

LEAVES FROM A DIARY
IN
LOWER BENGAL

By C. S.

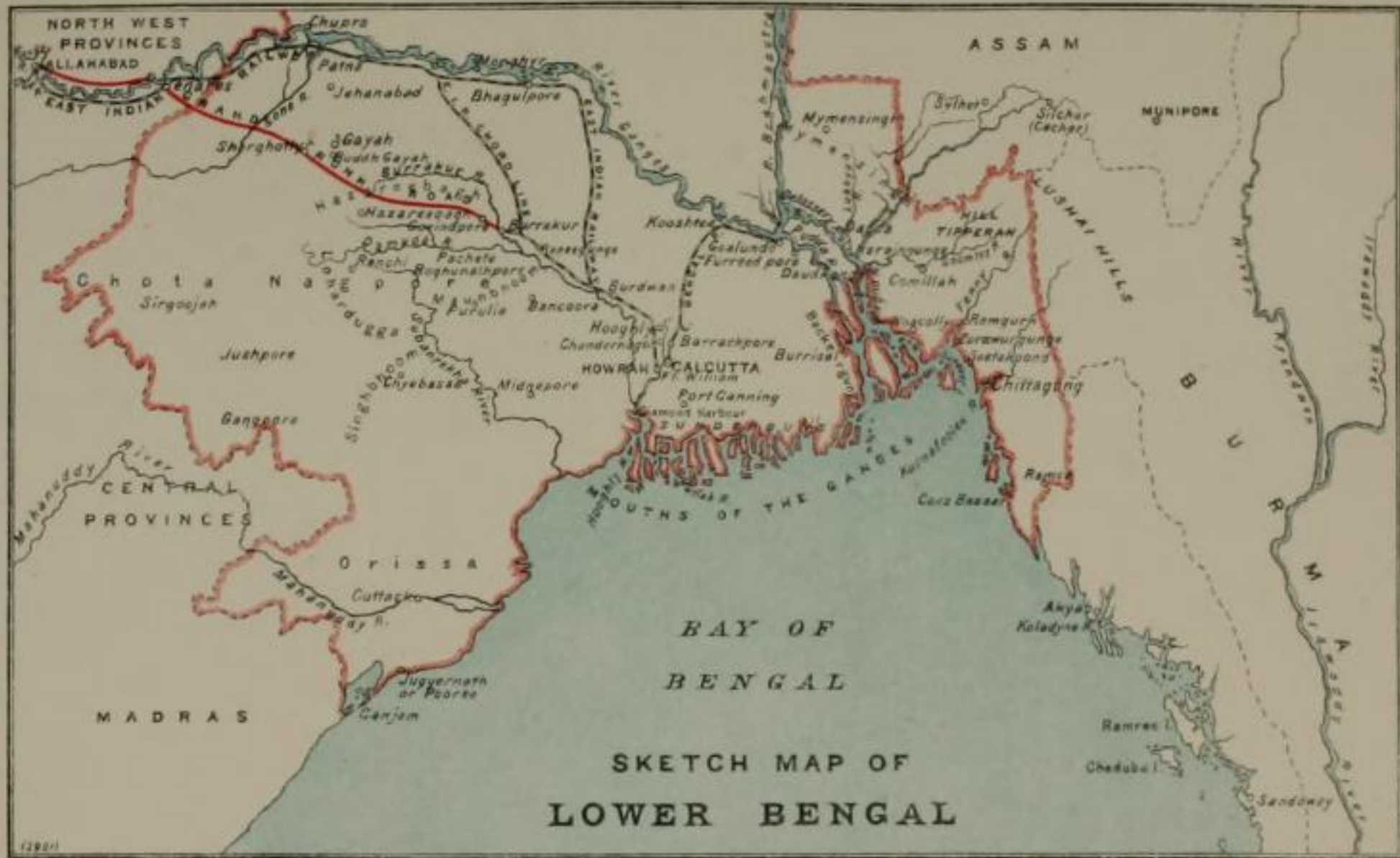
(Retired)

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hours, and report to the authorities whether or not there are grounds of suspicion as to the cause of death. In this instance three men had been struck down while cutting bamboos: one was stark dead, and had fallen headlong in the clump in which he was at work, the bamboos being apparently uninjured. The only mark noticeable on the body was a patch on one side like the "bloom" on a dark grape. The other two men were senseless, but some water revived them. The doctor gave directions for their treatment, and I heard afterwards that they were doing well.

