

## THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT

### PART III

THE ability of the bush elephant to pass rapidly through long grass or bush comparatively silently is almost as remarkable as the power of the forest elephant to tread softly on dead leaves. I have stood listening to elephants passing, as it turned out, within a few feet of me in grass ten or twelve feet in height, and all that I could hear was a swishing noise like a steady wind; but in long grass sounds are deadened and their exact direction and distance are difficult to determine. On catching only a whiff of tainted wind the grass elephant is capable of suddenly and mysteriously disappearing. Only his tracks betray him.

#### Structure of Elephant's Foot.

Much of the ability of the elephant to walk so silently is due to the highly specialised structure of his foot. Though the plantar fascia and skin of the sole may be an inch in thickness, the great pedestal-like foot functions much like a soft rubber cushion. If one places the tips of one's fingers on the table, with all the digits extended and widely separated, one has a fair representation of the bony structure of an elephant's foot, and one finds that beneath the palm is a considerable cavity. In the elephant this big cavity is completely filled with a mass of yellow-looking fat contained in a fibrous matrix, and forming a springy, elastic cushion, which, when the foot is raised, bulges out its plantar surface, but when in contact with the ground so adapts itself to every inequality that if a stick does crack beneath it the noise is muffled or not heard.

An elephant never looks fat. Even in the best of condition his skin hangs about him like a suit of ill-fitting clothes. With the exception of that attached to the intestines and omentum, which, by the way, increases enormously in certain seasons, the only fat obtainable in any quantity from a dead elephant,

before the carcass is cut up, is that beneath the above-mentioned plantar arch of the foot, and in the hollow above the eye.

To obtain the former one must cut away the sole of a fore-foot, by no means an easy matter. There is then exposed a mass of yellow india-rubbery substance. This should be cut out, piece by piece, thrown into a big earthenware pot containing water, and kept continuously on the boil. In time the melted fat appears on the surface and can be skimmed off into another vessel, and the process may be repeated, if necessary, until the residue is clean and pure. It then can be poured off into bottles and spare jam jars, and allowed to cool. When solidified it is white, tasteless, odourless, and makes first-class cooking lard, never becoming rancid apparently, even if kept for months. One foot will yield a gallon or more, sufficient for several weeks' camp-cooking operations. The foot of an old elephant may yield plenty, but often far less than that of a young one in good condition, and it is essential to get it cut up, and have the pieces put into the pot, as soon as possible after shooting the animal—within three or four hours in fact—otherwise the lard acquires a disagreeable flavour. During years of travel in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Uganda, Congo and elsewhere in elephant country, I have rarely used any other cooking fat. Always when on "safari" I take, amongst my venesta boxes, two or three containing a double layer of half-pound screw-topped glass jars of jam, packed tightly in "wood-wool" or straw. As the jam is used up the empty jars are washed and replaced in their recesses, and are afterwards available for filling as opportunity offers with elephant lard, natural history specimens in preservative, or with anything else.

#### **Elephant Meat.**

Is elephant meat palatable? On one or two occasions when I have killed an elephant two days away from camp and had to wait for my men bringing food, axes, cameras, bedding, etc., I have had to make a meal off elephant steak, cooked "assador" fashion on a stick, and quite good I have found it, though extremely tough. The best way to secure a supply, when one

has only a hunting knife, is to cut away the skin of the already-mentioned hollow over the eye. Here both meat and fat are easily obtainable, but should be cut out soon after death. Cold elephant steak is quite useful, but, although most non-Mahommedan natives in Africa will devour the carcase of an elephant, almost to the last ounce, the flesh is too coarse for the white man, and not to be thought of if other meat is obtainable. The toughness depends, of course, on the presence of rigor mortis, but long before this has passed off the flesh is only palatable to the black man, who revels in highly-flavoured meat.

#### **The Temporal Gland.**

The hollow above and behind the eye in the temporal region of the elephant is associated in my mind with yet another point of interest, and one of more than usual significance. In it, especially when the skin is dry and dusty, one is generally able to see what appears to be a large grease-spot, but on the clean black skin of the forest elephant it is not so easily noticed. Near the centre of this spot one may find, with a little probing, lying in the upper end of one of the forward-most and nearly vertical creases to be found in front of the ear, a small opening or duct leading into a cavity two or three inches deep, which puzzled me greatly when I first discovered it. On examination it is seen to be of the nature of a gland, the greasy secretion of which has a peculiar faint, rancid-butter-like odour, and doubtless plays a more or less important part in the life history and habits of the animal.

