CHAPTER VII

THROUGH TROPICAL SIKKIM

April 7 dawned mistily, but as the sun got up, the dense blanket of white, wet fog enwrapping Darjeeling quickly dissolved. Rifts were torn in the curtain disclosing Kangchenjunga, silvered, blue-shadowed, and remote. It was a morning full of a calm promise.

There were many friends and strangers to see us off, including an American lady, who seemed particularly anxious for our welfare, and asked us whether we did not expect to find it " turrible slippery " on Kangchenjunga.

Four Austin Seven motor cars had been engaged for the first stage of our journey to Singla. There we were to be met by ponies and continue on them to Chakung. From Darjeeling to Singla a rough track descends tortuously 6,000 feet, in a distance as the crow flies of about five miles. Frequently the gradient is as much as 1 : 3 or 1 : 4, and hairpin bends are such as to necessitate reversing, with the wheels but a few inches from the unprotected edge of precipitous drops.

" Baby " cars have done much to improve the social amenities of the Darjeeling district. A few years ago the tea planters, whose estates are scattered about the hill-sides, were forced to use ponies or mules for transport. As a result, their existence was frequently a lonely one, for many of the plantations are twenty or thirty miles from Darjeeling. Recently, however, one of the planters bought

a " baby " car as an experiment. He found to his surprise and delight that it was capable of negotiating the narrow zig-zagging tracks, and terrific hills of the district. Now practically every tea planter owns one, and the social life of the district has been vastly improved thereby.

The climate of Darjeeling is temperate, and comparable

By courtesy of *The Times*

to that of England, the temperature seldom rising above 70°. That of Singla in the Rangit Valley is definitely tropical. At first we passed through woods and glades of oaks, firs, and beeches reminiscent of the hillsides of Shropshire. Then came more open slopes covered in dark green terraces of tea, and clumps of tall bamboos.

Kurz, Wood Johnson, and myself were in the first car of the little procession. We had not gone more than a mile or

so from Darjeeling when we overtook a number of our porters scattered along the road, who had obviously only left Darjeeling that morning instead of the previous day. In reply to our query as to why they had not started, several of them said they were not feeling well. The cause of this was not far to seek. The advance pay intended for the upkeep of their wives and children in their absence had been spent in one last " beano " the previous night at Darjeeling. It was essential to get these men to Chakung the same day, and to Wood Johnson, as transport officer of our party, fell the unwelcome task of staying behind to see that they *did* get there.

As we descended, we were vouchsafed occasional glimpses of the snows. Below was the floor of the Rangit Valley, 2,000 feet above sea level, whilst forty-five miles away remote in heaven rose the summit of Kangchenjunga, 28,156 feet, a vertical height difference of over 26,000 feet !

Once we were stopped by a tea planter who cheerily wished us good luck, and insisted on taking a photograph. It became hotter and hotter. Several of us were wearing Terai hats, double wide-awakes with broad brims. These are worn mostly by tea planters, and afford excellent protection from the sun. The pith solar *topi* soon goes to pieces in the rains, but the Terai stands up to any amount of hard wear.

A peculiarity of tea is that given the right soil, and the requisite amount of rainfall, it seems to grow satisfactorily in any climate, varying from the temperate to the tropical. The highest Darjeeling tea garden is over 6,000 feet above sea level, and the lowest descends to the bottom

of the Rangit Valley. We passed garden after garden, all picturesque and forming charming deep green foregrounds to the distant procession of woolly white clouds masking the distant wall of the Himalayas.

At Singla we were hospitably greeted by the planters of one of these lower plantations, and spent a pleasant hour sipping cool drinks in a shady bungalow.

Apparently on the principle that walking was good for us, only four ponies had been ordered, and we had to take turns in riding them. No doubt, the intention was a good one, but in the enervating heat of the Rangit Valley, such mortification of the flesh seemed both unpleasant and unnecessary.

At Singla Bazar a dismal tale awaited us. According to Narsang, one of our sirdars, a large number of coolies had not yet arrived, and they could not possibly get to Chakung that day. We would have to wait a day for them to catch up. There was much that was unintelligible, and little that was useful in his declarations, poured out as they were in weird and wonderful English learnt during service with a Gurkha regiment in France. And what had happened to the cook? Why was he not there waiting for us with lunch prepared? "The cook? He is gone on somewhere," and Narsang waved a hand with characteristic native vagueness.

In my rucksack was a large lump of dry gingerbread. This was broken up and handed round. Suddenly, Wood Johnson arrived. "Not get to Chakung?" Nonsense! Of course, the porters would, all of them. Within five minutes the peaceful serenity of Singla Bazar was replaced by a feverish activity. The lazier of the porters who

had settled down for the day and the night at the village, found themselves, much to their surprise, on the road to Chakung. Our sheet anchor, Lobsang, was behind, bringing on the stragglers. The majority of the good porters, the Sherpas and Bhutias, had left the previous day, and were well *en route* to Chakung, it was only the Nepali "bazar wallahs" who were exhibiting such early slackness.

Singla Bazar is a picturesque little place. Its primitive thatched houses and shops rest in the shadow of spreading trees, but, like most native villages, the spaces between the houses were plentifully bestrewn with garbage. Therefore, there were smells, and there were flies. We were glad to leave it and jog leisurely along the valley.

Presently we came to a suspension bridge across the Ramman River, a tributary of the Rangit River. The former forms the frontier of Bengal and Sikkim, and there was a native frontier post at one end of the suspension bridge, with a corporal in charge. To him we showed the passes that had been given us in Darjeeling. Unfortunately, Dr. Richter and Eberl had left their passes in their rucksacks, which had been sent on ahead, whilst Wood Johnson, whom we had left at Singla Bazar, had forgotten his altogether. The former two had to wait until their rucksacks were returned, but Wood Johnson, we knew, would get across without a pass whether he was given permission or not. It transpired later that when the pass had been demanded of him, he had looked the corporal up and down until that unfortunate man had apologised for daring to insult the sahib by asking for the pass, and had humbly escorted Wood Johnson across the frontier.

