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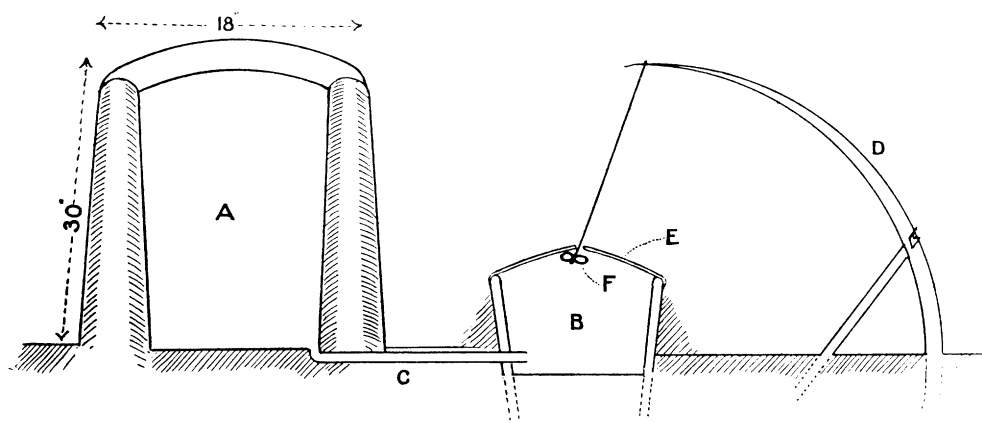
NOTES ON THE IRON WORKERS OF MANIPUR AND THE ANNUAL FESTIVAL IN HONOUR OF THEIR SPECIAL DEITY KHUMLANGBA.

BY LIEUT.-COLONEL J. SHAKESPEAR, C.I.E., D.S.O.

THERE are three villages in the state which manufacture iron : Kokching, Kokching Khuno (New), and Wairi. In the three villages there are 704 houses. These originally formed an endogamous group, but nowadays this custom is being broken through. The population is divided into families or *Sageis*, each of which is exogamous.

The people claim that their ancestors came from Cachar, whence their most important clan's name, Meyang langbam, Meyang denoting a foreigner from Cachar. The story runs that the ancestors of the Meyang langbam and Khettri mayum clan were one day walking near Thobal, and noticed some earth thrown out of a bamboo rat's burrow, which resembled that in which iron was found in Cachar, so they gathered it and on their way home they met the Raja, who asked what they were carrying, and, being told, ordered them to experiment and report the result. Eventually the community, numbering then only five or six households, was settled near the spot where the ore was found, and subsequently moved to their present locations, where the deposits of ore are more extensive. All these deposits are under the protection of an Umang Lai, *i.e.*, forest god, named Khumlangba, who has to be propitiated before the iron can be worked. When fresh ground has to be broken, a buffalo is sent by the Raja, and this animal is taken to the site of the proposed excavation, and in olden times was slain there, but since the introduction of Hinduism the animal is released and dedicated to Khumlangba, after a few hairs from each fetlock and the end of his tail, and a drop or two of blood from his ear have been offered to the Lai. Khumlangba is credited with the power of causing the iron ore to move about. One day it is found near the surface, the next it has disappeared only to appear again when the capricious god chooses. The presence of a deposit is detected by probing the soil with a long bamboo skewer, after heavy rain, when the ground is soft; if the skewer strikes something hard, a trial excavation is made. The deposits are near the surface, a pit seldom exceeding 9 feet in depth. Members of a party work together and the result of their labours is divided equally.

Smelting.—Two baskets of earth, weighing about 220 pounds, are treated at time. A piece of ground is smoothed and plastered with cow-dung and mud, on this the earth, after being thoroughly washed, is placed in layers with straw between each layer, and then burnt, after which the particles of ore can be picked out. These are then pounded.



A = Furnace.

There are two cylinders, B, each with a separate tube C, and spring D.

E = Leather cover.

F = Toggle.

