Assam Shikari

A Tea Planter's Story of Hunting and High Adventure in the Jungles of North East India

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Preface

Many of my friends, past and present, have requested me to relate the many jungle experiences and other interesting events which came my way during my fifty years in Assam. All except five of those years were spent on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River and in rather remote areas near the foothills of the eastern Himalayas south of Tibet.

During my childhood days in England I took keen delight in being in the woods, amongst the trees, birds and flowers. For hours I watched fox cubs, stoats and weasels. I accompanied the keepers at every opportunity and watched them set their traps for vermin. When I went out to Assam the forests gave me a new sort of life, different and fascinating and for approximately forty years I spent my weekends in the forests.

Following my retirement in 1952 I spent five months of each year in camp at least five miles from the nearest human settlements, in the midst of elephants, bison, deer, birds and trees, in the wonderful cold weather which is characteristic of the sub-Himalayan region of Assam, or for that matter the whole of India. Lying in bed at night, with the sound of the river as it rushed over the boulders, an occasional wild elephant trumpeting, sambar and barking deer emitting their warning cries of their enemy, the tiger, and now and then the musical note of a tiger calling to a mate, gave me the utmost pleasure. For over forty years, since I started visiting the forests regularly, my elephants and their attendants were my regular companions.

The call of the wild is in me, and will remain there always.

"You can take a man out of the jungle.
But if he is born to it, you cannot take the jungle out of the man."

FRANK NICHOLLS
The Jungle,
Assam

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Chapter One

Early Days in Tea

It was towards the end of 1911, while I was employed in the London office of a tea agency firm, that I was called in by one of the partners and asked if I would like to go out and join the firm in Calcutta. I looked down and hesitated to reply. The big man then asked me if I would prefer to go out to a tea estate in Assam, as an assistant manager. There was no hesitation in my reply this time and I was elated at the idea and by the offer.

I sailed from Liverpool for Calcutta early in January 1912 aboard the *City of Benares* and all went well until we reached the Bay of Biscay. Then we struck such a terrible storm that the ship did everything except capsize. Many of us hoped that it would, so dreadful did we feel! I kept to my cabin for about ten days and every time the steward asked if I was going down for a meal I simply lifted my head from the pillow and murmured "apples". I lived all those days on apples. I gathered afterwards that on most of those ten days that there were, on an average, only six people down to meals out of eighty passengers. A day out of Port Said I was feeling much better and was glad that the ship had remained afloat!

We reached Calcutta without further incident and after some ten days there, spent by me in purchasing tropical clothing and furniture, I left by train for Goalundo and thence by river paddle-steamer to Tezpur. This journey took ten days. The railway into Assam had not then been extended to Tezpur, but in any case it was an accepted thing to travel by steamer to Assam in those days and

this form of transportation had opened up the country. The day after my arrival at Tezpur, I left for Amaribari station, also known locally as Balipara, by a little narrow gauge railway which used to feed this important tea district from the vitally important steamer station. A friend of the manager of the Harchurah Tea Estate, to which I was going, met me at the station in a most peculiar-looking motor car, for I had not seen such a model in England. It was called the "Buggy-Aut" and it had a tiller steering, buggy wheels with solid tyres, and a two-way bell. The engine was at the back under the high seat, with crankshaft and drive across the vehicle, the drive being through two large rings bolted on to the inside of the rear wheels. The engine drove a pulley which made friction between the two rings, so that when the engine was pivoted forward the pulley contacted the smaller ring bolted to the wheel, and for the reverse the engine was pivoted on to the other and larger ring. It had an excellent clearance, as I well remember goats disappearing underneath without being injured. I also well remember sitting high up in the air, which was in keeping with my own personal feeling at that time. I was pleased with myself!

My manager at Harchurah, Mr Harley Mortimer, was from the north of England and we got along famously together. I very soon found out that he was an exceptionally hard worker, which suited me. I lived with him for six months while my bungalow was being built and received my first taste of the planter's life and style of living from that stay with him. Mr Mortimer's bungalow was on a brick and cement plinth with walls made of dried, split bamboo plastered with lime and sand and limewashed. The roofing was of bamboo covered with very thick thatch. The bungalow had four rooms and a large kitchen outside and it overlooked rice fields about 100 yards down below. The company started to build a small bungalow for me about a quarter of a mile away, to be all brick from the

foundation to the top of the room walls, about eight feet high. It had three rooms and an outside kitchen and overlooked a small but very deep river and occasionally wild elephants came at night to eat the long succulent grasses which grew alongside.

The Harchurah Tea Estate was of around 500 acres, but planting went on all the time I was there and about 20 acres were added each year. There was a mixed lot of labourers such as Santals, Urias, Sambalpuris, Porjas, Tanti Urias and Ghatwals, all of whom came from Orissa and Behar to work on different estates. They came for three years and most of them stayed when their time was up, and some men left their families and went and brought up their other relations. In those days there were recruiting agencies in the districts, kept going by the many tea companies. The Phulbari Tea Estate was only three miles from Harchurah and covered about 1,200 acres and in the evenings I frequently rode over on my pony to see the assistant manager there. It was the pruning season when I arrived at Harchurah and the machinery in the factory was being overhauled, in readiness for the approaching months of March to December, when tea leaves would be plucked and manufactured.

About June, although I was not an engineer, I was appointed to work in the factory for the season, and this experience was to prove invaluable. The manager emphasised that unless great care was taken, good leaf could be ruined in the factory. We were short of machinery and with much young tea coming into bearing the manufacturing hours were long and tedious. The manager never stopped talking about expenditure to me, and the resultant cost per pound of tea. Afterwards the reason for this continual emphasis on expenditure dawned on me when I learned about the commissions which the manager would earn on a good year's business! Whatever it was, I had only one native overseer to help me and when I visited other factories of gardens of about the same acreage and

crop I gathered from the European assistants there that there were two overseers, and in some cases even three!

It was a case, therefore, of my being present from about 3 a.m. until 11 p.m., with time off for meals, which included two hours for lunch. I worked that number of hours for five manufacturing seasons. When I tell young men of today of the number of hours that I worked in the factory and for five manufacturing seasons, they either do not believe me or consider that I must have been mad to have done it.

In those days to travel about we had either a horse or a cycle, which we bought ourselves. The assistant of today can obtain an advance soon after arrival equivalent to £800, or more, for the purchase of a car. Such are the changed times!

Five Europeans died in the district during my first year in tea, two of blackwater fever and three of malaria. It was the worst district in Assam for malaria in those years. Today blackwater fever, kalaazar, and the like, have been wiped out and malaria is on the decline.

I remember going to a funeral at Tezpur the year after my arrival in the district, which, to say the least, somewhat shattered me. About forty of us went in by train with the coffin. It was a special train and consisted of a guard's van next to the engine followed by a carriage in which travelled three frivolous young men, then the carriage containing the coffin, followed by a few more carriages containing the rest of us, and finally the rear guard's van.

In those days the track was only two feet six inches wide and on the way into Tezpur there is a fairly steep rise, followed by a sharp decline. Suddenly, upon reaching this point, the carriage parted, those behind the coffin all started to run backwards, the others, in front, going ahead at a breakneck speed. The guard in charge of the rear van completely lost his head and we had travelled quite a few miles before he realised what had happened and applied the brakes!

The engine and the front half of the train, including the carriage containing the coffin, had also gone a mile in the other direction before any action was taken to sort things out. After much shunting we were off on our journey again. Apparently two of the young planters in the next carriage to the one containing the coffin had unhooked the coupling at the commencement of the decline, thus causing the two halves of the train to part company!

On arriving at Tezpur we all proceeded to the club, where drinks were served. I thought this was funny procedure before attending a funeral. After about an hour I asked what time the funeral would take place and was informed that it had already taken place and that only the padre, the widow, and very close friends had gone, as the deceased was not very popular. Apparently the idea for most of the planters was more for a "joyride" and the consumption of liquor rather than to be present at the funeral ceremony itself. This being the first funeral I had attended since my arrival in Assam I was naturally somewhat shocked!

I found India, generally, to be a land of many contrasts and it was comprised then of provinces and numerous feudatory states which acknowledged British sovereignty and was inhabited by people of many tribes and religions. The area to which I had been posted was on the foothills and plains which stretched south from the Himalayas and was a largely wild and untamed region with many areas of jungle. In many places it was impenetrable to man but was rich in varieties of animals, scenery and climate. It was an area shut off from the rest of Asia by the lofty Himalayan mountains, the "Dwelling-place of Snow", and in the fertile valleys, cleared for cultivation, was reared the beneficial tea-plant, providing a living for planter and labourer alike.

The Harchurah Tea Estate, my first post, was a division of the Borelli Tea Co. Ltd., a company which had been formed many years before by arrival. The other divisions

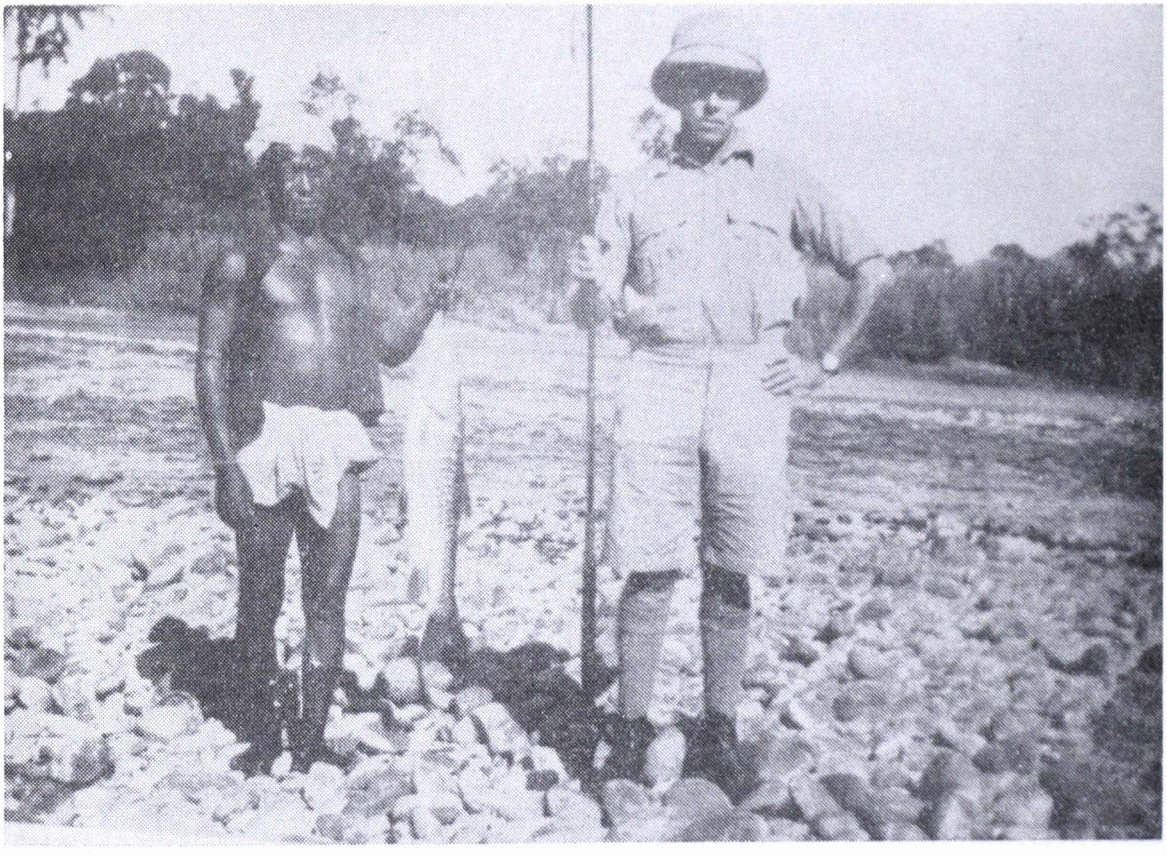
of that company were the Phulbari Tea Estate, on which I was also to serve for many years, and also the Amaribari and Panipoota Tea Estates. I was also to serve on estates of the Moabund Tea Co. Ltd., which had two divisions known as the Moabund and Sangsua Tea Estates, and the Attareekhat Tea Co. Ltd. with divisions known as the Attareekhat, Paneery and Bamonjuli Tea Estates. My first management was to be a compact estate called the Borbheel Tea Co. Ltd., in the Bargang area of Darrang, and I was then to manage the Bargang Tea Co. Ltd. which had three divisions known as the Bargang, Kettela and Rangaghur Tea Estates. These various companies had different directors and shares could be brought on the London Stock Exchange.

After about eight to ten years of being an assistant manager on a tea estate one could be chosen to be an acting manager for six months while a permanent manager went on leave. This relieving could entail transfer from one estate to another in the same firm's agency of gardens. When a relieving manager had shown his capability he was usually given a post as permanent manager. In my case I became a superintendent of a group of gardens after fifteen years' service and as such visited various estates each week or so. Later on I became a visiting agent and visited estates about every six months, these being long distances apart and from one end of Assam to the other.

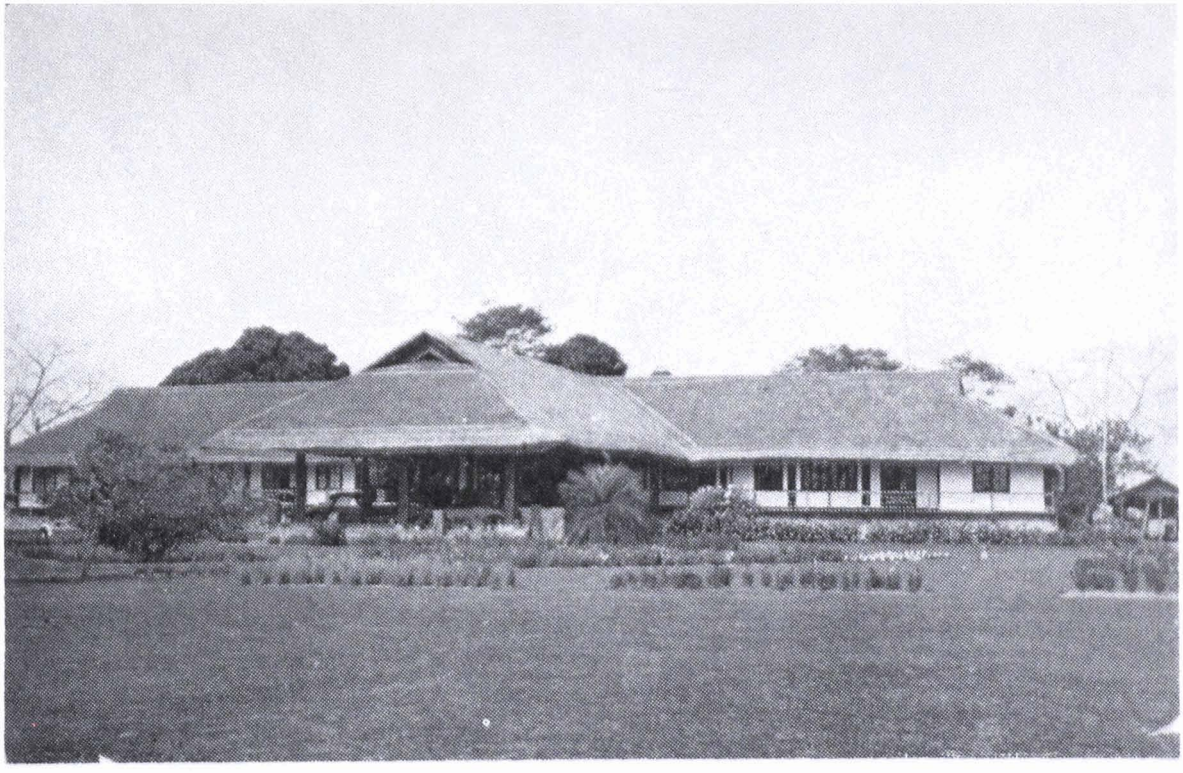
Balipara, when I first arrived, was a very small place with one post office for many tea estates. Tezpur, is now a large town, miles from most tea estates, but only in recent years has this growth resulted and it obtained an airport only a short time before the Chinese attempt to invade Assam and other parts of North East India. Naturally many changes have taken place in Assam as they have in other countries which have progressed or developed.

I was to spend over forty years in tea but my greatest enjoyment was in spending my free time in the jungle and very soon after my arrival I was appointed an honorary

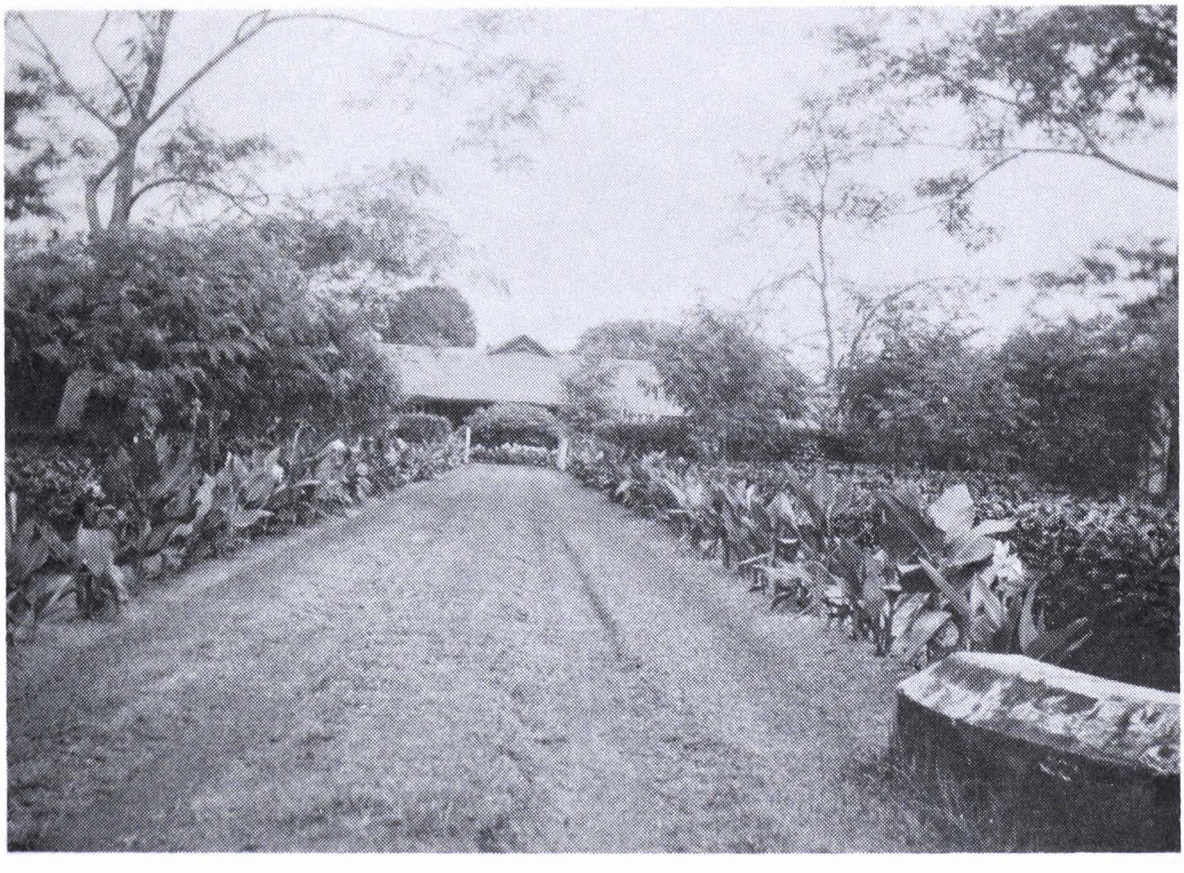
1. The road to the author's bungalow at Harchurah Tea Estate, Darrang, 1913.



2. A fish caught in the Borelli River, 1915. The Mikir tribesman is an informant of poachers.



3. The author's home at Bargang Tea Estate, Kettela, where he lived for twenty years from 1920.



4. The driveway leading to the bungalow at Bargang Tea Estate, Kettela.

game warden by the Assam Forest Department of India. My territory was up the Borelli River area and I was compelled to be accompanied by an informant of poachers, usually a Mikir tribesman, for in those days elephant tusks and rhinoceros horns were much sought after by native shooters. This direct contact with wild life was a pleasant and absorbing interest to me and life in the forest and river areas gave me an inner satisfaction which was to remain with me during all my years in India.

Chapter Two

Leopards as I Know them

A close friend of mine named Dyer, a married man with two children, was approached by the occupants of a village not far from his estate in the Brahmaputra area, with a request that he should go and shoot a leopard which had taken up residence in about an acre of sugar cane nearby. It was a longish strip of land, about twenty yards wide. When the villagers' goats wandered anywhere near while grazing, the leopard would spring out, grab its victim and take it back into the sugar cane.

My friend was expecting another planter by the name of Baldwin to stay with him for a few days and he arranged that the villagers should drive the sugar cane early next morning. It was agreed that the visitor was to walk level with the beaters, whilst my friend Dyer was to sit up in a small tree at the far end of the cane. He stayed to see the beat started and then, after a few minutes, proceeded towards the tree. After he had gone some thirty yards, the leopard came out of the cane behind him, sprang on to his shoulders and fastened its claws into my friend's throat. The poor fellow died within two days, of septic poisoning!

One Sunday night, a planter named Freeman, who lived some four miles from me, was proceeding in his car towards the district club. As he often saw leopards on his

trips to the club, he usually carried a rifle in his car. On this occasion, a fine leopard was illuminated by the car's headlights, some fifty yards off in the centre of the road. He stopped his car, took aim and fired. The leopard rolled over and over down the slope at the side of the road, then recovering itself managed to crawl into a small piece of jungle, where because it was dark the man left it.

On reaching the club he related the incident to a friend of his, living at Baghmari Tea Estate, a keen man on *shikar*. They both arranged to meet near the place on the next morning to see if the leopard was dead. The trail of blood to the small piece of jungle was easily seen and the keen *shikari* said he would go to the opposite side of this small piece of jungle to see whether the animal had gone out that side. As he was looking down for blood marks, the leopard sprang upon him from just inside the jungle, before he could get his rifle up. He shouted to his friend who rushed to his assistance and found him on the ground, holding the leopard by its forearms. However, in the confusion of the severe struggle going on, he was unable to shoot at the leopard for fear of hitting his friend. The leopard had the man's head in its jaws. The *shikari* managed to get to his feet, still holding a paw in each hand, but when the leopard suddenly brought his hind feet into action the poor fellow, feeling himself being disembowelled, let go. The animal then clawed his face and head terribly and jumped back into the jungle again. The victim was treated by the doctor at the nearest estate, who ordered his removal to the Tezpur Government Hospital, some forty miles away, where he died the following day.

A little boy of six was taking some food to his father, who was working on the estate. He was passing along a narrow road near our hospital, on either side of which there was some very light jungle, when suddenly a leopard sprang on him, mauling his chest and arms and according to an eye witness, disappeared as quickly as it had appeared. Luckily the garden's hospital was only about two hundred

yards away and the boy, after being taken there, recovered in about three weeks.

Another case of an attack of this type was made in front of me one afternoon while I was watching some boys staking out land, preparatory to the planting out of young tea. The boys were working at the extreme end of the area to be planted, which was contiguous to an area of three feet high thatch grass grown for thatching purposes. While watching them, my eye caught a slight movement a few yards inside the grass, where a little earlier the boys had said they had seen a reddish object which they thought was a barking deer, as they had heard a deer's call not long before. A few minutes later, a leopard sprang out on to the nearest boy, clawed and bit him and leapt back again into the grass—all in a flash!

The boy walked with me to my car, about one hundred yards off, and I had him under treatment in the estate's hospital within a few minutes. The lad was anaesthetised and deep claw wounds were lengthened in order to drain them properly and pure carbolic was dabbed in. He was discharged from hospital some two weeks later.

The very prompt treatment in both these cases was undoubtedly the reason for the wounds not becoming septic. Indeed, if one could see and smell the inside of the sheath of a leopard or tiger claw, as I have done, one would be filled with wonder of how victims of attack ever recover after being mauled.

My new bungalow at Kettela was approximately fifty yards from a deep, jungle-like hollow. Besides odd pigs, deer, pheasants and jungle fowl, a leopard also took its abode there during the daytime and any goat from the labourers' lines that strayed too near met its sudden death. This leopard had killed innumerable goats and had also taken my long-haired, white Kabuli cat—a very beautiful animal which had one blue eye and one green. The leopard took it off a low window-sill one evening, while the cat was asleep and I was having my bath.

Some labourers had approached me a few days earlier, requesting me to destroy this leopard if possible, because of their heavy losses. I therefore made arrangements for three of my friends from a neighbouring estate to come over the following Sunday. I also arranged for fifty beaters with their tom-toms to beat the leopard out of the ravine. My friends turned up at the appointed time. I noticed that most of the labourers had bows and arrows, spears, and axes while only a few had tom-toms.

The hollow to be driven led out from the main forest and continued for approximately three-quarters of a mile, where it finished up at a blind end near the labourers' lines. It was decided to drive this in two pieces and the first drive was from the blind end towards the main forest. Two of my friends remained on the edge of the bank to one side of the hollow and walked level with the beaters, the third, who was the best shot, remained on the opposite bank and level with the beaters, while I took up a position at the bottom of the hollow approximately five hundred yards from where the beaters were to start. The four of us had only 12 bore shot guns with No. 6 shot. In addition, we had cartridges loaded with a single spherical ball, which we kept separately in different pockets. In front of me, at the bottom of the hollow, was quite a lot of thick grass, approximately six feet high. I stood where there was a small narrow run, used chiefly by pigs and deer. I waved to a man I had left at the top of the bank, some sixty feet up and he passed on the signal for the beaters to commence.

Then the fun started. The noise made by the beaters was terrific. I had decided to keep ordinary 12 bore No. 6 cartridges in my gun, knowing that there were pheasants and jungle fowl and that No. 6 shot is even good at close range for leopards. A pheasant came flying towards me and I dropped that. Then came a jungle cock and I dropped that also. I immediately reloaded with No. 6 shot and at that time my attention was drawn to a man calling me

from the top of the bank and holding up a black goat, which I could see was headless. While my attention was distracted I saw a leopard in the air and only a few feet away, coming down on top of me. I fired both barrels, more or less simultaneously, at its head and throat, which were not more than a yard from the end of my gun barrels at that time and ran for my life to the bank above. I then stopped the beat, called out the men and told my friends what had happened.

After discussing the position, we decided to send some of the men off to a nearby grazing ground, to collect some buffaloes and their calves belonging to the labourers. The idea was to place a few boys on the backs of these animals and for them to take the buffaloes in the direction that I had fired at the leopard. If the leopard was dead, it would be seen by the boys, and if still alive the buffaloes would attack the leopard at once.

While the few beaters had gone to bring the buffaloes, we decided to proceed to my bungalow, some three hundred yards away, for tea, and I gave instructions to the remaining beaters to let me know when the buffaloes arrived.

After being in the bungalow about half an hour, a big commotion started outside and I went to investigate. Lying on the grass just beyond the bungalow steps was a dead beater and a dead leopard! Another man also lay there with his arm terribly injured and more or less severed at the elbow. With his body a mass of blood he looked a terrible sight.

This is what had happened. Most of the beaters were of the Munda and Oraon castes, real hunters and a fine lot of fellows who, from their childhood days, had lived for hunting. It being Sunday, they were primed with liquor and when we left them in order to go to the bungalow for tea, one of the senior men said to the others, "Let us show the sahibs how we can kill leopards!" Upon their reaching the place where I had fired at the leopard and then rushed

away, the animal stood up and with one swipe of its paw removed a man's windpipe. Another man close to him, although only armed with a stout cudgel, went to the first man's assistance and clubbed the leopard. The leopard knocked this man down and started to chew his arm off at the elbow—actually lying on the man at the time—before dying on top of him. The blood from the gunshot wound had covered the man's chest, hence the awful sight he presented. On examining the dead leopard, its windpipe was seen to have been shattered by the No. 6 shot at such close range, the charge having entered before spreading out. I was filled with regret for the whole incident. If only the men had waited for the arrival of the buffaloes, I am certain the leopard would have been found dead!

The wounded man was conveyed to the estate hospital about half a mile distant, where his arm was amputated at the elbow. Three months later he was given a job as the estate postman. Just after this event I was transferred to another estate, some two hundred miles away to the east. On my visiting the old estate about ten years afterwards, he was the first man to come along and pay his respects. On my asking him if he had seen any leopards recently, he rocked with laughter! He died a very old man a few years ago.

One evening, after returning from the estate office, my personal servant reported to me that a leopard had been showing its head through some flowers in my garden whilst my Airedale terrier, Ben, was barking at it from the bungalow verandah.

It was the hot season and I slept with my bedroom windows and doors wide open and the dog slept at the foot of my bed on a carpet outside the mosquito net. At about 2 a.m. I was awakened by a terrific noise. The leopard was chasing my dog round and round my bed. I shouted and clapped my hands and the leopard went out by the bedroom door.

I knew that, to get to my compound, the leopard would have to cross the main road through the estate, as the only jungle where the leopard could lie up was to the south of my bungalow. I had this road watched the following afternoon while I had Ben shut up. As it was getting dark, the leopard was seen to be making for my bungalow again, crossing the main road fifty yards or so from the bungalow.

It was dark when I returned from the estate office that night, so I could do nothing. The man whom I had put on to watch the road showed me the pug marks of the leopard where it had emerged from the tea, prior to crossing the main road. There were many pug marks to be seen there, for this was its favourite approach to my bungalow. It liked the smell of my dog.

The next day, I heard a leopard "sawing",—making a noise like the sawing of a piece of wood—from the direction of a bamboo *bari* (plantation). I immediately went to my bungalow to fetch my rifle and with the help of two men, was soon installed in a tree some thirty yards from where the numerous pug marks were to be seen, near a path.

After sitting there for about half an hour, I saw the leopard come out at the expected place, move up on the main road and stand broadside on, contemplating what it should do. It was an easy shot as the beast was approximately thirty yards away. Luckily it died quickly because it was not long before Ben, hearing the report of the rifle, came bounding down the road and was soon biting at the dead leopard!

A few weeks after this, while at breakfast one morning, a message came to me from the native doctor in charge of the hospital to say that a leopard was in the hospital compound and was after some goats feeding nearby. I was there in quick time with my rifle. The leopard had been showing itself some forty yards from the hospital and the goats were between it and the hospital building, but apparently the leopard was watching the out-patients on the hospital

verandah and was too frightened to approach any nearer. After sending the out-patients to the other side of the hospital, I hid behind a brick pillar which supported the roof of the verandah. After a few minutes the leopard showed itself and reassured by the absence of people, advanced slowly towards the nearest goat. It then lay down to watch. It was some thirty yards off when I shot it with my .470 rifle and it never moved again. The leopard was carried to my bungalow compound and a man was called to skin it.

I finished my breakfast and learned that the man who was to skin the leopard was away obtaining firewood and would be coming shortly. I went out to the estate and returned just after one o'clock. Imagine my surprise to find that there were a number of labourers, plus the would be "skinner" sitting around the dead leopard at a safe distance away. Ben, the Airedale, was in command, sitting against the leopard and not allowing any one to approach! It appeared that efforts had been made to coax the dog away, for a saucer of milk and a leg of chicken remained untouched five yards away. Ben had just continued to growl at anybody going near, so the men had waited for my return. He even looked at me very menacingly but changed his mind upon my producing a stick, got up, wagged his tail and actually laughed at the onlookers! Some dogs do laugh: I remember a Labrador I had which used to laugh quite a lot when pleased!

A week or so after this event, I was invited to dine with a friend about five miles away. He had two dogs which were asleep on the verandah when we adjourned to the dining room for dinner. About half an hour later, there was a yelp from one of the dogs and the other one rushed terrified into the dining room. A leopard had approached whilst they were asleep and had taken the nearest one, the animal's wet footprints being easily visible on the cement floor outside. The following Sunday afternoon we arranged to have tea with another acquaintance of his and my

friend drove me there in his pony trap. His other dog, a fox terrier, trotted along ahead of us. On our left was some jungle and on our right was tea.

