

## 'UP THE COUNTRY.'



### CHAPTER I.

On board the 'Megna' flat, Saturday, Oct. 21, 1837.

'ONCE more upon the waters, yet once more,' and so on. We are now fairly off for eighteen months' of travelling by steamers, tents, and mountains—and every day of a cabin seems to me like so much waste. They ought all to go to the great account of the long voyage that will, at last, take us home again. And this cabin looks so like my 'Jupiter' abode, in all its fittings and appointments, that it is really a pity to throw its discomforts away in going farther off. Well, I am sure it is all for the best—I make no objection—I like to see things take their course; but still I *do* say, that for a person who required nothing but to be allowed the undisturbed enjoyment of that small Greenwich house and garden, with all its little Cockney pleasures and

pursuits, I have been very hardly treated and rather over-worked. We got up at five this morning; the servants were all in a fuss, and Wright was in all the delusions of carpet-bags and nice bandboxes in which she may be indulged till we leave the steamer, and then she will be obliged to wake from them, as the coolie is yet to be discovered who would carry a carpet-bag, and a bandbox does not precisely meet the views of a camel.

When we came down for some coffee, the great hall was full of gentlemen who had come to accompany his lordship to the ghaut—even Mr. Macaulay had turned out for it. F. and I, with Captain P., soon took ourselves off, and drove down to the landing-place. There were two lines of troops from the door of Government House to the river, and the band was playing that march in the 'Puritani' which, when we were at the Admiralty, used to be played every morning by the Guards' band, and which, consequently, always carries me back to the horrid time of our preparations for leaving England, so I can always cry it all over again to that tune. The road was covered with carriages and riders; and, at the ghaut, a large set of our particular

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acquaintances were waiting for us, so we got out and stood with them while G. made his progress on foot. It was really a very pretty procession: such crowds of people and such diversities of dress. He is not so shy as he used to be at these ceremonies, though I think a long walk through troops presenting arms is trying to everybody. The instant he arrived at the ghaut, he gave a general good-bye, offered me his arm, and we walked off to the boats as fast as we could. The guns fired, the gentlemen waved their hats, and so we left Calcutta. It has really done handsomely by us, and we ought to be obliged to them for *saying*—if it is no more—that they are sorry we are going. But I dare say we are an amusement to them. They liked our balls and parties, and whatever we did or said was the subject of an anecdote; and if we said or did nothing they invented something for us—and it all served to wonder at—which, in a country where there is little society and few topics, was an advantage.

The Sunderbunds, Monday, Oct. 23.

We came into these lovely riant scenes on Sunday morning. They are a composition of

low stunted trees, marsh, tigers and snakes, with a stream that sometimes looks like a very wide lake and then becomes so narrow that the jungle wood scrapes against the sides of the flat—and this morning scraped away all G.'s jealousies, which are a great loss. I never saw such a desolate scene: no birds flying about—there is no grain for them to eat. We have met only one native boat, which must have been there since the Deluge. Occasionally there is a bamboo stuck up with a bush tied to it, which is to recall the cheerful fact that there a tiger has carried off a man. None of our Hindus, though they are starving, will go on shore to cook—and, indeed, it would be very unsafe. It looks as if this bit of world had been left unfinished when land and sea were originally parted. The flat is dreadfully hot at night; but not more uncomfortable than a boat must necessarily be in this climate.

I must make you acquainted with the other flat, because then, once for all, you will understand our prospect of travelling companions. You know all about Mr. and Mrs. A. and their two children. Mr. and Mrs. B. are our next couple. He is one of the Government secre-

taries, clever and pleasant, speaks Persian rather more fluently than English; Arabic better than Persian; but, for familiar conversation, rather prefers Sanscrit. Mr. and Mrs. C. (belonging to Mr. B.'s office) are a very pleasant couple; he acts and sings, and knows most of the people we know, and she sings and plays on the harp like an angel; and they have a small child, the least little sick thing possible, which I affection, and I mean to borrow it when we are in camp to play in my tent. I often *wear* for a child to talk to. Captain and Mrs. D. are our commissariat couple—she is very pretty. General E. is the public military secretary—an astutious oldish man. The two steamers generally anchor together at night; but the other comes in later than ours, and so we have seen none of the other party but Mr. A., who says they do very well together, all things considered. General E. is suspected of not being partial to the small D., A., and C. children—there had been rather an angry controversy about some apple and pear jam; and, in general, they were all, like our noble selves, so much bored that they went to bed at eight. Otherwise, they were all perfectly happy.

Wednesday, Oct. 25.

