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I.—*Description of Ancient Temples and Ruins at Chárdwár in Assam.*
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TOWARDS the close of November last, I had occasion to proceed on public duty into Chárdwár, a small district in the northern division of Central Assam, being on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra between Lat. $26^{\circ} 32'$ and $26^{\circ} 51'$, and Long. $92^{\circ} 19'$ and $92^{\circ} 55'$. It has its name from conducting to four passes of Bhután, and is bounded on the north by hills of various altitude, situate at the base of the Himálaya, and inhabited by three wild tribes of mountaineers, called *Duphas, Akhás, and Kupah Chowahs**; the Brahmaputra, confines it on the south; to the East it has the Bhairaví river, which divides it from Nondwár, and to the west the river Rhotás, which separates it from the small district of Chúteáh.

I think it necessary to state thus much in the way of introduction, to point out the precise locality of the ruins I am about to describe, as it is doubtful if many of my readers are aware of the geographical position of a district placed in so remote a corner of our possessions.

In the south-east angle of Chárdwár, a chain of granite hills, rising from two hundred to five hundred feet above sea level, and clothed with grass and forest trees, sweeps outwards in a crescent form from

* Kupah Chowah is a corruption from *kupás-chor* or cotton stealer, a name to which the people are well entitled from their predatory habits; but the Chárdwárians stand in much awe of these robbers, and shrink from bestowing on them so uncourteous an appellation. They come of the same stock with the Akhás, from whom they differ in few respects, and are said to have divided into a separate clan about sixty years since in the reign of LACHMI' SIMEN king of Assam.

the Bhairaví to the Brahmaputra. The inhabitants assert, these hills were originally called *Agníghar* or *Agnígarh*, the place or fort of fire, from their constantly sending forth flames, or, as others affirm, from a rájá named BANH having made a fort on the spot of fire: they add, that KRISHNA mounted on his garúra (a creature half-bird half-man, corresponding with the eagle of the Grecian Jupiter,) brought hither a supply of water and quenched the fires, and that in commemoration of the event the name of the hills was changed to *Porá*, which in the dialect of Assam signifies 'the burnt,' a name they still retain. I thought it possible this obscure tradition might be connected in some way with the existence at a former period of volcanos, but after an active scrutiny of the spot no traces of subterranean fire were discovered to bear out the supposition. I had taken up my abode temporarily in the neighbourhood, when I accidentally learnt there were some gigantic ruins to be seen in the wilds, respecting which the natives could furnish no satisfactory information: on proceeding in the direction indicated, I found it impracticable to conduct the search from the density of the jungle, which consisted of lofty trees entwined with parasitical plants, and reed-grass upwards of twenty feet high swarming with wild animals; these obstacles were partly removed with the assistance of some peasants, and opened to view many interesting remains of antiquity which amply recompensed me for the trouble I had taken.

The first temple I examined appeared to have faced the north, and to have been provided with a portico supported on three columns of sixteen sides; each shaft, not including the plinth and pedestal which stand four feet above the ground, measured eight feet high and five and a half in girth, and was wrought from a single block of fine granite. The shafts have sculptured capitals, while the surbases take the form of an octagon, and the plinths are circular at top, and spread into four feet, making a sort of cross that measured four and three quarters feet each way. Three gigantic stones, with the fragments of a fourth, each hewn from a single block fourteen feet long, and cut into five irregular sides of which the total showed a circumference of eight feet, seem to have formed the entablature of the entrance porch, which I judged to have been fifty-six feet long. The frieze has three tiers of carving in *basso relievo* representing scrolls of flowers; the apertures in which iron rivets were introduced can be distinctly traced, and it is evident that no cement was employed to unite the materials. The other members were too much shattered and dispersed to enable me to conjecture the form of the temple; from a great portion of the surrounding works being in an unfinished state, it affords the presumption that the architect must have met some unlooked-for interruption; and

that this and the other buildings were overthrown at the same period by some hostile power opposed to the propagation of Hinduism, assisted perhaps subsequently by a convulsion of nature. Earthquakes, I need scarcely observe, are more frequent in Assam than in any other quarter of our Indian possessions, and that they accomplish so small an amount of mischief must be attributed to its never having been the custom to employ stone and brick in the construction of dwellings. All classes, from the king to the serf, build with such slight and perishable materials as grass, bambus, and timber; thus houses sustain little injury from a shock however violent, and even if thrown down could not do much mischief to their inmates*. Had time been the sole instrument of overthrowing these structures, it is but fair to suppose from the great solidity of the materials that the ruin would have been less complete, and that the fragments would have lain in a narrower compass.

