

Excursion in the Abor Hills ; from Sadiya on the Upper Assam.

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I LEFT Sadiya by boat on the 11th October, 1884, and reached Oling Miri's village at Kodgagora, on the left bank of the Dihong, that evening. My party consisted of Mr. W. B. Mellor, a resident of Sadiya, who volunteered to accompany me, and thirty men, including a guard of frontier police, boatmen, and domestics.

On the 12th we proceeded (by boat) to Bhugdol's village, just below Namsing, on the right bank of the Dihong, and camped there for the night, and on the following morning we started (by boat) for the Membo Abor ghat, about one hour's journey above Namsing, which we reached about 11 A.M. I pitched my camp on the left bank of the Dihong and sent four Bar Abor kotokis (interpreters) to Membo to inform the villagers that I had arrived at their ghat and wished to visit their village, and I told the kotokis that, in the event of the Membo people consenting to receive me, I should want some men to carry up my traps. Next morning (the 13th) two of the kotokis returned in company with Labor, son of Bapok, one of the head men, and eleven other Abors, and informed me that the Membo people wished me very much to visit their village; it was then, however, too late in the day to make a move, so I determined to stay where I was until the following morning, the Membo men remaining in my camp for the night. Late that afternoon Punning, the head man from the Passi Abor village of Balek, called in at my camp on his way to Sadiya, and hearing that I intended visiting certain Passi Abor villages, he told me that his people would be glad to see me, but he requested that I would not visit his village after I had been to Padoo, as cholera had been raging there of late, and I promised him that I would not do so.

About six o'clock on the following morning, leaving one tent and all heavy baggage behind in charge of the Havildar, three frontier police sepoy, and two Abor kotokis, we started for Membo. Our baggage was purposely made very light, comprising only nine loads; but after crossing the Dihong, the Membo men refused for a time to carry most of them, declaring that they were too heavy. They said, "We are sepoy, exactly like your sepoy, not coolies." I told them that I was perfectly aware of the fact, and after explaining that I had made each load as light as I possibly could, and that I was entirely beholden to them for carriage, I gave them a few rupees, and they at last picked them up, and we left the ghat about 7 A.M. After proceeding for about a mile or so, we came upon some of their *arrabs* (cultivated fields), and our path lay through some very fine fields of late *dhan*, intermixed with *anyat* (a plant used for making liquor) and Job's tears. The path through the arrabs is

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wide, and clear of jungle, and after emerging from them we came upon a beautiful gravelly road, cleared of jungle, some 10 or 12 feet in breadth, which took us as far as the Siku (a mountain stream now about 60 feet broad, and running very strong), that is for a distance of about eight or nine miles. On our way to the Siku we met several parties of women and children on their way to the arraha, and afterwards a hunting party, who were beating the jungles close by, and parallel with our road. The Abors pointed out to us the branch of a tree a long way off, and would not be satisfied until we had fired several shots at it; the Abors then fired a large number of arrows at different objects, and proved themselves to be first-rate marksmen, even at a long distance.

The Siku is crossed by a most ingeniously and strongly made suspension bridge, which is repaired yearly. Two trees about two feet in diameter, one from either side of the river, and of sufficient length to span it, having been felled, and nicely adzed, their bases are firmly fixed (at an angle of about 20 degrees) into pillars of loose boulders, each encased in a very strong bamboo framework, so as to prevent their being washed away, as near the low-water mark of the river as possible, and these trees are again supported, about the middle, by some 150 or 200 stout canes, which reach from the adjacent trees (and there are luckily a good many very fine ones about the place) on one bank to those on the other. For instance, the canes fixed to the trees on the left of the bridge, looking at it from south to north, pass under the centre of it, and are fixed to the trees on the right of the bridge on the opposite bank, and *vice versa*. After this several canes are stretched across the river a little below, and several a little above the woodwork of the bridge, and a network of cane from one to the other, forms a kind of rail to steady oneself by when crossing over the bridge. I crossed over in company with some twenty other people, and the oscillation was wonderfully slight considering the width, about 120 feet, of the bridge. There is a path from this spot to the south-westward leading to Padoo.