The furnace A consists of a hollow cylinder of clay, from the bottom of which two bamboo tubes C lead to two cylinders, B, made by lining a slight excavation with stakes driven close together and caulked with mud. Each of these cylinders has a cover of buffalo hide securely bound on round the rim. In the middle of each cover is a hole, a piece of cord, with a toggle attached, is passed through the hole and held there by the toggle, the other end of each cord is tied to a stick securely buried in the ground and bent over so as to act as a spring and keep the cover always raised to its utmost. A layer of live charcoal is put into the furnace and the bellowsman takes his stand on the cylinders B, placing a foot over the hole in each cover and resting his hands on a cross bar. As he raises each foot in turn the cover is raised by the wooden spring and the air enters through the hole in the cover, as his foot descends the hole in the cover is closed and the air is forced out through the tube C; by moving his feet rapidly a strong draught is produced which soon raises the charcoal in the furnace to a great heat, and a little of the ore is then sprinkled on it. Charcoal and ore are added alternately, without any flux. About 45 pounds of ore are smelted, and then the furnace is extinguished and the iron extracted.

Forging.—The bellows used are the same as for smelting, the tubes being led through a hole in a stone, on the far side of which is a charcoal fire. An anvil is generally a stone. Five men are needed: one bellowsman; one fireman, to keep the fire in good order; two hammermen; one master, who manipulates the iron with a pair of pincers and is the expert, under whose orders the others work. He

receives eight annas a day, the others four each. The actual cash expenditure is very small, as the charcoal is manufactured from timber growing on the village lands, and the labour is mostly supplied by the partners in the enterprise. 220 pounds of earth are said to produce from Rs. 2 to Rs. 5 worth of manufactured iron articles, which if all the labour had to be paid for at market rates would cost Rs. 7/12/0. Formerly the people of these villages were not allowed to engage in any trade but iron making, and each worker had to give the Raja two pieces of iron 6 inches long and 2 inches thick every month.

The annual festival, or Lai-harauba, pleasing the god.—Khumlangba is represented by a piece of iron a few inches square. There are three such pieces, one in charge of each village, those in charge of Kokching and Wairi are said to have been brought with their ancestors from Cachar, that at Kokching Khuno was made when the village was formed from the mother village. Although there are three pieces of iron there is only one Khumlangba, and in reply to a question as to whether, if the piece of iron were stolen, the thief would carry off Khumlangba, I was told that Khumlangba would, of course, remain, as he always is a spirit, and would probably make things uncomfortable for the thief.

When a Lai-harauba is to be celebrated, the first thing to be done is to bring the Lai into a state of activity. Ordinarily speaking he is supposed to remain inert, unless offended in any way. Should a person without the approval of the Laisangba, hereditary guardian, cut a bamboo from the sacred grove, he would be made ill by the offended Lai, and if traders coming to the market steal anything and carry it off in their boats, he will pursue them and upset them. If a man be bold enough to make love to the wife of the Laisangba, Khumlangba will take up the matter and strike down the guilty couple. Even if the Laisangba turn his wife out for ill-temper or some minor offence, no man will dare to marry her, for fear of Khumlangba's wrath. Khumlangba, however, is said not to exercise any supervision over the morals of the rest of the community.

Khumlangba particularly affects two plants called Leisang Leirel and Langthei, and when he is about to be pleased the Leirangba, a specially selected official, has to fetch them, the former must be brought from the capital, the latter may be got on the spot. These plants are placed in Khumlangba's house on the first day of the pleasing. Thence they are taken in a brass vessel by the priestess down to the river which flows beside the grove. The old lady wades into the water, with the vessel in one hand and ringing a small bell with the other. On the bank her assistant priestess rings another bell, and in company with some male attendants chants in a low tone. Khumlangba's litter and its bearers waits beside them. The aged priestess moves slowly about in the water chanting and tinkling her bell. Suddenly she stumbles, falls, and after a moment emerges with the vessel full of water. Khumlangba has come. Sometimes the god is surly and will not come for a long time. The old lady now finds her way to shore trying her best to step joyously. The vessel with its precious contents is placed in a litter, and the bearers raise it on to their shoulders.

