

CHAPTER VII

I JOIN THE GURKHAS

WHEN on leave at Agra, the time the sixteen jackals were procured, Brunker, with his propensity for leg-pulling, sent me a wire from Peshawar to say I had been appointed to the 3rd Gurkhas. Much was my delight, but on return to Peshawar I found it was all a hoax. He did much the same thing to Bond, the acting adjutant of the 30th Punjab Infantry, who was most anxious not to give up such interesting work on the return from leave of the permanent incumbent, and this fact Brunker knew very well.

Besides new battalions of Gurkhas, the chief was also raising some of Sikhs. Hearing of this, Brunker concocted some cock-and-bull story about a brother officer of his having been offered the command of one of the latter, and asked Bond if he would like to be adjutant. Bond jumped at it, and while he went about saying what a lucky fellow he was, Brunker pretended he was fixing it all up.

Then we heard, accidentally, that the man Brunker had mentioned for C.O. was a perfectly impossible person quite unfit to command anything. This made us suspicious, and shortly afterwards we discovered it was another leg-pull! But the curious thing is that months afterwards both of us were actually appointed as Brunker had accidentally anticipated. That is, I went to the 3rd Gurkhas, and Bond got the adjutancy of a new Sikh battalion. He could not possibly have known, because in my case there was no vacancy in the 3rd, at the time he wired.

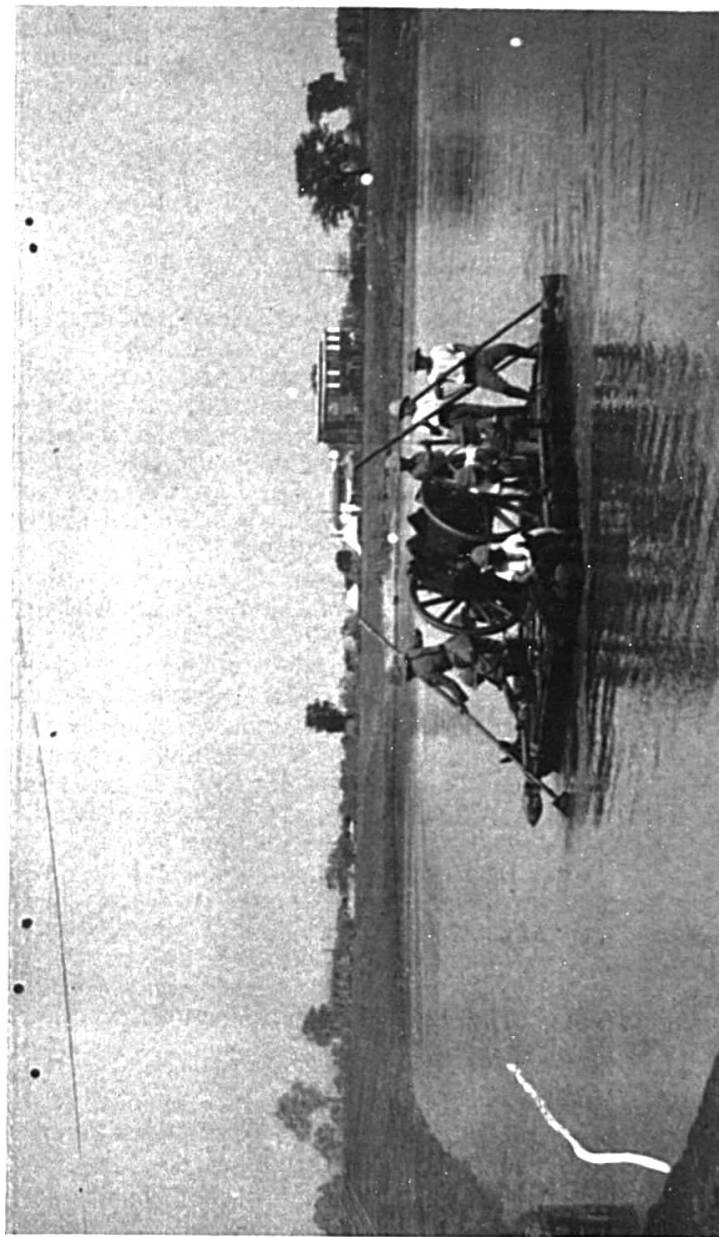
Having now waited in Peshawar seven months without any news of Gurkhas, I was beginning to feel rather uneasy, but in May welcome orders came that I had been appointed officiating wing officer in the 1st battalion 1st Gurkhas at Dharmsala. Sending off my ponies and heavy kit, I spent