When the terrier was some thirty yards in front of us, we saw a leopard spring out of the jungle, grab the dog and leap back under cover again. The whole action was over in a flash! There was nothing we could do in such thick jungle and there was only a yelp or two before it was all over. My friend, therefore, lost his two dogs within a week and with this latter occurring only a short distance from his bungalow, it was probably the same leopard.

Another incident concerns a leopard which was seen early one morning lying down near the labourers' lines. Some men threw stones at it from a distance but the leopard did not move. They then approached cautiously and eventually managed to hit it, but it never stirred. The leopard was dead! On further examination, it was seen that inside the leopard's mouth was an ordinary domestic cat. It was, of course, quite dead, but the cat's claws had penetrated the leopard's tongue and windpipe and the leopard had apparently died of suffocation.

I have shot seventeen of these dangerous animals and have never regretted it.

Chapter Three

Man-eating Tigers

Although I have sat up in machans over several victims of man-eating tigers, I have never had the fortune to obtain a shot at the tiger responsible as they never returned to the kill, and so I have never killed a man-eater. But I have had first hand knowledge of many cases of man-eating tigers and I can vouch for one thing—their superlative cunning.

When a tiger takes to killing human beings, it is generally because of old age or because of a disabling or crippling wound which renders it incapable of hunting its usual prey. Inheritance of an acquired taste for human flesh may also be one of the reasons for its terrible curse and I have known cases where a tigress, having been disabled in some way by a wound and taken to killing human beings, has unconsciously taught her cubs to carry on in the same manner so that they in turn become hunters of human beings. The fact that many man-eaters are comparatively young and healthy animals proves this.

These cunning animals often lie hidden near villagers' or garden labourers' houses and attack people when they go out to collect firewood or water. They also lie in wait alongside narrow paths on which people go to and from their work. I know of three cases where a tiger has sprung out on a group of several people moving together and killed one, but in all cases the brutes have not come back later that day or during the night to eat their victims. The reason is their superlative cunning and basic cowardice.

With its terrific strength and weight (approximately six hundred pounds) a tiger can knock its victim unconscious at the first onslaught and it is seldom that persons who are attacked escape with their lives. Man-eating leopards on the other hand, often fail to kill the victims of their attack but are as dangerous, if not more so, than tigers, because of their great agility and powers of concealment.

I know of a man-eater which killed fourteen people before it met its timely death. This particular tiger worked within a radius of about two miles from the bungalow in which I then lived. One of its victims was a man who had gone a little way into the forest with his wife who had their small baby strapped on her back. She went to wash some clothes at a stream and the man to collect firewood when the tragedy occurred. The husband was some twenty yards away, chopping firewood, when the tiger attacked from behind and carried him off before her very eyes. The brave woman screamed and chased the tiger, but in vain. Her screams were heard and a number of people from some nearby houses followed her as she ran in the direction the tiger had taken. It was only when she found her husband's headless body and blood-covered shirt that she turned back.

This attack took place not more than two hundred yards from where my two elephants were tethered at Rangaghur Tea Estate and was near the mahout's house. The mahout, with an elephant and some men, found the body later and brought it back. They all stopped outside the mahout's house where the body was prepared for burial. At midnight the tiger approached the house and went round it several times roaring loudly, before finally going away. It had obviously traced the victim's body which it had not had time to fully consume, by its powers of scent. My mahout and his wife had no sleep that night and spent most of the time shivering behind their barricaded door. I was away inspecting an estate in North

Lakhimpur at the time, and my mahout described everything to me two days after my return.

Although I repeatedly warned all villagers and labourers to keep away from the forest until the tiger had been disposed of, they paid little heed and within two weeks of the woman losing her husband, a father and two sons visited the forest where the tiger had secured his last victim. They knew it was dangerous and the father warned his sons to keep together, but all their precautions were in vain. They were on the edge of the stream where the previous victim's wife had been washing clothes and were only about ten yards apart, the younger son, who was about nine years of age, being on the left flank. Suddenly there was a rushing sound from behind and in a second the tiger had seized the child and jumped down into the stream with him. The father and the other son, though nearly shocked out of their wits, immediately endeavoured to circumvent the tiger and at the same time threw their billhooks at it. The killer dropped the boy but the poor lad was dead. The fangs of the tiger had met through the neck, breaking the vertebrae! When I arrived on the spot within an hour the little fellow was lying there still grasping his knife.

The tiger had gone into some dense jungle about forty yards away and I decided to sit up for it. Unfortunately, there was not a suitable tree to climb, the only one near enough being far too much on the slender side to my way of thinking. However, I had a rifle and a torch and there was no time to lose for it was getting dark. So, with the help of my elephant which had just returned with the mahout from a grass-foraging trip for the night's feed, I managed to climb on to a branch about twelve feet from the ground. My combined weight and movement caused the tree to sway from side to side and I had a decided feeling of insecurity, but looking down on the pathetic remains of the poor lad I was determined to get that villain of a tiger. I sent away all the people who had collected and gave in-

structions to the mahout to keep the saddle-pad on the elephant and to come when I called him.

I sat there for some time. Everything was still and there was no sound except that of the birds, in the patch of dense jungle into which the tiger had gone. I was certain that it was still there because the birds and monkeys kept on making their usual noises when alarmed. Through the distant trees I could see flashes of lightning from over the mighty Brahmaputra River and could hear the distant rolls of thunder. It was the time of year for storms and cyclones and this one was gradually coming nearer and nearer. After each brilliant flash complete blackness prevailed. I had fleeting glimpses of the crumpled remains and face of the dead boy lying about ten yards from the foot of the tree. Soon I became aware of the tremendous roar of the oncoming storm and as it came nearer, the noises of trees crashing down in the forest, some distance away from me. Presently the slender tree I was on was swaying violently with the wind under my weight, like a metronome pendulum, until it almost seemed as if it would touch the ground at any moment. I hung on grimly in my precarious position, all the while wondering whether I would become the next victim of the tiger. There appeared no reason at all why this should not be the case if I stayed where I was and I therefore called out to the mahout and eventually he heard me over the noise of the storm. By the time he reached me, accompanied by the relations of the poor victim, it had started to pour heavily as the result of the cloudburst and we were all soon drenched.

The little boy was taken back to the mahout's house, where many people of the same caste had collected, and was laid on the ground while we took shelter from the heavy rain which lasted about an hour. I then left for my bungalow, about three miles off. It was ten o'clock and I felt that the tiger would not show itelf because of the disturbance. The next morning I received word that the

tiger had again circled around the mahout's house for most of the night, roaring with anger!

Three days later eight villagers were just about to enter the main forest for firewood at a spot about a mile distant from the last killing, when the tiger charged out into the open roaring defiance at them. They all scattered but it knocked down the youngest who was about sixteen years of age. Strange to relate, this boy was my mahout's nephew. After knocking the lad down, the tiger bounded on for some twenty yards, roaring loudly. The young fellow picked himself up and was running for his life when the tiger came back and caught him as a fox catches a chicken and took him away.

Unfortunately, I was away from my bungalow for two days, visiting other tea estates. On my return I searched the jungle for three hours until I found the youth's clothes and some dry blood. The poor fellow had been completely eaten! He was the tiger's fourteenth victim.

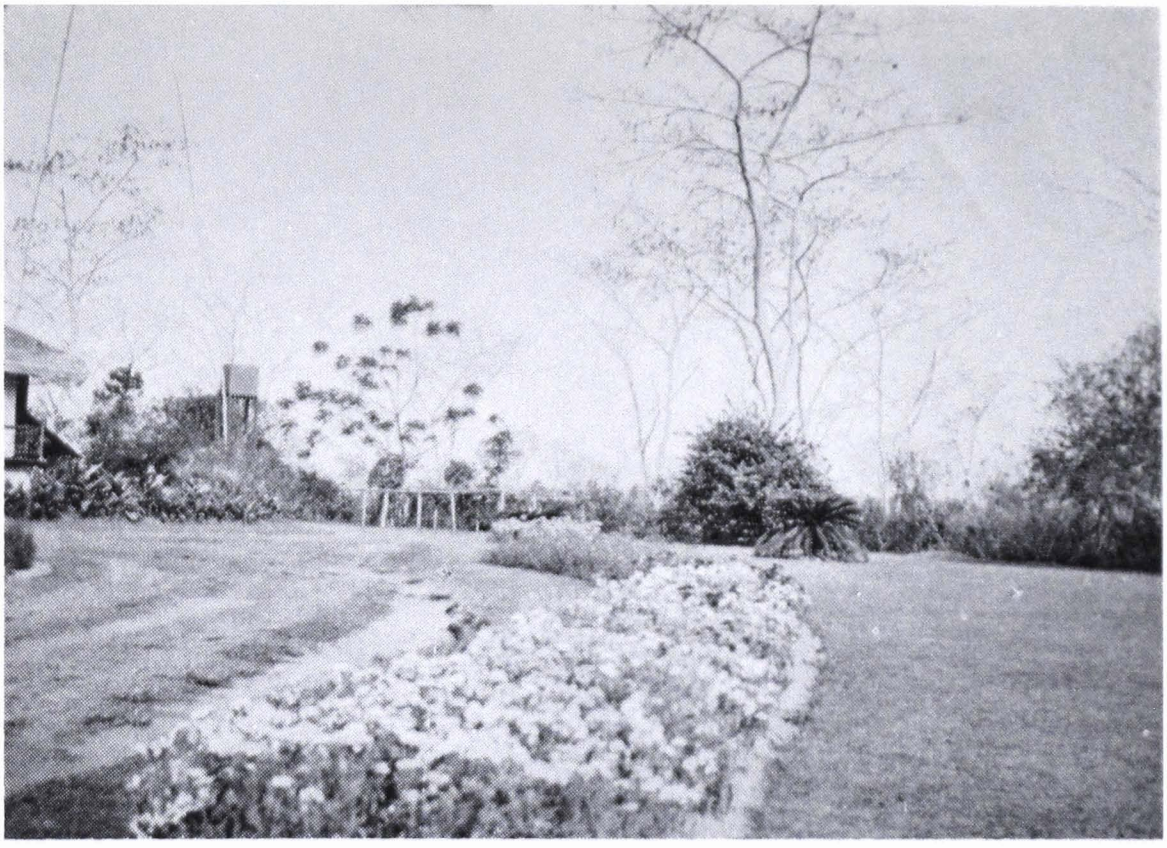
Finally the tiger came to his death in a most unique manner. Never had a case of this kind been heard of and surely it will not occur again. Approximately one and a half miles from where I had sat up over one of his victims during the cyclonic storm previously described, a gang of about fifty girls was engaged in cleaning out with knives the small, thin growth in the tea bushes which had had the thick wood previously pruned by men labourers. Just as the girls were leaving their work one afternoon the headman in charge of them saw a tiger cross a road not far from them. He reported the matter to me and said that the girls had refused to work there the next day, which was natural enough as the section was near some heavy grass jungle. I therefore suggested that my two elephants with their mahouts should patrol the section of tea until the cleaning-out operation was completed and the labourers were agreeable to work if this was done.

Next morning my elephants arrived early and I told the mahouts to patrol the area where the high, coarse grass

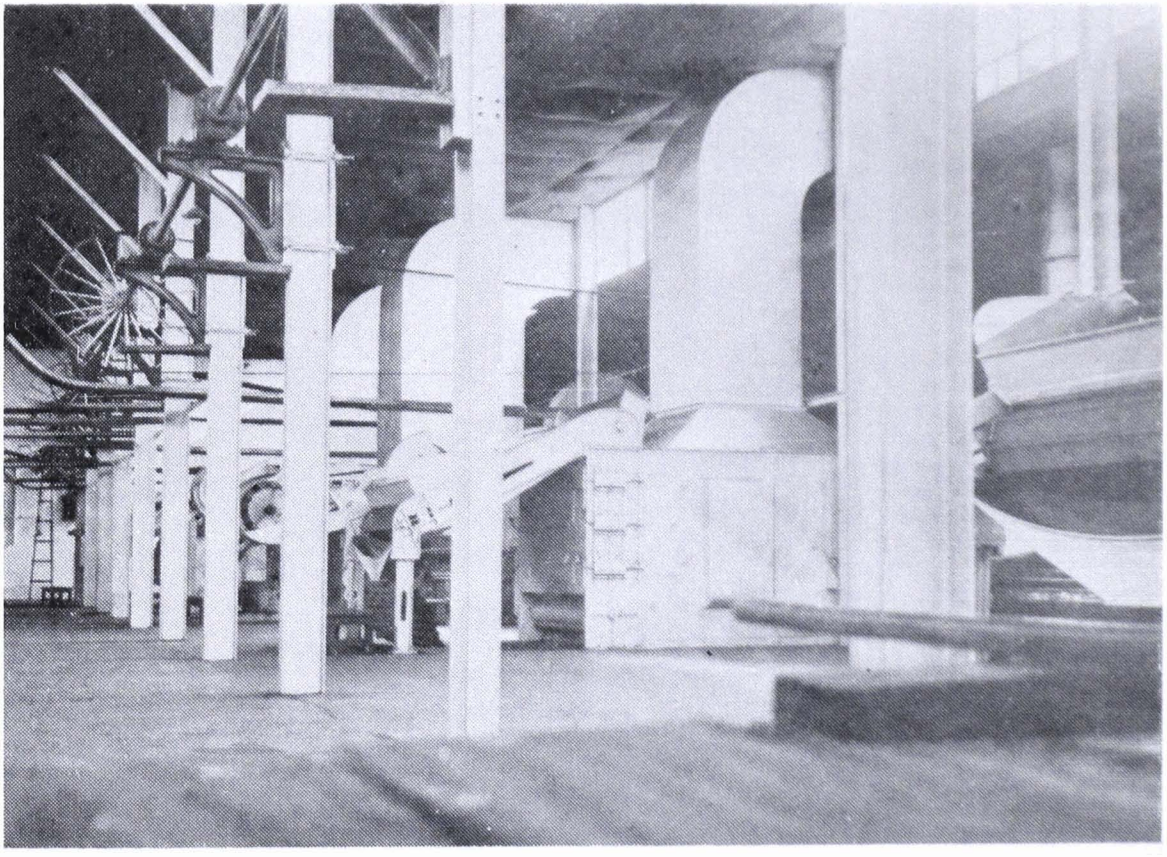
was contiguous to the tea. They were to stay well apart and to keep a good look-out. Beyond the grass was a patch of bamboo and jungle which was an ideal place for the tiger to lie up in. During the morning shouts were heard from some men who were employed on hoeing in a section of tea, about a quarter of a mile from where the girls were doing the cleaning-out operations. At this point the head mahout made a big mistake. He called on the other mahout and elephant to go with him and see what the noise was all about. About half an hour after they had left the gang of girl workers, the man-eater emerged from the edge of the coarse grass and sprang towards one of the girls who was working some six yards inside the tea area. The tea bushes were broad and table-like and the pruned branches were interlacing. Fortunately the girl was facing in the direction from which the tiger sprang, and she quickly ducked down below the bushes for protection. The surprised tiger, landing short, found himself impaled on the top of a tea bush, the sharp points of the thick, pruned branches entering his stomach! There he stuck for a few seconds, roaring his head off before finally freeing himself. Judging by the size of his footprints, a full-grown tiger as this one was, would weigh approximately six hundred pounds and it is little wonder that, having sprung a distance of some six yards, he would severely injure himself when landing on those thick, sharp, pruned points. I inspected these shortly afterwards and found that they were covered with hair and blood.

As no more killings whatever took place in that area after this, it was assumed by all of us that the tiger died in the jungle of the injuries it sustained in the manner described. There was no other explanation.

The girl, poor thing, completely lost her voice and when she was brought to the office the next morning by her father she was still trembling dreadfully. In order to keep her mind off the previous day's experience, I thought it would be better for her to do some light soil-forking with



5. A part of the gardens at the Kettela bungalow.

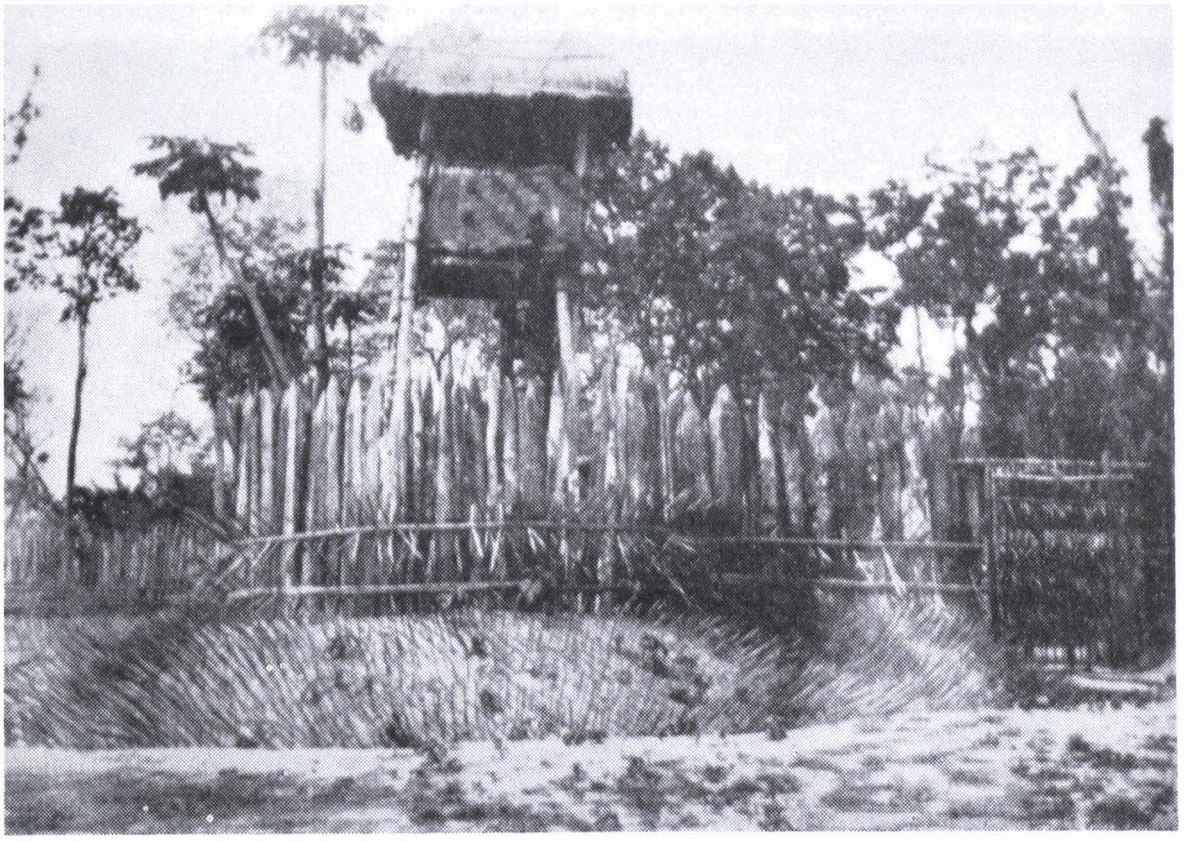


6. A view of the drying machines at Kettela Tea Factory.

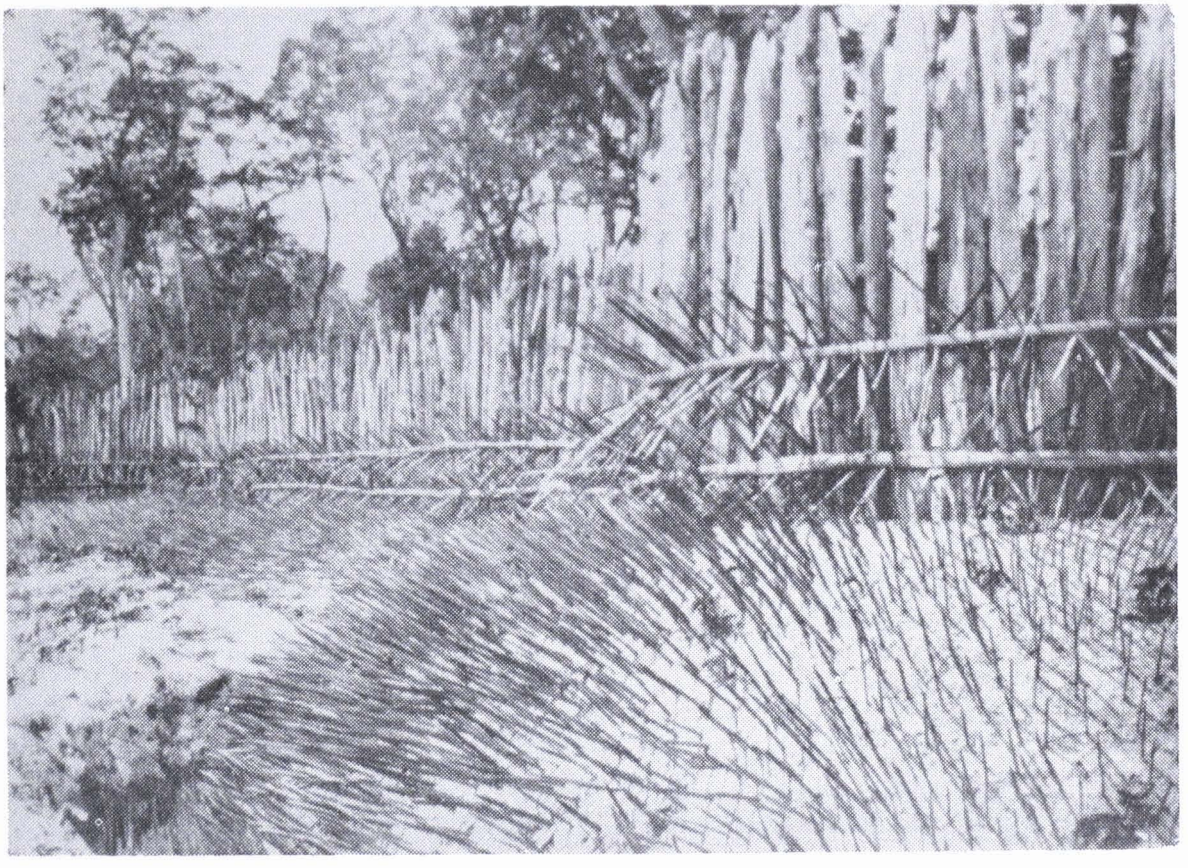
7. Young tea bushes being planted out at Bargang Tea Estate.

8. The finished tea planted area of fifty acres at Bargang Tea Estate.

9. Nepalese women plucking tea on Nagrifarm Tea Estate between Kalimpong and Darjeeling.



10. A watch tower within a stockade in hills near the Borelli River. This was occupied by troops in the 1926-34 period when Dafla tribesmen threatened the plains folk.



11. A section of the same stockade. The troops had huts within the enclosure.

the other girls in a wide open area, away from the jungle edge. She worked until the afternoon not speaking to anyone and then, after returning to her own house, left again for her aunt's house on another estate named Borbheel, some three miles away. She did not speak there either and left again early next morning for yet another estate named Pabhoi, twelve miles away, to stay at another relation's house. She regained her speech there but did not come back to our estate for over a year. A planter's life can be very harassing when he is called upon to protect his labour from the attacks of leopards, tigers and elephants. The rhythm of work on his garden can be badly disrupted, and serious financial losses sustained thereby if the labourers are disturbed or even refuse to work, as has often been the case.

A few years after the above episode, I was asked if I would go and shoot a man-eater which had killed many people some thirty miles away. It was said to have its home in some deep, main drains of an abandoned area of tea. Naturally, nobody was very keen to search on foot for the man-eater in the abandoned area of tangled tea bushes, grown into trees. So, I sent my elephants on four days ahead of me to try and find out where the marauder was actually lying up. The mahouts were instructed to also search the surrounding areas of virgin jungle for signs of it. I stayed at a friend's bungalow at Dikorai, not far from the area in which the tiger was supposed to be.

The mahouts had no success in their endeavour to locate the man-eater and I spent two whole days in the area, searching the jungle, the abandoned tea and the river-beds where it would be likely to go for water, but all in vain. After two unsuccessful days of searching, I was alighting from my elephant at the spot where I had parked my car near the mahout's camp, when the head mahout said that they wished to start on their journey home, as apparently the man-eater had left the area for the time being. I consented and drove away. Within an hour of the elephants

leaving the camp site, an old woman and her daughter went to collect the spare firewood which the mahouts had left behind, when the tiger, which was hiding nearby, leapt out on to the old woman and carried her off in his jaws, leaving her plump young daughter to flee in terror! It was a most extraordinary affair in that we had searched so vigorously for the killer in the locality. A few weeks after this episode, the tiger claimed his next victim. This time it was a native gardener who had a deformed toe with a ring on it. He was working in the garden of a European manager of the Majulighur Tea Estate a few miles distant and was carried away for some distance. The body of the partly eaten man was abandoned by the tiger and that evening a planter sat up in a machan over the victim and shot the animal as it came back for another meal.

The proprietors of the estate and the Government had both offered rewards, totalling five hundred rupees, to whoever shot this tiger, for it had killed a number of people in the surrounding district. The European manager of the estate, who studied expenditure very carefully, was reluctant to believe it was actually the tiger which had killed his gardener and so the planter decided to prove it to him. He had the animal's stomach opened up and out fell the deformed toe of the gardener, still with the ring on it! It was arranged for the toe to be delivered to the manager on a plate, just as he, his wife and guests were sitting down to their soup at dinner time. The killer of the tiger got his five hundred rupees next morning!

In the days before most of us had cars, a friend of mine on the south bank of the Brahmaputra river was driving his wife and baby daughter down in a pony cart to the steamer *ghat*, to meet the river steamer. At the back of the buggy sat the syce and ayah. It was getting dark but the vehicle lights were burning. The road along which they were travelling was on a raised embankment and there was a drop of some ten feet on either side. The jungle

on both sides came fairly close up to the embankment. Suddenly a large tiger pounced on to the horse's head and within a matter of seconds, had pulled the horse, buggy and all down to the jungle edge. One can imagine the chaos that followed! The shouting of the parents, helped by that of the nurse and syce and the screaming of the baby, was too much for the tiger which disappeared, but the horse was dead—its neck neatly broken. The greatly shaken travellers remained at a nearby village for the night, then walked to a planter's bungalow next morning. The manager of the estate sent his native doctor to inject poison into the horse's neck and on the following morning two tigers were found dead alongside.

My mahout had set some night lines to catch fish in a small lake in the jungle and had baited them with frogs. The lake had been formed by the river changing its course as a result of an earthquake some years ago, and we knew that there were some *sal* fish in it, as we had previously caught some up to 4 lbs. in weight. I was at that time looking after the elephant of a friend, who was away on leave. I had been warned that it was a bolter and even bolted from tame buffaloes and ponies! My mahout suggested that we should try it out in the forest and as a beginning, proposed that we go to see if his night-lines had caught anything.

We arrived at the lake early next day and as a safety precaution the mahout got down and tied the elephant's front legs together. He then proceeded around a bend in the path to look at a line, leaving me on the elephant some fifty yards behind, from where I was unable to see him. I learned later that, after going down the path to the lake where he found he had caught a fish, his attention was attracted by a slight noise behind him. On turning round he found himself face to face with a huge tiger some ten yards away, crouched ready to spring! On seeing the mahout turn round, the tiger went "whoof" and was off

with a bound. Undoubtedly the tiger had mistaken the mahout's hindquarters, while he was stooping down to extract the hook from the fish's mouth, for an animal drinking! The tiger got as much of a shock as did the mahout and on hearing the "whoof" from the tiger, the elephant I was on also got a similar fright. It turned round immediately, almost throwing me and went off, making for some thick trees. I realised that if I did not jump off beforehand I should certainly be swept off by the low branches, but on the other hand there was the risk, if I jumped off, of being trampled on by the elephant. However, I decided to jump and I did so, merely injuring my knee. The elephant was caught by the mahout shortly afterwards.

The mahout, who was wise in the ways of the jungle having had forty years experience, was certain that had he not turned round at the moment he did, the tiger would have sprung on him. He said it was just a case of mistaken identity! This incident leads one to speculate as to how man-eaters come to be made.

The following is also another case of this type. One evening a woman was drawing water from a well sited near a road, at Rangaghur Tea Estate, along which the labourers' cattle had just been driven back to the lines. She had just raised the bucket of water and had stooped down to pour it into her own pitcher, when a three-quarter grown tiger sprang clean over her head and disappeared down the well! Several persons actually saw this happen and ran to the well, where they found the tiger on his hind legs with his head out of the water. The animal was shot soon afterwards by the European in charge of the estate at that time. Evidently the tiger had been following the cattle and for some reason, had mistaken the stooping woman for one of them. The woman was struck dumb with fright and could not speak for two days but after being given a double tot of whisky, as a last resort, she

soon commenced to chatter. Her husband said later that she talked continually throughout that night! A few weeks afterwards the couple came to me, requesting to be sent back to their own province and I let them go.

Chapter Four

Tigers and their Prey

In India cattle are the villagers' wealth to a large extent but because they are usually of a rather poor standard, due chiefly to inbreeding, they supply only a very small quantity of milk. Both buffaloes and bullocks are kept by tea estate labourers and used for ploughing their land and also for pulling carts. The cattle killer, therefore, can cause great loss to a rural family and I always tried to deal with this type of tiger as severely as with man-eaters. In Assam once tigers take to killing cattle on tea estates, they seldom go far away from the area. They lie in wait at the edge of the forest of scrub jungle and woe betide the animal that ventures anywhere near them. They pounce and kill instantly and in most cases the herdsmen in charge of the herd are so terrified that they run away immediately. Furthermore, few men are keen to venture near the kill afterwards, which just suits the tiger. If he kills out in the open, he will usually drag the carcase under cover away from vultures and then lie up not far off until the evening. In my area whenever a tiger killed I was immediately informed and I aways did my best to shoot it. Out of the twenty-eight tigers I have shot over a period of fifty years, twenty-six have been cattle killers.

Early one morning, I was informed that a tigress with cubs had killed no less than six cattle simultaneously. She was undoubtedly showing the cubs how to attack and kill, as normally such wanton killings do not occur. About two hundred cattle were being driven out to their grazing ground and were passing close to some thick jungle, when

the tigress and two quarter-grown cubs sprang out, killing the six, all within a radius of about two hundred yards.

I have noticed on many occasions that when a tiger is approaching a kill, it relies on its sight. It advances very cautiously indeed and very often crouches before coming to the kill, raising only its head to take a good look round. I remember once, sitting in a machan and watching a tiger advance through a bamboo plantation free from undergrowth. It occasionally stood quite still and looked all round. It kept doing this until it came to within a few feet of the kill. It then looked at it for a few seconds before starting to tear huge chunks out of the carcase. I watched for quite fifteen minutes before I took careful aim and shot it. It was a magnificent tiger, measuring 9 feet 8 inches.

A bullock was killed a few months afterwards and was also dragged into the bamboo plantation, but this time only just inside. My machan was built about twelve feet from the ground and within the clump of bamboo, with a thin wall of grass as concealment. I sat up and was there for about an hour when, to my great delight, a tigress with three quarter-grown cubs appeared. The family was a lovely sight and I was in my element. I put my rifle down and watched for fully an hour. The mother crept into some very thin jungle, not more than eight yards from the bottom of my machan, leaving the cubs alone. She lay down and all the while kept a good look out around but not once up in my direction, although the grass was so thin round my perch that I felt sure she would look up and see me or smell me. She lay there peacefully, watching her cubs eat and lashing her tail from side to side. The mother had evidently had her fill after killing the bullock in the morning, or she preferred to remain on guard.

I was most interested in watching the three cubs. The large carting bullock was enough food for a dozen of them. The amusing thing was that when one of them tore off a small morsel from the carcase, the remaining two

fought to obtain it. This took place repeatedly and even though the fight became a bit noisy, mother just looked at them with her tail still gently lashing the ground.

