

KHASI CALLS

AN ADVENTURE IN FRIENDSHIP

GRIFFITH J. SPARHAM

Second Edition

Edited and enlarged by

MARGARET BARR, M.A.



THE LINDSEY PRESS

14 GORDON SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1

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Miss H. K. Watts
22 MacKie Ave., Hassocks
Sussex, England

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1945

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Printed in Great Britain

CHAPTER I

AN ADVENTURE IN FRIENDSHIP

IN 1928 a Delegation from the British and Foreign Unitarian Association to the Brahma Somaj Centenary Celebrations in India visited the Unitarians of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. They found the Khasi Unitarians putting up a brave fight, but acutely conscious of their need, for a period, of experienced advice and guidance. Hajom Kissor Singh, their founder, was dead, and they were as sheep without a shepherd. The Delegation, therefore, returned to England, urgently commissioned by the Khasis themselves to secure, if possible, a temporary leader from this country.

The Rev. M. C. Ratter's departure for India, in 1930, was a first response. After eighteen months' untiring and invaluable service he was forced to bring his Indian work to an end. The terms of his appointment had included service among the Brahmans, as well as among the Khasis, and travelling over the Indian plains had, for the time being, undermined his health.

His place has been taken by the Rev. Margaret Barr, formerly of Rotherham, whose work lies principally with the Unitarians of the Khasi hill-country, where health conditions are good.

The General Assembly Council has thus committed itself to this adventure in friendship towards a people which has earnestly sought its co-operation.

The following pages give the story of Hajom Kissor Singh and the Khasi Unitarian Church largely in the words of the Rev. M. C. Ratter by reprinting two chapters from his book *Tō Nangroi*, which is out of print. They also tell, in the words of the Rev. G. J. Sparham, of Miss Barr's appointment and the region to which she has gone, and in her own words give glimpses of her early experiences in the Khasi Hills and of the progress that the work had made since 1936. We are indebted to Mr. Ratter, Mr. Sparham, and the editor of the *Inquirer* for permission to reprint this material.

CHAPTER II

THE RISE OF THE KHASI UNITARIAN UNION

THE founding of the Khasi Unitarian Union was the result of similar Unitarian ideas developing separately in the minds of two men. The greater of these two was Hajom Kissor Singh, who,

when the first Jowai Church service was celebrated on September 18th, 1887, was aged thirty-three. A man of outstanding ability and keen spiritual perception, before long his penetrating mind could not rest content with the doctrines of the orthodox Christian faith. Accordingly he sought out and made the acquaintance of a Khasi Brahmo convert from whom he learned that there was at the time a Unitarian minister working in Calcutta. He quickly put himself in touch with this man, the Rev. C. H. A. Dall, Missionary of the American Unitarian Association, who supplied him with literature, and gave him every encouragement. Writing also to the editor of the American Unitarian Magazine, Kissor Singh enlisted the sympathy of the Rev. J. T. Sunderland, who also encouraged him.

Laying aside his Calvinism, Kissor Singh rejoiced in his newly-discovered faith as one who had passed from bondage into liberty. With him conviction was action, and certainty was effort. No sooner was he himself persuaded, than he must preach the glad tidings to others. So, in a little Khasi house was born what afterwards became the Unitarian Union.

The other of these two men was the Khasi minister of the orthodox church at Nongtalang, Heh Pohlong. He also had for some time been groping his way out of the gloom of a fanatical yet nobly self-sacrificing Calvinism. He also had procured some Unitarian books, and had gathered round him a few friends, who in their own naïve way were worshipping the One True God. Before long the two men discovered each other, and found that they were kindred minds with a common loyalty, even if they did not yet know very much about the implications and principles of their newly-reached conclusions. They now, each in their own way, set about preaching their Unitarian gospel. And for a time the work steadily progressed.

The beginnings were small: truly a mustard seed. The original membership of Kissor Singh's church at Jowai was one woman and two men (this woman being the mother of two of the leading members in the present congregation). The strength of the church at Nongtalang was as small; but, as at Jowai, the group persisted, enduring "the mockery and slander of their fellow-villagers without the least shame." Whatever else can be said of it, it grew, if slowly. The leaven—or, as the orthodox said, the poison—spread.

About this time also a certain David Edwards, a Khasi worker in charge of the Raliang orthodox church, left his pastorate, as he too discovered in Unitarianism a faith to him nobler than the prevailing Calvinism. For some time he endured much hardship, as his livelihood was thus lost, but "in spite of the anxiety of his dear

wife and children he went on preaching and giving them more light and understanding of the true God." The story is told that soon after Edwards left the orthodox church, his first-born son fell seriously ill. The mother reproached the father, believing that this was a judgment upon him, saying angrily, "If your god is a truly real God, pray to him; and if our boy recovers, I will also believe." The father prayed earnestly, and an immediate cure was granted; and so the mother and members of her family repented and joined our fellowship.

Nongtalang is twenty-four miles distant from Jowai, but, very early, Kissor Singh visited the group in this village, so bringing the two churches each nearer to the other. The Jowai cause flourished exceedingly, its thirty members becoming strong enough by 1889 to build a church in the compound of Kissor Singh's house. The joy of the young congregation overflowed when the Rev. J. T. Sunderland visited them in 1896, which visit certainly contributed to the success that followed in the immediately succeeding years.

At this time the American Unitarian Women's Alliance provided a grant which enabled the Union to appoint Mr. Edwards as their minister at Nongtalang, to which work he was consecrated by the Rev. J. T. Sunderland, who also—during his two weeks in the hills—visited Raliang and Nontalang. Writing of this time in the hills he says, "A few years after Mr. Singh had begun his movement, it was my privilege to visit the hills and spend two weeks going about with him among the villages—preaching, meeting with his Sunday Schools, holding religious services in homes, forming acquaintances with the people, attending a conference of all the societies, aiding in the formation of a Khasi Hills Unitarian Union."

American generosity in these early days printed their Khasi hymn-book, in which were over one hundred Unitarian hymns, many translated by Kissor Singh. There were also three columns of appropriate readings and two columns of prayers. This was their early compass, and right well it guided them for many years. Prior to this all hymns were in manuscript, a touching illustration of zeal triumphing over poverty.

In August 1893 the Jowai church opened a free school, under a woman teacher, who started with about twenty girls and boys. Two years later the school had grown. It was by that time staffed by four teachers controlling about sixty scholars. This school gave a free elementary training in the Khasi language, and was a great benefit to the place; and it is to be deeply regretted that it closed in 1904, when Kissor Singh was transferred from Jowai to Shil-

long. Without him, however, it could not continue, and no resident Western missionary of our communion, though one had been repeatedly asked for, was there to take it on.

In November 1893 the care of the Union was transferred from America to England, as it was felt that India being British territory, the British and Foreign Unitarian Association should control it. So an English grant became the mainstay of the work; and during all this time Kissor Singh not only organised and controlled the entire work of the Khasi churches, but also attended to the duties which fell to him as a Government Surveyor.

The Jowai work flourished so greatly that in 1895 there was built on the existing church site a finer church than the structure of 1889. This site was a hillock, thirty feet high, on top of which the church stood, proudly overlooking the village. The Khasi name for this hillock was Lum-phuh-Ninh-lich or "White-haired mountain," the name arising from an old superstition that if you climbed that eminence your hair would turn white. In 1916 an attempt to fire the church of Jowai failed, but in 1918 malice succeeded only too well, and it was burned to the ground. The local people subscribed, however, and a generous contribution from Dr. Carpenter and other English friends enabled them to rebuild the existing attractive and serviceable church in 1919. The local friends built a schoolroom in 1928, but as yet it is not in use.

In 1896 the Rev. J. Harwood spent two weeks in the hills, visiting Jowai, Nongtalang, and Laban—then a mission outpost. In 1898 the Rev. Fletcher Williams spent one month, covering Mr Harwood's tracks, and also visiting Raliang. What he wrote of his visit has a bearing on present requirements: "We should continue," he said, "to give liberal help to the Unitarian Mission in the Khasi Hills. That was a spontaneous movement. It was not thrust upon the Khasi people from outside. It sprang up on the soil. It was started by two Khasi men who, able to read and speak English, were inspired by reading some American Unitarian literature circulated by the Rev. C. H. Dall."

