MY HILL SO STRONG

by

JEAN KINGDON-WARD
F.R.G.S.

And in my prosperity I said,
I shall never be removed:
thou, Lord, of Thy goodness
hast made my hill so strong.

Psalm 30, v 6

JONATHAN CAPE
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE
LONDON

frontispiece: THE RIMA ROPE BRIDGE

FIRST PUBLISHED 1952

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN IN THE CITY OF OXFORD
AT THE ALDEN PRESS
BOUND BY A. W. BAIN & CO. LTD., LONDON

ILLUSTRATIONS

THE RIMA ROPE BRIDGE	*Frontispiece*
A ZACKRING PEASANT	*facing p.* 44
TIBETAN PORTER (note goitre)	44
AKKEY AND PHAG TSERING	44
A MIJU MISHMI	44
THE RIMA BASIN (before the earthquake)	76
THE V-SIDED VALLEY OF THE DI CHU	114
THE PEAKS OF DONG, NEAR WALONG	114
TIBETANS CARRYING 100 LB. LOADS IN THE DI CHU GORGE	142
THE DIPHU LA PATROL PASSING THE WRECKAGE OF CAPTAIN SAILO'S CAMP	176
HAV. INDRA BAHADUR LIMBU	208
HAV. PAHAL SING RANA	208
JEM. BIR BAHADUR GURUNG	208
RFM. TAKEM ABOR	208
NOT SNOW BUT BARE ROCK (photo: N. E. B. Warner)	232
10,000 FT. PEAK IN THE LOHIT VALLEY	232

All of these illustrations are reproduced from photographs taken by Mr. and Mrs. Kingdon-Ward with the one exception noted above.

MAP

THE LOHIT VALLEY *facing p. 13*

PREFACE

As this book is not a scientific one, it may be of interest to readers to know where they can find a more technical description of matters discussed in it.

Plant Hunting in the Lohit Valley by F. Kingdon-Ward discusses the botanical and horticultural aspects of the expedition (it is to be found in the *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society*, June 1952); while an account of the Great Assam Earthquake of 1950, from the seismologist's point of view, appeared in *Nature* on January 27th, 1951, together with an eye-witness account of the earthquake and its after effects by F. Kingdon-Ward.

J. K-W.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to all who have helped in the preparation of this book and the journey it records. Especial thanks are due to Messrs. Cadbury-Fry (India) Ltd., who supplied all our chocolate at a generous discount; to Mr. and Mrs. John Selander, Beth and Pete Vining, and Dr. O. W. Hasselblad (all of the American Baptist Mission) for hospitality, and for a gift of drugs and dressings; to Nick Warner, for permission to use an air photograph; and to my mother, who found the title to this book.

Finally to Frank, my husband, for everything — more especially for his unfailing patience and encouragement which brought us safely through.

J. K.-W.

To the

OFFICERS, N.C.O.s, AND MEN

of the

especially those of

2nd BATTALION, No. 3 PLATOON

this book is Dedicated

IN ADMIRATION AND AFFECTION

MAP OF THE LOHIT VALLEY

Route
Camps (6)
Outposts underlined: Walong
Heights in feet: •9613

0 4 8
Scale of Miles

96° 28′ 0′ 15′ 30′ 45′ 97° 0′ 15′ 97° 28′

15′ 28° 0′ 45′ 27°

Glei Pass X
•16089
16061•
15640• Tha Chu X Pass
•17172
•1470
Minyutang
•12010
Tha Chu R.
Rope Bridge
Shigathang
Rima
La Ti
ZAYUL PROVINCE
ZAYUL CHU
RONG THÖ CHU
SAP CHU
Sap Chu
Sangu (15)
Same
Bedi
La Ti R.
TIBET
McMahon Line
Di Chu
Camp (14)
Kahao
X Hot Springs
Krao Ti R.
Mashei
•14201
Diphu La X
•16661
(13)
M
14020
Yepak R.
X Brai Pass
15250•
Sat Ti R.
Dong
Walong (12)
4000′
Tinai
Shet Ti R.
Shet Ti
(11)
LOHIT R.
•14231
A
Yesong (10)
12843•
Munlang (7)
Hali R.
Pangong
(6) Hangam
Hayuliang (5)
2000′
Dolai R.
Dau R.
Ame-pani
Nara (4)
LOHIT R.
Raya-pani (3)
Machhima
Tiddang R.
Denning
Dreyu (1)
(2) Theronliang
•7391
Poya R.
Digaru R.
Teju R.
MOTOR ROAD
Teju
To Sadiya 27 m.
LOHIT RIVER
Pursnamkund
1000′
Kamlang R.
•7176
8740•
S
Changwintu (8)
(9) Minzong
3000′
Ghalum R.
•12833
•10690 X Cholam Pass
•9889
Kronjong Pass 9613
BURMA
E.G.M

CHAPTER ONE

NEITHER I nor my husband are economists, but we both believe firmly that good memories are the soundest investment. That belief was our justification for setting out in 1950 on a major plant hunting expedition to the borders of Assam and Tibet, on a wicket that financially was none too sound. At the time we started there was a considerable gap between our estimated expenses and the funds we had raised to cover them. When we returned, after ten eventful months, the gap was wider. Some would say we were improvident. Perhaps we were, but we have no cause to regret our improvidence, which so long as life lasts will go on paying us rewarding, tax-free dividends.

We returned from a plant hunt in the Naga Hills at the end of November 1949. Seven weeks later we were away on another, more ambitious. It can be a tiresome journey to Sadiya, the last town in India, and we had to thank the Chief Scientific Officer of Tocklai Experimental Station, in the heart of the tea-growing districts of Assam, for lending us a lorry, thus saving us a journey by train with a change in the small hours. We packed the truck the night before, and left Tocklai at seven in the morning with nearly a ton of kit in the back. It was January 23rd, 1950.

In Assam all travel schedules are qualified by 'unforeseen delays', and one soon learns to allow for them on a generous scale. Such annoyances as changing a wheel on a long journey by road, or waiting half an hour at a level crossing while trains are shunted aimlessly to and fro, do not fall into this category. One allows for them automatically, as they occur so frequently in Upper Assam where hardly any roads are tarmacked, and road and rail cross one another repeatedly.

At Panitola, however, we were so far ahead of schedule that we stopped for half an hour to have coffee with a friend.

Shortly after she had seen us on our way again, a mechanic in dungarees stood in the middle of the road beside his lorry, waving to us to stop. We drew up and asked what was wrong.

'Petrol,' he said (rather sheepishly, we thought). 'I've run dry and it's seven miles to the next pump. Could you let me have enough to get me there? I'll pay it back in Tinsukia.'

Petrol at that time was harshly rationed, and we had had difficulty in getting a police permit for the road trip to Sadiya at all. It was therefore essential that we recover the loan in kind, not in cash, or the Tocklai truck would not get home. We were not without misgivings, but we could hardly leave the wretched man on the road for ever; so Frank told our driver to empty a jerry-can into the tank of the stranded truck, and on we went, closely tailing it all the way to the next pump. Fresh white paint proclaimed unabashed, in letters a foot high, the ownership of the truck: 'A.O.C. — ASSAM OIL COMPANY'! We got our petrol.

The long drive went without a hitch, and when we reached the Lohit river at Saikhoaghat, we drove across the loose sand straight on board a waiting ferry-boat. Before three o'clock we were in Sadiya. With vivid memories of the previous year, when we had reached Manipur Road from Imphal (134 miles) after twenty-two hours on the road, it took me a little while to adjust myself to the fact that we had really arrived, with no delays of any kind foreseen or unforeseen. We had covered 160 miles in six hours! I half suspected there must be a catch somewhere.

Still wondering, I wrote in my diary that evening:

'If everything goes as well as this first day, I should think the "excursion", as the Assam Government calls it, will be about as dull and trouble-free as a Cook's tour.'

I need not have worried.

We stayed ten days in Sadiya and were busy most of the time, collecting rations from the bazaar and seeing people.

On January 28th our two servants arrived. One was tall — in

fact, very tall; the other short — in fact, very short. Both were from Sikkim and both were multi-lingual. They made a good impression from the start.

Phag Tsering was twenty-five, short and stocky, bandy-legged, and walked with a nautical roll. He was not particular about his dress, except that he had a weakness for bright-coloured scarves, which he generally wore bound tightly round his middle, matador fashion, or in a rakish turban that made him look even smaller than he was. His other weakness was for hats of any and every description. For some reason hard to explain the expedition started out with fourteen hats, a dozen of which were ours, and to these was added one more on the way up the valley! In the course of time Phag Tsering acquired, on loan or for keeps, quite half of them, but unfortunately not the one that I should have been happiest to give him — a battered old black trilby of Frank's.

Phag Tsering was an excellent cook, and it was a pity he had so little opportunity in the Lohit Valley to show what he could do. He was also a good plant collector, and in that capacity he had rather more scope. Like many border hillmen, he was an exceptionally good linguist and spoke Tibetan, Bhutanese, Nepali, Sikkimese and Hindustani fluently; but in spite of such ability Akkey exceeded him, for besides all Phag Tsering's languages he could speak quite a lot of English as well — especially when not too sober — and some German.

Akkey was altogether a different type, in appearance at least. He was very tall for a hillman, well built, rather too good-looking, and a bit of a dandy. In Sadiya he shamed his employers with the magnificent horsey clothes he wore, which were so much smarter and newer than anything we could boast ourselves. Akkey was thirty-seven, a man of the world with wide interests, and far more sophisticated than Phag Tsering.

It was time that we moved up the valley while the weather was still good, and Frank went to the Political Officer to see whether we could have forty Mishmi porters on February 1st.

The answer was not promising: all were engaged in portering rations for the Assam Rifles outposts, and would not be free before the middle of the month. There was nothing for it then but to cut out the Mishmis and pick up Tibetans in the bazaar, who were a good deal more expensive to employ. So Frank called on Samdup, the Tibetan Trade Agent, and made arrangements for forty Tibetans to take us up to Walong.

From November to March Tibetans come down the valley from places as far distant as Chamdo, to trade with India. They bring with them musk, gold dust, skins and borax and wool, and take back bazaar goods (chiefly aluminium cooking pots, beads and cheap cloth) besides fabulous quantities of cigarettes.

A rich trader may come down from Tibet in November with a score or two of lusty porters. He leaves them in Sadiya for perhaps a couple of months while he goes down to Calcutta to see the sights and to trade; and during that interval his porters are free to do as they please. Many of them make a little money by portering loads, or by cutting firewood in the jungle, and these can be seen returning in the evening, a ragged procession of big, deep chested men, carrying on their backs in bamboo baskets a hundred pounds of heavy, sappy timber. In Sadiya these Tibetans are known indiscriminately as 'lamas'. It must amuse the more ungodly of them to be thus honoured outside their own country.

The baggage was packed into a 3-ton truck on February 1st, in preparation for an early start next day. The Assistant Tibetan Trade Agent, Chu-tem-pa-la, called after dark to collect advances for our porter corps, so that they could buy rations in Sadiya for the journey to Walong. With him was Nima Tsering, a fine looking Tibetan from Gartok, near the China border, who towered head and shoulders over all of us. It was incongruous to hear this giant politely sucking in his breath when he addressed the Assistant Trade Agent, who was only half his size. Nima Tsering had been appointed *sirdar*,

and as such was expected to maintain discipline and be present at all financial transactions affecting the porters.

It was soon discovered that I had slipped up in my arithmetic, and that all our available cash was still Rs. 20 short of the advance promised. The rest was buried deeply in our many boxes, and there was nothing for it but to climb on board the truck with a torch and dig out what was required. My heart sank. I had supervised the loading myself and knew just what it meant. All the luggage in which there was no money happened to be on top — things like tents and bedding rolls, camp beds and oilcans and rations. And the cargo had been tightly stowed so that it would not shift on a bumpy road!

I peeled off my coat and actively supervised the removal. As we wanted to keep all our bullion for places where paper would not be accepted, it was just one particular box that had to be opened. It is perhaps unnecessary to mention that it was at the bottom of a pile, in a corner, with the lock jammed against the side of the truck.

I never was any good at arithmetic.

CHAPTER TWO

On February 2nd we got away at last. The driver of the truck turned up early with his mechanic, and after saying goodbye to our friends, who came to see us off, we all piled into the truck and began the last mechanized stage of our journey. First we called at the Assistant Tibetan Trade Agent's house to make sure that all arrangements were complete for our porters to join us at Denning the next day. Chu-tempa-la came out, looking rather harassed, with forty Tibetans crowded closely round him, all talking at once at the tops of their voices and smelling to heaven.

There were a few women among them, their round smiling faces framed in straight black hair done up in a pigtail coiled over the crown of the head. They wore rough homespun *chubas* like shapeless dressing-gowns, maroon or grey, ragged and patched in a score of places and tied at the waist with a bright coloured sash. It is a voluminous garment, the *chuba*, and ladies who wear them do not require a handbag in which to carry small personal possessions. Anything up to the size of a chicken or a small dog can be stuffed into its ample bosom. The women's ornaments were simple and did not amount to anything more than a few strings of opaque beads, bright yellow or orange, and sometimes a turquoise or coral ring set in Chamdo silver. None of the men wore the pendulous single turquoise ear 'ring' that seems to be the prerogative of the wealthier classes; but a few of them wore a simpler silver ornament through the left ear, like a large open finger-ring studded with coral or turquoise (or, occasionally, an Indian half- or quarter-rupee. These last, however, are probably acquired in trade with the Mishmis, who wear them to a man).

We finally left Sadiya in style at 9.30 on a beautiful winter's morning, the sun shining brightly on the distant snow peaks. But a mile from the bazaar we were held up for twenty minutes

at the Kundil river while a heavily laden army lorry was ferried across. The stream is barely a hundred yards wide; but the current is swift and there is only one ferry boat. These *māl* boats, as they are called, are cumbersome contraptions consisting of two heavy boats set about six feet apart, supporting a boxed-in platform with ends that let down on chains to allow vehicles to drive on board and off again. Motive power on the Kundil ferry is provided by four or five men with punt poles. It must be hard work.

After the ferry we made very good time, for the truck was in better condition inside than one would have expected from its unprepossessing outward appearance. We lunched early beside the Digaru river and stopped for a moment at Teju, where the road forks. The right-hand branch goes to Pursaramkund, once a place of pilgrimage for devout Hindus; but we followed the other. For six miles more the road runs straight and dead flat through dense evergreen jungle full of game, then zigzags as it climbs 2000 feet up the foothills to the first outpost of the Assam Rifles at Denning. There, at mile 48 from Sadiya, the motor road ends abruptly. Had the bridges and culverts been stronger, it would still have been 'jeepable'as far as Theronliang at mile 70, for the bridle track is twelve feet wide. But the bridges were unsafe, and from Denning we had to walk.

The truck was unloaded and everything counted and checked; then we paid off the driver and mate and away they went back to Sadiya. And that was the last motor vehicle we saw until November.

There was a P.W.D.[1] Inspection Bungalow at Denning, and we had been given permission to make use of it for as long as we remained there. Along the whole length of the front was a wide, covered veranda where all our surplus kit was stored. For the rest, there was plenty of space in the bedroom. Iron bedsteads sprung like school or hospital beds were a luxury; we did not need to erect the camp cots yet.

[1] Public Works Department.

Having got the place into some kind of order, we went out to enjoy the last of the daylight. The hills were right on top of us now, their steep slopes clothed to their summits with luxuriant evergreen rain forest. Denning has a rainfall comparable with that of Cherrapunji in the Khasi Hills, and Cherra is the wettest place in the world. The average rainfall there is about 400 inches; but over 600 was once recorded (London's rainfall for a quarter of a century!). Denning's rainfall is only 250-300 inches, and is spread fairly evenly over the whole year. Only December and January are dry, and even then it is exceptional to have no rain for a month.

That evening the sun set as a blood-red bar across greasy, grey cloud, through which the Sadiya plain appeared only in small ghostly patches here and there. We prayed for fine weather when we crossed the Tidding Saddle above Denning; but it looked far from promising, and presently it began to rain.

The next day was unspeakable. It rained and rained in solid sheets, rattling down on the tin roof of the Inspection Bungalow like shot. One had to shout to be heard at all, and the windowless living room was dark as night. Also, it was cold, and we called the *chowkidar* to make a fire, little realizing that to sit snugly beside it meant certain death by asphyxiation. Outside the wind was tossing dead leaves all over the compound, snapping off small branches as it roared through the trees, making an untidy mess everywhere. Still the rain streamed down from an amorphous, putty coloured sky, and mist swirled ceaselessly over a pile of firewood stacked under the eaves of the cookhouse, penetrating into the very heart of the timber. The wood was soaking wet and smoked abominably.

How much smoke (if any) found its way out through the chimney I cannot say; I am in a better position to judge how much went down our lungs and into our eyes. No sooner had we settled in chairs by the fire than a blast straight down the chimney sent us staggering blindly, speechlessly, outside for air, coughing and spluttering like squibs and desperately rubbing

the agony out of our eyes. From a safe distance on the draughty veranda we tearfully watched the smoke puffing out of the chimney and into the room, every few seconds. Visibility was 'tending to zero', and it was clear that heroic measures were called for.

Making a mental note of the position of the furniture, Frank took a deep breath, shut his eyes tight, and plunged into the smoke-screen like a pursuing destroyer. I ran to get water, but found only a mugful. Back came Frank, having beaten out the fire a little with the poker, and I took his place while he recovered his breath. We continued thus, taking it in turns to put out the fire (not quite turn and turn about, however; I said it was an heroic venture). At last the fire was dead — small thanks to me — and we breathed normally once more. But there was a dismal mess of charred wood and ash in the grate and puddles of dirty water everywhere. It was not much comfort to sit by on a wet and chilly evening, and I wandered away to find somewhere more cheerful.

On the table was the Visitors' Book which all occupants of the bungalow are asked to sign. These books, in the more out of the way places, can be very interesting, and I picked it up to glance through it. It was quite an antique record, dating from the early 'twenties, and I looked up the names of various people who I knew must have stayed at Denning. In 1936 I found Ronald Kaulback's party, and wondered what had made so promising an explorer give up the game so soon. Three years earlier Ronald Kaulback's name appeared again with that of my husband. And away back in November 1926 I noticed a caustic comment in the margin:

'A fire for drying clothes in the "dry" season would be useful.'

Signature? . . . *F. Kingdon-Ward*!

There had been a slight hitch in Sadiya, and we received a telephone message through the Assam Rifles to say that the porters would not be leaving till the 4th. This did not matter

very much, and it gave the weather a chance to clear up. Surprisingly enough, the next day was brilliantly fine and clear. We could hardly believe it!

There was a firm in New York that was interested in a certain plant from Africa whose seeds were believed to yield an alkaloid helpful to sufferers from rheumatoid arthritis. Its near relations were to be found in the jungles of the Mishmi Hills, and we had promised to keep an eye open for it. Walking down the Teju road in the warm sunshine, we presently saw the fluffy silken plumes of Strophanthus seeds come floating down from the tree-tops like fairy parachutes. We turned into the wind and searched the jungle through field-glasses. No luck. Nothing that looked a bit like Strophanthus. So we left the road and entered the jungle, not too hopefully, for it is far easier to find what you are looking for from *out*side thick forest than it is from within. Also, the seed plumes are light as thistledown, and may be blown for miles before they reach the ground.

It was difficult going and we picked up a lot of small leeches after the rain; but in the end Frank found a Strophanthus plant scrambling up a very tall tree some way off the road, and we collected scores of seeds from underneath it. Next day we pointed it out to Phag Tsering, and he tried to climb the tree to collect herbarium specimens. (The plant was in leaf and almost in flower, and specimens would be required for proper identification.) Up he went, climbing quickly — and down he came again, very much quicker. The tree was crawling with fierce red ants and the direct approach, he felt, was not quite in his line. We took stock of the situation and wondered if we had not better look about for another Strophanthus — the seed plumes were everywhere, so it could not be rare — when Phag Tsering heard voices on the road and went to investigate. A minute later he reappeared with an elderly man and a small boy, explaining to them what we wanted.

Rather to my surprise, the man seemed undismayed by the ants, which were half an inch long and bit like red-hot needles. He waved us all back to the road and said he would come to the

bungalow later. So we left them to it, the man and the boy; and in due course some more seed and a large bunch of Strophanthus were delivered at the bungalow.

There was no sign of our porters on the evening of the 4th, but as they had to walk from Teju, about nine miles by the road, they might have arrived late and be spending the night there. If they did not arrive before dark we should not see them till after ten o'clock next morning, and then it would be rather late to start at all, especially as the first march to Dreyi was a longish one and uphill all the way.

At midnight, however, there was a great banging and shouting, and the bungalow fairly shuddered in the uproar. It sounded like dacoity, and we prepared to put up a fight. But it was nothing so dramatic — merely the porters arriving, after walking for hours through the jungle in pitch darkness. They kept shouting for the *babu* (meaning Akkey) — a term of respect when addressed to our servants, but not much appreciated by ourselves. It really means, now, a clerk or office stooge, but Tibetans use the word indiscriminately as a term of respect, without at all implying that the person so addressed is a white collar type. We accepted the compliment in the spirit in which it was intended.

In the morning the porter corps turned up in strength to pick up the loads, which had all been packed and strapped in good time. There was a lot of noise as usual, but we were becoming accustomed to that and no longer feared a riot or worse. We thought nothing of it and told Akkey to hustle the men as we wanted to be off early. But no! there was a grouse, a complaint, a protest.

'What's wrong?' asked Frank.

'They say the loads are too heavy,' Akkey replied. 'Nima Tsering has gone to fetch a spring balance from the opium shop.'

'Good heavens!' I exclaimed in amazement, 'do you mean to say they deal in opium by the *maund*?'

But it appeared that rice and other things were also purchas-

able in Denning. The loads, I remembered, had been laboriously made up to sixty pounds before we left Jorhat, for Mishmi porters. In Sadiya, however, the Trade Agent had told us that Tibetans would carry seventy pounds, so naturally I distributed the weight of two or three loads among the others, without upsetting too badly the lists of contents or method of packing. It was irritating to have taken so much trouble for nothing to make them sixty pounds in the first place.

Now the porters came in a body and stated positively that they would carry sixty pounds like the Mishmis, and not a fraction more. It was pointed out to us that, unlike the Mishmis, they asked for no reserve porters, so that every one of them had to carry food for ten days, besides cooking pots, a blanket and a good deal else besides. This was perfectly true; but then, we were paying them more than we would have had to pay for Mishmis. I personally thought that even sixty pounds was a pretty staggering load in the circumstances; but Tibetans are powerfully built — much stronger than the Mishmis — and who were we to decide what loads they could and could not carry?

Lengthy discussion helped not at all. A spring balance was produced and each load weighed. It was good psychology to begin with a dozen identical stores boxes. They had not been opened since leaving Jorhat, so all weighed sixty pounds only and were passed without comment. Of the remainder, some were little over fifty pounds, but unadjustable; while others pulled the needle down to sixty-five and seventy. Something had to be done about the latter, and it took the best part of the day doing it.

In the end, after much juggling, and difficult sums scribbled on scraps of paper, we were left with forty loads weighing almost sixty pounds each — and one extra, for which there was no porter! A search round Denning produced no Tibetans at all (we had not expected it would), and the only alternative was to pick up a Mishmi — if we could get one. It was not very likely that one would be found at such short notice, but one

was. He came to inspect the shape and weight of his load that evening and, being satisfied (apparently) that it would not break his back, promised Akkey that he would be on the doorstep at eight in the morning. Akkey believed it, never having met the Mishmis before; but we were less optimistic.

When the forty loads had been adjusted to everybody's satisfaction, Nima Tsering collected a garter from each of his men and the half dozen women, mixed them all together, then laid one on each load. There ensued a hectic scramble for garters, and each man as he claimed his own gave his name to Akkey and had it written on the box in large Tibetan characters. They kept the same loads throughout the walk to Walong.

While everyone clamoured round asking questions which (being in Tibetan) I could not understand, my attention was momentarily distracted just after I had dug the blade of my knife into the ground, while I helped a man tie up his load. Going into the bungalow for a moment to fetch more rope, I suddenly remembered the knife and dashed out again to collect it. Already it was gone. One of the Tibetans had taken it. Of that there could be no doubt, for no one else had been present; and it was not any of the women, either, for they had all taken their loads outside the compound. It was absurd, in a space of under half a minute, not to be able to pin the theft to the culprit. Threats of mass punishment did not help, and I never saw my knife again. This was the first of a number of thefts by Tibetans, and we took the opportunity to spread it abroad that box contents and waterproof sheets would all be counted and inspected at Walong before any money was paid out. Nothing was replaceable, and we could not afford to be robbed.

I felt rather a fool about this, because over and over again in Sadiya I had warned Akkey and Phag Tsering, unaccustomed as they were to the ways of Mishmis, never to leave small objects lying about, especially knives! So far I have never had anything stolen by Mishmis. Admitted that, being warned, I do not tempt them by leaving valuables scattered around, but it

surprises me nevertheless. This is not to say that the Mishmis are above such things, but in such matters they are not so black as they are painted. I felt particularly foolish, because I had long had a sentimental prejudice in favour of Tibetans in general, and it was a shock to discover so early that it was misplaced. They are, of course, much the same as other people; some of them trustworthy, some of them not.

The weather looked as if it was breaking up again — after all, we had had two consecutive fine days — and we went gloomily to bed, expecting something like a tornado to speed us on our way in the morning. We were not far wrong.

CHAPTER THREE

On February 6th all was once again ready in good time, and we sat down to wait for the porters. The weather omens of the previous evening were fulfilled to the letter, and heavy rain always has a demoralizing effect on one's porters. During the night our altimeter had risen over a hundred feet; that is to say, the atmospheric pressure had fallen a good tenth of an inch — not very startling, perhaps, but in the hills even so small a change as that can produce surprising results. Half an hour after sunrise (or, at any rate, the time when the sun was supposed to rise) darkness descended once again and the lamps had to be re-lit. There was a feeling of uneasy tension in the air, and my hair crackled loudly as I brushed it.

Without further warning a sheet of lilac light filled the world, a tree split nearby, and the thunder fell on us like shell fire. There followed a cloudburst, and so it continued for more than two hours. Not knowing when the storm would abate, and not at all anxious to spend yet another night at Denning, we went over to the lines and made a few half-hearted attempts to get the porters away, without much success. Thus, before we even started we were wet through and perished with cold.

About 10.30 the rain lessened and the porters began to make a move. To complicate an already far from ideal start, our forty-first porter (the Mishmi) had not been seen since the night before, and plainly had no intention of coming. The extra load consisted of a camp-bed and our small lunch *joppa*, which could not possibly be left behind to be sent up later — perhaps. In the end, a man who had been making bamboo baskets for us volunteered to carry the offending load as far as Theronliang. Further than that he could not, and would not, venture; and he had to go home now and have his meal first. This was better than nothing; but when (or whether) we should

ever see him again was anybody's guess. We decided not to wait ourselves, but left Akkey to see that the fellow really did come.

It was a relief to move at last (even though I had to abandon, only half read, an exciting sea story from a 1924 *Blackwood's Magazine* which I should have to finish when we came back in November).

The Lohit Valley road was already familiar to Frank; but to me it was new. I had only read about it. (Having done so, there was no logical reason for my wanting to get on more intimate terms with it; but here we were anyway.) It was not, however, entirely strange, for the nearby Kamlang valley forests are identical in character, and a great many of the actual species we found there in 1949 are duplicated in the parallel valley of the Lohit. Not all of them, though. We looked in vain for a certain giant Acer, whose seeds we had failed to collect the previous year. It was disappointing not to find it in the Lohit Valley. Perhaps it was confined to the Kamlang and more southerly valleys.

On the bank beside the path grew ferns and mosses and, in the damper places especially, small pink flowered Begonias with characteristically lopsided leaves. They were quite pretty, if one happens to like Begonias, but not to be compared with another species (again, one that was common in the Kamlang Valley, but not to be found in that of the Lohit) which had pure white flowers and was sweetly scented. This was the time to collect seed of it; but we searched for it without success, and there is still no immediate prospect of seeing it in cultivation.

It rained a good deal, and when it stopped the trees still dripped. Also, the porters imagined that the small waterproof sheets that we gave them for covering loads like beddings, camp beds and the plant paper, were for their own protection. This was not so, but they were curiously reluctant to understand! Again and again we tugged a tarpaulin from a porter's head and shoulders and spread it, belatedly, over his load. It

was hardly surprising that when we reached Dreyi at dusk, in a storm of wind and rain, our beddings were soaking wet.

We had been six and a half hours on the road (too long for the first day's march) and were now nearly 5000 feet above the plains. The storm of the morning that had shed such torrents of icy rain over Denning had not spared Dreyi; only up there the rain was hail — big stones like moth-balls, as I discovered when I burrowed into the middle of a drift. For the last 500 feet there had been white patches of hail along the path, and the scene, in spite of the sub-tropical vegetation all round us, was distinctly wintry.

At Dreyi there is another Inspection Bungalow, and I have no doubt that it is the draughtiest one in all Asia. Though it stands in an exposed position, one would nevertheless expect the proximity of the forest on all sides to afford some protection from the wind. Perhaps it does; but what gets through knocks the breath out of you. And it is amazing, too, what air currents disport themselves within the four walls of the bungalow. All the same, the view from Dreyi on a fine evening is wonderful beyond words, and no one who has looked across at sunset on to the Abor Hills and seen range upon range rising in splendour beyond the Sadiya plain, would wish for a more sheltered site.

In spite of draughts the fire did not smoke, and we huddled over it thankfully while we ate our supper. The rest of the room was cold as ice, but mercifully the arrangements for water broke down, so we did not have to wash. I crawled inside two sleeping bags, with most of my clothes on over my pyjamas and my head in a balaclava. Just behind me the wind and rain drove in through holes in the windows. Several panes were missing, and not all of them had been replaced with rusty squares cut from old kerosene tins.

It was a wild night, with sheets of rain driven before a violent gale, and the bungalow nearly rattled itself to pieces. I remembered gratefully that this was the dry season, and

devoutly hoped I might never have to walk out of the Lohit Valley in the monsoon. Frank had done so in 1942, on the last lap of his trek out of North Burma; but on that occasion the weather had been fairly kind.

It rained all night long and was still raining when we left at 9.30 for Theronliang. Shorts, shirts and sneakers would have been the most suitable attire for such weather, but it was so bitterly cold we could neither of us face such spartan dress. It was eleven miles to Theronliang, with a stiff climb for the first half-hour to the Tidding Saddle at 6000 feet. In spite of the exercise, however, we got colder than ever. Hands in particular became quite numb, and I tried unsuccessfully to revive mine by rubbing them with hail. It was wet and only made them colder. The hail was so thick up on the Saddle, and for several miles below it, that it covered the path like snow. A bitter gale whipped over the ridge, still saturated with mist and rain, and there was no view.

Over the Saddle the path descended in never-ending zigzags to Theronliang, but so dense was the mist we might have been anywhere. Nothing was visible but the nearest trees, and the forest dripped dismally in the woolly whiteness. Our only thought was to get down to warmer levels and the comfort of the last real bungalow. We stopped for a five minute stand-up lunch half way down, under an overhanging cliff that dripped water down our necks persistently. It was no place to linger and we had no desire to do so.

By degrees the mist cleared a little, and about noon we could see high mountains all round us through momentary gaps in the all-pervading cloud. The snow was down to 7000 feet. When presently we caught a glimpse of the Tidding river a thousand feet below us, it was like nothing so much as a brown mud gutter, frothing angrily and spewing forth great logs and branches in its headlong rush to the Lohit and the plains.

We reached the bungalow soaked to the skin, teeth chattering. There was no place for a fire, but we told the *chowkidar* to

bring one; so he produced the usual thick iron basin and we soon had a fine blaze over which we thawed painfully, then tried to dry our sodden clothes. The fire smoked badly, but on the whole it was efficient.

There was no place for the Tibetans to sleep, so they billeted themselves *en masse* on the Assam Rifles, who had a small camp nearby. Understandably, our Tibetans were not received with much enthusiasm by the fastidious army of the new-born republic. Not to mince words, our porters smelled like nothing on earth and were alive with fleas and lice. I had watched them while we were weighing the loads at Denning. One after another they stripped to the waist, hunted frantically along the seams of their ancient, grimy *chubas*, and 'popped' the captives between their thumb-nails. Quite a slaughter there must have been. Down by their camp the half-dozen women were engaged in a similar occupation. They sat in a row, one behind the other, each examining the head of the girl in front of her, just as her own was being searched by the girl behind. It would have been amusing to have a photograph of this, but I was so fascinated by the whole performance I quite forgot I possessed a camera until too late. I hardly liked to ask them to do it again.

Our beddings that day were wetter than ever and steamed as we held the blankets close to the fire. They were far from dry when the wood was all used up, and that went for the plant press too. We had collected a number of plants in Denning, and a few more during the last two days; so there was plenty to do besides drying blankets, and while Frank wrote up the field notes, I began to change the press.

This must be done daily or the plants will disintegrate. On the whole they were in good condition, but the weather was doing little to help dry them, and already mould was appearing on the earlier specimens.

The rain stopped just before dark and we went outside for a moment. There was much fresh snow on the mountains across the Tidding, and in the failing light Theronliang looked

indescribably bleak and desolate. It is boxed in by high peaks and gets hardly any sunlight in the winter. There are not very many visitors either, and it must have been a dreary life for the bungalow *chowkidar*.

At seven next morning it was raining again, and Nima Tsering came over to the bungalow. If it had not cleared up by ten, he said, the porters would not start. It was twelve miles to Machhima, and from now on there was only a rough track. Being so heavily laden, the porters could not manage it if it was slippery as well. In an hour or two there was a sudden improvement in the weather and in no time the sun was shining. We prepared to leave at once. But somebody had just killed a cow down by the river, and the prospect of a feast was more than the Tibetans could resist. They decided to stay at Theronliang and enjoy the luxury of fresh meat while they could.

I was secretly rather glad of this unexpected rest day. Our beddings, even after being slept in, were still decidedly damp, and as head of the commissariat I was anxious about the contents of our plywood stores boxes. There were no spare tarpaulins with which to cover them, and after two such marches as we had just completed all were very damp inside. So we had a busy day.

It was surprising how quickly the muddy river ran clean again. By the afternoon it was white and green and sparkling, a fresh mountain torrent, and we watched a family of otters fishing. White-capped redstarts darted up and down, skimming close to the water for a hundred yards, then perching on the rocks for a moment before dashing away again. They were beautiful little birds, striking in colour as in flight.

The evening was fine and clear, with high cirrus cloud and less snow on the peaks. It looked as if fair weather had really set in. This was our last opportunity to have hot baths in a reasonably civilized manner, as the bungalow had tin tubs, and there were only grass and bamboo *bashas* beyond Theronliang, without such refinements as beds or bath. It was a well furnished Inspection Bungalow altogether, with springy iron beds

in both the rooms. I could imagine how we should appreciate them the next time we occupied the bungalow after nine months of roughing it!

We had supper at seven and turned in early. It would be a long march on the morrow.

CHAPTER FOUR

AFTER so much bad weather it was exciting to waken to a diamond-bright morning, warm and fresh and altogether invigorating. Everyone was impatient to be off, and before eight we had signed the bungalow Visitors' Book, paid the *chowkidar*, and started down the valley. It was going to be a perfect day. Walking easily, we tried not to hurry, but to spin out the golden moments as they came.

About a mile from Theronliang the path crossed the river to the left bank by a fine suspension bridge of timber and steel cables. We stopped to admire it, and its setting too, in the midst of the wildest jungle. Mountains rose almost vertically on every hand to eight, ten, twelve thousand feet; and everywhere there was forest, dark and invincible.

The bridge marked the end of the bridle track and the beginning of the old mule path, now fallen into a sad state of decay, and for many years far below the standard required by any self-respecting mule. This track was made in 1912 for a survey party, and must once have been quite a good one. It seemed to us a pity that it had not been kept up; but doubtless the Political Department had its reasons.

We halted forty minutes by a stream spanned by a swaying cane and bamboo bridge, where our porters had stopped for their morning meal. They usually preferred to have a bowl of tea and some *tsamba* before starting, and to halt for an hour by a stream half way through the march. However, 'a bowl of tea' to a Tibetan probably means four or five; and a handful of roasted barley meal goes a very long way indeed. When we caught up with them they were scattered in small groups, each group watching a pot of nearly cooked rice bubbling over a driftwood fire. While they waited they sipped tea out of wooden bowls, or kneaded a ball of *tsamba* into a damp dough, arms drawn out of their *chuba* sleeves, baring their backs to the warm rays of the sun.

At Theronliang the forty-first man returned to Denning, and for want of a more suitable candidate we had replaced him with a Mishmi. The latter had been told through the bungalow *chowkidar* to keep near us (as he carried our lunch); but being a Mishmi orders were, of course, disregarded, and we did not see him again till four o'clock, several hours after we had reached our camp for the night!

There was a touching encounter with two Mishmi girls on this march. We heard them coming from some little distance, rupees and silver hoops jangling with every step. As they turned the corner and came face to face with two Europeans, they stopped dead with astonishment, mouths open, eyes on stalks. I thought for a moment they would turn tail and bolt, but they decided that perhaps we weren't going to bite, and gave us a welcoming smile instead. Advancing shyly to inspect at close quarters a real live English girl, one of the Mishmis impulsively held out her hands to me. I took them and held them, and it was all very charming.

Frank wanted to be in on this, so when the girl had finished admiring our much-patched trousers and bush shirts, he held out his hands to her, hopefully. It was amusing to see the reproving look she gave, as she quickly put her hands away and walked demurely past him.

Machhima was reached after six-and-a-half hours. The *basha* was spacious, recently repaired and re-thatched, and we were very comfortable. The site was good too, with a lovely view across the Lohit to the towering forested mountains flanking the river. There was a steep pyramid right opposite Machhima, from which acres of jungle had been stripped away by a recent landslide. A bare whitish triangle now disfigured the mountain, destroying for a generation the symmetry of the forest.

An old friend we saw again for the first time today was an unidentified tree with a smooth white trunk, as leafless here in February as it had been in the Kamlang valley in May. In jungle so intensely, eternally green as that of the Mishmi Hills, a deciduous tree cannot fail to attract attention wherever it

grows; and this one was outstanding. Not only are its branches bare for several months in the year, but — still more striking — in the midst of neighbours swathed in ferns and mosses, the trunk rises straight and true for a hundred feet with never a fern to mar its stately beauty. More often than not the trunk divides into two or three within a few feet of the ground, each separate trunk then rising like a pillar straight up to the canopy overhead. The perfect habit of this tree is equalled by the beauty of its bark, silvery white and smooth as ivory.

To make up for a longish march the day before, that from Machhima to Nara was short and easy. We were woken in the dark by a party of Mishmis on the move, and our own men shuffling round lighting fires, fixing loads and so on. It was clear that we were not going to be allowed to laze, so we resigned ourselves to this unpleasant truth and got up. Breakfast arrived at 6.30 — a ghastly hour to feed — and even then the porters in charge of the cook box and the current rations hovered over us like vultures, itching to be off. It does not aid the process of digestion, I find, to be chivvied thus over a meal, and in combination with matutinal lethargy is almost enough to throw the whole mechanism into reverse. It happened every day, and by degrees we learned to put up with it more or less philosophically.

We made a record early start, leaving Machhima at 7.15. It was heavy going, after we had crossed Paya-pani, plugging up a steep and narrow path right on top of breakfast. Maybe our porters had the right idea in starting light, but personally I cannot get started at all without a proper meal. When its effect begins to wear off, I then like small snacks at frequent intervals, but never a big meal in the middle of a march, as the Tibetans seem to prefer.

We crossed two largish rivers by wobbly suspension-bridges, the water brilliantly green and clear like finely cut zircons. There was a great deal of cloud, but the rain held off until after we had made camp at 11.30.

Nara was the most beautiful camp of all, the grass and bamboo *bashas* standing on a sandy platform barely thirty feet above the translucent waters of the Lohit. The river here formed a series of rapids round either side of a shingle bank; then came a long green stretch flowing smoothly down to the next lot of broken white water. From the camp a snow peak was visible, and all around was the jungle.

A party of Mishmis passed through the camp, and Akkey bought some bananas for ten cigarettes. (In petty trade the Mishmis have no use for money.) He gave us some and they were very good, so long as one managed to avoid the seeds. To my dismay, for a further thirty cigarettes he also acquired, of all things — a hat! Not a nice soft thing he could roll up and cram into a pocket, but a positive helmet (it was of woven cane and guaranteed arrow-proof) which was so heavy that I knew in a flash he would never wear it; and it was almost a load in itself! At any other time I would have said firmly that he must not acquire so much extra weight until we came down in the autumn; only unfortunately the greater part of our assorted millinery had by this time been discovered, and I had not got a case. We could not with decency hang on to half a dozen hats apiece and then refuse to allow our servants more than a couple between them. I gulped miserably and tried to admire the offending headpiece. Akkey was very pleased.

Just after he had acquired his trophy and the Mishmis had disappeared up the valley, from the same direction arrived a bedraggled procession of five Indians with Mishmi porters. This was awkward. It had been raining for some hours, so they were cold and wet and wanted accommodation. The *basha* was tiny — it had only one room — and we were already in occupation. Also, the Tibetans had spread themselves through all the porters' huts. But there was plenty of room really, and we ruthlessly cleared them all out of one of the larger *bashas* to make room for the party from Hayuliang — two civilians and three Assam Rifles sepoys. All were very young and friendly, wanting to know where we were going and

why we were going there, how long we should stay in the Lohit Valley, and whether we were Americans. Answering the last question first, we told them that we were not Americans, in spite of the oddments of U.S. Army clothing we wore; that we were going to Walong to collect jungle plants; and that we should stay in the Lohit Valley for nine or ten months. One of them was Dr. P. C. Baruah, Medical Officer of the Assam Rifles outpost at Hayuliang. Later — much later — I had reason to remember him gratefully.

It was another raw, wet evening that boded ill for the next day's march, which was said to be nine miles. A rope bridge crossed the Lohit at Nara, to a Mishmi village of the same name on the left bank. Our forty-first porter could be counted on to spend the night with his kith and kin; and, as logically, could he be counted on *not* to turn up till all hours next morning. Though he had carried a load for two stages now, we were not at all certain that he would bother to return. We should have five rupees in our pocket, which he would not, but Mishmis can be very independent in matters financial if drawing their pay is too much trouble. Somebody had to wait and see that he really did come, and once again it was Akkey who stayed. If the man had not turned up by ten, Akkey was to cajole, bribe, or otherwise persuade any wayfarer who passed to carry that more than troublesome extra load. There was only one path and Akkey could not go wrong.

We could though. The main body of porters left while we were breakfasting. Presently off we went, blithely, along a well marked track close beside the Lohit. Our porters had gone that way, as it was less tiring than the ordinary route, which climbed steeply over a great spur only to descend as steeply the other side. (But to use this route you had to cross a large torrent, the Am-pani, early in the morning before the snow began to melt higher up.) So we followed the low road to the confluence of the Am-pani with the Lohit; and presently, after a boring mile through secondary growth, we found our-

selves right in the bed of the river. The Am-pani confluence was half a mile further on, and we covered the distance by boulder-hopping — that most exhausting of all forms of progression, and the most wearing to the temper.

When we reached the mouth of the Am river it looked innocent enough; but when it came to crossing it we found ourselves in difficulties at once. The water was knee high already and rising fast; and though it did not appear to get any deeper in the middle, the current nevertheless was very strong. We might have crossed safely or we might not. In any case, it was not safe for two people to attempt without so much as a yard of rope between them and — since I had lost my knife — no means of cutting a liana from the jungle. The water was intensely cold and the Lohit no more than twenty yards downstream. It was not a justifiable risk, and we sat down to wait for the half dozen porters who had still been in the camp when we left. With two of them, or even one, a 'chain' could cross without any qualms at all.

But nobody came. We boulder-hopped back under a nasty, unstable looking scree, and sought the path by which we had left the jungle. We had not particularly noticed where we emerged, and now everything looked the same. We wasted some time fruitlessly searching for our original footprints in the occasional patches of sand. Eventually Frank found a sort of path — nothing much — and leaving me to keep a lookout for people crossing at Ampanimukh, he followed it into the jungle to see if it joined the village path. It did, and presently he called me. We went to have one more look for our porters, spying out the land through Frank's binoculars, and on seeing nobody went back to Nara camp to start again.

We had, we found, come quite a long way. From time to time since leaving Theronliang we had been meeting Tibetan traders going down to Sadiya. One overtook us now with a solitary porter in tow. They were both powerfully built, but even so I was surprised that they had just crossed the Am-pani at the point where we had funked it, with the water thigh deep and still rising.

From Nara we started off again, going straight up the hill above the camp (Akkey and the extra load had already departed) and for 300 feet struggled up an appallingly steep and slippery slope. We had been going for three rather worrying hours before leaving Nara for the second time, and I for one was beginning to tire. However, we had a much needed rest a couple of miles further on at the Am suspension bridge, and as two small Mishmi boys happened to be there I sent one of them off to bring a bamboo full of water from the river in return for some dates, which greatly intrigued them. Frank did not drink much, but I was so thirsty I drank fifteen inches of water straight off from a bamboo tube five inches across. The child could scarcely believe his eyes. Had it been rice-beer or even tea . . . but *water*! He could not get over my phenomenal capacity.

Somewhat refreshed, we took off such impedimenta as rucksacks and field-glasses, lay back comfortably and had a good lunch off our usual snack rations — biscuits, chocolate, dates and cheese.

On we went after twenty minutes, in the wake of the two Mishmi boys. The path was very steep in places, but now we felt the benefit of the food and rest, and did better. The children were just ahead of us for several miles, and showed us the way through a large patch of cultivation, intersected with innumerable false trails all alike — and we had had enough of losing ourselves for one day!

At 1.30 I felt momentarily dead beat and hurled myself carelessly full length on the stony ground for a short breather. And at that very moment Frank made an appalling discovery. The binoculars were no longer round his neck, and after careful thought he could not remember having used them or noticed them since we were down by the Lohit looking for our porters three hours ago! There were two possibilities: either the strap had broken and they had fallen off, or they had been taken off when we rested at the Am bridge and been forgotten by both of us. If the first, Frank would surely have noticed it when they

fell; but if they had not been noticed and had, in fact, dropped off, they might easily have gone straight down the *khud*, where maybe they would turn up a couple of centuries hence. If left behind at our halt at the Am bridge, they would certainly be picked up sooner or later by a Mishmi, to be returned or not as the case might be.

