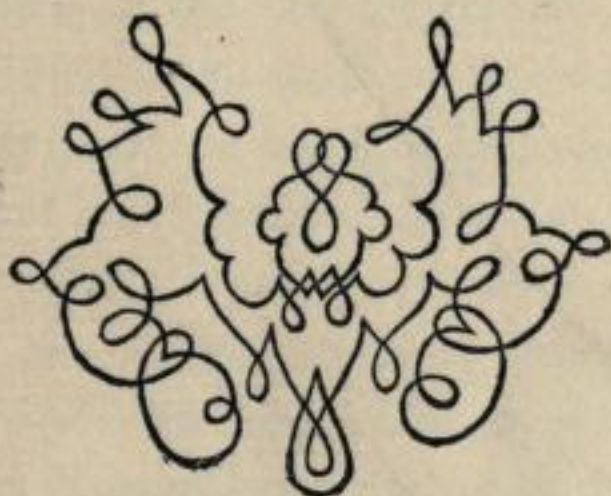


HAUNTS AND HOBBIES  
OF  
AN INDIAN OFFICIAL

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"ADVENTURES OF A MAGISTRATE IN THE INDIAN MUTINY"



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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *DISAPPEARANCE OF THE WILD ANIMALS*

THROUGHOUT India generally the larger wild animals are now less numerous than they formerly were. Over certain large tracts some of these animals have even entirely disappeared. This diminution and disappearance is ordinarily attributed partly to the greater numbers killed by sportsmen since our acquisition of the country, but in a greater degree to the increase of cultivation that has taken place under our rule, for this increase of cultivation has reduced the extent of the forests and waste lands in which alone these larger wild animals are able to exist.

No doubt this explanation, to a certain extent, is correct; still it is not altogether satisfactory, for it leaves some important facts altogether unexplained. The disappearance of the larger animals has in several cases occurred previous to our rule, and it has also occurred where the conditions of the country have apparently remained unchanged. The subject is one which I do not possess sufficient knowledge to properly discuss. I will, however, mention such facts as I happen to be aware of. They relate to three of the largest and most powerful of the wild animals—the



rhinoceros, the elephant, and the lion. And first as to the rhinoceros.

The Emperor Babur, the founder of the Mogul dynasty, entered India in the year 1525 of our era. He halted with his army for some time at Peshawar, and there amused himself, as he relates in his memoirs, with hunting the rhinoceros. Now I cannot speak with certainty, for I have never visited that part of the Punjaub, but I do not believe that the rhinoceros is now found either in the neighbourhood of Peshawar or anywhere in the adjacent regions, nor that it was there found at the time of our acquisition of the country.

If in this belief I am correct, then it appears that in the course of little more than three centuries the rhinoceros had entirely disappeared from extensive tracts of country where previously it was abundant; and it is to be noted that the country during the whole of this period had continued under native rule: its conditions, therefore, are not likely to have much changed. We may presume that the forests and wastes which sheltered the rhinoceros in the days of Babur had but slightly, if at all, diminished in extent at the period when the territory in which they are situated passed under the British rule.

But further, in the year 1803 we acquired all that part of the upper provinces which lies at the base of the Himalaya and Shewalic ranges. I have always understood that the rhinoceros was then found throughout the entire length of forest which extends below these mountains; but at the time when I had charge



of the Doon the rhinoceros was never met with, nor had been for many years, in any part of the forest to the westward of the Ganges; and to the east of the Ganges it was rarely found except in the district of Philibect, which is situated close adjacent to the frontiers of Nepaul. In the course, therefore, of about half a century the rhinoceros had retired eastwards for a distance of over two hundred miles.

During this period the forests, owing to the increase of cultivation, had certainly very much diminished in breadth; also the wild animals within them had been shot and hunted to a far greater extent than in previous times. But these changes had not caused the disappearance of the other animals. The tigers, the deer, and the herds of wild elephants roamed the forests as before, though in rather diminished numbers. Why then should the rhinoceros have vanished?