From the Siku up to Membo the distance is about two miles, and I calculated that we ascended about 800 or 1000 feet in that distance. The village site has been marvellously well chosen. On its southern and western sides the hills rise perpendicularly from the bed of the Siku to a height of about 800 feet, and they are quite bare, while to the north and westward the hill-sides are cut up by deep ravines, and they are likewise so perpendicular that it would be impossible to ascend them. As far as I could see the only possible way of getting into the village would be by the path we were taking, viz. from the southward, and there are numerous deep, though narrow, artificially made ravines to be crossed as well as several steep ascents to be made ere the village is reached, each of which might, if necessary, be so defended in turn by a resolute body of men as to make it an exceedingly difficult matter for any enemy to enter the village.

It was past 1 P.M. when we reached the village, owing to the stoppages on the road already alluded to. Had we marched straight through we should have arrived there by about 10.30 or 11 A.M., as I do not think the distance from the ghat is over 12 miles. Just before entering the village we came upon a large number of graves made of bamboos, and thatched. The Abors bury their dead in a squatting posture, and while grieving for a deceased relative they light a fire inside the hut every day. I was met close to the entrance of the village by Bapok, one of the senior *gams*, or head men, who told me that he was glad to see me and that I might stay as long as I liked. He is a thin, wizened old man with rather a nice expression, partially blind, and scarcely able to walk. We were then conducted to a spot close to the village palaver or council-house (called Mosup in Abor), and there we pitched our tent, and while the work was going on, crowds of women, children, and men began to form around us, some taking hold of this, others examining that, and all asking for *amas* (Abor for present). I told them that I was very sorry that I had brought nothing in the shape of presents with me, but this they would not at first credit, and as soon as they did they showed unmistakable signs of dissatisfaction. They said that Dalton, Bivar, and Nabin (?) Sahibs had each brought numerous presents with them when they visited their village, and that they could not understand, therefore, why I had come up empty-handed. I explained that I did not know that it had been usual for Sahibs when visiting their villages to give them presents; that I had come up as light as I could possibly travel; that I was not sure whether they would admit me into their village, &c.: but no amount of even legitimate excuses appeared to satisfy them, for they growled out "Oh! you are a pretty Sahib to come up here in this manner; other Sahibs that came up brought three or four elephant loads of things, and every one got a present." Just then the interpreters suggested a walk through the village, and thinking this was a good way of getting rid of the majority of my persecutors for a time, I jumped at the suggestion, and started off at once to explore the village. It is built on a very broad and stony spur, and the houses lie on terraces, in batches of 60 or 80, one terrace above the other, so that those on the upper terraces are several hundreds of feet above those on the lower. It is a very large village, containing at least from 250 to 300 houses, which, allowing ten people to each house—and I do not think I am over-estimating the number, for I entered several houses, and found families in them numbering from 12 to 20—would give a population of between 2000 and 2500 souls. The ground on which the houses in each terrace are erected, is strewn with loose stones, some of a large size, and is extremely uneven, so that in some places ten or fifteen houses may be seen on tolerably even ground, while around these again the roofs only of others are