I was for going on to camp at once, then insisting on a rest day tomorrow in order to visit the Am bridge again; but Frank thought it better to go back at once and see if the binoculars were on the road. He insisted on my staying where I was, or going on slowly to Hayuliang; but I hated the idea of leaving him to search alone with such a load on his mind, and so we went together, hand in hand. I tried hard to convince Frank that we should find the glasses, and eventually I almost believed we might.

We set a time limit, as we must reach Hayuliang by dark at six o'clock at the latest; but we gave up after only half an hour, both of us being tired already, and there was still a long way to go. By 2.30 we were back at the place where the loss was discovered. After a while we met a small party of Mishmis, acted in dumb show and Hindustani (probably not much understood) what had happened, and offered Rs. 25 reward to the finder of the binoculars. I indicated this by pointing to one of the women's ornamental rupees and opening my hand five times with all the fingers outstretched. (I only just remembered in time to stop when I got to twenty-five!)

Later we met a Mishmi headman wearing the Government red jacket. He spoke fluent Hindustani strongly flavoured with Assamese, and was unusually intelligent. He certainly understood the story, and said he would go straight on and try to recover the glasses at once, or at least spread the news in all the villages bordering the route.

On again and down steep slopes to the Delei, a beautiful river spanned by a wire cable suspension bridge of great length. The other side, of course, was uphill again, and we crawled with weariness. The camp at Hayuliang we had already seen

from a point an hour back on the other side of the Delei, and it never seemed to get any nearer. But we got there somehow. In the flat terrace fields a few hundred yards from the camp one of our porters met us with a thermos full of tea. Frank had a brandy flask in his haversack and we laced it well and truly. After nine hours on the road, and with something like fifteen Lohit Valley miles behind us, we were dropping.

The hut was excellent, only finished in a hurry that very morning and still damp about the floor and walls, which were of mud that smelt faintly and sweetly of cow dung — mithan dung anyway. We met a small herd of mithan just before we reached Hayuliang, one of them a pinky white bull of immense shoulder strength and ferocious aspect, yet docile as a newborn lamb. Strange that such fierce looking, semi-wild cattle should be so gentle.

Our backs and legs were aching horribly, but dinner revived us. Afterwards we called next door on the P.W.D. road engineer. He promised to send his Mishmi interpreter out tomorrow to try and find out about the field-glasses, and to repeat that the reward for recovering them would be Rs. 25. That is quite a lot of money to a Mishmi.

To bed at eight, dead to the world; but I began to feel more certain that the glasses would come back.

CHAPTER FIVE

As usual the porters started in the morning before we did, but this time the arrangement proved rather inconvenient. Before setting out for Pangong we walked across to the Assam Rifles outpost, to pay our respects to the Gurkha Subedar who was O/C Hayuliang. He was large and jolly and hospitable, giving us tea and biscuits while we talked; but as we got up to leave he asked to see our pass, which was in a box that had gone on ahead an hour before! There was nothing for it but to assure him that we had one and hope he would not insist on seeing it. He took our word for it and let us go.

So we left at eight, the P.W.D. engineer walking with us to the edge of the terrace to see us off. It will be remembered that the evening before, a mile or two below Hayuliang, we had crossed a major tributary of the Lohit — the Delei river, which comes down from the Glei pass to the north. It was astonishing, therefore, within fifteen minutes' walk on the other side of Hayuliang, to cross another river — the Dav — of much the same size as the Delei. Except for the Tidding, which joins the Lohit a few miles below Theronliang, none of the right bank tributaries can compare in size with the Dav and Delei; and yet, behind Hayuliang only a single narrow spur divides them.

This river also was crossed by a wire-rope suspension bridge floored with bamboo. The late Mr. F. P. Mainprice, I.C.S., Assistant Political Officer, Lohit Valley during the war, mentions in his tour diaries the trouble caused by Mishmi wire thieves who, in order to obtain good wire for their *dao* scabbards, do not hesitate to help themselves from so convenient a source as the bridge cables. If the bridges collapse under such outrageous treatment, it does not take the Mishmis long to cut cane in the jungle and make their own particular type of rope

bridge instead. Touring officers in a hurry, however (or plant hunters), do not appreciate the latter as a substitute.

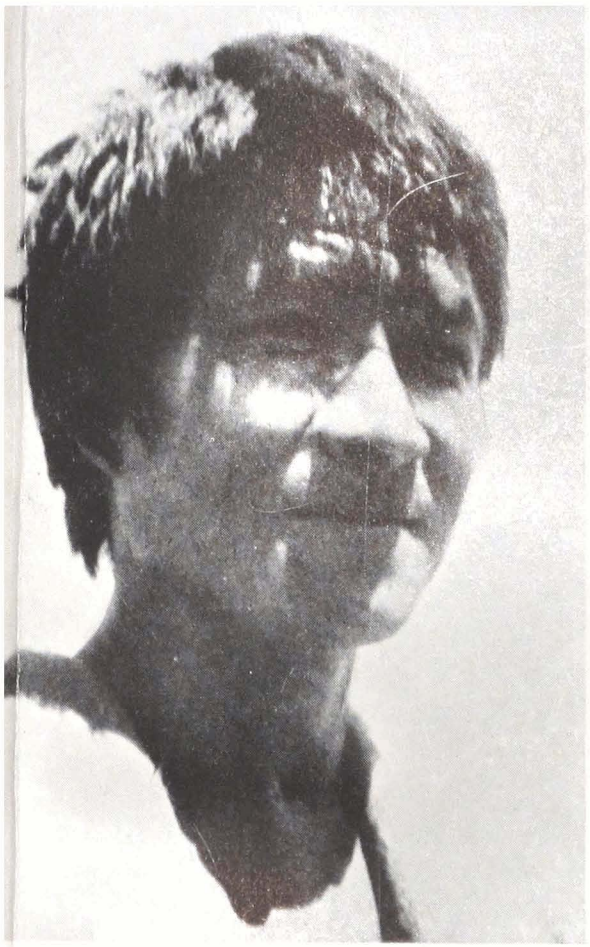
It was an unremarkable march to Pangong but for the views of snow-clad mountains east and west and the magical beauty of the Lohit, deep bottle-green now, broken here and there by foaming, creamy-white rapids. Every day the colour was more lovely, the water in the shallow pools more clear, and as the sun was still warm we went down to the river on a washing expedition — a rash decision with the temperature of the water only 44°.

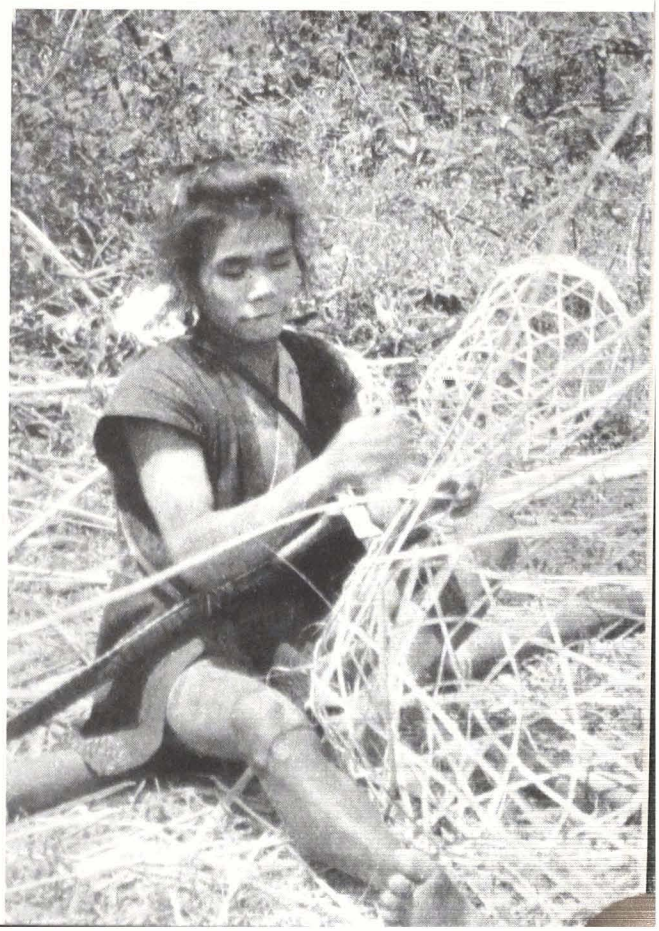
While we were rinsing socks in the river, a small dark-coloured bird with white eyelids, a bird that we had never seen before, came hopping over the rocks very close to us, every second shooting its absurd little tail straight up in the air like a wren, at the same time signalling morse by blinking its white eyelids repeatedly. It was a charming little creature that we never saw again. Frank took it to be a redstart; not the white-capped redstart, which is common hereabouts, but another species.

Towards evening blackish clouds blew over from the north-west and the wind had an edge to it. If bad weather was on the way, it was still behind us and perhaps would never catch up. The peaks to the east were razor-sharp against a cloudless sky, dove grey in the dusk; and that was the way we were going.

A dozen Mishmi girls and some of our porters sat at my feet for an hour while I changed the press outside and wrote up my diary. A few of the porters had developed raw, festering foot sores (largely, I believe, from wearing smart brown gym-shoes purchased in Sadiya, to which they were not accustomed). They asked for medicine to treat them. This was the first time we had been invited to hold a clinic, and after our experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills I was rather surprised at their holding off. There, people had come for medicine almost daily; and to tell the truth they did take up a lot of time. Neither of us felt cut out for the part of doctor, anyway, but we hated to refuse; in fact, I do not think we ever did so. Most of our

[*facing:* *Top:* A ZACKRING PEASANT:
TIBETAN PORTER (note goitre)
Bottom: AKKEY AND PHAG TSERING:
A MIJU MISHMI





patients had dreary things like jungle sores and vague fevers, about which I could not feel enthusiastic; but we would consult together like distinguished physicians and do our best for them.

Spectacular cases seldom came our way — which perhaps was just as well; but in Manipur, after many months of pills and ointments and stick-on-dressings, we were at last rewarded with something really big, when a young Kuki all but blew his leg off with a bomb. But sores and tummy troubles were the order of the day as a rule; and now we began handing out powdered sulphanylamide for the former and sulphaguanidine tablets for the latter — all the old routine. It was rather dull. I told the porters to walk barefooted until their blisters healed; and most of them were glad enough to do so, thus saving their precious gym-shoes for high days and holidays when they got home.

February 13th was a march to remember. It was said to be eleven and a quarter miles, but was certainly longer because we were eight and a half hours on the road. We always dawdled to collect plants, stopping several times on the way for snacks; but we nevertheless generally averaged a steady mile and a half an hour or rather more over a whole march.

We left Pangong at seven. There used to be four stages between the Hayuliang Outpost and the next one at Changwinti; but for some years now this section has been reduced to three very unequal stages. Mr. F. P. Mainprice, mentioned before, was an A.P.O.[1] of more than usually tough fibre (I have that on the authority of a Gurkha *havildar* from Walong who accompanied Mr. Mainprice on some of his more strenuous tours), and *à propos* of the revision of stages in the Lohit Valley that officer had airily written in his tour diary that 'the elimination of the Kaselyang stage between Delei and Hangam . . . will cause hardship to no one'. I humbly beg to differ; it caused great hardship to *us*!

It was all very pleasant for the first eight miles or so, though

[1] Assistant Political Officer.

the path was rather bad and the sun extremely hot. But after seven hours on the road we had become bored and could have done with a cup of tea. About 2.30 we met one of the Agricultural Officers who had been on tour in the upper Lohit Valley and was now on his way down. We stopped and talked for some time, then asked how far it was to the next camp. (He had just come from there so he ought to know.)

'Only two furlongs,' he told us.

'Two furlongs! Why, that's nothing,' said Frank. 'Come back and have a cup of tea.'

But he refused: said he could not manage it because — it was *too far*! Frank looked at me suspiciously; I too thought it sounded ominous.

We parted, estimating that we should cover the remaining quarter of a mile in about ten minutes. So we did; but there was still no sign of a camp. Half an hour later, with tempers worn wafer thin, we passed some citrus trees at one end of a flat open terrace where there were a few pines. Smoke was curling up from an as yet invisible source. It *might* be Munlang camp, but personally I suspected another leg-pull — a Mishmi *jhum* fire or something of the kind. However, this time we really had arrived.

It was late by the time we had changed and had tea, and the daylight was waning fast; but there were some important new specimens to press, and I had to hurry. One of them was a camellia (*C. drupifera*), and the Tocklai Tea Research Station at Jorhat was interested in all camellias, whether tea or not. Our camellia specimens, therefore, were treated with special care. They were the more valuable in that these specimens were the only ones we found of *any* camellia in the Lohit Valley above Denning; though *C. drupifera* is one of the commonest species in the Naga Hills, Manipur and elsewhere on the frontiers of Assam.

I have mentioned pine trees, and this was the first day we had seen them at river level. They clearly indicated a reduced rainfall — or at any rate a longer dry season — and were the

heralds of an altogether different type of vegetation. Already the broad leafed evergreen rain forest, so overwhelming in the lower part of the valley, had lost some of its exuberance. Now open slopes began to appear, clothed with various grasses; and down by the river, flat terraces were becoming more common, which of course made the going a great deal easier.

The following day, February 14th, we reached another Assam Rifles outpost at Changwinti. The Lohit was becoming a deeper and deeper green the higher we went. It was falling rather fast, though between long series of rapids there were still a number of deep, placid reaches which looked very inviting on a hot march. They were an extraordinary colour and quite opaque, like nothing so much as diesel oil — which is hardly a poetic way to describe a river so beautiful as the Lohit in February.

We met a large trading party from Tibet, complete with children and dogs, and made friends with a Mishmi girl of about eighteen, who sat and smoked a cigarette we gave her when we stopped for lunch. She must have been the daughter of a rich man (as riches go in the Mishmi Hills) for her ornaments were numerous and very beautiful. Any European woman who attempted to wear such quantities of 'jewellery' would only succeed in making herself ridiculous, besides being the last word in vulgarity. Yet this Mishmi girl, so young, so petite, and so unsophisticated, got away with it. Across her forehead, like all Mishmi women, she wore a broad band of beaten silver, with a pair of silver meat-skewers rammed through her hair, which she wore in a bun just off the crown of her head (as a woman of the Champs Elysées would wear her hat just out of the straight). Her dress amounted to a plain black skirt, ankle length, with a 'quiet' border design in maroon and majenta, and a tight-fitting bolero jacket that left the midriff bare. Round her neck she wore I forget how many chains of rupees and half-rupees, besides half a dozen solid silver hoops and several bead necklaces. A large Tibetan charm-box, also of silver and beautifully made, decorated with

pieces of coral and turquoise, lay on her chest. Her pipe too was of chased silver, perfectly proportioned but as long as a churchwarden. She was not dressed for a wedding or anything of the kind; she would wear all that finery every day of her life, even when carrying a load over bad ground. It always amazed me how the Mishmi women managed their loads at all, the wealthier ones especially, for they were so encumbered with hoops and silver rupees that they clanked through the forest like a troop of Regency ghosts. One such woman's ornaments would have stocked a silversmith's for months.

When the girl had finished her smoke, off she went, leaving behind her a vivid impression of youth and femininity which will not soon fade.

We met, too, a *havildar* and several sepoys of the Assam Rifles who were returning to Sadiya after six months' duty in Walong. They were a smart, polite, very pleasant lot of youngsters, and made a good impression. Intelligent, too; but when it came (more or less from habit) to asking the old question about how far it was to the next camp, no two of them could agree.

'Two miles to Changwinti,' said the *havildar*.

'Half a mile,' suggested a rifleman in the same breath.

'Half to two miles,' corrected the *havildar*.

And it was five.

We found our things parked in a room next to the schoolmaster. Frank told me no other European woman had been so far up the Lohit Valley, but I think he must have been mistaken. It was hard to believe that none of the former P.O.s' and A.P.O.s' wives ever took such a golden opportunity to see the frontier ranges as their husbands' tours afforded. Mr. Mainprice, however, mentions 'an elderly lady' who *twice* went several marches up the Delei valley, near Hayuliang, to collect insects for the Natural History Museum. She must have been very enterprising, for the Delei valley is appallingly steep and difficult, the track much worse than that through the Lohit

Valley, and often far from safe. Frank said that nothing would ever make him repeat the long, difficult and dangerous marches he had covered in 1928 and 1933 in the course of a journey down the Delei.

The Delei valley seems to be falling to pieces; yet it is probably the most thickly populated valley of the Mishmi Hills. Frank once camped for several months at Minyutang, the only large village in the whole valley. Late in the rains of 1948 there was a disaster. A lake high up on a mountain shelf above Minyutang burst its wall and overflowed in the night, carrying down countless tons of rock and water and completely overwhelming the village. The A.P.O., Mr. Campbell, was on tour at the time and had camped in Minyutang that night, together with a large number of influential headmen from nearby villages who had come to confer with him, and the two or three hundred inhabitants of the village. All night long the landslides thundered down; but after several days the bolder spirits from more fortunate villages ventured to approach the ruins. There were no survivors.

The schoolmaster at Changwinti, Assamese, asked us to inspect his school in the morning, or rather his pupils, since it was an outdoor P.T. display. The words of command were still given in English, and more lengthy instructions in Assamese. The team consisted of five Mishmi boys from the ages of six to fifteen, only one of whom was properly dressed — that is to say, in traditional Mishmi dress. The others, still with top-knots and earrings, wore ragged nondescript shirts and khaki shorts (none too clean), so that they appeared to be lacking in interest or character. It is a pity to discourage the gay and colourful dress of the hill tribes; each tribe has its distinctive dress, and all are attractive, while the alternatives offered them are drab and dull.

All things considered, the P.T. display was quite impressive, and the schoolmaster showed wonderful patience with children whose instincts are intensely averse to any kind of discipline imposed from outside. After five minutes or so the two tinies

got bored, and scampered away up the hill without bothering to wait for formal dismissal. The drill-master wisely said nothing, and made no attempt to call them back; I think he understood the Mishmi character pretty well.

The march from Changwinti to Minzong was a short one of only four and a half hours. When we reached the *basha*, therefore, there was still half the day before us for plant hunting. Blister flies (*Simulium*) were very bad. These pests, like the house flies, are part and parcel of the Lohit Valley, and they had plagued us all the way since Theronliang. Nothing discouraged them, and in hot weather, if one did not wish to be devoured alive, it was impossible to wear shorts and a thin shirt unless the latter had long sleeves and one wore cotton pyjama trousers under one's shorts. They are very small, these 'dim-dam' flies, as they are called, with bodies striped black and yellow like a wasp; and they are experts in the art of biting behind the knees and elbows where they cannot be seen. When this happens, one soon becomes aware of a very characteristic irritation — quite unlike that caused by mosquitoes, leeches, ticks, fleas, or any other common blood-sucking pest — and sure enough, one will discover a tiny blister filled with blood. Until one is accustomed to them, dim-dam bites cause a good deal of mild discomfort; but one soon acquires a certain degree of immunity to the poison they inject, so that the bites no longer develop into irritating lumps, inflamed and tender.

We were now only three marches from Walong. Between Changwinti and Minzong the country changes its appearance entirely. A smallish gorge joins the Lohit from the north, and the road looks like continuing south-eastwards for ever, up a comparatively broad valley, right over the passes into Burma. Then suddenly, as one comes abreast of the northern gorge the track swerves sharply to the left, and one realizes with surprise that it is the broad eastern Ghalum valley which is the tributary. In a distance of only a few hundred yards the Lohit turns abruptly through more than a right angle, and the effect

upon the topography and vegetation is profound. Down the valley the hills are steep yet rounded, and thickly covered with grass or broad leafed forest. Round the corner they are sharp, jagged, barbaric, while the grass which clothes them is but scanty, and the forest consists only of scattered pines. This was the kind of country that stretched far into Tibet, until at length the savage river gorges are overshadowed by the vast expanse of the Tibetan plateau. Our hearts quickened at the thought.

CHAPTER SIX

It was easy going from Minzong to Yesong and once again we reached camp early, the path keeping to the level terraces by the river as far as possible, though occasionally we had to climb projecting spurs.

The following morning we were away early as usual, with the promise of another easy, level march that was by no means fulfilled. The hillman's notion of what is level and mine do not coincide, I find. Part of the way was a very high traverse, the path barely a foot wide, across cliffs some two thousand feet above the river. We had already encountered several parties of trading Tibetans; and then, on the very narrowest part of this goat track, our party ran into a long string of Mishmi porters, closely followed by a half-platoon of Assam Rifles, who had just been relieved in Walong by men of No. 3 Platoon. If the rule of the road was left, then we had the inside track — only there was not room for two abreast, and it was agonizing, in the occasional shallow bays, to watch a burly Tibetan with an outsize load shoving past a small Mishmi girl with a sixty-pound bag of rice on her back. The track here was really very bad and called for a sure foot and steady head. Also, we felt it a heavy responsibility to take laden porters over such dangerous ground. They could be relied on not to get giddy or slip, but the soil was so weakened by recent burning — a crime committed annually — that it crumbled at a touch.

As I have said, the path was no more than a narrow shelf across precipitous slopes; it had been burnt over scarcely a week before, and was therefore friable; and about a hundred persons had used it in the last few days, all doing their bit to push the soil down into the valley. How many more could pass this way, I wondered, before the path crumbled away to vanishing point?

The steep hillsides were dismal, charred to blackness as they

were by deliberate firing — most of it to no purpose, as that part of the valley is virtually uninhabited, and there are no domestic cattle requiring grass for grazing.

The going became more difficult, and there were several short galleries built round vertical buttresses. These galleries, I firmly believe, are the product of that great inventive mind, Heath Robinson. Where a cliff cannot be 'turned' or a path cut across it, the road engineers have built wooden galleries, supported by poles jammed into cracks or resting on ledges below. Across these are laid bamboos, or flat stones are placed to make a rickety pathway, the whole contraption tied up with strong jungle lianas or strips of bamboo.

Before we left Jorhat, we had each had a pair of English boots re-soled, but today, after only ten marches, one of my new soles parted company with the upper, and the other was in much the same case. I had hoped to keep my best nailed boots for rougher conditions higher up; but that was not to be. Even our best were none too good, but they had to do.

At Shet Ti camp we met a P.W.D. road inspector and the Medical Officer from Walong, Dr. M. C. Goswami. They came and had tea with us while we exchanged news, and told us what Walong was like. There had always been a small village there, but the fort had only been built in 1944. Everyone spoke well of Walong. All the riflemen we had met on the road in the last few days had said what a grand place it was, with good barracks and plenty of flat ground for football and volley ball. There was a large vegetable garden, they told us, and a dairy too; so that, apart from the lack of fresh meat regularly (as Hindus they would not eat beef), the men fed very well indeed. The doctor, I remember, had been particularly impressed by the water supply, which he said was first-class and without limit. This was all good news, and we became quite excited at the prospect of arriving at Walong next day.

We met both of them again, the P.W.D. man not for nine months, but the doctor many times. He was now on his way down to Changwinti to deal with a case of smallpox in the

village. The Assam Rifles, of course, have to submit to regular vaccination and stabs of anti-this and that, so that smallpox, cholera and typhoid do not come their way; which is just as well. The Lohit Valley is no health resort; neither can one be ill there in comfort.

The weather had been cold and cloudy for several days, but no rain had fallen for a week. Snow covered the tops of the mountains, which near Shet Ti camp are very steep indeed, making the Lohit gorge almost a box canyon for several miles. How different was this part of the valley from that below Minzong! The right-angle bend had cut off much of the rainfall in a mile. There were still patches of broad leafed forest, it is true; but it was mostly deciduous, and only occurred in gullies where there was protection from the howling wind which blew up the gorge all the year round; otherwise we walked through grassland on which grew scattered pines, or through pine forest with bracken undergrowth. Bare patches were not uncommon — patches where the rock was so sheer that no soil could lie and no plant grow. In the middle of the day a wind roared up the valley from the south, and the process of erosion was demonstrated as we watched. It was, of course, due largely to the deliberate, indiscriminate burning of the grassland, the strong wind blowing the flames from river level (where firing of the terraces was justifiable) right up to 6000 and 8000 feet (where it was not). And as the flames raced up the precipitous slopes, all the pine trees in their wake were charred and scorched and mutilated by the heat. This pine regenerates easily and quickly; but even so, many young trees are destroyed. Such wilful, yet ignorant, destruction of the soil was appalling to behold.

The Shet Ti was a clean, swift torrent rising below the Brai Pass, and had dug for itself a very deep bed, so that one descended and ascended some fifty or sixty feet when crossing it. All of these side streams were well bridged with timber and bamboo, though the latter was becoming less abundant the higher we went. Bamboos do best in a wet climate; but at

Walong the rainfall is only fifty inches a year, or even less, and the value of the bamboo increases accordingly. Without a doubt it is one of the most useful raw materials known to man, and together with cane (and opium) is the hub round which the whole Mishmi universe revolves, besides that of several other jungle tribes of the Assam-Burma-Tibetan border. Where, in those rain-sodden jungles will you find a house that is not of bamboo, or a bridge, or a basket which is not made of cane? A hundred other things, great and small, for use indoors and out, are made of the same materials.

Bamboo is used for bird-scares in the fields. You may notice a number of strings radiating from a focus beside a small shelter, and wonder what they mean. If you are curious, as I was, you will tweak the master-string to which all are attached to see what happens, and immediately a loud clacking from every corner of the field announces that the bird-scares are functioning properly. The 'scare' end is merely a long stout bamboo, split in half for three feet of its length, but with the two parts not completely severed. Pulling the string (which is fastened to one half only) separates the two parts of the hollow tube, so that when the tension is relaxed they come quickly together, making a loud noise like a Walt Disney crocodile in search of its dinner.

This invaluable grass — for bamboo *is* only a grass — is used in hundreds of different ways, and if it were not to be found in their hills, the Mishmi culture (such as it is) would be fundamentally different. A bed made of split bamboo, if not too rigidly secured, is as comfortable and springy as any I know; much more so than a camp cot or *charpoy*, which has no 'give' in it.

The march next day from the Shet Ti to Walong was very short, and because it was one of the most beautiful of all we took our time over it. It is true that the hillsides were hideously blackened by fire, but even that could not destroy the grandeur of the scene that confronted us when the path, after a short

spell through the jungle, emerged once again on to wide, rolling parkland, bounded to the north by savage crags that rose in one bound from the low-lying valley to 14,000 feet. Half their bulk was covered in a mantle of snow. Here the valley opened out a little, the cliffs (no less steep than elsewhere) receded, and beside the mermaid-green Lohit the river terraces were wider than before.

Two miles from Walong we crossed the Yepak river. A few yards south of it the path passes close by a rather interesting flat-sided boulder. In 1911, when Chinese troops occupied Tibet, some soldiers were sent through Zayul (the Tibetan province here bordering Assam) to occupy Rima and go as far down the Lohit as they could. They considered that Walong was in Tibet, and carved an inscription on this boulder. Frank had taken a rubbing many years before, and had the Chinese characters deciphered. They proved to be only flowery nothings, an ode of no political interest. Evidently one of the Chinese, overcome by the wild beauty of the peaks and valleys all around him, had been moved to express his feelings in poetry, carved in the very rock that so inspired him. On the same panel are some lines in the beautiful flowing Persian script and — more prosaically, and in characters more familiar — a bald statement of the presence in the valley of the 2nd K.G.O. Sappers and Miners. This was carved in the following year, 1912.

In a moment Walong came into view. Through glasses we could see the long thatched barracks, the surrounding stone wall, and a kind of dovecot standing up above the rest — the sentry's lookout. No doubt our caravan was being inspected with as much curiosity as Walong was by us. We walked beside cultivated fields and climbed up a short rough path on to the higher terrace where Walong stands. At the top of it was a signpost announcing that this was Walong Outpost, with crossed *kukris* showing that the fort was manned by the Assam Rifles. The track broadened immediately to a well-kept four-foot path, bordered on either side with a neat row of white-

washed stones. Fruit tree saplings had been planted beside the path, and nearby were the bamboo goal-posts of the football field. Walking quickly towards us, with a white dog at his heels, was the Post Commander, Jemadar Bir Bahadur Gurung, come to meet us. Feeling suddenly shy — for at distant outposts women are not to be found in numbers you can count — I fumbled with a perfectly satisfactory bootlace until Frank, who was collecting a plant behind, caught me up and we could meet the Jemadar together.

In a moment we met and were being warmly welcomed to Walong Fort by its commander.

CHAPTER SEVEN

As we walked beside the Jemadar the remaining quarter mile to Walong Fort, we realized with surprise that our long journey was over. We had reached the furthest outpost on this part of India's frontier, and what now lay before us was very much on the knees of the gods. Anything might happen; we might be going anywhere — or nowhere. It remained to be seen which. Our ultimate objective was the alpine pastures; but for the time being the immediate present occupied all our attention, and we subdued our natural excitement.

I could not get over the fact that in spite of everything — in spite of all our fears of delay by bad weather, bad management, bad temper, or bad luck — we had come twelve stages from Denning to Walong without the slightest hitch; not only that, but in a third of the time we had allowed! We had reckoned — it seems absurd, but Frank knew the Mishmis — forty days for this part of the expedition, and we had expected to reach Walong (if ever) worn out by endless frustration. But having taken Tibetan porters instead of Mishmis, we were in consequence worn out by endless marching, for it was a cracking pace they set. Day after day we had panted along behind our porters, without loads, longing for a rest day now and then, yet never allowed to stop. The Mishmis grow no surplus food, so that any grain you buy in the Lohit Valley between Rima, where rice is grown, and Sadiya bears heavy transport charges. Our porters, therefore, could not afford to stop and rest. We could not have done so ourselves. They did, it is true, spend a day at Theronliang in order to have a feast, and I hope they thought the fresh beef they got there worth the rice they had to buy later at Hayuliang, when its price was already two and a half times what it had cost in Sadiya.

Having been dragged along for a fortnight like weary

puppies on a string, we felt we now deserved a breather. It was ridiculous to be so tired this day after a march of less than seven miles; but tired we were, and we sank gratefully on to our camp-beds as soon as Akkey had set them up in the Inspection Bungalow. In a moment we were drinking long draughts of tea which the Jemadar had ready to welcome us. He went to endless pains to see that we were comfortable and had all that we required; nothing was too much trouble. And he was as observant and hospitable as the perfect housewife, even lending us a charcoal *sigri* until our own little oil-stove was unpacked; it was decidedly cold and the fire was a kind thought.

While we were all talking and drinking tea, Akkey came in to say that the porters (some of whom were starting back to Sadiya the same afternoon) wanted their pay at once. First we called for all the waterproof sheets, and mentioned also that there was still a pocket-knife missing. It would be profitable to them all if the knife were returned at once. There was no shadow of doubt that one of the porters — one of the men — had stolen it at Denning, and it would be surprising if by this time the thief had not shown it proudly to his friends. But he had not, and the announcement that *baksheesh* for all, above their normal pay, would be withheld until the knife was returned, merely provoked a free fight in the porters' lines. Whoever it was, kept his crime — and my knife — to himself, for I never saw it again.

Into the tiny room we occupied were crammed the following: five boxes, two beds, a table and three chairs (these last great solid wooden thrones produced in our honour from the doctor's quarters — he was away); Frank, the Jemadar and myself seated upon the aforesaid thrones; the Jemadar's dog warming himself beside the fire; Akkey, who performed the functions of interpreter; the porters' *sirdar* Nima Tsering (twice the size of any of us except Akkey); and, one after another, a procession of thirty-four Tibetan men and six women. The aroma was choice — but not *my* choice.

We were glad to have the Jemadar present at the pay-off, as an unbiased witness that our part of the contract was fulfilled to

the letter; otherwise some of the brighter ones would almost certainly have invented further claims on us. And who can blame them? In their own country they are imposed upon shamefully and never paid a wage for supplying transport — not when they are employed by the officials, that is, who exploit them to the limit.[1] It is a reasonable and intelligent form of taxation, in a roadless country like Tibet where the only wheels are prayer-wheels, to make the villages supply free transport to travelling officials, whether of ponies, yaks or men. But it should be strictly limited to so many loads — *official* loads — a year, any number above that, including any loads for private trade, being paid for at a fair and reasonable rate. Bitter complaints were brought to us, who could not help, by villagers who had been impressed for wageless carrying of loads so often that their cultivation suffered in consequence. Surely the labourer is worthy of his hire.

Most of our porters remained for the night, and those who were not returning to Sadiya had to have their passes checked by the Fort Commander before they were allowed to go home. There was one woman whom I liked particularly. Her name was Dolma and she came from Sangachu Dzong, nine days' journey beyond Walong. She was not, I think, so strong as the others, and often made heavy weather of the hills; but she always had a cheery smile when we passed her on the road, resting by herself far behind the others. She never complained that her load was too heavy, which indeed officially it was not; but all the same, I tried to make things easier for her by taking heavy things from her load and distributing them, unbeknownst, among the men, so that she could keep up with the rest. She herself was a party to the conspiracy, and took much delight in the secret we shared.

After lunch we went to have a look round Walong, and what

[1] In a recent lecture to the Royal Central Asian Society, Mr. H. E. Richardson said that this practice had been abolished. However, the reform has not yet reached the distant province of Zayul.

we saw came fully up to expectations. The wide level terrace stretching from the Lohit nearly half a mile back to the foot of the mountains, was broken a few hundred yards from the river by a double 'step' perhaps fifty feet high. The Fort stood on the upper terrace, its stone wall perimeter barely six feet from the edge of the precipitous step. Inside the perimeter, which measured eighty yards by a hundred, stood seven buildings, including on the eastern (river) side the hospital, a granary and the Inspection Bungalow; and on the west, three barracks and office buildings, with the guardroom placed lengthwise to the south. In the middle was a small pond full of fish.

At the corners of the perimeter wall were machine-gun emplacements, and the wall itself was five feet high and two feet thick. It was not at all like a Cornish stone wall, which is easy to build neatly because the materials used to make it are flat flakes of slatey rock. In Walong, only rounded water-worn boulders are (or were) available, so that a wall is difficult to build at all, and not very stable when built. All the work involved in building the fort — and much of it was highly skilled — was done by the Assam Rifles themselves, who are nothing if not versatile.

The barracks and bungalow were of timber planks and raised a foot off the ground. There was, of course, no glass in the windows, which could be covered only by draught screens and had to be small. To overcome the resulting darkness, the inside walls were covered with white cotton parachute cloth. Just outside the perimeter stood the high dove-cot lookout post, manned twenty-four hours in the day; and beyond it a white-washed canteen-cum-clubhouse, a few grass and bamboo *bashas* and latrines, and an open-sided 'schoolroom' (roofed) with rows of iron desks and benches made from perforated runway sections.

There were flower beds and fruit trees; everything was as clean and tidy as a Dutch kitchen, and it all looked well run and highly organized. The men, too, were smartly and tidily dressed, though strict uniform was not insisted upon. But the

real *pièce de résistance* at Walong was, as the doctor had said, the water supply, which made sanitary arrangements in this remote, unheard of outpost as hygienic and civilized as any in the world. There was, moreover, nothing that could go wrong, so that unless the perennial spring in the mountain suddenly ran dry, the water would go on swiftly flowing for ever. And why *should* the spring run dry? It was not a possibility that the most pessimistic of plumbers need consider. Channels had been dug round each separate building, so that clean running water was laid on everywhere, and as it was uncontaminated between the source and Walong, we never had to boil it before drinking.

Beyond the games field rose the mountain wall, not sheer from the bottom like the peaks of Dong three miles to the north, but steepening gradually from rolling, pine-clad hillocks. They introduced an unexpected note of gentleness where it was most needed, for the mountains of Walong are undeniably harsh and crude, like a Picasso-style landscape created by an infant let loose with a box of chalks. Only the rounded hillocks saved it from such a fate.

Akkey and Phag Tsering were meat eaters and had had none since leaving Sadiya, so we arranged for one of them to go to Rima without delay and see what could be bought. Akkey left on the 19th with some of our porters, taking with him food for five days. Contrary to expectations, there was no meat for sale in Walong, and no eggs or chickens either. We were, it is true, offered a scraggy old hen for Rs. 3/8, which extortionate price we declined to pay. (She would have made us one tough meal, and a small one at that.) We were also given three eggs by an old woman from the village who, I suspect, just wanted to see what we looked like. Two of them must have been family heirlooms, for they danced so merrily on top of the water when I tested them that they almost became airborne. Those eggs reminded me somehow of the special life-jackets sold during the war, for the luxurious support of seafarers who did not care to be torpedoed in the hard and lumpy lifebelts provided by the

British Board of Trade. They were marvellously padded, and guaranteed to keep a body afloat for weeks, whether alive or not. You could get them at Harrods in the department euphemistically known as 'Sports and Games'.

Walong lies at the bottom of a windy, semi-arid gorge only 4000 feet above sea-level, and the flora, though more varied than might be supposed, is decidedly dull. On the mountain tops above Walong, however, there would be a rich alpine flora, and it was there that we hoped to do the bulk of our collecting.

While Akkey was away we explored the country round about, and on one of the first days that we were at Walong Frank found a ground orchid in flower, a Cymbidium with slender grass-like leaves (*C. cyperifolium*). The flowers, too, were grass-green, with maroon markings on the tightly curled lip. It was a beautiful plant but not (in its natural setting) striking; for it grew where the grass was longest, and was then almost indistinguishable from its surroundings, even when we carefully searched for more of it. Orchids in the upper Lohit Valley were rare; we found only about a dozen ground orchids in the arid region proper, but a good many more, including a few epiphytes, in forested side valleys at a greater altitude, where shelter and a higher rainfall gave better conditions for the orchid family in general. Cymbidiums are predominantly epiphytes of the wetter evergreen forests, and I wondered whether this one would not have been happier on a mossy tree trunk the other side of Minzong.

In sparsely populated hill tracts news travels like lightning; you hear of comings and goings weeks before they occur. So when Phag Tsering told us, two days after we reached Walong, that an American sahib had just arrived from Tibet (right in the middle of winter, was it likely?) and further, that he had a long beard and longer hair, I thought he must be talking through his hat, and said as much. But, apart from the detail that the American was a Scot, the whole fantastic story was perfectly

true; and while Frank was still sceptically implying that Phag Tsering had better consult an oculist, in walked — well, I thought it was John the Baptist. However, he introduced himself merely as Patterson — George Neil Patterson. Dressed for the road, he was wearing riding breeches, boots with leather leggings, a white silk Chinese shirt buttoning across the shoulder, and a Tibetan *chuba*.

But it was not the clothes that attracted attention, but the man wearing them. He was strikingly handsome. Tall and well built, he looked magnificently fit. He had a beard, as Phag Tsering had said, and deepset blue eyes. It was also true that he had long hair, chestnut in colour, fine and wavy, which fell nearly to his shoulders. Effeminate? No, not in the smallest degree. It was not a pose, the long hair and elegant dress, and because it was not, they emphasized rather than softened the powerful, clear-cut features which, though youthful, were yet so firmly drawn.

We gave him the room at the end of the bungalow, separated from ours by another, but there were no doors between. After he had had a meal we heard his news. Patterson was a free-lance missionary, still studying the language and customs of Tibet before he began his serious work among the Tibetans. He had come from a place thirty days journey away on the other side of the Yangtse river, but had travelled so fast that not the breath of a rumour had preceded him. The first and last that anyone knew of his arrival *was* his arrival. He had come, in mid-winter, by the route followed eighty years before by A. K., one of the great Indian explorers of the nineteenth century. He was, to the best of my knowledge, the first European to try it, and that he got through safely so late in the season, crossing snowbound passes 16,000 feet high on the way, is a tribute to his courage and endurance. He had very little baggage with him, and only one Tibetan servant; even so, the whole party had all but perished in a blizzard on the Tila La, when every landmark was blotted out, and even the prayer-flags crowning the pass were covered by the snow. No yak were

available for carrying loads, and on the pass one pony died of exhaustion and exposure, while the other ponies only just survived.

Patterson had been an intimate friend of the powerful Bondatsang family in Eastern Tibet — more accurately in China, since one branch of this progressive and enterprising family had quarrelled with Lhasa and been expelled from Tibet ten years before. They had moved to a valley near Batang,[1] where the bulk of the population is Tibetan, though the country is politically a part of Szechuan province in western China.

On his way Patterson had stayed with Dege Se, the *Deben* of Gartok, a member of an influential Lhasa family who nevertheless held unorthodox views on the government of Tibet. I suspect that Lhasa was aware of them, and that because of his independent notions Dege Se was posted to a remote part of the eastern frontier where it was hoped he could do no harm. He had been a pupil of Mr. Frank Ludlow before the school at Gyantse was closed down, and had absorbed some English ideas while enjoying the hospitality of British Political Officers in the past. It was his ambition to set up modern hospitals in Tibet, run by foreigners until such time as Tibet had enough trained doctors and nurses of her own to dispense with outside help. It was not his intention to open the floodgates and allow foreigners into Tibet without discrimination — though it is unlikely that many would want to go there, or having got there want to stay! Lhasa probably feared that an 'army in white' would be the thin end of the wedge. Besides, the wonders of modern medicine and surgery in Tibet could not but undermine the influence of the church, for it is the lamas who are the medicine men in Tibet, and the most skilful and painstaking of them could hardly hope to compete with the phenomenal healing power of the sulpha drugs, anti-biotics and antiseptic surgery.

Patterson having arrived out of the blue, he had to wait at

[1] Now Pa-an (pronounced Bah-ahn).

Walong until the Political Officer in Sadiya — and also the Central Government in Delhi — allowed him to go on. He was not in any particular hurry, and as he was an interesting and entertaining companion we rather hoped he would be detained some time. Signals passed to and fro over the W/T, and it was six days before he was allowed to continue his journey.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EVERY day we were at Walong we did a little botanizing, but there was not much to be seen in flower so early in the year. Phag Tsering, conventionally attired in shorts and jersey, used to join in the football. So did Patterson; only *he* had no shorts, and might be seen most afternoons flying about the football ground in breeches and silk shirt, his arms slipped out of his warm Tibetan *chuba*, the sleeves flapping wildly as he ran.

Patterson had done a year's special course in a London hospital before beginning his work among the Tibetans in 1947. There was plenty of scope for a doctor on the Chinese-Tibetan border, even if he were not fully qualified. He had come to India now because his medical stores were finished and he could no longer replace them via Shanghai. It seemed to us, even then, that he would be lucky if he ever got back; but if Patterson, who deeply loved the Tibetan people and their way of life, had any doubts himself, he never uttered them.

On February 25th a wireless message came from Sadiya saying that he could continue his journey, and the following morning he left. We missed him especially in the evenings, when he had always had supper with us. He had been most generous in giving us presents of rice and flour, walnuts, raisins, and salt; and it seemed a poor return to give him only a few tins of meat and milk to take with him, a little chocolate and some tea. But to tell the truth, we had brought with us stores for a bare six months, in the belief that we should be able to live entirely off the country during the summer months. That appeared unlikely now, and we might have to spin them out for a good ten months.

The day Patterson left it was reported that three Americans, a man and two women, would arrive the next day from Lhasa, where the man had an appointment under the Tibetan

government! One of the women was sick and being carried in a dandy. We wondered who they could be, and prepared, if necessary, to move into tents and let them have the bungalow to themselves.

Akkey returned from Rima on the 24th with a bag of dried yak meat and another of *tsamba*. The meat had been brought from Chamdo by a trader, and consisted of solid black lumps which looked singularly unappetizing. Akkey said it had been buried thirteen years in the snow, uncooked — a statement I accepted at face value.

On Sunday the Jemadar invited us to join a bathing party. It is not my idea of amusement to go bathing in mountain streams in February; but the water happened to be hot and we decided to go. These hot springs were two or three miles from Walong up the main valley, and it was a delightful walk through pine woods and grassland to reach them. The path in places was a mere wrinkle high up on the face of slopes so steep that they were often bare rock; and as I edged cautiously along it, I wondered how anybody could possibly be carried over such a terrible track. I hoped the sick American would be able to walk over the bad places; if not, one mistake in placing the feet and the whole dandy would go over the *khud*, dragging the bearers with it.

When we reached *Garram-pani*, as the hot springs are called, it was not actually possible to bathe, as the water was only a few inches deep. The spring, however, was pleasantly hot, a thermometer registering 103°. Rust-red and blue-green algae grew in the water, which both smelt and tasted unpleasantly medicinal. No doubt it had healing properties if one had the time to visit it daily, but the spring was too far from Walong for that. Dr. Goswami and several sepoys came too, and we all brought soap and towels. It was an enjoyable morning, and we justified the frivolous escapade by collecting some interesting plants and seeds in a jungle-filled gully.

There was music of a sort to be heard in Walong. In the

evening the Gurkhas used to dance and sing their lovely Nepali songs to the rhythm of a drum beaten with fingers or the flat of the hand. The two notes of the drum were a somewhat *im*-perfect fifth apart, and neither note blended at all happily with the music coming from the other end of the fort, where some of the Christians were singing American hymns. There is no doubt that certain of the hill tribes are very musical. Not only do they sing our western music (so different from their own) dead in tune, but they also sing splendidly in parts, either at sight by the sol-fa system, from memory, or (if they have not previously learned their parts) by instinct. This last is not quite so remarkable as it sounds, for it is unfortunately true that there is extremely little variety in American hymn tunes. If you know one you know them all. All are in the major key, the harmonies are commonplace, and modulations so obvious that they never contain the occasional element of surprise that is necessary in such severely simple music to hold one's interest. In all the time we were amongst the Tangkhul Nagas in Manipur I never heard a single hymn in the minor key, and though I once spent half an hour searching at random through Sankey's bulky hymn book to find one, I never succeeded. My natural reaction to such a surfeit of the major key was to go around whistling and humming about the prowling troops of Midian, to satisfy my craving for a little stimulating gloom!

Let this not be interpreted as a criticism in any way of the really wonderful musical achievements of the American Baptist Mission among the hill tribes of Assam. The Tangkhul Nagas are not the only ones who have natural musical ability, for the Angami Nagas and the Lushais, for instance, are outstanding. A few years ago the Ao Nagas celebrated their mission jubilee. At the time of the festival twelve thousand Christians came in from all over the district to the headquarters township of Mokachung, and a choir of six hundred Nagas set the echoes rolling from hill to hill in an open air performance of the Hallelujah Chorus! I wonder whether Sir Malcolm Sargent could be

persuaded one Good Friday to forsake the Albert Hall and conduct the Messiah from the top of the South Downs?

