



A LEOPARD HUNT IN NORTHERN BENGAL.

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DURING the cold season one fine Saturday afternoon, in India (where the afternoons are always a great deal too fine), a party of us went out for a shoot in the jhils (marshes) of the Rungpur district of Northern Bengal, to bag snipe, quail, duck or teal. We were all members of the staff engaged on the construction of the Northern Bengal state railway, then being made as a famine line to connect Calcutta with Darjeeling, a sanitarium in the Himalayas, 530 miles distant.

The majority had equipped themselves with guns and cartridges containing Nos. 4, 6, and 8 or 10 shot, but three men, either from foresight or a lucky Providence, took their Martini-Henry rifles, having spherical bullets in their cartridges. For at that time leopards were frequently met with in these parts, while tigers sometimes unexpectedly turned up at inopportune moments or surprised the unwary villager feeding his flock. Curtis, one of the contractors' resident engineers, was a well-built man of medium height, a capital shot, and plucky to boot, who had often restored confidence to the coolies by his personal bravery whenever they left the works on account of a rumor that wild animals were lurking about. The best shot and pluckiest fellow of the group was, however, Ashton, a tall, cadaverous man without an extra ounce of flesh on his bones, who had accounted for at least a

dozen leopards on foot, during a two-years' residence in these parts, and was game to account for any number more if he could only get a chance. Besides his trophies of leopards, the skins and heads of tigers and other animals adorned the floor and walls of his bungalow, as if it were a cave dwelling in Switzerland, of primeval man. Ashton, like Nelson, had once been a middy and did not know what fear was, but, later on, his rashness gave him such a rude awakening that his nerves were upset for a long time afterward.

Those who have ever indulged in big game shooting, whether in India, Africa, or elsewhere, know that shooting leopards on foot is by no means a wise proceeding for any one; while to be safe from a tiger the best thing is to be on the back of an elephant. In order to kill a leopard with the greatest comfort to yourself, there is nothing like getting on the roof of a house or some safe enclosure; don't trust the shelter of branches to hide you, for a leopard can climb like a cat.

As a rule, it is not necessary to seek for a leopard in the jungles, for he generally comes, an uninvited guest, after your dogs to your bungalow. The dogs are soon aware of his presence, for they utter a low moan or growl and tremble violently all over. To get a tiger you must, of course, search for his foot-prints! track him to his lair or till you find him; and remember it will fare ill

with you if you happen to wound him while you are supported only on your own legs.

On arriving at the nearest wayside station to one of the jhils which had a local reputation and a name among shikaries, inquiries soon revealed the whereabouts of the looked-for jhil, and the party split up into twos and threes, reconnoitering in different directions. As usual, some had better cover or luck than others. Fortunately the jhil had not been shot over much previously, so, after wading about for a couple of hours and getting well soaked up to the knees, a goodly number of snipe, quail, duck and teal had been contributed by everyone to the common stock, sufficient to give a toothsome morsel as second service for several dinners to come.

Meanwhile, the servants had been preparing the tea at a convenient spot, to which an adjournment was made. In India you do not have to grope about to gather sticks to make the kettle boil, pretending all the time that you are enjoying the "outing" immensely. No, you manage those things in a vastly superior fashion abroad from what they can do either in La belle France or Merrie England. You tell the "boy" that tea is required at a certain place, and hey! presto! if by the sweep of the magician's wand everything is not ready prepared in apple-pie order at the appointed time, somebody suffers.

The object of the expedition having been fulfilled by an enjoyable afternoon's sport, the party got into the bal-last train to return to headquarters at Saidpur, some fifteen miles distant. The train was approaching the site of the proposed station at Parbatipur when it was suddenly noticed that a group of villagers were standing on the railway bank gesticulating violently for the engine-driver to stop the train. The engineers being in open ballast-trucks Major Braddon gave the signal, and the engine-driver drew up to find out what all the disturbance was about. On the train coming to a standstill there was such a hullabaloo, such weeping, such seizing hold of the knees of the Europeans that it took some minutes to pacify the mob. When quiet was restored one of the village herdmen said:

"Huzur (your excellency), a leopard has just carried off a child, and is eating it on the other side of the village."

"What?" replied Major Braddon. "A child! I thought leopards only came for dogs,"

"Your honor is right, but when they cannot get dogs they walk off with children. Will your honor be good enough to help us kill the brute, which is quite close."

