

THE KACHÁRIS OF ASSAM.¹

THIS, the last volume included in the excellent series of monographs for which we are indebted to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, differs from its predecessors in that it contains less pure ethnography and more of the charming personality of the author, of whom his old friend, Mr. J. D. Anderson, contributes an appreciative memoir. Mr. Sidney Endle worked as a missionary under the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and as chaplain to the tea-gardens of Upper Assam, from 1864 to 1907, when, exhausted by long and devoted labour among the people he loved so well, he died in a steamer on the Brahmaputra while on his way to Europe.

The Kacháris, to use the name given to them by the Hindus, are usually known to the Bengalis as Mech, from the Sanskrit *Mleccha*, meaning "barbarian," but call themselves Bodo or Baro. Their Hindu name seems to be connected with that of the powerful Koch empire, which once included, roughly speaking, the present British provinces of Eastern Bengal and Assam, the name now surviving in the small native State of Koch Behar.

The people now described form part of the northern group of a once widespread race, divided from the southern group by a line closely following the Brahmaputra valley. In the southern group the strongest tribes are the Garos and the people of Hill Tippera. The separation of the northern from the southern group is complete, as is shown by the absence of common tradition and intermarriage; and their languages, though possessing much in common, differ from each other nearly as much as Italian does from Spanish. How this once united people became divided history does not tell. But Mr. Endle, with much probability, suggests that it resulted from the invasion of the Ahoms, a Shan tribe from whom Assam has acquired its name, who early in the thirteenth century entered the province from the Upper Irawaddy valley.

The Bodo Kacháris, numbering about 272,000 souls, now occupy the Kachári Duárs or passes and the districts of West Darrang and North Kamrup. In stature they are much smaller and shorter than the races of North-west India, and bear some resemblance to the Nepalese. Their physical type—square-set faces, projecting cheek-bones, almond-shaped eyes, and the almost complete absence of beard and moustache—connects them with the Mongoloid peoples. Mentally they are much inferior to their Hindu neighbours, but what they succeed in learning they retain with much tenacity. They are intensely clannish and obstinate. Owing to their comparative isolation they have acquired few of the vices of civilisation, an occasional bout of indulgence in rice-beer being one of their most obvious failings. Their standard of female chastity is much higher than that of the neighbouring tribes.

They are a prosperous people, well skilled in agriculture, growing the valuable Eri silk, out of which they weave an excellent cloth. It is curious that Col. Gurdon, the director of the Ethnographical

Survey, and the author are at issue on the question whether their subdivisions are endogamous or exogamous, a matter easily solved by local inquiry. In their manners and customs they much resemble the Garos, who are described in a monograph included in this series.

In religion they are in the animistic stage, with a pantheon containing groups of household and village deities. The leading members of the former group are Bathau, the tree spirit embodied in the *Euphorbia splendens*, found in nearly every house yard, and his consort Mainao, who is, as her name implies, the guardian goddess of the rice fields.

Two appendices, one describing some of the allied tribes, the other adding three additional folk tales

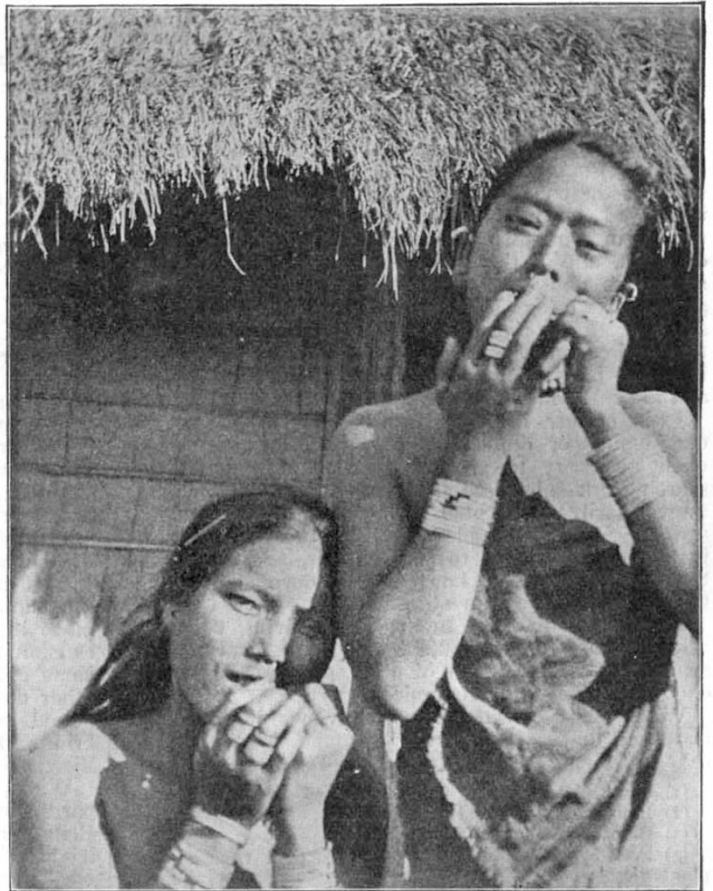


Photo.]

[Mrs. H. A. Colquhoun.

Kachári Girls playing Jew's Harps (Gongina). From "The Kacháris."

collected by Mr. Anderson, increase the value of the book, which, if not the work of a trained anthropologist, gives a sympathetic account of an interesting people.

THE PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND LOCAL INVESTIGATIONS.

THE Board of Agriculture and Fisheries has been in communication with the Development Commissioners with a view to the formulation of a scheme for the promotion of agricultural research and local investigations in England and Wales, and the Treasury, on the recommendation of the commissioners, has now sanctioned the allocation of funds to be

¹ "The Kacháris." By the late Rev. Sidney Endle. With an Introduction by J. D. Anderson. Pp. xix+128. (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd. 911.) Price 8s. 6d. net.