

# Where the Gods are Mountains

THREE YEARS AMONG THE PEOPLE OF THE HIMALAYAS



RENÉ VON NEBESKY-WOJKOWITZ

\$4.75

# Where the Gods are Mountains

by

RENE VON NEBESKY WOJKOWITZ

Rene von Nebesky-Wojkowitz, the distinguished Austrian anthropologist, went to Tibet and the neighboring mountain countries to study the legends, customs and religious traditions of the Himalayan peoples. His three-year visit coincided with the turbulent period when revolution broke out in Nepal and Tibet was conquered by Red China. In this account of his travels he describes his own experiences and gives much new and fascinating information about the people he was living among.

He met lamas and explorers, princes and adventurers, saints and ministers. He visited Bhutan, which has been penetrated by only a dozen Europeans in the twelve centuries of its history; Kalimpong, the terminus of the great caravan route which leads from Lhasa to India; the home of the Sherpas, whose customs have long been ignored by Europeans who concentrate on their abilities as climbers; and Tibet itself, where he was initiated into the mysteries of its religion, and studied the exquisite Tibetan painting and literature. He witnessed the extraordinary trance of an "oracle-priest"; the mystical marathon run by the Yogis every twelve years; and a royal Sikkimese wedding, at which the weather-makers produced torrents of rain by mistake. He also discusses the complicated marital relationships in Tibet, where women hold an exalted position and polyandry is common.

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"He has new information about the "Snowman" folk lore and fascinating descriptions of religious mysteries and black magic," says *The Oxford Mail*.

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*The Indian Express* says "While his scholarship is throughout evident, it is his capacity for friendship and his rare gift of identification that mainly strike the general reader. We learn of oracle priests and reborn saints, gods and demons, the weather-makers and the masters of black magic, the abominable snowman and the Mighty Thunderbolt. There are illustrations and maps, which add to the sense of mystery and variety. Here indeed is a wealth of curious lore, strange, colorful, sensitively written and altogether fascinating."

\* \* \*

"He is a good observer, noticing things and recording them in a way which wins confidence - which is a quality not always found among commentators in Tibet" says the *Manchester Guardian*, while the *London Observer* calls him "an intelligent, informed and lively observer. About Tibetan magic he is especially interesting and not only because the subject is."

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Here is a thrilling book of travel by a writer with a fresh eye and a gift for exploring deeply into the lives of people in strange places.

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# Where the Gods are Mountains

THREE YEARS AMONG THE  
PEOPLE OF THE HIMALAYAS



*René von Nebesky-Wojkowitz*

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY  
Michael Bullock

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## CHAPTER I

# Darjeeling — The 'Place of the Thunderbolt'

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OUR plane, an Indian Airways machine, had taken off an hour ago on its scheduled flight from Calcutta to the North Bengal airport of Bagdogra. The day had started with an unfriendly grey morning, saturated with the sultry humidity of the Indian rainy season. When I left my hotel around 5 a.m. a few scantily clothed figures were yawning and stretching on thin straw mats beneath the corrugated-iron roof of the porch—hotel servants who had taken refuge in the open air from the heat of their poky rooms. With the slow dignity appropriate to a sacred animal a cow made its way between the prostrate, tired bodies, turned into the hotel compound and breakfasted on withered cabbage leaves out of a rubbish bin. A bearded, khaki-clad Sikh was giving a leisurely polish to the gleaming chromium-plating of his taxi bonnet, while beside him a rickshaw-wallah was also doing his best to clean up his ramshackle vehicle. A bored policeman in a snow-white uniform stood watching them both, until the arrival of the antiquated bus that was to take me to the airport. After travelling through sheets of rain we had only a short wait in the big hall before being escorted to the plane under the shelter of brilliant red umbrellas.

The plane made a smooth take-off, despite the violent gusts of wind—and now I was standing in the perspex-covered cockpit looking down, from a height of 9,000 feet, on one of the most glorious sights in the world: the chain of Himalayan peaks. The conical mountain in front of us was Siniolchu, held by mountaineers to be the most beautiful of all; beside it stood Kangchenjunga, which has since been

conquered. These two were followed by the group of mountains situated in Nepal—Gosainthan, Annapurna, Dhaulagiri—and above them all towered Mount Everest. The biggest mountain range on earth stretched for miles and miles, from horizon to horizon, covered in ice and snow.

I went to my seat in the cabin and looked out of the window at the rainclouds that were now coming up again. The plane shuddered as it was hit by a sudden squall; the woman in front of me uttered a low cry and pressed her child to her anxiously. But we were soon through the overcast and sailing serenely along in a sea of yellow light. I had spent many years preparing myself for the task that lay ahead, studying the history, languages and religions of the peoples of Central Asia at a number of European universities and museums. Now my main purpose was to investigate the religious ideas and ceremonies of those ancient Tibetan sects whose holy places lie in the secrecy of the Himalayas. In addition, I hoped to collect all sorts of new material on the religions of almost unknown Himalayan tribes. Was I destined to succeed in these plans? The land looked peaceful and friendly from up here, but this gave little indication of the way things really stood among its isolated inhabitants.

I felt some apprehension regarding the next few hours. My first goal was Darjeeling, but whether I should be able to reach the town without difficulty was doubtful. Two months before, when I had left London by plane for India, headlines in the British Press had announced 'Torrential rains on Darjeeling', 'Hundreds of victims—the town is being supplied from the air'. A few weeks later the Indian province of Assam, on the edge of the Eastern Himalayas, had been shaken by a severe earthquake. Even in Calcutta, several hundred miles from the source of the disturbance, the ground had trembled so violently that the panic-stricken inhabitants rushed screaming from their houses. A few slight tremors had made themselves felt as far away as Kashmir, where I happened to be staying at the time. Now, a month after the disaster, the devastated province, and the mountainous country bordering it, were still rocked by after-tremors. News from the affected area was only gradually seeping

through. An English botanist, who had been travelling through the almost unexplored terrain of the Eastern Himalayas at the time of the catastrophe, told me that the ground suddenly began to sway like the deck of a ship in a storm. Avalanches of stones hurtled down the mountainsides, and boulders the size of a house came crashing down into the valley, breaking up as they went. An American journalist I met in Calcutta, who had been visiting Assam, told a similar story. The exact number of victims was never known, for the earthquake raged most violently in the unexplored territory between Tibet and Assam, over which India has so far only partially established her authority. Several British planters, who had flown over parts of the area in their small aircraft, reported that in some places the landscape had been so altered as to be quite unrecognizable. The first details of the effects of the earthquake on the southern part of Eastern Tibet did not become known until many months later, long after I had settled in the Indo-Tibetan frontier town of Kalimpong. In this region of Tibet monasteries and villages with all their inhabitants had been swallowed up by yawning cracks that suddenly opened in the earth. Several caravans had been buried beneath avalanches of stones, and the starving survivors wandered half-crazed about the countryside. No wonder the Tibetans interpreted this terrible occurrence as a bad omen for the immediate future of their country. Unfortunately they were not mistaken.

According to reports that had reached Calcutta, the earthquake had also caused some damage in the Darjeeling district. But the present catastrophic situation there was primarily due to the exceptionally heavy rains that had preceded the earthquake. The Sikkimese section of the Himalayas is one of the rainiest areas in the world at the best of times; during the monsoon scarcely a day passes without at least a few hours of rain. But on this occasion the floodgates of heaven seemed as though they would never shut again. Day after day the tropical deluge poured down without a break. The sodden earth began to skid down in huge landslides, tearing undergrowth, boulders, houses and even whole sections of forest along with it.

‘You want to go to Darjeeling just now?’ I was asked in Calcutta. ‘Don’t you know what things are like there at the moment? Reports are very bad. The road has collapsed or been blocked at several points, and it may be months before it can be cleared and repaired along its whole length. The little narrow-gauge railway that runs up to Darjeeling from the plains has been broken at so many points that it will probably never be re-laid. The landslide is believed to have claimed three hundred victims, and there is a food-shortage, because supplies for the town have to be carried by bearers along almost unused jungle trails. We must earnestly advise you against this journey.’

All these warnings were now running through my head. How would the place look in reality? I would soon know, for the plane was already putting its nose down in order to land. The air here was as sultry as in Calcutta—no sign yet of the longed-for cool breath of the mountains. The snow-capped peaks were enveloped in a veil of mist; only the steeply-rising foothills were visible. At the edge of the airfield stood a pile of tightly packed mailbags: they were stuffed with letters that could not be delivered because of the impassable state of the road. Nevertheless, an official told me I should be able to get through to Darjeeling the same day, in spite of the difficulties. The railway line had been destroyed at several points, but most of the landslides had already been cleared away from the road and a jeep would take me to within four miles or so of the town. On the other hand, the road through the Teesta Valley to Gangtok, capital of the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim, was still impassable. A whole scarp had slid down at two points, and it was impossible to predict when this road, so vital to trade between India and Tibet, would be free again.

A few thoroughly dilapidated vehicles stood at the airfield exit—battered pre-war American automobiles and three or four jeeps whose condition was not much better. I chose one of the latter. Its slim driver, wearing European clothes, assured me in good English with a friendly smile on his Mongolian face that his car would take me and my heavy luggage as far as the break in the road.



After a short drive over a bumpy track pitted with holes full of water, we came on to a well-kept tarred road. We passed through a small village consisting of several rows of tumbledown mud huts under spreading trees. Swarms of big-bellied, naked children were running wildly around. Two-wheeled carts drawn by emaciated, humped oxen came towards us, followed by a group of Indian peasant women in dirty saris, their brown arms gleaming with innumerable metal bangles.

The jeep bumped over worn and shiny railway lines and passed a white station building, beyond which a collection of wooden huts overtopped by modern concrete structures came into view. 'That's Siliguri, Sahib,' said the driver, 'the terminus of the railway line from Calcutta to the north.'

It was market day and the streets were filled with a thousand-headed, noisy multitude. The brown-skinned Bengalis in their white *dhotis* were still in the majority, but here they were interspersed with short-statured, slit-eyed, colourfully-dressed men and women from the nearby mountains. The vendors squatted at the roadside, their wares spread out on straw mats—bananas, oranges, gourds and great mounds of vegetables of kinds unknown to me. A betel-nut seller had taken up his position at one corner of the market-place, which was surrounded by twisted palm trees. Before the critical eyes of his customers he carefully mixed the pounded nuts with pinches of aromatic spices and wrapped the whole artistically in a green leaf, which the customer, after paying a small coin, slipped into his mouth and chewed with much smacking of the lips. All round the betel seller the ground was as red with expectorated betel juice as if half the population of Siliguri had been suffering for days from severe nose-bleeding. A few paces farther on a cigarette vendor was enthroned in a little wooden booth. He was offering for sale brightly coloured packets of European cigarettes and thin rolls of tobacco leaf, which were bought by the poorer sections of the populace. The walls of his stand were papered with magazine pictures of Hollywood lovelies and gaudy oleographs on which many-armed Indian deities were perpetrating frightful slaughter among hosts of demons with gnashing teeth.

A herd of water buffaloes with black nostrils and glassy eyes shouldered their way through the crowd, driven by three peasants who mercilessly flailed the beasts' flanks with their heavy sticks. A few rickshaws, occupied by bejewelled Indian matrons and drawn by half-grown boys on bicycles, followed the path made by the animals through the seething throng. At a crossroad a policeman sought diligently but in vain to bring some order into the chaos of people, animals and vehicles, while behind his back two street-sweepers—urged on by the shouts of a dense circle of interested spectators—were demonstrating their mutual dislike in an exchange of blows. The jeep made its way through this orgy of noise, colours and indefinable smells at walking pace and with its horn perpetually sounding.

We turned into a slightly quieter side-street. The crowd was thinner and the jeep accelerated its pace. A few minutes later we had left the last houses of Siliguri behind us and were speeding along the smooth road towards the mountains, which were still enveloped in cloud. The terrain on either side of the road was now becoming more hilly, the fields were giving place to a dense, dark green carpet made up of endless rows of low shrubs. We had reached the first of the plantations on which the celebrated Darjeeling tea is grown. A chain of half-naked bearers, panting under the burden of huge boxes, jog-trotted past us at the side of the road, their eyes fixed dully on the ground. Off the road, amongst the tea bushes, stood huts on tall piles—the dwellings of the plantation workers. Most of the huts seemed to be unoccupied; their roofs were partially caved in and their windows and doors boarded up. From others blue smoke rose, and the cries of children could be heard.

My driver explained to me that the houses hereabouts were built on piles because of the large number of snakes and tigers. Tigers, in particular, are greatly feared by the tea coolies. Just at that time, the driver told me, a dangerous man-eater had been roaming the district for several weeks. Only recently he had seized a victim on the open road. Three coolies on their way to Siliguri had been overtaken by darkness and decided to spend the night in the thicket beside

the road. The following morning one of the men was missing. The other two went in search of him, and to their horror came upon their companion's fleshless remains quite close by. A tiger had killed him during the night and dragged his body away so soundlessly that the other two had heard nothing.

Shortly afterwards an Indian policeman escaped the same fate by the skin of his teeth. He was travelling by night on his motor-cycle, quite unaware that he was being pursued by a tiger. Only a fortunate coincidence saved a man's life: at the critical moment a car came along in the opposite direction, and its headlights so dazzled the tiger that it gave up the chase and vanished into the jungle. The policeman was no little horrified when the occupants of the car told him they had seen the tiger by the light of their headlamps, immediately behind the motor-cycle and obviously on the point of springing upon its unsuspecting victim. The noise of the motor-cycle seemed to have made no impression on the beast whatever, and without the chance meeting with the car the policeman would have been doomed.

My companion told me this story in excellent English. When I asked how he had acquired such mastery of the language he explained that he had worked for many years as the servant of British officials, and used to accompany them when government business took them to Tibet. His last post had been with a British officer who had lived for some time at Kalimpong. The good fellow was very surprised when I told him that a few weeks earlier I had been the guest of his former master in Scotland.

Meanwhile, we had come to the foot of the first spur of the mountains, and the road began to ascend. Beside it, terrifyingly close to the yawning abyss, ran the narrow track of the mountain railway. At the bend in the road we caught sight of a train, consisting of five or six green-painted carriages and an old-fashioned little engine pulling its burden downhill, whistling loudly. Carriages, footboards and even the roofs were occupied by muddy workmen, obviously on their way back from repairing the track. Shortly afterwards we met a rickety little bus, packed with slit-eyed men, its battered roof covered with bundles.

Far behind, right back to the pastel blue southern horizon, the Bengal Plain lay in the harsh sunlight with the green fringe of the tea gardens at the foot of the mountains and the vast chessboard of fields and meadows beyond. The villages had dwindled to tiny dots, and even noisy Siliguri, which we had crossed earlier on, was now no more than a grey patch in the midst of which a few larger houses formed pinpoints of white. To the left a broad river broke out of the encircling foothills. Its muddy waters had inundated wide areas of the countryside. That must be the Teesta, Sikkim's biggest river, which flows out from the mountains at this point.

There was not much trace left of the warmth of the plains. A cool breath passed through the forest with a low rustling, driving shreds of cloud among the treetops. Shivering, I pulled a sweater and scarf out of my baggage.

The jeep began to climb again. A green-tinged snake with a reddish head slithered across the road in front of us—the driver wrenched the car to one side to avoid running over the reptile. The wheels screeched loudly, the jeep rocked dangerously, and for a ghastly moment it looked as though we were going over the edge, down into the gaping ravine. 'Forgive me, Sahib,' stammered the driver, looking at me apologetically. And then, to justify himself, he told me of the peculiar circumstances surrounding the recent death of one of his uncles. This uncle, like the rest of the family, was a Buddhist, but had not paid much heed to his religion. This, said a lama who had been consulted on the subject, was a grievous sin—and according to the Buddhist doctrine of the transmigration of souls it was to be feared that in his next life he would be re-born as an animal. 'So you see,' concluded my driver, 'why I didn't want to run over the snake. You never can tell. . . .'

A little later we crossed the stone-strewn path of a landslide. A group of men and women workers were busy shoveling away the last remnants of soil and removing the large stones from the road. As the jeep approached they stood aside to let us through. They were Nepalis, lean figures with light brown skin and narrow eyes. A few wore torn European jackets and trousers, but most of them were dressed Nepali



fashion in long linen trousers, close-fitting round the ankles, that had once been white, and shirt-like jackets. Many of them had tied a linen band round their waists, from which protruded a kukri in its black leather sheath. Only a few of the men possessed working-shoes, but all of them wore round 'pill-box' caps on their heads. The women, too, were poorly dressed. They wore tattered jackets, wide strips of linen wound several times round their waists and reaching down to their ankles, and big head-scarves that covered their shoulders and fell down over their backs. Leaning on their tools, they turned their brown faces, that looked as though they were carved out of wood, and gazed at us curiously. There were women bowed with age amongst them, as well as young girls hardly out of childhood. A considerable portion of the population was evidently engaged in repairing the damage wrought by the monsoon. For many people the heavy rains meant suffering and destruction; to others they had brought a welcome opportunity to earn money on road building.

We crossed the difficult patch at walking pace, but a few miles farther on we encountered a fresh obstruction. Here the work was more advanced, however. The road had already been cleared of debris, and a gang of young men and women were flattening down the torn surface with a heavy roller. In two long files, bent double with the effort, their bare feet dug into the wet soil, they were hauling the ponderous contraption up-hill with ropes, laughing and chattering as though it were all a great game. Suddenly a hoarse male voice launched into a song, and the chorus of girls took it up with high-pitched, strident voices. The simple, rising and falling melody was repeated two or three times, when they suddenly stopped and let the roller run down-hill a little way, shouting for joy. After this they picked up the ropes again and the human chains moved up-hill once more to the accompaniment of the same monotonous chant. A little farther on a group of men were shovelling rubble from the blocked road ditches.

I saw two Tibetans among them, young lads in clumsy Tibetan boots and black knee-length coats. A raw wind was sweeping across the roadway, but it was evidently too hot

here for these two workers from the cool Land of Snow, as Tibet is also called. They had therefore pushed their coats back off their shoulders and tied the empty sleeves round their waists with a knot in front. Both of them wore a kind of shirt of coarse linen, done up with a button at the side of the chest in the manner of Chinese garments. One had his raven black hair plaited in two small pigtailed decked out with red ribbons and arranged in a circlet round his head. The other wore a broad-brimmed khaki-coloured hat, from beneath which a long pigtail hung down at the back.

Around midday we reached Kurseong, a little hill town. Like many other places built on the slopes of the Himalayas it had enjoyed its heyday during the British raj. British officials and army officers' wives used to go there with their families during the hot weather to escape the oppressive heat of the plains. The mission schools and little guest-houses, which today eke out a meagre existence, date from this period. Kurseong is called by the Tibetans Karsang, the 'Good Castle'. It is the site of an outpost of Tibetan religious life—a small lamasery. Here, too, among Nepalis, Indians and the few remaining Europeans, one of the numerous divinities of the Tibetan pantheon has his dwelling. This is Karsang Gyepo, the 'King Demon of the Good Castle', the divine guardian of this little Buddhist shrine.

The village of Ghoom, which we reached an hour later, is already consecrated Buddhist ground, for here stands a long-established lamasery. Its twenty inmates belong to the Yellow Hat order, the most important Tibetan sect. The houses of Ghoom, for the most part wretched wooden huts, follow the line of the road, which at this point runs on towards Darjeeling along a ridge that drops steeply on both sides. The village creates a thoroughly dismal impression. Even when the sun is shining in nearby Darjeeling the weather witches swirl above the Ghoom Ridge. The local inhabitants say quite rightly that Gloom would be a better name for the place than Ghoom. The landmark of Ghoom is a group of three conical hills, on the summits of which stand the buildings of the Buddhist monastery.

The Yellow Hat monastery of Ghoom—its Tibetan name

means 'the Religious Continent of the Joyful Soul'—is a square one-storey building with yellow painted walls and curved roof in the Chinese style. Two stucco dragons writhe above the entrance, and long rows of the curious Tibetan prayer-wheels in open wooden boxes flank the monastery door on both sides. These are metal drums bearing characters of the so-called Lantsa alphabet on the outside and containing within innumerable strips of paper with prayers printed on them. An antechamber, on whose walls are portrayed the Buddhist Guardians of the Four Sides of the World, leads to the great assembly hall.

The heavy, iron-studded temple door opens with a creak. A wave of musty air wells out to meet the visitor; it smells of incense, mouldering paper and burnt oil. At first glance one can distinguish very little, for the room is windowless. A pale gleam of light that enters through one or two cracks in the roof, and the little butter lamps flickering on the altars, cannot disperse the darkness that fills all the niches and corners of the hall. Only gradually can the visitor make out that he is in a lofty room divided by two rows of mighty timber columns into a nave and two narrow aisles. At the end of the hall rises a huge, gilded statue of Buddha, whose half-closed eyes seem to be peering questioningly at the entrant. A faint, mysterious smile plays round its mouth. This is not the historical Buddha, the proclaimer of the Yellow Doctrine, but Jampa, the Redeemer of the Future, one of the innumerable Buddhas of the Tibetan pantheon. Unlike other figures of Buddha, which sit cross-legged in the characteristic position of meditation, Jampa is always represented with legs dangling, as though he were sitting on a chair.

Two rows of hassocks run from the entrance of the shrine to the feet of the great Buddha. These are the monks' seats: right at the entrance the low cushions of the novices, towards the centre the higher hassocks of the fully ordained monks, and immediately in front of the image of Jampa the throne-like seat of the abbot. The monks' red shawls lie on the smooth-worn hassocks, and low carved tables bearing hand-bells, little silver bowls and various ritual vessels stand in the central gangway between the two rows of hassocks. There are

frescoes on the walls, but they have been so blackened by smoke that much of their contents is indiscernible. Tibetan roll-paintings, the celebrated *thangkas*, hang from the copiously decorated columns. These *thangkas*—a very characteristic Tibetan art form—consist of miniature painting on silk or linen and are to be found not only in temples and monasteries, but also in a great many private houses. They generally portray the Buddhist heaven and its divine inhabitants, both good and evil.

The painting of *thangkas* is subject to definite rules and regulations, which have been carefully observed for centuries. This also applies to the outward shape of these roll-paintings. At the top and bottom they carry a round staff with a decorated knob. The picture itself is bordered with brocade, and they usually have red and yellow silk ribbons hanging from the sides. These ribbons symbolize a rainbow, and are intended to link the *thangka's* pious spectator with that distant heaven whose mysteries are revealed to him in the picture. A *thangka* is easily rolled up with the aid of the two rods. The suspended picture is shielded from unauthorized eyes—and also from the blackening smoke of the numerous butter lamps that burn in every Tibetan temple—by a silk curtain. When the curtain of the *thangka* is raised, in order to show the picture to the faithful during a ceremony, the gathered silk veil is attached to the upper edge of the roll-painting to form a sort of canopy.

A narrow stairway on the outer wall of the monastery leads to the upper storey, which houses the Chapel of the Thousand Buddhas. In this chapel long wooden shelves bear endless rows of absolutely identical little Buddhas with golden bodies and bright blue hair. In their honour joss-sticks, stuck in a shallow vessel filled with sand, are lit. This vessel manifestly also fulfils the purpose of an offertory box, for the sand is full of coins placed there by the pious as a gift to the gods and the monastic community. On sunny days the monastery presents a very gay and colourful appearance, with its brightly painted façade and the yellow prayer-flags. When I paid my first visit, however, the weather was very bad, and the monastery rose before me in the midst of grey

trails of mist. The prayer-flags hung limply from the poles, their fabric torn and the printed prayers washed off by the rain. The forecourt of the monastery was empty, the temple door closed. At the shouts of my guide a door opened in an adjoining building and the shaven head of a priest appeared in the narrow crack. It immediately vanished again; excited voices could be heard and then an old monk in the red, toga-like robe of a lama peered out. Apparently none too pleased by the disturbance, he opened the door ceremoniously and stood aside for us to enter the hall.

I walked slowly through the temple, followed by the shuffling footsteps of the lama, stooping now and again to examine one of the divinities depicted on the walls or a particularly beautiful ritual vessel. Not until I was on the point of leaving the shrine did I notice that two large silk curtains hung on the far wall, on either side of the door, obviously concealing mural paintings. I was anxious to find out what lay behind these hangings and tried to explain to the lama that I should like him to raise them. But the monk only shook his head in refusal and uttered a few words that I did not understand. My driver explained to me with an embarrassed smile that the lama could not show me these pictures because they depicted the tutelary deities of his monastery. The latter would be angry if they were exposed to the gaze of an unbeliever. The gods might even vent their displeasure on myself and the monastic community.

After some argument the priest agreed to lift the silk veil for a short time. First he removed the curtain to the left of the door, and I saw before me a gruesome fresco already severely affected by the dampness of the wall. The centre was taken up by a half naked, blue-skinned goddess. Her face was contorted with rage and she was surrounded by flames and clouds of smoke. Seated sideways on a brown mule, facing the spectator, she rode across the waves of a blood-coloured sea in which floated hands, feet and severed human heads. The right hand of this demonic figure brandished a club, the left held a child's skull before her breast. The goddess's brow, with a cyclopean eye in the centre, was embellished with a diadem of five human skulls; from the corners

of her half open mouth protruded four long fangs. A garland of severed heads hung round her neck. The mule looked no less singular. It had only three legs, but to offset this it had an eye in its flank. Its bridle consisted of green serpents; at the left side of its saddle hung three dice, such as the Tibetans use for dice-playing; a saddle-cloth protruded from under the saddle—a human skin whose hands trailed along the turbulent surface of the sea of blood. This central figure was surrounded by a host of smaller demonic figures.

It was not difficult to recognize whom this picture represented: it was Pelden Lhamo, the 'Sublime Goddess', the most important protective deity of Tibetan Buddhism. There are countless legends connected with this divinity. She is said once to have been the wife of the god of the underworld. When she fled from her husband the latter fired an arrow after her, which pierced the mule's flank. The goddess turned the wound into an eye. A son sprang from her marriage with the ruler of hell. Thanks to her cyclopean eye, which was able to see into the future, she knew that her son would one day become an adversary of the Buddhist doctrine. To prevent this she slew him with her own hand and then flayed him, afterwards using his skin as a saddle-cloth. Pelden Lhamo, say the Tibetans, moves at night across graveyards and casts her dice to decide the fate of men.

The lama was very surprised that I knew the name of this goddess. He repeatedly uttered an amazed '*Ah-le, ah-le!*' when he saw that I could also name her attendants—the goddess with the head of a sea monster, and a lion-headed female demon carrying a ritual chopping-knife and a blood-filled bowl made of a skull. At the lower edge of the picture I recognized four other small figures, the Goddesses of the Four Seasons. The Queen of Spring rides on a mule, the red Queen of Summer on a water buffalo. The Queen of Autumn wears a mantle of peacocks' feathers and gallops over the clouds on a stag; while the blue Queen of Winter rides on a camel.

The lama inquired how I came to know all these names. I told him through my interpreter that there were many books in the West from which one could learn about Tibet and its

gods. He seemed disinclined to believe this. In his opinion the people of far away E-u-rope and A-me-ri-ca were only interested in those wonder-machines that travelled, or even flew, by themselves. The foreigners had no time to concern themselves with the true religion, as preached in the Land of Snow. He had met many white men, but I was the first who had known the names of the Tibetan divinities. He supposed that I must have been a Tibetan in a former life and have been later reborn in the distant land of the foreigners. Now I had been led back into the sphere of influence of the Buddhist religion as a reward for good deeds.

The old monk had no further hesitation in showing me the picture of the second tutelary deity. He lifted the silk curtain—and to my amazement I beheld the image of a demoniac being I had never seen in any book on Tibet. Tongues of flame licked round this tutelary god. He possessed human form, but a third eye glittered in his forehead. His body was enveloped in costly garments, such as are worn by the highest priests in the Land of Snow. His head was covered by a broad-brimmed hat decorated with golden ornaments; on his feet he wore angular white boots. In his right hand he held a gleaming dagger with a wavy blade; with the left he pressed a bleeding heart to his breast. A ritual staff adorned with long, brightly-coloured ribbons rested in the crook of his left arm; a brownish ichneumon, from whose open mouth fell a stream of precious stones, sat on the forearm. The demon was perched on the back of the White Lioness with the Turquoise Locks that lives in the glaciers. An army of spectral beings was gathered round the tutelary god. A white demon holding in his hand a dart with brightly-coloured ribbons rode on an elephant with six tusks. Behind him trotted a tiger with a green tutelary god on its back brandishing a chopping-knife. Lower down an armour-clad rider galloped across thunder clouds, pursued by a red demon on a fire-belching dragon.

Who were all these deities? As luck would have it the priest did not put my knowledge to the test. Delighted to be able to display his own, he began to explain each figure. Unfortunately I could understand hardly anything of what he

was saying, but I did manage to grasp the fact that the central figure bore the name Dorje Shungden, 'Mighty Thunderbolt', and that this was a great tutelary god of the Yellow Hat sect. I should naturally have liked to learn more about this curious deity, but my driver warned me it was time to be going. It was growing late, and the most difficult stretch of the road to Darjeeling still lay ahead. So I had to say good-bye.

At dusk we reached the point where the road ended in nothingness. The little landslides we had seen in the morning were not to be compared with what had happened here. A whole rock-face had collapsed and with it the road and railway, over a length of several hundred yards, had vanished into the abyss. The road broke off sharply, like a ski-jump, and bent rails dangled from it into the mist of the valley. Only a narrow footpath linked the two ends of the road. Steps had been trodden in the loamy soil of the landslide and ropes stretched along both sides of the path. The last quarter of a mile before the break was jammed with lorries carrying supplies for Darjeeling. Long files of bearers laden with boxes and sacks were clambering up and down the slippery pathway with antlike diligence. Sturdy Nepalis in Indian police uniform were taking care that everything proceeded in orderly fashion.

My luggage was unloaded and I paid off the driver. A quarter of an hour's laborious climbing through the soft clay and I was on solid ground again. The luggage was put aboard one of the jeeps standing ready on the other side. The remainder of the journey to nearby Darjeeling went off without a hitch. I found a lodging for the night in a European-style hotel in which, for the moment, there were no other guests.

The following morning was cool and dull; rainclouds had wrapped the landscape in a milky grey. Only occasionally was the veil of mist torn. Then I caught sight of the market-place far down below, the widely scattered houses and the tea-gardens on the outskirts of the town, through whose dark green the landslide had drawn ugly brown streaks. Somewhat



apart from the dumpy stone houses of the market-place I perceived the curved yellow roof of a Buddhist temple. Not far from this rose the pagoda-shaped tower of a Nepali shrine, and only a little farther on stood a Christian church. The sound of its bells mingled with the dull strokes of a heathen gong. Darjeeling is undoubtedly one of the most religious towns I know. From the first light of dawn until late in the evening gongs and bells reverberate, prayer-wheels turn in the Buddhist shrines, and on the highest elevation of the town, a hill dedicated to the Indo-Tibetan god Mahakala, a whole forest of prayer-flags flaps in the wind. During the night, when the noises of the bazaar are still, the muted call of the long temple trumpets often rises up from the lamaseries in the valley.

The name Darjeeling comes from the Tibetan words '*Dorje Ling*', the 'Place of the Thunderbolt'. This was the name of a lamasery that once stood on Mahakala Hill. In 1828 two British officials came to the district in the course of their duties. They quickly observed that Dorje Ling, with its relatively cool climate and beautiful landscape, would make an excellent hot-weather resort—a suggestion which they passed on to the appropriate authorities. After a time the King of Sikkim, who was very anxious to maintain good relations with the new rulers of India, declared his willingness to make the British a present of this strip of land, ownership of which was in dispute. Thus Darjeeling became a district capital in British India and enjoyed an era of great prosperity as a favourite hill station. The Tibetans, however, were very displeased with this new arrangement, accusing the King of Sikkim of having ceded a piece of Tibetan territory to the foreigners without having any right to do so. Their protests were ineffectual, for Tibet, then as now, was practically powerless. Darjeeling became the summer residence of the British Governor of Bengal; splendid villas, hotels and office buildings were erected and a mountain railway built up to the town, which is situated at a height of 7,210 feet.

Today everything is different, very different. After Britain ended her sovereignty over India, Darjeeling lost much of its previous importance. Certainly, the town still enjoys the

world renown it gained for its celebrated tea, and it also retains its value as a base for the ever more numerous Himalayan expeditions. But nevertheless, during the major part of the year, Darjeeling looks almost abandoned. The hotels and guest-houses are almost or completely empty, many of the shops in the European-looking business street are closed, and a large number of the town's private houses bear the ominous notice 'For Sale'. Buyers seem to be in very short supply, for sun and rain have long ago dimmed the lettering on these notices. Only once a year, at the beginning of autumn, for a few weeks Darjeeling re-awakens into its old life. At this season the whole of India celebrates its greatest festival, the *Kali Puja*, which lasts several weeks and is held in honour of the goddess Kali. Then the hotels of the town are full to overflowing and the streets crowded with festively attired visitors. Even Darjeeling's tiny racecourse, daringly situated on a precipitous tongue of rock, comes into its own again. Shaggy Tibetan ponies are temporarily transformed into proud racehorses, on which many a poor Nepali stakes the last of his savings. There are high jinks on race days. High is the right word, for the local people assert that though this is the smallest, it is also the highest race-track in the world. Malicious tongues add that it is at the same time the most sinister arena of the 'sport of kings', for here, they say, every horse is doped and every jockey bribed. But no sooner is the *Kali Puja* over than Darjeeling sinks back into its enchanted slumber, while shopkeepers anxiously calculate whether their takings during the last few weeks will see them through until next autumn.

My first path in Darjeeling led to the European Cemetery. There, in the oldest row of graves, stands a tombstone in the form of a column. Its inscription announces that this is the burial place of Alexander Csoma de Körös—born 4 April 1784; died 11 April 1842—who devoted his life to the East and spent years of patient labour and extreme privation in the service of knowledge, compiling a dictionary and grammar of the Tibetan language, his best and truest memorial.