There was not much doing in public works at Madaripore, but materials were collected for a new (bamboo) Cutcherry, to replace the old cow-shed hitherto in use; and money was sent for repairing the bazaar road, which was in bad condition. The Police havildar proved a most efficient foreman, looking after the coolies in my absence,—supervision being very necessary for these idle gentry. The favourite digging tool of the native navy is a *kodali* or hoe. Wheelbarrows being unknown,¹ the earth is thrown into baskets, which are carried away on the heads of other coolies, and the contents placed where wanted. This is a slow process; but labour is cheap in Bengal, and time not valued at a high figure, so the work gets on somehow. It now became part of my daily routine to inspect the road works of a morning, and exhort the shopkeepers in the bazaar, who had been repeatedly enjoined to clean the road in front of their houses, and thus help to improve the thoroughfares. Orientals are apathetic, and it was difficult to get anything done: funds too were limited, and time was short, the rains being close at hand. Still, something was effected, and the place began to look less disreputable.

European visitors were few and far between. On the 9th April Westcott the Assistant looked in on his way back to Burrisaul from the half-yearly examination at Dacca, and from that time I saw never a white face till the 20th May, when the Executive Engineer of the Dacca Division appeared in a little steam cockboat called the *Fantail*, built by himself, which greatly astonished the natives. I took him

¹ An energetic engineer once thought to teach his coolies a new thing, and gave them wheelbarrows, carefully explaining their use. When his back was turned, they took off the wheels, filled the barrows with earth, clapped them on their heads and walked away, contented to do as their fathers had done before them.

round the bazaar, but fear that as a professional man he did not think much of my local works. He was on his way to inspect an old indigo factory some nineteen miles off, which Government proposed to buy as a new site for subdivisional headquarters. Having laid in a supply of wood fuel for his tiny craft, he went puffing away, leaving Madaripore to its accustomed loneliness.

On the 22nd May came a long envelope "On H.M. Service," which I hoped meant promotion, but only contained orders of transfer to another Subdivision, Moonsheegunge, in the Dacca District. Shortly after I was summoned to the Sudder Station, to be sworn Justice of the Peace before Nevile left for Dacca, to which district he had been transferred as Collector-Magistrate, so at my new Subdivision he would still be my chief. Commissions are issued periodically, and civilians usually become J.P. after serving a year or so. No European can be tried for an offence by any officer who is not a Justice, so it is necessary for some members of every district staff to be vested with such powers. Having taken the oath, I stayed at Burrisaul with Westcott and Pelham, a civilian attached to the Survey, as it was not worth while to return to Madaripore.

On the 27th, the Calcutta steamer brought Sutherland, the new Collector, to whom Nevile made over charge of the District, and I of my Subdivision, and after a farewell dance given by the Judge, Nevile departed, in company with Westcott, ordered to Cachar. Pelham was thus deprived of his chum, and as I had a month for joining at Moonsheegunge, we arranged to take a trip to the Sunderbuns, in the south of the District. The question how to get a boat—Pelham having just lent his own to Nevile and Westcott—was solved by Malthus, District Superintendent of Police, turning up most opportunely in the evening. He had a fine ten-oared *coss*-boat, which he agreed to lend, and himself join the party. A *coss*-boat is lighter than a *budgerow* or house-boat, and the cabin astern, roofed with matting instead of planking, less roomy. From the cabin roof the ridge-pole extends forward beyond the mast, and spare mats are carried, which, when drawn forward along the pole, afford shelter for the crew at night, or in bad weather. The *manjhi* (captain) stands on the roof astern, and steers with a rudder like a huge paddle. Rowing or sailing before the wind,

these boats are fast; but being flat-bottomed they cannot be manœuvred like craft with keels.

