

6.—*Overland Route to China viâ Assam, Tenga Pani River, Khamti, and Singphoo Country, across the Irrawaddi River into Yunnan.*
By HENRY COTTAM, Esq.

Deyanawatte Estate, Badulla, Ceylon,
November 27th, 1876.

A GENTLEMAN residing in Luckimpore, Upper Assam, one who has travelled much in nearly every part of the world, had made up his mind to attempt an entrance into Chinese territory viâ the Khamti and Singphoo country, and across the Irrawaddi River into Yunnan.

For the above purpose he went to considerable personal expense in the outfit of a small Expedition, and engaged eighteen followers as under:—

One Sepoy of the 44th (*on leave*); one Brahman pilgrim from Benares; one Assamese cook; three Bengali coolies for carrying provisions; six Dhooms (Assamese canoe-men); four Khamti guides and interpreters; two Mishmi mountaineers.—Total, eighteen.

My object in visiting Assam was principally to draw up a series of Letters on Tea Cultivation, for the benefit of planters in the Island of Ceylon; also to describe the country and its people; the manners and customs of the numerous Hill-tribes on either side of the great Assam Valley, through which flows the noble Brahmaputra River, which in the rainy season is no less than 15 miles wide *in parts*, with a very strong current.

My companion in travel met me at "Sadiya," the camp on the British frontier. Here we had witnessed the Mèla or annual fair, the meeting of the Hill-tribes, who numbered upwards of 2000 men, women, and children, chiefly consisting of Mishmis, Singphoos, Khamtis, and Meerees.

The Nágás, though seen on the road carrying cotton and other produce, did not attend the Mèla. The exchange of produce lasted a week, enlivened at intervals by races and field sports, after which the savages retired to their mountain homes.

Sadiya is about 870 miles from Calcutta, 150 miles of which may be done by railway; 660 miles from Goalundo to Debrooghur by steamer, and 60 on horseback.

Our little party left Sadiya on the 14th of February, 1876, the weather anything but promising to be fair. C. H. L. and myself occupied the first canoe, the Assamese and Bengali servants a second, and the Khamti guides a third.

The thermometer was below 60°, and drizzling rain descended all day.

We passed a Meeree village on the left bank of the Brahmaputra, and camped a few miles above it on a sand-bank, where our people made large log-fires to keep away wild beasts.

A storm came on in the night, which completely washed away everything in the shape of huts and our tent of tarpaulin.

The following day we camped at the mouths of the Tenga Pani and Noa Dehing rivers, and, on exploring the banks of the Noa Dehing, found it silted up to such an extent that our canoes could not go up. We therefore decided on entering the Tenga Pani, and arrived at a Khamti village called "Juna." Here we camped for the night, and the following day passed a village called "Latow," inhabited by Singphoos.

Our canoe-men had much difficulty in poling over the numerous rapids, many of which running at the rate of 10 miles an hour, but, fortunately for us, they were not very deep. Some of the islands on the River Tenga Pani are very picturesque, one in particular called Shi Kar Maseli Kopali (Fisherman's Island).

We approached another similar wooded islet of great beauty, called "Bor Kopali," meaning in Assamese "large island."

About 2 P.M. we passed the junction of the Tenga Nuddi and the Tenga Pani, joining at an acute angle. The Tenga Nuddi enters the Tenga Pani on the left bank.

The Khamtis informed us that we might go up the Tenga Nuddi without seeing a house or a man for six or seven days' journey. At 5.15 P.M., fourth day from Sadiya, we sighted the village called "Shang Kām," and rounding a densely wooded island, where the rapids ran with great impetuosity, our men, poling with all their might, brought us to an anchor.

The scenery up and down the Tenga Pani, looking at it from the village ghât (or landing-place), is extremely beautiful, and directly opposite stood an old tree, clothed from top to bottom with orchids and climbing ferns, hanging in festoons from the branches near the water.

We camped at Shang Kām for two days, dried our clothes, and wrote up our notes. The Khamtis appeared to be an industrious people. The men cultivate rice, with the assistance of Mishmi mountaineers, whilst the women weave their own grown cotton into neat-patterned cloths for themselves and their children. A Buddhist priest instructs the children in reading and writing, and they read their lessons aloud in his verandah.

