

LIFE IN AN INDIAN OUTPOST

BY

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"THE LAND OF THE BOXERS; OR CHINA UNDER THE ALLIES"; ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

LONDON

T. WERNER LAURIE LTD.

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the buildings, and broke a tusk trying to root up the platform."

And when daylight dawned and I could see the toy engine and carriages, I was not surprised at the fear of encountering an elephant on the line.

Now on our fifth day of travel we were nearing the end of the journey. We had passed the capital of Cooch Behar and were approaching Alipur Duar, the last station before the Terai Forest is reached. Suddenly, high in the air above the now distinct line of hills, stood out in the brilliant sunlight the white crest and snowy peaks of Kinchinjunga, twenty-eight thousand feet high, and nearly one hundred and twenty miles away. Past Alipur Duar, and then hills and snow-clad summits were lost to sight as our little train plunged from the sunny plain into the deep shadows of the famous Terai Forest—the wonderful jungle that stretches east and west along the foot of the Himalayas, and clothes their lowest slopes. In whose recesses roam the wild elephant, the rhinoceros and the bison, true lords of the woods; where deadlier foes to man than these, malaria and black-water fever hold sway and lay low the mightiest hunter before the Lord. And standing on the back platform of our tiny carriage my subaltern and I strove to pierce its gloomy depths, half hoping to see the giant bulk of a wild elephant or a rhinoceros. But nothing met our gaze save the great orchid-clad trees, the graceful fronds of monster ferns, and the dense undergrowth that would deny a passage to anything less powerful than bisons or elephants.

In a sudden clearing in the heart of the forest, the train stopped at a small station near which stood a few bamboo huts and a gaunt, two-storied wooden

CHAPTER V

IN THE JUNGLE

An Indian jungle—The trees—Creepers—Orchids—The undergrowth—On an elephant in the jungle—Forcing a passage—Wild bees—Red ants—A lost river—A *sambhur* hind—Spiders—Jungle fowl—A stag—*Hallal*—Wounded beasts—A halt—Skinning the stag—Ticks—Butcher apprentices—Natural rope—Water in the air—*Pani bel*—Trail of wild elephants—Their habits—An impudent monkey—An adventure with a rogue elephant—Fire lines—Wild dogs—A giant squirrel—The barking deer—A good bag—Spotted deer—Protective colouring—Dangerous beasts—Natives' dread of bears—A bison calf—The fascination of the forest—The generous jungle—Wild vegetables—Natural products—A home in the trees—Forest Lodge the First—Destroyed by a wild elephant—Its successor—A luncheon-party in the air—The salt lick—Discovery of a coal mine—A monkey's parliament—The jungle by night.

FROM the dense tangled undergrowth the great trees lift their bare stems, each striving to push its leafy crown through the thick canopy of foliage and get its share of the sun. The huge trunks are devoid of branches for many feet above the ground; but around them twist giant creepers which strangle them in close embrace and sink their coils deep into the bark. Here and there a tree, killed by the cruel pressure, stands withered and lifeless but still held up by the murderous parasite. From bole to bole these creepers, thick as a ship's hawser, swing in festoons, coiling and writhing around each other

detachment, and the *mahouts* and their families, and our coolies were grateful for the meat.

Tough as a *sambhur's* flesh is, we officers were glad of it ourselves when nothing better offered. But our Hindus rejoiced exceedingly whenever one of us brought home a wild boar; and the Moham-medans were correspondingly disgusted, as pork is anathema to them. The slaying of a boar with a gun in open country where pigsticking is possible is as great a crime in India as shooting a fox in a hunting county in England; but in the forest it is permissible. There were a few *cheetul* or spotted deer very like the English fallow deer in our jungles; but I only saw one herd and secured one stag all the time I was at Buxa. They usually frequent more open forests; and the spots on their hide assimilating to the dappled light and shade of the sun through the leaves is a good example of Nature's protective colouring. Thus the black hide of the *sambhur* stag blends easily with the dark shadows of the denser forest and makes them very hard to see.

One does not often meet the dangerous beasts of the jungle by day. Tigers and panthers, though frequent enough, generally move only by night. Yet I often saw on the tree-trunks long scratches where these animals had cleaned and sharpened their claws, just as the domestic cat does on the legs of chairs and tables. They keep out of the way of elephants; and so I sometimes must have passed some great feline, whose fresh tracks I had just observed, sheltering in the undergrowth and watching us as we went by. I have seen high up on the stems and branches other scratches which showed

where a bear had climbed in search of fruit. These animals, the dreaded large Himalayan variety, usually dwell in the hills and descend into the forest by night, so that they are rarely met with by daylight. The natives regard them with terror; for, if stumbled upon accidentally by some woodcutter, they will probably attack him and smash his skull with a crushing blow of a paw. In our stretch of jungle I only came across one rhinoceros and a herd of six bison, which, being protected by the rules of the forest department, we could not shoot. Once my elephant put up a stray bison calf which looked at us with mild curiosity until my orderly climbed down and tried to catch it. It trotted off out of his reach and stopped to look back at him. We drove it for a mile before us, hoping to shepherd it into camp and capture it; but we lost it in thick jungle. Wild elephants I occasionally came across, and had a couple of unpleasant adventures with them.

