

A NARRATIVE
OF
TRAVEL AND SPORT
IN BURMAH, SIAM, AND THE MALAY
PENINSULA.

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After advancing ten miles, we came to the outskirts of an extensive forest, and erected our tent. It was now only half-past ten o'clock in the morning, and we determined that towards evening (it is seldom that much game is to be met with except during early morning and evening) we would see what sport was to be had in this neighbourhood. Meantime, while wandering about in search of a shot at a bird or monkey, we came to a spot where several trees had been felled, a sign that there were people somewhere at no great distance off. We walked a mile or two, in several directions, in the hopes of discovering a village, but were disappointed; and again in the evening we had no success in our search after game, not even a partridge being found. We went to bed in something approaching a bad humour. The monotonous solitude of this place does not agree with us.

DEC. 7.—The scenery of some parts of the country is very beautiful, but the absence of mountains, and even hills, gives it a somewhat monotonous appearance. Since we have been

in the country we have scarcely seen a mound or hillock, and nothing whatever in the shape of a range or chain of hills. The highest ground we have crossed I should imagine is not more than two hundred feet above sea level. But everywhere the forest scenery is very diversified, and the beauty of the flowers, especially the creepers, beyond all description.

We made two marches to-day, one in the morning, the other late in the afternoon. As we were crossing a small plain towards evening, three rhinoceroses came in sight; but though we galloped after them full speed, we could not get near enough for a shot. In places where the country is not so thickly wooded, there are abundance of wild plum trees. The fruit is equal in flavour and larger in size than that obtained in Europe. We also met with peaches and apricots. In the morning a village was seen, but not entered, as it lay out of our road.

DEC. 8.—Very shortly after resuming our journey, we came within sight of large tracts of cultivated ground, and two villages, besides

many scattered huts and several pagodas. These latter were situated apart from the dwellings, and surrounded by magnificent banyan trees, under which sat several Buddhist priests at their devotions, and some of those Eastern fanatics who show their zeal for religion by distorting their bodies into various eccentric and painful positions. As we passed we threw them a few small coins, which were picked up by the boys in attendance upon them. One of the pagodas was a very large and fine building, and there seemed to be a great many priests about it. The dome and minaret, as in all similar buildings we saw in Siam, were highly ornamented and covered with gilt.

Upon passing the first village, though considerable curiosity was excited, the inhabitants did not pay that attention to us we had experienced in places farther to the west. So many Chinese, Anamese, &c., were seen, that we felt certain we were approaching Lahaing; and on stopping to make inquiries were assured that that city might be reached

by a person on foot in five hours. From this we concluded it to be fifteen miles distant—rather a long march for the oxen; but we determined to attempt to reach it to-day. The people with whom we communicated were obliging and civil, and great order appeared to be maintained amongst themselves. The street of the village was full of the covered stalls of native and Chinese* merchants; and there was a great deal of trade going on, considering the small size of the place.

With temporary halts, we continued our march the greater part of the day, passing through three villages, one of which might almost be called a town. Many other villages were seen on our right and left hand, and the country is highly cultivated. We were much surprised to find the country so thickly populated, while twenty miles to the westward not an inhabitant was to be seen.

Five o'clock in the afternoon.—In sight of Lahaing. It looks like a large city, its

* The number of Chinese, Anamese, Sava, Malays, and other foreigners, settled in this country is almost incredible.

minarets forming a complete forest. We arrive on the right bank of the Menam, and halt, the cattle being thoroughly exhausted, having covered more than twenty miles during the day. There is a great similarity in the appearance of the Siamese cities. Houses on piles, thousands of domes and minarets, mud, water, floating streets, a crowd whose noise is deafening, and bustle confusing, fancifully decorated pagodas, and splendid palaces of the rajahs—imagine this, and that the surging crowd is dressed in every form and colour of Eastern costume, and you have a Siamese city, at least, so far as it can be conceived without being seen. At Lahaing, as at Bangkok and other cities of the Siamese empire, the greatest part of the town is built on rafts which float in the river. These rafts are constructed of timber, and each carry from one to twenty houses, according to size. I think it probable that these raft-houses were first introduced into the country by the Chinese. However that may be, these people are the principal in-