Chárdwár at one period undoubtedly formed a part of the ancient and extensive kingdom of Kámrúp, but whether the city at Porá was destroyed by the Muhammedans during their invasions, or by the Ahom kings prior to their conversion to the Hindu faith; or was overthrown at a later period by the Vaishnavas in their struggles for pre-eminence with the Saivas, is alike matter for conjecture. In the absence of inscriptions and other precise information we must have recourse to the traditions current in the country, and to such historical records as are within our reach; these I now purpose to advert to.

The inhabitants of Chárdwár assert, that Rájá BANH, the founder of Porá, was a demi-god, sixth in direct descent from BRAHMA; they add on the authority of some work whose name has escaped me, that his dominions were situate on the banks of the Nermadá river; that he journeyed into Kámrúp, Chárdwár, and other parts of Assam, and was the first person who introduced the worship of MAHÁDEVÁ into that quarter of India. The extensive walls which encompass the temples at Porá, are said to have made part of a fort or city founded by him called Lohitpúr, Somitpúr or Tejpúr, all three signifying the

* In an ancient MS. I have met with, written according to the custom of the country on the inner surface of the bark of the *sachí* tree, a very destructive earthquake is recorded to have happened in the A. S. 1529 (A. D. 1607), when the earth opened and vomited a vast quantity of sand and water. On the 31st March last, two severe shocks were felt throughout Assam; the first cast down the stone spire of a temple at Bishnáth, fractured an idol within the shrine, and effected other damage in the province, and on the 3rd of November following there was another quake of less violence.

city of blood, perhaps in commemoration of a battle stated to have been fought there between KRISHNA and the Rájá. The 'Sri Bhagavat,' to which I referred, informs us that BANH was the son of BALI', the generous, and that he had a thousand arms, which probably means in a figurative sense that he was endued with immense strength; this power is said to have been conferred on him by SIVA, who also promised to defend his capital against external foes, in return for the pleasure he derived from the rájá's musical performance, (a talent in which he excelled,) when he played on some occasion before the god who was dancing with his votaries. On obtaining this boon, the invincible BANH subdued both gods and men, and returning to Sonitpúr surrounded his capital with fortifications of water, wind and fire, and lived there in perfect security; but when he found after a short time that none were able to oppose him, his heart was swollen with pride, and repairing to the court of SIVA he declared, that as he was indomitable the boon bestowed was worthless, and wished to know if there really was any one capable of resisting him. The god, displeased at his arrogance, presented him with a flag, which he desired him to hoist upon his palace, and promised that whenever it should fall an antagonist would appear to humble his power: delighted with the gift BANH returned home, and waited patiently the fulfilment of the prophecy.

The narrative goes on to say, that BANH had a daughter called from her extreme beauty, U'SA, or 'morning,' who was visited in a dream by ANIBUD the son of PRADYU'MNA and grandson of KÁMDE'VA; that on awaking from sleep the damsel indulged in loud laments, and was inconsolable at missing the lovely form imprinted on her memory, and which had occupied so large a share of her midnight thoughts.

One of her handmaidens, by name CHITRA-LIKHÁ or 'The Limner,' daughter to KU'MBHAND her father's minister, moved by her excess of sorrow, inquired its cause, and U'SA, reposing confidence in the attendant, related her eventful dream regarding 'a man of sable hue with lotus-eyes, long-arms, and clad in yellow garments, beloved among women, who had abandoned her in the ocean of distress.' CHITRA-LIKHÁ soothed her affliction by engaging to produce the object of her love: she painted the images of gods, of demi-gods, sages and powerful kings of the earth, of the house of BRISHNI', of ANUDU'NDAYI*, of BALARA'M†, and of PRADYU'MNA, which last (being the likeness of her father-in-law,) as soon as U'SA looked upon she was

* VASU-DE'VA the father of KRISHNA.