Our destination was the Baleshwar,¹ a big river running into the Bay of Bengal, one of the many channels through which the united waters of the Gangetic and Assam valleys find their way to the sea. Its current is said to be so strong that the water remains fresh down to the mouth at all states of the tide. Near the sea the banks are covered with dense jungle, the *sunder* trees² standing conspicuously up from the undergrowth. These trees are rather scraggy in appearance, but the wood is in great demand for building boats, bridges, and other structures exposed to the action of water, in which it lasts a long time. Walking through the jungle was in places impeded by a peculiar growth, blunt spikes standing up from the ground, like roots growing the wrong way. Maybe they were roots of the mangrove, which should flourish in such swampy regions. Tracks of game were found—tiger, deer, and rhinoceros,—and alligators were seen. One night two of the party went and sat *inside* a tiger-trap, with a cow and goat fastened outside as bait, to shoot a tiger that had been reported in the neighbourhood; but the tiger did not appear, and the sportsmen were exposed to the attack of nothing fiercer than the mosquito, which in the Sunderbuns is sufficiently bloodthirsty. After spending a day or two in the wilds, we returned with a fair southerly wind, reaching Burrisaul on the morning of Trinity Sunday, the 11th June.

My joining-time was not up yet; so with the Commissioner's permission I paid a flying visit to Comilla, where changes had taken place among the residents, even in the short interval since my departure. The *Rathjatra*, or Car Festival, was held while I was there. This is similar to that held at Juggernaut in Orissa on a much larger scale, and consists in dragging a lofty structure on wheels, painted and decorated in a gay and tawdry fashion, from one point to another, and back again after an interval of eight days, the ceremony being emblematic of a journey taken by the god Krishna and his divine mistress Radha or Radhika, to pay a visit to his father-in-law. The return

¹ The "Lord of Strength"; from the Sanskrit *Bal* (strength) and *Ishtwar* (Lord or Master). An appropriate name for a mighty river.

² Hence *Sunder-ban* (Sansk.) Forest of *sunder* trees.

CHAPTER IX

CHITTAGONG, SECOND VISIT.—1867-8

By daylight on the 25th November I was at Daoodkandi, and rode in the thirty odd miles to Comilla, but had to leave my things behind, the intelligent Police Sub-Inspector having sent back to the station the bullock cart ordered for their conveyance, instead of keeping it till my arrival. At Comilla I was hospitably entertained by Pakenham, manager for the Messrs. Courjon, French landholders owning large estates in Tippera and Noacolly, who also kindly lent me some clothes, for I had only those I stood up in. Here a halt was called to let the cart come up and get on towards Chittagong; and a few days passed pleasantly at my old station.

On Saturday, the 30th November, a lovely cold weather morning, I left Comilla on Pakenham's smart little Burma pony, reached the Fenny River in due course, and finding "Xit" on the other side, got to the Zorawulgunge dák bungalow before evening. Cart and servants had arrived, with my dogs and "Jocko" the monkey, which last rode on top of the gári, doubtless to her own satisfaction. My old acquaintance the khansama was still in charge, and I had a chat with him after dinner before turning in. Next morning the traps started early, and "Kate" also marched ahead. *Chota haziri* disposed of and the bill discharged, I commended my venerable friend to the care of the Prophet; and mounting little "Xit," soon caught up the cart, progressing at the usual mile-an-hour rate of Bengali bullocks. So checking my steed I proceeded at a more sober pace, for it was no use going on and leaving things to follow—I had had enough of that at Daoodkandi—and experience teaches that servants travel best when they know their master is behind

put up what looked like a very big snipe, and may have been a woodcock, but it was too dark to see.

Next day there was a new arrival in Capt. Holt, Assistant to Nuthill of the Kheddah Department, who had just come in on a flying visit from Ramoo in the south, towards the Arracan border, where a Kheddah was in progress. He gave great accounts of *shikár* in that direction, but said the jungle was dense and the game hard to get at.

1868.

New Year's Day passed without any noteworthy event, and on Sunday the 5th January Dr. Keating, Deputy-Inspector-General of Hospitals, arrived on tour from Dacca. He had a *ballám* boat, a coasting craft much used by traders between Bengal and Burma, stouter built than Bengali river boats and designed for rougher water. They go to sea in the fine season, keeping near the land, have fair weatherly qualities, and though light are strong, the streaks or planks tied with rattan cane instead of being nailed or bolted with iron. They are flat-bottomed, have good carrying capacity, and draw little water. *Ballám* boats are not so high in the stern as the river-craft of Bengal: their appearance is less unwieldy, and even graceful.