the usual ten days joining leave at Simla. At 7 a.m. the first morning, when about to get up, Ian Hamilton, who in the absence of Pole-Carew on leave, was acting as military secretary, walked into my room. Scentsing danger at once, I leapt out of bed with : " Any bad news, major ? " " Yes," he said, " I'm afraid it is," and proceeded to explain that he, in conjunction with Colonel Harris, the new D.A.G., had posted me to the 1st Gurkhas, without telling the chief. That my arrival would adversely affect another youngster called Watson who was junior to me. That on the way to the shooting range behind Jakko, the afternoon before, he had told the chief, who was exceedingly angry, and directed that the appointment was to be cancelled at once.

He said, quoted Ian Hamilton, " I never heard of such a thing. Young Woodyatt has never had a relation in the country, and got Gurkhas entirely through favour, whereas Watson is the son of my old and tried friend, Sir John, a very distinguished soldier who did immense service for India and the Empire. I won't hear of his son being interfered with." Finally Ian Hamilton said plaintively : " I don't quite know what to do, but I never saw the chief so angry. Anyhow, come down to office this morning and we'll see if Colonel Harris has any proposal to make."

Eventually, owing to the accidental entry of a superintendent in the adjutant-general's branch, who knew the ropes, I was posted to the 1st battalion 3rd Gurkhas in the seconded vacancy of Major H. D. Hutchinson, the new second-in-command, but with some time still to run as a garrison instructor. It was necessary, however, for me to join the 1st Gurkhas until fresh orders were issued, so to Dharmsala I went. My arrival on a Monday, knowing I was leaving about Friday, made me feel an awful fraud, especially when partaking, as a regimental guest, of the usual dinner given to the newly joined.

Then came a journey to Almora in the Kumaon Hills, the permanent station of the 1st battalion 3rd Gurkhas, with which regiment (i.e. 1st or 2nd battalion) I remained twenty years. Only nine, however, in Almora itself, the remainder being spent at Lansdowne, or on the staff. This little station at Almora, which was to be our home for the happy years of our early married life, and was to become the birthplace of our only beloved son, is enshrined in our hearts as no other place ever can be. It is difficult to know



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AN 18-POUNDER R.F.A. GUN CROSSING A RIVER ON A RAFT PROPELLED BY TWO HORSES SWIMMING.

to what, exactly, one can attribute its charm. The climate is certainly equable, not too hot in the summer and delightful in the winter, but I think it is really its simplicity and old-world atmosphere that make it so attractive to everyone.

On first arrival I found, as a resident, Major-General the Honourable Sir Henry Ramsay, commonly called the "King of Kumaon," and until recently the Commissioner of Kumaon and Garhwal, an appointment he had held for thirty-five years. As a friend of his son Jack in the Cheshires, I got to know Sir Henry and Lady Ramsay very well and often stayed with them at Khali and Binsur, eight and sixteen miles from Almora respectively. At both places the late Commissioner had built himself houses where he cultivated apples and potatoes, moving to one or the other according to the season of the year. Binsur was a most beautiful place, on a mountain 8,000 feet high covered with oak and rhododendron. Above the house was, according to Sir John Strachey, a former Lieutenant-Governor, one of the finest views of the snows obtainable anywhere.¹

Sir Henry was a relation of that seven years' Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, who ruled India between 1848 and 1856, and annexed more territory than any other Governor-General before or since. An erstwhile adjutant of the 3rd Gurkhas, a participant in the Mutiny, the Controller of the Prince of Wales' tiger shoot in 1875, and the omnipotent ruler, for years, of a province bigger than Belgium, Sir Henry was extremely interesting to talk to, and the old man loved to talk and to reminisce. He soon told me what a free hand he had to start with, soon after the Mutiny, and how irksome he had found the orders of the local government later on. So much so that if he did not like them he returned the paper endorsed in red ink, "Not applicable to Kumaon"!

