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The Director read the following paper :

On GĀRO HILL TRIBES, BENGAL. By Major H. H. GODWIN-AUSTEN, F.R.G.S., F.Z.S., etc., Deputy-Superintendent Topographical Survey of India.

IN a paper read before the Anthropological Institute in May, 1871, I gave some account of the customs of the Khāsis, particularly those connected with the erection of stone monuments similar to those known in Europe as druidical. In the present communication I propose to touch on a few points of interest connected with the tribes on their west, viz., the Gāros, occupying the extreme west point of the range of hills south of the Brahmaputra, and which terminate with the great bend of that river, on long. 90° E. The Gāros are of Bodo origin, and are closely allied to the Kachāri, who are found along the base of the hills from Gwalpāra to the Kopili river, where they have long been the principal tribe, extending across the hills to the southern base in Cachar. The Méch of the Bhūtan Dūars is also a kindred tribe. The languages of the Gāro and Kachāri of the Kopili, are very similar ; neither erect stone monuments, and both burn their dead. The Kachāri are certainly Hinduized, and have received a certain admixture of western blood, and they are taller and better featured than the Gāro.

Occupying the intermediate strip of country on the Um Blay river, between the Khāsi and the Gāros, there is a small tribe, the Migām or Langām, speaking a different dialect but assimilating more with the latter ; they are darker than the former, cultivate cotton, and build houses raised off the ground ; they dress like Gāros, but the women never wear the numerous and heavy earrings of that tribe. Stone monuments are not erected by them, but they resort to the general forms of sacrifice and incantation in case of sickness, etc. ; the sacrifice of fowls and the smearing of the door posts, or green boughs of trees set up near them, with the blood and feathers, having been noticed by me in both Gāro, Langām, and Khāsi villages. They erect carved stakes and bamboo platforms, on which are placed offerings as propitiation for good fortune. I give a drawing of one of these perishable monuments, and am of opinion that in the same way as the former use of wood in the construction of Hindu temples on the continent of India affected the style of architecture afterwards adopted, so these primitive wooden posts and tables led to the construction of the monolith and dolmen—their use and the motive being, as we find in tribes living contiguous in the Khāsi hills, precisely similar.

An uneven number of stakes is set up, and this is the same with the Khāsi monuments ; they are of bamboo, split up at the

head, and opened out to carry a little plaited table on which offerings are placed. The table in front is made of the same wood and tied together with twisted strips of cane. I have noticed leaves with a few grains of rice placed on this, and a pig or goat is sacrificed at the time they are set up. At the base of the stakes in the drawing, imitations in wood of the small short hoes used in weeding their fields are represented, and a broken "ghara" (water vessel) may often be seen. I believe this particular "offertory" had been erected to ensure a good harvest. The Gāros further west have a custom of setting up variously carved and peeled posts to avert sickness or any ill-luck, a custom also practised by tribes in Aracan, and alluded to in a paper read last June at the Anthropological Institute, by Mr. St. Andrew St. John. To give drawings of all the different forms would be very difficult, but I give one as a type of what they are generally like. Some are very large and intricately fashioned. That represented here was to avert headache and light-headedness, not an uncommon complaint with them after one of their drinking bouts.

A very interesting section of the Gāros is a small clan called Ātong, who have again a different dialect containing a great number of words not in use by other and neighbouring sections. On comparison many of these appear derivable from dialects on the Manipūr side, and it is not improbable that these Ātongs have found their way thence, at some distant period, along the base of the North Cachar and Khāsi hills into this locality, in the same way as we find Manipūri emigrants recently settling in Shūshang (Mymensing). As an instance of how far small communities will travel, these particular Manipūris had, in the first instance, after leaving their own valley, crossed the north Cachar hills and squatted near Gowhatty, where not getting on, they followed the base of the northern slopes round the extreme end of the Gāro hills to the village where I saw them near Shūshang. In appearance the Ātong differs from other Gāros, he is rather taller, fairer, and better looking, but from close contiguity with them, dress and habitations are the same. I append a short vocabulary of the language, from which it may be seen it differs materially from all those spoken around.

