaven knows !—and then he realized it was the tiger. The next minute it disappeared underneath the rise leading to the *machan*. His heart raced away and he thrust forward his rifle. With so light a weapon he must make sure of shooting straight. The tiger appeared exactly as he had expected on the ridge, and James' pulses throbbed with pleasure. He stood on the ridge with his head thrust forward and a surly look on his face. Then he raised his head and his white ruff began to stand up and he swished his tail to and fro, to show his disapproval of these disturbers of his midday nap. It was a magnificent sight. Then he turned to the right, broadside on, and James took careful aim and put a bullet through the shoulder. The tiger went down like a shot rabbit, and there was a cheer from the beaters as they heard the shot. But he was making frantic efforts to rise, and so James proceeded to give him the three remaining shots in his magazine, and one lethal from his shot gun. It was no good taking any risks for the sake of a pelt.

At that moment there was a roar and a crash from his front and a second tiger came bounding out of the jungle, with his tail up and taking great leaps into the air, as angry as could be. James was for the moment taken completely by surprise. Then he seized the shot gun, one barrel of which was still loaded. But his discretion gained the upper hand.. For tempting as it was to shoot at a tiger charging straight underneath him, it would have been asking for trouble to take a running shot with a lethal, when he had only an inadequate rifle for following up with. So he stayed his hand, and it is to be hoped that

the Committee of Selous, Walter Winans, Kinlock and Co., who keep the gamebook in Elysium, counted it unto him for righteousness.

Soon after the beat ended, and James descended from his tree, and found himself in the middle of a clamouring mob of beaters. After a great deal of ordering and shouting James managed to get them lined up, and gave each of the fifty beaters present a chit with his initials on it, thereby ensuring that nobody turned up at the subsequent payment who was not present at the kill. Then a bamboo was lopped down and the tiger's paws tied together, and the procession started off triumphantly to the village, with James dodging round the tiger like a collie round a flock of sheep, trying to make certain that the whiskers weren't pulled out.

On arrival at the village there was great enthusiasm. All the women in the village turned out, led by an elderly haridan in a sky-blue sarai and gold earrings, a sort of local Miriam, and carrying bowls of water and rice. They made low salaams, first to the tiger and then to James, and then they sprinkled water before the beast's nose and threw rice over its head. There was then a slight pause in the ceremonial, and everybody looked at James, who felt as gauche as a Kensitite in a High Church. The shikari, however, stepped forward and explained that having rewarded the heroes, it was well that at this juncture he should reward the mothers of heroes, and he pushed forward the elderly Miriam, who proved to be Maman Mére. James was pleased to be out of it at four rupees eight annas.

It was now two o'clock; he was four miles from the bungalow; the tyre of his bicycle had sub-

sided; its pump had removed itself after the manner of pumps on a railway journey; the temperature was somewhere between 110 degrees and 120 degrees. All the morning his rifle had been so hot that he had to wear a glove, but in the excitement of the moment he had hardly noticed it. Had he been a wise man he would have waited till the evening, but he was determined to get home, so off he went through clouds of powdering dust, pushing his bicycle before him in the parched, blazing, sultry heat of the afternoon, till he finally arrived almost in a state of collapse. What were his thoughts as he marched ? Were they of the triumphs of the day, of opportunities missed, and of chances to come ? Never for a moment. No, rather of whether he would walk into the bungalow, drink, undress, and get into the bath, or get a drink and then get into the bath in his shirt and shorts, or jump straight into the bath in his clothes and then have the drink. Perhaps it would be as well to add here that his better instincts prevailed and he adopted the former course. Later in the evening he paid out the beaters with comparatively little difficulty, at the rate of eight annas a head. This was then, and possibly now is, the right amount for a successful beat in most parts of the Central Provinces, though some people might say it was too much.

