

DULALL
THE FOREST GUARD

*A TALE OF SPORT AND ADVENTURE
IN THE FORESTS OF BENGAL*

2008. 393

BY
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Late Indian Police.



9752

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CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER I

- In the district of Shikarpore—Our desire for Sport—A bright idea—We get permission, and start for the Forest in charge of Dulall—We sight our first Tiger and our Elephants bolt—Tom falls into grass and is in a dangerous position—We find him—I fall off into bog, Tom follows suit, we are pulled out and resume our journey—See a Rhinoceros—A Tiger after Sambhur—The death-cry and our hopes from the "Kill" 1

CHAPTER II

- Our Forest home—Dulall finds the "Kill" and makes a Maichan—Off for our watch—Find the "Kill" gone and have to drag it back—Startled by a Peacock—Two Tigers!—In peril from one of them—Dulall to the rescue—The Tiger killed and the Tigress found dead—Unable to take them away we resolve to spend the night on the Maichan 25

CHAPTER III

- We have our tea for dinner and settle down for a quiet night—Attacked by a Rogue Tusker—Our desperate position—Frightened by the dead Tigers he retreats—Again attacks but is again frightened—Welcome morning—Breakfast on sardines and jam—Elephants arrive and we secure our spoil—Indian superstitions as to Tigers—We rest but Dulall does not—Off after Bear, we see wild Elephants on the way 49

CHAPTER IV

- The Bear cave—Dulall gets the Bear out—The Bear shot—Repeating rifles—We get two Bear cubs—The return—A vicious Elephant—Subdued, but breaks away at night—Found again—Dulall takes us to the Salt Licks—Another Maichan 69

CHAPTER V

- Dulall makes the Maichan—No smoking—Adventure with a Monkey and a Leopard—Elephants appear and we get a good view of the herd—We kill a Sambhur—Tigers about 93

CHAPTER VI

- Marks of Big Game—The return—Alarmed by Elephants—Tom will talk—A Forest "Look-out" hut—News of a Rhino—An Official Letter—Appointed Assistant Superintendent—Return to prepare for my Station—Take Dulall with us and start for Begumpore in a "Shigram" 115

CHAPTER VII

- Night travel—A Tiger scare—A Man-eater—Dulall returns with escort—A Rest House—Catching our Dinner—"Bibistek of Cock with Engines"—Our Palkis—Dulall and his family 137

CHAPTER VIII

- We pay our bill—In (and out) of a Palki—Dulall and his pony—The Jungle road—The Bearers refuse to go on—With extra torches they resume the journey—Two Tigers appear—The Bearers' panic—Elephant again—Driven off by fire—Dulall's adventure 159

CHAPTER IX

- Arrival at Begumpore—At the Dak Bungalow—The Superintendent—We introduce Dulall—Can the Man-eater be got?—At the Official Bungalow—Sporting trophies—My installation—Racquets—A chat about England—Khubbur of the Tiger—We start after him 179

CHAPTER X

- Dulall comes with news—The arrangement for the Shoot—The Beat—The Tiger comes out—The Drivers' panic—The second Beat—Tiger mauls an Elephant—The attack on our Elephant—Death of the Tiger—Superstitions as to Man-eaters—The Major gets the Skin—We fight our battles o'er again—The Chokedar suspended 201

DULALL THE FOREST GUARD

CHAPTER I

In the district of Shikarpore—Our desire for Sport—A bright idea—We get permission, and start for the Forest in charge of Dulall—We sight our first Tiger and our Elephants bolt—Tom falls into grass and is in a dangerous position—We find him—I fall off into bog, Tom follows suit, we are pulled out and resume our journey—See a Rhinoceros—A Tiger after Sambhur—The death-cry and our hopes from the "Kill"

TOM KEENAN and I, John Christopher Skellerton, known to my more intimate friends as "Bones," had come out to India together.

Educated at the same public school and very similar in tastes, if not in temperament, our long and close association had ripened into a friendship proof against all ordinary dissensions.

We had both been destined for the Army, but an unfortunate difference of opinion with the Civil Service Commissioners as to our knowledge of things in general, and "army subjects" in particular, had led to our seeking some other and more suitable career, which our parents thought they could find for us in India.

2 DULALL THE FOREST GUARD

Both Tom's father and my own were employed under the Indian Government, in the Forest and Police Services, respectively, and at the time this story opens were stationed in the district of Shikarpore, where we had joined them some four months previously.

The district was one of the wildest in the Presidency; abutting on the lower range of the Himalaya, the whole of the northern portion was one huge and, seemingly, impenetrable forest, abounding in big game of every description.

The "Head Quarters" Station, where the officials resided, was in the southern, or more civilised portion, and some thirty miles distant from the Forest.

And now, having introduced ourselves and the scene of our future adventures to the reader, let me proceed to tell my tale.

It was a hot, steamy afternoon in the month of April, one of the many yet to be endured before the "chota bursate" or "little rains" would come to cool the parched and thirsty land with its welcome and refreshing moisture.