Meantime the work was carried over hill and dale, and the many villages were not distant. Groups would go out from the centre under Kissor Singh's leadership, gather a village audience, then a service would be held. Not all this effort succeeded, but within the first decade of its history several churches were established. In 1898 small hut-churches were built at Nattiang and Mulang, but both disappeared after a three years' term. In 1896 a church at Shnonghdeag promised well, but the local leader passed away, so the whole enterprise collapsed. More successful

were the other efforts. Raliang church resulted from a mission tour of Mr. Edwards of Nongtalang in 1894, and is thriving still. By 1895 the Laban mission had established itself with a group at Laitlyngkot (later Mawpat): so that we may summarise progress by 1899 as follows:—

Jowai church	90 members:	70 average attendance		
Nongtalang church	32	28	„	„
Raliang	21	15	„	„
Laitlyngkot	20	10	„	„
Shillong	16	15	„	„
Other villages	25 members,	no meetings.		

No doubt children formed fifty per cent. of these figures, but even so it is a fine record of progress; and, whether satisfied or not, Kissor Singh must have been gratified that the work had so far developed that the Union now had two hundred members, with four full-time teachers at the village churches. This result was achieved with no Western resident to aid, counsel, or control, and one can but wistfully imagine what might have resulted had the work been taken up by America or England as it deserved. This result, too, was achieved in spite of the quite intelligible ill-favour of the orthodox missionaries, and as the Welsh mission had all the prestige of British leadership, and was then reputed to be perhaps the richest in the world, it is a lasting credit to the youthful church that it survived.

When Kissor Singh, having left Jowai, reached Shillong in 1904, he found that Unitarianism had preceded him. In 1886 a certain Robin Roy was transferred from Jowai to Shillong, but not before he had been claimed by Kissor Singh as a convert to the Unitarian faith. So he took with him a new-found enthusiasm, and tried, as early as 1893, to establish a regular congregation there. In this he succeeded to the extent that an old woman, Ka Sian Walang, a seller of tobacco-leaves, and her daughters joined—or rather, perhaps, one should say constituted the church. At this time also Ka Hirton, the one woman member of Jowai church in its early days, visited Shillong, preaching Unitarianism to the women, determined that they should adopt the new faith. This old and enthusiastic Jowai woman succeeded to the extent that she confirmed the faith of Ka Sian Walang, who was from henceforth an unwavering member.

Some years passed, U. Robin Roy and his congregation continuing faithful despite no apparent progress, when one glad day they were able to welcome to their church U. Durga Singh, the Shillong Postmaster-General, a man of fair consequence, and a

real asset to the cause. He had played with Kissor Singh as a boy, so that the old fellowship had prompted him to write for explanatory books, and thus one more was gathered to the struggling church. This recruit was welcomed into fellowship by the Rev. James Harwood, who also dedicated Bindro Singh.

Their first church was a thatched building, near to Ka Sian Walang's house, but in 1896 the congregation removed to Madan Laban, and in 1897 to the present site. Just after the foundations of the present building had been laid a great earthquake shook the entire hills, damage to Shillong proper being serious and fatal. Government buildings were destroyed, three London people were killed, while the foundations of the Unitarian church were ruined. Happily it had not affected the congregation themselves; thus before the following year the church was built, and from this time served as the centre of a movement which drew to itself a number of progressive people.

Now that the Shillong church was well established, it set out to create sister churches, and establish in the faith those already existing. In the early days of U. Robin Roy's work some tobacco traders coming to the weekly Shillong markets were in the habit of staying over-night at the house of Ka Sian Walang, returning to their village the next day; and what did she do but convert them to Unitarianism, so that by 1893 there were at least fifteen members at Laitlyngkot, who all, in 1903, moved to Mawpat, where a tin-roofed church was built, which still stands. As the village is only four miles from the Laban church, it is a common practice to hold services on alternate Sundays in the two churches.

Before 1904, when Kissor Singh was transferred from the Jaintia Hills to the Khasi Hills, the Jaintia churches, having benefited from his inspiration, were much stronger than those in the Khasi region; but his presence in Shillong so built up the movement there that henceforth it took an unquestionable lead.

One of his first ventures after this transfer resulted in a thatched church at Tynring, which continued for some time. A new church was built in 1927, with corrugated-iron roof, but it never grew strong. The visits of the Rev. D. Edwards and Kissor Singh to Mawpdang, however, led to the conversion of three households, which seed flowered into a nicely built church in 1910. In this year there was rather a sudden break-away of members from the orthodox church at Puriang, which enabled the local Unitarian nucleus to build a straw-thatched church. At first the promise of a strong congregation seemed assured, some sixty joining from the other church, but the work soon settled down to more normal dimensions, and steady development began.

Coming to more recent times, the propaganda efforts at Shillong led to the conversion from the Khasi religion of four people at Nongthymmai, and the nucleus being effectively guided, in 1922 a church was built. Perhaps one of the most intriguing developments was the Umkhrymi church, which was established because Kissor Singh, an enthusiastic sportsman, went down into this game-abounding district and, unable to forget his other enthusiasm, converted his Shikari; so was established another congregation, meeting in a light bamboo structure. The natives of this district are not Khasis but Bhois, members of a tribe whose development is still very primitive.

The work of a church must not be measured entirely in terms of increasing membership. The care of the flock within the fold may be as important as the attempt to get more of the ninety-and-nine from outside. During the three decades of the twentieth century the Khasi and Jaintia churches have continued their unobtrusive work, the common work of all churches everywhere. They have dedicated the children, helped each other, and their own members, when in difficulties, sung lustily their ever-increasing collection of hymns, worshipped Sunday by Sunday, with two week-night meetings to bridge the interval (because Sundays are so far apart when one is keen) and, last grace of all, they have said Farewell to their leaders, as, one by one, they relinquished their labours and left the burden to fall on younger men. In 1897 U. Heh Pohlong, in 1906 Durgan Singh, in 1907 Robin Roy, in 1916 the wife of Kissor Singh, in 1922 the Rev. David Edwards, and in 1923 Kissor Singh himself, all leaders of the heroic days, passed singly to their rest. For over fifty years the Union has persisted, giving its members the inspiration of a religion which has not the fear of the old Khasi belief, nor the strangeness of Welsh orthodoxy; and has thus rendered a noble service, teaching a faith of joy and light: revealing—as I find it put in their first hymn—God as our Father and Mother, loving and merciful, quick to forgive, and life here as but the beginning of a great adventure, the higher reaches of which lie in the world beyond.

An intellectual fashion is not yet in their midst. They have so little education. The progress of mankind is there for them when they are able to appreciate its meaning. They are a simple people: simple in both their joys and their sorrows. Their leader was so far ahead of them that they hardly yet know the value of the heritage he left. But if that be so, history requires that mention be made of the unpleasant as well as of the agreeable, and it must be admitted that the Khasi Union has had its quarrels. Often it is

surprising that in religious communities there should be so much quarrelling, and of course it is to be deeply regretted. As often as not someone's wounded pride is the cause of stumbling. At other times jealousy lies at the root of the trouble. But, on the other hand, not all religious quarrels are unworthy; for not infrequently they rise from the fact that in religious men feelings run deep and strong. A cinema audience is not so likely to quarrel as a congregation, just because the former has no serious concern, whereas the latter are dealing with matters of life and death. In the two serious Khasi quarrels, at any rate, little-minded men and big issues were inextricably mixed together.

The immediate cause was the money which came in support of the work from England. America contributed from 1892 to 1895, England from 1896 to 1908. Just before the close of this period Kissor Singh asked London to vest the control of its grant in the Rev. N. Chakrabarty—the Brahmo Samaj missionary in charge of Brahmo work in a distant part of the hills. This raised a storm of protest. Why? The details are not clear. London, knowing little of the situation, may be excused for feeling that in the circumstances no further grants should be made. Payments were stopped, but not before the movement was badly affected. In two places there were two and even three divisions of the Unitarian church. As a result they lost the help so much needed, and, what was more serious, divided their own ranks. Not till 1924 was this schism healed.

