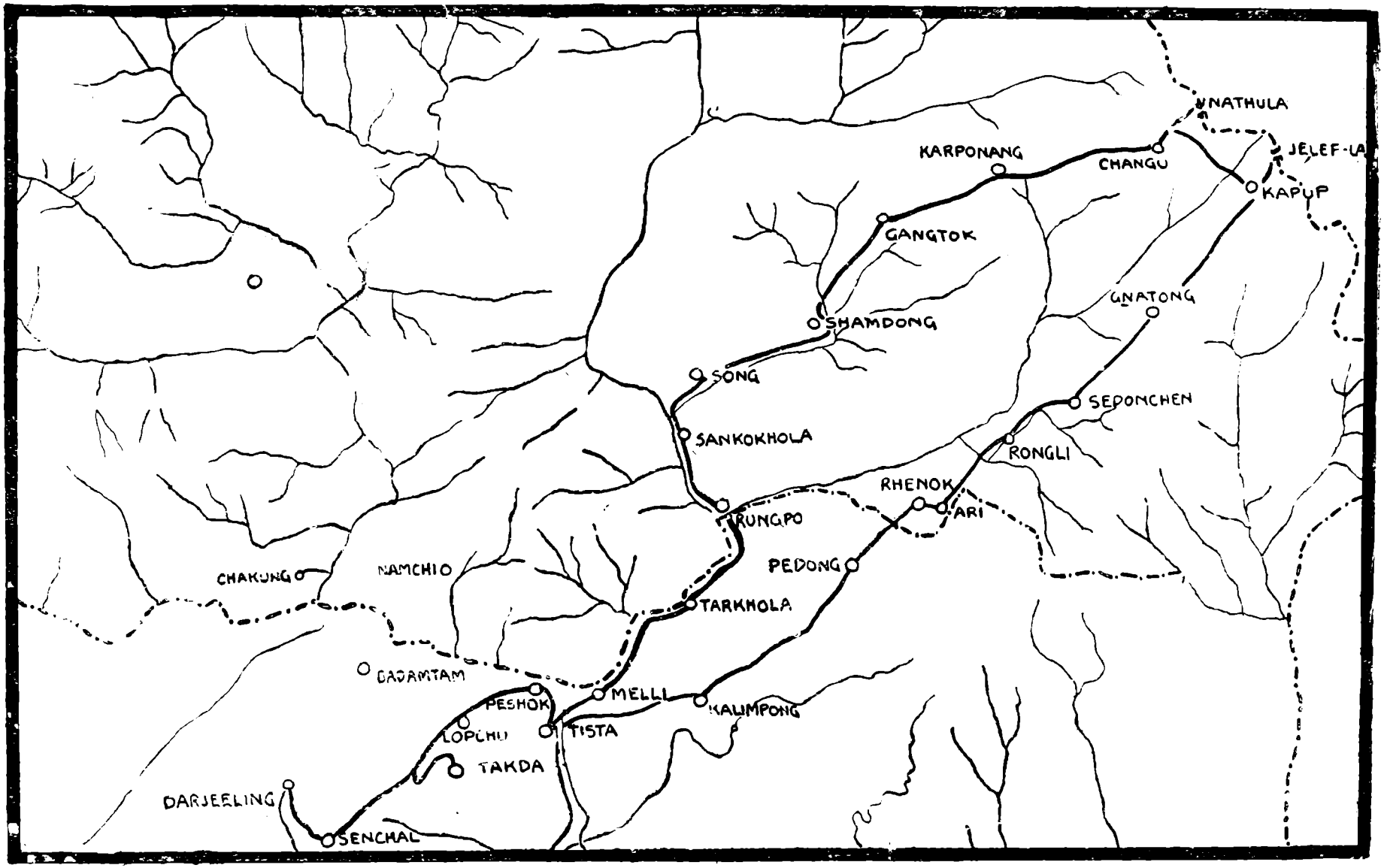
Midst Himalayan Mists

R. J. MINNEY

BUTTERWORTH



The deep black line linking together the place names indicates the itinerary followed by the author

MIDST HIMALAYAN MISTS.

BY

R. J. MINNEY,

Author of 'Night Life of Calcutta"

With 24 illustrations and Map.

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PREFACE.

In these chapters is set out the story of the author's journey to the Tibetan passes. The narrative is more in the nature of a personal record than a guide for tourists, and the writer submits them for what interest his own experiences may have to the casual reader.

The chapters were all originally published in *The Englishman.*

R. J. MINNEY.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

The journey to Darjeeling is to most people an every day event. Darjeeling has become a resort of foremost importance to Bengal and its comparative ease in accessibility by rail has made it a week-end affair with husbands anxious to pay a fleeting visit to their winter wives.

But for one traversing the route for the first time the journey does not fail to hold out endless attractions. There is primarily the novelty of the little train, its winding, squeaking, climbing, puffing; the manifold beauties of the moutain-side, which are unfolded at every bend of its irregular conformation; the descending mist; the floating clouds; the tall, alpine trees, a-weeping with creepers—in all a varying combination of white and grey and dark green. Here through the fringes of the hanging mist peeps out the red thatch of a lonely plantation villa; a telegraph post; or the silver shimmer of a crashing water-fall; and all step back again into the deep grey of the unfathomable mist. There may be seen the panorama of the plains—a stretch of fresh green a-pimpled with habitations, and now the advancing mist comes down upon it and blots it out of the view of the Himalayan sojourner. The mist is the Puck of the mountain-side; it loves nothing so much as to play its little pranks with the varying objects of alpine grandeur.

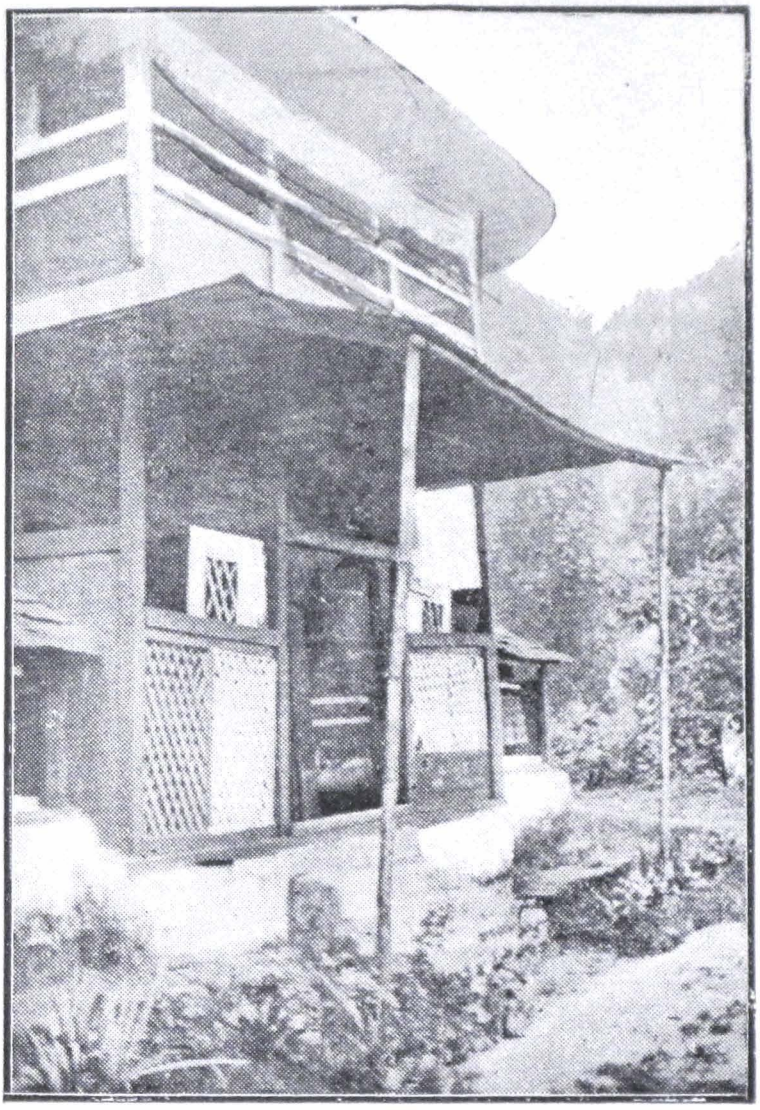
Darjeeling with its fairy lights and multitudinous attractions; its climbing houses; its cosmopolitan bazaar, where villagers come from afar each Sunday, some to barter and

some to buy, and where John Chinaman has a rag and bottle shop; its variety of races—the Nepalese, the Bhutanese, the Tibetan, and the Lepcha, amidst whom are now entwined the Hindu, the Mussulman, the Parsee and the white man; its commanding views of the majestic, silent snows;—is a holiday resort that is well-known almost the whole world over.

We have all heard perhaps its brief history: how it was conferred as a gift of gratitude upon the British Government for their services to Sikhim at a time of Nepalese aggression over eighty years ago; how it was almost instantly selected as a sanatorium; how later, for teachery, the Terai, the intervening forest between this hill top and Calcutta, was wrested from the Sikhimese grasp, and how in the course of time, forty years later, the present marvel in alpine travelling was opened by the Government. I will leave Darjeeling to the guide book and to the many who have already sung its praises.

The roads to Tibet are many. One leads straight off the Chowrasta—the most fashionable of Darjeeling's walks—down through the Rungit valley up to the Jalep La, a distance of but 80 miles. And beyond is the land of mystery and hush concealed once again from the gaze of the white man.

On a fine day the scene beyond stretches for miles into the distance. Writers have even set down that from the top of Observatory Hill, above the Chowrasta in Darjeeling, one can see some of the famous passes into Tibet. But what strikes one most from this irregular, rugged road that slopes down and down almost into infinity, is the row upon row of ever darkening hills that deepen into the distance. On the right crouches a monster hill—a solid block in the twilight, with clouds clinging around it like lather after an incompleted shave. Here—a landslip—all the hair has been carefully removed, and there a line of gaunt trees on the horizon, suggests the remnants of a stubbly beard, soon to be lathered over.



Tibetan Temple below Darjeeling.

But the morning is the time to view this hill-side, when the air is as often as not very much clearer. Select a Sunday and the scene is heightened by the colour and panorama of the streaming thousands from the surrounding valleys, all bowed under the burdens of their baskets, toiling ever up hill towards the stalls of the Darjeeling bazaar. Here goes by a Lepcha in his one-time white rags, now begrimed and dirty ; there a Bhutia family in their dirty long blue coats and their swinging pig tails ; here again some Nepalese children in pink head-dresses, and pretty coral neck chains ; there Bhutanese nobility, with clean combed hair and garments of deep blue plush and red sleeves ; here some Tibetan mendicants with their close-cropped heads and stooping gaits suggestive of the lama in "Kim." Others again in printed pinks, and all with a wealth of fanciful adornment, immense glass beads of green and red and yellow ; jade and silver bangles and anklets ; nose rings, ear rings and quaint hair adornments.

One at last understands where 'the silver of India' goes to. Village women by the score, some no better dressed than coolies, wear innumerable strings of silver coins descending in widening rows right down to the waist line ; and as they swing by in their measured tread one notices the currency of His Majesty's Mint—four anna pieces, eight anna bits and rupees. Anklets and chaplets of silver too suggest some previous incarnation as a medium of currency, prior to the smelting fire of the goldsmith and his assembling hammers.

They all pass in strings, chattering, smiling, laughing, singing. In the evening twilight their dark figures will move again along the path like shadows on the hill-side and the burden of their song arising from the fullness of a heart contented with the success of the market day, is all there will be to tell that these shadows are iotas of humanity.

CHAPTER II.

THE START.

Although the direct road to Tibet lies through Kalimpong on to the most negotiable of the frontier passes, I chose instead the route through Gantok, the capital of Sikhim, and thence to the Tibetan border. This gives one an opportunity of viewing some of the greater glories of the Sikhimese countryside.

Mr. S. W. Laden La, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Darjeeling, very kindly assisted me in mapping out my tour and put me on to a Sikhimese guide who came before me armed with a volume of chits that would have made any Government file blush beyond its red tape and a Calcutta cook green with envy.

The guide proved to be worth his weight in gold. The chits told me that he had been found so by His Excellency the Governor, by the Hon. Mr. Gourlay, who left the Governor to assist Lord Sinha at the Peace Conference, by the Hon. Mr. Kerr, a Russian Princess, and numberless others. Apart though from his many qualities the guide has a countenance that is inspiring of humour. Yet his face is not the most funny part about him; for his name, Chingri Naspati, sounds like an entire meal in itself—a sort of a meagre luncheon.

The arrangements for the start were quite elaborate. The luncheon guide demanded about a quarter of the entire cost in advance, in order, apparently, to bribe himself and the coolies to undertake the rigours of the journey. However, as

reports have occasionally come through of unreliable coolies who do not arrive at the halting stages in time to give you your meals or your bedding—detained presumably by drunkenness ; and of others who run away with one's belongings, my thanks are entirely due to Sirdar Chingri Naspati for his excellent arrangements, as a result of which every thing went off without a hitch—and came back too, I am glad to say, in the same condition. To this I have already testified in a personal contribution to his voluminous chit book.

The weather was excellent. The coolies—man, woman and daughter—appeared a little after dawn and started for our first halting place, Pashoke, 17½ miles out Darjeeling. The Sirdar called with the horses at 10 that morning.

Up to Katapahar the roads were as frequented as they are in Darjeeling. Beyond, the path narrowed, but numerous traders from Ghoom and further still passed in a steady stream. Just outside Jorabangla—the crossing point at which the railway passes through a Bhutia *busti*—sat an aged Lama mumbling to himself the universal prayer. My Sirdar passed him on horseback, and neither by sign nor sound did he pay him that respect that we in Calcutta are accustomed to see given the Brahmin as his special due.

The road wound out of the misty head of Ghoom, where that place gave us its proverbial drizzle. We next passed the road that leads up to Tiger Hill and Senschal and I was told it is the particular position of Ghoom between the three eminences of Katapahar, Senschal and Tiger Hill that gives it its name.

The mist still clung to trees and gave them a most unsubstantial appearance. Pale grey covered every thing I could see beyond the *khud* line.

But on the road there was traffic enough. Now there went past a Catholic Father, with flowing beard and gentle eye, who greeted me after the fraternal manner of his

order. He was coming, my guide told me, from Takda cantonment, where a Gurkha regiment is quartered; and the priest pays a twice-a-week call to minister the requirements of the faith to the officers of that regiment.

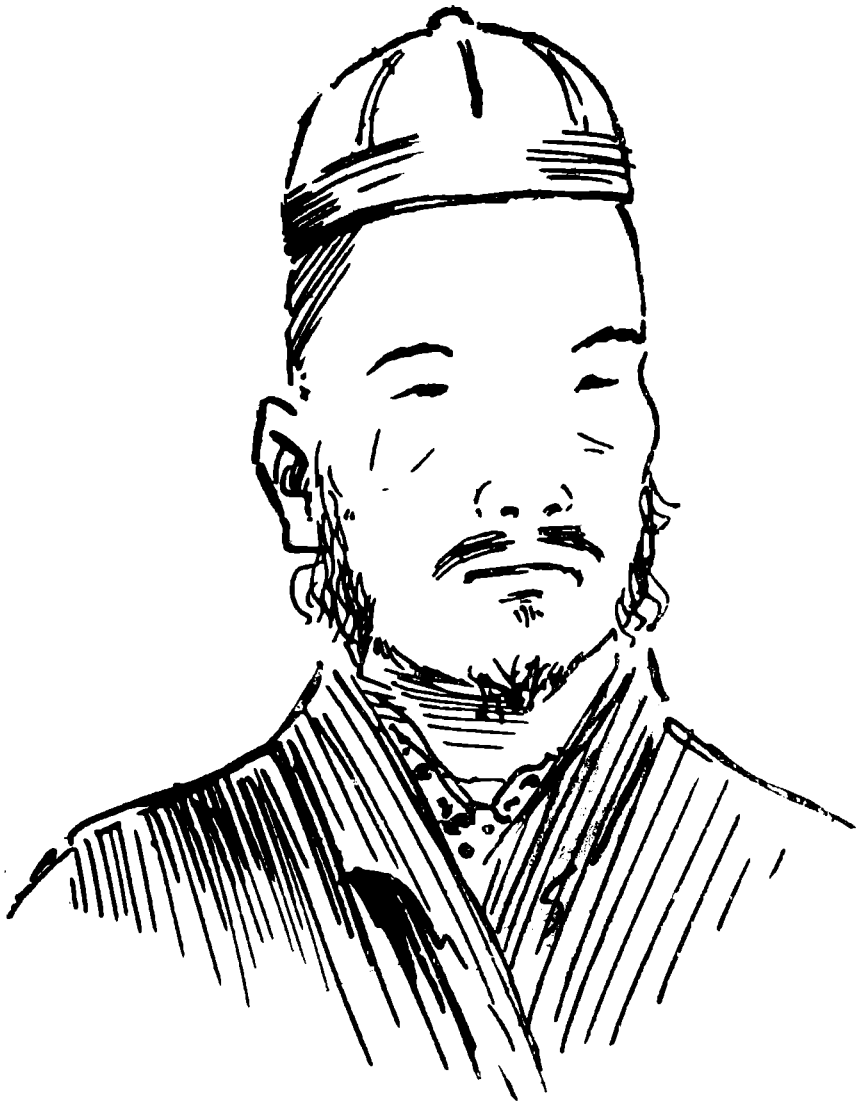
"At Takda," my guide went on, "are also the interned Germans of Darjeeling and elsewhere." And there passed by presently under police escort, a wagon, which, I was told, had just deposited its load of rations for the Germans. So the Huns here at any rate were well looked after.

My guide told me that the Germans lived, some in barrack-like buildings, others in separate houses, all under charge of a British Officer. They were all there, men, women and children; and no doubt some of them may have required the attention of the Catholic Father.

I should have liked to have seen them but Takda lies about five miles below the main road and a visit of such a distance—plus the return over the same track—was too big a detour with Pashoke still some miles before me.

The human panorama continued to pass. A Brahmin in saffron drapery and headgear bowed most meekly; a red-turbaned Marwari also gave me his greeting—truly the courtesy of the road is commendable! Nepalese youths laden with elongated barrels, iron-hooped, containing milk for the market; men with timber and basket loads of charcoal. A woman came along bearing upon her head two enormous planks that stretched across our path as a moving barrier. At the admonition of the Sirdar, she turned herself and the planks towards the hill-side, and we passed onwards.

In two hours after starting we overtook our coolies, who were breathing heavily below their burdens. The man walked by himself in bowed meditation. The mother and girl strode in single file close to the edge of the hill-side. The girl was one of the cheeriest creatures it has ever been



My Sikhimese Guide.

my lot to see. In this land of Himalayan happiness, almost everyone is grinning or smiling. But this little girl, despite the bending weight of her burden was laughing, always laughing. She laughed if the Sirdar sneezed ; and her mother had but to reprimand her when she set off again into further peals of laughter.

The road is marked with water troughs placed at intervals as a benefaction to travellers by some aged Buddhist or Hindu who is endeavouring thus to spur on his progress to Nirvana. At one such stop the coolies unloosed their burdens, washed their faces—another blow to the belief in their uncleanliness—and rested awhile their weary limbs. The Sirdar and I meanwhile pushed on to our destination.

Pashoke lies almost at the bottom of the valley, only 2,600 feet above sea-level. The road to it is a steep descent which though tiresome for the horses has the compensation of beauteous vegetation upon the hillside. Down, down, down, through thickly wooded slopes ; down, down upon a carpet of damp, trodden leaves ; down where each bush is spotted with brilliant hues of fragrant flowers and where picturesque butterflies flutter ; where branches of many trees stretch down their great arms towards you ; down amongst the sounds of the chockchafers, the whirl of the waterfalls and the smell of the tea gardens.

At about 1-30 I arrived a Lopchu, 14 miles from Darjeeling. Here a little rest-bungalow stands a little way above the *busti.* At this bungalow I stopped for lunch. My coolies went on to Pashoke.

The bungalow was occupied at the time by a young Australian missionary from Faridpore, who was enjoying a little holiday from his rounds of technical instruction to Indian converts, and had a wealth of information to give me of the various settlements in India which are provided for from funds from Australia. At Pabna is a women's centre where lace-

making is indulged in ; at Faridpore carpentry for boys ; at Mymensingh higher education ; and missionary work is also being carried out at Arnakoli among the Namasudras, as well as in the Garo hills amongst the aborigines.

Some of the dak bungalows on the route are stocked with a sprinkling of literature. This one had in a retiring cupboard somewhere at the back of the building many volumes of a religious nature that were presented by a Church of God Society. Two or three books that once belonged to the Amusement Club, Darjeeling, were re-stamped "Darjeeling Improvement Fund"—presented to isolated dak bungalows for the delectation of travellers.

From Lopchu the gradient grew steeper. At a corner the road folds back upon itself and traces its way to the Pashoke rest-bungalow through a tea estate which was alive with coolie women. Streams of them flowed past, each with her basket filled with the green pickings, amidst which nestled their little bratlings. Each woman knitted as she went by, glancing up coyly at us, or humming the air of an ancient Nepalese ditty. For the coolies of the tea estates in the Darjeeling district are all emigrants from Nepal and appear to be quite happy in their brown thatched settlements that cluster in groups around the factory building.

CHAPTER III.

THE ROAD TO RUNGPO.

A long avenue of bare, lanky trees preceded the dak bungalow of Pashoke. The bungalow itself was in a pleasant spot amongst butterflies and flowers, wooded vegetation, and within sound of the ripple of the Rungeet and the laughter of the tea garden coolies. There was no one else there but the chowkidar, and in a very little while an excellent dinner of the Sirdar's preparation eked out with tinned provisions was served up on a table beside an oil lamp which rattled at every footstep in the building. The Sirdar served up with the dessert one of his best Hindustanee stories, the telling of which I shall reserve for a later chapter. I was in bed by 7-30 and was lulled to sleep by the pouring rain which also had the faculty of disturbing me sometimes during the night, when I was able to see my watch glowing the small hours of the morning through the darkness.