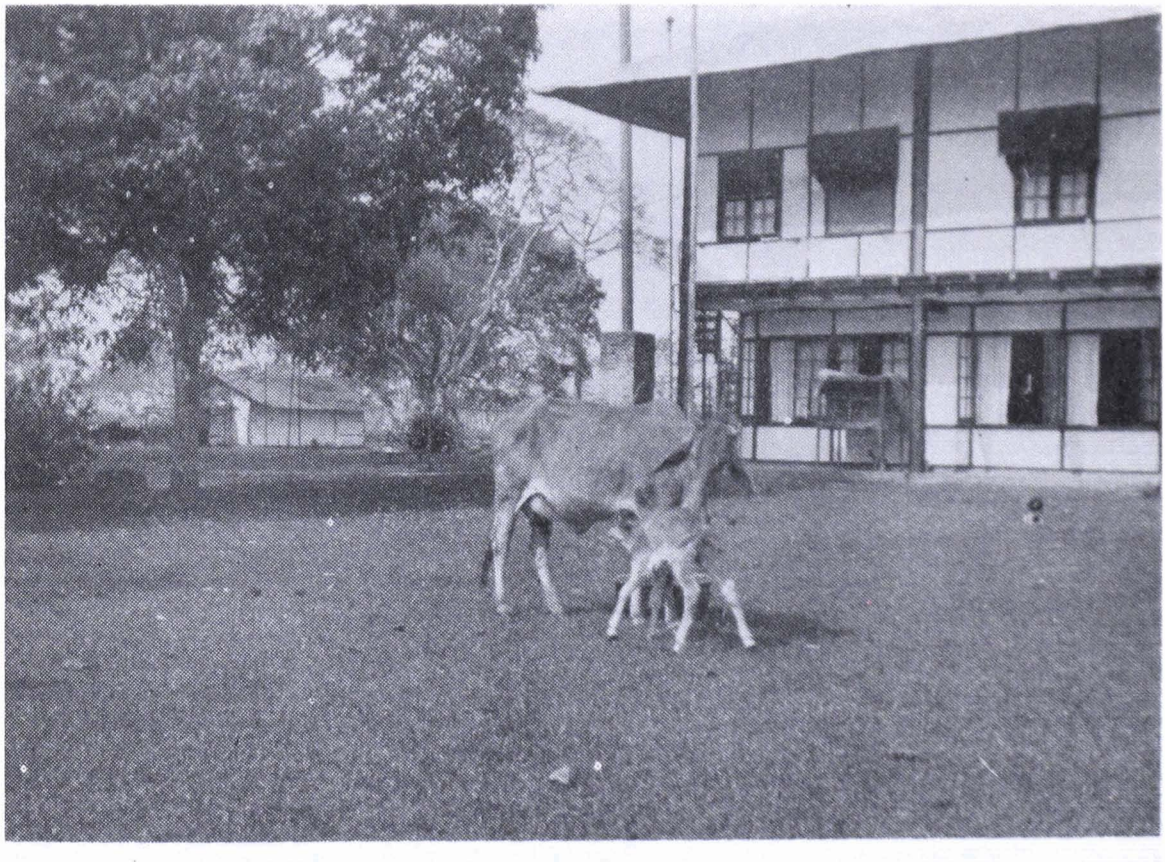
One by one they sat down, licked their paws and washed their faces just like cats do. I knew that after a while they would move off for a drink of water and sure enough, after about fifteen minutes, the mother got up and gave vent to what is best described as a subdued roar before they all went off together to a nearby stream. They had had their fill and were now satisfied. So was I and after a few minutes I climbed down from the machan and went quietly away in the opposite direction!

One day a villager came to see me to say that for two days and nights a tiger had been roaring in a patch of very thick grass, not far from his house. I told him that my elephants had gone away for a few days, but as soon as they returned I would come and have a look. He also said that it was not the usual roar, but a long, moaning sound. He thought that it was possibly wounded and therefore he and his pals had not gone to have a closer look. When the elephants returned we went to the villager's house, but he said the tiger had ceased to moan two days earlier. We had not long to search, as we soon got the smell of it. The tiger was dead.

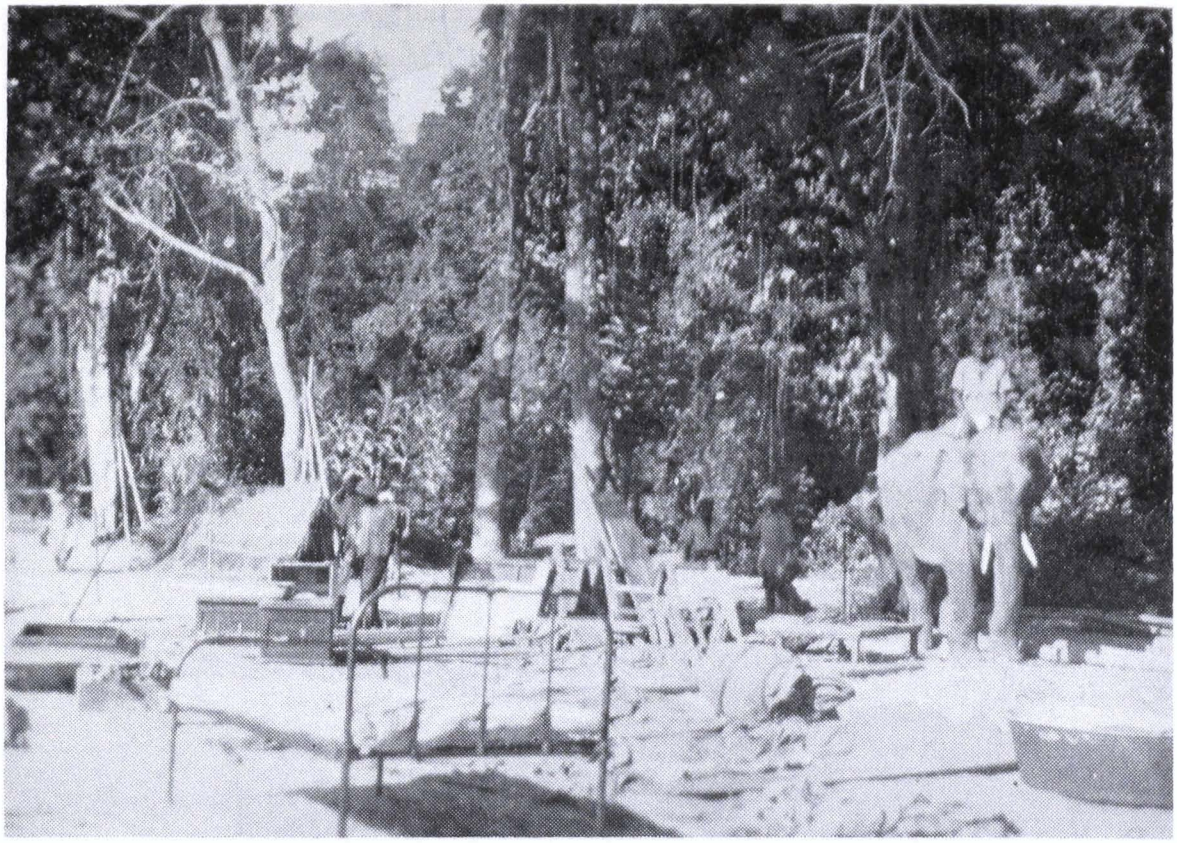
I got down from the elephant and saw some pieces of porcupine quills protruding from the animal's stomach. On opening up the area, we found several pieces of half chewed quills and I came to the conclusion that the animal had died of peritonitis. It certainly must have been in great agony before death.

Some years ago, I was in charge of an estate in lower Assam. I was going round the property with the visiting agent of the company, when an old man came to us from a village on the other side of a wide river, with the following story. For the past two days, he said, a large python had been holding on to the hind leg of a tiger. The python was fully stretched out with its tail round a tree. He

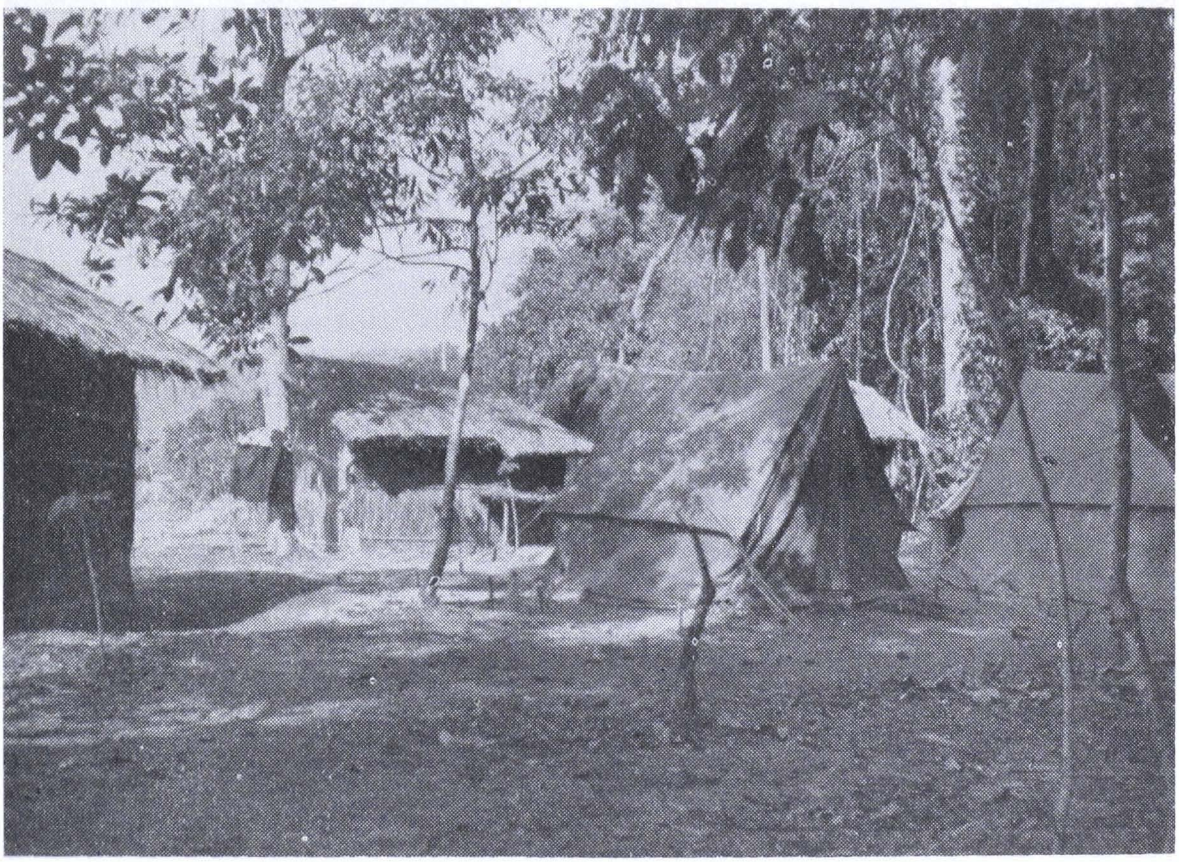
12. Chung bungalow, Kettela, the author's residence for six months each year. Pruned tea bushes are growing in front.



13. A freshly calved Indian cow in the grounds of Chung bungalow, Kettela. A spaniel pup, Lucy, is on the lawn and in the cage behind is a talking mynah.



18. Preparing the camp site in the Borgang River area.



19. Camp in the forest in the Borgang River area.

wanted me to go and shoot them. Knowing that the river was in flood, I asked him how he had managed to get across. He said that the villagers had collected some banana trees and had roped them together and he and another man had crossed over by using them as a raft. They had touched our side of the river some two miles further downstream from where they had started. When this river is in flood, the torrent can be heard fully a mile away!

I asked the visiting agent if he would like to accompany me, to see this unique spectacle. "Not on your life, far too risky!" was his reply. However, we agreed that as the man had risked his life, to cross the river whilst in flood, his story was undoubtedly true.

A month or so later I saw the man again and asked him what had happened to the python and tiger. He said that on the night after he came to inform me, the tiger had turned on the python and clawed it to pieces and had then cleared off. Why the tiger had not done this in the first place I cannot say.

A few months after that, I met an old and very experienced shikari friend of mine, named Percy Briscoe. During his early days in Assam, twenty years previously, he had spent much of his time roaming the Assam jungles, as I did on my free weekends, instead of going to clubs. I told him of the python and tiger episode which I have just narrated and he related the following tale. "I was on my elephant riding through some grassland, miles from anywhere. There were a few trees scattered about and I suddenly came to a spot where the grass had been flattened out in a semi-circle in the centre of which was the skeleton of a huge python. The old mahout said, on seeing the skeleton, that the python had probably struck a tiger or leopard and having embedded its fangs in it, was unable to withdraw them and was subsequently killed in the struggle".

Shortly afterwards, there appeared in the *Statesman*, an article written by a young subaltern who had been shoot-

ing in the Central Provinces. It said that he had come across a python holding on to a leopard, which he shot. They were in a fully stretched out position, as if the leopard was straining to get away. From this I am convinced that pythons strike at any close moving object, without troubling to find out exactly what it is. The following case rather points to this. A Nepalese, whilst walking across some open grass land, quite close to the Phulburi estate I was on at the time, had his ankle suddenly seized by a python. Luckily, a Nepalese never moves far without his kukri and drawing this he struck at the snake and managed to decapitate it. Later, he was admitted to the garden hospital for treatment to his leg and there related the story.

Some years ago, I flew up in the company's plane to inspect an estate in North Lakhimpur, about one hundred miles away. The manager of the estate was at the airstrip to meet me and told me that a man who had been gathering firewood the previous evening had been attacked by a tiger and severely mauled and was now lying in the estate's hospital in a precarious condition. While inspecting the hospital later, we saw the wounded man, his face and whole body covered in bandages. He was unconscious and his relatives were grouped round his bed. Although he was unable to describe the attack himself, it appeared that he had been knocked down by the tiger, mauled, and left for dead. As we were leaving the hospital, an estate babu arrived in the compound on his cycle. He dismounted shaking in every limb, lips quivering and saliva falling from his mouth. The poor fellow's speech had completely failed him. He could only gesticulate!

When he recovered sufficiently, he was able to tell us that some fifteen minutes beforehand, while cycling down the garden road, on either side of which were tea bushes, the company's lorry had overtaken him, with some men in it. Immediately after the lorry had gone past, he saw a large tiger spring out of the tea at the men in the lorry. It

hit the body of the vehicle and was knocked back into the surrounding tea bushes. The babu must have turned and remounted that cycle in record time! He said that he did not know which way the tiger had gone, but thought it was possibly making for the jungle near the site of a tea-nursery, where men were then working.

The manager immediately connected this tiger with the animal which had, during the previous evening, mauled the man now lying in hospital. He left me at the hospital while he went off to his bungalow in his jeep to get his shot-gun and some ball cartridges, as he had no rifle. He returned to pick me up and we then proceeded to the nursery site where the workers said that they had not seen the tiger. We then went another hundred yards into the forest to see the assistant manager who was trying out a new motor-saw which had just arrived from England. We were watching him when suddenly there was a terrifying scream, followed by shouts, coming from the direction of the nearby nursery. Almost at once the men from the nursery came running up to us, saying that one man had been seized by the tiger.

The manager and his assistant jumped into the jeep and drove to the nursery site, to find the poor fellow trying to crawl away and bleeding profusely. They lifted him into the jeep and rushed him to the hospital. I remained with the men, though being unarmed felt somewhat uneasy. However, the manager was soon back to collect me and told the labourers that they could return to their homes in the lines.

When passing the nursery site, I asked the manager to stop the jeep to let me get down to see in which direction the tiger had gone after mauling the man. It appeared that the animal had gone down one of the paths in the nursery towards the dense forest, for I noticed some drops of blood there. The man, who had followed us, confirmed that only one of their party had been attacked and so it was clear to me than the blood drops were coming from the tiger

itself. It was obviously not a man-eater and appeared to be suffering from some wound which had driven it mad.

We left the jeep at the jungle edge and then proceeded to a spot nearby where a large gang of women were pruning. We had gone about fifty yards inside the tea and were inspecting the pruning, when from just inside the forest, next to the parked jeep, came a series of terrific roars. The women fled in terror at once and in their panic some of them left their babies behind on the ground! However, seeing that neither the manager nor myself had moved they soon forgot their fears, came back and collected them. The pruners naturally refused to stay and went home for the rest of the day.

The manager and I proceeded to the south-eastern part of the garden to inspect other work until lunch time, and then returned to the bungalow. After lunch, we visited the factory and then adjourned to the office to check some books. Imagine our consternation when a labourer rushed into the office to say that a tiger was in the lines nearby and had entered a labourer's house! The manager immediately went back to his bungalow to collect his gun, which he had left there at lunch time. The gallant manager cautiously advanced towards the lines where a man, who had climbed on to the roof of his house, informed him that the tiger had gone through the lines and had entered the jungle on the other side. Blood spots were seen on the floor of the house which the tiger had entered, and so there was proof again that the tiger was wounded.

By the time the manager returned to the office, it was almost time for me to go home again, so we adjourned to the bungalow to imbibe a cup that cheers before we left. The pilot of the plane was there waiting and the three of us soon left for the airstrip, leaving the manager's wife behind at the bungalow. A few days later I received a letter from the manager, giving me further news of the tiger and of the experiences they had had after I had left.

On returning to the estate from the airstrip, the manager

found his wife at the office, holding her loaded shot-gun. She informed him that the tiger had caught a man in the jungle near the lines and that the European assistant had gone there with the manager's gun. Just when she was telling her husband this, a shot was heard! The manager hurried in the direction of the sound and came upon the assistant who said that he had seen the tiger on top of a man, clawing him to pieces and that he had only hit the tiger in its hindquarters, being afraid of killing the victim. The manager advanced with his gun and was able to shoot the tiger dead. The poor victim was dead—just torn to pieces! It must be mentioned that the assistant had never handled a shot-gun in his life before. On examining the tiger, it was seen that the upper jaw had been cut completely through near the nose, and that the jaw was completely useless—hence the clawing of the three victims instead of biting them. Eventually, the man who had been first attacked by the tiger and who had recovered, said that he had managed to get in a stroke with his large-bladed knife on the tiger's face, before being knocked down and mauled. This explained the spots of blood seen in the nursery and those later seen in the labourer's house, which the tiger had entered. This house was fully a mile and a half from where it had roared at us when we were inspecting the pruning during the morning.

As there were no other wounds to be seen on the tiger, other than the wound inflicted by the first man with his knife and the bullet wounds from the shots fired by the manager and assistant, the manager was interested to find out what had caused the tiger to attack the first man, so he ordered a post mortem to be done on the body of the tiger. On opening up the animal's head, one single 'S.G.' or buck shot pellet was found embedded in the brain and this had undoubtedly sent the tiger mad. Eight of such pellets go to the ounce and cartridges containing this type of shot are generally used by natives to shoot deer or pigs. So one man lost his life and two others were terribly

wounded, due to some villager shooting at a very dangerous animal with completely unsuitable ammunition!

Tame buffaloes can be very treacherous animals with strangers, especially in a herd with their calves. Even tigers and leopards give them a very wide berth at that time. When single, or without their calves, they are very much more tractable and even small boys, four and five years old, can sit on their backs as they graze—not only sit, but lie flat on their stomachs and go to sleep!

The natural antagonism which buffaloes feel towards carnivora is well known in India and is often utilised by shikaris when they wound tigers or leopards. In such cases it is a favourite practice to send in a herd of buffaloes to locate the wounded animal, which they seldom fail to do. What is more the buffaloes will even attack and finish it off. It is as if they recognise their natural enemy and realise that now it is at their mercy. An example of the extraordinary nature of this combativeness of buffaloes towards tigers is the following.

An Indian tea planter named Hussain shot at and wounded a tiger in the Bengal Dooars some years ago and was attacked. He was on foot along with several other friends and some men had been employed to beat the jungle towards the guns. The tigress—as it later turned out to be —appeared in front of him and he fired at it with a .375 Mannlicher Schonaeur, hitting it, as he thought, in the chest, at about thirty yards. The animal broke back and as the beaters were almost up to the guns, Hussain, very bravely, went forward to protect them in case of necessity. He was suddenly charged from close range by the wounded animal, which had turned and come back to almost the same position, but to one side. The attack was sudden and close but the sportsman managed to fire at point blank range, hitting the tiger in the shoulder. He failed to stop the animal, however, and the next moment the enraged beast had grabbed him by the right thigh and had pulled him down. It commenced to bite him all down his right

side while he attempted to fend it off with his left arm—his rifle, of course, had been flung aside in the struggle.

At this moment providence saved him. A pair of domestic buffaloes had been grazing nearby and the male, from somewhere in the rear and out of the blue, charged the tigress, hitting it violently with its powerful head and horns and carrying her forward for some yards on its head. It then returned and stood by the wounded man and when the tigress again attacked the performance was repeated. The tigress then went off and lay up growling in a bush where it was shot by the other shikaris who had come up upon hearing the commotion. The wounded man was taken to hospital in Darjeeling where it was found that he had no less than 36 wounds! However, no bones had been broken and he made a rapid recovery. Apparently the tigress had been unable to inflict mortal injuries because its lower jaw had been damaged by the first bullet fired. As for the brave buffalo, it was so badly mauled that it died, a fact which caused the man whom it had saved as much regret as any other part of the whole extraordinary business.

While I was sitting on the verandah of my bungalow one very wet Sunday morning, a tame bull buffalo came galloping into my compound. It was lame, its hind foot being almost severed, except for a piece of skin. Above the animal's tail were huge deep claw marks, which continued down the hind legs. It was in a terrible state and had evidently come into the compound for safety.

A tiger must have crept up to the buffalo from behind while it was grazing in long grass but, just as it was springing, the buffalo must have seen it and bolted. The tiger managed to claw only the extreme hindquarters of the buffalo and then bit through the animal's leg just above the foot. The poor animal swelled up like a balloon and within three hours of reaching my compound it was dead.

Not all tigers will attack a buffalo and in every case where I have shot a tiger over a dead buffalo, it has been

a male tiger and a large one at that. Whenever a tiger is wounded and cannot be found, a herd of tame buffaloes with their calves is obtained and they seldom fail to locate the tiger. There is a fierce courage about a buffalo, especially females with calves, when they attack a tiger and the latter often comes off second best.

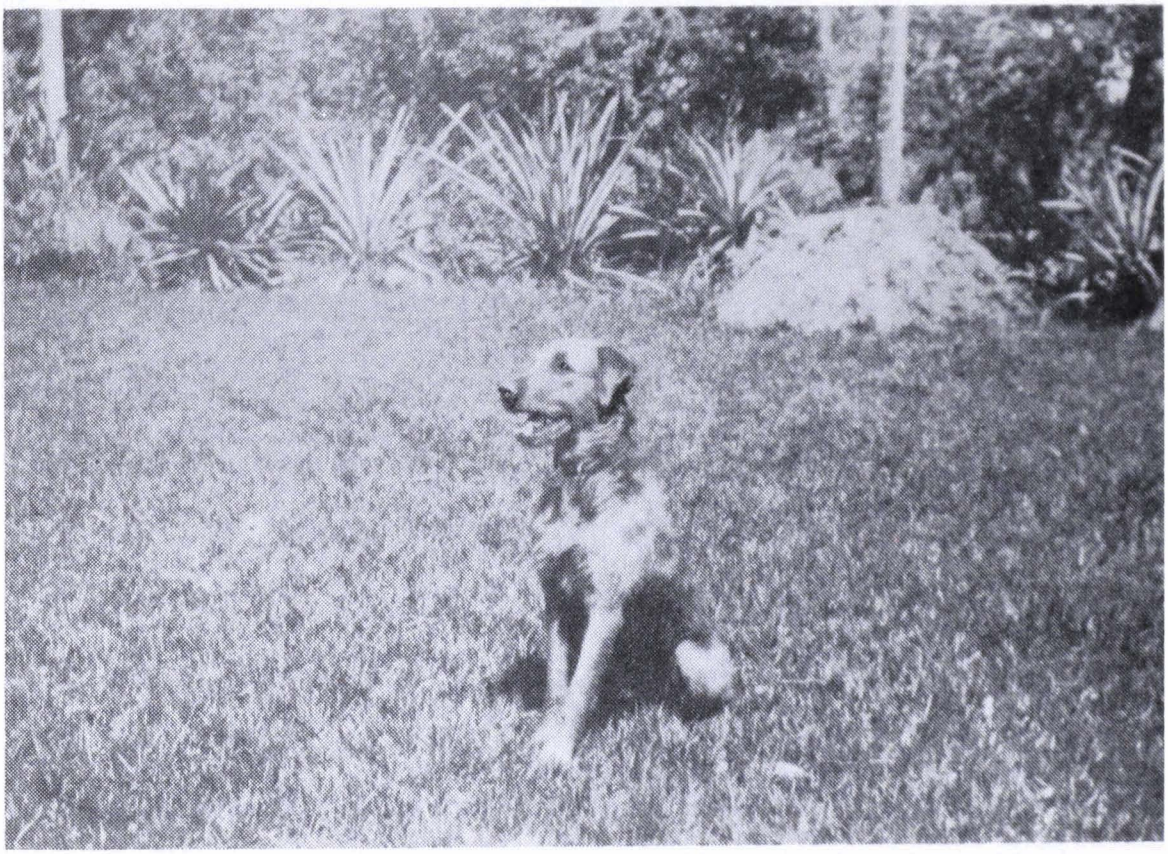
From 1913 onward I traversed the jungles of the north bank of the Brahmaputra River, from Kamrup to North Lakhimpur (a distance of over three hundred miles) at some places to a depth of twenty miles or more towards the Himalayan foothills. All my trips were accomplished on elephants. It would not have been possible otherwise to visit the remotest places, because of the extreme distances from roads or even paths and especially because of the deep turbulent rivers.

I was always struck by the number of tigers that followed the roaming herds of elephants. Their footprints were easily noticed in the sandy river bed where a herd had crossed and several times in my wanderings I came across little skeletons of elephants, most of them very small. The tiger's method of killing these baby elephants is to keep circling the herd and as soon as a youngster strays a few yards to the outskirts the tiger springs, breaking the youngster's neck and thereby killing it instantly, or breaking its back and rendering it immobile. The tiger then immediately retreats to a safe distance from the enraged mother who is, however, helpless.

I once came upon a youngster with a broken back. The herd had moved on for about half a mile but the poor mother was still standing by the helpless little fellow. Death would follow in a day or so and the mother would then leave it and proceed to catch up with the herd. Then the tiger would have the meal for which he had been waiting.

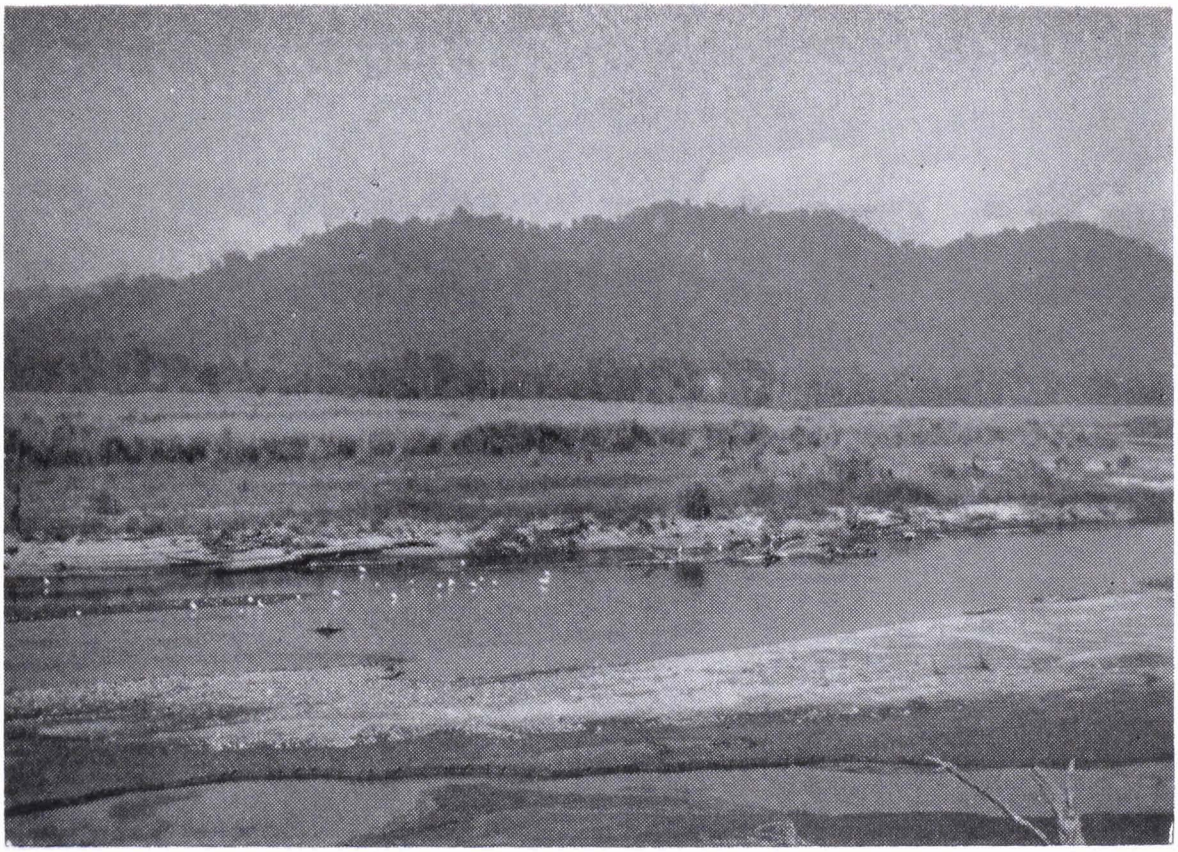
Lying in bed in my camp at night, I on several occasions heard a terrific noise from a herd of elephants and it at times continued for hours. This was caused by a tiger coming too near the herd. On one occasion a few years

20. A second morning tea at 8 a.m., with nothing between the author and Tibet, 1957.

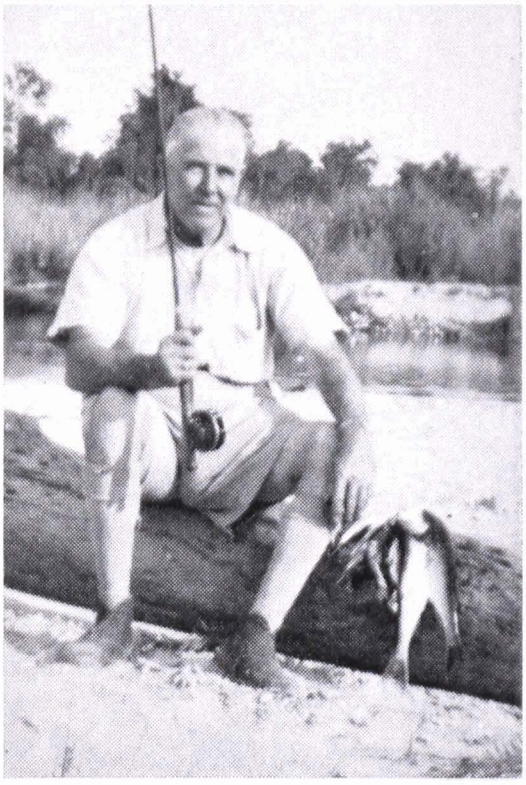


21. Ben, the Airedale, in the garden at Attareekhat.

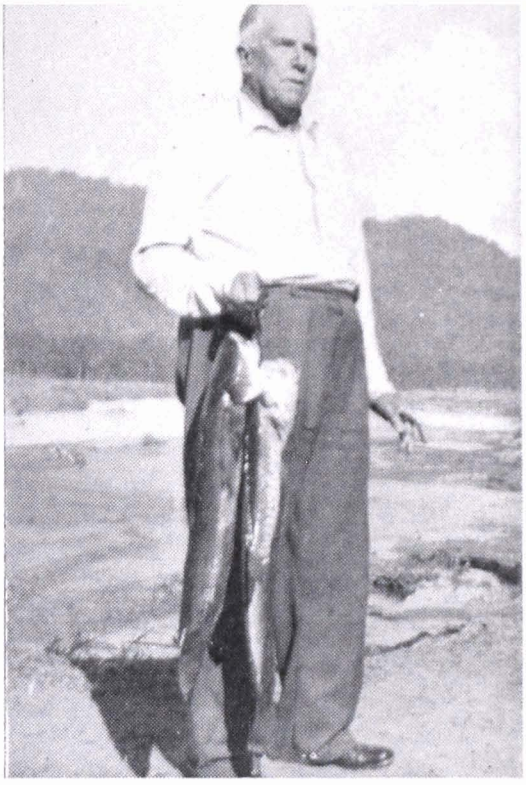
22. A view of the Borgang River. A deer and fawn stand in the stream at centre.



