

H U S S E I N

PATRICK O'BRIAN

an entertainment  
with a new foreword by the author



**'Remarkable...an extraordinary achievement.'**

**WILLIAM WALDEGRAVE, *Literary Review***

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**HUSSEIN**

*An Entertainment*

**PATRICK O'BRIAN**



Harper  
Press

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## Foreword

I cannot remember the genesis of *Hussein* with great clarity, but I rather think that it derived from a tale I wrote for one of the Oxford annuals, to which I contributed fairly often: Mr Kaberry, an amiab man who ran the annual, said that it would be a pity to publish no more than the abbreviated form showed him, and suggested that I should expand it to a book.

This I did: I was living in Dublin at the time, in a boarding-house in Leeson Street kept by two ve kind sisters from Tipperary and inhabited mostly by young men studying at the national universi with a few from Trinity. What fun we had in the evenings: the Miss Spains from Tipperary dance countless Irish dances with wonderful grace, big-boned Séan from Derry sawing away at his fiddle and the others joining in as well as they could. On Sundays we would go to a church where, witho impropriety, the priest could say his Mass in eighteen minutes; then we would ride to Blackrock swim; and all this time the book was flowing well, rarely less than a thousand words a day and sometimes much more. I finished it on a bench in Stephen's Green with a mixture of triumph and regret.

Although I had known some Indians, Muslim and Hindu, at that time I had never been to India, so the book is largely derivative, based on reading and on the recollections, anecdotes and letters of friends of relations who were well acquainted with that vast country; and it has no pretension to being anything more than what it is called, an *Entertainment*. But it did have a distinction that pleased my vanity: it was the first work of contemporary fiction that the Oxford University Press had published all the centuries of its existence.

It was fairly well received, and in the writing of the book I learnt the rudiments of my calling: but infinitely more than that, it opened a well of joy that has not yet run dry.

PATRICK O'BRIEN  
Trinity College, Dublin 1995

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## One

In the Public Works Department of the Government of India there are a great number of elephants. It is the custom for one mahout to stay with the same elephant throughout the years of his service. One of these elephants was called Muhammed Akbar; his first mahout was Wali Dad. When Wali Dad grew old, and was pensioned off, his son Ahmed became Muhammed Akbar's mahout, for he had grown up with the elephant.

Time went on, and as Muhammed Akbar was reaching the prime of his life, Ahmed took a wife who presently died, giving birth to a son.

The child was brought up by his grandfather and Ahmed. Ahmed had loved his wife very wholeheartedly, and he felt that he could not take another woman, although his food was much the worse for the want of a wife. She had been a small, delicately-formed girl of fifteen when Ahmed had married her — a grown woman by the standards of her people. But before the first year of the marriage was gone, she was dead, so Ahmed, who had not had time for disillusionment, carried a sweet memory with him always.

From his babyhood the boy, called Hussein after the father of his grandfather, who had been a great mahout in his day, was brought up among the elephants. His grandfather was very fond of Hussein and he taught him to walk by looping an elephant's picket-rope about him, and trailing him very gently to and fro.

The very first thing that Hussein could remember was his grandfather trailing him round in the shade of a pipal tree, while an elephant — probably Muhammed Akbar — rubbed himself with a grating noise against the bark of the thick trunk. What fixed the incident in his memory was a brilliantly blue butterfly that hovered quite near, but which he could not catch; while he was trying to do so he suddenly discovered that he could run by himself.

At first an aunt looked after Hussein, but while he was still quite a baby the elephants were moved to Agra and she was left behind, so Hussein grew up without any women. As soon as Hussein was old enough to learn, Wali Dad taught him the Mohammedan confession of faith — *La illah il Allah, Mohammed raisul Allah* — there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah — that with a few vague remarks about Paradise, which was only to be reached by those who did not make a noise when their elders were talking, and a good deal of rather bitter comment on the undesirability of *bût-parasti* like the Hindus, completed his religious training: after that his education was confined to the elephant lore accumulated by countless generations of mahouts, and passed down by word of mouth.

Both Wali Dad and Ahmed told him all that they had been taught about elephants, and all that they had found out; they also taught him the *hathi-tongue*, in which the mahouts speak to their elephants. This is a strange language, quite unlike any other; only the mahouts know it, and they keep the knowledge very carefully among themselves. The elephants understand it, and there is a tale that when the moon is eclipsed they speak it to one another.

Hussein absorbed the knowledge easily, for he was a born mahout; his ancestors had been mahouts as far as history went back and beyond: it was in his blood.

He grew up to be a strong boy, tall and slim. Muhammed Akbar was very fond of the boy, and taught him, in his own way, more about elephants than he could ever have learnt from men.

Now in the year when the great pestilence went up and down India, killing by thousands, and by hundreds of thousands, they were at the great city of Agra, which was crowded at the time for a certain festival. The monsoon had delayed in its breaking, so that the people were crying out for rain to avenge their gods. But it did not come. The weather grew hotter and still hotter, so that everything withered and men died from the heat alone.

Then the cholera came. People died in the streets, and in the temples: there was a famine all through the land, so that men were distraught, and died like flies from cholera, starvation, and fear of both.

The mahouts in the Government elephant lines did not fare so badly, for they were fed and made to keep clean.

All through the hot days and stifling nights the Hindus prayed in the temples of their bloody-handed goddess, Kali, but she would not hear them, although the conches screamed and blared without ceasing.

The dead were thrown into great pits, for there were so many. The Government did all that it could, and trains came from the south with food and doctors. It is said that men of the IMS died from overwork and exhaustion and nothing else.

One day Ahmed was sent out with Muhammed Akbar to take an official through some rough country for a day's journey. Ahmed did not want his son to be out of his sight at a time like this, so he asked if Hussein might go with him. The official, a kindly Englishman, agreed, and they set out at daybreak. It was a depressing journey, for men lay dead in the roads, with none to bury them. They passed through villages that had been busy with people a month ago, and that were now quite empty, the people having died, or run away to find a place where the cholera was not. All that should have been green was brown or grey: the air was heavy and still, and the heat seemed to beat up from the iron-hard ground as well as from out of the sky.

When they got back, Wali Dad was dead. He had sickened and died before nightfall, and he was already buried. Mahmud Khan, an old friend of his, had stayed with him to the last, in spite of the danger. He had given Wali Dad enough opium to ensure that his passing should be clean and painless, which was a very good thing; Mahmud had also given him an honourable burial. In that great heat a man had to be buried almost as soon as the breath was out of his body.

Ahmed tore his clothes, and cast off his turban, pouring ash and dust upon his head. Hussein did the same, and they mourned for a long time. For days Ahmed took no food, and only a little water; but Hussein fed more heartily, although his grief was sincere. Six more mahouts died in the next week, and new ones were sent from other parts to replace them. Among them came Mustapha, the husband of Ahmed's sister. Ahmed went to him and said, 'Peace upon your house!'

'And upon yours,' replied Mustapha; 'may you never grow tired.' For some time they talked about indifferent subjects before Ahmed came to the question that had brought him.

