

VI.

JOURNEY

ACROSS THE

PANDUA HILLS, NEAR SILHET, IN BENGAL.

BY H. WALTERS, Esq.

LEFT *Dacca* on the night of the 19th October 1828, and passed through an uninteresting inundated country, with scattered villages stuck on little islands, which barely sufficed to keep the people's heads above water. At day light, on the 26th, arrived at *Chatak*, and breakfasted with Mr. INGLIS, a respectable lime merchant. The *bangalo* is situated on a pretty little hill, close to the river *Súrma*. This place is about a day's journey from *Silhet*. Started at eleven, and crossed the *Hauras* to *Pandua*. The *Hauras* are extensive *jhils* or lakes covered with reed and rose jungle, having open expanses of water, many of them a mile across—while in other places the jungle is so thick it is with difficulty a boat can be impelled through it. The depth of water is, in many places, ten or twelve feet. They extend for many miles along the foot of the hills. In the dry season, the water runs off, and leaves an extensive waste, to be occupied by buffalos and tigers, and the *Barasinga*, or large *Silhet* stag, having six distinct

branches or projections from each horn. Reached *Pandua* at sunset. It is situated immediately under the hills, and is in fact the frontier village. Here is a small fort, and a company of Sepoys to keep the hill people in check. From hence the *Cásias* obtain their rice, cloth, salt, and in fact all the necessaries of life, in exchange for honey, wax, oranges, cinnamon, betelnut, &c., the produce of their hills.

27th. After some trouble succeeded in making a start at about eight A. M., my baggage and tent carried by about twenty *Cásias*, and myself mounted on a pony. At nine reached *Ramsing's* house—where a tent was pitched. Observed a forest tree, covered with a very large description of green caterpillar; a native with a bow and arrow, was keeping watch, and driving off the birds, to prevent the destruction of the insects. These caterpillars produce a coarse kind of yellow silk, called "*Múnga*," from which cloth is made by the *Cásias*. When they have devoured the foliage of one tree, (as they had nearly done of this) they are carefully removed to another. From hence the ground begins to rise. Passed along a tolerable path, through a grove of orange and areca trees,—crossed the bed of the *Pándua Nala* three or four times, over sand and round stones—now began to ascend in earnest. Proceeded through groves of orange and citron trees, loaded with fruit, interspersed among the broad-leaved plaintain and stately betel, with an underwood of flowering shrubs, and the prickly pine-apple obtruding its fruit across the path. Nothing can be more beautiful than these cool and shady groves, soothed by the murmurs of distant torrents, and refreshed by numerous crystal streams. A group of *Cásia* women passed by, bearing at their backs conical baskets, suspended from their foreheads by bands of matting, and heavily laden with lumps of smelted iron ore. My baggage was carried in the same manner. The women are the best porters, and young boys and girls also bear their appropriate loads.

The *Cásias* are a stout athletic race ; fair, as compared with the inhabitants of the plains, and with muscular limbs. They are devoted to chewing *pawn* and betel, very fond of spirituous liquor, and eat and drink whatever comes in their way. In religion they follow some of the *Hindu* customs. They have no written character, and their language is different from that of the *Garos* and other surrounding tribes ; though they all appear to be but different dialects of the same original language. Theft is unknown among them, and they are true to their word. In moral character, they tower, like their mountains, over the natives of the plains. They always go armed either with bows and arrows, or long naked iron swords. Their houses are raised on posts about four feet from the ground, with a flooring of bamboos, and are well boarded, and secured all round from the rain and cold. The men, women, and children live above, and the pigs, fowls, and the rest of the family, inhabit the lower apartment, and take care that nothing is wasted. Their houses are surrounded by yards fenced with neat stone walls ; and the villages are usually erected on the side of a hill, the houses rising one above another. Property descends to the nephew of the occupier, by his sister. They are governed by numerous petty *Rajas*, who exercise but little control over them. On all occasions of importance, the Queen Mother, and the elders of the tribe, are consulted, and nothing can be done without their consent. Their pigs are a small handsome race, like the Chinese ; their cattle large and sleek, and in good condition, the pasturage on the hills being excellent.