The penna players start a tune on their little fiddles, the drum beats and the fifers play, and the bearers essay to carry their Lai up to his house, but he asserts himself, they make a few steps forward, then come staggering back, they sway about, plunge forward again, reach the foot of the slope, but Khumlangba puts out his strength, and back they come staggering almost into the river, thus he plays with them several times, but finally permits himself to be borne up to his own place.

The Lai-pham, or god's place, is an open space, surrounded by bamboos and trees, at one end is an open shed in which a two-tiered carved wooden altar draped with red cloth on which the iron representations of Khumlangba and his wife Shija are placed, surmounted by brass head ornaments, the precious vessel is deposited beside them; at the foot of the altar are the brass vessels of the god, and offerings of fruit, flowers, and rice. Half-way up one side of the open space is the permanent abode of the Lai, a house of some size, with a verandah and a porch, but no windows. Sheds for the village officials run between this house and the open shed, and on the opposite side is a shed for their wives. The officials seat themselves in their appointed places, each on his mat, while their wives sit on chairs arranged from left to right in order of the seniority of the husbands. The drummer of the Lai takes up his position at the far end of the ground opposite the open shed. The Laisangba moves forward and kneels in front of the shed, all the officials rise and arranging themselves in rows behind him kneel and bow humbly to Khumlangba, the Laisangba prays at some length, and then the whole assembly bow their foreheads to the ground. The officials resume their seats and the sacred fire is made by drawing a band of cane swiftly backwards and forwards round a small log held under the performer's foot. A small lump of tinder having been ignited a fire is made opposite the shed and offerings of rice are laid in front of Khumlangba, the officials again come before the shed and kneel while another prayer is said, after which they resume their seats. A fish called sareng is singed slightly over the fire and laid before Khumlangba. This fish has spines in its head, and is chosen to represent the buffalo, which used to be sacrificed along with a pig before the advent of the "Brahmin with his scrolls and sanctities." If a sareng cannot be found, a prawn will do. When the sacrifices were made, the blood used to be caught on a stone and laid before the god. Even now a cock and a hen are killed at the conclusion of the Laiharauba.

The assistant priestess now comes forward, with a tray of fruit and vegetables on her head, and moving slowly about in front of Khumlangba's shrine invokes the gods of the four quarters; Khobru, Thangjing, Wang Purel, and Marjing, and then various other deities of hill and dale and the Imung Lais, the guardians of the hearth. Her invocation ended, the tray of vegetables is placed before Khumlangba, and for the moment the ceremonies cease. Later in the afternoon there is a grand dance.

The unmarried girls wear a special and most becoming dress. The head-dress consists of a crown ornamented with small gold tinsel pendants, from the sides of this chaplet plumes of peacocks' feathers stand up. Over each ear is a pendant

of various glittering objects, a loose veil of very fine muslin is worn over the shoulders, the body is wrapped in an embroidered cloth, the skirt is of green silk and reaches to within an inch or two of the ground; a foot from the bottom, all round is thickly studded with little looking-glasses and spangles; a broad band covered with silver spangles hangs in front from the girdle. The married women wear their usual dress, adding only a fine muslin veil over the head and shoulders, but the *phanek*, *i.e.*, cloth which answers for bodice and skirt, is new and of brighter colours than one sees ordinarily, perhaps chiefly due to the newness.

