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**Dr. THEODORE L. FLOOD, Editor**

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## TIGER HUNTING IN INDIA.

BY F. SCHEIBLER.

TRANSLATED FOR "THE CHAUTAUQUAN" FROM THE ITALIAN "NUOVA ANTOLOGIA."

**O**N returning to Calcutta on the first of March, and having made my call on Lord Beresford to thank him for his kindness, I found myself without any occupation, and, worse than that, fairly consumed by the mania for killing a tiger, so that I might carry its skin home as a trophy. I had only a month left before my departure for Italy, including the trip to Bombay. So the time was, to say the least, limited. I had received two invitations to join a hunt and was hesitating between them, when a fortunate combination of circumstances procured for me a third and more favorable opportunity and thus released me from the necessity of making a choice.

Having gone the Sunday after my return to the Zoological Gardens in company with my friend Fenwick, I met there Sir Benjamin Simpson, a most enthusiastic tiger-hunter. He had been in India for more than twenty years in the capacity of a physician, had met with great success, and now was on the point of returning to Europe in order to enjoy quietly the fruit of his labors. He owned important tea plantations at the foot of the Himalayas and had but recently returned from them, passing by the hunting camp of his excellency the maharajah of Cooch Behar on his way to the sea. We talked for some time about our enjoyment of the chase. I told him of my experience in India and expressed to him my desire of killing a tiger before I left the country. Then we parted.

Two days later I went to see some photographs he had taken of the rajah's camp, and was pleasantly surprised to find an invitation awaiting me from the rajah himself to a hunt which had been begun ten days before. Naturally I needed no urging and started the next morning for the camp. Eighteen hours by rail brought me to Mogolhat. There I crossed a broad stream

on the rajah's elephant and found a collation prepared near by in the bungalow. From this point I was rapidly driven to the palace of Cooch Behar, using four relays of horses.

The residence is truly a magnificent one, being built entirely out of red stone, which was brought from a distance at great expense. An immense dome in the center of the structure covers an atrium, which is paved in the Venetian style. Along the broad staircase and in the halls are hung innumerable trophies of the hunt. The palace is surrounded by a very large park with lawns after the English fashion, where are several lawn-tennis courts. I visited the well-filled cages of wild beasts and the horse and elephant stables. These last were wholly deserted by their occupants, which were being used in the hunt. Sixty horses were there, however, employed in transporting guests from Mogolhat to the palace and from the palace to the hunting camp.

I gave the letter of introduction, with which Simpson had furnished me, to a servant, adding my visiting card to it, and was soon invited to tiffin by the wife of the rajah's private secretary, Mrs. Bignell. Her husband, a genuine sportsman, was directing the movements of the hunt, and, indeed, combined in his one person the double functions of master of the horse and court ceremonies. Mrs. Bignell gave orders for my carriage as soon as tiffin was over, and after changing horses five times I reached, at half-past nine in the evening, an encampment of natives, which was the end of the carriage road and the last post of the Anglo-Indian constabulary. The guests had to go on elephants the remaining distance. But if I wished to take part in the hunt the next day I must travel all night and with whatever means I might find, for the ele-

phants did not start till the following morning.

I hired two ox-carts, one for myself and one for my servant and baggage, and the next day at the early hour of half-past five reached the camp. All were asleep save the sentinel pacing in front of the rajah's tent. So I fell into a doze, leaving orders to be wakened at eight. At breakfast I was presented to his excellency, a handsome man of about thirty, who spoke both English and French. He was educated in England and has adopted English customs and dress. He is a fine huntsman and an excellent shot. There were four other Europeans besides myself as guests, two of them English generals. The rajah had also an English military *attaché* with him and an English physician.

You make ready for the hunt the moment breakfast is over. Elephants carrying howdahs go to the tents of all the hunters to take along their arms. My own outfit included a soft hat for the evening, a waterproof, and my indispensable camera. Bignell gave me a carbine. We had twelve elephants when we started, almost all of them old bulls with very long tusks and of a colossal size. The one assigned to me was called Peabody. He was guided by a *mahout*, whom I very soon won over by a good fee and the promise of a fine present if he helped me kill a tiger. The finest elephant of all, however, was the one ridden by the rajah. Of immense size, his long, sharp tusks guaranteed him against the attacks of any animal whatsoever. Always impassive, he had absolutely no fear of tigers.

