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MOUNT EVEREST EXPEDITION.

Rongli Bridge
Sikkim.

May 22 1921

My dearest Ruth, I am told we shall pass a post office early on our march to-morrow so I must tell you briefly to-night how we are getting on. Firstly, the weather has been very bad; monsoon clouds blew up from the south on the day of our departure & we have had either very heavy rain-storms or continuous spells of rain since then - it is a disappointing circumstance because clouds have greatly curtailed our views & I have seen much less of Sikkim than I could have wished. And it makes transport more difficult. As you know this a country of steep valleys & we have to cross several on our route. The paths have become either muddy in the flat places or slippery on the hills - those near here are mostly very steep & with their surface of paré are able to endure a good deal of bad weather without being washed away, but the paré is very rough & greasy. Naturally the mules have had a bad time. They were not hard to

start with, & not accustomed to going down steep hills & water has increased the weight of many of their loads. ~~We have~~ Nine have fallen out, ~~sick~~, up to date & one in our party died on the road yesterday. Many have sore backs, a large number are wanting shoes. All these misfortunes have brought us to a halt, a very pleasant halt here in a warm valley bottom if it were not for the insects (they are not very bad however). It is a very beautiful place & I rather regret that I didn't see more of it to-day, but I took the opportunity to nail a pair of climbing boots (they are now nailed completely - greatly to my satisfaction), & that occupied much time.

About Sikehim I must first tell you that the country is on a very big scale. Not only are the hillsides extraordinarily steep but they are very high valley sides & whenever we have had a view it has been of great ridges & deep, dark valleys half-obscured by cloud, twisting in a chaotic manner so that the whole seems an insupportable jumble.

Some of the land, curious enough, perhaps nearly a third of it, is cultivated, more particularly on the higher slopes. These are very attractive - terraced or irrigated with elaborate can

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The maize crop is very common - runs about 5 ft. high - flowering. And wherever there is a hut there ^{are} a few fruit trees - oranges, bananas, mangoes etc & flowers, generally *Datura* or roses - the more elaborate gardens have many others. The huts themselves are very pretty & give a character to the country - little square boxes constructed almost entirely of bamboo & thatched with rice grass pitched at a gentle angle.

It would be an endless task to describe the vegetation & all the rich green growth which seems almost to cover one as one passes through the forests. The best of it I think are the orchids growing everywhere on the trees; a considerable variety of lilies; & the *datura* which one constantly sees out of the forest. I don't know whether you have seen a *datura* - it is commonly a spreading shrub about 10-20 ft high rather sparsely leaved & ~~crossed~~ ^{erect} suspending perhaps 50 to 100 great bell shaped white flowers 8 in to 15 in long; at

night it has a pungent sweet smell which is most delicious; here all the air is fragrant with it. And I mustn't forget the ferns perhaps best of all, of every size from the great tree ferns downwards all fresh green battling on the moisture.

Fine trees are of course common enough but on the hillsides a trifle disappointing; here in the valley they are splendid, particularly an acacia just coming into flower which is to be seen everywhere. Wollaston I find can supply the names of comparatively few trees, but he tells me a good deal about tropical things. One of the best moments on our last march was when we sat on a bridge waiting for our ponies & I saw & watched any number of gorgeous butterflies circling about like gently moving birds, dark objects shimmering with velvet colour.

Monday. I hoped to go on at length but we are starting off in a hurry while it is fine & comparatively cool, so I must write no more this time. I long to have you with me to see all this beautiful country & its beauties constantly call you in mind. I hope

All goes well with you. I wonder if Charles & the Hodges have come back.
I am very
Dear to you.
I must see you.