

"SPORT IN THE ARMY"

By COL. F. T. POLLOK



THERE is no doubt that, owing to our vast possessions, the British officer has greater opportunities of enjoying sport than the soldiers of other nations. The Navy has, in a measure, even better opportunities than the Army, because our vessels visit every part of the world. But the soldier need not grumble, because if he cannot roam all the world over, yet, if quartered in India or Burma, he has facilities of sport which are denied to his brethren of the Navy. The field of action is not as extended as it was half a century ago, for since several of our colonies have become self-governing, our troops are no longer sent there; but still, there is a vast field open to the military sportsman.

Of late years sport has been somewhat circumscribed even in India, for very many of the native potentates have taken to hunting in earnest, and have preserved vast tracts. Again, the Forest Department occupies many thousand acres in some of the very best localities for the *feræ natura*, which tracts are strictly guarded, and where it is hard to obtain permission even for a few days' shooting. Yet, with all these hindrances, there are still many localities where wild beasts abound, and which can be followed by the patient hunter without hindrance.

In Southern India there are the Wynaad jungles, Neilgherry-Annimullies, Sheveroy Hills, and Travancore, where I believe a permit is necessary, but not difficult to obtain; the Western Ghats, and Central India. In Bengal, Tirhoot and Assam especially, there is the finest pig sticking and tiger shooting in the world. Portions of the Terai are also good, and everybody knows of the varied sport obtainable in the Himalayas and borders of Thibet. Portions of Burma are especially good for big game; but well-trained elephants are a *sine quâ non*. In Assam, too, the game is varied—rhinoceros, buffaloes, gaur, mithun or gyal, tigers, bears, sambur, marsh deer, hog deer, kakur, or barking deer, are numerous; elephants are also plentiful, but are preserved.

In Lower Burma there are wild cattle, in sufficient numbers to satisfy the most ardent Nimrod. In the Nizam's country numerous bears exist in ground on which they can be ridden. The late Geoffrey Nightingale killed several hundreds with the spear. In Ceylon there are elephants, principally mucknas or tushless ones, buffaloes, sambur, leopards, pig, spotted deer, and hog deer. Again, most people stationed at Aden would imagine they would not have a chance of firing off a gun during the time they were quartered there; but the enterprising sportsman, having obtained the Resident's permit, has only to cross over to Berbera and penetrate into Somaliland and he will meet with the king of beasts, the lordly elephant, wart hog, and other African game. Between Mombasa and Uganda there is plenty of game, though not as numerous now as before the rinderpest decimated the buffaloes. In the Soudan, but for its insecurity, excellent sport can be had. All sportsmen have read, I presume, the late Sir Samuel Baker's account of his sport when in search of the sources of the Nile, but, unfortunately, this field has

been closed for many a year, but it is to be hoped, when we drive out the Dervishes, that our garrisons in Egypt will be again able to visit those Elysium fields of sport.

Even in the Andamans there is fair fishing, and, if anyone likes to take the trouble, wild pig abound in the larger islands, but to get at them dense jungles full of abominable ticks have to be negotiated, and the sport is scarcely worth its difficulties.

In the Straits Settlements there is no lack of big game, but the forests and jungles are very dense, and small game shooting is very fair all over the East.

Even those quartered in Cyprus can have excellent sport. In one day I killed two bustard, over a hundred brace of cock, a couple of geese, several duck and teal, five or six hares, besides francolins, partridge, quail, and one sand grouse. There are gazelles too, but they are very wild, and hardly repay the trouble one has to circumvent them. There are boars, too, but as they lie in the very densest bush—all a mass of thorns—it is not easy to move them. The country there is far safer than in Albania, as I always found the natives, especially the Ansaries, most friendly. They are a very handsome race, reminding me of the best of the Afghans.

With the exception of snipe and duck, there is very little to be got in Lower Egypt. From Natal, where we still have troops, expeditions can be made into the interior, and one has only to read Mr. Selous' two books to realise what a paradise for game many parts of South Africa, bordering on the Zambesi, are.

