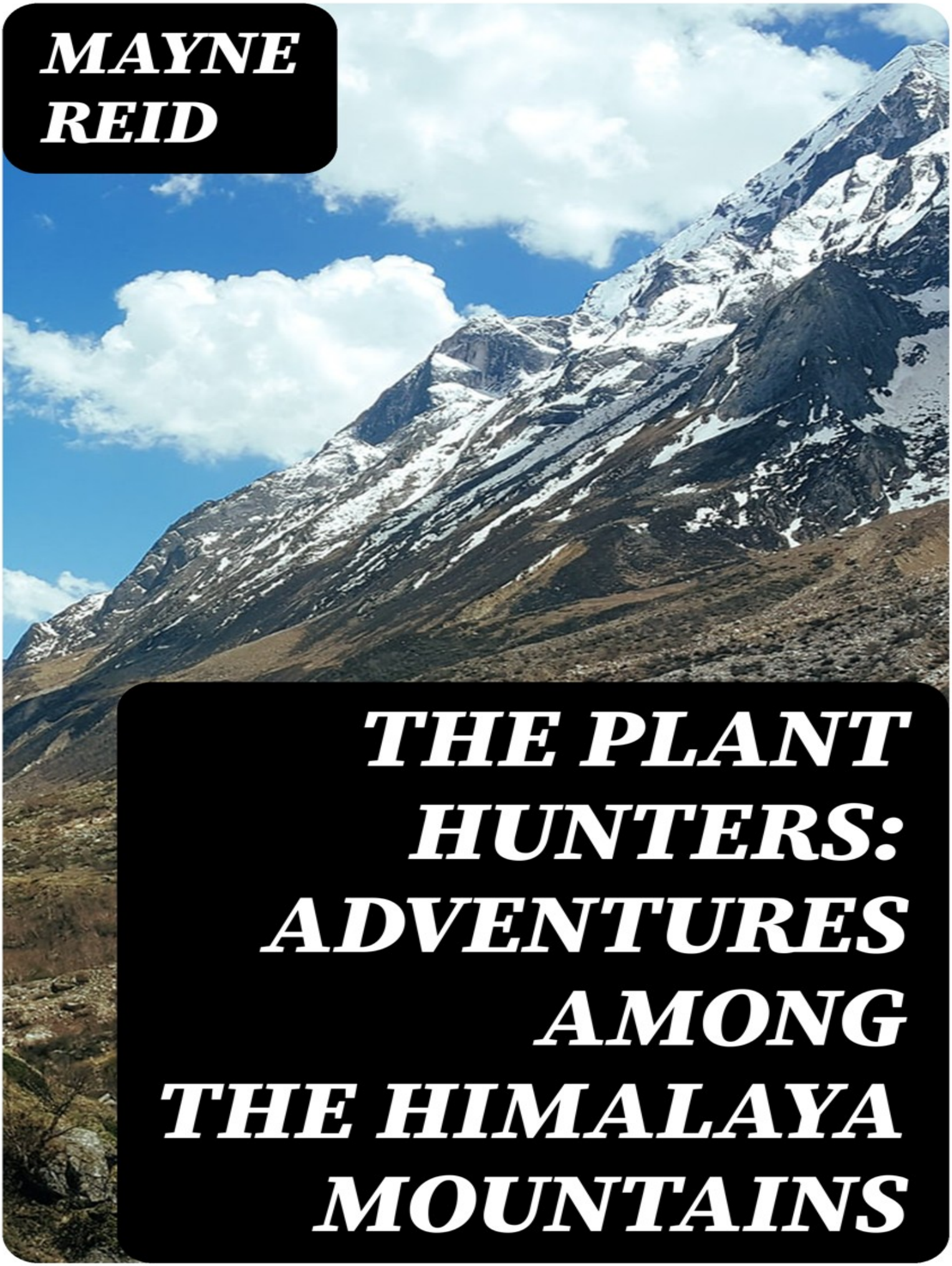
MAYNE REID



THE PLANT HUNTERS: ADVENTURES AMONG THE HIMALAYA MOUNTAINS

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The Plant Hunters: Adventures Among the Himalaya Mountains

EAN 8596547012795

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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Chapter One.