perceptible; but every available space has been occupied, for no ground is too uneven to build upon. The houses are all fine, massive buildings (I did not see a single mean-looking house in the village), from 60 to 80 by 20 feet; the front verandah is covered in like the sides, the roof coming to within two feet or so of the front *chang*, and the latter is then carried on, though on a slightly lower level, outside all for some 15 or 20 feet further. This is very convenient in many ways, for on a rainy day there is a large sheltered verandah to sit in; while if sunshine is required, the occupants of each house can squat about on the outer *chang*. No thatching grass is available, and so all the houses are thatched with a kind of plant called *tara* by the Abors, which is very like the *tokopat* used in many parts of Assam, but the lower stem of the *tara* is excessively thorny. This is split in half, and laid on when dry, and it is alleged that it will last from five to six years. The fronts of the houses are made of huge boards, some of which are three or four feet wide, but they are not, as far as I could see, carved. The heads of all game killed in hunting, as also of those killed at feasts, are arranged on shelves fixed to these boards, and under the roof in the verandah there are numerous bamboo shelves used as receptacles for all sorts of miscellaneous household goods. The eaves of the houses come down close to the ground, and each house has a back, as well as front, exit, but they are nevertheless naturally very dark inside, and as each house has from two to five large fire-places about four feet square, in which fires appear to be kept constantly burning, they are not comfortable places for a stranger, at least, to sit in for any length of time. The fire-places are made (like those in Miri houses) of planks resting on posts covered over with six or eight inches of earth, and over each one there is a bamboo framework suspended from above for drying meat, &c., on. None of the houses have any partitions inside, so that there can be no privacy of any sort. Fowls do not appear to prowl about much inside; they are supplied with bamboo baskets fixed in the front verandah, and they also roost there at night. The pig-styes are at one side of the house. They are partitioned off for each pig, and are boarded, and as the pigs are well fed and cared for, they are fat, and really nice eating; and as the boards upon which they rest are laid down with a slope outwards, most of the filth runs outside, and is carried off by the rain. There are a very large number of jack-trees in the village, the fruit of which is much prized. I also saw some fine lime and orange trees, and I tasted the fruit of both, and found them very good; the majority, however, had recently been hacked down, owing to cholera having been raging at Padoo. These trees are, I am told, thus treated whenever any serious stomachic disease makes its appearance. Why the jack-trees escape upon such occasions, I could not find out. Goitre is very prevalent in the village, and I was repeatedly asked for goitre ointment, though I had none with me. At least two-thirds of the

men, women, and children have it, and some of those I saw were abnormally large, and yet the water appears to be beautifully clean and pure, and the village is plentifully supplied with it from a huge spring which comes out of the rocks at the top of the spur. It is conducted through bamboos to several fixed spots in the village, the distance from the spring to the lower end of the village being at least three-quarters of a mile, or a mile.

We were about two hours and a half walking through the village, and upon our returning to the spot where our tent had been pitched we found some 700 or 800 people, men, women, and children, round it and the spot where our cook was busy getting our food ready, and as soon as we got inside we were completely hemmed in by them. The sides and back were lifted up, and the heads popped in here, there, and everywhere, and everything seized and examined, especially a looking and a magnifying glass which I had with me. About five o'clock we were asked to go and see the *morong* (*mosup* in Abor) or council-house. Abors are proud of their *mosup*, where all important topics are talked over, and disposed of. I paced the shed and found it 80 yards long and 10 yards wide, with twenty-four fire-places in it. It is built on the same plan as the houses, except that it is entirely open along the whole of one side in addition to having the usual front and back exits, probably to allow of its occupants jumping out speedily in case of an attack, or fire. In this house all the single men warriors reside, and it is also used as a council room.

The side walls are crammed with the heads of every description of animal, and all down the centre of it are to be seen the bows, arrows, fishing gear, hats, spears, &c., of the warriors on bamboo trays. The *mosup* is close to the entrance to the village, and would hold about 500 men. After sitting there for a short time we returned to our tent and called for dinner. We placed three or four Miris at either entrance to the tent and these men endeavoured to keep back the crowd, but all their endeavours to keep off the people were futile; the pushing and straining for places of vantage, from which a good view of us could be obtained, went on while we were eating, and fingers were unceremoniously popped on to, and into, anything strange, such as corned beef, mustard, pepper, &c. After dinner we went outside, but it was quite as bad there. Our hats were pulled off our heads and went the round of some 100 other heads in as many minutes, handkerchiefs the same. We had to take off our coats that they might feel our chests, and then they insisted on our taking off our boots and socks as they declared we had no feet. The women, I may here remark, are excessively rollicky, and the unmarried girls have apparently any amount of latitude given to them. They are plain, but the majority of them have pleasant, laughing faces. In figure they are squat and heavily made, and big limbed. They wear their hair cropped and have their breasts bare, their only article of clothing being a very short petticoat fastened round

their waist, which reaches to about two inches above the knee. Many of them are tattooed with perpendicular lines over the lips and the corners of their mouths, as also on the back of their legs under the bend of the knee above the calf.

