

Society and for the benefit of the countries to which they are giving their services, and our part may be both to squeeze a hard-pressed Treasury, and seek other ways to provide the funds for which those explorations will call.

It only remains for me, on your behalf, to thank our lecturer for his paper and Mr. Codrington for his valuable observations.

THE EXCLUDED AREAS OF ASSAM

SIR ROBERT REID, K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E.

Evening Meeting of the Society, 7 February 1944

THE title "Excluded Areas" which has been given to this paper is, I need hardly say, indicative of nothing forbidden or mysterious, but is a purely official phrase taken from the Indian Constitution Act of 1935. It is the lineal descendant of the older phrase "Backward Tracts," and means that the areas enumerated as such in the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order 1936 are excluded from the operation of the said Act. They are directly administered by the Governor, and the elected Ministry have no jurisdiction over them. Finance however and staff have to be found by the province as a whole.

A feature of the Excluded Areas of Assam which differentiates them from Excluded Areas elsewhere in India, is that they form a block, irregular in shape if you like, and far from compact, but a continuous block, on the borders of and within Assam itself. In other parts of India Excluded Areas are in comparatively small packets, islands in "included" areas, and therefore difficult to treat on special lines. The map explains my point, I think, as clearly as need be. Along the northern boundary of the province we have Balipara Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract: along the eastern boundary we have Tirap Frontier Tract,¹ the Naga Hills District, Manipur State, and the Lushai Hills. These, with the exception of Manipur, which of course is an Indian State under a ruling chief and therefore outside the Constitution altogether, are all Excluded Areas. Then, as a sort of projection from Manipur State and the Naga Hills District across to the western boundary of the Province, we have, first, one more Excluded Area, the North Cachar Sub-Division of the Cachar District, and then three Partially Excluded Areas, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills in a continuous line; and, thirdly, the Mikir Hills adjoining the northern corner of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

This term "Partially Excluded" is also a legislative expression, invented for the purposes of the 1935 Act, and means that they have elected representatives in the Legislature, that the Ministry is primarily responsible for the administration, but that the Governor is charged with a special responsibility for their peace and good government, a responsibility which it is far from easy to discharge to one's own satisfaction.

¹ Tirap Frontier Tract was made a separate district as recently as 1942, therefore it has not been possible to show it on the sketch-map.

These areas which I have enumerated differ markedly among themselves, but they have this one characteristic in common, that neither racially, historically, culturally, nor linguistically have they any affinity with the people of the plains, or with the peoples of India proper. It is only by an historical accident and as a natural administrative convenience that they have been tacked on to an Indian province.

I shall attempt to describe briefly the peoples who inhabit these areas. Beginning with Balipara Frontier Tract, we have here a narrow strip of administered country and behind it an immense hinterland running right up to the borders of Tibet. As you get farther north Tibetan influence increases, and, in fact, mainly on geographical grounds, the villages to the north all have their affinities in that direction. Away to the north-west lies Towang, which has figured considerably in frontier discussions of recent years, and will, I think, figure more in the future. The international boundary of Assam and Tibet has never been defined, but in 1914 a tentative agreement was reached which was embodied in a line on the map—our map—called the McMahon Line. Towang fell on the Indian side of this line. But China has always claimed to have a large say in the doings of Tibet; China never ratified the agreement, the war of 1914-18 intervened, the 1914 Convention was never published, and the fact is that the McMahon Line was forgotten until a few years ago. That is why I observed that Towang might well crop up again in the future. As a matter of interest I may mention that the Towang monastery, which is in fact Towang, is an offshoot of the great Drepung monastery of Lhasa and there is a 12,000-foot pass between Balipara and it. But there are considerations too on the other side, and Tibet agreed to the McMahon Line in 1914.

The principal tribes in this direction are Dufflas, Akas, and Miris, all very primitive peoples, who respond hardly at all to the influences of civilization. The Political Officer, a Police officer of the Assam cadre, spends the bulk of his time touring in the wild mountainous country settling disputes, generally by persuasion, sometimes by force, among the tribes. One of the most frequent causes of quarrels, leading to bloodshed and the holding of people to ransom, is an accusation of "carrying sickness." A party belonging to Village A will pass through Village B on, say, its way home from a visit to the plains. Subsequently in Village B there is an outbreak of illness. Village A is accused of introducing the sickness, and a demand is made for compensation, followed as often as not by attack, taking of captives and holding them to ransom. Feuds arising in this way often go on for generations and may result in terrible oppression of the weaker villages.

