

CHAPTER VIII.

INSECTS OF ASSAM—A SPIDER'S LICK—MOSQUITOS' VILLAINY
—CENTIPEDES AND SCORPIONS—DINNER INTERRUPTIONS
—A QUIET NIGHT—FROGS—BEETLES—ECCENTRIC MICE—
INDIAN ANTS—A WHITE ANT'S CAPABILITIES OF DEVOUR-
ING—LIZARDS FOR WALL DECORATIONS—FLIES—BATS—
GORGEOUS BUTTERFLIES—THE TORTOISE-BEETLE—THE
GREEN PARROT—VARIETIES OF MONKEYS—OUR PET—
THE GREAT CARNIVORA AND GRAMINIVORA.

A LONG blood-curdling chapter might easily, if space allowed, be devoted to insects, flying and crawling; birds, beautiful but songless; wild animals, dangerous and inoffensive; and all the other fauna inhabiting this vast natural history repository of the world. But first a word or two concerning insects, the smaller enemies, and most persistent attendants, that are everywhere present and for ever asserting their powers to make a disagreeable impression. Were it not for the innumerable mosquitos; ants, black and red; spiders, whose every step is a good six-inch stride, and whose bite or lick, as it is generally termed, will incapacitate the unfortunate licked one from active work for a few days after the accident,—I say, if it were not for

these and a few hundred other detestations that have life, a stay in Assam would be rendered twice as agreeable. I may as well here mention, while on the subject of spiders, that the lick produces a curious after-result, somewhat similar to blood-poisoning, and very uncomfortable and painful for the sufferer, the part affected presenting the appearance of mildew under the skin. After all, the intense longing to get back to England is really only the natural outcome of a desire to be quit entirely of a country full of noisome creatures and disgusting smells.

To assist in making up a complement of insects, sufficient in point of numbers to give no other country a chance of competition, there are creeping things innumerable, and boasting names that are not easy to retain in one's memory. But amongst a few old familiar friends, the cockroach holds a place, the only truly harmless beastie, but possessing a great predilection for boots, straps, portmanteaus, and other leathern goods; beetles, various in size and formation; lizards, centipedes, &c.

‘ The *première* place, by right, is the mosquito's. I place him first because by pure industry he has earned and deserved this doubtful compliment. No work published up to the present year of grace, treating in any way of travels to the warmer latitudes, that does not make some reference to the mosquito, usually in terms anything but polite, to that small particle of villainy. Notwithstanding his popularity amongst writers of travels as a subject for unvarying

anathematization, yet, after reading these descriptions, I have invariably come to but one conclusion—viz., justice has not been done to the subject, considering the enormities committed during a protracted career of enmity with all mankind. My pen falters when I conjure up past personal experiences of the alternate subtleness and audacity of this little brute ; how, even now, the common English gnat, winging his aimless flight, buzzes by my ear and makes my blood turn cold, carrying my thoughts back again to the East with its mosquitos. The persistently blood-thirsty attacks, the adroit twist with which he just evades the quickly-descending hand of kismet (translated as the “bitten one”), the artful way in which he will lie closely concealed for many hours awaiting an opportunity, in a fold on the inside of the mosquito curtain, until such time as the would-be slumberer has made himself comfortable, then, directly the light is out with what fiendish malignity drones and hums his preliminary pæan for the all too certain victory—are episodes never to be talked of lightly or forgotten. After a sleepless night, at the first peep of daylight, with what feelings of insatiable revenge does the luckless traveller rise in wrath to search for his enemy!—always to find him filled out and contented but wakeful, resting after his labours high up the mosquito curtain, where, though surfeited with blood and heavy of flight, he is difficult to capture. Away he goes at the first suggestion of danger to his vile body, and before he is finally smashed, has reduced

his Nemesis to a state of profuse perspiration. New comers, with the fresh blood of England flowing in their veins, are troubled more with the mosquito's attentions than the older sojourners in the land: their skin is thinner, consequently the irritation set up by the poisonous little stings results in leaving a sore that continues painful for a week or ten days, and renders the putting on of a boot, when the foot has been the part attacked, anything but a pleasant task.

Centipedes and scorpions are more deadly in their bites; but with the latter, fortunately, Assam is not plentifully supplied. Centipedes run to a large size; an average one would probably measure four inches from tip to tip; occasionally, however, they will be met with five or six inches long. A more loathsome creature it is impossible to picture, as it appears wriggling and darting across the floor, always travelling at such a pace that its forty or fifty legs are invisible. Armed with a large pair of nippers on its tail end, which it twists up when defending itself, somewhat after the manner of an earwig, it presents a formidable front to the hapless person who should approach it unwittingly, or upon whose head it falls from the bungalow roof. An unpleasant feeling steals over a dinner party when the pat, made by the fall of a centipede, is heard in the room—looks are exchanged, and all feet are lifted off the ground until some quick eye discerns the cause of the interruption, making off, as fast as he can put leg to ground, in the direction of

the book-case, or some other handy cover. To seize a thin cane, and, with well-directed aim, cut him smartly across the middle, is the work of an instant; the heel of a boot settles the rest.