'If anything were to happen to either of us,' he said, 'what would become of your wife and children, and of my Hussein?'

'Allah is merciful,' said Mustapha, who was a mild, dreamy man, and something of a scholar.

'Without doubt,' replied Ahmed, 'but perhaps it would be as well if, in the event of certain things coming upon either of us — (he would not mention cholera, for it was so near, and naming calls) —

we were to agree that the other should take care of those who would be left.'

'This is an excellent suggestion, and on my honour, and by the Beard of the Prophet, if such a thing should come about — which Allah forbid — I and my wife will look after Hussein.'

'And for my part, by my father's head, I will do the same for your wife, my sister, and for your children.'

And so it was agreed; after that the talk drifted to unimportant things. The same night Mahmud Khan was struck by the cholera; Ahmed stayed with him all night, doing all that could be done, which was not much. Towards the end Mahmud asked for opium; Ahmed gave it to him, and he died a little before daybreak.

Ahmed was worn out with grief and with nursing his friend. As he was very weak from taking almost no food since his father died, he stood no chance when the cholera struck him at noon; he was buried before sunset. Hussein, when they told him, was dazed: he had never thought it possible that his father should die — he had seemed so strong, and so essentially permanent. Even when he was buried Hussein could not believe that he was gone for ever. It all seemed like a bad dream, from which he would presently awake to find everything as it used to be. Within an hour of his father's burial Hussein was unconscious in the high fever of black cholera. Mustapha kept his word to Ahmed, and carried him to his own house, where his aunt nursed the boy. He lay on a string bed, his body distorted with the furious pain; it wracked him so that he could scarcely breathe the heavy air that seemed to weigh down on him like a stifling blanket.

Zeinab, Mustapha's wife, sat by Hussein all night, sponging him now and then with lukewarm water. He was still living at dawn, but as the day wore on he lapsed into a coma.

'It is all over now,' said Zeinab.

'El mektub, mektub,' replied Mustapha with a sigh, 'what is written, is written — his fate was on his forehead, and there is no escaping it.'

At dawn, however, a little breeze had sprung up, and by noon it had risen to a strong wind, and the people on the housetops could see the great banks of cloud driving down from the north. All day long the thunder roared, and a little after noon the monsoon broke at last. The rain fell out of the sky in great solid sheets, and the scorched earth drank it with a hissing sound. The mud splashed up waist-high, and the rivers swelled as one watched them. Ceaselessly the rain roared down, making a great noise like the thunder of traffic in a great city magnified tenfold. The air freshened within a few minutes of the coming of the rain, and Hussein stirred from his coma. The clean air revived him a little, and before nightfall Zeinab was able to feed a little soup to him from a spoon. By the time a week had passed the cholera had left the city — it was washed away.

Hussein lived, and after some time he was on his feet again. At first he kept forgetting that Wahid Dad and Ahmed were both dead, and each time that it came suddenly to him, his grief broke out afresh. At such times he would go to Muhammed Akbar, and lie between his fore-feet, with his head on the dust; but while Hussein tended to become used to it, the elephant did not. Indeed, Muhammed Akbar grieved so bitterly and so deeply that since Ahmed died he would hardly eat anything at all. Only Hussein could persuade him to take a few plantains now and then. The great beast wasted away, and his skin hung in folds on his flanks.

All the mahouts understood, and they did not trouble him. In a little while Muhammed Akbar became so weak that he could hardly support his own weight. One day Hussein found him leaning

against the pipal tree in the compound. The boy was carrying some plantains for the elephant: he stood between the great round forefeet, and began talking gently. Suddenly he stopped, for the elephant was not making those little throaty gurgles of response by which he always used to show that he was attending. Hussein slapped the hanging trunk to wake the elephant, but there was no response; he started to his feet, and looked up; then he understood, for Muhammed Akbar was dead.



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## Two

Mustapha, Hussein's uncle, was a quiet, dreamy man, and although he was by birth and breeding mahout, he was also a considerable scholar in the old Islamic tradition. He knew the greater part of the Q'ran by heart, and he had even begun a commentary on Al Beidâwi, the great commentator of the Q'ran. One of the first things he did when Hussein was convalescent was to teach him to read. His own sons — he had three — had reverted to type, and they were simple mahouts, blood and bone, so that they had long ceased trying to hammer any learning into their thick heads. But Hussein was more quick-witted, and he wished to please Mustapha.

Mustapha had all the scholar's enthusiasm for imparting his knowledge, and after a few months Hussein could struggle through most of the Q'ran. Among those people it was no little distinction to be able to read, for not two in a hundred of the common people could understand the written word. Mustapha's three sons were all considerably older than Hussein, and they thought him too young to quarrel with at all seriously, so they got on very well together.

Zeinab was particularly good to Hussein, for she was a good-natured motherly woman, and she felt the need of someone to look after now that her own children were almost grown up.

The elephants were soon moved away from Agra, and after a little time they were stationed at Amritsar. In this town Hussein began to lead a new life. To begin with, the people spoke a different tongue, for they were mostly Sikhs, speaking Punjabi. Hussein could generally make himself understood in Urdu, which is spoken all over the land, but very quickly he learnt Punjabi so well that he thought in it. His grief, which had died down to a dull ache, seemed to leave him with all these new things coming into his life, and although it returned sometimes when he was unhappy or alone, yet with time went on it faded out of his conscious mind.

They all lived in a hut in the elephant lines, which consisted of a long row of flat-roofed buildings with little gardens. There was a broad maiden that sloped down to the river, which was dammed in order to make a pool for the elephants. The town was some little distance from the elephant lines. In the evening the mahouts used to give their elephants over to their sons, and they were taken down to the pool. Hussein often used to take his uncle's elephant, who was called Jehangir Bahadur.

When they came to the pool the elephants would walk slowly in and squirt themselves all over with the cool water. They all had different habits, and it was Jehangir's custom to go out into the deeper part, where he could go right under, only leaving his trunk out to breathe. Then he would come out into the shallow part where Hussein was; he would suck up a trunkful of water, and squirt it all over himself, while Hussein scrubbed him with a coir brush. When they were back on the bank, Hussein would search Jehangir's broad feet for thorns, and also his ears, which were rather tender, becoming inflamed very easily.

The water at the dam made a perfect swimming pool, as no crocodiles ever came there for fear of the elephants.

In the garden outside Mustapha's house there was an old piece of wall that stood by itself; for no particular reason it had never been pulled down, so Mustapha made a sloping bed against it for melons. Hussein was very fond of melons, and he had made these his special care, for being rather farsighted he reasoned that the more they were looked after as plants, the better they would be as melons.

He was squatting idly on the top of the wall when the heat of the day had passed, gazing at the ripening melons. In the elephant lines he heard a tumult, but he paid little attention, for the mahouts often quarrelled, making a great noise without ever coming to blows; therefore, thought Hussein, it was not worth while running to see two men shouting at one another, with other people joining in to make more noise. Actually the hubbub was caused by Jehangir, who had gone mûsth, and had knocked another elephant over. It was a mild attack of that form of madness that is peculiar to elephants: it is often caused by an elephant being given too much bamboo in its fodder, for this makes its blood so hot that a very little will upset it and drive it mûsth.

