CHAPTER VIII

KHAMTI TO INDIA

Enter the Plain of Khamti—Blackmailing at Tsaukan—Passage of the Nam-Kiou—Khamti (Padao)—Interviews with the King's Son; with the King—English Influence—Account of the Khamti Thaïs—Pagodas—Panlian—Carrier Difficulties—Departure—Again in the Mountains—Vexatious Delays—Desertion of Porters—Critical Position—Fever—Three Columns—Roux falls in Rear—Pass to India—Death of an old Christian—Short Commons—Two more Men left behind—We abandon Tent and Baggage—Hunger—First Village—Mishmis—Revictualling the Stragglers—Singphos—The Way Lost—Plain of Assam—Bishi; Good Treatment—Details concerning Village—Roux Rejoins—Easy Progress—Elephants—Reception by a Singpho Chief—The Brahmaputra—Sadiya—Cordial Welcome from the English Agent—Position at Sadiya; Native Population—Tea Plantations—Method of Work—*En route* for Calcutta—Descent of the Brahmaputra—Historical Reflections on India; Dupleix.

After a bath in the river we stretched ourselves on the grass in the open; and watched a magnificent sunset. It was good thus to lie beneath the wide arc of heaven after being so long restricted in our surroundings.

Whilst preparing for our evening meal, our ears were saluted in the distance by a prolonged note, which, as it rose and fell in its approach, was presently distinguished as proceeding from a melancholy gong. A small band of about fourteen Païs then came in sight, winding in Indian file towards our camp. At their head we recognised one of the deputies who had given us their company on the road. When opposite to us they stopped, gravely saluted in a quasi-military fashion, pronounced

the word "Salaam," and squatted. Two of them carried muzzle-loaders.

As we had no clue to their intentions, it gave us satisfaction to observe the quiet promptness with which our men carried out our instructions, given previous to entering the Paï country. The packs were withdrawn, the tent closed, and our people grouped in rear. A quaint scene ensued. We three seated at a table behind a guttering candle, facing this solemn deputation, proceeded to conduct a colloquy, of which, I imagine, not a sixth part reached either party in intelligible form,—from us to Joseph, Joseph to Seran-Seli, Seran-Seli to a Kioutse with a few words of Lissou, the latter to a Paï with fewer of Kioutse, and from this last to the expectant group. Out of this chain of evidence we gathered that the chief of Khamti had received a letter from the south with threats of war. Had we any connection with this missive? The Paï, who constituted himself spokesman, addressed his remarks in so loud a tone that Joseph took exception, and concluded that he lied. In return, we assured them we were peaceably inclined, and anxious to expound our views at greater length to their great chiefs; after which they took their departure as they had come, to the lessening vibrations of the gong.

Next day (19th November) we had not gone far before we perceived a thatched village, from which issued a number of inhabitants, who motioned us to stop. They had with them a bamboo tube enclosing two rolls of paper, one of which contained some writing in Paï or Burmese characters, signed in English as far as could be deciphered: "*Emile . . . Art . . .*," with a seal below it, "*Seal of the Court of the Deput . . . Bha . . .*"; the rest was effaced. This letter found here was curious, but it did not concern us, as we endeavoured to convey to the people. A few

steps farther, and again we were stopped. Through the same medium as before, some notables intimated that we must make a present to the village. This procedure did not commend itself to us as at all a desirable precedent to establish. On the other hand, to use force when we did not know our way, had a river to cross, and with the ever-recurring difficulty of food, to say nothing of the presence in our column of local porters on whom we could not rely, seemed an unwise alternative. Their tone now became more menacing; it was a custom, they said, that other Europeans, none of whom had come from the East, had observed, and unless we conformed to it we could not pass. In this dilemma we offered them five rupees. They indignantly refused, and laid our modest ransom at a hundred rupees. This was too much; we made a signal to our men to fall in, and began to get out our guns, with obvious other intent than as gifts. Upon this they held a further conference with some pretended chief in the village, and ended by accepting ten rupees. Such was our first contact with the folk of Moam—a set of rapacious blackmailers, to whom nothing but prudential considerations for the success of our journey allowed us to yield.

The females in the crowd here were so far feminine, and unlike those of the Kioutses, as to recall to us that heaven created woman for a companion to man. They were tall, wearing a dark blue skirt, a light open jacket of the same colour, and a white girdle. Their hair was in a knot, and drawn into a glossy black coil, on the left side of which several fastened coquettish glass spangles that glittered in the sun. Most had rings in their ears, sometimes of amber. I saw a child here, playing with a wooden top, just as at home.

We passed through the village, Tsaukan, and at once found

ourselves on the borders of the river. This was the Nam-Kiou, or Meli-remaï of the Kioutses, the western branch of the Irawadi. It was about 160 yards in width and 12 feet deep; water clear and sluggish. We crossed without delay in five or six pirogues, and saw grounds for the arrogance of the natives in the ease with which they could have prevented our passage. A series of streams succeeded at close intervals; the region seemed a veritable

On the Nam-Kiou.

cullender for Indo-China. Some we forded, others we passed in dug-outs. Their gliding currents mingled or diverged without visible cause in this flat delta-like country; in marked contrast to the riotous torrents we had so lately left. They cannot come from far, as the chain of the Dzayul Mountains running south-west bounds them to the north of the plain of Moam.

As far as the eye could reach stretched rice-fields, yellow as the plains of Lombardy. A splendid territory, fertile in soil and abundant in water, where tropical and temperate culture flourish side by side, and the inhabitants are protected on three fronts by mountains. That they were fairly opulent was to be assumed from the silver bracelets of the children and the small Indian coins used as buttons. Indeed, nothing would appear to be lacking to the happiness of the people of Khamti. Only beware, you light-hearted folk, you are perilously close to the British leopard. His appetite is enormous: sooner or later, be it from the mountains of Assam, or from the South, he will place his paw upon you and bring you under his "dominion." There is no escape for you, ruler of Khamti! King Theebaw's lot awaits you unless you humbly give in your allegiance to the Empire of India. If you do this, you may perhaps retain your title, pleasures, and a shadow of authority; you will receive presents and become as one of the hired servants; but,—dare to lift your head, and you will be smashed like a vase of which the pieces are thrown away and never spoken of again.

We approached the capital, which, save for slightly larger dimensions and a higher stockade, was not distinguishable from other villages. They led us direct to a small pavilion outside, like a music kiosk, clean and well built. Four columns supported a demi-cone-shaped roof of rice-straw thatch. Round the cornice were panels painted on a white ground to represent seated Buddhas with a flame upon their heads, cars drawn by red horses, and devadas dancing. These were like what one had met with at Laos, only rougher. Without the fence that surrounded this building long bannerols fluttered from bamboo poles. For ourselves we could have preferred better board and worse lodg-

ing, as the inhabitants only replied to our hungry pantomime by signs that we should wait.

At the end of some time three personages presented themselves. The central one was indicated as the chief. He was a man of some stature and an intelligent face, wearing a white turban, flannel trousers in coloured stripes like a clown, a small rose silk vest, and an old patched pair of European shoes. His confederate had a white vest like the Laos, and a shrewd quick eye that recalled certain Siamese types. Until our interpreting links were all collected we sat staring at each other like china dogs. Then the story of the threatening letter from Bhamo was repeated to us, and we were asked to explain our movements. This we did as well as we could by means of a map, and with assurances that we had not been in Burmah. Already the talk began to turn upon presents; so as our translators were now tired we postponed any further discussion till the morrow. On leaving, these officials graciously gave instructions that provisions should be sold to us. We quickly realised that prices were to run high: two rupees for next to nothing; and I saw a man refuse a quarter rupee for a bit of dead wood for Nam's fire.

The early mist lifted next morning and disclosed to us the white summits of the Dzayul Mountains. We despatched the gifts we had prepared by the hands of Joseph and Sao; but they returned without effecting their purpose, and with the information that the gentleman we had seen on the previous day was only the king's son: the king, his father, would not rise before midday. Throughout the forenoon a peeping crowd pressed round our fence, and we felt rather like the exhibits in the Jardin d'Acclimatation, to whom visitors poke cigarettes and small coins;

The King's Son and his Escort at Khamti.

only with this difference, here our patrons seemed much more inclined to take than give.

Yesterday's magnates having returned, we displayed our presents. They regarded them without moving an eyelid, and did not offer to touch them. We were given to understand that donations were expected by the king (who desired a repeating rifle), by the king's son, and lastly by the people. This was Tsaukan over again. Much as one liked being agreeable to chiefs who were agreeable in their turn, it was a trifle irritating to have one's benefactions dictated to one. However, we dissembled our feelings. The minister, somewhat humanised by our promises, told us he had been several times to Calcutta and Mandalay, and vouchsafed some information regarding the route.

In the afternoon we—and our gifts—were conducted through the capital to be presented at court.