This gland has long been known, it seems, to comparative anatomists, and Owen, referring probably to the Indian elephant, has stated that it enlarges in the rutting season. It certainly is more highly developed in the Asiatic species, and was very large in the mammoth, with long bristles protruding from the orifice of the duct. Its uses are probably the same as those of similar specialised scent-glands occurring in the feet, on the face, etc., of other animals, enabling them to follow and recognise their species, and to communicate the fact of their recent presence in any neighbourhood. Elephants have a habit, in both forest and bush, of rubbing their forehead or the side of their

head against the tree-trunk, rock or bank by which they happen to be standing, and as high up as they can reach. In doing so it is probable that sufficient secretion from the forehead glands is left for detection, and possibly for individual recognition, by the next comer. It is the elephant's way of leaving a card upon his friends.

On several occasions, whilst an elephant that I had shot was being cut up, my men or the local natives, noticing probably that I took an interest in these moist spots on the forehead, have brought me pieces of stick, from two to two and a half inches in length, and about the thickness of a slate pencil, or even of one's little finger, which they had found in one or other, or both, of these temporal glands. They are not masses of hardened secretion, as might be supposed, but are evidently sticks which have penetrated the duct and been broken off in the gland as the animal forced its way through bush or forest.

#### **Cultivation in the Forest.**

I do not remember to have ever seen even a square yard of any sort of cultivation in any of the encampments of the little Ituri forest pygmy people, and yet they are very fond of all the hundred and one delicacies to be found in the gardens of their bigger brothers outside the forest. The pygmies live by hunting, augmenting their supplies by gathering the honey, wild fruits, nuts, fungi, roots, etc., to be found in plenty in the forest, and by trading toasted meat for garden produce which they are unable to grow themselves, either at recognised meeting-places on the forest edge, or by leaving it at night in the plantations and taking in exchange bananas, potatoes, or what they fancy. Not that they are too lazy to cultivate, for they are industrious, energetic little people, but the elephants will not let them. A pack of marauding elephants would rob them of every mouthful they possessed in one night if they attempted to grow anything, and probably destroy their camp in addition. Whether they have lost the art of cultivation altogether during their long existence in the forest it would be difficult to say.

#### **Timber Barricades.**

On the outskirts of the forests in an elephant country the natives are only able to hold their own against the elephants

by growing supplies in excess of their actual needs, by utilising cunning scares, by keeping fires burning, or by sitting up all night shouting and beating tins. Even their utmost and combined endeavours will often not prevent the half of their crops being taken from them. In districts where the villages are actually in the forest the natives are obliged to build great timber barricades round their fields by felling a strip of forest outwards so that the branches of the trees interlock. These barricades are rather astonishing sights, and, if complete, are quite effectual as regards most wild animals. By means of pathways along the tree trunks, often twenty feet from the ground, the natives can pass through them easily enough, but for the white man with a heavy gun, especially when the logs are slippery in the early morning, I know of no more horribly dangerous places.

#### **Elephant Scares.**

The scare most universally in vogue against marauding elephants is strangely like that, consisting of pieces of paper tied along a string, so commonly used by the European gardener for scaring mice and birds from newly-sown peas and beans. Along the edge of his plantation, or where the barricade is lacking, or along the side of an approaching pathway, the native gardener fixes on posts a forest-made rope, four or five feet from the ground, along which, at intervals of a few feet, are tied pieces of white cloth, or white leaves, if he cannot get cloth. The least touch of the rope in the still moonlight shakes all the flags, and, blind though the arch-robber may seem, this is sufficient, even on the darkest nights, to immediately raise his suspicions and cause a sudden retreat. One only need examine the tracks outside a plantation to see how successful this simple contrivance is. The elephants never break through, but go on to the next plantation if they cannot find a way round.

In spite of the utmost the natives are able to do to protect themselves and their crops it frequently happens that a plantation, or perhaps group of native gardens, is so persistently raided by elephants that at last the people find themselves starving and are obliged to give up the unequal fight and go away. Even

before they have gone the whole elephant community seems to know all about it, and herd after herd, from far and near, turns up to take part in the nightly raids, which go on for weeks and even months till nothing but an open area remains trampled flat by many feet. Even the habitations are wrecked and the materials scattered in all directions.

#### **Raided Plantation.**

I remember one afternoon in 1912, travelling in the Ituri district from Avakubi to Mawambi, we came to just such a place, called Abaranga. The natives at our camp the night before had told us there was no food, and warned us not to camp there, but the next camp was far, and my porters were tired and easily persuaded. Abaranga, quite recently, had been a fairly important little place, consisting of many huts and several pretentious square mud buildings belonging to Swahili, Indian or Arab traders, but all were in ruins, scarcely a roof being left. There was also a dilapidated rest-house, which the elephants had played pitch and toss with, throwing the grass thatch and rafters everywhere. All round was general havoc, remnants of potato fields, banana gardens and papai groves, while round the village was a log barricade, and round the plantations other barricades, now breached in places, and old tree-trunks lying about in profusion.