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The Plant-Hunter.

“A Plant-Hunter! what is that?

“We have heard of fox-hunters, of deer-hunters, of bear and buffalo-hunters, of lion-hunters, and of ‘boy-hunters;’ of a plant-hunter never.

“Stay! Truffles are plants. Dogs are used in finding them; and the collector of these is termed a truffle-hunter. Perhaps this is what the Captain means?”

No, my boy reader. Something very different from that. My plant-hunter is no fungus-digger. His occupation is of a nobler kind than contributing merely to the capricious palate of the gourmand. To his labours the whole civilised world is indebted—yourself among the rest. Yes, you owe him gratitude for many a bright joy. For the varied sheen of your garden you are indebted to him. The gorgeous dahlia that nods over the flower-bed—the brilliant peony that sparkles on the parterre—the lovely camelia that greets you in the greenhouse,—the kalmias, the azaleas, the rhododendrons, the starry jessamines, the gerania, and a thousand other floral beauties, are, one and all of them, the gifts of the plant-hunter. By his agency England—cold cloudy England—has become a garden of flowers, more varied in species and brighter in bloom than those that blossomed in the famed valley of Cashmere. Many of the noble trees that lend grace to our English landscape,—most of the beautiful shrubs that adorn our villas, and gladden the prospect from our cottage-windows, are the produce of his industry. But for him, many fruits, and vegetables, and roots, and berries, that garnish your table at dinner and dessert, you might never have tasted. But for him these delicacies might never have reached your lips. A good word, then, for the plant-hunter!

And now, boy reader, in all seriousness I shall tell you what I mean by a “plant-hunter.” I mean a person who devotes all his time and labour to the collection of rare plants and flowers—in short, one who makes this occupation his *profession*. These are not simply “botanists”—though botanical knowledge they must needs possess—but, rather, what has hitherto been termed “botanical collectors.”

Though these men may not stand high in the eyes of the scientific world—though the closet-systematist may affect to underrate their calling, I dare boldly affirm that the humblest of their class has done more service to the human race than even the great Linnaeus himself. They are, indeed, the botanists of true value, who have not only imparted to us a knowledge of the world’s vegetation, but have brought its rarest forms before our very eyes—have placed its brightest flowers under our very noses, as it were—flowers, that but for them had been still “blushing unseen,” and “wasting their sweetness on the desert air.”

My young reader, do not imagine that I have any desire to underrate the merits of the scientific botanist. No, nothing of the sort. I am only desirous of bringing into the foreground a class of men whose services in my opinion the world has not yet sufficiently acknowledged—I mean the botanical collectors—the *plant-hunters*.

It is just possible that you never dreamt of the existence of such a profession or calling, and yet from the earliest historic times there have been men who followed it. There were plant-collectors in the days of Pliny, who furnished the gardens of Herculaneum and Pompeii; there were plant-collectors employed by the wealthy mandarins of China, by

the royal sybarites of Delhi and Cashmere, at a time when our semi-barbarous ancestors were contented with the wild flowers of their native woods. But even in England the calling of the plant-hunter is far from being one of recent origin. It dates as early as the discovery and colonisation of America; and the names of the Tradescants, the Bartrams, and the Catesbys—true plant-hunters—are among the most respected in the botanical world. To them we are indebted for our tulip-trees, our magnolias, our maples, our robinias, our western *platanus*, and a host of other noble trees, that already share the forest, and contest with our native species, the right to our soil.

At no period of the world has the number of plant-hunters been so great as at present. Will you believe it, hundreds of men are engaged in this noble and useful calling? Among them may be found representatives of all the nations of Europe—Germans in greatest number; but there are Swedes and Russ as well, Danes and Britons, Frenchmen, Spaniards, and Portuguese, Swiss and Italians. They may be found pursuing their avocation in every corner of the world—through the sequestered passes of the Rocky Mountains, upon the pathless prairies, in the deep barrancas of the Andes, amid the tangled forests of the Amazon and the Orinoco, on the steppes of Siberia, in the glacier valleys of the Himalaya—everywhere—everywhere amid wild and savage scenes, where the untrodden and the unknown invite to fresh discoveries in the world of vegetation. Wandering on with eager eyes, scanning with scrutiny every leaf and flower—toiling over hill and dale—climbing the steep cliff—wading the dank morass or the rapid river—

threading his path through thorny thicket, through “chapparal” and “jungle”—sleeping in the open air—hungering, thirsting, risking life amidst wild beasts, and wilder men,—such are a few of the trials that chequer the life of the plant-hunter.