The outskirts of the town were occupied by fenced rectangular gardens, in which chiefly women were hoeing; the soil looked extremely rich and well tended. Between them and the village were rows of small bamboo rice granaries on piles about 3 feet from the ground. Passing them we came to the enceinte, which consisted of a stockade made of wattled bamboos 12 feet high, supported on the inner face by an embankment. This palisade was armed at one-third and again at two-thirds of its height by projecting sharpened stakes like *chevaux de frises*. It was pierced by narrow entrances closed by a gate formed in most cases of a single solid baulk of timber.

Once inside, the detached houses did not admit of streets; but in all directions ran narrow plank causeways a foot or so from the earth, necessary in the rains. The roofs were thatched and sloping, with a conical excrescence at either end, and in the

centre a small gable like a bonnet, that allowed light to enter and smoke to escape. At one extremity of the building was an open platform under the eaves, which admitted more light horizontally. Each dwelling ran from 80 to 130 feet in length, and was erected on piles which formed commodious pens underneath for the live stock. The whole village was arranged on a system of parallels. From one point of view, with screens hiding the foundation posts, the place seemed a conglomeration of circular huts or big molehills as one sees in Africa. With their thatch they gave me the illusion at a distance of some herd of hairy mammoths, arrested in their course by a sudden paralysis of nature.

The palace dominated the rest of the village, and was surrounded by small gardens within a paling. Save in point of size, it was very similar to the other domiciles, but had a second roof with two dragons carved in wood at the corners. We were ushered into a spacious hall beside the terrace. Tall wooden columns 27 feet high ran up to the roof, and the chamber was shut off from the rest of the house by a bamboo partition, on which were hung black Hindu bucklers studded with gold, and some lances. The beams were decorated with figures of tigers and monkeys painted red, and on the lower parts of the pillars were fastened horns of animals draped with strips of calico of bright hues. In rear of this fringe stood the royal throne. It was made of a long chest, on the front panel of which was depicted a cavalcade of gods or warriors mounted on strange beasts, evidently of Hindu design. On either side of its base twin serpents reared their heads slightly in advance of a grotesque squatting wooden effigy, in whose hands were a sword and a lance. Behind, a trophy of flint- and match-locks was arranged.

Upon the throne a little wrinkled beardless old man was seated. He had on a white vest and a "langouti" (species of kilt) of mauve silk; a pillow and tobacco jar were beside him, and a spittoon and a long pipe at his feet. Before him were planted two gilded umbrellas. The whole was the monarch.

We were invited to seat ourselves on the floor in front of his majesty, with his majesty's son upon our right, and a group of five or six old men who had the air of councillors or notables of the place. The rest of the hall was filled with an audience of attendants and general rabble, in the background of which appeared the top-knots of several women, while some of our Thibetans gazed on the scene with open-mouthed wonder. Apart from the pomp of the reception, I was struck with the familiarity of the people, who chatted with the members of the royal party quite unconcernedly. It was not so in the Laos States. The king's son addressed his sire in a long speech, in which we supposed he was declaring who we were and whence we came. The presents were then deposited in a tray before the throne. The king rejoined by putting a few short questions to us directly Who had shown us the way? Did we come of our own will, or were we sent by anyone? At Tonkin, how were the children? the old men? Were the people rich? Finally, he asked by what route we desired to reach Assam.

The travelled minister had already taken our names as a souvenir. The wary Joseph for his own part gave an alias, alleging that he had found it a wise precaution when dealing with a mandarin.

In the conversation, as was natural, Tonkin took chief place. We did endeavour to explain that France was at a greater distance;

but not being engaged to give a history or geography lecture to the people of Khamti, and as we were chiefly concerned to gain their furtherance for our departure, we refrained from puzzling their Oriental brains. In the end the general impression left was, I fancy, that M. Carnot and some generals in a picture I showed were the principal men in Tonkin, and Napoleon III., whose head was on the louis d'or I distributed, was its great chief. A sign of dismissal being given, we withdrew with much pleasure. We had had about enough of social amenities for one day.

Under the palace we observed some men at work forging sword-blades; the fire was in a sunk trench, and for bellows a man seated on a trestle worked two pistons in bamboo tubes pump-wise. We had fondly hoped for some amelioration of our diet on coming to Moam. So far we had not succeeded. When we asked for victuals they replied by telling us to stay here three days longer, and not to bother about porters—an invitation capable of more than one interpretation. As we returned to our camp we met an elephant which belonged to the king. Our men were highly amused at their first meeting with such an animal. It came from Assam. But notwithstanding this and other surprises, they were quite ready to quit Khamti, where their reception had not equalled expectation. Seran-Seli delivered himself of his astonishment that the king, who reminded him of an old monkey, should have been perched on a seat while we were on the floor; and as for Nam, he regarded all the inhabitants as pigs.

We turned our enforced delay to account by visiting the suburbs and studying the population. There was a pagoda in a grove near the village, wherein was placed a row of gilded Buddhas with conical head-dress, and some smaller ones of marble, painted or

gilded as in India. Flags bearing Buddhist subjects and Thaï inscriptions hung from the ceiling, but we saw nothing unusual, artistic, or finely sculptured as in Laos. Some tablets of black wood served as boards, which were written on with a white substance obtained from the bamboo, and the bonze showed me a letter of recommendation from an Englishman, Mr. Gray, in case the priest should wish to go to India.

In the course of the day following our audience we received another visit from the king's son and his adviser. This time they smiled upon us, and brought some tubes of bamboo filled with molasses. The minister became sufficiently confidential to produce the subjoined paper for our inspection. It was in English, and ran thus :—

"This is a certificate that Hoé Daung, nephew of the Lakhoum Saubroa of Pamkouti Khamti, came to Bhamo to pay homage and respect in February '92. He was accompanied by the Amdogyi of Lakhoum, named Baraugnan, as representing the Lakhoum Saubroa. The Amdogyi and Hoé Daung were at Mandalay and Rangoon. No promises were made them, save that with regard to the claim set forth by Sankpakhou, the Lakhoum Saubroa, to be chief Saubroa of Khamti,[1] such claim should be the subject of inquiry and further consideration. By this prompt visit, bearing the homage and presents of the Saubroa, his nephew (in the place of the said Saubroa) has recognised the supremacy of the Government, and has expressed his desire to be a loyal subject, and this will be taken into account in future dealings with him. His *territory* now forms part of the district

[1] This is ambiguous : the claim has been made in the course of a past visit . . . query : an inquiry will be made in the course of our visit (future)?—AUTHOR.

controlled by the Deputy-Commissioner of Bhamo, and he has a right to the protection and consideration of the Government.

"E. C. S. GEORGE,
"Deputy-Commissioner.

"CAMP MOGAUM, 13*th March* 1892."

This document confirmed our conjectures on first reaching the plain. The chief of Khamti, finding most likely his power shaken by competitors, or for some other good reason, had found it advisable to address his submission to England. He had sent ambassadors to the Indian Government, and it was probably following on this embassage that Mr. Gray was despatched to explore and thoroughly investigate the country.

Here we have the inveterate method pursued by England: an advance as sure as it is deliberate, and with no retrograde. The rule of Britain spreads like a drop of oil by a sort of inexorable law of nature and decree of destiny. Assam is one instance, absorbed fifty years ago; Upper Burmah is another, annexed within the last ten. To-day these countries are conterminous; and, united under the English flag, are boring little by little up to the very springs of the Irawadi. To the right of Khamti they are stopped by the ranges of Thibet. They will not go farther to the north-east, for two reasons,—the precipitous height of the mountains, and the nakedness of the land. Where no profits are, there is no English flag.

The minister told us also that steamers from Bhamo now went as high as Mogaung. In this again I recognised the admirable system of English colonisation. First conquer; then follow up unhesitatingly, working to turn to use what has been acquired, by pushing trade, by establishing communications, and by allowing all

without reservation and without delay to extract the benefits from the fresh territory.

We inquired of our interlocutors as to their origin. They said the people of Khamti had always dwelt there, under their own name of Thaïs, like the Laotians. The mountain tribes to the east, west, and north of Khamti were known by the general term Khanungs. One portion of the plain was called Lakhoum, and another, comprising about a dozen villages in the west, Manchi-Khamti.

As at this point of the conversation we appeared to be on such good terms with each other, we ventured to reopen the subject of porters. In a moment our friends' faces were made to exhibit blank amazement. To the watchword "porters" the countersign was "presents." Everyone demanded something. We perceived very clearly that short of actual molestation we had fallen into a nest of brigands; should we never shake off these jackals? A petty chief from Tsaukan put in for ten rupees; we refused, having already given him enough; whereupon he laid at our feet a sword-blade sent to us from his people; and when that was also declined, said he could not take it back for very shame, what would we offer?—got rid of at five rupees. The prime minister next claimed value for an ox;—settled him, and off he went to confer with the king. The evening visits took the form of emissaries, sent to urge their own, and to decry their neighbours', merits. Altogether we received a lesson in discrimination and diplomacy.

