ON THE TRACK OF THE ÀBOR

BY

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"TO LHASSA AT LAST," "A HOMEWARD MAIL"

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PREFACE

It is told against my wife by one of the less charitable of her friends that when I had just got my orders to join the Àbor expedition, she said to someone in her haste:

"It is such a bore that my husband has to go off on that silly Àbor expedition to fight those stupid aborigines with their queer arboreal habits."

But when these terrible though unconscious puns have been forgiven, the impression left by the remark will be found profoundly accurate. It would really be ridiculous to write a whole book in the hope of improving upon it, and this is not my object. I am only going to record the happenings of some por-

tions of the force engaged in the recent expedition, and add a few comments and reflections.

War on its most romantic side is seen from the front; but there is another side with its own responsibilities, its own dangers, its own humours, its own importance, as being the very foundation for the vanward pomp and circumstance.

This is the burden of my tale. It was on the "Lines of Communications" that my lot was mainly cast, where arms and men and incidents are viewed under more of a business aspect and in the simpler human relations.

I am indebted to my friend, Captain Coleridge of the 8th Gurkha Rifles, for much of the data upon which the appendices at the end of the volume are based. I must also express the hope that any mistakes that I may

have made in passing on the information which he has so kindly given me will be attributed to me, the guilty one, and not to him.

POWELL MILLINGTON.

Sept. 1912.

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On the Track of the Àbor

CHAPTER I

A shifting of scenes — Dibrugarh — Life on a house-boat — A cholera scare — A juvenile offender.

An officer seems always to be doing something incongruous when he receives the order to proceed on field-service. On this occasion I was doing scene-shifter at a children's play, performed in aid of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. I was methodically shifting scenes when the telegram came that told me that my own scene was to be shifted. The Àbor expedition was to begin at once, and I was to start forthwith for Dibrugarh.

Dibrugarh, as most atlases will show, is near the far north-east corner of Assam. I was stationed at the moment in a little hill-

station in the North-West Frontier province, so had before me a journey just coterminous with the whole Himalaya. A sudden jump from the North-West to the North-East Frontier, typical as it was of foreshadowed changes in Indian strategy, was not without its fascination.

The journey itself, at the end of August, was far from fascinating: first a ride through the rain; then a tonga-drive to Rawulpindi and into the heat; then through the heat a railway journey of five days and five nights, relieved but twice by crossing in a steamer, first the Ganges and then the Brahmaputra.

Dirty and bored I at last reached the Dibrugarh *ghat*, on the left bank of the Brahmaputra. There I found three brother officers who had just beaten me in the race to get there first.

It at once became our business to collect local supplies and stow them in a large "flat" for subsequent despatch up the river to the future base of operations. Meanwhile the

upper portions of the "flat" made a delightful place to live in. We enjoyed, in fact, for the next fortnight all the luxuries of a house-boat, and when, as often, there was a breeze on the river that did not reach the land, we revelled in its coolness and owned ourselves very lucky.

Dibrugarh is almost the last outpost of civilisation on the North-East Frontier. Up to Dibrugarh extend tea-gardens, roads, railway trains, motor-cars, horses, carriages, and shops. The life of the Assam planter extends to Dibrugarh, and culminates in the Dibrugarh club and on the Dibrugarh polo-ground. Beyond lie the jungle, the Upper Brahmaputra, and the less known of the Brahmaputra's tributaries, and in the jungle and on the banks of these rivers flourish the Miris, the Mishmis, the Àbors, and other wild men.

One morning, after we had been collecting supplies for several days, three of us were woken up very early by different people, who

gave us the same alarming news that a young Indian follower of ours was lying prostrate with all the symptoms of cholera, and that he had been so lying since the middle of the night. Being in separate cabins we had received the information independently, and so took independent action. We had no doctor with us. But one of us, well stocked by fond wife with good chlorodyne, hurried to the spot where the poor youth lay and poured chlorodyne down his throat. Another, ignorant of the treatment already administered, followed it up a moment later with a bumper dose of camphorydine. A third, in equal ignorance, bicycled off to a neighbouring charitable dispensary. He returned shortly with the most potent anti-cholera specific that a sleepy hospital babu could concoct at five o'clock in the morning, and duly administered it.

The patient, according to all the canons of medicine, ought to have died promptly from his triple dose of opiates, but instead he slept

the clock round peacefully and awoke cured. It transpired, meanwhile, that he had not really been suffering from cholera at all. He had, however, gone to bed the night before dangerously near to a leaking tin of liquid *gur* (coarse Indian sugar), and had spent the early part of the night sucking greedily at the leak, so that it was not really surprising that by early morning he was feeling a trifle bilious.

I eventually found that the previous career of this youth had not been without interest. He was now a carpenter by trade, and belonged to my own particular gang of artisans. But three months later urgent inquiries reached me concerning his whereabouts from the police authorities in Calcutta. It appeared that in his early boyhood he had killed a playmate in a quarrel, been locked up in a reformatory, and subsequently apprenticed under police supervision to the trade of carpenter. His adventurous spirit had, however, driven him to escape from the humdrum

control of the police and join the Àbor expedition. This sin against police discipline was, I believe, eventually forgiven him on my representing how well, under police supervision, he had learnt his trade. For, despite his murderous propensities and love of coarse sweetmeats, he was quite the best artisan I had. He was specially skilful at converting empty packing-cases into comfortable mess-chairs — a warlike art that in its higher branches is little understood.

CHAPTER II

A visit to Kobo—"The fauna of delirium tremens"—Kobo as a name—Swiss Family Robinson at Kobo—The collapse of the "Kamrup" flat.

OUR immediate destination was Kobo, some thirty miles up the river on the right (and so the far) bank. It could be reached by river direct from Dibrugarh, or from the eastern terminus of the railway near Saikhowa. Saikhowa was on the banks of the Dibong, which joins the Brahmaputra a few miles above Kobo. It is above this junction that the Brahmaputra itself becomes the Dihong. The Saikhowa route was used throughout the expedition for the post, which came down-stream and across to Kobo in country boats, but this route was impracticable for steamers in the drier weather. Hence troops and stores were always sent to Kobo by the Dibrugarh route.

Our small contingent of the Supply and Transport Corps soon needed access to Kobo, which was then held by a detachment of Military Police. We were lucky in securing a motor-launch in which to communicate with the place before we eventually settled down there.

I had one pleasant little trip to Kobo by myself in the launch at this period, but remember it chiefly for the introduction it gave me into the insect life of the country. The "Sarang" or skipper, a cheerful Mussulman with a prominent and most grotesquely misshapen set of teeth, took me in charge.

We started at midday, and had to stop *en route* for the night. I wanted to anchor in mid-stream to avoid the heat and insect life of the dry, or rather swampy, land. But, the anchor being out of order, this was forbidden by the merciless Sarang. He moored me instead to a bank, alongside a small settlement of men and buffaloes. The contrast

between the cool clear breezes of the open water and the swarming muggy atmosphere of the river-side was extraordinary. In a few moments I found myself in a perfect purgatory of insect life, all the worse for the proximity of cattle and unclean human beings.

The head-man of the hamlet, with two wives in tow, came promptly to salaam, to ask for a drink, to offer me one indifferent egg, and to invite me to a village Nautch. He was a Miri and talked a sort of Assamese, while I answered in the usual bad Hindustani of the Sahib-log, and, as often happens with such unpromising combinations, we got on famously. After at last disposing of the old gentleman I sat down to the first of the many bad dinners with which my ex-golf-caddie, now promoted to general factotum, provided me on this expedition. The head-man's indifferent egg served on toast as a savoury was perhaps the best part of it.

As soon as it was dark and my hurricane-

lamp was lit to show me the way to my mouth, the fun for the insects grew faster and more furious. I had never before seen, swallowed, heard, or smelt such swarms all at once. It soon was necessary to hang the lamp outside the cabin window, as far away as possible from my food. In this way they were decoyed away, but sat down and died in their hundreds on the outer surface of the lamp till they dimmed its light. I was most embarrassed, however, when I found a cheery croaking green frog sitting at my elbow on the table. While I wondered how he could have got there, he undertook to show me by spreading a pair of well-developed wings and flying off to another perch. The conventional fear of the effects of injudicious living of course assailed me, and I was glad when the Sarang came by and assured me in answer to my earnest inquiries that it was quite right and proper in this country for frogs to have wings.

The way in which various species of insect

and reptile appear to be blended with one another in these parts is certainly disconcerting to the novice. The earth-worm, for instance (always a monster in size), wriggles often like a snake instead of crawling sedately like a worm, and sometimes he runs on legs like a centipede.

I once, too, saw a lizard—but no; one does oneself no good by this sort of story. Either it is not believed or is used as evidence against one hereafter. Sir Frederick Treves puts this point very aptly in one of his writings, where he describes a certain damp country that he visited as full of "the fauna of delirium tremens."

Kobo, like other places in these wilds, got its name in a happy-go-lucky way. It was not a place at all when it was christened. It was just the spot where a reconnoitring party happened to put in to shore. They found a man standing on the bank, who lived in a hut some miles distant. They asked the man his

name, and he said it was "Kobo," and they thought it would do duty for this spot as well as for the man who lived a half-day's march away.

To the uninitiated, when listening to an Assamese conversation, most words in that language seem to end in "obo," so the name Kobo seemed at any rate quite typical and to have the right ring. I only once heard it objected to as a name, and that was by a sergeant who had a very special complaint against it. He showed me an envelope addressed to him at Kobo in a fair feminine hand, and complained that the letter had taken six weeks to reach him. He wondered why, and asked me to help him to discover the reason. I examined the envelope, which told quite an interesting tale of its own wanderings. It had started from Allahabad after the Kobo post-office had been opened, but before the fact had been duly intimated to all other post-offices in India. The babu in the Alla-

habad post-office, having more skill in textual emendation than knowledge of Kobo, had written "Try Kobe" on the envelope. Hence the letter went to Kobe in Japan, and thence back in despair to Allahabad. But by that time Kobo had become well known in postal circles, and the tender message reached its proper destination at last.

One of us four officers left Dibrugarh for good some days ahead of the others, and started planting a small colony at Kobo. Guarded by the Military Police already on the spot, and assisted by a gang of Gurkhali coolies, he experienced the delights and hardships of the typical pioneer in a new country. His adventures must have been as much those of a Swiss Family Robinson as of the advanced party of a military expedition. His daily occupation consisted of cutting down trees, of clearing jungle, of putting to human uses as much as he could out of what he had cut and cleared, and of making away with the

rest. When I joined him after he had done a week's hard work, I found Kobo quite a promising village. We all slept under roofs of sorts, and a *baniah* had sprung out of the ground and was selling cigarettes. The local newspaper, however, which in the truly enterprising colony is supposed to be among the earliest institutions, did not start till a few weeks later. It did start eventually, was produced by an office cyclostyle, and was called the *Kobo Times*. It did not, however, last very long, for apparently the anonymous editor's wit began, I was told, at length to outreach his discretion, and the paper had to be suppressed.

The night I arrived at Kobo there was a new moon, and the aforesaid *baniah*, constituting himself the local intelligence officer, assured us that the new moon was considered favourable by Àbors for warlike enterprises, and that therefore we were bound to be attacked that night. We made the usual

preparations for a night alarm, but, despite the *baniah*, the Àbors let us sleep in peace.

By coming somewhat early to Kobo I missed the first real sensation of the Àbor expedition, the collapse of the "Kamrup" flat. It was she upon whom we had lived so peacefully at Dibrugarh, and whom we had made so replete below decks with the good things of Assam. She had borne the burden of us and our rations bravely while she lay moored near the bank. But when lashed to a tug and towed up a swift current the strain was too great for her. Her poor old back broke, and she had to be taken back hastily to the river-side. Her cargo was all saved without mishap, and I believe she is still afloat, resting from her labours and enjoying again the dignified ease of a house-boat. The delay caused by this false start was minimised by the presence of another spare flat at Dibrugarh, and by the willing hands of the Dibrugarh regiment of Mahrattas, who furnished a monster fatigue-party to shift the cargo.

After the arrival of the new flat at Kobo we were a larger party, but still awaited the arrival of several large steamers that were to bring stores from Calcutta, troops from all parts, and Naga carriers from the Naga Hills.

CHAPTER III

The composition of the force—The Naga carriers and their manners and customs.

ALL these troops, carriers, and rations poured into Kobo in due course. The force comprised the first battalion of the 8th Gurkha Rifles from Shillong, the first battalion of the 2nd Gurkha Rifles from Dehra Dun, a company of Sappers and Miners from Rurki, the 32nd Sikh Pioneers from the Punjab, and the machine-gun detachment of the Assam Valley Light Horse. The last named were our only European unit, and they were part of a well-known corps of volunteers. Their patriotism in joining us, and the personal sacrifices that some of them made by doing so, cannot be passed by without a word of admiration from the professional soldier. The Sappers and Miners arrived, still mourning the death of an officer who had

recently lost his life at Rurki in an accident from a hand-grenade, while practising with the company an attack upon a sham Àbor stockade.

Except for a few regimental mules and pack-ponies, whose normal function was to carry machine-guns or engineering equipment, the transport at the beginning of the expedition consisted only of carriers. They were, however, shortly reinforced, first by one-half and later by the other half of the 26th Mule Corps. The carriers that first joined us were all Nagas, though these were latterly reinforced and eventually replaced by two corps of Gurkhalis.

The Naga was on the whole a most popular person. He is three parts a savage; but if you judge savagery by the superficial area of a man's nakedness, the fraction that you would not call pure savage would be a small one indeed. He came from the Naga Hills, still farther to the east and visible on fine days from Kobo. But his journey to join us had been quite a long one. Many days' marching had

been necessary to bring him from his village to a *ghat* on the Brahmaputra called Kukli Mukh. From here he came up past Dibrugarh by steamer.

There were several tribes of Nagas represented in the carrier corps—the Tankals, the Aos, the Semas, the Lotas, and the Angamis. Each tribe has its own customs, modes of dress (or rather sporadic ornament), and in most cases more than one language. The social organisation of the village followed them into the field, and each small gang of villagers throughout the expedition worked under a representative head-man called a Gámbora. The Gámboras were a leisured class, being there mainly to see their villagers do the work that was set them. To make this matter quite clear they were provided with red blankets as a sign of office.

To the learned in racial matters the distinctions between the particular tribes would perhaps prove the most interesting points con-

cerning the Nagas, but the plain man speaking of them casually must deal with them all as one class. In all cases their ears were made by artificial aids into their most prominent feature. It was first necessary not merely to pierce the lobe, but to stretch the hole made to an extent that would admit of a considerable bulk of some substance being held in it as an ornament. It did not much matter of what this substance exactly consisted. A small metal cylinder that has once held shaving-soap would do admirably, or a roll of cardboard made from the coverings of packets of cheap cigarettes. Besides earrings, necklaces were also worn. Those of beads or cowries were apparently considered quite *chic*, though to be thoroughly smart it was well to have the neck encircled by parts of the hornbill's beak. Fashions, however, changed, and at one period of the expedition the *dernier cri* in neck ornaments was a key that had opened a tin of bully-beef. It was worn dangling like a locket.

It is therefore not surprising that the bronze identification disc, which is stamped with a number and issued to all followers, and which also must be worn round the neck like a locket, is said to have been one of the aids to luring these lovers of ornament into our Service.

Their hair was left untouched as far as a certain line below the ears, where it was cut abruptly and formed a ridge. The method of hair-cutting was interesting. You needed a friend as barber. He laid your tresses across the edge of his *dao* (or big knife), and taking a block of wood tapped away with the latter at the hair till the *dao* gradually worked its way through to the wood, while the ends of the hair fell away.

The *dao* when not in use generally lay in a wooden socket that rested against the lowest part of the Naga's backbone, and was secured by a very low waistband. The *dao* rattled in the socket as its owner

shuffled along. It struck me that there was much method in the choice of this position for a weight that had to be suspended from a waistband; and I altered the position of the revolver on my own back accordingly. This clumsy weapon certainly seemed to be less heavy thereafter when aligned along the very end of my spine like a Naga's *dao*.

Besides his *dao* the Naga carried a spear, iron-spiked at both ends. On his back he carried his personal property in a commodious conical basket. On the top of that came the sixty-pound load which he was carrying for the Maharani. (With the Naga, as well as the Àbor, Queen Victoria still sways the imagination. Intervening kings have not yet been realised, and the impersonal "Sirkar" of the Indian is of no account.)

A long line of Nagas breasting a hill or trotting loose-kneed down one, each *dao* jingling in its socket and each spear brandished, each back bent with its load, but the body's

movements scarcely impeded, was an exhilarating sight. It struck terror too on one or more occasions into the Àbors, who, it is said, were more afraid at the beginning of the expedition of these primitive warriors than of our civilised troops equipped with all their scientific weapons.

It was not only the sight of the Naga that was impressive. The sounds that he emitted as he went about his work added to the impression. Whether on fatigue or on the march, he punctuated each pace or repeated movement with a rhythmical grunt; these grunts varying in pitch formed a kind of chant that regulated the breath and cheated the labour. If you were a Naga and had been set to climb a hill your subsequent fatigue at the top would be less if all the way up you had punctuated each fall of the left foot with a grunt like "Heigh," and each fall of the right foot with a grunt like "Ho." Though rigid silence might have saved you

more actual breath, yet to the tune of Heigh-Ho you would have gone up the hill like a bird. And the moral effect of the "Heigh-Ho" chorus was not only exhilarating to yourself and your comrades, but was also calculated to strike alarm among any enemies that might be lurking near.

The Nagas had their faults, but they were mostly the faults of children. They squabbled sometimes like children, and, like children, would hide sometimes when wanted for irksome duties. They had, as a rule, very few notions concerning religion, though a few of the Aos were Christians. These sang the hymns of Moody and Sankey in Naga language on Sunday evenings under the direction of a Gámbora, who was also a deacon. Strict teetotalism and abstinence from dog's meat were included in these Nagas' Christian code. Most Nagas ate dogs greedily if they got the chance, and would relish a goat that had died a natural death, and some of them once saved

me in the same accommodating way from the labour of cremating a dead mule.

Some of them seemed to believe in the efficacy of sacrifice. For at Kobo, in one of our Naga carrier corps, a man fell sick. His commandant, who belonged to a mess which I was, for the time being, running, came to me with a request that I should sell him or present him with a chicken, for it had been stated by his Nagas that the sacrifice of a chicken might save the sick man's life. Chickens were, however, scarce. Though all for supporting indigenous religions, in accordance with our Government's avowed principles, I yet thought we might just as well enjoy our chicken ourselves as give it to these Nagas, and despite my hard heart the patient recovered.

CHAPTER IV

A steamer stuck fast—An autumn spate—*Básha*-building—Town-planning—Street-naming—Time-killing.

IT was a matter of some wonder that all the passengers and cargoes that were destined for Kobo arrived with so little delay or mishap. "Snags" and shifting sandbanks, a swift current and, near Kobo, a succession of "pebble-beds" were the chief dangers to navigation. But the only real accident occurred when a steamer that had already brought its load alongside the primitive Kobo wharf sat down through some mischance on the anchor of another steamer. Several plates in the bottom were at once ripped open. Day and night, with the aid of pioneers, sappers, and other handy men, the pumps worked their hardest in the hope of lifting the vessel off this tenacious anchor. But nothing seemed likely to

be of any avail, except such a rise in the river's level as would lift bodily upward whatever lay upon her surface; and the season for higher levels had passed. We were only waiting for the streams, swamps, and nullahs to dry up a little more before we made our start from Kobo. But just when this steamer seemed doomed to be "neaped" for the winter at Kobo, the unexpected happened. We were visited with a flood out of season. This, while lifting the steamer into safety, yet delayed our own movements many days and kept us all very wet meanwhile.

First one snug hut by the river-side and then another was encroached upon by the rising river, the occupants having to turn out in the night and run with bag and baggage higher up the bank. The 32nd Pioneers had levelled a piece of ground for their mess near the river and been enjoying some of the river breeze which those of us further inland had been envying them. But one night this

pleasant promontory was all submerged, and the mess had to be reconstructed hurriedly and further inland. A bazaar newly built for timid Miri traders was quickly submerged. Our scanty supply of goats for slaughter, that had hitherto been comfortably ensconced in a pen near their drinking water, were rescued with difficulty at four o'clock one morning. Meanwhile the flood grew and grew, the water becoming ever muddier and bringing with it a steady procession of tree-trunks, torn from the banks upstream, and destined, when the spate was over, to sow the sandbanks with a new crop of "snags."