He now determined to let the tigers be till his cartridges arrived, which they might do in three days, and he called in his baits. He decided to leave the bungalow, as he would have to be out in the jungle very early after sambhur, chitul, bear and so on, and he formed an advanced base in the village where he had got the tiger. Here he

was able to get a charpoi for himself and Mangal and they established themselves quite comfortably in a large open shed in the village, where, during the heat of the day, they lived and moved and had their beings as well sheltered from the heat of the sun as in the bungalow. Every day he set off silently through the forest—"still hunting," as the Americans so aptly describe it —for the three or four hours after dawn and before dusk, when the jungle springs to life. He saw a number of pig and karkur, and sambhur and chitul hinds, but for the first two days he did not get a shot. One evening he went out, and sat near a water hole, not to shoot, for that is hardly cricket, but to watch the animals come down to drink. He was amazed at the nervousness of the deer as they approached. One little karkur, in particular, took over half an hour to advance a hundred yards to the pool, and then took fright at the last minute and bolted off without his drink. Such is the effect of sharing one's water supply with felix leo !

As they were returning to camp the same evening they suddenly saw a sloth bear padding along at a steady trot towards them. They withdrew to a clump of rocks about thirty yards from the path and Mohomed Meira threw himself down on his knees and buried his head in his hands like an ostrich. The villagers are more frightened of a bear than they are of a tiger. James waited till the bear was within thirty yards and then fired. To his horror and amazement he missed clean, and the bear bolted into the jungle howling dismally. Truth to tell he had aimed carelessly, for the amount of hair on a sloth bear's body makes the vital target much bigger

than it really is. So James had to eat his pride, and hope that Mohomed Meira was ostriching too hard to see what an easy shot he had missed.

He was certain that the cartridges would arrive the following morning, and Mangal was despatched on the bicycle to fetch them, and the baits were set out again. As a result one of the baits was taken, and Mangal returned empty-handed. James determined to tempt his luck with the Mannlicher. It is only to be hoped that Homer in the shape of the aforementioned committee was nodding.

The beat was comparatively simple. The tiger was obviously lying between the river and the higher ground, a rocky ridge a few hundred yards behind it, and running round in a half circle. At the end of the semi-circle was the thin edge of the jungle opening out into the fields in which the village stood. The tiger would obviously make for the rocks, and so the machan was placed accordingly, and the stops arranged. The beat began a good half mile off, for James had over fifty beaters and he didn't want to hurry the tiger unduly. As soon as it began there was a rush of monkeys to the rocks and then silence. Then a warrantable sambhur stag and two hinds with a youngster came up step by step to the machan. They were obviously nervous, but quite where the danger lay they couldn't say. They came forward right under James so that he could have lassoed them with his braces. However, there might be a tiger in the beat and he could not risk a shot. He had with him in the machan a number of stones, as missiles to prove that a supposedly dead tiger was not "possum"—many

a shikari has been reduced to throwing his boots. He dropped one of these stones on the back of the stag. They leapt off with one terrified bound, and had disappeared within five seconds.

The beat was almost over, and James was on the point of unloading when he heard the stops on his right become suddenly more staccato, and a tigress trotted out in front of his machan like an amiable tabby come for a saucer of milk. She paused for a moment and James fired at her eye. With hardly a tremor the great beast went off at a steady gallop whining to herself, and disappeared into the jungle behind. He descended from his tree and called to his lookout man behind: his news was not particularly assuring: the tigress had passed him still at a gallop. He sat down for half an hour to give the tigress time to stiffen, though he knew that with a head wound this was hardly necessary, and off they went.

He had called for volunteers to assist in the following up, and two of the meekest and most puny looking individuals had come forward, while quite a number of the brawnier ones found themselves suddenly wrapped in a charmed contemplation of the jungle scenery. He directed the remainder of the beaters to remain where they were under pain of instant death at his hands or the tiger's. As they advanced the puny ones made a tree to tree rush on the flanks, and reported by signs if anything was to be seen. In half an hour they had gone four hundred yards, and the suspense was becoming more and more sickening, yet still there was no sign of the tigress. Then they came to a small nallah bed,

and as the watchers in the trees peered into it they gesticulated wildly. James had a squeamish feeling in his insides, an acute hedgehog. He wanted—how he wanted !—to make for a tree, but he was conscious of the watching eye of Mangal, who had insisted on coming out to share the fun, and of Mohomed Meira and the puny ones. Some ridiculous chord of flamboyant vanity was stirred: he must play the Sahib: it was part of the white man's burden: by stepping forward, not backward, he symbolized his acceptance of the load. So he advanced till he saw the top of the tigress' head appearing over the top of the nallah. On subsequent reflection he decided that the tigress must have been dead already, but he had no time to reflect at that moment, and he put a couple of shots into her with the utmost speed. She was a fine tigress, just nine feet, but with the same pale coat as the first one, which comes of living in bamboo jungle.

