

TRAVELS AND ADVENTURES
IN THE
PROVINCE OF ASSAM,
DURING A RESIDENCE OF FOURTEEN YEARS.

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CHAPTER II.

Starting of the expedition—An extraordinary shot—Difficulty of progression—A visit to Tooleeram Senaputtee—Description of his territory—His life and adventures—Internal feuds—The Jummoonah rapids—The ruined city of Dheemahpoor.

20th, 21st.—The two first marches to Koteeatollie and Dubboka, about twenty-four miles, were through a level country, studded with flourishing and populous villages and gardens, and intersected by streams and large lakes. We passed through immense sheets of fine rice cultivation, and here and there small patches of sugar-cane.

22nd.—At half past seven A.M., we left Dubboka and crossed the Jummoonah river in small boats to the south bank in Tooleeram Senaputtee's territory, and at once entered tree jungle, which we traversed for some miles. We then passed the two small, wretched looking villages of Katkutea and Deohore, situated in extensive plains of high reed jungle, but only a few acres of land were brought under cultivation. Although the distance to Howrah-ghat, our

encampment, was only ten miles, we were five hours on the road, as, in many places, we were obliged to cut open a footpath through the dense high reed jungle to enable us to get along at all. On reaching Howrah-ghat we waded through the Jummoonah river knee deep, and were snugly housed in a few grass huts hastily erected for our accommodation in the vicinity of the village on the north bank of the Jummoonah.

In the afternoon, Lieutenant Campbell, seeing innumerable tracks of wild animals, deer, elephants, buffaloes, and rhinoceroses, mounted his elephant for a little sport; he had scarcely left the camp, when he suddenly came upon two rhinoceroses, in the midst of miry reed jungle twenty feet high. With great dexterity he instantly fired two shots at the animal nearest him, and, by a happy accident, the ball not only passed through the head of the animal aimed at, but lodged in the head of another rhinoceros standing close by it; when, to his surprise, both animals fell dead on the spot. One rhinoceros having fallen on the legs of the other, Lieutenant Campbell was firmly convinced that his first shot missed and the second ball proved fatal to both animals; it seems almost incredible, but there is no reason to doubt the fact.

tiated, but they disclaim the imputation with much vehemence."

In my tours in the hills I have had a good deal of communication with the Kookies, as they are the most hardy and best Coolies in the district for hill travelling. The Kookie chiefs have likewise frequently visited me at Now-Gong; and whenever I put the question to them, whether they did not eat the flesh of human beings slain in battle, they have invariably promptly denied the existence of such a custom in the tribe with apparent abhorrence; and although nothing comes amiss to a Kookie—the elephant, rhinoceros, and beef, being equal delicacies—we have been unable to prove that they are or ever were cannibals.

Lieutenant Vincent describes the new Kookies as follows:—"The new Kookie clans have an excellent form of government. They are presided over by Rajahs and Muntrees, who decide all matters of dispute brought before them; and in such respect do they hold their Rajahs that their word is law. One, among all the Rajahs of each class, is chosen to be the Prudham or chief Rajah of that clan. The dignity is not hereditary, as is the case with the minor rajahships, but is enjoyed by each Rajah of the clan in rotation. All the

PART III.

THE DISTRICT OF NOW-GONG.

CHAPTER XIII.

Field-sports in Assam—Specimens of Assamese music—Assamese customs, &c.

FROM the vast extent of waste or jungle land everywhere met with in Assam, there are, perhaps, few countries that can be compared with it for affording diversion, of all kinds, for the English sportsman. A shikang or sporting elephant is indispensable; and when seated on the animal's back in a well-secured howdah—a kind of square wooden tower containing shelves for four double-barrel guns—all wild animals of the forest may be fearlessly encountered and overcome. But the reader must not imagine a field-day in Assam unattended with danger, or less exciting than fox-hunting; for at no time would it be safe or prudent to go alone on a solitary elephant, to beat through dense, high, and almost impenetrable reed and grass jungle:

though keen sportsmen frequently do so, and enjoy excellent sport.

To ensure success and avoid danger, a party is generally formed of from three to twenty elephants; making a grand line in this way, tigers, buffaloes, rhinoceroses, deer, and hogs, are all beaten out of their lairs, and can seldom escape death except by flight. On many occasions, buffaloes rush down with awful fury upon the nearest elephant, when, unless the sportsman happens to be an expert shot, the elephant is generally gored and lacerated in a frightful manner, and the mahout or driver of the elephant not unfrequently severely injured. Sometimes the howdah, or tower, is thrown off the elephant's back by the shock sustained from the buffalo's charge, and the sportsman with his guns is hurled prostrate on the ground with the elephant. In this predicament nothing but the immediate assistance of another elephant prevents inevitable destruction.

It is a noble sight to see the wild buffalo, wounded and rendered furious, his head armed with enormous horns, lowered to the ground, rushing down with the speed of a cannon-ball upon the timid elephant; who, however, being well trained, stands firm and receives the shock, which is truly terrific:

the elephant, if not knocked down, is hurled back many yards by the violence and strength of the buffalo's charge.

