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A JOURNEY IN BHUTAN: *A paper read at the Evening Meeting of the Society on 27 May 1935, by*

C. J. MORRIS

**B**HUTAN is an independent state in the Eastern Himalayas. On the north and east it is bordered by Tibet; on the west by the Tibetan district of Chumbi, the scenery of which has been made familiar by successive expeditions to Mount Everest; and on the south by the British Indian Provinces of Assam and Bengal. Its extreme length from east to west is 190 miles, and its breadth, which varies considerably, extends to 90 miles at the widest point. The area is about 18,000 square miles, and the population has been estimated at about 300,000.

Communication between the hills of Bhutan and the plains of Bengal and Assam takes place through a series of mountain passes, known locally as Dooars, a word derived from the Hindustani *dwār*, meaning gate or entrance. This name is nowadays used also to denote the level tracts upon which these passes open. The Dooars, which contain much rich and fertile soil capable of high cultivation, are divided into two by the Sun Kosh river, which also forms the boundary between Assam and Bengal. The western or Bengal Dooars are for the most part now covered with tea gardens; but the eastern or Assam Dooars are still to a great extent covered in virgin forest and are not at all unlike the Nepal Terai. The present southern boundary of Bhutan runs along the foothills, and thus the country contains practically no flat land beyond a narrow strip only a few miles broad which has been retained in places. Prior to the war in 1865 the whole of the Dooars belonged to Bhutan. Geographically the country does not differ greatly from Nepal and Sikkim, and forms an extension eastwards of the latter countries. It possesses similar deep valleys and high mountain ridges, and suffers equally from a lack of communications.

The original inhabitants of Bhutan are believed to have been subjugated about two centuries ago by a band of military colonists from Tibet. In 1774 the East India Company concluded a treaty with the ruler of Bhutan; but repeated outrages on British subjects committed by the dwellers in the hills led from time to time to punitive measures, usually ending in the temporary

or permanent annexation of various parts of the Dooars. In November 1864 the eleven western or Bengal Dooars were thus annexed, and in the following year a treaty was concluded under the terms of which Bhutan was granted an annual subsidy on condition of good behaviour. Many years later, in 1910, this treaty was amended and by its terms the British Government undertook not to interfere in the internal administration of the country. On its part the Bhutanese Government agreed to be guided by the advice of the British Government in regard to its external relations.

The form of government in Bhutan, which existed from the middle of the sixteenth century until 1907, consisted of a dual control by the clergy and the laity as represented by Dharma and Deb Rajas. In 1907 however the Deb Raja, who was also Dharma Raja, resigned his position, and the Tongsa Penlop, or Governor, Sir Ugyen Wangchuk, was thereupon elected as the first hereditary Maharaja of Bhutan. He died in 1926 and was succeeded by the present ruler, Sir Jig-me Wangchuk, K.C.I.E.

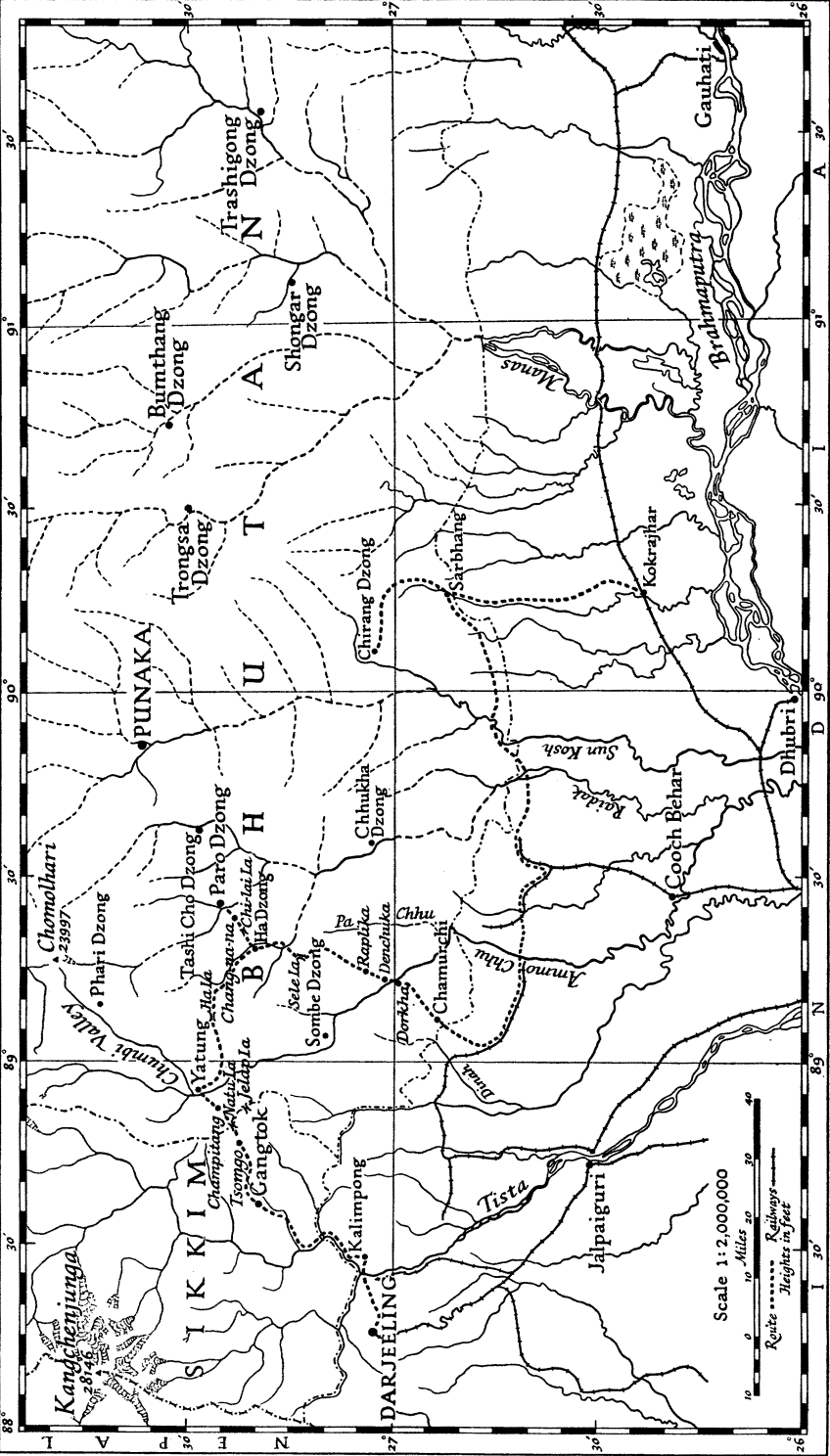
The people of Bhutan are closely akin to the Tibetans and speak a Tibetan dialect similar to that spoken in Sikkim.<sup>1</sup> Anthropologically they are closely allied to the Mongoloid tribes of Nepal, such as for instance the Gurungs, Rais, and Limbus; but whereas the latter are now Hindus the Bhutanese are Buddhists. A very large number of people spend most of their lives in monasteries or nunneries, and probably in no other Buddhist country is such a large proportion of the population so segregated. These religious institutions vary in size from diminutive wayside chapels housing no more than a bare half-dozen monks to the great Lamasery at Tashi Cho Dzong, which contains some three hundred.

