

HUNTING BIG GAME IN INDIA

TOLD BY
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C.B.E., M.C., A.D.C.
AND SET DOWN BY
REGINALD POUND

A very interesting account of the experiences of the Vernay-Faunthorpe expedition, which

went to India on behalf of the New York Museum of Natural History in order to secure

BEFORE complying with the request that I should describe some of my more interesting experiences as leader of what has become known to the scientific world as the Vernay-Faunthorpe expedition to India, I should like to state the purpose of the expedition, and to indicate, very briefly, how it came into existence.

specimens of Asiatic animals, the hunters' quest leading them into some of the most

remote regions of the country. The narrative is illustrated with some striking photographs.

The New York Museum of Natural History is erecting, at a cost of several millions of dollars, a building to be known as the Roosevelt Hall, part of which is being devoted to the display of Asiatic specimens. It was the desire of the Museum authorities to obtain a good representative collection of Indian mammals, and, on hearing this, Mr. Arthur S. Vernay, an Englishman well known in

the U.S.A. as an explorer and hunter of big game, volunteered to fit out an expedition at his own expense, my services being sought in organizing and leading it.

And here let me say that although our object in visiting the jungles of India involved the killing of a certain number of wild animals, the expedition's programme strictly limited the "bags" we had in view, both Vernay and myself being opposed to the senseless slaughter of the creatures of the wild, whether large or small. Our plans provided for the inclusion in our collection of only one group of each species; that is to say, one adult male, one adult female, and one young specimen, and, in addition, a skeleton of an adult male. This arrangement was subject to slight variation, as in the case of elephant and rhinoceros we omitted the young. The skeletons, I should explain, were required for the study of the evolution of the different types represented, this being a subject on which the president of the Museum is an acknowledged authority. One other point that I may mention here is that in no instance was unnecessary suffering inflicted on the animals that fell to our guns, it being a matter of pride with us that not a single animal got away wounded.

The first stage of the expedition, which set out at the beginning of 1923, yielded no experiences that we ourselves regarded as being of outstanding interest. Our first "bags" were obtained in the Rani of Khairigarh's jungles, in the United Provinces, and consisted of specimens of the rare and very beautiful swamp deer, including a stag with twelve-point antlers measuring not quite forty inches—the finest head of its kind I ever saw, and a record for Oudh country. These deer, like

most of their kind, are very shy and nervous, and not at all easy to track, while their agility, manifested in frequent graceful leaps into the air, is quite wonderful.

Specimens of the Sambhur stag, the Indian antelope, and the gazelle having been obtained in Bhopal, where we were welcomed on behalf of the Bhegum by the Prime Minister of the State, we made our way into Nepal, the comparatively little-known "closed" State, ruled over by His Highness Maharajah Sir Chandra Shumshere Jung, whose help and advice proved of the utmost value. His Highness, appreciating the significance of the expedition, directed us to the Gandak Valley, an expanse of country almost wholly enclosed by ranges of hills, which divide it from the plains. Through the valley runs the Gandak River, a rather turbulent stream that rushes and whirls between high cliffs and through precipitous ravines, its course broken at various points by rapids demanding considerable skill in navigating them. According to the Nepalese, the river is the abode of certain fearsome evil spirits, which are supposed to lure the traveller to his destruction at the slightest provocation.

Our immediate purpose, in this district, was to secure good examples of the great Indian one-horned rhinoceros, which is now extremely rare in British India and diminishing every year in Nepal. The Nepalese trackers we had engaged seemed reluctant at first to take us to the rhino's haunts, but actuated by the promise of handsome rewards, they finally undertook to put us on the trail, though it was fairly evident that rhino-tracking was not an occupation into which they entered with enthusiasm.

The first member of the species to cross our path consisted of a female, whom we promptly nicknamed "Lizzie"; and a calf. They were beaten out of the bush not far from our camp, and when we saw the mother lumbering across our line of vision with her solitary



A young spotted deer, captured alive, which served as the mascot of the expedition.

offspring bringing up the rear, we lowered our rifles and amused ourselves by observing how a rhino behaves when disturbed. The trackers, of course, could not understand our attitude, and seemed disappointed, but really "Lizzie" interested us much more alive than she would have

and, after scenting us and trotting off at a sharp pace, suddenly turned about and received both our bullets, at once toppling over dead.