Historically there is little to relate about our dealings with this group of hill tribes. There were some raids on British territory in the nineteenth century, but there was very little difficulty in suppressing such tendencies and in fact accounts of the early expeditions go to show that the forces we took up were out of all proportion to the nature of the task. Profound peace has reigned there for many years so far as any menace to our border is concerned. The only reminder in fact that the peace to our borders here was ever disturbed lies in the annual payments of *posa* or subsidy to certain persons or tribes which we still make in fulfilment of ancient treaties. The photograph

facing p. 20 was taken at Udalguri in 1942 when posa was being paid to the Jongpens of Kalaktang.

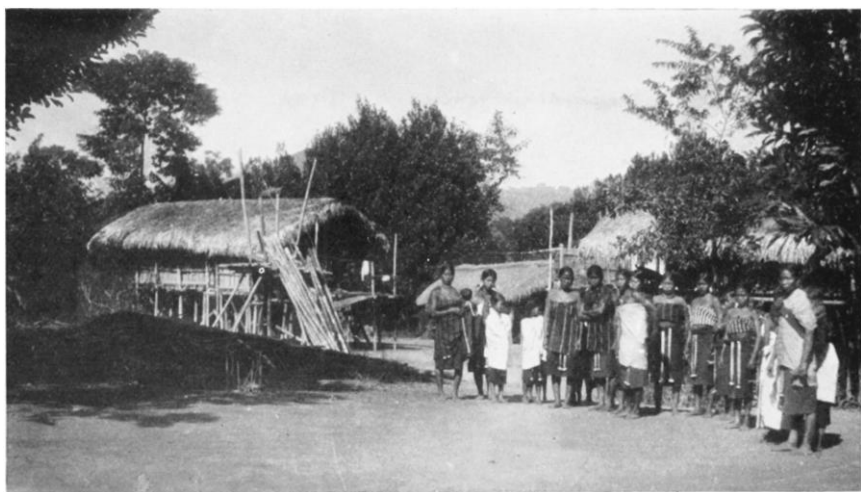
Passing farther to the east and to the left bank of the Subansiri we come to the very large area known as Sadiya Frontier Tract, inhabited in the west by the Abors and Miris, in the east by the Mishmis, Khamtis, and Singhphos. The hinterland of this area runs up to the borders of Tibet, entailing again contact, direct or indirect, with China. On the eastern edge of the tract, in Mishmi country, is the road to Rima, the trade route to Tibet. This was the route which was followed by the French missionaries Krick and Boury in 1854, by Needham in 1885, and by Williamson in 1908. Bailey came down it from Batang in 1911 and Dundas took the Lohit valley column up it in 1911-12. I may mention that about then we were very perturbed at what appeared to be Chinese penetration. In more recent times this is the route by which the British Museum Expedition of 1933-34, which included Kingdon Ward and Kaulback, went up into Tibet.

The Mishmis are a shy, inoffensive, and rather suspicious race, very dirty, preferring to live in their hamlets on the high hills and not fond of coming down to the plains. The Khamtis are of the same stock as the Thais of Thailand or Siam, and they and the Singhphos are small communities which have given no trouble.

Though the Abors, unlike the Nagas, enjoy the great advantage of a single language, they have very definite divisions among themselves. The four great clans are the Padam, the Pasi, the Galong, and the Minyong. The principal Pasi and Minyong villages are around the basin of the Tsangpo or Dihang, as the Brahmaputra is there called, along the line where that river takes its great southern bend through the Himalaya and into Assam. The Padam villages lie farther to the east between the Dihang and the Dibang. The Abors are short and sturdy with broad Mongolian features: not very demonstrative but tremendous talkers among themselves. Unending discussions precede any combined action. They have no written language and have been little touched by civilization. Unlike other hill tribes, they have given us in the past little trouble by way of raiding the plains, mainly for geographical reasons, and on our side it is only since 1911, when the murder of Mr. Williamson, the Political Officer, and Dr. Gregorson, a tea-estate doctor, led to the Abor Expedition of 1912, that we have penetrated the Abor country to any considerable extent. The expedition entailed no fighting worth mentioning, but the result was a great opening up of the country by means of roads, and an important reorganization of our administration, including the setting up of two new Frontier areas which are known now by the titles of Sadiya and Balipara Frontier Tracts. There has been no trouble with the Abors since.

In the present war they have expressed and felt great loyalty to the British, and in 1942 they furnished a Labour Corps of two thousand men who did excellent work in carrying supplies for and rescuing the Indian refugees on their way out of Burma. One was awarded the George Medal.

The present system of administration centres round the Political Officer stationed at Sadiya with one, sometimes two, assistants at Headquarters, and an outlying Assistant Political Officer stationed at Pasighat on the banks of



Mikir village



Khasi women



The Kelintang Jongpens



Lushai chiefs



Abor headman



Abor tribesman

the Dihang in the heart of the Abor country. The Political Officer's time is more taken up with long expeditions into the hinterland than with local administration. Work of course is very largely personal and the personal influence in the past of such men as Needham from 1882 to 1905, Dundas from 1911 to 1920, and Godfrey the present Political Officer, to mention only a few, has been very great. I may add that the Abor still believes that Queen Victoria is on the throne, and two years ago, when at Godfrey's advice I addressed the tribesmen regarding certain misdeeds they had committed, I couched my orders as if coming from Her late Majesty.