That evening I had a bit of luck. Going to my favourite haunt, the Turtle Tank, with my gun, I saw a snipe get up in the paddy-fields between the road and the hills. I marked him down, made a rapid stalk, and as he rose the second time fired, and the bird fell! I wrung its neck, and stuck it conspicuously in my belt, to show that I had been snipe-shooting and had bagged my bird. It is astonishing how pleased with himself a bad marksman is after making a hit. I could honestly say that I bagged all I fired at that day, for not another shot did I get. Perhaps this was as well: a second chance might have spoiled the average. Going along my woodcutters' path I met an old fellow with whom I had exchanged a few words on the previous Sunday. He seemed to take a fatherly interest in me, for he said: "*Suno! akela mat jao. Sher bahut hai.*" (Listen! don't go alone. There are many tigers.) I went further into the hills this time, and had a delightful ramble and scramble. The moon shone brightly as I cantered home on little "Xit."



Jail which was close by, and then rode down to the racket court. The side-walls of this were built in steps, for convenience of getting to the top; so up I went and examined some new posts being fixed for the nets, besides doing a little amateur whitewashing. Thence back to the Jail and round it with the Commissioner on a visit of inspection. The old jailor—a portly Baboo—was much impressed by our Chief's title, and it was great fun to hear him "My Lord" -ing his visitor continually. Walked back with Lord Ulick to the foot of our hill, and so home to dinner. The above is a fair specimen of daily routine; one day being much like another for people with regular occupations in Bengal as elsewhere.

On the 31st there was a little excitement: the Charitable Dispensary in the bazaar caught fire, and being built of inflammable materials, at this season dry as tinder, was soon demolished, leaving a skeleton of charred posts beams and rafters which speedily collapsed. Young Manton and I turned to as volunteers to help the Police, who act as firemen on these occasions, throwing water on the fire with buckets and such other vessels as were procurable; made ourselves hot and grimy, and half-sick with swallowing a lot of smoke. The building was doomed; but it was something to prevent the fire from spreading in the bazaar.

Nuthill, who had been living with Captain Holt in a snug little house near Tempest Hill, being ordered to Dacca to take charge of the Elephant Depôt, Holt had asked me to take his place in the chummery. So on the 1st of April I moved over. Maxim, having been down with fever, on the 29th March had left for a change to Europe, and Tempest Hill was for the time deserted. My new chum was a pleasant fellow, fond of the jungle, a keen sportsman with rod and rifle, and had seen service in the Mutiny. For the first few weeks we saw little of one another, each having his own occupations—Holt away most of the time, looking after Kheddah work in the Hills, and occasionally visiting headquarters, while I had my daily Cutcherry, varied by inspection of station roads and bridges. I liked amateur engineering, and there was plenty to do at Chittagong. The soil is sandy; the station hilly; many of the roads are steep and bordered by deep ravines; the average yearly rainfall approaches or exceeds

ing was isolated in the jungle, and the fire could hardly have been accidental. Suspicion rested on the people of a neighbouring village, who had no ill-feeling against Bryce himself, but owed his vendor a grudge,—rather an Irish way of paying off a score. But evidence there was none; so the result of my enquiry was not altogether satisfactory. The malicious firing of houses is a common native way of taking revenge, and the crime was especially rife in Chittagong, where the “*bena kánun*”¹ (law of the firebrand) is an expression well understood, as also the threat to “make a man *red*,”—a phrase that recalls “the red cock crowing in the strawyard” in one of Scott’s novels. From the nature of the act, detection is most difficult; and even if the actual incendiary were caught red-handed, his instigator—a worse culprit—might still go unpunished. The obvious course is, to fix responsibility on the *village* to which the crime can be traced; and to this extent it can often be localised. It is perhaps not quite correct in theory, when an offender cannot be found, to make it hot for his neighbours; but it may be safely assumed that the villagers know perfectly well who are the delinquents, so if they withhold information, as accessories after the fact they must take the consequences. In India this rough and ready justice is thoroughly appreciated, and practically meets the requirements of such cases. So on my return to headquarters I reported to the Magistrate, recommending that under a certain section of the Police Act (V. of 1861) a party of special punitive Police should be quartered on the suspected village, which would have to pay the cost of their maintenance. Whether the suggestion was adopted or not, I don’t know.

