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ON THE KINCHIN LAY (Part 1)
THE MARCH

By
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We left Talut after a welcome day of rest; the weather itself seemed to have got tired, or perhaps mountain-sick, and it merely drizzled as I went down to Chabanjong, on Mr. White's coolies, amusing himself by watching an Italian flag which he had brought and hoisted. If I had known, I would have brought him a clockwork toy. The coolies had, however, left, and it was with a few words of gentle admonition that I persuaded our men to follow me up the steep path to the ridge. The coolie if he sees a place fit to sleep in, thinks it is a shame not to do so. However, my kind words, which I have every reason to believe will never die, prevailed. The ridge beyond Chabanjong is heavily forested, and I spent a good deal of time blazing the trees. In the words of a great American poet and gentleman,

> *"His sinuous path, by blazes, wound*
> *Among trunks grouped in myriads round."*

As Poe justly remarks: " 'By blazes' is not intended for an oath."

The weather, all the fresher for its repose, came down heavier than ever, and it was a miserably soaked Crowley that squatted, in spite of the arthritis in his left knee, under a rock, and prayed for the tents. I don't know where this camp was, they called it Chuaktanko. The road is everywhere an unexpectedly excellent mountain track, right from Chabanjong to the end of this article.

Leading the Guide

On Monday, the 14th, we went miserably on, though it cleared for a short time at midday, and on the 15th we reached what I believe to have been the Neglo Cave. I refrain from harrowing my readers by vivid descriptions of the beastly condition

of body and mind in which one remained. The 16th was too wet to make a start; it came down in sheets; and there wasn't a dry blanket in the party, so the sheets had to do. We were somewhat cheered in the afternoon though, for what we at first supposed to be a drowned marmot turned out to be a Head Constable from Darjeeling with a letter from the Deputy Commissioner informing us that the Nepal authorities consented to our invasion, and would send a responsible guide to conduct us to Klunza and other places to which we did not want to go. However, we will guide him instead.

On the 17th the weather was again mountain-sick, the symptoms being those described by Sir Martin Conway, perhaps the finest stylist of his age, as "an extreme disinclination for any form of exertion." Anyhow, it did not rain till eight o'clock. I took advantage of this to climb a viewpoint in the neighbourhood, but it availed me little. I got down into the valley of Gamotanj at a quarter to five after nine hours' walking and three hours' sitting in the rain arguing with Mr. White's coolies, over whose proceedings I will draw a veil. As to the scenery, it was exactly like average Welsh mountain scenery, in every detail but the flora and the fauna. The Valley of Gamotanja is, however, worth seeing; I recommend everybody to go there. Closely skirted on all sides, one gets the whole sweep of the richly forested vale up to the bare grey rocks, and behind one may catch a glimpse of the snows. If one could only see crooked one could see much more. Things are badly arranged after all, as Buddha pointed out, though the fact of his having been a voluptuary for twenty-two years and an ascetic for six may to some minds detract from the value of his opinion.

Travellers' Comfort!

From Gamotanj the road mounts to a lovely scene. Of lakes in these journies one soon becomes *blasé,* and passes with scarce a glance dozens of places, the most commonplace of which would make the fortune of any European resort, and thence goes steeply to the Chumbab by a steep yet excellent track. On the far Nepalese side one slogs along over the stony track for a long way, until a great block of quartz stuck up squarely in a valley with a very inadequate space of level grass around it bade us halt for the night. The doctor, who was rearguard, did not arrive until long after dark; we set up lamps to light him to his happy home. Several of the coolies did not ar-

rive at all, preferring to curl themselves up under rocks and sit out the night, but the next morning all turned up as brisk and lively as ever. I decided to go on with the doctor to Tseram, an outlying village—if three huts make a village in Nepal—to save the messenger of the Maharaja the trouble of ascending to the Kang La to meet us, and ourselves a similar misery. We consequently started at about half-past ten, and crossed a pass—perhaps the Semo La—which took us into the Tseram valley. We crossed the stream by a native bridge, at least I did; the doctor, sailing along an hour behind everybody, preferred to wade up to his waist. It is related by Sir Martin Conway, perhaps the finest mountaineer that the world has ever seen, that his balance is so perfect that he never crossed one of these native bridges without first attaching to himself by a stout rope two other men, preferably Alpine guides, one on each side of him, thus securing their safety on the dangerous passage. I can make no claim to rival this exploit, and walked over tamely, allowing my men to take their own chance. We camped just below Tseram in the wettest weather we had yet experienced, and, hearing that there was a Customs House at Tseram, I sent to bid the man to my presence, so as to get in touch at once with Nepalese authority. But I was fated to do a "Mariana in the Moated Grange" stunt, and when, in the morning, I went off up the Yalung Valley, I found nobody but an aged and very goitrous couple, and higher still a solitary shepherd.

An Interval for Dreams

I left a man at Tesram to explain matters to the Maharaja's "guide" and went on up the valley, which now took on the truly mountainous character, by a delightful path. I was rewarded by a fine day; and the tremendous ridge of Kabru, with its splendid masses of ice, made a magnificent background to the glacier with its morains of quartz glistening silver-grey in the sunlight. Before eleven o'clock I reached what in Norway would be called a Saeter—an upland farm with nobody in it. The height, as nearly as I could judge, was from fourteen to fifteen thousand feet—until calculations are properly worked out, we do not care to specify more closely. I was immensely struck by the imagination shown by Mr. Garwood in his charming effort to depict the physical features of this glacier, which neither he nor any other European had seen. Surely of him it was written: "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." I can hardly bless him though, for his trifling omission to mark

as a summit the great rounded peak, second or third in length to Kinchinjanga, caused me at first considerable trouble. A boy at school who made a similar blunder would probably have remarked in his next day's "Essay on Pleasure" that of all pleasures sung by poets, those of sitting down were the most overrated.

Never mind, I may see the mountain itself tomorrow, and in the meantime here I am lying lazily on the grass in the sunshine—the march ended and the glacier to begin—feeling exactly like the famous spadger at the superb moment in his career when he sat on the grass, and gave the thunderstorm to understand that he felt nothing but contempt for it. So I muse on Kubla Khan and the Ancient Mariner, most appropriate fragments from which come floating into my consciousness every other minute, until the night falls, and I slide into delicious dreams, while Venus, Jupiter, and the moon watch over me. In the morning I wake from dreaming that Government have employed me to survey the entire continent (probably suggested by my struggles with the map), and that, having successfully completed my task, I am about to be invested with three and perhaps four letters to my name, to the far gladder feelings that today I may walk into sight of my long-wished for goal.