Ascending by a stone causeway : at ten reached the first stone bridge, over a mountain torrent, in a beautiful secluded spot. A single stone slab, of large size, at least twelve feet long, forms the bridge, having four upright stones at the corners. The torrent rushing over the rocks immediately under it, is received in a rude bason full of large fish. The

rocks are of limestone. Beautiful flowers and creeping plants, ferns and mosses, invite attention at every step.

Here a very steep ascent commences, and continues till a landing place is reached, shaded with trees, whence branches off the road to the village of *Supar-Punji*. This road descends into and crosses the valley. Passed over three or four stone bridges of small size, and one of bambu—the scenery secluded and beautiful. Ascended a very bad road, and a very steep fall, at an angle of forty-five in some places. Succeeded in reaching the village at half-past eleven A. M. The village is stockaded and defended by a “cheval de frize” of sharp-pointed bambus. Obligated to pitch my tent on a level space inside, under the shade of some beautiful trees, commanding a superb view of the mountain glen, the overhanging precipices, and the plain below. Under these trees are some two or three hundred monuments, large and small, all formed of circular solid stone slabs, supported by upright stones set an end, which enclose the space below. They vary from two to six and eight feet in diameter, and are disposed on the side of the hill all close together, producing a singular effect. On these the villagers sit on occasions of state, each on his own stool, large or small, according to his rank in the commonwealth. These are, in fact, however, tombs. The dead bodies of the *Cásias* are burned on a spot set aside for the purpose, a little higher up the hill, and their ashes are collected and put into earthen pots, which are deposited under the stones. I saw several of these pots by looking through the interstices of the stones. As it happened, a dead child was brought out of the stockade by its mother and female relations, who made a dreadful howling. They placed it in a sort of wooden cradle prepared in the place of concretion, and after fire was placed under it, retired to the village. A Priest then mumbled some prayers, while the dogs and pigs fought for the plantains, oranges, and green betelnut, which had been offered on the occasion, and would doubtless have fought for

the roasted child also, were he not too hot for them. The people looked on with the most perfect indifference—the father, a stupid looking brute, stood chewing his *paun*. In the evening, in strolling through the village, to the west end, I had a fine view of the great waterfall which runs over the table ledge of the mountain, and forms an upper and lower fall of altogether not less than one thousand five hundred feet. By going up a very steep ascent, and winding through the upper *Punji* or village, the bottom of the fall was approached, so that I got wet with the spray. Across this torrent, they told me, is the road to *Cherra-Punji*; but it is evident that it is impossible loaded coolies can cross it; indeed it would be difficult for any one to do so. It is a noble fall, and well worth coming out of the way to see. I learnt moreover, that further on ravines are crossed by monkey bridges, formed of two or three bambus tied together; so that in fact I had come the wrong road, and had to retrace my steps to the landing place before mentioned, notwithstanding what the *Cásias* said to the contrary. Information was brought me in the evening, which led me to think the *Supar-Punji* people had some design in bringing me to their village instead of taking me the usual road, and I thought it possible, as I was completely in their power, inside their stockades, that I might have some trouble in making my escape.

28th. Rose by moonlight this morning, and without disturbing the people, quitted the village. Accompanied by two servants, I soon found my way to the bottom of the valley, and ascending the hill on the opposite side, reached the landing place before mentioned, in time to see the sun rise in all its majesty. At seven A. M. reached the great stone, or rather rock, at the foot of the "*Mahudeo ki Cherti*," which commands a glorious view of the valley and plain below. After resting, proceeded to climb the ascent, almost perpendicular, and at eight reached the first stone door at the top of the hill, the great stone door at twenty minutes to nine, and the village of *Masmae* at nine A. M. The scenery from