At night various noises outside and inside keep the heaviest sleeper awake, until he grows accustomed to them. Every night, and all night, there is the same chorus of croaking frogs going on—not the ordinary croak of an English frog, but a veritable mammoth, whose note is penetrating and unutterably woe-inspiring. Amidst the monotony of the chorus will rise the deep guttural utterances of two old toads, love-making, calling to each other over the puddle created by the emptying of your last tub. The noises are suddenly and rudely broken in upon by the boom of a beetle, as he rushes into the bedroom. Round and round he whirls with a terrific uproar, like to a hundred spindles hard at work, until he winds up with a grand crash, as he comes blindly in contact with one of the rafters, or the looking-glass. A short silence ensues, during which you sincerely hope that he has knocked his detestable brains out; but no, he is only stunned. Hark! there he is, prone on his back whirring round his wings, unable to get up, spinning round and round with ever-increasing noise in his frantic efforts to get the right side uppermost. Sleep under these circumstances being impossible, up the wretched wooer of that shadowy god Morpheus has to rise, and remove the new cause of his disquieting; only, perchance, to find, when safe back in bed again,

having first carefully tucked in the mosquito curtains that there is a large bat in the room, which proceeds to make frantic efforts to regain the liberty that he has unknowingly deprived himself of. So the night wears through, full of incidents, exactly as is the day—events made up out of the inconvenient activity of birds, beasts, and insects.

Mice and rats are here also in goodly numbers, and contribute their quota towards the enjoyment of a quiet night. If nothing else is on the move, the weary planter can invariably calculate on representatives of one or both of these exasperating families careering recklessly round the room, over the boxes, on to the dressing-table, where they succeed in knocking over in their gallop some small article that makes a noise like thunder as it tumbles on to the hollow floor of the chung. Even in broad daylight mice will come out and play about the room. There is hardly a residence in India in which you will not find these small plagues running about in the middle of the most frequented apartment, having no fear of its occupants, helping themselves to the crumbs that have fallen round the table, or, more to their taste, deeply interested in the almonds and raisins on the side-board, the ascent to which elevated position is impossible to any ordinary animal twice its size, but to the mouse a promenade of the most simple description.

Indian ants are universally known, and, next to the mosquito, the most dreaded of the insect world, for

under no circumstances can his too familiar presence be dispensed with : he is ubiquitous. Death in any form has a gigantic attraction for him ; his scent is keen, and death to him means something to eat. If it be but a mosquito that has paid a well-deserved debt to nature, the last convulsive kick has scarce left his body ere a solemn line of ants parade in the direction of the defunct one, gather round the carcase, pounce upon and carry him off to their nest, there to be placed in the common stock-pot. Endless amusement can be got out of watching the mode of procedure of these wonderfully organised little fellows. For instance, when an opportunity arises for them to really put forth their strength collectively—as over the Brobdingnagian body of a dead beetle—the system with which they work together is curiously effective. After the first jubilation over the discovery of the corpse, and the consequent discordant efforts of each ant to pull his own way (with a view to showing what a strong fellow he is, or possibly to securing the prize for his own especial delectation), they will settle down to haul their comparatively monstrous load in a very business-like fashion, while one ant, a sort of overseer, bustles in and out and round the burden, evidently dictating the way that it should go, giving a push here and a pull there, to stimulate his fellow-workmen. A certain portion of their labour—for they are always hard at work on something—seems to the uninitiated to be a complete waste of time. One can grasp their reasons for tunnelling underground, but what earthly

use can there be in covered ways above ground, in building which they spend a vast amount of time and show much ingenuity? If, too, they would only confine their tunnel-building proclivities to the outside of the bungalow, all would go well; but, unluckily, they appear to get much satisfaction out of placing them in the bindings of books, or between the outsides of two calf-bound volumes, or wherever the book-boards and printed matter do not lie flush with each other. When among a row of books there is sufficient space for him to crawl through, there the ant will build his home; or, correctly speaking, a portion of it. This is a true record, although many villainies of the black and red ant have not been mentioned for want of time. Next there is the white ant.

