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As Well as Tigers

My India. By Jim Corbett. (Oxford. 10s. 6d.)

By H. E. BATES

WHATEVER your India is or has been it is quite certain it is no one else's. Mr. Corbett's India, which is that of simple hill peoples and tiger-valleys and remote lakeland in the country below the splendour of Kamet and Nanda Devi, seems as far removed from the parasols of Mr. E. M. Forster as it does from Jane Austen, and as unlike Kipling as Kipling is unlike Mr. R. K. Narayan or Miss Mayo. "If you are looking for a history of India, or for an account of the rise and fall of the British raj, or for the reason for the cleaving of the sub-continent into two mutually antagonistic parts, and the effect this mutilation will have on the respective sections, and ultimately on Asia, you will not find it in these pages."

On landing in India it is cus-

sionary to meet, about five minutes later, a gin-toughened sahib who declares that he has lived in the country for thirty-five years and still does not know it even now. Mr. Corbett is not of this sort. He knows India not simply through long association in the years when what we now call Imperialism was the accepted, revered, hated and yet, as he points out, often the supremely human thing; he knows it really in the only way that one can know India, whether it is the India of the raj or the India of partition or the India of four hundred million tomorrows: through Love.

The feeling generated by every page of "My India" is that of a simple and profound affection. Mr. Corbett loves the villagers scraping a living off the high narrow terraces of the valleys; he loves the children, the men who are his bearers on tiger pursuit, the women buying their handfuls of salt and dal and ghee at village bazaars; he even loves the tiger, with whose ferocity, grandeur and gradual disappearance his book is so much concerned.

It is the man-eating tiger, in fact, that is as it were the hero-villain of his book; it springs out, terrifying, from almost every page, and there is in the early part of the book an account of a tigress clawing out the belly of a young Indian to within an inch of the backbone, and of his companion stuffing back the living entrails and of a doctor finally sewing up the whole thing with complete satisfaction to all, that simply reeks with barbaric terror and yet is, in the Indian way, quite humorous, too.

Even so, I feel that it is the people—what he calls the "simple, honest, brave, loyal, hard-working souls"—and not the tigers, who are the real essence of his book. There is one beautiful episode of pre-red-tape justice, an account of a man taking for himself a new wife with an assessed second-hand value of seventy-five rupees, and having only fifty-two rupees with which to pay for her in court; then, when the extra twenty-three rupees have been collected from friends, the old wife turns up and says, weeping, "What now of me? I am homeless now. I have nowhere to go." To this the new wife says, "Don't cry. Don't say you are homeless. Come and live with us."

The story has in it some of the essential truths of the Prodigal Son. Somewhere in it is one of the keys to India—why, in spite of everything about it that is repugnant and horrific, one loves it and cannot forget it; and why, incidentally, Mr. Corbett's account of it is so endearing and so good.

situation for which they were no longer suited. Northcliffe is undoubtedly the big figure of this volume. He saved "The Times's" life, and the chapter ("Price One Penny") which describes how he did it is for a journalist of absorbing interest. All Northcliffe's qualities are there—his brutal dynamism, his baffling reserves, his tyrannical tricks, his gambling, and in the final result the excellence of his judgment and execution. But if he saved the paper then, he later well-nigh destroyed it. Similarly with the nation at war; his early agitations for conscription and for shells were helpful; but later he turned to mere puckishness and "rocking the boat." In his personal vendettas against Haldane and later against Milner he touched odious depths.

But Northcliffe is only one of many great figures who here cross the pages. Lloyd George is another on whom new lights are thrown. How many know (though Dr. Thomas Jones mentioned it in his "Life") that after Northcliffe's death there was a scheme (backed by money) to enthrone him at "The Times" as editor and managing director? But the whole involved story of the succession to Northcliffe is full of drama and admirably told here.

Something needs adding about the book's Appendices. The one called "Sources"—more than a hundred pages of very small type—is almost a book in itself. It is far more than a bibliography, and packed with interest from end to end. With it is a full account of "The Times's" part in the Abdication, and a very honourable *amende* unsaying a number of things said in Vol. III about Parnell.