Beyond the guards for the defence of the various castles there is no army, but some parts of the country are famed for the manufacture of muzzle-loading guns and swords of highly-tempered steel.

His Highness keeps an agent at Kalimpong, who is also assistant to the Political Officer in Sikkim for Bhutanese affairs. This is at present Raja Sonam Tobgay Dorji. He it was who made the detailed arrangements for my journey and he also gave me much valuable information about the country. I cannot sufficiently thank him for all that he did on my behalf.

Bhutan is probably the most closed country in the world at the present day, and beyond occasional ceremonial visits to the Capital by the Political Officer in Sikkim very few Europeans have been allowed to enter the country. I visited Bhutan in 1933 at the request of the Government of India and at the invitation of the Maharaja. It was originally intended that I should confine my travels to the southern parts of the country, now almost exclusively occupied by Gurkha settlers from Nepal. I was however extremely anxious to see Ha and Paro. There seemed at one time little chance of this: but Mr. F. Williamson, the Political Officer, mentioned my desire to Raja Dorji, with the result that I was given permission to visit both these most interesting places. Part of my route has been previously traversed, but in the opposite direction, by Lord Zetland (then Lord Ronaldshay) when he was Governor of Bengal. "The greater part of the route we followed," he later noted, "was said never before to have been traversed by a European. It provided little of

<sup>1</sup> See *e.g.* 'Linguistic Survey of India,' vol. 3, part 1, pp. 129 *et seq.*



interest, however, climbing up and down heavily wooded mountain sides sparsely populated for the first few days, but colonised by Nepalis as we got nearer to the plains.”<sup>1</sup> I have quoted his words as a warning of what follows, since the remainder of this paper is principally concerned with the question of Nepalese settlement in Bhutan. I must also make it quite clear that since my time in Bhutan was fully occupied I had no opportunity, nor had I the means, of making detailed investigations. The journey occupied in all only a few weeks, and I was almost constantly on the move. I would, then, ask the reader to receive my comments in the spirit in which they are offered: that is to say, as the superficial impressions of a very hurried and brief visit.

It is said that until some sixty years ago the foothills about Sarbhang were peopled by Bhutanese. About 1870 however the Bhutanese are believed to have begun a gradual movement farther into the hills. Until a few years before the Great War the district, which consisted for the most part of dense jungle, appears to have been practically uninhabited; but about 1910 the first of the Gurkha settlers arrived. Prior to this however many Gurkhas used to make annual visits to the district, but they never stayed more than a few months in the hot weather. They came in order to tap the rubber trees, of which there is still a large number, but for the rest of the year they remained at their homes in Nepal. This rubber tapping went on for some years, but eventually the Government of Assam commenced to plant on a large scale, after which it was no longer profitable to the Gurkha owing to lack of proper equipment and ignorance of scientific methods. The systematic settlement and commencement of agriculture by Gurkhas in this part of Bhutan appears to date from this time.

There are several reasons for this immigration into Bhutan. Some men for instance told me that in 1914 there was a very serious landslide in the Yangrup district of Eastern Nepal. Large numbers of people lost their entire property in this calamity, and hearing that there was good land to be obtained for the asking in Bhutan they decided to emigrate. Nepal however is undoubtedly over populated in its more fertile parts, and it appears always to have been difficult to arrange for sufficient land in the hills to support the needs of the people. Until comparatively recently the Nepal Terai was of little use as a settlement area owing to the difficulty of providing a sufficiency of pure water and to the danger of malaria throughout the greater part of the year. Thanks however to modern methods of research and to the efforts and expenditure of vast sums of money on the part of successive Maharajas of Nepal, large tracts of this once ill-famed stretch of country have been made habitable and numbers of the early settlers have now been able to return to their own country.

Gurkha settlement in Bhutan is at the present time confined to two main areas: firstly, the eastern area known as Chirang, which lies immediately to the north of the eastern or Assam Dooars; and secondly, the western area, which lies to the north of the Western or Bengal Dooars. This is known to the Bhutanese as Samchi, and to the plains-dwellers as Chamurchi. The two areas are roughly separated by the Sun Kosh river. I decided first to visit the eastern area.

<sup>1</sup> 'Lands of the Thunderbolt—Sikkim, Chumbi, and Bhutan,' London, 1923, p. 246.



*Typical Bhutanese*



*Typical Nepalese settlers*

Chirang is reached *via* Kokrajhar, a flag-station on the Lalmanir Hat-Gauhati section of the Eastern Bengal Railway, and here I found myself towards four o'clock of a morning in March 1933. It was hardly the most suitable hour to arrive at even the most civilized of places, nor was I feeling disposed to hunt for a guide. There was nothing to be done beyond spreading our bedding on the cement platform and waiting—one could hardly sleep—for the day to dawn. Later on we learned that the Bhutanese authorities had most kindly sent porters for our onward journey, and soon after daybreak we set off over the dusty and scorched plains: far away in the distance the outline of the foothills was just visible.

Along the whole of the southern border of Bhutan and extending for some miles south into British territory runs a dense belt of forest. This is strictly comparable with the Nepal Terai and is equally famed for the quantity of big game to be found within its secluded glades; and also for the numbers of particularly malicious mosquitoes which make the area uninhabitable for a great part of the year. There are clearings in this forest belt, many of them very large, and before reaching the foothills we passed through a number of villages, occupied mostly by a tribe known as Mechi. The Mechis are of Mongoloid appearance, and except for the very dark colour of their skin, not greatly different from Gurkhas. Many of the men indeed spoke Nepali, but I was told that the women never learn this language. Unlike the Gurkhas, the Mechis carry their loads slung from a pole across the shoulder and do not use the head-strap—the universal method of carrying loads in Nepal. We saw also a few villages inhabited by Santals. These people are small of stature, very dark-skinned, and of somewhat Negroid appearance, but for lack of a common language I was unable to converse with them.