The life of this man, who is now hailed as the Father of Tibetan Studies, reads like a novel. He was born in the little

village of Körös in the Hungarian county of Háromszék. From his earliest student days he concerned himself with the problem of the origin of the Magyars. At the age of thirty-six he left Hungary in search of the ancestral home of his people. By a series of detours he came to Siberia, whence he made his way to Mossul with a caravan, disguised as an Arab. He used a raft to get to Baghdad, and from here he travelled—again with various caravans—via Teheran and Kabul to the North-West Indian city of Peshawar. Thence he proceeded to Kashmir and on to the Tibetan frontier zone. What he discovered there was not the cradle of the Magyar race, but something that took an even stronger grip on his interest: the mysterious people of Tibet. He went to work with unparalleled industry and perseverance on the self-imposed task of studying the language and literature of the inhabitants of the Land of Snow. For several years he lived under conditions of great hardship in lamaseries of the South-West Ladakh. On their return to India British officials and army officers, who had met him on their travels, gave accounts of this strange Hungarian dressed as a lama, who occupied a lonely outpost of learning in the icy mountains.

One of the men who met Csoma de Körös in the village of Kanum at this period wrote of him: 'The cold is extremely intense, but he remains at his writing-desk throughout the whole winter, wrapped from head to foot in woollen clothing, from morning till night, without a moment's break for rest or warmth apart from his copious meals, which consist of nothing but a succession of bowls of butter tea. But winter in Kanum shrinks into insignificance compared with the cold in the monastery of Yangla, where Csoma spent a whole year. Here he and his lama teacher and a servant were confined for three or four months to a room with an area of barely three square yards. They dared not go outside, for the ground was covered in snow and the temperature far below freezing point. There he sat with folded arms, wrapped in a sheepskin, reading from morning till evening, without fire and without light after darkness had fallen. The bare ground was his bed, the naked walls his only protection from the rigours of the weather.'

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In 1831 Csoma de Körös came to Calcutta, which he left again for a two years' sojourn on the borders of Sikkim. On his return to Calcutta he began to learn several Indian languages, in order to extend his field of study, and published his grammar and dictionary, which were of paramount importance to Tibetan research. His primary aim continued to be the study of the Tibetan language, however, so at the beginning of 1842 he set off on a journey which he hoped would crown his life's work—the journey to Lhasa. But fate decreed otherwise. As he was crossing the plain of Northern Bengal he contracted tropical malaria. Shortly after arriving in Darjeeling his condition became critical and he died here some days later, only a few miles from the Tibetan frontier.

## CHAPTER II

# The Five Treasures of the Eternal Snow

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ON the third day of my stay in Darjeeling I was woken in the early morning by a cold wind that swept into my room through the half-open window and sent the curtains flapping high in the air. The valleys around Darjeeling were hidden by a seething white ocean of clouds, and the ridge of the mountains rose above this restlessly moving surface like an island. The silently rolling billows of this sea of clouds were just beginning to break over the houses farthest down the mountainside. The measured strokes of a Nepali temple bell, deadened by the mist, echoed from the invisible depths of the valley. High above the cloudy sea, the still sleeping town and the barren foothills of the Himalayas, towered the colossal massif of Kangchenjunga. All the details of its shape stood out clearly in the limpid morning air: its rocky flanks, whose naked blackness was only partially covered by a mantle of freshly fallen snow, the deeply furrowed ice crust of its glaciers, and its five glistening peaks.

How often I had heard or read descriptions of the fairy-like splendour of Kangchenjunga. But what I now saw before me far surpassed all my expectations and is hardly to be expressed in words. Now I could well understand why all the people who live at the foot of this giant mountain look up with pious dread to its storm-encircled peaks.

To the Lepchas, the short-statured aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim, Kangchenjunga is a holy mountain. They call it Konglo Chu, the 'Highest Veil of the Ice'. The Lepchas believe that the benevolent creator-god Tasheting formed their tribe's ancestral parents, the man Furongthing and his wife Nazongnyu, from the ice of its glaciers. The mysterious

'Snowman'—whom the Lepchas worship as the god of hunting—roams the moraine fields of Konglo Chu, and behind its ramparts of ice lies the Kingdom of the Dead.

Kangchenjunga is a holy mountain not only for the Lepchas, however, but also for the Tibetans. The sons of the Land of Snow believe that the Tibetan god of wealth made it his abode, storing on its five peaks five kinds of riches: gold, silver, precious stones, corn, and sacred books. Hence the Tibetan name of this mountain—'The Five Treasures of the Eternal Snow'. In the morning, when the rays of the rising sun sweep across the walls of the ice and the peaks shine like gold, it is not difficult to imagine one is looking at sparkling, glistening hoards of jewels and precious metals.

The books of the lamas describe the beauty of this mountain in vivid words. They say it is 'like a king sitting on his throne. The four subsidiary peaks are like pillars supporting a baldaquin of clouds. Seen from the valleys the five pinnacles, decked in eternal snow, are like a crown or like the points of a diadem of the gods. Seven crystal-clear lakes lie on the rim of the mountain. They are like a row of libation vessels filled with water. The white crags to left and right resemble lions trying to leap up to the sky. The nests of the lammergeyers are their necklaces. The land that lies at the foot of the mountain is a bowl full of jewels.'

Though one Tibetan legend makes Kangchenjunga the dwelling of the god of wealth, others speak of a god who is the personification of the mountain, and yet others of five divine brothers each of whom lives on one of the summits. The highest pinnacle of the mountain is called the Peak of the Tiger, the remainder are the Peaks of the Lion, the Horse, the Dragon and the wonder-bird Garuda. The five brothers who live on these peaks are portrayed on cult paintings as riders clad in armour and brandishing lances. The cuirass, helm and lance of each one are of a different material. Those of the first brother are made of turquoise, those of the second of pure gold, while the remaining three brothers wear armour of shells, copper and iron respectively.

The mountain god Kangchenjunga is assisted by a minis-

ter, the demon Yabdu, 'Father of Devils', whose abode is on a mountain near Siliguri. He is regarded as a form of the great tutelary god Mahakala. It is written in Tibetan books that Yabdu lives in a thick forest from which clouds of smoke and fire rise. His glistening black body is clad in a flaming garment of black silk, his head is covered with a red turban decorated in front with grinning human skulls. His right hand brandishes a club of sandalwood, his left holds a skull-bowl filled with the blood of an enemy of the Buddhist religion. The natives say that Yabdu sends the warm south wind that releases the destructive avalanches from the sides of the mountains. To placate him a black buffalo must be sacrificed. Pahunri, another mountain in Sikkim, also possesses its divine ruler. He is depicted as a Buddhist priest with a cap of the Red Hat order on his head and wielding a ceremonial staff. He rides on a white lion with turquoise locks.

When Lhatsun Chempo—the Buddhist patron saint of Sikkim—came to Sikkim four centuries ago, with fifteen of his pupils, to spread the teaching of Buddha, the mountain god Kangchenjunga rendered him good service. An old Sikkimese legend relates that the divine ruler of this mountain changed himself into a wild duck and flew to meet Lhatsun Chempo, who was approaching from the north, so as to instruct him in person concerning his future province. When the saint reached the borders of Sikkim he left his pupils there and, making use of his magic powers, flew to the top of Kabru, a neighbouring mountain to Kangchenjunga, from which vantage point he could survey the whole of Sikkim.

From the summit of Kabru, Lhatsun Chempo perceived the best route to Sikkim. He hastened to his patiently waiting pupils and led them into the land which he hoped to win for the Yellow Doctrine. Lhatsun Chempo did not forget the aid he had received from Kangchenjunga. The following autumn he brought the mountain god and the rest of the gods of the country an offering, which has been repeated every year at the same season ever since. A century after Lhatsun Chempo's death this offering was enriched by a great religious

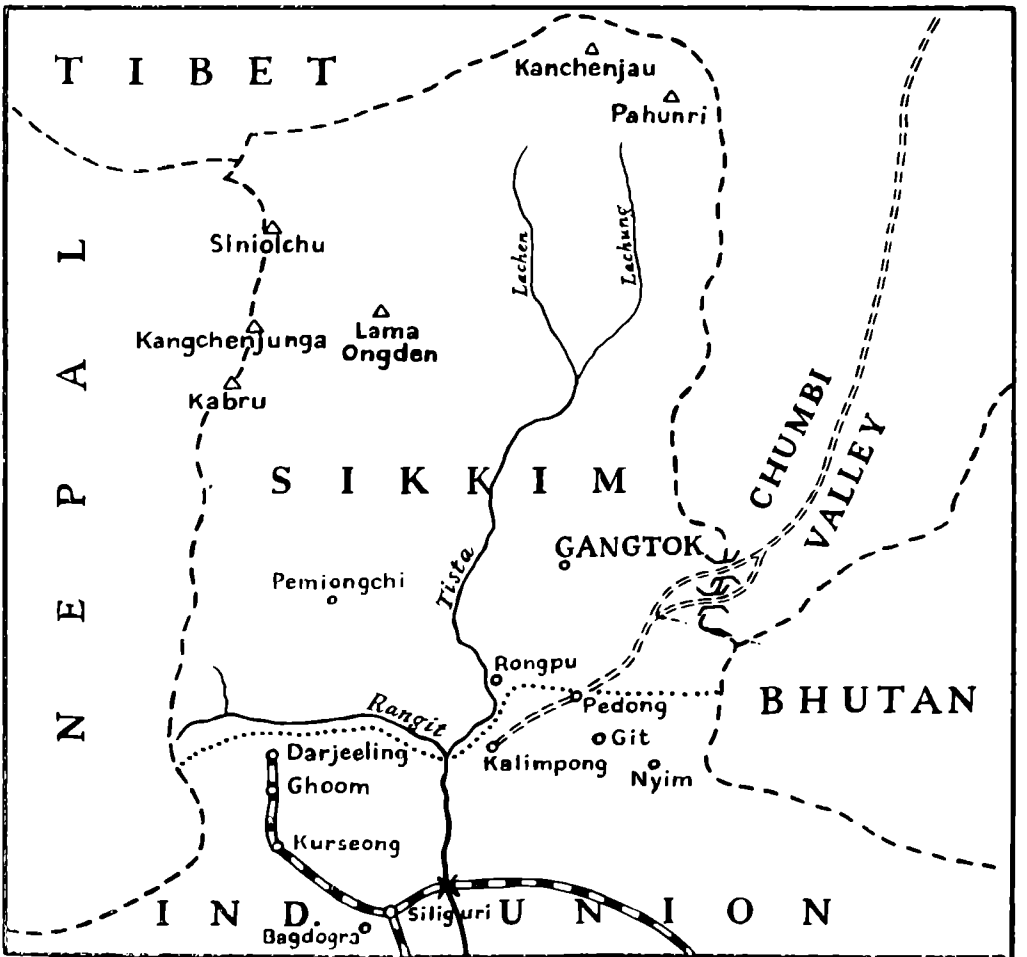
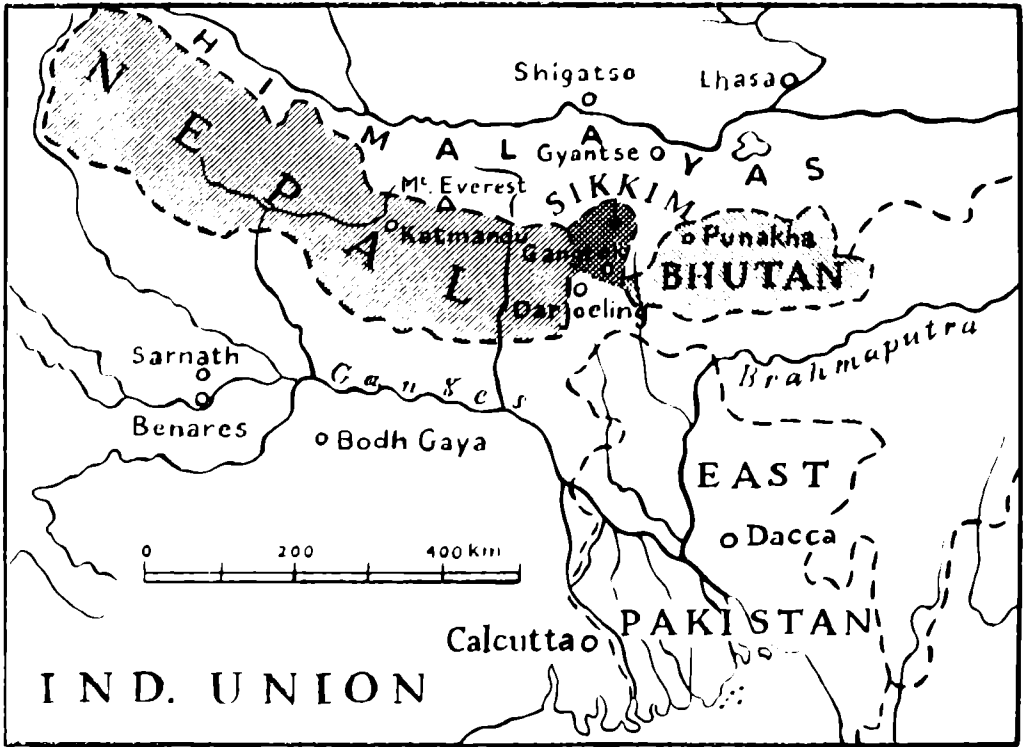
masked dance, which is still performed today and in the course of which the mountain god Kangchenjunga, his minister Yabdu, and their retinue—represented by Buddhist priests—appear on the scene.

Shortly before the British mountaineers under Charles Evans embarked on the final assault upon the hitherto unconquered Kangchenjunga, in May 1955, the divinity of this mountain threatened to put a stop to the whole enterprise. The leaders of the expedition received letters from the Governments of Sikkim, India and Nepal officially requesting them to renounce the attempt to climb Kangchenjunga. The reason given was the mountain's sanctity and the risk that climbing it would provoke the anger of the god and bring serious harm to the land. In reply Evans promised that none of the climbers would set foot on the holy summit. He kept his word. On 25 May 1955, after overcoming tremendous difficulties, the party stood within a stone's throw of the summit. Here they halted and turned back, in order not to violate the susceptibilities of the natives and the sanctity of the mountain.

In addition to Kangchenjunga, Yabdu and other mountain gods of their country, the Sikkimese Buddhists also worship Nyen-chen Tang-la, the embodiment of the Trans-Himalaya, the mighty range of mountains that runs through the wilderness of Northern Tibet. A legend relates that this mountain god was once an adversary of Buddhism. When the Buddhist missionary Padma Sambhava came to Tibet, Nyen-chen Tang-la tried to block the saint's path with mists and snowstorms. But Padma Sambhava succeeded in breaking the mountain god's opposition and converting him into a protector of the Yellow Doctrine. An ancient Tibetan work recounts the origin of Nyen-chen Tang-la :

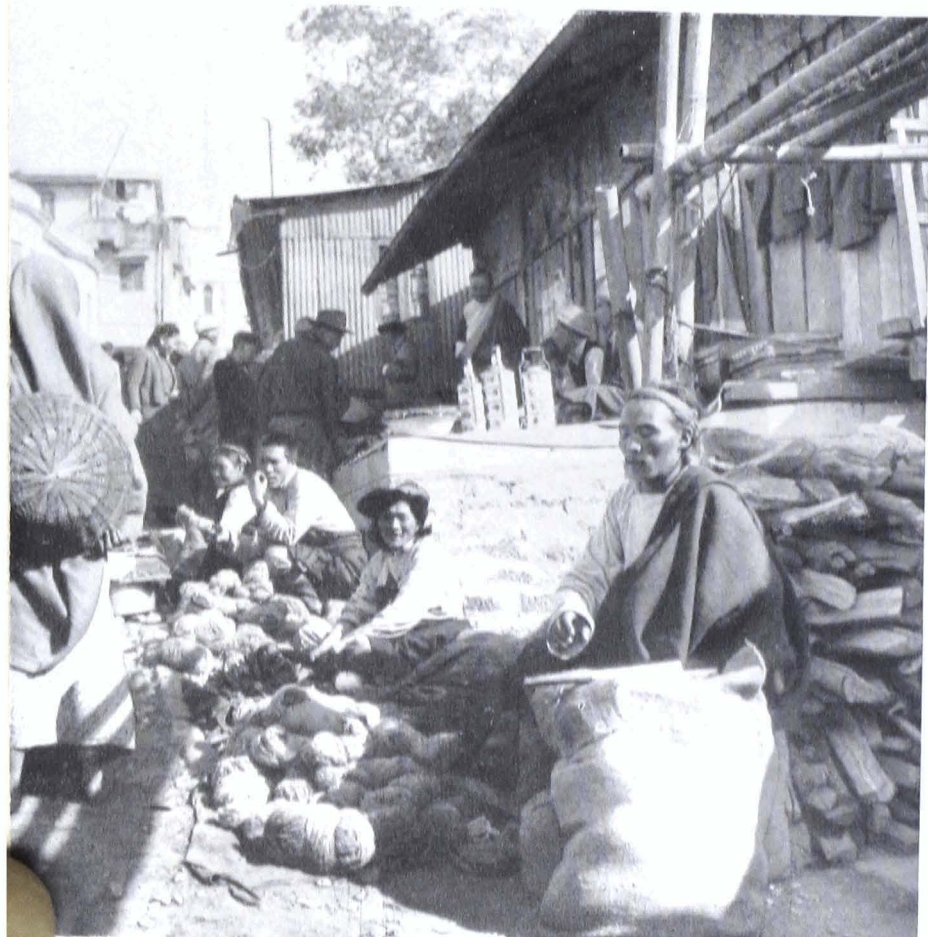
*I invoke thy father,  
The mountain god Ode Gunggyel,  
I invoke thy mother,  
The Turquoise Bird with One Wing . . .  
Full of reverence I name thy dwelling,  
The Long Marsh of the low lying Land.*







Lepcha paddy fields  
on a Sikkimese  
mountainside



Tibetan wool mer-  
chants at Kalim-  
pong market

## THE FIVE TREASURES OF THE ETERNAL SNOW

*Turquoise green eagles flutter about there.  
Joy-arousing is this place,  
Which even in winter bears the green of spring.  
Happy is the land in which this god dwells.  
I name the name by which the gods know thee :  
King of the Scent-Eaters, Five Locks of Hair.  
I name thy secret name :  
Flaming Thunderbolt.  
What wearest thou on thy body?  
Thou wearest white silk and white woollen garments.  
What dost thou ride upon?  
Thou ridest a divine horse with white hooves.  
Thou wanderest through the Three Worlds,  
Thy white colour is of radiant holiness,  
Thy right hand raiseth a bamboo staff,  
And with thy left hand thou countest the beads of a crystal  
rosary.*

Nyen-chen Tang-la is only one of the countless mountain deities worshipped by the Tibetans. There is hardly a peak in the Land of Snow that does not possess its supernatural ruler. Mount Everest is the abode of the Five Sisters of the Long Life, to whom five legendary lakes at the foot of the mountain are sacred. Each of these lakes contains water of a different colour. Related to the Five Sisters of the Long Life are the Twelve Ten-ma Sisters, each of whom dwells on a different Tibetan peak. This group of mountain goddesses includes the red Ugtsho Yamasil on her nine-headed tortoise, the brown Kongtsun Demo armed with a magic dart and mounted on a turquoise-maned horse, and Gangkar Shame, the 'Glacier-White Fleshless One', a goddess clothed in glacier ice carrying a blood-spattered banner. She, like her sisters, was one of the divinities who sought to destroy the great Padma Sambhava. But the saint struck out one of her eyes with a thunderbolt, and when the terrified she-demon fled into a lake he caused the water to boil. When her flesh began to fall from her in the boiling water she finally yielded, and the saint took her into the host of Buddhist deities.

Dorje Dragmogyel is the name of another peak goddess,

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the sovereign of the mountain at whose feet stands Drepung, the largest monastery in Tibet. In honour of the tutelary mistress of their shrine the lamas of Drepung sing :

*Thou glorious Dorje Dragmogyel . . .  
When thou art wroth with thine enemies  
Thou ridest upon a fiery ball of lightning.  
A flame-cloud—like that which will come at the end of time  
—issues from thy mouth,  
Smoke streams out of thy nose,  
Pillars of fire follow thee.  
Rapidly thou gatherest clouds on the firmament,  
The rumble of thunder penetrates to the ten regions of the  
universe,  
A terrible rain of meteors and great hailstones pelts down,  
And the earth is inundated by fire and water.  
Devil-birds and screech-owls flutter around,  
Black birds with yellow beaks swoop past, one after the  
other.  
The circle of the Menmo goddesses swirl around,  
The war-hordes of the demons rush by,  
And the horses of the Tsan spirits gallop away.  
When thou art happy, the ocean beats against the sky.  
When thou art filled with anger, the sun and moon fall  
down.  
When thou laughest, the mountain of the universe crumbles  
into dust . . .  
Thou and thy companions  
Vanquish all who wish to harm the Buddhist doctrine,  
And seek to disturb the life of the community of monks.  
Injure all who are of evil mind,  
And protect especially our monastery, this holy place . . .  
Thou shouldst not wait years and months,  
Drink now the warm heart's blood of the foe,  
And destroy them with the speed of lightning.*

Amne Ma-chen, a mystery-laden mountain in North-East Tibet, is held to be the dwelling of the mighty god Ma-chen Pomra. Exploration of the Amne Ma-chen region, and above

all a final measurement of the height of this mountain, are among the many tasks Tibet still holds for us. Is Amne Ma-chen really higher than Mount Everest, as is frequently asserted? The British General Pereira saw the Amne Ma-chen massif from the distance, and the American traveller Rock succeeded in exploring the area around the hallowed mountain. Men of the US Air Force, who strayed into the region with their machines during the Second World War, stated that they had flown past Amne Ma-chen at the height of Mount Everest but that its peak was far above them. Clark, another American, managed to penetrate into the vicinity of the mysterious mountain with a strong military escort shortly before the collapse of the Chiang Kai-Shek régime. Unfortunately, the measurement of the mountain's height, made by a surveyor attached to the party, proved worthless owing to the defectiveness of the instruments.

The difficulties in the way of exploring Amne Ma-chen are its remote position and, above all, the bitter hostility which the Gologs, a robber people living at the foot of the mountain, evince towards all foreigners. To fall into the hands of the Gologs means an end accompanied by frightful tortures. Hence even the Tibetans make a wide detour round Amne Ma-chen. Many writers on Tibet attribute the untamed ferocity of the Gologs to the fact that they are the descendants of Tibetan criminals, driven out by their fellow men, who gathered here and founded their own kingdom. The Gologs, paradoxical as it sounds, are pious Buddhists. They make pilgrimages to holy Lhasa and have their own monasteries, whose halls are filled with the drone of endless litanies—until the monks feel the urge to exchange their prayer books for the robber's sword.

The tutelary god of the Gologs is Ma-chen Pomra, the lord of Amne Ma-chen. Together with his three hundred and sixty brothers he inhabits the inaccessible pinnacles of this giant mountain, which Tibetan books say is like a reliquary made of crystal. According to the belief of the Gologs its base rests in the depths of the earth, its summit reaches into the zone of the sun and moon, its middle is girt with rainclouds. The lord of Amne Ma-chen, the lamas believe, wears golden

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armour and a white mantle. In his hands he holds a spear and a vessel full of jewels. The Gologs worship their divine protector by ritual processions round his mountain home. The ice on the sides of Amne Ma-chen is said to possess curative properties: the lama doctors claim that rubbing with the glacier water of this mountain even heals leprosy.

## Tibetan Books

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THERE are three lama temples in Darjeeling; frequent visits have made me very well acquainted with all of them. Close to the market-place stands the shrine of the Tamang, a Nepali tribe that professes Buddhism in its Tibetan form. Up to the present anthropologists have not been able to learn very much concerning the history and traditions of the Tamang. The majority of this tribe, also referred to by their neighbours as Murmi, live within the borders of Nepal; but their settlements are also found in the Darjeeling area, in Sikkim and in the frontier regions of the adjacent kingdom of Bhutan. Racially and linguistically the Tamang are related to the Tibetans, whose system of writing they have adopted. The Tamang settlements which I saw were almost identical with those of their other Nepali neighbours, apart from certain monuments to their Buddhist religion—little chapels surrounded by prayer-flags and containing images of the countless divinities in the Lamaist pantheon, and white reliquaries. I have only good to report of the few Tamangs I met in the course of my travels. But they do not seem to be particularly popular with their neighbours, for a Nepali proverb says of the Tamang: ‘First they steal—and afterwards they come and murder.’

Darjeeling’s other two Buddhist temples stand on the eastern slope of the long mountain ridge on which the town is built. The largest of the temples is situated in the middle of the poor quarter of Bhutia Basti, the ‘Tibetan Village’, as this part of Darjeeling is called. A steep path runs down to the temple, past a large white reliquary reputed to contain the mortal remains of a Sikkimese queen. Here the rain had wrought the greatest havoc. Many of the wretched huts in the vicinity of the temple had collapsed. Numbers of their



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occupants still lay buried under thick layers of mud and rubble. Only the temple had been spared by the unleashed forces of nature.

So this was the shrine from which Darjeeling takes its name. At one time it used to stand on Mahakala Hill. But the nocturnal din of the lama orchestra disturbed the British, who had the temple demolished and rebuilt farther down the mountainside. It belongs to the Karmapa sect, one of the least known orders of Tibetan Buddhism. There were formerly fourteen hierarchs at the head of this sect. Images of them decorate the great hall of the temple, which is on the first floor. On the ground floor is a room in which are stored various masks worn by the priests during their religious dances: blue and red demons' faces with a tiara of five human skulls, as well as heads of the legendary bird Garuda, a sea monster and a stag with long antlers to which are attached a number of small prayer-streamers.

The third temple stands at the upper edge of Bhutia Basti. It was erected by the Dzogchempa, the 'Sect of the Great Consummation', in whose cult a great many of the magical customs of Ancient Tibet are preserved. This shrine bears the name The Temple of the Master Who Watches over the White Shells; it is the smallest, but the most interesting of Darjeeling's three Buddhist temples. The first time I tried to visit it the shrine was surrounded by a dense throng. Sherpa women adorned with golden ear-rings as big as the palm of the hand and three or four characteristically striped Tibetan aprons, some pigtailed Tibetans and several Tamangs in tattered European clothes were milling round the entrance. I asked one of the men what was happening; he explained to me in broken English that a young monk of the Dzogchempa sect, who was worshipped as the reincarnation of a saint, was staying at the temple for a few days. People were therefore crowding in to obtain his blessing. The fact that most of those who had come to be blessed did not belong to the Sect of the Great Consummation did not seem to worry either the saint or his visitors. They probably felt that the blessing of a re-born saint could do no harm in any case. In order not to interrupt the proceedings I resolved to come back next morning.



The same day, however, I made the acquaintance of the lama Nyima Norbu—his name means ‘Sunday Jewel’ in English—one of the curators of this temple. Nyima Norbu teaches Tibetan at Darjeeling’s Indian State School; he is one of the very few English-speaking Tibetans I met during my sojourn in the Himalayas. This chubby, friendly and exceptionally helpful lama personally introduced me to the keeper of the shrine, whose antagonistic attitude would otherwise have defeated my plan to pay a prolonged visit to the temple. As it was, however, the surly guardian of the Temple of the Master Who Watches over the White Shells had no alternative but to obey his superior’s instructions. Henceforth I enjoyed free access to the treasures stored in the shrine.

A row of beautifully executed roll-paintings decked the walls, among them a *thangka* showing one of the most interesting motifs in Tibetan ecclesiastical painting. It represented the majority of the divinities who are supposed to appear to the spirit of a dead man during the forty-nine days it spends in Bardo—the intermediate realm between death and rebirth. After these forty-nine days the soul is reborn, according to the measure of its good and evil deeds, either in the world of the gods, or the kingdom of the demi-gods, as a man or an animal, in one of the Buddhist hells, or as a spirit tormented by hunger and thirst. The centre of the painting is occupied by the six-handed and three-headed god Heruka. Around him, in circles of nine figures each, are gathered numerous animal-headed goddesses.

They are all enumerated by the lama when he repeats at the death-bed of a man who has died the words of the Bardo Todol, the ‘Redemption from Bardo by Hearing’. The words of the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*, spoken aloud, are believed to aid the dead man’s soul to pass safely by the dangerous phantasms of the Intermediate Realm.

In an outbuilding of the temple I discovered a small chapel almost entirely filled by the enormous metal housing of a giant prayer-wheel. When set in motion with the aid of a handle the monster turns creaking on its axis, while the tinkle of a little bell announces every complete revolution.

This is not one of the ordinary prayer-wheels filled with long strips of printed paper. It contains a whole library of religious works. A single revolution of this prayer-machine therefore brings the believer the same merit as if he had spent weeks reading all these books—assuming that he was capable of reading at all. I paid a good many visits to this chapel, for its walls are covered with brightly coloured frescoes portraying hosts of Tibetan gods and goddesses.

One wall bears a representation of the Western Paradise, governed by the Buddha Opame, 'Boundless Light'. This red-coloured Buddha, whose soul is reincarnated in the Panchen Lamas of Tibet, can be seen in the centre of the fresco. A little lower down is an 'emanation' of Opame, the so-called Tsepame, 'Boundless Life'. He holds in his hands a vessel filled with elixir of life, out of which grows the green Tree of Impassivity. On each side of the Tsepame stand four Bodhisattvas—candidates for the rank of Buddha. On the right-hand wall the great Padma Sambhava is portrayed on his heavenly seat, the Copper-Coloured Sublime Mountain. The lower half of the painting contains a few lesser known members of the Tibetan pantheon, including the King of the Srinpo Demons, who has nine devil's faces and above them the mildly smiling head of a Buddha. Beside him, riding on a white lion, is Dorje Lepa, an old Tibetan god subjugated by Padma Sambhava. This god wears a broad green hat; a bow and a quiver full of arrows hang at his side. In his hands he holds a thunderbolt and a bleeding human heart. The third member of the group is the Red Angry Master. His attributes are a scorpion and a thunderbolt. The wall to the left of the entrance bears a painting of the Potala Heaven, inhabited by the four-handed god Chenresi. According to Tibetan belief his soul is reincarnated in the Dalai Lama, the ruler of the Land of Snow. The red god Tamdin, 'Horse's Mane', who has a little green horse's head peeping out of his shaggy hair, eight Bodhisattvas, five goddesses of the class known as 'Heaven-Goers', a river spirit with serpents instead of hair, and a horse-headed heavenly lute-player are gathered round him.

The chapel was generally empty during the day, so that I was able to study the frescoes undisturbed and write my

observations in a note-book. Only occasionally a wizened little woman appeared, set the prayer-wheel turning, and then vanished again. Towards evening, however, the chapel was filled with the pious, and the little bell on the prayer-wheel tinkled incessantly. During the hours of evening I used to like sitting in a dark corner of the small shrine, watching the visitors performing their devotions by the scanty light of the butter lamps. They walked round the room murmuring prayers, always keeping the prayer-wheel on their right, as demanded by Buddhist doctrine. For to rotate a holy object anti-clockwise is a practice of the infamous Bonpos, the adherents of the pre-Buddhist demon cult of Ancient Tibet. The red dots of smouldering joss-sticks glowed from a dark niche. Occasionally a gust of wind swept in through the half-open door, causing the butter lamps to flicker restlessly. Their light passed over the bowed figures of the praying, drew bright streaks across the paintings on the walls and caused here the rapturous countenance of a goddess, there the fury-contorted face of a demon, to shine forth out of the darkness. It was a fascinating picture, my first deeply moving contact with the alien world of Lamaism.

Bit by bit, the more I visited the Temple of the Master Who Watches over the White Shells, the custodian became friendlier. His son, a man of about thirty, had shown himself more affable from the start. He was a gifted carver and just then engaged in cutting the wood blocks for a little prayer book compiled by my friend Nyima Norbu. I often used to sit beside the young artist, watching how row after row of Tibetan characters appeared on the long, flat piece of wood under his skilful fingers.

The Tibetan alphabet must be one of the most beautiful forms of writing in Asia. The Tibetans look upon their script as sacred, for it was created especially to enable the works of Buddhism to be translated into the Tibetan language. Today it is also used for profane purposes, but even so, nothing bearing these letters must be cast on the ground, far less trodden upon. If a piece of writing is no longer required it must be consigned to the flames. According to Tibetan tradition there was no script in the Land of Snow until the middle

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of the seventh century A.D. To recall the details of contracts and agreements knots were tied, or simple signs cut in flat sticks. The creator of the Tibetan alphabet was called Thonmi Sambhota. He was a minister of King Srongtsen Gampo, who probably lived from 618 to 650 and was the first Tibetan ruler to be converted to Buddhism. Srongtsen Gampo had two wives, Weng Chen, the daughter of the Chinese Emperor Tai Tsung, and Bhrikuti, a princess from Nepal. Both women were adherents of the Yellow Doctrine, and at their insistent request the King resolved to invite Buddhist teachers to his country. At the same time, he sent his minister Thonmi to India with instructions to attend one of the centres of Buddhist learning, until he had acquired the knowledge that would enable him to devise an alphabet suited to the Tibetan language.

After toilsome wanderings Thonmi reached the homeland of Buddhism. For almost a decade, it is said, he sat as a docile pupil at the feet of the masters Livikara and Devavid Sinha, who gave him the Indian surname Sambhota, the 'Good Tibetan'. He designed the letters of the Tibetan alphabet, which is written in horizontal lines from left to right, on the model of the Indian script. Then he returned to the Land of Snow, to pass on to his countrymen what he had learnt in India. He compiled the first grammars of the Tibetan language, also modelled on Indian works. These were two small books of only a few pages each, but they served as basis for all the comprehensive treatises on the grammatical rules of Tibetan subsequently written by native authors.

Half a millennium after Thonmi Sambhota's memorable journey the Tibetans adopted two remarkable alphabets from the Indians, the Wartula and the Lantsa. In Tibet, however, their exceedingly intricate looking characters were only employed for writing prayers or to embellish the title pages of religious books. The Tibetan alphabet has two main forms, printed characters and cursive, known respectively as *Uchen* and *Ume*. But there are also a large number of other scripts, such as the elegantly curved chancery script, employed by the official scribes, or the rare Script of the Heaven-Goers, called after the group of Tibetan goddesses already

referred to. There are even two cyphers in use, in which the thirty letters of the alphabet, the four vowel signs and the numerous compound characters are replaced by numbers, representations of a human eye with the lashes bent in different directions, triangles, squares and the like.