The suspension bridge had tied to it numbers of little prayer flags, or perhaps more literally, prayer rags. All bridges in this part of the world are decorated thus in order to propitiate the river gods. It is usual, also, to throw a coin or two into the river when crossing a bridge to help, presumably, towards the upkeep of the river gods.

From the suspension bridge the path wound steeply uphill through dense jungle. The afternoon was close and boilingly hot, and a heavy slumberous silence was broken only by the whirring of insects. We turned a corner; a small spring of pure water was bubbling from a bank. By the side of the path in an orange garden a meal had been laid out on the grass, presided over by the grinning face of Tencheddar. Famished, we greeted it with a pæon of praise and thanksgiving, forgetting in the ecstasy of the moment to revile Tencheddar for his idiocy in having come this absurd distance before stopping to prepare a meal.

The orange garden is the property of the Maharajah of Sikkim. There are many such scattered about this fertile countryside, for orange-growing is the most important industry in Sikkim, and the revenue brought in from these scattered estates is surprisingly large.

With appeased appetites we lay back at last contentedly. Already we felt ourselves to be far from civilisation. Dotted about the hillside below were primitive little houses, above rude terraces of rice, irrigated by roughly cut channels along which flowed water from the mountain streams and springs. The day was drawing to a close, and between the blue cloud shadows moving across the broad bosomed hills, the forests were daffodil gold in the declining

sun. Somehow I was reminded of an evening I once spent on Bowfell, in the English Lake District, one of those perfect evenings, still and peaceful, with soft colourful distances. Seated on a grey boulder I had watched just such a peaceful sunset and seen the hills imperceptibly annexed by the Kingdom of Night. But here everything was greater. In the Lake District, you may run down a hill into a valley and up another hill in an hour or so. In the foot-hills of the Himalayas, it is a day's hard work. The country over which we were looking was vaster than any of us had imagined. It produced in us almost a feeling of impotence. We were not ants, or flies, but mere microcosms toiling over the age-worn wrinkles of the earth.

Night was falling rapidly as we continued on our way. Now and again we passed porters. In the heat, they were making heavy weather of it, but a few days' marching would soon sweat out the fatty accumulations of soft living, and knit together muscles and sinew in preparation for the hard work ahead.

Presently the path rounded a shoulder and passed into the Ratho Valley, contouring along its southern side. The others were ahead, and I found myself alone. Night trod hard on the heels of day. Soon it was dark. Fireflies flitted out from the forest on either hand, like minute lamps in the hands of hurrying elves. Rain began to fall, each heavy drop drumming on the still leaves of the silent forest. The path divided, but my pony unhesitatingly took the left branch. A few minutes later I arrived at the dak-bungalow, just in time to escape a tropical deluge.

The dak-bungalows of Sikkim are theoretically run by the Government of that State, but actually it is the British

Government that is primarily responsible for their upkeep. Each bungalow is in charge of a native caretaker. All those at which we stayed were clean and comfortable. Their situation is admirable, and the sites of many of them were obviously chosen by someone with an eye for scenic beauty. The bungalow at Chakung stands on a wooded ridge separating the Ramman and Ratho Valleys close to the ruins of an ancient shrine, which was most likely formerly employed for the worship of some local deity.

The supper that evening was a merry one. Wood Johnson arrived in the middle of it, and later Eberl and Dr. Richter. Just as we were thinking of turning in, the corporal of the police put in a belated appearance. Recovering from his surprise at the suspension bridge, he had followed Wood Johnson with a tenacity worthy of the "Flying Squad." As he had no wish to get the man into trouble, Wood Johnson gave him a note to take to the Commissioner at Darjeeling. With this in his pocket, plus substantial *baksheesh*, the corporal returned to his post a happy man.

Heavy rain fell all night, and was succeeded by a dull grey morning and low sluggish mists. Already some of the Nepali porters had come to the conclusion that loafing in Darjeeling was preferable to work, and it was only with difficulty that we were able to get some of the more miserable specimens to start at all.

Our next stage was to Rinchenpung. From Chakung the route descended into the Ratho Valley, and crossing a stream climbed over a low ridge bounding the northern side of the valley. The path was bog-like in places, and the

morning was as depressingly dismal and damp as an August day in the Highlands.

We had not gone far before we saw our first leech. Soon the path was swarming with them. Apparently they had their own telegraph system, and leeches all along the route had been warned of our coming. These pests are the most unpleasant feature of journeying through the tropical valleys of Sikkim. Ungorged they are about the thickness of a match, and a little shorter. Gorged, they attain the dimensions of a large slug. They are blind, and attack by scent alone, but their nasal acuteness more than compensates for their blindness. Stop for but a few moments, and they approach from all directions.

Their method of progress is peculiar and comical. Raising their heads in the air, they bend forward and attach themselves, apparently by the mouth, to the ground in front. The tail is then brought up against the head with the body arched between and the head makes another forward lunge. Had it not been annoying, it would have been amusing to see these eager little blood-suckers standing with their heads upright, like tiny serpents, waiting to affix themselves to their prey.

The powers of insinuation and penetration of a leech are great. They can insinuate themselves into an eyehole of a boot with the greatest of ease, whilst their drill-like head is capable of boring through at least one layer of a puttee. Personally, I found that the Kashmiri puttees given to me by General Bruce afforded excellent protection, and I was not once bitten on either foot. But the persevering little devils are not easily baulked of their prey. I was just beginning to congratulate myself on my immunity, when

I discovered two large ones firmly attached to my scalp ! It is a mistake to pick a leech off once it has become attached to the skin, as its head will be left in the wound, and this may lead to blood poisoning, or at least a nasty festering sore. The usual way of forcing them to release their hold is by dipping a bag of salt in water, and letting the brine drip on to the leech, which soon drops off. Another excellent method is to apply a burning cigarette.