We were forced to spend one night in the forest, where there was a tiny rest-house and a few wretched huts. The people here looked emaciated and fever-ridden. It was a hot and airless night and the glade was filled with the myriad lights of fireflies. Soon after leaving this little clearing of Patgaon the forest becomes denser, and for the last 18 miles or so consists of almost impassable sal jungle. It is crossed only by a few rough tracks, and there is water at only one placé. Shortly before reaching the Bhutanese frontier the forest becomes thinner and there is again a number of clearings. During the monsoon rains this forest belt becomes almost impassable, but the journey down from the hills is at all times a fairly arduous one. It is important to note these facts, for they have done much in preventing culture contact with the plains of Bengal and Assam, and have enabled the Nepalese to live a life in conditions not dissimilar to those prevailing in their own country. The Nepalese settlements are equally segregated from the north, as will be noted in a later paragraph.

A mile or so beyond the frontier is a big clearing in the forest, and here is Sarbhang, the principal and indeed the only market for the people living in the Chirang district. It consists of about forty thatched huts, all occupied by Nepalese. The inhabitants live here throughout the year and rice is grown in the surrounding fields. Every Sunday throughout the year a *Hât*, or market, is held and practically the entire adult population of the district regularly attend. They bring down oranges, potatoes, mustard, and a certain amount

of rice from the hills. These they sell or exchange for salt, which is unobtainable in the hills. I also saw many stalls where cheap cotton goods, necklaces, and mirrors could be obtained, and there was a brisk sale in umbrellas. Oranges are obtainable here at one hundred for eleven annas (about one shilling), and the market rate for rice at the time of my visit was 36 lb. for one rupee (one shilling and sixpence). Most of the oranges are exported by Bengali traders who either visit or have agents in these various markets. Chirang, which gives its name to the district, is about 5000 feet above sea-level. It is only one of many villages, but the name is used to denote the whole of the settlements in this area. There are said to be about one thousand houses in Chirang, exclusively occupied by Nepalese, and beyond the Bhutanese official who accompanied me I saw none but Gurkhas in the whole area.

The Bhutan Government does not in any way interfere with its Nepalese settlers, and provided they pay their taxes they are entirely free to live as they wish. It follows therefore that the system of village administration which has gradually come into being is based on that existing in Nepal, only slightly modified to suit local conditions. Each group of villages has an official known as *Mandal* (in Nepal *Mukhiyā*). The Mandal is selected by the villagers themselves and is then recognized by the Bhutan Government. He receives no official remuneration, but, on the other hand, he is not required to pay any taxes. The occupants of each house are required to pay him a tax of one rupee and four annas yearly, or in lieu provide six days' labour. Most people provide the labour and the cash is seldom paid. When labour is required by the Government it must be provided, but is paid for at the rate of four annas a man each day. Each house is assessed at a rate varying between six and nine rupees a year according to the number of male occupants. Buffaloes are taxed at the rate of two rupees a year; cows at twelve annas; and sheep at two annas. All other animals are free. The rent for land under rice cultivation is three rupees per acre yearly; but ground used only for the cultivation of maize is free of tax. All lands are held in perpetuity.

Except in the rice fields the system of cultivation known in Assam as *jhuming* is carried out. In this method a piece of ground is cleared of jungle, used for one season, and then allowed to revert to jungle again for the next four or five years. Large areas are thus being gradually deforested, and much valuable timber destroyed; but it is probably not economically possible under present conditions to carry out scientific timber cutting. Mr. J. P. Mills informs me that it is now generally considered that the custom of *jhuming* as carried out in Assam is no longer harmful owing to the fact that virgin jungle no longer exists in that district. The same cannot be said at present of Bhutan. It is of course a difficult matter to control; but the Bhutanese Government has made a start by prohibiting all cultivation in the actual valley of the Sun Kosh where *jhuming* operations on the banks, resulting in some places in almost complete deforestation, had already caused considerable damage during times of flood.

The area in the foothills nearest to the plains is occupied for the most part by a floating population of Nepalese. These grow rice and maize: a few people, those who are able to afford cattle, also grow a little jute, for this cannot be satisfactorily grown without manure. The inhabitants of this district usually

