

INDIA

AND ITS NATIVE PRINCES

Travels in Central India

AND IN THE PRESIDENCIES OF BOMBAY AND BENGAL

By LOUIS ROUSSELET

CAREFULLY REVISED AND EDITED BY LIEUT.-COL. BUCKLE

NEW EDITION

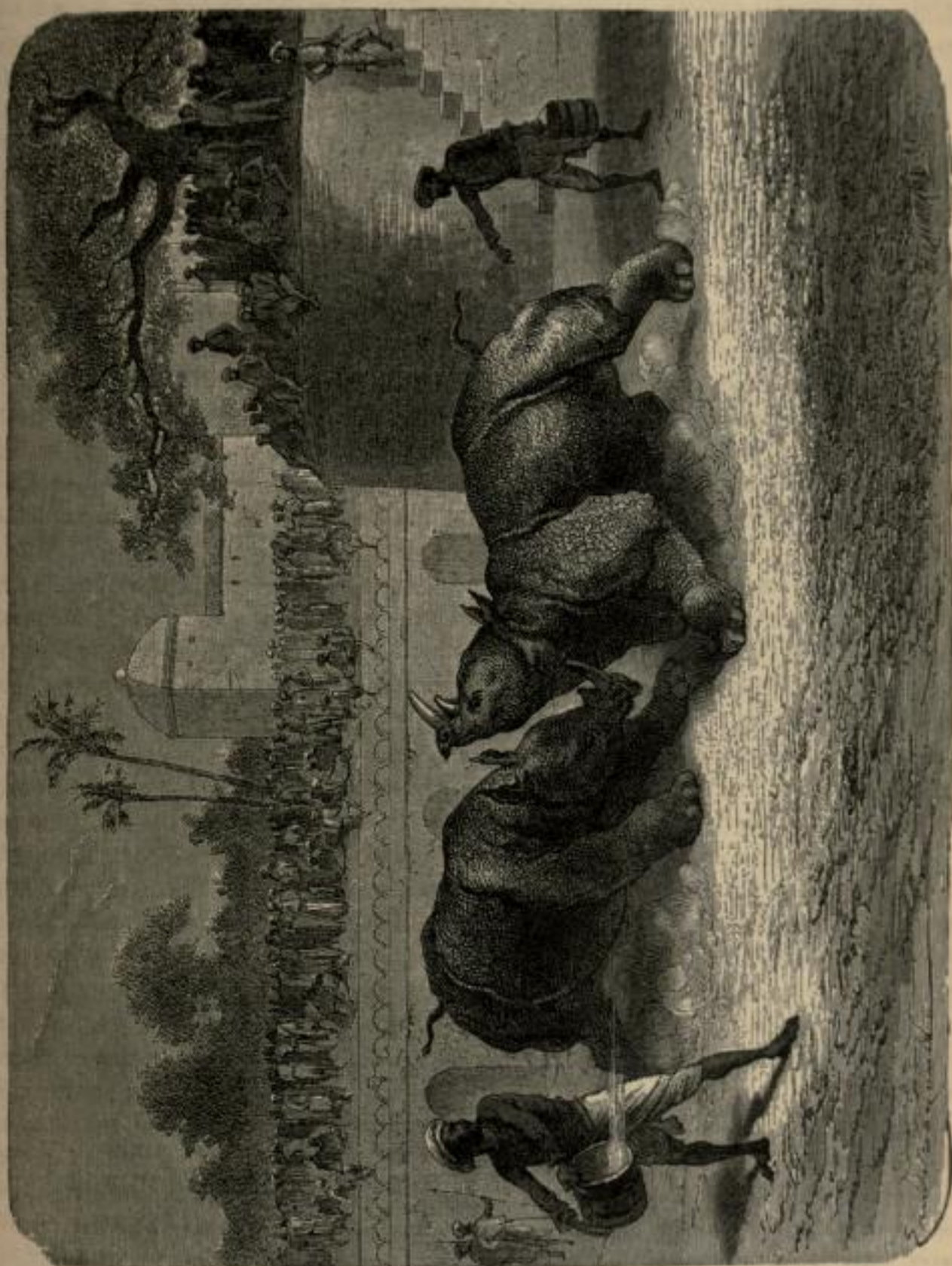
With Numerous Illustrations and Maps

LONDON

BICKERS & SON, LEICESTER SQUARE

1882

The sight of the hyena filled him with such rage that he immediately attacked, and, by dint of kicking and biting, very soon disabled him. The victor was covered with garlands of flowers, and led off amid the cheers of the multitude.