The dawn was gorgeous. The rain had ceased and ere the sun had yet come up in its magnificence I was able to see the greenish blue of the hill sides; the purplish green of the rocks; the sandy brown of the river—all dimly suggested in the twilight. There was a chill in the air and a gentle breeze that played with one's hair and scanty garments until the sun came up and bathed everything in a different hue.

There is an art in the pronunciation of the word Pashoke, as there is in the pronunciation of most words in these regions. The first sound you make is like a splash; the next a noise

like a monkey—*onk.* Though you need not scratch yourself under the arm unless you want to.

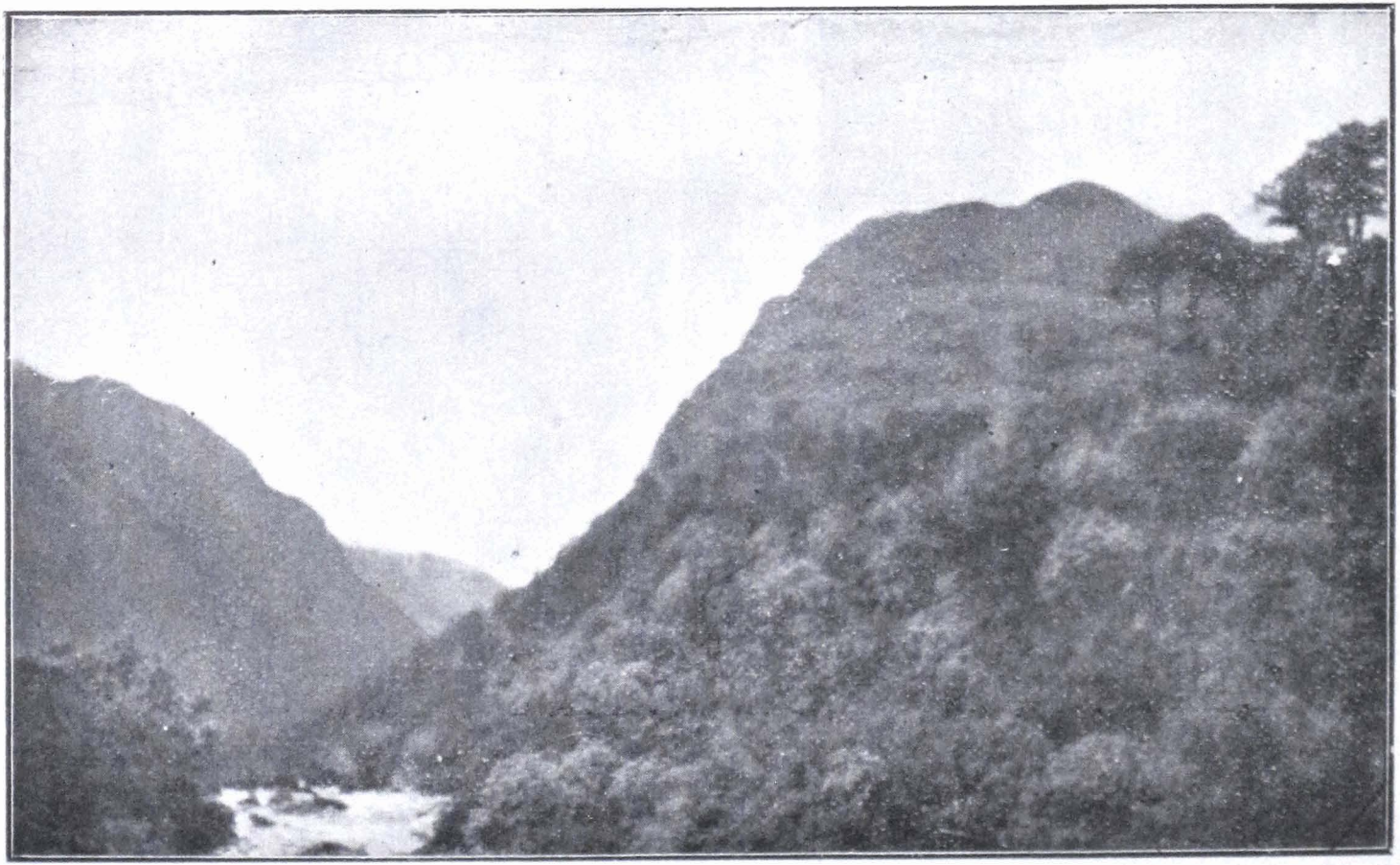
A preliminary to departure was the production of the visitor's book by the chowkidar, a goodly soul whose unkempt condition suggested one of the many beggars we see at the corner of Dharumtollah,—with the difference though of a Mongolian cast of countenance. The entries were interesting. General Chung, the last Chinese Amban in Tibet, spent a night in this very bungalow in May 1913. That was after he had left Tibet for ever and was proceeding —he little knew then—to (so it is whispered) his execution in China. He was, it is stated, blamed for having evacuated Lhasa—when his small garrison did all it could against the hordes of the Tibetans. Along side General Chung's name were the words "and party, To see Deputy Commissioner." What was the result of that interview is a closed chapter. Perhaps it was to ask permission for himself and his men to pass through India.

Almost a year later Lady Carnduff resided in the same building; a month later General May, and later still in 1914 is the name of Miss Carmichael. My own added to this worthy collection I proceeded on my journey.

The valley paths were damp and strewn with leaves after the all-night rainfall. In the distance gunpowder boomed with the blasting of rocks and the making of new roads. A fragrance of weeds and simul bark pervaded the air and around was thick jungle as far as the eye could see.

A little way out is a shelter with a three-sided wooden bench, commanding the confluence of the Rungeet and the Tista, and to the right the road descends in irregular puddly stages to the Tista bazaar and the bridge beyond it.

At this bazaar we passed our coolies, who had, after their custom, set out considerably earlier than I did. Outside a tea stall I saw my coolie girl feeding a little one, whom I did not



A Sikhimese Valley.

remember seeing on the day previous. It was, I fancied, either borrowed for the occasion or had been concealed somewhere amongst my stores during our marches. Opposite this spot on a bamboo construction were perched three roosters intently engaged in discussing the immodesty of the exhibition.

Beyond the bridge the road stretches away to Melli,—the calling place for breakfast. From this road one can see to the left the first glimpse of Sikhim—a solid mass of greenery. Behind, a spot of white amongst the jungle, is the little bungalow of Pashoke—my house for one night in the vicinity.

The Sirdar spoke as we rode onward to Melli, of the bears and monkeys and the visits these creatures pay to the lonely chowkidar of Pashoke. No wonder the chowkidar appeared to be only half human. No wonder the Sirdar and the coolie women looked so scared that morning.

The day was hot and sweltering as the sun worked patterns upon the trees and people. Butterflies with eyes of a thousand colours upon their wings danced around in front of the horses; and cockchafers made the entire Himalayas resound with their quaint metallic noises, sounds that were only stilled in the increasing *swoosh* of each approaching waterfall.

At Melli the horses were unsaddled and turned adrift amongst the vegetation to take their little rest while they could get it. My animal rolled himself upon the grass performing a queer feat of backscratching in which he so much delighted that he was loth to leave off for the continuance of my holiday. We had to await the pleasure of His Royal Highness Horse a full half hour, but he was apparently aggrieved at not having been consulted with regard to my excursion. He went round and round the bungalow and it took the combined efforts of the syce, the Sirdar,

the chowkidar of the bungalow and one or two villagers to curb his obstinacy. And then we were once more gaily started.

We passed a number of points where the road had been washed away by the previous night's rainfall and in one place the land was slowly slipping above the roadway when I was advised to get across quickly lest I should be held up while repairs were in progress. It is surprising though how speedily repair work is undertaken. For there is the rubbish of the hillside to clear away primarily, and then the blasting of rocks in order to widen the path to its previous measure. The road-menders are almost all Lepchas, the aboriginal inhabitants of the country. But strings of Gurkha carters passed me on their way towards Tista, transporting to that station square packages of tea, perforated chests containing Sikhimese flowers, and barrels of milk for the villagers—all responding to the magnetic call of the railway.

At mile 7 we passed a thickly wooded hillside labelled "Bhalukhop." It is, my guide tells me, the haunt of the Bhalus—the brown bears of the Himalayas. And sometimes, he tells me, these animals descend upon the villagers, whose settlements can be seen far, far above the roadway like little specks amongst the vegetation, reached only by tiny, irregular mountain paths ; and upon them the bears wreak an unnecessary vengeance of life and property. Sometimes the white Sahib comes along with a long rifle and then he does for the villagers what their strange gods have so long failed to do. These villagers all worship the white man, and bow in salutation as he rides past.

Not far from the Bhalukhop is a little doorway at the foot of a high rock. Swing this square foot of battered wood forward and a passage of impenetrable darkness will reveal itself. The passage is barely wide enough to admit a man ; but there within, many hundred yards within, is a sanctuary

of the gods—for it is here, the lamas will tell you, that the great God Sakyamuni, the one and only Lord Buddha, paused for rest on his way to Tibet. From this sanctuary one path leads downwards to the riverside—the river Tista, which is always with you along this road until your next halt for the night ; while another path leads miles into the interior emerging somewhere, nobody knows where. It is all concealed in impenetrable darkness ; and with the aid of what lights the worshippers reach the sanctuary and what gods actually inhabit such depths of darkness none is able to tell correctly.

CHAPTER IV.

ENTERING SIKHIM.

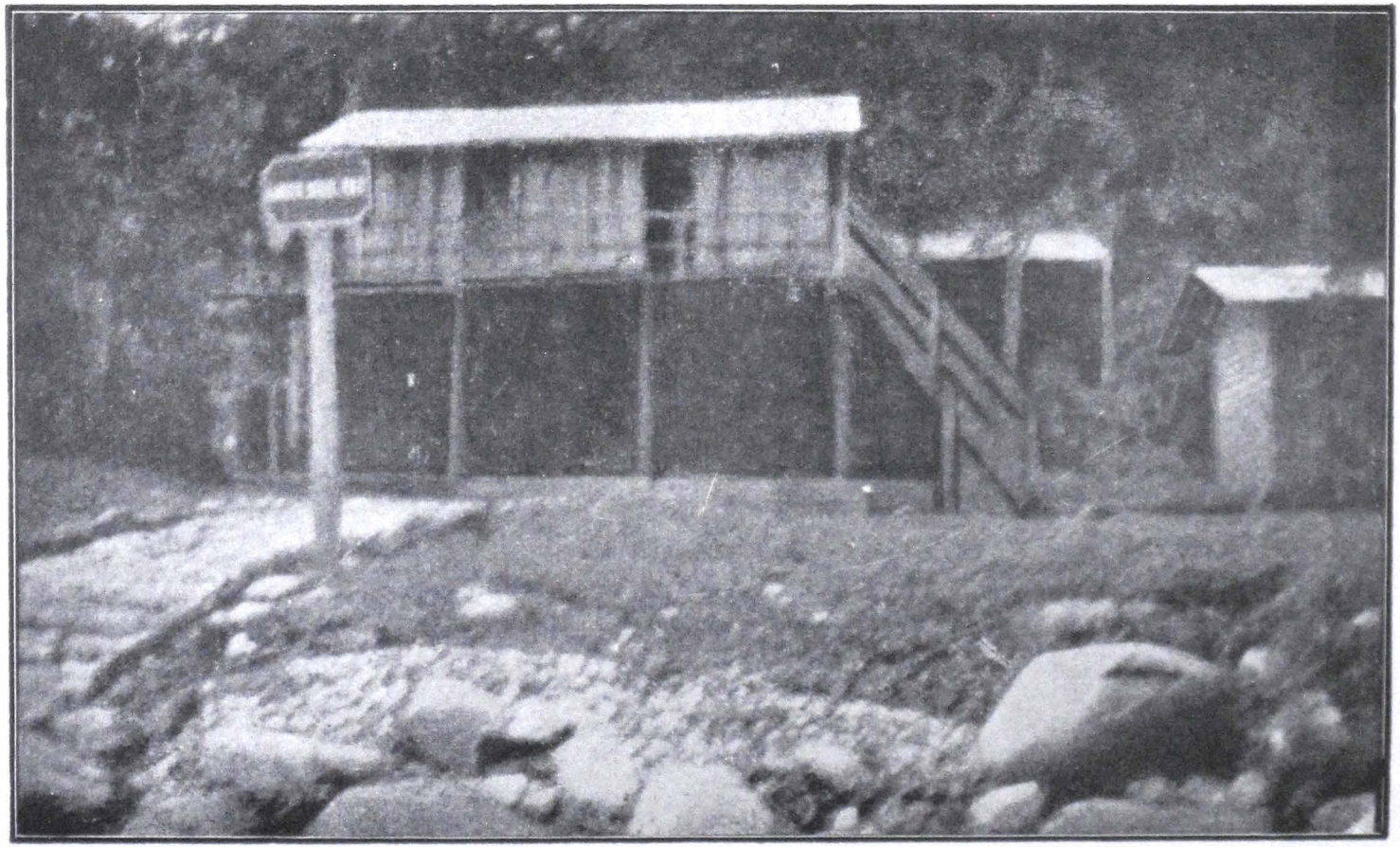
Not far distant was the bungalow of Tarkola, six miles from Rungpo.

The air grew perceptibly hotter. The sunshine was brilliant, almost blinding, and but for the Gurkhas, the alpine vegetation and the sounds of the waterfall and the rushing stream one might easily have been led into believing that he was back again in the plains. Now and again the greenery was broken by a patch of brown rock scarred with the gash of the labourer's pike.

The air was full of sound and smell ; never for a moment was it free of either. The roar of the river was intensified at intervals by the *swoosh* of the waterfalls as they leapt down the hill-side. The crickets chirped from tree to tree and every now and again there was one in their midst who had learnt in some manner to produce its melody upon two distinctive notes. Such creatures were never slow in displaying their powers ; but whether they gave their display for the admiration or envy of the rest of their kind, they certainly had the intense admiration of one member at least of humanity.

My coolie girl was not so cheerful that day. Perhaps it was due to the weather. She and the others passed us while we paused at Melli for breakfast, and now our horses passed them once more nearer Tarkola.

The atmosphere was stifling. Everything—the crickets and the waterfalls excepted—seemed to be charged with a



The frontier post outside Rungpo.

spell of drowsiness, and we crawled dreamily onward. Even our Tibetan ponies were half asleep as they faltered, muttering—as they appeared to do—in a sort of dreamy incantation the "*Om mani padme hom*" of their country people.

A tired feeling came over me. The rhythmic jog of horseback was inspiring of a sensation of torpor and I nodded until awakened by realising the peril of some spot overtopping a precipice. Then I turned my attention again to guiding my pony.

The vale was a vale of butterflies: butterflies of green and blue ; white with deep black swallow tails ; yellows without any border ; browns with swallow tails of white, and chequered butterflies of blue and black ; quaint mauves, and others like clippings from printed muslin ; butterflies with wings like leaves ; and some of entire saffron like any Brahmin on a pilgrimage.

The road dragged ceaselessly under foot. The mile posts went by slower and slower and all one's efforts to make the horse trot failed until in time one didn't even have the energy left to endeavour. There is a secret in persuading Tibetan ponies into quickening their paces and that is in making a sound like sneezing. I did not learn this till afterwards when a symptom of cold produced from me a double effort and set my horse off in an unexpected gallop. Careful observation of sounds since then has taught me that the syces and the Sirdar also produce sounds akin to "*Tschoo-Tschoo*" if they want the animals to proceed quickly. This is apparently a Tibetan word, the etymology of which I have not endeavoured to study.

Tarkola appeared to be the hottest place in the world. The dak bungalow—a Forest Department construction——showed its teeth of unwelcome in the bare planks that passed for walls in the interior. The Chowkidar was absent, everything was thick with dust and mouldy, and pending

the warden's arrival I had the satisfaction of sitting in the verandah and watching the ponies at lunch while my own, of not so easily procurable a variety, depended on the fire and the kitchen for preparation. From the verandah I could see the forests of Sikhim stretching high up into a mist-capped summit.

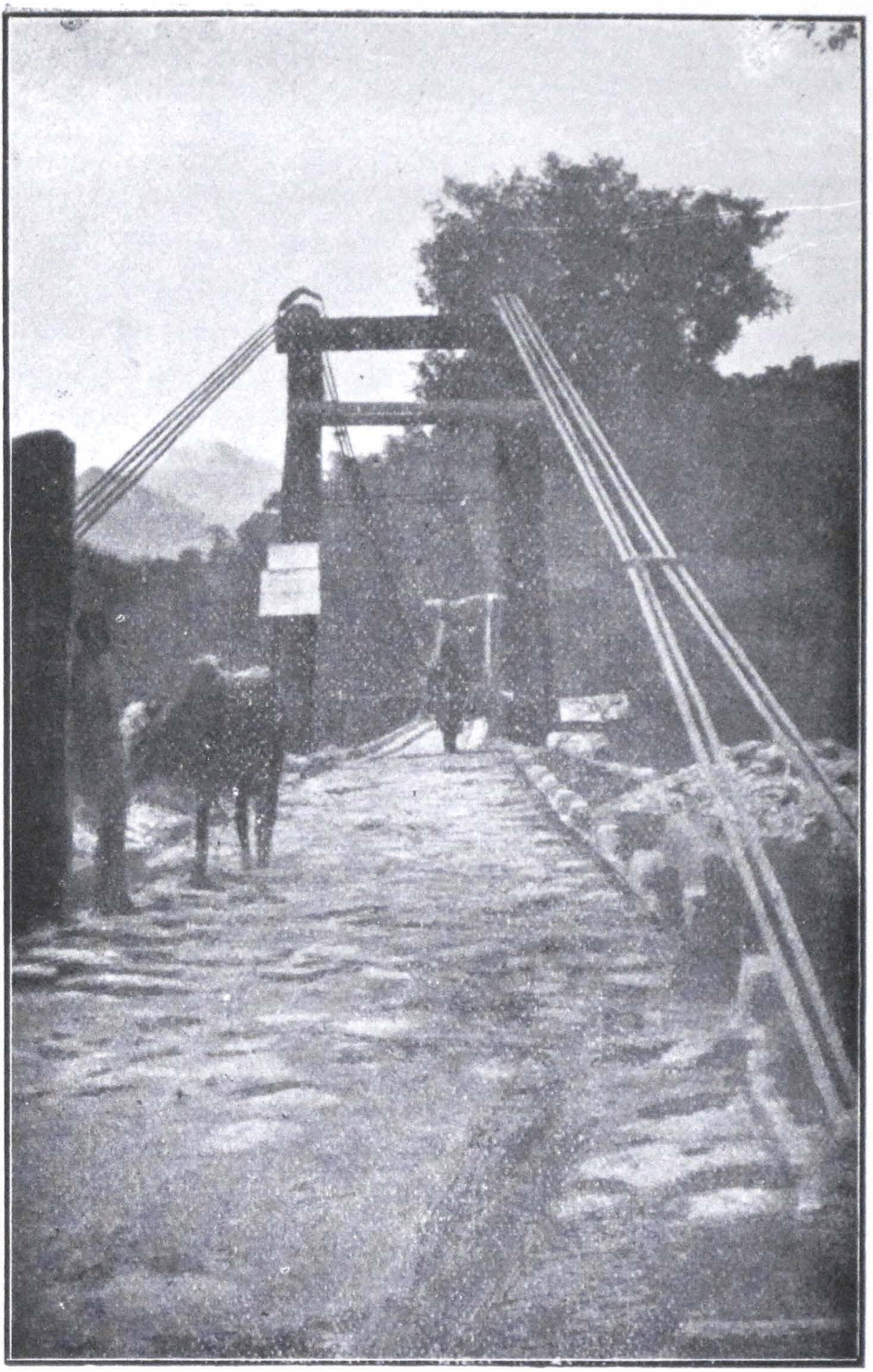
The path onward to Rungpo is through forest glades with trees so thick on either side that the river though audible is rarely visible. Now and again the road emerges by the riverside and bursts upon the prettiest of views—brown rocks towering above the water's edge or the sandy bank sloping down to the green and white ripples.

On the roads the menders work and carts go by, while from the hillsides issue round bellows of smoke—the sign-posts of the charcoal burner's industry. Reed mats on lank bamboo supports act as shelters for the road workers, and the brown of a native settlement peers from behind the bushes.

There is not much else to see until one comes to Rungpo. A bridge across the Tista leads into Sikhim, and near its entrance stands a frontier post where a guard or two come forward and demand your passes. A moment or so later you are in Sikhim.

Rungpo is a straggling town by the water's edge, possessing a Post Office and a live policeman. The bazaar clings around the buildings of the settlement which are ranged on either side of the roadway, and beyond these, up a picturesque path shaded by trees and flower hedges where yellow butterflies frolic in their hundreds, stands the dak bungalow—my home for my first night in Sikhim.

The bungalow is a commodious construction and wholly English in arrangement. It is, if I am not mistaken, still under British care, since the Resident at Gantok's notices adorn its walls on all sides. There are no mattresses, but the



The entrance to Sikhim : Bridge across the Tista leading to Rungpo.

cotton strappings of the *nawar* bedsteads, eked out with a blanket or two, which the heat of a height of a mere 1,200 feet permits you to discard, serve admirably without them.

Rain fell soon after my arrival at Rungpo, which added to the stupendous noises of the valley. At tea time these were augmented by the *slip-slap* of the syces grooming the horses and the clamour of the coolies in the kitchen where they were regaling each other with the gossip of the villagers, retailed to them separately during the day time.

I remember during my ride that day to have discovered on passing the coolies that the coolie girl carries her baby behind her in her basket amongst my stores. This I first espied by noticing an exceptionally large onion in the midst of the vegetables, but on fixing my gaze upon it, found scanty locks here and there and soon saw that the object really was the uppermost extreme of a slumbering brown baby.