A procession is formed, the head Maibi, or priestess, with a man carrying Khumlangba's sacred dao, with three blades on either side of her, leads the way followed by the second Maibi, with an umbrella bearer on one side and a fan bearer on the other, two more fan bearers follow them, parallel with whom on the left move two penna players and two fifers. Then follow in ranks a large number of women and girls, the former on the flanks the latter two or three abreast in the centre. On their left following the penna players come a crowd of men and boys of fourteen or fifteen. This procession moves in circle from left to right, so that the men and boys are on the inner flank. The step consists of a hop, with body bent on to the left foot, right brought up to calf of left leg, slight pause, then hop on to right foot, and left foot brought up to right calf, again pause, hop on to left foot, and so on; as the right foot comes up to the left calf all clap hands. The step is much slurred by the women and girls, who merely bring one foot up to the other, pause and then continue the step, but the Maibis and menfolk hop with considerable vigour. The Maibis turn round from time to time, and sometimes taking hands dance round two or three times. One of the men sings praises of Khumlangba and the other performers sing the refrain "*Seyā nasidā*," which is obsolete Manipuri for "We are very pleased." The procession goes round and round many times, gradually the pace quickens, the hopping becomes more excited, the singer breaks into obscene jokes and abuse of the women, and is joined amid peals of laughter by all the men and lads; the women reply in a similar manner, and just when it seems that the ceremony is going to degenerate into a regular romp, the men break out of the ring and the women and girls form into lines facing the shrine behind the Maibis and their attendants and continue the dance. The step changes to a kind of valse; in this and in the circling dance great play is made with the hands and fingers. This dance finishes the ceremony for the day.

A penna is a fiddle, the head of which is a cocoanut shell, with a piece of thin leather stretched over it, the stem is of bamboo, the strings of horse hair, and the strings of the bow are of the same material. The bow has a handle of wood, with a curved metal head with many little bells attached to it, which tinkle as the bow moves. A bright-coloured banneret hangs from the stem of the penna. The village officials wear the peculiar head-dress so much affected by the Manipuris on gala occasions. A white turban is bound tightly round the head, and over the top and in front is wound round a *shumzil*, a horn-shaped construction of cane bound over with cloth or gold braid, and ending above in a loop and below in three

flat loops which are concealed under the turban. The *shumzil* is over a foot high and curves slightly backwards, from the loop at its end hangs an embroidered streamer. On each side of the head a plume made of peacocks' feathers and the tail feathers of the hornbill are inserted in the turban, and sometimes another such plume is worn behind, the upper end passing through the loop of the *shumzil*. The whole structure is bound together by a narrow band of red and white embroidery, wound round and round and tied under the chin with ends hanging down nearly to the waist. Cheap vests dyed various colours are apparently very much liked; a white cloth, with red embroidered border, is wrapped round the waist and thighs. Far into the night the sound of the drum tells that devotees are still pleasing Khumlangba with song and dance, but this is an unofficial performance. Every evening Khumlangba is replaced in his permanent house, and each morning brought and installed in the shrine called Yathok sang; on each occasion the officials of the village are present, and prayers are said. Khumlangba's servants are two Maibis or priestesses, old women whose fitness for the post is demonstrated by the Lai taking possession of them, throwing them into a species of fit, during which they babble incoherently. If a man is thus taken possession of by the god he is known as Maiba, and during all ceremonies of the Lai-harauba he wears the dress of a Maibi, viz., white cloth wound round the body from below the armpits, a white jacket, and a sash which is sometimes coloured twisted round the waist. A fine muslin veil is worn over the head. The Maibi is looked on as superior to any man, by reason of her communion with the god; and therefore if a man is honoured in the same way he assumes the dress of the Maibi as an honour. If a man marries a Maibi, he sleeps on the right of her, whereas the ordinary place of woman is the right, as being the inferior side. It appears that women are more liable to be possessed by the god, and the same may be observed among all the hill tribes of these parts. Among the Lushais the Khawhring, who "eats" other women, is also a woman, and the Zawlnei, who answers almost exactly to the Maibi, is almost always a woman. Besides the Maibis there are in attendance the Laisangba, hereditary guardian of the shrine and the god, a Maiba appointed by the village, who during the Lai-harauba is given four or five assistants. All these officials of the Lai live inside the Laipham throughout the Harauba only going out when the Lai himself goes, and their food is cooked at the sacred fire. The second and third days' performances are the same, therefore one description will suffice.