The Tibetans devised their alphabet with the help of the Indians; but the art of papermaking they learned from the Chinese. Tibetan paper is made chiefly of willow bark and occasionally from roots. The quality of the paper varies greatly according to the place and the method of fabrication. The best paper is made in Bhutan, but the political events of recent years have seriously curtailed the export of Bhutanese paper to Lhasa. The great advantage of paper made in Bhutan lies in the fact that it is soft and smooth, an important prerequisite for easily legible block prints.

The heart of the papermaking industry in Central Tibet is the town of Gyantse. The paper manufactured here is intended primarily for the use of Tibetan government departments. Hence the inhabitants of the region are obliged to collect the required quantities of bark and deliver them to the paper manufacturers, the amount demanded from each village being determined according to its size. The bark is soaked in water for several days, then chopped up, and finally trodden for a long time by a number of workmen until it is reduced to a mush. This is spread out on a fine net attached to a wooden frame, which is carefully dipped in running water so that any impurities or coarse fragments are carried away. When the washing process is complete the frame is withdrawn from the water, the paper pulp on the net smoothed out again, and the frame with the raw paper adhering to it put out to dry. After a few days, when the sheet is dry, it is pulled off the net and cut up.

In the South Tibetan border country, where sufficient firewood is available, a different method of fabrication is employed. A closely plaited basket is filled with wood ash, over which water is thrown. The solution that pours out from the bottom of the basket is caught in a vessel and heated till it boils. Chopped bark is dropped into the boiling fluid. As soon as the bark has been boiled soft it is beaten in a mortar

with a wooden pestle until it has been reduced to a dough. This is placed in a shallow receptacle, sprinkled with water, and stirred vigorously with a piece of wood. The mush is passed through a fine sieve, which retains any coarse fragments. The filtered pulp is spread on a cloth stretched on a wooden frame, and washed in flowing water. Finally the finished product is dried by a fire.

The paper is rarely subjected to after-treatment. If a particularly smooth paper is required the broad strips, into which it has been cut, are laid on a flat piece of wood and smoothed with a mussel-shell. To prevent the ink running during writing, the paper is treated with diluted milk and then thoroughly dried again. Sometimes starch or an arsenical substance is mixed with the pulp while the paper is being made. This is likewise supposed to prevent the ink from running, and also renders the paper resistant to mould fungi and insects. Hence most types of Tibetan paper are poisonous. They emit an intense and curious odour that is particularly noticeable in the badly ventilated libraries of Tibetan monasteries, and often causes violent headaches after only a short time.

The first Tibetan books were in the form of scrolls. Even today especially important documents are occasionally written with red or black Indian ink on rolls of yellow silk. Roll-books in Tibetan script are also in use among the Himalayan Tamang people. In Tibet itself, however, scrolls were soon replaced by block prints and manuscripts, modelled on the *poti* or palm-leaf books of India. Tibetan block-printed books consist of separate long sheets printed on both sides. Each sheet bears the abbreviated title of the work, the volume, the chapter, and the page number in the margin. The sheets are placed one on top of the other, wrapped in a silk cloth and then tied tightly between two wooden covers, the upper one of which is frequently embellished with artistic carving. In the case of a work in several volumes a broad strip of material with a protective flap of brocade, giving the number of the volume and details of the work, is generally fastened between the wrapping and the wooden cover and projects at the narrow edge of the book. The individual



volumes are not distinguished by numbers, but by letters of the alphabet.

Movable type is unknown in Tibet, so that each page of a Tibetan book has to be printed with a separate wooden block, as was done in Europe prior to Gutenberg. Hence the lion's share in the work of producing such a book falls to the cutter of the printing-blocks. Most cutters show an extraordinary level of skill, for the lettering on the blocks is beautifully shaped, uniform in size and regularly spaced over hundreds of pages. But to err is human, and so it happens that the artist sometimes omits a word or even part of a sentence. Then the missing words are cut in smaller type and linked to the appropriate place in the text by a row of dots. Short commentaries are also inserted in the same way.

Soft woods, chiefly hazel and birch, are used for making blocks. A sheet of transparent paper bearing the letters and decorations of the desired size is placed on the prepared block. The surface of the block between the characters and ornamentation is then cut away with a knife, leaving the latter standing out in relief.

Thousands of blocks are required to print a large book. All monks rightly regard the printing-blocks as amongst their monastery's most priceless possessions. The storage rooms, in which the blocks are stacked in orderly piles, are watched over carefully; a fire would find dangerous nourishment in these desiccated slabs of wood, which are often hundreds of years old, and could destroy the work of generations of industrious monks in a few hours.

The preparation of the printing blocks gains their carver great religious merit, in which a Maecenas who pays for the artist's work can share. Hence the declaration at the end of every Tibetan block-printed book as to the place at which it was printed and the author—in which connexion it is generally stated whether the latter wrote the text with his own hand, or dictated it to the scribe So-and-So—also informs the reader who gave the money for the cutting of the wood blocks and who actually cut them. These details often contain very curious information, for instance that a divinity took possession of the body of a mediumistically gifted priest and,

through the mouth of the latter, ordered the book to be printed. In many cases the reader is told what things were achieved with the help of the book by others who made use of it. Thus the final paragraph of *The Throwing of the Red Blood-Dart*—an occult work containing instructions on how to injure one's fellow men by praying to the war god Chamsring and his attendants—asserts that it is a book of great worth hidden by Padma Sambhava and discovered by the scholar Glorious Sunlight at the place known as Red Corpse's Tooth. With its aid its finder vanquished all his enemies. It was also used later, with the same success, by the magicians Black Moon and Red Scholar.

Only a few exceptionally popular works are kept ready in the monasteries or sold in the market-place by itinerant vendors. As a rule, anyone wanting to acquire a book has first to ascertain where the blocks for the work in question are to be found. Assistance in this inquiry is provided by the monastery-guides published for the benefit of pilgrims, which generally list the works printed in the temple press. Then permission to print the desired book has to be obtained from the abbot of the monastery; this is usually forthcoming on payment of a fee. But there are certain works whose blocks are kept locked up under the seal of a high ecclesiastical authority or even the Tibetan Government. These are occult books on medicine, astrology, the execution of ritual dances and particularly on various domains of Black Magic, the contents of which are not allowed to become common property. After the authorities have satisfied themselves concerning the person of the applicant and the purpose for which the book is required, printing is permitted accompanied by special precautions and, as a rule, after payment of a high tax.

The printing of the book is carried out by trained monks. The customer pays them only a very small wage for their labour, but he has to cover the cost of their food and drink while the printing is in progress, and also to furnish the paper and ink required. Sometimes printers have first to be found, for many monasteries possess printing-blocks but have no lamas with experience of book production among their inmates. Printing is generally carried out during the warm

summer months. In the big presses laymen are often employed alongside the lamas: they come here to work during the summer and return to their home villages during the winter.

The men work in groups of three. One cuts the paper, the second places the blocks in readiness, and the third does the actual printing. He inks the block, places a sheet of paper on it, and smooths it over with a brush. The printed sheet is then removed from the block and dried. Where experienced printers are employed the work proceeds at great speed. On the average one group of printers prints a hundred double-sided sheets a day.

On the whole, hand-written books are rarer and more valuable than block prints. There are manuscripts whose decorative calligraphy and artistic drawings fall little short of our own medieval missals. Books written in letters of silver, or even gold, on black-lacquered pages are exceptionally valuable. The Tibetans frequently use wooden tablets coated with chalk for short notes or writing exercises, which are executed with a wooden style. Such tablets are also employed for transmitting confidential messages. The text is written on the coating of chalk and the tablet placed in a case. The courier entrusted with carrying the message has instructions, in case of danger, to render it illegible by wiping off the chalk. A special method of writing is practised in a number of monastery schools. Here the characters are drawn with broad reed pens in viscid white clay on black-lacquered wooden tablets.

The printers are not always too conscientious about their work. The finished book often has pages missing, and sometimes—in the hope that the customer will not read the book anyway—the printers insert a number of blank pages in the middle. Frequently the print is so bad as to be scarcely legible.

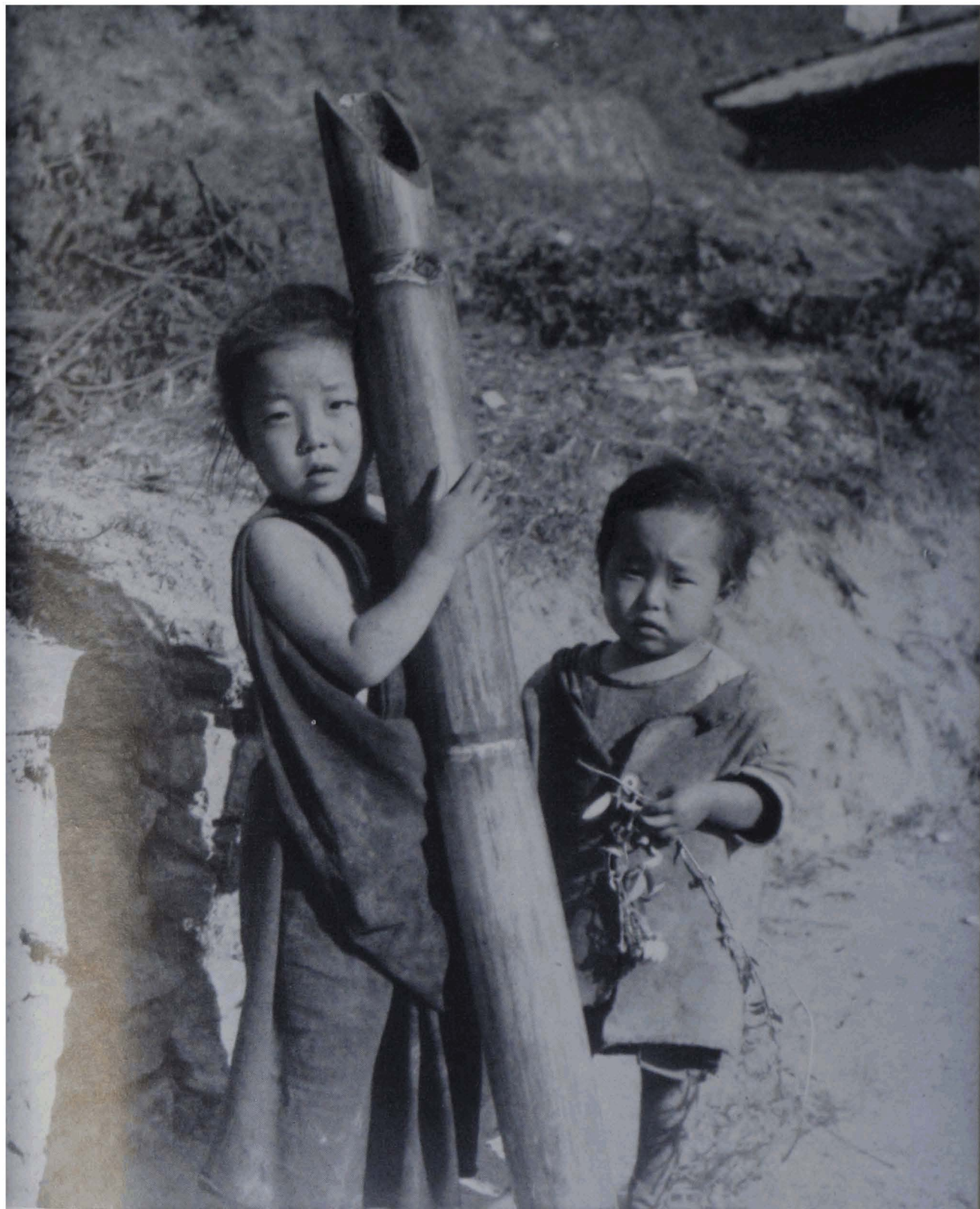
Scholars have been busy for a century and a half exploring the literature of Tibet. In spite of intensive study only a general outline of this broad domain has so far emerged. There is no branch of this literature that is not closely bound up with the religion that dominates everything in the Land

of Snow. Books on meditation and astrology, geography and painting—they are all indissolubly linked with cult and creed. By far the greater majority of Tibetan works deal directly with Buddhist dogma. The two most extensive collections of such writings bear the names *Kangyur* and *Tengyur*. The *Kangyur* is printed in several of the larger monasteries: the *Tengyur*, on the other hand, only in the temples of Narthang and Derge. The editions of these two works that were once printed in the East Tibetan monastery of Chone possess a rarity value, for the blocks were destroyed in a fire some decades ago. Several European and American libraries contain copies of the *Kangyur*, but only a very few of them possess a complete edition of the rarer *Tengyur*.

The *Kangyur*, the *Translation of Precepts*, comprises numerous Buddhist writings translated into Tibetan from Sanskrit, Pali and Chinese between the eighth and thirteenth centuries. It is divided into several sections, of which the following are the most important: *Dulva*, thirteen volumes containing rules for monastic life and discipline; twenty-one volumes of philosophic texts known as *Knowledge that has Reached the Further Bank*; *Do*, thirty volumes containing sermons by Buddha and his disciples; and finally twenty-two works on occult teachings. The *Tengyur*, or *Translation of Religious Teachings*, contains commentaries on the writings collected in the *Kangyur*, together with a wealth of essays on astrology, art, poetics and grammar.

Another important collected work, numbering sixty-four volumes, is the so-called *Rinchen Terdzo*, the *Treasury of Jewels*. It is a compendium of texts used primarily by the Nyingmapa sect. The Nyingmapa is an important order whose doctrines are opposed to those of the Gelukpa, the dominant sect in modern Tibet. The books of the *Treasury of Jewels* contain much valuable information concerning Tibet's oldest religious practices.

The collected works of the various Tibetan princes of the Church are likewise of considerable bulk. Amongst the most important books of this kind are those written by Tsong Kapa (1356–1418), the 'Man from the Onion Valley', and his two leading pupils. Tsong Kapa, the founder of the



Hard-worked Lepcha children fetch water in bamboo containers





The Royal Temple at Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim

The Dance of the Rivers, the legendary wedding of the Rangit with the Teesta



Gelukpa sect, was an extremely fertile author. More than three hundred works came from his pen. The most important of them is the philosophical treatise *Lamrim Chempo*, *The Great Stairway*. Gedundub (1391–1474), a nephew of Tsong Kapa, also wrote a number of important books. He was the first of those fourteen Dalai Lamas who have so far guided the destiny of the Land of Snow.

One of the most important collected works springs from the hand of the fifth Dalai Lama, who, despite his position as spiritual head of the Gelukpa sect, showed a great predilection for the teachings and rites of the Nyingmapa order. The section of his work collected under the title *Occult Writings*, which may only be printed by special permission of the Tibetan Government, is particularly rich in descriptions of mysterious magic rites.

The Terma, or Treasure Books, of the Nyingmapa belong to a special category among Tibetan writings. These are works alleged to have been hidden by the Buddhist missionary Padma Sambhava in Tibet and adjacent territories and found centuries later by favoured priests, the Tertons or Treasure Seekers. Padma Sambhava—one of the most singular figures in Tibetan history—came to Tibet from his homeland of Odiyana round the middle of the eighth century, at the invitation of the reigning king, Tisong Detsen, to disseminate Buddhism. Tradition asserts that he wrote a large number of religious works. Being of the opinion that the knowledge he had acquired could only be fully understood and correctly applied by the priests of coming generations, he hid many of his books in caves and the foundation walls of monasteries, where examples of these strange writings are allegedly still discovered from time to time.

There are a considerable number of historical works, but they deal with the history of the Land of Snow exclusively from the standpoint of the Buddhist Church. It is difficult to sift fact from fiction in these books. Amongst the most celebrated examples are the *Hundred Thousand Jewel Precepts*—whose author is supposed to be King Srongtsen Gampo—the *Blue Chronicle* and the *Red Chronicle*, and the books by the sage Buton concerning the genesis of Buddhism in India and its

subsequent spread in Tibet. In a cave at Tunhuang, an ancient Buddhist cult place on Chinese soil, the remains of an old library were found, containing amongst other things a quantity of Tibetan books. The translation of these writings, which is rendered extremely difficult by the archaic style, is far from complete. Nevertheless the figures of several kings, intriguing ministers and quarrelsome war lords have already been recovered from the obscurity of the past. The faded characters of the Tunhuang books tell of sacrificial rites in which hecatombs of animals were slaughtered, and of mysterious ceremonies of the death cult.

Amongst the most curious elements of Tibetan literature are the medical works, whose difficult terminology renders them incomprehensible except to the initiated. In Tibet medicine, like so much else, is a province of the lamas. Most of the great Tibetan lamaseries possess their own medical school, in which the physician's art is taught. The most famous medical school in Tibet is situated at Lhasa, on Chagpori, the 'Iron Mountain' whose steep cone stands opposite the residence of the Dalai Lama.

The lama doctors' most important text-book is the so-called *Gyushi*, the *Four Roots*, a compendious work to which there are a number of commentaries. Many of these books are regarded as occult texts; to prevent their misuse the printing-blocks are kept under seal by the Government. One much-used medical work is the *Vaidurya Ngompo*, the *Blue Lapis Lazuli*, a book containing, *inter alia*, illustrations of curious-looking Tibetan surgical instruments and prescriptions for the preparation of secret medicines.

Apart from a knowledge of all available medicaments and their methods of use, the lama doctor has to master the many intricate rites with which to counter the influence of the disease-bringing demons. His divine allies in the struggle with the sickness spirits are Menlha, the Buddha of medicine—a blue-skinned figure who holds in his hand the fruit of the healing myrobalan—and his seven attendants.

Closely linked with the medical literature are numerous works on astrology, for the success of medical treatment and any other lama ceremony is largely dependent on the con-



stellation of the stars and the behaviour of all sorts of local and celestial divinities. Even the simplest Tibetan follows certain astrological rules of thumb. Thus, for example, he will never set out on a journey of any length on a Thursday or Saturday, for both days are considered unlucky. The most important work on astrology is the *Vaidurya Karpo*, the *White Lapis Lazuli*. Its author is the Regent Sangye Gyamtso, who held the reins of government for two decades after the death of the fifth Dalai Lama. The four-hundred-odd pages of this book are covered with amazing representations of the celestial and terrestrial spirits that determine the destinies of living beings. There is the Black Hound of Heaven, who has a hound's body, but the wings of a bird and a serpent's tail ending in a human head. There is Gapa, the Thunder-God of the Centre. He is portrayed with the body of a man and the head of a dragon, and holding a great iron pan in his hands. Then follows a demon with nine wolves' heads, holding a hook and a magic wand. After him comes Hang Phan, the Lord of the West—he has a snake's head and wears a loin-cloth of writhing serpents. He is followed by the black earth-demon Dsin Phung; a scorpion-headed being brandishing a sword and riding on an ox; a dark blue demon in a billowing black garment, carrying a rosary of children's skulls and a skull-bowl; a mouse-headed earth-demon with a sceptre of crystal; and a host of other demonic beings. Beside these illustrations are complex-looking astrological tables accompanied by closely printed text, giving instructions for the interpretation and application of these mysterious drawings.

The prime source of geographical knowledge is the *Dsamling Gyeshe*, the *Extended Wisdom of the World*. This book contains a great deal of extremely interesting information concerning Tibet. The history of important monasteries and cities is discussed, together with the political divisions of the farthest provinces and the sights to be seen in famous shrines. Truly remarkable facts about Europe are reported in the *Extended Wisdom of the World*. The author of this work, a Mongolian lama who lived at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had acquired some familiarity with the geography

of Europe through the agency of a Russian scholar. His description corresponds to the condition of Europe during the first third of last century. Thus the names of all the small Italian States, which still existed at that time, are carefully given in Tibetan transliteration, and the Napoleonic era, which had long ago come to an end, is briefly mentioned. Since no 'new and revised edition' of the *Dsamling Gyeshé* was ever published, many lamas today imagine that Europe is still the same as this book depicts it.

Tibetan literature also possesses many works by sensitive poets. The poems of Mila Repa, a pupil of Marpa and a great magician-priest and translator of sacred texts, are well known and universally loved. Mila Repa is one of the most interesting figures among the thousands of famous priests produced by the Land of Snow. He spent years wandering through the magnificent landscape of the Himalayas, accompanied by only a few faithful followers and suffering considerable privations. On the edge of the Mount Everest glacier stood a hermitage, and Mila Repa fought a magical battle with the Bon sorcerer Naropa on the slopes of Kaila, high above the green waters of Lake Manasarowar, for possession of this lonely place of meditation. Despite his penitential exercises and religious meditations, Mila Repa paid heed to all the beauties of nature; he speaks of them in the *Book of the Hundred Thousand Songs*, one of the best known works of Tibetan poetry. No less famous and well loved is the biography of the Master, by one of Mila Repa's pupils.

The sixth Dalai Lama, whose brief reign took place in the seventeenth century, was a highly controversial figure. It is clear that he was murdered. He had powerful enemies among the Tibetan clergy, but the people loved this young prince of the Church who wrote nostalgic love poems in the seclusion of his palace. He must have had a presentiment of his approaching end when he wrote the prophetic lines:

*The time is now no longer distant  
When I shall go from hence.  
Lend me thy pinions*

## TIBETAN BOOKS

*O swift white crane!  
I am only going as far as Lithang,  
And from thence I shall return.*

Shortly after the sixth Dalai Lama's death his foes, with Chinese support, endeavoured to replace him by a successor of their own choosing; but the people, unwilling to forget this ruler who had died so young and around whose figure they had begun to weave all sort of legends, frustrated the plans of his enemies. According to Tibetan custom his re-incarnation was sought, and finally found in the little East Tibetan town of Lithang, as prophesied by the unhappy high-priest in his poem. The poems of the sixth Dalai Lama are amongst the most important works of Tibetan poetic literature.

There is a special category of books, extremely popular among the broad masses of the populace, that contain accounts by people who were called back to life a short while after their death. These stories portray the experiences of the dead in the hot and cold hells of Buddhism, and especially the torments that await the hardened sinner.

Many types of Tibetan books remain to be listed. Works were written for the painter of religious pictures telling him exactly how to depict the countless gods and goddesses of the Tibetan pantheon; the weather-maker, who averts hail and brings down rain, finds directions on how to do so in the appropriate magical books; while occult texts like *The Hurling of Magic Weapons and the Great Sacrificial Cake of the Noble Four-Faced Lord* or *The Bloody Thread Cross of the Very Angry Mamo She-Demons* give precise instructions as to how the reader can injure his enemies, or most swiftly and easily do away with them, by magical means.

The books of the Ancient Tibetan Bon cult are particularly rich in descriptions of Black Magic ceremonies. The Bon priests, who, from the outset, carried on a bitter but fruitless struggle against the Buddhist missionaries, adopted the alphabet devised by the Buddhists and used it to set down their own ancient traditions. The lamas countered this misuse of their script by ordering the destruction of all Bon books,

hence works of the Bon cult are exceedingly rare. The best known are three volumes entitled respectively the *Legion of White, of Black and of Piebald Water Spirits*. Even Buddhist weather-makers employ these books in the rites they perform in honour of the rain-bestowing water spirits.

## The City of the Seven New Years

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Two weeks after my arrival in Darjeeling I prepared to leave again. The weather was improving daily, the air was becoming cooler and drier and distant visibility clearer. On all sides the damage caused by the heavy rains was being repaired and communications re-established. Darjeeling had little more of interest to offer, so I proposed to move on in search of a suitable spot at which to continue my studies.

I had originally intended to settle down in Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim. But this required a special permit from the Indian Government, which at the time I had not received.

I therefore decided to make my way to Kalimpong, the terminus of the great caravan route that leads from Lhasa to India. I left Darjeeling by the same road along which I had come a fortnight earlier. Again I had to negotiate the landslide and reload my luggage on another vehicle. This time I found myself in a Land Rover driven by a thick-set, taciturn Nepali in worn-out European clothes. We raced through cloud-hung Ghoom with its three hills standing out in grey silhouette. The car slowed down at a fork in the road on the southern outskirts of the town. The road leading straight ahead and downhill would have taken me back to Siliguri. But we swung sharp left, on to a road that had suffered heavy damage during the recent months of rain. It led along the spine of a ridge that ran in a south-easterly direction and formed one wall of the broad valley. This was the Rangit Valley, called after Sikkim's second largest river, which zig-zags along its flat bottom. At this point the Rangit is the demarcation line between Sikkim and India. The green forests, terraced fields and scattered houses I could clearly descry on the other side of the valley already lay within the confines of the closed Himalayan kingdom.

A well surrounded by walls, stone benches and crude images of gods came into view. I recognized one of the figures as the Indian monkey-god, Hanuman. This well, as my companion informed me, was built by a wealthy Nepali as a memorial to his dead ancestors. The walls bore tablets in Nepali script. They were intended for the traveller seeking rest and refreshment here : he was also to learn by whom and for what purpose this structure had been erected. In the coming months and years I saw many such memorials. For the most part they consisted of simple benches of stone, or even wood, placed by Nepalis at points with a particularly fine view. Inscriptions were cut in the backs of these benches explaining whom the traveller should remember as he took his rest upon them.

The road went on up hill and down dale, through valleys and over ridges. We passed the tea-garden of Lopchu, one of the oldest and most celebrated plantations in the Darjeeling district. Later the route led through steaming jungle in a narrow valley, brooded over by the damp heat of the monsoon. For an instant I caught a glimpse of another valley that came down to meet the Rangit Valley from the north-east. Then the jungle swallowed us up again. We stopped for a breather at a curve in the road. Shaken up by the journey, I clambered out of the uncomfortable seat and walked a few steps to the edge of the sheer precipice. The ground was padded with a thick cushion of moss, and clumps of fern hung down over the sharply cut corner of the cliff. A big, brilliantly-coloured butterfly fluttered over my head and out across the valley. Seven hundred feet below me the Rangit flowed foaming and frothing into the Teesta, the major river of the Sikkimese Himalayas.

The Lepchas, the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim, say that here the Rangit and the Teesta have their wedding. For the Teesta is female and the Rangit male. According to one of the oldest legends of this little Himalayan people, the two rivers formerly lived in different parts of Sikkim, far apart from one another. Tired of solitude, they resolved to marry and agreed that the site of the festival should be the wall of rock at the foot of which the two rivers now meet.

At that time, however, they did not know the way thither. So each of them chose a guide acquainted with the country to lead them to the rendezvous. The Teesta was guided by a black snake that twisted swiftly and surely through the valleys. The river followed all its windings and thus acquired its present serpentine course. The Rangit was less fortunate. It took as its guide a bird, which became hungry on the way and flew this way and that in a zigzag in search of food. The unsuspecting Rangit hastened after it—and therefore its course is full of sharp bends. On top of this it arrived late at the meeting place. The Teesta had waited for it impatiently. When the Rangit saw it was late it wanted to flow back again, but was finally persuaded to mingle with the waters of the Teesta. Then, in a broad stream, the two of them hastened on towards the south, towards the Indian plains.

Today, when a young Lepcha couple bind themselves for life, the guests often sing a song that refers to the marriage of the rivers and expresses the wish that the joint path of the newly-weds shall be as happy as that of the Rangit and the Teesta. A Lepcha boy sings the first verse, a girl answers him and so the song proceeds, alternately.

*My heart is open,  
I shall tell you everything,  
Listen to me  
Carefully.*

*I will give ear to you,  
Your words,  
They sound so sweet,  
I shall sit down and listen to you.*

*However much has been said,  
One thing at least you must understand :  
We must love one another,  
This you must bear in mind.*

*I am only a simple girl,  
Inexperienced in the ways of the world,*

THE PEOPLE OF THE HIMALAYAS

*But you are clever and skilful,  
You must teach me well how to understand all this.*

*Now I will speak openly :  
You are like the waters of the Teesta,  
And I like the River Rangit,  
Like these two we shall be united.*

*Truly I have been like the Teesta river,  
Since my birth,  
Till the present day,  
I have been a spotless child of my mother.*

*I am a Lepcha boy,  
I have climbed down from high above, from the glaciers,  
What joy fills me  
That you have recognized me.*

*I am a daughter of the Lepcha people,  
I have been waiting  
For you to climb down  
From the glaciers.*

*We two are from the same tribe,  
We come from the same source,  
The Creator  
Gave us his blessing.*

*You, a boy, like the River Rangit,  
And I, who am like the waters of the Teesta,  
That we should meet,  
This was the will of the Creator.*

*Now that we two are united,  
We will hasten together,  
To seek turquoises and pearls  
In the deep sea.*



## THE CITY OF THE SEVEN NEW YEARS

*If we find turquoises and pearls  
Our descendants  
Will spread  
Over the whole world.*

One of the oldest folk dances of the Lepchas also symbolizes the legendary wedding of the rivers. The Teesta is represented by girls, the Rangit by young men. The two rows of dancers approach one another from opposite sides, the girls in a serpentine line, the lads hopping this way and that to imitate the characteristic course of Sikkim's principal river. When the two rows meet they portray with eloquent gestures the discussion between the betrothed couple, and finally form a single gaily coloured line that moves sinuously forward, depicting the union of the two rivers in a single stream.

We drove on. Beyond a rocky bluff the first houses of a village on the steep bank of the Teesta emerged. This was Teesta Bridge, which takes its name from the modern concrete bridge that spans the Teesta at this point in a bold arch. We drove slowly over the bridge and on the other bank began to climb once more. After a few hundred yards we came to a fork in the road. A signpost indicated that the road which ran through the Teesta Valley led to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, and that this was sixty-five miles away. 'It will be at least a year before traffic will be able to go along here again,' said my driver, pointing to the signpost. 'There were at least as many landslides on this road as there are miles.' But the winding road we took was largely intact.

A small Tibetan caravan was resting at one of the bends. Ten or twelve tiny donkeys with galled and bleeding backs stood apathetically by the side of the road nibbling joylessly at the grass. Their loads, bales of dirty grey wool, had been piled up beside them. Two young Tibetan women had lit a fire in their wind-break. They were brewing something in a small soot-blackened kettle resting on three stones. One of the girls obviously found the weather too hot. She had stripped off the upper part of her greasy dress and was squatting half-naked by the fire, oblivious of the three men sitting beside her

mending a saddle. With her dirty face relieved only by the whites of her eyes, her tousled, clammy hair and her yellow torso she looked exactly like a witch.

With every fresh twist in the road the air became cooler. The forest that had accompanied us on either side for the first few miles was left behind. In its place appeared terraced fields and amongst them isolated Nepali houses with ochre-coloured mud walls and thick straw roofs, encircled by low banana palms with broad wind-tattered leaves, and tall rustling bamboos. From time to time I still caught sight of the grey ribbon of the Teesta far below me. Half an hour later we had scaled the mountain. Now the road became more level; it rounded a rocky promontory in a broad sweep, and then Kalimpong came into sight. We had taken a good five hours for the short run.

This town, the most important on the Indo-Tibetan frontier, is called by the Tibetans Kalonphug, the 'Cave of the Ministers', allegedly because the Sikkimese ministers used once to hold meetings here in a cave. In reality, however, this name seems to have come originally from the Lepcha language, in which it is believed to mean the 'Governor's Fortress'. The area round Kalimpong formerly belonged to Bhutan, but the Bhutanese were compelled to cede this strip of country to the British as reparation after a defeat inflicted on the Bhutanese army by British troops in 1864. Kalimpong numbers about twelve thousand permanent inhabitants. But in winter, when the influx of Tibetan caravans is at its height, the population is often doubled. The majority of the houses stand on one of the mountain-tops, Ringkingpong and Deolo, which are joined by a narrow ridge. The road that links the town with the valley of the Teesta runs along the side of Ringkingpong, over the ridge and then winds north-eastward across the slopes of Deolo.

It is no exaggeration to describe Kalimpong as one of the most beautifully situated places in the world. To the north the gaze sweeps across the chain of Sikkimese mountains, which break in green waves against the white rampart of the Himalayas. The mountains support the vault of heaven with

their glittering peaks and pinnacles. Amongst the snowy summits, overtopping all its neighbours, stands the sacred Kangchenjunga. Seen from the town it is half hidden behind another mountain whose southern slope contains a naked wall of rock many hundreds of yards high. This rock-face was laid bare only thirty years ago by a gigantic landslide. During the rainy months the cliff-face is covered by a soft green veil of grass, which progressively gives way to the brownish colour of the bare rock as the weather becomes drier. From Deolo and Ringkingpong, however, Kangchenjunga and its neighbouring peaks are visible in all their glory. Farther to the west lies the elongated Kabru; to the east are Siniolchu, Pandim and Lama Ongden. Lama Ongden means in English the 'Mighty Lama'. The natives give it this name because it looks like a lama squatting at prayer on a cushion, with his priest's hat on his head and his cloak drawn closely about him. At its eastern extremity the mountain range becomes lower. Here a deep notch cleaves the stone wall that separates the Land of the Gods from the rest of the world. This is Cho-la, the 'Pass of the Lord', one of the highest and most difficult mountain passes leading from Sikkim to Tibet. Through this pass the great Padma Sambhava is supposed to have entered Sikkim, which was then still almost uninhabited. Foreseeing that the Yellow Doctrine would one day get a foothold here as well, he buried many of his Treasure Books in Sikkim, to facilitate the task of future Buddhist religious teachers.

Towards evening, when deep shadows spread across mountains and valleys, causing the contours to stand out more clearly, a light streak can be distinguished on the rocky hillside below Cho-la running diagonally upwards. This is the great caravan route that links Central Asia with India. It leads to the two most important passes in the Sikkimese Himalayas: Natu-la, 14,560 feet up, and its neighbour, Jelep-la, at about the same altitude. Across these passes the traveller enters the Chumbi Valley—called by the Tibetans Tromo, the 'Land of Wheat'—a piece of Tibetan territory thrust like a wedge between Sikkim to the west and Bhutan to the east. The caravan road crosses the Chumbi Valley and,

rising again, reaches the great Tibetan plateau at Phari Dzong, the 'Hog-Mountain Fortress'. This is a small market-town, to which European travellers have given the uncomplimentary nickname 'the dirtiest place in the world'. From Jelep-la a long mountain ridge runs in a south-easterly direction. It divides Sikkim—and its southern extremity also a piece of Indian territory—from the kingdom of Bhutan.