All through tea the river kept puffing like an enormous steam engine, while in the night time my repose was interrupted by a nasty drain pipe that neglect and rain had caused to drip unceasingly outside my window.

CHAPTER V.

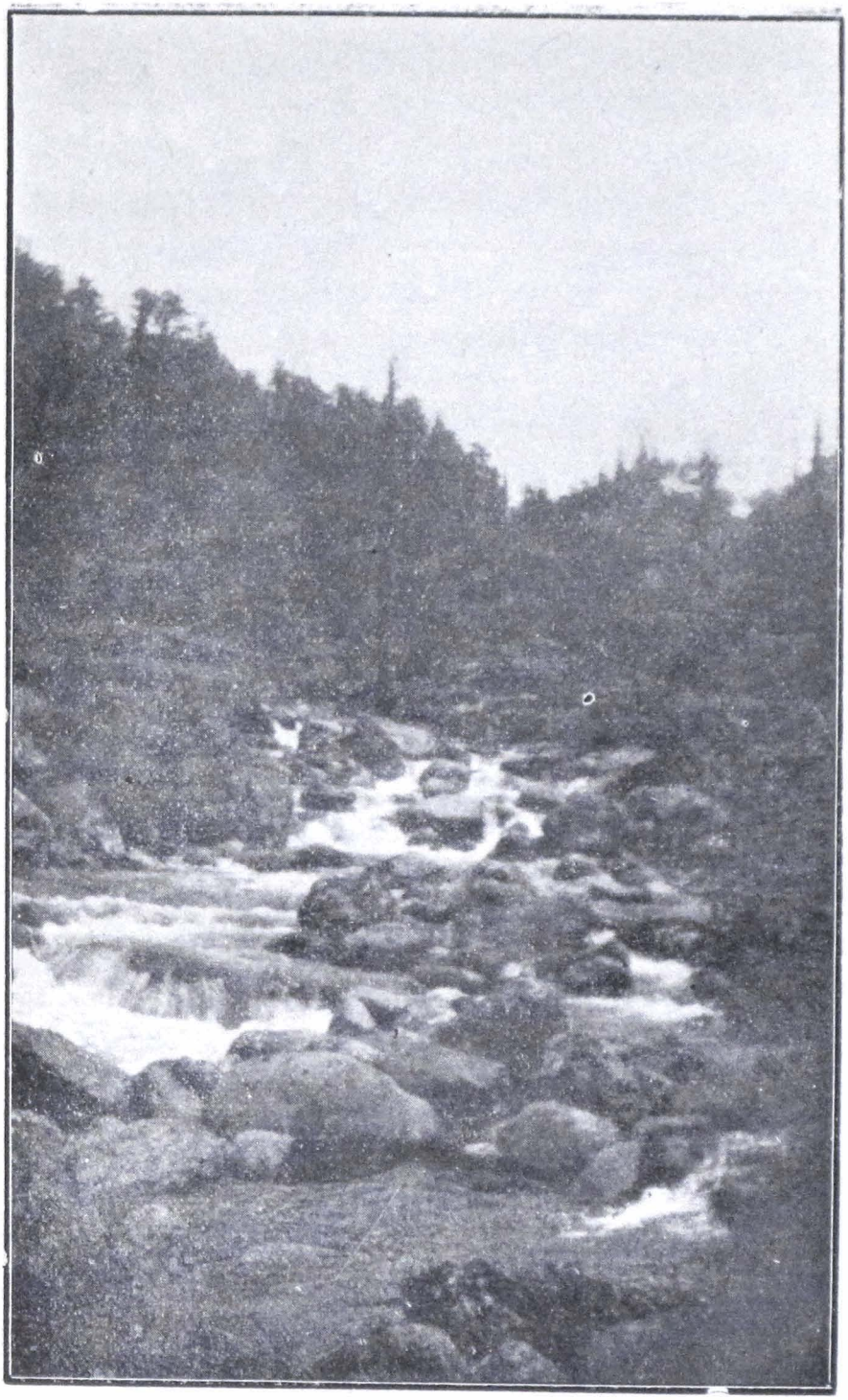
THE CAPITAL OF SIKHIM.

The morning was damp and sunless. Rungpo lay before me a small plain ending abruptly at the river, beyond which rose the high hills of British India. The road to Gantok lifts gently off this plain and rises by stages of other plains on to cloud land. Everything bore the brand of cultivation and the fields unfolded grasses of a variety of hues of maturity : Indian corn and maize and the ever favourite *murwa*—the beverage of the Sikhimese Bhutias.

The methods employed for irrigation were quaintly original. Every waterfall was pressed into service and its powers conveyed by bamboo piping on to the green fields. Bamboos lined the roads on the both sides. Split bamboos with the water trickling through the hollowed surface, ran overhead and poured their contents into others which lowered them gently down to the cultivator.

Settlements of brown thatches appeared in all directions—brown in its varying shades from hut to inhabitants ; brown even to their very rags. And the only notes of colour were in the fat hens, the cows and the stray dogs of the villagers.

As we went by the inhabitants all turned out in their numbers to watch our stately procession. Even the hens and dogs ran forward, while the cows looked up from the staid monotony of their occupations. One old hen with an unbounded zeal for processions scuttled forward most hurriedly in her odd manner, and then, slipping on the moist hillside, performed a glide on one leg such as I thought only Charlie



A wayside stream.

Chaplin was capable of doing. She eventually steadied herself by raising the other leg in the air, and, taking a gentle turn to one side, again like the film actor, she stopped. She did not, though, put a wing to her beak and giggle. There was no applause from anybody. Not even the fowls and dogs were interested in her performance.

The road I was climbing was, I was told, constructed at the time of the Younghusband Mission. One party of soldiers went to Tibet through Gantok and the Nathu La; while another proceeded by the straightforward road, *via* Kalimpong, on to the Jelep La. On one side a little way after we started we saw enormous rocks chock-full of copper—worked, I was told, by some German miner, until claimed for internment. Signs of work were there plentifully manifest; a viaduct across an immense gap and huge cave chambers now sadly neglected. Stones on the wayside were pointed out to me as being riddled with copper. But it was their working that was wanted. Sikhim is really quite rich in this mineral.

In a little while I met my first bird in Sikhim, a pretty though little specimen. As a result of the previous night's rain many of the waterfalls were very swollen, and difficult to cross where the authorities had not by a bridge safeguarded the travellers from the dangers of the monsoons. The crossing of one such spot where a waterfall had developed into a roaring torrent presented quite a problem which was solved, so far as the coolies were concerned, by the man carrying the women across —on separate trips—on his shoulders. For myself I trusted to the tender mercies of the pony who was fairly sure of footing and got across by stepping on more or less loose stones despite every effort the rushing stream made to dislodge his foot-hold.

Sheep passed me in great flocks driven by Tibetan shepherds, all whistling their shrill notes of warning. The sheep were of the mountain variety and in their rear marched old rams with quaintly twisted horns.

At Singtam, a little beyond the dak bungalow of Sankokhola—where we did not call—the road that leads off the Chowrasta at Darjeeling joins this highway in a common journey to Gantok. The road has come from Temi, through Namchi and the Manjitar bridge across the Rangit. At Singtam you leave the Tista and follow to its higher course a smaller but far prettier stream.

About mile 16—that is to say 8 from Rungpo—the road deploys upon a beauteous view where bushes of flowers run down to the river's edge and stoop over with their lips to the water. Butterflies and birds play friendly around, and higher up are the hills, not quite so wooded, but full of signs of life and cultivation. Pumalo groves are around you and the air is filled with the fragrance of the fruit while the roadway is strewn with relics of wayfarers' repasts off this delicacy. Just here and there a big crag frowns: everything else is so happy, so friendly.

We next came to the bungalow of Shamdong. At the entrance the stump of a tree stands up erect like a stag—an unconscious touch of beauty. For the bungalow itself is very dirty, as is also the Chowkidar, against whom were entered complaints in the bungalow book. These visitors' books are most interesting narratives. They bear, many of them, the records of personal history, and nearly all tell their tale of broken crockery. This book, however, had as its first entry the following :—

> Suggested that the Chowkidar be changed. He is apparently suffering from *skin disease.* Keeps dogs which stole some our food.

And then below this :—

> I find it is the Chowkidar's brother who did all the work and it is he of whom I am complaining.

The official entry against this was :

> Noted. The "brother" who acted for the Chowkidar has been warned not to put in an appearance in future.

But the dog is still there—a black and tan specimen that very nearly succeeded in annexing my foodstuffs.

A mile out of Shamdong is a little tablet by the roadway, placed to the memory of some ill-starred roadmaker who ended his life whilst employed in his duties, more than 15 years previously. This little slab of stone brought home to me more than the road itself had done before, the peril of road construction in the mountains. It had taken its toll, so far as I knew, of at least one person.

The panorama was still of cultivated fields with occasional glimpses of the river. Here and there a cultivator is visible on his own fields and cows wander amidst the hedges unattended. The new stream that joined us at Singtam, from where the Tista went on northwards, was the Royo Chu—a stream of unending picturesqueness. The road itself was sadly deserted. Relics of carts and wheels littered the sides, and flocks of sheep went by like white fleecy patches. And as I had taught myself to count imaginary sleep as an antidote to insomnia, the effect of watching these passes was every bit drowsy. Each animal had a tiny speck of mud at the end of each little strand of fleece—due no doubt to rolling on some damp spot overnight. They had all come, my guide's enquiries elicited, from Tibet through the northern passes of Sikhim, and had passed through Thangu, the place which the Governor of Bengal has but recently visited.

A little bridge across the river leads onward to the hill of Gantok. The capital of Sikhim reclines on the summit and the climb upward, especially by the short cut, is most wearying. The bends of the narrow roadway are the most atrocious conceivable. The sensation on horseback by this route is as bad as it would be if one tried to ride up the steps of the monument in Calcutta. Only the latter would not be quite as perilous. The horse performed a variety of circus turns ; and as the road narrowed the higher it mount-

ed, I began to fear for my safety. My horse had an objectionable manner of pausing at the sections that were most nerve-racking, as if it were his confirmed intention to cause me to reflect fully upon the dangers that lay before us. Then once more he would stumble forward. One false step and I should be reduced to infinity, after the manner of certain things in school arithmetic. Then a particularly large bit of rock would project just where the road was narrowest and steepest and where the precipice on the other side was deeper than ever. My horse had an antipathy to large rocks and showed it by edging towards the . . . . . ! Then he would crane his neck downward and behold the beauties of the country lying far far below him, while I could do nothing but shudder silently.

The journey had indeed been arduous for the animal. Moreover he may have had family troubles of his own to disturb him. The opportunities for suicide were imcomparable, and I could only hope he would do nothing with me in his company.

CHAPTER VI.

ROUND ABOUT GANTOK.

The short cut to Gantok was more tiresome than the main road could possibly have been. I saved four miles by this route, but I was a considerable time saving them. In point of fact I actually timed myself, and, working on the basis that there were 8 miles to do by the cart road, I should have been in Gantok, had I gone by that route, half an hour earlier than I was by the short cut. The explanation is that the horses got out of breath in negotiating the steep inclines, and much time was wasted in pausing for their recovery.

There are in all three actual short cuts, one above the other; the route the rest of the time coincides with the main track. Of these three cuts the first is by far the longest, while the third is almost inconsiderable. When the first has been completed the straggling town of Gantok breaks in upon the vision and is kept in sight practically the whole of the way upward.

The entire run to Gantok was 24 miles by the cart road. The coolies were in consequence left far behind us, and even our syces dropped back until approaching the short cuts when they seemed to have recovered both their breath and their cheerfulness. When the *busti* below Gantok was visible I could hear them whistle the calls of the Darjeeling police—for the Bhutia boys are adepts at picking up all airs. Numerous rest benches marked the road at intervals and upon these at stages the syces rested, contributing no doubt thereby to the religious merit of the souls of the departed founders.

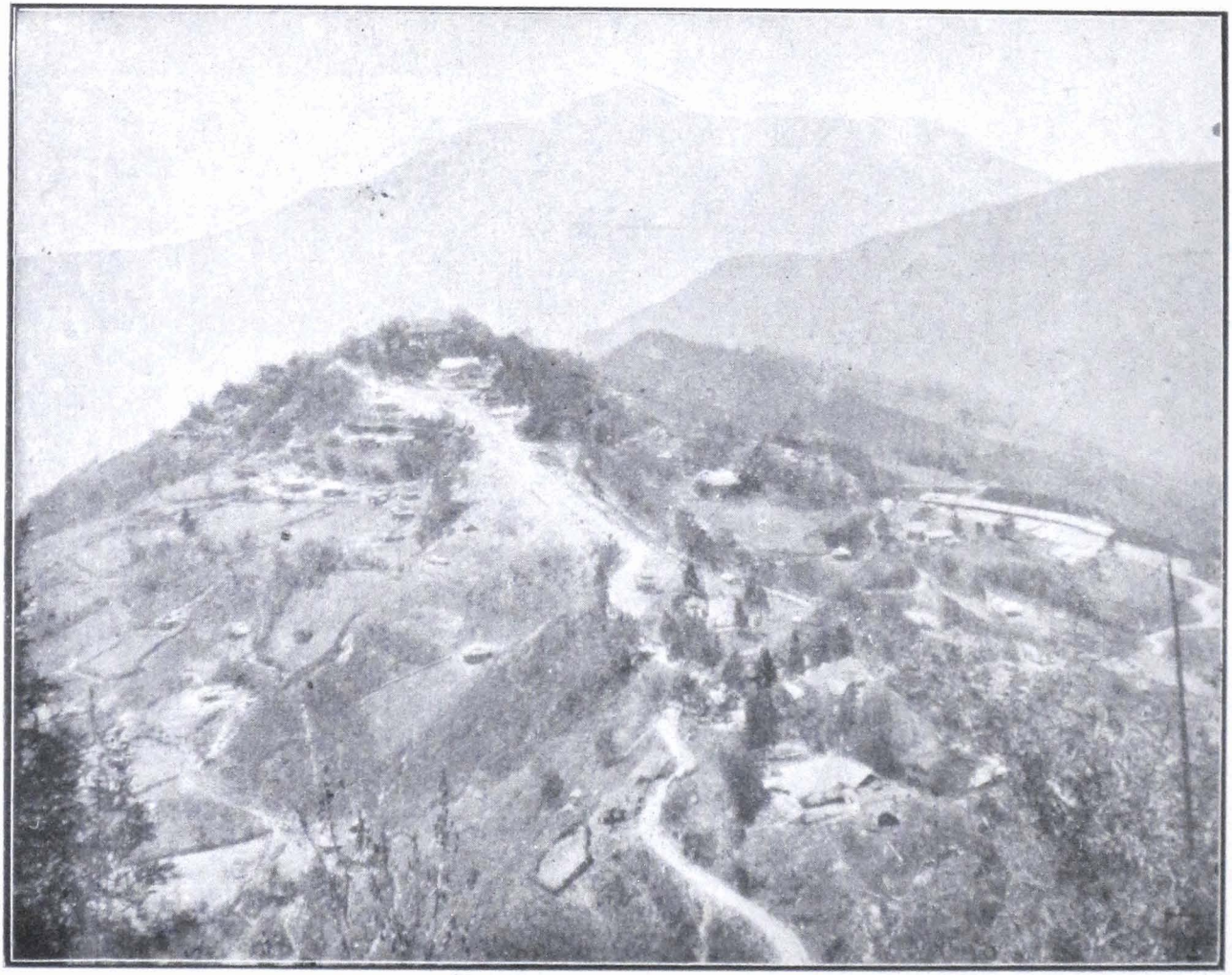
In the *busti* referred to were numerous tea shops all briskly

frequented. A woman had charge of each of them and exchanged pleasantries with her customers in a manner not known in India. Some wayfarers more pressed for time quaffed the beverage on the roadway, and amongst these I must number my Sirdar who had qualms about keeping me waiting. So taking the enamel glass from the fingers of the maid who served him, he raised it to his lips and almost as soon gargled out its entire contents upon the roadway. This was due, he told me, to its putrid composition. No milk, no sugar and yet three pice! But he dared not say it loudly. We were strangers in a strange place and two Sikhimese youths stood by with sporting rifles, whistling to birds which were never coming. So he paid the three pice without comment and jogged onward to Gantok. The woman, for her part, seemed injured by the insult; but she too held her peace.

The road to Gantok was thronged with traffic. Traders went by us by the score and more flocks and shepherds, till at length we came to a school opposite which was the bazaar wearing a lively appearance as it was market day in Gantok. Most towns in this area hold their market days on Sundays —an incident which I have been unable to account for.

Gantok is a city of toy houses with the cleanest little bazaar in the world. This is probably due to the fact that the old bazaar, which occupied the topmost ridge in Gantok, was destroyed by lightning and a new one has but recently been constructed a little lower on the hill-side. The topmost ridge when I saw it was a dreary waste with promise though of being transformed into a Chowrasta. Tree guards of cane lined it on each side between the Maharajah's two palaces and the dak bungalow—which occupied opposite ends upon this eminence.

In front of the dak bungalow is the Edward Memorial erected by His late Majesty's "loving subjects in Sikhim." This is merely a rest house and women come here as a rule



Gantok, showing the topmost ridge with the Maharajah's two palaces in the distance.

(Photo by H. H. Maharaja of Sikhim.)

to knit and to gossip. The Sikhimese woman's love of knitting is unbounded. Possibly it is the weather that makes woollen wear imperative; and with Tibet only across the frontier, wool ought not to be difficult to procure.

The capital of Sikhim, one regrets to say it, is in total darkness at night time. Not a single, solitary light guides the way farer in the darkness. There is no electricity in the station, and if any one is misguided enough to venture out after sundown—no Sikhimese subject is—he must carry his own lantern.

I went on to the bungalow. It was already almost dark when I arrived there and found to my surprise the building well stocked with white people. There were two ladies who had just completed the tour that I was about to undertake—to the passes of Tibet; and an American student who had been in Gantok for a number of months engaged in the study of Tibetan.

My coolies were an unconscionable time in arriving—or perhaps it was unconscionable of me to expect their earlier arrival, seeing that the distance traversed since morning was considerable. At any rate the discomfort of not having my things to change into, or even the stores to tackle, was a trifle disconcerting. I got tidy somehow eventually and called on the Maharajah.

I had the good fortune to have been in school with His Highness. Our meeting was in consequence one of the utmost cordiality. His Highness pressed me to stay to dinner, and provided an excellent repast.

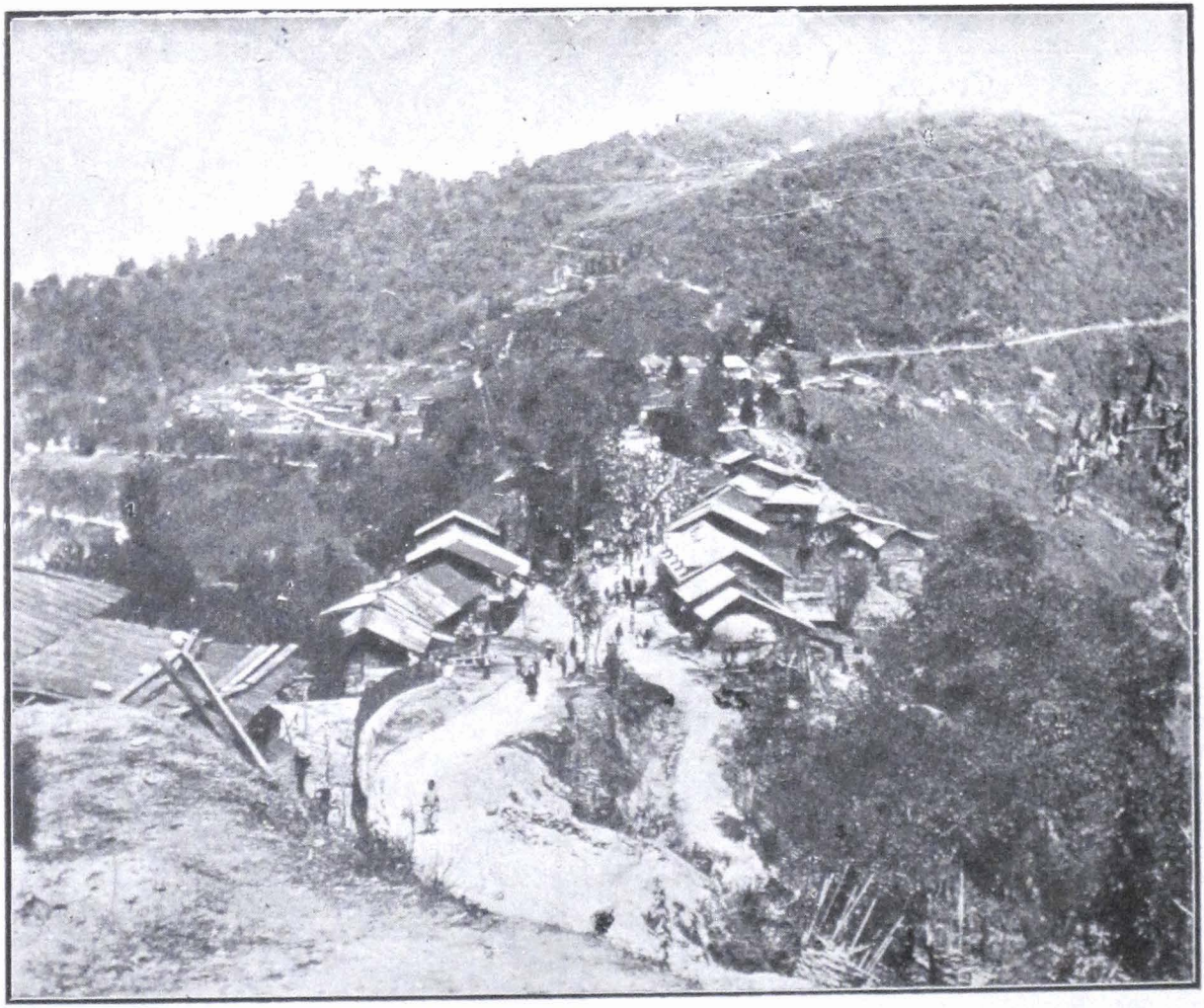
The Maharajah is a young man of six and twenty. He succeeded his brother as a ruler in 1914 and is wholly responsible for the help Sikhim has rendered us during war time.

