



PICTURESQUE  
INDIA

Handbook  
for  
European  
Travellers

BY  
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its monotony; but the rise from the plains to Darjiling is probably the grandest railway journey in the world.

The railway is really a light tram, a Tee rail of about forty pounds



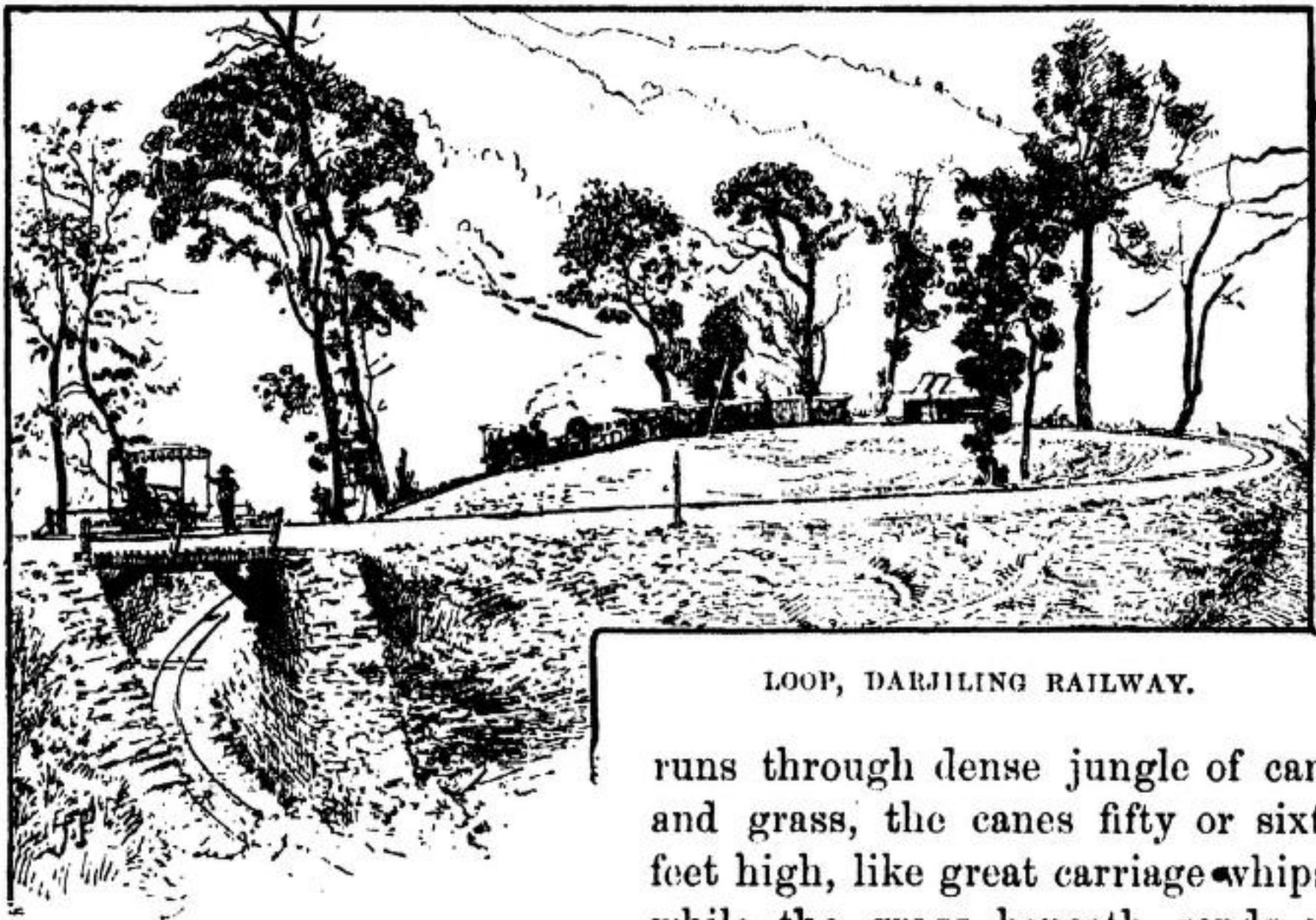
ON THE DARJILING RAILWAY.