After making camp round the remains of the rest-house I set to work to write up my notes. Towards six o'clock I heard a good deal of shouting amongst my men in the ruined houses, some four or five hundred yards away, and noticed some of them on one of the roofs. My porters were all "mangwanas," men with Arabese blood in their veins, and knowing little of woodcraft and the forest animals. Presently I heard that there was an elephant in their quarters. Sure enough, when I got there, I saw an elephant, with what seemed a good pair of tusks, standing amongst the logs only a hundred yards away, and apparently contemplating the timid ones on the roof, laughing at them it seemed to me, but they insisted that he was waiting for the coming darkness to attack them. In equatorial regions the change from daylight to darkness comes somewhat suddenly at six o'clock. There were only a

few minutes more of daylight. I could get no nearer than about forty yards, and could only see the outline of his back above the logs. I had to shoot then or not at all, so I aimed for his back. A misplaced spine shot usually smashes a spinous process of one of the vertebræ and nothing more. One must aim ten inches or a foot below the outline behind the shoulders to have a chance of reaching the spine. In this instance I was lucky. At the shot there was the sound of a mighty fall. The porters on the roof told me he was down, and we could hear him thrashing and banging about with his fore-feet and trunk in his endeavours to rise. It was then dark and impossible to get near him, so I decided that the best thing to do was to turn my attention to bath and dinner, and wait till the morning.

#### **A Memorable Night.**

That night was a memorable one for all. Few of us got any sleep, and some of the men, I feel sure, spent it on the roof of their quarters. There were elephants all round the camp, seemingly perfectly indifferent to our shouts and camp fires. They had a hearty contempt apparently for the people who had lived there, but they neither attacked the camp nor the men's quarters. Several times I tried to get near them, but it was too pitch-dark and hopeless. They crashed about amongst the timber, blew their noses and gurgled, while the younger ones made unseemly noises, till morning came and they were gone.

#### **His Brothers Cry for Him.**

The morning was a drizzling dull and misty one. As soon as the cook could get me some breakfast—I never start the day without breakfast, even if it needs to be at four o'clock—I went off to see my elephant, and lo!! it was gone. Great doings indeed had taken place in the night, which set me thinking and marvelling. All round the spot where he had fallen was trampled into mud by many feet. His friends had collected round him in force, six or eight of them—there could scarcely have been room for more amongst the fallen timber—and had got him to his feet. In the condition he was he could scarcely have got up by himself. They had shouldered him along foot

by foot, even getting him over one or two of the tree-trunks. Twice he had fallen in spite of their united efforts, and they got him up again, and all this in the pitch-dark and near the porters' quarters. We could read it clearly in the tracks, and in the marks on the timber. One great log had been pushed clean out of the way, apparently by the concerted effort of five or six feet, and by the marks left, not fore-feet, but hind-feet. They got him at last through a breach in the outer barricade, which was fully three hundred yards away, and into the forest, although all the while his hind limbs must have been almost out of action—paralysed. There beneath some big trees, by a small watercourse, they had been obliged to leave him, presumably at daylight. A few minutes' tracking sufficed for us to find him. He heard us coming, and though very wobbly, he was able to shuffle round slowly and face in our direction. Then circumstances were too much for the poor beast, and he gave vent to two long-drawn squeals of agonised fear that must have been heard for miles. At the moment all my attention was centred upon him and his capacity for mischief, and I heard no answering call from the forest, but the men with me indicated a direction, and I could see were listening. I asked what it was, and they said, "His brothers (*wandugu wake*) cry for him."

One sometimes has to face similar situations with buffalo. No hunter who has ever heard the really soul-stirring bellow of a mortally wounded old buffalo, in the depths of the still and silent forest, can forget it. Plainly it is the "Revenge me, oh, my brothers," of the die-hard. It is not fear. I cannot recollect, however, that I ever heard an answering echo.

One shot was sufficient to make an end of the tottering elephant. It was too dark and wet to do any photography; and when axes came I set all the men to work chopping out the tusks, and getting themselves some meat.