Being a Sunday, Tom and his father had come over to us for tiffin, and while the elders were enjoying their usual Sunday afternoon siesta, we, who as yet scorned the idea of sleeping in the day, were lounging in long armed chairs, smoking and discussing our usual topic—Sport, or to be more correct, the absence of it.

For weeks past we had been out nearly every morning with our guns and rifles, but, so far, had bagged but a few snipe and partridge earlier in the season. Of Big Game we had, as yet, seen nothing.

Tom, whose sole aim and object in life, at present, seemed to be the slaughter of wild animals in any shape or form, was giving vent to his disgust and disappointment, in language more forcible than correct.

I sat listening to him for a time, but gradually a feeling of intense drowsiness stole over me; I tried to fight against it. At length, yielding to the influence of the heat, the darkened room, and the monotonous creaking of the punkah overhead, I fell fast asleep.

But Tom, now mounted on his pet hobby, was not to be so easily put off, and a nearly full tobacco pouch, hurled with unerring aim at my head, soon disturbed my slumbers.

"Wake up, you lazy beggar, and listen to me," he shouted, "I have got an idea!"

"Have you really! Well that's something new, any way, so let's have it before it evaporates in the heat," I exclaimed, eyeing the speaker with a look of feigned surprise.

"You dry up, you old cynic," retorted Tom, "but listen really and joking apart. Here we have been in this hot, dull, old hole of a place for months and never a wild animal of any sort or kind have

4 DULALL THE FOREST GUARD

we seen, or even heard of, larger than a rat, nor are we likely to. So what I vote is to ask 'the Dad' to lend us his Bungalow at Hatigunge, and a couple of elephants, and let us go there next Tuesday, for a week."

Having delivered himself of this long oration, he jumped up from his chair and, crossing over to where I sat, peered eagerly into my face as if to catch the first look of approval with which he knew his proposal would be met.

The suggestion had, indeed, filled me with delight, for though not so demonstrative as my chum, I was quite as keen and eager in my way, as he well knew.

"Hooray!" I cried, "that's excellent, but why in the name of all that's aggravating have you kept an idea like this bottled up in your silly old head for so long? If you had only come out with it two months ago think of the good time we might have had, instead of wasting it as we have done all these weeks!"

"Steady, old boy, steady," interrupted Tom, endeavouring to curb my enthusiasm. "Remember it is only an idea so far, and may not be sanctioned by the 'powers that be.' To begin with, there will probably be a difficulty about the elephants. One has a sore back, we know, and the other three are generally on some work or other. Then there is this everlasting fear of setting the Forest on fire."

DULALL THE FOREST GUARD 5

“ Oh, don't go making difficulties now,” I said, speaking more hopefully than I felt. “ You see the ‘ paters ’ are both so keen themselves, they are bound to let us go ; and, as to the elephants, if we can't get two, we must just do the best we can with one ! ”

This allusion to the well-known sporting instincts of our respective parents seemed to cheer Tom up immensely and, forgetting for the moment that he had just thrown cold water on the scheme, now proceeded to paint the joys in store for us.

“ By Jove, it will be jolly, though, won't it? Fancy being right away miles inside the Forest, hearing the tigers calling all around us at night, to say nothing of the ‘ rhino ’ and wild elephants, and then going out all day, blazing away at anything we come across ; what would our pals at home give for such a chance, eh ? Why——”

How long he would have continued in this strain I cannot say, but seeing that it was now Sunday, and we proposed starting on the following Tuesday, it was high time to commence our preparation. So, cutting short his seductive but somewhat visionary description, I suggested that we should descend to realities and tackle the parents at once.

Half-an-hour later found us in my father's sanctum, where he and the individual irreverently referred to as “ the Dad,” were having their tea.

We plunged at once into the subject, but the

6 DULALL THE FOREST GUARD

reception it received from the person principally concerned, was not encouraging.

“ Good heavens, the boys must be mad to propose such a thing,” gasped Tom senior, aghast at the bare idea of two irresponsible youths being let loose, to work their wicked wills in his beloved Forest. “ Why they would set the grass jungle on fire to a certainty, to say nothing of shooting half the does in the place, and most likely each other into the bargain ! ”

My father, who had hitherto been apparently on our side, now vigorously joined the opposition on hearing the last two objections.

Now, whether it was the probable slaughter of the inoffensive does, or the possible sudden demise of myself at the hands of my friend Tom, which had induced his sudden change of front, I am not prepared to say, but this I can affirm, viz., that the shooting of does was in his eyes a most heinous and unpardonable offence, and one which should find place in his penal code next to murder, if not actually before it !

However, to make a long story short, after protesting vehemently against the remotest likelihood of any such terrible calamities, as suggested, occurring, and strongly repudiating such unpardonable conduct as the shooting of does, we gained the day and received permission to make our preparations, but only on two conditions.

