



*Manipur
and the
Naga Hills*

Sir James Johnstone

Manipur, a beautiful valley, is surrounded by the hills on all sides and bounded on the North by Naga Hills. Naga Hills forms a part of the complex mountain barriers on the borders of Burma and India. Since the author had been to both the places he acquired a first hand information, with immense experiences about their people, history, politics, religion, culture, economics, etc. He has set down authentic facts in a systematic way and given historical events connected with Manipur and Naga Hills in British India.

Sir James, Johnstone who had been
*Political Officer of Manipur for several years,
has written about Manipur and the Naga Hills
(situated in the North-East corner of India) as
prevalent in those days with antiquity.*

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MANIPUR AND THE NAGA HILLS

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*Major General
Sir James Johnstone...K.C.S.I.*

MANIPUR AND THE NAGA HILLS



MAJOR-GENERAL SIR JAMES JOHNSTONE
K.C.S.I.

With an Introductory Memoir

ILLUSTRATED



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Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	13
<i>Author's Preface</i>	15
<i>Introductory Memoir</i>	19

CHAPTER-I

My Experiences in Manipur and Naga Hills

Arrival in India—Hospitable friends—The Lieut.-Governor— Journey to the Naga Hills—Nigriting—Golaghat—A panther reminiscence—Hot springs—A village dance—Dimapur—My new abode.	25
---	----

CHAPTER-II

Samagudting—Unhealthy quarters—A callous widower—Want of water—Inhabitants of the Naga Hills—Captain Butler—Other Officials—Our Life in the wilds—A tiger carries off the postman—An Indian forest—Encouragement.	33
--	----

CHAPTER-III

Historical events connected with Manipur and the Naga Hills— Different tribes—Their religion—Food and customs.	41
---	----

CHAPTER-IV

Value of keeping a promise—Episode of Sallajee—Protection given to small villages, and the large one defied—"Thorough" Government of India's views—A plea for Christian education in the Naga Hills.	55
---	----

CHAPTER-V

Visit Dimapur—A terrible storm—Cultivation—Aggression by Konoma—My ultimatum—Konoma submits—Birth of a son— Forest flowers—A fever patient—Proposed change of station— Leave Naga Hills—March through the forest—Depredation by tigers—Calcutta—Return to England.	61
--	----

CHAPTER-VI

- Return to India—Attached to Foreign Office—Imperial assemblage at Delhi—Almorah—Appointed to Manipur—Journey to Shillong—Cherra Poojee—Colonel McCulloch—Question of ceremony. 69

CHAPTER-VII

- Start for Manipur—March over the hills—Lovely scenery—Views of the valley—State reception—The Residency—Visitors. 73

CHAPTER-VIII

- Visit the Maharajah—His ministers—Former revolutions—Thangal Major. 79

CHAPTER-IX

- Manipur—Early history—Our connection with it—Ghumbeer Singh—Burmese war. 85

CHAPTER-X

- Ghumbeer Singh and our treatment of him—Nur Singh and attempt on his life—McCulloch—His wisdom and generosity—My establishment—Settlement of frontier dispute. 93

CHAPTER-XI

- My early days in Manipur—The capital—The inhabitants—Good qualities of Manipuris—Origin of valley of Manipur—Expedition to the Naga Hills—Lovely scenery—Attack on Kongal Tannah by Burmese—Return from Naga Hills—Visit Kongal Tannah. 97

CHAPTER-XII

- Discussions as to new Residency—Its completion—Annual boat-races—Kang-joop-kool—Daily work—Dealings with the Durbar. 103

CHAPTER-XIII

- Violent conduct of Prince Koireng—A rebuke—Service payment—Advantages of Manipuri system—Customs duties—Slavery—Releasing slaves—Chowbas' fidelity—Sepoy's kindness to children—Visit to the Yoma range. 109

CHAPTER-XIV

- An old acquaintance—Monetary crisis—A cure for breaking crockery—Rumour of human sacrifices—Improved postal system—Apricots—Mulberries—A snake story—Search after treasure—Another snake story—Visit to Calcutta—Athletics—Ball practice—A near shave. 115

CHAPTER-XV

- Spring in Manipur—Visit Kombokang—Manipuri orderlies—Parade of the Maharajah's Guards—Birth of a daughter—An evening walk in the capital—Polo—Visit to Cachar. 123

CHAPTER-XVI

- Punishment of female criminals—A man saved from execution—A Kuki executed—Old customs abolished—Anecdots of Ghumber Singh—The Manipuri army—Effort to re-organise Manipur Levy—System of rewards—"Nothing for nothing"—An English School—Hindoo Festivals—Rainbows—View from Kang-joop-kool. 127

CHAPTER-XVII

- Mr. Damant and the Naga Hills—Rumours on which I act—News of revolt in Naga Hills and Mr. Damant's murder—Maharajah's loyalty—March to the relief of Kohima—Relief of Kohima—Incidents of siege—Heroism of ladies—A noble defence. 133