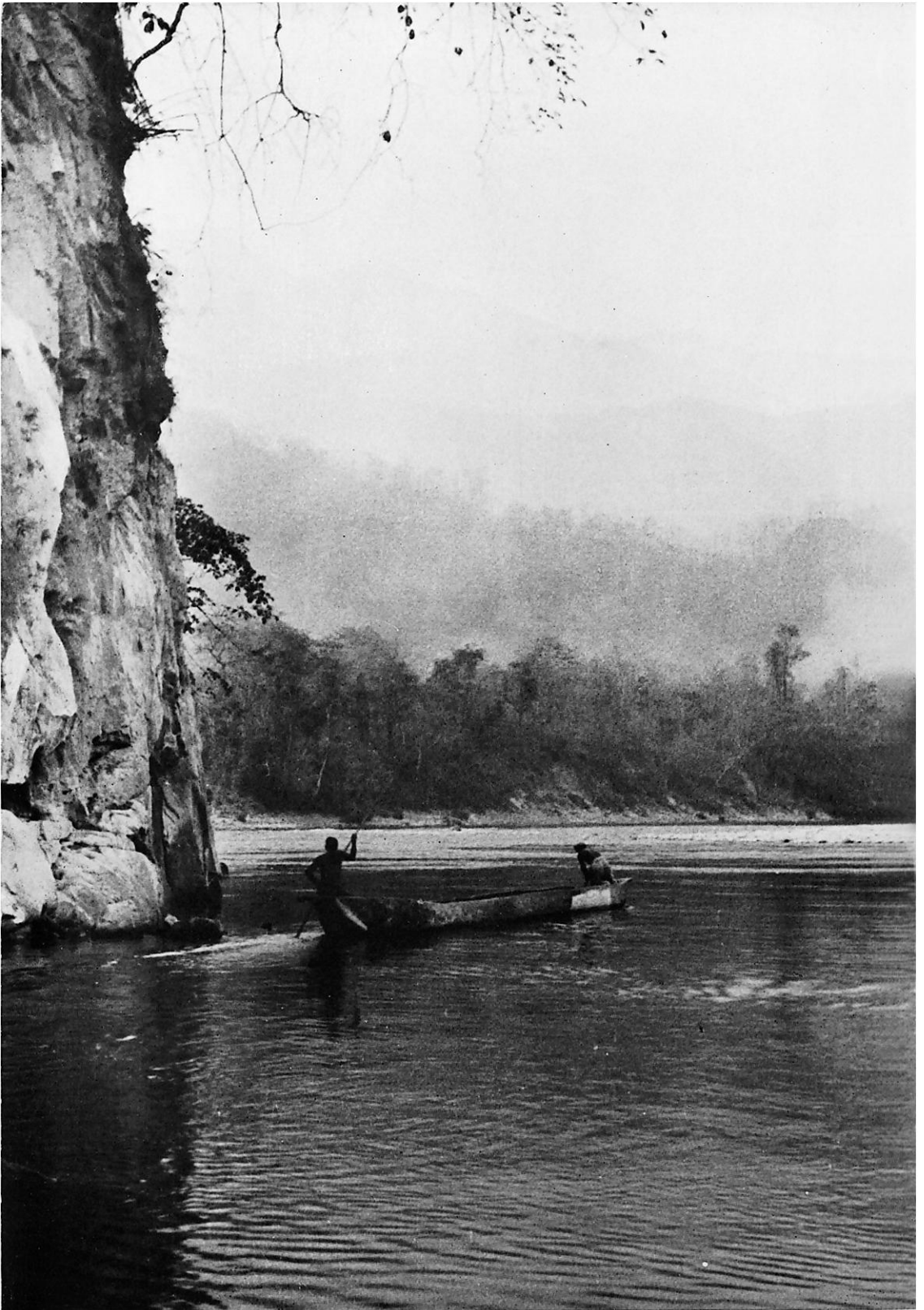




*A typical example of Nepalese terraced cultivation*



*A typical example of jhuming cultivation*



*Crossing the Sun Kosh river*

stay only long enough to make a little money, generally two or three years, and then move on elsewhere. It is from this area that many people have recently returned to the newly opened districts in the Nepal Terai. The whole of this district is very malarious and the people looked ill and under-nourished. One effect directly attributable to the custom of cultivation by jhuming is that the people do not trouble to build themselves proper houses and live in very primitive shelters of bamboo and grass. These last only a short time, but can be easily constructed without cost each time the family moves to a fresh area. The land here is good for rice and maize, but the people suffer greatly from the depredations of wild elephants, which are numerous in the surrounding forests, as also are tigers. I was told that every year four or five people are killed by elephants. Each field has a very high machan in the corner in which people sit up all night when the crop is ripening. It is their custom to discharge a gun at intervals throughout the hours of darkness in order to scare away elephants. In this district there are many so-called salt springs, which are actually large patches of very damp greyish-black earthy sand. The salt is of no use for human consumption, but the places are much frequented by animals as salt licks. We passed by one which contained all about it the footprints and droppings of many kinds of animals, including elephants. I was told that on dark nights elephants can always be heard at the salt licks, but they are said never to come when there is a moon.

The early emigrants from Nepal settled almost entirely in this foothill area owing to the fact that it was the most convenient for their rubber-tapping operations. It was only when the rubber tapping ceased to be profitable and the need for agricultural land arose that they started to penetrate farther into the hills. I do not think the question of the Bhutanese being pushed back by the Nepalese has ever arisen. Raja Dorji himself told me that the Bhutanese have been consistently decreasing in numbers for a very long time. He considered this to be due to the fact that an unduly large proportion of both sexes enter religious institutions and do not therefore marry, and also to syphilis, which is said to have increased greatly during recent years. When the Nepalese settlers started to penetrate into the hills they found them already uninhabited or at least deserted, and even at the present day there is still a fairly wide strip of practically uninhabited land between the two peoples, which both however use as a grazing ground.

One interesting social fact may be briefly noted. When the early settlers arrived from Nepal they left their wives at home, as seems usually to be the case with emigrants. In the course of time however women settlers also arrived, and from amongst these many of the earlier arrivals selected wives. Later on, the original wives, finding that their husbands did not return, decided to join them in Bhutan, and thus it is common for the Nepalese settlers to have several wives. Polygamy is of course permitted in Nepal, but in actual practice amongst the peasantry monogamous marriages are by far the more common, except where there have been no children by the original marriage.

At one place we were shown a Limbu cemetery. There were no longer any survivors of these particular settlers from eastern Nepal. The Headman pointed out that the people had made a particular point of burying their dead with the faces turned in the direction of Nepal, whence they had originally

come. He also told me that if the deceased had been a heavy drinker or smoker it used to be the custom to place a little spirit or tobacco by the side of the grave; but with the death of the last of this particular colony the custom had not survived. Each grave was marked by a pile of stones, but there was no indication of any names.

After crossing the Sun Kosh river I re-entered British territory; but the subsequent journey across to the western or Chamurchi area, carried out by various means of transport, does not merit description here.

The Chamurchi or Samchi district of Bhutan lies directly to the north of the tea-growing district of Jalpaiguri. Unlike the eastern district this area is not approached through dense forest as the land was cleared and turned into tea plantations many years ago. It was indeed on account of the ease with which work could be obtained on the tea gardens that the early Nepalese settlers came to this part. Amongst the earlier arrivals was one with considerably more foresight than his fellows. He discovered that there were vast quantities of lime to be obtained with ease in the surrounding foothills of Bhutan; and in course of time he obtained the sole right to deal in this commodity. His enterprise flourished considerably until later on he was able to obtain a concession for practically the whole of the western area now occupied by Nepalese. No actual boundaries have been fixed, but the concession appears at present to be bounded on the east by the Pa Chhu river and on the west by the Dinah. The southern boundary is of course the British Indian frontier; and the northern extends as far as Raplika, a grazing camp one march beyond Denchuka. The present holder of the concession is a grandson of the original owner. He holds his title on the authority of the Maharaja's *lāl mohor*, which has been granted to him and his successors in perpetuity. Since he has been invested with full judicial powers, excluding only the power to award a sentence of death, and is required to remit only a portion of his revenues to the Bhutan Government, his position is somewhat analogous to that of a tributary raja to the Maharaja of Bhutan. The system of administration does not differ greatly from that in force in the eastern area; but if a settler wishes to leave the district his land and houses lapse to the owner of the concession, who is at liberty to sell them to any one he wishes. Taxes are rather higher than in the other district; but since the area has been settled for a longer period the land is probably much more valuable. This corner of Bhutan is said to be much used as a refuge by Nepalese criminals when they are able to get away before the discovery of their crimes. Incidentally, it may be of interest to note that in Bhutan the death sentence is carried out by sewing the criminal up in a bullock skin and throwing him thus into the nearest river: it is said to be most efficacious in preventing crime!

