

# Tea Planter Sahib

*The Life and Adventures of a Tea Planter  
in North East India*

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in pound packets, at 2s. 8d., which was probably the cheapest tea in New Zealand. I marketed "Tengco Tea" in one pound packets.

Because of its geographical position and better shipping service, New Zealand has always preferred Ceylon teas to those of India. There was a small surtax on Indian tea, which was not imposed on the Ceylon product. Even in 1954, when Ceylon levied a tax of 11d. a pound on exports, while India's export duty was only 4½d., 90 percent of tea that was imported to New Zealand came from Ceylon.

The United Kingdom then imported largely Indian teas, but dealt in all the world's markets, and sold tea at more than a shilling a pound cheaper than it was sold in New Zealand.

I suppose that I was wise in deciding to return to tea planting. It must have been that nostalgic feeling—the call of the East—that took me back once more to India. Though India was a frightful place to be in, it was also frightful to be away from India. Had I remained in New Zealand, the war, which was then in the offing, would have made business very difficult. It was very fortunate for me that the agents whom I had left, Williamson, Magor & Company, were good enough to take me back on one of their gardens in Assam.



*Chapter Seven*

## *Borjan*

I had joined the fraternity of married men while in New Zealand, and my carefree bachelor days were over. I must live a more domesticated and accountable life, and there was now the responsibility of looking after a wife, in a climate which was far from salubrious.

The agents in Calcutta sent me up to Borjan, a garden of 917 acres in the Sibsagar district, where A. V. Pearson was the manager. The senior assistant being on leave in England, we took over his bungalow, and life was much as I expected it to be in the district.

It was very evident to me, having seen other labourers working at jobs in urban areas, that the tea garden workers were happy in their employment. The garden workers were cheerful and seemed to know that they were wanted, and were of some importance, and not just ciphers. The urban workers in contrast, were a sad looking crowd, who appeared sorry that they had ever been born.

I did strike one new experience on this estate. A bridge was being built locally by the Works Department, and the credulous coolies always imagined that some child would be kidnapped for a sacrifice to the gods. There were frequent panics while the workers were plucking. Usually they were caused by a hysterical woman yelling that she had seen a kidnapper about. In cases such as these, it could happen that some unfortunate stranger, passing harmlessly through the garden, might be attacked, in the belief that he was a kidnapper.

I had not come across this menace on any other garden. The reader should not imagine that the worker on a tea garden is in any way bloodthirsty. Even the lowest of the Hindus are probably more peaceful and merciful than Europeans. The Christian religion teaches men to love their neighbours; the Hindu religion teaches men to love every living thing as their own selves. Of all the nations of the world the Hindu alone dreads to shed blood.

The Nagas, and other hill tribes of Assam, are more inclined to be murderous. They would, for example, in times gone by, arm themselves with a dhao (knife), hide near the spring of a neighbouring village at feud with their own, and return with the head of the first man or woman that came to take water.

The hill Miris and Daflas prize the flesh of the tiger, but will not allow their women to eat it, as it would make them too strong minded.

The Abors, another hill tribe, were feared most. They wore a piece of bark as their only raiment, which they also used as a carpet to sit on, and as a covering at night. Owing to their truculence, numerous British military expeditions were sent against many of these hill tribes—the Lushais particularly—and to this day the Nagas are causing much trouble for the Indian Government. One thinks of the annoyances suffered by British troops in operations against these tribes, who were so skilled in jungle warfare. In fact, every Britisher who takes an interest in history must be

curious to know how a handful of his countrymen, separated by an immense ocean from their homeland, conquered and subjugated, within a century, one of the world's greatest empires. It was not as though the enemy had no artillery or small arms, for they had large guns in numbers. Other nations would have probably been proud of these achievements, but to the average Britisher this subject was not only uninteresting, it was positively distasteful. What hardship the British soldiers of old endured, in the days of the tight scarlet tunics and heavy uniforms, which were quite unsuited to fighting in the tropics!

Though the planter saw these Assam tribes frequently when they came to the garden bazaars to buy salt and sell their own wares, he had no dealings with them, as they would never work on a tea estate. The local Assamese were also too independent to work on tea estates, and labour had to be recruited from afar. The best type of workers for garden work were from the Kolarian tribes, particularly the Santals, Paharis, Oraons, Kols and Gonds. These people, with Mundas, were successful on tea estates. They could subsist and flourish near the jungle.

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The temples and mosques in Golaghat, a small town near Borjan, were a reminder to me that both large communities in India are very devout. I have already emphasised that the Hindu has a religion of peace.