The unmarried girls wear five or six flat circular plates of brass, one slightly overlapping the other, called *boiop*, fixed to a platted band of thin cane under their petticoats, and while working in their fields, or in the village on a hot day, it is the only article they have to cover their nakedness; they also wear little gaiters of platted cane, coloured, about six inches wide, on each ankle, called *essong* in Abor. They are excessively fond of necklaces, earrings, and bracelets, in fact, finery of all sorts. Their teeth are as black as a coal from continually chewing *sali*, tobacco, and *chun* (the latter the Abors make themselves out of a shell which they find in their river beds), and many of them also smoke pipes like the men. They are very fond of singing and dancing; they treated us to two exhibitions, and did their utmost to get us to sing and dance too. There is nothing either graceful or pretty in their dancing. Some fifteen to twenty hold one another by the arm, above the elbow, and after one of their number has sung a line or two, in an almost inaudible, and very plaintive voice, the rest join in a chorus, moving round slowly in a ring the while; sometimes they open out the chain to its full extent, and run up against one another face to face, singing all the while, first one way then the other.

On another occasion they will all move round in a ring with the aid of a small and excessively stiff hop, and bow very low to one another the while. Each village has a *mirü* (Abor word) called Dondai in Assamese, a sort of sorcerer. He is fantastically dressed, wears heaps of necklaces, and bits of cane and other stuffs in his ears, and carries a long knife (called *yoksha* in Abor). He moves about the village in a stately manner and with a dignified air, as if he was quite something out of the common. I have not yet been able to find out what real power these men possess, but as the Abor is naturally very superstitious, I fancy, from the manner he is treated, that he is a great man amongst them. He is supposed to possess preternatural powers and to be able to commune with spirits (*oyu* in Abor). He is consulted in all cases of serious illness, and will then strut about and pretend that he has found out the spirit that is offended, and he will dictate what kind of propitiation is required, but beyond this I know nothing, notwithstanding all my inquiries. The Membo man was brought up to our tent in the evening, and was made to go through a few steps and sing a little for our edification, and while doing so he shook his long knife about and made a jingling noise with it, drawn and pointed upright, but whether he was advocating our immediate slaughter, or soliciting that we should be hospitably and kindly treated, I could not tell, and the interpreters either could not or would not tell us what he said. After dark

he went off and danced and sang with the girls, and we then flattered ourselves that we should get some short respite, but alas, we were mistaken. Everybody goes about the village after dark with a fire-brand made of thinly cut pieces of bamboo, and some dozens of these were brought to our tent and poked into our faces, and presently some wood having been collected, a fire was kindled, and the crowd got thicker than ever, and continued so until 9 P.M., when, as we were tired, we expressed a wish to go to bed. But as fast as we shut the door of our tent it was opened again. Sleep was out of the question. Our sleeplessness was enhanced by two of the kotokis who were lying under the outer fly of our tent calling out to me in Assamese, "Sahib! I don't like the look of affairs. The Abors seem undecided what they intend doing. You brought us up here and we will stick by you, and if you die we will die too." And when I asked what they meant, they merely replied, "How can we say?" Of course all we could do was to put our revolvers under our heads and trust in Providence. Three times were we disturbed by fire-brands being poked into our tent, and when at last we did fall asleep we were awoke by hearing the most awful yells proceeding from every part of the village, and from one man in particular, who, fire-brand in hand, ran yelling past our tent. I immediately woke up the kotokis—for having primed themselves with grog during the day they had by this time fallen off into a sound sleep—and asked them what it all meant; and after listening for a while, they said, "Oh, it is an order from the council-house going round the village telling the villagers that it has been decided that there is to be a general holiday to-morrow, and that every man, woman, and child is to remain in the village and not go out to work." And, as they added that this augured well for us, we were soon sound asleep. At 5 A.M. we were awoke by the cocks crowing and the women pounding out grain, and so we got up and performed our ablutions, and had our early breakfast in peace.

As soon as it was daylight the crowd commenced again to hem us in, and by 6.30 we had some hundreds of new faces around us, chiefly those that had been away from the village on the previous day, and as I noticed one or two men whom I had treated well in Sadiya, we gladly accepted their invitation to visit their houses, and we thus got rid of the crowd for a time. But what with the smoke inside the house we were ushered into, and the liquor we were compelled to swallow at 7 A.M., it was really no better than being pulled about by the crowd outside, and having to answer fifty questions per minute.

