TRAVEL AND COLONISATION.

A TRIP TO THE SIAMESE FRONTIER.

THE TIME FOR MY FURLOUGH, which had recently been sanctioned, was drawing close; and as Capt. P., who had recently joined the district, and was a keen though inexperienced sportsman, was desirous that I should introduce him to the native talent in the shikari lines—furthermore, as I was desirous of slaying the Yapoo rhinoceros—Capt. P. and I, after careful consultation, arranged to proceed to the northern part of the district. This part is almost uninhabited by Siamese, and hence is a refuge and sanctuary to the wild beasts, driven thither by the indiscriminate and wholesale issue of gun licences to native shikaris. Capt. P. had only a popgun in the shape of a ·450 Express, with ordinary explosive bullets. With this he imagined that he could lay low anything, and indeed got wrath with me when I informed him his bullets would only annoy the solid elephant, bison, and rhinoceros. He said that with this rifle he had been at the death of a fine tusker; he further stated that the beast, after being hit in the head, had travelled eight miles and then fought; furthermore, he told me that he had been accompanied by some armed shikaris, and that they had also fired. As P., however, had the first shot, the beast was his, according to Indian sporting etiquette, though I imagine the body shot of the shikaris had led to the death of the elephant. In all my experience of elephants I have invariably found that, with a steel-tipped bullet and a ·577 Express, the elephant, unless it drops at once, will leave the place as if untouched. In my opening campaigns I remember one incident in support of my story. I put eleven steel-tipped ·577 bullets in an elephant's head, knocking him over time after time, and losing him after all. I tracked him for a long way, as he was a particularly fine tusker, and the further he went the fresher he seemed.

After this long digression I once more return to our trip. Four days' rough work saw P. and myself up near my north outpost; here hsine and bison abound; so we agreed, although we had had a long day's march, to try after them in the evening. We were out for a a very short time when we came on the tracks of a large herd of hsine. The tracks were very fresh, so we agreed to follow them up. I handed P. my ·577 Express, taking my ·450 Express myself. An hour's tracking brought us to within hearing of the herd; they were in extremely bad jungle bamboo, with lots of fallen bamboos covering the ground. I told P., in case the herd took the alarm, to run in amongst them, as, like bison, they usually give you a shot or two in this way while seeking to ascertain the cause of the alarm. My misgivings were well founded; they heard or winded us, and there was a tremendous stampede. I soon got amongst them, but could not get a good broadside shot, to justify myself in trying them with my ·450 Express explosive bullets. How I ground my teeth. Had my ·577 Express been in hand I could have settled a couple I wondered what had become of P. At last I doubled up, out of breath, after despatching a revengeful shot at a fine bull. I was much blown by my run, and a provisional clump of bamboos in front of me saved him from hurt. I pulled up in despair, and whistled for P. and the men; they turned up shortly. P. thought he would do a smart trick, and had run to the right; but, unfortunately, the herd held straight on, and he had seen nothing. If he had followed me he must have bagged one, as, with the herd between us, if he had fired they would have turned about to see if I had fired, they would have crossed him. It was now too late for further operations, so we returned sadly homewards.