From what motive, you will ask, do men choose to undergo such hardships and dangers?

The motives are various. Some are lured on by the pure love of botanical science; others by a fondness for travel. Still others are the *employés* of regal or noble patrons—of high-born botanical amateurs. Not a few are the emissaries of public gardens and arboretums; and yet another few—perchance of humbler names and more limited means, though not less zealous in their well-beloved calling,—are collectors for the “nursery.”

Yes; you will no doubt be astonished to hear that the plain “seedsman” at the town end, who sells you your roots and bulbs and seedlings, keeps in his pay a staff of plant-hunters—men of botanical skill, who traverse the whole globe in search of new plants and flowers, that may gratify the heart and gladden the eyes of the lovers of floral beauty.

Need I say that the lives of such men are fraught with adventures and hair-breadth perils? You shall judge for yourself when I have narrated to you a few chapters from the experience of a young Bavarian botanist,—Karl Linden—while engaged in a *plant-hunting* expedition to the Alps of India—the stupendous mountains of the Himalaya.

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Karl Linden.

Karl Linden was a native of Upper Bavaria, near the Tyrolese frontier. Not high-born, for his father was a gardener; but, what is of more importance in modern days, well brought up and well educated. A gardener's son may still be a gentleman; and so may a gardener himself, for that matter, or he may not. There are many senses to this much-abused title. It so happens, that young Linden was a gentleman in the *true* sense; that is, he was possessed of a feeling heart, a nice sense of honesty and honour, and was, notwithstanding his humble lineage, an educated and accomplished youth. His father, the gardener, was a man of ambitious spirit, though quite unlettered; and, having himself often experienced the disadvantage of this condition, he resolved that his son never should.

In most parts of Germany, education is considered a thing of value, and is eagerly sought after. It is provided liberally for all classes; and the Germans, as a people, are perhaps the best educated in the world. It is partly owing to this fact, and partly to their energetic industry, that they exercise so great an influence in the affairs of the world; in the arts and sciences, in music, painting, and the study of nature—above all, in a knowledge of botany. I cannot believe that the Germans stand highest as an *intellectual* race, but only as an *educated* people. What a pity I could not add, that they are a free people; but in that their condition differs less from our own than we fondly imagine.

At nineteen years of age, young Karl Linden did not consider them as free as they deserved to be. He was then a student in one of the universities; and, naturally enough, had imbibed those principles of patriotic liberty, that, in 1848, were stirring in the German heart.

He did more than advocate his faith by empty words. Joined with his college compatriots, he endeavoured to have it carried into practice; and he was one of those brave students, who, in 1848, gave freedom to Baden and Bavaria.

But the hydra league of crowned heads was too strong to be so easily broken; and, among other youthful patriots, our hero was forced to flee from his native land.

An exile in London—“a refugee,” as it is termed—he scarce knew what to do. His parent was too poor to send him money for his support. Besides, his father was not over well pleased with him. The old man was one of those who still clung to a belief in the divine right of kings, and was contented with the “powers that be,” no matter how tyrannical they be. He was angry with Karl, for having made a fool of himself by turning patriot, or “rebel,” as it pleases crowned monsters to term it. He had intended him for better things; a secretary to some great noble, a post in the Custom-house, or, may be, a commission in the bodyguard of some petty tyrant. Any of these would have fulfilled the ambitious hopes of Karl’s father. The latter, therefore, was displeased with the conduct of his son. Karl had no hope from home, at least until the anger of the old man should die out.

What was the young refugee to do? He found English hospitality cold enough. He was free enough; that is, to

wander the streets and beg.