The return from the Palace to the dak bungalow at the late hour of 11-30 was a feat to accomplish in that blinding darkness, despite the aid of the palace servants and lanterns

which the Maharajah so kindly provided. Much work in the advancement of the capital of Sikhim has, I understand, been held up owing to the war, and His Highness told me one of the first things he has in mind is the linking up of Gantok with India by railway. The line would in this case be a continuation from Tista, the termination at present of the Kalimpong railway.

At present the Maharajah covers this distance by motor in a Baby Standard. The road down from Gantok is good enough almost all the way to Tista, and amply broad for a Baby Standard. The Maharajah also does a considerable amount of motoring within his capital.

I returned to the dak bungalow, as I have said, at 11-30. None of the servants were sufficiently anxious about me to wait up for my return, but my pony, solicitous of my safety, entered my bed room during the small hours of the morning to see if I was by any chance a-bed, and disturbed me not a little by this act of consideration.



The Ridge, Gantok, as it was two or three years ago, showing the old bazaar which has since been struck down by lightning.

(Photo by H. H. Maharaja of Sikhim.)

CHAPTER VII.

THE GANTOK BAZAAR.

The next morning I was up early to look at the capital. The morning was not very bright and before long it drizzled, but later the sun appeared and the day was in every way promising. The Maharajah has two palaces in Gantok, a big one with a brown roof, and a little white one quite near it. It was the latter in which he received me. The place was very prim and tidy and chock full of Tibetan curios. One section to the right of the porch was most artistically decorated on the outside. This, I learnt later, was the chapel.

In front of this palace is the printing press. As far as I know no papers are published in Gantok, but the press is utilized merely for Government purposes. Opposite the palace are the palace stables, and beyond these the new Secretariat which is now under construction and is, I am told, to be larger than the Secretariat in Darjeeling.

Far behind both palaces is the Maharajah's carpet factory where girls and women work at the looms and turn out some of the prettiest of articles. The entire palace's flooring supplies are obtained from their workmanship, and every individual works most assiduously and cheerfully. In this factory I was shown a quaint Tibetan brass lock. It is a clamp-like affair rather intricate in its management and most crude in construction. This one lock suffices, however, to keep out the Gantok brigands—if there are any—from interfering with these preserves of the Maharajah.

But Gantok seems to be good and orderly. The hand of

"Pussyfoot" is not yet upon the place, but for all that there is only one "pub" in the whole city, and in this the *murwa* is quaffed with the quietude of a clerical tea party. Around it are numerous tea shops and one or two restaurants providing light refreshments. In one of the latter I found my party of coolies, who, with the syces, were having a merry time in the company of a number of the Gantok residents.

This was in the bazaar. Around are a number of shops kept by Afghans and Marwaris who sell the trashiest trinkets at the most fabulous of prices. I had run low with some of my provisions and entered a Kabuli establishment to buy some biscuits. The shop-keeper showed me a tin of Jacob's Cream Crackers for which he wanted Rs. 2-12. I offered him Rs. 2-8 ; but he merely wailed about the customs charges, the perils of the journey, and the increased cost of living. He next produced some candles at my bidding and declared they were twelve annas a packet.

"Twelve annas and two-twelve make four-eight," he said quite calmly, "but for your sake, Sahib, I shall reduce the four-annas you have requested and make it four-four."

If the Afghan thought he could "do" me it is an insult to Calcutta. Two twelve and twelve annas make three-eight and always will, but when I told him so he refused to allow the reduction. The four annas off was not worth while unless he could more than recoup it. The amount paid therefore was three-eight *and no reduction.*

I was all along during my walk through the bazaar an object of much curiosity. Shop-keepers left their stalls and came out to see me, forgetting to beckon in their astonishment, feeders at restaurants left their tables and men from the "pub" ran out with their glasses. I suppose I created as much sensation in Gantok as a Tibetan would in his national garb in Covent Garden. "Blime, Bill, there's a funny cuss for yer"—or rather the Sikhimese equivalent at my expense.

In this bazaar there was an old Chinaman—a tailor, with white hair and a pair of spectacles. This is the nearest to Tibet that I have seen a member of this people.

Some beggar women next approached and stuck their tongues out at me. Fortunately I had already heard it said that this with them is a form of salutation; else I might have been unduly offended. But there is a wealth of significance even in the sticking out of the tongue, according to the actions that accompany it: whether the eyes glare wide and a scowl is fashioned, or the head is bowed and wagged submissively from one side to the other. The latter is what the old women did and the impression it conveyed to me was that the women would readily suffer strangling on my behalf. I was glad after that to give them some coppers.

I had my Sikhimese guide with me all that morning. For one thing he knew the city; for another very few people in Gantok speak Hindustani. He next took me to a sort of a Gompa (temple) surrounded by prayer wheels. There was an entire row of them running round the building and we walked right round the place while the Sirdar set every one of them in motion. The idea is apparently that the swing of the wheels creates a breeze and the winds bear the prayer to Heaven. The streamers of cloth and paper that one sees marking the roofs of Tibetan settlements or waving from the summits of mountains are also believed to serve a similar purpose—the breezes wafting the prayers to the Almighty.

Inside, the Gompa was just like any other. An immense prayer wheel on each side of a mighty Buddha and before it, on a table, holy water and burning butter and incense. A little tubby lama advanced to meet us. He had a rosary between his fingers and was repeating to himself the "*Om Mani*" prayer.

Before I knew where I was, I saw the Sirdar on all fours before me, crawling forward rapidly towards the Buddha. The lama and he exchanged between them certain sounds like the firing of cannons, and then they were ready to direct their attentions towards me.

Lamas, I have found, are very obliging and no part of the temple is too sacred for the gaze of the foreigner. On the walls on each side of the Buddha pigeon hole shelves stretch away to the corners of the chamber. In these are placed the religious books of the lamas—the Kanjur, the Tanjur and the Boom ; the books, in which are written all the prophesies.

"And what prophesies are there ?" I asked curiously.

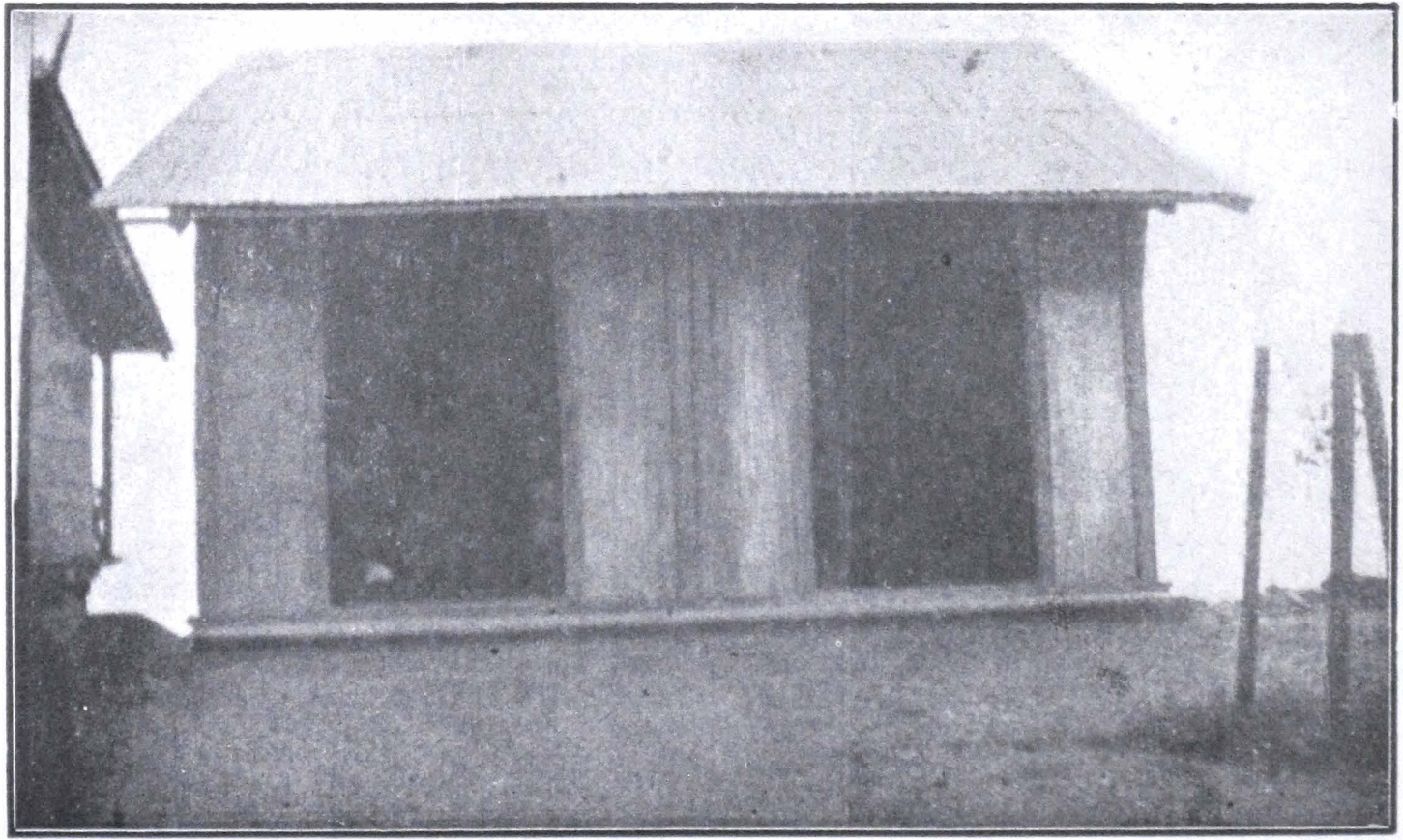
"The prophesy of the late war between England and Germany."

"Indeed. And what is a prophesy of the near future ?"

"War between Tibet and China."

My guide looked concerned, but maintained his silence. Pictures abound in the Gompa, all the handiwork of Tibetan artists. After an examination of these and the conferring of a consideration to the lama—they are ever meek enough to accept this—we took our departure.

That afternoon I called on Dr. Turner, the Civil Surgeon, and in the evening went to tea at the Palace. Mrs. Turner invited me to return to dinner, and the journey there from the Palace at night time in pouring rain and on horseback, was a more difficult task to accomplish than the previous night's walk in the darkness. However the horse was indispensable as I was already late for dinner. Dr. and Mrs. Turner I found to be very hospitable people but they were bowed under a sorrow inflicted upon their home by the late war. Bertie, the fond son of his proud parents, was killed in an aeroplane crash in Central Asia whilst on his way to bomb Astrakhan, a few months after the armistice. Thus had Armageddon pene-



The only "pub" at Gantok.

trated even into this distant solitary white home on the mountain top.

At about 7 the following morning, the weather had sufficiently cleared to give me a glimpse of the snow line, and I was favoured with a view of Kinchenjunga, other than we get in Darjeeling. The range of Kinchenjunga stretches between Gantok and Darjeeling so that the snow-capped summit is seen from Gantok from the opposite angle to the one we get from our holiday hill station of Darjeeling.

Gantok was full of flowers that twinkled in the sunlight, and wild pigs roamed the capital in place of dogs, of which there were very few in number.

CHAPTER VIII.

LIFE IN GANTOK.

Gantok was, as far as I could gather, once a scene of gaiety. Gaiety such as is got in our hill stations one cannot expect; for our hill stations are primarily holiday resorts with Government business merely as a secondary consideration.

But Gantok, the capital of Sikhim, was at one time, and down to but a year or two recently, inhabited by a band of Europeans—officials in capacity, but social because of their wives and families. The Resident entertained the Civil Surgeon, the State Engineer, and the Assistant to the Maharajah; and later in the week the State Engineer entertained all the others. Then the Maharajah gave a dance and garden party to which the whole station was invited, including of course the Councillors of His Highness, the Kazis, or zemindars, who have a form of petty jurisdiction, the judges of the Chief Court in Gantok, the officers of the regiment, and others. Or if it was the season of worship of the ever-lasting snows when homage is paid to Kinchenjunga, then the station was again entertained by the Maharajah.

The youthful European element, though, turned to Darjeeling for its ordinary gaiety; the older officials had no need to eke out the simplicity of the rounds that were supplied them in Sikhim. The younger rode into Darjeeling on Saturdays for dances at the club and rode back again on Sunday, covering the distance of 60 miles each way during the daylight of one day on each occasion.

Apart from this though Gantok has nothing to offer, its

particular elevation encourages cultivation and all the fields around stretch like terraces on the mountain side, studded with settlements as far as the eye can see. The sights of Gantok are seen in one day—and the pretty toy houses with windows rimmed in many colours cease to attract attention in a hardened inhabitant.

But beyond Gantok there are excursions enough for those who seek them. Pamionchi, the largest monastery in Sikhim, lies a little to the north-westward, with its three hundred monks and its "Archbishop of Canterbury" who crowns the Maharajah; Thangu and the northern passes to Tibet, more or less bridle paths most of the way, and with few dak bungalows to afford any shelter. And finally the passes to Tibet. Nearer Thangu, I have been told, there is plentiful shooting, but around Gantok there was at the season of my visit very little even in the way of small game; and the same may be said of the road to Tibet.

The lot of the European in Gantok is also alleviated by the visits of friends, who come but rarely. Tourists too are few, and a perusal of the books in the dak bungalows indicate that not more than an average of a dozen yearly, mostly men, ever travel in these parts. And in connection with these visits excitement is caused by suspicion. A wary eye is kept upon possible spies, and gossip—a real thing even in these parts—will tell you of women spying in the villages, and nearer the frontier; of German lamas who used to traverse the country prior to 1914 and, under the guise of Buddhists, penetrate into the forbidden land, the land of mystery. Scottish Buddhists have also sometimes made their appearance, so it is said, and again it was wondered whether they were really Scottish. There is besides the historic tale of the American that Gantok will always tell you, the American in disguise, who wandered into Tibet from Kashmir, and wandered and wandered till he came upon the British post at Gyantze. And then he was

sent back under escort to the frontier and finally back again to his own country. But him they do not accuse of spying; he is merely an American gone mad on touring.

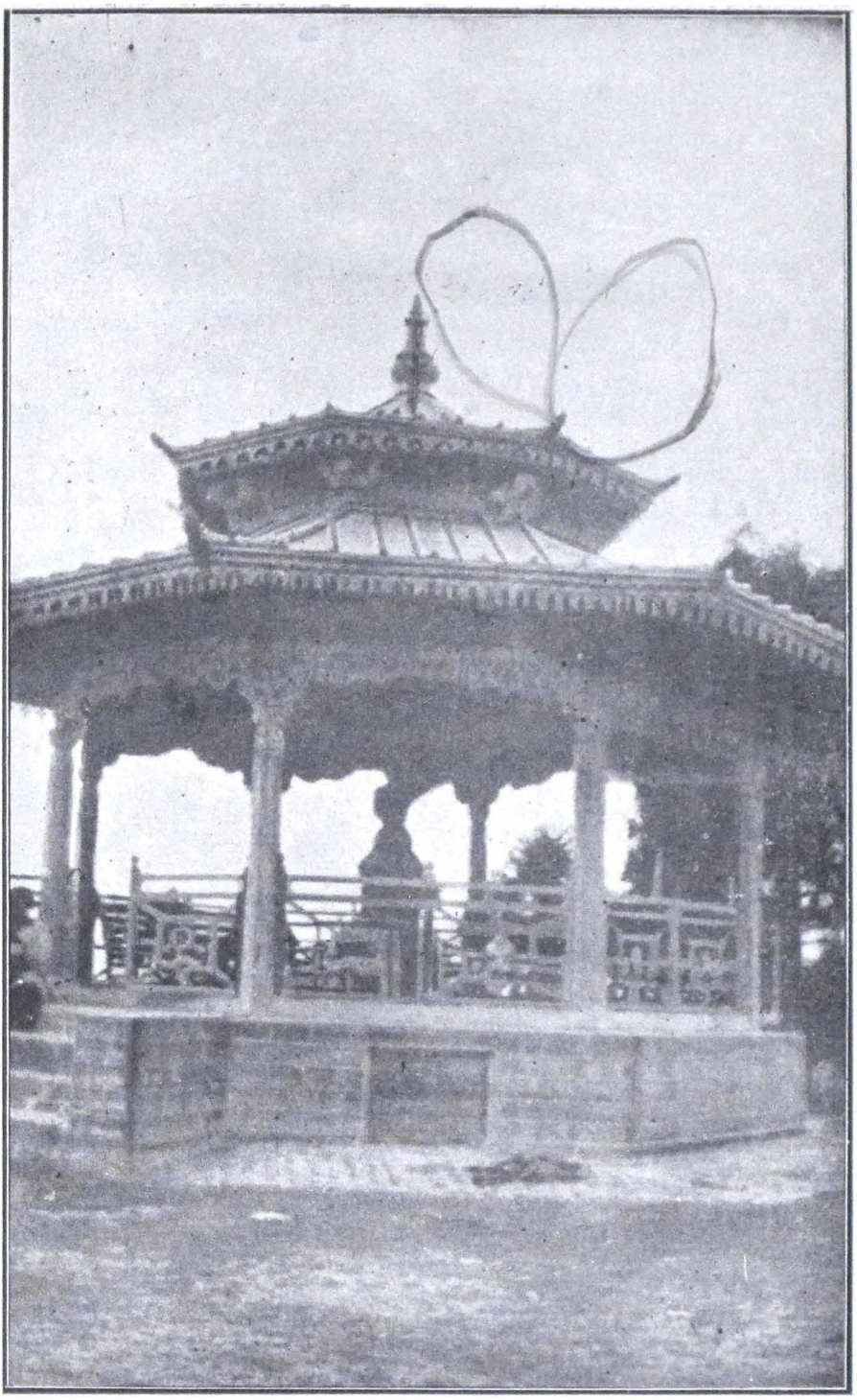
Few Sikhimese speak English. A little bit is heard at the Post Office, and it is spoken in a measure at the Dilkusha, the spacious building beside the dak bungalow, where the State office is housed. English is taught in the higher standards of most schools in Gantok; but instruction is communicated primarily in Hindi and Tibetan.

A Gompa is supposed to have sprung up in Sikhim at every spot upon which Buddha preached, so tradition amongst these peoples has it. Yet it is a surprising thing that Sikhim did not accept Buddhism until the advent of the present dynasty, the Numgyal dynasty which dates back to the days of Queen Elizabeth. The founder of the line came from Eastern Tibet and wrested the kingdom from the aboriginal Lepchas. The present Maharajah is the direct descendant of this line of rulers.

Since the introduction of Buddhism almost the entire State has been converted. But lately there has been a great influx of Nepalese immigrants with the result that Hinduism is vying with Buddhism in its marks upon the country side. Buddhism is, however, the State religion despite the fact that more than half the inhabitants of Sikhim are Gurkhas, who are members of the Hindu faith.

Most Gompas are also Buddhist monastic settlements. There is one such above Gantok, about a mile up the hill-side. Here a number of lamas dwell in different houses, in the interval of tending their flocks in distant Changu, nearer to the Tibetan passes. Above Gantok cultivation ceases. Below Gantok settlements of field workers stretch down almost to the valleys.

But our road was all upward, upward to Karponang—10 miles out of the capital.



The Edward Memorial, Gantok.

We left Gantok rather late in the morning. The road stretched away from the right of the bungalow, then behind it, and climbed in spirals to the monastery, from which an excellent view could be had of the capital. Alongside the temple is the State jail—a line of low, clean buildings.

Gantok can be seen for miles after starting, shrinking into specks on the hill-side with each step away from it. The Maharaja's palace is the largest thing on the horizon, until it too disappears beyond the vision.

The road so far is good and easy going. At mile 4 the scenery is particularly alluring. The mountain path traces its way through lavish vegetation, leaving the *khud* line for a lane of hedges and flowers of varied beauty. A mile onward a waterfall appears beside a big cave which acts as dak bungalow to the native travellers. A party was there of men and women from Tibet, with wares for the Sikhimese markets. Bit by bit the road gets more rugged and narrows with the miles onward to Karponang.

The climb upward is also growing steeper. The gradient is now at an angle of no less than 40 degrees—and the road is every bit stony. The fickle path once again leaves the hedges and returns to the *khud* side which is in many parts unclothed down to the valleys. As the road goes higher, the slope grows steeper and its width ever narrower. Below the *khud* can be seen the destination of a mistaken footstep.

Gradually a mist descended upon us and blotted out this danger. One was glad of this because of the awful visions depths of such a nature are capable of conjuring up in a fatigued imagination. But the mist turned into rain, and with rain each stone grew slippery. And the slopes of the flat-stones on the roadway were all towards the *khud* side.

The road was no more than three to four feet across at the widest, and the pony itself was nearly of this measure,

Immense rocks abutted from the hill-side and robbed the traveller of even this little space. Below was a sheer drop to —the Lord knew where. The height of the spot was nearly 9,000 ft.

The path got narrower and narrower and then wound round and round upward; then got steeper, then narrower again and wound round and round above the tree tops which the traveller could see silouhetted in the mist in the distance.

CHAPTER IX.

KARPONANG

There started from Gantok at the same time as we did a lama and a party of muleteers. They were all proceeding to Changu, the last stop on this side of the Tibetan Passes, where nature provides excellent grazing grounds for cattle. The lama, who belonged to the Enche monastery above the capital, was the proud possessor of a herd of cattle which he grazed in these regions, and one of his duties in connection with this possession was a visit every few months of nineteen miles each way with provisions for the herdsmen—for nowhere beyond Gantok in this direction can anything be grown that could be edible by human beings.