All the mahouts were trying to separate the elephants but they could do nothing. As the noise increased Hussein climbed on to the flat roof of the hut to see what it was all about; he hoped that it would be Imam Din pulling Daoud Shah's beard, as he had often threatened to do. The mahouts got out two of the biggest elephants to force Jehangir away.

Hussein was in two minds about going to find out what it was all about: the sun was still too hot for it to be worth while running to hear two of the mahouts' wives abusing one another, but, of course, it might with luck be Imam Din carrying out his threat. From the roof he could not see anything but a confused crowd, because of the dust and the heat-haze.

Before the big elephants had been brought on the scene, Jehangir's mood had changed. He ramméd his opponent once more with all his force, and then went away to look for something to destroy, for his temper made him feel like destroying things.

No one dared to get in front of him, so he trotted off down the lines towards the larger huts where the married mahouts lived. His one desire, that was by now an obsession, was to crush something: his head was aching splittingly, and his madness had driven all the goodness out of him for the time. He came quickly down the dusty road, and Hussein, on the roof, recognised him at once by the glint of the silver bands round his tusks, which were cut short. He had no idea that Jehangir was mûsth; indeed, he had never seen an elephant in that state, and he only knew of it by hearsay. He called out to the elephant, but he was rather surprised when Jehangir came charging at full speed towards the mahout's house; Hussein thought that he was only playing, as he had often done before. But Jehangir did not pull up; he blundered right on into the brick wall, smashing it down with his forehead, and quite ruining the melons.

Hussein gasped, and then shouted, 'Oh, soor-kabutcha kasoorneen, what have you done?'

The elephant stood still over the wreckage of the bed; he had knocked his head very hard against the wall, and that had cleared it a little. If he had been left alone the madness would have clouded his brain again, but Hussein came scrambling off the roof, catching a heavy bowl which was there to catch the rain, and he leapt from the top of the verandah on to Jehangir's neck, crying, 'Oh, son of a great pig, what have you done to my fine melons?' He beat the bowl furiously on Jehangir's head, so that it broke.

It did not hurt the elephant particularly, but it brought him to his senses. Suddenly he saw what he had done: it was as though he had awoken from a bad dream. He was horribly afraid that he might have injured Hussein, for he was very fond of the boy. But Hussein kept banging at his head with what remained of the pot, so he saw that there was no harm done.

'Go straight back to your picket, you clumsy, toad-like oont; I shall never speak to you again. The melons were almost ripe, and now they are quite ruined. Worthless earth-worm that you are,' shouted Hussein very angrily. By this time a pursuing crowd of mahouts with five huge tuskers and chains had

come up, and as soon as they were within ear-shot, a man shouted, 'Have a care, have a care, he mûsth.'

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Hussein heard this, but he saw that the fit had passed. Very quickly the two biggest elephants came up on either side of Jehangir to pin him, so that a rope could be passed about one of his legs; but Hussein saw his opportunity, and cried, 'Leave us alone, we shall not hurt you.'

Everyone gaped, as Hussein had hoped they would, and Mustapha said, 'But what is this? Jehangir has gone mûsth.'

'It is a small matter, I have dealt with it. He was only a little troubled with the heat, so he came to see me. I shall take him to the pool.' Hussein carried it off perfectly, and they went down to the water where Jehangir squirted water all over himself, and then plastered his head with cool grey mud.

But the next day Jehangir was punished in the only way that an elephant can be. He was chained firmly to a tree, and each of the other elephants was given a good length of chain. They all filed past him, and each gave him a great blow with the chain: they went round three times. Jehangir was bitter and ashamed of himself, and he trumpeted in the night, but Hussein came and comforted him until the morning.

Hussein gained a great deal of credit, and it was prophesied that he would become a famous mahout when he grew older. The Englishman in charge of the mahouts sent him twenty rupees, for he said that anything might have happened if Jehangir had not been caught. The khitmutgar took fifteen of the rupees by way of commission, but even so, it was great wealth for Hussein while it lasted. For a little while Hussein was quite unbearable at home, but Mustapha beat him one day, and he returned to normal.

Jehangir became even more attached to Hussein after that, as he felt that he had saved him from doing horrible things.

Zeinab was the only person who saw through Hussein's pretence of having known that the elephant was mûsth, and one day, when she suddenly taxed him with it, he was too flustered to deny it. She used to blackmail him in a mild way, so he paid more attention to Mustapha's teaching than he would have done otherwise, and he kept the garden in much better order; but she was a kindly soul, and did not plague him at all, so he loved her none the less. Although she had a long tongue with a shrewd edge to it on occasion, she was as good as a mother to Hussein, and she treated him just as well as her own sons, and perhaps a little better, for she knew that she would never have another young boy of her own. Zeinab was also a surpassingly good cook, which made her household love her more than any amount of beauty would have done. It was firmly held by all those who had tasted it that the saffron stew she made from the tail of a fat-tailed sheep was equal to any food this side of Paradise. She had inherited the recipe for this dish from her mother, who in turn had had it from hers; it had come with her to Mustapha, being of great worth. Indeed, it was this stew that had brought Mustapha to her in the first place, as he had eaten it one evening in the house of Wali Dad, and had asked who had cooked it.

Mustapha's three sons, Amir Khan, Yussuf, and Abd'allah, were also kind to Hussein in that rather condescending, offhand manner that very young men use towards boys, because they wish it clearly to be understood that they are on two different planes — that they are quite grown up, and that anyone younger is a great deal younger, and not a man at all.

Amir Khan had a moustache, of which he was inordinately proud, and which he oiled assiduously. He was the mahout of a cow elephant called Kali, because of her temper. He was a weak, good-natured youth; handsome, and rather vain. He was very proud of his elephant, who, to tell the truth, was

singularly dull and vicious brute as elephants go, and often he would tell Hussein of the wonderful way in which she understood him, and of the things she could do if she were not so highly strung.

Yussuf and Abd'allah were twins; they were very much alike — both tall and well set; but apart from their inherent understanding of elephants, they were stupid; but they were simple and good-natured, and Hussein got on very well with them. Being rather young to be full mahouts, they were employed to cut fodder in between taking out any odd elephant that had no regular mahout. They spent a good deal of their time playing soccer football, which had been introduced by the English soldiers. It was extremely popular, particularly among the young Mohammedans. They played in bare feet, and their game was very fast, as the ground was nearly always as hard as asphalt. Hussein played quite a lot, but he was very light, so he did not get much of a game, the barging being rather heavy; but he was quick on his feet, and when he could get hold of the ball he could generally do something with it.

The Sikhs at Amritsar were also keen footballers, and one of the younger English officers in the PWD had organised a match between an eleven of his men and a team drawn by his friend, a lieutenant in a Sikh regiment.

The game was played on Thursday, when there were no parades, and the soldiers turned up in great force. All the mahouts came with as great a muster of elephants as they could bring for the honour of their side.