February 27th was a brilliant day, with the snow sun-flooded from dawn to dusk and every detail of the mountains sharply defined. The sky above the snowy peaks was deep blue, dotted here and there with harmless white puffs. *Below* them, fine ripple clouds were driving across the Lohit before a westerly wind, while the south wind never ceased to tear up the valley beneath this cross current. It was so hot that the south wind did not blow itself out until long after dark, and the day's range of altitude on the altimeter was 300 feet, corresponding to a change in barometric pressure of nearly half an inch. At sea such a rapid change would bring a hurricane, but in the arid Lohit gorge it was of daily occurrence when the weather was fine and clear.

As the weather was now settled we decided that it was time to move, and told Akkey to get porters. On his return from Rima he had reported that we might go and pay our respects to the Jongpen or local governor. As we also had to make arrangements to buy rice, we decided to go to Rima by easy stages (collecting on the way) before turning our attention to one or other of the Lohit's tributary valleys. It was impossible to get forty porters at once, so we decided to go in relays.

On March 3rd we were up very early getting the loads ready, but it was hours before we got away from Walong, after every load had been laboriously weighed. Phag Tsering was left behind to send off the rest of the kit from day to day as porters became available, and we left with Akkey and a total of eleven porters.

The day's march carried us nine miles to the Krao Ti river. Half a mile from Walong the Lohit can be crossed opposite the small village of Tinai, by a Mishmi rope bridge. Rope bridges are commonly used by both Tibetans and Mishmis, but the two are of quite different construction. The type made by the Mishmis is not nearly so easy as the Tibetan rope bridge; the

crossing is much slower, and involves more work by the person crossing. A Mishmi bridge consists merely of a few lengths of jungle cane (or stolen telegraph wire!) stretched right across the river, the ends fixed firmly to a tree or to a stout post. Over the ropes is threaded a large ring made of twisted cane, and through this hoop the passenger fits his body, sitting like a trapeze artist suspended from the roof. Then lying back beneath the rope, and using both arms and legs to haul and push himself across, he makes the hazardous journey upside down like a monkey. If many loads have to be pulled over too, a Mishmi rope bridge means an interminable delay.

The Tibetans more ingeniously make use of the force of gravity. A spot is chosen where the banks are high and steep. Strong supports are rigged on each side, one at a much higher level than the other, so that the bridge slopes steeply down in the direction in which you are to travel. The rope is made of twisted bamboo and is about two inches thick. As soon as the ends have been fixed tightly to the supports, and as much of the slack as possible drawn up, the bridge is ready for use. When anyone wishes to cross, he ties himself into a harness consisting of several yards of leather straps attached to a short half-cylinder of wood, which fits over the bridge rope. Then he lets himself go, and slides rapidly down the rope above the water. If there is a great difference in height between the attached ends, he may get the whole way over before stopping; but usually the gradient is not steep enough, or the friction is too great, and he stops before the end. Then he has to haul himself up the remaining distance to the landing-stage. To cross in the other direction, another rope must be used, sloping the other way.

A few miles from Walong, and on the east bank of the Lohit, the Sat Ti river comes down from near the Burma frontier. It is a very small stream for so wide a bed, and no doubt the valley was carved originally by a glacier, much greater than the present Sat Ti torrent. There are unmistakable signs of recent glaciation in the Lohit Valley and its tributaries, from Walong

upwards. At the mouth of the Sat Ti river stands the tiny hamlet of Dong, a handful of houses on one side of the stream and cultivation on both, all dwarfed by the terrific crags that rise immediately behind Dong.

The path was mostly good, though occasionally rather steep and slippery for gym-shoes. I had left my worn out second-best boots in Walong, and I was not going to wear out my good ones on such easy ground. There was one gallery to cross, and it was in urgent need of repairs. The bamboo bindings were worn and frayed, and the wooden supports looked distinctly tired. We crossed gingerly, one at a time, trying not to visualize what would happen if the whole contraption suddenly fell apart. It was an airy situation with a wonderful view down a thousand-foot drop to the deep green waters of the Lohit — a bird's-eye view indeed. Frank and Akkey, who do not care about such places, did not really appreciate it.

We were all hot and hungry when we reached the camp by the Krao Ti at five o'clock, six hours after leaving Walong. Blister flies were very bad, and all our precautions could not save us from many bites; and there were far too many pine trees. Over all the blackened hillsides young bracken was uncurling its fronds, helping the pines to choke most other plants out of existence. All the same, on a grassy bank that had escaped the recent flames, Frank found the dry capsules of a climbing gentian, full of ripe seed; and in a patch of broad leafed jungle a Deutzia also was in ripe fruit. There, too, we found signs of a ground orchid (Calanthe), whose flowers would be open in another week or two.

There was barely time to get the plants we had collected into the press before it was dark. The camp at the Krao Ti was much the same as all the camps up the Lohit Valley, but was in a much worse state of repair. The little grass *bashas* would not have kept out so much as a drop of rain; but as the sky was cloudless we did not worry about that. It was the bamboo beds that were the real trouble, and each of us crashed through them several times during the night. The next time

we passed this camp it looked like a flourishing village, with six or seven big huts, thickly thatched and comfortably arranged.

I could see that it was going to be hot the next day, so we left early to break the back of the march before the sun rose high in the sky. The warm air was full of smoky haze, and we watched flames running across the steep slopes on both sides of the Lohit. In one place we even had to make a detour of half a mile to avoid a living fire. In another, the effect of all this burning was to weaken the surface soil so badly that part of a hillside had slipped bodily into the river. As the path had run across it, this held the party up while a new track was stamped across the remaining soft, dry, sharply inclined sand cliff. The surface was in constant movement, and though we were unpleasantly high above the river, we were still more unpleasantly far below the top of the cliff. It was studded with occasional boulders, and some of them could have caused serious, even fatal, injury had they come unstuck during our passage and bounced down on top of us.

It was useless to tell our porters (cultivators all) — even to explain to them in words of one syllable — how shockingly destructive was this practice of firing the forest. They had eyes, and if they could not see the ruin that resulted for themselves, then it was hopeless to appeal to their intellect. It was unnerving having to cross those two hundred yards of slippery, unstable sand cliff in gym-shoes. I have always had a deep-rooted fear of landslips (a fear that many a truly courageous alpine climber would not be ashamed to own), and I felt on tenterhooks until everyone was safely over. The whole episode annoyed me. There was no natural reason why the hillside should have slipped; it was solely the result of man's interference. After such needless expenditure of nervous energy my temper was sweet as vinegar.

Akkey, who was really doing very well on his own without Phag Tsering's assistance, now blotted his copy-book. Striding

on ahead of us all, with the laudable intention of getting the camp straight for us as soon as the porters arrived with the loads, he turned off the main path by a faint track leading to the all but invisible Bedi camp, forgetting that *we* had not just been to Rima and back by this route. He did not, therefore, trouble to block the Rima path with freshly cut vegetation — the accepted signal for those behind to ignore a branch path — with the result that we sailed on past the turning, blissfully ignorant that the march was over. We descended into a wall-sided gully and climbed out of it again, then happened to look back. It was lucky for Akkey that we did so just then; for there, on the other side of the gully we had just crossed, stood a group of three or four *bashas* — Bedi camp! Back we went. Frank patiently explained to Akkey that such errors must be avoided in future, and demonstrated how, with a few fresh twigs from a pine tree.

In Krao Ti camp the night before we had had no privacy at all. Bedi was a trifle better in this respect, but nothing to speak of. All the *bashas* were falling to pieces, and cattle came and helped themselves to what remained of the thatch-grass walls and roof. Some token walls had been spared for the time being, and we rigged up a few curtains out of waterproof sheets.

Four porters, found for us by the Jemadar at Walong, announced that they were returning early in the morning, and asked for their pay. This was extremely awkward and annoying, and quite unexpected, too. They could not come with us another march as they would then be two days short of food, having brought sufficient for two outward marches only. There was nothing for it but to pay them and let them go, then see what could be done about the four porterless loads.

Akkey's seven pick-ups took the opportunity to say that they *all* wanted three days' pay at once in order to go to their village, Same, and get food. They would sleep the night in the village and be back with us early in the morning. Perhaps! We refused this demand as being both unnecessary and unreasonable, and eventually two men went, quite happily, without any money

at all. In their own village they needed none, but probably hoped we were too green to realize that! True to their word, they turned up in good time next morning, with three ponies to carry their own two loads and the four abandoned ones. After they had all had a meal of tea and *tsamba* we moved off.

In another mile we came to the frontier, marked by an unpretentious *basha* beside the Rima track, just above the river, where a solitary Tibetan soldier sat at the receipt of custom and inspected the contents of every load crossing the Line into Tibet. This, of course, was the busy season, with several traders returning every day from Calcutta or Sadiya laden with merchandise. Akkey was with us. He now disappeared inside the *basha* to announce our arrival and hand over the customary present of cigarettes to the frontier guard. We had already declared that we carried no arms or merchandise, so our luggage was not examined and we were allowed to go on at once. Three hours later we camped in a pine wood on the bank just above the Sap Chu torrent.

CHAPTER NINE

THE day after our arrival at the Sap Chu camp the first seven loads arrived from Walong. This was better than we had expected, and as one of the loads was the big tent lent us by Mr. Frank Ludlow, we wasted no time in putting it up. (That, on reflection, is scarcely a true statement of the facts, because we wasted a great deal of time.) While we were still in Sadiya, Akkey and Phag Tsering were instructed, one sunny afternoon, how to erect our own three tents, all of which were very small and perfectly straightforward. Akkey and Phag Tsering were both experienced in the art of camping and the rehearsal did not have to be repeated. We had not then troubled to unpack Mr. Ludlow's tent, because Phag Tsering knew its ways from A to Z, and could show Akkey any time how to put it up.

And now here we were, with no Phag Tsering to explain the mysteries, confronted with a bundle of canvas, sundry bits of rope and cord, a ground-sheet of vast dimensions and intractable rigidity, and thirteen unnumbered sections of duralumin tubing that all looked very much alike. The soldier from Bedi arrived in our midst just when he was most wanted, and was immediately impressed for the task of erecting Ludlow's marquee — for so it seemed by comparison with our tiny U.S. Army pup tent, a two-man climbing tent, and our 'large' tent, which was a modest six feet by seven. Actually, Ludlow's tent was only nine-and-a-half by seven-and-a-half, but it stood nearly seven feet high and was very spacious and comfortable.

To begin with, two sections of tubing were apparently missing; I could make no sense out of the eleven I had been fiddling with for a quarter of an hour. Then Frank found the missing parts under the ground-sheet, and I began again with rather better success. Things proceeded smoothly for a while. It was unfortunate that neither Akkey nor I had ever erected a ridge-

[*facing:* THE RIMA BASIN (before the earthquake)

pole tent, and Frank had not done so for so long that he gave a very fair imitation of never having done it either. The number of permutations and combinations possible in joining together a tent, an outer fly, three ropes and thirteen sections of pole (not to mention the ground-sheet) is astounding. I think we discovered most of them.

As we got more and more involved in a crazy tangle of ropes and flapping canvas, I was thankful Phag Tsering was not there to jeer at such an exhibition of incompetence. It was, at first, amusing; but when the sun dropped behind the mountains and it grew chilly in an instant, I began wondering if we'd get the thing up before dark. About half an hour after the joke had begun, we pegged the three ropes that go over the ridge and fastened the guy ropes all the way round; then stood back to admire our handiwork. Something was wrong. The sides of the tent, all the way round, could not be brought within three inches of the ground, still less pegged neatly down. The whole thing swung in the breeze like a crinoline. Frank discovered what was amiss: the ridge-pole had not been slung through the loops! That was put right. Then when we really had got the thing to look like a tent — and a very magnificent one too — someone discovered that with a tent that has a centre pole, the ground-sheet must be laid down before anything else is done. And now everything else *had been* done! We decided to call it a day, and used two or three small ground-sheets instead of one large one. A poor performance altogether.

Around the camp we collected a great quantity of scarlet berries from scattered wind-dwarfed bushes of *Cotoneaster conspicua*. This little shrub grew and flourished at only 5000 feet altitude, and bore incredible numbers of berries, even on the tiniest bushes half a foot high. It was, in fact, interesting to note that the larger bushes — those that poked their heads above the thick grass cover and thus exposed themselves to the cruel edge of the wind — bore hardly any berries; while those which lay snugly in the long grass, warm and protected, were thickly covered with them.

Growing near the Cotoneaster were bushes of *Gaultheria fragrantisssima*, a member of the heather and rhododendron family that is one of the first shrubs to flower in the upper Lohit Valley. The tiny bell-flowers were creamy white, without any scent; but the leaves when crushed smelled strongly of wintergreen. An infusion of the young leaves might make a useful brew for rheumatism.

Two other plants of which we collected seed were a wild rose (*R. longicuspis*) and a cherry. The rose was overburdened with small dark red hips, and must have been a wonderful sight in flower. It was common in open rocky ground near villages and cultivation, and in its leafless state was most striking.

A few loads caught up with us every day, and the *bandobast* in Walong seemed to be working smoothly. We were settled comfortably into our camp by the Sap Chu, and already local supplies were more plentiful than they had been in Walong. We had no difficulty in getting eggs or rice, though at New Year there had been a serious fire at Shigathang and many bags of tax rice had been destroyed. Somebody gave us a small bag of *tsamba* in return for cigarettes. We had some with soup for lunch. Nourishing it certainly was; of that there could be no doubt. But I would as soon have sat down to a bowlful of plaster of Paris as to one of the Tibetans' staple cereal. I doubt whether I should even have known the difference — till later.

On March 13th it began to rain, and continued for more than two days. After twenty-four hours of it I noticed a kerosene tin outside the cookhouse, its contents apparently tea ready mixed with milk. It seemed an enormous quantity to make in one brew, and I wondered whether Akkey had arranged to entertain the whole of the neighbouring villages of Sangu and Same. But it was not tea. It was water — our drinking water from the Sap Chu, that the heavy rain and melting snow had transformed into a frothing mud gutter!

The next day a very bedraggled Phag Tsering turned up

with the last four loads left at Walong. He had had an unpleasant march in icy rain that had fallen as snow barely a thousand feet above the floor of the valley. The Jemadar had sent us a letter, complaining that we had not paid the porters he had supplied in accordance with his chits. The chits, however, had made no sense, and we saw no reason to pay several headmen and reserve porters mentioned in the bills, who had never shown up at all. However, Phag Tsering explained that it was the custom to pay them whether they took the trouble to earn their pay or not! It seemed an odd system to me, having to pay for services *not* rendered; but if that was the custom there was nothing to do but toe the line. Frank returned a soft answer and sent back the balance by the headman of Kahao. As a peace offering for the mistake we sent the Jemadar, who smoked like Vesuvius, a hundred cigarettes.

Now that Phag Tsering was back we could send Akkey to Sangu to make arrangements for three riding ponies to take us to Rima on the first fine day. As it was fine on the 15th they should have come that morning, and we spent a busy half-hour collecting presents for the Jongpen and dressing up to kill. Then we sat down to await the arrival of the ponies. Nothing happened. Not a sign of a quadruped of any sort. At last someone from Sangpu came down to the camp to say that the ponies had broken loose in the night and had only just been recaptured. It was then too late to start at all and we went for a walk instead.

When we returned we found a small party of Assam Rifles at our camp, with two prisoners in tow. They looked harmless enough. One was a young Chinese-Tibetan who had been turned out of Tibet by the officials. He had left Rima with his wife and child with the intention of settling in India, but at Walong the party had been stopped and questioned by the post commander and forbidden to go any further. Having nothing against them, he had allowed them to stay in Walong for a time while the child was ill, and now they were trying to get back into Tibet.

The second prisoner came hobbling painfully along on a stick, using only one leg. The other had been mauled by a dog the day before in Same village. It looked bad, was already septic, and by signs I indicated that the patient should wash it in the now clean river before I put on a dressing. He was touchingly grateful, and came slowly up the path afterwards to have his bites dressed.

The reason for his being deported from India under arrest was rather amusing. At Denning a Mishmi had insulted him by saying that Tibetan women were no better than they should be. Such a charge, if not perfectly accurate, was so nearly true that it was certainly not worth defending; and the Tibetan must have been unusually chivalrous to have bothered to do so. He had whipped out a knife and attacked the Mishmi, who received an insignificant flesh wound in the arm. Hence the Tibetan's present predicament.

Akkey and Phag Tsering saw to it that the whole party had tea, and the *havildar* then asked if we could let them have a little rice until they could get some from Rima. They had none left. We handed over two days' rations for the whole party and, after cooking and eating a meal, two of the men left at once for Rima.

It began raining again and continued without interruption for another spell of forty-eight hours. One morning the temperature of the rain water in a basin outside the tent was 32°, and the air temperature was only two degrees higher. The snow was down to within 300 feet of us on both sides of the Lohit, and we were glad to be able to stoke up a fug in the tent with a little Rippingille stove. At noon on March 17th the clouds stopped leaking and temporarily disbanded, so out we went up the hill towards Sangu and Rima. On our way back two children scampered ahead of us, and we arrived at the camp to find seething activity on every hand. The children had come to report that another official was on his way to visit us, and we might expect him any moment!

CHAPTER TEN

THE official arrived hot on our heels. He called himself Transport Officer, and by his prosperous appearance gave the impression that the appointment was a lucrative one. With him he brought a retinue of half a dozen servants, and as the Assam Rifles were at our camp that afternoon with their prisoners, there was quite a large gathering. After giving the official tea and biscuits we discussed the weather briefly and then got down to business. Not *our* business, however. First of all we helped the *havildar* get rid of his prisoners.

Nobody had anything definite against the young man from the Chinese border, yet all were reluctant to allow him to remain permanently in their own country. For the time being, however, he was allowed to stay in Tibet. But not for long. Some months later we saw him again, still roaming about the frontier in neither the one country nor the other. A wandering Jew.

The prisoner who had lost his temper with the Mishmi was handed over by the Assam Rifles and allowed to go home. His dog bites had healed, and all the swelling and tenderness were gone. Because of this success we acquired an undeserved and unwanted reputation as healers, and in the next few days a number of people came and asked for medicine. They were welcome to anything we had, but symptoms were always so vague that I never knew what to offer. There are a hundred things that might account for a pain in the middle, and I knew perhaps three of them. It was all rather hit and miss, and there were probably more misses than hits, though I never heard that we actually killed any of our patients. However, I do not flatter myself that even that much success was anything more than a lucky chance.

The Transport Officer, Tashi La by name, brought an invitation for us to visit the Jongpen at Rima next day, and to

call at his own house later. Next morning we were to meet Tashi La in Sangu, so that we could ride to Rima together.

Once again we dressed with unusual care, and by eight we were away on tough little ponies having only one rein apiece, and Tibetan wooden saddles made only slightly less hard and angular by the use of a few blankets and cushions. Leather saddles, other than foreign ones, are unknown in Tibet, though leather is used in many other ways and is obtained from a number of animals including yak, takin and deer. The only type of saddle is of solid wood, quite ingeniously worked, but without spring; and a pack-saddle is converted into a riding saddle merely by throwing a few rugs over it and suspending from it a pair of large iron stirrups. A rich man will have quite a thick pile of rugs to sit on, and the good ones, beautifully woven in rich harmonious colours, are very gay and attractive and comfortable to ride. The more humble villagers of Sangu, however, did not go in for such luxuries as saddle-rugs, and since they had never had to hire out their ponies except as pack animals, we could hardly expect them to provide anything more than the bare saddle and bridle. There were stirrups of a sort, the leathers so twisted and knotted that our shins were black with bruises by the end of the day.

We picked up Tashi La in Sangu and then pushed on, very slowly, to Rima, which was clearly visible on the other bank of the river. There was one steep descent where we had to get off and walk, but otherwise it was an easy ride and we reached the rope bridge, a good mile above Rima, in three hours. There were six of us to cross and two loads. The loads went over first and Tashi La followed them. His servant tied him into the harness, saw that the wooden slider fitted properly over the bamboo rope, and gave his master a push. He was a heavy man, probably not less than fourteen stone, and had had plenty of experience in crossing rivers by ropeway. He got almost the whole way over, and only had to pull himself up a distance of five yards to the landing stage. Frank (who had also crossed scores of rivers this way) followed him and managed well,

though being lighter he had further to pull himself up the sag.

It was then my turn. A part of me was excited at the prospect of a new experience so different from any other. Of the other part, the less said the better. I was in a blue funk that the rope would break; that I'd fall out of the harness, or that I'd get stuck in the middle and be unable to move forward or back, thus having to spend the remainder of my natural life suspended in an undignified manner over the middle of the raging Lohit. The latter emotion unfortunately prevailed, and took such command over my stomach that I thought I was going to lose my breakfast. Happily I did not, which was just as well, because I'd have missed it badly later if I had.

I stood on the rocks under the bridge rope and meekly submitted to the indignity of being trussed like a fowl for the pot. Leather thongs were passed under my arms, under my knees, round my waist, round my neck — so fast that I had no time to remember the technique. I was then told to keep my head away from the rope and not to let my hands slip as my fingers clasped each other over the top of the slider. If they touched the rope once I had started, they would be badly burned and skinned by the heat generated by the friction. When all was ready I felt more sick than ever, but was so tightly parcelled that it was impossible to be so. Then a babel of voices rose above the din of the river, someone gave me a shove from behind and away I went.

The speed seemed to me tremendous, but I suppose it was not so really. At any rate, after all the rain that had fallen recently the rope was very sticky and my weight — about seventy pounds less than that of burly Tashi La — could not carry me much more than half way over the river. I stopped over a splendid rapid, my boots only a few feet above it. Then I tried to wriggle the harness more comfortably about my person, for it had slipped and was pinching me; but in such an awkward position I could not move it a fraction. So I gave up the struggle and began heaving my weight up the remaining distance. Again I had not had time to observe the proper

technique, and had become extremely hot and bothered by the time I had covered only a few yards and some kind soul came down the rope from the landing side to rescue me. He tied his harness to mine and I had nothing further to do but sit back and relax.

At the top of the river bank we all foregathered in the bridge keeper's house and were plied with a beverage which the Tibetans called tea. I believe one of the ingredients actually *is* tea, but you would never suspect it. The tea is churned up with salt and soda and emulsified with yak butter, usually fresh; but in Rima very little butter is made and the imported yak butter always smelled rather high. To me the brew was like concentrated dishwater, complete with grease and patent soap substitute. Frank declares that he really likes it, and so do most people if they try hard enough and can get nothing better. It was impossible to avoid having any at all, and for politeness' sake I allowed my cup to be filled; I even sipped the contents, though the smell and the flavour were nauseating. I kept saying to myself as I struggled to swallow the stuff: 'This isn't tea; it's soup, it's *soup*!' — which I did not find very convincing or helpful, as it was not even nice soup. This ordeal of drinking buttered tea was repeated with depressing frequency for the next six hours. Fortunately one is not obliged to drink all that one is given, and as the cup is filled to the brim after each sip one always finishes with a full cup.

The bridge keeper's house-cum-store was of pine logs, neatly and strongly joined at the corners and roofed with overlapping wooden tiles. There were two rooms, one small and well furnished with low ornate tables and many woollen rugs, besides household articles, such as large silver teapots, Chinese tea cups with stand and cover in Tibetan silver, charm boxes, and pictures of the Dalai Lama. The rest of the house — and for that matter, odd corners of the living-room also — was piled high with box after box of cigarettes. There were 100,000 cigarettes in that house alone, so that our gift — more cigarettes! — looked rather foolish.

Our first port of call after the bridge was Shigathang, and what had once been the official residence of Rima's two Jongpens; we walked there, having left the ponies on the other side of the bridge. Shigathang, the official village, was a sorry spectacle. Beyond the tiny temple and the *chorten*, which had miraculously been spared, was a level space strewn with grey ash, and here and there a blackened stone hearth. Nothing was standing of the houses and granaries, and the scene was desolate. Beyond the rice fields we entered Rima, a mile south of Shigathang. It was a tiny village of not more than ten or a dozen wooden houses, but with a surprisingly large population that turned out in force to stare at us. Probably some of them came from nearby villages, and had come into Rima specially for the occasion.

There had been so many conflicting reports about the Jongpens that we never really knew whom we were going to meet, nor how many presents to bring. We had heard that there was one Jongpen; we had heard that there were two. That one had gone to Chamdo to report the fire in Shigathang; that both had gone; that neither had gone. We were told that one was a lama; that both were lamas; that both were laymen. It was impossible to rely on anything one heard, though by the laws of chance I suppose we occasionally got true information. But then we never knew how to distinguish it from the false.

In any case, the first house we entered was the temporary home of the senior of the two Jongpens, and he was of the church. The village was a sea of mire through which we wallowed to reach the notched wooden ladder leading up to his house. It was windowless and very dark inside. On a small platform the Jongpen, after coming to the door to greet us, sat on a pile of rugs. We sat on the floor beside him, also on rugs, with our various gifts arrayed on a low table.

The Jongpen, a pleasant man of about forty, welcomed us kindly and gave us tea. Akkey then explained who we were and where we had come from. The Jongpen solemnly wrote down our names; Frank's first, then mine. At first he could not

understand why we had the same name, and Akkey had to explain that it was the English custom. Plainly sceptical, the Jongpen then passed to our ages, occupation and other personal irrelevancies.

As we were already in Tibet we took the opportunity of asking the Jongpen if he would give us a pass to collect plants in Zayul province. There are better hunting grounds, admittedly, but in case any of the other valleys we had in mind proved disappointing or inaccessible, it was as well to have a second string to our bow, and a pass for Zayul might come in useful. The Jongpen himself had no objection to our collecting anywhere we liked, but he had no powers to give us the run of his province beyond Rima, and for the time being had to refuse our request.

After talking for an hour the Jongpen took us to the house of his junior colleague, a hundred yards distant through the muddy lanes of Rima, where further tea sipping and polite conversation took place. By 2.30 we were starving, having eaten nothing since breakfast seven hours before. Some biscuits and a slab of chocolate were burning holes in our pockets, but so far there had been no opportunity to eat them privately, and we could do nothing but wait. Now, at last, we were offered some unleavened barley-buns. They were heavy and stodgy, but they tasted good and were gratefully filling in our empty state. At three o'clock, when we were covertly glancing at our watches, the Jongpen asked us if we would like a meal. The obvious answer was 'Yes, please,' but we wanted to get home in daylight, and with the rope bridge to cross again would have to leave soon. So we asked if we might accept the invitation later, when we passed through Rima once more on our way to Kahao.

The Jongpens asked us to take their photographs, and then we hoped to escape. But even then we could not get away. First we must trail back to the senior Jongpen's house, drink more tea, and receive presents. These consisted of about twenty pounds of rice, some bundles of noodles, a plate of eggs

(a quarter of them bad), and a pile of blackened pork so ancient that it was riddled with maggots and had to be buried — though not in Rima.

We left the village with relief at half past three, with only three hours of daylight left; and it had taken us four to get here in the morning. I was fretting and fuming over the delay, but etiquette forbade any dispensing with the formalities, whatever the inconvenience entailed, and we just had to be patient and look as though we had all the day before us in which to get home.

Near the site of old Shigathang several *bashas* had been set up as temporary shelters. They were of faggots and stringy grass, very far from wind or weather proof, and not nearly so comfortable as the bamboo *bashas* of the lower valley. As we passed one of them, a man came out to greet us who had known Frank in Rima in 1933; so once again we had to stop and be entertained. The hospitality of the house this time took the form of arrack, and Akkey (who had himself had plenty in Rima) warned me not to take too much as it was very strong! The information was superfluous, as the first sip nearly burned my tongue off.

Escaping after five minutes of arrack sipping we were then seized by the fat, jolly Transport Officer and made to drink tea in his house. There were bowls of walnuts and puffed rice on the table. The walnuts were good, and anything solid was by that time more than welcome. Even so, the delay was annoying, as it was 4.30 and we could not conceivably get home before dark; and we were still the wrong side of the river.

From east to west the bridge sloped more steeply than in the other direction, and one got a good deal further over before stopping. The rope was still damp, and the friction so great that the rope smoked with the heat generated. No wonder that it lasts, as a rule, only a month during the busy trading season, and when rain has increased the friction the wear is severe.

Akkey, who had had a good deal too much to drink, was volubly solicitous of our welfare and fretted me considerably

with his last minute instructions. He even tried to tell Frank, who had been crossing rivers by ropeway before Akkey was born, how to get over the bridge! Frank, besides being a good deal more familiar with these contraptions than was Akkey, was also sober and made short work of his injunctions. We crossed first, creditably this time; but when Akkey eventually came over himself, he put up a shocking performance and, like myself in the morning, had to be rescued from the middle of the rope! Even that disgrace did not suppress his exuberance.

It was five o'clock before we were all over the bridge and on our ponies again. Akkey chattered all the time, mostly in English, of which he had a remarkable vocabulary when tight; in that state he was always over-anxious to make himself useful, and kept asking if we were cold, if we were hungry, if our saddles were comfortable (as if they could be), and a score of other things that occurred to him. He was such a tiresome bore that Frank soon suggested that he go on ahead to the camp and bring back a torch and hurricane lamp, for the light was fading fast. That was just what Akkey himself had been saying he would do every ten minutes since we left the bridge! But somehow he could not control his pony, which like all ponies wanted to stay with the main party. Then he fell off and pretended that the girth had slipped (maybe it had, but it looked suspicious in the circumstances). We went as fast as we could in a failing light, but darkness fell at its appointed hour and we were still a long way from home. Also, Akkey was still with us, still foolishly saying he would go and fetch a light.

Beyond Sangu, which was only a mile from the camp, we went wrong in the maze of small paths. I was still riding, as I could not make out anything in the darkness and had no wish to break my neck. Frank and Akkey, having abandoned their ponies prematurely in the village where they belonged, staggered about helplessly in the mud, and at last Akkey really did go ahead to bring a lamp. We wondered whether he would ever find his way in his befuddled condition. Anyway, we sat down together like babes in the wood, tired (very),

hungry (very), and longing above all things to get home to a hot meal and bed. Akkey returned surprisingly soon, having met a worried Phag Tsering on the path just within sight of the camp, and relieved him of his torch. We turned the third pony loose after tying the rein so he could not trip over it, and watched it wander off towards Sangu, grazing as it went. There was no sign of the pony boys, as we had come much faster than they could manage on their feet.

We were home nearly twelve hours after leaving, and immediately sat down to a hot dinner, followed by an unforgettable cup of tea with neither butter, salt, milk, sugar, nor any other adulterant. I could hardly stay awake long enough to drink it.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AFTER our visit to Rima we settled down once more to plant hunting, and went out every day up the Sap Chu ravine, up and down the main Lohit Valley, and on the mountains above our camp. The weather was still unsure of itself and rain fell most days. Trading parties were returning from Sadiya, and one morning a caravan of thirty small mules passed, almost all of them laden with cigarettes. Each carried about 15,000, so that in that one caravan alone nearly half a million cigarettes found their way into Tibet.

It was a source of great annoyance to Phag Tsering that he could buy very few cigarettes, though they passed daily in their thousands. He did not smoke excessively — not more than twenty a day at the most — but he was nevertheless a tobacco addict, and went all to pieces the first time the supply failed. Usually quiet and polite, he suddenly became rude and noisy, said that cigarettes should be supplied free by us as he considered that they came under 'rations', and behaved in a most boorish manner altogether, winding up with the announcement that he could not carry on without cigarettes! It had never occurred to either of us to wonder how many he usually smoked, and when he asked for (and received) an advance of pay to buy 2000 in Sadiya, I assumed that they would see him through ten months. But he had, in fact, bought only 1000, and they were now finished. The canteen in Walong had none at the time he left, and it was all very trying for him — and us. Fortunately he pulled himself together sooner than I expected; and when, much later, he could get no cigarettes at all for weeks on end — at a time when even the non-smokers of the party would have appreciated the soothing properties of tobacco — he accepted the situation philosophically, never complained of his craving for a smoke, and did his work perfectly without it.

On March 22nd Akkey and Phag Tsering went to Rima to

buy their rations, and came back with some freshly killed pork (without any maggots this time), a large lump of hairy yak butter, and some eggs for us, very much cheaper than they are in India and mostly good. The butter was very expensive, as it had been imported from higher up the valley where the people keep yaks.

In the valley of the Sap Chu there was a certain amount of broad leafed jungle close by the river. Amongst other beautiful trees were two cherries of which we got plenty of seed, and a species of *Cedrela*. Growing on a cliff right beside the river was a rare Gaultheria in flower (*G. codonantha*), which hitherto was known only from the upper Delei Valley, where Frank had discovered it in 1928. The leaves, which are large and stiff, covered with crimson bristles, lie in one plane on either side of the stem, the fascicles of flowers being almost hidden beneath them. It is an unfortunate habit, because the flowers are thus not displayed to advantage. *G. codonantha* has the largest flowers of any known Gaultheria, delicate wide open bells of creamy white flushed rose. Unfortunately it is not quite hardy in Britain.

One Sunday we decided to do a whole day's plant hunting, so after finishing the usual chores in camp we started before ten and climbed up the hill across the Sap Chu to a height of 7200 feet. Most of the way it was very steep indeed, up a pathless slope strewn with dry, slippery pine needles (not nice going at all, and at times rather frightening in gym-shoes). We were still preserving our boots for the future, and made do with sneakers that had to be mended over and over again with string threaded through a darning needle. Without cobbler's wax the string rubbed through after a week's wear, and the repairs had to be done all over again.

Small gentians looked up at us through the springy turf, but we saw nothing new until we stopped for lunch, when Frank discovered *Gaultheria Wardii*, loaded with berries, growing with *G. fragrantissima* and *G. nummularioides*. This was a good find,

as the plant in fruit is very striking, having dense clusters of blue berries thickly covered with a pale bloom that makes them appear a misty blue or pearl white. The tiny creeping *G. nummularioides* was also in fruit, so we collected two species of seed before lunch.

In a shallow pit Frank found *Rhododendron oleifolium* in flower, but it had been badly battered by the recent rain, and the pinky-mauve flowers looked rather sluttish. A few, however, were undamaged, and the plant is well worth growing if one cares for that particular colour. There is a much darker form of this rhododendron which is decidedly worth its keep. Higher up we found it again, growing at the top of a villainously steep grass slope. In getting the flowers — no easy matter — Frank noticed that some of last year's capsules were still 'on', and though wide open, the five little boat-shaped carpels of each capsule were full of seed that had somehow escaped being blown away by the wind, or washed out by the rain. Bone dry as they were, it was a delicate gymnastic feat to lean over and collect the seeds in paper, without spilling them or pitching oneself down the slope head first.

Along the ridge top there were grand views up and down and across the Lohit, and we took several photographs. Looking down the sheltered (north) side of the ridge I could see a vivid scarlet rhododendron with apparently glaucous leaves, long and slender. I knew that *R. arboreum* is found abundantly on both sides of the Assam Valley between 5000 and 8000 feet, and the plant was familiar to me from our year in Manipur. I knew also that it is a very variable species; but after looking at it carefully I optimistically dismissed the possibility of its being *R. arboreum*. Incoherent with excitement, I beckoned frantically to Frank, who tormented me by ambling up like a sloth bear after a heavy meal. He thought it must be *R. arboreum* in still another guise, and when he had collected specimens from the tree, *R. arboreum* it undoubtedly was. But it was such a magnificent sight in full flower, I could not really feel disappointed that it was nothing new.

On the way down we followed a vague path for 500 feet, but it petered out in some thick secondary growth and we were gradually forced on to the steep, needle-covered pine slopes again. They were much more alarming going down than they had been when we struggled up them in the morning, slipping back one step in every three. We were sweating with the effort of constant braking, and (so far as I was concerned) with nerves too. More than most things I dislike steep slopes covered with dry pine needles, and I believe one could ski down them more safely than one can walk.

We got down eventually to the fields of Same, and hurried back to camp in order to get the plants into the press before dark. It was all that a plant hunting day should be, with a fine collection of specimens for the herbarium, plenty of good seed, and happy memories to be recalled when frustrations and discomforts were all forgotten.

A thief had come in the night and got away with some of the meat that Akkey and Phag Tsering had brought from Rima. A dog was suspected of the crime, and when we got home we found an elaborate trap beside the cookhouse, which was set when the boys went off duty after supper. In the night it went off with a great clatter of tin cans; but the thief got away, having broken the noose. I could not sleep again for another two hours, on account of a mysterious noise that had been worrying us for several nights. It was a persistent clicking, then a rasping sound like a file on rough granite. We could not make out what caused it, though we kept shining a torch into dark corners. It went on even while the light was on, and was extraordinarily difficult to locate. Sometimes it seemed to come from outside the tent, and I got up twice in the night to look. But there was not a sign of life. Just as I had put it down to a spook that I did not know how to silence, a small mouse ran under Frank's bed and the clicking stopped abruptly. Where had it come from, and what was it eating? I got out of bed once again to investigate, and noticed a tiny pile of the

finest sawdust just under the meat safe. There was a slight hollow in the ground, and there the mouse had been patiently gnawing its way, undisturbed and undetected, through the shell of a walnut! Strange to say, though we were far longer in one of our other camps than we were at the Sap Chu, we were never again troubled by any kind of rodent.

One morning Phag Tsering asked for the day off in order to do a little plant hunting on his own, and came back after seven hours with all sorts of good things, including whole plants of a Cymbidium that he had found growing in the shelter of the forest. It was in full bloom and one of the stems bore thirteen perfect flowers, olive green with a creamy yellow, maroon-spotted lip and column. The flowers were three inches across and heavily, sweetly scented. It was a remarkable orchid, and far from rare locally.

Phag Tsering also found a rhododendron (§ *ciliicalyx*) with masses of greenish white trumpet flowers, delicately scented. It was even more beautiful than the Cymbidium, and we desperately wanted seed of so lovely a plant. However, Phag Tsering (with Ludlow's training behind him) had thought of that for himself, and triumphantly emptied a pocketful of capsules which yielded several thousand seeds. Besides these two outstanding species he had collected a dozen others, and the presses were becoming unmanageable. Not that that deterred us from further collecting for the time being; in fact, we were so encouraged by these two excellent days that we decided to do some intensive collecting once again, and told Phag Tsering to come with us in the morning.

After some misty rain early, the day cleared up and the three of us left camp at ten. From Same village, still beautiful with peach and pear blossom, we set off in the direction of a waterfall we had seen from the top of the ridge on Sunday, and presently found a steep, rocky path which we followed for 1000 feet up the slope to the beginning of a fine patch of broad leafed forest. Here a laurel, last seen on Japvo in the Naga Hills, kept deceiving me; again and again I took the foliage for

that of a rhododendron. There were many ground orchids (Calanthe) now in flower, beautiful mauve spikes that smelt strongly of hyacinth.

A further climb of several hundred feet brought us into the stream bed, and we followed it up some way through the forest until the going became too wet. I did not think my boots would stand much water, and was anxious to keep them dry if I possibly could. On rocks and tree stumps by the stream we saw many plants of Phag Tsering's Cymbidium trailing long spikes of olive green flowers right in the water. After lunch, while Frank went up to the waterfall, I tried to photograph this orchid; but it was far from easy.

Frank found *Mahonia calamicaulis* in flower. This was encouraging, as it was a species that we particularly wanted in fruit. It would be ripe in another two or three months, and we should be able to find it again without difficulty, as the cartwheel habit of this evergreen shrub, no less than its prickly holly-like leaves, make it conspicuous at all seasons. There was any amount of *Rhododendron arboreum* in flower, and we hoped to find plenty of Phag Tsering's greenish white rhododendron as well. In that, however, we were disappointed; Phag Tsering and I found one rather open bush of it about seven feet tall; but Frank, who had taken a different route of his own, did not see even that.

In an open space in the lower pine forest, on the way down, a party of villagers from Same were cutting up firewood. Suddenly, without warning, a stout-looking pine, severely burnt, collapsed with a screech of tearing timber and the top half crashed to the ground. It missed the woodcutters by fifty yards, myself by very much less, as I was almost under the tree when it collapsed and about to pass close beside it.

Tibetans love picnics, and at the outskirts of the village we came upon a picnic party of two couples. There was water boiling over a fire and half a dozen bamboo containers propped against a log. The women ran out to meet us and asked us to join the party, which we were only too glad to do after a

strenuous day's climbing up and down very steep mountains. I held out a mug, expecting it to be filled with buttered tea; but to my joy I did not have to struggle with that dreadful beverage. The cup was filled to overflowing with rice beer, one of the coolest, sweetest and most refreshing brews I have ever had, and superior to any we had drunk lately. Perhaps the donors thought we would not know the good from the bad, and it was not worth offering a good vintage that might not be appreciated! In that they were mistaken. Our round faced young hostess kept filling the mug that Frank and I shared, and Phag Tsering's also, so that we went on our way in excellent spirits, all stiffness and weariness forgotten.

We passed through Same with all eyes open for the dog that had mauled the Assam Rifles prisoner, just as all the village had their eyes upon us. There must have been one or two hundred inhabitants of Same, and they all crowded round as though we were the man in the moon and his wife. It must be admitted that they were a rough crowd, both men and women; hard work aged them rapidly — for they *did* work hard. Same had a great extent of fields, and they could not be kept in good condition without strenuous efforts on the part of everyone. Just now the men were ploughing-in the rice stubble, and the last harvest was said to have been a good one.

The time had come to leave the Sap Chu camp and move to Kahao on the east bank of the Lohit, stopping at Rima on the way. The headman of Sangu came down to the camp, and we arranged to leave on April 1st. The weather cleared suddenly and peaks were visible that we had never seen before. But they did not remain visible for long. As soon as the ground was dry after the rain, the forest fires began all over again and the air was soon thick with smoke and dust that blotted out the mountains. Blister flies were very annoying, though Frank considered that they had not really begun.

We heard of a tragedy in the last days of March. The Tibetan interpreter at Walong, who was only a youth, his

voice not yet properly broken, had been drowned in the Lohit while crossing the river by ferry. He was neither the first nor the last to be claimed by the Lohit that year, for a month previously a trader was moving some bags of rice from one bank to the other, also by raft, and a man was drowned on that occasion also. There are short stretches of the Lohit, even in its upper reaches, where a raft could be used instead of a rope bridge; but the Tibetans and tibetanized tribes who inhabit the area — not to speak of the Mishmis — have no idea of how to manage a boat or raft of any kind, in fast water. Therefore, unless there is an overhead cable to which the raft is attached (to save it from disaster should it get out of control) ferry crossings on the Lohit are far from safe. Rope bridges are a nuisance and they waste a lot of time, but it is rare for anyone to be drowned when using one. We declined an offer to have ourselves and our loads taken over by ferry, preferring the safer, slower method that is normally practised.

April 1st was a scorching hot day, but we did not have to march after all, because the arrangement for porters broke down and only four turned up. We did, however, leave on the 2nd. Porters and pack ponies invaded the camp at seven o'clock and made the usual clamour in rasping, raucous voices that were a bit of a trial before breakfast. They seemed incapable — even the women — of talking more quietly than *fortissimo* triple *f*, and the harsh, discordant yells were ear-splitting. It was a short march but witheringly hot, and the light reflected off the snows was dazzling.

The ponies set off in single file, carrying two loads each, followed by a dozen men and women. We lagged behind to enjoy the day and to collect plants. Shortly before the rope bridge, the pattern of sheer cliff and flat terrace was broken, as at Walong, by a few rolling hillocks covered with pines; and on these grassy knolls grew many clumps of one of the most perfect of all rock plants — *Stellera chamaejasme*. That it had chosen a parkland setting did not alter the fact that it was ideally suited to the rock garden. The compact habit of the plant, combined

with its very small stature even when full grown, were but two of its claims to a place in the sun. Besides these, the fresh green of the young foliage was restful to the eye, and the colour, shape and scent of the flowers were incomparably lovely. The largest plants were nearly two feet across, but less than a foot high, and as neat and tidy as one could wish. Within a circle of green leafy shoots the flowering stems formed a compact bunch, each ending in a tuft of close-packed tiny flowers. The buds were every shade of red and yellow from the palest primrose to deep orange, and salmon pink to vermilion and scarlet. Only when they opened did the flowers turn into little white star clusters straight out of the Milky Way.

Crossing the river on a hot, dry day was entirely different from crossing it after rain. This time, so far from sticking in the middle of the river and having to drag ourselves up the remaining distance to the bank, we shot down the rope at such speed that at the receiving end two men held a leather strap right across the rope, to act as a brake and prevent our crashing full tilt against the rocks! I did not notice this brake until it was too late to slow down, and I was going so fast when I hit it that I spun round violently and nearly had my head knocked off by the tightly held strap. It would not have been difficult to have one's neck broken, and when Frank (whose neck *had* once been broken) followed me over the bridge, I shouted to him when he was within earshot to keep his head out of the way.

At the Rima side of the bridge one of the officials met us, the Zayul Shengoh. He took us up to the bridge keeper's house once again, where this time we were offered arrack. It was terrible stuff to drink in the middle of a blazing hot morning, and seeing someone else drinking rice beer, I indicated my preference. The *zu* was sweet and full flavoured, and as the bamboo in which it was stored had been kept in running water, the contents were as cool and refreshing as an iced lager.

Rima was beautiful in April, and we looked forward to staying a few days.

CHAPTER TWELVE

PHAG TSERING went ahead with the baggage and pitched the camp near Shigathang. Under a white awning decorated with Tibetan designs in coloured cloth *appliqué*, some Lhasa women, wives of the officials, were having a picnic and preparing tea and rice beer to welcome us.

These real Tibetan women were very different from the local women, with whom they really had nothing more in common than a certain similarity of language. The Lhasa women were more refined in every way — in features, skin texture, voice, dress and manner — and one or two of them were very pretty, which few of the overworked Zakring peasants ever had the chance to be. Instead of the shapeless *chubas* worn by their poorer sisters, these women from the capital wore the ordinary dress of a Tibetan woman of good birth — black skirt, white silk blouse, and a multi-coloured striped apron in three pieces, joined so that the stripes did not match. Their hair was glossy, neatly combed, and worn in pigtails over the head. Though they were arrayed in all manner of jewellery, when I asked to be allowed to take some photographs they begged me to wait till tomorrow, when they would be wearing their best clothes! I in my threadbare, much darned, much patched, and very grimy trousers felt like Cinderella before the ball, and no doubt looked like her too. Unfortunately there was no fairy godmother to conjure up a ball dress in which I might take Rima by storm, and I had to make do with my only slightly more respectable corduroys.