CHAPTER-XVIII

- Restoring order and confidence—Arrival of Major Evans—Arrival of Major Williamson—Keeping open communication—Attack on Phesama—Visit to Manipur—General Nation arrives—Join him at Suchema—Prepare to attack Konoma—Assault of Konoma. 145

CHAPTER-XIX

- Konoma evacuated—Journey to Suchema for provisions and ammunition, and return—We march to Suchema with General—Visit Manipur—Very ill—Meet Sir Steuart Bayley in Cachar—His visit to Manipur—Grand reception—Star of India—Chussad attack on Chingsow—March to Kohima and

back—Reflections on Maharajah's services—Naga Hills campaign overshadowed by Afghan war. 155

CHAPTER-XX

Visit Chingsow to investigate Chussad outrage—Interesting country—Rhododendrons—Splendid forest—Chingsow and the murders—Chattik—March back across the hills. 161

CHAPTER-XXI

Saving a criminal from execution—Konoma men visit me—A terrible earthquake—Destruction wrought in the capital—Illness of the Maharajah—Question as to the succession—Arrival of the Queen's warrant—Reception by the Maharajah—The Burmese question. 167

CHAPTER-XXII

March to Mao and improvement of the road—Lieutenant Raban—Constant troubles with Burmah—Visit to Mr. Elliott at Kohima—A tiger hunt made easy—A perilous adventure—Rose bushes—Brutal conduct of Prince Koireng—We leave Manipur for England. 173

CHAPTER-XXIII

Return to Manipur—Revolution in my absence—Arrangements for boundary—Survey and settlement—Start for Kongal—Burmese will not act—We settle boundary—Report to Government—Return to England. 179

CHAPTER-XXIV

Return to India—Visit to Shillong—Manipur again—Cordial reception—Trouble with Thangal Major—New arts introduced. 185

CHAPTER-XXV

A friend in need—Tour round the valley—Meet the Chief Commissioner—March to Cachar—Tour through the Tankhool country—Metomi Saraméttie—Somrah—Terrace cultivators—A dislocation—Old quarters at Kongal Tannah—Return to the valley—A sad parting. 189

CHAPTER-XXVI

- More trouble with Thangal Major—Tit-for-tat—Visit to the Kubo valley—A new Aya Pooiel—Journey to Shillong—War is declared—A message to Kendat to the Bombay-Burmah Corporation Agents—Anxiety as to their fate—March to Mao. 197

CHAPTER-XXVII

- News from Kendat—Mr. Morgan and his people safe—I determine to march to Morch Tannah—March to Kendat—Arrive in time to save the Bombay-Burmah Corporation Agents—Visit of the Woon—Visit to the Woon. 203

CHAPTER-XXVIII

- People fairly friendly—Crucifixion—Carelessness of Manipuris—I cross the Chindwin—Recross the Chindwin—Collect provisions—Erect stockades and fortify our position—Revolt at Kendat—We assume the offensive—Capture boats and small stockade—Revolt put down—Woon and Ruckstuhl rescued—Steamers arrive and leave. 207

CHAPTER-XXIX

- Mischief done by departure of steamers—Determine to establish the Woon at Tamu—The country quieting down—Recovery of mails—Letter from the Viceroy—Arrive at Manipur—Bad News—I return to Tamu—Night march to Pot-thâ—An engagement—Wounded—Return to Manipur—Farewell—Leave for England. 213

CHAPTER-XXX

- Conclusions* 223
The Events of 1890-1891 223
Index 231

List of Illustrations

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1. Samagudting | <i>To Face Page 34</i> |
| 2. Kohima Stone | <i>To Face Page 42</i> |
| 3. The Naga Hills and Manipur | <i>To Face Page 50</i> |
| 4. Fulford Hall | <i>To Face Page 62</i> |
| 5. Kohima | <i>To Face Page 118</i> |
| 6. Colonel Johnstone, the Prince of Manipur,
Thangal Major, The European Officers in
Kohima, etc. | <i>To Face Page 138</i> |
| 7. Arthur Johnstone's Grave | <i>To Face Page 218</i> |



Author's Preface

When I first brought my wife out to India in 1873, I was struck by the comments she made on things which had so long been part of my daily life. I had almost ceased to observe them. Every day she noted something new, and her diary was so interesting that I advised her to write a book on her "First Impressions of India," and she meant to do so, but never had time. Had she lived, this would have been a pleasure to her, but it was otherwise ordained. I feel now that I am in some way carrying out her wishes, by attempting a description of our life in India, though I am fully sensible that I cannot hope to achieve the pleasant chatty style in which she excelled.

I have also striven to give a fair record to the events with which I was connected; and perhaps, as they include a description of a state of things that has passed away for ever, they may not be devoid of interest. I am one of those old-fashioned Anglo-Indians who still believe in personal government, a system by which we gained India, solidified our rule, and made ourselves fairly acceptable to the people whom we govern. I believe the machine-like system which we have introduced and are endeavouring to force into every corner of India, till all personal influence is killed out, to the ill-adapted to the requirement of these Oriental races, and blighting in its effects. Not one native chief has adopted it in its integrity, which is in itself a fair argument that it is distasteful to the native mind; and we may be assured that if we evacuated India tomorrow, personal rule would again make itself felt throughout the length and breadth of the land, and grow stronger every day. I have always striven to be a reformer, but a reformer building on the solid foundations that we already find everywhere in India. Wherever you go, if there is a semblance of native rule left, you find a system admirably adapted to the needs of the population, though very often grown over with abuses. Clear away these abuses, and add a little in the way of modern progress, but always building on the foundation you find ready to hand, and you have a system acceptable to all.