In the Samchi district there are now many Brahmans, mostly of the Jaisi sub-caste. The Brahman is as a rule thrifty, and neither drinks nor gambles. The Mongoloid tribes, on the other hand, have no such scruples, and are extremely improvident: when they have any money they like to spend it. The result of this state of affairs is that most of the Gurkha settlers are heavily in debt to the Brahmans, whose position in Bhutan, unlike Nepal, is no longer that of spiritual leader but of money lender. Their position is analogous to that of the Marwaris in the plains of India. Cash advances are usually given

against a lien on the harvest, and the rate of interest is high. Brahmans, on account of their superior social status, used formerly to receive homage from every one, as indeed they still do in Nepal. In Bhutan however this custom has entirely dropped out and they are not now treated differently from any one else. Many Bhutanese also advance money to Nepalese settlers for grain. The rice and other crops grown in the Dorkha–Denchuka area is much more than is required for the people's own consumption, and large quantities are therefore sent up into the interior of Bhutan, notably into the Ha district, where, on account of its elevation and consequent cold climate, rice cannot be grown. Some of the Nepalese in the areas nearest the plains have now taken to breeding pigs on quite a large scale. These they dispose of at the weekly markets where there is a big demand for them by the agents of the various Calcutta hotels.

It was my intention after visiting Samchi to continue north to Ha, and then, after visiting the Governor of Western Bhutan at Paro, to return to India *via* the Chumbi Valley and Sikkim. I stayed some days at Samchi both in order to pay my respects to Kaji Hemraj Gurung, the present owner of the concession, and also to make arrangements for the onward journey into Bhutan proper. It was a characteristic kindness of the Paro Penlop to send me a letter of welcome to this place: he told me that all arrangements had been made for my visit, but gave me no hint of the part I was expected to play.

We set off towards the end of March: it was already almost unbearably hot in the plains, and I was glad, in spite of the roughness of the track, to be making for the inner heights. Along the whole of the southern border of Bhutan the foothills rise very steeply and suddenly out of the plains, and there is not such a gradual ascent as in other parts of the Himalaya. It follows therefore that the valleys are narrow and steep and the rivers in consequence swift. To these facts are due the peculiar Dooar formation to which reference has already been made, and which makes it difficult to enter the country except through these various narrow valleys. The Chamurchi Dooar, through which we now entered, is formed by the valley of the Ammo Chhu and is a remarkable natural gateway and a very strong defensive position. It was in this area that the operations against the Bhutanese took place in 1865, and it is not difficult to realize what a very great advantage must have been possessed by the defenders.

There is no proper road up the valley of the Ammo Chhu, but we were easily able to pick our way along the boulder-strewn banks. I had been given a mule to ride and was told that his name was *Gyamo*, or "The brown one." His master, a Nepali-speaking Bhutanese, kept up a running commentary as the mule picked its way carefully amongst the rocks. "Now then, *Gyamo*, go carefully!" he would say, "don't stumble; go round that rock; go slowly, don't throw the gentleman off!" and so on. But in spite of these careful injunctions *Gyamo*, who was a quiet and tractable beast, did manage on one occasion to pitch me over his head, but without any damaging result. As we descended the hill towards Dorkha, the chief stronghold of the Nepalese settlements, we were met on the path by a party of Damai musicians, who played us into the village. Every now and again the band would halt while the leader, who carried an enormous jointed instrument, blew a sort of

fanfare. Occasionally he would execute a brief *pas seul* in front of the band. In this manner we proceeded at a slow pace for the last mile or so.

I found on arrival at Dorkha that my visit had been made the occasion for a general gathering of the surrounding villagers. The place had been gaily decorated and I found that I was expected to make a speech to the assembled headmen. It was a great pleasure to meet them; but since I was travelling very lightly and quite unprepared for anything of the sort, the official part of the gathering was a trifle embarrassing. I hoped that there would be nothing of the kind at Paro; but in any case there was now nothing to be done, since I was quite out of touch with India and could make no further additions either to my following or my wardrobe.

Dorkha is largely populated by Rais: Denchuka, on the other side of the river, by Limbus, both these being eastern Nepalese tribes. All the rice fields here were beautifully terraced and the houses well built of stone with thatched roofs. Jhuming is not the custom here, and there is therefore more incentive to build permanent houses. The people were very cheerful and seemed prosperous, and everywhere I was greeted with the greatest kindness and attention. When the rice is cut it is all collected in one spot, known as *Khali*. Both Rais and Limbus spread the sheaves all over the ground in this place and then both boys and girls dance on it in order to separate the straw from the rice. This is a time of great feasting, and singing and dancing go on throughout the night.

In Nepal, although at one time most of the Mongoloid tribes were in the habit of burying their dead, the custom of cremation is now becoming usual owing to the spread of orthodox Hindu ideas. In Bhutan however both Rais and Limbus still bury their dead and there is a small cemetery outside each village. Only very occasionally are bodies cremated, in spite of the fact that fuel is plentiful here: this is only one of many possible examples which might be quoted to show how the customs of an emigrant people persist in spite of changed geographical conditions.

In addition to the Nepalese there are also in this district a number of Lepchas, some of whom are Christians, and a very few people calling themselves Daoya. The Daoyas, of whom I saw only one or two, are of very Mongoloid appearance. Some of them speak Nepali, but their own language almost certainly belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group, as I found some words to be almost identical with those used in other languages of this group with which I am familiar. The Daoyas eat elephants, which they kill by means of poisoned arrows. They make their clothes from the fibre of nettles. They have apparently no caste restrictions and no organization beyond that of the family, as in Tibet and Bhutan. They are said to intermarry to some extent with the Bhutanese. The Daoyas never burn their dead but place them in very shallow graves, which they cover with large flat stones: offerings are made at the graveside from time to time. These people do not recognize the Brahmans in any way nor have they any priesthood of their own. I have been unable to find any mention of them in works of reference. They seemed somewhat similar to the Naga tribes of Assam, whence they may possibly have originally come.

We left Dorkha as we had entered it, with a musical accompaniment. The

band turned back after a mile or so and almost at once the country became less thickly inhabited. The last Nepalese settlements are at Raplika, north of which the Samchi concession does not extend; but beyond the Bhutanese hamlet of Shektina the area between Raplika and the Ha valley is practically uninhabited. It is thickly forested and contains some good grazing alps. It is used by both the Bhutanese from Ha and the Nepalese from Dorkha and Denchuka as a grazing ground, and I noticed a number of temporary shepherds' huts scattered about on the hillsides. This practically uninhabited tract serves as a buffer or "no-man's land" between the Bhutanese and the Nepalese, and segregates the latter from the north in the same way that the Terai forest does in the south of the eastern settlement area.

