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HIMALAYAN RANGE SCENE OF GRANDEUR

By MARSHALL D. TAYLOR.

One is not apt to associate India with ice and snow, even at this season of the year, especially the people of the Hawaiian Islands, who live in a perpetual summer. But nevertheless hundreds of mountaineers and residents of Calcutta have packed their grips and are now spending their New Year vacation at Darjeeling, where, amidst the snow-clad mountains, the cryptomaria and keen frosty air the heat and discomfort of the plains may be forgotten and a semblance of "old home Yuletide" be enjoyed.

Residents of these mid-Pacific islands rather pride themselves on the ruggedness of their mountains, and one of their first questions to eastern tourists is: Have you been to the top of Tantalus, Haleakala or even Mauna Kea, and viewed the superb panorama of land and sea which unfolds itself from these lofty heights? However lovely these mountains may be, they are as pigmies in comparison to the Darjeeling snowy range, where, for hundreds of miles, an uninterupted view of mountain peaks, many considerably over 20,000 feet, some falling short of the 30,000 feet mark by only a few hundred feet, may be seen in the full majesty of their glory.

Just fancy a mountain forty-five miles away, but which, on account of the clearness of the atmosphere, looks only a stone's throw off; nine times the height of Konahonu. An even more striking comparison would be Mt. Shasta, which alone would be dwarfed by the side of Kinchinjunga, and it would require five additional Mt. Tamalpais, piled up on top of the other, to equal the height of this sentinel of the Darjeeling Himalayas.

Comparisons are often odious, but they are nevertheless essential, and to those who have never had the opportunity of visiting India, this brief description of Darjeeling will be of interest.

After leaving Scaldah depot, Calcutta the train steams for five hours through miles of paddy fields to Sara Ghat, on the river Ganges. Here trans-shipment is made to one of the mail boats which are used for the conveyance of mails and passengers to the opposite shore, where a second train is in waiting. The trans-shipment of mails and passengers together with the actual crossing, occupies about three-quarters of an hour. By the time dinner, which is served on

board, is over, and everyone in readiness to land, the familiar strains of the "Khalassie" are heard as he takes soundings, chanting as he does so: "Teen-balm-mil-oney," or the subsequent varying depth of channel, as the steamer approaches her moorings. After much bustle and ringing of bells the train starts off towards Siliguri at the base of the Himalayas, among whose peaks the highest mountains of the world are numbered.

Monkeys at Roadside.

Soon after sunrise this terminus is reached. After sundry ablutions and a change into warmer garments, breakfast is ordered and the baggage seen safely aboard. For the first few miles the train steams through paddy fields and forests of bamboo, with an occasional tea plantation, whose factory buildings and pretty bungalow peeping from out a veritable jungle of tropical vegetation, add not a little to the attractiveness of the ride. Once the foothills have been entered, the thick jungle seems veritably alive with beasts and insects of various kinds. As the engine pants and snorts up the steep inclines, troops of monkeys scamper off to the seclusion of the trees, gesticulating and chattering until lost to view as the train sweeps around one of the many curves. Deer are often seen and not infrequently one has the luck to catch a glimpse of a tiger as it crosses the track. The incessant droning of the cicadae and screeching of parrots, tend to make one realize how manifold and varied are the works of nature in these Himalayan foothills. The scenery was truly grand, and as the train mounted higher and higher, past tea plantations and clearings owned by Europeans and natives, many beautiful vistas were obtained.

Teendharra about half way to Kurseong, was the first important stopping place; here an opportunity was afforded passengers to stretch their legs and partake of light refreshments. The view from this spot was beautiful and the air refreshingly cool. At the first sound of the warning gong the journey was continued, through heavily timbered hills, up steep grades, surmounting the more difficult portions of the track by means of loops, until Kurseong was reached. At this place all seemed changed; the faces around were typically mongolian; the dress totally different from that of the plains; while the language was unintelligible to one accustomed to Hindustani. From the depot platform could be seen stretching away to the north peak upon peak of snow-clad mountains. This was the snowy range of which so much has been said and written.