If only people would study—and learn from—history! But movements other than the Khasi Church reflect a weakness here. In any case, the second quarrel was more to be excused than the first one, the subject of controversy being that disciplinary action should follow a serious adultery case. This division did not last so long as the other, and after a little time the gentlemen in the case joined the orthodox Church!

But the loss of the foreign grant was a serious blow to the Khasi cause, as it meant the dismissal of all village workers, and it is not too much to say that the work suffered irreparable damage. It is to be hoped that we of the present generation will learn the lesson. The hill folk, above all the Khasi Unitarians, are far too poor to maintain any teachers of their own, as against the work subsidised by the Welsh mission. This activity of the Welsh is so admirably organised, withal so helpful, that no purely native enterprise could possibly compare with it in efficiency or strength. Were all aid withdrawn from Welsh Methodist, Church of England, Roman Catholic and Church of God churches, our Unitarian communities would flourish as a green bay tree; but they

cannot possibly, in their own strength, counter such trained opposition: it is to expect David without a sling to kill Goliath.

True, the village teachers neither were, nor are, remarkably efficient, but, after all, a mere drop of oil does give at least a flicker of light. Even this went out, however, in the village pulpits after the grant was withdrawn. The central churches were not so much affected, but the villages were left stranded altogether. Fortunately the American Unitarian Women's Association renewed the grant in 1924, but the sixteen barren years between did lasting harm.

The Census gives the Union a sentence which shows that, in spite of all its setbacks, it now has taken its place in the life of the people. Since 1908 its anniversary date (September 18th) has been gazetted, which means that any Government official who is a Unitarian is entitled to the day as holiday. It is, if less officially, recognised by the other churches as a movement of great interest, while they pay it the compliment of studying its Service-book as a model.

CHAPTER III

THE GREATNESS OF HAJOM KISSOR SINGH

"A REMARKABLE man—modest, unselfish, unknown to the world, but courageous, indomitable, and, as a pioneer of Unitarianism, great," this memorial sentence tells the greatness of one almost unknown to our home community, yet deserving of great fame. His work in building up the Khasi Unitarian Union has been told. Now we ask, What of the man? only wishful that one of his spiritual sons should write what would be an inspiring and touching story.

His father, Bor Singh, was engaged by the Government as Sergeant of Police at Jowai, this making it clear that the family were advanced far beyond the normal Khasi home at that early time. This position would enable the father to give his sons the higher education of which they both made such exceptional use; so much so, indeed, that both rose to great eminence.

Born June 15th, 1865, the boy, Hajom, was given the education then available at the mission school, which has trained scholars up to matriculation standard. In his case there is no need to regret that he did not proceed further towards a University degree, for it is difficult to imagine that he could have achieved more than he did. Learning to read and write, acquiring the technique

of self-education, what mattered the degrees? All that was essential he grasped, and, best of all, the sacred fire burned strong within.

If any of the Welsh missionaries should be tempted to regret when they recall that he drew after him many of their own persuasion; if they should feel what a wonderful instrument he would have been for the service of God within their own Church; if they opine that Welsh sacrifice and devotion, having given his race great benefits, deserved the reward of his later service; if they are aghast that the faith to which he drew his followers was what their ardent piety must regard as nigh to blasphemy, let them be patient, realising that God's ways are not our ways, and that when charity is in the minds of all, Kissor Singh will be the chief of those who proclaim the greatness of their work. It was natural that one missionary, perhaps secretly disappointed over so great a loss to their own mission, should say to me on one occasion, "These people do love to take a leading position, so he left us." But it was not intelligent or generous. Thus Catholic narrowness explains Luther and the Reformation.

Trained in a Methodist mission school, where there is no special "Law" for religious instruction, it was natural that the cygnet amongst the ducklings should find himself moving with ease on the breast of deep waters. He was an apt pupil, especially in religious matters. God had made him for Himself, nor was he to find rest till he discovered the One True God. Imbibing from his tutors their devotion of spirit, if casting aside the letter of their belief, he loved to study the Bible, inquiring into all doctrines! He was such a pupil as delights the heart of the teacher, even if in later life he disappoints expectations.

At fifteen years of age he was converted to the Calvinistic faith, about that time gaining a scholarship which took him from the elementary to the High Grade School. When compelled to leave school, his father's influence had him appointed as "bugle," but soon we find that he went out to help the survey parties then sent out by Government. From this time his rise was rapid, and also well merited. When only twenty-two he held a responsible Government position, already "supporting his mother, brother, and wife."

So keen was his study of religion that he was accustomed every spare moment to retire to a neighbouring wood, that in silence and with Nature he might study the Bible, or other devotional book. On a hillock near to the present church he had made for himself a quiet sanctuary, where he would always be found if not at home or in the office. One afternoon he was paid his monthly salary.

Resorting as usual to his "azure walled retreat," he laid his pay envelope on the ground and was soon lost in study. In meditative mood he returned home, and retired to bed, only to wake about midnight remembering that his pay envelope still lay on the grass. He dressed hastily, lit a storm-lantern, and went out to recover his wages. Fortunately they were still there undisturbed! Such absorption cannot but take a man far along the road of its interests; and Kissor Singh was no exception to the rule.

Till the age of twenty-five he remained a questioning member of the orthodox Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church, his doubts ever increasing: say rather, his vision of a noble faith becoming ever more bright. At this time a Khasi Brahma convert told him of the Unitarian minister, the Rev. C. H. A. Dall, then working in Calcutta, to whom he wrote, obtaining with others a copy of Channing's works. And now the great American, still speaking, called one more disciple, and one of whom he might be proud. This book, and what it showed, was indeed his vision of the burning bush. Henceforth his life was dedicated to the redemption of his people from the superstitious bondage which held them in slavery, and from now on his biography is the story of the Unitarian Union which he built. In 1893 he studied theology under the postal guidance of Miss Emily Sharpe, but even before this he would have called himself a "Unitarian Atheist," accustomed to the abuse of his orthodox friends, who called him an Atheist, and an "enemy of the Lord."

His ordinary work was that of Government surveying, which he must have carried out efficiently, as later we find him occupying almost as high a post in Government service as was open to Khasis at the time. In 1902 he was transferred from Jowai to Shillong, then engaged as Diwan (Regent) of the Khyrim State, a position of some consequence, which helped to give him the modest wealth he acquired. This was a temporary appointment, and in 1903 he reverted to ordinary Government service, taking a post as head clerk in the Deputy Commissioner's Office, which he held till retirement in 1922. During all this time he built up the Unitarian Church, which entailed constant labour.

One or two little extras in his life illustrate his many-sidedness. He was an amateur medicine-dealer, always keeping a stock of drugs and medicines for the help of those in need. Freely he gave of his skill and substance that the suffering might be alleviated and the poor helped. For many years he was on the board of directors of a local Khasi bank which paid good dividends. Then, too, he would on occasion buy a house, or land, as opportunity offered a bargain. After his transfer to Shillong, some places

which were to be sold were considered demon-haunted, and therefore no Khasi would dream of buying them. Kissor Singh's scepticism in the matter of demons, accordingly, had now a financial value! He purchased the plots quite cheaply. Then, too, his Shillong house was built so high up one of the surrounding hill-sides that no council water-supply was available. He thereupon instructed a clever engineer, U. Konjro, to erect a pump which forced the water up to a tank; and from this he was able to supply the houses in the vicinity at a nominal charge. He was no grasping money-maker, but just a natural genius, able to triumph in every situation. At this time U. Konjro established an up-to-date engineering shop, the only one in the town, and to this day he pays testimony to the help which Kissor Singh rendered by way of suggestion and advice. He was a good sportsman, thoroughly enjoying a big-game hunt.

Though in mid-career a man of modest wealth as Khasi standards go, he was never ostentatious, never attempted to "dress" his children, that their frippery might advertise parental success. Though his family was large, as is common in the hills, consisting of six sons and five daughters, his home life was quiet; he being particularly happy in his wife, who was described to me as "the mother of the Union." In appearance Kissor Singh, like the Khasis generally, was of short stature, square features and yet of a pleasing mien. As I look on his photos I seem to see a country gardener who can raise better vegetables than "anyone else, come these twenty miles round."