Next as to the elephant. There are two great forests in India; they are known among the natives, if I remember the names correctly, as the Chungle Bun (forest) and the Pâtree Bun. The one is the forest which stretches along the base of the Himalaya; the other forms a belt across the continent of India. It extends, running in a south-westerly direction, from the river Ganges to near Bombay. It covers those ranges of hills and low mountains that separate Hindostan proper from the peninsula below it.

Three centuries ago both these forests abounded in elephants; the forest below the Himalaya does so still. From the other forest the elephants have entirely or



almost entirely disappeared. Of their former abundance we have historical proof.

The Emperor Babur, when proceeding on his expedition against Bengal, passed near the town of Calpee. Describing it in his memoirs, he mentions that the forests around were full of elephants. He remarks further, the elephants were so numerous that the greater part of the domesticated elephants in India were obtained from among them. These forests form the eastern portion of the great forest belt. I was once for a short time stationed in their neighbourhood, and my recollection is that no elephants at all then existed within them; certainly none were captured.

The *Ayeen Akbari* was composed more than half a century later. In its account of the "soobah," or province, of Agra, it is stated that elephants were very plentiful in that province, and were there captured for use. The forests in which the elephants were found and captured must have been also a part of the great belt, but one more to the westward. No elephants are now captured in those forests, nor, so far as I am aware, do any exist.

But, further; the historian Firishtah, in his narrative of the events of the reign of the Emperor Akbar, mentions that on one occasion the Emperor, when returning from Mando to Agra, came on a herd of wild elephants in the forests of Sipree. These forests are in the neighbourhood of Indore, and form a still more westerly portion of the belt. Colonel Briggs, in his English translation of Firishtah, comments on this passage. He observes that then, at the time he wrote,



there were no elephants in those forests. Colonel Briggs' translation was published about seventy years ago, and must have been composed, we may presume, a little earlier. It would appear, therefore, that the elephants had disappeared within a period not much exceeding two centuries and a half.

But the forests still exist; at least, in my time they did, for I have passed through them: and they have always remained, as indeed have most of the other parts of the great forest belt, under the native rule.

I will now speak of the lion. As compared with the tigers, the leopards, and some other of the larger beasts of prey, the lions have at no time been very abundant in India. The area of their range has also been more restricted. They have never, for example, been found, I believe, to the eastward of the Jumna. In the tracts of country that border that river on the west the lions were, however, in former times tolerably numerous; they were sufficiently numerous to render the hunting them one of the ordinary sports. There are several descriptions of lion hunts and allusions to the sport in the *Ayeen Akbari* and also in the memoirs of the Emperor Jehangire. Some of them I will quote; they may perhaps be found entertaining.

The *Ayeen Akbari* describes one mode of hunting the lion which it states was occasionally practised, and which must certainly have been most hazardous. It was as follows. A man mounted on a buffalo rode up to the lion, and then urged on the buffalo to attack it. A fierce combat of course ensued. In the end the



buffalo was victorious : he gored the lion with his horns and tossed him, and finally killed him.

The Emperor Akbar was very partial to lion-hunting, and frequently indulged in the sport. On two occasions, however, when pursuing it, he had narrow escapes ; they are thus related : On the first occasion the Emperor, armed with bow and arrows, came on a lion ; the lion advanced ; the Emperor drew his bow and let fly an arrow ; the arrow struck the lion ; he fell mortally wounded. But as he fell a second lion suddenly appeared, and with rage and fury bounded towards the Emperor. It came near, then it paused, turned, and fled, its instinct inspiring it with terror at the aspect of the Emperor, " Heaven's favourite."

On the second occasion the Emperor's escape was due to human intervention. The Emperor, as before, was lion-hunting. Unexpectedly three lions rushed forward to attack him. A young Uzbek noble was standing at a little distance ; beside him was the Emperor's favourite horse " Kohpârâ " (mountain-sized) ; it was a horse that feared neither lion nor elephant. Perceiving the Emperor's danger, the young noble sprang at once on Kohpârâ, and galloped forward to his assistance. One lion he seized by the mane, and drove his dagger through its throat. The lion fell dead. Then the young noble caught hold of the other two lions by their necks, each with one hand, and thus holding them, he dashed their heads together, and with such violence that their skulls were shattered, and they also fell dead beside their companion lion.

This young noble afterwards gave an exhibition of