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V. Memoir on Sirmór

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V. *Memoir on SIRMÓR. By the late Captain GEORGE RODNEY BLANE, Engineers, Bengal. Communicated by Sir GILBERT BLANE, Bart.*

Read December 6, 1823.

Boundaries and Divisions of Sirmór.

SIRMÓR is bounded, on the north by *Bisé*r, from which it is divided by the river *Páber* ; on the west by *Hindūr* and the *Barah Tukrdi*, or twelve districts ; on the south by the *Sikh* possessions ; and on the east by *Gerh-wál*, and the river *Jumna*. It is divided into *Pergunahs*, and each *Pergunah* into *Pattis*. The head of a *Patti* is styled a *Siana*, and is responsible to the Government for its revenues. Some villages are possessed by the tenure of military service. *Náhen* is the capital, once a flourishing town.

Sketch of the Inhabitants.

Eternal feuds subsisted between the *Sirmeris* and the *Gerhwális*, under the dominion of their Rajas. Owing to this spirit, and the anarchy which prevailed in the interior, the *Gorkhas*, as allies of the *Srinagar Raja*, made an easy conquest of *Sirmór*. *Manóher Sinh*, their commander, who had been preceded by some smaller detachments, forded the *Tans*, at *Kelár Ghat*, in December 1804, and in the course of the following year carried his victorious arms to the banks of the *Setlej*. Devastation and emigration were the consequences of the subjugation of *Sirmór* by the *Gorkhas*. During a peace of ten years, the inhabitants had, in a great measure, recovered from the effects of the conquest ; and it may be questioned whether their condition, in general, was not better under the severe government of its new masters, than under the misrule, and imperfect police of their native Rajas. These Princes having but an insufficient control over their subjects, each village decided its own disputes, and waged an incessant warfare with its neighbours.

The terror in which the new government was held, and its comparative vigour, entirely checked these proceedings, and the character of *Ranjūr Thappa*, the *Gorkha* governor, for mildness and justice, had in some degree reconciled the people to the revolution. But the cruelty and the extortion of the other *Gorkha* officers (aided by that love of independence, which is

the characteristic of mountaineers) counteracted this feeling, and excited those discontents which were found to prevail, on the invasion of the country by the British. Submission to the equitable rule of this power was deemed preferable to the despotism of masters, whom they feared, without respecting. Yet their manners to European travellers have been found deceitful, and inhospitable; the natural result of their poverty, and of the oppression and rapacity, to which they have been subject; coupled with a desire to impress their new lords with the most unfavourable ideas of the wealth of the country.

The *Sirmóris* are filthy in their persons and habits. Great inattention to cleanliness is exhibited in the interior of their houses; and nothing can be conceived more disgusting, than the skirts of their villages, at the close of the winter, when the snow begins to melt. Their habitations, however, are neatly and substantially built, of stone. Those S.W. of the *Girí*, have flat roofs; but in the interior, they consist of two and three stories, with pent roofs, projecting considerably over the wall, constructed of deal planks, and slated, where this material is procurable. Their villages are small, containing from three to fourteen houses. Situated on the summit of the ranges, or ornamenting their craggy slopes, they give a singular, but highly pleasing, effect to the mountain landscape.

Besides *Náhen*, *Kalsi* and *Keardah* are the only towns of which they can boast; unless *Rajpúr*, a place in *Kongra*, with two or three shops, can be accounted one. *Kalsi*, like *Náhen*, has lost much of its former prosperity; yet it still remains the *entrepôt* of the diminished commerce of the plain, with the countries to the northward.

Notwithstanding the dislike, in which the *Gorkhas* were held by both nations, ten years of restraint have not subdued the mutual animosity of the borderers of *Sirmór* and *Gerhwal*. The one, in speaking of the other, rarely uses the appellation of his nation, but substitutes the more expressive and rancorous term "*bairí*," signifying foe. This sentiment is very strong with the former, as he has suffered from the superior enterprise of his poorer, and more hardy neighbour; who makes war by sudden irruptions, and carries off the flocks of the nearest villages, their best moveable wealth. These incursions are seldom revenged.

The superstition of this people is extreme. Every peak is the residence of some sprite, whose wrath it is deemed dangerous to provoke.

Polyandry, or the custom of one woman having two or more husbands (relations), obtains among them. It frequently happens that two brothers succeed conjointly to an estate. They cohabit with one wife, and the integrity of the property is thus preserved.