Next, and now trending southwards, we come to Tirap Frontier Tract, inhabited mainly by Nagas of rather a degraded, backward type, known as the Rangpangs. This area was cut out of Sadiya Frontier Tract in 1942, and set up as a separate district. This was an administrative improvement which had long been called for, but the technical difficulties were great, and in peacetime would have entailed protracted correspondence. The war however and the urgent necessity of having a Political Officer on the spot with full powers resolved all that, and since 1942 it has been a separate unit under a Political Officer drawn from the Indian Police. It was through this tract that those refugees from Burma who took the Hukawng valley route staggered on the last stages of their dolorous journey. It had no roads until recently, but now, according to the newspaper reports, a road fit for military traffic is being constructed. It would be interesting to know the details, but that we can scarcely expect just now. The search for routes in this direction into Northern Burma dates from long before the present war. Needham travelled twice in that direction, on one occasion in 1892 joining hands with a Burma column at Maingkwan, a name well known fifty years later to many weary and hungry refugees. It was also along this line that a railway survey was made in 1920 and 1921. It is a very sparsely populated, mountainous, and wet country; and supplies are unobtainable on any large or even moderate scale.

And then we come to the abode proper of those picturesque people the Nagas, the Naga Hills District, an area of some 4000 square miles with a great belt of unadministered Naga country lying between it and the Patkai range, the natural boundary between Assam and Burma. The term Naga is, if inaccurate, decidedly convenient, for they themselves have no general name to describe themselves and their numerous clans and sub-divisions. Nor is there any common language, but each tribe, be it Angami, Lhota, Ao, Chang, or a dozen others too numerous to mention, has its own peculiar tongue. This is a circumstance of course which adds enormously to the difficulties of administration, and in fact the only common medium is Assamese. Our officers, who know Assamese, work very largely through *dobashis*, or Assamese-speaking interpreters, drawn from the different tribes. The *dobashis* are very carefully selected and are a great deal more than mere interpreters. In fact we depend very largely on them for information as to what is going on, as well as for settling disputes and preventing trouble either within or without the border.

The Nagas are frank and independent by nature, of a cheerful and hospitable disposition, and the men who work there become devotedly attached to them. Our administration centres round the Deputy-Commissioner, who

has his headquarters at Kohima, and his assistant at the sub-divisional headquarters at Mokokchung, both nearly always British officers of the Indian Civil Service. The success of their administration depends entirely on their personality, and we have been fortunate, both in the past and the present, in the type of men who have served in these hills. McCabe made a name for himself in the latter part of the nineteenth century and has had even greater successors. I think, with all due respect to the great men of the past, that that is because latter-day administrators have perhaps imported more of sympathy and understanding into their attitude. It is curious for instance how often the expression "these savages" occurs in official correspondence of the Victorian era. We don't talk like that now, and rightly so. Of the moderns, men like Hutton, Mills, and Pawsey have all left their mark on these hills and their names are still household words in the villages. It is due to them that the hill tribes have stood the test of war, war on their doorstep, so successfully.

Historically, our early relations with the Nagas were unfriendly. We went into the country first as a measure of protection for our own people in the plains, beyond which in the early days our writ did not run, for the trans-border Nagas were constantly raiding the plains, and carrying off heads. And, once the process of penetrating the country on these lines had begun, it had to go on. Starting in 1832 with the protection of the peoples of the plains we went on inevitably to protecting the peoples of the hills, who had made submission to us and had thereby transferred the responsibility of defence from their own shoulders to those of Government. For, as Lord Cranbrook, the Secretary of State, said in 1878, "the continuance in the immediate proximity of settled districts of a system of internecine warfare conducted principally against women and children cannot be tolerated." I may add that it was in that year that Kohima, a name well known now to the British Army in Eastern India, became the headquarters of the district.

The American Baptist Mission has done excellent work in these hills for a number of years, both educational, medical, and in the way of general uplift. The rather iconoclastic zeal of the earlier missionaries who saw evil in anything that savoured of heathenism has in modern times given way, to the great advantage of all, to a more sensible policy which is prepared to preserve all that is good in old custom so long as it is not inconsistent with Christian teaching.