So true is it of every religious genius that it hardly requires mention—he was, as they all are, humble of spirit; with that gracious personality which readily gains the affection of others, he was loved by his many followers. Then, too, he had the power of leadership, able to inspire the young to give their generous impulses full control. But it was always "Follow me," never "Go thou." If there was a fifteen-mile hill trek to evangelise a distant village, or a twenty-mile trek to encourage a weak congregation, Kissor Singh was leader of the party, walking all the way. He knew that a lone visit from himself was of little account, so he gathered as many as possible to form a singing party. Then when Sunday morning came, off would tramp the entire group, that a good service might be ensured. So was built up our Khasi Union.

These heroic days are a pleasant memory to the now older members, and a testimony to his influence. It is remarkable that he was able to inspire these young men to do such work even when he left them orphaned. They all, these his children born of

the spirit, speak of him as would a father tell his own boy stories of the beloved and honoured parent he once knew. There is just the suggestion of awe when they refer to him that tells of his spiritual power. How often they went with him on these long treks, sharing the simple rice meals, pleased if there were any recent successes to record!

For over thirty years a total hill congregation of from two hundred to four hundred looked to him as their mitreless Bishop: he was their father-in-God, and so they revered him. During all those years he visited the sick, sympathised with the mourners, dealt gently with the wayward, encouraged the promising, dedicated the children, welcomed the converts, conducted services over the dead, led the family memorials, preached to the congregations Sunday by Sunday, catechised the inquirers as often as their enthusiasm brought them to church or house, watched over the finances and business control, and kept in touch with America and England—all this was his labour, a labour of love.

This was not achieved without opposition, ridicule, and disappointment; but we do not draw back the curtain of time that screens it now from sight; believing with Browning, that when, after long years, a life-work is reviewed, the evil fades into the good, and the weed is lost in the beauty of the distant landscape, we are content to leave such things obscure. And yet he had many disappointments, bitter hours; and, it may be, his saddest thought was that other—Western—Unitarians did not send him a teacher to help him in his work.

There is a photograph of him with some hundred of his congregation. It is a conference; and they are all in their Sunday clothes. He sits a little before them all, patient gardener that he is, with his many flowers. On either side of him are two little boys, one with a cap that is much too big for him. The photograph in his life-work gathered into a happy fellowship. One of the attractive teachings of the Catholic Church is that no priest enters heaven or hell alone. Clinging to the happier side of this, if it be as Swedenborg imagined, that we are all gathered into communities of the like-minded, then it will prove that in the Unitarian vicinage Kissor Singh will have a large and eager following.

Twilight did not bring the day of Kissor Singh's life to a beautiful and appropriate close. It ended rather in storm and calamity, and he sank into unconsciousness without the family circle which makes the passing light. Having travelled to Calcutta over Christmas 1915, he was distressed, there, to learn that his wife lay seriously ill. He returned immediately to Shillong, but it was only

to be near her as she died in childbirth. Shortly after the infant too died. This prostrating grief did not, however, prevent his concluding arrangements that his youngest son be sent to America to train for the ministry, that he might continue his work; and it was a grief to the stricken father to part with his bright fifteen-year-old boy, though, for the sake of his education, and the future work, he let him go.

A few months after the boy had left, the distressing news came that the most promising of his daughters, sent to Calcutta for higher education, was seriously ill. She was the daughter of his affection, but at that distance the father could do nothing, and illness claimed her as its victim. While she was dying, her brother was returning from War service in Mesopotamia, and scarcely had he been home three months when he too died. This would surely seem enough sorrow for a lifetime; but the year was not ended when a household accident led to an appalling catastrophe: his eight-year-old boy was burned to death—the oil lamp had overturned.

And even yet the worst was still to come; hardly had the pierced heart ceased to bleed because of this fierce anguish than, before another year had passed, his eldest daughter was carried off by fatal illness. She had been happily married to U. Konjro, thus making of the engineer a son-in-law, as well as son in the faith. Well might it be thought that Job could suffer no more, but it was not so. At this time his boy, sent to America, lost himself in that strange new world, carefully avoiding all his friends who would have done all they could to serve him. The father never heard of his boy thereafter, mourning now the loss of a prodigal where he had hoped for a worthy successor. So the fateful unseen messengers left him prostrate; yet, despite all, he continued his religious work. But now the leafless, stricken tree only waited the woodman's axe. Just after sunrise on November 13th, 1923, pneumonia preventing his giving a parting message to one of his spiritual sons, he passed into the nearer presence.

Kissor Singh was not only a man of action, but also a writer. He was aptly styled by a Welsh missionary the "star of the Khasis." When he commenced his work, the education of the Khasis in reading was but thirty years old. It was only in his father's time that the missionaries had given the people an alphabet. In consequence there was practically no literature in the vernacular written by Khasis. Welsh zeal had translated what was necessary for elementary education, and particularly for religious use; but of ordinary writing there was none. So it must be

placed to his credit that very early he helped to give this people a literature. He ranks with the first pioneers who created a Khasi literary style.

He and his brother were evidently both gifted with literary power, as the brother, U. Nissor Singh, prepared a Khasi-English Dictionary (in which labour Hajom Kissor Singh helped), the first of its kind to be so full and scholarly, wherein are seven thousand two hundred Khasi words with their English equivalents. U. Nissor Singh was also deputy school-inspector, and remained a member of the orthodox Church, though Kissor Singh had the joy of welcoming his father into the fellowship of the new Unitarian Union. For many years, too, Kissor Singh was co-editor of a Khasi monthly.

To describe Kissor Singh's literary work is to describe the Unitarian service-book, which more than anything, has contributed to the permanence of the Union itself. Without this book I am confident the work would have lapsed at his death, perhaps much earlier, but it continues even yet strong in its own way. The value of this service-book is the value that attaches to all service-books: it eliminates the ignorance or idiosyncrasy of the preacher. He may say what he likes during the sermon, but during the service he must tread in the footsteps of the master-mind. Particularly with the type of leader available in the remote villages, this is an inestimable blessing, for, granted they at least can read, the people have beautiful thoughts, finely expressed. Then, too, with people so illiterate or little educated as is the average Khasi congregation, it is advisable that they should be familiar with the form of worship.

The more I get to know the service-book the more I am filled with admiration for the genius of its author. It is a unique and truly great achievement, providing for nearly all occasions, and being the sure foundation on which the Union is built. There must have been behind it months—no, years—of labour, and of penetrating foresight, which realised beforehand the needs of such a movement, aiding wise erudition to choose aright. Just consider the situation. Here was a man born of a race still only rising out of animism, "a government euphemism which covers a crude demonology." He goes to school for eleven or twelve years, and not only absorbs Christianity, but both absorbs it and casts away dogmatic accretions; then, studying all available Unitarian liturgies (and how many else I do not know), himself creates a service-book which, were it translated from its native tongue, no Western congregation need be ashamed to use, and we might indeed study with profit!

The copy which lies before me is a neatly bound, purple-covered volume, four by seven inches in size, of 432 pages, clearly printed. I wish that more were available, as congregations appear to be unable to provide one for each worshipper, so that it is common to see many—even of those who are able to read—without a book. Perhaps the price, three shillings, is too high. The title-page, ornamented with a little oakleaf woodcut, reads:—

Ki Sarvis:
lane
Ki Rukom Mane Lang
jong
Ka Seng lang Mane-wei Blei Unitarian
Ri-Khasi bad Ri-Jaintia
da
U. Hajom Kissor Singh
revised de
H. D. Bindro Singh
1928

The Services
or manner of communal worship
of that Society worshipping One
God. The Khasia and Jaintia
Hills Unitarian Union.

Much surprised to discover all so well arranged, we find that there are seven orders of Service to cover such occasions as the following: the customary Sunday worship; Sunday School; house-meeting; children's meeting; house consecration; young people's service; memorial service; burial service. He has not left them guideless, but has rather given a suggested order of service for every occasion—which is strictly followed even now. As followed at every church service the order is, by now, silent prayer, introductory reading, hymn, responses, Lord's Prayer and responses, extemporary prayer, sermon, hymn, prayer, hymn, Benediction with response, silent prayer. Certainly a well-thought-out and commendable order of worship.