When we came to examine our prize we found, to our disappointment, that while the animal itself was a good specimen, its



Crossing the swamps on the Nepal border on elephants.

done dead; and in any case, her horn was small, while her calf was too young for our purpose. "Lizzie" and her little one became quite friendly, as jungle animals go, during our stay in their district, and on one occasion allowed Vernay to venture to within only four yards of their wallowing place, from which exceedingly good vantage-point he watched their antics as probably no Indian rhino had ever been watched before. It also behoves me to add that our film pictures of "Lizzie" and her little one were the first ever secured of the Indian rhino in its native haunts, the credit for obtaining them belonging to the well-known traveller and cinematographer who was responsible for making a pictorial record of our doings.

Repetition of our offers to the trackers induced them, after a certain amount of parleying, to put us in touch with a big male rhinoceros which had been located in the Sal Forest region, in country that was chiefly composed of very thick bush and half-hidden sheets of water. As soon as we neared our quarry, the trackers took to the trees and, by dint of their remarkable visual faculties, kept us informed of its movements. The rhino in question, a massive, tough-looking, slate-coloured old fellow, did not seem unduly concerned by the approach of our elephants,

horn had been worn and splintered down, either by fighting or by grubbing in the earth, or possibly both, to eight inches, whereas our ambition was to get specimens of twelve inches. The kill had been made some miles from camp, and our taxidermist, a skilled American worker whose services were lent to us by the Museum, was obliged to spend the night by the carcass.

The following day, after several hours' fruitless marching in search of further game, we were told by a number of villagers, on returning to camp, that a rhino had been marked down near a waterhole on the opposite side of the river. Tired as he must have been, like the rest of us, Vernay at once got into a boat and made the crossing, while I, weary after the day's exertions under a broiling sun, sat down to enjoy a long-looked-for cup of tea.

A few minutes later an excited Nepalese official who had been out bird shooting came in with the news that another big rhino was wallowing in a pool not far from the river, about a mile away. Breathlessly he explained that, with a companion, he had seen what they thought was a black water-fowl swimming in the pool, and that he had asked the other for the gun wherewith to shoot it. His companion's reply was amusing.

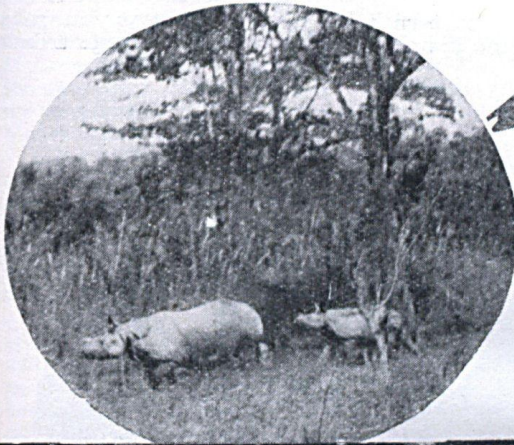
"Brother," he said gravely, "if there is any shooting of birds to be done I am the one to do it." Taking advantage of the bush cover, they solemnly and cautiously stalked the supposed "bird," only to find to their astonishment that it was none other than the ears and horn of a rhinoceros enjoying a bath!

Dusk was almost on us. Still, the chance was too good to lose, so, calling for a boat, I got out my gun and set off downstream, arriving within shooting distance of the quarry after a most uncomfortable crawl over a pebbly stretch of ground, in the course of which both my person and my clothes sustained numerous cuts and scratches. By this time the light was inclined to be baffling, and my aim had to be in consequence more or less a matter of guesswork, though I could make out the form of the big beast as it slowly emerged from the water, which rose and fell with an