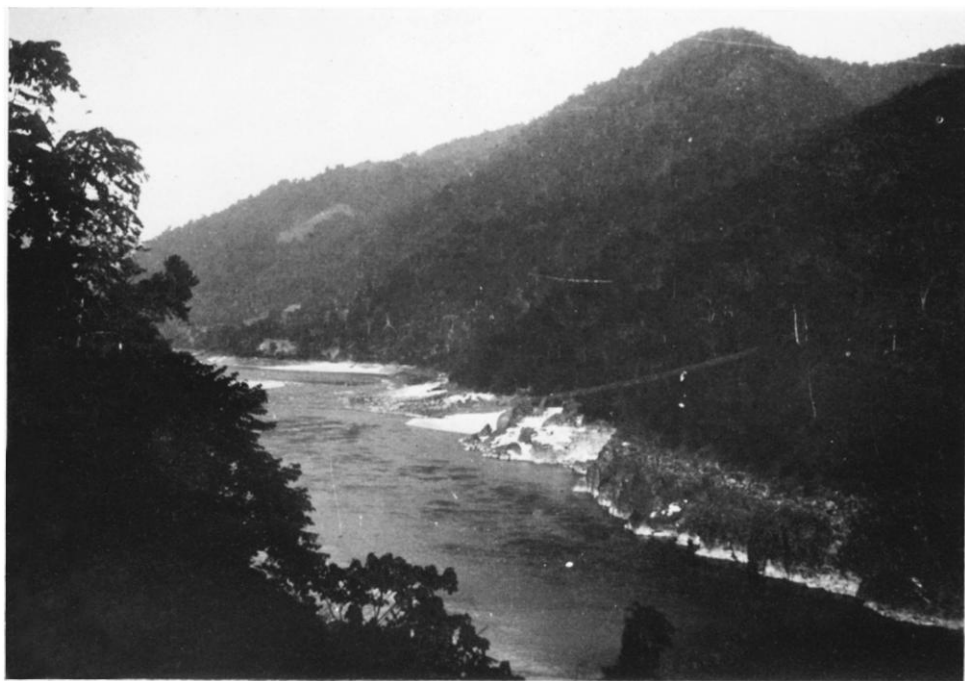
Educationally, the Nagas as a whole must be described as backward; yet there is a great demand among certain of them for higher education and the time will come when their demands for higher educational institutions in their own hills will have to be met. At present they have to seek it outside in the plains with results that are often far from desirable.

The Nagas have shown themselves thoroughly loyal in the war. At the very start they offered themselves for service in Labour Corps, but G.H.Q. did not find it possible to utilize them. Hostilities with Japan however brought the war to the Naga doorstep, especially that of the Angamis, who live on either side of the Manipur Road, and they furnished thousands of young men for road or transport work.

Next we come to Manipur State, a small Native State under its own ruler, the Maharaja. Manipur covers an area of about 8000 square miles, and has a



Pangin outpost, Assam Rifles, Abor country



Komli bridge, Dihang river



Dancers in a Naga village



Chingmak, a Naga chief



Mullem of Balek, Pasi Abor, and his family

population of rather over half a million. It consists of a small central plain inhabited by the Manipuris proper and a great circle of hills inhabited by hill people, Nagas, Kukis, and the like. Three-fifths of the population are concentrated in the small central plain.

The Manipuris are orthodox Hindus, and no killing of cattle for instance is allowed in the Manipur plain. Perhaps it would be safer to say *was*, for the war may have changed even that. They are not very advanced, educationally or politically, except for some members of the ruling family. The inhabitants of the hills are on much the same level as the more remote Naga clans.

Our relations with Manipur have, with one exception, been traditionally friendly, and in the past we interfered little with their doings. This does not I am afraid imply that their habits were altogether innocent. In fact, MacKenzie, in his classic work on the North East Frontier, stigmatizes the early history of Manipur as "barbarous in the extreme . . . marked . . . by internal wars of the most savage and revolting type in which sons murdered fathers and brothers murdered brothers without a single trait of heroism to relieve the dark scene of blood and treachery."

The exception to which I have referred was in 1891, when the Chief Commissioner of Assam and four other officers were murdered. That disturbance was very quickly suppressed, but it led to a very definite change in the character of our relations with the State. Though annexation, which was strongly advocated by the local officers, was not agreed to by the British Government, the new ruler, a small boy of six, was chosen from another and obscure branch of the house, and a *sanad* in stringent terms was drawn, and of course the new ruler was under close tutelage for many years. Control has remained pretty close ever since. Besides a Political Agent resident in the State, we also have a British officer as President of the Durbar, or council of administration, and one of his most important duties is to administer to the hill area on behalf of the Maharaja. As that area covers some seven-eighths of the State, it will be gathered that the ruler's powers are somewhat severely limited. But experience has shown this to be essential if the hill people are to get a fair deal and, conversely, trouble is to be averted.