Firstly, that we should be accompanied by one

Dulall Sing, an old and trusted Forest Guard who, in addition to ourselves, should also have sole charge of the elephants ; and, secondly, that we should give our solemn promise not to smoke while going through or near any grass jungle !

Matters being thus satisfactorily arranged, we set to work at once on our preparations, assisted by the trusty Dulall, who seemed to take as keen an interest in the proceedings as ourselves.

By six o'clock the following evening the two elephants, loaded up with camp beds, bedding, guns, rifles, pots and pans, and such provisions as were indispensable, and accompanied by Dulall and our two servants, were despatched to the edge of the Forest, there to await our arrival.

As the animals went lumbering off, we could not help smiling at the comical appearance presented by the old Guard, seated on the leading elephant.

Picture to yourself a thin, withered, little, old man, clad in what remained of a faded khaki suit, two sizes too small even for him. His legs bare from below the knee and innocent of calves, ending in ammunition boots of the largest size procurable.

His close-cropped grizzled head surmounted by a check deer-stalker's cap, erstwhile the property of his master, and now adorned with a green worsted fringe which once had graced the ends of his "full dress" khaki pugri. Imagine this animated scarecrow-like figure perched on the

8 DULALL THE FOREST GUARD

very apex of the huge pyramid of bedding, gun cases, and pots and pans, maintaining his seat with palpable difficulty, yet attempting to preserve a solemn and dignified bearing, in spite of his evidently perilous and decidedly uncomfortable position.

The sight was ludicrous in the extreme, yet we dared not laugh outright till the elephants had passed out of hearing.

The next morning, after a very early breakfast, we mounted our ponies and started for the Forest, having received many parting injunctions to be careful as to fire and the slaying of inoffensive game, from both parents who, notwithstanding the early hour, were up to see us off.

We reached the elephants about eleven o'clock, and the rest of the road or track being unsuitable for riding, mounted the one prepared for us and continued our journey.

For the first mile or so the Forest was fairly open and progression easy enough, but as we advanced further into it the track could no longer be distinguished, and we had to cut our way through tangled creepers, and force our passage through a dense undergrowth, rising at times higher than ourselves.

Finally, having traversed the heavy tree jungle, which though only some three miles in extent, occupied as many hours to get through, we emerged into a Savannah of high thick grass,

as dense as the Forest we had left behind, and were amazed, as well we might be, at the enormous space it covered.

"No wonder 'the Dad' was so mighty particular about fire," said Tom, "just look how dry the grass is and the amount of it! If we were to drop a lighted match here, there would be a bonfire that would last a week at least."

"By Jove, yes; but where should we be ourselves?" I replied, realising what our position would be, in the event of any such calamity overtaking us.

Tom, who had not seen the matter in this light before, looked grave for once, and even suggested that we should put our pipes out, which we did most carefully, not only in fulfilment of our promise, but also from a sense of the terrible danger a chance spark would place us in.

Entering this huge sea of grass, which seemed to extend for miles on either side of us, and to our front, we soon discovered that there were other living creatures here beside ourselves, some of them evidently of great bulk and weight.

Tom was in raptures. Here were the wild animals at last that his soul had long thirsted after, that he had talked about and dreamt of, aye, and, at times, even slaughtered in his dreams.

"Look, Bones, look, that big chap there must be a rhino," he cried, excitedly, as some apparently huge animal, startled at our approach, started up

in front of us and dashed heavily through the grass.

Before I could reply, an exclamation from the usually silent and unemotional Dulall attracted our attention, and, following the direction of his pointed finger, we observed a slow, sinuous movement in the grass, just ahead of us.

“What is it?” I asked, in an excited whisper.

“Bagh, sahib” (tiger, sir), “and a very big one,” was his reply, and as he spoke a loud, hoarse, coughing grunt, followed by a swift rush through the grass, proved that he was right!

Our elephants, having already scented the tiger, were much excited, and expressed their feelings in the loud, peculiar squeals and rumblings by which these animals invariably proclaim a tiger’s presence.

The Mahouts, or drivers, with a patience and perseverance so often found amongst men of their unique and dangerous calling, were doing their best to soothe their nervous charges, when, unfortunately, some small animal, probably a hog deer, rushed through the grass towards us.

The elephants, already in a highly nervous and excited condition, thinking that the tiger was charging down upon them, now became completely demoralised, and wheeling suddenly round, dashed off at full speed towards the Forest.

So sudden was the movement, that Tom, who was sitting in front, behind the driver, and

DULALL THE FOREST GUARD 11

leaning forward at the time, losing his balance, fell headlong into the grass !

In vain I shouted to the driver to stop my elephant ; as well might I have asked him to stay the progress of the sun, for he was as powerless to do the one as the other.

In the meantime we were rapidly increasing our distance from the hapless Tom, whose position was a very serious one, and becoming more critical each moment.