Fortunately, he bethought him of a resource. At intervals, during his life, he had aided his father in the occupation of gardening. He could dig, plant, and sow. He could prune trees, and propagate flowers to perfection. He understood the management of the greenhouse and hothouse, the cold-pit and the forcing-pit; nay, more—he understood the names and nature of most of the plants that are cultivated in European countries; in other words, he was a botanist. His early opportunities in the garden of a great noble, where his father was superintendent, had given him this knowledge; and, having a taste for the thing, he had made botany a study.

If he could do no better, he might take a hand in a garden, or a nursery, or some such place. That would be better than wandering idly about the streets of the metropolis, and half-starving in the midst of its profuse plenty.

With such ideas in his mind, the young refugee presented himself at the gate of one of the magnificent “nurseries,” in which great London abounds. He told his story; he was employed.

It was not long before the intelligent and enterprising proprietor of the establishment discovered the botanical knowledge of his German *protégé*. He wanted just such a man. He had “plant-hunters” in other parts of the world; in North and South America, in Africa, in Australia. He wanted a collector for India; he wanted to enrich his stock from the flora of the Himalayas, just then coming into popular celebrity, on account of the magnificent forms of vegetation

discovered there, by the great “plant-hunters” Boyle and Hooker.

The splendid pine-trees, arums, and screw-pines; the varied species of bambusa, the grand magnolias and rhododendrons, which grow so profusely in the Himalaya valleys, had been described, and many of them introduced into European gardens. These plants were therefore the rage; and, consequently, the *desiderata* of the nurseryman.

What rendered them still more interesting and valuable was, that many of those beautiful exotics would bear the open air of high latitudes, on account of the elevated region of their native habitat possessing a similarity of temperature and climate to that of northern Europe.

More than one “botanical collector” was at this time despatched to explore the chain of the Indian Alps, whose vast extent offered scope enough for all.

Among the number of these plant-hunters, then, was our hero, Karl Linden.

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Caspar, Ossaroo, and Fritz.

An English ship carried the plant-hunter to Calcutta, and his own good legs carried him to the foot of the Himalaya Mountains. He might have travelled there in many other ways—for perhaps in no country in the world are there so many modes of travelling as in India. Elephants, camels, horses, asses, mules, ponies, buffaloes, oxen, zebus, yaks,

and men are all made use of to transport the traveller from place to place. Even dogs, goats, and sheep, are trained as beasts of burden!

Had Karl Linden been a Government emissary, or the *employé* of some regal patron, he would very likely have travelled in grand style—either upon an elephant in a sumptuous howdah, or in a palanquin with relays of bearers, and a host of coolies to answer to his call.

As it was, he had no money to throw away in such a foolish manner. It was not *public* money he was spending, but that of private enterprise, and his means were necessarily limited. He was not the less likely to accomplish the object for which he had been sent out. Many a vast and pompous expedition has gone forth regardless either of expense or waste—ay, many a one that has returned without having accomplished the object intended. “Too many cooks spoil the dinner,” is a familiar old adage, very applicable to exploring expeditions; and it is a question, whether unaided individual enterprise has not effected more in the way of scientific and geographical discovery, than has been done by the more noisy demonstrations of governments. At all events, it is certain enough, that the exploring expeditions to which we are most indebted for our geognostic knowledge are those that have been fitted out with the greatest economy. As an example, I may point to the tracing of the northern coasts of America—which, after costing enormous sums of money, and the lives of many brave men, has been done, after all, by the Hudson’s Bay Company with a simple boat’s crew, and at an expense, that

would not have franked one of our grand Arctic exploring expeditions for a week!

I might point to the economic mode by which the Americans are laying open their whole continent—a *single* officer having lately been sent to descend the Amazon alone, and explore its extensive valley from the Andes to the Atlantic. This was performed, and a copious report delivered to the American government and to the world at an expense of a few hundred dollars; whereas an English exploration of similar importance would have cost some thousands of pounds, with perhaps a much scantier return, for the outlay.

As with the American explorer, so was it with our plant-hunter. There was no expensive equipment or crowd of idle attendants. He reached the Himalayas on foot, and on foot he had resolved to climb their vast slopes and traverse their rugged valleys.