† Foster brother of KRISHNA.

ashamed. The limner next painted the likeness of ANIRUD, and when U'SA saw it she modestly hung down her head, and exclaimed smiling, 'This is he who has robbed me of my heart.' Recognising the portrait to be that of KRISHNA's grand-son, CHITRA-LIKHÁ left her mistress and departed for *Dwáriká* (on the sea coast near the gulf of Cach, at that period governed by KRISHNA,) and seeing ANIRUD, sleeping on a couch, she by means of enchantments spirited him away and brought him in safety to Sonitpúr. U'SA, overjoyed at the sight of her beloved, introduced him to her private apartments, and he intoxicated with pleasure took no account of time. The military guard in attendance on U'SA suspecting that some stranger had gained access to the harem and seduced the lady from her maidenly vows, waited on the prince, and apprised him his daughter's conduct had brought a stain upon his lineage. BANH, distressed at the news, repaired with some armed followers to his daughter's apartments, and surprised the lovers playing the game of chess: ANIRUD starting up on their approach, seized his bow and discharged a flight of arrows with so much precision against the hostile party that they took to flight; BANH, however, whose rage had now passed all bounds, disregarding the tears and lamentations of his daughter, seized upon ANIRUD and bound him with cords.

Meanwhile KRISHNA, having missed his grand-son during the four rainy months, was filled with anxiety for his safety, a feeling in which the other friends of ANIRUD participated, and at length intelligence of his confinement reaching them through a sage called NA'RAD, the race of BRISHNI' of whom KRISHNA is the lord, went up to Sonitpúr with twelve legions, and attacking the city on all sides broke down the walls and buildings and destroyed the orchards. Exasperated at the mischief that was done, BANH came forth with an army whose divisions equalled in number those of the foe, and assisted by SIVA who rode on his bull, and came attended by his son and votaries, gave battle to BALARÁM and KRISHNA: a bloody engagement ensued; but at length KRISHNA bewitched SIVA whose votaries fled, and slew a vast number of BANH's army.

Furious at the prospect of defeat the prince sought out KRISHNA and encountered him in single combat, but the god cut through his adversary's bow-string, destroyed his car, slew the charioteer and horses, and sounded his shell in token of exultation. KU'TABI' the mother of BANH, trembling for the life of her son, appeared naked and with dishevelled locks in presence of KRISHNA, and he ashamed at the spectacle cast down his head, an occasion which the lord of Sonitpúr immediately seized upon to make his escape, and fled for refuge to his capital.

After this event, SIVA visited KRISHNA's army with fever; but the latter not to be outdone in modes of annoyance created another fever to contend with that of his adversary, and came off victorious. The rájá now advanced a second time to give battle, holding a variety of weapons in his thousand hands, which he hurled at KRISHNA, who broke them with his discus and hewed off the prince's arms like branches from a giant tree; seeing the peril in which he stood, MAHÁDEVVA advanced and besought his brother deity to save the life of his favourite. KRISHNA made answer, that he was bound to gratify MAHÁDEVVA, and that he intended to spare the prince because he was the son of BALI and grand-son of PRAHLÁD, whose race he had promised never to destroy—'What I have done,' continued the god, 'was to subvert his pride, I have lopped off his superfluous arms, and the four which remain are quite sufficient to enable him to enjoy eternal life.' Thus assured BANH fell at KRISHNA's feet, and brought forth ANIRUD and his daughter, seated in a car richly apparelled and ornamented, and surrounded by countless armies; KRISHNA was content, and returned to his kingdom of Dwáriká.

