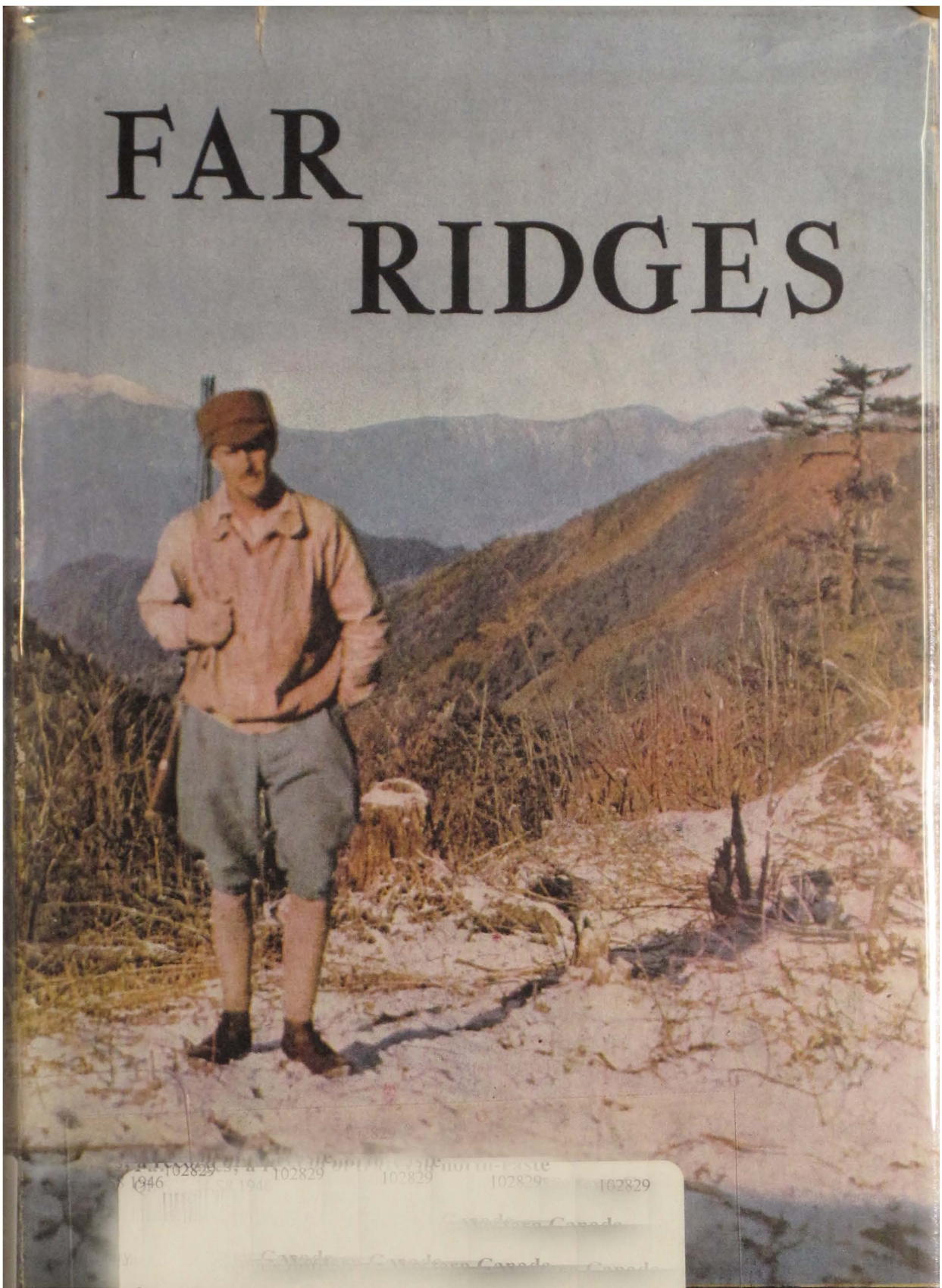
FAR RIDGES



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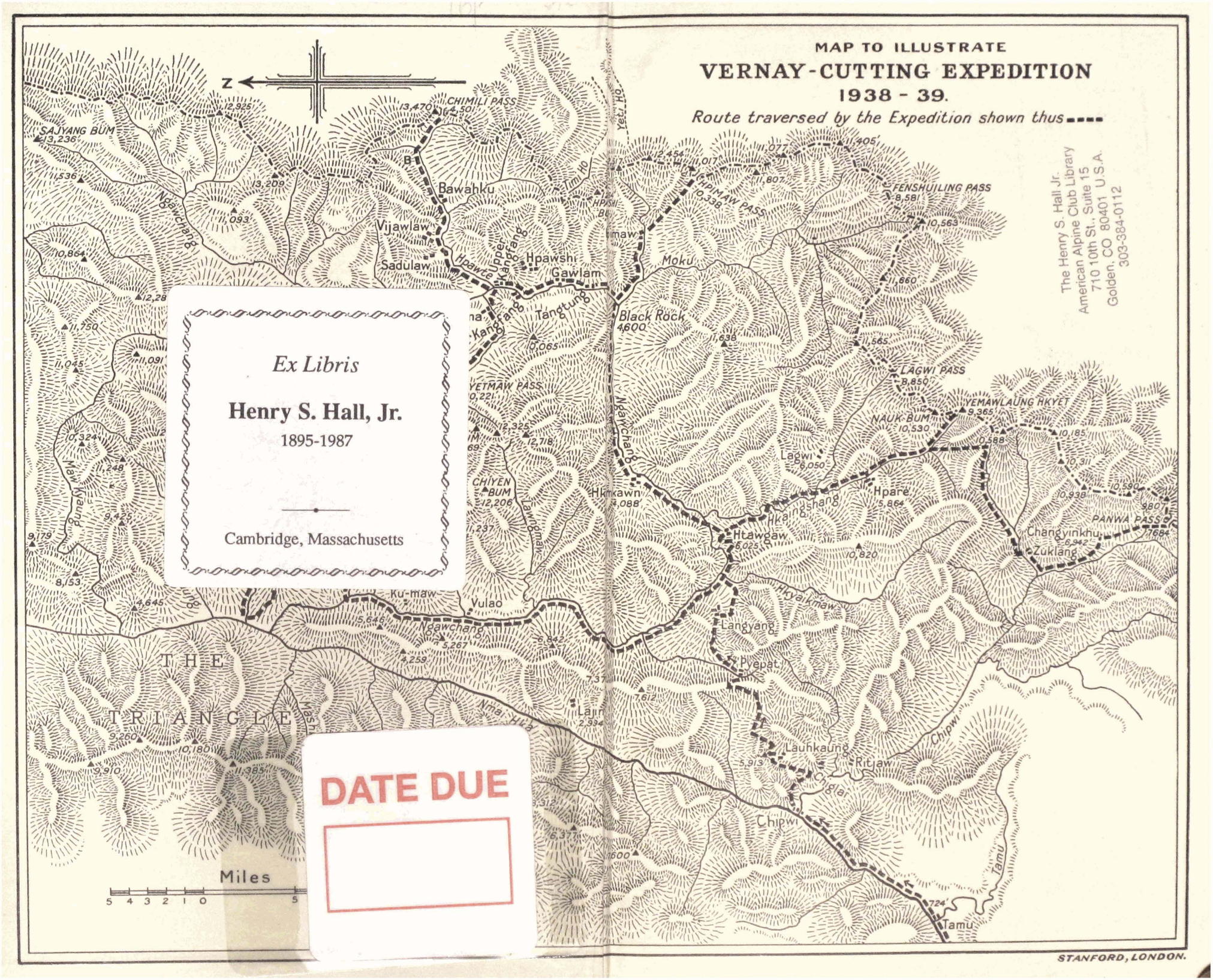
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FAR RIDGES

A RECORD OF TRAVEL
IN NORTH-EASTERN BURMA
1938-39

by

J. K. STANFORD

" To-day I know that there is nothing beyond the farthest of far ridges, but a signpost to unknown places: the end is in the means . . . "

EDWARD THOMAS

C. & J. TEMPLE LIMITED
LONDON

To Bill

WHO KNEW AND LOVED MYITKYINA

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

In the winter of 1938/39 I was lucky enough to accompany the Vernay-Cutting expedition which visited the Laukkaung subdivision of the Myitkyina district of Burma, to collect for the American Museum of Natural History.

This is only a very one-sided account of certain aspects of our journey. We penetrated no new country, though much of it was very little known. We made no startling discoveries, though we did confirm a good deal of what had previously been guesswork about the birds and beasts of this difficult region; and we did manage to fill in a number of gaps, some of which, but for this journey, might have remained unfilled for another hundred years. To Arthur Vernay and Suydam Cutting, for many and varied kindnesses, I should like to tender my very grateful thanks.

J. K. S.

Kingsclere,
23.1.44.

CHAPTER I

THE LUCKY DIP

Life cannot happen again

JOHN MASEFIELD.

IT was given to few ex-officials before the present war to revisit, as free men, the Burma in which they had toiled for years, and to be sure, not many wished to do so. Like overworked horses, they found themselves, at 55 or so, turned out for the rest of their lives, and if the meadow seemed limited, and the grass of retirement a trifle thin, yet in their hearts they guessed both to be better than the incessant plough-toil, even if it was on oats and clover-hay, which was once their portion in one of the most relaxing climates in the world. Few of them, moreover, could afford to travel at their own charges a matter of 7,000 miles. For when they returned to England on pension, they used to find that the island-princes, overbold, had eaten a good quarter of their substance one way and another, and they were bound with the chain of their bank-balances until they died.

But Fate was kinder to me. I had served since 1919 from the north to the south of Burma, from the Upper Chindwin to Myaungmya, from Putao to Thaton, nearly always in the plains with blue wooded hills far away in the distance, and sometimes with the Irrawaddy flowing past my door. And all that time I hankered, as so many did, to learn one day something of the fringes of the districts which I administered, the yomas east and west, the hidden streams which came out of their fastnesses, the great mountains from Saramati to Chimili, which fed the Chindwin or the Irrawaddy or the Sittang, or the endless salt-levels, alive with a million birds, where Lower Burma melted so gradually into the gulf of Martaban.

Now and again, in those strenuous years, the prison doors were opened, tantalizingly, for a day or two; one dashed out into camp in a forest-reserve, or on the salt-stubble at Kamakaloke, or one drifted in a launch down the bright pageant of the river. Even the unending rice-plains had their hour in November, when the sun shone all day on miles of green and whispering crops, and the duck and snipe had just come down out of Tibet to the inviolate

broads. Then it was that all Burma seemed for a moment in tune, with everyone out and about after the rains, merry and singing at their business in the fields. A few days, too often for most of us a few hours, of irrevocable bliss, and we were back again, chained to the bench, back to the grim and sordid round of crime and revenue collections, disease and lies and litigation, and the frailties of man which one was forced to administer.

'One day,' I used to vow to myself, 'I will go back as a free man to that secret bog at Ulauk. I will search for the forest on the Sittang where Oates found a hundred miles of pelicans nesting. I will revisit that tiny volcanic marsh where the stilts nest in Shwebo. I will watch the bison and sambhur on the Pidaung plain, or try my luck with the mahseer at N'sop or on the Nanthawà. I will visit Hlelaw when the geese have just come down, or the Dawnas, or the Kaukkwe reserve, or the Mergui isles and a dozen other enchanted corners of the province. I will go and see and not have to hurry away again.'

But for most of us that magic carpet of opportunity never came. We kept on passing on, never to return. In my case, it came when I had long given up hope, when I was back in a London office, as it seemed for ever, sick with longing for the high hills of the north and wondering if I should ever lift my eyes to them before I died. But when it came, it was more than I had dreamed; for it meant joining Arthur Vernay's expedition to the eastern edge of the Myitkyina district, where I had once been Deputy Commissioner for four never-to-be-forgotten years.

Myitkyina district, where the Japanese (confound them!) once had a headquarters, was nearly 33,000 miles in extent, about eleven times as big as the ordinary district in Burma. And though I had travelled much of it, I knew how little I had seen in those four years, during which I had contended, in an amateur fashion, with its queer problems, which ranged from jade-mining to human sacrifice, from slavery to 'dead-fish-taxes' or elephant-control, from game-sanctuaries to opium-running on a most lordly scale, from 'unadministered areas' (perhaps forgotten, perhaps too expensive to run) to sugar-cane and earthquakes.

I had collected a good many birds there, many of them previously unknown in Burma, and more had been brought in to me by hillmen, from the great bustard to the tiniest flowerpeckers. And the north-eastern hills of the district where the Mali, and the N'mai, the Ngawchang and the Ahkyang and a score of other

rivers cut their way south and westwards out of the great mass of the Tibetan hills seemed the most likely place to hold any surprises of natural history.

Years before in Rangoon I had spent an unforgettable evening with Maxwell West, one of the best *shikaris* thrown up in the last war generation. He was just back from commanding a punitive expedition to the Andamans, with a grim row of Jarawa skulls for some museum (and, I believe, a live Jarawa baby for the anthropologists) but he was longing again for the high hills of Hpimaw, cloud-wrapped, never-ending, fold on fold, holding, as he guessed almost alone among the Europeans of his day, so many secrets in their bosoms.

He had reeled some of them off, that night, for my benefit, from takin and a black barking-deer to 'white-maned' serow, and Sclater's monàl pheasant and the lovely Amherst pheasant nearly five feet over all, possibly wolves and musk-deer, and, he felt sure, a 'new bear.' Then he went away with all that keenness and local knowledge bubbling inside him, and a few months later, there was an ambush in the Triangle foot-hills, a flurry of senseless shots and, in a moment, nothing left of all he knew or guessed at or believed but a column or two of print in the *Field*, and a few notes in his neat hand-writing in a book in far-away Htawgaw.

That has been too often the way with the secrets of natural history throughout the ages, the time and the place and the fortunate one all together, and then, suddenly, the blind fury with her abhorred shears, and the thing has to be done all over again, the old tale retold as new, by someone else.

Now, eleven years after West's death, it was to be my lot to accompany almost the first 'scientific expedition' into the hills he had cherished. We were to collect, if we could, everything from takin to centipedes or flowers: above all Arthur Vernay, our leader, wished to solve the mystery of the black barking-deer, which not only West but Colonel Whittall of the 52nd Light Infantry had reported as existing there. Was it a dark high-altitude form of the little red barking-deer which is found all over Burma? Was it, perchance, Michie's tufted deer, a rare Chinese beast which West had once shot in those hills? Or was it something altogether new? I had read, not so long before, the diary of a journey which Captain Eldred Pottinger, R.A., had made from Sadon in 1897. He had been almost the first traveller to go up the N'mai, and when on or near the Laking river, his followers had embroiled

themselves with the local Marus so that the whole party had had to retreat hastily across the high hills which divide the N'mai from the Upper Ngawchang. Somewhere on that anxious journey, at about 11,000 feet, they had heard what Pottinger described as the 'shrill cries of startled musk-deer.'

Was this a guess of Pottinger's or yet another problem, forty-one years old, for us to solve? For no musk-deer were known for certain to exist anywhere in Burma, although I had seen in Putao in 1932 musk-deer pods and hair which, they told me, the Yawyins used to bring in from somewhere in the snow-covered hills which ring Putao; those hills which merge into Tibet and the Mishmi hills are only twenty miles or so away in an air-line but are almost completely unknown to any European.

Then there were the birds. In four years in Myitkyina, I had collected, very hurriedly and never more than a mile from a Government road, about thirteen hundred skins, and some three hundred others had been brought in to me by sepoys and hill men. Between them, they numbered no less than 470 'species' (without bothering about those minute geographical forms, over which the taxonomic scholars wrangle so continually); of these nearly forty, headed by the great bustard, had never yet been found in any part of Burma. I felt I ought to have been satisfied with this collection until a very brief study of the *Avifauna of Yunnan* by Lord Rothschild convinced me that I had somehow missed nearly fifty rare species which George Forrest, the plant-collector, had amassed either on or just beyond the Myitkyina border of Yunnan. His bird collections survived at Tring or in New York; his field-notes on them, for he was a botanist above all things, were almost *nil*. I felt that there must be more than a little still to do, if only in filling up Forrest's gaps and my own.

It is the fashion nowadays, in that 'goodly literature of disappointment' which is one of our legacies from the last war, to say that there is nowhere new to go, and nothing left to find. Except perhaps for the very tip of Everest, someone, we are constantly told, has 'done it already,' whether 'it' be Lhasa, or Mecca, or the centre of the Kalahari or the Poles. All has been visited and surveyed and recorded, the rarities and their secrets are all well known; even the Dalai Lama and the King Penguin seem to have publicity agents in Hollywood, while the bongo, the okapi, the giant eland or the panda, down to the very Fuehrer in his lair, have surrendered themselves to the cine-camera for all time.

But those who have worked, however briefly, at the birds or beasts, the plants or insects, of a country, know too well how little is known for certain, what gaps there are to fill in our knowledge and how often they seem to gape, with no prospect of being filled for the next fifty years. And if I had ever doubted it, a friend in a London club soon undeceived me. He had done in his time more hard jungle-slogging then most men; and though fate had laid him by, he had been given eyes to see all those years and a memory to recall things clearly. He would never journey to the high hills again, but he had left his heart, I think, behind him there.

'Five months?' he said to me with lifted eyebrows. 'Bit short. isn't it? You might be there five years and not do more than scratch the surface of that country. That sort of jungle is as blind as a bran-tub. The only thing to do is to take a lucky dip. You know what I mean. Shut your mouth and open your eyes and see what Somebody sends you. Whatever you do turn up, you'll probably find it's quite different to what you expected. . . .

'Good luck to you, anyway.' I could see that his eyes were with his heart and that was somewhere in the Himàl.

'I wish to God I could be going with you! And look here, when you get to the first patch of snow, pour a tiny libation on it for me, as a long-range gift, and say a prayer as well. *Et ego* . . . more's the pity!'

It was about then that I had a letter from another friend wishing us luck. He was hybridizing tung trees in the Shan States, and glancing back regretfully, as I knew, at the days when he had been in charge of all the forests in Burma. The letter ended:

'I am going into China on Sunday. I have some idea of raising and drilling 100,000 Yunnanese . . . *the* best infantry in the world, my boy! And just when the Japs think that, although the period of gestation has been abnormally prolonged, they are at last pregnant with victory, I and my Yunnanese will descend from the mountains and conduct an entirely successful illegal operation.'

Well, I thought, here was another 'rapt amateur of shady adventure and profitless zeal' who knew what surprises could lurk on the corners of that limitless frontier. There might still be room and time, before our final war came, for a journey to the Hpimaw hills. But, to be sure, all hope of peace seemed gone, a few weeks after our store-boxes and cartridges and medicines had

left London, and when the scientific equipment was all at sea somewhere between New York and Rangoon. I hurriedly cancelled my passage on the *Shropshire* on September 24 and then, after the Munich affair was over, had much ado to get another one a fortnight later. My own kit was in fact unloaded at Marseilles, sent back to Tilbury and hurried once more up to Liverpool just in time to catch me at Marseilles again. Some instinct, not my own, warned me that though war seemed a certainty, it was not coming just yet. For the time being I could be a humble 'Trotter,' that creature I had so often heartily reviled in Myitkyina. I wondered what the next six months would yield to me, in people and places and beasts and birds which I had never beheld. But of one thing I was sure: I knew so little of the Myitkyina hills that almost any dip in their giant bran-tub was bound to be a lucky one for me.

CHAPTER II

THE SHALLOW END

THE train started out of Victoria with a jerk and a crash; it is true that there had been a series of preliminary whistle-blasts by the engine which had sent us all scurrying from time to time to our places, but when at last the moment of starting did come, we had no warning at all. The score of little Japs bowing and hissing interminably on the platform drew themselves up and gave one final imperial bow to the Unknown Personage to whom they were saying farewell; the clergyman in the grey cloth cap and with 'Milano' on his baggage took out his prayerbook, and began to murmur over it; the Frenchman on my right was already deep in the 'Mots-Croisés' of the *Soir*. No one, I think, could possibly have guessed that I was bound for Imaw and Chimili and the unkempt edges of Yunnan.

Perhaps it was at Dover that the East began to appear unmistakably. There had seemed an unusual bevy of carnation buttonholes, and what were known as 'Eden' hats, at Victoria and a subdued air of importance further down the train. But suddenly at Dover three of the Eden hats resolved themselves magically into A.D.C.s in mufti, and beside them was a tall figure whom I could not but recognise. Last time we had met was at Prome in 1928; I had taken his arm and we had staggered for 30 yards in the streaming dark, and in close and unsteady communion, up the semi-vertical quagmire which led from his launch to the railway siding. Then I was a D.C. and he the chairman of a Royal Agricultural Commission, for whom Prome had prepared forty-eight hours of untimely November rain, perhaps to hide the fact that it was almost in the dry zone. He had cursed the rain and the mud and thanked me before he slithered forlornly into his carriage, never to return.

Now he was the Viceroy of All India on leave and doubtless yearning to be back in it as early as might be. For there at any rate no one would expect him, as the Southern Railway did, to lean uncomfortably over the grimy side of a steamer and shout his farewells, before all the tag-rag and bobtail of the ship, to relatives waiting precariously on the metals below between shunting

engines. But the authorities of the Southern Railway are nothing if not democratic: they take care to set even Viceroys free from too much love of living in the England that they serve.

Yet the chance encounter set me wondering at the vagaries of Fate. I had served for eighteen years as a covenanted servant of the Crown in Burma and only once had I ever had a distant glimpse of a reigning Viceroy. Now, when I was a private citizen and bound for the edge of beyond to try to meet a takin and other rare creatures of the Empire fauna, I had begun my journey by almost bumping into the rarest of them all.

But it was certainly no moment to recall myself to him, as we sidled out and met the jade-green sea. Strong men lit pipes with ostentation and turned towards the bar; Lord Linlithgow hastened with his ladies into a cabin filled with flowers; two of the A.D.C.s-in-Waiting, in charge of a ton or so of hand-baggage by the companion, simultaneously turned the colour of chartreuse beneath their sombre hats. So perhaps did I. Luckier than they, I could hurry above to that one small corner of the crowded packet where the seafarer may feel the breeze on his face and avoid at the same time its rude kisses of spray. We were off.

Luck was with me again. You may cross the Channel a dozen times and see no birds at all except a gull or two. But on that October afternoon, with the wind from the south-west, we saw, close beside us and all heading down channel into the wind, more sea-birds than I had ever seen before. Gannets crossed our bows and drew away from us, with their slow-winged leisurely flight, as if we were standing still. One young one, all in brown, saw a fish and dived on the turn with a smack close beside us, so that he seemed at last to emerge from under our stem. Little auks dashed into the waves as if they were going to pitch on their noses and past us with that curious hurrying flight. Gulls and scoters, shear-waters and a tern or two all passed us slant-wise as we lurched towards Calais. I had come out to the East to collect birds and I took it for a good omen.

It is customary to say that the East begins to be visible at Port Said. For me, revisiting it after two years' absence, it began at Calais and I hailed it with delight. Here were strange dark-haired people, chattering unintelligibly in high-pitched polysyllables and waving their hands, behaving, as it seemed, absurdly and in no way conscious of being absurd. They had no nonsensical shames or inhibitions, they had a sort of dark vitality which defied the

way they lived and the hours they kept. They wore queer clothes and ate strange things without self-consciousness. And as the train swept across France, I recognised joyfully more and more the signs of the East, in the stark communal hedgeless fields, cropped and eaten to the bone, in the shapeless elderly women in red and green petticoats, chattering along beneath enormous burdens (just as in the Kachin Hills it is the grandmothers who stagger home at night with the heaviest load); in the old man stalking a rook in a field with no futile code of sport to hamper him, in the cows tethered out on the grass-banks between the crops, or a whole family, young and old, pressed into service to get the mangolds in; or a taxi-driver charging madly through traffic with a jubilant fanfare on his horn.

The impression deepened the nearer we drew to Marseilles. And there, what with the sun, the bamboo trees, the unashamed smells, the leisurely dark polyglot crowd, the police who seemed to exist in spite of, rather than in charge of, the care-free traffic, the iron tables and chairs in the cafés, the very ' encroachments ' on the pavements, all these were merely the Eastern scene again, etherialized very slightly for the European to live in. I drank it in joyously. And when a suave being sidled up to me discreetly with postcards or an invitation to the ' blue cinema,' I found myself saying *' Thwa-like '* automatically over my shoulder: but he understood my Burmese as perfectly as he doubtless would have understood Arabic.

In the Cannebière, so soon to be destroyed by fire, the manager of my favourite restaurant greeted me with warmth, advised me paternally what to eat and drink, smoked a cigarette at my table after the meal and assured me with finality: *' Nous allons avoir la guerre! Absolument. Mais pas au moment.'*

' But when?' I asked. Every Frenchman I spoke to made no secret of this conviction at a time when the Press of all England seemed to be hailing the Munich agreement as marking ' a new era in diplomatic relations,' when old gentlemen in London clubs, as I had seen, were assuring all who cared to listen that the ' whole of Czecho-Slovakia, my dear boy, was not worth one British grenadier! '

He shrugged. ' It is a breathing-space only. It will come. And we, we have composed our differences now. *Il faut en finir!'*

But in the meantime, he too, it seemed, possessed an azure cinema, not so far away, which I could see, if I was at leisure that

afternoon, in ' very agreeable ' company.

I preferred to wander out down by the harbour, where I watched a man, with a pair of tailor's scissors, prepare *oursins* for eating as carefully as if he loved them. They look like large horse-chestnuts but are presumably living creatures until that moment comes. He snipped each one neatly in half, delicately trimmed the roe, and there was the *oursin,* poor bivalve, ready to eat upon a plate.

How many of those, I wonder, in the Eastern chain-gangs who passed through Marseilles, before the War, went up and said a prayer for themselves in the church of Notre Dame de la Garde? It was at once the most nobly sited and most companionable among the great shrines of the world, from Amiens or St. Paul's to the Shwe Dagon, and one, if ever there was one, to ' inspire our hopes, quicken our prayers and praises,' lifted high, as it was, above all that roaring city. I liked the peace of it, and the quiet and the cool dark and the way simple people had hung up in it their swords and medals, and models of fishing-boats and steamships and aeroplanes from whose destruction perhaps some miracle had preserved them. Even there I could not overlook the East. There was a simple votive tablet from some forgotten *' dames telegraphistes'* of 1884: *' Reconnaissance Notre Dame de La Garde qui nous a preservée du cholera nous et nos familles.'* And on the great stained-glass dome above the Virgin, I found that day a remarkable number of eastern birds in coloured relief: there were hoopoes and orioles and flowerpeckers and two silver pheasants which looked exactly like the lineated pheasant of Burma. I took them for another good omen and somehow my thoughts flew back to a December afternoon, almost exactly nineteen years before, when I had been up in the Shwe Dagon pagoda for the first and last time (just before they closed it for ever to Europeans in boots). Then I had been with Farrer and Euan Cox who had just come down from the very hills where I was now bound, on Farrer's last journey but one. And Frank Kingdon Ward, with whom we had dined that night, was now to be one of my companions. That he and I should make a journey to the Hpimaw hills nineteen years later must have seemed, then, as improbable as that we should make one to the Mountains of the Moon.

CHAPTER III

EXILE'S RETURN

The Tragedy of all our East is laid
On those white decks beneath the awning shade.

RUDYARD KIPLING.

TO some the spending of three weeks in complete idleness, without responsibility, on a well-found passenger liner in smooth and sunny waters might seem to be a foretaste of Heaven. Those of us in the Eastern chain-gangs who had to do it twice in every two or three years were apt to realise the 'insupportable tedium of a life of pleasure.' To be fair to them, the steamship companies who wafted us to and from the East realised it as well; they sought to keep each passenger, young or old, in a well-nourished stupor of oblivion. Even in 1938 the sea voyage took as many days as it did in 1908, but it must be remembered that it was the cargo which counted. The passenger, kennelled in his six-by-six cell, or loose on one of the two upper decks, was a not very lucrative side-line. But while he was at sea, let his mouth at least be stopped. And stopped it was.

From the moment about dawn when tea and fruit and bread and butter arrived in his cabin, to the hour about 10 p.m. when sandwiches were brought to accompany his final drink in the saloon, he was never more than two hours from a meal or a snack. He had a choice of forty viands at breakfast, of soup or ices or biscuits and cheese at 11 o'clock, of thirty or forty viands at luncheon. By about 2 p.m. he felt he must be 'where that Æaean isle forgets the main.' The main indeed was there for him to glance at, if he wanted to, serene as ever and spangled inconsequently from time to time with flying fish, until the tea-gong wakened the ship at four. After that it was time to play skittles or quoits or walk slowly round the deck until at 6 p.m. the sun went down and potato-chips or anchovies on toast formed the prelude to a seven-course dinner a little later on.

Life from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. was thus one almost endless repast, and the sensitive could not but feel embarrassment at the sight of small migrant birds so obviously starving as they searched the well-scrubbed planking of the fore-deck for insects that were not

there. I must confess that those hapless waifs of the October passage, wagtails and warblers and tree-pipits, which kept circling the ship and flitting back again to resume their fruitless quest, worried me not a little and I used to hunt under my bed or under the lounge settees for earwigs or an ant to offer them.

I watched the relentless driving of chance splitting up the Departmental coveys on the ship, planter and judge, policeman and heaven-born, merchant-prince and globe-trotter, as they stooped over children's games or sat at meat. We read, we slept, we ate again and discussed our neighbours, idly. There were forest managers, old friends like Geoff Bostock, gigantic and comely, with whom I had played polo aforetime; there was an artist who was also a soldier, with the brow and jowl of a Roman emperor below black curls, who behind all his apparent menace had a Puck-like humour and charm; there was said to be a film-star on her way to the Sudan as heroine of *The Four Feathers,* but she turned out to be the camera-man's wife with no official part to play at all; there were brides bound for various Edges of Beyond whom we watched with reticent compassion; there was a Colonel, very stout and handsome and genial, and his delightful wife who had tried retirement in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, and in England, and were now proposing to build yet a fourth nest in the hills of Southern India.

'I wrote to 'em all,' he told me, 'and asked 'em what income-tax we should have to pay if we had £1,000 a year all in and no kids. In the United Kingdom I should have to pay about £280, in Africa £80 and only £40 in Ooty or thereabouts. So we're going to try it.'

'But I thought Kenya and all those places were so cheap?' I protested.

'Cheap?' was the reply. 'Why, if they know you've got a bottle of whisky in the house, there are people in Southern Rhodesia who'll drive forty miles to bum a drink off you, and a carpenter gets about £2 a day.'

He threw other curious sidelights on the retirement problem and I realised as I talked to those of my fellow-slaves who still toiled in the galley how grimly and incessantly the bogey of it hung over them all. They had all read *How to Live in England on a Pension* and felt sure that they could not. They had all been Somebodies in the East, judges, district magistrates, forest managers, commissioners of police, colonels, agents of great com-

panies, directors of this or that. Everybody over a fairly wide area knew them. They enjoyed at least local respect, the credit of an adequate income, spacious houses, all the servants they needed, ponies and motor-cars and clubs. They were suspended for the time being in a solvent vacuum. But ever behind them, and always before, hung the thought, not of the next war, but of the England where their children were, to which one day they hoped to return and 'settle down,' to search for a job which would eke out their pensions or provident funds, or children's school-fees, when they would be tied with the chains of their little houses and gardens and servants, clinging grimly to the country membership of one club after being lords of four or five, seeming to themselves to have thrown away at fifty or so all that had made life bearable for so many years.

So many had gone before them and were scattered from Fleet to Porlock, from the Mearns to Guernsey, living cramped and thwarted and, it must be said, rather regretful lives. We talked them over and the way they had gone up and down since they retired. X., once a wizard with a polo pony, now sold something on commission from door to door. Y. was keeping a garage and Z., in the words of his last plaintive letter, was 'mowing the b——y lawn, with a Lieutenant-General doing the same on one side of him and an Admiral of the Fleet on the other!' D. was growing apples for Covent Garden, and E. cabbages to feed his young. F., once a Member of Council, was getting £300 a year in something to do with A.R.P. and working eleven hours a day for it.

'I am free—to watch my messmates beating out to open main,
Free of all that Life can offer——'

But if they left the galley, most of them felt that they would never know freedom again until they died, and they wondered not what Life could offer but what they could 'manage' to support Life on.

They did not talk of the immediate future because they knew what it held for them too well; nor except in snatches did they dare talk of the ultimate future, when they had done with their files and forests for ever and had unpacked for the very last time of all, when they had retired, like termites, under the great log of English taxation.

In between meals we played skittles, a game of which I should like to see a revival in this country: for it demands in turn brute

force, finesse, judgment, steadiness and accuracy, combined with a spectacular element of blind luck and gambling to watch which women instinctively put on their best clothes, as they do for the races.

But no one seemed to flirt with any seriousness. Perhaps they were wondering still, those Kings in Babylon, about retirement to somewhere where old Aunt Rose and Cousin Anne would be within train-shot of them. Perhaps they had eaten too much.

'Just think what a French ship would be like at the end of a voyage like this!' said the soldier to me darkly over a drink one evening.

The young flirted of course, but when the young reached Rangoon they would find themselves cast away in the jungle with nothing but Burmese or Malay to talk for the next three years and they had better make what hay they could with their primitive technique before the ship arrived.

We came into Port Sudan on the afternoon of October 22 escorted by a cloud of sooty gulls. It was as different as it could be from Port Said or Colombo. Here were no yelling divers, no hordes of chattering bum-boatmen, no 'gully-gully' men, no post-cards, no guides to whatever illicit pleasures the huge brown place possessed. A pelican sitting quietly on a post a stone's throw from the quay and gazing down his immense nose, and another pelican swimming close to the shore seemed to suggest that here we were in a wilderness regulated by Government. On the quay a spotless white row of policemen, so shaven and disciplined that it was impossible to guess their race, awaited us; as we surged up the harbour, a nightjar flew off a great steam crane and as swift as a cuckoo perched aboard us for a moment, then flickered back to the crane again.

There were no irritating formalities about getting us ashore. A notice painted on a huge warehouse promised a fine 'not exceeding Le.10' to anyone who pestered the stranger for tips, and in two hours' wandering ashore alone I met no one who attempted to qualify for it. The huge town stretched, orderly, to the horizon and had trebled itself in a few years, a symbol of dominion and power in the wilderness as impressive as any in the East. And yet the wild was within a stone's throw.

I walked where I have always walked before when at Port Sudan, northwards into the wind along the edge of the sand, margined with samphire and little scurrying crabs. Its occasional use

as a privy by the native quarter does not detract from its genuine merits as a sanctuary for birds. Here within gunshot of the town, close to the huge oil-tanks of the Shell Company with their curious godowns like old-fashioned spiked helmets, was a narrow reef a mile long and but thirty yards off the shore, and between it and the sand I saw more birds in half an hour than a watcher on many estuaries could have hoped for in a year. Three spoonbills sat resting within a few yards of the beach, and beyond them were two flamingos with their pink behinds and coral-red hocks turned towards me. I sat watching them as they buried their elephant heads in the water and straightened out their necks, but whenever the head was raised, the neck came up again curved like a plumber's elbow-joint in a pipe, perhaps to make sure that nothing passes into the flamingo which has not been duly filtered.

And on the mud itself were all the waders which I had not seen for six long years, since those golden days in April at Kamakaloke on the Gulf of Martaban when they sat in their spring finery, company by company each after their kind, on the salt grass above the mud, and beyond them great black buffaloes stumped out and lay down peacefully in the sea. There were little stints, and sand-plovers great and small, ringed plovers and greenshanks, curlews, a grey plover and some broadbilled sandpipers; and one red-shank, as if to take me home again, forgot that it was October and whistled '*whirra, whirra, whirra*' most musically as he ran with his white wings upraised, as it might have been by Alde or Itchen in the spring.

They were all so near that I could barely use my glasses and, as if to complete the picture, a black heron, looking oddly like a cormorant, plunged down into the shallows only thirty yards from me as I sat; then he scratched his white pouch with one foot as tamely as if he had been at the Zoo, while a handful of Caspian terns with their huge scarlet beaks drifted past me into the wind.

Further on where they were thrusting a new breakwater out into the sea made of rocks and old oil tins and rubbish, there was a kingfisher and sandpipers and a flock of turnstones. I wondered if anywhere else in the world within half a mile of a busy port with thousands of natives living on the desert edge, could one hope to see as many delightful birds within a stone's throw of the shore.

And presently there was another picture to remember: a smart white-clad orderly with a bicycle came down to the beach to meet a pink rowing boat which was drifting idly in the blue shallows

inside the reef. I thought the boat was a fisherman's, but presently the boatman emerged and waded ashore, carrying on his shoulder an English child of four who was pulling his frizzy black hair affectionately and calling him names. Then the three went off over the sands, chattering hard together, to the child's home. I was left wondering if he would ever grow up and go home and despise those men who were fond of him as a child. Would he grow up to call them 'Wogs' and other names? I hope he never will. Perhaps he will be a watcher of birds, and will he, if he is, I wonder, ever come there again to take up the life he will have left at five or so, and recognise those waders which once piped and fed on the saltings all round him?

I had come out to Burma to watch birds. I felt this fortunate lonely walk along the sands where the yellow green crabs raced in front of me to their holes was another good omen. Against the sunset the mountains were luminous-grey and as fantastically shaped as clouds, with the sky turning from pale yellow to buff and umber and amber round a single star, and a far bugle calling as I walked back to the ship. I was in the East at last.

Writers are always supposed to be in search of atmosphere, and to prefer it where it is fairly obvious and pungent, an opium-den in Chinatown, a fried-fish shop in Lambeth, or a whaling-ship. But on our arrival in Colombo I found one more bit of old-world atmosphere blown to the four winds: when it became necessary for me to send a cable.

In the good old days, and not so very long ago either, the normal '*sahib*' would no more have despatched a telegram or a cable himself in the East than he would have skinned his own mutton. Even posting a letter was almost unheard of. One gave the telegraph form and some rupees to a strong persevering *chaprassi* and it was his task to elbow into the jabbering odorous timeless throng and gradually to put the matter through. Some hours later, when one had forgotten all about it, one received an illegible receipt (rather sweaty and franked with thumb-prints) and some change, and that was that.

But neither in Colombo nor elsewhere could I call on any more *chaprassis* for ever, so I had to send this one myself.

With set teeth and a sinking heart I approached the General Post Office. But even as I came up the steps, a suave and smiling being in a peaked cap and spotless khaki uniform greeted me in English and asked my pleasure. Then he opened a neat egg-

cabinet, handed me a clean form, and a piece of blotting-paper which had only begun life that morning and could still blot, and a pen which, for sheer efficiency, must have made some official nibs in the United Kingdom uncross themselves for very shame. When my task was done, he did not even try to read the result, though I would gladly have let him to do so as a small token of gratitude. He and the true gentleman behind the grille then went into conference and smilingly assured me that the official instructions on the form were misleading and that 'D.L.T.' on it did not mean what for years I had taken it to mean: to put it briefly, I was sending my cable by a slower and more expensive method than was necessary.

We bowed, we smiled, the telegram was corrected, stamped and disappeared behind the grille. The Being then leapt forward to stamp some letters for me and I was so touched by his camaraderie that, in defiance of the Government Servants' Conduct Rules, I offered him a small but illegal gratification, which he accepted with a smile. But I do assure the Postmaster-General that that man was wasted in Colombo: he ought to have been at Selfridge's or the Savoy.

I then drove out to the cemetery. Passing a large building which stood 'in its own grounds' I asked the driver what it might be.

'Oh, that!' he said airily. 'That was lunatic asylum, but now of course Government office!'

Doubtless it was promotion of a kind, but I could not help wondering what went on there now, in that gaunt old building behind its dank brown wall. A building's past, some aura of the lives that lived themselves out in it long ago, can, as I know too well, hang round it far too often to darken the lives of those who take it on. I had years before been one of the Governors of the great asylum near Rangoon and hated inspecting it far worse than the condemned cells of any jail. Was all that mental confusion, that melancholy inertia and frustrate gloom, above all was the windy optimism of some of those who had dwelt there, now hanging round the work of a nation-building Department? I shall never know, but the sight of that building somehow depressed me far more than the cemetery, a spacious and cheerful place of many acres where I watched robins and a flock of 'seven sisters' which were new to me and had no fear of man, and little striped squirrels which raced, tails up like a tiger, over the graves.

It was 5 a.m. as we went up the Rangoon river past the oil tanks at Thilawa, with a cluster of night-herons flying home to their roost against a saffron sky. The crow which had haunted the rigging since Colombo had disappeared. Everyone had assured me that on arrival in Rangoon he would instantly be killed as a stranger but he had plenty of time to land before the Rangoon crows came out to meet us: in dress he exactly resembled them, no lighter, no darker, and if his accent was any different I could not detect it.

The policeman and the judge in their night attire resumed for the last time, at dawn outside my cabin, their interminable conversation which had lasted since Marseilles. They were poles apart in every way, except in their love of words. Day by day, they were at it before the decks had been scrubbed, and in the long afternoons when the ship was hushed in sleep, they had tired the sun with talking until the tea-gong went. George the Policeman was now off to Papun, a remote corner of Arcady upon the Sittang. Here he would see no enemy, for crime and politics hardly existed, and he was District Magistrate as well as Superintendent of Police, and could thus make certain that any of his criminals got what they deserved. He would, however, have no one at all to argue with in his mother-tongue for at least a year.

The Hon. Mr. Justice B. would sink once more, with a sigh of contentment, back into the dignified ease of the Bench where everyone had to listen to his lightest word and murmur: 'As your Lordship pleases.' But while I shaved, they both seemed to be making the most of what little time for dispute was left to them.

Geoff Bostock joined me as I leaned over the side. He had just overheard two young commercial assistants, who were going to Burma for the first time, arguing in the bathroom about the greater firms of Burma.

Said A.: 'A few years ago Steels' were a hundred per cent. Scotch!'

'I know,' retorted B., 'but they've taken steps to rectify that for some years now.'

A third, a rather gawky silent youth, chimed in witheringly:

'And am I not right in saying that they haven't paid a single dividend since?'

I was sorry to leave my boat-deck kennel on the *Yorkshire*. To those who 'travelled Bibby,' as the phrase went, between Liverpool or Marseilles and Rangoon, one of these liners was, I

imagine, very much the same as another, in its meals and accommodation, in its inescapable routine and companionship, in its everlasting 'shop' of Burma and Ceylon; there were some who boasted that they could never tell t'other from which, when on board, except by the bar-steward's face. The *Yorkshire* had been launched just after the last Great War to replace the only ship the Bibby Company had lost in it. How many thousands of exiles she had borne to and fro in all those years I do not know. But I had a more tender feeling for her than most because, years before, I had committed in her what some think to be the supreme indiscretion of a sea-voyage, that of becoming engaged to be married to a girl chance-met among her passengers. So even the name of *Yorkshire* still aroused vaguely tender memories. They do still, now that she lies somewhere at the bottom of the Atlantic, together with the bodies of those stewards who befriended me on her, and a score of women and children, homing from the East, who had thought that their long anxious voyage was well-nigh done. She was one of the earlier, and not the least sorrowful, of the victims of Hitler. *Molliter ossa cubent!*

I sampled Rangoon for two sunny days. By all accounts the trade depression there was even worse than in London, but she looked on the surface much the same as ever from the smells to the parti-coloured crowds in the streets. I could detect little change except in side-streets where I saw long queues of people waiting their turn at water-taps, for the supply of water in Rangoon was steadily becoming acute, or on the Sule Pagoda where pretty Burmese girls sat in booths all day long selling, not cheroots or betel, but tickets in the new State Lottery. The showrooms of two of the biggest European stores were almost empty, and 'Whiteaway Laidlaws,' for years one of the best-known shops in Burma, stood shuttered and forlorn; never, men told me, had trade been so appalling. Yet perhaps the money was still there and had just changed hands: in De Souza's, the great plate-glass fronted chemists where I went to buy anæsthetics and formaldehyde and arsenic, I watched an elderly Burman of the well-to-do cultivating class, who came from Hlawga, walk in and purchase perfumed soap and face-powder and a patent-medicine as if he had been shopping there all his life. There was no longer any suggestion that Burma was now being administered by, or for, anyone but the Burmese.

Perhaps it was in the Secretariat that I could discern least

change. Gone was the pleasant old white-bearded *chaprassi*, the one who was said to lend so much money to junior clerks on his pay of twenty rupees a month that he was worth two lakhs near the end of his service; but his successor greeted me with a smile and a salute as I came up the stair. I thought of the endless river of Secretariat officials I had known who had come and gone through its many mansions since the last war. They had vanished for ever but their files remained everywhere, on the floor, on tables, on racks and trays, with the same carefree kites that I had known wheeling and shrilling outside the windows as if to call attention to the sunshine and the sky. They needed no paper-weights, those files, no wind could ever stir the packed brown strata of their 'precedents,' the hares which Brown or Robinson had started on the same subject in 1893. Unless you bribed someone to remove them, there was no fear of the 'major questions' getting lost or overlooked. Some of the older files looked almost like leaf-mould with their frayed brown desiccated edges; for them there was no death. The sense of their permanence, their indestructibility, their imperviousness to the assaults of Time, or the changes of Separation, was somehow emphasised for me by the huge scarlet, yellow and green 'slips' which adorned them marked *Immediate, Urgent, Early*. The warning the slips conveyed seemed, in these quiet and airy rooms, as little heeded as those of a Seventh Day Adventist. Some at least of the thirty *Immediates* lay in a corner of the floor, heavy with dust. Others scarlet-robed *chaprassis* were already burying beneath fresh files, like robins interring the babes in the wood.

I thought of one such file, a great one linked in a bundle with its forebears, which had sat on my table long years ago in 1923, when I was a raw new Under-Secretary, for over four months in the hopes that one day I should have time to master it. I called it Aunt Lizzie, for it had a Victorian solidity and dullness as well as the faintly musty aroma of a bygone age. Aunt Lizzie had weighed about a stone and was thicker than any volume of the Encyclopædia.

One afternoon my new chief, Frederick Lewisohn, had blown like an East wind through my office.

'Here,' he said, 'you get away home! I don't approve of Under-Secretaries addling their brains in here after 4 o'clock. You ought to be out taking exercise.'

He cast a glance round my ramparts of unfinished files and his

cold eye fell on Aunt Lizzie.

'What the deuce is this?'

I told him, trembling.

'Good God,' he said, 'has that come up *again*?' (Lewisohn had been Chief Secretary before.) 'And how long has that been here?'

'I don't know, Sir, she was in the room when I took over.'

'All right, leave her to me.' And he went off, rumbling, with Aunt Lizzie under his arm.

Next morning she reappeared on my table with a note on her which began:

'I will not trouble His Excellency to read through the foregoing 264 pages of notes in which unprofitable side-issues have been chased half-heartedly up *culs-de-sac*. . . .'

Then followed a masterly one-page summary of Aunt Lizzie's symptoms, with their cause and a comprehensive prescription for their cure. She came back again a day later from Government House marked 'I agree. H.B.' and passed for ever from my ken. She had received her quietus at last.

But *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Lewisohn had been a private citizen for 14 years. If not Aunt Lizzie, one of her near relations was certainly back again on the table and surely there must be Fire Over Burma now to judge by the number of scarlet slips.

But no! No one seemed unduly worried. They were all indeed most helpful to me and talked, for once, with intelligence about the north-east frontier where we were going, for every mercantile eye in the Province was fastened on the new road from Burma through to Yunnanfu and on that long-forgotten backdoor into China which was daily acquiring greater significance. The desolate hills of the frontier had a real importance to Burma at last.

And how were things in Burma itself? Oh, so so. They needed watching here and there, but then they always did. Crop-failures, revenue-collections, crime, much the same as ever. A political boil here and there had burst with a little mess or bloodshed, and things were now better. Bags of work as always. So-and-so had asked for his bowler-hat, poor old Stick-in-the-Mud had gone home at last, a very sick man. The Japs? Oh, Lord no! They looked indeed, my informants one and all, as pale and drawn as if they had, themselves, just recovered from a bout of influenza.

But I suppose we all once looked like that at the end of a hot October.

I tip-toed out, awed as I had never been before by the scarlet slips. It merely meant that I had been out of the galley too long.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEEP END

I SPENT two busy days buying crockery and miscellaneous articles we required for our camp, and revolving between the bank, the customs-house, the excise commissioner's office and the police. Our guns, rifles and hypodermic syringes, and (of all Eastern necessities) the chlorodyne in the medicine chest, had all impinged on the regulations. Further, knowing what had happened to a fishing friend of mine in the Hukawng valley when he had been compelled to endure the cutting of a mahseer-hook out of his finger at a time when there were no anæsthetics within 100 miles, I was anxious that we should carry with us novo-caine and ethyl-chloride.

The young Indian appraiser in the Customs House was obviously bursting with curiosity about me.

'You are doctor, no?'

'No.'

'Then why you want all these drugs?'

I explained that we were going to be far from any medical aid but our own.

'How many days from Myitkyina?'

'Twenty at least.'

'Twenty! Then how you are going, by camel?'

I had with reluctance to admit that there were no camels even in Northern Burma, an inadequate place; but if I had said that our kit was being transported from rail-head by takin, I think he would have believed me, so completely was northern Burma unguessed-at by people in Rangoon.

Eventually I met by chance a tall European officer whom I had known years before as a Rugby footballer; deep called irregularly to deep, and with his magic aid, regulations seemed to be waived wholesale and delays vanished.

As we said goodbye in the Appraiser's Stores, I saw a pretty young woman sitting near me on a chair whose face seemed vaguely familiar. She sat with a composed and charming smile, her luggage all about her, while a customs' officer was unwrapping from her lingerie bottle after bottle of brandy and packets of new

golf-balls. I felt sure I had danced with her somewhere once upon a time, but it seemed a tactless moment to renew the acquaintance, and I went out thirsting with a curiosity which is, alas! still unslaked.

From the clean spaciousness and politesse of the Customs House I went back through Barr Street with its rookery of lawyers' offices, its jabbering medley of litigants and its gutter swimming in betel juice for all the world like blood, to the post office. Here it was necessary to endure for a space, in a strong smell as of leopards, with Telugu coolies leaning heavily against me and scratching themselves until at long last I despatched a telegram. The new post-office technique, which had so greatly impressed me in Colombo, had its limits.

At the police offices I boldly sent in my card to the Commissioner, Peter Reynolds, himself, and achieved one of those all too rare but satisfying interviews with an official which begin, 'I say, old boy, I'm afraid I'm going to be a ruddy nuisance,' and end, 'O.K. Let me know if there's any more I can do, and give my salaams to your missis.' *O si sic omnes*!

On the last day it was necessary to pay a final visit to the Law Courts to see the police again. The centre of one step on the great stone staircase was occupied by two Indians of low degree, one of whom was engaged either in tattooing, or removing blackheads from, the inside of the other's left ear. So motionless, so rapt they sat in oblivion of their surroundings, absorbed in their delicate task, with the echoing din of litigants and the slip-slap of sandals all about them, that I stopped to watch, though no one else seemed to think the sight in any way unusual. The model was obviously in a trance of endurance or enjoyment, as if in a barber's chair, the artist, in a good north light and a rent-free studio provided by the Government, was putting forth all his powers. I shelved a theory which I had long been forming that, even in the East, personal privacy is a luxury which the poorest do not readily forego. At last the artist became aware of my scrutiny: he withdrew his needle and very clearly cleared his throat, then looked me coldly up and down. Then he spat generously in the direction of the kilderdin, one of which stood in those days at every corner of that great stair, hoping against hope that some litigant would some day remember to use it as a cuspidor. Then he resumed his task.

The train seemed unusually crowded, but in 1938 one did not

change from the mail at Mandalay so that whatever kit went into one's compartment (and mine reached nearly to the roof) remained there until the train reached Myitkyina, 720 miles away. I saw Geoff Bostock and his retriever dog, both looking even larger than usual, lolling without concern out of a window marked 'Ladies only,' and all the first-class compartments seemed to hold three or four people. On the label of my own there were two other names, that of a young 'forest assistant' who had been on the ship and was bound for Myitkyina and another marked 'To N'ba, Mr. Holla.' Just before the train started Mr. Holla arrived, a slim dapper olive gentleman in a grey Homburg and khaki shorts. Once previously he had tried to enter the carriage but at the sight of our luggage—and it might perhaps have caused an inspector at Paddington or Waterloo to burst a blood vessel—he had recoiled murmuring in English: 'This is not the place for me!'

But at the last moment he discovered that there was no other place for him, and he was our companion for six hundred miles. I was puzzled as to his nationality. He had a Mongolian face (which in Burma means nothing), a rug of Fraser tartan in a new Wolseley valise, and his yellow Gladstone bag was labelled 'Palace Hotel, Mombasa.' He settled down to read Maurice Collis's *Lords of the Sunset,* a travel book about the Shan States, and was seen off by a Burman and a Sikh. He replied to my advances first in English and then, thinking better of it, in Hindustani. His habiliments seemed those of a well-to-do Chinaman down to the tussore coat and the fountain pen. An ethnologist would, perhaps, I thought, have drawn some further conclusion from watching him go to bed, as he sat cross-legged on his out-spread valise facing the pillow and patting it with both hands. It seemed at first sight a form of prayer, but it was really the strap of his valise with which he was trying to deal. Then he spread a very dirty silk handkerchief on the pillow and was soon asleep. Somehow I found myself hesitating to place him, and even Sherlock Holmes in his palmy days might, I think, have guessed wrong from his ensemble.

On Mandalay platform, in the chilly dawn, I watched a group of young Buddhist priests, with tensely shaven heads projecting from the huddle of their yellow robes, reading the vernacular newspapers, which our train had just brought up from Rangoon. There was, at that moment, a case arising out of the Mandalay

riots which all 'politically-minded' Burmans were following closely. I had, in my two years at home, been nursing a nostalgic vision of the old Upper Burma which Fielding Hall had painted so well long ago in *The Soul of a People*, and of which I had had an unforgettable glimpse in those enchanted years just after the last war; of an archaic rural life beneath the tamarinds, seed-time and harvest, youth and birth and death, with the deep-toned bells, long before dawn, calling the simple villagers to prayer; the kindly, clean, ascetic, leisurely, pious Buddhism of days gone by. But I confess that the sight of these truculent young priests, with their naked tortoise heads and eyes full of cold menace, reading (in public) what, as a Government officer, I had once been wont to call the 'seditious Press,' struck me like a blow. Here before my eyes was the Church militant which I had met aforetime in the rebellion, when, in my haste, I had tried to get all wandering *pongyis* in Henzada licensed; secretive, fiercely intolerant, anti-Government, they formed an incalculable reservoir of ill-feeling and disorder behind the fence of their privilege. I began to understand what one or two friends of mine, policemen, had uttered to me in the last few days about what they felt was so soon to come.