The match ground lay near the regimental barracks. None of the senior officers of the Sikhs or the PWD liked to be spoil-sports, so they all turned up. The Mohammedans played in white turbans, closely tied for greater security, and the Sikhs in blue turbans. Yussuf and Abd'allah were both playing as half-backs, and Hussein was watching with Mustapha on Jehangir.

The match was very fast from the beginning, and the ball was all over the field before a few minutes had gone. The audience was very much worked up, and the Sikhs were howling in Punjabi to encourage their men.

At half-time there was still no score: the barging had been a trifle wild, but it had been perfectly clean. After the change-over the game was still faster, and presently Abd'allah, the left half, took the ball from one of the Sikhs, and ran up the field with it. He tricked three men very neatly, and he had just swung the ball in to the waiting centre forward when one of the backs charged him very heavily. He had already passed the ball when he was knocked flying; the Sikh had used his elbow, and Abd'allah was carried off the field. A penalty was awarded against the soldiers, and immediately afterwards the PWD side scored. The penalty was unpopular with the non-Moslem part of the crowd, and the goal made it even more so. The Sikhs began playing rather wildly, and their opponents met them fully half-way.

Before long a Sikh was knocked out practically in the goal mouth; his turban came off, showing his long hair — a great shame for a Sikh. But the game went on and no penalty was awarded, although half the crowd howled for one.

Then the outside left of the PWD team broke away, running right up the touch-line with the ball. The inside left was backing him up. They were on the side away from their supporters; two more converged on the outside left, but he tricked them both, and passed the ball to the inside left, who had gone ahead. Instantly all the Sikhs shouted 'Offside!' but the referee did not blow his whistle.

No one quite saw what happened next, but there was a scuffle as some of the onlookers surged on to the ground, and when they went back the inside left was lying unconscious over the ball.

Then someone knocked a Sikh's turban off, and pulled his long hair. A Sikh hurled his knife-edge steel turban-quoit at the referee, cutting his head open. Then all the Mohammedans rushed as one man from their side on to the ground, and the Sikhs met them in mid-field. Their elephants were a tower of strength to the mahouts, and although they were outnumbered, the PWD team were collected, and carried off to safety by their supporters.

The Hindus in the crowd joined with the Sikhs against the Mohammedans, and soon a budding riot was growing on the football-ground.

Fortunately some of the senior officers had guessed what would happen a little after half-time, and they had called out the guard from the barracks. The Sikhs' discipline soon re-asserted itself, and what might have been a very ugly riot fizzled out after a round of blank cartridge. Nevertheless, three people had managed to get killed, and a great deal of religious fanaticism had been stirred up, which meant an anxious month for the Indian Police. The unfortunate young men who had organised the game were given exceedingly undesirable posts. The PWD man was sent out to investigate wells in the Bikaner desert villages, and the Sikhs' officer was attached to a Madrassi regiment of infantry. The mahouts were moved, with the elephants, to a place right away in the Deccan, where they were building a road. The elephants, with their mahouts, travelled with the baggage-train of a south-bound regiment.

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## Three

They marched all the way, as there was no urgent need for them. The journey took several weeks. Hussein and Mustapha stayed with Jehangir, and on the way Mustapha recited long suras, in a high chanting voice, so as to improve Hussein's mind. Sometimes, when Mustapha dozed on Jehangir's neck, Hussein would slip off, and go back through the dust to the slow bullock carts where Zeinab sat among the pots and bundles. At each stopping-place she made a little fire, and prepared kebabs, which she wrapped in cool leaves for Hussein to eat on the way. Every day was like the one before. They marched, with halts, from dawn until sunset, when the soldiers pitched their tents, and a complete camp sprang up within an hour. Hussein and his cousins slept on a great soft pile of fodder that smelled sweet and fresh, like new-mown hay.

Before dawn the bugles went, and the tents disappeared like snow in summer. By sunrise they would be on the march again.

It was a splendid journey from Hussein's point of view — there were always new things to be seen and new people to talk to. On one memorable evening some villagers tried to creep into the camp and steal a rack of rifles, but they were caught, amid great tumult and shouting; once a leopard took a straggling goat; and once Hussein lay down on a fat snake in the fodder heap.

But at last they came to the place where the regiment was stationed, and the mahouts went on alone. They had an escort of the Indian Police, as they were going through a very wild part of the country where there were bands of dacoits. One night they camped half-way through a great forest, and in the night they heard the trumpeting of wild elephants. The tame elephants trumpeted back, and Kali, Amir Khan's elephant, broke her picket-rope and vanished into the forest; she went for ever, and though most of the mahouts thought it a good riddance, Amir Khan was inconsolable. He wandered into the jungle calling for Kali, and he got lost. They spent a day in finding him; he had stumbled into a wild bees' nest, and he was in a lamentable state.

At length they came to Rajkot, where the road was being made right through the jungle. The hills nearby abounded in game, from wild elephants and tigers to sand-grouse. The young 'Stant Sahib' who commanded the Police was a very keen shikar; and Hussein soon developed a great admiration for him.

He was a big, red-headed man, with a face burnt brick-red by the sun. This prevailing redness gave his blue eyes a startling intensity which impressed the natives tremendously; in fact, there was a rumour current that he had a tail, being a sort of djinni. Hussein used to gaze at him for long periods; he had never seen anything like it before. 'I wonder', he thought, 'whether his tail is red, too?'

He often used to hold the Stant Sahib's pony, so as to look at him more closely, but he never saw a vestige of a tail, red or otherwise. After a while the Englishman began to notice Hussein, and sometimes he spoke to him. At this time Hussein was a tall, thin boy of about sixteen — a young man by Indian standards.

One day the Stant Sahib, whose name was Gill, heard of a leopard that had made a kill about half a day's journey into the jungle. According to the report the leopard was a very large one, which had been harrying the cattle in a little Ghond village in the jungle for some time. Gill wanted to pot a good-sized leopard, but the journey would have to be made on an elephant, as it would take much to

long to cut a way through the virgin jungle. So he went to the Englishman in charge of the mahouts and asked him if he could spare him an elephant.

‘I can let you have an elephant all right,’ said this man, ‘but I’m afraid I really can’t spare a single mahout; you see, four of my best men have gone on leave for some damned funeral or festival or something, and I need every man I can lay my hands on for this tricky stretch of road by the stream.’

‘That’s a pest, because I particularly want to get out to that part of the jungle — it isn’t so much on account of the leopard, but because the dacoits have been rather busy in that direction, and I’ve an idea that a bit of reconnoitring might do some good.’

‘I’m awfully sorry, old man, but no can do. I’ve got to get past that awkward patch before the big wigs come out and make remarks about inefficiency and lamentable lack of drive.’

‘Oh well, I daresay I can make it on a pony, but it’ll mean carrying a hell of a lot of kit. I suppose you’re coming over for bridge to-night?’

‘Yes, of course; look here, I tell you what, perhaps you can get hold of a chap who knows which end of an elephant goes first, and then I can let you have one, if you’ll take full responsibility and all that.’