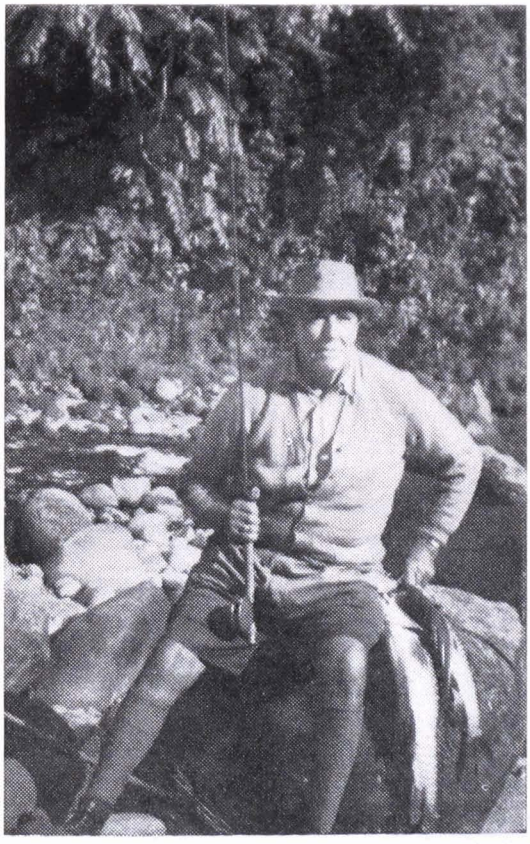
23. The view from a Dikal River camp site. The Dafla Hills lay in the background and stilt birds wade in the river.



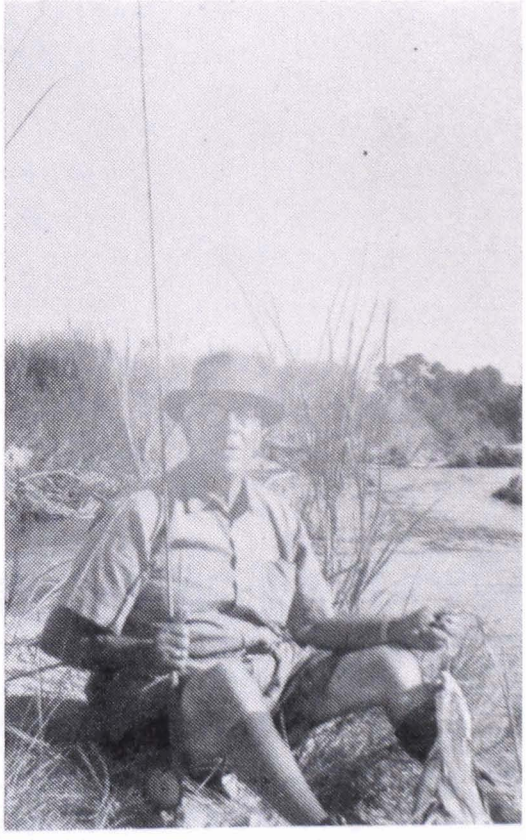
24. Sitting on a log after fishing in the Dikal River.



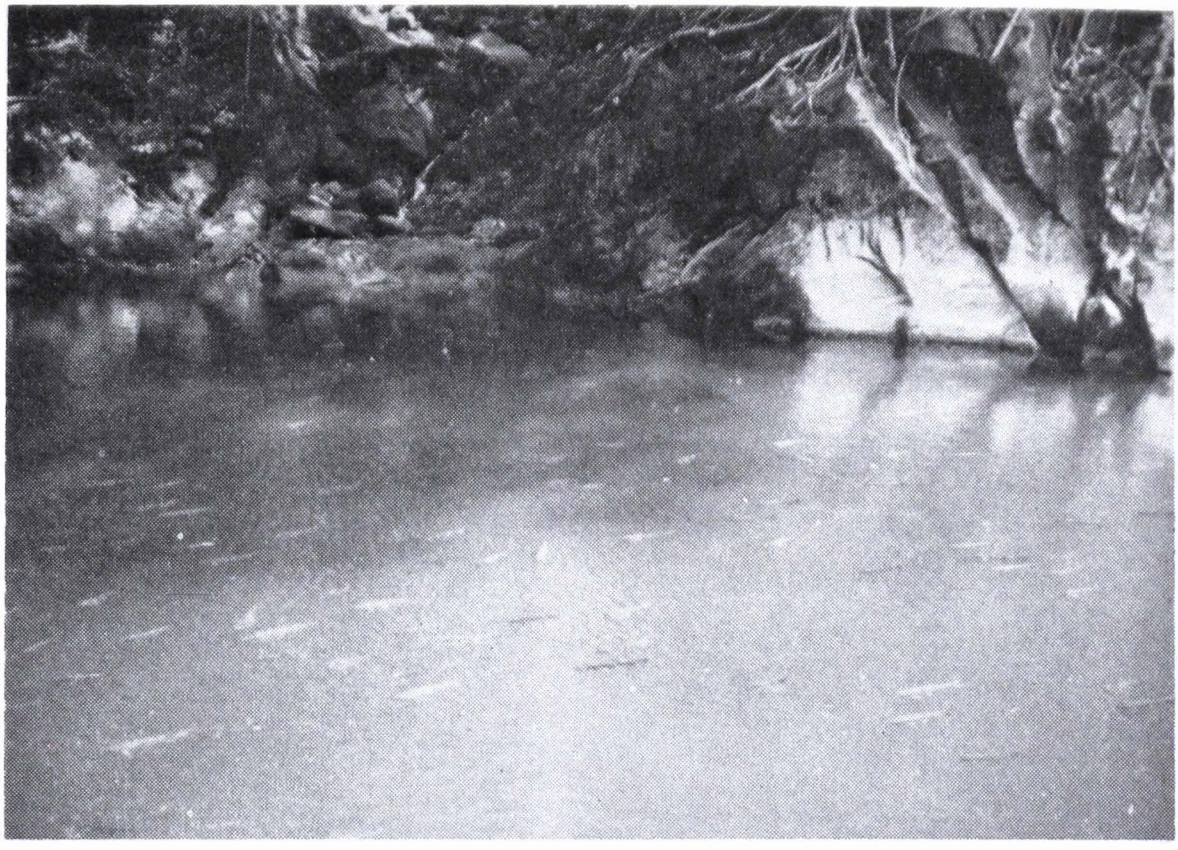
25. Two sal fish caught in the Dikal River using frogs as bait on night lines.



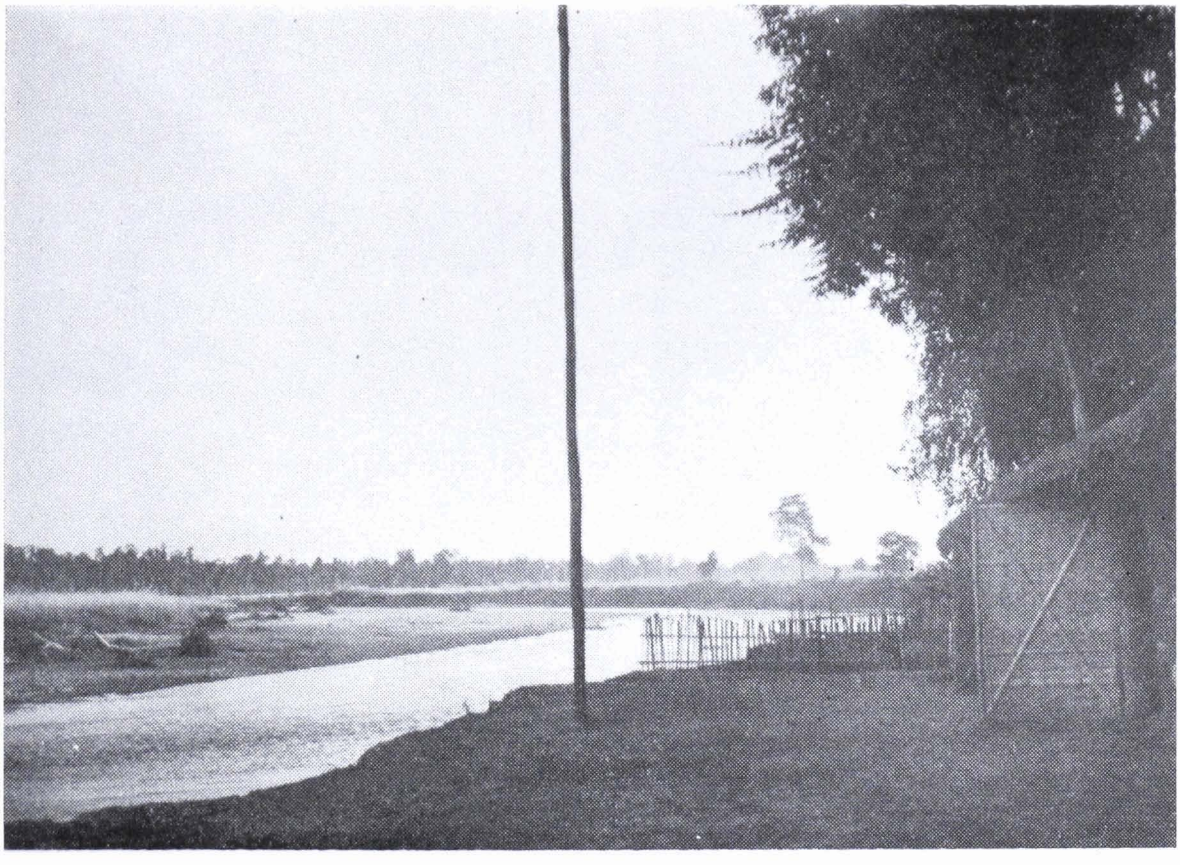
26. Fishing in the Dikal River six miles from camp.



27. In the lower reaches of the Borgang River, 1959.



28. Marsheer and boka fish in a pool by the Dikal River, 1957. When one was caught the others refused the bait for some time.



29. Looking south from camp by the Dikal River. A wireless pole and a fenced mali bari can be seen in the foreground.

ago, after getting very little sleep one night owing to dozens of elephants trumpeting and bellowing, my mahout and I went to have a look at the area the next morning. We found a circular patch of about two acres of ground which had been completely flattened out. It was quite easy to see that the outside of the perimeter, so to speak, had been taken up by mature elephants whilst all the youngsters had occupied the centre for safety.

I have read many books on shikar and have spoken to forest officers regarding the number of young elephants that meet their death by tigers and it has always struck me that the number of small elephants that are killed by tigers is often not fully realised, even by experienced people. It is only men who have had the opportunity to remain in the forests for considerable periods and in areas where elephants are more or less always present, who can witness the heavy losses to the elephant herds from this cause. I have particularly noticed, and my mahout confirmed this, that the tigers which follow up these herds to kill the youngsters are always males. An experienced shikari or mahout can tell at once, by the tiger's footprint, whether the animal is a male or female.

Chapter Five

Tame Elephants

For forty years I used elephants for *shikar*, and in fact for over twenty-two years I had two of my own. On occasions, when entertaining friends in camp during the cold weather season, I had as many as five at once, three being hired ones.

The individual characters of elephants are, in my opinion, more distinctive than in the case of any other animal. Indeed, one can say that there are no two elephants alike. Being with them and watching their different ways over long periods one realises how fascinating some are, whilst others can become most treacherous and dangerous.

One elephant I hired had a horrible habit of swinging its tail if you passed too near, which resulted in a grass cutter, who was not used to this, losing his front teeth in a second! I knew of another two which appeared quite docile but would occasionally try to squeeze their mahouts to death when passing the trunks of trees. One large tusker I had many years ago in lower Assam, was absolutely staunch when following up dangerous animals and was usually a very likeable animal. However, if an elephant ever suffered from a bad liver at times, I am sure that this one did!

At the northern end of the estate on which I worked in those days there was a long protection drain, running along the boundary a few yards beyond the tea. This drain was six feet deep and four feet wide at the top. The land sloped slightly from the Bhutan Hills towards the tea area and this drain was there to catch the surface rain water

which washed down. On some Sunday mornings, when I went out for shikar, the tusker would take that drain in its stride. On another Sunday, however, it would refuse to cross over that drain. It would stand there trumpeting loudly, rolling from side to side, trying to get me off. The more it did this the more the mahout applied the ankus to its head. Then it would roll so much that the mahout would say "no good sahib!"

The mahout would take me to a tree and I would step off on to a branch, while he took the elephant away for another try. But again, on reaching the drain, it would refuse to go over. Then the fun would begin! The mahout, not having me to think of, would let the elephant really have it with his iron prong. The elephant would behave like a small boat in a rough sea but after five minutes or so of bedlam, with wild screams and trumpetings, over the drain it would go. After recrossing a few times to be certain that it would not play up again that day, the mahout would bring it to the tree and I would step on to the saddle and we would cross the drain without further trouble! That elephant would take bananas gently out of my pocket at lunch time but occasionally and after a few weeks had passed, it would play up again and we would go through the same procedure.

The Miri who was employed to cut grass for the elephant to eat at night was, for some reason, not at all popular with that particular elephant and he was very careful to keep just out of reach of its trunk. I suggested to the grasscutter that he should look for employment elsewhere and he left to work for another elephant owner. Shortly afterwards I was transferred. Some three years later, this man was re-engaged by the new manager and I learned afterwards that the elephant had taken him unaware one day and had killed him!

On one occasion I hired another elephant which intensely loathed crossing deep pools, especially those very deep ones where all that could be seen was its trunk looking like a

submarine's periscope above the water. Although other elephants with it used to cross willingly enough, this elephant went through every possible antic in an endeavour not to swim those pools. On one occasion it tried to rub the mahout against a projecting rock. I learned from the owner afterwards that some twenty years before, soon after being captured and while still only a five foot high baby, it had been roped to a fully grown elephant and made to swim the very wide Brahmaputra. It had probably swallowed a lot of water during that trip and had never forgotten that unhappy experience.

At the same camp, I had a female elephant with an eighteen months old calf. The calf was full of mischief, mostly brought about by native boys playing and wrestling with it. The mother was the most lovely elephant, Motimali by name, that I have ever hired. She had no vices whatsoever. She died of old age a few years ago. One bitterly cold morning in January, the male guests in this camp were standing on the river bank, busily preparing their fishing rods and tackle for the day's fishing. Motimali and four other elephants were tethered to trees about fifty yards away. My guests were facing the river and a cold wind from the gorge was blowing. I noticed that the baby elephant, with mischief in its eyes, was circling around in the trees behind us. I had a shrewd idea as to what the baby elephant's intentions were. As it was working its way nearer and nearer to us, my friend Freeman was saying that he thought preparing one's rods, lines and flies for the day's fishing was nearly as enjoyable as the actual fishing. He had just finished the sentence when the young elephant, which was about four and half feet high, came like a charging bull and put him straight into the river below us and then bolted back to join its mother!

My friend's language was blue and so was he, by the time he had clambered up some fifty yards downstream! The bank at that spot was four or five feet high and precipitous. After the rest of us had stopped laughing, we

saw the young elephant against its mother and standing partly behind a tree, with just its head sticking out, watching the result of its early morning effort. A number of elephants born in captivity, as this one was, eventually become too nervous for shooting purposes, especially when they have to approach dangerous game. They have not the nerves of elephants which have roamed the forests for some years prior to being captured. Furthermore, animals born in captivity cannot be trusted and often become dangerous as they grow up. This is because they become too familiar with human beings from the time of their birth.

Many of these so-called trained and staunch elephants that one is offered by native owners, when an extra elephant or two is required for camp, can be very dangerous. It is also a most nerve-wracking experience to be on a bolting elephant, weighing some three tons, crashing through the low branches of trees festooned with spiked creepers, many of which have barbs like fish-hooks strong enough to pull a man off. It is difficult to describe the feeling of being on a bolting elephant, but imagine yourself perched on the top of an express engine with a hooked stick round the funnel, trying to pull it to a standstill while it rocks from side to side and dashes under very low bridges. A good friend of mine, who was a very powerfully built person, would, on these occasions, spring up on to a branch of a tree for safety. However, it is quite possible to drop and damage one's rifle when doing this trick.

During my years in the jungle, I had three such experiences, and wish for no more! Providing that no wild elephants, buffaloes, bears, tigers, or leopards were following close behind, I would look for a soft place to jump down to as soon as possible. It would be easy to break one's neck by getting caught under the jaw by one of these very strong creepers, some being even strong enough to hold an elephant. Moreover, if pulled off unexpectedly,

one is liable to come down under the elephant's back feet. These incidents usually occur in very thick and dense jungle, as these are the places were one sometimes disturbs a sleeping tiger or bear, and the resulting noise is quite enough to frighten some elephants.

Most mahouts, when they find they cannot hold their elephant with the sharp hook of their ankus, just lie as flat as they can behind the elephant's head for protection and hope for the best. If they are swept off, the elephant is often lost for days. I remember an occasion when two tame elephants took fright together. One bolted upon the sudden closing of a car door and the other followed sympathetically. They both kept together and went fully five miles before they became more or less exhausted and the mahouts managed to pull them up. I saw the mahouts the next day and they looked a very disfigured couple with many deep scars on their faces and legs. They certainly were a brave pair and were suitably rewarded for not losing their charges.

Not far from an estate which I was on many years ago, a rhinocerous had gone berserk and had killed some natives. It had made its home in a *bheel* or large muddy pond, surrounded by high grass, from where it rampaged through the surrounding villages. The local planters decided to destroy it and as many of even the staunchest of elephants are really terrified of rhinoceros, no less than seven shikar elephants were collected together. They advanced towards the *bheel* where the rhinoceros had taken up its residence, when out came the animal and with a terrific snort and bubbling sound it made towards one of the elephants and the whole seven turned and fled for their lives. Fortunately, it was open grassy country so no one was hurt but not one of those elephants pulled up under three miles.

I was on an elephant once which I knew to be staunch as far as wild elephants, buffaloes and tigers were concerned. While proceeding over some open country, we came upon the dung of a rhinoceros. The elephant turned

and bolted and the mahout was not able to stop it for about half a mile. The rhinoceros was somewhere about and that was quite sufficient for that elephant!

My mahout's father, who had spent all his life with elephants and who must have been seventy when I first knew him in 1927, was one of the most interesting old men I have ever met. He has been dead many years now but up to his death, although too feeble to work, the old fellow still loved being on an elephant with his son, my mahout, roaming through the jungle. Before I employed him the old man had been in charge of twelve elephants which belonged to a European and had been used by him for catching wild elephants in the Assam forests. He once told me of a terrifying experience he had once had, deep in the wilds, with his employer. They were moving camp and had two elephants, one carrying the pots and pans, glasses, crockery and other utensils in a large box, in addition to carrying his employer's personal servant. Another servant was following behind carrying two empty kerosene tins, which had been used for carrying water from the river for the camp.

They had just entered the forest, when the man behind dropped the two empty kerosene tins, just behind the elephant's hind legs. The elephant immediately bolted. Some pots and pans soon dropped off and this further noise caused the elephant to accelerate. These were followed by the box containing the glasses and dishes crashing to the ground, with the result that the elephant increased its speed still further! The servant was brushed off but the mahout managed to cling on and he pulled up a mile or so further on, just as darkness was setting in. As elephants do not realise that when passing under low branches in the blackness of the forest the mahout can be easily swept off, it is no fun riding on an elephant in the jungle at night! Therefore, after calling out for sometime and obtaining no reply from the servant the mahout hurried on to get out of the forest before darkness finally closed in.

Although the European had seven elephants out early the next morning and searched daily for a week, the poor servant was never found. They came to the conclusion that he had tried to cross the winding river of the Dikal in the darkness and been swept away and drowned. This river was partly in flood at the time as it was the end of the cold season and there had been a lot of rain in the nearby hills. I know the area well where they were in camp and the surrounding forests still contain many hundreds of wild elephants, tigers and bears.

I know of a gentleman and his wife who were out shooting one day on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River. They had two elephants. Husband and wife were on one elephant and the other was for carrying their lunch and any game that might be shot. This latter elephant was rather nervous and very likely to bolt if a gun was fired too near. She was therefore kept a couple of hundred yards or more away. After a barking deer was shot, the mahout brought her along and after loading the deer, went away again to a good distance from the other elephant.

Unfortunately, there were some bottles of soda water in the luncheon basket and owing to the heat and movement of the elephant one of these exploded. Off bolted the elephant, the mahout unable to stop her. More soda bottles popped, up went her speed and she eventually shed her mahout! She then swam the Brahmaputra River, possibly a mile wide at the site where she crossed, and reached her home, with the barking deer and luncheon basket, some three weeks later. I guess that the deer must have exploded too, during that time and might have helped accelerate her journey home!

Elephants can be fitted with howdahs, or platforms with seats, but these are quite unsuitable for thick jungle and would get pulled off immediately and my elephants were fitted with saddles. With the ordinary saddle the feet of the riders simply hung down and this could become very tiring, so I designed a new kind of saddle with running

boards on either side of the elephant on which the riders' feet could be rested. I gave this style of saddle to the Kaziranga Game Reserve which had several elephants for visitors who went to see the animals there, for these elephants had only the ordinary saddle. Strange to relate, the first person to use it was Mr Pandit Nehru, Prime Minister of India, and Mr E. P. Gee, whom I knew, took a photograph of him seated on the saddle which I had invented!

While writing this book, I received word from the owner of Motimali's death. For twenty-six years I had hired her whenever necessary. Of all the elephants I have known, including my own two, she stood out above them all as the most human and intelligent. She had no vices and was lovable and adorable at all times. She was the mother of at least six calves, one of which was the young male which very cleverly put my friend Freeman into the cold river early one morning. From her back, I shot over twenty rogue elephants and also many tigers and bears.

She would pick up the smallest of things dropped by anyone riding on her back—often without being told. Many topees and hats and even a cartridge did she carefully pick up in her sensitive trunk. These she handed to the mahout gently, and did not just throw them up, as many elephants do. Once a very thin rope, thinner than one's little finger and about eighteen inches long, came adrift from the iron ring at the back of the saddle. Without any instructions, she stopped suddenly, turned completely round and picked this very thin short rope out of the grass and handed it up.

I think the most intelligent thing she did and one which saved me from a very embarrassing position, was when going into camp with my sister-in-law and nephew. We had crossed a river and were just coming to a bank some five feet high, which we had to climb. Motimali stopped dead and absolutely refused to move another step, in spite of the mahout's efforts. He then suggested that perhaps she was standing on a snake, hence her refusal to move for a few

minutes. However, eventally he had to dismount. Imagine our surprise when the mahout announced that the girth securing the saddle was broken! Imagine the chaos which would have ensued if the saddle had slipped off when we were halfway up that bank, the three of us falling over backwards for quite ten feet. I would have landed on the top of my sister-in-law, a terrible thing, as I then weighed 14 stone 8 lbs! I offered up a silent prayer of thanks.

One day in 1955, Motimali was feeding peacefully under some *tenga* trees just behind the camp. Tengas are large apple-like fruit, very acid but loved by most wild animals, particularly elephants. Hence the name "elephant apple". She was hobbled by her front feet so she would not stray too far. My mahout had just handed over his duties to a new man and was leaving for his home that afternoon. At noon, two wild tuskers came out of the jungle and had a terrific battle in the river-bed some two hundred yards below camp. After some time they stopped and separated, each taking one side of the river. Seeing these two tuskers facing each other, my mahout asked to be taken safely past the trouble. I took my rifle and with the new mahout, escorted my man some way along the jungle path leading out of the jungle. On seeing us, the tuskers casually walked away in opposite directions, the one which was on my camp side of the river, going up the bank and entering the forest. Little did I realise at the time that he would make for my female elephant Motimali.

Imagine my surprise to find, on my return, that the tusker had taken Motimali away to a herd some two hundred yards from my camp, to add her to his harem. The new mahout and myself followed the tracks towards the herd but the tusker kept coming at us, while Motimali retreated further towards the centre of the herd. I did not want to shoot the tusker and as the whole herd was gradually moving further and further away from us, we were compelled to give up the chase. We knew that the rope which tied Motimali's front feet loosely together

would wear through in two weeks or so and that she would eventually go back home. By the time I had hired other elephants to try to intercept her, four days had passed and she was many miles off in a dense wild area.

Six weeks later she arrived back at the home of her owner, some sixty miles away, very fat and in good condition. A few years before this episode, she had absconded from a place where she was on timber work about eighty-six miles away and had reached home safely some two months later.

Not all runaway elephants will make for home like Motimali. Many years ago, in some very wild country, I came upon a herd of bison. Most of the magnificent creatures were lying down but immediately behind them stood a large female elephant with two calves, one about six feet in height and the other about two years of age. The bison got up and cleared off but the female elephant, with her ears wide, allowed us to get within about twenty yards of her before moving off. The mahout and I could see clearly that she had a perfectly round hole in her ear, about the size of a golf ball. She was undoubtedly an escaped animal. Later my mahout spoke to his old father about it, and the old man knew all about this elephant, having seen her previously with her owner and with the hole through her ear.

She had been captured when young and escaped six years later and had since then been wandering in the jungle for the last fifteen years. Her two calves were the progeny of a wild male. The old mahout said that as a rule elephants that had been in captivity remained alone in the forest.

It was in 1960 when the manager of a tea estate, some 10 miles from my camp site, asked me if I could possibly go and shoot an elephant that was causing damage to tea nurseries and shade trees. It also visited the assistant's compound some nights and ate his banana trees and damaged his vegetable garden.

I searched for that elephant for a day and a half without finding it. On the second afternoon, about 3 p.m. I told the mahout to have his tea and proceed back to camp with the elephant. Apparently, on his way back, he took something very much stronger than the "cup that cheers"! He then proceeded for about two miles and near some labourers' houses at the Rungaghur Tea Estate he parted company with the elephant, falling against her front feet, and fortunately near where some labourers were standing.

The elephant, Mohonmalla by name, was a most intelligent and docile animal. She stopped immediately after the mahout fell and did her part, as she thought, by more or less throwing the man back on to her neck! Down went the mahout, up he went again, down again, up again and finally and mercifully, down. By this time a man who was witnessing this performance, with ready wit cut down one of his own banana trees from nearby and gave it to the elephant, after which she stopped trying to replace the mahout on her neck to eat the banana stem. The mahout's son, who resided a quarter of a mile or so away, was sent for and he took charge of the elephant and rode her back to camp.

The mahout was carried to his house for the night, with blood coming from his nose. He turned up at camp the next afternoon, and appeared to treat the whole thing as a joke. He said that after leaving me, a friend had given him too much drink and on an empty stomach and in the hot sun, his head started to spin. He had no recollection of the elephant's attempts to lift him and he did not remember anything until the next morning!

Two weeks after this, I broke camp, and returned the elephant to the owner in North Lakhimpur some forty miles away. There was very little natural fodder where the owner resided, so the elephant lived more or less for six months on banana trees until she returned to my care again, where she became very fat.

After being back with her owner for about two months

or so, she absconded one night, and proceeded in the direction of my late camp, some forty miles distant. Probably she was remembering that large area, and the most wonderful time she had there with all kinds of luxuriant fodder, not least of all the sugar cane that she was given by me twice daily and for which she always showed her thanks by purring. She had only about four miles to go to reach her old camp area, when her owner, who was on her heels tracking her, caught up with her and compelled her to return. He told me later that she greatly resented being captured and trumpeted to show her disgust at having to return home!

I was once upon a huge tusker and roaming through a patch of jungle which had been burnt off a few weeks before. All of a sudden the elephant stumbled and almost came down but recovered itself and stopped, holding up its front foot. The mahout dismounted, realising that something had entered the animal's foot and I also got down. On telling the elephant to lie down, it went down very quietly, on its side. The head of a small stake was to be seen embedded in the sole and broken off flush with the rough surface. The mahout soon got his penknife out and after cutting away a small piece of the pad of the foot round the end of the stake, he cut a niche round the head of it. He then tied a strand of jute from one of his ropes to the stake and we both took a pull and extracted it. It was four inches long and one and a half inches in diameter! The elephant remained perfectly still throughout the proceedings. When we got home we cleaned the wound thoroughly with hot water and applied Stockholm tar and after a week of rest the elephant was no longer lame.

A horse or cow would have been very much more difficult to treat under similar circumstances, but from the beginning the elephant seemed to realise that we were helping it.

I have read many articles in this connection which have always interested me and I have been asked many times

whether there is any truth in the widely held belief that old elephants proceed to a communal burial place.

During my many journeys into the forests, I came across only three dead mature elephants in a reasonable state of preservation. Two of these three were very, very old females and without a doubt had died of old age. One I found a few yards from a salt lick but the other female was lying dead in a very remote area where there was no water. The third elephant, a male, was also found in similar country but not very far from a river.

I, for one, do not believe that elephants make for any particular spot before they die, any more than do other wild animals. What I often saw, however, was that most elephants died in ravines or gorges in the foothills, many miles from human habitation. Both my mahouts, whom I had for years, shared the same belief. Many a time, when wandering up the river-beds near the foothills, I saw old elephant bones amongst the boulders near an entrance to a ravine and on searching around, often found other bones also. These bones were washed down out of the ravines and gorges in the rainy season.

It stands to reason that an old or sick elephant will not remain in open forest where gad-flies and leeches will worry it. They naturally make for the narrow, cool gorges, far up some mountain stream, where there is perennial water and their favourite, lush grasses and creepers.

I have come upon a number of old elephants, usually on their own, their skins withered and many of them deaf. Some have been so old and infirm that they could just move their trunks to smell my elephant and I have even patted some of them as we passed by.

I have the greatest admiration and love for elephants.

Two years after selling my big makhna elephant, which I had had for twenty-two years, to the Government of Assam, I received a visit from a Government official who was riding it. I had not seen that elephant for two years and he made quite a loud gurgling sound as if greeting me.

They often do this when they meet a person they like or if they are pleased to see one and even do so among themselves.

On the guest leaving, I walked down the path about ten yards behind the elephant to see him off. I said goodbye to my visitor and went towards my late elephant to pat it. It turned and came half way to meet me, pushed its face into mine, almost pushing me backwards and gurgled away for quite a few seconds. The mahout was quite taken aback, as he was unaware up to that time that the elephant had belonged to me.

An elephant never forgets!