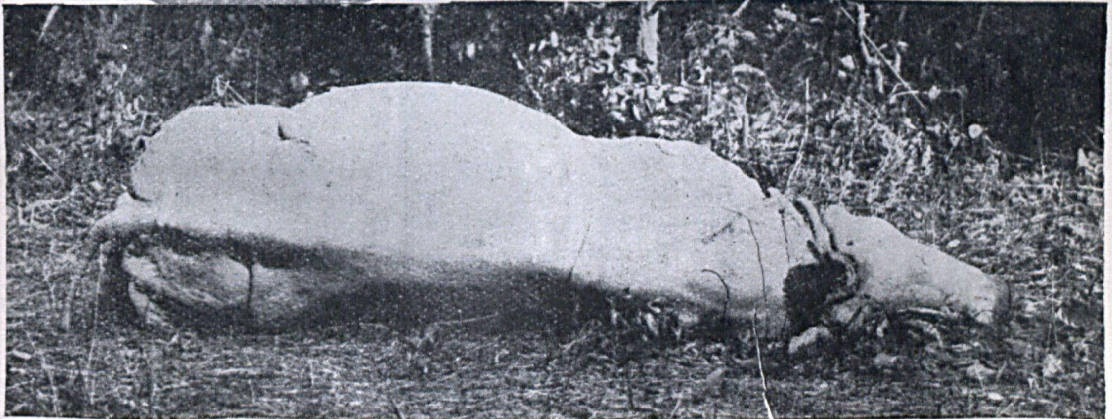


Nepalese trackers.

"Lizzie" and her calf.



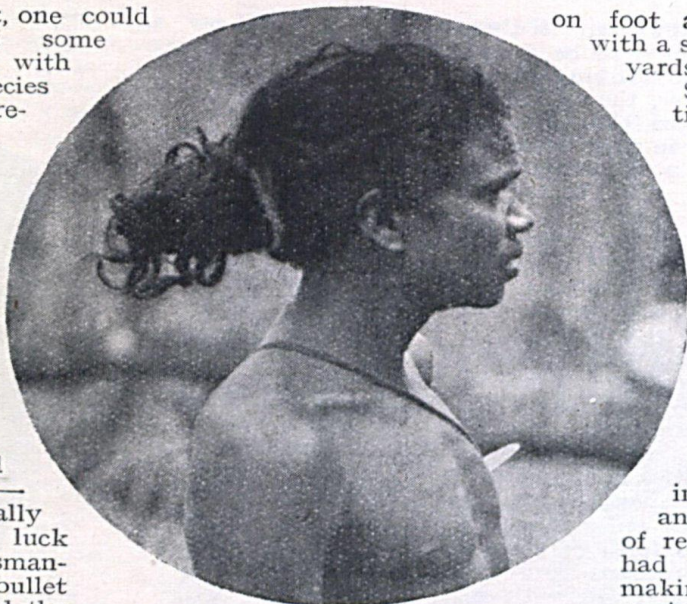
agitation that suggested a veritable subterranean upheaval. As, with a startling *woof!* the rhino reared itself on to the bank, I raised my gun and fired, putting an instant end to its career. The horn of this specimen, a very fine male, measured twelve and a half inches in length. On examining the carcass the next day I discovered some fair-sized



The great one-horned Indian rhinoceros.

wounds, the result, one could only surmise, of some primeval combat with another of the species a short time previously.

Meanwhile, Vernay's quest had also proved successful, he having accounted for the rhino he had gone out after—a male with a twelve-inch horn. His first bullet just grazed the animal, which promptly charged him. Luckily—though it was really less a matter of luck than of good marksmanship—the second bullet found its billet, and the monster fell dead at Vernay's feet. Our next and last specimen of the rhino family, a female, also fell to Vernay's gun, he having stalked the animal



Ranga, an aboriginal tracker who showed remarkable skill.

on foot and dispatched it with a single shot at twenty yards' range.

Since most of our time was spent in the more remote parts of the country, opportunities for observing the natives and their characteristics were not of frequent occurrence, our studies in this direction consequently being somewhat perfunctory. The

Nepalese are an interesting people, and it was a matter of regret to us that we had so few chances of making their closer acquaintance. They are of mixed Mongol origin, while here and there in the forest depths of the eastern part of the country you may come upon what are virtually savage tribes.

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A group of Sholagas, an aboriginal tribe, arrayed in weird costumes for a ceremonial dance.

As in Burma, the people are much given to keeping feasts, and public holidays are almost incessant. Temples, too, are numerous, and priests abound in most parts of the State. Every family of rank has its priest, whose office is nearly always hereditary. Astrologers, or those who profess to be, are likewise to be found in large numbers, their advice being constantly sought by the people in all kinds of domestic matters. If you propose building a house, for example, you consult the astrologers before laying your foundations—just to make sure, I suppose, that your future warrants your embarking on the task. The Nepalese do not set out on a journey of any importance, or cultivate a patch of ground, or, for that matter, take a dose of medicine, without referring the question to these wise men. But, as I have stated, hunting was our chief preoccupation in the State, and our studies in human nature were restricted almost entirely to the native trackers whom we employed to lead us into the jungle.