If, by virtue of boots and puttees, we were comparatively immune, it was a different matter for the porters and ponies. The majority of the porters preferred walking in their bare feet, and the leeches made the most of them. The ponies' legs streamed with blood, and it was necessary to keep a sharp look-out to see that the leeches did not crawl into their nostrils and ears. In the absence of human beings and beasts, how do leeches manage to exist ?

From the ridge north of the Ratho Valley, we descended into the Rishi Valley. Both these valleys are side valleys of the main Rangit Valley, and are comparatively small and glen-like. A primitive little bridge of logs spans the Rishi River, and large boulders near by afforded a luncheon site free from leeches, for a leech hates a dry surface, and only lives in swampy ground, or comes out after rain.

It was a delightful spot, almost like a valley in South Devon. The water of the torrent was sweet and clear, and despite a formal protest on the part of Dr. Richter, we did not hesitate to drink it. It is only from these smaller streams that pass through villages that there is danger of typhoid or dysentery.

If there had been any doubts as to how Frau Dyhrenfurth would stand the strain of these marches through

Sikkim, they were soon set at rest, for the " Memsahib," as she was soon respectfully and affectionately known by all the members of the expedition, not only insisted on taking a man's share of the work, but was usually among the first to finish the day's march.

From the Rishi Valley, the path rose steeply to the ridge on which stands the Rinchenpung dak-bungalow. This is one of the prettiest bungalows in Sikkim, and from its well kept lawn and creeper-clad veranda, there is an enchanting view up the Rangit Valley towards the snows. Once again, the day ended in rainstorms of monsoonish intensity.

There were two other visitors at the bungalow. They told us that they were on a world tour, and had been " taking the Himalayas " as part of their Indian itinerary. The weather, they said, had been continuously bad, and they were now returning to Darjeeling without having had one satisfactory view of Kangchenjunga.

Wood Johnson and I preferred the fresh air of the veranda to the crowded little rooms of the bungalow. I woke at dawn next morning. The rain had ceased. From the still woodlands came the song of the coppersmith bird, a musical, yet monotonous note, like someone beating a sheet of copper with a metal hammer. As I raised myself in my sleeping bag, I saw between a gap in the nearer mists the crest of a great cloud high up in the sky aglow with the first pale light of day. But was it a cloud ? It was too steadfast, too immovable. I rubbed the dimming sleepiness from my eyes. It was no cloud, but a snowy mountain. Even as I watched, the dawn came up fiercely, ruddily, a titanic conflagration sweeping the upper regions of the sky. The nearer mists dissolved ; other peaks became

visible, their summits glowing like the white tents of a besieging army reflecting the glare from some burning city.

I roused our tourist friends. Now, at last, they had seen the snows. I wonder whether they still remember that glimpse of them?

The morning was one of sparkle and freshness as we set out for Pemayangtse. Improving weather raised the spirits of the porters, and for once in their lives even the Nepalis seemed cheerful and willing.

I left well in advance of the party to try to take some photographs before the usual morning clouds concealed the peaks. I did not go unrewarded. For a little distance the path descended through woods, but in one place a landslip had swept out a clearance. Framed between the trees, and thirty miles away, I saw Kabru and Kangchenjunga. It was a view so overwhelming in its magnificence as would cause the most ardent photographer to despair of reproducing one tithe of its grandeur. The morning clouds gathering about the crests of intervening hills, or, rising from the valleys, served but to increase the visual impression of height and depth. How is a photographer to transfer such an impression to a film? Only by comparison can he hope to convey to the unsophisticated any suggestion of the real scale, and what method of comparison is there? The forests covering the lower hills are but a dark green cloak, over which the eye passes at a casual glance. The river in the valley beneath was a mere thread. The greatest works of man, his towns, his cathedrals, and his factories, would be lost in such a landscape. Place St. Paul's on the crest of one of the intervening hills; to the

KABRU AND KANGCHENJUNGA FROM RINCHENPUNG

eye it would appear as a mere dot ; on a photographic film it would be invisible. Only physically can one learn to appreciate the scale of the Himalayan foot-hills, and that by toiling over them.

Mentally, a man is lost in this country. Like an astronomer he can estimate distance only in figures. His brain is too small, too tied to the little houses, towns, villages, and hedgerows among which he is accustomed to live, to grasp the real magnitude of these immense landscapes.

As I came out of the forest on to the open hillside, the snows had all but vanished behind growing masses of cumuli. Only the summit of the nearest snow peak, Narsingh, was visible, and I had barely time to take a photograph before it, too, vanished.

The path passed along a ridge, decorated by a row of chortens (prayer shrines), at which it is customary to pray and give thanks to the gods, and then plunged in steep zig-zags down a precipitous hillside.

At the junction of the Kalet and Rangit Valleys we found ourselves once more in tropical heat. The Rangit Valley here becomes gorge-like, yet so fertile is the soil, trees and other vegetation somehow manage to eke out a precarious existence on ledges and crannies of precipitous cliffs and crags.

Some women from a neighbouring hamlet were washing clothes in the river. Their method was to dip the clothes in the water, then, holding them up, beat them violently with a piece of flat wood. This must be the method employed by my local laundry when washing my dress shirts.

Thanks to the efficiency of Mr. Kydd, we were overtaken here by a runner, and spent a pleasant half-hour in the

shade reading letters from home, and the latest murder sensations and French railway accidents in newspapers.

Some members of the party had seen a large snake, the markings of which they described to Wood Johnson. He said it was probably a king cobra. If so, they were lucky not to be attacked, for the king cobra is one of the few snakes that attack human beings without provocation. It is said that it can overtake a running man.

We lunched near a small hamlet, at which Duvanel and his ciné camera created considerable excitement, and afterwards trudged up to Pemayangtse. It was scorchingly hot, but the gradually increasing coolness as we gained height was well worth the effort.