The peaceful obscurity which Manipur enjoyed for the fifty years of the late Maharaja's reign was rudely disturbed by the war. Though the only road from India to Burma ran through this State, Manipur had very little contact indeed with the outer world before the war. Few Manipuris undertook the long 134-mile journey to the railway at Dimapur, and few strangers ever came in. Money was scarce, and nobody wanted it. Food, *i.e.* rice, was very cheap, probably the cheapest in India, and wages were very low. All that has changed since December 1941, when Japan entered the war. First, there was the evacuation of Burma, when about one quarter of the million Indians in Burma who had been settled came out through Manipur. Then General Alexander's retreating Army came down the same route in May 1942, and at the same time fresh troops and supplies were sent up to defend India against invasion. The result was a tremendous demand, far more than they could cope with, for all sorts of local supplies; prices soared, and there was more money in the State than had ever been dreamt of before, so much that they did not know what to do with it. The capital, Imphal, also had the experience of being one of the

few places in Assam which were bombed. This happened to it twice, and a great deal of damage was done, with a considerable number of deaths.

Then, running down to the southern tip of Assam are the Lushai Hills, with the Chin Hills district of Burma on their eastern border. As with the Nagas, our first contacts with the Lushais were unfriendly, because the Lushai of a hundred years ago had, like all hillmen, an inveterate habit of raiding the people of the plains. The British India districts of Cachar, Sylhet, Tippera, and Chittagong were the subject of his attentions and consequently there were numerous punitive expeditions between 1850 and 1890. The last to be undertaken on a large scale was the Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-90, in which some six thousand troops and police were engaged. The Lushai country was taken directly under our administration in 1890 and, except for certain disturbances in the early days, peace has reigned ever since. The administration, as in the Naga Hills, is in the hands of a British District Officer, with one assistant in charge of the sub-division of Lungleh in the south. As elsewhere, all depends on the personal influence of these officers. The name of Colonel Shakespear who was in these Hills for fourteen years, from 1891 to 1905, is still remembered, and of recent years Major McCall, 1932 to 1943, is a worthy successor.

The Lushais have been largely Christianized by the Welsh Calvinist Mission in the North and by the English Baptists in the South, and both Missions have done excellent work. The Welsh have a special affinity for the Lushais as the Lushais are as musical as they are. Next to the Khasis, whom I shall mention later, I should say that the Lushais were the most advanced of the Assam hill tribes. They have the elements of self-government, as it has always been our policy to foster the authority of the Chiefs over defined territorial limits. They are avid for education and have made great strides under the tuition of the missionaries. Substantial numbers leave the hills every year to pursue their higher studies in the schools and colleges of the plains. They have for long taken a great interest in the happenings of the outside world and display a wonderful knowledge of what is going on. Yet, while some have attained a comparatively high degree of education and culture, the bulk of them are still very backward in many ways. The former feel themselves in rather a dilemma just now. They do not want to be tacked on to a predominantly Indian polity, yet they do not want to be labelled for ever as backward. This is a natural and reasonable attitude and there is a remedy, as I shall try to show later. The war has come close to them, and it has had, and will have, great effects both for good and evil. It has tested their loyalty, and their loyalty has stood the test just as firmly as in 1914-18, and in much more difficult circumstances. Lushais have freely joined the Assam Regiment, the Indian Hospital Corps, the Assam Rifles, and, in the largest numbers, a local service Labour Corps, while Lushai girls, trained in the excellent Mission hospitals, have done nobly in the nursing service.

Military necessity has, I understand, brought to fruition a project which we, on the civil side, had long striven to get financed out of the Road Fund, and that is the construction of a motor road up from the plains to Aijal, the capital, a distance of about 100 miles which in my time was a seven-day march. This will greatly facilitate contact with the outside world.

Lastly there is the North Cachar sub-division of Cachar district, a portion of an "Included" area, *i.e.* the plains district of Cachar, which has been excluded. This means a certain anomaly in the administration as the Deputy-Commissioner of Cachar is subject to the Ministry in respect of half of his district and subject to the Governor alone in the other half. However it works well enough. This sub-division is inhabited by Nagas, Mikirs, Cacharis, and others, is very hilly, poorly provided with roads, and in general the people are pretty backward.

So much for the Excluded Areas. I venture however to mention the three Partially Excluded Areas as well in this lecture because they also are peopled by non-Indian inhabitants, have many characteristics in common with the people of the Excluded Areas, and also because in my own view the justification for differentiating them in treatment from the Excluded Areas is very small. These are the Mikir Hills, the Garo Hills, and the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, constituting roughly the central hill mass which separates the two valleys of which Assam in the main consists.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my address, the meaning of Partial Exclusion is that the administration is primarily the responsibility of the Cabinet, but the Governor has a special responsibility for their welfare and good government. Like all fully included districts they each return representatives to the Legislative Assembly, a privilege which, personally, I think the Mikirs and the Garos are not yet fitted to exercise. The case of the Khasis is more arguable.

