

INDIA

AND ITS NATIVE PRINCES

Travels in Central India

AND IN THE PRESIDENCIES OF BOMBAY AND BENGAL

By LOUIS ROUSSELET

CAREFULLY REVISED AND EDITED BY LIEUT.-COL. BUCKLE

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CHAPTER IX.

BARODA.—(Continued.)

The Hāghur.—Fight between Elephants, Rhinoceroses, Buffaloes, &c.—The Wrestlers.—The Nucki-ka-kousti.—The Disobliging Astrologers.—A Misadventure.—The Royal Train.—Antelope Hunting.—Leopards for Hunting Purposes.—“Pig-sticking.”—The Guicowar’s Birthday.—Tiger Hunting.—The Plains of Goojerat.—A Night on a Tree.—The Royal Menagerie.



OWARDS the end of June the rains gave us a little respite, and the Guicowar availed himself of this break in the season to commence the series of fêtes he had promised to give us. These consisted of hunting-parties, tilting-matches, and combats. Every day brought a new programme.

The Court of the Guicowars is the only one in India that has preserved, down to the present time, the customs of the Middle Ages in their primitive splendour. The impoverishment of their estates has compelled most of the other rājās to despoil these great ceremonies of a considerable portion of their former luxury, and amongst some of the others English influence has introduced European habits, higher objects, and better tastes. Here this mixture is never seen; everything bears the impress of the Hindoo character, and displays the originality of past times.

The contests of athletes and animals are what the Guicowar prefers to all other entertainments; and he spends enormous sums upon them. Of an ardent and somewhat truculent character, he is passionately fond of these exciting and cruel sports, in which the lives of men are endangered. He personally superintends every arrangement that concerns them, and indulges in a liberality that borders on extravagance in their promotion. His parks contain numbers of elephants, employed specially for combats; and rarely does a week elapse without one of these spectacles. The elephant, which is in general an animal of a most gentle disposition, can be brought by a system of exciting nourishment to a state of rage which the Indians call *mustā*. He then becomes furious, and attacks whatever comes in his way, men or animals. The males alone are capable of becoming *mustā*, and, to bring them to this state, it is usually necessary to feed them with sugar and butter for three months.

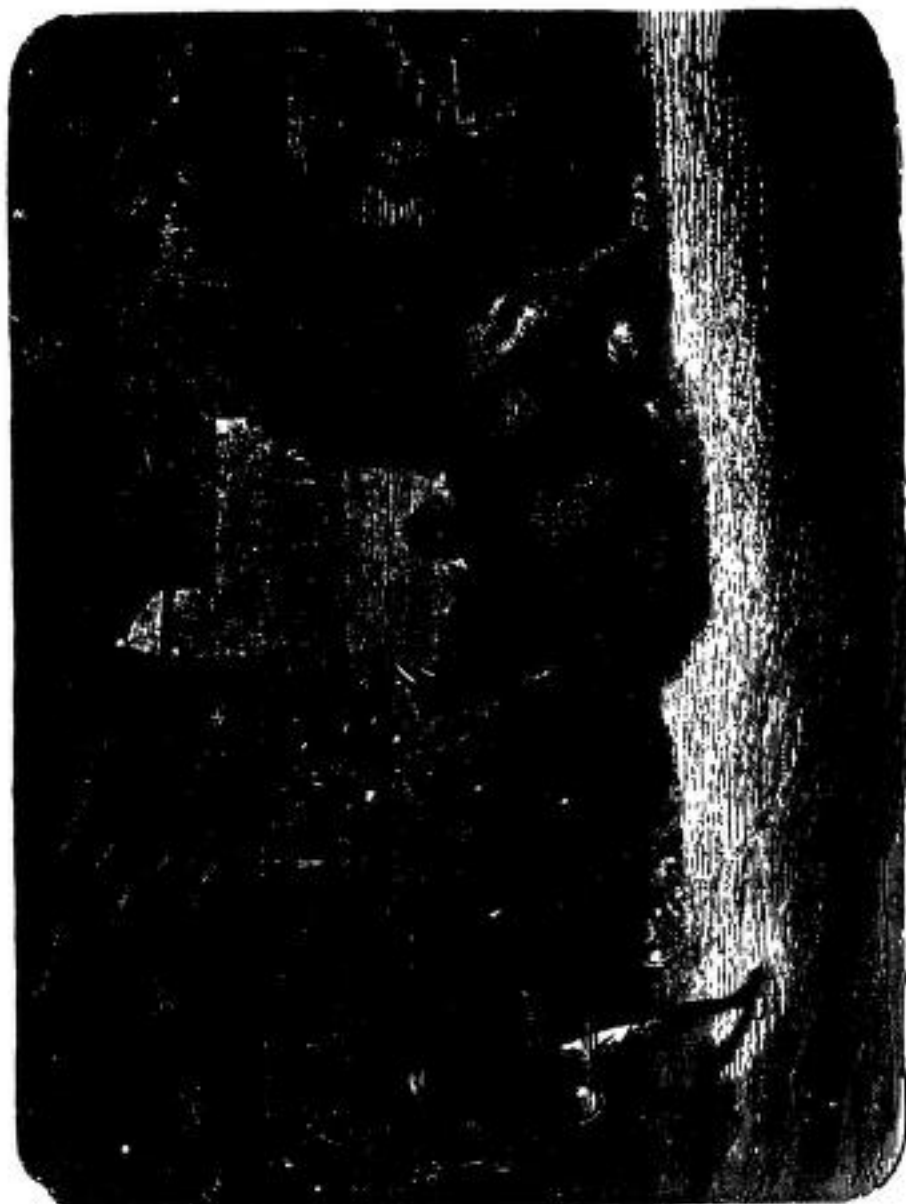
The Guicowar one day informed me, with evident good-humour, that all preparations had been made, and on the morrow would be held the first combat of elephants. We went to see the two animals which were to fight, and upon which many wagers had already been staked. These immense brutes were loaded with iron chains of considerable weight, and shut up separately in strongly fenced