The village of Shang Kām contains about twenty well-built houses, raised on piles or changs, around which may be seen the orange, lemon, lime, mango, jak, peach, plum, and guava; also patches of opium-poppy, Khamti tobacco, and onions, &c., cultivated and fenced in on the banks of the Tenga Pani.

The following conversation with the Rajah of Shang Kām is important, as it refers to the overland trade-route to China.

Chow Mung Thi is employed by the British Government as interpreter to the Deputy-Commissioner, and we met him at Sadiya during the Mēla. He then promised to escort us to China direct by the Khamti, Singphoo, and Irrawaddi route, into the Chinese province of Yunan.

The conversation we had with him regarding this subject, with a more detailed description of our journey, was published by my companion in the 'Calcutta Englishman,' and by me in the 'Ceylon Observer,' Colombo.

In reply to Mr. L.'s questions in Assamese, Chow Mung Thi spoke as follows:—

"You could not possibly go to China at this time of the year. The rains have begun, and you could only get to Khamti and have to wait there till next cold season, as you could neither get back nor go on. What would you do then? The paths are very jungly, and there is snow to cross; you have to march in watercourses, which, although you could pass now, you will find impassable on your attempt to return. The journey would kill you now, and would be very hard work for my people. If you did get to China, and went on as you propose, what would become of my people?"

"It is just the season for beginning to attend to our rice-farming, and these men would not get back." (This, we believe, was his principal reason for obstructing our progress, for he probably wanted the men himself.)

"You have only one steep hill, and that you can ascend and descend in one day.

"It is all very well your saying you came to expect great hardships, but you don't know what is before you now; if you offer me 30 rupees per diem I will not go with you. I will get you some men. You say you want thirty to carry everything, including their own food, &c. Well, I'll try and get them; but it will cost you a rupee a day for each man, or 900" (900 rs. for the thirty men per mensem); "and, if you succeed at all, it will take you at least two months, i.e. 1800" (1800 rs., or 1800), and the return-journey for the men!

"If you try next November instead of now, I'll go with you myself, and write to the Singphos and bring them in, arrange everything, and the men will only cost from six to eight annas (from 9d. to 1s.) each per diem, and you can give me what you like."

Here was an obstacle we did not anticipate, and we tried to reduce our baggage; but, as we should have to carry sixteen days' provisions, we did not see our way to curtail the number.

We became convinced it would be useless attempting to push our way to China without the consent of Chow Mung Thi, whose influence extends throughout the Khamti country, and even with the Singphos. We had another interview with the Rajah, when he informed us that he had visited China and also Calcutta."

The cross-questioning was resumed, and the following are the answers:—

"If you determine to go next dry season, give me a few months' notice, so that I may arrange with the Singphos, for they are a wild people; and although they behave themselves when at 'Sadiya'" (the British frontier) "and in Assam, away from their own country, for fear of the 'Sahib'" (Deputy Commissioner), "in their own country they are very different, and very exacting from strangers. When I went through their country, they cost me over 300 rs. (30*l.*) in presents alone! So you can see what it would cost you, a Sahib, to go through their country. At home they are almost savages, hardly dressing themselves, and doing very little cultivation.

"Mr. Cooper, when he tried to go to Thibet through the strip of Mishmi country which lies between us and Thibet, took 500 rs. (50*l.*) with him from here, and only brought back 100 rs. (10*l.*), with only four men. The distance to Thibet takes us eight days only. Mr. Cooper took thirty days accomplishing a distance which our people can walk in four days."

We hear from Europeans in Assam who met Mr. Cooper, that he was turned back by the Mishmi mountaineers near one of their cane bridges. A chief presented him with a dhow (native sword) and spear, and said: "Take these to your Queen, and tell her these are the weapons we fight with. You cannot enter Thibet, it is against the order of the Chinese Government. Go back, or we will kill you."

Chow Mung Thi went on to say:—

"Hobong is eight days' journey from us, but sixteen for you; and no supplies of provisions on the road. Then it takes eight days more to reach the Irrawaddi River, and it will take you at least sixteen or eighteen days."

(Hobong, the Khamti village, must not be mistaken for Hookung, nearer Burmah, and the site of the Amber mines, near the Irrawaddi River.)

"Then it takes eight days more to reach the Irrawaddi River, and it will take you at least sixteen or eighteen.

