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A SAGA OF THE CARAVANS

THE DESERT ROAD TO TURKESTAN. By OWEN LATTIMORE. London:

Methuen 1928. 9×6 inches; xiv+332 pages; illustrations and maps. 21s

MR. OWEN LATTIMORE in 1926 was hypnotized by the great nomad's-land lying between China and Siberia, even as forty years ago Lieutenant Francis Younghusband, looking westwards from Peking, set his heart on a trans-continental journey from Cathay to Hindustan. Both were doing their first journeys, both were suffering from an "urge" which nothing but achievement would sate; and both would have suffered anything rather than turn back, or fail in their undertakings! Sir Francis made a new crossing of the Great Gobi (new in 1887 and not followed since), went down into Chinese Turkestan, and attempted to climb over into India by a new pass. Forty years have elapsed and another young traveller turns up, actuated by the same desire, his eye on the same trans-continental journey.

As luck would have it for Mr. Lattimore and for us, there was trouble on the frontier, Russia, Mongolia, and China being embroiled. In 1926 political conditions in Northern Mongolia caused all caravan traffic to keep well away from the disturbed area, "it was imperative to open a new road to Chinese Turkestan. It had to fulfil two conditions: to keep as far as possible from Chinese officials collecting transit taxes, and far enough away from the independent Mongol tribes to escape confiscation. Such a road the caravans found, and called it the Jao Lu, or Winding Road. It stands in part for what must have been an ancient trade-route through Alashan between Eastern Inner Mongolia and Khara-Khoto or the Etsin Gol, when Khara-Khoto was a city of the Tangut Kingdom. From Etsin Gol it crosses the Black Gobi and goes on through No Man's Land, touching mountains that must be a southern extension of the Aji Bogdo, which themselves extend southward from the Altai. Then there comes a day when, from a certain lonely marsh, the mountains of perpetual snow can be seen, the outliers of the T'ien Shan."

Thus it chanced that the Younghusband route was superseded by the "Winding Road" through the sands and tamarisk of the heart of the Gobi, and Mr. Lattimore, on reaching Tai-ling Miao, found his caravaneers heading for "the most desert of all the caravan routes which traverse Mongolia"—in short, he was to make a bee-line from the great northern bend of the Yellow River to Barkul, the first oasis in Zungaria under the northern slopes of the Celestial Mountains.

The author belonged to no mission or expedition. He went as a Caravan man in a World of Caravans, and herein lies the chief interest of his story. He lays open to us the weird existence led by that curious caravan community which seems to be destined to wander for ever to and fro across the desert heart of Asia. His very efficient knowledge of the Chinese language enabled him to avoid the pitfalls and inaccuracies of interpretations, and gave him unusual facilities for recording the life and traditions of the caravan class—not an unimportant fraternity of Inner Asian Society, where thousands of miles separate the rail-heads of Russia and Cathay. "I was thrown among men where talk was for ever of the prices of wool and camels, of caravan routes and cart-hire, of journeys counted in many tens of days into the remote hinterland of Asia, and of the bandits besetting this road or the soldiers obstructing that. Or else their gossip would run on storms or the loss of caravans, or lucky ventures that had made men rich at a blow, and all the chances and alarms of a way of trading and living utterly different from the alien civilization which I had seen creeping up along the railway."

Some of his descriptions are vivid word pictures. "We overtook a Barkul caravan on its way home, and were ourselves overtaken by two caravans. We had halted at about one in the morning, and had already drunk tea and rolled up in our bedding when in the deep hush we heard far away the faint throbbing beat of camel-bells. As they drew nearer the sound swelled slowly until the caravans were almost up with our camp, when it broke into the jangling of many different bells. It was over an hour after we heard the most distant pulsation that the first files of silent-footed camels began to go by us, their bulky shadows seeming to darken the night as one watched from the door of the tent. I got up to watch. A caravan master had ridden up first. At the position he took, the camels wheeled left and right in alternate files and then wheeled inwards again until they were head on in pairs of files. Each halted in a straight line; the camels gurgled and screamed as they knelt; the 2-foot bell on the last camel of each file clanked as it was slipped and thrown to the ground, the clamour was over, and the caravan lay in two compact squares, facing each other across a clean space." Or again, as caravans pass each other in mid-Gobi, the "camel-pullers shouted greetings to each other, with bits of news about friends on the road . . ., the passengers stared at us out of their sheepskins; and the mounted caravan-masters rode to meet each other in little groups, talking for a few moments gravely of high matters like the state of the road and conditions of pasture and water, military requisitions, disbanded soldiery, and tax collectors. A brother going east would run over to speak with his brother bound for the west, and after a few words with each other for perhaps the first time in a year they would plod away again to the west and the east, each with his file of camels, not to meet for another year or so. The camels turned their heads to stare like the men as the long files drew past each other, with a vast mingling of the slow reluctant tones of camel-bells; and in no more time than it takes for a good long stare the meeting and the parting in the red and yellow smouldering sunset, in the black desert among the thinly scattered grey tamarisks, were over."