'The Lord preserve me,' one had said, 'from being in Pegu in the *next* rebellion, when presumably they'll have learnt something!'

They all talked of rebellion: nobody ever even thought of war.

We spent that day crawling from station to station through the sunshine north of Mandalay. At intervals while Mr. Holla was asleep, I borrowed *Lords of the Sunset* from him, and at other times I read the Burma Railway's Timetable, which had more in it than met the eye. Only a timetable could have compressed the history of Burma into two quite readable pages, and it also contained a useful gazetteer and a compendium of railway law. In the gazetteer I noticed that 'of the carnivora' (in Burma) 'the wolf and wild dog are prominent.' Our party had hoped, in its researches, to verify whether or not wolves really did occur in Burma, for no one except the railways seemed to have made certain of them yet. The law compendium treated of divers crimes, some of which seemed hardly to present themselves to the mind of the ordinary traveller. It was, for example, an offence to sell any part of one's return ticket, or to ride in or upon the engine or to extinguish the lamps. The latter in our carriage re-

sembled, indeed, in the Irish R.M.'s memorable words, a gold-fish, and were 'about as much use as an illuminant,' and Heaven forbid that we should have extinguished any of them. But I could appreciate the penalty destined for 'minors who removed any part of the permanent way,' for once, long ago, in the Henzada district, I had arrived hurriedly by Accident Special at what was left of the mail-train after some idle herd-boys had removed a fish-plate to while away the burning noon.

At intervals we stopped a little longer even than usual. At Shwebo, for example, late in the forenoon, we descended to consume what our tickets, bought in the early morning, had described as a 'First-class Mandalay Breakfast'; here, too, we bought other tickets, which would entitle us many hours later to a 'First-class Shwebo Dinner' at Naba. More seasoned travellers lighted spirit-stoves in the lavatory and beguiled the hours with tea and corned beef and cheese; they filled the wash-basin with ice and beer, which gave rise to that curious inscription on them all, 'DO NOT BREAK ICE ON BASIN.' Years ago, in my young innocence, travelling through the dry zone, I had imagined from this warning that even on the Burma Railways it must sometimes freeze at nights.

Mr. Holla, who also seemed to be out of practice in railway travel, like myself, was very mournful after we left Shwebo, and it was not long before he bared his heart to me. He had, misled by the caption on it, unwittingly exchanged his 'First-class Mandalay Breakfast' ticket, which had cost him Rs.2, for an eight-anna *chota hazri* of tea and toast at Mandalay. Now to pay for the breakfast at Shwebo which was awaiting him, he had had to give up his 'First-class Shwebo Dinner' ticket costing Rs.2.8.

Nor was this all. To ensure a meal at Naba he had paid in cash another Rs.2.8 to the Shwebo refreshment staff, and they perhaps with malign misunderstanding, had thrust into our carriage, at the latest moment, as the train was moving off, a large and reeking box (the railway euphemism is a 'breakfast hamper') containing another instalment of the food he had just consumed.

Poor Mr. Holla! he was several rupees out of pocket and without any hope of redress, or prospect of an evening meal, unless he was prepared, many hours hence, to eat the fried fish and curry, cold, out of the reeking box. He had put his faith in a British institution, the Burma Railways, and its underlings had done him down, not once, but thrice. I suggested that he should eat as

much of the contents as he could before they grew cold (for the smell of curry was rapidly becoming insupportable), and revenge himself on the Management by presenting the box, plates and all, to one of the countless beggars who infested the train at every halt. He took the first part of my advice, and, warmed with my sympathy and two large meals at once, admitted to me that he was not a Chinaman at all, but, as I had suspected, a Japanese. He was, he said, travelling ' for his health ' to Naba and thence to Bhamo.

Was he a spy? It thrilled me in those days to think he might be, for then one did not think of the Japanese in Burma in battalions. I had never, to my knowledge, travelled with a spy, and it seemed, in any case, tactless to make any reference to gun-running, or to munitions of war going across Yunnan (though, to be sure, for that very reason the eyes of commercial Rangoon were now firmly set on this forgotten frontier).

But I did venture to say: ' In a year or two, Mr. Holla, your nation will be able to walk into Japanese territory from Bhamo.'

Later I found that Mr. Lloyd George, with trumpets also and shawms, had been ululating the same view in Parliament. To me, then, that remark seemed merely an absurd and meaningless piece of courtesy.

But Mr. Holla did not turn a hair.

' ' Not for another hundred years,' he said, and deftly changed the subject.

CHAPTER V

PARTIAL MOBILISATION

WE reached Myitkyina at last before dawn. It was over two years since I had left it, as I thought for ever, with all the pomp and circumstance of an official farewell, a seething crowd of all peoples, nations and languages, waving goodbye, the Club members shouting friendly ribaldries, two battalion bands playing mournfully against each other, and fog-signals detonating under the carriage wheels like bombs as the train moved out. Now I crept back to it, a humble private citizen, in the dank gloom of a November dawn, wondering if anyone would even remember me.

Our sons inherit us: our looks are strange:
And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy.

But, even at that untimely hour, the nucleus of a domestic staff was grouped on the platform, under a peon from Robin McGuire's house and a senior clerk from his office. There was Lalit Mohun Barua, my old cook's mate, looking gaunter and more like a death's head than ever, and three or four Chinghpaws, whose faces seemed vaguely familiar, to whom I could only put the old Kachin greeting, 'Are you good?' They said they were.

As usual in Myitkyina, most of the senior officials were 'out' till no one knew when, on progress somewhere in their extensive hinterland. (There were parts of Myitkyina district where the King's Writ ran which would take you three or four weeks to reach by any means.) Roper, indeed, the Executive Engineer, was lying 120 miles away at Sumprabum, seriously injured after a motor smash on the winding cart-track which crept to it through the hills, and which motors sometimes used in the 'open season.' It was not the first accident they had had on that road which I can best describe, perhaps, by saying that I have known a powerful American car, starting on it stone-cold at dawn, to 'boil' even with the skid chains on it in the first three miles. Poor Roper was in hospital, 500 miles from X-rays, with a badly fractured jaw and no prospect, even if it did not rain, of getting down for days to come. Luckily for him, my old friend, Rai Bahadur Doctor Nihal Chand (who had saved my life from enteric years before by

riding 69 miles on a pony in 24 hours) had turned up from Putao in his uncanny way, to attend to Roper, and everyone was hoping, with that appreciative gloom reserved for bad accidents, 'for the best.'

But of the other officials, Robin McGuire, my successor in office and a tried friend, was still 'in,' luckily for me, and while he was there, was not only an exceptional host but a tower of advice and strength. So also was Major Jones, the commandant of the military police battalion. He gave me much good counsel, and a Lashi signaller called Bum Lang as an orderly, as well as a score of waterproof sheets and ration bags; he also permitted us to buy locally at his outpost 'coffee shops' in the hills our rice and sugar and kerosene, *atta* and salt and *dhal*. Travellers, eternally suspended in space and wanting so many things, most of which are illegal, have much to be grateful for, to officers such as these.

Only for an hour or so on my arrival could I gaze my fill at the remembered hills, into whose heart we were to disappear so soon. Plum-dark they were against the dawn, with the great river, as smooth and broad and leaden as ever at the foot of the garden, sweeping away round the spacious bay of Waingmaw on its thousand mile journey to the sea. Then in an hour or so it began to rain, and for three days I looked out at the mist-wrapped foothills across the river, where trees and debris and a carcase or two were swirling down the rain-pocked flood, which in a few hours swallowed completely all the shingle and the willow-scrub on the farther shore. I thought gloomily of our doubtful tents, of our lack of waterproofs, and of a hundred other things, but took comfort because, as usual, the ordinary inhabitants of Myitkyina seemed quite impervious to wet. Occasionally they held up an umbrella more as a gesture at, than a protection from, the streaming skies, but, umbrellas or no, they never lost their glossy appearance any more than birds do. After two years of England and the pandemonium of Rangoon, it was pleasant to walk again on unmetalled roads, whereon dogs slept and little children played unscathed, and mothers with babies on their hips and wooden sandals on their feet came slap-slapping down the middle with complete immunity. The whole town seemed full of grazing mules, for several hundred had recently come over the river bound for the Jade Mines and Putao, and all the miscellaneous work of rations and transport in the open season. I looked at their sores, and the hair which had gone white, but not with years, under their

saddles and breast-bands, and wondered what those patches would look like ere April saw them back here again.

One evening, in a sudden glow of sunshine, I wandered down to the river bank. There was an elderly American lounging there, an engineer, who was in charge of gold-dredging machinery near-by (for the idea died very hard that gold was somewhere either in the Hukawng or the Uyu or the Irrawaddy valley in workable quantities). Neither of us was sure who the other was, so we avoided official 'shop' and talked of China, which lay out ruddily before us, layer by layer, beyond the river forty miles away.

'Once,' he told me, 'some years ago, it cost my firm £50,000 in one year to keep two of us out there, and they didn't get a red cent out of it either. Everybody had their hand out and the squeeze started in Pekin and went on down to the lowest lousy cooky boy. . . . But there the Chinks have been asleep for 4,000 years.'

'I'm not so sure,' I said, 'they're like the Jews. The rest of us never know they're there until we suddenly come to and find they've collared all the rackets that are worth running. Perhaps the Japanese will wake up to that one day.'

'You may be right,' he agreed. 'It's true of this place, anyway: if there's any graft in Myitkyina in jade, liquor, rice, sugar cane, dives, mule-contracts, opium, pawn-broking or just the pork trade, you find a Chink, or a syndicate, doing themselves quite well and keeping behind the scenes. It's the same down below, they tell me, but I don't know Lower Burma. . . .'

I thought of Henzada (in the delta) where I had served: there even the crime racket, no mean one, was controlled long ago by a little frail, smiling Chinaman, who looked as if butter would not melt in his gold-stopped mouth, but of whom even the toughest were afraid.

The American looked behind me at the rain clouds piling behind the sunset over the Kumone hills.

'I like these parts,' he said, 'but Jesus Christ, you have got a climate! You must have had 70 inches in the last month!'

I had first to get a cook, some servants and other followers, and knowing Myitkyina, was very apprehensive of the result. Native servants in temporary employment rarely give of their best, and the reliable ones do not usually apply for it. Years before I had watched the seething crowd of would-be 'boys,' five hundred strong, and all in spotless raiment and bristling with testimonials,

which had invested Thomas Cook's on the arrival of an American pleasure-cruise for a three days' sojourn in Rangoon. I had talked with the two C.I.D. men who, notebook in hand, stood like collies on the outskirts of the flock. They assured me they were there to purge out only (a) the pick-pockets (b) the absconders from justice and (c) those with four or more previous convictions. There would be at least 200 men left available for employment.

I had been paying retainers for some months to Lazum Naw—a Chinghpaw with a knowledge of the Maru, Burmese and Lashi dialects and cooking, and with quite a flair for bird-skinning—and to Lalbir Lama, who years before had been Maxwell West's sepoy-orderly in Hpimaw. He was a silent being, content, it always seemed to me, when I knew him better, to be misjudged rather than explain, an ' old soldier ' in every sense of the word, but he had been with West when he got the only Burma specimen of Michie's deer, and knew the country. No one else had applied beforehand except the Head Accountant of one of the Arakan Treasuries, a Bengali, who seemed to wish to go ' as far as Chinese Boarder ' with me, possibly as a step towards the Frontier Service on which he had set his heart, and Lalit Barua, the cook's mate, who had met me on the platform. He was a Mugh (Chittagonian Buddhist) who had written to me in England; ' I am always blessing God for your life and also to Memsahib and Babar. I am still stuck up without job as I am pennyless. At present I was fed by my cousin.'

Neither of these two applicants seemed *prima facie* suited for the high hills. But Dudrow, an old friend of the American Baptist mission, produced a motley gathering of Kachins under his bungalow one morning (some of them had met me on the train) and with his kindly aid I chose five. They all had something to recommend them, a discharge certificate from the Burma Rifles, a letter from a previous employer whom I knew, or sometimes just a likeable grin, and I asked no more than that they should know a little servants' work, be medically fit, and be prepared for five months in the ' blue.' It was perhaps with some vague idea of preventing a cabal against us that I took as many different tribes as possible. Eventually, by the time Arthur Vernay arrived, we had a Gurkha, a Nung, a Yawyin, four Lashis, three Chinghpaws, two Marus, a Shan-Burman, a Mugh, and an Ooriya, who cooked for the skinners.

Of the skinners, Mr. Gabriel, from the Bombay Museum, had

come up with me from Rangoon, and a Karen, Aye Thaung, a shy, silent, likeable soul, now arrived from the Forest Botanists Department in Maymyo. Our cooks, pivots of camp life as they were bound to be, caused me most anxiety. I had once previously employed Wana Naw, and knew him to be an excellent cook, but he had recently married a youthful and attractive wife from the Mission, and Dudrow doubted if he would remain with us for five months. But he stuck to us faithfully, cooked very well indeed, and was a most trustworthy and agreeable being. As second string, I engaged Lalit Barua, the Mugh, for he assured me with tears in his eyes that he would die if I did not employ him. As things turned out, die he very nearly did, as snow at 10,000 feet had not entered into his calculations. Each man was given two woollen jerseys, a muffler, a woollen cap and four blankets to enable him to endure the cold. I decided to wait for Kingdon Ward's advice before I broached the subject of boots.

Finally, on 13th November, after one heavy shower in the night, I set off in dense fog on the launch for Waingmaw. Robin McGuire had gone 'out,' but he had given me leave to sleep on the launch, so that I could wake and dress at my ease, my only anxiety being whether all our followers, after their last night in civilisation, would appear. But all went well, and at Waingmaw the military police most helpfully lent me a fatigue party. So by 11 a.m. I had got forty mule loads tied up and away, most of the stores, the rum, the tents, the rice, formaldehyde, sawdust, lamp-oil and other things. Even then there were no less than thirty-nine packages, cartridges, skinning chests, tow, cotton, rifles and museum packages to put in the quarter-guard, where they were to await the Mammal Curator. At the last moment I realised that I wanted to shoot duck next morning, and had no cartridges. This meant two hours enticing out screws which had long ago sunk out of sight in the wood of the cartridge-boxes, and which severely tested almost every screwdriver in Waingmaw.

In the middle of a busy day a motor drove up with Major Roche, of the military police, from Laukkaung. He had ridden up there, a six days' journey, in October, with a promise from the Inspector-General that there he would be for six months or a year. He was in Laukkaung exactly 21 days, and then came a wire telling him to forsake all and 'proceed' to Lashio, 500 miles away, by road and rail, to command a battalion, as someone else had 'sprue.' Gone, in a second, were his dreams of ease, of saving money in

solitude, of sixty-pound mahseer in the N'Mai. Gone, too, it may be added, was a good deal of public money, for the officers of the military police, who were nearly all seconded from regiments in India, were passage migrants of no uncertain order. It was not unusual to post an officer from Quetta to Putao, or from the Chin Hills to Sumprabum and then, even if he did not fall sick with one of the hill diseases, to move him a few months later several hundred miles. For the 'exigencies of the service' reck little of the map; the officer himself rarely grumbled, for he drew travelling allowances at triple rates on transfer, and his migration was, perforce, a leisurely progress up or down, like that of a bird

I gave Roche lunch, and he in turn gave Gabriel, the head skinner, a passage by launch to Myitkyina, for Gabriel had a boil as big as a hen's egg under his armpit.

In the afternoon I got a wire from Frank Kingdon Ward to say he was arriving on the sixteenth morning. I decided to wait at Waingmaw and meet him, partly because I longed for his advice on innumerable minor details before we started, and partly because I guessed there would be duck on the morrow three miles away on two little lakes I knew of, and a lot of other birds besides.

That evening I wandered out among the rice fields with a gun and collected a few birds, including a ruby-throat, a half-seen shadow which churred harshly at me, like a nightingale, from a tangle by the road.

I came back to the village in the evening with goats, pigs, a hundred mules and ponies, harvesters, carts and pedestrians, all smoking in along the dusty high road in the low sunshine. Ten yards off it on the edge of the village stood an elderly and rather time-worn buffalo tethered in a small shelter of mats. His owner, a Kachin, was feeding him with grass by hand and seemed trying to explain to him, as he did to me, that he had foot-and-mouth disease and that he must be good and stop there for a few days. He called the buffalo a *dingla* (an old man) and indeed he looked to be of a great age. I suppose technically he was by local standards 'segregated,' but hundreds of animals must have been passing close to him that day.

Trouble with the boxes began early. First the sparklet and bulbs, which I had purchased specially for the Americans, had all gone ahead with the advance mules, as had the tea and coffee I wanted for myself, and secondly nothing but a jemmy sufficed to open the medicine-chest when I wanted to bandage Gabriel's boil.

Thirdly, the patent tin-openers, rather of the Yale standard, were too abstruse for our Kachins, who preferred one of the plain smash-and-grab kind. Flit, a table-cloth, napkins and a powerful screwdriver, all had to be put on the list of wants, and a runner sent off to stop Box 113 at Washaung. The sun set in a blaze of red, with great dark clouds to the north, and it rained hard later on. But the weather no longer seemed to matter. We were nearly off at last.

There were no famous resorts of wildfowl in Myitkyina—when they came down out of Tibet most of them seemed to stay only for a day or two and pass on down to the great *ins* like Wetlet and Padu, in the dry zone—but all over the plain of the Irrawaddy, which begins here to spread on both sides of the river for miles, there were quiet little lakes and beds of ancient backwaters in which duck could be found if you looked for them. A few shots and off they would go elsewhere, and rarely would they return, for there were a score of other lakelets to receive them within a few minutes' flight, but it was pleasant to follow them, from one to the other all day, with a breeze in your face and the sun over endless miles of rice and grass. Katcho, where I went next morning, was one of the easiest of these little *ins* to reach, a long narrow shelterless depression running through the rice fields, and beyond it another and another which you hardly saw till you came on them. Mallard and teal, widgeon and gadwall, pochard and tufted duck and pin-tail, I had shot them all here in small numbers early in the season, and once I got a scaup-duck and saw some geese. You will never get a big bag on such a place, as there is almost no cover, and after a few shots the duck go off three miles or more to the east, over the endless plain running back into the hills, to some hidden water which I never found; but it is what you see and not what you shoot which makes the charm of such a day. Long lines and wedges of gray cranes etched against the sunrise like a Japanese print; immense sarus cranes clanging and creaking; the quack of a mallard; a company of lapwings and golden plover running on the short grass; kingfishers and wagtails, herons and egrets in snowy multitudes, doves by scores feeding in a dewy corner of the rice-fields, larks and terns, a coot or a cormorant, marsh harriers and peregrines; you might come back after a morning here drunk with the sight of birds, and for a collector it was an embarrassment of riches.

And if you could stumble on the rice-patch or the swamp

where those scattered companies of duck came in from all round the compass to their evening feed—as I did once by accident—you might wait in the dusk and enjoy such flighting as most men only do in dreams.

We had a long and wet and slippery walk to get round the *in* along the narrow banks of the rice-fields, which were covered with soaked and flattened stems of corn, but at last we reached the edge of the open plain and I sent Bum Lang round to the further side of the water to 'wake the duck.' As I crouched, there was an outburst of quacking close behind me, where a score of mallard had gathered to sleep out the day on a little wet depression among some bushes. I took off my shoes and stalked them, and got a right and left as they rose, but the shots sent a hundred duck away from somewhere else, at a great height, off to their sanctum in the east.

Then a young peregrine swished over my head suddenly from behind at the golden plover and I had shot him before I realised what he was, and was sorry for it afterwards, though, to be sure, he was the only falcon in five months which gave us a chance at him at all. To me a peregrine always seems the tiger of the bird-world: with his lean, hard shape, rather rank smell, deadly claws and those relentless implacable eyes, he has a terror and a magnetism above eagles. I suppose it is the touch of sleepy good nature about the lion and the eagle which gives them their value as national emblems. I ended the morning by collecting an avocet, on a village pond where women were washing clothes. He was feeding near some terns, belly-deep in water, and swam as gracefully as a gull.

I was up at 4.30 next morning, and went down to the station at 5 to meet Kingdon Ward on the mail train. The station, lampless in the cold mist, was inhabited by one cabman asleep beside his dozing pony, and three Yunnanese coolies who, in cloth caps, shorts and a blanket each, were sleeping on the steps of the ticket-office. Presently, a mile away, I could hear the train; it came on and then stopped most considerately for ten or fifteen minutes to let the station staff wake. It did not strive or cry or exhibit any of the ordinary signs of impatience. I could hear the durwan asleep on the counter in the office clearing his throat leisurely and well, then he rolled up his bedding and lit a lamp and opened the door; then a clerk appeared to relieve him and finally the shunting jemadar appeared and walked off, dressing himself, into the dark-

ness to adjust the points and lower the distance signal. Finally the engine whistled half-apologetically and the mail turned the corner and came rumbling in at last.

It was all done with that commonsense and minimum of fuss which you will find in the East when it has a chance to manage itself. No one was any the worse because the train was late. Far from it: the passengers in the warm frowst of their carriages had another ten minutes for repose or dressing or packing, and those without tickets could vanish peacefully into the Ewigkeit. No one, in fact, with the possible exception of the engine driver or some stickler in the Rangoon office, really wanted the train to come in when it was due, before the bazaar was awake, or the mail-wagon had arrived, or it was light enough to see. Had not Robin McGuire, in his letter of welcome to me, added a postscript: 'I positively refuse to meet you at the unearthly hour of 5.15!' After all, this was the only train for many hours, and was not, as on our overcrowded lines, likely to get in anybody's way by being an hour late. There it would sit and rest, and when the engine was at last ready late that evening, round it would steam and fasten on to the other end, and away the whole affair would go through the night, this time as the Myitkyina-Rangoon Mail. This last arrangement was, perhaps, the most admirable of the lot, and in the composition of the new time-table I seemed to detect strong evidence of a local hand; for by it no high official from Rangoon or Mandalay, Commissioners and Inspector-Generals and such, could ever pass through the Myitkyina district except at night. There was, in fact, a sort of close-time for them, as there is for game-birds, between sunset and sunrise, and the district had rest by day. In the old days, when the mail-train entered the district at about seven in the morning and lumbered through it till finally it got to Myitkyina at '1600 hours' (and, believe me, you felt you had endured every one of them) the Great Ones had been wont to lean and peer out of the carriage window all day long, and see what was going on: all sorts of subordinates, from headmen upwards, at wayside stations, instead of backchatting with their own friends, had to come up, properly dressed, and make obeisance and answer questions, and try to keep up a conversation while the engine was off having one of its numerous drinks. It was an ordeal for all concerned. But now the Great Ones turned in full-fed at Myitkyina or Naba and pulled the shutters down, as instructed by the Company, and read a book or went to sleep, and

no more attention need be paid to them than one would to a horse, until they were unboxed next morning at Mandalay or Myitkyina.

I realised, in fact, how much behind the times we had been when I was in charge of the district.

CHAPTER VI

UP THE VALLEY

So I took the road, as a man takes a woman,
for better or worse. DAVID GRAYSON.

FRANK KINGDON WARD and I went down to the launch and discussed innumerable details over tea and bacon. He was a real traveller, one of the few I had encountered, who was quite prepared to go anywhere in the world and back again and make no fuss about it, as he had done a hundred times before. So I listened carefully and studied his battered kit, two small tin uniform cases, a very large bedding-roll, which held two hot-water bottles, a suitcase and a great *toppa* or cooly basket, in which went all manner of oddments, plants, his three cameras, his leather jerkin when the morning grew too hot, and other things. He had no bed or tent or camp furniture, and his Shan servant, whom he had not seen for a year, was supposed to be on his way from Bhamo to meet him. A lesser being (myself, in fact) would have been fussed and explanatory: Frank was not. He needed little and had done without almost everything else in turn, scores of times, and had all a seasoned explorer's contempt for the minor gadgets and snobberies of travel. I recalled a remark I had heard somewhere in the first year of the 1914-18 war:

'The roads of Flanders are paved with fitted mess-tins, all given as useful presents by fond Aunts!'

It might have come from Frank. None the less, because all men have their fads, he insisted on my laying in a huge stock of mosquito coils which we gave away five months later, and at our first meal he drew pointed attention to the fact that there was no tea-cosy. I brought out a new Jaegar woollen helmet, which was intended for someone on Imaw Bum, and what was left of Frank's own helmet speedily adorned the teapot through the trip. He then asked me why there was no crumb-brush. That, too, I had forgotten.

As so often, just as our purchases of beads and blankets and oiled paper for plants were accomplished, and when I had no gun, I saw before the launch steamed away a bird which I have re-

gretted ever since I did not collect. It was by the river bank, a small, pale-brown eagle with a whitish head, a yellow-green cere and a dark line through the eye. It sat up above us in a mango tree and departed with a slow, soft, owl-like flight, looking very pale in the sunlight and pursued by crows.

'What is hit is history
And what is missed is mystery.'

I quoted the old collector's rhyme to Frank, not knowing how often in the next five months it was to come into my mind.

We got the mules away from Waingmaw by 2 p.m., and started ourselves half an hour later in the blazing sun.

As we put forth we passed a stone mile-post, set up by the P.W.D. It did not, as it might do, tell you that it was 5,000 miles to London Town, or 79 to Tengyueh, or 158 to the Hpimaw Post. It said quite simply and profoundly $\frac{'M'}{O}$ and left the rest to you. For the traveller that silent enigmatic starting-point might mark the gateway of all romance. For here began or ended a dozen roads across the great barren mountains of the frontier, by Chimili and Hpimaw, Fenshuiling and Lagwi, Hparè and Panwa, Kambaiti and Maiku, Sima, Pajao and Sinlum. By this road, if you would, you could start for Yunnanfu or Pekin or Li-kiang, or round the world; here as you came wearily out of the hills by a dozen different ways, with your opium or goats or pigs or the merchandise of Yunnan, you might think you had arrived somewhere, and be proud of the distance you had come, as you saw the lights of Myitkyina shining up the river. But the P.W.D. knew better. Perhaps if you were going up the hill, they did not wish to discourage your mules at the very outset by warning them how far they had to go. In any case, mere distance is most misleading on a road where rivers perform the strangest antics in the rains, and if wear and tear could not close a road, an earthquake might well do so at any time. And what was the good of raising your hopes by telling you it was only '4 miles to Myitkyina' from Waingmaw when it would take you all of a day to get your pigs or mules across the river by the ferry, and even then there was no road at all across that mile and a half of burning shingle on the other side?

I suggested once to a Government engineer that all this might be the reason for that blank non-committal signpost. 'Oh no!' he said, 'it's for budget purposes partly,' and he went on to ex-

plain to me how if his office asked in the 'Frontier Watch and Ward' budget for a lump-sum for all the hundreds of miles of road or path which spread away from Waingmaw, the amount needed would so shock the Finance Department that they were never likely to grant the money. So the amounts required were split up, and the money was allotted in little packets. 'M/O' marked the start of the Waingmaw-Seniku road and the Waingmaw-Sima road, and thirteen miles on, the first gave birth to the Washaung-Sadon road, and the rest became the Seniku road, and later still had issue, this time the Manwaing-Sailaw road, and so on. And at Seniku, when you had done 32 useful miles, you got back to 'M/O' again, which was rather depressing, and made you wonder where you were. There was, in fact, only one mile-post, in this district of immense distances, which told you how far it was to anywhere and that one, tactfully suppressing all intermediate places and details, said, 'To Putao 221 miles.' It would also have been true until a few years back to put on it, 'To Putao 3 weeks,' for that was the time it took with loaded mules.

So, leaving 'M/O' Frank and I tramped down the wide street of Waingmaw to the wonderment of the bazaar, who presently grinned to see our head muleteer posting lightly past us in a motor-car. It was a week before we knew the reason. But we wanted, or at least I did, to harden our feet, and in any case we could see more on the road by walking, and there was not much point in arriving at Washaung hours before the mules. The road was straight and hot and dusty, and by the side of it we soon came upon that old sick buffalo, whom I had met two days before, lying now beside the roadside in the dust of the passing mules with the flies already busy round his glazing eyes. Whatever he was dying of, old age or 'foot-and-mouth,' there was now no pretence that he was segregated.

We saw little on the way except a score of black pigs, pleasantly tired with their long march over the hills and sleeping round a camp-fire on terms of perfect equality with their herdsmen. For them, as for most of us, to travel hopefully was a better thing than to arrive, but luckily for them there were no essayists to point it out to them. And then at last, after miles of the flat, stifling plains-forest which divided Washaung from Waingmaw, we came out to rice-fields, serene and golden in the clear evening light, and all about us were young Shan-Tayokes stripped to their trousers

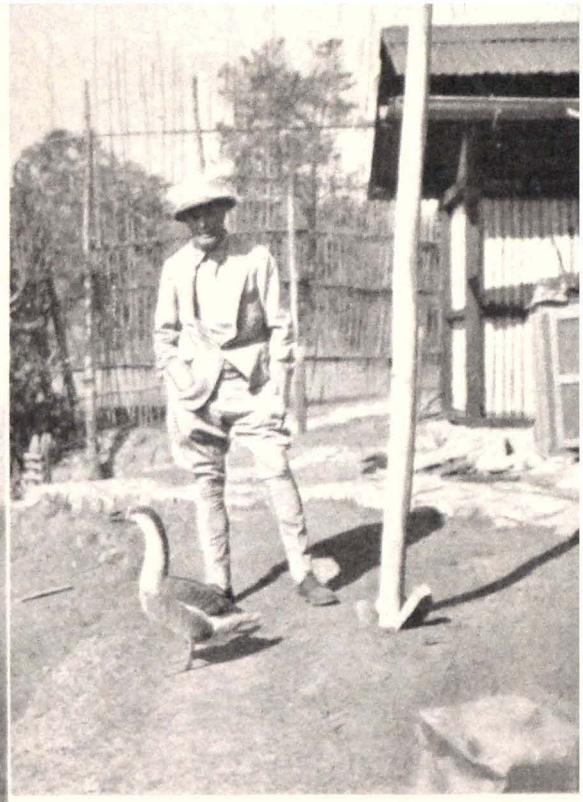
and neat and comely girls busy with the harvest. They sang as we passed them—a high, untuneful song, perhaps of derision, but we could not understand.

To the wanderer in Northern Burma, before the War, the Shan-Tayokes were among the cleanest and most personable, and also the least-known people he would meet. They had settled down in this part of Myitkyina in hundreds, and now by their labours a great plain of rice stretches from Waingmaw and Katcho nearly to Kazu. Their women wear neat, dark-blue turbans and pale-blue tunics and dark-blue trousers, and are as comely as the Hkamti Shans; yet I never met anyone who professed to know them, even among those who administered them. They were not litigants; a few appeared in the courts yearly for distilling liquor. They grew rice and bred pigs and ducks and buffaloes and paid their taxes and kept themselves most strictly to themselves. Yet if I had wanted to photograph rural Burma at its best and most picturesque, I think I should have gone first of all to a Shan-Tayoke village.

I spent twenty minutes and a number of cartridges that evening trying to collect some bats, small as butterflies, which jinked and jinked more maddeningly than anything I ever tried to point a gun at. I also lost an owl which gave me an easy chance, and saw a woodcock flighting out of the forest down on to the rice-fields, but he was over me while I was busy with a bat. At Namaoyang, next evening, waiting at dusk beside the road, another woodcock came at me out of the after-glow and I dropped him in a tangle of bushes, but ten minutes later when we were searching for him and it was too dark to shoot, he rose and flew off again. Woodcock were common enough in the plains of Myitkyina in winter, and I have seen as many as six shot in an afternoon of beating for junglefowl; but at night, when they are travelling swiftly to their feeding-grounds, they are as different as possible from the slow owl-like bird you may beat out in the afternoon.

The six marches, about 73 miles, which lie between Washaung and Chipwi, we did at our leisure. To those who were not naturalists or fishermen, there was little of interest in the low, hot, bamboo-covered hills which fringe the N'mai river, and most travellers hurry through them. But we had to harden our skinning staff and the servants gradually, to break our party in to camp routine, and to sort, by trial and error, the immense variety of equipment we had with us. We should have gained

ARTHUR S. VERNAY
leader of the expedition



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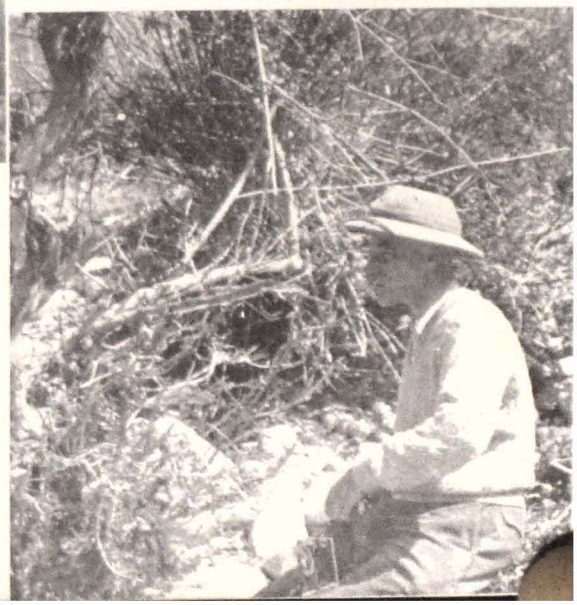

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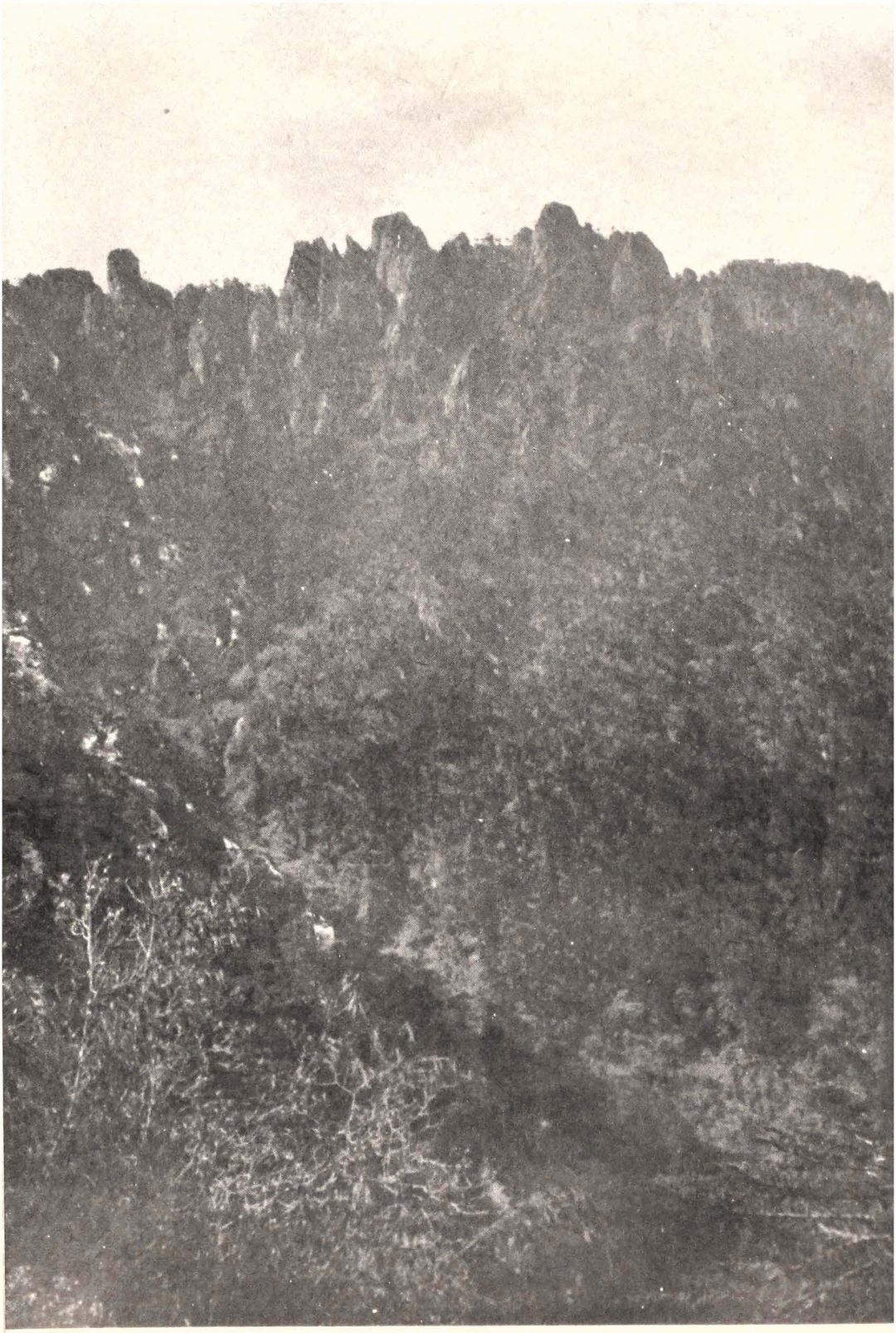


The giant brantub of the hills (p.12)

nothing by hurrying, and I wanted also to savour to the full the advantage of being no longer a Deputy Commissioner. In that office, however little work there was to do along the road, one was expected to preserve some outward and visible signs of sanity and dignity, to arrive at the rest-houses, or roadside villages, properly dressed, moderately clean and in reasonable time to greet those who, in their levée dress, had been awaiting one's arrival for many hours. I had learnt that lesson in the Army and again years later in the Upper Chindwin. My lot it had been once, on a long march up the Kalè valley, to dally for three hours with some bison-tracks chance-met along the road. I arrived at mid-day at a village, black with sweat and grime, dishevelled and alone, to find all the elders and a bevy of fourteen maidens, each with a bouquet, waiting, cool and comely and immaculate, to accord me an official welcome. I went on that spruce parade just as I was and inspected it, feeling sure that in the Army I should have been unhesitatingly crimed for 'having a dirty neck.'

A predecessor of mine, Grant-Brown, had, so the legend runs, on such an occasion, after a swim in the Mergui Archipelago, sat calmly dripping in a chair and inspected a large mixed school without even his spectacles to adorn him; but I lacked his invincible aplomb.

Now, however, I was just a simple naturalist and a D.C. no longer, and Frank was already known far and wide as the *nampan duwa,* the lord of wild flowers. We were both clearly mad and nothing we did or wore or looked like really mattered, nor should we be keeping anyone waiting, however long we dallied on the way. We knew as we rounded the last spur, dirty and sweating, with our arms full of plants, or carrying by the leg some absurdly diminutive bird, and longing only for a bath and tea, that we should not find an infant school lined up beside the path with wooden faces ready to burst into 'God Save the King!' There would be no officials so unrecognisable in uniform or their best clothes that we should mistake the overseer for the rest-house durwan, or the doctor for the sub-inspector of excise. There would be no more 'shop' to talk over for ever; we were private citizens. So we marched in peace, collecting as we went, and one fine day, at luncheon, we discovered that in four long hours we had only come three miles.

Thus, with the whole day before us, and the 'high unaltered blue' above, we took the road at a reasonable hour each morning.

There was always a struggle with the head *laoban* who had, since long before dawn, been wide awake and gossiping with his muleteers round the fire; he was determined to get us up and away by 7 a.m., so that, the short march over, he could send his mules off to graze and spend the rest of the day in peace. But at last the loads would be packed and tied and off the 80 mules would go, all stepping delicately as if each step was their last, while they wriggled their lean withers and croups to adjust the weight, and their noses to loosen the cord muzzles to their liking. Once fairly into their stride—and never once have I seen a mule attempt to turn back on to the road that he had come—they would go on to the end of the stage, without haste, without rest; for the mule, like the hunted fox, is a 'toddling animal,' and once started does not stop. And we, when the servants had gone, could follow them in our own time, with Bum Lang, the Lashi signaller lance-naik, and Lama Ta to carry our guns, and behind them one small muleteer in an immense hat and with an even smaller mule almost concealed under Frank's great 'toppa,' which held our lunch and cameras and plants and birds, and our surplus clothing when the sun grew warm.

There was an incessant ebb and flow of traffic on the road, ration mules taking *dhal* and *atta,* rice and salt and oil, boots and clothing, and a hundred oddments to the outposts at Laukkaung and Htawgaw, mules for the Public Works Department and the post office and hospital, laden with everything from cable wire or stovepipes to drugs and bedding, to nails and ink and postage stamps; for Laukkaung and Htawgaw were suspended in a vacuum in the hills and their every civilised requirement came either eight or eleven days' journey to them. Behind them came a relief-platoon marching up with its women and children for a year at Htawgaw; a treasure escort with the year's requirements of silver; or a contractor jolting along on a bicycle to do rest-house repairs, with his luggage, for a month, consisting of a tiny bedding-roll strapped on his carrier and a very seasick cockerel in a basket, fastened to the handlebars.

And down the valley to meet us came the people of the hills: police-sepoys on leave, with their boots slung on their rifle-butts, singing and smoking; a long line of shaggy recruits from the back of beyond, under a havildar of the Burma Rifles, already losing their shyness and singing songs of Maymyo; a flock of sheep from the Panwa Pass; villages of Yawyins after a starvation bad season

in the Upper Ngawchang, who were to spend the next four months cutting firewood at the Sahmaw factory; or a Yunnanese merchant riding lordlily on a quilted pony with a posse of ragged yoke-laden coolies on their way to the jade mines.

At one point we met a party of Chinghpaws from N'Ding in the Triangle, who were wearing queer white-peaked caps, much the shape of a schoolboy's following-up cap, made of tree bark. They called it '*Tang-gawng-pyi*' and it was a curious leathery substance like the inside of orange-peel but nearly an inch thick. I never saw any other Kachins in these hills similarly capped, so it is probably a rare local product.

We saw hardly any mammals, though one night a shot close to the skinners' quarters at Tanga brought us tumbling out, but it was the Kachin jemadar of the platoon marching to Htawgaw, who had, by mistake for a tiger, assassinated a large civet-cat in the dark. The mistake was excusable as tigers are a common nuisance on that part of the road. Four years before, over-persuaded by a slightly drunk Gurkha sepoy, I had sat out one night on the bare cropped grass of the hillside in almost that very spot, fifteen yards from the glimmering carcase of an old white pony which had been killed by a tiger from the line of my mules, close to a fire, only a few minutes before. The tiger was, they assured me, a well-known one and 'very bold,' so we put a lantern on the carcase and sat down expectantly side by side with .303 rifles. But he was not so bold as that, though I can remember sitting there, like an orphan exposed on the hillside, expecting every moment to feel him breathing down my neck. Throughout our vigil, the smell of liquor and onions which emanated from the sepoy was scarcely less terrifying.

But all along the road, as we went, the birds were there; for they love clearings and to them the road was one endless clearing. They were there sunning themselves on the telegraph wires, searching for grit on the only bare and level space for miles, or darting out of the gloom across the open into the gloom again. Frank and I stopped one morning between Seniku and Shingaw to let nearly two hundred mules go by and five minutes later, when the road had settled down in the sunshine, a very pale sandy lark rose, with a musical twitter, almost from under our feet. It was a sand-lark (*Calandrella rufescens*) a bird, so the books assured us, spread from Yarkand to Kashgar and said to winter in Baluchistan. Neither in Eastern India nor Yunnan had it been met before.

Other surprises met us early on: on November 17 I watched a pair of striated swallows collecting mud at a road-side puddle and plastering their nest under a culvert. It seemed the wrong time of year for swallows to be nesting and there was no sign, on dissection, that they were breeding birds at all. It was, alas! one of those problems which collecting does not solve. And on the same day Frank shot in heavy evergreen rain forest a red-capped babbler which until then I had thought was a bird of the dry zone.

There were single redstarts all along the road, and between Washaung and Chipwi I collected eleven dark thrushes[1] and saw as many more, all single birds: in four years previously I had never blundered across any in Myitkyina, and only two in twelve years' collecting in Burma. We saw another a few days farther on and then no more till the end of our trip, and what to deduce from that I do not know.

The bungalow register, which at each stage every traveller had to sign, was a bald official record of those who sojourned in it in their incessant comings and goings up and down the valley, a string of names and dates and hours, of breakages and fees. Its use by the facetious, or as a complaint book, used to be sternly discouraged by the P.W.D., but from Shingaw onwards up the valley to Chipwi, the human touch had prevailed and the last few pages of each book became a fishing diary. Here were the names of two-score bygone fishermen, mainly officers of the ever-shifting military police, who had their hours of bliss and sorrow beside these turbulent pools; for where the Shingaw and the Tamu and the Chipwi rivers came foaming out into the N'mai, were haunts of mahseer once famous and difficult as any in Burma.

Here you might read how Captain Conner caught a 49-pounder and a gunner officer, Captain Jagoe, a fish of 42½ pounds, and at one bungalow there were records of ninety mahseer landed in ten years, great and small. Wails of anguish and vivid bursts of detail quickened the record here and there:

'N'mai filthy and high, Tamuhka very clear. Lost a real good fish after forty-five minutes on through the hook bending.'

And a year later another voice chimed in mournfully:

'Lost a fizzer which played with me for about ten minutes and finally snagged me.'

[1] *Turdus obscurus.*

And later still came a Captain Fife with his bald memorial of woe:

'Lost an 80-pound fish after thirty minutes on. Took all my 300 yards of line and then broke me, taking a 100 yards of line and spoon. Also broke hook in second big fish and lost a third. (My last day and OH, HOW I SWORE!)'

In the Chipwi book a Major-General's voice was audible:

'A big fellow on for fifty-five minutes. Lost five fish and was broken by three of them.'

And there was a neat map, in blue and red pencil, of the pools and shoals, and under it: 'X = the best spot when river is low February-April.' Beneath it a cynic had scrawled in a later hand:

'There ain't no X now: June, '34.'

For the N'mai in its annual upheavals had completely changed its course.

There is a book to be written some day, by a fisherman with local knowledge and the lyric touch, round such bare statistics as you might get from these registers and the more detailed fishing diary which was kept in the Myitkyina Club, of those *zups* where the bright waters meet, for there was probably nothing quite like them in the world. What a chapter could be composed, for example, round that terse entry at the Chipwi rest-house of a week-end in which Captain Geake broke the Burma record:

'26—28/3/34. Chyathèhka Zup. 28, 11, 8, $2\frac{1}{2}$, 31, $67\frac{1}{2}$, 92 pounds, water falling, clearish'

Or that other:

'6/4/34—10/4/34. 68, 62, 42, 18, 10, 10 pounds, water flooding, muddy.'

That was all. The rest was silence.

Rightly or wrongly, the layman got the impression that from Putao to the Confluence, from Chipwi to Shingaw, certain pools must be full of monster fish from whose jaws still dangled the most expensive spoons and tracing. And if this was so, did it perhaps explain how a famous pool could suddenly lose its savour? Did the great fish learn in time and cease to rise for evermore? And above all, did they teach the rest of them? For there were pools with great traditions—the Confluence was one—which suddenly 'went off' and in which not a fish seemed to have been caught for years.

CHAPTER VII

INTO THE HILLS

I sow no seeds and I pay no rent
And I thank no man for his bounties
But I've a treasure that's never spent,
I'm lord of a dozen counties.

JOHN DRINKWATER.

WE halted half a day at Chipwi to rearrange ourselves. We put up the tents to see what we had, for our kit had been sent out partly from London and partly from New York, and we were not too certain what we were carrying with us. We also re-sorted the contents of the two stout chests of medicine, which, partly on Ronald Kaulback's advice, I had taken out. Their size appalled us and Frank was very scornful, as was Arthur, our leader, later on.

'What on earth do we want all this for in six months?'

'I hope we shan't need it,' I said defensively. 'But Ronnie told me wherever he camped the whole populace simply flocked in to be treated. Besides which, we shall be, with coolies, a party of seventy or eighty when we get out in the blue. I know when I was a D.C. travelling with a sub-assistant surgeon in this district people came streaming in at every halt from miles away and they're a pretty C3 crowd—in the Mali hills, anyway.'

That was no less than the truth. I cherished a vivid recollection of one such village near Punlumbum where a few years before we had proffered our medical wares one afternoon: a dense and odorous crowd of men, women and children, with every ailment from goitre to scabies ringing us in, and in the centre of the ring, the village elder, a grey-haired old reprobate, reclining on his back with closed eyes as in a barber's chair, determined to have the first and fullest whack of Government treatment somehow. He had absorbed in turn some castor-oil and cough lozenges and eye-drops and sweet-oil for earache and had allowed a boil on his nose to be lanced with every symptom of enjoyment. He looked as if he was acting a charade of 'Love lies bleeding.' We had declined to deal with what fifty years of neglect and betel had

left of his teeth. He had finally hinted that a vermifuge would not come amiss until he discovered that this treatment entailed a preliminary starvation of twenty-four hours. In the West, I think, he would have been the type of customer who insists on a shave, haircut, shampoo, face massage and manicure, regardless of how many others are waiting for their turn.

'Well,' said Frank, with gloomy conviction, 'if you start on that sort of thing, you'll never do any bird-collecting. And Ronnie'll kill someone some day if he starts doctoring them wholesale. These drugs are all very well if you know how to use them. All *I've* ever taken on any of my trips' (and Frank had been to more than one world's end) 'have been iodine, permanganate, some cotton wool, a starter and a stopper.'

He showed me a small battered biscuit-tin in which what was left of these medical comforts, an empty ampoule of iodine and two forlorn bottles of cascara and chlorodyne, from his last three expeditions, reposed, much the worse for wear, among seeds and insect-powder and developer.

But, as I told Frank, he was the happy warrior, a traveller without peer, and a fatalist: if you fell sick in the wilds, you fell sick and probably recovered; if not, well, we all had to die some time. I had realised this a few days previously when we had both recoiled hurriedly from a large snake chance-met on the mule-path.

'I loathe snakes,' said Frank, as it swirled over the hillside.

'So do I, but what do *you* do if you're bitten by one?' Frank's work for twenty-five years, botanising in forests throughout the rains, had probably exposed him to snake-bite beyond most other persons in the world.

'God knows!' said Frank soberly. 'I don't. Iodine, I suppose.'

But I had seen too many strong men come down on dhoolies out of the Myitkyina hills, gaunt, sad shadows of themselves. I like to think it was our excess of medicines which insured us from all but minor mishaps in the next five months. We consumed barely a quarter of our supply though Lalbir Lama did his best. Once he was given half a day's leave, a teaspoon and a pint bottle of the Blitzkrieg cough-cure (dose for adults one teaspoonful thrice daily). He reappeared next morning, heavily muffled up, with the teaspoon and with an air about him as of dead yesterdays. He said he was *thora acchha* and might he have some more, as the bottle was *khilàs*?

'But it can't be *khilàs!*' I said, 'that bottle should have lasted you three weeks.'

'*Ji, sahib!* I am a little better.'

'Well, if you've drunk the whole ruddy bottle and aren't dead, you must be cured!'

'*Ji, sahib!*' very bleakly and without conviction.

But it was impossible to defeat Lalbir; he was an old soldier and fought on interior lines. Having taken half a day off to recover from his cough, he now had to take a whole day off to recover from a severe overdose of the Blitzkrieg.

It was at Chipwi too that we had at last a reckoning with the muleteers. We had sent forty laden mules ahead of us on November 15 and another ten had followed them 'empty'; these last were intended to carry rice from Htawgaw to the base camp, or to be available in case at any stage I wanted to double-march. They had most carefully kept a stage ahead of us all the way up from Waingmaw.

But to a Chinaman an unloaded pack animal, especially one going uphill, is not only criminal waste but an intolerable temptation; at last we knew why the head *laoban* had posted on ahead of us to Washaung in a motor-car. Eight of the ten 'empty' beasts were now, miraculously, carrying about 150 pounds of paddy each, and ten of the others which were nominally 'full' with my 120-pound loads had twenty to thirty pounds of paddy concealed on the saddle-yoke under the covers. To a Chinaman this did not mean anything; true, most of the ponies and mules were from ten to twelve hands high and in England nowadays would have been carrying nothing but a child of nine or ten, but here, on the edge of Yunnan, despite every known equine blemish and deficiency, and as improvidently catered for as any sparrow, they were carrying ten or eleven stone of dead weight up grades of one-in-four. And when I came to think of it, they were the lucky ones, for they were all picked beasts, passed by a Government officer as 'sound and fit to carry 120-pound loads on ordinary marches.' Their rejected rivals, mules too small or poor or malformed to pass the official test, carried as a matter of course a private load computed generously by Yunnanese standards; with these rocking on their uncared-for spines they normally double-marched eighteen to twenty miles a day.

It is not an easy task, especially if it is a bright morning with birds all round which one wishes to collect, to count, re-sort, and

re-pack even part of eighty to ninety loads of varying weights and bulk and dimensions. The *laoban* did his best to baffle us by trying to hustle some of the mules off before we were ready, by bringing up some of his underlings for medical treatment, and by surrounding the loads *ad misericordiam* with dejected-looking animals which, I knew, would get no breakfast or luncheon till they reached Laukkaung. When questioned, he became in turns deaf, blandly imbecile, or ignorant of all languages except his own dialect of Yunnanese. Frank did his best by loosing at him a few belts of lethal Pekinese, while I sprayed him on the other side with Burmese, Chinghpaw and barrack-room English.

In the middle of the uproar, when we had mislaid the keys of the medicine-chest, and the Mugh cook was complaining that the Kachins had eaten all the skinners' *dhal,* while the skinners were complaining that the Mugh cook was starving them, and an oil tin was found to be leaking and certain knives to have been forgotten beside the path at luncheon on the previous day, a very pale lark (which I feel sure was another *Calandrella*) flew towards us from the north and pitched outside the bungalow fence. I forsook all in the interests of science, but the lark, doubtless scenting trouble, went off hurriedly elsewhere, before I could fire a shot.

But at last the mules were reloaded and jingling up the hill, and Frank and I, before following them, had time to cast round that sunny bay of hill by the river in which so many fishermen have rejoiced. For here the Chipwi river came pouring out of a dark gorge under its mighty bridge to force the N'mai over against the foothills of the Triangle and pin it there behind half a mile of sand and stones. Here by the little Baptist School, in the terraced fields of rice fringed with dense scrub and the orange-grove which was all that was left of the old Government farm, some of the plains birds for the last time met the advance-guard of the hills. Here you might see little ringed plovers and spurwinged plovers on the sand, a kingfisher on the shingle, drongos and spotted doves, bulbuls and shrikes and wagtails and redstarts and jungle fowl. Cormorants came swinging down out of the gorge, dark as driven grouse; in the bushes below the rest-house you might hear troops of the little black rufous-necked laughing thrush[1] and bamboo partridges[2] which burst with a cackle out of the wild pea-vines and a few hill-birds which had wandered down, finch-

[1] *Garrulax ruficollis.* [2] *Bambusicola fytchii.*

billed bulbuls with their white beaks and queer chuckle, and the white-browed laughing thrush.

