

SONTHALIA

AND THE

SONTHALS.



BY

E. G. [✓]MAN,

*Of Lincoln's Inn, Barrister-at-Law; and late Assistant
Commissioner, Sonthal Pergunnahs.*

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CHAPTER XX.

Marked change with regard to the number of tigers in Sonthal Pergunnahs—Tigers in garden of nightly occurrence—Sheep taken—Tragic end of a cartman—Pursuit of tiger—Awful appearance of body—Man eater—Nine persons taken—Buxoo's unfortunate end—Daring chase by Native Jockey—Escape of tiger—Retreat of elephants—Pluck displayed by Mr. A. N. Stewart in shooting man eater from horseback—Happy escape of little boy.

WITHIN the last few years a marked change has come over the face of the Sonthal country. Where rank jungle and fetid swamps prevailed, once the homes of elephants, rhinoceros, wild boars, and their compeers, now stands many a thriving Sonthali village, buried in the midst of its rice, sugarcane, and barley fields, all in good cultivation, and attesting the industry of the race. Formerly it was no uncommon thing to be awoke by the sentry, and on going out, to see, at the bottom of a long walk in the garden at Pakour, a large tiger crawling with his nose close to the ground,

sleeping mat, and the next morning all three were found dead. I have seen a man recover from the bite of a krite, or whip-snake, in one instance only, and he was working in my own garden at the time. Hearing a shriek, I ran out and found him bitten on the back of the hand by a krite. Some of his companions were busily employed in killing the reptile, while others crowded around him, desiring to know his last wishes, as they kindly informed all in his hearing that a quarter of an hour was the longest time he could possibly live. Luckily, when disturbed, I had a razor in my hand and ran out with it.

Seeing the marks of the bite on his flesh, I told him to turn his head away, and before he could remonstrate, I cut out the whole piece from his hand with a deep incision. I then told my servant to heat a knife in the charcoal fire, which was in the verandah, as I was just going to breakfast, and after allowing the wound to bleed freely for a little time, I applied the knife almost red-hot to the incision. This active treatment proved successful, and only left the man with a bad hand to cure.

Tradition says that wild elephants and rhinoceros were abundant some twenty years ago; now the latter are quite extinct, and of the

former but three specimens remain—the last remnants of the many herds of days gone by. One of these three is, by common report, a magnificent animal. While riding through the jungle at the beginning of this year, I came across his tracks, and measured the size of their marks in the mud with a pocket handkerchief. The circumference of the print of one footstep measured was over four and a half feet, which would make him above nine feet high; for twice round the foot is a sure standard of the height. The neighbouring villagers informed me that the three were inseparable, and had contracted a liking for parched grain. They used, therefore, to enter a village at one end, which was the signal for the inhabitants to vanish at the other, and after inspecting the shops for any delicacies that might tempt them, they would finish up by pulling down a house or two for recreation, and then quietly retire. These unwelcome visits might generally be looked for twice a year, at the spring and autumn seasons.

A few peacocks and numbers of deer still offer inducements for shooting, but the inveterate non-preserving instinct of the Sonthal is aiding to eliminate from the jungle the little game left. These poachers—for I can hardly