Chapter Six

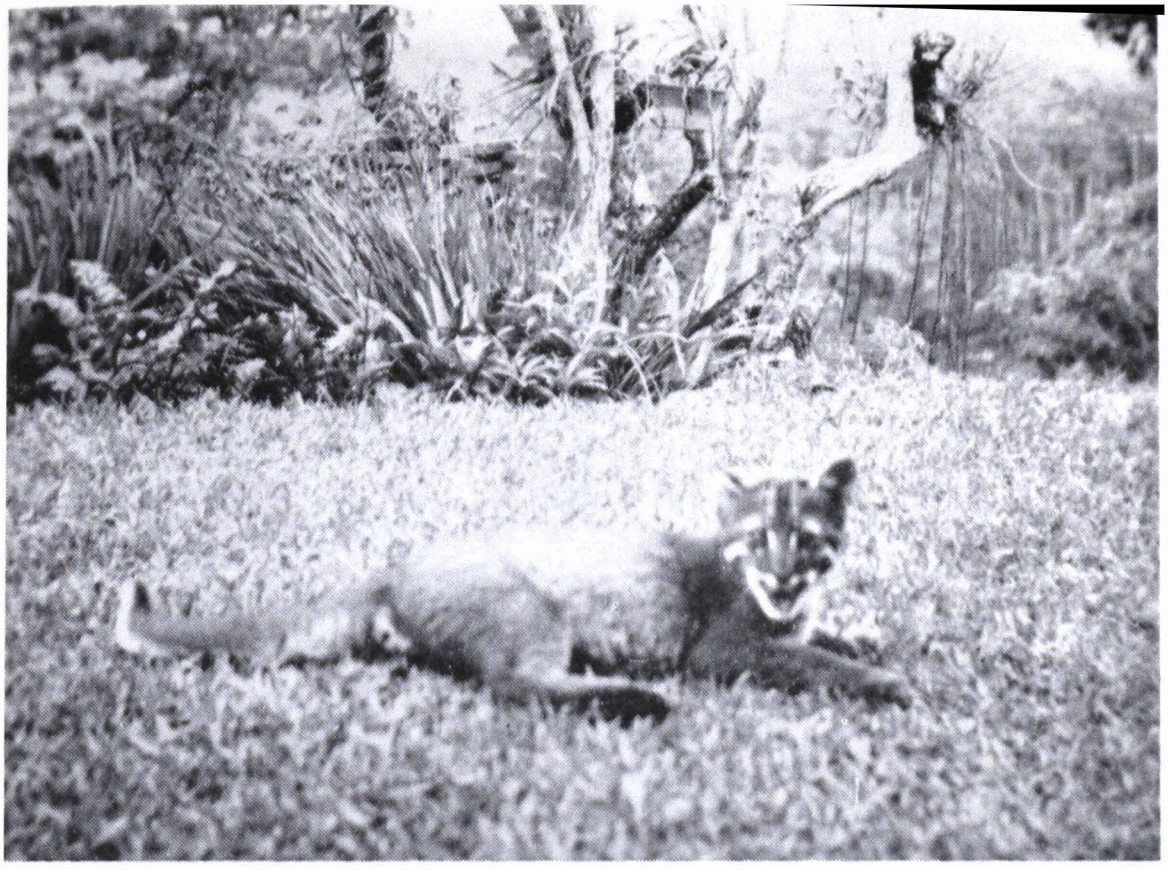
Experiences with Elephants

Quite a lot can be learned about elephants from watching wild ones close at hand. This is best done from a staunch tame elephant, such as mine was. At times, one can become part of the herd and on many occasions my mahout and I have followed up herds and got right inside amongst them. A thrilling experience!

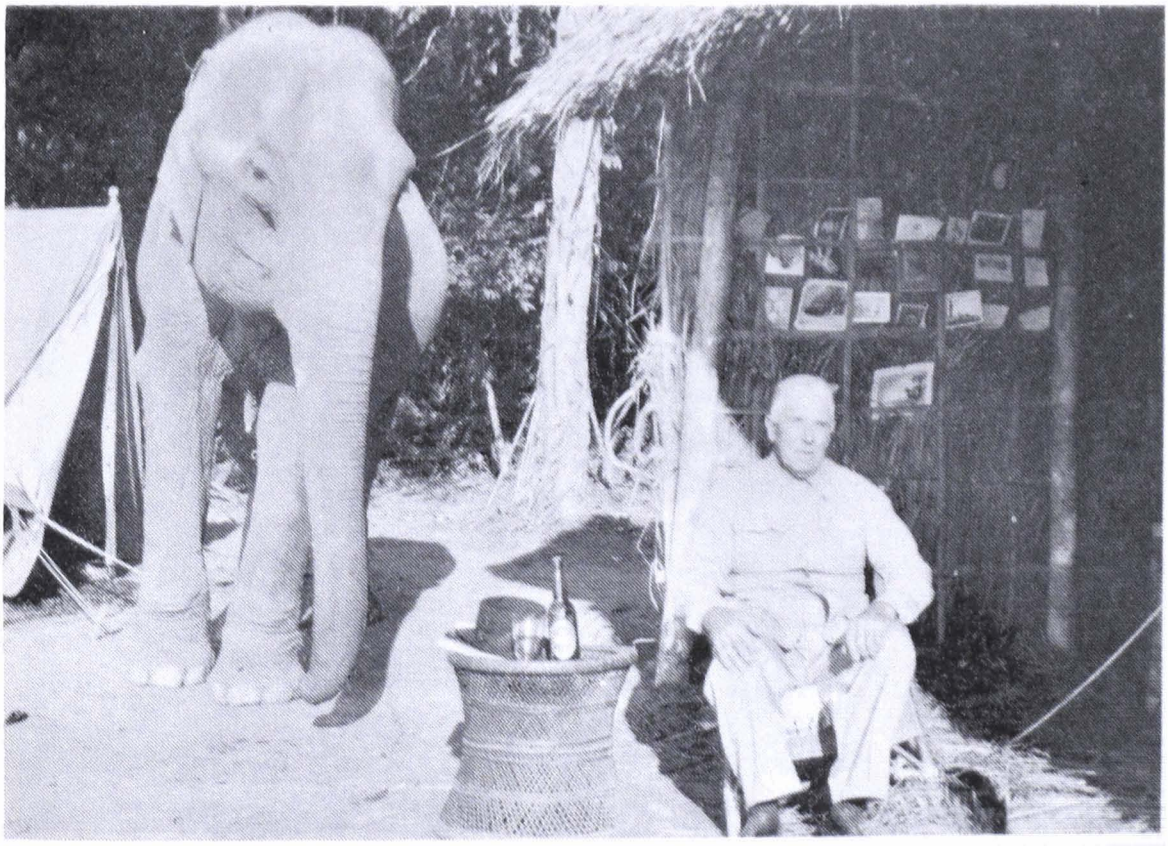
One approaches slowly against the wind and makes quietly for the nearest large tree. It is imperative to remain there for safety sake, if the herd is resting. If they are feeding, however and gradually moving on, one's own elephants do the same, but always being kept near a large tree in case of necessity.

While resting, elephants are never really still. They are continually blowing, swinging their trunks, rocking on their feet and throwing earth and leaves over themselves. The youngsters play tug-of-war between themselves and tease each other all the time. Wild calves come along and pass underneath one's own elephants or even try a tug-of-war with them. Often, fully grown elephants will move near enough for one to quietly reach out and scratch their backs and hind quarters!

During the last war I had the pleasure, on several occasions, of taking American officers and British soldiers into these herds. When I would tell the Americans that with



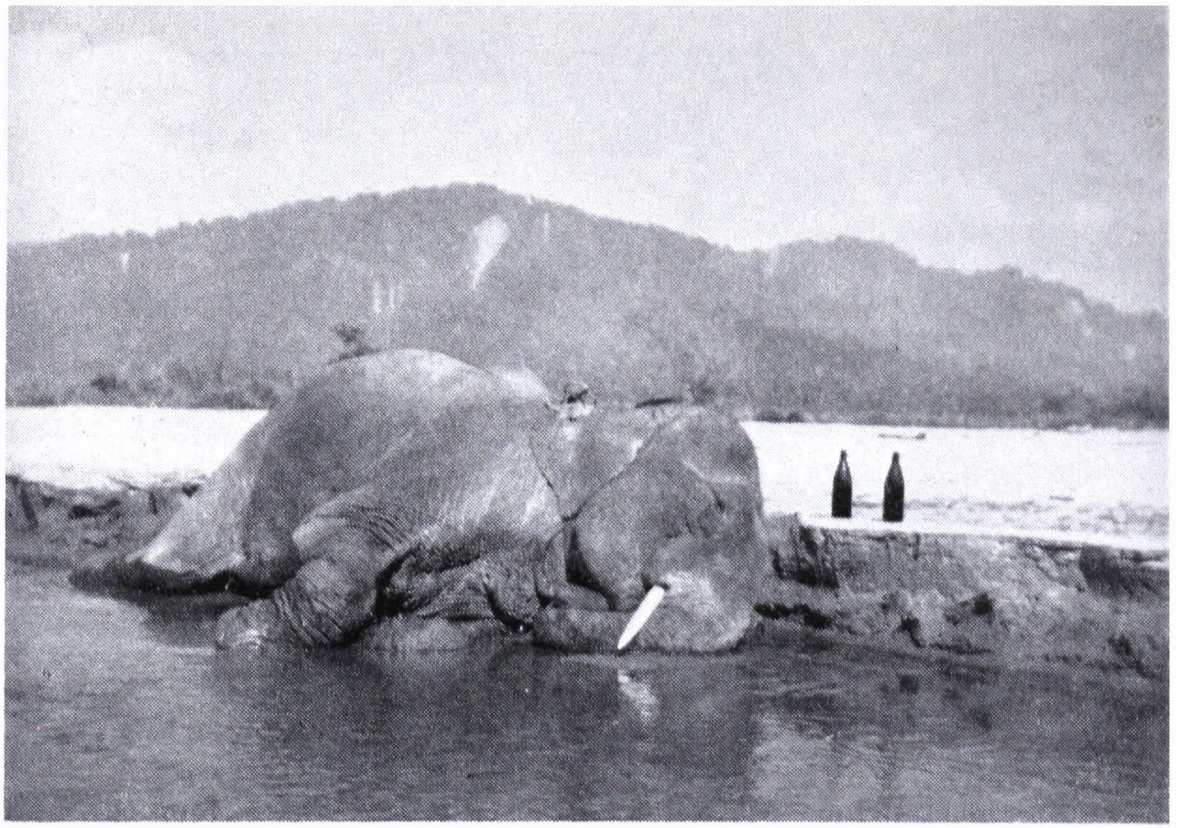
30. Tishi, a golden cat from the Burma area. Owned by Mr E. P. Gee it was sent to London Zoo in 1961 and grew to about half the size of a leopard.



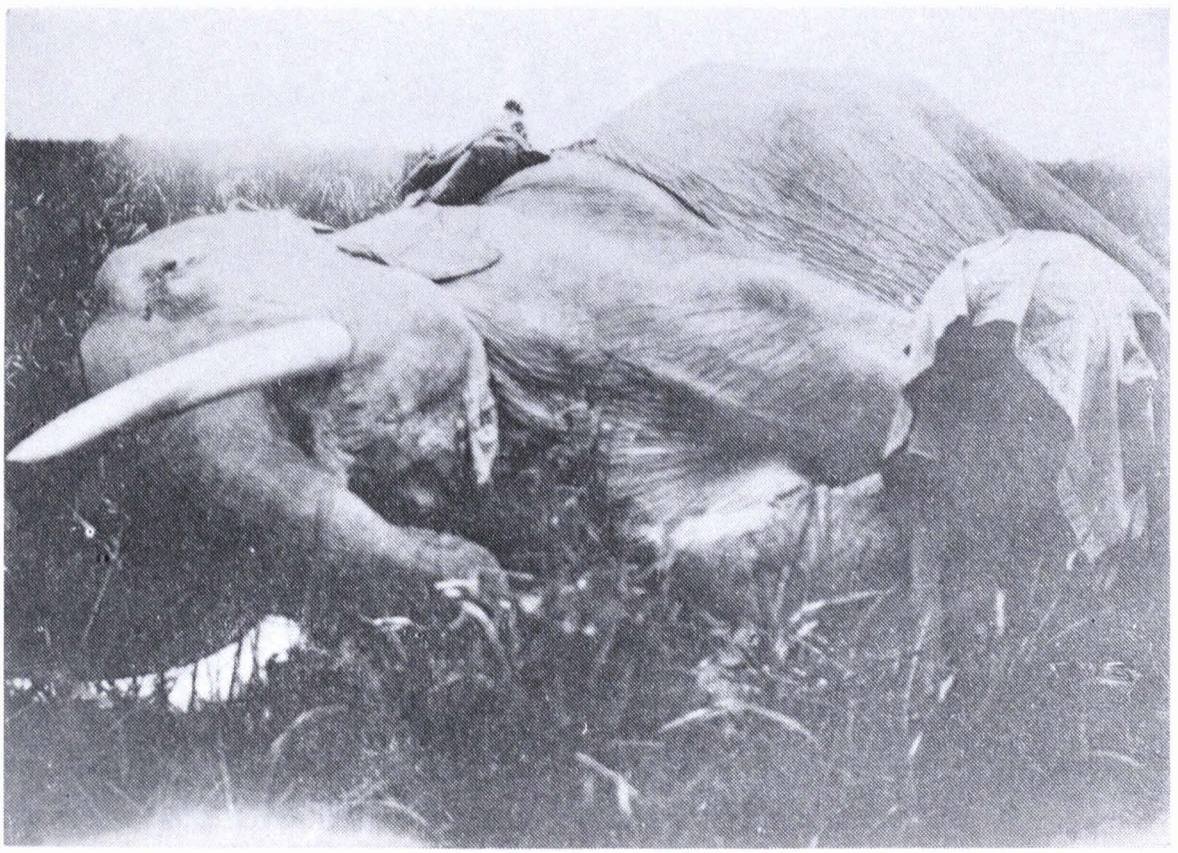
31. Christmas Day in the jungle. Motimali is standing behind and a small hog deer weaned by the author lies at his feet.

32. Chandra and Motimali loading up at camp near the Dikal River.

33. Chandra bringing in his night food at the Dikal River camp site.



34. The bottle always wins! This elephant, Motimali, by the Borgang River, was taught to lay down and close her eyes.



35. Removing the stake from the foot of the tusker.

luck, they would be able to scratch the wild elephant's backs, the reply I invariably got was, "Are you kidding me?" However I usually managed to get them right into a wild herd and they would take many photographs from only a few feet away. They were thrilled. I remember one American showing me the next day an eighteen page letter to his wife, giving her all the news of the trip. But as I always warned them before we left for the jungle, such photographs did not come out satisfactorily due to the heavy shade and the most that they got were faint outlines of the elephants.

One may reasonably ask why elephants in such circumstances do not bolt on the approach of strangers. The answer is that they frequently do, hence the necessity of keeping near large trees for protection, in case they stampede in your direction. Also, it is advisable to let your own elephant do more or less the same as the wild ones are doing, such as reaching up for creepers and pulling the trunks of the young ones when they come along. The mahout and riders must wear dark or khaki coloured clothes and on occasions must be prepared to lie very flat on the saddle. It is not advisable to move more than is strictly necessary and moreover when one does move, to do so very slowly.

Sometimes wild elephants bolt when one is approaching them while at other times it may be possible to get just inside the herd for only a few minutes before they do bolt. Occasionally, one may be lucky and remain with them for twenty minutes or more, before one of them gets your wind. It is nearly always a female that is the first to realise that the herd is not alone. She then trumpets and heaven help you if you are not near a good big tree for protection!

Once the signal is given away they all go with their heads down, crashing through the forest and some of them trumpeting! Small trees of the thickness of one's leg are flattened, creepers get caught up by the elephants as they go and branches come crashing down. The baby elephants

take up their position almost under their mothers, near their mother's forelegs but keeping out of reach of their mother's hind legs, and each mother regulates her pace to suit her youngster's. The single elephants, however, can go at a speed of about fifteen miles an hour for short distances of half a mile or so, which is far enough for them to feel safe.

I well remember an occasion when a friend of mine named Christie, who was living then in Assam, wished to see a herd of elephants at close quarters. We tracked a large herd up from a river where it had been drinking. There were about sixty animals in the herd when we came upon them and after we had remained with them for quite fifteen minutes, I turned slowly round to ask my friend, who was on the same elephant as myself, whether he was ready for his lunch. I noticed that he was a ghastly white colour. Just behind our elephant stood one of the largest males I have ever seen! He had a fine pair of tusks and had evidently come creeping up from behind unnoticed and far too close for my friend's liking! I whispered to the mahout to move slowly ahead, with the idea of getting out of the herd and to the riverside for lunch. As we did, the whole herd started moving with us and finally, keeping up with us at a quick walking pace!

Having manoeuvred against a nice large tree, I spoke out in an ordinary voice. The big fellow turned and trumpeted and the whole herd disappeared in a minute, with the usual trumpeting from the larger elephants, squeals from the youngsters and noises from the crashings of small trees. It was an exciting experience while it lasted. After some twenty minutes we were at the riverside having lunch and I could not help but notice that my friend's hand was extremely shaky when holding out his glass for a drink! We had a good laugh while discussing the incident. It was his first experience of a herd of bolting elephants, so there was really an excuse for the unsteadiness of his hand.

There are three kinds of male elephants—the ordinary tusker, the *gonesh*, born with one tusk only and the *makhna* which has tushes but not tusks. The tushes from some thirty makhnas I have shot have averaged only twelve to fifteen inches in total length whilst the average thickness of the tush at the point where it meets the trunk or upper lip was about three inches. The female of the Asian elephant does not bear tusks, like its counterpart in the African species, but tushes. These are straight and point vertically downwards. In the females they barely project outside the upper lip, but in makhnas they can be quite long. The reason for this differentiation in tusk formation is not clear, but quite a high proportion of males of the Asian elephants bear tushes instead of tusks.

Fights between male elephants take place off and on throughout the year but are far more prevalent and severe during the mating season, which is from about November to April. Young, mature males try to get control of the herd from the herd bulls and this is the main cause of such fights. A makhna elephant is generally handicapped through his lack of tusks, but with his short tushes often wins in a battle with a young tusker. The makhna elephant's neck and trunk are more massive and powerful than a tusker's and if he succeeds in gripping his opponent's tusk he can at times wrench it clean out of its socket or break it. Makhnas are generally, size for size, more powerful than tuskers and the strength of the latter seems to have been diverted into growing its tusks, a process which goes on well into middle age. Dangerous, tame tuskers often have their tusks cut short and this operation has to be done periodically, as the tips soon grow pointed again.

On several occasions, I have come upon elephants actually fighting or having just finished a battle. I once encountered a large tusker standing all by himself, utterly dejected. He had one magnificent tusk, whilst blood was still dripping from the hole where the other tusk had been. Hardly an hour before this, we had seen a herd with a huge

makhna in charge. This herd had come from the direction in which we met the dejected tusker and there is no doubt whatsoever that the makhna we saw had won the battle and had taken charge of that herd. On another occasion, I have seen an enormous tusker with about four feet of tusk visible. He was chasing a three-quarter grown makhna and they were so absorbed in their battle that they passed without noticing us, only some thirty feet away. My mahout's old father actually saw a full-grown makhna bring a full-grown tusker to his knees, by getting his trunk round his opponent's tusks and heaving with all his might.

On the other hand, I have come on to a three-quarter grown tusker lying dead at the bottom of a slope, with a single tusk wound, evidently made by a gonesh, eighteen inches deep by ten inches in circumference. Marks on the slope showed that the dead animal had had its back towards the tusker when the fatal blow was delivered and the thrust had more or less lifted the body some five yards down the slope, with the tusk still in it. Marks on the slope clearly showed that the dead elephant had more or less been carried down the slope by the killer. The previous afternoon my servants and I had watched from a plateau a gonesh elephant having a drink from the river, some fifty feet below. His single tusk was enormous and we estimated it was protruding four feet beyond the animal's lips. That night there were screamings and trumpetings half a mile below my camp, just where I found the dead tusker later and I am also certain that it was this gonesh which killed the tusker mentioned earlier.

Twice the circumference of an elephant's front foot is roughly equivalent to the animal's height—there might be an inch or so either way, no more. This gonesh elephant's footprint measured four feet eleven inches, so the animal must have been approximately nine feet ten inches high. After three days, this same animal returned and walked across the river below the camp and entered the jungle close by. For hours during that night I got no sleep

—he was having a terrific battle with another male some few hundred yards from my camp.

The next morning a full-grown tusker with his tusks protruding some three feet, was standing in the sand of the river-bed. When some Daflas (hill tribesmen) came down the river-bed and passed close by him he made no movement. My mahout spoke to one of the men who said they had thought the tusker was mine, being so near camp, otherwise, they said, they would never have passed so close! They also said that the elephant was bleeding profusely from several big wounds. I could see through my glasses that the poor animal was trying to move away and was trailing a front leg. Also I could see a large wound immediately behind its shoulder. The mahout saddled my elephant and we proceeded towards the wounded elephant, which continued to drag itself along at a snail's pace. It was in a shocking state but must have put up a terrific fight with the gonesh. The wounded elephant slowly crossed the river-bed and disappeared into the high elephant grass. Elephants have terrific powers of recovery and if the poor brute's wounds did not become infested with maggots, he probably survived.

Some years ago one of my male elephants, a young tusker, was tethered near my camp when a wild tusker charged him and knocked him down, leaving a wound in his hindquarters eighteen inches deep. When the Indian veterinary doctor was cleaning out the wound he had to insert his arm up to his elbow in order to pull out some pieces of hide, which had been forced down to the extreme end of the wound. It was so tightly packed that the doctor had considerable difficulty in extracting these pieces with his fingers. After syringing out the wound with a strong solution of Dettol every day for a week and keeping the aperture closed with cotton wool, we applied sulphanilamide powder and the elephant recovered completely after three months' treatment.

In 1942, I received a request from the local forest office,

to disperse a large herd of elephants which was doing exceptional damage to the villagers' paddy (rice). They had refused to leave the area, in spite of the villagers' efforts to move them with flaming torches of grass fixed on long bamboo poles. Two men, while safely up in some trees, had watched the herd crossing the river and had counted one hundred and fifty-eight elephants.

I sent two elephants to the place early next morning and gave instructions to the mahouts to reconnoitre the forest where the wild elephants were and to ascertain what type of male or males were in charge of this large herd. I also gave them instructions to be at a certain point where I would meet them that evening. I took my .470 rifle, a shot-gun and a five-cell torch with me. On reaching the pre-arranged site, the senior mahout said it was indeed a very large herd, that he had been through it twice but he could only find three half-grown tuskers and he was certain that the male or males in control were away for the time being.

As we arrived at the paddy area contiguous to the forest, it was just getting dark and elephants were there in plenty. There were groups of villagers sitting round fires and I gathered from them that the elephants had destroyed approximately ten acres of paddy in three days. Believe it or not, some men were crying: the rice they had expected to feed their families with for the whole year had been destroyed, and they had toiled for nothing!

We very quietly went into the herd. It was the largest I had seen. I switched on my torch every thirty yards or so and if I kept the light too long on one animal it simply turned its beam end to me. They just continued to pull up the paddy, beating the dirt off its roots by threshing it against their forefeet and eating it. Paddy grows in soft wet soil and more was destroyed by their huge feet than was actually eaten. They ignored us completely—safety in numbers, they most probably thought! I knew that unless I shot the leader of the herd, they would not leave the

area. I knew too that he was not far off, probably gone to chase away one of the attentive bachelor elephants which is always keen to decoy one or two of the females from the herd.

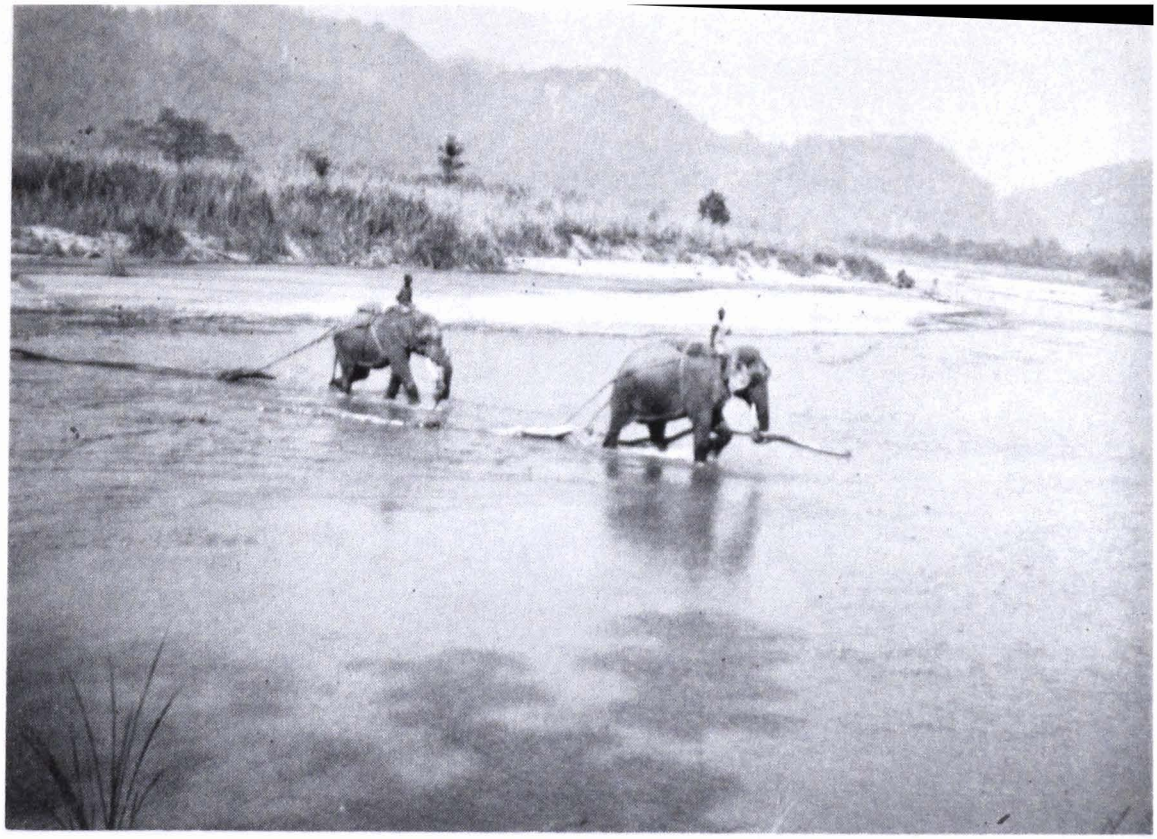
After making certain the leader was absent, I went back to my car and told the mahouts I would be back at daybreak the next morning. On my return I found that the whole herd had entered the forest. I followed on my elephant and we soon came upon them. We went quietly through them looking for the fellow in control but there were only the three half-grown tuskers which had been seen the evening before. We then came out of the forest and proceeded to a river about a quarter of a mile away. Looking from the river-bank towards the hills we saw a huge makhna coming towards us on the opposite side of the river. It appeared to be tracking another elephant, for it was continually raising its trunk and scenting the air on the opposite side of the Boroi River. After coming to within one hundred and fifty yards of us, it decided to go up the river-bank and across a patch of grassland towards some forest. We quietly went down the bank and crossed the river with the idea of intercepting it. On entering the forest, we suddenly came upon a full-grown tusker. It had been badly knocked about and one eye had been gouged out and was hanging on its cheek, and it had some other nasty wounds also.

The large makhna then arrived and made to attack the tusker. Unfortunately the makhna got our wind and turned and went off like a tank before I could get near enough for a fatal shot. Seeing that the tusker had lost an eye, and had many other wounds and it had belonged to the herd, I put it out of its misery. We recrossed the river near the herd and fired two shots in the air from my 12-bore shot-gun. This dispersed the herd, which went thundering off into the forest. A week later I enquired as to whether the herd had returned and was informed that it had not been seen again.

Some three months after shooting the one-eyed tusker, I received a message from the local forest officer to say that at the foot of the Dafla Hills, some twenty miles from me, a makhna was chasing everyone it set eyes on, including his subordinates, and would I go and shoot it please. I knew there was a fairly reliable female elephant to be hired near that area, so I made arrangements and got it, but took along my own head mahout and a grasscutter. The latter also knew how to work an elephant, should it be necessary for the mahout to dismount for tracking. It was during the month of March, when everything was terribly dry in this area and the ground as hard as cement.

I arrived at about eight o'clock and we went to a villager's house, not far from the main forest, to enquire of the whereabouts of the makhna. He said he had not seen or heard of it since it had paid a visit to his house one night a week earlier, when it had trampled on his cooking pot and brass plates which his wife had left outside the hut. There was a small stream about a quarter of a mile from his house and I thought it would be a likely place to find footprints, as the main river was some four miles away. On following the bank of the stream for a while we came upon some fresh footprints of an elephant but owing to the very dry conditions we found it difficult to follow these through the scrub jungles.

The mahout dismounted to track the makhna, as it was very difficult to see any marks from the top of my elephant and the grasscutter took his place at the controls. We then made better progress but it was midday before we came to where the elephant had entered a ravine at the foot of the first range of the hills. The ravine was about twenty feet wide, with fairly precipitous sides: an ideal retreat in which an elephant could remain undisturbed during the excessive daytime heat. It really was delightfully cool inside the ravine and where the sides were not too steep overhanging bamboo and creepers were growing, giving some welcome shade and food.



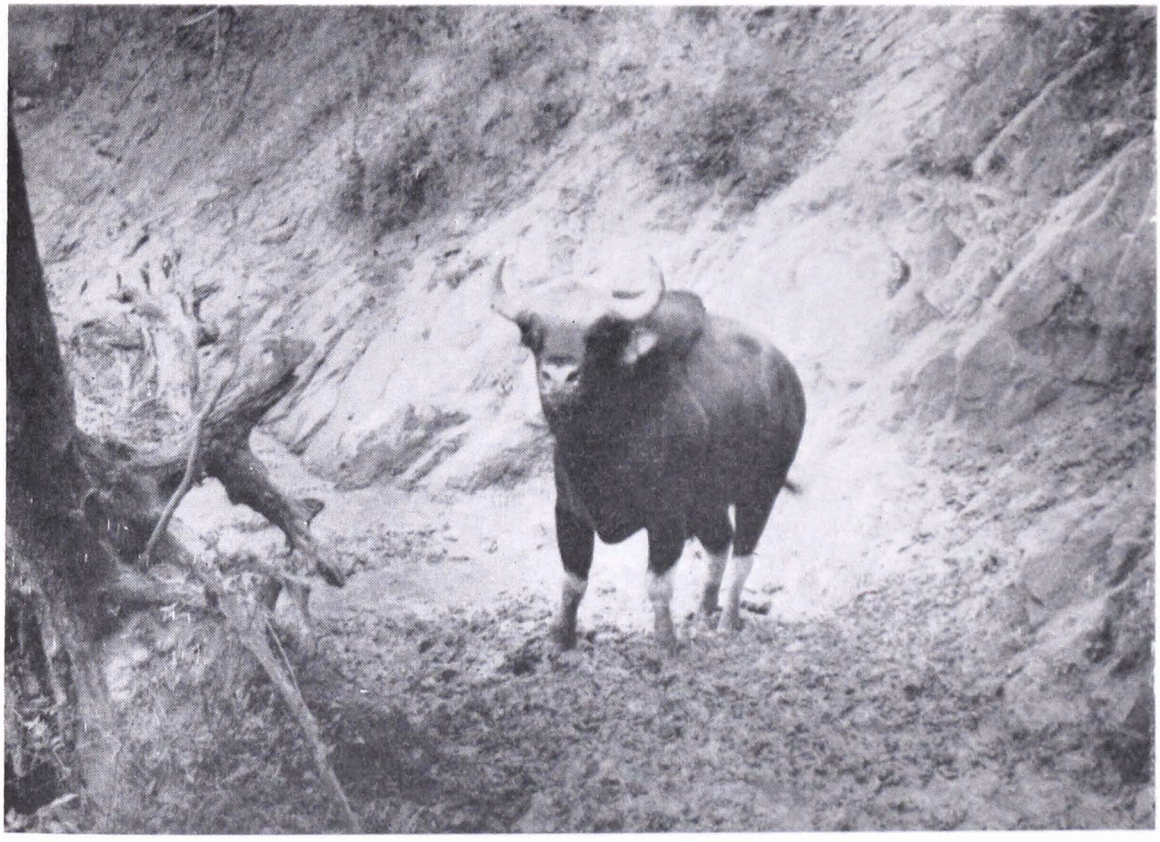
36. The elephants bringing in drift wood for camp use, Borgang River.