Perhaps a worse instance of pure love for heartless destruction, prompted, apparently, by an insane love of mischief, does not exist. To the white ant all things are edible, except kerosene oil and metal goods. Nature has constituted him with a ten thousand ostrich power digestion, which he is for ever abusing. In appearance he is of a creamy white colour, and of a retiring disposition. Suggestive of inoffensiveness, it is not until he has buried himself in some dark corner that his natural depravity comes out. The spot selected is usually one that is likely to be undisturbed by man for some time, such as a portmanteau put away, or a box full of clothes that are not in immediate use. If there is one thing that he appreciates more highly than another it is a good

English box made of deal. Leave him alone for a month with an article of this sort, and he will reduce it to such a condition that, when an attempt is made to lift it, it will not bear its own weight, but crumbles to powder at the first touch. Hat-boxes, gun-cases, stocks of guns, portmanteaus, packing-cases, furniture, the floor of the bungalow, and a thousand other things, all these mean good living to white ants. They have a strong distaste for kerosene oil and boiling water: the first-named, smeared over the furniture, will, if frequently applied, keep them away; the latter judiciously introduced where they are collected together to pursue their usual calling, will have a somewhat disturbing influence.

Lizards are plentiful but harmless, and form a pretty wall decoration. Their food consists of all small flying things; therefore they receive every encouragement to take up a residence inside the bungalow, on whose walls they cling in an extraordinary manner. At night, when insects, attracted by the lights, fly in, lizards hold high carnival. The neighbourhood of a lamp, as a point of vantage, is much sought after; and here can be noted the craft employed by the lizard to secure his dinner. Twiddling his tail jerkily, as a cat does in the process of fascinating a bird, he stealthily advances step by step, with body crouched and eyes distended, until within striking distance, when with a sudden dash he seizes his prey, gobbles it up, and is immediately ready to repeat the performance. Hornets, wasps, bees, are

well cared for by Dame Nature, and thrive prodigiously if their size, which is at least twice that of their English *confrères*, be accounted as a satisfactory sign of goodly condition.

At times, dinner is disturbed by the irruption of thousands of crickets, small beetles, or green flies, whichever are in season, that tumble headlong into the soup, glasses, lamps—in fact, into every spot that one could wish free of them. The pleasures of the table, under these circumstances, cease to hold out any attractions. Again, at quite unexpected moments, a large insect, a species of locust, settles with a flop on your face, alarming enough in a place like Assam, but it is only the harmless praying insect, so called on account of a strange way that he has of doubling up his two front claws, when he presents a most ludicrous appearance of supplication. A peculiarly objectionable visitor is a tiny beetle, properly enough called the stinking bug. At certain times of the year these horrible little brutes muster in great force, depositing their odious bodies in the most frequently traversed quarters of the bungalow, in order, as it seems, that they may be trodden upon, and, *en revanche*, throw off a perfume so intensely disagreeable that hand-punkahs, handkerchiefs, scent, etc., are brought into requisition for the next quarter of an hour to dispel the stifling odour. Once I inadvertently squashed one in my eye, a sensation as if the pupil had been suddenly seared with a red hot iron seized me, and for the next half an hour the

intense agony prevented the possibility of opening either one eye or the other. I never expected to look out of that eye again.

Bats, flying foxes, owls with a terrible hoot, and around whom ominous suspicions are cast of possessing the power to scent out those about to die—these and countless other creatures render night a particularly lively time, and add a novel and charming zest to life in the East.

Butterflies and beautifully-coloured birds abound in every variety of shape and size. The commonest, but one of the most magnificently-marked, is the jay, to whom nature with niggardly hand has given a splendid coat, but a note that vies with the shriek of a slate pencil when guided by the hand of mischievous youth, and sends a cold shudder down the back of the hearer. Resplendent with his golden yellow plumage, the mango bird forms an attractive mark against the sky, and as he flits across the tea garden, the greens of the surrounding jungle look colder than ever. Butterflies, equal in size to an English tit, marked with bars and blots of colour in extraordinary contrast, float round the bungalow, deeply interested in the growth of the hibiscus or the roses.

Of the Coleoptera, undoubtedly the most beautiful is the tortoiseshell beetle ; but he is not common, and is peculiar, I believe, to only certain parts of Assam. In his flight he presents the appearance of a small golden ball of fire, surrounded by thin gossamer ; at

rest, on close inspection, the under part of his body closely resembles solid gold-scaled armour, while the wings are of a thin horny material, not unlike tale to the touch, and when closed, shaped like the shell of a tortoise, and bearing in the centre a distinctly coloured impression of that reptile.