After the Lord's Prayer has been reverently repeated by all, they continue standing, while their leader calls, "O God, open thou our eyes"; the people speaking their response, "That we may see thy holy faith, that it is more precious than all earthly things."

"O God, open thou our lips."



MISS BARR AND AIMILDA, YOUNGEST GRAND-DAUGHTER OF
HAJOM KISSOR SINGH



THE LADY REID SCHOOL, SHILLONG
Opened by Lady Reid, March 7th, 1942



THE FIRST SCHOOL PLAYGROUND, LABAN
Memorial to Hajom Kissor Singh in background



MOHUN ROY, LEADER OF THE UMKHYRMIE
CHURCH



DANIEL S. LAMIN, 1939, AGED 11

"That we may honour thy holy name, here, now, in our home, in all places and at all times."

"Holy, Holy, Holy, art thou, God, mighty Lord, who art now and will be, for ever and ever."

To this the last response comes very beautifully: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill to men."

For the children is a grace before and after meals. In the earlier days this was much followed, particularly by the orthodox, as this story proves. At the taking of the census one Christian woman returned her six-year-old boy as an "animist." Asked why she had not entered the boy as a Christian, she explained that the little rascal was so greedy that he could not wait to say grace before meals! The children's night prayer to follow the Lord's Prayer is likewise beautiful and simple:—"O God, before I sleep I thank you; and give my thoughts to your keeping, now and always. Amen." They also have a prayer written for them to be said silently before and after the meeting. I rather think that the little rascals do not say it! Once, after the leader had said Amen, one little boy remained on his knees for very long, but it was not piety: it was merely sleep.

The order of service planned for the several occasions is somewhat similar. After the first or second hymn there is always a reading taken from the selection printed within their service-book. I regret that they do not use the Bible, but adhere always to their own selection of readings. Probably, however, they have not yet the training which enables them to appreciate the worthy portions, and if their leaders have, with misguided enthusiasm, ever tried to read the Bible through, we can understand that they prefer to keep to their own list of well-chosen readings. Yet it is a great loss that they do not use more of the New Testament than they do.

There are forty-three readings given, averaging one page in length, all selected and translated by Kissor Singh. A number of readings are scripture-verses put into a brief anthology; other readings are taken from Martineau's Ten Services, the English S.S.A. Hymnal, the Boston U.S.S. Service, R. C. Jones' Book of Prayer, Unity Services, and one long translation from Emerson. The whole selection, and the Response-Services which follow, testify to Kissor Singh's range of knowledge in the matter of liturgies, for it is clear that he must have ranged over all available service-books. This is even more evident when we look at the twenty-seven responses which he translated, or himself composed. These are nearly all taken from the books already mentioned. One, for example (and this is one that is popular and often

chosen), is based on the Beatitudes, Psalms 131, 118, 107, 100, 67. The more one hears of these services the more one is impressed with the fact that the service-book which Singh gave them is the rock foundation on which the fabric of their church is built.

As their actual order of worship has been elsewhere described, we need not linger, but may pass on to look at what else is bound within the two covers of their service-book, interested to read "Ka Kot Jinglylli Balyngkot: shaphang ka Niam-U-Blei." ("The book of short questions about the faith in God.") This is a most admirable catechism of one hundred and two questions, divided into five sections, the first four of which are by U. Robin Roy. The first section deals with the doctrines about God: Does He see us? Where is He? Answered in quotations from the Psalms. Following the attributes we turn to the media of His self-manifestation, and are told that our own spirit, our parents and friends, the teachings of Jesus and all holy men, the Bible and all religious books—indeed many things in heaven and on earth—reveal Him to us; and that His chief commandments are that we love Him and our fellow-men.

Our duties to God open the second section, where also prayer is defined. Duties to our neighbours and others constitute the third section; and if children can be trained to act as the answers here suggest, their lives will indeed be universally admired. Particularly does one appreciate the teaching that they should defer to their elders and be considerate when others younger than themselves are present.

The section on "Duties to Ourselves" opens with a definition of conscience and an encouragement to study. One or two of the items of advice given here are mildly amusing: do not walk in front of your elders; if you must pass say, "Excuse me"; do not rush about; do not stare at people; when sitting by a stranger's fire do not sit straddle-legged; do not touch a stranger's cooking-pots; do not wear another's clothes without permission; never put out the tongue as a mark of disrespect; never pol-pry. There is some admirable health advice, with details as to the right conduct appropriate at meetings.

"Section 5" is a well-informed catechism on Sin and Salvation, written, as we can well understand, by Kissor Singh. There are sins of omission and commission, many of which are considered. Conscience is more fully studied. The more common sins—pride, jealousy, anger, evil companions—are detailed, appropriate advice being given: when you are about to speak angrily, count twenty, then speak. A doctrine of spiritual presences is inculcated but the Devil is denied; conscience is made much of, and it is

taught that sin is a poison which kills even while the person lives. Repentance is fully considered and defined. Salvation is defined as "escape from the inner slavery of sin, vice, and superstition with progress of the soul to righteousness conscious always of God's abiding fellowship." Hell is "the bitterness of the soul which hath sinned." Heaven is "that holy state free from sin and vicious desire, in which peaceful life the soul rests trustfully in God."

So excellent is the section that it even considers if an evil man would be happy in heaven, answering that, as day and night are both dark to a blind man, so also to the sinful. Kissor Singh's closing questions give the five stages of life, teaching that as the boy must create a noble-minded youth, so the youth must create the respected man. Time which is lost can never be recovered; wasted manhood brings a foolish old age. All of this, and much else, is put into question and answer, easy to understand and learn. I know of no such Catechism current in our English movement. Though one regrets that this Catechism is not now taught to the Khasi children as it should be, one realises that it is partly because they lack adequate and efficient teachers. There is nothing here that the child would ever need to unlearn, so liberal is the theology, so enlightened the instruction. The latest edition has some questions without the answer. When I asked him why, the Editor, U. Bindro Singh, explained that this made the people think out the particular answer possible, in the light of previous answers.

Their hymn-book of two hundred and thirty-eight hymns, written in nearly all possible metre variations, is a hymn collection from which any church could sing with pride and fervour. One thing which justifies the Unitarian community at home is its poetical hymn-book. This is also true of the Khasi Union. Most of their hymns are from our own American and British hymnals, otherwise they are original compositions. If they have taken an orthodox hymn they do not hesitate to alter it: the last line of the hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy," instead of running, "God in three persons, blessed Trinity," goes, "Perfect in love and holiness and power."

To detail all the hymns they sing, known to us, is unnecessary. Their tunes, too, are familiar, as the Welsh missionaries have taught them these. Khasis are very quick, and have learned tunes from all their visitors in turn, so that now they can sing almost any hymn a visitor may choose. But that their singing drags (often slower than even German singing), one might imagine oneself to be listening to an English congregation. To realise that Kissor Singh again built up this collection is once more to appreciate

his genius, for of the two hundred hymns, seventy-four are his original compositions, while many others are his translation of our Western hymns.

As an illustration of his adroit use of uncommon metres, here is his version of the old Khasi national song, sung in ancient times to a monotonous chant, but now put to a metre with which we are familiar.

O God, thy blessing send
On Khasi and Synteng;
Watch over us.
Thy peace upon our land,
We all as brothers stand,
Awaiting thy command;
Watch over us.

Destroy all noxious sin,
Plant right and truth within;
Watch over us.
Justice in every heart,
Our kings and headmen guard,
That they the right reward;
Watch over us.

Destroy all worships vain,
Error and darkness chain;
Watch over us.
The ancient, thus expelled,
On mountain, hill, and feld,
Be truth the one thing held;
Watch over us.

CHAPTER IV

HOW MISS BARR WENT TO THE KHASHI HILLS

WHEN the Rev. Magnus Ratter was on the eve of his departure for India, he said, on the occasion of his farewell meeting at Essex Hall, that the "true missionary, unlike himself, was not sent, but went." Strictly speaking, that is not so, since the very word "missionary" means, precisely, one who is sent. But, in spirit, Mr. Ratter was right. The true missionary, as Polhill-Turner, one of the Cambridge seven, once said, is a person "who gets there somehow."

And in that sense, if ever there was a true missionary, it is Mr. Ratter's successor, the Rev. Margaret Barr.