It was a place from which the fisherman could hardly be torn and where the naturalist would fain linger. But we were bound for the high hills. Chipwi seemed close and stuffy, the last of the plains. Frank drew a deep breath and set his eyes to the hills and his foot on a path which went like a ladder up through a field of corn. I had not realised till this moment how this long plod up the valley, as dull to a botanist as the Euston Road, had irked him. But now he was back in his own world which no one grudged him, the unwanted edges of Burma and Assam and Tibet.

Laukkaung, nine miles uphill from Chipwi, had been for some years the headquarters of the sub-division which embraced all the country between the Shan-Ngaw hills west of the N'mai and the still greater range which divides Burma from the Salween. Once these headquarters were at Htawgaw, three marches on, on an open pine-clad hillside. It was a delectable spot, chosen with care by F. V. Clerk and Lowis, men whose names will live long on this frontier, but the buildings of hewn stone began to crack and slip under the incessant strain of earthquake shocks, which numbered not hundreds but thousands a year. In 1938 all but one of them had been pulled down and most of the military police barracks and the little civil station had been transferred to temporary wooden buildings on narrow ridges and ledges which thrust themselves out of the great Pyèpat ridge at Laukkaung.

We were received with every kindness by McGuinness, the Assistant Superintendent. His task it was to control an area which ran a hundred miles from the Mekh to the Panwa Pass and forty miles from East to West. He was head of a little community which now comprised a Kachin subadar, a Sikh overseer, a Karen doctor, a Hindu postmaster and a Maru *taungok* or township officer; the villages of his charge were Maru, Lashi, Yawyin, and a few Chingpaw with odd settlements of Chinese traders, so that he was apt to be starved of conversation in his mother-tongue.

But in those 4,000 miles of mountain communications were not so much, by our standards, Elizabethan as early British; for months at a time McGuinness shut up his house and went 'out,' sometimes with an escort of military police, sometimes with a handful of red-turbaned civil *pyadas*. Fair, spare and imperturbable, his lonely life had given him in a few years not only great fluency in Chinghpaw but a balance beyond his years. He

offered us one of his few *pyadas* as liaison officer and found us an interpreter, Lup Teng, *alias* Luk Tyen *alias* Luk Tai, a Lashi who had been for years with the military police in Hpimaw. He was now a pensioner but still only in the middle forties, had several wives, and his last two confidential reports by local military police officers, which I had once been privileged to see, had run as follows:

'Is a bit above himself and needs a kick in the what-nots.'

'A "tough" and a stout fellow: appears to have a mania for lying.'

But moral deficiencies did not seem to us to matter beside the fact that Lup Teng could speak all the local dialects, was still strong enough to accompany local hunters after takin and knew the Hpimaw neighbourhood from A to Z. He was our right-hand man for many months.

Next day, the tenth since we had left Myitkyina, we struck up into the hills. The path wound up from the rest-house, through a squalid Chinese village with little shops set about untidily on rocky knolls, on up to the main spur of the Pyèpat ridge, from whose top you may look down on the whole length of the N'mai valley to Seniku. Past the mulesheds and the overseer's house, the military police lines, the narrow tin-roofed hospital, and the tiny football ground, we came suddenly on a neat villa with the ghost of a garden before it and behind. In the West someone perhaps would have labelled it *Mon Repos* or *Bellavista* or *Sunnyside*. I had dined in it of old with one of the ever-changing Assistant Commandants and listened, through the smoke of our pipes, to the faint whoops and thumps and groanings of the earliest radio set in the Kachin Hills. Now it stood shuttered and empty, forgotten of its long line of youthful owners. The last but one had painted, half-defiantly, a nameboard on its gate: 'Purity Palace.' He was a *viveur* and a keen fisherman and had made a neat terrace or rockery beneath the windows, buttressed, as we could see, with old beer bottles.

If a step should sound or a word be spoken
Would a ghost not rise at the strange guest's hand?

But there would, I felt, be two-score ghosts or more hanging about that villa. Captains all, so many of them had come and gone in the last ten or twenty years into and out of these hills, *shikaris*, fishermen, naturalists, some of them all three, and a very few who

hated it all and yearned only to be back in civilisation again. There was no memorial of them except in this quarter-acre of garden where bulbuls whistled and played among the peas, and in a manuscript book which it had once been my lot to see, in which each officer had said his say and handed down his *shikar* knowledge, his gardening failures, the details of his journeys here and there about the frontier to those that came after; in it there were 101 queer details of life in the sub-division from notes on takin, or serow, or aconite-poisoning of mules, to outspoken comments on their predecessors or their underlings.

I wondered where that book was now. Its hard-bought local knowledge, even the mere conjectures of its *shikaris,* were beyond price.

Then we struck up the zigzag path on to the great ridge which cuts the N'mai off from the eastern hills. There were house martins flying above it, one of the rarest of birds in most of Burma, though not so in this remote corner; one moment they would be wheeling close over our heads and the next far away out in the haze a mile away, and unless one snapped at them at the instant they were over the path it would have been cruel to shoot and impossible to recover them in the tangle. I also collected in McGuinness's garden, where we stopped on our way up, a grey sibia,[1] a silent long-tailed bird of a curious family whose movements seem to depend on the supply of flowering trees. Frank also shot a red-tailed laughing thrush skulking in a bush by the path, the only one we saw or obtained in many months.

That ten-mile march, though we did not know it till later, was one of the luckiest of the whole trip. We moved very slowly and did not go off the path, for it was a waste of time to plunge up or down hill and expect to see anything. At every other corner a red-flanked bush robin would meet us, escort us a hundred yards along the path and disappear. They looked like little blue flycatchers with rusty sides and a white ring round the eye, and most of them were immature. We also shot a tree shrew[2] which I mistook for a squirrel though it has a sharper nose and, when frightened, always seems to dash down a tree to the ground and not up into the highest branches.

Then I came suddenly round a bend on Frank, who was in the act of aiming at two small birds on the road. He pulled at them

[1] *Leioptila gracilis.* [2] *Tupaia.*

once to find his gun was on safe and again to find it was empty; he signalled to me to 'carry on' and I rushed after them round the corner. The two were clearly of different species though I could not identify either, but one, a small bird rather stripy about the head, was sitting in deep shade. Luckily, I decided that this was the one to shoot and it turned out to be a female Tristram's bunting,[1] a bird never previously obtained in India and only once in Yunnan. By such slender margins is history sometimes made.

A mile farther on, a trogon suddenly flew over my head from behind and down the path for some way before it flickered into the bamboo. It seemed rather large and with much crimson on the edges of the tail, so I sent Lalbir into the undergrowth to try and stalk it. I could hear him plunging and hacking his way in but, at last, by good fortune, the trogon flew out on to a bare stem and gave me an easy shot. *'Naya wala, sahib,'* shouted Lalbir as he retrieved it and one glance showed me it *was* new, a large dark-vinous bird with a cerise pink beak, crimson forehead and undertail. There was certainly no such trogon in my book and only the common one had been met with in Yunnan. Frank Ward and I began to dream dreams and christened it provisionally *Pyrotrogon incognitus.* I wrote that night to Claud Ticehurst, my ornithological mentor far away in Kent, a full description of the bird. Back in due time came his rather caustic answer: 'Your description is clearly that of a male *Harpactes wardi,'* (a bird christened after Frank himself, who had first found it in 1926 in the Seinghku Wang at 8,000 feet, but which had not yet got into the reference books), 'it's a wise collector that knows his own discoveries!'

But, new or not, that lovely bird was rare enough in all conscience. Ward's trogon had been found in some numbers by Delacour in Tonkin in 1930, but Frank's own type specimen, a female at the British Museum, had remained for thirteen years the only one obtained in any part of India or China.

Nor was this all. Two hours later I shot a dingy green finch in the bamboo on the edge of the path, which turned out to be a hen Tibetan rose-finch,[2] a bird of the highest altitudes about which little indeed was on record. We had also watched two or three score of the dusky-green tit babbler,[3] birds almost unknown

[1] *Emberiza tristrami.* [2] *Carpodacus edwardsii.* [3] *Pseudominla cinerea.*

in Burma, with black-striped crowns and yellow eyestreaks, which cascaded like tiny black and yellow and green balls down the hillside, in incessant movement but unafraid of man.

So we came cheerfully to Pyèpat and gave the skinners all they could manage till far into the night. The mule-path crosses the first ridge at 7,000 feet and suddenly you come on the great valley—'the valley of death,' as it was called in 1911: for when the first expedition went to Hpimaw they lost in crossing it over 400 mules. The records of that sad holocaust are almost forgotten but in the days before the present path was cut, when the immemorial tangle of trees and cane ran sheer down into the Ngamaw stream, they reached a point where they could not go forward or back and over the cliff the mules had to go. Somewhere in that quiet forest, which belongs now only to the singing hoolocks and the birds, is their sepulchre. It was not the least part of the price we paid for taking over an area which once paid but two bamboo rats yearly as revenue to China, and which before the War of 1939 produced barely enough money to pay for the cost of the pass-roads.

Twenty miles away to the north-east, beyond the sheer hills which fringed the Ngawchang river, shone a great snowy peak with screes below. Gabriel, the head-skinner, looked at it mournfully and said: 'We are getting some nice birds but have we got to go up *that?*' He was from Bombay and had never seen or been in snow. And even to Frank and myself from 7,000 feet it looked unduly forbidding and cold and high that night, with the stove pouring smoke but not heat at us from every joint in the pipe, so that even corned-beef curry and cocoa hardly kept us warm. 'I've got a circulation like a scientific journal,' said Frank, as he bent afresh to batter at the stove.

We had met that day only a few drovers on the road. One flock of goats were all very lame, many limping along on three legs and all of them of the breed that grazes by preference on its knee-pads. Behind them came a river of lean black pigs moving at half a mile an hour, gazing up dully at their keeper, a cretinous blue-clad boy who piped '*wa! wa! wa!*' as he walked and pretended to offer them inducements out of a small black bag. There must be few slower and more contemplative lives than herding livestock a hundred and fifty miles across these hills. To any after the war who want peace and mountain scenery and to discover with Professor Joad that there is nothing at the end of any road

better than may be found beside it, I commend that pastime unreservedly.

Our luck was in next day as well. We got the mules away early for Langyang and I went back up to the ridge to try and come to terms with some accentors glimpsed the day before. I did not see them but shot a large finch with a yellow-gold patch on its forehead which turned out to be the rare red-headed rose-finch[1] and a plain-coloured laughing thrush, a very dark olive-brown thrush with black markings, which was on the road.

I returned to find the hoolock gibbons chorusing below the rest-house in a deep blue pit of sunshine over the valley and Frank almost as triumphant, in his quieter way, as they were.

'I've made a magnificent discovery, J.K.!' he cried, as I appeared. 'I've found a new *Cypripedium!* It's like finding a new planet! Can't think how I missed it in 1920!'

Those were the days of the half-hearted who thought there was nothing new under the sun and nothing worth finding, new or not, in all the world. Frank, of all men, after so many years of patient plant-hunting, might well have been *blasé* over this slipper-orchid, but it was good to see him exuding happiness like the fabled dog with two tails.

'Tell the durwan I'll give him a chip for every plant he finds and brings you on your way back.'

So we stopped another half-hour and celebrated the *Cypripedium* in cocoa taken off the luncheon-mule, and Lalbir and Lama Ta brought in their contributions, a golden-throated barbet and a striated bulbul, and everyone was pleased except the luncheon-mule and the muleteer, who saw their own next meal receding into infinity. And in the middle I had to rush out and shoot a Gould's thrush, a rare enough bird in Burma, but this one had lost its tail and nothing was to be seen but the undertail coverts curving drake-like upwards, so that it looked even rarer than it was. It was a strong runner but Lalbir retrieved it miraculously from down the cliff.

Then a mile down the road Frank must needs find another slipper-orchid on a shady wet cliff above the path, and he insisted on taking it round the corner a hundred yards into the sun so that I could photograph it and him. 'And so is history faked, Frank!' I said, as he rose to his feet, and behold! in the very spot

[1] *Propyrrhula subhimachala.*

where he had been sitting was another one growing. So that had it not been noon and a mile uphill to the rest-house, we should have gone back to tell the durwan that the slipper-orchid market was now closed.

Thus merrily we came to Langyang, stopping on the way to photograph a village of Lisus on their way from Gangfang to the Sahmaw factory, 150 miles away, to cut firewood. There were shock-headed primitives who had never seen a comb or a dentist or a railway in their lives and could only grin at us, and a sprinkling of ex-riflemen who spoke Chinghpaw, and had gold-stopped teeth and Balaclava hats and a queer kind of off-smartness, derived from years of soldiering in Maymyo, to contrast with their cross-bows and aconite-tipped arrows.

You come to Langyang rest-house, when you have crossed the eastern ridge of the Pyèpat valley at about 7,000 feet; it sits on the end of a long, bare slope of grass and bracken, with the village out of sight just below the curve of the hill and the mountains in a ring all about it. From here you can see, for the first time, Htaw-gaw, once the headquarters of the sub-division, facing you among its pine-trees nine miles away across the great blue pit of dusk, at the bottom of which, three-quarters of a mile beneath, are the village harvest-fields with their close-set curving terraces like lines of breakers frozen on the sea. It must be a weary climb from them for heavily-laden women back up the hill to the village when the day's work is done.

Here at last you are out of the dense bamboo and stifling forest of the Irrawaddy watershed. The country becomes steeper and redder and more bare, and spindly pine and bracken crown the ridges a few miles farther on.

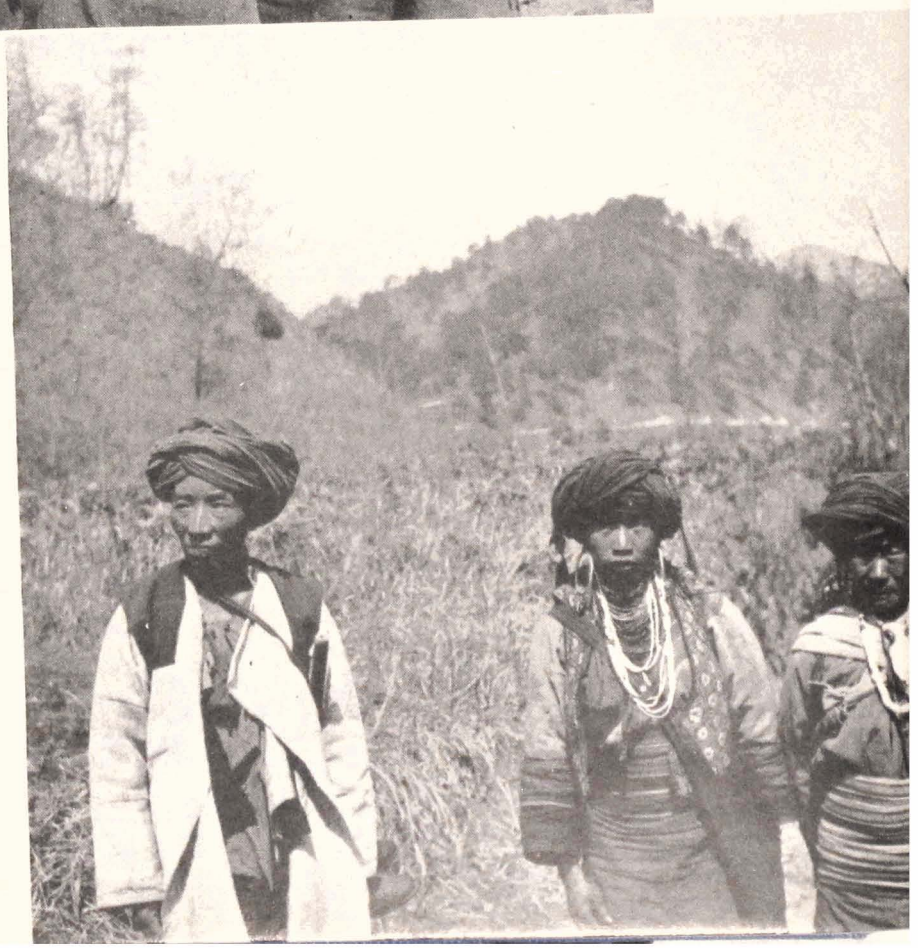
Among the new birds I saw on the march were a tiny rufous piculet creeping about wren-like in a dense, wet 'plant which bites,' as Lama Ta described it to me ruefully when he had finished retrieving it. Farther on a pair of *kalij* pheasants, cock and hen, strolled across the road about fifty yards away and tripped nonchalantly up the bank before I was near enough to fire. I tried to have them driven to me with only Lama Ta to beat but they were gone. Only four months later did I realise what a chance I had lost, for they were the only *kalij* pheasants we met with on the whole trip.

Claud Ticehurst, my mentor far away in Kent, had evolved a

The road to the hills: pack-mules on the march

Mule-saddles stacked by the roadside

And down the valley to meet us came the people of the hills (p.50)



A Lashi headman in the N'Mai valley

theory that the black-breasted *kalij*[1] of the plains with its lovely blue-black plumage graduated slowly into the shimmering white 'herring-bone' pheasant[2] of the higher hills, but here in the heart of them seemed to be the plains-bird, to all outward seeming unchanged except for an increase of white in the tail.

As usual, we were busy that night till 10 p.m. looking up references, identifying birds, pressing and re-pressing plants, writing labels, checking the sex-organs of birds or poring like augurs over their entrails to ascertain their food, and writing up our diaries and notes. There was no sound except the steady distant roar of the Ngawchang and female voices, rather remonstrant, 'off,' which suggested that part of our following was seeking consolation down the hill. When I had gone to bed, Frank sat on, as he always did, till midnight, compiling one of his innumerable notebooks. The most thorough and painstaking of naturalists, he slept little and I can never remember seeing him idle when in camp. When all his work was over, he would sit down and indite, in his plain, careful script, a long letter to one of his friends scattered all over the world. Letter writing is to most of us in these electric days a lost art, but in Frank it had survived. He had lived so many years in loneliness and the replies he gleaned, short or long, were all that made up to him for the conversation he could so rarely enjoy.

We were off to Htawgaw next morning, but I struck back up the hill to try for some doves I had seen the day before. There was a litter of figs on the path below the tree, but above in the green there was not a sound or a movement. I fired a shot at random and out into the next tree flew a dove. Next second it had vanished shrieking down the hill in the grip of a hawk, which was, I believe, a crested goshawk; for later I watched another soaring a thousand feet above me with his white undertail-coverts showing clearly on either side of the thin, dark line of his legs. But I had no more time to identify him than the luckless dove.

Then we came down the hill and for a mile or two through high forest overlooking the Ngawchang, where imperial pigeons watched us from the gallery of the trees, past a sunny, brown, open hill of high grass and cane, beneath house-martins circling in the haze, to lunch by a waterfall. Here we could see for the first time the Ngawchang foaming westwards below before it started its great

[1] *Gennæus lathami*. [2] *Nycthemerus*.

curve northwards towards the N'mai. It was perhaps the strangest of the rivers which cut their troughs from north to south out of those mountains. For fifty miles it flowed almost due south like the N'mai and the Salween and the Mekong and then round it came to the west, and thirty miles on began to turn northwards and ended up in the N'mai only a few miles south of the latitude in which it started.

Frank went on ahead of me and luck was with us both. I saw a long-tailed, apple-green bird flit out of the forest by the path and down the hill to a stubble patch where women were still gleaning. I thought at first it was the green long-tailed cuckoo, but, peering over a rock, found myself within easy range of a yellow-billed magpie,[1] a rare hill magpie which George Forest had once obtained near Tengyueh and I had hoped to meet. Never again did such an easy chance occur with what I came to think of later as one of the shyest birds of the hill-forests.

Then I heard Frank shoot ahead of me and found him engaged with almost a covey of trogons in a dell of high trees beside the path. Between us in a few minutes we collected three of the rare *wardi,* two cocks and a hen, and one of the red-headed trogons as well. The former looked, at a little distance as they sat, almost as black as crows, except for their cerise beaks, but in their fluttering darts from tree to tree the tail showed almost crimson.

So with sixteen birds for the skinner, we came to Htawgaw, where half the population of the hills seemed to be waiting for us. Here sat Marip Tu, the *taungok,* that strong, persevering man, who was at once the cook and the captain bold and the mate and the bos'n tight under McGuinness, hammering away in Chinghpaw at a typewriter, surrounded by a hundred prospective recruits for the Burma Rifles.

Tousled, uncouth, shy youths of the mountains were showing their teeth and their paces and their chest measurements before an appreciative audience of their fellows and all the loafers in Htawgaw. For, strange as it may seem, the Indian Army for years had gone for its best recruits for the Burma Rifles, not to where the standard of feeding and education and wealth and intellect was highest, but to Burma's remotest bounds, where for half the year man was liable to starve and lived a life almost as primitive as that of the apes. It drew its recruits partly from the Chin hills

[1] *Urocissa flavirostris.*

and partly from the wildest parts of the Salween divide—Nungs and Black Lisus. For, with civilisation in Burma, too often went either indiscipline or degeneracy. Even in the lower hills that fringe the N'mai and Mali and Taping, and above all in the Hukawng Valley, the Chinghpaw tribes, with their more civilised life and dress and customs, were rotted with opium and venereal disease. Lower down still in the Irrawaddy Valley the Burman, despite his war-like history, had never taken kindly to the bonds of discipline at all.

We spent an exasperating day in Htawgaw, wrestling in the intervals with deputations of Chinese women who brought us walnuts and eggs and ducks and chickens and obviously expected some immediate return; with coveys of small boys who similarly brought in dead flowerpeckers captured on limed rods and without their tails and primaries, or live thrushes with string threaded through their nostrils; with the head *laoban,* once a simple muleteer but now much disfigured by acute conjunctivitis, a gold-bound fountain-pen and a wrist-watch, who tried to make us believe that, having brought up seventy-eight mules with sixty-three loads he was short of pack-saddles; with the coffee-shop clerk whose intricate system of balancing his scales with minute handfuls of *dhal,* is still a mystery to me; with the servants, in an endeavour to divide our camp and kitchen stores into two workable portions, one of which would go on with Frank to the base-camp and the other come back with me.

We seemed, in fact, to be going hard until that moment, long after dark, when Frank, still wearing his battered topee, and myself found ourselves entertaining the postmaster, the overseer, the doctor and the two military police jemadars to tea and rum and whisky over the fire. Conversation flagged until the postmaster, to keep it going, produced for me a mutilated telegram about which he assured me he had been 'buzzing' ineffectually all the afternoon to his opposite number in Laukkaung. I could have understood it myself without aid but it was unthinkable that he, the postmaster, should not be able to enjoy fully the contents of every telegram passing through his hands. It informed me that Blue Dancer, a filly bred three years before by my wife in Myitkyina, had just won the Breeders' Stakes in Rangoon and I had better apply to the Turf Club for the breeders' prize. Perhaps Htawgaw, with the wind howling round the hill, and our under-bred, under-fed ponies and mules tethered out behind the

rest-house with their heads drooping and their lean goose-rumps hunched against the cold, was the most incongruous setting in Burma for such an announcement.

CHAPTER VIII

DOWN AGAIN

NEXT day (November 29) in all love we parted, Frank for the base camp at Gangfang, four marches further up the Ngawchang valley, and I back to Myitkyina to meet the rest of our party. I had promised McGuinness that I would purchase from the local shopkeepers a thousand pounds at least of rice, but it took an hour and much altercation to buy 180 pounds. The only bags in Htawgaw were either pre-war or had held nameless substances with which rice did not mix, or else were patched with pieces of ancient blue trousers and leaked at every seam. Half the village assisted me in the deal, Lup Teng twining string busily between his toes, two muleteers sewing up the bags, and the rest of the populace flinging my money on the earthern floor to test it and raptly watching the antics of the spring balance. Their own Chinese measure was an aged trough-like box with a handle and sloping sides, very solid, which held about seven pounds.

At the foot of the hill, I passed a Chinese caravan resting by the stream. They had with them six young bulls and heifers, a goat and twenty or thirty dogs, all bound, so Bum Lang assured me, *nat kalaw na matu*, that is, for sacrificial purposes, in the Maru villages west of Langyang. The dogs were nearly all Chows, of every size and colour, but most of them very poor and dull and weedy animals, lame or worm-ridden or with mange. They were led on the march in batches of six or seven, with string collars round their necks to which was fastened not a lead but a stout wooden stick about two feet long. The purpose of this was, I gathered, to keep the dog at a distance if he started a fight with his companions or attacked his keeper. A Frontier officer had years before described to me the dogless Maru villages near the Maiku pass and the terror which his own dogs constantly evinced when he was touring in them. But I began to wonder. Repellent though the sacrifice of dogs seems to us on the face of it, I did not find that anything in this doomed pack excited my compassion; most of them were bazaar pariahs of a low order and there cannot be much money in this curious Chinese export trade.

Langyang on its little bare knoll was, perhaps, of all the rest-houses on the road to Hpimaw the place to watch a sunset. The mountains stand about it in a ring and you could gaze your fill at them, with the hollow barking of a deer coming across from a far-away ridge and a purple-green shadow climbing out of the valley in which little dots of harvesters below moved about their mosaic of tiny fields. I sat there and watched the slow-moving frieze of clouds hanging like smoke along the eastern rim of the hills, and suddenly the hill-top flared crimson as if with fire and all the bare slope on which Htawgaw stood was heather-red below it, for a second before night shut down.

At Pyèpat next day the rest-house durwan was waiting for me with ill-suppressed excitement. I had forgotten all about Frank's offer to him of ' one rupee per *Cypripedium,*' but he had not. He advanced towards me and laid at my feet, very silently and reverently as if I was a cenotaph, two enormous wreaths of green-stuff, and then stood to attention. Alas! I found I could barely recall what Frank's ' new planet ' looked like and he was nearly fifty miles away. My own knowledge of botany may be inferred from the fact that I have been known to mistake a polyanthus for a gloxinia and once, being shown an orchid in a greenhouse, had asked the name of that ' tiny cactus.' I have, in fact, all my life been the scourge of those who have piloted me round their gardens after luncheon, and am now silent with the tongue-tied ignorance of a philatelist in a fox-hound kennel.

I stared fiercely at the wreaths as if daring them to have me on. The durwan stooped and pulled them hurriedly apart and laid them in bunches round my feet. ' I have brought the great lord eleven,' he said modestly, ' there are many more on the mountain.'

The plants all had a vaguely orchidaceous (or shall I say cypripedic?) appearance, but most of their flowers were missing or dead and my memory of those I had seen a week before was very vague. But I guessed there must be at least two species in the durwan's collection, so I gave him Rs. 5/- and said he could keep six of the bunches for himself. He tried to look pleased and mournful simultaneously, and no one will ever know what dreams of affluence he had nourished in the last week, of a slipper-orchid farm set in these wilds from which he, as sole monopolist, would trade his secret roots to wandering *nampan duni* for years to come.

I sent the residue, carefully wrapped in moss and a basket

sewn in linen to the Regius Professor of Botany at Edinburgh, and at the same time wrote to him explaining how I had come by them. At last I felt I was numbered among the horticultural elect and could say 'Ha! ha!' among the gardeners of my acquaintance when I got home. Six weeks later the basket was returned by the Rangoon post-office on the ground that the export of plants was prohibited. Seven weeks later, when Frank's own parcel, previously sent from Htawgaw, had also come back, and his temper had nearly fused with pointing out the regulations about Royal Gardens to the Postmaster-General, he opened mine. For the first time in a fortnight he seemed at peace:

'It's just as well *your* parcel didn't get to Edinburgh,' he told me, 'you paid that ruddy durwan five chips for a miserable lot of *Cymbidia!* There wasn't a *Cypripedium* among the lot!'

So, if this ever catches the eye of the Regius Professor at Edinburgh, perhaps he will kindly note that my Snarks were all unfortunately Booja, and that the parcel referred to will not be arriving?

But one rare prize I did collect that day, a pair of shrike-babblers[1] of a species that I had never seen before. Of it the *Fauna of British India* had merely stated: 'Beyond the fact that it is a bird of high elevations nothing is known about it.' Frank, with his uncanny eye for a rare bird, had shot one in a roadside tree near Langyang a week earlier. The shrike-babblers, like the broadbills, always seem to me either half-stupefied or very short-sighted: at any rate they are pathetically contemptuous of man. (Someone had once told me of a large flock of longtailed broadbills which had entered the Bhamo courthouse regardless of what was going on 'and almost interfering with the ends of justice.') I had plunged into a tangle of ivy-covered trees beside the path to take stock of some birds I could hear but not see, and found myself suddenly with a shrike-babbler perched almost at my feet, a black-headed, green-backed bird with chestnut on the rump and tail, peering about slowly and inconsequently as if I was not there. Only those who have tried to collect birds, and found themselves in a position where they can only hope to memorise, hurriedly, the plumage of a bird they know they have never seen before, can guess what my feelings were. Before I could withdraw to shooting distance it had hopped quietly up into the creepers and disap-

[1] *Hilarocichla rufiventer.*

peared in a wave of small tits.

I then saw another bird, quite different from the first but equally unrecognisable, on a branch above my head. I shot him hurriedly and rushed down the hill after the disappearing flock, and a minute or two later managed to collect the bird I had seen before, which was the hen. The cock was a lovely bird with a black head, chestnut above, with a pale, ashy throat and breast with golden-yellow patches on the sides.

It was very cold that evening and Wana Naw curried me a tinned steak and kidney pudding—an unorthodox mode of presentation which would have made a god-like meal but for the blinding clouds of smoke from the tin stove, which later prevented me from doing any work at all.

I crossed the western ridge next day, and on the upward climb got three different forms of laughing thrush in a mile, the blue-winged, the red-headed, and the little dull-green, black-tipped bird which is called in books the plain-coloured laughing thrush. Just over the divide I shot a churring shadow in dense bamboo and after a long search down the hill-face Bum Lang picked up a scaly-breasted wren, one I had never seen before. Each of these, though sitting shots at close range, took nearly ten minutes to find in the tangle and I began to feel we had omitted, as an essential adjunct to our trip, a cocker-spaniel delicately trained to retrieve small birds.

West of the ridge, I had some memorable window-glimpses of the N'mai valley to north and south from Chishen nearly to Seniku, and far beyond that I could see the Irrawaddy where it ran between wide white banks of sand and a round hill in the plain which I believe was Graugra, nearly ninety miles away. It was a day of exalting distances, and line after line of hills, fainter and more faint, drew the eye almost to the Chindwin.

At Laukkaung there was a general air of alarm and despondency about the military police. They were all, except the sentry, either dressing with feverish haste or peering, like Sister Anne, down the hill towards Chipwi.

'Sir,' said the postmaster to me, 'it is, I think, untimely arrival of B.C.'

And so it proved, for Major Jones, the Battalion Commandant, and his young wife, had recked nothing of double and even treble stages along the road and the whole command, without due warning as it felt, was now convulsed in preparations for their coming.

I went down next day by the short cut—the 'friendly road' the Chinghpaws call such things—which they averred made only four miles of the nine lying between Laukkaung and Chipwi. In Kachin circles, it was regularly used each way by heavily-loaded grandmothers, but it took me two good hours down hill, and an intelligence officer would doubtless describe it as hardly suitable in places for goats. It began as a rabbit-run under and over tree-trunks and fallen boughs in dense bamboo, then for a time became a pleasant path which wound down hill through golden rice and cotton where women and children were harvesting by hand. Then it forgot itself completely and became nothing but a faint impression of past goings-on with an almost vertical camber along a cliff-face, and at one point was merely a couple of orchid roots and a six-year-old bamboo pole, clinging desperately to the base of a rocky waterfall. Elsewhere the high plumed grass was kind enough to hide the fact that the path was only six inches wide with a hidden precipice swathed in bayonets of cut bamboo on one side of it. Yet whatever seeds of heart disease they must have sown in themselves by its use uphill, the Kachins preferred such a path to the wide graded roads we gave them. Perhaps the centuries had given them muscles which could not adapt themselves to grades; perhaps they cherished the morsel of time they saved in their timeless lives; perhaps they liked it, as we prefer whisky to milk, knowing how much worse it is for us. But prefer it they undoubtedly did.

I had two memorable and unusual glimpses, while resting on that path, of rufous piculets,[1] tiny golden-bay woodpeckers hardly bigger than a wren, once as a shadow slipping along the ground in green fern, and once, hovering like a sunbird, with rapid wings in front of a nest-hole in a bamboo. They are elusive wraiths of the bamboo forest, whose soft tapping one may constantly hear—but like all the birds of that vast green sea are all too rarely visible in the dense tangle in which they seem to live and move.

[1] *Sasia ochracea.*

CHAPTER IX

BATTLE STATIONS

I SPENT two days in Myitkyina on my return trying to pick up various loose threads of the expedition by telegram and letter. There was Arthur Vernay, down in Rangoon with his two companions, and the date of his arrival in Myitkyina I still did not know; there was Willie Stubbs, our fourth skinner, at Kyatpyin 120 miles away in the Mogok hills, from whom I had had as yet no reply. There were firms in Rangoon whom I had pestered for such forgotten things as arsenic and .410 cleaning rods and skinners' mittens; and there was Frank the omniscient, twelve days distant by mule and at least five days by telegram, for whose advice I yearned though he might have been in Heaven for all the chance I had of obtaining it.

I was turning away from the post-office counter on my third or fourth fruitless enquiry for letters when my eye caught a large black-and-white notice on the wall. It ran:

'YOU CAN NOW SPEAK TO YOUR FRIENDS ANYWHERE IN BURMA BETWEEN 8 P.M. AND MIDNIGHT FOR . . . ONE RUPEE.

'ARE YOU MAKING FULL USE OF YOUR TELEPHONE?

'DO YOU RING UP YOUR FRIENDS ON THE TRUNKS?

'DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH CAN BE SAID AND SETTLED IN THREE MINUTES?

'YOUR RIVAL DOES HIS BUSINESS ON THE 'PHONE WHILE YOU WRITE LETTERS!

'GET THE HABIT OF SAYING:

'"TRUNKS, PLEASE!" AND BE MODERN.'

I thought of Henzada aforetime, where, when the Commissioner rang us up once a quarter, we ran sweating profusely for half a mile to the post-office, to take over a receiver still hot from the operator and redolent of onions and curry. In Myitkyina as I had known it, a trunk call seemed almost as incongruous as finding a soda-fountain in the ruins of Nineveh. Yet . . .

'Trunks, please!' I said hopefully to the young assistant, though it sounded all wrong somehow.

'Who you want?' he enquired with polite suspicion.

'Trunks, please! I want to put a call through to Kyatpyin and then the Strand Hotel, Rangoon, and then Watson's in Rangoon, and then to Captain Kingdon Ward in Htawgaw.'

I felt if I was going to 'Be Modern,' it was better to go the whole hog.

He blenched and hurried for the postmaster, a charming Madrassi Brahmin and a quondam friend of mine, who beamed at me over his spectacles through the grille and asked my pleasure.

'Does one telephone from here?' I asked, hurriedly reducing my demands but feeling more and more absurd, 'and when does this office close?'

'Your Honour, eighteen hours exactly closing,' said the postmaster with firmness, 'but I can buzz Laukkaung at ten hours to-morrow morning for your Honour, and they shall buzz Htawgaw, if no blockade on line.'

'What about Rangoon or Mogok?' I asked, pointing to the notice.

He smiled as if I had made a bad joke or suggested a message to Mars.

'Sir,' he said, 'it is not done'; and I believed him. In fact, all things considered, rather than be modern and spend from 8 p.m. to midnight 'buzzing' forlornly as a mosquito in the dank post-office, I decided to be ancient and write another letter.

But by good fortune Stubbs appeared at dawn next day, and the rest of our party, Arthur Vernay, Suydam Cutting and Harold Anthony, arrived on December 12. They came, as a matter of fact, a day before I had been warned to expect them, and as I surveyed the wondrous hillock of their kit on the platform and watched our flustered followers panting, hot-foot behind me, to the station, I thanked Heaven that I was not down at Waingmaw and that I had laid in there, with a fugitive gleam of provision, an extra fifteen mules. I had also taken on, at the last moment, two Maru servants, Wanghte Gam and Law Wai La, who proved to be almost the best of our whole retinue.

It was decided that we should start at midday for Waingmaw and we spent the morning in Robin McGuire's verandas, red-faced, with our sterns projecting from trunks and packing cases. We also, at the eleventh hour, encumbered ourselves with five immense metal oil-stoves, each over two feet high, which went with us on mule or cooly-back for the next two months and came back to Myitkyina, still undeflowered, at the end of the trip.

Frank, fore-knowing what tents would be like in January or February at 11,000 feet on Imaw Bum, had insisted on my bringing something with which to warm them. A friend in the military police, fresh from the North-West Frontier, had suggested small charcoal-burning *sigris* and these a smith had made for us very cheaply in the bazaar. It is an awful moment when, faced with an almost certain shortage of transport, you cannot be sure whether you are using obvious forethought or being absurdly imaginative. Visions had floated before me in the small hours of four still forms lying frozen on the snow-bound screes, and of myself standing over them reading to a remnant of frost-bitten coolies and skinners, what I could remember of the Burial Service. (Mem., had I provided a prayer-book and the necessary flags?) Then with the advent of the *sigris* came another vision of five still forms, my own included, on whom the Angel of Death had breathed carbon monoxide, as on troops in dug-outs aforetime, while we slept. Some such nightmares, I imagine, throng round the pillow of most organisers; they beget those queer white elephants whose skeletons litter the trail of all military and scientific expeditions, and have doubtless soothed the savage breast with mirth in a thousand rude hinterlands. The size of the stoves appalled me as we already seemed to have more assorted baggage for six months than the Children of Israel in all their wanderings. But there were no others of any other kind nearer than Rangoon, and Arthur, the most sweepingly generous man I know, told me 'not to worry,' so the deed was done.

We were a night at Waingmaw tying up our loads, cameras, radio, guns, rifles, ammunition, skinning boxes and a hundred bulky packages, which ranged from salted fish for the skinners to arsenic and ration-bags, and somehow or other by nine next morning the mules were jingling off for Washaung. I persuaded my companions to prowl for an hour round the Katcho marshes before we followed them by motor but it was not a happy thought. The sun was hot and high, the narrow banks through the rice-fields, no longer masked in flattened corn, were slippery hard, my companions' new foot-wear irked them, and several of the little lagoons were now dry. The area which had held so many distractions for me in November seemed absurdly bare now with four guns loosed upon it; and the ducks which had not already passed southwards were as elusive as a sunset. None the less one large party flew past us, out of which by a lucky right

and left, I dropped a pintail and a gadwall, and we disturbed a company of lapwings in whose midst, as they wheeled round the marshland were two starlings.[1] The true starling of any race is one of the rarest stragglers to Burma, and when the plovers had settled I made three attempts to stalk their companions. They were all in vain though I risked a long shot at length on the ground, as they waddled about among the plovers, and sent the whole band wheeling off at a great height two miles to the east.

We came back at noon past the village pond in Katcho where I had shot the avocet in November, and in it now was a fishing party, a laughing ring of Shan men, women and children splashing chest-deep inwards with flopnets and above their heads a cloud of terns crying and flickering and diving almost upon them; that must be an age-old sight along the great rivers of Burma, but one to whose action and charm no painter has yet done justice. There were hoopoes and a little cuckoo in the great hedges by the village and I shot a blackfaced bunting,[2] a shy and skulking bird of the village-gardens though it is in northern Burma not by any means a rare one.

We spent from December 14th to the 21st jogging up the valley by easy stages to Laukkaung. It was much as it had been in November except that there were more herds of goats and pigs and sheep, and two large parties of recruits coming down from Htawgaw to Maymyo. We did not see so many birds on the road. When its edges are first cleared in November after the rains, the birds delight in their winding glade, across which they are constantly darting, or down to pick up something off the road. They will sit, at first, in full view on the edge but soon learn caution; then, like club-men serenely remote behind their windows, they watch from some secure perch whatever passes by, and can at an instant's notice efface themselves in the trees.

None the less my diary shows that in a week we collected ninety birds of fifty-seven species without moving far off the path, which gives a faint idea of the wealth of bird-life such as even chance travellers in those hills may encounter. There were crested buntings in the elephant grass, the cock-birds moulting from green to black, and bulbuls and laughing-thrushes of three or four kinds. We also shot, at about 700 feet above sea-level, no

[1] *Sturnus vulgaris* [2] *Emberiza spodocephala*

less than five birds which I had long grown to think of as birds only of the middle hills from 4,000 to 6,000 feet. There was the beautiful chestnut-backed Blyth's sibia[1] feeding on insects in a fig tree and the white-browed laughing-thrush[2] in bamboo on an open stubble beside the road, and a single bartailed cuckoo-dove, and barwings and the Burmese shrike-babbler[3]. In four years' collecting I had met none of them except the cuckoo-dove so low down, but as we turned some corner of the road and saw the immense blue-green folds of the hill only three or four miles away towering above us, we realised that a local migration from 4,000 feet in those parts must be only a matter of minutes to a bird. And one morning between Shingaw and Tanga we saw this migration actually occurring; for in the space of a few minutes four successive parties of black bulbuls,[4] one of them comprising all birds of the rare white-headed form, came flighting swift and straight as arrows over the path to some feeding-ground in the valley to the south-west. They were the only flocks we saw in the lower hills on our way up of a bulbul which I was most anxious to collect, and which had previously seemed absent altogether in the winter months. We also got one rare fly-catcher[5] in canebrake beside the road, a bird I had never met before, and which we were not to see again. Harold shot a kestrel and a Japanese buzzard,[6] and we collected sultan tits and redstarts and trogons and woodpeckers, and missed a small owl which was sitting out on a bare branch in the blaze of noon. Every wild plantain clump along the road seemed to hold spider-hunters,[7] whose shrill 'chip' note could be heard again and again though shooting them was another matter.

We saw almost no mammals except two otters on the N'mai and a few squirrels and tree-shrews which Harold blew down in skilful fashion from the high tree-tops with his heavily-choked gun. He had decided that it was a waste of time to put out traps each afternoon, which might mean delaying our start next day, and only attempted to collect what we saw along the road.

One evening at Tamu, where the Tamu stream comes roaring out of its gloomy gorge under the black wooden bridge, I wandered out along the path to the north. Just at dusk, I watched for five minutes a tiny bat which kept flickering out of dense scrub over a streamlet almost at ground level and circling back.

[1] *Leioptila annectens.* [2] *Garrulax sannio.* [3] *Pteruthius erythopterus.*
[4] *Microscelis.* [5] *Cyornis concreta.* [6] *Buteo burmanicus.* [7] *Arachnothera magna.*

quick as thought, into the gloom again. There was no time to shoot it as it emerged, but after a score of fruitless attempts to align the gun I at last got a snap-shot at it disappearing. I was groping for it in the jungle-fringe when a large dark brown form flew head-high very slowly past me along the path. It looked as big as a woodcock, and for the moment I thought it must be one, and then as it vanished I realised it was a bat, nearly half as big as a flying-fox. I started back along the path for a torch to search for the little bat, and over me again wavered the great brown form, so low and close and slow that I fired at it with dust shot and the .410. It staggered and fell almost to the ground, then recovered and flapped into the dense tree-fringe between the river and the path. And that was all we ever saw or knew despite hours of fruitless search next morning of the largest bat, next to a flying-fox, which I ever encountered. Harold thought, from my description, it must be a fruit-eating bat, and that he saw another next evening on a path at Chipwi, but its species remains a mystery. If anyone comes out of the Kachin Hills some day with wild tales of a vampire, I shall know what he has been seeing.

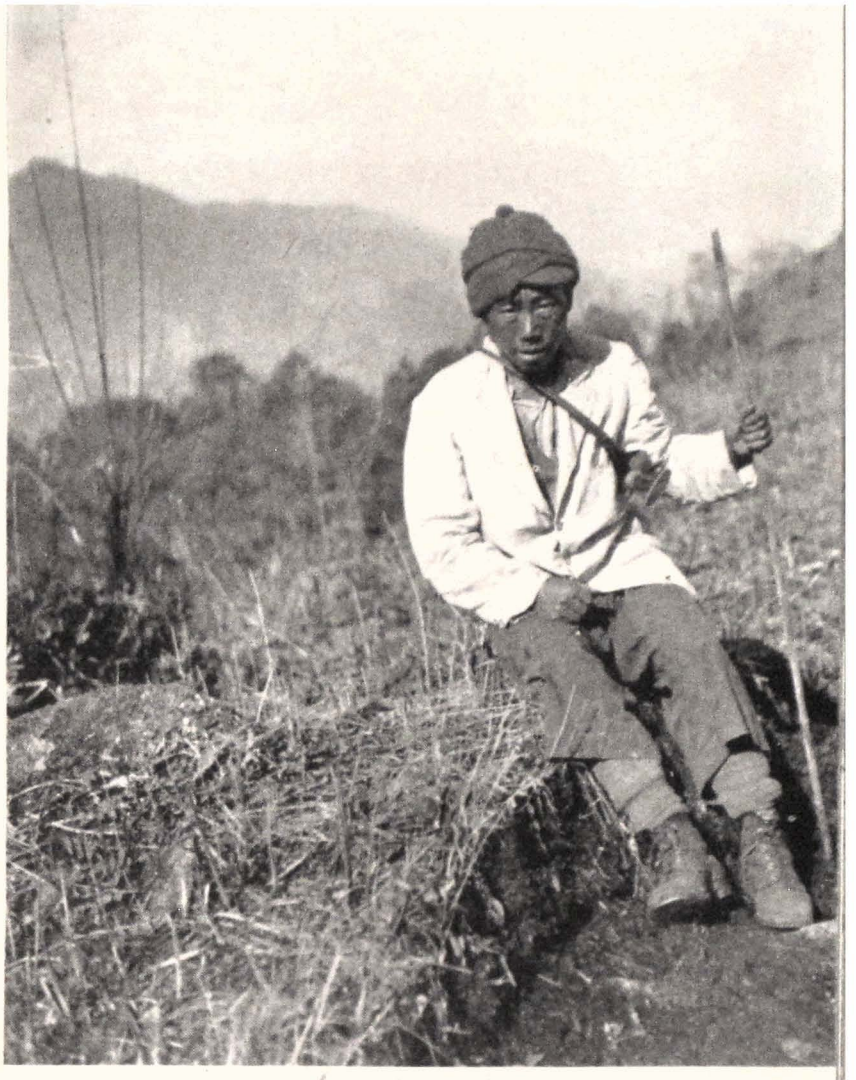
In the intervals, I learned much from my companions, and realised what a wealth of curious experience and talent they embodied between them. Arthur Vernay, our leader, an expert on *objets d'art* of every kind, had shot big-game over half the world in Africa, in India, in Burma and elsewhere. Most men would have been proud of one-tenth of the superbly-mounted trophies which he possessed or had bequeathed to the American Museum. A connoisseur of the rare, he had collected *Rhinoceros sondaicus* in Malaya, and met the Dalai Lama in Lhasa. Like most travellers he was one of ' those that cannot use one bed too long ' and flitted from New York to the Bahamas, from the Bahamas to Berkeley Square or Biarritz, until at a moment's notice you might find him in some remote forest-reserve of Asia, or the Kalahari or the Hukawng Valley. Though 60 years of age, he used to walk at five or six miles an hour, and still had a boy's exuberance and generosity, a boy's triumphant zest in all he did. Like other successful men, he loved attention to the minutest detail, and was never happier than when he could spend hours ' reorganising ' our stores, packing and repacking incessantly, with squadrons of tins and boxes all round him and half the camp hurrying hither and yon at his bidding.

Suydam Cutting, once a famous lawn-tennis player, shy and

spare and reticent, 'with a quick dark eye like a woodcock,' had a charm behind his rather saturnine appearance which everyone was quick to recognise. He was no longer a keen *shikari* though he had been with the Roosevelt expedition to Szechuan which had obtained the giant panda; but it was almost impossible to mention any remote part of the East without finding that Suydam had friends in it who ranged from the Dalai Lama to professors of ethnology and hard-drinking captains of frontier outposts. He had been in the Naga Hills and Kashgar and Samarkand, Yunnan and Chinese Turkestan, Tibet and French Indo-China, and a thousand other little-known places, all of which he seemed to have visited under the happiest auspices. Not much, I think, had escaped that quick dark eye, though he spoke seldom of his travels and they were only occasionally lit for us, as it were from below, with sulphurous flashes of comment. 'Jesus, but those hills were cold' or 'It's *the* most God-awful place' was as far as he would usually go, save when he permitted himself some infra-Rabelaisian anecdote on the subject of tribal customs. Yet he had studied history to good purpose and read abstruse and surprising books when he was not photographing.

In this last pursuit he was daily involved in argument with Harold on the subject of 'stops' and exposures, Suydam basing his calculations, for some reason, on 'English summer light' while Harold insisted that the exposure meter, created for that end, could never lie, even in a Burmese winter. We were all, I fear, at the time experimenting with two diverse types of colour film; with both, as results proved, the camera was capable if not of deliberate falsehood, at least of actinic inexactitude.

I learnt much, too, from Harold Anthony, the Mammal Curator, an immense blonde bald man with gold spectacles, whom I recall as for ever striding with long strides away from me, or leaning on a pole to mop his steaming crown even in the modified heat of December. He had started life at Portland, Oregon, the 'webfoot state' as he called it, and seemed to have been everything from cook in a mining-camp to an artillery-instructor in France. (The last war he once tersely and finally summarised to me as 'Jesus, there was a hell of a lot of lost motion there.') Harold possessed, besides a remarkable fund of those stories which are euphemistically labelled 'smoking room,' an almost Teutonic thoroughness and method, and to his capable hands were consigned in turn refractory 'cans,' disabled gun-locks, electric



Lup Teng, the interpreter

'Despite every known equine blemish . . .' (p.56) Chinese mules at a river-crossing

Lashi women coming in to the festival

A group at Gam-khawn

torches, locks, camera shutters, and the radio set from Rangoon. Very rarely did they dare defeat him. He was, in fact, eminently practical and a born curator. Though he had collected animals in many countries, for him, as for most taxonomists, they did not commence to exist until they had been ' taken care of '—that is, skinned and pickled, or stuffed and pinned down, snout and tail and paws, on a board. He was not greatly interested in their habits or food or measurements, and conjectures on what creatures might or might not be found in those hills seemed to him of little moment, for he realised that knowledge of that kind was severely fortuitous, born of blind sweat and blind chance. But as a museum naturalist he had few equals and I watched the unfolding of his equipment, which ranged from ' gopher traps ' and radio wrenches to ' canvas sneakers ' in wondering admiration. With no museum training and very limited experience, I felt I could assist him little, though I guessed, as did Frank later, that even a Doctor of Science without his boots or trousers and with no language except American in which to express himself locally, might feel, now and again, the urgent need of an interpreter as a safety-valve.

So in due time we climbed again from Chipwi to Laukkaung, where Frank was to meet us with the rest of our mules and our followers. The valley had served its turn; Arthur had fished at our halting-places along the road in vain and each evening Harold and I went out ' batting ' with shot-guns at dusk. We had very moderate success except for a couple of small bats on December 19 outside the Chipwi bungalow: over it that evening for half an hour at sunset a host of Himalayan swiftlets and house martins and striated swallows had flickered and fed in the still air to and fro, until suddenly a large dark falcon—a peregrine I think, for he looked too big for a hobby—appeared and scattered them, towering into the empyrean.

But on the morning of December 20 we struck up the ascent to Laukkaung. I stayed behind till the mule-path had ' settled down ' after the turmoil of our followers' departure and as I crossed the great suspension bridge over the Chipwi river, I stopped to watch two brown dippers[1] chasing each other from stone to stone far below. One of them kept settling in the water as lightly as a falling leaf. Presently they flew up stream and perched on a great smooth wall of rock which buttressed one end of the bridge. There far

[1] *Cinclus pallasii.*

below me I could see with glasses in a cranny, three feet or so above the dark swirl of the water, the wet green-weed beginnings of their nest. One bird clung to the cranny's edge and kept placing more green-stuff there, but some of it fell again and again into the river, and for five minutes the other bird swam untiringly in the linn below the rock, picking up the weeds or making queer little dabs at them as it swam. The current was swift, but the dipper seemed to have no difficulty in holding its own against it. They were the only birds I saw nesting in the next two months and perhaps dippers choose December to avoid the risk of having their home flooded out in the late February rises in the hills.

Though I did not take the heart-breaking 'short cut' up to Laukkaung, birds were about my path the whole way up. There were little blue niltavas (*half-flycatcher, half-robin*) in the bamboo scrub, I shot a ground thrush on the path and at one corner there was a great mixed flock of birds in which were suthoras and scimitar babblers[1] and the little yellow-green herpornis.

Further up, where the path had corn-fields above it or below, a mixed flock of house martins and swiftlets were looping and swerving above me. It took me nearly an hour and twenty cartridges and much hard swearing at my loader, Hpaonan La (who was trying to change a .410 with a 12-bore as the chances came to me) to collect five birds out of this flock and I lost two others wounded in tangles just round the corner. For slow though they seemed, one had to 'pick one's bird,' not only when they were at a shootable angle—no easy feat with a bird which can stop in mid-air and change direction—but when one was certain they would fall on the narrow path. A hundred times I started to align the gun for once that I pulled trigger. But the house martins[2] were a prize indeed—a rare and little-known bird in Burma which we did not meet with again.

And just before I got to Laukkaung, I heard a grey-headed imperial pigeon grunting with its curious saw-like note in the bamboo, and shot a sibia and a stripe-bellied squirrel[3] coming to feed on a flowering prunus tree beside the path.

At Rukchang, Frank was awaiting us, and our two retinues (mules, skinners, servants, interpreters and stores) were at last merged. You would hardly have called them reunited.

The smoky gloom of the little tin-roofed rest-house that night

[1] *Pomatorhinus ochraceiceps.* [2] *Delichon cashmiriensis.* [3] *Tomeutes.*

looked like a packing warehouse after a lightning raid.

The Christmas mail had just come in, the table was strewn with it and the debris of tea, and every corner of the room seemed to be littered with guns, rifles, field-glasses, cameras, hats, boots, rat-traps, half-open store and medicine and ammunition boxes, food tins, bird-skins, photographic films, cartridges, letters and reference books; from behind the door came in gusts, of Burmese and Chinghpaw, the incessant wrangling of Frank's Shan servant, Ba Khaing, who was loth to yield up his suzerainty over the precious tea and sugar and ration sacks of rice to Arthur's Maru ex-butler, Wanghte Gam. Equally loth to be supplanted was my Chittagonian cook.

