

CHAPTER II

FROM THE CHURCH TOWER

A BIRD'S eye view of our general surroundings will prepare us for more detailed inquiries, and the top of the church tower furnishes the best point of vantage. Look where we will, one sight presents itself—a confused labyrinth of mighty mountains and deep valleys. And yet the seeming jumble resolves itself into order as we trace the spurs one by one and find that they are all connected, however tortuously, with the central Himalayan range. As we look north we see the range, some fifty miles off, which forms the great white barrier between India and Tibet, that country whose gates are so jealously guarded by its Lamas. There, to the north-west, stands out Kinchinjunga, the world's second highest height, 28,156 feet, forming the boundary pillar, as it were, of three countries, Tibet, Nepal, and Independent Sikkim. On the western side

we look up the valley of the Rungeet, a tributary of the Teesta, which it joins near the Suspension Bridge. The valley is a magnificent one, and commands our admiration whether filled with a great billowy sea of fleecy clouds or made expressive by the light reflected from the river, as a face is



DONKIA PASS ON SIKKIM-TIBET FRONTIER, 18,300 FEET HIGH.
THE SNOWY PEAK IS 21,000 FEET.

by the light of the eye. At its head is the ridge which forms the eastern boundary of Nepal, and on a clear day we can descry upon it the Rest-house at Phállut whither globe-trotters go to view the giant Everest. This valley, too, separates British Sikkim from Independent Sikkim. The latter lies to the north; and just over that huge precipice beyond the Teesta is Chidam, the centre of

the Scottish Universities' Mission work, and the head-quarters of Mr. Macara, their missionary.¹ British Sikkim, to the south of the Rungeet, was ceded to the British in 1835 for a sanatorium, and as our eye follows up one of the tea-covered spurs it lights



VIEW TOWARDS DARJEELING.

upon the houses of Darjeeling, the capital of the district. Turning now to the south we first trace the forest-clad Senchal ridge which marks our horizon in that direction, and from which, coming towards us, are five spurs, two under tea cultivation and two forming the Government cinchona plantation of 18,000 acres or thereby, producing the bark from which is manufactured Quinine, that priceless boon to a malarial country. On each of these spurs is a House of Prayer and a School which acknowledge Kalimpong

¹ The Missionary also of St. Cuthbert's, Edinburgh.

as the central sanctuary, and some such may also be made out on those other intervening ridges which we see as we continue the line of our southern horizon eastward across the Teesta. Beyond them lie the plains of India, between which and the base of the Himalayas is the rich plateau (within the Mission's sphere) called the Dooars—now



REV. JOHN MACARA AND HIS EVANGELISTS.

filled with prosperous tea-gardens. To the east, looking across the River Rilli, another tributary of the Teesta, is ridge after ridge covered with great forests. Beyond them, not many miles as the crow flies, but three days' journey on foot, is the River Jaldacca, a part of which forms the boundary with Bhutan, and on which a Mission outpost is placed.

The magnificence of the farther view is

but enhanced by the quiet beauty of the peaceful and prosperous foreground. At our feet nestles the village itself, situated on the saddle of a ridge which seems to run into the centre of that vast amphitheatre whose circle we have sketched. On the sides of our ridge, sloping down to the Teesta and



ON THE BHUTAN FRONTIER.

Rilli, we see dotted thickly the little homesteads in the midst of the well-cultivated fields. It is hard to realise that all this land, with its Christian churches, and its schools within reach of almost every child, was a scene of distraction and terror and the home of a comparatively small number of oppressed peasantry till the British took it from the Bhutanese after the war of 1865.