In the third Asia Lecture, printed in the *Journal* for December last, Mr. Lattimore gave us a condensed account of his journey, and we welcome the fuller book, for not one word of his information on the various aspects of the great traffic which links East and West over the Gobi trade routes is to be missed. Whether knowledge is sought on the great two-humped Bactrian camels which carry the goods, or the giant hounds which act as camp guards and messengers, or of the actual merchandise carried in those neat compact loads, it is to be found somewhere in his volume. His previous experience of the trade which filters through to the Chinese ports from the vast hinterland made him doubly alive to all that was passing on the trade routes he followed west. To others a caravan is a caravan, but to Lattimore every caravan is a romance. "In the night, after we camped, there passed us a strange caravan laden with thousands of taels' worth of raw jade from Khotan in the ancient Kingdom of Jade. It had already been a year on the road. Some of it in big raw masses too heavy for camel-loads." And we can read a good deal more of most intriguing interest regarding that inaccessible stone. Or again, he meets a caravan of Torgut Mongols, descendants of those stout fellows who migrated from Central Asia to the Volga, and *back again* in 1770. "There was something stupendous in the march of these tribesmen from Central Asia, from one of the most outlying Mongol communities, with their women and children, their camel-loads of treasure and offering, their gowns of yellow and purple, red and green, their bold determined faces, their assured carriage, their mixed armoury of match-locks and breech-loading rifles, swords and assorted pistols, bound across the desert to China to acquire merit by abasing themselves in the presence of the holiest of

the Incarnate Divinities of Tibet." The Winding Road must be well trod, judging by the amount and variety of traffic they met.

As regards the geographical value of Mr. Lattimore's journey, his line of march from Shadun Miao to Etsin Gol, for more than 300 miles, was new as an east-to-west journey, although it crossed at different points the routes of the great Russian explorers Prjevalsky and Kozlov. At his crossing of the Etsin Gol (he skirted the famous dead city of Khara-Khoto, Marco Polo's Etsina) his forerunners were Stein and Landon Warner. His traverse of the Black Gobi between Etsin Gol and the foothills of the Kharlik Tagh—easternmost bastion of the great T'ien Shan—was a seventeen-day trek, over a varied region of sand-dunes and low mountains. Of this wide area we only knew before from Ladighin of Kozlov's party. This was a true No Man's Land, situated beyond the longest arm of any law. It was a sanctuary for discontents and outlaws of a harmless nature, renegades from Government control or the authority of their own tribal chiefs. In the heart of this desolation was found the stronghold of that romantic figure "The False Lama." Whether Russian or Mongol who can say? but the account of his brief career and the fortress he built in this waste reads like an Edgar Wallace thriller. It is almost incredible that such "an old man of the mountains" could exist, and carry on for years, in the manner he did in the twentieth century. But many unusual things have been going on in Mongolia, since she threw off the Chinese yoke, and again since the Russian Revolution. On these happenings the author throws some sidelights, as he also does on the parts played by local adventurers—both Chinese and Russian—to the discomfiture of the wretched Mongols.

In short, the whole of the volume makes delightful reading, being full of information on most original lines, yet not without a spice of adventure—as the episode, which came near to being disaster, shows, when the caravan, over a thousand strong, were trapped at midnight by deep snow, at Dead Mongol Pass.

The book is accompanied by sketch-maps on the front and back end papers; insufficient to do justice to such a wide area; inadequate as well to illustrate the author's own estimate of distances. For instance, the Chinese estimate of the stage Kuei-hue to Morhgujing is 317 miles, Lattimore corrects this to 285 miles, but the map shows it at no more than 150 miles. D. C.

curt, and vivid idiom is free from sophistry. The map is a model of how to confine cartography to the needs of the letterpress. He has been badly advised in his bizarre "new-art" binding, out of harmony as it is with the sincerity of the contents. An index is absent.

L. A. B.

THE MONKS OF KÛBLÂI KHÂN. Translated from the Syriac by Sir F. A. WALLIS BUDGE. *London: Religious Tract Society* 1928. 9×6 inches; xvi+335 pages; illustrations. 12s 6d

The Syriac 'History of Mar Yahballaha III and Rabban Sawma,' one of the most valuable firsthand documents on the Mongols of Persia and the fortunes of the Nestorian Church in Asia, has hitherto failed to receive in this country the attention it deserves. Professor Montgomery's translation of the first part, published in New York in 1927, and covering only the travels of the two monks from China to Persia and Europe, rendered it the more desirable that a complete English version should be made, and the appearance of this edition is a welcome coincidence. Sir Wallis Budge has prefixed to his translation an erudite if rather discursive introduction on the Mongols and Nestorians, based on both Syriac and European sources. Maabar, however, is not Malabar, but Coromandel, and Professor Saeki is not always a reliable guide to the history of the early Muhammadans in China. The relative accuracy of the two translations must be left to Syriac scholars to decide; from the geographical point of view the only charge to be made against Sir Wallis Budge is that he has overlooked the studies of Professor Pelliot and others in the journal *T'oung Pao*.

