

40 - 1

CHUMOLARI MOUNTAIN.

Name

Chumolari Mountain. Bride of Kinchinjunga the L implies and anything more beautiful or more stately y could hardly be conceived. One catches the first glimpse of her snow covered white rock top when passing through a gorge leading from the Chumbi Valley. From Hooker's exquisite description one recognises it at once and is struck dumb with Admiration . Bare hillsides and dark forbidding rock surround one when laboriously rising to the Phari Valley. The wind sweeps down the ravines, rendering vegetation abortive and trees impossible. Nothing but desolation appears in front, until one suddenly turns a corner to find the wedge of blue sky in the scene ahead filled by a wondrous slimming cone pointing heaven-ward like a great diamond set between the shoulders of the Hills. Chumolari is moderate in height compared with the boundry between Bhutan and Tibet.

Death Ceremonies of the Hill Rajas.

" When a Raja is near to the point of death a low class Brahman is summoned from some place outside the State. A dish of sweetened rice and milk is prepared, and when the breath leaves the body a portion of this is placed in the right hand of the corpse. The Brahman then approaches and eats of the rice out of the lifeless hand. For ~~he~~ each spoon-ful he swallows he receives a reward of fifteen rupees, but the fees earned on such occasions do not run into an extravagant amount . He is then dressed in the clothes and ornaments of the late ruler, is given a sword, a palanquin and a horse, and is furnished with cooking vessels from the royal kitchen and with anything else within reason which he may desire. He is lodged either in the palace or in a building adjacent to it and is given as attendants the personal servants of the late Raja. In some

places he is addressed as Raja. He is not allowed to leave the residence allotted to him, except on special occasions, when he repairs to the temple where the services for the dead chief are held. For a whole year he lives in the State as an honoured guest, the monthly gifts of food (Rasutt) offered for the comfort of the Raja's soul are consumed by him. His last feast is on the first anniversary of death when he detains the Barshela, or offering of cakes and other food, made in the name of the deceased ruler . This he enjoys early in the morning . The same after noon he is escorted with every mark of honour outside the confines of the State. He is himself mounted on a horse, but the chief officials who follow him go on foot. The latter throw alms of copper coins on him as he rides, and having accompanied him a mile or so respectfully ask permission to return. This is formality given, but the Brahman is not allowed to proceed alone. An escort of soldiers, or police go with him to the frontier, which he must cross before night fall. It is part of their duty to see that he does not alight from his horse, and if necessary they must prevent him from doing so by force. They have also to see that he neither gives away ~~xxx~~ nor sells, within the State territory, any of the various gifts he has accumulated during his year of office. Once across the ~~bdx~~ border he can never return.

" The explanation of this custom is contained in the title of the Brahmin. He is known as the ' Pre- palu - pret' meaning the immature soul and 'Palu', the sustainer or feeder. The priest is the envelope of the Raja's soul which passes into his body through the spoonfuls of sweetened rice. The Raja , though dead, still lives in the human sustainer of his soul and it is to the king and not the priest that homage is ~~fi~~ pind. The Brahman's wants and desire's are those of the departed ruler and hence must be gratified at once, for fear as much as

piety accounted for the original institution, though now-a-days the veneration of the dead is the dominating motive. Nevertheless the prohibition on the Brahman alighting from his horse is still ascribed to the belief that should ~~he~~ he do so the late Raja would continue to rule in spirit over that part of the territory within view similarly the fear of a conflict of authority explains the removal outside the State of all clothes and ornaments worn by the Pret-palu and of all gifts acquired by him.

The above interpretation of the banishment of the Raja's deputy disposes of a theory advanced in Golden bough . A very brief account of the custom is there given, and it is suggested that the Brahmin may have been originally a sacrificial victim, slain vicariously for the Raja, and that as was ~~often~~ often the case in similar substitutions, the extreme penalty was commuted into a sentence of exile. But although traces of kingly sacrifice are found in the Himalaya, the institution of the pret-palu is not one of them. There is no evidence whatever to show that he was ever slain and his death, in fact would have defeated the very object of his appointment.

The procedure however, was not every where uniform . It is probable that the custom was prevalent in all the Hill States. In Chamba the rice and milk ceremony is performed at the burning ghat and the Brahmin is the same day mounted on a horse and escorted across the bridge over the Ravi which is ~~very~~ regarded as equal to expulsion from the State to which ~~the~~ he may never return.

Chumolari Mountain.

Chumolari Mountain . Bride of Kinchinjunga,