Although at other times there was no regular market, the inhabitants preferring house-to-house exchange, one sprang up towards the end of our stay round our kiosk, chiefly for the sale of rice, vegetables, eggs, and potatoes. Salt was very scarce and

valued highly; it was measured in small hand-scales against fragments of pottery as weights. I saw also a sort of brown wick like that for lamps, which, soaked in opium, was used in the preparation of a drink. Amber from the south was pretty plentiful, and I was shown a bit of rough jasper and some garnets like those in the Himalayas.

In the people themselves we recognised the Laotian type, which is not a strongly marked one. They had straight-set rather wide-open eyes with slightly puckered lids, broad nose, arch of eyebrow and frontal bones prominent, thick lips, and olive complexion somewhat deeper than among the folk of Laos. Most of the men were ugly; but the younger females had pleasant faces and sometimes fine eyes. As a whole, they were less inquisitive and annoying than a similar Chinese crowd, and did not mind being dispersed. The costume of the men was the langouti, and a garment passing under the left arm and fastened on the right shoulder. Nearly all carried the short sword across the breast, Kioutse fashion; these had finely tempered blades and a good balance. A rather coarse thread stuff, with a red or blue pattern on a light ground, is made in Khamti itself, and calico prints are seen equally with vests of Thibetan poulou. The women invariably wore a blue cotton skirt, rather long and fitted to the figure. Their bosoms were not exposed as in Laos, and they no longer bathed openly in the river like their sisters of the south-east. Their carriage was erect and graceful, with short steps. Both sexes smoked pipes, bamboo-root with silver mounts, or a long cigarette made of the leaf of a tree. Other characteristics in common were the wide-brimmed, cone-crowned Burmese straw hat, and the ear-rings either of amber, bamboo, or even leaves. Except in the case of two or three chiefs who had

English shoes, everyone went barefoot. The plain folk do little carrying; when they do, they make use of a long bamboo balanced on the shoulder with a basket at either end.

Much of our information was derived from the minister, who, when we got him alone and with the insinuation of a special bribe if carriers were forthcoming, displayed no lack of intelligence and a really remarkable memory, by which he described the routes of departure from Khamti,[1] and reeled off almost without check each day's stage for a month's march. On this occasion also we dispensed with our cumbrous method of intercourse, and got along quite as fast by a speedily established dumb-show. In the course of our talk we learned that the Singphos and the Kachins are one and the same, the first being the Thaï appellation and the second the Burmese. This people, who extend south of Khamti, were described as at this very time in active warfare with the English.

A petty chief from a village to the west paid us a visit, and he too possessed a certificate from Mr. Gray. Plenty of folk hereabout expressed a desire to go to India. If the route is improved, frequent communication between it and Khamti will probably ere long be established.

The announcement—naturally not made without fresh gratuity—of twelve porters recruited for us in the mountains, made us anxious to prove the minister's itinerary without delay. From Khamti to Bishi, the first village in Assam, was said to be only nine days' march, but without intermediate settlements. To be on the safe side, we laid in supplies for eleven days.

[1] There are three routes to Assam: one to the south by the source of the river Dapha; a second by that of the river Dihing; and a third to the north by the Mishmis. The first of these only has been followed: by Colonel Woodthorpe in 1875 (1885?) and by Mr. Gray in 1893.

The minister now requested a written testimonial in return for his good offices. He got it in the form of a notice, in French and English, warning future travellers to beware of the rapacity of the inhabitants of Khamti, chiefs and commons.

Our preparations were interrupted by the arrival of two horsemen, mounted on broad-chested, short-necked tats, like those of Annam. One of these gentry, dressed in a many-coloured langouti, fox-skin vest, and white turban, proved to be a Gourka of Nepaul, who had travelled by Darjeeling to Calcutta, and thence to Rangoon, Moulmein, Mandalay, Bhamo, and Mogaung. He spoke a few words of English, and confirmed the report of fighting between the English and the Singphos. He described how he himself, a merchant, had been made prisoner, bound, and despoiled of three thousand rupees and three cases of goods, but had made his escape minus everything. An offer which we made him to accompany our party back to India was declined, on the score of attempting the recovery of his lost effects. His presence added an entirely fresh and unexpected type of Asiatic to the motley gathering round our kiosk.

We had fixed our start for the 24th (November). The morning came, but no porters. Seran-Seli, sent to beat them up, raises three; the rest reported coming. Reappearance of king's son and minister—just to see us off, and to beg a case for the former's Winchester, which we gave rather as one does a bone to a dog. Another hour—still five carriers short. King's son issues orders to find them. This not producing the smallest effect, "Pessimus," as Joseph dubbed the avaricious Paï interpreter, sallies in quest; and—2 p.m.—returns—unaccompanied, to say that they were certainly there overnight, but have fled. Another day lost!

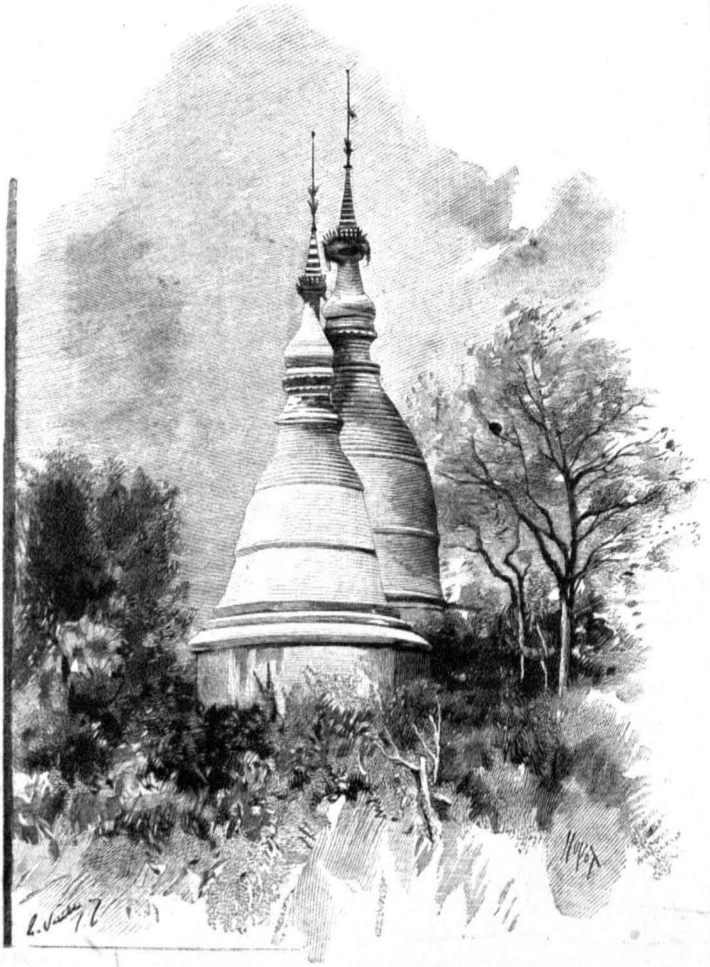
As one throws out everything from a balloon to lighten it, so we decided upon a still further reduction of impedimenta; and, to this end, discarded the men's tents and as much else as we possibly could. Our men themselves proposed each to carry an additional share of the remainder, preferring increased individual loads to staying longer in this place. They had now been more than two months on the road, and were as anxious to reach India as ourselves.

Poulanghing, our Guide from Khamti.

We were satisfied with the look of our guide, who was a robust and thick-set fellow, with more of the hillman than the plain about him, resembling the Singphos rather than the Païs, and acquainted with the dialect of the former. He was to accompany us as far as Dibrugarh, where we hoped to reach the railway.

To fill the afternoon before our actual start, I paid a visit to the village of Panlian, about three-quarters of a mile to the south. In the pagoda here the bonzes had a large number of puppies — a regular dogs' home. I was interested in a sugar-cane press in the courtyard. Two posts, one vertical and the

other horizontal, each having cogs cut in their centre, bit on each other, and crushed the cane as they revolved. A child turned the mill, and fed it at the same time; the juice running down into a hollow below. Near the pagoda stood some



Religious Monuments at Panlian.

religious monuments, in stone or hardened clay, covered with white cement. Their shape was pyramidal, surmounted by a sugar loaf, recalling the lotus knob, and dwindling above through iron rings to a point. On their sides niches contained gilt or

white marble Buddhas, seated or recumbent. We wondered if the Khamti worshippers knew of the existence of similar shrines on the other side of the Dzayul Mountains to the north. Another monument was in the form of a tapering pillar, with a tablet as if for an inscription, beneath a gilt bird like a cock. The scene as I lingered on the brink of a stream, and watched the string of women and slow buffaloes moving homeward through the shallow ford in the mellow sunlight, was a very lovely and a lazy one, and suggested reflections on this fair region of Khamti and its inhabitants, whose artistic and indolent natures harmonised in their pose, their garments, their dwellings, and their memorials. It is a beautiful country, where everything seemed to be fitly wedded to its counterpart, under a clear sky and vivifying sun; I was tempted to apply the line—

> *O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint,*
> Thaïs! . . .