there to pass the night, and it was very desirable that we should do so, it would be necessary for us to start early in the afternoon, especially as we intended to move in a circuitous direction with the object of examining as wide a tract of country as possible for the game of which we were in search. Accordingly, we left the shade of our banyan about three in the afternoon, though the heat was then at its height. Our march was a tiresome one, owing to the detours we were constantly obliged to make in order to avoid the numerous bogs and morasses which abounded. That all sorts of large game was abundant, was evidenced by the footmarks which were met with at every pace; but we saw none until nearly seven o'clock in the evening, at which time we concluded ourselves to be distant from our camp about nine miles. About this time a solitary rhinoceros was seen, and, as was the case with other animals of this kind on a former occasion, it took fright long before we could get near enough to

attack it. Very shortly afterwards, however, a small herd of five rhinoceroses came right across our path, and received our fire from a distance of about ninety yards. None of the herd fell, but one creature was wounded in the right fore leg so severely that the limb was rendered useless; and, of course, the animal could not follow its companions, who made off at a gallop. Our friend, however, made the best use of his three remaining legs, and on our approach to finish him off, made a most determined effort to charge, lowering his formidable-looking horns, and advancing on his three pins quickly enough to make it necessary for us to display some activity in getting out of his way. He was shot down without much difficulty, taking seven bullets into his podgy carcass before he went down upon his knees and yielded up the ghost. It was a fine animal, but not so large as some we afterwards met with. The rhinoceroses, as well as elephants and buffalo, in this country often nearly ruin the villagers by breaking

into the rice and maize fields, and beating down the grain with the weight of their huge bodies : for they destroy, at least, twenty times as much as they eat. The only methods they usually resort to to destroy them are pitfalls, but some of the rajahs and chiefs hunt them for sport, invariably shooting them, like tigers, from elephant-back.

As we approached our camp we saw several tigers, probably the same that had been seen the previous evening. That they were attracted by the presence of our cattle there could be little doubt. They were cowardly, and tried in each case to get away. One fellow got a shot through the loins that stopped him, and although he showed his teeth, with a great deal of horrid growling, he had not much pluck in him, and was easily killed. We found upon reaching our tent that Akbar had also seen tigers lurking about, as on last evening, and, assisted by Laoo and the other servants, had succeeded in shooting one and driving the others away. A country in which these dangerous beasts are so numerous can

scarcely be called agreeable, notwithstanding the beauty of the scenery.

After dark myriads of fire-flies appeared about the trees, and a more grand and astonishing sight I have never witnessed. The whole forest seemed to be full of brilliant lamps, showing a silver-coloured light. Suddenly every light would be extinguished, and after an interval of a few seconds would simultaneously recommence shining again. It may easily be conceived what an extraordinary effect this would have. Fancy an immense forest of gigantic trees, illuminated with innumerable thousands of bright lights, and these lights disappearing and reappearing at regular intervals, perhaps seven or eight times a minute, and you have some vague notion of the grand sight that met our gaze in this part of the Siamese Empire. The light emitted by these flies is very different from and much more brilliant than that of the glow-worms met with in Europe, and the insect itself is of considerable size. They seemed to be stationary while showing their light regularly together; but

covery, and amused himself with stuffing the small birds which we shot for his collection. Since we have been in the country he has got together nearly a hundred different species, several of which he considers are quite new to science, and others but imperfectly known and described.

Myself and Lacy passed the time, which hung heavily on our hands, in shooting and wandering about the forest. We made several excursions in search of a tiger, but were unsuccessful, though we had often heard the cry of the animal during the past week.

JAN. 16.—Mr. Grant being well enough to endure the exertion of riding, we broke up our camp, and proceeded on our way south, keeping along the bank of the river, which was here about three quarters of a mile wide. Many small streams ran into it, some of which were nearly choked up with reeds. The country here seems more fertile than farther north; and we were pleased to again meet with troops of monkeys, for it is a singular fact that wherever these animals are found there

is generally an abundance of large game and birds. Parrots are as plentiful as in any of the forests hitherto passed through.

