



### A DAY IN THE "RAINS" IN ASSAM.

WHAT a black stifling night it is! Although all the four windows in my bedroom are flung wide open, not a breath of air seems to penetrate to the centre of the room where my bed stands. Generally I sleep so soundly that nothing disturbs me; but to-night, when it is too hot to sleep, the air seems more filled with noise than usual. The fiendish yells of the jackals that are prowling round and under the bungalow, the croaking of frogs, the disagreeable chirping of the grasshoppers, and away in a distant village the weary, monotonous sound of a "tom-tom," all disturb the still air, while in the room itself the swish-swish of the punkah, and the angry trumpeting of disappointed mosquitoes trying vainly to find an entrance through my well-darned curtain, seem enough to drive sleep away, quite apart from this awful choking heat, which makes me think of the Black Hole of Calcutta as I toss about. Fortunately the mosquitoes are all *outside* my curtain. Although I have only been six months in Assam, I already know too well from experience the result of leaving the smallest hole in my net undarned; and woe betide my luckless ayah if she neglects her daily duty of looking it all over, as the entrance of one of those little wretches means a night not only of sleeplessness, but positive torture.

Towards morning the sounds die away, the heat seems, if possible, more stifling; and what a relief it is when, about four o'clock, I hear the distant mutterings of an approaching storm. First comes the low grumbling thunder, getting louder as it draws gradually nearer, then the rustling in the leaves of the two large trees in the compound warns me to see to my windows if I do not wish the room to be blown almost inside out immediately. So reluctantly I close them one by one, standing by the last to enjoy the refreshing breeze as long as possible before shutting it out.

Presently it blows a perfect hurricane; my punkah boy, who sits pulling under the bungalow, rushes off to seek shelter, the trees groan and throw their branches angrily about, and it seems every minute as if the roof of the bungalow would be torn off. The lightning grows more vivid and terrible, and soon I hear

far off in the distant jungle the welcome sound of rain. It comes rapidly near, then suddenly seems to come down with a terrific rush overhead; a blinding flash, followed immediately by such a crash of thunder as I have never heard before, and which leaves me quivering from head to foot, and the worst of the storm is over.

The rain gushes down in torrents, the wind dies away, and soon I am able to open the windows wide again; and oh, the delicious coolness brought by that blessed rain! It is like a draught of cold water when one is parched with thirst, and I sit by the open window drawing long satisfied breaths.

Soon I creep back to bed, and, throwing myself wearily down, fall into a sound, refreshing, dreamless sleep, which lasts till Lutchmi, my little ayah, creeps gently in with my usual early cup of tea, and informs me that it is half-past seven—two hours later than my usual time for rising.

I drink the tea sleepily, then plunge into my tub, and feel so refreshed that I get into my white riding-habit quite energetically, and order "chota hazree" and my old pony Tim to be brought round in the same breath.

"Chota hazree" is always a short affair, consisting as it does merely of tea and toast; so in a few minutes I am cantering gently along a grass path, with Badeo, the old syce, running behind.

Far away upon either side stretch row upon row of tea bushes, their stiff green leaves looking greener and glossier than ever after the rain. Far in on the right a group of chattering women, many of them with babies tied to their backs, are busily plucking the leaf, their shrill voices distinctly heard in the still morning air. They certainly look decidedly more picturesque at a distance like this than when close at hand.

Though so early, the sun is already unpleasantly hot—and an August sun in Assam is a thing to be avoided; so, touching up Tim, who is jogging along as lazily as possible, I ride quickly on till I come to a belt of jungle which casts a delightful shade over the path. Here Tim is allowed to fall into his laziest pace, the slowest of slow walks; for

here, though still hot, it is pleasant, and the jungle itself so exquisitely lonely, I feel as if I never could feast my eyes enough on the rich greens of the trees and climbing ferns, which are interspersed with lovely starry white flowers and convolvuli, all seeming more beautiful than usual, covered with sparkling rain-drops.

Coming to the end of this bit of jungle, I am reluctantly about to turn, when Badeo draws my attention to a distant moving speck far away among the tea, and announces that it is the "sahib." Sure enough, as it comes nearer I can recognise my brother, riding back from one of his out-gardens on Rajah, his old white horse. In spite of the blazing sun he looks quite cool and comfortable in his shady topee and white drill suit; but there is a frown on his usually merry face as he comes nearer.