There were at last barely two or three feet left between the river and the higher level of the camp, where, luckily, most of us lay. A little more persistence in the flood would have seen us strutting about on stilts or perching in trees. But the fall began while we still had a little margin of safety. Great were the dryings of clothes as the sun came out.

Each *básha* (or hut) was like an old clothes' shop in the East End of London, and the garments exposed for view after the wearing and the weathering they had had would have done little credit to any respectable neighbourhood.

Kobo was now quite a big place, and daily grew more comfortable and spick and span as the time for our move forward drew near. The jungle had now been cleared for many acres, and the camp laid out on a spacious scale. Many of the force were in tents, but these were not to be carried further, owing to the drain that they would have made upon our transport, and so many of us were already living in *báshas*, or improvised huts.

A volume could be written about *báshas*. *Básha* building on the North-East Frontier is quite an art, and has an architecture all its own. The primary rule is to give a very steep slope to the roof to enable Assam rain to run off quickly. There are roughly three

kinds of *bási.* In the small *bási* for summer use the roof slopes up from back to front. Your bed-platform or *chang* lies along the low back wall. You may fill in the sides, but will probably leave the lofty front of the *bási* quite unwalled, so as to let in all the breeze there may be, while the roof keeps off the rain or the sun as the case may be.

You get a somewhat stuffier effect, and one more adapted to winter, if you reverse the slope, so that your open front is lower than the wall at the back.

If, however, you wish to accommodate yourself in some style, you run to a ridge-pole and have the roof sloping downwards on either side of it. Small tree-stems and bamboos fresh cut from the jungle make all the framework. The uprights should end in catapult forks to hold up the ridge-pole and the other main horizontal pieces. Bark cut into strips makes the rope that square-lashes each piece

of the framework to the piece which it crosses. Grass or leaves fill in the walls and roof, and the instrument that fells the timber, digs the holes for the uprights, strips the bark for the binding, and cuts the grass or leaves for filling in the framework, is the common *dao* of the country, or else the *kukri* of the Gurkha.

The *chang* or platform is a most desirable addition, for it is well to have more than a waterproof sheet between yourself and the damp and animated ground. But the surface of the *chang*, constructed as it often is like a piece of corduroy road, is often most uncompromising. One extra thick and knotty crosspiece will often be found lying just where the small of the back has to come.

The roof is usually the least satisfactory part. It often only tempers the rain instead of actually keeping it out. What, too, may one night be rain-proof, may two nights later be like a sieve. Such is the shrinkage caused by the drying up of the grass or the leaves.

There were many kinds of roofing material available. Grass, if pressed tightly enough and laid on thickly enough, was probably the best, but the wild banana leaf did wonders till it shrivelled.

It was a common sight to see a Naga carrying a couple or so of these leaves home with him, using them for the time being as an umbrella, but intending them ultimately for a new roof for his house. A secondary use, too, was soon found for the waterproof bags that were placed outside all our sacks of rations. Instead of their being all sent back as soon as empty (to save the purchase of new bags for the next lot of rations), they had a way sometimes of adhering to the roofs of *báshas*, and thus filling up the holes in the thatch.

The camp at Kobo had been fairly well laid out some days before the G.O.C. arrived. But to set a finishing touch upon the preparations, an officer interested in the matter

asked me to join him in inventing names for the various streets. We had, that is to say, to sit down methodically for two hours one wet afternoon with a set of stencils and try to be appropriate. Out of compliment to the G.O.C. the fine broad road along the river-bank was called "Boulevard Bower." Two other important arteries were called "Regent Street" and "Piccadilly." The road leading inland into Àbor country was called "Rue de Kebong." "Harley Street," of course, led past the hospitals. The military policemen were bounded on one side by "Scotland Yard," and on the other by "Bow Street." The path that led past the lines of the savage Nagas was given the still notorious name of "Sidney Street." This last name proved the least satisfactory, for those officers who were not careful readers of their newspapers kept asking us the reason of the name. It is always trying to be made to explain a joke, especially

when you are aware that it is after all only a feeble one, and it was therefore trying to be made to recount several times over in cold blood to critical ears the tale of Mr. Winston Churchill's pitched battle against the Sidney Street anarchists.

Time undoubtedly hung heavily at Kobo. Fatigues to unload stores, parades to practise jungle warfare, and military engineering in its various forms constituted for most of us the only kinds of duty. There was little but drudgery in the first of these kinds, though I did once surprise a Sepoy who had found it interesting. He had helped in emptying a whole holdful of rum, and three hours after his party had been dismissed I found him lying at the far end of the hold. The temperature there was over 100°, but he was sleeping peacefully, and hugging in his arms a missing keg, the bung of which was noticeably loose, and which was undoubtedly short in weight.

Practice in jungle warfare consisted of

marches in single file round the camp perimeter at a pace suitable to a long column in thick country, but yet sadly suggestive of funerals. Every bayonet was fixed, and the whole column arranged on a careful system of sandwiching, each short string of followers, armed only with *daos* or spears, being guarded at either end by a string of fighting men. Occasional pairs of fighting men were also interspersed among the followers.

Road-making towards Pobo-Mukh—a *ghat* that lay a few miles down the river, and also towards Mishing, where the flanking columns were to proceed—occupied sappers and pioneers and any carriers or coolies that were available. Meanwhile, in the camp itself, a certain amount of fortification and clearing still remained to be done. A few elephants that we had with us helped greatly at clearing tree-trunks, each massive beast putting the whole weight of a tug-of-war team into his task. Perhaps the most noticeable engineering feat at Kobo was

the erection of a "crow's nest," or post of observation, at the top of a tree at least one hundred and fifty feet high.

What some of us suffered from most was lack of violent exercise. The excellent Kobo football ground was not yet in existence, and walks up the "Rue de Kebong" (sometimes with gun in hand on the chance of an "imperial" pigeon) were the favourite form of recreation. The river was still too muddy for fishing. One officer, in his zeal for exercise, is said one day to have nearly lost his life. He was wont, shortly before "Retreat," to go for a run by himself up the "Rue de Kebong," which debouched on a *chapri* or grass-covered plain about a mile from camp. He was disappearing one evening behind the tall grass at a steady eight miles an hour, when an armed road-making party were returning from the Mishing road, which joined the "Rue de Kebong" at the edge of the *chapri*. They mistook the running officer for a fleeing Àbor, and

two of them were at once down on their knees taking aim at him. Their officers, however, decided to give the poor "Àbor" the benefit of the doubt and restrained their men. Before they reached camp the "Àbor," glowing from his run and with putties all awry, came pounding back on his return journey. He overtook his would-be executioners, blissfully ignorant of their previous intentions towards him, till their commander cheerfully enlightened him. After that dumb-bells, improvised from ammunition boots, had to serve this officer in place of his evening run.

CHAPTER V

The start of the two columns—An eclipse of the sun—"Six-mile camp"—A toilsome march to Pillung—A windfall in a thatch.

At last we were off. The flood had subsided. The road was reported to be no longer very much submerged, and there was hope of camping above river-level. Our first halt was to be at "Six-mile Camp,"[1] in the middle of the above-mentioned grass *chapri*. The Mishing column, meanwhile, went off half-left to protect our left flank. Our right flank was protected by the river Dihong.

As we marched along the *chapri* there was a partial eclipse of the sun. It gave us a cool hour's walking across a hot spot, and the Augurs, both Indian and Naga, told us it was a good omen for the success of the expedition.

[1] The map in Appendix I gives the relative positions of places mentioned in the narrative.

After all it was only a partial eclipse, so we did not like to expect too much. We might, for instance, take Kebong, but perhaps not reach the Falls of the Tsangpo. "Six-mile Camp," when we reached it, proved to be a pleasant spot on a clearing in the tall grass. Alongside it flowed a small river of clear water, which gave us fish for dinner and an evening bathe.

Our next march was to Pillung and took much longer, for we had soon left the *chapri*, and had to follow a winding and sodden path much overrun and overhung with jungle. If we had been botanists or entomologists we would have been in our element. But being only a long toiling column of fighting men and laden followers we cared little for the orchids that trailed over our heads, for the giant tree-trunks that lay across our path, or for the insects that got into our eyes, crawled up our legs, or flaunted their gay colours in our faces. Of these objects of scientific

interest the most unpleasant was perhaps the leech, whose insinuating behaviour will at times defy the tightest-bound puttie, and leave a scar on the leg that will irritate for weeks after he has digested his fill of his victim's blood. A pinch of salt—which is never handy—is the best rebuff to the leech. Failing this, the foul nicotine juice in an old pipe—an article that is more often handy—will send him shrivelling away.

Six miles had seemed a ridiculously short distance as a march for able-bodied men, but with our long column in single file it proved quite enough. It was imperative, for tactical reasons, that there should be no gaps in the column. But every man stumbling over a tree-trunk, or pausing before he jumped a ditch, or pausing to balance himself before he launched himself Blondin-wise on to a tree-trunk bridge, caused an appreciable check. For every man in front of him had to wait for him, and every man behind him had not

only to wait for him, but had to make the same pause subsequently on his own account. A thousand or so of such checks repeated for each little obstacle, meant hours and hours of waiting by the way. When we halted we had to look outwards into the jungle to greet the Àbors, who might have been about to swoop down upon us. Their failure at this stage of the operations to seek this opportunity of embarrassing us on the march was not yet an established fact. The different parts of the column kept in touch with one another by means of a whistling code. Three sharp blows on the whistle meant one thing, a single long whistle another. It is said that certain mocking-birds learnt our whistling code, and that some of its failures to prevent occasional gaps in the column was due to their pranks.

The camp at Pillung was nothing but a half-made clearing in the jungle and a network of felled tree-trunks. It was therefore

impossible to lay out a mathematically accurate camp. There was little time for *básha* building, for we did not arrive till late in the afternoon. But the ground was soft and the night was fine, and despite the dew we bivouacked comfortably under our waterproof sheets.

The few regimental mules that accompanied us came unprovided with fodder. At the first halt near the tall grass of the *chapri* they had been quite happy, and at our next camp—Lokhpur—they were able to get some rice-straw, which friendly Àbors from Balek had stacked for them. But here at Pillung there appeared to be nothing either growing or gathered that mules would eat. A regimental transport officer came to me anxiously at a late hour in the afternoon, telling me that he had tried to make his mules eat leaves but without effect, and wondering what to try next. Putting our heads together we scanned such horizon as is laid bare by a

small clearing in a forest. Our eyes lighted on two or three old *báshas* that had presumably been built during the summer when the Military Police were in sole occupation of this region.

"It seems rather a forlorn hope," said one of us to the other, "but we will have to try that thatch."

We went to the *báshas*, and pulling out a handful of the thatch found that it consisted of very ancient, dry, and coarse grass, but was free from the mustiness that might have been expected. We took one handful and offered it to a mule, who ate it greedily. Therefore we returned and took the thatch off all of these *báshas* and distributed it among all the mules, who thanked us kindly. The only people to suffer were some Nagas, who had been so shrewd as to take possession of the houses, but it was, after all, quite easy for them to replace their edible roof with an inedible one.

CHAPTER VI

Lokhpur and a thunderstorm—The clearing of Pasighat camp—A hunt for a well—Àbors and Àbor ladies.

We reached Lokhpur the next day after another six miles of hopping and skipping and jumping through the damp nullahs that ran at close intervals across our path. We were again in a constricted clearing in the forest, and had the same difficulty in converting it into a camp. The weather had been fine so far, and I remember going to bed without taking any particular precautions against the weather. A waterproof sheet suspended above me on one or two sticks as a shelter from the dew, and another waterproof sheet between my body and the ground, seemed all that cautious man should want. But I was just getting off to sleep when

there was a distant rumble of thunder, and then another, and then another.

"Shall I, being sleepy, go to sleep and risk it, or shall I be fussy and turn out and dig a trench around my bivouac?"

This is what I asked myself, and what many others must have asked themselves on this and similar occasions. On this occasion I was fussy, and was subsequently glad that I had been. I turned out of my cosy kennel, and with the aid of the useful *dao* had only half made the necessary trench, and the equally necessary embankment on the inside of it, when the rain began. I crawled into bed again a little wet but fairly happy, when the work was finished. My bivouac was on a slope, and the water that would have flowed all over me but for the trench and the small embankment, turned off on each side of me and left me fairly dry.

The next day we reached Pasighat, after another short march through jungle and

ditches. Here again there was no natural camping-ground, but we had emerged upon a small *chapri* encumbered only with grass some eight feet high. The Nagas and anyone else who carried a *dao* or a *kukri* were let loose to mow down the grass and prepare the camping-ground. Just as an army of locusts devastates an area of cultivation, so did our little army devastate this *chapri*, and in as short a time. In an hour or so the grass was lying in occasional heaps, and nothing but the stalks was standing. These stalks had to be crushed down later. Though the stalks were of mere grass, they were yet half an inch thick and almost as hard as wood; and they scratched a man's knee as he trampled through them in shorts. But the ordinary perambulations about camp of one or two thousand people soon levelled them to the ground, and thus we soon felt that we were at least in an open space again. A sharp bluff at the edge of the camp overlooked a

stony beach that fringed the Dihong River. The river water was still thick from the recent rain, and was unpleasant to drink on that account. At our other camping-grounds we had found clear water, and at Kobo we had latterly stopped drinking from the muddy Brahmaputra and sunk Norton tube wells at various places in the camp. Norton tube wells were, however, useless at Pasighat, for the ground a few feet below the surface was as stony as the beach beyond the bluff. However hard we hammered in the tube, and wherever we tried doing so, it only got its nose blunted and failed to find water.

The force was to halt at Pasighat for a few days while convoys from Kobo brought up more rations. It was now that we first saw Àbors in their own environment, though we had been able to examine as isolated curiosities a few Àbor prisoners at Kobo. Balek, the post held by Military Police throughout the summer, was six miles distant from

Pasighat, to the left of our line of advance. The Military Police, who were still there, kept sending us small contributions of fodder for our mules on the backs of Balek Àbors. It was the ladies of Balek who for the most part performed this kind office. Àbor ladies seen close are not, as a rule, individually beautiful; but a group of them in single file, emerging from a jungle path, each in a short red petticoat, with fair skin, with a necklace of bright blue beads round her neck, and a bundle of brown paddy-straw or green bamboo leaves on her back, was a picturesque sight. Equally picturesque were the children that followed in their train, each maid of seven summers carrying her baby brother in a basket on her back.

But each one of the women tattoos her face with blue lines that twist her expression, and detract from what natural beauty she possesses. She is usually square-jawed and large-mouthed. Her eyes are set very much after the Mon-

golian type. She is cheery enough, and laughs readily enough at the slightest pleasantry. She has little modesty and strange ideas of dress. It is only a wave of Indian or European prudishness, or else a very cold wind, that induces her to cover herself above the waist. Her wedding-ring she wears not in metal, nor on her fingers, but in the form of a spiral garter made of thin twisted bark round the calf. She cuts her hair short like the Naga with the help of a friend's *dao*. Her most feminine appurtenance is her *boyup*. This is a girdle made of metal discs strung together and worn beneath the petticoat. It jingles as she moves, and doubtless she takes the same feminine pride in the mysteries of its shrouded noise as the European lady is said to take in the *frou-frou* of her silk petticoat.

For the rest, she is unkempt and dirty. Her bare skin, of which there is much expanse, is disfigured with skin diseases. She is certainly more pleasantly conceived as one

of a picturesque group in the jungle than as an individual displaying herself at close quarters.

The men as a rule are almost as pale and hairless as the women. Some of them are tattooed on the face with a sign resembling the cross, and tales are extant in some villages of a missionary (presumably French or Portuguese) coming among them generations ago and introducing the custom. They wear coats without sleeves or buttons, the scantiest of loin-cloths, and a few bead ornaments. On their heads are hard bamboo hats, sometimes fitted with plumes of red hair, and shaped rather like the European "bowler." *Daos* are slung across their shoulders, and hanging low on their backs are the satchels in which they carry their possessions. These satchels are large and flat, and carefully covered with a hairy skin. The faces of the men are generally ugly and dirty, and their bodies scabrous. The expression of their faces is sometimes crafty and villainous, but more often they wear the typical hillman's look of good humour.

CHAPTER VII

The arrival of the boat convoy—Boats, boatmen, and boating on the Dihong.

ONE of the convoys that we were awaiting—not without twinges of anxiety—was the boat convoy. It had left Kobo on its maiden voyage a day ahead of us and was to reach Pasighat on the same day as we did. It kept its appointment, and arrived in the late afternoon, having given us just a few hours of mild suspense concerning its fate.

It had been no small enterprise to despatch, in charge of a subaltern and two warrant officers, some seventy primitive boats of various sorts and sizes and degrees of dilapidation, laden with foodstuffs worth to us their weight in gold, and manned by a polyglot crowd of puny, timid men of peace into the fringe of the enemy's country, up a swollen river that had

been little explored but was known to contain several formidable rapids. It is not to be wondered at that there was heard here and there a sigh of relief when a fleet in very irregular formation straggled slowly into sight as the sun was setting. Very deliberately it crawled past us along the far bank, making use of a stretch of slack water there before striking across the swift mid-current. Once across, each boat floated comfortably into a wide bay with a sloping beach a few hundred yards below the camp.

First of all to arrive was the "flagship," decked out as such with a common or garden *pocky-wipe* or *hanky* on the end of a stray stick of bamboo. In it sailed the aforesaid subaltern, known upon the waters as the "admiral of the fleet," or in terms of greater endearment as "the pirate." Later, his disreputable pocket-handkerchief was replaced by the proper blue and white distinguishing flag of a transport officer.

The only sufferer from this voyage was one of the warrant officers, whose knees had been very badly sunburnt. After wading barelegged with the boatmen to help in pushing the boats up a rapid, he had sat in the sun still barelegged, so that his legs might dry. This in a southern clime, with the sun's rays reflected off the water, is a dangerous thing to do. His legs had swelled, and the surface of each knee was one huge blister. He was well again in a few days, but his luck seemed to continue against him. For, two months or so later, he began growing the indigenous goitre, and had to be invalided promptly to climes where the goitre does not flourish.

The people least pleased with the arrival of the boats at this hour were the Nagas. Having marched with their loads a day's march, having mown down a *chapri* and turned it into a camp, having built *báshas* for themselves and for anyone who had a lien on their good offices, and having at last felt the moment ripe for

a mighty meal of rice, a smoke, and a sleep, they must needs be roused to lift the boats' cargoes from the beach to the camp. Such were often the bad turns that fate played the Naga at the end of a day. But on such occasions, though he often took a sporting chance of evading the duty altogether, yet when once past escape from it he performed it manfully and, above all, cheerily.

It was raining hard that night long before we had finished unloading the boats, and a downpour of rain was likely to affect the level of the river. This beach where the boats were moored might by morning be all under water. But the boatmen were undismayed by this contingency. They had erected in no time their little bivouacs of *paulins* on poles, and these could be moved at shortest notice a few yards up the bank, along with the moorings of the boats, should they hear the water lapping too near their pillows in their dreams. The perils of a river in spate were nothing to them. On

the other hand, it would have needed a great deal to induce them to come a hundred yards farther inland and spend that night amid the horrors of the Sirkar's armed camp. The bristling of bayonets and such wild warlike cries as "Halt! hugus dere," and "Number one, àlisvel," were a very real terror to them.

The boats were all of the "dug-out" class, though they varied in size and shape. The girth of the tree that was dug out to make the boat determined to some extent the width of the beam, but there was a margin within which this width could be extended. Strips of wood could be wedged tighter and tighter between the gunwales until the sides splayed out from the tension and became permanently farther apart. Still bigger cross-pieces could then be substituted, and the sides be made to gape still more, provided the strain put upon the whole fabric was not too great. Only the very wide boats were made of more than one tree, and even in this case the components

consisted of strips of hollowed tree-trunk joined at cunningly fitted seams. Though the workmanship is a little rough, this method of construction is very closely allied to that of the light cedar-wood "ships" in which Oxford and Cambridge race each other.