'That damn Mugh of yours nearly poisoned me two nights ago, J.K.!' Frank kept rumbling. 'Perfectly foul dinner he gave me!'

But Lalit Mohun Barua, gaunter and dirtier and more like a death's-head than ever after his trip to Gangfang, and shivering as if he had been left out in the snow, was most unwilling to let Wana Naw, the young Kachin cook, loose among his stew-pots.

Frank and I were both by now uneasily certain that we had too much cargo with us and a day's halt had to be called to reshuffle loads, those for example which we should not require before Gangfang and those, hardly less numerous, which someone seemed always to be requisitioning at each halt. (On liners they mark the first firmly 'HOLD—NOT WANTED ON VOYAGE,' and lock the door of the hold.) My Christmas mail had chanced to include *The Blind Road,* and I now read out, amid derisive mirth, Forepoint Severn's veracious comments on 'bundobust':

'It is a form of precautionary and defensive organisation on the part of the more methodical and previsionary white mentality, designed to defeat in advance the obstacles of climate, native mental inertia, and lack of initiative, and the complete unhelpfulness of everybody round one. . . . It postulates forethought and organising power; a knowledge of what snags may be expected; a habitual mental pessimism which will put those snags at their worst. . . . Its breakdown is a fair and unanswerable reason for official reprimand . . . or worse.'

'Well,' said Harold to me later, 'you can over-do the "habitual mental pessimism"! I've been on expeditions which were run on a shoe-string and one where they gave me the bridal suite on the steamer, but we sure have got some junk on this one!'

So we halted a day at Rukchang, a day which seemed to pass in a flash and a medley of petty annoyances before I could do any collecting at all. All that semi-circle of hillside towering up to the crags above Rukchang is a harbour for birds of every kind, but Harold trapped on the first night round the edge of the jungle and caught nothing. Luckily, Frank's collection of birds, made between November 29 and the date of his return, made up for me in interest what it lacked in numbers, for his rather elderly .410 bore had collapsed a few days after we had parted and for much of the time the two skinners had had but little to do. He had, however, obtained two more Gould's thrushes, two fine adult magpies, birds which I had been straitly charged to obtain, several *Leioptila pulchella* (a long-tailed, blackish-grey bird of that queer tree-haunting family the sibias), a female tragopan, a large red-brown striated laughing-thrush[1] from the Pyèpat ridge, and a hoary barwing, which was one of the rarest of Burma birds.

What with the labelling of these, and despatching the mail and a mass of telegrams for things of which Arthur, most provident among men, felt sure we should run out later on, I stayed behind the rest of the party when they left for Pyèpat next day. It was a lovely morning when finally, on December 22, I set out again up the ridge, and every kind of bird seemed to be out rejoicing in the sun. I started about 9 a.m. and the ten miles took me nearly seven hours. I was continually flushing some bird off the path edge which whisked round a rock or into the trees, and the only way to get them seemed to be to walk on and return quietly a few minutes later. For one bunting (which I believe to have been another Tristram's bunting) I went back on five successive occasions without getting a shot. But one rare bird gave me an easy chance early on: a large dark-green finch suddenly appeared out of a dense bamboo-clump in tree jungle, and as I was in the instant of firing, the cock-bird emerged beside her resplendent in the sun. It was the scarlet finch,[2] a bird as lovely as it was rare in Burma. Further on, I flushed a party of maroon-backed accentors[3] in a rocky corner, but they evaded three attempts to get a shot at them.

At one point, two miles out of Laukkaung, the bushes by the path were full of invisible black bulbuls mewing incessantly and obviously feeding almost on the ground. Only occasionally did

[1] *Grammatoptila.* [2] *Hæmatospiza sipahi.* [3] *Prunella immaculata.*

one catch a glimpse of a dark form flighting from tree to tree. This is one of the handsomest birds of the hills, its colour varying from dark smoky-grey to glossy black, set off by the crimson beak and salmon-pink legs.

As so often I failed to realise how extremely local these bulbuls were, their food supply at this season being almost entirely the *leucospectrum* or dead-nettle bush. In my haste I imagined I should find them further along the road later on. It was a vain thought. In bird collecting, as elsewhere in life, you have got to take your chance when it comes or forego it for ever. If you imagine that it will come again next day or next week, it is too often gone 'out on the wind of time.' Happy, too, is the bird-collector, like the careerist, who can coldly pick and choose just what he intends to 'go for,' and have no regrets at the end of it all. Usually I found myself all day long like a huntsman with five or six foxes on foot in front of him and not knowing which was the right one. I might walk for a mile and never see a bird and then suddenly the choice had to be made: should I go for A, perched high on a tree above the path, or B, skulking in the bamboo twenty yards below it? As often as not, when I was committed to one or the other, C, a hawk, would swish down like a falling shell close over my head from behind and put A and B to flight, or a travelling party, comprising E, F and G, would come feeding and twittering past me, leaving me in a tremble of excitement lest in their midst should be some H, which I had never seen before. Whichever I fired at, the shot was likely to disturb all the others, so that the results of our collecting were apt to be highly fortuitous at the day's end.

Rime, which was almost snow, lingered all that day on the northerly curves of the path, and when I crossed the ridge Imaw and the whole far Salween divide were white-crowned for a thousand feet or more.

'And *that* won't melt this year!' said Frank to me that afternoon as a wind swept at us across the valley from the distant snows. His tent and mine looked very bleak and thin, perched on the hand-breadth of ridge which surrounds the Pyèpat rest-house, but, as I was soon to learn, we were warmer and more comfortable at nights in them at that height than in the draughty thatched rest-house, where the stove belched smoke from everywhere except its cowl. I thanked Heaven that I was not a skinner: they had to work until nearly midnight with smarting eyes round a log-fire, in

an atmosphere of gloom to which only Hamlet could have done justice. It was their portion for most of the expedition.

It had taken two coolies most of the morning to hack a trap-line for Harold up to the top of the ridge, so steep it was and densely veiled, and it was decided that trapping here for only two nights was hardly likely to yield much result. But one of Harold's traps next morning yielded a water-shrew (and that a very rare one, a mole-like creature with a long tail); it was caught along the streamlet which the durwan had tapped down to the rest-house by a lengthy culvert of bamboo. Just before breakfast, Lama Ta came running in to point out half a dozen large finches on the ground by the spot where this rude pipe dripped and splashed without ceasing, and I generously missed them out of the window as they pecked about in the gravel. I felt sure they were immature rose finches[1] and later Harold shot one in a tree beside the path. Like all the finches we collected, the stomach held little but quartz grit, with a few fragments of lichen.

We set off down the hill one by one in the wake of the mules. I started an hour behind Frank but overtook him in the first mile. What we called his 'trouser-press' was open on the road and covered with assorted flowers, while Frank himself, with flashing spectacles and his cap-comforter awry, looked as if he was directing the early stages of a film scenario. He was waving his stick and shouting Chinese exhortations, coupled with a few straight-flung English oaths, at Lama Ta, who, forty feet up in the wrong tree, was pointing at every plant in sight and shouting back in Yawyin. It was, we were told later, a *Pentopterygium*. Somewhere behind the scenes the invisible hoolocks yodelled and whooped and applauded in their own tongue, glad perhaps to see us go.

I saw little of moment on that march except a number of the maroon-backed accentors, which are common on this ridge. They were beautiful little birds, maroon and french-grey and red-brown and black with a yellow-white iris which gave them a queer, cold look of malignity as they pecked about at *polygala* seeds beside the road, as tamely as a hedge-sparrow in an English garden.

We reached Htawgaw on December 24. The two marches up there were uneventful, except that we watched, far below us and nearly a mile away, a party of grey langurs in the bare hills which enclose the Ngawchang stream below in the ascent to Htawgaw.

[1] *Propyrrhula subhimachala.*

Also a ragged Lisu on the way to Langyang brought us in a specimen (shot with a cross-bow) of the rare white-headed form of black bulbul,[1] a bird which I had seen on at least five occasions in as many years near Myitkyina and had never yet managed to shoot at. We saw another next day, but it was too shy to offer a chance. I also attempted a short cut from Langyang across the valley to the Htawgaw road, but effectually lost myself and Hpaonan La for an hour on a vertical hill-face masked in six-foot grass and bamboo. Normally when the track petered out I should have left the matter unhesitatingly to Hpaonan La's sense of direction, but he speedily convinced me that he was no more a hillman than myself.

In Htawgaw we abode till Christmas Day was past, eating, drinking, receiving deputations and photographing them and the leading dignitaries' wives 'with all their bravery on and tackle trim.' (A Grenadier in levee dress, believe me, can barely outshine the wife of a well-to-do Kachin, except in the matter of four-anna pieces sewn round the thorax and a furlong or two of bead necklaces.)

In the intervals we watched athletic sports on the Lashi school play-ground, or listened to Christmas carols and interminable recitals and speeches of welcome in the Stygian gloom of the school-house after dark. At every turn we were presented with live chickens entombed in tiny open-work containers, which squawked and clucked faintly and pecked at our boots as we sat. We could have done without them; they embarrassed us, in our faltering attempts to return thanks or make bright small-talk in Chinghpaw, as perhaps their offerings of slaves or apes or peacocks may have embarrassed the kings of old.

Luckily for us, McGuinness was there, and he not only allowed us a liberal share of the rest-house but, in Harold's words, 'held the baby' during most of our social encounters. The urge to light conversation on such occasions is, I imagine, sheer nervous reaction bred in us by centuries of prandial tittle-tattle; we feel irresistibly compelled to 'say something,' however vapid, at a party, to burst into speech, however trivial or forlorn, and we feel uncomfortable and impolite if we have no words in which to do so. You may see this urge at its sprightliest and most artificial on any stage in the chorus of revellers or wedding guests or hangers-on,

[1] *Microsoelis leucocephalus.*

chatting two by two in the intervals of the ballet. That is our way in England or America. The Oriental, so often with lengthier breeding, always with so much more control, is quite content to be pitilessly silent without any loss of poise. I have seen an Acting Governor of Burma, a cultured and kindly Burmese gentleman, sit without uttering a word for half an hour at a tea-table surrounded by the beautifully-dressed wives of local grandees, without attempting even to ask any of them how many children they had. They all looked to their front, raising their eyes now and again from their cups or plates with the absorbed demeanour of birds at a drinking pan.

Towards the end, his dismayed Private Secretary, brought up in the social traditions of the Buffs, leaned over and whispered to me at another table:

'For God's sake, old boy, wade in over there and say something to keep the party going!'

But, as I assured him, the party was going very well. They were all making a hearty tea and looking their best and were not spoiling either process with any futile chatter.

CHAPTER X

SEMPER ALIQUID

BOXING DAY was a day of peace. I spent a blissfully idle morning collecting only a few hundred yards from the rest-house on the little goat-tracks which thread the tangle of the hill. One large bay was full of flowering *leucospectrum,* the form of dead-nettle, of which I had met a patch above Laukkaung, and was alive with birds of all kinds coming to feed on the nectar hiding at the base of the tall white flower capsules. Here were laughing thrushes, including a black-faced one, a bird of the highest hills, McClelland's bulbul, a scarlet flowerpecker, and a score of the little chestnut-naped ixulus,[1] like a brown-crested tit, incessantly darting out to drink their fill and poke round the base of the flowers and back to cover again. But everywhere mewing among the flowers, swaying on bare branches in the wind, flighting to and fro noisily all day long, were black bulbuls. Every one of them for miles seemed to be concentrated here, as heedless of danger as men in a bar.

I had for years thought them only a spring visitor to these hills, but this was clearly incorrect. Many seemed to be about to pair, the black males with scarlet beaks and orange legs each on his chosen branch, the dark-grey females flattening themselves out on a twig with flapping wings and shrill, mewing cries. I collected seven that day and males and females could be clearly distinguished by their colour.

There had been a vexed question for years among museum naturalists about these black bulbuls in Yunnan. Were they, as some said, three polychromatic forms of one species or were there three species which hybridised freely where their ranges met? For white-headed, jet-black, and slate-coloured birds all seemed to have been found in the same area. The theorists covered themselves against error by guarded references to 'individual variation' and 'plumage wear' and by insisting rather tartly that 'field observations on the breeding biology of *Microscelis* were

[1] *Ixulus flavicollis.*

lamentably few.' But I wondered all that day if I could convince anyone at home that the differences, at any rate, between the black and slate-coloured birds, might not be racial but sexual, and that when you got the two forms together they were 'hybridising freely' because the sexes differed.

I had three surprises that morning. The first was a paroquet which suddenly appeared out of the tangle below me: it was the first and indeed the only paroquet I ever saw in those hills and may possibly have been an escape from a cage, as it was an immature bird, in very dirty plumage and moulting heavily all over. Then I shot at a dark bird, half-seen in a tangle of bushes, and found it to be a gold-headed black finch,[1] a rare bird which had never previously been collected in Burma. Once, years before, on the path by the Pyèpat rest-house, I had watched a small party feeding when I was without a gun. I ended a more than useful morning by shooting a Tibetan siskin, a tiny yellow-green finch, out of a large flock feeding on dead-nettle trees above the village washing-place round the hill.

That evening, after tea, we played the Kachins of the Frontier Force at football, the first game of its kind that some of us had played for thirty years, watched by an absorbed and critical gallery of everyone else in Htawgaw from the high bank above the goal. Our silent cook, Wana Naw, proved to be our star performer, while the lance-naik, Bum Lang, did next to nothing on the wing with unbelievable agility. ('He sure is a Bum footballer, anyway,' as Harold said afterwards.) But it was Arthur, with his towering height, and Frank, with his great cramponed ammunition boots and what may have been a Leander sweater, who really struck terror into our opponents' hearts. The rest of us on both sides played in a medley of footwear, which ranged from pure-bred football boots down to nailed brogues and 'sneakers' and bare but horny feet.

The little parade-ground below the rest-house was almost the only level space on all that hill, and for football, like all the parade-grounds of the outposts, it had been surrounded by a fence of poles twenty to thirty feet high, for it was an arduous matter if the ball went out of play and vanished a mile downhill. There was no touchline and the experts dribbled past us by kicking the ball hard against the fence and running round us to take the

[1] *Pyrrhoplectes epauletta.*

rebound. The sepoys played in grim silence, while we, lacking their speed and skill, encouraged each other with shrill cries in a medley of tongues:

'Attaboy, Frank, attaboy!' '*Shabash*, Puran, *chelao!* '*Myan myan thwa*, Ba Khaing!' '*Alawan* you b—— fool, Bum Lang!' interspersed with holloas when we broke from scent to view of the goal. The first ball developed a hernia early in the game and after two foiled attempts to escape downhill, burst finally with a loud report, startling the bulbuls off the trees around. Arthur, who had mistaken the noise for a gunshot, kicked what was left of it a moment later with his great seven-leagued boot and nearly put his knee out.

Though we lost by several goals, yet we capered and panted and ran in good fellowship for an hour, and even the silent critics in the stand could scarce forbear to cheer our one and only goal when Frank, by the sheer menace of his great boots, sent the ball, the goalkeeper and himself, almost through the net in one glorious charge.

It was a long business getting our untidy camp away next morning after two days' halt, and I stayed behind at nine to draw some extra rice, salt and oil, and send off some letters and telegrams. With the mail due to go out in an hour, and the postman about to go on leave to the '*pwè*' at Gamhkawn, the post-office was a scene of feverish activity. The postmaster sighed and groaned heavily while he did innumerable sums on little slips of paper which lay about the table. I had two parcels of orchids to send off for Frank to Edinburgh. The postmaster kept intoning: 'Royal Botahnic Gardens, Edingburg, first half-pound four rupees no four rupees two annas for every additional half-pound up to eleven pounds. . . .'

'When,' I asked, 'do you expect the mail in?'

'Sir,' he replied, 'those lazy b—— doing as they please, now ten o'clock, now twelve o'clock, now next day! I never know. But I am going to bombard them.'

At that moment a correction slip—those bugbears of all junior officials—in the Manual of Postal Regulations caught his eye while he was calculating my parcel charges, and the poor man had to 'buzz' for ten minutes to Laukkaung, thirty miles away, in the hope that the postmaster there, who was out, could get it construed.

So it took me an hour to fill up customs and other declarations

with the remnant of the office-ink (some relief-ink was on its way up with the mail runners) and to forge Frank's name for him a dozen times. But I had at any rate been sitting in comfort in the postmaster's own chair. It had not been mine to wait and watch anxiously like those others, at a grille beneath a board marked 'No Admittence.'

So it was long past noon before I could strike over the hill and down the three-mile steep of bracken and pine which plunges to the valley. I could look far up its length, for it was a day of sunny haze, nearly to the terraced fields which flanked Gamhkawn.

Beyond the wooden bridge at the bottom the hills opened out and the mule-path had rice-fields above it and below, queer curving terraces of stubble, some barely ten feet wide with a six-foot bank dividing them from the neighbouring field. Where the old cultivation had been, were rounded slopes smothered in grass and brambles from two to ten years high, a tangle which would fray your temper and your clothes to shreds if you tried to push through it. But all along the valley to Lower Hpimaw, thirty-five miles on, there was a well-graded easy track with neat stone bridges and culverts along which you could ride or walk at five miles an hour. Here you could look all about you, and linger by a score of tiny mountain streams which slip under the path, and catch here and there a glimpse of the clouds boiling out of the blue pits in the mountains, which were so near and yet so hidden away. For twelve miles here the road skirted the southern flank of Imaw Bum. The map asserts that it was only eight or nine miles to its highest peak as the crow flies, but I do not know how many days or weeks it would have taken one to climb it from that side. The Ngawchang river cuts, as it were, through the whole great mass, which is continued south-eastwards towards the Fenshuiling and Panwa Passes. In my haste, I had once counted on our making a base at Gamhkawn and attacking Imaw from that side, but Frank knew better; from the west, he said, there was a way which he had used, but otherwise we must make another four days' march skirting the edge of the range to Gangfang and then three marches in from the east would find us not too far from the summit.

But that was not yet. Arthur, our leader, was anxious to halt two days at Gamhkawn (Hkamhkam the maps call it) and to take a 'colour movie' of the thousands of Kachins of all races who had been flocking in to the feast and congress of the Baptist Mission.

Birds were few on the way to Gamhkawn, though I saw black-headed shrikes and stonechats and many of the yellow-vented bulbuls. These hereabouts replaced the cheery red-vented bird with the minute scarlet 'whiskers,' which you might find all over the lower hills and plains from Tenasserim to Putao.

Three miles out from Gamhkawn, we began to meet many little family parties of Marus, a few Chinghpaws and Lashis, coming in to the feast; they were resting and washing their feet and faces in trickles of water beside the road. I do not know how many days' journey some of them had come in, bent beneath their monster baskets, sweating in their heavy gala clothes, but every woman and girl among them seemed busy, adding top-gallants and stunsles to the press of sail they carried already. The 'quaint compelling scent' of them, as I passed, recalled memories of summer-time not on Bredon but in trenches at Hooge, where men were forbidden to take their equipment off except for ten minutes a day to scratch.

A mile out of the village, the crowd began to thicken and I was way-laid by the Taungok, that strong persevering man, who insisted that I, as a former Deputy Commissioner, should wait for McGuinness and make a ceremonial entry behind him. Sweat-soaked and grimy in my ragged work-a-day clothes I followed self-consciously between lines of gaily-dressed silent women, past schoolboys in their sports jerseys, past a very solemn and aristocratic *mythun*—that queer pied half-bison of the further hills (who happily did not realise what part, poor beast, he was due so soon to play at the festival)—and rows of elders in their blue Chinese frock-coats and ell-long turbans, each party with a foot-sore heifer as a contribution to the affair or chickens in bamboo baskets.

Last of all, a clown came up behind us at a trot, amid loud laughter, towing a barn-door cock, also at a trot, by a string threaded through its nostrils; a more angry and demoralised fowl —purple with an indignation he could not express—I never beheld. I persuaded the clown, rather to his disgust, to carry the poor thing under his arm for the rest of the procession. But I suppose our ancestors, not so far back, were doing much the same thing, with much the same gross chuckling, to human beings that they had conquered in battle or had outcast from society. I wonder when 'squeamishness' finally forced its way into recognition under the name of common humanity?

Gamhkawn, for the occasion, had become a town of neat little straw-thatched bothies, in long lines in the fields, with one larger assembly hall, its floor bedded down with rice-straw a foot deep like an agricultural show. We abode there two days. The large cine-camera had been dented somehow in its tin-box on the mule-saddle from overtight lashing, and it took Harold half a day to repair the damage, nor was the light then adequate for photography. One morning I went a thousand feet up the hill-side in pursuit of an eagle and though, like most of the large raptorial birds we met, he was too shy for me, I looked down, as an eagle does, upon the road. It was alive with parties of Kachins bound for the feast, the women hurrying in their heavy finery, the little children running ahead and leaping with excitement. Then came a grey and black herd of goats, not limping and footsore as we had seen them so often at the day's end, but rested and flowing round the corner as smooth as a river of oil; behind them two deeply-reluctant dogs on wooden leads, destined for some distant Maru sacrifice, were being led by the Chinese goat-men who beneath their huge round hats looked, for all the world, like mushrooms walking.

We took innumerable photographs in those two days, of the crowds massed rank by rank up the hillside, of women gay in scarlet and blue, with their high black turbans, of men in every shade of blue. Most of them had an authentic comeliness, which owed nothing to colouring or breeding or over-much health or beauty culture, but which was born, I suspect, of centuries of hard living and plain thinking. There were, for us to photograph, Lashi dances and Lisu dances and sword dances, each with a simple and age-old technique, but for me they lost much by not being performed, as they should be, in the dark round the leaping flames of a wood-fire.

One night after supper, we attended a crowded meeting in the gloomy assembly hall. Speeches of welcome were made, to which McGuinness and myself were expected to reply. It was all very well for McGuinness; he spoke Chinghpaw with a fluency as admirable as it was rare, and as *Bumduwa* or Lord of the Hills could not only talk flagrant 'shop' but could give his charges much good counsel into the bargain besides a personal sight of the 'Government' which would normally have entailed for him months of weary travel. But I had forgotten most of my Chinghpaw and remembered, too, that ex-Deputy Commissioners were

like ex-Masters of Foxhounds, in Mr. George Evans' words, ' vermin in their own country.'

Native audiences, however, all over Burma were too well-bred to smile even at the grossest vagaries of grammar and pronunciation. Mine sat in the straw, almost invisible in the gloom, and in a disconcerting silence which was made more intense by the fact that at every third sentence the President leaped to his feet and declaimed in fluent Lashi what I had been struggling to say in Chinghpaw. However, we achieved our thanks and Arthur Vernay bestowed gifts upon the President. At last I pointed to the radio, and told them that the ' British Government from London ' would now talk to them on the *n'bong tyinan* (the wind telegraph).

It seemed hopeless to explain what the B.B.C. was or even how the thing was done, but the crowd were, I think, impressed by the prospect of hearing a voice coming from a town which, as I told them, was at least ' 36 days' journey away.' There was a profound hush as Harold switched on the current and twiddled his knobs. But there was no voice nor any that answered. I found myself praying, like a priest of Baal, that the ' British Government,' whom we were now summoning from the vasty deep, might not be talking or pursuing or in a journey.

Then, from the dark, filling the hall, came a few faint crackling thumps and a whirring, then loud whoops and hunting noises as of gnats, and then not the suave wood-notes of the ' National Programme,' but five long minutes of what, as Suydam assured me later, must have been a flatulent bison.

There are limits, we have been told, to the sublime politeness of an ancient people, but our audience, couched in the straw, did not register whatever emotions it felt. But it was, to the intelligentsia on the platform, an overwhelming relief when the ' British Government,' after this rude overture, burst incontinently into a ragtime song.

We never repeated the experiment elsewhere. Officially it was hinted that atmospherics interfered unduly with transmission, but in those wild hills where British prestige had somehow to be maintained, we felt we could not trust the B.B.C. not to let the party down.

I did a few hours collecting at Gamhkawn, and got more birds than I expected. One steep little valley between two villages was choked with *leucospectrum* bushes and thither as at Htawgaw, like bovines to a salt-lick or men to a bar, every bird of the neigh-

bourhood flocked heedlessly, though many of them, we found, had also been feeding on seeds, *maesa, rhus, embelia* and *polygonum.* Five different laughing-thrushes we collected, including the rare blue-winged one and the even rarer striated laughing-thrush.[1] I had never seen this bird before, but twice from a distance watched its large ruddy-brown form clambering about in the tops of the bushes. Yet while the scrub on the edge of the village, seamed with paths, scoured by pigs and chickens, and constantly disturbed, was alive with birds so that the startled grandmothers pounding rice would cry out when a shot was fired near their homes, it was possible to plunge, as I did twice, into silent virgin forest a mile up the hill and sit there for an hour without sight or sound of any bird at all. That is so often the case, even in England; you may see more birds of every kind on the home fields of a farm any day than you will on the unharried moor where no man comes at all.

The fields rose terrace by terrace, ledge by ledge, above the village, and beside the little untroubled streams, white-capped redstarts played among great hummocks of rock, and also the shy and beautiful whistling-thrush,[2] dark blue but as big as a partridge. And where the confluence of all the little waters went out in a flurry of great rocks and boulders into the Ngawchang, I flushed at my feet, besides a woodcock, a green heron.[3] Engrossed with other birds, I let him go, and regretted it afterwards, as never before or since have I met any herons in the hills.

On the last morning of the old year, we turned northwards off the Hpimaw road at last, crossed the Ngawchang and struck up over a bare pine-covered hill and down, in a mile or so, to the valley again. It is from the top of this hill that you can see Black Rock in all its grandeur, two great masses of dark crags and weathered rock slides towering up out of the gorge. The valley opens out here, with occasional wide rice-fields set in acres of dry scrub and thatching grass. The hills on both sides rise bare and yellow-brown, dotted with odd fir trees and outcrops of rock, as bare as a Sutherland moor. We saw little that day except some cinnamon sparrows, greenfinches, a little flock of spotted munias and a crested bunting, and the poverty of the land, with all its bones showing and a few starveling hamlets along it, seemed to daunt even the birds. But in the afternoon I watched a pair of

[1] *Crammatoptila striata.* [2] *Myiophoneus temminckii.* [3] *Butorides striatus.*

Lashi dancers

Part of the crowd
at Gamkhawn

The Salween divide from near Vijawlaw

Nipawla and the shock-headed man (p.106)

magpies busy at their nest, an immense fortalice of thorns in a bare tree by Tangdung, and also a yellow-billed blue magpie on a stubble. He defeated me in the middle of my stalk by flying suddenly up into a tree five feet from my head. I also collected a sparrowhawk, and at dusk we 'flighted' for bats and woodcock without firing a shot. There was a big grass fire up the ridge beyond the river, a square crown of flame racing up the flank of the hill in the dusk, leaving all purple-dark behind it.

It was on New Year's Day that we came to Gangfang, our base-camp at last. Gangfang is a cluster of long dark Chinese huts on a sandy flat, where the Hpawte stream comes down from the east to join the Ngawchang. Squalid and bare, with infinitely arid hills of grass and bracken all about us, and the snow-peaks of Chimili far away to the east, Gangfang seemed to me the least attractive of all the camps we had reached so far. But from here it was only three short marches to the Chimili Pass, and westwards three more, over the Nyetmaw divide, to the stream which came out of the heart of Imaw Bum. Gangfang itself was an age-old Chinese trading post, through which filtered most of the barter of the further hills, from skins and horns to coffin-wood and medicine roots. We were received cordially by the little old one-eyed Lashi headman in his long blue quilted robe of ceremony, but the Chinese in duffle coats and Homburg hats summed us up privily from the background, and retired to their houses. Their turn would come and they, like bank directors, could afford to dispense with the limelight or introductions. They knew that any money we, or our servants, spent locally would pass sooner or later through their hands, and they had cornered in advance whatever local products we were likely to need, from rice or fuel or goats or fowls to liquor and opium and coolies, and the crazy bamboo 'godown' in which our surplus baggage and supplies were to be stored. Even the rickety bridge with which they had spanned the torrent was theirs, though they allowed someone else to claim the money. And if it did let us down, they had the finest coffin-planks in China handy for our interment. They were, in fact, dormy whatever happened.

Next morning was bitterly cold, with frost outside on the path. Nobody except our reluctant servants seemed alive till about nine o'clock down in the hamlet below, but once the sun was above the hill, all was peace till 11 a.m., about which hour

daily a gale rose and blew steadily up the valley from the south for several hours. Frank assured me this wind, due to air-pressure as the sun warms the long trough of the valley, is also a feature of the Tibetan plateau, but, Tibetan or not, we had no love for it, and it made 'office work' with seeds or skins or labels almost impossible while it lasted.

I spent part of that morning making notes of the fifteen mules we were keeping, which looked so much alike that it was only by their sores, past or present, that I could describe most of them. There was one little black mule with a fair round belly which had always reminded me of a rather fat schoolboy in an Eton jacket. I had long wanted to measure him, and found him to be 39 inches at the withers (i.e., 9.3 hands), about as big as the 'sweet little' Shetland ponies which small boys of six or eight are almost outgrowing nowadays at English shows. Yet he had carried a 130-pound load daily for the last six weeks and looked withal as if he had just spent a summer at grass. My heart did not bleed for him: it tried, instead, vainly to imagine what sort of a load a Chinese muleteer would attempt to tie on to the heavy-weight hunter of those same shows.

Most of the ponies were friendly and eager to lick the salt in my hand; perhaps they had seen better days before a caravan claimed them. The mules, great and small, would not let me put a hand on them. As it came near their withers, they set up a violent shuddering or flinching, though to be sure their owners could slap the dust out of their sore patches without causing them a quiver. One weedy little mule, goose-rumped, scissor-hocked, under-bred, with fetlocks which almost brushed the ground and one comically out-turned toe, had heels so contracted that the points of the shoe were barely half an inch apart and bent down into the horn. The sand had balled as hard as rock in each narrow foot, so that it walked as if on high-heeled shoes. I cleaned out its hooves before it started its journey of 130 miles back to Waingmaw. Its youthful part-owner gazed at me with the air of bland vacancy with which the Yunnanese can out-register contempt or derision. 'My good sir,' he seemed to be saying, 'a mule is a mule, and not an invalid aunt.' I felt that I had done little good as the mule waddled for ever from my ken: I could only solace myself with the words of Friedrich Holderlin about the Germans of 140 years ago:

'I did not look for much and was prepared to find even

less.. . . . Barbarians from old time . . . profoundly incapable of any god-like emotion.'

So the long line went off cheerfully on its journey home; for a few unwonted days at least they would have rest, without any loads, though it was too much to expect that no Chinaman would make use of them when they passed through Htawgaw. Only the white Chow bitch, who had walked proudly at the caravan's head so long, barked disconsolately and tore at her bonds. Her puppies were only two days' old, and at Gangfang she had, unwillingly, to remain seconded for other duty.

CHAPTER XI

BASE CAMP

OF those first few days at Gangfang I prefer not to think too often. Not that we accomplished very much, though it seemed at the time a nightmare of unpacking and repacking, of sorting and re-sorting 101 items of our equipment, of weighing and sacking and storing rice, of issuing clothing and boots and odds and ends, and attempting to store in our cramped and gloomy bamboo hut the mass of stuff which it seemed now unlikely we should ever need.

Whatever we did we were watched, like clowns in a circus, by large and leisurely and amused crowds, who, when there was nothing more to look at, retired to gossip and carouse and kipper themselves over fires in the long smoky huts which abutted on each house. At frequent intervals a hunter or ragged urchin would arrive and stand by the cookhouse with a dead bird or a squirrel or a rat. Each had to be interrogated and paid, and as fast as one was dismissed another who had been waiting shyly round the corner would come forward. Then a bevy of elders under the little old one-eyed herdman would advance on the rest-house and wait there timelessly, holding two screaming goats by the horns, or a leash of roosters under their arms, sunk in that apathy of high blood-pressure which gift-cocks in such circumstances so often assume.

One could not blame, however much one felt like cursing, the elders; they pretended they had come to 'call' but in reality they did not see why every ragged urchin should be in on this reward racket and not themselves. They wanted *kumpa,* and did not hesitate to say so; the whole valley, in fact, realised that such a golden chance would never be theirs again.

'I will not let thee go except thou bless me,' was the burden of their unspoken song, and who can blame them? It was no good saying we had no need of goats or fowls, or that we would let them know later when we required any. The goats would be marched back screaming down the hill and tied by the horns with bamboo ropes to the outside of the long dormitory, where most

of the servants slept. There they would bleat *ad misericordiam* and maddeningly, for the next six hours as if to make us change our minds.

Even when we bought one and presented it to Ma Gam and the servants for meat, nothing happened to reduce the noise. For on the appointed day, Ah Hpung, the Kanung lampman, to whose mercies the goat had been consigned, was recovering from a party and also engaged in the first washing he had accomplished for a month. He was in no mood to think of goat-meat: he had forgotten even to feed the wailing animal. Speechless with wrath, for I had been trying to count money and label skins, I went down at last and released the goat. It should at least be given a chance to escape. I struggled with the bamboo rope, which cut my fingers to the bone, and the goat finally broke loose, dived between my legs and knocked me sprawling. It gave one final wail, glared at me with its cold amber eyes, and walked into a near-by privy, where it spent the morning.

'Funny,' said Suydam, who, I found, had been photographing my struggles quietly from behind, 'in the Naga hills, you know, they always fence those places in and rent them out to the local pig-keepers as a sty.'

I have never known Suydam at a loss for a parallel yet.

But what we said to Ah Hpung when he at length appeared, spruce as the dawn, with pink eyes and a mauve-striped shirt, is perhaps best left unrecorded.

During these days Frank and I slept in the rest-house, the others in tents below. The rest-house was a gloomy bamboo building without windows; its doors, north and south, were made of two great coffin planks with bamboo hinges, which had to be hoisted and dragged into place when anyone went in or out. An earthen fire-box in the centre of the floor completed its furnishing. Apart from our tables and chairs, it was a medley of guns, rifles, torches, plants, dead birds, the current tins of jam and biscuits and butter and tea, packets of seeds, rucksacks, store-boxes, a medicine chest, reference books, treasure boxes, cartridges, and a score of oddments from formaldehyde to bloater paste.

Through this tangled gloom of smoke-eddies and draughts and cross lights came, rather incongruously, the suave wood-notes of the B.B.C.; as I have already hinted, we had brought with us, to keep in touch with the outside world, an expensive radio set purchased in Rangoon. Its unpacking and erection on the march,

and repacking again at dawn, was a lengthy process; a partly-used battery had to be lashed carefully in a basket of hay and fastened upright on a mule-saddle in such a way that the acid could not spill. It was, in fact, like so many luxuries of travel, more trouble than it was worth.

But at Gangfang we had it all and every day; at dawn as we thawed out, crouching over the fire with tin mugs of tea, some midnight dance-band would open to solace us; valse music seemed to mock our heavy boots, though to be sure the rest-house was no more dim and smoke-laden than some of the night clubs we had known. At dusk all the world tuned in for our instruction; we came to know them all, Manila and London, Berlin—cultured, truculent, sarcastic, anti-British, except for its accent, to the core—and a very flat despondent female voice, tonelessly reciting improbable victories, which was then the voice of China. I remember one evening we listened to Roosevelt denouncing Fascism and ' the living and the dead worlds ' between which we hovered, and a few minutes later came London on the ether, bland, honeyed, immaculate, to assure us, first of all, that the Second Test Match at Cape Town had been drawn. It must be confessed that these ' Empire broadcasts,' with their bowdlerised tittle-tattle, their preoccupation with the sports results, their girlish excitement over some escape from a menagerie (copyright reserved), did not impress us, and I dare not repeat what Harold said about them, except that ' you folks in England might be going to Hell in a handbasket and those guys'd never let you know.'

To me they always suggested a fashionable doctor on a visit to a sick old lady with ample private means from whose bedside rumours of wars and income-tax demands and servants giving notice, and indeed most of the rude facts of life, must be for ever barred. Looking back on them, from the vantage point of 1944, one can perhaps be thankful that we were, for our last winter in the world as we knew it, under such a powerful anæsthetic.

CHAPTER XII

A TRIAL RUN

BUT one day (January 4) I did escape, and that was the day after I met the tragopan trapper, the man in the bamboo bowler, whom the rest of the camp had christened Bill the Sailor. For I had always wanted to see a tragopan pheasant alive ever since my first trip to Hpimaw, in April, 1933. Tousled, lean, mountainy men, unwashed and grimy and ageless, their crossbows the only neat and *soigné* things about them, had brought five of the great red grey-spotted square-tailed birds in, had sold them to me for a few annas each, and had jerked their heads south-eastwards when I asked them whence they came, murmuring 'Laikàm.' Laikàm was a cluster of untidy huts, far below us and three miles away from where the road to the Hpimaw Pass wound up through the snow into open alpine meadows. I had met the lasses of the village one night at a Lisu dance, which had been arranged for me outside the rest-house at Hpimaw—great strapping wenches, by no means over-clean in their tarnished bravery, who had sororized freely in fluent Gurkhali with the sepoys of the post, ere they had clasped hands and danced a weird slow swaying glide round the fire with their eyes on the ground, to the maddening music of a single string. But it was not the Laikàm girls I wanted to study closer. It was that great gold and scarlet Beau Brummell of a bird which their men brought in. 'One day,' I said in my haste, 'I will go to Laikàm and watch a cock tragopan showing himself off in spring. He must beat a black-cock or a cock-caper hollow!'

I made up my mind to go in April. It seemed absurd that here was I, who had watched birds from infancy and was equipped with field-glasses, book-learning, and desire, and there were these dingy beings who scarcely knew one bird from another except by its bulk in the pot, and yet had so much more in their tousled heads about the horned pheasant than anyone.

Well, that was in 1933, five years and more before. And the vision came again with the sight of the man in the bamboo bowler, holding two cock tragopans dangling like great golden-red spor-

rans from a stick held across his waist. *Tragopan satyr,* the 'satyr pheasant' Linnaeus had called him, and I seemed to see him half-pheasant, half-god, strutting to and fro, as I had read of him, pricking his absurd pale-blue pointed horns and blowing up those queer blue pink-patched wattles like a child's balloon. How did he do it, and did he bellow in spring as Jerdon had described, or bleat as Hume insisted?

Again I said in my haste, 'I will find out on this trip which of them is correct, Jerdon or Hume, or possibly myself alone.'

I think, too, there was something about Bill the Sailor's face, or his unusual hat, which took my fancy at once. Every variety of head-covering was worn by those who thronged into our camp, from yards of neat blue cloth, or round and greasy Chinese caps, down to the old Homburg, or a woollen balaclava or simply hair which, fallowed for thirty years, had weathered almost to the consistency of moss. But this was a hat in a hundred, neat, distinctive, easily made at home, thornproof, rainproof, imperishable, and doubtless offering little or no harbourage to creeping things in its owner's hair. The face it framed was equally attractive, shrewd, smooth, cheerful, bright-eyed, with a long upper lip, a mouth like Swig or Chowey, and a nose which quietly suggested that its owner might, on occasion, drink; one of those spare, utterly competent faces you may see in this country among boatmen or some hunt-servants, and which are so common in the Ngawchang Valley. I felt I wanted to see more of him, and Arthur generously let me drop the incessant 'Q' details and made no bones about my going next day.

'Ask him where he got them,' I told Lup Teng.

Bill the Sailor pointed north by east up the valley and murmured something in Yawyin.

As Lup Teng interpreted it, his cracked voice rose in that indescribable way which, in Burmese or Chinghpaw, means that it is a long way off or far up hill.

'Tell him,' I said, 'that I'll give him three rupees if he'll show me his traps and where he caught those birds.'

There was a passionate interlude in Yawyin. I caught the eyes under the bamboo bowler looking me up and down with the disrobing eye of a trainer or a grazier. Possibly he was wondering whether I could stay the course; I do not think he thought me, even with my field-glasses and my great gun, a serious rival if he revealed to me the secret of his hunting-grounds. Then he

smiled and hinted that we ought to make an early start next day. What else he said to Lup Teng was Yawyin to me, but I agreed.

The thermometer said 31° at 7 a.m. next morning when we started, Bill the Sailor, whose real name I found was Nipawla, in front, and behind me old Hpaonan La, carrying my gun and haversack. There was ice on every pool, the path was iron-hard and the dry bracken and grass on the hillside were coated with rime. It was one of the few days I had ever spent in Burma when I was glad to wear heavy gloves and boots and as much clothing as possible. The side pools in the little streams that ran across our path were muted in the cold, though miles away up the Hpawte valley, I could see the highest tops already glowing yellow-brown in the sun. Nipawla strode ahead of us with long, easy paces, his great splay feet, socked only with grime and ashes, spurning the frozen puddles, his ragged shirt tail protruding from under his blanket. He clanked loudly as he walked, and I thought that he must have a bundle of cooking-pots slung beneath his blanket. But I found later they were only empty tins, the jetsam of our camp which all the hill-tribes seemed to covet.

We walked through a dead world motionless and waiting for the sun. Once we met a child of four strolling, naked from throat to knee, the rest of him covered by a single cotton shirt, oblivious of the cold. Once a hill-partridge dashed up off the path and later I watched four dippers, who seemed convinced that spring had come, sporting cock-tailed on a boulder in the foaming river below.

Once, too, we met a shock-headed man with a lined face hurrying in, driven by rumour, with three small birds for me. He proffered them to me shyly, with averted eyes, wondering if the tale flying round the hills could possibly be true, that we bought such things for money. He had, too, though he knew it not, confounded one of the pundits in far-away England, who had recently stated rather tartly that the slender-billed babbler[1] did not 'occur' in Burma. The shock-headed man, however, produced one, still warm and rumpled, and without its tail, from his tattered shirt, and I told him to bring me as many more as he liked at four annas, if possible complete with tail.

Nipawla burst into a flurry of Yawyin to explain that we, the lunatic *duni* who had arrived at Gangfang, did not eat rats or voles or birds as sensible folk did, but threw the good parts away

[1] *Xiphiramphus superciliaris.*

and kept the uneatable remnant stuffed with cotton wool in boxes. Suydam had recently described to me certain large-hearted statesmen of America who were, he said, 'the greatest ones to cash in on the opportunity' he ever saw. The shock-headed man was no whit behind them in intelligence. He smiled at me and announced his intention of following me all day.

An hour later I sat on a log outside Vijawlaw village, waiting for Nipawla, who was finishing his breakfast or perhaps explaining to his wife where he had been since noon the day before. The rest of Vijawlaw, young and old, convinced that small birds were a rising market, had disappeared hot foot into the hills to emulate the shock-headed man's example. He himself, for the moment in affluence (I had given him four annas) squatted beside me, pointing to the holes which were the outstanding feature of his garments; in half-Chinese asides to Hpaonan La and smiling gestures to me, he made it clear that in my service, he hoped to re-stock his wardrobe before the spring.

I allowed him to carry the twelve-bore. I guessed that in the country where we were going, he was much less likely to fall with it than Hpaonan La. For I was beginning to realise that the Minstrel Boy, as we called him, was no mountaineer. Only Chaplin himself, in his earlier films, could have tumbled over himself with such uncanny skill uphill or down, and the great boots he now wore 'mid snow and ice seemed only to enhance his powers.

Here Nipawla returned, having shed his blanket and his tins for a crossbow and a black skin bag. He smiled at me, indicated with one sweep of his hand a thin dark line which ran straight as a parting up the grass of a bare hill half a mile north of us, and with another lateral sweep implied that, once up it, we could walk swiftly along the crest to the oak-forest, which I could just see peeping behind its shoulder. I looked at the bare hill, feeling sure that I should dislike it most unreasonably ere long.

Forty minutes later, I stood panting and remembering all my sins and indulgences of the last twenty years as I looked down at the silver thread of the river and the village below. The pocket barometer suggested that we had only climbed 1,100 feet, but my heart, thighs and calves, and the perspiration drenching my heavy clothes, all cried out that the barometer was grossly out of order. The fir-trees which had seemed to crown the slope were out of sight below the curve of the hill, up which Nipawla's path still went like a parting, through dry, bare grass and bracken in front of

us. I felt that if he climbed this twice a day to visit his traps, he fully earned any tragopans that fell into them. And I thought of my pheasant-shooting friends far away in England, some of whom, doubtless, were strolling out smoking cigars or pipes in the keen January air to a day of 'cocks only,' and wondered how much longer they would pursue the sport if it meant walking for an hour almost vertically to the first stand.

Nipawla and the shock-headed man had not turned a hair. They stood resignedly at gaze during my frequent pauses to recuperate, their feet gripping the steep slope from toe to heel, their ragged shirt-tails flapping in the wind and their eyes roving to the distance, in which all round more and more forest was visible above the shaven line of grass and bracken which marked where man had burned for 50 years. One could, in fact, hardly see the bare brown hills which cover such scores of miles from Black Rock to Vijawlaw.

But I will not go too deeply into that blank and arduous day. Suffice it that we climbed for three hours more till the barometer paused at 8700, for the last two hours along a ridge about nine inches wide in rain-forest, with oak and rhododendron sweeping down almost vertically for a mile on either side. One of the tragopans brought in at Gangfang had been eating, so Frank assured me, *lomaria* fern, and I had imagined myself, as in an Alken print, flushing at my feet great red-gold birds out of level green fern, and shooting them as they glinted down hill, impossible to miss in the January sunshine.

But by all the unwritten laws of the English shooting field, it would have been criminal to walk this country carrying a loaded gun at all, with one man in front of me and two more behind. My gun was, I fear, loaded to the public danger, but by the time I could have pulled myself together and let it off, there would have been nothing living in sight except my entourage.

Up at the top, on the ever-narrowing rabbit-run on which we ended, we found ourselves crouching and stumbling and grovelling on hands and knees in a gloom of green over twisted mossy rhododendron roots which ran in every direction. If this was a typical tragopan beat, they seemed reasonably safe, except from a fox or Nipawla.

Nipawla showed me his traps, so simply made and yet so neatly intricate, a fence of twigs on each side of a gap at spots where the ridge slackened out or the tree-roots thinned and where all

creeping things tended to cross, and in the gap a noose tied to a pliant sapling or cane, and held in position by a trigger and a notched bow which Nipawla could cut in half a minute from the trees around.

I nearly stepped into one of these snares myself, of a much stronger make, not for tragopan, I think, but barking deer—a neat coil of twine attached to a stout sapling bent over from where it grew ten feet down the hill. Nipawla gripped my foot in time with a hand of iron, smiled, and lightly sprung the trap himself. The sapling shot up with a force quite sufficient to hurl a light man up in the air to fall down the hillside with a dislocated leg.

It seemed a painful and undignified end for any satyr pheasant who was luckless enough to put anything but his head into the noose, especially as I wondered how Nipawla could possibly visit his traps every day. But he had to, I gathered, firstly because in that jungle little would be left of edible game after one night, and secondly because I suppose my nightmare hill was to him as easy as an office stair.

'After all,' I ruminated, 'a certain number may get caught by the leg and dangle there for hours. But they've got a good many hundred miles to roam, north, south, east and west from here, from Imaw to the Salween, without a soul to stop them, and if they do meet a snare . . . isn't it possibly less painful, less undignified to be snared by Nipawla, so hard-trained and unassuming and living with his hungry young on what he catches down to the last gnawed drumstick?' Than what? 'Than to be tailored, like some of those old January cocks, by Sir Ambrose Suchanone, all unaware of it and replete with luncheon, before an audience of gaping ladies, high over the valley of Test or Tweed?' Yes, I still think the tragopan would have the better end when it came.

Once only we emerged from the gloom. There was a great flat rock, a few yards off the ridge and near its top, and on it we sat near mid-day for a space in hot sunshine, and gazed our fill at Imaw, far to the west and crowned with snow, and east at a score of great snow-filled gullies that slashed the face of Chimili. Here, in old years, takin or gooral may have sat looking out over the silent oak trees, but now it was Nipawla's pet perch, worn smooth and grimy by his toes. Here he brought out his flint and steel and tow and smoked some wet green tobacco which he drew from his bag and showed me how deftly he could fashion a trap from nothing but what grew ready to his hand.

We did not converse very much, for neither Nipawla nor the shock-headed man, both Yawyins, had any Chinghpaw, and Hpaonan La and myself had only about ten words of Yawyin or Yunnanese between us. But we did quite a lot by signs. For example, I asked what month the tragopans nested in. Hpaonan La did not know either the Yawyin or the Yunnanese for egg-laying if there is one, but he rounded one finger and thumb, drew it vertically from his breastbone to his lap and made his point quite neatly.

I suppose to judge by results there never was a blanker day. I saw nothing after we started to climb the hill, except a few quaker-babblers[1] near the top of the ridge, and two crows on the skirts of the forest. But when I looked back in the afternoon to that hill, serene as ever in the wind and sun, and thought how tired I was and how little we had seen of the silent forest we had traversed, it seemed clear that a shy pheasant like the goat-god would be likely to outlast my time and even Nipawla's.

There must have been, however, plenty of birds about somewhere. When we got back to Vijawlaw the entire populace, from ragged grandmothers down to naked babes of five, was awaiting us grimly, like a lot of rival poulterers, each with a basket full of crossbowed birds. There were almost as many as the skinners could cope with, redheaded and plain-coloured laughing thrushes, tit-babblers, leioptilas, tits and buntings. Many of them were badly rumpled or damaged by the crossbow or had been killed many hours before but, I think, when I had taken what I wanted, the women and children who had beset me had cash in hand beyond their wildest dreams.

[1] *Alcippe nipalensis.*

CHAPTER XIII

CHASE OF BEAR

The Major gave us a graphic account of a struggle with a wounded bear. I privately wished that the bears would win sometimes on these occasions; at least they wouldn't go vapouring about it afterwards.

'REGINALD' BY SAKI.

I GOT back to camp that evening, weary and ravenous, to find two deputations of spies waiting on us with news from the remoter local Eshcols. The party which had gone towards Imaw had not yet come in. The men of Sadulaw said nothing but produced to us, silently and convincingly, as it might have been once a bunch of grapes to Joshua, some fresh takin droppings wrapped in a leaf of rhododendron. They had no need of words; it was plain as mud that they must have been not so far from takin in the last twenty-four hours (some three miles from Sadulaw by what we could make out) and, so the Botanist guessed from the rhododendron leaf, at between nine and ten thousand feet.

Their rivals of Hpawshi, with that peculiar honesty which will normally make a hillman plead guilty even to murder, did not give us, as a keeper or a stalker might have done, any 'easy hopes or lies' to bring us to their hills. They produced a smoke-dried civet-cat (rather like an amateur conjurer who doubts if his audience will believe him) and said simply that in two days up the Hpawshi stream, they had found the tracks of four bears and nothing else at all.

It was finally ordained that I should test the Hpawshi men's story, while Frank took Arthur and Suydam after the takin. I had always regarded bears as eminently likeable, almost clubbable beasts, and knew nothing about bear-shooting, except that you must never let a wounded bear get up-hill of you. But it seemed that the Museum wanted one, and I was glad enough to get out into little-known country on my own. There was a day of preparation and then with a tent, a borrowed rifle, two guns, a basket of clothes and bedding, twenty pounds of salt (in case I met a bear and could not get him in), a chair, a bag of rice and

Lazum Naw, as skinner-valet-interpreter-cook, I set off next day. I left a scene of chaos, the movie-camera in full blast, and old Lup Teng trying to sort 30 or 40 coolies with his cracked voice rising to a scream as they fastened, after their custom, on the lighter bundles or tried the heavier ones and then left them deftly for someone else to bear.

I had got leave to take with me, as intelligence officer and general standby, old Lalbir Lama. He had never been up the Hpawshi stream, but he told me he had gone with Maxwell West in the old days several times into the hills behind Tangdung and Gawlam, and I thought, if we met a bear, he was a useful man to have beside me. As things turned out, but for Lalbir, we should have had a very blank time indeed.

We got away about 9.30 a.m., Lalbir and Lazum Naw and I, and were making camp in heavy jungle on the Hpawshi stream by 3.30 p.m. There had been a long halt while our coolies passed through the numerous Hpawshi villages, and we were continually waiting with the spies on them, but on the whole I think it was to everyone but a crow a fair day's journey that we accomplished at last. We went about two miles down the Ngawchang, then out over the hill past a series of fenced and hedged-in villages where women were ginning cotton, and the coolies all disappeared for a meal, then up the Hpawshi by a path which, a mile from the last village, frankly forgot itself in a series of notched logs and once, in a gloomy ravine, became an almost passionate log-jam, slippery with frost and nearly two hundred yards long, where the Hpawshi stream came rushing out of the dark forest.

Camp, when we decided that it would be dark if we did not make it soon, was an easy matter, but hardly a sociable one. I was given a generous fire of ten-foot trunks as light and central heating at my tent door. Lazum Naw squatted amid his pots and pans five yards away under a ground sheet in equally flammiferous surroundings, while Lalbir Lama, disdaining us and ground-sheets and the small tent, turned his back on us and brooded over a cooking-pot beneath a tree close by. The spies, Luk Seng and another with a villainous, likeable face, and their companion who acted as cook and lumber man, sent the coolies home (all except an ex-sepoy, a Lisu called Mi Pa, whom I kept to talk Chinghpaw to me), and then with four or five swift slashes, fashioned themselves a sort of bamboo sparrows' nest with a fourth ample fire in its heart, round which they kippered themselves in inexhaustible

gossip through the night. Possibly they were marvelling at the amount of kit I had with me; their own, food, bedding, kitchen, pantry, bathroom and armoury, would have gone twice over in a wastepaper basket. To solace me, I recalled the cavalry dogma that 'any fool can be uncomfortable in the jungle.' But I still felt uneasy, because in these haunts of theirs no one could have called them fools, and I was none too sure about myself.

We were off at sunrise next day, one Lashi taking Lalbir, with my shot gun, and the heaviest cartridges I had, to prospect towards the east, while Luk Seng and Mi Pa took me across the stream and up the hill to the north. Far above the forest, at 10,000 feet or so, I could see in the early sun a row of white pines, blasted by fire, on the top of the ridge, standing up like question-marks out of the rock and cane. The rock itself was like a gaunt dark face, peeping above the rounded bosoms of the trees.