Three more days passed without a kill and once more James devoted himself to "still hunting". There is a peculiar charm in brushing through the dried up grass of the forest in the first light of dawn with its comparative cool, not knowing what may be in store for one in a moment of time. One morning as he was out with Mohomed Meira he became aware of a movement in a little glade in front of him. There were half a dozen sambhur hinds, and a couple of small stags; he looked again; yes, there slowly moved into view another stag carrying his fine antlers bravely enough, and with a sleek shining brown body. He was barely eighty yards off. James covered him with his rifle and brought him down with a most resounding smack to earth, while the rest

of the herd made off. He walked slowly over to it and started to span the horns with his hand. At that moment the sambhur leapt to its feet, knocking him staggering back, and made off. If the glade had suddenly been filled with a troupe of Mr. Cochran's young ladies he could not have been more surprised.

There was no doubt whatever that the sambhur was fairly hit, for he had seen the blood pouring from behind its shoulder, and there was a copious blood track. So they set off after it. They followed that sambhur for four hours through the heat and dust and sweat of a grilling hot-weather day. Twice they got up quite close to the poor beast, and they could see that he had lain down from time to time and bled profusely; and once James fired a shot at his disappearing rump. Finally, as the sun reached its midday zenith James managed to steal up to where he was lying and put him out of his misery.

It was a nice head of thirty-nine inches with six tines in perfect symmetry, but James felt he wouldn't be caught like that again for all the riches of Colconda.

They now had to gralloch him and skin him. (James had already mentally divided the skin into shoes and suitcases.) They were seven miles from home but they didn't like to leave the carcass and go and get help lest it be devoured of vultures. So they rested for an hour and then started off. James carried the skin and the shikari the head. Slower they went and slower; longer and longer were the rests they took. James would willingly have cast the skin from him, had he not been ashamed of giving in in front of the

shikari. Had it not been for that fact he would not have carried that stinking pelt for another five minutes, for all the shoes that ever came out of Peal's shop. However, Providence favoured them. After going for about an hour and a half they met two elderly villagers. These they seized on. One had the sambhur's horns and skin dumped on his head and went off with James to the village, and the other went back with Mohomed Meira for one of the haunches. James arrived back at the bungalow at five o'clock completely exhausted. It was definitely one of the moments when the Southampton lawn tennis club appeared to be infinitely sweeter than the plains of Hindustan.

However, there was news for him when he got in. From a village about five miles away there came the report of a kill, but if the report had come of the finding of the lost treasure of the Incas, or a King's daughter to be had in marriage for the asking, James would have ignored them: not another yard was he stirring that day. He was sitting in his bath and in his bath he intended to remain.

The next morning he arrived at the village in question, very early, on his bicycle, Mohomed Meira having been sent on in advance. He was greeted by the village worthies with every token of respect. The fame of the Sahib had gone before him: was he not the father of the oppressed, the slayer of the terror by night, a second Siva come to destroy ? It had been long since the ambition of this village to provide a tiger for the heaven-born to slay, and lo ! that very night the fattest and most prized of all the

village cattle had been taken. Poor men they were, who could ill stand up against such strokes of ill-fortune. And now they were assembled to beat out the oppressor to the feet of the Child of Light for the most trifling consideration. James cast his eye over the crowd before him. There must have been seventy beaters there at least. Seventy at eight annas; he did a little mental arithmetic and divided the result back into his dwindling supply of ready money.

Then he set off to view the corpse. It was lying on the edge of the jungle not far from the village. It was the most ancient and ill-nourished bullock that James had ever seen. It was quite uneaten. He asked the leader of the locals the why and the wherefore. That worthy explained volubly. When this jewel had been snatched from their bosoms brave and fearless men had driven off the evil one before he had had time to carry out his fell design. The heaven-born would look at the tiger's teeth marks on the beast's neck. There were three small punctures on the lower jaws; that was all. Now when a tiger kills, in nine cases out of ten, it makes two large teeth marks on the upper part of the neck with its upper jaw and similar marks below with the lower jaw. Further, although the ground leading down to the water was sandy there were no pug marks anywhere to be found. It was perfectly clear to James what the game was. The elderly bullock had probably died of old age, and the villagers were not averse to making six or eight annas a head out of a beat in which there was no danger to anyone. With a few very pointed words James mounted on his bicycle and

rode off, leaving a very crestfallen village behind him.