25th (November).—Positively our last morning! and a last request. The king's son, through "Pessimus," insinuated that he would be glad of my boots. This time I could not oblige him. He kept us company for some distance, and we parted friends.

It was manifest that without the help of these people we should have been hard put to it to continue our journey; but they set such an exorbitant price on their services, and showed themselves so petty in their cupidity, begging up to the last moment, that, despite their utility to our plans, they left on our minds the unpleasant reminiscence of a pack of fawning parasites. We could have wished—for their sakes, though not for ours—to see them boldly oppose our advance, and demand a healthy

ransom. I would any day rather pass for a real brigand than for a cozener.

We had started with what porters we could get together; and every one of our party was glad to be off on this the final stage of our way to India. The men marched briskly, and sang, notwithstanding their heavy burdens, for throughout the first day our direction lay across the plain. A few insignificant rivers had to be waded, but the jungle, where it approached the paddy-fields, was of no density. At intervals we passed religious erections, in the shape of shrines, tombs, or posts about 5 feet high, most of which were partially gilded, and shone handsomely in the sun. From one village still came a demand for a gun, but it sounded only as an echo of importunity, and was treated with a shrug of the shoulders. As they continued to pester us, Anio, the plain speaker, promised to slit their throats unless they desisted; and Fa, who harboured sanguinary notions, graphically proposed to pluck out the thin hairs of their moustaches, till their faces should be as bare as the outside of a copper pot. So great a dislike had our men taken to the people of Khamti, that their commonly expressed desire was to return with a hundred well-armed men and terrorise them.

The 26th (November) saw us into the mountains; and now the heavy loads began to tell. The first ridge was gained at 4,225 feet, where, at the village of Singleng, we met with a hospitality from the wild hillmen which contrasted favourably with that of the more civilised folk of the plain. But already troubles were gathering on our horizon. To begin with, all our carriers did not get up to the night's halting-place. Further, we here learned that at least eighteen days would be wanted to reach Assam, instead of the Khamti computation, which had

evidently been based upon relay porters and light order. From this, the extreme village, then, we were confronted with fifteen to eighteen days' march through unpeopled mountains with tired followers. And, as necessary preliminaries, we must lay in extra rice, thereby increasing the loads, and invent reliefs to carry them. It was a large mouthful to swallow, but we were in for it.

On the 27th (November), as if in answer to our presentiments, the early mist rolled back, and disclosed the mighty barrier awaiting us. The sunrise effects upon its snowy topmost line and among its peaks and chasms were superb. As morning advanced, the belated porters came in by twos and threes, having slept where night overtook them, without shelter, fire, or food. They were quite discouraged. Ills rarely come singly, and we presently discovered that three of the Kioutse carriers had decamped at daylight. One result of this defection was the interruption of our link of intercourse with our guide, which had henceforth to be carried on by signs. The rest of the day was expended in unremitting efforts to recruit our carriers from the villagers. Fearing lest they should imagine they were being pressed for corvée, I gave them to understand they would be well paid. I need have been under no anxiety on this score; the Kioutses were quite alive to our straits, and demanded five rupees per man per diem, which terms we perforce conceded. As an appropriate culmination to the day's adversities, several of our own men went down with a bout of fever. I treated them with quinine and kola.

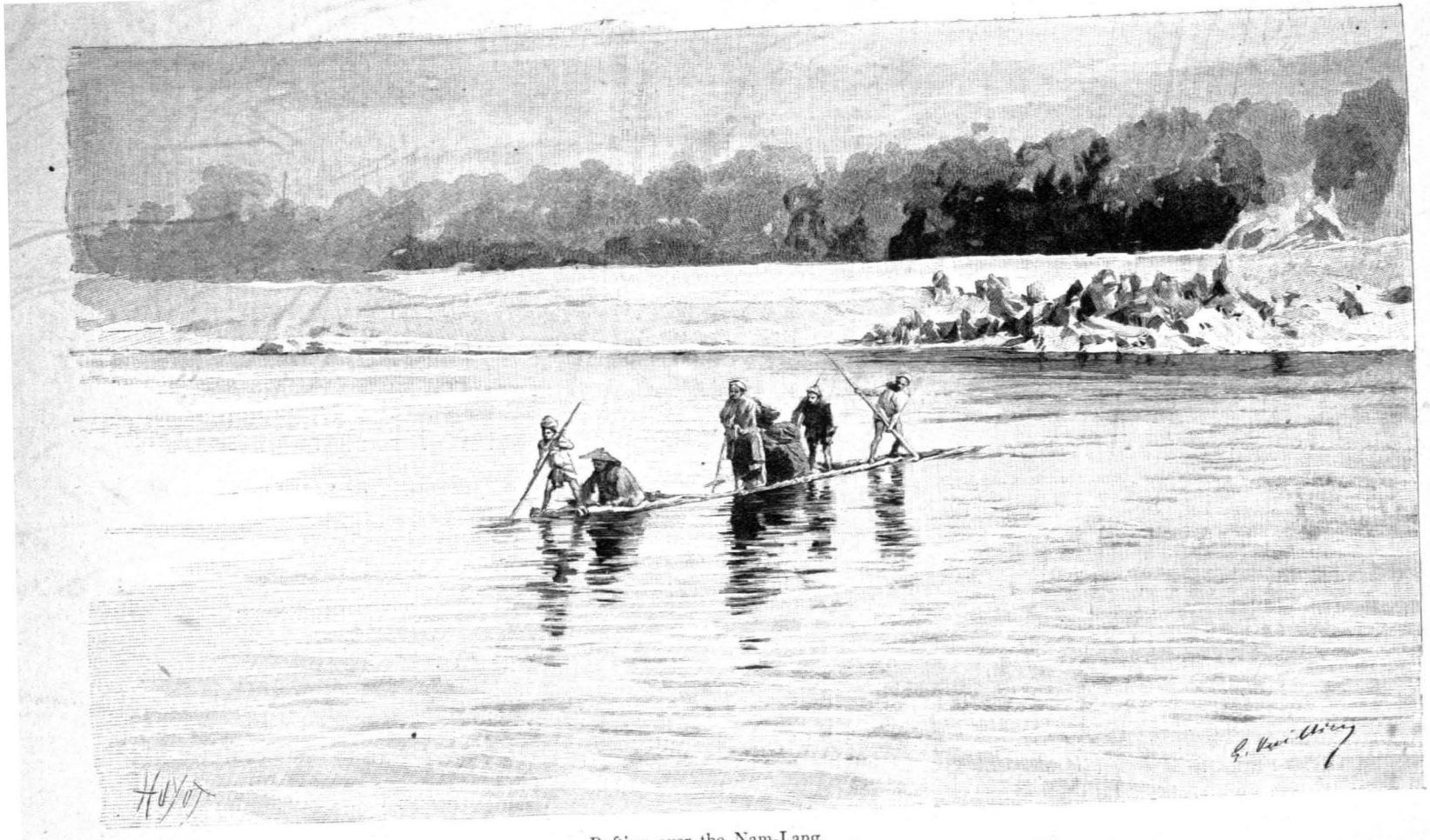
Some of the people of this part smoked opium, though not in the Chinese fashion. They cut up a bit of the sodden wick already mentioned, and boiled it in a little water. Then chopping very

fine a leaf resembling plantain, and drying it, they steeped the fibre in the opium decoction, and smoked it in a wooden hubble-bubble.

On the 28th (November) more ballast was thrown out. We jettisoned Briffaud's valise and the frame of his camp bed, Roux's cloak, and the hammers, axes, and leather bags. It was imperative that we should have sixteen days' rations, and our only chance was to make forced marches under lighter loads. Even now, with scarcity staring them in the face, I found it hard to stir our men to a sense of the situation. Their indifference is constitutional.

Our first camp after leaving Singleng was three miles on, and by the evening we had only accomplished half a stage. Fifteen days' food left: our reflections were not rosy. Ever since our arrival at Khamti, previously so longed for, we had had nothing but vexations; and now, when we thought our toils almost ended, the greatest difficulties were in reality beginning. There was no advantage in returning to Khamti; a lengthened sojourn there, or an attempt on another route under identical conditions, were equally futile. It was not a question of luxury but of bare subsistence, and it was annoying to feel that a slight lack of prevision should jeopardise both our followers and ourselves.