The Mussulman willingly responds to prayer and fasting. His religion is a strict one. How many a wild border Mussulman tribesman has charged into the very mouth of a gun, stirred on by bright visions of beautiful houris he hopes to meet soon in Paradise.

The Hindu believes in the transmigration of souls, or the passing of the soul from one body to another after death. Some people prefer to call it reincarnation.

Suttee, the self immolation of a widow on her husband's pyre, was to release her husband's and her own soul from

all further transmigrations. Before the British Government stopped this act it was a Hindu widow's duty to sacrifice herself on her husband's pyre. She had no life after her husband's death. Job Charnock, who founded Calcutta, rescued a Brahman woman from a funeral pyre in 1690, and married her.

Many corruptions in Hinduism have vanished with learning. For instance, in the 1880s, anyone leaving India for study in a foreign land became an outcast from that moment. He had crossed the Kala Pani (ocean), and this was not to be tolerated. The youth who returned from abroad was excommunicated. India did not want to progress, so travelling was unnecessary. Even the elders of the family, who had once coddled the returned youth in infancy, now regarded him as an unclean thing.

Infanticide was once rife, and it was considered a greater sin to kill a cow than to slay a low caste man. At the great melas, or fairs, the crowd is so great at the bathing places that people are pushed out of their depth and drowned. Others are dragged off by sharks. But prior to the eighteenth century pilgrims offered themselves to be devoured by sharks. The aged and infirm sacrificed themselves voluntarily in such numbers that in March 1802 a law was enacted preventing this practice.

Like Suttee, the practice prevailed so generally, and was considered by the Hindus so instrumental to their happiness in a future state of existence, that it is rather wonderful that any rule stopped these practices, which were rooted in remotest antiquity, and sanctioned in their most sacred books. The Ganges is a sacred river, and the Hindus carry away the water in pots—to even long distances—so that they may, for instance, wash their ageing parents with it.

Children were also once sacrificed in the Ganges. This arose from superstitious vows made by parents, who when apprehensive of not having issue, promised that in the event of having five children they would devote the fifth to the Ganges.

Some people, of all nations, believe that at some future time, evolution will bring the whole of mankind together as one family, having one government, one language, one colour, one religion, one sex, and in the end, one season. This would be when the evolutionary process declines and reverses, and dissolution takes over. The world would then end.

I was sometimes at a loss to understand how in Bengal, with more or less chronic hunger in the land, so many Bengalis were content to stay in a rut. False pride, and an objection to doing any manual labour among the classes who would only do soft jobs, was surely against what nature demanded. True, the masses in India are peasants—horny-handed sons of the soil—and all types are needed to run a country, but there was too large a percentage of sedentary workers in Bengal. Exertion is wanted of everyone, and the use of all one's faculties by each individual is necessary if a nation is to thrive. While people may hunger for food and long for better conditions, lethargy is worse for a nation than discontent.

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At this time we felt that war with Germany was imminent, and on 3rd September 1939 Mr Chamberlain spoke to the Empire by radio, announcing the existence of a state of war between Britain and Germany.

Some of the younger planters were called to the army, but not in great numbers at first, as for some time the war was quiet, and tea was urgently needed. Most Europeans in India asked for conscription at the start of the war, and were ready to go where the government thought their services were most needed.

Our life at this stage was hardly affected by the war, and we enjoyed our social life at the club as usual, on fixed club days.

The Kakadanga Club, near Borjan, was just a golf club during my time. My wife and I played several games of



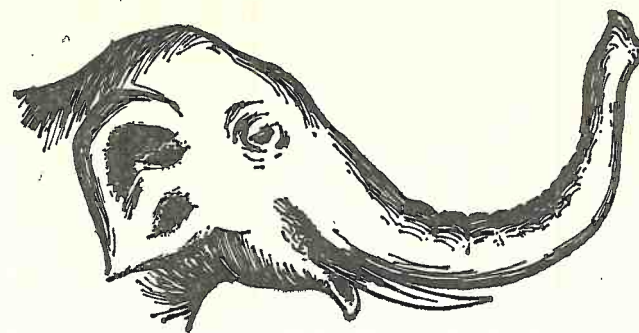
golf here, but never met the rhinoceros which was reputed to come out from the jungle nearby and graze on the course.

Golaghat was a pleasant little town, some seven miles from Borjan. It contained some good shops, and it was here that our tennis club was sited.

Bridge followed tennis, usually until late at night, and the standard was high. Many acrimonious post mortems made things temporarily animated, but it all added to the spice of life. I remember one night there, how thrilled we were to hear the news of the victory of the *Achilles*, *Ajax* and *Exeter* over the German pocket battleship *Graf Spee*.