We are wonderfully timid in sweeping away real abuses, for fear of hurting the feelings of the people; at the same time we weigh them down with unnecessary, oppressive, and worrying forms, and deluge the country

with paper returns, never realising that these cause far more annoyance than would be felt at our making some radical change in a matter which, after all, affects only a minority. Take, for instance, the case of suttee, or widow-burning. It was argued for years that we could not put it down without causing a rebellion. What are the facts? A governor-general, blessed with moral courage in a great degree, determined to abolish the barbarous custom, and his edict was obeyed without a murmur. So it has been in many other cases, and so it will be wherever we have the courage to do the right thing. An unpopular tax would cause more real dissatisfaction than any interference with bad old customs, only adhered to from innate conservatism. The great principle on which to act is to do what is right, and what commends itself to common sense, and to try and carry the people with you. Do not let us have more mystery than is necessary; telling the plain truth is the best course; vacillation is fatal; the strongest officer is generally the most popular, and is remembered by the people long after he is dead and gone.

Personal rule is doomed, and men born to be personal rulers and a blessing to the governed, are now harassed by the authorities till they give up in despair, and swim with the stream.

The machine system did not gain India, and will not keep it for us; we must go back to a better system, or be prepared to relax our grasp, and give up the grandest work any nation ever undertook—the regeneration of an empire !

The House of Commons has to answer for much. No Indian administration is safe from the interference of theorists. Today it is opium that is attacked by self-righteous individuals, who see in the usual, and in most cases harmful, stimulant of millions, a crying evil; while they view with apparent complacency the expenditure of \$120,000,000 per annum on intoxicating liquors in England, and long columns in almost every newspaper recording brutal outrages on helpless women and children as the result.

Then the military administration is attacked, and in pursuance of another chimera, an iniquitous bill is forced on the Government of India calculated to produce results, which will probably sap the efficiency of our army at a critical moment. So it goes on, and it is hardly to be wondered at that the authorities in India give up resistance in sheer disgust, knowing all the while that, as the French say, *le deluge* must come after them.

It may be said, "What has all this to do with Manipur and the Naga Hills?" Nothing perhaps directly, but indirectly a great deal. The system which I decry carries its evil influence everywhere, and Manipur has

suffered from it. I describe the Naga Hills and Manipur as they were in old days. I strove hard for years to hold the floods back from this little State and to preserve it intact, while doing all I could to introduce reforms. Now the floods have overwhelmed it, and if it rises again above them it will not be the Manipur that I knew and loved. May it, in spite of my doubts and fears, be a better Manipur.

Introductory Memoir

These experiences were written in brief intervals of leisure, during the last few months of the author's busy life, which was brought to a sudden close before they were finally revised. Only last March when his nearest relations met at Fulford Hall to take leave of the eldest son of the house, before he sailed for India, the manuscript was still incomplete, and Sir James read some part of it aloud. His health had suffered greatly from over-fatigue in the unhealthy parts of India, in which his lot had been chiefly east, but it was now quite restored and a prolonged period of usefulness seemed before him.

Improvements on the farms on his estate, a church within reach of his cottagers, to be built as a memorial to his late wife, and the hope of being once more employed abroad, probably as a colonial governor, were all plans for the immediate future, while the present was occupied with the magisterial and other business (including lectures on history in village institutes), which fill up so much of an English country gentleman's life. He had saved nothing in India. What the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal wrote in 1872 of his early work at Keonjhur, applied to everything else he subsequently undertook: "Captain Johnstone's schools, twenty in number, continue to flourish, attracting an average attendance of 665 children. Captain Johnstone's efforts to improve the crops and cattle of Keonjhur have before been remarked by the Lieutenant-Governor. His sacrifices for this end and for his charge generally, are, His Honour believes, almost unique."¹ But in 1881 by the death of his late father's elder brother, he inherited the Fulford estate on the boundaries of Worcestershire and Warwickshire, as well as Dunsley Manor in Staffordshire. The old Hall at Fulford, a strongly built, black and white, half-timbered erection of some centuries back, had been pulled down a few years before, and Sir James built the present house close to the old site. It was here that he was brought back in a dying state on June 13th, 1895, about 10 A.M., after riding out of the grounds only ten minutes before, full of life and energy. No one witnessed what occurred; he was a splendid horseman, but there was evidence that the horse, always inclined to

be restive, had taken fright on passing a cottager's gate and tried to turn back, and that, as its master's whip was still firmly grasped in his hand, there had been a struggle.