About two o'clock a procession is formed to convey the Lai from the Lai-pham to the village market-place, where a small cloth-sided shrine has been put up for him. The wives of the officials with their huge state umbrellas lead the way. Two tall banners with the figure of a monkey on each are carried, next followed by several little girls two and two in their dance dress, several pairs of small boys in disreputable attire come next; these children carry Khumlangba's brass vessels, fans, etc., then come men carrying dao and spears presented to Khumlangba by suppliants for his favour, then the old Maibi bearing on her head the brass vessel containing

the sacred flowers in which Khumlangba was yesterday persuaded to take up his temporary residence ; this is gaily decorated with orchids, two little girls attend her ; behind her comes the litter containing the sacred pieces of iron, each surmounted by a *shumzil*, which represent Khumlangba and his wife Shija. This litter is gaily decorated with peacocks' feathers and flowers and attended by fan and umbrella bearers. As the litter nears the shrine, Khumlangba sports with his bearers, driving them hither and thither, the litter sways to and fro as the carriers try to get it to the shrine, the umbrella and fan bearers strive anxiously to keep in their appointed places, one moment the litter is borne forward with a rush, then it suddenly stops and the carriers seem drawn backwards, stoutly but vainly resisting. At last the Lai graciously submits, and the litter is safely stowed in the shrine.

The officials of the village kneel before the shrine and the Laisangba says a prayer, then all resume their places, and pieces of grass called *lang*, which have been presented to the Lai, are distributed to all important people. On the first day orchids were similarly distributed, that was in the Lai-pham, but outside of it *lang* is the proper offering. These offerings are collected and burnt at the end of the ceremony. Now follow a series of dances before the shrine ; the two Maibis and the village Maiba commence ; the steps are various, much play is made with the hands, and there is constant turning round and advancing and retreating. After each dance the performers bow to the Lai, and then to the head officials seated on their mats, each under his own umbrella. The Maibis are followed by three men, then three pairs of men dance in succession. When the dancers are officials, their attendants stand near them and clap their hands in time with the drum. A boy approaches with an offering of parched rice ; he is from Imphal, and thinks it wise to propitiate the Lai of the locality he has come to. The Laisangba receives the offering, and lays it reverently in front of the shrine, the boy kneels down and a prayer is said, the second Maibi tinkling her bell the while. Then the wives of the chief officials of the village advance, and after making obeisance, dance in two lines, three in each line ; gradually the space behind them is filled with girls and women all dancing, advancing and retreating in lines. This goes on for a very long time, to the accompaniment of drum, penna, hand clapping, and singing.

The next dance begins with the Maibis attended by the two dao carriers and penna men, praying before the shrine, then dancing there with clapping of hands, then turning to the left they circle round the ground holding their hands, with their wrists touching, hands slightly apart level with their foreheads, as if holding up something. I am told this means that they are offering themselves to Khumlangba, the Maibis are supposed to be holding their souls in their hands and offering them to the Lai. Thus they circle twenty-six or twenty-seven times, holding the hands in a different way each time, and varying the motions. The various actions are to show that they owe all to Khumlangba, thus the hands held to head show that that is due to him, then placed at the corners of the mouth, that the teeth are his gift, then the action of spinning, that cotton and cloth come from