At first, buffaloes that have long been undisturbed by the sound of a gun, seem to court danger, and proudly walk out to meet it, fiercely pawing the ground and tossing their heads; but death-blows being dealt out freely to their companions, they become in time alarmed at the sight of the elephant and sportsman, when their flight is so rapid that it is no easy matter to come up with them. In Lower and Central Assam large herds of 100 buffaloes are frequently met with; the devastations committed on the paddy fields is incalculable, and numbers of lives are annually lost from their attacks on the people. In one day's sport it is no uncommon event for three or four sportsmen to shoot thirty buffaloes, twenty deer, and a dozen hogs, besides one or two tigers. At times, a tiger, being surrounded by a field of elephants in a small patch of high grass, shows great sport; for as often as he is beaten up by the elephants, he turns round and with a tremendous roar rushes across the plain towards the nearest one, and jumps upon its head or stern; the elephant then becomes dreadfully alarmed, and

screeches out in the most terrific manner, shaking its body with all its power, to free itself from the claws of the enraged monster clinging to it. In this predicament the sportsman is helpless; as from the violent motion of the elephant, all he can do is to hold fast to the howdah, for if thrown out, he would be torn to pieces; but a skilful sportsman, on perceiving the tiger's approach towards his elephant, will generally stop the rapid charge of the tiger by one or two well-directed shots, which will either prove fatal, or so cripple the beast as to render his efforts to charge futile.

Few elephants can be brought to stand repeated charges of a tiger; if the sportsman fail to shoot the tiger in the first charge, the elephant instinctively seems to lose confidence, and no exertions on the part of the mahout can induce the elephant again to encounter the danger of a second charge, by advancing to beat up the tiger concealed in the grass: a tiger's charge is always desperately fierce, and seldom met without making its pursuers feel the power of its fangs and claws, and causing sometimes fatal accidents.

Not less exciting is the rhinoceros hunt. This animal is found in the highest and most dense reed jungle, generally near a river, or Bheel

lake, in a very miry place. The squeaking grunt of this beast is peculiarly sharp and fierce, and the elephants become so alarmed that few wait its approach in the shape of a charge, but mostly quit the field with the utmost speed, scarcely giving the sportsman time to have a shot. If the rhinoceros succeeds in overtaking the elephant, it inflicts terrible wounds on the haunches of the latter with its mouth, and with the horn on its nose endeavours to rip up the belly of the elephant. Of all the animals of the forest, the rhinoceros is most feared, from its destructive powers; and, as it possesses an enormously thick skin, it requires a good gun or rifle to bring it down. Nevertheless, we have known several rhinoceroses killed with one ball, if hit in a vital part; otherwise, as with the buffalo, ten or fifteen balls may be fired without effect. The rhinoceros is found in every part of Assam.

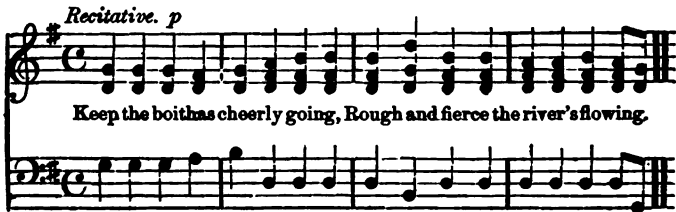
The most pleasant sport in Assam is deer shooting: all kinds are found in great numbers, and in open plains many may be killed in a day. Black partridges, and the common gray partridge, are plentiful, and a few quail and hares may be found; but they cannot be pursued on foot, as they lie in the densest and most impenetrable

jungles. An elephant is indispensable, and but few sportsmen are steady enough in a howdah to bag many head of game in a day.

Assam is so intersected by rivers, that the Assamese prefer moving about in their little canoes to travelling by land; the Doods or Nudeals (watermen) seem greatly to enjoy themselves on these boat trips, for they are always singing songs as they paddle along. A facetious friend has felicitously given me the following version of one of these boat songs universally sung throughout the province:—

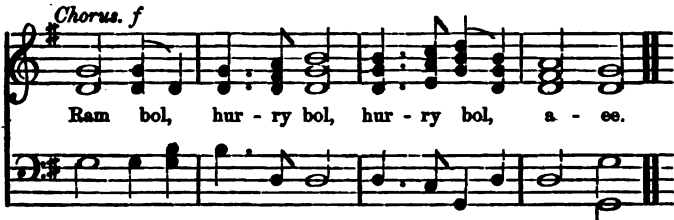
ASSAMESE BOAT SONG.

Recitative. p



Keep the boithas cheerly going, Rough and fierce the river's flowing.

Chorus. f



Ram bol, hur - ry bol, hur - ry bol, a - ee.

“ Keep the boithas cheerly going ;
 Rough and fierce the river's flowing,
 Ram bol, Hurry bol, Hurry bol Aee.