The mules kept well before us, their little bells tinkling with their movement. The lama and one or two muleteers conversed with the Sirdar, and all were in the best of spirits.

When the mist descended and the steep, narrow roadway climbed up to the heavens, with the tremendous precipices on one side, silence befell our little party. I do not know if they mumbled anything—if they did it must have been a little prayer. But the mist came down before us and between us, and the rain beat heavily upon our faces, upon our cheeks, and upon our noses, while leeches dripped from trees to seek what nourishment they could from our necks and ears, and any other exposed parts of our persons.

Every few yards the road bent sharply to the left and a turn to left meant——! One dreaded to think it! Below—was the secret of the mists.

"Here, *sahib*," said the Sirdar, dismounting very cautiously, the hand that held the reins showing a slight tremor, "at this spot many a man has fallen below; and many, many mules and horses."

I shuddered inwardly. It was the fateful mile 8 of which the Maharajah had spoken. "At mile 8", he had told me, "many a man has slipped over the *khud* side. The road is not too wide, and very steep. But I am trying to improve it. Perhaps later there will be a wider, and a better road below the present one."

The road sloped downward for a few yards, with a severe gradient of about 60 degrees. It still wound, and the *tinka tonka* of the mules' bells ahead slowed down with the peril, to a solemn *t-ink-a, t-onk-a* which came to us through the mists ahead.

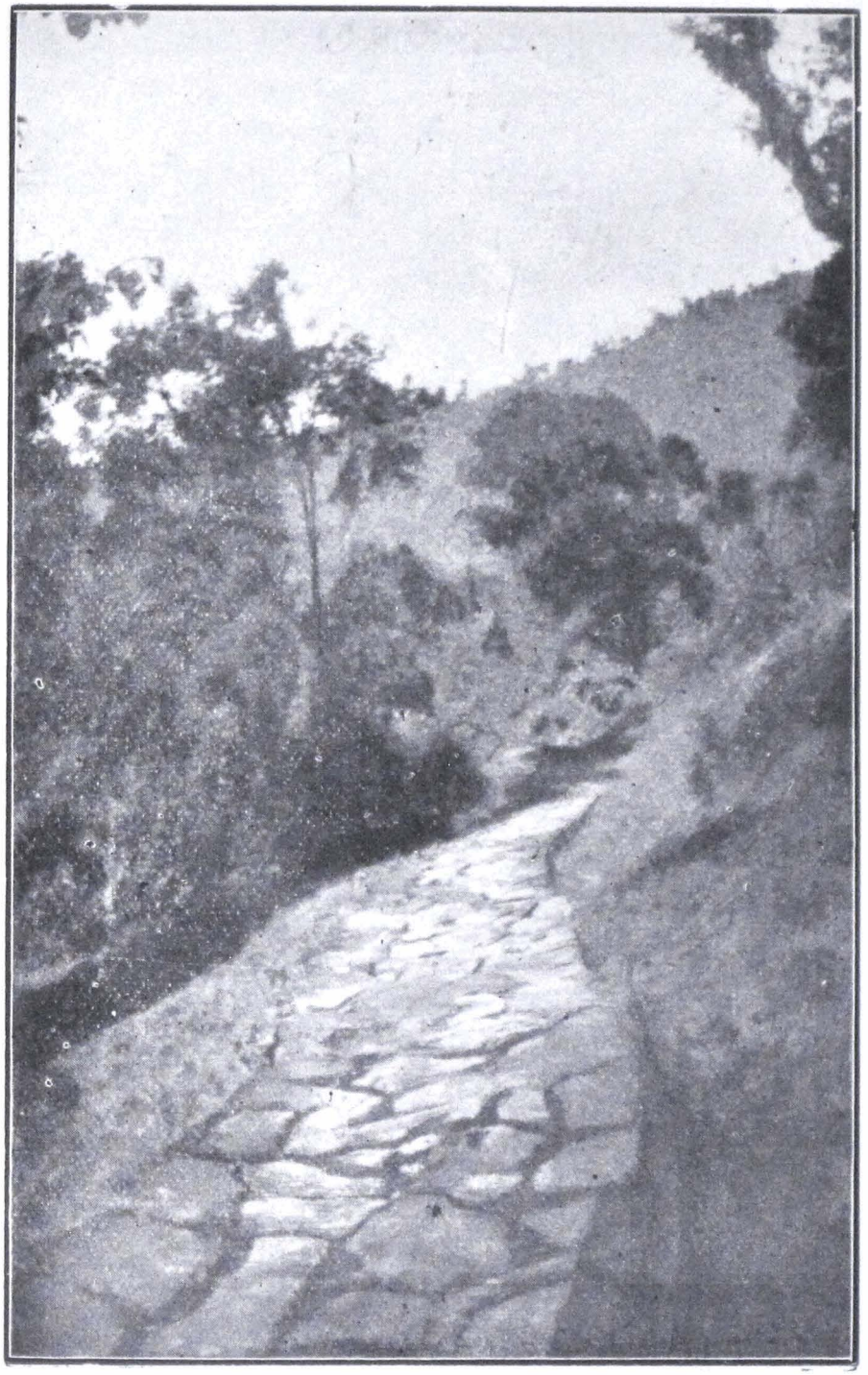
I dismounted and led my animal. Every step almost was a scrape—the scrape of the iron horse shoe upon the smooth surface of the slippery stones.....and the procession was a funeral march of what seemed like many hours. Mile 10—Karponang—was never coming. A native dak bungalow was reached at length and the mules and the lama found a shelter from the inclemencies of the weather; while my party plodded onward.

The rain still pattered. A tumble-down wooden structure appeared upon the hill top and I looked to it with longing as a refuge. But "No," said my Sirdar, "that is not the bungalow. That is a commissariat building—a relic of the late war."

A few more turns, and then mile 10—yet no dak bungalow; only rain, and mist and slippery stones ahead.

In a little while, though, we found our haven. Wet, hungry and tried, we arrived about tea time. But the coolies, whom I had seen resting in the immense cave at mile 5, were a long way behind us.

The dak bungalow at Karponang stands at an altitude



Section of road to Karponang.

of 9,200 feet and was very cold and uncomfortable. It nestles in a hollow towered over by enormous ugly hill tops that cluster close together. In that dreary rainfall it was the most awe-inspiring spot it has ever been my lot to visit. There is not another *busti* in sight—no bazaar, no lights.

Some candles were produced, a fire lighted and by the time I got warm I heard the merry laughter of the coolies coming up the roadway. How they could be merry under such conditions I was unable to understand, but if my prayers of thankfulness went up to Heaven that evening the coolies have an excellent future before them.

They arrived at last, and though some minor casualties had occurred in my store basket, I was glad to get something served up by way of a combined tea and dinner. And then for sleep and merry forgetfulness.

"To-morrow's road," said the Sirdar, breaking in upon a reverie," will be worse than to-day's." And he was right.

* * * * *

The road is very deserted. Few people ever come or go by it. The traffic between Gantok and Tibet is only a fraction of that between Tibet and Kalimpong—the main route through the Jelep La. But occasionally one sees a party of muleteers go by and then the sensation of standing up flat against the wall is far from pleasant; but there is no alternative owing to the narrow nature of the pathway.

Not a party though passed us without some inquisitive question from the Sirdar. He wished to know everything about their businesses, down to the ages of their grand-mothers. How different is this from western reserve and western commercial silence. This trader had brought some goods down from Shigatse for sale at Gantok; another was bent on a pilgrimage to the monasteries in Sikhim. They all had their missions and they all told the Sirdar.

The improvement in the weather gave me a chance of

having a better look at the lama who, with his mules, rejoined our party in the morning. He was a very different person from the lama described in "Kim" by Kipling. He was young and tall and stately, and did not once mutter over his beads. Nor was he looking for a river, but rather did he seek his herds that grazed at Changu. His lips were tinged with the red of *pan* and he frequently hummed to himself a Tibetan air. He whistled to the mules in a manner which to them was most intelligible, and he occasionally cursed them too in shrill accents which were far from spiritual. And the Sirdar and he laughed and joked with scandalous familiarity, while even the muleteers occasionally joined in the conversation. There is no class or colour in these mountains, no caste, nor even religious differences. All men are one, except the *Sahib* and even with him there is a better understanding, better, that is, than in the plains of India.

The road was still steep and narrow. It is not all stone all the way, but mud and loose stones that slip beneath the feet, and the width of the pathway is but two to three feet in most parts with an unfathomable precipice on the right side. Dark scowling rocks overhang the roadway, sometimes offering shelter and sometimes impinging as an obstacle to the tourist. And the gathered rain water came *drip, drip, drip* from below them in a manner that made one feel it might very easily wear away the stones, which were far from being proverbial.

The road is by no means straightforward. There are barely twenty consecutive yards without a turning. The road curves round boulders, and after every curve one sees the next. The scene in front presents the appearance of some awful hill demon with an ominous scowl, an irregular nose and a protruding underlip. It is this protruding underlip upon which we have to walk, while the lower portions of the irregular nose have to be dodged by the head of the tourist. The paths are very narrow and very steep and for most of the

way too, very dangerous. Here and there as a safeguard against danger is a construction of red rhododendron branches that serves as a railing above the precipice. We pass one frail bridge, a slender track above a deep chasm, with fences on each side of red rhododendron branches; but by the time four miles have been covered one has done with danger more or less for the rest of the journey. The auspicious site, mile 14, is marked by a joyous fall by Nature, the finest and the largest waterfall on the entire intenerary.

A curious thing I noticed was that every time we came upon a corner that was particularly perilous some good soul had scribbled on the rocks above it, texts about Christianity, in both English and Tibetan. For my part I mumbled the "*Om Mani*" as being more likely to propitiate the particular dieties of that countryside.

The rest of the road is safe, but not always good. Beyond the waterfall it enters the Changu valley which displays a heath on either side of the roadway. But it is not altogether a picturesque heath. Black boulders litter it on all sides and portions of trunks of felled trees. Here and there the road has been washed away, but the horses scramble up the mountain side with the ease and agility of goats. And all around the cows graze in complacency, their big ugly forms peeping between the deep green flowerless bushes of the rhododendron.

CHAPTER X.

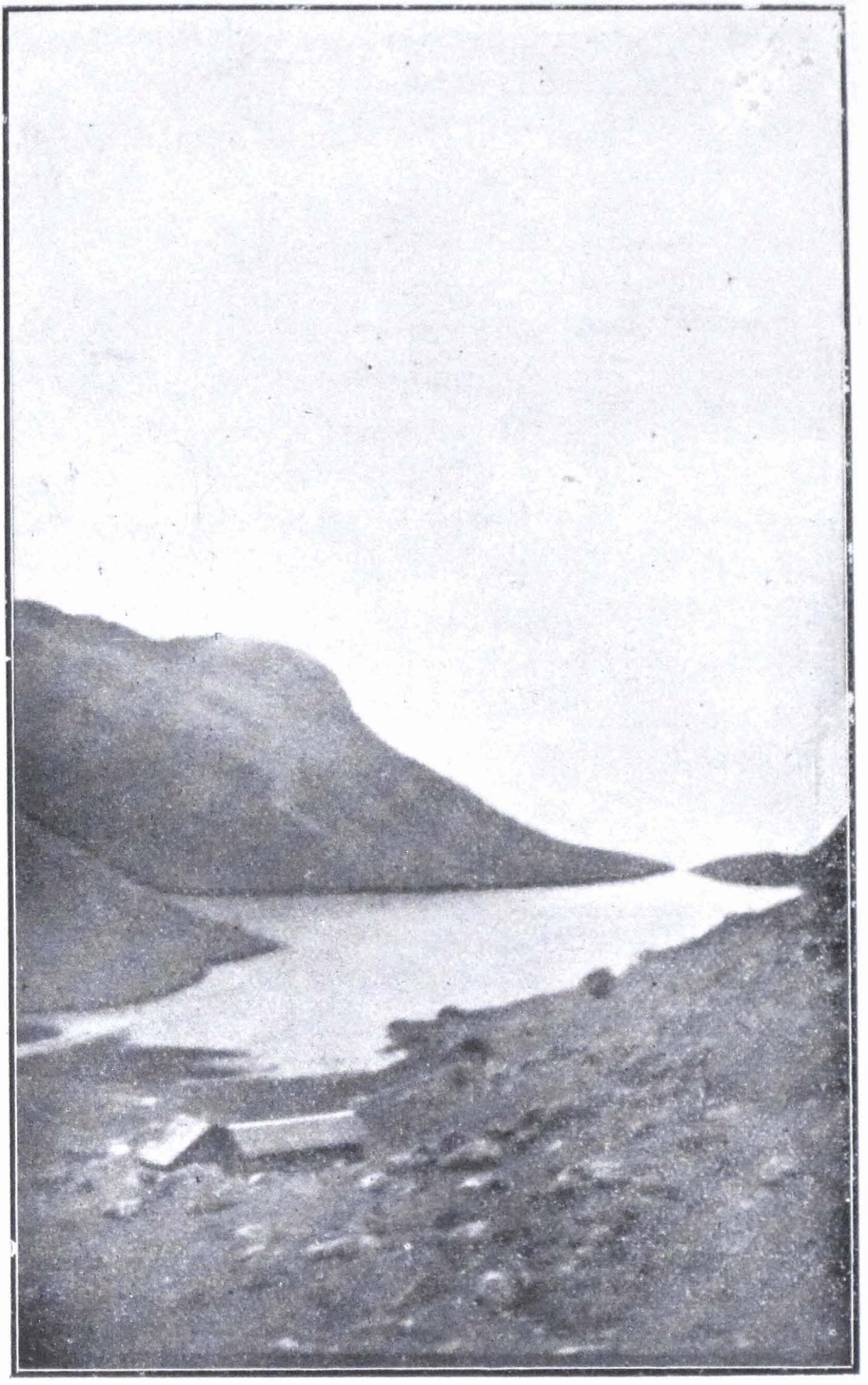
THE NATHU LA.

The Lake of Changu is one of the prettiest sights in Sikhim. It first shows itself to the tourist from Karponang in the form of a waterfall which empties itself at mile 18 into a sort of a miniature stream. Beyond and above this is the lake,—a sheet of calm, unrippled water lying in the hollow and the shadow of the mountains. The road runs by the left in a line of neat white to the bungalow which just misses being on the edge of the lake side.

In front of the bungalow is a barren hollow waste where the lake water possibly comes if it ever rises. The water shows itself in a silver shimmer where the glare of the sunlight falls upon it. For the rest it is dark and motionless.

The scene is one to be remembered. Even the horse paused to gaze upon it—the horse which bears the dignified name of Kazi—or zemindar—just as in America the title of Colonel is bestowed upon people without any offence meant whatsoever. On this lake, I am told, the soldiers of the Younghusband Mission skated in the year 1904 while waiting the pleasure of the minions of the Dalai Lama to come to terms with the powers that be in Simla. Though those who tell the story also add that the skating was not without its casualties, for the waters of the lake are very deep; very, very, deep indeed.

The place was singularly free of mist upon my arrival. The chowkidar told me that it had been raining for days on end previously. But chowkidars usually do say such things



Changu Lake.

in the hope of loosening the purse strings of the tourist at the time of departure. As if the inoffensive chowkidar could help it whether it rained or not. And there is no more sense in giving the chowkidar *bucksheesh* if it is clear after many dull days, than it would be to give him a hiding were it the only bad day after many good ones. Though he would undoubtedly deserve the latter were he to make the statement of his own volition.

The height of the lake of Changu is 12,600—a height that those who know say is conducive to mountain sickness. Dr. Turner at Gantok had very kindly warned me of this, and had armed me against the eventuality by providing me with some aspirin. This I was advised to take should a headache visit me. For mountain sickness to assume merely the form of a headache is moderate, not to say considerate. Some mountaineers have placed it on record that they, when seized with the sickness, were constrained to roll on the ground and almost bite the dust until the feeling wore off. For myself, the aspirin did the needful, and beyond a slight headache brought on, as I thought, by the severe sun of that particular morning, I was not in any way uneasy. The weather at Changu was weather to glory in. Were Changu not so far, not so difficult of access, and not so inconceivably lonely and desolate, I could hardly recommend a better holiday ground, in season, than the little bungalow by the lake side in delightful Changu.

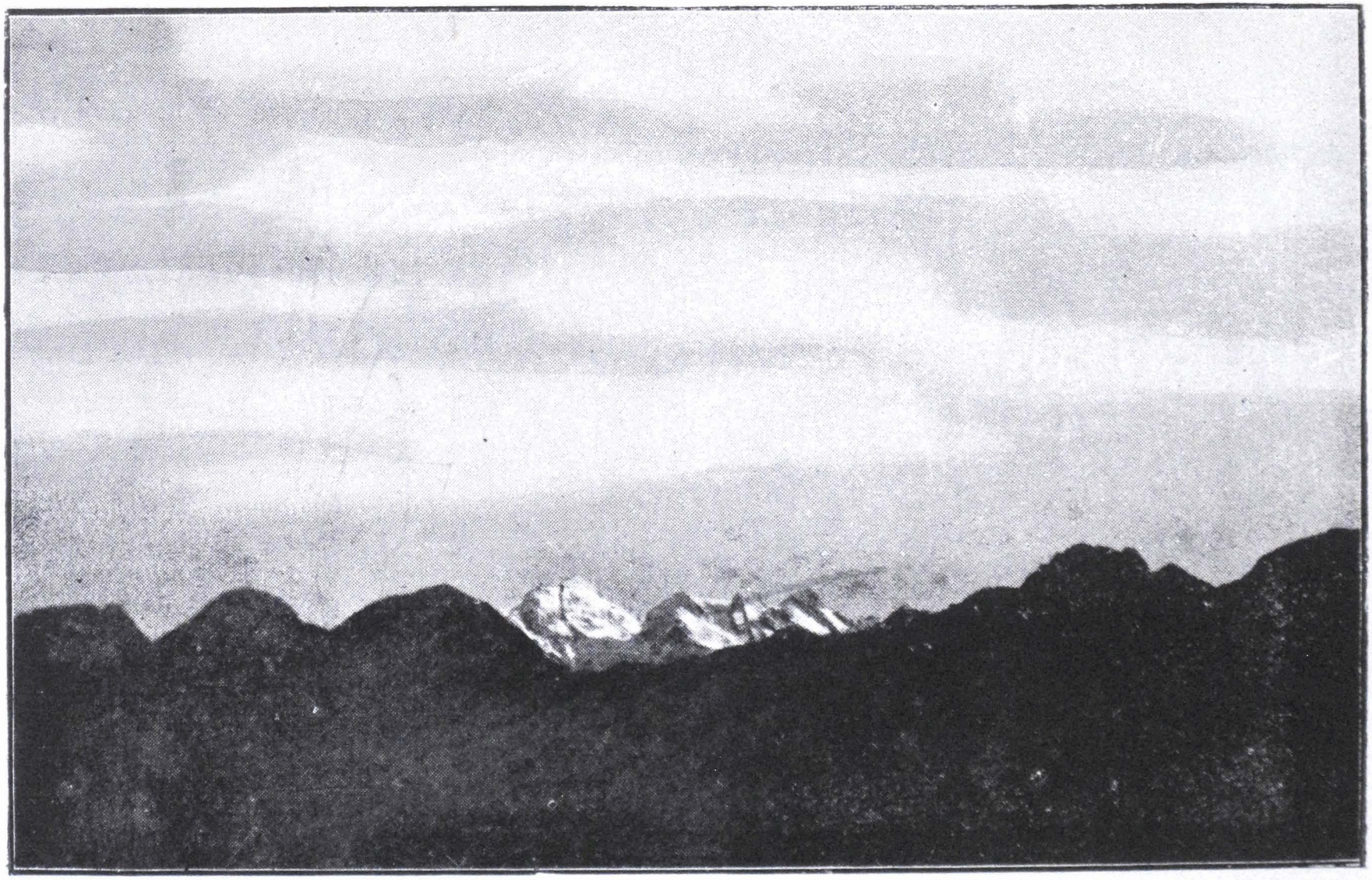
Not a soul was visible for miles around. The lama left us for his cattle a little before we got to the bungalow, at a spot where cattle grazed in dozens, and where the countryside was dotted by shelters of a temporary nature for the habitation of travellers or the housing of the cowherds. A little before we got to the lake was a canvas erection—a sort of a crude tent which contained a number of women—Tibetan women, whose men folk, if they had any, must have

been out with the herds, or doing aught else by the hill-side than solace their women. But their women undoubtedly needed no solacing, for they chattered merrily by themselves, indifferent alike to the cattle and their men folk. Above Changu, from the hill behind the bungalow can be seen a great part of the snowy range, and sometimes, in clear weather, far distant Darjeeling. The snows appear to be exceedingly near to the northward ; south are Darjeeling and the plains ; to the east the Nathu La and the Chumbi Valley. The next morning we started for the Nathu La—the first real gateway to Tibet on my route.

The detour to the Nathu La itself is one of five or six miles from the main road between Changu and Kapup.

The main road resembles in a measure the main road from Karponang to Changu after the passing of the water-fall; that is to say after the perilous tracks have been got over. On this road I met my first yak, a sort of hairy cow of sturdy appearance. These yaks loitered harmlessly on the roadway, but my pony, who if he had ever seen a yak before had forgotten one, took it into his silly head to shy at the ugly animal and skipped backwards off the roadway. I thanked my stars then that this was the first yak I had yet met, for I shuddered to think what my fate would have been had one of these things made its appearance upon the extremely narrow path that I had left behind me.

There was none to keep us company. No lamas, no traders, no cattle herdsmen. We wandered on and on in silence, the chill in the air blunted by the heat of the exercise on horse back and by the enthusiasm aroused by the magnificent heights and depths around us. Presently the road entered an amphitheatre at the opposite end of which on the sky line the Nathu La showed its gate-post heights with the famous pass between them, at an eminence of 14,400 feet. Little lakes sprang into view on many sides, and on the



A glimpse of the snowy range from above Changu.

right in the distance could be seen the tiny lake of Kapup and its red-roofed bungalow.