One great point of difference between the Khāsi and Gāro is the use of the bow by the former, while the latter carry spears only and a very peculiar form of short sword, called "darai;" it is 2 ft. 9 in. long, the handle and blade in one piece. These swords are all made for them by Bengali iron smiths in the plains. I have never seen such a form from either the Peninsular or N.W. of India, and the nearest to it in shape is the Burmese dao; the substitution of a wooden handle for iron being

the only difference. There appears to me to be on this side of India a gradual approach from the spear (which I take to be the most primitive weapon) into the *dāo*. Spears range from the small iron pointed kind of the Gāro, to the very long iron headed, short hafted kind among the Nāgā tribes. Both people use their spears as knives or bill hooks in cutting boughs and creepers that impede the jungle paths. From the Nāgā form, in which the wooden haft is not longer than the iron head, to the Burmese *dāo* is but a very short advance, and into a weapon like the Gāro "*darai*" entirely of iron, only another, which may have had an independent origin; but as the Burmese overran the Assam valley, their form of sword would have been quite familiar to the Gāro people and to the iron smiths they employ. The spears are short, having heavy iron points with well sharpened edges. In action they only throw pointed ones of bamboo, every man carrying two or three. The Gāros fear the bow and arrow of their neighbours, and the two people appear to have seldom molested each other. They do not appear to possess any fire-arms, or if they have any, their use is most restricted. The houses of the interior villages are well built, and are very long, raised about four feet off the ground; in every village is the "*bolbang*" or young men's house, the largest in the place, built upon very large upright posts, the front beams adorned with some little carving. The floor is at least twelve feet, often more above the ground, ascended by notched logs and the roof solidly thatched. In this house all the unmarried males live, as soon as they attain the age of puberty, and in this any travellers are put up; this custom prevails also among the Mikirs and the Nāgā tribes, but not among all Kūkis. The Gāros burn their dead, and after cremation curious railed enclosures, with a grating above, are made of bamboo matting, with grotesque carved posts standing at the corners. I saw no less than three of these in one village street, and I produce a drawing which will give, I hope, a fair idea of what they are like. This is what Mr. John Elliot says, "*Asiatic Researches*," vol. iii. (1792):

"The dead are kept four days, burnt, the ashes put into a hole exactly where the funeral pyre was made, covered with a small thatch building and surrounded with a railing; a lamp is burnt within the building every night for a month or more, the wearing apparel of the deceased is hung on poles fixed at each corner of the railing, which after a certain time, from six weeks to two months, are broken and then allowed to hang downwards till they fall to pieces. They burn their dead within six or eight yards of their changs, and the ceremony is performed at exactly twelve o'clock at night; the pile is lighted by the

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nearest relation ; after this they feast, etc. If it be a person of rank, a bullock is sacrificed and the head of the beast burnt with the corpse, but if it be an upper hill Gāro (a chief) the head of one or more slaves would be cut off and burnt with him. The railed graves of head men are decorated with images of animals.”*

The manners, customs and ceremonies of these people have never been fully described, and I was unable to obtain complete and satisfactory information owing to my colloquial ignorance of the language ; information obtained through interpreters is not always trustworthy, and requires verification by long residence among them. Captain Williamson who has had great opportunities will, no doubt when his duties permit, give us something more definite. They practise human sacrifice, and generally select their victims out of the Bengali villages in the plains. The last season my survey party worked in the Gāro hills, a Goorkha of the establishment was captured and never seen again ; his companion had a narrow escape, being chased for a long distance with the help of dogs. Blood feuds seem very common among the different clans, and they exercise their revenge on women and children alike. They eat animal food of every kind, even reptiles ; dogs they are very fond of, and large numbers of puppies are brought up in the plains, fattened by the outer Gāros and taken into the interior for barter. They are diligent cultivators. I saw more joomed (cleared) land in the interior than in any part of the Khāsi-Gāro range, and cotton is their principal crop. The women adorn themselves with a great number of large brass ear-rings, so heavy that they drag the lobe of the ear down to the shoulder, and it often requires a chain passing over the top of the head to prevent this from breaking ; ears so destroyed are often seen. Armlets of brass are also worn and necklaces of small red coral beads. The Langām women pile these necklaces on until the neck is completely hidden, and nearly as broad as the head above, giving them a most peculiar short necked appearance. The women wear a very short strip of striped blue coloured cotton (of their own manufacture) round the waist, and are quite nude above, throwing a white cloth over the shoulders only in cold weather. The men wear a very narrow waist cloth tied behind and then brought up between the legs ; the portion hanging over in front is sometimes adorned with brass boss-like ornaments, and white long shaped beads, made out of the columella of certain conch shells, manufactured by Gāros at the base of the hills. A curious

