

Topography of Assam

JOHN M'COSH

The north-eastern part of India offers a fascinating study to the researcher. It is a unique area in more senses than one. The ruggedness of the area, the climatic diversities of the hills and the plains, the vastness of rivers and their effect on the economy, the richness of colourful tribal life and the wealth of mineral and other resources are a geographer's delight.

Information on all these aspects lies in different books and treatises that have been written from time to time. The chief merit of the present book, first published in 1837, is that it offers a view of all these aspects in a concise manner. This is no comprehensive anthropological study even though the cultural and demographic trends among the sons of the soil have been outlined to provide a clear perspective of the subject covered.

Economic life of any area is obviously related to the special features of its geography. Naturally, therefore, along with information on economic, trade, revenue, and wild life aspects a thorough study has been made of the geographical features of all major towns and the country-side. The section on hill tribes of Assam is quite comprehensive and gives an intimate account of the life of the local people, their customs, arts and religious and social patterns.

Rs. 150

§ 30

Some Important Books

Bengal District Gazetteers

- I. DARJEELING : L.S.S. O'Malley
 - II. BURDWAN : J.C.K. Paterson
 - III. HOOGHLY : L.S.S. O'Malley
 - IV. HOWRAH : L.S.S. O'Malley
 - V. SANTHAL PARGANAS : L.S.S. O'Malley
- 1985; Rs. 150 \$ 30 (Per vol.)

The Highlands of India (Two Volumes)

Major General D.J.F. Newall, R.A.

Vol. I : Strategically Considered with Special Reference to their Colonization as Reserve Circles, Military, Industrial, and Sanitary

Vol. II : Being a Chronicle of Field Sports and Travel in India

1984; xvi; 314p; vii; 463p; Rs. 400 \$ 80 (Per set)

Madras District Gazetteers

The Nilgiris:

W. Francis

1984; xiv; 394p; Tables;

Rs. 200 \$ 40

Abhidhana Rajendra Kosh

Jain Encyclopaedia : A Dictionary of Prakrit Magadhi to Sanskrit

Vijayarajendra Suri

Rs. 8000 \$ 1600 (Per set of seven volumes)

The Ayurvedic System of Medicine

Two Volumes

Nagendranath Sen Gupta

1964; 408p; iv; 778p;

Rs. 600 \$ 120 (Per set)

Swaraj : The Problem of India

J.I. Ellam;

1984; 288p; Rs. 120 \$ 24

The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley

L.A. Waddell

1986; Rs. 150 \$ 30

Topography of Assam

John M'Cosh

1986; Rs. 150 \$ 30

T O P O G R A P H Y

OF

A S S A M

J O H N M ' C O S H

LOGOS PRESS

NEW DELHI-110023

954152
M/O

First Published 1837

First Indian Reprint 1986

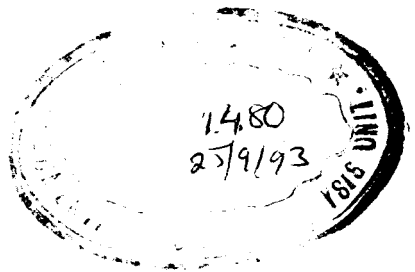
Published by

LOGOS PRESS

**14 Suvidha Bazar, Sarojini Nagar
New Delhi-110023**

Printed by

**Sushil Printers
at New Sachdeva Press
Maya Puri, Phase I
NEW DELHI-110064**



001480

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

1, Boundaries. 2, Face of Country. 3, Aquatic habits of people. 4, Soil. 5, Brahmaputra. 6, Scenery. 7, Navigation. 8, Route to Bengal by water. 9, Routes to Bengal by land. 10, Via Kassy Hills. 11, Via Dyung and Jetinga. 12, Route to Bootan. 13, Route to Thibet. 14, Route to Burma and China via Hookeong. 15, Route from Brahmaputra to Irrawaddi via Noa-dihing. 16, Importance of Road towards China.