the crest of the mountain is beautiful, and very extensive—but the view from the table rock overhanging the glen, and the village of *Supar-Punji*, is magnificent. The mountain forms a horse-shoe, the top perfectly flat, and the sides quite perpendicular, like a wall, so that I actually sat with my legs hanging over it, and admired the water tumbling over the rock in the centre of the horse-shoe. Had I fallen, I must have gone through a space of at least one thousand feet, before a friendly tree would have stopped my progress. The uprights and stone doors are monuments to the memory of departed Rajas and Chiefs, some of them are wonderful works, resembling those of “Stone henge” in construction, and vying with them in magnitude. The gate mentioned above is about twelve feet high, and is formed of very large single slabs of stone—one slab that I afterwards saw, a circular stone, measured twelve feet in diameter by about two feet thick, and was raised four feet from the ground, some of them must weigh thirty tons at least, and are often brought from a distance. These monuments are found near all the villages on the hills. I observed some upright slabs of granite that stood at least twenty feet high from the ground. They are detached from the rock by means of fire; and four or five hundred men combine to convey and set them up on the death of any famous Chief. They mark and immortalize the family as well as the individual, and are held in great reverence by all the people. When a descendant dies, a feast is made of two, three, or four bullocks, according to the man’s means, and the bullocks’ heads are tied to the top of the stone, as a memento of the importance of the individual. I observed several tied up in this way. From *Masmae* to *Cherra-Punji*, the road is pretty level, till the latter village is approached, when a considerable hill must be ascended. Found a tent and two good huts at *Cherra*. It is proposed to establish a Sanitarium at this place, for English soldiers and sick people, from *Calcutta*, &c. The elevation is about five thousand feet above the level of the sea. The air is cool, light, and refreshing; and although the sun is hot, it is innoxious. The hill is free from jungle,

covered with fine pasture and flowers, but rocky—and the ravines filled with trees and shrubs—I can almost fancy myself on the top of *Bannerdown!* The range of hills runs east and west. The view over the plain is most extensive. I should think the eye, at one glance, must take in a semicircle of fifty miles at least—*Chatak* and *Silhet* are visible, and the course of the *Súrma* to a great distance.

Thursday 20th.—Started at half-past five, and at half-past eight reached *Surarím*, the first village—passed over a coal region, the coal cropping out of the ground—road tolerable so far. Here iron-smelters reside—entered one of the forges, the bellows are curious, and are worked by women, who stand on the top, and move them with their feet; the furnace is made of clay, hooped with iron: the ore is broken into small pieces, and put into the furnace with charcoal—the iron melts and runs out at the bottom, it is then taken up and cut into large lumps for exportation to the plains. It is very good, and is used for all purposes in this part of India. The country is bare and open, and the rocks of sandstone. The iron ore is collected in the streams below. Proceeded along the edge of a mountain, the path not two feet broad, and a tremendous precipice yawning beneath. The view of the valley and distant glens and mountains is most sublime—descended through a beautiful glen amidst tall strait trees, with numerous flowers and shrubs, and soon reached the first stream—crossed on stones—a beautiful spot. Ascended to the top of the opposite hill; the road very rugged and steep; the valley altogether is the most picturesque and beautiful I ever saw,—large masses of rock, the strata, perfectly horizontal, stand out from amidst the foliage, while hurled beneath are huge fragments having the strata perpendicular. Reached the top of the hill about eleven; from hence the road is tolerable. Reached the top of the “*Zeber Pahar*,” and looked down on the *Kála* and *Safed* rivers—a glorious view—on the right a beautiful water fall, the source of the former river. Crossed the *Kala Páni*. Reached the *Safed*

or *Boga Pank*. The road lay over broken fragments, or rather huge masses of rock, along the bank. Crossed over a bridge made of a few sticks tied together, the water dashing among the rocks beneath; the river at present is about a hundred feet wide, but after rain it swells prodigiously; the bed of this river is four thousand eight hundred and seventy-seven feet above the level of the sea, by barometer. The water is quite white, as if mixed with fine white sand, though when taken up it appears perfectly clear. The water of the other river, at the same time, appears quite black, from its rocky bed. Ascended a long, steep, difficult and fatiguing hill by regular stone steps, some of them loose, and at half-past two arrived at *Moiplong*, after a very hard day's march—distance about fourteen miles. *Moiplong* is five thousand nine hundred and forty-two feet high, and is the highest range in the journey. The rock is a blue slate; there are no trees, except about the *Boga* or *Safed Páni*, where I observed the first *firs*, small and stunted. The ground is covered with flowers and shrubs, strawberries, raspberries, dandelions, thistles, &c.