Our next two days were spent in marching. This brought us on to my favourite ground, Yapoo. Here we called for my old friends the local trackers. My first inquiries were after my rhinoceros. He was said to have a foot length of horn, and to be grandfather to all the rhinoceroses around. P. had never seen a rhinoceros before him, but live in hopes of getting him still. There was no news of him; elephants, bison, and hsine were, however, reported to be abundant. As I make it a moral, when up at Y., to try after this rhinoceros, I arranged they should take us next day to the salt-lick which he frequents, and from there work north for anything we could find, in event of the rhino not being at home. With some difficulty rousing P. (who is one of those men I know I can always call kicks to stay in bed to the last) we got off at 6.30 a.m., just an hour too late, as I remarked to P. (Early rising is absolutely necessary in big game shooting, and you save yourself many a long and weary mile by being off as soon as you can see; besides, you catch your game on the feed, when they are much easier of approach.) On reaching the salt-lick we could find no sign of the rhinoceros; he had been there some four days before, as we could see from his tracks, so we struck north as agreed on. We had a long tramp, with nothing in the way of game tracks to interest us, until, at about 12 o'clock, we recrossed the Tavoy river, and got into bison and hsine country. This suited P. much better, as he has very little patience and is always expecting to come across something. We had not gone very far when we came on the tracks of a herd of hsine. We hunted for some distance, up to where they had gone up hill. Our trackers told us to look out, as they were near; so they were. As we got to the foot of the hill one of the trackers pulled up, and pointed out the bull; he was standing broadside on at the top of the hill, and looking in our direction. He was about 100 yards off, I gave P. my ·577 Express, and the shot. How long he did take in getting his sights. Just as he pulled trigger, the bull, considering matters to be unsatisfactory, moved off; P. therefore missed him, but bagged the tree in front of which our friend had been standing. I have seen many sad faces, but seldom so sad a one as P.'s. He is usually of a cheerfully facetious nature, but nothing could get a word out of him now. I therefore spared his feelings and said nothing about it, beyond stating that he was certain to repeat it out the next day.

We now made our way home, where a good dinner and a talk about next day's sport soon set P. all right. In the morning we agreed to work south for bison and hsine. We made a comparatively early start, getting off at 6 a.m. I knew well the ground over which we were to work; it was that on which, in a former trip, I had bagged a bull, and an hour and a half after sunrise. About an hour after our start we got on to the tracks of a large herd of bison; the ground we were working on was bamboo jungle, varied by open glades; the tracking excellent, so we were able to push along at racing speed. From the footmarks we judged there were two or three good bulls in the herd. The tracks now were quite fresh, and, as ill luck would have it, took us through a quantity of fallen bamboos. Precious hard work it was to keep up any pace, and to avoid stepping on the bamboos and making a noise. After about half a mile of this tiring work we heard some members of the herd bellowing in front of us. The pace now became fast and furious; too much so for P., whose legs were of the shortest description. We emerged from the fallen bamboo jungle into open country, turf with bamboos in clumps. We now heard a tremendous stampede on the left of us. I beckoned to P., who had fallen behind, and, hurrying round an intervening clump of bamboos, came on some thirty bison standing and looking back towards us. I signalled to P., some thirty yards behind, to hurry up. On his arrival I pointed out the bison, and handed him the ·577 Express, loaded with steel-tipped bullets. Amongst the bison was a fine bull; this I pointed out to him, and told him to shoot. I snatched my ·450 Express from a tracker, and was going to pick up; but before I had finished I heard P. fire, and at once adopted my usual practice of running down amongst the herd. I had only gone some fifty yards, still pushing at my rifle, the cartridge of which had jammed, when I came on a fine bull facing me. I pulled up, as I thought he was going to charge, and was busy trying to get my rifle into working order. Just as I succeeded I was called to by P., who called out in a loud voice and said, "Where are they gone?" My reply, I fear, was hardly polite, but I was justified in my want of politeness, as the bison at the sound of P.'s voice, wheeled round and disappeared. A cow bison was following the bull, and, as she also was disappearing in the jungle, annoyed beyond measure, and quite incapable of sparing the sex, I let fly at her with my rifle. I had shot straight, as I heard the comforting thud so dear to the sportsman's ear. Turning to P. I remonstrated with him about his unlucky speech, and asked him what he had done. P. was profuse in apologies, and said that he thought he had hit the bull, but that it had gone on. We went back to the place where the bull had been standing, about thirty yards from P., and searched for blood; we could find none, but, whilst searching, one of the trackers called out to us and pointed us out the bullet mark on the tree. I had in his excitement either mistaken the tree for a bison or made extremely bad shooting; the rifle I knew was not to blame. I was rather anxious to get a cow bison's head for my collection, as, though I have shot more than twenty bulls, I had never before bagged a cow bison, so I suggested to P. to follow up the blood tracks. To this he agreed, and we started off, trackers in front. The blood marks were plentiful, so we were able to push on fast. After a mile of tracking we put the bison up, but could get no chance at a shot, the jungle being too dense. The Karens then warned me that she would probably show fight, and seemed rather nervous, so I persuaded P. to load up and to keep close to the trackers. After a short distance we again put her up in dense jungle, and again could not see her; the blood tracks were now becoming scanty and the pace slow. P. jeered at the idea of her showing fight, but we had not gone far from the scene of where we had last put up when P. heard a gun shown by bad guns for the advantages which they enjoy over the rest of the Empire.