CHAPTER II.

1, State of Country. 2, Dynasty. 3, Origin of. 4, Eminence of. 5, Decline of. 6, Cause of Decline. 7, Present Rajah. 8, Capitals. 9, Disqualifications for Throne. 10, Rassell's Valley. 11, Assam Kings. 12, Ahom Language.

CHAPTER III.

1, People. 2, Women. 3, Native Christians. 4, Burmese Refugees. 5, Kyahs or Marwaris. 6, Education. 7, Slavery. 8, Houses. 9, Conveyance.

CHAPTER IV.

1, Agriculture. 2, Rice. 3, Sugar. 4, Mustard. 5, Cotton. 6, Opium. 7, Lack. 8, Silk. 9, Tea. 10, Coffee. 11, Ratan. 12, Plantain. 13, India Rubber. 14, Gums. 15, Ferns. 16, Figs. 17, Creepers. 18, Parasites. 19, Palms. 20, Fruit Trees. 21, Poison. 22, Timbers.

CHAPTER V.

1, Animals. 2, Elephants. 3, Rhinoceroses. 4, Tigers, Leopards, and Bears. 5, Buffaloes. 6, Cows. 7, Horses. 8, Sheep. 9, Hogs. 10, Poultry. 11, Game. 12, Porcu-

pines. 13, Snakes. 14, Leeches. 15, White Ants. 16, Crocodiles. 17, Tortoises. 18, Porpoises. 19, Fish. 20, Fishing.

CHAPTER VI.

1, Gold. 2, Silver. 3, Iron. 4, Coal. 5, Lime. 6, Precious Stones. 7, Amber. 8, Salt. 9, Petroleum. 10, Hot Springs.

CHAPTER VII.

1, Arts. 2, Trade. 3, — with Bengal. 4, — with Bootan. 5, — with Thibet. 6, — with China and Ava. 7, Temples. 8, Bridges. 9, Bunds. 10, Forts.

CHAPTER VIII.

1, Seasons. 2, Storms. 3, Rains. 4, Inundation. 5, Earthquakes.

CHAPTER IX.

1, Extent of Assam. 2, Divisions. 3, Zillahs. 4, Goalpara. 5, Station. 6, Public Buildings. 7, Town. 8, Bunds. 9, Suggested Improvements. 10, Chokey. 11, Provisions. 12, Conveyance to and from Gohatti. 13, Post. 14, Temperature and Rain.

CHAPTER X.

1, Kamroop. 2, Arparbut. 3, Umanunda. 4, Assam Se-bundy Corps. 5, Gohatti. 6, Ancient Splendour. 7, Aghor-punts. 8, Vestals. 9, Unhealthiness. 10, Causes of. 11, Jail and Hospital. 12, Improvements. 13, Probable change of Station. 14, Pay of Medical Officers.

CHAPTER XI.

1, Durrung. 2, Tezapore. 3, Nowgong. 4, Rungagora. 5, Now-dwar. 6, Bishnauth. 7, Prison Discipline of Assam generally.

CHAPTER XII.

1, Salubrity. 2, Malaria. 3, Properties of. 4, Sources of —Marshes. 5, Rice Fields. 6, Tanks and Pools. 7, Jungle. 8, Neglect of Ventilation. 9, Ruined Houses. 10, Pre-

disponent Causes of Fever. 11, **Depressing Passions.** 12, Low Diet. 13, Putrid Fish. 14, Substitute for Salt. 15, Impure Water. 16, Bathing. 17, Exposing Sick on river side. 18, Deficiency of Clothing. 19, Prevalent Diseases. 20, Cholera. 21, Scurvy. 22, Sanatorium on Bootan Mountains. 23, Comparative Sickness of Goalpara and Gohatti. 24, Comparative healthness of N. E. Frontier.

CHAPTER XIII.