At length I saw the old Guard, whose elephant was racing alongside of my own, creep cautiously forward with his drawn "kukri" between his teeth ; a moment later he was seated behind the Mahout, and, leaning over him, drove the sharp point of his weapon into the elephant's forehead. The pain of the wound, and the suddenness with which it was delivered, checked the animal for a moment and the Mahout, quick to take advantage of the pause, regained his lost control.

My own animal, seeing its companion stop, now pulled up, too, and turning back we retraced our steps along the track we had made, till we arrived, as nearly as we could guess, at the spot where we had seen Tom fall.

We had now to use the very greatest care, for in that tall and huge expanse of grass it was impossible to distinguish anything on the ground, and for all we knew, Tom, stunned by the violence of his fall, might be lying unconscious at our feet,

to be trampled to death as we passed over his senseless body.

Or he might have attempted to follow us and lost himself, as he well might do in that endless waste, and have, perhaps, encountered the tiger, or any of the other dangerous beasts we knew were there.

It was, indeed, a terrible position for him, and not less so for ourselves, helpless as we were to aid him, and feeling that any step we took to do so might only make matters worse.

However, it was urgently necessary that some action should be taken, and that speedily, before the darkness, now approaching, was upon us. So placing the elephants abreast, we advanced slowly forward, trusting to the instinct of the animals to give timely notice of any object or movement made in front of us.

We had proceeded thus for some fifteen minutes or so, when suddenly a piercing shriek was heard, and then a quick movement through the grass. We shouted loudly in response and continued to advance, but with each step we took the shrieks grew louder and the efforts to get away from us more violent than before.

That this agonising scream proceeded from our lost companion, we had, of course, no doubt, but why should he try to escape from us? Could it be that the violence of his fall had so dazed him that he was unable to collect his thoughts?

Or, and my heart sank at the thought, perhaps the awful terror he had undergone during the last hour had turned his brain ?

In my anguish and despair I turned to Dulall for consolation, trusting that his experience would furnish a more hopeful explanation, or at any rate suggest some means for rescuing my poor comrade.

My knowledge of the vernacular was somewhat limited, but I contrived to make him understand what was passing in my mind.

To my intense relief he scouted the idea of any harm having come to the sahib.

" You see," he continued, " Tom Sahib is on the ground with high grass all round him, he can see nothing, so when he heard us crashing through the grass towards him he was afraid it was some wild animal ; he shouted to frighten it off, but as we still advanced he ran away, still screaming, so could not hear our shouts."

This was so natural and simple an explanation that I wondered it had not occurred to me before, and, much comforted in mind, I stopped the elephant and, standing up on the pad, shouted with all my might, " Tom, old man, we have come to pick you up. Say if you are all right, and walk quietly towards us if you can ! "

There was no reply. Again I shouted, and at last a faint " hullo " came back, then louder as he drew nearer. " Where are you ? Yes, I am all right, but come on quick for heaven's

sake, as I think there is a rhino or wild elephant close to me."

Relieved beyond measure to find that Tom was, at any rate, unhurt, we urged our elephants on, shouting as we went, till, hearing his voice quite close, we turned the animals round lest they should charge him, and moving them a length or two, we waited.

A moment or two later a "solah topeed" head appeared, and soon his whole figure came into view, in the lane that we had made behind us.

Ordering my Mahout to make the elephant sit down, I scrambled quickly off, but quick as I had been the old man had been quicker.

Sliding backwards off his perch he had swarmed down the elephant's tail, and was already beside Tom, now embracing both his knees, now wringing his own ears, then slapping himself on the forehead and going through other pantomimic gestures, all suggestive of the great fault he had committed in allowing one of his charges to fall off!

"What is the matter with the old chap? He seems to have gone off his chump," exclaimed Tom, after taking a long pull at the whisky and soda I had given him, and gazing in amused amazement at the antics of the queer old man.

"Oh, that is only his way of showing his joy at having found you; but tell me," I continued, "what did you feel like when you found yourself alone in the jungle?"

CHAPTER V

Dulall makes the Maichan—No smoking—Adventure with a Monkey and a Leopard—Elephants appear and we get a good view of the herd—We kill a Sambhur—Tigers about

WE could hear Dulall hacking away in the Forest, close behind us, while the Mahout sat unravelling one of the raw hemp ropes we carried, and re-making it into shorter ones.

Soon the hacking ceased and Dulall appeared, carrying several saplings of different lengths. He then climbed up the tree, and selecting two thick branches, as nearly parallel to each other as he could find, let down a rope and hauled up four of the poles. These he placed at intervals across the branches, fastening them securely; he then tied some shorter ones across them till he had made a platform resembling the gratings on a boat, and about eight feet square.

A few leafy branches strewed over this structure, with the blankets spread over all, completed our quarters for the night. Being perched some fifteen feet above the level of the cliff it would command a good view of the gorge below.

It was now four o'clock, and time the elephants

whispered a suggestion that we should go to sleep again.

We knew the moon had risen—for, although we could not see her, the stars had paled and the dark canopy of leaves above our heads seemed less opaque, while here and there a faint streak of light showed through the tree tops, but all below was still an inky darkness.