He was engaged to assist the next day at the annual meeting of the Conservative and Unionist Association at Stratford-on-Avon. The Marquis of Hertford, who presided, when announcing the catastrophe in very feeling terms, spoke of the excellent work that Sir James Johnstone had done for the Unionist cause in Warwickshire. At Wythall Church (of which he was warden) the Vicar alluded, the following Sunday, to "the striking example he had set of a devout and attentive worshipper."

A retired official who had been acquainted with him in India for over thirty years, wrote on the same occasion to Captain Charles Johnstone, R.N.: "Your brother was a type of character not at all common, high-principled, fearless, just, with an overwhelming sense of duty, and restless spirit of adventure. It is by characters of his type, that our great empire has been created, and it is only if such types continue that we may look forward and hope that it will be maintained and extended."

Although the family from which Sir James Johnstone sprang is of Scottish origin, his own branch of it had lived in Worcestershire and Warwickshire for nearly a century and a half. "It has taken a prominent part in the social and public life of the Midlands, and has produced several eminent physicians."² He was the eleventh in direct male descent from William Johnstone of Graitney, who received a charter of the barony of Newbie for "distinguished services" to the Scottish crown in 1541. A remnant of the old Scottish estates was inherited by his great-grandfather, Dr. James Johnstone, who died at Worcester in 1802, and who, being the fourth son of his parents, had left Annandale at the age of twenty-one to settle in Worcestershire as a physician, but who always kept up his relations with Scotland, and meant to return there in his old age. His anxiety to secure this estate—Galabank—in the male line, really defeated his purpose; for he bequeathed it to his then unmarried younger son, the late Dr. John Johnstone, F.R.S., whose daughter now possesses it, to the exclusion of his elder sons who seemed likely to leave nothing but daughters. One of these elder sons was Sir James's grandfather, the late Dr. Edward Johnstone of Edgbaston Hall, who had married the heiress of Fulford, but was left a widower in 1800. Dr. Edward Johnstone was remarried in 1802 to Miss Pearson of Tettenhall, and of their two sons, the younger, James, born in 1806, practised for many years as a physician, and was President of the British Medical Association when it met in

Birmingham in 1856. His eldest son, the subject of this notice, was born in a house now pulled down in the Old Square, Birmingham, on February 9th, 1841. Brought up in the midst of the large family of brothers and sisters, whose childhood was passed between their home in the Old Square and their grandfather's residence at Edgbaston Hall, where they spent the summer and autumn: he used also to look back with particular pleasure on his visits to his maternal grandfather's country house, where he first mounted a pony. His mother was his instructor, except occasional lessons from the Rev. T. Price, till at the age of nine he entered King Edward's Classical School, of which his father was a governor. The head master at that time (1850), was the Rev. (now Archdeacon) E.H. Gifford, D.D., and in the school list for 1852, Johnstone senior is placed next in the same class to Mackenzie (now Sir Alex.), the present Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal.

In 1855, young James Johnstone went to a military college in Paris, which was swept away before 1870, with a great part of the older portion of the city. After a year and a half in Paris he was transferred to the Royal Naval and Military Academy, Gosport, and a few months later qualified for one of the last cadetships given under the old East India Company. Without delay he proceeded to India, which was at that period distracted by the Indian Mutiny, so that his regiment the 68th Bengal Native Infantry, consisted only of officers attached to different European regiments, or acting in a civil capacity. With the 73rd (Queen's Regiment) he marched through the country, and was actively employed in the suppression of the insurgents, after which he was stationed for some time in Assam where he also saw active service. There, in 1862, he met with the accident he alludes to on pp. 26 and 36. It came in the course of his duty, as the population of a village which had been disarmed had sent to the nearest military post to ask for assistance against a tiger (panther), causing destruction in the neighbourhood; but he was very much hurt, and the weakening effects of this accident, seem to have predisposed him to attacks of the malaria fever of the district, from which he frequently suffered afterwards.

His next post was at Keonjhur, where there had been an outbreak against the Rajab by some of the hill-tribes and the chief insurgent had been executed. Lieutenant Johnstone was appointed special assistant to the Superintendent of the Tributary Mehals at Cuttack, in whose official district Keonjhur lies. The Superintendent wrote to the Lieutenant-Governor (Sir William Grey of Bengal in 1869: "Captain Johnstone has acquired their full confidence, and hopes very shortly to be able to dispense

with the greater part of the Special Police Force posted at Keonjhur. He appears to take very great interest in his work, and is sanguine of success." The same official when enclosing Captain Johnstone's first report, wrote: "It contains much interesting matter regarding the people, and shows that he has taken great pains in bringing them into the present peaceable and apparently loyal condition,' and a little further on, when describing an interview he had with the Rajah: "From the manner in which he spoke of Captain Johnstone, I was exceedingly glad to find that the most good feeling exists between them." He also adds, apropos of a recommendation that the Government should pay half the expense of the special commission instead of charging it all on the native state: "Nearly one half of Captain Johnstone's time has been occupied in Khedda (catching wild elephants) operations, which have been successful and profitable to Government, and totally unconnected with that officer's duty in Keonjhur."³