The fascination of a day's sport in the heart of the great forest is beyond words. Even if nothing falls to one's rifle the pleasure of roaming through the woodland is intense. Of the world nothing seems to exist farther than the eye can see down the short vistas of soft green light between the giant trees. Lulled by the swaying motion of the elephant—not unpleasant when used to it—one's senses are nevertheless keenly on the alert; for every stride may disclose some strange denizen of the jungle either to be sought after or guarded against. And the beauty of it all. The fern-carpeted glades, the drooping trails of bright-coloured orchids, the tangled shadows of the dense undergrowth, the glimpses of never-ending woodland between

CHAPTER XI

IN THE PALACE OF THE MAHARAJAH

The Durbar—Outside the palace—The State elephants—The soldiery—The Durbar Hall—Officials and gentry of the State—The throne—Queen Victoria's banner—The hidden ladies—*Purdah nashin*—Arrival of the *Dewan*—The Maharajah's entry—The Sons' Salute—A chivalrous Indian custom—*Nuzzurs*—The *Dewan's* task—The Maharani—An Indian reformer—*Bramo Samaj*—Pretty princesses—An informal banquet—The *nautch*—A moonlight ride—The Maharajah—A soldier and a sportsman—Cooch Behar—The palace—A dinner-party—The heir's birthday celebrations—Schoolboys' sports—Indian amateur theatricals—An evening in the palace—A panther-drive—Exciting sport—Death of the panther—Partridge shooting on elephants—A stray rhinoceros—Prince Jit's luck—Friendly intercourse between Indians and Englishmen—An unjust complaint.

THE long arcaded front of the Palace of Cooch Behar gleamed in the glow of torches held by hundreds of white-clad natives. From the broad steps of the entrance to the lofty dome above it was outlined with lamps flickering in the night breeze. Before the great portals were ranged two lines of elephants with the State silver howdahs and trappings of heavily embroidered cloth of gold. Their broad faces streaked with white paint in quaint designs, their tusks tipped with brass, the great beasts looked like legendary monsters in the ruddy torchlight as they stood swinging their trunks, flapping their ears, and shifting restlessly from foot to foot. Up the lane

between them came carriages and palankeens bearing the officials and nobles of the State to do homage to their Maharajah, who this night held his annual Durbar. The flight of broad steps in front of the great doorway was crowded with swordsmen and spearmen; while on the ground below were the uniformed State Band under a European conductor, and a Guard of Honour of the red-coated Cooch Behar Infantry with muzzle-loading muskets.

The large circular Durbar Hall running up to the high domed roof and surrounded by a balustraded gallery seemed set for a stage scene. The floor was covered with the seated forms of officials and gentry clothed in white and wearing their jewels. On a dais under a golden canopy stood an empty gilt throne, one arm fashioned into the shape of an elephant, the other a tiger. Beside it was a large banner, the gift of the late Queen Victoria, heavily embroidered in gold with the same animals, which are the armorial bearings of the State. Behind the throne stood a number of swordsmen and halberdiers. One portion of the gallery was shrouded by latticed screens, from behind which came the rustle of draperies and the murmur of female voices; for they hid Her Highness the Maharani, her daughters, and the ladies of Cooch Behar—*purdah nashin*, that is, "hidden behind the veil" and never to reveal their faces to any men but their near kin. In another part of the gallery were a few British officers and civilians gazing with interest on the brilliant spectacle below. Through the great entrance could be seen the crowd outside, the soldiery and the lines of restlessly swaying elephants. Through them up the broad roadway came a palankeen borne on the shoulders of coolies

Sudhira calmly leant over the front of her howdah and snapshotted it as it sprang up and tried to charge, only to be bowled over by a final shot. With a last spasm the beautiful animal sank on the ground and lay still, its yellow and black skin shining in the brilliant sunlight. Several *mahouts* climbed down and approached the body cautiously, while we covered it with our rifles. But it was dead at last; and they lifted it on to the pad of one of the "beater" elephants.