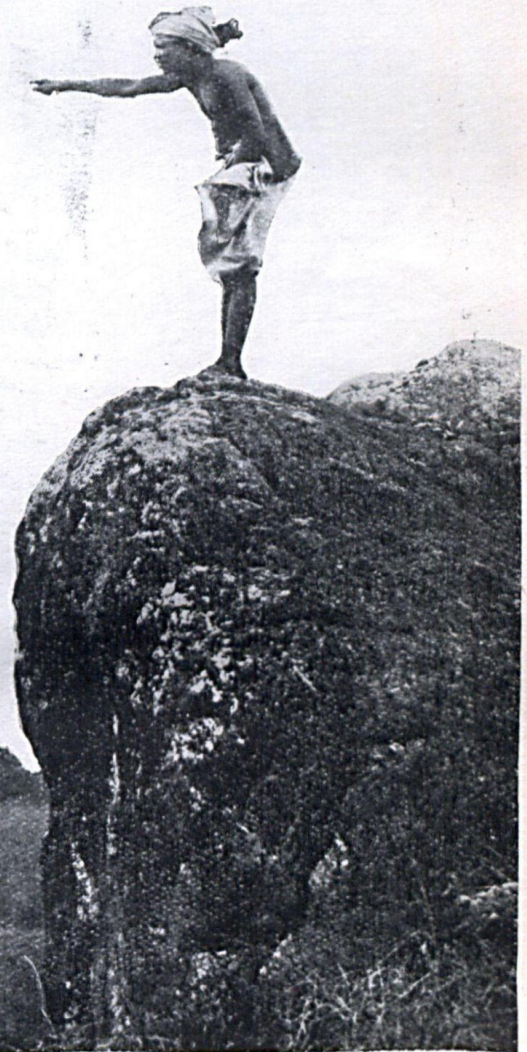
The best of the various trackers whose services we engaged were unquestionably men belonging to the Sholagas people, with whom we got in touch on the next stage of our jaunt, in the neighbourhood of the Billigiri Rangan hills, lying partly in Mysore territory and partly in the Madras Presidency. This is the district dealt with by Sanderson in his famous book, "Thirteen Years Among Wild Animals."

Here we found ourselves in a not altogether un-English tract of country, lying between four thousand and six thousand feet up, with boldly outlined ranges of hills and steep inclines. Our quarry in this country was elephant, and it was not long before we got to work.

The Sholagas were delighted to learn that we were out to shoot elephants, as the animals had recently been ravaging their plantations, the catch-phrase, "We have no bananas to-day," being, in effect, quite often heard in the district! One of the first specimens to fall to our guns was a big tusker, having, however, only one tusk.

This animal, with a *muckna*, or tuskless elephant, had been doing a lot of damage on the coffee estates. The *muckna*, which we did not get, although we could have had him quite easily, was a magnificent creature, quite the finest specimen of its kind, I think, that I have ever seen. To those who are acquainted with elephants, these animals have as many good points as a thoroughbred horse. This one in particular was in perfect condition, while—strange as it may seem to the uninitiated—its movements reminded one of the effortless grace of the best type of racing steed.

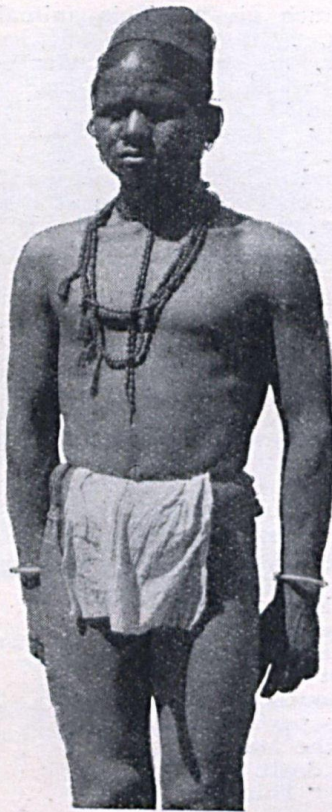
Few people, I suppose, conceive the elephant doing anything but crashing noisily and clumsily through the jungle when being pursued. Yet, on the contrary, these great creatures move with extraordinarily little



Ranga spotting elephant in a Mysore valley.

sound, and even where the trees and undergrowth are thickest they seem to have an uncanny knack of getting through without creating undue disturbance. The unaccustomed eye, indeed, might very well mistake a moving elephant in the jungle for a fleeting shadow, while when the animals stand stock still, as they frequently do when alarmed, even the experienced hunter may at first glance be deceived into thinking that they are boulders or rocks, if the surroundings favour the deception.

