

Source A

George Orwell was a young British writer who started work in 1922 as a policeman in Burma. At that time, Burma was part of the British Empire. The extract is from his essay Shooting an Elephant, which he wrote in 1936.

Early one morning, the sub-inspector at another police station the other end of town rang me up on the phone and said that an elephant was ravaging the bazaar. Would I please come and do something about it? I did not know what I could do, but I wanted to see what was happening and I started out. I took my rifle, much too small to kill an elephant, but I thought the noise might be useful.

It was not of course a wild elephant, but a tame one. It had been chained up, but on the previous night it had broken its chain and escaped. In the morning the elephant had suddenly reappeared in the town. It had already destroyed somebody's bamboo hut, killed a cow and raided some fruit-stalls and devoured the stock. Some Burmese men arrived and told us that the elephant was in the paddy fields below, only a few hundred yards away. I sent an orderly to borrow an elephant rifle. The orderly came back in a few minutes with a rifle and five cartridges.

As I started forward practically the whole population of the area flocked out of their houses and followed me. They had seen the rifle and were all shouting excitedly that I was going to shoot the elephant. It made me vaguely uneasy. I had no intention of shooting the elephant. I marched down the hill, looking and feeling a fool, with the rifle over my shoulder and an ever-growing army of people jostling at my heels.

At the bottom, the elephant was standing eighty yards from the road. He took not the slightest notice of the crowd's approach. He was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and stuffing them into his mouth.

As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him. It is a serious matter to shoot a working elephant – it is comparable to destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery. And at that distance, peacefully eating, the elephant looked no more dangerous than a cow. I decided that I would watch him for a while to make sure he did not turn savage again, and then go home.

But at that moment I glanced around at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. I looked at the sea of faces above the garish clothes – faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they would watch a conjurer about to perform a trick. And suddenly I realised that I should have to shoot the elephant

after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it. Here was I, the white man with his gun, seemingly the leading actor of the piece, but in reality I was only a puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those faces behind. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing – no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me.

But I did not want to shoot the elephant. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him. (Somehow it always seems worse to kill a large animal.)

It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to the elephant and test his behaviour. If he charged I could shoot, if he took no notice of me it would be safe to leave him. But I also knew I was going to do no such thing. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a toad under a steam-roller. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmese people would see me pursued, caught and trampled on. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do. There was only one alternative.

Source B

The extract below is from the book *Wild Animals in Captivity*, published in 1898 by Abraham Bartlett, Head Keeper at the Zoological Society Gardens (now London Zoo).

The first elephant that ever came under my charge was the celebrated Jumbo. The African elephant was received at the Zoological Gardens in exchange for other animals on June 26, 1863.

At that date Jumbo was about 4 ft high and he was in filthy and miserable condition. I handed him over to keeper Matthew Scott. The first thing we did was to remove the filth and dirt from his skin. This was a task requiring a great deal of labour and patience. The poor beast's feet had grown out of shape, but by scraping and rasping, together with a supply of good food, his condition rapidly improved.

However, he soon began to play some very lively tricks, so much so that we found it necessary to put a stop to his games, and this we did in a very speedy and effectual manner. Scott and myself, holding him by each ear, gave him a good thrashing. He quickly recognised that he was mastered by lying down and uttering a cry of submission.

We coaxed him and fed him with a few tempting treats, and after this time he appeared to recognise that we were his best friends, and he continued on the best of terms with both of us until the year before he was sold. He was at that time about twenty-one years old and had

gained the enormous size of 11 ft in height. All male elephants at this age become troublesome and dangerous. Jumbo was no exception to this rule.

He began to destroy the doors and other parts of his house, driving his tusks through the iron plates, splintering the timbers in all directions. When in this condition, and in his home, none of the other keepers except Scott dare go near him; but, strange to say, he was perfectly quiet as soon as he was allowed to be free in the Gardens.

I was perfectly aware that this restless and frantic condition could be calmed by reducing the quantity of his food, fastening his limbs by chains, and an occasional flogging; but this treatment would have called forth a multitude of protests from kind-hearted and sensitive people, and would have led to those keepers concerned appearing before the magistrates at the police court charged with cruelty. It is only those who have had experience in the management of an elephant who are aware that, unless the person in charge of him is determined to be master and overpower him, that person will lose all control over him and will be likely to fall victim to his enormous strength.

But to return to Jumbo's early days, he was very soon strong enough to carry children on his back and therefore a new saddle was made for him. At that time, all the cash handed to the keepers of the elephants by the people who rode on them was the keepers' to keep. How much they received from the visitors will probably never be known, but, as Jumbo became the great favourite, Scott came in for the lion's share.

Jumbo had been for nearly sixteen years quiet, gentle and obedient, and had daily carried hundreds of visitors about the gardens. Finding that, at the end of that period, he was likely to do some fatal mischief, I made an application to the council to be supplied with a powerful enough rifle in the event of finding it necessary to kill him.

About this time I received a letter from Mr Barnum* asking if the Zoological Society would sell the big African elephant and at what price. I wrote immediately to Mr Barnum telling him that he could have Jumbo for £2000.

Glossary

*Mr Barnum – a world famous American showman and circus promoter