We sat there, however, until 8 A.M., after which we visited the chief Bapok, and spent a comparatively quiet hour with him, during which time I managed to ingratiate myself with the old man, by talking to him in the Abor language, and promising to send him a few little odds and ends on my return to Sadiya. During our conversation I hinted that I should like to leave that afternoon, but he would not

desecration, when they believe them to harbour two of the most powerful spirits (called Apom and Nyipong) they are accustomed periodically to propitiate. We discussed many of their grievances, and as soon as I had finished replying to them, they showed visible signs of satisfaction, and we were permitted to leave the mosup and have a cup of tea; but as soon as this was finished, we were again surrounded by a large mob, who vociferously requested us to fire our guns for the edification of the general community. It was no use arguing that, as there were inhabited houses on all sides of us, there was the danger of a bullet striking a stone, and by so doing maiming, or even killing, some one; so seeing that the men were determined that we should fire, I picked out a large jack-tree some 300 yards from the mosup and fired some dozen or so shots at the branches. After I had finished they brought out their bows and arrows, and showed us what they could do with them, and made us also use them afterwards. We were then permitted to go to our tents and rest.

We were, as usual, up before daylight, and had struck our tent and got everything packed before many Abors were astir, and at 7 A.M., getting our coolies together, we bade farewell to the villagers and commenced our return march. Before leaving the village, however, there was a discussion as to whether we might go through the arrahs or not, as the villagers had determined to have a *gena* that day, but Bapok, the head gam, said we might. When we got to the arrahs, however, our porters at first refused to allow us to go through them, and they threatened to put down our goods and return to the village if we persisted in doing so; but after a long argument, and I had explained that Bapok had told us that we might do so, they consented to our going through alone, while they went round them, through some very dense jungle, making a detour of some four miles more. We accordingly walked down the road through the arrahs, and after passing through them we sat, according to previous arrangement, upon a stone to await the arrival of our luggage, and just as we had seated ourselves, up came one of our Abor friends, with his load, grinning. It appears that previous to our arrival at the arrahs he had lagged behind a little, and so when he came to the spot where his comrades had gone off the road into the jungle, he considered it would be less trouble to come on straight after us, and so he did, although he was acting in strict contravention to all Abor rules by doing so, and shortly after he had arrived up came the four orderlies and our two servants, they having also come by the straight route. The incident shows, I think, that the skirting of fields with crops upon them during *gena* days, is merely an old custom which, when inconvenient, may be broken through without the dread of any very serious consequences ensuing.

On reaching our camp I sent Bhugdol Kotoki, the only Passi Abor

I had with me, off to Romkang to inform the gams and people that I wished to see their village, and we moved to Passighat, reaching there about 5 P.M. I pitched my tents on the right bank of the Dihong, nearly opposite the spot where our troops were encamped in 1859, just before the assault on Romkang. We could see the Padu village smoke curling up above the forest trees, but we could not see the houses. This village is more easily reached from the spot were the Siku empties itself into the Dihong than from Membo. The different shades of green from the Padu fields, on the slopes of the hills, looked very pretty about sunset, and from the centre of them, as it were, rises the sugar-loaf peak called Regam by the Abors. The Padu people declare that it is the abode of a mighty spirit, and none of them therefore ever dream of going up it. It is alleged that there is a bheel or ghost covering about a *poorah* of land, very near the top of it, in which there is a very large Buka fish without tail, and that two black divers swim about the water and guard the fish. The legend was started by the Passi Abora. They declare that years and years ago some of their people, when searching about for a new village site, came upon the bheel and saw the fish and divers in question.

On the morning of the 18th instant we were up early, but Bhugdol Kotoki did not come in with any Abors until about 10.30 A.M. As, however, he informed me that the villagers of Gina, Mongku, Romkang, and Balek (they are all together in a cluster) wished to see me, and he told me that the distance to Gina, where he suggested I should pitch my camp, was only about five miles, I decided to leave at once for the place, and accordingly we started for the village about 11.15 A.M., reaching there about 2 P.M., having halted for three-quarters of an hour, *en route*, at a mountain stream about a mile or so below the village of Gina for breakfast.