Three days after this episode James had another kill. It was some way away from the village and by the time he arrived it was twelve o'clock, and as hot as could be. The beat was not an easy one to arrange. The tiger had killed on the edge of a main stream in a little island of jungle about six hundred yards by eight hundred. James was fairly certain that it was lying up on the island, but getting it out was not an easy matter. Moreover, so much of the bullock had been eaten—it was one that had strayed from the village—that James thought it must be the work of more than one tiger. The beat was bound to start sufficiently near the tigers to get them thoroughly roused. They would (when they heard the beat start) realize that it would be necessary to make across the nallah, and the strong probability appeared to be that he would have a long shot at a running target, and that the tiger or tigers would break through the stops. However, he put his machan covering two sides of the nallah and hoped for the best, and he now had a greater feeling of confidence owing to his previous successes and the fact that his cartridges had now arrived. He explained all this to Mohomed Meira, who was inclined to be dubious, and he again had the pleasure of seeing things turn out as he had prophecied.

Soon after the beat had started he heard the stops on his right getting very excited, and then suddenly away down the nallah he saw tigers coming out like rabbits, one, two, three—one after the other. It was the most impressive sight. There was one big one and two smaller ones,

obviously a mother and two almost grown cubs. They were about three hundred yards away, and as luck would have it they came straight down the nallah towards him, and making for the opposite bank. As they reached it James fired at the bigger one, and saw the bullet hit the sand behind her; then she jumped up the bank and disappeared. Before the two cubs could follow suit he took a snap at the leading one with the second barrel of his .450, and by a great fluke hit it in the small of the back breaking its spine. It pawed angrily at the sand two or three times and then rolled over.

James was well enough pleased at the success of the beat though, being human, he could not help wondering if he couldn't have managed a "possible".

It was getting dark, and as they were tying up the tiger to take it home, one of the beaters called that he could see another tiger a little way off in the jungle. James climbed into a tree, and sure enough he thought he could see a tiger's head peering through the undergrowth in the gathering gloom. It was obviously the mother looking for her cub. It was an awkward moment. The beaters were in a great state of excitement and wanted to dump the tiger and make off down the nallah bed, and it was with great difficulty that James prevented them from so doing. The march home was a peculiarly eerie sensation, and James bringing up the rear was much occupied with the fearful fiend that did close behind him tread. Every few seconds he looked round and expected to see the tigress springing on his back. Fortunately, there was a moon, otherwise things might have gone badly

for them, and at last they got home after an exceedingly unpleasant two hours.

After that they had no more kills for a week, and James was beginning to think he had exhausted the possibilities of the block, when one of his baits was taken within half a mile of the village. By this time his finances were rather low, and he decided that instead of having a beat he would walk up the water holes in the middle of the day. This is a very sporting way of stalking tigers in the hot weather. After gorging himself on the kill the tiger withdraws into the jungle, and sleeps it off as near water as possible, on occasions going down to lie in or near the water holes in the heat of the day. It is then possible for the Sahib to steal round these localities till he meets his victim taking his midday nap. As there is a very reasonable chance of the tiger waking and getting in first, the word "victim" is probably an euphony. On this occasion James pursued the chain of brackish pools for an hour or so in the burning heat of midday, turning aside from time to time into the likelier side ravines. However, he saw nothing, and as the temperature cannot have been a degree under 115 degrees, he was beginning to feel heartily fed up with the business.

Then he suddenly rounded a corner, and there, stretched in the shade of some rocks, was a full grown tiger fast asleep and not more than twenty yards away. It was a nerve-racking moment. Behind them was a little rock-crowned hillock, whence James felt that he could take a sure and certain shot, and so with a sign to Mohomed Meira he retreated on silent tiptoe. The tiger still slept. Unfortunately, at this juncture Mohomed

Meira lost his nerve, and began to shout to frighten the tiger, who decamped in a second of time. It was a moment when James felt more like murder than he had ever felt before in his life; yet a shower of either abuse or blows seemed insufficient to meet the case, and he simply turned in disgust from the now thoroughly ashamed Mohomed Meira, and walked speechlessly back to camp.