At the end of February tall towers of cloud appear on the southern horizon—harbingers of the approaching monsoon. Night after night heavy storms sweep over the town, while the days are usually still dry. As the monsoon advances the rain patters down day after day, week after week. Little runnels become foaming torrents; insignificant mountain streams become great rivers, whose muddy waters sweep away the light bamboo bridges at the first shock. This is the time of leeches and gnats, toads and black crabs. A mass of creatures otherwise rarely seen come up out of the pores of the sodden earth; fleeing from the ubiquitous water they seek refuge in the houses. Malignant scorpions nest overnight in shoes; black, long-legged spiders gather in nauseous clumps at the corners of the ceiling; and large ants march across the walls in broad columns. Now and again a harmless slow-worm slips into the house through a drain-pipe, but occasionally snakes enter by the same route—dangerous Himalayan vipers, or cobras, which are quite common even at this high altitude. Myriads of gnats fill the air with their nerve-racking hum; the armies of frogs perform their concerts. Sometimes one of the nauseating great toads whose skin secretes a poisonous slime appears inside the house.

The leeches are an even greater torment. The little grey worms clinging to stones, leaves and branches look thoroughly harmless. One only has to stand still during a stroll through the woods to see them come wriggling up from all sides, their tiny heads swaying greedily this way and that. Contracted to the thickness of a needle, they slip into one's shoes and then work their way upwards unnoticed to the ankle or even as high as the back of the knee. Their bite is scarcely perceptible, so one usually fails to observe the leeches until they have already transformed themselves into bluish maggots as thick

as one's thumb. Having sucked their fill, they drop to the ground, while the blood begins to flow from the wound in a warm stream. It takes a long time to stop running, for coagulation is retarded by a secretion which the leech injects into the puncture. I learnt from experience that the best way to staunch the bleeding is to place a piece of paper over the wound. Closely knitted stockings or boots provide only partial protection from leeches. But it is the animals that suffer most from these pests. When riding through the forest one has to dismount at frequent intervals to free one's horse from the disgusting little worms, which hang in bunches from its legs. To be bitten by a number of leeches may bring serious consequences. An acquaintance of mine, who went for several hours' walk through the dripping jungle, in spite of repeated warnings, returned with more than a hundred leech bites. He spent the rest of the rainy season in Darjeeling hospital recovering from severe blood poisoning.

During the rainy season the landscape presents a melancholy appearance. The predominant colour is grey. The chain of snow-covered mountains is hidden behind thick clouds. The air is saturated with moisture; clothing and bedding feels wet and clammy; leather articles often become covered in a thick layer of whitish-green mould within a few hours. The maintenance of technical equipment is a perpetual battle with the damp. Camera shutters no longer function properly; films left in the camera for a few days become breeding places for iridescent fungi; and nothing but grunts and growls are to be got out of the sound-track apparatus.

The humid heat of the monsoon breeds in the jungles of the valley little moths and huge hawk-moths, which are drawn as though by magic to the lights of the town, and flutter round lamps in dense clouds. During my first year at Kalimpong I lived in a modern house on a cliff high above the valley of the Teesta. Three of the walls of my study consisted almost entirely of glass, and when I lit the lamps at dusk the panes were covered in a matter of minutes by hosts of bright-coloured moths, desperately beating their wings and trying to get to the light. Uncannily large praying mantises edged

slowly along the window-sill; flying ants looked for some chink through which to enter. Now and again the cigar-shaped body of a big hawk-moth thudded against the glass with a crack that sounded as though the pane had been struck by a pebble. I often felt as if I were sitting in a glass vivarium watched curiously by a thousand pairs of gleaming moth's eyes.

Shortly after the arrival of the first hawk-moth my friends, the little geckos, inevitably appeared on the scene. Clamping their velvety paws firmly to the glass by suction they inched their green lizard bodies cautiously forward, fascinated by the sight of so much prey. They pressed their soft little grey bellies against the glass, ready to spring, so that I could clearly see the pulsing of the dark strands of their veins. A sudden leap, scarcely perceptible to the eye, and a fat moth was struggling in the gecko's gaping jaws. Its prey was often much too big for the little lizard, and it had its work cut out, clinging to the smooth surface of the window-pane, to prevent itself being carried away by the moth's desperately beating wings. After a while the victim's strength ebbed, and the gecko gobbled up the morsel, until only the tips of the moth's wings protruded from the lizard's half-open mouth.

Round the middle of August the monsoon generally stops for a breather. Rays of sunshine break through the overcast, and the mountain peaks are visible for a little while in the mornings. Then the rain descends again with full vigour. But now the monsoon's days are numbered, and one day in September it comes to a long-awaited end with one final violent storm. Then the brilliant contrast between glistening white glaciers and clumps of yellow orchids, between the azure sky and hedges of red flowers, brings full compensation for the long months of the rainy season.

In Sikkim autumn is the loveliest season of the year. It fills the valleys with seething oceans of cloud, and spreads a pink veil of wild cherry blossom over the hills around Kalimpong. The dew of its cool nights transforms the delicate webs attached to trees and creepers at this season by iridescent yellow spiders into diamond-sprinkled lace; and the morning wind sweeps the snow from the summit of divine Kangchen-

junga for miles across the glassy blue sky. The natives say then that the mountain god is brandishing his spear streaming with pennants. When the army of clouds advances from the Indian plains in the early afternoon, an enchanting alternation of light and shade begins to play across the green undulations of the Sikkimese mountains. The landscape opens up to unsuspected distances, and the glittering yellow rays of the sun, breaking through the banks of cloud, swing like the beams of giant searchlights over valleys and mountainsides, lighting up here a strangely shaped group of rocks and there the huge, steeply rising steps of terraced fields.

The evening sky is turquoise blue, and the light of the sun setting behind the sharply defined silhouette of the mountains on the borders of Nepal bathes the glaciers of Kangchenjunga in a red glow. Cobalt-blue honey-guides and emerald-green fireflies flit through the undergrowth and the rustling bamboos. A warm wind, impregnated with the overpowering scent of huge noctiflorous bell-flowers, wafts bizarre cloud formations across the horizon—an animal-headed giant or a primeval dragon with the evening star as a malignantly sparkling eye. A jagged mountain ridge rips the monster's body apart and transforms it into a cloud ship, pounding forward with billowing sails to its destruction on snow-covered rocks. White trails of incense smoke rise from the dark courtyards of Buddhist monasteries, and the jackal's lament mingles with the evening call of the great lamasery trumpets.

Today Kalimpong is the most important town on the Indo-Tibetan frontier, the gateway to Central Asia and the starting point of the busy trade road to the three closed kingdoms of the Himalayas—Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. Because of its favourable position the town was chosen as the administrative centre for a considerable tract of Indian territory bordering Sikkim and Bhutan. For this reason there is a daily postal service between Kalimpong and the plains—as long as the road to Siliguri remains intact. Every day around 4 p.m. a ramshackle bus, that looks like a gigantic preserve tin with its shiny aluminium sides, drives into the town and discharges its load of green sacks. At about the same time the

post leaves for 'Gangtok and places in Tibet', as a notice on the Post Office letterbox has it. This statement is not entirely accurate, for until recently only Yatung, in the Chumbi Valley, and the Central Tibetan town of Gyantse had a postal delivery. Both places contained Indian trade agents, who were furnished with a small detachment of troops for protection. Post Offices using Indian stamps overprinted 'Gyantse-Tibet' or 'Yatung-Tibet' were also established at both places to facilitate commercial relations. The recent agreement between India and China for the withdrawal of the troops will no doubt also result in the closing of the two Post Offices.

From an ethnological point of view Kalimpong is extremely fertile terrain. On market days its streets are filled with a motley throng of purchasers and onlookers representing practically all the peoples living in the Himalayas and adjacent territories. Tibetans from all parts of the Land of Snow, Bhutanese, Bengalis, Marwaris, Gurkhas and Lepchas, Tamangs and Limbus, Mangars, Chetris—their names are legion. This multiplicity of peoples and religions is responsible for the fact that New Year is celebrated in Kalimpong at least seven times annually. First comes the European New Year; then in February, the Chinese hold their festival of the turn of the year, which is followed a few days later by the Tibetan Lossar. A new year begins for the Marwaris in April, and two months later it is the Nepalis' turn. The Moslems also have their own New Year festival; and when the European calendar year is nearing its end a new one has already begun for the Lepchas.

The houses of Kalimpong's wealthiest merchants are grouped on both sides of the road that comes up from the Teesta Valley, at the point where it crosses the narrow bridge of rock linking Deolo with Ringkingpong. These merchants are practically all Marwaris, from Marwari (now Jodpur), in Rajputana, North-West India. Marwaris are born traders, unbelievably hard-working, but hated by their fellow Indians for the craft and cunning with which they advance their business interests. It has been claimed that eighty per cent of India's national property is in the hands



of the Marwaris. People say that the Marwaris of Kalimpong charge interest at fifty per cent or more on loans, and that many of them present their bills twice. On the other hand, the Marwaris always head the lists of subscribers to the various collections that circulate in the town from time to time. Though many Indians assert that this generosity on the part of the Marwaris is due solely to their belief that the substantial sums they give to charity will be, so to speak, credited to a 'heavenly account' and placed at their disposal in the after life.

The Marwaris are extremely frugal; the only luxuries many of them permit themselves are a little car, a radio or a camera. Almost all the men dress alike, in a simple collarless shirt or a brown jacket, a *dhoti* gathered in folds and tied round the waist or a pair of voluminous trousers of spotless white linen, and a stiff 'forage cap' of black material or a saffron-yellow turban. The women are far more pretentious, however, and their billowing saris, the traditional garb of Indian women, are distinguished by a profusion of hues that is frequently garish. The patterns on the material, mostly flowers and leaves, look crude, and their glaring greens, yellows, violets and oranges combine to form great splodges of colour. The head and the greater part of the face are veiled by a corner of the sari; arms and ankles are adorned with broad bangles; the heels and the soles of the feet are painted red with henna. Marwari women are almost invariably seen in groups, and their chattering and the shuffling of their sandals can be heard long before they appear round the bend in the road. On catching sight of a stranger they generally cover their faces quickly, as propriety demands. The ladies are followed, at a respectful distance, by bare-footed serving women carrying their mistresses' offspring on their hips. When a Marwari goes for a walk through the town with his family he always forms the head of a small procession. A few steps behind him comes his wife, her face veiled and her eyes modestly downcast. Behind her, at the appropriate distance, follow the serving women with the children.

The Marwaris keep no special shop hours. They open at sunrise and do not close until late at night. Their shops are

without windows, but open to the street along their whole width. A large proportion of the space is occupied by a low dais covered with white linen, which serves as a counter and desk by day and as a bed at night.

Another indispensable article of furniture in a Marwari shop is a safe. Beside the neatly piled bundles of bank-notes stands a little statue of the elephant-headed Indian god Ganesha, the divine multiplier of worldly goods. The shop-keepers burn joss-sticks of sandalwood before the safe every evening in his honour. It was this practice, no doubt, which gave rise to the rumour that Marwaris pray every evening to filthy lucre.

For the merchants one month passes like another, without any Sabbath rest, interrupted only by one or two annual festivals. Even death is not allowed to interfere with business. I remember a scene I observed in the course of an afternoon's ride through the commercial quarter. A Marwari had died and was lying wrapped in a white cloth on the sleeping-dais in a corner of his shop. A few men squatted round him, motionless and silent, keeping the death-watch. But only a few yards away, in another corner of the shop, it was 'business as usual'.

A huge hoarding stands in the business quarter, bearing in Tibetan characters the statement: 'So and so's cigarettes are your cigarettes'. The lamas who pass by look at this advertisement askance, for their religion disapproves of indulgence in this 'devil's weed'. The first building in the commercial street, separated from the hoarding by only a few wooden huts, is the branch of an Indian bank, a modern concrete edifice. This bank is filled practically all day long with a crowd of gesticulating Marwaris. A slit-eyed man in a brown uniform stands guard at the door. An old army rifle is slung from his shoulder, and two cartridge belts run diagonally across his chest. He is a Gurkha, a member of the present military ruling caste of Nepal. He gazes with an expressionless face at the multitudes thronging past him—unless he happens to be knitting a pullover to while away the time.

Farther down the hill stand a few Chinese cobblers' shops and a restaurant, the owner of which is likewise from the

Middle Kingdom. Kalimpong shelters a small Chinese colony, mostly merchants and artisans. The Chinese have their own school, from whose roof the red, five-starred flag of Communist China waves, a little shrine, and also their own cemetery.

Next to the Chinese cobblers' shops comes a Tibetan eating-house. The only decoration on the walls of this establishment is an oleograph that strikes a grotesque note in these surroundings: it shows a group of yodelling men in Bavarian costume with a background of well-known Bavarian scenery. Slightly below the Tibetan restaurant stands a mosque. A little wooden tower beside it fulfils the function of a minaret. A steep path leads from the mosque to the Scottish Mission Church, whose neo-Gothic architecture is thoroughly out of keeping with the landscape. The Fathers of the Swiss Catholic Mission, whose Church and school lie lower down in the valley of the Teesta, had a far better idea: they built their spacious place of worship in the Tibetan style. Its square plan and the division of its interior into a wide nave and two aisles, divided off by richly carved pillars, are entirely in accord with the principles of Tibetan temple architecture. The roof is turquoise blue, the entrance door is copied from Lamaist models and even bears Tibetan ornamentation—flaming jewels, prayer-wheels, ritual vessels and lucky knots. The pictures inside the church are adapted to the style of Tibetan paintings: the saints have Mongolian features and are dressed in lama's robes. The statues on the altars also keep to the same style, so that many Tibetans visiting the church out of curiosity hang a white ceremonial scarf round the images' necks—the customary sign of reverence in Tibet. Even the organ is unusual: its pipes are made of bamboo. The builder of this unique church was Monsignor Gianora, the Apostolic Prefect for Sikkim. He is an excellent architect, and the natives have to thank him for the erection of many bridges which, unlike the usual bamboo structures, are strong enough to withstand the monsoon floods.

There is even a cinema in Kalimpong. It shows well-worn products of the Indian film industry—incidentally, the second largest in the world—and occasionally Wild West

films, which are particularly popular with the Tibetan muleteers. In the hot season the interior of the cinema is like an oven, while during the monsoon the rain drums so loudly on the corrugated-iron roof that even the loudest sound film becomes a silent film.

It is not far from the cinema to the market-place, or bazaar. On market days it presents an unparalleled sight. Its wide area is filled by an immense, jostling crowd. The vendors sit in roofed stands on both sides of the principal lane, which runs diagonally across the square. The majority are Nepali peasants from the district offering agricultural produce—corn on the cob, buckwheat, millet, beans, tomatoes, red peppers and above all rice, for rice is the staple food of the inhabitants of the Sikkimese Himalayas. There is hardly a mountainside in Sikkim without its terraced paddy field. For this reason the Tibetans call Sikkim ‘Dremoshong’, the ‘Rice Province’. Fruit of all kinds can also be bought in the bazaar, especially large and delicious oranges and bananas, while traders from the neighbouring Chumbi Valley bring tasty sweet apples.

A Nepali street-trader has taken up his position near the peasants, spreading out a bewildering plethora of wares on the ground. They include paraffin lamps, little mirrors, brown and purple woollen caps, sticky sweets and dried up biscuits, buttons, balls of thread, needles, saucepans and gaudy silk scarves. A young Tibetan woman sitting close by has far less to offer: a heap of bent and rusty nails and a battery of bottles of all sizes stand in front of her. I wonder who on earth can want to buy such things, but I soon discover that the bottles, in particular, sell well among Tibetans.

Directly beside the Tibetan woman sit two of her countrymen—from Lhasa, to judge by their clothes. They are selling undyed Tibetan wool. Tibetan wool merchants are a common sight in Kalimpong, for wool is Tibet’s principal export. An old Lepcha with a horrifying ugly face, but the friendly and guileless eyes of a child, squats next to the Tibetans. He is modestly offering some of the products of the Sikkimese jungle for sale: bamboo shoots, which can be made into a

dish resembling asparagus, combs of wild honey, dried medicinal plants and the tubers of rare orchids that he has gathered at the risk of his life from the topmost moss-grown branches of dead and rotting giant trees. Opposite the Lepcha sits a Tibetan herdsman. He has come to the market from the Almas of North Sikkim and is selling pieces of dried curd—which looks like plaster of Paris and tastes much the same—together with yak butter squeezed into little goatskin bags, and yak cheese that is cut into small cubes and then strung on a cord.

An Indian barber squats in the dust behind the stands. His lathered customers crouch in front of him. The turbaned Figaro goes through the operation of shaving with measured movements, as though performing a ceremony, before the admiring gaze of a mob of half-naked children. Not far from the barber, in the shade of a projecting roof, several Nepalis are busy breaking open bales of Tibetan wool tied up with yak-leather straps. Afterwards the wool will be picked, sorted according to colour and quality, and taken to a warehouse to await transport to Calcutta.

A hoarse voice and the music of a concertina come from a corner of the market. They belong to a preacher of some obscure Christian sect, who is endeavouring to convince the Tibetans of the special advantages of his religion—a vain attempt, for Tibetans are almost completely immune to the influence of Christian missionaries. The man speaks very imperfect Tibetan, and the dense crowd of Tibetans gathered round him repeatedly roar with laughter at his bad pronunciation. To them this sermon is a glorious entertainment. After the fervent propagandist has concluded by damning all other Christian Churches as utterly heathen, he strikes up a hymn—accompanied by his wife on a squeaking concertina. At this the merriment of his audience reaches its climax. It undoubtedly takes courage for these two people to make a public declaration of their faith in the face of such derision. But does not their behaviour damage yet further the already diminished prestige of the white man among Himalayan peoples? Most other missionaries do far more useful work in this field. Without any ado they perform valuable services to

the community as physicians and teachers, making no distinction of race or religion.

With luck all sorts of interesting scenes can be observed in the market-place. A Nepali wedding, for instance, with the bare-footed bridegroom in the middle, a thick layer of rice grains stuck to his forehead as a symbol of good fortune and an umbrella—considerably the worse for wear—held over his head as a mark of dignity. Or a Chinese funeral procession may wind slowly past, accompanied by the howling of hired female mourners clad in white and the loud reports of fire-crackers—the noise is supposed to drive away demons.

We will now continue our tour of Kalimpong. Above the market-place, at the side of the main highway leading along the slopes of Deolo, stand the houses of the Tibetan quarter. This part of the town is known as the 'Tenth Mile' because it is exactly ten miles from the Teesta Bridge. The name Tenth Mile has a slightly objectionable flavour in Kalimpong. It is the site of offices, warehouses and shops of the Tibetan merchants—but also of the lodgings of numerous Tibetan ladies of easy virtue. A few Marwari shops and the workshops of Nepali silversmiths have slipped in between the Tibetan houses. The workshops belong to Newars, members of the Buddhist population that once dominated Central Nepal, until they were subjugated by the warlike Gurkhas in the eighteenth century. Nepal owes most of its artistic treasures to the skill and industry of the Newars, but Tibet too has profited greatly from the work of Newar artists. Lhasa and some other towns contain colonies of Newar craftsmen, who supply the lamaseries with statues of the gods and ritual vessels. If the visitor likes to sit down for an hour or so in one of these workshops he can watch rough lumps of metal transformed into beautifully shaped incense bowls, richly ornamented jugs or images of many-armed demons under the deft fingers of the silversmiths.

The shops of the Tibetan merchants on the Tenth Mile are filled with the most marvellous wares. Thick bundles of reddish-brown joss-sticks lie alongside piles of blankets made from coarse Tibetan wool; Chinese rice bowls of paper-thin porcelain stand next to fat yak tails, used as ceremonial fans

in Hindu temples. Bales of silk and brocade, of which wealthy Tibetans have their clothes made, little caskets full of turquoises and old silver coins, the rolled-up skins of Tibetan snow-leopards, strings of artificial beads, and big white shells used by the lamas as musical instruments lie cheek by jowl with tins of Chinese delicacies. Here, too, are Chinese chopsticks of ivory, or cheaper ones of plastic or wood, colourful Tibetan rugs and saddle-cloths, musk in little leather bags, triangles of brocade, with which Tibetan women embellish the corners of their gaily striped aprons, simple eating-bowls of wood and more expensive ones inlaid with silver. Men of rank prefer this type of bowl, for a sudden blackening of the silver gives them timely warning that poison has been added to their food. Turquoise or coral rings from the Eastern Tibetan town of Derge, bells for the leading animals of caravans, and long strips of white, blue, yellow, red, green and black linen, from which the lamas make prayer flags, are also for sale. Beside them lie Tibetan and Chinese medicinal herbs, brightly coloured silk cords for decorating the pigtail or the sword, and other unusual goods.

In the middle of the Tibetan quarter stands a corrugated-iron shed, from which a steep flight of steps runs up to a small stone building. The two buildings house the editorial offices and press of the oddest newspaper in the world. This is the *Mirror of News from All Sides of the World*, as its title means literally, some hundred and fifty copies of which appear monthly. Until the occupation of the Land of Snow by Red Chinese troops, this was Tibet's only newspaper. It was founded as long ago as 1925. The editor is Kusho Tharchin, an affable Tibetan who prefers European clothes and has mastered English as thoroughly as the tortuous formulas of honorific Tibetan. This paper is an exception among Tibetan printed works: it is not printed with wood blocks, but with lead type from the founts of the big Baptist Mission press at Calcutta.

*The Mirror of News from All Sides of the World* generally consists of only six or eight small pages of print, but it offers a wealth of absorbing news to him who can read it. There are columns headed 'News from Lhasa', or 'Reports from

Bhutan'. Next to the latest rumours from the caravan routes stands a report on the most recent sitting of the Tibetan Council of Ministers, followed by intelligence from the land of the U-ru-su (Russians) and the Sog-po (Mongolians), from Gya-nag (China), Ko-ri-ya (Korea) and Ri-pin (Japan). In between are to be found the 'Legend of the Parrot that spoke several Languages', proverbs, the 'Honey-essence of Good Sense contained in the Wise Sayings of the Lama White Lotus', and news of the opening of a new 'skyway'—the Tibetan term for an airline. Many of the headlines would do credit to a sensation-mongering Western paper, e.g. 'Thunder, Lightning and Hail over Lhasa', 'Six Tibetan Robbers Commit a Double Murder in Sikkim', 'Serious Damage by Earthquakes in Yunnan' or 'No World War to be Expected This Year'. A column under the heading 'News from India' contains the outline of a peace speech by Pandit Nehru and in the section 'News from the Western Continent' may be read a declaration by President Ai-sing-hu-war on the Formosa conflict. The name of the island is spelt Phormosa, for the Tibetan language possesses no 'f'.

Western personal and geographical names are transliterated into Tibetan characters according to the English pronunciation; but the familiar names are not always easy to recognize in their Tibetan guise. Thus the section 'News from the Western Continent' contains an account of the Diugophe E-den-bara's (Duke of Edinburgh's) Canadian tour, a note about international discussions taking place in Pe-ri-si (Paris) the capital of Pha-ran-se (France), and the gist of a declaration made by Char-cha-hil (Churchill), all of them telegraphic reports, 'wind-tidings', as the Tibetans say.

Most issues of the paper carry a few photographs. A picture of the young Dalai Lama often graces the front page, but a photograph of the Communist National Assembly at Lhasa is quite likely to appear as well. A few pages farther on a true marvel is shown: a new-laid egg, the natural markings on whose shell form the party symbol of Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang. The back page of the *Mirror of News from All Sides of the World* also has interesting information to offer. Under the heading 'Commercial News' it gives the current



prices of Tibetan wool, fox and snow-leopard skins, black and white yak's tails, hog's bristles, and musk. Next to this are announcements by the Association of Tibetan Merchants in Kalimpong and a few advertisements, such as the statement that Ballisandas Shyamrata pays the highest price for musk, or a price list of the goods just arrived at Haji Musa Khan's shop on the Tenth Mile.

On the eastern outskirts of the town, only three hundred paces from the Tibetan press, stands a long stone building. 'Tobkhana', the inhabitants of Kalimpong call it. Here the poorest of the poor live, Tibetans of the lowest classes, who cannot find shelter anywhere else. At night the interior of the Tobkhana looks like a scene from hell. Twenty or thirty open fires burn in small enclosures erected along the walls. The high, bare room is filled with their acrid smoke. Dark figures wrapped in filthy rags squat round the fires and look fearfully, inquisitively or threateningly at the stranger who has ventured amongst them. Most of those who live here are beggars, but the Tobkhana sometimes affords free shelter to a poor muleteer or mendicant monk. Over there four young priests are sitting round a fire. One of them is laboriously reading the grubby pages of a tattered book in the flickering firelight, while his three companions intone a prayer, clapping their hands in the rhythm of the verses. Outside the circle of light an old lama squats, leaning his back against the sooty wall, with glassy eyes and half-open mouth and beads of sweat on his leathery face. He wheezes as he draws in air and now and again his hands flutter up as though he were trying to push something away. The priests observe my questioning glance. The man with the book shrugs his shoulders and says unconcernedly: 'Fever. He often has it.'

Each of the many fires illuminates the same melancholy picture. But even amongst these destitute people the gods of Tibet are at home. Here and there little altars of flat stones can be seen, on which stand amulet caskets and images. Even the poorest beggar has set up a clay image of the merciful Chenresi, before whom a little butter lamp burns.

This inferno once had its good spirit, but unfortunately only for a short time. Father Morse, an American missionary

whom war drove first from Korea and later from China, came to the aid of these unfortunates. He used to go through the Tobkhana two or three times a day, giving food to the hungry and tending the sick. He even good-naturedly allowed the children to touch his long white beard, a source of endless amazement to the Tibetans. The better to care for his protégés, he rented a room in a house close to the Tobkhana and converted its little antechamber into a consulting-room. The Tibetans crowded into the room from early morning onwards to receive free treatment from the *Amirika amchi*, the 'American doctor'. When I visited Father Morse for the first time he was unpacking his new acquisition, a microscope of the latest type, which had just arrived in a small box. How long he must have scraped and saved in order to purchase this expensive instrument out of the meagre donations he received. Visibly pleased at my visit he told his Tibetan servant, a well-meaning but extremely clumsy young man, to make tea at once. I observed the young man out of the corner of my eye as he stood at the stove. It had struck me the moment I entered the room that he had no eyebrows. Was it possible . . .? The servant passed me a plate of biscuits with an ingenuous smile, and a single glance at his maimed hands turned my suspicion to horrifying certainty: the man had leprosy. But the good Father Morse said to me reassuringly: 'Don't be afraid, his treatment has reached a point at which he can no longer pass the disease on to anyone.'

Father Morse remained barely a year in Kalimpong, then he was compelled to return to America. He had passed most of his life in Asia, and his ecclesiastical superiors were of the opinion that it was now time for him to spend a longish period in the house of his Order. Disconsolately, he distributed his scanty possessions among the inmates of the Tobkhana. The day before his departure the abbot of the nearby Buddhist monastery appeared in the company of a few of his monks, to thank Father Morse for the great kindness he had shown his countrymen and to present him with a lama's robe as a parting gift. Even in America Father Morse did not forget his protégés: years after leaving he continued to send money to friends in Kalimpong, with the request that

they should distribute it among the occupants of the Tobkhana.

Above the poor quarter, on the slope of Deolo, stands Tirpai Gompa, the town's Yellow Hat monastery, an imposing, single-storey temple with some forty inmates. The little Bhutanese shrine lower down, on the other hand, is tended by only two watchmen. It belongs to the Kagyupa sect, the ruling Church of Bhutan, and the priests only assemble there for the great festivals. Another Bhutanese place of worship is the European-looking Bhutan House, a palatial building belonging to the family of the former Bhutanese Prime Minister, Raja Dorje, who died in 1953. The chapel on the first floor is a gem of Lamaist ecclesiastical architecture. Wooden bookshelves round the walls carry the many volumes of the *Kangyur*, the *Tengyur* and other collected works. Offer-tory bowls stand before the gilded images of the gods on the altar, filled to the brim with old silver coins as big as the palm of the hand. The *thangkas* on the walls are choice examples of Tibetan and Bhutanese painting. But the most valuable object is the gorgeous throne in the centre of the chapel, over the back of which a wide ceremonial scarf of white silk, a so-called *khatag*, is draped. This is the throne used by the thirteenth Dalai Lama when he fled to Kalimpong, in 1910, after being driven from Lhasa by the Chinese.

A road that joins the caravan highway beside Bhutan House winds its way up the Deolo in broad curves to an extensive complex of European buildings populated by innumerable children of all shades, from white to the darkest brown. These are Dr. Graham's Homes, founded by Dr. Graham, a former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, who went to his final rest here in the midst of his magnificent work. The Homes, as they are called for short in Kalimpong, are an educational establishment for children of European fathers and Indian mothers neglected or abandoned by their parents. Here they receive a good education and, above all, care and attention, food, and a roof over their heads.

It takes a good hour to walk from the Homes, past the Tirpai monastery, to the Indian and European section of

Kalimpong. This consists of a few European houses built by British officials and business men, and a number of Indian villas in which well-to-do Bengalis spend their holiday with their families. During the major part of the year the houses are unoccupied. But there are several exceedingly interesting personalities who live here permanently. To begin with, there is Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark—a cousin of the King of Greece and nephew of the Duchess of Kent—and his wife, Princess Irene. Prince Peter took the degree of Doctor of Laws at the Sorbonne and that of Master of Arts at the University of London. But his principal interest is ethnology, in which domain he is well known for his investigations of that rare form of marriage, known as polyandry, in which women take more than one husband. Research in this and other fields of ethnology took him to Ceylon, South India, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Western Tibet, Nepal and finally to the Sikkimese Himalayas, where the Prince found an ideal province for the pursuit of his studies. So as to be able to converse with the Tibetans directly, instead of through the unreliable inter-medium of an interpreter, he learnt Tibetan, one of the most difficult languages in the world. The Prince was appointed leader of the Third Royal Danish Expedition to Central Asia, which he presided over until its termination in 1954.

Princess Irene, who is of Russian origin, used to accompany the Prince on most of his research trips. She, too, attended lectures on ethnology at London University. Her particular field of interest is Indian religion, and especially the beliefs of the aboriginal tribes living on the western seaboard of the Indian sub-continent. For two years, from the spring of 1951 until my departure, my own studies were intimately bound up with those of the Prince and Princess. It was an unadulterated pleasure to work with Prince Peter and Princess Irene. Anyone who has met this charming and hospitable couple will appreciate that this is no empty flattery.

Another prominent European inhabitant of Kalimpong is the celebrated Russian tibetologist Dr. G. N. Roerich. He travelled across wide areas of Central Asia in the company of his father, a famous painter who captured the magnificence

of the Tibetan landscape in a series of unique pictures. Amongst other languages, Dr. Roerich speaks fluent Tibetan, Mongolian and even Sanskrit, the language in which the books of Ancient India are written. He lives with his mother in a delightfully situated house. I was often a guest at this house, where I discussed with my ever helpful fellow anthropologist—over countless cups of tea, and often far into the night—the many still unsolved problems of Tibet.

Bhikshu Sangharakshita, another European resident of Kalimpong, lives in much more modest style. This exotic-sounding name hides the identity of a young Englishman who has settled in a wooden bungalow on the north-western edge of the European quarter. He developed a lively interest in the Yellow Doctrine during his schooldays in London. The Second World War brought him to the Far East as a member of the R.A.F., and so into direct contact with the Buddhist religion. He went over to Buddhism and, on his release from the armed forces, broke all his ties with the West. The airman became a Buddhist monk, tramping the dusty roads of India dressed in a yellow robe, with a shaven head and a begging-bowl in his hand. He passed the severe tests to which a novice is subjected to try the sincerity of his decision—poverty and mortification of the flesh, wearisome pilgrimages and protracted meditational exercises. Finally, after receiving initiation of the lower degree, he became a *bhikshu*, a full-ordained priest.

The majority of Indian Buddhists reject Lamaism out of hand, without any close knowledge of its essential nature, as a primitive demon cult which, in their opinion, has scarcely anything in common with Buddha's philosophic teaching. Sangharakshita resolved to examine the facts for himself. The conclusions he reached led him to work for a rapprochement between the Hinayana or 'Lesser Vehicle'—the form of Buddhism predominant in the countries of South Asia—and the Mahayana or 'Greater Vehicle' prevailing in Tibet. As his mouthpiece in this endeavour he publishes a monthly periodical, *Stepping Stones*, which contains a wealth of interesting information concerning the religious life of the inhabitants of Tibet and the Himalayas. During his stay in Kalimpong he

observed that many young Buddhist Nepalis and Tibetans wasted a great deal of time in idleness or allowed themselves to be enlisted for dubious causes by political agitators. To set the young men's minds on more productive paths, he united with ex-R.A.F. Wing-Commander Swale-Ryan—likewise a convert to Buddhism and now called Anagarika Sasana Ratana—in founding the Young Men's Buddhist Association, Y.M.B.A. for short, on the lines of the well-known Y.M.C.A.

On the outskirts of the European quarter, above the Post Office, stands the Himalayan Hotel, the town's only guest-house that comes up to European standards. It belongs to David Macdonald, known to everyone as 'Daddy', the former British Trade Agent in the Central Tibetan town of Gyantse. 'Daddy' Macdonald is well over eighty, but the many years spent in Tibet have steeled his body and mind. His perfect knowledge of the language and customs of the Tibetans, coupled with the fact that Tibetan as well as Scottish blood flows in his veins, resulted in his being on terms of intimate friendship with many of Tibet's highest dignitaries. He corresponded for many years with the thirteenth Dalai Lama, who died in 1939, and long after his retirement he was frequently called in by the Tibetan Government to act as intermediary in matters of importance. It was due to his influence with the Tibetans, for example, that the Imperial Chinese troops stationed in Tibet were allowed to leave the country unmolested in 1912. The outbreak of revolution in their country had cut these detachments off from their base, and it looked as though the Tibetans would seize the opportunity to wipe out the hated Chinese soldiery. But 'Daddy' Macdonald succeeded in obtaining a safe conduct for the occupation troops.