Hornbills (or the beefsteak bird, a name that they acquired from a peculiar method the natives have of preparing the flesh so as to resemble that delicacy) and green pigeons are to be found in great abundance, and afford an acceptable change to the terribly monotonous dietary routine. The former, with gigantic yellow bill, presents an ill-proportioned, top-heavy appearance, but like the green pigeon is exceedingly shy, being doubtless aware that Europeans do not walk about armed with guns for no purpose. The green pigeon is a remarkably attractive bird, with a coat of many colours, and feathers close and compact, that render him, like his English representative, a difficult bird to kill. They are migratory. Their residence in Assam extends over a space of about three months, and we were always sorry when their time of sojourn amongst us had expired. Snipe, in the cold weather, come in vast numbers, but the climate seems to affect their flight, for they lazily flap along in a down-hearted kind of way, at not more than half the pace of the English bird, nor do they approach that distinguished ornament to the table in delicacy of flavour.

The jungle fowl remains a perpetual resident, and

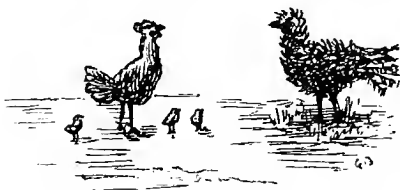
is delicious eating. In sport he would take rank with the partridge, for he is full of pluck, and will fly until, exhausted by his wounds, he drops dead. The cock bird has glorious plumage, and is about the same size as a game bantam, and, like him, is perpetually on the watch for a row. The female is a dusky brown, and nearly as large as her lord and master. Our only pheasant was griffs, uneatable; but up in the hills they have a bird known as the hill pheasant, who is hard to hit, and very palatable.

I must not forget the green parrot, the noisiest occupant of the garden, and a scoundrel of the deepest dye. Dainty in feeding, they have a great predilection for the choicest of the fruit: mangoes, peaches, guavas, plums, etc., pay toll to these marauders, who, not content with eating their fill of the best and ripest, nip off the rest, and leave them on the ground to rot, or for the benefit of the ants. Whenever there is nothing else to do in the shape of mischief, they will get up a fight with some of their fellows; then the air is tortured with a tornado of piercing screams, succeeded by a sudden dash of the whole colony across the garden, leaving only an impression on the eye of the beholder as of a flash of green lightning having just darted by. Their only amiable quality is that, in the hands of a good *khan-sama*, they make a capital imitation of turtle soup.

Distressing, indeed, is the monotony of the notes of most Eastern birds, especially the better-looking ones. It would appear as though their pleasing powers of

song had been allotted in inverse ratio to their personal appearance. Sweetness can claim no part in their matutinal lays, one long drawn-out note, ending up usually with a screeching, rasping sound, has to do duty for their jubulations; though, doubtless, they mean as well as a canary thrilling with the warble of its most beautiful song.

Among the curiosities of the feathered tribe is a peculiar variety of the chicken, which a perverse dispensation has ordained, in many instances, should go through their brief span of life with feathers



CHICKEN WITH REVERSED FEATHERS.

reversed, presenting an uncanny, woe-begone, disreputable appearance to an eye accustomed to regard feathers as a pattern of neatness and sleekness. The rough and tumble look of these ill-conditioned fowls, especially exaggerated on a rainy day, puts sympathy out of the question, and I often found myself pondering whether one of these phenomenal birds would look as well on a dish, and cut up the same as an ordinary specimen of her race.

Penetrating, in the course of a clearance, into the jungle, the cutters disturb hundreds of monkeys,

which start up and rush chattering away, swinging from the topmost branch of one tree to the next. The hoolock, the largest specimen of monkeydom in Assam, is a sturdy, dark-coated, shaggy, long-armed fellow, very shy, but possessed of a deep, rich, musical note that reverberates again and again through the jungle when he has once found his tongue. The noise made by these animals (they are seldom to be found singly, but usually go about in parties of eight or ten) has been, not inappropriately, compared to a pack of hounds in full cry. Awake at first peep of dawn, they travel through the jungle, uttering their curious cry, at first in chorus, but finally tailing off to one solitary yelper that keeps on calling, and tries to resuscitate the musical din. Though the sound seems to be but a few yards away, if you happen to be standing near the edge of the jungle, yet the hoolocks are never visible, and it is only by driving them into a well-wooded corner with open country beyond that a chance view may be had, and then only for the shortest period. So wary are they, that they seldom fall into captivity; even the natives—themselves pretty 'cute—are baffled by their cunning. Sometimes one will get separated from the rest of the band, and fall among his enemies, who can always make a good market of their prize as a curiosity, the usual value set upon a full-grown hoolock being from thirty to forty rupees.