Each boat, as a precaution against capsizing, had a stout bamboo lashed to the outside of each gunwale. This was an excellent safeguard, and doubtless saved us many a load of stores in the course of many boat convoys. The method of propulsion varied with the direction you were going. Up-stream, for the most part, you hugged the bank and punted, though sometimes the bank was so sheer that you could not touch bottom even at the water's edge. Down-stream, for the most part, you kept away from the bank, so as to get the best of the current, and you then paddled as in a Canadian canoe. In the course of time, both at Pasighat and at Jánakmukh, it fell to my lot to make great use of the dug-out,

and in the course of my duties to act frequently as ferryman. I never realised before what salvage there might be for a misspent youth. The arts of punting and "Canadian canoeing," which I had learnt on summer mornings on the Cherwell at Oxford, when I ought to have been attending lectures, now at last stood me in good stead on field-service as a humble military asset.

Some of the bigger boats had one oar only, which was placed near the bows. The oarsman would go on rowing serenely by the hour, regardless of the time of the paddlers who paddled on one side or the other astern of him. The sternmost paddler was, of course, also the steersman, and there was some cunning required in keeping a strong oarsman in the bows from pulling round lazy paddlers amidships, and in keeping the head straight when it was caught by a cross-current or a gust of wind.

The boatmen hailed from various parts.

Many were Assamese "Doms" or fisher-folk, whose trade is for some reason despised in Assam. Though despised as a class they were yet sufficiently contented with their lot to need much persuasion before they would join our Service. Equally reluctant were the Miri boatmen, and this seemed ungracious to those who expected a Miri to have a working conscience. For it was partly for the sake of the Miris that we were fighting the Àbors. The Àbors are the brutal, stalwart hillmen who for generations have harried that softer portion of the Miri race which lives upon the plain. It is, for instance, from the Miris of the plain that the Àbors have captured most of their slaves. And here we were come to help the Miris, and the Miris were loth to lend a hand.

But this complaint would hardly appeal to a Miri, or to any unwarlike subject in like case. Our more peace-loving subjects always expect us to fight their battles for them, since

we pose as strong men that come to the rescue of the weak. Meanwhile, they would hold it more becoming for the weak to sit at ease.

Later on the fleet recruited some boatmen from the friendly Àbors. Personally, I liked these the best. They were cheerier and had more power in the elbow. They kept even worse time in a boat than the Miris, but worked with a will, possessing that great quality of mountain vigour which the Miris lacked.

I had later a gang of nine Àbor boatmen working three boats for me at Jánakmukh. They were interesting characters. Some were veritable students, who studied hard in their spare time at both English and Hindustani. Very soon they could talk to me in Hindustani with moderate fluency, and I wondered how they had picked up what they knew, till I found them fraternising at odd moments with any stray follower they could buttonhole, and systematically gleaning a vocabulary from

him. One had a musical ear, and annoyed me by it very much; for I own the moral copyright of a very distinctive whistle-call. It is a call with which my wife and I greet each other on home-coming, or signal to each other in a crowd: we also use it to call our dogs. There are at least ten notes in it, and I had always thought that my wife and I were the sole masters of it. But one day one of these Àbors had the impertinence to call my dog from me with my own particular whistle-call, and the dog, I am ashamed to relate, left me and went to be fondled by the Àbor.

The most exciting feature of boating in dug-outs on the Dihong was the shooting of rapids. Going up a rapid was a dreary business, and bad both for men and boat. It meant hugging the bank and wading knee-deep to haul the boat over an uneven bottom, where it grated against each boulder that lay near the surface. At the end of the haul the boat would be the worse for wear, and

eventually would have to be patched with wads of tow and be pegged on the bottom like a cracked cricket-bat. The waders also who had toiled through the snow-fed water would be weary and chilled to the bone.

But if instead your duty led you down the rapid instead of up it, the sensation was as exhilarating as one of the sixpenny nervous shocks at an Earl's Court exhibition. The motion was even fuller of poetry than the "switchback railway" or the "water-chute." As you glided along you could cheat yourself out of any sensation of movement by keeping your eyes on the bubbling water that ran with you, but if you cast your eyes suddenly upwards on to the land, you became aware with a lightning shock that you were racing at a terrific speed. The rough water at the end of the rapid was more prosaic; for a rapid has a way of ending in a high sea that makes a "dug-out" suddenly seem to be a very rickety kind of vessel. I once lured

an officer who was a particularly bad sailor down a particularly strong rapid, and nearly succeeded in making him sea-sick. He went through all the stages of the complaint except the final one in the few moments during which we ploughed through the surf that mounted round us as the current slackened.

CHAPTER VIII

The friendship of certain Pási *gàms*—Political presents—A digression on "punitive globe-trotting"—Tree-felling—Making and abandoning the post at Pasighat.

WHILE the main force halted at Pasighat some of the Pási *gàms* came in and swore friendship. These were the head-men of the villages of those Pási Àbors who lived hereabouts. Balek, already mentioned as the place held throughout the hot weather by Military Police, was one of this group of villages. By a great deal of protestation and some oath-taking these head-men dissociated themselves from the murders of the political officer and doctor, partially on whose account we were now present in this country. There was then an exchange of presents.

The stock political present made by the Àbor on such an occasion as this is an

unbleached cotton counterpane of very Early Victorian appearance. The Àbor women make this material by hand. It has a rough pile, consisting of small tufts of raw cotton allowed to protrude from the surface. It is thick and heavy, and as a counterpane would surely by the modern doctor be pronounced unhygienic. The same material is used for many of the men's winter coats, but its undoubted advantage as a washing material is unfortunately not appreciated by them. Hence, having never been to the wash, it makes but a dingy coat. In passing it may be mentioned that there are apparently only three choices for a suit of clothes in Àbor-land. The white counterpane cloth is one, and the other two, being woollen, are imported into this sheepless land from Tibet. One of them is the well-known red monastic "self-colour," and the other a rather saucy thing in heather-mixtures.

The present most valued by Àbors was the

red blanket. Its use as the distinguishing uniform of a Naga Gámbora had possibly drawn their attention to it, but at any rate an Àbor sent away from our camp with a new red blanket wrapped round him was a proud and happy man. It was, of course, only upon the great among them that the gift could be bestowed, but even so it taxed the resources of the force to improvise red blankets in the required number.

However, the hospitals came to the rescue, for it is a convention of the British army in India that whereas the sound man in barracks or in the field shall lie under a brown blanket, the sick man in hospital shall lie under a red one. It was easy to break through this convention to a small extent, and by providing a few sick men with surplus brown blankets for once in a way to release a few red ones for the adornment of vain Àbor *gàms*.

When these Pási *gàms* had sworn friendship they were taken for a personally con-

ducted tour round the camp. Besides the riflemen with fixed bayonets who guarded them, they were attended by persons who expounded to them something of the meaning of Western armaments, with a view to instilling into them a more wholesome awe of their neighbours. The effect produced on this occasion was, I believe, not very marked. They went away still admiring the naked Naga and his spear more than our machine-guns and dynamite.

It may be, however, that this notion of instilling respect for ourselves among border savages by means of such tours is worthy of development on a larger scale. It is certainly true that a great deal of the misunderstanding that exists between ourselves and troublesome frontier tribes is due to their utter ignorance of our real strength. A typical instance of the frontier tribesman's attitude is told about the *gàm* of another Àbor village farther up the line. I cannot vouch

for the truth of the details, for the story reached me through several mouths. But it appears that this *gàm*, whose village was certainly the biggest of the little group to which it belonged, came to visit our General in a spirit of considerable condescension. He made this quite clear by remarking that since he was the biggest head-man in those parts, and since he had heard that the General represented a head-man in a similar position elsewhere, he considered it not unseemly that they two should strike up a friendship.

The frontier tribesman, of course, always sees us at our weakest, for we have to overcome gigantic difficulties of road-making, transport, and supply before we can throw out the smallest feeler into his territory, and our subsequent victory over him is sometimes therefore not of the most signal kind. But when that victory, such as it is, has been achieved, a little of what one might call "punitive globe-trotting," imposed as one of the terms of peace,

might have a great effect upon our future relations. Imagine a band of hostages handed over to us at the close of hostilities for a couple of years, and the chance thus afforded of enlarging their political outlook. A dozen Àbor *gàms* would, for instance, make excellent subjects for "punitive globe-trotting." We would start by a little general education of an elementary kind. Having thus rendered them receptive of larger notions, we would proceed to "trot" them round the British Empire, expound to them the big physical facts upon which our empire is founded, and then send them back to their corner in the mountains to give a salutary account of what they had learnt to their fellow-tribesmen.

After a few days at Pasighat enough supplies had been accumulated to justify the advance of the main column. Our marches from the start had been short ones, and even through the flat *terai* that divided Kobo from Pasighat, a road-making party had often

had to proceed ahead of the column to break down obstacles. But from Pasighat onwards the progress was of necessity even slower, each march shorter, and each halt more protracted.

I had to remain at Pasighat and watch the column move out. Being left behind is never a pleasant sensation, and it needs some philosophy to assure oneself that the fun is not always at the front, and that the line of communications, like the proverbial onlooker, sometimes sees most of the game.

Our first duty was to set our house in order —in other words, to build our houses and fortify our post.

The garrison of pioneers had soon constructed a very formidable little post. We had a trench all round us with the jungle well cleared in front of it, and at opposite corners of the post were two stockaded bastions. These stockades consisted of upright logs about twelve feet high with sharp points, up

and over which the Àbor was unlikely to climb, while the slopes of the trenches and a fringe of the ground outside them were set with *pánjis*. The *pánji* is a bit of thin stick a foot or so long, fastened in the ground and pointing with a sharp point in the direction from which the enemy is expected. It has often proved a very useful entanglement, especially in the dark, and in this land of trees and bamboo groves the material was ready to hand. The general scenic effect of a *pánji'd* slope is suggestive of a tipsy-cake set with split almonds.

The post was, as already explained, on the site of a former *chapri*, but even so there were stray trees here and there which had to come down, and great was the labour of felling them. There is much fun, however, to be derived from the felling of a good tall tree. I do not know in which part of the operation Mr. Gladstone took his chief pleasure. From the pictures in ancient

Punches it was presumably in the fierce exertion of wielding the axe, a somewhat grim and lonely pleasure. I should have liked to see him instead taking his part with a gang of Naga coolies. They used no felling-axes, but each his ever-handy *dao*. After two minutes' lightning work with the *dao*, the Naga was ready for a comrade to relieve him, while he himself squatted and watched progress. A dozen men quickly relieving each other would soon work through several feet of tree-trunk. They would all know the trick, taught in engineering manuals, of making two incisions, one above the other, but on opposite sides of the trunk, and of getting the tree to fall eventually towards the lower incision by hauling at it in that direction with a rope. Actual ropes, long enough for the purpose, were seldom available, but this mattered little, for every tree of any importance has its attendant myrmidons of rope-like tendrils clinging to it. These will often bear

a strain that would snap the best Manila rope of equal calibre. The climax comes when the haul on the rope has snapped the trunk between the two incisions. Then there is a pause, while men hold their breath. First imperceptibly, then more quickly, the tree starts falling in the direction designed. Then, after a long crowded moment, it comes with a glorious bang to the ground, and the ground shakes, and a small unconscious cheer, like the cheer of a crowd of firework-gazers, rises from the whole gang. Mr. Gladstone would assuredly have joined the Nagas in their cheer!

In places (other than Pasighat camp) where trees grew close together the process was not such plain-sailing. Those tendrils that made such excellent ropes were in this case a nuisance, for when you had severed your tree at the bottom it still stood upright and laughed at your efforts. The tendrils kept it suspended from its neighbours, and

you had therefore to set to work to fell one or more of these. It was probably not till you had felled several of them that you had a sufficient weight of tree-trunks suspended to break through the network of tendrils. But when this at last happened the effect was even more sensational, for the whole mass would fall together, and you would be wise to run for your life; for you could not tell on this occasion in which particular direction the mass would prefer to fall.

Trees that now stood alone, after being used to company, were a source of danger. It was well to cut the whole clump down and leave none standing if they were near to a vulnerable spot. Such trees suddenly isolated are top-heavy, and can no longer resist the wind without protection from their fellows. It was one such tree that, at Kobo, fell without warning on the leg of a warrant officer in the ordnance department, and damaged it severely; a very bad piece of luck which, however, did

not prevent the victim from sticking to his guns and seeing the expedition through. I am told that at Kobo, during a sudden tornado later in the expedition, the trees that were not in close formation fell about like spillikins.

Fallen tree-trunks were removed in various ways. At Kobo we had had the elephants to help us, but here at Pasighat elephants were taboo, for they offered too large a mark to Àbor missiles. Fifty Nagas would sometimes try to raise a tree-trunk and fail, or lift it but a few yards at a time. A better way was to hack it into sections with *daos*, and put a party on to each section to roll it away like a big snowball. Perhaps the best way was to leave it lying and let it gradually disappear as fuel. If a few hundred men became dependent on one tree for fuel with which to cook their food, it did not take many days before the tree disappeared.

In these days at Pasighat we built many *báshas*. There was a *básha* for the officers'

mess, a *básha* for the post-office, a *básha* for the telegraph office. The troops and followers built lines for themselves, and a fairly water-tight hospital, with beautiful beds on *changs*, was soon in position. Large platforms were erected to hold stores, and each unit took delight in laying out its own little model village in the space allotted to it. But when at last all was nearly ready, a sudden order came—for such are the vicissitudes of war—that Pasighat was to be abandoned, and the advanced post and depôt removed six miles onward to Jánakmukh.

CHAPTER IX

Jánakmukh and its wild bananas—Àbor paths and mule roads —Gradients by water and by land—Problems of road-making.

In two days we had abandoned Pasighat. The stockades, the snug *báshas*, the tipsy-cake *pánjis* were all left to crumble in the sun and rain, and we had moved to Jánakmukh. Here we inherited the quarters recently built and vacated by the main column, who had now advanced to Ramidambang. This last name seems to need a word of apology. The press correspondent, I remember, regretted at the time that it was suggestive of *opéra bouffe*, but explained to his readers that the word in Àbor language meant the place where sportsmen collected the spoils of the chase. But it is with Jánakmukh not Ramidambang that we are now dealing.

"Mukh" (with the "u" pronounced like the "u" in the verb to "put" in the non-golfing sense, and unlike the "u" in the golfers' "putting") means the mouth of a river or tributary. Hence Jánakmukh meant the mouth of the Jának. Till our troops reached the spot there was nothing to mark it except the mouth of the stream, and as a matter of fact it was afterwards discovered that the stream in question was not the Jának at all, but that the Jának was some way farther on. This did not matter. We had found, without too great mental effort, a fairly pronounceable name for our camp, and this was all we wanted.

I shall always have pleasant recollections of Jánakmukh. It is one of the prettiest spots I have ever seen. The view up and down and across the river on a fine day was just the blend of green hill and blue water that most delights the eye. Above us was a rapid and then a wide reach of the Dihong, and below us was a two-mile reach of perfect water upon which

races might have been rowed. Immediately opposite the post the current was swifter. Our camp lay at the foot of a narrow valley dividing two wooded spurs which jutted sheer above the Dihong. Across the Dihong rose in layer upon layer the hills of the Padam Àbors. The water came clear down the pseudo-Jának alongside our camp and was pleasant to drink, though the Dihong into which it flowed was still muddy. We lived within earshot of the roaring rapid above us. There was a sandy beach in front of the post on to which the post eventually overflowed when the river had settled down to its normal winter level.

The original post, just above the beach, had a few days before been just a wild banana grove. This had been easier even to clear than a grass *chapri*, for a single slash from a *dao* will cleave the soft banana trunk in two with little exertion. Moreover, the foliage of the felled banana trees gave good material for *básha* roofs, as has already been expounded.

The banana tree as a jungle companion has, however, a few disadvantages. Its leaves as they dry give out a rather sickly smell, and the stump of the felled banana is a messy object. It continues sobbing for ever. It invites you to sit down on it or place things on it, but everything that touches it comes off dripping. The tree is, moreover, of a rickety nature even at the best of times, and a puff of wind may send it flopping at any time across a neighbouring *básha*, to the discomfort of the inmates. It was therefore not surprising that we very soon had removed the banana element altogether from Jánakmukh.

There was more tree-felling to be done here than at Pasighat, for we soon found that what the place wanted was more sun on the days when the sun happened to be shining. The trees fringing the southern spur alongside the camp blocked the sun. They grew very much in clusters, and were tied together by

parasitic tendrils, so that it was seldom that any one tree would fall by itself. But in a few days of judicious clearing we had increased our possible hours of sunshine by a few hundred per cent. This was good for everyone, for the weather was turning quite cold, and coughs and colds and fevers and dysentery were increasingly prevalent.

From a mile below Jánakmukh to the far front, where the foremost reconnoitring parties at length came upon possible yak-tracks, the problems of road-finding, road-aligning, road-making, and road-repairing were a constant anxiety. A mile below Jánakmukh the hilly country began, and thence onwards there was hardly a level stretch of more than a few hundred yards. There was still, as in the *terai*, a thick jungle to contend with, and the surface drainage of the rainfall was constantly sweeping down the hillsides and across our roads, sometimes wiping great pieces of them out as soon as they had been aligned and

made. Throughout the whole of the campaign it was seldom that the weather kept fine for more than a few days at a time.

The Abor's notions of road-making were excellent as far as his own needs went. Possessed of capacious lungs and stout *caloes* and little personal baggage, and moving as a rule in small parties, he was never deterred by the steepest route. His tracks, therefore, ran as a rule over a mountain rather than along its face, up and down the spurs rather than in the valleys. He knew well that the line of a "divide" makes the driest road, and steered his course accordingly. But we, though we travelled with what to most armies would have seemed amazing lightness, could not afford on our line of communication the time and labour involved in constantly climbing the steeper gradients. For however well the average Englishman or Indian may climb, the pace of a body of men is the pace of the worst climber. The inevitable opening out, that

even on the flat is the greatest drag on a long column, increases always in proportion to the steepness and extent of a climb. Moreover, we aspired to taking our mule transport eventually into the heart of the country (and in the end succeeded in doing so).

We had therefore to circumvent the hills as far as possible, even though our roads must run across lines of intermittent waterfalls. Even so, our flattest piece of road from Jánakmukh onwards was a veritable switch-back. On the other hand, since we never strayed far from the banks of the Dihong, our aggregate ascent was very gradual.

It is indeed surprising, till one works the sum out in cold arithmetic, how nearly level is even the swiftest river. The Brahmaputra, for instance, is a swift river, and it taxes powerful engines to drive a steamer up the many hundred miles that are covered before Dibrugarh is reached. But in all that distance the rise is but three hundred feet, so that the

gradient of the river is barely one in five thousand! Even in the thirty miles from Kobo to Pasighat, where boats took days to toil up a succession of rapids, the rise is but two hundred feet, and this gives a gradient of but one in eight hundred! But even upon the most carefully surveyed of express railway lines we ignore gradients of less than one in one hundred!

These dry sums in arithmetic at any rate help us to realise what a very long way it must be by water from the Tsangpo near Lhassa to the Brahmaputra in Assam. Even though the undiscovered falls of the Tsangpo may drop farther at one leap than any other falls in the world, and the rapids in the higher reaches be ever so swift and frequent, that river must yet go through many tortuous windings before it accomplishes a total fall of twelve thousand feet! The fall from Pasighat to Kobo is, as our boat convoy knew to its cost, fairly abrupt, but this rate must on the

average be quadrupled if the distance to Kobo by river from the ferry near Lhassa is to be counted as less than five hundred miles. This is nearly double the distance as the crow flies, and so would involve an average deviation of nearly sixty degrees from the main direction.