Topography.

With the exception of the *Keardah Dún*, this country is entirely mountainous : for the narrow levels, which partially pervade the banks of the *Girí*, the *Tans*, and the *Jumna*, can scarcely be accounted valleys. The mountains lie in ranges, much indented, and often crowned with peaks, greatly higher than their general level. To give a clear and comprehensive idea of these ranges, they may be classed as primary, and secondary : the secondary being, as it were, the counterforts, or buttresses, to the first. Carrying on the analogy, these counterforts may be considered as minor ranges, which are in like manner buttressed by others, projecting from them ; and these again by others, and so on, with invariable uniformity.

One continuous range extends from the mountain, which divides the sources of the *Setlej* and *Tans*, through *Biser*, to mount *Cupar*, at the head of the *Girí*. It there forms two branches : one stretching irregularly between these two rivers, passes through *Cúmhasia*, by the village of *T^hheög* and the peak of *Rájghar*, whence it spreads towards the plain, in many diverging ranges, which, with their counterforts, fill up the space between the *Jumna*, at *Badshah Mahl*, and the *Setlej* at *Rúper*. The other connects with *Chúr*, and continuing by the forts of *Heripúr* and *Chandpúr*, divides the streams, which fall into the *Tans*, from those which feed the *Girí*. The peak, called *Chúr*, has an elevation, above the plain, of 10,588 feet ; and though sixty miles from the nearest summit of the snowy chain, is higher than any intervening point. It is the centre, from which the several ranges radiate, that lie between the *Tans* and the *Girí*.

Between the rivers *Tans* and *Jumna*, a grand central range is to be traced from the snowy mountains, projecting its huge buttresses, on either side, with little uniformity. At the head of the *Umló*, this elevated ridge divides, and forms the basin of the stream, running, by *Kalsi*, into the *Jumna*. The most elevated land of this tract is from *Karám* peak, south to *Debún*, and crosswise from *Lákandí* to *Bogrú*.

Two snowy peaks are conspicuous, one of which, 17,574 feet high, is

said to give rise to the *Tans*, and to furnish tributary streams to the *Jumna*, and the *Bhagirathi*, one of the main branches of the Ganges. The other, about ten miles to the eastward, is 18,775 feet in height.

Climate, Productions, and Commerce.

A line drawn transversely along the range, separating the *Bajehú* and *Mashini Nallá*, to *Chír* peak, and thence S. E. by *Chandpúr*, to the *Tans*, and continued through *Ldkandí*, *Debún*, *Bógrú*, and *Bartání*, to the *Jumna*, divides the mountainous region into two climates, distinguished by their productions, and a sensible difference of temperature. In the division contiguous to the plain, the harvest occurs towards the latter end of April, and beginning of May; whereas, in the more distant highlands, the barley was still unripe on the 26th of May, and the wheat frequently does not ripen at all.

The low land, on the banks of the rivers, is the most fertile and productive; and in parts of *Jounsár*, affords a revenue to the proprietor, amounting to one-half the produce. Other lands do not afford more than one-fifth, and the back districts probably even less. It is evident, that an invading force should not place much reliance on the resources of such a country.

The cultivation, in general, is carried on upon the surfaces of the secondary ranges, and upon their slopes, which are formed into terraces, for the convenience of the plough. The small breed of black cattle, peculiar to the mountains, is well adapted for this species of labour. The crops are scanty and poor, from the quantity of stone which is mingled with the soil. The stubble of the corn, in reaping, is left very long. The grain is separated from the ear by the trampling of oxen, in circular enclosures, paved with slate.

Besides wheat and barley, a small black grain, called *Marwa* (*Eleusine Coracana*), is reared, and constitutes the chief food of the people; and generally, all the frumentaceous and leguminous herbs, common to the plains, are grown. Rice is more attended to, and earlier sown, in the colder climate. It is generally cultivated along the banks of the torrents, for the convenience of irrigation. The water, for this purpose, is conducted with much ingenuity, and often carried across a deep glen, by a rustic aqueduct, consisting of the hollow trunk of a fir tree. Other varieties of rice are produced on the highlands, which do not require this labour.

