

**THE ENGLISHMAN
CALCUTTA, WEST BENGAL, INDIA
24 AUGUST 1905
(page 10)**

“The Conquest of Kinchenjunga.”

**Troubles with Coolies.
(Special for the “Englishman.”)**

Phulut, Aug. 12.

At last everything is ready, the morning is fine, the rain holds off an hour or two, the coolies have turned up to time and are struggling to find the lightest load.

From six o'clock to nine we are all busy putting the finishing touches to our labours. All runs smoothly, and by nine o'clock every cooly is on the march to our first stage, Jorepakry. We snatched a hurried breakfast and entered our train. Ghoom is reached without any misadventure. As we wend our way from the station through the Gap and up through the Ghoom busti all the people turn out to have a peep at us, and as some of the coolies live here I notice a good deal of liquor as a parting glass being given them. I leave them and push along as I know the rear guard will bring them on. A little further on I pass the site of little Buddhist Temple. We are now practically in the forest with its giant gnarled oaks, rhododendrons, and hydrangeas, all covered with velvety moss, spangled with creepers and orchids. Butterflies are flying around us everywhere in spite of the rain. Every turn of the road reveals a pretty scene. Now an enormous rock dominates the road, or a woodman's little hut nestles close to a streamlet, then quite a little crowd of children appear, lustily claiming toll in the shape of bachsheesh from the passing stranger. At the sixth mile the famous Ghoom rock looms in view through the mist. A few miles further on Sukiapuwry (“the dried up tarn”) is reached. The bazar is quite empty, a great contrast to the busy scene it is on a fine day. I notice the mission people have built a neat school house. Through the village I strike the road to the rest house. A winding path a mile long eventually lands me at my first stage, a trim white-washed bungalow. Soon the chowkidar appears, and in a few minutes a cheery wood fire is lighted and most of my wet things are steaming around it. My companions will appreciate its comforts as they will like myself be wet through.

About an hour after my arrival the first of the porters turns up, and I check their numbers, as the first twelve who arrive are to receive a packet of cigarettes as a reward. This we are going to do every day, as it will show who are the best among the porters, and will enable us to choose the men we shall take on the glacier. To my great surprise, after seeing their send off from Ghoom busti, only one man arrives drunk and just manages to drop his load on the verandah steps. All the members of the Expedition are now in sight and only a few coolies, those with the heaviest loads have not yet showed up, but by five all are in, and a little after the rations are served out and we sit down to our evening meal. A policeman now turns up and claims one of our men on a charge of criminal breach of trust, another example of the long reach of the law. We ask him to show us his warrant, but as it is late and he has it not with him he returns the next morning and brings the accuser who has come out from Darjeeling for identification. All is right so far, but who is going to indemnify us for the five rupees advance this man has received from us before leaving? This is soon solved by the claimant giving us one of his large silver and turquoise earrings which he will claim from us on our return, so he is going to insist on his pound of flesh and means to have it. After a few games of chess, and our journals written, one by one we seek a well earned rest. At 4-30 next morning the camp is afoot; by five we are sitting before some good steaming cocoa, eggs, and bread and jam. This done justice to, we start mustering the coolies and serve out their loads. A good many are not to be found, but on account of the small accommodation for them and having still some money they have sought the shelter of wine shops in the bazar and I daresay by their puzzled looks a tamasha took place last night; they all eventually turn up so that by 6-45 a.m. all are en route. I start last with the rear guard in a drizzling rain. The road continues through a forest of stately magnolias and gnarled oaks. In half an hour we reach the small busti on the frontier of Nepaul. We find it full of our men who are crowding the "arrack" and "marwa" shops. We lost a good quarter of an hour moving them on, and I feel quite certain several would never have turned up at Toongloo to-night had we not stopped and seen the place cleared of them. Our path winds down to a deep dell where I find my pony which I mount, bidding "au revoir" to my companion. The zig-zaging road leads me through a charred forest.

I eventually reach our advance party and offer one of them as a rest the loan of my pony which is gladly accepted.

At the rest house every cooly is again checked and we start off on our longest and worst march between Darjeeling and Phulut. This proves a trying march not only owing to the distance and harassing descents and rises, but three coolies abandon their loads and decamp, taking a tin of satthu, a tin of sugar, and two tins of biscuits. I sincerely trust I shall be able to bring them to book, if it is not done long before I return, by the authorities of Darjeeling to whom notice is being sent. This desertion gave us a good deal of trouble. We did not know of the missing loads and coolies till 6 o'clock at night and we expected them to arrive at any minute, but when 9 o'clock came and no coolies, we sent out a relief party to search for them. They went as far as Kalapookry and failed to find them. Nothing could be done till next morning. Nangar left at 3 o'clock and eventually found the loads just 4 miles outside of Toongloo. He had taken the precaution of taking two pack ponies fearing that the coolies had decamped; he did not get to Sandackphu till 3-30 and pluckily came on with them to Phulut, doing a march of about 35 miles. Before we knew what had really happened we kept a watch in turns in case they should turn up during the night and as by 6 o'clock of the 11th no tidings had come of them the train started on their next march, I being left behind to continue the search. I went as far as the first saddle after Kalapookry where a "pukdandy" branches off and there I decided to wait. I waited in a cold piercing north wind which drove the persistent rain into every crevice of my clothing and succeeded in chilling one to the bone. I saw after an hour's consideration the futility of my remaining and regained the dark bungalow at 2 p.m. The first tidings of our missing loads reached me in the shape of our dakwallah, who told me that Nangar had found the loads and was just behind him and would be there in an hour or so. I waited till 3 o'clock but knowing that Nangar would bring them along safely I rode off and reached Phaloot at 7-30. I am just starting off to Chaubanja. Our stores we have just found are still there, so I must get along and see why these have not been forwarded on. The coolies are there and as I am the only one, beside the leader, who speaks Hindustani, I am sent ahead to carry out instructions.