I got back on Sunday the 10th May, and found myself gazetted to Manbhoom. Lord Ulick called after church and very kindly congratulated me on the step.

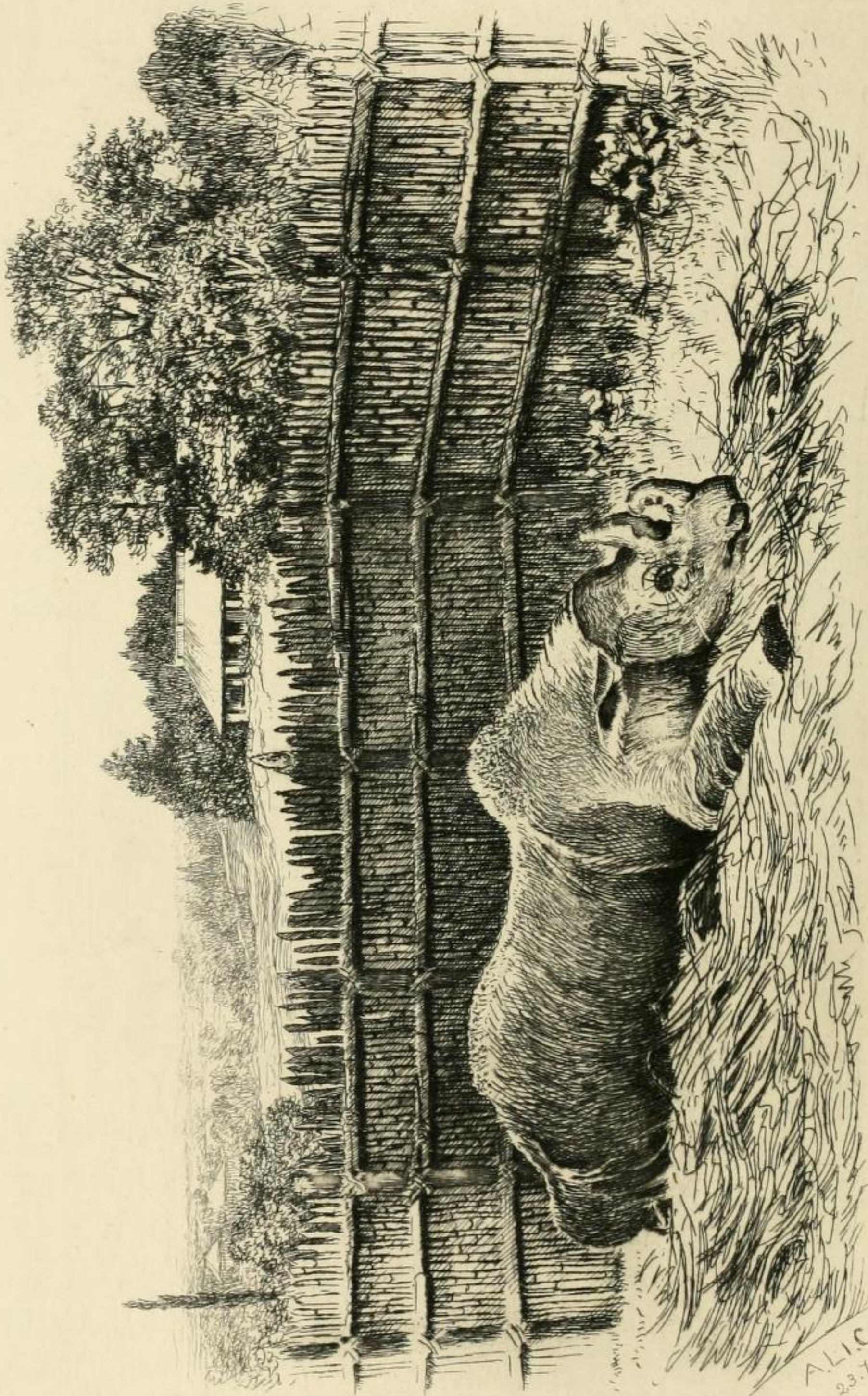
At this time Captain Holt was as usual oscillating between the Station and the Hills, where Kheddah work had to be looked after. Orders now came down from Dacca (Commissariat headquarters) to send the newly-caught elephants to that station, and a European Sergeant arrived by steamer to accompany the draft. The animals were brought down from Chandragona in the Hill Tracts, and camped at a place about three