"Certainly; just wait for a minute and then take us to the place." Braddon, Ashton and Curtis were the only ones who had brought rifles, so they loaded up and began to follow the village herdman, who had armed himself with a large pitchfork in one hand and a bill-hook in the other. The rest of the engineers kept somewhat in the rear, having first of all loaded up with buckshot in case they might get a chance of peppering the beast. As the villager had said, they had not far to go, for the party had scarcely proceeded three hundred yards the other side of the village when they could hear the brute munching and growling, though they could not see him as dusk was coming on. Ashton and Curtis kept ahead of the guide with their rifles fully cocked, and Ashton could be heard distinctly saying: "Where is he? Where is he?" The guide replied: "Take care, sir; he may spring up at any time - there he is. Look out, sahib."

Now it is a strange thing that, though the grass was not a foot high yet, only the natives who followed could see the brute, so unaccustomed are Europeans to distinguish slight differences in color, for the skin of a tiger or leopard is a dull ochre or yellow resembling straw or grass burnt by the sun.

The guide once more shouted "Look out, sahib; there he is to your left. Come back, come back!" The words were hardly out of his mouth when the brute sprang up, putting one paw right on the face of Curtis, both rolling over together. The sudden action pulled Curtis' trigger, but the bullet sped into the air without touching the animal.

Now here was a predicament. Not a shot could be fired lest it might kill Curtis at the same time as despatching the leopard, or if the latter got wounded he would become so ferocious that there would be no hope for Curtis' life. Everything had to be done in the twinkling of an eye, so Ashton pluckily ran up and planted a bullet into the beast at close quarters. The brute, letting go of Curtis,

sprang for Ashton, who dodged, giving him the second barrel. Now was the chance for Major Braddon, who seeing his opportunity poured in two more barrels. This bowled over the brute, and Ashton, having had time to reload, finally gave him his *quietus*.

Immediately the villagers saw the great brute gasping in his last agonies, they gave way to their feelings; from being extremely quiet they began to shout all manner of imprecations against him for all the foul deeds he had committed against them and their flocks. Cats are proverbially a long time in dying, but though this one probably took only a few minutes to expire, yet as everyone was on tenter-hooks the period seemed very much longer than it really was. No one can be sure that a final spring will not be made at the last moment, so everyone is diffident in approaching the animal just toward the finish. Still before the herdman turned over the huge dead beast with his pitchfork the relations of the child rushed forward. The pitiable cries of the mother, sisters and other relatives were heart-rending.

On running up to help Curtis it was found that he was quite unconscious, being fearfully mauled, the whole of the skin of the upper part of the face being pulled down. He was also bleeding profusely, his clothes were torn in

places, and there were claw-marks on hands, neck, chest and head, but fortunately the brute had not taken a bite at his victim, thus saving the head-bones from being crushed. The doctor of the line who was present could do but little, so we carried Curtis with care to the village, where his wounds were washed and bandaged temporarily as best they could. He was put on a *charpai*, or bed of strings, conveyed to the train and thus transported with the utmost speed to headquarters.

There it was found that the fingers of the right hand were broken, probably in defending his throat; and though the case was not quite hopeless, yet his life was despaired of for some time. Of course fever and other complications set in, but Curtis' excellent constitution and careful nursing by native servants gradually brought him to a state of convalescence. The invalid, however, having led an open-air life for some years could with difficulty be restrained within the house. Some time later he was sent by boat to Calcutta, and shortly afterward was granted by his firm a year's leave of absence, home. Whether he is still alive or not, it is impossible to say, for all the engineers have lost sight of one another, but this much is certain, that he must still carry about the marks of that afternoon's adventure with the leopard in Northern Bengal.

FIGURE SKATING.

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WITH the introduction of the rink and its artificial ice surface in our large cities, hundreds have ventured out on the glassy field; and it is not a rash prediction to state that hundreds of others will be added to their ranks this coming season. Old and young of both sexes will be seen chiseling "3s," "scrolls," "grapevines," and the like; the gentler sex keeping pace in the execution of fancy movements.

Every beginner realizes that the first lessons must aim toward some degree of proficiency in "straight-ahead" skating, which should be followed by acquiring the trick of backward movements. These are the fundamentals of all skating, and must be well developed ere one can become an expert at figure skating.

From the first strokes one falls unconsciously into an original style of carriage when in motion; the arms and lower limbs take these positions at all times and their movements become fixed. This being so, we see that it is essential to form good habits in the beginning.

A good style shows the observer the following especially marked points: The head is held erect and naturally, and the eyes are not kept on the ice at the feet; the body is carried in an easy, natural way; the heels are not tossed up behind; the knees are firm, but not stiff, at the beginning of each stroke, and they are neither bent nor stiff throughout the movement. The arms of the figure-skater are carried at or near the side.