It was found very hard to decide what type of road to build in Àbor-land. There are, roughly speaking, two types of hill-road. One slopes outwards from the hillside and the other inwards. The former drains off the rain-water automatically, but tends to wear itself away in the process. The other, if it is to keep from getting waterlogged, needs a good masonry drain along its inner side, punctuated by good stone culverts or Irish bridges. The former is the less elaborate type, and in some rainy countries—as, for instance, in Jamaica—it is generally chosen, even for carriage roads. The other is the more finished type—better approved, I believe, in engineering circles—and is usually chosen in India. It was natural,

therefore, that we should begin with this type. But the drawback was the lack of solid stone with which to make the necessary drains. For except near the beds of rivers the ground is mostly soft soil, the product of a prolific and ever-rotting vegetation. The nearest approach to rock in some parts was a kind of Fuller's earth, which on a dry day seemed hard and serviceable, but in rainy weather turned into a spongy pulp. In the last stages of the expedition the official opinion changed, and the last roads built were of the *kuchcha*, outward sloping kind.

CHAPTER X

The *Jhum* of Ramidambang—*Jhums* in general—The irrepressible forest.

WHILE we sat making Jánakmukh commodious, and laying up stores of provisions there, the main column were pushing their way steadily forward. They had found something of an oasis at Ramidambang; though little except "paddy-straw" and *dhan* that was of practical use to our commissariat. The camp of Ramidambang was situated in the middle of one of the largest *jhums* in the country. A *jhum* is a cultivated clearing in the jungle. On the Ramidambang *jhum* stood many acres of *dhan* (rice in the husk) that should already have been harvested, and but for our presence would have furnished the staple food for many months of several hamlets in the neighbourhood. This loss of the autumn

crops was perhaps the hardest part of the punishment inflicted on the Àbors.

Side by side with rice, and often without signs of any attempt to divide the different kinds of crop, would be found standing certain kinds of millet that were mostly used by the Àbors for making their wine or beer, which they called *Apong*. The most conspicuous of these millets was "Job's tears," which grew to a great height. The straw of this made very good fodder. I also tried feeding mules on the grain of "Job's tears," but they found eating it savour too much of a conjuring trick; for the grain is light and partially hollow. As soon as they got their teeth in it, it would seem to disappear, so that they would look round them disappointed.

In among the rice and millet on this and other *jhums* cotton would also be found growing. One big *jhum* that I knew of was as much a cotton plantation as anything

else. But to us the most attractive feature of Ramidambang was the roots. By grubbing at random in among the millet, the rice, and the cotton, you came upon yams and sweet potatoes, and these were appreciated by many, and pronounced by the medical faculty to be highly anti-scorbutic. A larger kind of pumpkin, very red inside, was also found in considerable quantities. One day I found also a few chillie shrubs covered with chillies still mostly green. I picked a haversack-full, and my babu—the fire-eater to whom I presented them—pronounced them excellent.

Of all untidy, listless sorts of farming this of the Àbors seems most to merit condemnation. Not only did they throw different kinds of seed at random into the ground, without thought of the hopeless tangle that would ensue, but they never troubled to check the growth of weeds. Even in the thickest plots of *dhan* there were probably more weeds standing than stalks of *dhan*. When

first they cleared the *jhum* they never troubled to remove the tree-trunks or the tree-stumps. The stumps in this climate seldom died, so that they went on drawing wasteful nourishment from the ground. Meanwhile, the massive tree-trunks lying about at all angles turned the whole *jhum* into a gigantic jig-saw puzzle. When these tree-trunks lay specially thick, the best way to get from one spot to another was to choose a zigzag course along them, and never put foot to the ground, otherwise you were constantly climbing over the breast-high tree-trunks when you might have been running comfortably along them.

This prodigal use of the ground was probably not so culpable as it seems. For this was a country in which a very little scratching of the ground was necessary to make things grow. Clearing—not ploughing, nor manuring, nor weeding—was the really important process. It is usual for the Àbor, after using a *jhum* for a few years in succession, and

so wearing out the soil somewhat, either to make a special effort and clear a fresh *jhum* out of virgin forest, or to resort to a still older *jhum* that has been lying fallow for a long time. The latter will, of course, by this time be a fair specimen of "secondary jungle," and need almost as much clearing as the brand-new *jhum*. It was interesting, when strolling over the hills and through the jungle, to come upon places where the trees were younger and less clogged with tendrils, and to realise that this was just a *jhum* temporarily abandoned a few years ago; or to come upon a nice little plantation of shrubs a foot or more high growing up among tall grasses, and to realise that this was the *jhum* of a year ago.

The appearance of an abandoned *jhum* in a distant view was very deceptive. Facing us at Jánakmukh was a hill that rose in almost regular terraces to a height of some thousand feet ten miles away. Each terrace

had probably been a *jhum* once, for there were villages nestling in the valleys around. Some of these terraces appeared from this distance as masses of delicate mauve. This was because they had reverted, not into jungle, but mainly into *chapris* of tall elephant grass, which was then flowering with a pink flower. Other terraces, again, looked in the distance, by contrast with the deep green of the forest-clad slopes alongside of them, as if they were covered with the shortest of green turf. They were really a carpet of young trees at least two feet high.

The wonderful fertility of the country—due, I suppose, to the rain and the rank soil—was brought home to me rather forcibly. A forest officer visited us, and he and I one day travelled a march together. He told me a great deal about the training for his profession, and of the course which he had had to go through in the Black Forest under German experts in forestry.

"Such rot it all was," he added; "there I was, year in and year out, learning to keep trees alive. And here I am, stationed in a part of the world where the damned things won't die."

These trees have certainly a wonderful hold upon life. Cut them down, and the stumps will grow. "Ring" them, and they will seem to have had a tonic. Leave the felled trunk hanging horizontally to the stump by a few shreds of bark and splinter, and the tree will take to fifty years of horizontal growth as to a pleasant change.

CHAPTER XI

Sirpo River and the Rengings—A discourse on Àbor warfare as exemplified at Kikar Monying—A few other scraps—"The battle of Jánakmukh."

THE next move onwards was to Sirpo River. The route first ran upwards from Ramidambang through a *chapri* and thence through thick forest, reaching a "col" two thousand feet high. It then descended into a most dismal overgrown and sodden valley, down which the Sirpo, as merry as any Scotch burn, ran to meet the Dihong, which now lay a few miles to the right flank. This was, perhaps, the wettest piece of jungle in the whole country, and the worst stretch for road-making. Little better was the face of the next hill, up which the path wound into Renging camp three miles distant.

The name "Renging" was a little vague, for not only did we use it eventually for this camp, but it was the name of a village which from force of circumstances was moved more than once. The original Renging lay at one corner of the *jhum* of Ramidambang, but in the previous spring, shortly after the outrages committed by the Àbors, this village had been destroyed by a flying column of Military Pòlice operating from Balek. The inhabitants had then fled farther into the mountains, and built themselves a temporary village not far from our Renging camp. Latterly, when peace was made, they were allowed to return towards Ramidambang and choose a new site for their village, not far from the old site, and that presumably will be the Renging of the future.

It was after the advance of the main force from Sirpo River that the Àbors began to show some fight. Their prowess, however, lay as a rule not in attacking in force nor in hold-

ing a position, but in hiding in small parties behind trees, usually in some depression of the ground, and potting upwards at their enemy with poisoned arrows. When they did make a stand they began by lying quiet in a carefully prepared stockade to watch the effect of their booby-traps and stone-shoots. These will have been previously erected with immense labour over the route along which they expected the enemy to come. It should be added that they seemed generally to expect him to make a frontal attack. Therefore if the stone-shoots were circumvented or let loose upon nothing by our own flanking parties, and so rendered innocuous, it seemed high time for the Àbors to decamp, and either to take up a position elsewhere or to disperse.

It is very difficult to deal adequately with this type of enemy. He does not put up a good fight and let you have troops at him, but he sets great store by such "back-hander" casualties as he may be able to inflict. It is

therefore necessary to be very watchful against the traps which he may set, and the small spasmodic pounces which he may make from the jungle. Meanwhile, it is necessary to get at him somehow, in order to make an adequate "bag."

I am speaking very diffidently, for I was not present at any of the recognised engagements; but it seems that throughout the expedition the tactics pursued, and the only tactics possible, were rather those of big-game hunting than of human warfare. To avoid a booby-trap by means of a flank attack was of course pure tactics of the dignified human sort, but apart from a few such human details, the main objects in fighting Àbors were to take care that your quarry did not round on you unawares, but to stalk him yourself so closely and so cunningly that you got a good shot into him before he slunk away.

A typical instance was the action of Kikar Monying, in which the fighting culminated

some weeks later.[1] The quarry was located in its lair in the stockade. The stalk was prepared for the night, and was to be complete at dawn. One party of stalkers crept through the jungle on the steep slope to the left. Another party, after achieving a crossing on a laboriously constructed raft, approached the position from the other side of the river. The central and main party crawled forwards in a direct line. Bayonets were kept fixed throughout the advance, and such other precautions taken as seems necessary against sudden isolated assaults from out the blind jungle. These, though very complete, did not prevent a couple of Gurkhas from being cut up stealthily during the advance. Long after dawn had broken, and while the three parties waited in position, the stalker's ever-recurring dilemma confronted our force—

"Shall I shoot now and stand a greater

[1] For a rough sketch of this action, copied from a sketch by an eye-witness, *vide* Appendix II.

chance of missing, or shall I creep nearer and run a greater chance of the quarry getting away before I can fire my shot?"

Who ever answers this question with confidence? And what big-game hunter or other sportsman shall say what was the exactly correct moment for opening fire on this occasion—that is to say, the moment conducive to the biggest bag?

Suffice it to say that the moment chosen resulted in a bag of Àbors sufficient for the purposes of punishment and persuasion. For from this moment opposition practically ceased, and it was not many days later that the head-men of the hostile villages began to come in and sue for peace. It was even said that they would have come in sooner had they not required an interval in which to recover from the nervous breakdown resulting from the roar of the maxims on that morning.

"What a despicable kind of warfare it

must all have been!" may be the reader's parting comment. But perhaps he should remember that a heterogeneous empire cannot be guarded without heterogeneous wars. We who have drawn so many creeds under our flag need to have a catholic taste even in warfare.

There is, however, a kind of technical snobbishness to be found at the back of certain tacticians' minds. What they delight in calling *La grande guerre*, as waged on spacious European terrains, is the only sort of war that they consider at all "high-class." They are half-ashamed of our army, because as a rule it is more often engaged in that suburban kind of fighting, called technically the "small war." But fighting the arboreal savage with his bow and arrow is lower down still in this social scale of warfare than the suburban or "small war" against well-armed frontier tribes. It savours of the very limit of the East End. But, even so, it

must be recognised as war, and as calling for as many warlike qualities as does *La grande guerre*. It has its own risks, its own hardships, and its own problems.

. . . . . .

While the Àbors were active ahead of us, we at Jánakmukh were told to be careful. The narrow jungle path recently blazed by us between Jánakmukh and Balek proved for the time being to be a haunt for hostile Àbors; and armed parties of ourselves, moving along these five miles, might at any time be running the gauntlet of poisoned arrows shot from behind trees. One small party of Gurkhas thus attacked fired their rifles into the jungle, thought they had missed, pursued without effect, and came back to Jánakmukh disconsolate. But months after, when relations with the Àbors were peaceful, a garrulous *gâm* told us the names of the Àbors who had been hit that day, of the

recovery of some from their wounds, and of the death of another.

It was their knack of disappearing, wounded or dying, into the jungle, and leaving no trace, except perhaps a little blood, that made it so hard to count the casualties inflicted by us on the Àbors. These were probably, in the best opinions, far more numerous than it would have been safe to allow for in official returns. It is stated that their ignorance of surgery and their extremely dirty habits tended to wounds originally slight becoming eventually fatal. I know of a case of a man gored by a wild animal whose friends doctored him by stuffing parts of a fresh-killed chicken, feathers and all, into the wound. A man with a .303 inch bullet in him will often run a long way before he drops, and it needs a very few yards of Àbor jungle to hide a man effectually from his pursuers. If he found he was leaving a trail of blood, he was known sometimes deliberately to have taken the precaution of

staunching the wound as he ran with a leaf or any substance handy, apparently not so much in order to prevent further loss of blood as to evade pursuit.

During these somewhat stirring times we went to bed one night at Jánakmukh in normal frames of mind. The river was still high, and the boat convoy had succeeded that day, for the third and last time, in reaching Jánakmukh, instead of stopping at Pasighat. By deepening a channel here and there a way had been found for the boats up a back-water that avoided the almost impassable rapid just above Pasighat. (A week or two later our deepened channels and their massive walls stood high and dry to mock us.)

There were thus on that night more lives to protect than usual, but the post was well guarded. Sentries gazed out over *pánjis* up the pseudo-Jának valley, other sentries gazed up the Dihong, and pickets sat on the summits of a miniature range of mountains that over-

looked the rear of the camp. Those not on guard were all sleeping peacefully when shots began to be fired. The night alarm sounded, and a maxim began to play. The noise was terrific, and as is bound to happen on such occasions, no one could tell what it was all about. Dressed in melodramatic combinations of pyjamas and Sam Browne belts we appeared, wherever the orders for night alarms required us to appear, and awaited events. The officer commanding the post had got the maxim and the other noises quiet at last, and it was then possible to hear a friend speak, and to speculate on the nature of the attack, the direction whence it was being made, the probable strength of the enemy, and the equally interesting question whether the attack was being or had been made at all.

At length the evidence for the attack was reduced to a young sentry's statement that he had heard a movement as of footfalls on the far slope of one of our miniature mountains.

He owned that the same noise might have been made in many other ways. This being the case, we were allowed to go grumbling back to bed.

The boatmen of the boat convoy perhaps felt this relief most. They had been sleeping on the beach by their boats, and being, as before explained, though brave boatmen yet eminently men of peace, had been very much shocked by this display of military violence in their vicinity. They had rushed as one man for their boats, and were for embarking there and then for their less tumultuous homes in Assam. But the "Pirate" was down on the beach in his pyjamas in time to restrain them, and to tuck them up again in their beds.

"The battle of Jánakmukh" soon ceased to be accounted of importance. The young sentry's tale of footfalls on the hillside, the expenditure of many rounds of ammunition into the black night, and our rude disturbance from our dreams had for long been but a stale

laughing-stock, when the same garrulous *gàm* above mentioned told us one day that the night attack, so far as it had proceeded, had been a real one. The maxims with their prompt answer to the first advance had cowed the Àbors and they had slunk ignominiously away.

CHAPTER XII

"Coolie-col"—Renging to Rotung—Agar—Kalek and Mount Bàpu.

An object-lesson on the savage alertness of the Àbor when in the vantage-ground of thick jungle, and of the consequent need of watchfulness on our part, was taught by the fate of two telegraph coolies. They left the Sirpo River camp one morning against orders, intending to return to Jánakmukh to recover some kit. Close to the "col" that divided the slopes above Ramidambang from the valley of the Sirpo, they were shot at with poisoned arrows and mortally wounded.

The poison in the Àbor's arrows was generally croton, and the effects of it are very painful even when not fatal. Some doubt exists whether aconite (the poison obtained from the plant of that name and found in abundance in

the higher altitudes near Tibet) was ever used against us by the Àbors. Certainly the poison used in this and some other well-tested cases was croton. In certain other cases the arrow was found to have been poisoned by the simple method of rubbing its point with a piece of putrid flesh.

The doctor attending one of these coolies fell ill immediately afterwards, and it was thought that he had poisoned himself with croton while extracting the poisoned barb from his patient's leg. As his illness developed, however, he was found instead to be suffering from just one of the baffling and malignant forms of malaria with which this country is infested.

Apart from its unfortunate ending, the escapade of these coolies was interesting to some people for the part it played in the evolution of a place-name. This "col" was a convenient meeting-place for convoys between Jánakmukh and Renging. An officer, telegraphing from

our camp to the other to say where the next day's convoy should meet, at first found no better way of describing the spot than "Col, where telegraph coolies killed." The following day, to shorten the wording, the name ran: "Telegraph-Coolie-col." The word "telegraph" next seemed unnecessary, and subsequently to the end of the expedition the name of the spot was "Coolie-col."

As already described, the route left the Sirpo River and rose another thousand feet to the camp of Renging. This place, except for the presence of water, was as unfitted by nature for a camp as it well could be, for it lay right on the side of a steep ridge. At a distance, it reminded one of a collection of hamlets in some other part of the Himalaya, where the ground is cultivated in small terraces. For terraces were made all down the slope to accommodate the various *báshas*. The only level spots were the floors of these *báshas*, and these were carved out of the hillside. Any-

one whose duties compelled him to move much about that camp got his meed of exercise without leaving it.

Renging stood two thousand feet high, being almost the same height as "Coolie-col." From Renging to the next camp at Rotung the road was still more of a switchback. You climbed up five hundred feet, then followed a narrow but fairly level ridge for a mile or two, then dropped quickly down more than a thousand feet, crossed a bubbling brook, and immediately rose up another very steep thousand feet to what came to be known as the "Razor Edge." The first descents that were made from the "Razor Edge" were down an almost precipitous scarp of loose shale, but afterwards the road was diverted. Having dropped down this scarp you descended gradually for a mile or two, then rose abruptly again, but at length descended gradually into the pleasantest spot in all Àbor-land, the plain of Rotung.

The original advance to Rotung from Renging was not accomplished without opposition. A good many stone-shoots had to be disposed of; a lot of arrows flew about, and a stockade in one of the valleys—the Agar valley—had to be taken. It was on this occasion that one of the staff was clean bowled over by a boulder from a shoot, that there were many hand-to-hand tussles, and that the General's hand was grazed by an arrow. Certain portions of the force not present at the engagement sent their congratulations by telegram to the general staff on the success of the day's work. A delightful telegram from the base, worded hurriedly by a well-meaning officer, ran: "Hearty congratulations on taking of Rotung, but much regret G.O.C.'s narrow escape."

The carriers on march in rear of the main column must have had a very poor time on the day following. They reached camp in the early hours of the morning, having had to start descending the above-mentioned scarp

well after darkness had set in. The ordinary man, more or less unencumbered, had sat down and slid, and perhaps thought it rather fun, but the carrier with a big weight on his back impeding his movements could not let himself go. The descent of that little bit of hill in the dark by a thousand or so of carriers therefore took many hours, and the last man to arrive at Rotung had taken twenty-one hours over the whole march.

Rotung was found deserted and already demolished by the Àbors themselves. What may be called "the plain of Rotung" was really one huge natural terrace on the side of the hill. Above it steep *jhums* sloped upwards for several thousand feet, and below it a steep wooded slope ran down eight hundred feet or so to the Dihong. Our route had not touched the Dihong since it left it just above Jánakmukh. A bend of the river had thus been avoided, but many zigzags up and down steep *khuds* had been encountered instead.

There was, however, often no choice in these matters; for, as on this occasion, the river-bank might for many miles be so precipitous that a detour from it was imperative.

There was no attempt here or elsewhere to level the *jhums* into terraces. That branch of the hillman's agriculture was unknown in Àbor-land, but rice in this country seems to grow as well at an angle as on the flat. The *jhums* extended for many miles on the hillside, and there seemed to be much more cultivation here than lower down the valley. Even where the grain had been removed a high rice-stubble had been left, which in the distance still gave the appearance of a standing crop.

Up among these hilly *jhums*, but more to the front, lay the village of Kalek, which was soon abandoned by its inhabitants. It was an important village, for it lay upon the upper road from Assam to Rotung. This road passes through Balek, rises nearly to six thousand feet on the face of Mount Bàpu, and then

falls to Kalek and to Rotung, which is well under two thousand feet. It was along this road that the Àbors originally expected us to come, but the stockades, entanglements, and booby-traps that they had erected along it had never been used against us. But it seemed to some officers who subsequently investigated them, that they were more formidable than those which the Àbors erected in greater haste when they realised at the eleventh hour in which direction we were really coming.

