



ST. JOHN'S GATE, QUEBEC.  
(Messrs. Wm. Notman & Son, photo.)

### A Morning's Ride in Upper Burma.

A long night of tossing and turning on the bed, of counting the hours as the garrison gong breaks the monotony of darkness, and then, just before morning, a little breeze springs up, and we fall into a deep refreshing sleep. Not to last long however, for as dawn glimmers in the east *reveille* peals out, and as we turn uneasily to snatch another minute of rest, there is a knock at the door, and "Please sir! quarter to five; tea ready, sir," sounds in our ears. We must not delay if we would catch the freshness of the early morning, and it does not take one long to dress for a jungle ride, so by a quarter past five we are in the saddle and off. Our steeds are two hardy little Burman ponies—pretty creatures, only standing 12.2 and 12.3 respectively, yet up to almost any weight, willing to go all day, and clever with their feet on rough ground. We canter across the *maidan* (parade ground) and enter a shady lane.

It is always a matter of speculation with us how these lanes were formed; no Burman ever planted the cactus and creepers which twine so luxuriantly over the bushes; and we have come to the conclusion that they were primarily paths through the dense jungle, and as the ground was cleared for cultivation, a border was left along the sides of the roads, true to the Burmanese principle of not doing one stroke more work than is absolutely necessary.

These are the cart roads, and as we pursue the winding track we hear a gruesome sound in the distance, it is something between a bark and a groan, rising occasionally to an appalling yell, as of a score of pigs under torment, and as a cloud of dust meets us at the next corner we turn our ponies aside to let the cart pass. The Burmanese cart is of the most primitive kind; the wheel is simply a circle of wood, through the centre of which a hole is made for the axle. I have heard that in the more remote districts the wheel is not even rounded, but allowed to wear itself into shape. Through what joltings this is accomplished on rough, unmade roads, in which the rents are two feet deep at times, I leave to the imagination. But jolting is apparently congenial to the Burman, for he sits well forward on his load of paddy, (rice) or maize, with cigar between his

teeth, (a dirty loincloth wound round him, and a bright silk handkerchief pushed askew on his head constituting his costume) and his Mongolian features expand into a broad grin as he looks with curiosity on the surprising spectacle of a woman on horseback.

One of the first ladies who rode in Upper Burma is said to have elicited the remark:

"If the women can ride horses, what is it the men cannot do?" And truly it seems that we are only objects of surprise to each other, for in a moment we come to a deep gully, down which the horses scramble to what will be the bed of a stream in the rains, and rush up the other side, almost as steep as a house. We know the cart has passed this very gully, and as we look back, we wonder how the bullocks, willing and plodding as they are, ever dragged that lumbering piece of workmanship up the sides. And now the sun is slowly rising. One of the mind pictures of one's early youth is that of the sun rising glorious from beds of clouds; but here it is painfully evident that he has been up elsewhere all night. Up above the horizon rises the great red ball, shorn of all mystery, and of half its majesty and splendour; and as it mounts into the sky the heavens brighten to a vivid blue, and the horizon fades into the grey mistiness which marks the Burmese hot weather.

The sides of the lane are thicker and greener, and on the tips of the cactus leaves little flowers shoot out, in shape like a half open rose, but striped red and yellow; a straggling branch bars our way, studded with bunches of delicate white blossom, and a butterfly flutters near, with a brilliant scarlet body. High up in the sun-lit air circles a kite, its cruel eye fixed on its prey, and a crow pheasant, that anomaly with glossy black body and golden brown wings, sweeps across the path, startling us with a noisy discordant cry. A rustle at our feet, and our eyes instinctively search the undergrowth, for who knows but that in the midst of all this beauty a deadly cobra may be coiled, ready for a spring; but only a harmless little lizard runs out, the spots on its back gleaming like jewels in the sun.

Now the lane widens, and loses itself on a bare bit of uncultivated land, across which we look at a Burmese vil-

lage, a curious collection of matting walls and thatched roofs in the last stage of decay.

Half a dozen little naked children are sitting in the dust, deeply absorbed in a game which we find to be just the old familiar game of "jacks," but played with stones.

There is nothing very inviting about the village, where the gaunt dogs prowl round the hovels, picking up what food they may, and the babies roll in the dirt, so we turn to the river, and pass a group of men winnowing the chaff from the wheat by casting it out into the wind by the basketful; the refuse blows away, and so does a large portion that is good, but the pile at their feet steadily increases, and with that they are content. Here we draw aside for a moment to make way for a string of women slowly winding up the steep road from the river with water jars gracefully poised on their heads. The simple garment of one long, straight piece of cloth, is folded across back and chest, and falls to the ankle. Nothing could be better adapted to the swaying grace of their movements, and the black hair twisted in elaborate coils is a framework to many a pretty face. They are an eager, animated party, and laugh and talk freely as they eye us in passing, so that we know we are the object of their conversation, but can only nod and smile in return, as we do not understand what they say.

And then we turn away from them, and down the steep road to the bank, along the shores of the Irrawaddy river, the course of which our fingers knew on the map not so many years ago, though we never dreamed our eyes should see it. The water is very low now, and the shores are rich with crops of paddy and tobacco, and we pause a moment to watch the care with which each green tobacco leaf is picked and laid out to dry under a framework of bamboos.

So homeward, for the cool breeze is dying away, the sun is striking hot on our pith hats, and the early freshness is fast giving place to the heat and glare of the day, when with doors fast closed and punkahs swinging in the dusky rooms, we shall see the thermometer rise to 108° or more, and long for the night.

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