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New York 18, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Some days ago, I arrived back at this hill station after a two-week holiday trek through Himalayan foothills up to the snow range. Brenda Waites, the English girl who accompanied me, complained half-seriously on our return that, "We didn't have any exciting adventures such as avalanches or wild animals." Without such excitement, nevertheless, we both found it a most relaxing withdrawal from the political and economic scene in the world below. We came back to 'civilization' refreshed by the cold, bracing air of high altitudes, the isolation of deep, wooded river valleys, and the sturdy beauty of flowering Alpine plants and soft grasses, released only two or three weeks earlier from their binding burden of winter snow and ice.

Neither Brenda nor I had the necessary background for spectacular or arduous climbing in the Himalayas. Nor were our present jobs conducive to real hiking fitness. Brenda, in her year in India, had been at desks in the Calcutta and New Delhi offices of the British Information Services, while I, since my last year's illness, had not really put myself in tip-top physical shape. We therefore selected an easy walk for our outing, and provided ourselves with some amenities - large quantities of tinned food purchased at Mr. Gopal Shah's general store in Almora - that at home we might have considered too extravagant for a hike. These in turn demanded transport, for which we were able to get two strong, good-natured hill men from an Almora coolie contractor. (Still nursing pride in what I used to do easily, I also took along my old Army knapsack, with somewhat less than half the weight carried by each coolie). Our party was completed by an elderly Muslim khansamma (cook) who was familiar with the route, and who took charge of negotiations for ghee, vegetables, eggs, milk, rice and wheat flour in the small villages where we found these available. The luxury of having meals cooked for, rather than by the hikers, was a comfort in which we gladly indulged.

You see, I describe our entourage a bit apologetically, for my real idea of a hike is self-reliance. Yet (proud again) I must add that we had frequent occasion to pat ourselves on the back for almost traveling light: on our way we met parties of one to three hikers accompanied in some cases by eight coolies and eight packmules. We were especially proud of the 'Misssahiba' who did not (as did two later English girls) need to be carried up the longest climb. Also amused, and aghast at my lack of chivalry, in face of the local people's query, repeated two or three times daily on the trail and in villages, "Haven't you brought a horse for the Misssahiba?" Still, we both admitted to real tiredness on the first three days, walking in hot sun in low river valleys. During later days, walking short distances on high, cool mountain paths, we were glad that Man, with an eye to Nature's perfect array of trees and

shade, birds and flowers, had built his dak bungalows only seven miles apart, rather than fourteen as in the valleys below.

Dak bungalows are sturdily constructed two-room buildings maintained by local district government boards, primarily for official use. We were therefore not surprised to meet enroute the Divisional Forest Officer, on inspection tour, and a Government of India meteorologist, returning from the Pindari Glacier where he had been sent to set up a regular system for measuring the annual melting of ice and snow, information necessary for a major dam project lower down. But dak bungalows are open to private hikers also, and in hills like these provide a chain of halting places reminiscent of the Appalachian Mountain Club huts in the northeast USA. At 8,000 to 11,000 feet in the Pindar River Valley, the bungalow's shelter and the warmth of its all-night fireplace fire were most welcome. At the highest bungalow, five miles from Pindari Glacier, snow had covered the eaves not three weeks earlier, we were told by local hunters. Now the snow was melted, leaving a residue of dampness in the cold nights. My memories of our two nights there are of waking several times to rebuild the fire; of pausing then, in the middle of the night, magnetically drawn by the power of snowy peaks outside; and of then making a quick break out the door, once to be met by heavy clouds, but usually to fall silent and motionless before the silvery 20,000-foot peak, its snow shining in the moonlight, majestically framed at the north end of the dark, broad valley. Silent I would stand for a priceless minute under the crisp starlit sky, then shiver, then dash quickly inside to the fire and the woolly Tibetan blanket rented from Mr. Shah's store.

In our first three days of walking, we were still in populous and busy river valleys. From Almora we went 46 miles by bus to road's end on the Gumti River, which eventually passes Lucknow and reaches the Ganges, but which here at our takeoff point was about 3500 feet above sea level. As we walked out over flat wheat and barley fields and then up steep pine-clad ridges edging the Gumti, we were still not free from the meshes of modern communication: our path to Bageshwar, the first day, was even then being widened and blasted, soon to be a metalled road. Bageshwar is an important center both of Hindu pilgrimage and of trade. To an annual fair there, Bhutiya hillmen carry wool and hides from the Tibetan border, 80 miles away. On the trail we were passed by muletrains carrying in salt, and cloth from United Provinces factories, to Bageshwar's shops. Soon lorries will drive the mules farther up the valleys.

At Bageshwar the Gumti drops into the Surja River, and stone water wheels in a score of squat, dust-choked stone huts use the fall to grind local grain into flour. Walking up the Surja Valley, 14 miles to Kapkot, then 10 more to Loharkhet, we found many such examples of productive activity: small canals to turn water wheels or irrigate fields; intensive use of stonework - the farmer has almost to be a stonemason - to build terraces from the river bed up the hillsides; dozens of bullock teams out in the early morning to draw wood plows through the rich soil of tiny plots, some no wider than a dozen furrows; women crouching in the fields to chop up dry soil, or to weed newly-sown fields where water had been applied; small boys or girls driving the milch herd - buffaloes or cows - from hillslope to water; muletrains or human coolies loaded with goods on the trail; occasional stacks of 4" x 8" timbers, skidded down the steep mountain slope, soon to be sold for building a new shop, or bridge, school, or hospital. (The back valley's first hospital is now being built a few miles above Bageshwar).