Mount Bàpu, six thousand and two hundred feet high, lying, as the crow flies, about half-way between Balek and Rotung, gives a contrasting view of Assam on the one hand and the heart of the Àbor country on the other. I went to the top of the mountain one day, quite late in the campaign. My headquarters were at Pasighat at the time, so that I had a long day's walk. At Balek I was provided with breakfast and a fresh escort of three Gurkha military police. It was a pleasant

walk. We climbed first through a straggling village on a spur above Balek (where the village maidens were dancing to a pretty chaunt the wedding dance in honour of one of their number), then wound gradually upwards through thick jungle along a mountain stream. We passed the remains of first one camp of *báshas* and then of another. These had been occupied by parties who had gone out months before to clear the road. They had had not only to cut down jungle, but to demolish the stone shoots erected for our reception, and tear away wide entanglements of tree-trunks. The nearness of the two camps showed how great had been the labour involved in the clearing, for they were barely two miles apart. Beyond the second of these two camps the climb suddenly stiffened, and we went up for some way literally at a gradient of one in two. But either the Àbor or the Sikh pioneer here had made things easier for us by turning the track up this steep bit into a regular staircase.

Each step had a tread and a rise of equal dimensions, and the edge of each tread had a neat little beading of wood to keep it from wearing away. Going upstairs always seems such an easy way of climbing, but only because, even in the case of the highest of cathedral spires, we never climb more than a few hundred feet at a time. When the staircase rises for more than a thousand feet without a "landing," the succession of flat treads ceases to be luxurious.

Two of the three Gurkhas were not in great fettle, and lagged behind. I told them to keep together and go as they pleased, while the third Gurkha and I pushed on together. These were easy days of peace, and two men together could look after themselves. We went on and on, and yet saw nothing that seemed like the top of Bàpu, and at last we seemed even to be going downhill. The Gurkha then informed me cheerfully that he really did not know the way, whereas I had

all the time been regarding him as my guide. One always has a childish desire not to be baulked from reaching the top of a hill, and I was feeling as childish as ever in this respect. But when the missing summit is only a small clearing in the jungle, and cannot be seen from the dense slopes beneath it, and can only be guessed at by the general configuration of those slopes, the search for it becomes difficult.

At length we met a small party of Àbors. We promptly kidnapped one, and told him to take us to the top. It was the Gurkha who did the talking. He knew no more Àbor than I did, but showed real genius in making his meaning clear. He first imitated the cutting down of a tree with a *dao* by jerking his hand many times horizontally in the air. He then shaped his hands into imaginary field-glasses, and holding them earnestly to his eyes scanned the horizon. The Àbor laughed, grunted, and proceeded to lead us to the top.

He took us up from the path and backwards through the jungle. We had a good mile of struggling through thorn bushes and creepers before we came suddenly upon the clearing. There, in the middle of it, stood a cairn, not of stones but of logs, with a sort of Christian cross erected in the middle of it, and decorated with branches at the top. There were old bully-beef tins lying about, suggestive of the ordinary tripper's picnic-resort, and other relics of the survey party who had spent many days there, connecting by "triangulation" and such methods the known points in Assam with the unknown points in all other directions. The other two Gurkhas, who had left the Kalek road at the right point and followed a small *pagdandi* cut by our troops to the top, had arrived there five minutes before us, and were grinning hugely at having stolen a march upon us after all.

It was a dull day, but the clouds were high enough for us to see the hills of Eastern Assam

and the snow-peaks of Southern China, and, veering round in the opposite direction, to trace the Dihong upwards towards Tibet, as bits of it, like bits of green ribbon, showed clear between the folds of the hills. One could see where it took the long bend to the east that had hitherto been unsuspected, and had put out our calculations as to its length a hundred miles or so. It seemed a very little way from the top of Mount Bàpu to the valleys where our reconnoitring parties, after many days' march from our foremost post, were still toiling after the unknown.

A run down the hill and a tramp down the valley soon brought me back to Balek, where a friendly garrison fed me with a gorgeous tea, and sent me on my way through the five miles of sultry jungle that stretched to Pasighat. I was of course called up on the telephone before I had finished my bath, and the strenuous evening's work of a post commandant on the line of communication soon

began :—So many troops and so much baggage for to-morrow's convoy — A much-needed package gone wrong here, and an urgent demand for life's necessaries there—A breach in the road so many miles away—A delinquent waiting patiently in the quarterguard to be flogged—A report for signature showing the week's percentage of local sick to two places of decimals.

CHAPTER XIII

Kikar Monying and some uses of telegraphy — Puak and Bàbuk—Junction with the Ledum column — Taking of Kebong—Peace-making at Yambung.

I MENTIONED the action of Kikar Monying some pages back, thus breaking through the proper order of events so that I might quote what seemed the most typical example of Àbor warfare. It was some time after the taking of Rotung that this action took place, and Kikar Monying itself, where the Àbors erected their big stockade and made their last stand, was some miles beyond Rotung, on the way to Kebong. It was a well-chosen position, being at the head of a defile, with overhanging precipices on one side and the Dihong on the other ; a place which but for modern firearms might have been circumvented but hardly rushed ; a grand place for a second Marathon

and dogged resistance against odds, but rather wasted on the slim Àbor.

This is not a military text-book, and no one will ever use these pages in order to "get up" the campaign, therefore I will be forgiven for not elaborating the brief account of the action already given, more especially as I did not take personal part in it, and only visited the spot for the first time a few weeks later. Kikar Monying was then of course shorn of most of its glory, the site of the stockade appearing then but as a narrow stone embankment, and all "booby-traps" and such-like machinations having vanished. My companion and I did, however, find in the sand in front of the former stockade a few neat little Àbor *pánjis*. They were very sharp indeed, and were set in holes to catch the enemy as he advanced by night. I have kept one or two of these particular *pánjis* among my curios.

As a matter of fact, during the last phase

of the fight a most minute and detailed description of it was reaching me continuously. I was at Jánakmukh at the time. We were doing little that day, and into our mess in the course of the morning there came at intervals a telegraph-sergeant with the latest pieces of information. A field-telephone had been extended from Rotung to the scene of action, with a sergeant in charge of it at the business end. The latter kept sending his friends down the line the latest bits of news—news that thrilled us through and through, even at Jánakmukh. Armageddon was nowhere. The Àbors lay dead in their thousands, and the Maxims were still dealing death into their huddled masses as they lay in their stockade penned in and bombarded from all directions. After a little legitimate gloating, we even began to feel a little sorry for the Àbors. Very sheepish and shamefaced was our telegraph-sergeant when, some hours later, he came to the post commandant with

the official report of the engagement's results, and told us how all that morning he had been having his leg vilely pulled by his pal up the line.

Much cheery wit scintillated from time to time up and down that telegraph line. When the operators were not busy with official work, the telephone was for ever humming between post and post, "Rotung" jeering at "Pasi," "Jának" calling up Kobo in military terms of endearment.

An officer once told me how he went one day to ring up someone, and taking up the receiver in a hurry surprised a concert. The song was something rousing and with a rattling chorus. The soloist, some twenty miles away, was singing of love or war at the top of his voice. When the verse was over the chorus joined in, both base and front and all the posts between contributing their shares of noise along these many miles of hard-worked wire.

The night after the taking of Kikar Monying must have been spent in great discomfort by the troops engaged. The place where they bivouacked—damp, constricted, and *básha*-less—looked very uninviting when I saw it later. They soon, however, advanced to Puak, where a good camp was made, and the force halted awhile. Not far from Puak was the village of Bàbuk, high up on a spur, with sloping *jhums* above it. The village was deserted; and deserted too was the village leper, who lived in a hut by himself at a distance from the village. He was not the first derelict that the Àbors had thrown in our way. A toothless old hag, picked up near Rotung, lived for many weeks in the quarterguard at Rotung at our expense. She had been abandoned by her own people, and so thrown upon our mercy. She throve in the Rotung quarterguard on Indian rations, and grew hale and garrulous.

The flanking column that had left Kobo for

Ledum at the same time that the main column left for Pasighat now joined the latter at Rotung. It had operated all this time upon the left flank, and latterly had concentrated in a place called Mishing. Here it left a temporary garrison of military police, who stayed there for some months longer, not so much to continue protecting our flank as to keep the villages round Mishing at peace with one another, and protect the more peaceful from the more truculent. The doings of this flanking column are of course "another story," and no attempt can be made to tell it adequately here. They had, it seems, on the whole a very rough time. The ground that they first went through was very swampy, and their weather perhaps even worse than our own, and they suffered very much for a time from fever and dysentery. A very fine officer of theirs died from pneumonia. This was the most regretted casualty in the whole expedition.

In one particular camp they encountered a particular germ which gave many of them a kind of fever never known before to medical science. It claimed no kinship to the germs either of malaria, typhoid, or para-typhoid. The only thing ascertained definitely about it was that it was more virulent than the equally elusive germs of the "ten days' fever" and "three days' fever" so common in India. The victims had therefore all to be returned officially as suffering from "pyrexia of uncertain origin."

This name was repeated in the reports made to the War Office at home for the benefit of some of the patients' relations. The parent of one patient was, I am told, very angry at the insinuation which he considered the diagnosis to convey.

"It sounds," he is said to have told the War Office, "as if my boy had been up to mischief somewhere. But it is fever that he has been having, and not pyrexia or anything else.

And if you want to know the origin, I can tell you, for he has been on the Àbor expedition the whole time."

The Ledum-Mishing column had its fair share of fighting as well as fever. In fact they drew first blood, and had had their scraps with the enemy, and rushed stockades, while the main column were still finding their enemy hopelessly elusive. A considerable portion of the total bag of Àbor casualties belongs to the Ledum column.

After the Mishing and main columns had joined forces and Kikar Monying had been taken, the main objective of Kebong still remained intact. This village lay six miles beyond Puak, up in the hills above the river. Its capture, however, must have seemed somewhat of an anticlimax, for when our troops arrived the village was found deserted.

I once met an American who talked proudly to me of his indigenous skunk, and described its stench as the animal's "main weapon of

offence." Something of the same power might, from all accounts, have been claimed for the village of Kebong, for when our troops came and saw and conquered it, they yet found the place stank so horribly, that they fled down the hill and took up their quarters out of nose-shot at Yambung, near the banks of the Dihong.

Thus Yambung became the foremost post of the line of communications. It was henceforward the headquarters of the force, and it was here that negotiations for peace were made. It was from here also that most of the exploring parties set out. The camp was terraced, though not so steeply as Renging. It was roughly divided into two levels, of which the lower was occupied by the Naga carriers. A rope-ferry was soon in working order across the river, so that connection was quickly established with the other bank, which had still, on the whole, maintained its reputation for friendliness. Here, side by side, by aid of pulley and "traveller," plied the raft

of the Sirkar—a thing of air and bags of air-tight canvas, and the raft of the Àbors—a tangle of bamboos. Many a stout *mithan*, thrown and lashed as though for slaughter, crossed the river placidly on the latter.

Warfare continued for some time longer, small parties of Àbors being here and there surprised. But as it appeared that, for the most part, they were thoroughly cowed, it was decided to give them a breathing-space for reflection. After some reflection they came in, village after village, to sue for peace. (A few weeks before they had told us that they intended to hold out for two whole years, whereupon we had retorted that our arrangements were complete for ten.)

The Àbors had already been punished severely. They had had more casualties than in the annals of their slim warfare could be remembered. They had lost their homesteads, for, as a rule, presumably to spite us, they had themselves burnt them before aban-

donment. They had also lost much of their crops. But these were the prices already paid for fighting, and they had now to pay a further, though not exorbitant, price for peace. Naturally they had to give back as much as remained to them of the property which had been stolen from the murdered sahibs, and in addition they had fines imposed upon them.

In a land where coin is little used, the fines had to be in kind. Therefore the arrow, the *dao*, the pig, and the *mithan* were tabulated into a rough scale of currency, and the villagers fined accordingly.

Of the *mithan* I have as yet barely spoken. He is the half-tame bison, allowed to graze at will, on foliage and tall grass, around each village, within the limits of a tall *mithan* fence, and coming at will, but with condescension, into the village to lick the villagers' rock-salt. The Àbor does not milk the female, and it had been said that we should never succeed in milking her. But one

stout female, kept captive in Rotung camp, after knocking a few rash Gurkhas over, at length began to give milk in the ordinary domesticated way, and continued to do so. The Divisional General when he visited us took some *mithan* away with him, and I am told they now are to be found roaming happily in the park in Lucknow.

The *mithan* easily headed the list of those articles of value in which fines were paid. For it is held to be as valuable as a female slave, and nearer Assam a good *mithan* might be sold for sixty rupees. It is a little difficult at first to see in what—to the Àbor—the great value of the animal lies, for it is not milked by him, nor used for either draught or pack-work, and is not even sacred. It is, however, eaten on great occasions, and will yield many hundred pounds of rare tough meat. It is therefore, I suppose, a suitable investment for spare savings which the Àbor may not wish to turn over too frequently, but which are,

nevertheless, readily realisable as occasion requires.

I was told of an Àbor who boasted before the expedition began, that for every coolie he killed he would slay and eat a goat, for every sepoy a pig, and for every white sahib a *mithan*.

CHAPTER XIV

A ceremony at Komsing—A cairn in the jungle—A Gurkhali in durance—Frank confessions.

A PARTY went out at length to Komsing, which is the village where a political officer had been murdered in the previous spring. They built a cairn to commemorate him, and placed on it a suitable inscription. The villagers were then solemnly warned that it was their duty to preserve the cairn with all reverence for ever.

I have seen a photograph that was taken on this occasion, and wish the film was my own. The cairn stands in one corner, an imposing mass. Beside it is a group of Gurkha soldiers in strict formation, who are guarding a senior officer. He has come to the village specially upon this visit of grave ceremony. He is supported by some junior officers, and a *koteki* or interpreter stands close to his side. Facing

the group, at a distance of several paces, stands all alone the chief *gàm* of the village in his primitive garments. He is being addressed by the senior officer through the *koteki* on the import of the occasion. His eyes are cast down, his whole demeanour is very meek, and he seems to be listening attentively. Around and about, equally submissive, stand groups of villagers. Let us hope that this ceremony will remain imprinted as clearly upon their minds as upon the film of that photograph.

Elsewhere, in a lonely clearing away from villages, stands another cairn, which our troops have erected in memory of the European doctor, who was also murdered by the Àbors. But it was in this secluded spot and not in a crowded village that the latter was slain. The two sahibs had started together, but the doctor had halted awhile in the jungle on entomology bent, while the political officer pushed forward on his friendly tour among the villages. The

murders were doubtless the result of the same plot, though committed at a distance from each other, and not precisely at the same time.

Very interesting, though sad, were the tales of the survivors, who succeeded at the time in making their escape to Assam, after nights and days of hiding in the jungle, or desperate plunges on crazy rafts down the worst of the Dihong's rapids. But strangest of all must have been the adventures of the Gurkhali bearer, who was eventually befriended by a certain Àbor village and kept in it till, nearly a year later, we came into its vicinity. Then, dressed as an Àbor, and with his hair grown and cut like one, this Nepalese servant came creeping diffidently towards our camp. Hostilities were in full swing at the time, and he was met by a small party of Gurkhas under a havildar. There was an awkward moment, it is said, in which the bearer was too bewildered to hold up a white handkerchief, and in which the havildar was preparing to open

fire upon him. But all at once the havildar, in the king's uniform, and the bearer, in the garb of the Àbor, recognised each other. The bearer, though somewhat undersized, was in other respects of the same type that is enlisted in Gurkha regiments, and two years ago this havildar, while engaged on a recruiting tour, had met him, and measured him, and found him wanting. The incident recurred to them both at the right moment, and the bearer was brought into camp in safety. It is said that at first his nerves appeared very much shaken, that his memory for his own tongue had temporarily failed him, and that it was not till some days had passed that he talked intelligently about his experiences of the previous year. When, however, at last his memory and his tongue were in working order, he gave very useful and interesting information. It appeared that he himself had been well treated, and even been offered the daughter of a *gàm* in marriage. It was natural that in

our camp also he should become something of a hero. He was fêted and made much of, and I know of certain Gurkha riflemen who showered gifts upon him. When, however, his brains had been sucked and there was no more use for him, he was sent back to Assam, and I remember catching sight of him on the slopes of Ramidambang as he came stalking along near the head of a downward convoy. He was dressed, not in the ordinary khaki of soldiers and followers, but in an assortment of sahib's mufti gathered from mysterious sources. An ancient flowing frockcoat and a Homburg hat were the main items. He carried a long *khud* stick, and walked with an inimitable swagger. In the distance it was hard to see whether he was black or white. I and the friend I was with asked each other who on earth was our new General Staff Officer, what price he could have paid for Àbor-land, and with what obeisances we had best approach him, when it transpired that this was the

Gurkhali exile, erstwhile bearer, erstwhile Àbor bondsman.

Though adequate collective punishment of the military kind had been duly administered upon the offending villages, the individual murderers were still at large, and had yet to be brought before a civil tribunal. Fines of *mithan*, pigs, and arrows were not enough to atone for those treacherous murders, and it was deemed right to capture and try in a court of law at any rate a representative proportion of the men actually engaged in the crimes. These miscreants soon came to know that they were "wanted," and flitted from village to village. But not unnaturally the villages, now at peace with us, were unwilling to harbour them, and at length six of the men who had joined in murdering the political officer were caught and fast bound. They were sent eventually to Pasighat to be tried.

Their trial was held by the assistant political

officer of the force just before we demobilised. I was walking about the Pasighat camp on the afternoon before the trial, when the officer detailed as prosecutor spied me. He was looking out for some idler who might be employed in taking down from the prisoners the confessions with which they appeared to be brimming over. He assured me it would only take an hour, and that the only qualification I required was that of a person to whom the prisoners might confess without consideration of either fear or favour. This seemed an easy enough rôle to play, so I consented, and let my other work slide meanwhile. It took four hours, not one, but was an interesting, though rather gruesome, experience.

I armed myself with two *kotekis* who talked fair Hindustani as well as Assamese and the Àbor language, and then proceeded to turn my *básha* into a confessional. It was built to hold one man and a dog, so that with the addition of two *kotekis*, and one prisoner after

another, held fast from his handcuffs by a double sentry, we were a tight fit. It was hard to write the confessions legibly as I sat doubled up on a corner of my camp-bed.

Since the moment when they had apparently first made up their minds to confess they had had no chance of collusion, so that the agreement between their several versions of the tale was particularly striking. More striking still was the extreme frankness of their confessions. This has been set down by some critics to a wicked bravado, and a tendency to glory in their misdeeds. This, I think, is a mistake. They certainly showed no abject remorse and no desire to throw themselves upon their captors' mercy. But, on the other hand, they showed no defiance, no swashbuckling swagger. They told their tales in the most matter-of-fact way. One man would name that part of his victim's body that he himself had succeeded in striking, and would then proceed to name the parts where

others had inflicted their blows; and this without any apparent thought either of giving a comrade away or, on the other hand, of giving him his due. It was not my business to try to extract their motives, but the impression left on me by their bare confessions was that their minds were morally a blank. Their deeds had been neither deeds of shame nor deeds of glory, but simply matters of course. The fear of punishment seemed also absent from their minds at the time. They were in the legal sense ideal confessors, for no thought of "fear or favour" seemed to influence them. One only out of the whole number added any argument to his confession, and this he did as an afterthought. He was an old man, probably the biggest rogue of the lot, and a ringleader, so that his argument was hardly to the point. But when his confession had been taken, and translated back to him through the *kotekis*, and assented to by him, he pointed dramatically to the sentries

on either side of him, and gabbled some Àbor. This, when interpreted, amounted to the following :—

"You see these sepoys. They are your servants. If you order them to slay me as I sit here, they will slay me, and you will commend them for carrying out your orders. It was thus that I too carried out orders when I slew the political sahib."

This man was, as I have said, a ringleader, and had helped to give rather than received the orders, so that from these remarks alone he may have deserved a hanging. But they were quite out of keeping with the rest of his own and the whole of the other men's confessions. I was glad, therefore, when I heard late next day that transportation for life was the worst punishment inflicted. One of the men was actually acquitted.

Still later two of the doctor's murderers were captured, and they have since been tried. Their sentences are, I believe, still pending.

CHAPTER XV

Àbor villages near Jánakmukh—Navigation of the Dihong near Jánakmukh—Crossing the river on the way to Ayang.