As soon as we had paid off our porters, we had the Zayul Shengoh and half a dozen women in the tent watching us drink buttered tea and eat puffed rice. Later the tea, to my relief, was changed to *zu*, and I was spared further pretence of enjoying a drink that I find repulsive. When the party broke up, the Shengoh took us to his house for further entertainment. The poor man had been in Sadiya at the time of the New Year

celebrations, and had come back to find his house and everything in it totally destroyed by the fire. Now he lived rather wretchedly in a small, draughty *basha* that looked so fragile it seemed that the faintest puff of air must blow it flat like a house of cards. We sat down to more tea, more *zu*. This time the tea was served in European style with milk and sugar. I ought to have been pleased by this deliverance from endless cups of greasy dish water, only I am perverse enough to like my tea plain and unadulterated, and the sweet milky brew tasted to me almost as vile as Tibetan buttered tea.

Just as we were wondering whether it was time to go, plates were put before us and a gargantuan meal appeared. Akkey was with us to interpret, and he too had his share of the banquet. There were little dishes of fresh potato, pickled vegetables, soya sauce, chili sauce; bowls of rice, of noodles, fresh pork and other delicacies. Everything was cooked to perfection and it was a delicious meal. Only chopsticks were provided, and it was a relief to discover that my education in the art of using them (acquired in the Chinese restaurants of Bombay) had not been altogether forgotten.

Next morning Tashi La, the Transport Officer who had escorted us to Rima a fortnight before, arrived with his wife. They were soon joined by a retired official and his wife and family, all asking to be photographed. The women looked very attractive in their best Lhasa dresses, though one costume was ruined by an atrocious pair of high heeled black fancy shoes. I had some difficulty in persuading the same woman to refrain from covering her glossy black hair with a shabby old Aussie hat of her husband's. After that I had her small son almost in tears while he posed for a photograph, when I relieved him of our chipped enamel milk jug, which did not consort at all happily with three beautifully worked silver tea cups which his mother had brought. A bazaar teapot was also gently removed from his embrace, and a torn and battered kerosene can which was being used as a table to show off the silver tea cups!

In the end all was arranged correctly and several photographs

were taken. But the time spent was all wasted. One of the officials asked for the film. He was going down to Calcutta and wanted to have it developed there. With many misgivings, but anxious to please, I foolishly parted with the film, and also gave him money and a letter to a firm in Calcutta, asking them to keep the negatives for me. The man promised he would take the film to that firm and no other, but when I wrote after our return, they knew nothing about my negatives; no Tibetan had ever brought them a film of mine. It was a hard lesson, but I shall not have to learn it twice.

One afternoon the senior Jongpen invited us to his house, and we were shown this time into the inner room where stood his private altar. A gaudy *thangka*, or religious painting hung on one wall, mounted on fine silk brocade. The colours were too brilliant, without any neutral tints to tone them down, and seemed unsuited to the subject, which showed the Buddha as the central figure, with some forty or fifty smaller haloed figures grouped symmetrically round him. All were seated cross-legged, and only their hands expressed different ideas, to any who could read their inner meaning.

Beneath the *thangka* on a low carved table were a silver *dorji* and bell, as much the outward symbols of northern Buddhism as the cross in a Christian church. Two prayer-wheels, charm boxes, water bowls and other small objects of ritual were arranged on a shelf beside the table, and in a corner was a large box that contained religious books, though it was littered with dusty papers in the utmost confusion.

Opposite the little altar a miserable parrot dragged out its existence in a box-like wooden cage, in which it could scarcely move or see out. It was adequately fed, but judging from the pile of untouched food on the floor of its cage, the poor creature seemed to have lost heart. It was tormented, too, by a small servant of the Jongpen about twelve years old, and the unhappy bird was in such cramped quarters that it never had a fair chance to defend itself with beak and claw from a poke in the ribs or a tweak to its elegant tail feathers.

The Jongpen, who had trained at one of the great monastic universities near Lhasa, was an intelligent man and showed an interest in all we had to say about England and English customs. It was trying that we had to talk through an interpreter, and difficult sometimes to keep the conversational ball rolling. Feeling that we owed some hospitality, we invited the Jongpen to a meal with us one day, and several of the other officials, too.

After a few days we found that our camp at Shigathang was not entirely suitable, so we moved it a mile to Rima. The tent was pitched in one corner of a field, far too near the village, so we attracted all the flies and villagers not otherwise occupied — and both were legion. But the new camp had certain advantages over the other. There was clean water within ten yards of the cookhouse and the ground was flat, or nearly so.

With the best of the day still before us, we went out to explore. Walking across the fields from Shiga in the morning, we had passed many bushes of *Cotoneaster conspicua* in ripe fruit, and some of fire-thorn (Pyracantha). The berries of the latter were vivid orange, and displayed just as extravagantly as the scarlet fruits of Cotoneaster. It was, as a rule, a larger shrub than the Cotoneaster, but had the same sort of habit and very similar foliage; so it was not always easy to distinguish them if there were no berries.

We went southwards to the high bank above the La Ti torrent, a swift mountain river that joins the Lohit just below Rima, after a journey straight from the snows of the Assam-Burma-Tibetan border. The La Ti valley has never been explored botanically, and would probably have justified a full scale expedition. The last mile or two of the river's course lay across the level Rima basin; but beyond that a narrow path traversed high up on the northern side of the gorge, several days' journey to the alpine meadows.

There was a small irrigation stream to cross. It led from the La Ti to the rice fields of Rima, passing just behind our camp

on its way to the lower terraces. *Iris Wattii* was in flower beside the stream, but we left it to use as table decoration the next day when we entertained the Jongpen and other officials. From a few hundred feet above Rima there was a fine view across the basin right up the broad valley of the Rong Thö Chu that came in from the north-west. A single rounded buttress was wedged between it and the much narrower valley of the Zayul Chu (which is usually, perhaps mistakenly, honoured as the major source of the Lohit; it is, however, the Rong Thö Chu which is fed by glaciers, not the Zayul Chu). Unhappily the air was still full of smoke and eroded dust, so that the splendour of the scene before us was blurred, the snow-clad peaks grubby and indistinct.

We got back after tea to find the Jongpen and the Zayul Shengoh waiting at the camp to inquire when we had arrived. As the village was not two hundred yards away and the Jongpen's house was plainly visible from the camp, this courtesy seemed superfluous, almost rhetorical. I suspect that it was only an excuse to come and look at a book I had promised to show them. It was illustrated with many excellent photos of the Tibetan way of life, indoors and out of doors, secular and monastic; not so much in Tibet itself as in the neighbouring Buddhist countries of Sikkim and Ladakh. Almost the whole population of Rima came at one time or another to see this book. Reverence for the written word is deeply engrained in the Tibetan mind, for the reason that nearly all books in Tibet are of a religious, or at any rate learned character; so the pictures of monasteries, *thangkas*, prayer-wheels and other articles used in worship, moved the lama Jongpen and peasant alike. Photographs of mountains did not interest them; it was the pictures of abbots, temple paintings, *māni* walls, and anything else of a religious flavour that were regarded with rapt devotion by all. The Jongpen recognized, in one of the abbots of a distant monastery in Ladakh, a man he had known while he was studying at Sera Gompa; while Akkey found his younger brother in a group of school children at Gangtok! The book caused such a

sensation in Rima that I began to wonder if I should ever see it again.

Among our very limited allowance of literature was the official report of a past Adviser to the Governor of Assam on Tribal Areas, who had toured the Lohit Valley in 1946, Mr. J. P. Mills, C.I.E., I.C.S. Most of his service had been among the Nagas, who are (in spite of their tradition of head-hunting) a highly civilized people, and energetic cultivators. Anyone who has been fortunate enough to live amongst them would, I think, find it difficult not to love the Nagas, and Philip Mills was certainly no exception in that respect. Finding himself in the Mishmi Hills, amongst a totally different sort of people, must have been rather a trial. At any rate, he never missed an opportunity to get in a dig at the Mishmis' expense! They are admittedly a poor lot compared with the Nagas, and the world's most lazy and inefficient cultivators. Yet I cannot help liking the Mishmis, exasperating though they undoubtedly are.

Mills had a higher opinion of the inhabitants of Rima, and of the thirty mile stretch of the Lohit Valley from Rima downwards. They are known variously as Maiyi or Zakring, and little is known of their origin. They are neither Mishmi nor Tibetan, though they speak a language that is understood (with difficulty) by Tibetans. They have also adopted Tibetan dress and religion — nominally, at any rate — and their method of cultivation; but they are in no sense real Tibetans, and do not even look like them, being much darker in complexion and coarser in feature. Some of the men, in a rather barbaric sort of way, are strikingly handsome.

As Mills points out, their struggle for survival is becoming more severe as the annual burning of the forest is continued. At frequent intervals one sees signs of abandoned cultivation — carefully terraced fields where once wet rice was grown. The irrigation streams exist no longer, and as families moved from the old sites their numbers dwindled. The Zakring peasants are themselves largely to blame for the present lamentable state of affairs, and in some respects they are even more destruc-

tive and thoughtless than the Mishmis. It is perhaps too late, now, ever to repair the damage done by fire; if so, the upper Lohit Valley between Rima and the Minzong bend will in time become a desert beyond the powers of man to cultivate. Only an optimist would say that it is not so already.

The Zakring, like the Tibetans, plough their land, and cattle are kept for the purpose. The Mishmis merely poke about with wooden hand implements within an inch or two of the surface. To tell the truth, though, the Zakring land is so stony that a blunt wooden plough with no appreciable weight behind it cannot penetrate much further than the Mishmi hoe, and the superiority of the Zakring method lies more in the fact that they practise terracing and irrigation. Contour cultivation is a safeguard against erosion by water, but affords no special protection against wind. On the mountain-sides bordering the Lohit and its tributaries, the winter and spring fires, having temporarily denuded the land of its vegetation, lay the steep slopes open to destruction by wind *and* water. March and April are the months of heaviest rainfall in the arid region of the Lohit Valley, so that as soon as the fires are extinguished by rain, the debris is washed down into the rivers and carried away, to the ultimate benefit of cultivators on the plains of Assam and Bengal. After only one day's rain at our Sap Chu camp, we heard one rockfall after another thundering down as the water washed away the ash and the top soil, leaving nothing to hold the smaller rocks in position. It was terrible to see, and hear, the disintegration of useful land as a result of a man's unthinking interference, and be powerless to do anything to prevent it.

There was rain in the night, but it cleared up early and we had a fine day for our party. The table was covered with a vivid blue teacloth on which stood a tin of blue irises and orange Pyracantha and bowls of walnuts. Phag Tsering had prepared a noble meal in good time, and at twelve we sat down to await events. The Jongpen had a watch and had been told

what time to come; but he apparently thought it correct to arrive an hour and a half late, by which time we were ravenously hungry and very impatient. But he came at last with the Zayul Shengoh and a young lama secretary attached to the Jong, and we all sat down to lunch. I had not really expected the conversation to flow — the fact that an interpreter was required was almost sure to make it disjointed and heavy going — but there were no awkward silences, and everyone seemed to be enjoying the party as much as I was myself.

It was a long time before our guests departed, and when they did we were invited to a party ourselves, to be held at the Jong the following day.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

EVER since we had been at Rima a single tree, some 2000 feet above the village on the far side of the La Ti torrent, had made a conspicuous splash of white blossom. At such a distance it was impossible to say with certainty what it might be, but it looked like a large rhododendron, or a magnolia. We had decided one day to explore the La Ti gorge ourselves, so Phag Tsering went on his own to find the white tree and bring back specimens of it in the press. The creamy-white flowers turned out to be not rhododendron, but Michelia, and Phag Tsering had prepared and pressed a dozen beautiful specimens.

Besides the Michelia he had collected some other plants as well, including a bird cherry of which we already had a little of last year's seed, but had not seen in flower. It was so graceful, with its long racemes of golden-eyed ivory flowers, that we decided we must get fresh seed in August, by which time the cherries should be ripe. There were various herbs in Phag Tsering's press below the Michelia; an Acer with foliage only, one or two common oaks, and then in the last half dozen sheets of paper were perfect specimens of a tree that Frank did not recognize. The stems were rather dark, quite leafless except for a very few half-open buds, and the shoots were bursting everywhere with tight little balls of tiny, close-packed flowers. They were the very spirit of spring time — clean, fresh, full of sunshine, and as golden yellow as a daffodil. This tree turned out to be one of the dogwoods (*Cornus chinensis*), and though it had been collected before, the Rima form of the plant was so incomparably better than the original specimens from China and north Burma, as to be unrecognizable.

In the gorge we had found nothing very exciting botanically, because the vegetation had all been recently burnt; but we had a good view up the La Ti Valley, and what we saw looked

promising. The floor of the valley itself was sharply tilted, so that one could climb high in a very few marches, and the walls of the gorge, black and forbidding, were more than usually steep. This adjective 'steep' has been overworked. I know it, yet cannot avoid using it, for there are no words in the English language that are synonymous — after all, England itself is mostly flat or gently undulating — and 'steepness' more than any other is the key word of the Lohit Valley, whose walls so often are more nearly perpendicular than horizontal.

Next day the Shengoh came in the morning to escort us to the Jongpen's house for the promised party, Akkey interpreting. Cups were set before us, and we had the choice of tea in the Tibetan or the European style. Unfortunately both were ready mixed, and it was impossible to get a cup of plain tea. I did not find sweet tea at all a suitable *apéritif* to the really excellent meal that followed. The basis of the meal was *tsamba*, which each of us kneaded into a paste with buttered tea to the consistency desired. This 'pulverized blotting paper' as Frank Smythe described *tsamba*, made a surprisingly good foundation for tender garden peas (the first, and almost the last, of the year), a kind of spinach called *sāg*, noodles, pickled radish or something like it, and yak meat. The beef was quite delicious, though raw, for that meat also had been for twelve or fifteen years in cold storage in the snow. Though it looked far from appetizing, it had preserved its flavour perfectly.

Outside the Jongpen's house was a high platform, and it was there, under a parachute awning, that the meal was served. On a hot day it was cool and pleasant to eat out of doors, but the smell of pigs, which grovelled in the dust immediately underneath, was a little hard to ignore. Nobody else seemed to notice it, and perhaps if one lives all one's life with pigs and chickens rooting in the mud and dust beneath one's house, they cease to make their presence known.

The senior Jongpen brought my book, which to judge by the dirty finger marks all over the picture pages must have been handled by most of the village. Now it went the rounds of the

Jongpen's servants, thus acquiring a few more honourable scars.

The mythical Americans were on the air again and were reported to be arriving in Rima from Lhasa on April 7th. We had long ceased to believe in their existence, so we were neither surprised nor disappointed when the 7th came and went, and the Americans did not. But the officials evidently believed they were coming, and preparations were made to welcome them. At Shiga, near where we had camped a few days previously, several tents were erected; the Americans would arrive tomorrow. But it was always 'tomorrow', and I saw no more reason to expect them next day than next year. And needless to say, they did not appear.

There was a gently rising plateau that ended abruptly in a 500 foot step to the north and east of Rima. On this plateau stood the two halves of Tooning village with all its rice fields, and on the far side, where the plateau met the mountain, was a belt of broad leafed forest that we wanted to explore. In several places it extended far up the mountain on either side of a stream, and was certain to contain some good plants.

On April 9th we left very early for the Tooning plateau and the nearest gully behind it, determined to make the best use of the daylight hours. It was another of many fine days and the morning was full of delight. Phag Tsering was away just before us, bound for the Mishmi villages some six or eight miles up the La Ti gorge, and he too took a plant press with him.

At the top of the step were the rice fields of Tooning, and beside them a hedge where grew a small Lindera. The male — for we saw only one — was quite leafless, and the slender branches were scarcely visible for the cloud of yellow blossom that hid them, every flower still in perfect condition though the female shrubs nearby were already developing their fruits. As the only flowers left were all on the male plant, I did not hesitate to take back to camp several big sprays for specimens and for decoration.

Iris Wattii was now flowering abundantly in all the streams,

and in a tree the olive coloured, sweet scented Cymbidium was hanging out sprays of richly marked flowers. It seemed to be equally at home in the fork of an oak tree or on wet rocks in a stream bed; the one condition it did demand was heavy shade, and it was disappointing that this lovely orchid could not be used as a cut flower, as it wilted in only a few hours.

As has been remarked before, it is always easier to examine a forest from the outside than from within, and in the case of this particular gully it was easy to keep outside it, climbing up through the slippery needle-covered pine woods at a constant level with the tree tops in the adjacent ravine. The going was rather trying, as one wasted such a lot of energy slipping backwards and having to struggle up again; but we made fair progress for an hour or so, when the angle steepened suddenly and slowed us up a good deal. We saw several specimens of Phag Tsering's dogwood — a breath-taking sight with the sun shining full on its golden yellow pompons — but not a sign of his white rhododendron. Michelias everywhere were opening their ivory flowers to the sun, and while Frank was scrambling about in the gully I spied a slab of rock a hundred feet above me, with a deep purple rhododendron growing along the top of it. I hoped it was new, but it was only *R. oleifolium* once more — a much finer form of it than we had collected on the other side of the Lohit, and with several unspilled seed capsules, too.

Rhododendron arboreum's flamboyant scarlet was everywhere in the sheltered gully, and before we came down I gathered a large bunch for our tin vase. The gnarled old trees grew scattered all the way up the slope, each one laden with innumerable blood red balls of tightly packed open trumpet flowers, borne well clear of the leathery leaves. The little yellow Lindera and all the pink and white flowered fruit trees of the valley have a feminine delicacy that is gentle and charming. Not for them the imperial splendour of *R. arboreum*, which cannot but assault you with the glory of its colour.

We decided to move to the Di Chu valley on April 10th,

and in case the Americans ever turned up we left a letter for them with the headman of Rima. There was rain in the night and the snow line crept several hundred feet lower down the mountains. It was still drizzling when we left Rima at nine with thirty-six loads carried by men, women and ponies. In two hours we had left behind the stony fields of Rima and La Ti village and found ourselves, still a few miles inside Tibet, on level parkland opposite Sangu, where women were working in the fields. We decided to camp; it might be worth exploring the forest above us. Even if we found nothing we should still have some wonderful views of the Lohit and the mountains guarding it.

So we paid our transport charges and told the porters to return in two days' time. It was pleasant to be alone again, out of range of prying eyes. We had never felt very comfortable in Rima, because small articles had a way of disappearing while we were camped right on top of the village, and we never managed to catch the culprits. Now we felt free once more.

With our departure from Tibet a new (or perhaps an old) problem confronted us: food. Contrary to reports in Sadiya, the villages below Rima produced almost nothing but cereals, mostly rice and buckwheat. Of other more or less essential foodstuffs, such as vegetables, pulses, milk, fats and meat, we should get none at all; even eggs and chickens would be rare and expensive luxuries. We should therefore be entirely dependent on rice which we could buy locally for the bulk of our diet, and on our six months' allowance of tinned stores for variety. The expedition, as has been mentioned before, was estimated to keep us in the hills for about ten months, and it was virtually impossible to replenish stocks from India. Therefore it was only common sense to continue using up stores sparingly on a ten months' basis, as we had, in fact, been doing all along. The only trouble was that our rations on that scale were not really adequate except for a very sedentary mode of existence. Rice, it is true, was unlimited, and Akkey and Phag Tsering (habitual rice-eaters) consumed a steady twenty ounces

a day each. Such a quantity, though very moderate, was far beyond our capacity, and we ate exactly half as much rice as our servants. At the end of a five-ounce bowl I always felt I could not eat another mouthful; but an hour later would wish that I had done so, because rice is one of the least efficient cereals, and the filling effects of it (like porridge) wear off extremely quickly. Maize, weight for weight, is incomparably more sustaining, but its season is short and it was not available so early in the year, so we had to make do with rice and buckwheat *ad nauseum.*

The porters arrived from La Ti on the day promised, and we moved down the valley to Kahao. We were now, so to speak, on the wrong side of the river, and by comparison the regular path up the Lohit Valley was as Piccadilly to a Cornish lane. Between Rima and Kahao lay a difficult cliff traverse across granite slabs thinly and inadequately clothed with scanty grass and a few trees. The track as soon as we were off the level parkland became execrable, climbing up and down sheer precipices in the most abrupt, hair-raising manner and frequently running along a narrow outward-sloping ledge sheer above the river. A bulge in the mountainside hid all that lay below, and the eye leapt straight from the bulge to a boiling fury of white rapids in midstream, in the midst of which boulders were being ground together as corn in a mill. This crazy traverse provided everything one could desire in the way of excitement; but it was one thing to do it with nerveless men accustomed to such tracks, and quite another to take laden ponies along it as well.

They were, of course, unshod or they could not have covered such ground at all, even with the help of the occasional long detours that avoided some of the rock staircases we had to scramble over. It seemed silly to bring quadrupeds along such a track, and our hearts were in our mouths lest some of them should go over the *khud,* taking our loads with them. This bad section did not take more than an hour, and at the bottom

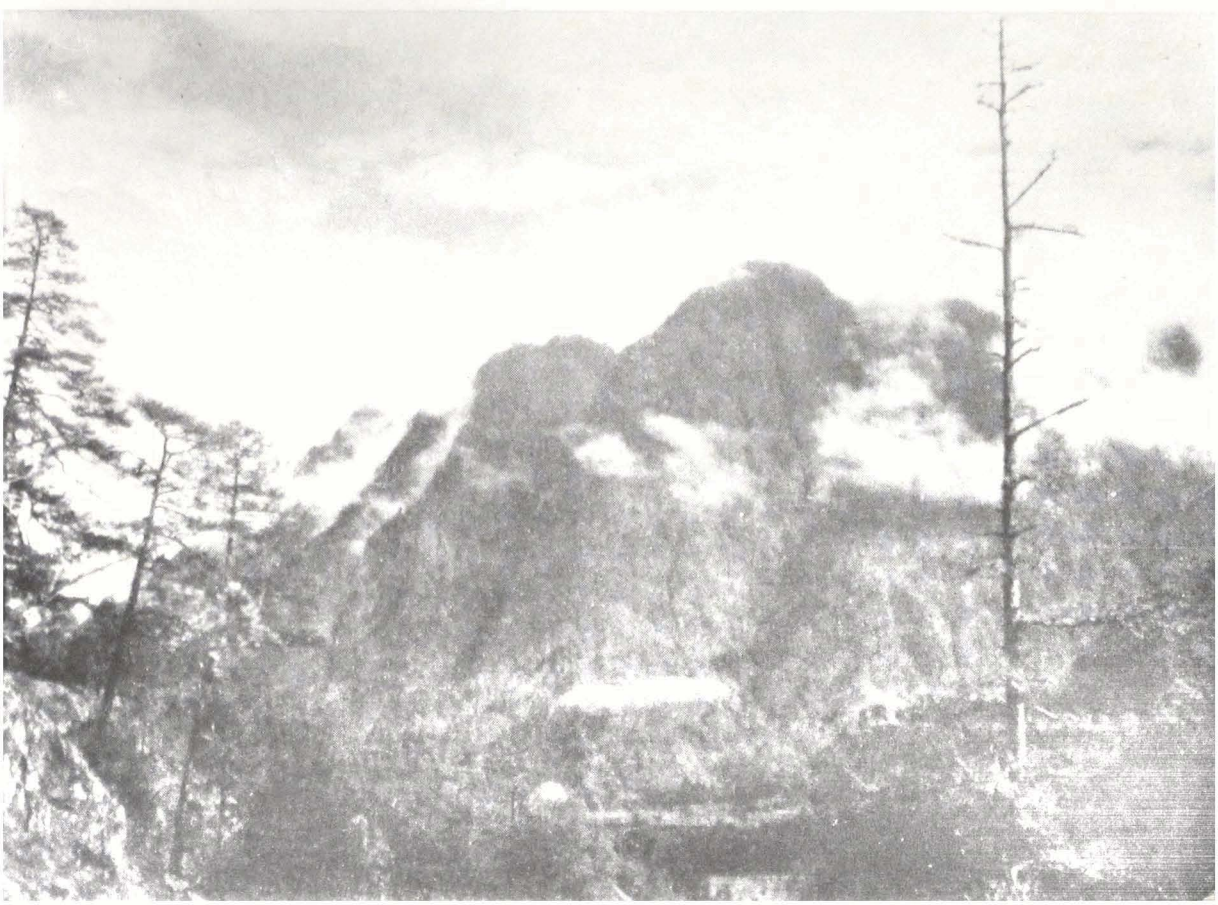
gave way once again to flat river terraces where we all stopped for a meal. The ponies were unloaded, saddles thrown on to the ground, and the ponies turned loose to graze while the men made tea and boiled a meal of rice. There was no need to hurry as we were doing only half a march, and we took life leisurely; even so, we reached our camp site in the early afternoon. We were at the mouth of the Di Chu valley, on open flat ground a mile from the confluence with the Lohit. For a short spell it was as good a place as any for a camp. It was April 12th, and we had yet to learn how long a 'short spell' can be.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE porters did not return to Rima the same day, but camped in the open under the trees. Next morning Phag Tsering took one of them and went to have a look at the route through the gorge. He returned after an hour or two and reported that the small ponds on the terrace a thousand feet above us were bone-dry, and that the next water (according to the local man who knew the route) would therefore be some five or six hours distant from our present camp. In the circumstances we could not move to the upper plateau, where we thought there might be fresher air; and as the porters had only one day's food in hand, we could not yet move right up the gorge either. So we were obliged to stay where we were for the time being. We gave the headman a present of cigarettes, paid off the porters, and back they all went to Rima, promising to take us up the Di Chu as soon as we sent word.

There was plenty to do in camp. We had been so busy lately in Rima, entertaining and being entertained, and then moving to the Di Chu just after a long day's independent collecting on the part of Phag Tsering and ourselves, that the plant presses were crammed with specimens. A dozen new species had to be trimmed, labelled, written up in the catalogue and entered in the card-index, their papers changed and dried as usual, and so on. Dry specimens were taken out of the presses, many of which had been waiting to come out for several days; but there had been no time to attend to them, and they just had to be changed each day as though they were still damp. Each species separately was placed in a folded sheet of newspaper and the different species incorporated in the bundles where they belonged. So far we had six complete bundles of herbarium material, representing about a hundred and fifty different species, and they just filled the first empty stores box. The boxes had been designed to take dried plants when the stores

[*facing:* *Top:* THE V-SIDED VALLEY OF THE DI CHU
Bottom: THE PEAKS OF DONG, NEAR WALONG



were used up, so all were a little bigger than a half sheet of newspaper and six or seven bundles deep.

As soon as these botanical chores had been disposed of (and others more domestic) we were free to go out and get acquainted with our new surroundings and collect more plants. The camp itself was on a rectangular piece of flattish ground some twenty yards from the Di Chu river on its northern bank. Our water supply once again was perfect, or nearly so. Above us there was no village or encampment, so it was unnecessary to boil our drinking water, and we never did so. Though unpolluted, the water of the Di Chu and Sap Chu was nevertheless hard on our insides, because like other swift-flowing hill streams in that part of the world, they contained minute particles of rock that were very irritating, and it was over a month before we really accustomed ourselves to the harshness of the water.

Our tent was pitched close to a clump of small oak trees at the eastern end of the camp site, and faced west towards the snowy peaks of the Mishmi Hills, just visible across the Lohit behind the valley walls that rise 5000 feet above the river. A short distance away was the cookhouse, and beyond it our lightweight six-by-seven tent, which the boys soon dispensed with by building themselves a more spacious *basha*. Close beside us on the right a hill went steeply up to the almost level pine woods 1000 feet above, and behind the oak trees lay the narrow valley of the Di Chu. Between us and the gorge proper a level terrace extended eastwards for a mile or more on either side of the river. On our side it was almost bare of trees, but rose bushes grew abundantly, and with them raspberries of several species and surpassing sweetness.

These brambles delayed us a good deal in our wanderings by the river, for the earliest fruiting species (*Rubus ellipticus*) was now ripe and the raspberries irresistible. They are yellow or orange in colour, never red, and are full of juice of such delicious flavour that the berries are at once thirst quenching and thirst provoking.

Towards the middle of April the nights became suddenly

colder with minimum temperatures of 45°, while the days warmed up till it was 85° in the shade at noon. The long fine spell was delightful in many ways, but the hot sun brought out the blister flies (or dim-dams) in their thousands to torment us. They were bad at the Sap Chu also, but Rima is completely free of them even in the very hottest part of the summer. However, one pays for every comfort in the Lohit Valley, and Rima's tribute for immunity from dim-dams was a perpetual plague of small house flies, which in so insanitary a village was a far worse menace than the relatively harmless blister fly. In the summer, also, mosquitoes at Rima are very trying. At least no one has yet pinned down the carrying of any disease to the dim-dam.

The nights were wonderful. Out of the dense blackness of the sky Sirius shone like the star of Bethlehem right over the Lohit Valley, with Orion the Hunter sprawled near him across the invisible mountains guarding the far side of the river.

Our first Sunday at the Di Chu, a very hot day, we took a man from the nearby village of Kahao, crossed the river by a single rail-less pine tree bridge, and climbed 2000 feet up the burnt pine slopes behind Kahao. Though we were out for nearly six hours it was the dullest, most unprofitable plant hunt I ever remember. There was nothing of interest anywhere, and we became more and more hot and bored as the hours went by. There were no trees near us but Khasi pines and a few Pieris not yet in flower; no undergrowth either, except bracken (now approaching its most exuberant stage and already six feet high) and a certain species of long grass growing in clumps expressly designed to catch in boot nails and trip one up. For lack of anything better, we dutifully collected half a dozen common herbaceous weeds (that we had seen every day for a month and ignored) for the benefit of the 'pure' botanists, in whose god-like eyes the majestic rhododendron and humble chickweed are of equal value in the scheme of things.

We got back to camp disappointed, to find the headman of

Kahao there with a haunch of gooral meat he had recently shot and wanted to give us. It was a generous present, because game in the Lohit Valley is scarce indeed, and we never had occasion to regret not having brought a gun. The fresh meat would no doubt have been excellent, but for lack of refrigeration it had immediately been smoked. All the juices were therefore lost, and the remaining dry, black, fibrous meat tasted of nothing at all.

The new moon brought a change in the weather after sixteen consecutive fine days. On April 17th there was quite a heavy shower, and the river, which had been dead low when we arrived, began to rise steadily and swiftly, changing in appearance from crystal to dull brown as the water carried along with it more and more mud. In the afternoon a man came from Rima with a letter from the long expected Americans. The note was from Mr. Edgar Nichols of the Tibetan Church of Christ Mission in Batang, China, who was travelling with his wife and four adopted Tibetan boys. So much for his serving the Tibetan Government in Lhasa! How Akkey had got hold of that story (and many others) we never discovered, but he had a genius for collecting and passing on misinformation. I think it was just that he liked always to appear important and 'in the know', and therefore imparted to us any interesting gossip that came his way, whether it was true or not. The safest way to treat Akkey's tales, we soon discovered, was to build no plans upon them — just ignore them and see what happened. As often as not nothing did.

We sent Phag Tsering next morning with a reply to the Nichols in Rima, and asked them to come and visit us in the next few days. But for three days and nights it rained unceasingly, and the channels round the tent had to be substantially deepened with an ice-axe to divert the flood that resulted. Rain below meant snow higher up, and when the snow line had crept below 9000 feet once more, winter clothing had to be unpacked. Phag Tsering, who had gone to Rima to buy food as well as to take a message to the Nichols, returned

on the 20th with a load of rice, another of *tsamba*, some eggs, two laying hens, fresh peas and a side of wild sheep mutton. The larder was now fairly well stocked for the time being, and a large part of it, namely eight hens and a cockerel, spent its time running around the camp. However, after being woken up on two successive mornings by the cock behaving as cocks generally do at first light, I gave orders for his execution forthwith, and the eight hens were condemned thereafter to a life of celibacy.

A letter from the Nichols told us they would arrive next afternoon, and we prepared a camp for them not far from our own. They came at tea-time — or, since they were Americans, at coffee time — and there was much to talk about. With them were two of their adopted children, one a youth of twenty and the other an infant of under two years. There was also a Tibetan soldier of their escort, but his duties while the Nichols stayed with us at the Di Chu were intimately domestic, since he looked after the baby!

Having been more or less forced by the impossible political situation on the Chinese-Tibetan border to leave their mission station, the Nichols were anxious to get to India with the least possible delay.

They left us on the 24th, having spent three days with us, and we were sorry to see them go. We passed on to them what we knew of the Lohit Valley road, but it was already late in the season for travelling, and hardly likely that the weather would be anything but bad. With children in the party too, and neither of the Nichols in their first youth, it would have been kinder to advise them to stay in Tibet until the end of the rains, and then face the Lohit Valley in reasonable conditions. But their permits for Tibet were only 'road passes', and allowed them to go through from China to India by the shortest possible route, without undue dallying on the way. They could not, therefore, settle down in Tibet, and as there was so little food to be had (other than rice) between Rima and the plains, it was no use suggesting they spend the next six months on short com-

mons near us, in order (perhaps) to have fine marches in October. In short, the sooner they were on their way down the valley, the better it would be for them all. We worried about how they would both stand the journey. In Batang and all the way through Tibet they had been able to ride everywhere; but from the Tibetan frontier to the plains they would have to walk. There was no alternative.

On April 28th we decided to reconnoitre the Di Chu valley path. There was heavy rain in the night, but by breakfast time it was fine again and we started early. A faint zigzag track took us directly up a hillside slippery with pine needles, and after 1000 feet we stepped on to a very gently rising grassy plateau dotted with pines. Valerian was still in flower here and there, though February and March are the months of its fullest flowering. The dainty pink and white umbels belie the obnoxious odour of this plant. When specimens were first collected in Walong, I knew from a distance of half a dozen sheets of drying paper (while changing the press) when I was getting near the Valerian. The smell of drains gave it away every time, even after the specimens were dry and dead.

From the higher (north-eastern) end of the plateau we could clearly see the fields of Same two miles away across the Lohit, and blue wood smoke curling lazily upwards in the still morning air. The water holes that had been dry when we arrived at the Di Chu had all filled up during the week's rain, and the water in them tasted fresh and sweet. Close to us a cuckoo was calling, not the hideous, infuriating cry of the various cuckoos that visit the Indian plains, but the well-loved call of the 'English' bird. Other birds have more musical voices, many a less monotonous song; but there is something strangely restful and lovely in the call of a cuckoo across a pine wood in spring. We saw and heard but few birds in the Lohit Valley, and those we did were all the more welcome.

At the end of the plateau the path worked its way on to the sharply tilted northern side of the gorge, and after a short level

traverse climbed steeply to a spur, where we sat down and had our lunch before continuing unburdened with baggage. The track was nowhere more than nine inches wide, and it was thus never possible to stand with both feet together on the path. After the spring fires there was almost no vegetation between the pine trees that grew widely scattered above and below us, and the burnt soil was brittle and unstable; so much so that several times the outer edge of the path crumbled away under the pressure of a boot.

I led for part of the way, leaning my stick against the inner wall to keep myself upright and increase friction. Frank followed close behind me, trying hard to keep his eyes from straying down the terrible drop on the right. I do not think he can have felt very happy about it — not that that would prevent his carrying on so long as the track existed at all. At the time I did not pay much attention to the angle myself, because I knew the track itself was safe enough if one went slowly and carefully as we were doing. There were a few shingle gullies to cross, and a bulge in one place just above a scoured out drop of fifty feet. This last was crossed by a simple bridge of two pine logs laid side by side. It was not very pleasant, but one could push against the bulge (which was solid rock) and sidle across the logs without real difficulty. It was, however, a case of moving quickly or not at all.

We continued as far as the time allowed, finding no plants worth mentioning since the damage by fire was almost complete, but getting a very good idea of the going up this narrow valley. A thousand feet below us the Di Chu roared unseen over its rocky bed, an eerie sound when one paused to reflect — foolishly and against one's will — that a single false step could send one rolling over and over into its icy waters.

That I had so far been almost unmoved by the unpleasantness of this hunter's path was due, I suppose, to the fact that the rising slope was on my left hand and the falling one on my right. For some reason my balance is always better that way. Frank, on the other hand, felt happier with the rising slope on

his right hand and the falling one on his left. On the way back, therefore, it was he who was confident and I who had the jitters all the way. I still did not feel giddy at the mere airiness of our situation, but I looked at the route more critically, especially at the nature of the slopes now rising steeply on my right hand, and I came to the conclusion that they were abominably dangerous. Not everywhere, but over long stretches of too frequent occurrence. In the fire-blackened earth boulders great and small were embedded. But *were* they embedded? How deep did their roots go into the mountain-side? If any of them shifted, what were our chances of dodging them?

Not many travellers other than the local tribesmen have been up this Di Chu gorge. Colonel F. M. Bailey was one, and in the book of his 1912 journey[1] he gives a brief account of a week's expedition to shoot takin at the Hot Springs, roughly half way up. It does not read as though the path was at all easy even in those days, but in the past eight years it has deteriorated considerably. In 1942 Frank romped down from the Hot Springs to La Ti village in only two days. Such a feat in 1950 would have been impossible. The reason for the decay? Forest fires, and people like ourselves using the track before the ravaged soil had consolidated after the spring rain.

It was as well that we went up the gorge when we did, for no sooner were we home than it began to rain again, and continued relentlessly for four whole days. During one of these atrociously wet nights Frank was woken by the sound of a rock-fall nearby, and in the morning, not fifty yards from our tent, he found a boulder weighing several tons lying as it fell, with earth still sticking to the surface in chunks. For a hundred feet above us the hillside was scarred by its fall, and two of the smaller pines in its path were smashed to matchwood.

On May 7th it was fine again, and we sent Akkey to Rima to get porters. We decided to spend a week collecting higher up the Di Chu Valley.

[1] *China-Tibet-Assam*, by Colonel F. M. Bailey. (Cape, 1946.)

All round our camp two shrubs were in flower — one a snow-white Philadelphus (mock orange), and the other its close relative, Deutzia. In foliage they were almost indistinguishable, and since the Deutzia unexpectedly produced rose-pink flowers, it was necessary to make sure that there was no mistaking them when we came to collect seed later. Only three of the Deutzias flowered at all, and every one of them was surrounded by white Philadelphus; so we carefully marked the Deutzia with tags of scarlet yarn.

A mysterious thief had visited the cookhouse two nights running, and several small saucepans and plates were missing. The third time he came a quantity of cooked rice was eaten, and a heavy stone removed from the lid of the saucepan in order to get at it. That the thief could be a dog sounded rather far-fetched, as our camp was over a mile from Kahao village and separated from it by a slippery pine tree bridge. But at any rate it was not a man, for Phag Tsering by degrees picked up all the plates and saucepans at a distance of a hundred yards from camp, on open ground and in the opposite direction to the village. The third night the animal came he jumped through the thin fabric of the cookhouse tarpaulin, leaving plenty of muddy footprints and a long rent in the cloth!

From time to time the boys amused themselves making traps. They were very simple and effective so long as the creature they were set for walked into them. The only time that had happened at the Sap Chu camp the noose broke and the victim got away. I rather expected the same thing to happen again when I found Phag Tsering standing in the middle of the bridge (having at last fixed a few sketchy handrails) preparing a trap at the one point the thief could not avoid passing. This time the noose was of silk parachute cord with a breaking strain that should enable it to hold an elephant. I need hardly say that in the morning the trap was exactly as Phag Tsering had left it. However, the thefts of food and kitchen equipment ceased from that night, so perhaps it served its purpose well enough.

That evening Akkey returned from Rima with porters.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ONCE again our porters camped for the night under the trees preparatory to an early start in the morning; but it was wet again on the 9th and the long traverse through the burnt gorge was likely to be more unstable than ever. So we all sat down and patiently waited for the weather to clear. This it did by midday, but by then it was too late to reach the next water before dark, unless we stopped near the small ponds on the terrace just above. In the ordinary way it would not have been worth moving so short a distance, but we already had a fair idea of what we were in for once we began the shuffle across the northern wall of the gorge, and anything we could do to ease the strain of it was worth doing, especially for the porters. Akkey had been unable to raise more than half a dozen (one of them with a recently broken toe) in the three villages of Rima, La Ti and Tooning, and these valiant six had volunteered to move our nine loads between them. Each man would thus be carrying over a hundred pounds, since his own food had to be added to the ninety pounds of our kit.

On the afternoon of May 9th, therefore, we and the porters with Phag Tsering moved slowly up the slippery track to the pine-clad plateau. The porters had to rest frequently, but they managed the stiff climb wonderfully and reached the camp site by one of the water holes in an hour and a half. Unladen they would have done it in half the time or less, and the wisdom of having spared our overloaded porters such an arduous climb at the very beginning of a trying march, was shown next morning, when they were able to tackle the difficult track through the gorge perfectly fresh, and therefore more safely.

Waist-high bracken was cut down and cleared away and the tents pitched. For ourselves we brought the lightweight six-by-seven, which with outer fly, groundsheet and aluminium poles weighed only twenty-two pounds complete. Phag Tsering

used the little American pup tent, and for the porters (who were not particular how or where they slept) there were a number of small tarpaulins. Akkey, of course, had to be left behind, since we could not entirely abandon the camp and all our possessions. He was disappointed, as it was he, after all, who had made the expedition possible by rounding up the necessary porters; and he also harboured the notion of being able to trap all manner of game if he came with us. But privately I did not feel that past experience justified such optimism. Besides, Phag Tsering was quite an experienced plant hunter, which Akkey was not, and would therefore be by far the more valuable of the two.

After a good night we packed up early, breakfasted, and began the day's work. As described in the last chapter, the path left the plateau quite soon after the water holes, and climbed steeply up to a spur where we had stopped for lunch the week before. Here all the porters sat down for a long rest.

The next four hours under a blazing sun are best forgotten. The going was atrocious, and beyond the point where we had turned back ten days ago the track, if anything, deteriorated. The sides of the gorge rose more directly skywards, and great slabs of weathered granite frowned down upon us. A curious optical illusion — not a very reassuring one — made them appear to be moving slowly, but happily it *was* only an illusion.

There were several screes to cross, on which grew a twiggy, hungry-looking little jasmine with pink buds opening white, and then two patches of broad leafed forest. Here grew some beautiful trees, including an Acer in flower with leaves like the English sycamore, and a mysterious tree that had puzzled us some days before when Frank found it right beside the river at the very mouth of the gorge. It bore neither fruit nor flower in all the time we were at the Di Chu, and for months we wondered what it could be. The foliage, of a fresh spring green that did not change in several months, was extraordinarily like that of the London plane; but the bark, instead of being pale and smooth and apt to peel off in patches like damp wall

paper, was dark and knobbly. The leaves, moreover, were alternate, and for want of a better name we referred to it as *Acer alternifolia*, until Frank recognized it as a species of Liquidambar.

In the forest the path (such as it was) vanished, and we each took the line that seemed to offer the least resistance. Even so, it was one long drag over boulders and rotten moss-covered tree trunks until we reached open country again. The compensations for such wearisome struggling were several: first, it was cool and shady under the trees; and then, we felt free of the nagging fear that the rocks above us might at any moment break loose and come flying down the precipice on top of us. Also, the vegetation of the evergreen forest was a great deal more varied and interesting than the everlasting Khasi pines and burnt grass. Scarlet bugles of Aeschynanthus decorated a mossy oak tree, and near it the white waxen stars of Hoya dangled from the top of an overhanging rock. Less attractive was a nettle, very common in the hills, whose leaves are armed with ferocious stinging spines. At least there is no deception about it; no one could fail to recognize it as a plant to be avoided. But it was by no means always possible to keep out of range in such a jumble of rocks and broken trees, and the nettle flourished everywhere. Our porters, horny hided as they were, paid it scant respect, but I wasted a lot of time trying (unsuccessfully) to avoid being stung. The sting for a short time is far more painful than that of the common English nettle, but the discomfort seldom lasts more than a few minutes, and gradually passes into a kind of numbness that lasts several days, not unlike the 'feeling' left after an injection of cocaine.

Out of the forest we edged cautiously along the brittle path once more, until we came to the beginning of another patch of jungle. The path had been gradually descending for some time and was now almost down to river level (here 7000 feet). It was the end of the march. There was a small open space just big enough for the tent, and plenty of room for the porters nearby, so we all set about making camp. The man with the

broken toe found his load too much for him and had lagged far behind. Amongst other things he carried my bedding, but I was too tired to care about that, knowing that I should sleep anywhere, with or without bedding. However, two of the porters, unasked, hardly waited for a cup of tea before going back to relieve the laggard of his load and let him follow slowly. Their toughness and staying powers in such terrible country were an endless source of wonder to me — and shame — because I never did a march either up or down the Di Chu, carrying almost nothing, without feeling tired to death in a couple of hours, and horribly frightened. As I bitterly remarked in my diary: 'This valley is damn tough for one who isn't.'

After changing the presses and dealing with the many new specimens collected in the morning, Frank and I left the porters happily engaged on camp chores and explored the forest for an hour or two. In it Frank found Sorbus, Pyrus and Photinia in flower (all of the rose family) besides a beautiful Symplocos, also in flower, Euonymus, Mahonia, spruce, fir and young plants of a big-leafed rhododendron. This was a promising beginning. Most tantalizing of all, about a mile distant as a helicopter flies, great masses of peach-pink rhododendron fringed the edge of a vertical granite cliff. It was, of course, on the wrong side of the river, a day's journey away, and we had no helicopter to take us there; but if the rhododendron grew at 8000 feet on the one side of the river, there was a good chance that we should find it on our side also, and we did not worry about it yet.

It was an absurdly short march next morning of only two hours. On the way we passed two gigantic boulders, each with a great overhang. Under them were signs that these dry shelters had been recently used as night stops by hunting parties — wood ash and chewed corn cobs still lay in the recess under the rock, and a few grains of cooked rice were scattered among the ashes.

The floor of the valley had by this time flattened itself out a good deal, and we climbed only 350 feet in two hours. This was

a relief, because the track in every other respect was execrable. Over and over again a slippery tree trunk blocked the way and had to be surmounted — a perilous diversion in nailed climbing boots—and all the time the noise of the snow-fed torrent thundering over the rocks deafened us. Our heavily laden porters as usual made light of all difficulties and irritations, and I marvelled at their placidity. My own nerves were still frayed at the edges from our struggles of the day before, and were in no way repaired by this ridiculous obstacle race through the evergreen jungle. Also, the fact that the porters with their enormous loads chatted and laughed all the way, merely shamed me into a state of deeper annoyance as I pulled thorny twigs from my jacket, heaved myself over roots and boulders, and dealt with ticks as they attached themselves uninvited to my person.