The Jorhat Club was not too far away to attend now and again. This was one of the biggest clubs in the tea districts. Just outside Jorhat was the Tocklai experimental station where the Tea Scientific Department carried on their work. Their guest house and some of the bungalows were occupied during the war period by units of the British and American armies.

We were not destined to remain long at Borjan for when the assistant, from whom I had taken over, returned from Home leave, I was posted to another garden in the agency in the Mangaldai district.



Chapter Eight

## Attareekhat

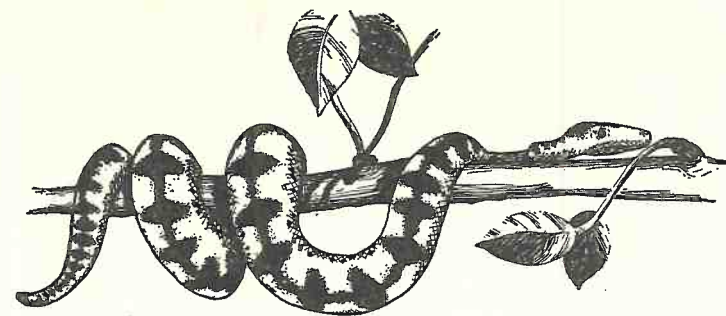
We had arrived at Attareekhat, a picturesque garden in the wilds. This was in the Mangaldai district of Darrang, only a few miles from Orangajuli, and we liked the assistant's bungalow. It was in a beautiful situation in open country, and not surrounded by tea, as were so many bungalows.

Often, while having our early morning cup of tea on the verandah, we saw wild animals passing to and fro on the land outside the bungalow hedge. I knew the manager, W. Read, quite well and was glad to be here in the place of a young assistant, who had joined the army. Attareekhat was a small garden of 608 acres, having a good factory, and being extremely well appointed. The manager's bungalow was of really lovely construction, and sited in beautiful grounds.

As Read had a lot of work in the factory and office, he left much of the garden work to me, and I enjoyed my work thoroughly. Yet all the time we were conscious of the

Our own C.O. on the Manipur Road was a planter, Colonel A. H. Pilcher, C.I.E., M.C., who wrote a little book entitled *Navvies to the Fourteenth Army*.

He was a splendid leader.



*Chapter Ten*

## *Misamari Airfield and Belsiri Quarry*

**I**n December 1943 I was posted from the Manipur Road to Misamari, and after a short spell at this American airfield, which was in the Darrang district of Assam, I was sent to manage the Belsiri Quarry. This was in the Forest Reserve, a few miles from Misamari, and it supplied the stone for this airfield. I was fortunate in being allowed to take my wife with me, for there we were well away from the battle area.

The great aerodrome at Misamari was built on fairly marshy land, and was therefore very difficult to drain. The yearly rainfall, in this area, was about eighty inches, which is low for Assam. It will be realised then, that without an abundance of stone the airfield would have been useless, especially as it was a base for long-range heavy bombers and transport planes taking supplies to China over the Hump. The runways, as well as the roads, in this "mush-room city" had all to be maintained.

As Assam is regarded as a stoneless province, and stone

had usually to be transported from great distances, Misamari was lucky to have a supply of stone so near at hand as Belsiri, only a few miles away.

A branch line was laid through the jungle to this lonely spot. About a thousand tea garden labourers officered by two planters were sent to work the quarry. It was essential, at first, to fill two rakes daily—something like one hundred and twenty wagons in all.

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When I took over the camp at the quarry there was quite a serious outbreak of dysentery among the workers, and the camp was most unpopular.

A new doctor babu was employed to relieve a man who was obviously too old for the job. Jungle clearing and enforced using of latrines, which were dug around the camp at a distance, soon eliminated the epidemic. The coolie is primitive in his habits and will not use a latrine unless made to do so.

About 150 men were needed daily to fill the wagons with stone, usually collected the previous day. The remainder were employed gathering stone from the river bed, whence it was carried to the siding in baskets and stacked in peels of 100 cubic feet. The number of men to each peel varied according to the distance the stone had to be carried. Four mechanical dumpers were sent to help work at the quarry, but as these were driven by local Assamese, who were usually ill, and in any case could not do even minor repairs to the machines, no importance was attached to this method of transport.

As the first rays of the sun topped the trees in the jungle the workers, armed with wire mesh scoops and cane baskets, would trail out to the part of the river which was being worked that day. Talking loudly, and clearing their throats as they travelled, there was small chance of their meeting wild animals, which by then would have slunk back into the forest.