per yard, laid for the greater part of the way along the old trunk road through Sikkim to Tibet. To increase the radii of the needful curves, many deviations have been made from the road, and practically there is now a pretty even gradient of one in twenty-eight from the foot of the hills to Darjiling. The line winds in and out along the hill sides, often running along the edge of tremendous gorges and precipices, now on one side, now on the other. At one spot the line rises in a complete figure of 8, at another a hill is climbed in a series of zigzags, on which the engine is alternately at the front and rear of the train, now drawing, now pushing. The locomotives are sturdy little engines weighing ten tons, built by Sharp, Stewart & Co.

The open carriages hold six, in comfortable armchairs.

A formidable break is provided for each. They are short four-wheeled bogies, for the line twists like a snake, and the curves are so sharp that the little train is in the shape of the letter S for two-thirds of the journey. A good shaking-up might reasonably be looked for, but the travelling is as smooth and steady as a trunk line in England. The road runs the whole distance through dense primeval forest, except

where sunny spurs of mountains have been cleared for tea-gardens, making, with their bungalows and offices, a pleasant break in the landscape. At every turn fresh beauty reveals itself. Behind, stretching away to the horizon, is the vast fertile plain of Bengal, bathed in sunlight, with rivers meandering out from the mountain gorges like bright silver ribbons. Before, the first ranges of the Himalyas rising from 5,000 to 8,000 feet above the plain, forest clad to their summits. As the train commences the ascent, the line



LOOP, DARJILING RAILWAY.

runs through dense jungle of cane and grass, the canes fifty or sixty feet high, like great carriage whips, while the grass beneath sends up

blades fifteen feet, and seed-stalks twenty to twenty-five feet from the ground, with huge feathery tops. These impenetrable wildernesses are the haunts of tigers, rhinoceros, buffaloes, bears, sambhar deer, and wild hogs. As the train ascends, the jungle gives place to forest; oaks, banyans, mimosas, acacias, fig, India-rubber, and mulberry trees are all plentiful for the first 2,000 or 3,000 feet of ascent, and these are interspersed with great clumps of giant bamboo sixty feet high, with culms as thick as a man's thigh. At 3,700 feet above the plain both peach and almond trees are in full blossom in January, and at 4,500 feet there are fine spreading chestnuts. At 5,000 feet appear the first of those beautiful Himalyan tree-ferns, fifteen or twenty feet high. A little further on a small tea plantation is



passed, where the planter, in clearing his jungle, had spared some forty or fifty of these graceful trees, and very pretty they look standing out from the even spread of the low tea-bushes. 2,000 feet below the summit the train often enters a dense cloud, but on passing over and running down into Darjiling, clear weather is generally reached, the magnificent valley of the Ranjit and the snowy heights of Kinchinjanga bursting upon the sight in all the splendour of the setting sun.

Darjiling lives under the shadow of Kinchinjanga, in the heart of the great Himalyan Range. The giant mountain fills the window of the comfortable English Hotel, the "Woodlands," perched on the summit of a little hill, which is only twice the height of Snowdon or Ben Lomond. The station is 7,200 feet above Calcutta, yet when I was there in January, 1889, roses, nasturtiums, and lupins were blossoming in the garden, and wild raspberries were plentiful in the evergreen forest which surrounds the town.