A year later the superintendent (T.E. Ravenshaw, Esq.) reports: "Captain Johnstone, with his usual liberality and tact, has clothed two thousand naked savages, and has succeeded in inducing them to wear the garments;" and again, "Captain Johnstone's success in establishing schools has been most marked, and there are now nine hundred children receiving a rudimentary education. . . . Captain Johnstone has very correctly estimated the political importance of, education and enlightenment among the hill people, and it is evident that he has worked most judiciously and successfully in this direction." And again: "In the matter of improvement of breed of cattle, Captain Johnstone has, at his own expense, formed a valuable herd of sixty cows and several young bulls ready to extend the experiment Captain Johnstone's experiments on rice and flax cultivation have been very successful" (two years later this is attributed to his having superintended them himself). The official report sums up, "Of Captain Johnstone I cannot speak too highly; his management has been efficient, and he has exercised careful and constant supervision over the Rajah and his estate, in a manner which has resulted in material improvement to both."

Subsequently, when Captain Johnstone was on leave in England, the Keonjhur despatches show that he sent directions that the increase of his herd of cattle should be distributed gratis among the natives. They were at first afraid to accept them, hardly believing in the gift.

"Keonjhur," says the Government report of India for 1870-1, "continues under the able administration of Captain Johnstone, who, it will be remembered, was mainly instrumental in restoring the country to quiet three years ago."

Captain Johnstone was too good a classic not to remember the Roman method of conquering and subduing a province; and as far as funds would permit, he opened out roads and cleared away jungle. But he suffered again from the malaria so prevalent in the forest districts of India, and took three months' furlough in 1871, which meant just one month in England. Although he had lost his father in May, 1869, and his absence from home that year gave him some extra legal expense, he would not quit his work till he could leave it in a satisfactory state; yet the Lieut.-Governor of Bengal (Sir George Campbell) twice referred to this furlough as being "most unfortunate," particularly as it had to be repeated within a few months. The superintendent wrote from Cuttack in his yearly report to the Lient-Governor: "Captain Johnstone's serious and alarming illness necessitated his taking sick leave to England in August, 1871. He had only a short time previously returned from furlough and with health half restored, over-tasked his strength in carrying out elephant Khedda work in the deadly jungles of Moburdhunj."

In the spring of 1872, Captain Johnstone was married to Emma Mary Lloyd, with whose family his own had a hereditary friendship of three generations. Her father was at that time M.P. for Plymouth, and living at Moor Hall in Warwickshire. Their first child, James, died of bronchitis when six months old, and they returned to India a short time afterwards, at which point the experiences begin. Their second child, Richard, was born at Samagudting, and is now a junior officer in the battalion of the 60th King's Own Royal Rifles, quartered in India. The third son, Edward, was born at Dunsley Manor, and two younger children in Manipur.

Manipur, to which Colonel Johnstone was appointed in 1877, was called by one of the Indian secretaries the Cinderella among political agencies. "They'll never," he said, "get a good man to take it." "Well," was the reply, "a good man has taken it now." The loneliness, the surrounding savages, and the ill-feeling excited by the Kubo valley (which so late as 1852 is placed in Manipur, in maps published in Calcutta) having been made over to Burmah, were among the reasons of its unpopularity. Colonel Johnstone's predecessor, Captain Durand (now Sir Edward) draws a very glaring picture in his official report for 1877, of the Maharajah's misgovernment; the wretched condition of the people, and the most unpleasant position of the Political Agent, whom he described as "in fact a British officer under Manipur surveillance. . . . He is surrounded by spies. . . . If the Maharajah is not pleased with the Political Agent he cannot get anything—he is ostracised. From bad coarse black atta, which the

Maharajah sells him as a favour, to the dhoby who washes his clothes, and the Nagas who work in his garden, he cannot purchase anything." Yet, well knowing all this, Colonel Johnstone readily accepted the post, confident that with his great knowledge of Eastern languages, and of Eastern customs and modes of thought, he should be able to bring about a better state of things, both as regarded the oppressed inhabitants and the permanent influence of the representative of the British Government. Whether this confidence was justified, the following pages will show.

Editor

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1. Resolution, Political Department, No. 87, 1872.
2. *Birmingham Daily Post*, June 15, 1895.
3. Printed official reports.

CHAPTER-XXX

CONCLUSION

The Events of 1890 and 1891

When I first began this book it was my intention to have given a connected account of the Palace Revolution of September 1890, and that of 1891, against the British Government. Being probably the only living person in full possession of the whole facts connected with the startling events that then took place, and the circumstances that led up to them, and having, moreover, a strong conviction that it is best for all parties that the truth should be known, I felt that a fair and impartial statement could do no harm, and might act as a warning. Further reflection has led me to alter my determination, and to ask myself the question, "*Cui bono?*" The Government of India has shown no desire to make more disclosures than necessary, and it is not for me, a loyal old servant, to lift the veil.

"Let the dead past bury its dead."