In the cold weather the work was easy, for there was only a trickle of water, and the stone was in abundance. It was very cold as they started work, but the sun soon warmed the workers, for there was seldom a dull day in the cold dry season.

In the higher reaches of this trickling river were deep pools in which large mahseer lurked. These fish take a spoon bait, and specimens of fifty pounds and more have been caught.

During the hot rainy season the river spread, and a swift current brought down huge logs from the higher jungles, so should there have been heavy rain in the hills, work in the river became impossible, and the men were then employed to find stone and sand along the bank. When this became necessary much less stone was brought to the siding.

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In this forest of perennial green under the foothills of the Himalayas, our labourers were housed along the banks of the river on a flat, well cleared of jungle. The houses were of bamboo with thatched roofs, and they were large enough to accommodate fifty men. Care was taken to provide plenty of space for sleeping quarters, and orders were given for men to sleep head to foot alternately. This was to prevent spinal meningitis—a common complaint among labourers at the various projects on which they were employed all over Assam. Wild elephants, which haunted the area, were kept away by the noise from this huge camp.

The two planters lived in small bashas, also of bamboo and thatch, less than a quarter of a mile from the labourers' camp, and near the bank of the river.

In such a place, at high water, there is usually malaria, and at low water, dysentery, while the myriad insects during the rainy season smother everything within proximity.



ty of a lamp. The terrible anopheles mosquito was always prevalent, and with a shortage, caused by the war, of quinine, atabrine, and also spray killing extracts, malaria was rife. The I.T.A. medical branch, however, usually had enough quinine to treat the worst cases.

Owing to these unhealthy conditions, our workers did spells of only three months at this project, but the European planters carried on for as long as they were wanted.

The scenery at Belsiri was superb. The blue mountains in the distance, capped with snow, the green forest; the clear river water, running between boulders; and the brightly coloured flowering trees, some of which were festooned by orchids of divers colours. These were impressions which I can never forget.

The food supplied for the labourers was mainly rice and dhal, with occasional vegetables. We also introduced atta (wholemeal), when rice was short all over India. This diet was lacking in proteins, but some of the workers made up for this by killing and eating rats, the camp being infested by these rodents.

In the rice godown, which was usually filled almost to capacity with foodstuffs of some description, a sixteen-foot python had taken up its abode. I gave instructions that it was not to be harmed, as it was living on rodents which were ravaging the rice supplies. As large as this snake was, it was seldom seen in the long dark rice and food store. It probably enticed a mate later to share in its cornucopial existence.

We usually sent a labourer back to his garden fatter than before he arrived among us.

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Except for the daily rake, we at Belsiri were out of touch with the world during the rains, but, as soon as the cold weather arrived, a road was made across the khets (rice-fields) to Misamari.

It was lonely enough for us, but picture the lot of an old retired planter, the local game warden, who lived alone for most of the year in a bungalow in the forest. This man could have retired to his castle in Scotland, but chose to live among herds of wild elephants and rhinoceros.

On more than one occasion I received letters from him complaining about the coolies poaching fish and disturbing his much loved denizens of the forest. I had other things to do than to bother about so small a matter in wartime, but I confiscated any fishing nets I found. I am glad that I never fell out with the old gentleman, for he was soon to die of malaria in the jungle which he loved so well.

I have mentioned that our bashas (bamboo houses) were built near the river bank at Belsiri. Just opposite, the other bank was covered with dense elephant grass, and beyond the grass was thick timber forest. At night we sometimes heard the trumpeting of wild elephants, the barking of deer, and the roar of tigers, for we were in a forest reserve. Deer and pigs often came out into the open to drink at the river, offering tempting targets. But shooting was not allowed.

One evening at dusk a very large solitary tusker elephant crossed the river, almost opposite us, coming over to our bank, in spite of the numbers of labourers now gathered to see the fun. We thought he would make for the local busti dhan, but he remained close by.

Just after dinner he came right into the camp clearance, and all the shouting would not stop him.

Grabbing my .303 rifle, I went out. My bearer carried the incandescent light by which we could see the beast, about twenty yards away. The servants thought he must be a rogue, and that he would start destroying our small houses of bamboo and thatch, and I wondered if I should fire a shot to scare him off. The counsel of my wife and my co-supervisor prevailed against this action, and soon after the light turned the beast. We heard another elephant



calling to our intruder, which recrossed the river, leaving us in peace for the night.