¹ *Bena* is the article used to start the fire; sometimes a burning dart, shot from a distance into the thatch.

miles beyond Háthazáree, east of the Futtickcherry Road. It was proposed to go and have a look at them; so on Tuesday the 19th May we turned out about 3 A.M. and started for the camp,—Holt and I on one elephant, the Sergeant on the other. We rode on a *chárjama*, on which you sit back to back, as on an Irish outside car, or when riding elephants at the Zoo, which for a long journey is much easier than a howdah. To cross the Hulda there was a canoe resembling Euclid's definition of a line—length without breadth—an uncommonly crank vessel, on which we (not the elephants) wobbled across somehow without an upset.

The wild elephants were picketed about singly, or in twos and threes, fastened by stout jute ropes passing round neck and legs, and secured to trees. Amongst them was one that attracted notice at once, conspicuous in the herd as a thoroughbred in a crowd of cart-horses. Holt called him "Captain," a name worthy of so fine a beast, measuring some 10 feet 6 inches, an unusual height for an Indian elephant. His head was massive and shapely; being a young animal the tusks were not long, but faultless in curve and symmetry; his legs, like columns, well fitted to support the huge body. Altogether he was a grand specimen—the sort of elephant a Rajah or rich native would give almost any money for, he would look so imposing in a procession. His capture had been rather a fluke: he had not been caught in the Kheddah "surround," but was tied up while paying attention to some of the females. He bore his captivity with dignity and resignation, not screaming or struggling like some of the other elephants, but gently swaying his great body to and fro in a lazy manner, and looking out of his little eyes as much as to say: "Well, gentlemen, you've got me tied up; do your worst: if I were only loose, I'd make it lively for some of you!" But his behaviour had not been always so phlegmatic. At Chandragona Scotland of the Police and others were looking at him, when he threw a piece of plantain stem at Scotland and knocked him over. An uncommonly good shot, but rather nasty for the object, the stem of a plantain being no light missile, which hurled by a young monster like "Captain" must have come with the force of a catapult.

After admiring "Captain," we went round and inspected the other elephants, a very inferior lot by comparison. One or two looked ill and miserable, as if at the point of death. Elephants are delicate animals,



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and when newly caught require most careful treatment. Generally some of them die, and the percentage of loss is sometimes very high.

Next morning (20th May) I found that a poor little monkey called "John," left with me by Maxim when he went home, had been carried off during the night, probably by a wild-cat or jackal, the only traces being the string that had been round his neck, all bloody, and drops of blood here and there. Holt had another monkey; also a young bear; and these two were great chums. They would seize and hug each other and roll about the verandah, making believe to bite. The young bear was a comical little beast: when he saw any one he knew he would get up on his hind legs, stagger towards him, and embracing his leg, begin playfully biting it. The sweeper used to feed him with bread and milk, when *Ursa Minor* would get his paw into the bowl; and if the sweeper objected, he grumbled and swore like a trooper. Sometimes he was let loose, and went careering about the compound with a long string to his neck. My own monkey (bigger and stronger than Holt's) watching her opportunity would get hold of this string, and when Master Bruin was at the full jump would give a sly tug and bring him up with a round turn that sent him sprawling on his back, loudly protesting. But "Jocko" never pursued her advantage: she would let go the string and gaze abroad, contemplating the landscape and pensively scratching, as if there were no such animal in existence as the bear; while the latter no doubt wondered what could have upset him so suddenly.

Besides the bear and the monkey, Holt possessed another animal, rather large for a pet, in the shape of a rhinoceros, which had been found stuck in a quicksand somewhere in the south of the district by one of the Kheddah parties, and secured and brought in with the help of elephants. "Begum" lived in a stockaded enclosure on our hill containing a bath or rather mud-hole in which it was her delight to wallow. She was different from the Indian rhino which has a single horn, being a specimen of the Malayan or two-horned variety. After a time she got very tame and quiet, but never could endure the sight of an elephant, which perhaps reminded her of her capture. She was afterwards bought by Jamrach the great beast collector, sent to England, and eventually found a home in the Zoo at Regent's Park, where she was labelled the "Hairy-eared Rhinoceros."