His time in the block was becoming beautifully less, and three days before they had to leave for Bombay they had their last kill, which was incidentally the last but one of their buffalo calves, who must by this time have been suffering from rather a ten little nigger boy sensation. The kill was on the edge of a nallah with a small pool in it, and the tiger had made a hearty meal. On its completion it was open to him to go off to the right and lie up on the high ground about half a mile away; or equally well to the left where there was a small but dense patch of jungle nearer to the water. James was of opinion that after so heavy a meal the tiger would choose the cover nearer to the water. The shikari replied that the last time they had had a kill near here twelve years earlier, the tiger had made for the higher ground, and he thought it would do so again. James retorted (alas ! for human nature) that he hadn't been very far out in his ideas in the last two beats, and Mohomed Meira grudgingly assented. Accordingly, James had it his own way and the beat started.

Nearer and nearer came the shouting and James waited and waited. Perhaps the tiger had broken out to the side ? Yet not a sound from the stops. The beaters were only four hundred

yards off; another two minutes they were surrounding his tree and the beat was over. Mohomed Meira—who can blame him ?—was standing there with an I-told-you-so expression on his face, which broadened considerably when the tiger's pug marks were found in some soft ground not fifty yards from where he had said it would lie. So James had to pocket his conceit and extract what consolidation he could from the fact that he had made a mess of the beat in his own way.

He had some slight solace on the last night he spent in his shed, as he came across an elderly sloth bear making away through the jungle, and bowled her over with a rump shot which raked right through her. She turned round howling vociferously, and he had to put three more shots into her before she lay still.

So he was able to leave North Wairagarh after a thoroughly successful month in which he had had a great deal more than his share of luck. His bag of three tigers, a sambhur and a bear was very creditable, and he could have increased it if he had not wished to keep the jungles quiet for tiger. Still it had been a trying month, more trying than he had realized, and when he bade the tearful Mangal farewell at Bombay he was conscious of a great relief at being free from the pitiless suns of the Central Provinces.

So ended the beginnings of James shooting education. (Nobody's shooting education is ever finished.) As he looked back on those six years they seemed to have been incredibly delightful. A romantic sentiment had already begun to surround them, and soften the harsher memories.

Forgotten were the heat and blizzards, the sweat, the dust, the stinks, and there remained only the glamour of the east before his eyes, and the once heard, never forgotten call of the Red Gods in his ears.

GLOSSARY

Like Mr. Peter Fleming, I enter the Nallah (or Ravine) school of authorship with misgiving, but as I am assured that the lack of a glossary lends my text an unenviable obscurity I am constrained to explain some of the terms in common use in India which occur in these pages.—R.M.

Badmarsh : A " Bad Hat."
Bagh : A Tiger.
Baloo : A Bear.
Bandobast : An arrangement, piece of organization.
Chapatti : Unleavened bread.
Charpoi : Native bedstead.
Chokra : Youth.
Chota Bagh : Panther.
Dastur : Custom.
Dak : A posting stage. The post.
Dak Bungalow : A staging house.
Djula : Rope bridge.
Dunga : Cashmere houseboat.
Ekka : Native two-wheeled cart.
Goa : Tibetan Gazelle.
Ghora Pultan : A British (white) Regiment.
Halal : The Mohomedan slitting of a beast's throat before death, without which meat cannot be eaten.
Izzat : Reputation.
Juldee : Quickly.
Kala Pultan : Indian (black) Regiment.
Khel : Ibex.
Khubbar : Information.
Khud : Stap hillside.
Lagga ! : Hit !
Lambadar : Village headman.
Machan : Platform for shooting in a tree.
Maro ! : Shoot ! Maro Mut ! : Don't shoot !
Nallah (With apologies to Mr. Fleming) : a valley—from the smallest to a matter of miles in length.
Perag: A Tibetan woman's head-dress.
Puja: Hindu Festival ; in consequence a Calcutta holiday.
Shabash ! : Well Done !
Skikara : A small Cashmere boat.
Shusog : Abbot.
Subadar : A Native Officer of the Indian Army.
Tat : A colloquial word for a pony.
Tiffin Coolie. Man who carries the lunch.
Yakdan : Leather box for pack transport.

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