The distance from where we left our second tent to the village is between four and a half to five and a half miles. The road lay through dense forest all the way, and unlike the road to Membo, the jungle had not been cleared, so our movements were unavoidably slow. The last half-mile to the village (Gina) is steep, and the ground rugged and stony, and there are also numerous artificially made gullies to be crossed, at present by single planks, ere the village is entered, one and all of which might, if necessary, be speedily strongly palisaded, and as the jungle is very dense in their immediate vicinity the village would be difficult to assault, provided its defenders were brave and resolute men.

At the entrance of the village there is a guard-house to which certain warriors are told off daily, and from this place they keep a look-out day and night. I pitched my camp under a jack-tree on the eastern extremity of the village, and while this was being done we were surrounded, similarly as at Membo, by an admiring crowd. The two gams, Tumkot and Oloong, also came up and said they were glad to

see us, but I noticed several scowling faces among the men, though the women and children were at first exceedingly jovial and friendly. There was the usual cry for *amgn* (present), and there was a very marked display of dissatisfaction upon every one's face when I explained that I had brought none. Upon my explaining, however, as I had done at Membo, that I had only come on a hurried visit this time, being uncertain how I should be received, and promising to bring a few presents next time I came, the majority of the scowling faces disappeared, and our tent was soon as crowded as it had been shortly before at Membo, for people had commenced to come in from the adjacent villages of Monku, Ramkong, and Balek. The women (who are like the Membo women in appearance, dress, &c., except that they have no goitre) were delighted with the looking and magnifying glasses, our boots were pulled off, feet petted and pulled about, coats and hats taken off and tried on, banians opened, and our bodies pinched and examined as at Membo; and when at four o'clock we sat down to a cup of tea the tent was so closely surrounded that one rope was broken and the whole thing threatened to collapse. About this time an incident happened which showed me how very little it required to bring on a row. One of the sulky gentlemen alluded to above had stalked into the tent, which was already almost full to suffocation, and upon my touching him very gently, remonstrating against his pushing his way in in the manner he had done, he rudely pushed my hand away and said, "What do you come here for if you don't want to be looked at? you have brought nothing. Who are you that you can't be looked at? If I want to come in I will. If I want to sit there (pointing to my bed) I will. I shall do as I like." I knew it was no good arguing, so I said in the Abor language, "Certainly, sit down and stay as long as you like. Do just as you like. I did not intend to insult you. You see the crowd in here already: I merely wanted a little room." On another occasion, seeing a little man standing outside, I said to one of the interpreters in Assamese, "Is that man a Miri or an Abor?" But before the interpreter could reply the little man had guessed what had been said, and he became very wroth and said, "You call me a Miri? I am an Abor, I don't belong to you." And he then got very furious with me, although I explained that I had meant no insult; that I was new to the place, and had not called him a Miri, but had merely asked if he was one or not. Nothing, however, seemed to appease him, and after that wherever I went he was at my side scowling. Later on, however, the sulky ones appeared to get better tempered, for I had repeated that I would come and see them all again, and that when I did I would bring them all a small present of something; and I had also conversed a good deal in Abor to the girls and children, as also to many of the men, and this appeared to please them immensely. I had likewise shown the men our guns and revolvers, and had fired many shots into a large jack-tree, first with one

and then with the other. To show their satisfaction they announced their intention to kill a pig, and this was speedily done, and by 7 P.M. every one appeared to be friendly inclined. Their Mirii (sorcerer) was brought up for our inspection, and after dark the girls had a dance, the same in every respect as we had while at Membo.

Early next morning we started to visit Monku, Ramkong, and Balek. These villages have likewise been pitched upon well and carefully chosen sites, the approaches to them are tortuous and narrow, and each could if necessary be easily and stoutly defended by resolute men. I am told that in 1859 we had some very sharp fighting before these villages were stormed and burnt. Monku has about forty houses, and is about one mile from Gina. We stayed there for about half an hour as the people had all been in to see us on the previous day, and then climbed up the hill to Ramkong, which is the largest of the four, having about 100 houses in it. Here we were immediately surrounded, and the chief told us that we should have to remain in the village for three hours as the villagers intended to brew some liquor for us, so we walked about the village, getting a glorious view of the whole valley of the Dihong from the upper portion of it, and chatted with the villagers. About an hour or so after this we were taken off to see the mosup, a fine building, but diminutive compared with the Membo one, and here we found several men busy brewing an enormous quantity of liquor. The brewing was finished about 1.30 P.M., and we then had to swallow some, the interpreters and our three sepoy's being made to do the same. After this some huge stones lying in the village were pointed out to us, and one of the gams said, "That is where Dalton Sahib sat and that where Bivar Sahib sat; now you sit there," pointing to two adjacent stones, one for myself and one for my companion, but we were not kept there long. The men told us to return to Gina as they were going there and wished me to be present at a council to be held in the afternoon, and we accordingly departed, marching back through Balek.