However much, therefore, I may wish to see the right horse saddled, I shall for the present, at any rate, avoid criticism as far as possible, and confine myself to a few general remarks.

Nothing that I can say will undo the past, and all that remains is to hope for the future.

After I left Manipur fresh disturbances broke out in the Kubo valley, where I had left all peaceful, prosperous, and contented, and a considerable strain was put on the resources of Manipur. Had I been ordered to return I would gladly have done so, but my health was too bad to make it advisable for me to volunteer my services.¹ I regret that I did not, as I might in that case have again urged the claims of Manipur to have the Kubo valley restored to her, as she had a right to expect that it would be substantial hopes having been on at least one occasion held out to her, and her many good services and constant loyalty entitling her to consideration.

However, it was not to be; and in the summer of 1886 another misfortune befell her, in the death of Maharajah Chandra Kirtee Singh. Perhaps, like his father, Ghumbeer Singh, he was happy in the hour of his

death, as he did not live to see the disgrace of his country, and the ingratitude of our Government to his family.

Now was the grand opportunity for the Government and an able Political Agent to step in and make the many needful reforms, and introduce necessary changes, and instil a more modern spirit in keeping with the times, into the institutions of the country. Did we take advantage of it? Of course we did not; but, true to our happy-go-lucky traditions, let one precious opportunity after another pass by unheeded. Year after year during my period of office had I struggled hard, and carried on a never-ending fight for influence and prestige, with the strong and capable old Chandra Kirtee Singh, gaining ground steadily; but realising that, while I worked, the full advantage would be reaped by that one of my successors who might chance to be in office when my old friend closed his eventful life. At such a time, in addition to the result of my labours, a weaker occupant of the throne would afford many opportunities such as were not vouchsafed to me, and now the time had arrived when we might have worked unimpeded for the good of all classes.

Soor Chandra Singh, the former Jubraj, or heir apparent, succeeded his father, a good, amiable man, with plenty of ability, but very weak. He was loyal to the British Government, and had on several occasions given strong proof of it, and he was much respected by his own people. Had he been taken in hand properly all would have been well, but the Government of India seems never to have realised that excessive care and caution were necessary. The records of the past plainly showed that the appointment of a Political Agent was always a difficult one to fill satisfactorily, but no pains seem to have been at any time taken to find a suitable man; if one happened to be appointed, it was a matter of chance, and the post seems generally to have been put up to a kind of Dutch auction. On one occasion I believe that an officer, who was at the time doing well, and liked the place, was taken away, and another, who did not wish to go, sent up, to die within a month of a long-standing complaint. For all this, of course the Foreign Office must be held responsible, as it had a long traditional knowledge of Manipur; and though its powers were delegated to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, it should have ascertained that that officer was capable of making a good selection, and had an officer under him fit for the appointment. The work may not have been of a nature requiring the very highest class of intellect, but it certainly did require a rather rare combination of qualities, together with one indispensable to make a good officer, namely, a real love for the work,

the country, and the people. My immediate successor had these latter qualities, but he died of wounds received within six weeks of my leaving.²

It is to be regretted, also, that the Government of India acts so much on the principle that the private claims of some of its servants should be considered before the claims of the State generally, and the people over whom they are put, in particular. It seems to be thought that the great object, in many cases, is to secure a certain amount of pay to an individual, quite irrespective of his qualifications, rather than to seek out an officer in every way competent to administer a great province, and satisfy the requirement of its people. I say this especially with reference to Assam. Few provinces of India require more special qualities in its ruler, containing, as it does, many races of different grades of civilisation; the situation being further complicated by the presence of a large European population of tea-planters. These, by their energy and the judicious application of a large amount of capital, have raised it to a great pitch of prosperity, and they naturally require to be dealt with in a different way to their less civilised native fellow-subjects.

An officer may be an admirable accountant, or very well able to decide between two litigants, or, may be, to look after stamps and stationery; but without special administrative experience, or those abilities which enable a genius to grasp any subject he takes up, he cannot be considered fit to be trusted with the government of a great and flourishing province. His claims as regards pay should not be allowed to weigh at all with the Government of India; it is unjust to the people, and would be cheaper to give an enhanced pension than ruin a province. Yet it cannot be denied that the considerations I have referred to, do prevail, and that the Manipur disaster was, in a great measure, due to the system, and that with proper care it could never have happened.

When I was in Manipur no European could enter the state without obtaining the permission of the Durbar through the Political Agent, and the Maharajah, very wisely, did his utmost to discourage such visitors, unless they were friends of the latter. Orchid collectors, and such like, were rigorously excluded, wisely, again I say, considering the havoc wrought by selfish traders with these lovely denizens of the forests of Manipur and Burmah, and when the Burmese war broke out, very few were those of our countrymen who had visited the interesting little state. As for myself I quite sympathised with the Maharajah and I even said a word on behalf of the Sungai (swamp deer) peculiar to Manipur and Burmah, and advised him to preserve it strictly. I fear it must be extinct in Manipur by this time. The Burmese war changed all this; troops poured

through the country, and European officers were constantly passing to and fro, much to the annoyance of the Durbar. Of course, a stay-at-home Englishman will hardly understand this, but to anyone knowing natives of India well, it is self-evident, a European cannot go through a state like Manipur where suspicion reigns rampant, and where people are wedded to their own peculiar ways, without causing a great deal of trouble. All sorts of things have to be provided for him, and though he pays liberally, some one suffers. The presence of one or two Europeans constantly moving about would no doubt in itself be a source of annoyance to the high officials of Manipur, who would always suspect them of making enquiries with a view to an unfavourable report to Government. All natives of India are suspicious, and this remark applies with tenfold force to Manipuris.