One day the Sholagas reported that a large tusker, a stranger in the district, which had been well surveyed by the trackers, had taken up a position in a valley a few miles from camp. Accordingly we set out early the following morning and very soon sighted the animal—a splendid example of its kind. Vernay took the brain shot at forty yards, and no sooner had his rifle spoken than the elephant sank to the ground—dead as the proverbial door-nail. In my



A Tharu aboriginal of the Gandak Valley, in Nepal.

time I have had a great deal to do with elephants, and it went distinctly against the grain to destroy this fine animal. But we found consolation in the reflection that long after we have migrated to what may prove to be happier hunting grounds this particular elephant will be the object of a fame that has never so much as approached us in our life-time. It is decreed, in fact, that the animal shall have a place alongside the specimen presented to the New York Museum of Natural History by President Roosevelt.

Bison-hunting provided us with no out-of-the-way experiences, though it will always be associated in my mind with one of the most trying jaunts after game that I was ever let in for. A solitary bull had been located by some of the Sholagas, and tracking the animal involved climbing a gruelling mountain-side and then, immediately afterwards, descending it again. In cold print this does not sound very terrible, I know, but I could hardly wish my



Two notorious cattle-killing tigers shot by Colonel Faunthorpe. The male was a magnificent specimen, measuring ten feet from tip to tip.

worst enemy a more exacting experience than it proved to be. By the time we had got the bison, a fine black specimen with horns measuring nearly twenty-four inches at the base, my whole body was

aching, while my feet seemed to be a mass of scalding blisters, pricked by red-hot needles!

But the weeks were flying by, and as we were anxious to secure the requisite specimens



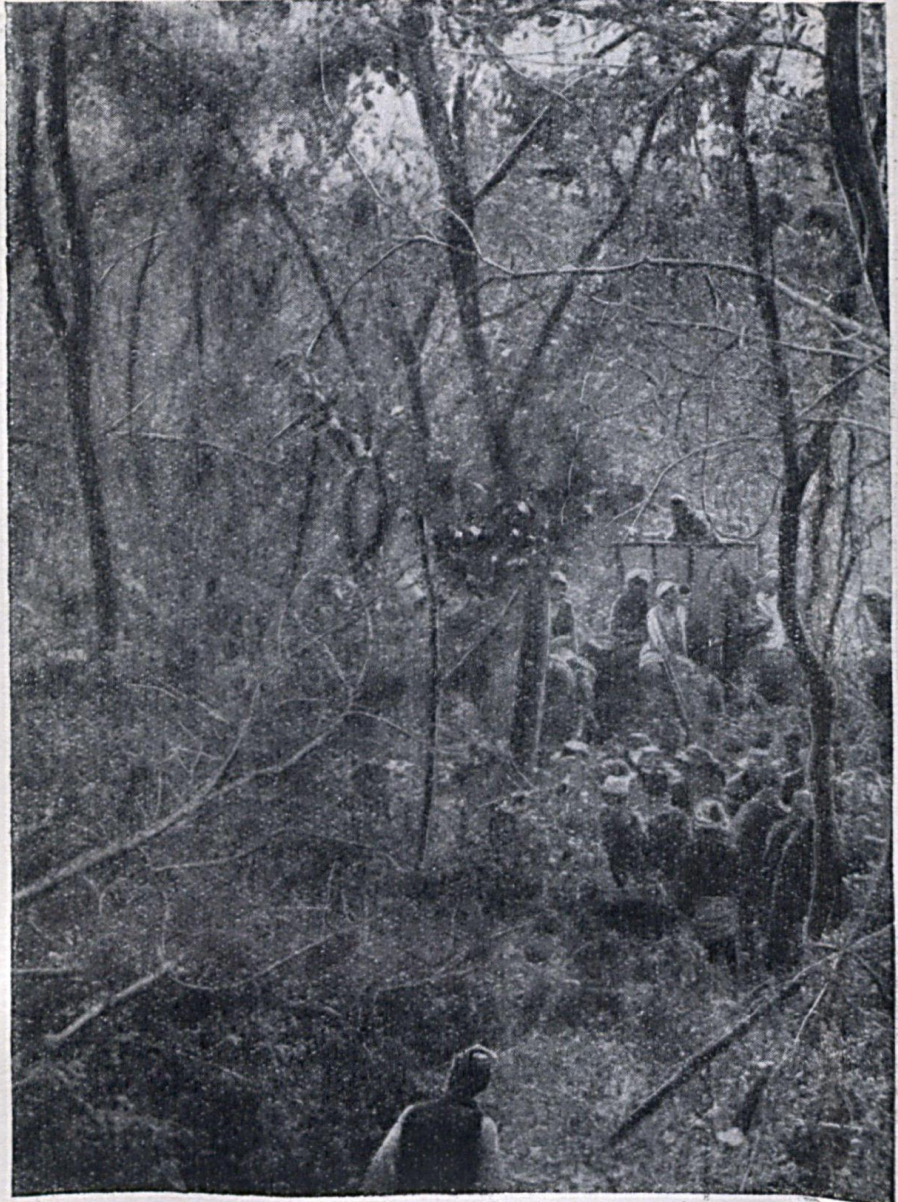
The tiger that leapt on to Colonel Faunthorpe's elephant.

