

MY THREE YEARS IN MANIPUR

Memoirs and private diaries of spouses of important leaders, statesmen, diplomats and civil servants have a significance of their own in the history of mankind. The account of Ethel St. Clair Grimwood, wife of Frank Grimwood, the ill fated Political Agent of Manipur during the close of the last century, is the one that writes with imagination and records certain facts and observations that go a long way in promoting a clear understanding of the area covered.

Ethel's book is not merely a few hundred pages of light reading material on the pleasantness of the landscape but also as first rate literature on anthropology and the history of Manipur.

Manipur, lying between Cachar, the Kubo valley and Nagaland is one of the most beautiful places in the world. Starting with a readable account of the Grimwoods' arrival in Manipur and their impressions of the place, the book goes on to describe Cachar and the hill tribes : Maos, Tongkhuls, Kukis, etc.

The Grimwood couple naturally came in close contact with the ruling royal family and watched their sport, customs and illusive ways of life; the music, dance and other inseparables of the Meitheis and other tribal groups come in for vivid eyewitness descriptions as a corollary.

The Grimwood's memorable stay in Manipur was unfortunately broken by the mutiny in 1890. In this rebellion, Ethel escaped—the details of which she has recorded in a sentimental and pathetic manner—while Grimwood was killed. However, the sad news reached her many days later, after she had landed at a safe place in Cachar. On her return to England, she was honoured by the Queen with a Red Cross, for serving in Manipur under the most adverse circumstances.

The inclusion of illustrations and an index at the end has greatly enhanced the utility of the book.

Rs. 60.00



MRS. ST. CLAIR GRIMWOOD.

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY VANDYK.

MY
THREE YEARS IN MANIPUR

ETHEL ST. CLAIR GRIMWOOD



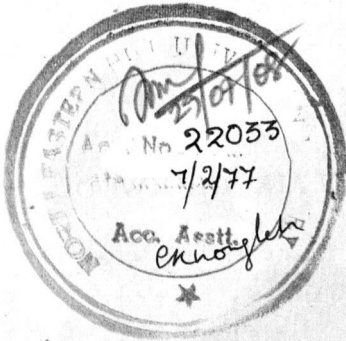
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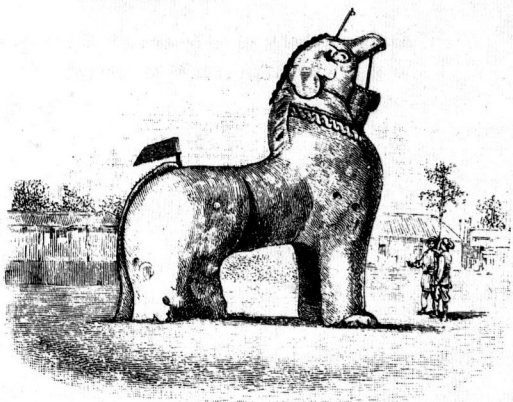
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DRAGON IN FRONT OF THE PALACE.

THREE YEARS IN MANIPUR

CHAPTER I.

MANIPUR! How well I remember the first time I ever heard the name—a name, too, which was comparatively unknown three short years ago, owing to the fact that it belongs to a remote little tract of country buried amongst hills and difficult of access, far away from civilized India, and out of the beaten track. This is not a geographical treatise, and therefore there is no necessity to dwell much on the exact whereabouts of a place which has already been described more than once. I will therefore attempt no lengthy description, simply stating that

the valley of Manipur lies between Cachar, the Kubo Valley, and Kohima, and is surrounded by six ranges of hills which separate it from the tracts of country named. A pretty place, more beautiful than many of the show-places of the world; beautiful in its habitable parts, but more beautiful in those tracts covered with forest jungle where the foot of man seldom treads, and the stillness of which is only broken by the weird cry of the hooluck* or the scream of a night-bird hunting its prey.

We had not been in India many months when my husband was offered the post of political agent at Manipur. We were at the time in a very junior position in Sylhet, a place which had not fascinated either of us in our short stay there; but as a junior officer my husband could not complain. When, therefore, we got a letter one morning offering him Manipur, we were much elated. Visions of the glories heard of, but not seen,

* The hooluck is a black monkey, peculiar to Assam.

floated in front of both our minds. I pictured to myself the dignity of being the mistress of a Residency, of possessing servants in scarlet and gold, with 'V.R.' on their buttons, and a guard-of-honour to walk out with me whenever I chose. I saw visions of a large house and extensive grounds, and I pictured the ensign of Old England dominating over all. Frank, likewise, had dreams of polo ponies that played of their own accord every day of the week, and visions of many tigers only waiting to be shot, and snipe roosting in the veranda!