It cannot, I fear, be denied, that as a race we are a little careless of the feelings of others. It is possibly due in a great measure to our insularity; but, whatever be the cause, it is an undesirable quality to possess. With a regiment of Native Infantry stationed at Langthabal to support our authority, our prestige ought to have rapidly increased; apparently the reverse was the case, and from time to time incidents occurred, which indicated how events were drifting. On one occasion some sepoy's of the Political Agent's escort were hustled and beaten by some Manipuris at a public festival, and on another the man carrying the Government mail bag between Imphal and Langthabal, was stopped and robbed of the mails. Everything seemed to show that our position was not what it had been. In former days such things could not have happened.

Kotwal Koireng had always been a bad character, and had for years been under a cloud. Had I remained in Manipur I should have turned him out when the Maharajah his father died, and reported the matter to Government. He was allowed to remain, and proved the ruin of the state. His blood-thirsty nature soon showed itself, and he half-roasted two men after a most cruel flogging, the Maharajah was asked to turn him out of the state, and would probably have consented, but just at the time a European sergeant shot a cow, the sacred animal of the Hindoos, an outrage far exceeding any that our imagination can paint, and the Rajah in his wrath flatly refused to punish his brother, while such a fearful crime as cow killing, was allowed to pass unnoticed. Of course the last was an untoward event, that should never have occurred. We ought not to allow uncultured Europeans likely to be careless of native feeling and susceptibilities to enter a state so full of prejudice and suspicion as Manipur.

Thus events followed one another in rapid succession, signs every

now and then appearing which showed that all was not as quiet as it seemed. I heard from time to time things that made me uneasy, as I tattered that Kotwal Koireng, now become Senaputtee or Commander-in-Chief, had much power and influence, and I felt sure that he would soon make an attempt to oust his brother, the Maharajah.

At last the attempt was made. In September, 1890, the Maharajah Soor Chandra Singh was attacked in his palace at night and driven out. He fled to Cachar and having petitioned the Government of India for his restoration, proceeded to Calcutta. The case was a simple one, a palace revolution had occurred and our nominee whose succession and whose throne we had guaranteed, had been deposed. The course to be adopted by Government was as clear as the day, Soor Chandra Singh should have been restored at once and the usurper severely punished for insulting the majesty of the British Government. Nothing of the kind was done. It was decided, on what grounds I know not, to break our pledged word; the Maharajah was to be exiled with a pittance for his support; his stupid boorish brother who had been set up as puppet by the Senaputtee was to be Rajah; while the evil genius of Manipur, the treacherous Senaputtee, was to be exiled. The Government of India then ordered the Chief Commissioner of Assam to proceed to Manipur and carry out their decision, including the Senaputtee's arrest.

It is difficult to say which showed the greatest want of wisdom, the Government in issuing such an order, or the Chief Commissioner in accepting such a mission, quite derogatory to one of such high rank. We all know how it ended. The less said about it the better, it reflects no credit on us.³

With one or two things, however, I am concerned, and one of these is the sentence on Thangal Major, or General as he was called; in the correspondence usually ignorantly referred to, as "The Thangal General," a misnomer, Thangal being a name and not a title. This old man seventy-four years of age had long almost retired into private life. He was a devoted follower of Soor Chandra Singh, and hated the Senaputtee whose evil influence he always feared would wreck Manipur. This probably made the latter recall him to public life, so as to keep him under his eye; anyhow, he was by force of circumstances obliged, however unwillingly, to act as a loyal subject of his own *de facto* chief.

I have said so much about the old man, that his character will be well understood. He was a strong, able, unscrupulous man, not likely to stick at trifles, and, like most Asiatics of his type, capable of anything. This does not, however, mean that he was worse than his neighbours, our

characters are made by our surroundings, and in Manipur the surroundings are not of an elevating nature. Thangal was in many ways kind hearted, in others ruthless, and for the moment cruel, his wrath flared up and, except when kept aglow for policy's sake, soon burned itself out.

