ART. VI.—*Note on the Valley of Choombi.* By DR. A. CAMPBELL, late Superintendent of Darjeeling.

As this valley has never been visited by an European traveller, the little I have to say about it may make it acceptable to the Society. On one occasion I tried to visit it in company with Dr. Hooker, but unsuccessfully, as, after reaching the top of the Chola Pass—14,900 feet—which leads into it from Sikim, we were met by an officer of the Chinese Government at Lassa, with a military escort, who refused us permission to enter the valley.¹ The particulars I have to state may, I believe, be relied on, as during many years I had constant opportunities of communicating with traders and others residing in the valley, in addition to the officials of the Sikim Raja, who annually sojourned in it from May to November. The route from Darjeeling to Choombi was described by me many years ago,² as also the route from it to Lassa; but no one has described the valley itself.

Choombi lies in the Eastern Himalaya, between Sikim and Bootan, and on the route from Darjeeling to Lassa. It is in the bed of the Machoo River, which, rising from the base of Chumalari, a mountain 23,000 feet high, runs through Choombi, and leaving it at Rinchingong, traverses Bootan to Cooch Behar, in the plains of Bengal, where it is known as the Torisha River. It is bounded on the West and South by the Chola and Yakla ranges, 17,000 feet high, and on the North and East by the Chakoong and Kamphee mountains. To the North by Thibet. Its length from Galling, on the North, to Rinchingong, the exit of the Machoo, is 20 or 24 miles. It is not above a mile broad anywhere. It is in the

¹ See Dr. Hooker's *Himalayan Journals*, vol. ii., for details of this expedition.

² See *Journal Asiatic Society of Calcutta*.

territories of the Government of Lassa, and is said to have been so always. In its physical characters it much more resembles Bootan, which bounds it on the South and East, than it does the contiguous province of Phari to the North, which is characteristically Thibetan, *i.e.* bare, and without trees.

The soil is generally light loam and sand, and not rocky. Cultivation is carried on in the flat part of the valley, and some way up both sides of the bounding mountains there is a good deal of vegetation and many trees. Pines prevail, of rather stunted growth; and there are three kinds of *Rhododendron* on the neighbouring mountains. The *Pinus longifolia* is not found there, nor does rice grow in any part of it. The crops are wheat, barley, pease, mustard, sown in March, reaped in September.

The grazing is excellent, and large herds of yaks and cows abound. The cow is a very small breed, like the gaina of India, but is a good milker.

It is administered by the civil officer at Phari, of which Thibetan district it is a dependency, but the Government operations are confined to collecting the revenue, which is raised by a land tax, head money on cattle, and a house tax. There are no magisterial or police arrangements, the Bootanese commit thefts there with impunity, and also carry off the people occasionally. When this has been carried very far, the Lassa authorities have addressed the Paro Pilo, whose Bootanese jurisdiction extends to the confines of Choombi, and it has been arrested.

The inhabitants are of the same race as the Bootanese, at least they are more like them than they are to the Thibetans. The climate is notably salubrious. The rainfall is much less than in Bootan or Sikim, there is but little damp in the air, and the soil is never muddy anywhere in the rains. It is well peopled. The town of Eusa is built in close streets, the houses are of mud, with shingle roofs.

The valley is divided into sixteen Talooks, called Chocheeroop, viz. Galling, Eusa, Gango, Rinchingong, Bukchaum, Tema, Choombi, Keomsheth, Rebun, Phari, Kanghoo,

Kangten, Toyen, Shari, Gianuk, Keomooshoo. The population is estimated at 3000 souls.¹

The people are fond of trade, their mart to the north is Phari. To the south they trade with Bootan, and a little with Sikim.