We stopped at Koolna yesterday for coals, and stayed an hour to let the Hindus cook their dinner. We are out of the Sunderbunds now, and steaming between two banks not quite so elevated, nor nearly so picturesque as those flat marshes between Eastcombe and the river; and, they say, we shall see nothing prettier, or rather less hideous, between this and Simla, except at Raj Mahl. G. is already bored to death with having nothing to do. He has read two novels and cannot swallow any more, and is longing for his quiet cool room at Government House. The nights are dreadful—all for want of a punkah—and hardly any of us get a wink of sleep. However, we shall soon overtake cooler weather. The six gentlemen passed the three first nights on deck, owing to the heat below, and I sat up in bed fanning myself. The native servants sleep any and everywhere, over our heads, under our feet, or at our doors, and as there are no partitions but green blinds at the sides and gratings above, of course we hear them coughing all night.

Thursday, Oct. 26.

They are steering us very badly; we go rolling about from one side of the river to the other,

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and every now and then thump against the bank, and then the chairs and table all shake and the inkstand tips over. I think I feel a little seasick. Our native servants look so unhappy. They hate leaving their families, and possibly leaving two or three wives is two or three times as painful as leaving one, and they cannot endure being parted from their children. Then they are too crowded here to sleep comfortably. Major J. observed in a gentle, ill-used voice: 'I think Captain K. behaved very ill to us; he said that between both steamers and the flat he could lodge all the servants that were indispensably and absolutely necessary to us, so I only brought one hundred and forty, and now he says there is not room even for them.' Certainly this boat must be drunk, she reels about in such a disorderly fashion. I wish I had my cork jacket on.

I am glad that in your last letter you deigned for once to comment on the 'Pickwick Papers.' I collected all the stray numbers, and began reading them straight through to-day, because hitherto I have never had time to make out exactly what they were about, delightful as they were. I wish you would read over again that

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account of Winkle and the horse which will not go on—'Poor fellow! good old horse!'—and Pickwick saying, 'It is like a dream, a horrid dream, to go about all day with a horrid horse that we cannot get rid of.' That book makes me laugh till I cry, when I am sitting quite by myself.—There! I thought so. We are aground, and the other steamer is going flourishing by, in grinning delight.

Friday, Oct. 27.

We remained aground for two hours, and *touched* several times after we were afloat. Some of the other party visited us in the evening, and I lent General E. a novel to help him on. I have been reading 'Astoria,' out of that last box you sent us, and that great fat 'Johnsoniana.' The anecdotes are not very new, but anything about Johnson is readable. G. has got some Bridgewater Treatises, which he likes.

Beanleah, Saturday, Oct. 28.

We stopped at Surder yesterday, to take in some sheep. We ought to have been there two days ago, if we had had better pilots and fewer groundings. G. said, last night, when we again failed in landing there, that it seemed to him Absurder rather than Surder. He made another



good pun to-day. How our intellects are weakened by the climate!—we make and relish puns! The A. D. C.'s are very apt to assemble over our cabins at night, to smoke and to talk, and we hear every word they say. When it is really time to go to sleep, I generally send old Rosina up to disperse them, in her civilest manner. I was telling W. O. that they were like so many old Chelsea pensioners; they go on prosing night after night exclusively about the army, the king's army, and the company's army; and that if there were only a little levity in their talk, I should not so much mind being kept awake by it. He said, 'Ah, yes, we were very animated last night about the company's army, and your old Rosina came creeping up with "O sahib, *astai* bolo" (*gently* speak), upon which G. observed, "Ah, if she had said, O sahib, *nasty* bolo!" that would have satisfied Emily much better.' This joke being founded on Hindustani, and coming from the Governor-General, kept the whole suite in a roar of laughter for half an hour. They really relished it.

Two young writers whom we had known at Calcutta came to Surder to meet us, and we took them on board and took them back to Baulyah.

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How some of these young men must detest their lives! Mr. ——— was brought up entirely at Naples and Paris, came out in the world when he was quite a boy, and cares for nothing but society and Victor Hugo's novels, and that sort of thing. He is now stationed at B., and supposed to be very lucky in being appointed to such a cheerful station. The whole concern consists of five bungalows, very much like the thatched lodge at Langley. There are three married residents: one lady has bad spirits (small blame to her), and she has never been seen; another has weak eyes, and wears a large shade about the size of a common verandah; and the other has bad health, and has had her head shaved. A tour is not to be had here for love or money, so she wears a brown silk cushion with a cap pinned to the top of it. The Doctor and our friend make up the rest of the society. He goes every morning to hear causes between natives about strips of land or a few rupees—that lasts till five; then he rides about an uninhabited jungle till seven; dines; reads a magazine, or a new book when he can afford one, and then goes to bed. A lively life, with the thermometer at several hundred!