Another curious specimen—a dear little fellow belonging to the monkey world—is the shame-faced

monkey. Quaint of face, with large round eyes, suggestive of entire confidence and trustfulness, with a gentle way of moving about, his bashfulness is so great that he prefers to hang his head down or hide his face in his hands (it is cruel to call them paws) or behind any convenient cover where he can get away out of sight rather than be rudely stared at. We possessed one in whom, for the short time he took up his residence amongst us, we placed thorough reliance, thinking that this, at any rate, was not the animal to abuse it. He was brought up to the bungalow, having been captured by the coolies after they had finished work for the day. His shyness was his most attractive feature, and in order not to obtrude our presence on him, and to make him feel comfortable we tied him up with a long cord to the lattice-work, on which were many creepers, and left him alone for the night. Behold, in the morning he was gone! cord and all. We would have forgiven his sudden departure if he had left the cord behind him, for cord is cord in such out-of-the-way places; but that he, the embodiment (ostensibly) of all that was gentle and meek, should have gone off, taking this property with him, forcibly brought home to us the fact that we should never put faith in outward appearances, in this case so much in his favour. Besides every quality that made him lovable, his personal exterior was comely and sleek, his fur being similar to, or rather rivalling, the chinchilla in fineness of texture and colour. Alas, how may every form of deception

lurk under the most unsuspecting looking externals!

Pariah dogs and jackals, first cousins, according to natural history, are the necessary accompaniments to all tea gardens. The former fraternize with the coolies in the lines, and have, to a certain extent, sociable instincts, while the latter pass the day in the surrounding jungle or tea bushes, away from the haunts of men. Both lead roving lives of treachery and deceit; for without thieving their existence would cease to be. No one, even the most tender-hearted, thinks of giving a pariah anything, unless it be a kick; or, perchance, his unwelcome and uninvited presence is acknowledged by throwing something handy at him. Always hungry, gaunt, lean, his ribs prominently proclaiming their whereabouts through the skin, an extraordinary cunning, fox-like look in his eye, good length of limb to enable, if an emergency should occasion it, his speedy exit—he goes through life with every man's hand against him, bearing the stamp of a hunted beast, especially marked in the abject manner in which he carries his tail. Nature has been unkind to him in not allowing him any method of showing his satisfaction at a kindly action, a sensation that is likely to be foreign to him for the reason that he has never had a single chance of experiencing what it is like. He cannot bark; a short, sharp yelp is his best effort in this line. There are instances of an occasional development of attachment to some one coolie who has, in a moment of tender-

hearted sympathy, shared his humble fare with the brute; but these are rare. So much for the pariah. His near relation, the jackal, is very similar in character and disposition, with all his vices, and but one saving feature in his depravity, viz., he keeps out of sight as much as possible, although he frequently makes himself heard. A pack of jackals, sweeping through the garden and past the bungalow, in the dead of night, uttering their chorus of howls, produces an uncomfortably weird sensation, and makes one involuntarily associate their unearthly cry with the terrible wail of disappointment that imagination pictures would be uttered by disembodied spirits let loose from Hades to seek for rest on that earth that they have quitted, but, disappointed in their search, continue, with lamentations and despair, their unsuccessful journeyings. I know no more soul-terrifying noise when heard for the first time; and I remember that my first impression, after a shudder had passed over me, was that two or three banshees had escaped, and preceded me to India. Jackals are very good scavengers, but when nothing is left to scavenge (this word, I am afraid, is now hardly admissible, but no doubt will one day be accepted, and I am only anticipating its use by a few years) they will levy on the moorgie-khana (chicken-house). Missing chickens total up to a considerable amount at the end of each month, whenever the khansama is fond of good living, and many a bird that was intended for his master's table finds its way diverted, through the form of

savoury curry, into the maw of that excellent man. Under these circumstances the jackal figures in the rôle of that much-abused and wrongly-represented animal—the domestic cat, to whom most missing delicacies can be indirectly traced, if we accept Albert Smith's authority.

Vultures and kites render powerful assistance to the pariahs and jackals in demolishing things objectionable. During a murrain among the cattle, which carried off a great number of the poor brutes, these animals held high carnival. We could always mark the spot where a cow had died, by the surrounding trees being thickly dotted with vultures in various stages of repletion. They are of a melancholy humour, and will always select a tree that is blighted or that has been struck by lightning, and on its bare branches sit clustered together in rows of ten or twelve, packed side by side. Some, after their meal, presumably to aid digestion, enjoy a siesta, with head on one side, and wings loosely drooped, so as to distribute the genial rays of the sun over their foul bodies. While these snooze, the hungry late arrivals are disputing with the jackals over the carcase, and nothing is heard but snarls and flappings of wings, for each one is intent on securing a more prominent position at the delectable feast, and jostles his neighbour. A planter, in the course of his rounds through the garden, coming suddenly upon a party thus engaged, is much struck by the curious *mêlée* that they present. Nothing of the carcase can be seen for

the crowd of animals quarrelling over it; and beyond turning their heads to look at the cause of the interruption, their equanimity remains undisturbed. A few of the birds, standing apart after their meal is finished, and happening to be nearest the intruder, will walk off in the opposite direction, stretching their pinions in the vain hope of being able to fly, but they have miscalculated the additional weight of their dinner, and the sluggishness following after a too ample repast. Their efforts to leave mother earth are in vain: let them flap their huge wings ever so strenuously, they cannot rise an inch. We will leave them there undisturbed, to enjoy their filthy repast; for, after all, they are performing for us a useful office, by getting rid of a probable source of many fevers.

