

confess that I felt ashamed that I a young man, should not venture to do what old Mr. Beutel had done so often. The Khansaman and myself, therefore, made a fresh effort, got safely into the sling and across the river and reached Nirmaṇḍ on the same evening, after a long and trying climb.

Pindi Lal marched with the caravan to Rāmpur, but kept himself in readiness to come to Nirmaṇḍ with his apparatus, as soon as he should be wanted. Nirmaṇḍ, the Kāśī of the mountains, as it is called, was perfectly inaccessible in the days of the brothers Gerard (1817) who wished to see it, but were not allowed to enter it. Later on, it was opened to visitors, and Capt. Harcourt (1871) witnessed here the curious ceremony of the swinging rope. A young man is fed at the public expense for a year, during which time he has to plait a rope of considerable length. On the day of the *Mela*, this rope is stretched from the top of a precipice and he has to slide down on it. This custom which is also practised at Lhasa and at Śrīnagar of Garhwāl is, as Dr. Vogel says, probably a survival of human sacrifice, the prevalence of which in former times in these districts is indicated by popular tradition.<sup>1</sup> "But in this peculiar case the victim, instead of being actually killed, had to undergo a risk which endangered his life. An offering was thus made to the deity who might decline or accept the sacrifice according to her divine pleasure. In 1856 the man was killed, and since then the practice has been prohibited."

At Kōṭgur, the tree under which the human sacrifices took place is still shown. Until quite recently several iron links, the last remains of chains, could be seen there. Regarding the abolition of human sacrifices, at Kōṭgur, Mr. Beutel told me the following tale: A young virgin had to be sacrificed every year. Once it was a poor widow's turn to offer up her only daughter. The widow cried and asked the oracle below Hatti if there was not a way out of her difficulty. The oracle answered that on the day of the execution there would be a thunderstorm of unusual force, and the rain would carry off even men, and this would be the end of human sacrifices. When on the day of execution the heavy storm actually broke forth, the frightened Brahmans declared that the divinity was angry and did not wish to accept any more human sacrifices.

The story of the Rākshasa Bamburaha at Kōṭgur, also told by Mr. Beutel, is not very different. This Rākshasa devoured the breasts of women, and from time to time he demanded a woman to eat up altogether. He was blinded by the bird Karaita who thrust pollen of the cedar into his eyes. Then he was killed by armed men. This had also been announced by the Hatti oracle.

Although Nirmaṇḍ is nowadays open to visitors, the inhabitants do their best to make a stay there as unpleasant to the stranger as possible. The town, being a holy place, is inhabited chiefly by Brahmans, who dress in white. Besides them, there are only two other castes represented, the Sōnārs or goldsmiths, and the Kōlis or peasants (aboriginal population). Wherever one goes, one finds Brahmans on both sides who

<sup>1</sup> *J. A. S. B.*, Vol. LXX, Part 1, No. 1, 1902, p. 35.