Miss Barr went to India, in 1933, entirely on her own initiative. Her special qualifications, as a Unitarian minister who was also a trained teacher, secured her the post of Religious Instructor in the Gokhalé Memorial Girls' School, Calcutta, an educational institution in which Brahmo Somaj influence is very strong.

Her heart, however, was in the Khasi Hills, and she had not been long in India before she seized an opportunity, offered by a vacation, to visit the Unitarian Churches of the Khasi and Jaintia district; and no sooner did she and the Khasi Unitarians establish contact than it became obvious that she was the proper—indeed the only possible—successor to Mr. Ratter.

Accordingly, Miss Barr was cordially appointed at the October meeting of the General Assembly Council, in 1934, as its agent in the Khasi Hills, as from the summer of 1935. At the urgent request of the Gokhalé School authorities, however, she continued her work there until the end of 1935, proceeding to the Khasi Hills early in 1936. The Assembly therefore now commends her to the Churches and Sunday Schools of Britain and the Overseas Dominions, as their "hand of help" to their fellow-Unitarians in India, and hopes for the fullest sympathy and support in this venture of faith and friendship.

It is peculiarly fitting that we should be represented by a woman in the Khasi region, because among the Khasis, to an extent rarely found in India, women hold a place of predominance and honour.

For two years the India sub-committee had been preparing plans, but always it ran up into a dead-end on the question, "But where is the man?"

And, all the time, while it was looking for "the man" in one direction, a woman was "getting there somehow" in another.

That is how Miss Barr got to the Khasi Hills. Let us now remind ourselves of a few details regarding her sphere of work.

CHAPTER V

THE KHASHI UNITARIANS—THEIR COUNTRY, PEOPLE, AND CHURCH

THE Khasi country lies at a distance of about 350 miles by rail from Calcutta. From the foothills one proceeds by car up the great motor road that leads to Shillong. Shillong has no railway and only three roads: one from the north through Gauhati, one from Sylhet in the south through Jaintiapore, and one from Shillong to Cherrapunji, where it comes to a dead-end at the brink

of the precipice where the Khasi Hills overlook the flooded plains of Assam and N.E. Bengal. Cherrapunji enjoys the doubtful distinction of being the wettest place in the world: The average rainfall in Surrey is approximately 27 inches, in the Lake District about 115 inches, in Cherrapunji not less than 448 inches, in the year.

Shillong is a lovely spot. If we arrive in spring it is a blaze of beautiful flowers. In all times of the year it is a garden. Firs, oaks, and fruit-trees cover the hillsides, in complete contrast to the weary sun-baked plains 5,000 feet below.

The people who live there are pleasant, short, wiry and active. Most of them are dark, like Indians. Some, however, are fairer in complexion, and resemble, to some extent, the Chinese, to whom they are akin, and the border of whose country is not very far away.

The houses of the ordinary people are low, oval, grass-thatched cottages, each with a little porch, but entirely innocent of windows or chimneys, and often far from comfortable from a Western point of view. This is the general rule, though at Shillong we may see houses built more after the Western manner. In these the wealthier Khasis and the foreign residents live.

Here too, as elsewhere in the Hills, are churches—very simple structures for the most part, as judged by Western standards; but churches nevertheless, and most of them well attended. And here and there are little churches, owned and maintained entirely by Khasis, often very poor in this world's goods and very conscious of their need of a helping hand from abroad. These are those of our own household of faith.

When one arrives in the Khasi Hills, one's immediate impression is that of a merry, attractive, lovable people, possessed of a strong sense of sturdy independence. They love laughter and singing, and easily pick up, and delight in, Western tunes.

The common attitude of resident Europeans towards the Khasis is one of admiration, and the character of the people is one that deserves respect. The Khasi temper is kindly, genial, almost childlike, and remarkably responsive to fair treatment, but very manly and independent, and if treated unjustly, almost fiercely resentful, until the rightful balance of things has been restored. The Khasi is on top of life; freedom and generosity are in his bones.

And what of Khasi customs? Many of them are exceedingly interesting and attractive. Outstanding among them is the distinctive place that is held by women. Women among them have a position that is almost unique in India. They are more than

the equals of the men. For instance, inheritance is through the woman. It comes through the mother and the youngest daughter. Again, marriage is not arranged by parents, as in other parts of India, but is left to the choice of the contracting parties; and after marriage the bridegroom, instead of taking his bride away to become a member of his family, will generally go to live in the house of the bride's mother. These are customs that arise from the simple nature of Khasi society. They give woman a great place.

This does not, however, mean that the men are lacking in virility. Their love of sport is very great. Favourite among such sport is archery, and in the past archery meetings were frequent, and offered occasions for much feasting and merriment. Two teams were formed, generally from neighbouring villages, a money-pledge was given by the contesting parties, and each side was cheered on to glory and honour by its womenkind. The losing side forfeited its pledge to the winners. To-day football is a favourite game. It is played with bare feet. How the players contrived to kick the ball without breaking the joints of their bare toes it is hard to imagine, but they will play teams wearing boots, and sometimes win.

All Khasi customs and beliefs, however, are not so pleasing. Especially was this so in the past. Excessive drunkenness was not uncommon, and although monogamy was universal, marriage was held in light regard, and divorce was readily sought and obtained. Nevertheless, to marry a widow was not thought well, because it was supposed that a widow who had remarried would always walk in the next world with the husband who had first left her a widow, so that any succeeding husband would have to walk at her heels like a dog!

The old religion of the Khasis, too, often tended to excite feelings of fear and cruelty rather than any higher emotion. True, they believed in the existence of U Blei Nongthaw, God the Creator, but he seemed a remote being, hence their belief in his mere existence did not much affect their thoughts and life. They also believed in good spirits, but as they had nothing to fear from good spirits, they felt they could be safely ignored. Religion, therefore, for them meant, primarily, the placation of bad spirits, with all that that involves in the way of witchcraft and magic.

The worst of their beliefs and practices in this connection concerned the "thlen," or serpent, which, it was believed, lived in the Cherra Cave, 3,000 feet deep, and devoured half the number of every party that passed his lair. This gave rise to a practice known as "thlen-murder." In order to placate the thlen, a man,

having fortified himself with very strong liquor, would set out, carrying a club, a pair of scissors, a silver lancet and a small bamboo vessel in which to receive the blood. A victim was found, knocked on the head and killed, the nails cut, and blood, drawn from the nostrils and mouth, then offered to the thlen. Since the thlen was invisible, he might be anywhere, and was therefore a possible cause of any evil that befell. Through sheer fear, therefore, should evil befall, any man might think it advisable to become a thlen-murderer. Many innocent people were thus murdered in cold blood by reason of a purely superstitious belief.

Such was Khasi life when Christianity found it; a great mixture of good and bad. Since 1841, when the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church (now known as the Welsh Presbyterian Church) Mission was established, these hills have known Christianity mainly in two forms, Roman Catholic and Calvinistic Protestant. Even in these forms Christianity did, and is doing, much to help the Khasi people. Many old and bad customs have been abandoned, respect for marriage has been enhanced, drunkenness has diminished, old fears have been removed, and many humanitarian services, notably those of medicine and education, have been introduced. But with the founding of the Unitarian Movement in 1887 something new came into the religious life of the Khasis. For the first time they were given a glimpse of religion freed from the bonds of fear.

During the life of Hajom Kissor Singh the movement grew, until, before his death, he had established no fewer than ten churches, with a definite membership of not less than five hundred adult persons. These ten churches he organised into a Unitarian Union, which meets regularly, and is active in promoting the welfare of its constituent bodies. It has its Young People's Committee, nor is it lacking in missionary incentive. Some of the original churches have died out and others have come into being during the years since the death of Hajom Kissor Singh. In 1943 the list of churches contained sixteen names, but most of these were small and a few almost non-existent, and the total number of adult members probably not greater than during the lifetime of the founder. The only church that has grown and flourished consistently is the one at Jowai which has been fortunate in having as its leader one of the ablest and most faithful of the early converts, Mr. Kat Sergeant, for many years secretary of the Union, and always one of its most trustworthy leaders.

