

## CHAPTER III

### THE VILLAGE

THE corrugated iron on the roofs of the wooden shops suggests the occident rather than the orient. Nor are the tidy, well-made,



THE MAIN STREET.

regular roads typical of an Indian Bazaar. This Bazaar, however, is but of yesterday, and has been planned by successive Deputy-Commissioners who have jealously guarded

its amenities. As the head-quarters of a Government estate, Kalimpong has been specially favoured, and the water-supply just laid on is the latest evidence of this. But when we peep into the shops we find plenty to remind us that we are in Indian territory.

That black-bearded man—squatting on the mat, which serves also as his bed, and adding up the beloved account book with his back against the iron safe—is the regular Marwari merchant from the Bombay Presidency, the Jew of Northern India. The bulk of the trade of Kalimpong is in the hands of those men. They buy wool from the Tibetans and cardamoms and other produce from the cultivators, and in return sell Manchester and Birmingham goods and many “made in Germany.” Their hope, however, is not in merchandise so much as money-lending, and the cultivator who once gets into their clutches does not easily get free. Seventy-five per cent compound interest is no uncommon rate! To



MARWARI MERCHANTS.

give an example, a crofter who in a time of dearth got ten and a half rupee's worth of rice had, within five years, paid off seventy-six rupees and was still owing one hundred and forty! The Mission has done what it could to help the Government to checkmate such exorbitant demands, and the present Deputy-Commissioner has earned the gratitude of many a poor crofter by curbing those extortioners—not, however, that they are all equally bad, nor that the debtors are all simple dupes, only it is hard that the respectable have to pay so severely for defaulters.

The Marwaris are mostly strict Hindus, who attend carefully to the toilet of their little idols each morning and do the appointed obeisance before them. They have too their common temple below the bazaar, and we hear the priest ringing up the idol-god with his tinsel trappings in the morning, or putting him to peaceful slumber in the evening. A poor specimen of a temple it is. Hinduism is marvellously comprehen-



THE HINDU TEMPLE.

sive! Beside the temple we see a tree under which incense is burned to propitiate the spirit of a once famous Bhutanese free-booter, still dreaded by these money-grubbing plainsmen. And we may see, gathering



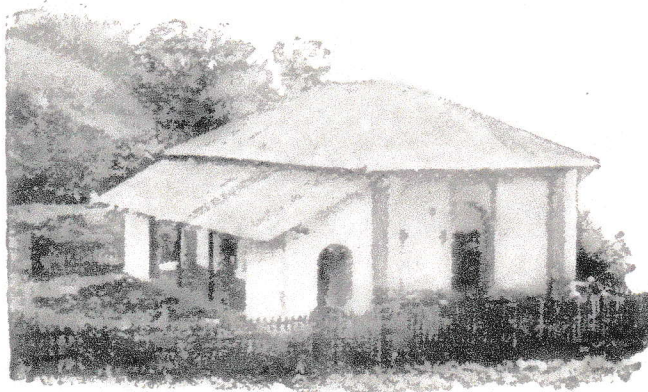
HINDU SADHUS.

alms from shop to shop, a band of Hindu *Sadhus*—wandering religious mendicants whose appearance, repulsive to us, must add weight to their supposed sanctity in drawing forth donations.

A few of the Marwaris are *Jains* by religion—a kind of Hindu-Buddhist sect, a visible remnant of that Indian Buddhism once prevalent but now unknown in the land of its birth. Their chief dogma, as it presents itself to an ordinary observer, is the protest against the taking of life in any form

—a dogma strengthened greatly by the belief in the transmigration of souls. The excessive stress on this point is apt to lead to absurdity, and even to hypocrisy. Some may even wear a cloth upon the mouth to keep stray insects from entering the jaws of death. A terrible revelation to such is a drop of water out of an ordinary Indian tank as seen under the microscope!

Sacred above all to the Hindu is the life of the cow, which is to him as a god; and one of his chief grudges against the Mohammedans, whose mosque is hard by the temple, is their cow-killing propensity, and especially at the time of a great Mohammedan feast with which cow-killing is associated. Two years ago, the Mohammedans at Kalimpong, against the Government orders and all rules of decency, insisted on holding this festival with full accessories, including the killing of a cow by the side of the mosque. The results would have been disastrous could the Hindus and Jains fight as well as they can talk. Their temple, they said, and also their common



THE MOHAMMEDAN MOSQUE.