We made but a short stay in the capital, as our destination was Kuopio, the chief town of one of the northern provinces, sixteen hours away by rail. A word on the Finnish railway system. There are three great trunk lines; from Helsingfors to Uleaborg, Kuopio, and St. Petersburg; from which radiate branch lines. Thus the coast line of the Gulfs of Bothnia and Finland is served by the first and last, while the third great line has the entire and great wooded district of the country. It is intended to continue the Uleaborg line to the new Arctic port, which is to be established near the Norwegian frontier; and probably the Kuopio line will be eventually extended to Uleaborg.

The carriages are very comfortable, well lit, warmed, and with every convenience for a long journey. One can move from one to another along the whole length of the train. The pace at which one travels enables one to see the scenery to the best advantage. We had to change carriages at Kovalo, and the arrangements at the station were of the best; the style primitive, but clean, exceedingly clean. At each stoppage the little station in the woods bustled up, the station-master donned a sky-blue cap of office, to be removed until the passage of the next train, perhaps in twelve hours' time; all was excitement, which faded away as the locomotive puffed and wheezed off.

The land of fens is indeed no inappropriate name for Finland. Nursed in the damp, grow mosses of the brightest hues; lichens of incomparable beauty clothe the granite boulders, which lie all over the land. The silver birch and the spruce fir are almost the only trees, but they have a charm of their own. The autumn tints are of a richness unknown in England, but recall the flaming maples on the banks of Ontario. On the spruce branches roost the beautiful blackcock and the giant capercailzie; and on the islands there, in the numerous lakes which we pass in succession, abound the ptarmigan. Varying like these in colour as the winter approaches, crouches the great Arctic hare, his ears laid close to his head as we pass. This is about all the game which can be found in Finland; but a few years ago can be had on the East Bothnia coast; they do not, however, come so far inland as the St. Michel Government, through which we are speeding on through never ending woods.

Next morning we stop at a pretty little station for breakfast. In the waiting room is the ever present samovar, with excellent bread, butter, and honey. We are not sorry when our train draws up, at two o'clock in the afternoon, at the terminus of Kuopio.

This interesting town stands at almost the north end of the great central lake system, which enables direct communication by water, *via* Viborg, to be held with St. Petersburg. In summer this is a charming route to take, but in autumn it is chilly, and in winter it is of course closed by ice. Kuopio, as the terminus of the central great railway line, is a halting place on the way to the best fishing rivers in the country; for from it one takes the steamer to Idensalmi, whence post horses draw you to Kajana, on a large lake which feeds the Ulea river. From this town a steamer runs to Vala, at the junction of lake and river; and here undoubtedly is the best salmon fishing to be found. The fish run to great size, and, as they find no difficulty in getting to the sea, are in fine condition, and afford splendid sport. It is rare to hook a fish under 20lb. on the Ulea river, whilst 40lb., and even larger fish, are not uncommon. There are many other fishing quarters in Finland, but Vala is the best. It will be found that salmon fishing in the southern provinces is not, as a rule, satisfactory, as the fish run small; and in the central provinces of Kuopio, St. Michel, and Tavastehus, though the fish run to a fair size, the sport is principally harling, and the fish are not equal in appearance, or as food, to Norwegian or our own salmon.

But I am not writing a fishing article, so will return to Kuopio, a picturesque town, composed chiefly of wooden houses, but with two or three good streets of stone, church, town hall, governor's palace—substantial, even handsome buildings, and 10,000 inhabitants. The town is the headquarters of a flotilla of gunboats, which is housed in excellent barracks, built on the detached block system, and quite according to the latest sanitary ideas.