Ticks in the temperate forest are as great a trial as the leeches in the sub-tropical forest near Denning, and of the two I personally find ticks the more loathsome. Their ugly little heads are armed with a short bayonet, which may or may not be sharp. If it is not, the pain as it stabs into one's flesh is severe enough to make one instantly aware of the tick's arrival, and it is then easily removed by a sharp tweak before it has got a firm hold. Often, however, the weapon has been kept in battle condition and penetrates painlessly. Then you know nothing about this odious little parasite until it withdraws the bayonet and drops off gorged with blood — a revolting object. The bite of a tick is far more troublesome than that of a leech, which latter is seldom noticeable after a week; but a tick leaves a hard, sore lump that can still be felt after half a year. Parasites are choosey about their hosts, and all blood is not equally desirable. Frank, for instance, collected ticks and leeches at the rate of six to one compared with myself, while I, on the other hand, suffered ten months' torture in Manipur from fleas. No insecticide made the slightest difference to their numbers or their appetites, and it was a perpetual trial to me that Frank hardly picked up one. This immunity I considered rank injustice.

The forest became more beautiful the higher we went up the valley. There was a grove of maples close to the river, every tree in young foliage and each a different colour. High above our heads an intricate pattern of green and scarlet, coral, pink and gold was woven against a background of intensely blue sky; while across the river ancient trees of *Rhododendron arboreum* defied the lateness of the season, still blazing with scarlet balls of flower.

More delicate were the white-flecked branches of a cherry as they swept low over the foaming water. Each fleck was a cluster of dainty cup-shaped flowers, golden yellow stamens ringed with five snowy petals, which in turn were enclosed in a crimson fan-shaped bract. As with so many outstanding trees and shrubs, it was seemingly the only one of its kind. No amount of careful searching ever revealed another, though in such dense jungle there may have been a hundred similar cherries that we never saw. We were thus entirely dependent on this one particular tree for seed, and if it set no fruit it would remain unknown to cultivation.[1]

Camp was made in a very small natural clearing right beside the path and only twenty yards from the river. The porters, after dumping their loads, at once got busy cutting and clearing the long grass, fetching water, and chopping firewood. Phag Tsering was wearing a pair of rubber gumboots of which he was very proud and was, in fact, the only one besides ourselves not barefooted. So it was fortunate that he was the one to step on a five foot viper as he swept his *kukri* through the knee-high grass.

Phag Tsering was not fond of snakes, and I had the greatest difficulty in preventing him from hacking the lovely skin to pieces out of sheer malice. One of the porters held a forked stick behind its head as a temporary, not very satisfactory anchor, while I held another somewhere near the tail and threatened Phag Tsering with dire reprisals if he dared spoil the skin when he killed it. The bit in between lashed wildly from

[1] Collected under K.W. 19400.

side to side, and in a moment one of the rotten sticks snapped, the snake made a bee line for the broken ground at the edge of the clearing, and we were in danger of losing it altogether. By now the harassed creature was extremely angry, and no one wanted it to escape in the vicinity of the camp. Not only did all the men declare that it was poisonous, but for once they were right — this diamond-headed viper was an old friend from Manipur, or as near it as made no difference. So in we plunged after it, and Phag Tsering stopped its flight with a neatly aimed rock thrown as its head appeared over a tree stump. Already stunned, its back was quickly broken at the neck with the blunt edge of a *kukri*, and that was that.

I began to skin it at once — with a blunt razor-blade, blunter nail-scissors and a pair of eyebrow tweezers — but its powerful muscles were reflexing so violently that I had to leave it until it had been dead for an hour. Even then, when I had almost finished the job, the skinless body suddenly coiled again round my arm. The curved fangs in the roof of the mouth were over half an inch long — not at all the sort of creature one wants loose in a jungle camp.

The same afternoon Frank found another snake of the same species hanging over a low branch, right beside the path, too small to be worth skinning. We killed it nevertheless, in case anyone in their comings and goings round the camp should accidentally tread on it. Only a few days previously, at our lower camp, Frank had dispatched a scorpion crawling up the wall of our tent. It had a claw span of two-and-a-half inches. One way and another, we were at last discovering some of the Lohit Valley fauna, though we never saw anything fit to eat that did not come out of the river.

After changing the presses we went a little further up the valley to see what we could find. The track became worse and worse, and was soon one continuous scramble over, round, under, or along fallen tree trunks, some of great girth and lying at an angle of 45° down the mountainside; over boulders, under thorny horrors that clawed one's hat off, tore one's clothes,

lacerated one's hands and face. All the time ticks tormented Frank, though few honoured me with their unwelcome attentions.

The Di Chu was cascading down in tremendous rapids, the spray filling the air in a fine cloud and making rainbows in the sunlight. On both sides of the river giant firs towered darkly through the lighter greens of the broad leafed forest, striking a sombre note. In girth some of them were nearly twenty feet, while the crown of them might be 150 feet from the ground. Immature trees of a big-leafed rhododendron (*R. sidereum*) were also conspicuous, but though some were probably ten or fifteen years old, none had yet reached flowering age. Two other rhododendrons besides the common *R. arboreum*, we found within a mile of the camp — *RR. bullatum* and one of the 'Maddeni' series. These also were not in flower, at least, not at such a low altitude.

One of our porters had brought with him a matchlock gun and was eager to use it. There was, however, nothing to shoot near the camp, and he was anxious to go another two days' journey up the valley to shoot takin at the Hot Springs. Talking round the fire with Phag Tsering and the porters that first evening, it was arranged that the party should break up next day. The man with the gun and another called Drakpa, both Tibetans from the China border, would go to the Hot Springs and shoot for the pot; while two others went down to our base camp to bring up some rations they had left in Akkey's care, and also any eggs our wayward hens might have laid for us. Phag Tsering, not to be left out of the fun, asked to be let off the cooking in order to do some plant hunting on his own in the upper part of the gorge, and we were only too glad to let him go. The boy with the broken toe and another rather weedy youth stayed in camp with us.

The camping ground, unexpandable, was over-populated, so the departure of five out of its nine occupants resulted in some very satisfactory slum clearance. The romance of sleeping out in the wide open spaces is all very fine if the spaces *are* wide,

but to have nine active persons crammed into an area twenty feet by ten is more reminiscent of conditions in the East End of London before the blitz (and about as romantic too).

Among other things Phag Tsering was to look for was a suitable camping ground (preferably in the alpine meadows near the Hot Springs) where we could, if necessary, spend several months collecting. In June all true Tibetans would thankfully leave Rima to the withering heat of summer and move to higher levels, so we had to make use of our present porters before they went back to their home in Tsarong.

After breakfast Phag Tsering, Drakpa and the owner of the antique gun disappeared up the valley, lightly laden; while we ourselves, following the ration carriers, retraced our steps in order to look for more of the cherry. Half a mile below camp the path for a short distance came right down into the river bed. At one end was the cherry with the crimson bracts that had so delighted us the day before; and at the other was another cherry of a different species. Frank with his superior strength spent some time throwing sticks at it to bring down specimens for the press, not yet collected, while I played the less glorious part of spaniel and collector of ammunition. The shooting was rather wild and my retrieving duties not heavy. However, we got a fairly representative collection of specimens in the end, and left them in a pool to pick up on the way home.

Just below the cherries a high-walled dry gully went straight up through thinning forest at right angles to the track. Though steep enough to take us up (in theory) very rapidly, it was so cluttered up with fallen trees, jungle lianas, loose boulders and what-not that progress was not spectacular. Furthermore, it was one of those scorching hot days when the sun is thinly overcast, the light painfully bright, and the air damp and heavy. As we floundered cursing through the appalling mess and confusion, now along one bank, now up the floor of the gully, I wondered dully about the masochistic streak in the explorer's nature that leads him (and his wife also) to take on such thoroughly unpleasant tasks, with their eyes wide open too.

After climbing nearly 1000 feet the gully emerged fom the mixed jungle into pine-bracken country, and the slope became so steep it was difficult not to slip on the treacherous burnt grass. The forest looked magnificent from the outside, a great tapestry in greens and browns under the hot summer sky; while far away to the east the jagged, snow-topped peaks of the Assam-Burma frontier rose savagely out of the haze.

Frank collected an Aristolochia (*A. Griffithii*) that morning. The wide-mouthed fleshy flowers, shaped like a saxophone, were dirty-yellow on the outside, murky purple within, and smelt as nasty as they looked. It seemed incredible that any insect could pollinate them, so narrow was the S-bend they must pass to reach the stamens and pistil. But when I later dissected a few of the ugly, evil-smelling flowers for the press, I found several small beetles inside. This disgusting plant took nearly three weeks to dry, and it was much longer than that before the carrion smell of it finally wore off the drying paper.

May 13th was another very fine, hot day. I was feeling slack and feverish, so Frank went out with one of the porters in pursuit of the peach-pink rhododendron we had seen growing across the river, while I lazed in camp and caught up with some of the dreary office work that is inseparable even from such an unbureaucratic occupation as plant hunting. A few hundred yards above our camp a stream joined the Di Chu from the north, and as it seemed to offer a quick and easy way to the higher ground, Frank followed it to a height of 9000 feet. Unfortunately the rhododendron was not to be found, but after a gruelling climb he managed to reach the first primula of the year (the widespread *P. atrodentata* in flower and fruit), another Cotoneaster, a chrome yellow Violet, Sedum and a dwarf willow.

Our camp was nearly 7500 feet above sea level, and without a pressure cooker, at that height rice requires a good two hours' fast boiling to become properly digestible. So no sooner had we swallowed our last mugs of tea than it was time to get the dinner ready. The stew (supper was usually stew of some sort) was

simple enough, since there was nothing to put in it but dried onion flakes, a few ounces of canned meat, and a packet of American soup mix to make it taste a little like something at any rate.

The weather was still perfect, and we decided to make a long day of it tomorrow, going as high up the valley as we could manage in the hours of daylight.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

FRANK made the tea next morning and we drank it quickly in order to get the presses changed before breakfast. We wanted one of our porters to help carry things and wield a knife in the jungle, but the boy was still lame and the other was curled up by the fire with a pain in his inside; so I gave him some medicine and a hot water bottle to hug, and off we went alone. With the avowed intention of travelling fast and getting as far up the valley as we could, we were nevertheless held up for a quarter of an hour within a few minutes of leaving camp. This delay was occasioned by no physical obstacle.

On a mossy log, touched by a shaft of sunlight through the green forest, a pair of moonmoths were mating. In colour they were *eau-de-nil* with a claret coloured eye on each wing rimmed by a jet black 'eyebrow'. The very edge of the wings was yellow brown, except for the almost straight leading edges, which were dark wine to a depth of a tenth of an inch before merging sharply into the phantom green of the rest of the wing. Each body was fluffy white, the wide-angled feathery antennae light brown, and the legs deep claret. Thus, in general appearance the two sexes were almost identical, nor did they differ very much in size. The wing span of the larger moth was fully four inches, that of the smaller only a third of an inch less; and the length of the beautiful tail on each hind wing was scarcely less than the wing span. This tail was not in one plane (as that of a swallow-tailed butterfly), but lightly folded like drapery in a wind. In colour these divine creatures were like the aurora borealis, and no less enchantingly lovely. We did not disturb them in their love making, and hoped they would still be on their mossy log when we returned late in the afternoon; but they were gone, and we never saw them again.

At last we dragged ourselves away from the moonmoths and tried to make up for lost time. The valley was still rising

gradually, though in several hours we reached no higher than 8000 feet. On the way we passed (on the other side of the river) a long tongue of snow that came right down to the water's edge — grim reminder of winter, and the great avalanches that crash down the sides of the gorge with the returning warmth of spring.

By the time we stopped for lunch it was raining hard, and three jagged peaks far up the valley were shrouded in a swirl of mist. The ticks were past belief, and between us we must have collected a hundred. But we collected some other things besides these parasites, and the day was an unqualified success.

When we left camp in the morning there was not one single spare sheet of drying paper (Phag Tsering having taken half the total stock with him to the Hot Springs), so that if we collected *any* more plants the presses would have to be changed in relays, the damp paper from one press hastily dried before being used immediately in another. It was unanimously agreed, therefore, that we should collect with discrimination. Such good resolutions we always hope to break, and we did so very thoroughly that memorable day in the middle Di Chu gorge; for into the press that evening went no less than eighteen different species of plants.

On this May 14th one of the first exciting trees that Frank found was a smooth-barked, whippy rhododendron of the 'Thomsonii' series, ablaze with cerise bell flowers borne in generous trusses from all its branches. Almost immediately afterwards he found *R. megacalyx* in bud and — most wonderful of all — *R. bullatum* in glorious flower. This last was growing all over the top of a cottage-sized boulder. The rock had been worn smooth by the river, but there was one easy way up it that did not take us long to find, and after wading through the springy mat of rhododendron that covered the top, we sat down and drank deeply of the heady scent of nutmeg that poured from the pink and white flowers. Not the least beautiful part of this rhododendron was its foliage, for each leaf was lined with

a thick coat of foxy red felt that entirely covered the back of it.

Rhododendron bullatum was not the only plant growing on this boulder, for a rowan in young leaf hung heads of whitish, strongly scented flowers just out of reach. It seemed to be growing out of an invisible crack in the rock overhanging the river, and was too good a plant to miss. Frank carried a long cane walking stick with a hooked end. Without asking him I picked it up, and with this extra length it was easy to drag a branch close enough for me to break off a few specimens for the press. But I let the branch spring back before disentangling the stick, so there it was — again just out of reach — dangling over the turbulent waters of the Di Chu as it thundered down its rocky bed twenty feet below. Had I been alone I would have had no choice but to leave it where it was, but as there were two of us, after some argument I managed to convince Frank that the stick could quite safely and easily be recovered if we co-operated. There was no possibility of slipping with our ankles entwined as they were in a strong mesh of rhododendron. All the same, the situation was rather like a faked *ciné* shot — it looked much more dramatic than it really was. The stick was recovered in a moment without difficulty; we climbed down the rock, and continued up the valley.

Other plants we found that day were two honeysuckles, spruce, fir, a Daphne in flower, and a creamy-purplish Corydalis by the river with blue-green stem and foliage. Besides these were three Ribes (currant), a laurel, a Viburnum, and several beautiful ferns, sedges and grasses, including a delicate maidenhair fern that grew on the rocks in the forest.

By the time we turned back we were both so burdened with plants that we could scarcely see where we were going; but when we passed an old camp site, we found that a party of hunters had recently abandoned a broken old bamboo basket for our especial benefit. It was two feet high and about the same across; but even so, not all of our specimens (collected with moderation!) could be carried in it. Frank had to sacrifice his belt to make a harness for carrying the unwieldy basket, then

complained all the way home that his pants were falling down.

We took it in turns carrying the basket, which when it came to my turn seemed to me almost as awkward as carrying the plants in my arms. First I tried the local method, used by most hill people of short stature, of taking the weight on a head band. This quickly gave me a headache. Carrying it like a rucksack nearly cut my arms off as the belt was too short; while the simplest way — that of holding it between us — was impossible because of the narrowness of the path and the nature of the ground. There was a bad moment when the path for a couple of yards ran along a log under an overhanging rock. On the left the river lapped right up to the log, and the water (as I could see) deepened quickly. With the awkward basket on his back, Frank chose this moment to slip on the wet log and fall! We were both rather shaken by this near disaster, and next time the path indulged in a similar antic by the river the basket was untied and man-handled across the difficult place.

It was too late when we got home to do much more than put the plants in water for the night (they were all in perfect condition) then get the dinner ready. In the morning Frank went to fetch my binoculars, which I had put down and forgotten when he slipped into the river. I begged him to collect no more plants, as I was already at my wits' end to know how to accommodate all that we had found the day before. There were the old ones to change besides, and no sooner had I broken the back of the work than in walked Frank, closely followed by Drakpa, the man with the gun, and Phag Tsering — proudly carrying two more presses crammed to bursting point with plants he had collected on his own! The paper problem was acute. Being so short of porters, we had reluctantly left a third of our total stock in the lower camp, and already the presses had to be changed in relays. Now, too, the sun was not shining, and cloud was rolling up fast out of the south-west. The paper must all be dried over the fire until the sun came out again.

All hands were impressed for the task, but it was nevertheless five hours before our plants, now in four grossly over-packed presses, were all in dry paper. I broke a strap and had to beg a garter from one of the porters to maintain the necessary pressure. Knowing nothing of why we were engaged in this extraordinary pursuit of common jungle plants, they entered into the spirit of the chase wholeheartedly, and from time to time presented Frank with some choice weed he had been trying not to notice — things that must be in every herbarium collection throughout the world. Occasionally, however, one of them would find something of interest. I am too soft hearted ever to say 'Oh, take it away!' and foolishly go on accepting handfuls of drooping weeds from all and sundry, reverently admiring them until the donor has departed. Of course, such kindly meant hypocrisy merely encourages further useless contributions.

While Phag Tsering and the hunting party drank tea and had a meal, Frank and I went through the new presses. It was like opening a stocking on Christmas morning, each treasure more thrilling than the one before! Phag Tsering had brought back twenty-two specimens new to the collection, besides a dozen more that we had found ourselves. His finds included seven more rhododendrons, three primulas, three dwarf willows, a third honeysuckle, larch, Spiraea, a purple flowered Crucifer, and a beautiful iris from the alpine pastures, deepest violet marked with white. But best of all were half a dozen sheets — reckless extravagance at which we could not but delight — of the incomparable snow white *Viburnum cordifolium.* Several times in the past Frank had tried to get this exquisite shrub into cultivation, but its seeds retain their viability for so short a time that they usually die before they can be got home. It is easy enough these days to send them 7000 miles from Calcutta in forty-eight hours; but getting them safely out of the remote and all but inaccessible valleys where they grow, down to the plains, takes (in proportion) several thousand times as long. In 1950 seed of *V. cordifolium* was once again sent to England from the

Lohit Valley, and we are anxiously waiting to hear whether this time some of it has germinated.

The three primulas were the insignificant *P. albiflos*, a small violet-flowered 'farinosa', and the large egg-yellow *P. chungensis*. The rhododendrons (which included *R. bullatum* and the cerise flowered 'Thomsonii' we had found the day before) left me speechless. In colour they ranged from pure white to deep crimson, and in size from a large tree (*R. sinogrande* with a truss of flowers that weighs two pounds) to the tiny, aromatic, majenta flowered dwarf *R. riparium* from the windswept alps below the Diphu La.

There were several sheets of a scarlet flowered tree rhododendron (§ 'sanguineum'), then a yellow green 'Triflorum', another 'Thomsonii' with flowers of a rather risky pink, *R. niphargum* and *R. crinigerum*. In *R. niphargum* the combination of snow white flowers and dark green silver-backed leaves was most striking, and so was the rufous felt of the under leaf surface of *R. crinigerum* against its dense trusses of pinky white flowers.

But of all these high-born beauties none was more superb, more truly regal, than the tiny dwarf from the heights, *R. riparium*. In spite of its high quality, this beautiful rhododendron is widely distributed. Frank found it first in the Tsangpo gorge, again in the Seingkhu valley of North Burma (just across the Diphu La), in the Rong Thö Chu beyond Rima, and in the Mishmi Hills. Of all the Di Chu's rhododendrons I think I loved *R. riparium* best of all, though the pure white *R. niphargum* and the cerise 'Thomsonii' ran it close.

The hunters did not fare so well as Phag Tsering, for they never saw a takin at all! But there *is* a herd there, and the headman of Kahao wantonly shot four of them some weeks later. Everyone complained of the ticks, which were as bad at the Hot Springs at 9000 feet as they were 2000 feet lower down the valley; and with one accord the porters announced, cheerfully enough, that they would demand Rs. 3 per load per day to come again! This was not an unreasonable demand, for the Di

Chu gorge is much more than twice as difficult as the Lohit Valley, where the same porters in those days demanded only Rs. 2 per stage.

Phag Tsering followed up the valley for several miles above the Hot Springs (which were not particularly hot, he said), but after the first five miles from our camp the path gave out altogether and there was not even the pretence of a track to follow. Avalanche snow was still lying, some of it recently fallen, and neither he nor the men with him were keen to stay there so early in the year; but in another month it would be safe until the autumn.

It had been a successful reconnaissance and we were pleased with the results. The porters had rice left for only two more days, and we could do no further useful work in our present camp; so on May 16th we walked down leisurely to the camp at the end of the forest, just before the long traverse across the northern wall of the gorge, and spent several hours changing the presses sheet by sheet. Most of the rhododendrons were so full of moisture that the paper was visibly wet after twenty-four hours, and the more highly coloured of them, such as the scarlet 'sanguineum' and the cerise flowered 'Thomsonii', had stained the paper as well.

We decided to start back really early in the morning, and gave orders accordingly. At a quarter to five I gradually, protestingly, became aware of a pot of tea on the floor waiting to be poured out, and a lamp. Breakfast came an hour later, but we had to force ourselves to eat it. Various remarks I made during the morning would be sufficient to blackball me for ever from membership of the Ladies' Alpine Club. In the first place, I groused loud and long about the loathsomeness of eating when you're still three parts asleep; and later, on a particularly difficult and hair-raising section of the traverse high above the river, I was base enough to declare fervently that I wished I could be securely tied between two alpine guides and lugged along like a parcel. However, I am not likely ever to seek membership of the Ladies' Alpine or any other honoured

sporting club. For one thing, I have a profound dislike of violent exercise (and mountain climbing is largely just that); and for another, like Hilaire Belloc, when the acrobatics begin I am frightened of falling off.

The last four hours through the Di Chu gorge were an abomination. It was difficult most of the way and dangerous all the way. Just beyond the pine log bridge across a nearly vertical gully there was a fresh slip, the sandy soil still rolling gently down. It was not more than twenty yards across, but a most unsavoury place altogether. It seemed best to tackle it at top speed one at a time, and hope that nothing big came down while anyone was crossing. Nothing did, though Phag Tsering was narrowly missed by a fist-sized rock whizzing past his head. Our porters apparently had neither nerves nor imagination, which was lucky for them, and no doubt they thought me ridiculously timid as I kept glancing anxiously at the cliffs above.

At the end of the traverse we all rested for an hour in the shade of the pines on the terrace. The relaxation was the more enjoyable because I had lumbago, and was tired by the long effort to avoid painful twinges by constantly flexing muscles that are usually relaxed. Phag Tsering made tea, which we laced with brandy, and the pine wood was a pleasant relief from the hot, exposed wall of the gorge.

Down at our base camp we found that all the hens had run wild, and one had been killed by a civet cat or something of the sort that walked into Akkey's *basha* in the middle of the night. No doubt our stray hens would return when they got hungry, but it was a blow to find that instead of six we now had none.

As we had already had tea, we spent the rest of the morning — and most of the afternoon as well — working on the botanical collection. The porters were not going home until next morning, and two of them went to Kahao to buy rice. We decided that all of them had earned more than the original agreement

laid down. They had carried very heavy loads, and some of them had helped a lot in camp. In the end we gave them nearly double what they expected to get. For once they forgot to grumble, so no doubt we overdid it!

After the pay-off we held a lottery of old tins. I collected half a dozen (the number of the porters who had come with us), and each man put a personal token into a hat. The best tin was raffled first (so that all should have an equal chance of winning it), and went to Drakpa. I was glad of that, for he was an indefatigable worker who no sooner arrived in camp than he dumped his load, and without waiting for a moment's rest started collecting firewood, drawing water, or preparing the ground for the tents. He was immensely strong, nearly six feet tall, with the build of a prize bull. A load of 100 lb. was all in the day's work to him — nothing at all remarkable — and I remembered him from the time when we came up from Sadiya. He was even then the most outstanding of a fine lot of porters. Like many other Tibetans, he had a large goitre. It did not inconvenience him in the least.

All our porters volunteered to carry for us again when we decided to move higher up the Di Chu Valley. The population of Kahao had shrunk so much in the last twenty years that the village would not be able to supply us with anything like all the porters we should need; so it was good to know that we could count on reinforcements from Rima.

[*facing:* TIBETANS CARRYING 100 LB. LOADS IN THE DI CHU GORGE

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AKKEY did not have a very happy time while we were away. After the episode of the civet cat he had some more unaccountable visitors. He reported that on the afternoon of May 13th two strangers in Tibetan dress walked unannounced into the camp. They were both tall, wore their hair long and tied in a plait round the head, carried long Tibetan swords and spoke good Tibetan. Akkey made tea for them and they stayed with him an hour or so, talking.

In some parts of Asia it is not bad manners to ask personal questions of a stranger, that among Europeans would be left until the acquaintance had progressed some way beyond the preliminaries. So there was nothing unusual in Akkey asking where his guests had come from (they said from Kahao, though they had arrived from *up* the valley), nor in their asking Akkey all about us. Where had the sahib gone? What was he doing? When would he return? Akkey waved a hand in the general direction of the Di Chu gorge and promptly said, untruthfully, that he expected us back the same evening. Suspecting his visitors of being up to no good, he nonchalantly added that the sahib had left with him a revolver and ten rounds. (In fact we possessed no firearms, and Akkey's only weapon was a *kukri*.)

As soon as they had gone, Akkey sent a passing fisherman to fetch the headman from Kahao. He came, but knew nothing of the two Tibetans; they had never been near his village! The camp being a good mile from the nearest habitation, before dark Akkey took the precaution of moving everything valuable into our big tent (including himself), made a bonfire outside to burn all night, and slept uneasily.

Nothing happened. The Tibetans vanished as mysteriously as they had come, and Akkey never saw them again. We thought he had behaved very sensibly in the circumstances. If they were indeed thieves, it was possible that Akkey may have

frightened them off when he boasted of having a revolver in his possession. At least the remark made it clear to any would-be malefactor that Akkey had his head screwed on the right way. None of us gave it another thought for several months.

It must be remembered that since leaving Sadiya more than three months earlier, we had had no letters, no newspapers, no contact of any kind with the rest of the world, and our minds were not running on the subject of Communism at all. It is true that the Nichols had told us of the unpleasantness of living under the new regime in China; but Batang was a long way from Rima, and it did not occur to us, then, that there might be any connection between the Communist programme for Tibet and Akkey's visitors. We still do not know that there was, but in the light of later events it looks suspicious.

The weather had warmed up a good deal during the week we were away, and the temperature inside the tent for four or five hours each day was now all but 100°. Until the wind got up at midday, with such a temperature the lack of a fan was rather trying, and our very unsuitable stodgy diet even more so. There was nothing to be done about either. Perhaps we were lucky to get any food locally at all. Even if meat and vegetables were the rarest luxuries, rice at least was unlimited; but it is unsatisfying stuff. Neither are buckwheat cakes very exciting when made with water instead of with milk and butter And yet, there *was* plenty of milk wandering round the grassy pastures. In Kahao there was a small herd of cows and young calves, but neither the Mishmis nor the Zakring can be bothered to milk their cattle, and the children are thus deprived of a useful addition to a deficient diet. Glancing through the columns of an English paper, I came across an advertisement for buckwheat. 'Excellent unrationed poultry food,' it said, 'at 18s. 9d. per stone, including packing and postage.' Buying buckwheat flour in Rima, for our own consumption, we had to pay exactly four times the price! Rice, too, had skyrocketed. In 1942 Frank paid Rs. 5 a *maund* for rice; now it was Rs. 32.

However, the establishment of an outpost at Walong in 1944 may have had something to do with that inflation. The Assam Rifles required rice, and Rima, thirty miles away, was the only place that could supply it other than Sadiya, which was twelve marches distant. The local people can hardly be blamed for taking advantage of the market.

Chickens were so seldom offered for sale that we made a determined effort to recover our five stray hens. At least, Akkey did. Having failed to trap any of them, he took it into his head to fire the undergrowth and smoke them out, or at any rate make them more easy to catch by destroying the cover. The first we knew of his intentions was a loud crackling a bare 200 yards behind the camp, and a thick cloud of smoke mounting skywards. The tearing wind soon fanned a small fire into a big blaze, and though the wind was blowing up-valley at the time, it was variable and might at any moment change direction.

There was no time to waste telling Akkey what a clown he was. At the moment we had enough to do making plans to evacuate the camp if necessary — first the plant collection and Rs. 1500 in notes; after that anything there was time for. As might be expected, the flames worked back gradually towards the camp, and the four of us went with sticks to beat them out. Instead of cutting a fire line (for which there was no time), gallons of water were carried up from the river and thrown across the path of the fire should it cut back any more. After that precaution, more water was used to drown the edge of the blaze, which by then was less than a hundred yards from the camp, and we breathed freely once more. Not one of the hens returned as a result of the conflagration, and Akkey lost face. The fire did no particular damage to the ground, because the valley was almost level; but it set a bad example nevertheless.

The same afternoon a letter arrived from the Assistant Political Officer at Teju, with good news that the binoculars (lost more than three months earlier) had been handed in by a Mishmi and would be forwarded to Walong. Captain Sailo

added that he hoped to meet us later when he came up the Lohit Valley on tour. We did indeed meet Captain Sailo during his tour, but in unexpected circumstances.

The next day we sent Akkey to Walong to pay the promised reward and bring back the glasses, and to take a few books and tins to the Nichols, who were still stranded there waiting for their permits to enter India.

There were several shrubs in flower just now, and we spent some time in photographing them. The graceful Philadelphus was mostly over, but large bushes of Cotoneaster were flowering by the river, scenting the air as with almond oil. The big golden buttercup flowers of *Hypericum Hookerianum* also loved the banks of the stream, while at the Lohit-Di Chu confluence a solitary Pyracantha opened its myriad flowers to the sun, and turned overnight from sombre green to palest ivory. Under the oak trees near the camp a Phajus (*P. Wallichii*), transplanted a month earlier from a grassy bank at 6000 feet and watched with tender care, had by now opened three of its eleven flowers. The buds of this orchid are white, but they open into a five-pointed light brown star with a white and majenta lip.

Akkey was back in three days, but without the field-glasses, as they had not yet arrived. While he was at Walong news came that the Nichols could continue their journey to Sadiya, and they left at the end of May. The weather was still very hot and dry, but there was still a good deal of snow left on the highest tops visible from the valley, and it was mid-July before it had all disappeared.

No sooner was Akkey back than we sent him to Rima to buy supplies. There was a rumour that after the officials left for the summer it would be impossible to get anything more before they returned. We therefore gave him Rs. 300 and told him to buy rice and buckwheat for another five months, but to store most of it with the headman of Rima until we required fresh supplies.

Every day we saw a pair of cowherds on the other bank of

the Lohit, and the smoke from their fire. They were only a furlong distant across the river, but there was no possibility of crossing it within ten miles either upstream or down, and we did not see many new faces.

However, in the first days of June seven Tibetans arrived from the other side of the Diphu La, from the Seingkhu valley in North Burma, to buy salt in Rima in exchange for musk and skins. The fact that they lived on the Burma side of the frontier did not prevent their being imposed upon by Tibetan officials, who came down on them for taxes every year; and as they depended on Rima for their salt, there was not much they could do to evade these unlawful demands. They were a cheerful lot and very friendly, especially when it transpired that their village had supplied Frank with porters in 1942. Frank and the headman recognized each other.

We had spent much time the last few days turning over various plans in our minds. In order to cover as much ground as possible, we had already decided to send Phag Tsering on his own up the Di Chu to the Diphu La, while we crossed the Lohit at Walong and went up the Tha Chu valley, marked on the map with a path almost up to the pass at its head. The mouth of the Tha Chu was only four miles away, but because of the Lohit river it would take three long marches to reach it.

We arranged with Cherup, therefore (the headman of Samdam village on the Burma side of the Diphu La) to come over the pass at the next full moon, meet Phag Tsering, and with four or five porters take him over the pass to the Tibetan yak pastures at the head of the Seingkhu valley. As an earnest of good faith Frank paid over to Cherup some *baksheesh* which he felt the headman had earned in 1942, when Frank came out of Burma by this route.

Our decision to split into two parties meant that we required another tent, and it so happened that just about this time another American family arrived in Rima on their way from Batang to India, and we hoped to get one from them; which we did. We wrote and invited them to stay at our camp, and on

June 9th Mr. Ellis R. Back of the Church of Christ Mission came for the night, alone.

We told him about the Lohit Valley road, but it cannot have been encouraging news, since he had been looking forward to the last stage of the journey as passing through a land of plenty, and it was useless to pretend that it was anything but a desert so far as supplies were concerned. I knew they would be well enough off so long as they remained at Walong, because the Nichols had written and told us that they daily received a basket of fresh vegetables grown by the Assam Rifles.

The Nichols, we heard, had sold some gold in Rima for only half its market value, and we warned the Backs not to do the same. It was now plain that we should not require all the silver we had brought, and so we offered Mr. Back enough to get his party back to Sadiya. Before he left, therefore, twenty-five pounds weight of Indian rupees was loaded into his saddle-bags, and away he went, to the chagrin of the money changers in Rima, whose costly services he would not now require.

It was pouring with rain when he left, and the Di Chu had risen four feet. A week or so earlier Akkey, Phag Tsering and some of the Kahao villagers had tried to bridge the river right opposite our camp, as the tree trunk lower down was awash from end to end and no longer safe. But after much labour the pine they selected fell with its head downstream, and became a total loss. Ever since, it had lain as it fell; but now in the deeper water it came to life and suddenly began to move, grinding against the boulders as it pushed its way down the river head first. Five minutes below the camp it hit the old bridge amidships and carried it clean away, before battering its way still further down the angry river to a place two hundred yards from where it had started its mad run. The din of the river in spate, with its eerie undertone of grinding boulders, reminded me of one of the more savage passages in William Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*. Blaring brass and clashing cymbals, rushing flood water and tortured rock — where is the difference? Both satisfy man's primitive delight in the barbaric.

Very early on the morning after Mr. Back's departure Drapka arrived with bad news. On a difficult section of the path from Rima a smooth slab of rock (barely four feet wide) had to be crossed by means of a wooden gallery. Yesterday, at this very place a pony carrying 160 pounds of our rice had broken through the rotten timber, rolled down the *khud* side for thirty feet, and bounded over the remaining precipice straight into the thunderous rapids of the Lohit. The miracle was that Mr. Back, on a mule far heavier than the little pack pony, and with Rs. 1000 in his saddle bags, had passed barely half an hour earlier. Drapka had met him on the Rima side of this dangerous gallery! He was the last man to cross it.

This disaster presented quite a problem in international law (or would have had there been anyone to interpret and enforce it). The rice had been paid for and was therefore our property. We had not, however, ordered it to be brought to the Di Chu and had, in fact, arranged to leave it indefinitely with the headman of Rima. Then again, the accident had occurred in Tibet, about two miles away, while our camp was within the boundaries of India. Who was responsible? The man who had given unnecessary orders for the rice to be sent to us at once; or Drapka, who had made all the arrangements and hired the pony? The unfortunate man who owned the dead pony? or ourselves who owned the load it carried?

Drapka stayed with us all day, undecided what to do. He was afraid to go back to Rima, where he said the officials would beat him. That looked as though he considered himself guilty — as, according to Tibetan custom, he was. It was no sort of a track for laden pack animals, and he should have known better than to hire one. At all events, next morning a decrepit old man, owner of the drowned pony, arrived to demand compensation from *us*! The accident, we pointed out, was none of our business, and nobody was going to compensate *us* for the loss of two *maunds* of rice bought at famine prices. However, it was hard on the old fellow to have lost his animal, and we meant to help him out to a reasonable extent. But we were not an

insurance company and were under no obligation to anybody. Frank offered to pay Rs. 50. At this incredible meanness the old rascal turned up his nose and promptly demanded Rs. 200! 'Fifty,' Frank repeated; but the offer was flatly refused.

So the old man stumped back to Rima, and in Drapka's absence (he was still seeking sanctuary in India with us) confiscated his donkey, all his movable property, and even relieved Drapka's wife of her personal ornaments to cover the loss of his wretched little nag, which apparently he valued as though it were a racehorse.

Two days after the accident Drapka's wife arrived to plead with us, closely followed by the aged one and his son. The latter were now threatening to have both Drapka and his wife publicly whipped if full compensation — as assessed by himself — were not forthcoming. As we well knew, in Tibet such injustice might easily be committed, and we did not intend to be even indirectly responsible for it. So we argued and argued, and after two hours the vindictive old man agreed to accept our offer of Rs. 50 (which was sheer charity anyway). But a moment later, when he was given the money he took one look at it, refused to touch it, and marched off in a huff! We were back where we had started.

At this juncture the phlegmatic Drapka decided to have hysterics. In a blind rage he poured forth a guttural torrent of furious words, roared and ranted all over the camp, tried to fight Akkey (who picked up a boulder to defend himself), and finally, drawing his long knife, threatened to commit suicide before our eyes. For the time being he was insane, and looked it. However, Frank with the utmost coolness quietly took the knife from him, while Drapka was busy flinging his arms about and shrieking the place down.

After a while he cooled off, collected his wife, and strode off to Rima cursing as he went. The tiresome old man had already left the scene of action and we expected to see him no more. But in half an hour they all trooped back again. The owner of the pony philosophically accepted his Rs. 50 (and was paid

before he could change his mind again), Drapka claimed his knife, and that was the end of that. The owner of the pony had still to return Drapka's property in full, but in view of the latter's great physical strength, it was unlikely that he would be so foolish as to risk further trouble by withholding any of Drapka's belongings. Nor did he.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

In the following two months nearly everything went wrong. The cause of the trouble boiled down to one factor: the shortage of porters in the Lohit Valley. The Tibetans from Tsarong who had accompanied us up the Di Chu gorge (and promised to carry for us again when we returned there) let us down by decamping suddenly overnight. So when Akkey went to collect porters from Rima in June, he was able to find only three local men who were free to come. Three was less than the barest minimum required, even by Phag Tsering working alone; but he would have to manage somehow. Things were going so awry that we now began seriously to doubt whether we should get away from our low-level Di Chu camp before the alpine flowers were over. Frank therefore made a last minute change of plan and sent Phag Tsering across the Lohit to collect in the unknown Tha Chu valley.

On June 21st he set out. With such a shortage of porters he could carry no more rations than would take him to Walong. Even so the men were overloaded. We gave Phag Tsering the small tent, which was light both in colour and in weight, and big enough for one man to live and work in comfortably. For Akkey, if and when we ever went up to the alps ourselves, there was a slightly larger tent which we had bought from the Backs. It proved useful, but had certain fatal defects shared by every type of American army tent I have seen. In the first place, it was dark jungle green, unlined, so it was impossible to work inside it without artificial light. Far more serious was the fact that, in spite of its colour — which indicated that it was intended for use in the tropics — it possessed no outer fly for protection from rain and the fierce heat of the sun, nor any ventilation. For the time being we used it as a storage tent, which at sub-alpine levels was all it *could* be used for by day. The temperature inside it on a sunny day rose to 134°, which was 35° above

the highest we ever had to endure in our well ventilated Benjamin Edgington tent. Admirably strong, admittedly, these dark green single-fly tents are more suited to arctic conditions than to temperate or tropical climates.

After Phag Tsering left there was nothing to do but envy him the cool air and lovely flowers he must be finding. Through field-glasses we watched a patch of vegetation high up on the mountains guarding the Tha Chu river change in a few days from green to coral red. Almost certainly it was dwarf rhododendron, and for us as inaccessible as the moon. It grew hotter than ever, and whole-day outings to look for plants became more and more trying, especially with our foot-gear getting daily into a more deplorable condition. We kept patching our boots with bits of canvas and odd scraps of leather, but all of them let in the water wherever the ground was damp, and of my 'best' nailed climbing boots, one sole was kept in place only by three ordinary carpenter's nails that Akkey artfully manipulated with a pair of pliers. Our gym-shoes I still mended regularly every few days, but the time would come when there would be nothing left to sew! In despair, we sent an S.O.S. to friends in Sadiya (the message was wirelessed from Walong) asking for a dozen pairs of gym-shoes to be sent to Walong as soon as possible. I thought they might reach us in six weeks' time, but in the end they were four months on the way and we got them only in October. Until then we gave up wearing shoes when we pottered about near the camp, and tried to harden our feet that way, without appreciable success.

On the last day of June, when our spirits were at such a low ebb that only the eight hours of sleep seemed to have any point to them, a party of Mishmis arrived; among them a man of character to whom had been entrusted a bundle of five letters for us, and a generous present of home-grown vegetables from the Assam Rifles in Walong. One of the letters was from Phag Tsering, whose porters had given him a good deal of trouble on the way, taking three days to reach Walong, which Akkey (unladen) managed in a day. Also, they had deserted him in

Walong because he refused to double the agreed rate of payment, and Phag Tsering had had to hang about for five days while Mishmis were collected.

All things considered, it was clear that drastic measures were called for if we were to move up to the alps at all. Every effort to collect the minimum number of porters we required stopped at two or three volunteers. On one occasion four were promised in two days' time from Rima, but nothing came of it. Then again, two men turned up one evening from a village in the Rong Thö Chu with fifteen days' food, saying they were the nucleus of a porter corps of over a dozen. They stayed with us a week. No one else joined them, and back they went to their homes.

On July 7th the headman of Kahao and another man from his village started up the Di Chu valley, ostensibly on our behalf. They undertook to go over the Diphu La to Samdam village (two days' march over the pass) and get in touch with the headman Cherup, whom, as already related, we had met in June. Cherup was to arrange for porters to come over from Burma and take us up to the yak pastures above the Seingkhu Valley. We reckoned that the earliest we could expect to see the headman again was in eighteen days' time, say July 25th. We began waiting all over again. Now, however, we were confident of reaching the alps *some* time, and the thought of it made the time pass more quickly.

Ever since our transport troubles began in April we had been saying: 'Well, so long as we get away by such-and-such a date it will be all right — we'll get our alpine plants.' And with each new frustration we pushed forward the deadline date — from mid-June to early July, from late July to the middle of August, until it became more or less a game. If all went well this time, we said, we should reach the alpine pastures in the first or second week of August, and though we would miss the rhododendrons in flower, and probably most of the primulas, we should see the poppies and gentians and a great many other plants as well. It was useless to hope that we might get there

before August, so we tried to pretend that was just the time we really wanted to move up the valley.

Every evening we walked to the edge of the terrace above the Lohit to enjoy the cool air. Once on the way back I stopped to look at an ant lying dead on the path. It was a big brown and black creature, half an inch long. A small silken ant soon found him and began pulling him about, while one or two tiny sand coloured ants joined the fray. The silken one kicked them both rudely out of the way; whereupon one bold spirit returned undaunted to guard the corpse, while its companion dashed home to bring help. The silken one made no attempt to share the feast with his own kind, and I wondered whether some species of ants are solitary, or whether this one just happened to be anti-social. By degrees more of the minute sandy ants arrived, all from the same direction, and the silken discoverer of the carcase became rather flustered at having so many small rivals to dispose of all at once. So he made an angry sortie several inches abroad, and was unfortunate enough to run into one of the common small black ants, extremely ferocious. Not only was the silken one disposed of with scarcely more than a look, but he was shown up to be a coward as well as a bully. Happy enough to do battle with a tiny creature a quarter of his size, he fled in terror when he met one of his own stature. The common black ants were not interested in the feast, though several of them sniffed around for a moment and departed.

Meanwhile quite a drama was taking place. A score or more of the small sandy ants had surrounded the dead leviathan and were pushing and pulling him across the path, over all kinds of obstacles, great and small — twigs, pebbles, pine needles, and small tufts of grass. The silken ant (still alone), unwilling to compete with such a weight of numbers, ran hither and thither in a passion at having been balked of his prey by the tiny ones. But he lacked the spirit to do anything about it, and continued to run round in circles like a distracted hen. The little sandy ants, after fifteen minutes' struggle, succeeded in getting the monster to their mud home under a clump of grasses six inches

off the path, where others of their kind met them. I hope the feast that followed was worth the effort of transporting it.

Throughout the dry weather the blue green waters of the Di Chu came down through the gorge like an endless cascade of sparkling zircons. One evening, however, as we strolled home from our usual look-out beside the Lohit, we were mystified by an extraordinary smell that grew stronger as we neared the camp. It was like nothing I had ever smelled before, though it had a kind of earthiness about it that seemed familiar. Then we saw our river. Such a transformation seemed incredible. In the space of an hour it had changed from a happy, sparkling mountain torrent to a foul, evil-smelling river of mud. The water was a thick brown topped with dirty foam, unspeakably horrible. And the reek of mud was everywhere. Fortunately the river had not risen much. Still more fortunately it had not *fallen*, so we felt confident that there was no block higher up to burst suddenly and inundate the camp. Nevertheless, after dark we listened anxiously to the sound of the river, and slept with half an ear cocked for any change in its note.

The landslip, wherever it was, cannot have been very big, for in twelve hours the water was appreciably cleaner, though still far from clear. Our drinking water had to be brought from a spring instead of straight out of the river, whose water was not fit to drink for a week.

July 25th came and went, and there was no sign of the headman of Kahao. Two days later, however, a shot rang out at midday, and we both leapt to the conclusion that porters were on the way. With difficulty I restrained an impulse to begin packing at once, and we waited on tenterhooks for over an hour until the headman and his friend arrived. Then all our hopes crashed in ruins yet again. The headman told us — untruthfully as it turned out — that he had been to Cherup's village and found him away. He added something about there being an epidemic in the Seingkhu valley, so that nobody could come over the pass and move our camp up to the Diphu La. Sick

at heart, we paid the headman for his supposed services (which, had we but known it, amounted to a fortnight's takin shooting on *this* side of the pass at our expense) and thought out a new plan of action.

Next morning the headman left for Walong with a letter to the Jemadar asking again if he could send Mishmi porters to Kahao. In the meantime we could not bear to wait any longer, and we reduced our demands to just one porter for two days, so that we could at least collect seed of the Di Chu cherry before it was too late! And then, suddenly, Phag Tsering returned.

At supper we heard a shout from several people on the far side of the river. Very excited, Akkey took a torch and went half a mile up the valley to the new bridge. Soon he was back with Phag Tsering, followed by three porters in almost total darkness. It was good to see Phag Tsering safely back again, and to know that he had collected a boxful of alpine plants which, however, would have to wait until the morning before we looked at them. August 2nd was in several ways a memorable day, for it was then that we received our first home mail for six months, and learned for the first time that there was a war going on in Korea, and the result of the General Election six months earlier. Frank's binoculars came back at last, and once again we had a magnificent present of vegetables from Walong, which lasted the four of us (on a lavish scale) for a fortnight.

Phag Tsering had had a difficult time in the Tha Chu valley, where the going, he said, was even worse than in the Di Chu gorge. For two days he and his Mishmi porters (procured with great difficulty) had had to cut a path, the previous one having been completely engulfed by the jungle. Nobody had used the track for years. There was much snow above 11,000 feet and many good alpine plants. But they were very hard to get, and Phag Tsering said he would not care to return in the autumn for seed. At the moment it did not look as though any of us would be going there in the autumn — or, indeed, ever!

