

ON INDIA'S FRONTIER;

OR

NEPAL

THE GURKHAS' MYSTERIOUS LAND.

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BY

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NEW YORK

J. SELWIN TAIT AND SONS

65 FIFTH AVENUE

CHAPTER VII.

A STARTLING EXPERIENCE.

We were up the next morning by dawn that revealed our "first-class accommodation" to be of the wildest description conceivable. What most concerned us, however, was to find ourselves none the worse for the night's bivouac.

We started but had hardly gone fifty yards when a most extraordinary spectacle greeted our eyes as well as our sense of smell. There lay before us, blocking up the pathway, the carcass of an immense elephant, his legs sticking up in the air like the tall stumps on freshly cleared land, while his body and trunk lay stiffened and mortifying, the only mourner being a large carrion vulture (*Gyps Bengalensis*) so well known in India for spying a dainty funeral miles and miles away. There he sat on a tall commanding pine, the

personification of hypochondria, evidently ruminating on the uncertainty of life, and how the mighty had fallen.

We did not disturb him in his meditations but left him to the diversion of his gloomy thoughts.

The elephant had evidently been dead only a few hours, for his skin was quite intact, but decomposition had already made progress, as was evident from the sound of the seething gases escaping from his huge body just as if the carcass were being roasted over a fire, and also from the offensive odor, which luckily for us had been wafted by the wind away from our encampment during the night; otherwise we should have been driven from the spot, bag and baggage, most unceremoniously by a foe of which none of us, with the most lively imagination, had the faintest conception. I am positive had a live elephant come crushing down upon us through the forest, not one of us would have thought it at all strange; indeed the coolies with bated breath had spoken of such an occurrence as not unlikely, but to encounter and be overpowered by a dead elephant was the height of absurdity.

We laughed, held our noses, and with great difficulty made a detour over the rocks and boulders around the carcass and proceeded on our march.

A little more than a mile brought us to Chirriaghata, a low sandstone range over which the path is carried by a deep, narrow fissure in the sandy soil, thereby reducing the climb. At the top, in an excavation made in the side of the fissure, we came upon a Hindoo deity with a brazen face and front, beside which was the ever-present Mahadeo's phallic linga (the Hindoo's Creator) all bedecked with tinsel and flowers, and strewn with rice and copper coins, the votive offerings of the sin-laden as they filter through this first Nepalese pass.

This mountain shrine was attended by a bright Newar boy not over fourteen, who told us in reply to our many inquiries, that he had been there all alone two years; that his home was miles away beyond certain lofty ranges, but that a family in a hut just at the foot of the pass we had ascended took care of him, and that he had nothing to fear as he was en-

gaged in the meritorious duty of custodian to the Gods, an instance of faith that would cause a good many examples of modern Christianity to suffer by comparison.

The ascending path by which we had come now descended as abruptly on the other side into the dry rocky channel of a mountain torrent that wended its way in the opposite direction from the one we had just come. After a mile of very rough walking, we came upon what appeared to be a faint attempt at a good, wide-made road free from stones, leading at a gently inclined gradient, through a beautiful forest of very uniformly developed young, slender, tapering sal trees.

After some three miles of this rather pleasant walk we came to the full flowing, yet narrow stream of Kurru, crossed by an old, but well-made, sal log bridge.