The dak-bungalow at Pemayangtse is admirably situated on a grassy sparsely wooded ridge, and commands superb views to the north and south. We had barely arrived when we were greeted by an imposing little procession of Lamas from the neighbouring monastery. They were barefooted, and clad in long gowns of a dingy red colour, on top of which was the " patched robe," the emblem of poverty. From the girdle encircling their waist were suspended various sacred instruments and relics, such as pencil holders, knives, and purses. Their heads were close cropped like black flue brushes, but the tropical sun seemed to have little effect on them. Most of them were young, with somewhat vacuous faces, dull, unintelligent eyes, and loose lipped smiles. There was, however, one old monk of dignified carriage, who was most likely the Proctor of the monastery, for his face bore the stamp of character and intelligence. Standing before the bungalow, they commenced a low, monotonous intoning, possibly praying for

THE HEAD LAMA OF PEMAYANGTSE MONASTERY CHATS WITH WOOD JOHNSON

our souls, while the old man came forward and burst forth into a torrent of Nepali and Thibetan. After considerable difficulty, we were at last able to get his meaning. Yes, they were glad to greet us, but we had only come in the nick of time. Had we a Doctor Sahib? Then would he cure them of this terrible thing that was afflicting the monastery? "What was the terrible thing?" we enquired. His answer was simple and expressive, "Worms!" And as for himself, for his sins, he was possessed of a terrible ear-ache.

A little later, a number of Holy Men might have been seen imbibing large quantities of castor oil and santonin with every appearance of gusto and enjoyment, whilst the old monk lay on the ground in order to have oil poured into his bad ear. Gratitude in the form of eggs and skinny chickens arrived later, and it was arranged that they should give us a devil dance the following morning.

Devil dances are a religious observation. They are usually given in honour or propitiation of some deity. In this particular instance, the deity was the God of Kangchenjunga.

That evening we made merry with the gramophone. This was always a never ending source of amusement to the porters. Scarcely had the first record been put on, when the doorway of the dining room was filled with dirty faces grinning appreciatively. The classical masters were little appreciated, but Messrs. Layton and Johnstone, and the bass voiced vocalist in "Give Yourself a Pat on the Back," never failed to produce roars of merriment.

Before turning in, we sat on the veranda, arguing as to whether something white far up among the stars, lit by

the rising moon, was a mountain top or a cloud. Most argued cloud, but when hours later I woke in the middle of the night, and looked out, the " cloud " was still there, watched over by trembling stars.

We rose early next morning, and passed up the roughly paved road leading to the monastery. The approach to the monastery was lined with high poles decorated with prayer flags, consisting of long, multi-coloured strips, inscribed with prayers, nailed longitudinally to the poles. These prayer flags are common all over Thibet, Sikkim, and Nepal, and are supposed to have been originated by Asoka, the Constantine of Buddhism, who ordered pillars to be erected, inscribed with prayers and extracts from Buddhistic laws. Planted in the ground more than twenty centuries ago (B.C. 253–251) there are six set up by him in India still standing. Sometimes prayer flags display the dragon-headed horse, one of the great mythical animals of China.

The Pemayangtse Monastery stands on a wooded ridge about 7,000 feet above sea level. So fierce are the storms that sweep across the Himalayas, that its wooden roof was once carried away. It is now secured by iron wires to the ground. It is a tall building of stone and wood, gaudily painted in red and yellow, the two holy colours of Thibet.

The Lamas were waiting to receive us grouped round the Head Lama, a charming old gentleman who greeted us with a warm smile of welcome. While not engaged in conversing with Wood Johnson, our transport officer, who spoke Nepali, he was ceaselessly engaged in telling his rosary of yellow beads, keeping up a low, monotonous

mumble at the same time, which is appropriately called "purring like a cat."

General Bruce relates that on one occasion when visiting the Pemayangtse Monastery he was for some reason put under a spell by the Head Lama. The spell took the form of a severe stomach-ache which General Bruce was told would last until mid-day. It did, in spite of efforts made to cure it, but punctually at mid-day it disappeared as "miraculously" as it came.

Telling beads is one convenient method of praying, but perhaps the best of all methods, as it gets through the greatest number of prayers in the shortest possible time, is the prayer wheel. This consists of a copper or brass cylinder, which is made to revolve on a wooden handle. Inside the cylinder is a roll of paper or parchment on which are written as many prayers as can be squeezed in. As every revolution is equivalent to reciting all the prayers inside, it is possible, by assiduously revolving this apparatus, to get through some millions of prayers a day.

The Head Lama told us that he would be pleased to offer up a prayer to the God of Kangchenjunga for the safety of the expedition, and also volunteered the information that the weather would remain fine. This was an excellent idea, as we knew it would put great heart into our porters. If he possessed such powers over General Bruce's internal economy, the ordering of meteorological conditions should present little difficulty.

Before the monastery was a large grass-covered quadrangle, enclosed by pavilions and outhouses on three sides, whilst a flight of steps leading up to the imposing and fantastically painted portico of the monastery, overhung

with tapestries, formed the fourth. Arranged in a line before the monastery was the band. The instruments consisted of two long metal-chased and ornamented horns, from twelve to fifteen feet in length, smaller horns, flutes, drums, and cymbals. Some of the bandsmen wore cowls, which gave to them a curiously Ku Klux Klannish appearance, and others a curved, cockatoo-like crest to their hats.

Shortly after our arrival, the band crashed forth into what was presumably a welcome. My first impression was of a hideous medley of sound, which, judged by European standards, was completely tuneless and unintelligible. Yet, as my ears became accustomed to the din, I became aware of a perceptible rhythm. The music began to take shape and form in my mind. Gradually, I felt myself borne away, as it were, mentally, from the Twentieth Century, conveyed on the wings of this strange music into the very heart of this mystic mountain land, where time and space are limitless, and man is re-incarnated through eternity. The bass note of the great horns, surely the deepest note of any known musical instrument, seemed to boom of the might of the gods, the thunder of their avalanches, the roar of their torrents, the solemn roll of the thunderstorms that beat about the buttresses of their mid-aerial thrones.

The music dropped into a dirge-like monotone, then rose suddenly into a passionate crescendo. Two hideously masked figures appeared in the portico of the monastery. Leaping down the steps they dashed into the quadrangle, spinning round and round with wide-spread arms and swirling silken robes.