Although the hamlet of Shektina contains no more than a dozen or so Bhutanese shepherds it is at once apparent to the traveller that he has entered an area of a different culture. In place of the Nepalese wood and thatch we have here two-storeyed houses with roofs of matting, weighted down with large rocks. The method of cultivation too is different from that practised by the Nepalese, for the millet fields surrounding the houses are not terraced, as they certainly would be were they Nepalese.

Before entering the Ha Valley we had first to cross the Sele La, an easy pass 10,900 feet above sea-level. We climbed up through pastures deeply carpeted with purple primulas and soft green bracken: it was a strange contrast to the steamy forest through which we had passed only a few days previously. There was fresh snow on the top of the pass and a cold wind blew: we halted only long enough to check the height and then ran rapidly down the snow-covered track that leads into the Ha Valley. This valley lies at an average height of 8000 feet above sea-level, and is therefore never hot. The surrounding hillsides are high and steep, so that the valley loses the sun in the early afternoon. During these days of early April it was pleasant when walking about in the sun, but bitterly cold in the early mornings and evening. I have never seen any Himalayan valley that so reminded me of Switzerland—of the road up to Zermatt for instance—and the impression was heightened by the very chalet-like appearance of many of the houses.

Any doubts I might have had concerning the nature of my visit were now finally resolved, for I noticed with considerable apprehension that the path leading up to Raja Dorji's house, which he had most kindly placed at my disposal, was lined with local officials and schoolboys, who had erected a large banner with an inscription of welcome over the door. I felt that I had come out of the ordeal of speech making rather badly, and my sombre garments compared most unfavourably with the magnificent brocades of my hosts. The Dzongpon however was a man of great charm. He had been educated at the University of Calcutta, and it soon became apparent that the opportunity to exercise his considerable knowledge of English made up for some of the stranger's other deficiencies. Since the Bhutanese are Buddhists and therefore free from the restrictions of caste, we were able to dine together, and thus a degree of intimacy was possible such as would be quite out of the question in most other parts of the Himalaya. The Ha Valley forms part of the personal estate of Raja Dorji, the Bhutanese Agent at Kalimpong, and to him is principally due a remarkable educational experiment which has been

proceeding with the very greatest success for some years. He himself was educated at St. Paul's school in Darjeeling, but he early realized that although Bhutan has need of men with modern western education, it must be an education adapted to the special needs of the country and given primarily through the medium of the people's own tongue. There were some thirty boys in residence at the school, where they are given instruction up to the university matriculation standard. It is hoped that eventually they may be trained to the various professions of which the country has need, such as medicine, forestry, and agriculture. With great foresight the number of pupils has been strictly limited to the number of trained men the country can at present absorb, and during their early training the boys are always in intimate touch with the lives of the people amongst whom their work will eventually lie. It is in this matter in particular that the school gives such a much better education than any provided in British India. The Dzungpon of Ha, who, as I have already noted, was extremely well educated, fully realized that he would have been of more value to his country had his own preliminary training been carried out on similar lines. "I can draw from memory a map of Africa," he told me, "but of what use is this in Bhutan, where my ignorance of agricultural methods is a great handicap?"

In order to reach Paro we had first to cross the Chi Lai La. This pass is 12,200 feet above sea-level, but the ascent is very gradual and presents no difficulty of any kind whatsoever. A number of domestic yak were grazing on the upper slopes, but they resented all efforts to approach them closely. A little way down on the Paro side of the pass the Penlop has constructed a little bungalow at Chang-na-na, and at his special request I arranged to spend the night in this delightful little forest clearing. No sooner had I arrived than the Penlop's representatives were announced. They brought with them a letter and scarf of welcome and a considerable quantity of liquor and oranges, all in heavily sealed containers. We set off early the next morning, the Penlop's retainers making a picturesque addition to my humble retinue. Hardly had we covered a few miles when I found a meal spread out for me by the wayside and a further supply of spirit and oranges. This remarkable display of hospitality was repeated at intervals along the route. I had now sufficient oranges to last me for several months, and the spirit, which I had on each occasion distributed to the assembled company, had put them all into a distinctly Jubilee mood. I was by now so embarrassed by this lavish display of welcome and my lack of ability to make any adequate return that I was quite unperturbed by the state of my following, for, truth to tell, the Penlop's special brew was no fit drink for the hours of the hot mid-day sun! The culminating point however had by no means yet been reached, for a short distance outside Paro itself the Penlop's private bodyguard awaited us. They brought with them a magnificently caparisoned mule for me to ride and also a small portable cannon. We proceeded at a slow pace, the size of our party being increased at each house we passed. At intervals the whole cavalcade was halted while some of the retainers performed a short dance and the ancient piece was primed. I was preparing to dismount before the explosion, but I was told that the mule was well used to the performance: and so it proved to be. I was now taking, so far as I could see, the principal part in a mediaeval





*The valley of the Ammo Chhu, showing the entrance to Chamurchi Doar*



*The upper reaches of the Ammo Chhu*



*Lama dance at Paro Dzong*

pageant; but by some mischance I was dressed in the inappropriate mufti of the twentieth century, and I felt that some sort of fancy dress would be more suited to the occasion. With some such feelings as these I dismounted by the banks of the river, where I found that a most comfortable camp had been prepared and laid out on a lavish scale.

I decided to call on the Penlop at once in order to thank him for his welcome. Some word of my intention must evidently have reached him, for with true oriental grace he decided to forestall me and pay his visit first. He was perfectly charming and all doubts as to my reception were finally set at rest. He appeared genuinely pleased to meet some one from the outside world, and stayed talking for a considerable time. Before he left we arranged that I should dine with him on the following day and then witness a performance of the dance which annually takes place at this time of the year.

The big dance of the year at Paro is held in the early Spring and usually lasts for three whole days. It is carried out entirely by parties of monks who live in the monastery attached to the Dzong at Paro and must, I imagine, necessitate many months of arduous practice throughout the year, for there did not seem to be the slightest hesitation or mistake throughout the entire performance. Very early in the morning people started to arrive from all the surrounding villages. Most were dressed in their gala clothes in which brilliant reds and yellows predominated; many, with a view to staying throughout the entire three days, carried supplies of food and drink with them. The performance was timed to begin at ten o'clock, and shortly before this hour I was escorted to my place beside the Penlop. The dance took place in an inner court of the Dzong, where was a paved court surrounded on all four sides by many-storeyed buildings, the ground floors of which were built in the form of large verandahs opening on to the court. Privileged spectators and some of the monastic dignitaries were accommodated in some of these verandahs, others were used as dressing-rooms for the performers. There was a dense mass on all four sides and the crowd was in holiday mood. It was probably the first occasion that many of the spectators had ever set eyes upon a European; but it was a relief to be treated with no more attention than an Englishman receives in Piccadilly.