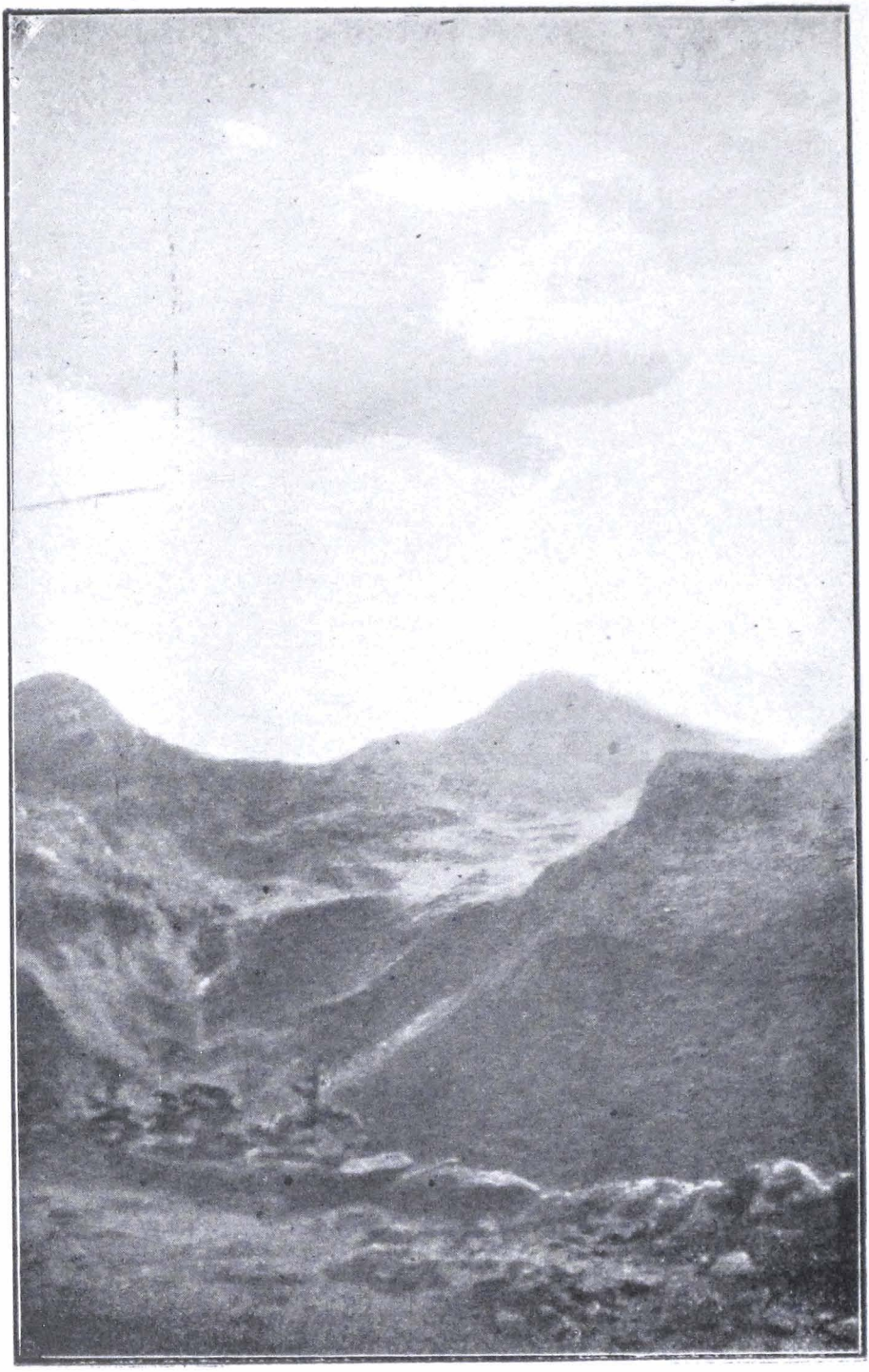
The climb to the Nathu La was almost unending. There isn't a single mile post to break the monotony of the progress, and although one is buoyed up with the expectation of a glimpse of the forbidden land from the summit, that summit is most distractingly elusive. It is always the one you see just before you and when you have arrived there, it is the next one, and the next—barely fifty yards ahead. It is possible to ride right up to the Nathu La, and one would be well advised to do so. Otherwise one may not have sufficient breath to exclaim over Tibet when one sees it.

Tibet from the top of the Nathu La, hardly presented any difference in appearance from Sikhim as it appeared from the same position. One must understand that although Tibet is a brown windswept tableland one does not see it in this garb from any of the eastern passes of Sikhim. The outlook from there is upon the Chumbi valley which is like unto any other valley one has ever passed, with the exception though that it is rather bare of vegetation and in consequence somewhat brown in appearance.

The valley was when I saw it partially concealed by mist, above which appeared a line of snowy heights from which Chumularhi (23,900 ft.) protruded its triangular apex of solid white in the sunshine. But the clouds in their playful frolicing permitted me as they drifted from one side to the other, to see the Chumbi valley by instalments, and later even rose sufficiently to allow a connected view of the entire valley, with the snow line, though, blotted out of my vision. I was pointed out the positions of Chumbi and Yatung and the Ka-gui Gompa. But I saw none of these places; nor, I am told, are they ever visible from these passes. Not even Phari, which lies at the base of Chumularhi and is hidden by a lower summit.

The top of the Nathu La was absolutely deserted. Not a sign of life was to be seen anywhere, except the Buddhist mound of stones and prayer flags that embellished the frontier, above which a bird flew backwards and forwards a few times.

This was the only guardian of the marches.



Tibet from the Nathu La.

CHAPTER XI.

THE JELEP LA.

Not being permitted to enter Tibet—though there was nothing to stop us, except at some miles beyond at Yatung—we had to turn our backs upon the forbidden land and return to the main road that leads to Kapup. The descent was easy, and was accomplished in about half the time it took to go up. The return was by what the Sirdar called a "shawcut," by which designation he christens any road that is not a proper road. As witness the entire journey from the Jelep La to Kalimpong which was all "shawcut" in the Sirdar's language. But of this I shall have more to say later. For the present let us plod onward to Kapup.

Another strain of the throat muscles is needed with regard to the pronunciation of the word "Kapup"; but despite all one's efforts one learns in time that none but a Tibetan or a pigeon can pronounce it correctly. It is "Ka-poop!" with the stress of a ton load upon the second syllable. So to "Ka-poop!" we proceeded.

The scenery before us from the foot of the Nathu La up to the dak bungalow, was almost the grandest on the entire route: such sublime heights; such magnificent depths; such a display of the finest shades of colour; the chilly east wind; growling waterfalls; and the occasional twitter of an unrecognisable mountain bird. The horses seemed to enjoy nothing so much as to sniff the air, and to throw up their heads every little while to gaze upon the splendid clearness of the emerald sky.

Dwarf rhododendron bushes, each like a mass of minute carvings upon billowing green, lined the road on both sides, and an occasional yak showed itself on the hill-side, engaged in the unending occupation that this animal shares with the others of its kind—of chewing the cud. The roads are wider than they have been, and though the precipices are still with us their danger is not so manifest as it was previously. The road is of soft earth, disfigured at intervals by puddles into which the horses splash their hoofs with perceptible delight.

The mountain sides are forested almost to their summits, forested in varying shades of maturity : shades of light brown, dark brown, green and pale green. Flower bushes make a variety with the rhododendrons nearer the road side, their little eyes of blue or pink or white peeping through ever so coyly. And all at a height of 14,000 ft.

The dak bungalow arrived at, the next gateway to Tibet confronts the traveller. The Jelep La stands high on the sky line, but partially visible from the bungalow's location. From the summit of the Jelep La a stony serpentine track descends to and beyond the bungalow. It leads onward to Kalimpong, stony most of the way, and ever so full of traffic. Opposite the bungalow is a Tibetan inn, the last on this side of the passes.

Kapup bungalow is a relic of the Younghusband Mission. In those days it used to be a portion of a barrack ; to-day, it resounds with the exclamations of travellers over the sublimity of mountain grandeur, or with the oaths of officials tired with tedious journeying and inured to mountain beauty. Such are the vicissitudes of a wooden thatch !

The chowkidar came forward after the custom of his kind, with a deep salaam. He too expressed his views upon the weather, past, present and future. Indeed the day was in every way ideal and it was some consolation to feel that

The summit of the Jelep La.

the view of Tibet next morning was likely to be unhindered by mist of any sort whatsoever.

Luncheon devoured, I settled down in the verandah with an ancient magazine I found in the place, to enjoy the climate and the story. But I was not left long in my enjoyment of the latter. A panorama was passing before my eyes along the serpentine track to Tibet and it was impossible that I should continue reading. Kazis went by in rich trappings of gold and red velvet; their wives on little ponies, jolted almost out of their reveries; their suite with their bags and baggage, swaying to giddiness upon the backs of tinkling mules, the tails of which swung like pendulums; traders with their loads of wool filling the air with the smell of damp sheep; pilgrims with perpetual frowns and hoary beards, through the hair of which their fingers wandered in uneasy meditation; yak herdsmen; muleteers; and jangling postmen.

The postal service with Tibet is maintained by human runners. The allotted stages, in relays of four, the Gurkha postmen run with bugles and bells, pausing now and again at inns to partake of refreshment. But the inn is more indeed than a postal rest house. Let us go in and see how the Tibetan travels.

A traveller arrives and calls for a cup of tea and a disc or two of flat bread, which in themselves entitle him, should he want it, to a corner of the shelter for the entire night. He unties the band of his long blue dressing gown, allows that garment to extend to its full length, and tucks himself away into it in a corner. If it is summer time he entirely removes that garment, and places it under his head for a pillow; then stretches himself out to full length, his brown arms displayed to view through the looped sleeves of his waistcoat.

The next morning he has a meal similar to the previous night's dinner, calls it, I suppose, *chota hazri*, and goes his way after paying for the two meals—a total of a very few

annas. For luncheon he will call at some village refreshment room for his favourite tea, some *pan* and some cigarettes; and with the smoke issuing in blue curls from his red-stained lips, he will, after an exchange of confidences with the other travellers, emerge from the hovel and plod onward until night time. He wants no bedding, no stores, no change of clothes, no coolies to carry his burden; he pays no Sirdar, nor tips the chowkidars of bungalows; he waits not for his meals while they are in preparation, nor does he enter little tit bits into the visitor's books. He just takes what the road gives him; and it gives him a good deal. Most of all it gives him camaraderie; for scarcely a passer-by but has his little jokes to unburden;—and they all help to lighten the monotony of travel.

That night I listened to the melody of a concert improvised by my coolies, which floated in by my window as I was endeavouring to slumber. The melody was good and I listened to it while it lasted; when it died down, it gave place to rain, inharmonious torrential rainfall, which caused me to regret having missed my chance of climbing the Jelep La while I had it. The following morning was the dullest imaginable, and with scant hope I climbed up the serpentine track to the Jelep La.

The summit was almost as elusive as that of the previous pass attempted. Again it is possible to ride right up to the frontier and one ought to do so; as otherwise the climb would be exceedingly tiring, though not quite as bad as in the case of the Nathu La.

At the summit stands the inevitable cairn and prayer flags, making a somewhat braver display than they did at the Nathu La.

I stayed for about four hours on the summit of the Jelep La, waiting for the sun to come up. This at last it did, but, as on the previous day, Tibet was not entirely

free of mist while I viewed it. Chumulhari glistened through straggling fringes of grey cloud, and to its side one or two other peaks were partially visible. In the hollow of the valley lay a straggling settlement (not Chumbi), and a portion of the Ka-gui Gompa.

The irregular serpentine track continues beyond the cairn, downwards towards Chumbi, but it is no longer stony. The country around it is brown and barren and to the left an immense amphitheatre, strewn with crumbled mounds from the hill-side prevents the outlook on to Bhutan. Opposite this amphitheatre, on the left of the roadway, a few hundred yards within Tibet, is a lake, that appeared dull in that soft light. It was made duller still by the dark forms of yaks that loitered upon its banks.

A few of the loitering forms, smaller than any other, came on towards the great pass, and were magnified as they advanced into human beings. The pilgrims paused as they arrived at the cairn, turned towards it and bowed their heads in silent meditation.

Then we all took the zigzagging track back to the bungalow.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN.

The next stage from Kapup was to Gnatong, a small settlement of natives and telegraphists, some five miles nearer civilization. The coolies who had been feasting and making merry at the postal inn at the foot of the Jelep La, were summoned to get ready on our return from that summit, and once duly loaded with their burdens were launched out upon the high road to Gnatong. The Sirdar and I started some moments later.

The road marked its irregular way up and across two summits that lay between Kapup and Gnatong—two round green and brown summits upon which the breezes blew their chilly blasts causing a flutter amongst the bushes of dwarf rhododendron. The air seemed clearer and purer, and the horizon appeared to be much further than it ever had been, and yet better defined in the distance. To all appearances it seemed as if we were upon the roof of the world with one or two irregularities around us.

Telegraph poles accompanied us all the time, skipping from side to side of the roadway in their zeal for economy. About three miles from our destination, an outlook more badly scribbled over with debris than the rest was pointed out as a battlefield, the scene of a conflict in the first of the Tibetan wars—a campaign of the later eighties. There were one or two ruined mounds and clusters of crumbling stone, and that was all.

Few ever talk about the first Tibetan war, because few

A Postal Inn at the foot of the Jelep La.

have ever heard of it. It was one of those wars that passed off with little incident and little outcome. The Tibetans made their way into Sikhim, for no obvious reason whatsover, and had an unpleasant way of moving their camp forward every now and again. Darjeeling seemed to be threatened, and British soldiers were got together to chase the Tibetans back over the frontier. This campaign has left us three battlefields and ruins which are pointed out to tourists by eager Sirdars, and perhaps has been the means of depriving Sikhim of Chumbi, or so at least the Sikhimese say.

It seems that the Maharajah of Sikhim had a summer palace at Chumbi, which valley was regarded as a sort of No Man's Land between the two powers, Tibet and Sikhim. It is stated by the Sikhimese that their Maharajah out of friendliness towards the Tibetans, declared at the time of the Tibetan invasion that the latter had not come far beyond their frontier as the frontier extended up to the Jelep La. And this, they say, has deprived the country of Chumbi,—the happiest of the happy valleys in the Himalayas. The Sikhimese palace at Chumbi is now in a state of decay and no Maharaja ever occupies it.

The second domed summit got over, the road dipped towards a thin stream, and, crossing it by a narrow bridge, leapt up almost to the town of Gnatong, which deployed on the left, a small straggling collection of brown huts and tin roofs kept down with big stones so as not to be borne away by the strong winds. A ragged collection of people went about their businesses, either growing turnips in the fields or drinking tea in the restaurants, and one or two even lounged in "pubs" sipping the *murwa* beverage of the country-side. Blacksmiths clanged their trade, street dogs yelped, and the mules made the funny little noises that they are ever known to be making.

The hillside around the settlement was marked out into

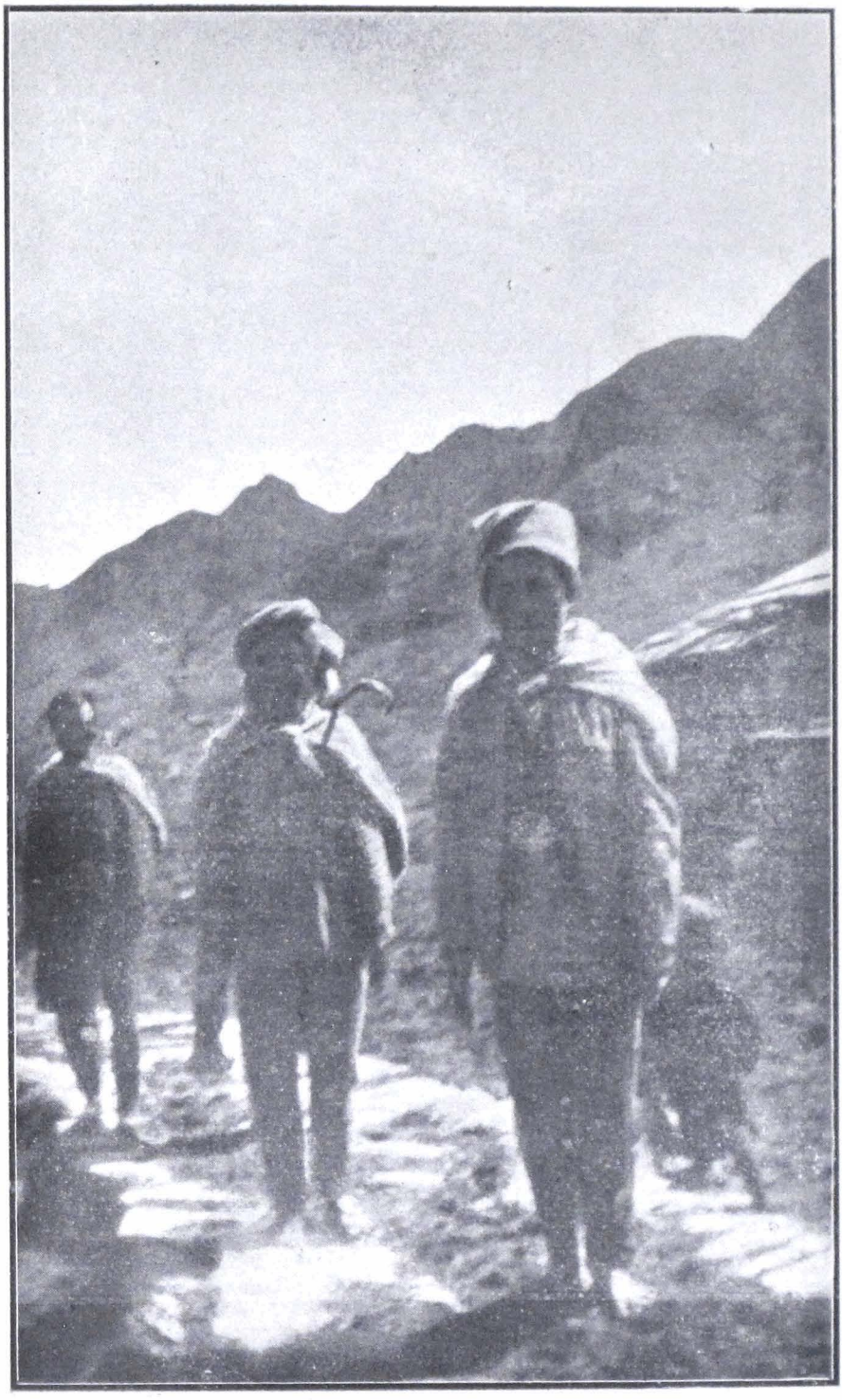
cultivation plots, each one clearly demarcated and visible for miles around ; and here and there a cultivator held up to view a monster turnip that would have carried the prize in any show of its kind. To the side on a high hill was a Gompa, almost hidden by tall trees.

You turn to the dak bungalow and guide your pony instinctively towards the best building in the settlement. The best building, though, is not the bungalow, but turns out to be the Post and Telegraph Office in which *sahibs* work, and have a cemetery of their own on the opposite mound across the town where the crosses just peer above the grey stones of the boundary wall. The dak bungalow stands not far from the "best building" in about the position where the stable would be were the best building the bungalow ; and like a stable it looks too.

The building is small and stuffy and abounds in every discomfort from a blinking chowkidar to a couple of troublesome dogs, and I did not in the least bit favour the idea of passing the night there. Consequently I summoned the Sirdar and told him to prepare the coolies to proceed onward. The next bungalow was some nine miles distant, and as it was then only lunch time we calculated, going at our average rate of progess, to arrive at Sedonchen by tea time.

And so we started.

I could not then foresee what I was undertaking. I realised that the descent from Gnatong to Sedonchen was one of about six thousand feet in nine miles ; and mathematicians can work out precisely the angle of the incline downwards. The road prior to Sedonchen was stony in most parts, but I was not aware that the stones were to continue, that there would be no break in the stony track the entire way to Sedonchen, and ever so much further beyond ; that the stones would be bigger, and more angular, and generally more difficult going as I went onward ; that the Sirdar should take



Postal runners on Jelep La Road.

the wrong turning and appreciably increase the total journey of nine miles by many more; that the Sirdar would buy a pup at the time of our departure and that the pup should give a vocal number of its own as we went along; that the horses would prove unequal to the task and would require to be led; that rain should descend upon us, followed by night; that we should stumble on and on in the darkness, a prey to the leeches that fell from the overhanging branches; that there shouldn't be a light in sight in the dimmest distance; that we should twist our ankles and knees, and blister our heels with every step forward; that the miles should be twice as long as any ordinary English mile.....

My feet almost ache with pain and tingle with pinpricks as I recall it. Somebody has said somewhere that the easiest way to cover this road is to do it in tennis shoes. Let that somebody try it. I can only be sorry for him. Of all the inquisitions that the mind of man has ever been successful in devising a walk along this road is, I think, the awfullest. The going was like walking on a road laid out for a steam roller—only infinitely worse. The stones were bigger and the projections had a way of finding the sole of the feet in a manner that almost set one writhing.

The road also has an aggravating way of stretching some distance before the eye. It zigzags, of course, downwards, but the zigs are long, and so also are the zags, and at every bend one sees the awful ground he has just covered, and the awful ground he has yet to cover. There were flowers, trees, valleys, streams around me, of all of which I was vaguely conscious. I saw nothing, nothing but the ugly stones before me.

Some soldier who was constrained to climb this road is said to have remarked that if Tibet is a tableland, this certainly is one of the legs of the table. If it is a leg at all, it's a Chippendale, twisting and bending in all directions.

I shall have more to say about the short cut, and how it came about that we were overtaken by darkness.

CHAPTER XIII.