But Karl Linden was not alone. Far from it. He was in company with him he held dearest of all others in the world—his only brother. Yes, the stout youth by his side is his brother Caspar, who had joined him in his exile, and now shares the labours and perils of his expedition. There is no great difference between them in point of size, though Caspar is two years the younger. But Caspar’s strength has not been wasted by too much study. He has never been penned up within the walls of a college or a city; and, fresh from his native hills, his stout build and bright ruddy cheek present a contrast to the thinner form and paler visage of the student.

Their costumes are in keeping with their looks. That of Karl exhibits the sombre hue of the man of learning, while on his head he wears the proscribed “Hecker hat.” Caspar’s dress is of a more lively style, and consists of a frock of Tyrolese green, a cap of the same colour, with long projecting peak, over-alls of blue velveteen, and Blucher boots.

Both carry guns, with the usual accoutrements of sportsmen. Caspar’s gun is a double-barrelled fowling-piece; —while that of Karl is a rifle of the species known as a “Swiss yäger.”

A true hunter is Caspar, and although still but a boy, he has often followed the chamois in its dizzy path among his native mountains. Of letters he knows little, for Caspar has not been much to school; but in matters of hunter-craft he is well skilled. A brave and cheerful youth is Caspar—foot-free and untiring—and Karl could not have found in all India a better assistant.

But there is still another individual in the train of the plant-hunter—the guide, *Ossaroo*. It would take pages to describe Ossaroo; and he is worthy of a full description: but we shall leave him to be known by his deeds. Suffice it to say, that Ossaroo is a Hindoo of handsome proportions, with his swarth complexion, large beautiful eyes, and luxuriant black hair, which characterise his race. He is by caste a “shikarree,” or hunter, and is not only so by hereditary descent, but he is one of the noted “mighty hunters” in the province to which he belongs. Far and wide is his name known—for Ossaroo possesses, what is somewhat rare among his indolent countrymen, an energy of mind,

combined with strength and activity of body, that would have given him distinction anywhere; but among a people where such qualities are extremely rare, Ossaroo is of course a hunter-hero—the Nimrod of his district.

Ossaroo’s costume and equipments differ entirely from those of his fellow-travellers. A white cotton tunic, and wide trousers, sandals, a scarlet sash around the waist, a check shawl upon the head, a light spear in the hand, a bamboo bow, a quiver of arrows on his back, a long knife stuck behind the sash, a shoulder-belt sustaining a pouch, with various trinket-like implements suspended over his breast. Such is the *coup d’oeil* presented by the shikarree.

Ossaroo had never in his life climbed the mighty Himalayas. He was a native of the hot plains—a hunter of the jungles—but for all that the botanist had engaged him for a *guide*. It was not so much a guide to enable them to find their route, as one who could assist them in their daily duties, who knew the way of life peculiar to this part of the world, who knew how to *keep house in, the open air*, Ossaroo was the very man of all others.

Moreover the expedition was just to his mind. He had long gazed upon the gigantic Himalaya from the distant plains—he had looked upon its domes and peaks glittering white in the robes of eternal snow, and had often desired to make a hunting excursion thither. But no good opportunity had presented itself, although through all his life he had lived within sight of those stupendous peaks. He, therefore, joyfully accepted the offer of the young botanist, and became “hunter and guide” to the expedition.

There was still another of the hunter-race in that company—one as much addicted to the chase as either Ossaroo or Caspar. This was a quadruped as tall as a mastiff dog, but whose black-and-tan colour and long pendulous ears bespoke him of a different race—the race of the hound. He was, in truth, a splendid hound, whose heavy jaws had ere now dragged to the ground many a red stag, and many a wild Bavarian boar. A dog to be valued was Fritz, and highly did his master esteem him. Caspar was that master. Caspar would not have exchanged Fritz for the choicest elephant in all India.

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Is it Blood?

Behold the plant-hunter and his little party *en route*!

