

**IN ABOR JUNGLES OF
NORTH-EAST INDIA**

The book records the sensational story of the most gruesome and treacherous massacre of Mr. Noel Williamson, the Assistant Political Officer at Sidiya and Dr. Grigorson, Medical Officer-in-charge, European and Native Staff of Tea Gardens, Tinsukhia in 1911 at the hands of Abor Tribes in the North-East frontier of old Assam province of India. In sheer cruelty and reachery, the tale of this gruesome murder has few parallels, specially when it is seen that Mr. Williamson had set out on a goodwill mission (the third tour of its kind since he took over as Assistant Political Officer), accompanied by Dr. Gregorson and 47 coolies, carrying a number of gifts and a chest of medicines for Abors of Minyong.

Mr. Williamson had left for Konsing, leaving behind Dr. Gregorson to look after the sick coolies at Sissin. The former was done to death at Konsing and the latter at Sissin together with majority of their party of whom only five could manage to flee through dense jungles, chased by Abors and their dogs.

The rest of the story revolves round planning of a comprehensive military strategy to take revenge against the guilty Abors for their crimes. The news of massacre reached Dibrugarh on April 5, 1911. Soon the Dy. Commissioner of Lakhimpur and the Commandant of Lakhimpur Military Police pushed off with a movable column of 150 men and reached Pasighat by boats. The Lt. Governor of Assam consulted Major General H. Bower, the Officer Commanding of Assam Brigade about the punitive action to be taken against the guilty Abors. The latter advised military action only after the rains were over. Till then the small force, that had already left, must stand fast at Pasighat.

The feasibility of a plan for military action was drawn by General Bower in consultation with the different authorities at Calcutta, Shillong and Dibrugarh

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with due regard to factors like difficult terrain, communication difficulties, dense forests, turbulent mountain rivers, engagement of Naga Coolies and hosts of other problems.

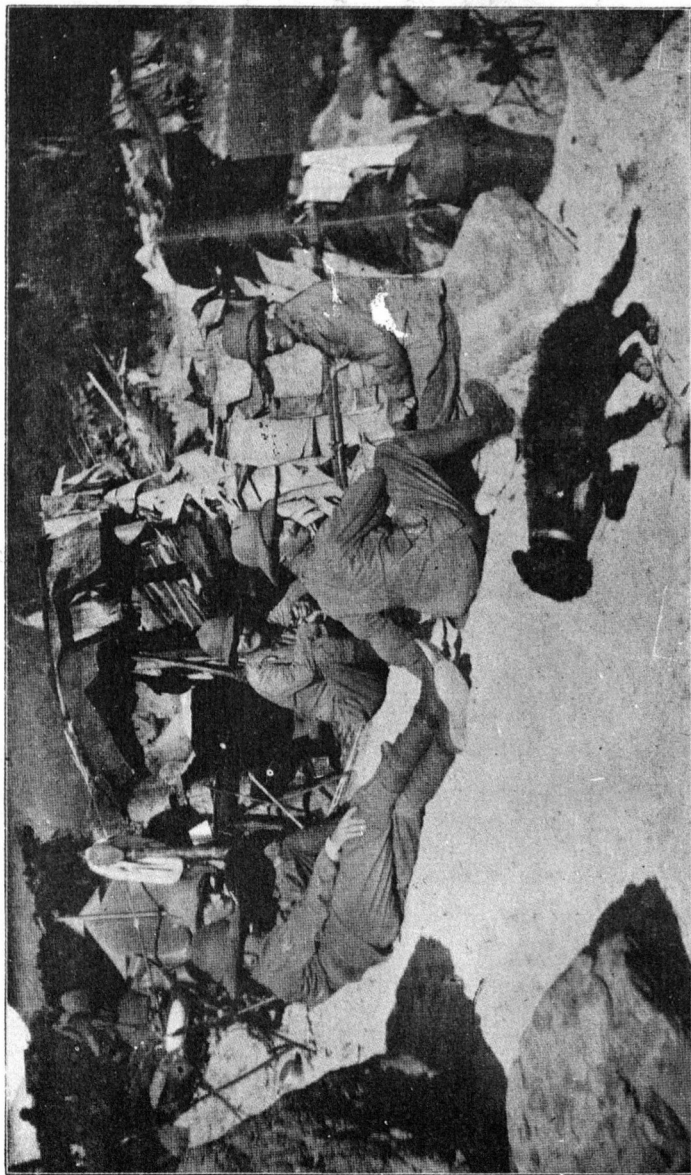
But no difficulties are insurmountable before resolute will and firm determination specially for General Bower who had commanded the Assam Brigade since 1908 and had thorough knowledge of tribal and physical peculiarities of the region. Besides, his men had implicit confidence in him. He had already become famous for his expeditions in Tibet, travels in the Pamirs and exploration in the deserts of Chinese Turkestan. He was also awarded the Founders' Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society.

