

THE DEADLY WILD BEASTS OF INDIA.

IN this paper, and in that which will follow, I propose to give a brief description of the destructive wild animals and venomous snakes of British India, with an account of the mortality caused by them among men and domestic animals throughout those provinces which have furnished the necessary statistical information. I shall describe also the measures in force for abating the evil, and offer suggestions for rendering them more effective. The completeness and accuracy of the official returns of deaths caused by wild animals and venomous snakes vary in different districts, but the figures generally, if they err, rather understate than exaggerate the evil, for there can be little doubt that the number of reported deaths falls short of the actual reality. The loss of life is indeed so startling that an inquiry into the circumstances under which the yearly deaths of about twenty-five thousand human beings and fifty-five thousand head of domestic animals occur is one of no slight interest.

The following provinces are those from which detailed reports have been obtained: Bengal, Assam, Lower Burmah, North-West Provinces and Oudh, the Punjab, Central Provinces, Hyderabad Assigned Districts, Coorg, Madras, Bangalore, Bombay, Ajmere and Merwara districts, altogether representing a population of 199,043,492. On the other hand, Kashmir, Rajpootana, Hyderabad, Central Indian agency, and Bundelkund, Baroda, Mysore, Munipore, and the Native States under the Bombay, Bengal, and Madras Governments, and under the North-West and Central Provinces, with a population of 56,604,371, are not included. It will thus be seen that only a part, though a great part, of the Indian peninsula is represented, and only about seven-ninths of the whole population, which is estimated at 255,647,863. There is every reason to believe that similar returns, with similar results, might be furnished by the unregistered provinces.

This yearly loss of life suggests the question whether more effective measures might not be devised for diminishing it. Much has been done towards mitigating the evil, but the results are not satisfactory, for the destruction of life still goes on at an almost unabated, and at what has been fitly called 'an appalling rate.'

The Government returns for the last eight years, *i.e.* 1880 to

enclosures, or by noosing, tame elephants assisting in the capture. When the elephant is viciously disposed, he destroys his victim by dashing it on the ground, and then crushing it with his feet and tusks, kicking the body backwards and forwards between the fore and hind feet. In former days, under native governments, the elephant was trained to be executioner, and destroyed the culprit by plucking him limb from limb, and by pressing his feet on the trunk. Stories have been told of elephants not only tearing off the limbs, but eating the flesh of the victims; this, I think, is very improbable.

The returns for 1887 show that 56 persons and 28 cattle were killed by elephants, while 16 elephants were destroyed, at a cost of Rs. 210. This sum, I find, was given in Assam (Rs. 150) and Burmah (Rs. 60) at the rate of about Rs. 13 per head.

Rhinoceros indicus, the great Indian rhinoceros (Gairdha), is found in the Nepal Terai, Bhotan, Purneah, Assam, in dense jungle and swamps. This animal may cause the deaths of a few human beings and cattle in chance encounters, but it does not appear on the roll of wild beasts destructive to life. There are other species, but they are rare, and I pass them all by with this simple reference.

Bubalus arni, buffalo (Arna bains), is common in Assam, Bengal, the swamps of the Eastern Terai, Central India, and Ceylon. It is a very powerful animal, with long, scimitar-like horns. The solitary males are very vicious and dangerous, make great havoc among the fields, and occasionally kill men. The same may be said of the bison or gaur, *Bos gaurus* (bun-parra, gauri gai). This is a powerful animal, sometimes standing six feet high, with massive horns. It is found in the forests from Cape Comorin to the foot of the Himalayas, but not in the Oude, Nepaul, and Rohilkund Terai. It is common in Southern and Central India, but is extinct in Ceylon; an allied species, gayal, mithun, *Bibos frontalis*, is found in Assam. The bisons are naturally timid and wary animals, but the bulls are occasionally dangerous, especially when attacked, and cause the death of a few men. These also are dismissed with this brief notice.

Sus indicus, the wild boar (jungly soor, bara soor, and other local names), is common all over India from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. It differs somewhat from the wild boar of Europe in being not quite so massive; it has a lighter head and limbs, is very fleet and brave, and very fierce when opposed or wounded. It lives in the open country, in grassy plains, among sugar-canes and other light cover, also in the jungle. It is much hunted and is well-known. Hog-hunting, whether with the short, leaded spear of Bengal, or the long spear of Madras and Bombay, is regarded as the best of all sports. The boars of Bengal are generally considered to be the largest and finest; they are said to attain a height of nearly forty inches, but from thirty to thirty-six inches is more common.

local governments and administrations are empowered to increase, within the limits of their respective budget allotments, the rate of the authorised rewards whenever such a measure is considered desirable ; but rewards should only be given for killing destructive, and not merely wild, animals.

All over India the authorities concur that the evil is great and needs remedy. Various rewards are offered in different localities, full price being given for adult animals, half, or less, for cubs. Some think the rewards should be continued, others that they should be given up or offered only in special cases. Some think them too high, others too low ; a variety of opinions exist as to modes of dealing with the evil, but even the independent States, such as the Nizam's and Jeypore, have proclaimed rewards for the destruction of noxious animals. It cannot be said that the subject has been ignored. The question is how best to carry on the war against these creatures. What is needed is a system laid down on general principles for the whole country, to be carried out in detail according to the requirements of each particular district. There should be a Department, with a responsible chief and subordinate agents, for whom certain rules should be laid down, to be carried out steadily and perseveringly, whilst leaving much to the discretion of the local authorities, who should be enjoined to give encouragement to those who are entrusted with the duty of destroying the wild animals, but insisting on the work being carried on uniformly everywhere. Ample means exist if sought for, for constituting such a Department, and if it were entrusted to a selected officer, as in the case of the Dacoity and Thuggie Departments, it is probable that in a few years the result would be as good in respect of noxious animals as it has been in respect of thugs and dacoits.

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