The sequel to this story followed swiftly. Early in the morning, two days later, reports reached me at the office that a solitary tusker elephant was near the men who were collecting stone from the river. He seemed harmless enough, and then it was noticed that the front feet of the beast were shackled. This was our unwelcome nocturnal visitor. He turned out to be most docile, being led away by two men, and was later claimed by his owner. I presume that the beast was lonely, or frightened of the wild herd of elephants, and sought our company. What a tragedy had I fired at this friendly beast, mistaking him for a rogue!

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When I was recalled to tea garden life in 1945, the Japanese had been pushed back so far into Burma that the heavy guns and Bofors at Misamari were no longer necessary. Many of the gunner boys were transferred to infantry units, some we knew well being killed in the subsequent fighting in Burma.

The Americans at Misamari had been most generous, and their fine cinema show was much appreciated by the British boys. Pictures were shown there which had just been made in America, and flown straight out for the American troops. We made many friends among these fine men. A large number of giant Commandos never returned from the hazardous trip to China. Brave men flew these transport planes, which had no armament and which were easy targets for lurking Japanese Zero fighters. These airmen did two, and sometimes three, trips daily—a wonderful feat of endurance.

When I last saw Misamari, from a train, in 1946, it presented a melancholy sight. As far as one could see the site had been claimed by jungle, and the buildings were in ruins. It was difficult to believe that only a year previously this had been an operating aerodrome.

I was not fated to see Belsiri again. The wild animals which now prowl freely over our late camp site must wonder at the peace of it all, for gone are those monsters of the sky, and but for a few forest guards, gone also are the hateful humans. My wife and I sometimes wonder if the daffodil bulbs that she brought from Darjeeling and planted near the river bank were ever left to bloom to make an exotic picture, which would be as pleasing to the eye as the already beautiful indigenous one.

hormone weedkiller—from a boom placed on the back—on an area of jungle which was once a thatch barry, but was then being choked by a type of jungle. This thatch was necessary for roofing line houses, and would be a great loss if it died out. After spraying this area of some twenty acres of undulating land with the hormone weedkiller, the new thatch grew quite rapidly, and from the bank above one could see the yellow grass moving as some animal wandered through it.

Among the Nepali workers here there were some bad characters, and I was unable to turn them off the garden. They had the backing of many who feared them, and threatened to leave with them, if police came to put them out. Some of these females bullied the women from the plains and would go to the head of a queue, even if they came late. I always saw that justice was done in this regard, and that they went in order of arrival, for leaf weighment or any other function.

I was never beaten up in all my time in tea, but I was very lucky to escape at Washabari with this gang of bad characters among the Nepalis. The women in the gang were even worse than the men. One afternoon on the garden at first plucking, after pruning which must be carried out meticulously, I found the gang of women, as usual, doing bad work and was determined that they would not get off with it. Turning them all back I spoke very strongly and told them what I thought of them. They were deciding whether to get the chains from their baskets and attack me, and I was thinking what chance I had of defending myself, when an old Nepali woman, who was plucking nearby, came to my help. She slanged the gang, who then understood that I would not put up with their nonsense.

I also struck trouble with the union. It was the custom, each year in the cold weather, to have necessary repairs done to labourers' houses, and Sylhet Bengalis, who were experts and very neat workers, did the job year after year. Now the union decided that this extra money should go to

the garden workers, who wanted to do the job themselves.

Knowing that the Bengalis' work was more thorough, I stuck out for this, explaining that they (the garden workers) would benefit more if their houses were in ship-shape condition.

This union tried to interfere in matters which were far beyond their cause and were often a source of worry to me. In the Dooars, the labourers were so out of hand on some estates, that they had even been known to say to the manager that many sahibs had been beaten up, and that as he had not, his time for attack would be coming up.

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My main headache, while at Washabari, was the new Assam Rail Link Project, which ran through some acres of our garden land. Designed to avoid Pakistan, this new link ran across the waterways of North Bengal, and so would always be subject to possible damage. The line crossed part of the estate, causing considerable damage to our labourers' houses and land. I had endless worry trying to gain compensation for this damage from the government and railway authorities, who naturally suspected many of the claims to be highly exaggerated.

The agents in Calcutta, McLeod and Company, sent up a director on more than one occasion to discuss the matter with high railway officials. Though the embankment was raised and strengthened at certain weak points, until the link has stood the test of time, nobody can safely predict what might happen in this rainy region, where hostile waters dash madly down from the hills, and terrific storms sweep the hillsides and rocky plains. I know that there would have been serious trouble had any of our labourers been drowned.