H. A. R. G.

BURIED TREASURES OF CHINESE TURKESTAN: an account of the activities and adventures of the Second and Third German Turfan Expeditions. By ALBERT VON LE COQ. Translated by ANNA BARWELL. *London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.* 1928. 9×6 inches; 180 pages, and illustrations. 18s

The work of the German Turfan Expeditions, the complement of that done by Sir Aurel Stein and investigators of other nationalities, deserves the wider public which this book will ensure. The original German version, 'Auf Hellas Spuren in Ostturkistan,' has been reviewed in the *Journal* (November 1928, p. 474); the translation is literal, and at times rather stiff. All the previous illustrations are reproduced, but, unlike the German edition, it lacks even one page sketch-map.

ORANG UTAN: Bei den Urwaldmenschen Malayas und Sumatras. By PAUL SCHEBESTA. *Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus* 1928. 9×6 inches; 268 pages; 125 illustrations and two maps

This work is supplementary to the same author's 'Bei den Urwaldzergen von Malaya,' reviewed in the *Journal* of November 1927 (p. 491), and gives a further description of his anthropological work among the little-known forest tribes of the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra between January 1924 and September 1925. He first visited the Ple group in the mountainous region of Temengor in upper Perak, crossed into Kelantan and spent some time in the Nenggiri-Setong district among the Menri negritos, penetrating into country previously unvisited by Europeans. Thence he proceeded up the Nenggiri river in rafts to the first Semai village, and descended the Kelantan river to Kota Bharu, whence he reached Penang by rail. His next journey was through the Batang Padang valley and into the hills of Pahang, and after a period among the Mantra and Serani of Malacca (who speak a mixture of Malay and archaic Portuguese), he journeyed to the Krau district (Pahang) and spent some weeks among the

Mr. Harmer left them. Their value will be evident to every one interested in glacial geology, and the thanks of all glaciologists are due to Sir Sidney Harmer and his fellow-trustees for bearing the cost of reproduction, and to the Yorkshire Geological Society for placing at their disposal this unique summary of Mr. Harmer's extensive knowledge. P. L.

THEORY OF CONTINENTAL DRIFT: a Symposium on the Origin and Movement of Land-masses both Inter-continental and Intra-continental, as proposed by Alfred Wegener. By fourteen authors. Tulsa, Oklahoma, U.S.A.: The American Association of Petroleum Geologists 1928. *London: Thomas Murby & Co. 9×6 inches; x+240 pages; 29 figures. 15s*

In the case of a theory such as that of continental drift a symposium of this kind is particularly valuable. Few will assert that the evidence in its favour is conclusive, few will deny that some of it is suggestive; and it is both interesting and useful to see how it appeals to different minds. Fourteen writers have taken part in the discussion, and the space available has been fairly divided between supporters and opponents. The subject is introduced by W. A. J. M. van Waterschoot van der Gracht, who is a supporter, and his introduction occupies nearly a third of the book. He is not dogmatic, and his chief concern is that the theory should not be dismissed as unworthy of consideration. He is himself convinced of the general truth of the hypothesis, though he does not follow Wegener in all his conclusions. He does not think, for example, that the present continental masses of Africa and South America were ever in actual contact. There has been a certain amount of foundering as well as drifting. He urges that although there are difficulties in detail, the theory explains so much that we should not be deterred from accepting it on that account. Perhaps he is not quite fair to other theories. The contraction theory explains much that the drift theory does not, yet he rejects it on account of difficulties. Like many writers he tacitly assumes that contraction and continental drift are the only alternatives.

Wegener himself contributes a short article. Of the other writers Joly, Molengraaf, Singewald, and F. B. Taylor are in favour of continental drift in some form or other. Joly thinks that it is likely to occur during his periods of revolution, when the sima is melted. Molengraaf stresses the inadequacy of a primarily westward drift, but otherwise is rather favourably inclined towards the theory. Singewald objects strongly to Wegener's mode of presenting the case, but thinks that there is sufficient sound evidence to give the theory a high degree of probability. Taylor, who advocated continental movement several years before Wegener, is allowed twenty pages in which to develop his theory that the Tertiary mountain-building was due to such movements and that these movements resulted from the capture of the moon during the Cretaceous period.

The remaining writers take, on the whole, the other side, though several of them would not deny the possibility that continental drift may have had some effect. J. W. Gregory has no *a priori* objection to the theory, and has himself postulated movement of the crust, but he attributes the main features of the globe to vertical rather than horizontal movements. David White modestly disclaims the special knowledge necessary to form a decided opinion. He thinks, however, that the maps of Köppen and Wegener are open to serious criticism, and he asks why Wegener's Pangaea did not begin to break up till so late a period. Bailey Willis, Longwell, and Bowie object to the theory chiefly on physical grounds, R. T. Chamberlin partly on physical and partly on geological grounds, Schuchert and Berry chiefly on geological grounds. Apart from the introduction, Schuchert's contribution is much the longest article in the book. It is a detailed and critical analysis of the geological evidence and is altogether