The next account, which has less admixture of the fabulous and appears the most deserving of attention, is taken from ancient records in MS. of the Assam kings, which speak of a place called Pratáppúr, the splendid city, the capital of RÁMACHANDRA, usually known under the name of the Pratáppúriya rájá, and which can, I think, be no other than Porá. This town is stated in the MS. to have been placed on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, a little below Bishnáth; and as the entire country bordering the river from Porá eastward to Bishnáth, with the exception of a range of hills three miles above the former, where the Bhairaví enters the great stream, is covered with swamp to the extent of several miles inland; there are strong grounds for supposing that Pratáppúr and Porá are the same. The present path from Porá to Bishnáth, which is only practicable in the dry months, often runs so far as six miles from the river, and the travelling distance does not exceed twenty-six or twenty-eight miles; while to the eastward of the Porá chain, extensive morasses skirt the Brahmaputra, without interruption, as far as Chútéah, from twenty-five to thirty miles distant. No ruins have been discovered nearer to Bishnáth than the spot indicated, and though it is possible the site of Pratáppúr may have disappeared in the lapse of ages, it must not be forgotten that it was always usual with the kings of Assam to found their capitals on the bank of the Brahmaputra or other navigable streams, and to choose a situation removed alike beyond the reach of inundation, and the chance of being swept away by the floods—advantages which are possessed by Porá in an admirable degree.