When this new railway started to run, the roofs of the carriages were full of people, who were enjoying a free ride at great risk to themselves. Anyone who travelled at

this time saw the most glaring examples of disregard for authority. In first and second class coaches on railways most of the fittings had been destroyed. Lights had been removed, switches torn away and the cushions from bunks had been either removed or slashed about. Window frames had been broken, and all looking glasses in lavatories had been smashed or stolen. Ticketless travel was rampant, and any bona fide traveller in a first or second class compartment was likely to have his carriage filled with ticketless student travellers. Railway officials seemed powerless, and were even too scared to protest. The masses really thought that now independence had come, travel would be free.

This confusion on the railway was a direct result of partition, which cut off a substantial portion of Indian territory from the rest of the dominion, without a direct rail or water link. Overnight, a host of problems were created for traders wishing to send goods to Assam and the Dooars. These difficulties were made still harder by controls and customs tariffs and restrictions between the two dominions.

Early in 1948 the Assam Valley and the West Bengal districts of Jalpaiguri (Dooars) and Darjeeling started receiving a large portion of their requirements by air from Calcutta. Dum Dum, the airport for Calcutta, was sending about twenty tons of supplies daily to these areas.

Recollections of the achievement of allied airmen, who had opened up the Hump route to China during World War II, were still fresh in mind, so this new idea took shape swiftly. Actually, it started in August 1947, when a Calcutta airways company began accepting charter flights to the Assam Valley. At first the quantity of cargo was small, but by early 1948 the amount of cargo had grown rapidly, and the lift included not only the Assam Valley but the northern districts of West Bengal and two Indian States, Tripura and Cooch Behar.

By April and May 1948, one airline brought in four aircraft, which were doing seven to eight round flights

daily and lifted approximately 2,100,000 lbs. in the two months. Another airline company was operating with two machines. Attracted by the good business, other companies from other parts of India opened offices in Calcutta and joined in the trade. Foreign and Indian pilots with wartime experience were employed to fly the machines.

In August 1948 Pakistan prohibited the flights of non-scheduled aircraft over her territory, and this made a decline in the cargo. Nevertheless, business in this venture still prospered in some degree. The landing bases used in the airlift were twenty-one airstrips and aerodromes built in North East India during World War II, mainly by the Americans. They extended from Bagdogra, near Siliguri, to Imphal, near the border of Burma.

The planes employed were exclusively Dakotas (D.C.3s), but one company brought in a Skymaster (D.C.4) aircraft, which enabled them to carry far more cargo in fewer trips. The pilots were Indians, Britishers, Australians, Americans, Poles, Anglo-Indians and others. Most had been boys when the war began and knew only the one job—flying. They were an intrepid bunch of flyers, working under extremely hazardous conditions. Many of the airstrips they used were situated in the middle of thick jungle, so that animals might walk across the runway while a plane was taking off. They carried no wireless operators to tell them the direction and speed of the wind as they came in to land, and there was no weather office to keep them informed of weather conditions.

The main cargo consisted of textiles, and then came tea garden stores, and machinery and tobacco (cigarettes). The rest of the cargo was an assortment of cars, jeeps, motor cycles, bicycles and clothing. Even Sabitri, the elephant, now giving rides to children at the London Zoo, came down on one of the return trips from the Assam Valley.

Very little freight was carried on the return trips to Dum Dum—only 5 percent—most of which was new tobacco, and some tea. Most of the tea was being sent the



long way round by river. When the new metre gauge railway is completed, passing entirely through Indian Dominion territory, and linking the Assam Valley with the rest of India, need for the airlift will not be so vital.

Though air transport costs are higher than those of surface transport the air transport is as safe and regular, and far speedier. So perhaps there will always be scope for airlifting in the area. When we left the Dooars, and tea, for the last time, it was only by this airlift that we got out with our baggage. It was exciting, but very costly.

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While at Washabari I sometimes entertained European Jesuits, who visited the few Roman Catholic labourers on the estate. These priests were quite content to partake of the humble hospitality which the coolies would provide, and did not expect to be asked to the bungalow, but were nevertheless very pleased to enjoy the more gracious living if one invited them. After walking miles they always appreciated a good hot bath and change of clothing, and also European food.

I admired these men, who put up with primitive conditions and sacrificed their health away from their homeland to be missionaries. A noble life in truth, and all too soon forgotten. A life for which the admiration of men is too paltry a reward. During the war the Italian and German Jesuits were placed on parole.

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Just before my wife and I left the Dooars for good, I was to play my last tennis match for our club, in the finals of the Stoddart Cup Competition, against Nagrakata Club. We left by car, well before dusk, and had to enter a patch of wood jungle on the way. Not long after we entered the forest we noticed a great one-horned rhinoceros entering a grassy patch, just to our left, about twenty yards away. It

must have crossed only seconds before us. As we stopped the car, with the engine running, to look at it, we wondered what would have happened had we been fifteen seconds earlier.