RHINOCEROS-FIGHT AT BARODA.

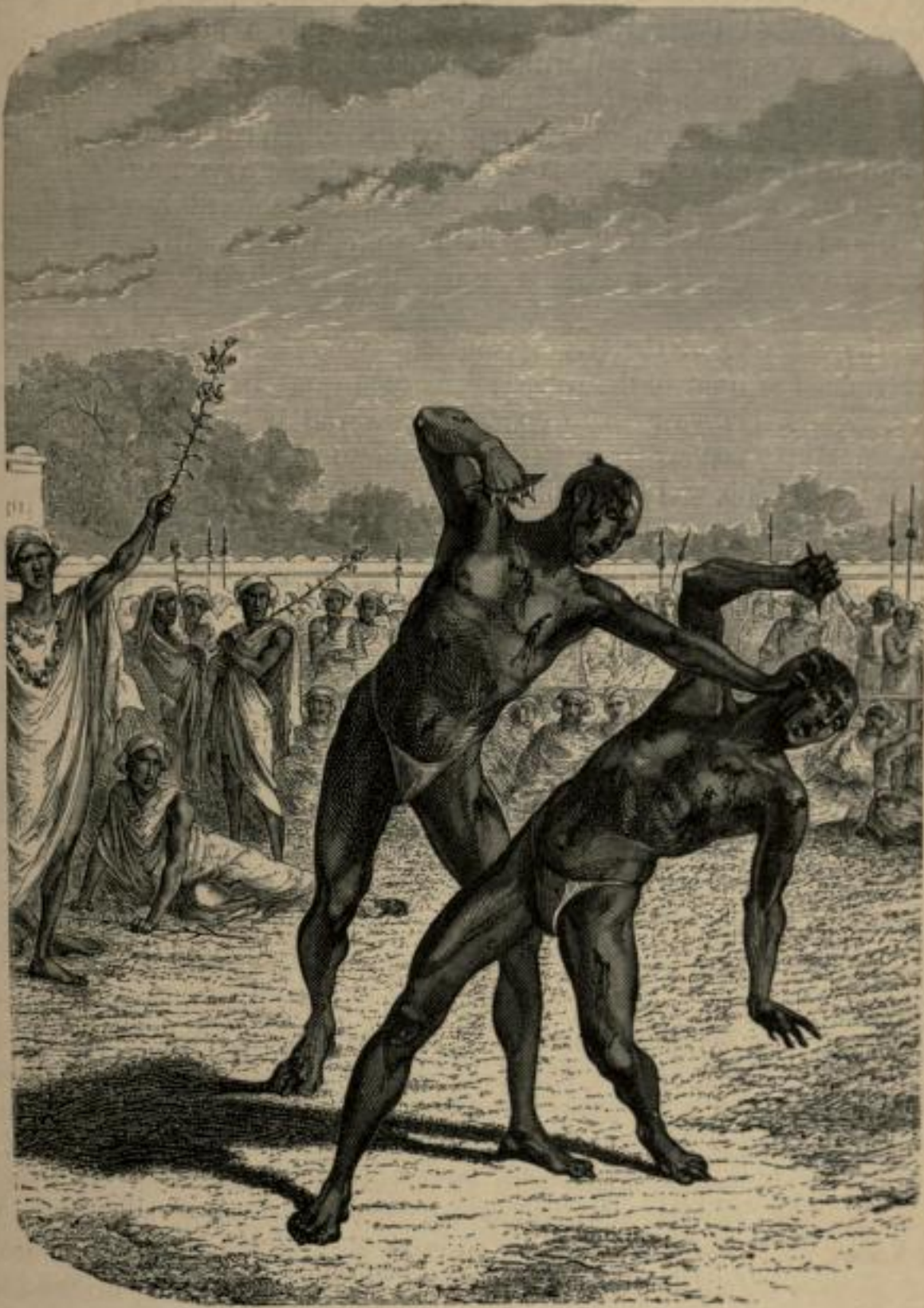
The Guicowar's passionate love of this kind of entertainment is not limited to combats between animals of every description that can be trained for the purpose. He also keeps at his court a perfect army of athletes, who are cele-