For the followers of Izaak Walton there is much sport to be obtained in India. Some people like tank fishing, where the rhoé, a sort of carp, attains vast proportions. I have seen a native catch murrel by the dozen, but I, fishing close by with the best of tackle, failed to lure a single fish. In Upper India there is good mahseer fishing—this is often called the Indian salmon; it is in reality a barbel, but affords excellent sport, as it is a game fish and will fight for an hour or two or more. The late Colonel Nightingale was on to one, I believe, in the Gorge of the Godavery, the whole night. I have killed many in Assam and the Cossyah and Jynteah hills. The largest I ever landed weighed 44-lb., but I have known them caught up to 60-lb., and a Lascar on board a steamer off Gowhatty caught one over 80-lb. with a ball of rice. In the Manass, in Baghdooar, this fish is plentiful, and grows to a large size. The best lure for them is a spoon, of the size of a gravy spoon—gold on the outside and silver on the inside. It is as well to have strong tackle and about 100 yards of line.

In Malta there is very little game, and at Gibraltar the game is nil, or next to it; but by crossing over to Tangiers, which for some years was ours, excellent sport can be had. Thanks to the late Sir Drummond Hay there is very good pig sticking, and further inland there is plenty of small game.

In our possessions on the West Coast of Africa game is not plentiful, but by going down the coast to Cape Lopez the West Coast buffaloes roam in herds, and there are hippopotami

in the rivers. The formidable South Africa buffalo is met with in Mossamedes, but not further north. Even in the island of St. Helena there is, I believe, now some game.

Our protectorate now extends up the Niger beyond Bida. I spent some months there and searched for game, but beyond shooting a few partridges, francolins, and guinea fowl, I found nothing. But at Lakoja there are plenty of buffaloes and antelope, and thousands of guinea fowl. Elephants come close to Lakoja at certain seasons, and they are plentiful along the right bank of the Binue.

We used to have troops at Labuan, and very good sport is to be had in Borneo, but I think our forces have been withdrawn. That excellent sportsman, Douglas Hamilton, killed a wild boar there forty-two inches high. Beyond birds of paradise there is very little to kill in New Guinea worth powder and shot.

In Australia there are kangaroos and duck and black swans, but no large game. In New Zealand it is different. Red deer and pheasants and wild pigs have been introduced, and have multiplied fairly. In Tasmania trout up to thirty pounds' weight have been captured, but it is a disputed point whether the salmon has become acclimatised, although the fry have been successfully reared and put into the rivers. In Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Canada there is still good sport; but very few military men can get at it without taking long leave, for our garrisons have, I think, been withdrawn.

Vancouver known locality for game, but no troops there now. From ingleave, good pheasant is to be had in China, easily be reached. There is much to interest the visitor there, and there are also some rare pheasants and other game, but no big bags need be expected. Admiral Kennedy, one of our most popular Admirals, and second to none as a shikarie, had good sport in Mauritius and other adjacent islands, which he has so well described in various papers. But in the first island the shooting is all in the hands of a few residents of French extraction, and can only be indulged in by invitation. Socotra, a large island under our protectorate, not far from Cape Guardafui, ought to have game in it, but I do not think it has ever been visited by a sportsman, so its capabilities or otherwise are unknown. From Perim, I believe, several officers crossed over to the mainland and had fair sport, but of late the country has been too disturbed to allow of Europeans going there hunting.

I do not think there is much sport in any of our West Indian islands, or in the Bahamas, but as the latter are not far from Florida, it is not difficult to cross over on short leave, and if you do nothing else, endeavour to catch a 200-lb. tarpon, and eat oranges.