The surplus produce of the country is conveyed to *Náhen* and *Kalsi*, whence it is exported to the plains. Turmeric, ginger, and capsicum, form articles of export from the lower to the upper highlands, and also to the plains. Excellent honey and walnuts, are conveyed from the hills to the low country. Tobacco of an inferior kind, and poppies, are partially cultivated, and require much care and attention. Cotton is grown, equal to the consumption of the country, which is not great, especially in the farther highlands, where woollen clothing is in use, for the greater part of the year. Salt is the chief import.

The climate of such a country, as may well be conceived, is very various. In the depths of the glens, and on the banks of the rivers, the sultriness is extreme; and a current of hot wind may be experienced, in the month of May, on the borders of the *Tans* river, offering a strong contrast to the delicious coolness of the highlands. The traveller, in the summer months, would do well to avoid the low ground, and direct his course, as much as possible, along the crests of the ranges. The thermometer, on the 26th of May, at noon, at *Pingoö*, in *Kandu*, stood at 62°; on the 27th, near *Sangúk Ghat*, on the *Tans*, at 102°. Snow falls in *Jábal*, and lies two to three feet deep, on the elevated ranges, projecting from *Chúr*, and on the central land, between the *Tans* and *Jumna*, as late as the middle of March. That lofty peak is enveloped in snow, till the month of June. It is said that rain never falls there. The musk deer, the denizen of eternal snow, is sometimes found on the side of this mountain. It is strangled by the snare laid for it, and is seldom caught alive.

The productions of the woods and forests are as various, as the climate. The farther side of the boundary line, above described, and of the contiguous mountains, is covered with several species of the finest fir trees; whereas the oak, and a beautiful tree called the *Boras* (*Rhododendron puniceum*) prevail on the warmer face of this elevated region. The sources of the *Raknúr*, and the neighbourhood of *Kardm* peak, produce a vast variety of valuable forest trees, of immense growth, among which is observed the horse-chesnut. Strawberries, and raspberries, grow on the mountain sides; and barberries, cranberries, cherry trees, the dog-rose, the weeping willow, and other plants and trees, familiar to Europeans, frequently occur on the road side, and in the woods and glens. Apples, pears, peaches, and apricots are seen near the villages. The pears and peaches never arrive at perfection.

Seven distinct species of fir are observed in *Sirmór*. 1. The *Dúp*, or

Sarlí, with the large cone, found in abundance near *Náhen*; 2. the *Chír*, another long-leaved fir, very common; 3. the *Ró*, bearing a small oval cone; 4. the *Kelöi*, whose cone is from six to eight inches long, and of a delightful fragrance; the wood of this tree is the most valued of all the firs 5. the *Morinda*; 6. the *Theönar*; and 7. *Liaur*, complete the enumeration. The five last reach the greatest perfection, on the ranges projecting from *Chúr*, and those between *Kardm* and *Lákandí*. The *Dúp*, and *Chur*, are long-leaved. The turpentine, pitch, and tar, which the fir forests would yield, are alone sufficient to render them worthy of attention. Their value, as timber, is much diminished by the difficulty and labour, which must attend their removal; and on account of their distance from any dock-yard, where they would be most prized. Roads might, however, be opened to the nearest points of the *Tans*, and *Jumna*, from the banks of which it would be easy to float them down, at a moderate expense.

Mines.

Sirmór is not productive in mines, as they are at present wrought. A copper mine near *Kalsi*, was formerly productive; but has, for some time, been abandoned. Abundance of iron ore is found on the slopes of the hills, near the great *Lákandí*. The ore yields one-fourth of its weight of impure iron, which scarcely affords the labourer his bread. It is procured by smelting in a small clay furnace, in the form of the frustum of a cone, from which it runs out, imperfectly liquified, at an orifice beneath. The coarse iron is sold at twenty-four sers for a rupee; and is chiefly used at the neighbouring lead mine of *Lódí*. This is a more profitable concern, and gives employment daily to one hundred men. From twenty-five to thirty maunds of ore are collected in a day, which yield six maunds of metal, valued at ten rupees per maund.

In *Jounsar*, and the country lying between the *Sain* range and *Chúr*, are some slate quarries. This material, clumsily wrought, is used for roofing, in those districts where timber is scarce. It is difficult to say, what stores of mineral wealth may be contained in such a country. They offer an ample field of research to the mineralogist, as the vegetable productions do to the botanist.