1, Revenue, Judicial and Police. 2, Feudal system. 3, Revenue system of Kamroop. 4, Revenue Officers. 5, Fees of Revenue Officers. 6, Private Estates how assessed. 7, House Tax. 8, Land Tax. 9, Abolition of Capitation and House Taxes. 10, Civil Courts. 11, Criminal Courts. 12, Police. 13, Omlahs Bengali. 14, Language of Courts. 15, Public Crime. 16, Punishment. 17, Insufficiency of Punishment. 18, Area of Kamroop. 19, Classes of Land. 20, Land Measure. 21, Population. 22, Stock. 23, Revenue and Disbursement. 24, Crime committed. 25, People killed by wild Animals. 26, Population of Assam. 27, Receipts and Disbursements of Assam.

CHAPTER XIV.

HILL TRIBES OF ASSAM.

SECTION I.—BOOTEAS.

1, Boundaries and Extent. 2, Cultivation. 3, Dwars. 4, Tribute to Honorable Company. 5, Government, Dhurm Rajah. 6, Daeb Rajah. 7, Capitals. 8, Revenue and Pay of Public Officers. 9, People. 10, Army. 11, Religion. 12, Anomalous Marriages. 13, Trade.

SECTION II.—AKAS, DUPHLAS, AND KOPPACHORS.

1, Fierce People. 2, Levy Black Mail.

SECTION III.—MIRIS.

1, Extent. 2, Manners and Customs. 3, Eat Poisoned Animals.

SECTION IV.—ABORS, BOR-ABORS, AND MISHMIS.

1, Extent. 2, Houses. 3, Hospitality. 4, Preserve Skulls of Cattle. 5, Migration. 6, Trade.

SECTION V.—KANGTIS.

1, Extent. 2, Descent. 3, Superiority. 4, Suddia. 5, Force.

SECTION VI.—BOR-KANGTIS.

1, Subjects of Ava. 2, Silver Mine. 3, Munglung Kangtis.

SECTION VII.—SINGPHOS.

1, Boundaries. 2, Chiefs. 3, Irruptions. 4, Wakum Koonjie's Invasion. 5, Bisa Gaum. 6, Duffa Gaum. 7, Caste. 8, Religion. 9, Language. 10, Marriages. 11, Funeral Rites. 12, Inheritance. 13, Intercourse with Burmese Singphos.

SECTION VIII.—MUAMARIAS OR MATTUCKS.

1, Extent. 2, Devastated Assam. 3, Rajah. 4, Doubtful Fidelity. 5, Capital.

SECTION IX.—NAGAS.

1, Numerous Tribes. 2, Dreaded by Neighbours. 3, Dress.

SECTION X.—MUNNIPORE.

1, Extent. 2, Valley. 3, Capitals. 4, Wars. 5, People. 6, Climate.

SECTION XI.—CACHARIS.

1, Extent. 2, Wars. 3, Royal Race extinct. 4, People.

SECTION XII.—KASSYAS.

1, Fierce Race of Men. 2, Massacre of Lieutenants Beddingfield and Burlton. 3, Habits. 4, Weather.

SECTION XIII.—GARROWS.

1, Dress and Dainties. 2, Women. 3, Ornaments. 4, Nature of Country. 5, Unhealthiness.

SECTION XIV.

Rabbas, Lalungs, Chooteas, and Mikirs.

CHAPTER I.

- 1, *Boundaries.* 2, *Face of Country.* 3, *Aquatic habits of people.* 4, *Soil.* 5, *Brahmaputra.* 6, *Scenery.* 7, *Navigation.* 8, *Route to Bengal by water.* 9, *Routes to Bengal by land.* 10, *Via Kassya Hills.* 11, *Via Dyung and Jetinga.* 12, *Route to Bootan.* 13, *Route to Thibet.* 14, *Route to Burma and China via Hoo-koong.* 15, *Route from Brahmaputra to Irrawaddi via Noa-dihing.* 16, *Importance of Road towards China.*