#### **The Lendu Maize-fields.**

In the Lendu and Balega upland country, west of Lake Albert, the natives grow large areas of maize. The extent of the Lendu maize-fields between Irumu and Bugoro, the latter a Belgian post on the escarpment heights overlooking Lake



Albert, and the way the tops of the hills, roughly 5000 feet above the sea (3000 above the lake), were cultivated, seemed to me, when I first saw them, in July, when the corn was nearly ready to harvest, quite an astonishing sight. It is open rolling country and thickly populated, and from any of the hill-tops one may count numerous villages scattered about the slopes far and near. The Walendu are very interesting and industrious people, but savage fighters. Owing to their powers of combination and rapid concentration they are rather a thorn in the side of the Belgian administration, which they are powerful enough to defy at times, and occasionally do. Their arrows and spears, especially the former, are some of the most ingeniously barbed and beautifully made that I have seen anywhere in Africa.

The maize-fields are guarded at night by men with long-handled elephant spears, who have fires on the hill slopes, and have each their regular beat. In August 1913 I reached a place in the Lendu country called Kingombe, where the river Masia flows out of a valley in the hills. The maize crop had been harvested and the men had ceased to guard the fields only the day before. To my surprise every field had been systematically quartered over by elephants during the night. Scores of them had apparently appeared, from nowhere it seemed, like an army of gleaners to a corn-field at home, and had tramped up and down looking for any corn cobs that were left, and all the while in the dark. Such is the craving for the seasonable delicacy. I asked the natives why they had not speared one of the horde of gleaners, and they said, "Oh! there were too many." "Besides," they said, "it was the elephants' night." The astonishing thing was how the animals managed to arrive in such numbers exactly on the right night, the one after the last day of the harvest. According to the natives they timed their arrival correctly every year, but no one could tell from which direction they would come.

Amongst the many tracks I found those of a very big old bull, so, having plenty of food for my men, I decided to spend the next day there and follow him up. I set off late in the afternoon with two men carrying my spare rifle, etc., a blanket for myself for the night, and food for the next day. All the

tracks converged towards the Masia valley, and those of the big fellow were soon obliterated. I had hoped that there would be a second night's invasion from the direction of the valley, and with that possibility in mind I selected at nightfall a snug place on a slope a few feet above the main elephant highway, but, although we heard elephants on the move during the night not far off, none came our way. Next morning we again picked up the big fellow's trail, and to make a long story short, followed them for many miles, eventually having to give up the chase. During the day we came on elephants no less than three times, and much trouble we had to get past them. Some got our wind and moved on, probably giving warning to our big tusker, disturbing him very likely during his mid-day siesta, just the time when we hoped to have had a chance of getting up to him.

#### **Roads not Man-made.**

Tropical Africa is a network of pathways, but not all of them man-made. In an elephant country one frequently has occasion to marvel at the ramifications of the elaborate system of roads and pathways, made and kept up by the elephant community. Main highways, three feet or so wide, run for scores, even hundreds, of miles across the country through forest and bush, with lesser ways, branch tracks and short cuts, not simply here, there and everywhere, but converging upon river-crossings or outlying blocks of forest, or continuing as highways direct to other parts of the country. These highways, possibly hundreds of years old, to judge by the way in which rocky banks of rivers and such places are worn down or indented by them, are rammed too hard by the countless number of feet passing along them for anything to grow upon them, and for many miles at a stretch are smooth enough for a bicycle track. Only in the forest, where overhung by trees, do they become poached up and difficult to traverse. In bush country in the dry weather, when the grass is twelve feet high, pushing one's way along them is tedious, hard and nervous work; but when the grass is burnt and the country open they show up white in the prevailing blackness, and must appear almost like man-made paths, I should fancy, to a person in an

aeroplane overhead. Their want of directness, or rather straightness, would, however, serve to indicate their origin, but I can quite imagine that in a large area of uninhabited bush country without landmarks, as in some parts of the Bahr-el-Ghazal in the Sudan, a map or sky photograph of them might be of the utmost service in directing the airmen, or indicating to him his whereabouts.

Following the tracks of elephants along their main roads and paths, in both bush and forest, I have sometimes been filled with wonder at the extraordinary way in which the beasts know every foot of their country. A herd, however scattered, may in some places have a range of a hundred, or even three hundred miles or more, but it is probably to be found at some place within its range-area about the same date each year; while in another region the herds remain in some small area all the year round. The principal factors influencing periodic local migrations would seem to be the wet and dry seasons, length of the grass, ripening of shamba or forest produce, etc. One soon discovers that in moving from one district to another the animals know unhesitatingly where they are, and not only which road to take, but exactly where the short cuts are if necessary, just as well as any motorist travelling from Bristol to Edinburgh with signposts all the way, never hesitating or losing their direction, whether in daylight or darkness. They are truly wonderful beasts, and reading their habits and life history by following their tracks is a never-ceasing source of interest, especially in the forest. And yet when one recollects that an elephant spends his long life roaming about his particular range-area, his accurate knowledge of every foot of it is perhaps not so very wonderful.

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*(To be concluded.)*