We sat on in silence and suspense, longing for the light to come, for now we could hear an occasional movement in the gorge below, and it was tantalizing to feel some beast was there, yet hidden from our sight.

We strained our eyes in trying to pierce the gloom, but it was useless; for though the light was now increasing it had not yet dispelled the vault-like darkness of the depths below, which seemed to grow darker as the light above increased.

Presently, to add to our annoyance, we heard the heavy tread of some large animal coming down the gorge, and then a shrill, peculiar sound, something between a grunt and snort.

“Genda hye, sahib; sunno” (it’s a rhinoceros, sahib; listen), whispered Dulall, excitedly, recognising the sound immediately.

“What’s the good of listening; we want to see!” I heard Tom mutter under his breath; and I must confess I was of the same opinion. However, we could only hope that the rhino would

find the spot attractive and remain there till the moon rose higher !

I was about to whisper this to Tom when, suddenly, from the jungle behind us, there arose the most piercing scream I had ever heard, followed by a chorus of shrill trumpeting, in various keys, as if all the elephants in the Forest were assembled.

These sounds, at first some distance off, seemed rapidly drawing nearer, for soon we could hear the loud crashing of the jungle as the animals approached, one of them evidently considerably in advance.

Sitting as we were now, with our backs toward the chasm, we noticed that directly to our front the Forest was comparatively open and well lit up by the moon.

As the elephants seemed to be approaching from our right it was quite possible they might pass across the glade, which, being some twenty feet in width, would give us a good view of them. How fervently we hoped for this may easily be imagined.

Nearer and nearer the herd approached, till the leading animal seemed to be quite close, and evidently heading for the glade, for we could now see the violent movement of the jungle as he came crashing through. Another moment or two and we might expect to see it dash into the glade.

But would it face the opening ? or, by swerving

to the right, keep to the shelter of the Forest? These were the thoughts that troubled us as, with bated breath and hearts beating with excitement, we awaited its decision.

The next moment two gleaming tusks were seen protruding through the belt of trees. Then, with a mighty crash, an enormous elephant broke out into the glade.

It paused for a second, as if astonished at the light; then, with a scream of rage, or possibly of terror, threw up its trunk and continued its headlong flight, disappearing into the jungle opposite.

We had a grand view of him as he crossed, scarcely twenty feet in front of us; and a finer sight it would be difficult to conceive: considerably above the average height, as Dulall subsequently informed us, and magnificently porportioned, with enormous tusks of perfect shape, he was, indeed, a noble looking beast.

I have seen many an elephant since then, both wild and tame, but never one to equal this in any one particular.

But to continue. The animal had scarcely passed out of sight, and we could still hear it plunging through the trees, when the rest of the herd came trooping through the gap. Led by a Tusker of most truculent appearance, they stalked solemnly, in single file, across the opening, each animal seeming to step into the footsteps of

the one before him ; we counted them as they passed—just twenty-five in all, of which four were large Tuskers, and the rest either females or the tuskless male, commonly called " Mukhnas."

Bringing up the rear was, evidently, a female, for nestling close against her was her little one—no higher than a calf, but in gait and manner as solemn and dignified as the rest. We watched the procession with absorbing interest, for each animal that came into view brought with it something fresh to admire and wonder at. Though resembling each other in general appearance we could see that they consisted of two distinctly different types.

Now would appear a beast short-legged and deep bodied, with massive head and slow, heavy tread ; and immediately following him, perhaps, a tall, long-limbed monster, lean and comparatively nimble of foot, with receding forehead and wild, restless appearance, as compared with the calm and almost gentle bearing of the other.

The two types I have attempted to describe are, as we subsequently learned, known as the " Domurriah " and " Mirghi " class, respectively. The former, when tamed, being much valued because of their greater strength and powers of endurance, while the latter, as a rule, are weedy, nervous brutes, and often of uncertain temper.

It was not until the last animal in the procession had passed, that we were able to question Dulall

as to the extraordinary conduct of the Tusker that had first appeared ; and then we learnt what an extremely rare and curious sight we had had the luck to witness.

He now told us that the Tusker was a Rogue elephant, and the disturbance we had heard in the distance was the fight, ending in his defeat and expulsion from the herd—which had then chased him from their midst.

“ The sahibs’ ‘ kapal ’ ” (luck) “ is good,” said the old man, as he concluded, “ for it is a rare sight to see a Rogue driven from the herd, and I have only seen it once before, many years ago, when I was still a ‘ chokra ’ ” (boy).

That this ancient, dried-up specimen of humanity had ever been a “ boy ” it was not easy to imagine, but we were quite ready to believe it must have been “ very long ago,” hence, congratulated ourselves greatly on having witnessed an occurrence so evidently rare.

The rest of this eventful night passed quietly enough. The moon, now shining brightly overhead, lit up the scene around, and its rays, penetrating to the depths below, revealed all that it contained ; but alas ! there was now nothing there to see.