Half an hour after the departure of the howdahs the hunters started in companies of three or four, mounted on their respective elephants. Seated beside her husband on one of these was Lady Gordon. This manner of journeying is very acceptable. The elephants go more swiftly and their gait is more pleasing than those which carry the howdahs. But you must get into this structure when once you reach the field of action. My first day at the hunt was not very lucky. The servants beat up the dense high thickets

so favored by the rhinoceros, but did not discover any. The rhinoceros likes marshes but stays during the day in the depths of the jungle. The Asiatic rhinoceros has one horn only, not over a foot long at the most. His foot is a complete circle and is furnished with three nails. He boasts of four sharp teeth, two upper and two lower, which are intended to tear to shreds the cane and the branches on which he feeds. He is a dangerous animal to hunt and even assails the elephant. Besides, he does not die easily.

This first day I was especially interested in noticing the arrangements for the hunt and the work of the elephants in the thicket. The hunters came in their howdahs to the leeward of the woods, while the fifty elephants which beat up the bush entered it to the windward side. The line of these elephants is flanked at either end by a hunter, who directs the line and who also looks after any animal that tries to escape from the jungle. There is also a hunter in the center of the file who exercises like duties, and in case of a large number of elephants it is customary to increase the number of hunters.

A strict oversight on the part of the men who guide the elephants is necessary. They must keep in touch with one another so as not to pass by any animal which may be in their path. The line of the beaters advances through the dense brush with tremendous uproar, breaking down even the trees which oppose its progress. The noise sounds like the sea in a storm. In the jungles which are haunted by the rhinoceros and buffalo the reeds often rise to a greater height than the howdahs on the elephants' backs, or nearly to twenty feet. In that case it is impossible to see the ground on which they are treading. Nor can the drivers see one another easily, and they are therefore provided with long poles which have white flags at the end. By these signals the file is kept in line. Whenever a tiger attacks an elephant in such a jungle the hunter can only lay down his gun and hold tight to the howdah. For in case the tiger leaps on the elephant's back the latter gives

such tremendous shakes to get rid of, him that the hunter runs the risk of being thrown entirely out of his protection and into the deep morass.

But on this particular day we found neither rhinoceros nor buffaloes, though we continued the beating till evening, interrupting it only from one to two o'clock to take tiffin, which was provided in the most luxurious manner imaginable. Seats were set about a well-furnished table. There were cold and hot dishes and rice with excellent curry prepared by an Arabian cook, who had no other duties. Wines and liquors of all kinds were supplied in abundance, as well as ice, which was in great demand by all. We returned to the camp late, having shot but three deer, and after a good hot bath all sat about in smoking jackets to await the dinner hour. I had time to make the rounds of the camp, which seemed like a city of tents. These were arranged in two rows, with the dining tent on one side between the rows and on the other the tent of the rajah. The elephants' stables and the *mahouts'* tents were about two hundred yards distant, while between these and ours was the tent of the embalmers, who prepare and preserve the trophies. I noticed among the animals which had been already killed, twelve tigers, five rhinoceros, fifteen buffaloes, four bears, and twelve deer.

After dinner I made Bignell tell me his adventures. One of them was unusually interesting. It happened fifteen years before, when he was stationed in Central India. At that time he received a visit from an English friend, who, like most travelers, wished to kill a tiger. They learned that a large one had just devoured a buffalo in a neighboring wood. So he took his friend to the place, put him in a tree on a kind of platform, gave him his new Winchester, and stationed himself some seventy yards distant on the ground. In Central India, where there is a dearth of elephants and where the jungle is not so dense as in Bengal, the beating up is done by natives on foot, who make a great din with the *tom-tom* (rings on sticks). The tiger was discovered and passed under the tree, the