‘That’s definitely an idea. I daresay I’ll be able to get hold of someone, if it’s only my syce — an elephant will make all the difference. By the way, don’t forget to bring over some sodawater to-night. I’ve run clean out of it.’

The next day Gill’s khitmutgar went among the mahouts to find someone who could take the Englishman’s elephant. After a good deal of discussion a man suggested Hussein.

‘He is very young,’ objected the khitmutgar.

‘Yes,’ said Mustapha, ‘but he knows Jehangir almost as well as I know him myself, and moreover he handled him when he was mûsth, which not many would have done.’ All the mahouts supported him in this.

‘He would have to take a lesser wage,’ said the khitmutgar, ‘on account of his youth.’

‘And a certain khitmutgar would get a larger share of it,’ replied Mustapha.

‘No such thought entered my mind,’ said the khitmutgar, ‘for I am a virtuous man; he will get eight annas, which is a princely sum for a youth.’

‘Allah! Behold this virtuous khitmutgar — he would sell his grandmother’s shroud! Hussein shall have one rupee and four annas, not a pice less.’

‘These Muslims! I am fallen among thieves! Fourteen annas and two pice.’

‘By no means; one rupee and one anna.’

‘Very well, one rupee.’ They haggled a little longer, and at length Mustapha got one rupee two pice for Hussein, who had not said a word. He had a curiously exalted feeling in his heart, as he had never officially been in full charge of an elephant before.

He wanted to have a howdah on Jehangir, that he should look the more glorious, but Gill only wanted a pad. Long before dawn Hussein prepared Jehangir. He scrubbed the great forehead, so that it seemed grey against the blackness of the rest of his body, and he polished the silver bands about the fore-shortened tusks. Zeinab wrapped up some chupatties for him, and Amir Khan lent him an ancient iron ankus.

At daybreak he brought Jehangir round to Gill’s bungalow. Gill had his breakfast while the

khitmutgar and Hussein put his things on the pad. He only expected to be gone three days, so he had cut down his baggage to the minimum. When everything was ready, Jehangir knelt so that Gill could get up, and they set off down a little thin path.

The sun had not yet come up over the trees, and there was only a curious greenish light. It was quite cold. A slight silver mist floated about the tall grass and the trees. Everything was quiet.

Jehangir made very little sound as he went along; his great round feet were padded like thick rubber, so that he seemed like a moving shadow. Presently Hussein, who had been awake nearly all night, fell asleep as he sat a-straddle on the elephant's neck. Gill was not sufficiently used to the elephant's rolling walk to be able to sleep, but he dozed now and then. It was rather like being in a boat when there is a swell on the sea, and the tall, waving elephant grass rippled like water. At length they came to a place where the path joined three others: Jehangir stopped for guidance. Hussein awoke with a start; he turned to Gill, who was looking at a sketch map on the back of an envelope. It showed a vague path — indicated by a wavy pencil line — that led to the Ghond village.

'Hm,' he said, 'it doesn't show any other paths. Still, the place lies almost dead east of the road ahead, so we had better steer by compass.'

According to the compass none of the paths would do, so they struck into the jungle. It was not long after the rains just then, and the jungle was very thick, so thick that a man on the ground would have had to go down on his hands and knees to creep through it in places; but Jehangir made his own way.

Hussein carried his cousin's ankus with him, so as to look like a great mahout; but he never used it because his grandfather had said that the best mahouts never needed to — but it looked well. He had soon got tired of holding it, and had put it down behind him, just in front of the compass by which Gill was going. Naturally the iron affected the compass, so that by noon they found themselves before a river that ran between a hillside covered with bamboo and a great reddish expanse of rocky hills that faded away into thin jungly country in the distance.

'This is all wrong,' said Gill. 'We are miles out. This river isn't shown at all on the map.'

'It is the Jhelunga, huzoor,' said Hussein.

'You're right; I remember it now; I was here for pig-sticking some time ago. We'd better have lunch now we're here.'

Hussein tapped Jehangir on the forehead, and the elephant knelt. Gill got off, and they pitched a little tent, for the sun was at its height. Gill fed from a tin of peaches and some biscuits, while Hussein retired behind a rock and ate his chupatties and some cold lamb's tail, carefully wrapped in a vine leaf by Zeinab. Jehangir found a flowering mimosa bush, which he ate as far as the roots. Gill slept for a while in his tent, and Hussein wandered about until he found a wild mango. He called Jehangir, and he was lifted up into the tree; he threw some mangoes down for the elephant, and had a few himself; then he swam in the river. It was a swiftly flowing stream, with a gravelly bed, so there was no danger of crocodiles. He swam about until Gill awoke and called him.

'We had better cross the river,' said Gill, after they had folded up the tent and got underway again. 'if we strike due south we may get in by about moonrise.'

So Hussein led Jehangir down to the bank: there was a little sandy beach, and the elephant went over it very cautiously, for he knew that if once he got into a quicksand nothing would save him. As soon as the water was deep enough for him to swim, the elephant surged along at a surprising rate. Hussein swam beside him, for he knew that Jehangir must be feeling nervous. The strong current



swept them down-stream quite a long way, but they got over without any mishap.

As Hussein was scrambling up the bank he cut his foot on a sharp-edged stone; Gill, on the elephant's back, did not see it, or he would have put iodine and a bandage on it. They had followed the river for some way when they saw some black-buck feeding under a clump of trees. They were upwind of the elephant, so they had not smelt the men. Gill whispered to Hussein to make Jehangir kneel, as he wanted to stalk one for the pot. Hussein was to wait with Jehangir by the river, where he could easily be found. Accordingly, as soon as Gill had slipped away among the bushes, Hussein turned Jehangir back to the river. He went along the bank until he reached a grove of bamboos. Here he got off Jehangir, and plucked some broad leaves, which he wrapped round his foot, to cool it.

Then he wandered in the shade, vaguely looking for fruit trees. Jehangir went back to the river, but Hussein knew that he would come back at a call. Quite soon he found a very large mango tree standing among the bamboos. Its smooth trunk stretched high up without a branch within reach, so he had to go up by means of a rather shaky bamboo that was growing beside it. He was waving about alarmingly at the top of the bamboo by the time he reached the lowest branch, but he managed to reach it in safety. The mangoes were very good, but monkeys had eaten most of them. Hussein climbed to a comfortable broad crotch, where he lay along a branch with his head to the trunk. The deep green shade of the myriads of leaves was very restful: millions of insects buzzed, making a deep, steady note all together.

A mynah came and whistled in a branch over his head, but a small grey monkey chattered at it, and it flew away. A brilliant green tree-frog clung to the underside of a broad leaf above him: it looked as though it had been glued there and painted. Suddenly its neck swelled, and it made an utterance of disproportionate noise like the yapping of a small dog. Hussein threw a mango stone at it, and it vanished to another leaf, where it yapped again. Another mango stone flew, and it was quiet. Far away he could hear Jehangir splashing in the river, and once he trumpeted, perhaps to a wild elephant, for they lived in those parts. A sowar of wild pig grunted among the fallen mangoes for a while, but soon they went. A minute, gem-like beetle crawled laboriously on to his big toe, and flew away. Hussein slept.