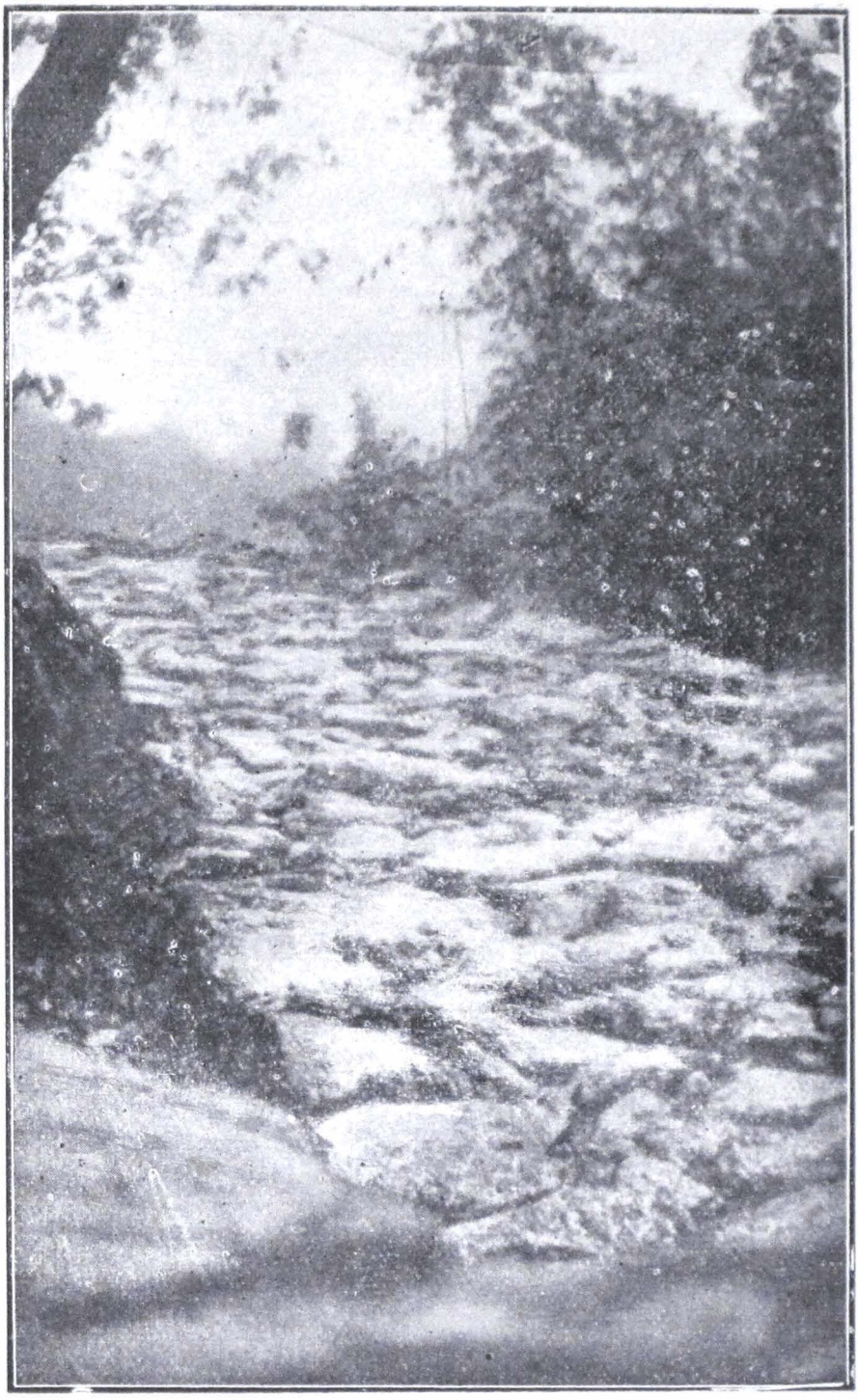
A SHORT CUT.

The Sirdar was a genius at finding short cuts. Were it left to him tourists would do much what the tanks have done at the Western front and no obstacle would be any obstacle except air and water. Did he not take our ponies up the precipitous cliffs of the hill to Gantok? Did he not try to do the same sort of thing near Gnatong and miss the Gompa? We did not see the Gompa until we had given it up for lost and were tracing our steps towards Gnatong; then we suddenly espied it amongst some trees, much nearer than we actually thought it was.

After all this I should have distrusted the Sirdar. But when the road is rough and stony and you yourself tired, awfully tired, and the Sirdar brings to bear on his statement the evidence of the chowkidar at Kapup—a goodly soul—and the opinions of five or six Gnatongese villagers—well what then are you expected to do? The road bifurcated from a spot a few miles out of Gnatong and the newer road was said to be the shorter and the better—the chowkidar at Kapup had said so. The villagers at Gnatong had also said so.

We took it.

It was in fact an easier road and a longer. It had been made presumably to break the steep gradient of the older and shorter track, but few, one might imagine, would mind how steep the gradient is provided the abominable stones are quickly got over.



A section of the awful road down from the Jelep La.

We did not realise how long the road was until we began to miss the mile posts. Half hours went by without a single mile post, and the Sirdar who has a way of explaining things —no doubt a great asset in his matrimonial relations—suggested that they had not yet been installed in this newer track.

Presently we came to a village, a tiny postal rest house made of thatch with a cluster of huts around from which peered a quantity of villagers. The Sirdar recognised the spot as Jeluk and ordered himself some tea. We were now back on the main track, he said, and could not be more than a few miles—two or three—from our destination.

"Ask the villagers," I suggested.

"I know it, *sahib*. But still I shall ask if you wish it."

He asked.

"Six miles from Sedonchen," chorussed the villagers.

"They are liars, *sahib*," affirmed the Sirdar emphatically. "What do these people know of English measurements? We have been marching since one, and it is now nearly four"—the Sirdar consulted his wristlet—"past four. We can't be more than two miles distant."

When the villagers said "Six," I could have fainted. Had it been a dramatic entertainment I should certainly have done so; but as it was merely a grim reality I thrust my best foot forward and proceeded onward. Though which was the *best* foot it was difficult to say at that stage of pain and exhaustion.

It was no good remonstrating with the Sirdar. He started his explanations already. It was the chowkidar at Kapup who was responsible, the hypocritical chowkidar at Kapup, about whom the *sahib* had said good words in the Visitor's book in that bungalow. A curse upon the chowkidar. But then the *sahib* saw the battlefield of Lingtu—on the summit of the hill which the new road traverses. The *sahib* saw the battlefield, though the *sahib* was delayed—considerably—for Sedonchen.

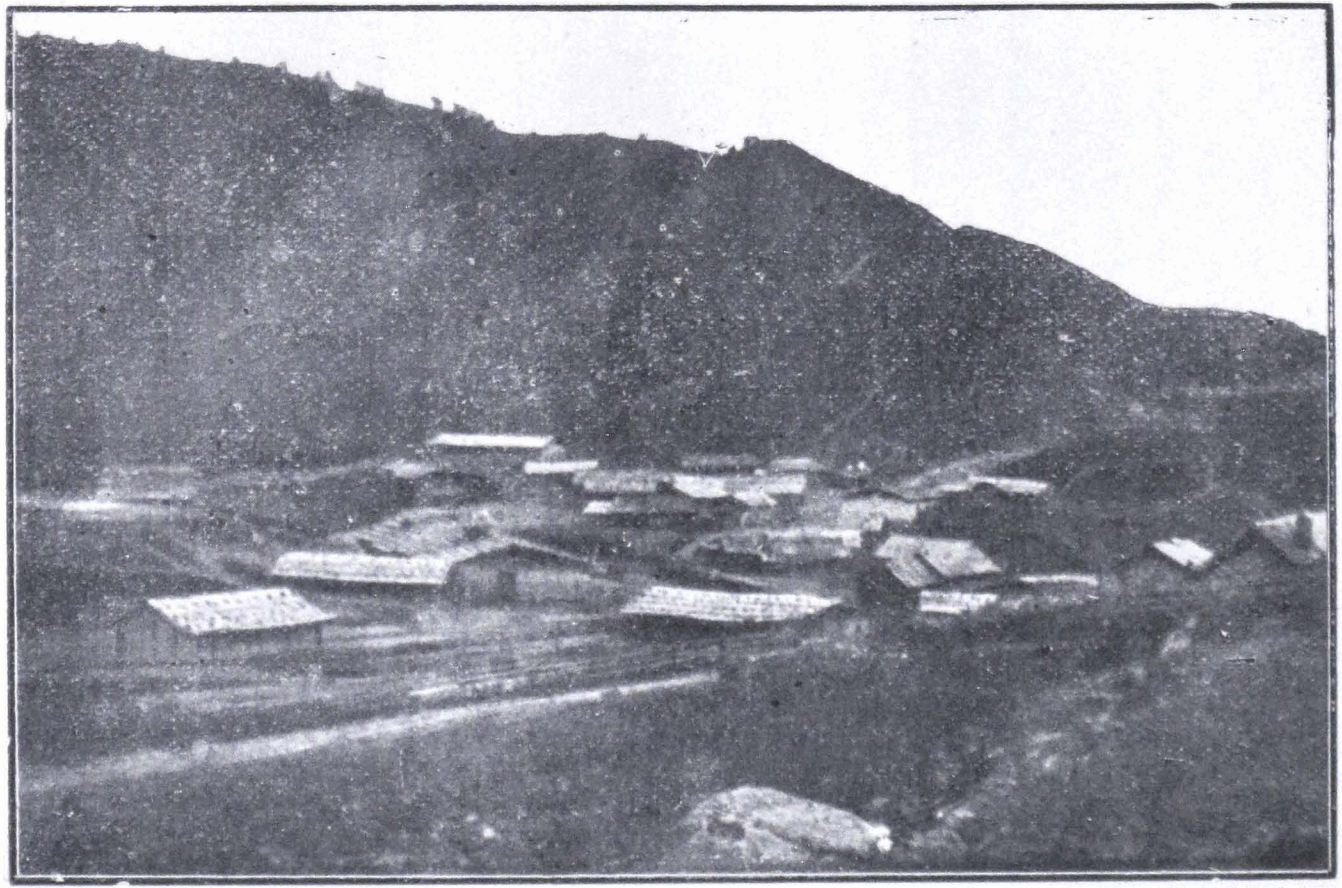
We got to Jeluk some hours later. Night was already falling, and the forms of the villagers appeared but as shadows in the dim twilight. Jeluk is the third of the battlefields along this route, all relics of our first war with Tibet. There is little or nothing to see in these battlefields, except just to say one has seen them.

The Sirdar called again for some tea. He has an aptitude for consuming this beverage and never misses an opportunity for doing so, calling loudly for his glass-full at every *busti*. But when night is falling and a long road is still before you. . . If the entire road from here to the Jelep La were lined with tea houses, I wouldn't put it past the Sirdar to stop at every one of them and call for his glass-full. Tea quaffed, we proceeded onward.

The darkness intensified with every step we took. The cobble stones were entirely invisible, and so as not to place the foot in between two stones and get it twisted, it was necessary to slide the foot gently forward from stone to stone, feeling for and avoiding the points and angles. Even the turns in the road were invisible, and at every pace we wondered where the next turn was and whether a few moments would find us lodged in some bushes. The Sirdar cleared his throat—to scare the wild beasts—in front; the horses came *click-clock*, *clock-clack*-ing behind, and Sedonchen was only a vision of our longing.

At length through the gloom below, was perceptible a twinkle, ever so tiny a twinkle, but none the less a twinkle. The Sirdar made certain of this, the *syces* saw it too, and our voices having attracted attention queer calls came from the direction of the little twinkle which by now had slipt up into two specks.

The Sirdar recognised the queer calls and said they were our coolies. The kind creatures fearing of our fate in that darkness had come provided with lanterns from the bungalow



Gnatong.

at Sedonchen. It was still more than a mile to the bungalow when they joined us, but with a light in front and a light behind, we were able to accomplish this in considerably less discomfort.

I have a vague memory of this last mile or so of progress. I know my legs trembled with tiredness at every step I took, I remember it raining and of my being soaked through because I was too tired to bother about mackintosh or umbrella, and I remember at length finding myself sitting, wet to the bones, before a fire in the dak bungalow.

The little dog the Sirdar had purchased squealed outside and the rain pitter-pattered until it ceased, and when I had taken my aching limbs to bed the considerate guide came in to ask me if I would care to see the lights of Darjeeling in the distance. The lights of Darjeeling! I was seeing at the moment sundry lights of my own through fatigue and would not have stirred for kingdoms!

No kingdoms were offered me and I resumed my slumber.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SIRDAR'S DOG.

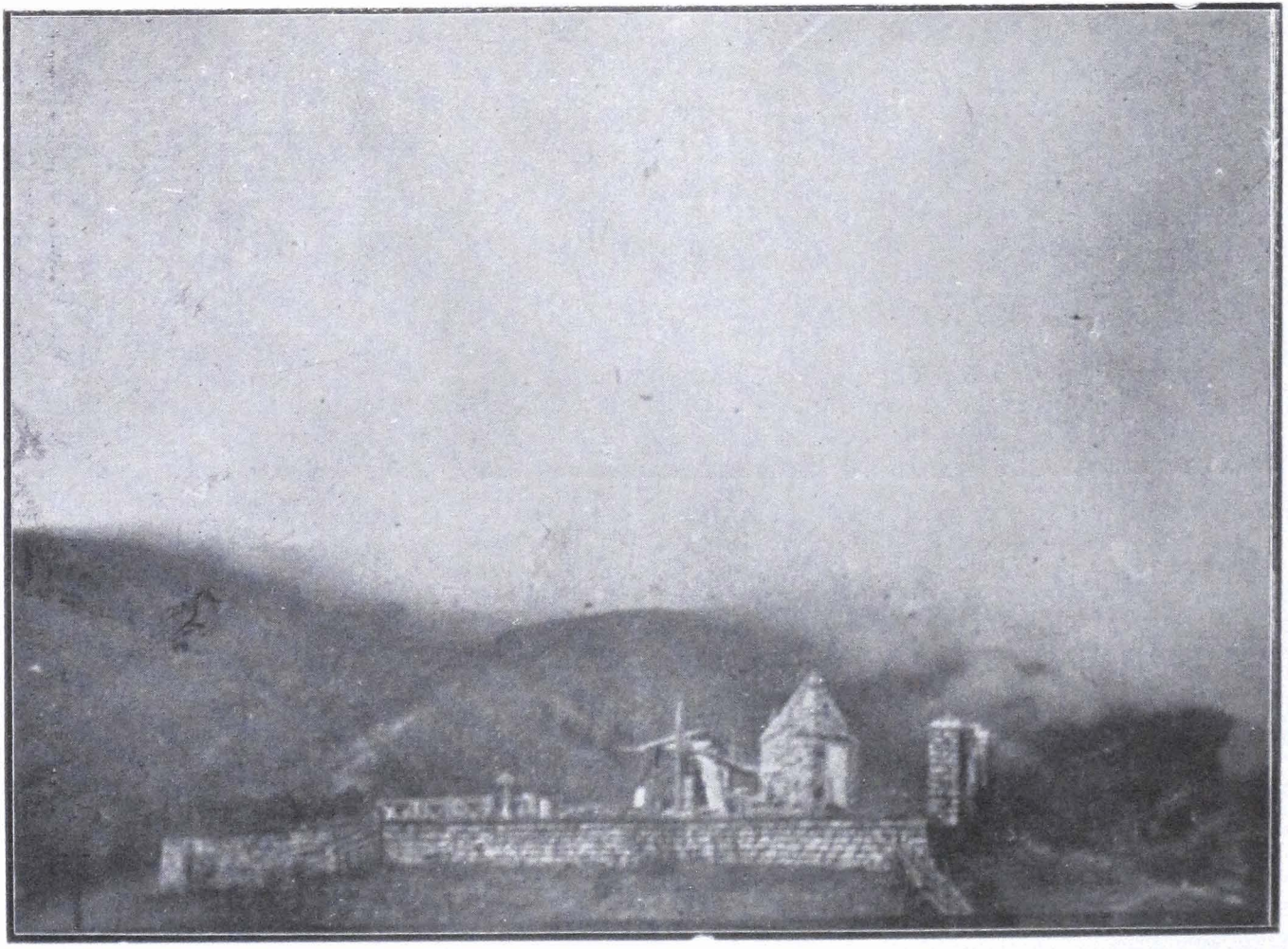
Of all my aches and pains the Sirdar's dog had a faculty of reminding me throughout that awful night. The Sirdar had thought fit to lodge the little animal in the verandah of the bungalow and I was treated to a narration of its woes at a time when I was least disposed to hear them. I wished that dogs had never been domesticated, and that such a tribe of people as Sirdars never existed. What little rest I had was jerky, and I resolved to do my damnedest the following morning.

This comprised in insisting on the exclusion of the dog from the rest of our programme.

At dawn, then, the Sirdar was summoned.

There was no response. The pup had disappeared and so had the Sirdar—to search for it. Fortunately he was unsuccessful, though for this I must disclaim all responsibility. The guide would fain have stayed for hours, perhaps days, seeking his six-rupee purchase. But at 7 A. M. we started—a fine morning marred only by the stony track that stretched onward before us.

Sedonchen is a smaller place than Gnatong. At the same time it appears to be busier as a trade centre, through the prominence and patronage of the local inn where lines and lines of waiting mules outside testified to the custom within and the financial increment this brought the keeper. Yet for all his wealth, the keeper's house, if he lived elsewhere than in the inn, did not display his position.



The little cemetery at Gnatong.

Across the valley in the distance, yet clearly defined, could be seen Darjeeling—Calcutta road, Observatory Hill and the Chowrusta, all easily distinguishable. The journey by air, were it possible, would be one of a bare half hour; and the road stretched a three days' march before us. But aviation in these high hills is still a doubtful quantity while the mists can play bo-peep above the landing grounds or conceal from view projecting cliffs until they are too near to be avoided.

The road below Sedonchen was as stony as it had been above it. The route is a busy one and traffic passed in both directions throughout the day time. The Sirdar now displayed a remarkable interest in his fellow travellers, stopping all those upward bound to tell them about his little dog and its mysterious disappearance. He never forgot to caution them, should they see it, to deliver it unto the chowkidar at Sedonchen, from whom he would come and take it as soon as the *sahib* arrived at Darjeeling. The travellers took up their duties as members of a search party eagerly, in fact so much eagerness did they display that it is my firm belief the Sirdar will never see his pup again unless he buys it.

I may here mention that whilst about to sign the visitor's register at Sedonchen I noticed that the chowkidar had an exceptionally red frontage to the greater part of his countenance, particularly the protruding feature that by its flatness betrayed its Mongolian origin. I hastily glanced at my bottle of brandy, which had been included in my stores by way of meeting emergencies, and found to my dismay well nigh four fingers deep from the top empty. Of course, it may have evaporated through the sunshine of the day preceding, and the chowkidar may have jammed his nose in a door, but a quantity of the brandy was nonetheless missing.

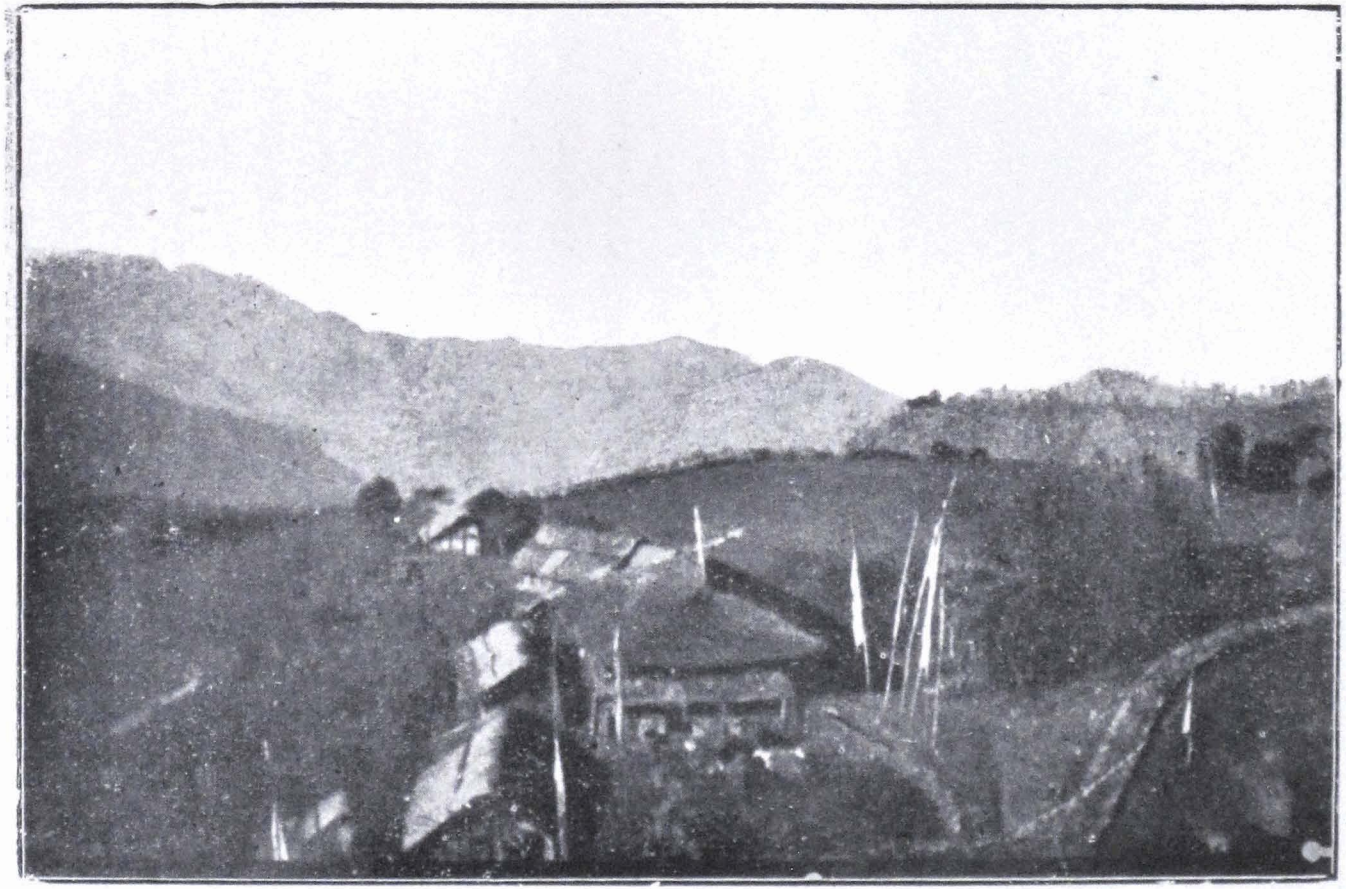
We plodded onwards, having to add to our previous day's miseries the negotiation of steep descents to cross three rivers

in quick succession, and the climb after each of these crossings to some small settlement on a suitably selected elevation—there was only the one road and we had to follow it. The villages were inconsiderable so far as size went, but one can never be forgotten so far as I am concerned and that was the place where the Sirdar's horse was given a new shoe. The poor animal had lost his footwear in the previous day's trials over the awful stones, and here in this little village, thousands of feet up in the air, a Tibetan with a pigtail struggled with the animal's hind leg while squealing pigs and children darted in and out and around in all directions. From the tea houses peeped undemure maidens and matrons and travellers, all to see the exciting event of the season. The Sirdar meanwhile viewed the operation of shoeing from various angles at a safe distance, admonishing the animal in unrestrained language for its restiveness.