The guide, who had been away trying to enlist porters, rejoined on the 29th (November) with twelve men, and we moved off without loss of time. Our march was a rough one, partly beside a rushing grey-blue torrent, the Nam-Lang, crossed later in the day at a quiet spot, and partly in the woods. Indeed it was a repetition on a minor scale of the Kiou-kiang, not omitting the leeches. Now and then in the more open spots we saw traces of circular enclosures of crossed bamboo sticks, which may have been, as was said, intended for protection against panthers or



Rafting over the Nam-Lang.

tigers; if so, they were utterly inadequate for the purpose, and we inclined to the belief that they were connected with some religious superstition. When we bivouacked for the night, we should have felt more satisfied with the day's work if fever had not got a firm hold on four of our men. Loureti, the youngest of the troop, was the worst case, and kept up with difficulty, although the unselfish Anio took his pack as well as his own. Their condition distressed us, as we could do little to alleviate it beyond giving them flannel shirts and quinine. It is perhaps needless to say that this and the days that followed proved the utter fallaciousness of the information supplied us at Khamti. "Pessimus" had assured us we should have no more torrent scrambles; we had little else. As for Hoé Daung, the minister, he had told us that we could have no difficulty in finding the way, as there was no choice; he might have added that, for the most part, there was no route to lose. Without the guide it must have been impossible for us to guess it.

We ascended the valley of the Nam-Tsaï, finding plentiful signs of forest rangers in the spoor of antelope, tigers, and rhinoceros. We had to thank the latter for many an enlarged path and flattened bank. Poulanghing, the guide, explained that these are two-horned rhinos, and that their flesh is good. Their prints were not so large as those which I had seen in Sundarbunds. In this forest march we came to a clearing where was a muddy spring, a likely lair for wild pig. In a large tree was built a machán or small bamboo platform, whence a hunter could command the descent of tiger or rhinoceros to drink.

Near our midday halt we had a stroke of luck in the discovery of two loads of rice placed under cover, no doubt by some folk against their return from Assam. It was a godsend and a

temptation ; we had thirteen days' food left, and the guide declared there were fifteen stages at least before we could hope to reach a village. We therefore did not hesitate, but took one basket, and left some rupees in its place. During the day we passed a crest of 6,175 feet. More evidence of tigers abounding ; by the site of our camp lay the scattered relics of some traveller, said to have been eaten.

2nd (December).—Looking out through the trees on a hilltop, we perceived, right before us, the great chain of separation between the basins of the Irawadi and the Brahmaputra. It appeared of great altitude, and snow covered its rocky summits. In the north-west, at the head of the valley into which we were about to descend, the guide pointed out a dip in the range as the pass over which our route would lie. To counteract the pleasure which the sight gave us, a number of misfortunes assailed us at once, and we saw that Fate was not going to admit us into India without protest. Roux dragged himself into camp under a sharp access of fever which had followed a night chill. Briffaud also was on the sick-list from a similar, though slighter, attack. By the afternoon Joseph and two others were *hors de combat* with ailments and wounds. A half-day halt had to be called.

To further curtail our baggage, my valise was next to go. Some of its contents we put into a lottery for the men, to keep up their spirits. The wag Pétalon drew the chief prize, a pair of double glasses. As for my poor little volumes of V. Hugo and de Musset, my companions for many a month, it was with a pang that I saw their leaves help to kindle a fire for barbarians ; the bird labels and photograph slips were transformed into quills for the ears of the Kioutses, and the pages of a dictionary went for cigarettes.

Before turning in, all hands came for medical treatment, and I allayed their complaints as far as possible with kola, quinine, or opium pills. But it was high time to arrive somewhere; the store of remedies was well-nigh exhausted.

When we again set forward, heavy work fell on the column in hacking a way through the bamboos and creepers. One advantage in this slow progress was that it allowed the more sickly to get up with the main body by nightfall. On the way we started some hornbills that, with enormous beaks and resounding wings, flew over our heads with much clangour. In two spots we saw deserted huts; among the wayfarers who traverse these solitary chains many never complete their journey, victims to tigers or starvation. The first pioneers who penetrated these fastnesses must, I imagine, have done so by degrees, each improving a little on his predecessor.

4th (December).—Roux was so ill as to be unable to move, and Briffaud was not much better. As the situation grew graver, I decided to send on Seran-Seli with a flying column of a few reliable men, and the less robust, the guide, and the Kioutses. We divided the food so as to give ten days' rice at three bowls per diem, and I made up a few papers of kola and quinine for them. His detachment could move fairly, with the exception of one old Christian, whose case caused us anxiety. His heart was weak; and it was a painful sight to see him tottering on with fixed eyes and swollen limbs; he was too feeble any longer to bear a burden. If only we got him to a village, we might save him yet. The main body, consisting of the stronger men, our boys, Joseph, my sick comrades, and myself, must remain where we were for a day. That was the longest we could rest with safety. My further plans were that if on the morrow my two companions were no better,

they should stay where they were, with three men and twelve days' food. *The others, with myself, would push on in the track of Seran-Seli on short rations, remitting or depositing as much* and as often as possible for the rear party, who should follow as they were able. Distressing as it was to leave any sick in the midst of the mountains with such slender resources, this was the only feasible scheme, for the first to reach help would immediately pass it back along the line.

That tedious day of halt we spent in such distractions as each could devise for himself and his fellows. We were twenty-two in camp, including two Kioutses kept back as useful in tracking. We might deem ourselves fortunate to have round us such a loyal, enduring, and plucky band of followers. Actually, on acquainting Anio with the prospect of relinquishing the sick, he and the other Thibetans were for attempting to carry them on their shoulders, but the tangled path rendered litters impracticable.

The 5th (December) found Roux incapable of the exertion of walking, and we put our dispositions into effect. Two men remained with him, and we furnished him with nearly all our little reserve stock of candles, compressed soup, medicine, and tobacco. And so we left our comrade, reluctantly, but with good hope that before many days he would be on our trail. Heaven alone knew what would be the end of all this, and I ardently longed to see our whole troop reunited in the nearest village of Assam.

Briffaud, though much exhausted, resolved to keep going. Our reduced column had rather a hunted aspect, especially forlorn being that of the two Kioutses, who at every halt crouched with their elbows on their knees, shaking in every limb. We bivouacked that night under a big rock that offered a natural shelter in the middle of the forest. There were traces of previous travellers in

five or six small bamboo altars with a few propitiatory grains of rice for the genius of the mountain. Before quitting the spot next morning, we left a line of encouragement for Roux to find when he came along. This was a terrible day in all respects. We made a late start in shivering cold, which was not improved in my own case by an involuntary bath in an icy torrent. Fever, too, laid hold of Joseph. At a little over 7,000 feet we came into the region of conifers, which we had not seen lately, and shortly after reached the snow. It was only ankle deep, but the shoulders of the great chain to our left were spread with flawless folds. From the pass we were on we could see behind us the Nam Phungan valley, the wide depression where Khamti lay, and in the background a tumbled mass of mountains, to the right of which a white line marked the dividing range between the Salwen and the Kiou-kiang; it had not its winter coat when we traversed it. Before us the valley of the Dapha burrowed into the hills, and on our right loomed the dim outline of big Daphaboum. From this point the downward streams we should cross would be bound for the Brahmaputra. We had done with the basin of the Irawadi, and our feet were now in India,—India the rich, India the wonderful, a name to conjure with, and a land to conquer from the days of Alexander to Napoleon. I could hardly believe that our object was so nearly attained, that we had achieved our design in its entirety; explored the Chinese Mekong, fixed the sources of the great English Irawadi, and debouched on India; that it had been reserved for us to fulfil the dream of so many Englishmen, by finding the shortest route from China into India.

But imagination outstripped reality. Soon after passing the col, word was brought that Joseph, far in rear, was prostrated by fever. To forsake him there was certain death, to send back a

man with food to stand by in an exposed, waterless spot would court the loss of both. In this crisis Anio again came to the fore, and volunteered to go back and bring him in; or, if that were impossible, to get him over the pass into shelter. We gave him godspeed and a supply of food. At the same time one of the Kioutses, a rice bearer, dropped behind shaking with cold and fever. We could not stay in the snow, and went on until we came to the ground where the advanced party had passed the preceding night. We found two of them awaiting us with the news that the old Christian had disappeared the evening before. Seran-Seli had searched long and unremittingly, but without success, and it is to be feared the poor fellow crawled into some hole, where he succumbed to his privations, or fell a prey to wild beasts. A great grief fell upon the whole troop at the loss of a member of our united little family—a feeling rendered more melancholy by our inability to recover and bury his body. In the evening, after mealtime, when the moon was up and the wind blew cold off the snow-fields, the men knelt in a circle round the fire with their faces turned towards Tsekou. Even we were shivering; but the Thibetans, with bare limbs and uncovered heads and their tchaupas thrown open at the chest, recited the litanies for the dead. There was something deeply moving in the sight of such simple mourning, and we joined them with sincere reverence. When we set forward on the next morning, the men out of respect left on the spot the few coverings that had been the old man's. And that was all his monument.