Punctually at ten there was a crash of cymbals and a faded yak-hair curtain was pulled aside. There then entered in slow procession the various officials of the Penlop's court and all the elders of the monastery. All were dressed in magnificent robes of brocade and silk and many of the priests carried large drums which they beat rhythmically as the procession moved slowly round the court. Following them came the dancers, all of them monks or novices, some fifty or so in number. Some were dressed in peacock blue brocades and wore large-brimmed black hats surmounted with a single peacock's feather; others were garbed in costumes of various colours and wore the most fantastic masks. One series for instance represented human skulls; another yaks and cows; and there was one series consisting of the most nightmarish of farmyard animals: one almost expected Alice or the White Knight to appear at any moment. Soon the court was filled to overflowing and all but the actual dancers then withdrew.

We saw first the Black-hat dance. This has been many times described by

travellers to Tibet, where it may be seen in many of the monasteries. It was carried out by the monks in robes of peacock blue. The dance consists in slowly circling round the arena with the addition of a very intricate gyration at every few steps. By means of certain hip movements the dancers are able to keep the very ample folds of their robes standing well out from the body, and there is much graceful play with the long ribbon streamers with which each performer is adorned. This and indeed the other dances too were extremely interesting to watch for a short time; but since each separate movement is performed for about two hours without a break of any sort the spectacle becomes a little wearisome after a time. One would imagine these dances to be extremely exhausting, but in actual fact none of the performers appeared to be in the least tired after dancing in the hot sun for two hours without a rest.

All the dances were carried out to the accompaniment of the monastery band. In addition to several kinds of drums and flute-like instruments there were several very long trumpets. These were not sounded continuously, and their notes appeared often to be in rhythmic opposition to the rest of the music. Their note was extremely deep and more of a pulsating vibration than an actual musical sound. These long trumpets produce only one note: they are said to be difficult to play, and only a man with exceedingly strong lungs is able to produce any sound out of them. In front of the band sat all the novices, many of whom were quite small boys, not more than seven or eight years of age. They were clearly enjoying the performance; but lest they lose sight of the more serious religious significance of the play an elderly monk occasionally brandished a knotted whip in their faces in order to restore their wandering attention. For a little while they would watch the dance with rapt attention, but soon their gaze would be wandering and before long they would once again be laughing and talking amongst themselves.

Other dances followed the Black-hat dance, but there is no space here to describe them. In some the performers were completely masked, in others they wore a head-dress almost exactly similar to the head-cloth universally worn in Arabia. One dance in particular appeared to be connected in some way with the idea of Spring, although none of the people actually offered this interpretation. In this dance, which was free from the stereotyped movements considered essential in the more ritual dances, the performers all wore wreaths of fresh green leaves.<sup>1</sup> The dance was continued without a break until the late evening, and many of the villagers camped in the Dzong for the night.

On the following day the whole performance was repeated. This time it took place in an open space outside the fort in order to allow a greater number of spectators than was possible inside the Dzong to watch the celebration. It was preceded by a dignified procession consisting not only of the Penlop's Court officials but also of the entire population of the monastery; all wore Lama's robes of deep maroon. The purpose of this procession was to do honour to a visiting prelate from Tibet and to escort him in state to the performance. I had no opportunity to talk with him, but he gave me the friendliest of smiles as he passed to his seat in the upper storey of a neighbouring house. From this point of vantage he watched the dances from behind a thin gauze

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *e.g.* 'The Golden Bough' by Frazer, abridged edition, ch. 28, pp. 296-323, inc.

screen. Once more the dance was continued throughout the day, and only when the sun had already sunk behind the distant hills did many of the spectators set off towards their homes. Late that night I went for a last turn along the banks of the river. The walls of the Dzong gleamed white in the cloudy moonlight, but there was no lamp in any of the windows. From somewhere far above in an upper gallery I could hear the piercing vibrations of the longest trumpets: evidently the last office of the day was being celebrated. Soon there was no further sound, only the splash of the water against the stones in the river-bed. I turned and went back.

After leaving Paro I retraced my path to Ha and from the latter place crossed over the Ha La (13,900 feet) to Chumbi. Although it was now mid-April it was bitterly cold in Yatung and a little snow fell. I decided to push on into Sikkim, waiting only long enough in Chumbi to collect transport. The road from Chumbi over the Natu La to Sikkim is almost a tourist track, and has been traversed by hundreds of travellers. It was raining when we left Yatung and still exceedingly cold. Very soon the rain turned to snow, and it was only with difficulty that we reached Champitang late that evening. It continued to snow, and by the next night there was about 4 feet all round the bungalow. It seemed impossible to go on, but after two more days we decided to try the pass, as the supply of food for the transport mules was running low. We set off in almost a gale, and it was impossible to see for any distance in front. My diary for April 16 notes: "Over the Natu La: left at 6.30 and reached Tsomgo at 5.30 in the evening. Snowstorm most of the way: a tiring day." The following evening we arrived at Gangtok, whence I continued by motor to Darjeeling.

## DISCUSSION

Before the paper the PRESIDENT (Major-General Sir PERCY COX) said: My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,—Major Morris, who is going to read the paper to-night on "A Journey in Bhutan," is no stranger to us. He lectured to us twice in the Aeolian Hall: in 1923 on "A Journey in Nepal," and in 1928 on "A Journey in Hunza-Nagar Territory," while at the opening of this hall he was one of those, as a member of the Second Mount Everest Expedition, to speak on the platform here. He is a practised lecturer and a highly skilled photographer, so you may be sure that we are going to have an interesting evening. The journey he will describe was undertaken in March 1933. He is shortly going back to India, to Nepal, and the Himalayas, so we may look forward to hearing him again later on. To-night, as I have said, he is going to talk about Bhutan.

*Major Morris then read the paper printed above, and a discussion followed.*

The PRESIDENT: Lord Zetland, the lecturer has made reference to your connection with the region: I hope you will favour us with some observations on the expedition undertaken by you in the tract of country he has been discussing, during your service as Governor of Bengal.