ASSAM is that extensive tract of country on either side of the Brahmaputra; stretching on the N. shore from the river Monash opposite Goalpara, and on the S. from Nughurbera hill, about 16 miles above Goalpara, to the foot of the Himayala mountains, close upon the western boundary of China. On the N. it is bounded by a cold mountainous country inhabited by **Bee-** I. teas, Akas, Duphlas, Koppachors, Miris, Abors, and Mishmis; the first being most westward, and the others eastward in succession; the Kangtis, Bor-Kangtis, Singphos and Muamarias, separate it on the extreme east from China and Burma; the Munniporis, Nagas, Mikirs, Cacharis, Kassyas and Garrows from our possessions in Sylhet on the south; while it is connected on the west with Bengal, by the Zillah Goalpara, late N. E. Rungpore. Though geographically speaking, Assam terminates at the river Monash, yet the same peculiar country

1.
Boundaries.

- I. borders the Brahmaputra as far as Jumal-pore: has the same climate, and the same change of seasons. Assam may properly be called the valley of the Brahmaputra, navigable branches intersect it in every possible direction, and there is perhaps not a spot of habitated ground so situated, as to be more than a convenient distance from some navigable stream.

2.
Face of Coun-
try.

The appearance of the country is very different from that of most others in India; being a perfect flat as far as the eye can penetrate, studded with a multitude of little green conical hills, like hay-cocks in a meadow, rising abruptly from the level plains to the height of from two to seven hundred feet. So very singular are the shapes and arrangement of these mountains in miniature, that the imagination could fancy them the remnants of a country that once stood on the same level with their summits; whose obdurate constituents having resisted the torrents of centuries that washed away the more moveable soil into the Indian ocean, were reserved by Providence as places of shelter and retreat from the floods that periodically inundate the land. Assam is not without some extensive ranges of well cultivated land as is to be found in the zillah of Kam-roop. Nor is it entirely composed of alluvial flats; there are some districts of primitive soil far above the reach of inundation, and fit for crops of all kinds. Of these high plains, those at Bishnauth, Chardwar, and Chotegah are the most considerable

Yet strange it is, the inhabitants dont avail themselves of this provision of nature, to raise themselves above the reach of the floods, when they might do so without trouble, expence or inconvenience. They will sit still on the low ground till the water encompasses their huts, and drowns the fires upon their hearths, rather than live comfortably on high dry ground; when the inundation has risen too high for them to wade from one house to another, or even to stand upon their own floors, they paddle out of their houses in canoes, or roost on scaffolds high as the thatch itself, with the frequent calamity of their children falling out of their nests and being drowned. Such is the influence of superstition! for these little hills are believed to be the abodes of devils and unclean spirits, and unless they are consecrated by a religious temple and defended by the followers of Brahmah, it is judged advisable to leave those fiends incarnate in undisturbed possession.

3.
Aquatic habits
of people.

Though the country is at all seasons generally swampy, and intersected with half-filled channels and stagnant lakes, yet in the dry season it is very susceptible of cultivation, and amply repays any labour and expence bestowed upon it by producing abundant crops. The soil is for the most part composed of rich black mould; though occasionally of red stiff clay; so hard and tenacious as to resist the current of the river like rock itself, even when undermined, and thrown down in fragments into the stream. The soil upon the hills is universally