The band had previously taken up a position in the

THE BAND OF THE PEMAYANGTSE MONASTERY

pavilion. Seated in front was the Head Lama amid a horde of acolytes. In one hand he held a bell which he occasionally rang vigorously as a signal for changes of music, or to call in more devil dancers.

The duty of these first two devils was apparently only to announce the more important devil participants in the dance. Suddenly the band, which had stopped for a rest, blared forth again, and four figures slowly descended the steps, and commenced to dance.

They wore long silken robes, beautifully embroidered, and on their heads the most fantastic masks we had ever seen. Intended primarily to represent animals, fowls, yaks, eagles, goats, horses, and sheep, they were yet ghastly mockeries of nature—the phantasmagoria of a madman's imagination. At first the music was dirge-like, and the dancers' movements correspondingly slow. It quickened gradually. Other dancers joined in. Lines, circles, and squares were formed as in folk dancing. Movements became more rapid, arms were flung wide with gestures of abandon, legs kicked high in time with the banging of the drums, and the boom of the great horns. They pirouetted round and round with incredible speed, their heavy garments flying upwards and outwards like human catherine wheels. The music mounted to a terrific pitch of frenzy. Suddenly, above the din, came the sharp ringing of the Head Lama's bell. The music dropped, the dancers retired after a final twirl and obeisance, and sprang quickly up the steps into the monastery.

Duvanel was naturally anxious to secure " shots " of the dancing, but at first it was plain that his machinations were regarded as savouring of black magic. However, directly he

commenced to turn the handle of his camera the Lamas appeared considerably relieved. Obviously this complicated machine was nothing but a new and improved form of prayer wheel.

Lastly, there appeared several monsters of ferocious aspect, accompanied by two small boys dressed to represent demons. Possibly, they were intended to represent the devils which worry beasts in the form of insect pests and leeches, for armed with long yak-hair whisks, they proceeded to goad the monsters into fury until they reared, stamped, and charged about the quadrangle, whilst once again the band obliged with a crashing crescendo of sound.

As though in answer to this demonstration in its honour, the cloudy draperies of morning were drawn aside, disclosing Kangchenjunga. One silver banner of cloud trailed from its crest. The attendant fairies of the great God were " baking their bread."

From Pemayangtse to Tingling was an easy march, but a hot one. Once again, we descended into and across the upper Rangit Valley. On the descent we passed a well-built, modern looking temple. It was here that the Dalai Lama stayed during a tour of Sikkim. As, in view of his extreme holiness, it was thought necessary to erect a temple at every place at which he spent a night such a tour must be something of a drain on the purses of the local taxpayers. Several members stopped to bathe in the Rangit River. The current of these mountain torrents is dangerously strong, and Dr. Richter was nearly carried away. Had he been so, he would certainly have been drowned.

We forgathered for lunch in a cool, shady spot by a

DEVIL-DANCERS OF PEMAYANGTSE MONASTERY

small brook, afterwards dozing and resting during the heat of the day. But cool, shady spots in Sikkim are only too liable to harbour leeches, and it was not long before Schneider had a large one affixed to his bare arm.

At Tingling we camped for the first time. It was a charming site for a camp. Close at hand was the little village of Tingling, which stands on one of the few flat bits in Sikkim, and we pitched our tents at the edge of a wheatfield.

Prior to the expedition, Professor Dyhrenfurth had had tents made for each member. Actually, they were two-men tents, so that there was plenty of room for one man. The dweller in civilisation may argue that for each man to have his own tent is unnecessary and unsociable. Travellers and explorers, however, know the psychological value of privacy. During the months of monotony and hardship of a Polar expedition—and the same thing applies in a lesser degree to Himalayan expeditions—the best friends may become sick of the sight of each other, and little habits of speech and manner that count for nothing in civilisation may jar intolerably. Only by being able to escape for a while is a man able to tolerate things which normally he would not give a care to.

Nemu, my servant, was an expert in the art of camping. He was usually among the first to arrive at the end of a day's march, and had an unerring eye as to the best place to pitch a tent. This, combined with a never failing capacity for looking after his master's interests, made him an invaluable servant. He was an old soldier, and had the North-west Frontier Medal, and like most old soldiers, he was an adept in the gentle art of scrounging. Not that I

ever missed so much as a cigarette, but in the event of my breaking or losing anything, it was sure to be replaced in some mysterious way. Both on the march and on the mountains Nemu proved a tower of strength, and I can see now his broad good-natured face, with its philosophical eyes, and occasional broad grin, that flashed out always when least expected.

At Tingling an unpleasant incident occurred. One of the coolies ran amok with a *kukri*, and before anyone could stop him, had run another porter—one of our best men—through the chest. The wound was a serious one below the heart, and had it not been for the skilful treatment of Dr. Richter, the injured man would probably have lost his life.

His assailant was brought along to the Mess Tent, under the charge of Tikeram Thapa, to be interrogated by Wood Johnson. While doing so, he managed to pick up a large stone, and made as though to try and brain me as I was standing back to him outside the Mess Tent, but was fortunately promptly collared by Tikeram. The man was obviously demented, and we were forced to tie him up, hand him over to the Head Man of Tingling, and send a runner to the police at Gangtok.

Apart from this unpleasant incident, Tingling will always remain in my mind as one of our most charming camping sites. There is no view of the snows from it, but perhaps that is as well, for the gentle verdure-clad hills around are reminiscent of Glen Affric, and any intrusion on such a scene by the more restless forms of nature would tend to detract from the peaceful beauty of the landscape.

Late that evening, several of us went to the Head Man's

house to see after our injured porter who had been lodged there. Climbing a rickety, wooden ladder, we entered a low-roofed room, like the upper story of a Swiss cowherd's châlet. In the middle was an open stone fireplace, in which crackled a log fire, the flames of which lit the wrinkled face of the Head Man and his friends, as they squatted round. The atmosphere was close and heavy, even the pungent smoke not altogether successfully combating the odour of bodies unwashed since birth. The injured man had been wrapped in rugs, and placed on a bed of straw. He appeared comfortable. We ordered hot milk to be given to him at intervals throughout the night. Such is the toughness of these people, that despite the severe injury, and the obvious risk of subsequent infection and blood poisoning, we heard later that he was on his feet again in less than a fortnight.