Then, exchanging our weapons for shot-guns we moved off in a long line over the fields in search of partridges. Birds were plentiful. Covey after covey flashed up from the grass under the elephants' feet. A scattered fire opened along the line and the partridges dropped in crumpled balls of feathers. How different it seemed from walking them up over the stubble in the brisk air of an autumn morning in distant England! The Maharajah was shooting now and we soon secured a good bag. We reached the road, found the motor-cars waiting for us, and were whirled back to the palace. Panther and partridges before breakfast—what an attractive programme that would be for a shooting-party in an English country-house!

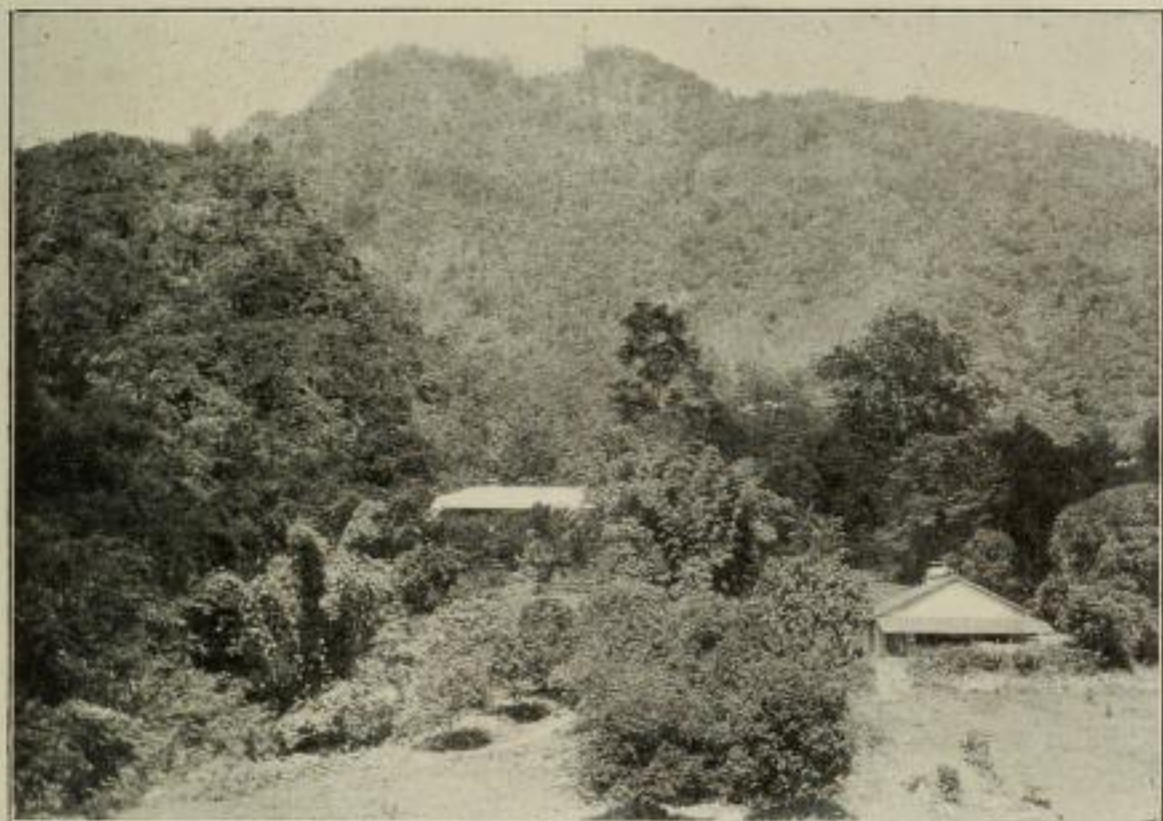
Though formerly the haunt of every species of big game, Cooch Behar has been so opened up for cultivation that it no longer affords cover for the larger animals of the chase. But in recent years the Maharajah's second son, Jitendra, had an unexpected bit of good fortune in *shikar*. His father was absent in Assam organising a big shoot, and had taken with him all his elephants except one. "Jit," then little more than a schoolboy, was the only member of the

family at the palace and was very disgusted at being considered too young to be taken on the shoot. But the Fates were good to him. One day an excited peasant repaired to the palace with the information that a rhinoceros had appeared in a village not five miles from the town. Jit was incredulous. Such a thing seemed impossible; for a rhino had not been seen in Cooch Behar State for many years. But the man stuck to his story. So the boy sent the solitary elephant out to the spot, mounted his bicycle and rode to the village. Here he found a crowd of peasants surrounding, at a respectful distance, a small clump of bamboos in the middle of a large bare field in which several cows were grazing. It seemed impossible that a rhinoceros, which in India always inhabits dense jungle, could have come into such open country. But the villagers declared the animal was there in the bamboos. Jit, still half incredulous, mounted his elephant. Hardly had he done so when a large rhinoceros burst out from the tiny patch of cover, and, apparently objecting to the presence of the cows, charged furiously at them. Up went their tails and off went the cows. Round and round the field they raced, the young heifers leaping and frisking like black buck, while the rhino lumbered heavily after them. The villagers scattered and fled. The scene was so comical that Jit, standing like a circus-master in the centre of the ring, could hardly stop laughing long enough to lift his rifle and take aim. At last he fired; and the rhinoceros checked, stumbled forward a few paces and collapsed in an inert mass on the ground. Then the boy, fearful lest his father might resent his having appropriated the best bit of sport that the State had afforded for years, got on his