What was to be the future of this courageous little movement? Whence was it to get the new life and encouragement, and above all the competent leadership, that were essential if it was ever to

become the power for good that its founder hoped and intended? And who else could do the work of liberating the Khasi mind from the fears implanted first by their old religion and subsequently by the Calvinism which they called Christianity? These were the questions that presented themselves insistently to Miss Barr and demanded to be answered.

On her first visit she became convinced that the primary need was for trained and educated leaders, and subsequent experience has served only to confirm this judgment. But as all the existing Khasi schools were Mission schools, preoccupied with the teaching of creeds and dogmas, where was a liberal education to be procured for Khasi boys and girls and especially for those who were destined to be leaders in the Unitarian Church? Nowhere, under existing conditions, so the conditions must be changed and suitable schools started.

Early in 1938 the educational experiment was begun. A little school for young children was opened in the Laban church and a training class for young women teachers started. Very rapidly word went round that here was a school different from all the rest and methods of teaching that had never even been dreamed of in the Khasi Hills. Even the inspector of schools, himself a Khasi with an exhaustive knowledge of Khasi Primary schools, on visiting the school less than six months after it had been started, stated in his report that "it was totally different from any school he had ever seen," and added the significant remark that he "could never have believed it possible for Khasi school children to be so alert and so happy."

Encouraged by the Director of Education, by the enthusiasm of the young women who came for training as teachers, and above all by the happy faces and rapid progress of the children, Miss Barr worked steadily on. The obstacles were numerous and formidable, chief amongst them being the entire lack of apparatus and suitable Khasi books and the almost complete illiteracy of the teachers. With the aid of the training class she made apparatus and a number of manuscript story books and supplemented the deficiencies in the teachers' education.

By 1941 that first little school had a building of its own, given by American Unitarians and called the Sunderland Memorial School in memory of Dr. J. T. Sunderland and of all that his friendship did to encourage Hajom Kissor Singh in his early struggles.

In 1940 another and larger school was opened in a more central position to cater for children from the Nongthymmai as well as the Laban church. The Laban school remained an Infant school

and all the older children went to the new school at Malki, meeting at first in a large rented bungalow, until in the winter of 1941-42 the school was built. This building was opened in March 1942 by Lady Reid who, as a mark of her appreciation of the work that the schools were doing, allowed this one to be called by her name.

These schools between them meet the needs of the Unitarians whose homes are in Shillong. But that is only the beginning, as the majority of Khasi Unitarians live in villages. Miss Barr's ultimate aim is to have a training centre where many more teachers can be trained, so that there may be at last a school in every village where there is a Unitarian church. But the Training Centre must come first, as it is no use starting schools until there are trained teachers ready to run them. She decided therefore to invite to Shillong a few promising boys from the village churches in order that the work of training village boys for the work of leadership should begin at once.

Outstanding amongst these boys is Daniel Singh Lamin of Padu, whose story will be found at the end of the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

A BROADCAST FROM THE HILLS

THE foregoing has given us a glimpse of the sphere of work Miss Barr has gone to, and how and why she has gone there. We can now go over to the Khasi Hills themselves, and let Miss Barr tell us, in her own words, something of the story of heroism and romance that lies behind the bare facts we have outlined. Life anywhere is much the same at bottom. Everywhere work well done means personal sacrifice and personal love. We know this in our churches at home, and the same is equally true in India. Here is a tale of magnificent devotion. It has a lesson for us in the "difficult places" nearer our own doors.

"About twenty-five years ago, Hajom Kissor Singh, the founder of the Khasi Unitarian Movement, visited the village of Puriang (a small place outlying from Shillong) and started a little Unitarian cause there. But in spite of all his efforts it did not thrive. A contagious epidemic swept through the village and carried off several of the members, and the rest drifted one by one to the orthodox church, until there remained one solitary young man. Week by week he held his services—alone. Every day, when a passing traveller was available as a messenger he received a

letter of encouragement from Hajom Kissor Singh. Every holiday that the latter got, he visited Puriang in person, to encourage him and join him in his worship.

"Week followed week, and the weeks grew into months, and the months into years, and still the Puriang church consisted of one solitary member, derided by his fellow-villagers, unaided by any fellowship save that of the sporadic visits, and regular letters, of his leader—but undaunted, undismayed.

"For seven years this state of things continued. Seven years of worshipping alone! But at last the tide, which had been out so long, began to turn, and faith and patience were rewarded. He had one fellow-worshipper other than Hajom Kissor Singh.

"To-day the Puriang Church is one of the most thriving in the Movement. They have built a new church since Mr. Ratter's visit, a building capable of seating from forty to fifty adults on its benches, and an indefinite number of children on the floor. It was nearly full for our service. After the service I was privileged to drink tea in the house of the hero of this story. He is now in middle life, bright-eyed, intelligent and kindly, and, as one might expect, still the life and soul of the church and immensely proud of its progress and success.

"Mr. Ratter's little book, *Tō Nangroi*, was dedicated to Hajom Kissor Singh and all brave souls who have stood alone for the sake of conscience and the faith of the One True God in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Surely one of the names that should stand beside that of Kissor's is that of Kamai Singh of Puriang, who worshipped alone for seven years."

And what about Kissor himself? Here is a sidelight on his character. As Mr. Ratter has told us in *Tō Nangroi*, he was a man and a poet. The service-book he compiled is still the sheet-anchor of the Khasi Church. Miss Barr bears testimony to Mr. Ratter's judgment. Kissor was a really great man and a really great Unitarian. Being dead, he yet speaks, and works.

"Now that I am beginning to read Khasi and understand it, I am beginning to understand and appreciate the personality of Kissor. He was a poet and a writer of hymns. They were beautiful hymns, beautiful not only in thought, but in the language in which the thought was expressed. Furthermore, I have discovered that the Bible extracts, which he has included in his service-book, are not taken word for word from the Khasi Bible, but translated by himself, with some astonishing results.

"Psalm cxxxix, for instance, which in the Khasi Bible is a plodding prose, becomes in the Unitarian Service-Book a magnificent piece of Khasi poetry. And it is not that he has achieved

this at the expense of a literal interpretation of the thought. Verse 9, for example, which in the Khasi Bible runs, 'If I take wings in the morning' (which sounds a little like setting off by the daily air service to Madras) recaptures in Kissor's translation the magic of the Authorised Version, 'If I take the wings of the morning.' It needed a poet to do that.

"Another point is one I stumbled upon by chance. I was taken one day to see his books. My eyes ran eagerly over the shelves. Martineau's *Seat of Authority*, Freeman Clarke's *Ten Great Religions*, Ramohun Roy's English Works, *The Sayings of Lao-tse*, a book about the stars, and so on. And then suddenly, one that riveted my attention, the *Boy's Own Conjuring Book*. There flashed into my mind a Chinese saying, 'The truly great man is one who does not lose his child-heart.'

"Surely a man who to the end of his days keeps the *Boy's Own Conjuring Book* cheek by jowl with Martineau and Plato, is one who has never lost his truest greatness—the child-heart of the Chinese saying, which Jesus also praised."

And what of Miss Barr herself? Why do the Khasis want her? What is the secret of her appeal to them? One factor, we need not doubt, is her love of the open-air, and her well-known prowess in hiking! Another, however, is a reason of which she is not perhaps as conscious. Let her tell a tale that will show quite clearly what that reason is.

"The afternoon sun had worked so far round that it was difficult to find a shady spot on the little, sandy, riverside beach, where we had halted for our midday meal. The bamboo raft which had brought us across the river two at a time, was creaking gently at its moorings. The raft-man, having partaken of a cup of tea and a few brotherly pulls at Ekiman's pipe, had gone home. The three men who had escorted us through the tiger-infested forests from Raliang, last night's port of call, had also set off back. I had drunk my tea and eaten my bananas, alone as usual, while the other members of the party were making the most of the unusual blessings of a river at hand to wash their clothes and their persons. Now I had moved back into the last remaining bit of shade, and was trying to write a letter.

"There was no doubt about it, things were going better this tour. Last May I had had a tussle to persuade my escort to let me carry my own rucksack. That was the first step, and since then I had gone on from strength to strength. Last tour they had carried white rice and English vegetables for me wherever we went; and a professional cook, experienced in European cooking, accompanied us to prepare my food. This time I was eating the

coarse, unrefined rice they all ate, and any Khasi vegetables that happened to be available, cooked by the woman who prepared the food for the rest of the party.