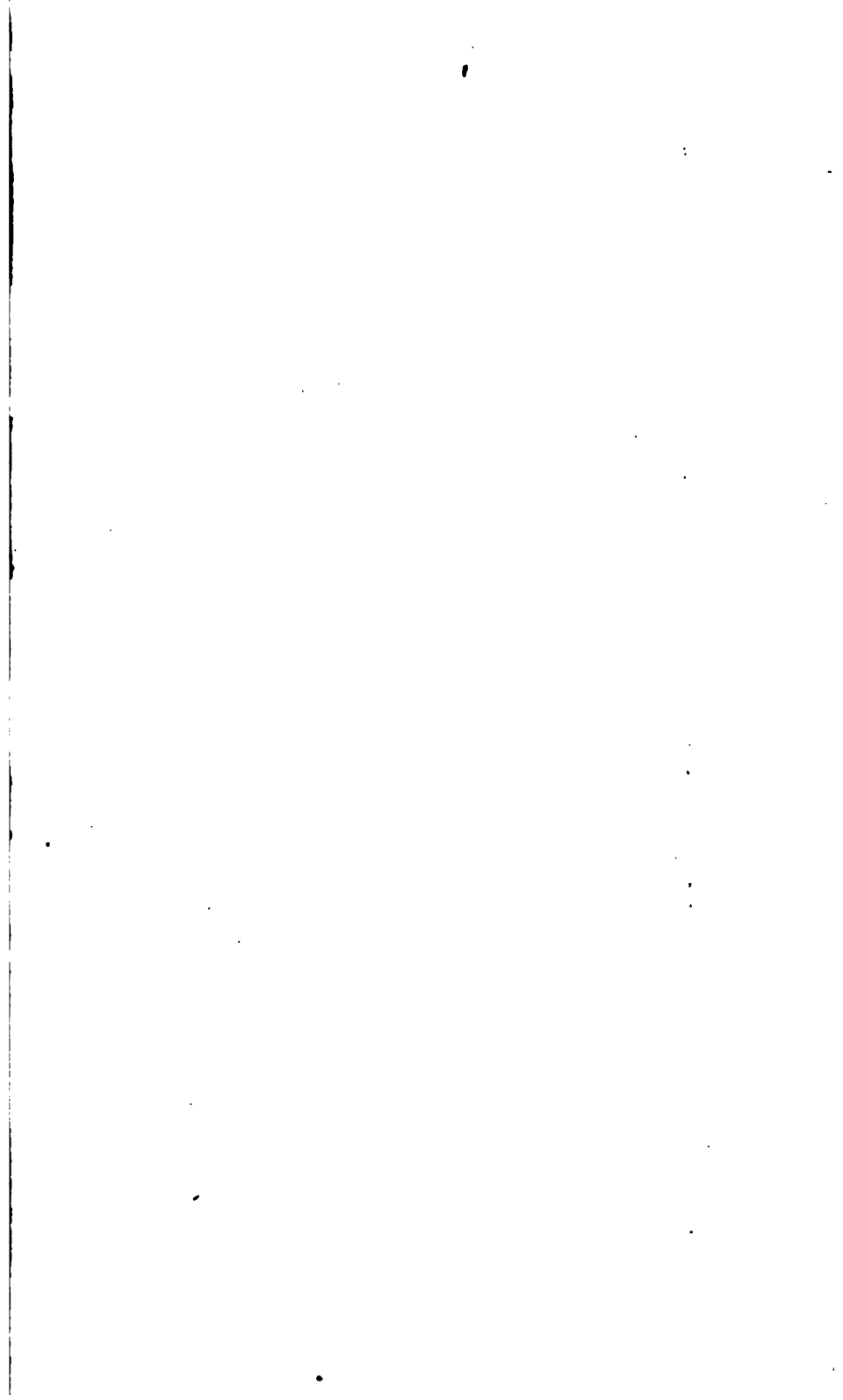
RÁMACHANDRA was, according to the volume I consulted, the twenty-fourth sovereign of a kingdom which embraced part of ancient Kámrúp, and made the eleventh of a third dynasty of its kings. SHUBÁHU the thirteenth sovereign, and ninth and last of the second dynasty, was vanquished by VIKRAMA'DITYA, and was succeeded by JITARI, a pious Cbhatrí from Dabera in the Dakhan, who overcame Kámrúp, and on ascending the throne, assumed the title of DHARMA-PA'L. He was the progenitor of RA'MACHANDRA, who began to reign A. S. 1160, (A. D. 1238-9.) and is the first prince the date of whose accession is commemorated in the volume. RA'MACHANDRA is stated to have wedded with a daughter of the Kiat Rájá, who ruled a country on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, and whose subjects followed the occupation of fishermen; some remains of his capital are to be seen, it is affirmed, on the Bakaní Chaprí, an extensive island supposed to have been separated from the main land, or thrown up by the river. The princess, his daughter, was known among the people by the name of the KAMALÁ KUNBI', but in books she is styled CHANDRA PRABHÁ. She was walking one day during her husband's absence on the bank of the Brahmaputra when the god, becoming enamoured of her extraordinary beauty, fell a prey to sensual desires, and effected his purpose by embracing the princess with his waves; but another account attributes her impregnation with greater show of probability to a young bráhmaṇ of the prince's household, and declares the amour with the river god was a fabrication of the lady to conceal the lapse of which she was guilty from her parent. Passing over that part of the narrative which details the discovery of her inconstancy, and the means to which RA'MACHANDRA had recourse to put a termination to her existence, all of which failed of success, we come to the period when the princess, who had taken refuge at her father's court, gave birth to a son who was called from his beauty SHASHÁNK; his head bore the impress of an ári-fish, which marked his parentage, and hence he acquired the surname A'RIMASTHA, or A'RIMATH, & c. having the head of an ári-fish. He passed his early years with the father of his mother, and subsequently removed to the north bank of the Brahmaputra, where he acquired territory; he made war upon Rájá PHENUA of Phenuágarh, in Kámrúp, where the remains of a small fort are still to be seen, and reduced that prince to subjection; and afterwards constructed a fort called Bad-yagarh at Háthimorá, in Kachárí mahal, which is still in existence, and made it his residence. In the course of his wars A'RIMATH extended his conquests to the kingdom of RA'MACHANDRA, of whose relationship to himself he was ignorant; he laid siege to Pratáppúr,

and through the treachery of a drummer of the garrison, who gave notice of a fitting time for attack, he surprised a part of the works that were imperfectly defended, made himself master of the fortress, and beheading RA'MACHANDRA returned in triumph to Badyagarh.