"It is between Hobong and the Irrawaddi River that the ascent has to be made I told you of. A little past Hobong are the two hills of almost pure silver, a sample of which I have given you. There is a great quantity of gold there too, from which the name of our little colony is named Khamti, meaning gold country, and by which name you Sahibs call all of us, who are really Shans, from Chan or Shan, a country nearer China, having a strip of Singphoo country between us. The Singphos again lie between Shan country and China.

"I gave Captain B. a large sample of our silver ore, but I don't know what he did with it" (probably destroyed when the Kachcheri was burned down in Debecoghur). "We have got a quarter seer of silver out of one seer of ore from our place (a seer is two pounds, thus half a pound of silver to two pounds weight), and three-eighths of metal (30 rs.) out of one seer from another place. The hills are bright with it, and look like the sample I have given you."

We were informed that the Chinese have made periodical visits to the

silver mine, and built a screen to prevent the Khamtis from seeing their *modus operandi*.

The want of opium and sufficient money to pay our way was the cause of our return *viâ* the Tenga Pani into the Brahmaputra; and as we obtained Government passes to visit the Brahma Khund, we proceeded on our journey up the Brahmaputra as far as navigable. Tigers, wild buffalo, and deer were seen on the banks of the river; but the object of our trip was to gain geographical knowledge, therefore our party did not often indulge in sport.

Friday, 25th February, twelfth day out, we reached the head of the Karam River, or, as the natives call it, the "Karam Pani." Another river, called the Subatu, meets the Karam, a few miles from the Brahmaputra. Wild duck were plentiful, and the river abounds with Marseer fish (Indian salmon), 64 lbs. of which we succeeded in landing in one day.

We camped at "Man Kooti," meaning buffalo grazing-ground.

The difficulties we encountered with the rapids in the Karam Pani were greater than those of the Tenga Pani for our people. All hands had to assist in dragging the canoes over the rocks, and the waters rushed through narrow channels with great fury, foaming and roaring in a manner calculated to alarm any one but an old traveller; they reminded me of the coral reefs of the Fiji Islands and South Seas.

27th February, 1876.—Fourteenth day from Sadiya. We commenced our overland march in the direction of the Brahma Khund; camping on the bank of the Karam Pani, and built our huts of sticks and leaves. Marching up the bed of the river all next day, as we looked up stream, the large gorge in the hills in which the Mishmi mountaineers say the Kamlung or Karam rises directly facing us, 30° s. of E., and the Brahma Khund is a little north of east of us. The snow-clad giant mountains of the Himalayan range stood out in bold relief with the sun shining on them, and often rooted me to the spot in silent admiration.

The following day we resumed our march, leaving the Karam River behind us, and abandoned our huts in the centre of the bed of the river, on mounds of sand and stones, with streams and small rapids flowing on all sides of our camp. Again we encountered a fearful storm, and suffered great inconvenience. The jungle we had to march through consisted of cane and bamboo, the most troublesome of jungles to cut one's way through.

Entering the jungle on its right bank, through this disagreeable undergrowth of cane and bamboo, we continued east by north, until we entered the dry bed of a river for about a mile, when we suddenly came upon a river running at right angles to it; this river is called the "Lohit." Following its course on the left bank for a short distance, we then waded across, and proceeded along its right bank for a time, and crossed it again, using its left bank.

Having followed this river's course for more than a mile, we came to another dry river-bed at a bend in the "Lohit," which met the bend nearly at right angles on the left bank. This dry river-bed might be described as a valley of ferns, skirted by a dense cane-growth, until we ascended the jungle, and marched some distance under the shade of heavy forest trees, clothed with many descriptions of orchids and wax plants for about two miles, when we were agreeably surprised to find ourselves once more on the banks of our old friend the Brahmaputra, which we hailed with delight, after so much jungle travelling, although a very cold breeze was blowing down from the mountains.

We had now arrived at the most difficult part of our journey, having to jump from boulder to boulder for a great distance along the left bank of the great river; entering the jungle again for a short distance, and again emerging on to the boulders, with about one mile of jumping to do from one stone to

another, many of which gave way, and caused unpleasant sensations in slipping. At last we came to a sand-plain fringed with grass, and on this we agreed to camp. Already the Mishmi mountaineers had erected some rude huts, and our people gladly took possession of them to shield themselves from the heavy rain which had drenched us all.