There is detailed description of the various phases of Abor expedition resulting into crushing defeat of Abor Tribes who comprise a number of clans including Minyongs, Padams, Komkar, Karko, Panggi, Pasi, Doba or Galong, Simong and Aieng. The whole story is of such an absorbing interest that once you start reading it, you would not like to stop unless you have finished the whole book. Finally, the 'gams' of Kebang and Sissin and the rest of Abors yielded. Cairns were built in the grateful memory of Noel Williamson and Dr. Gregorson exactly at the spots where they had been massacred.

The closing part of the book deals with the geographical survey of the hitherto unexplored river system of Abor land for which the opportunity came as a god-send. All the aspects relating to the geographical exploration of the area were thoroughly investigated as explained in the book.

Thus it is not only a gripping narrative or remarkable chronicle of the Abor expedition but is also a book giving an interesting account of exploration of a region in which no white man had set his foot before.

Rs. 350



HOURS OF EASE AT PUK CAMP.

In background (left).—Captain Poole, D.S.O., Official Correspondent; (facing camera) Major-General Hamilton Power, C.B., Commanding Expedition. In foreground (lying down).—Major Hutchinson, Chief Staff Officer; Captain Smitners, Orderly Officer; (sitting on rock) Major Wilson, 1st Batt. 8th Gurkha Rifles. Note the war dog!

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IN ABOR JUNGLES OF NORTH-EAST INDIA



A. HAMILTON



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TO
THE OFFICERS, NON-COMMISSIONED
OFFICERS AND MEN
OF THE
ABOR EXPEDITIONARY FIELD FORCE
AND OF THE MISHMI AND MIRI POLITICAL MISSIONS
THIS NARRATIVE OF THE WORK ACCOMPLISHED
BY ALL CONCERNED
RESPECTFULLY IS DEDICATED

IN ABOR JUNGLES

CHAPTER I

The Lands of the Abors—Tribal Life—Manners—Customs—Dress
—Methods of Fighting.

THE lands of the Abors, which served as the theatre of war for the operations which Major-General Bower recently conducted on the north-east frontier of India, have been hitherto almost unknown to white men. Geographically, they may be said to fall between the eastern watershed of the Dibong River and the western drainage of the Subansiri River, and to extend from the course of the Brahmaputra River in the south to the water-parting in the north which divides Assam from the plateaux of Tibet. Aborland is only a few hundred miles square, but it comprises between the slopes of the snow-clad northern uplands and the jungle-covered banks of the mighty river some of the most difficult country in the world for purposes of war. Varying very much in character, it reveals between north and south extremes of heat and cold, vast stretches of dense jungle, deep barren valleys, patches of alluvial plain and many ranges, the lower rising

seven thousand feet, while the higher ones, snow-clad and wooded from base to summit, exceed ten thousand feet.

The lands on the west of the Dihang are low-lying. The belt between the Dihang and the Dibong is traversed by the mountains, and contains only an occasional indication of cultivation, and few villages. Beyond Kebang, the valley of the Dihang is more open. Between Dijmur and the mouth of the Dibong to the foot of the hills, the country is flat, and overgrown with an almost impenetrable jungle forest in which giant ferns, bamboos, and plantains grow side by side with entangling thorns and poisonous creepers.

In addition to the dense vegetation, the region is distinguished by its rivers—at least four being quite large—and by what has been hitherto an entire absence of roads. Such pathways as did exist were mere animal tracks, while the best “roads” were the chasms through which the rivers flowed. When the traveller was not wading waist-deep through these, he was crawling along narrow ledges cut out of the face of high precipices. Now and again he came to places where there was no ledge, while the path, such as it was, was continued by a rude gallery contrived out of the face of the cliff, or he found himself compelled to climb perpendicular cliffs with the aid of cane ropes.