The call for breakfast was at Rongli, a few miles further, where a picturesque dak bungalow flanks a river and is set in a neatly kept garden. A little before this halt we passed the Nag Daha waterfall—sacred to the Serpent God of the district. Near this is a crude, and one should think unsafe, bamboo bridge which, however, I was told, is still in use by natives. The bamboos curve low above the gurgling, tossing stream, that is pretty enough to look at but has its dangers in the many large boulders above and around which the waters surge incessantly.

The road improved as we ploughed onward to Ari. That village stands on a high hill the incline to which is negotiable with a certain amount of discomfort. But when at the top one sees bazaar and huts but no dak bungalow one is apt to.... The bungalow is three quarters of a mile further and more slowly you proceed to the destination.

For a commanding outlook on the scenery of the country I do not think a better situated bungalow exists along the



Sedonchen.

itinerary. An inviting bow window in the front room makes the place doubly alluring, and were it not that my coolies were already on the road to Rhenok I might have called a halt at Ari. Rhenok moreover possessed the advantage of having a bazaar not far from the bungalow; and after a protracted spell on tinned provisions the consideration of a bazaar is likely to weigh in one's judgment.

The bugles of the police lines below the Ari bungalow sounded a call, and the drums of the lamas beat out the summons to evening prayer as we turned down the road leading to Rhenok. The road lay open and roughly defined along the slope of an unwooded mountain side, and entered the dak bungalow through a forest glade by a Rai Bahadur's *bageecha.*

That Rai Bahadur was good enough to send me some fruit from his garden, as there was none in the bazaar.

And after dinner when I sat in the verandah looking out into the vast darkness and stillness of the valley around I saw the darkness pierced by many pin pricks of light, studding the hillside at intervals and indicating the settlements.

Drums and gongs beat out the solitude, and there was revelry in progress around one of those pin-head lights I could see in the distance.

Across the valley Pedong slept, above the hill Ari slept, and only I and the music appeared to be awake on that evening.

CHAPTER XV

KALIMPONG.

A few miles below Rhenok we entered British Bhutan and left Sikhim a thing of the past behind us. There was no frontier guard at the river, and the Sirdar, who was familiar with the ways of these outpost men, was not surprised but sought them out in the bazaar at Pedong, where they were reclining in a tea shop.

To one who has traversed stony tracks and steep inclines and narrow roads for days together in Sikhim, the entry of British territory is a delight not to be surpassed, so far at least as physical conditions are concerned ; though, it must be conceded that a good deal of what constitutes beauty of scenery is left with the disabilities behind one.

The ascent to Pedong is not unpleasing and the fact that it is shaded for the most part contributes in no small measure to this happy result. The road is wide, much wider than the roads in Sikhim, and the gradient is of the mildest except at the bends when it is a trifle more tedious than usual. The vista before one is like that of a country lane, with hedges and flowers on each side and aerial garlands of spiders' webs overhead, embellished with dangling spiders of the rugged, hairy variety, glistening with dew in the sunshine. The flowers are of many kinds, sizes and colours, from white balls like cotton wool to the poisonous white-bell of Sikhim ; and butterflies, pretty splashes of colour like chips from an artist's palette, dance about them and amidst them and flutter a joyful welcome to the passers.

Pedong is quite a large place compared with some of the calls we had been used to. It even boasts a Catholic father, and a European tea planter (retired) who has built himself a pretty mansion by the parade ground, where the boys of the Kalimpong Home School were camped at the time of our arrival. The bazaar tails off below the bungalow, with its chattering lines of stalls and traders' dwellings.

Our halt at Pedong was a brief one—only long enough to breakfast on sandwiches and a lemon squash; and we continued our journey to Kalimpong.

We passed first an elderly couple just setting out for the Northern passes. Their luggage bore labels of Bombay and elsewhere, and they had apparently come a long way to undertake a still longer journey. *Mais il vaut la peine*, as the French say; and I feel sure the old couple would agree heartily. My Sirdar soon found out all about them down to the number of buttons on the shirt front of the gentleman. A couple of horses were being led by *syces* behind, and the tourists slouched forward with the aid of high poles.

About half way to Kalimpong we came upon a Gompa which had a clustering monastic settlement around it, as most Gompas do. The number of lamas in residence here was not large, but the curious thing about it was that I found three nuns attached to the monastery—three very old women whose ages must have been anything from 90 to 190, if the number of wrinkles they screwed up at us are of any account in the calculation. One was very tall and stately and reminded me somewhat of the mother of Cardinal Wolsley, though why I cannot tell, for I have never seen a picture of that lady and don't even remember reading of her. Perhaps it was the cardinal-like cap this nun wore. Her companions were: one a very old and doubled-up dame; the other rather insignificant and retiring. The tall woman did most of the talking, all of which the little doubled body made it a point of echoing.

The conversation was very patchy, well padded out with fragments of the "Lord's Prayer" as the Tibetans know it.

"Who are these women?" I asked the Sirdar.

"*Anis*," he replied, respectfully bowing before them.

"Yes," said the tall woman, "we are—*om mani padme hom*!—Anis—*om mani padme hom*! *om mani padmi hom*!" and the beads glided forward ever so imperceptibly and silently. The little doubled-up figure repeated the statement with a more emphasised lisp of senility and circled the chain of beads, muttering similar incantations.

The lamas were all away at the bazaar, doing the week's marketing, while the three old women spent the evening of their lives preparing that the next dawn may be under happier conditions. When a man or woman amongst Tibetans is too old for work the thoughts invariably turn to prayer. Utility in life is apparently over, and the Lord has granted extra days for penance; and these are spent accordingly.

The road onward to Kalimpong is wide and level though marred with ruts at intervals. These ruts grow more frequent nearer to Kalimpong, and are perhaps most disturbing after the little village of Algarah which was holding its market day as we passed through. This place is almost on the bend of the hill on the same side as is Kalimpong. A few miles further is one of the first houses in Kalimpong—the mansion of the Raja Dorje, the Prime Minister of Bhutan, a picturesque residence, sacred as a refuge of the Dalai Lama at the time of his flight before the Chinese.

I called to inspect the building and the Kumari, who is sister to the Maharaja of Sikhim, extended to me the greatest hospitality. She is no more than about 18 or 19 years of age; talks English fluently and is as polished in her manners as anyone can be. She took me to see the family chapel—the cleanest "gompa" I have set my eyes on—alongside which is the room in which the Dalai Lama had slept—the bed and

The Maharajah of Sikhim.

(Photo by Bourne & Shepherd.)

other articles, all preserved as His Holiness had left them. Holy water stood in cups on all sides and the place seemed draped in saffron. A golden statue of the Dalai Lama squatted Buddha fashion in a little niche at one end of the small room. This, I was told, had been sent the Raja in recognition of his services to His Holiness. A special lama is employed for the care of this chamber, and it has already become a shrine amongst Tibetans.

The church bells in Kalimpong rang out their *ding-dongs* and spruce and tidy old dames and dainty women walked prayer book in hand with measured tread to the little church in the heart of the station. And there passed them by on a perspiring pony, a tired traveller from a tour in Sikhim, with a queer little Sirdar on a brown horse, beside him. The Sirdar danced his little eyes from one side of the road to the other, recognising now one acquaintance now another, while the *gamins* of the bazaar howled in their delight, though the cause for their delight—as it never is—was not manifest.

Kalimpong is a pretty settlement with pretty little houses that resemble those in Darjeeling. There is sufficient unoccupied land around to assure it a big future, but the station has no lights in the streets at night time; nor any electricity whatsoever. The result is that visiting after dark has to be carried out with the aid of an escort of runners with lanterns, while a rickshaw would be in danger of destruction by virtue of the deep ruts even in broad daylight. Kalimpong, moreover, has mosquitoes that are a veritable pest during the hours of slumber. And my memories of but one night's attempt at repose in that station are sufficient to make me far from anxious to re-visit the place.

At the bungalow, the first things that greeted my eyes were the forms of two Huns in pyjamas, who chased butterflies in and out of my bedroom. There was no mistaking

they were Huns. It was obvious from the manner of growth of their moustaches, the increment of flesh on particular parts of the anatomy of one, and the quaint tones of language that issued from both. Swedes, it is true, talk a species of German ; but it was easy to see these were not Swedes.

The situation that faced me was not easy of solution. How should I plan my campaign for their capture, supposing, that is to say, they were escaped prisoners. I could not imagine how the Huns had got here.

"Barong !" fawned the leaner of the two specimens.

Aha ! a real live Baron !

"Barong, aber das iss nat zho !"

"Oh yah !" said the Baron indifferently and ambled his rotund gait after a flitting butterfly.

On one of their traverses through my bedroom it suddenly occurred to them that the room was occupied and bowing their salutations they departed.

I walked quietly to the door and listened. The enemy merely went on with the hunt for butterflies.

At dinner later that evening in a common dining room the Huns told me their story.

"We are Huns !" they said unabashedly.

"Und 'e his a Barong !" said the lean body pointing respectfully to the bulkier figure.

"Yes," went on the lean man, "a Barong von Burma, where he great plantion haf got—"

"Haf *had*," corrected the Baron.

"——haf had. Von the Shan States. You wis the Shan States ? Und now it all confiscate haf been."

"Yes, yes," said the Baron, "that is an old story."

They were interned, they told me, at Takda.

"And you haven't escaped ?" I asked dubiously.

"Nein, nein," they chorussed. "Only we leaf haf got—leaf

for butterfly hunt machen. Up to here; up to there. But not in Sikhim."

"Oh! I see!"

"You zee. Und why we not go to Sikhim? We no more trouble can machen."

I told them they had made quite enough trouble already, and perhaps it were best if the authorities were careful. Besides they ought to be greatly pleased that they had any liberties allowed them at all.

The Baron was rather bitter in his references to Britain, and slapped his bald head frequently when he reflected on the plight of Germany. The other man, was less malignant, and said as a mark of the utmost concession that he wouldn't mind becoming a British subject. "The Barong" he added "his beautiful castle haf had bomb-bombed machen. Und he not haf forgiven."

"Bombed?"

"Yes, by you."

"Your fat, bully—what you call—aeroplangs" said the Baron

"Yah, yah," echoed his companion mildly.

The non Baron, I learnt, had been a pioneer in Matabele-land where he had fought under Captain O' Hara for the British against the Matabeles. At the outbreak of war between us and Germany, his fatherland had pressed him into service in his old age—he was over 50—and he found himself against his old chief, by that time Major O' Hara.

"In fair fight I a prisoner taken haf been," and thus eventually he found himself at Takda, where he met the Baron.

At Kalimpong I met again the ladies I had seen at Gantok; they had been making their way back leisurely.

From Kalimpong to the Tista bridge was one of the worst sections of road imaginable—too long by the cart road and

almost unwalkable—leave alone rideable—by the short cut. From the bridge I took my way back *via* Pashoke, for the aternative road was still closed as it had been when I started.

My pony, who had already sensed the air of Darjeeling, covered ground more rapidly than he had done before on that journey, and I was back in Darjeeling by tea time.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STORY WITHIN A STORY.

This is the story the Sirdar told me at Pashoke :—

There was a Raja once, a very spiritual man, whose powers were far above the worldly. He had acquired the art of transmitting his soul into dead things, and making them act and move as if they lived.

One day while out hunting with his Vizier, the Raja happened to betray before his man that he possessed these powers. The two were resting at the time under a mango tree and the smell of the luscious fruit filled the Raja's heart with longing to partake of it. He called upon his Vizier to climb up and pluck the fruit.

"Excuse me," pleaded the Vizier meekly. "But I cannot climb ; I may fall down and then I shall die."

The Raja looked around, noticed the carcase of a monkey that had been dead many days, transmitted his soul into that form, and himself fell lifeless at the feet of his Vizier.

The Vizier started with alarm. The Rajah dead. And a monkey plucking fruit for the Vizier.

When a sufficient number of mangoes had been gathered, the monkey collapsed into a corner and the Raja sat up and enjoyed his repast. This set the Vizier wondering greatly ; nor for many days could he forget about it.

Now the Raja was unmarried and it happened that whilst they were returning from their hunt to the palace, the Raja and Vizier saw bands of liveried men and elephants and

horses pass in endless succession. It appeared to them as if some potentate was on a call in all his panoply.

On enquiring of retainers they learnt that the Raja of a State adjacent had placed a wager on the hand of his daughter and had invited the ruling princes throughout the length and breadth of India to compete for her favour.

"He who makes her talk, will win her. He who does not must die. With her goes half my kingdom. With death comes the confiscation of thine."

This was the mandate of the neighbouring Raja, and many a prince had tried and suffered for the hand of the daughter. The limit set was three days and a committee sat to hear the voice of the girl if she did speak. But nothing could lure her. Mute she sat and listened boredly, and Raja after Raja paid the extreme penalty, while the father of the girl added largely to his possessions.

The Raja from the hunt was seized with enthusiasm to join in the contest, and set out immediately with his Vizier for the neighbouring kingdom. No panoply his ; merely the one attendant.

The Vizier had some misgivings as to the possible fate of the Raja in a strange kingdom, and beseeched His Highness to reveal to him his secret arts of soul transmission so that he too may, should they be in difficulties, be able to extricate himself from them, as the Raja would most assuredly be able to do for his own person.

The committee assembled, the young princess sighed at the prospect of another day of boredom, and the Raja from the hunt began his efforts to draw a word from the lady. The policy he adopted was to tell a story, so that he may interest her out of herself and make her speak despite her purpose to remain silent.

He began then in this manner :

THE RAJA'S STORY.

There was a Raja once, with a wife he loved most dearly. She was dearer to him than the apple of his eye and he wondered how dear he was to her. So one day he asked her.

She said : "Oh ; true love consists of such deep feeling, that the heart of the one who loves ceases to beat the instant the loved one dies."

The Raja smiled, as he well might, and pondered as to how he could put so severe a test into practise.

He accordingly set out with his vizier for the forest, killed a lamb, sprinkled its gore upon his long outer garment, and sent the soiled garment back by his vizier as evidence of his own murder. The story the vizier told the Rani was that the Raja had been devoured by a tiger, and instantly the Rani departed this existence. When the Raja returned it was to a dead queen,—the result of his zeal for some tangible evidence of her love for him.

He was naturally very disquieted, refused to part with his queen's body, and when after much coaxing, he found it was impossible to bring her round to life, he carried her on his back into the jungles, with the tears coursing down his two cheeks.

There came to him then Krishna in the form of a *jogi*.

"Why carry you this dead form hither and thither, man ?" asked Krishna.

"This was my wife," replied the Raja, "and I am loth to part with her."

"You have," continued Krishna, "forty more years before you in your own existence. Would you share these with your dead queen ?"

"Gladly," replied the Raja.

"Very well then," went on Krishna, "I will restore her to life and you shall each live twenty years and quit this life together."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," bowed the Raja, "I shall thank you while life is with me."

The jogi took the Raja's hand and pricked a finger, he pricked too a finger of the dead Rani, and placed these together so as to allow the blood to course freely from the Raja's form into the Rani's. In a few moments the Rani lived. The jogi vanished as the Raja turned to thank him, and there remained nothing but the Raja, the Rani and the Raja's faithful dog, which had followed him into the forest and which until that moment he had failed to notice.

The Raja led his Rani to the edge of a river, and there they sat and rested. The Raja was very fatigued and was soon in the land of slumber.

His queen, on the other hand, having just commenced a fresh existence, was far from sleepy, and sat by his side idly.

Now this was in the days when traffic coursed along the rivers, and there passed by the couple a rich merchant with cloth of gold and a goodly display of ware and jewels, and the heart of the queen was moved towards them.

The merchant beckoned to the lady, "Come with me," he said, "and I will give you all these. Come with me. The Raja has not such wealth. Come with me and be happy."

And the queen went, and left the Raja sleeping by the riverside.

The dog ran along the bank following the boat closely and when he had marked the house of the merchant, returned to the Raja and licking his face awoke him.

The Raja arose and followed the dog. He was, of course, exceedingly grieved at the disappearance of the Rani.

The merchant swore he had seen nothing of the Rani, and promised the Raja, he would aid him in finding her. He gave the Raja food and a room to rest in and whilst the Raja was resting seized him and cast him upright into a ditch, which was dug within an enclosure. We then filled the ditch

in with mud up to the chin of the Raja. The Raja's hands had been strapped to his sides so that he could just see but do nothing.

In this position his faithful dog found him. Scraping its way from beneath the door of the enclosure to the side of his master, the dog pawed out all the mud around the Raja and released him from his confinement.

All this took many hours and it was the dead of night when the Raja found himself free again. The merchant and the Rani were asleep at the moment and the Raja strode boldly into the room and awoke them.

A conflict ensued in which the merchant was worsted. The Raja severed his head from his body and gripping the Rani by the wrist led her away with him. The Rani on an excuse went back again, took hold of the severed head of the merchant as it dripped with blood, and held it in her hands behind her. The trickling blood she hoped would leave a red trail and attract the attention of others so that the Raja might be punished. For she loved the merchant and was sad at his murder.

But the knowing dog followed behind and licked up each drop of blood as it fell, so that after many yards of walking there was not a vestige of a trail behind them. The Rani looked back and was wrath, and complained to the Raja that the dog had bitten her. She put some of the blood on her ankle, and the Raja seeing it drew his sword and sliced the dog into two parts.

The journey was then continued and a red trail was visible from the dead dog to the moving figures of the Raja and Rani.

Arrived at a village, the couple were stopped by the people and questioned. The Rani exposed the head of her murdered lover, accused the Raja, and had him arrested. The Raja appealed to the heart and the reasons of the villagers and told them his story.

The villagers were greatly moved. They said in chorus that the Rani was culpable, accompanied the Raja to the spot where the dead dog lay, and carried its severed parts into the village. The Raja then prayed to Krishna, and performed the feat he had seen the *jogi* perform. The dog's fore paw was placed upon a pricked finger of the Rani. The Rani died and the dog revived.

The story had ended.

The princess as she listened to the tale under the observation of a committee, exclaimed with emotion, "What a disgraceful woman !"

There was instantly great excitement in the chamber. The Raja who told the story had won. The princess was his, and with her, half her father's kingdom.

The honeymoon party, comprising Raja, Vizier, the princess (now Rani) and the princess's cortege set out for the Raja's kingdom. *En route* was passed the mango grove in which the Vizier had seen his master perform the miraculous feat of soul transmission. Struck with a happy idea he suggested to the Raja that he again pluck the fruit from the tree top, this time for the Rani, and incidentally show her some of his divine powers. The carcase of the monkey still lay there, and the Raja transferred his life into its body.

The Vizier lost no time in making the most of the situation. In an instant he himself entered the Raja's body, for he had been taught the powers by the Raja, and moved, talked and acted like the Raja, while the Raja was left on the tree like a monkey. The Raja had the option of entering the body of the Vizier which lay lifeless beside the party, but he had no desire to serve his own man.

The Vizier took the princess home, and the Raja swung from the branches. He ultimately came upon a dead parrot and discarded the monkey form for that of the parrot. As a

parrot he flew townwards, perched outside the house of a trader, and called unto him to house him.

"If you keep me," said the bird, "I shall bring you good fortune."

The trader being a believer in omens, took in the bird and fed it. Thenceforth the bird conducted the sales in the shop and the customers marvelled at the intelligence of the creature. The house of the trader became a wonder in the country and people came from far and near to hear the bird, and incidentally brought custom to its owner.

The fame of the bird spread even to the palace and the Rani asked her supposed husband, the Vizier, to buy her the bird. The trader was a resident in that State and it was with great grief that he heard the royal mandate. But the bird consoled him, demanded of the Raja a handsome price for its own purchase, and was duly installed into the Rani's household. The bird became the chief companion of the Rańi, and told her tales to while away the dreary hours when the Raja was a-hunting.

On one of these absences of the Raja the bird told the Rani its own story, bringing in the affair of the princess and of his wooing and winning. The Rani recognised the incidents of the narrative, listened with wonder, and when the bird went on to tell her of what took place in the mango grove, she vowed that she would revenge herself on the supposed Raja.

The bird cautioned her with moderation. "Remember," it said, "I have to enter that body. Do not harm him. Poison a goat, tell the Raja you would like to have it alive once more —even to see it frisk for but a few minutes—as it was your favourite, and ask him if he knows of any means of making it do so."

On the Vizier's return the plan was carried out by the Rani. The Vizier fell victim to her request, pranced about as

a goat for a few moments, and when he turned to resume his body found the Raja and Rani in each other's arms.

THE END.