visitor meanwhile inflicting on him a slight wound, which only infuriated him. He saw Bignell and, giving vent to hoarse, sinister growls, leaped toward him. At fifty yards Bignell fires. The tiger lifts his tail, as he always does when he is hit, and keeps on. Bignell kneels and taking careful aim fires again at ten yards only, piercing the tiger's stomach. One more leap and he is struck down by a mighty blow of the tiger's tail, and loses his senses. He had a vague remembrance of the beast licking his wounds in his death throes, and then all grew black under the oppression of the heavy weight on his breast. When he revived he heard one shot after another. It was his friend in the tree, who, perceiving the tiger's hide from his perch, was using up the remaining cartridges of the Winchester rifle, fortunately, however, without effect. When the beaters arrived and drew Bignell out from under the animal they found that the latter had just missed the hunter's head with his open jaws but had struck him with his hind feet. His claws left their mark on the Englishman's head and shoulders. The whole of the following year he spent in a hospital. It was necessary to trepan his head and insert a platinum plate in the place of the bone which was removed. He assured me he never lent his Winchester to a friend again. For even the wounds made by a tiger are generally fatal. His mouth and claws are almost always infected by the carcasses he devours and their contact produces blood-poisoning.

The hunt as carried on at Cooch Behar is unique for the simple reason that no other Indian rajah keeps sixty elephants for that purpose alone. Their line was guided by Bignell. He would take the right end and place in the center the chief of the native beaters, a certain Goli who had the care of the elephants during the entire year. This man was a fine type of the Hindu. Lean and tall, he would stand erect on his elephant and by much shouting and gesticulating would keep the line straight. All day long you could hear his "Forward on the right," "Slower in the center," "Firm on the left," and so on.

On the second day we did not get started before ten o'clock. The rajah prefers to make a late hunt in order to have news of tigers, if there are any in the vicinity. He induces the natives to let their buffalo herds loose during the night in the neighborhood of the jungles that are most frequented by tigers. He reimburses them for the value of the beasts they lose and also makes them a present for every tiger they may locate. So it is quite certain that if any tigers appear he is told of the fact in the morning, and then with his array of elephants and huntsmen it is quite difficult for the animals to escape. On this particular morning no such tidings had arrived and so we started in for a buffalo hunt. I am very fortunately placed at the angle of a thicket. The beaters stir up one buffalo, then another, then a third, each one of which I strike in the head as he appears. He, falling on his knees, disappears in the bush. Great is the applause of the natives at such lucky shots. But when the chase is over and the thicket is searched only one dead buffalo is discovered. I dismount from my elephant, and scanning the carcass find out that the same buffalo has received all three of my bullets and they in his head. This will show you what an extraordinary vitality this animal possesses. If you do not strike at once into his heart or brain he can carry a perfect mass of lead. There was no other large game forthcoming for the day. A very strong wind was blowing, which is an unfavorable condition for hunting.

The next day a native runs in with the news that a tiger had been seen to swim across the river Sunkos at five o'clock and enter the jungle. The prospect of fine sport created a general good humor. For in India the tiger is the king of the forest and all hunters prefer him to the other game. We are placed in position; I am but fifty paces from the rajah. The beaters enter the bush. We are on the alert, but nothing is seen. A native swears that the tiger must be there and that he is an old male. Bignell says that sometimes they remain crouched motionless on the ground within a yard of the nearest elephant that

passes by. The beating is gone over again. About half way through there is a general commotion in the line. Some of the elephants trumpet, a sound which ends in a very loud *pluff*. Others turn around and try to run away.