The rhino had departed. Alarmed by the Tusker’s boisterous approach, it had scampered off with that peculiar whistle which these animals give when frightened or disturbed, and which we

had heard and wondered at till explained to us by Dulall.

The various incidents I have described had kept us so interested the greater portion of the night, that we were surprised to find, from the increasing light, that it was now nearly dawn.

Tom, who with a fortitude most remarkable in one of his impetuous nature, had hitherto controlled his longing to fire at everything we had seen or heard, now saw his opportunity.

“What is the use of watching any longer now that it is daylight,” he exclaimed. “We may as well fire if anything turns up. Don’t you think so, Dulall?” and, turning to the latter, repeated the question in what he imagined to be Hindustani.

I could see by the old man’s face that this proposal was not exactly to his liking, but much to my surprise he approved of the suggestion and replied that he thought the firing would do no harm now, adding that “if the sahib could kill a deer or two the Mahouts would be much pleased.”

We noticed that he did not include himself in the anticipated feast, but we knew that he would share in it as largely as the others—for if there was one thing the old man enjoyed more thoroughly than another, it was a good square meal of “Hurin Ghosh” (deer’s flesh).

However, as it was decided we might shoot, we took up the rifles and, placing ourselves so as to command the entrance of the gorge, waited

DULALL THE FOREST GUARD III

anxiously for anything that might come. To Tom it mattered little what animal turned up so long as he could fire, and I firmly believe that had an elephant appeared he would have fired at it, in spite of the penalty attached to such an act—unless done in self-defence.

Fortunately, no such temptation offered, for he would assuredly have succumbed; but after we had been watching for half-an-hour, or so, we heard something approaching, and soon an enormous "Sambhur" stag was seen cautiously walking towards the "lick."

He was a magnificent beast, with a "head" such as one often hears about, but very seldom sees. I waited to let him pass on to the lick, for I was anxious to see what he would do, and whispered to Tom to wait, but he was too impatient.

"Oh, no! let's fire now or he may go off," he replied, so loudly that the animal, hearing the unaccustomed sound, stopped suddenly and looked suspiciously around.

It was too late now to wait, so, making a sign to Tom, we fired together. As the two reports went echoing through the trees the beast rolled over on its side, apparently quite dead.

Almost simultaneously with the explosion there was a loud rustling in the jungle opposite, then a quick rush of some animal through the strip of grass that fringed the heavier cover.

112 DULALL THE FOREST GUARD

“ That is a ‘ bagh,’ I think,” exclaimed Dulall, as he watched its movements in the grass, “ and if it is it won’t go far, for he must have seen the Sambhur coming and was lying there in wait.”

“ Well, he can’t climb down that bank, anyway, so let’s go down and examine the Sambhur,” said Tom ; and ignoring the old man’s objections, we descended from our perch and, taking the path we had come up, went down into the gorge.

We found both our bullets in the Sambhur, just behind the shoulder, and must of course have killed it instantaneously. He looked enormous as we stood beside him, and I couldn’t help thinking that even his “ splendid head ” was hardly an excuse for destroying such a noble looking beast.

But Dulall, to whom sentiment, in any shape, was a quality unknown, and who had strangely objected to our leaving the Maichan, soon turned my thoughts to matters more important, pointing out to us the critical position we should be in should any dangerous animal come up while we were on the ground.

“ But we have our rifles with us, so what would that matter ? ” we urged, thinking with the confidence of young sportsmen, that with loaded weapons in our hands we would be absolutely safe !

The wily old man, seeing that we were not to be convinced, now went on another plan, and one he

knew would send us scampering up the bank faster than he could follow.

“ Yes, sahib, but what is the use of staying down here, when by sitting concealed on the Maichan, the tiger we heard just now might come down, after a time, to feed upon the deer and then the sahibs could shoot him ? ”

He said this with such an appearance of sincerity that we were both completely taken in.

“ By Jove, the old chap is right, as he always seems to be,” said Tom. “ Come on, Bones, let’s get on sharp,” and, without waiting for a reply, he hurried up the path as fast as he could go. I followed him, nothing loth, for the chance of a pot shot at an unsuspecting tiger was one not to be lightly thrown away !

Dulall came hustling up behind, as fast as his drumsticks would allow, chuckling to himself, no doubt, at the success of this little ruse he had so artfully concocted.

We took up our positions again on the Maichan, watching anxiously for the tiger to appear, for we quite believed it would—in spite of the disturbance we had created, and the fact that it was now broad daylight, too !

But nothing was more improbable, as we might have known, and eventually admitted, though not till after we had been watching for an hour ! To make up for our disappointment we turned our attention to the “ tiffin basket,” for now that

the excitement was over we discovered we were hungry.

The scraps left over from our previous meal had not improved by keeping, but, such as they were, they served to stay our hunger for the time, and so increased my longing for a smoke that, quite forgetful of the trick I had played poor Tom, I produced the tobacco pouch from my pocket and proceeded to fill my pipe.