Balek is also a small village, containing about thirty houses, approached from Ramkong by a difficult and intricate path. The people had all been down to our camp at Gina on the previous day, and so we were not much persecuted, though we were compelled to fire a dozen or so shots as also to drink more grog, and the usual solicitations for *aman* were made. We stayed in the village for about 20 minutes and then returned to Gina, where as usual we found some 200 or 300 people gathered round our tent and cooking-place. As soon as I arrived I was told that my presence was required at the Cutcherry (nearly all the men of these villages use this word and they know its meaning), and upon arriving there at 2.30 P.M. I found five chiefs from the neighbouring villages, with a large following, awaiting our arrival. The work of speechifying was at once commenced. First one chief spoke, then another, and occasionally an outsider put in a word, and this

continued until past 5 P.M. The chief topics were as follows:—Paucity of *posa* (money allowance) given them; our refusing to return runaway slaves; the Poba stockade looked upon as a menace, and a source of great worry to the whole of the Passi Miyong, the withdrawal of which they requested; Dums being allowed to fish high up the Dihong, and no rest-house at Sadiya for Abors visiting the place. As regards their *posa*, they declared that the amount was so small that it was useless to them, and they said they would never be satisfied until they got 1000 rupees.

In reply I told them that as they had always received the sum they had now got, I did not think Government would increase it; but that I would represent the matter, and inform them of the result later on.

Their language with regard to the retention by us of their runaway people and slaves, was loud and irate. They argued that inasmuch as they had, years ago, entered into a covenant with us to keep friendly, and to deliver up any of our subjects who might run away from our territory, and seek an asylum with them, we had broken faith with them by not returning their runaways; and when I endeavoured to explain that we should never ask them to return any one who had left us voluntarily and settled with them, unless he was a criminal, they laughed, and evidently considered I was telling a fearful fib. Their language was also vehement with regard to the Poba guard. They commenced the subject by declaring that they had always been our friends, and said that the Poba guard was a menace to them, and that unless it was withdrawn, something would certainly happen, which would, they felt, surely estrange us from one another, a thing they sincerely wished to avoid. I explained why the guard had been placed there, pointed out that it occupied but a very small spot of land, and so forth, and satisfied them at length by assuring them that I would inform Government of their wish, and communicate the result to them later on. With regard to the Dums fishing in the Dihong, as also the erection of a rest-house for them at Sadiya, I told them exactly what I had told the Membo men, and they were quite satisfied.

By 5.15 P.M. having finished replying to their several grievances, the chiefs informed me that they had nothing more to say, and I could see that they, as also the majority of the men, were, like the Membo people, more inclined to be friendly with us after they had poured out their complaints, and been attentively listened and replied to. As soon as we left the Cutcherry a second pig was killed, and I felt that having killed two pigs, and given us a dozen or so of fowls, besides heaps of rice, vegetables, and liquor, they had already been hospitable to us beyond my utmost expectations.

Soon afterwards an incident happened which, had I not been near at the time, might have turned out serious. The sepoy was cooking inside a small enclosure made of green boughs, and there was a goodly

crowd of men, women, and children, watching them. The latter were all laughing and talking amongst themselves, and as they would keep moving very near to the green boughs, one of the sepoys got up and motioned them to go back. This the women and children did, but the men refused to move, whereupon the sepoy commenced abusing them roundly in Hindustani, saying, "You soors, you are not men, only dogs." Luckily I heard this, and rushed up in time to peremptorily order the sepoy to desist. I spoke quietly to the Abors, explaining that the men were not like us, and would not eat if they (the Abors) went near them. I succeeded at last in drawing them away, and as soon as the sepoys had finished their food, I ordered them all to sit down near our cooking-place, where I could see them from my tent, and watched them very closely until they were all asleep. I need, however, scarcely say that there would have been a terrific row had the Abors understood the abuse which the sepoy had levelled at them. I cannot blame the sepoys, for they had behaved exceedingly well, cheerfully enduring the mobbing and pulling about (and they were subject to quite as much of it, if not more than we were), and never either by word or action had shown the slightest sign of surliness or ill-humour, even at meal times, when they were often rudely and unceremoniously interfered with.