The Brahma Khund bore 3° north of east from our camp on the sandbank, until we came to the edge of the jungle, which we entered, and a hard hour's march we had of it before we came out again on the banks of the Brahmaputra. Here we found exercise à la chamois hunter, jumping from boulder to boulder for about a mile and a half. This kind of exercise accounts for the muscular calves of the Mishmi mountaineers, both male and female.

Now and again we would stop to admire the grand scenery on the opposite bank of the Brahmaputra River, the hills rising abruptly from the water's-edge, and in the distance we could see the Khund. A very cold, strong, but healthy breeze was blowing down stream, which, with the prospect of soon arriving at the end of our journey, put new life into all of us.

Again entering the jungle, ascending steep paths only fit for the Mishmi mountaineers, for it was slippery and full of thorns, with overhanging rocks and fallen trees in our path, we suddenly came upon the famous Brahma Khund, the sacred pool of Brahma, and the main object of our visit, the first civilians who have visited it alone and unprotected.

The Brahma Khund, or Sacred Pool of Brahma, is a bay dependent principally on the Brahmaputra River for its support or supply of water, for we could see plainly the Brahmaputra issuing from between the two nearest hills to the Khund, and, whilst supplying the river, sending a backwater into this small bay, enclosed by rocks nearly perpendicular. The Brahma Khund is a romantic piece of wild scenery, enclosed by rugged, overhanging rocks and precipices, from fifty to several hundred feet in height, the contents of the bay being principally supplied by the Brahmaputra; for, as we sat at the foot of the Sacred Pool, we could see a backwater flowing into and retiring from it; whilst again it is fed by the Deo Pani, or Godly Water, which forms a small stream, and drains the surrounding elevated land (the Mishmi Hills).

There is a projecting rock, over which we climbed, and there caught a glimpse of the mighty Brahmaputra, rushing and foaming through a deep chasm, as though angry at being enclosed in so small a space. (This outlet is about two hundred yards from the Khund, and can only be seen by climbing over the rocks.) How anxious we were to explore its banks and find its true source! but, alas! we were short of rice, and our men refused to go an inch farther; refused even to fetch a tin of rice hidden in the jungle on the bank of the Karam, intended for our return journey. (The rice was hidden in the jungle on account of our inability to carry it, and to check extravagance.)

But, to return to the subject; the castle-like appearance of the rocks, the Deo Pani Cascade, the roaring waters of the Brahmaputra issuing from an unexplored region, the Mishmi Hills clothed with forest to their summits, and our little camp in the midst of so much romantic scenery, produced pleasing sensations. All these things had to be weighed in the scale against our pet object being thwarted, and the discovery that the Brahmaputra was still a heavy body of water sweeping round from the Himalaya, and probably running through Thibet and China.

The most remarkable feature of this journey was the fact of our encountering heavy rain, with thunder, lightning, and strong winds, from the day we left the British frontier until our return to Sadiya, 22 days out, where we found 16 buildings had been blown down on the night we were moored at the mouths of the Tenga Pani and Noa Dehing; many were of opinion that it was a cyclone.

We have both kept our journals of this journey in full detail; and should

the Geographical Society wish for further information regarding the rivers and villages in the Mishmi and Khamti country, both of which are excluded from ordinary maps, we should only be too glad to make another attempt to enter China.

7.—*Table of Distances on the River Amazons.*

By LLEWELLYN NASH, Esq.

Pará, July 3rd, 1876.

By the medium of Mr. S. W. Silver, I forward a Table of the distances in geographical miles of various towns and places of call on the River Amazons, from Pará to Yurimaguas, in Peru, which it may be agreeable to you to receive. The calculations are founded on the experience of upwards of twenty voyages of different steamers, and I believe the Table to be more correct than any yet published. The latitudes and longitudes are incomplete, but I was unable to take observations.

I am indebted to Mr. Simson, an English Naturalist, lately from Guayaquil, and to Don Rafael Reyes, of Popayan, on the River Putumayo, in Columbia, for assistance in forming the Table, especially as regards that portion between Yquitos and Yurimaguas, in Peru.

We are opening up steam communication with Columbia, by the River Iça, or Putumayo, and may probably be in a position to gain geographical knowledge regarding remote countries on the eastern slopes of the Cordillera of the Andes, and if you will direct my attention to especial points of interest to your Society, I will endeavour to secure reliable information.

To the Secretary, B.G.S.