I WAS destined from the start of the expedition to spend most of my time half-way up the line of communication. Jánakmukh thus became for many months my headquarters, and it was only an occasional turn of fortune that sent me on a short visit to the posts beyond, and to the headquarters at Yambung. It was, therefore, mainly through Jánakmukh spectacles that I saw Àbor life, but I am told that the Àbors thereabouts are fairly typical of the whole race. They trade, of course, more with Assam than do the villages farther up the Dihong, and only trade indirectly with Tibet. But the villages of Ayang and Balek, both near Jánakmukh, are by no means

Indianised, and even there one sees Tibetan charm-boxes worn as lockets, and coats of dull red cloth beloved of the *lama*. Photographs that I have seen of the further villages and their inhabitants show the same types of face and dress, the same kinds of building and house arrangement as seen in Ayang and Balek.

I greatly hope that someone who went to the farthest limit of our explorations will soon tell his tale in print. Each such exploration party might well provide material for a whole book about itself. Only a few tales of their doings reached me in the gossip of our camp mess, where we took in and fed occasional travellers from beyond. And these were mainly such small matters of interest as the rapture with which the wild Àbor first listened to a cheap accordion; his chariness in one village of parting with his hens, but his readiness to exchange two fat ones, not for rupees, but for an empty whisky-bottle: how else-

where in his naïve vanity he admired himself in a sahib's shaving-glass, and then looked behind it, like an intelligent monkey, to see what mechanism had propelled his own visage into his view; how elsewhere he took huge delight in wearing the paper caps from a packet of Tom Smith's Christmas crackers.[1]

Not all such *naïveté* was to be met with in Ayang, but the village was interesting and picturesque. I will therefore attempt to describe it, and the manners and customs of the inhabitants. But getting there, on the first occasion, had its difficulties, and I will describe these first.

The position of the village was at first not accurately known to us at Jánakmukh, but we had heard that it lay some miles off the far bank of the Dihong, across the flat country nestling under the hills. We had heard, too, that it was rich in *dhan* and other good things,

[1] For a very brief summary of the surveying and reconnaissances, *vide* Appendices III and IV.

and being a friendly village we hoped it would be open to a deal. So one day I got an escort of twenty Gurkha Rifles and proceeded to explore it.

The crossing of the river was the main difficulty. At that time we kept no dug-outs at Jánakmukh, and our only means of crossing was two Berthon boats. These had been brought up on the chance of proving useful, but were still lying packed piecemeal in coolie loads under a pile of engineer's stores. We got them into working order the day before, and gave them a trial trip. There was an officer in the post who had rowed for Bedford, whereas I had once rowed for Shrewsbury, so that we saw a chance of continuing our old school rivalries as the ferrymen of Jánakmukh. A little preliminary navigation was necessary before we found the best crossing. The current, except near the banks, was very swift, and it was almost impossible to make headway against it in

midstream. But a bend of the river just above the camp ended in a sharp promontory, which somehow brought into existence a convenient back current some way from the bank. Therefore, putting out from a certain shingly beach, we could soon get into the back current, and while making some way across could at the same time be carried pleasantly upwards for fifty yards or so. The process of crossing from the back current into the main current was not such plain-sailing; for at the junction of the two currents eddies formed, and these had to be avoided. Meanwhile, the sudden change of current tended to slew the boat's head round abruptly, and we had to row hard with one oar and hold-water with the other to retain our course. From that point we had a race across the main current with the object of being carried no farther down by it than the back current had carried us upwards. The bow and the stern thwarts in a Berthon boat are so far apart

in relation to the rest of the build that we found "bow" always pulled "stroke" round, and so we very soon took to sculling.

The next morning we had to cross twenty riflemen, their Gurkha officer, a spare Naga carrying odds and ends, and a *koteki*, who came with us to guide us as well as to interpret. The Bedford oarsman and I each took charge of one boat. Five men with their rifles and accoutrements made a full load for one boat, and the two that sat on the stern seat had to arrange their legs very neatly to keep clear of the sculler's hands as he swung forward. One of the thole-pins had been found missing from my boat when we unpacked it, and I had to replace it by a loop of telegraph wire commandeered from the telegraph office.

While I was on the far side with a boat-load, a telegraph sergeant out for an airing came to see the fun, and proclaiming himself a great oarsman, persuaded my Bedford friend

to let him relieve him for a spell. The sergeant in crossing from one current to the other let the boat be caught in one of the eddies, and with horror I saw it from the other side spinning round and round like a top. The Bedford oarsman, who had luckily taken the place of one of the passengers, had to change places with the sergeant, not only in mid-stream, but in mid-eddy, but succeeded with much skill in getting safely to land.

It is astonishing how much more suited to this river were the "dug-out" boats of the country than these Berthon boats of an English pattern. The Assamese "dug-out," often narrow and wobbly to a degree, would yet with its great length glide clean through the eddies and the change of currents with barely a swerve, if the man in the stern steered fairly skilfully and had his crew in hand.

More astonishing still on this occasion was

the placid behaviour of the Gurkha riflemen. The Gurkha is not a swimmer, and even if he were he would have little chance of saving his life in an eddy or strong current with his body weighed down with ammunition, and his legs with ammunition boots. Their behaviour on this occasion reminded me of an old yarn told about the very regiment to which these men belonged. In the stormy days of Beaconsfield and Bismarck they were brought suddenly from India to Malta to strengthen the hands of British diplomacy. A day or so after their arrival a bathing parade was ordered for the garrison, and some of this regiment under Gurkha officers were sent to take part in it. On the word "march" or "dive," or whatever was the prescribed signal, they took their headers into the sea as smartly as their British comrades alongside. It was only when they had dived that the question arose whether any of them could swim, and this was only answered by

the sputtering and life-saving that had to ensue. It was this same stoicism that their descendants in the regiment displayed when twirling round this eddy of the Dihong under the pilotage of a tyro.

CHAPTER XVI

The road to Ayang—The *jhum*—The village—The granary—The dwellings—The occupations and sports—The manners and customs—Forms of hospitality and funerals.

In an hour or so I had got my little party ready on the far bank, while the Bedford oarsman returned to other duties. The *koteki* began by taking us for four miles in a direction at right angles to that in which we knew the village lay. It was hard, therefore, to keep on believing in him as he led us mile after mile down along the heavy sand of the river's edge instead of taking us where we wanted to go. But he really showed sound sense, and had avoided a wide belt of jungle through which at that time no path ran into our vicinity. The reason of our long detour was suddenly made appa-

rent by his taking us at last away from the river bed and up a thickly wooded slope. At the top of this, after only a few minutes' climbing, we abruptly found ourselves on the edge of the finest *jhum* in lower Àbor-land, the *jhum* of Ayang. It was three miles long, a mile wide, and had bays extending in all directions. It was a full mile beyond the very far end of the *jhum* that the still unseen village lay.

This *jhum* itself was as untidy and in as much of a tangle of crops as any other, and tree-trunks lay all about, and tree-stumps protruded. Adam and Eve's first efforts at tillage could hardly have been less methodical. But the ground was undoubtedly rich and the crops abundant. A little *dhan* was still standing, flanked here and there by "Job's tears," but most of the grain was already harvested, and lay about in heaps of a few hundredweight. Each heap was sheltered by a small rough *básha*, and some hundreds of these *báshas*

were dotted everywhere about the *jhum*. It was in them, or just outside them, that the *dhan* was sifted before being taken into the village, and dirty heaps of siftings lay here and there.

The *jhum*, however, seemed at first to be quite deserted. We passed many of these small *báshas* before we saw a sign of human life. It was only in a few of those nearer the village that work was going on, and the work was mainly being done by very old women, who were apparently slaves. They were stripped to the waist, and very hideous and dirty, but seemed charmed to see us. Their dogs—small animals, like indifferent fox-terriers—were not so charmed, and barked furiously.

At length we had trudged to the far end of the *jhum*, and were led up a wide, well-beaten path that in parts seemed almost fit for wheeled traffic. We went on and on. The path got worse, not better, and I had

promised to be back by a certain time. The hours were slipping by, there was no sign of the village, the men were tired and hot, and the *koteki* had already lied palpably that day on more than one occasion concerning minor particulars of the distance. We now made him ask a stray Àbor what the remaining distance really was. The Àbor pointed to the sun and then pointed half-right away from it. This meant, in Àbor reckonings, that it would take as long to walk to Ayang as for the sun to move forty-five degrees across the sky. This also was clearly a lie, but was nevertheless disconcerting. As I began to wonder regretfully whether I ought not to return with Ayang still unsighted, we came upon a giant *mithan* fence, and this gave us new hope. For this was undoubtedly the *mithan* fence that ringed Ayang. There was a very fine bamboo stile by which to cross it, and pushing on we reached the village a few minutes later. We

could not see much of it that day, but on other occasions explored it thoroughly.

Ayang is built upon a slope. It stretches for about a mile from end to end, and contains several hundred houses. The lower quarter is not residential at all. It is the village granary. Before entering the residential part, on my first visit, I looked inside one of these grain-houses and found it contained lots of *dhan* and also some Indian corn. The presence of the latter was interesting, as none grew in the near neighbourhood. The grain-houses seemed to be very numerous in proportion to the dwelling-houses, and hope arose in my mind of finding the villagers with a large surplus stock to sell. But these hopes were never realised, except to a very small extent.

Perhaps they themselves had greater personal capacity for rice and other grains than we imagined possible. Perhaps it was not deemed inconsistent with their friendship for us to do a little friendly warehousing for other Àbors

at present otherwise engaged. Perhaps, on the other hand, they were merely financiers, making a "corner" in the grain that our expedition was making so scarce in other quarters. Certain it is, however, that very little of the grain in all those grain-houses could be purchased by ourselves. I coaxed them to sell it in every way I could think of, but with little avail. Instead of asking for a reduction on taking a quantity, I promised them an increase of price on their letting me have a larger quantity at a time. But even this inversion of ordinary trading principles left them cold, and they held on obdurately to their *dhan*.

Each house, whether a granary or a dwelling, stood on a *chang*, or platform on stilts, to keep it clear of damp and ground vermin. Each stilt under a grain-house had a wooden flange at its top—that is to say, just below the floor of the house itself. This flange was a successful barrier against rats.

In grain-houses built by ourselves, with a view to the country's occupation during the summer, we copied this idea of the rat-proof flange to some extent. But instead of carving it laboriously out of wood, we found that a disc with a hole in it, made from the ubiquitous kerosene oil-tin, would serve the purpose equally well.

The houses are fairly massive. The framework is of wood, and the walls are of bamboo and matting made of bamboo bark. It is perhaps the thatch on each house that chiefly gives it its picturesque appearance. This thatch is very thick, and overhangs the house with long eaves. The top layer of it is made of a coarse many-leafed weed, and the leaves are carefully made to point downwards. This arrangement is said to make the rain drain off more quickly from the ridge-pole to the eaves. Each house has a square veranda at one end, and this is the official front of the house. It, like the covered portion behind

it, is on the *chang*, and it is here that you will be asked to squat and be entertained. Something soft will be brought for you to sit upon. It may be some home-woven garment, but I have known it to be one of our own gunny bags with the Government mark upon it, obviously pilfered, but unblushingly proffered. *Apong* will be brought to you—a dirty-looking fluid—in a vessel made from a hollow piece of bamboo. Some will be poured into a drinking-cup, made also of bamboo, and you will feel bound at any rate to put it to your lips. If you drink too much of it, it will, like other intoxicants, make you drunk. Near some of the houses may be found neat little garden plots, well fenced in, where poppies grow. But they are not there really for æsthetic effect: it is from them that the village draws a scanty stock of opium.

The main living and sleeping room lies behind the veranda, and stretches nearly the

whole length of the building, though room is left for a kind of cupboard at the far end. There are convenient shelves in the roof and on the walls, and here bows and quivers and other treasures will be found lying about. A stone fireplace, with a small grate in the middle, stands in the centre of the room. Here food is cooked and the inmates warm themselves. The grate is small in proportion to the rest of the fireplace, so that those sitting round it are kept clear to some extent from the wood smoke. This escapes, not through a chimney, but as best it can. This "best" is not such a very bad one, for the whole house is very draughty. Under the *chang* beneath the house are more "godowns," and here in coops and pens live the poultry and the pigs.

There being only one room for living and sleeping, decency is observed to some extent by herding all the bachelors of the village at night into one large building called the

Moshup. It is a long barrack, a hundred feet or so from end to end. In the day-time it is clear of furniture, but at night each young blood brings his blanket and dosses down there away from his family. In the day-time, however, he seems very domestic. Whenever I visited the village it seemed to be full of young men who were sitting at home and doing nothing.

The lowest in the social scale seem, as was hinted above, to be those who work in a *jhum*. The better-class women seem to stay at home and weave or spin, while the better-class men either stay at home to idle, or engage in field-sports of various kinds. The bow and arrow are of course largely used in hunting, but the Àbor is also a great artist in snares of all kinds. You may, for instance, see in the jungle a long shed three feet high heavily roofed with stones. A bait will be placed within it, and some beast, either by touching the bait, or merely by entering the shed, lets

go the roof's support and brings a ton of stones upon his head.

Elsewhere a bird-catching trap may be found in a tree, a contrivance by which the bird, with ever so slight a brush with its feathers, will release a stout bamboo-spring, and, as quick as lightning, draw a tight noose round its own neck. This contrivance is most ingenious. It is quite a lesson in engineering to follow the various but almost instantaneous processes that end in the bird's death, and the whole machine with its curves and angles and straight-drawn strings looks like a very complicated proposition in a book of Euclid. Another such proposition (I think from the third book) is to be found writ large in some of the bamboo river-bridges that, with circles and curves touching and intersecting, are so constructed that men can travel rocking but safe over the torrents beneath them.

The bamboo-spring and the booby-trap are, as already recounted, used also for the destruc-

tion of an enemy, but they take a few more military forms than have hitherto been described. Perhaps the most fascinating is a big bow, which is fitted with a whole sheaf of arrows, and will loose off the whole sheaf at the touch of an unsuspecting foot. Not less murderous is a felled tree hanging over a precipice, and joined to its stump on the crest of the precipice by a few splinters. It remains there ready to fall on its victims below at one gentle, well-timed push. But these devices belong to war, and it is of the Àbor at peace that we are now speaking.

Fishing is another of the Àbor's occupations. He does not fish with rod and line, but he uses nets by night, and both by night and day he uses fish-traps. The fish-trap is a piece of basket-work shaped like the basket that holds a coach-horn. It is laid between the stones in a rapid with mouth upstream. The fish, forced by the stream into the blind narrow end, is held fast, his movements cramped, and the

current still pressing him down. The fisherman (save the mark!) has but to come along and pull out the fish-trap with the fish inside it. Oh! shades of Izaak Walton.[1]

They dry most of their fish to feed on when other foods are scarce. I was once offered a dried fish as a present, but refused it. It was black with age, and had never been cleaned or opened out. I dare say it was good eating, but it did not appeal to me.

Jack-fruit, when rice is scarce, becomes also an important food. It is said that if you recover from the smell of the fruit you enjoy the taste, but here again, though never averse to the doughtiest cheese, I proved faint-hearted, and never faced this preliminary process.

Among Àbor sportsmen the beetle-catcher must not be forgotten. We met one one day as we returned from Ayang. He was return-

[1] What would Izaak Walton have said to a basket of fifteen hundred pounds of mahser and boka caught by one rod in ten days in the rivers of Àborland!

ing to Ayang from a beetle-hunt on the banks of the Dihong. He was a ferocious-looking person, armed to the teeth, and we thought fit to overhaul him and see what other engines of destruction he might be carrying besides bow and quiver and a very murderous *dao*. In his hand he held a long cylindrical bamboo box, and into this we peeped. Out of it, as the lid came off, began hopping the day's bag of beetles that he had picked up from under the stones by the river-side. He grinned and demonstrated their use by eating one. It seemed pleasant to the taste to judge by the expression of his face, but the succulent portions within it stained his lips a dirty crimson. On this occasion, too, an invitation to join in the repast was weakly refused.

On the whole, the people of Ayang seemed to enjoy our visits, and always plied us not only with *apong*, but with other small presents. As you sat chatting on the verandah of a *gàm's* house, surrounded by loafing men, screaming

children, and grunting pigs, someone would be very busy close by plaiting thin strips of white peeled bark into a small oval basket. Into the oval, when nearly complete, he would fit a hen's egg. Having closed up that oval, he would continue the plaiting till another oval section was ready for another egg. At last a whole row of some six eggs, each in its basket partition, would be ready to be presented to you, the loose ends of basket-work having been wound into a dainty handle by which the whole could be carried. Similarly, complaining hens would be sometimes thrust into improvised baskets and pressed upon you.

This village, like others, had several *gàms*. The chief one was a lean but fine-looking man. His face was as naturally beardless as that of any of his fellows, but its features were suggestive of the ascetic *lama* rather than the typical bucolic Àbor. Though his face was hairless, he yet, when dressed for some great occasion, such as a visit to the Inspector of Communica-

tions, would be wearing a pair of artificial whiskers. They were just a strip of *mithan* calf-skin with short hair upon it, that passed under the chin and extended from ear to ear. It appeared to be only men of importance who adopted this fashion. This head-man's wife was as nice as he was. Old, shrivelled and ugly, and shockingly *décolletée*, she yet had charming manners, and was a cheery hostess. She too used to tramp the eight miles with her husband to Jánakmukh when he came to pay us return visits, and she always brought me a pumpkin as a present in the capacious basket which she wore as a bustle.

One day we visited Ayang while a funeral was in progress. The Àbor has little religion, and probably most of what he does possess centres round his ceremonies in honour of the dead. He is probably more of an ancestor-worshipper than anything else. There is certainly a great show made by him of making his dead comfortable. Over each

grave a tiny baby *bâsha* is built, where presumably the departed spirit gets shelter from the rain. A funeral offering, on a scale far more magnificent than sufficed to carry a Roman spirit across the Styx, was on this occasion being carried behind the corpse to the grave. The offering took the form of ten pigs. Each pig was carried slung on a pole, and they were all neatly arranged according to size, the biggest pig in front and the smallest in rear. When the funeral was over the procession returned cheerfully to the village. We were made just as much at home as usual, and not allowed to feel that we had come calling at the wrong time.

CHAPTER XVII

What we were fed on, and how our food was brought to us.

To whatever picture of the Àbor I have succeeded in imprinting on the reader's mind, will he please add a goitre, and that a large one? Most of the men and even more of the women have goitres on their necks. One doctor at Jánakmukh did his best to treat them. As was natural, it was specially the younger maidens, with beauty of a sort to redeem, who trooped to the left bank of the Dihong, where our doctor, with his pot of goitre-paint, having crossed in a "dug-out," would apply the remedy to many bulging necks.

It was to the attractions of the goitre-treatment that we perhaps owed most of the scanty supplies that the Ayang people brought us. The men and maidens coming to be treated

would carry small loads of *dhan* on their backs to sell to us. It was wrapped in fresh banana leaves and then enclosed in loosely plaited baskets. Each dab of goitre-paint would thus result in the purchase of a day's food for a few mules. Of course payment was made in cash as well as goitre-paint, the latter being mainly "thrown in"; but even so, the sum total of *dhan* thus obtained went a very little way towards supplying our needs.

This brings us to the matter-of-fact subject of the feeding of the Àbor Expeditionary Force. It needed careful feeding, for the difficulty of getting the right food into the right mouths at the right moments was greater on this than upon many expeditions.

The amount of food that the country gave us was negligible. The few hundred bags of *dhan* that were sold to us, the few hundred that were found here and there in abandoned villages, the stray *mithan* that were captured,

and the *mithan* that were brought in as fines, constituted the whole of our official pickings from the Àbor larder. Hence practically everything that man or beast required had to be sent up to us. It had to come, not merely from Kobo, the base, which was a barren spot, but from markets still farther away. Our base was divided from these markets by thirty miles of river that, for the first five months of the expedition, grew steadily less navigable. These difficulties were increased by the tendency of foodstuffs in general, and live stock in particular, to perish *en route* in the miserable weather.