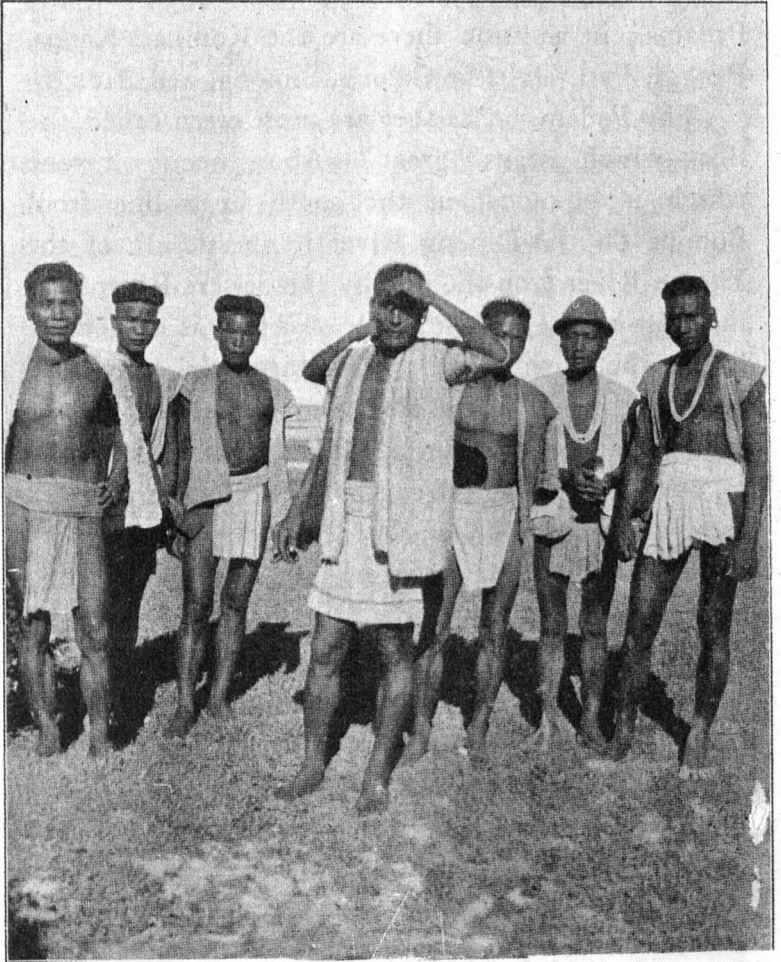
The Abors are divided into a number of clans, of which the principal are the Minyongs and the Padams ; in addition there are the Komkar, Karko, Panggi, Pasi, Doba or Galong, Simong, and Aieng.

The Padam, or, as they are more often called, the Bor—which means “great”—Abors, occupy a zone which is bounded on the south by a line from Bomjur on the Dibong River to the mouth of the Yamne River ; on the east by the Sesseri River ; on the west by the Yamne River. There is no definite line to the north where the Milangs, who are closely allied with the Padams, are found. The chief village of the Padams is Damro. The clan is reported to have a fighting strength between five and six thousand strong.

The Aiengs occupy a few villages situated along the foothills east of the Dihang River opposite Pasighat. In a measure, they have encroached on the territory of the Padams.