It was good to be in a tent again beneath the stars, and I lay long in my sleeping bag that night looking between the flaps at the sentinel trees on a neighbouring ridge dimly outlined against the sky.

From Tingling to Yoksam was a longer march than that of the previous day, although the horizontal distance was no greater. A sharp ascent brought us to the crest of a wooded ridge north of Tingling. As we breasted the last rise, we were surprised to be met by a sudden blare from a band. The monks of the neighbouring Kachöperi Monastery had come to greet us, and had erected two little shelters of gay chintz-like material, for all the world like little beach bathing tents, in which fruit and tea were pressed upon us. The latter appeared to be made from aromatic herbs, and was rich, thick, and buttery. The day

was very hot, and we were thirsty; I, for one, drank several cups of the sickly stuff, and for the remainder of the day wished I had not. The monastery band, complete with long poles to which were fastened various prayer flags and pennants, lined along the path outside the tent and did honour to us in a crashing crescendo of sound.

From the ridge we glimpsed the summits of Kangchenjunga and Kabru. A silver lock of cloud was trailing from Kangchenjunga. Standing there in the still morning, perspiring gently under a fierce sun, it was difficult to realise that had we been up there we might have been fighting for our lives in death dealing cold and a *tourmente* of wind-flung snow.

From the ridge we had to descend once more into the Rangit Valley. The valley here begins to narrow, and bold crags jut out through a tangle of vegetation on its steepening sides.

The trudge up to Yoksam was a hot one but we were fanned by a fresh southerly breeze. As we progressed, we were puzzled to hear a series of pistol-like reports, and an intermittent crackling, like rifle fire. Turning a corner, we saw that the jungle was ablaze. Dull red flames were leaping high into the air, amid a pall of black smoke. Hastened by the breeze, the fire was sweeping with great velocity along the hillside. One moment some majestic tree would stand defiantly in its path, the next it would disappear in a smother of flame and smoke, reappearing as a gaunt, blackened corpse. Owing to the clearings made by the natives of Yoksam, the scope of the fire was limited, but its fierceness and the speed with which it swept the hillside reminded me of boyhood tales of prairies and pampas.

THE FIRST CAMP : AT TINGLING

Like Tingling, Yoksam is situated on a shelf clothed in pasture land, rice and wheat-fields. We pitched our camp on the terraces of a rice-field. Soon after we arrived we received word that the second party, under the charge of Hannah and Wieland, was two marches behind and that the convoy of mules under Colonel Tobin had left Darjeeling.

Yoksam is the last village. Thenceforward our way must lie through wilder country, and along rougher tracks towards Dzongri and the Kang La. Soon we would be at grips with things. Already the veneer of civilisation had lost its polish, despite the restraining and elevating influence of the "Memsahib." Table manners were already at a discount. Beards were growing steadily, and it was a matter of speculation as to who would win the race for length and bushiness. At present the honours were fairly evenly distributed between Professor Dyhrenfurth, Dr. Richter, and Duvanel. My own particular effort promised to develop into what I believe is technically known as a "King Beaver," or a beard bright red in colour.

The following morning, April 12, saw us strolling across the open pastures of Yoksam, or between fields of ripening grain. Then the path degenerated into a narrow, rough track and the forest enclosed us once again.

The paths in this part of the world are a fair indication of the character of those who make them. The native, of course, lives only in the present; the future holds no interest for him. Therefore, he goes about everything in the easiest possible way, the thought that by a little extra trouble he might save himself work in the future never occurring to him. It would not have been difficult to have

made the path north of Yoksam contour the eastern side of the Rangit Valley. It would never have occurred to a Swiss Verschönerungs Verein to have done otherwise. But generations of native yak-herds and travellers over the Kang La have thought fit always to follow the line of least resistance, irrespective of time and future convenience. Thus, the path was continually climbing up, or dropping down to avoid the direct traverse of a steep piece of hillside. It was an extremely irritating path to the ordered and practical mind of a European.

But passing through this magnificent primæval forest cloaking the Upper Rangit Valley one can forgive the path its vagaries. None of us had ever seen an Amazonian forest, but it can scarcely be finer than the forests that line the trench-like valleys of the Himalayas. Yet, to one who finds pleasure in tramping the windy moors, fells, and bens of the North Country, there is something indescribably depressing about such a forest. The dense walls of vegetation on either side of the narrow straggling track and the interlacing canopy of vegetation far above the head shut out the health-giving sunlight and breezes. An awed silence seems somehow to hold in its arms a breathless suspense. There exists undefined menace, suggested perhaps by the dank odours of rotting vegetation. I experienced a feeling of being imprisoned in a vault, and longed to escape into more open places, to breathe air untainted by the miasmal odours of decay. Even the creepers that writhe about the trunks of the trees, or hang snakelike from the branches, appear ready to grip the traveller, and drag him to some horrible death in the gloomy recesses of the forest. There is little of good, and much of evil about such a place, and

as Wood Johnson said, its impenetrable depths might hide anything, even the dreaded Snow Men.

To the botanist, however, there is much of interest and beauty in the flora of these forests. Quoting from Sir Joseph Hooker : " The vegetation consisted of oak, maple, birch, laurel, rhododendron, white Daphne, Jessamine, Arum, Begonias, Cyrtandaceæ, pepper, fig, Menispermum, wild cinnamon, Scitamineæ, several epiphytic orchids, vines, and ferns in great abundance."

As the path progressed it became worse. Here and there it was built up of bamboos and logs against the sides of precipitous crags. Mr. Freshfield found it " a great trial of temper." So, too, did we, or perhaps I should say, the porters. For loads such as ski and tent poles are a considerable nuisance in such a place.