Sand-stone prevails in the low ranges, contiguous to the plains, and in the *Jaitak* range; and calcareous incrustations are occasionally observed, in the beds of the torrents, which here have their birth. Sections of pudding-stone

appear alternating with strata of soft and imperfect sand-stone, which the passes into these ranges disclose, inclining at an angle of 15° with the horizon. Primitive lime-stone rock, projecting in awful and fanciful forms its craggy pinnacles, discovers itself to be the basis of the *Sain* range. The schistose rock, which prevails in the regions beyond, and in *Jounsár*, contains iron, as is occasionally indicated, to the mortification of the surveyor, by the deviation of the magnetic needle.

Roads.

The communications through the country are very imperfect, and totally unfit for the marching of bodies of troops, exceeding a few companies. A path of a foot and a half in width, with the mountain rising precipitously on one side, and a deep glen on the other, if not very rugged, is esteemed by the natives a good road. Beasts of burthen are never used beyond *Náhen* or *Kalsí*; and it is with difficulty that a led horse, even of the indigenous breed, accompanies the traveller. The roads, such as they are, suffice for the limited commerce of the country. It would neither be difficult, nor expensive, to render them more commodious, and to open new ones, suited to the extended and more ready intercourse, which is now required. This is evident from those which have been made, in the mountainous districts, that have lately been under military occupation. Generally, a direct distance of ten miles, measured on the map, will give fifteen of road distance.

Passes.

The two principal débouches into *Deira Dún*, are sufficiently known. They have been much improved by the late frequency of ingress and egress, and are passable for every species of carriage. The one leading to *Náhen* might, with a little labour, be made practicable for loaded camels. The other passes, from the plain to *Sirmór*, by the valleys of *Deira* and *Keardah*, are less known and less frequented.

Fords.

From *Onári*, a place of great sanctity, to *Heripúr*, the *Tans* has six fords: the three upper ones practicable until the middle of May; and the other three, only during the winter months. The map exhibits ten fords, on the *Jumna*, above its union with the *Tans*, and four below. The former

are passable, until the commencement of the rainy season, and the latter only till the melting of the snow, in March. The access to the fords of both rivers, above their junction, is extremely difficult, and easily to be defended against a very superior force. The *Girí* is almost always fordable.

Besides these fords, the mountaineers have a contrivance, called a *Jola*, by which they cross the *Tans* and *Jumna*, at all seasons. The narrowest part of the river is chosen, and four or five ropes, called a *T,hován*, are thrown across, and made fast to upright stakes, rendered firm by being let into the rock, and strengthened by loose stones, piled around them. To these ropes is attached a piece of wood, called the *Jola*, (made to fit the small of the back), by the assistance of which the passenger glides across the river, with his back to the water, flowing perhaps thirty or forty feet beneath him. If loaded, his load is suspended on a ring of wood, sliding over the rope, and easily drawn across by means of a small cord, doubling through the supporting stakes. The traveller who does not chuse to trust himself to his own exertions, may avail himself of this resource. The *T,hovans* vary from sixty to one hundred and thirty feet in length.

Rivers.

The *Jumna*, before it is precipitated into the plains, is swelled by two large streams, the *Girí* and the *Tans*. The *Tans*, *Jumna*, and the *Bhdgí-rathí*, one of the main branches of the *Ganges*, are said to rise from the same group of mountains as the *Girí*, but this information should be received with caution.

The appearance of the two first, from *Bástab*, and *Chamriya*, and their gradual approximation, render it probable that their sources cannot be very remote. When the snow begins to melt, the waters of these rivers are discoloured; those of the *Tans* are of a greenish grey (similar to the *Setlej* at *Beldáshúr*), while those of the *Jumna* are of a brownish red. The *Setlej* has a longer course, through the mountains, than either the *Tans*, or *Jumna*. The snowy chain, coming from the east to the peak of *Jamnotrí*, thence trends northerly.

Forts.

Many forts, or more properly castles, are scattered through *Sirmór*. Their strength consists in their position, which is generally on peaks, com-

manding all the neighbouring heights. They are built of stone, connected with wooden binders. The want of water is their chief weakness, and must ultimately cause their surrender to an investing force, unless covered by an army from without, to secure a supply of this necessary article. An army, in this situation, fortifies itself with wooden stockades ; and the fort, which they are intended to cover, becomes no more than a point in the position ; and its fall must necessarily follow a successful attack on the covering force.

G. R. B.

Delhi, 18 February 1816.