It was the same day on which they had engaged the guide Ossaroo, and this was their first journey together. Each carried his knapsack and blanket strapped to his back—and as each was to be his own travelling attendant, there was not much extra baggage. Ossaroo was some paces in the advance, and Karl and Caspar habitually walked side by side, where the nature of the path would permit. Fritz usually trotted along in the rear, though he sometimes busked up to the side of the guide, as if by instinct he recognised the born hunter. Although the acquaintance was but a short one, already had Fritz become a favourite with the “shikarree.”

As they trudged along, the attention of Caspar was drawn to some red spots that appeared at intervals upon the path. It was a smooth road, and a very small object could be discerned upon it. The spots had all the appearance of blood-spots, as if quite freshly dropped!

“Blood it is,” remarked Karl, who was also observing the spots.

“I wonder whether it’s been a man or a beast,” said Caspar, after an interval.

“Well, brother,” rejoined Karl, “I think it must have been a beast, and a pretty large one too; I have been noticing it for more than a mile, and the quantity of blood I’ve observed would have emptied the veins of a giant. I fancy it must have been an elephant that has been bleeding.”

“But there’s no trace of an elephant,” replied Caspar; “at least no tracks that are fresh; and this blood appears to be quite newly spilled.”

“You are right, Caspar,” rejoined his brother.

“It cannot have been an elephant, nor a camel neither. What may it have been, I wonder?”

At this interrogatory both the boys directed their glances along the road, in the direction in which they were going, hoping to discover some explanation of the matter. There was no object before them as far as they could see except Ossaroo. The Hindoo alone was upon the road. The blood could not be from him—surely not? Such a loss of blood would have killed the shikarree long ago. So thought Karl and Caspar.

They had fixed their eyes, however, upon Ossaroo, and just at that moment they saw him lean his head to one side,

as though he had spat upon the ground. They marked the spot, and what was their astonishment on coming up and discovering upon the road another red spot exactly like those they had been noticing. Beyond a doubt Ossaroo was spitting blood!

To make sure, they watched him a little longer, and about a hundred yards farther on they saw him repeat his red expectoration!

They became considerably alarmed for the life of their guide.

“Poor Ossaroo!” exclaimed they, “he cannot live much longer after the loss of so much blood!”

And as this remark was made, both ran forward calling upon him to stop.

The guide wheeled round, and halted, wondering what was the matter. He quickly unslung his bow and placed an arrow to the string, fancying that they were attacked by some enemy. The hound, too, catching the alarm, came scampering up, and was soon upon the ground.

“What’s the matter, Ossaroo?” demanded Karl and Caspar in a breath.

“Matter, Sahibs! me knowee noting—matter.”

“But what ails you? are you ill?”

“No, Sahibs! me not ill—why my lords askee?”

“But this blood? See?”

They pointed to the red saliva on the road.

At this the shikarree burst out laughing, still further perplexing his interrogators. His laughter was not intended to be disrespectful to the young “Sahibs,” only that he was

unable to restrain himself on perceiving the mistake they had made.

“Pawnee, Sahibs,” said he, drawing from his pouch a small roll like a cartridge of tobacco-leaves, and taking a bite off the end of it, to convince them that it was it—the “pawn”—which had imparted to his saliva such a peculiar colour.

The boys at once comprehended the nature of their mistake. The roll shown them by Ossaroo was the celebrated *betel*; and Ossaroo himself was a “betel-chewer,” in common with many millions of his countrymen, and still more millions of the natives of Assam, Burmah, Siam, China, Cochin China, Malacca, the Philippine, and other islands of the great Indian Archipelago.

Of course the boys were now curious to know what the betel was, and the shikarree proceeded to give them full information about this curious commodity.

The “betel,” or “pawn” as it is called by the Hindoos, is a compound substance, and its component parts are a leaf, a nut, and some quicklime. The leaf is taken from an evergreen shrub, which is cultivated in India for this very purpose. Ossaroo stated that it is usually cultivated under a shed made of bamboos, and wattled all around the sides to exclude the strong rays of the sun. The plant requires heat and a damp atmosphere, but exposure to the sun or dry winds would wither it, and destroy the flavour and pungency of the leaf. It requires great care in the cultivation, and every day a man enters the shed by a little door and carefully cleans the plants. The shed where it grows is usually a favourite lurking-place for poisonous snakes, and