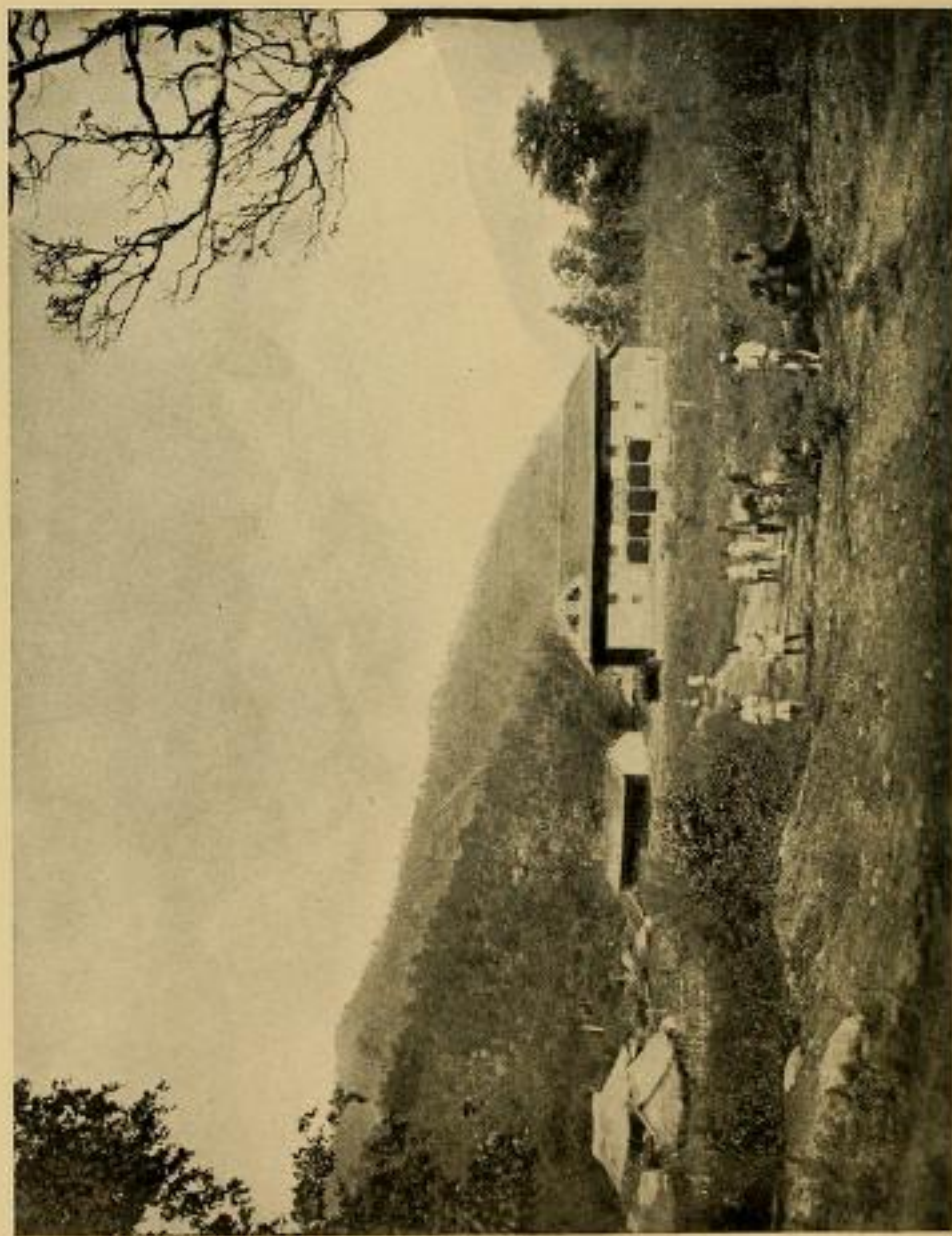
We began now to pass numbers of coolies, attended by sepoy guards of the British Government, carrying all sorts of camp articles, such as tents, folding tables, chairs, carpets and everything requisite to make one comfortable. There must have been a little army

of coolies, a number of whom having been pressed into service against their will, took every opportunity to get behind a bush or tree, dodge the guards, drop their burdens and bolt into the jungles.

In various secluded spots we came upon a deserted bed and chair here, an abandoned washstand or basin there, and so on; strange things to find in the wilds of the jungle. All this turn out, we presently learned, belonged to the British Resident, or English consular officer deputed by his Government to watch British interests at the Court of Nepal.

This officer was on his way to Segowli to attend to certain boundary questions; we were told that we should meet him at our next halting ground, which place was the village of Hetowda, about two miles beyond Kurru log bridge, where we arrived by nine o'clock that morning, and found the largest and best kept Powah of any on the road.

Then, too, the village was a very good sized one for the jungle, but like a number of other inhabited places along our route, it was only a winter settlement, for from the first of May



HETOWDA POWAH OR CARAVANSERY,
FAMOUS RENDEZVOUS FOR TIGER SHOOTING.

to the end of October the place is abandoned to the deadly orgies of the Terai fever, to the loathsome leech and the filthy rhinoceros. Even the Nepalese Custom House located here, and which during the winter months collects quite an amount of duty on merchandise passing through, closes its doors in summer and retires further into the interior.

Here too nearly all the caravans of bullocks, ponies and donkeys coming from India turn and go back, leaving their burdens to be carried further on by coolies, owing to the difficulties of the road.

The Powah of Hetowda, we found to be a commodious, well-constructed two-storied building in the form of a square surrounding an open court, the prevailing caravansery style so common in the East. We found quite a number of such buildings at various intervals all along our route, and whether built by the Nepalese Government or by private enterprise, their construction is deemed most meritorious. They certainly are a great boon to travellers.

In front of the Hetowda Powah were num-