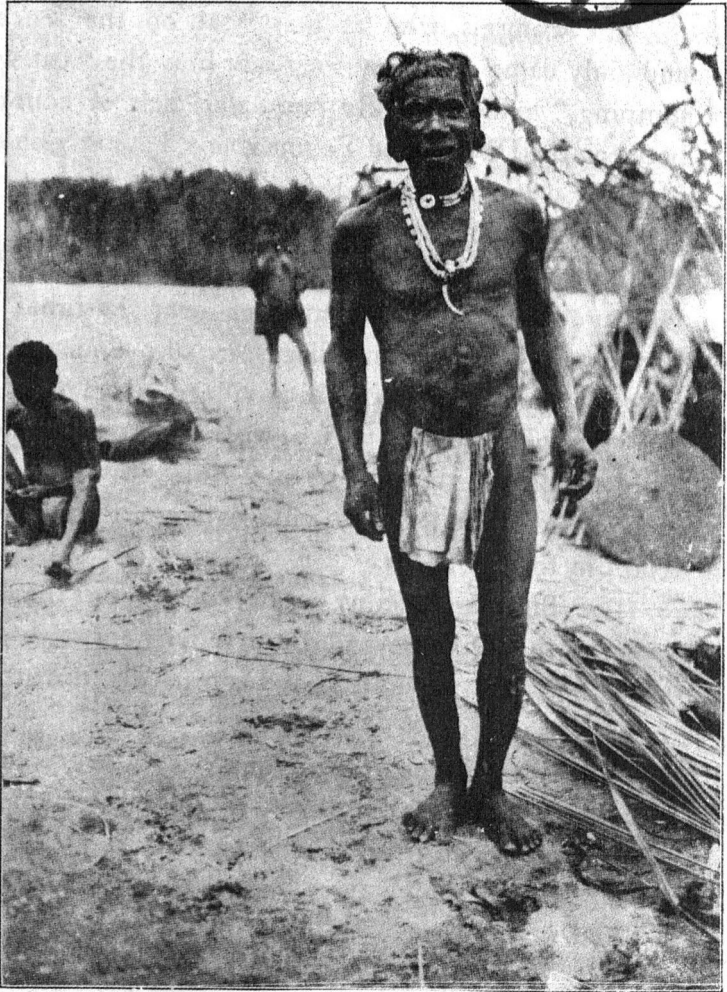
The Komkars control a strongly stockaded group of villages lying between the Yamne and Dihang rivers. Occupying a central position they do not concern themselves with the affairs of any of their neighbours. Their country, accordingly, is regarded as a haven of refuge from the more turbulent areas surrounding it.

The Karkos inhabit three villages to the west of the Komkars. They are more or less independent.



PASIS FROM PASIGHAT.

210779



AN OLD ABOR.

The Panggis, who at first "sat on the fence," and only came in when they saw how the "cat was jumping," hold a thickly populated belt of country between the Dihang and Yamne rivers, having Sibhum for their principal stockade.

The Minyongs, lying to the south and west of the Panggis, possess villages on both banks of the Dihang River; from Rengging near Pasighat to Pankang. The Ledum villages are also under Minyong authority. Their chief village, Riga, fearing the fate of Kebang, which was burnt, ultimately climbed down, though at one time it was much inclined to fight. Other villages were Puding and Rikol in the far north.

The Simongs occupy a few villages on the left bank of the Dihang, and though friendly with the Minyongs, are separated and quite distinct from them.

The Pasis live in a group of villages near Pasighat. They are dominated by the military police post at Balek, and from that fact profess a friendship for the British which it is known they are far from feeling.

The Galongs, the remaining section, occupy the basin of the Dijnur River where they have been ever since they were driven off the left bank of the Dihang by the Padams. They are divided into four groups: the Rimens, Taipudias,

Dobangs, and the Taduns. The Taduns are allied with the Minyongs. The Dobangs, on the other hand, are distinct from the Taduns. They are friendly with the British.

Many sections of the Abor tribesmen name themselves after the tracts of country in which their particular clan has settled. This is the case with the Pasis, Panggis, Karkos and Komkars. Other clans have inter-married so freely that it is difficult to tell where the possessions of one group end and those of another begin. It is, perhaps, because of this excessive inter-relationship that tribal feuds are specially bitter among the Abors. Jealousy prevents any possibility of tribal combination, and together with lack of opportunity restrained the clans from uniting against General Bower. If they had done so, from ten to fifteen thousand fighting men would have been available. To this total the Pasi Minyongs would have contributed some 6500 men, and the Padams a rather less amount, when a much more formidable resistance would have been possible. As it was, the Abor defence was by no means insignificant, though gaining nothing from the few muzzle-loading guns which Tibetan traders had introduced to the tribesmen during the last two or three years. In point of fact the expedition was brought to a successful conclusion only by the patient and laborious co-operation of all ranks in the plans

which General Bower laid in the face of very great difficulties.

For a long time past the Abors have been cocks of the Assam border. Very independent and quarrelsome, they had come to regard themselves as the rulers of this far-distant corner of India from the fact that so many of the Miri and the Mishmi tribes had submitted to their exactions. It is to be feared, too, that the success of the expedition has been a sad blow to their self-esteem, for it has brought peace where before peace was an unknown quantity.