Feeding a force in a barren country, unrelieved by oases of any kind, becomes of course more difficult the farther the force advances. It is interesting, sometimes, to follow the progression of these difficulties by simple arithmetic. It can be shown, for instance, by means of quite plausible figures, that after a given number of marches the net

carrying power of every animal or other carrier is a minus quantity! This may suggest Lewis Carroll in a playful mood, but it is a solemn fact. Let us put the carrier's gross load at sixty pounds, as it was on the Àbor expedition. Let us put him eleven marches from the base, where it was often his lot to be when at work with a reconnoitring party. Let him eat three pounds a day, which he did with avidity, being generally a Naga. His three pounds' ration for this particular day has been carried for him over eleven marches, so that thirty-three pounds of daily carrying power have been expended over it. But the same amount has also been expended, or rather inevitably wasted, by the carriers engaged in the service having all to return empty into position, so as to be ready for a similar service another day. Hence the total in daily carrying power expended is sixty-six pounds, not thirty-three. Each ration, therefore, that the hungry Naga,

eleven marches from the base, so unhesitatingly consumes, is not merely three pounds of luscious rice, tea, and tobacco, it is also a debit balance of sixty-six pounds of daily carrying power. In the day's work with which he earned these good things, the weight he carried was only sixty pounds. Therefore his net carrying power for the day is minus six pounds! This is really the same as saying that you cannot go far up a barren line of communication before each mule, man, or other carrier needs more than one other of the same class solely for the purpose of ministering to his own wants.

When at work, the coolie or human carrier does not eat away his own carrying power as fast as do some other forms of transport, but when he goes sick the "debit balance" goes up against him very quickly. When sick he is from the cruel transport official's standpoint a much worse patient than any animal; for he needs heavy hospitals kept

ready for him and carried about for him, and when his illness proves tedious, so that he is no longer worth his keep, he yet may not be shot!

The Nagas could not stay with us till the bitter end. A pardonable homesickness at length came over them, and a reasonable desire to be back in time for their spring sowings. We would have broken the terms of our contract with them if we had detained them against their will beyond a certain date, and therefore they were allowed to go. But by this time not only had we a whole mule corps in this country, but first one and then another Gurkhali carrier corps had been raised.

The Gurkhali is better known in the annals of frontier warfare than the Naga. He is not a savage, and wears more clothes and fewer ornaments than the Naga, so that he is hardly tinged with the same romance. But he has the same Mongolian cheerfulness and the same zeal for work, and will carry a

heavy load up any altitude. However, he sang no martial chaunt as he climbed a hill, and carried no spear. Hence he was accounted by many, the Àbors included, as less of a warrior.

Of the mules, many were Burmans, scarcely thirteen hands high, war-worn and long since into their teens. But these were the best of the bunch. They took to the wet jungle paths and the damp climate as ducks to water, and would plough gaily uphill and through fetlock-deep mud with full loads on their backs, while their larger and younger comrades from Africa or the Argentine stopped to flounder and gasp. The mule road eventually reached Yambung, and sometimes mules were taken as far as there, but most of their work was naturally done on the lower part of the line, where the hill-man carriers' special qualities would have been wasted.

But for one dismal fortnight, when it rained almost incessantly, some of the mules

had to suffer more than they could bear. I spoke just now of mud reaching the fetlock, but during the fortnight, in the ever-dripping valley of the Sirpo, between Coolie-col and Renging, the mud on the mule track—not then superseded by the new and drier road—reached to the knees and hocks. Progress through it was necessarily of the slowest, for not only did the mud clog, but just here the gradients were of the steepest. The mules during that fortnight often reached camp after dark, to the natural detriment of the evening's grooming. A hundred or so within a few days went dead lame with what appeared to be the same mud fever that may be met with in wet hunting counties in England. The whole hoof became spongy and porous, and was tender all over the surface; the legs swelled, and eventually the hair came off them. The disease seemed to some also to resemble the sufferings of human feet from the Kobo or Balek mud in the worst of the

rainy season. Men, after a day's march in such mud, though wearing stout boots, would come home sometimes with their feet all flabby and tender, and their legs all swollen.

The feeding of the mules was of course a difficulty. Soon baled hay and baled *bhoosa* from mobilisation depôts more than a thousand miles away came pouring in to supplement the local grass. This grass, as before explained, was tall and coarse, but the mules liked it. The coarser it was the more it looked like sugar-cane, and the more sugar it did in fact contain. Hence the mule with the sweet tooth liked the coarsest best. The difficulty was to spare the men, mules, and time for cutting and lifting it, for the *chapris* where it grew generally lay off the line of route, and it could not, therefore, be brought in by mules returning from the day's ordinary work. Diversions through the jungle to the *chapris* were therefore often necessary, and this in-

volved detaching valuable carrying-power from the primary duty of carrying loads.

Both at Jánakmukh and also at Pasighat, where my depôt was eventually withdrawn, before the final demobilisation, the river banks were filled with narrow *chapris*. Here, therefore, a few "dug-outs," usually manned by friendly Àbors from Balek or Ayang, brought in grass up to the very lines of the mules. To find men to cut the grass was sometimes a difficulty, but at last I got a windfall of grasscutters which lasted me for a long time. I owed the windfall to mumps, which though it had been with us since the beginning of the expedition, was now very prevalent in one of the Gurkhali carrier corps. The mump cases, together with the "contacts" who had been sharing their *báshas*, were therefore segregated on the other side of the river by the doctor's order. But when they were not actually bulging with mumps they were all allowed to cut grass for me, and,

with the aid of the boats, did as much for the force as if they had been carrying bales of pressed fodder all the time up from the base.

The grain eaten by the mules was chiefly *dhan* or unhusked rice, for this was the commonest grain for many hundreds of miles around. It was a relief to have no fastidious animals with us who needed coaxing into a diet of *dhan*, and it was fortunate that we had few horses to feed in addition to the mules. With the mule corps itself had come a few riding-ponies, who were very useful for special purposes—for instance, when they carried the Divisional General and his staff most of the way on his flying visit to Yambung. But we all of us had had to leave our own chargers to eat their heads off in snug stables in India, while we re-learnt—some of us with much discomfort—the simple art of marching many miles in the day on two flat feet. It was extraordinary

how good it was for us, and how briskly many, even elderly men, began to skip about. It was interesting, too, to see our notions of distances passing through several phases. What in an unmapped jungle had seemed at first to be a long march, got docked off mile after mile, as we got fitter, till at last the more hale and hearty even began to underestimate instead of exaggerating their achievements.

The feeding of men was as difficult as the feeding of the animals. We were almost as omnivorous as we were polyglot, needing almost as many different diets as we spoke languages. The Sahib had his special ration. So had the Naga, while even the Gurkha and the Sikh do not feed quite alike. It might be said, as a rough generalisation, that the farther to the east was your home, the more rice you wanted and the less flour or *ata*. None of these things keep well if they have once got wet, and, despite the waterproof bags that covered the inner sacks, a load that had come

up from the base by road during one of our periodical deluges, or had floated from Kobo to Pasighat in the bilge of a "dug-out," was often no longer dry inside. It might hide in a stack unnoticed for a week or two, and then betray itself to the critical nose of a watchful storekeeper. Even then it was not to be wasted, for the ducks and geese, dirty feeders as they are and clearly not teetotalers, would like their rice all the better for its being highly fermented.

Ducks and geese seem out of place on a military expedition. They suggest peaceful homesteads and surroundings of unwarlike luxury. But they, along with goats, formed usually our only possible substitute for otherwise eternal "bully-beef" or "bully-mutton." A special contingent of geese was ordered up for Christmas, and I never heard such a cackling and complaining as they made when they landed from the boat convoy at Pasighat, and had to be carried up the same evening to

Jánakmukh. They made awkward carrier-loads, for they were too quarrelsome to share the same carrier's basket. So each carrier placed a single goose in his basket, and letting only his head and neck protrude proceeded on his way. This procession of carriers marching with their geese from Pasighat to Jánakmukh was one long and continuous cackle. They continued cackling in the house which I had made specially for them at Jánakmukh until a late hour in the night, and one wit at dinner with a knowledge of the classics and a more recent recollection of "The battle of Jának-mukh," remarked that we should be quite safe that night with the geese to give the alarm. We kept our own share to fatten for Christmas, but sent the rest of them next day cackling onwards to the front.

Ducks travelled less like first-class passengers, and were huddled in crates. Each crate was in three tiers, and there were four ducks in each tier, so that twelve could go on the back

of one carrier. The weather in Àborland was of course to the proverbial liking of the ducks, and they enjoyed themselves immensely in the duck-docks which we built for them on the banks of the Dihong. The balmy rain suited them, and they fattened till we ate them. Fowls did not take to the climate nearly so well, and we soon gave up sending for them. The local fowl, however, presented by or bought in small numbers from the Àbor villagers, were of sterner stuff.

Sheep were as unsatisfactory as fowls. They died in great numbers from exposure, and, not being leaf eaters, were hard to feed in the jungle. Goats quickly took their place in the European as well as the Indian ration. Most people, even those who have eaten goat without knowing it, think that this is only an animal to be eaten as a hardship; they seem to me quite wrong. A very few days of the conscious eating of goat made it seem to me not only as good as, but just the same as mutton. When I returned to the land of

sheep I found it needed some days' training to recover my lost sense of distinction between the two.

Even goats needed care to keep them well in this country. They had to be herded in well-covered pens built on *changs* to keep them off the wet ground, and their marching powers were not great. A day's halt between each march was desirable, and, when they marched, the men detailed as goatherds had to be sufficiently numerous to pick up and carry a good proportion of stragglers. The mule, who could not bear quacking ducks on his back, was kinder to goats. I have seen many a mule coming into camp with a goat on each side of his back, the latter peeping out and bleating from gunny bags with holes in the top.

Onions were an important part of our diet, for they are the hardiest travellers in the class of "anti-scorbutics." Their drawback, however, is their tendency to sprout quickly in a damp

climate and, as they sprout, to emit a stronger smell than usual. The smell of the onion was often the pervading smell of a whole camp; and if I smell an onion to-day I think of Àbor-land. I sent a large consignment one day to a depôt several marches ahead. The officer in charge wired back to me indignantly, when the consignment arrived, that he had asked for onions and not for orchids. I told him in reply that when they left me they were still onions, and that since the government botanist had recently left for the front, their strange behaviour seemed eminently a case for the latter to deal with. A still more pressing telegram then reached me, telling me that the government botanist had not yet arrived, but that the "orchids" were now developing into "water-lilies"!

I have told how the geese came to give us some Christmas cheer, but have not mentioned the parcels' post and the tons of parcels from fond relations that poured in upon us at

Christmas-time, containing plum-puddings, mince pies, and the like. The post, as mentioned earlier, came to Kobo not up-stream from Dibrugarh, but down-stream in "dug-outs" from Saikhowa Ghàt. One "dug-out," bearing more Christmas letters and parcels than it could conveniently hold, was swamped *en route*. Great of course was the grief among the sufferers, and many were the dainties that never reached their destination. But on sand-banks here, and by dredging and diving there, the post office recovered some of the missing articles in varying degrees of dampness.

I, among others, was to some extent a sufferer. One day, after all hope had been abandoned, the Christmas cake sent me all the way from Rawulpindi at last arrived. I had heard by letter of its making and baking, and of its many rich ingredients. But though at last it had come, it was not the cake it had been. Though encased in tin, the waters

of the Brahmaputra had yet succeeded in invading it, and it swam in its tin. But with the water that swamped it was mixed all the brandy that had been put into it (whether to add to its rich flavour or to make it digestive). If I had been content to drink the surrounding fluid I should at any rate have had a good drink. But I had to do my best for the cake itself, so sent it straightway to the camp bakery and had it baked for several hours in the oven. The result was not satisfactory. Though the crust was harder, yet a cautious incision revealed nothing but a mass of pure stodginess. I next tried boiling. I had it boiled twice for several hours at a time, and then we began to eat it, not as a cake but as a pudding. It was quite satisfactory as a pudding, but there still seemed hope for the remainder of it as a cake. So I sent it once more to be baked for many hours, and at last it fulfilled its original function and proved an excellent cake.

It was, however, unfortunate to the end. For that evening my ex-golf-caddie (elsewhere mentioned) left it unheeded on the low bamboo sideboard in our mess *básha*, and by morning the rats had eaten most of what was left.

CHAPTER XVIII

The end of the expedition—An attempt to summarise.

WHEN a certain degree of latitude had been reached by the survey-parties, when many prisoners had been captured and were awaiting trial, when the weather was each day growing mistier, and spate after spate of rain had made the ground more water-logged, when the winter snow was melting fast in the heights and raising the Dihong towards its summer level, the orders came from Simla that we were to demobilise. This took some time. For survey-parties had to be withdrawn, and down a long line of communications a considerable force had to be despatched in driblets that were small enough to fit into the smallest camping ground *en route*. The prisoners had also to be tried, and, though the permanent post at

Rotung was completely built and stocked with provisions, there were yet some finishing touches to be put to the subsidiary posts of Balek and Pasighat. But at length all these undertakings were completed, and one evening as I sat bored at Pasighat I was sent for on the telephone and told to return to Kobo; and so floated there in a "dug-out" the next day. At Kobo I heard that an order had been published authorising all unimportant details of my service to return to India. Having little difficulty in identifying myself with these details, and having in fact no more work to do, I got leave to flit, and flitted. A procession of steamers soon took away the major portion of the force. But a few troops and some transport had to remain for some weeks longer to remove the reserve of stores from Rotung. For at the last moment the order came that no garrison was to be left there. Garrisons at Balek and Pasighat were held to be sufficient.

. . . . . .

People are asking what the expedition has accomplished, and perhaps even this irresponsible record would be incomplete without its irresponsible version of the answer.

No sane man will blame us for not killing more Àbors when we had killed enough, nor yet for losing so few of ourselves in action when it was the Àbors and not ourselves whom we were out to punish. It cannot, I think, be doubted that the military operations were a complete success, however low it may be necessary to class jungle tactics in the academic scale of modern warfare, or however poor reading our achievements may have provided at the civilian's breakfast. It is surely enough that the Àbors were thoroughly cowed and humiliated by the losses which they suffered, and that they received an adequate punishment, both personal and collective, for the crimes that we were sent to avenge.

That this result was achieved with so little loss to ourselves is more than ordinarily a

matter for satisfaction. For this was a country into which we had never yet entered without either failing to achieve our object, or achieving it at the cost of some disaster. Such disasters must, in the minds of these people, have always blurred the moral effect of our achievements, and doubtless been celebrated after our departure with holocausts of *mithan* and pigs. Thus our previous disasters really had left a more lasting impression than our temporary and not very signal achievements. It was chiefly for this very reason that the Àbor was now "above himself." It was good therefore for once to go into the country, harry it, and come out almost scatheless.

The scientists who joined us evidently tell varying tales of their achievements. Some seem contented, others disappointed. Even at Jánakmukh we had seen visions of enriching ourselves by starting coal-mines and pegging out our personal claims there and then. Coal peeped at us from rocks in many directions,

and many a stream that rose in the nearer hills was dark as soot and turned the mud in its bed into the semblance of the best boot-blacking. But the coal itself when found was pronounced by the geologist to be execrable. Gold also was to be had, but in non-paying quantities, but here and there there were possibly more hopeful traces of oil. At Jánakmukh, besides our coal we had our rubber. For, eight hundred feet above the camp, on "Piquet Hill," was a solitary rubber tree. It was already hacked all over by the *daos* of Àbors, who understand the value of the white juice beneath the bark and sent it on sale to Assam. But there was plenty of the white juice still left in that tree, and it became a sort of Sunday afternoon amusement to take a friend to the top of "Piquet Hill" and make him hack for rubber. But perhaps it was not the best *para*, for neither this nor any other rubber tree, nor, for that matter, any of the many kinds of tree in their great forests, seemed to find

much favour with the experts. As in the case of the gold, they could not exactly see the way to make them pay.

The botanists and entomologists, on the other hand, seemed very happy, and I believe that the new specimens of bugs, beetles, reptiles, weeds, and flowers discovered in Àbor jungles are an important contribution to science. You did not ask one of these scientists whether he thought it was a fine evening. You asked him how many new specimens he had discovered that day. I did, however, once hear a botanist complain that we had inadvertently arranged to fight the Àbors at a season when it was impossible for him to see many of the flowers in bloom!

Concerning topographical exploration, let me first quote from the general's dispatch: "An accurate series of triangulation emanating from the Assam longitudinal series of the great trigonometrical survey has been carried over the outlying ranges to the latitude of

Kebang, terminating in the base at Sadup. This will prove of the greatest assistance to future surveyors or explorers. From this series, and at the extension of reconnaissance-triangulation to the latitude of Simong, several large snowy peaks have been fixed on what appears to be the main Himalayan Divide, including one very fine peak over 25,000 feet high. Many more snow peaks have also been fixed on the watershed between the Dihong and Subansiri Rivers, which seems to be a very prominent part of the main Divide. It has only been possible to obtain a mere approximation of the topography of these snowy ranges; but the results are in themselves of great value. About 3500 square miles have been more or less rigorously mapped on a scale of 4 miles to 1 inch, including the whole of the Yamne and Shimang Valleys, a portion of the Siyom River, and the whole of the Dihong Valley as far north as Singging."

This extract will make clear, even to those unversed in topographical terms, that our Farthest North in Àbor-land was reached by filling up many gaps in the world's knowledge. That there should remain gaps as yet unfilled is not surprising, even though the result is somewhat tantalising. It is tantalising, for instance, to hear how the name Dihong changes by imperceptible degrees, as village after village is passed, till it bears a strong resemblance to the Tsang in Tsangpo, but still remains as definitely divided from it in sound as we were in space. It is tantalising too that the famous Falls of the Tsangpo, about which much has been heard in the past and more still was heard on the expedition itself, were not actually sighted. It was also tantalising to hear of but not see the people who live near the falls, who are said to be pygmies with no necks, whose heads grow abruptly from their chests, and who cannot look upwards.

After all, perhaps a little too much fuss has been made about these falls. Though they may drop farther at one leap than any other falls in the world, the river must still wind many hundreds of miles before the descent of twelve thousand feet from Chaksam Ferry, near Lhassa, is at length completed. Though they be as awe-inspiring as Niagara, it will be long before Mr. Cook can take his yearly influx of American ladies through Àbor-land to view them.

More worthy of speculation, to my mind, was the question whether the Tsangpo of Tibet did really send the whole of its waters into the Dihong in Àbor-land. Many of us had seen the Tsangpo at Chaksam Ferry, and come away with a picture in our minds of a swift river with steep banks and a breadth not far short of that of the Dihong. We formed two schools; one school, more approved than the other by the expert surveyors, argued that we had only seen the

Tsangpo at its high summer level; that it was probably not even then as big as we had come to think it after this lapse of years; that at the time we had never measured its average depth; that the Dihong in winter, thirty miles above Kobo, had an average depth of forty-five feet, a breadth of fully two hundred yards, and its third dimension represented by a very swift current; that even these measurements gave no idea of the mighty volume of water that—to judge from the high-level marks upon the banks—must have been pouring down the Dihong while we were spanning the Tsangpo with a rope ferry.

The other school, to which I confess I belong, still remained impressed by the size of the Tsangpo. They wondered how such a river, after traversing many hundreds of miles of the wettest country in the world, with tributaries flowing into it from every fold in a thousand hills, could emerge as nothing bigger than our

winter Dihong. They remembered, too, that the crossing of the Tsangpo on the way to Lhassa was effected before the full summer height of the river was reached, and how the river was not recrossed till the dry though early autumn had begun, and that on neither occasion had the river seemed insignificant in comparison with the Dihong.

Distributaries are unfortunately seldom found in the mountains; otherwise it would have been easy to imagine the surplus water being drawn off by them at intervals, and the main channel thus prevented from growing. There are rumours, however, that the Tsangpo at one point falls into a big lake, and that some of the water of this lake disappears underground. There are tales too, current among Miris, of one or more of the western tributaries of the Brahmaputra rising suddenly in great volume from the ground instead of starting from the usual diminutive sources. It is therefore possible that these springs, if they

exist, come underground from this lake, and so form hidden distributaries of the Tsangpo. That in this country even rivers—apart from lakes—do sometimes disappear underground is, at any rate on a smaller scale, an established fact. For instance, there is a stream that, even in dry weather, rushes by Balek in considerable force and size. But, as it flows downwards, it gradually grows smaller, and the channel, where the latter meets the Dihong, is, at the same time of the year, completely dried up.