Away by the bank where they had crossed, a dhole sniffed at the stone on which Hussein had cut his foot. The wild dog put back his head and howled. Another dhole answered him, and soon there were half a dozen of them on the little beach. Now and again one of them would raise his muzzle and give the calling cry to the rest of the pack. Far away, from among the red sandstone of the caves, where the pack lived, an answering howl came back.

More dholes came, and they followed the scent until it became confused at the place where Hussein had mounted Jehangir. The wild dogs scattered, and cast about until one of them picked up the trail again at the spot where Hussein had wandered off by himself. The dholes came together again; the scent of blood was easy to follow, so they ran along the trail. They were fierce red wild dogs — bush-tailed, stoutly built, and rather smaller than wolves. They hunted in much larger packs than wolves, and there was nothing that could withstand them; a tiger or a wild boar would run from them, and even an elephant would turn aside when they passed.

Hussein heard a sound in his sleep, and stirred uneasily; then he yawned, and opened his eyes. In the open space beneath the tree there were about a dozen dholes. More were coming quietly through the undergrowth: they were all watching him.

He started to his feet, and instantly the nearest dhole leapt up at him, snapping his teeth just under the branch. As they reached the end of the trail the wild dogs had kept silent, but now they gave

tongue. Several more leapt up, but fortunately for Hussein the branch was about a foot out of the reach. Many more came through the bushes and sat beneath the tree. Hussein counted fifty of them.

At intervals they howled; it was something between the howl of a jackal and that of a wolf, but more fierce than either. Hussein reached up and grasped a branch above his head; he swung himself higher, and the dholes stopped jumping up at him: they sat in a wide circle round the tree. They were quite capable of waiting there until he dropped from exhaustion.

Hussein heard a sound like an old rusty watch ticking very loud and fast: with a shock he realised that it was his own heart beating. He climbed higher and higher. Every time he seized a higher branch he felt a wave of fright go through him; he had never felt anything like it when he had been climbing before, but now his nerves were upset by the certain knowledge that if he lost his hold and fell, the dholes would be there. At length he crept out to the end of a long branch from which he could see a part of the river, and he called, 'Ohé, Jehangir.' His voice was rather squeaky and wavering. He waited a moment, and then called again, 'Hitherao, hathi-raj. Ohé Jehangir!'

The dholes howled beneath him, and suddenly he felt giddy: he lay flat along the bough, and gripped it with all his strength. He shouted until his voice grew hoarse, and at length it failed him altogether — when he shouted only a croak came; but he saw no sign of the elephant. He crawled back along the branch, and sat with his back to the trunk, a-straddle the crotch.

Hussein pulled himself together, feeling rather angry at his weakness; but, indeed, the great circle of dholes, all glaring up at him with furious eyes, and all lusting hotly to eat his flesh, was enough to make the bravest man shiver a little.

A strong musty odour drifted up to him — the smell of the dholes — and he spat down at them. He called again — his voice had come back — and this time there was a despairing note in his cry, and the dholes sensed it: they howled.

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## Four

Some time before, while Hussein was asleep, Gill had come back to the river with a small black-buck over his shoulder. Jehangir, standing shoulder-high in the stream, had seen him, and had come out to the bank; they waited for Hussein in the shade of a twisted tree among the rocks. After some time the Englishman blew on his whistle; Hussein, in his tree, heard it, and shouted back. But the wind was in his direction, and although it carried the sound of the whistle to him, it carried his own voice away. Nevertheless, he felt rather better now that he knew where Gill was, for the sound obviously came from the river bank some way to his right. Hussein stopped his ears with a piece of bread that he still had in his dhoti, so that he might not hear the howling of the dholes, for it seemed to melt the strength from his bones, and he climbed down to a branch that touched a limb coming from another tree that lay towards the river. As he crawled out to the thin end of the bough, it bent down and swayed so much that it just brought him within reach of the leaping dholes for a moment: one of them, snapping at a twig growing from the branch, hung there as it swung up again. Then the dhole scrambled on to the branch and rushed at Hussein. Luckily the rounded branch gave the dog no foothold, and it fell to the ground before reaching him. Before the branch swung down again, Hussein had caught hold of the other one; he swung himself on to it. Although it was much stouter, it still swayed up and down a good deal, so that one moment he was practically in the jaws of the dholes as they leapt up, and the next he was far above them. The wild dogs were furiously excited: the noise was appalling. As soon as he could steady himself, Hussein scrambled along the branch to the trunk, where he rested, and pulled the bread from his ears, for his first panic was over, and he felt master of himself again.

There was a dead creeper on the tree, and he broke off lengths of it, throwing them at the dholes. They sat down and waited, with their red tongues hanging out, their ears pricked, and their thick tails brushing to and fro.

From this tree he could see his way plainly for about the spread of five large trees and a few smaller ones. After that a confused mass of greenness blocked out everything else. There were innumerable creepers joining the higher branches. Hussein saw a big grey langur running swiftly along them, and he decided to go by the same way. He found that they were easily strong enough to hold him. Grasping one of the thickest of the lianas he walked gingerly along.

In the middle, where the supporting branches were far apart, the monkey's road swayed a good deal and one or two dead creepers fell in long strands; but it held, and he quickly made his way through the trees, holding the thinner lianas with his hands, and walking along on the great cable-thick parasite that grew all over the biggest trees, and crushed the smaller ones to the ground. He was practically hidden among the leaves and blazing crimson flowers of the giant creepers, and he was high above the ground, so that for the space of two trees the dholes lost sight of him. His heart leapt, and he ran along the twisted stems: there was a chance that they would wait under one tree, while he could get away. But he went too fast in his eagerness, and missed his footing; he almost fell, but he snatched at a long liana that ripped away from the rest, and swung him hard against a branch. He grasped it, and was safe; but the noise had brought the dholes to the tree, and they crowded round it, howling like demons.

He rested awhile, as the fall had shaken him; his ribs were bruised, and he felt them tenderly. Nothing was broken — the leaves had checked the speed of the swing, but it was a nasty knock, and he had winded him. When his breath came back he went on, but soon he came to the last big tree. A se

of waving bamboos stretched away almost to the river. There was no large tree standing among them and there were no creepers: he saw that he could go no farther.

He climbed as high as he could among the dark green shadows: nearly at the top of the great tree he poked his head out of the leaves. At first the sun blinded him, but when his eyes got used to the brilliant light he could see the river plainly, and by the place where they had crossed he could see Gill and Jehangir.

There were several kites circling above him; they were following the dholes for a share in their kill. Hussein unwound his turban and waved it, shouting as loud as he could. He could hear Gill whistling impatiently: the white man saw nothing, and Hussein saw him sit down on a rock; but Jehangir, who had been vaguely uneasy for some time, turned his head from side to side, with his great ears outstretched, and his trunk held straight out, sniffing the wind.