flight, and appears to be on the look-out for some unexpected attack. A door opens, and a Mahratta horseman, lance in hand, and mounted on a beautiful steed, enters the arena. Prancing up to our balcony, he gracefully salutes the king. I remark that the horse has his tail cut very short, and I am told that this is to prevent the elephant laying hold of him. The latter runs towards him with his trunk raised aloft, in order to annihilate the creature whom he hates most of all. He has, in fact, a peculiar aversion for the horse, which he manifests even in his gentlest moments. This third act of the combat is the most attractive. The horse, admirably trained, does not stir, save by order of his rider; so that the latter allows the elephant almost to touch him with his trunk before getting out of his way. He attacks the enormous beast with his lance, sometimes in front, sometimes in flank, driving him into a paroxysm of rage. But even at this moment the elephant displays his extraordinary intelligence. Pretending to take no notice of the horseman, he allows him to approach behind; and, suddenly turning round with astounding rapidity, he is on the point of seizing the horse, who only saves himself by a desperate bound. At length the combat terminates; the horseman again salutes us and withdraws, and the pincer-bearers enter, welcomed by the shouts of the crowd, to secure the elephant. These poor fellows have hard work of it, for the elephant charges them, and they have great difficulty in bringing it to a stand-still. The king calls before him the fuse-bearer who saved the life of the *sâtmari-wallah*, and rewards him with a piece of figured stuff and a purse of five hundred rupees.

Another sort of combat, though not so attractive nor on so grand a scale, is not wanting in originality; I mean rhinoceros-fights. The two animals are chained at opposite extremities of the arena. One is painted black, the other red, in order that they may be distinguished, for otherwise they resemble each other in every point. When the company is assembled (I am describing a scene of which I was a witness), the two hideous animals are let loose, and start off in an ungainly trot, raising angry cries. They seem to have very bad sight, for they pass one another several times without stopping; but at length they meet, and attack each other fiercely. Horn against horn, they exchange passes, as though fencing with swords, until one succeeds in passing his horn beneath the head of his antagonist, which is their vulnerable spot. The animal, therefore, who finds himself in this predicament suddenly turns, so that the point of the enemy's horn rests against his jaw-bone, instead of penetrating his throat. They remain in this position, motionless, for some minutes, then separate, and one of them takes to flight. For a whole hour the fight is many times renewed with increasing fury; their horns clashing together with a great noise, their enormous lips covered with foam, and their foreheads stained with blood. Their attendants surround them, and throw buckets of water over them to refresh them, so that they may sustain the combat. At last the Guicowar orders a cessation of hostilities; a fuse is employed to separate the combatants; they are secured, sponged, and led away.