4.
Soil.

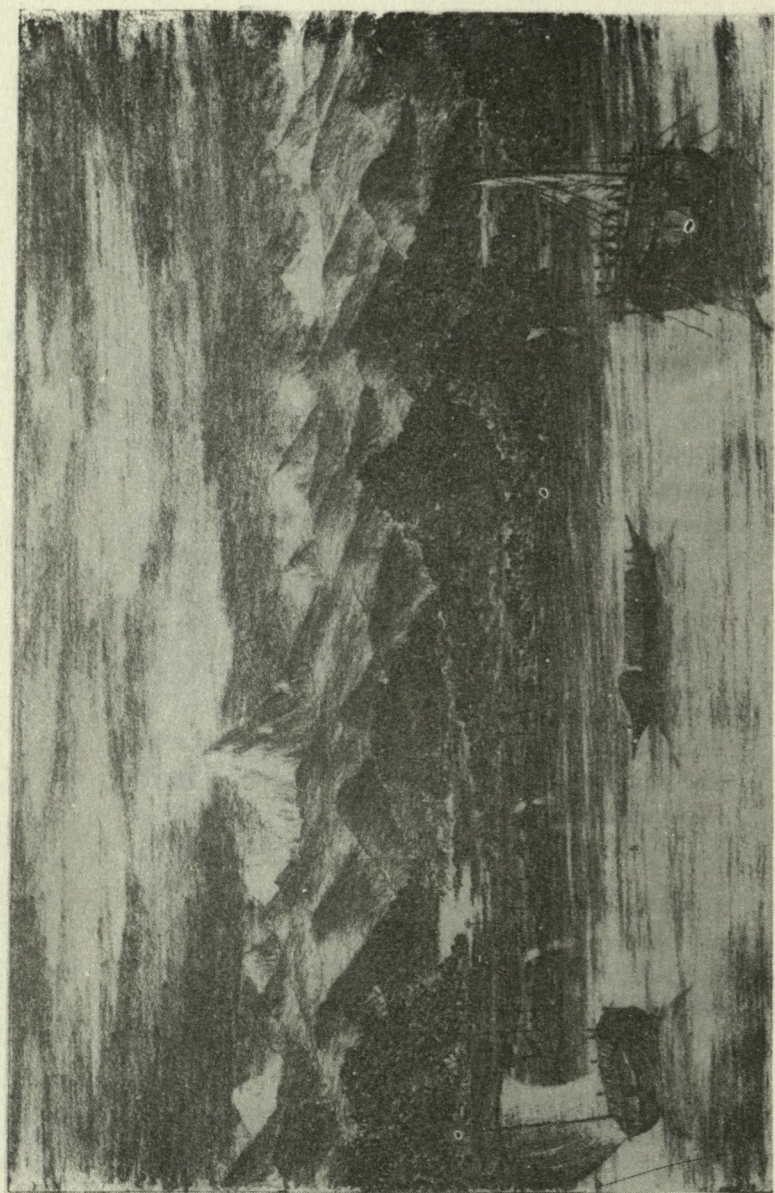
1. composed of red rich loam, with a sprinkling of particles of quartz or talc; and if we may judge by the exuberance of the brushwood, they also would well remunerate the cultivators. Large masses of granite are scattered all over these hills and seem indebted for their often whimsical arrangement, to some convulsion of nature.

5.
Brahmaputra.

The intercourse between Assam and Bengal proper is almost entirely maintained by water. There is a free communication between the Brahmaputra and the Ganges, and boats of the largest burden pass by different inosculation out of the one into the other throughout the year. The Brahmaputra may be called the great drain of Assam, and not of it only, but of all the mountainous countries that surround it; the numerous tributary streams of which swell it to a river of the very first-rate magnitude, so as to make it out-rival the great Ganges itself in its tribute to the ocean. History still leaves it doubtful whether or not it receives the waters of the Sampu, of Thibet; though the reasonable presumption is that it does so. Most certainly the Sampu does not flow into the Irawaddi; and unless it flows into the Brahmaputra, and is the same with the Dihong river, it is difficult to account for its course to the sea.