Meeting him out for a walk he would *stand* for an hour or two and tell me the most enthralling stories of his life, stories you never see in books, and stories you could listen to for ever. How the Prince of Wales stayed up so late at night that on the second evening, in his shooting camp, Sir Henry approached him at 11 p.m. and asked special permission to retire always at that hour, "as I can't burn the candle at both ends." How, in the first days shoot—

¹ See p. 41 Sir John Strachey's *India: Its Administration and Progress*.

though there were plenty of wild tiger—it had been necessary to introduce a few tame ones to make the bagging of at least two or three by the Prince an absolute certainty. How, when the huge “ring” of three hundred elephants was closing in gradually, a shot was heard, when the Prince of Wales called out sharply, “Who fired that shot?” (It was Arthur Prinsep of the 11th Lancers, but he was never given away, and the matter wasn’t pressed.) How, a few minutes later one of the tame tiger would not go away from in front of Sir Henry’s elephant, and he had to *pelt him with oranges* to get him to move on! How, big lunches in *hot cases* on the backs of elephants were taken into the jungle, and how delighted the Prince was with his first tiger, etc., etc., etc.

If I remember rightly, Sir Henry only took leave to England once during his sojourn of some fifty years in India. It was then only for three months, and made in order to procure agricultural implements and machinery for his district. In those days it only gave him about three weeks at home, and he had much to do. Directly he arrived a summons came from Marlborough House, and there the Prince of Wales told him he was to go to Balmoral to stay with the Queen. H.R.H. also added that on return to London he must make Marlborough House his head-quarters. These were sad encroachments on the scanty days of his short stay, but it couldn’t be helped. On leaving, the Prince and Princess of Wales (now Queen Alexandra) each presented him with a large signed photograph. These, in his haste, he left behind in his room. “What on earth did you do?” I gasped. “Oh,” said the old man, “I had a nephew, an equerry, and he had to go and retrieve them for me!”

He loved his unofficial title of “King of Kumaon.” Once a High Court judge, on leave from the plains, put up in the Government bungalow of Muktesar in the Kumaon Hills, and now a bacteriological college. Here was a large area Sir Henry had devoted to apples and potatoes. The judge liked the potatoes so much he took a sack away with him, sending the three rupees to the Commissioner, as told to do by the European caretaker. “I sent the money back,” said Sir Henry, “with the words ‘Kings don’t sell!’”

He reclaimed thousands of acres in the Kumaon *Bhābar*

(land below the foot-hills and dry, as opposed to the *Tarāi*, which is marshy and jungly land lying along the foot of the Himalayas north of the Ganges River), and persuaded the hill people to migrate there in the winter with their flocks and herds, thereby greatly adding to their wealth by giving them all seasons' crops. He also introduced the cultivation of potatoes, chestnuts, etc., all over Kumaon, another source of profit to his beloved people. These lived in what might well be called a model province, thanks to their king and father, Sir Henry Ramsay.

Some years after I joined at Almora, he was persuaded by his family to leave India and reside at home, where perhaps the cramped life speedily killed him, for he only survived about a couple of years, if so long. Like most strong men he had, of course, his enemies. I came across one who for years had been one of his subordinate officers and hated the sound of his name. Getting to know this man pretty well, I probed for the reason for this dislike. It turned out to be resentment at various official wiggings for slackness, which were well deserved, and also because he was "checked" for living with a native lady of Kumaon to whom he was not married. An amusing thing was that when this old bachelor moved anywhere, the good woman was always carried in a large packing case, the bearers of which were instructed, if questions were asked, to say it was the sahib's "bàja" (piano)!