* They believe that after death the soul of a Gāro goes to the peak of Chickmung or Kylas of the Bengalis, which is the most conspicuous point in the hills. This peak they consider very sacred and they never ascend it.

tinsel coronet is worn by men in the independent villages who have taken a life in action. The Gāros are short and robust with well-formed strong limbs, but their faces have a disagreeable coarse expression; a good-looking individual is seldom seen. The women shorter and more square in figure, certainly ugly, and as a race they are inferior to all the hill tribes I have seen on the Eastern frontier. Among the Khāsis, Kūkis, and especially the Mikirs, very good-looking young men and women are to be seen.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. LEWIS said no one could fail to see the resemblance between the stone erections of the Khasias as depicted by Dr. Hooker, and the bamboo erections of the Gāro tribes as depicted by Major Godwin-Austen; but at the same time he hesitated to accept the suggestion of the latter gentleman that the bamboo structures were the originals from which the stone monuments had been copied. He thought it more probable that the stone monuments were the originals, and that the Gāro tribes had adopted bamboo from want either of suitable stone, or of ability or inclination to make use of it. It was worthy of remark, also, that whereas the Khasian erections were, according to Dr. Hooker, generally memorials of the deceased, the Gāro structures were, according to Major Godwin-Austen, used for sacrificial purposes, as, according to Colonel Forbes Leslie, were lines of upright stones in Southern India.

Dr. A. CAMPBELL said that he considered Major Austen's paper a very interesting one, especially as it followed Mr. St. John's paper on the Hill Tribes of Aracan, recently read before the Institute, thus bringing to our notice some of the people who inhabited a portion of our Indian frontier not very well known to us before. In this region, we find from these papers, and from the accounts of the late campaign against the Looshais, that there is a great admixture of different bloods. We have the northern Aracan tribes assimilated to some extent with the Burmese on the one hand, and on the other with the Looshais and Gāros. In this corner of our frontier—south of the Burrampootur—it may be said that the Indo-Chinese and the Indo-Himalayan races meet and mingle to form the existing tribes—viz., the Munnipoorees, Kookees, and Looshais; the Garrows, the Northern Arracanes, Khasias, Nagas, and others. From Major Austen's description of the Garrows, it would appear that they are less savage now than they were when we first came in contact with them—about the end of the last century; at least he does not allude to any peculiarly savage customs, as he no doubt would have done had such been prevalent. In 1815, the joint-magistrate of Bungpoo, in reporting on the Garrows, said:—"When a quarrel arises between two Garrows, the weaker party flies to a hill to elude the vengeance of his more powerful antagonist. Both parties immediately plant a tree bearing a sour fruit called M. Nalakar, and make a solemn vow that they will avail themselves of the earliest opportunity that offers to eat its

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fruit with the juice of their antagonist's head. A generation may pass away without either party finding an opportunity of revenge, in which case the feud becomes hereditary, and descends to the children. The party who eventually succeeds in revenging himself upon his antagonist cuts off his head, summons his friends, with whom he boils the head, along with the fruit of the tree, and portions out the mixed juice to them, and drinks of it himself. The tree is then cut down and the feud is at an end. This account exhibits such a shocking instance of human depravity, that I should not have deemed it for a moment worthy of credit, had not subsequent inquiry from other and various sources satisfied me that the practice really existed." Dr. Campbell further said that he thought the time had now come, when any of the innumerable tribes of our Indian possessions were described, that it should be ascertained, as far as possible, to what extent their habits and customs had become less savage from contact less or more close with Europeans. Dr. Campbell believed that a gradual improvement was taking place, no doubt attributable in a great degree to our presence in India. Dr. Campbell could not recollect that any one tribe in India had in the course of our rule there become extinct or had retrograded; whereas in America and Australia tribe upon tribe had become extinct, and many of the remaining ones were degraded below the level of the brutes since they came in contact with Europeans; and this, Dr. Campbell thought, was very gratifying on the one hand, and very distressing on the other.

The meeting then separated.

JANUARY 7TH, 1873.

SIR JOHN LUBBOCK, Bart., M.P., F.R.S., *President, in the Chair.*

THE minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

GEORGE JAMES DUNCAN, Esq., B.A., Old Square, Lincoln's Inn; and ROBERT EMMETT LARGE, Esq., South Square, Gray's Inn, were elected members.

IL CANONICO SPANO, of Sardinia, was elected a Corresponding Member.

A. P. REID, Esq., M.D., was elected Local Secretary for Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The following presents were announced, and the thanks of the meeting voted to the respective donors.

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