6.
Scenery.

From the uncultivated nature of the country a voyage up is always a tedious one and as dreary a trip as one could well desire; for days and weeks together nought else is visible but sandbanks and water bounding the very horizon, with no trace of vegetation but an endless jungle of



impenetrable reeds ; without the shadow of an inhabitant, or signs of animal life but water-fowls and alligators. Though this is the ordinary nature of the Brahmaputra, it is occasionally relieved by groups of beautifully wooded hills ; whose shape and colour constantly changing by position, gratify the eye with a pleasing panorama till other and nearer groups come into view. As the voyager advances higher up, the scenery improves ; and a series of hills innumerable, retiring far away in fine perspective, till their blue conical summits are relieved by the snowy peaks of the Himalaya towering their icy pinnacles midway up to the vertex of the sky, afford one of the grandest scenes in nature. The sight of a hill in this level land is always agreeable ; few things more readily summon up before the mind's eye youthful associations ; and the stranger hails its appearance like a friend of his boyhood met in a foreign land. Hence the scenery of Assam is always agreeable, and the eye wanders from hill to hill as over faces once familiar, and with happy invention assimilates them with those of his native home.

A voyage up the Brahmaputra is attended with many obstacles not to be met with upon the Ganges. In the dry season there are no beaten paths to facilitate tracking ; the boatmen must either force their way through the high reeds on the crumbling perpendicular bank, or scramble along the bottom ; or, what they prefer, keep upon the shoal side of the river, where the sand-bank affords good footing, though with the great drawback of the boat's

- I. getting often aground. During the rains the navigation is very much impeded, the banks are overflowed and little or no tracking ground is left ; so that pushing along by the slowest of all processes, the bamboo, is the only means of advancing. The prevailing wind being from the east adds no little impediment to the journey. During the cold weather the Brahmaputra is clear and transparent, but in the rains thick and turbid, and at the full flood covered with rafts of pine trees, swept away by its mountain torrents ; or by large masses of soil, with the reeds and long grass adhering. The water is esteemed by the natives as good and wholesome, and that blessing is distributed to every village in the country.

8.
Route to Ben-
gal by water.

The usual route from Assam is down the river Brahmaputra via the Jennai, which leaves the Brahmaputra at Jumalpore, passes by the large town Syragegunge, whence it soon after meets with the Pubna river, a navigable branch of the Ganges. After proceeding up the Pubna river for two or three days the boats meet the great current of the Ganges, up which they ascend for three or four days more, till they come to the mouth of the Matabanga or the Jellingi, down either of which they drop to Calcutta. These two rivers are almost dry during the cold season, and during that period the voyage to and fro is made by the Sunderbunds. Of late years the main channel of the Brahmaputra beneath Jumalpore has been almost shut up during the dry season, and the Jennai is now the principal river. The voyage from Goalpara to Calcutta is performed

in from twenty-five to thirty-five days, and I.
from Calcutta to Goalpara in about eight days
more.

There are three overland routes from Bengal to Assam. The first by Murshadabad, Mauldah, Dinagepore, Rungpore, Baugwah and Goalpara. This is the line of the Calcutta dawki, but it is almost impassable during the rains. The second road is via Dacca, Dumary, Puculoe, Jumalpole, Singymary, and Goalpara, also nearly impassable in the rains.

9.
Routes to Bengal by land.

The third passes by Sylhet, Chirra, Moplung, Nunklow, Ranneygodown, Cannymook and Gohatti, but from its crossing over the Kassya hills it is impracticable to any land carriage, and beast of burden; nor is a journey performed at any season without much difficulty. Another branch of this road after leaving Sylhet passes over the hills by Jyntia, Hautputtree, Nurtung and Nunclung, and joins the river Kullung, about twenty miles from its junction with the Brahmaputra. This last branch is much preferable to the other and much better adapted for carriage. The principal mode of conveyance is by baskets of the shape of a pine cheese, slung over a Kassya's back, and suspended by a stout strap across the brow. One of these sturdy fellows will carry a maund at a time; nor is he at all particular about his burden; but will take up an invalid upon a chair, and convey him over precipices in safety where he could not venture to ride, and was unable to proceed on foot.