Perhaps some may wonder why such dreams should be ours, and why we built such castles in the air. Once, many years before this time of which I write, my husband had passed through Manipur on his way to England. He had spent a couple of days there, and had seen the lake in the compound covered with wild-duck, which were almost as tame as the familiar bird associated, as a rule, in our minds with

green peas and the spring. He had played a never-to-be-forgotten game of polo with three royal princes on a ground worthy of Hurlingham, and he had taken it out of the snipe one morning. Small wonder that those two days remained in his memory, and made him long for more like them, when it was his fate to be stationed in an uncongenial spot, where polo comes like Christmas once a year, and which even the snipe desert. And small wonder, too, was it that when the letter came, offering him the coveted post, he jumped at it. How glad we were, and how we hastened to pack up our belongings and depart to the land of so much promise!

Nothing bothered us, not even when our kitchen was blown down bodily in a gale of wind one night, and our new cooking-pans were damaged, and, worst of all, our highly-valued and excellent cook gave notice to quit immediately. The latter though, I am glad to say, reconsidered his decision, and

on my promising him extra pay and new cooking-pots, he kindly condescended to link his fortunes with ours for a further period. All's well that ends well, and the extreme sunniness of my temper on that occasion merited a little reward. A flying visit to Shillong, the hill station of Assam and headquarters of the Government of that province, and a hasty return to Sylhet to bid good-bye to the few Europeans there and to collect our possessions, occupied our time until the day arrived which was to see us start on our long journey.

Here in England we consider a journey long that lasts perhaps a day and a half, or even one whole day ; but to anyone who has ever been in the remote parts of India, and more especially of Assam, a two days' journey would count as very little. Our journey to Manipur took sixteen days, and hard travelling into the bargain. Up every morning and in our saddles soon after six, with a fifteen-mile ride before us—hail, rain,

or sunshine. People in England cannot realize what real hard travelling means. The whole of your baggage in Assam is carried by coolies. They are wonderfully strong, and can take very heavy loads—when they please, that is to say. But a disagreeable coolie can be very disagreeable indeed. We encountered many such, and the first day on our travels it happened that we had more than one unruly specimen.

We started in boats late one night after dinner, and slept on the river, while the boatmen rowed us up stream to a place some twenty miles away, where our horses were to meet us. It sounds rather pleasant travelling by boat at night on a broad smooth river, with the moon shining overhead as only an Indian moon can shine. But the situation loses much of its romance when you know the style of boat that we travelled in. They are small, awkwardly-built machines, rather of the Noah's-ark type, with a roofing made of bamboo coarsely

woven into matting, and so low that it necessitated crawling in on all fours when you wished to retire for the night. Any idea of standing upright had to be abandoned. Once in, you had to lie down and shuffle off your clothes, and tumble into your blankets, which were spread upon the floor. Every time there was any steering to do, the vibration caused by the movement of the rudder awoke you from your slumbers ; and, worst of all, the insects that swarmed in the woodwork were most numerous and officious in their unceasing attentions to the unhappy occupants of the boat.

Two of our crew had the misfortune to disagree upon some trivial matter during the night, and as the space for settling their differences was limited to about four square feet on the prow of the boat, the stronger mariner ejected his weaker comrade into the river with much noise, wordy and otherwise. Having ascertained the cause of the squabble, and insisted on the immediate rescue of the

fallen adversary from an untimely end, we were allowed to sleep as peacefully as we could until daylight, when we arrived rather cold and very hungry at our first halting-stage, where chota hazri (early breakfast) and our horses awaited us. Then began a struggle between our domestics and the shivering crowd of coolies collected for the purpose of carrying our luggage. With one voice they exclaimed that the Memsahib's boxes were quite too enormous to be carried at all—in fact, that there never had been boxes like them before or since, and that we must pay for at least three coolies for every box. My husband made a few observations to them in a somewhat peremptory form, and the end of the matter was that two men were told off for each trunk, and eventually, with many heart-rending groans, our luggage moved off. Now, there is one point which I must touch upon before going on, and it is a point which must strike anyone who has ever travelled in India, and that is the

extraordinary habit your rattletraps have of looking disreputable as soon as they come to be mounted on the back of a coolie. Whether it is that the undeniable presence of a large and unsightly bundle of bedding has a demoralizing effect upon the whole, which is not lessened by the accompanying basket of fowls and ducks destined to be your breakfasts and dinners until you arrive at your destination, I cannot say. But be your trunks the most respectable, neat, orderly trunks on the face of this earth, they will look plebeian when they come to be carried on the back of a half-clothed native, and you would scarcely recognise them were it not that your own name betrays you, painted in large white letters on them all, and your horses fail to shy at them in consequence, if they are gifted with ordinary intelligence.