The mixed education system prevails in Finland; and although the plan of bringing up semi-adults of opposite sexes together is a curious one, it seems to answer well. It causes a great economy in the staff of teachers, which was the original reason for its adoption in this land of small population and means.

The mode of everyday life in Finland resembles that in France. Breakfast, a substantial meal, is at 11 a.m. Each meal is preceded by a zakouskha, or ante-prandial nibble at cheese, pickles, smoked or cured fish, accompanied by a glass of kvass. I preferred the very fair local beer to this Russian sour drink. Milk is much drunk at repasts. Dinner, considering the late breakfast and its solid character, is at the early hour of 4 p.m., and supper at nine or ten. The cookery is fairly good; much fish is eaten, the beef and mutton are indifferent, but there is plenty of game. Indeed, both in Russia and Finland, the eternal gelinotte or hazel hen, served with cream sauce, palls at last. Idle men are few in this country, but the office or work hours are short. In the summer, at Kuopio, the band of the regiment plays daily in the park, which consists of a promontory in the lake, beautifully laid out, and in which are small pavilions or summer houses, commanding charming views of the lake; a restaurant, and summer theatre. Calls are often paid in the evening, and social *réunions* are frequent.

It was a curious sight on Sundays to see the boats laden with peasant folk arriving from the country or distant villages to go to Divine service in the town. The Finns are a devout race. Lutherans Protestants form the religion of the country, and only about two per cent. of the population, mainly inhabiting the Russian frontier, are of the orthodox Greek faith. I have seen it written that religious liberty is refused to the Finns by Russia, but I can absolutely deny the statement. The Bible is seen in nearly every peasant's house; pictures of Melanchthon and Luther, alongside those of the Emperor and Empress, are the common ornaments of the cottages. In fact, the principle of religious liberty was established by law in 1869. The only influence which the Emperor has in religious matters is the fact that bishops and curates are selected by his Majesty from the names submitted to him as having obtained most votes. The bishops are elected by the votes of the clergy of the diocese, and the curates or pastors by those of the parishioners. The question of the relations of other religious communities to the State is one of the knotty points which will come on for deliberation at the triennial Diet, which assembles this year in Helsingfors.

Now as to the constitution of this Diet. It consists of four estates—nobles, clergy, burgesses, and peasants. It is convoked by the Emperor Grand Duke. The normal length of a session is four months. The estate of nobles consists of the heads of the 237 noble families of Finland, of whom seven are counts, forty-five barons, and 185 gentlemen. The right to sit is hereditary, tempered by selection. If the head of the family abstains, he may designate a member of his family. About 140 members take their places, elected by the votes of their peers. The estate of the clergy consists of one archbishop, two suffragans, and twenty-eight deputies, elected by the Lutheran clergy; and four to six elected by the professors of the university and public schools. The burgesses are the deputies elected by the towns, by universal suffrage, which denies the right of voting only to women, soldiers, sailors, and servants. The estate of peasants is composed of one deputy for each rural commune. The number of deputies in the last two estates is about equal, and together amounts to 120. Every Finn of twenty one years of age may vote, except as above mentioned, and those disqualified as (1) lunatics, (2) bankrupts, (3) criminals, (4) those condemned to loss of civil rights, (5) those convicted of bribery or corruption. An elector who has voted for one order cannot vote for another; so the one man one vote system prevails.

It may be noted that no Finn is eligible for election to any order unless he is of some Christian belief, is twenty-five years of age, and is not himself suffering under any electoral disqualification.

The session this year will be a memorable one, for, besides the religious question alluded to, that of the incorporation of Finland in a Customs Union with the rest of the Empire, and the restriction of certain trading privileges, the possesses, will also be discussed.

It will be a great pity if Finnish trade and enterprise receive a check. At present the country is in the full swing of the pendulum of civilisation, its communications are excellent, and complete liberty