There is no district in India, to my mind, so enchanting for a cold-weather tour as Kumaon, with its very comfortable rest-houses and good roads, thanks to Sir Henry Ramsay. Especially is this the case in the autumn, after the rains, with the air so crisp and the snows so glorious. Of many trips none brings back pleasanter recollections than one my wife and I took in the late eighties with the late Sir Auckland Colvin, the Lieutenant-Governor of the then called North-West Provinces of Agra and Oudh.

He had as his private secretary Captain Jack Strachey, than whom no greater master of detail, or better organiser, ever existed. This was later on evinced by the way all Governors fought for his services, and by his promotion, eventually, to be Controller of the Household to Lord Curzon. The arrangements for the camps on that tour were a perfect marvel, and it was through him that I was taken, with a party of signallers, to try and keep up com-

munication, by helio, or lamp, with Sir Auckland's summer capital, Naini Tal. Our destination was the charming tea estate of Kousanie, then under the management of Hugh Macmaster, one of the best of good fellows, who, with his daughter Bell—now Lady Ailsa—did all they could to make our visit a pleasant one.

The party, besides Sir Auckland and Jack Strachey, consisted of Mr. A. B. Patterson, the Commissioner of Inland Revenue (my wife's father); Colonel Erskine, the Commissioner of Kumaon in succession to Herky Ross; Jimmy Robertson, the senior member of the Board of Revenue; a Miss Ada Dyson, my wife, myself and, for a night or two, the Bishop of Lucknow. Nothing had been forgotten by Strachey and nothing was too difficult to procure. After a few days the ladies ran out of hairpins. They went straight to Jack, of course, as if he kept a haberdasher's shop, but, I think, with very little hope in their hearts. To their joy, however, they learnt the hairpins would be in camp the next evening. Miss Dyson was undoubtedly a most fascinating young woman. I firmly believe the whole camp fell in love with her, including the Bishop.

My signalling N.C.O.—a Gurkha—being a stickler for red tape, was very pressing regarding this State message, to know what kind of Government supply was a hairpin, which he noted was to be sent from Naini Tal by a special runner. On my explaining it was required for His Honour's hair in camp to keep it from getting caught up in official files, he appeared quite satisfied. Another heliogram sent by Sir Auckland also rather upset him. It was occasioned by the news that his brother Bassett's daughter, Amy, had got engaged to be married to Harry Somebody, and ran as follows:

" One more lamb to be led to slaughter,
Auckland's niece and Bassett's daughter.
All delighted you're to marry,
Fondest love to you and 'arry."

At the Naini end had been posted the battalion schoolmaster, a good signaller and very proud of his knowledge of English. I sent this message myself, but it was nearly an hour before I could get him to take the word " 'arry " as sent. He would keep asking for a repetition, while enquiring whether it should not be " Harry " !

Sir Auckland was at his very best in camp. The scenery, the weather, the healthy marching, and the release from worry and official cares made him a boy again, and full of humour and chaff. Even loud shouting for my bearer one night, after he had gone to sleep, only caused the sarcastic remark at breakfast next morning that he hoped I had found him. One evening, after tea, he sat down and actually composed a very admirable poem on the members of the camp party.

Very few of that jolly party now survive, but for none do we mourn more than for the dear old "Shepherd," as Sir Auckland called Patterson, in joke, as if he was herding us two. His quick Irish temperament having been fired by reading of the wrongs of Italy, he left home at eighteen, joined Garibaldi, fought with him for two years, and besides being wounded and decorated on the field of battle, was promoted from cadet to captain within that period. Coming home afterwards, he passed brilliantly for the Indian Civil, was posted to the then North-West Provinces, and later became Commissioner of Inland Revenue with the Government of India. His ability much surpassed both his industry and his ambition, but with a memory so marvellous and a fund of knowledge so great, he was the most delightful companion imaginable, being, withal, the most lovable of men.