37. Chandra travelling alone and towing drift wood between the forest and the Dikal River camp site.

38. Wild elephants leaving the forest in the evening to reach the Dikal salt lick, about half a mile distant, 1960.

39. Footprints of numerous wild animals in the sand near the Borgang River, of elephants, mithan, deer and tigers proceeding to the salt lick, 1956.

40. Motimali enjoying Dikal poong or salt lick.



41. An Assam mithan or bison in the salt lick or Bogajuli poong.

42. The Borgang River, with the lower Himalayas in background. An elephant bathes in the river.

As we proceeded, it appeared that no human beings had ever entered the area but there were signs that elephants, deer and pigs came and went at will. After we had been travelling for an hour, the ravine became more narrow and winding, and I began to realise that there was not much space to turn round in an emergency. We noticed that some very thick bamboos were drooping down and had been obviously pushed aside by the wild elephant as it went up the nala. After going for about another two miles up this ravine, I thought it was time to turn back. My mahout, who had remounted, then suggested that he should go ahead on foot to see if he could spot the elephant round the next few corners. Off he went, while my elephant reached for creepers to eat. I told the grasscutter to keep his mount facing the way the mahout had gone.

After a few minutes, there were loud shouts from the mahout ahead! I could make out that the elephant was charging down the ravine at him and his yells were followed by terrific trumpetings, which sounded louder than usual as we were in a confined space. The wild elephant came round the corner, some twenty yards away like an express bulldozer and hit a clump of thick bamboos which were dropping down from the sides of the ravine. These went off like fire crackers as the segments between the knots cracked open! This terrific noise, in addition to the elephant screaming at us with rage, was too much for the elephant I was on and she turned and bolted back down the ravine with me clinging on top!

The elephant's saddle, just in front of where the rider sits, is fitted with a strong iron bar to hold on to and there is also a six inch wide running-board along either side of the elephant's pad, fixed at each end by ropes to the saddle and on which the feet are rested. I gripped the round iron bar with my left hand and bringing up my rifle with the other, I fired at the vital spot in the wild elephant's forehead just as my mount started to swing round. A .470 double-barrelled rifle weighs eleven and a quarter pounds,

so naturally I could not hold it up to my shoulder very steadily or for more than a second or two. The shot did not, however, take effect and merely added to the noise while our speed was soon up to fifteen miles an hour! The grasscutter was powerless to hold the elephant and after she had gone some fifty yards at full blast, some hanging creepers caught the man under his jaw and pulled him off the neck of the elephant and back on top of me. I then found myself gripping the iron bar with my left hand and helping the struggling grasscutter to regain his seat with the other, while still holding on to my rifle.

As the grasscutter regained his seat, I felt something touch me high up on my back. On turning round, I saw it was the wild elephant's trunk endeavouring to get a grip on my coat near my shoulders! For a moment I was frozen with fear and then I immediately drew myself up and forward by the iron bar in front of me, swung round and brought the heavy rifle up to my shoulder, holding it more or less like a revolver and fired. The elephant came down like a ton of bricks, stone dead. As I fired that shot, my topee was swept off and the reader must believe me when I say that it was later found squashed flat under the elephant's trunk!

After going round the next corner the elephant I was on pulled up on her own. A few minutes later we turned back up the ravine and I heard a wailing from my mahout, who had apparently dodged the elephant in some bamboos and was now coming on as fast as he could. I could make out his crying to be "*Hamara sahib morigello!*" which means "my sahib is dead!" That was his reaction to seeing my topee crushed under the dead beast's trunk! On hearing his wailing, I shouted out that I was not dead and he came running round the corner and looked at me. After we got our breath back we laughed heartily for five minutes while we went over the incident and felt much better for it.

On getting down to inspect the dead elephant, I saw that my two bullet marks were exactly parallel to each

other and only four inches apart. That was my thirty-eighth elephant. On getting out of the ravine again I made for my car and drove to the nearest European's bungalow, where Mr Brett lived at Bori, instead of going many miles to my own, as I had a thirst that I would not sell if I could avoid it! On reaching the bungalow my friend said to me, "Good heavens! What have you done to your face? Thank goodness my wife is not here to see you!" He led me by the arm to a looking glass and I saw that I really did look a dreadful mess. What had happened was that in our flight from the wild elephant, hanging creepers, some with barbs like fret saws, had been drawn across my face at fifteen miles an hour and had drawn blood which, with the perspiration running out of my hair, I had been wiping all over my face with my hands. However, a wash and a drink soon put me right.

The next morning my right arm failed to function. It was set stiff and I could not move it without pain. The European doctor said it was due to the recoil of the rifle when I fired it like a revolver, without holding it against my shoulder. He advised me to go to Shillong for an X-ray and I went a few days later—a drive of some three hundred miles. That dear friend of mine, Dr Roberts of the Welsh Mission, was there at the time and he put the whole arm in plaster, with strict instructions to leave it for three weeks but to keep moving my fingers, and a few days after the local doctor had removed the plaster the arm had healed.

The following December I was requested by the Government to go and shoot a tusker which had killed a man, his wife and child. This occurred some thirty-five miles away, but I was not risking another such experience as I had had with the hired elephant. I therefore sent my own two elephants off ahead, although it meant their being away at least eight days. I gave my mahout instructions to wire me from the nearest telegraph office when he had located the elephant. After four days I received a telegram to say that he had and I left very early the next morning

in my car. I found my mahout and elephant at the appointed place near the telegraph office and we then proceeded to a spot some three miles across the country.

It appeared that the tusker was remaining in some very high elephant grass, not far from where he had killed the family. The husband, a Nepalese, had planted out some potatoes near his thatched house and they were about ready for lifting. The elephant had been in the habit of coming out just before it was dark and would kick the potatoes out of the ground to eat. When the owner approached the elephant one evening to chase it away, it chased him. The poor man ran into his house. The elephant went round the house a few times and pushed it down and afterwards walked about on the top of it, killing the three members of the family.

I was on my makhna elephant Joyprosad and we were soon able to track the fresh footprints of the animal and found it in some twelve feet high elephant grass. The wild tusker at first bolted for some fifty yards and then stopped when it reached grass only some six feet in height. On seeing us approaching it started to curl up its trunk, which is generally a sign before charging. I was fortunate in dropping it dead with the first shot.

The tusks are beautifully symmetrical and weigh some forty-six pounds each. During my fifty years in Assam I accounted for forty elephants, the majority of them makhnas. The best tusks out of the tuskers I have shot are a pair weighing sixty-five and a half and sixty-six and a half pounds respectively. Both of the above pairs are with members of our family.

Every year I had a path cleared by the mahout, working from the back of the elephant, from my camp site to some exceedingly wild country some nine miles away. This was to facilitate my journey to a salt lick in that area, on which I kept a watchful eye. Although it is prohibited to kill game at a salt lick, I found on one occasion some Daflas

cutting up two sambar deer prior to carrying the flesh away for sale to a neighbouring Mikir village.

The last time the mahout undertook this job of cutting the patch, a very determined tusker chased him away for three consecutive days. My big makhna was annoyed at being hurriedly taken away from the tusker and wanted to fight him but the mahout, of course, was not at all keen on the prospect of being pulled down and killed by the tusker and so he cleared off while the going was good. On the fourth day the tusker had gone off elsewhere so the work proceeded.

At that time, mela shikar was going on in the area and a few days later the elephant catchers caught a baby elephant. The baby screamed and trumpeted, as they do and a tusker (undoubtedly the one that had objected to my mahout cutting the path) heard the noise and came to the youngster's rescue. The spare man from one of the hunting elephants had dismounted and was in the act of roping the young elephant's hind leg to a tree, prior to fixing other ropes round the captive's body, when the tusker appeared. On seeing the tusker approaching the two elephants bolted, leaving the man on the ground to fend for himself. He immediately climbed a tree, as it was useless to try and run away. The tusker was after him, however, and with a few heaves with his head brought the tree down. The elephant immediately rushed at the man who endeavoured to protect himself with his kukri and he was last seen by one of the elephant catchers striking with the knife at the elephant's trunk. However the tusker killed him immediately and threw his body up in the air.

Next day my mahout and some native police visited the place and to their horror and amazement, found the remains of the man in pieces hardly larger than the size of one's hand. The herd had come back and pulverised the poor fellow more or less into mincemeat!

The man left a wife and seven children.

Chapter Seven

Seeing is Believing

Wild buffaloes, which are the feral cousins of the water buffalo of Asia, are very much more treacherous than bison, as the wild cow of India is known. About forty years ago there was a herd of about eighteen buffaloes up the Dikal River and I used to see them frequently but they have now moved further north. The country immediately south of the outer Himalayan ranges however, is not very suitable country for them as they are basically swamp-dwellers but they favour long-grass areas on any stream banks.

Nearly fifty years ago there were some very large herds in lower Assam, on the border of Kamrup, and there are still their remnants near the foothills of Bhutan, on both sides of the mighty Manas River and its lesser neighbours, the Eie and Beki, in what is known as the Manas Sanctuary. There are a few herds also in the North Lakhimpur area while there are many to be seen in the Kaziranga Sanctuary on the south bank of the Brahmaputra.

Bull buffaloes especially are extremely cunning and dangerous. They will often make off on seeing you but frequently circle round very quietly indeed and then come charging from the flank, or take one in the rear.

I remember once, many years ago, going out after a particularly large bull buffalo which had killed two villagers. On locating the animal at first it galloped away straight ahead of me. It was luck for me that I had just finished reading a book by a well-known shikari called Sanderson, in which he warned of the cunning ways of

wild buffalo and to be always wide awake when tracking them, because of their habit of circling quietly around and attacking one from the flank. I therefore stopped and listened and surely enough I soon heard it to one side, as if pieces of dry wood were being broken underfoot. I continued turning my elephant to continually face the noise as it moved around and had almost reversed my original position when suddenly the bull charged straight at me! I brought it down only some fifteen yards off, with a bullet through its forehead. I still possess its horns.

I heard soon afterwards that an officer out shooting in the Central Provinces of India, was killed instantly by a bull buffalo which he was following up and which attacked him in the rear, putting its horns through his back. Luckily his servant who was with him escaped.

I have known bull buffaloes from the Kaziranga Sanctuary cross the Brahmaputra River and mate with the tame buffaloes belonging to villagers. The latter were quite happy to have this because the offspring were naturally much finer specimens than those obtained from their own tame bulls. The latter, of course, kept well in the background when the wild bulls were about! Shooting these bulls, which have generally very large horns and are therefore magnificent trophies, can be a great experience. One has to approach the animal in the open and on foot and although the bull may be totally engrossed with the tame cows and so likely to give one a clear shot, should it charge the hunter has but one choice—to stand firm and shoot straight!

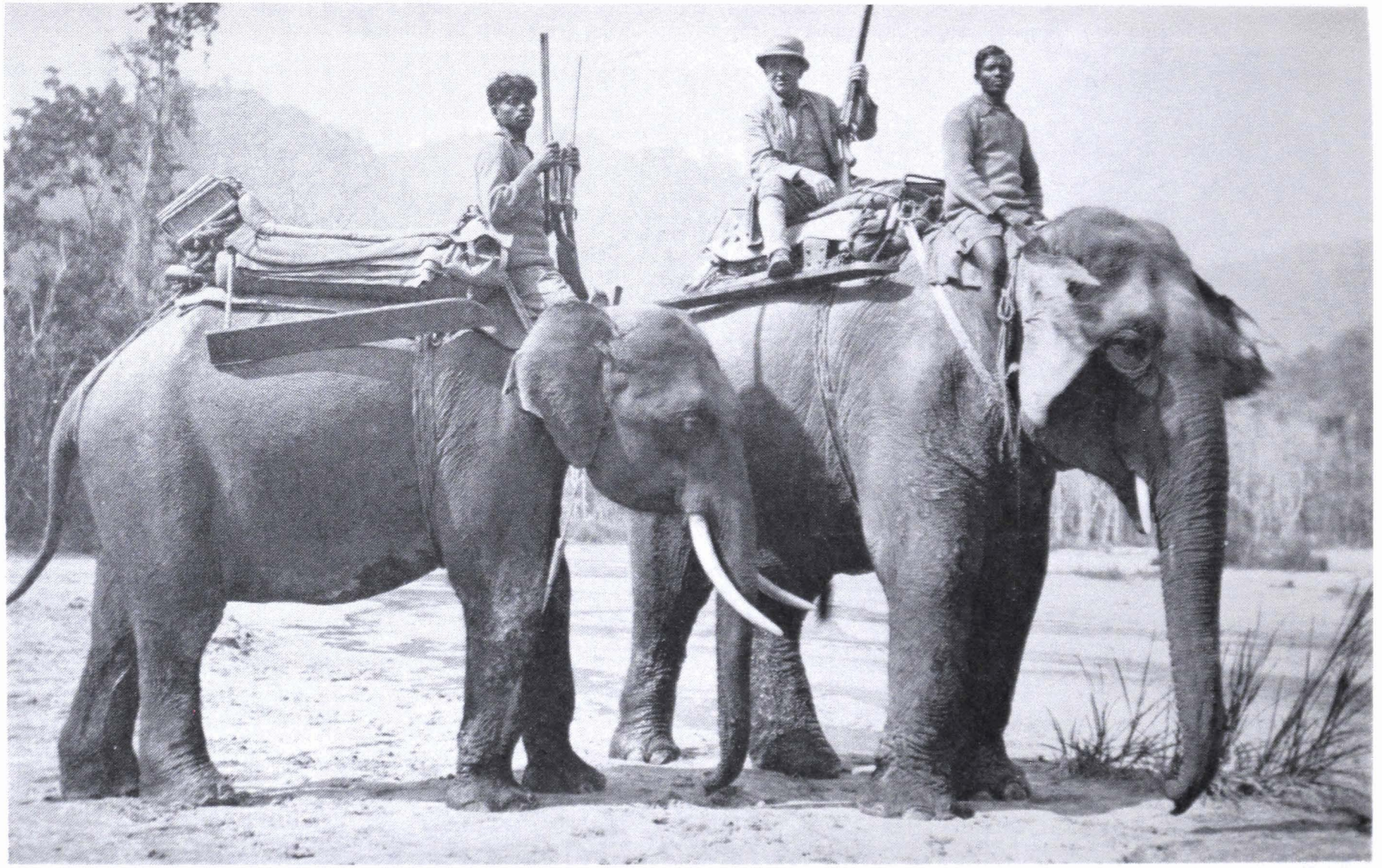
Many areas on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River which previously held bison or *mithan* as they are called in Assam are now devoid of these majestic and lovely animals. This is partly due to the opening up of these areas for cultivation and partly due to indiscriminate shooting. I know of one area of jungle, however, some twenty miles by ten, where they have increased in numbers very considerably during the last thirty years.

Previously, a large number of them met their death from the Daflas, who set trip-wires armed with poisoned arrows in the jungle paths leading to salt licks. The people of the Mikir and Miri tribes who lived in the jungle areas were hand-in-glove with the Daflas, and sold flesh in the villages and bazaars, at a handsome profit. Munda, Oraon and Kalahandi Porjas, former tea garden labourers, also bought it from the Daflas.

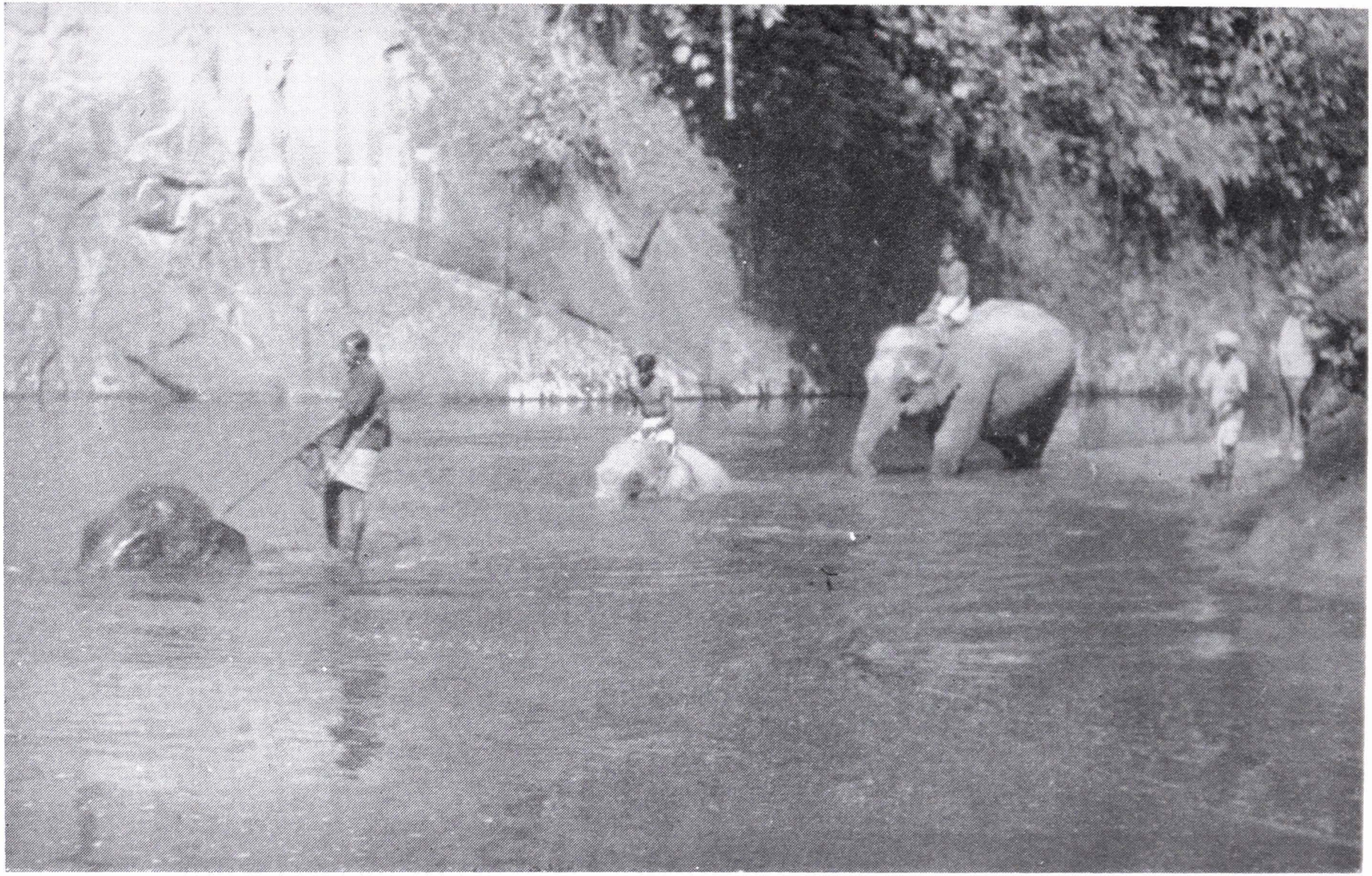
The largest recorded bull bison shot under permit was six feet two and half inches at the shoulder, which will give some idea of these magnificent creatures. I have been charged by a bull on only one occasion. It was indeed a fine fellow, grazing alone away from the herd, although this was in the mating season. We were watching the bull from about twenty yards away, when after a few minutes it raised its head, saw us, snorted, put down its head and charged right at our elephant's side! It was only due to my outstanding mahout and his prompt action in swinging the elephant round on its toes, that the bull missed disembowelling my elephant. It then pulled up, turned, looked at us for a minute and gradually sauntered off. I breathed again!

Some few years ago I watched, in more or less open forest, a terrific fight between two bull mithan. We were attracted by the sound of their heads crashing together as they charged each other. The ground became ploughed up and saplings a foot in circumference were smashed off like matchwood. The fight continued for fully fifteen minutes after we arrived. Several times either one or the other was down on its knees. Eventually, the older bull of the two gave up and moved away, passing not far from us. We could see that one tip of its horn was mushroomed out and the other partly split at the top. The other bull, younger but fully matured, carried a long red wound on the flank.

In the mating season, one can sometimes hear bulls making a very long drawn-out moaning noise, when they are

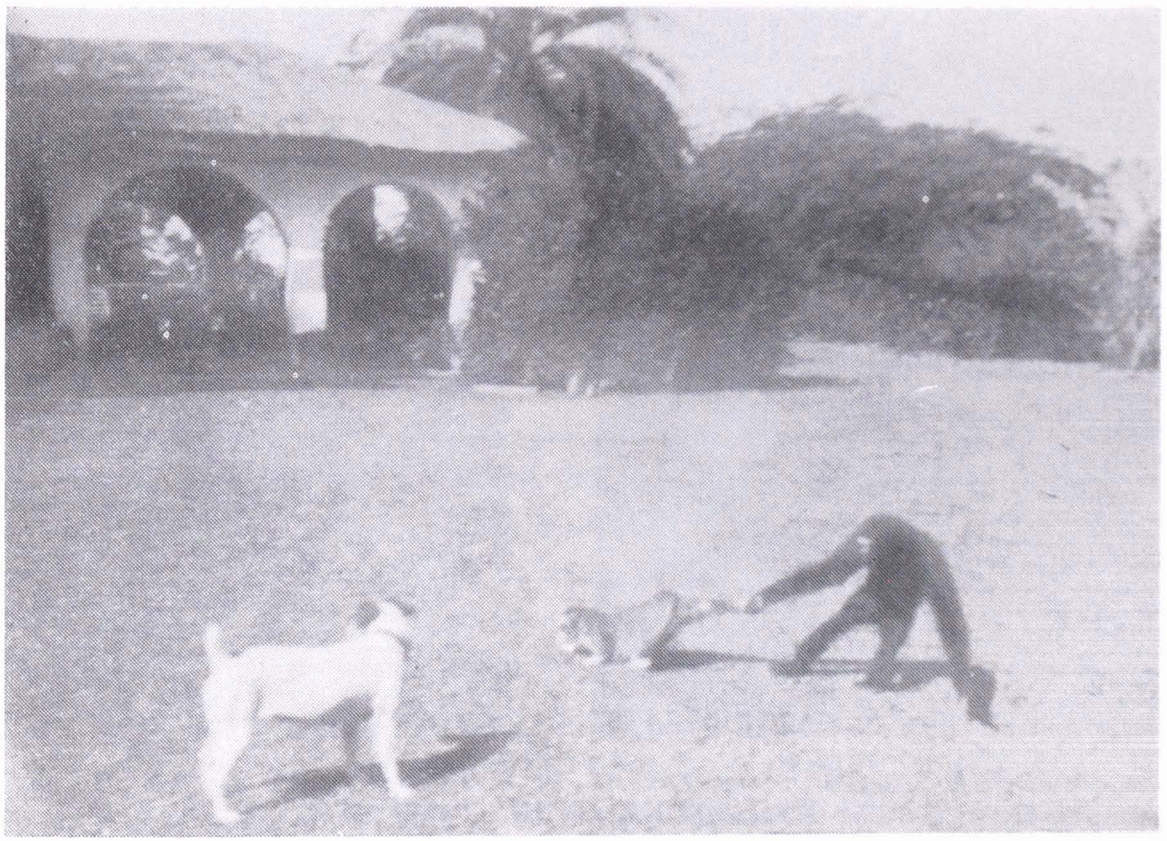


43. Chandra and Motimali in the Borgang River area with a friend, Fred Nicol, seated behind Jippa, the mahout. The saddles designed by the author are clearly seen.

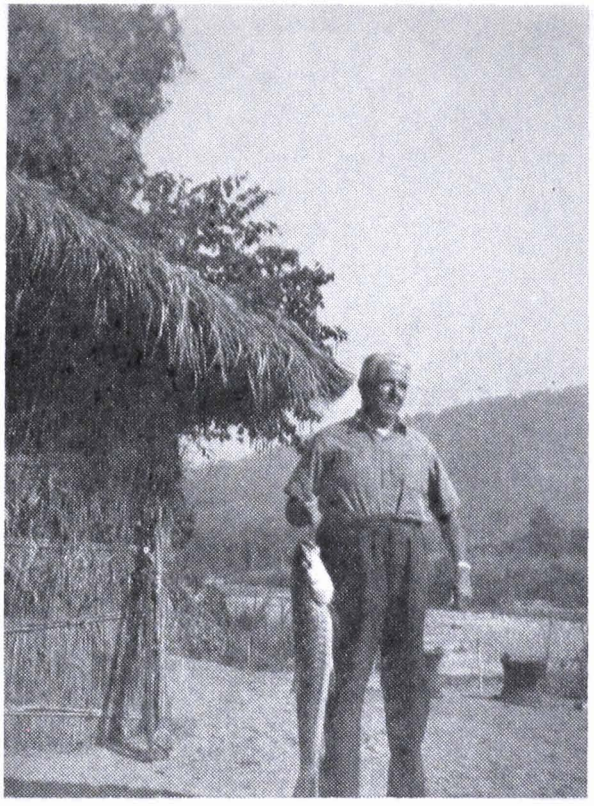


44. Elephants bathing in the Dikal River after a day of work and before feeding. The author stands to the right.

45. A hoolock or ape from Nagaland which enjoyed pulling ears on tennis days. The lady is Mrs Lees.

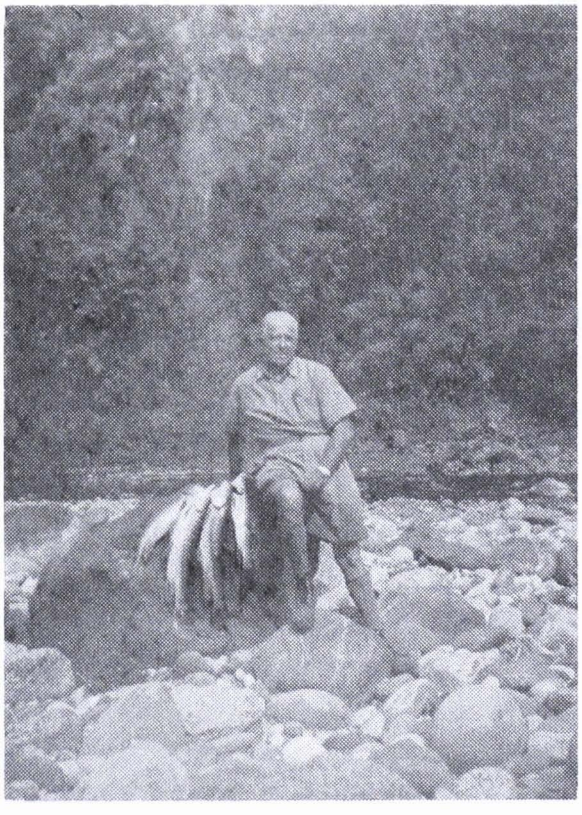


46. The playful hoolock teasing the cat. He was also a "ball boy" on tennis days.

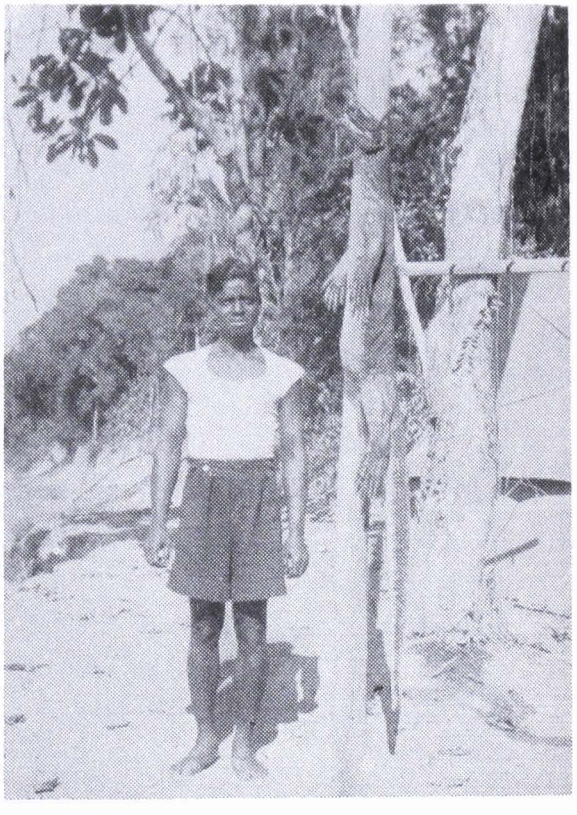


47. A nice fish, caught 1960. At left is the store godown at the Dikal River camp site.

48. The author's best fish ever. A marsheer weighing twenty-eight pounds caught in the Dikal River.



49. Some fish caught in the Dikal River, 1960. The largest sixteen pounds.



50. An iguana (lizard) six feet six inches in length, shot by the Dikal River, 1960. This one, beside Jippa's son Budhoo, consumed many water birds.

searching for a herd. This call can be heard a mile or so away, even in the dense forest. On occasions, I have followed the direction of that mournful, drawn-out sound and have, by tracking the footprints and listening to the call, eventually come upon a lone bull bison.

My experience of bears is that they are vicious and bad tempered and will go out of their way to track a man down and attack him. On different occasions, I have seen three men who were killed by these animals. They had been collecting firewood in the jungle and two of them had their faces so terribly clawed that they were unrecognisable by their own people.

The European doctor on a neighbouring estate told me about a poor man who was attacked while returning to his house one Sunday evening, just as it was getting dark. I had seen a bear, very near the place where he was found, on the previous evening. The victim's face bore terrible injuries and he had been more or less disembowelled. His intestines were badly lacerated and covered with mud and sand, and he had been lying in this condition for 14 hours. The doctor privately told me that he had to do the only humanitarian act that was possible under those terribly painful conditions and that was to put the poor fellow into a deep sleep, during which he passed away.

These bears apparently track a person by scent and their eyesight seems to be poor. I have watched them following me on several occasions. They come hurrying along, stop, stand on their hind legs, sniff the air until they get the direction, then hurry on again, and so on. Just when they get near they stand up and look. It is then that they make a good target with the white mark on their chests.

I have shot eight Himalayan bears and three sloth. In these sub-Himalayan tracts the two species meet, although the former animal does not go very far from the mountains. The Himalayan bears are enormous brutes and no man stands a chance of escaping, once he is caught by one of them. They have closer coats than the sloth bear and two

which I shot were suffering very badly from mange and were practically hairless. The sloth bear's long, shaggy coat and ugly snout make it a poor trophy which is the case, really speaking, with all bears, the skins of which generally lose their hair sooner or later and are difficult to keep free of dust. Bear fat is much sought after by the natives, for it is considered a cure for rheumatism, but so is tiger fat and iguana fat, which is most highly prized.

In 1949 I was asked to shoot a large boar that kept eating paddy, which is rice growing ripe and ready for cutting. The boar had chased the owners away. The native owners called me one evening just as dusk was approaching, but the boar was making for the dense jungle nearby, frightened by the noise from the beating of empty tins by the natives. A few evenings afterwards it was up to its old tricks again, but this happened to be on a Sunday when I had my elephant with me to mount. I had my heavy .470 rifle with me and on seeing the elephant, the boar charged it, but I was quick and shot the boar a few yards away. It had a weight of 276 pounds.

During several cold weather seasons a few years ago I frequently saw a cormorant swimming and diving in the small river below my camp site. Keeping close to the water's edge was a white egret, running backwards and forwards and keeping level with the cormorant, which was often submerged looking for and chasing small fish. The latter, at times, would throw themselves on to the sand at the edge of the river in an endeavour to save themselves temporarily from the cormorant, but the egret was ready waiting for them. After a time the cormorant would fly up on to a partly submerged dead tree and the egret would join it, sitting a foot or so from the cormorant, which would have its wings spread out to dry. After an hour or so they would go through the same procedure. It was noticed that should other egrets come anywhere near the pair when they were catching fish the egret, which appeared to be a most pugnacious fellow, would chase the

others away, squawking the whole time and having seen them to a safe distance, would return to the cormorant.