Then he shuffled quickly away towards the trees; Gill saw that something was the matter, and ran after him. The elephant paused and looked at Gill, considering whether he would be useful or not. He made up his mind quickly, and unceremoniously took Gill about the waist with his trunk, hoisting him up on to his back.

Hussein saw them coming, and climbed quickly down the tree. About half-way down he stepped right on top of a fat snake that lay coiled under a cluster of leaves; it fell, without striking him, and hit the ground squelchily. Hussein saw that his luck was in that day, and took heart of grace. As he came down lower the dholes greeted him with a deafening howl. He put on his turban again, and waited for Jehangir. He heard a crashing sound among the bamboos — Jehangir was making his own path. The dholes heard it too, and they looked this way and that: they were clearly puzzled, but they stayed under the tree.

At the edge of the clearing Jehangir paused for a moment. Gill was seated astride his neck, with his shot-gun in his hands, and the HV rifle, which he had brought for the leopard, across his knees; he had grasped the situation when he heard the dholes howling. Jehangir was thinking for a moment, trying to decide the best method of attack: the dholes stood motionless, the hair upright on their backs.

‘Call him to you and jump on to his back,’ shouted Gill, who had found that nothing he said or did had the least effect on the elephant. ‘I’ll pepper them with the shot-gun until we get clear.’

Hussein nodded and came down lower; the dholes leapt up at him, two and three at a time. He called gently to the elephant, ‘Hitherao, Jehangir.’

Jehangir came out from the bamboos with his trunk curled up: Gill blazed away into the dense reddish-brown mass of the wild dogs, and in another moment Jehangir had passed under the branches and Hussein had dropped on to his broad back. They were out of the clearing before the dholes had time to follow what was happening. But the wild dogs, though they were confused, were not daunted, and giving tongue they streaked away after the elephant. None of them was killed or even seriously injured, as the gun was only loaded with shot for partridge or sand-grouse.

Jehangir crashed through the thick bamboos as if they were grass; the stems struck the men on his back like whips.

The dholes wriggled through the undergrowth, yelping like young hounds in a covert. They came out into the open, and Jehangir began moving really fast. The wild dogs were strung out on either side with a bunch just behind him. Altogether there were between fifty and seventy-five of them — a very formidable pack. They ran silently, keeping their distance, and waiting for a lead. Gill and Hussein

changed places, a very difficult thing to do on the elephant's swaying back, and Gill tried to pick off some of the dholes with his rifle; but Jehangir, going at full speed, rolled like a ship in a heavy sea, so his shooting was rather wild.

'Shall we cross the river?' he asked.

'No,' replied Hussein, 'for they swim well; moreover, even Jehangir likes to take his time over crossing and, being worried by these scum, he might be injured.'

As they were speaking one of the dholes running at the side came in and snapped at the elephant's flank; he hung there for a moment, and dropped. Several others followed his lead, and soon the whole pack was close behind. Jehangir stopped suddenly, so that Gill was almost jerked off; then he turned very nimbly; the dholes fell away on either side, but he stamped on two of the slowest, destroying them utterly.

Then he went on, rumbling a little to himself in his throat. For a little while the pack kept its distance, but soon they were snapping behind him again. Gill was getting more used to the rolling now, and he wounded one of the leaders severely. In a moment the wounded dhole was torn to pieces; he had been the leader of the pack, and was very unpopular with the younger dholes. The pack went on, leaving him for the following kites.

At this time they were passing through the bare rocks where the dholes had their lairs. Some of them ran ahead to a rocky defile where a ledge overhung the path. They leapt down as the elephant passed. Three of them got a footing on Jehangir's hind-quarters, and they came at Gill. Hussein knocked one off, and Gill another, but the third got the Englishman's arm between his teeth, and hung on. The heavy, thick-set brute had Gill half off before Hussein caught up his ankus (he had tucked it into the pad) and beat the dhole so hard on the head that it died at once. But even then its jaws stayed clamped, and they had to prise them open.

Gill recovered his balance as Jehangir turned again and stamped four times: at each stamp there was a short gasp as a dhole was flattened into the ground. But this time the dholes did not scatter: they leapt up all round, worrying the elephant's legs. Jehangir plucked them off with his trunk, and hurled them against the rocks, but more came on. Some scrambled up to the ledge, and jumped down at Gill and Hussein. They were prepared, however, and knocked them off with clubbed guns. Jehangir stamped twice more, and broke away.

The chase began again, and for quite a long while the wild dogs kept a good distance off. Gill was firing rapidly, and he managed to pick off one or two now and then. They went on and on: the river was left far behind, and they were in a very desolate country with bare, reddish ground thinly covered with thorn trees. Gill's left arm, just above the elbow, was badly torn, and it made his aim very unsteady after a while. He kept on firing, however, as he thought that the noise might keep the dholes off, even if it did not hit any of them; but soon they took very little notice of it.

Every now and then Jehangir turned, but the dholes were intent on tiring him out, so they fell back and would not close with him.

The elephant was limping with his off fore foot now — a long thorn had lodged in it. The pace was telling on him, and his speed grew less and less. He stumbled, but recovered and went on. Imperceptibly the dholes drew in. They were silent now, and they ran with their tongues hanging out. When they were fairly close, Gill and Hussein took the rifle and the shot-gun, holding them clubbed together for there would be no time to load if all the dholes rushed them together.

Jehangir stumbled again; he fell to his knees, and stopped. He turned and faced the dholes. They spread out in a wide circle; they were panting fast by now, but they were still good for half a day's running, whereas the elephant, with his heavy load and his lame foot, could not go much farther. Suddenly the circle contracted, and they were surrounded by a seething mass of dholes. Some scrambled with amazing agility on to his back; Gill guarded one side and Hussein the other, but they could hardly keep themselves from being pulled off. The elephant slipped to his knees again as he stamped on a dhole, and several of them came over his shoulders. They were beaten off, but one seized Hussein's foot, and another tore Gill's coat from his back. They all drew off for an instant, yelling like fiends: it was obvious that they were going to make a concerted charge. In a second they rushed together. In desperation Hussein shouted, 'Break away, hathi-raj!'

Jehangir grunted, and heaved himself out of the mass of dholes. He shook his great shoulders, and stamped again and again; he stumbled twice, and nearly went over, but he broke away. Dholes hung on to him all over, like leeches: Hussein and Gill beat them off. It was clear that he could not go much farther without a rest, and without having the thorn pulled from his foot. Before they had beaten the last dhole off, the elephant crossed a path. He uncoiled his trunk and sniffed the wind: then he turned along the path. The wild dogs followed.

'By the mercy of Allah', said Hussein, 'he has smelt a village.'

'If only he can reach it,' replied Gill, 'everything will be all right.'

They swept on, the dholes running silently. Behind them, at the place where Jehangir had almost fallen, the kites and jackals, who had followed at a distance, closed in on the dead or dying wild dogs.

Jehangir was going along at a good speed, but his breath was coming short, and he faltered now and again in his stride. The dholes were less confident now; they came on just the same, but none of them was anxious to give the lead in attacking the elephant.