this diurnal visit of the betel-grower to his crop is rather a dangerous business; but the article is so profitable, and the mature crop yields such a fine price, that both the labour and the danger are disregarded. Ossaroo chanced to have some of the leaves in his pouch still in an entire state. He only knew them as “pawn-leaves,” but the botanist at once recognised a rare hothouse plant, belonging to the pepper tribe, *Piperacea*. It is in fact a species of *Piper*, the *Piper-betel*, very closely allied to the climbing shrub which produces the common black-pepper of commerce, and having deep green oval and sharply-pointed leaves of very similar appearance to the leaves of the latter. Another species called *Piper siriboa* is also cultivated for the same purpose. So much for one of the component parts of this singular Oriental “quid.”

“Now,” continued Ossaroo, facing to one side of the path and pointing upwards, “if Sahibs lookee up, dey see de pawn-nut.”

The boys looked as directed, and beheld with interest a grove of noble palms, each of them rising to the height of fifty feet, with a smooth cylindrical shank, and a beautiful tuft of pinnated leaves at the top. These leaves were full two yards in breadth, by several in length. Even the pinnae, or leaflets, were each over a yard long. Just below where the leaves grew out from the stem, a large bunch of nuts of a reddish orange colour, and each as big as a hen’s egg, hung downward. These were the famous *betel-nuts*, so long recorded in the books of Oriental travellers. Karl recognised the tree as the *Areca catechu*, or betel-nut palm—by many considered the most beautiful palm of India.

Of the same genus *Areca* there are two other known species, one also a native of India, the other an American palm, and even a still more celebrated tree than the betel-nut, for it is no other than the great “cabbage-palm” of the West Indies (*Areca oleracea*). This last tree grows to the height of two hundred feet, with a trunk only seven inches in diameter! This beautiful shaft is often cut down for the sake of the young heart-leaves near the top, that when dressed are eaten as a substitute for cabbage.

Ossaroo showed his young masters how the betel was prepared for chewing. The leaves of the betel pepper are first spread out. Upon these a layer of lime is placed, moistened so as to keep it in its place. The betel-nut is then cut into very thin slices, and laid on top; and the whole is rolled up like a cheroot, and deposited with other similar rolls in a neat case of bamboo—to be taken out whenever required for chewing.

The nut is not eatable alone. Its flavour is too pungent, and too highly astringent on account of the tannin it contains; but along with the pepper-leaf and the lime, it becomes milder and more pleasant. Withal, it is too acrid for a European palate, and produces intoxication in those not used to it. An old betel-eater like Ossaroo does not feel these effects, and would smile at the idea of getting “tipsy” upon pawn.

A singular peculiarity of the betel-nut is that of its staining the saliva of a deep red colour, so as to resemble blood. Ossaroo, who possessed a large share of intelligence, and who had travelled to the great city of Calcutta and other

parts of India, narrated a good anecdote connected with this fact. The substance of his relation was as follows:—

A young doctor, fresh from Europe and from the university, had arrived in one of the Indian cities in a big ship. The morning after his arrival he was walking out on the public road near the suburbs, when he chanced to meet a young native girl who appeared to be spitting blood. The doctor turned and followed the girl, who continued to spit blood at nearly every step she took! He became alarmed, thinking the poor girl could not live another hour, and following her home to her house, announced to her parents who he was, and assured them that, from the symptoms he had observed, their daughter had not many minutes to live! Her parents in their turn grew alarmed, as also did the girl herself—for the skill of a great Sahib doctor was not to be doubted. The priest was sent for, but before he could arrive the young girl *actually died*.

Now it was from *fear* that the poor girl had died, and it was the doctor who had *frightened* her to death! but neither parents, nor priest, nor the doctor himself, knew this at the time. The doctor still believed the girl had died of blood-spitting, and the others remained in ignorance that it was upon this he had founded his prognosis.