Professor Dyhrenfurth was anxious to make a double march, and reach Dzongri in two days instead of three from Yoksam. But these three stages had not been arranged without reason, and Wood Johnson, who had traversed this same route the previous year, pointed out the inadvisability of a double march under such difficult conditions for transport. We accordingly camped in the usual camping place at the end of the first day's march, where there is a flat shelf and the forest is not too dense to allow of tents being pitched. This camping place harboured an unpleasant form of tick, a crablike insect about the size of a little finger nail, the bite of which was both painful and poisonous.

The scene at night was a curious one. Every flat place on the hillside above the camp was occupied by the porters. Their fires twinkled through the gloom like the

fires of goblins. Like us, they were depressed by the forests, but their depression found adequate expression in the simple belief that devils and other unpleasant characters dwelt therein. That is, perhaps, the chief difference between the workings of the native mind and the European mind. Scenery may depress or exhilarate the European mind in exactly the same way as it does the native mind, but the European mind is educated sufficiently to be able to analyse consciously, or subconsciously, the reason for its reactions. The European tells himself that his feeling of depression is due to the gloom, the smell, or the appearance of what he sees, but the native mind is too clogged with superstition to be able to reason out its reactions. It must look for a simpler and more direct explanation, and such an explanation usually takes the form of belief in devils, gods, or other figments of the imagination. These he is able to propitiate and thus set his fears at rest. Thus, where the European is able to conquer his feelings by the exercise of will power, and so remain mentally superior to his environment, the native is able to arrive at exactly the same result by completely different means. Thus, that evening it was thought necessary to propitiate the devils of the jungle, but this having been accomplished, our porters settled down for the night perfectly happily, with no fears that anything untowards was likely to occur.

Mists hung low in the great ravine up which we were passing as we set off the following morning. The path became gradually worse and worse. In some places it was blocked by fallen tree trunks. Sometimes it was necessary to jump from one boulder to another across turbulent torrents. For a considerable distance the path vanished

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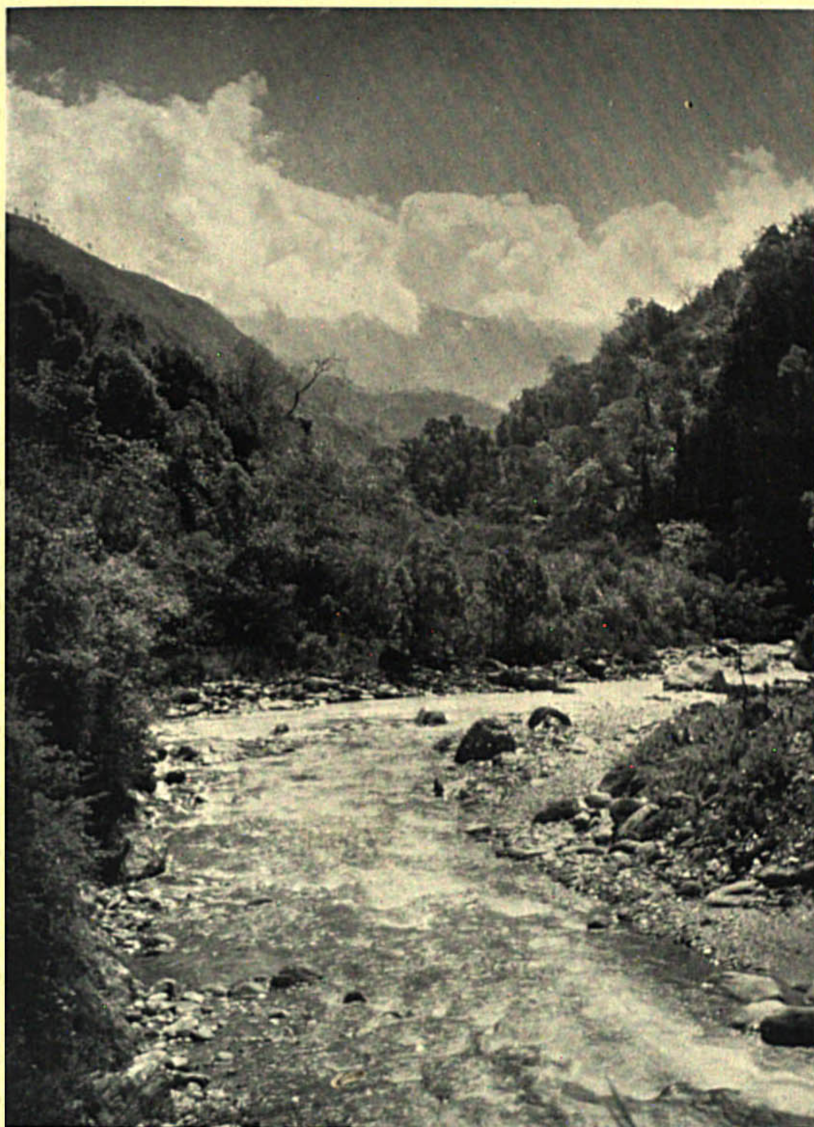

THE RANGIT VALLEY

altogether beneath the débris of a landslip of considerable size. Here shattered tree trunks were piled in an inextricable confusion, and dense undergrowth that had sprung up between made progress fatiguing and difficult.

The way had to be cleared with *kukris*, and it was interesting to watch how quickly and neatly these were wielded by expert hands. Many who are reading this will have seen the batting of Frank Woolley, the great Kent cricketer. Seemingly little force is put into the stroke, yet the ball is at the boundary before the spectators have realised what has happened. The secret is hitting the ball exactly in the driving centre of the bat, combined with perfect timing of the stroke. The same methods apply to cutting with a *kukri*, and it was interesting to watch the dexterity with which heavy branches were lopped cleanly off, and a way cleared through the undergrowth.

It was during this march that I began to feel ill. The forest had repaid my dislike for it by presenting me with a severe chill. Of course, it was my own fault—a chill always is the fault of its victim in the tropics. I did not have to cast back far in my mind to remember how the previous evening I had neglected to change damp clothes until I had been actually shivering. The tropics allow no latitude for foolishness, and to look after one's physical well-being with scrupulous care is the first essential of Himalayan travelling.