We have not yet solved these problems of evasive waterfalls, mysterious lakes, and subterraneous channels, but we have paved the way for others to do so. With the knowledge that we have acquired of the lower half of the country, with the roads which we have made, with the friendly relations and wholesome fear of ourselves that we have established, we have, it would seem, made it possible for a force of one-quarter of our strength to get twice as

far as we did in half the time. When the sun shines again in Àbor-land and there is more government money to burn, let us hope that these mysteries will be solved.

The Tibet and the Àbor expeditions not only explored portions of the same river, but have another and perhaps more striking point of resemblance. Each expedition, though primarily punitive, was also prompted by wider political considerations which in the course of the expedition lost a great deal of their weight. But in each case they did so from causes with which the expedition had nothing to do. When we went to Tibet we were nervous of Russian interference in Lhassa, but before we had arrived there the Russians had had their attention drawn far from Lhassa, and were in the throes of war with Japan. Similarly when we invaded and explored the Àbor country and sent missions simultaneously into the countries of the Mishmis and the hill Miris, we were wondering how far the Chinese had

been encroaching upon our spheres of influence. But while we were thus occupied China, cramped by revolution, had been concentrating upon herself.

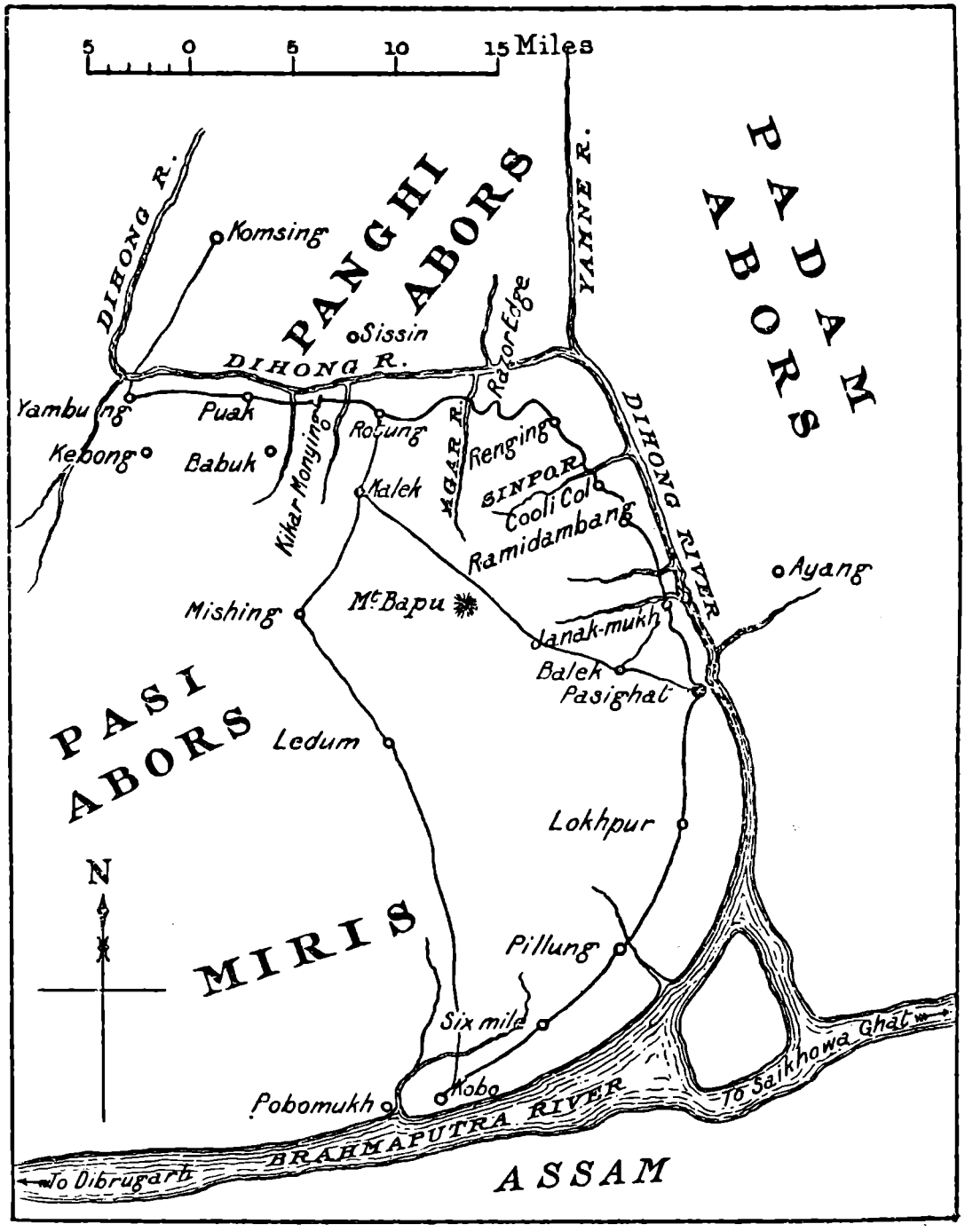
These double coincidences seem to point either to our ill-luck or to our good luck. It seems either that it is our fate to make political demonstrations that eventually, for unforeseen reasons, lose half their point, or else that we have the happy knack of looking to our spheres of influence just when our important neighbours are about to be busy elsewhere.

It was a disappointment to many of us to hear that the post of Rotung was to be given up, and only Balek and Pasighat maintained. Much labour had been lavished on the Rotung post. The situation was healthy and pleasant, and the idea of hot weather to be spent there had appealed to those who had expected to remain. Moreover, Rotung was very close to those villages that were least likely to remain tractable, and so seemed the best centre from

which to maintain law and order. But these were, I suppose, parochial not imperial views. Having been in Àbor-land we felt naturally that we had been the "men on the spot," and so knew best. But the argument of "the man on the spot"—the *argumentum ad hominem in loco*—is after all, as the expression betrays, only a parochial argument. When the argument is imperial the "spot" that matters is not a ten-acre clearing in a valley of a Dihong, but a secretariat in Simla, or an office in Downing Street. For the men sitting there are sitting in the imperial centres and so in the places that matter, and are therefore the "men on the spot."

APPENDIX I

LOWER ÀBOR-LAND



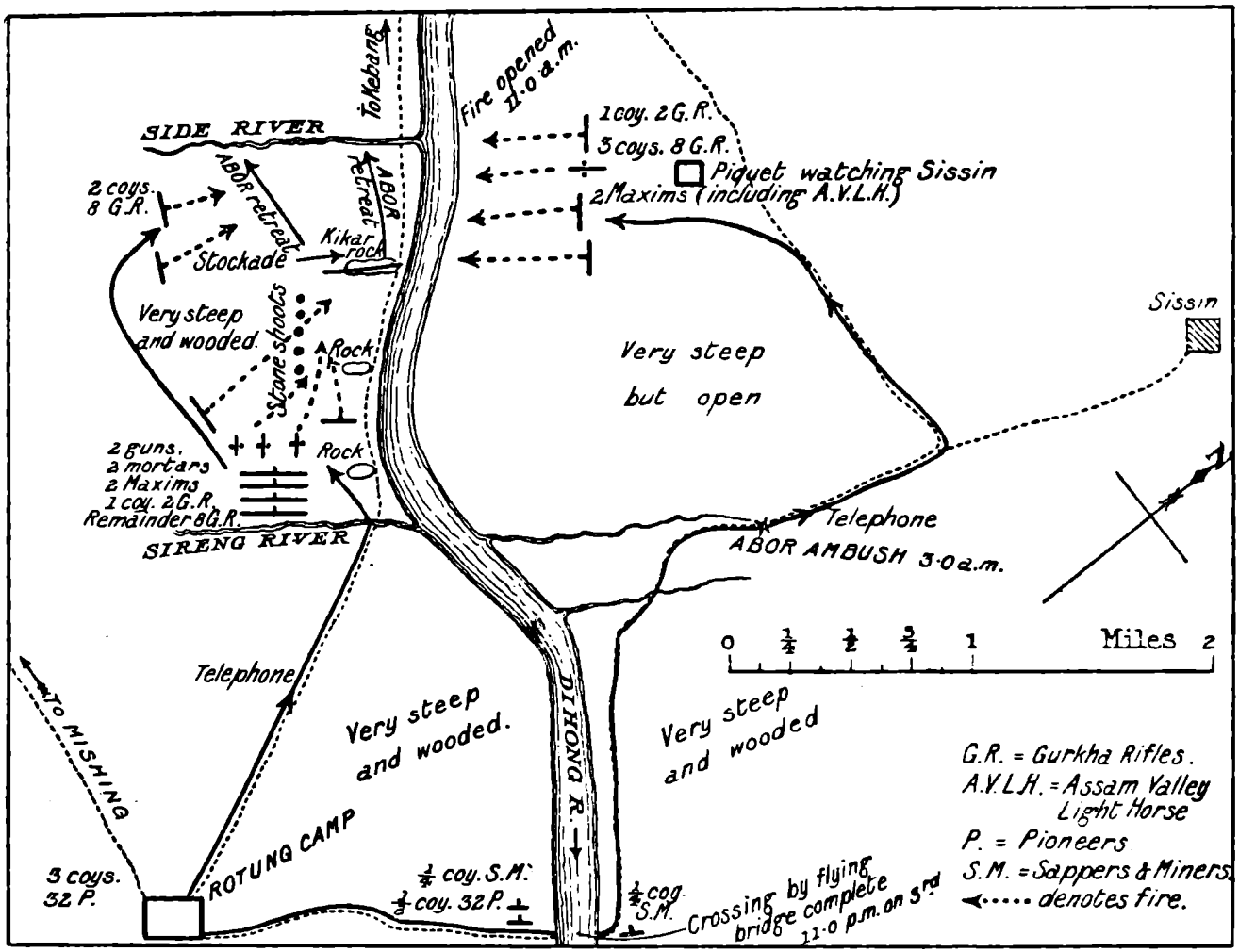
LOWER ABOR-LAND

NOTE

THIS is a rough map made from memory with a friend's aid. The details in it are not intended to be exhaustive, but merely to enable the reader to distinguish the places mentioned in my own narrative.

APPENDIX II

ROUGH SKETCH OF THE ACTION AT KIKAR MONYING

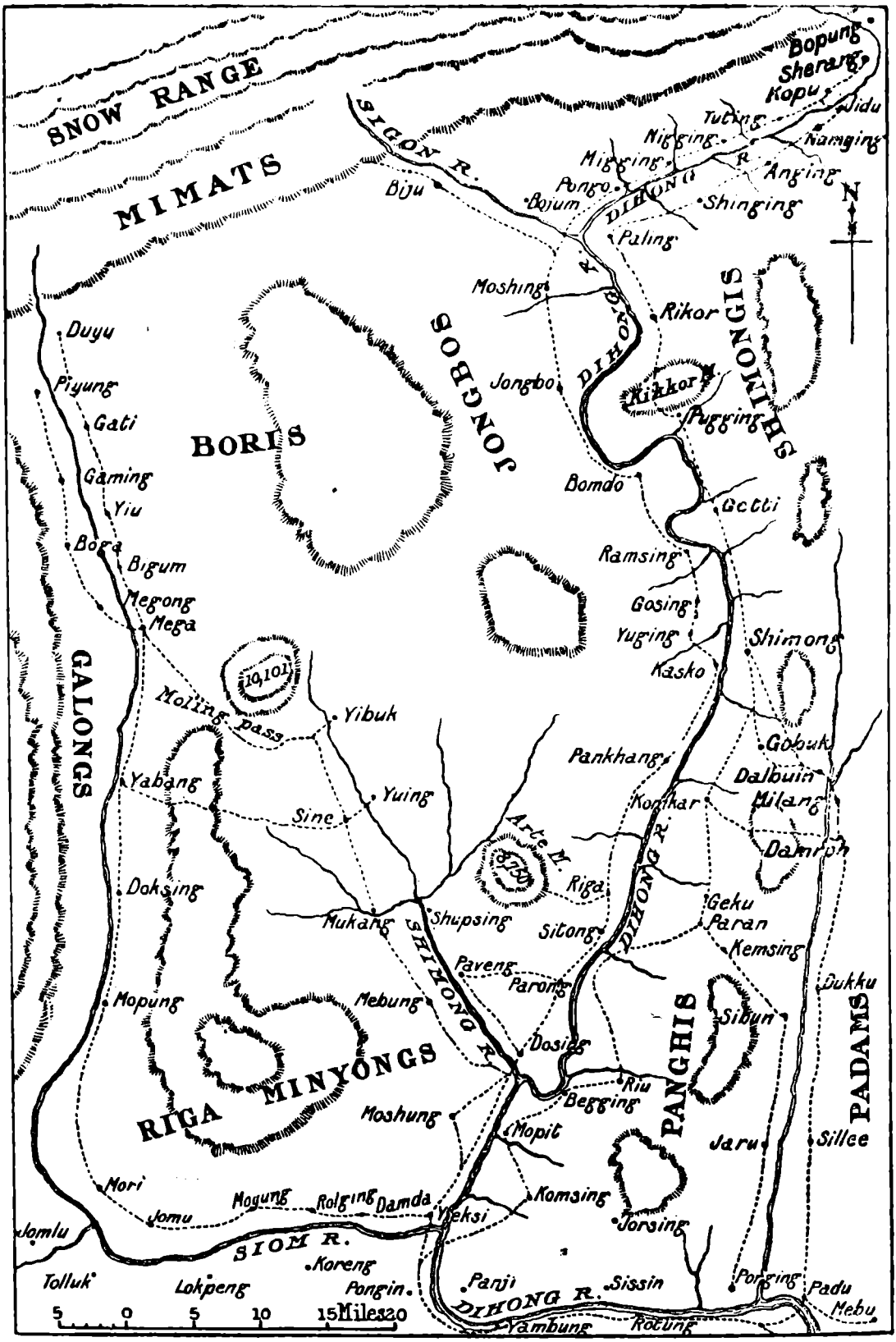


ROUGH SKETCH OF ACTION AT KIKAR MONYING

(Position 11.0 A.M. on December 4, 1911)

APPENDIX III

THE FAN OF RECONNAISSANCE



THE FAN OF RECONNAISSANCE

NOTE

My friend above mentioned has furnished me with a map, of which I have made this copy on a small scale. His map was made from memory and did not aim at complete accuracy, but his own personal knowledge of a large part of the country covered by it is a great safeguard from serious errors. As this is not an official publication I forbore from reproducing any map that was the property of the Government, and have therefore restricted myself to giving such information as is public property.

It will be seen that the map omits what in the previous appendix I have called "Lower Àbor-land." It is based, therefore, upon the line of which the road from Rotung to Yambung forms the central portion. I have called this map "The Fan of Reconaissance," because, as will be seen from the dotted lines representing paths, the reconnaissances for the most part spread upwards like a fan from Rotung and Yambung. The important reconnaissance to Damroh was, however, an exception to this rule, for it left the main line of communication at Jánakmukh by crossing the Dihong at that place. Its first few marches are therefore not shown on this map, but its return journey to Rotung can here be traced. The contours drawn in irregular circles are not based on any exact perpendicular scale.

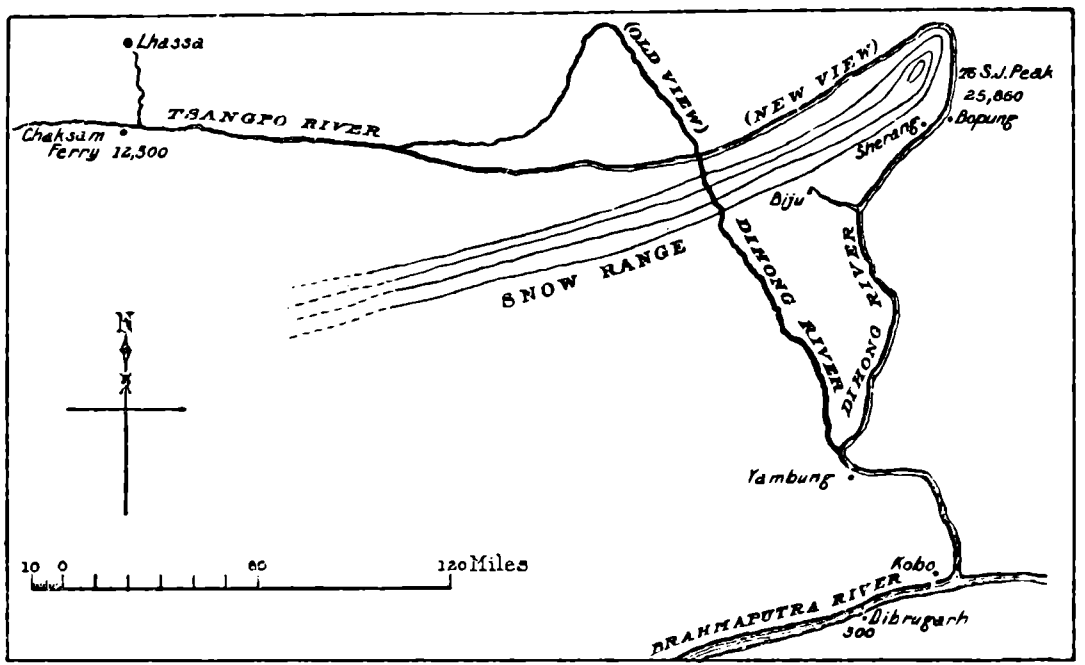
It is open to doubt whether any useful purpose is served

by producing in such profusion the names of the villages visited; but it seemed that this collection of crisp Mongolian dissyllables, many with a strong family likeness, might prove interesting, and give some notion of the sound of the Àbor language. Their very profusion also helps to indicate the extent to which this country was scoured.

The names produced in thick type belong to villages which the Indian traveller Kintop records as having been visited by himself. It was he who, many years ago, attempted to reach Assam from Tibet down the valley of the Tsangpo. When, however, he reached the neighbourhood of Damroh he records that he was held up by unfriendly Àbors and forbidden to proceed. He therefore was obliged to retrace his steps. It is interesting that so many of the villages of which he mentioned the names have been verified upon the recent expedition.

APPENDIX IV

THE OLD AND NEW VIEWS OF THE COURSES OF THE TSANGPO AND DIHONG



SKELETON MAP SHOWING THE OLD AND NEW VIEWS OF THE COURSES OF THE TSANGPO AND THE DIHONG

NOTE

WITH my friend's help I have also compiled this very rough skeleton map. All details of curve, contour, and name not bearing upon the point which it was desired to illustrate have been omitted. It is hoped that the map will thus gain in clearness what it undoubtedly loses in artistic effect.

Such modern atlases as have hitherto ventured to trace the courses of the Tsangpo and Dihong will be found to follow more or less the black line shown here. It is said that their view is based on investigations made by a survey officer in India in 1880. The great loop to the north is said to have been discovered not by himself but by one of his Indian assistants, who marched down-stream from Tibet, counting his paces as he went. This Indian was short of stature and, according to the story, his officer refused to believe that in measuring in this way he had taken due account of the shortness of his own paces. The officer, therefore in his official report, reduced his assistant's estimate of his distance eastward to the apex of the great loop by about one hundred miles. It seems, therefore, that had he trusted his short-statured assistant more completely he would have brought the apex of the loop into much the same place as it is now supposed to occupy. It seems, also, that having placed the apex too far to the west he was obliged to conclude that the river flowed thence

downwards as far as the Yambung corner in a south-easterly direction instead of, as it is now known to do, in a southerly or south-western direction. It is perhaps to this ancient error that the great astonishment of our surveyors was due the other day when they found that the Dihong immediately above Yambung, in its upward course, took a bend to the north-east instead of continuing in a westerly direction.

The discovery that a snow range continues without a break as far to the north-east as 76 S. J. Peak, now makes it probable that the river goes right round this peak before it moves southwards. There are indications that the necessary break does exist just beyond this peak, and that near here may be the real position of the falls. It is also found from general observation that a compensating dip in a ridge is often found near to an exceptionally high peak.

The arguments and opinions here expressed are not official, nor do they carry any scientific weight. They are merely the fragments that two pure laymen have carried away in their minds after occasional sittings at the feet of the learned round a drowsy camp-fire.

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