After leaving Kurseong, the grade in many places was very steep, culminating at Ghoom, the highest point on the line. From this spot the track descends somewhat to Darjeeling which place was reached after a most enchanting scenic ride lasting in all about six hours.

Moonlight Grandeur.

At Darjeeling the train was met by dandy-wallahs (chair carriers) and those of the party who preferred were carried shoulder-high to their respective quarters. This is a most novel conveyance, and resembles an egg-shaped box attached to two curved poles; the broad end being fitted up as a seat. In wet weather a rubber hood is raised over the whole so that the occupant is kept perfectly dry. The dandy-wallahs are four sturdy Paharia coolies or Bhutias, who raise the dandy upon their shoulders and set off at a brisk amble. After an excellent dinner had been partaken of, a visit to the chowrasta was made where a military band was playing popular airs.

It would be impossible to describe adequately the glory and grandeur of the Himalayas as seen from Darjeeling by moonlight. Words are wanting to express the feelings and emotions which transcend one's thoughts as Kinchinjunga and her sister peaks, clothed in perpetual snow, are viewed for the first time. The ever changing tints which are lavishly displayed,

the billowy clouds and filmy atmospheric effects made a picture never to be forgotten.

From Tiger Hill, the highest point on Senchal and within easy riding distance of Darjeeling the view is simply indescribable. Beneath for miles around, rolled a billowy mass of dense clouds, with here and there the timbered tops of mountain peaks peeping from out this soothing mass. Above, as far as the eye could reach were hundreds of snow-capped mountains, overshadowed by the towering crests of Everest and Kinchinjunga. These, catching the first rays of the rising sun, appeared like beacons to the still slumbering valleys nestling at their base. Truly it was an inspiring sight and one not readily to be forgotten. Even Mt. Shasta, Mauna Kea and other noted peaks of this hemisphere appeared dwarf-like as compared to these giants of the Orient.

Darjeeling is a very cosmopolitan city. It has its social side as well as its commercial. It becomes the seat of government during the hot weather when the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal takes up his residence at the Shrubbery and administers the affairs of that Province, whose population numbers some eighty seven and a half millions, a total exceeding by several millions the population of the United States. Standing out conspicuously and distant only some forty-five miles as the crow flies, is: Kinchinjunga, 28,156 feet in altitude; while to the northwest is Mt. Everest, 29,002 feet in altitude, the two highest mountains in the world.

Types Are Many.

Scampering along the chowrasta, many types of Mongolian were met. First a jovial band of Bhutias was passed several of the women having their faces smeared with an admixture of butter and congealed pig's blood. They held each other's hands and laughed and cracked jokes as they returned homeward after a visit to Signal Hill, where they had stopped to offer up prayers. A Tibetan lady, with her hair done up in the form of a queue, coiled gracefully upon her head, her ears literally weighted down with gold and turquoise ornaments and with a chateleine suspended from her right breast, was next passed. Scores of Nepalese and Paharias were seen wending their way up the mountain paths. On the way home a party of Lepchas, the supposedly aboriginal inhabitants of these regions, were interviewed. They proved to be a most intelligent people and seemed to know the names of every beast and insect as well as those of flowers and plants with which their forests abound.

Darjeeling besides being the seat of government of Bengal during the hot months preceding the monsoon, is one of the great tea producing districts of India. This plant was introduced into these hills as early as 1856 and today thousands of natives find employment on the estates. Cinchona is also extensively cultivated, the government having several large plantations in and about Darjeeling and supplementing its revenue by the ready sale of quinine a drug so much in evidence throughout the malarial districts of Hindustan.

Himalaya is a Sanskrit word, meaning "the abode of snow." This stupendous mountain chain extends from the Brahmaputra river, which flows through the Assam Valley, to the Indus, thus forming an insurmountable barrier. The term Himalaya, as interpreted above, is applicable only to those mountains whose tops are perpetually covered with snow; the name pahar, being suggestive of those that are not.

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