At daylight of the 20th inst. we bade good-bye to every one and left the village. By 11 A.M. all our things had come into camp, carried in from Gina entirely by women, and by noon we were on our way to Sadiya, reaching Boivagi Miris village on the Brahmaputra that evening and Sadiya at noon on the following morning, the 22nd inst.

That my trip has been a successful one I think admits of no doubt. I and my party were most heartily welcomed, and hospitably treated by the Passi as well as by the Bar Abors. Colonel Dalton was, I believe, the last British officer that visited Membo, and this was in 1854—thirty years ago. It is no wonder therefore that the people of this village beset us in the manner they did. The last visit to Romkang and other places was by a British force in 1859, when we destroyed it by fire, and yet, here also, we were most hospitably received, and entertained. I cannot speak too highly of the villagers as a whole. We had a quantity of miscellaneous property with us, but notwithstanding that everything was somewhat unceremoniously seized and handled, we never lost a single article, while the gams or headmen of all the villages I visited were not only extremely civil, but went out of their way to make us comfortable.

My being able to express myself in their own language pleased the Abors immensely, and they repeatedly told me so, saying, "Now we are not afraid of the Miri interpreters telling you and us lies;" but although I am convinced that the fact of my being able to do so added in no small measure to the success of my visit to their villages, I never-

theless feel that I have to be thankful to the native interpreters for the part they played throughout. Had they chosen to blacken my fame I feel sure they would have been eagerly listened to, instead of which they invariably spoke of me, and I often (unknown to them) heard them doing so, as a just and kind master, and their having done so helped in no small measure to ensure the Abors treating me well.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

The late Captain William Gill, R.E.—Miss Gill, the sister of the eminent traveller Captain W. J. Gill, who lost his life, it will be remembered, during the Egyptian campaign of 1882, in the treacherous attack on the party of Professor Palmer in the desert east of Suez, has generously presented the sum of 1000*l.* to our Society for the purpose of founding a "Gill Memorial Fund," the interest to be applied by the Council in an analogous manner to that of the Murchison Grant, in encouragement of geographical exploration.

Mr. Last's Expedition.—Mr. Last reports from Blantyre that he reached that place on January 13th. He stayed a week at Ngomano (the junction of the Lujenda and Rovuma) taking observations to fix its position, and on leaving travelled up the right bank of the Lujenda to its source. The Lujenda valley, he says, rises very gradually, and at the northern end of Lake Amaramba has an altitude of about 1600 feet. Along its whole length it is very fertile and thickly peopled, but the industrious inhabitants are often harried by the robber tribes of Ndondi and Gwangwara, who plunder their plantations and kill or kidnap all who are unable to escape to their places of refuge in the islands, which stud the river throughout its course. Mr. Last travelled along the east shore of Lakes Amaramba, Chiuta, and Kilwa. With regard to the connection or otherwise of Kilwa with the Lujenda, he was invariably informed by the natives whom he questioned that the waters of the lake rise every rainy season, and then drain, or filter, through the sandy mound which separates the lake basin on the north from the Lujenda. If so, he adds, Kilwa is really the source of the river; but he intends to thoroughly examine the locality on his journey, in the season of high water, to the field of his chief explorations, the Namuli Hills. He was hospitably welcomed at Blantyre by Mr. Hawes, the British Consul.

Recent News from Lake Tanganyika.—Mr. E. C. Hore, now an old resident on Tanganyika, informs us in a letter dated the 18th January last, that he was still engaged in the difficult task of reconstructing the little steamer *Good News*, the portions of which had been conveyed to the lake via the Zambesi, Nyassa, and the land-route between the two inland waters. The last load was delivered in