The Himalayan Hotel is run by Annie Perry, 'Daddy' Macdonald's eldest daughter. Annie-la, as she is called by her friends according to the custom of Tibetan honorific speech, is a good friend of many travellers in the Himalayas and Tibet who have halted in Kalimpong. All of them recall with pleasure the days spent under her care, as the mountains of Christmas cards that pour in every year testify. Like her sisters, Vera and Vicky, Annie-la passed her childhood in

Tibet. The accounts she gives of this period in her life are no less interesting than the experiences of her father. Thus she and her sisters were once guests at a Tibetan children's party arranged by a few noblemen's families in Gyantse. For a time the party went splendidly. The children played, drank tea and ate sweets, while the grown-ups, including Annie-la's mother, chatted. When the party-spirit was at its height the hostess appeared and announced with a smile: 'Now, as a special surprise treat, our little ones can watch some criminals being tortured.' Upon which Annie-la's mother sprang to her feet in horror and declared that under those circumstances she and her children would have to leave immediately. Her hostess and the other Tibetan women were amazed to learn that in Europe such 'amusements' were by no means a normal part of the entertainment at children's parties.

The hotel's factotum is a little old Tibetan woman who only once a year, on the feast-days of the Tibetan New Year, exchanges her unadorned *chuba*—the long Tibetan gown—for the colourful festal garments anxiously put away for the occasion. The poor woman had a terrifying experience with one of the diabolical inventions of the West. A telephone was installed in the hotel, and Annie-la showed her what to do when it rang: lift the receiver, find out whom the call is for, place the receiver beside the instrument and fetch the person who is wanted. The few people who rang announced themselves in English, and the old woman, although she did not speak a word of this language, always managed to find out whom the call was for. But one morning a Tibetan telephoned and asked for one of the guests at the hotel in his mother tongue. The little old woman, overcome by terror, dropped the receiver with a scream and ran to tell her mistress: 'Memsahib, something unbelievable has happened! The telephone is talking Tibetan!'

The small dining-room of the Himalayan Hotel is the meeting place for the Europeans living in Kalimpong. Strangers often find their way in here as well—merchants from Calcutta, owners and employers of neighbouring tea plantations, Tibetan nobles and their families, journalists, philologists and ethnologists, and now and then a tourist who

has strayed from the beaten track of Indian tourism. One can only shake one's head at the naïvety of many visitors in the latter category. An elderly couple from the U.S.A., 'the land of unlimited possibilities', once came to the hotel. They had obviously been the victims of some practical joker, for on retiring in the evening they instructed the hotel porter: 'On no account forget to wake us at 6 a.m. sharp. We don't want to miss the bus to Lhasa.'



## CHAPTER V

# Turbulent Days

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THE three years I spent in the Himalayan zone were both an interesting and a politically agitated period. In Kalimpong, the gateway to Central Asia, I made the acquaintance of many remarkable people—Europeans and Asians, lamas and explorers, princes and adventurers, saints and ministers. But over every conversation lay the shadow of the great events in the forbidden lands on the fringe of the highest mountains in the world. A revolution broke out in Nepal, and the ancient ecclesiastical State of Tibet was conquered by Red China; the King of Nepal and the Dalai Lama were compelled to flee. In this chapter I shall quote from the diary I kept at the time some of the entries bearing on my own experiences in Kalimpong and those occurrences whose effects are still making themselves felt in Asia.

LATE AUGUST 1950

Tendub Namgyal, the Crown Prince of Sikkim, was married on August 25. Sikkim has been ruled since the sixteenth century by a royal family of Tibetan origin. In order to keep the links with the Tibetan motherland alive, Sikkimese princes and court dignitaries almost always marry women from the Tibetan nobility. The Crown Prince obeyed this unwritten law, and the wedding was celebrated with great pomp and circumstance at Gangtok. Shortly afterwards one of the wedding guests told me that the celebrations had gone off very well—only the two weather-makers responsible for conjuring up fine weather had, unfortunately, temporarily failed in their task. As is usual in such cases among the Tibetans and the neighbouring peoples who also practise Lamaism, the King of Sikkim had specially engaged two weather-magicians to ensure fine weather during the festivities. All went well to

begin with: the weather-makers buried an offering in the royal garden to the water spirits that rule the rain, and uttered the prescribed incantation. On the morning of the feast-day the sun shone from a clear blue sky, as the sorcerers and their client had expected. Satisfied with their handiwork and certain of rich rewards, the two drank a considerable quantity of millet beer and lay down in a shady corner of the garden to sleep it off. While they were asleep, however, black clouds gathered over the capital and it soon began to rain in torrents. Drenched and sobered, the magicians hurried to the buried offerings, followed by a party of soldiers whom the king had sent to give the weather-makers a forcible reminder of their duty. The dismayed wizards dug up the weather-magic—and what did they find? According to the instructions they should have buried an offering to the water spirit consisting of thirteen clay snakes and thirteen clay frogs; but in reality it had been fourteen snakes and only twelve frogs. No wonder the rain-controllers, enraged by the inaccuracy of the offering, had sent bad weather as a punishment! As quickly as they could, the sorcerers rectified their mistake. They were lucky, for the rain immediately abated and an hour later a cloudless sky was once more arched over Gangtok—reason enough for the weather-makers to drink themselves silly again.

#### EARLY SEPTEMBER 1950

I am gradually making my first acquaintances among the Tibetans. One of these is an exceedingly interesting young man: his name is Nyima and he is the business agent of the former cabinet minister Kabshopa. Nyima is a very wide-awake young man; he speaks fluent Chinese and Hindi, and very good English. His home is in the Chumbi Valley, but he has lived for long periods in various parts of Tibet and has even spent some time in China and Malaya. He has been living in Kalimpong for a year, travelling almost every month to Calcutta and Bombay to do business on behalf of his clients in Lhasa. He prefers European clothes and is as used to travelling by car, plane or express train as any Western businessman. His strikingly pretty wife, who wears

## TURBULENT DAYS

Chinese clothes and likes to use Western make-up, comes from the Na-khi people, who are related to the Tibetans and live in the eastern Sino-Tibetan frontier zone.

Nyima is thoroughly *au courant* with events in the great world. He reads Indian papers every day, and once a month he buys the latest number of *Reader's Digest*; though he often finds it difficult to grasp the meaning of the articles, especially when they deal with technical or scientific matters. So we quickly reached a mutually advantageous agreement: I shall go through English magazine and newspaper articles with him every day and explain unfamiliar concepts to him, while he will help me translate lama books and improve my knowledge of colloquial Tibetan.

My task soon proved to be a very exacting one, for Nyima has a passion for learning and wants to know everything. He is particularly interested in the fundamentals of physics and chemistry. It is fortunate that I spent a year or two studying chemistry—but how explain the composition of chlorophyll or the term 'isotopes' to a Tibetan, when the Tibetan language doesn't even contain a word for 'metal', but only speaks of 'gold', 'copper' or 'silver'?

My new friend has turned out to be an absolutely ideal teacher. He is not only a master of the honorific and literary languages, as well as many Tibetan dialects, but is also a mine of information on the finer points of the Lamaist religion. This comes from the fact that his teacher was a learned monk, who later became tutor to the present Dalai Lama. In spite of his orthodox upbringing, however, Nyima has a highly sceptical attitude towards many Buddhist dogmas. This is outwardly visible from the fact that Lamaist roll-paintings hang cheek by jowl with pictures of Christian saints on the walls of his house—greatly to the displeasure of Nyima's strictly orthodox father, a venerable-looking old gentleman, whose Buddhist rosary is never out of his hand.

MID-SEPTEMBER 1950

Relations between Tibet and Red China have progressively

deteriorated during the last few months, and now seem to have entered a critical phase. The Red Chinese recently declared their intention to 'liberate' Tibet. The first incidents have already taken place, and the beginning of a Communist march on Lhasa is expected daily in Kalimpong. Red Chinese troops are concentrated on Tibet's eastern frontier, and their commander, General Liu Po Cheng, has proclaimed that the army of liberation will shortly march into Tibet to smash the aggressive influence of the Anglo-American imperialists. He sees his task as being 'to bring the Tibetan people back into the great family of the Chinese People's Republic'.

The Tibetan Government shows an understandable lack of enthusiasm for this forthcoming 'liberation'. It has sent troops to the threatened frontiers and ordered something like general mobilization. To reinforce its regular army, which numbers only ten thousand poorly equipped troops, 'recruits' are being called to the colours by a very simple procedure: soldiers stationed at the various bridges bring every fit man, who wishes to cross but can give no convincing reason why he should be allowed to continue his journey, to the nearest collecting point.

During recent months the Tibetan Government has repeatedly declared its readiness to do everything possible to reach a peaceful settlement with China. Last March a delegation of seven was formed to seek contact with Peking, either through Hong Kong or through Red China's accredited ambassador in New Delhi. The delegation arrived in Calcutta in May, hoping to leave for Hong Kong in June. But the visas for Hong Kong, which had already been issued, were cancelled shortly before the delegates' plane was due to leave. The peace mission has now settled down in Kalimpong to await further instructions from Lhasa. These are a long time coming, for telegraphic communication with the Tibetan capital has been broken as the result of a heavy fall of snow in the Phari Dzong region. Couriers take twenty days to bring an answer from Lhasa back to Kalimpong.

## TURBULENT DAYS

LATE SEPTEMBER 1950

The situation is becoming acute. General Liu Po Cheng is said by the Indian newspapers to have concentrated sixty thousand troops on the Tibetan frontier, who are forced to eat *tsampa*—roasted barley-meal, the Tibetan national dish—every day, to prepare them for living off the land, if necessary, once they are inside Tibet. Tibetans arriving in Kalimpong report that large sections of the people are opposed to war with China. Some of the priesthood is supposed to have come out openly in favour of surrendering Tibet to the Communists without a fight. This defeatism is bound up with the fact that supporters of the Panchen Lama desire the return of their supreme head from his Chinese exile, while they are not particularly well disposed towards the Tibetan Government.

To understand this rather complicated situation, we must take a brief glance at the curious 'dual papacy' that prevails in the land of the lamas and has led more than once in Tibetan history to conflicts between the two princes of the Church. The seat of the Panchen Lama is the monastery of Tashilhumpo by the town of Shigatse. From an exclusively religious point of view the Panchen Lama, as a reincarnation of Opame, the 'Buddha of Infinite Light', is higher in rank than the Dalai Lama, the reincarnation of the candidate for Buddhahood (Bodhisattva) Chenresi. In practice, however, Tibet's historical development has given the true reins of government to the Dalai Lama, making him the god-king. The present Panchen Lama, who was discovered to be the reincarnation of Opame while still a boy in Chinese territory, was held by China and brought up under Chinese protection. First Chiang Kai-Shek's agents planned to make the young prince of the Church their tool; later, the Communists did the same. Few Tibetans take any interest in Chinese political aspirations, but many of them would welcome a Chinese invasion if it resulted in the return of the Panchen Lama. Other adherents of the Panchen Lama, notably priests and nobles in the Shigatse region, were harried for years by the Tibetan Government—they have not forgotten it, and for this reason they sympathize with China.

The monks of the great monastery of Sera and the former

supporters of the Regent Reting Rimpoche, who was murdered in 1947, are also Sinophils. Rimpoche was one of Tibet's most outstanding regents, i.e. one of those politically highly important men who govern the Land of Snow while the current Dalai Lama is still a minor and has not yet begun his rule. After the death of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, the reincarnated lama of Reting monastery was appointed regent during the fourteenth Dalai Lama's minority. When Reting Rimpoche, who took his religious duties very seriously, retired for a long period into a monk's cell, he temporarily entrusted the affairs of State to his friend Tagta Rimpoche, 'His Preciousness of the Dragon-Rock Monastery'. The latter became so enamoured of the regent's throne, however, that when Reting Rimpoche emerged from his cell Tagta Rimpoche refused to hand back the reins of government. Thereupon the monks of Reting, supported by the inmates of Sera, resolved to overthrow Tagta Rimpoche. Their plot, in which a number of nobles were also involved, was discovered in time by followers of Tagta Rimpoche. The ringleaders were arrested, the monastery of Reting stormed by Government troops, and the monks of Sera also forced to bow to superior force. Reting Rimpoche was thrown into gaol, where he died at the hands of a murderer.

LATE SEPTEMBER 1950

Indian friends have placed a charming, villa-like house at my disposal, and absolutely refuse to accept the slightest payment: a shining example of the much-extolled Eastern hospitality. The house is delightfully situated, right in the middle of the gardens of the Indian and European quarter. My next-door neighbour is Prince Latthakin of Burma, who is married to the daughter of the last of the Burmese kings, King Thibaw. Prince Latthakin is a charming old gentleman, for whom my visits and his frequent return visits constitute a welcome diversion in his monotonous exile's life. He has had a little Burmese pagoda built in the garden of his house, the roof of which is hung with tiny bells. The least breath of air sets them jingling, and I often hear their silvery tinkle in my sleep at night.

## TURBULENT DAYS

Another nearby house, a large modern building with magnificent gardens and wide terraces, somewhat lower down the hillside, belongs to Professor Rotindranath Tagore, the son of the celebrated Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore. But Professor Tagore, a man of very patriarchal appearance, and his wife Pratima seldom stay here. They spend most of their time at Shantiniketan, the educational institution north of Calcutta founded by the poet. They have therefore let the upper storey of their house to George Patterson, a young Scottish missionary, known to his friends as Pat. This bearded, always cheerful Scot soon became one of my best friends. In the company of an English missionary, he had worked for several years in the Eastern Tibetan province of Kham, and speaks the local dialect. In 1949, when the Communist troops approached the frontier and cut communications with the Chinese market-towns, Pat set off on horseback with a few Tibetan servants and rode across one of the wildest tracts of land in Tibet—a journey of several weeks—to fetch new gear and provisions, and above all medicaments, from India. But the advance of the Red Chinese troops was more rapid than anticipated, and when Pat embarked on the homeward journey he found the way already blocked. To his bitter regret he had left all his most precious possessions, notably some irreplaceable photographs, in Kham. In the hope of eventually being able to get back to Tibet, he has settled for the time being in Kalimpong.

LATE OCTOBER 1950

Another sensation in Kalimpong: a double murder has been committed on the great caravan road that runs through Sikkim up to the frontier passes. Six Tibetan robbers stopped two Tibetans travelling with their laden mules before the frontier, killed them, and made off with their goods. One of the victims was a former captain in the Tibetan Army, who was stationed for a time in East Tibet. There—so it is said—he was guilty of a number of acts of violence. The murderers were reported to be Khampas who had been maltreated by him and had sworn revenge at the first opportunity. The other victim was the captain's nephew.

The shopkeepers in the bazaar even claim to know exactly how the deed was carried out. The murderers had been following the two men for some time; they attacked at a moment when no caravan was in sight. There was a brief struggle, but the captain did not defend himself with much vigour, for he recognized the faces of his assailants and knew that his end had come. One of the murderers picked a favourable moment and struck the captain a mighty blow on the head—but his weapon bounced off, and the victim sank stunned but uninjured to his knees. The Tibetans could think of only one explanation: the captain was carrying a talisman that protected him from weapons. The attackers tore his amulet casket from around his neck, and the next moment a sword split his skull. The dead man's nephew pleaded for mercy, but they slew him as well to prevent him giving away the names of the murderers.

One of the murderers returned to Kalimpong after the deed and bragged of it to acquaintances. He was gone again before the police could catch him. Official activity now ran at full pressure, and a sergeant of the Tibetan Police came from the Chumbi Valley to assist in tracing the murderers. The police soon got on their tracks. A man was arrested in Darjeeling market trying to sell a mule bearing an obvious sword wound. He told the police he had bought the animal cheap from some men who had been in a hurry to get to East Nepal, and could not take the wounded beast with them. Inquiry disclosed that the mule had belonged to the two victims and had evidently received a cut with a sword during the skirmish. Nepalese and Indian police immediately took up the pursuit, but the tracks of most of the culprits, who had doubtless split up, were lost in the wilderness of the East Nepal mountains. Only one of the murderers was captured.

EARLY NOVEMBER 1950

The Austrian traveller through Asia, Dr. Herbert Tichy, an old acquaintance from Vienna, has arrived in Kalimpong. We had planned a journey of exploration into Sikkim in the summer of 1949, but the project was frustrated by financial difficulties. Now—independently and by different routes—



## TURBULENT DAYS

we have met at the very moment we had originally intended to embark on this trip. There is no chance of proceeding with the plan now, however, for in the meantime the frontier between India and Sikkim has been closed.

MID-NOVEMBER 1950

The war between Tibet and China has begun. Chamdo, an important mercantile town on the Eastern Tibetan border, is already in the hands of the enemy. The town was taken by the Chinese, in a night attack, without a fight. The Communist troops are supposed to have let off firework rockets before launching the assault. The Tibetan soldiers, who had heard about the atom bomb, believed that the Chinese were using one of these miracle-weapons against them and made off as fast as their legs would carry them. General Ngabo, who commanded the Tibetan troops in the area, is said by some to have been taken prisoner; but others claim that he openly deserted to the Chinese. In spite of the overwhelming superiority of the enemy, Lhasa has not abandoned the struggle. Fresh troops are on their way to the threatened zone, and Tibet has naïvely appealed for aid to U.N.O.

I learn from my Tibetan acquaintances that there is considerable concern in Lhasa over the possibility of Chinese air-raids. In the absence of anti-aircraft artillery, big prayer-flags have been erected there and in other towns as a defence against bombs. Poor Tibet!

Since the withdrawal of the last Chinese troops in 1912, the Land of Snow has enjoyed *de facto* independence; the Chinese have had no further say in her affairs. But Tibet, striving for total isolation, omitted to reinforce its autonomy by establishing diplomatic relations with the Great Powers beyond her borders. Only Britain and Nepal had their own embassies at Lhasa. Later, the Chiang Kai-Shek régime was permitted to send a diplomatic mission to the Tibetan capital. Its members naturally had no more influence than the ambassadors of the other two States, but the Chinese Press reported the activities of the diplomats in such a way as to make it appear that they were running the country. Consequently world opinion, which had difficulty in obtaining a clear picture of

events in Tibet and was more or less dependent for information on Chinese Press reports, received the impression that Tibet was still part of China.

When the Communists gained the upper hand in the Middle Kingdom, Chiang Kai-Shek's representatives were expelled from Lhasa, because the Tibetans were anxious to avoid friction with the new masters of their mighty neighbour. Only then, at the eleventh hour, did they take the step they ought to have taken thirty years before: they tried to gain recognition of their independence from at least a few of the Western countries. A four-man delegation from the Tibetan Government, led by Shagapa, the Minister of Finance, left Hong Kong in 1948 for a tour of America and Europe. Ostensibly, Tibet wanted to expand her trade with the West. In reality, however, the delegation sought to obtain recognition for Tibet and the establishment of Tibetan embassies in Washington, London, Paris and Berne.

The Tibetan envoys met with nothing but disappointment on their long journey. In America the representatives of Chiang Kai-Shek, in whose eyes the Tibetans were nothing but rebellious subjects, had been pulling strings: the Tibetan delegation stood before closed doors. They were only received by underlings, and fobbed off with empty words. They did not fare much better in Europe, where no one quite knew what to make of this queer delegation. All the same, these first contacts had shown the Tibetans what power the Press exercised in Western countries, and how important it was to enlist its aid in arousing interest in the fate of Tibet among the American and European public. Reversing their previous policy of keeping foreigners out of the country by every means in their power, the Tibetan Government allowed first the French journalist Améry de Riencourt, in 1947, and later, in 1949, the Americans Lowell Thomas Senior and Junior to enter the Forbidden Land. Articles and books now began to appear, portraying Tibet and its inhabitants in a very favourable light; but they did not elicit the response hoped for by the Tibetans. The world was preoccupied by graver problems and had little interest in the fate of far-away Tibet.

## TURBULENT DAYS

The Dalai Lama, and with him the Tibetan Government, left Lhasa some days ago to escape the advancing Chinese forces. The four Europeans resident in Lhasa—the English radio-operator Fox, the Austrians Harrer and Aufschneider, who were employed by the Tibetan Government, and the White Russian mechanic Nedbailoff, who had been engaged on the electrification of the city—had already left the capital. As yet, no one knows where the Tibetan ruler is making for, but his goal is conjectured to be the Indian frontier. The headman of the village of Yatung in the nearby Chumbi Valley has had instructions to prepare the best house in the place to receive a ‘very exalted personage’. Will the Dalai Lama leave Tibet and seek shelter in Kalimpong, as his predecessor did in 1910?

MID-NOVEMBER 1950

A large caravan has arrived in Gangtok, the freight from which—a number of heavy chests—was unloaded under armed guard. This is said to be part of the Tibetan State treasure, which has been placed in the safekeeping of a Marwari banker. The Himalayan Hotel is beginning to fill up with refugees from Lhasa. Most of them are old acquaintances of the Macdonald family, and there is no end to the astonished cries of welcome. I see many faces among the new arrivals that are familiar to me from books on Tibet. Amongst them are some pretty princesses, who went to school in Darjeeling or Kalimpong and therefore speak fluent English. Many of the refugees have brought their most valuable possessions with them—ancient roll-paintings, jewellery, priceless statues and documents. But there are also some among them who, with rare lack of foresight, took mountains of foodstuffs on their flight, while they handed their jewellery and money to the monks of the Lhasa monasteries for safe-keeping.

The Tibetans from Lhasa have brought interesting news: a few weeks ago the Dalai Lama, who is still a minor and was not due to take over the government for another two years, was installed as ruler of the Land of Snow. This decision was taken as the result of a priestly oracle coupled with the

Ministers' view that the resistance of the Tibetan people would be stiffened if the Dalai Lama were in personal control of the State.

LATE NOVEMBER 1950

A dozen journalists have popped up in Kalimpong overnight. Tibet is hitting the headlines these days. The squad of reporters hurry through the streets of Kalimpong festooned with cameras, questioning every new arrival from Tibet—down to the last muleteer—with the aid of interpreters. In the afternoon they queue up outside the telegraph office, whose employees have never had so much to do in all their lives. In the evening the pressmen sit with the local Europeans in the Himalayan Hotel, drinking mild millet beer which Annie-la sets before her guests in tall bamboo receptacles. They are interesting men, who have seen a great deal of what goes on behind the political scenes, and they bring something of the turbulence of the outside world into normally tranquil Kalimpong.

EARLY DECEMBER 1950

A new centre of disturbance has formed on the fringe of Central Asia—Nepal. Dissatisfaction with the dictatorship of the Prime Minister, Mohan Bahadur Rana, who thrust King Tribhuna completely into the background and kept him and his family virtually imprisoned in the royal palace—a dissatisfaction which has long been smouldering under the surface—has flared up into revolution. Events in Tibet now take second place, and all eyes are turned on Nepal.

The position in the Nepalese capital seems very confused. The King managed to flee from the Prime Minister's custody. He sought and received asylum in the Indian embassy. Shortly afterwards he left the country on an Indian plane and took up temporary residence in New Delhi as the guest of the Indian Government. The Prime Minister set a thirteen-year-old prince on the vacant throne. Fighting broke out on the Indo-Nepalese frontier between rebels, belonging to the Nepalese Congress Party, and Government troops. Most of the leaders of this party, which was modelled on the Indian

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Congress Party and therefore enjoys a great deal of sympathy among Indians, had long been in exile in Calcutta. The rebels appear to be well equipped and, unlike the Government forces, even possess a few aeroplanes. They threatened to bomb the capital if the Prime Minister did not resign. India, although sympathizing with the progressive forces in Nepal, has assumed the role of mediator and is striving to bring the conflict to an end as quickly as possible. The events in Nepal are extremely unwelcome to me. They merely augment the tension in the area round Kalimpong, the most sensitive nerve ganglion of the Himalayas. This will greatly increase the obstacles in the way of my studies.

LATE DECEMBER 1950

Just before Christmas I had an astonishing experience. Late at night I heard low singing that seemed to come from far away. No, my ears must be playing tricks . . . for what I thought I could hear was nothing other than the old familiar melody of *Silent night, holy night*. I listened intently. I wasn't mistaken after all. The singing came closer. I couldn't understand the words, but there was no doubt about the tune—it was the well-known carol, though sung with a slightly Oriental rhythm. A few seconds later I caught sight of the unknown singers. A light was swaying along on the path that leads from the Catholic mission church past my house. The point of light came closer, and now I could see that it was a lantern, carried by a little Nepali boy. Behind him followed a group of Nepali girls in the colourful costume of their homeland. They were Christian Nepalis, probably on their way back from a late service. They were singing the carol in their mother tongue, beginning it afresh time after time for the sheer joy of singing characteristic of simple children of nature.

A few days later I heard the old Christmas song again, during matins at the mission church. Once more it was sung by Nepalis. Afterwards, I asked one of them if she knew where the tune came from. She looked at me in surprise and shook her head. No, she didn't know where the song came from. Her father had sung it; they had learnt it from the

white priests who settled on the borders of Sikkim nearly a century ago. I tried to explain to the Nepalis that this song had come to them from Austria, my homeland ; but they only shook their heads incredulously. Austria—was there really a country of that name? They had never heard of Austria, and they didn't care where the carol came from or who had written it. They loved its melody and sang it because it had become part of their idea of Christmas.

EARLY JANUARY 1951

I thought that Asia, which has grown so prosaic in many respects, no longer had any room for adventurers, but last Sunday I learnt better. A few of us 'old-established' Europeans had gathered for a chat in the Himalayan Hotel, when two young Englishmen appeared whom we had not previously seen in Kalimpong. We tried to strike up a conversation with them, but they proved very taciturn. When Annie-la finally asked them their profession, they answered with the single word 'adventurers'. We thought at first our ears must have deceived us ; but they had not. Bit by bit we learned from the two Englishmen that one of them had, until recently, served as a policeman in Malaya. His slightly older companion had studied for a time at Oxford. Now the two of them were roaming India, ready for anything, as they put it, and on the look-out for adventure. Annie-la invited them both to lunch, but they looked at one another regretfully and explained that unfortunately they could not accept the invitation because the chief of the security police had ordered them to be out of the town by noon at the latest. After a few telephone calls, Annie-la managed to get the period extended by two hours.

A fourteen-year-old prince of the Nepalese royal family, who went to school in Darjeeling and was travelling to East Nepal with his retinue the same day, chanced to be present at lunch. When the two adventurers learnt of this they immediately declared that they would accompany the prince on his journey 'to see nothing happened to him'. They brushed aside the objection that Nepal's frontiers were closed with a contemptuous gesture and the statement that



A Sherpa peasant making roofing shingles of bamboo



Sherpa women pounding rice







A reborn saint:  
Rimpoche Dando  
Tulku

The wail of flutes  
and the thud of  
drums accompany  
the lamas' dances





for them frontiers did not exist. Finally one of them said to the prince, in a tone that sounded more serious than jesting: 'Oh, I know what we'll do. We'll kidnap you.' To which the other added: 'What do you think we'll get for you?' The little prince looked at the two for a while in silence, then in an icy voice he rapped out the single word, 'Prison'. The lad's ready wit took the two adventurers' breath away. With a quick glance at the clock they announced that their time was almost up and they must be on their way. Before leaving the hotel they inquired the shortest route to Bhutan. On being told that Bhutan was probably the most difficult country in the world to enter, and warned against trying to cross the frontier illegally, they merely smiled. Shouldering their packs they made off in the direction of the Bhutanese mountains. We never heard of them again.

## EARLY JANUARY 1951

Kalimpong has an exalted visitor at the moment. This is the Dalai Lama's mother, the first lady of the Forbidden Land. She is called by Tibetans the Gyeyum Chenmo, the 'Great Distinguished Mother of the King'. She is accompanied by two of her children, the Dalai Lama's sister and younger brother. Her retinue includes a son of the former Minister Kabshopa—a pleasant young man who went to school in India and therefore speaks fluent English. He functions at times as the Gyeyum Chenmo's private secretary. The fact that his father has fallen into disgrace with the Government is no valid reason why the son should not occupy this important position; Tibetans are not so petty about these things as we Europeans.

## MID-JANUARY 1951

The Dalai Lama has arrived in the Chumbi Valley accompanied by his bodyguard and the highest State officials. At first he put up in the house of the governor of the district, moving later to the Dungkar Gompa, the 'Monastery of the White Shells'. The Tibetan frontier with India is now hermetically sealed to Europeans. Only members of the Indian security forces stationed at Gyantse and Yatung, and a few

high officials, are allowed to enter the Chumbi Valley. Although the Dalai Lama himself is remaining on Tibetan soil, most of his followers—including the Cabinet Ministers, high nobles with their families, officers and lamas—are staying for varying periods at Kalimpong. The otherwise empty houses of the European and Indian quarter are suddenly all occupied, and rents have reached an all-time high. In the crooked alleys all over the town one meets men and women in costly Tibetan clothes who greet each other with intricate ceremonial. Servants scurry in all directions, plump nurses carry chubby-faced Mongolian babies for an airing. Removed from the atmosphere of holy Lhasa the Tibetans prove, in this foreign country, far more expansive than they would ever have been in the capital of the Land of Snow. I spend several hours a day in the company of Tibetan nobles and lamas, questioning them about old customs and traditions. In return I have to answer a lot of questions concerning life in the West, about which even the highest dignitaries often have only very confused ideas. Again and again I have to describe my country and the way people live there; I have to let them hear specimens of my mother tongue and sing them folk-songs. I have had an illustrated book on Austria sent me, to help me answer all the questions. There is no end to the Tibetans' astonishment as they look at the pictures, for they see in them a great deal that is reminiscent of their own homeland: alpine horns, that resemble the long temple trumpets of the lamas; the *Perchten*, who look so like the masked demon-dancers of the Tibetan New Year festival; or Christian processions, winding round the church with music and ecclesiastical banners. The Buddhist priests of Tibet also circle their temples with censers and ecclesiastical banners. Many of the Tibetan nobles continue in Kalimpong the easy, gay life they were accustomed to at Lhasa, inviting one another for meals and meeting in the evenings to chat and dance. Most of the younger generation of Tibetan men and women have attended schools in India run on European lines, and are therefore well acquainted with Western tunes and dances. Even the Dalai Lama's rather clumsy elder sister, who is a wallflower at most dances, was one day taught

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the basic steps of the foxtrot and the samba. But Tibetan folk dances also receive their due at these festivities. When the dancers are tired of the rhythms of *Buttons and Bows*, *Jealousy* or *Domino*, they form a long line and dance with quick steps, reminiscent of tap-dancing, to one of the strange Tibetan melodies. Late in the evening they generally strike up a song with a chorus. Many Tibetans sit doubled up while singing, forcing their voices to a shrill falsetto and holding their right hands to their right ears, as may be seen in portrayals of the famous Tibetan poet Mila Repa. I was compelled to sing them one or two songs to the best of my ability. To my surprise, the Tibetans insisted on hearing *Lili Marlene* in its original language. This song obviously penetrated as far as distant Lhasa during the last war. . . .

LATE JANUARY 1951

I have often been a guest of Jigme Taring, a cousin of the King of Sikkim, who normally lives in Lhasa and acts as interpreter to high officials of the Tibetan Government during important negotiations. Once I arrived just in time to see his wife skilfully plaiting his raven hair, which reaches to his belt, into pigtails. A very unusual sight. Jigme's wife Mary-la was the first Tibetan woman to enjoy a European education. Her marriage with Jigme Taring—it was her second marriage—produced two daughters, Peggy and Yuno. They were educated in Darjeeling at the same school formerly attended by their mother. Both of them are very pretty by European standards, but they do not look in the least like sisters. The shy Peggy has a pale, European skin and big dark eyes, like those of a Southern European. The tomboyish Yuno, on the other hand, has bronze-coloured skin and a typical Mongolian face in which the eyes are visible only as two narrow slits. Mary-la's first husband was the famous Tsarong Shape, a favourite of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, who rose from commander of the bodyguard to generalissimo of the Tibetan Armed Forces and finally to Prime Minister. She was not Tsarong Shape's only wife, for he was simultaneously married to two of her sisters. This is no unusual situation in Tibet, where monogamy, polygamy and

polyandry exist side by side. From her marriage with Tsarong Shape sprang Betty-la, who is no whit less beautiful than her sisters Peggy and Yuno. Betty-la is married to a brother of Jigme Taring, her mother's second husband, which introduces a certain element of complexity; for she is now the sister-in-law of her mother and her stepfather. The various forms of marriage prevalent in Tibet make relationships extraordinarily complicated. Looking at the intricate genealogical tables Prince Peter has worked out for his study of polyandry, I get the impression that in Tibet, with a little effort, one could become one's own grandfather.

I am frequently invited to the house of George Tsarong, the famous Minister's son. His wife, Yangchen-la, is the most beautiful Tibetan woman I have ever seen. Young Tsarong is an enthusiastic photographer. One Sunday I was guest at his house together with a number of Tibetans; towards the end of the party George Tsarong showed a long colour-film he had taken in Tibet. It was a really unique film, showing parties given by the noble families of Lhasa, the New Year celebrations, and even some clandestine shots of Nechung Choje, Tibet's State magician with the gift of prophecy, at the height of a trance. The Tibetan visitors kept up a vociferous running commentary. Then a young, carelessly laughing priest appeared on the screen—and the comments stopped instantly. A great stillness fell on the gathering as the Tibetans stared at the picture of the lama, the breathless silence broken only by the whirring of the projector. The camera followed the priest, who walked through a garden, sat on a swing and began to sway to and fro, causing his voluminous robe to billow out like a bell. The spectators did not wake out of their frozen silence until the picture of a Tibetan caravan appeared on the screen. I heard excited whispering behind me and was able to catch a few words that explained the sudden hush: the lama I had just watched on the screen was Reting Rimpoche, the Regent who had been murdered a few years before. Jigme Taring, who was sitting next to me, seemed depressed by the film. It probably brought back unpleasant memories, for he is said to have operated one of

## TURBULENT DAYS

the machine-guns during the storming of Reting monastery by Government troops.

A little while ago I saw another film made by a Tibetan. These shots had been taken during the journey by one of the members of the four-man Tibetan mission that visited America and Europe in 1948. I have never been sea-sick, but I could scarcely repress a feeling of nausea while this film was running, for the image on the screen rocked wildly this way and that. Looking at many of the shots I found it hard to imagine how the cameraman had taken them without turning a somersault. One would have expected such a film to show the most interesting sights seen by the delegation in the course of its long journey, but the cameraman had obviously contented himself with photographing scenes that struck him as 'Tibetan'. In America he filmed soldiers at a picnic; in Paris a beggar on the banks of the Seine. A long line of heavily-laden mules was his only shot from the Eternal City. . . .