His collection included seven or eight rhododendrons (mostly dwarf), half a dozen rare primulas, several anemones, only one Meconopsis, and that the widespread *M. betonicifolia.* There were unaccountable gaps in the flora, and some tantalizing surprises as well, including a fine spotted Nomocharis and a Rodgersia. But there were more than enough good plants to whet our appetites.

On August 6th, after three last minute postponements by our one and only porter, Frank and I left with a man called Omphu from Kahao, to spend two nights at our old first camp up the Di Chu, in order to collect seed of the crimson bracted cherry, and of anything else we happened to find. Weight was cut to the minimum. We took a tiny two-man tent (so-called), whose total weight was only ten pounds, rice for two days, a tin of bully beef, another of Heinz's tomato soup (which was a luxury we had been saving for just such an occasion), and some ready cooked *chupattis.* Bedding was limited to a sleeping bag and a blanket each, since the weather was warm; and we took no change of clothes other than a warm coat or jersey to put on after sunset. A press we had to have, also paper, but we had cut it down to fifty sheets and told Phag Tsering to change the presses we left in camp. Before we left, Omphu asked me whether we had any matches. Having packed them a week ago, I confidently answered that we had; whereupon he left his flint and steel with Akkey and followed us up the hill.

We made excellent time, reaching the old camp site at the end of the 'Abominable Traverse' in five-and-a-half hours. We laid down bracken, spread the ground sheet, erected the tent (which was wretchedly small), and put the bedding right. Frank had silently disappeared into the forest when Omphu asked me for matches to light the fire. There ensued immediately the ghastly discovery that *we had none*! How such a mistake came to be made is immaterial. The fact that the trip had been 'on' and 'off' so many times was the real reason, but was certainly no excuse for such carelessness. The truth of the

matter was that two boxes of matches had at some time or other been removed from the tin in which I had packed them, and had never been replaced. As Omphu's flint and steel had been left down below, and Frank had the only lens with him — wherever he was — there was no immediate possibility of making a fire. I left Omphu rubbing sticks together and dashed into the jungle in pursuit of Frank and the lens. I shouted myself hoarse, which was a silly waste of effort with the river making such a noise only fifty yards away; and not knowing which way he had gone, I soon gave up the chase.

Then I remembered that Frank had left his haversack in camp, and that he kept a pair of bi-focal spectacles in it. With these I tried for twenty minutes to raise a flame, but the sun was watery — for the first time in weeks — and nothing happened. By the time Frank returned with the lens (and a fair collection of plants) there was no sun at all and it had begun to rain.

All of us were tired and looking forward to a cup of tea and a hot supper before turning in, but it was plain that we should have to do without either. Cold, flabby *chupattis* and cold corned beef (which we shared with Omphu) were singularly unappetizing, and the cold water with which they were washed down was even more so. Also, Omphu wanted a fire to sleep by as well as a tarpaulin over his head, and he could not have one. Tired, hungry and miserable, we crawled into our sleeping bags on the hard ground and tried to sleep. The tent was barely big enough for one, especially on a wet night.

It was four or five hours before either of us slept, and when we did it was only for a few broken hours. I felt almost too ashamed of myself to sleep at all, for the lack of a few matches was the cause of nearly all our discomfort. The craving for a cup of tea was more acute than our need of a hot meal, and I began to understand what it must be like to have to manage without it, and why the High Command in war time puts tea in a category almost as high as home mail as a maintainer of morale.

August 7th was Black Monday indeed. Terribly tired, we got out of our sleeping bags at 5.30 and into soaking wet clothes and boots. After swallowing a few mouthfuls of bully beef and very stale *chupattis*, the three of us started for the cherry. We reached it in less than an hour, but after such a night we were going badly from the start. All the fruit had already fallen from the tree, as we discovered when Omphu hacked a part of it down. After grubbing about in the cold, wet river sand for another hour, the total number of good seeds collected amounted to twenty-one. For such a peerless plant any effort was worth while — but that does not necessarily make the effort enjoyable.

Had we had a good meal we would have spent the whole day in the jungle, slept a second night in our bivouac tent, and returned the following morning. As it was, we had to start down at once. Leaving Frank, who had neuralgia, to return slowly, I went ahead as fast as I could crawl to catch the sun's rays the moment it came over the mountains. Even at eight o'clock the angle was still very low, and I was not very hopeful of getting a flame immediately with such a low powered lens. For tinder I tried in turn dry paper shavings from the biscuit tin, resinous pine chips, dry pine needles, dead bracken, newspaper with black print, and a lichen off the rocks. Finally, a mixture of the whole lot.

This trick of concentrating the sun's rays through a lens in order to light a cigarette (no doubt with a perfectly good box of matches in one's pocket in case it fails) had always seemed to me an amusing little stunt to entertain children. That it should ever, as now, become a matter of deadly seriousness, had never occurred to me. For half an hour I tried every trick I knew to make the tinder catch — and every effort failed. Meanwhile, the higher the sun rose the nearer it came to being blotted out entirely by massing clouds. Already the tinder was pouring forth smoke (so you *can* have smoke without fire!) and I redoubled my efforts. And then, in the last half minute that the sun was clear, I got enough glow for Omphu to ignite some

pine needles, then a sliver of resinous wood — and lo and behold! — we had a flame, just as Frank arrived. A shout went up in honour of Loki, the Norse god of fire, and in no time we had boiled up a can of tomato soup and made tea. What tea! I do not suppose I shall ever again taste tea quite like that first mug. It was unique.

Much refreshed, we started down at ten o'clock. By now the grass had grown quite long, so the chances of the soil slipping were very much reduced. Nevertheless the first three hours were killing, though for once the strain was purely physical. Had conditions been as dangerous as they were three months before, I was much too tired to care.

At the end of the traverse we had a long rest in the shade of the pine trees on the terrace, and enjoyed to the full the wonderful view of the Mishmi Hills before we tackled the last 1000 feet down to the camp. While we rested we had a nip of brandy and a little food, which put new life into us — temporarily at least. That night I slept ten hours without a break.

There was good news when we got home. Akkey, in our absence, had been to Rima. He now cheered us with the unexpected news that he had managed to collect for us twenty-five porters.

We had intended to return to Walong on our way to the Tha Chu valley, to pick up some loads and deposit others; and the quickest way was to go straight down the left bank of the Lohit. Akkey and Phag Tsering, however, who had both tried it quite recently, reported the east bank route unsafe. The timber bridge over the Sat Ti torrent at Dong was in a bad state of repair; while at various points along the track one was exposed to the danger of rock falls, which came down at frequent intervals. Neither of them was keen to repeat the journey, and they strongly advised us not to risk taking a large party on such a route.

The alternative was to cross the Lohit at Rima and follow the river down to the mouth of the Tha Chu by the ordinary

Lohit Valley route. It was sad that we should meet none of the Tibetan officials who had been so kind to us in April. All of them had left some weeks before. Our friends the Jongpens, we heard, had been promoted and sent to the forward areas, where a handful of Tibetans were trying to resist the onslaughts of a Chinese Communist army. The fighting was said to be only eight days' journey from Rima. There was no means of discovering the truth or otherwise of this report, but in any case it seemed improbable that the Communists would bother about the Lohit Valley before Lhasa was taken. And the drive on Lhasa had apparently been halted at Chamdo.

On August 8th an Assam Rifles frontier patrol arrived from Walong. They had a look round the McMahon Line — an imaginary line like the equator, close to our camp — then returned to Kahao. In a day or two they would move up the Di Chu valley and visit the frontier pass at its head, the Diphu La. This was a routine patrol. We did not then see much of them because on August 10th, seventeen weeks after we first occupied our Di Chu camp, back we went to Rima. The evening before, a seemingly interminable file of men passed us as we sat for the last time at our windswept lookout above the river. They were our porters — at last.

With a marked absence of sentimental regrets, we turned our backs on the Di Chu and set our faces towards Tibet once more. It was a hot, airless day and the hour's scramble over the cliffs was gruelling. The gallery where the pony had fallen to its death two months earlier had not been repaired, but there was no difficulty in edging oneself cautiously over the rock slab, using projecting roots for handholds, and our sure-footed porters treated the place with contempt.

In Rima, while Akkey and Phag Tsering set up the camp on a weed-covered sandbank by an irrigation flume, we enjoyed ourselves in the headman's house drinking ice cold *zu* in liberal quantities and eating unleavened barley buns prepared by the lady of the house. However, the Tibetans of Rima have a standard of living considerably below that of the true Tibetans

beyond the province of Zayul (social status and other things being equal). Even in the headman's house there was neither furniture nor ornament; and the contents of the house amounted only to utility articles such as cooking pots, bamboo baskets and drinking cups, a few large ladles, muzzle loaders, knives, wooden saddles, and sundry bits of harness and yak hair rope.

The fields of Rima reflected the general poverty. All were hopelessly littered with stones which, if removed from the surface, would only be replaced immediately by similar stones working up from a few inches lower down. Wet rice, millet and a little barley are grown, and one or two leguminous crops on a very small scale. Many cattle are kept for ploughing the stony fields, but the cows among them are never milked. The villagers also kept pigs, ponies and hens, and it was occasionally possible to buy eggs or a scraggy chicken, even (more rarely) a small pig.

The first day we were at Rima, Akkey and Phag Tsering invested in a pig. It was the height of the summer, and in such a temperature the meat had to be smoked right away. They left it all night hanging in bamboo baskets over the cookhouse fire, and the following morning there was no pork! That night *we* were foolish enough to leave a haversack lying about, and next morning there was no haversack either. The loss of the bag itself was nothing, but in it were a brandy flask I had carefully filled to the brim, and Frank's bi-focal spectacles. Though useless to anyone else, even the glasses were not returned, and none of these losses was ever traced. Otherwise our first days at Rima were wholly enjoyable.

We decided to spend two months at least in the alpine regions of the Tha Chu, and as the valley floor rose steeply we should within four or five days march of Rima be at an ideal altitude for collecting alpine plants. First we had to buy rice, and the headman supplied a *maund* with the promise of more later. Akkey managed to get hold of a little barley flour as

well, and some more or less fresh yak butter imported from the high pastures at fabulous expense. The headman undertook to house our unwanted loads until we required them, so for the time being sixteen porters were all that we required. A great throng came over to the camp one evening to get the feel of the loads, and it was plain that this time we were not going to be let down.

We arranged to leave Rima on August 14th, but as some of the porters still had work to finish in the fields before they could leave, our departure, at their request, was postponed at the last moment until the morning of the 16th. This suited our plans well enough, and gave us time to do a little local collecting.

Rima was much hotter than the Di Chu, the reason being that the wind was so much more dispersed in the wide Rima basin than it was in the confined space of a steep river gorge. For some reason never discovered, about this time I developed a mild fever. It began the day after we reached Rima, and I put it down to the appalling heat from which we could not escape. I was confident it would stop as soon as we reached cooler levels, and it did not then seem worth bothering about.

August 15th was hotter than ever and we longed for rain. With all our loads now ready for the Tha Chu, or stored in the headman's house as the case might be, we went for a walk after tea to the Lohit-La Ti confluence. The sun had mercifully dropped behind the mountains and a cool breeze was blowing up the river, bringing much needed relief from the scorching heat of the day. The La Ti was brilliantly clear and of the same breath-taking blue colour as the Di Chu had been. As we sat on the bridge gazing into its blue-green depths, I could hardly wait till the morning to begin the five day march to the flowery alps where such rivers are born. I was all impatience as I reflected that had we left Rima the previous day, as first arranged, we should already have been well on our way, on the very threshold of the alps we had waited so long to see.

I wanted to be fresh for the march next day and went to bed as soon as we had finished our supper of boiled rice and pumpkin, hoping to be asleep before all the village dogs began their nightly chorus of futile yapping. Frank was writing his diary in a chair by the open door of the tent, but the light did not disturb me and in a few minutes I was almost asleep.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THERE are times in everyone's life when a great experience comes upon one without warning; so unexpectedly, perhaps, that when it is over memory is blurred and some of the details are inevitably lost. Such an experience befell us at Rima on August 15th, 1950.

It was nearly an hour after dark on a still, moonless night that I felt the camp bed on which I was lying give a sharp jolt. In a split second it jerked again, more violently, and I was dragged roughly from the very brink of sleep back to full consciousness. The realization of what was happening was instantaneous, and with a shout of '*Earthquake!*' I was out of bed and at the door of the tent before Frank, who was not lying down, felt anything amiss. It was not the first time I had experienced an earth tremor — no one can live in Assam for three years without feeling several — but this time I was afraid, and I never had been before.

Frank methodically put the cap on his pen, picked up the lantern, and followed me outside. Two paces more and we were thrown violently to the ground, which was now shuddering like a mad thing beneath our feet. The lamp also fell with a crash and went out instantly, leaving us in darkness. Bewildered and annoyed, we tried to pick ourselves up and behave with a little dignity, only to find that it was impossible to stand, or indeed even to sit, while the world broke up all round us. With the first big shock there came a deep rumbling noise from the earth itself, full of menace, which quickly swelled in volume to a deafening roar that filled all the valley. Mixed with it was a terrifying clatter, as though a hundred rods were being rapidly drawn over sheets of corrugated iron. The noise was unbelievable, agonizing. Never before had our ears been subjected to such an onslaught of sound.

Through the din we shouted continuously to Akkey and

Phag Tsering to join us. Their tent was only twenty yards from our own, but in the tumult they never heard us, nor we them, until they had made their way, falling and rolling repeatedly, to where Frank and I lay flat on our faces on the heaving, buffeting sand. All of us held hands as we waited in indescribable terror for the enraged earth to open beneath us and swallow us whole. It seemed impossible that any of us could escape that fate, for the convulsions beneath us never ceased for minutes on end; and how long, I wondered, could the tortured sand bear our weight upon it? Helpless as we were in the grip of the earthquake, every one of us, I think, experienced that night the uttermost depths of human fear.

Incredibly, after an interval that can only be measured in terms of eternity, we found ourselves back in the more familiar dimensions of space and time. The deep rumbling gradually died away, and only then was it possible to distinguish which elements of the confusion and uproar had been earthquake noises and which the thunder of landslides. We got up and looked around us in the darkness. Then, when all was quiet once more and even the dogs were terrified into silence, from the north-west came the sound of heavy gunfire. It was as though a salvo of shells had been fired, and were bursting in quick succession somewhere up the valley of the Rong Thö Chu. Whatever this extraordinary sound might mean, the earthquake was over and we were still alive.

Throughout the night the ground trembled every few seconds like a frightened animal, while the mountains poured down an endless cascade of rock and dust into the stricken valley. It was an ominous sound, but at least Rima was out of range of the avalanches. There was only one cliff near us. For a time we listened anxiously as rocks broke away from it and crashed down to the fields behind our camp; but the cliff was not quite high enough for anything to reach us.

Someone suggested a cup of tea, and Phag Tsering went to fill a kettle at the stream fifty yards away. In a moment he came hurrying back to say that the flume was choked and that

only a thread of water now remained. Before this too dried up we all went out with every receptacle we could lay hands on, to catch the last drops. Even so, two or three gallons was all we could wring from the muddy little trickle before it dried up completely.

For two hours we all sat on the ground outside the tent drinking tea and listening uneasily to the Lohit. The river was half a mile distant and perhaps forty feet below us across the level fields. In such mountainous country it was certain that many tributary valleys would be blocked by landslips, so that when the pent up waters eventually broke through the dam, the Lohit would rise very suddenly. To the fear of annihilation by earthquake and avalanche was now added that of flood; and to give ourselves something definite to do, and take our minds off the horror we had just experienced, we made preparations for flight in the darkness if need be.

Before the earthquake began it had been a clear starlit night. Now, one by one the stars were blotted out as an impenetrable cloud of dust rose from the shattered mountains and smothered everything. We watched it as it rose higher and higher in the sky, spreading in every direction as the breeze dispersed it. In less than an hour it was upon us, engulfing the camp and village and the whole Rima basin in a suffocating pall. Tiny fragments grated under our teeth like sandpaper and filled our eyes. There was no escaping it.

One of the men from the village came over at ten o'clock bearing a torch of resinous pine. It was good to hear from him that nobody in the village had been killed or injured, though every house had been badly damaged and whole families were sleeping out of doors. *Sleeping!* Was it possible? One by one we went back to bed, half dressed, only to lie awake hour after hour. It rained for an hour or so at midnight, but not heavily enough to bring down the temperature or drown the sound of the rock avalanches as they roared down the steep gullies into the valley. The ground was never still for a moment, but Frank managed to sleep a little. I know of no one else who did

that night, and it was a relief when morning came. Twice during the night we dashed outside as a stronger tremor than usual shook the earth beneath us. We were, of course, perfectly safe in our tent; there was nothing that could do any damage if it did fall on top of us. But there is a powerful instinct that urges one to get out of doors in an earthquake, and in such a state of nervous hypertension we could not but obey it.

The night passed somehow, and at dawn we dressed and went to see what had happened. The tremors, which still occurred every ten or fifteen minutes, were far less noticeable when we walked about; but often the weeds of the sandbed would shiver, and when we stood still we could plainly feel the ground trembling beneath us.

The sun rose while we were walking over the fields towards Shigathang, but it was invisible through the choking dust. In all other respects the morning of August 16th was like any other. The birds sang as usual in the hedges — even the golden voiced shama, whose only rival is the nightingale. Less musical was the raucous shouting of a half witted ten-year-old as he sat on a raised platform in the middle of a field of millet, scaring the birds from the crops. He had done this every morning since we arrived in Rima, and he did it every morning until we left. It was his job in life, and neither earthquake nor any other catastrophe lessened its importance to the village community.

We walked dry-shod across the irrigation stream that once had been our main water supply, climbed several stiles, and passed a small *māni* wall. The flat stones are all inscribed with the sacred words *Om māni padme hum*, and the whole structure, so carefully and reverently built, had fallen apart and lay scattered over the path in all directions.

As we neared Shiga we began to notice fissures in the hard ground. None were very wide, but all were three or four feet deep at least, and between parallel chasms blocks of land had sunk bodily several feet. Not much had survived the New Year fire at Shigathang — little more, in fact, than the monastery and the *chorten*. But to see them now! They might just as well

have suffered then the same fate as the rest of the village. The monastery was tilted to the east at an angle of 40°, while the *chorten* had been so badly shaken that it was stripped almost to the central wooden pole.

It was not until later in the day that Frank discovered our only means of contact with India — the rope bridge — trailing downstream, snapped in the middle like a piece of cotton thread.

We went back to breakfast. But food for a long time was repulsive; we had to struggle to swallow anything. Across the river and on both sides of the Rong Thö Chu the mountains were white with scars. Slip after slip showed faintly through the dust haze; but the most disquieting sight was the Lohit itself, and the La Ti. Both rivers were unrecognizable. The beautiful torrent we had watched with such delight the night before was now a thick chocolate brown flood bearing countless tons of mud and rock and timber, flung into it by the avalanches of the night before.

Never an hour passed but fresh rockfalls hurled their debris noisily into the valley, while many of the innumerable tremors were preceded by a short roar. We soon learned to associate them with a strong tremor in a few seconds' time; but in those first days the small ones were just as unnerving as the big, and the boys kept up a ceaseless mutter of Tibetan prayers. I found it impossible to sleep through the tremors, and became more sensitive to them than any seismograph!

Our greatest anxiety was for Captain Sailo's party, known to be on its way to the Tibetan frontier; and for the Assam Rifles patrol who, of all death traps, had been caught somewhere up the Di Chu gorge. How many men were involved we could not discover, as reports varied from four to thirty. However, without previous experience of such calamities, we had no means of knowing whether the earthquake was a small one, confined in its effects to an area, say, of a 100 square miles, or something more severe. Possibly nobody in Assam knew anything about it at all. That the earthquake was felt over an area of a million

square miles and was the greatest ever recorded,[1] we did not discover for months; nor that we had been perilously close to its epicentre.

Everyone in the village was busy repairing their houses, all of which had been unroofed at least. A few had been much more severely damaged, and it was a miracle that nobody was trapped under falling timber. The rice-fields were dry — a serious matter at that season — and water was an immediate problem. For the first three or four days, until Frank found a spring in the bank of the Lohit, we had to drink the green oozings of a marsh where cattle and ponies grazed. It was the only alternative to the undrinkable river water. For once there was plenty of fresh food — several pigs, cows and poultry having been crushed by falling timber. No eggs though, for with one accord every hen in the valley ceased to lay. There was also some delicious fish to be had from the river, which had presumably been suffocated by the tremendous quantity of mud in the water. Untold thousands of fish died as a result of the earthquake, but few could be recovered from the furious brown flood.

There were two islands in the Lohit where day by day the accumulation of drowned trees increased. In a few days they were piled high, and had the river not been so wide must have caused a serious jam. The water had risen several feet since the earthquake, and the flood level added so many yards to the width of the river that all efforts to mend the rope bridge failed. On the fourth day a group of people from Sangu appeared on the far bank of the Lohit. Some Rima people went to 'meet' them, and by prolonged shouting across the roaring waters, odd fragments of conversation got over the river. By this primitive means of communication it was arranged for another attempt to re-bridge the river to be made opposite Same, where the banks were a little closer together.

Akkey, whose strong right arm was something like Jehovah's, went along too, and with him in the party we felt confident that

[1] *Nature*, Jan. 27th, 1951. Published by Macmillan.

even if the local people could not manage it, Akkey at any rate would succeed in getting a light line across to the west bank. We began to think about getting back to Walong, since it was clear from the first that any expedition up to the alps was out of the question. The La Ti gorge was stripped by landslides, and two men from Tooning who had gone up the valley to hunt, had the greatest difficulty getting back at all. They reported, too, that two small Mishmi villages visited by Phag Tsering in April, had been overwhelmed by rock avalanches and obliterated as though they had never been.

At midday the bridging party returned to Rima. After four hours of untiring effort the attempt to fix a bridge opposite Same had been abandoned as hopeless until the water level fell, and Akkey brought us the news with a long face. There was not even any question of trying again the next day, for the water was rising again, bringing down more and more timber on the flood.

With a sense of foreboding we realized we were trapped.

CHAPTER TWENTY

By degrees rumours arrived in Rima about conditions lower down the valley, and on August 24th a Mishmi struggled in from Kahao, taking a whole day to cover the distance as he had to pick a route by trial and error. He brought news both good and bad. First, that the Assam Rifles patrol were all safe, though they had been caught by the earthquake at the Hot Springs half way up the Di Chu Valley; and second, that the whole of the cliff path between Rima and Kahao had been swept away by landslips, making the journey (which never had been an easy one) worse than ever. This Mishmi, who came from a village a day's journey below Walong, was anxious to get home as soon as he could. The route down the west bank of the Lohit having been cut off when the rope bridge snapped, his only hope lay in forcing a way along the cliffs of the east bank, which three weeks before we had considered too dangerous to attempt.

With this object, therefore, he left Rima early on the morning of August 25th, taking food for a week and carrying some letters for us. We wrote to the A.P.O. and to the Jemadar at Walong offering whatever help we could give — which was little enough in the circumstances — and asking for news. When the Mishmi had left we reverted to our usual occupation of waiting for something to happen.

The river was still very high, and the clean spring Frank had found had been engulfed almost as soon as it was discovered. Again we had to drink the polluted water of the marsh, which was fast-boiled for twenty minutes before being used for any purpose whatsoever. Water was far too precious at this time to use for washing, and for several days we managed with a quarter of a basinful, into which we dipped our grimy wash rags, squeezing the dirty water back into the basin again and again. The heat was scorching and one longed above all

things for a bath, especially as the afternoon wind daily blew clouds of fine dust over everything. Our clothes were filthy, our hair was grey with dust; but we could not afford to wash it off with the relatively clear water from the marsh, which was so nearly dry; we just had to put up with the dirt. There was the river, of course, but it was choked with mud.

We discussed ways and means of escaping from the Lohit Valley by routes other than the ordinary one. There were (in theory) several possibilities, but it remained to be seen whether any of them could be put into practice. First, there was the trade route to Chamdo in eastern Tibet, whence we could reach India by way of Lhasa and Kalimpong. Such a journey would take three or four months, and probably we had not sufficient money to carry it out. And we would be sure to run into trouble with the Communists, who had last been heard of only a week's journey from Rima. Secondly, when the rope bridge was replaced we might be able to follow up the Rong Thö Chu to the Kangri Karpo La at its head — a pass over 17,000 feet high — and come down the Dihang Valley through the Abor Hills to Pasighat. It would be a very tough proposition, and if it was to be attempted at all it would have to be soon, before the pass was snowed up for another eight months.

Finally, there were two valleys which would take us, with difficulty, into Burma: the La Ti valley and the Di Chu. But we had already seen (from the colour of its water) how the La Ti had suffered in the earthquake, and it was unlikely that the Di Chu would be any better off. In any case, supposing we succeeded in reaching Fort Hertz, with Burma in the state of chaos that it then was, where were we to make for after that? All things considered, the ordinary Lohit Valley route — the devil we knew — seemed less unattractive than any of the alternatives. But we could not move yet, as no porters were willing to leave their homes and families for the present, and we did not intend to abandon our collection of plants.

One day at the end of August Frank and Phag Tsering took ponies up to the Tooning plateau and tried to find the beautiful

yellow Cornus that had caused such a sensation in April. Phag Tsering had refused to visit the tree he had found in April, so Frank said he must try himself to reach the tree *he* had found. After long and careful searching they returned with a good collection of plants, but no Cornus, which must now be in ripe fruit. Phag Tsering then volunteered to take a local man and revisit his original tree, which was on the south side of the La Ti torrent and above some unpleasant looking landslips that would be difficult to cross and still harder to avoid. To our joy, he returned after an outing of ten hours with his pockets crammed full of Cornus fruits. This tree (*C. chinensis*) was *the* find of the expedition,[1] and that seed of it was collected in spite of everything, made up to some extent for the scores of alpine plants which would now have to remain undiscovered until some time in the remote, indefinite future.

In the midst of the gloom and depression that resulted from living in a perpetual dust cloud — never knowing when or how we should get back to a normal existence — there was a moment of much needed comic relief. As already recorded, the irrigation flume from the La Ti to the fields of Rima had dried up immediately after the earthquake, and for nearly a fortnight nothing had been done to unblock it. At last, however, a large party of men from Rima, Shiga, La Ti village and Tooning, spent the best part of a day clearing the debris that had choked the stream. Late in the afternoon, while Akkey was helping me with some small job inside the tent, Frank startled the wits out of us by suddenly shouting: 'Pani āta!'

In the heat of the moment Akkey and I both interpreted this as: 'The river's coming!' and dashed outside, expecting to see an irresistible wall of water advancing upon the camp from the direction of the Lohit. All Frank had meant was that our water supply had been restored, but we were in such a state of nerves that this discovery did nothing to lessen the previous shock!

On August 30th the Mishmi who had tried to get to Walong along the east bank of the Lohit returned, saying that it was

[1] Collected under K.W. 19300.

impossible to get through. He managed to force a way as far as Kahao, and even a few miles further, before being stopped dead by a raw precipice a quarter of a mile wide, down which rocks were falling every few minutes. Further progress was out of the question. Back at Kahao he found the Assam Rifles patrol returned from the Di Chu, putting new heart into the villagers by helping them repair their houses and clear blocked irrigation flumes.

There was good news from Walong, too. By the usual means of communication — shouting and signalling across the river — the patrol had been able to discover that all was well there and the wireless transmitter still functioning. Also, to our immeasurable relief, Captain Sailo's party was at last known to be safe.

The Mishmi had orders from the patrol commander to return to Kahao as soon as possible, with as much food as he could get. This sounded bad, and we did what we could for them from our own rather slender resources, giving the Mishmi a few tins of food and a letter of congratulation for the *havildar*.

When we left the Di Chu a few days before the earthquake, we had handed over to the headman of Kahao three boxes of dried plants to be taken down to Walong some time during the next two months. It was clear that they would never get to Walong by the east bank route, and Frank made arrangements with a local man and our Mishmi letter carrier to bring them up to Rima. The idea of losing the collection altogether was not to be thought of, and the sooner we had it safely under our own eye again the better, even though it meant a further accumulation of belongings in Rima.

August dragged out its hot, dreary days somehow, but the first morning of September was appropriately autumnal. I felt encouraged, too, by having slept over four hours in the night, for the first time since the earthquake. Until then I had never slept more than two or three hours in twenty-four.

Another attempt was made to bridge the Lohit, and this time it was successful. In point of fact, however, we still could

[*facing:* THE DIPHU LA PATROL PASSING THE WRECKAGE OF CAPTAIN SAILO'S CAMP

not get away from Rima, because the bridge was an emergency one only, and not particularly safe. It was an old rope that was already worn out and condemned, and had only been put into use again for want of a better one. Also, it was a Mishmi type bridge, and one had to work one's passage all the way over the river. At the time we were hardly strong enough to do this.

Preparations were at last under way for the twisting of new ropes for the ordinary Rima bridge. The five or six villages in the Rima basin take it in turn to replace the bridge which all use, and now it was La Ti's turn to supply the raw materials and labour.

The first man over from the west bank was Gombu Dorji, a Tibetan of good family who had settled in Zayul province and lived at Tooning. He at once gave orders to the headman of La Ti to make new bridge ropes, and gave us the firm assurance that it would be ready 'tomorrow'. It was now a matter of the utmost urgency that the bridge be in working order without further delay, because the Assam Rifles patrol was expected any moment from Kahao and, being so long overdue, it was certain that they would be short of food — if, indeed, they had any rations left at all.

On our arrival in Rima three weeks earlier, we had contracted with the headman to buy two *maunds* of rice. Up to the day of the earthquake only one had been delivered, and now that Rima was likely to be short of food in the near future, we thought it probable that the rest of the deal would be cancelled. All honour to him, the headman kept his word and let us have the rice at the end of August, even though, with the paddy fields dry for a fortnight, the harvest prospects were by then very much less promising than they had been when the agreement was made.

The afternoon of September 1st was as hot as ever. Each day for ten hours there was no shade, no respite from the burning heat of Rima. One of our clinical thermometers, which I carelessly left in a box that stood at the door of the tent in the sun, was broken when the mercury rose above 110°.

At 3.30 the same day there arrived in Rima a bedraggled procession of fifteen tired and hungry men — the Diphu La patrol of eight Assam Riflemen from Walong, and their seven Zakring porters from the villages of Kahao and Mashei. Their clothes were torn and dusty, their boots worn out; but they marched in with all their equipment, and their heads high. It did us good to see them.

As soon as they arrived Phag Tsering made tea for the whole party, and we got out our few remaining cigarettes. It annoyed me to remember how lightheartedly we had splashed cigarettes around in the early months, to people who did not need them and could buy them anyway if they wanted to. Now we had only 200 left, half of which I had already promised to Phag Tsering as soon as we began the journey down the valley. The other half would not go far among eight men — and in any case we knew that the Assam Rifles would share whatever cigarettes they had with their porters, which meant that each man would get only half a dozen.

We invited the patrol leader, Havildar Pahal Sing Rana, to come to our tent and have tea with us. He was a Gurkha of sixteen years' service in the Indian Army. One might even say that he was a typical Gurkha, short and broad, with an open, generous face full of humour, and an abundance of those qualities that have so endeared his race to all who come in contact with them.

By degrees we heard from him, and from the men under him, the story of the Lost Patrol which had been missing for so many days. On the night of the earthquake they were camped at the Hot Springs, three hard days' march up the Di Chu Valley from Kahao, on their way to the Diphu La pass — over 14,000 feet — at its head. The earthquake, so terrible at Rima, must have been no less appalling at the Hot Springs, for there the mountains were right on top of the torrent, and the din and confusion in that confined space would be magnified by multiple echoes.

Not surprisingly, the porters temporarily lost their nerve, and

when morning came refused to continue up the valley. But the patrol leader had his orders, and did not consider an earthquake any reason for not carrying them out. What he said to the porters is not recorded; but whatever it was, they all thought better of mutiny, picked up their loads, and followed the indomitable *havildar* another three days' journey to the Diphu La.

What their difficulties and hardships must have been it is impossible to conceive, but in all that week they can hardly have had a single easy moment. It must be remembered, too, that the ground was shaking continuously, bringing down fresh rock falls every hour. Having completed their mission, the patrol got down the gorge to the end of the forest (which more than ever before was one long obstacle race over uprooted trees and gigantic boulders hurled from above), and were then faced with the hateful four mile traverse to the top of the wooded plateau above our old camp.

The entire face of the gorge had peeled off, leaving not a shred of vegetation to hold the slabs together, nor the faintest sign of a track. Picking a way as best he could, for six hours Pahal Sing led his men with dauntless courage across those glaring white slopes, every minute of the way exposed to murderous fire from the rotten, disintegrating cliffs above. And not a man or a rifle was lost.

For us it was a privilege to be with such a man as Pahal Sing, whose leadership and devotion to duty were an inspiration to all. Not only was he a very brave man, but as delightful a companion as one could wish for. We were to see a lot of him in the next six weeks.

Needless to say, the rope bridge was *not* ready, as promised, on the 2nd. Havildar Pahal Sing, accustomed as he was to having orders obeyed and promises honoured, was not at all dismayed; on the contrary, he was perfectly confident that we should somehow be able to leave Rima on September 3rd as arranged. Frank explained the circumstances to him: this

was Tibet, and the villagers were not soldiers. They did not have a long tradition of discipline behind them, as had the Gurkhas; and they could not be relied upon to make a bridge on a certain day just because they had promised they would. When this point had penetrated, Pahal Sing lost no time in sending a rifleman (with rifle) and one of the porters to fetch Gombu Dorji from Tooning, who seemed to be the only man in the district with any pretensions to authority.

When Gombu Dorji arrived we held a joint conference for an hour, Akkey interpreting. The outcome of it was that Gombu Dorji rode down in person to La Ti village to hustle the proceedings. As we had expected, the Diphu Patrol had arrived in Rima with scarcely a grain of rice between them, and the *maund* we had just received from the headman was immediately handed over to them, together with about twenty pounds of barley flour. On slender rations this might be spun out for seven or eight days, supplemented with various species of marrow and pumpkin which were now abundant. Our own stocks of rice and buckwheat also amounted to about a week's supply for the four of us. Nobody in the village could afford to sell any food — and we certainly could not blame them for that. But the situation was becoming critical, and it was imperative that we all get back to Walong without delay, where there would be ample rations for everyone.

On September 4th Pahal Sing ordered the headman of Kahao (who was acting as a porter for the time being) to take an S.O.S. message to Walong asking for food and bridging materials to be sent to Rima without delay, if necessary to be air dropped. But when Gombu Dorji casually turned up again and said it was *certain* the bridge would be fixed that day and we could all leave the next, the *havildar* all but told the headman of Kahao he need not go to Walong after all. Frank and I, however, were still sceptical, and persuaded Pahal Sing that we had heard all this before, many times over, and were far from convinced that we should get away in one, two, or even three days. With food so short we could not take the risk of

further indefinite delay without replenishment. So the headman of Kahao left Rima on the 4th after all, and we began listening for planes bringing us an air drop. Our doubts about the value of Gombu Dorji's word were not misplaced, and it was September 6th before the new rope bridge was fixed and open for traffic.

On one of our evening walks we collected a Clematis in flower; but there was little else to notice in Rima at this time, except the dazzling blue of Ceratostigma in the hedges. This lovely flower was irresistible to a species of swallow-tail butterfly, and when I put a sprig of it in the buttonhole of my ragged old bush shirt, butterflies swarmed round me to drink the nectar.

Birds, as already mentioned, are not legion in the arid gorge country round Rima, but we once found two small birds of different species lying dead on the path, their beaks locked together, apparently after a mid-air collision!

It was alarming to discover how nearly exhausted I felt after a gentle stroll of one mile on dead level ground. Even mild fever wears down one's energy if it continues for weeks, and I had now had fever daily for twenty-five days. Inability to sleep is far more trying, and my head was reeling with insomnia. This seemed hardly the time to begin a journey down the Lohit Valley, but there was no alternative, and I only hoped I should not be a burden on the rest of the party when we eventually got away.

There was some rain on the 6th, which mercifully brought down the temperature many degrees and washed some of the accumulated mud off the outer fly of the tent. The rain that fell for an hour or two on the night of the earthquake was so charged with dust, that the canvas in the morning was covered with blobs of mud — an extraordinary sight. In the evening news came that the rope bridge, after so much procrastination and delay, was in place at last and functioning properly. We could all leave for Walong next day.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

It was a dull morning, heavily overcast though not actually raining, when we started the journey back to Walong. There were forty-two of us in the party, which included our four selves, our porters, and the Diphu patrol and *their* porters. The first hold-up was, of course, the rope bridge, and to get so large a number of loads and people over the river took a good two hours. At the bridge a hawk-nosed Tartar from the eastern marches of Tibet was directing operations, a sergeant in the Tibetan army. He had been sent to Rima several days earlier by the Zayul Shengoh (who was somewhere up the valley of the Rong Thö Chu), and now showed his worth as he pushed onlookers and other hindrances out of the way while the loads were being tied on. He was not armed — Tibetan soldiers seldom are, it seems — but he was a man of quick temper and amazing strength, and everyone respected the fact. I saw him move two of our loads stacked together, with as little fuss as I should make in picking up a tin of biscuits.

A dozen porters crossed the river first, then one by one the loads were attached to the rope by means of the usual slider and leather straps, and launched over the furious rapids; and one after another they were 'met' by the porters who had already crossed, and dragged slowly up to the landing stage. After every six or eight loads had been released the supply of sliders on the Rima bank gave out, and a man from the west bank would have to bring some back, crossing the river very slowly and carefully by the nearby Mishmi type bridge whose rope was so frayed and old.

When most of the loads were over Akkey crossed, and we followed. To ensure a swift passage we poured a little oil from the lamp into our sliders, with the result that we shot down the rope like rockets and got fully three-quarters of the way across before having to pull ourselves up the last bit. Phag Tsering,

who had a profound dislike of rope bridges — contraptions he had never had to use in his own country — arrived in a passion of indignation after a crossing that took him five minutes. Whoever had tied him into the harness had done it so thoroughly that he could scarcely move his arms at all, to pull himself up to the landing stage. All day he bore a grudge about this, and kept up a perpetual mutter on the subject of rope bridges in general and the Rima one in particular.

There was another passenger over the bridge who had a bigger grouse than Phag Tsering: a pig! The boys had invested in a yearling pig, which they hoped to carry alive (more accurately, cause to be carried) all the way to Walong. But the unfortunate animal, which had to be tied up in a bamboo basket, died on the first march, and as the weather was still very hot, all the meat had to be smoked the same day. We bought a leg of it, and had a memorable meal that night of roast pork stuffed with cloves. Cold, the meat lasted us until we reached Walong.

The first day's march, after the long delay at the bridge, took us no further than Sangu, and on the whole the going was not difficult. There were, however, two unpleasant sections that gave us a foretaste of what was to come, where the path above the Lohit had been bodily removed by landslips. What remained was mostly dry sand in a very unstable condition, over which no one had any desire to linger. As we neared Sangu the ground became more and more broken by fissures. Chasms had opened in the rice fields, giving the impression that a monster plough had been at work. The village itself had not suffered to anything like the same extent as the cultivation — or at any rate all the houses had by now been adequately repaired.

The patrol was ahead of us, and it was early afternoon before we reached the village ourselves. One of the first people we saw was a *havildar* whose face was not familiar. He came over and introduced himself as Indra Bahadur Limbu, leader

of the rescue party sent from Walong to look for the Diphu La patrol and ourselves, and help us all on the journey back. To our relief, they brought food to last the whole party for nearly a week.

When the tents were up in an open space south of the village, the two *havildars* came to tea with us, and for the first time we heard news that we could be certain was true. Almost all of it was very bad indeed. Havildar Indra Bahadur brought us a letter from the A.P.O., Captain L. R. Sailo, whom as yet we had never met:

My dear Kingdon-Ward [it read],

Greatly relieved to hear reported safety of you and Mrs. Kingdon-Ward. By the grace of God my party also escaped miraculously at the border camp and withdrew to Walong under most difficult and risky circumstances, and arrived here (Walong) on 23rd August . . . On inquiry by your families I have already signalled Sadiya about you some time ago. L. of C. along L. V. is now completely cut off. Even for you to come to Walong is at the moment too risky, due to continual shakings and fallings of boulders. Air dropping is also reported out of the question now due to the weather. Sadiya and Jorhat also affected, but effects in the plains cannot, of course, be compared with this valley. As my McMahon Line camp was completely buried, we are now living at Mishmi level, if not worse.

Though most of his news was undeniably bad, it was so heartening to know that the road to Walong was not totally impassable, that we felt encouraged beyond measure (and, as it turned out, beyond reason). As for taking Captain Sailo's advice and postponing our departure for Walong, we discussed it briefly and soon decided against it. For one thing, the food situation was too precarious to allow of our hanging about any longer; and also, the tremors and rockfalls were likely to continue for many months yet, and the Lohit Valley road would

never be even moderately safe within any foreseeable time. It might even get worse. After all, a few men *had* come up from Walong. We decided to go on.

From Sangu we had a clear view up the La Ti valley, and what we saw made us thank Providence that we were not ourselves in the alps at the time of the earthquake. Not a tree, not a blade of grass remained on the face of the cliff, which shone white as a tombstone and as smooth, in the sunshine. It had been scraped clean. Several times we were startled by the sound of rending rocks, and looking across the Lohit, watched boulders of fantastic size leaping down the side of the La Ti gorge along which, as in the Di Chu gorge, the only path had run. As they crashed and roared down the cliffs, the boulders broke up into smaller and smaller fragments, until at length the whole valley was filled with clouds of pulverized rock through which nothing was visible. No doubt the Tha Chu, and every other ravine, had suffered the same fate.

Now, too, we saw what the Assam Rifles patrol had had to contend with on their desperate journey from Kahao to Rima. Above the Lohit also rocks were pouring down every gully, and the whole aspect from Sangu was as grimly depressing as anything I had ever seen. To see the familiar valley now was as shocking, in its way, as to look upon the victim of a violent accident, and discover him with face and body mutilated beyond recognition.

The second day's march was even shorter than the first, and easier. Between us and Same there was only one obstacle — the Sap Chu river. We were interested to see what had happened to it; but nothing we had imagined prepared us for the sight that confronted us when we reached our old camping ground in the pine woods. Our camp in March had stood some way back from the edge of the river terrace, and the river itself had flowed between banks covered with broad leafed jungle. The place where our tents had been was now the extreme edge of the cliff.

It was easy to see what had happened. The Sap Chu had

been blocked higher up and for several days had ceased to flow. When the dam eventually broke, the wall of water that rushed through the narrow valley stripped all the vegetation from the banks (and large chunks of the banks too) leaving a train of desolation in its wake, and a shrivelled-up stream flowing through a wide bed of stinking grey mud which plastered the sides of the valley like volcanic lava. The reek of the mud was characteristic of our journey back to Sadiya. Being of earth, there is nothing with which to compare it except the sweet, earthy smell of a garden after rain — and of that it was the very antithesis, for it was inherently evil, morbid and full of death.

The Assam Rifles had made a crude bridge of pine saplings and jungle lianas, which saved much time in crossing the river, to say nothing of cuts and bruises from the constantly churning boulders in its bed. At Same the entire village turned out to stare at the cavalcade, and we found ourselves and the Assam Rifles camped on marshy ground just above the highest houses. Mosquitoes were bad, and so were blister flies.

Pahal Sing and Indra Bahadur had tea with us again, and from the latter we learned in detail what the journey entailed from this point on. It had been noticed that rockfalls were fewest during the hours between dawn and ten o'clock, when the valley wind began to blow in strength. For this reason we were advised to be ready to leave at five next morning, as the day's march to the next good water was a long one, and the latter part of it dangerous on account of falling rocks.

So we all turned in early and were ready in good time. It was a perfect autumn morning, and in the half light the cloud-topped mountains had a serenity and beauty about them that was strangely reassuring. I could not then associate them with feelings of fear or anxiety; only with the joy of walking through the hills on a fine, cold morning in high health and spirits.

The porters had dispersed in the night, some of them returning to their homes in Sangu, and it was three hours before they were all rounded up and the day's march began. We left Same

with the patrol. For half an hour there was rough boulder hopping over what may have been the debris of a previous earthquake, before we came out on to easy river terraces and reached the McMahon Line. As we passed from Tibet into India by the solitary Customs hut, perched on the extreme edge of the gravel cliff above the river, a piece of the cliff close beside it broke away and crashed into the river. A young sepoy who was sauntering along like Johnnie Head-in-Air made us all laugh as he came down from the clouds and made for safety with a leap like a gazelle.

A moment later we passed a mighty pile of debris, every block in it weighing tons. It is impossible to imagine what the noise must have been like when it fell; yet Indra Bahadur told us that it was the very spot where Captain Sailo's party had camped on August 15th and that under it lay all their possessions — the rifles, sten-guns and ammunition of the Assam Rifles escort, rations, medicines, money for the porters, political presents, and the bodies of three Mishmi porters who had been killed in the avalanche, and the two cowherds we had seen daily from the Di Chu. For a moment I did not believe it possible that *anyone* could have escaped who was caught in such a place. Captain Sailo's description of his party's escape as 'miraculous' was nothing if not accurate.

To give some idea of the speed with which the rocks came hurtling down the mountain side from a height of several thousand feet above the river, beside the remains of the A.P.O.'s camp we passed a solitary pine tree in whose mutilated trunk were buried three pieces of rock. Two flakes had struck the tree end on and penetrated both bark and wood like the blade of an axe, immovably; while a third and bigger block had hit the trunk broadside on and buried itself deep in the very heart wood.

In another half mile we had a perfect view of the familiar Di Chu gorge. Familiar? Hardly that. The general outline was the same, but nothing else. From top to bottom the gorge was stripped bare, and while we watched the destruction

continued. With a roar and a clatter, huge boulders loosened by the earthquake dislodged themsleves and thundered down into the valley, sending up suffocating clouds of dust as they did so. How was it possible that fifteen laden men had passed through such a barrage unscathed ten days before? Well, God helps those who help themselves; and that, I suppose, is the answer.

I asked Pahal Sing whether our camp had suffered (they had had to pass it on the way to Kahao). The boys' *basha* was still standing, more or less, but the whole area had been swept by boulders, and it was clear that after our four months' residence at the Di Chu, by moving to Rima when we did we escaped a very unpleasant form of death.

Grim though Captain Sailo's experiences must have been at the McMahon Line camp, it was nevertheless providential that he had not stopped for the night at the usual camping place, Bedi, a mile away, where there were three or four *bashas* for the use of touring officers. The bank of the Lohit, thirty feet high and quite sheer, had broken off here also, and taken with it all but one of the huts. Had the earthquake not occurred on Indian Independence Day, when there was a peculiar fascination in camping on the exact frontier with one foot in India and the other in Tibet, Captain Sailo would have spent the night at Bedi where shelters were ready made. Had he done so, hardly a man would have escaped being buried alive or drowned in the river.