We started off about two hours after our things had left, but we had not gone far when I saw a familiar object lying on the

side of the road in the shape of my largest bonnet-box. Further on we spied nearly all our luggage, with the wretched cook doing 'sentry go' over it. On inquiring, we found that all our coolies had run away—no one knew where, and it was quite impossible to get them again. Eventually we raised a few more from a police Thana, and had to drive them in front of us the whole way to prevent them bolting too. Consequently we were many hours getting to our destination, and did not get dinner till about nine at night. With few exceptions, our march continued like this every day until we arrived at Cachar, a small station on the Manipur frontier.

CHAPTER XX.

LITTLE remains now to be added to the record of my three years in Manipur, and escape from the Mutiny. Mr. Grant is now a major and a V.C., and never were honours more bravely won. England has given me unstinted praise, and her Majesty has honoured me of her own accord with the Red Cross, of which I am proud to be the possessor.

Shortly after my arrival in England in June, I was invited to Windsor and had an audience of her Majesty, during which I related some of my experiences, which, I believe, interested her. The Red Cross is an honour doubly valuable as having been presented to me by her Majesty in person; but the warm interest she has since been pleased to take in

me I look upon as an equally great honour, and my visit to the Queen at Windsor will for ever be remembered as a red-letter day in my existence.

Before I had been many days in England, the Princess of Wales was also kind enough to express a wish to see me, and her royal highness has honoured me greatly by interesting herself in me in many ways ; so that though I have lost much, I have received great sympathy ; and I know that there are few hearts in England who have not felt for me in my trouble.

But sometimes the thought of the future, and the fate in store for me, seems very dark and dreary. Few of us are without ambitions, and I had mine in the days that are gone ; but when they have all been destroyed at one blow, it is difficult to raise up new ones to take the place of the old—difficult to battle for one's self in this eager, hurrying world, when one has grown accustomed to having someone always ready and willing to

battle for one ; and difficult to accustom myself to a lonely, solitary existence, after four years of close companionship with one whose sole wish was to make my life happy.

Ah, well ! life, after all, does not last for ever, and maybe some day we shall awake to find ourselves in a different sphere, where our lost ambitions may be realized, and where disappointment and death have no part.

In this book I have endeavoured to avoid writing anything which may be construed into an accusation or insinuation against any of the persons concerned, whether they be alive or dead. Far be it from me to speak of blame, or to attempt to place any extra responsibility on any one person. It is not in my power to do so, and if it were, I should hesitate.

We know that those five brave men sacrificed their lives sooner than listen to the terms of ignominy and disgrace proposed by their victorious enemies. The touching answer given when the ungenerous proposal

was made to them shows that they never wavered from their duty. 'We cannot lay down our arms,' they said, 'for they belong to Government.' And each one met his death bravely for the honour of England.

* * * * *

I have since heard of the escape of most of our servants. They were made prisoners and kept by the Jubraj in gaol for some time, but released before the arrival of the troops. Mr. Melville's sad fate filled all with horror, and seemed doubly hard as he had never had anything to do with Manipur before this year, 1891, but merely happened to be in the place at the time.

A new Rajah has been appointed now on an entirely different footing. He is only a little fellow of five years old, a descendant of some former monarch, and it will be many years yet before he can govern the country and the people, and restore the old feelings of peace which existed between our Government and Manipur.

Those by whose orders Mr. Quinton and his companions were murdered have paid the penalty by forfeiting, some their lives, and others their liberty, and order is once more restored.

But in more than one home in England there is sorrow for those who are not. Their vacant places can never be filled up, even though in time, when the grass has grown green above them, we shall learn to think of them not as dead, but as living elsewhere purer, truer, freer lives, unhampered by the sorrows and cares of this world.

Time may, perhaps, do that for us, but meanwhile hearts will ache, and longings will arise for 'the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still,' and the hard lesson will have to be learned that nothing is our own—no, not even those who seem part of our very lives, around whom all our tenderest interests and highest hopes cling.

Well for us if, in learning the lesson, we

keep our faith and trust in the Being for whose pleasure we were created, and whose right it is to demand from us what we value most. And if, when our time comes, and we look back across the vista of years at all the disappointments and all the sorrows, which, after all, outweigh the happiness in our lives, and can say, 'It was all for the best,' then the lesson will not have been learnt in vain, and it will indeed be well with us.

THE END.