

soak through everything, for there was not only the rain beating down from above, but the penetrating mists creeping in all round. But I could not be depressed by mere rain, however much. The road passed through a forest of unsurpassable beauty. Chestnuts, walnuts, oaks, laurels, rhododendrons, and magnolias grew in great magnificence, and among them Himalayan kinds of birch, alder, maple, holly, apple, and cherry. Orchids of the most brilliant varieties I could have gathered in basketfuls. The perpetual moisture and the still atmosphere nourished the most delicate ferns; while the mosses were almost as beautiful, and hung from the trees in graceful pendants, blending with the festoons of the climbing plants.

After riding for some miles along the ridge, we descended towards the Teesta River, and again met with the magnificent tree-ferns, palms, bamboos, and wild bananas. We passed by several flourishing tea plantations, each with its cosy, but lonely, bungalow, surrounded by a beautiful garden. By the roadway caladiums of every variegated colour brightened the prospect. But as we descended the atmosphere grew more oppressive and stifling, till when we reached the Teesta itself, which here lies at an altitude of only 700 feet above sea-level, the atmosphere was precisely that of a hothouse. The thermometer did not rise above  $95^{\circ}$ , but the heat was well-nigh unbearable. Perspiration poured from every pore. Energy oozed away with every drop, and the thought of a winter amid the snows of Tibet became positively cheering. It was a curious beginning for such an expedition as was to follow, but the Indian officer has to be prepared to undergo at a moment's notice every degree of heat or cold, of storm and sunshine, of drought or deluge, and take everything he meets cheerily as in the day's work.

We were now in Sikkim proper, the thin wedge of a valley which runs from the plains to the watershed of the Himalayas, and separates Nepal from Bhutan. For luxuriance and for variety of vegetation, and of animal, bird, and insect life, it must, I should say, be unequalled by any other country in the world, for it lies in the tropics, and rises from an elevation of only a few hundred