### EARLY FEBRUARY 1951

The civil war in Nepal is over. The powers of the hitherto almighty Prime Minister have now been drastically curtailed; the King will henceforth be assisted by a Government formed according to democratic principles. Initial reforms have been introduced. For the first time in a hundred years the populace is allowed out in the streets late at night. The Newars, previously treated by the dominant Gurkhas as second-class citizens, are now permitted to publish newspapers in their own language.

In the course of the last few days I have met in the Himalayan Hotel a Nepalese prince, whose age I should guess to be about twenty-five. He told me he had been living for some time, with his four wives, in exile in Calcutta, having quarrelled with his grandfather, the Prime Minister. I inquired from him about the sights of the Nepalese capital and came to speak of the curious guns preserved in Gangtok Museum. These are weapons captured by the Gurkhas during their attack on Tibet in 1791. The barrels of these cannon are of a most unusual material: they are made of compressed yak's

leather and are supposed to stand up to four or five shots. The young prince proved to be exceptionally well informed concerning these exhibits. When I expressed surprise he remarked: 'Well, I know all about them because the Museum came under my jurisdiction at the time I was Minister of Education.' I was naturally somewhat astonished to hear that he had occupied such an important post when just on twenty, but he made a deprecating gesture and remarked: 'Oh, that wasn't my first Cabinet post. I was Minister of Agriculture some years earlier.'

MID-FEBRUARY 1951

New visitors from Tibet are arriving all the time. Among them is a particularly important personage: Minister Surkhang, one of Tibet's two Foreign Ministers. In the ecclesiastical State of Tibet all important posts are occupied by two dignitaries, a priest and a layman. Minister Surkhang, I have been told, has held his office since 1904! I often meet him on his evening stroll. He wears the costly garments of Tibetan aristocrats plus a European hat and sunglasses. The Minister recently paid a visit to Prince Peter; he took the opportunity to inquire the whereabouts of the State of San Salvador, which was championing Tibet in the United Nations. After looking at the little South American republic on a map through a magnifying glass, he exclaimed disappointedly: 'But this State is hardly as big as Bhutan.' He had obviously been under the impression that San Salvador was one of the Great Powers.

Surkhang's family affairs are extraordinarily involved. He separated from his first wife, a lady from the high nobility; his second wife died. When already very advanced in years he entered into matrimony once more with a pretty young Tibetan girl. His new spouse was already married to a minor official, but this was no serious obstacle in the land of polyandry. The position became complicated, however, even by Tibetan standards, when a son of Surkhang's by his second marriage wed the same lady, with the consent of her other two husbands. When Minister Surkhang arrived in Kalimpong with wife No. 3, the complications had already resolved

themselves. The youngest husband was forced to recognize that his continued presence in the quadripartite matrimonial union was not welcome to their common wife. It is rumoured that she convinced him of this fact by attempting to murder him; so he decided it would be better to look around for another consort. The much-sought-after beauty's first husband had already left the field to his successors, for his wife had sent him off in search of a new reincarnation.

There are also some other interesting visitors, for example a Torgut prince who numbers Genghis Khan among his ancestors and who was educated at the Military Academy of Tsarist Russia. He has two wives, one Polish, the other Mongolian. The two ladies do not hit it off together, and the prince has therefore established them in different houses at opposite ends of the town. The most secretive refugee from the Land of Snow is a Tibetan who keeps to his room night and day, never leaving it for an instant. This is Reting Rimpoche's murderer, and my Tibetan acquaintances tell me in whispers the ghastly fashion in which this man slew the Regent, so as to leave no trace of the deed on his body. Now that the Dalai Lama has taken power out of the hands of Tagta Rimpoche, he fears for his life. That is why he left Tibet, feeling himself a trifle safer on Indian soil.

MID-FEBRUARY 1951

A Nepali living in my vicinity has died. At first light I heard the plaintive call of the shell-trumpet of a priest who was performing the death ceremony in the house of death. I was invited to watch the interment. It was certainly the oddest burial I have ever been present at. The dead man had been laid in a long wooden box decked with garlands of yellow flowers, and this primitive coffin transported to the scree-covered eastern declivity of Ringkingpong, the site of the Nepali cemetery. Most of the mounds are almost completely flat and nameless, but here and there a plain, unadorned little headstone may be seen. A considerable number of men had turned up for the funeral rites; in conformity with custom the women had stayed at home. Some of the mourners had brought their goats and cows with them. They

sat down on the grave mounds and let their cattle graze. The coffin was set on the ground by the bearers, and the dead man's brother sat beside it to keep the death-watch. To the accompaniment of much laughing and joking, some young men began to dig the grave. The rest of the company, enlivened by cigarettes and animated conversation, seemed to be thoroughly enjoying themselves. Finally the coffin was lowered into the pit. A bowl of rice was placed on its lid, as a viaticum for the dead man on his journey to the Other World. Then the grave was quickly filled in and a freshly cut branch stuck into the mound. All the mourners took hands and formed a long chain, the last man of which grasped the branch projecting from the grave. With a loud shout the men moved off, the last man pulling the branch out of the grave mound as they did so. By this means the dead man's ties with the world of the living were broken, his spirit could no longer return to those he had left behind. On the way back from the interment I saw the dead man's brother beside a stream. A barber from the bazaar was squatting at his side shaving his head and eyebrows—the outward sign of mourning demanded by custom.

MID-FEBRUARY 1951

A few days after the funeral I was invited to a Tibetan wedding. To my surprise, on arriving at the house where the festivities were taking place, I was introduced to the bridal pair's two children, both of whom already went to school. It was explained to me that the couple's real marriage ceremony had taken place many years before, but that they had not possessed the means to give a feast appropriate to their social standing. Since their relations and friends did not want to be done out of a banquet, however, they were promised the celebrations later. Now the time had come, and the guests had been making free with their host's house for the last three days already.

I had just taken my seat when suddenly a female voice behind me said: '*Guden dag! Is das aber scheen, dass Sie gegommen sin!*' (Good day, how nice you've come). I turned round—and thought I must be dreaming, for the speaker, despite the



accent, was not a Saxonian woman, but a Tibetan matron. She enjoyed my amazement for a while and said: '*Da stau'n Se, was?!*' (Surprised, aren't you?). A Tibetan woman who spoke German—or rather, Saxonian! The riddle was soon solved. The Tibetan lady—it was the bride's mother—had formerly been employed as a nursemaid in the family of a British diplomat living at Kalimpong. When her employers left Kalimpong she went with them to Europe. She accompanied the family to all sorts of countries, till she was as well acquainted with Stockholm as with Berlin and Paris. But her longest stay had been in Dresden, and it was there that she had picked up her knowledge of German.

## MID-FEBRUARY 1951

All the Tibetan refugees gathered in Kalimpong are oppressed by uncertainty over the future; but notwithstanding this, they are now celebrating their New Year festival according to custom. It is hard to imagine a more colourful sight than a festal gathering of upper class Tibetans. The guests' garments are of heavy brocade; many of the high officials wear golden amulet boxes in their hair; and the women are festooned with strings of turquoises, pearls and corals. In addition to these, however, one also sees Tibetan women wearing jewellery consisting of long, black and white striped beads. These beads, which are made of a vitreous substance and look much less attractive than the rest of the jewellery, are called by the Tibetans *si*. A necklace of faultless *si* beads possesses a far higher value in Tibet than the finest piece of goldsmith's work. My friend Nyima told me recently that ex-Minister Kabshopa, for instance, had invested a large part of his fortune in *si*. These beads have a strange story: they date from Tibet's distant past and are often turned up during digging operations. In the north-east of the Land of Snow *si* are frequently found accompanied by arrowheads as funerary objects in ancient burial places. These beads are supposed at times to be washed up out of the soil by the rain and then swallowed by grazing cattle. Hence Tibetan herdsmen closely examine their animals' dung, in the hope of coming across one of these costly pieces of jewellery.

The method of fabricating *si* is no longer known to the present inhabitants of Tibet. Imitation *si* are imported from neighbouring countries, but they are easily distinguished from the genuine article. *Si* beads vary considerably in appearance. The commonest are elongated and have round spots between the stripes. These spots are called 'eyes', and one bead may have up to twelve eyes. The most valuable *si* are those with nine eyes, for nine is a magic number; beads of this type are alleged to protect their wearer from all sorts of ills. They provide a defence against the influence of the ten-headed planet-god Rahu, who causes strokes, and counteract the baneful effects of astrologically inauspicious days. Round *si* with patterning in the shape of a Buddhist ritual vessel or a lotus are also very highly prized. The Tibetans have a number of legends to account for the origin of *si*. Some state that these beads were the jewellery of the gods, thrown down by them on to the earth. Others, again, assert that they are petrified worms, claiming that when *si* are accidentally dug up they can be observed trying to crawl away like worms. According to a third legend the *si* came to Tibet from Persia. The legendary Tibetan hero-king Kesar once conquered the whole of Persia. He found the treasuries of the Persian ruler filled with *si* beads, which he brought back with him to the Land of Snow and distributed among his victorious troops.

EARLY APRIL 1951

March brought an important event for the Buddhists of Sikkim and the Chumbi Valley: the arrival of the relics of Buddha and his principal disciples Shariputra and Maugalayana. A group of Buddhist priests is travelling through India with the relics on behalf of the Mahabodhi Society, whose aim is the revival of Buddhism, which is almost extinct in India. Their route also led through the Tibetan border country, where the relics of the Great Enlightened One and his disciples received a particularly tumultuous welcome.

The relics reached Kalimpong on March 31, and were carried through the streets in a great procession to the Tirpai

monastery. This procession was an unforgettable sight, such as Kalimpong had never seen before. At the head went a Tibetan in ceremonial dress bearing a long stick with a *thangka* attached to it like an ecclesiastical banner. Behind him came a single file of forty lamas in their brick-red robes. Each of them held a shallow, wide, round drum fixed to a rod, which he beat with a hooked stick in time to the slow march. The drummers were followed by the rest of the lama orchestra—priests with flutes, cymbals and long trumpets whose deep, booming notes are supposed to resemble the voices of the legendary elephants that keep watch at the various sides of the world.

The flower-decked palanquin containing the golden coffers with the relics was immediately preceded by a group of priests swinging costly censers, from which rose clouds of white smoke smelling of sandalwood. The palanquin rested on the shoulders of splendidly attired Tibetans, flanked on either side by its guardians, shaven-headed monks in bright yellow garments, and a number of martial-looking Indian policemen. The swaying canopy halted frequently to enable the bearers to be changed, for many pious Tibetans were waiting to acquire religious merit by carrying the ashes of the Great Enlightened One. Behind this most important part of the procession followed huge crowds of the faithful—Buddhist Newars and visitors from Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan in their gaily coloured clothes. The Tibetans had lined the route taken by the procession with pans containing burning juniper branches. This part of the city, usually so dirty, was unrecognizable. The streets had been swept clean, and strings of bright coloured prayer-pennants stretched from house to house. The Tirpai monastery, where the relics were kept overnight, had been specially spruced up for the occasion. The walls were freshly whitewashed, and colourful Buddhist victory standards flapped in front of the entrance. The splendid roll-paintings inside the shrine were brightly illuminated by the yellow light of the many butter lamps. The monks watched and prayed all night long before the reliquaries, which had been placed on the high altar at the feet of the three huge figures of Buddha and his disciples.

The following day the relics were carried in solemn procession and brilliant sunshine to the Bhutanese monastery lower down the hillside. Here the scene was perhaps even more impressive, for the festal raiment of the inhabitants of the Land of Dragons is even more colourful than the Tibetans'. The temple, which is generally quite empty, was today bursting with people; there was not room for everyone inside, and I had difficulty in getting through to the seat reserved for me. A huge multitude thronged round the shrine and listened to the sounds of music and the choir of monks that was carried out to them.

This red letter day for Kalimpong's Buddhists closed with a great public festival. In all the gardens round the town inhabitants of the Land of Snow, in gala dress, had gathered for joyful picnics; while Bhutanese men took part in archery contests. This is the favourite sport of the warlike Bhutanese, who attain astonishing proficiency with bow and arrow. It was also a great day for the Tibetan beggars. They sat by the roadside in dozens, and today at least they certainly did not go away empty-handed. Many of them turned their prayer-wheels in apathetic silence, like the blind lama for whom an especially good place had been made at the entrance to the temple; others sought to draw the attention of the passers-by to their terrible infirmities with cries and gestures. Amongst these unfortunates were a few criminals, both of whose hands had been cut off by harsh Tibetan justice.

Towards evening the relics were brought for an hour to the house of Prince Latthakin of Burma, where they were placed in an improvised chapel. Bhikshu Sangharatna and Dr. Soft, the leaders of the deputation, told me of the events of their long journey up to that point and of a visit to the Dalai Lama. Although they are Indian Buddhists, who normally have scant regard for the Tibetan Mahayana, they were both deeply impressed by their experiences in Tibet. They spoke with high esteem of the Dalai Lama, who had executed all the difficult tasks of ecclesiastical ceremonial with great dignity, despite his youth.

Finally, the receptacles containing the Buddhist relics were opened specially for me, and I was able to get a close-up

## TURBULENT DAYS

view of the internal decorations of the costly vessels and the remains they held.

LATE MAY 1951

The Tibetans have capitulated. The treaty desired by China was signed on May 23 by a plenipotentiary of the Tibetan Government and four other delegates in Peking. The Chinese troops have resumed their advance into the interior, to which there is no further resistance. The future Chinese military governor, Chang Ching Wu, who holds the rank of general, will pass through Kalimpong on his way to Lhasa. His advance guard has already arrived in Kalimpong: it consists of several young men in the grey uniform worn by all officials of the Chinese People's Republic. They are staying at the Himalayan Hotel, but they scarcely ever leave their rooms and anxiously avoid coming into contact with other guests. Invisible, but clearly perceptible, the Bamboo Curtain has begun to go up in Kalimpong.

LATE JUNE 1951

A few weeks later the time has come. The Chinese military governor is expected in Kalimpong in the early afternoon. A few Tibetan officials, who would like to get well in with the Chinese, are going to meet him at Teesta Bridge. Several hundreds of Tibetans in their feast-day clothes have assembled on the outskirts of the town, where the new lord of the Land of Snow will be officially welcomed by Tibetan dignitaries. One of the men is holding the Tibetan standard with the two lions and the 'wishing jewel', but beside him stands another with the red, five-starred flag of Communist China. Not one of the many reporters, who filled the streets of Kalimpong a few months ago, is here to record this historic scene. The world is no longer interested in the fate of the little country of Tibet: the headlines are now devoted to the dispute over the oil refineries at Abadan. So the last act of the Tibetan tragedy is watched by only three Europeans—Prince Peter, my countryman Harrer, who has meanwhile arrived from Tibet, and myself.

The Chinese are already a good hour late when suddenly a

whisper runs through the patiently waiting crowd. An escort of Indian police on mud-bespattered motor-cycles and jeeps roar past, then a convoy of cars appears on the road leading into the town from the Teesta Valley. The first cars in the column are decorated with Chinese flags; they are brand-new American vehicles, bought for the occasion by a wealthy Tibetan merchant. He is manifestly hoping to find grace in the eyes of Tibet's new masters by a display of loyalty. A dozen Chinese officials and army officers alight from the cars. Their simple light-grey uniforms, devoid of any badges of rank, are in striking contrast to the shimmering brocade garments of the Tibetan dignitaries. Two worlds are confronting one another. Slowly, bowing deeply, the Tibetans go to meet the Chinese, carrying white ceremonial veils. To my surprise, in the front rank of the Tibetan group I catch sight of a few nobles who, at the time when Tibet turned to Britain for support, were regarded as outstanding anglophiles.

A Chinese reporter, likewise in a grey uniform, is busily engaged recording all the phases of this scene with his camera. I watch a Tibetan, with polite mien, put a *khatag* round the Chinese general's neck; the Chinese pulls the veil off impatiently, but holds it in his hand. The faces of the Tibetan nobles fall, but the silent spectators do not bat an eyelid. Do they realize what an historically important moment they are witnessing? Only a few Nepali Communists, who have turned out to welcome their confrères with streamers and red flags, shout themselves hoarse with enthusiasm.

The exchange of greetings is brief. Then the Chinese re-enter their cars and drive to the house provided for their stay in Kalimpong. This building is notoriously haunted; for this reason it has remained empty, in spite of its fine appearance and excellent position. Did the Tibetans intentionally arrange for the Chinese to put up there? In two cars right at the end of the convoy I catch sight of a few resigned and weary-looking Tibetan dignitaries. These are the members of the deputation that signed the fatal agreement with China in Peking.

The Chinese stay a few days in Kalimpong. They receive

## TURBULENT DAYS

deputations from the Tibetan Church, the nobility and the merchants; they even give a banquet to which Tibetan officials and prominent members of the local Chinese community are invited. For their part, they attend a banquet given in their honour by a Tibetan merchant. It is the same man who bought the new cars to receive the Chinese. The banquet takes place on the first floor of his modern house. Underneath, in a ground-floor room converted into a chapel, two dozen lamas pray all night long—according to the initiated they are praying for the destruction of all Red Chinese.

MID-JULY 1951

I wanted to pay a visit to my neighbour, the mother of the Dalai Lama. Tharchin, the publisher of the Tibetan newspaper, agreed to act as interpreter. To our disappointment, however, we learnt on arriving at the house that the Gyeyum Chenmo was ill and confined to bed. In her place we were received by Tagtshel Rimpoche, the Dalai Lama's eldest brother. As is clear from his title Rimpoche, 'Preciousness', he is honoured by the Tibetans as the reincarnation of a Buddhist saint. The Dalai Lama's youngest brother, Ngari Rimpoche, who is only just four, is also considered to be a reincarnated saint. Although Ngari Rimpoche is still in his mother's care he already wears the prescribed garb of a priest. His head is shaved bare, as is usual with Buddhist monks. I see him almost every day as, with a serious face and dressed in a robe and white ceremonial shoes, he rides on his favourite toy—a European tricycle—up and down the garden paths under the watchful eye of a giant bodyguard, who is responsible for the little saint's life. Great honour is always paid in Tibet to the woman who has borne a Dalai Lama. But for a Tibetan woman to bring into the world no less than three famous reincarnations is unique in the annals of the Land of Snow. This explains the extraordinary esteem in which the mother of the present Dalai Lama is held by the Tibetan people.

Tagtshel Rimpoche, a tall, slim man with an intelligent face and strikingly shapely hands, had spent all his previous

life in a monastery that was occupied by Chinese troops right at the outset of the conflict. The Chinese sent him to Lhasa with instructions to persuade his brother to yield to their demands. Tagtshel Rimpoche seems, however, to have given his brother exactly the opposite advice. The reincarnated saint proved an exceedingly interesting conversationalist. With Tharchin's aid I attempted to discuss with him, in my still very halting Tibetan, various problems of Lamaism. Very soon, however, he became the questioner and I the answerer. For Tagtshel Rimpoche showed great interest in the state of Tibetan studies in the West. In particular, he inquired whether there were Tibetan books in American libraries, and who dealt with the Tibetan language and culture at American universities.

Our conversation lasted nearly two hours. I was astonished by my host's thirst for knowledge, but a few days later the mystery was explained. Indian newspapers gave the surprising news that Tagtshel Rimpoche had flown from Calcutta, accompanied by a servant, for a longish stay in America.

MID-JULY 1951

The Chinese military governor has arrived in the Chumbi Valley with his retinue; from there he will go on to Lhasa with the Dalai Lama. During the past weeks the Chinese troops have occupied most of Tibet, and their entry into the Tibetan capital is imminent. At almost the same time as the Chinese general and his companions crossed the Tibetan frontier, some twenty Russian refugees entered India from Tibet, seeking asylum. The refugees had a veritable odyssey behind them. At one time they had lived in a village in Sinkiang, from which they were expelled by robber bands. Then they became involved in the battles between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists, in the course of which their numbers grew fewer and fewer. When Sinkiang was overrun by Red Chinese troops, the survivors—who included only two women—fled to Tibetan territory. After unspeakable hardships they succeeded in reaching Lhasa. At the end of protracted negotiations they obtained permission, at the last minute, to travel to India via Gyantse. The



Tibetan old age



Nepalese youth







A mendicant monk from  
the Land of Gods

Champa Sangda, a Ti-  
betan bard, singing the  
Kesar epos for me



Russians stayed in Kalimpong for a week, then they were taken to Calcutta, whence they finally emigrated to America with the assistance of the International Refugee Organization.

The Dalai Lama's return being imminent, all Tibetan officials still in Kalimpong have received orders to go back to Tibet at once. This means that I shall have to say good-bye to a number of friends, perhaps for ever. But a few dignitaries have found some excuse or other to delay their departure. The Dalai Lama's command has had one curious consequence: women's hair has suddenly become a much-sought-after commodity in the Kalimpong bazaar. Many of the young Tibetan officials had their troublesome pigtails cut off while in Kalimpong. Now word has gone round that the Tibetan Government will dismiss all officials no longer wearing this prescribed outward badge of office. Hence the young men are frantically trying to find substitutes for the crowning glory they have lost.

LATE JULY 1951

I was present at an extremely interesting ceremony in the Tirpai monastery today: a solemn reconciliation between two rival groups of monks. Shortly before my arrival in Kalimpong there was a serious dispute among the inmates of the monastery. When the newly appointed abbot took office he found that, under his predecessor, many of the monks had grossly neglected their duties. A section of the lamas opposed his efforts to tighten up discipline. The conflict grew more acute, and eventually fighting broke out between the opponents and the supporters of the abbot, in the course of which a monk was killed. The section of the monks dissatisfied with the abbot thereupon left the monastery and set up their own shrine in the immediate vicinity. After long negotiations, in which the Tibetan Government and even the Dalai Lama himself intervened, peace has now been established between the warring factions.

The solemn act of the return of the renegade monks to the monastic community was celebrated in brilliant sunshine in the forecourt of the temple. Here a large white tent had been

erected, open along its whole length on the side facing the temple and decorated on walls and ceiling with blue Chinese good-luck symbols. The representatives of the Tibetan Government and a few invited guests took their seats at a table inside the tent. Lengthways along the table sat Minister Shagapa, next to him Gyantse Khen-chung—at present the local plenipotentiary of the Dalai Lama and liaison officer to the Government of India—the merchant Pangdu-tsang, one of the richest men in Tibet and a member of the 1948 delegation to the West, and finally Tharchin, the publisher of the Tibetan newspaper. At one end of the table sat a few Chinese; at the other Prince Peter and myself. In front of the tent stood the throng of monks, and behind them sat rows of Tibetan women in gala dress tirelessly rotating their prayer-wheels. The rest of the quadrilateral was occupied by a dense crowd of Tibetan spectators. The ceremony began with an address by Tharchin, who explained in well chosen sentences uttered in honorific Tibetan, pointing his theme with a brief outline of the history of the Land of Snow, what ill effects even minor quarrels could have and how great were the advantages arising from unity and a pious life. The monks listened with bowed heads to his words of admonition, then the abbot stepped forward and gave the assurance that henceforth perfect harmony would prevail among the inmates of his monastery. Now Gyantse Khen-chung arose to convey to the monks of the Tirpai monastery the wishes of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government. Finally he read out a document concerning the renewal of the monastic community, to which the abbot and the Tibetan dignitaries present solemnly affixed their personal seals. With this the ceremony was over.

## EARLY AUGUST 1951

Today I was at last able to visit the Dalai Lama's mother, who is now well again. In the meantime she had left the house next door and gone to live with her retinue in an imposing building in the Tibetan quarter. Again Tharchin kept me company, as well as a bearer carrying a large bottle of apple juice as a gift. The private secretary of the Dalai Lama's

mother, who was already known to me, met us at the door. He led us down a long, dark passage, past the little private chapel. The scent of incense came out through its half-open door, and as I passed I could see a number of Tibetan monks squatting on low cushions in front of an altar. We crossed a terrace and came to an outbuilding, on the flat roof of which long rows of brightly coloured prayer-flags were fluttering in the wind.

Our guide led us into an almost bare antechamber. He asked us to excuse him for a while, but immediately afterwards he returned and showed us into the audience chamber. We entered a large room whose walls were hung with old roll-paintings. Gaily coloured carpets covered the floor and big cushions lay along the walls. In front of them stood little tables with red and gold decorations. I hadn't much time to look at the room, for a slim woman's figure stood up from a raised seat by the window—the mother of the Dalai Lama. Although the room was comparatively dark her eyes were protected by sunglasses. I bowed and presented the Gyeyum Chenmo with the white *khatag* I was holding in readiness, while the bearer placed the gift I had brought on a small table. Then my interpreter, bowing deeply, explained to our hostess in the intricate sentences of the honorific speech the purpose of our visit. The Great Distinguished Mother of the King thanked us for the gift, and with a gesture of the hand invited Tharchin and myself to take a seat. First a few ceremonial phrases were exchanged, and I tried to converse with her in Tibetan. But this was not easy, since she spoke the difficult dialect of her home province better than the Lhasa Tibetan usually employed in official circles. But the experienced Tharchin was fully equal to the situation.

We began by talking about the weather and lamenting the evil times. The conversation gradually warmed up, and suddenly my *vis-à-vis* took off her sunglasses. Now I could see the Gyeyum Chenmo's face clearly. Her features were regular and of a certain natural beauty, her dark eyes calm and quizzical. Her movements were measured but imperious. It was hard to believe that this lady who had all the assurance of a born aristocrat was formerly a simple peasant woman.



A servant brought bowls of tea. I noticed that this was not the usual butter tea, but the beverage prepared in the European manner. The mother of the Dalai Lama must have observed my surprised glance, for she remarked with a smile that she, too, often drank the 'sweet tea of the foreigners'. Then pastries were served, and the Great Distinguished Mother of the King handed a few sweetmeats to our bearer, who had been standing silently in the background. He accepted the gift, politely smacking his lips and sticking out his tongue. I noticed that he immediately slipped the little present into the folds of his garment, in order to preserve it as a valued memento of today's audience.

I inquired whether the Gyeyum Chenmo had received any news yet from her son in America. Yes, she replied, a letter had come from him: he was near Washington at the moment and would soon move on farther west. So we talked for a time about Tagtshel Rimpoche; I avoided mentioning the Dalai Lama, who was at the time on his way back to Lhasa in the company of the Chinese, and about whose fate she must certainly have been worried.

I was still sipping my third cup of tea when the secretary came back: a sign that the audience was over. We rose and exchanged the usual farewell formulas with the Gyeyum Chenmo. 'Kalechudenja', I said, 'Sit down slowly'; and she replied with a smile, 'Kalechibgyunang', 'Go slowly'. A final obeisance, then we left the room.

Outside a group of Tibetan singers and dancers were just taking up their position. I glanced back over my shoulder and saw the Great Distinguished Mother of the King standing at the window looking down at the motley spectacle of the dancers, who were now whirling round on the lawn to the beating of a drum. 'An unusual woman,' I said thoughtfully to Tharchin. 'Yes, an unusual woman,' he replied. 'But you mustn't forget she is the mother of three famous reincarnations. . . .'

MID-NOVEMBER 1951

In a few days I shall be leaving Kalimpong for a considerable period, to study a branch of the Lepcha people living on the

Bhutanese border. Before my departure, Pat and I gave a farewell party. Such a variety of guests as attended our little festivity could only have been assembled in Kalimpong. There was Prince Latthakin of Burma; Jigme Taring with his wife Mary-la; Princess Tess-la, a daughter of Minister Tsarong, with her husband Jigme Dorje, one of the sons of the Bhutanese prime minister (following in his father's footsteps, he is now governor of West Bhutan); and an American student with an Existentialist beard, whose studies of the Oriental mind have brought him to Kalimpong. Other guests were Major Vasu of the Indian Ministry of War; the Bhutanese Princess Tashi (she still occupies the post of Bhutanese Foreign Minister); an Indian lady from Calcutta; Mary-la's daughter, Betty-la; and Ray Williams, a niece of Annie Perry (now married to K. Sprigg, a Tibetologist at London University). Kabshopa Junior, the secretary of the Dalai Lama's mother, was also here with his wife. The two young people are seriously worried at the moment. Ex-Minister Kabshopa, the stormy petrel of Tibetan politics, is at present in Kalimpong and trying to compel his son's wife to enter into polyandrous marriage with the latter's brother as well. The young couple are resisting this demand, thereby bringing down on their heads the wrath of the old gentleman, who inveighs against the 'immoral' views of modern Tibetan youth.

It was really a splendid party. We made ourselves at home on the lawn of Pat's garden, nibbled biscuits, drank tea, and at intervals danced modern or Tibetan dances. It was late at night before our last guest left. The gramophone was still and the silence broken only by the steps of the bearer, carrying plates and cushions into the house. Pat and I sat on the low garden wall and looked down at the darkened town. A jackal barked in the distance, and the pariah dogs in the bazaar answered him with a long-drawn howl. High above the western mountains hung the thin sickle of the moon. The booming call of the temple trumpets echoed up from the Tirpai monastery. The lamas were keeping their nightly watch before the idols and praying in endless litanies to the gods of the Land of Snow. For the gods never sleep.

## Forbidden Sikkim

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‘THE strangers rode on huge pigs and carried long sticks that made a noise like thunder.’ This, according to the *Chronicle of the Kings of Sikkim*, is what the timid Lepchas said when they saw a host of Tibetans riding into their country somewhere towards the end of the sixteenth century. At that time they were still undisputed masters of the country which now bears the name of Sikkim. They lived in the depths of the boundless jungles, and it seems they had almost no contact with other peoples. For this reason they held the guns of the Tibetan interlopers to be magic sticks, and even the horses on which they rode were unfamiliar creatures to the Lepchas. The Tibetans came from the Chumbi Valley in search of new land on which to settle. Their leader was a nobleman from East Tibet named Gyebumse, who is said to have been a man of enormous strength. He helped in the building of the great Central Tibetan monastery of Sakaya, and erected the many pillars of the great assembly hall single-handed. Therefore he was given the name-of-honour Gyebumse, ‘Erector of the Hundred Thousand Pillars’. In the Chumbi Valley he gave fresh proof of his terrific strength by overcoming a Bhutanese giant in single combat.

After his entry into Sikkim, Gyebumse visited the leader of the Lepcha tribe, who was called Thekong Thek and whom the Lepchas claim to have been their first magician-priest. The *Chronicle of the Kings* reports of this meeting: ‘When the Tibetans entered the hut they saw the old man was sitting on a throne-like seat of bamboo. He wore a hat trimmed with feathers and a necklace of shells and the teeth and claws of wild beasts. Full of dignity, he sat on this throne, while his wife Nyokong busied herself with the preparation of food and drink. A bamboo mat was spread on the



ground, and refreshments were immediately set before the guests.'

The Tibetans evidently had little difficulty in obtaining permission from the good-natured Lepchas to settle in Sikkim. The Lepchas were perfectly willing to share their sparsely populated land with the strangers. So Thekong Thek and Gyebumse concluded a solemn pact, by which all Lepchas and Tibetans were henceforth to treat one another as brothers. Their agreement was sealed by a curious ceremony. Various wild and domestic animals were slaughtered and skinned. Then the two leaders sat on the fresh skins and dipped their feet in a vessel filled with blood, while their bodies were wrapped in the steaming entrails of the sacrificial animals.

The Tibetans did not keep to the pact of blood-brotherhood, however. They soon managed to gain the upper hand over the primitive, trusting jungle dwellers. A descendant of Gyebumse was crowned first King of Sikkim in 1642, and since then the Lepchas have had little hand in the running of their country. Many of them became, as the *Chronicle of the Kings* puts it, 'servants of the royal house and of the State'.

After the creation of the royal house, Lamaism began to spread in Sikkim, for the Tibetan immigrants were ardent Buddhists. A considerable body of lamas soon gathered at the court of the first King of Sikkim. Most of them belonged to the Nyingmapa and Dzogchempa Orders; and so Sikkim became a stronghold of these sects, which are but sparsely represented in Tibet and whose beliefs preserve many traditions from the Land of Snow's pre-Buddhist period. The most esteemed of these priests was Lhatsun Chempo, now Sikkim's patron saint, who is supposed to have been shown the way to the land of the Lepchas by the mountain-god Kangchenjunga. Lhatsun Chempo and his confrères built Sikkim's first monastery, the Dubde, or Hermitage, which is alleged to stand on the spot where the first King of Sikkim was crowned. While the monarch began to erect his palace at Tashi Tengkha, the lamas built three further monasteries: Tashiding Gompa, the 'Shrine of Floating Bliss', Lakhang

Marpo, the 'Red House of the Gods', and finally Pemayangtse Gompa, the 'Monastery of the Sublime Lotus', whose name has become in the Sikkimese dialect Pemiongchi. Today Pemiongchi is Sikkim's largest and most important monastery. According to the statutes laid down by Lhatsun Chempo it must always have a hundred inmates, for this is a sacred number and one that brings luck. Nonetheless, it usually presents a deserted appearance: its priests are allowed to marry, and they rarely meet in its assembly halls except at the great festivals.

The newly created kingdom soon established political relations with the Tibetan Government, which had hitherto regarded Sikkim as a dependent vassal State. The first King reigned for twelve years. Of his successor little is known beside the fact that he had three wives—a Bhutanese woman, a Tibetan woman, and a woman from the Limbu tribe.

Chagdor Namgyal was the third king of the Lepcha country. He came to the throne in 1700. The All-Victorious Thunderbolt-Bearer, as his name means in English, was one of the most interesting figures in Sikkimese history. Throughout his life Chagdor Namgyal had to contend with the intrigues of his sister, who would have liked to seize power herself. Her machinations left her time for a rather costly love-affair: she seduced a lama, whereupon the royal family felt obliged to have a new monastery built as a penance. The Sikkimese say today that she was no ordinary woman, but the reincarnation of the demon wife of the evil planet-god Rahu. She was ready to employ any means to attain her goal. She planned to murder her brother, and to this end she allied herself with the Bhutanese; but the King, who was still a minor, succeeded in fleeing to Tibet via Nepal. There he found refuge at the court of the unhappy sixth Dalai Lama, who must have seen a kindred spirit in the young Sikkimese monarch with his striving for higher knowledge. It was eight years before the Tibetans were able to persuade the Bhutanese to evacuate Sikkim. Chagdor Namgyal returned to Sikkim with a Tibetan escort. There he found that the Bhutanese were still in possession of the eastern section of

his country, and for the time being he had no means of regaining this territory.