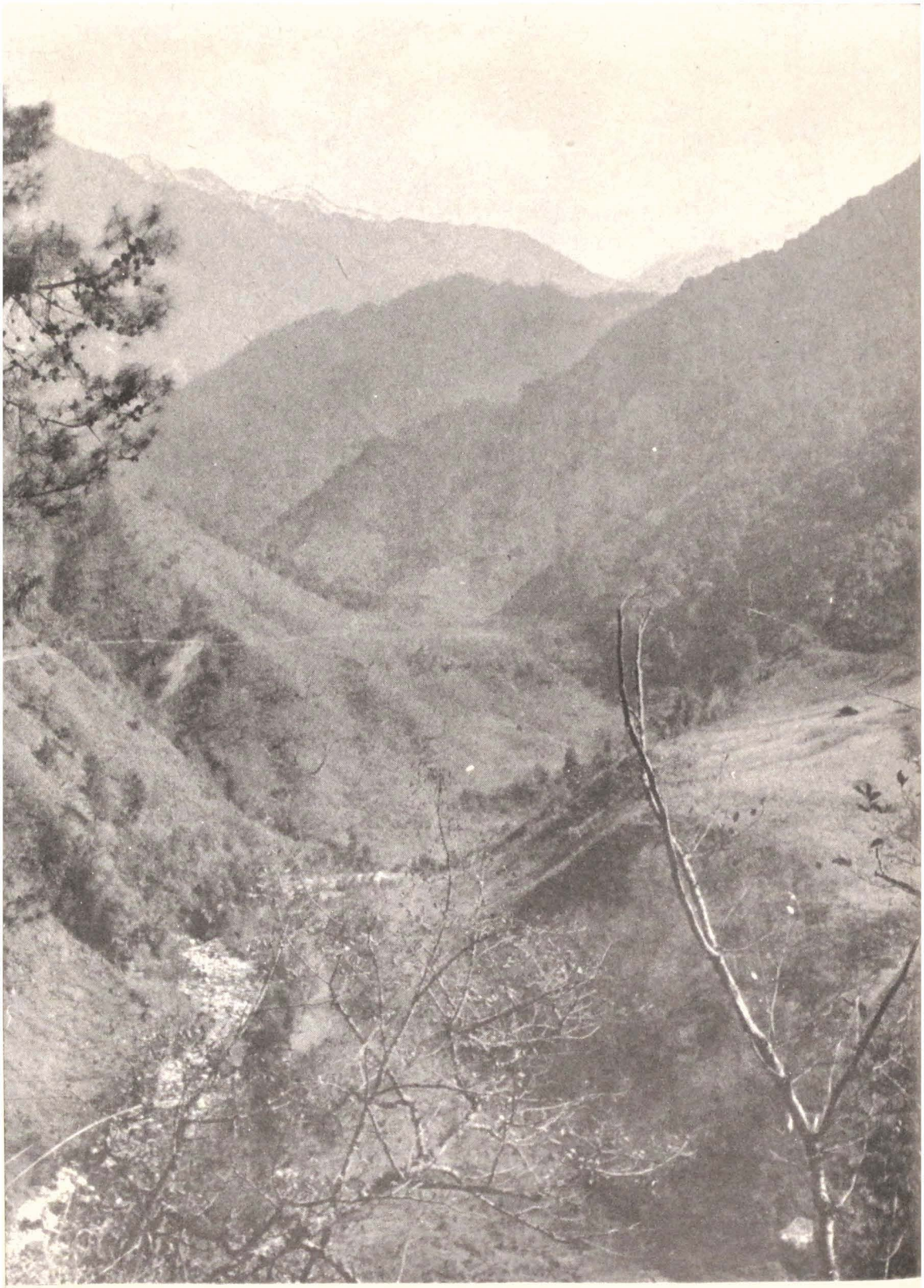
That, I think, was one of the hardest days I ever had in my life. I lost all count of the times I fell or slipped, up hill or down. In fact, to the patient Mi Pa behind me, I must have seemed in a state of permanent collapse. The rifle I had borrowed from Arthur had no cap and the muzzle seemed to be always catching or brushing against something, leaves or moss, twigs or earth or fern. After two hours we came out on a flat ridge where there were many droppings, and the couch of a barking-deer. Mi Pa assured me it was a black one. Then far away we heard a strange bleating cry which Luk Seng instantly copied on a leaf held between his thumbs. But the cry came only from Lalbir and his Lashi, who now appeared silently from the trees above us, having achieved some sort of understanding in Yunnanese.

'*Bahut shikar hai,*' said Lalbir, indicating the hill above. It was the first time on the trip that I had seen him look interested. But all he seemed to have met was a hen tragopan. Her he had unhesitatingly attacked with S.G. and, I should imagine, the choke barrel. What had survived the encounter now protruded limply from his satchel.

We parted once more and never saw each other, or for that matter anything to shoot, for the rest of the day. Looking back on it, I do not suppose that that Hpawshi rain-forest was much more difficult than most of the rest between seven and nine thousand feet which lay within a hundred miles. But to me that day, new to it all and not yet in training, it seemed almost malignantly vertical. Dead branches, especially bamboo, masked in grass and

Lazum Naw and Lup Teng in camp on the Hpawshi stream

Rope bridge at Gangfang. Mule with coffin planks in foreground



The Hpawte valley looking towards Chimili

fern which lay pointing down hill, old and withered to the eye, but as slippery as greased stair-rods if one trod on them; a kind of knotted alder, which made as if maliciously to elbow me sideways over a drop, or, if there was no drop, to whip my face and legs with jointed canes; more dead boughs which held me as firmly as barbed wire until I trusted my weight to them when they went off like crackers and shot me down the hill; ferns and pliant twigs that clasped me round the neck and plucked my cap off; streams where the smooth brown rocks were sheathed in ice and the way of a snake on them was nothing to mine; it seemed to be one endless succession of obstacles and butter-slides.

Luk Seng strode in front, his neat blue and dirty-white smock and trousers and gaiters blending in some odd way with the green and brown we moved through. Whenever I stopped for breath he took out a needle and repaired the holes in his garments. But even he, I thought, was in doubt when we started down the hill; we had to traverse a mile or more to the west rather than face, or rather bottom, an almost vertical descent.

Mi Pa, behind me, formed my eyes and ears and understanding. At intervals he prodded me gently in the rear and presented me with fragments of his researches, an empty snail-shell, a handful of sambhur droppings and once a great bunch of blue primulas (*primula whitei,* Frank told me later that they were) which at one place grew in a hundred moist crannies along a tiny stream. Once when we came to a torrent, Luk Seng lifted my wrist and led me over the stones with a dainty mincing step, as if he was my partner in a gavotte. Once we came to a place where the ferns, in one great patch and a score of little eccentric trails, had all turned blue; Luk Seng turned to me and indicated in one flashing gesture a bear sitting on his end and eating acorns out of his paws.

Twice there was a faint whirr of wings and a rustle round a bush. In a second Luk Seng had become a furtive, crouching, hurrying face aligned behind the crossbow held outstretched in his right hand, as he tripped with little, soft, murderous steps towards a shadow which was a partridge running through the fern. We met several partridges that day, mostly in pairs and ludicrously tame. They hardly troubled to fly, but the crossbow, although it made no more noise than the blow of a stick on a tree, was not, I found, a weapon of precision.

I was, to cut a long story short, out from 7.30 to 3.30 p.m., and

in all that time we had not seen a beast of any kind, and, except for the partridges, hardly a bird. When I got back, I found that Lazum Naw, who had not stirred more than a hundred yards from camp, had shot with the .410 a Gould's shortwing.[1] All I could be sure of at the time was that it was a bird I had never seen before, and I found difficulty in guessing its family. It had been, he assured me, in dense undergrowth on the ground just across the stream. Later I found that, according to the book, 'nothing is known of this very rare bird.'

This was not the first time Lazum Naw had achieved results in collecting out of all proportion to the time he spent on it. In March, 1936, he had wandered out on the hillside just below the Laukkaung post and in the space of two hours had collected not only a rare laughing-thrush, but a still rarer scimitar babbler and a specimen of the wedge-billed wren,[2] one of the most curious and least-known birds of the Burma-Assam Hills, of which only about five specimens exist. Another day he had gone out at tea-time below the Hpimaw rest-house and collected a magnificent male Amherst pheasant. I excused him his many shortcomings on account of his uncanny luck.

Next day was a repetition of the first. We clomb, we slid, we clomb again, we saw nothing. The only difference was that we did a long cast round towards the east, crossing stream after gloomy stream which faced the west and never saw the sun except very late in the day. Here snow lay in patches among the dark ravines and stalactites hung from every rock where the spray had frozen or bearded the trickles. Sometimes the water slipped mutely under a sugary crust of ice; in one place there was a waterfall a hundred feet high, which dropped from ledge to ledge to ledge, frozen except for its heart, dumb under brakes of ice six inches thick. We reached at one point the lower edge of the cane where a little fulvetta, brown with a broad white eyestripe, came out of a hemlock tree and chid us from going higher. And once, I lay on my back, and glassed the rocky face a mile above me, for nearly an hour, where it peered up out from the cane and the fire-stricken pine, and hoped to see something there. Gooral or serow, takin or bear, the high tops might have sheltered them all, but the whole great mountain was as silent and empty far above me as the fold of the hill where I lay.

It was on the third morning (January 9) that the bear at last

[1] *Brachypteryx stellatus.* [2] *Sphenocichla roberti.*

vouchsafed himself to us. All those two, long, sunny days, we had seemed to be for ever climbing up the endless stairs of the hill, or glissading round the steep headwaters of a hundred hidden streams. I had not lifted the rifle in all that time except to make sure that it was still unchoked. My left elbow was capped like that of a horse from repeated falls on rock or down the hill, my puttees hung in tatters; even Luk Seng had abandoned what was left of one gaiter on the hill.

The blasted pines still showed white and straight far up on the inviolate ridge, no longer as question but as exclamation marks; for in all those miles we had clambered without ever crossing our own tracks once, we had not been within two hours of them.

Except for a few partridges and a laughing-thrush or two, I had met only one lean old woman with a starveling boy huddled in a tent of branches near our camp. They had cleared a half-acre of ground under the oak-trees and were cultivating, or more probably collecting, a medicine-root which the Lashis called '*hwa-li*,' and which they sold to the Chinese shopkeepers at Gang-fang. All round the cleared portion was a fence of twigs with snares for tragopan. Yet in those miles of virgin forest I had seen less wild life than you may see in a London park. It was as if the tide of it had ebbed from where we were, perhaps up to the cane and rock on the horizon. Pig and sambhur, serow and bear and tragopan, and a dozen others at which we could only guess, the owners of the hill were all 'away.' They had thrown their pleasaunce 'open to the public' and gone, themselves, elsewhere. Only their old lairs remained to show where they had been, sunny beds beside a log, sheltered couches under the slant of a great rock, a feather and a scratching among the granite dust beside a boulder, or a mass of squashed blue ferns where the fabled bears had sat around munching acorns.

Once on the second morning a loud and startling cry, half-owl, half-curlew, had rung out from the depths of the oak trees far below. Luk Seng plucked an arrow like a hairpin from the tangle of his head-dress and vanished down the hill. A few minutes later I heard a flurry of great resonant wings as some unseen bird took flight. Luk Seng came back to us, panting and swearing, and indicated between his hands a bird with a girth twice that of a tragopan which he called a '*ngaw-maw*.' It had made a noise in rising like a peacock, but there were none, I am

sure, in those hills. I believe myself it was a monàl pheasant strayed down to the oak forest from above, but to me not Pan or Apollo could have been more invisible.

On the third morning I gave up the bear and decided to go about my job, though I told Lalbir to have one last look round on the hill we had searched all that first morning. We, Luk Seng and myself, climbed the steep dark hill to the east before the sun was over it to collect birds with the .410, Mi Pa carrying the rifle behind me. The forest seemed as silent as ever, but Luk Seng sat down at last in an empty glade and blew on a bamboo pipe, which he cut from the bushes nearby, four little notes, long, short, long, long, 'whor-whe-whor-whor,' repeated again and again. There was a faraway sound which presently became a twittering and then we were surrounded, as if by magic, by a host of quaker-babblers, scolding, chiding, puffing out their throats, darting from cane to cane all round the pied piper who had summoned them and mobbing him as if he was in very truth an owl.

I was about to fire when, a mile away to the north, we heard a shot, then another, and, a full minute afterwards, a third. Luk Seng dropped his pipe, gave one quick smiling glance at the rifle and myself and was away down like a vulture on to his kill. How in that uncharted tangle he found us our way I do not know, but in twenty minutes, straight down the slope, across a stream and almost as straight up, we had met the other Lashi and old Lalbir, for once excited out of his soldierly reticence.

They had met a bear—a *bahut burra balu,* Lalbir assured me—and he had knocked it headlong down a steep slope with S.G. in its off shoulder. The bear had rolled a hundred feet and vanished and Lalbir was waiting, very sensibly, for it to stiffen up and for our arrival with the big rifle.

It was nearly half-past eight when we started on what seemed to me to be a very faint trail of blood, a drop or two here and there on a leaf, a trickle on the tip of a fern, a four-inch stain on the edge of a sapling where the bear had squeezed himself between it and the slope of the hill. But Luk Seng and Mi Pa and the other Lashi (whose name I never knew) made more of it on the hard going than I should have believed possible. They were off like a flash with noses to the ground and hackles up round the edge of the hill to the east.

I lost all count of time; it was all I could do to keep with them though gradually I realised that the bear was leading us round

fold after fold of the mountainside always by the line of least resistance, across a series of gullies and waterfalls and re-entrants by a path which, barely recognisable as such, was yet so clearly the only way. We peered into caverns under hanging rocks, we swayed across ledges where the stream, above us and vertically below, trickled mute under its great brakeshoes of ice, where the spray was frozen into spicules on every rock, through bushes masked in rocks and fallen mouldering trees where even the bear had slipped.

'*Bahut gir-gya*!' said Lalbir, pointing at the stains, and Mi Pa himself also fell heavily in the same place.

When the curve of the hill slackened out and the blood failed us, we cast ourselves up hill and down, till at last round a reddened fern-stem we would close in on one another again, panting and pointing and murmuring in Chinghpaw and Hindustani and Lashi, as bobbery a pack as ever ran a line. I had long ceased to wonder where we were; I was intent only on keeping the rifle muzzle clear, and of remaining near the leading hounds who were going slower and slower as the faint signs dried.

The hunt ended as suddenly as it had begun; there was a long check when Lalbir and his Lashi cast themselves far up hill, and Luk Seng, to whose head the .410 had gone in the last two days like wine, affected to search for tracks in a bushy ravine while he trifled with a covey of black-faced laughing thrushes. '*Ma moh*!' I heard disconsolately from above and below, '*ma moh*!' I took out a cigarette and saw it was after eleven o'clock and knew the bear had walked us out of scent.

We converged a minute or two later, one behind the other, on a slippery dead tree trunk masked in brambles and alder, with the hill on one side and in front sheer above us and on our right a drop of thirty feet into a stream. There was a sudden crackling and swaying in the bushes at the end of the log where a ledge ran out across the waterfall, I saw Lalbir stumble forward, and the next second I was being passed into action like a fire-bucket by three shouting men from hand to hand along the log. My field-glass strap caught in the bushes, the rifle sling in something else, and while I was writhing loose Lalbir's gun went off twice, there was a coughing roar and then Lalbir's voice came sharp with warning: '*Nahin mara, sahib*!' as he called to me to come.

He had slipped and was sitting down, his back against a tree, his gun open, grimacing in the agony of trying to extract another

cartridge from some recess of his person. Beyond him a dark form was limping up the hill, masked in rustling cane except for the head half turned. I fired twice and the dark form became a great black object crescented with white which crashed and somersaulted down past us at hurricane speed to lie still at last with one massive forearm clasping a fallen tree-trunk twenty feet below.

I found Lalbir clutching my own arm to explain that this was verily a bear of bears, and how could he hope to kill it with my miserable gun and S.G.? The other Lashi and Mi Pa were unstringing their crossbows and scratching their heads ecstatically with the arrows. Luk Seng, holding an empty .410 case, the dust shot of which he had contributed to the final fusillade, was murmuring to Lalbir the only Hindustani word he thought he knew: '*Shar-boosh*! *Shar-boosh*! '

I found myself on my knees, like a second in a boxing ring, turning the bear on his back, wondering what would have happened if he had come at us while we were jammed together on the log, and mechanically applying cotton wool and my handkerchief to his nose and ear to staunch the blood, which might spoil him for the Museum. The S.G. holes in his off shoulder had been neatly plugged with moss, possibly as he brushed against the trees, and were neither bleeding nor visible. Only under his near forearm where they had emerged was a great bare patch licked clean of fur and skin. Had he not waited there, I doubt if we should ever have seen him again. But perhaps this ledge to which he had led us was an old lair of his, cool and high, whence as through a window of the trees he had been wont to look out at the snow on Imaw forty miles away.

* * *

'And what sort of forest,' said Harold to me at 10 p.m. that night, 'did you get him in? Was it pretty pure climax that hasn't been monkeyed with at all? '

'Exactly! ' I replied; his phrase seemed to summarise, beyond any attempt of mine, the scene of our labours of the past three days. I wondered how I could begin to explain all that had happened since that hour-long wait beside the bear, while old Lalbir sat above me on the hill, smoking, and rehearsing to himself in muttered phrases the very words in which he would describe his victory to the others when he returned to camp. We had managed to get the bear in somehow to camp with eight other

men, beside the spies, by 4 o'clock. There I had restaunched his wounds and wrapped him anew in a groundsheet until such time as Harold, the Curator, could 'take care' of him. Then we had broken camp and those dark forms had started in beneath their grotesque bundles, on to that final game of blindman's buff, as each man staggered inch by inch leaning on his staff along the frozen log-jam in the dusk, and up the vertical notched log at the other end, with his feet being carefully placed in position by another. And then the slow, undulating, ceaselessly halting crawl between lanterns through the villages, at each of which dogs and women and children leapt out to cry aloud at the great bear, alone and aloof on his stretcher, heedless of our triumph over him.

'Yes,' was all I could find to say, 'it was as slippery as bedamned and like a ruddy tightrope over the stream at the end, and some of them were carrying eighty pounds! Lord only knows when they'll get in here.'

I had, in my weakness, taken Luk Seng and a lantern and hurried on ahead of those dark forms, who, cheerful as ever and gossiping of the reward they hoped for, were still on their way in from Hpawshi. Probably the bear, over whom I had made so much fuss, would be of less account to the Museum than any vole or shrew; he was so much less likely to be new to science.

'Yes,' mused Harold darkly, 'one can waste a lot of time on those large mammals. I hear Arthur and Suydam got nothing and are coming in to-morrow. And was that all you saw the whole time?'

'All except what old Lalbir had left of a hen tragopan,' I told him. 'I do wish I could have *seen* a live one myself!'

We turned on the wireless while I supped and waited for the coolies: there was a talk by A. G. Street on Wiltshire farming, some comments on the football results and then a woman talking rather too jauntily on cosmetics. Then in came the bear at last with his unwearied, eager pall-bearers, and they propped his stretcher like a ladder against the eaves of the hut outside my bedroom for the night.

'He'll freeze there,' said Harold, 'and I'll take care of him in the morning.'

We turned in at 11 p.m. and only then for the first time did I recall that at 7 a.m. I had given up bears and gone up the mountain-side to collect a quaker-babbler and a tit-mouse or two.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAMP OF FRUSTRATION

THERE are two main classes of persons who go upon journeys great or small. The first you may see poring over Bradshaws, worrying exalted friends for letters of introduction, buying maps and 'folders,' asking a hundred questions of travel-agents and porters and other wayfarers, and rising long before dawn to take a census of their belongings and hurry everyone else through breakfast. Life for them is apt to be pandemonium until that moment when, with forty minutes to spare, they take their seats relentlessly upon the company's benches and dare the next train or the steamer to go without them.

The others, whether they are bound for Szechuan or Charing Cross, rise at their usual hour, pack light-heartedly at the last minute and decide that, even if they do miss the train there will probably be another, anyway, and what does it matter if there isn't a refreshment car?

'I think I've travelled,' said one of these simple-hearted optimists to me once, 'on every single train which goes to Maidenhead, including the one which doesn't stop till it reaches Exeter!'

To these, Providence, and not one of the Big Five, is apt to be banker and travel-agent. Life for them is too full and too good to be wasted in for ever sprinting for the 7.59, or in worrying whether they have a permit for this and that, or are running out of tea or iodine. When travelling with them, you can never be sure whether you will be dining the next night at Government House or in gaol.

A third type, more complex and more rare, loves to work out the details of its travel-programme down to the last rupee or train-connection, and then either leaves the 'schedule' or some other essential behind, or else adopts a new programme at a second's notice. (Of these was my friend, Ronald Kaulback, who set off from my house in Myitkyina for eighteen months in Tibet and left the cash that was to pay his way behind in an unlocked helmet-case.) To them, also, Providence is normally somewhere in the out-field or at long-stop.

We got away eventually on our journey to Imaw Bum on January 14, though Frank and I found the resources of our joint Chinese and Chinghpaw all too inadequate for what we wanted to

say at times. We found we had no less than sixty-three loads, apart from the coolies' rice and the lamp-oil in the godown, and only after issuing these to the rabble of men, who pounced vulture-like on them and fought for the lightest, did we discover that we had omitted the skinners' kit and two loads of cine-cameras. In the middle of the confusion, the mail arrived, all work ceased, and I found that the only envelopes with my name on them contained bills. Then ten of our following thrust money on me and enjoined me to count, seal and despatch it to their wives. The cook, Wana Naw, sent a brief message on the money-order to his young bride: 'I am behaving very prettily (*atswamsha*). I hope you are doing the same.'

Lalbir, who since his affair with the bear had been resting on his laurels and doing as little work as possible, disappeared about this time and only when I was dark with cursing for him, did he reappear, sodden with tears, a letter in his hand.

'She is dead, *sahib*,' was all he would say. It was his youngest daughter, who had died suddenly in Waingmaw the day before we had met the bear.

So it was a gloomy departure for our three marches to what Frank described as the 'valley of the giant rats.' Somehow we had badly miscalculated the loads, and though coolies were easy to secure, this meant fresh calculations about the rice we should need in the next three weeks and further coolies to carry the extra rice. The staff who remained behind, Arthur's servant, Wanghte Gam, Lalit Barua, the Mugh cook, and Hpaonan La, who seemed too old for the journey, were convinced that, if left to the headman's mercies, they would starve, and the post-runner made things still more lugubrious by asserting that the mules (which I was sending in to Htawgaw for more rice) would never get beyond Gawlam, as the big bridge over the Ngawchang was down.

So it was noon before I had cleaned up the incredible raffle of oddments, from bulbs to bloater-paste, in the rest-house, put out the fires, despatched the mail and rationed the base-camp for the next fortnight. It had just begun to rain, the river was, as a Burman once expressed it to me in his imperfect but vivid English, 'swollen and waving,' and the rickety bridge was straining at its loosely-tied wicker thongs. In fact, it seemed to be holding together only out of courtesy to its makers, and when I stepped on to it, it shook like a jelly—and so did I—and started moving rapidly upstream with me. But this, I found later, was

mere 'sensuous perception,' involving, as scientists aver, a false belief.

One of my nameless Lisu friends in the village, a man with an old, ugly, humorous face (we had been on grinning terms for a week), put his hand on my shoulder and pointed north at the weather and shook his matted head. '*Ma tau,*' he kept saying. I do not know what it meant but I took it for a warning.

But actually the rain ceased for the next ten days as Mi Pa and I plodded up over the bare brown shoulder of the hill to the Nyetmaw stream, whose source we were to cross two days later, and then up a zig-zag path westwards. There seemed to be no birds on the way, except numbers of what Arthur had christened 'the forbidden bunting,' *Emberiza pusilla.* For we had met with them everywhere through the hills. Like grey-hens on a grouse moor, or hen pheasants in September roots, it seemed impossible to miss them, however difficult a snap-shot or rocketing chance they offered. They were the only birds which, pale-brown and non-descript, one could always mistake in flight for something else, the only birds which stayed behind and seemed to dare us, when whatever flock we were stalking had flown away. Frank would return daily with his arms full of plants and draw from his pocket a little bunting wrapped in paper.

'Sorry, J.K. I'm afraid it's only one of your blessed "cag" birds,' he would say.

If I shot one little bunting without meaning to in those five months, I shot at least twenty. I began to feel for them towards the close: like myself, the dragoman and quartermaster of this trip, they seemed to be '*ex-officio* children of perdition.'

The march was only six miles through bare brown scrub-covered hills, though everywhere the crown of the ridges a thousand feet higher and the depths of the steeper gorges were black with that virgin forest which I had now learned from Frank to call 'climax' and which seemed to prevail everywhere about 7,000 feet. We passed through one filthy cluster of Yawyin huts on a rock-strewn slope (the map calls it Tsonma) and from there could see our tents a mile or so further on, in bracken on the rise above a stream.

I collected nothing on the march or round camp that evening, but a cooly brought in a little forktail (the smallest and rarest of that delightful family of pied wagtail-robins whose playgrounds are the rocks of mountain torrents) and someone else, before we

left Gangfang, had given us yet another *Xiphiramphus*, the aptly-named slender-billed scimitar-babbler, with a slim, down-curving beak. This last was a bird I have never yet seen alive, and it must, I think, be a rare one, for we had little difficulty in watching and collecting the other forms of scimitar-babbler on this journey.

It froze hard in the night and the bracken was white around our tents in the morning. I got away ahead of the rest with Luk Seng, and Mi Pa, the Yawyin, to carry my belongings, and the steep climb speedily brought us to our noses, so that I was fain to shed my heavy clothing before we were up through that uncompromising tangle of grass and briars. At just over 8,000 feet, the slope of the path eased off in a stretch of magnificent oak forest. Luk Seng disappeared ahead of me in his pied blue-and-white smock, and then I heard his bamboo pipe ahead of me, calling those owl-like notes which he had blown so effectively in the Hpawte hills. (I found that by whistling on an empty twelve-bore cartridge case or his clenched hands he could achieve almost the same result.) Then I heard the rattle of his cross-bow and was speedily busy myself, for the moss-draped oaks were full of the dark-grey sibias, so many of which we had seen or purchased at Gangfang, and also of a queer, round-bodied, short-tailed bird with a queerer name, which was till then unknown to me, the Nepal cutia.[1] We collected four, all males, and lost a fifth and also three male sibias. The cutias, like their shrike-babbler cousins, are birds of striking plumage, chestnut above and whitey-buff below; with weak flight and 'short-sighted' movements they creep about on moss-grown trunks after insects and seeds, but they can run and hop with incredible speed up the slope of a trunk. Like so many of that curious family, they seem to have no fear of man or the noise of firearms.

For the next four hours we followed a narrow track north-westwards through primeval oak-forest. It is an old route from the Maru villages on the Lower Ngawchang to Gangfang and China. We did not see as much as the quiet solitudes seemed to promise, though now and again a flock of quaker-babblers and tit-babblers, and once a scurrying party of Blyth's suthora (tiny, fawn, long-tailed tit-mice) crossed our path, and once a hill partridge. I do not know how a staff-officer would have classified the track, but our long column of coolies wound its way in never-ceasing con-

[1] *Cutia nipalensis.*

versation for five or six hours and by 2.30 our camp-site on the Nyetmaw stream had been cleared, the undergrowth removed with pointed sticks, and the forest had swallowed up the coolies, each party to its generous fire in a bamboo shack floored with cane leaves and rhododendron. All night long from up the hill and down came the inexhaustible murmur of low-voiced talk, punctuated by the resounding gun-shots of bamboos bursting in the flames.

Next morning we had but a five-mile march of it over the steep Nyetmaw ridge, which, running north-east and south-west, hides the sources of the Nyetmaw stream somewhere in its impenetrable heart. From the pass one looks out over Imaw and the Chawngmaw stream which circles its base. Our way took us through two miles of a magnificent forest of serrated oaks mixed with lustrous patches of bamboo and a rhododendron Frank called *magnificum*. This last is aptly named. Even a two-foot sapling gives birth to one immense oval leaf thirty inches long by nearly a foot wide, and all along the flat banks of the stream was a goblin forest of fantastically whiskered and sinuous trees, reaching their mossy arms all-whither as if beckoning hungrily to some ray of sunlight filtering through the towering oaks above them. Probably, as Frank told me later, these huge leaves on yearling trees are signs of their immense effort to survive in the golden-green gloom. On each sunny patch beside the path and all along the streamlets that crossed it were clump after clump of pale mauve primulas.

At about 9,000 feet we came suddenly to the upper edge of the oak-forest. Above us was a stretch, such as so often seems to mark the tree limit of these hills, of blasted pine and hemlock, the dead-white trunks standing forlornly out of a sea of yellow cane. Up through this the path sidled from rock to rock and a mile away on our left as we went was a great escarpment, its face seamed with gullies of snow, its summit fretted into a hundred battlements. This was not, as I had thought, the ridge of Imaw, though it merged into it somewhere round a corner we could not see, several miles away.

I shot one small green tit on the way up, which I discovered later had a concealed yellow eye-stripe. It was a yellow-browed tit and 'new to Burma.' As we sweated and scrambled up the bare ridge, 500 feet below the crest, there was a cluck and a scurry of dark forms a few yards away in the cane, and Luk Seng, with my .410, was out of sight in the bushes below me in one lightning

slither. We had walked almost on to a covey of blood-pheasants[1] and I managed to get a cock and a hen on the ground with the twelve-bore, while Luk Seng brought in the remains of another (to all appearances bayoneted) before they scattered down the cliff. Lovely birds they were too, grey above with scarlet throats and yellow-green and scarlet below, with orange legs and salmon-pink claws, whose food seemed to be mainly moss and quartz-grit. Later, it turned out they belonged to a race hitherto undescribed.

We panted, nose to the earth, up to the foot-wide tunnel through cane and rhododendron which is the Nyetmaw pass, and from there paused to photograph the coolies steaming in the snow and the glistening white screes of Imaw two miles away, towering out of a mass of blue-green conifers which filled the basin below us.

I think it was a shock to all of us, after the sweat and glare of the south face, to take that sudden plunge down the north side out of the sun through feet of drifted snow. The skinners had never met snow before and to them it must have seemed a malignant, quelling thing. The older coolies doubtless knew what to expect and most of them had spent the previous evening, with a stick held between their toes, plaiting neat sandals of bamboo string; but many of the younger men I saw sliding or staggering down that inhospitable steep with bare feet and chattering teeth. It was an uncomfortable hour for all, until we came to the two bamboo huts, for which Frank had arranged weeks before, and then we could bask in the sun under great hemlocks in a snow-patched glade.

We paid off the coolies that night and settled down. Next morning, with seventeen degrees of frost, we found them in no hurry to face that gloomy ascent up to the pass, the more so as without a load they knew they could be home in one day's march with enough money to keep them solvent for a fortnight. About ten, when the last chattering party was fading into the bamboo, Mi Pa and I started northwards along a narrow path for a mile and then struck eastwards up towards the open meadows which I had seen from the pass the day before. It was a slippery climb, over the inevitable dead bamboos, buried in plume grass and old edelweiss and fern, but as malign as ever; in an hour we were out in hot sunshine on the edge of a wide, steep meadow, which ran

[1] *Ithaginis kuseri.*

nearly up to the ridge. It was almost the only open ground, except for a few stubble-fields, which I had seen since we left Laukkaung, and it gave me a curious thrill to turn the glasses on it, as it looked an ideal grazing-ground for game and I had seen large cloven-hoofed tracks on the way up. But it was as empty of wild life as a parade-ground, though I glassed it very carefully from end to end for half an hour.

Behind us was another great bay of hill filled two-thirds full of pine and hemlock and rhododendron with yellow-dun heights, patched with cane, along the ridge above it. West of the Chawng-maw stream, the forest rose black and featureless to the mass of chimneys and rifts and gullies and crags which form, as it were, the back and nape of Imaw's crown. Only with glasses could one discern the snow which lurked over the whole of that face beneath the trees. South-westwards lay the great snowy screes of Imaw rising three thousand feet above us. I glassed them from rock to rock in a good light for nearly an hour, but there were no signs of tracks on them or of any living thing. Then up we went through the snow-beds and gained the ridge, narrow as a plank, at about 11,000 feet. From there the whole Salween divide was set out before us for fifty miles. We looked at it over a great pit of dark forest twelve or thirteen miles wide, which began at our feet on the east side of the ridge.

I drank my fill of that view. It was one as memorable as any I know, snow-peak after peak on three sides of us and most of them nameless. There was not a village or a cultivated patch in sight. It seemed given over for all time to the beasts and the birds, like one of the kingdoms of the earth, a purposeless country on which man had not, and could not till the end, set any mark at all. My eye ranged back northwards to the valley, and I saw suddenly that the great bay of hill we had skirted on our way up was filling with smoke. Man, it seemed, was not so far away after all. A deer-stalking friend had once described to me his feelings on seeing two holiday-makers, with a large red umbrella, come over the ridge just as he thought he was 'getting in.' My own were not dissimilar.

That fire burned for four days. We never proved, though apart from Lup Teng's enigmatic hints, we could passably guess, who had lit it, but it consumed the whole face of the hill from a mile north of our camp away to the gorge of the Chawngmaw stream. I discovered on my return to camp that Frank had met

in the valley the son of one of the Chinese shop-keepers in Gang-fang, coming 'from the Maru country' with two coolies. He had smiled at Frank with the words, 'So you've come, have you?'; it seemed clear that we were expected and that someone had put up a Notice to Trespassers as annoying as it was unmistakable. Two days later I visited the two camping places down the gorge and found that the fire had been started in a straight line all along the path for a hundred yards behind each shack. We assumed from what we were told that the Chinamen had a monopoly, among other things, of skins and horns and game in this valley, and were not going to have intruders, armed with binoculars and rifles and traps, trespassing on their preserves.

Yet, in the curve of the hill, some two thousand acres or so, which was above our camp and to which the fire never spread, though smoke blew over it all day, there was little enough wild life in all conscience. I saw no fresh tracks (though barking-deer or gooral had been there some time before), and in a week never set eyes on an animal of any kind above ground except a tree-shrew.[1] In a snow-drift near the top of the ridge, where a small wave of dark tree forest had flowed over from the eastern side, there was a row of tracks, each directly in front of the next, which looked for all the world like those of small stub human feet. They might have been of a bear or a panda, or the young of the Abominable Snowman himself. Mi Pa, whose Chinghpaw was almost as limited as mine, said they were made by a beast 'like a dog but not a dog.' Further down were droppings of chewed bamboo, which he assured me were those of a '*wu-beh.*' I decided to persuade Harold to climb the ridge and look at both. He would, at any rate, earn an incomparable view for his toil. Lower down, in scattered cane-clumps on the meadow, I saw one or two small birds, apparently drifting southwards away from the fire. One, which showed a good deal of white on the wings, I shot, and it fell dead in high grass out of sight over the curve of the hill, but Mi Pa traced it with uncanny precision when I had despaired of it. It was Guldenstadt's redstart,[2] a bird of high altitudes and in Burma of exceptional rarity. Apart from a hawk, which whizzed suddenly overhead down hill, and a white-browed bush-robin (which later on we found was the commonest small bird of the cane) that was all that virgin country could produce in five or six hours.

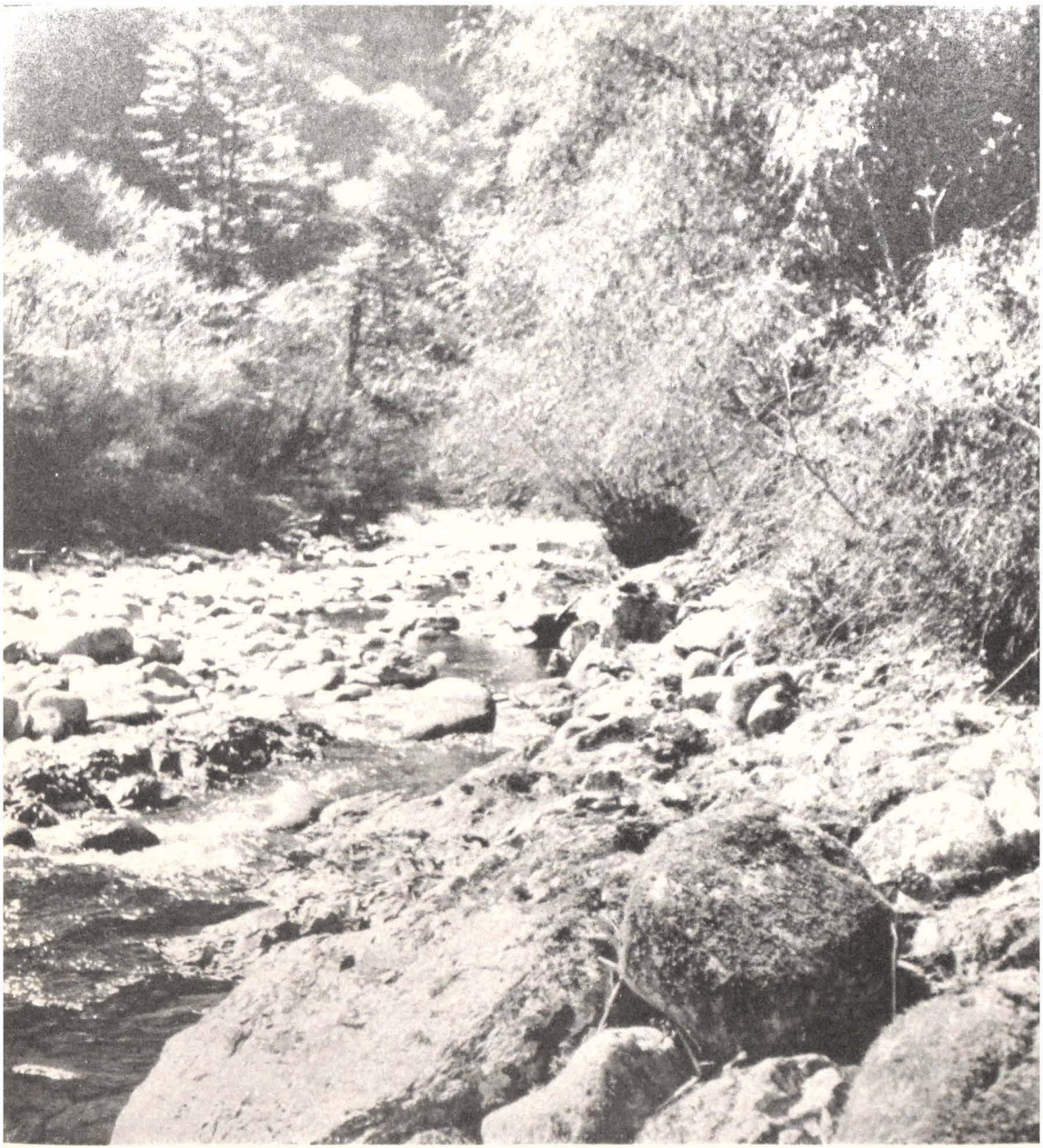
[1] *Dremomys.* [2] *Phoenicurus schisticeps.*

We came, in fact, to know that valley as the birdless valley before we had done. Until that week, I had never believed it possible to be out for many hours in forest where no man seemed to come and yet think myself lucky to see and to collect two birds a day. I could have understood their scarcity and the silence, unbroken by a twitter or movement, in the dark aisles of conifers which spread up the steep to the pass and on the other side of the Chawngmaw, from which they were ranked, hiding the snow, up nearly to Imaw's nape; for birds seem to shun high conifer forest just as mankind does the sombre heights of a cathedral.

But there it was. Forest or bamboo, stream-bed and open meadow, we tried them all. My diary shows that from January 17 to 23, five of us with shot-guns, and two trappers with cross-bows, were out daily for many hours and collected just forty-eight specimens of fourteen 'species.' True, these made up in rarity what they lacked in numbers. We got three forms of the rarest parrot-bills in the Indian avifauna, two of which had never been known before in Burma. Frank, with his uncanny luck, also shot a white-bellied dipper on the snow-bound stream, a lovely bird with almost a pearl-grey back, no mean prize and no mean feat, either, with his ancient string-bound .410, which had long since earned an honourable demise. In addition to these we got a tree creeper, several of the fulvettas[1] I had met on the Hpawshi Bum, a brown wren, three or four beautiful black and yellow grosbeaks[2] and four or five specimens of the new rose-finch which I had shot near Pyèpat, so the camp was a memorable one.

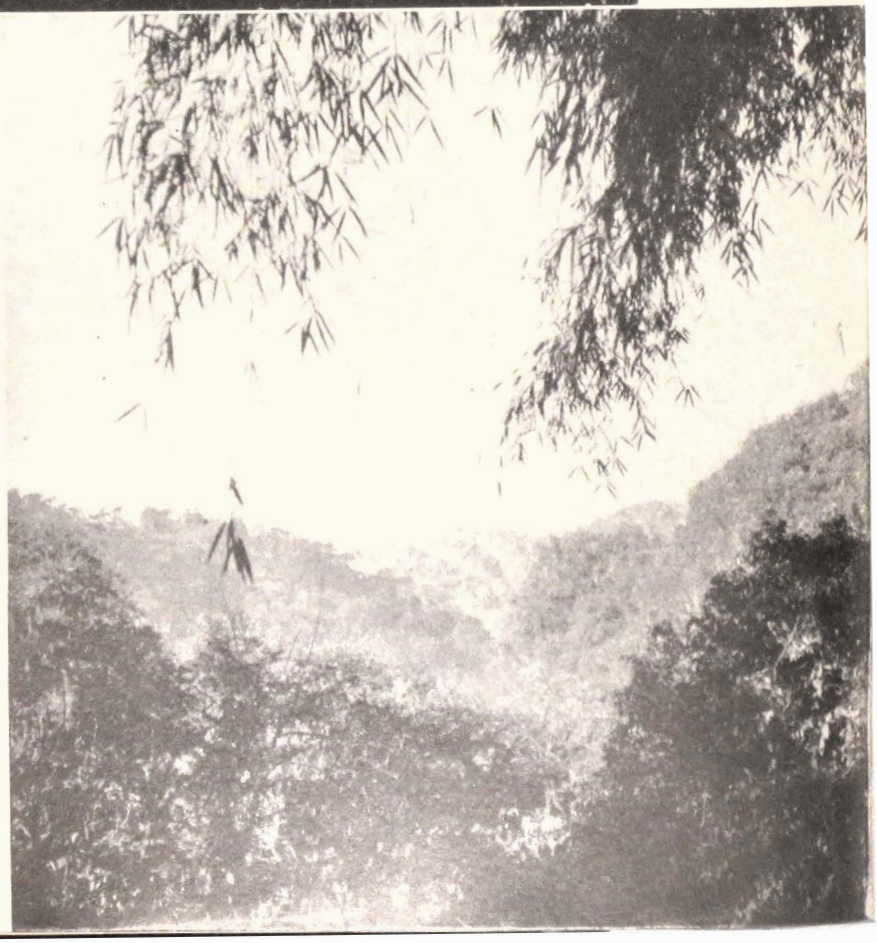
But why birds were so scarce we never knew. Perhaps it was partly the fire a mile or so away to the north which had upset the birds of the valley, but then we still had a good many hundred accessible acres of hemlock and pine and rhododendron and cane across the river and south and west of camp. Perhaps it was that the valley faced north and we had visited it in the dead waste and middle of winter, when all birds were either too hard put to it for food to show themselves, or had crossed the Nyetmaw pass into the warmer recesses of the oak-forest. Perhaps at that altitude (9,200 feet and over) the bird population in those months is always rigidly select. I do not know. But I would give a great deal to go back there some day at another time of year, when new flowers were blooming in the alpine meadows above the dried

[1] *Fulvetta vinipecta.* [2] *Perissospiza icteroides.*



The gorge of the Chawngmaw stream at 9,500 feet

Climax forest
at 8,000 feet



Near Imaw Bum

stalks we slid on, and find out what that valley contained.

One spot there was which I nearly worked to death before we left, for lack of anywhere else where birds seemed to be. A mile north on the slippery winding path through the snow was nearly an acre of meadow dotted with cane-clumps and crab-apple trees, at one end of which a stream trickled across the path. Before the end of a week, mud had frozen hard over our footprints at every angle on the path, and we skated and slipped and stumbled along it in the gloom, clutching at bamboos and prepared at every corner for a shattering fall. But the birds were usually there. There were nearly always two or three yellow-billed magpies, and a covey of black-faced laughing-thrushes; on the edge of it also, I shot one morning five out of a flock of the brown crow-tit,[1] an olive-brown bird with a dark line above the eye. This was one of the least-known of that curious family of the parrot-bills—which Science knows as the '*Paradoxornithidæ*'—queer birds, with bills like parrots and manners like tits, and a primeval, disarming tameness all their own, though they are undoubtedly related to the reedling and the long-tailed tit-mice of Europe. None seemed to have been met with by any other naturalist in the Indian Empire since 1889, except one small party which Willie Stubbs, my skinner, had encountered when we were crossing Lungrebum on the Bhamo-Myitkyina-Yunnan border in 1934.

Here, too, as they hopped about in the bamboo under a crab-apple tree, I called up one morning and shot two great parrot-bills[2]—even rarer birds, as big as a thrush, pale brown with a grey-white forehead and an orange beak shaped like that of a crow; Forrest, as usual, had forestalled me, but his single Yunnan specimen seemed to be the only one any naturalist had collected in fifty years from India and Yunnan.

So I went back eagerly to that meadow again and again, and the magpies, at any rate, got to know me well. On the first morning, when I had been busy with the crow-tits and other birds, they had given me several fair chances as they passed and repassed with their curious sneaking flight, but now all I ever knew of their presence was a shrill whistle somewhere up the hill, a harsh chatter as one swept out over the river two hundred yards away, or a faint bull-finch pipe from the bamboo. For, though rarely viewed, they were about our path and spied out all our ways, so

[1] *Paradoxornis unicolor.* [2] *Conostoma œmodium.*

that three caught themselves privily in Harold's vole-traps, baited with pea-nut butter. But whether I skated up that path in the gloomy chill of dawn or crept towards the glade from above or below at any hour, they never gave me a chance except once, when Mi Pa and I were balanced precariously each on one leg on an ice-bound rock in the river, and two rocketed out over us like pheasants from a hangar and nearly sent us, gun and all, into the stream. I had in fact given them up when, on the very last afternoon, one rose at my feet as I blundered round a corner of the path and almost surprised me into missing it. I could not detect, in their flight or call-notes or general ways, any difference between these rare magpies and the red-billed bird of the hills (they are just a shy forest form, while the other haunts the outskirts of the villages and the stubble terraces), but the yellow-beak, the apple-green underparts and the much blacker head are at all times what scientists call 'diagnostic' in the field.

One other beautiful bird was more often than not a far voice crying. On the first morning of our stay, Arthur and Harold shot near camp two black-and-yellow grosbeaks, grotesque with their huge yellow-green beaks and reddish-hazel eyes, and next morning I stumbled on to three males which were feeding on the meadow-edge under the bamboos. Thereafter we never saw any, but in the early morning we would sometimes hear their bell-like whickering chorus (which Frank had heard of old in the Adung Wang) as the flock flew round unseen.

Arthur and Harold and Frank all trapped with scores of small break-back traps in the forest and with varying results, a weasel at 9,500 feet being perhaps one of the most unusual victims. Our professional trapper, Nipawla, who had now added a tin crown to his bamboo bowler, and was temporarily on our pay-roll at six annas a day and his rice, proved a broken reed. I imagine that this was the first time in his hand-to-mouth life that he had ever had a job which was not paid, most strictly, by results, so that, like the civil servant of the comic papers, he made the most of it. He built himself a very comfortable bamboo shack, roofed it with a borrowed ground-sheet, and became a connoisseur of empty tins; he was, too, always at hand with his ragged apron held out to receive his generous portion of rice at the twice-daily issues. But in between he disappeared, and for all I know was fast asleep somewhere up the hill under a tree, for he rarely brought back anything at all. Whenever I emerged, empty-handed, from the

bamboo, and skated over the last streamlet into camp, Nipawla seemed to be waiting before his fire to grin cheerfully at me and shake his head when I asked him how he had fared.

He was, in fact, so ineffective as a trapper that Harold's Lashi boy, a sturdy, likeable youth with a pinkish-olive face, demanded an opportunity to show what *he* could do. He had a name which none of us could ever pronounce; it was spelt by the interpreter Zi Kwi, and sounded to some of us like 'Soup's served' elided, and to others like 'Cigarekk' quietly hiccupped, but he answered readily to cries of 'Serkee!' Zi Kwi was quick to master the setting and resetting of Harold's 'gopher-traps,' which were hidden in crannies and rocks and stream-beds and hollow trees all around camp. One day, when crouching under a bamboo clump on the meadow edge a mile away from camp, I heard a steady subterranean snoring noise, which gradually resolved itself into the grinding crunch of teeth coming from below the roots of another bamboo twenty feet away. I showed the place to Zi Kwi and he knew no rest for three days till he had presented me with the cruncher; it was a moribund *Rhizomys* or bamboo rat, as big as a rabbit, with a huge blind guinea-pig's face which somehow looked as if it had been artificially inflated, with inch-long yellow-brown curved incisors projecting from its pursed under-lip, and pale, horribly child-like hands, with which it seemed to be protesting faintly against Zi Kwi and his ideas on bamboo gins. It looked like some gnome of a nightmare and was one of the 'giant rats' which Frank had promised us, before we started, in this valley. They seem to burrow like moles, too swiftly to dig down on them and, unlike moles, leave little or no trace of their presence despite their size, unless one overhears them eating. I suspect that in their underground nests of chewed bamboo and grass they are not uncommon between 9,000 and 11,000 feet.

But, all told, it was a frustrate camp. We seemed to have come, as near as might be, to the heart of the rose and there was nothing there. Whatever secrets Imaw possessed in her snow-bound bosom, she did not intend to give them away at that time of year. We could partly blame the fire for wiping out the most obvious area, and breathe out threatenings and slaughters against the Gangfang Chinamen and their offspring; but with Robin McGuire three weeks or more distant from us in Myitkyina, and McGuinness God knew where days away from us across the N'mai in the Triangle, we knew anything we threatened was largely

academic. Day after day we watched the great grey-dark clouds boiling and curling up over the ridge behind Imaw from the north, but no rain or snow came down.

'You've got to realise that spring and snow in this country are synonymous,' said Frank, but spring still held her hand. Arthur, after a few days' comparative inaction, was already burning to set off again down the Chawngmaw valley and up over the ridge to Laktang, a little used Maru trade-route which Frank had once crossed, from Gangfang to the N'mai. Harold and I were eager to collect in the oak forest south of the Nyetmaw pass, which we had skirted a few days before, and we anxiously watched the barometer and the clouds piling up, for we guessed, from what Frank said, that a rise in temperature and two or three days of snow would mean the closing of the pass over which we had come. Frank himself, insatiate of travel, had also been hoping that we should retrace our steps and make a dash northwards up the Ngawchang for the Wulaw *chet,* and then for the Sajyang Bum, both on the great ridge which, curving out south-westwards from the Salween divide, forms the head waters of the Ngawchang.

It was one of the few lofty mountain masses in this part of the world which he had never attempted, and I, too, had greatly hoped that we might go there; for Colonel Whittall had assured me that, if anything new awaited us, the giant panda or what not, it would be in the hills north of Chimili towards the Sajyang. Perhaps I fretted unduly at the change of plans and the sub-division of our forces, the extra coolies and money and rice and cooking-oil, salt and films and oddments for which we had to send, the division of skinners and servants, stores and lamps and crockery and cooking-pots which it entailed. We were all possibly a little irritable, and the level of our stories, I recollect, never very high, sank perceptibly lower.

None the less, I look back on that camp with affection for many things: the joy of long scrambles up hill and down in the sun, crowned after dark by a posset of steaming rum and water, and then a superb dish of curry and rice, which we had so often and so loftily despised in the forgotten plains; memorable talk which ranged all over the world, from Alaska to Nepal, in which my companions, one by one, gave me queer 'close-ups' of rare things they had met with, from flowers or books to savage tribes, from uncouth beasts of the forest to the American *haute monde,* interspersed with fragments of old backstairs gossip of the secret

service or unpublished professional theories of glaciers or salt-licks or cannibalism (the last by a natural transition, for Suydam averred that it was the European missionary's greater 'salt-content' which rendered his remains so toothsome to the cannibal). Then Harold would chime in with tales about forgotten colonels of American artillery whom he had studied in the last war—('All they knew was General Crook and "Squads right and left," but Hell, they didn't know one single darned thing about ballistics!') —or Frank would delight us with his story of how, fresh from the Tsangpo gorges and on a lecture tour, he had been lost for hours in the New York subway at night, 'among savages, utterly uncivilised! You would be far better off in Tibet!'

Then about ten we would leave Frank still busy at his notes and diaries, and go out into the starlit dusk, where there was no sound but the soft 'hu-hu' of a great owl somewhere aloft on a hemlock stump (we never set eyes on him), to find that even at 9,000 feet, with fifteen degrees of frost, a single-fly tent with a lantern burning in it, and a water-bottle hidden in one's bedding, was an unexpectedly snug retreat, warm as any wren's. But one midnight we were awoken by agonised roars of 'Ba Khaing!' from Frank, whose tent was pitched inside one corner of the bamboo hut, and there was a prolonged antistrophe of English expletive and Burmese-Hindustani apology when Ba Khaing at length appeared; for one hot water-bottle is a comfort, and two you may think perhaps a luxury, but when they have both, as had Frank's, been leaking surreptitiously for hours into your blankets, they may well be considered an outrage.

Best of all I cherish the memory of two scrambles up and down the stream. The first was when Frank took me to the place where he had shot the rare dipper, and thought he had seen another one. He used to move at all times very deliberately, raking the hill with binoculars, stopping now and then to gather a plant or to pat some promising young sapling on the shoulder, or to milk some seed-pods into an envelope. But when we got among the rocks of the stream he said, 'Trust in God, J.K., and keep your trousers dry!' and struck boldly up its centre over the snow. In places it was impossible to know what we were walking on, snow or ice or rock or nothing at all, but whatever it was it seemed to hold; here and there we could see ice a foot deep rimming a pool, and close by the stream would be flowing glass-green above more ice which was forming in tiny stars and diamonds beneath it. I left Frank

busy with a stand-camera and went on, to be stopped at last by a confusion of immense rocks and fallen trees, over which I could discern, a mile or two on, a pinnacle of cliff rising out of the forest. Here it was Frank had camped, years before, in the rains, when he climbed to the top of Imaw Bum. From there he assured me the summits—for Imaw is not one, but three or four great peaks close together—are but a morning's march, when most of the snow has melted. We should, he kept saying, have done better to tackle it in November, just after the rains: at this time of year the ascent would take us perhaps two fruitless days with nothing much to find when we got there.