Boar hunting is a form of sport that has gained a firm hold in many portions of India, but here, in Assam, the denseness of the jungle completely frustrates any attempt to follow the chase. No power on earth could prevent the animal from retreating to cover five minutes after he had broken away. A wild pig may be viewed trotting through the tea, but he keeps well under shelter, and it is only by the merest chance that he prevents a favourable opportunity for a shot. When he is killed, nobody but a few low caste coolies, who devour anything, will touch him. The dead pig not unfrequently works a retribution on his admirers during the course of the ensuing three or four days, and indigestion is a form of malady that is not entirely unknown.

Certain portions of the country are infested with bears, whose mission in life would appear to be, judging by my own experience, imperilling the necks of the European population by digging large holes in the roadway. Driving along in the evening, keeping a sharp look-out for pitfalls or sloughs where the wheels of the buggy are likely to stick, geographically marking all these perilous localities on the tablets of one's memory, with a view to studiously avoiding them on the return journey,—all calculations are brought to naught, when retracing our steps, by a sudden wrench and an upset, and that too at a spot on the road which you left a few hours before in as good a state of repair as most Assamese highways ever aspire to. To jump up, and if there is no apparent damage done, find that your old enemy the bear has been hard at work scooping out a goodly-sized grave, in the most prominent part of the way, and to avoid which, even in the daylight, would have been almost impossible, is the work of a second. The next most advisable step is to examine the state of your springs, wheels, horses' knees, etc., and on arriving at the first bungalow, warn the occupant of the dangers of travelling along that route. Road-keeping has always been a source of much worry and vexation to the planters; but now that the Government are beginning to show a fairly liberal desire to help to preserve their own roadways, by the payment to the nearest planter in whose district the road lies (of course, conditionally on his consent to undertake the

work) of a fixed sum per annum, according to the length of road and the number of pukha bridges requiring to be renewed or repaired;—I say, now that the expenses of road-keeping will not be entirely cast upon the planter's shoulders, there is hope that all the high-roads will be before long in a drivable condition.

A few words concerning the most useful brute in Assam, the elephant, will not be out of place. If they were to die out, I really can form no idea how the Eastern world would get on without them, or what could take their place. Buffalo and bullocks divide the lighter labours of the plough or cart-drawing between them. A strong buffalo can even be used for dragging the smaller timber from the jungle clearing, but when, through the heaviness of the soil, buffalo are not able to operate, the elephant is requisitioned, and rarely fails to accomplish work that could not possibly be effected by any other motive power. A giant of strength, willing and docile, he goes about his work in a business-like way, dragging gigantic trunks of trees, or carrying heavy loads that would otherwise be a source of very considerable perplexity as to how they were to be moved. The indiscriminate slaughter of these splendid fellows, under the title of sport, has been rightly tabooed, and a heavy penalty attaches to anybody killing one without special permission. The Indian authorities employ in Assam one gentleman's services for catching and training wild elephants for their duties as beasts of burden, and a very paying speculation this

must be for the powers that be. Our last Naga expedition pointed out in a most marked manner how entirely dependent on this mode of conveyance, in a hilly country with terribly bad tracks, the army was for its supplies; and the thoughtless way in which seventy of these poor beasts were underfed and worked to death will be long remembered amongst the planters who owned them. A disgraceful delay in settling up claims for the value of the animals destroyed had ultimately to be brought to a termination by the appointment of a committee (that never-failing refuge for all governmental mismanagement) as valuers.

A long, even swinging step, with which they do not speedily tire, carries them over the ground at an average pace of between four and five miles an hour. Some few rogue elephants, turned out of their herd, are met with. These wander about the country doing an immense amount of mischief; but it is easy enough to procure permission to shoot the dangerous brutes, and a good riddance they are to the district which they honour with their presence, when dead.