The ground eastward seems to rise in low undulating hills, but they are of insignificant elevation, and not arranged in chains or ranges. The forest, though dense, is not unbroken, and we passed over several plains almost destitute of trees; but these were of such small extent as to scarcely justify particular mention. The whole face of the country may be called one vast forest of gigantic trees.

JAN. 17.—While crossing one of the small plains, or glades, such as were described yesterday, we met with a large single-horned rhinoceros. He was standing, when first seen, perfectly motionless — perhaps listening, for they are very quick of ear, and some sound from our party must have reached him. Halting the men, myself and Lacy dismounted and cautiously neared the brute, which beyond a slight movement of the head gave no sign of life; and looked uncommonly like a huge

model of a rhinoceros, such as I have seen in some museum.

I would here remark that we always attacked the dangerous game on foot for these reasons : that it is impossible to take a steady aim from horseback ; and, moreover, it is necessary to approach so close for an effective shot, that in the event of the beast making a sudden rush, he is nearly sure to be upon you before you can spur your horse out of the way ; besides, it is ten to one that the latter does not become frightened and unmanageable. It would be madness to attack a tiger on horseback, and nearly as dangerous to repeat the experiment with a rhinoceros.

The sight of the rhinoceros is very dim, and owing to this circumstance if you are careful not to make any noise, you may get quite close to it without being observed. There were trees within forty yards of our rhinoceros, so that we were well concealed ; but there being some bushes still nearer to it, we crawled forward under their shelter, and gave it the first shot behind the shoulder from a distance

of only twenty yards. Up to this moment the beast had remained perfectly quiet; but on receipt of the bullet he wheeled round and charged with the rapidity of a flash of lightning before Captain Lacy had time to fire a shot. I had not time to rise and get out of the way, and only saved myself by rolling over and over in a very undignified manner. It is almost marvellous that the rhinoceros did not see me; but his whole attention was concentrated on the bush, which he appeared to think was the foe from whence the attack proceeded. He trampled over it, breaking it down with the weight of his huge body, and commenced to rip it to pieces with his horn.

Meantime Captain Lacy blazed away with both barrels from behind a tree trunk, and though the beast was badly hurt it charged at him desperately, which gave me an opportunity of recovering my rifle, which was lying near the bush. It was difficult now to hit the rhinoceros in a vital part, for it was tearing about wildly amongst the bushes, evidently

in search of its foe. We discharged eight or nine shots at it before it fell, and every time we fired it charged furiously in the direction of the report of the rifle, and it required some nimbleness to get out of its way. Even when it sank to the ground it made strenuous efforts to rise again, and received six more bullets before it was finished off. At this juncture Mr. Grant came up with two spare rifles, alarmed at the continued firing and great commotion which he had witnessed from the distance.

Our aiming in this little affair had been very bad, for though no less than nineteen bullets had penetrated this beast, not one of them had hit a really vital part; and it had been literally bled to death by the number of its wounds. In curious contrast with this difficulty in slaying a rhinoceros was another adventure that happened that same evening while myself and Lacy were out searching for game after the tent had been pitched.

We had taken a rather long ramble, and darkness was coming on fast, so that we

struck the river and began to hasten back to our camp, distant a good three miles. Not half a mile of this distance was got over when we came upon a very large rhinoceros standing in the water about twenty yards from the bank. We were so anxious to get back to our tent before darkness had set in that we should probably have passed the brute without interfering with it had it not come out of the water and made a demonstration of disputing our passage. Captain Lacy dropped upon his knee and fired, and the rhinoceros fell with a heavy shock. The muscular twitching of its limbs, which ceased in a minute or two, showed that it had been killed outright; and upon walking up to it we found that the bullet had actually penetrated the brain through the eye, which was more the effect of chance than design.

Besides rhinoceroses we have found the footprints of deer, wild elephants, boar, and buffalo in the soft earth and mud of the river bank; and all sorts of birds are very abundant. Mr. Grant informed us that during our absence a