The Abors are of Mongoloid descent, though their characteristics differ considerably. The men of the north stand over six feet, while those of the southern clans are short and squatly built. All are lithe and active, with symmetrically shaped, well-developed limbs. They have lank black hair, which they wear closely cropped, and cut by laying across the blade of a sword, and beating it with a stick ; saffron or brown complexions, high cheek-bones, and oblique brown eyes. They employ in speaking a mixture of Tibetan with dialects of their own that differ so radically among the various groups into which they are divided that the men of one clan do not as a rule understand those of another. They are slow talkers, intoning words and giving them a certain sonorous cadence that makes what is said very clear and distinct.

While the Abors speak with the deliberation of a

typical savage people, their manners and customs no less reveal their primitive state. If not quite so degraded as the Sunthals of Bengal—who, on occasion, have been known to devour human flesh, though as a rule they feed off dogs, bats and animal refuse—they run them a close second. They live off the smaller wild life of the jungle, and favour frogs, lizards, snakes, rats, dogs, monkeys, cats and mice. An animal that has died a natural death is as acceptable to them as the best butcher's meat, while the flesh of the tiger is reckoned particularly good—for men, though it is denied to women on account of its supposed passion-rousing qualities.

Abors prefer their food to be smoke-cured, and use but little water in its preparation. Both sexes are inveterate smokers. They begin when they are four or five years old and never leave off the practice until they die. They inhale the smoke ; but their greatest treat is to add a little water to the nicotine that is precipitated in the bowl of the pipe, and then to drink it ! They have no other use for water, for they consider dirt an antidote to cold, and avoid removing the one lest they should take the other. Both sexes tattoo, the men wearing a cross on the forehead between the eyebrows ; the women a smaller cross in the hollow of the upper lip immediately under the nose.

During the greater part of the year the only dress

of the Abors—and this applies both to men and women—is a loin-cloth of bark. In some of the villages the men wear a sleeveless cloth jacket, while the women favour a skirt of cloth, the two garments being woven out of jungle products. They also make great play with bamboo. At all times scantily clad, when they do have resource to bamboo it is put to an infinite variety of uses. On state occasions, for example, the Abor belle dons a small petticoat, or skirt, made of filaments of cane closely woven together. It is only about a foot in breadth, and is fastened so tightly round the lower part of the thighs as to impede the free action of the legs. In a measure, therefore, Abor women may be cited as the inventors of the hobble skirt.

Another direction in which bamboo is seen is as an ankle-band of finely plaited cane, the object of which is to set off to the best advantage the curve of the bare leg. Abor girls particularly favour such ornaments while both the married and the unmarried encircle their waists with bamboo girdles, from which depend a number of small, bell-metal discs—*boyops*—which are imported from Tibet. These clank and jangle at every movement, the sound resembling nothing so much as the harsh tinkling of the bells that farmers hang round the necks of their wethers.

The principal thing which the men make out of bamboo is a head-piece in the shape of a jockey-cap,

which is worn on the back of the head with the peak slanting down the neck. The cap is generally adorned with a "bheem-raj" of king crow's feather, or of cock's feathers, boar's tusches, *mithun* skin or yak's tail. It is made so well that it is capable of turning a direct or even a glancing cut from sword and spear. Like their women-folk, the men coil strips of bamboo round their arms and legs. Each sex is very partial to necklaces of turquoise stones, and to all kinds of beads.

Bamboo, however, figures not only in the dress of the men and women. It is the essential factor in everything appertaining to the daily life of Aborland. Bridges over turbulent torrents, if crude and uninviting, owe their existence to this pliable though very durable cane, as do the houses in the village, the weapons of defence and the implements of husbandry. In regard to bridges, the Abors favour two methods of construction. The commonest kinds are swing-bridges, made of cane, which they walk across. Another form is made by stretching a bamboo across a river at a considerable height. A bamboo basket is then slung on to this cane, and the Abor pulls himself across hand-over-hand like a monkey. Rivers of fifty or sixty yards are crossed in this way. A bridge of the other kind over the Dihang, near Komsing, was three hundred yards long.