The Khasis have among them extremes of development. At the top there are highly educated men and women; they have furnished both a man and a woman member of the Assam Cabinet. At the bottom there are many tribesmen at a very low level of civilization indeed. But in general the level of education is high, especially among the women, among whom the proportion of literacy, seventy-nine per thousand, is the highest in the province. The intelligent and enterprising Khasi girls have taken freely to the nursing profession. Their enterprise is no doubt due in great measure to the fact that the Khasi polity is a matriarchal one. They have been largely Christianized. The Welsh Mission is particularly strong there, having been in the district now for one hundred years. Shillong, the capital of Assam, lies in the Khasi Hills.

The Garos are a backward, slow-witted lot, with broad, rather flat features and strong if rather ungainly bodies. The American Baptists have done excellent work there but have made slow progress. The Garos furnished Labour Corps both in the last and the present war.

The Mikirs are even more backward, a quiet, inoffensive tribe who have never given any trouble. I am afraid they have been rather neglected just because they are so harmless and non-vocal.

I hope this attempt to explain what the Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas, and the pleasant, unsophisticated people who inhabit them look like, will furnish a background to what I have to say about their present and future political state. The two characteristics which they all share are their non-Indian origin and their backward state of development. It is for these reasons that in the past the various Reform measures, Morley-Minto, Montagu-Chelmsford, and then the Act of 1935, gave them special treatment.

If anyone wishes to pursue this interesting subject, I would commend for perusal the Memorandum prepared by the Government of Assam for the Indian Statutory Commission in 1928. I need not however for present purposes go back farther than the existing Constitution Act, under which we have six districts or parts of districts classed as Excluded and three as Partially Excluded.

In the first five years of the working of the Act, which coincided with my own experience in Assam, the Excluded Areas did not do so badly. As regards supply and staff, which had to come out of the common pool of a province ill-provided with both, I had no really serious difficulties. In fact as regards the former the Excluded Areas benefited from the extravagance of Ministers. The Act of 1935 gives the Cabinet full control over finance and the Governor has no power to interfere with their doings; and so when they formulated schemes, *e.g.* for education, to be financed out of non-existing revenues, I was able to claim and get a share for my Excluded Areas. All the same, this sharing of revenues and staff obviously contains the seeds of trouble and an intolerable position might well arise if you had, say, a Congress Government in power over a long period, and I could see the signs of trouble even with the well-disposed Ministries which I enjoyed. In any case though we went on well enough for the five years of my experience, the whole arrangement is makeshift and unsatisfactory, an unnatural alliance, one partner of which has to provide funds for the other out of a meagre purse and retain no control over the expenditure of those funds: and that without any such softening influences as ties of blood or affection would provide. For the Ministerial partner has no inborn love for or interest in the people of the hills, who are alien to him in blood and culture, and the cleavage which the Constitution establishes between the Excluded Areas and the rest of the province is not calculated to do other than intensify his feelings.

With the Partially Excluded Areas, the disadvantages were I think greater. To begin with, representation in the Legislative Assembly was an almost worthless privilege. The poor Mikir member knew hardly any English and never opened his mouth and merely attached himself where his support seemed most likely to be profitable to himself. The two Garos enjoyed no authority in the house, and commanded no respect for reasons which I need not elaborate. The Khasi M.L.A., a Church of England padre, was an able man but a lone voice, and I know he felt he could do little in that capacity for his people. Conversely, I found it extremely difficult to exercise the special responsibility to which I have referred. It was difficult to obtain information about what was going on without treading on the toes of responsible Ministers, and some indeed of them resented anything which could be construed as interference. In any case you can well imagine that it must always be difficult to find a really good case for interference, while, if you are to interfere, you must be on a good wicket. So that safeguard did not really amount to very much. The fact was, I am afraid, that the theory which underlay the assignment of these areas to Partially Excluded status was based on two fallacies, the fallacy that their inhabitants were only just not ready to take their place as full members of a democratic state, and the fallacy that they could return representatives to the Assembly who could voice and stand up for their

claims. The sooner the weakness of that theory is recognized and the results which flow from it corrected the better.

A new constitution, in which we may be sure British control will be enormously diminished, is promised for India as a whole, and it will be a question whether the Hill Tribes are to be included in it, or kept outside. We are responsible for the future welfare of a set of very loyal, primitive peoples who are habituated to look to us for protection and who will get it from no other source. They are not, by a hundred years, ready to take their place in a democratic constitution, or to compete with the sophisticated Indian politician for place and power, and personally I have no doubt whatever that to allow them in any way to be involved in Indian politics, and with no safeguards such as now exist, would spell disaster for them. It is up to us to see that they are given under our protection a period of respite, within which they will develop on their own lines and without outside interference. There is no doubt they will develop. It will be no case of stagnation as museum pieces or anthropological specimens. Education is there and is in great demand. Interest in the outside world is there and is growing. Contact with the outside world has been immensely widened by the war and will be more widened as time goes on, and the leaders of these peoples have no intention of being left in a state of savage contentment. They have already the germs of self-government in various forms in their own polity, and when they are ready, they will be the first to say so, but they are not ready yet.