No pen can give any adequate description of the stupendous magnificence of the situation and surroundings of Darjiling. It is at the end of a long wooded spur of Sinchul, a mountain about 9,000 feet high, which projects its steep sides out into an amphitheatre, whose floor is paved with modest hills 6,000 or 8,000 feet above the sea, and whose walls are the mightiest giants of the mighty Himalyas. Standing on Observatory Hill, the very end of the spur, looking west, the eye travels round the amphitheatre, dwelling in turn on the icy summits of Janu, 25,300 feet above the sea; Kabur, 24,000; Pandim, 22,000; Narsing, 18,200; Chomiamo, 23,300; Yakcham, 19,200; Kamhenjhan, 22,500; then a succession of unnamed snowy peaks lead on to Donkhia, 23,200, and other mountains of Bhutan. These fine sonorous words are fitting names for these Himalyan giants. Between these mountains, which stretch in a chain of over 200 miles in extent, are continuous successions of snow-fields and glaciers, and in the centre of the whole range rises their glorious monarch, Kinchinjanga, whose crown of ice rears itself five clear miles above the plain of Bengal. These mountains are from thirty to sixty miles distant from Darjiling, but their height is so immense that they could not be seen much nearer. Between Sinchul and Kinchinjanga, across the Ranjit Valley, stretches a chain of mountains from 10,000 to 12,000 feet. On this platform Kinchinjanga itself is raised. Its flanks are great granite

carts were being unladen, and their contents packed on the backs of tiny ponies, which would take them two days' journey towards the front, the rest of the way they would be carried on by coolies. Presently our food arrived, and by the light of one lamp on a wall, and a candle stuck in a bottle, we had dinner, and soon after went to bed, somewhat tired with our twenty-one miles ride.

“*Nov. 25.*—After breakfast, at which we were joined by one of the



BHUTIAS AT BREAKFAST.

contractors looking after the transport, we left Tista and rode along still by the river. The road very much cut up by the ox carts, a number of which we met, some drawn by small, others by good sized oxen, but all requiring a good deal of prodding and shouting at to get them to drag their loads through the mud and mire. By eleven the sun was very hot, and the road so near the river's edge that there was in places very little shade, the jungle on our side still very thick, and the hills across the river covered also up to the summit with thick jungle. At 1:30, after eleven miles ride, we reached the rest-house of



Kâligura, very prettily situated under trees with the road and some native huts below on the river. To the right is an iron bridge, under which the Kâli, or Black river, now dry, flows to join the Tista. The Tista, here takes another bend, so that there are three valleys joining here, all alike, covered up to the top of the hills with thick jungle. We sketched and photographed, and after dinner sat outside watching the stars and talking to a native engineer who had just arrived, and who told us that the forests belong to Government and contained wild elephants, rhinoceros, and a few tigers, and that during the rains the valley is so feverish that even the coolies refused to work without extra pay. The Kâligura rest-house smaller than the one at Tista but better furniture and a bath.

“*Nov. 26.*—Up early and off by eight, riding still for some miles along the banks of the river, the country gradually getting more open and the hill lower. In about two hours we forded a small river in company with many ox carts, and found on the other side a good-sized village where huts of bamboos were being erected for the troops coming down from Sikkim. Here we left the Tista and the woods began to get much thinner until, at the end of an avenue of trees, we could see the plains. Several native villages were to be seen along the road, and we met a running postman taking mails for the troops. Under one of the last group of trees we had tiffin and then made up our minds to face the heat and finish our ride, although it was midday; and it was indeed hot, and the road had been most carefully made to avoid every bit of shade. We constantly saw villages ahead of us under clumps of trees, but our road took us always between them through fields of rice and quite straight across the hot plains. After about four miles we reached Siliguri and got off at the large Dâk Bungalow there, most thankful for the shade and some good tea which the Khansamah brought us. Were we to take the ride over again we should ride up instead of down, arranging for carriers and ponies to meet us on the arrival of the morning train from Calcutta and get the ride across the hot plains over before the sun was high; the steep path up at the end to Darjiling would be much pleasanter to ride up than down.”

There are many interesting and beautiful excursions to be made from Darjiling, and since the British troops entered Sikkim, in 1888, much has been done to improve old and develop new roads. The principal road into Sikkim is good as far as Gnatong, seventy-two