Of an affectionate disposition, elephants speedily become much attached to their mahout, and will learn tricks from and allow him to do almost anything with them. If he drops his little pointed stick, used in lieu of a whip for driving, the animal will pick it up with its trunk and hand it back; or when he has dismounted he has a choice of two ways offered for remounting: either by placing his foot in the curled-

up end of the trunk, by which he is gently raised to a height whence he can scramble into his customary seat, or else he can mount up behind, using the hind foot, that the willing giant, at a word of command, raises up, as the first step towards a somewhat awkward ascent. Invariably of an easy-going temperament, taking just chastisement meekly, elephants are always ready to overlook an unintentional insult ; but woe-betide the man that does them an injury, with malice prepense : they will store its recollection away with the most malevolent feelings of vindictiveness, awaiting some future opportunity to arise for paying off old scores ; and so surely as the occasion shall present itself, it is hoping against hope to try to believe that the elephant has forgotten the cause of quarrel ; his memory is retentive, and he is a very Shylock in exacting all his due.

Dogs are, curiously enough, his pet aversion. It seems absurd to imagine that a gigantic animal like this should be terrified at so small a creature, but it is nevertheless a fact. They all cordially detest dogs, and are very unhappy if, in the course of a journey, they are accompanied by one. Throughout the march the huge fellow displays symptoms of nervous anxiety as to the whereabouts of his detestation, swaying his ears in a restless manner, and trying to turn his head, so as to have a look at the position of the enemy. Every word of the mahout is apparently understood ; and with the aid of his small stick, and a good deal of exhortation to do as his driver wishes—

all delivered, by the way, at the top of the said driver's terribly treble voice—hatti tramps along, perfectly cognisant of what is expected of him.

There are many worse modes of travelling than to be seated behind a really entertaining mahout—one who understands his business. Probably, if he is in the inclination, he will beguile the time amusingly enough by talking to the hatti, calling on him to go



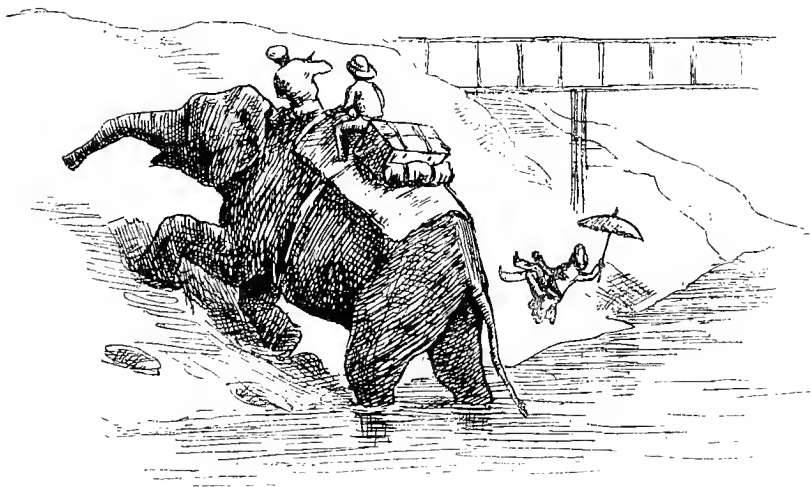
MAHOUT.

faster, telling him that it is no babu (native gentleman) that is on his back, but a white sahib, and that consequently he must be on his best behaviour and put his best foot foremost.

A beginner soon gets accustomed to the swaying motion; although, I remember, on one occasion, taking with me a new servant who had never been out of Calcutta, and to whom the swaying could not have become customary. This worthy, ignorant of elephants and their ways, presented himself before me at the

start, got up in his best, wearing a beautiful new pair of patent leather shoes for the occasion, a luxury that most good Mussulman servants affect, and duly took up his position behind me. We got along very well for the first seven or eight miles, because it was quite flat; then we had to cross a swollen river. The bridge, like most others, was a light wooden structure, not built for elephant traffic, so there was no alternative but to dismount, carry over the trappings, stores, cooking utensils, etc., and leave the mahout to swim the elephant across. On the other side we fixed up again, and journeyed along pleasantly until, in due course, we arrived at another river, a veritable Styx, without the accompanying Charon to facilitate all difficulties of passage. Here the water was sufficiently shallow to allow of our going over on the animal's back, but unfortunately the banks consisted of a loose kind of black mud, shelving down at an angle of sixty degrees. Going down to the river it was as much as I could do to hold on tight enough to prevent shooting over the elephant's head; but as we turned in the river up towards the opposite bank, my poor servant suddenly let go. I heard a scrambling, scraping noise behind; then a "plomp" as he made a hole in the water. Arrived at the top of the bank, without further misadventure, I turned round, and was just in time to see an open umbrella floating gaily down stream, and a head, slowly emerging from out the muddy water, that gasped, sputtered, then smiled the most sickly smile that has ever been seen on mortal

countenance. He was nearly glued to the bottom, owing to the stickiness of the mud ; and when he had waded with much difficulty out of the river, presented a most comical appearance, from the knees to the heels being so coated with black slime that he looked more like an elephant, as to his extremities, than a man. Alas, the patent shoes were utterly ruined !