Professor Coupland in Part III of that valuable report which has recently been published takes, I am glad to say, much the same view as I do as to what is the just way to treat these peoples, and links it with the defence of the North East Frontier, a point in which I most cordially agree. Here again he and I are only repeating in a slightly different form what the Government of Assam said to the Simon Commission in 1928. This is what it said: "In the interests both of the Backward Tracts and of the rest of the Province the present artificial union should be ended. The Backward Tracts should be excluded from the Province of Assam and be administered by the Governor in Council, as Agent for the Governor-General in Council, and at the cost of the Central revenues. If it be contended that the charge of these areas cannot reasonably be transferred from the provincial taxpayer to the general taxpayer of India, it may be stated in reply that the Naga Hills, Lushai Hills, and the Sadiya and Balipara Frontier Tracts are frontier districts occupied to protect India as well as the province from invasion and attack, and that, though for the moment the North East Frontier may not be a serious menace to the peace of the rest of India, there was a time not long ago when attention was directed to that frontier, and the time may soon come"—prophetic words these—"when that frontier will become no less, if not more, important for the defence of India than the North West Frontier, the administration of which is a charge on Central revenues."

The Constitution Act of 1935, which was the outcome of the discussions during which the extract I have quoted was drafted, did exclude these tracts in a sense, but only from the full privileges of representative government. There are two factors now which make the situation totally different from the one which was pictured in 1928 or even in 1935, when the present Act was

passed. One is that the political advance for India which we have now to contemplate will differ tremendously in degree, possibly in kind as well, from any measure of political change that has yet been invented for India, entailing, among other things, far less protection, or, shall we say, the abolition of protection, for the classes that need protection. The other factor is the proved military importance from the defence point of view of the North East Frontier, an importance which I for one do not believe will disappear when the last Japanese has been hunted back out of the territories he has invaded into his own islands. These two grounds alone appear to me, and to a good many other students of this subject, to point overwhelmingly in favour of some such arrangement as is outlined briefly in Part III of Professor Coupland's report, *i.e.* a civil administrative unit comprising the Hill Areas along the north and east frontiers of Assam and taking in as well the similar areas in Burma itself. I do not know what views are taken in Burma on the subject, but some such coalition does seem to make sense. In any case, supposing the defence argument does not appeal to G.H.Q. and supposing the proposal to join up with the Burma Hill districts comes to nothing, the hard fact remains that we have a serious responsibility for the future welfare of these people, and I have no manner of doubt that we shall be failing in our duty if we do not take this opportunity to ensure for the Excluded Areas that period of protection which is their right. Unless they are assured of such protection until they have achieved a substantial measure of political advance they will suffer a disaster which will be irreparable, for the opportunity will not recur.

DISCUSSION

Before the paper the PRESIDENT (The Rt. Hon. Sir GEORGE CLERK) said: Sir Robert Reid, our lecturer this evening, is a distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service who, after holding many important positions, was Governor of Assam from 1937 to 1942. His subject to-night is "The excluded areas of Assam," that is to say the areas inhabited by hill tribes on the borders who do not come under the ordinary machinery of government of the province but are the special and individual responsibility of the Governor. Lecturers in past years have, from time to time, described one part or another of the country inhabited by these almost unknown but very interesting people; the political problem of the Excluded Areas has never been described to us as a whole and it is one of very great importance. We therefore look forward with very great interest to hearing what Sir Robert Reid has to say.

Sir Robert Reid then read the paper printed above.

The PRESIDENT: We have had a most interesting paper and one which is really worth thinking over. If you think back to the map it showed that Manipur, which compared with the whole of Assam is quite a small part, is about the same size as Wales.

Sir ROBERT REID: Assam is 67,000 square miles.