The All-Victorious Thunderbolt-Bearer was a pious Buddhist. According to tradition he augmented the annual autumn offering to Sikkim's mountain deities by the great masked dance of lamas, which is still performed. To facilitate the diffusion of the Yellow Doctrine among the Lepchas he devised—taking the Tibetan alphabet as a model—the Lepcha script, which was subsequently used for the translation of various Buddhist works into the Lepcha language. The Lepchas, however, were hesitant about accepting the new faith so zealously propagated by the lamas and the royal house. The priests of the old tribal religion offered particularly stubborn resistance. The *Chronicle of the Kings* asserts that fourteen Lepcha priests and priestesses plotted to kill the King with the aid of Black Magic. Their wicked plan miscarried. But Chagdor Namgyal's sister, who made a fresh attempt on the life of her brother, was more successful. She managed to gain the King's personal physician as an ally. The monarch was slain by his doctor while taking a remedial bath in a thermal spring. The murder was kept secret and the body burnt in the vicinity of Pemiongchi monastery. But the murdered king's followers soon found out what had happened and took vengeance on the instigator. They killed her in the manner usually employed in Tibet for assassinating high-born persons: they stuffed a ceremonial scarf down her throat.

Chagdor Namgyal's successor was Chogyel Gyurme, the 'All-Victorious Immutable King of Religion', who began his reign in 1717. He was considered a friend of the Lepchas, whose language and script he mastered. He was even well-disposed towards the sorcerers of the old tribal faith, a fact which disturbed the lamas. Soon after his accession to the throne there was a clash between the two groups of priests. Five Lepcha wizards had come to the court to give a demonstration of their supernatural powers in the presence of the King. They performed a series of magic feats before the astonished ruler and his followers: they tied a knot in the jet of water flowing from a spring, caused stones to float in the air, drew magic diagrams on the surface of a pond and

plaited a rope from sand. Finally, they made the roof of Pemiongchi monastery curl up until the ends touched. Only the lamas refused to be impressed by these feats of wizardry. To rid themselves of the hated sorcerers they did not even shrink from murder—in the eyes of the Buddhist religion one of the most heinous sins a priest can commit.

The reign of the fourth King of Sikkim was ill-starred. Again and again the hordes of warlike Bhutanese surged into Sikkim from the east, plundering the settlements and carrying off their inhabitants as slaves to Bhutan, the Land of Dragons. The peaceable Lepchas were prepared to abandon the disputed strip of country, but the King of Sikkim endeavoured to assert his right to the territory by erecting extensive fortifications. For this purpose the Lepchas and their neighbours, the Limbus, were compelled by the Tibetan ruling class to do forced labour. When the yoke became too oppressive the Lepchas attempted a revolt, which failed; while the Limbus preferred to leave Sikkim and settle in Eastern Nepal.

When the King fell mortally ill in 1734, there was no successor to the throne. But on his death-bed the monarch confessed that he had begotten a son by a nun. This son was recognized as successor to the throne, and during his minority Sikkim was governed by an ambassador from Tibet. This regent started by making all the inhabitants of the Lepcha land pay taxes. There was a great shortage of salt in Sikkim at that time. When the Regent took over the affairs of government he announced that he would make a free distribution of salt. The population came from all parts of Sikkim to receive the welcome gift—but whoever received salt had to give his name and address to the officials. Henceforth annual taxes were levied on the basis of the lists so obtained. In addition, the Regent tightened up the country's administration. He called together all officials and chiefs and, with their collaboration, drew up a code of laws establishing the rights and duties of the inhabitants of Sikkim.

The King was succeeded, in 1780, by Tensing Namgyal, the 'All-Victorious Preserver of Religious Doctrine', during whose reign Sikkim had to withstand a series of exceedingly

severe trials. To the frequent attacks of the Bhutanese were now added assaults by the Gurkhas on Sikkim's western frontier. The warlike Gurkha tribe had made themselves masters of Nepal in 1769, and were now seeking to extend their dominion by the ruthless use of fire and sword. The Gurkhas mercilessly slew all prisoners, and cut off the ears and lips of those they subjugated. These attacks from east and west placed Sikkim in the position of a grain of corn between two millstones. Its population was forced to fight a desperate two-front war against the invaders. The scales were temporarily tipped in favour of the Sikkimese by the intervention of Tibetan forces; but in 1788 the Gurkhas succeeded in overrunning the whole of Sikkim. The royal family just managed to elude the enemy warriors. All their possessions were left behind in the palace. The only object salvaged was an ancient mask representing the rage-contorted face of the mountain-god Kangchenjunga, regarded by the Sikkimese Buddhists as an especially priceless relic. For a long time the King and his family lived under conditions of extreme privation in the primeval forests of North Sikkim. His subjects were no better off. The brutality of the Gurkhas made it impossible, for years on end, to cultivate the soil: the result was a serious famine. At last, however, the Gurkhas' lust for conquest was brought to an end. They attacked Tibet, and even succeeded in taking Shigatse, the second largest city in the Land of Snow. But a powerful Chinese force came to the aid of the Tibetans and defeated the Gurkhas. The subsequent peace treaty rendered conditions in Sikkim considerably more normal.

The reign of the seventh king, Tsugphu Namgyal, began in 1793. During the first years of his rule Sikkim made its first contacts with the British. When the Gurkhas, beginning to recover from their defeat in the war with Tibet, made a fresh onslaught on Western Sikkim in 1814, it was British troops under the famous General Ochterlony who came to Sikkim's assistance. Again the Gurkhas were defeated, and the disputed frontier between Nepal and Sikkim was laid down afresh at the Peace of Titalia, 1817. Scarcely had the attacks from without ceased, however, when Sikkim was rent

by internal conflicts. The King had a troublesome minister assassinated, whereupon the victim's followers persuaded a section of the population to emigrate to Nepal. Some eight hundred Lepcha families found a new home at that time in the Nepalese district of Illam. With the support of the Gurkhas, the emigrants organized several rebellions against their former master, which were only put down after a prolonged struggle.

The cession of Darjeeling to the British in 1835 was regarded by the Tibetans as an illegal act on the part of the King of Sikkim, and led to a serious crisis in Tibeto-Sikkimese relations. The tension between the two countries found outward expression in a regulation forbidding the Sikkimese rulers to visit holy Lhasa more than once every eight years. When the King set out for the Tibetan capital in 1844, he almost lost his life soon after crossing the frontier. At Phari Dzong he became involved in a dispute with the governor of West Bhutan, who happened to arrive at the same time. Only the intervention of the Tibetans saved the Sikkimese monarch from being slain by the Bhutanese official.

Five years later a serious conflict arose with the British, over the arrest of two high-ranking British officials while travelling in Sikkim. The dispute resulted in the southern foothills being detached from Sikkim and in the British ceasing the payments they had hitherto made for Darjeeling. Henceforth, Sikkim came increasingly under British influence, and in 1861 an agreement was signed making the country officially a British protectorate. There was one more major crisis, in 1892, when the ninth King of Sikkim fled to Tibet as a protest against the high-handedness of the British Resident appointed to his country. The quarrel was eventually settled, and the four kings who have reigned since then remained nominally the masters of their realm. But the real power was in the hands of the so-called Political Officers, who had their residence at Gangtok, immediately next-door to the royal palace. This little Himalayan State, forming a bridge between India and Tibet, was of considerable commercial and military importance to the British. Hence

visitors from the West were allowed into Sikkim only by special permission from the authorities.

After Britain's withdrawal from India the newly-created Republic of India became Sikkim's protecting power. The Indians carried out one or two reforms, but on the whole there was not much change in the land of the Lepchas—except that it became even more difficult for Europeans to visit the Sikkimese capital. I did not receive the necessary papers until December of the second year I spent in Kalimpong. Then I had to give a written undertaking to keep exactly to the stated route and not to cross the frontier into Tibet, Bhutan or Nepal.

Although the last rainy season had caused serious fresh damage to the main highway to Sikkim, it was possible to cover the fifty-mile stretch between Kalimpong and Gangtok in about five hours by Land Rover. I shared the vehicle with four other passengers: an Indian engineer on a tour of inspection; two Tibetan merchants, who became horribly car-sick within a few minutes of setting out; and a servant of the Bhutanese prime minister, who slept and snored throughout the journey, his shaven head rolling from side to side at every bump as though hanging on a string. We sped down the hairpin bends into the Teesta Valley, and there took an uneven road leading up the valley in a north-easterly direction. On the left the green waters of the Teesta wound among yellow sandbanks; on the right rose the jungle-covered wall of the valley. At places the watercourse became a sinister dark gorge, in which the roar of the foaming torrent drowned every other sound.

We crossed the Sikkimese frontier, by a swaying suspension bridge, at the little market town of Rongpu. An Indian policeman checked our papers and noted in a thick book the precise time we entered Sikkim. A few other men in uniform, surrounded by cursing muleteers, were busily engaged in searching the packs of a Tibetan caravan that had come from the direction of Gangtok. They prodded the bales of wool hanging on the flanks of the animals with long iron rods, to make sure no other goods were hidden inside the wool. One of the policemen explained to me that many Tibetans,

working for Marwaris, try to smuggle large quantities of old Chinese silver coins into India.

An orange market was in progress at Rangpu. Huge mountains of these fruit, the best Sikkim produces, covered the dusty little market-place and lent a somewhat more friendly note to the bleak, dilapidated-looking town. Long lines of half-naked Nepali porters, dressed only in short shirts and tightly drawn loin-cloths, passed us in the opposite direction as we climbed the continually rising road. They were carrying huge baskets of oranges slung from a strap round their foreheads. Sparkling micaceous sand from the streams they had waded across adhered to their muscular brown legs. We reached the Sikkimese capital towards 4 p.m. Blue-grey clouds had spread over the sky, and rain mingled with snowflakes was pattering down on the town's streets of bottomless mud, churned up by the hooves of countless mules. The meadows on the outskirts were strewn with tents, and a stream of Tibetan caravans wound through the narrow, crooked streets to the accompaniment of a monotonous jingling of bells. Events of recent months had made Gangtok Tibet's most important supply base. The entry of large Chinese forces had created an acute food-shortage in the Land of Snow, and the Chinese sought in vain to bring up sufficient supplies by the long route from Western China to Lhasa. Urgent measures were required, for the famine-stricken populace were beginning to perpetrate acts of violence against the occupation troops and the pro-Chinese nobility. With the permission of the Government at New Delhi, supplies for Tibet were now being brought via India. Chinese ships carried rice to Calcutta and Indian vehicles transported it to Gangtok, where it was taken over by Tibetan caravans.

During my stay in the Sikkimese capital I lodged in the State rest-house. The open fireplace in my room gave out no heat whatsoever, but filled the room with suffocating clouds of smoke. The wind blew snowflakes in through the broken window, and during the ice-cold nights I was kept awake by the loud jangling of bells, for herds of mules used to graze in the meadows all round the rest-house.



Gangtok, a collection of wooden stalls, Marwari shops and a few stone-built houses, numbers some two thousand inhabitants. Its only sights are the Royal Palace, rebuilt a few decades ago; the villa-like Residency of the political officer; and the lama temple, situated in the immediate vicinity of the royal dwelling. The entrance to the palace is guarded by soldiers of the bodyguard, Lepchas equipped with British rifles and wearing an extremely colourful uniform: a red and white striped robe, such as all Lepcha men wear; over this a brilliant red jacket adorned with wide black braid; and a cylindrical hat plaited from reeds and nettles, dyed pink and decorated in front with a few feathers and the royal arms in silver. The windows of the Residency look out on the nearby chain of the Himalayas. Down below in the garden, among gnarled trees and tall tree-ferns, stand brightly painted Buddhist reliquaries and prayer-flags swaying in the wind.

At first sight the Royal Palace looks just like a European house, but closer inspection reveals here and there on its outer walls Tibetan characters interlaced to form diagrams. These are magic formulae that serve to keep away demons and ensure the occupants of the house good luck and contentment. The two elongated buildings close to the Palace, which house the offices of the King's private secretary and a few Sikkimese Government departments, offer the same curious contrast. In the offices, which are decorated with images of Buddhist saints and photographs of Tibetan princes of the Church, typewriters clatter and telephones ring—but prayer-streamers flutter on the roof, and eerie constructions of animals' skulls, coloured threads and thin sticks, looking like the mast of a galleon with all its stays, hang on the pillars by the entrance. These are the so-called 'thread-crosses', demon-traps made by Buddhist wizards to prevent the evil spirits from forcing their way into the offices.

Soon after my arrival in Gangtok I paid a visit to Tseten Tashi, the King's private secretary, whom I had already met in Kalimpong. Tseten Tashi comes from the old Tibeto-Sikkimese nobility and is married to a lady from one of Tibet's most distinguished families. Like the King and the members of the court, he wears the traditional brocade dress of the

Tibetan nobility. This very affable young Sikkimese, who speaks fluent English and is an enthusiastic amateur photographer, showed me the gorgeously furnished temple. Along with costly altars, images of the gods, ritual vessels and ancient masks it contains the beautifully carved throne of the Sikkimese monarch. Tseten Tashi also arranged for me a brief audience with the King, a friendly gentleman of about sixty. A third interesting personality I met during my brief stay in Gangtok was Dadul Densapa, a minister of the Sikkimese Government. At that time, in addition to a number of other offices, he held the post of minister for matters affecting the Buddhist State religion. The Minister's house, appointed in the finest Tibetan style, contains a valuable library of Tibetan books and Sikkimese chronicles, to which I was given access by their owner. I spent many, many hours in this library copying these rare books, which give information about the activities of the first Buddhist apostles in Sikkim and the cult of the local mountain-gods.

Interesting as my visit to Gangtok was from the point of view of studying the forms of the Buddhist religion in Sikkim, there was little to be learned here concerning the Lepchas and their traditions, since few members of the Lepcha people live at Gangtok today. The majority of Gangtok's inhabitants are Tibetan immigrants and, above all, Nepalis; whereas the Lepchas have withdrawn to the Songbu district farther west, which has been kept as a Lepcha reservation. The way to Songbu had long been closed, however, because of the difficult political situation; besides which, the life of the Lepchas in this area was already fairly well known from earlier accounts. I therefore decided to return to Kalimpong and make my way from there to Git, a valley on the Bhutanese border. I knew from a previous visit that many Lepcha settlements were still to be found in Git and the surrounding country, and even a few priests and priestesses of the old tribal religion of the Lepchas.

## The Brothers of the Bamboo

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I LEFT Kalimpong on a sunny winter's day. A young Lepcha had already set out at first light with most of the baggage; hence my shaggy little Tibetan horse had only a light load packed in two saddlebags to carry, in addition to myself. As the crow flies the Git Valley is hardly thirteen miles from Kalimpong. In Europe this would be no distance at all, but in the precipitous terrain of the Himalayas thirteen miles mean a strenuous day's journey. Often the goal seems almost within reach, then the path is suddenly cut by a deep valley. This means a climb down of six thousand feet or more and an equally laborious climb up again on the other side of the valley.

For a short time I followed the great trade road that leads up to the passes on the Tibetan frontier. In front of me trekked a long Tibetan caravan led by a string of mules, hung with bells, whose hooves kicked up clouds of dust. Behind them rode a few jubilantly shouting Tibetans, while a huge, vicious-looking nomad hound trotted along in the rear, strips of silk printed with prayers fluttering from its collar. I turned off the caravan route at a fork in the road, and followed a narrow path winding between gardens and the broad steps of the paddy fields. The tinkle of the caravan bells and the shouts of the muleteers faded into the distance.

Half an hour later I came to a fresh parting of the ways. I had only ridden along here once before, and I thought I had to take the right-hand path. Half an hour later, however, I was forced to admit that I had made a mistake, for the path began to run down steeply to the river valley, while a mountain ridge that I ought to have crossed began to tower higher and higher above me. The idea of retracing my steps did not appeal to me, and as I knew that sooner or later I must come

to the valley at my feet I began to clamber down the trackless mountainside. Slipping and slithering and leading the recalcitrant horse behind me, I looked for a path. Two hours later I stood bathed in sweat at the bottom of the valley, where the heat was tropical, on the banks of the wildly foaming Rilli. The walls of the valley rose almost vertically at this point; six thousand feet above me, on a ridge at right angles to the Rilli Valley to the south, I saw the white houses of Kalimpong. I knew that I must now ride up the valley to the point where a suspension bridge spans the Rilli. There I could get back to the right road. No sooner said than done. At first all went well, for the level of the Rilli was low and I made rapid progress along the sandbanks. But then the valley contracted to a frighteningly narrow canyon almost completely filled by the river. There was nothing for it but to ride through the water, in doing which my horse got out of its depth and I took an involuntary bath. About an hour and a half later I was back on the right road and stopped for a short rest in the shade of some plane-trees. I resumed the weary climb, through rice fields and little orchards and past the straw huts of Nepali peasants. Soon after reaching the three-thousand-foot line I was swallowed up by the green twilight of the Sikkimese forest, and the moss deadened the hoofbeats of my mount.

The jungle of the Indian plain is full of life and noise, but in the forests of Sikkim an eerie silence reigns. The oppressive stillness is broken only occasionally by the soft drip of water running down the bare rocks of the mountainside, the distant call of a cuckoo or the cooing of a wood-pigeon. On many of the mountain slopes another, terrifying sound may be heard in the midst of the rain forest: a deep growling that rises out of a crevasse like the angry voice of a giant imprisoned in the heart of the mountain. But it is only the rushing of a subterranean river, which emerges lower down in the valley.

Flung to the ground by storms, giant trees lie rotting in great heaps round which, at night, phantasmal will-o'-the-wisps dance. Ferns and tall grasses grow out of the brown carpet of mouldering leaves; thick cushions of moss envelop the trunks and stunted branches of the still living trees, each

of which is anchored to the soil by the ropes of creepers. High in the treetops, where the moss is thickest between trunk and branches, hang clusters of brilliant orchids. In hidden folds of the mountainsides, where the rays of the sun seldom penetrate, stand groups of giant tree-ferns. The traveller feels as though he were passing through a primeval forest at the dawn of the world. . . .

When the mists of the rainy season sink over the land or the cold breath of the snowy mountains drives low clouds along the slopes, the Sikkimese jungle changes into a ghostly magic forest. Silently, like the claws of some spectral being, thick bundles of closely entwined lianas sway in the grey veil of mist. The treetops with their long tresses of creepers are turned into huge Medusa heads; detached pads of moss move with every breath of wind like the beards of gnomes; gnarled, queerly twisted branches clutch into the semi-darkness like the arms of phantasmal witches.

The path crept higher and higher. Every now and then it led over a ridge so narrow that I could see both its precipitous flanks at the same time. The view down into the dark made my head spin, but my little Tibetan horse climbed sure-footedly over the sharp spine of rock. At the top of a rocky hummock I stopped to look round. The northern icepeaks were shimmering in the deep blue evening, and only on the glaciers of Kangchenjunga was a dim light still glowing. The darker the shadows became, the steeper and more threatening towered the mountains. To the west flickered the lights of Kalimpong; somewhere below, among the black treetops of the primeval forest, nightbirds were circling. The whine of a lonely jackal echoed from far away. A fantastically big moon came slowly up over the rim of the eastern mountains, and the edge of the forest stood out in sharp silhouette against the spectral-looking orange disc.

I rode for another hour along the now almost indistinguishable path. Then I crossed the mountain-crest that had hitherto blocked my view to the south and entered another valley running from south to north. A little later I came to a brilliantly lit bungalow: the home of my Swiss friend Jean Marcel Brahier. He is a missionary and has been working

for more than a decade among the Lepchas. Father Brahier and I had agreed on my visit to Git a long time ago. My friend had promised to introduce me to priests of the ancient Lepcha faith and to help me question them by acting as interpreter.

Unfortunately I had chosen a thoroughly unpropitious moment for my journey to Git, for the valley had just been struck by a serious smallpox epidemic. The Indian Government had sent official inoculators, but they were unable to cope with all the work. The Lepchas do not form closed settlements, and many hours of very difficult travel is often required to get from one of the houses scattered about the mountainside to another. Father Brahier and I therefore set out to inoculate the Lepchas living in the more isolated parts of the valley. The area looked deserted and there was not a soul to be seen in the fields, for the Lepchas had shut themselves up in their houses. Neighbour avoided neighbour, and the dead were hurriedly burned without the usual rites. At the sides of the path we were following lay palm-leaves bent into the shape of a bowl and containing rice—a touchingly naïve plea to the smallpox spirits not to continue on their baneful way, but to be content with the food thus offered them. As we approached a Lepcha house we were generally greeted, while still a long way off, by loud shouts from the owner warning us not to enter his smallpox-infected dwelling. But we were not to be frightened away. The patients, whose ghastly appearance still occasionally haunts my dreams, were mostly beyond help—but we could at least try to save those who were still well. In many cases we observed that the Lepchas had attempted, purely instinctively, to guard themselves from infection. The members of the family untouched by the disease had built themselves makeshift shelters far away in the fields. The sick were left behind in the houses, either in the care of an old person who no longer attached much importance to life, or tended by someone who had already had the illness and was therefore immune to it.

After the epidemic had passed its peak, I was able to put my real plans into execution. Accompanied by my friend I wandered from hut to hut, observing the Lepchas' mode of

life and writing down their ancient legends. Old, blind Ongdi, once the head of all the magician-priests of the neighbourhood, told me about his people's good and evil gods; his son, Saliang, explained the hunting rites to me; and Cheche, the fisherman, showed me how to catch fish. Young Kabo sang sentimental-sounding folk songs into the microphone of the recording apparatus. After a few vain attempts, I learnt from the suspicious Labu Kabari how sickness demons could be placated by animal sacrifices; and the corpulent sorceress-priestess Kanyemu related to me all the things she experienced when the spirits took possession of her. Many of the traditions I heard proved on closer examination to be really Nepalese, Tibetan or Bhutanese legends taken over by the Lepchas. Traditions originating from the Land of Snow occurred most frequently, for today the majority of Lepchas profess Tibetan Buddhism, Sikkim's State religion. Bit by bit, however, I managed to isolate the alien elements and form a picture of the original, ancient Lepcha religion.

The Lepchas say the world was created by the god Tasheting. Like the human body, which consists primarily of flesh and bones, Tasheting formed the world of earth and rocks. He created the Himalayas, the elder brother of all mountains, and decorated the empty sky with countless stars. Finally, he moulded the primal ancestors of the Lepcha people, the man Furongthing and the woman Nazongnyu, from the ice of Kangchenjunga. Hence the Lepchas revere Kangchenjunga as a sacred mountain. So much for the legend. Anthropologists have not yet been able to answer the question of where the Lepchas came from in reality. Racially they are related to the Tibetans, so it is reasonable to suppose that they once immigrated into their present home from the north or east, following the chain of the Himalayas. This must have been a very long time ago, however, for they possess no tradition today hinting at any such migration. The Lepchas assert, on the contrary, that they have lived in Sikkim since the creation of the world. Their language also indicates an affinity with the inhabitants of the Land of Snow. It is a syllabic language belonging to the same linguistic branch as Tibetan. The Lepchas refer to themselves in

their own language as the Rong people, calling their country Nelyang, the 'Land of Caves'. The name Lepcha, today the most usual designation for this little Himalayan tribe, is a truncated Nepali word, and originally meant the 'Nonsense-Speakers'.

At the same time as he made the primal couple, Tasheting also created bamboo, for he knew that the Lepchas could not live without it. They use it for building their houses; they make weapons, household gear, pots, mats, ropes and flutes from it; from pressed bamboo shoots they prepare *sakritbi*, a tasty food. For this reason the Lepchas say they are 'the brothers of the bamboo'. The good Tasheting also called to life seven divine couples, who settled in Mayel, a legendary country somewhere beyond the wall of the Himalayas. The dwellers in Mayel are the bestowers of fertility, and the Lepchas therefore beg them in their prayers to ensure a rich harvest. If mankind were ever to become extinct, these seven divine couples would leave their dwelling-places to people the world afresh. In olden days the way to Mayel lay open, and so many Lepchas visited this land. Later it was forgotten. Even now, says the legend, the distant voices of the inhabitants of Mayel and the barking of their dogs can sometimes be heard.

Amongst the most interesting of the Lepchas' legends are those that tell of the Flood and the building of a tower up to the sky. They bear a startling resemblance to the biblical account, but it is known from older sources that these legends were already current among the Lepchas before the tribe came into contact with the first missionaries. The legend of the Flood relates that the whole of Sikkim was submerged by a gigantic inundation. The few Lepchas who escaped the waters sought refuge on a mountain that is now called Tendon, the 'Raised Horn'. The terrified survivors watched one Himalayan peak after the other vanishing under the flood. But the gods preserved the Lepchas from annihilation. They caused the mountain to increase in height, and so the people on its summit remained out of reach of the surging waters. When the inundation subsided the survivors stayed on the mountain, not daring to come down until a bird



flew past bearing a twig with fresh green leaves in its beak.

The tale of the legendary tower runs as follows: Once upon a time a branch of the Lepcha people called the Naong resolved to build a colossal tower so as to reach the sky. Building proceeded apace, and one day those who were working on the pinnacle of the tower saw the sky directly overhead. They shouted to the workers down below to pass hooks up to them, so that they could drag the firmament down. But those below understood that the men on the pinnacle had already reached the sky, and the tower was no longer needed. Thinking no more about it, they set to and tore away the foundations. It was not long before the whole structure came thundering down, burying most of the builders beneath its ruins. The few who escaped with their lives discovered, to their amazement, that they could no longer understand one another. They scattered all over the country, and thus the various peoples of the Himalayas came into being.

Tasheting and the good divinities accompanying him are known collectively as the 'Rom'. Opposing the good, benevolent might of the Rom are the noxious powers of the demons, the 'Mung', as the Lepchas call them. The Mung live in hollow trees and among lonely crags, on the summits of the snowy mountains and in the depths of the primeval forests. They are very singular figures, these horrific phantoms of Lepcha mythology. There is Midyop Mung, who wears his eyes in his shoulders. He can change his size at will, and sometimes transforms himself into a giant whose head reaches the clouds. A death-bringing spirit is Maso Mung, who creeps round the houses on moonless nights in the shape of a black, fire-breathing dog. He is always hungry, and he can be driven away by giving him a red-hot stone to eat. Once he has thoroughly burnt his throat he is in no great hurry to come back again. Sandong Mung is a feathered monster that frightens people during the night with its piping; and Sagrong Mung, who lives in caves, carries off solitary wanderers. Sumu Mung, a demoniacal old woman with a horrifyingly ugly body and long hair reaching to her

heels, also attacks people venturing into the forest alone in darkness. She is particularly keen on young men: the more easily to lure them to their downfall, she changes herself into a radiantly beautiful girl. She makes her captives her lovers; if she is satisfied with them she keeps them with her for a time. In the end, however, every one of those she has seduced meets a terrible end in the vengeance of the bloodthirsty she-demon.

The most curious figure in the Lepcha pantheon is Chu Mung, the 'Glacier Spirit', an apelike creature. This is no other than the mysterious Yeti, or 'Snowman', of the Sherpas and Tibetans. The Lepchas worship the Glacier Spirit as the god of hunting and lord of all forest beasts. Appropriate offerings have to be made to him before and after the chase, and many Lepcha hunters claim to have met the Glacier Spirit during expeditions on the edge of the moraine fields.

The so-called *bongthing*, the priests of the old tribal religion, are mediators between the human and the spirit worlds. Outwardly they differ little from the other members of the tribe, apart from the fact that many of them wear a rosary of turquoises, white stones and corals round their necks. They have families and go hunting or till the fields like any other Lepcha. But when sowing-time comes, when the harvest is gathered, or when a village is plagued with sickness or misfortunes, then the *bongthing* become indispensable helpers of their fellow-men. They bring fruit and millet beer as offerings to the spirits of the ancestors; they sacrifice pigs and oxen to propitiate the supernatural tormentors, killing the animals with an arrow or a sharp bamboo. Sacrifices that are particularly appreciated are 'animals with long legs, such as men'. The *bongthing* predict the future with the aid of their rosaries, raw eggs or coloured stones; and at night, when the spirits soar over hills and valleys on silvery clouds by the light of the full moon, they hold mysterious dialogues with gods and demons.

Indispensable assistants of the *bongthing* are the *mon*, women with mediumistic gifts who are also conversant with sacrificial rites and soothsaying. The most important task of these

priestesses, however, is to guide the spirits of the dead into the other world. For the performance of their ceremonies the *mon* employ a curious paraphernalia reminiscent of the dress of many Siberian shamans. Their heads are adorned with the feathers of sacred birds. On their hips hang open linen bags, suspended on bands running diagonally across the breast. The bands are embellished with white shells, and a tangle of strange objects is attached to the bags: eagles' claws, the tusks of wild pigs, the lower jaws of great fish, birdskins and roebucks' antlers. When the *mon* is looking for a lost soul, she is alleged to be able to turn herself into every animal of which some part is attached to her outfit. After the ceremony she distributes the contents of the bags to those present as valuable medicines.

Not everyone can become a *bongthing* or a *mon*—the gods themselves have to make the choice. The person chosen suddenly falls into a state resembling a serious illness. He or she is tormented with fever and most of the time unconscious. A *bongthing* gave me an account of this:

'When I was about twenty years old I was suddenly taken with a high fever. All my limbs ached at the slightest movement; some of my ancestors, who were *bongthing*, appeared to me in dreams. They told me I must now enter upon their inheritance and likewise become a *bongthing*. I resisted, for I had no wish to exercise the strenuous office of a priest. But they came back and threatened me. They said the longer I delayed the more serious my illness would grow, and if I rejected the choice I should die. I also heard the voices of the gods, but I could not see them. I often left my house and soared effortlessly as an eagle over the mountains. I flew to the Himalayas and back. Another time I ascended a gigantic ladder, step by step, until I came to the country of the spirits. When I had reached it I saw all round the peaks of the Himalayas.

'For six months I was ill. Finally a *bongthing* came to initiate me in my new duties. The farther my training progressed, the more my condition improved. Then I resolved to remain an ordinary man. As a result I was immediately tormented by fever and pains again. Only when my schooling was finished

and I had brought the gods a cock, several small forest birds, some sugar-canes, a bowl of rice and three bamboo beakers full of beer, as a first offering, did I become completely well again.'

Besides the *bongthing* and the *mon* there are two other groups of priests: men, who are called *parwo*, and women, who are known as *nyenjomo*. These are Lepchas who are allegedly taken possession of by Tibetan spirits, and therefore speak Tibetan while in a trance. They are called in to exorcize and expel sickness-demons. During their ceremonies the *parwo* and *nyenjomo* wear Tibetan clothes; they decorate their hair with wool and wield drums made from two human skulls. Another group is the *yaba* and *yama*. These are men and women with mediumistic proclivities, who are believed to be under the influence of the gods of the Limbu people.

The majority of Lepchas call lamas into their houses on the occasion of weddings, births, sickness and death, so that they may read their holy books and perform the appropriate ceremonies. But nobody wants to get on the wrong side of the gods of the old religion; so they also invite a *bongthing* or a *mon*, so that they may make offerings in the way practised by their forefathers. This simultaneous adherence to two religions is mainly responsible for the economic ruin of the Lepchas. The lamas demand money and food for their services; the tribal priests sacrifice the domestic animals and keep the meat as their fee. If a family has been struck by a serious misfortune, the ceremonies are endless and the demands of the priests insatiable. The family then has to borrow money from a Marwari at extortionate interest and mortgage its possessions. But once a Lepcha family has lost its house and fields it is done for. It is quickly ousted by unscrupulous Nepali settlers; unless its members emigrate to the Songbu Reservation they are soon submerged in the mass of Nepalis.

The Lepchas' mode of life has been appreciably altered by the infiltration of Tibetans, and above all by the rapid spread of Nepali settlers. In the old days they were a race of gatherers and hunters: the forest gave the Lepchas all they needed. It provided plenty of game, edible fruits and tubers,

medicinal herbs, fibres that could be woven into fabrics, and roots with which to dye these fabrics. In addition, they cultivated small patches of the forest, cutting down the trees, burning the undergrowth and planting the clearing with maize, buckwheat and millet. From the millet the Lepchas made their beer, known as *chi*. After bringing in the harvest they left the patch fallow, and moved a little way on. The clearing was once more overgrown by jungle, which was not allowed to be burnt down again at this spot for at least another eight years. The Nepali settlers, on the other hand, cut down wide areas of the forest for their paddy-fields. The Lepchas' living space was continually reduced in consequence; the tribe became more sedentary, enlarging its fields and livestock. Gathering supplies in the forest lost importance, and hunting became the occupation of a few individuals. Nevertheless, the urge to hunt is still in every Lepcha's blood. No woodland bird is safe from their slings. They lie in wait for sambur deer, mountain goats and wild pig with their bows and arrows, and even attack the dangerous Himalayan bear with their spears. Their arrowheads are poisoned with aconitine: the hunter dips his arrow into a jar of poison hanging at his waist before firing it.

In the old days, when the Lepchas still went on hunting expeditions in the jungles bordering the Plain of Bengal, they even brought down rhinoceros and elephant with their primitive weapons. They made war-shields from rhinoceros hide, and bartered ivory with the Bhutanese for salt and textiles. Often, too, the Lepchas had to contend with man-eating tigers that ventured up into their mountain villages from the Indian jungle. An old Lepcha hunter gave me an interesting account of one such tiger hunt:

'It was a long time ago, six decades or more, when a great misfortune fell upon our settlement. I was very young then, but I can remember it all clearly. At that time my father was the *mandal*, the headman of Git. He was known far and wide as a great hunter. In those days our valley was almost completely covered by thick forest; there were only five or six houses here, and our fields were very small. One day five men went to a nearby river to fish. They intended to stay

away one day, or at most two. But the second day passed, the third and one more. Then the wives set out in search of their husbands. They did not have far to go: they found the bodies of their husbands at the river's edge. A tiger had killed all five of them. The basket full of fish still stood beside the corpses. The women wanted to take the basket back with them, for they were big fish; but then they heard the tiger growling. They ran back to the village wailing and shouting loudly. When my father heard what had happened, he ran to the river to slay the dangerous marauder. But the beast had already made off. Weeks passed, very many weeks, and still the man-killer was roaming our valley. Once it managed to carry off a girl working in the fields. Now my father resolved to slay the tiger with a trap. We prayed to Chu Mung, the god of hunting, and sacrificed a whole ox to him, it was a fine, strong ox! When we had prayed and sacrificed sufficiently we went into the forest to set traps. We built a trap on each of the jungle paths leading into our village.