The carriage from the south and to Phari is all by porters. At Phari yak carriage is to be had abundantly and cheaply. In trading with Thibet from Bootan and Sikim, the great drawback is the expense of porter carriage as far as Phari. Rice, tobacco, sugar, munjeet, endicloth, timber, rattans, bamboos, are the principal articles exported from the south to Phari. The Chinese authoritatively monopolize all the rice that goes to Phari, whether through Choombi from Sikim, or from Bootan. It is required for the Chinese troops at Lassa, who hate feeding on wheat, barley, and even dried mutton, the staple articles of consumption in that city. Rice is always very dear at Lassa, five seers per rupee is reckoned cheap. A maund of tobacco will sell at Lassa for 30 rupees; it may be had at Darjeeling for 3, and at the foot of the hills sometimes for 1. Sugar is proportionately dear, and all this enhancement of price arises from the want of roads for bullock and pony carriage.

The direct route from Western Bootan to Phari is not through Choombi, but by a more northerly one from Paro *via* Pemla. This is the route which Turner took in 1783, it leaves Choombi to the left. The distance of Paro from Choombi is a long day's journey east, and a little south—say 25 miles. A traveller on foot can go from Choombi to Phari in a day. After the first few miles, you round the end of the Chakoong range; there you leave trees and vegetation, and come on the bare stony plains, which continue to Phari.

The Sikim Raja has no territorial rights in Choombi. He has, however, become the possessor of a little land by purchase. In Thibet proper he has two small Talooks, viz.

¹ Number of houses—Choombi, 20; Pema, 20; Eusa, 12; Gango, 45; Rinchingong, 25; Shari, 20; Gianuk, 20; Bukehaum, 10; Toyen, 8; Galling, 60; Keomsheth, 18; Rebsom, 50; Kanghoo, 30; Kangten, 12; Phari, 300: total, 650. One-half of the houses at Phari are mere temporary booths erected by casual traders.

Dobtah and Sareh, they are west of Kongra Lama,¹ and on the road to Digarchi and Lassa.

The Sikim Raja and the Bootanese of the Paro Pilo's jurisdiction are constantly engaged in disputes and quarrels, which arise about contested limits, and in the practice of kidnapping one another's subjects. The Bootanese before the last war were desperately addicted to this, and carried it on, not only against the Sikimites, but against British subjects along their whole frontier of Rungpoor, Cooch Behar, and Assam. The persons kidnapped were of all ages, of both sexes, and were usually sold into slavery.

Another cause of feud was their respective claim to the supremacy of a Goomba or monastery in Choombi. This was for a long time a large and thriving monastery, and had nearly 100 lamas attached to it. Dissensions arose among them, in the course of which the Abbot died. To complicate matters completely, it was announced that he had reappeared in this life in two places, and in two persons, at the same time: one was at Gantoke, in Sikim, in the person of the Kazi's brother; the other in Bootan, and the person was a relative of the Paro Pilo! Here were nuts to crack for the wily monks. The partisans on both sides made strenuous efforts to induct their respective Awatars; but neither got a footing in the Goompa, and the dispute was referred to the Grand Lama at Lassa. His Holiness decided in favour of the Sikim candidate. This was not to be disputed by the Pilo. But before the successful Lama was seated, the Bootanese plundered the monastery of all its silver utensils, other valuables, and library, and left nothing but the bare walls for the new superior. The Goomba has now gone entirely to decay, and is deserted. The temporal authorities at Lassa did nothing to punish this outrage. They appeared to leave Choombi to take care of itself, and much at the mercy of the Bootanese.

On one occasion a party of Bootanese, under orders from the Paro Pilo, was assembled near Phari, and actually be-

¹ The Pass by which Dr. Hooker and I entered Thibet. See vol. ii. of *Himalayan Journals*.

leaguered the Sikim Raja on his return from Thibet, and for two months prevented his return to Choombi. This was their method of forcing him into their terms regarding some boundary dispute, and it was for the purpose of coercing me as the Political Agent for the affairs of Sikim, that the Raja's Dewan ordered my seizure and imprisonment.

A reference to the Thibet authorities procured his release eventually. The Raja applied to me for assistance in arms and ammunition, but it was refused. The Raja and his Ranees, who are all Thibetans, leave Tumloong¹ annually for Choombi in the month of May, and return to Sikim in November. The great damp and constant rain in Sikim for that period disagrees greatly with all natives of Thibet.

¹ The Sikim Raja's usual residence.