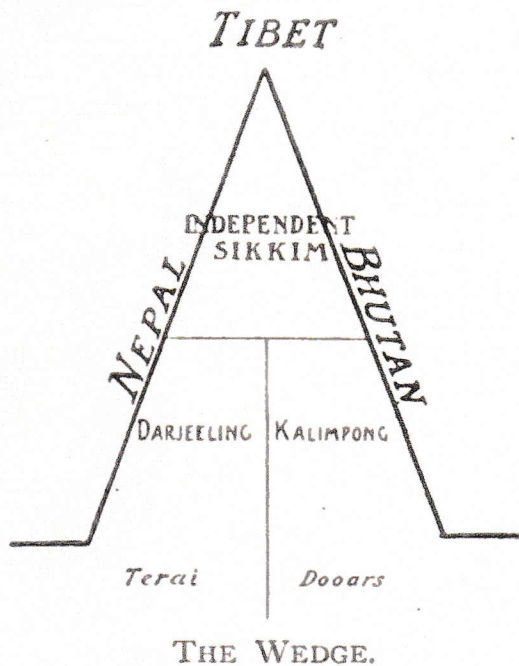


CHAPTER I

THE WAY THITHER

EN ROUTE to the threshold of closed lands! Few such are to be found nowadays. Of late years many writers have thrilled us with this aspect of the "Romance of Missions," telling how the doors of countries, barred a hundred years ago to the entrance of the Gospel, have, one by one, been flung wide open, and how from out them the old cry, "Come over and help us," is now heard uttered with a peculiar urgency. Never during any period of her past history has the Church of Christ had such a grand opportunity nor, therefore, such a heavy responsibility. To almost every nation the good news may be freely offered. But not quite to all. On the north-eastern frontier of our Indian Empire lie three lands within which the European missionary may not preach, and it is to the confines of these—Tibet, Bhutan,

and Nepal—we are to go. Signs are not awaiting that God's good time for them, too, is near at hand, and that ere long the barriers will be broken down, and the King's messengers enter in. Even now they are



being encompassed by the missionary host. Tibet is being attacked from the Indian and the Chinese sides. Nepal is being assailed at different points. The same is true of Bhutan. And as an assailant of all three the Church of Scotland, through her Eastern Himalayan Mission, a part of

which we are to visit, occupies a unique position of vantage and of privilege. The northern part of her district, indeed, may be roughly compared to a wedge driven right into the heart of these three great closed lands.

Kalimpong is our destination, and to reach it we have taken ship to Calcutta. A day or two is spent in that "City of Palaces" under the hospitable roof of the Church of Scotland's General Assembly's

Institution, the parent of those Christian colleges which have fulfilled and are still fulfilling an important part in the education and evangelisation of India. It is but sixty-six years since this college for Bengali youths was founded by the great Dr. Alexander Duff, the first missionary sent forth by a Reformed Scottish Church.

Leaving Calcutta we go by rail 300 miles due north to Siliguri at the base of the Himalayas. Rather an uninteresting night journey it is over the flat fields of Lower Bengal, varied by the ferry across the sacred Ganges. But what a contrast, when in the morning we come within sight of the world's giants, and how grateful in the tropical heat to see, in the distance even, the snow-clad summits of Kinchinjunga and his not unworthy companions!

Arrived at Siliguri, we have the choice of two routes. If we be good riders we choose the Teesta Valley road, and Kalimpong is but thirty-six miles distant. For the first twelve we canter across the Terai or belt of land below the mountains, past the homesteads of Bengali crofters—the curved thatch roofs peeping out from among the clumps of graceful bamboos and bananas—and through the great shady sal-tree forest which provides cover for the tiger and the wild elephant, and furnishes that invaluable timber which even

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the white ant finds hard to digest. We then enter the valley of the Teesta, and for the next eighteen miles the road runs along the right bank of that snow-fed river. Words can convey little idea of the surpassing beauty



TRAVELLING BY BULLOCK CART.

and grandeur of this Teesta Valley with its steep, high banks wooded to the water's edge. "A hundred Killiecrankies" was the descrip-



"DUG-OUT" FERRY BOAT.

tion of a canny Scot, and he did not exaggerate. A halt at Kalijhora (the black stream) Dâk Bungalow or Rest-house, charmingly situated above

the river, refreshes us and allows of a change of ponies; and were it not that we have ridden thirty miles by the time we cross the Teesta Suspension Bridge we



TEESTA SUSPENSION BRIDGE.