

## BOOK REVIEWS (Cont'd.)



STRAND BAG CO. LTD. — CHRISTCHURCH — FEBRUARY, 1949

5th Indian Division, with which he remained from August, 1942, till October, 1945. For most of his three and a-half years' service he was a signal officer with the 9th Indian Brigade, in which capacity he fought through the Burma campaign from Arakan onwards. *Report My Signals* is for the most part a personal memoir of this campaign. As an intellectual cast by the exigencies of war among hearty people who disliked classical music and whose conversation had certain narrow limits, Mr. Brett-James occasionally found the society of his peers uncongenial, but his interest in human beings was always insatiable. The stress of his narrative is upon human behaviour rather than historical event: much of his characterisation is both vivid and profound, but pages are devoted to short biographical sketches of men whose part in the story is negligible, as a consequence of which the reader's memory is burdened with a perfect glossary of names that seldom recur.

The author displays throughout a sympathetic understanding of the Indians, whom he liked—especially the Madrasis, a race not usually held in high regard for their fighting qualities by British officers. Their English was a perpetual source of amusement to him, and one or two delightful passages are quoted. For instance—"Since seven seven months over I am in possession of a 'DOG' called as 'Blacky,' but during the further period also I am in great anxious to continue my life with the above mentioned as in highest sympathy. So that I am requesting your kind honour to grant me a 'LICENCE' to above stated for the prevention of the external troubles. For which act of kindness I shall be ever grateful to you by the blessing of Gracious."

Mr. Brett-James's own prose is not altogether devoid of singularities. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* accompanied his travels, and I suspect him of trying to emulate Lawrence's elaborate style with unfortunate results. Nouns seldom go unqualified and of the legion of adjectives some appear to have been chosen with an eye to euphony rather than meaning. The Nigerians brought fear upon the enemy "by the ferocity of their massive aggression." The author and his men slept with their boots on so that they might be "ready for all darkened emergencies." Much of the writing is over-spiced and affected: "When men slept, the enemy sent through the bluish-black murk a rare assault of shells," and (in a different context) "this weighty steel flail was unleashed against the yellow progress," are examples. But Mr. Brett-James, one gathers, is still a very young man, and extravagance in all its forms is youth's prerogative. Moreover his chapters describing a trip beyond Darjeeling in the Himalayas are sufficiently delightful to compensate for many shortcomings.

—R. M. Burdon

### MAN AGAINST LEOPARD

THE MAN-EATING LEOPARD OF RUDRAPRAYAG. By Jim Corbett. Oxford University Press, (through Geoffrey Cumberlege. (English price, 8/6).

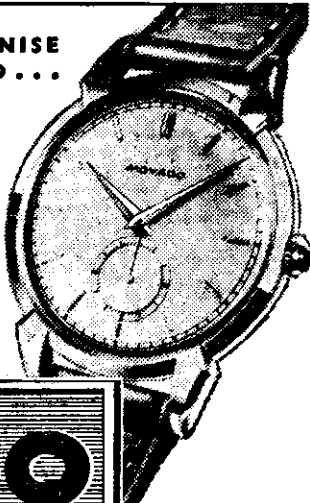
THIS is not the best book for its kind ever written, or the second best; but I can think of only two better books, and one was written by the same author.

It is the incredible story of a leopard which terrorised an area of 500 square miles in the Indian hills for eight years, killed 125 people, and took Jim Corbett two years to track down and destroy. Most readers will be as surprised as I was to discover that a leopard can not merely kill a man in a second or two but literally carry him off. This leopard, "an outsized male but long past his prime," carried one of his victims a distance of four miles, "for two miles up the steep slope of a heavily wooded hill, then down the other side for another two miles through dense scrub jungle." When humans were too hard to get he would of course kill goats and cows, and although he could not carry a cow off after he had killed it, he would drag it an astonishing distance if the mood took him and the ground was favourable. And when the author says that he terrorised all the villages in this big area he means nothing less than that. "No curfew order was ever more strictly enforced or more implicitly obeyed than the curfew imposed by the Man-eating Leopard of Rudraprayag." Of the 50,000 regular inhabitants of his territory, and the 60,000 pilgrims who annually passed through it, not one would open a door at night within miles of the latest kill; not one would travel at night without lanterns and an escort and not one, if the killer had broken in and secured a victim, would follow him out again and try to give assistance. So it went on for eight years; and when the author arrived to try to end the terror—with his rifle, with poison, with a gin-trap, and with powerful netting for shutting him into caves—the battle of wits went on for two years without ever bringing the killing to an end for more than a few weeks at a time. The all-out effort that succeeded (quite simply) on Corbett's final night lasted for 10 weeks, though "leopards have tender pads and keep to footpaths and game tracks; are not hard to locate, since every bird and animal in the jungle assists the hunter; and are easy to stalk because, though they are blessed with keen sight and hearing, they are handicapped by having no keen sense of smell." And by that time the hunter was so near to complete exhaustion that he was about to give up and confess himself beaten.

No one who once gets into the book will lay it down before the last shot is fired, and when that point comes he will discover that he has not only been hunting a man-eater but learning a hundred things he did not know before about the life of the jungle and the habits, traditions, and superstitions of India's hill villagers.

—O.D.

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### Longer To Live

[I]N 1885 one baby in seven died during the first year of life; now the figure is one in 25 and we think that too high. In 1885 a young man of 20 would expect to live, on the average, 40 years; now his expectation of life is nearly 50 years, and it's not merely that he can look forward to a longer existence on earth—what matters much more is that he'll have a much more active life."—Sir Henry Tizard, K.C.B., F.R.S., speaking in a BBC scientific programme.

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