“Hullo, how the deuce did that get there?” he cried, eyeing me suspiciously, “I didn’t see you pick it up below!”

“Never you mind how it came there, but be thankful that you have got it,” I replied, handing him the pouch.

He took it with a grunt of disapproval, and filling his pipe puffed away in sullen and mystified silence for a while, till, the soothing influence of the weed restoring his good humour, he laughingly admitted “he had been done.”

CHAPTER VI

Marks of Big Game—The return—Alarmed by Elephants—Tom will talk—A Forest "Look-out" hut—News of a Rhino—An Official Letter—Appointed Assistant Superintendent—Return to prepare for my Station—Take Dulall with us and start for Begumpore in a "Shigram"

As we were finishing our smoke the elephants turned up, and while the Sambhur was being "padded" we got down and strolled about, anxious to find the footprints of the animal we had taken for a leopard.

The ground was hard and so thickly covered with fallen leaves and scrub that it was impossible to discover any marks, but at last, close up against our tree, we found a small patch of open sand, and clearly imprinted on it the "pugs" of an enormous leopard, for, as Dulall observed, they were as large as those of an ordinary sized tigress.

Immediately around the footprint, and deeply imbedded on the trunk, were several long scratches—about three-quarters of an inch apart—still moist with the sap that had run out. These, Dulall told us, were the marks made by the leopard as he cleaned and sharpened his claws

We had seen some of these curious structures from a distance, but had not examined any closely, and were most anxious to do so; the one we had now arrived at was said to be the highest in the Forest, and looking up to it from the ground we were astonished at its height.

I cannot for the moment recall to mind the name of the tree on which it stood, but it was a straight and comparatively slender one, with most of its branches growing almost at right angles to its trunk.

Within a few feet of the summit, and at a distance of about forty from the ground, was a thick cluster of these branches, and built upon this, a platform on which was erected a small, thatched hut.

We could not at first discover any means of reaching this crow's-nest-like structure, but on looking about, found a rough pole with one end resting on the ground, and the other firmly secured to the lowest branch above, from this branch to one higher up again, was another pole similarly secured—but at both ends, and so on, till the topmost one reached the platform. Some notches roughly cut on both sides of these poles served for footholds. These poles were so placed that the person climbing could rest his back against the trunk, and thus obtain some assistance. It was certainly an ingenious substitute

for a ladder, but required a fairly expert climber to make use of it.

To Tom and myself, accustomed from early youth to climbing trees, the task was simple enough, and we were half way up the tree before Dulall had time to stop us, then seeing that we were perfectly at home, he came up slowly after us.

It was not long before we reached the platform, which we found was made entirely of bamboos, and about eight feet by six in size. On this was built the hut, a tiny little shed, with just room enough for one, the edges of the platform, being roughly railed in with bamboos, afforded the necessary protection.

We were both enchanted with the place, and promptly decided spending a night in one, deeper in the Forest, before returning to Shikarpur. In fact, Tom was so fascinated with the idea, that he suggested sending for our blankets, and sleeping there that night!

Happily, Dulall happened at this moment to interpose with a scheme so infinitely more attractive, that I had no difficulty in persuading Tom to abandon his proposal.

It appeared that the keen old sportsman, always on the look out for information, had during the day discovered, from some perfectly fresh tracks, that a large rhino was about, and promised us an interview with him next morning,

explaining on our way home how this was to be accomplished !

These animals, he informed us, always come out to feed at night and as the dawn approaches go back into the Forest, returning, almost invariably, by the track they have made in coming out. These tracks, or "Dundis," as they are called, though much resembling those made by wild elephants, are easily distinguishable from their tunnel like formation. For the rhino, being of lower stature, does not disturb the surface of the jungle, but bores its way through it, so to speak.

"I have seen the 'Dundi' he made last night," continued Dulall, "and if we conceal ourselves near the one he makes to-night, the sahib can shoot him as he returns. But we must be there before the dawn !"

"But how can you be sure of hitting off the right 'Dundi,' as you call it ?" we asked, wondering how the old man would be able to distinguish this particular one from that of the night before.

"Kuch mushkil nye, sahib" (there is no difficulty, sir), he replied, evidently surprised that there should be any doubt about the matter, and spoke with such confidence that we were easily convinced, and before we reached the Bungalow had arranged to start for the jungle shortly after midnight.

We were naturally much excited at the prospect

of another night adventure and, anxious to commence our preparations at once, hustled the elephants on as fast as the jungle would admit.

“What lucky chaps we are!” exclaimed Tom, as he dodged a creeper which stretched across our track. “Just think of all the curious sights we have seen, to say nothing of bagging a tiger each! and all in three days, too! but, hullo! whose elephant is that I wonder?”

Poor Tom! he little guessed the disappointment this animal's arrival meant to him, for as he spoke, we could see an elephant approaching the Bungalow from the opposite side, and seated on it was a constable.