For purposes of protection, the Abors largely use

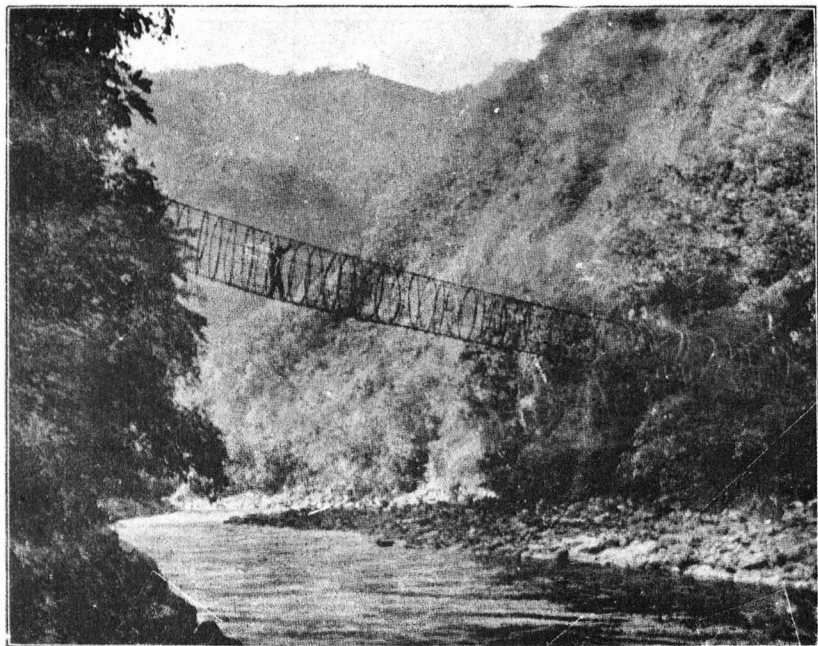
panjees, or pieces of bamboo, hardened to the toughness of steel by being placed in hot ashes. When thoroughly fired the stakes are sharpened at one end and stuck into the ground at an angle that just catches the foot of any unobservant walker. In this state they easily penetrate a soft boot or gaiter, and are disastrous to a barefooted coolie. They are laid in thousands all round a village, or are concealed under leaves about the paths leading to it. Somewhat similar pieces of bamboo, but placed horizontally some two or three feet from the ground, are also employed; while the rock chute or "booby trap" is a very favourite device. An Abor village is never without its cordon of chutes formed of huge boulders, which are so hidden that they are released by the enemy himself as he advances along a jungle-path, or through some defile leading to the village. He is, of course, crushed to death. Abors select very inaccessible places for their villages. Surrounded with bamboo palisades, or protected by a stockade of tree trunks, with all approaches carefully "panjeed" and flanked by chutes, the villages present very formidable positions to an attacking party.

An Abor village is an entirely independent entity over which the Gam or headman exercises absolute authority. The houses are laid on piles and raised some few feet from the ground. The roofs, like the walls, are made of plantain leaves placed one



HAIR-DRESSING EXTRAORDINARY.

1. Looking for trouble.
2. Hair-cutting. The method employed is to put a dhao under the lock of hair and then to strike it with a bit of wood.



TUBULAR BAMBOO BRIDGE OVER THE DIHANG RIVER.



upon the other like tiles in our own houses. The floors are bamboo. The space beneath is used as a latrine or as a lumber store, and also provides accommodation for poultry, pigs and the *mithun*: a much-prized species of cattle, strong, handsome, white legged, and resembling both the ox and the bison in shape and size.

In the heart of the village is the "moshup," a spacious building, where the inhabitants attend to discuss the business of the community. It is also used as the place where the unmarried men of the village sleep, and as a guard-house, where they take duty by turns at night in order to protect the village from sudden attack. Among the Abors only married men have the privilege of possessing a hut for their own use, the arrangements serving as a strong incentive to the young "bloods" of the town to throw off the parental yoke for that of the conjugal hearth. To judge from the careworn expression of the women, who are pretty enough to deserve a better fate, the system is not altogether to their liking.

Abor implements of peace, like Abor weapons of war, are made from bamboo. For purposes of agriculture they use a bamboo spike to scrape the earth, or to make the holes in which they drop the seeds. When a clearance has been made in the forest and the ground between the fallen logs has been scratched

over, it is planted with Indian corn, tobacco, opium, pumpkins, melons and, of course, rice.

