

MY EXPERIENCES

IN

MANIPUR AND THE NAGA HILLS

BY THE LATE

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR JAMES JOHNSTONE
K.C.S.I.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR

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and pitched our tent on the site of the lines of my old detachment, which I had commanded twelve years before. What a change! Trees that I had remembered as small, had grown large, and some that were planted since I left, already a fair size.

In the morning we received a perfect ovation. People who had known me before, crowded to see me and pay their respects, many of them bringing their children born since I had left. All this was pleasant enough and greatly delighted my wife, but we had to proceed on our way, and it is always difficult to get one's followers to move from a civilised place, where there is a bazaar, into the jungle, and henceforth our road lay through jungle, the Nambor forest beginning about five miles from Golaghat. At last coolies to carry my wife arrived, and I sent her on in her "dandy" with her ayah, charging the bearers to wait for me at a village I well knew, called "Sipahee Hoikeeah." The men replied, "Hoi Deota" (Yes, deity*) and started. The elephants were a great difficulty, and it was some hours before I could get off, and even then some had not arrived. However, off I started, and hurried on to "Sipahee Hoikeeah" so as not to keep my wife waiting, but when I reached the spot, I found to my amazement that the village had ceased to exist, having, as I subsequently learned, been abandoned for fear of the Nagas. I hurried on in much anxiety, as my wife did not speak Hindoostani, and neither ayah nor bearers spoke English. At

* One of the witnesses at the trial of the Regent and Senaputty of Manipur, in 1891, stated that Mr. Quinton was partly induced to enter the palace from which he never emerged alive, by the Manipuris saying, "Are you not our deity?"—ED.

last I caught them up at the Nambor hot springs, called by natives the "Noonpoong" where we were to halt.

The Noonpoong is situated in a lovely spot amidst fine forest. The hot water springs out of the ground, at a temperature of 112 degrees and fills a small pool. It is similar in taste to the waters of Aix-la-Chapelle, and is highly efficacious in skin diseases, being resorted to even for the cure of severe leech bites, which are easily obtained from the land leech infesting all the forests of Assam. Fortunately some of our cooking things, with chairs and a table arrived, also a mattress, but no bed and no tent. We waited till 9 P.M., and finding that no more elephants came up, I made up a bed for my wife on the ground under a table, to shelter her from the dew, but while sitting by the camp fire for a last warm, we heard the noise of an elephant, and saw one emerging from the forest. Fortunately he carried the tent which was quickly pitched, and we passed a comfortable night.

The hot springs are not the only attraction of the neighbourhood, as about two miles off in the forest, there is a very pretty waterfall, not high, but the volume of water is considerable, and it comes down with a thundering sound heard for some distance. The natives call it the "phutta hil," literally "rent rock." The Nambor forest is noted for its Nahor or Nagessur trees (*Mesua Ferma*) a handsome tree, the heart of which is a fine red wood, very hard and very heavy, and quite impervious to the attacks of white ants. Europeans call it the iron wood of Assam. It is very plentiful in parts of the forest

between the Noonpoong and Golaghat, and also grows in the lowlands of Manipur.

The next morning we set out for Borpathar, a village with a fine sheet of cultivation on the banks of the Dunseree, and took up our quarters in the old blockhouse, which had been converted into a comfortable rest house. Here again we received a perfect ovation, the people, headed by my old friend Hova Ram, now promoted to a Mouzadar, coming in a body, with fruit and eggs, etc., to pay their respects. The population had sadly diminished since my early days, the people having in many cases fled the country for fear of Naga raids.

The march having been a short one, all our baggage had time to come up. In the evening the girls of the village entertained us with one of their national dances, a very pretty and interesting sight. After a good night's rest we again started, our march lying through the noble forest, where buttressed trees formed an arch over the road, showing plainly that Gothic architecture was an adaptation from nature. I had never marched along the road since it was cleared; but I was there in 1862, in pursuit of some Naga raiders, when it would have been impassable, but for elephant and rhinoceros tracks. Even then I was struck by its great beauty, and now it was a fairly good cold weather track.

We halted at Deo Panee, then at Hurreo Jan, and Nowkatta, and on the fourth day reached Dimapur, where we found a comfortable rest house, on the banks of a fine tank about two hundred yards square. This, with many others near it, spoke of days of civilisation that had long since passed away, before

the Naga drove the Cacharee from the hills he now inhabits, and from the rich valley of the Dunseree. Near Dimapur we passed a Meekir hut built on posts ten or twelve feet high, and with a notched log resting against it, at an angle of about seventy degrees by way of a staircase, up which a dog ran like a squirrel at our approach. The Meekirs occupy some low hill ranges between the Naga hills and the Burhampooter.

The country round Dimapur is exceedingly rich, and everywhere bears the marks of having been thickly populated. It is well supplied with artificial square tanks, some much larger than the one already referred to, and on the opposite bank of the river we crossed to reach our halting place, are the remains of an old fortified city. Mounds containing broken pottery made with the wheel, abound, though the neighbouring tribes have forgotten its use. At Dimapur, in those days, there were three or four Government elephants and a few shops kept by "Khyahs," an enterprising race of merchants from Western India.

The ruined city is worth describing. It was surrounded originally by solid brick walls twelve feet in height and six in thickness, the bricks admirably made and burned. The walls enclosed a space seven hundred yards square; it was entered by a Gothic archway, and not far off had a gap in the wall, said to have been made for cattle to enter by. Inside were tanks, some lined with brick walls, and with brick steps leading to the water. Though I carefully explored the interior, I never saw any other traces of brickwork, except perhaps a plat-