When I was walking down to a fairly small, muddy pool one evening, about a quarter of a mile from my camp, a cormorant got out of the water near me, flew some yards across the pool and settled on a small, dead branch, protruding some inches out of the water. Not more than ten yards from me and out from the roots of an old tree at the water's edge, came a large iguana, which slid into the water and straightaway submerged itself. I watched carefully for some time, and suddenly the iguana's head was seen to emerge just under the bird. Snap! But the cormorant was too quick and I saw the iguana some time afterwards swimming to the other side of the pool. After that I went and explored the roots of the old tree on the bank where the iguana had come from. I received the surprise of my life for there were bunches of feathers belonging to several different species of water birds. The iguana's excreta was also seen near a large hole where it lived, and this contained chewed bones and small pieces of feathers. A few days afterwards I had a letter from an old acquaintance of mine, asking me if I had seen the nearly extinct wood-duck in my area. I thought to myself, after seeing the animal submerge and swim out to attack the cormorant, that the iguana might be helping to make the wood-duck extinct. I next visited the pool on my elephant one evening, some ten days after that, and took my gun. I found the large lizard in some reeds not far from its home and shot it. It was six feet three inches in length and bore several scars.

Some years ago on the south bank, I made the acquaintance of two tame hoolock apes. They had been captured when very young in the Naga Hills, where the species is found. They became most amusingly human. Two of my friends had one each. One hoolock was very fond of cats and although he treated them fairly roughly at times they were out to play if possible. The hoolock at Borkotonee

Tea Estate, near Golaghat, would sit up in a tree and at times, if the cat passed under the tree, the ape just pounced upon it. It would either pull pussy's tail or her hind legs. They would have a 'rough and tumble' together and then they would part, apparently good friends. This hoolock was excellent at collecting balls on a tennis day—in fact, he was allocated one end of the court where he collected the balls and returned them to the server when necessary. He was extremely active and did the same work as the two boys employed at the other end of the court.

The other hoolock was owned by Mr Farrar of the Sangsua Tea Estate and lived a few miles away. It was amusing to watch him at tea time. The owner would be having his tea with the ape looking on. The servant would come in during tea time, and some biscuits would be put on a plate which was then locked in a cupboard. The keys would then be given to the ape, who would try every key in the bunch until he got the correct one! I was a frequent visitor, but the ape never remembered which or what kind of key it was that opened the cupboard. There was a telephone wire which led to another estate of the company, some two miles away, where there was a local market on Saturday. The hoolock would see some of the servants leaving the bungalow compound with their usual baskets and away the ape used to go. He would climb the nearby telephone post and then proceed hand over hand for the full two miles, with his legs dangling. He had many friends at the bazaar—men, women, and especially children. They looked forward to his weekly visits and loaded him with fruit, such as ground nuts and bananas. What he did not eat there the servants would bring back to give him at the bungalow. He returned to the bungalow on the telephone wire in the evening.

Mr E. P. Gee, who was a personal friend of mine, managed to get a golden cat from the Burma area and named it Tishi and it became a family pet. These cats have a rather beautifully marked face but the body is relatively

unmarked. Their Latin name is *Felis temmincki* and they come from an area relatively unfrequented by Europeans —that blob on the map which starts in North East India, includes North Burma, South West China and a part of Tibet. They are not often seen in zoos, but this is not necessarily a measure of their real rarity. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature does not include them in its Red Book.

Eventually, at the beginning of 1961, this cat was sent to London Zoo and by 1965, when I visited the zoo, it had grown to about half the size of a leopard. When I approached it stood and looked at me and meowed several times and then proceeded to pace back and forward in its huge cage again. After five minutes or so I called out "Tishi" and it immediately stopped and again meowed several times. About thirty visitors were watching and a number turned round and said to me "That cat certainly knows you!" I told them that it had come from the Burma side of India and that I had nursed it many times when it was growing up.

Although for forty years, before I retired in 1952, I hardly ever missed a weekend roaming the forests and various river-beds, just admiring the animals and birds when I saw them, it was not until I retired and remained in camp by the river for 5½ months continuously during the lovely cold weather, that I was able to watch and study the animals and birds as they live their daily lives. They became less shy of me. I noticed for instance, that in time elephants became far less frightened, and occasionally came up to within 50 yards of my camp, where plenty of fodder was available, much to the delight of my servants and myself. It was most amusing to watch the antics of the youngsters butting each other. On one occasion they delighted themselves tobogganing down a nearby slope, whilst their parents went on quietly eating.

Two half-grown sambar deer became quite friendly, feeding roughly twenty yards away in the mornings and

evenings on succulent grass in the river-bed just below my camp. There were two that the plovers objected to, for the plovers had a nest and they actually chased the deer into the nearby jungle before returning to their nest.

At the commencement of my camp which was at the end of October, I generally had visits from half a dozen doves that remembered my feeding them in other years. The flock gradually grew to about forty by the time I left in mid-April. They got on well together except at meal times. Believe it or not two often slept under my bed in the afternoon, when I was lying down. They all knew feeding time which was 4 p.m. and collected outside my bedroom all sitting happily together and not quarrelling in any way. But immediately I scattered rice a scene of complete uproar took place. The cock birds all commenced fighting, feathers flew and soon the frightened hens flew up into the nearby trees. The winning birds chased their opponents clear away and then the hens returned to feed in peace. It was strange how this took place every evening and I can only think that the cock birds were real gluttons and were afraid that they would not get sufficient to eat —otherwise, why were they so happy and peaceful together before they were fed? The hens did not quarrel and only wanted to eat.

Another thing I was able to observe while in camp was the number of different kinds of kingfishers that visited the pool just below my camp site and their comparative efficiency as divers and catchers of fish. Of the smaller species the pied kingfisher seemed to be the winner at obtaining fish, in proportion to the number of dives made. I checked this kingfisher over several years against other varieties and it scored the most successes. But the most interesting fact about this bird is that it feeds its offspring on the wing. When the young are able to fly they hover near their parents while the latter dive for food and when a fish is caught the youngster is fed while it is in mid air! Other species of kingfisher feed their young while sitting

on boulders or low tree-branches, as they do in England. I first saw the pied kingfisher feeding its young in this manner in 1954, when I was in camp, and every following year I enjoyed this unique spectacle. The birds had been breeding for several years in holes in the river-bank, about fifty yards from my camp, and I watched them with the greatest of pleasure. I had not been aware of this peculiarity in this species before and my passings up and down the rivers on elephant back, as was the case before I retired, and was able to camp out for long periods, had not revealed it to me.

Chapter Eight

Mostly Human

During the cold weather of 1943-44, on returning from my office to my bungalow one evening, I found a much dishevelled American airman on my verandah. He had a half-grown beard and his clothes were completely tattered. The seat of his trousers had gone and a patch of woven thatch grass had been sewn in. He spoke to me with considerable emotion and said he had been in the Dafla Hills with the tribesmen for sixteen days. Four Daflas had brought him down to me.

After giving him tea and something substantial to eat, he went away to have a hot bath and his first shave for sixteen days. I had to supply him with a new change of clothes and luckily, my clothes fitted him beautifully.

After his bath this is the story he told me. He started by emphasising that he had been an atheist all his life, but that he was now absolutely convinced of the fact that the Almighty had come to his aid during the last few days.

While flying a fighter plane at midnight on his way from Jorhat to Tezpur, he had become lost. He had eventually run out of petrol over the Dafla Hills and he therefore had to bail out. He landed by parachute safely in a tree, but not before the plane had missed him by only a few feet on its way down.

It was a very cold, pitch-black night but he was able to gather part of his parachute around him and thus kept fairly warm while waiting for daybreak. When daylight came he found himself hanging by his parachute harness in the branches of a very tall tree. This tree happened to be

the only one in the vicinity which had a creeper growing up the trunk. Many trees in the jungle and hills are very tall and the one in which he found himself was over eighty feet high and, looking down, he noticed that it was growing out from the edge of a hill with a sheer fall of some several hundred feet down a precipice to the valley below.

All he had with him was a knife, a revolver with five bullets, a piece of chocolate, and four one hundred rupee notes. He gradually let himself down the stout creeper but just after reaching half-way, the creeper came away from the tree and he found himself slithering on his hindquarters down to the valley below. Fortunately, he was able to stop himself on a narrow ledge. Below lay a clear drop to the valley, some two hundred feet below. He managed, however, to crawl back up the hillside, minus the seat of his pants, and then sat down to think things over.

He decided to fire a shot from his revolver, hoping it would possibly attract some tribesman to him, and shortly afterwards he fired another. He remained there and after some considerable time two Daflas came into view along the hillside. As the airman had been in Assam for about a year, he knew a few words of Assamese. The Daflas likewise, having visited the bazaars in the plains during the cold weather season, also understood a few words of that language.

He considered it best to give them a hundred rupee note with the promise of another on their taking him down to the plains, so they started off and after about an hour they had reached the mens' houses. The other men-folk of the tribe immediately set to work and built him a small rough house, which was not far off from their own houses. After some time, a Dafla woman brought him some cooked rice and a chicken and he noticed that a different woman brought his meal to him at each meal time. They also took him to a small waterfall, emerging from a hill some hundred feet below his little rough house, where he was to drink and wash.

The airman spent four days there with many Daflas, old and young, sitting around and watching him. He always kept his revolver in the holster which was strapped round him, except when he cleaned it, a routine which he followed daily.

On his fourth afternoon, some twelve men came and sat down in a circle near him, each holding a newly hatched chicken in the palm of his left hand. Following them was a very old Dafla with a knife and the old fellow proceeded to cut open each chicken and inspect their livers. Apparently, four of the chicken's livers were of a different colour or size, as the four men holding these were detailed off to take him down to the plains.

The next morning, everybody was astir early and the four men were loading their baskets with food, preparatory to leaving. The airman then made a very serious mistake for when going down to the waterfall for the last time he omitted to take his revolver with him, leaving it on the floor of his house. Whilst he was washing at the waterfall, he heard a shot and a Dafla woman came rushing down to him, screaming. Realising immediately what had happened, he rushed up to find one of the two men who had found him lying on his back, with a bullet hole in his chest. On turning the poor fellow over, it was seen that the bullet had passed through him and that he was already dead.

When the Daflas saw that the man was dead, pandemonium prevailed. Long knives were drawn and they were out to kill the man who had fired the weapon. At the same time, his wife had both arms round her husband and was screaming for protection. The airman also went to the man's assistance.

At that moment the old Dafla man who had performed the ritual with the chickens the day before came on to the scene and after a lot of talking, swords were put back and the man responsible for the shooting was tied by the ankles to a log of wood, with his hands tied together behind his

back. The airman promised the old man that he would explain the affair to the Political Officer at Charduwar, and this seemed to help satisfy them.

But as the result of the episode the four men who had been detailed off to escort the American down to the plains refused to go. Instead they gave him all the chickens and rice out of the basket and led him down to the waterfall and made signs to him to follow the stream of water. This he did all that day and just as darkness was approaching, he came to a very long, dark and deep pool with precipitous rocks on either side, some one hundred feet or more high. After exploring the area, he decided to stay the night on a patch of sand, against a small rock. He ate his chicken and rice, then cut some nearby jungle with which he covered himself and soon went to sleep.

At daybreak, he explored the area again but could not find a way out. He reluctantly reached the conclusion that, as he had only one small piece of chocolate left to eat, he would have to shoot himself, unless he could get out of that area within the next two days or so. While following the course of a small stream which ran into the same deep pool, he noticed a bamboo fish trap. There were recent footmarks leading to it so he therefore decided to remain near this place, in case the trappers returned.

Nobody came that day and he had eaten his last piece of chocolate. He knew that he would be too weak to make the journey back up the steep hills, so he decided to wait near the fish trap for one more day. At about three o'clock on the following afternoon, two Dafla boys appeared but on seeing him they ran away. The airman kept shouting "American sahib! baksheesh daega!" (reward will be given). They never stopped, however, and disappeared up the hillside.

He was becoming steadily weaker for want of proper food but there was no alternative to waiting there a day or two more, before deciding whether or not to shoot himself. While sitting there his thoughts were of his home,

his wife and his son, aged ten. Seven days had passed since he had bailed out and he knew that after another two days his wife would be advised by cable that he was missing, believed dead.

The next morning, several Dafla tribesmen came from the direction that the boys had taken on the previous afternoon. They offered to lead the airman back to their houses but after travelling a short distance he found that he was too weak to walk up the hills so the men carried him up to their village. It was six more days before he was able to continue his journey to the plains. Four men accompanied him and they proceeded back past the fish trap and took the path by which he had come down, some days before. After retracing his steps for an hour or so they again turned south. The party slept at night and travelled for three days before arriving at my bungalow. It was then sixteen days since the airman had bailed out from his plane.

The Daflas received the remaining three hundred rupees from him as a reward and they spent most of it at the local shop, on foodstuffs and cloth for their respective families. The next day I lent him my car and driver to take him first to the local post office to send a cable to his wife in Ohio and then on to the Political Officer some twenty miles from Tezpur, to whom he gave a full account of his experiences. He then proceeded to his headquarters at Tezpur.

Within a few days of his leaving my bungalow the Daflas came back saying that they had been set upon by another gang of Daflas who had robbed them of all the things they had purchased with their reward. I gave them a letter to the Political Officer who acted immediately and despatched a few Assam riflemen with an interpreter into the hills. They traced the culprits who were made to hand over four *gayal*, or domesticated cross-breed bison, to the men who had been deprived of their goods. Furthermore, they also visited the village where the unfortunate Dafla had met his death. They found the accidental killer still

tied up and released him. I learned afterwards that no further harm came to the Dafla.

Approximately six months after the airman had left me, I received a most charming letter of thanks from his parents for having helped him. A few months later while I was away in England, a plane flew round my bungalow several times and dropped a parcel on to the tennis court. A pair of sun glasses was also dropped beside the parcel. On opening the latter, after my return from leave, I found new khaki clothes to replace the ones I had given him when he came out of the hills. In addition a note was enclosed saying that he was sorry that they had not been replaced before, but that the dhobi had lost them so he was replacing them with new ones!

I wrote to him, care of his parents, thanking him and asking what I should do with the glasses, which had evidently got attached to the parcel at the time of it leaving the plane. I never received a reply, but trust he is well—and still a Christian!

One day in 1944, I received a note from a neighbouring planter to say that some Dafla tribesmen had come down from the hills and told him that a big plane had crashed about four and a half days journey up in the hills. About thirty sahibs were dead but one, though injured, had survived. I was asked to convey this news to the Political Officer, some forty miles away. I sent my driver off in my car with the news and the Political Officer informed the air force authorities some twenty-five miles beyond him.

Fortunately, there was a private airfield large enough for a Dakota on my friend's estate. Two days later a small plane put down at this airstrip and the pilot took aboard one of the Daflas to help him locate the crash. This they managed to do and returned to base. On the next day, the airmen were back over the hills dropping doctors, engineers and stores by parachute into that very wild area.

I gathered from my friend that there was one survivor out of thirty-two men. He had been catapulted from the

plane when it hit the mountainside head on and had landed in a clump of bamboos. The resilience of the bamboos had undoubtedly saved his life, although he had been injured. The Daflas had fed him on raw eggs. Some of the dead were found to be without their fingers. These had been cut off by the Daflas, to obtain the rings which some of the men had worn.

It was learnt from the survivor that the plane had been bound for Bombay from Chungking, with troops going on leave. He, the survivor, had been sitting amidships with his back to the door at the time of the crash.

The American authorities lost no time in employing some four hundred Dafla tribesmen to clear a runway in a valley to allow a small plane to land. After this was completed, the survivor was flown out to my friend's airstrip, being encased in plaster of paris and smoking a cigarette. From this airstrip he was taken to Chabua hospital in Upper Assam. He survived his injuries and said that he would be writing of his experiences. I often wonder whether he did.

About two years later, an American officer and some soldiers arrived with a jeep load of stores and empty sacks. A number of Daflas had arrived previously, through an arrangement with the Political Officer. They were to transport the stores and sacks up into the hills and collect the bones of the deceased men from the site of the crash.

I came to learn afterwards from the officer in charge of the party that, while collecting the bones of the poor fellows, he came upon a wrist watch buried four inches below the surface. After being wound up the watch started to go and kept good time afterwards!

There were two brothers in tea-planting, one of whom, Harold by name, was most amusing and more eccentric than the other. I remember that he used to keep a black-painted coffin ready for himself in the corner of his spare bedroom! In those days there were no cars and we rode horseback, or used a buggy and pony. When visiting

friends, one would previously write and ask for the loan of a horse to be at a certain place at some particular time. The horse would be there, harnessed, and the visitor would change his horse and proceed, his own horse remaining there for the return journey. Eight miles was considered a sufficient distance to cover before changing horses. In the rainy season the roads were deep in mud and occasionally buffaloes were encountered wallowing in them.

Harold, being the superintendent of a large estate near the main road, had many visitors. He would always ask them to stay for a few days and many accepted with thanks, but on entering the spare bedroom some would suddenly change their minds. I often wondered if the coffin was put there for that purpose!

Harold's brother J . . . lived much further east in the Assam Valley on the south bank of the Brahmaputra River. Once, after a visit to his brother on the north bank, he drove his brother's horse and buggy to the river steamer ghat to catch the steamer which was due to arrive late in the evening. Arriving by the same steamer and getting off at that ghat, was a travelling salesman from a well-known Calcutta tailoring house. On arrival, he asked J . . . if he had seen a bullock cart which had been arranged by the local planters for him to do the rounds of the bungalows in the district.

"No" said J . . . "but you are certainly in luck's way, as it so happens I am leaving the district for good and this buggy and pony are for sale for only 600 rupees. You will be able to tour the whole of Assam in it." "That suits me fine" said the traveller and withdrew from his pocket a bundle of notes from which he paid over the 600 rupees to J . . ., who departed on the steamer for Upper Assam.

The first bungalow the traveller reached happened to be Harold's. The traveller stayed there the night, had his breakfast the next morning and measured Harold for a new suit. The traveller then asked if he could have his horse and buggy brought round to the verandah for him, for he

thought it was time he was leaving. "What!" said Harold, "your buggy and pony, indeed! I like that!"

"Well," said the traveller, "I paid 600 rupees for it at the steamer ghat last night."

We never heard how the brothers settled the transaction with the traveller, as World War I broke out soon afterwards.

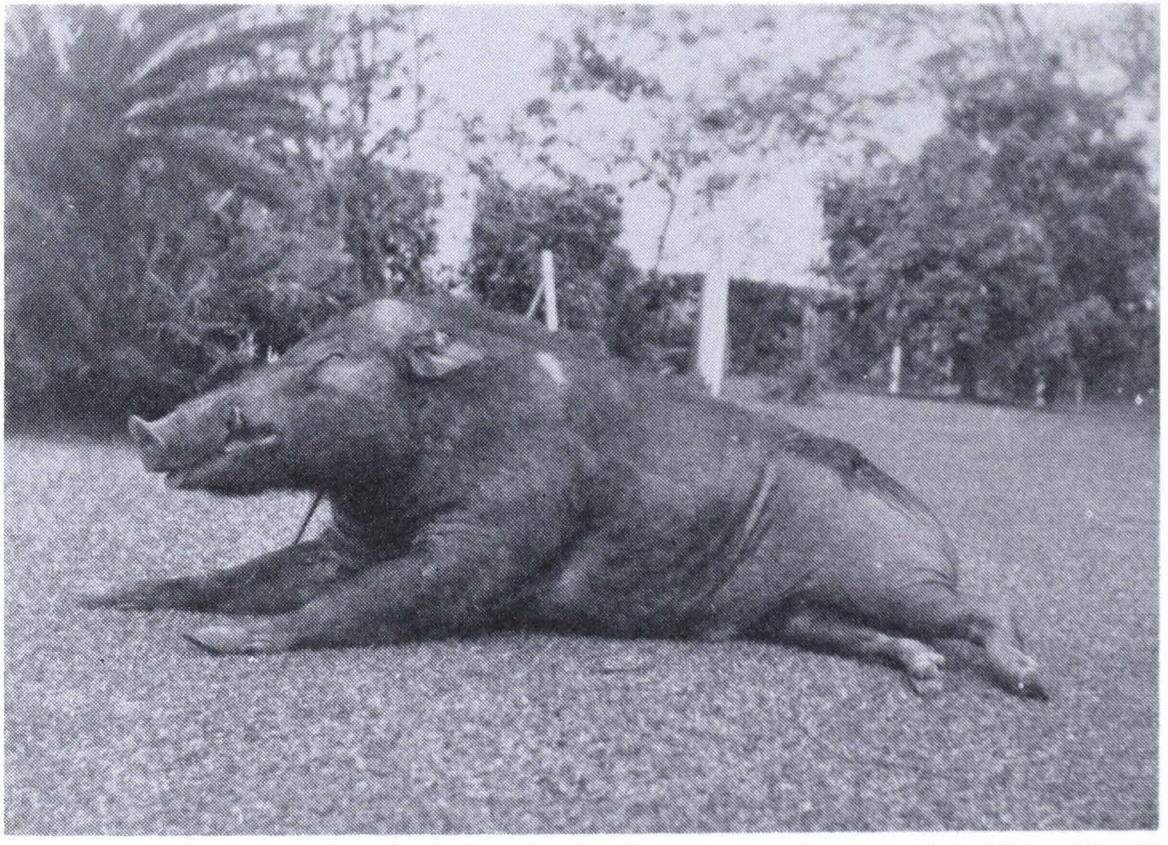
A good idea of Harold's love of practical jokes will be gathered from this story. He had been spending a long weekend with a friend in the Nowgong district, which is on the south bank of the Brahmaputra River. Whilst there, he had learned that a very high Government official would be inspecting the boys' high school at 3 p.m. on the day that he was leaving for home. He thought this over and decided to wear his blue suit and his white Hawkes topee and to visit the school at 2 p.m.

On his entering the school, the boys immediately stood up and sang "God save the King." Harold acted his part and put the boys and master through their paces. He then congratulated the master on the boys' efficiency and said he had great pleasure in giving them two days' holiday to mark his visit. He left, with vociferous cheering from the boys ringing in his ears, and wondering what would happen when the Commissioner of Assam visited the school shortly afterwards and found it closed!

The most cunning and courageous poacher that I have ever known and one who always just managed to evade me when I tried to intercept him, eventually met his death in the depths of the forest, a few years ago under the following circumstances. He had boasted, on a number of occasions previously, that if he ever got me in his gun sights when I was alone, he would shoot me first!

He frequented the forest, even in the wet monsoon season when most humans keep out of it. At this season it rains continuously and millions of leeches abound. They infest the ground and low branches of trees and reach

51. A jungle pig shot near the Borgang River. Motimali stands by the riverside and the Dafla Hills are in the background.



52. A large boar weighing 276 pounds shot near Kettela, 1949.

57. A line of mounted elephant-catchers make for the foothills near camp by the Borgang River. The Dafla Hills are in the background.

outwards hoping to attach themselves to any persons passing by, to suck blood from their veins. They even squeeze themselves through the partly-filled eyelets of a person's boots, in spite of laces, while ordinary socks or puttees cannot keep them out. Only linen stockings are any protection, as the leech cannot get its jaw through them. It is therefore wise to remain on one's shikar elephant when venturing into the jungle at this time of year, during the period from June to October.

This poacher was a very brave man. He often went into the very depths of the forest, miles from human habitation, generally at night and often quite alone. He carried a torch and a gun and used the wild elephant's tracks for ease of movement. The jungle contained many dangerous animals, such as elephants, tigers, leopards and bears, as well as wild boars.

On the occasion on which he met his death, he had shot a female sambar at a salt lick, fully eight miles as the crow flies from the nearest human habitation. By next morning, he was back in his village making arrangements with his close friends to accompany him back to cut up the deer and bring it to the village for sale. He took three men with him and that evening they were on their way back and were nearing the edge of the forest with their heavy loads, when they suddenly saw a huge leopard coming down the elephant track towards them.

The poacher signalled the others to remain behind, dropped the part of the deer he was carrying and crept forward alone. He shot the animal but it managed to crawl into a small but very thick piece of jungle which was covered with entangled creepers. He cautiously followed it, but the leopard was too quick for him. With one swipe of its paw it removed one of the poacher's eyes and inflicted other injuries. His companions rushed to his aid with stout poles, and one of them lost an ear and was severely mauled for his effort. The poacher died a short while afterwards

—and the leopard also. The man who lost an ear recovered eventually, after four months in a tea estate hospital.

Knowing the jungle area in which the lone poacher operated, I can say with certainty that he was a very, very brave man indeed.

Chapter Nine

Jungle Miscellany

Early one morning, along with my mahout, I was on my elephant in a very quiet and secluded area. There were patches of thick, low jungle alternating with areas of ordinary tree forest. Presently the elephant raised its trunk several times, which made us prepared for something. Almost immediately we heard a noise compounded of grunts and gaspings, coming from a thick patch of jungle near a large tree.

We proceeded very cautiously and suddenly we saw a tiger looking as if about to spring at something. My mahout stopped the elephant. The tiger was about two yards from the tree and as it was in the act of springing a wild boar was seen to stand up on its hind legs and lunge at the tiger's stomach. The boar had its hindquarters up against the tree, the bole of which was fluted thus giving it plenty of protection. It was obvious that we had surprised a tiger in the act of attacking a wild boar, but it was also apparent that the brave pig was defending itself vigorously and was giving as good as it was receiving.

We watched the tense drama from a distance of some fifteen or twenty yards, and it went on for about a quarter of an hour. Each time the tiger leapt at the boar the latter stood up on its hind legs and met the tiger with its wicked looking tushes. After some of the springs and lunges, pieces of tiger-fur were to be observed floating to the ground! A small sapling in front of the boar gave it added protection and the tiger kept striking this in its springs. The tiger was in an extremely exhausted condition and its gasps were

becoming louder and louder, indicating that the fight had been going on for some time.

Suddenly both animals stopped fighting, having obviously become aware of our presence, and after a second both walked off in opposite directions. What was so striking, however, was the quiet manner in which the boar moved off, as compared to the tiger which was frightened by our presence. The tiger was about three-quarters-grown but the boar was a massive animal and obviously an experienced old stager. Still, I think that if the tree had not been at hand the tiger would have got its meat!

A very close friend of mine at that time, a Mr Smith, wrote and asked me if I would initiate him into the gentle art of fishing. He had not fished before and was more than keen to learn. I agreed to take him up the river to some good pools. I met him at the end of the car track on my large makhna elephant and thinking that we would not see anything to worry us on the way up the river to the first decent pool, I persuaded him against his wish to sit immediately behind the mahout. He had not been in such wild looking country before and he felt that I should be sitting behind the mahout.

We proceeded along the river-bank with elephant grass some fifteen feet high on the left of us. After going for two miles my friend said he could hear something in the grass and that the noise seemed to be proceeding in the same direction. But I could hear nothing unusual and told him that I thought the fairly strong wind which was blowing at the time was causing the elephant grass to make a rustling noise. After going for a little while longer, my friend said that he was certain some animal was keeping level with us and as I could see that he was becoming agitated I spoke to the mahout and asked him if he could hear anything. He listened and then nodded his head, pointing in the direction in which my friend had said he had heard the noise.

A little further on, the river took an abrupt turn to the

left. Approximately fifty yards before reaching that corner, an enormous tusker elephant appeared in front of us. The mahout recognised it at once as the one that had chased him on those three previous occasions when he was endeavouring to cut that path for me and as the same tusker which had killed the elephant catcher some two months before.

Having my friend between me and the mahout was not the best position from which to control the situation, particularly as I could see that the tusker meant business—it was curling up its trunk and extending its ears, preparatory to charging. However, there was no time to change places. It came at us full blast and my makhna stood like the rock of Gibralter. I let the tusker come to about forty yards, then fired. Down it went, then picked itself up again, veered away and disappeared into the high grass before I could get in a second sure shot. I then changed places with my friend, who had lost his usual rosy colour. My mahout, however, had his usual smile on his face.

We followed the elephant's track in that dense, fifteen foot grass for two hours but it had had all the fight knocked out of it and was making towards the hills as fast as it could go, so we gave up the chase. I decided to send my two elephants the next day to search for the wounded animal and gave instructions to the mahout to take food sufficient for four days. However, as things turned out, it rained heavily that night and the tracks were lost. We then proceeded to fish, so as not to disappoint my friend and I was indeed pleased to see him catch his first fish ever, a four pound boka, on a Durrant's Yellow Spider.

A month or so after this, my mahout and I were proceeding up another river, which ran parallel to the one already mentioned and only four miles to the west of it. A boar came out of the forest just in front of us and started to swim across the river, making for the opposite side. Now wild pork to my mahout was like an ice cream to a child. He turned the elephant down to the river in a flash, and

tried his best to get to the other side before the boar, to give me a sporting shot, but the old boar made it first and was away, giving us no chance.

As I had got to the other side of the river, I decided to visit a grove of *nahor* or iron-wood trees, where it was usual to see pigs. They would collect there to eat the *nahor* tree fruit, which are something like walnuts with oily seeds, in a similar way that pigs in England collect under oak trees to eat acorns. After proceeding along the bank of the river for about half a mile, we suddenly saw a large tusker elephant standing in the open. My mahout turned and whispered that it resembled the bad tusker which had previously chased him and which had killed the elephant-catcher and had come at us when I was taking my friend to fish.

My elephant and the wild one were exchanging challenges to battle—both were raising their trunks to their full length. It was clear that there was going to be trouble. The tusker came towards us and the mahout confirmed that it was the bad tusker. On came the tusker and when about fifty yards off it curled up its trunk, spread its ears wide and charged. It crumpled up at my first shot—stone dead!

After waiting for a few minutes to make quite certain, I dismounted to inspect the brute. First to be seen was the mark of a kukri cut on its tusk, made by the unfortunate elephant catcher just before he was killed, and then the old bullet wound of mine which was approximately four inches too high, having met with the solid bone of its skull.

That was my thirty-ninth elephant over a period of some forty-five years.

When the elephant-catching operations known as *mela shikar* were in progress, I naturally kept out of the forest as much as I could, until the quota of young elephants had been caught. I stuck to the rivers and fished and never shot inside the forest, so as not to disturb the herds of elephants. It was interesting to note, however, that on occasions when

I shot a jungle fowl for the pot in areas where elephant-catching operations were not in progress I often came upon elephants only a couple of hundred yards away, quite undisturbed by the shot. The reason for this is that elephants reach up and pull down quite large branches which break off, making a loud noise resembling a shot from a gun. They are therefore not disturbed by one or two shots but they surely would be if shots were fired frequently. No guns are allowed during mela shikar.

The mela shikar method is now the chief and cheapest way of catching young elephants. However, it is very disturbing to other wild animals and winged game. Should the elephant-catchers fail to throw the rope noose over the head of the young elephants, when in the herd and the latter takes fright, the catchers go "all out" chasing them until the youngsters are exhausted.

On one occasion, several years ago, I was looking down on to the bed of the river some three hundred yards from my camp, when I saw a tiger come out of the forest and bound across it. A few minutes afterwards, three sambar deer followed, and those by some twenty mithan or so. In a few minutes after they had galloped across the river, they were followed by some thirty elephants with babies, and following them were six elephant-catchers proceeding as fast as possible after the herd.

As time goes on and not so long after the season commences, the herds of elephants become very alert and the catchers have great difficulty in approaching the elephants. Consequently this chasing grows and grows, as the season proceeds. One constantly hears adult elephants trumpeting and babies screaming as they are chased through the dense jungle by the would-be catchers. Later on in the season, the herds become so frightened that they keep in the lower foothills during the daytime and come out on the flat to feed when it becomes dark, returning to the hills at daybreak next morning.

The elephant-catchers do not enter the foothills, as it would be dangerous to their own lives to catch a baby on such slopes. The catchers camp for the night in close proximity to the hills and in the very early morning endeavour to intercept the herds returning to the hills. All this has a most disturbing influence on other animals, especially deer, mithan and wild pigs, all remaining in the foothills soon after elephant-catching operations commence. Further, the jungle fowl, pheasants and partridges also remain in the hills as droppings from the wild animals, especially elephants, become a home for various beetles and insects and naturally the winged game remain in those areas to feed.