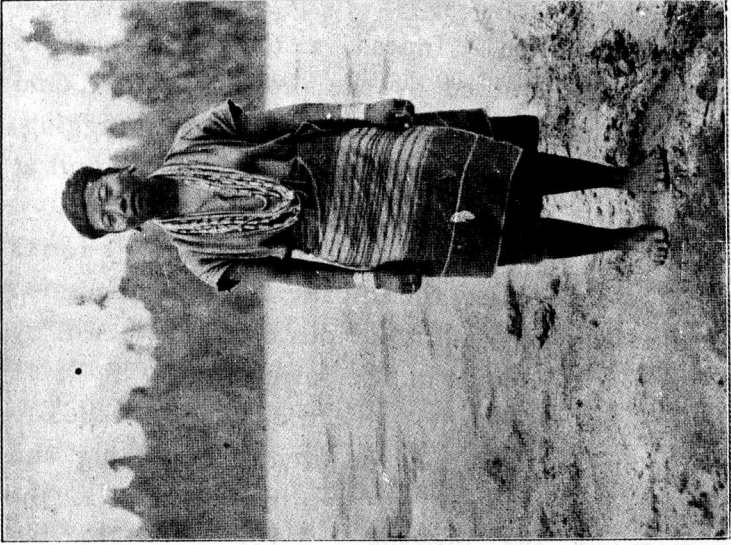
For arms they possess bamboo shields, cross-bows, ordinary bows and arrows with iron tips poisoned with aconite, very long spears, daggers, and the strong, straight-cutting swords (or dhaos), which are reported to come from Tibet. It was with these weapons moreover that the tribesmen endeavoured to check the progress of the punitive columns. Though their arms were not modern arms of precision, in the hands of the Abor expert they could be, and were, extraordinarily serviceable.

From the moment that the clansmen knew that a military force was to be dispatched against them a state of wild excitement prevailed in Aborland. All the principal gams or headmen assembled in council at Kebang; and, after prolonged discussion, agreed upon certain measures, which, if of a somewhat elementary character, undoubtedly resulted in General Bower's advance being met by substantial resistance. In the first place, fords across the rivers were removed; strong stockades, constructed out of trunks of trees felled for the purpose, were thrown across the valleys; and palisades of green bamboo erected round the villages. Foot-traps, in the form of shallow pits, lined with poisoned *panjees* and carefully covered over, were sunk in the jungle tracks, and formidable chutes were built up on every con-

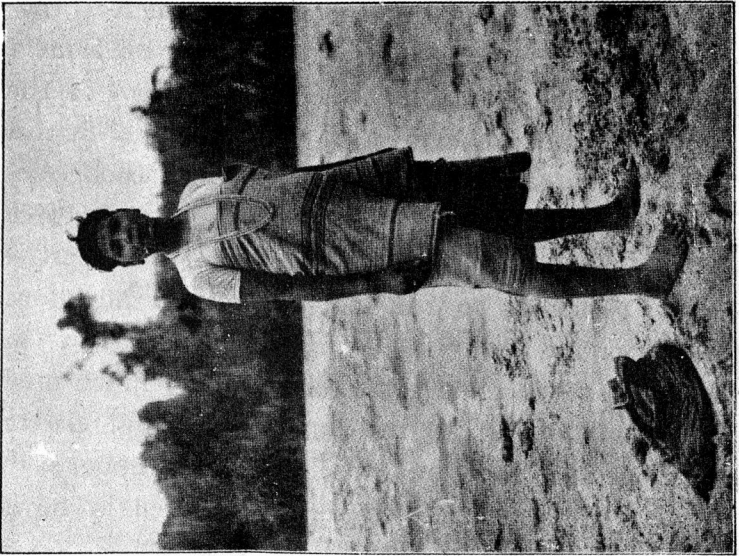
ceivable position. Indeed, a thorough spirit of defiance was aroused by the prospect of war, and the gams of Yemsing, Pongging, Riga, Rengging, Yekshi, Sissin, Panggi, Komsing, Riu, and Mopit at once declared that they would support Kebang.

As the weeks passed, and General Bower's forces made no appearance, the impatience of the clansmen steadily increased, and imperious orders were sent by Kebang to the men in the lower villages to leave the fighting men to it, while the others attended to the coolies. "We shall be tired of eating pig, and chicken is not food for fighting men," was the purport of one message. "We want the big meat, so leave us the white sepoy," was the sense of another message. Pig, chicken, and big meat or *mithun* represent the principal dishes in the feast that is given by an Abor warrior on his return from a war where he has killed in combat a sepoy of the Native Army, a coolie, or a soldier of the British Service. Dancing and merriment attend such celebrations, which are kept going one, two, or three days, in accordance with the standard of the repast.