The battalion I was now with (the old 3rd Gurkhas) had just returned from the Burma campaign, and Lord Roberts (then Sir Frederick) had raised to it at Almora a new battalion of Garhwalis. These men, though excellent soldiers, were not looked upon, then, with the same esteem as Gurkhas, mainly because they were not so well known, enlisted sparingly and came from a province adjoining that of Kumaon and therefore in British territory. The selection of Garhwalis was somewhat resented by the officers of the old 3rd and especially so by Barry Bishop, our colonel. But the Chief was more far-seeing than most of us and, having appreciated the great value of the Garhwali on his many campaigns, was bent on raising at least one complete unit of them, in spite of the depressing reports from civil sources regarding their disinclination to enlist. Here again he showed his acumen, for he did not agree with these reports or believe in them; time proved him to have judged correctly.

He once asked me, when up at Simla on leave from Almora, what I thought of the Garhwali. On my replying that I knew nothing of him, he said: "Well, I'll tell you something. There has always been a certain number of them, as well as Kumaonis, in every Gurkha battalion, and nearly every so-called Gurkha who has won the Indian Order of Merit for gallantry has been a Garhwali or Kumaoni!" Soon afterwards I had the curiosity to look this up, and found it was a matter of about ninety per cent. 'However—as I have said—Barry Bishop was hipped, and for Barry Bishop to be hipped meant he would go on worry, worry, worry, until either he got his way or was outed. After three years' official, semi-official and private correspondence on this, to him, all-absorbing topic, we were given a new battalion of Gurkhas and the old 2/3rd was reconstructed the "39th Garhwalis," station Lansdowne. The number caused them much heart-burning, for it was that of the unit disbanded for the "shoe" episode at Delhi, to which I have already referred.

But the number was vacant and remonstrance proved futile. The adjutant, now Brigadier-General J. T. Evatt, D.S.O., their Colonel-in-Chief, devised, with prophetic foresight, a crest with the motto "Resurgam." I have often thought what a source of joy it would have been to Lord Roberts, and must have been to Evatt, to read the glorious record of the Garhwalis in the Great War, both in France and on other fronts, and to note the number of gallant soldiers this district provided.

Soon after joining the 1/3rd, we received a welcome addition to our strength in the person of Vincent Ormsby, whose maternal grandfather had been instrumental in raising the battalion in 1815. A deep friendship soon developed between "Vin" and myself, only ended, to my infinite sorrow, by his death in action in France in 1917, when Brigadier-General V. A. Ormsby, C.B., commanding the 127th Brigade, 42nd Division. No better fellow ever lived than this old Wykehamist, and it was a bright day for Almora when he and his charming bride arrived to make it their home for so many years. Not only was he a fine rider, first-class cricketer, and good sportsman, but he had an uncommonly pretty style with his pen, as evinced by his "Almoriana," and many other brochures, published in India.

About the time we heard of Government's sanction to the new 2nd battalion 3rd Gurkhas, I was going home on leave, after seven years in India. Having secured passages on a trooper, I was ready to start for Bombay, when Barry Bishop looked in on us at breakfast with something evidently on his mind. He soon brought it out by saying how extremely foolish it was of me to go home just then, when I was certain to get the adjutancy of the new battalion. I was of a different opinion and said so, but eventually he persuaded me to send a wire to Colonel (afterwards Lord) Nicholson, the Chief's military secretary, explaining the circumstances and enquiring what chance I had. It was a long and expensive urgent telegram, which I could ill afford, but I felt the outlay justified at 4 p.m. the same day on receiving the reply as follows :

"Chief selected you for adjutancy new Gurkha battalion Stop. You will probably have to take up your duties early next month." That settled it and England did not see me for six years more.

A good deal of football was played in Gurkha units even then ; but, so far as could be ascertained, it was a desultory kind of game with no definite rules. This was certainly the case at Almora, where sides consisted of any number, like Gilgit polo ; the ball was sometimes round and sometimes oval, and the by-laws varied at the fancy of the predominant Britisher playing. Rugby was suggested, but as this seemed impossible for Gurkhas, I started Soccer instead.