LOSING MY KITMUTGAR.

I left him to tramp on foot the remainder of the distance, since he flatly refused to have anything more to do with elephant travelling, a resolve not to be wondered at with his recently acquired experience, and more rivers to be crossed,

The Government telegraph department are the lucky possessors of an extraordinarily talented speci-

men. He knows more about telegraph poles than any native, carries or rolls with his feet each pole to the hole that is intended for its reception, beats the earth down round it after it has been placed in position, snaps off boughs that interfere with the route of the wires, and does a variety of other useful things in much less time than would occupy a band of hired coolies.

On a hot march they will, early in the proceedings, break off a small branch, or pluck up a bundle of reeds, to use as a chowrie (whisk) for their sides, to keep off flies and other torments, and when passing through water they will suck up a supply which, after a march of two or three miles, they squirt in small quantities over their hot and dusty sides, retaining a portion for future use, or until the next supply can be procured.

The day's work over, they are turned out, hobbled to a heavy log of wood, and allowed to roam through their native jungle. If an early start has to be made, it often happens that some little trouble is experienced next morning in laying hands upon them, for they will have wandered away three or four miles, notwithstanding the hobbles, and it is only by following their well-defined track that the mahout eventually succeeds in capturing them.

A curious incident occurred to an elephant in the possession of a neighbouring garden just before I left. A favourite old animal had been turned loose, and was wandering through the tea close to the edge

of the jungle, when suddenly, with a heavy rush through the dense cover, a rhinoceros charged out, making a furious attack on the elephant, and succeeded in dashing his horn between her ribs. A more unprovoked assault was never committed. The poor old animal had been lying down on her side for three days, with some ribs broken, when I left; nor have I heard whether she ever got over it.

Rhinos are fairly plentiful in some out-of-the-way districts, and in their erratic course through a garden (a place that under usual circumstances they steer clear of) play fearful havoc with their unwieldy carcasses amongst the tea.

Tigers there are also in quantities in most districts of Assam. To be suddenly aroused in the middle of the night by squeals issuing from the direction of the stables, followed by a sudden irruption into your bed-chamber of the chowkeydar and his black satellites, green with fear, and yelling in chorus, "Barg, barg" (tiger), is not the most pleasant awakening. There is not a moment to be lost if the horses are to be saved. A light is secured, rifles, together with all the odd firearms that can be speedily collected together, are distributed, and the procession starts for the stables in the following order. First the sahib, behind him the light-bearer, succeeded a few yards off by the chowkeydar with a gun; then, some considerable distance in the rear, the establishment, armed with anything handy; slowly come after. Each and all—always, of

course, excepting the sahib—are prepared to bolt on the slightest appearance of danger.

The sight or scent of a tiger nearly reduces a horse to fits. Even the spot where one of these brutes has crossed the road will have terrors for the pony that you are mounted on, and neither spurring nor whipping will get him past the place. At the first signs of dusk, leopards and tigers sally forth, seeking what they may devour, to remain abroad until dawn shall drive them back to their lairs in the jungle. In the middle of the night, and a few yards from the bungalow, the noise made by a leopard strikes disagreeably on the ear, a sound like the grating of a blunt saw against hard wood. Luckily, thank goodness, these visitations are not frequent, for in the neighbourhood of civilization there is but a poor chance of a supper; and it is only when made bold by hunger and driven to extremities that they will risk an attack on the stables. Any unfortunate horse then which happens to be tethered up tightly has but a poor chance for his life. So much for the animals of Assam.

Now a small space for the fruits; of which, perhaps, the less said the better, for fear of misleading or raising false hopes among my readers.

Pine apples, custard apples, tengas (a kind of lemon or lime), mangos, lychees, plantains, guavas, peaches, and jack fruit, are the most abundant and easily raised of the fruits. The first-named grow plentifully, as also do plantains and guavas. They seem, however, to be entirely deficient of flavour. Pine-

apples combine the ornamental and useful, and make a formidable edging to the garden plot with their bristling spiky leaves. The far-famed mango, at any rate in Assam, is a vast humbug, nine out of ten being afflicted with what is vaguely termed "pokes," or maggots. Plantains are the only fruit that can have any reliance placed in them; and though at first sickly of taste to the uncultivated European, their natural good qualities cause them speedily to be well appreciated. Of the fruit I can only say that I never thought it worth the trouble of disputing with the parrots and other birds, for they seemed to have a liking for it, while I had none.