"What folly it is," he says, "your venturing out in such a sun with a useless little thing like that on your head"—pointing to my neat little pith helmet. "Why will you not wear a sensible, thick, broad-brimmed topee that will shade the back of your head?"

He speaks quite crossly; indeed, it always makes him cross when he sees me, as he thinks, not taking proper precautions against the sun.

"My dear Harry," I return flippantly, "I really think I would almost rather get 'a touch of the sun' than run the risk of another such headache as I had after my ride in the great hard topee you are always advising me to wear. I can't think how you men endure those heavy things on your heads."

"Nonsense," says Harry. "You would very soon get accustomed to them; and, as I have often told you, you can't be too careful. We are going to have a piping hot day," he adds, as we pass out of the shade of the jungle into the full blaze of the sun again—"the sooner you are indoors now the better."

A disagreeable damp hot air rises in our faces from the ground as we ride quickly along the narrow path, and I long even for the shade of the despised topee.

We soon reach the bungalow. Harry rides

round to the tea-house, and I gladly draw up under the big shady porch.

We have ridden so fast that old Badeo has been left far behind; but another syce runs quickly up, and leads Tim off to the stables, which are only about fifty yards beyond the compound gate, but nicely hidden by a clump of graceful bamboos.

I slowly climb the long wooden stair to the verandah—our bungalow is built on strong wooden posts, so high that one can walk upright under it from end to end—throw myself with a sigh of relief into a deliciously comfortable long chair, and proceed to open and read a *chit* (note) I find awaiting me on the table. It is an invitation to a moon-light picnic for Harry and me, given by the bachelors of the district; the last we were at was great fun, so we shall accept, of course.

How deliciously cool it is in the verandah, and what a pretty verandah it is! The lovely ferns and flowers in it are my special care; watering and looking after them is part of my regular morning's work, and I feel well rewarded for the little trouble I take by their exquisite beauty.

The drawing-room is seldom used in the hot weather—the verandah is so much cooler, and there is such a lovely view of the Brahma-pootra and the distant hills from it. Then all the most comfortable chairs seem to find their way there; the newest magazines and papers lie scattered on the table; and—greatest attraction of all, perhaps—the best punkah in the bungalow is in the verandah.

Passing through the drawing-room, and on my way to my bedroom, I find Goroo, one of the house servants, there, flicking a duster about with a great show of industry. Telling him to take my sewing-machine and work-basket to the verandah, I pass on to my room, which Lutchmi has already put in perfect order.

Slipping off my habit I put on my coolest white frock, and hurry out to the back verandah to interview the cook, get an account from him of the expenses of the day before (which I always note down accurately every morning), and order breakfast and dinner for to-day.

This done, I put on a huge topee, and go over to the stables to give each pony his customary slice of bread, and see that Rajah and Tim have been well rubbed down after their morning run.

As I stand stroking Tim's nose and gazing absently at the quivering atmosphere through the little paneless stable window, I catch sight of a man wending his way along a path through the tea, the *dák-wallah*—postman—evidently, from his red puggaree.

It flashes through my mind that this is "home-mail day," and, forgetting the heat, I hurry joyfully to meet him.

What a splendid budget he has brought! Seldom has the bag been so fat and heavy. Without going near the vegetable garden, as I had intended, I hasten back to the bungalow and empty the bag on the verandah table. Five letters and three papers for me, not to mention a thick roll of music.

Drawing forward my most comfortable chair I sit down to enjoy them thoroughly, and soon forget all outward surroundings. Oh! if our friends at home only knew half the pleasure we get from their letters, they would feel well repaid for their thoughtfulness in sending frequent and lengthy epistles.

As I finish my last letter Harry comes in from the tea-house, so hot and tired that I persuade him to take his bath before touching his mail; then we have a delicious hour before breakfast, going over the home news together.

Harry has been in Assam for six years, but he is just as eager as I am over news from

home, and quite enjoys all the little bits of gossip that are meant specially for me.

Breakfast is over by one, and by that time the heat is so intense I retire to my own room with an English paper, slip into a loose muslin dressing-gown, and, lying down on the bed, call to the punkah-boy to "pull hard."