When first I heard of the outbreak I made two predictions, both proved to be true. One of these was that, whoever was guilty, Thangal Major would be accused. I never did think him guilty by premeditation, but I knew that as for so long a time he was the strong head of the executive, he was not loved, and that to save the Senaputtee, whom I of course at once pitched upon as the "*fons et origo*" of the rebellion, and who like all of the blood royal was looked upon as semi-divine, he would be accused. I read the evidence published, which I can quite understand appeared conclusive to the tribunal before which he was tried; reading between the lines, however, with a thorough knowledge of Manipur as I was able to do, it gave me quite a different impression. Knowing the old man so intimately as I did, his way of talking and his way of acting, I am convinced that he was in no way a willing accessory to the rebellion, that he in no way connived at the invitation to our officers to enter the palace at night, and further that he never suggested or consented to their murder! The whole proceeding was so totally opposed to his policy that he would never have sanctioned such an act of folly, to say the least. The Senaputtee richly deserved all he got and more. An unscrupulous and selfish butcher by nature he played his cards badly and when he lost, determined to involve his whole family and loyal dependents in the ruin which his own insensate folly had brought on him. I quite acknowledge old Thangal's many faults, but I also remember his good qualities, and shall ever regret that he came to such an untimely end.

As regards the disposition of the throne I have a word to say. Recognising as I do the necessity of maintaining the firmness of our rule and prestige to the utmost, a rule that is of incalculable benefit to millions, I quite approved of a heavy punishment being exacted as a terrible warning to all time, when we re-conquered Manipur. It cannot be denied that we showed unseemly want of nerve when the news of the disaster arrived. There was no necessity to place Assam under a military ruler, nor was there any need for such a formidable muster of troops, at a vast expenditure of money and suffering, to retrieve a disaster brought about by such an extraordinary want of courage, nerve, forethought and common-sense.⁴ Our position in Manipur had never been a dangerous one, and even after the murder of the Chief Commissioner's party the troops in the Residency

might easily have held their own till daybreak, when all opposition would have collapsed, and the rebels would have fled, leaving our people masters of the situation.

I have expressed my opinion as to the mistake we made in not restoring the Rajah *before* the outbreak of March, and now I ask the question, why, after the rebellion was put down, we did not do our best to repair the evil by restoring Soor Chandra Singh to his own? He, or his infant son, might have been restored, and have been kept in a state of tutelage as long as necessary, and good government would have been secured and our pledge to Chandra Kirtee Singh have been maintained intact. Instead of this, an obscure child, a descendant not of Ghumber Singh, but of Nur Singh, was selected, and the old line cut off from the succession, and yet three generations had been faithful to us. Ghumber Singh, Chandra Kirtee Singh, and Soor Chandra Singh all served us loyally, and yet we suffered the last to die of a broken heart in exile. Well might he exclaim, "And is this the reward for so many years' service!" For my part I say emphatically, *let us beware, we have not heard the last of Manipur!*

My sense of right and justice make me record facts as they strike me, and yet I cannot help acknowledging as I do so, that the Government of India is the best government in the world. When has India been so governed, and what country in Europe has such an able and just administration? Surrounded by difficulties, material, financial and political, badgered by ignorant members of the House of Commons; for ever asking foolish questions and moving foolish resolutions; the stately bureaucracy plods steadily on with one object in view, the good of the people. If at times it makes mistakes, who does not? The greatest General is he who makes fewest mistakes, and, judged by this standard alone, the Government of India has the first rank among governing bodies. It has, however, a title to honour which no one can assail. It is the only instance in history of a body of foreigners who govern an Empire, not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the races committed by Providence to their charge. May Providence long watch over it!

References

1. "Oh! for a moment of colonel Johnstone's presence at such a crisis," wrote a British official from Manipur, to the *Pioneer*, in 1891. "One strong word with the ominous raising of the forefinger, would have paralyzed the treacherous rebel Koireng (Senaputtee) from perpetrating this outrage."—ED.
2. Major Trotter. He received wounds from an ambushade, and died of their effects, July, 1886.—ED.

3. "The general history of the Manipur incident," wrote the *Times* in a leading article, Aug. 14, 1891, "must inspire mingled feelings in the breasts of most Englishmen. The policy in which it originated, cannot be said to reflect credit on the Government of India, while the actual explosion itself was precipitated by a series of blunders which have never been explained. There seems to be little doubt that had the Government of India made up its mind promptly on the merits of the dynastic quarrel between the dethroned Maharajah and his brothers, the Senaputtee would hardly have been able to commit the crimes which have cost him his life. But for five months the Government of India seemed to accept the revolution accomplished last September in the palace of Manipur. That revolution was notoriously the work of the Senaputtee, although he chose, for his own reasons, to place one of his brothers on the throne. The Government did not indeed assent to the change, but their local representative does not appear to have taken marked steps to express his disapproval. He is said to have tolerated and condoned it to this extent, that he kept up friendly relations with the new ruler as with the old. On the deplorable mistakes which led up to the massacre, and made it possible, it is unnecessary to dwell. They are still unaccounted for, and so many of the chief actors in that fatal business have perished, that it is more than doubtful whether we shall ever know exactly to whom they severally were due."—ED.
4. Three columns (one alone numbering 1000 strong), were marched at once on Imphal, which was found deserted. The Regent was the last of the princes who fled. He released the surviving English prisoner, and sent him to the British camp to ask for an armistice; but this was refused until he delivered up the Englishmen already dead. The Manipuris, then expecting no mercy, opposed the march of the troops.—ED.



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