This type of rhinoceros is the largest of all existing rhinoceroses, but its horn is smaller than the African species. They are usually solitary, and their feed consists mainly of grass. Rhinoceroses have special places for dropping their excreta, and mounds accumulate. While coming to these spots a rhinoceros walks backwards, and so is easily hit by poachers.

Everyone knows of the legendary story of the animal's horn containing an aphrodisiac, not only in the East but also in Europe. In Nepal the flesh and blood of the beast is offered to the shades of the dead, the Manes. Even the urine is considered antiseptic and is hung in a vessel at the main door to ward off ghosts, evil spirits, and diseases. These beliefs are prevalent in so many Eastern countries, and place such a value on the animal, that no wonder its numbers are dwindling.

The Hindu is not cruel to animals normally, in fact his is a religion of peace. He hates to shed blood, for his faith teaches him to love every living thing as himself. There is no doubt that the sense of justice, mercy, and charity is as much developed in the Indian mind as in the European. The Great Teacher taught the world to present its left cheek to the one who had just slapped the right, and India with its truth and non-violence doctrine, and non-aggression, probably goes too far in this respect. To think of scrapping the army because no one would attack a non-violent nation, is sheer folly in the world as it is. With China on the border, it is madness.

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In 1950, when I left tea planting for good, I had seen tremendous strides in mechanisation in the factory for the manufacture of tea, but absolutely nothing had been done

in this respect for outside work. The old methods of planting tea, triangular or square fashion, at four to five feet apart, were still in vogue. All jobs from plucking to hoeing were done by hand. The Japanese had been using scissors with a bag attached, instead of plucking leaf, for many years—this was a form of mechanisation.

One of my last jobs in the Dooars, however, was to plant tea in a new way in preparation for the machine. This was hedge fashion planting, five feet by two feet apart, to allow for mechanical cultivation and plucking. With the cost of labour so high today, mechanisation of outside work must ultimately be introduced. Leaf will be cut off, instead of being hand plucked. This will make the period between flushes longer, but the flushes will be heavier. The machine cannot select leaf, like the human being can, and as a result more stalk will reach the factory.

Largely in consequence of the misfortune in losing our bungalow by fire, and also because of labour unrest all round, my wife and I decided that money was not everything, and that life in a more peaceful atmosphere would be preferable. From being a friendly land, India, at the time, seemed to us sternly inhospitable. The pendulum, for India has swung from smiles to tears, but our hope is that after things change it will again return to smiles.

Now that the time had come to depart I thought back to 1920, when I first began my career in tea, so young and so full of hope. Since then I have had my share of joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments. It is not with such hope that I face what is ahead for me. I know that the sun shines in the morning of life, but that evening and night must follow. I realise that we are living in a troubled age. We are not even a united nation, able to meet our troubles as we formerly did, when I was young. Patriotism seems dead.

In every land the forces of revolt and violence prevail, and age-old moral structures are being shattered. Religion is for the few. May the faith in which I was brought up still

serve me. I do not feel that I can retire, and will have to find some work in New Zealand, but the thought of this does not disturb me. I feel that great numbers of European managers and assistants will be resigning soon from their tea planting positions in India. They will find, and are even now finding, that planting has become a too exacting, and even dangerous occupation, under present-day conditions.

Many of the younger planters feel now that there are no longer prospects for them in India. Senior planters feel that the good old days, when profits could be made and labour was subservient, never questioning an order, are over. I hope, however, that young European blood will remain to help the tea industry. Co-operation of both British and Indians would be a stimulus.

Even now the old life has gone for ever. There is practically no polo. The Auxiliary Force, comprising the Assam Valley Light Horse, Surma Valley Light Horse and the Northern Bengal Mounted Rifles, have all been disbanded. Roads are now better, and cars are of more use than horses.

