

MY FIRST TIGER.

A STORY OF ADVENTURE IN INDIA.

No soldier, who has made one of a well-organized shooting party in India, is likely to forget the feelings of pleasure and real liberty with which he enjoyed his week's or month's absence from duty. Talk of a hard-worked lawyer's annual holiday to Baden or Switzerland, it is not to be compared with the enjoyment of a month's party in India. In these days, there is no nook or corner of Europe—no, nor of many parts of Asia either—where you can get completely away from the worry and bother of every-day life. I know a large shareholder in Overend, Gurney's unfortunate bank, who heard of his ruin when he was on the banks of the Jordan, and another friend of mine got the news that his daughter had run away with a fellow not worth a shilling, whilst he, the honored parent, was traveling in Bulgaria. In London, we are always running a race against time, and constantly losing it. Not so in India. In that country, one day is so much like another, there is so very little to do, and so much time to do it in, that any change from the ordinary life is accounted a God-send. Even the preparation for a month's campaign, no light matter, for the occupation it affords, for a fortnight or so before leaving the station, is not the least pleasing part of the undertaking. Tents have to be bought or hired; camels or carts to carry luggage must be provided; provisions for the party, and for the servants of the party, are laid in; guns and ammunition put in order; and a thousand things must be thought of which a "griffin," or new hand in the country, would never dream of being necessary. In the present instance, our party consisted of Capt. Ring and myself of my own regiment, Mr. Hogan and Mr. Anger of the civil service, and Major Aster of the staff, and Dr. Hoxon, an assistant surgeon of horse artillery. After the custom and fashion of Bengal, the native servants of these gentlemen numbered more than a hundred and fifty souls, and this without including such temporary followers as might join our camp from any of the villages we passed near. Those who have never been in the East, may wonder at such an immense following; but when I enumerate the servants which each of our gentlemen is obliged to keep in their country, their surprise will cease. For instance, I had to look after—a "kitchen," or table servant, a Moslem, whose sole duty it was to wait upon me at breakfast, luncheon and dinner. Next was a "bearer," a Hindoo, who looked after my clothes and acted as bed-maker. The third servant in social position was a maulavie, or lamp-trimmer; the fourth, a dholie, or washerman, (no dholie would dream of washing for two masters); the fifth, a sweeper; and though last, not least, each of my three horses had a syce, or groom, and a grass-cutter—six servants connected with my stables, and five for myself, or eleven in all. Suppose each of the party to have had three servants, would have made thirty-six servants. But having fewer horses than the others, I had also fewer servants, so that the personal following of the party may be safely set down as eighty individuals. To these must be added a cook, with two assistants, a butcher, and six tent-pitchers, that were in the general pay of the party, and the wives of more than half the servants, who accompanied their lords to the jungle, many of them having two and three children. Besides, there were the camel-drivers; the gharry, or cart-drivers; the mahouts, or men in charge of the half-dozen elephants lent us by the commissariat department, each elephant having two men to cut forage for him, besides his drivers. And it is a curious fact, that in India, the lower the "caste" of the individual, the greater the number of children he is certain to have. Capt. Ring and myself had between us seven horses; these necessitated seven syces, or grooms, and seven grass-cutters—fourteen men, eleven of whom had wives, and having amongst them twenty-eight children. When these various figures and facts are taken into consideration, it will not be deemed surprising that following in this camp amounted to upwards of a hundred and fifty souls.

All our arrangements being ready, the servants, camp equipage, baggage, spare horses, and everything which we did not want with us, was sent ahead, with orders to form our camp at a village about fifty miles from Meerut. At certain stations on the road, about twelve or fifteen miles apart from each other, a groom with a horse belonging to each of our party was to stop, so that we might ride through without stopping, and have a change of horses on the road. We started the day after our absence commenced, and in about seven hours from the time we left the cantonment we found ourselves in our camp, which was pitched under a grove of trees, and in the immediate neighborhood of what Orientals value above all other things—a running stream of good water.

To an Englishman, and an outdoor sportsman, and yet, to a certain degree, liking his personal comfort, I cannot imagine anything more "jolly" than a sporting camp in India. When we arrived, the servants had had plenty of time to get everything ready. Each of us had a good single-poled tent, some sixteen feet square, with double roof and double walls. Round each such tent there was a cluster of smaller tents, in which the owner's servants lived, about twelve or fifteen in number. A little way off, in the middle of the camp, was the mess tent, in which we intended to breakfast, lunch and dine, during our sojourn in the jungle. On the outskirts of the camp were the half-dozen temporary huts erected by the grain sellers, who had followed us from Meerut, determined to attach themselves to our camp, and supply our servants during the month we were to be away from cantonment. We were camped late for luncheon, and the afternoon in making preparations for whatever sport the next day might afford; for as yet no certain news of any tiger being in the vicinity had been received, and our head shikarie—the individual whose profession it is to wander far and near, in order to find out where sport is to be had—was still absent.

That evening old Hassein, the shikarie, returned to camp, and brought us news—"khuber," as it is called in An-

glo-Indian jargon—or a more hopeful character than is common at the outset of a shooting party. A tiger had been lately seen in the vicinity of our camp, and it was not unlikely that we might see one. Hassein himself seen it that very morning. The villagers themselves had not been molested by the brute; but it had destroyed three or four of their cattle, which was a serious loss to them. His hair was not known; but it had been seen to come regularly every morning and evening to a certain pond to drink; and Hassein recommended that we should start from camp about two hours before day-break, so as to reach the spot and be ready when the animal appeared, as the nature of its kind, to drink as soon as it is daylight enough to see any distance.

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