7th (December).—Joseph and Anio happily rejoined us; but our concern was transferred to Briffaud and another, who were in a very weak state. We made a short stage, but it was downhill towards the Dapha, and the sun both warmed and cheered us.

There was plenty of talk in the troop of "Kalikata" (Calcutta), and Anio declared that he must learn some English words, notably "wine" and "sugar," for with the former one could laugh at fever and cold. The big heathen, Atong, had a remedy against these foes in a bowl of hot water, into which he scraped a couple of pimentos and some ginger.

Throughout the forenoon of the 8th (December) we followed a wooded track on the left bank of the Nam-Dapha. I went on ahead, and had a regular paper-chase in discovering the blazed trees and broken branches of the advanced column from among the numerous false scents of wild animals. We could not have been far behind the others, for at one place we found the embers of their fire still smouldering, and a mouké or tally, on which were cut some Thibetan signs to warn us that there was no water in front. We therefore provided ourselves with bamboo tubes full, carried in bandolier. A large monkey which I shot proved a welcome addition to the camp kettle. It was of the fair sex, and very tough, but we picked her bones. A wearisome climb had taken it out of us, and the bivouac was one of general dejection. Each one realised that it was a struggle for life now; the Kioutses contradicted themselves every hour. Many footprints of tigers cutting the fresh ones of our men showed the sympathetic creatures had wind of us. But I had no desire here for a return call from those old friends, whose acquaintance I had formerly sought in India, and guns were fired at dusk to warn them off.

9th (December).—We had only rice for one more day and a breakfast. At daybreak Anio despatched the two Kioutses to catch up the leaders, who had two days' more supplies than we, and to tell them to leave a little by the way for us. The march was now along crests, and in the afternoon we viewed through the

trees the end of the mountains and a distant plain, in which the Dihing lay like a ribbon. Safety looked a long way off. The only water we found on this stage was dark and brackish; but we made tea with it, called it coffee, and drank. No stragglers on this day.

10th (December).—The descent continued of a kind which frequent falls had rendered familiar to us, down a watercourse, from rock to rock. In the tops of the trees grey apes with black faces swung by their long tails, and Sao managed with his Winchester to bag a little one, which did not go far among so many. A thread of smoke to our right attracted us, as it had been intended, to the site of the previous camp; and there, on a bamboo decorated with plantain leaves, Seran-Seli had hung a little bag of rice, showing that our Kioutses had overtaken him. This furnished us with a meal, which was taken at once. Two more men (Tatou and Pétalon) fell out. We could not stop for them, but left them in charge of each other. Anio now marched so fast, almost at a trot, that I could scarce keep up with him. A mountain river of considerable dimensions and strength next confronted us, and demanded three separate fordings at spots marked for us by pyramids of stone. The water was cold and the bottom ragged, so that the performance was not an enjoyment. Wet to the waist, we mended our pace, hoping to come in sight of a village at every bend of the stream. Instead, to our chagrin, we stumbled on to a bank of sand, where further footprints ended. Some tree trunks thrust into mid-current showed that someone had attempted a bridge, and failed. There was no evading it,—into the water we must go again. But we had had enough for the day, it would keep till the morning; and I called a halt.

The men had nothing to eat, but there was still some tea, so we

crowded round the fire, and were not more down-hearted than was necessary. This time, at any rate, we were at the foot of the formidable chains for good. Had I been in the humour to admire nature at this period, I should have been struck with wonder at the scene which the sunset lit for us. The head of the valley was closed by a bold buttress of the remoter mountains whence we had come. Low down by the river the trees already lay in softened dimness, but the departing light was moving slowly upwards from slope to sheer, blending bands of deepening heather shadows at the base as though laid with the broad sweep of a painter's hand, until aloft as it touched the cameo-tinted snow the purple paled to violet and the violet blushed to rose. This was perhaps the last look we should have of the Dzayul chain, where its final limits reach the borderland of India.

11th (December).—Abandoned the tent and other portions of baggage. After reconnoitring the bridge end and finding deep water, the men scattered up and down the banks to seek a passage, but returned nonplused. As they huddled like sheep and hung back, Sao cut the knot by plunging in and struggling through,—the water was up to the arm-pits, and bitterly cold. The whole of the day we followed the windings of the valley, now on the margin, now in the woods to cut off promontories, and in narrow places we laid bamboo slides. The work was nearly as bad as that by the Kioukiang. Empty stomachs caused our knees to knock and our heads to swim, and the advance left a very vague impression on our minds. Anio had got ahead of us, still bearing his pack, and, notwithstanding that he had had nothing to eat since noon of the day previous, he sang or whistled as loud as he could to cheer us whenever he stopped. About four o'clock I heard shouts and a gunshot from the front, and with my field-glasses distinguished

more than one figure. Presently we came up with Anio sitting on a stone, and with him Iayo, one of the Thibetans of the leading column, and a Kioutse. Best of all to our famished eyes, they had rice for us. In a short time we were seated round a bowl, which to my mind tasted better than the finest dinner at the Café Anglais.

The news of the first division showed that they too had been in a critical situation. Three Kioutses had been lost, and only found that morning; when the guide cheerfully proposed to have them killed. But Seran-Seli had fallen in with four hunters belonging to a small village, which we might hope to reach next evening or the day after. Thus reassured, we called for volunteers to start back for Tatou and Pétalon, the two we had left yesterday. At first the reward offered did not meet with any immediate response; their sufferings were too fresh to make any anxious to retrace that route. Eventually Iayo and a Kioutse declared themselves willing, and departed. Poor Iayo's courageous devotion deserved a better end than he shortly afterwards met from sickness in Calcutta.

Throughout the 12th (December) we proceeded more leisurely along the shores of the Nam-Dihing. The hills receded, and left room for many branches and islets and sandy bars, on which traces of wild oxen were frequent. Nevertheless we had not done with crossings yet, and four times in as many miles did we ford the stream. The end came at length, and quickening down an excellent path we saw with joyful eyes a field of millet and a house.

Seran-Seli and the guide were waiting for us. The last fourteen days had made us feel like shipwrecked sailors sighting land again. Our satisfaction was only marred by the thought of those still

behind us in the mountains. We could not but feel very anxious till we could succour them. As an immediate measure, people were set to work preparing rice for the relief column.

The village we had lit upon was Bouniang, on a confluent of the Nam-Dapha, two days from Bishi. The inhabitants and their language were strange to us. They were styled Khamangs by our guide. These Khamangs, I discovered, were no other than the Mishmis, the English calling them by the latter and the Singphos by the former name. I was glad of the chance of seeing these noted Mishmis, of such fierce repute, among whom Fathers Krik and Bourry met their death, and who are opposing the English by the Dzayul valley. They are more like the Païs than the Kioutses, being almost brown, with rather large noses and cheek-bones, and small chins. They wear their hair in a knot on the top of their head, and are clad in a sleeveless coat to the knees, open in front, and a loin cloth; over their shoulders they occasionally throw a covering like the Païs, either striped brown or all scarlet. Their ears are pierced with a metal tube, to which sometimes a ring is hung. Slung across the shoulder are a slender sword, and a pouch made of the skin of a wild animal. The women have in front of their hair a silver crescent held behind by cowries, and the knot above is transfixed by wooden pins. A thin silver circlet with a small cock's feather is fastened to the upper part of the ear, and necklets of brass wire or glass ware are also seen. They wear a sort of waistcoat, brown, short-sleeved, and cut in to the figure before and behind.

The dwellings were small, and on piles. The construction of their tombs seemed to point to a more religious, or at any rate superstitious, character than that of the Kioutses we had hitherto met, nor were they less distinguished from them in their bellicose

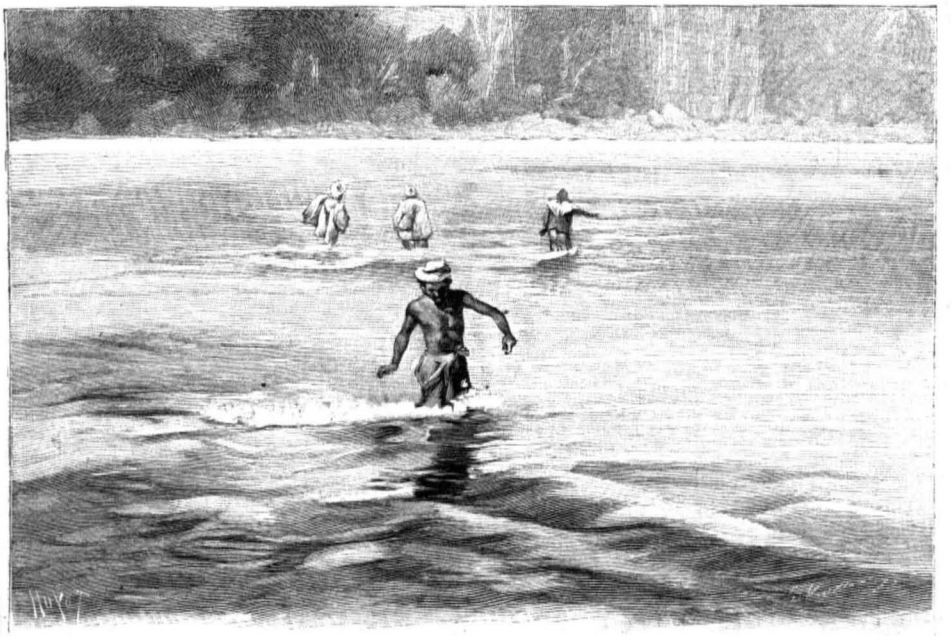
humour. A couple of our men having dug up some potatoes in a field, the chief of Bouniang made for them with a knife.