The MARQUESS OF ZETLAND: I need hardly say that I have listened to Major Morris's paper with very acute interest, for I have travelled over much of the ground which he has described to us to-night. I have witnessed those remarkable corybantic performances at Paro Dzong of which he has shown a number of most admirable pictures. I have taken part in those ceremonial processions which the hospitable people of Bhutan insist on organizing in honour, if I may

say so, of distinguished visitors, and I have drunk, as Major Morris drank, the wine of the country.

Those of you who have visited Sikkim will perhaps remember that the wine of the country, known as *marwa*, is made by pouring hot water into a vessel containing fermented millet. The hot water can be poured into the same vessel of millet more than once, and at first sight it might be mistaken by the novice for a temperance drink. The question whether indeed it did come within that category or not was settled rather unexpectedly one day for me and my companion—an ardent teetotaler, by the way—who were drinking *marwa* provided by the hospitable headman of a Sikkim village. We got into conversation and asked: “How many times may the vessel of millet be replenished with hot water?” and they replied, “Oh, many times.” We then asked, “What is done with the millet when it is finished with?” and we were told that it was given to the pigs, and our informant, looking at us reflectively, added musingly and, if I may say so, quite gratuitously, “And the pigs get drunk too.”

Major Morris has spoken of the unhealthiness of the Dooars, that undulating country which runs along the borders of Bengal and the mountain States, including Bhutan; and it is, indeed, a fever-infested land. In the plains of Bengal the malaria carrier is the mosquito known as *Anopheles fuliginosus*. The *Anopheles fuliginosus* breeds only in stagnant water. One might have hoped therefore that when one came to the undulating tracts of the Dooars where water is not stagnant but where there are running streams, one would have got beyond the range of the malaria-carrying mosquito; but, unhappily, there is another mosquito, the *Anopheles listoni*, which also carries the malaria parasite, and by an unhappy dispensation of Providence this mosquito breeds not in stagnant but in running water! Hence the malarious nature of the Dooars.

But it was not by the Dooars that I myself entered Bhutan. I actually entered the country by a route which lies a good deal north of the Ha La by which Major Morris told us he left Bhutan to enter the Chumbi valley. I actually branched off from Phari on the Phari table-land and crossed into Bhutan by a pass known as the Tremo La, some 16,500 feet in altitude, dominated in its turn by a magnificent snow-clad peak known to the Bhutanese as Cho-tra-ké, “The Lord of the Cleft Rock,” and proceeding down the Pa Chhu, that is to say, the Pa river, I came to Paro.

Now there are two things that immediately strike one in Western Bhutan. The first of these things has been well brought out by Major Morris in the course of his paper, and particularly by his photographs. That is the solidity and the massive character of the chief buildings of Western Bhutan. The first time that I crossed the Pa Chhu I did so by a substantial covered-in roadway similar to the one of which Major Morris showed a photograph, flanked by stone towers at either end and constructed with great engineering skill, as it seemed to me, on the cantilever principle.

Some way down the Pa Chhu I came across that which is reputed to be the oldest of the great feudal castles of Bhutan known as Duggye Dzong, and I found structures which corresponded very closely to the barbican, the gateway, the bailey, and the keep of feudal castles of the twelfth century of our own country.

And that brings me to the second point which immediately, I think, strikes the traveller, and that is the existence in Western Bhutan of a social system which corresponds very closely, as far as I was able to judge, with the feudal system which was characteristic of a well-known epoch in our own history. The Duggye Dzong itself is a vast building, but even Duggye Dzong pales into insignificance before the immense dimensions of Paro Dzong, of which you have seen photographs this evening, a really stupendous quadrilateral of whitewashed stone,

with the great eaves of a penthouse roof surmounting it. At the time of my visit I was informed that the actual population of the castle of Paro Dzong itself was three hundred persons. The impression that I had stepped back in time to the twelfth century in our own country was heightened by an archery contest which was ordered by the Penlop, or governor, of Western Bhutan in my honour. Locksley had his counterpart in a skilled Bowman who had come from a distant part of Bhutan to take part in the contest. The targets were set up at each end of a pitch about 120 paces in length, and it was the practice of the archers, as soon as they had discharged the arrows from their bows, to shout after them wildly adjuring them to fly true to the mark. I soon noticed that this practice was very necessary, though on this particular occasion it, unhappily, did not prove to be very effective. However at last one archer did succeed in getting a bull's-eye, much to the delight, and I think the surprise, of the vast audience which had gathered round, and the proceedings came to an end with the falling of dusk.

From Paro I traversed the same route as has been described by Major Morris this evening, only of course in the reverse direction, spending some time at Ha, the Bhutanese home of Raja Sonam Tobgay Dorji, the admirable Bhutanese Agent, through whom passes all the official correspondence between the Government of Bhutan and the Government of India. I should like to join Major Morris in the tribute which he paid both to the charm and the ability of Tobgay Dorji.

I was delighted to hear what Major Morris said with regard to the educational experiment which Tobgay Dorji was actually initiating at the time of my visit, and I remember well the enthusiasm with which the scheme was conceived and with which its details were worked out, on the advice of Drs. Graham and Sutherland of Kalimpong.

From Ha I crossed back down the route across the Nepali inhabited part of Southern Bhutan over the same route as that by which Major Morris entered, returning to Bengal once more by, I think, the same Dooar—at least judging by the photograph it appeared to be the same—the Chamurchi Dooar, of which you saw a picture.

May I say once more how very much I have enjoyed listening to the lecture which has brought back to me so many memories of a happy kind.

The PRESIDENT: Ladies and gentlemen, we have been indeed fortunate in that Lord Zetland has been able to be with us to-night. I am sure I am voicing your feelings when I say what a great pleasure it has been to us to see him on this platform. We only wish that we saw him oftener.

There is one question I would like to ask the lecturer. He said that the masks shown in his pictures seemed to be of Chinese origin. I do not know whether he has been on the Leh side of Tibet, and, if he has, whether he regards them also as being of Chinese origin. I have always regarded them as Tibetan.

Major MORRIS: I think they are rather different.

The PRESIDENT: I take it the local idea is that the masks came from China. I do not know that we have any other speakers present to-night who know the country that we have been hearing about; in that case I can only ask you to join me in thanking the lecturer. It has been of very great interest to listen to him and see his fine photographs, especially the different types met with. They must be of very great value. Major Morris' bent is in the direction of anthropology, and during his journeys in Nepal or, as in this case, Bhutan, he devotes himself especially to anthropological work among the natives. I ask you to join me in thanking him exceedingly for his excellent paper and his very fine photographs.