I came back alone through the forest, and in three hours saw only one living thing—a white-browed bush-robin with a queer grating churr, which appeared for two seconds from the bamboo. There were occasional ungulate tracks here, not very fresh, and a bear had crossed the river at one place in the snow. For the rest the forest was as blank and silent and lifeless as a tomb. The sun shone and now and again there came a faint chuckle from the stream, though for the most part it ran mute and hidden beneath its counterpane of snow. In that forsaken valley, I thought,

Only the wind here hovers and revels
In a round where life seems barren as death.

But not even the wind was there, though I guessed it was singing knife-edged along the ridge tops above me east and west. Was the stillness of that valley, like the silence of so many women, emptiness or just containment? I shall never know.

The day after that I tried downstream beyond the meadow, partly to collect some evidence about the fires. Except for a tree creeper jerking itself up a green bamboo and one or two brown wrens which went to ground like mice in the mossy hollows of the river bank, I hardly saw a bird all day. I tried down the valley for three or four miles, and would give much to see that stream two miles below our camp as it must be when the rains descend, and the snows on Imaw are coming away with a roar, and the whole boiling has to squeeze somehow through a dark chasm fifteen feet from wall to wall, which is almost a cave. There were pleasant open stretches, clear as glass, between runs of snow, where flies skimmed over freezing pools, and shady reaches where the side-streams were solid sheets of ice for fifty feet up the cliff. In the sun the stream seemed to be lingering in admiration of its

own infinite variety; I hung over pool after pool with my camera and exposed a series of colour films and prayed that the makers' promise, given us so lightly a few months back at luncheon in the Savoy Grill, might now be fulfilled; for no pen could hope to describe the blending of queer tints which the water had caught from the snow and the hemlock and the golden-green rhododendron leaves and the rocks around and beneath it, amber and pale-blue and bottle-green and opaline and buff. I hoped desperately that the camera would not lie.

Below that again was a gorge two miles long, where the cliffs and the trees close in and the rocks in places are so close that I feel sure a gooral could cross the gorge at a bound if it wished to. Somewhere, I suspect, at one end of this canyon, is a game-crossing from Imaw to the eastern ridge, and the Chinamen, in firing the open hill faces where they did, had seen to it that our hunting would be confined to the sunless steeper tree forest, where we could do little harm.

We got back to camp at four. The coolies had come to take Arthur's party on over to the Maru hills, and with them they had brought a 'black barking-deer,' killed somewhere beyond Gang-fang, for which we had offered a reward of five rupees. At Gang-fang we had already received a red one (very similar to those of the plains) and it seemed clear that this dark iron-grey beast, though closely akin, was a quite separate species, and was the Michie's tufted deer which West had shot in the hills behind Hpimaw.

'We've got the crux of the expedition, anyway,' Arthur insisted; but here was one of the rarest inhabitants of the hills which none of us had laid eyes on alive. For all we knew it might haunt the very forest we were in.

CHAPTER XV

THE OAK FOREST

IT was on 24th January that Arthur, Suydam and Frank, with Stubbs as skinner and Lup Teng as interpreter, started down the gorge with 40 coolies to cross the western ridge of the valley to Luktang. Just after they had gone, I realised that they had gone off without any kerosene, and a forty-first cooly had to be despatched in their wake, carrying a nearly full tin, hastily sealed down with candle grease and a wooden stopper. This cooly reappeared a few days later in our camp, his back flayed from shoulder to haunches with the steady drip-drip of the oil which he had suffered, unmurmuring, all that arduous march. He had not thought fit to complain to Lup Teng of his injuries, and seemed rather surprised at the medical treatment we accorded him.

The same morning Harold and I set out for the oak forest south of the pass. His trapping was beginning to 'duplicate' certain voles and shrews over and over again, and I had collected, as far as I could ascertain, nearly all the birds which that forsaken valley seemed to hold. In the last three days we had got only seventeen specimens; of these seven were black-faced laughing thrushes,[1] a large troop of which seemed to haunt the meadow of the crab-apple trees. Harold and Frank had also shot one of a flock of the rare fulvous-fronted parrotbill[2] on the path up to the pass—a tiny long-tailed bird with chestnut on the wings, which had been feeding on birch buds and grit. This was another bird which Forrest had shot on the Li-chiang Mountains beyond the Salween, but it was unknown in Burma, and was one of the many species first described from Nepal or Sikkim, over ninety years ago, of whose habits the books remarked: 'Practically nothing known.'

Three other birds we had seen and not collected, the small sparrow-hawk, which had whizzed over me on the first morning, an owl (Harold assured me it was an eagle-owl) which called 'hu-hu' from far away in the starlight, and a pair of very wild

[1] *Trochalopteron affine oustaleti.* [2] *Paradoxornis fulvifrons.*

dippers which I had chased fruitlessly up the frozen stream one afternoon: to all appearance they were the brown dipper[1] of the lower hills.

I climbed to the pass in a bitter north wind with the last of our coolies about one o'clock, and took a last look at the heart of Imaw, veiled in heavy masses of cloud. Then I struck down through the blasted pines. Since leaving camp I had not seen or heard a bird of any kind for two hours. This indeed was nothing unusual in the Chawngmaw basin, but as I came round a corner at the top-most limit of the oak forest, with a dense mass of trees below, and above me great white stalks of dead pines like stubble against the blue, I found myself suddenly in the midst of birds, as you may do when you come round the corner of an oat-stack. I did not take long to realise what they were after, a tree with leaves not unlike a fig and black-currant-like berries, which Harold called *aralia,* though Frank told me later it was probably a form of *heptapleurum.* It seemed to be growing everywhere below 9,000 feet, in bushes and trees thirty feet high, and wherever it was, thither were all kinds of birds gathered together, guzzling, playing, fighting, darting in and out of the clusters all day long, heedless as boys in an orchard. The commonest bird of all, and the greatest addict, was the stripe-throated yuhina,[2] one of a curious group of hill birds all with unusual names, and in their habits half-tit, half-bulbul. This bird I had met with in the mossy tree-forest on the Yunnan border years before, a fulvous-brown bird, with a tilted crest, a vinous throat streaked with black, orange on wings and legs and a plaintive mewing cry. And through the trees nearby, attracted by the concourse and the noise in the *aralia* bushes, drifted troops of other small insect-eating birds, tree creepers, and chestnut-headed babblers and yellow-browed and other tits, so that after an hour crouching under one tree I came into camp with as many birds for the skinners as our combined efforts had accounted for in two or three days on the other side of the pass.

Harold, who had gone ahead, had chosen for us an excellent camping site on the flat bank of the Nyetmaw stream at 8,700 feet. The brown water purled past the edge of our tents, and between the two he had hung a tarpaulin on poles; with a roaring fire of eight-foot-long rhododendron logs and bamboo, and our food

[1] *Cinclus pallasii.* [2] *Yuhina gularis.*

served hot from another noble blaze thirty feet away, we had as pleasant an open-air dining-room as I have ever known. We were, perhaps, taking a risk of being flooded out by a sudden rise, but we were too near the stream's source, I think, for this to be a great danger in January. The only other drawback was that in this narrow valley the sun got below the hill at 2.30 p.m. Otherwise the site was superb, in virgin forest untouched by man.

So unharried, in fact, were our surroundings, that while we were in the middle of tea, I collected a whole party of hoary barwings,[1] another of the little-known hill-species which so far we had not seen. They came, heavy with a surfeit of berries, pathetically regardless of the coolies and the crackling fires all around, and settled within a few feet of us and would not go. Then a little forktail appeared from nowhere in mid-stream almost as close, but vanished in a confusion of coolies.

That was a profitable camp, and we abode in it for seven rainless days. Out of 94 specimens of birds, nearly all collected within two hundred yards of the stream, there were no less than thirty different species. Four of these we had already come across north of the pass, but three others were as rare as any we met with then or later.

There was first a nutcracker,[2] a great brown creature, which Zi Kwi rushed out to shoot one morning in the middle of breakfast, as it sat in a tree just above the skinner's tent. Frank and Lord Cranbrook had collected one previously in the Adung Valley, but we never saw another, and it seems as rare as any bird that flies in Burma or Western Yunnan. Two mornings later, wandering up to the limit of the oak forest, I found myself surrounded by a flock of small long-tailed tit-mice, of which it was only possible to say that I had never seen any before. Only collectors can appreciate the nightmare of the next few moments as the flock, with soft chidings, fed all round me, a foot or so from my face, in incessant movement, but far too close to shoot at. They were gone over the ravine before I could even memorise their plumage. Five minutes later they were back again, all round me, and too near to fire at, and were gone once more. I was in despair, but mysteriously, a little later, the flock worked round past me yet again, and a lucky snapshot, much too close, procured me one of them undamaged. It was Bonvalot's black-

[1] *Actinodura nipalensis.* [2] *Nucifraga caryocatactes.*

headed tit,[1] a lovely little bird with a black head and chin and a chestnut pectoral band.

Zi Kwi, who was by now proving himself one of the keenest of our followers, produced the third surprise the same afternoon. He came in with two laughing-thrushes, one the grey-sided,[2] a rare enough bird, the other a large and lovely chestnut bird with pale tips to the feathers, which one glance showed me was something new. It was the white-spotted laughing thrush,[3] another 'addition' to the Burma avifauna, which George Forrest's discoveries in Yunnan had led me to expect. 'There were two,' said Zi Kwi, so we visited the spot next day, and as he plunged into the bamboo, a large dark bird flitted out through the shade and gave me a momentary but easy chance.

Excursions far from the stream or the path, along both of which in every moist cranny or sunny patch, the blue-mauve primulas were clustered, usually proved fruitless, though I spent many hours of that week just loitering, or crouching in cover, waiting for some sound or movement of a bird. Perhaps it was that wading through the fern or brambles made too much noise; more likely, I think, that the *aralia,* the stream, and the slight opening of the path, drew all the birds there were. But each day new forms appeared, in flocks or pairs or single spies, as if the news of the *aralia* or the spring were spreading down the valley. One day it would be a trogon, not the scarlet bird of the plains, but a hill race, the next a Chinese barbet, with his great pale crow-beak, the next a pair of yellow-vented bulbuls,[4] or a willow-warbler fly-catching just on the edge of the tree-line, or a pair of hill-partridges running before me with soft clucks into the fern. I shot four other forms of bulbul here, at nearly 9,000 feet, the big brown rufous-bellied bird,[5] the smaller brown-eared,[6] the large green striated bulbul,[7] and finally, out of a flock all but unseen in the trees, one of the rare white-headed black bulbuls.[8] Besides these and other birds there were two large travelling flocks which I met with every day: one was a flock of the little Blyth's suthoras,[9] darting swift as shuttles from bough to bough, which seemed to keep entirely to the green bamboo, and out of whose ranks I shot two of the rare golden-breasted fulvetta.

[1] *Aegithaliscus iouschistos bonvaloti.* [2] *Garrulax caerulatus.* [3] *Garrulax ocellata.* [4] *Pycnonotus xanthorrous.* [5] *Ixos macclellandi.* [6] *Ixos flavala.* [7] *Alcurus striatus.* [8] *Microscelis leucocephalus.* [9] *Paradoxornis poliotis.*

The other flock consisted of at least seven or eight forms (I got new ones out of it every day), a motley gathering, ever on the move, which included two rare forms of shrike-babbler, pied woodpeckers, white-tailed nuthatches, crested tits, yellow-browed tits, tree-creepers, tit-babblers and a new form of herpornis, which seemed much larger than those of the lower hills. Nearly all these undoubtedly fed on insects, and when they passed above me through the oak trees, it meant a scrambling rush up or down hill, in a tremor of anxiety, to pick out the right bird, three or four flurried shots, and then they were gone for the day. At least ten of the other birds, from the nutcracker and a yellow-billed magpie downwards, had eaten nothing but *aralia* berries.

We collected several squirrels and tree shrews, and once a yellow-black creature, as big as a hare, fled grunting past me, which may have been some form of civet-cat. Harold also caught, besides many voles and shrews, a tiny mouse-hare (*Ochatona*), the only one we got on the trip. He attempted on one or two nights to 'hi-jack' for nocturnal animals along the path. 'Hi-jacking,' which Arthur had used with much success in the Hukawng Valley, consists in walking very slowly and quietly along a forest path or through glades with a powerful spotlight strapped cyclops-fashion to one's forehead; with it one endeavours to focus the lambent eyes of the creatures of the night either on the path or high up in the surrounding trees. I imagine that to 'hi-jack' in forest single-handed, where dangerous game abounds, must have its thrills; we had tried it without seeing anything on one or two previous occasions. On this particular night I was much too busy trying to walk quietly behind Harold on the path, on which each step was upwards or downwards or sideways from the last. The tangle of branches above us seemed full of stars, and the moon and the lustrous shadows of the spotlight dancing here and there, so that when Harold suddenly fired and a magnificent flying squirrel crashed down beside us, I had seen nothing of it at all. It was, I believe, the only beast he obtained by this method throughout the trip.

One little-known bird I had an exceptional opportunity of studying, and that was the hoary barwing, a party of which had invaded our camp on the first afternoon. We collected seventeen, and they seemed to be one of the commoner birds of this oak forest and the moss-draped goblin tangle of rhododendron. Of their habits there was practically nothing on record since Jerdon's

day, but I saw them as moving brown shadows for ever slipping about in the topmost branches of some great tree (often with the beautiful sibia), anon as a neat coffee-brown bird pecking about at ground level with a covey of laughing thrushes. Several I watched clinging, woodpecker-fashion, to a mossy bough, and once I winged a bird which fell out of a tree, hopped with incredible speed up a sloping trunk and vanished in the top again. They moved at other times in small troops through the forest with the slow, heavy flutter of the typical babbler, but in many of their curiously quick movements on a tree trunk, and their disregard of man, they resembled the cutias and the sibia family. Twelve at least of our specimens had been eating *aralia* berries.

From the path a hundred feet above our camp, we could look out through the trees towards a tremendous amphitheatre of mountain, its summit fretted by chimneys and gullies and crags, and a ragged fringe of trees, not more than two miles away; out of this great basin of forest a stream came gliding to join the Nyetmaw in a muddle of rocks and rhododendrons just below our camp. Harold and I decided one day that this basin would be worth looking into, and he hoped to trap another form of mouse-hare higher up the hill.

We climbed steadily from 9 a.m. to 1.30 p.m., at first in oak forest and fern, then in cane and rhododendron and hemlock, with a maximum visibility of about thirty yards. At one point in the shelter of a great wall of rock we found piles of droppings, not too old, which were probably serow or gooral. Hereabouts in the gloom of the cane, the rock-crannies and roots of the rhododendron were riddled with mouse-hare runs and holes, burrowed in the soft mould of centuries. Harold told me that, in some places he had known, the *Ochotona* cut and piled hay for winter use, but here, doubtless, winter and summer, they had no need to store any food. Harold set a score of traps, but in four hours there was never a sound of a living thing, except once of some birds, unseen, in an *aralia* tree. At one place, at over 10,000 feet, Zi Kwi cut himself a bamboo crowbar and dug out the nest of a 'giant rat,' but the owner was elsewhere.

At 10,600 feet we found ourselves on a narrow ridge, a few feet wide, running up through cane and twisted trunks, and here we could see even less than before. Eventually we gained a point at about 11,000 feet, where the ridge levelled off and turned southwards, still a mile at least from the main cliff face. Here, at

last, Mi Pa was set to cutting cane in an endeavour to clear a view for photography, and in almost the first minute his sword slipped and nearly took his big toe off. He changed in a second from a self-confident ex-soldier and hillman to a very woe-begone cripple indeed. We staunched the blood with pads of snow, while Hpaonan La, sent downhill a hundred yards, in haste for the field-dressing in my haversack, lost his head more completely than usual and re-emerged, panting and beaming, three minutes later, with Harold's camera. So what with cursing and first aid, our reconnaissance of that great womb of hill was little enough before we had to help the forlorn Mi Pa down the ridge again, and it was nearly dusk before we reached camp.

The map has since insisted to me that the crest of that ridge is well under 3,000 yards from the stream where we were camped: well under, that is, as the crow flies. 'As the beggar 'ops' in that region I am not so sure, though now I shall never know. When I got back to camp that night I found a letter from a far-travelled friend, in which he gloated a little over a new map which the Survey of India had recently brought out, called 'The Highlands of Tibet.' It was a comprehensive title for two huge sheets of many colours which covered the Khyber and Western China, Mongolia and south of Myitkyina, and all between. He lamented, did my friend, what he described as the rending of the old veil of mystery which hung, before the last war, round the 'Himalayan wall, now mapped, dissected and laid out flat like a dissected frog. One sometimes wishes,' he wrote, 'that the old days of "something lost behind the Ranges" were still with us. There was a kick in them which, since then, all the maps in the world have failed adequately to replace.'

Well, that country we had laboured in had, I suppose, been 'surveyed,' the main peaks and stream junctions fixed by triangulation, the few permanent villages dotted on a chart, the contours roughly traversed or form-lined. Man, in fact, years before had sat here and there on the rim of the bran-tub and charted its outer edge with a theodolite and aneroid. 'It was mapped,' men were wont to say with an air of finality, in the smoke and warmth of Kensington Gore, as if that meant everything. Someone had 'done' it years ago, and left it, and that was that. Yet to say it was 'known' was as if a bird might say that he knew what the sea contained because he had flown, years before, over it. Did anyone 'know' what that huddle of mountains held? Frank had

had one or two lucky dips in the bran-tub, Maxwell West another, Farrer and Cox a third. Harold and I were, perhaps, for the moment, elbow deep in bran, not knowing what might turn up next. And then the tub might, for all we knew, be put away for another fifty years or till Judgment Day, ' whichever,' as we used to say on files in that stately official periphrasis, ' was earlier.'

I wrote that night to my friend. ' You may be right,' I told him, ' but if you had fallen as heavily, and as often, as I have over that country which is, as you suggest, " now laid out flat like a dissected frog," you'd find it, I think, still pretty vertical. I've hardly taken one step in the last week without premeditation, for no two are ever on the same consecutive plane, with a lot of butter slides neatly wrapped in undergrowth, thrown in.' I cherished, among other aching memories, that of a recent moment when, with my feet on the path itself, my eyes in the tree-tops and my thoughts in the birdroom at the British Museum, only a flying tackle by my henchman, Hpaonan La, had stopped me from ending up at the base of a waterfall thirty feet below.

But it was time to move on again. The coolies who had taken Arthur's party to Luktang had come back, bearing fresh instructions. They had crossed the ridge north of Imaw, camping on its narrow summit at 11,000 feet, and were now down on the Lower Ngawchang, moving through the low hills to Htawgaw. Arthur wanted the mules to meet him on February 9, and this entailed our early return to the base camp.

' I've about cleaned up here, anyway,' said Harold. ' We may as well go on ahead of the others and see what there is on the Chimili hills.'

So back we went through the oak forest once again, seeing little but a few partridges and a woodcock, which I endeavoured to drive to Harold out of a ravine: (but though he seemed so sleepy, once on the wing Harold assured me the chance he offered was no better than that of ' a bat out of Hell! ') We camped a night in a hollow under the great oaks which topped the steep rise above Tsonma, and I shot two squirrels; one of them gibbered at me for twenty minutes with a reverberating cackle of abuse which seemed to fill the forest like a pack of hounds. At night Zi Kwi and Mi Pa, and Harold and myself, strove for two hours to locate an owl that called continually with a strange loud note, in a manner not unlike the long-eared owl of England. Even when it came and reproached us from a tree directly

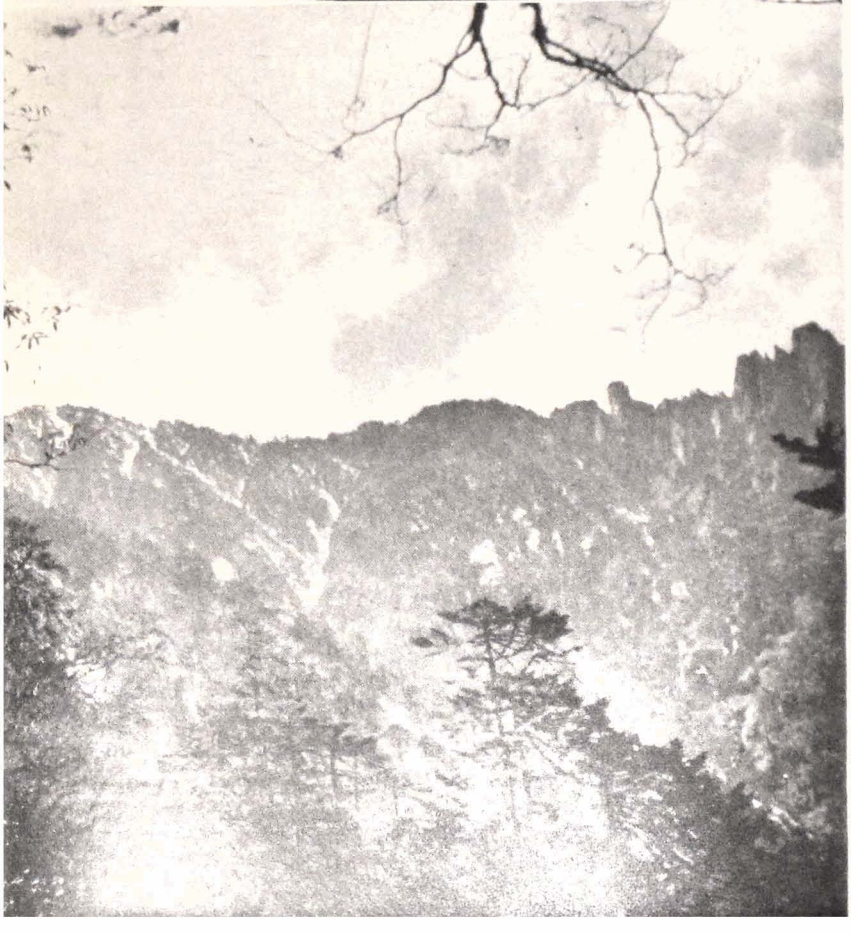
over our tents we were unable to detect it with the spotlight.

Next day was an easy march in to Gangfang, so easy that a few of the coolies and nearly all our servants fell heavily by the wayside at Tsonma. The latter arrived, jubilant and reeking of good cheer, long after most of the baggage, and one (we need name no names) collapsed, 'canned,' in Harold's words, 'to the gills,' on the farther side of the rickety wooden tight-rope which still did duty for a bridge over the river; he had to be manhandled across by three hilarious coolies, in front of the whole village.

Why lapses on the part of one's body-servant should necessarily lead to a feeling of acute personal shame, I do not know, but I found myself, red-hot with blushes and fury, adjuring the coolies in the course of this portage to 'let him drown.' Ah Hpung, the lamp-and-odd-man who, when in wine, harked back to his corporal's days in the Burma Rifles, was meanwhile clicking his heels and saluting me in slow time to report 'all present,' if far from correct, his eyes pink as a ferret's, a fog, possibly of war, hanging all round him.

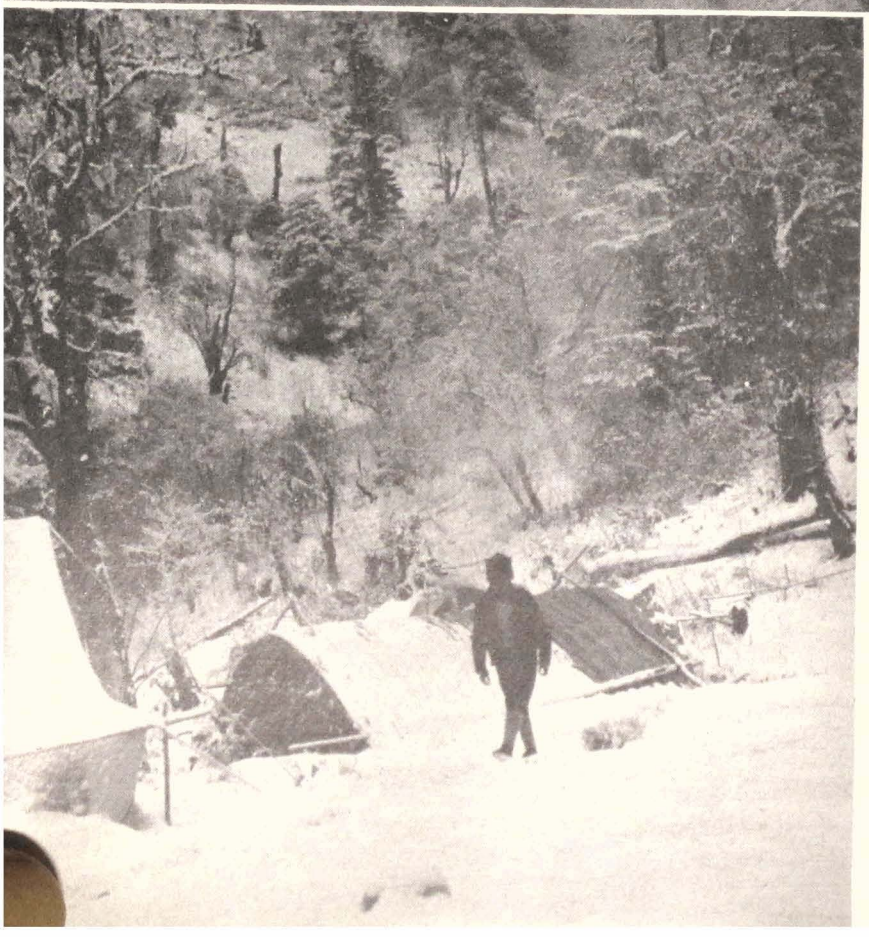
Taking it all round, it was a not unfitting end to a trip in which few things seemed to have happened according to plan.

The Chimili ridge
at 12,500 feet



An unnamed valley
south of Imaw Bum
at 11,000 feet

Snowcloud on the ridge opposite Chimili camp



The Chimili camp after a snowstorm

CHAPTER XVI

CHIMILI AND AFTER

Hardly a bird with the heart to sing
Or a bud that dares to pry.
G. F. BRADBY.

THE coolies who now had money, by their standards, to burn, disappeared into the Chinamen's long dark barns and burnt it night and day. At any hour if one passed through the hamlet, a deep hum as of bees could be heard from the gloom, and the smoke seeping through the entire length of the thatched roofs spoke eloquently of the atmosphere inside. The resident shopkeepers doubtless tapped the stream of wealth as nearly as possible at its source, but on those who occasionally emerged, Chinese pedlars descended from the empyrean, unerring as vultures, with bundles of dark-blue cloth and cheap-jack wares and, I have no doubt, liquor.

A furlong or so upstream across the Ngawchang, two little inconspicuous bivouacs of bamboo had sprung up in a rice-field. I did not know what they portended until, next afternoon, Harold and I saw with glasses a large gathering of teal asleep on a still reach of the river two hundred yards above its confluence with the Hpawte stream. Harold crouched among the boulders near the confluence to await them and, crossing the tight-rope bridge over the Ngawchang, I ran up the path, gun in hand, to drive them over him. I came round a corner suddenly on a tense gathering of thirty men squatting in a circle, their eyes on the path. Even as I saw them, the circle exploded uphill and down into the high grass and bushes, leaving the two croupiers, one Yawyin and one Chinese, facing each other motionless and imperturbable over the empty cloth. When you have come out in a strictly private capacity to shoot teal, it is a little embarrassing to be mistaken for an armed magistrate conducting a lightning raid on gamblers, and still more so to find, as I did when the teal had departed unscathed, that all the participants were still vainly hunting, nose to the ground, for the stake monies they had scattered in their head-

long flight. I felt certain that the only two in the gathering who had lost nothing were the two croupiers.

That night I gave the one-eyed old headman a stern avuncular warning about the evils of gambling and the sin of allowing strangers from China to fleece his villagers of their winter's keep, which should be buying clothing and food and necessaries for their wives and children. He promised to 'drive them away.' Next morning he complained to me that one of the croupiers, a Yawyin ex-soldier from Vijawlaw, had declined to go. I sent for this man and told him rudely to be gone ere worse befell him. hoping in my heart that he would obey an order I had no longer any power to enforce. He gave me a proud glance and departed 'to pack.' Next morning, after I had handed out tickets to the chosen coolies for our Chimili trip, and sent the rest disconsolately away, I discovered the evicted one had not only been one of the first in the eager line to receive a ticket, but had contrived to be issued with one of the lightest loads. He had become almost unrecognisable by washing his face and changing his hat, and hoped, doubtless, to pursue his other calling at our first halt.

It seemed then about time to speak to the resident Chinese, for we were still very angry about the fire on the Chawngmaw hill, and had no wish to have any further fires near our Chimili camp. The young Chinaman whom Frank had met up the Chawngmaw stream was, of course, 'gone on a journey' to Htawgaw, but his 'agent' turned up, supported by his partner from the Hpimaw shop, fifteen miles away, very smartly dressed in a blue overcoat and a tweed cap. They smiled olive smiles and held their own with ease in a twenty minutes' altercation, until at last I asked a question about the 'agent's' permit, a document which every Chinese resident in these hills was supposed to possess.

Had he a permit? Yes, of course!

Would he please go and fetch it for me to see? Yes, certainly.

By the way, his name was So-and-So? Yes, but . . . a pause, then a torrent of explanation, as if I had touched a spring, to the interpreter.

After that, it was plain sailing. He had no permit, but his father had gone to China 'on business,' and, of course, he had his father's permit.

Was he sure the permit was in his father's name?

Well, in his uncle's, anyway. . . .

Again I could breathe out threatenings and slaughters, but

this time with the feeling that we had him, as Harold said, ' where we needed him.' For to the Chinese, who between them had imperceptibly acquired control of most of the rackets and all the lucrative ones, in the Kachin Hills, the fear of expulsion to China was very real, and kept them good when all else failed. They gave us no more trouble.

Apart from a woodcock which Harold shot flighting at dusk and an ibis-bill, we got little of moment during our two days at Gangfang. The ibis-bill, half-plover, half-curlew, is one of the rare, high-altitude waders of the Himàl, which I had once previously met with in Putao, where they winter on the great shingle banks of the Mali and kindred rivers. I watched this bird with glasses feeding belly-deep, and with head submerged like a flamingo, on the shingle edge, and after two unsuccessful stalks managed to drop it with a long flying shot with a 12-bore. It had blood-red eyes and bill, but the legs red in summer, were in February a curious mixture of pale-olive and blue-grey and mauve. Its stomach contained a mass of water beetles.

We saw quite a number of teal in those two days and if, as seems probable, they are on migration in this latitude by February 1st, they must reach the high marshes of Tibet long before spring has come.

We set out for the Chimili on February 4th. The two previous days had been spent despatching mules and stores to Arthur at Langyang, sacking rice, mending guns, sorting oil and tinned stuff and money and ammunition, and trying to get rid of some of the unwanted odds-and-ends of camp equipment which it seemed certain that now we should never need. I shared to the full the feelings of the yachtsman in *The Riddle of the Sands,* whose chief consolation was in throwing things overboard. For the art of travel is to travel light, but conversely scientific expeditions must have ready at hand everything they need; I suppose there is some sort of sealed pattern laid by in Heaven showing how the two can be suitably combined.

We got away finally for the Chimili Pass. At the last moment, just as the loads were being dealt out, the men of Anasipakà, two miles up the valley, brought in a fine red barking deer, caught, they assured us, with dogs on ' a very high hill ' somewhere near the source of the Lipawlaw stream, and also a little owlet, smoke-grimed and heavily singed. The owlet could be kept until we reached our next camp, but the deer had to be dealt with there

and then, so it was 10.30 before we got away in hot sunshine. The coolies were a mixed lot, mostly the men from Hpawshi we had employed before, but a few had come from the village of Gawlam, near Black Rock, ten miles away. There was one Chinese cooly in the party, to whom I had given a ticket with some misgiving, though he was vouched for by the one-eyed headman: I made certain that he was allotted a full load, one possibly nearer 70 than 60 pounds. We overtook the line four miles on and, behold, he was now carrying nothing but our five pounds of medicines. His son, a stripling aged about sixteen and under five feet in height, was staggering and sweating up the hill beside him with the rest of the load.

We had a very hot march of four and a half hours eastwards up the valley mule path, which I had trudged with Bill the Sailor, through the bare, brown grass and bracken of the hills, dotted with starveling pines and towering up steeply on each side of the Hpawte stream to remote fastnesses of crags. Then close to Vijawlaw we struck up over a steep shoulder of hill and round and down very gradually till the valley opened out, and we could see the five or six hamlets of Hpawte scattered haphazard on both sides of the stream two miles on.

We saw very little wild life on the twelve-mile march, but once a black eagle[1] flew past us along the hill carrying a mammal which we could not see clearly: possibly a big squirrel or a marten cat. Harold thought he was flying to an eyrie, and there may well be one on the great crags west of Vijawlaw, for twice I watched a pair of black eagles soaring at a great height above Gangfang, and once, for nearly an hour one evening, displaying most statelily as they soared. We took many photographs of the valley, with the pine trees against the blue and the river winding far below, but no camera could recall the magic of light that was in that day of sun and wind.

The rest-house camp was in a cluster of rude thatch and bamboo huts on a bracken-covered hillside. It lay a mile away at least from any of the hamlets, for the Hpawte villagers doubtless think that officials, as in Burma, are plagues to be kept as much as possible at a distance. A small boy brought in to us a vole and a pair of fine tragopans, the cock already resplendent with his two-inch turquoise-blue horns and blue-green facial skin and pink spurs, the female a lovely mottled brown bird like a hen caper-

[1] *Ictinaetus nipalensis.*

caillie. Her crop contained 23 acorns and a mass of green leaves, but the cock's held nothing but grit. One tousled youth, whom I took on to replace the Chinaman, showed his gratitude by bringing in an *apodemus* or vole for Harold, and a specimen of the rare Manipur fulvetta[1] for me.

We woke to a hard, white frost after a night of brilliant moon. I stayed behind when Harold and the coolies had gone, and found the bracken all round the rest-house full of birds. They were mostly the 'forbidden buntings' which, pale and flitting as shades, gave me little enough chance to identify them, but among them were one or two much darker birds, nearly as shy, which kept flitting up wild and diving again into the bracken out of shot. I chased one for half an hour into the bracken, and by a lucky shot secured it as it perched for a moment in a bush. It was the rufous-breasted hedge-sparrow, a bird almost black on the back and dark-striped as a water-pipit, with chestnut buff on the breast. Here, too, were cinnamon sparrows in flocks in the thorn trees and in the rocky dell between the villages, I managed, with much scrambling and snap-shooting, to collect specimens both of the Manipur fulvetta and the little red-capped hill babbler,[2] which were creeping about in bushes and undergrowth like wrens.

We went past open maize stubbles dotted with rocks and then through two untidy hamlets where lean sows and grimy children looked at us with vacant glances. After that we struck up hill eastwards, with the gorge beginning to narrow, the bare hills above us, and below, across the gorge, dark forest into which a flight of red-billed magpies disappeared with shrill whistles. Then up and up with the hills continually closing in, no longer bare and brown, but dark with rhododendron and hemlock and bamboo. It could not have been more than seven or eight miles from the rest-house before we had reached our camp at 10,000 feet, on a bare spur between the woods, a camp with a breath-taking view. East of us, three thousand feet above us, was a massive snow-clad ridge, up to which two others ran like walls a mile away on either side, both wrapped in clouds, the southern one striped to its summit with frozen pale-green waterfalls for hundreds of feet. Behind us, we could look out over the whole length of the Hpawte valley and see, beyond three lesser ridges, Imaw's crest etched against the afternoon sun.

All round us, towering away on three sides, was blue-dark

[1] *Fulvetta manipurensis.* [2] *Stachyris ruficeps.*

hemlock and *abies* pine, as silent as the woods that guarded Imaw.

I found our tents pitched in the snow outside a bamboo shack, through whose open-work roof the snow had entered freely. We paid off the coolies, who hurried down the hill before it should snow again. The skinners had a tent in which to sleep, and a bamboo hut in which to work, and Lalit Barua, the cook, shivering from his death's-head face to his bony black shins, had another frail bamboo shack in which he slept and cooked and, I have no doubt, prayed nightly for death or Chittagong. The others, hillmen all, were speedily comfortable under tarpaulin shelters covered with bamboo and stuffed at every corner with rhododendron branches and snow.

Harold was gazing at Imaw Bum when I got in.

'Have you a map here?' he asked. 'I just want to get our altitudinal tie-up with the Bum. I reckon you and I ought to about clean up here before the others arrive!'

Was that it, I wondered, now that we seemed to have reached the very heart of the east, a land virgin as it was in the beginning? Were we only planning to deflower it scientifically in a week and leave it for ever? Somehow I guessed that that silent land, like some houses and gardens I had known, could keep some at least of its secrets to itself for ever against all invaders. It might yield a little of its beauty to our cameras, a score or two of its shy birds and beasts, but that would be all: its remoteness would remain. Man might now and again attempt familiarity, but the mountains would merely look down on him as a creeping, helpless, puny thing.

I went up the snowy path through the silent pines after luncheon. On the way up from Hpawte I had seen a good many birds, shrike-babblers, tits, including the little red-headed long-tailed tit, hoary barwings and brown-eared bulbuls, on an *aralia* tree, some nuthatches and a black-faced laughing thrush. But above camp in two or three hours I saw and heard not a single bird except one bush-robin, and the only tracks near the path were a few of what I think were mouse-hares. It did not get dark till six, and we watched the clouds racing over the crest into Yunnan, with the moon seeming to race up the sky to get above them.

Just before dusk, two very dark eagles appeared, flying east at a height of at least 12,000 feet, quartering the ridge-top above camp. One crossed over the valley and spent some time soaring

in tiny circles over the side of an immense and frowning crag which flanked the turn of the Hpawte stream where it disappeared south-eastwards into a great dark corrie.

'He wouldn't be doing that,' said Harold, 'if there weren't some mammals there; I wonder what's he after? Gooral? Mouse-hares?'

But none answered, and the eagles made off at last into Yunnan, flying slow but straight, as if to some roost or eyrie they knew of well. They looked, to our glasses, quite black, and from their long tails I feel certain they were black eagles, but we never saw them near that camp again.

The mail-runner came that night and with him a letter from Ronald Kaulback, who was so near us as eagles flew and yet so impossibly far away in the Triangle; he lamented that he could not walk over for a few days and 'look us up.' The letter was neatly typewritten, a detail which seemed to me as incongruous as perhaps the whelkstall in a desert once seemed to Saki's washer-woman. 'If you, a real explorer,' I wrote to him, 'dare to send me a typewritten letter from whatever wilderness you are now surveying, the least I feel I can do is to reply on packing paper in carpenter's pencil. A typewriter seems all wrong.'

We stayed in the Chimili camp till February 12. The first morning was a glorious sparkling one of frost, and Harold and I went up to the Pass, which took us about three hours.

The first part was easy, through forest with alpine meadows here and there, then at 11,500 feet the path became a torrent bed and then a vague track through deep drifted snow to a glistening bare ridge of screes, where the snow was drifted three or four feet high. At the pass itself, where our barometer registered 12950, it was dazzling enough to make me regret the snow-goggles which, after Imaw, I had packed away finally. We looked down from the crest into a huge basin of snowy hill, from which a stream ran blue amid rocks and peat and pine. Beyond, many miles on, lay the Salween Valley, and beyond it, mocking my field glasses' attempt to pierce to them, lay ridge after ridge of China, blue and dim. There were fox tracks, or so Harold thought, a day or two old, at nearly 13,000 feet on the deep frozen snow at the crest south of the pass, and half a mile or more away on the China side a thousand feet down the hill, my glasses picked up a line of great footmarks, much larger than those I had seen on the Chawngmaw ridge, each in front of the next, ascending the hill.

'Well, the Japs don't seem to have got here yet,' I said foolishly, remembering the last newspaper I had seen in November and Mr. Lloyd George's warning, which was so soon to be fulfilled, 'but there's the Abominable Snow-man all right, Harold! Don't you think you had better pop down into China and have a look for him?'

But Harold, his bare head shining and steaming, his spectacles a-gleam in the dazzle of sun, had filled a kettle with a great handful of virgin snow and was boiling it for lunch.

'You can waste a lot of time on those large mammals,' he told me again,' and that sign's maybe weeks old. It's probably only a bear.'

But as I glassed the two great corries east of us and south, so bare to all seeming and yet so full of folds, and saw the ridge tops north and north-east and south again, hiding other corries at which we could only guess, I thought of what West had told me, eleven years before in Rangoon, of the 'red bear' he had once seen near the Chimili. Lalbir had imparted much the same tale, more simply, to me: how West *sahib* had spotted the bear far away up hill with his glasses, and had become very excited, insisting that it was an *ek dum naya wala,* and how when two hours later Lalbir and he had reached the place, there was nothing there, save only the faintest tracks.

Well, perhaps I was now residuary legatee of West's vast, silent kingdom and all that it contained. Somewhere in the corrie south of me, which hid the source of the Hpawte stream in its bony heart, was where Colonel Whittall had got a takin in 1934. And had not he surmised a possibility of the giant panda, in country which Suydam, with his memories of the Roosevelt expedition, had assured me was 'exactly panda bear country'? On the far side of the south corrie was the cliff wall ending in that majestic crag where we had watched the eagle quartering overnight. I doubted if any European except Farrer had ever been more than two miles north of where we were along the watershed for the next hundred and fifty miles or so. To 'clean up' this country, birds or mammals, with all the resources of science, might well take a lifetime.

We lunched in China out of the wind, but the snow proved most disappointing when boiled for tea, being unexpectedly dark with peat and mouse-hare droppings. Apart from some tits in a fir tree at 11,500 feet on our way up, at which I did not fire, I

only saw two birds all that day, one the flitting shadow of a redstart or a bush robin far away in the cane, the other a dark bird which dropped out of the blue towards a crag at 12,000 feet, and which may have been a chough, though I never got more than a glimpse of it.

Disappointment was, I think, the keynote of the next few days, though we collected 47 birds of 15 different species, five of which I had never met with before. We woke each morning in the frosty dark to hear from afar, unutterably forlorn, the note of the collared owlet, with which Luk Seng, at our Hpawshi and Nyetmaw camps had decoyed so many birds to me. I had wondered a little that all the hillmen seemed to use this call, because in the real hills, I had never yet heard this owlet, which is so common in the N'mai Valley. But now,

'whor whe whor whòr,'

one was calling each morning desolately for half an hour before night was done, before any bird of day had stirred. Perhaps he was hungry and trying to decoy himself a meal; perhaps, for all his feathers, he was acold and trying to hail the spring, as I knew his kindred would now be doing all down the warm valley from Chipwi.

Each morning a flock of tits would come hurrying through the bushes close to our huts and vanish up or down the hill. Out of this party, whose members seemed to vary every day, I shot specimens of all the three rare hill-tits, as well as the little black-headed bottle-tit, which I had seen in the Nyetmaw hills. Once, sitting with two henchmen on a log near the path, a gooral (I believe, though only my henchmen saw it) rose from a seat in the bushes close behind us. Both men changed in a flash to eager savages, incredibly stealthy and agile, who dragged me silently in their wake through a maze of cane and fallen trees. The soft ground was inches deep in moss and pine-needles and leaves of cane, and our feet sank in at every stride, till suddenly we found ourselves crouching and stooping on the edge of a hundred-foot drop of solid ice, running chute-like into the river far below. We tried back along the cliff-face for a way down, but the gooral seemed to have floated down the chute and was by now doubtless far across the frozen stream and up the opposite hill. Only when we tried a short cut back did we realise what a steep tangle that was of frozen streamlets and twisted roots and rocks which came out of the soft earth at a touch, to crash like bombs downhill.

Each day the weather came boiling up out of the west, with heavy snow-clouds crowning every ridge and loosing their burden in the night. One morning I got to the top of the ridge above our camp at 11,400 feet, and had just five minutes to spy before the mist closed down. All I could see was a great mass of cane, pinkish-buff in the snow, curling up towards the divide, a rocky hill at the base of which were acres of black crags, and to the north open meadows dotted with clumps of cane. It did not look difficult country either to spy or to stalk in, but apart from some six months' old takin dung on a meadow at 10,500 feet, some game bird droppings lower down, and a buzzard wheeling over the hill above me, I saw nothing. Then the billowing mist and the snow swept everything away beyond the crest, and we started down the hill. A flock of parrot-bills, looking as big as chickens in the gloom, came past me feeding up hill, and I managed to call them back to me and get a brown suthora[1] and a great parrot-bill,[2] both birds which I had secured on the Chawngmaw stream. The great parrot-bill uttered a curious four-fold grating chuckle—not the 'shrill bleat' described in the books—and was intensely curious of man though, despite its grey-white forehead and orange beak, it was hard enough to see as it hopped about in the gloom of the cane.

I found meconopsis bushes budding as I scrambled down the hill, and tiny rhododendrons each with one enormous crimson bud ready to burst at the first hint of spring. The whole camp was under snow when I got in, but Harold had secured 23 mammals, including a mouse-hare in a mouse-trap.

The snow seemed to be bringing the spring, though it only made the hills around more desolate and wintry to view. A black-faced laughing thrush was singing close to camp one morning, and a little later two jungle crows passed over, cawing with the abandon of English rooks, among the firs. We saw them several times, and I always wondered what they fed on at a season when eggs and carrion must have been difficult indeed to come by. But if they were hungry, they never relaxed their shyness, and I never got a chance at them.

The common small birds of the cane and the forest edge near it were undoubtedly the little fulvettas,[3] with brown backs and broad white eyestreaks; charming and confiding birds, of which

[1] *Paradoxornis unicolor.* [2] *Conostoma aemodium.* [3] *Fulvetta vinipecta.*

the Lisus took shameful advantage. They would call them up either by the owl's call or by hissing with their hands patting at their open mouths, and when they had the fulvetta twittering and chiding on a cane twig close to them, the blunt arrow of the cross-bow would speedily knock it out. One morning, when I was glassing the northern corrie in the intervals of the snow storm, I heard a bow twang thrice and saw a tiny flock of long-tailed birds disappearing downhill. One remained, spitted clean through with the blunt arrow at ten paces, though it was a bird with a body as small as a willow wren. It was the rare *paradoxornis fulvifrons,* which Harold had got up the Nyetmaw hill, and which I never saw again.

One other rare bird the Lisus brought in, a grey-green shrike babbler,[1] which no one seemed to have met before in Burma, except in the Chin Hills, though Forrest's collectors had got several, both on the Li-Chang Range and the Mekong-Salween divide. I was lucky enough to get one myself a day or two later, in a flock with another tree-creeper in a hemlock tree. Its plumage, like that of the three grey-green or brownish-grey tits, seems exactly suited to the winter pine and hemlock they frequent, but it has the typical slow, deliberate movements of all the shrike-babblers.

But alas! we were called on to go down again, from this strange corner, which had for the most part the age-old hush and grandeur and lifelessness of a museum, or a palace from which the owners were away. Arthur had returned to Gangfang from his rapid circuit of the Maru hills, and wished us to sample the Hpimaw and Panwa passes before he and Suydam returned, prematurely, to Myitkyina. No one, I think, except myself, was sorry to go. Harold had trapped at least a hundred voles and shrews and rats and mice and other small deer with oatmeal, mixed bait and rice. The skinners, plainsmen all and new to snow, were suffering severely from cold in their draughty bamboo shack. The Mugh cook, though he could still please our uncritical appetites, used to wake about 2.30 a.m. and cough heartrendingly over his cooking pots till dawn. Ah Hpung, the Kanung lampman, lacking amenity, had also done his best to improve conditions by promulgating the twin theories that he had fever and an enlarged spleen; Harold had exploded the first with a clinical thermometer, and the second with scientific palpation, but Ah Hpung was not an old soldier for nothing. He fell back in good

[1] *Pteruthius xanthochloris.*

order on 'sore eyes,' which he renewed each morning indubitably in the smoke-bound gloom of his bothy, so that he became more and more deephawed, like a Clumber spaniel, and one could hardly bear to look at him.

We had seen no mammals at all except one deer, possibly a Michie's deer, which had dashed past Harold when he was loaded with dust shot, and a *tamiops,* the tiny striped squirrelet which seems to range from 1,000 feet up nearly to the limit of the trees. I had dashed up the hill one clear, cold morning, after a night in which the thermometer sank to 21° Fahrenheit, to try one more chance to spy the great valley to the north. Imaw was radiant in a new cap of snow, as were the mountains that ringed us in, and the moon shining in a cloudless sky. From somewhere between 11,000 and 12,000 feet on a foot-wide ridge, covered with stunted rhododendron, I could see at last into the valley's very heart; it ended three miles away in an immense circle of crags, at the foot of which was a blue lakelet surrounded by screes. That valley or glacier and the stream that comes out of it has no name. The summit north of it is but an unnumbered angle of the last ridge in Burma along which in twenty miles there are thirteen surveyed peaks of over 13,000 feet.

I have never been in that valley: I wish with all my heart that I could say I had. But the path to the Chimili crosses its outlet about two miles below our camp, where it comes out in a secret linn of deep, smooth rocks which you could span with a fishing-rod. I should not advise anyone who visits it one day to try approaching it through this, its official outlet.

So I came down sadly for the last time. And that evening two hunters arrived from Sadulaw and said they had shot a 'mountain goat on a snow hill' in very difficult country, some miles in from Sadulaw, which was too heavy for them to bring in unskinned. So we told them to bring the head in complete and skin the rest out and meet us at Bawahku; we had already sent off for coolies.

That night snow fell freely again, so that it was impossible to work in our bamboo shack, but with lanterns inside our tents they were not too cold, though they looked very blanched and forlorn in the snow. I got two bullfinches in the afternoon on a budding willow a mile down the road and one of the Lisus departed into space and returned with a pair of tragopans. He would not show me where he had got them, insisting that the snow was too deep, but the crop of the male contained a huge mass of raspberry

leaves as big as a croquet ball, so I doubt if they were far above our camp.

I went up the pass-track alone to 11,300 feet that last afternoon and in three hours never set eyes on a bird or a beast of any kind. I smoked a cigarette under the huge slanting rock beside the path which so many travellers seem to have used as a bivouac in their hurried journeys over the pass; its under-surface is black with the smoke of centuries, and it must be an awesome shelter in a storm in this land of daily earthquakes. From it you can look right up into the heart of the Hpawte corrie. But all that afternoon it snowed steadily, so that I could see nothing but the woods which waited, unstirring, for the moment of spring.

Next morning our camp was deep in drifted snow and the whole valley west of us was a trooping mass of storm-cloud which lifted for an instant, now and then, to reveal the fresh-powdered hills. The coolies from Bawahku appeared about 9 a.m., shivering and grey beneath their cheap umbrellas, their feet and ears wrapped in cotton rags. We struck the sodden tents and loaded them up and sent the long line winding down the hill. And as if to show how little we knew of this corner we were leaving, a strange, loud cry began out of the snow-cloud a thousand feet up the ridge which I had climbed so painfully and drawn so blank half a dozen times: half-owl, half-curlew, it was without doubt that same great bird whose call-note and flight I had heard in January during my bear-hunt, probably Sclater's monal. But I felt it was bidding us a farewell in mockery of all we had not done or seen.

I hid up for the last time for the crows, this time in the bamboo shack after everyone had gone, but there was not a sound. Then I turned down through the woods, so still that every tip of every smallest bough was an inch deep in snow.

At Bawahku we found the 'mountain-goat' awaiting us, a very fine male serow, and collected two or three new birds on the open hillsides, a red-throated thrush, a babax, as also several of the little pink suthora. The dark hedge-sparrows were there again, as wild and furtive as ever, and I failed to get a shot at them, though I flushed them many times.

At Gangfang, Arthur and the others were awaiting us. They had crossed the great ridge which continues Imaw towards the north on to the Sakkauk stream and fifteen miles on had struck down to the Lower Ngawchang, and so back in a circle to Htaw-

gaw and Gangfang. They had collected forty-eight birds, mostly at altitudes below 5,000 feet, one of which, the Himalayan crossbill,[1] shot in a pine tree near Black Rock, was a most unexpected prize. There was also a very fine specimen of the fulvous pitta,[2] the only pitta of any kind we saw on the whole trip.

The weather broke almost as soon as we got in, there was snow on the hills as low as 7,000 feet, and for three days we suffered pouring rain, the discomfort of leaky tents and the turmoil of dismantling the base-camp. One morning, Harold filmed a cross-bow competition for the hunters of the surrounding villages; once again, I could not but marvel at the contrast between the beautifully cared-for cross-bows, smooth and shining with the lustre of years, and the unkempt squalor of the men who wielded them. Some remarkable shooting occurred in this contest, though we ourselves felt like the suitors of Penelope endeavouring even to string the great bows; their owners, with an indulgent smile at our efforts, would drive the butt home against their own iron-hard stomach-muscles and accomplish it without concern.

On one brief morning of sun, Harold arranged to film the coffin planks being floated down the Ngawchang. Whatever the normal custom of the trade is, the villagers made for us a most spectacular affair of it, three or four of them, one after the other, flashing down the rapids and shooting the tight-rope bridge, each poling himself on his plank with a bamboo, and with all the instinctive balance and grace of the born waterman.

On the last night, Harold also attempted to film a series of local dances by the light of magnesium flares. They lacked, I think, the authentic frenzy which is so characteristic of all Kachin dances and which is born of strong liquor and the maddening beat of drums and bonfire flames, but from the deep corybantic hum which welled up from the hamlet for hours after we ourselves had gone away and the appearance of our followers next day, I suspect that its later stages of joy were unconfined and more expressive than those we had witnessed.

I was too busy with innumerable domestic details to collect very much, though I saw many more birds at Gangfang than we had seen in January, and it was clear that migration of drongos, flycatchers and many other birds from the lower hills was beginning by mid-February. One sunny morning I collected five Nepal

[1] *Loxia recurvirostra.* [2] *Pitta nipalensis.*

house-martins, out of a large flock, which were hawking flies along a cliff-face lower down the Ngawchang, and a small marshy pond half a mile from camp produced on successive days a golden bush-robin, a solitary snipe, bamboo partridges and the little-known hill-bird called Elwes' crake.[1] This last was shot by a Lashi, but I saw another slipping away from the pool next day, as shy as any rat.

Each evening the air above the camp was full of Himalayan swiftlets, feeding slowly over the rest-house, until one night a hobby appeared and sent them off pell-mell into the clouds. And one evening I counted a flight of forty-two jungle crows passing high in air southwards to some roost in the direction of Hpimaw.