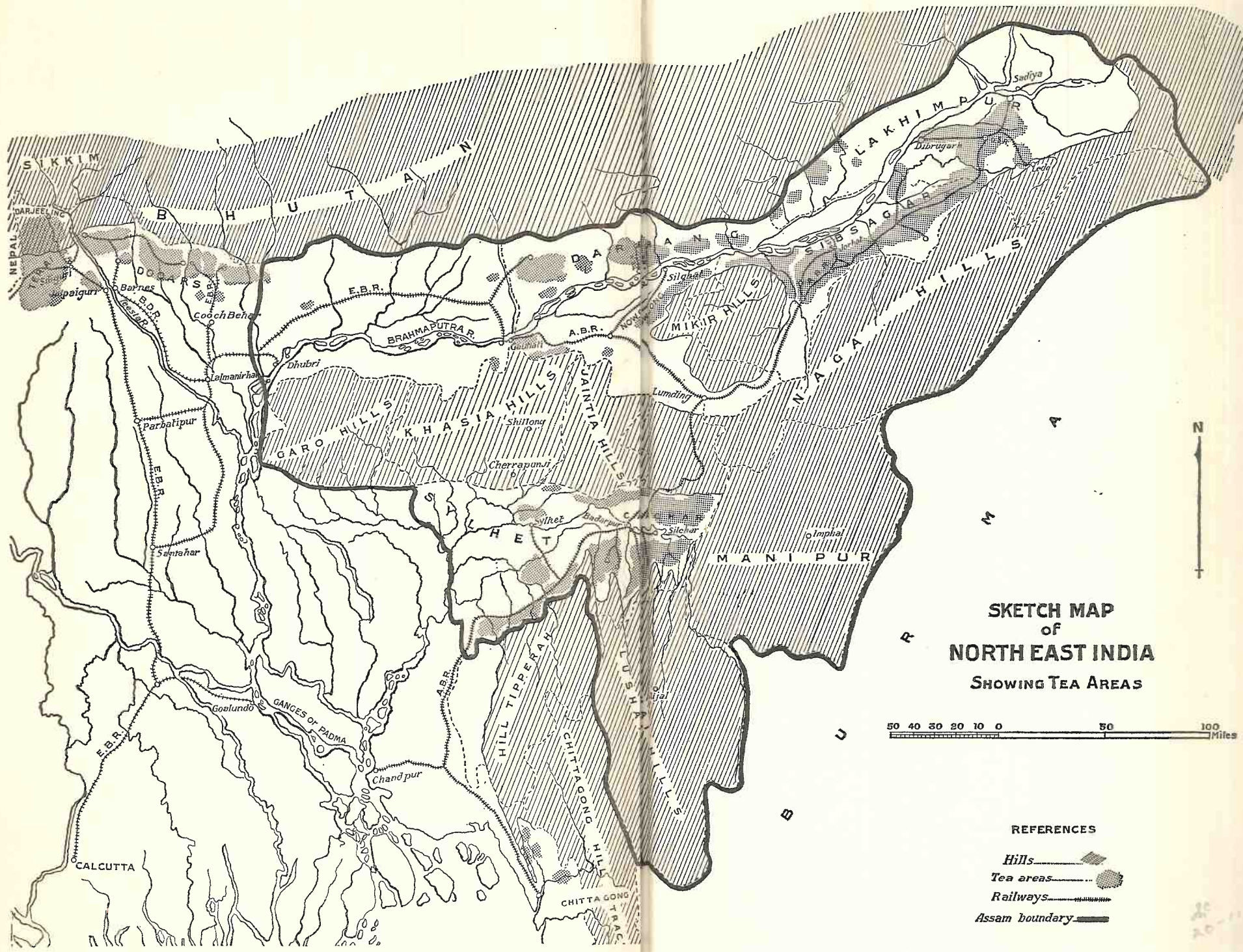
It is interesting to compare the lot of the present European planter with that of the early planter pioneer. Today's planters have as many anxieties as the old pioneers who set out to open estates, but they are quite different in nature. The old planters in India faced untold dangers all the way along. They set off by boat up the River Ganges. They struggled, through fever haunted jungle and flood, up to the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains. On the way they faced dangerous wild animals and head hunting tribesmen. Many of them survived only a few years, but they established a name for Indian tea. When they gave an order it was obeyed. Today, the European planter is no longer the master. He is as a guest in a strange land. I feel, however, that the spirit of the British planter of today will surely surmount any obstacles with which he may have to contend.

Our final spell, in the Dooars, lasted three years, and the agents, McLeod & Company, always treated us well. For

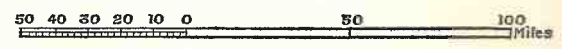
me, it was still a wrench to leave a task which had absorbed so much of my time for so many years. They had, until then, been such happy years that I know I shall always cherish them. I know, that when saying my final goodbye to tea, that I left a part of myself in the green valleys of Sylhet, Assam, and the Dooars.

## APPENDIX





SKETCH MAP  
of  
NORTH EAST INDIA  
SHOWING TEA AREAS



REFERENCES

- Hills
- Tea areas
- Railways
- Assam boundary