The report of such a skilful physician soon spread abroad. Patients flocked to him, and he was in a fair way of rapidly accumulating a fortune. But ere long he had observed other people with symptoms of the same complaint which had caused the death of the poor girl, and had learnt also that these symptoms proceeded from chewing the betel-nut. Had he been discreet he would have kept his secret to himself;

but, unluckily for his good fortune he was a talker, and could not help telling his companions the whole affair. He related it rather as a good joke—for, sad to say, the life of a poor native is held but too lightly by Europeans.

In the end, however, it proved no joke to the doctor. The parents of the girl came to understand the matter, as well as the public at large, and vengeance was vowed against him by the friends of the deceased. His patients deserted him as rapidly as they had come; and to get rid of the scandal, as well as to get out of the danger that surrounded him, he was but too glad to take passage home in the same ship that had brought him out.

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The Fishing-Birds.

Our travellers were following up one of the tributaries of the Burrampooter, which, rising in the Himalayas, and running southward joins the latter near its great bend. The plant-hunter designed to penetrate the Bholan Himalaya, because it had not yet been visited by any botanist, and its flora was reported to be very rich and varied. They were still passing through a settled part of the country, where fields of rice and sugar-cane, with groves of bananas, and various species of palm, were cultivated; some of the latter, as the cocoa-palm and betel, for their nuts, while others, as the large-leaved *Caryota*, for the wine which they produce.

The opium-poppy was also seen in cultivation, and mango-trees, and the great broad-leaved pawpaw, and black-pepper vines, with beautiful green leaves, trained against the stems of the palms. Jack-trees with their gigantic fruit, and figs, and nettle-trees, and the singular screw-pines, and euphorbias, and various species of the orange, were observed along the way.

The botanist saw many trees and plants, which he recognised as belonging to the Chinese flora, and he could not help remarking many other things that reminded him of what he had read about China. In fact, this part of India—for he was very near the borders of Assam—bears a considerable resemblance to China, in its natural productions, and even the customs of the people assimilate somewhat to those of the Celestial land. To make the resemblance more complete, the cultivation of the tea-plant has been introduced into this part of the world, and is now carried on with success.

But as our travellers proceeded, they became witnesses of a scene which brought China more vividly, before their minds than anything they had yet observed.

On rounding a clump of trees they came in view of a moderate-sized lake. On the water, near the edge of this lake, they perceived a man in a small light boat. He was standing up, and held in his hands a long slender pole, with which he was poling the boat out towards the centre of the lake.

Our travellers, Ossaroo excepted, uttered exclamations of surprise, and came at once to a halt.

What had caused them such astonishment? Not the boat, nor the man in it, nor yet the long bamboo pole. No. Such were common objects seen every day on their journey. It was none of these that had brought them to so sudden a stop, and caused them to stand wondering. It was the fact that along both sides of the boat—on the very edge or gunwale—was a row of large birds as big as geese. They were white-throated, white-breasted birds, mottled over the wings and back with dark brown, and having long crooked necks, large yellow bills, and broad tails rounded at the tips.

Although the man was standing up in his boat, and working his long pole over their heads, now on one side, then on the other, the birds appeared so tame that they did not heed his manoeuvres; and yet not one of them seemed to be fastened, but merely perched upon the edge of the skiff! Now and then one would stretch its long neck over the water, turn its head a little to one side, and then draw it in again, and resume its former attitude. Such tame birds had never been seen. No wonder the sight astonished the Bavarian boys. Both turned to Ossaroo for an explanation, who gave it by simply nodding towards the lake, and uttering the words—

“He go fishee.”

“Ah! a fisherman!” rejoined the botanist.

“Yes, Sahib—you watchee, you see.”

This was explanation enough. The boys now remembered having read of the Chinese mode of fishing with cormorants; and even at the distance at which they saw them, they could perceive that the birds on the boat were no other than cormorants. They were the species known as *Phalacrocorax*

Sinensis; and although differing somewhat from the common cormorant, they possessed all the characteristic marks of the tribe,—the long flat body, the projecting breastbone, the beak curving downward at the tip, and the broad rounded tail.

Desirous of witnessing the birds at work, our travellers remained stationary near the shore of the lake. It was evident the fisherman had not yet commenced

operations, and was only proceeding towards his ground.

After a short while he reached the centre of the lake; and then, laying aside his long bamboo, he turned his attention