"Last time, when we approached a new village and a surging mass of strange, brown, curious faces came thronging round, my heart failed me, if for a moment I lost sight of Ekiman.

"This time wherever we went were familiar faces, many even with names attached, and if need be, I could even talk enough to make myself understood on simple matters. This time even the babies were less uncompromisingly hostile. My heart warmed as I remembered how little two-year-old Irwin had come running to me with open arms to be picked up.

"Yes, undoubtedly the barriers were breaking down. But there was one that remained apparently as unbreakable as ever, the barrier imposed by meal-time. Then I was automatically shut out from companionship. I dined in solitary state. I had begun to think that the song I had sung so often in camp was coming ironically true in my case:

" 'One is one and all alone,
And evermore shall be so.' "

"I looked up from my letter and cast a glance at the little group of my companions. The murmur of voices reached me, and then Ekiman's voice calling down the blessing of God upon their simple meal. A sudden wave of loneliness swept over me. Would it always be like this, I wondered. And if so, would it ever be possible to enter fully into fellowship with my Khasi friends? How far did Christianity not derive its strength from the fact that it always put the communion of a common meal at the centre of its fellowship? If I could not eat with them, I was to them a foreigner, and as long as I was that, I was one apart. I could not help them as I would.

"In order to put an end to these depressing thoughts, I was about to return to my writing, when I heard the voice of one of the women addressing me: 'Mem, come and eat with us.' Had she read my thoughts?

"As usual, when in doubt, I looked at Ekiman for light and leading. He is a true leader among them and speaks English. The enigmatical little smile I had come to know so well was playing about his eyes.

" 'What did she say?' I asked.

" 'She says, come and eat with us.' "

"What did *he* expect of me? The smile was as enigmatical as ever. What did he think I ought to do? I never knew.

"May I, really?" I asked.

"Of course, if you wish," he replied.

"I waited for no second invitation. I had eaten all the food I wanted, but if I refused, I might be doomed for ever to the outer darkness of lonely meals.

"In another moment I had joined the circle and was eating with my fellow-creatures. From then on I was one of the family.

"I have dispensed entirely with knives and forks, and hope never to be expected to use them again among the Khasis, and what is more, I know now the joy of communion as never before in my life."

And lastly there is the story of Daniel, written by Miss Barr for the *Christian Register*, to whose editor we are indebted for permission to reprint it here.

Daniel Lamin belongs to the village of Padu, a hill village separated by some twenty miles of rough hill country from Jowai, the nearest Unitarian Church of any size, and by ten to twelve miles of gorges and dense jungle from Nongtalang, its nearest Unitarian neighbour.

When I first went there Daniel was a seven-year-old lad, unusually intelligent and enterprising and already able to read a little of his hymn-book. But that was the only book that he had ever seen, except, perhaps, the Khasi Bible. His home was a typical Khasi village home, airless, unhealthy, dirty, and overcrowded. None of his relations or friends could read, and the only person connected with the church who could help him at all was the old man who was employed by denominational headquarters to lead the church and conduct the services, for which work he received a small salary from the money sent annually by the Women's Alliance.

My visit was destined to be a turning-point in Daniel's life. His dawning intelligence saw in this visitant from higher realms something more than most of his playmates saw, a weird and rather terrifying apparition, for most of the children of that village had never seen a white woman before. To Daniel, in spite of my strangeness, or perhaps partly because of it, I was a link with an unknown but alluring world. And with characteristic tenacity he determined to hold on. When I set off for Nongtalang after two days at Padu he followed, without a word to anyone or permission from parents or teacher. And it was only when he was assured by my interpreter (for in those early days my Khasi was not yet adequate to deal with crises of that kind or to make me intelligible to the village children) that unless he went home and was obedient to his parents I should never be able to visit his

village again; and also that when next I went there I would myself ask his parents' permission to take him with me, that he was persuaded to return. I can see it all now as if it were yesterday: the autumn sun shining through the trees on to the narrow path, the amused and appreciative twinkle in the eyes of my interpreter, and Daniel's diminutive form as suddenly, without another word, even the usual farewell "Khublei," he turned round and stumped off on his little bare feet along the path back to Padu. Not once did he look back, though we watched till he was out of sight, but the whole, small, sturdy figure, head erect, eyes front, spoke of determination and courage even in the face of disappointment. I knew that I had not seen the last of Daniel.

It was not until three years later, however, that I was able to redeem my promise, and not until a year after that that his parents were at last persuaded to allow him to go to Shillong to live with me and go to school.

Daniel was only a child when I first met him, but his intelligence had already taught him certain things: that there was a wide world beyond his village undreamed of by his village mates; that there were clever people in the world who could read and write other books than the one that he knew; that the school in the village which could have put him on the way to that wider world was closed to him, because he was a Unitarian and his parents would not wish him to go to it lest he should be converted. What chance was there for such a child if he remained a Unitarian? None, under the conditions that prevailed until 1937.

Daniel in 1944 is a sixteen-year-old High School boy, reading and writing English as well as Khasi, within a few months of sitting for his Matriculation examination, in every possible way vindicating the trust reposed in him and the money spent on his education. But there have been many vicissitudes in this career.

By 1942 Daniel had already outgrown my own school, and as I wanted him to go on with his education and to have the best education available, I sent him to the Seventh Day Adventist Mission School, where the boys are given the kind of training in which I believe, for the school is part of a community centre where agricultural and manual work are correlated with the book learning necessary for examination purposes and general education. Excellent. . . . But . . . !

Early in this year (1943), while in England raising the necessary funds to enable me to raise the Lady Reid School to High School standard, I received a letter from Daniel from which the following is a verbatim extract, exactly as he wrote it, including spelling and punctuation mistakes. Remember that Daniel only

started school and began to hear any English in 1939. Here is a piece of his long and newsy letter:

"One particular thing I want to mention that is now since the school started I have been reading certain books and together with the explanation of Mr. L. I was convinced that if they are right then I am lost. I hope you would read yourself the prophecies in the 2nd chapter in the Book of Daniel. When I turn to Christianity I found that it is right and when I turn again to other side I found that Unitarianism is right so now I am in between the two and of course with my own understanding I cannot solve the problem unless God would help me so please pray for me that I may know the right one out of the two.

"Last night I read an article which said about a certain person who had the same experience that I now do. She also before decided to leave Christianity alone but within a year she was a baptised member (she also was brought up at the same Christian school as I am). . . .

"I hope you are alright and your family too, I also am alright save that I have a struggle between those two problems.

"With love and great desire to meet you soon,

Your boy,

D. S. LAMIN."

That letter will speak for itself. "If they are right then I am lost." The old story: only by baptism and the accepting of some narrow creed can people be saved. And the old motive: fear. This alas! has always been and still is what the Khasis understand by Christianity, all save those few who accepted the wider message of Hajom Kissor Singh; and even for them and their descendants the problem is still acute whenever they are brought into close contact with the missionaries. They do believe in the great universal message of love for God and man, but when an educated American assures them with absolute conviction that the end of the world is at hand and their only hope of escaping hell fire is immediate baptism and entry into his church, it is not the easiest thing in the world for an ignorant peasant boy to stand firm, and not to wonder whether it would not be wise to be in the safe side, just in case this is the truth.

It is essential, therefore, that we should be in a position to give a good all-round education and training to the children of our churches without having to submit them to these narrowing and proselytising influences. To that end I want to have a village community centre similar to that of the S.D.A., where I can train

teachers for the schools and workers for the churches, and send them out into the villages competent to do the welfare work that is so sorely needed.

In this way, and in this way only, can the Khasi Unitarian Church be put upon its feet and rendered capable of going forward to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of its courageous leader.

CHAPTER VII

KHASI CALLS

NEARLY two thousand years ago a young Jew, lately drawn into the service of Christianity, had a dream. He dreamed that a man of Macedonian race had called to him, saying, "Come over and help us." He went, and the result, as we know, was of immense significance to Europe. To-day, comes to us the call of our fellow-believers in India. Paul followed the bidding of his dream. Shall we not do likewise in the case of our dream, when Khasi calls?