him, and so on. Singing men, married women, and girls gradually join in till the dance becomes the same as that performed on the first day. The last three rounds are very tumultuous, many young men and boys breaking into the circle, and between them and the women loud obscene chaff is bandied freely, with much laughter. Then the men and boys retire and the Maibis with attendants dance before the shrine, the women and girls dancing in rows behind them. A canopy of cloth supported on the fans and umbrellas is erected, and the head Maibi taking the brass vessel with the sacred flowers in it, places it on her head, and in company with the Laisangba, dances slowly round it from left to right, while the second Maibi alone goes round from right to left all singing, the Maibi and the Laisangba pass to and fro in different directions under the canopy, while the second Maibi and the village Maiba, pass special rolls of sacred cloth from one to the other over the canopy which is lowered for them. This is done several times. The four supports of the canopy represent the gods of the four quarters before referred to. The canopy is to protect the Lai, Khumlangba, and his wife while they play beneath it. The passing to and fro of the cloth is part of the play. The exact performance of this portion of the ceremony is of the highest importance, all performers must follow exactly the appointed path, and each action must be done at exactly the right moment. Finally, the Maibi and Laisangba dance under the canopy, and then bowing down to the Lai retire, and the dance is over. While the last portion of this dance was proceeding, one of the attendants began to dance wildly, and after going through most extraordinary contortions, reeling about as if drunk, he fell down and was dragged to the front of the shrine and placed there kneeling with his head on the ground, and remained there for some time shaking with emotion. Khumlangba had entered into him. The same thing happened to this man on three days of the festival, and he will probably be a regular Maiba by next year, and appear in Maibi's dress. On the next day the second Maibi became possessed. She danced wildly, staggered about shaking her head, for the Lai is supposed to sit on the head of his devotee, then she knelt before the shrine, and trembling all over, shaking her head, began a long series of babblings, which were said to be prophecies. The Raja had sent some cloths, and a head-dress for the Lai, and I had made a small offering of money, and these babblings were said to be the Lai promising us prosperity in consequence of our good acts.

The finale was almost the most interesting ceremony of all. The second Maibi put on a Naga cloth, and a Naga basket was hung over her shoulder. With a Naga hoe held up in one hand she proceeded to invoke Khumlangba, while the head Maibi, the village Maiba, three other men, and a man with only a loin cloth, who was said to represent a Tangkhul Naga, all with sticks in their hands, stood round. The invocation ended, the whole party form a circle and dance round striking the ground as if hoeing, and shout in imitation of Nagas working, then the village Maiba takes a little gourd from the second Maibi's basket, and standing before the shrine offers it to the Lai, making an invocation, after which the second Maibi, taking a packet of rice, wrapped in a plantain leaf, as Nagas carry food

into the fields, from her basket offers it to the Lai with an invocation. Then the gourd, which is supposed to contain rice beer, and some of the rice are offered to the other members of the party. The Tangkhul, who is the clown, causes much amusement by his antics, trying to avoid the attentions of the Maibi, who tries to force the food down his throat. The village Maiba then marks on the ground the imaginary area they have cultivated. This whole play is transacted three times. I am told that it may be repeated any *uneven* number of times. After the third repetition, all retire except the second Maibi and the Tangkhul. The latter takes one of his companions' sticks, and holds it across his own to represent a bow with arrow in position. The two performers now dance at opposite ends of the ground singing in turn, and advance and retreat, the Maibi evidently trying to catch the man, who fends her off and makes pretence to shoot her; this goes on for a long time, and the dialogue is evidently extremely amusing, though said to be highly improper. Finally the Maibi seizes the Tangkhul by his loin cloth and forces him on to his knees before the shrine, after which they dance together. Then all the officials gather before the shrine for a final prayer, during which all the boys of the village gather at the other end of the ground and raise loud shouts, with much laughter and gusto, evidently imitating the Hau-hau with which the Kabui Nagas greet someone whom they wish to honour. Khumlangba is now carried to his home, in the same manner as he was brought, but it is no easy matter to get him off the market-place. The litter bearers are driven in all directions, backwards, forwards, sideways; several times the fickle deity seems to have made up his mind to go, and drives his bearers forward at a fast run, then suddenly stops, backs, and finally makes off in the opposite direction. All these antics are signs of his being well pleased.

The following is the explanation of the dramatic performance. The woman dressed up as a Naga is Panthoibi, a goddess, who appears in several tales (*The Meitheis*, pp. 97, 99, 127, 128, T. C. Hodson). The comic man is Nongpok Ningthau, also referred to in Mr. Hodson's work. Panthoibi was once cultivating on the Nong-mai-Ching hill east of Imphal, when the Nongpok Ningthau came and said, "This is my land and my father's before me, be off, or I will shoot you with my bow and arrow." Panthoibi made love to him in order to get permission to cultivate the place; when she had fed him with all the food and drink she had, he said he would have none of her, but she seized him and insisted on his marrying her; eventually the persistent lady had her way, and the ceremony was performed before Khumlangba. Panthoibi is said by Mr. Hodson to have been the wife of Khaba and my informants admit this, but say Nongpok Ningthau took her, though it would rather appear that the taking was on the lady's side.