“A bobby, too, by Jove!” he added, anxiously, realizing that something serious must have happened.

“Hullo, Man Sing! What has brought you here?” I asked, recognising one of my father's orderlies.

“An urgent letter from the burra sahib, huzoor,” he replied, saluting, and, as his elephant came nearer, handed me a long, official looking cover; I took it from him, and tearing it hastily open, found an envelope addressed to me marked “On H.M.S.—Urgent.”

Opening this at once, I saw that it was from the Secretary of the Government, informing me “That his Honour the Lieutenant Governor,

having been pleased to appoint Mr. John Christopher Skellerton to officiate as an Assistant Superintendent of Police at Begumpore, he was requested to join that District at once, and that he, the writer, had the honour to be my most obedient servant, etc., etc., etc."

There was also a note from my father, calling me to Shikarpore immediately, as he had heard, privately, that I should join in a day or two at latest.

"I congratulate you, heartily, Bones, old boy," said Tom, giving my hand a cordial grip, "but I bet it's those 'lucky bones' that have done it," he added, laughing at the hideous pun.

"Thanks, old man, and I hope yours will soon 'do it' too," I answered, "but I wish 'my obedient servant' had chosen some other time for informing me what 'His Honour had been pleased to do,'" I added, feeling, for the moment, anything but pleased!

"I was just wishing the same thing, too, but did not like to say so," replied Tom, evidently glad to find that I agreed with him; "but it is an awful sell though, isn't it? having to return, just as we had marked down a rhino, too!"

"But why don't you stay on, and let me return alone?" I suggested, unwilling to spoil his sport.

"Oh, no! it would be no fun staying on alone, besides, I can't speak the lingo well enough. I

DULALL THE FOREST GUARD 131

tell you what, though! I will get 'the Dad' to let me go to Begumpore with you. That's a good idea, eh?"

"Excellent!" I replied, delighted at the suggestion, "and we will take Dulall with us, too, for I hear it is a splendid place for sport."

Having thus settled matters to our mutual satisfaction, I told the old man the good news I had received, which impressed him greatly, for Dulall, like most natives of his class, had a profound respect for "the Police," though not unmixed with awe, and a "Police sahib," to him, was a most important personage.

Giving him time for his mind to recover its equilibrium, I then told him we must return immediately, if possible, and he went off to make the necessary arrangements.

It was eventually decided that we should start at two o'clock in the morning, so as to reach the grass jungle at daylight, as it would be unsafe to go through that by night.

The return journey proved an uneventful one, and we accordingly accomplished it in half the time it had taken us to come out.

The "Parents," when we had told them the tale of our adventures, were perfectly astounded at our extraordinary success.

"I never heard of such luck," said Tom senior, in quite an injured tone, "Fancy two youngsters, scarcely four months in the country,

and each with a tiger to his credit! Why, how long was it before you got your first one, Jack?"

"Five years! and then it was only a very little one," replied my father, smiling at his old friend's rueful countenance.

"There, do you hear that, youngsters," cried the latter, "and here I have been, all my life in the jungle, and never shot one over nine feet eleven inches yet! Really, the precocity of the present generation is positively appalling!"

"So it is, old man, I quite agree with you, but there is such a thing as quantity, you know, and was not your last the hundred and second?" observed my father, quietly.

"Well, yes, I *have* topped my century," replied the other, somewhat mollified at this allusion to his prowess as a tiger slayer; "but this is a record anyway, and must be duly celebrated. Here, Bearer, ek bottle Simkin lao, and tell Dulall I want to see him."

The Simkin (champagne) and Dulall appeared together, and, filling our glasses to the brim, we drank death to all tigers, large and small, while Dulall looked smilingly on, having pouched the fifty rupees "Bukshish" his master had bestowed on him.

Taking advantage of the soothing effect the sparkling liquid had produced upon the elders, especially on the older Tom, I ventured to broach

the plans we had concocted in the Forest. The project seemed to meet with their approval, up to a certain point!

The permission for Tom to accompany me was readily accorded, but when I suggested that Dulall might come, too, the indignation displayed by Tom Senior was positively alarming. In fact, had I proposed taking all the trees in his beloved Forest with me, the proposal could scarcely have been more wrathfully received.

“What! take Dulall away! just as the ‘marking’ season is coming on, too,” he cried, knocking over the bottle and the glasses as he started up excitedly. “And who is to mark the trees I should like to know? or, perhaps, you think they will mark themselves?”

How long he might have continued in this strain it is difficult to say. Fortunately my father, accustomed, doubtless, to these sudden outbursts of temper in his friend, now came to our assistance.

“Look here, Tom,” he interrupted, “you know the marking season is still three months off, so Dulall would be back in plenty of time. He has had no leave for fifteen years, and the rest would do him good.

“Rest!” retorted his irascible old friend, “a lot of rest he’d have with two restless youngsters hustling him about all day, and probably half the night!”