Mela shikar is carried out usually by a pair of elephants each with their mahouts and a spare man. These spare men carry a small iron spike or a piece of sharpened bamboo. This is to make the koonkies or tame elephants go all out in order to run the young elephants down. Elephant catchers always prefer to lassoo the youngster while quietly feeding with the herd, rather than have the dangerous job of dashing after them through festoons of creepers until the youngsters are run to a standstill.

The noose used to lassoo the elephant has to be tied in position with another small rope after the elephant has been noosed so that the animal is not strangled in its struggles. After the lassooing there is violent struggling and screaming and very often the mother comes back and tries to bite through the rope. This is where the second elephant comes to the assistance of the first and helps to keep the mother off until the koonkies move away with the youngster and further ropes are attached to make it more secure.

It is then taken to a *peel khana* or headquarters of the catchers, which is often away from the forest itself but sited near a river and where plenty of suitable natural green food is available. It takes about six weeks' training, which is carried out with the aid of tame elephants to which the captive is roped, before it is sufficiently broken

in for a man to be able to ride it down to the river. Part of the secret of successfully training an elephant, so as to enable it to survive in captivity, is plenty of food and kindness. After they have been more or less fully trained, the elephants are taken away by their buyers, who may be local people or professional elephant dealers from Bihar and Bengal. The Government receives a "royalty" on each elephant captured, which amounts to about £50, and an elephant may sell for £250 when it is still about five feet in height. Strangly enough young elephants, and females at that, fetch the best prices.

Khedda operations entail the building of a very strong, large pen or stockade which has a wide entrance facing a main elephant-path and, as a rule, near a salt-lick which they regularly visit. The gate is very strongly made and in five stockades which I saw between 1918 and 1930, the gate was suspended by a strong creeper and pulled high up above the entrance. The wild elephants are driven for long distances very gradually, so as not to cause a stampede. Men on foot, sometimes on elephants, are used to drive the wild elephants towards the stockade with the minimum of noise and disturbance and it is only at the end, when the herd is rushed into the stockade in a final drive, that pandemonium is let loose. As the elephants commence to get near the stockade area, a man takes up his position on the platform over the gate and cuts the creeper-rope with his bill-hook, when they are in. This is a responsible task. Around the inside of the stockade, except naturally at the entrance, a five foot wide ditch is sometimes made to keep elephants from pushing against the walls. In some stockades, around and outside the walls, a platform is erected to enable men armed with spears to fight off the attempts of the elephants to break out. The stockade has naturally to be made very strongly and the construction has several very ingenious features, complete trunks of trees being lashed together with cane, and no nails or iron materials whatsoever are used.

A day or two after the capturing has been effected, tame elephants enter the stockade with their mahouts armed with nooses, which are cast over the captives' heads. The wild animals are lashed to the sides of the tame elephants and brought out one at a time and tethered to trees in suitable places, near water and fodder. They are then marched to the *peel khana* where training commences.

The khedda method of catching elephants is very much less in evidence now as compared with some twenty-five years ago. The reason for this is the very much higher costs for labour that has to be employed and the uncertainty regarding the number of elephants that will be caught in this way. It is certainly a bit of a gamble, as sometimes many unwanted elephants get driven into these stockades, such as fully grown tuskers, too difficult of capture because of their size, and old elephants which are unsaleable. That is why the mela shikar method, by which only young elephants are captured, is more greatly favoured, apart from the lower investment required.

I saw some thirty-one elephants captured in a stockade some years ago and that might be considered a large catch. The average catch is generally ten to fifteen elephants. All the thirty-one elephants, however, were not of sufficient value to keep and train, and five were let loose, being too old.

During all my years in India I developed a genuine fondness for elephants and among all animals they became my favourites. I never shot an elephant except in cases when it was necessary, for either the protection of life, or the villager's life-sustaining crops, or for humanitarian reasons. It was with some sadness therefore that I sold my elephants to the Government during the period of national emergency when the Chinese invaded Assam and forced their way through the areas in which I camped. This came about in the following way.

At about 4 p.m. one evening during the 1952-53 cold weather season of Assam I had a special message delivered

to me telling me to proceed to Tezpur immediately as the Chinese were on their way down to the tea areas. Planes would be at Tezpur waiting to take Europeans to Calcutta. I travelled about eighty miles during the night in my car and got into a plane waiting there at the airport. On the way down to Tezpur I could hear the firing of guns by the Indian and Chinese troops. I also passed hundreds of native people all moving towards Tezpur town and the road was littered with sandals that came off their feet as they were running away. The next morning, on reaching Calcutta, word had reached our office there that the Chinese had turned around and were off back to China! I had to wait three days to get back to Tezpur because of the number of garden managers and their wives who were anxious to return to their respective bungalows there.

The story of the Chinese entry into India is now well known to all as, too, is that of the continual fighting over boundaries, and these matters greatly affected those who resided in the sub-Himalayan regions. In my fifty years in Assam I saw many changes, the once isolated areas where I camped and fished becoming gradually ever smaller and its wild life diminishing, the survivors pushed back to the forested areas remaining, as man moved in, in the name of progress.

In 1963, when the time finally came to say goodbye to India and the Assam jungle I loved and where I had spent so many happy years of my life it was a wrench which I felt very deeply. In my retirement in New Zealand, however, and my occasional stays in Australia, I have many fond memories to cherish.

Pen Portrait

By Patrick Stracey, late Chief Conservator of Forests, Assam, India.

Frank Nicholls, as I knew him in Assam, was a genial, silver-haired man of seventy odd years with a stout body which had not bulged very much with the passing of time, strong arms with firm, broad-fingered hands, and a pair of large, twinkling blue eyes which peered out of a fresh face faintly marked in the cheeks with a tracery of veins. His shrewd glance summed up the stranger and one could sense the struggle that went on between the conservative, old-school Englishman and the warm, human personality which was the real man. With friends he was much more relaxed and you would soon catch his rather impish, wide smile which often broke into a laugh as he narrated a story, and feel the warmth of his large palm on your arm as he leaned forward to emphasise a point. His stories were not about a pretty girl or the latest scandal—unless the latter was of some "crime" against wild life! They were mostly about something he had seen in the jungle and they were invariably spiced with that touch of wonderment which carried the listener along with him, or of the humour and fun in the situation.

I first met him more than thirty years ago when I went to the north bank of the Brahmaputra as a young khedda officer, organising my first independent elephant-catching operations in his district. He put me up for the night and in the course of the next few months we saw much of each

other whenever I went up to the Dikal stockade. His large, rambling bungalow with the polished, slippery floors and its staff of well drilled servants is still in my mind's eye, as is the talking mynah which used to call *"mali"!* in a falsetto imitation of its master. I suppose there was something mutual in our interests which drew us together, although I did not dream that elephant-catching, on which I was engaged for five years and which laid the enduring foundation of my interest in these animals, would become his *bete noir!*

In the years that have passed I have learnt to put up with his complaints and tirades against this unavoidable cruelty towards a wonderful animal, while agreeing heartily with him on the need to run it strictly according to the rules and established procedure of the old departmental *kheddas*. For, whether soft-hearted persons like it or not, elephants have to be captured by various means and must be put through the vigorous training to fit them to serve man—though in all this and in the concomitant disturbance to the other denizens of the jungle, there should be the minimum force. In all this, being an "ex-bureaucrat" I can be forgiven if I view things somewhat differently but our mutuality of interest and sentiment is there. I can see quite clearly that an attitude of *laissez faire* in regard to wild life and the problems of its survival in a modern and rapidly changing world will not achieve anything. Rather must we have the burning determination, the singleness of purpose, the almost one-track mind of a Frank Nicholls.

A man is remembered best by his personality and recalled most readily through his letters—and for those who have received letters over the years from Frank Nicholls it is not difficult to bring him to life. I have been privileged to receive his letters on and off for years and the best tribute I can pay to them and to the man who wrote them, is that they are not such as can be destroyed. I have a bundle of them before me as I pen these words and I have just finished glancing through some of them. They are

letters which immediately make you chuckle and sometimes laugh, until the tears run down. The writing is strong and thick, the letters large and open, like the man. Every sentence is to the point, with a simple directness so characteristic of the stories he has here written. Fifty years in Assam have left their imprint on him in this, the written language he uses to his intimate friends who know him and knew his surroundings, as nothing else has done. With touches of ribaldry of a harmless nature, every paragraph is larded with coolie *bat*, the jargon of the tea gardens—an extraordinary mixture of Bengali, Assamese, Hindi and the lingo of the particular race to which the man belongs, whether Santhal, Uraon, Munda or Oriya—words underlined and a free sprinkling of exclamation marks, sometimes double and treble parentheses, underlinings, and such punctuation. The sentences hit you with an aptness and vigour which would be completely missing in a conventionally worded Englishman's letter and leaves one breathless, often with laughter. The effect is like someone talking to you in the same room.

I cannot resist the temptation to reproduce a typical sample, with tactful omissions where necessary, of course.

"You make me feel old—you speak as if 1934 was a long, long time ago—I left England for Harchurah at the end of 1911!! The forest that *was* between the Borgang and Dikal—say roughly one and a half miles from the foothills—is completely ruined. Huge, wide roads all over the place, where trees—even *uriam* trees, seeds so sought after by *greeners*—have all been cut down, and many other roads to bring out cane, and used over weekends by babus in jeeps at night with torches and guns—*such is progress* . . . all that area held the finest lot of sambar and mithan anywhere—*now dead!*

"Now for something you have probably not heard about before in *your life!!* I went to Kettela from my camp—three miles up Dikal River—and I stayed the night at Kettela bungalow whilst Jippa with a female elephant (caught

at the same time as the late Motimali, which belonged to Hazarika of L'himpur) proceeded to Kettela from the stockade. I was out for a "makhna" that had played havoc with the manager's malibaris, labour lines and tea nurseries. It had left the area and after searching altogether nine hours over two days I gave it up. Jippa was on his way down that straight road from Kettela to Rungaghur when he saw a pal of his, Tetra Kalahandi—it was 2 p.m., temperature about 90°, 12 April!!

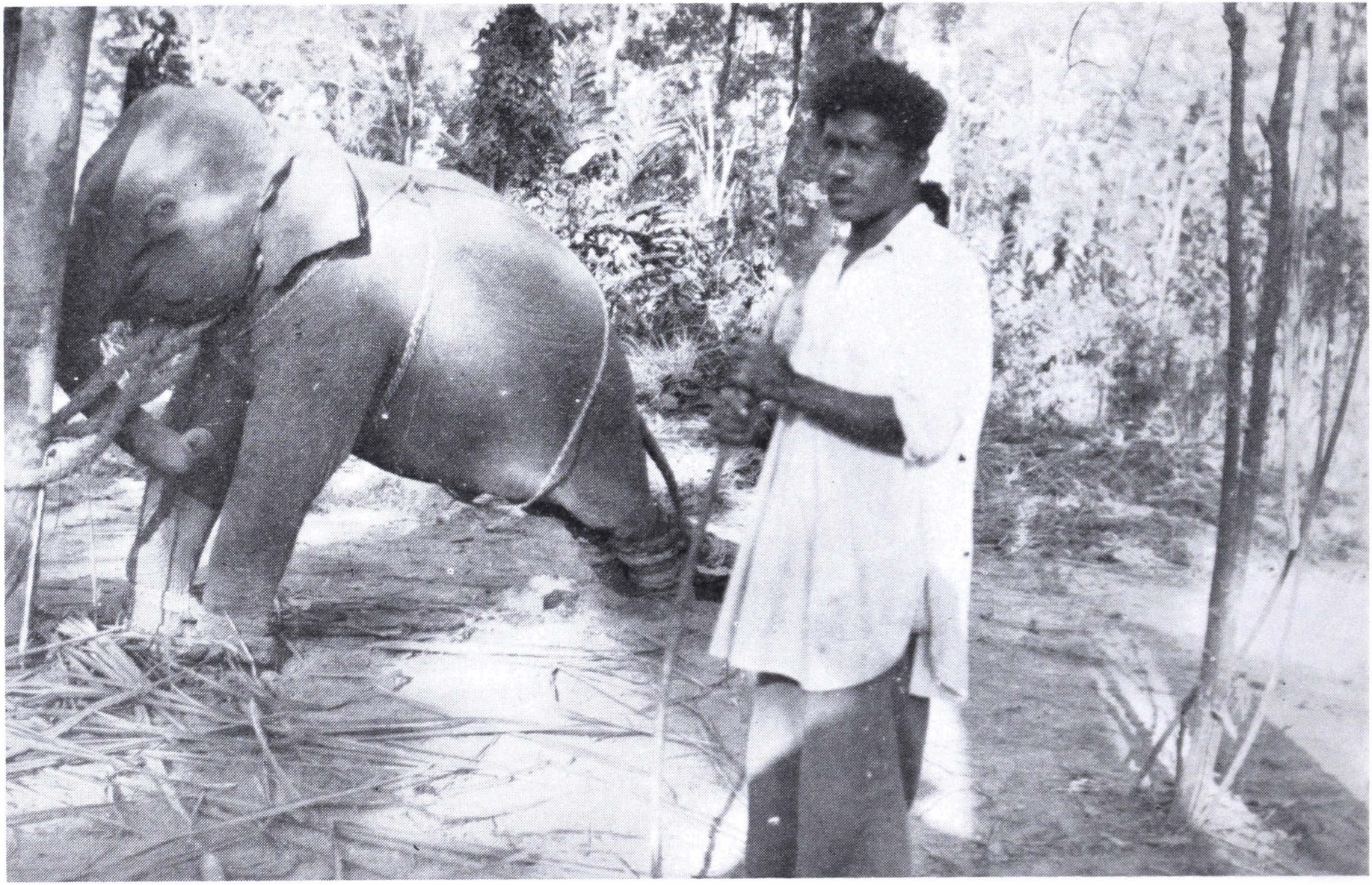
"Tetra says "must have a drink"—Jippa has never been known to say "No"!!!—Just as he was arriving at Rungaghur and fortunately against some Munda houses, Jippa fell from the elephant—she picked or *rather* threw him up—she is *not* gentle—down Jippa came again as dead, up he went again, and down again!!! The Mundas seeing this pulled Jippa away and sent for his son at Rungaghur office, being a pay day and about 3 p.m.!! A man then cut down a banana tree and kept her (the elephant) quiet! Jippa had three broken front teeth and a nose like a piece of *raw beef!!!!* He says—that *sala* Tetra at Kettela put "*beesh*" (poison) into that drink he is certain!! Was off work two weeks!! . . ."

I wish I could include more of his utterances, for that is what they are really, *utterances on paper* particularly the ones which reveal his deep frustrations over the threat to his beloved wild life in the area which he had appropriated as his special charge. The simple language, whether of his letter or of his more contrived writing, is that of the man himself. There are no pretensions or frills, no detailed descriptions designed to excite or intrigue. It is like the man's obvious shooting prowess—solid and straight. Nobody is going to pretend that he was not once, like so many of his generation and avocation, a keen shikari for the sake of the sport it offered. We are not all born as conservationists and protectors of wild life—it comes in the course of time, to most of us. And if, as in the case of every retired sportsman who has found himself in a similar posi-

tion, there is a tendency to deny to the succeeding generation, or even to the next man, the unrestricted enjoyment of the right to kill that was once his, is that not but natural and a wise dispensation of providence?

I tried to analyse the man's psyche, in the background and context of the task which he set himself—that of protecting an area, some ten miles by twenty, from the ravages of twentieth century greed for exploitation. It was not as if he was a Raphael Matta, the friend of the elephants whom Romain Gary has romanticised in his moving book "The Roots of Heaven". Frank Nicholls had his feet too solidly planted on the ground for that. Nor was he of the stuff which makes of an elephant, or of a bison, the symbol of Nature which man is destroying. This complete absorption in a particular part of the world which he had known for almost fifty years and which, in spite of a few trips here and there, he rarely ever left, was intriguing. Most wild life men have the itch to see other places and varieties of animals and birds, once they have been bitten by the particular bug. But even in a small country like Assam he did not move around very much—at least "wild life speaking". True he had been to Africa, where he had seen the magnificent herds of wildebeest raising the dust but in Assam he had not even seen Kaziranga. And in the wild life circles of this tea-planting State this was something which was almost unheard of! I remember how difficult it was, some years ago, for me to persuade him to visit Kaziranga—it was only because as head of the Forest Department that I had promised to show him round that he agreed to come. Unfortunately, some very urgent matter cropped up just at that moment which prevented me from leaving my headquarters and I had to send a telegram to say that I could not join him. I urged him to go ahead and make use of the arrangements I had made for our visit, but he did not take me up. Later he always, half jokingly, put down his failure to visit Kaziranga to *me* but I think he was secretly a little relieved. He did go two years later.

58. Young elephants photographed soon after capture and being brought down the Dikal River.



Nobody has to search for something different, or perhaps as deep. I do not know what it was that influenced a man like him, so that he became completely absorbed and involved in the problems connected with an area which to him, after nearly fifty years of knowing it, must have been as familiar as one's own backyard. For that was the case with Frank Nicholls, take it or leave it! It was both a strength and a weakness, this utter absorption. Did it have its roots in the instinctive turning of a certain type of planter to the wilderness out of which has garden was once hacked? I have seen a lot of this, one way or the other, in the years that I lived in Assam. During the great depression of the early 1930s, when the bottom dropped out of the tea market and planters were sacked right and left, many being left stranded without repatriation, I saw many of them make for the jungle. In grass bashas they weathered the storm. Some never came back into tea. With others the jungle life was a deliberate choice—"going native", is the expression I suppose. But Frank Nicholls did neither—he completed a distinguished career in tea and he retained his links with the world outside.

Was it then some deep-seated desire to make up for what persons like him have done to wild life in India and in this particular part of the world? I know it is the usual thing to blame "the natives" for the state in which India's wild life finds itself today. "Much more damage is done by a single villager armed with an old muzzle loader than a dozen legitimate sportsmen, old chap!" is the type of opinion one has got so used to hearing. True to a point and of today but except in the tribal areas, where animals have been hunted to extinction by meat-hungry populations, the wild life of India would not have taken such a beating had not the foreigner come with his guns and then his rifles and his greed for "expansion". What of the planter of the Dooars who in 1876 shot at a hundred rhinoceros in a day and killed five? What of F. B. Simson who recorded that he had killed over five thousand tigers? To go

further afield and farther west, what of the cavalry officer who shot eighty lions and another who shot fourteen lions in one day, in Kathiawar? Was it the revulsion of the psyche towards all this killing of the past? Or was it something much more simple than that—a man's realisation that he had found something, a way of life which suited him and in which he was happy, and he was determined that he would not do anything else?

It was a situation of his own making, mind you, for he could have retired like his friends to his native country where, although he might have suffered with rheumatism and from the cold, he would have been spared the sight of his beloved wilderness being steadily whittled down, and its privacy being further and further breached in the name of progress. There must have been much that was galling for those of the pre-independence Britishers who stayed on in India, some for this reason and others for that, even though the sunshine and the life was there to drug their sensibilities and make them forget their past life, but Frank Nicholls did not show it. In fact, he gave every evidence of enjoying the Indian scene and particularly his own little niche in it. The respect and even affection which he attracted, while attaching to most Britishers in India, seemed somehow to be peculiarly his. He was part of the past and yet had somehow succeeded in detaching himself from his past.

I think nature and wild life did that for him, commencing with a gradual withdrawal from the routine of golf and tennis and club evenings to, first of all, the self-immurements each weekend in his forest camps and finally, after retirement, to complete withdrawal from all such trivia. Inevitably, but I think somewhat to Frank's naive surprise, this withdrawal from man-made society to communing with nature had in turn meant a deepening of the awareness of wild life around him. No casual observations and slap-dash conclusion for him any more, as he rather proudly gave you to understand. Living alone in a grass

basha by the side of a stream, which debouched from the hills only a few miles further up and well away from everything, waking and sleeping with the birds, he re-discovered nature. "Did you ever see the speckled kingfisher and do you know that it feeds its offspring on the wing, as it hovers over the pool?" is the type of question he was likely to ask you in those days. What could you answer in the presence of those shining eyes? His naive pleasure in rediscovering nature was also childlike in its approach, and was infectious. Other men can rave over minute though beautiful flowers, yet others like to hear the names of plants roll of their tongues—with him it was animals, birds and fish,—*life!* The jungle was but the setting for this moving panorama, where everything pleased and only man was vile.

Basically a reserved man, he was yet ready to meet anybody whom you took up to introduce. His conversation might have been considered by some as rather restricted in range and it was not long before he was off on his favourite hobby horse—at least with his cronies. His is a famous name in Assam tea and there are few who have not heard of him and who do not know his family, particularly among the older generation. Names of men and gardens rolled out easily and as one listened one received the impression of a solid and successful tea-man, sitting slap in the middle of his environment. The course of his personal life has followed that of many of the old-timers in tea, with this stipulation—that there has been no faltering, no swerving.

Completely fit physically, when I knew him in Assam, he yet made sure that nothing interfered with his daily routine which had given him that ruddy health, the envy of many men younger than himself. No extraneous concerns and worries were allowed to intrude on his serenity of mind and to tax his nerves. His world was circumscribed by his favourite papers, including the *Times Weekly* from home, his morning walk, his thrice weekly visit to the

town when he was spending the summer in Upper Shillong, when he spent his time in the club while his servant shopped, and by his periodical visits to the old country.

His cold weather camps were the one thing that I believe Frank Nicholls lived for and eagerly awaited each year. His routine was the same and I suppose did not waver, ever since he retired and made it a practice to spend nearly six months out of the twelve in camp, near his old tea gardens where he had spent fifty years. Down to the plains by the middle of October and into a tented camp until his elephants arrived and his grass *bashas*, the construction of which he supervised himself, were up then, the essential furniture and accessories in, he moved into the hut (I suppose you would call it that) which was his home for the next five months or more. With his Ford wagonette based some miles away and his elephants to carry him to and fro over the short stretch of unmotorable country which led to his camp; his daily *dak wallah*, whose load of mail and newspapers must have been the highlight of each day, moving steadily up and down between the camp and post office, with friendly and helpful tea planters, many of whom were *chokras* under him and who found it easy to be nice to the big man with all those home connections, and last but not least the jungle and its inhabitants literally at his door-step, ready to be observed from the back of an elephant in the dewy freshness of a winter morning, when they were not showing themselves of their own accord right out in the open—what more could a man of his temperament and way of life have demanded?

It was the way of life of many planters before him. I remember Erskine Scott who used to come out every cold weather to his camp at Tiger Flat, by the side of the Belsiri River and the path down which the Dalai Lama entered the plains of Assam not many years ago on his flight from Tibet. Scott literally died, of neglected dysentery, in the forest and we very nearly buried him in his beloved camp, where the elephants which used to trouble

him would no doubt have sniffed at and walked over his grave. There was Errol Grey, doyen of elephant-catchers, who, having retired from the business before the 1930s, would come out each winter to the Harmatti, scene of so many elephant training depots when he was cleaning up North Lakhimpur of elephants. He would plant his cold weather vegetables as soon as he arrived and watch them grow, surrounded by the people he knew so well and visited each morning and evening by his few remaining *koonkies,* which he resolutely refused to sell and which he maintained to the end. They lived this sort of life for one reason or the other: I even heard it whispered of one veteran in the early years of my service that he came back for the opium which he could not live without!

With Frank Nicholls it was the jungle and its peace, the wild life and their ways, which called him back—called him in spite of a growing pessimism and frustration over the state of affairs in regard to his beloved wild life. He did not attend Wild Life Week celebrations and the like in those days for the simple reason that he considered them a lot of humbug. This "preaching from the hill-tops" as he called it was, in his opinion, useless or very nearly so. "Elephants galore used in the procession on Wild Life Day and then, after a few weeks, being used for shooting at deer, mithan, and other animals—right, left and centre!" The new movements with their *Weeks and Days* and their implied belief in the eventual success of self-conviction were, to people like him, merely self-delusion. Again, what is one to say in the face of this attitude, which stemmed from such deep despair as to compel attention and respect? Men of his generation knew but one way of administering a country and its people and it was too late for an old dog to learn such new tricks.

Tea planters in Assam speak the most weird form of Hindusthani, the basic *lingua franca* of northern India. This is because their labourers are drawn from many different parts of India and the fact that in course of time a

special sort of dialect has come to be spoken on the tea gardens, known as *coolie bat!* It is spoken with a certain inflection of the voice and a ready repetitiveness which the foreigner tries his best to imitate. To hear Frank Nicholls talk to his men and staff always fascinated me. Still more fascinating was the effect of his attempts at conversing with strange *bhadralog*, whose knowledge of English he did not trust sufficiently for a conversation in that language. But best of all is his ability to almost completely translate his speaking manner into his written language. His paragraphs are interjected with coolie words, slang and idiom as are his sentences punctuated with parentheses, exclamation marks and the like—the whole producing an effect on the eye which in no time brings on a fit of chuckling. The "foreign matter", if I may put it that way, in his letters is so aptly allusive and well timed that it adds immeasurably to the savour of the communication, at any rate to the initiated.

But there is yet more. It is the man's gift of graphically telling a story in a manner which unerringly makes the picture stand out in the mind's eye of the listener. This is because he throws himself so heartily into the incident he is narrating, reliving it again with an ease which comes to only the born raconteur. In this terrific ability to tell a story Frank Nicholls uses all his powers of mimicry of men, animals and birds. The result is something which compels grown men and children alike to sit rapt with fascination and in the end explode in laughter! No reputation for traditional British reserve is here allowed to ruin a story—in fact, many of his admirers in this particular field are convinced that Frank would be a great success on television. The effect of his heavy frame eagerly thrust forward, his large sparkling blue eyes, the engaging grin breaking occasionally into a laugh at the effect of his story on himself, the short sentences and simple words sometimes repeated in stacatto, as are the realistic animal or bird noises he repro-

duces to "illustrate" his story, would both startle and delight wider audiences. His art of mimicry is superb, particularly in regard to the animals and birds he knows.

But deeply ingrained in the man is a pride of position and of family, coupled with an essential modesty and aversion to anything smacking of pretension or pose. Only one thing really interests or moves him—and that is the integrity of the area which he guarded, as a virtual sanctuary for wild life, for nearly fifty years. Men like Frank Nicholls living close to their environment, ears to the ground, friend and confidant of half the neighbourhood, must know what they are talking about. They must feel as if their words beat, like the leaves carried by wind, against closed windows.

In recent years the process of penetration has become more general and the tempo of progress has been stepped up, with the more intensive development of the frontier areas. "There are about twenty sawyers and sixty cane-cutters nearby. Lorries entering the jungle at night to take these things away.—For thirty years the area between the Dikal and the Borgang was quiet and in 1930 I remember so vividly how I took two ladies one morning on the *hathi* and saw a mixture of mithan and sambar together—at least seven sambar and about fifteen mithan. That area—may be known to you and as Tengabari—always contained some animals or a crowd of *jungli murghis* (jungle fowl). One could always take a friend, knowing that you would surely see something. Well, last cold weather there were at least seventy-five men and lorries, the latter grinding and groaning away till 10 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays and the tree-cutters chanting away until midnight. These tracks made by the lorries leave a permanent way more or less, for "our friends" who own jeeps!

"Since this lot have arrived some of their men are using heavily weighted nets to catch fish. Heaps of little stones brought out by their nets tell the tale and I personally saw one large net drying on the roof of one of the staff there.

Three days ago I had been fishing a mile or so up the river and coming down about 4 p.m. I came on to two men coming from the direction of these new buildings, with nine large "*kokas*" which they put into the rapids—one of them a man could about crawl into!! They refused to say who the "*kokas*" belonged to, but I told them where to go, seeing that I pay eighty rupees a season to the fishing association . . .!

"I came on to some hill men making a huge, long koka in the Dikal River—some thirty yards long! I asked them what they were doing and who gave them permission to make this *enormous trap*—some twenty men, two weeks apparently.—"Babu pass diya"—which he showed me—a small piece of paper—freshly written on—in the vernacular. I went straight over to the camp and he said "pass given for cutting cane!!"—With miles and miles of hills and with cane everywhere—why should they ask for a pass to cut cane?!

"The other day I heard a shot in the direction of the salt licks which is as already stated three-quarters of a mile, as the crow flies, from the new camp.

"Five days afterwards, I was on a "gooming around" trip and came on to a dead bull mithan, with a bullet (lethal) mark behind the shoulder. I found the animal in the forest reserve area due EAST of that salt lick! Next morning, I sent Jippa on the elephant (in case somebody might have tracked it up)—he came on two tigers, eating the mithan!

"The peon fellow I have seen with a gun at the camp site. It makes me very suspicious, as the man in charge asked me for cartridges last cold weather. It strikes me that what is wanted is some senior overseer to keep an eye on these beautiful areas on the border.

"Elephant-catching operations are on again this year in my area—second year running! Why can't they rest them, like the old days?

"Three mornings ago—when up at my camp site, who should pass by but the . . . and the . . . (two native poach-

ers). They were on elephants and had two guns. On seeing me they said they were going up to the area near the "poong" to see the boundary!

"I am a much depressed man to see all this going on after watching the Borgang-Boroi area for so many years. I was able to do this on weekends having my elephants—and since 1952 I have camped the whole cold weather as you know—that is, after my retirement.

"*Some fifteen years* ago in the forest alongside the *Boroi* River I came on to three dead mithan—they had died of rinderpest. The village buffaloes were dying daily of it too—the latter grazed inside the forests—I reported it to the Political Officer who sent up some of his men in a truck and warned the villages—something like this might happen up the Borgang River area!"

Glossary

Ankus	An iron prong used as a spur and control of elephants.
Ayah	Children's nurse or lady's maid.
Babu	An educated Indian, usually clerk.
Bari	A plantation.
Bheel	A swamp or muddy pool.
Beesh	Poison.
Bajra	A grain (millet).
Basha	House, grass hut.
Bāt	Language.
Bhadralog	Gentlemen.
Chung	An elevated bamboo platform.
Cheetal	Spotted deer.
Chowkidar	Watchman.
Chokras	Young boys.
Dafla	A hill tribesman of Assam.
Dundi, Dandi	Path.
Dak	Post.
Gonesh	One-tusked male elephant.
Ghat	A landing place on a river-bank.
Gayal	Domesticated cross-bred bison.
Grasscutter	A cutter of green food for elephants.
Greeners	Green Pigeons—several varieties.
Hoolock	Indian gibbon, Hylobates hoolock.

Hathi	Elephant.
Howa	Wind.
Hoogra deer	Hog deer.
Kabuli	A man from Kabul, in India mainly a money-lender.
Khedda shikar	A method of catching elephants in stockades.
Koonkies	Tame elephants used in elephant-catching.
Kukri	A curved knife, favoured by Nepalis.
Koka	Fish trap, a long bamboo basket.
Machan	A platform in a tree for a shikari.
Mahout	An elephant driver.
Makhna	Male elephant with *tush* instead of *tusk*.
Mela shikar	A method of catching elephants by noosing with a thick rope lassoo.
Mikir Miri	Tribesmen of Assam.
Munda	Tribesman of Bihar.
Mali	Gardener.
Maidan	Public waste-land.
Mithan	Bison (Assam).
Murghi	Fowl.
Nala	Ravine.
Nepali	A man from Nepal.
Nahor	Iron-wood, Messua ferrea.
Oraon, Uraon	Tribesman of Bihar.
Oriya	A man of Orissa.
Paddy	Unhusked rice.
Pheel khana	Place where elephants are stabled.
Pug mark	Footprint (carnivora).
Poong	Salt lick.

Roti	Bread.
Sahib	An educated person usually European.
Sambar	A variety of deer.
Syce	A native groom.
Sal	A variety of fish.
Sala	Literally brother-in-law; used in abuse.
Shikar	Hunting.
Shikari	Hunter.
Shabash	Well done!
Tarapat	Elephant grass.
Tenga, outenga	Dillenia Indica, elephant-apple.
Uriam	Bischofia javanica.
Wallah	Man.
Zamindar	Land owner.

SKETCH MAP OF THE BISHNATH DISTRICT

Scale — 8.645 Miles to 1 inch