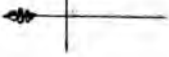
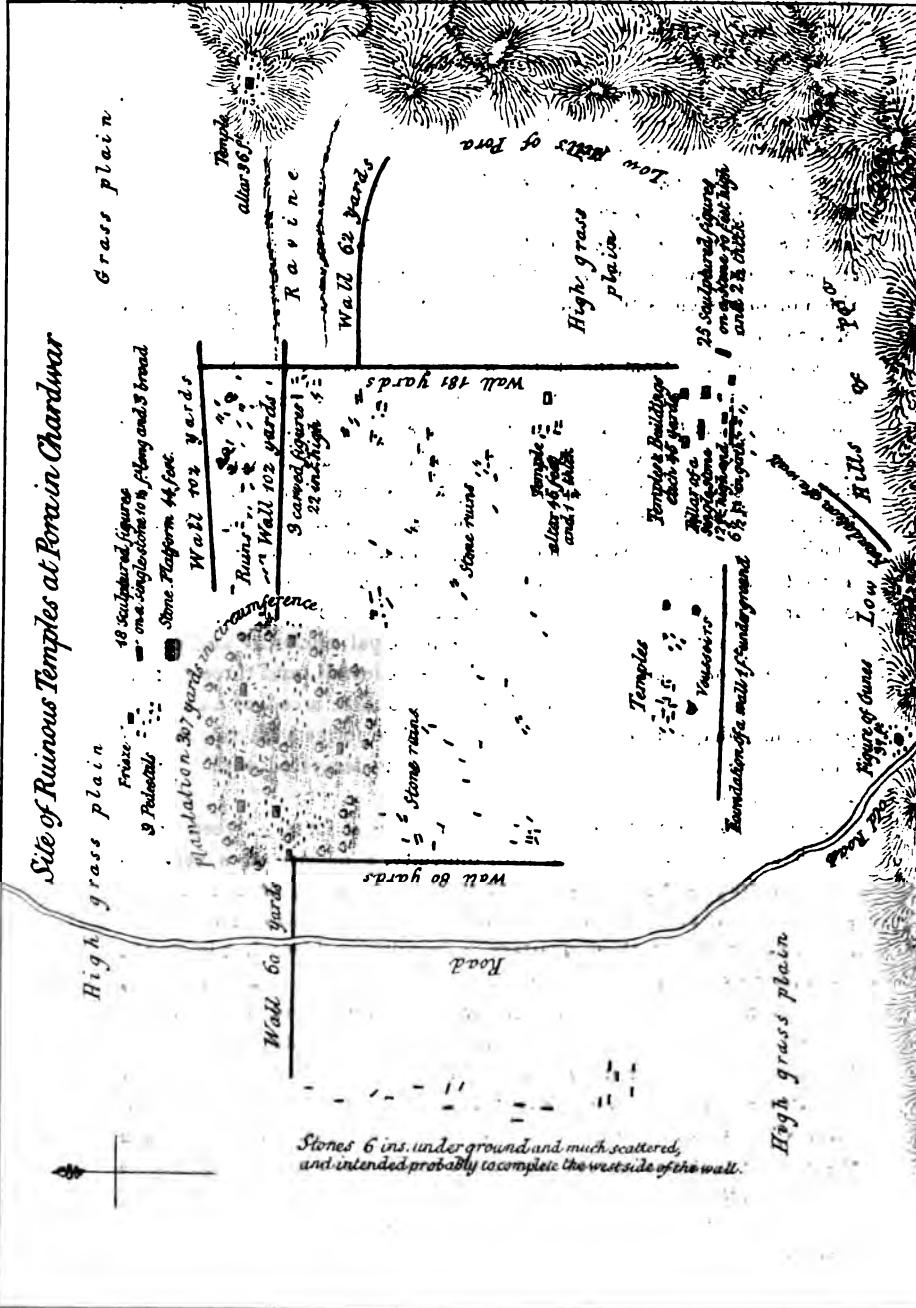
Some discrepancies are here apparent in two MSS. I consulted; one account states A'RIMATH slew PHENUA, while another maintains that PHENUA usurped the throne of A'RIMATH on the death of the latter, and abode in Phenuágarh. GAJANK, the son of A'RIMATH, succeeded PHENUA, and made his residence near Pratáppúr, in the vicinity of Agnigarh, and it is provoking that from this time no further mention is made of the place. I shall merely add, that the last named prince was followed by his son SUKRANK, who died without issue A. S. 1400, (A. D. 1478-9,) when the dynasty of Jitarí became extinct.