By a fluke Gill shot two of them with two successive shots, killing both. But just then the path dipped into a little valley. There was a muddy stream at the bottom, and as Jehangir came to it he hesitated, and the dholes crowded behind him, howling with new ferocity.

Hussein bent over his head, patting him and urging him on; at the bank he stopped dead, and several of the wild dogs leapt; one caught Jehangir's tail; the sudden pain startled him, and he shot forward. They were across the slow stream in a flurry of spray before the elephant realised it. The dholes swam across. There were only about thirty heads bobbing in the water now, but the pack was still quite large enough to be very dangerous, as all the weaker dholes had fallen back, and only the biggest and fiercest ones remained.

Jehangir smelt that the village was not far away, and he put on an extra spurt. After a little while a dense patch of thorns appeared; the path led in and out to the mud walls of the village, which was quite near now. Jehangir took no count of the path; he went straight through the thorn bushes; they crackled as he smashed through them.

The dholes were losing ground as they picked their way among the bushes. As they came nearer and nearer to the village many of them stopped.

Only one was near the elephant now: this one, with a prodigious effort, leapt up and snapped his teeth on the heel of Gill's boot. It snarled, and bit clean through the heel; then Gill killed it with the butt of his rifle.

To their amazement they saw that the gates of the village were shut. Two or three shots rang on

from the walls, and the bullets hummed unpleasantly close to their heads. But Jehangir was determined to get to the village, and nothing short of heavy artillery could have stopped him now; he rolled up his trunk under his tusks, bent his head, and putting on an extra burst of speed he fairly flew at the gates. Gill and Hussein crouched flat on his back. There was a rending crash; a cloud of dust flew up. When it faded they saw that Jehangir had destroyed the gates and half the thick mud wall as well; he was now standing in a deserted square surrounded by huts. A man crept from beneath the wreckage.

‘What the devil did you mean by firing on us?’ shouted Gill.

Hussein pointed, and whispered, ‘Ismail Khan.’

Gill said, ‘You’re right,’ and to the man, ‘Put your hands up.’ He covered him with his rifle, for he recognised Ismail Khan, a notorious dacoit.

The man salaamed. ‘Pray do not threaten a poor honest thief, huzoor,’ he said; ‘we will be peaceable.’

‘Then call your men out one by one, and tell them to lay down their arms: if anything else happens I’ll shoot you as you stand.’

Ismail Khan obeyed: as each man came out from his hut Hussein covered him with the shot-gun. They laid down their weapons — ancient blunderbusses and matchlocks for the most part — in a pile by Jehangir, who stood quite still, breathing heavily.

‘We should have been able to entertain you more like men,’ said Ismail Khan, with a grin — for he held his hereditary and ancient profession to be no shame — ‘if we had not run out of powder. Will it be a hanging or only the jail-khana?’

‘That depends,’ said Gill; ‘now you will get me a very long rope. Let no other man move. Hussein will follow that man, and shoot him if he tries to escape.’

Hussein followed Ismail Khan, scowling fiercely to show that he was not at all afraid. The dacoit led the way into a hut where there were various jars of grain and stores. He paused for a moment, and Hussein raised his gun.

‘That jar is full of rupees,’ remarked the dacoit. ‘Get the rope,’ replied Hussein.

‘Handsome young mahouts can do a lot with a jar of rupees.’

‘That is true, but I do not believe that there are any there.’

‘Look and see for yourself — I am very liberal to my friends.’

‘Yes, and put my gun down: I am not quite a fool,’ said Hussein.

The dacoit turned the jar on its side: a stream of silver coins came out on to the mud floor. ‘Help yourself,’ he said. Hussein said nothing.

The dacoit showed another jar — smaller this time. ‘Gold,’ he whispered, opening a leather bag from inside the jar, ‘you understand?’ Hussein nodded; the dacoit threw the bag, and Hussein caught it in one hand, keeping his distance from the dacoit.

‘Now look the other way,’ said Ismail Khan, ‘so that you can swear by the Beard of the Prophet that you did not see me go.’

‘No,’ said Hussein.

‘What in Jehannum?’

‘I said no; now get that rope.’ He pointed the gun at the dacoit — he had tucked the little bag in his dhoti.

‘O son of Eblis — incredibly base leper ...’

‘Silence, soor-ka-butcha. Get the rope.’ Hussein scowled ferociously. With no more words, but with an evil look, Ismail Khan brought out a coil of rope. Coming out of the door he made a rush at Hussein, flinging the heavy coil. Hussein ducked, and jabbed the dacoit in the stomach with the gun — he was not sure how to fire it. When Ismail Khan got his breath again, he picked up the rope and walked back quietly to the square where Gill sat on Jehangir, guarding the other prisoners. Gill dismounted and took the rope: as he put his rifle under his arm to take it, someone threw a knife: it knocked his topi off, but did no harm. Ismail Khan gathered himself together for a spring, and Hussein clubbed him from behind with the butt of the shot-gun. Before his topi had reached the ground, Gill fired from his hip, killing the man who had thrown the knife.

After that the dacoits were quite meek. They stood in a line with their hands behind them, and Hussein bound them, linking them all together.

They bound Ismail Khan and put him across Jehangir’s back. Before the dacoits were bound it had been touch and go whether Gill and Hussein would get out alive; but no man cared to be the first to move, although if several had attacked together they would have been certain of victory; yet no one wanted to be the first to get shot. Also, they were cowed by the ease with which Jehangir had crushed their wall, and some even made remarks about people who employed djinn to fight for them.

Now Gill, having discovered the dacoits’ village by accident, did not wish to remain in a part of the country that might be swarming with their friends, nor did he want them to have time to recover from their despondency, so he asked Hussein if it were possible for Jehangir to make the journey back again at once.

‘Yes,’ replied Hussein, ‘when I have got this thorn out, and provided he is given a great jar of arrack; I saw some where the rope was.’

‘Go and get it, then,’ replied Gill.

Hussein went, and returned with the jar: his dhoti seemed curiously swelled, and he clanked gently as he walked.

Jehangir lifted up his foot, and Hussein soon got the thorn out. Then the elephant sniffed at the jar, picked it up with his trunk, and emptied it down his throat. He flapped his ears, and seemed brighter a few minutes, for the immensely powerful spirit gave him heart. Leaving Hussein to guard the bound prisoners, Gill searched the huts, finding nobody until he came to the last and biggest. He opened the door of this one with some effort, for it was being held closed from within. He poked his head in; there were piercing screams. He slammed the door. ‘Oh Lord,’ he said, ‘women.’

There was a passable horse in the village; he commandeered it, so as to relieve Jehangir, and rode out with his prisoners over the ruins of the shattered wall. They were tied in a string, and as he had forbidden them to speak, they were quite easy to manage. As they were crossing the Jhelunga they made a faint-hearted effort to escape when Gill’s horse became skittish and nearly threw him in, but a shot over their heads quietened them at once.

By keeping them at a sharp trot, Gill managed to reach the road-head before nightfall, which was fortunate, as they would have had more chance to escape in the dark. It was a very good thing to have got them all at once, as this band had spoiled the countryside for years, and in spite of the mo-



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