Some of our folk had gone to a neighbouring village to forage, and now returned at the head of a company clothed in all respects like Païs, and resembling them also in face. They proved to be Singphos. Their leader wore a long toga of Thibetan poulou, and brought us a gift of eggs, fish, and rice.

By the next morning sufficient supplies were collected to start off a rescue party of three men under Oumbo, with enough for a six days' march and back, revictualling Roux's and Iayo's detachments *en route*. I felt easier when they had gone: provided that our comrade had succeeded in passing the col, he would be out of danger.

We ourselves proceeded across the valley of the Dapha. This river rolls down from the north in many branches over a pebbly bottom, and was perhaps a hundred yards from side to side. Higher up it must have an imposing course; here it was easily fordable. On the farther shore we came to three long buildings, each over 60 feet long, as at Mélékeu. This was Daphagang. We did not at first understand the meaning of our cold reception; we were prevented passing through a house, and told that it was *de règle* to make your entry and exit by the same door, and though live stock abounded there was an evident disinclination to deal. The enigma, however, was soon solved. The chief being rich did not want money; what he desired was a certificate and some European object at our hands. We luckily had a pair of double glasses left, and the clouds were immediately dispelled. The language of these Singphos differed again from previous idioms; they were familiar with several Hindustani words.

We had thought that henceforward our progress was to be little more than a promenade. But we were undeceived in several particulars. On continuing we had a splendid path until midday through trees, among which we startled many large monkeys and hornbills, and elephant trails were fresh and misleading. But after that the track was lost, and for several miles we had to tear our way through thorny undergrowth and



Ford on the Nam-Dihing.

stony nullahs. When we struck the Nam-Dihing on the left bank, a precipitous bluff stood full in our way, with no passage between its base and the water. It had therefore to be assailed in flank, and proved a hard nut to crack on account of constant backsliding and falling stones dislodged by the leading files. It was a curious landmark, obtruding itself 100 feet high from the otherwise level surroundings. Down by the river again we found a reed hut with four Singphos fishing. They sold us

twenty grand fish, mahseers, many weighing over 5 lbs. If I had had lines, and had not been so tired, I must have joined them.

The valley of the Nam-Dihing is wide, and bounded by low wooded hills. The river-bed in which we walked for some distance testified to the size of the river in flood. As it was, we had to ford it in many arms, and at the village of Mong-Pien to cross by raft. At the latter place we were well received by the people, who let off guns in our honour, and amongst whom we met a young man who had been guide to Colonel Woodthorpe in 1875 (1885?) and later to Mr. Gray. Bishi was declared to be but a short distance farther.

Chief at Bishi.

At our approach the aged chief of Bishi came out to meet us, and escorted us to a house where we made ourselves comfortable once more within four walls. This was on the 16th (December).

During the three days which we spent at Bishi we lived on the fat of the land, and the time passed agreeably, but for

anxiety on Roux's account. The men did not prepossess me very favourably even in comparison with the Khamti Thaïs, being their inferiors both in industry and civilisation. Round the fire in the evening it was interesting to reckon up the different tongues which were trying mutually to converse: they were nine,—Chinese, Thibetan, Mosso, Lissou, Loutse,[1] Thaï, Singpho, Mishmi, and Hindu, called here Monam.

In a corner of an open space of the village were two rows of five small holes with two larger ones at either end, into which the people tossed small pebbles. I did not understand the game, but I had seen something similar played by negroes at Majunga. Outside the village there was a clearing beneath some large trees, which seemed as though intended as a place of prayer. Along the path that led to it trunks of trees, cut longitudinally, faced each other in pairs, with a third, the bark of which hung in shreds from half its height, in the middle. The adjacent woods appeared full of game.

On the 17th (December) Iayo, Tatou, and Pétalon came in. The two latter had given themselves up for lost by the time aid reached them. They said that they found in the sand the footprints of a tiger which had regularly followed our column, like a shark in the wake of a ship.

By the 19th (December) we had hoped to have news of Roux; but none coming up to that date, and the feeding of so large a number of visitors taxing the resources of the place, we deemed it expedient to move on by slow marches into the plain. Accordingly our troop left Bishi on the 20th (December) in the morning. Sao, Joseph, and I were to follow at noon. We

[1] The Kioutses from Singleng spoke a slightly altered dialect. They called themselves Métouans.

intrusted a letter and some money for Roux to the chief, with injunctions that as soon as he should be signalled a messenger should be sent after us. I had just gone into the house, when Sao came running in, calling, "Here he is!", and "Loutajen!" shouted Joseph at the same moment from without.

The joy with which we met may be imagined. We both breathed freely again, and a great weight was lifted off my mind. The whole party was safe and sound, and could afford to look back upon deliverance from a very near thing.

Roux's story was as follows: For two whole days after our departure he had been unable to move. The fever then abated, but left him very weak. By the time they got to the pass fresh snow had nearly obliterated our tracks. They were disturbed by the nightly proximity of a tiger, doubtless the same that snuffed us, whose respect evidently decreased as numbers diminished. When they reached the Nam-Dihing they were stopped by a spate, and one of them narrowly escaped drowning while trying to make a bridge. As it was, he was cast ashore on the wrong side, and passed the night without fire or food, and soaked. The "Doctor" and the other meanwhile retraced their steps through the woods in the dark in search of a ford, with the agreeable reflection that they were cut off by a big river with almost empty haversacks. Their disquietude was augmented by the discovery of our abandoned baggage; they dreaded lest the next turn should disclose the starving remnants of our column. The relief did not fall in with them a moment too soon.

Our whole strength reassembled at Khagan, with hearty congratulations at our reunion. From there we descended in four days to Sadiya. Everywhere our welcome was cordial. The English Political Agent at the latter place, to whom we had notified

our coming by courier from Bishi, had issued orders that every possible facility should be given us, and himself kindly sent us a most acceptable present of preserves.

On the 21st (December) we found elephants awaiting us, provided by the same gentleman's forethought; and for the first time for months we were able to spare our own legs and smoke our pipes in luxury.

The intermediate villages were mainly Singpho, and a few Thaï, the latter easily recognisable from their religious posts in shape like elliptical roofed houses, such as we had already seen in Khamti. The scenery much resembled that of Laos; dwellings appeared amid palms and plantains. Between the villages we traversed extensive woods and paddy-fields, where the startled buffaloes wheeled into line of battle as we passed. We certainly formed a queer troop. At the head we rode on elephants, and behind us wound our porters, their grey tchaupas contrasting with the brighter garments of the Singphos in the sun. We might have been taken for a string of prisoners or a procession of penitents. Nam's behaviour at this time was that of a little child; he was

Singphos.

continually stopping to smoke pipes with the villagers and getting lost. It was a wonder he was not left behind. At the large village of Ninglou we were received by the white-bearded chief, who, with his son, was clad in Chinese robes of gorgeous silk, with a gold dragon embroidered on the front. This venerable personage was a Singpho of importance; three men behind him bore a white umbrella and two red banners. He presented a letter to us from Mr. Needham at Sadiya. It was a pleasure to me to remark several Indians at Ninglou. After a year spent among the peoples of the Mongol race, these Aryans, with their lively eyes, profiles, and beards like our own, seemed almost brothers; as indeed the Indians are, elder brothers. Joseph's delight, too, at seeing a real shop again and comparing its prices with those of Tali, was amusing.

Singpho Woman.

On the 24th (December) Roux and I descended the remaining reaches of the Nam-Dihing for some hours in a pirogue to the Brahmaputra, which at this point was 100 yards to 200 yards

wide, with a slow current. In the west and north-west we perceived the distant ranges behind which lies an unexplored territory, the Tsangpo valley. In the course of the afternoon we disembarked at Sadiya, where hearty greetings were exchanged with Mr. Needham.