Very soon the paper drops from my hand, and I fall into a sound sleep, which lasts till half-past three, when Harry, who has been reading and napping in the verandah, calls in to remind me that it is tennis day at the Club, and that we must start in half-an-hour.

With a groan of disgust I roll out of bed—for the heat, bad enough before, seems almost insufferable now; the bungalow feels like an oven, and the sun is blazing outside as brightly as ever. Nevertheless, I struggle bravely into my tennis shoes, dress quickly, and taking my racquet from its nail on the wall, climb into the high dog-cart beside Harry. He is driving tandem to-day, and we set off at a good pace on our five miles' drive.

As we fly along, a delicious, cool breeze blows in our faces from the river; soon we feel invigorated, and quite brisk and ready for tennis. Early as we are, there is quite a large party on the tennis ground when we arrive. As Harry pulls up at the gate, I count seven ladies (quite a large number for our district), and see that there is the usual large contingent of men, several of the more energetic of whom have already begun to play.

What a pretty scene it is!—the broad, smooth river flowing past within a few yards of us, high feathery grasses fringing it on this side, and on the other, the green, luxuriant jungle, while away in the distance loom the great, gloomy, purple mountains, their summits lost in the clouds.

The ladies, in their pretty muslins and laces, are sitting under the shade of several large trees, while the men stand about in little

groups, most of them engrossed in the subject of *tea*, that everlasting, always interesting topic.

On joining the ladies, I find them in the midst of "home news." Tea and cake appear on the scene, and our conversation becomes so engrossing we can scarcely tear ourselves away to begin tennis and badminton.

After little more than an hour's play it gets too dark to see the balls; the sun has disappeared, but the air is close and muggy, and the breeze has quite died away.

It gets quickly darker, the mosquitoes begin to hum round us in a threatening manner, and as the moon rises, we bid each other a friendly "Good-night," and drive off in different directions, Harry and I imparting to each other any amusing little bit of gossip we have heard, or rather, I impart, and Harry listens good-naturedly to all I have to tell.

We get home just in time for our eight o'clock dinner, both of us with very fair appetites after our tennis and drive, in spite of the heat. I feel sure the mosquitoes are going to be very bad to-night, so as I sit down to dinner, I tuck a rug well round my feet and ankles to keep them off, trusting to the punkah to drive them from my face and hands. How I envy Harry as he sits calmly ignoring them. He is one of those lucky individuals whom they leave in peace, while they worry others less fortunate, yet equally deserving!

When dinner is over I am so sleepy I cannot keep my eyes open to read, so saying "Good-night" to Harry, who is smoking and reading his *Englishman* with the placid, contented expression of a man who has dined well, and is oblivious to the fact that he has to get up next morning at 5 A.M., I retire to my room, and am soon lying in a sound, dreamless sleep, which lasts till morning, and which a whole army of jackals would find it difficult to disturb.



SHE leaned and looked into the tide; the river dark and grim  
Flowed at her feet. 'Twas evening, and her eyes with pain were dim.  
She scarcely saw the hurrying forms that passed on nimble feet:  
She only heard Temptation's voice, clear-ringing, strong, and sweet.  
Two children passed her, hand in hand; it bruised her heart to see  
Their loving looks. "Oh, God!" she cried,  
"There's love for all on earth beside, but only death for me!"

A gentle face, with earnest look, and happy, loving eyes,  
Came o'er the bridge and lightly passed, then turned in some surprise;  
"Are you unhappy?"—just a touch, a touch upon the arm,  
A tender gaze, a soft caress (Oh, wondrous healing balm!);  
Light flushes on the cold hard world; the cruel tale is told.  
A rush of tears, a new life breaks in sunset tints of gold.  
A sweet voice drowns Temptation's spell, and breaks the bitter thrall.  
Its words ring true—  
"No sorrow lasts, hope is for you, and love is over all."

The world is dark to all of us in hours of fell despair,  
We feel the grasp of tempting death close round the fainting air.  
Then for a tender touch, a voice, a heart to help us bear:  
To hear our woes, divide our griefs, our sorrows keen to share!  
This is a part we all may play—we all may hear the call,  
And cry anew—  
"No sorrow lasts, there's hope for you, and love is over all."

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