Active influences from outside also reach this busy valley. Two soldiers passed us quickly near Bageshwar, on leave from the Kashmir Front, doing a double stage in order to spend as many days as possible in their stone homes on the hillside at Loharkhet. These hills have long been important recruiting areas, as we were reminded by a plaque on the Kapkot bridge: "From this village 576 men gave their services in the Great War, 1914 to 1919; of these, 23 gave their lives." Political consciousness is awake, prodded recently by Congress Party placards on shops and tea-houses seeking support in the district board elections and proclaiming, in Hindi, "Citizens, the right to vote is now yours!" Our mode of salutation was even altered in response to local political opinion: I at first greeted men on the path with "Namaste", or "Ram Ram", familiar Hindu greetings; there were two usual types of reply: "Salaam", out of long-customary deference to 'sahib-log'; or, in a cheerful, slightly challenging mood, "Jai Hind". With equal cheerfulness, I promptly adopted this Congress greeting as my own, though my "Jai Hind" brought startled looks from some of the more stolid peasants up the valley.

In the dusk of our second day we stopped for hot tea at the teashop of a small village near Kapkot. Half a dozen men gathered, among them one active Congress worker. After the usual questions as to why I was carrying a load myself and why the Misssahiba didn't have a horse, and after ascertaining that I was American and she English, they started their inquiry in earnest. Social and political considerations about the outside world were weighing on their minds. First and apparently foremost of their real questions was one which had been asked of me by cultivators in villages near Mathura and Agra last February and March:

"We hear that Russia and America are ready to go to war. Is this a true thing, or not?"

I answered as intelligently as I knew how, as I had tried to do for villagers, or strangers on busses and trains, on several previous occasions in the past few months. Before I had a real chance to inquire into my interrogator's concern in possible Russian-American war, another man led us into thoughts of the troubles being caused the world by present smaller wars: China, Palestine, Kashmir. Would Hyderabad be next? they wondered.

As I leaned forward, trying to express my own thoughts and questions in Hindustani, another man brought forth a different question, with which I have also become familiar in village visits: "We hear that in America there are no castes, no jati. Is this so?" Again I explained as fairly as I was able. Then to yet another realm, the next man's questions demonstrating the mysterious hold of big names, of leaders: "Do you think Hitler is really dead? What of Subhas Chandra Bose?" I tried to dispose of these, but gathered that the magic of Bose's name made one or two of my listeners hopeful that he may still be alive. Closing our half-hour talk, a somewhat allied question, about leaders, revealed doubts still lingering in minds uncertain about distant political changes: "Is Lord Mountbatten really going to leave in June, and will there really be an Indian Governor-General?"

I have listed these questions because of their striking similarity, in both scope and phrasing, to those asked me by many villagers this winter and spring in the United Provinces. As usual, I was here outnumbered and outpaced by the series of questions, and didn't probe suffi-

ciently into the nature of the village peoples' concern over these problems. Most of the questions were beyond our control. Most seemed at first sight to be beyond the direct experiential range of contact of the local people. Yet somehow these men were aware, and felt participation in and influence by these outside forces. Their concern spoke unconscious recognition of the interdependence of their lives with those of people far away.

But such talks weren't providing the holiday relaxation I had hoped for. Two days later, at Loharkhet, we left behind the clamor of practical and world problems. We passed the last school, the last government bania (shopkeeper charged with the supply of provisions to official travellers), and the last post office, where we dropped letters to be carried to the outside world by runner, three days later.

Climbing from 4500 feet to 10,000 in $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles, beyond Loharkhet, we gained the pass leading into the Pindar Valley. Among shrubs by the upward path, some bright with white blossoms, I startled a lovely reddish-brown deer, which turned springing up the mountain. At the pass we were in heavy hardwood forest, and looked down and up almost unbroken wooded slopes of the river valley, no human habitation visible. That afternoon a thunderstorm broke the air's heaviness. From our cabin just below the pass a clear panorama of striking snow peaks, 18,000 to 22,000 feet high, hemmed us in on north and west. This was the solitude and thrill in nature that I had sought. From then through the next nine days, on leafy paths through the woods and flowery slopes above tree line, we met only migrant beings like ourselves: occasional villagers, a dozen shepherds moving their goat and sheep flocks up to the highest grassy hillsides, black and shaggy sheep dogs, some mountain ponies, and eight or ten hikers. We fancied that all were free of cares. Something in the spirit of Nehru we walked on, "remembering also that life, for all its ills, has joy and beauty, and we can always wander, if we know how to, in the enchanted woods of nature." Alone in silence and remoteness, quickened by the joy and beauty of nature, the mind seemed momentarily to shed a crust of confusion and turmoil, and to become serene and clear.

Freshened, and still 4000 feet above the plains' summer heat, I'm now taking up the study of Hindi again, as well as further readings in modern Indian political and economic affairs. I expect to be in Almora several weeks more, during which time I will describe to you in individual letters recent and present phases of my inquiries.

Yours sincerely,

Dick

Richard Morse