Sadiya is the extreme north-east outpost of the British Indian Empire. Mr. Needham's position is that of Assistant to the Political Service, and he is in supreme and sole charge. He has passed twenty-eight years in India, and exercises the functions of Resident, judge, and commandant of the troops, of whom there are one hundred under native officers. Another five hundred sepoys could be summoned by telegraph within twelve hours, should emergency arise. In addition to the importance involved by his relations with the frontier tribes, he governs in and around Sadiya more than sixty thousand people. After twenty-eight years passed in India, thirteen of which have been spent in the district, he speaks, besides Hindustani,—Bengali, Thaï (of which he has compiled a Grammar), Singpho, Assamese, Abor (also with a Grammar in preparation), and Mishmi. What an example to France of the right man in the right place! and what a simplification of the world of *vice-résidents*, *commis de résidence*, and *chanceliers* all engaged in manipulating the papers which we deem indispensable to the administration of a province. Here, one hand controls the whole. It is true that he is well paid, and that after thirty years' service he will be entitled to a pension. He submits his claim for travelling expenses, and it is discharged to him direct. There is none of that system of mistrust to which we are too prone. The English place implicit confidence in the zeal of their officers to work their hardest for the interests of their empire.

The pacification of Upper Assam has not been an easy undertaking. For many years the English have had to maintain frequent feuds with the Khamtis and the Singphos. At present the country is fairly quiet. The Singphos have been allowed their independence under a chief, who reports to the Imperial Government the movements and intentions of the neighbouring tribesmen. In return he receives a subsidy. It was he whom we saw at Ninglou. His subjects pay no taxes to the English, but they are sometimes employed as coolies on such public works as the making of a road or a railway.

To the north the Himalaya Mountains, through which the Tsangpo and the Lohit or Dzayul rivers fret their way by narrow gorges, are infested by tribes which, although adjacent, differ from each other both in speech and customs. This aggregation of little-known and inaccessible peoples, always wild and generally fierce, constitutes a regular Babel. Whence they came; how, having pitched on the southern flank of the Himalayas overlooking India, they have yet preserved their individual distinctions; and why, if they are of a common stock, they are so dissimilar, are problems still unsolved.

Among these populations the most important is that of the Abors, who occupy the hills to the north and north-west of Sadiya. Their name for themselves is Pandam. Next to them come the Miris, who in successive raids burned three villages in the plain. The Abors having killed some native soldiers in an ambuscade, a punitive expedition was recently sent against them, and encountered great physical difficulties. Mr. Needham described them as having no chief, and as making slaves. Their villages are large collections of from seven hundred to a thousand dwellings. They invariably put all prisoners to the sword, and

strip the dead. In the late operations the troops had to escalade abattis 1,800 yards long formed of stones and trunks of trees. Seven or eight villages were burnt, their cattle slain, and their cultivation trampled by elephants. In this way the English make their power felt. At the time of our visit the Abors were blockaded in their valleys, and forbidden to sell anything in the plain on pain of death. We, however, had a sight of a few who had been allowed to come down and tender their submission to the Government with offerings of the large short-horned black cattle called gayals. They had olive complexions, straight-set eyes, nose and mouth large. From their habit of shaving the crown of the head, they looked at a distance as if they had caps. They wore a short-sleeved red garment and small loin cloth. Some Mishmis whom we also saw at Sadiya had small conical hats of plaited bamboo. We were shown some of their earthen vessels, which seemed to corroborate the account of the pandits of parts of Thibet where stone utensils are in vogue.

During our three days' stay at Sadiya, Mr. Needham drove us round the neighbourhood. A loaded Winchester and a revolver were advisable to guard against ambushes, which are frequent. It is by clearing the bush, the gradual making of roads, and the establishment of small blockhouses with patrols between them, that little by little the settlement of the district is being effected.

From Sadiya the descent to Calcutta is easy. A few hours of pirogue to Talap, and thence by rail to Dibrugarh. As far as the eye could reach the country was covered with tea plantations.

From the official statistics of tea culture in Assam for 1894 we took the following figures:—Acres under cultivation, 268,796; number of gardens, 823; permanent labourers and overseers, 331,807; temporary ditto, 98,043. Picking, approx., 94,829,059

lbs. In Calcutta the pound fetches on an average from seven to eleven annas. We visited a garden at Talap. The tea is not planted on the hills but well in the plain, on ground cleared but not manured, with intervals of 4 or 5 feet between the bushes. Two coolies are enough to an acre. When the leaves have been picked, in March and September, the plant is cut back to within 6 inches of the ground. The best seasons yield 900 lbs. an acre per annum; the tea begins to pay after three or four years. The plantation at Talap was of 1,350 acres, and the usual number of plants is 2,700 on an acre.

In the centre of the plantation are the coolie villages, the large two-storeyed bungalows of the Europeans, and the buildings where the leaf is prepared. These houses are often as much as 130 feet long, built of bricks, with corrugated zinc roofs. In some is the steam machinery, and in others the drying process is carried on.

The prosperity of the tea plantations of Assam is due not only to the spirit of enterprise in those who made them, but also in a large measure to the labour regulations. The coolies are recruited in Bengal, whence the journey of each one costs a hundred and fifty rupees; and they engage of their own free will for a term of three years. Should anyone during that time desert, and be captured, he is first imprisoned and then handed over to his master. Escape is not easy, for to stay in Hindu Assam is to be retaken, and to seek refuge with the Singphos or the hill tribes is to be enslaved. The intervention of the Government, which we should call forfeit for breach of contract, secures the employer. "If we had not this safeguard against any who chose to break their agreement," said an overseer to me, "we could not risk the capital which we put into the plantation."

Of course, when recruiting, the usual attractions are held out to the men,—healthy country, plenty to eat, nothing to do. These enticements are no more than the baits employed for the enlistment of soldiers or sailors.

If the employers can count on the support of the Government to ensure the conditions of their labour, the men on their side can also claim the protection of the same power. Twice a year the plantations are visited by official inspectors, who inquire into the treatment of the coolies, see that they are properly housed, and that hospitals are provided for the sick and schools for the children. It is this direct interposition of the Government of the Queen to which Assam owes the opulence and air of thriving vigour which I envy for our own colonies. In Annam, as I have said, we possess splendid land well suited for the culture of tea. The French colonist ought similarly to be able to look for the help or at least the non-hostility of his Government in his efforts to achieve fortune.

From Dibrugarh we descended the Brahmaputra by steamer. The service is a daily one, and the boats excellent. Along the river banks torpid crocodiles basked on sandy bars, and offered tempting shots for our carbines. After the tea country came the fine plain of Assam, with frequent towns—Tespour, Gauhati, Goalapura; at each numerous steamers lined the bank. On all sides were proofs of wealth, power, strength, and success. At the stopping-places we usually went ashore to stretch our legs, see the market, or loiter before the shops, where to our unaccustomed eyes all seemed fresh. On such occasions our men would follow us about, exclaiming at each step, like school-boys. And right well had they earned their holiday, after the life they had led and the trials they had gone through, and the

manner in which they had given us their entire trust and devotion without a murmur. This was paradise to them, and they plied us with astonished questions. Like ourselves, they were struck by the prosperity of the country. We told them how the "*Inquijens*" (English) had only been in Assam for fifty years; but to attempt an explanation of the reasons for their welfare to a Thibetan comprehension was too complicated. Moreover, in the colonial spirit of our rivals there is not a little affinity to the commercial side of the Chinese.

As I admire the work of the English, I look round upon ourselves, and think of what is wanting to make our colonies prosperous like theirs. It is continuity of policy; it is the grand freedom of the colonist, backed up by his Government; it is a simplicity of administration in the hands of able men who know their way and take it.

There is no use in hiding one's head ostrich-like under a stone. It is better to look the truth in the face. In no set of circumstances has γνῶθι σεαυτόν more significance than in colonial affairs, in which it behoves us to take a lesson.

And all the while that I am making these reflections and comparisons I cannot dispossess my mind of the thought that the whole of this rich expanse ought to have been ours.

"'*Inquijen*' *prehendunt bonas terras!*" cried Joseph as we descended into the plains of Assam. Yes; the English have taken India, and we let them do it. The ineptness and ignorance of a monarch with ill counsellors allowed our rivals to win an empire whose foundations were laid by a few resolute Frenchmen. Yet, if there is any consolation to be derived under the loss of one of our children, it is that of seeing it grown into a strong man, and of knowing that to make it so its guardians

followed the lines of its first instructor. Over India the mighty shade of Dupleix ever watches. Though the patriot died in his own country, poor, unknown, and deserted, his memory lives. No one knew better how to render justice to the generous and wide-reaching schemes of Dupleix than his greatest antagonist, Clive. It is with the same perception that Colonel Malleson has written (*Hist. of the French in India*):—"If, in the present day, there exist among her citizens regrets at the loss of an empire so vast, so powerful, so important, . . . it will be impossible for France herself . . . to suppress a glow of pride at the recollection that it was a child of her soil who dared first to aspire to that great dominion, and that by means of the impulse which he gave, though followed out by his rivals, the inhabitants of Hindostan have become permanently united to their long-parted kinsmen—the members of the great family of Europe."

Thibetan Dwelling.

APPENDICES