10.
Via Kassya Hills.

I. Nature has pointed out a very convenient road across the mountains which could be made as practicable for conveyance as such a hilly country would admit of. The Dyung, a river that communicates with the Brahmaputra, and the Jetinga that flows into the Barak, rise the one on the N. and the other on the S. of the same chain of hills, and both streams are so far navigable that a land conveyance of only six days' march would be necessary to connect them. The intermediate country is so undulating, and the superstrata of rock so friable, that no difficulty would be met with in the formation of a road well adapted for carriage.

11.
Via Dyung and
Jetinga.

There are numerous passes into Bootan along the frontier, some of which lead direct to the Capital. These passes are called Dwars, the principal of which are Bijni-dwar, Buxadwar, Now-dwar, and Char-dwar. The two last are more correctly the names of districts, and are so called from their containing the former nine and the latter four passes into the mountains.

12.
Route to Boo-
tan.

Thibet is open to travellers on foot from the extreme east of Assam. The route runs across the Himalaya mountains parallel with the course of the Brahmaputra. The journey from Suddia, the most advanced British post on this frontier to Bhaloo, the first town met with in Thibet is performed by pilgrims in about sixteen days. The following are the towns on the line of march in succession: Suddia, Kudgin, Luckquee, Galoom, Mamanoo, Dullee, Omono, Hullee, Sumlay, Hamay, Kum-day, Rheeshah, Bhaloo. About four days' journey beyond Bha-

13.
Route to Thi-
bet.

loo stands the City of Roshecma, containing I. fine stone buildings, a large population, and a Government purely Chinese. This route is a very arduous task, the rugged nature of the snowy country is of itself nearly insurmountable, and the hostility shewn by the tribes on the road, to all ingress of strangers, is no less difficult to encounter. The Kangti Chief at Suddia is believed to have great influence with these mountaineers, and is in the habit of giving those devotees, who have the good fortune to obtain his protection, a safe escort to the borders.

There is an open road from Upper Assam into Burma, and thence into China, by which a considerable trade in Chinese and Burmese manufactures is carried on. Indeed the Burmese in their invasions of Assam generally entered it by this route. The line of trade after leaving Suddia passes by Bisa across the Patkoye range of mountains and through the valley of Hoo-koong, to the town of Moon-koong, situated on a navigable branch of the Irrawaddi called Nam-yang. Merchants proceeding from Moon-koong to Ava at once descend the Irrawaddi to the capital; while those to China ascend the Irrawaddi for many miles, to a place called Cat-mow, where they disembark their goods and thence convey them on mules over a range of mountainous country inhabited by Shans (subject to Ava) into the Chinese province of Yunan.

14.
Route to Bur-
ma and China
via Hoo-koong.

The intercourse between China and Assam by this route is extremely tedious and can only be followed by a trading people who traffic as they

15.
Route from
Brahmaputra
to Irrawaddi
via Noa-
dihing.

- I. go along. A knowledge of the extreme navigable branches of the Brahmaputra has pointed out a much shorter and more convenient path ; and this was travelled over by Lieutenant Wilcox. Tracking up the Noa-dihing which enters the Lohit, the great eastern branch of the Brahmaputra, a few miles above Suddia, Lieutenant Wilcox was able to proceed by water conveyance to within nine days' march of Moon-lang on the Irrawaddi ; and this journey he accomplished without any serious difficulty, or any inconvenience more than what arose from the jungly state of the country.

16.
Importance of
Road towards
hina.

Considering the small extent of land that intervenes between the navigable branches of the Brahmaputra, and the sources of the great rivers of Ava, of Martaban, of Cambodia, and of Nankin, an overland communication by means of a good road would be mutually beneficial to the three great nations whose territories there meet ; and would open a direct inlet for the importation of all the valuable productions of Northern Central Asia. It would also tend to civilize the Hill Barbarians who inhabit these regions ; and enable a force to penetrate into the centre of their country whither they can at present retreat before a superior force with comparative impunity ; and in the event of its ever becoming necessary to take vengeance on the Chinese, an armed force embarking on the Brahmaputra could march across the mountains and enter Yunan, one of the richest provinces of the empire.