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BURMA

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CHAPTER III

ACROSS THE YOMAS TO TAUNGDWINGYI

AMONG the many friends I made in Rangoon were the heads of the Bombay-Burma Trading Corporation, who kindly invited me to visit their forest of Taungdwingyi and see something of the teak industry and jungle life. Having purchased the necessary camp equipment I made a comfortable journey by the night train to Prome, accompanied by Mr. MacLennan, their forest manager. The first break of dawn found us running through paddy fields, pleasantly broken up by palm groves and clumps of forest trees, partly veiled by the morning mists which still hung heavy on the land. As we approached Prome station the first rays of sunlight were illuminating the golden pinnacles and dome of the Shwe Tsan Daw Pagoda, just visible through the palm trees which hid the base of the hill upon which it was built. It appeared very enticing, but as it was now 6.30 A.M., and we had to start by steamer at 7 A.M., Prome and its pagoda had to be reserved for a further visit.

As we entered the station Mr. Litchfield, of the

Across the Yomas to Taungdwingyi

crest in rivalry with the ever-present pagoda. Our steamer started promptly, the character of the banks varying little as we proceeded upstream, though the almost instantaneous disappearance of the morning fogs opened up more extended vistas, and enabled one to judge better as to the general characteristics of the scenery.¹

On the river banks are Burmese villages constructed mainly of bamboo, while nearly every knoll is crowned by a pagoda or a monastery. On the sand-banks of the river are fishing huts, which will be washed away next rise, and at frequent intervals rafts of enormous size drift slowly towards the teak mills in Rangoon. Smaller craft of various kinds, under sail or drifting with the stream, together with the animated crowds which, in search of profit or amusement, thronged the landing-places at which we stopped, kept one's interest alive until, about sun-down, we reached the town of Thayetmyo. Here we had to transfer from the mail-steamer to a small ferry-boat, on which we spent the night.

Leaving early in the morning, a short run brought us to Meegyongyai, where it had been arranged for coolies, bullock gharries, and ponies to be waiting to

¹ These jungle-clad hills are, I am told, full of game, and I heard of one particularly sportsmanlike event which took place hereabout. A gentleman coming down the river in a steamer, in searching the banks with his field-glasses, picked up what he took to be the trail of a rhinoceros, and persuading the captain to put him ashore, he with his "shikarri" followed the trail for several hours, eventually coming up with and killing a fine "rhino," the head of which he was able to take away.