bicycle and sped home to write a hurried letter of explanation and apology, which had the effect of the proverbial "soft answer."

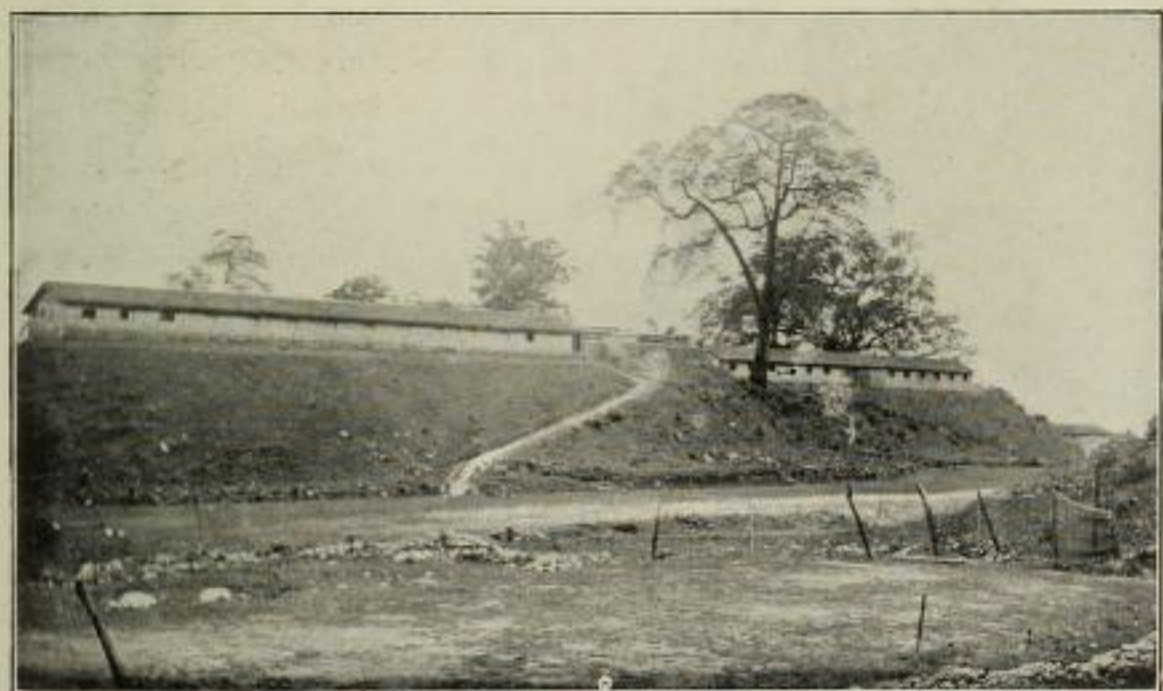
The late Maharajah of Cooch Behar,* as I have said, was practically the first Indian Prince to adopt English customs, and, with his family, mixed freely in European society. By doing so he helped greatly the cause of friendly intercourse between the two races and did much to break down the great barrier between Briton and Indian. But, be it remembered, that barrier is not of the white man's raising. Educated Indians when in England, complain bitterly to sympathising audiences that in their own land they are not admitted freely into Anglo-Indian society. And the cry is taken up parrot-like and echoed in the British Isles by people absolutely ignorant of Indian conditions. The educated native, fresh from the boarding-houses of Bayswater, claims that he has a right to be introduced to a white man's house, to his wife and daughters. But he would hardly let a European see the face of *his* wife or permit him to enter anywhere but the fringe of his domicile. He has all the Oriental's contempt for women, and yet demands to be freely admitted to the society of English ladies, for whom in his heart he has no respect. And we who live in the land know it. But until he emancipates his own womenkind he cannot reasonably expect to be allowed a familiar footing in an Englishman's home.

* He died in 1911; and his eldest son and successor, Rajendra, died in 1913. Prince Jitendra is now Maharajah.



BUXA DUAR.

My bungalow in the foreground; the Officers' Mess among the trees.



“THE FORT WAS BUILT ON A KNOLL.”