A variation on the foot-pit was an ingenious adaptation of the spring trap, fitted with arrows in place of the customary blunderbuss, and much used by Abor hunters. In this unwieldy, though pretty reliable contrivance, hollow lengths of bamboo, each fitted with a poisoned arrow, were fixed in bows



AN ABOR WOMAN.



AN ABOR WOMAN.



Photo]

Colonel Lumsden.

ABOR WARRIORS.



ABORS ROASTING "BIG" MEAT.

which were fastened to bamboos growing conveniently near a jungle path. From the bows lines of bamboo fibre were carried across the path at various elevations from the ground: from a few inches to two or three feet. The lines were strung tightly, and so placed that the lightest touch discharged a flight of arrows. For any ordinary purpose a hunter seldom sets more than a pair of arrows. In warfare, or as a defensive measure along a path leading to a village, both sides of a section of the track, perhaps two or even three hundred yards in length, would be closely planted with the traps, the bow-strings so adjusted that they released an irregular fire of poisoned arrows from many angles and at varying distances. Another popular, though less reliable, trap was formed by cutting nearly through some tree that overhung the track, and connecting its top with the path by a length of bamboo fibre in such a way that the trunk crashed to the ground if the least strain were put upon the line.

In addition to ambushes, the Abors rely largely on their prowess as bowmen and spearmen, while they are adept also in wielding heavy dhaos, which vary in length between one and four feet. It is as bowmen, however, that they are most distinguished, and Abor archers can pick off an object with unerring precision at a couple of hundred yards. The arrow used is the long, heavy bolt common to most

parts of Asia. In many cases the arrow-heads are flanged and grooved, and detach themselves on impact. For purposes of extraction the bolt must be pushed through for, as a rule, it cannot be pulled out without the head remaining behind, the wound being badly torn.

The Abors obtain the poison with which they anoint their arms from aconite, deadly nightshade, or the flesh of decomposing carcasses of animals—or enemies, whichever might be most handy. The mixture is smeared on the weapons, which are then varnished and slow-dried. Once treated in this way, the arms retain their deadly character for a considerable period, and can be used again and again. The action of the poison, too, is very rapid—sometimes less than one hour, and rarely more than six hours. Violent convulsions are set up, and tetanus supervenes. With a view to the treatment of any arrow wounds which might be received during the course of the expedition, all hospital details were furnished with phials of crystals of permanganate of potash together with metal syringes, while precise instructions for the application of the remedy appeared in Force Orders. From these it appeared that when the arrow had been pushed out of the body, its track had to be swabbed out with pure carbolic acid and then syringed with permanganate of potash.

In order to secure the destruction of the enemy's "defences," it was intended to equip the Field Force with some light artillery and a supply of hand-bombs of the "Martin-Hale" pattern, which combine the advantages of a grenade which may be slung or thrown, as the user may prefer, or discharged from a rifle. While it was very doubtful whether artillery or bombs would make any direct impression on the enemy's protective works, it was thought that the moral effect on the tribesmen themselves, produced by a shell or bomb which, skimming prettily over their defences, burst in their very midst, would be very telling. The happiest results therefore were anticipated from the dainty little Martin-Hale grenade, and it was distinctly unfortunate that this well-made, handy little bomb did not arrive in time to prove its value.

In appearance these bombs seem little more than a few inches of brass tubing charged with a high explosive and fitted with a percussion-cap. At the same time they make a "surprise packet" of peculiar deadliness, for the tube is packed with small shrapnel bullets. It weighs when fully charged nearly two pounds, and is an inch in diameter. Thrown by hand, it can be hurled about sixty yards or more; when shot from a rifle, to which it is fastened by a steel rod which passes into the barrel at the muzzle and is ejected by the explosion of the

cartridge, its duration of effectiveness is regulated by the "set" of the fuse and is usually up to four hundred yards. The value of bombs, however, in modern warfare is always rather doubtful. In the South African and Russo-Japanese campaigns where they were used by both belligerents, as also in the Balkans where the Macedonians affected them, their use was ever more picturesque than practical.

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