Friday 31st.—At day-break, thermometer 50. Started at five A. M.—road, hill and dale, with one steep descent, and little streams here and there, the vallies *stiff* and *white* with *hoar frost!* the first I have seen since leaving *England* fifteen years ago. There is always a difference of at least ten degrees between the plains and the tops of the hills. In November 1827, the thermometer stood at twenty-one, in one of these vallies. Crossed a good sized plain with cultivation, and then a steep ascent brought me to the summit of the hill, which overlooks the plain *Siang*. Passed several beds of quartz, and collected some specimens; no trees to be seen, but fine pasture, and numerous flowers—fine plains and high round hills, some conical. Left the village of *Siang* on the right, on the top of a ravine, with trees, at about a quarter after eight. This is not a friendly village. Tolerable road with soft black soil, and occasional bogs. Arrived at a stream, and

observed the first firs disposed in *clumps*—crossed on stepping stones, passed over several hills, and arrived at *Lombray* in two hours and a half from *Siang*. This is about half-way between *Moiplong* and *Nanklow*. Left the village of *Lombray* on the right amidst trees. The country begins to open, and to be better covered with timber, firs especially. This village has also a bad name. *Lombray* stands at an elevation of 5914 feet. The trees are stunted; the rock is a red micaceous slate. Passed over moderate hills and an extensive plain, with some scattered cultivation and a hut here and there, and at twelve o'clock reached the village of *Muirang*—this village is also left on the top of the hill to the right, the road here winding round the bottom of a hill to the left. Proceeded to some shady firs, commanding a view of a beautiful little stream with a small fall, the hillocks clothed with firs rising in picturesque forms around, and behind it. We were now in a granite country, the firs indicating the transition. As we advanced, the firs grew larger, and the country opened into a beautiful undulated park—the scenery is extremely beautiful. Saw several very large upright stones and stone gates. Passed a regular *mow* of grain in the straw, perfectly *English*: observed apple, pear, and plum trees, with brambles and black briars, strawberries, &c.; even daisies are said to carpet the sod! but unfortunately they were not in blossom. Birch trees also flourish. Large granite boulders stand out at intervals, and crown the tops of the hills. This country, growing more beautiful at every step, continues for seven miles from *Lixi hát* to *Nanklow*, which we reached at four P. M. *Nanklow* is 4,550 feet above the level of the sea.

Saturday, 1st November.—My eyes opened this morning on a beautifully clear view of the snow-clad mountains of *Thibet*, elevating their giant peaks above the *Bhotiya* range. These latter, about fourteen thousand feet high, also shewed peaks covered partially with snow; but the former, which attain an elevation of twenty-two thousand feet, are clothed

in perpetual white. They reflect a pinkish tinge, and are thus easily distinguished from the clouds below them. The valley of *Asam*, covered with clouds, looked like a vast white sea.

2d.—Accompanied Capt. JONES to the bottom of the *Nanklow* hill, a distance of four miles, one continued descent, through most beautiful groves of fir and hill bambu, with the most exquisite views of the hills and rocks above and below, from the different elevations, that can be imagined—crossed a brook, and, after a further descent, in an hour and a half's walking and riding, arrived at the *Boga* river. Here is a fall of about sixty feet, the river rushing and breaking with fury over rocks, some of them almost perpendicular—immediately over the fall is a bridge formed of deal spars, built by Mr. SCOTT—it is upwards of one hundred feet long—some of the trees, on which it is supported, were carried away last rains. The fall is received in a large bason, thirty feet deep in the middle and sixty yards in diameter. This bason, with the bridge and the over-hanging rocks and trees, and surrounding scenery, is one of the most beautiful spots I ever visited. The rock, which is extremely hard, is of serpentine. In places, it has been completely honeycombed by the action of the water—large lumps of pure quartz and granite boulders, with other rocks, in detached pieces, abound here, and beautiful flowers and creeping plants complete the scene.

3d.—Rode to Prospect Rock, properly so called—the view it commands of the *Garo* hills, the plain of *Asam* with the *Brakmaputra* river—the *Bhoteah* and *T'hibet* mountains, is most grand, extensive, and diversified, and I imagine, can be equalled by few in the world.—The *Kásia* monuments are numerous, and of large size, about *Nanklow*. The circular and square stones, supported by stones placed on end, are extremely similar to the “Cromlechs” found in Cornwall and Wales—doubtless those ancient monuments were appropriated to the same

purpose—the reception of the ashes of deceased Chiefs, enclosed in urns. If this was the case, how singular it is that the customs of nations, in the same stage of society indeed, but situated at such an immeasurable distance from each other, should be found so exactly to coincide! If any doubt exists as to the purpose for which the monuments in Britain were erected, is it not dissipated by observation, as to the actual use of similar monuments in this country at the present day? I did not observe that any of the upright stones were placed in circles, like those of Stone Henge, but generally in lines. Some of them are ornamented by a carved stone, placed like a crown on the top of the centre one. I have not heard that monuments of a similar character have been found in other parts of India. I believe they are peculiar to this range, or rather to the *Kásias*.