We left Gangfang on February 19. Arthur had departed for Htawgaw the previous day in pouring rain with the mules; he was most anxious to get our skins there dry and undamaged, and to get in touch with McGuinness. For McGuinness had been on a two months' tour in the Triangle, and then to Myitkyina, and when he locked up his treasury and went 'out' like that into the blue, there was a bank-holiday, perforce, until he returned.

We got to Hpimaw after two wet marches on the 20th. I saw little on the way, but at Tangdung, in the marshy stubbles, I shot a woodcock and flushed another, and a Lisu brought in the only nightjar we saw on the trip.

Hpimaw, or Pienma as the Chinese call it, was in 1939 one of the almost forgotten cantonments of Burma. The three or four remaining buildings stood high on their own bare hill, looking up at the steep pass-road and down at the thriving Lashi villages which are clustered 1,500 feet below them at the junction of the Moku and Kayulang streams. Once they were 'strong with soldiers, loud with voices,' for there was a military outpost there for twenty-six years. I had visited them in 1933, on the wave of retrenchment which followed the Burmese rebellion, just before Hpimaw was reduced to an open-season post; four years later it met the fate of so many cantonments in Burma which have outlived their purpose, Shwegyin and Seniku, Bernardmyo and Kyaukpyu, Kindat and Konglu and Chingnambum. Generals came up to fish in the N'mai, cast an eye over the barren hills from afar and said:

'After all, who wants the ruddy place?'

[1] *Porzana bicolor.*

Secretariat officials computed that now the coffin-tree was almost dying out, no Chinaman would covet Pienma, for was not the sole revenue of all that thriving valley in 1910 'two bamboo rats'? Militarists insisted on the greater strategic possibilities of the Panwa Pass, the road to which would only cost seven lakhs of rupees. Seismologists computed the 'earthquake incidence' of this area or that. And brand-new reformers would find some new site set on a hill, full of amenity and miles from anywhere, which only needed a road to it and some jungle-clearing to take its rightful place as queen of the North Burmese Oberland. And the P.W.D., who had had to carry the cantonment 120 miles up the hill, bit by bit on mule-back through the years, stoves and screws, and cement, zinc-sheets and furniture, glass and wire, heartily endorsed any proposal to abandon a place whose inspection meant for them at least three weeks' absence from home, and which cost Burma, one way and another, some thirty thousand rupees a year.

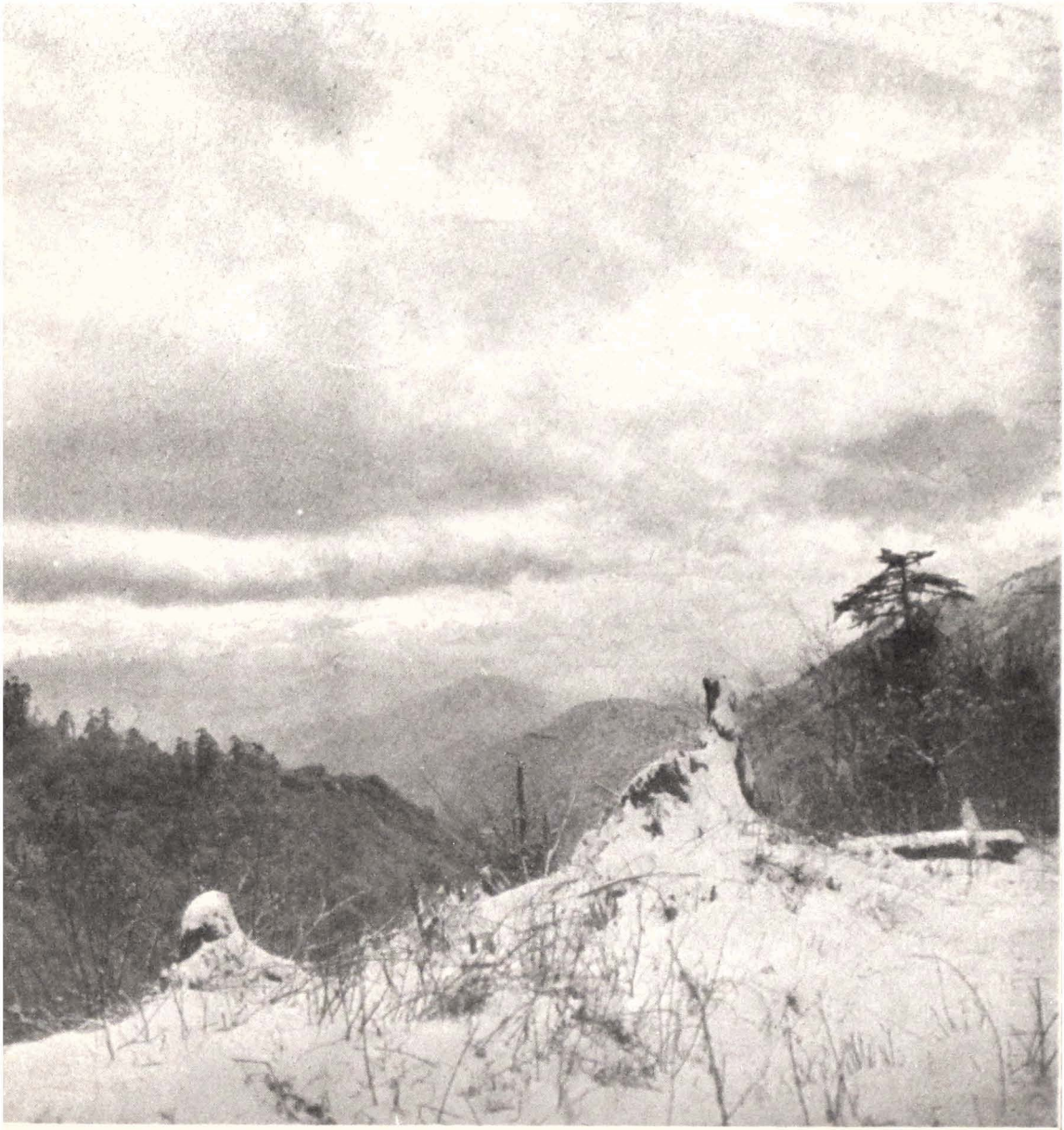
'What do you think of this new hill they're talking of as a subdivisional headquarters?' I asked Mahtab Singh, the overseer, a week later. By all accounts it was another Monte Rosa, only needing a little capital and 'development.'

'Oh, that!' he said easily: 'one bump here, one bump there! Too much blasting and no water. It will not be!'

So now Hpimaw's keep and hospital, its terraced, well-watered vegetable garden, its barrack-rooms and officers' quarters and family lines were no more: only the marks of the kitchens on the smooth-turfed terraces round the edge of the hill and the levelled parade-ground remained to show what things had been. One day, perhaps, when Burma is ours again, Hpimaw, on its windy hill, may have to be laboriously reassembled.

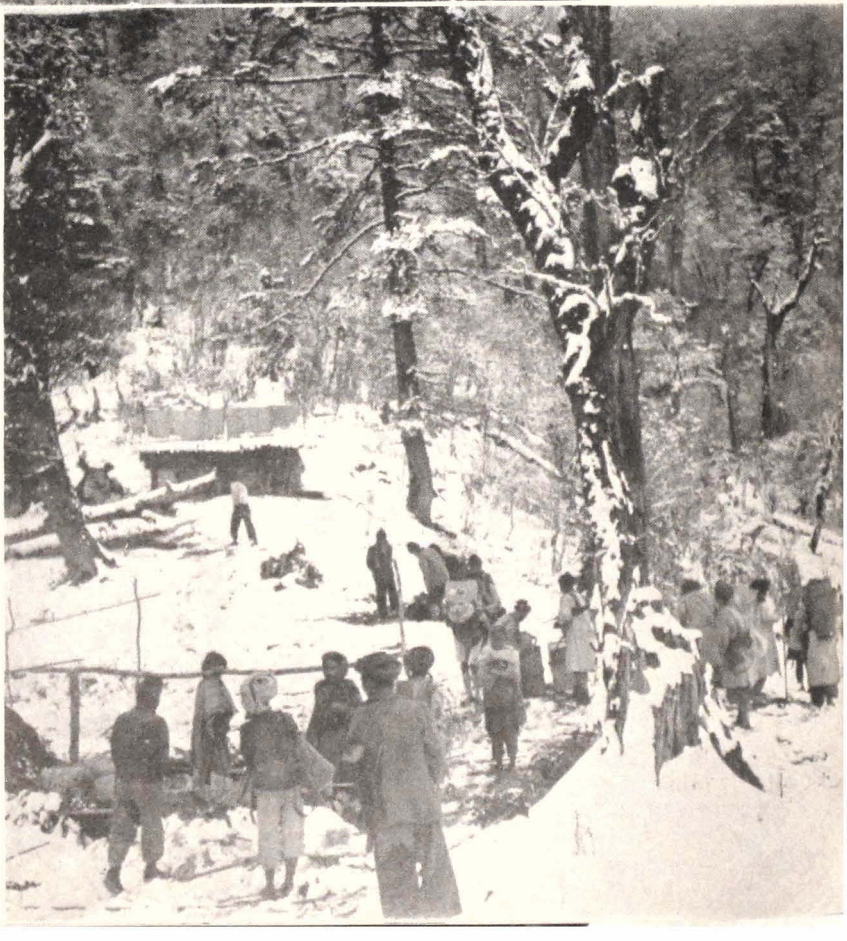
But that will not be yet, as I realised on the day after our arrival, when old Lup Teng and I plunged, thigh-deep, for two long miles, through the drifted snow to the pass and saw below us, in the words of an old report, the graded mule-path on the Burma side dwindle suddenly 'into a six-inch track descending vertically into China.'

Lup Teng had been telling me that morning stories about the coffin-tree, how few there were left in the Ngawchang drainage, just a tree or two here and there, and how one tree would fetch 1,000 dollars in China. And as I looked at the tilted hills before us and behind, and thought of the infinite labour of tired men which was needed to get those planks from Gangfang to Yun-



View from the Chimili Camp towards Imaw Bum

Abies forest near Chimili at 10,000 feet



Coolies breaking camp at Chimili

nanfu, the price did not seem too high.

But then we never quite knew when to believe Lup Teng. Frank had said that he had a sort of lingual switchboard in his brain and could switch from one dialect to another with no more effort than a telephone operator or a motorist changing gears. And I was beginning to suspect that he switched with equal ease from truth to fiction, whenever the need arose; the veritable coffin-tree was always, on this journey, waiting for Frank at some future camp, but it kept receding from him like the golden bough. Now, if I was to believe Lup Teng, there was not one nearer than the Fenshuiling Pass, three marches southwards, which he knew we did not intend to visit. Lup Teng's numerous wives were, on the other hand, so often in plain view and usually camped close to my tent where their incessant chatter could be most annoying. But I have Lup Teng's solemn and repeated assurances that they were never really there at all.

CHAPTER XVII

HPIMAW

To know a country it is not enough to have seen some tit-bit of a place here and there. C. E. MONTAGUE.

BY now we could tell from the thin web of bird-song woven at dawn in the valleys below us that spring was near. Gone were those ice-bound mornings less than a fortnight ago when the forest was dumb except for the forlorn crying of an owl. On February 23 I heard a yaffle laughing, a loud musical fourfold note, and later there was a new caller in scrub below the rest-house which I thought might be a pheasant. But presently he revealed himself as a resplendent black woodpecker, nearly as big as a rook, white-rumped with a great scarlet head and cheeks and belly, who was jerking himself inch by inch up a dead tree and listening, in vain, with head turned sideways for any answer to his call. Perhaps he had just arrived in his breeding-territory: he was, at any rate, very shy, and my attempt to stalk him failed.

He was calling again at dawn next day, and I took Lalbir into my confidence. He disappeared like a shadow over the edge of the hill and in half an hour emerged, dripping with sweat and dew, with the yaffle, a green woodpecker with a black nape, in his hand. He said he had seen the *kala wala* also, but had not been able to get near it.

About ten we both heard the strange call again. This time Lalbir needed no urging to disappear, for he had more than a suspicion that Suydam and Frank were planning a trip to the Pass, and Lup Teng must have made it clear to him that with so much snow about the walk was a 'fatigue.' Lalbir, Suydam's henchman, was too old a soldier to be caught easily when fatigues were in the offing, so he waited only long enough to load a gun and murmur 'that bird again' to me before plunging down into the undergrowth again. Later, when Suydam and Frank were well on their way to the Pass without him, he reappeared with the bird. It was *Thriponax feddeni,* much larger than any black wood-

pecker which is found in Burma, and a new race for the Indian fauna.

I tried, that morning of sun and wind, down the hill into the valley which comes out in Upper Hpimaw from near the Hpawshi Bum, and luck was with me. I saw little on the hill except some red-headed long-tailed tits[1] and nuthatches in a patch of alders, but a mile below, in the curve of the river, every man and bird seemed to be busy in the terraced fields. I photographed a boy ploughing with a buffalo, which he assured me was twenty years old, and another with a lean bullock. Their rough wooden ploughs had iron shares but were so light that they could be lifted with one hand; when the buffalo twice started off a little too far to one side, the boy could lift his plough and drag the whole affair, buffalo and all, backwards for several yards.

In the sunny amphitheatre of newly-turned, or newly-flooded, stubble all was spring. Cinnamon sparrows in pairs were feeding here and there, and a flock of rose finches, the males already in nearly full dress, flew off from some waste ground. Further on there were six red-billed magpies, black and lavender-blue with orange-red legs, hopping about on a field six inches deep in water, with their long tails held up in a graceful curve to keep them dry. They are surely the most picturesque birds that ever adorned a plough. Beyond them were a pair of black-and-white magpies waddling stiffly, and little buntings and white-capped redstarts and snipe and wagtails and a score of other birds, heedless of the ploughmen and their children. Where the stream came rushing round a corner, I watched a pair of plumbeous redstarts, no longer crouching apart, as they do all winter, on rocks in the spray; now the hen sat on the topmost twig of a thorn-bush with the male fluttering past her with vibrating wings to show her the beauty of his wide-spread chestnut tail.

I pointed out to Hpaonan La a fine michelia tree flowering on the other bank and sent him across to pluck a branch or two of it for Frank. Alas! it was one of Hpaonan La's days when he could misunderstand almost any order. He departed into space for twenty minutes, and only when I was exhausted with shouting for him did he emerge, quietly whistling, from the bushes on the stream.

'There is nothing there, *duwa*,' he said, standing underneath

[1] *Aegithaliscus concinnus.*

the tree.

He had, it appeared, spent the interval in beating half a mile of jungle fringing the stream single-handed towards me, under the impression that I had seen a jungle-fowl or a pheasant.

But it was impossible to be angry for long with Hpaonan La: with his great boots and dreamy eyes, his dishevelled hair, his sword girt about him and his extraordinary flair for getting into trouble, he always reminded me of the Minstrel Boy; 'in the ranks of death you'll find him' the poet had predicted with confidence, and, indeed, we found ourselves consigning him daily to perdition. I almost expected to see a wild harp slung somewhere among Hpaonan La's impedimenta. He had been taken on, despite his age, at the last moment, because, on the Chindwin expedition, said Arthur, he had been 'always smiling.' I had come to know that smile. It was not the confident smile of the undaunted 'go-getter,' one who never doubted clouds would break. Many things could, we found, bring Hpaonan La's proud soul under, as I knew ever since that first dreadful day at Tamu when he had been put in charge of the luncheon mule. Arthur and Suydam had waited for two hours under the appointed bridge only to find, when I arrived, that the luncheon mule was five miles ahead and still moving. His smile was too often the anxious deprecatory grin with which Mr. Chaplin has made us so familiar, the smile of one who hopes by it to disarm the fury of rude and intolerant men.

I came back by the mule-road, past the great wooden house, standing by itself at the foot of the hill in which Lup Teng, our interpreter, so Hpaonan La assured me, kept all but his current women-folk. (He had another house on the edge of the old cantonment two miles up the hill in which his youngest wife, his followers and a medley of mules and pigs and goats were housed.) Half-way up the hill, two hen pheasants, the first I had seen on the wing in three and a half months, rose at my feet from the bracken. With only dust-shot in the .410, I was lucky to drop one of them, and found it was a Stone's pheasant,[1] the only true pheasant which is found in Burma, and, to look at, indistinguishable from those in England. If pheasants of any kind had been really numerous in the hills where we had camped, they had kept themselves most strictly to themselves.

[1] *Phasianus elegans.*

That evening, just before dusk, Arthur came striding up the hill. He had come from Gamhkawn, twenty-four miles, in the day, had got all the skins safely under cover at Htawgaw and 'raised the wind' from a Chinaman. There was a change of plans and we were now due to start back to Htawgaw on the 29th, but I pleaded for a chance to camp for one night near the Pass and try for the jays, which had swung over me suddenly one morning in the mist and vanished before I could get a shot. They were the only jays I had ever seen in the district and I was most anxious to collect one.

So next afternoon I started up the road with five coolies and Bum Lang. Our skinners, with a rush of work, were short-handed and Lazum Naw, my henchman, was too busily employed with them to come with me, so I decided to cook for myself. The camp-site I had hoped for, just above where the snow began, was occupied by a party of Lisus bound for the Salween, so we camped a little further up the path.

Bum Lang, now transferred to be my orderly and on his own at last, became at once the trained lance-naik and took command. In half an hour the cane was cleared, the tent was up, a great pile of rhododendron logs was stacked beside the fireplace and my lantern and towels hung from an improvised towelrack-cum-chandelier, which had taken less than a minute to make and erect. Bum Lang and the coolies, after ten minutes' work fastening a ground-sheet over a frame-work of poles, were as cosy themselves as if they had been there for a week.

My stove and cooking-range took one minute to put up and consisted of two rhododendron poles stuck in a bank and supported on forked sticks. They were so full of sap that the ends frothed like beer over my feet throughout the evening while I cooked. I savoured to the full the 'enormous advantages of those who have their meals in the kitchen,' though, to be sure, whenever I took my eye off the ball (as when a great owl hooted softly at me from above), the bacon and the frying butter spat with loud reports all over my face.

The owl was one of those voices of the high forest whose owner we had never seen, though we had frequently heard the soft 'huhu' from dead hemlock trees near Imaw and Chimili. In the middle of my cooking, too, another mysterious voice came down from the dark to puzzle me, the loud 'quark' of great birds passing high overhead towards the north. Had I been in the plains,

I should have said at once 'night herons,' for that loud quacking sound is an unmistakable one all over the plains of Burma when a night-heronry voyages forth from the trees in which it has spent the day.

But could there possibly be night-herons at 10,000 feet in those mountains? And if there were, were they on migration, for the quacking noises seemed to be of birds coming from the south-east and passing north? Someone will know some day; it was but one of the many puzzles we had to leave to others.

I enjoyed my rude cookery, though no one could have called it a well-balanced meal: army ration fried in a saucepan, then a Welsh rarebit and cocoa, topped up with hot rum. To be sure, when I had done my utmost with the savoury it did not resemble any dish I had ever eaten in my life, though the cheese had defied me and was still just recognisable as cheese. But at any rate it tasted good and woke me with indigestion in the small hours, for all the world as if it had been concocted by the chef at my club. There was a steady drone of conversation most of the night from under the tarpaulin. Lashis, like elephants, seem to need very little sleep.

We were up, Bum Lang and I, before dawn next day, and away along the pass-road as soon as it was light, but we had a blank morning. I never saw the jays at all in five hours, though at the highest point of the path, where we cut down over the open meadows towards Laikàm, one was calling somewhere half a mile away in a great basin of hemlock and pine below me. Just before that I had missed a black and yellow grosbeak,[1] such as we had shot on the Chawngmaw, which was sitting near us on a stump, beside the path and calling with a loud ringing whickering call which ended in a musical tinkle and seemed to come from far away. Later on the Laikàm path, we saw another—a female—also calling from a tall, dead tree-stump. I saw little else in four or five hours except a party of hoary barwings, which fluttered heavily, one behind the next, across the path in front of us, and two Rippon's yuhinas,[2] little brown crested birds with white napes, which were feeding at the top of an oak tree in the forest. They seemed common near Hpimaw, though previously we had seen none.

We broke camp about 1.30 and started down the path. Half a

[1] *Perissospiza icterroides.* [2] *Y. diademata.*

mile lower, at about 9,000 feet, the bracken rustled, and across the path, within ten yards of us, bounded an immense wild-boar and crashed away down into the forest. Bum Lang thrust the shot-gun into my hand, we left the coolies standing, and were away, grovelling and stooping and slithering down a trail which, though little more than a vague but recent disturbance of the forest floor, was clearly visible even to me. Bum Lang hardly hesitated, though now and again he would stoop and lift a fallen leaf to verify beneath it the sharp-pointed hoof-tips in the soil. Gradually the trail ceased to descend and we turned eastwards through fairly open oak forest. We neither stopped nor stayed, and both of us were soon dripping with sweat; but it was clear at last that the boar, for all his great weight and bulk, was moving faster than ourselves and, judging by the height of some of the places through which we had to crawl, with far less exertion.

After an hour we gave him up; I had no hopes of collecting him with a shot-gun but had wanted a better view of what was probably *Sus yunnanensis,* as I felt the hill pigs must be a race apart. We struck uphill towards the pass-road, and only when we ceased to follow the boar's way did I realise how dense and steep was the tangle that clothed the hill. As the bamboos stabbed us with their bayonets or shot us downhill on their hidden stair-rails, I found myself marvelling, as one may do all day on the trail of *tsaing* or bison, at the eye for country which the heavy beasts of the forest possess. Our coolies were waiting on the road where we had left them. Pigs, they told me, were not common in those hills but came up as high as the oaks grew, that is, nearly to 10,000 feet, and those they killed were usually of great size. Harold had shown me pig tracks at 8,700 feet near our Nyetmaw camp, but, apart from two sows Bum Lang had seen when he was with Arthur in the Maru hills much lower down at about 3,000 feet, this great boar was the only pig we met with.

We left for Black Rock next morning, a clear and sunny day with a wind from the north. It was the first we had had for nearly ten days, and Imaw twinkled with snow at us across the valley, no longer wrapped in clouds. I counted the peaks on the ridge, all of which must have been nearly 12,000 feet or more, and that did not include the ridge north of the Luktang *chet*. South of me, the whole range from the Fenshuiling lay bare, twenty-three or twenty-four peaks, no longer blue walls wreathed in smoke and darkness; now the comely limbs of the mountains

stood out as fold after fold of placid wooded hill.

That morning two parties of spies, whom Lup Teng had sent out before our change of plan, came in from the hills to the north; each had found it impossible, on account of snow, to cross the first ridge of the watershed to 'West's lake,' which lies in China and is somewhere near the headquarters of two streams called on the survey map the Timi Ho and the Yeti Ho. But there were salt licks at about 10,000 to 11,000 feet in the forest about nine or ten miles from Upper Hpimaw before one crossed the ridge (somewhere, I think, on the stream the map calls the Kayu Lang) and at one of these they had seen takin tracks a week old. A week! They might have been a year for all the good they were to us. It was too late now. I paid them off sadly, and with a sore heart said good-bye to Hpimaw, that abandoned outpost, for ever.

So many peaks looked down on it from all sides, almost untrodden from century to century, except by a wandering hunter or a root-collector. When would someone come again, like Maxwell West, and tell the world what secrets they held? I looked across at the snow-dazzle on the great ridge of Imaw. From the Lungpang Bum, overlooking the Ngawchang, north by east to the nameless heights we had been within a few miles of in January. it stretched for twenty-five miles and yet I could not but wonder how many weeks, not days, it would take to journey along that ridge from end to end.

One thing, however, seemed clear about the takin's haunts north of Hpimaw. The burnt belt runs up in places to nearly 8,000 feet and at 10,500 feet the snow in January and February is probably too deep for animals to live in. So that the climax forest and the rhododendron and cane below the snow-line form, as it were, a thick belt of hair between the shaven neck of the mountain and its bald and shining crown. This belt is a comparatively narrow one, possibly 2,000 to 2,500 feet in altitude, at certain seasons. But then, as my glasses carried my eyes into the sweeping folds of the great tangle and up to a mass of crags and rock faces and gullies and rifts jutting from among the trees and still far below the snowy peaks which topped the whole, I realised that comparisons were absurd. Here was a forest which defied the mathematics of acreage or altitude. It was still, for us crawling humans, infinity.

We went down the hill with the sun shining, a swallow or two

circling below the fort, the cinnamon sparrows chirping of spring in the budding alders. And ten minutes later I realised again how futile it was to expect in five or six or sixteen days to discover what any area held: just as when we were leaving the Chimili camp, so now a bird with a new note began to call sharply in some trees downhill of us among the bracken. Bum Lang almost snatched the twelve-bore from my hand and paused only to murmur '*grai galu re*' (he is a very long one). I feel sure from what he told me on his return that it was an Amherst pheasant (a *ngawchik* it seems to be called locally) but he neither flushed it nor got a shot.

And even while I waited, another sound broke out above us up the eastern hill, one we had not heard or suspected in the seven days of our stay, the chorus of the hoolock gibbons, full-voiced and mocking at us for all we had not seen.

"Huha! whér-hua, whér-hua, whér-ha!' they sang, then quicker and quicker till all sounds merged in a rollicking 'wack! wack! wack!' as if the joke had struck them. And thus, as we went down, their voices cheered our going from behind the scenes, now with the tangled unison of hounds or geese, anon mellow and swelling as a huntsman's cheer, then a flurry of falsetto trills and grace-notes and whoops and view-holloas as each gibbon tried out variants of his own, or practised scales between the choruses.

So, too, when we reached the village, there was more outcry, though not of mockery any more: little ragged boys greeted us with beaming smiles and shouts of 'Bum Lang! Bum Lang! oi Bum Lang!' and he, though to us but a very ordinary lance-naik, was so obviously a hero to his own people that I was fain to send him off with his eager attendants for an hour or two more in his own home.

He returned in due time, cheerful and flushed and reeking of whatever stirrup-cup his family had pressed upon him. We passed on down the valley, where jungle crows stalked cawing like rooks in the new-ploughed fields and an old cock Stone's pheasant, the first I had seen, flipped crowing into the bracken as if it was a March day in Norfolk.

I saw little else that day except a Himalayan nuthatch, normally a forest bird, in open alder scrub at 5,000 feet beside the road, but one new and rare bird swam into my ken, the mysterious dark-striped bunting with a yellow head which a Yawyin had brought in on January 13 at Gangfang. I saw one now, on a great rock in

the middle of a rice-stubble, which hopped down to feed with a party of little buntings. It gave me no chance to collect and I searched for it all round the hill for an hour in vain; but I had seen it well enough with glasses to be sure it was no bunting which had yet been described from Indian limits.

Near Black Rock, I had a brief but sufficient glimpse of a little forktail and knocked down a quail out of a party of three which fell in high bamboo, apparently dead, but which I could never find. These were the only quail I saw in the hills throughout the trip.

The overseer was working on the bridge over the Ngawchang. I asked him if the coolies whom Lup Teng had been sent to escort from Gangfang to Htawgaw with some of our surplus stores had passed that way.

'Yes,' he told me, 'they went through to-day.'

'And Lup Teng?'

'No, but his wife did.'

'Which wife?' I asked to gain time.

'She was his fourth,' said Mahtab Singh, 'but one is dead and still there are three.'

Lup Teng, who did not lack prescience, managed to slip through Black Rock after dark without seeing me and I did not meet him again till we reached Htawgaw. Three days previously, I had straitly charged him that he was on this occasion to leave *all* his women-folk at Hpimaw. We had never got as far as counting them but the youngest one had an uncanny knack of turning up as if by accident in camp.

A day later, when I met Frank at Gamhkawn, I found he, too, had seen her passing through. 'And the old blighter swore blind to me, ten minutes later, that she was back in Hpimaw! And, J.K., if ever you run a show like this again (which Heaven forbid!) I suggest you arrange for a non-polygamous interpreter! Others are the devil.'

It is a piece of advice which I propose to adopt.

CHAPTER XVIII

OPEN COUNTRY

SPRING had come, with heavy showers of rain, to the Ngawchang valley before we reached Htawgaw. There were water-redstarts everywhere, no longer crouched on stones in the spray, but fluttering wide-tailed over the stubble: there were willow-warblers and wrynecks and shrikes and a score of other birds, in new-fangled plumage along the path. In the lemon trees the little black-headed greenfinches were already paired, and on two wet mornings I was woken by the long rippling call of the barred owlet ringing down the valley. That is a lovely cry which, as you may sometimes see, shakes its utterer from head to heel with ecstasy. You may hear it ringing all over the plains in March and April, for this owlet is, beyond all the owls, a daylight one, and neither the barest tree top, nor the hottest sun, seems to daunt his ardour in the spring.

Here, too, I saw a large flock of mesias, surely the most gaudy bird of the hills; yet one sees them merely as green-brown shadows slipping through rank undergrowth with the cry '*cheroi-cherit*,' after which the Kachins have named them. Rarely do they allow more than a glimpse of the neat black cap, the silver cheeks, the yellow throat and scarlet wings.

We found Htawgaw still full of birds, though most of those we had seen in December were gone. No black bulbuls thronged the dead-nettle bushes any longer, and their lamps were brown, but on the seed capsules which remained rose finches and scarlet flowerpeckers were feeding. Below the rest-house the sunny bay of the hill was alive with pairs of the little yellow-tailed bulbul,[1] and I watched a score of finch-billed bulbuls, with their unmistakable white beaks, ravaging the peas in the durwan's garden.

At Htawgaw we abode for three days, and in the intervals of 'reorganising' our impedimenta and ornithology, I had a final reckoning with Lup Teng on the least of his lesser wives. She was a tousled square-faced Lashi girl in a long and rather dirty smock, but though, like the Russians in Britain in 1914, everyone seemed to have seen her, I was assured that she was never there at

[1] *Pycnonotus aurigaster.*

all. 'She is not,' was all Lup Teng would say.

'Well, she went through Black Rock and Gamhkawn, anyway,' I insisted, 'and you know it!'

'I do not know, *duwa*. She is not.'

Eventually he conceded that she was at the moment not in Htawgaw but in his young brother-in-law's house, three miles away. Girls, he hinted under pressure, would be girls, but *he* could not be held responsible.

Chang Bawm, the brother-in-law, had for some months occupied the arduous post of Frank's peon, or botanical hanger-on. He it was who climbed trees and cut off boughs for Frank, who dried his seeds and changed his blotting-paper. He it was who acted at need as a cathartic or purge for Frank's passions, effecting a refinement of them daily by pity and fear, for he could always be relied on to misunderstand Frank's Pekinese or do the wrong thing.

Alibi or no alibi, Lup Teng, after a half-hearted attempt to shift the blame on to his lesser wife or Chang Bawm, was quite ready to go. Spring had come, and perhaps his fancies were lightly turning to an even lesser wife elsewhere. In any case he had seen us through the winter and we were moving south to an area where there was no need of coolies, and his prestige was not unquestioned. He handed in his boots and groundsheet, bade us goodbye with dignity and disappeared.

For what we hoped was the very last time of all, we packed and re-sorted the loads, the skins and skulls which were to go down direct to Myitkyina with the mules, the stores and fishing tackle and hot-weather needs which were to await Arthur and Suydam in the valley at Chipwi, the stores and oddments which the rest of us did not expect to need before we got to Laukkaung in April, the stores we should need on the Panwa trip to which Arthur was now eager to be off. It was an orgy of packing and long files of men trailed for a day and a half up and down the steep path which led from the rest-house to the store shed.

By now, however, Frank was hot on the trail of what he called the *taiwania*, or coffin tree. He was determined to spend a day or two by himself in camp near Htawgaw in search of it. Apart from one small specimen, a planted tree which grew just behind the rest-house, and which looked, to my untutored eyes, like a yew with a reddish-brown trunk, Frank had never yet set eyes on a coffin tree. He was burning to make certain whether Farrer and

Euan Cox, 20 years before, had been right about its identity. They had described it as a species of juniper, though they had only seen two, one a seedling and the other the 'burnt-out stump of a giant.' This rare tree had been a moot point with botanists from Edinburgh to Maymyo for 20 years.

'I believe they're all wrong, and that it's monotypic,' Frank said to me, more than once.

But for years the grown tree in its wild state had eluded him; in the last three months, like Lup Teng's wife, it had always been two camps or more from wherever we halted. But now, near Htawgaw, there seemed a final chance to see one. We had entertained one evening a courtly Chinese pensioner—'Mr. Ma Chwin Yoo,' by his visiting cards—who kept a shop at Htawgaw. He had cashed Arthur's cheques, his wives and daughters had brought us eggs and walnuts and chickens, and he now, for a small consideration, promised to lend Frank a guide to a genuine tree near a village seven miles away on the Black Rock Road.

I, too, wanted to stay behind, to finish off arrears of labelling and notes and to chase the unknown bunting with the yellow crown which I had seen once at Hpimaw and twice at least at Htawgaw. It was a maddening bird, which would sit with temerity on the path before me whenever I had no gun or was on some urgent errand up or down the hill. But once I set out to search for it I could see nothing but the ever-changing screens of little buntings and other birds which, unidentifiable as shades, swarmed in the tiny patches of grass and scrub all round the Htawgaw hill.

So on the 6th March Frank and I remained behind when Arthur, Suydam and Harold set off with their long file of mules and coolies for the Panwa Pass. Frank later made his simple preparations and departed into space with two coolies in quest of his *taiwania*. I settled down to labelling and bird-notes, the compilation of telegrams to Rangoon and the unravelling of our accounts with the postmaster.

These last had resembled for months an exchange of notes between quasi-belligerent powers in which the situation was apt to get out of hand between the despatch of the missive and the arrival of its reply. Each week we had sent in with the mail-runner sums of money to cover our letters and telegrams, and a few days later the mail-runner would bring back not the postmaster's reply, but his reply to my last despatch but one, with

corrigenda, dating back a fortnight or three weeks, of all the arithmetical mistakes we or he had made in computing bygone telegrams and parcels.

It was a good game played slowly, and as neither side kept copies of what it had said, the situation, as in Europe, had been steadily deteriorating for some time. By now the postmaster, realising that the expedition was nearing its close, was claiming the jack-pot and I, having no official status any more, realised that my only redress was the poor one of telling the postmaster, unofficially but exactly, what I thought of him, a consolation denied to us in post-offices at home.

What with the bunting and the postmaster, I had forgotten all about Arthur's party, but just before dusk a grinning coolie dropped over the edge of the hill and presented me with a note marked 'Urgent,' from Arthur himself.

'*Lu sha n nga ai lo-o-o*' (They have no food at all), he said, and went out to savour the joke with Lazum Naw, in the cookhouse. For somehow the final 'reorganisation' of the store-boxes had been such that the stores intended for the Panwa trip were all labelled 'Myitkyina,' and up in the store-shed, while Arthur's party, at Luksang, ten miles away, were left to support life on a box containing rope and spare mosquito-coils and another of preserved mammal skulls.

I hastily summoned three coolies from the nearest shebeen and packed them off, reeking of good cheer, into the night, to the relief of Luksang, bidding them hasten.

I looked again for the bunting next morning in vain, and then double-marched with four coolies to overtake Arthur's party at Hparè. It was a dull, hot tramp, through low, barren hills covered with thatching grass and bracken and pine, and I saw no birds except a tree creeper, which I missed.

But gradually, after we left Luksang, the valley opened out and the vegetation seemed to change. The hills eased off, and were no longer slashed and precipitous, but rounded, gentle slopes, topped far back with the final dark line of the rain forest. Here, for almost the first time since we had left Waingmaw, the jungle was no longer an overpowering malignant presence; we tramped the last two miles through high-terraced, stone-walled fields of rice and maize stubble falling gently to the river, and past a string of thriving hamlets studded with cherry-trees in flower. Here was age-old cultivation and prosperity and peace.

Beyond the thatched rest-house on its knoll, the road ran down over a well-built bridge of stone, then up amid reddening poplar-scrub towards the woods which hid the Hparè Pass.

The others were at tea when I arrived; the Hparè villagers had brought in a magnificent cock Lady Amherst pheasant, and Harold was certain that he had seen a wolf. First Bum Lang and Zi Kwi, with their unerring field-glass vision, had seen it across the valley on their way up, and later, when Harold was putting out his traps, it had come out of a damp hollow and cantered across him.

'I ought to have had a crack at him, too,' said Harold mournfully, 'but I was taken by surprise and thought for a moment he was a dog.'

'I wish you had,' I said, 'I don't believe anyone, except the author of the Burma Railways' Timetable, is certain whether wolves occur in Burma. I remember there was a lot of hu-ha in 1920, when I first came out about a skin which Colonel Evans had obtained in the Shan States, I believe, and West left some notes about one killed by a sepoy at Hpimaw, but like most of our natural history records of the last fifty years, those about wolves are wrapped in mystery.'

Yet the local Lashis, when we questioned them that night, seemed certain that wolves came over from Yunnan into the Panwa area at times and one, they said, in the previous year had actually killed or mauled a buffalo near Hparè. Even the Yunnan records, as Harold's book showed, were few and far between, and in the western part of the province almost non-existent. But it was proof, not evidence, that we wanted, and the lost chance came no more.

We had a long, hot march next day of nearly 18 miles to Zuklang, first through the reddening poplar and sallow scrub, then south across a stream, then up through a wilderness of barbed-wire brambles and fallen logs, which hid the fields of yester-year. At about 7,000 feet we found ourselves in cane, and then came three miles of magnificent rhododendron and oak forest, unlike any I had encountered before; the soil underfoot was sand and gravel, the side streams wound away, at easy gradients, cloaked in fern, and landslides met us at every turn of the road. We emerged at last amid great bare downs dotted with magnolias and the yellow-white patches of sand which each marked some bygone earthquake. For in these hills seemed to be the centre of

the earthquake zone; sometimes there were three shocks or so a minute, more often twenty or thirty through the day, as if subterranean trains were crossing under the hill. It was an empty land which not even the birds seemed to dwell in, and we walked at our ease over open, stony slopes speckled with the tall mauve primulas.

Zuklang was a desolate cluster of thatched huts, with another beyond the stream: the populace seemed to have gone on a journey and had left it to us and the household fowls.

There was heavy rain in the night, but we had a short ten-mile march to Changyin-hku. The country opened out more and more, with curious bare, short-grassed hills curving up abruptly from the marshy flats. Here, for the first time since we had left the Irrawaddy, could we walk at our ease on the flat for a mile or more. Here were ploughed open fields, no longer with six-foot terraces to keep them from sliding down the hill. Here were wide-flung groves of alder trees and oak forest, with bracken beneath them, and, as if to take us home, there were larks singing and chasing each other on the old potato-fields, and every now and then came the raucous 'kok-kok' and muffled drumming of a pheasant. For me it might have been March in Hampshire, but Hampshire was still five weeks away.

We pitched our tents beside the wicker rest-house on its round, bare knoll, and I walked up towards the pass through open oak and alder forest; above it and around, every treeless patch on the hillside was aflame with flowering *rhododendron delavayi*.

That forest, as well as the hill above it, was alive with birds of every kind throughout our stay. The oaks, the alders, the bare, burnt ground beneath, the scarlet bushes flaming their invitation, had drawn them all for miles. I shot both crossbills and siskins feeding on the alder cones, minivets flitted in pairs from tree to tree, and there were woodpeckers of three or four different species, tree-creepers, tits and nuthatches in the oak-tops. To the nectar of the rhododendrons came jungle-crows, and red-billed tree-pies and barbets, rose-finches, including the rare dark finch,[1] almost black with a purple-pink eyestripe, cinnamon sparrows, pied woodpeckers of three kinds, laughing-thrushes, yuhinas, and above them all, the little scarlet Dabry's sunbird, surely designed by God on purpose to dance and dart all day long in the sunshine from flower to crimson flower. We saw no hen

[1] *Carduelis nipalensis.*

Mule with coffin planks at Gangfang

Lashi hunters with serow head at Bawahku (p.157)

Hpaonan La (left) and Lup Teng near the Hpimaw pass

Zi Kwi

sunbirds, and the males, for all their gorgeous colouring, still lacked their long metallic tails of spring.

Most of the pheasants had eluded us throughout the trip, but here, for the first and last time, we could watch daily the little-known Stone's pheasant, the only true *phasianus* which occurs in Burma. They looked very much like our English birds, except for the cock bird's darker belly and grey-green rump, and unlike them they would squat in the nearest cover when disturbed and were not too hard to flush. I tried a drive one afternoon in the oak forest, but having posted the guns, found myself and the beaters cut off from them by three hundred yards of cane and thorn, which it would have taken us half a day to cut through. After ten minutes swearing I gave it up and started round to explain matters to the indignant guns, and at that instant an old cock rose at my feet, gave me the merest snap-shot between tree trunks, and cost me ten more minutes hacking, and a skinful of thorns, before he was retrieved. Not for the first time did I sigh for a spaniel.

That week was perhaps as prolific in new birds as any we spent: woodpeckers of five species, including the beautiful rufous-bellied woodpecker[1] and a green woodpecker with a loud ringing call like a greenshank, the rare meadow bunting,[2] which we shot both under the oaks and in the open meadows which flanked the pass, a water-pipit, larks, wrens, tree-creepers, a dusky thrush, all swelled the list of those we had not collected before. I spent hours on three successive days chasing the small dark hedge-sparrows which I had seen at Bawahku. Shy as ghosts, they would flit out of the rocks and bracken and down into the woodland before one could shoot. Here, too, besides the larks, three birds, that in most of Burma are only winter migrants, were paired and apparently about to nest, white wagtails by the rocky stream, stonechats on the pass-meadows and in the coarse bog-grass and near the pass, woodcock. I flushed three or four here, and shot two feeding at eleven o'clock in the forenoon on an open trickle of stream where there was no shade or cover of any kind. The hen of this pair had eggs in her ovary the size of beads. For years I had felt certain that the scores of woodcock which wintered in the foothills and plains of Myitkyina were bred not far away, but someone has yet to discover a nest in Burma.

The Chinese, in the two or three scattered hamlets near

[1] *Hypopicus hyperythrus.* [2] *Emberiza cia.*

Changyinhku, kept themselves to themselves, though their children, 'kind of colourful little squirts,' as Harold called them, drifted over to our camp to be photographed and to collect tins. I met one or two herdsmen with sheep or cattle on the open meadows by the pass, and one day an old blind woman with a goitre, who was being led by a puppy on a string through the oak forest, but the residents kept themselves to themselves. Perhaps they knew how, years before, I had opposed the Chinese attempts to form a settlement here: for China still was sure that the Panwa area, like the Triangle, belonged to her. There had even been an attempt to start a cotton mill at Changyinhku to gin cotton which would pay no duty to the Chinese customs.

But they had chosen one of the likeliest wildernesses in all Burma to colonise. The Panwa Pass is, as it were, the only bow-window on the frontier which opens on Yunnan; the rest are attic casements, muffled in creepers, approached up steep stairs, from which the view is poor. But from here we could walk easily up over open flower-decked meadows patched with stones, through pine and rhododendron to sit, amid the tinkle of cow-bells, on the open down and look at the white road winding through leagues of China, blue and dim, to the Shweli-Salween divide, ribbed and roofed with snow. For the moment we seemed to have left the savagery and the starkness of this frontier behind us. But once, just before we left, I climbed the hill above Changyinhku, and three miles in to the north is a mass of gullies and crags masked in jungle which may yet, I think, preserve their secrets for another thousand years.

CHAPTER XIX

CAMP OF LOST CHANCES

But secrets hidden are all forbidden
Till God means men to know. . . .
We might be the men God meant to know.

ARTHUR and Suydam, who had to be, the one in Paris, the other in London by given dates, departed down the valley to Chipwi on March 12th, and we others were left with a bare month before us to 'clean up' and bring our train of mules and servants, and our collections, in to Myitkyina. The weather held for all our stay in Changyinhku, but it broke almost as soon as we turned our backs on the scarlet-flowered hillsides, and set our faces northwards.

We camped for four nights on the *chet* between Zuklang and Hparè, at 8,000 feet in the oak and rhododendron forest, which was, at first glance, so different from all we had come through and yet was so much the same, as silent and as empty. It was a good camp-site beside a track which few men seemed to use, but the rainstorms which kept boiling up day after day, out of the great cauldron of hills which lay between us and the Pyepat ridge, made it the least enjoyable camp of all.

The skinners, skinning unceasingly in the gloom of their sodden tent, and the servants, under leaky groundsheets and roofs of boughs, suffered most of all, but the Chinese muleteers seemed almost to enjoy the storms, as heedless of them as ducks or their own mules. They sent the mules back down the hill, in the care of the two youngest boys, and the man with the wide, almost prehistoric, face whose teeth stuck out like a shelf from his lips, and then, each under a neat bivouac of mule-saddles and load-covers, they forgot everything in an orgy of idleness. Whenever I went out of camp, the head muleteer was lying on his bed reciting to himself in his unchanging sing-song from the only book he possessed, of which he read a page a day.

It was a wet and not a happy camp. Harold was frankly anxious lest he should find himself, a month or more hence, in

Kashmir, yoked to a 'problem son.' Frank, the insatiable, mourned aloud for the great hills far to the north, which had been so near to us a month before, and were now closed to him till he knew not when. 'This year, next year, sometime, never,' that was always the rune that haunted him, for every new trip produced some new great range which he longed to explore and might not see again for years. He seemed to be wavering now between the hills north of the Sajyang, to which we had been so near, and some cloud-folded summit which no one seemed to have 'done' in north-eastern Assam.

'I wish I could find a "problem son" with £1,000 or so, and a taste for the wilds this summer,' he mourned to me.

I had, like Frank, that sense of fleeting time, that inescapable regret which one may feel in England so often in mid-July, when the quintessence of another high summer is gone, and you feel you have once more failed to capture its bloom and fragrance. Day after day I would creep up into the silent forest, sometimes alone, sometimes with Bum Lang, the Lashi signaller, and sit for hours under a tree, hoping that if I was still enough or quiet enough, something would emerge to reward me. But, with rare exceptions, that forest, like the others, kept its secrets to itself. The great trees hung motionless in the rain or beneath the scudding clouds, and only the long rumbling tremors of earthquakes beneath me disturbed the stillness. Once I heard an old cock pheasant call far away; twice a jay swung out of the misty tree tops far above me and vanished out of shot; once a great owl, invisible as ever, called 'hu-hu' at dusk from down the hill. And close by camp there was always a stir where yuhinas and little flowerpeckers mewed and darted in and out of the rhododendrons round the tents.

'That's *gymnogynum*,' said Frank, patting the nearest one fondly and, indeed, it was a lovely female thing, that tree, with a smooth polished stem like a ripe plum.

But one new bird, the rare chestnut-headed wren,[1] we met for the first time, and if our success in seeing it was typical of all the shy denizens of that forest, then many of them must have blushed unseen. There were wrens of some kind everywhere, in the tangles of ferns and rocks and fallen trees beside the mule path and in the wet green undergrowth which fringed the winding streams. All that one heard or saw was a shrill bat-like squeak,

[1] *Tesia castaneocoronata.*

which to me was normally inaudible, and then the faintest disturbance of the boskage twenty yards away. Now and again a wren would offer a momentary chance at a few yards range, then after ten minutes of patient watching and attempts to 'squeak him up,' as Harold termed it, we would find the quarry had lost interest in us and gone elsewhere. Once, during such a wait, a wren emerged a foot from my face out of a tangle of logs. The surprise was mutual, but I had an unforgettable glimpse of its lovely chestnut head and sulphur-yellow throat before it vanished. Harold managed to collect one, and I missed another twice or thrice, but it fell to Frank with his uncanny luck and patience, to show us what was also there. He sauntered out one morning close to camp and ten minutes later came in with one of the rarest birds of the Indian Empire—one of the long-tailed wrens,[1] unknown before in Burma, and certainly one of the least observed of all hill-birds. The next morning Bum Lang and I shot a pair in a tangle of bushes on the mule path, one of which gave me a 'close up' as it churred and sang a few feet away. How many other species of wrens there were there I do not know, but in the vile weather, shy troglodytes that they were, they spent most of their time, unattainably, in their holes and log caverns behind the dripping fern.

So on March 17, we packed up and squattered down the path, the soaked mules biting at each other and jostling and sliding with ears laid back, their *laobans* dry under their great umbrella hats, their trousers rolled up to their massive thighs, each with a ragged-edged load-cover worn cloak-like over him till they resembled the 'hula-hula' girls of Hawaii.

The venomous tangle of brambles, strong as barbs of iron, masking an old *taungya* of fallen trees a mile and a half down the path, was full of shy finches. Shooting them, as one balanced precariously on a log, was one thing, and retrieving them quite another. Here I saw close to me, not only the rare black finch,[2] but the gold-capped Himalayan rosefinch[3] and a flock of bullfinches, which gave me a chance from a great dead tree. The rest were dark shadows swinging in and out of the brambles. At last in despair, I took a long high chance with the twelve bore and dropped one stone-dead round a corner of the hill, fifty yards away.

[1] *Spelaeornis soulei.* [2] *Pyrrhoplectes epauletta.*
[3] *Propyrrhula subhimachala.*

'We shall not meet it, I think,' said Bum Lang, resignedly, after ten minutes plunging and groping in the bushes, and lo! even as he said the words, there lay the finch between my boots on the one bare morsel of ground within fifty yards. It was the dark Nepal rose-finch, which I had met but once before.

We camped two nights at Hparè. For Harold the trip was finished, for over him hung the shadow of Kashmir, but Frank and I were eager to take one last dip in the giant bran-tub of the hills. So we left Harold with three long trap-lines out in the forest, and half the village damming the backwaters of the Hparè streams with aconite for a rare watershrew which Harold said was a '*Nectogale*.' It was a soft white-bellied beastie, with silver hairs showing through the black velvet of its coat, and it inhabited burrows below the water line. At one rupee per shrew, the villagers thought the pastime 'money for jam,' and devoted themselves to it with ardour.

Frank and I trudged once more up the pass-road on a day of scudding cloud and sun, while hoolocks sang to us on our way from hill to hill, first through the crimson poplar scrub which clothed all the hillside that had once been ploughed, then through the deepening forest to a camp on an old stubble a mile short of Hparè Pass. We had turned north-east away from the Panwa road, and the oak woods closed in steeply about us, with green aisles of cane below the trees, cool and quiet and emptily restful as a cathedral. Birds on the way were few, though I shot two of the rare Yunnan fulvettas, which I watched for some time creeping about like wrens in bramble clumps, and was chidden by a couple of yellow-billed pies on the forest edge.

That was a good camp, the last Frank and I were to do before the world fell in, though we—*fortunati nimium*—did not know it at the time. A great log shut our tents off from the skinners and the sparse traffic of the pass-road, and north of us the hill towered up to a ridge as wide as a shelf at 10,000 feet, which opened at its eastward end into bare meadows and clumps of cane and dwarf rhododendron; below us the hill plunged steeply into a stream, beyond which were untraversable crags masked in trees.

The Pass itself is just another of the attic casements of the frontier, which open suddenly on to Yunnan between the hills. You come up to it by a steep and stony path, and can see nothing but forest all round till suddenly the slope eases off for twenty

yards, and you find yourself in China and going down. The view is poor, but south of it a path zig-zags up for a mile to the boundary pillar, and from there you are on the roof of Burma once again. I crept up to it on the first evening through oak and hemlock and pine and rhododendron and, as I rounded the last corner, a blood pheasant which had been sunning himself, or perhaps enjoying the view, in the last rays of the evening sun, stepped without concern over into China, and down a precipice, off what was clearly his favourite strolling ground. Three or four times later I tried for him in vain, but on the last day, as I came round the corner with eyes on the ground, a jay, the bird I most desired, launched himself out into the great abyss of forest and flapped away till I lost him, a dark dot still wavering above the oaks of the northern hill.

Those were but two of the chances which I lost because I was not 'quick enough on the draw,' and did not like to risk losing a bird falling far down the hill. But all that undisturbed region was almost as empty as Imaw Bum had been. Frank nightly trapped the runs which honeycombed the bank above the path, in vain; I spent hours on Nauk Bum's crest, glassing the meadows below, and saw nothing but a swift feeding into the great dim void of China. The shelf-like ridge which crowned the hill for a mile or more, and was, so Bum Lang assured me, a path used by Chinese dacoits—we found their old bivouacs on the side of the hill far away from water and the mule track—was silent, without the twitter of a bird, from end to end. But once, as I rested smoking against a rhododendron tree before commencing the long scramble down to camp, a mouse-hare, the first I had seen alive, hopped almost up to my elbow and vanished like a fairy before I could turn. Even at 9,000 feet there were sambhur tracks and great shed horns, though we only saw one stag, which picked its way at breakfast time down into some fastness of the precipice opposite camp. But nowhere, amid the myriad dim voices of the forest at dawn, had I seen anything which sounded like a tragopan.

This was probably my fault. Bum Lang, sent out at dawn one morning to try to collect a cat which was mewing somewhere down the hill, came back with a magnificent cock tragopan full-wattled, pale-blue of horn, which, he said, was 'parading' round a log with low grunting sounds. But this was the only one even he admitted to have seen. I would sit for an hour at times,

as still as any stone, and see no living thing except a bamboo tick which would appear suddenly clamped to my knuckles. Once on the stream which ran past our camp, I found a blue primula among the common blue-mauve ones. For the first time since I had known him, Frank displayed a flicker of interest; usually he was as withering about my 'dam-roots' as Bat, Martin Ross's immortal gardener, and I was always expecting Frank to say: 'Sha! that's one of the Heth family! The hills is rotten with it!'

But this time he asked eagerly, 'Was this the only one?'

'The only one,' I said, swelling with pride: 'I tried up and down stream for some way.'

'Um . . . that,' said Frank musingly, 'is the one What's-his-name mentioned in his diary. I thought he must have made a mistake, but he can't have done.'

My triumph over this, my one ewe-flower, was a short-lived one. Frank disappeared after tea and was back by dusk with a gathering of them as big as my head. But I consoled myself that even if 'the hills was rotten with them' they were, at all events, something that he had not found before.

Life, like the drama, has a knack of reserving its surprises. In our youth it was always on the day we went back to school that the old cock pheasant strolled out on to the lawn in the middle of luncheon, or that the marshes seemed suddenly full of nesting snipe or redshank, or, bitterest of all, that the shoals were a lather of roaring foam with a north-east gale bringing in before it the embattled widgeon or teal which we had pined for all the holidays.

So it is apt to be with those other, maturer aims of ours: the strokes or cunning which we yearn for at tennis or polo so often come when we have no longer the wind to use them and cannot ride under fifteen stone. The success or position or honours for which we crave may land us at last full in the public eye when we are so bald or grey or corpulent that we cannot hope to attract it.

