

## The Lordly Elephant

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Ages ago, in prehistoric times, there were all sorts of elephants wandering over tracts where no one would now dream of looking for an elephant—in the bitter sub-arctic regions, for instance. We still find the age-hardened bones of these beasts buried in the earth and, where the freezing cold has preserved them, their flesh and skin as well. Perhaps you have heard of two of these old time elephants, the mammoth and the mastodon. Today there are, for all practical purposes, only two kinds of elephants in the world, the African and the Asiatic (or Indian).

These two are as different as lions are from tigers or wolves from jackals, that is, they belong to separate genera altogether. The African elephant is taller and less massively built, and differs from its Asiatic cousin in that it has a sloping forehead, two 'fingers' at the end of the trunk instead of one, three nails on each hind foot instead of four, and much larger ears—moreover, cow elephants also carry tusks, while in the Asiatic species cows rarely have tusks. There

are other variations also, but I thought a picture, though it may not show the details, would bring out the easily-seen difference in looks between the two kinds, and so took the photographs shown here of an African and an Indian elephant. Note that the African elephant in my photograph, a big bull in somewhat poor condition, has only one tusk (the other having been broken off short accidentally) and that the Indian, a very fine adult

cow, has a short tusk! In spite of all this, I am sure the over-all difference in build and looks between the two kinds of elephants will be seen at a glance.

You will note that I speak of the Asiatic or Indian elephant; both names are used for the same animal. It is

true that this elephant is found in other Asiatic countries besides ours, in Burma, Siam, and Ceylon, for example. Still, it is in our country that the art of catching and taming elephants

has probably been practised longest, it is here that the greatest number of elephants are to be found, and from here that most of the elephants to foreign circuses and zoos are shipped. I do not think it is idle or wrong to speak of this particular elephant as the Indian Elephant.

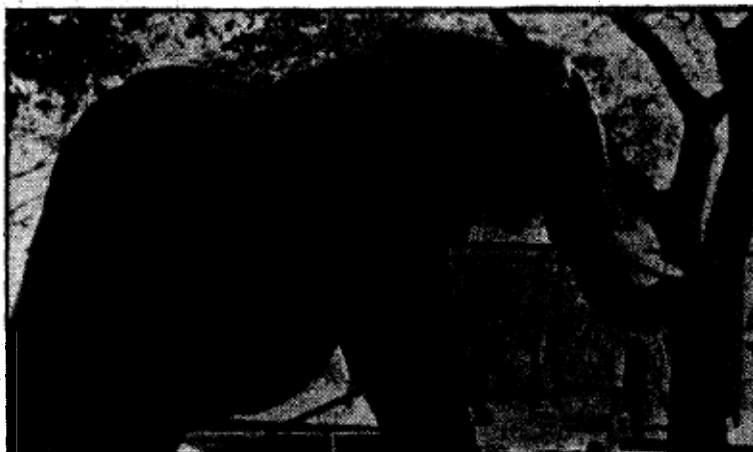
Incidentally, in Ceylon the native wild bulls are tuskless—such tuskless male elephants are called 'makhnas', and are known occasionally in India as well. There are no white elephants, but some, especially in Burma and Siam, are very light in colour and so termed 'white'.

There are many things about our elephant you may want to know, how long it lives, if it really never forgets, and so on. I shall answer a few of these questions here. The elephant is probably as long-lived as we are, and though

there does not appear to be any scientific record of a hundred-year old elephant, I see no reason why elephants should not occasionally reach that age. The baby elephant is nearly 3-foot high and 200 lbs heavy at birth and grows slowly to its full size, taking some 25 years to attain maturity. Such a long period of infancy and adolescence is itself excellent evidence of the elephant being a very long-lived beast.

The elephant does forget at times, no doubt, but having a long span of life, and being quite intelligent as animals go, it learns a lot by experience and has an excellent memory. Every mahout whom I have con-

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sulted has told me that his charge had a good memory and was quite capable of bearing anyone who ill-treated it a grudge—and who knows the elephant better than its *mahout*!

Elephants were tamed by men and used in our country thousands of years ago—we have records, nearly two thousand years old, to show that this was an established practice in those days. Sometimes elephants breed in captivity, but surely it is more convenient to catch them when nearly grown and then to train them. It is part of our culture to keep even domestic animals like cattle and poultry in as natural surroundings and conditions as possible, to let them find their food in jungles and to breed in freedom. Westerners, who practice very different methods of breeding stock, have often criticised our methods of bringing up animals, without understanding the merits of those methods. The tusker heading a procession or shifting timber is five tons of proof of the good sense of our native animal culture.