The destruction of the temples at Porá is ascribed by some to an apostate bráhman of Kánoj, called PORÁ SUTHAN, or KÁLÁPAHÁB, who was compelled to embrace Muhammedanism, and at whose door the Chárdwárians and others in Assam lay all the sacrilege and mischief that has been consummated in the province. From their massive proportions, and the carving and ornaments being so much worn by time and exposure, the fanes are evidently the work of a remote era; I sought in vain for an inscription, and neither the priests of the district, nor the ancient families whom I consulted, could assist my researches, or point with an approximation to accuracy, to the date of their origin.

Unconnected with the first temple, and retired some yards deeper in the wood, or rather grove of trees, which was in likelihood planted by the priests who ministered at the temples, I found the ruins of six or seven other enormous structures of granite, broken into thousands of fragments, and dispersed over the ground in the same extraordinary manner as those already described. Altars of gigantic proportions were among the most remarkable objects: one of these measuring upwards of six feet each way, and eighteen inches thick, was elevated from seven to eight feet above the level of the plain, and approached on each side by layers of stone disposed in the nature of steps. It was hewn from a single block of granite; underneath was a sort of cavern: the top had holes for iron links, and a receptacle to receive flowers and water to bedew the Nandi or sacred bull of SIVA, who was placed, my informants imagined, on the brink of the reservoir. Six or eight other altars, one of them making a square of forty-six feet, and eighteen inches thick, are to be seen in other parts of the ruins, and several square blocks, each measuring from twenty to thirty feet, concave in the centre, and sculptured in imitation of circlets of flowers,



Site of Ruinous Temples at Poru in Chardwar



Stones 6 ins. underground and much scattered, and intended probably to complete the west side of the wall.

must have formed the Bedf or altar-place of SIVA, as there is a seat for the Ling or symbol of the deity in the middle of each.

Among the specimens of sculptured figures that fell under observation, I discerned on a portion of frieze, nine images, each about a foot high, of whom *КАНЬУТА* playing on a flute, and flanked by two *Suhelá* (damsels), were the only persons I could identify, though assisted by the priests of Chardwár. There were four figures of naked children eight inches high, that looked very much like Cupids; they were executed like the rest in basso relievo and were dancing or gambolling together in pairs, and another groupe of five figures, eight inches high, two of them in an obscene attitude, appeared like the others to have formed part of a cornice.

It will be seen from the sketch which accompanies this description, that the ruins are partly encompassed by walls, which extend in so many directions that it is scarcely possible to guess at the purpose of the architect. The walls have their foundations laid very deep in the earth: they are in an unfinished state, and were evidently constructed at a period long subsequent to the temples; they are built of massive blocks of cut stone, sometimes disposed in a double row, and exhibit a good deal of carving. The stones are of various shapes, and rise three or four feet from the ground, and were all intended to be united with bands of iron. The entrance of the principal enclosure appears to have been from the south, where lie some pedestals, and three or four wedge-shaped stones, about five feet long and three broad, of a flattened pentagonal shape, intended I presume to have formed the voussoirs of an arch; and the middle of the key-stone is decorated with a hand-some diadem or plumed tiara.

A little to the north of the wood, buried in a forest of reed grass, which an elephant penetrated with difficulty, I discovered a very interesting fragment; this was a solid mass of granite, of a much finer grain than the kind used in the temples, measuring ten and a half feet in length, two and three-quarters in breadth, and two feet in depth. On this were sculptured, in very high relief, eighteen figures of gods, partially mutilated, but generally in a good state of preservation. Fifteen of the figures correspond in size, and are each eighteen inches high, and placed lengthwise in compartments, in groupes of threes. Of these the two external groupes, and the centre one representing, I think, *PADMA'* (*LACSHMI*), supported by two females, are raised on the stone more than half a foot above the others; and again, each centre figure (*PADMA'*) of the compartments is more in relief than its fellows. The whole of the images have high cone-shaped head-dresses and ear-rings, and *PADMA'* is represented standing on a snake, and the

attendants are supported on or rising from lotos flowers. The groupes of the two divisions, which are less elevated than the others, exhibit, I believe, DURGA, flanked by LACSHMI and SARASWATI; five of these figures are crowned with a sort of tri-pointed diadem, while the sixth has a round turban or cap. One of the forms of DURGA' has the right foot on the head of the demon, while the left is twisted up at her side, and the hands are clasped over the breast, in the attitude of supplication; under the central groupe of the whole, and forming part of what may have been intended for the ornamented frieze of the temple, is a seated figure of GANESH in relief, five inches high, flanked by two other persons, one of them playing on a stringed instrument, and the other wielding a club. The lower part and sides of the block are decorated with a band of carving, showing beasts of different kinds, encircled by wreaths of flowers, in relief, and the gods are placed in scalloped arches, supported by pillars, which divide each of the images from its neighbour.