4th.—Started at six A. M. on the return to *Cherra*. We made good our journey in two days, without accident. We carried the snowy *Thibet* peaks with us, half the first day's journey, the atmosphere being remarkably clear—indeed the snowy mountains looked better than from *Nanklow*.

We spent the 6th at *Cherra*, and found some beautiful flowers and plants, the roots and seeds of some of which I collected. The cinnamon tree grows here wild—the leaves and young branches are exported to the plains for sale. Also a species of holly is found; in fact, here is an ample unexplored field for a Botanist—also for a Mineralogist. I procured some specimens of the coal, and of other rocks.

On the 9th we started at day-light, in opposite directions. I got down the hill, and reached my budgerow at two P. M. and by three P. M. next day, had commenced the Sessions at *Sylhet*. This is a very pretty station—some of the houses are on small hills—and altogether in soil, plants, and appearance, it is very like *Chittagong*. The rides and drives are very pretty. The place is full of *Mamuris*—they are clean looking people

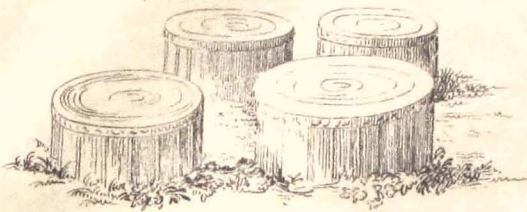
Numerous passages were left to the right and left—and several singular fissures were apparent in the rock at different elevations. The mountain appears to be perforated, in all directions, like a honey-comb. In one place, day-light is visible through the roof at a great height. We now retraced our steps to the mouth of the Cave, which we reached at three o'clock. The thermometer outside the Cave stood at sixty-eight degrees, under the shade of the trees with which the entrance is surrounded—inside, it rose to seventy-four degrees—the air, however, was not close, or disagreeable, indeed a free circulation evidently takes place. I was, on the whole, much pleased and gratified by the excursion—the Cave is certainly a wonderful natural curiosity, and much resembles the drawings of the famous Cave of Antiparos, in the *Levant*. Its full extent has not yet been ascertained—tradition says, it joins the subterranean passages of the Seraglio of *Pekin*! We paced the distance, and took bearings, and found we had gone nearly a mile before we turned. An abrupt and deep precipice obstructs the road a little beyond where we turned, and further than this has not yet been explored. It would be curious to follow it up, and trace out all its ramifications—an opening might very probably be found on the opposite face of the mountain. Also to ascertain the existence, or otherwise, of organic remains in the muddy soil.

Latitude of *Nanklow*,..... 25° 40' 30" N.
 Longitude,..... 91° 32' 0" E.

Range of the Thermometer at Nanklow.

From 23d to 31st May, thermometer varied from 67° 4' to 75° 7'.
 From 1st to 14th June, " " 68° 6' to 72° 5'.

Stone Seats at a Kasya Village.
2 to 6 f. Diam.



Kasya Monumental Stones.



Bellows used in smelting Iron



Section of the Pandua Hills



- A. Plain of Asam 120^{ft} above the level of the Sea
- P. Angrugi 4090^{ft} elev.
- C. Mopusa 2746
- D. Bed of Surjpani R. 2320
- E. Nanklao 4550
- F. Langbri 3914
- G. Moylang 3942
- H. Baga pani or Sufeid R. 4877
- I. Saruram
- K. Cherra Punji
- L. Plain of Silhet.

- 1. - Hilly covered with Jungle decomposed Granite.
- 2. - Open & hilly with few trees - Granite
- 3. - Fir, Larch and apple trees Granite boulders.
- 4. - Trees stunted, disappear altogether towards the South, red micaceous slate.
- 5. - Blue slate, no trees, except about the Baga pani.
- 6. - Sandstone - flat and often bare
- 7. - Coal.



VIEW IN THE KASYA HILLS.

Engraved by W. Woodcut 1831.