We had now been on our way for three hours, and Havildar Indra Bahadur, who knew what was ahead, called a halt. There was shade under some pine trees, and we all rested for an hour and had a meal. On the other side of the river were the mountains behind Kahao, all denuded of vegetation. Even the waterfall that was normally in sight for a full day's march appeared to have been blocked; at any rate, there was now not a sign of it. The hour's rest passed all too quickly, and no sooner had we started again than difficulties began in earnest.

The path stopped abruptly at a cliff face, and for the next half mile we could see nothing but a chaotic jumble of angular granite blocks piled one on top of the other. Above us the raw mountain side from which they had broken away was in places vertical. Over this difficult and extremely dangerous slip speed was essential. The going was terrible, and completely exhausting. Havildar Indra Bahadur, realizing that I was not at the top of my form, had ordered one of the sepoys in the rescue party to keep an eye on me and help me if I needed it; and no one could have carried out his orders more kindly and tactfully than Rifleman Takem Abor. All the way along this slip he gave me a hand over the apparently endless jumble of rocks, telling me from previous experience which likely looking footholds were in fact unstable, and which ones safe. Half way across the slip the cliff came right down to the river and the only route lay under the very waters of the Lohit. Three days earlier, Indra Bahadur told us, the river had been so high that they had had to wade chest deep along a submerged shelf, the current threatening all the time to wash them off their feet. Since then it had fallen nearly two feet and the water, still thick with mud, was no more than thigh deep. Takem insisted on carrying me here. I felt perfectly sure of myself, but he evidently did not trust me to keep my footing, and picked me up in spite of my protests. He was no bigger than I was, and the idea of being carried over such a place by *any*one appalled me. I had no wish to see Takem drowned in the Lohit through being encumbered with unnecessary baggage — and to tell the truth, I did not want to be drowned myself. He was superbly sure footed as he stepped down into the river and felt his way inch by inch along the submerged ledge — a distance of eight or ten feet — then out again on to the boulders. Frank's second pair of boots disintegrated on this march, and the two best remaining (one brown, one black) had to be bandaged on to his feet with strips torn off an old ground sheet.

At two o'clock we reached the Tha Chu. As with the Di Chu, the walls of the valley had slipped badly on either side

leaving nothing but bare cliffs, with piles of rubble and uprooted trees by the river. It was a fifteen minute scramble to the crossing place, where a party sent from Walong by Captain Sailo had made a temporary log bridge to replace the one washed away by a flood. When they first reached the Tha Chu, Indra Bahadur's rescue party had taken over three hours to cross the river, which was then flowing chest deep and carrying down an endless burden of sharp boulders. Some of these were quite heavy enough to throw a man off his feet, and there was nearly an accident when one of the sepoys was knocked over and washed twenty yards downstream, where he luckily came to rest in a shallow bay and was able to climb out, bruised and shaken, on to the bank.

There was now quite a solid bridge of pine saplings with wire-rope handrails, and the crossing took no time. Once over the river we all stopped to brew tea and, of all surprising things, to collect a mail! For us there was another letter from Captain Sailo, and one from the Medical Officer at Walong. At 3.15, after seven hours on the road, we reached a safe camping ground with good water, in a pine wood. It had been a long day.

From this camp we watched, spellbound, a series of rock avalanches just across the Lohit. A wedge of granite broke away with a savage roar from the cliffs above the river, toppled over very, very slowly, then crashed hundreds of feet in one bound till it hit a projecting spur. There it exploded into smaller blocks, which fell hundreds of feet again down the sheer mountain wall, breaking into still smaller fragments as they bounced off the cliff once more and plunged headlong into the muddy waters of the Lohit. After the barrage ceased, the whole cliff smoked with clouds of pulverized rock, white and brown and yellow. No sooner was it clear again than the awful performance was repeated. The noise alone was terrifying. We were well out of range, but it was all happening within two hundred yards of where we stood.

Dr. Goswami had very kindly sent some medicines from

Walong, and I looked forward to a good sleep after a double dose of some evil-smelling bromide. However, the violent exercise we were taking had so aggravated the fever I had now had for a month, that I wasted half the night trying to cool off sufficiently to sleep.

On September 10th we were away by seven. The path that day was occasionally quite good, and one could walk at a reasonable pace for a mile or more. But in many places the path had disappeared entirely. Where it had skirted the foot of the cliffs, it was buried under tons of rock. In other stretches, where it had followed a high-level route, it had been stripped clean off the face of the mountain. So it was often necessary to struggle over a jumble of unstable granite blocks and uprooted trees. That kind of going was merely exhausting, and played the very devil with one's temper. But the other kind of slip crossing put a far more severe strain on one's nerves. Many times we had to follow an all but invisible track across a loose, dry mixture of sand and mud inclined at anything from 40° to 70°, and with nothing on one side but the Lohit river, perhaps 2000 feet below. A slip could have but one result; but the danger from falling rocks was even greater.

Indra Bahadur had warned us of a place two miles from Walong which was the crux of the whole nightmare journey. It was not wide, he said, but well nigh impassable. Also, it was 1500 feet sheer above the river, and could not be avoided. As retailed to us by Akkey, it lost nothing in the telling. I dreaded it for Frank, for whom these dizzy drops, so frequently recurring, were mental torture beyond my powers to imagine. He never gave any indication, save by the whiteness of his complexion, of how hateful these precipices were to him. Neither did Havildar Pahal Sing Rana, who also confessed that, hillman though he was, he had no head for heights — a statement which made us regard his exploits in the Di Chu gorge with even greater admiration.

Frank and Takem always gave me a hand over the boulders,

which were *my* particular bugbear, and in return I tried to give Frank confidence on the dizzy places high up on the cliffs above the river, which I perversely found both stimulating and enjoyable. Most of the first half-hour of this march was taken up with negotiating dry gravel cliffs, followed by a long drawn out game of hide-and-seek round a chaos of jagged blocks until we struck the path again. Where the path had not been wiped out it ran more or less level through grass and bracken-clad pine woods. Though seldom so much as a foot wide, it nevertheless had suffered badly in the earthquake, and in one section was cracked wide open for six hundred yards on end, though the grassland on either side of it, significantly enough, was untouched. This threw an interesting light on the evil of destroying the vegetation cover every year by burning the forest. It looked as though the damage in this particular area was at least partly due to man's interference with nature.

At 8.30 we reached another important tributary of the Lohit, the Krao Ti, where for once little change was noticeable. It was an indescribable relief to look up the valley and see hardly a sign of a slip. Yet at one time there must have been serious trouble higher up, for the strong timber bridge had been carried away by a flood, and once again we crossed gingerly on a pine log. One of my boots was protesting at the treatment it was receiving. The sole had all but parted company with the upper, and to save myself the annoyance of constantly tripping over the flapping sole, I pulled it off and put it in my rucksack for repairs later. There was still a thin piece of leather between me and the ground, but even that was like a sieve, and barely lasted as far as Walong.

At ten o'clock we halted an hour for lunch at Chumprung camp, where there was a hut occupied by an elderly Tibetan who farmed a few small fields. The Lohit at this point was an extraordinary spectacle. The left bank had been so severely shaken, and so much rock and sand had been hurled into the water, that islands had formed, greatly interfering with the normal flow of the river.

We were both tired after only three hours of this march. There were many long stretches where there was neither difficulty nor danger to keep one's mind occupied and give one something more exciting to think about than one's chronic weariness. Our pace — my pace, that is — became slower and slower, until gallant little Takem (who no doubt was tired enough himself) offered me a lift up a long ascent in the heat of the day, which normally would have passed unnoticed. At the top of the spur he sat down to rest while Frank and I carried on slowly together.

Descending steeply into a wall-sided ravine, through which flowed a small and dirty stream, Frank carefully picked a way down. It was slippery and we soon got into difficulties, ploughing through uprooted trees and all manner of rubbish in an endeavour to spare what remained of our boots and cross the stream dry shod. Evidently Frank had chosen the right line, as we soon picked up a faint track on the far side of the stream and followed it to the top. By this time the two *havildars*, Akkey and Phag Tsering had joined us, together with three or four porters. So many people on the unstable earth cliffs at one time was risky, and it was no surprise when the whole surface began to move uneasily as we struggled upwards. The track ended, and Frank could not climb the vertical gravel cliff, so the file turned right about face with Frank now last. Fortunately we were almost out of the ravine; Phag Tsering was already over the top and Akkey was now in the lead. As he began to slide he clutched at an exposed tree root; it broke away and he grabbed another, which held. Safely belayed, he had a spare hand for Indra Bahadur, who then had a hand to give to me, and so on to Pahal Sing, Frank and the porters. With feet firmly planted, we stood quite still while the dry earth and boulders rolled over our feet, rapidly gaining momentum as they bounced down the sides of the ravine. Luckily we all kept our balance and were able to clamber on to the bank before worse happened.

We were now close beside the river again. After a dull mile

over shadeless pasture land came a long and difficult climb of over 1000 feet from the river terrace. I knew what was in store at the top, but hoped that Frank did not; it was the *mauvais pas* Indra Bahadur had told us about. Takem again gave me a ride up part of this interminable slog, at what cost to himself I can only guess. He was magnificent. Without his help, and without all the encouragement given me by Frank and by both *havildars*, I do not think I could have made the effort needed to complete such a gruelling march as the one we did that day.

Tired almost to death, at last we reached the top, and turning a corner found ourselves suddenly confronted with the show piece of this amazing route from Rima to Walong. It can be described in a very few words, for it consisted merely of an earth cliff some 1200 feet high, inclined at an angle of 70°. Immediately in front of us was an outcrop of rock — about the only solid-looking object in sight — beside which, with great daring, two small pine logs had somehow been lashed. Three ringed iron pitons were of value at this point. We acquired them as pegs with the Backs' tent, and it was lucky that they had not been thrown away — which, as we invariably used bamboo or wooden pegs cut as required, they easily might have been.

At the far side of this gallery stood Indra Bahadur, cool and efficient as usual, to help the rest of us over. I wanted to go first, but Frank was already in the lead and it was no place to stop and argue. So on he went, with one hand against the bulging rock to steady himself. Indra Bahadur, who had been waiting patiently in a most exposed position just beyond the logs, held out a stick for moral support at least, and briefly ordered us not to look down. Frank, to whom such a place must have been a cruel ordeal, appeared perfectly cool and unconcerned.

'Don't look down, sahib! Don't look down!' chanted Indra Bahadur as Frank sidled slowly across, white as a ghost. Then it was my turn. Orders not to look down I disregarded; I could not help it. The whole situation was so dramatic, and the

view down the precipice to the Lohit and the shattered peaks of Dong, rising on the other side, so heart stirring, that in the twinkling of an eye I felt refreshed in mind and body and ready for anything. Coming at just that moment, when I imagined I was at my last gasp with fatigue, the psychological effect of this exhilarating cliff crawl was astounding.

But we weren't over the cliff yet. As Frank gingerly stepped on to the next traverse, the headman of Kahao (back from Walong) appeared from nowhere, and to atone for past sins came forward and planted himself in the soft sand *below* the track, to give us each a hand. Such an act required great nerve, for all the time he had to 'tread water', so to speak, as the sand kept slipping from under his feet. The grin on his face as he stood there paddling away for dear life was wonderfully reassuring.

We thought this would be the last thrill of the day, but round the next bulge in the cliff was another improvised gallery, and then yet a fourth, before the shadow of a track took us back to the original path. A whole foot wide and well worn, it felt as safe as the Strand. Another moment and we were plunging steeply down to a grassy terrace beside a small patch of jungle near the Hot Springs, within two miles of Walong; the adventure almost at an end. We reached camp at 2.30 after eight and a half hours on the road (long enough in the circumstances), and thoroughly enjoyed lazing away the remainder of the hot day. Having once sat down, however, it was all but impossible to move again, so stiff did our muscles become.

The evening was fine and sunny. All the way from Rima we had been blessed with perfect weather — perfect, that is, from the point of view of a safe passage. With the sun overcast most of the time, there had been only the faintest breath of wind; nothing like the usual dry hurricane that eroded the hills and brought down tons of loosened rock into the valley. No heavy rain either, which would have been equally disastrous; just gentle showers once or twice, which helped to consolidate the scars of the earthquake into something a little resembling stability.

At 4.15 next morning, September 11th, after an all but sleepless night, Phag Tsering brought us tea, *chupattis* and cold pork (which were hard to swallow at that hour), and soon after five we began the last lap of the journey to Walong. We wondered what all the hurry was about; Walong was so near, we might have made a much more leisurely start and still have been in hours before midday. But the reason for this very early start — we dressed in the dark — was soon apparent. Ahead of us lay a mile of unbroken slip crossing, of a kind that would be affected by the faintest breath of wind, and Indra Bahadur wanted as soon as possible to be through with the heavy responsibility of bringing the party back safely.

I think it would not be an exaggeration to describe the high traverse that lay between that last night's camp and Walong as suicidal. No mountaineer in his right mind, and having a proper sense of responsibility, would have considered it a legitimate risk to venture for a solid hour on to slopes so steep, so completely rotten, and so exposed to the danger of bombardment from above. Only in the most desperate circumstances could such foolhardiness be condoned. The circumstances *were* desperate, and the risk had to be taken. Looked at objectively, the chances of sixty people (or even six) getting through safely were exceedingly remote; yet I for one felt convinced from the first that all would be well. And I know that I was not alone in this feeling of confidence and safety, which I make no attempt to explain. It had no logical foundation, but it was real and true nevertheless.

Every now and then we scrambled over or under uprooted pine trees or big rocks precariously balanced; but most of the way was a more or less horizontal traverse across immense slopes of the finest scree. Six months later we passed close to Stromboli, and could not resist comparing the great scree on the west side of the island with the slips we had crossed near Walong. They lacked the steaming fumaroles, but otherwise there was nothing to choose between them.

It was hard work, but so interesting and exhilarating that

one could not help enjoying it (though not, perhaps, to the extent of wishing to repeat the adventure). On the way Frank picked up a tattered copy of a text book on medicine, which had been dropped by Dr. Goswami on his way back to Walong. I am not surprised he dropped it, for it weighed over three pounds! Nevertheless, he was glad to get it back.

In an hour we struck the old path and followed it down a short distance to a flat terrace above the river. Here we stopped and waited until the whole party had assembled. Half a yard from the edge of the terrace was a fissure, a foot wide and several feet deep, running for fifty yards all along the edge of the terrace. While they waited for the last stragglers to come in, the porters and bridge-makers — to say nothing of the Diphu La patrol and our two servants — felt it necessary to sit *outside* the fissure in order to dangle their legs over the extreme edge of the terrace. No other place would do! Such flirting with death, after all they had gone through, was typical of the happy-go-lucky Gurkha.

When the last porter had arrived and was rested, we formed a long line and marched the last half mile into Walong in something like military style, led by Havildar Indra Bahadur Limbu and the sepoys of the rescue party, then the sepoys of the Diphu patrol, Frank and myself, Havildar Pahal Sing Rana, Akkey and Phag Tsering, and some forty porters and road makers.

Rounding a spur we came to a group of tattered Tibetan prayer flags, and beyond them caught sight of the familiar sentry tower and the barracks of Walong. Five minutes later we entered the fort, where nearly everyone turned out to greet the patrol — in complete silence! Mr. T. Tsering, Tibetan interpreter, came forward to shake hands with everyone and welcome them home; and then the Diphu Patrol and the rescue party paraded in front of the guard room, presented arms and dismissed.

It was the end of the road.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Now began a period of detention at India's remotest outpost; five weeks which in retrospect are among the very happiest I remember. Mr. Tsering took us along to the grass and bamboo *basha* which had been hurriedly put up for Captain Sailo and other officers stranded at Walong, and there we spent the rest of the long morning — it was only seven o'clock when we arrived — drinking cup after cup of tea and swapping news. It was good to see old friends again, among them Jemadar Bir Bahadur Gurung and Dr. M. C. Goswami; and to meet for the first time Captain L. R. Sailo, Mr. Tsering, Subedar Kharka Bahadur Gurung, and other members of the A.P.O.'s party who had so barely escaped with their lives at the border camp.

Among the latter were four semi-invalids who had been injured by falling boulders on the night of the earthquake — the M.O. himself and his Medical Orderly, Captain Sailo's Naga servant, and a Gurkha sepoy of the Assam Rifles escort. With ribs broken, and an impressive stock of valuable drugs and dressings buried under the debris of the avalanche, the agony of their journey back from the McMahon Line to Walong can hardly be described. The doctor in particular deserved the highest praise, for he was neither young nor physically strong, and coming from east Bengal was a plainsman born and bred. Until 1950 the Lohit Valley must have been almost beyond the scope of his imagination.

There was a pre-earthquake mail waiting for us that included a copy of *Everybody's*, six months old, with an article entitled 'The Great Earthquake Year — 1750'. It recalled a series of small, but alarming, earthquakes felt in London and other parts of England just two centuries ago. None of them spectacular, they were nevertheless to us very interesting, for there were two references to a sound like an explosion high in the air: once

in London and once in Norwich. The 'gunfire' that we had heard so clearly at Rima immediately after the most violent shocks were over, had greatly puzzled us. Could it be due to reflection of sound from the Heaviside layer or something of the sort? There are no mountains, or even hills, near London or Norwich, so the noise could not have been caused by hills splitting in half. Furthermore, the explosions we heard were clearly heard on the plains of Assam 200 miles from the epicentre. One could easily believe that the thunderous roar heard immediately before a severe tremor was caused by the tearing and rending of the earth's crust. But the 'gunfire' came from high in the sky immediately *after* the main earthquake, and the explosions were consecutive and at regular intervals, like bursting shells.

In those days the busiest men in Walong were undoubtedly the wireless operators. Apart from the routine roll-call from Shillong at six o'clock every evening, they were handling an endless stream of urgent messages from Sadiya, Shillong, and from the only other outpost in the Lohit Valley with a wireless transmitter — Hayuliang.[1] By this means only, Walong kept in touch with all that was going on.

One of the outgoing messages reported our safe arrival, and on the strength of that news H.E. the Governor of Assam, Sri Jairamdas Doulatram, though overwhelmed with work resulting from the earthquake, found time to send personal cables and letters to our families in England, thus bringing to an end three weeks' suspense when they did not know even whether we were alive — only that we had been in the very heart of the earthquake.

Frank botanized so far as he was able in the very small area in which he could move at all; but there was not really very much to do. Any work that did turn up was accordingly seized upon with joy. Among the high lights in this respect was Captain Sailo's dramatic report of the earthquake at the McMahon Line camp, which he was kind enough to let me type. It kept

[1] This went off the air shortly after we reached Walong.

me busy for a whole day; and then the time hung heavily again.

The next excitement was T.A.B. inoculations for all Assam Rifles personnel. Walong at the time was over-populated, and I did not see why the M.O. should have all the stabbing of the men, alone and unassisted. My offer to help was received with embarrassing gratitude by Dr. Goswami, and before I had time to think again a loaded syringe was thrust into my hand. Only then did I realize with a shock that I had never given an injection in my life, and wasn't quite sure I knew how to do it. It was too late then to draw back without dreadful loss of face, so for the sake of the patients' peace of mind I put on what I hoped was a convincingly professional manner, and with an air of easy confidence I was far from feeling, began the job.

The syringe had a leak in it somewhere, and I wasted two doses of serum before finding that it was impossible to exclude all air bubbles. This discovery on top of my other anxieties rattled me a bit; but not the M.O., to whom I went and complained that the weapon was faulty. Quite unconcerned, he told me to go ahead, but added a warning not to inject the stuff into a vein! Dr. Goswami was busy at his end of the queue, and it hardly seemed the time to ask for a map of the veins in a man's arm; so with a fervent prayer that I should manage to avoid them, I called the first victim. L/Naik Jitman Rai of the Diphu patrol stepped forward and rolled up his sleeve. He was a fine soldier and thoroughly deserved to live; so it was with the most desperate prayers for his preservation that I smeared iodine on his arm and jabbed.

The texture of his skin was like fine old morocco leather, and the muscles beneath it hard as ebony. The needle was blunt too, and barely penetrated; then wobbled backwards and forwards like a diviner's rod, threatening to snap at any moment as I struggled to get it well under the skin. I was completely unnerved by this unexpected resistance; Jitman Rai perfectly unruffled and serene. But I had to go through with it now,

and presently succeeded in getting the needle in another half inch and giving the required dose of serum. Then I leant back against the wall, feeling rather sick.

The next man presented his arm for a jab, and got much the same mauling as Jitman Rai had done. But after a few more efforts my technique improved a little (though there were still bubbles in the syringe), and the last dozen victims were treated fairly gently. I inquired anxiously next morning about the general state of health in Walong. Nobody had died.

During September several parties under Jemadar Bir Bahadur Gurung left with picks and shovels to repair some of the worst bits on the track between Walong and Changwinti, which had been pretty thoroughly wrecked. So badly damaged, in fact, that our friend from Manipur, Major R. C. Kathing, M.C., had been unable to get through at all. On August 15th he was camped at Minzong on his way to Walong, but every effort to move up the valley afterwards failed. On the third day he and his party managed, with the greatest difficulty, to retreat to Changwinti, and thence in three days more to Hayuliang. Beyond that it was impossible for several weeks to go, and his daily reports were far from reassuring. For us and for Captain Sailo (a brother officer in the Assam Regiment during the war) it was a great disappointment that Bob Kathing never reached Walong.

We liked to entertain often — more accurately, have people in to talk, since tea was usually the only beverage we could offer — so the rickety Inspection Bungalow we had occupied in February suited us much better than the tent. The tent had been set up just where it caught all the wind, and the noise of the outer fly flapping and banging in the gale became more than we could stand. So we moved into the bungalow after a week or two, and in spite of the varied cross currents of air, were fairly comfortable. Like most of the buildings at Walong, it had been tilted by the earthquake and was none too stable. Moreover, every tremor — and they were still of daily occur-

rence — caused a great commotion in its rheumy joints, and no one but ourselves considered it a desirable residence. I must admit that we moved out ourselves for any but the slightest tremors.

Towards the end of September the track had been patched up to the extent of being usable — but only just — and Captain Sailo made arrangements to leave. Not only himself, but the doctor too, the A.P.O.'s escort, Mr. Tsering and others. It was not, of course, possible to collect more than a very few porters at a time, so there was no question of our leaving with them. Even the very modest requirements of the A.P.O.'s party, who had lost almost all they possessed, put such a strain on local resources that they did not leave Walong until five days after the date originally chosen.

The dangerous work of repairing the track had not been completed without cost, and a day's march below Walong a Gurkha sepoy was hit below the knee by a falling boulder. Though the damage did not appear to be serious at the time, the wound quickly went septic, and after two days Rifleman Tek Bahadur had to be carried pick-a-back to Walong by a Mishmi porter. When he arrived he was already in a burning fever and in great pain. The M.O. got to work on him at once, gave him penicillin for twenty-four hours, and then dealt with the abscess, which was three inches across and an inch deep. It must be remembered that the greater part of Walong's medical equipment was buried at the McMahon Line, and that two-thirds of what drugs had been left behind were shaken off the shelves and smashed in one glorious cocktail all over the dispensary floor. In consequence Tek Bahadur had the benefit of only the mildest surface anaesthetic, and the operation was sheer butchery. But Dr. Goswami was neither insensitive nor unimaginative, and I have never seen anything like the speed and thoroughness of his work, which was so successful that in a bare ten days Tek Bahadur was on his feet again. All this in spite of the most trying conditions for operating. Inside the

hospital it was so dark that the patient had to be carried on to the open veranda, over which the dust blew in gritty clouds before the usual afternoon gale. Truly there is not much luxury about being ill in the Lohit Valley.

The day before Captain Sailo's party left for the plains, the fort and the nearby cultivation were threatened with destruction by fire. After the way of Zakring peasants, two irresponsible children with nothing better to do deliberately set fire to the dry grass, and the wind did the rest. In a matter of only a few hours the flames had travelled right to the top of the 8000 foot ridge, and had eaten back to the very edge of the cultivated land a mile down the valley. By early evening the flames were forty feet high and the situation so serious that the fire-fighting squad was doubled. For an hour or two it was touch and go; but the flames were brought under control at last, and we were all able to enjoy the farewell party arranged by the sepoys for those who would be leaving in the morning. Rice beer flowed freely, and the sadness of the occasion was soon forgotten in song and dance, until the Jemadar spoke on behalf of us all, and Captain Sailo replied. At four o'clock next morning everybody turned out to wish them good luck on their difficult journey to the plains.

Post-earthquake mails began to arrive, among them one from my mother dated August 18th, before the full extent of the disaster was known in England. She said: 'We have just read of an earthquake in Assam, and wonder whether you know anything about it.' Decidedly a letter to keep!

Though landslides occurred several times daily on both sides of the Lohit, Frank was determined, somehow, to collect some alpine or near-alpine seeds. With this purpose in mind he made several all-day reconnaissances on the craggy mountains behind Walong, and worked out a route. These mountains had taken hard punishment in the great shake-up. The rocks that were torn from them then blocked the stream below, and for twelve hours Walong's unfailing water supply actually failed.

On October 9th Frank left with Dapti and three other men from Walong village to spend a few nights in the mountains. In spite of Dr. Goswami's care of me, I still had not managed to throw off the fever that had begun in Rima, and did not feel strong enough to tackle such a tough expedition. We still had to get down the Lohit Valley and I needed to keep my physical resources for that, so on this occasion I had to let Frank go alone.

He got back on October 12th with a fine collection of hard-won seeds from altitudes up to nearly 11,000 feet. Higher than that it was impossible to go, and even that much height was not achieved without a severe struggle that involved the crossing of several bad slips. Because of the lack of water above 7000 feet, they could not camp high enough to be within reach of the true alpine zone, which in that arid region does not extend much below 12,000 feet. Even so, the thirty species of seed collected between 8000 and 11,000 feet included two roses, two rowans, eight rhododendrons, two barberries and the beautiful white *Viburnum cordifolium* already mentioned — a good return for a last-hope effort to save the autumn harvest from total failure.

While Frank was away the opportunity came for us to leave on the 15th, and I began packing. Pahal Sing, good friend that he was, undertook to make all necessary arrangements with the porters, thus saving us much argument and anxiety. Friday the 13th was wet, and the next day also, and the unexpected rain caused two tremendous rockfalls from the cliffs opposite Walong across the river. The din was awful, and it was not pleasant to watch granite blocks weighing tons spin through the air like pebbles, bouncing, disintegrating, and threatening annihilation to any living thing in their path. After jettisoning most of our equipment we would have still fourteen porters with us when we left Walong, besides our two servants, and the responsibility for their safety already began to weigh heavily upon us. For this reason, if for no other, loads were cut to the barest minimum, though we did not abandon any of our hard-won collection.

We would take no one who was not absolutely necessary.

As there were huts at the end of every march, we scrapped our two large tents and also the camp beds, which we presented to the hospital. At least, the Jemadar and Pahal Sing asked if they might have them, and we parted with them on condition that any in-patient should have first claim on the beds, which were at least a little more comfortable than the solid wooden benches provided. To the quartermaster we handed back all but twenty days' supply of rice. It was still reckoned only twelve marches to the plains; but with floods and landslips and other probable calamities to reckon with, we did not feel justified in having less than a full week's rations in reserve. As it turned out, we needed it all.

On the 13th a message came through from Shillong for a map reference and a weather report. Was the long awaited air dropping to begin at last? But it so happened that at Walong the 13th and 14th October were the first wet days since August, and the clouds so low that aircraft would not have a chance. Nothing less than perfect visibility and calm airs would do in such a narrow gorge; and as I estimated the width of the valley in terms of the wing span of a Dakota aircraft, I could not but be thankful that we were spared having to fly up the Lohit ourselves. There was little room for mistakes.

On account of the weather, however, no planes came for several months. By the time Walong was clear again the lower valley had clouded over completely, and remained thus — its usual state — until long after the I.A.F. had packed up and gone home. There is no point in waiting on the weather in the Mishmi Hills, and no Air Force could do so. But there is no doubt that the food, clothing and medical stores which the I.A.F. dropped over the flooded plains of Assam and in the Abor Hills saved thousands from death by starvation and exposure. They did a wonderful job in atrocious weather conditions and never lost a plane.

On October 14th, the day before we were to leave, we walked down to the vegetable garden and the dairy to say goodbye to

Takem and to other friends there, when we were startled by an extraordinary noise down the valley. It was a continuous booming which grew louder and louder, and seemed to be rapidly approaching us. It lasted for ten minutes. There seemed to be nothing to account for it. We saw no rock fall, no dust; we felt no tremor. And that only made the noise more ominous. Frank soon guessed what had happened. The small Yepak river that joined the Lohit two miles below Walong on the right bank, had for some time been much reduced in size. Evidently the dam which had formed higher up had burst at last and the roar of the flood water was the noise we heard. That meant that the bridge had probably been swept away, so in the morning the Jemadar ordered Indra Bahadur and two riflemen to go and see what had happened and report. They were soon back, and Indra Bahadur (who had a slightly gloomy streak in him) made the most of the new misfortune. He wound up a long and colourful tale of devastation with the announcement that we could not possibly leave Walong for another fortnight! I believe now that he was pulling my leg; but he was so insistent, so lugubrious, that at the time I swallowed every word and sank forthwith into a state of extreme woe. The prospect of *another* hold-up was more than I could bear. However, by midday a small bridging party returned from the Yepak with their task completed. We could leave next morning after all.

Our last day at Walong was a Sunday, and according to custom there was an informal sing-song in one of the barracks that evening. Dapti had bartered half a gallon of excellent *zu* for two of our padlocks, and we invited the Jemadar and the two *havildars* to help us drink it before supper. Only when we had got down to the very last drops did the Jemadar mention that we had been invited to join the sing-song in twenty minutes time — and I knew what that meant! Without further ceremony we shooed our guests out and called for dinner. *Zu* is mild as beers go, but it is not entirely innocuous, and I felt that a meal would help us to keep our heads clear.

After bolting our rice and bully beef we tidied ourselves up for the party and sallied forth into the night. It was cold. Above Dong a 12,000 foot plateau was still white with the first snow of winter, which had fallen three days before. By contrast there was a delicious fug in the long barrack, which was full of noise and laughter, song and dance. A Gurkha with a bracelet of bells round each ankle gave a spirited performance of a Nepali dance — not just once, but over and over again throughout the evening — while the rest of us sang, clapped the rhythm, or beat a drum with the fingers. I think I shall never forget that lively dance. In the ordinary way the air would, no doubt, have been blue with smoke, but there had been no cigarettes at Walong for many weeks, and the atmosphere in consequence was sweet.

We and the Jemadar had been installed, as usual, in the terrible throne-like chairs reserved for distinguished guests. They were the last word in discomfort, and had all too obviously been designed and constructed by someone unaccustomed to sitting in a chair, and unversed in the rudiments of anatomy. Perhaps because I was born in India and have supple joints, I have always been able to sit quite comfortably cross-legged on the floor, and on this occasion would have much preferred to do so. Apart from the agony of sitting in the stocks, so to speak, one feels conspicuous and foolish stuck on a kind of baby's high chair when everyone else is on the floor. However, it would be unkind and discourteous to pursue the subject further. The Jemadar, I am sure, intended to honour us by providing the accommodation to which he believed we were accustomed.

More *zu* was produced (I knew it would be) and we enjoyed the party greatly. Not only *zu*, but infinitely precious tinned herrings from the canteen, which I fear were the last in stock, and savoury eggs. Eggs too were beyond price, and we felt guilty to accept such luxuries.

Not to be outdone in dancing, Frank and I, having practised on the table with our fingers, took the floor for a Highland

fling to the tune of the 'Keel Row'. The idea was that we should simultaneously sing and dance it. But I had not the lungs for such a feat, and breathlessly left Frank to provide the noise while I concentrated on the steps. The onlookers all helped nobly by clapping the rhythm, but I am afraid no Scotsman would have recognized our turn as having anything to do with his native land. Never mind, the Assam Rifles appeared to enjoy it, anyway; and so did we.

About nine o'clock Jemadar Bir Bahadur got up, called for silence, and addressed a short farewell speech to us. Of course it was up to Frank to reply, but he was coward enough to say it 'would come better from me', and I (after all the *zu*) had lost enough inhibitions to be beguiled by his flattery. After-dinner speeches are not in my line, and I thought it hard that my maiden speech should have to be in Hindustani. However, that is by the way; it was rather bad Hindustani, anyway. But in no language could I have expressed what was in my heart that last night at Walong, and it seemed better not to try. I think the Assam Rifles understood.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

As so often happens after a long break from daily travel, we made a bad start in the morning. It was after 9.30 when most of Walong turned out to see us off; and when the moment came I found myself miserably wishing that the Yepak flood *had* held us up another fortnight. For six weeks we had lived in close contact with the men of the Assam Rifles, and had come to know a few of them intimately. Their friendship I shall always value highly.

The first day's march to the Shet Ti river was a very short one. Even so, I hoped it was not a fair sample of the twelve that lay before us. Apart from the heat, which was reflected back from the now unprotected hillsides, the going was hard. Soon after crossing the foul-smelling Yepak by the new bridge, we came to the first difficulty. About 100 yards of steep hillside had been transformed from grassland to bare scree, and had somehow to be crossed. Just as our party reached it there was a shout of 'Stones falling!' and we all stopped in our tracks until the bombardment ceased. Then, each choosing the line that seemed best, we and our porters hurried over. Not that it was possible to move fast, but we went as fast as we possibly could. But before we were out of range a heavier bombardment began, and for five minutes we crouched under the lee of a big boulder while missiles of varying shapes and sizes whizzed over our heads and exploded on the rocks below. This slip was notorious. Every day from Walong we had seen dust rising in clouds from it, especially in the afternoon and evening when the savage wind was blowing full strength up the gorge; so we were not altogether unprepared to have to run the gauntlet of rock falls.

Nevertheless, the four hours' march we made that day was no preparation for the horrors of the next, when we were eight-and-a-half hours on the road. It was the hardest march I ever

remember. We dressed in the dark at four and struggled with breakfast an hour later, by which time the loads were all ready. After an all but sleepless night neither of us had any desire to eat; but one's body cannot function without fuel, and we did our best to supply it. A tablespoonful of grapenuts and condensed milk, and two thin *chupattis* were quite inadequate for the march that followed; but even so little as that took us nearly half an hour's struggle to swallow.

The porters were finishing their own meal when Frank and I started ahead of them. They caught us up at the entrance to a fantastic 'monkey gallery' round a bulging cliff. It sloped gently upwards at a general angle of about 30°, and though it looked as fragile as a spider's web was quite safe in itself—provided nothing fell from above. It was a wonderful achievement to have built such a structure in such a place, and we tried to imagine what it was like when the pioneers, Jemadar Bir Bahadur, the Naga compounder Emotiba Ao, and a handful of riflemen struggled to Changwinti late in August to restock the all but empty dispensary at Walong and examine the ruined track. They had to *make* this gallery!

The steeply ascending gallery curved like a scenic railway round the bulge, until the latter merged gradually into the hillside. But what a hillside! The angle of it was over 40°, and very soon there was not even a handrail to provide moral support for the timid. On the left the scree fell away hundreds of feet to the river, while above us it swept upwards to a line of rocks, harsh against the sky. To judge from the scars on the slope we were crossing, rocks fell frequently, and I doubt if there was sufficient cover to protect a fly once they began moving. We staggered on in silence across the uneasy surface, our gallant porters thinking nothing of the risks they ran, and always having a hand to offer us in awkward places.

At ten we stopped for an hour for lunch by a fair sized river, after a tedious climb to nearly 2000 feet above the Lohit and down again. Not long after we started again the path (for the most part undamaged), climbed relentlessly another thousand

feet, then turned a corner and ended, apparently, in mid-air. The sight that confronted us was so horrifying that when Akkey told us the route lay straight ahead I did not believe he meant it. But he was not joking — and it would have been a joke in rather poor taste if he had been.

For Frank the mere contemplation of such an ordeal must have been terrifying, and the worst of it was that we had to hang about for half an hour while our porters crossed in a widespread line. Their balance was faultless, but even they looked anxious as they worked their way over, not daring to linger for fear of falling stones, not daring to hurry either for fear of slipping, defenceless, down the almost sheer slope. Akkey and Phag Tsering were wonderful. They moved barefooted across the dry, gravelly precipice poking toe holds in the earth and giving us each a hand when our turn came to cross. Progress was funereal. All the time we were on those treacherous slopes, stones and small boulders were leaping down at us; yet we dared not hurry. The surface was so loose and so steep that every foothold had to be tested before we could trust all our weight on it.

If anybody put a foot wrong, or was hit by a falling rock, it was a straight run down to the bottom of the slope, then one bound over the edge of the precipice into the Lohit. Towards the end of this traverse the track went steeply downwards over slabs of sandstone. Rough steps had been made, but they were too far apart for anyone less than seven feet high to use with confidence. This was, indeed, the climax to that grim day's march.

We reached Yesong, after crossing a few more small but frightening slips, at 2.15. The camp had fallen to pieces, as much from old age as from the shaking it had suffered in the earthquake. But it was a fine night, and we slept just as comfortably out of doors on the ground under a roughly made lean-to which gave protection from the heavy dew. It was a beautiful starlit night and we both slept well; but at dawn we were prematurely awakened by a sharp tremor — or rather, by the

thundering roar which heralded it. But tremors were becoming less frequent now, and before we left Walong there was one spell of twenty-four hours when the sentries reported no earth movement at all.

Some Mishmi porters had camped near us, and we were happy to see that among other rations they carried several cases of rum for Walong. Durga Puja, the great Hindu festival, was due to begin on October 18th, and to the Gurkhas it is *the* great holiday of the year. It was indeed a happy coincidence that Walong's first rum ration for many weeks should arrive just at that time.

Between Yesong and Minzong there were few difficulties. One long and tedious scramble over an untidy pile of granite blocks was really the only cause for complaint that day. There were no scree crossings worth the name, and the mere release from nervous tension such as we had experienced the day before did us good. It was a short march too, of under five hours. At 9.30 we stopped for lunch by a sandy beach beside the river. It was cool — almost cold — and drizzling. In the south, a bank of dark cloud looked as though it were building up for rain. None fell, but the air was damp and sunless.

Nevertheless, when we reached Minzong we unpacked Frank's seed packets and hopefully spread them out to dry. There were many packets of 'mixed fruits' too — dry rhododendron capsules, squashy rose hips, barberries and Cotoneaster fruits, soft black berries of *Viburnum cordifolium* (to be treated as gold), and brilliant clusters of rowan. From all of these except the rhododendrons the seeds had to be extracted one by one. There is no machine that can do the work; you just have to use your fingers. After an hour of it you are not only bored, but your fingers are sore and half paralysed, and your back ready to break in two however often you change position. It is then time to get up and take a walk, before your patience fails and you hurl fruits, seeds, pulp and all into the devouring jungle.

On a tree beside the camp at Minzong a notice board erected by the Political Officer reminds all who pass this way

that the Lohit Valley road, like any other jungle track, from time to time demands its sacrifice. The notice reads:

Here died brave INDRA BAHADUR SONAR of C.L.C.[1] on 3rd Feb. 1949, while performing his onerous task. The track from this bridge to the next up the valley is named after him.

At the time we read it there seemed to be something peculiarly awful in the idea of dying in the Lohit Valley.

The porters warned us that it was necessary to leave at first light in the morning, so as to cross a notorious slip before stones began to fall — as they did daily from sunrise until dark. It is a curious thing that though I love rising late in the mornings, and am so lazy that I would have breakfast in bed every day of my life for choice, I always enjoy a *really* early start. To my sentimental English mind there is something exciting and romantic in getting up in pitch darkness in the deep silence of the night. I do not know why. On this particular morning there was nothing that was romantic, but plenty that was exciting.

Breakfast was disposed of with no more than usual distaste. (The romance of early rising wears off, I find, as soon as food appears.) Some of the porters left Minzong at five, but most of them were not ready for another half-hour and left with us. Just ahead of us the Lohit made its great right-angle bend, and in twenty minutes we had turned the corner and were marching no longer southwards, but west-nor'-west. Behind us now the wide valley of the Ghalum still looked like the main Lohit Valley, and I wondered if it would be as deceptive from the air. There was some irritating boulder hopping shortly after we rounded the corner; and then, within half a mile of it, came a slip as bad as any we had crossed two days before. It was the usual sort of thing — an airy traverse across a bare scree that ended in a sheer precipice 100 feet above the grey waters of the river. What made it so frightening was the severe angle of it (60° in places), and its length, about a quarter of a mile.

[1] Central Labour Corps.

In a letter he wrote us from Changwinti, Captain Sailo had mentioned this place; and as he had mentioned specifically only two other slips between Walong and Changwinti, we knew it must be extra bad. The headman of Tinai led the way with a sixty-pound load on his back. He was so surefooted, so steady and serene, he might have been a yak. Dapti, who had accompanied Frank when he camped above Walong, went next; then Frank and I, Akkey and Phag Tsering, and the rest of the porters followed at intervals. Until our turn came I tried to disguise my funk by reciting poetry; anything that came into my head. It was something to think about, and more profitable than working out one's chances of getting across the slip alive.

Half way over there were two small outcrops of rock some yards apart. The track passed immediately below them, but footholds were precarious and set wide apart, so that one had an uncomfortable feeling that one might suddenly 'do the splits' in the middle and go spinning down the slope into the river. Across the gulf, however, the Assam Rifles had fixed a handrail of telephone wire. It was firmly fixed at each end, but hung slack, and I doubt if it had any real substance; but the difference it made to one's *feeling* of security was amazing. And that, in the circumstances, was what we needed most. A light contact was sufficient; I would not have dared trust my whole weight on it.

While four of us were crawling past this obstacle there was a roar from high up over our heads, followed immediately by the familiar shout 'Rocks falling!' Down they crashed, leaping, spinning, thudding into the cliff side and starting a series of minor avalanches in their train. We kept quite still, all of us, and cowered against the small outcrop we were passing; but it did not overhang and afforded no protection. At the height of the bombardment pebbles were falling in showers all round us, bouncing off our hats and shoulders, and leaping again down the raw gravel scree below us before the final plunge into the turbulent river. Fortunately none of the big stuff hit us;

had it done so, that would have been the end so far as we were concerned.

At last the racket ceased and we collected our wits. It was agreed that we must make a dash for it before a heavier bombardment began; so one after another we moved carefully — oh! so slowly — round the rocks until we reached a point where the track across the slip broadened to eight inches and had been nicely consolidated by recent rain. Then we ran. We ran as hard as we could the remaining thirty yards to the edge of the friendly jungle, where we sat down to rest and recover our nerve.

The rest of the march was without terrors, but there were several places where even in the thick jungle the hillsides had slipped and poured a confusion of rocks and uprooted trees all over where the path had lain. These obstacles took their toll of nerve and tissue. Hands as well as feet were necessary at almost every step, and progress was maddeningly slow and laborious.

Shortly before our arrival at Changwinti we found a colony of *Cypripedium villosum* (slipper orchid) growing on the steep bank, but the flower buds were not yet open. A few plants were carefully dug up and eventually transplanted to a garden in Shillong.

At Changwinti we found ourselves housed in the same building that we had used before, only this time we did not share it with anyone. The schoolmaster had left some months earlier and no one had replaced him. It must be hard to get schoolmasters accustomed to the comfort of life on the plains to stay for long in a lonely little outpost like Changwinti. The Mishmis are not interested in academic learning (which has no practical application in their territory), and though not openly hostile to its teachers, they are not co-operative, either. From every point of view it must be a heartbreaking job to be a schoolmaster in the Mishmi Hills.

Our porters were in a hurry to get home, and started back for Minzong the same afternoon, unperturbed by the prospect

of re-crossing the slip that had done its best to kill us all in the morning. The headman came and asked if the men could be paid at once. The porterage rate for the section of the route between Walong and Changwinti used to be Rs. 22 per load; but in view of the extreme difficulty of carrying in the Lohit Valley since the earthquake, the rates had been doubled at the orders of the Political Officer, and each man now received Rs. 44. They had carried splendidly and we were sad to see them go, especially as most of them came from the Walong area and were well known to us by sight. All were Zakrings, but from now on our porters would be Mishmis.

We rested a day at Changwinti, which was just as well. With their usual friendliness the Assam Rifles showered hospitality upon us the evening we arrived (chiefly in the form of strong Army rum), and it was pleasant to have a day in which to enjoy the party in retrospect, at our leisure, and to do something for them in return. The *havildar* commanding the outpost came from a village on the borders of Sikkim and knew Akkey well. It was on the strength of this old acquaintance, I suppose, that Akkey came into possession of several pounds of sugar bought from the Q.M. stores — a priceless treasure at that stage of the journey.

The rain began in the afternoon, and on the 21st we resumed our journey in a steady downpour. It will be remembered that on the journey up the valley in February we complained bitterly of the two absurdly long stages between Changwinti and Pangong. Now, in order to conserve our remaining energies, and to assert our independence of Mr. Mainprice's revision of stages, we decided to revert to the old division of four marches between Changwinti and the next outpost at Hayuliang. The Mishmi interpreter attached to the fort was a friendly, intelligent young man who spoke fluent Assamese. We told him several times to make quite sure all the porters understood that they would require food for four days, not for three; and I believe the interpreter did tell them so. But enough

has been said of the Mishmis' mulishness for the reader to guess that when we stopped after eight miles at an excellent camping ground, there was a general protest because the porters had only three days' food with them. In fairness I must say that the weather was so atrocious that we did not suffer from the heat as we had before, and the long march to Munlang camp was quite enjoyable. It began in a rather exciting manner.

The *havildar* came a short distance to see us off, then on we went, single file, along a narrow, slippery path bordered by tall elephant grass. Suddenly there was a pounding of hooves ahead, a startled shout from the porters, who one after another dived into the jungle on either side of the path, and before we knew what was happening, along the fairway at a spanking trot came His Majesty the prize bull of the Changwinti herd. Indian bulls are usually docile; they are treated no differently from their women-folk and are allowed to wander where they will. But once in a while you will find one with more spirit, and this large handsome creature — all sepia tones and beautifully marked — was such a bull. I had noticed the day before that he became very restive when a volley was fired in honour of Durga Puja, and in the last year he was reputed to have gored to death five Mishmis, unprovoked. This was probably an exaggeration; the correct number seems to have been only three.