I do not purpose in this article to give records of such sport as I have indulged in either alone or in company. But during all but fifty years' service and wanderings in exceptionally favourable localities for sport, and having indulged in them all, from slaying the mighty behemoth to the tiny rain quail, I may say that there is no sport in the world that can hold a candle to pig sticking. Before the Anicuts were built and the land irrigated to the extent it is now, there used to be excellent pig sticking at Omsul Davy, about eighteen miles from Masulipatam, at Guntoor, in the Churs (islands), and along the banks of the Kistna and Godavery rivers; but now it is a thing of the past in those localities. There is still good hunting to be got at Ellichpoor and near Kamptee, and the meets from Meerut are generally very successful. But in the Indigo districts the Bengal Tent Club has the best sport. Simson, probably the best pig sticker India has produced, would find a pig and ride him where nobody else would look for one, and he is equally as good to hounds in England as he was to pig in India; a better all-round sportsman never lived.

After pig sticking, tiger shooting off elephants in the vast plains of Bengal, Assam, and Burma is the most exciting.

I never did see much sport in sitting up in a machan, or a tree over a kill, or ensconced in a mart (a circular pit dug near water), and bagging, or far oftener missing, your tiger. I'd rather shoot six on foot or a dozen off elephants than a hundred from a coign of vantage, where you sit night after night devoured by mosquitoes and inhaling malaria, in perfect safety to yourself, as far as the beast is concerned, but with a great deal of discomfort.

It is true that a man mounted in a howdah on a staunch elephant runs very little risk, but there is risk for all that. On foot the chances are not equal. A tiger will hide in a bush where one would think a hare could scarcely conceal himself, and bide his time to pounce upon the shikarie. Only those who have nerves of steel and have acquired knowledge by a long pursuit of large game should indulge in shooting tigers on foot.

Elephants may rank as next. I never could see the sense of shooting hundreds of tushless pachyderms, as many noted men have done in Ceylon. There is the same danger, of course, as when following a tusher, but there is no trophy; and is it worth while to kill these useful slaves to man just to say you have killed so many elephants?

Then comes buffalo shooting—the most dangerous animal, whether in India or Africa, and also the most treacherous and tenacious of life. I have shot so many of them I lost all count, but latterly I left them severely alone unless they were pugna-ordin- ciously inclined or carried an extraordinary head. The largest are feral in

Assam and Burma—those in parts of India are tame ones become feral—but all are equally savage, and take a lot of killing.

Rhinoceros, though pachydermatous, are far easier to kill, for the hide on the living beast is easily penetrated, and only hardens when taken off and dried in the sun. Yet for all that heavy charges are requisite, not on account of the hide, but because between it and the heart and lungs there is an immense mass of blubber, muscle and bone. The animal is inoffensive as a rule, and will run sooner than fight, but if its dander is risen it charges viciously, and does not use its horn, but tushes,

and slashes with them. I have seen an elephant's leg cut to the bone, and as they fight amongst themselves, they are often scored all over.

There is just sufficient danger in bear shooting to make it very attractive. The noise a bear makes after being wounded is enough to upset the nerves of an old sportsman, to say nothing of the novice.

Gaur are well worth shooting, as they are grand beasts, some being as high as seven feet at the shoulder. They are not very dangerous. A few will charge, but the greater part seek safety in flight. Tsine, a wild bull found in Burma and some of the islands lower down, are very handsome cattle, but very difficult to get at, as they graze in open quins; they are not wanting in pluck either. The gyal much resembles the gaur at a distance, and the Assames call both varieties "mithun," but if pressed, they say the gaur is the "Asseel mithun," and the other, "mithun" only.

I need not here attempt to describe the chase of the numerous deer and the few antelope found in parts of India from the Himalayas down to Ceylon. There is a great charm in stalking a sambur or a spotted buck. To mountaineers the makhoor, ibex, the various wild sheep, the wild yak, and the numerous deer afford grand sport, but it is one I have never indulged in, so will say nothing further about it. I trust I have shown that to the Army officer there is grand sport to be obtained in our possessions. To enable a man to be an efficient officer he should be inured to hardships, to be able to stand the sun and various changes of climate. Who gets inured so soon as the shikarie?