of bear, leopard, and tiger, the expedition split up, Vernay remaining behind to complete the bison group, while I went on to Kheri Oudh. Here, for some days, our activities yielded only negative results, bear, in particular, being apparently impervious to our bullets. Our many misses, I suspect, were due to the unsteady gait of the elephants on which we were mounted. I believe that most people imagine that a ride on an elephant is a tolerably comfortable proceeding. Those who subscribe to this opinion would be surprised if they could see the film which was taken from the back of one of our elephants. The impression it creates is akin to that of a ship rolling in heavy sea! Elephant riding is certainly one of those hobbies that take a deal of getting used to.

My first tiger, so far as this trip was concerned, was put up during a hunt in some ratoa grass for bear. Ratoa grass is not unlike sugar-cane in appearance, and provides good cover for most jungle animals. Our elephants suddenly pulled up, waving their trunks in the nervous fashion that betokens, almost infallibly, the presence of tiger. The next moment I got a shot at a fine male in excellent coat, measuring four inches short of ten feet.

Shortly after this Vernay rejoined us, having completed the arrangements whereby the hides and skeletons we had collected

were dispatched to the coast for transport to New York. No one who has not had personal experience of the bulk of an elephant's hide and bones can have an adequate idea of the extraordinary amount of hard



The scene in the forest after

work necessitated in carrying them from place to place.

Our second tiger was unexpectedly beaten out of some ratoa grass that fringed the forest. The animal dashed out from cover and, gaining the forest, swung round and stood with its head and shoulders concealed

by a tree-trunk. My shot necessarily took him in the middle of the body, instead of in the shoulder—the most effective shot one can get, as it means instantaneous death—with the result that, instead of falling, the

one of the trackers spotted a bullet-mark in the tree behind which the tiger had stood when I fired. As soon as I saw the mark I realized that the bullet had gone clean through the tiger, a conclusion which none

of the trackers could be induced to take seriously. But I insisted on the search being kept up, as I felt certain in my own mind that the tiger was either lying "doggo" close by or that it was dead.

Suddenly there was a fierce snarl from the ratoa grass, followed by a whirlwind movement ahead of us. A second later the wounded animal rushed out and leapt straight at one of the elephants, mauling its trunk in its frenzied rage and then breaking back to cover. The elephants and their mahouts were extremely reluctant to surround the spot to which the tiger retired after this onslaught, but I got them to move forward a few paces when, with a succession of ominous growls, the tiger reappeared and, springing towards me, landed full on my elephant's head. The moment was an exciting one, but the thrill was not prolonged, as my next shot took the tiger straight in the forehead.



the killing of the tiger.

tiger rushed back into the grass, where for an hour or more we looked for it, without hearing so much as a growl to indicate its whereabouts.

It is possible that we should have abandoned the search, in the belief that the animal had made off, but for the fact that

As for my elephant, she stood steady as a rock, in spite of the tiger's rush and of the wound inflicted by its claws. Had she been less well-trained my second shot might not have been so effective, in which event I should most likely have had a different tale to tell—if, indeed, I had one to tell at all!