In these beast-fights buffaloes also display a terrible degree of fury. Their vast horns are formidable weapons that repel the tiger himself, and their agility makes them more dangerous than even the elephant. But the oddest of all these contests was one I saw one day, in the *Adghar* at Baroda, between an ass and an hyena, and—who would have thought it?—the ass gained the victory!

The sight of the hyena filled him with such rage that he immediately attacked, and, by dint of kicking and biting, very soon disabled him. The victor was covered with garlands of flowers, and led off amid the cheers of the multitude.



RHINOCEROS-FIGHT AT BABODA.

The Guicowar's passionate love of this kind of entertainment is not limited to combats between animals of every description that can be trained for the purpose. He also keeps at his court a perfect army of athletes, who are cele-

brated throughout the whole of India. He, himself, glories in being a *pehlwan*, or wrestler, and devotes himself daily to this exercise. Every morning, after performing his ablutions, he goes on to the terrace and wrestles with one of his *pehlwana*. Of consummate skill as an amateur, he is exceedingly jealous of his powers, and would assuredly be enraged if the wrestler allowed him to detect the least mark of condescension at this game. The latter is therefore obliged to strive freely with the king, and nevertheless, like a good courtier, to allow him to claim the victory. These wrestlers are recruited in all the provinces of India, but they come principally from the Punjab and Travancore. Brought up from their infancy in the profession, they attain an extraordinary development of muscle. Their diet, their mode of living, and their dwellings are all regulated by the king himself, who tends them somewhat as he does his fighting buffaloes and elephants. The wrestling-day is always announced a long time beforehand; very often the neighbouring rajahs send their *pehlwana*s to compete; bets are freely made, and great animation prevails throughout the Court.

The first contest was held on the 19th of July, and we went to the *hâghur* to witness it. The king and his courtiers had already arrived, and were seated on chairs round an arena strewn with sand. They were only waiting for us, and we had scarcely taken our seats when two men, half naked, formed like Hercules himself, came forward to salute the king; then, taking up their position in the centre of the circle, they fraternally embraced, and closed with one another. The rule at these wrestlings is, that one of the combatants is to throw the other on his back on the ground, or at least to compel him to declare himself vanquished. When, therefore, one holds the other doubled up under him and cannot succeed in forcing him down, he twists his wrist and tries to break it; the other then cries for quarter. But the ardour they import into these games is such that very frequently they prefer to bear the pain than to confess themselves beaten, and it is necessary abruptly to put an end to the combat.

Another sort of combat, much more terrible than those already mentioned, and which is only to be seen nowadays at Baroda, is the *Nucki-ka-kousti*, that is to say, "fight with claws." Here the combatants, almost naked, but adorned with crowns and garlands, tear each other with claws of horn. These claws were formerly of steel, and caused certain death to one or other of the combatants; but they have been abolished, as too barbarous for modern times. Those now in use, are, as I have said, of horn, and are fixed on the closed fist with thongs. I was only once present at a combat of this kind, for my heart was so moved by the horrible spectacle that I refused to go again. The wrestlers, intoxicated with *âng*—liquid opium, mixed with an infusion of hemp—sing as they rush upon one another; their faces and heads are soon covered with blood, and their frenzy knows no bounds. The king, with wild eyes and the veins of his neck swollen, surveys the scene with such passionate excitement that he cannot remain quiet, but imitates by gestures the movements of the wrestlers. The arena is covered with blood; the defeated combatant is carried off, sometimes in a dying condition; and the conqueror, the skin of his forehead hanging down in stripes, prostrates himself before the king, who places round his neck a necklace of fine pearls, and covers him with garments of great value. One episode, moreover, disgusted me to such a degree that, without any heed of the effect my sudden departure might have upon the Guicowar, I at once withdrew. One of the