

*From the Very Rev^d the Dean of St David's
in the name of the Author*

A

PARSON'S HOLIDAY;

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF A

TOUR IN INDIA, BURMA, AND CEYLON,

IN THE

WINTER OF 1882-83.

BY

W. OSBORN B. ALLEN,

VICAR OF SHIRBURN, OXON.

TENBY:

F. B. MASON, PRINTER, "OBSERVER" OFFICE.

1885.

From Benares I had a long railway journey of 475 miles to Calcutta. The time taken was about eighteen hours, and the line lay through a very thickly populated country. Every acre seemed cultivated, and the land was occupied in every corner. The population is, I believe, thicker in Lower Bengal than in any other part of India, and in some districts there are 900 people to the square mile. I had very little opportunity of seeing Calcutta, as I only stopped long enough for a bath and breakfast, and then drove across the city to take the train for Darjeeling. I had been advised to hasten there as quickly as possible, as the weather in the hills becomes unsettled about the middle of December, and the nights very cold. The great sight of Darjeeling is the view of the snowclad peaks, but later on in the winter these are often obscured by rain and mists for days together. It would have been disappointing to arrive at that hill station and find oneself in the clouds. So I was advised to hurry onwards for fear of losing the fine weather.

The distance from Calcutta to Darjeeling is about 350 miles. The first part of the journey lies through a flat and uninteresting country. At sunset we reached the Ganges, which we crossed by a steam ferry, and entered another train, which was waiting. We travelled all through the night, and in the early morning found ourselves at the foot of the hills. Then began the great interest of the journey, viz., the climb up the lower slopes of the Himalayas to the plateau on which Darjeeling is built. This is effected by a very narrow gauge railway with extremely powerful engines. The gauge is only two-and-a-half feet, and the carriages are five-and-a-half feet broad, and thus project on each side beyond the wheels. By means of this narrow gauge the train is enabled to go round very sharp curves, and thus to ascend the hill in steep zigzags. The distance from Siliguri at the foot of the hills to Darjeeling is 48 miles, and this distance is accomplished in eight hours, during which one as-

cends about 7000 feet. It was the most beautiful railway journey I ever took. At first we passed through a broad strip of swampy jungle, called the Terai, at the foot of the hills, which is so malarious and unhealthy that none can live in it, and in many parts it is the home of the tiger and rhinoceros. Then as the ascent began, the hills on each side were seen covered with dense wood and undergrowth. Creepers twined everywhere, often with stems as thick as small trees. Butterflies of gorgeous colours flew about through the undergrowth, and far above one got glimpses of heights still to be ascended. Often we could see the track above our heads round which we were presently to wind, and long distances had to be traversed in the zigzag to win a very small rise in perpendicular height. Often the rail ran alongside the mountain road or pass, which had been used from time immemorial, and then one saw numbers of the hill men, journeying to or from Tibet with strings of small active ponies, laden with merchandise. This was the only method a few years ago, before the railway was made, for supplying Darjeeling with stores, and these are still the only merchants who cross the high passes of the Himalayas, and penetrate into the unknown country beyond our northern frontier. Wild looking, dark-faced, wiry men they appeared, and each was armed with a long knife or short sword in a wooden sheath, which could be used either for cutting food or hacking down branches in the jungle, or as a weapon of offence very dangerous at close quarters.

As we got higher the view over the plains beneath was spread before us like a map. We could look far to the southward, and see the rich flat land with winding streams and cultivated fields shut out from the cold north by

"The stainless ramps of huge Himāla's wall."

We passed many tea plantations, but at this season of the year there was little to be done except weeding.