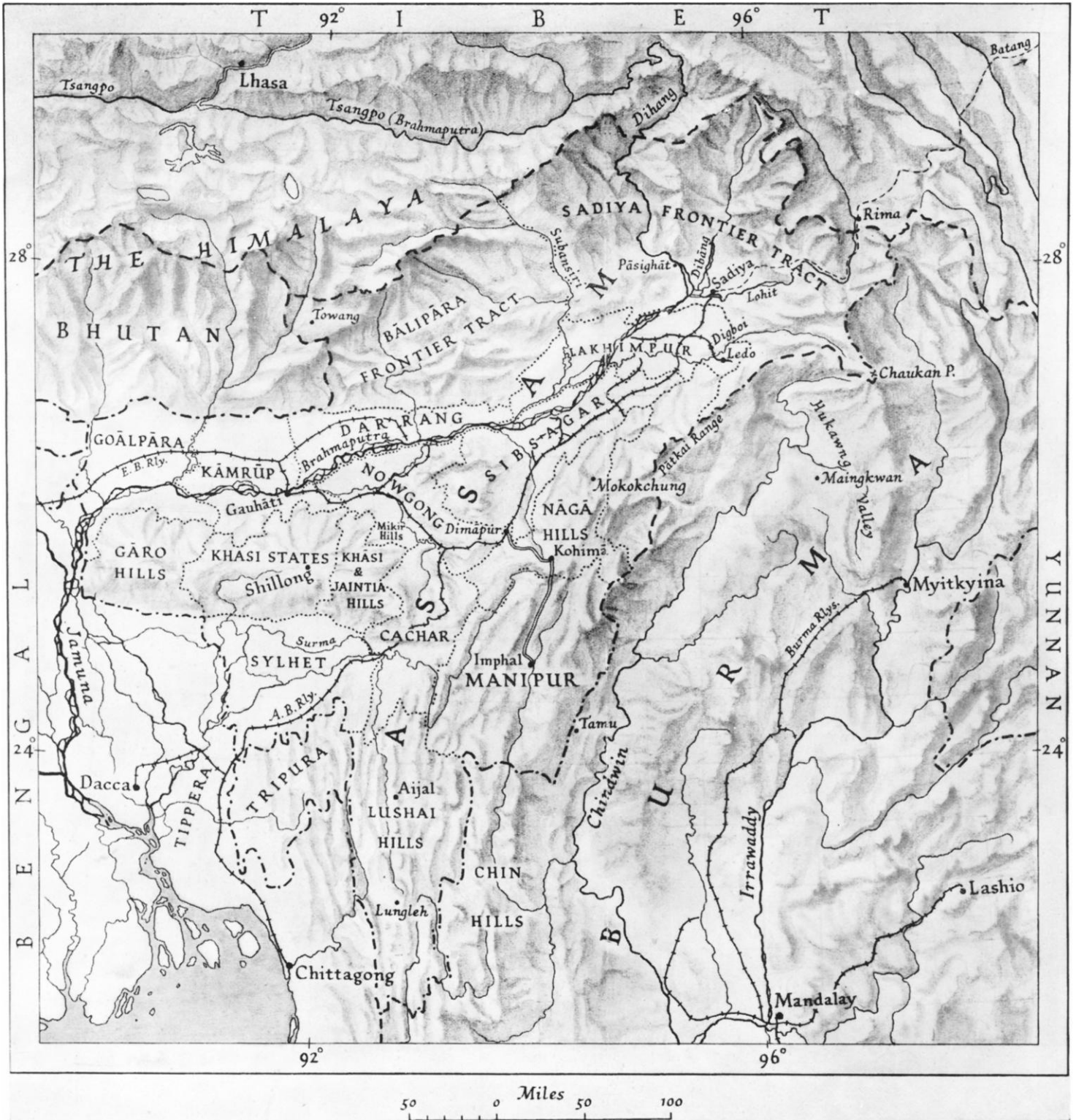
The President: It is a large area which, as we have gathered from the lecturer, was peaceably administered by a handful of British officers. That is where we are at our best, but our lecturer was right when he laid weight upon the fact that these people who a hundred years ago may have been head hunters and raiders, are now peaceable, quiet, and loyal subjects of the Raj. This is due to the work, the example, and the prestige of these officers; and if we let them

down, we shall have failed in a very great responsibility. I hope that when the time comes for a settlement of this vast Indian problem that the case of people such as these hill tribes will be borne in mind and our duty towards them will be remembered, and we shall make it possible for officers such as our lecturer to-night and those under him to lead them towards the period when they themselves will be able to take a share in the government of their own country.

The numbers in the tribes are comparatively few and insignificant, but they are on a frontier which will play as great a part in our future history as the North West Frontier has in the past. It is when we have administrators such as Sir Robert Reid, whose views, I hope, will be heard in any final settlement, that we hope that the tribes will remain trusting in our protection.

Quite apart from the political side of it, we have had a very interesting ethnological lecture. We have seen pictures of different peoples each with their separate characteristics. I was very much struck by the photographs of the Nagas who have such very distinctive aquiline features that they seemed to be something quite apart and different from the others.

I am sure you will all agree that we have had this evening a lecture for which we can be very grateful to Sir Robert Reid, and you will allow me to express, on your behalf, our very sincere thanks.



EXCLUDED AREAS OF ASSAM
Sir Robert Reid