The third and fourth days' performances were the same up to the end of the Panthoibi farce, at the close of which the officials made their usual obeisance, and then all the engaged couples advanced in pairs, and each in turn danced before Khumlangba. It is the practice here for boys and girls to be betrothed at about ten to twelve years of age, but the marriage does not take place till the girl

reaches the age of puberty, and sometimes later. In the meantime the young man is treated as a son of the house, though living with his parents, and he works for his future father-in-law. The girls' dance is just the usual turning round and waving the hands, the boys' is more difficult, consisting of three hops forward on the right foot, turn round, three back again on the left, waving the hands and opening and shutting them with a rolling motion of the fingers, then with knees bent balancing on each foot alternately, hopping from one to the other, and turning round. The audience is extremely critical, and any awkwardness on the part of the performers is greeted with jeers and laughter. As the boy resumes his place he is met by friends who make him presents of pan and betel nut. This giving of presents goes on throughout the festival; presents are being continually taken to the performers, and friends send presents to each other by the hands of their children. When giving a present the giver bows to the ground, and the receiver returns the compliment. On the sixth day the ceremonies are the same as the fourth and fifth, except that in place of engaged couples dancing together the married people take the floor in reverse order of seniority, the officials coming last, and the Ningthau, or chief, bringing the dance to a conclusion. The seventh and last day the whole of the ceremonies take place within the *Lai-pham* enclosure, and to the dances are added exhibitions of strength and wrestling. I could not stay for these two last days, but hope before long to witness the last three days of the *Harauba* in the sister village, Wairi.

The advent of the Meyang-lambam is said to have taken place in the reign of Khagenba, about the beginning of the seventeenth century. It is evident that the immigrants were not Hindus, for the people of Kokching have only become Hindus quite recently, in fact there are still some old men who refuse to abandon their varied meat diet. Hinduism does not seem to have been introduced into Cachar till the beginning of the eighteenth century. I see no reason to doubt the story of the origin of the Meyang-langbam family, but in these three villages there are seven other exogamous families which form an endogamous group. It seems probable that these are descendants of people of the locality, who joined the Meyang-langbam in the manufacture of iron. Each family has its own Lai, who has to be "pleased" at intervals by members of the family, and those who have married into it. All join in the "pleasing" of Khumlangba. The ceremonies of the "pleasing" bear some resemblance to festivals celebrated by the hill tribes. Thus the carrying of Khumlangba about in the litter, is paralleled by the *Mi-thi-rawp-lam*, a feast of the Lushais, in which effigies of their ancestors are carried about, and in some respects the rest of the performance reminds me of the "Kut" feasts celebrated by nearly every Kuki-Lushai clan about this season of the year, and said to ensure good crops. At the close of the day's ceremonies, when Khumlangba was being borne back to his house, a man always raised a loud shout, "We have pleased Khumlangba well, may our crops be good, may all be well with us," and the whole crowd shout back, "Yes! "Yes!" The Naga costumes adopted in the Panthoibi episode are in keeping with Manipuri customs, and show how

close the connection between the Manipuris and the tribes round them really is (compare Mr. Hodson's remarks in *The Meitheids*, p. 4 *et seq.*). The parade of the engaged couples is not an actual part of the Lai-harauba ; it was explained to me that up till the prayer and obeisance performed by the officials at the end of the Panthoibi farce, every action and word was of importance, but that the obeisance and prayer closed the important ceremonies and the rest was unimportant, mistakes did no harm.

Where I have attempted no explanation I could get none, except the vexatious one, " It was the custom of our forefathers, how do we know its meaning ? "