Nobody cared to dispute the right of way, and we lost no time in effacing ourselves. I leapt to one side of the narrow path and collapsed ungracefully into a bed of nettles, too scared to breathe. Too scared to notice the nettles either, until the danger had thundered past and I became rather painfully aware of my immediate surroundings.

Between Changwinti and Hayuliang the earthquake's effects were much less noticeable than they were above the great bend in the river. Certainly they were not spectacular, and this middle section of the Lohit Valley road, from being the most wearisome had become the easiest of all, in spite of the

length of the first two stages. Slips were few and fairly small. Where they occurred they delayed us for only a few minutes, and did not tear our nerves to shreds either. But the weather was bad. There was not the smallest chance of an air drop in such rain, and we ceased to look and listen for planes. The river was much swollen and full of sandbanks and timber. Also, it was chocolate brown and smelled horribly of mud.

We reached Hangam shortly before one, and stopped there for the night as the camp at Pangong, two miles further on, had recently collapsed. But Hangam camp was no better, and we had to put up the tent. As usually happens, our bedding rolls were carried by women and arrived last, two hours after we had arrived ourselves, soaked to the skin and very cold. But Phag Tsering quickly made a fire out of sodden bamboo and thatch grass, in a tiny box-like *basha*, six feet square and rather sketchily roofed. In this we changed out of our soaking bush shirts — now so worn they scarcely held together — and put on sweaters out of our haversacks, which were only slightly less wet than everything else. But by the time we had heated up a mug of cold tea from the water bottle we were warm again, and began to enjoy the luxury of a snug little weather-proof tent when all outside was bleak and wet and dismal.

There were signs of autumn in the Lohit Valley. No longer were we in the country of pine trees, and conspicuous in the evergreen rain forest was *Terminalia myriocarpa*, its long tassels of fruit beginning to redden as they ripened. In the bamboo brake we saw a beautiful dull olive woodpecker with brilliant black and yellow crest and a dark cleft down its back.

We reached Hayuliang on the afternoon of October 23rd after a hot and steamy march. The porters also felt the heat, some of them not turning up till several hours after we arrived; and we did not hurry. The Dav suspension bridge, half a mile from the outpost, was in good repair and did not appear to have suffered at all since we last saw it; but it must have been stretched like a stocking at the time of the earthquake.

Our intention was to spend a day at Hayuliang collecting a

fresh lot of porters, then go straight through to the plains in five marches. But it was not so simple as that. Ahead of us was the Lohit's largest tributary, the Tidding river, which for the past two months had been behaving in a very peculiar manner. We heard strange stories of a lake, a flood, another flood, and again a flood; and it all sounded so improbable that we could not quite follow what really had been happening down there. At any rate, we were strongly advised against going on until a new temporary bridge had been put up. So with as good a grace as possible we accepted the delay and stayed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

We expected to be held up only a day or two, and decided to sleep in the small tent (the only one that had not been abandoned). As our beds also had been left at Walong, we slept on the ground on a pile of thatch grass, so badly laid that it was full of lumps and very uncomfortable. Akkey and Phag Tsering shared the little house we had used in February, with Mr. Barooah, the P.W.D. road engineer who now occupied one half of it. We knew him already, as he had spent a week at Walong early in October.

The evening we reached Hayuliang my leg became very sore and painful. I had slipped four days before and grazed the shin on a blade of rock. In the ordinary way I should scarcely have troubled even to wash it; but it was important that we should all keep fit at this time, and I had taken what I secretly thought was a ridiculous amount of trouble over a scratch. But in spite of all the fussing an abscess formed, and by the morning I could hardly put my foot to the ground. Fortunately there was a doctor at Hayuliang, Dr. P. C. Baruah, whom we had met once before at Nara camp in February. He came to see me and at once began preparing me for execution, so to speak, by filling me up with penicillin, sulphathiazole and shark liver oil. One day of this treatment having failed to kill me, he proceeded with the execution — that is, he lanced the abscess; after which, like Tek Bahadur at Walong, I recovered rapidly, though the wound was slow to heal.

For two days the weather was as bad as it could be. Such rain was bound to make the task of re-bridging the Tidding river impossible for the time being, and the wisdom of staying at Hayuliang became plain. Had we started, our porters would have had no choice but to desert us, for the reason that they could carry no reserve rations; and it would be difficult to pick up more porters in a jungle camp beside the Tidding river

where there were few villages. However long we were held up by bad weather, so long as we remained at Hayuliang we would not starve. The post would supply us with rice if we needed it, so we decided to stay until news came through that we could cross the Tidding. For some weeks the radio at Hayuliang had been out of order, and the only means of communication with the rest of the valley was by runner. Towards the end of the week a Mishmi arrived and reported that work on the bridge had begun, and we made preparations to leave.

There was not a great deal to do at Hayuliang, but every day we held tea and coffee parties in our minute tent, and got to know the doctor and Mr. Barooah well; the O.C. Outpost also, Subedar Debilan Rai, who spoke fluent and idiomatic English and always kept us amused.

We were up at five on the morning of October 31st. Only eleven out of fourteen porters turned up, an hour or two late, and among those eleven was one who might almost have been a professional trouble-maker. He began by demanding payment in advance when all the loads were tied up and some had already left; but he got nothing for his pains. It was some time before three porters were found for the extra loads, which we temporarily abandoned. They eventually reached our camp after dark. Annoyances such as these are typical of what one constantly has to put up with at the hands of the Mishmis, especially the Digaru Mishmis who inhabit the lower part of the valley. They have more frequent contact with the plains than their more tractable Miju brethren, whose domain only begins at Hayuliang, and this may have something to do with their unpleasant disposition. In dress the Miju and Digaru Mishmis are indistinguishable; but their languages are entirely different, and to a certain degree their temperaments also.

Two hours after crossing the Delei river the path ended abruptly at a smooth slab of rock, forty yards wide and tilted at a sharp angle, then continued as before. In order to avoid this insignificant little landslip a new path had been roughly

hacked through the dense forest, climbing steeply along the edge of the slip to the crest of a spur, and as steeply down again on the far side. The detour added three-quarters of an hour to the length of the day's march.

From time to time we caught glimpses of the river, now a broad sheet of water with drowned trees standing far out in the lake, and all around it mountains mutilated by the earthquake. Every slope was scarred with great white gashes, and the whole aspect was ugly and depressing.

Three hours from the Delei we reached the Am river where Frank's field-glasses had been lost. The descent to the bridge was not difficult, but the bridge itself was a different matter. In some extraordinary way the bamboo floor of it had been tilted half way to the vertical, so that without a firm grip on the handrail one might easily have slipped right through the spider's web sides of the bridge on to the rocks beneath. The whole structure swayed shakily to and fro as soon as one looked at it, and one had to do a crab walk to get across.

The right bank of the Am-pani had slipped badly and the escape from the bridge was rather frightening. The gravelly screes were not particularly stable, and were devoid of any trace of vegetation, so that in rubber soled shoes we had to move cautiously and make sure of every foothold before using it. Towards the top came a short earth cliff at the edge of the jungle. It was too steep for laden porters to climb direct, but the Assam Rifles had fixed some Mishmi ladders to connect the new scree track with the undamaged path in the jungle above, and there was no delay.

An hour after this little commando exercise we reached the new camp high above the lake-like river. It was set in a clearing beside plantations of impenetrable elephant grass twenty feet high, and was quite new. Cattle had been allowed the run of the whole site, so the place was filthy and sizzling with flies, though otherwise comfortable. In one of the small *bashas* two very sick Mishmis lay groaning on the ground, curled up in threadbare blankets. Speech was impossible with no one to

interpret, but both were scorching hot and probably had malaria. Whether it was malaria or not, there could be no harm in giving them paludrine, and we had little else left. Whatever their fever was, both patients had vanished by morning and we never saw them again.

From now on we were continually meeting Mishmis carrying loads up the valley for the outposts; some of them we knew by sight. A great stock of rations had been piling up, and much of it had been carried over the Tidding river before the second makeshift bridge had been washed away. The wearisome task of moving rations up the valley had therefore not been brought to a standstill by the last disastrous flood, which (we heard later) had threatened Sadiya many miles away.

The night between October and November was fine and clear, and we foolishly looked forward to a short and easy march. A mile away was a mountain some thousands of feet high, sliced from top to bottom so as to reveal the very heart of it. The scar was white as snow, and like snow took on a golden glow as the sun appeared over the eastern ranges behind us.

The promise of fine weather was fulfilled, and the first day of November was hot and steamy, with many long ascents and descents and two very big slips to cross. The first, after a stiff climb and worse descent to a tributary river, took three-quarters of an hour, and tore what remained of my good temper to shreds. If there is anything more fatiguing, more hateful in every way, than heaving oneself over a seemingly endless pile of angular boulders, under a vicious sun, I have yet to discover it. Soft sand runs it close, but one can plough through sand with a steady rhythm, however slowly one may move. There can be no rhythm in boulder hopping, which is what makes that form of progression so utterly abominable.

There were several unbridged streams to cross that day. My leg had given no trouble since leaving Hayuliang, but it was not yet healed, and I did not want to run the risk of reinfection by getting gritty, muddy water into it. Akkey good-naturedly carried me over all these streams. It was a pity he could not

carry some of the loads as well, for two Mishmi girls fell into the shallow water, and each was carrying a box of dried plants! Had our porters been Nungs or Marus from the other side of the Burma frontier, the women's loads would all have been carried over such places by their menfolk. One must not expect such chivalry from the Mishmis.

It was more than eight hours before we reached Paya-pani and found Machhima camp a furlong distant on the other side of the stream. Of the old camp with its palatial *basha* there was no trace. The whole site had been overwhelmed by an avalanche of rocks and mud. On the way up I had noticed what was then a conspicuous scar on the side of a pyramid peak across the Lohit from Machhima. Now, in the midst of the greater devastation I had to look twice to notice it at all. And what devastation! With every mile we marched the scars on the green hillsides became wider, deeper, more and more depressing, until the climax was reached when we entered the valley of the Tidding river, which flows into the Lohit from the north-west.

We left Machhima at 6.30 next morning with another eight hour march before us to the Tidding camp. Easy to begin with, the track suddenly took a header down slopes of thin secondary growth, so steeply that I did not trust myself to keep my feet in wet gym-shoes, and slid very determinedly 800 feet on my seat. After that we plunged into heavy jungle along the merest thread of a path, picked up a fine crop of leeches in the soaking undergrowth, and emerged at last by the side of the Tidding river. We had seen the last of the Lohit now until we reached the Sadiya plain. A short tricky scramble along the rocks brought us to the new bridge, erected several miles below the old.

Until we saw what had happened to the Tidding valley we had doubted reports that the old bridge put up by the Sappers and Miners in 1912 had really been destroyed. What kind of a flood could have carried away anything so permanent, so solid,

so established? The new bridge was several hundred feet long and spanned both channels of the Tidding's new bed. It looked like nothing so much as a long, long hammock secured at one end to trees and rocks above the river, and at the other to artificial props of timber driven deep into the shingly sand. The cane footway of the bridge was several strands wide, with handrails also of cane at a comfortable distance on either side. The structure was kept open by means of hoops of cane at short intervals, laced together with strips of bamboo and jungle lianas, so that one crawled through a swaying lattice-work tunnel five feet high.

The new bridge was not quite finished, and every few yards we crept cautiously past a Mishmi clinging unconcernedly to the *outside* of the web, fiddling with bits of jungle rope and twine. The Mishmis must be devoid of any sort of imagination. The roaring of the waters and the harsh grinding of great boulders in the river bed would try the nerves of most ordinary mortals in a matter of minutes. But the Mishmis never noticed the din, and worked away for half an hour at a time. Far worse even than the incessant noise was the sight of furious eddies and whirlpools twenty feet below. But the Mishmis, hanging on so casually to the swaying hammock, never seemed to see them, never became giddy or seasick, and never fell off.

On the far side of the Tidding was an encampment of bridge builders, cane cutters, Assam Rifles, P.W.D. supervisors, and porters in transit. Someone came and offered us a cup of tea. It was the road surveyor whom we had met at Shet Ti camp nine months before. We spent an hour with him, drinking tea and eating our picnic lunch; then went on our way, for we had done but half the day's march and the rest was difficult.

From now on we had to keep the porters in sight, for the new route — on the wrong side of the river in any case — bore not the slightest relation to the old. Nor did the landscape. Such annihilation was awful to behold. From end to end the Tidding valley was broken, shattered, pulverized. Nothing was recognizable. The whole scene was so overpowering that I had

the curious sensation that I was not quite alive or, at any rate, not properly awake, and I kept mentally jerking myself to try and recognize my surroundings. But I could not, and the feeling of bewilderment, of crushing loneliness and primitive fear of the unknown, remained with me so long as we were in that stricken valley.

The new route lay alternately through the dark forest, and then out again into the naked river bed. It had been cool and overcast all day, but now a watery sun broke through the leaden clouds and was reflected back, blinding white, from the raw cliffs across the river. The bed of the Tidding was fully half a mile wide, a grey and sterile waste of boulders, sand and mud, lifeless as the moon. Terrible things had happened here, and in the midst of such desolation we found no words with which to express our thoughts.

I do not know how many hundreds of feet we climbed and unclimbed that day, but it must have been several score. At last we reached a long, gentle slope of sand, at the top of which the track inconsequentially entered the jungle once again. Why were we not going to camp down by the river at Theronliang, as before? The answer was simple. Theronliang was only a name. It belonged to a different world, a different era from the present one. There was no such place as Theronliang any more. The bungalow, like the bridge and everything else, had been annihilated in a flood that roared through the valley sixty feet deep, and in all that desolate landscape not a sign of human habitation could one see.

Six hundred feet above the river, following a slippery path through second growth, we came to Souliang camp, a flat clearing in the jungle so covered with *bashas* of every size and shape that we immediately got lost in the maze of streets and lanes. Souliang was a well organized temporary village — or seemed so after the tiny camps and hamlets to which we were accustomed.

At last someone led us to the *basha* where our kit had been dumped, and no sooner had we sat down than we received a

visitor — Mr. Hussein, who was in charge of the camp. Not only a visitor, but a parcel also — from Captain Sailo, who had taken the trouble to have it sent up specially for us. We had no idea what was inside, and what we actually found was better than all our dreams and speculations. Since leaving Walong we had tasted no fruit or vegetables, and the first things I unpacked were a dozen juicy oranges! There had not been much soap to spare for washing clothes either, and next I found two cakes of soap. That was not all. There were some newspapers only two weeks old, which of course were news to us; some flour, two pairs of tennis shoes (a stroke of genius, that), and finally a letter welcoming us to his bungalow in Teju as soon as we got down to the plains. The mere smell of the oranges was intoxicating, and the juice of them very nearly so.

Mr. Hussein invited us to tea in his hut and explained the function of Souliang camp. It was a distributing centre for relief rations to villages in the Lohit Valley that had been hardest hit in the earthquake (the hardest hit, that is, without being actually obliterated, as was the fate of a number of hamlets in the upper Dav and Delei valleys especially). The earthquake had evoked world-wide sympathy for Assam, and contributions in cash or in kind were pouring in from all sides. The great thing was to distribute them as rapidly as possible, and so far as Souliang was concerned, the arrangements were working well. We ourselves were to benefit by the relief rice. After our week's hold-up at Hayuliang we had exhausted all our reserve rations, and the few pounds of relief rice we drew here saved the situation.

As was only to be expected, the hundreds of feet we had climbed to Souliang were all lost in the first half hour of the next morning's march. The ground was dangerously slippery, and we took longer going down, when we were fresh, than we had taken coming up, tired, the day before. We regained the river bed, here a desert of boulders a mile wide. Apparently we were on the very site of Theronliang, for soon we struck the

bridle path, and there at the bottom was milepost 70 from Sadiya.

It was an easy march that day to Dreyi. Occasionally landslides blocked the path and for a short distance we had to use the slippery Mishmi track instead; but there were no nerve racking traverses; and though we climbed over 4000 feet from Theronliang to the Tidding Saddle, the gradient was so easy and the path so wide that we seemed almost to float up. Above 5000 feet we stopped to collect the vermilion coated seeds of Michelia, a beautiful tree closely related to Magnolia. There was also a cherry in fruit, and we spent some time picking the stones out of the mud to swell our collection of seeds by one more species. At the top of the ridge Frank found the ripe capsules of a white flowered rhododendron, and these too went into the day's bag.

At one o'clock we stood on top of the Tidding Saddle at 6000 feet and looked down for the last time into the Tidding valley. This time it was fine and we had the view we had longed for in February, when wet and frozen we had crossed the Saddle on a path white with hail, unable to see twenty yards through the all-enveloping mist. Even now there was a cold wind blowing, and we hastened down the other side of the range where an even grander view awaited us.

Now for the first time we saw spread out before us the limitless forest of the Sadiya plain. Far, far below, the Lohit wended its silvery way through the dark jungle towards the Brahmaputra and the distant sea; while on our other hand lay the long broken spurs of the Abor Hills, strong yet featureless in the afternoon haze. It is a view that more than any other I know holds all the magic of travel in faraway places, and is worth any amount of toil and sacrifice to see.

Though the march to Dreyi was easy by comparison with any of the previous ten, it was twelve miles nevertheless, and neither of us was sorry to reach the Inspection Bungalow. Part of the old bungalow lay sprawled on the grass outside, having had one wall and a chimney knocked out of it. The *chowkidar*, however, showed us with ceremony to a smaller house nearby,

whose chimney had only been loosened. The wind, inescapable, howled through the three-inch gaps on either side of the fireplace; but it was shelter of a sort and we were glad of it.

The last march should have taken us straight down the bridle path to Denning, but the earthquake had caused such havoc there that Denning had been abandoned. Travellers now had to go to Teju direct, a distance of thirteen miles, partly by the old bridle-path (much broken by landslips), but mostly by Mishmi tracks to the motor road, by-passing Denning. The most frustrating part about the new arrangement was that I should be unable to finish the *Blackwood's* story I had been reading at Denning just before we began our first march in February. I had been tempted then to slip it into my rucksack and return it later on, and wished now that I had done so.

The evergreen forest round Dreyi contains a great wealth of fine trees. Among the smaller ones a pink winter-flowering cherry was now in full bloom — a species almost identical with the beautiful Carmine Cherry, but not so rich in colour. We had noticed it first on the far side of the Tidding, but only three or four isolated specimens. At Dreyi it was abundant; perhaps not more so than any other species, but at this season it made such a conspicuous splash of colour in the sombre green of the forest that it seemed to be everywhere.

Below Dreyi we plunged straight down for several hundred feet by one of the Mishmi tracks, crossed the broad highway of the bridle path, and immediately entered the jungle again on the other side of it for another few hundred feet of ankle-breaking steepness. Then for a short distance the route followed the post-earthquake edition of the bridle path. All things considered, I think the Mishmi track was much the less nerve racking of the two.

We were making for the bed of the Teju river, but before we reached it we had to perform an airy little cat-walk along a razor-backed ridge 100 yards in length. It was, I imagine, very much like steeple-jacking over the roofs of Oxford, and not the kind of sport I most enjoy. Hardly had we recovered our poise

than we found ourselves slithering down a sand cliff so sheer that a handrail had been placed for the safety of the porters. It was just a jungle liana about as thick as a man's arm, and one after another we swarmed down it like so many monkeys.

In the river bed the porters stopped for a rest and we had our lunch, but not before another girl had come to grief and slipped into the water with her load — dried plants again! The track then followed the boulder-strewn bed of the Teju river for two hot and weary miles; and then, after a short stretch through the jungle, emerged quite suddenly on to the motor road. Our difficulties, for the time being, were over.

You would think that after the kind of marches we had survived between Rima and the plains, six miles on a wide road with not a foot to climb or a single slip to cross, would be unimaginable bliss. That was how we had always expected it would be; but the reality was more like purgatory. I suppose it was just that reaction set in too soon. At any rate, we started slowly and finished up three hours later at a crawl. Frank had a pain in his middle and staggered along bent double; I had strained a muscle in my leg and was walking dead lame; and to crown everything, all the way from Walong we had both had badly blistered feet. Those last six miles were torture. Once, when we thought we could not walk another step, we stopped for ten minutes' rest. I knew it was foolish, but we were dropping. Immediately every joint and muscle went rigid, and the effort of getting them unstuck and moving again was so painful that we had to laugh, if we were not to cry.

Vanity rather than pride spurred us to a noble effort when at last Teju came in sight. I did not think it likely that we should be mistaken for Guardsmen, but at least we did not mean to be taken for cripples and offered bath chairs when our friends came out to meet us. So Frank stopped clutching his side and made a valiant effort to straighten up, while I did my best to limp on both feet equally. Thus we achieved some semblance of style for the last two furlongs, and after all our adventures looked, I hope, as though we were game for more.

EPILOGUE

THE final stage of our journey back to Jorhat was completed at 160 miles an hour, by Dakota aircraft. We failed to persuade the pilot to fly some hundreds of miles out of his course and take us over the Abor and Mishmi Hills. It was disappointing, but we bore him no grudge.

Early in February, however, four V.I.P.s from Delhi on a visit to Assam came to discuss with Frank questions concerning the frontier. I overheard Lieut.-General Kalwant Singh mention casually that air dropping, by planes based on Jorhat, had just begun again over the hills — including the Lohit Valley!

I did not wait to be invited on a trip — the invitation might not come. Instead, I went straight to the point with British directness, and begged a ride to Walong. I was prepared for a polite refusal (there were several fairly reasonable excuses for giving one); but even if I got a refusal I was determined to use every weapon I knew, without remorse or scruple, until I had bullied the General into reversing his judgment. As it happened, we did not have to cross swords, for the General promised us a joy ride in due course, and his word for the time being kept me quiet.

The dropping was carried out by Dakotas belonging to Air Services of India, Ltd., the leading commercial air line, and soon the pilots got in touch with us. But bad weather set in, grounding all the aircraft for several days, so it was February 19th before we had our first of several flights over the mountain barrier that divides Assam and Tibet.

It was a fine morning, and weather reports from the different outposts in the hills were good. At 9.15 we took off. There were, of course, no passenger seats in the plane, which was cluttered up with loads destined for outposts in the Lohit Valley. It differed from a passenger plane in one other respect also: the door had been removed to allow of loads being pushed

out freely. For this strenuous task there was a crew of six under a Jemadar of the Indian Army Service Corps.

For an hour we flew up the wide Assam Valley, so steadily that it was hard to realize we were moving at all. Only the sunlight glinting on one stretch of water after another showed that the plane was not, as it seemed, hovering motionless like a hawk. The dropping crew, all old hands at the game and with a hard job before them, stretched themselves out on top of the loads and went to sleep. The Jemadar woke them when we entered the hills. By that time the plane had climbed to over 10,000 feet. Both Frank and I spent most of the time until then in the cockpit; but I had brought a camera, and in order to get the best possible pictures as soon as the scenery became interesting, I decided to stand by the doorway where the view was unrestricted by the pilots' heads.

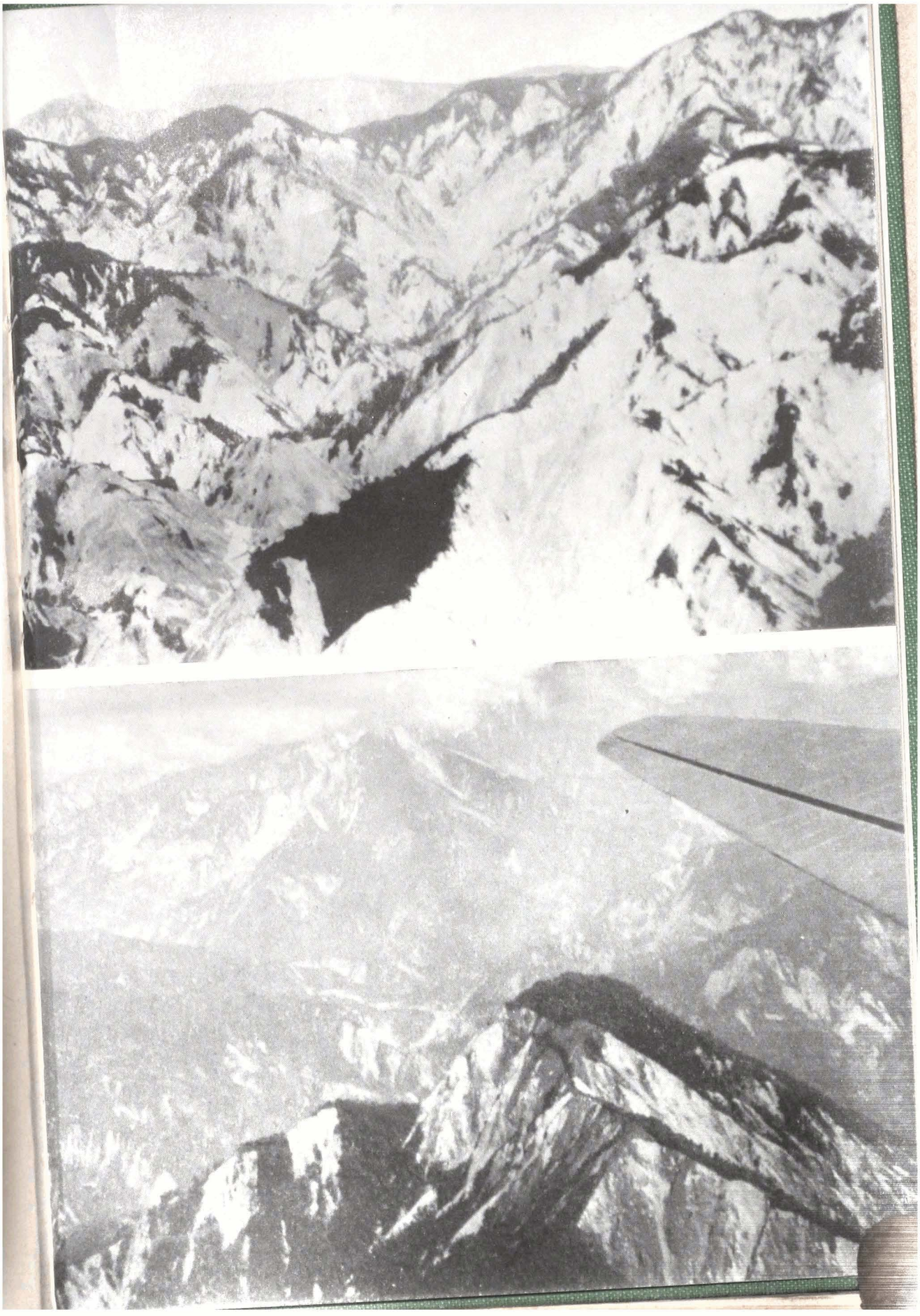
Back in the fuselage it was bitterly cold, and though an hour before on Rowriah airfield I had been steaming in corduroy battledress and sheepskin boots, I was now glad of an overcoat, gloves and balaclava as well. The dropping crew, now wide awake and ready for action, were clipping life-lines round their waists and getting the first loads into position for the drop. I did not want to get in their way, but neither did I care to stand close to the open door taking photographs, with nothing but a sense of balance to keep me inside the plane. I said so, and at once Jemadar Lall (who had been treating me to a lot of charming nonsense on the subject of memsahibs who went flying over the mountains) chivalrously put his arms round my waist and clung on like grim death. That would have been all right had *he* been attached to the plane; but he was not, and I did not think the arrangement quite good enough. In the end I succeeded in clipping a line round my waist, and feeling rather like a dog on a lead, continued taking photographs through the door.

When one is travelling through a narrow gorge at two-and-a-half miles a minute, one has to think fast, and there is no time to compose one's picture. Also, I had had no previous experience of air photography, and thought the best policy was

AIR PHOTOS AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

[*facing:* *Top:* NOT SNOW BUT BARE ROCK (photo: N. E. B. Warner)

Bottom: 10,000 FT. PEAK IN THE LOHIT VALLEY



probably to take as many pictures as possible. Thus, between the time we entered the hills and the time we were over Changwinti, I had finished one film and put in another.

I had to move away from the doorway now, as the loads were piled up four deep behind me, ready to be pushed out the moment the signal was given. We circled once over the D.Z. (dropping zone), which was on a flat spur 1000 feet above Changwinti outpost and marked with a large white cross. When the plane was a few hundred feet above the target a bell rang harshly. Instantly there was a rush and a scuffle. The men pushed and kicked at the pile of loads with all their strength, and out they went into space, the slipstream blowing a mass of dust and straw shavings back into the plane. Not pausing to draw breath, the crew were busy again dragging more loads to the doorway, piling them one on top of the other at furious speed, and getting themselves ready to push.

Meanwhile, the plane was circling to get back over the target. The bell rang again, the men kicked and heaved, and four more loads had gone.

During all this activity I had been standing well out of the way, and had so far not been able to see very much. (To tell the truth, I was busy enough trying to keep my rebellious inside where it belonged.) Now, however, I crossed to the other side of the doorway and watched the loads on their parachutes float gently down and land, one and all, within a hand's grasp of the big white cross on the ground. Most of the loads went out on a single parachute, but there were one or two clusters of three loads and parachutes together, which were a lovely sight as they floated down like a group of celestial puff balls. When all the loads with parachutes had been pushed out, the pilot came down to within a hundred feet of the ground for a free drop of rice in double bags. We were so low I believe I could have grabbed a handful of seed as we passed!

At Changwinti we had circled so often that I had long since lost my bearings, and it took me a minute or two to gather my wits. By that time we were abreast of the wide Ghalum valley

leading into Burma, and flying round the corner to Walong. To cover a stretch of country in ten minutes which has only recently taken four days of toil and terror on one's feet, is bewildering. So hard was it to adjust my mind to think in terms of miles rather than days, I was usually three marches behind, and found it quite impossible to keep up! As we flew up the valley to Walong, on either hand rose the snow-clad peaks of the high Mishmi Hills and far on the right the snows of the Burma frontier. Judging only from photographs and films, I had always imagined that to view high mountains from the air would be little more inspiring than to fly over New York or the tall factory chimneys of Lancashire. But in that I was wrong. It was a thrilling and wonderful experience, and the power and majesty of the mountain scene were overwhelming. Much closer at hand (for the gorge was so narrow it seemed that the wing tips must touch the sides) were the broken cliffs and gullies that we had had to cross on foot, with every now and then a tiny wrinkle across the face of the mountain to show where the path by some miracle had been spared.

In a few minutes the gorge began to open out and we were at Walong. A D.Z. had been marked out on the football ground. As we flew over it and the loads went out, I caught sight of a crowd of sepoys inside the perimeter waving to the plane. The temptation to jump out and join them, instead of feebly waving back, was almost irresistible.

After taking more photos I unclipped my life-line and went back to the cockpit, where the Radio Officer sat twiddling knobs and interpreting the demoniacal shrieks and whistles that emanated from his headphones. He passed the speaking-tube and headphones over to us; so we were able to exchange gossip with the men on the ground and wish them all good luck.

There were nearly fifty loads to be dropped, and into one of them we slipped a number of photographs taken at Walong in September, and a tin of sweets. There is not a great deal of room to manœuvre a Dakota at Walong, though the valley for

two miles or so is wider than elsewhere. For landlubbers like us, the violent banks that were necessary to keep the aircraft clear of the mountains — banks that were repeated a dozen times with distressing frequency — were almost too much for both of us, and much too much for one. After half an hour's trapezing round the sky we turned for home on a steady course. It was rather a relief.

On the way back we turned aside to fly a few miles up the white-walled Tidding valley, then skimmed the tree tops over the Tidding Saddle and met the plains near Teju. As we already had a representative collection of photos from the flight up the main valley, I did not use my camera so much on the way home. That left me free to enjoy the scenery undisturbed (though the scenery, in fact, was very disturbing indeed).

A casual glance and one would suppose that the white patches disfiguring every mountain and hill were snow. They were not snow; they were bare rock. In every direction as far as the eye could see, the mountains had been shaken to pieces, stripped bare, and the wreckage of them hurled to the bottom of the valley in indescribable confusion. It called for no great powers of imagination to realize the difficulties and dangers of a journey through such ruin; and had we been able to see the general picture before we left Walong in October, I am certain that I for one would be there still.

INDEX

Abor Hills, 29, 205, 228, 232
Acer, 28, 107, 124, 128
Aeschynanthus, 125
Air Dropping, 180, 181, 184, 205, 218, 232-6
Air Services of India Ltd., 232
Akkey, 15, 25, 37, 73, 87, 88, 117, 143-6, 153, 211, 216; as interpreter, 59, 180; collects porters, 70, 121-4, 152, 161
Am River, 38, 39, 222; bridge, 40, 41, 222
Ants, 22, 155, 156
Aristolochia Griffithii, 132
Arrack, 87, 98
Assam Rifles, 31, 37, 48, 52, 56, 61, 79, 80, 209; gifts of vegetables, 148, 153, 157; Diphu La patrol, 162, 170, 173, 176 et seq; parade of, 197; hospitality from, 203, 207, 216; repair damaged track, 202, 214, 222
Assam Rifles Outposts, 16 (*see also* Changwinti, Denning, Hayuliang, Walong)

Back, Mr. and Mrs. Ellis R., 148, 149, 152, 194
Bailey, Colonel F. M., 121 & n
Bamboo, 54, 55
Barberry, 204, 212
Baruah, Dr. P. C., 38, 220, 221
Bedi Camp, 74; destroyed in earthquake, 188
Begonias, 28
Binoculars, 39; loss of, 40-2, 222; recovery of, 145, 146, 157
Bir Bahadur Gurung, Jemadar, 57, 79, 173, 201, 203, 205-8, 210
Birds, 32, 44, 119, 169, 181, 218; scares, 55
Blister flies, 50, 72, 96, 116, 186
Bridges, pine log, 116, 122, 148, 186; rope (Mishmi type), 38, 43, 70, 71; rope (Tibetan type), 70, 71, 82-4, 87, 88, 97, 98, 170-3, 176, 177, 179-84; suspension, 34, 41, 43, 218, 219, 222, 224, 225; timber, 54

Calanthe, 72, 95
Camellia drupifera, 46
Campbell, Mr. (A.P.O.L.V.), 49
Cedrela, 91
Ceratostigma, 181
Changwinti Outpost, 45, 47-50, 215, 216; air drop for, 234; bull at, 217
Cherries, 78, 91, 107, 128, 131, 228, 229
Di Chu, 128, 157 et seq
Carmine, 229
Chinese (troops in Zayul), 56, 162, 174
Cigarettes, 16, 75, 78, 79, 84, 90, 178, 207
Civet cat, 141, 143
Clematis, 181
Climate of Lohit Valley, 54
Cornus chinensis, 107, 175 & n
Corydalis, 136
Cotoneaster, 132, 146, 212
conspicua, 77, 102
Cymbidium, 94, 95, 110
cyperifolium, 63
Cypripedium villosum, 215

Daphne, 136
Dapti, 204, 206, 214
Dav River and Valley, 43, 218; villages destroyed, 227
Debilan Rai, Subedar, 221
Delei River, 41-3, 221, 222; valley, 48, 49, 91; villages destroyed, 227
Denning Outpost, 18, 19, 24, 27; rainfall at, 20; damage at, 229
Deutzia, 72, 122
Di Chu, 110, 115, 121, 148, 156, 178; arrival in, 113; departure from, 162; journeys in, 119, 135, 140, 141; flora of, 124 eq seq; damage to gorge of, 187, 188
Digaru River, 19
Dim-dam flies (*see* Blister flies)
Diphu La, 139, 147, 154, 178, 179
Doctoring, 44, 81, 200, 202, 222, 223
Dong, 62, 72, 161, 195, 207
Drakpa, 130, 131, 137, 142; and the drowned pony, 149-51
Dreyi, 23, 29, 228, 229
Drinking water, 62, 115, 156, 171, 173, 175, 203

Drownings in Lohit; men, 96, 97; pony, 149-51, 162; fish, 171

EARTHQUAKE, 166-8, 178, 187; tremors, 166, 167, 168, 170, 179, 212; noises, 166, 167, 198, 199; destruction by, 169, 170, 172, 183, 185, 186, 187 et seq, 217, 219, 223, 224, 229 (*see also* Landslips); dust, 167-9, 174, 175, 181, 188, 209
Emotiba Ao (Naga compounder), 210
Euonymus, 126

FIRES, GRASS and FOREST, 52-4, 55, 72, 73, 95, 96, 103-5, 107, 120, 121, 145, 192, 203
Firs, 126, 130, 136
Fleas, 31, 50, 127
Flies, 102, 116, 222
Food, 68, 78, 91, 100, 108, 118, 146, 163, 171, 176, 177, 227; price of, 58, 62; snack marching rations, 40; Tibetan meals, 86, 87; scarcity of, 111, 133, 144, 180, 184
Footwear, 53, 72, 91, 95, 153, 189, 192, 193, 227

GALLERIES, CLIFF, 53, 72, 149, 162, 194, 195, 210
Gaultheria
codonantha, 91
fragrantissima, 78, 91
nummularioides, 91, 92
Wardii, 91
Gentians, 91; climbing, 72
Ghalum Valley, 50, 213, 234
Glaciation, 71, 103
Glei Pass, 43
Goitre, 142
Gombu Dorji, 177, 180, 181
Goswami, Dr. M. C., 53, 190, 197, 198, 200, 202, 204; departure of, 203
Governor of Assam, 199
Gurkhas, 43, 178, 180, 197; dancing, 69, 207

HAIL, 29, 30
Hangam Camp, 218
Hats, 15, 37
Hayuliang Outpost, 37, 38, 41-3, 45, 199 and n, 216-21
Honeysuckle, 136, 138
Hot springs in Di Chu valley, 121, 130, 131, 139, 140, 173, 178; near Walong, 69, 195
Hoya, 125
Hussein, Mr., 227
Hypericum Hookerianum, 146

INDIAN AIR FORCE, air dropping by, 205
Indra Bahadur Limbu, Havildar, 183, 184, 186-91, 193, 194, 196, 197, 206
Iris, 138
Wattii, 103, 109

Jasmine, 124
Jemadar (*see* Bir Bahadur Gurung)
Jongpen of Rima, 79, 85, 102; entertains us, 101, 108; entertained by us, 103, 105, 106
Jorhat, 24, 46, 232; affected by earthquake, 184

KAHAO, 112, 116, 141, 143, 188; headman of, 79, 116, 117, 139, 143, 154, 156, 158, 176, 180, 181, 195; population of, 142
Kamlang Valley, 28, 35
Kathing, Major R. C., M.C., M.B.E., 201
Kaulback, Ronald, 21
Kharka Bahadur Gurung, Subedar, 198
Krao Ti River, 70, 72, 192
Kundil Ferry, 19

LALL, JEMADAR, 233
Landslips, 35, 156, 167, 172, 173, 175, 183, 185 187, 189, 193, 203-5, 209, 211, 213, 214, 221-3, 228, 230, 236
effect of wind and rain on, 195, 196
La Ti River, 102, 109, 170, 172, 185
La Ti Village, 111, 121, 123, 175, 177, 180
Leeches, 22, 50, 127, 224
Lice, 31
Lindera, 109
Liquidambar, 125
Lohit River, 14, 35, 37, 39, 44, 47, 97, 103, 170, 171, 176, 177, 213; silting after earthquake, 192; last view of, 224
Lohit Valley, 28, 38, 48, 54; air dropping in, 232-6; autumn in the, 218; track, 112, 118, 148, 201, 213, 217; rainfall, 55, 105
Ludlow, Mr. Frank, 65, 76, 94

Machhima, 32, 35-6, 224
Mahonia calamicaulis, 95, 126
Mails, 157, 190, 198, 203
Mainprice, Mr. F. P., I.C.S., 43, 45, 48, 216
Maize, 112
Manipur, 44-6; snakes, 129
McMahon Line, 162, 184, 187, 188, 202
Meconopsis betonicifolia, 158
Michelia, 107, 110, 228
Mills, Mr. J. P., C.I.E., I.C.S., 104
Minyutang, 49
Minzong, 50, 52, 54, 212, 213, 215
Mishmis, 18, 25, 35, 37, 47, 49, 50, 55, 173, 175, 176, 215, 217; comparison with Nungs and Marus, 224; sick, 222, 223; wire thieves, 43; comparison with Nagas, 104; cultivation methods, 105; Miju and Digaru, 221; lack of imagination of, 225
Mishmi Hills, 22, 49, 115, 161, 232, 235
Mishmi porters, 15, 16, 24, 27, 48, 52, 154, 157, 216, 217, 223; carry sick sepoy, 202; killed in earthquake, 187
Missionaries, 64, 65, 67 et seq
Mithan, 42
Money, 17
Moonmoths, 134
Mosquitoes, 116, 186
Mouse, 93
Munlang Camp, 46, 217
Music, 68, 69

Naga Hills, 13, 44, 46
Nara Camp, 36-40, 220; destruction of, 222

Nettles, 125
Nichols, Mr. and Mrs. Edgar, 117-9, 144, 146, 148
Nima Tsering, sirdar, 16, 25, 32, 59
Nomocharis, 158

Omphu, 158-60
Opium, 23, 55
Orchids, 63, 72, 94, 95, 110, 146, 215
Otters, 32

Pahal Sing Rana, Havildar, 178-80, 186, 188, 191, 204, 205
Pangong Camp, 43-5, 216, 218
Parasites (*see* Blister flies, Fleas, Flies, Leeches, Lice, Mosquitoes, Ticks)
Patterson, Mr. George Neil; arrival of, 64; departure of, 67
Paya-pani, 36, 224
Phag Tsering, 15, 22, 90, 141, 182, 183, 211; arrival at Sap Chu, 78; as plant collector, 94, 107, 109, 124, 130, 131, 137, 140, 147, 152, 175; and the snake, 128, 129
Phajus Wallichii, 146
Philadelphus, 122, 146
Photinia, 126
Pieris, 116
Pine trees, 46, 51, 116, 125, 218; damaged by flying rocks, 187
Porters (*see under* Mishmi, Tibetan, Zakring)
  rates of payment, 24
Primula, 138, 158
  albiflos, 139
  atrodentata, 132
  chungensis, 139
  §*farinosa*, 139
Prisoners, 79, 80, 96
Pursaramkund, 19
Pyracantha, 102, 146
Pyrus, 126

Raspberries, 115
Rhododendron, 126, 132, 138, 140, 153, 158, 204, 212, 228
  arboreum, 92, 95, 110, 138, 130
  bullatum, 130, 135, 137, 139
  §*ciliicalyx*, 94, 95
  crinigerum, 139
  §*Maddeni*, 130
  megacalyx, 135
  niphargum, 139
  oleifolium, 92, 110
  riparium, 139
  §*sanguineum*, 139, 140
  sidereum, 130
  sinogrande, 139
  §*Thomsonii*, 135, 139
  §*Triflorum*, 139
Ribes, 136
Rice; price of, 58, 144; inefficient cereal, 112; loss of, 149-51; relief, 227
Rice-beer (*zu*), 96, 98-101, 162, 203, 206-8
Rima, flies and mosquitoes at, 116; camp at, 102; invitation to, 81; officials of, 81, 87; visits to, 82, 85 et seq, 162 et seq; departures from, 110
Rockfalls, 170, 179, 186, 190, 209, 214

Rodgersia, 158
Rong Thö Chu River, 103
Roses, 115, 204, 212
  family, 126
  longicuspis, 78
Rubus ellipticus, 115
Rum, 212, 216

SADIYA, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19; threatened by flood, 223; affected by earthquake, 184
Saikhoaghat, 14
Sailo, Captain L. R. (A.P.O.L.V.), 145, 146, 170, 176, 187, 188, 190, 198, 199, 201, 202; departure of, 203; letters from, 184, 214, 227; parcel from, 227
Same, 78, 94, 171, 186; picnic at, 95
Sangu, 78, 111, 171, 183, 186
Sap Chu River, 75 et seq, 185, 186; flora, 91
Sat Ti River, 71, 72, 161
Scorpion, 129
Sedum, 132
Seinghku Valley, 139, 147, 154
Shet Ti Camp, 53, 54, 209, 225
Shigathang, 99, 102; New Year fire at, 78, 85, 100; earthquake destruction, 169, 170
Singh, Lieut.-General Kalwant, 232
Smell of mud, 156, 186, 209, 218
Snakes, 128, 129
Snow, 54, 207
Sorbus (rowan), 126, 136, 204, 212
Souliang Camp, 226, 227
Spiraea, 138
Spruce, 126, 136
Stellera chamaejasme, 97
Strophanthus, 22, 23
Symplocos, 126

TAKEM ABOR, RIFLEMAN, 189, 191, 193, 194, 206
Takin, 121, 130, 139, 157
Tea, Tibetan style, 84, 99, 100
Teju, 19, 23, 229, 230; flying over, 236; river, 229, 230
Tek Bahadur, 202, 220
Tents, 76, 77, 115, 124, 147, 158, 194, 205; temperature in, 152, 153
Terminalia myriocarpa, 218
Tha Chu Valley, 147, 152, 153, 157, 161, 163, 185; plants from, 157, 158; destruction of, 189
Thefts by dogs, 93, 122
Thefts by Tibetans, 25, 111, 163
Theronliang, 19, 27, 30-2, 34, 35, 228; obliteration of, 226, 227
Tibet, 16, 51, 111; two strangers from, 143, 144
Tibetan porters, 16, 18, 21, 23, 24, 31, 142, 147, 152
Tibetan Trade Agent, 16, 18
Tibetan traders, 16, 39, 47, 52, 75, 90
Ticks, 50, 127, 130, 135, 139
Tidding River, 30, 31, 43, 219-21, 223-5, 229
Tidding Saddle, 20, 30, 228
  flying over, 236
Tidding Valley, 224, 236
Tinai, 70
  headman of, 214
Tocklai Experimental Station, 13, 46
Tooning, 109, 172, 174, 177
Traps, 93, 122, 124, 145
Tsering, T. (Tibetan interpreter), 197, 198, 202

Valerian, 119
Vegetation, 47, 51, 124-8, 229
Viburnum, 136
  cordifolium, 138, 204, 212
Violets, 132

WALONG OUTPOST, 16, 25, 38, 48, 53, 61, 145, 146, 232; arrival at, 56-9, 197; departure from 70, 209; journey back to, 182, 197; rainfall at, 55; water supply, 62, 203; air drop for, 235
Willow, 132, 138

YEPAK RIVER, 56; flood in, 206, 209
Yesong Camp, 52, 211, 212

ZAKRING, 99, 104; cultivation, 105
Zakring porters, 74, 153, 178, 216
Zayul Chu, 103
Zayul Shengoh, 98, 99, 103, 106, 108, 182
Zu (*see* Rice-beer)