We crossed the eastern branch of the Rangit River, where it divides south of Dzongri. It was a wild spot. Mountain and cloud seemed to roof us in ; the air was damp and chill. Far above we could just discern streaks of snow projecting like white fangs through the lowering

mists. The glacier-born river roared sullenly over its rocky bed ; cold spray beat upwards from its grey waters. Even more than in the forest did we feel enclosed and shut in. As Eberl said, it might have been the end of the world.

Into the forest again, and up the hillside, where the feet sank into leaves rotting into leaf mould, or crushed into blackened débris, and decayed branches. A storm was threatening as we camped on a slope under dismal trees. No doubt my recollections are prejudiced, for my voice had completely disappeared, and I crawled into my sleeping bag ill and feverish, but this camping site remains in my memory as the most depressing one at which it had been my ill fortune to spend a night. Fortunately, Dr. Richter gave me some excellent medicine and throat spray which considerably relieved me, but sleep was impossible. The weather broke that night in a thunderstorm accompanied by torrential rain. Though lying ill in a sleeping bag, with the rain from a leaky patch in the tent oozing through, there was an element of magnificence in listening to this warring of the elements on the very edge of the Himalayas. The blue glares of lightning were answered by majestic crashes of thunder that seemed to be precipitated from hill to hill and peak to peak in volleys and waves of sound like music in the nave of some immense cathedral. The very echoes were indicative of vastness. In a flat country the thunder seems to dominate, but in the Himalayas, it is but the mouth-organ of the giants.

The storm died of its own fury, and morning dawned clear and cold. The forests above were dusted with new-fallen snow which extended down to as low as 8,000 feet. Such weather boded ill for the crossing of the Kang La.

My lungs had been touched by the chill, and breathing was painful and difficult when walking uphill. Had it not been for the encouragement of Wood Johnson, who stayed with me during this trying time, I do not think I could have struggled up the 5,000 feet to Dzongri.

As we ascended, oaks and chestnuts gradually gave place to firs. The dense tropical tree roof under which we had been marching for the past two days thinned. Shafts of sunlight illuminated a ground covered no longer in the rotting débris of tropical vegetation, but in fir cones and needles. The fresher and purer air from the snows brought with it a fragrance of sun-warmed resin. Beneath the firs were clumps of giant rhododendrons already budding, and as we got higher, these thickened, and the path twisted tortuously between their snaky, mangrove-like stems. The sun melted the snow on the fir branches above, sending it down in little showers of water drops, that filled the forest with patterings and murmurings.

Wood Johnson and I rested in a hillside glade, but before we had sat down for more than a minute we saw dozens of malignant leeches making for us with a stern resolution. At this height, above 8,000 feet, we had expected to be rid of the pests, but they seemed to thrive in spite of the cold. Actually, they were the last we saw until returning to Darjeeling.

The snow-drifts became more frequent. At length the path was completely snow covered, in places to a depth of two or three feet. Only a small portion of this snow had fallen in the night, and what we were encountering was obviously the lees of winter snow. To find such deep snow below 10,000 feet was disquieting, and doubts as to getting

barefooted porters over the Kang La returned with redoubled force.

The rhododendron belt seemed interminable, but at length we emerged from it on to an open hillside clad only in dwarf rhododendrons, which are but two or three feet high, as compared to giant rhododendrons which attain a height of fifteen to twenty feet. The scene was more Alpine than Himalayan in character. The gentle snowy summits of the Singalila Ridge to the west put me in mind of the summits around Kitzbuhel in Tyrol. Normally, at this time of the year these slopes should have been mostly grass covered, but now, so large was the amount of snow on them, they suggested ski-ing rather than walking.

The trudge, or perhaps it would be more correct to say stagger in my case, up to Dzongri remains in my mind as the most severe physical effort I have ever been called upon to do. As we breasted the last slope, on the summit of which flutter a few forlorn prayer flags, we were met by a biting wind from the north, bringing with it a hurrying swarm of snow-flakes.

The sky was greying as we walked over the bleak upland pastures on which stand the huts of Dzongri. The few remaining blue pools of sky were engulfed in the advancing tide of a blizzard. Wood Johnson went on ahead to look after the porters. On arriving at the camp he at once ordered a Thermos flask full of hot tea to be sent back. Narsang also carried my rucksack. Thus, I was able to reach Dzongri without having to be carried.

The two primitive stone huts of Dzongri which afford shelter to the yak-herds later in the summer, stand on a rolling upland, the crest of which separates the Praig Chu

BETWEEN TINGLING AND YOKSAM

and Rathong Valleys. Though Dzongri would appear to be a prey to every wind that blows, it is the obvious climbing centre for this part of the Kangchenjunga Range, and its comparative easiness of access from Darjeeling demands that a proper shelter hut, run on the same lines as a Swiss Alpine Club hut, should be built. There are a number of fine peaks, for the ascent of which Dzongri would make an excellent starting point : Kabru, 24,002 feet, Little Kabru, 22,000 feet, Simvu, 22,360 feet, Pandim, 22,010 feet, and the rugged range to the south of it. All these peaks would appear to be possible to a strong mountaineering party.

Dzongri itself stands at 13,200 feet, and immediately to the north of it is 15,480 feet Kabur, the culminating point of the Dzongri Ridge. The great gneissic boulders that are strewn about the slopes hereabouts form an interesting geological problem. How came they to be there ? Sir Joseph Hooker's theory that ice once covered the whole spur, and in moving downwards transported these boulders from the upper crags to other parts of the spur is most likely the correct explanation. At all events, it is curious to find these grassy, rolling downs littered with boulders lying in the midst of savage snow and rock peaks.

That evening the threatened blizzard broke. Once again I lay sleepless listening to the fury of the elements. Two days before we had slept in the moist, enervating heat of a tropical forest, now the snow slashed our tents, and the mercury of the thermometer shrank into its bulb.