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1.!

Barakar

18/2/91

My dear Pippa

As you see I am now at Barakar where we have been since the 9th. This is also a great coal place and perfectly filthy - worse than London far. Every day we come in perfectly black with coal dust. The party is H. Wright, Peddie and me, and yesterday Drysdale came for a day or two; Peddie & I sleep in a tent and Wright in the dark bungalow, where we

also eat. If you do not know what a dak bungalow is (pronounced dawk) I will inform you that it is a house kept by Government for travellers to stop at. Beds, tables, chairs, &c are provided and at very grand ones (like this) there is a khansamah who will provide food at advanced prices. There is a pretty big river here in the rains, about 1000 yards across, though now there is hardly any water, and our chief work has been taking sections across it for a bridge which will continue

a branch line ~~from~~ of the E. I.R. across the river which now stops on this side. This is the beginning of the great Barakbar Sherria line that you wrote to me about but I am afraid the Gov. are going to put a stop to it ^{if they can.} However I think they will very likely let the bridge be built as there are large coalfields across the river which we send lots of coal across if there was a bridge and ~~make it pay~~ ^{the fares paid} to the railway would soon pay for the bridge. At present the only way is to cart the coal across the

to Barakar station

road bridge here, and this costs such a lot that the coal fields are not worked. Of course Gov. want the coal fields to be worked so they will let the bridge be ~~to~~ built. Mean while we lie low, and as soon as it is finished we say "What a pity not to have a line to Sherma now the bridge is built" and Gov. will have to agree. This is very dodgy (and interesting?) isn't it? It was chiefly gathered when the inspection came here the other day. (Robertson & Gov. Consulting Engineer)

I will now recede to the 5th when I went to the Rauegunge races.

~~3!!~~

Thanejung is the next station to Atrassol and about 20 minutes run. I went with Dr. Baith & Jennings and went straight to Geake's house where the first person I saw was Lewis Paul who introduced me to Mr. Geake, porpoise like with large black goggles; Mrs. Geake, rather pretty; & the two Miss Geakes, sisters of Geake, good but unhandsome. There was a large gathering of sportsmen, and after a big breakfast - Indian breakfasts generally consist of 17 courses, & this had 18 - we proceeded in ticca gharries, which are the growlers of the country & are all in the last stage of

delapidation, to the race course. The first event was a match between two ponies and was the most exciting of all as one of them refused to go any way but backwards and walked into all the railings, stables & grand stand, & threw its rider 3 times before it could be got onto the course. Then the other pony which had been patiently waiting took it into its head to bolt, & when at last it was brought back to the starting place, the first gee began its manoeuvres again. Eventually it was brought to reason by a stock whip and won the race.

After this things went off swimmingly and we returned to dinner. After dinner there was a dance which was extremely feeble, as there were only about ten people to dance on a stone floor covered by newspapers and a drugget, and a band of 1 fiddle & a cracked piano. I slept in a tent and returned at an early hour in the morning to Arambol. Lewis went back to Calcutta that night - he looks very flourishing & is the most unlikely person to be a brother to Maurice I ever saw & discoursed feelingly on the subject of his

marriage. I had expected to go off to Barakar on Friday (the 6th) but somehow I didn't till Sunday night so on Saturday I went again to Raneeunge with a large crowd of railway wallahs - the 2 Wrights Peddie, who isn't one really however, Baith & Jennings. On arriving at Raneeunge we were pounced on by Mr. Tommy Courneuve and dragged off to breakfast by him. He is a coal manager I think and is a most awful howler as also are all the friends & relations gathered round his festive boards. After a wierd meal we departed for the race course each ^{gent} with an enormous lily about the

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size of this envelope in his button hole 'to show we all belonged to this party'. Having got rid of this mark of the beast at the earliest opportunity I went to Mrs Geake and got asked to dinner. Joy!

The other poor critters were not so lucky and had to go back with Tommy & Co and see them all get perfectly intoxicated at dinner. At the Geakes I sat next to Ince, the collector of Burdwan. He is exactly the form of Mrs Bardner (do you remember?) and rather an old beast. However he is very amusing and reels off long yarns of which make you laugh.

He is now ^{at Barakar} here, and is going to give us a dinner tomorrow.

When we have not anything to do in the evening we ride out and hunt jackals - We have not yet caught one. There is a man here in the D.P.W who has got several dogs and he arranges the hunt. He was at Coopers Hill & knew Dick of Ashwick very well. & his name is White.

I think I have about finished now & with much pride will now proceed to number the sheets! I hope ~~you~~ with this letter will be posted today as I did not

write last week, but it is rather doubtful as the posts here are very erratic.

Love to all kind friends
Yr loving brother

Ralph Strachey.

Please observe that I have got slightly mixed in numbering the sheets owing to the large number.