Bignell, who is with the line and who sees the jungle move before him, fires at a guess, both to prevent the tiger from profiting by the confusion of the file in order to escape to the rear, as well as to urge him toward the hunters. The tiger bounds forward, crying now and then. It finally reaches the last point of the brush formed by reeds, which I see moving right before me. Great is the uproar. All the *mahouts* on their elephants shriek loudly enough to split their throats. They are able by their noise to keep the tiger from turning on them and therefore are full of courage. The cry which dominates all is the phrase of "The tiger is going forward," which is always repeated when the tiger is started from its lair. The rajah perceives that if they make him come out in my direction he can take refuge, unless he is at once killed, in a large thick jungle where it would be difficult to discover him. So he closes up his elephants. He brings the front of the beating line to the place where we were stationed and he moves me to the other side of the little piece of reeds in which the tiger had taken refuge—who knows in what frame of mind. The point of the bush was not over ten yards wide. No sooner is the rajah's order given than the elephant wall advances and the tiger comes out fifteen paces from me. The rajah could not have been more polite. He allowed me to fire first. My bullet struck the shoulder in the place at which I had aimed, but it did not stop the tiger on the spot. He gave another leap, and received together with my second bullet a regular fusilade from the rajah, Bignell, and Hughes, who had come up. He sinks in a death struggle at the feet of my elephant. Peabody sends him flying with one kick. I beg the others not to shoot, photograph his agony, then finish him with a bullet behind the ear. The rajah was so kind as to present me with his skin, which

was unusually beautiful. It extended to nearly nine feet in length, or but a little short of the record, which is slightly over nine feet.

We were returning to the camp well satisfied with our sport, when a native ran up saying there was another tiger in a jungle some four miles distant. This one came out at the first beating up. With long growls often repeated, it passed unharmed through the hunters and jumping into a ditch some ten yards broad disappeared under the water. When it came to the surface there was a general discharge of rifles. The bullets churned up the water around its head but without harming it. It reached the opposite bank, right in the direction of the elephant, posted near by, on which were Major Gordon and his wife. The major fires twice, but does not succeed in stopping the beast. His wife, however, aims at him with her little carbine, and it is her bullet which lays the great animal low. There is no need of saying that we gave the brave lady a regular ovation. After dinner that evening the rajah had champagne brought out and proposed a toast to her. The results of her good shot were, however, not fortunate for Mrs. Gordon. The next year in wishing to handle a larger carbine she received a violent blow in the face from the kick of the gun, and ever after bore the scar that the accident occasioned.

Other hunts resulted in trophies of rhinoceros, bison, bears, and also one tiger. At last we ran across a tiger family. It consisted of a male, a female, and two cubs. The male was in the jungle where we started our first one. The beating up is but half over when we hear a howl. The elephants trumpet and run away, and the tiger escapes by passing through the line. He plunges into the Sunkos and continues his flight on the other side for several miles. We hope to be more fortunate with the female, which is in a thicket of high canes near a ditch to which it had dragged a dead buffalo. The thicket is surrounded by the elephants and the tigress comes out

swimming through the reedy water, so that she is invisible. I notice the tops of the reeds moving some twenty yards distant, and fire at random without any result. The elephants then drive out the two cubs, which are easy prey. A native has seen the mother among some bushes near a marsh. The elephants are driven thither, beat up the brush, but refuse to enter the swamp, where a dense growth covers the water. Bignell is sure that the tigress is there, and the rajah has several shots fired into the jungle with the object of driving her out, but to no purpose. We then go away, leaving a native in a tree to observe the course of events. Half an hour later she calmly appears, and catches a buffalo that very night.

The day following the rajah decides to postpone the hunt, both because the tiger will be on the watch and because the elephants are tired and need a rest. The morning after this recess, we start out once more, a tiger is discovered but he turns on the elephants and drives them back in terror. Gordon, who is in the line with them, wounds him twice. Bignell rallies the elephant drivers and they advance once more. The infuriated beast leaps at Bignell's elephant and grips its forehead with his teeth. The elephant shrieks, shakes himself vigorously, and frees himself. The tiger utters a growl which terrifies the other elephants. They all flee. He returns to the bush. In the meantime Bignell had laid down his rifle and clung to his howdah to escape falling. He must have been endowed with nerves of steel not to tremble at all. The elephants all refusing to make another trial I obtain permission to advance with Peabody. We enter the jungle. The tiger which had been wounded by Gordon greets me with terrible howls. I plant a bullet near his heart. Another bullet carries away a tooth, but this was bad practice on my part, since the wound was not a mortal one. And the rajah, who had now come up, gave me a lesson by at once despatching the beast. It was even larger than the one we had first killed.