So it was now when our time in the hills seemed to rush to its close and that mid-summer sense of frustration, of irrecoverable loss, deepened in me every time that I climbed to the pass and looked out over the great sea of tree tops or up to the yellow-dun heights where there was only grass and bamboo. We were almost at the end of it. We had collected a thousand mammals and thirteen hundred birds. Frank and I had each slogged at least a thousand miles up hill and down. But what had we seen? Had

we had more than a glimpse here and there, gone with the flash of a film, of what was going on in those hills? Could Harold describe the way of life of a single one among all his pinned-out specimens? My own mind kept coming back again and again to the pheasants, so large, so lovely, so immaculate in their spring finery, but to me as invisible as rumour. I knew that my previous random collection of pheasants, made usually through natives in four years in Myitkyina during my hurried official tours, had thrown 'a good deal of light' on their forms and plumage changes. But now when I had come out with little to do for five months but to prowl round and collect them, I had hardly seen, much less slain, a pheasant, with the exception of a few Stone's pheasants at Changyinhku. I knew no more of their existence than the Greeks did of faun or dryad. The Burmese jungle is apt to increase any sense of incompetence or frustration you may feel, for in it, if you disturb or miss a wild thing, it is gone for ever. You may watch a bird two hundred feet away in a tree which it would cost an hour to hack your way under; if you wish to speak to someone, it may well take you four or forty days before you can be sure of doing so. And whatever you see on the road you know, for certain, that the next time you pass that way will be in a fortnight or next year or never.

What, I kept asking myself, had we seen of Michie's deer or takin or bear or even the flying squirrels the villagers kept bringing in? Not all our piety or wit had vouchsafed us a glimpse of any of them. Here was a jungle that ought to be alive with snakes, and the only one I had seen in the last three months was the corpse of a fierce-looking green one which I had bought off a Lashi hurrying over the pass to a fair two days' journey further on. Harold had spent hours at Changyinkhu with trowel and mole traps, and the first Burmese mole he had set eyes on had been brought in off the crest of the same pass by a casual villager that morning, who was astounded when we gave him eight annas for it.

Yes, there was no getting away from it, we had seen so little and there was no knowing when someone would come again to supplement what little we had seen. And why, in this quiet, virgin forest, was there so little? Were we so noisy, so crude, so impatient? Or was the game really so shy or nocturnal, or was there, in reality, nothing there at all?

I tramped on the afternoon of our last day but one up the stony path to the pass for the twentieth time, and was wondering

what were the chances against my meeting any given bird or beast. The males, at any rate, had no fixed abode; they might be almost anywhere at almost any time of day. There could not possibly be more than one to every three or four acres of forest, and in a square mile the mathematical odds seemed fantastic.

I was thinking all this, and Bum Lang was dreaming along a dozen yards behind me with my gun when suddenly not one, but two cock tragopans, shimmering in red and gold, strolled quietly across the path twenty yards in front of me. They were not hurrying or feeding, and did not seem to have seen me. There was none of the sudden crouching scurry, back humped, head low, tail pressed to the ground, which in a hunting country so often causes the running cock pheasant to be mistaken for a fox. They were simply two gorgeous male beings strolling in the sunshine after luncheon. Perhaps they had been eating grit off the road, the grit which is so often the whole content of the gizzards of birds in those hills.

I should like to be able to record how I put down my gun and watched them, with glasses, feeding or displaying or doing something which no one had previously observed. But the truth is so often sheer anti-climax. I turned and beckoned frantically to Bum Lang for the gun, and when I turned round again two seconds later the tragopans had disappeared. I dashed up the hill and right and left into every fern-clump, little enough, which I could see, but there was not a sound or a movement. Bum Lang, who had seen them too, quartered like a setter far up the slope in vain.

Perhaps that was the way of old with the goat-god when he vouchsafed himself for a moment to someone in Arcady. . . .

Frank was having tea when I got in three hours later, or rather his tea stewed forgotten, while he, with a lens jutting from his eye, was peering into the entrails of some plant in the welter of green stuff with which he contrived to cover every table he sat at.

'Well,' he murmured without looking up, 'what sort of an afternoon did you have?' To Frank, so old, so wise, so incomparably far-travelled, there were, as I knew by now, no bad days, though some of them seemed to him less prolific than others.

'Rotten,' I replied, heavy with the shame of that afternoon, 'I at last met two magnificent cock tragopans walking across the pass-road when Bum Lang had my gun, and they simply melted away before I could do anything. And half an hour later about a

thousand feet up the hill north of the pass, I'm blowed if I didn't meet a Michie's deer face to face and, as far as I can make out, missed him clean with S.G.'

That, for me, had been the most searing moment of the whole trip, when suddenly fifteen yards away and slightly up hill of me I had seen 'the crux of the expedition,' as Arthur had called it, peering at me from behind a tiny bush. I had had time, while we both stared, not only to change the cartridges in my gun from No. 6 but to note the calm, dark, quizzical calf-like face, and the grizzled fringe of the wide ears; he had seemed so sure of himself, so unafraid, so interested in me. And then a sitting shot, a black form with a huge white flag bounding away uphill for a few yards and suddenly turning down again past me and out of my sight for ever. And then . . . the fruitless aching search for a track or a drop of blood. Unbelievable as it seemed to Bum Lang or myself at the time, I think I must have missed him clean; now I most sincerely hope I did so.

'Well, it might have been worse,' said Frank, when my sorry tale was done. 'You might have wounded him. And do they really look black at this time of year?'

'Absolutely, except for an enormous white scut! I got a good view of him after I fired.'

'And you call that a rotten afternoon!' said Frank gently. 'I wonder how many Europeans have seen those two creatures at close quarters in a life time?'

I felt better. I had been grumbling to myself as I scrambled down the hill at having bungled two of my ambitions so badly. What odds, I now began to wonder, would a bookmaker have given me against bringing off that double in one hour of the same afternoon or even of having the chance to do so?

Yes, they were wiser in Arcady. If Pan or a brace of dryads appeared, there were no chiels among them taking field-notes for museums, and no one fumbled feverishly for a gun or a camera, or prayed for them to emerge into shot or focus from the shadows of the oak forest. The lucky ones went back quietly and said what they had seen, and perhaps in those days people believed them.

* * *

So at last, on March 29th, we broke camp for the last time and turned down hill. I hated leaving, for though we had collected new birds here, as elsewhere, and I had seen, at long last, a mouse-

hare and a Michie's deer, we seemed to be leaving so many problems behind us unanswered. There was a tree-pipit singing on the steep open slope above camp, and on the fringe of it the small dark accentors, which I had seen at Changyinhku, still defied me. New birds, particularly fly-catchers, kept arriving every day, and we had shot the hen of a pair of Ward's trogons, which was clearly about to nest.

What for three days I had imagined to be a pheasant with a low, elusive whistle, in the fern, had turned out to be a collared owlet,[1] sunning herself in full view on a tree above the path. This was probably the same as the bird we had heard at Chimili, crying forlornly in the frozen dawn, but that we never proved.

There were tiny bats which flew over the smoke of our camp fire at night which had resisted all my efforts at collection, and the jay was still but a harsh voice in the forest, chiding me daily from some invisible vantage-point.

So, sadly, past the singing hoolocks we came back to Hparè, where Harold was jubilant. He had collected twelve of the rare *Nectogale* and other things besides, and he had flushed, and missed, an Amherst pheasant in dense forest a mile from camp.

'Time we were home,' he said, 'I've cleaned up here.' But I was miserable. I had left so many queries unanswered, and each day seemed to add more to the list. All we seemed to have done was to take a fortuitous cross-section of what those hills contained.

We double-marched in next day from Hparè to Htawgaw, and there, at last, I contrived to shoot two of the elusive yellow-crowned buntings,[2] which had been brought in to us at Gangfang, and which I had seen at Htawgaw, at Hpimaw and Zuklang. The whole hillside was, as usual, alive with little buntings, but this time they threw out their changing screens in vain.

[1] *Glaucidium brodiei.* [2] *Emberiza elegans.*

CHAPTER XX

BACK TO NORMAL

It is, indeed, one of the many paradoxes of our civilisation that those goods which mankind has previously enjoyed so abundantly that men took them for granted, not realising that they were goods—quiet and solitude and the opportunity to sit undisturbed in the sun—are to-day purchasable only at a very high figure.

THE TESTAMENT OF JOAD.

APRIL 2nd was a fine day, and I started away from Pyèpat rest-house down towards the bridge in the valley shortly after seven. It was a day of ease for the mules, and the head muleteer was lying on his bed beside the road, as I passed, with the cook-farrier sitting astride of his legs and rolling his stomach with a heavy rolling-pin of bamboo. They smiled at me, without self-consciousness.

'Are you ill?' I asked in Chinghpaw.

'Belly-pain, that's all,' the head muleteer replied, politely, in Burmese.

Both clearly enjoyed the leisurely operation of the cure. Even so have I seen old women on their way to the bazaar in Upper Burma, stretched beside the road while their daughters massaged their aged spines by walking up and down them with a slow kneading movement of the toes.

Later, when I was some way down the path, three mules came swinging round a corner, followed by a riding pony with a huge blue wadded quilt on its back. Behind it came its owner, a young Chinaman in a topee with a green oil-silk cover, a black-quilted coat and wide-mouthed trousers, from which his shanks projected lean as pipe-stems. He had an immense hairy mole on his cheek, and eyed me with cold, weary, disdainful eyes; he walked as if in a dream, possibly of opium, and lashed himself as he walked with a seven-thonged pony whip. As master of the caravan, he carried only a white china thermos-flask in a sling. His was the sort of figure to attain which women in the west endure great privations, willowy, haunch-less, bust-less, slim-waisted,

curving slightly backwards from the hips, as if both his spine and intestines had been removed.

His body-servant came behind him armed to the teeth. He carried a sword slung over each shoulder, a cross-bow and two umbrellas, one with a silver handle, the other black with its red shop label still in place. His great bamboo hat was slung across his back like a shield. He was refreshing himself, as he walked, with what looked like, but probably was not, dirty water out of a graduated medicine bottle.

Behind the pair of them came a real hill-man, a Lashi, whose immense knotted calves were worth seven of his master's. His sword and his own personal baggage, about the size of a lady's muff, surmounted a great basket of cooking utensils and bottles. He was a sturdy, iron-hard ruffian, who smiled jovially at me as he went by: in the West I think he would have winked as well. For he looked, one way and another, as if he could have killed and eaten his master without compunction before breakfast, but doubtless he and the body-servant found it more lucrative to keep him 'alive and writing cheques.'

As this strange trio passed round the corner and out of my life for ever, the unseen hoolocks, who had been momentarily silent, burst into a whooping uproar of applause; possibly they, too, were looking forward to the time when they would have body-servants and a quilted pony to ride on through the hills.

I had a fine day, and nothing at all to do but to collect birds, but, as so often on such occasions, I did not make the most of my chances. The great Pyèpat ridge rises and falls almost vertically on both sides of the path, and to shoot a bird on a tree twenty yards away meant always a scramble of a hundred feet down to a spot it was impossible to mark. Birds sitting twenty yards up hill were almost out of sight behind the fringe of the huge tree-ferns, so that a stalk, or rather a scramble off the path, was usually fruitless from the noise one made.

There were that day hundreds of black bulbuls, mewing and calling and flighting along the ridge in companies, half at least being white-headed birds, the rest coal-black or dark slaty-grey. It was the first time I had been certain that all three forms were to be found in the same party. Some of the black and grey birds were clearly paired, but I saw no white-headed pairs, nor could I ever be sure of a pair of which the male was a white-headed bird. The noise they made in the trees recalled a 'murmuration' of

starlings in reed-beds at home. I spent much of the day attempting to stalk units of the vast gathering, but was singularly unsuccessful, apart from two high rocketting chances killed with No. 8 and two birds which Harold and Chang Bawm brought in. But it was clear that this one part of the ridge was for the time being the bulbuls' home, where they roosted and fed, flighting from one *aralia* tree to another; nor yet were they about to breed.

Our dust-shot cartridges were limited, and I missed several birds through over-anxiety, a rose-finch, the shadow of a wren, a great spider-hunter,[1] and a largish foxy-red woodpecker with the harsh chattering note of a squirrel, which I saw for an instant crouching on a branch; it was, I feel sure, *Blythipicus pyrrhotis,* of which Harold had shot a specimen the day before. I also watched two maroon orioles singing, with puffed-out throat feathers, on high forest-trees over the ravine; they looked almost black except for the maroon-red tails.

Here, I thought, was I trying to shoot in cold blood what are not only *the* great travellers of the world, but also its greatest colonists. For birds can go almost anywhere in the world without fuss or baggage or preparation, living quietly and humbly on the country, asking nothing of it but what no one else desires, berries or seeds, worms or flies, or merely the quartz grit on the road. They can and do colonise, without molestation, our houses and barns and church towers, and all the most waste and inhospitable places of the earth, desert and mountain, torrent and crag and mosquito-ridden marsh; they can enrich and beautify them all, even those with which man, for all his skill and talent, can do nothing at all. They do not change the face of nature when they 'take' a place; they merely adorn it.

And here were we collecting them to try and throw some light on the problems of their moults and plumage and tribal variants, breeding-areas and distribution which, for all we knew, might have been proved somewhere years before; for no naturalist, in field or museum, has sufficient knowledge of all the facts and all the museum material in the world to know all that is known elsewhere. Some of the best collectors, like George Forrest, left few, if any, notes of what they guessed or knew, some of the most expert museum workers have never seen alive the birds on which they may be working. Between them is a great gulf fixed.

And ever as I walked, or sat quietly watching with glasses, new

[1] *Arachnothera magna.*

birds appeared out of that cauldron of forest which surrounded me: striated bulbuls, large and striped and green, a party of ruddy-brown striated laughing-thrushes, or a company of the little dusky-green tit babblers, flinging themselves headlong across the path, and with them the tiny Blyth's suthora.

Just before dusk, too, another bird which I had never yet seen, appeared; a pair of ashy woodpigeons[1] came and sat crouching in a dream, as pigeons do, on the top boughs of a dead tree in front of the rest-house, dark brown-purple birds with grey heads and yellow-white eyes and speckles on the wing coverts.

We shot the male and his stomach held nothing but quartz-grit, about forty pieces, some as big as a pea.

We 'batted' that night against a tiny window of sky at a corner of the winding path, and I managed to collect one small slow-flying bat with the .410, and saw another one, so big that Harold mistook it for an owl.

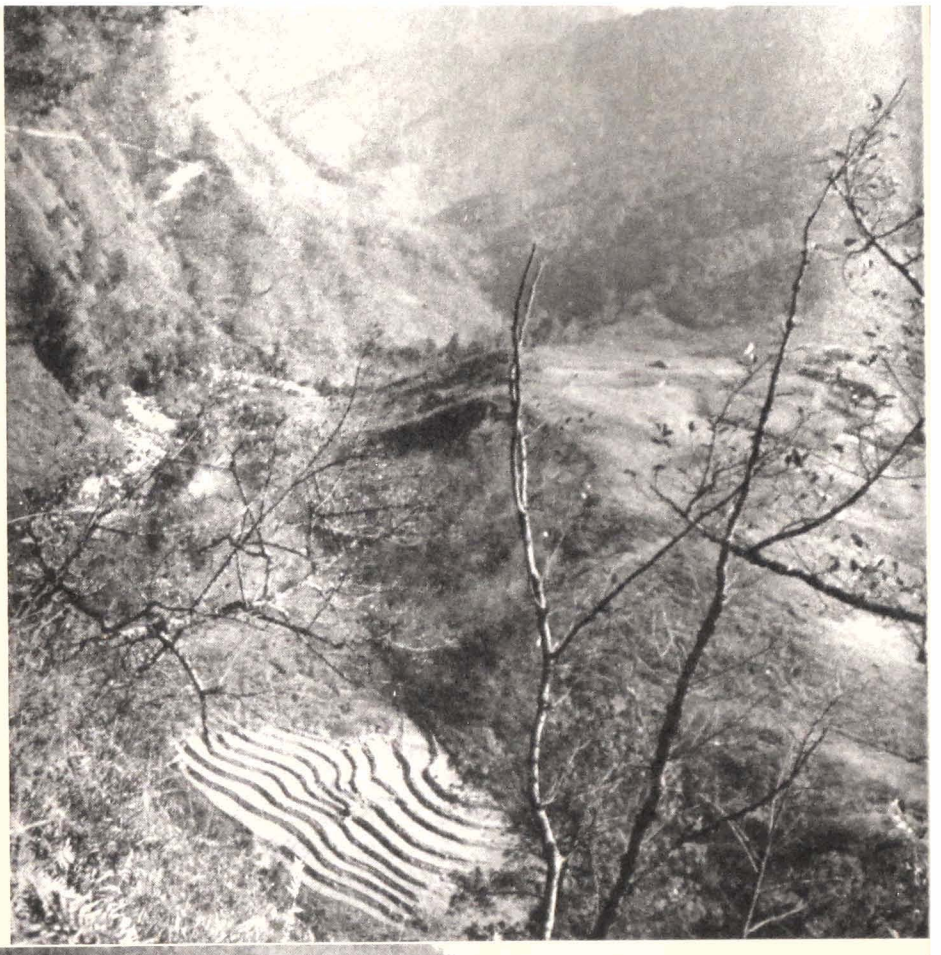
The immense depths of the valley were silent under the glory of a full moon, when we came in, except for the torrent muted to a low rumble of sound and the voices of two scops owls which answered each other 'who whó' and 'who whó' in a lower key (like a child's whistle), minute by minute throughout the night.

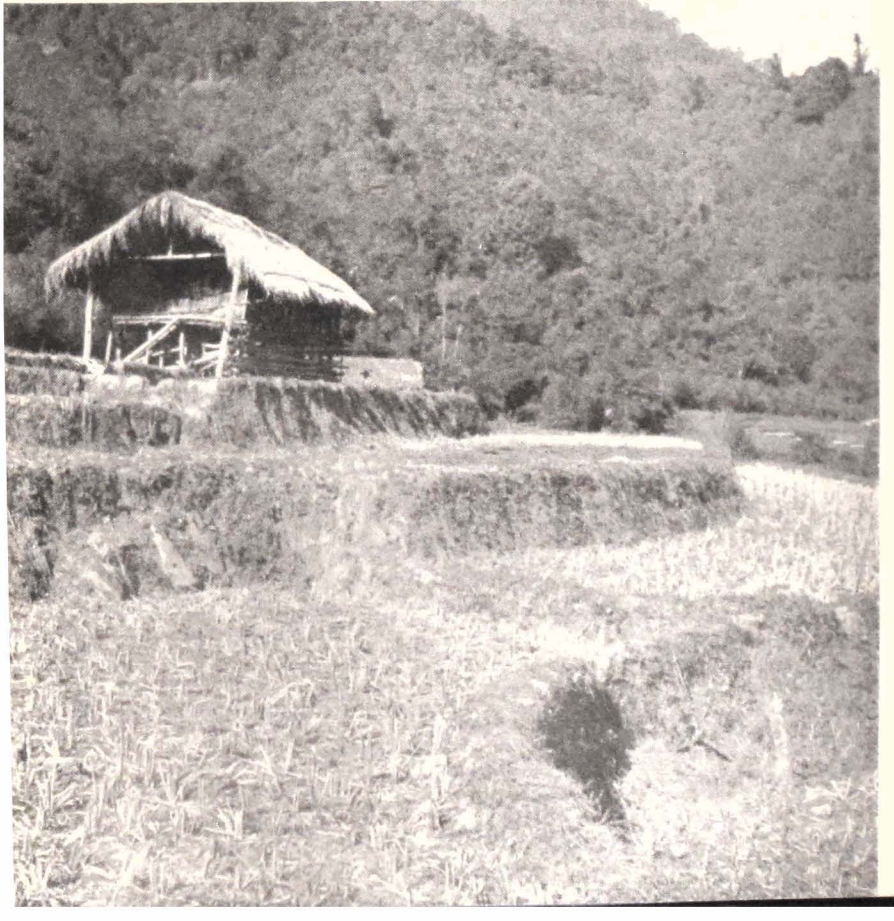
Next day was much the same. The forest above the path purred in the early morning, like a giant kettle on the boil, with black bulbuls, unseen save when a handful of black bolts would fling themselves suddenly down over the path into the trees, where they would spend the day. Harold, who had the previous day secured another of the rare *Chaimarrogale* water-shrews, captured a mole at last. He had spent weeks with trowel and mole-traps trying to circumvent a mole, and had offered substantial rewards: he caught one at last in an ordinary mouse-trap set above ground!

I sampled the ridge that day in all its maddening richness; lianas that gripped my ankle like chains, roots that lay in wait beneath the moss, spicules of bamboo to bayonet my eyes or ankles, soft fronds and sprays which stroked my ears or neck with maddening fingers; boughs that had defied the years until I clutched them scrambling up and down. Whenever I fell, the worn-out .410 burst open and decanted its cartridges far in under the leaves. Whenever I shot a bird, it either ran headlong down the mountain or emerged, after ten minutes heated search, much

[1] *Columba hodgsonii.*

Terraced cultivation near Bawahku





A Lashi field hut in terraced cultivation at 6,000 feet

A Maru village near the Pyepat ridge

A typical *taungya* clearing for cultivation near Pyepat

the worse for wear from beneath my ammunition boots. I crowned an unlucky day by shooting an ashy woodpigeon which sat motionless and silent in a tree above the path; sore-stricken, it nose-dived vertically to the ground, which at that point was not far short of 300 feet below the tree. Chang Zawm dashed down the cliff like a gooral after it, but in vain.

Yet I collected ten different species of birds that day, including a brown wren,[1] which chid me from a tangle of bamboo: Harold got another, a scaly-breasted wren,[2] in a gully beside the path. We both saw and heard a number of wrens that day, elusive as wood-nymphs, but he would be a bold man who could say, in less than six months' patient watching, what species occur in that forest and which are the common wrens.

'This wren,' I read out to Harold from Stuart Baker's book, 'is loth to take flight, and if one can mark it into a dense isolated bush, it can easily be caught with a butterfly net.'

Harold turned what I had come to call his 'Oh, yeah' eye on me.

'Easily,' he said, 'or chloroform the little bastards! But our trouble in the next ten miles is going to be finding that nice isolated bush!'

At one spot, an old camp-site on the top of the ridge, I crouched for an hour in dense cane and found it was on one of those mysterious trails which travelling flocks of birds seem to follow, like steamer routes across the ocean, or the invisible highways of the air, though all the rest near-by seems exactly similar. What it is that draws them I do not know, but you may sit for hours in one place and never see a bird, though a score are passing near at hand. Perhaps flock after flock follows each other along some ancestral path; perhaps the same flock goes round in a big circle and back on its old course again: perhaps it is some invisible area of food which we cannot discern. I only know that such routes exist. A flock of Blyth's suthoras came and scolded me here, with soft hissings and chirrupings, their black throats puffed out wide, and among them I shot a golden-breasted fulvetta,[3] a rare bird, olive-green above, orange-yellow below, with a broad white stripe dividing the black crown. I also shot a scimitar babbler and a black-faced laughing-thrush—both birds of the higher eastern hills—and saw some tree creepers. None of them I had seen so near the N'mai valley before.

[1] *Troglodytes nipalensis.* [2] *Pnoepyga albiventer.* [3] *Fulvetta chrysotis.*

Once more, just as we were going, the Pyèpat ridge, that 'Valley of Death,' had showed us a handful of its hidden treasures of bird life. It is without any doubt as fine a natural reserve for birds as any that exists in Burma, and I think that man, whatever efforts he may make, can do little or nothing to destroy it. There must be many thousands of acres on both sides of the rest-house on which no one has set foot for five hundred years, and no one is likely to. How many hours it would take one to go a mile along the crest of the ridge north or south I do not know. By the mule-path and the *jinghku lam,* the 'friendly road,' a short cut which twists and drops almost from tree-root to tree-root vertically down for a mile on to the rest-house, one may take a cross-section of what birds the whole contains, but a very fortuitous cross-section it will be.

There were two well-groomed military police ponies waiting to take us in to Laukkaung next day, with the fore-knowledge that there would be a bottle of beer and luncheon awaiting us, at whatever hour we or the mules got in. For 'Purity Palace' stood empty no longer. Another in the chain of Assistant Commandants had come to take over the military police. So I wandered for the last time up to the top of the ridge, before riding slowly in; I saw some cutias flying down to eat grit on the road, and in the tree-depths the endless kettle of the bulbuls was still a-boil, but beyond the ridge, once mounted, I hardly saw a bird.

I rode most of the way in a dream, remembering all we had come out to see and how little of it we had seen, and yet how much at which we had never guessed. For out of these hills, as out of Africa, there will always come something new.

* * *

'Are we at war yet?' was the first question I put to Parkes on the steps of his spotless bungalow. The Mussulman sowar who had ridden down behind me had perhaps been glad in his gossiping of an almost virgin mind to work on: for since November 15 I had only seen one newspaper. He had given me full measure of wars, and rumours of wars, of a *burra larai* about to break out in Europe, of some *'dipty sahib'* manhandled and stripped by priests and women, of almost a riot of schoolboys in Myitkyina itself, of platoons from the battalion sent hither and yon to strengthen the civil power in other districts; even 'Arvan,' as he called the peerless chestnut pony Ivan, whom my wife had sold to the military police in 1936, was now remembering no more

his 'chasing days, but was out with a troop patrolling some troublous area in Shwebo.

'Well, I know we weren't at war last week,' said Parkes, 'the mail's due in to-morrow evening. But we must be pretty near it. It's as bad as last September. And things are pretty tricky, I gather, in several parts of Burma.'

So that was it. Law and order lay behind us in the unkempt hills, not before us in the plains or the Western world beyond. We had left what is called civilisation for all these months to plunge into the wild and had found there, hidden like a jewel, what we imagined we had forsaken.

Behind us was the frontier, along the face of which we had crawled like emmets for so long, where the King's Writ ran so tardily, and where a dozen wild tribes, without education, with only a rudiment of religion, with no moral codes, lacking any of the benefits or resources of culture, lived out quietly what we deemed to be their rude and barbarous lives. And it had all been, as it had been for centuries, as crimeless and peaceful as Eden. We had seen no enemy but winter and rough weather. We had met courtesy and friendliness, and some of the old forgotten virtues, thrift and endurance, patience and humility, courage and good humour among folk who lived from minute to minute with the cheerful hardihood of a robin or a sparrow.

And down in the cities and the populous plains was the real Wilderness of Sin; there men of culture and education were scowling at each other and thumping their chests and putting out their tongues and calling each other names. They were demanding country with menaces and belying each other the while in the hubbub of lies with every refinement of the twentieth century. It seemed that if you wanted crime and intolerance and primitive exhibitions of lust, if you wanted the mask torn off from 'the hideous face of peace,' you went not to the jungle any more but to wherever the standard of civilisation was locally highest, to Mandalay or Shanghai, to Rome or Tokio or Berlin. We had exchanged once more the musical whooping of the gibbons, who had been our companions for so many weeks on the road, singing 'Hu-ha! hu-ha!' every morning, for the maturer organ-voices of the Press. Perhaps Harold and I had been starved of that queer commodity called News too long; we found a full meal of it that day not easy to digest at all.

'They won't let me know how long I'm going to be up here,'

said Parkes at breakfast; 'this is a goodish spot and I'm hoping to have a look at the passes later on. But if there's a row, I suppose I'll be hooked down to run around the ruddy delta or the dry zone. What a life!'

'There's only one motto for an A.C. in a place like Laukkaung,' I told him, 'and that's *Carpe diem!* You're never likely to be here again, so I shouldn't advise you to do a stroke more than you need to, and make the most of it while you are.'

'Right-ho, sir!' he answered cheerfully. 'What about another spot of beer?'

We were dining that night in the rest-house, Harold and I, when there came a note from Parkes. Some sepoys of his had wounded a tiger out of a *machan* over a salt-lick and had spent the day in trying to finish him off. Would we come up and talk about it, as the local villagers who cultivated near the salt-lick were all badly scared, and the tiger, wounded as he was, was a menace to everyone? We would.

I remember once reading an acid and probably most untrue commentary on some of the plans evolved by the First Lord of the Admiralty after a good dinner during the last war and the same plans as seen later in the cold light of early morning by his opposite number, the First Sea Lord. Perhaps our arrangements for dealing with that tiger were not dissimilar. We had drunk a good deal of Parkes' whisky and smoked his cigarettes and cross-examined the Chinghpaw lance-naik who had shot the tiger, before we decided, in a mellow bout of optimism, 'that it was a public duty to finish him off' next morning, if possible in a beat. The lance-naik was an uncouth little man, but I had seen untidy soldiers like that before who were better value, in many situations, than their highly-polished contemporaries. From what I could gather, he and his companion had flushed the wounded animal three or four times during the day: it was very angry and very lame and had steered a most erratic course through the jungle but they had been given no chance to fire.

'I shouldn't mind a crack at a tiger,' said Harold as we slithered and zigzagged down the short cut back to the rest-house.

But in the dank gloom of next morning, a thousand feet or so below the quarter-guard, with dense bamboo and grass all about us, the path wet and slippery and no notion where on the immense hillside to start, everything seemed agley from the bolt-action of Harold's rifle to the tiger and the lance-naik. Only some people,

the three of us felt, were fools all the time. The lance-naik's 'evidences' melted, like a gloss, within an hour under the stern rays of the Higher Criticism. The blood-trail was grossly inadequate; a tiger that could climb a slope like that was obviously convalescent, if not perfectly well. If he had moved around as far as *that,* he might be anywhere by now. And so on. The position the tiger had taken up was the one, well-known to some thinking soldiers, which is impregnable to attack and equally untenable, when you have taken it, in defence.

The lance-naik, by this time almost in tears and feeling sure that his stripe would be off him by dusk if he did not offer us something more concrete, after leading us down the garden path in this way, besought Parkes at last for permission to show us the *sharaw yupsharà,* the 'tiger's bedroom,' which he had found the day before. 'There is very much blood there,' he assured us.

'What about it, sir?' said Parkes to me. 'We may as well just have a look at that to console him and then call it a wash-out?'

I nodded. Harold, who had no love, as he said, for damned fools, had gone home with the rifle.

'This is the tiger's road,' said our guide, and disappeared, unarmed, on hands and knees along a tunnel in the bamboo about eighteen inches high and twelve wide, covered with grass and rank undergrowth. Parkes and I crept after him, dragging our shotguns. Reason assured me that the line we were on was almost certainly 'heel'; it also assured me that our quarry was probably a mile or more away. But it threw in a historical parallel or two to even up, of Daniel and the young lady of Riga, and so on.

About twenty-five yards in along the passage, I stopped, as did Parkes. The lance-naik was out of sight round a bend.

'How much farther is the bedroom?' I called in Chinghpaw. I felt as if I were keeping some disreputable assignation, though, to be sure, there was nothing in sight except the sweat on the tip of my nose and Parkes' stern filling the tunnel.

'Only about a furlong more, *duwa!*' came our guide's answer encouragingly from some way further on.

I have never yet been in a tiger's bedroom, past or present, but we decided to deny ourselves the experience and to 'call it a wash-out' then and there. I fear our guide, who had flushed the tiger in these surroundings four times on the previous day, was disappointed in us. But that is probably the reason why he is still only a lance-naik.

CHAPTER XXI

PARTLY STATISTICAL

After all, man knows mighty little, and may some day learn enough of his own ignorance to fall down and pray.

HENRY ADAMS.

THERE is little more to tell. The tiger had beaten us, as had most of the larger denizens of the hills. Before us lay six days of the low, sweltering bamboo jungle along the N'mai's course and then, at Myitkyina, a final orgy of disintegration, before Rangoon. Harold's 'problem son' had thought better of Kashmir and he was now free to go home by way of Australia. Frank was torn between his mountain in the Assam hinterland and a lecture-tour in New York. Before me, incongruously near, lay a week of the Imperial Airways and then home, and, if there was no war, the 'wire-fund' problems of a moribund provincial hunt.

We little knew our own blessedness as we started down the valley: the untroubled days when we could rise at our leisure and start on a short march as and when we pleased; the level, winding, sunlit path along which we need collect no more. After the hole-and-corner toilets in tents or leaky shelters of the last few months, there was the solid comfort and space of the rest-houses, hip-baths, clean linen (no longer kippered over the smoke of the cookhouse fires), lemon drinks and tinned salmon (after those months of curry crowned each night with a rumposset). There was time, too, before dusk to record faithfully what we had seen each day and catch up on multitudinous arrears.

Frank, who had left us at Langyang to sample a newly-cut mule-path through the Maru hills, came down the N'mai to rejoin us at Chipwi. I was anxious, before the chance went for ever, to visit the cave in the hills behind Chipwi, of which a soldier had given me a highly-coloured account a few years before. He had spoken of a labyrinth of tunnels with at least one bottomless pit in them, and told me he had taken thirty sepoys with him, posting a man at every turning to make sure of the way back. My imagination had pictured something midway between the Chislehurst Caves and King Solomon's Mines: I felt every precaution

must be taken before we started. Sepoys were no longer at my bidding and our electric torches had long since died on us, but I collected Ah Hpung, the two best petrol lamps, a hundred yards of cord, and six tousled schoolboys under the Chipwi schoolmaster.

Thus equipped, I climbed the steep ridge east of the school and struck southwards along it. An hour and a quarter's walk brought us to a tiny hamlet, from which we plunged into the undergrowth and along a steep north face for five hundred yards. What the cave had been I do not know but its entrance was unimposing, merely a hole about three feet high in the hillface. Once we had crawled inside, we found ourselves in a spacious chamber thirty yards long and some three feet wide, hung with yellow-white stalactites and odorous with bats on roof and wall. It led to other chambers, reached usually by crawling.

I have loathed bats ever since I was at Prome, where every tree in the Deputy Commissioner's garden had its obscene festoon of flying foxes, hanging like monstrous fruits in the sunshine. I used to shoot them, night in, night out, as they put forth over the river at dusk, without making the smallest impression on their numbers, and they made each dawn hideous with their shrieks and gibberings as they returned to their chosen trees. Nor was that all: in the roof of the old house there were at least two thousand smaller bats, which seemed to scuffle and practise scrums above our heads all night long when they were not invading the bedrooms. When visitors stayed with us in the rains, it was our custom to hand each a candle and a tennis racquet at the foot of the stairs when we said 'Good night.' One could not help listening sometimes to what went on through the wall as stray bats blundered against the mosquito-net.

But these Chipwi bats, poor things! had been there winter and summer, old and young, for centuries, living out their harmless upside-down lives in their chosen seclusion.

They had done no wrong or annoyance to anyone; where they went at nightfall I do not know, for we had in five months only set eyes on one of the large bats at all. In any case, generations of them had never encountered anyone remotely connected with a museum. I felt like a murderer as I fired the first shot with the .410 up at a cluster in the echoing roof, even though I knew that neither Harold nor the Museum would ever forgive me if I let go the chance of obtaining for him so much 'material.' Then the

schoolboys, thrilled with slaughter, leapt to the fray, slashing and winnowing with sticks and branches in the gloom while I squeezed my way from cavern to cavern, sometimes on all-fours between great rocks, with the stench and leathery flutter of more and more bats about my ears and wondering, at the back of my mind, what might happen if any unusual tremor, in this land of daily earthquakes, shook the hill we were in. I had hoped for owls or swifts or jungle-cats, but we saw no signs of life except the bats—there seemed to be only two species, one a large horse-shoe and one a pipistrelle—and a small newt-like creature which escaped me. We had soon explored the cave from end to end and were out of it, with nearly a hundred bats, in half an hour.

On our journey down the valley we saw many swallows moving northwards and also the small, dark swiftlets, which had been so common at Gangfang; at a damp patch on the road two pairs of striated swallows were collecting mud for their nests. One of these I collected, and it turned out to be an undescribed race.[1]

At Tanga, where the rest-house building stands on the only bare patch of grass for many miles, there were two large flocks of short-toed larks, birds which I had met with once before in April near Myitkyina, though on paper they are among the rarest of all on the Burmese list. I missed a number of easy chances and four or five times both flocks departed, with their graceful, lilting flight, southwards over the edge of the jungle, but having, presumably, nowhere else except the mule-track to alight on, they kept returning when I had given them up for lost.

At Seniku I collected one other rare bird, the great brown-throated spinetail,[2] a swift nearly eighteen inches across the wings. When they wish to do so, these spinetails can fly as fast as any bird alive; but that sunny afternoon they seemed to be just 'taking the air,' or at play, and gave a wonderful impression of power in leash as they soared and circled lazily in twos and threes without the flicker of a wing, now over my hill-top and a moment later far out above the great blue-green void of jungle which lies below Seniku. To shoot at they were as big a mark as a golden plover but had that deceptive flight with set wings which sometimes makes a grouse so hard to hit as he comes at you on the invisible wind. I bungled shot after shot when their inconsequent circles brought them at once near enough to me and at such an

[1] *Hirundo striolata stanfordi.* [2] *Chaetura gigantea.*

angle that they would not fall far below me down the hill. At last I contrived to drop one on the path, a female which would have laid eggs somewhere within a week or two; but where these great birds breed in Burma, whether in the crags, or in hollow trees as they do in Assam, is still unknown.

Our journey was over now and we could reckon the results. Our dip in the giant bran-tub had been, all things considered, a lucky one, but how blind! Harold had now a thousand mammal skins —mainly squirrels and voles, rats, shrews, mice and moles, to take home to New York. They would, he opined, need two years or more before he could 'work them out,' even if no war intervened. Frank had nearly two thousand plants and seeds, but for him they were only another milestone on his endless pilgrimage. In three years' time he might be compiling, from his patiently-kept diaries, an account of his last trip but one, in five years some professor at Kew or Edinburgh might pronounce on the last details of what Frank had found a month ago. His *cypripedium,* over which he had rejoiced months before at Pyèpat, had turned out to be not new but a rare slipper-orchid someone had discovered many years before, and six hundred miles south of us, in the Dawna mountains of Tenasserim. But he had at last seen, and photographed, an adult *taiwania* and he was prepared now to join battle with any botanist in the world as to its species.

We had, I reckoned, just over 1,500 bird skins belonging to 299 species. Of these, fifty-three I had not encountered in any part of Burma before and of twenty-three I could find no published records from Burma at all; probably the Germans had found some of them on their recent journey to Mount Victoria, far away in the Chin Hills, but their results were not yet available to the world and, if war broke out, were not likely to be. Best of all, I had been lucky enough to watch at close quarters and make notes on the habits and food of more than a dozen birds which the *Fauna of British India* had labelled 'practically nothing known.' That was something; but I kept wondering how many new species we should have come across on a longer trip, or on one taken at a different time of year, or if we had spent more time above 10,000 feet. In four years, from 1932 to 1936, no less than 470 'species' had passed through my hands from the Myitkyina district alone, of which forty, from the great bustard down to tiny willow-warblers, were 'new,' as the phrase went, to the Burmese avifauna, and we had now, in five months' work, added

another fifty-three, and missed or lost probably half a dozen more.

Was it possible to say, as Harold did, that we had 'cleaned up'? One might as well say that one had dredged the sea. True, we knew by now more or less accurately what were the commoner birds of the central layer of hills from 4,000 up to 8,000 feet; I was fairly sure of the more conspicuous birds of the Myitkyina plain, though we could only guess at what shy travellers lurked in the dense bamboo and *eupatorium* which covered so many thousand miles of foothills from Seniku to the Hukawng Valley. We had sampled for three short winter weeks the birds of the higher layer—that aristocracy of mountain-dwellers, parrotbills and tits and finches, which rarely came below 9,000 feet and lived in or near the snow. Twenty-three species I was sure of there, but how many pheasants had escaped us it was impossible to say, and the eagles, buzzards, owls and hawks had all defeated us: I still believed that near the Chimili I had caught a momentary glimpse of a chough.

We had seen, too, how local many birds were. There had been strange congregations drawn from all across the hills to some tree at the moment of its flowering or fruiting, while the rest of the forest was empty of them for miles. We had seen some of the rare gipsies like the sand-lark and the ibis-bill, which are spilled by chance at times over the edge of the great plateau of Tibet, but it would be a hundred years before anyone could say for certain if their 'occurrence' on the Ngawchang or the N'mai was annual or not.

We knew now that in Myitkyina district there were no less than eighteen different 'species,' apart from racial forms, of laughing-thrush alone, but no one could yet define the limits of their distribution, or explain how it was that so many lovely forms, all much alike in habits and food, but each so distinct in plumage, should have been evolved in such a limited area. Of the true thrushes and the ground-thrushes there were at least fifteen species to be found; presumably they breed somewhere in the hills and do not cross the high mountains to the north, but I had heard no song from any thrush since February, nor seen a sign of any nesting.

And as for the smaller birds, what were they but a voice in the brake, a shadow in a tangle of fern, a flicker of wings through the bamboo? At Hparè and Htawgaw I had heard again and again a sudden sweet trill which was the song of a bush-warbler

but had only set eyes on two in a month, and one could have been a year watching for such birds without making any contribution to knowledge. There must have been fifty species, particularly the fly-catchers and the fly-catcher-warblers and the *phylloscopi*, of which we knew little, but the bare fact that we had shot or trapped them in such-and-such surroundings or at such-and-such an altitude.

Yes, whatever museum scientists said of our 'results,' however many new racial forms they described from our skins, we knew mighty little and it would be fifty years before they had linked up finally the population of the ranges we had been through with Forrest's and Rippon's and Wingate's collections from Yunnan, and Baker's from Assam, and those which Ludlow and Sherriff were even now making in Tibet. And even if we gave our names to some new 'form' its skin would be old and foxed and worn in fifty years and new men would come along with new ideas and new 'material' to discredit conclusions someone had been so sure of at the time.

We said good-bye to the mules at Waingmaw; my heart went out to them, for now their day of sorrow was at hand. No longer a well-balanced 120-pound load and a fair day's journey but as much as their owners could cram on them ere they were double-marched back to Yunnan, and back again and again before the rains made the pass-roads impossible. That would be their fate, year by year, until a tiger met them or their weary hearts failed as they scrambled, sick and dizzy, up the last of their endless hills.

I felt less sorry for our followers, who disappeared one by one to their homes with all our surplus gear and pots and pans and enough gossip, I felt sure, to dine out on for the rest of the summer.

CHAPTER XXII

JOURNEY HOME

There is nothing at the end of any road better than may be found beside it. THE TESTAMENT OF JOAD.

'HO-OME! ho-ome! ho-ome!' drummed the great engines. With every hour we were ten days' march nearer it, a hundred and twenty miles. Between dawn and dusk we put behind us, while we drank and slept and felt like plants in a conservatory, more miles than any of us had tramped in five long months. The great map of the world unrolled itself in hundred-mile sheets beneath us and we slept above it, satiate with scenery, and perhaps secretly rather bored. We longed for the end of the day when the engines would throb in our ears no more, and we could walk a mile or two. Our camp, we knew, would be just another hotel *de luxe,* with the same meals and orchestra and waiters, and a slightly more maddening currency with which to pay for the drinks.

The soldier from Shanghai and the planter from Lakhimpur were both asleep, so was the spectacled young journalist who was posting from Sydney to Fleet Street as a 'learner.' The mystery-man from Yorkshire, who had once been an 'ace' in the Tank Corps and now travelled in munitions, smoked endless cigarettes and thought of the girl in Melbourne from whom now mountains divided him and a waste of seas. 'For I'm getting on,' he had told me, 'but I never before met anyone I fell for in one b——y heap!' He had, indeed, shown me a cable received from her in Melbourne which had been inadvertently handed to a young air-pilot of the same name in the hotel at Basra and had caused him no ordinary embarrassment. By the time he got home the mystery-man would have flown 26,000 miles, but for him there would be no rest till he had completed half that weary journey once again.

Beside me sat the Associated Pressman, a lean, green-eyed young American, lithe and keen as a panther, who, at an hour's notice, was flying from Shanghai to Rome. It was another week of crisis, and his task it was to watch, without rest from year to

year, whatever pot seemed nearest in the world to boiling over. He was now addressing the platoon of picture post-cards with which he had surrounded himself at luncheon in the little white hotel by the lake under the eucalyptus trees; at each halt he sent forty or fifty to his friends and 'contacts' all over the world, for by 'contacts' did he live, and was a migrant who took half the world in his stride. He had shown me one card at luncheon which ran: 'Have just flown over the Garden of Eden and am now lunching at Galilee'; he had eaten there *filets de St. Pierre meunières* and a chocolate ice, so little does hotel life reck of culinary or geographical barriers.

But his post-card had summed it up: could one attempt to remember, much less describe, that immense dun pavement of crocodile skin, dotted with queer loops and circles and pink-brown pools which we had flown over for three hours after Basra, in which the only signs of life were little moving dots of goats preceded by their shadows, and once a stranded motorbus, on its knees as if praying, in a sand drift? Could one, so gorged with scenery, ever recall the shrapnel barrage of clouds far below us across the Bengal Bay as thick and green and shiny as linoleum, the little moving shadow we made upon the sea, and then the great white floor of cloud, half snow, half fleecy wool, through which at times showed the queer green entrails of the Sunderbuns, above which we had eaten fish with *sauce tartare,* and *fraises Melba?* Yet they were less than two days behind us. Should we only remember this journey by its meals?

The road we trudged with feet of lead
The shadows of his pinions skim.

Bengal and India itself had been just a mud-brown tessellated pavement, and that great country east of the Holy Land a quilt of patches, pink and heather-purple, glaucous and buff and opal, fading away to where beyond lay Lebanon, far and inviolate as Imaw, crowned like Imaw with snow.

I looked up and found the Associated Pressman was telling me a story: 'I covered the London Naval Conference,' he said mournfully, 'and I guessed I'd made quite a few contacts there. But last time I went near your Foreign Office they put me in a cold, draughty, mossy hall and at the end of an hour I hadn't been able to get hold of anybody with five grains of sense!'

'What happened?' I asked.

'Well, they sure got a bum reaction out of me and didn't do themselves any good! And what *I* say is syndicated in fourteen hundred different newspapers.'

I thought of the Foreign Office as I had known it once, serene and timeless and unshakeable as Imaw or Chimili. Perhaps there were, after all, fixed, unassailable strongholds somewhere in the vortex of the nations which looked down, like them, aloof and contemptuous, on our fevered scurryings to them, our futile curiosity, our gropings around them for something to tell the world. Perhaps to them a 'bum reaction' meant precisely nothing.

'We'll be in Alex in one hour,' he went on. 'Have you any explosives, birds, feathers, cats and dogs, hashish, opium or exposed cinema films on you? That's all you'll be asked about.'

'No,' I said, 'not on me. My kit's all coming round by sea.'

CHAPTER XXIII

RETROSPECT

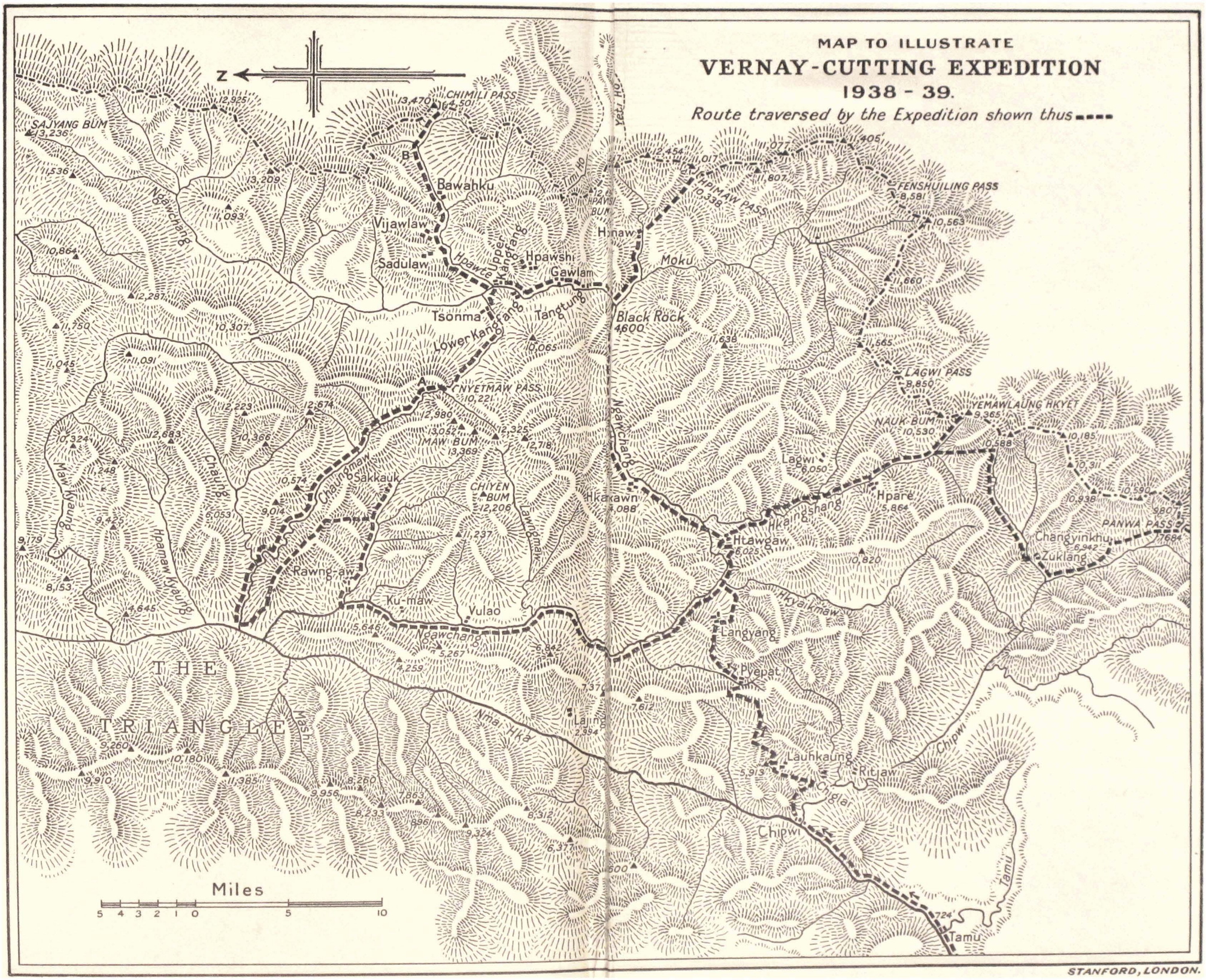
But by what measure do ye mete?
By what I did or what I sought and lost?
HUMBERT WOLFE.

I THINK one day they will be found branded on my heart, the things we said in our haste that we would do, the chances that came to us only to be missed, above all those birds and beasts of the quiet forest which we shot and lost, or sent wounded away. But I, for one, had learnt once again what Edward Thomas taught me years ago, that 'there is nothing beyond the farthest of far ridges but a signpost to unknown places. The end is in the means,' in weariness after long marches in the rain, in the sight of those snow-filled gullies slashing the face of the untrodden mountain, in the clouds quilted over the cane and rhododendron, above all, in those spare and cheerful coolies of ours gossiping for ever in their crackling bamboo bivouacs, living so bleakly and barely but asking nothing more of life.

It may be five, it may be fifty years before another expedition comes to collect in the Hpimaw hills again. Perhaps next time they will come from the Irrawaddy by aeroplane in a day, and hang surveying, like a kestrel from above, the whole scene of their hunting-grounds before they start. They may do; but somehow I do not think that science will save them over-much labour when it comes to discovering the secrets of those hills, whether it be the little parrot-bills in the cane above the snow-line, the gooral on the cliff, or the tiny shrews and flowers that haunt the mountain streams. I like to think it will not be too easy for them even then, but that, wiser than we, they will be trained like panthers, rationed by lozenge, with silent guns and cameras whose lenses will be as quick and faithful and percipient as the eyes of those who carry them. There have been, so far, two attempts of recent years to take a 'colour-movie' of life in those hills: both have failed and, it may be, the perfected process will come too late when the Homburg hat and the chromatic blazer are current wear among the sons of the men we knew.

But of one thing I am certain: if all goes well it should be a humaner, quieter, surer expedition than ours or any of the present day. Its collectors will not want too many specimens, for by then there will be a world museum, a big central clearing-house of natural history facts, in which picked men will have already worked out exactly the problems needing to be solved, and will have all the relevant material and references in the world ready to their hand. There will be no power to shoot haphazard or collect indiscriminately; they will devote themselves to filling up gaps which are obvious to all. Patient field observation by night and day will be an integral part of their work, and the hardest and chanciest of it all. 'One year to survey, one year to collect, and one year to mop up,' was how Kermit Roosevelt defined a modern expedition's needs.

Three years? They will, I should not wonder, find twice that time, in those unconquerable hills, not a moment too long.


MAP TO ILLUSTRATE
VERNAY-CUTTING EXPEDITION
1938 - 39.
Route traversed by the Expedition shown thus
N
CHIMILI PASS
13,470
SAJYANG BUM
13,236
12,925
11,536
13,209
11,093
10,864
12,287
11,750
10,307
11,091
11,045
Ngawchang
Bawahku
Vijawlaw
Sadulaw
Hpawshi
Gawlam
Hpawte Upper Kangfang
Lower Kangfang
Tsonma
Tangtung
10,065
CHYETMAW PASS
10,221
12,980
13,052
MAW BUM
13,369
12,325
12,718
12,223
12,674
10,324
2,683
10,366
10,574
Chaungmaw
Sakkauk
9,014
CHIYEN BUM
12,206
11,237
Lawngmaw
6,053
9,425
9,179
8,153
4,645
Maw Kyang Pung
Hpamaw Kyang
Rawng-aw
Ku-maw
Vulao
5,646
Ngawchang
5,267
6,842
4,259
THE TRIANGLE
Mashi
9,260
10,180
9,910
11,385
9,956
8,260
7,863
8,233
896
9,324
8,312
6,377
500
Nmai Hka
7,37
7,612
Lajm
2,954
Miles
5 4 3 2 1 0 5 10
Yeti Ho
Hpawshi Bum
Hpimaw Pass
10,338
12,454
11,017
11,807
11,405
Hpaw
Moku
Black Rock
4600
11,638
11,660
11,565
FENSHUILING PASS
8,581
10,563
LAGWI PASS
8,850
YEMAWLAUNG HKYET
9,365
NAUK-BUM
10,530
10,588
10,185
10,311
10,590
10,938
9807
PANWA PASS
7684
Changyinkhu
6,942
Zuklang
10,820
Lagwi
6,050
Hpare
5,864
Hkawn
4,088
Htawgaw
6,025
Hkyaikmaw
Langyang
Pyepat
Lauhkaung
5,913
Ritjaw
Chipwi
Tamu
724
Tamu
STANFORD, LONDON.