The priests are so little versed in the distinguishing characteristics of the Hindu deities, that they could not determine whom the figures were intended to represent.

Near the images are nine square pedestals of large dimensions, with three carved feet, which must have been intended to give support to as many columns: of these, several have almost disappeared in the earth; and it is likely, others are lost altogether. It shows at all events the design of the temple must have been projected on a large scale. These pedestals do not appear to have been moved from the spot where they were originally carved, and they are so little impaired by time and exposure to the elements, that I feel assured they are of modern date, compared with the buildings in the plantation and on the adjacent plains; they were, indeed, as fresh to look at as if but recently executed by the mason's chisel. Vast fragments of the epistylum and frieze, carved with beaded drapery, also lie half buried in the soil. The people at one time commenced fracturing the stones, from an idea that gold was concealed in their cavities, but desisted, on a mysterious warning of the goddess DURGA', who threatened to visit such sacrilegious attempts with death.

In the south-west angle of the Porá plains, there is another curious remnant of sculpture, also wrought from a single mass of granite, upwards of ten feet long, and two and a half feet thick at the middle; it appears to have formed the side of a gate, and has a band of carving three inches broad on each side, showing in relief elephants, tigers, deer, rams, cattle, and swans, encircled by scrolls of flowers. The stone has in all twenty-five figures of Hindu deities, disposed

cross-wise upon it; of these, the eighteen upper ones are in six rows, three of a row, and each in a separate compartment, while the centre figure is much more elevated than its fellows: they represent male and female divinities, twenty inches high; among them I recognized Hanumán. Another image has a fish's tail, and represents, I think, the Máchh Avatár or first incarnation of VISHNU, who is recorded to have appeared in the form of a fish to SATYAVRUTA, to warn him of the great flood. Several other figures are playing on stringed instruments, and the three lower ones are merely busts, with hands clasped over the breast. The lowest compartment embraces three images, of whom SIVA occupies the middle place, and is provided with a venerable flowing beard; he stands thirty inches high, and on each side of him are females, twenty-six inches high: one has been destroyed, but the other is playing on a stringed instrument, and her ears are strung with a pair of enormous circular rings. Over this compartment are two groups of dwarf figures, six inches high, in a sedentary posture, and the whole sculpture bears evident marks of having been mutilated by a barbarian hand.

No quarries were discovered, to indicate that the stones were disembowelled from the hills; but quantities of chips were seen in places; and once I came upon pillars and altars in an unfinished state, shaped from blocks of granite, on the surface of the earth; and there seems no question that all the material employed on the fabrics was similarly procured from the masses of rock that cover the hills in great abundance. Once or twice only I fell in with well-burnt bricks; they were smooth and thin, of rather a large size, but not badly shaped. Great part of these extensive ruins are buried or have sunk into the earth, and they cover altogether four or five acres of land. I have been thus particular in noticing them, because there are not, so far as I know, any architectural remains in Assam, that can challenge a comparison with them for durability of material and magnitude of design; and it is certain, from the prodigious number of ruinous and deserted temples, all of which appear to have been dedicated to SIVA, being within the circuit of a few miles of Porá (I discovered twelve or fifteen in as many days on the hills and highlands at their feet), that this spot must have been the capital of a sovereign Prince, or a principal seat of the Hindu religion, and enjoyed a large share of prosperity at some remote period*.

* The records of Assam, which I consulted, mention, that CHU CHENG PHA', the seventeenth sovereign of the Ahom dynasty, in a direct descent from CHU KA PHA', the conqueror and founder of the kingdom, being stung with remorse for the