brated throughout the whole of India. He, himself, glories in being a *pehlwan*, or wrestler, and devotes himself daily to this exercise. Every morning, after performing his ablutions, he goes on to the terrace and wrestles with one of his *pehlwans*. Of consummate skill as an amateur, he is exceedingly jealous of his powers, and would assuredly be enraged if the wrestler allowed him to detect the least mark of condescension at this game. The latter is therefore obliged to strive freely with the king, and nevertheless, like a good courtier, to allow him to claim the victory. These wrestlers are recruited in all the provinces of India, but they come principally from the Punjaub and Travancore. Brought up from their infancy in the profession, they attain an extraordinary development of muscle. Their diet, their mode of living, and their dwellings are all regulated by the king himself, who tends them somewhat as he does his fighting buffaloes and elephants. The wrestling-day is always announced a long time beforehand; very often the neighbouring rajahs send their *pehlwans* to compete; bets are freely made, and great animation prevails throughout the Court.

The first contest was held on the 19th of July, and we went to the *hâghur* to witness it. The king and his courtiers had already arrived, and were seated on chairs round an arena strewn with sand. They were only waiting for us, and we had scarcely taken our seats when two men, half naked, formed like Hercules himself, came forward to salute the king; then, taking up their position in the centre of the circle, they fraternally embraced, and closed with one another. The rule at these wrestlings is, that one of the combatants is to throw the other on his back on the ground, or at least to compel him to declare himself vanquished. When, therefore, one holds the other doubled up under him and cannot succeed in forcing him down, he twists his wrist and tries to break it; the other then cries for quarter. But the ardour they import into these games is such that very frequently they prefer to bear the pain than to confess themselves beaten, and it is necessary abruptly to put an end to the combat.

Another sort of combat, much more terrible than those already mentioned, and which is only to be seen nowadays at Baroda, is the *Nucki-ka-kousti*, that is to say, "fight with claws." Here the combatants, almost naked, but adorned with crowns and garlands, tear each other with claws of horn. These claws were formerly of steel, and caused certain death to one or other of the combatants; but they have been abolished, as too barbarous for modern times. Those now in use, are, as I have said, of horn, and are fixed on the closed fist with thongs. I was only once present at a combat of this kind, for my heart was so moved by the horrible spectacle that I refused to go again. The wrestlers, intoxicated with *bâng*—liquid opium, mixed with an infusion of hemp—sing as they rush upon one another; their faces and heads are soon covered with blood, and their frenzy knows no bounds. The king, with wild eyes and the veins of his neck swollen, surveys the scene with such passionate excitement that he cannot remain quiet, but imitates by gestures the movements of the wrestlers. The arena is covered with blood; the defeated combatant is carried off, sometimes in a dying condition; and the conqueror, the skin of his forehead hanging down in stripes, prostrates himself before the king, who places round his neck a necklace of fine pearls, and covers him with garments of great value. One episode, moreover, disgusted me to such a degree that, without any heed of the effect my sudden departure might have upon the Guicowar, I at once withdrew. One of the

wrestlers, whom the *báng* had only half intoxicated, after receiving the first few blows, made a show of wishing to escape; his antagonist threw him, and they rolled together on the ground before us. The victor, seeing the unhappy wretch



THE NUCKI-KA-KOOSTI, AT BARODA.

demand quarter, turned to the king to know whether he should let the other rise: but, inflamed with the spectacle, the monarch cried out, "*Maro! maro!*" (Strike! strike!) and the scalp of the unfortunate fellow was torn without mercy. When he was taken away he had lost all consciousness. That same day, the king