

ASSAM SPORT.

By G. G.

A SHORT time ago it was feared, on account of tea becoming such an important article of commerce, that the whole of Assam—the principal province of tea-culture—would be one large expanse of cultivated land. This to the lover of sport would not have been pleasant, and would have caused him to advance far up the Himalayas to have a few days' good jungle shooting. The land laws, however, came to his and the natives' rescue; and, by putting the purchase of land by tea-companies under some strictures, the Government has left a large portion of Assam what it has always had the character for, that is, a large expanse of flat-land, and long ranges of hills covered with jungle as wild, lonely and feverish as the most enthusiastic sportsman could wish for.

The Assamese, as a rule, are not very conspicuous for courage or pluck; they are, in fact, a very gentle race of people, given to nothing more warlike than cultivating their paddy-fields and weaving their cloth. The principal *shikaris* or huntsmen are men who have a decidedly Burmese cast of countenance and who are found in the many large villages that are scattered over the province. They are for the most part well-made men, not very tall certainly, but valuable for possessing a cool, dare-devil manner when following up their game and the extraordinary pluck they exhibit when they really come upon it. The time of the year that the Assamese generally choose for their native hunts, is when the paddy-fields are on the point of ripening, and a chance is, therefore, run of finding a great many animals on and about one piece of cultivated ground; such ground being chosen, that is somewhat detached from the hamlet and well surrounded by jungle. This being settled, a number of men set about making lanes and avenues through and through the field. This is easily done by laying the growing corn aside with the hand, while at the end of each lane is firmly planted a strong well-woven net, made of coarse fibres and silk. A number of men, generally the entire male population of the village, being ready with guns, clubs, and bow and arrows, the jungle and field are surrounded and well beaten. The noise that is made is something

extraordinary. Everybody is yelling, shrieking and banging about to his heart's content; while a surplus lot are beating tom-toms and pieces of tin. The unfortunate animals are scared out of their senses by this unusual riot, and running out of the growing paddy into one of the lanes and finding a sort of clear thoroughfare, they tear along it and so blunder into the nets. Here short work is made of them by a combined battery of clubs, matchlocks and arrows. In this primitive way as many as a dozen or two heads of game are captured, according to the working and guidance of the *shikaris*, who generally have a great deal to do with the management. The beasts that are caught are generally the barking and the sambur deer, wild pig, cat, *etc.* Often, too, there are lots of jungle fowl and black pheasant in the field. These get so terrified that, instead of flying up into the air and so getting a good chance of escaping, they run along the paths and into the trap. At the conclusion of the beat, a division of spoil takes place, and a *burra-khana* ensues.

Towards the north of Assam—north Luckimpore—live large tribes of Meerees, originally dwelling in the lower ranges of the Himalayas. They have by degrees descended into the plains and spread themselves all over the norther portion of the Brahmapootra valley. In the sub-valley of the Soobansiri, for instance, they are very numerous. They build always on the banks of a river and are given more to fishing and sporting than the true Assamese are. But what, perhaps, is more valuable, is, that they have a great more “spunk” in them: and as a rule are tall, well-built fellows, willing and obliging, especially if “tipped” with their favourite stimulant—a piece of opium. These fellows are, perhaps, more of a “dab” at hunting than the Assamese. The Sootia and Gossii Meerees, whose main tribe is high up the Himalayas, hunt long strips of jungle, in the same manner as above described, dogs being used as well as beaters. The best time for this sport is when the rains have fairly set in and the rivers are in full flood—say about July and August. The lower lands, as many a wretched tea-planter can testify, are completely under water; and all game, both friends and foes, congregate on the higher lands. The consequence is often amusing; for a small piece of jungle land, sticking out of the water, suddenly becomes populated and is converted into a species of zoological gardens. A quantity of men get on to this piece of land, while others get

every boat they can lay hands on and station themselves on the river and along the opposite banks. The game driven onwards take to the water, when the men in the boats have them at their mercy. The hill-sections of the same tribe are also great hunters, although on account of their ground they cannot hunt the deer, *etc.*, into the river. They therefore make the salt-pits a substitute, using as arms small barbed arrows with poisoned heads, the poison probably coming from a plant of the Solaniceæ tribe, which grows abundantly on the hills of the lower Himalaya range.

LEOPARD-HUNTING IN UPPER INDIA, AS PURSUED IN THE DAYS OF THE EMPEROR AKBAR.

BY YOUNG NIMROD.

I HAVE to premise that, it is very evident the animal here alluded to by Abul Fazl is neither the panther (*Felis pardus*, Linneus), nor the leopard (*F. leopardus*, Temminck), but the hunting leopard (*F. jubata*, Schreber), though the translator does not expressly state such to be the case.

As regards the habits of the hunting leopards, we are told that, they alternately occupy three parts of the country, in one of which "they hunt," in the next "they rest and sleep," and in the last "they play and amuse themselves." This is most curious indeed, and must be accepted, I think, *cum grano salis*. We are further informed that, they mostly select the summit of a hill for a sleeping place, and that the shade of a tree is sufficient protection for them, and round about it "they deposit their excrements," which are known in Hindi as *āk'har*.

It is stated that, formerly these leopards were caught in deep holes covered with grass, but the Emperor had invented an improved method of so doing, which is described as "a pit only two or three *gaz*"—six to nine feet—"deep, and "constructed with a peculiar trap-door, which closes when "the leopard falls into the hole." More than a single leopard can be caught in such a trap, and it is said that once as many as seven were entrapped together. This unusual, if not extraordinary, incident, is thus related :—