'What do such snares look like? First you cut down a sapling and lop the branches off. You fix the thick end between three strong pegs so that it rests horizontally four handbreadths above the ground. Then you bend its tip far back and hold it in this position with a thin stick. You stretch a string from this stick to a tree on the opposite side of the path. The string must be very fine, as fine as a hair. Having done this you place a wooden trough on four crossed bamboo stakes, and in this trough a spear.

'When we had constructed the traps we went back to the village. The whole of the following day we stayed in our house. In the evening we looked at the traps, but they were all untouched. Another day passed. Darkness fell and we sat round the fire. Suddenly my mother sprang to her feet and pointed in terror at a hunting bow hanging on the wall. And then we all saw it: the bow bent, it bent three times, as though the string were being pulled by an invisible archer. "An omen!" cried my father. "A good omen!" He rushed out of the house, and we sons followed him. We crept cautiously to the first trap, but it was unaltered. The second and third snares were also still set. But by the fourth snare the

tiger lay dead. The spear had passed right through the middle of his body.'

The Lepchas tend to be individualists, a characteristic that is clearly expressed in their settlements. The spacious huts built on piles are separated from one another by fields, meadows and copses; the few houses of a 'village' are often scattered over many square miles. As a rule the houses are divided internally into three rooms. Crossing a narrow stone terrace one first climbs up to an antechamber, which is generally full of agricultural implements and tall water containers of bamboo. From here a ladder leads up to the granary, which is immediately under the thick straw roof. The antechamber opens on to a large room that serves simultaneously as kitchen, living-room and bedroom. On one side is the spacious open hearth; above it, on a broad platform suspended from the ceiling, lie household utensils, hunting weapons, and clothing spread out to dry. The third room is a dark chapel containing a simple altar, ritual vessels and primitive Buddhist images. It is also used as a guest chamber. The outer walls of the house are pierced by two or three little windows almost Gothic in shape. A serious disadvantage of Lepcha houses is the fact that very few of them possess a smoke vent. Hence the interior of the house is usually filled with a dense cloud of smoke that forms a sticky, brownish deposit on walls, ceilings and every object. Underneath the house, between the supporting piles, are the shelters for hens, goats and pigs, while cows and oxen are kept in a separate byre.

Houses of this kind are rare today. When the beams rot or the dwelling gets burnt down the Lepchas put up a little hut of bamboo and clay in the Nepali style, which is less trouble to build. Besides this, the Lepchas lack the necessary material. The forest has ceased to belong to them, and they have to pay dearly for the large amount of timber needed in the construction of their traditional houses.

The gaily coloured, picturesque costume formerly worn by the Lepchas is seldom seen today. The men's red and white striped linen coats reaching to the knees, and their characteristic reed helmets, are being replaced by Nepali garments

or cheap jackets and trousers of European cut from Indian bazaars. They do not stand up to the weather and to work in the fields, and all too quickly degenerate into filthy rags. Only one thing the Lepcha man has not given up—the *ban*, the long bush-knife that hangs at his hip in a sheath of bamboo open on one side, with the aid of which he can quickly cut a way for himself through even the densest jungle. Lepcha women, on the other hand, are still frequently to be seen wearing their old tribal garb: a long linen robe artistically gathered at the belt and held at the shoulders by short, sharp slivers of bamboo or a pair of huge silver pins joined by a little chain. The costume includes enormous silver earrings set with turquoises, and necklaces of red and blue glass beads. Unmarried girls wear brilliant red jackets, while married women, on festive occasions, put on a black cloak with green or red braid as a badge of their status. Most Lepcha women today, however, wear a costume adopted from the women of Nepal.

As a people, the Lepchas are honest, peace-loving and unselfishly helpful. But their timidity and shyness, their naïvety and tendency to individualism, have proved very poor weapons in the unequal struggle they have had to wage for four centuries against interlopers from the north, west and east. Their ever closer contact with foreigners has had profound consequences for the easily influenced Lepchas. They have begun to give up their own ways and customs and replace them by those of their neighbours. Clothing in the style of the Nepali immigrants has taken the place of the old tribal costume; inferior Indian bazaar goods have ousted the simple practical household utensils. Many Lepchas now speak Nepali better than their own mother tongue. Large sections of the tribe have been submerged in the flood of Nepali settlers; furthermore, the fertility of Lepcha women—probably as the result of perpetual inbreeding—has greatly diminished. The result has been a drastic reduction in the numbers of these aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim. Some 24,000 Lepchas have settled in the Songbu Reservation; a further 6,000 live in other parts of Sikkim, in the Eastern Nepalese district in Illam, in two valleys of Bhutan, and in the



## THE BROTHERS OF THE BAMBOO

vicinity of the Indian town of Jalpaiguri at the foot of the Sikkimese foothills. The approximately 30,000 Lepchas compare with about 160,000 immigrant Nepalis and the 9,000 members of the Tibetan ruling class.

The measures introduced to protect the Lepchas during the last decades have averted the danger of the tribe's extinction, at least for the immediate future. And yet this little Himalayan people is doomed to perish, for the rapid disappearance of its old customs and their replacement by alien ways must eventually lead to the total extinction of the specific national character of the 'Brothers of the Bamboo'.

## The Dying Village

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THE pale sickle of the moon still hung in the sky, and the first mists of morning were gathering above the rivers, as we reached the crest of the mountain chain that separates Git from its neighbouring valley to the east. Father Brahier, our Lepcha guide, and I had been in the saddle a good hour. During the past weeks the inhabitants of Git had frequently told us of a Lepcha, reputed to be more than a hundred years old, who lived in the village of Nyim close to the Bhutanese border. The people called him Manibu Baji—the ‘Old Man of the Mani Shrine’. They said he was the oldest living Lepcha and could remember all sorts of strange customs long since forgotten everywhere else. Father Brahier and I therefore decided to visit Manibu Baji. A Lepcha from Git, who knew the way, was to take us to him.

The descent into the valley was steep and difficult. We slithered down, bathed in sweat, enveloped in a cloud of stinging grey dust and with the hot breath of the horses on the backs of our necks. Round about midday we crossed a little bamboo bridge over the river that foamed along the floor of the valley. On the other bank we began to climb once more. The wooded scarp in front of us rose so steeply that I wondered how we could possibly get up it with our horses. The jungle on the slope was still wet with the humidity of the recent rains, and the path was seething with leeches. It was not long before the first of these were hanging from the legs of our mounts. Hoofbeats and the silvery tinkle of bells echoed from the forest above us. A caravan was going in the same direction as ourselves. Ruby-red drops of fresh blood shimmering here and there on the stones of the path showed that they, too, had paid their tribute to the leeches.

We reached the level of the pass towards evening, bitten,

Demon traps on the mountains (*above*) protect the crops from hailstorms. The skull-drum, oracle-book and magic dagger (*left*) are the most important instruments of the Tibetan weather-maker (*right*)







The lamas spend weeks constructing their large demon traps



dusty and tired by the hard ride. The wind whistled past us, driving damp shreds of cloud. A new horizon lay before our eyes: a wide valley and within it, projecting from its eastern slope, a little plateau wreathed by the green of the young forest and crowned by the walls of an old fort. Behind it rose the blue rampart of the Bhutanese border mountains. At our feet we saw the pile-dwellings of Nyim village. Somewhat to one side, next to the grey, towerlike structure of a Buddhist reliquary, stood the massive house of Manibu Baji.

An hour later we knocked at his door. We heard voices in the house, but the door remained shut. Why didn't they answer? A passing Lepcha gave us the explanation: Manibu Baji and his family were at home, but they were not allowed to let us in. Manibu Baji's sister was suffering from an eye disease, and a lama had performed an exorcization of the sickness-demon that morning. His orders were that no one should enter or leave the house till next morning. Where could we spend the night? The Lepcha told us we might be able to stay with the *mandal*, the headman of the village. Besides, there was already a sahib living there.

'A sahib?' we asked incredulously. 'How did a white man get here?' We made our way to the *mandal's* house, higher up the slope; and true enough, there stood a young man in torn European clothing looking at us with a sullen expression. But he wasn't a 'pukka sahib', a 'proper sahib', as our keen-eyed Lepcha guide soon spotted, but only a 'chota sahib', a 'little sahib'—to be more exact, a Eurasian. We inquired after the *mandal*, and he replied in English that the *mandal*, his father-in-law, was out at the moment. Unfortunately we couldn't spend the night here: the hut was too small. This looked perfectly true, for it was only a mud hut in the Nepali style. Behind it, however, stood the ruins of a spacious old Lepcha house.

We were already on our way to the next house when the 'chota sahib' came running after us. The *mandal* had returned, and if we would excuse the wretchedness of his dwelling we were heartily welcome to put up there. Fair enough. We turned round again. The *mandal*, a friendly old man, greeted us at the door. He had had a corner of the

house cleared for us. Warm water for washing and tea for our refreshment were already awaiting us.

There were two other guests staying at the *mandal's* house, a lama and his assistant. A little daughter of the 'chota sahib' had recently died, and the two priests had come to read the sacred books, so that the girl's soul might find a good reincarnation. When dusk fell they lit a hundred and eight butter lamps on a little low table. The elder of the two began to read prayers in an undertone, his face lit up by the yellow glow of the lamps. The *mandal* and the women of the house squatted by the fire, staring into the embers; Father Brahier turned the pages of his breviary; every now and then he and the lama gave one another a friendly nod. The 'chota sahib' came and sat beside me on the ground and inquired where I had come from and where I was going.

I avoided the question how he came to be in these surroundings, but in the end he told me his story unasked. His mother was a Lepcha, his father an Englishman. He had married the daughter of the local *mandal*. As long as the British governed India he had held a post as a mechanic in Kalimpong. But when the British left he found himself working under an Indian, who had no more use for him, the half-caste. He had no means, and therefore had to move into his father-in-law's house with his family. Now he helped in the fields and hoped eventually to find work as a teacher, if a school were ever established here.

While we were talking, the *mandal* and the rest of the family had risen at the injunction of the younger of the two priests. The man beside me murmured, 'Excuse me,' and quickly joined the others. At a sign from the lama they all knelt down and touched the ground three times with their foreheads. The 'chota sahib' came back again, looking somewhat embarrassed. 'You mustn't be surprised,' he said in a low voice, staring in front of him. 'I don't feel myself a European. I'm a Lepcha, and that's the custom of my people.'

When the ceremony was over, guests and hosts sat down to a chat. The woman brought each of us a bamboo mug full of warm millet beer with a straw in it. Bit by bit we learnt from the accounts of the *mandal* and the two priests the story of the

## THE DYING VILLAGE

village of Nyim. At one time some twenty Lepcha families lived here; then a few immigrants arrived from the area of Lepcha settlements in the Eastern Nepalese district of Illam. Manibu Baji's family also came from Illam. He and the other immigrants were descendants of those Lepchas who had fled to Nepal after an unsuccessful revolt against the King of Sikkim. At that time Nyim still belonged to Bhutan, and Bhutanese officials and soldiers were housed in the fort whose ruins we had seen. The fort was stormed by British troops, in 1865, during the war between Britain and Bhutan. A few years later seven families emigrated from Nyim to Bhutan, where they are thought later to have died out. Those who remained behind in Nyim also went downhill. Nepali settlers moved in and soon managed to gain possession of most of the fields. Our host himself had lost a great deal of his land. He was still called the *mandal*, but in reality he had long ago been forced to surrender this position to a Nepali. We asked him what had happened to the big tumbledown house behind his hut. It belonged to him, said the *mandal*. He had to leave it because the piles rotted and collapsed. It was not the only Lepcha house in Nyim that had fallen into decay of recent years. Of course the hut they were now occupying was only a temporary habitation, until the big house was rebuilt. When was he going to start rebuilding, we asked. The *mandal* made a vague gesture with his hands. Sometime this year—or next year at the latest. But the tired, hopeless look in his eyes told us that the big house would never rise from its ruins.

Next morning a messenger fetched us to the house of Manibu Baji. The Elder of the Lepcha people was one of the most striking personalities I met in the course of my travels through the Himalayan zone: a lean figure with snow-white hair falling to his shoulders and the sharply-cut, aquiline features of an old Red Indian chief. His yellowish face, criss-crossed by a thousand furrows, had been tanned to leather by the wind, rain and snow of a full century. The expression in his eyes, which were somewhat weak with age, was friendly but proud. According to his own statement he was 105 years old, and the stories he told us seemed to confirm this assertion. He was no longer a youth when British troops stormed

the nearby Bhutanese fort. After the fortifications had been dismantled he and other men of the village helped to move two large Bhutanese cannon to Kalimpong, where they stand today in front of the State rest-house. He was very bitter about the fact that he had never been paid the promised reward for the transport of these guns. He had suffered a great deal in the course of his long life. Two of his sisters had been carried off by Bhutanese warriors. He learnt by round-about channels that the two women had been sold as slaves in the market of the Bhutanese capital. He never heard anything more of them.

At one time, so he told us, he had been a wealthy man, and he had hoped to leave his only son a rich inheritance. To preserve the history of his family for posterity he wrote a chronicle, in which he set down the many ancient traditions he had heard from his father and grandfather. But then his son died, and in his grief he burned the book. His daughter married a Nepali. A good, hard-working man certainly, but—a Nepali. So his house, too, would go to the intruders from the west.

I can still see him before me, surrounded by yellowing books and crude Buddhist images, telling us about one of the most curious customs of his people.

‘I was just on thirty when Norkit died. He was a famous *bongthing*, this Norkit. Today people burn the dead. But formerly they were buried, and because Norkit was a *bongthing* he too was buried, just as the custom was among our forefathers. We dressed the dead man in his best clothes and then carried him out of the house. But not through the door. No, we made a big hole in the floor specially for the purpose, for so the custom demanded. The grave was dug outside the village; we lined the walls with stones. We placed the dead man in it, in a squatting position and with his face towards the Himalayas, so that he could see the mountains, for that is where we Lepchas come from. Beside the body we set the offerings: a little basket filled with medicine, a bowl of corn and a silver coin as a gift to the ancestral spirits. We also placed a little ladder in the grave. Then we filled it in, and on the grave-mound we set a tall stone. On our way home we barricaded



the path with thorn bushes. They stop the demons of death, who would otherwise fetch a fresh victim from the village.'

Manibu Baji fell silent. There was no sound but the crackling of the fire in the open hearth. Darkness was gradually gathering outside and the first stars were flickering in the little unglazed windows. The old man reached with trembling hands for his beer mug and drew noisily at the straw. Then he continued :

'In the evening we all gathered in the house of mourning. A *bongthing* had been fetched from a neighbouring village and a *mon* had come too. The *bongthing* killed an ox and offered its flesh to the gods. The right foreleg was detached from the carcase and brought into the house in a basket. The *mon* sat with her face to the mountains and the *bongthing* took a string, one end of which he tied to the *mon's* left hand and the other to the severed leg of the sacrificial animal. The *mon* shut her eyes and shifted restlessly this way and that on her seat. Then she called the dead man's soul. "Ho, ho," she cried, "Come here! Do not hide in fire or in water, in rocks or in trees!" In a singing voice she enumerated the many names of the snowy mountains, the seas, the rivers and the settlements of our people. She sang for many, many hours and so beautifully that we all wept.

'As morning was drawing near the *mon* stopped singing. Her face grew pale, as pale as the face of a dead person. Suddenly she began to speak. But it was not her voice, no, it was the voice of the dead Norkit! His spirit had entered into the body of the *mon* so that he could speak to his family once more. Norkit had died quite suddenly, and no one knew where he had hidden the jewellery inherited from his ancestors. His family had searched all day long, but in vain. Now he told them where the treasure was concealed: he had buried it underneath the house, just beside the centre pillar. One of the sons hurried out—and immediately came back with the jewellery in his hand. Norkit seemed to have been waiting for this. He left the body of the priestess as quickly as he had come. The *mon* recovered her senses. Her task was almost done. Now she had only to accompany the dead man's spirit into the Kingdom of the Dead.'

While Manibu Baji told his tale it had grown late and now it was time to go to sleep. I lay down like the others on the hard planks of the floor, wrapped in a saddle-cloth—for the smell of horse keeps away bugs. But the acrid smoke of the dying fire and the snuffing and shuffling of the animals in the stalls below prevented me from falling asleep. I slipped quietly out of the hut and strolled along to the moss-grown reliquary that stood close by Manibu Baji's house. The sky had clouded over, the bamboos were creaking in the wind, and the rats were scampering and squeaking in the ruins of the *mandal's* pile-dwelling. A great stormcloud hung threateningly over the dark mountains of Bhutan; pallid shafts of lightning illuminated the leaning, tumbledown houses of the dying Lepcha village.

## CHAPTER IX

# Sherpas and Snowmen

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AROUND midday on 29 May 1953, two members of the expedition led by Colonel Hunt reached the summit of Mount Everest. One of the two was the Sherpa Tenzing, a member of the people whose men have become indispensable to any Himalayan expedition, and without whose aid the British assault on Everest would never have succeeded. Who are these Sherpas, whose name crops up again and again in connexion with Himalayas ascents? Information concerning this singular people will be sought in vain in the many books written about the Himalayas. The Sherpas have so far shared the fate of so many other inhabitants of the world's highest mountains. In their hurry to get to the top people have forgotten to pay any attention to the history and ways of life of the peoples who make their home among the Himalayas. Unfortunately, many of these tribes are in the process of giving up their old national culture, while others are even threatened with extinction. Hence to preserve for posterity a picture of the original, unspoilt way of life of the Himalayan peoples—in the form of ethnographic collections, research reports, films and sound recordings—is an urgent task of anthropological investigation in this area. But progress is slow and difficult, for the means available to Himalayan ethnologists are extremely limited.

What little is at present known about the Sherpas may be summarized as follows: The Sherpas are of Tibetan origin; they appear to be descended from a wave of settlers who came over the crest of the Himalayas and developed their own national spirit in the seclusion of the valleys of Northern Nepal. The exact number of Sherpas is not yet known, but it has been estimated at around 50,000. The majority live in Northern Nepal, but there are a good many Sherpa

settlements in Sikkim and particularly in the area round Darjeeling. Tenzing, the co-conqueror of Everest, comes from this district.

The name Sherpa is a Tibetan word and means 'the Easterner'. It is now used by Europeans to designate all porters in Himalayan expeditions, irrespective of whether they are members of the Tamang, Limbu, Gurung or other almost unknown Himalayan tribes. Physical vigour and, above all, tremendous stamina are characteristics which clearly distinguish the Sherpas from their Nepali neighbours and the Tibetans, who live at similar high altitudes.

The Sherpas' language is a Tibetan dialect. It contains many Nepali loan-words, however, for most Sherpas today speak Nepali just as well as their mother tongue. A great many of the Sherpas' customs accord with those of the Tibetans; for instance, the Tibetan practice of polyandry is very widespread among the Sherpas. The Sherpa men also wear Tibetan clothes, though many of them have lately abandoned their picturesque costume in favour of European clothing. The Sherpa women are more conservative; their costume, the most colourful to be seen in the Himalayas, consists of long, close-fitting, armless garments of black or brown material with yellow, purple, bright green or orange silk jackets. In addition to this they wear three of the gaily striped Tibetan aprons, one at the front and one on each side. Their knee-high boots are also covered with gaudy trimmings. Their wrists are adorned with heavy silver bangles. Round their necks they hang amulet caskets of silver, or even gold, set with turquoises, pearls and corals. Their ears are covered by round discs of beaten gold, as big as the palm of the hand. The Sherpa beauty's brown or violet woollen cap is also frequently embellished with broad gold clasps.

Despite their close affinity with the Tibetans, the Sherpas have not maintained any political ties with their former homeland. Today they are citizens of the Kingdom of Nepal. In past centuries, however, their relations with the land of the Dalai Lama were closer, and Tibetan warriors even assisted the Sherpas to fight their Nepali neighbours.

A war of this nature was fought only a few centuries ago in

the mountain valley of Kampa-chen in Eastern Nepal. At the time this was a big Sherpa settlement-area under the jurisdiction of a Nepali prince of the Mangar tribe. The Mangar chief came round the Sherpa villages every year collecting taxes at the point of the sword. One year, when the Nepalis behaved with particular brutality while extorting taxes, the Sherpas banded together and slew their oppressor. The murdered man's widow immediately took over the government and dispatched troops to recover her husband's body. Then she organized a great funeral celebration to which all the Sherpas of the Kampa-chen valley were also invited. The credulous Sherpas came to the feast with their wives and children and drank copiously of the beer set before them by the Mangar princess. They paid for this lack of caution with their lives, for the vengeful princess had mixed a deadly poison with the beer. Some thousand Sherpas are said to have perished through this plot: the spot where they were poisoned is still called the Place of a Thousand Murders.

The few Sherpas who escaped the holocaust turned for help to the governor of the neighbouring Tibetan province, who responded by sending troops to punish the murderous princess. The latter retired into one of her strongholds, where she held out against the Tibetan siege for three months. The Tibetans tried to compel the beleaguered forces to surrender by cutting off their water supply. When the reserves of water were threatening to run out, the princess ordered that all the remaining water should be thrown over the battlements, to deceive the enemy. The Tibetans fell for this ruse, abandoned the siege as hopeless, and set off for home. The princess immediately assembled her troops and went in pursuit of the foe. But she had overestimated her warriors: the Tibetans proved the stronger. The princess was killed in the struggle while fiercely resisting capture. After breaking all opposition the Tibetans plundered the Mangar settlements and divided the spoils with the Sherpas.

The Sherpas' religion is Tibetan Buddhism, and most of them profess the doctrine of the Red Hat sect. The priests of this order are allowed to marry. Hence they live with their families and engage in agriculture or trade. Only at the time

of the great religious festivals do they put on priestly garments and foregather at the nearest shrine. The Sherpas are in no way inferior to their Tibetan cousins in piety: 'mechanical praying' is just as popular with them as with the Tibetans. In the precincts of Sherpa temples there are often long walls bearing stone plaques with prayers cut in them; to walk round these walls brings religious merit. Great prayer-wheels filled with sacred books rotate with a grinding sound inside the temples; in front of the houses white prayer-flags flutter from tall masts.

The Sherpa lamas pay especial reverence to the nearby snowy peaks, for they are the dwellings of innumerable gods and demons who can send good fortune and well-being, or sickness and death. The priests of the Sherpas guard many mysterious traditions from the distant past. They question the gods with oracle-book and dice. They burn the blood-flecked shoulder blade of a sheep in the fire, and predict the future by observing the cracks that form in the bone tissue. The croaking of ravens and the hooting of owls are for them signs that can be interpreted, according to the place and time, as omens of human luck or misfortune.

The memory of ancient customs is awakened when the Sherpa men assemble for their evening gathering in the chapel of the house. Here the family council meets, here they receive guests. I often used to visit a neighbouring Sherpa village during my stay at Git. The Sherpas are a polite people, and therefore I was always given the place of honour beside the domestic altar, which is never missing from any well-to-do Sherpa house. It is a broad coffer decorated with primitive carvings and divided internally into several open compartments, each of which contains the gilded figure of a benignly smiling Buddha or a fat-bellied demon brandishing a spear. A bowl of corn, with an arrow thrust into it vertically, and beakers full of water are set in front of the images as offerings. Faded, tattered photographs frequently hang beside the altar—mementoes of mountaineering expeditions in which some member of the family took part.

I have spent many evenings in Sherpa houses. Darkness falls almost without any transition. Two or three restlessly

flickering lights emerge on the mountainside and approach the house. These are neighbours coming to pay a call. They carry lanterns in their hands, whose light is supposed to scare away evil spirits prowling in the darkness of the night. The door below opens, rough jests and high-pitched laughter ring out, and the late visitors enter. First they turn their faces to the images, fold their hands and whisper a prayer. Perhaps one of them is a red-robed lama; he will prostrate himself in front of the altar and touch the ground with his forehead several times. Only after saluting the gods do the visitors greet those present and sit down ceremoniously on the low cushions. The minor events of the day generally form the first topic of conversation. Later in the night, when sufficient millet beer has been drunk, talk gradually becomes more lively. Beer drinking is an extremely solemn procedure among the Sherpas. First a piece of butter is smeared on the edge of the mug to bring luck; then some of the fluid has to be sucked up the straw and dropped on the ground as an offering to the earth demons. After this the drinker dips a finger in the liquid and flicks a few drops towards each of the four points of the compass, as a gift to the eternally thirsty spirits of hell. Only when he has done this, and murmured a blessing on the host and his house, can the guest at last begin to drink.

I heard many queer stories during the Sherpas' evening chats. They related old legends and new tales of daring climbs with the mountain-mad white sahibs. They spoke particularly often of the mysterious Snowman, the Yeti, as the Sherpas call him. They are all convinced that a sinister, apelike creature roams the snowfields of the Himalayas. It has rarely been seen, and then only from a distance, for it is very shy. In any case the Sherpas avoid meeting it, for the sight of the Snowman is thought to portend misfortune.

Are there really such things as Snowmen? The question is often discussed in the Western Press, for time and again Himalayan expeditions report the discovery of curious tracks in the region of eternal snow. The guessing game was at its height when the British mountaineer Eric Shipton brought back excellent photographs of Snowman's tracks from his trip to Everest in 1952. The most various conjectures were

advanced as to what creature had made the impressions. Some people even believed them to be the footprints of Indian fakirs going across the snowfields to their meditations. In England, on the other hand, the Natural History Museum, London, hurriedly brought a stuffed Himalayan langur—a species of ape found in the higher altitudes of the Himalayas—from the obscurity of its storerooms, and put it on show as the true author of the footprints observed in the snow of Mount Everest. This by no means ended the discussion, however, for other experts did not share the opinion of their colleagues at the Natural History Museum. They pointed out, amongst other things, that the tracks measured and photographed by Shipton were different, and above all far larger, than those of the normal Himalayan langur. In the course of my ethnological studies I was always hearing legends about the Snowman; every now and then I met people who claimed to have met this mysterious denizen of the Himalayas themselves. I had also come across a good many drawings of so-called Snowman's tracks in books on Tibet and the Himalayas written during the last decades. In many cases zoologists were able to identify these footprints as those of the brown Himalayan bear. This bear is called by the Tibetans *midre*, the 'man-bear', to which the words *gang mi*, 'glacier man' are added. As the result of a misunderstanding, the word *midre* was mistranslated by a member of a Himalayan expedition as 'abominable'. The error was never rectified, and so today people still speak, quite wrongly, of the Abominable Snowman. Apart from the bear-tracks, however, other imprints were found, resembling those of a large human foot. These tracks have baffled zoologists, for they manifestly do not belong to any being known to science.

A glance through the reports of earlier expeditions to the Himalayas shows that the legendary Snowmen are not the only unknown creatures alleged to exist in these mountains. There are repeated statements by mountaineers to the effect that they have seen gigantic white eagles soaring above the pinnacles of eight-thousand-foot mountains. There are also supposed to be giant lizards in the Himalayas. This last statement originated from the so-called Apa Tani. The Apa



Tani themselves are a secret only very recently wrested from the Himalayas.

The Apa Tani are a people living in an out-of-the-way valley of the Eastern Himalayas. They have been known by name for a considerable time, but it was only towards the end of the Second World War that the first explorers entered their territory. There they heard a very singular story. The Apa Tani assert that their valley was originally a great lake. When their forefathers set to work draining the valley and clearing the surrounding jungle, they came upon terrifying giant lizards, *buru*, as the Apa Tani call them. The description did not tally with any known species of lizard. According to the natives there were still a few *buru* in another valley, fifty miles north of the last Apa Tani villages. A few years later an expedition was sent to the Eastern Himalayas, with the support of a leading English newspaper, to search for *buru*. The explorers had first to cut a path through impassable jungle, in an exhausting struggle with precipices, thorn thickets, mosquitoes and leeches. But all their efforts were vain, for the *buru* was never found. True, the explorers repeatedly met natives who gave them further reports of giant lizards, but the truth of their stories could never be checked. The *buru* is probably a species of crocodile that also occurs in the Brahmaputra.

Is the Snowman perhaps some as yet unknown animal that has found a last refuge in the fastnesses of the Himalayas? The problem seemed to me worth further investigation. As a sideline to my ethnological studies I began to collect native reports concerning the Snowman. First I questioned my Tibetan acquaintances and was surprised how much they could tell me about this strange denizen of the Himalayas. The Tibetans call the apelike creature, which, in addition to the *midre* bear, leaves its footprints on the snowfields, *mi chempo*, 'big man', *mi bompo*, 'strong man' and also *gang mi*, 'glacier man'—an expression which, as already mentioned, is also employed to designate the brown Himalayan bear. The commonest term, however, is *mi go*, 'wild man'; and I found the Snowman referred to by this name in a yellowed and faded manuscript belonging to a magician of the now

almost extinct pre-Buddhist Bon faith. The book contained a description of a demonic deity who wore the skins of Snowmen as clothes, as well as recipes for the preparation of magic substances requiring, in addition to dog's blood, poisonous roots and bone marrow, the blood of a Snowman. One set of instructions for the preparation of magic remedies expressly stated that only the blood of a Snowman killed with an arrow should be used, whereas another passage recommended that of a *migo* transfixed by a sword.

I heard from Tibetans a great many stories that were undoubtedly pure fables and the product of an excessively fertile imagination. Thus I was told the tale of a hunter who freed a *migo* from a painful thorn, whereupon the grateful beast brought its benefactor a mountain goat it had killed. Another Tibetan assured me that every *migo* carried a large stone about with it as a weapon. Another claimed that Snowmen were very long-lived. For example on the slopes of Migo Ri—the 'Snowman Mountain'—a limping Snowman had been observed from time to time, which, according to local tradition, had been wounded during a hunt three generations ago. As already mentioned, the Snowman is also known to the Lepchas, who worship him under the name of Chu Mung, the 'Glacier Spirit', as the lord of all forest creatures.

In addition to stories of this kind, however, I also heard reports that were worth rather more serious attention. They came from various Tibetan Government officials, men who had received a Western education in India and were therefore far less superstitious than the rest of their countrymen. Nevertheless, several of them swore by all they held sacred that the Snowman really existed and that they themselves had actually seen it. Even Nyima, Minister Kabshopa's agent, averred with absolute conviction that he had three times crossed the path of a Snowman.

The first time he saw a *migo's* tracks he was still a child. He was spending a few winter months in Dungkar Gompa, the principal monastery in the Chumbi Valley. One night he suddenly heard outside the characteristic whistling of a *migo*, which struck terror into the hearts of the inmates of the

lamasery. The following morning they discovered in the snow beyond the monastery walls the footprints of the *migo*, which had long ago disappeared into the forest again. Many years later Nyima was travelling from Sikkim to Tibet, in the company of several other Tibetans, and passed the night on the snow-covered Natu Pass. After darkness had fallen they heard the whistling call of a *migo* not far from the camp. At dawn the travellers discovered its tracks. When Nyima followed the trail the *migo* suddenly emerged from the protection of some rocks: an apelike creature that made off without undue haste, with a rolling gait, and finally vanished behind a spur of the mountain. Nyima met the *migo* for the third time in a mountain forest about seven miles from Yatung in the Chumbi Valley, where he was encamped with other Tibetans. During the night Nyima and his companions heard the sound of an approaching *migo*, whereupon they hurriedly kindled a fire to scare away the unwelcome visitor. Once the *migo*, which wandered round the camp for a time, came within the circle of firelight, and Nyima caught a glimpse of his hairy back.

Nyima also told me the story of a Snowman that was temporarily captured in the vicinity of the Natu Pass. One day the Tibetan caretakers of a dak bungalow close to the pass road noticed a Snowman approach the bungalow and drink water from a trough. They watched the apelike creature cautiously through a chink in the door as it moved about in front of the bungalow. When the *migo* returned next day they resolved to catch it. The two of them thought up a very cunning plan. They filled the trough with Tibetan beer instead of water and then lay in wait armed with ropes and poles. Sure enough, the *migo* came again. It went to the trough as usual and began to drink. At first it was taken aback, but it obviously liked the beer and in a short time it emptied the trough. Immediately afterwards it fell to the ground stupefied. The Tibetans quickly tied the *migo's* arms and legs to a carrying pole. Then they set off with their burden as fast as they could to the nearest town, believing that the European sahibs would give them a rich reward for their strange capture. They did not get far, however, for the Snowman soon

woke from its state of insensibility. With a single effortless wrench it tore its strong bonds apart and vanished with a few long bounds among the rocks of a nearby mountainside.

It is a remarkable fact that the statements of Tibetans, Sherpas and Lepchas concerning the Snowman's appearance largely coincide. According to their description a warrant for the arrest of this most 'wanted' of all the inhabitants of the Himalayas would read as follows: 7 feet to 7 feet 6 inches tall when erect on his hind legs. Powerful body covered with dark brown hair. Long arms. Oval head running to a point at the top, with apelike face. Face and head are only sparsely covered with hair. He fears the light of a fire, and in spite of his great strength is regarded by the less superstitious inhabitants of the Himalayas as a harmless creature that would attack a man only if wounded.

From what native hunters say the term 'snowman' is a misnomer, since firstly it is not human and secondly it does not live in the zone of snow. Its habitat is rather the impenetrable thickets of the highest tracts of Himalayan forest. During the day it sleeps in its lair, which it does not leave until nightfall. Then its approach may be recognized by the cracking of branches and its peculiar whistling call. In the forest the *migo* moves on all fours or by swinging from tree to tree. But in open country it generally walks upright with an unsteady, rolling gait. Why does the creature undertake what must certainly be extremely wearisome expeditions into the inhospitable regions of snow? The natives have what sounds a very credible explanation: they say the Snowman likes a saline moss which it finds on the rocks of the moraine fields. While searching for this moss it leaves its characteristic tracks on the snowfields. When it has satisfied its hunger for salt it returns to the forest.

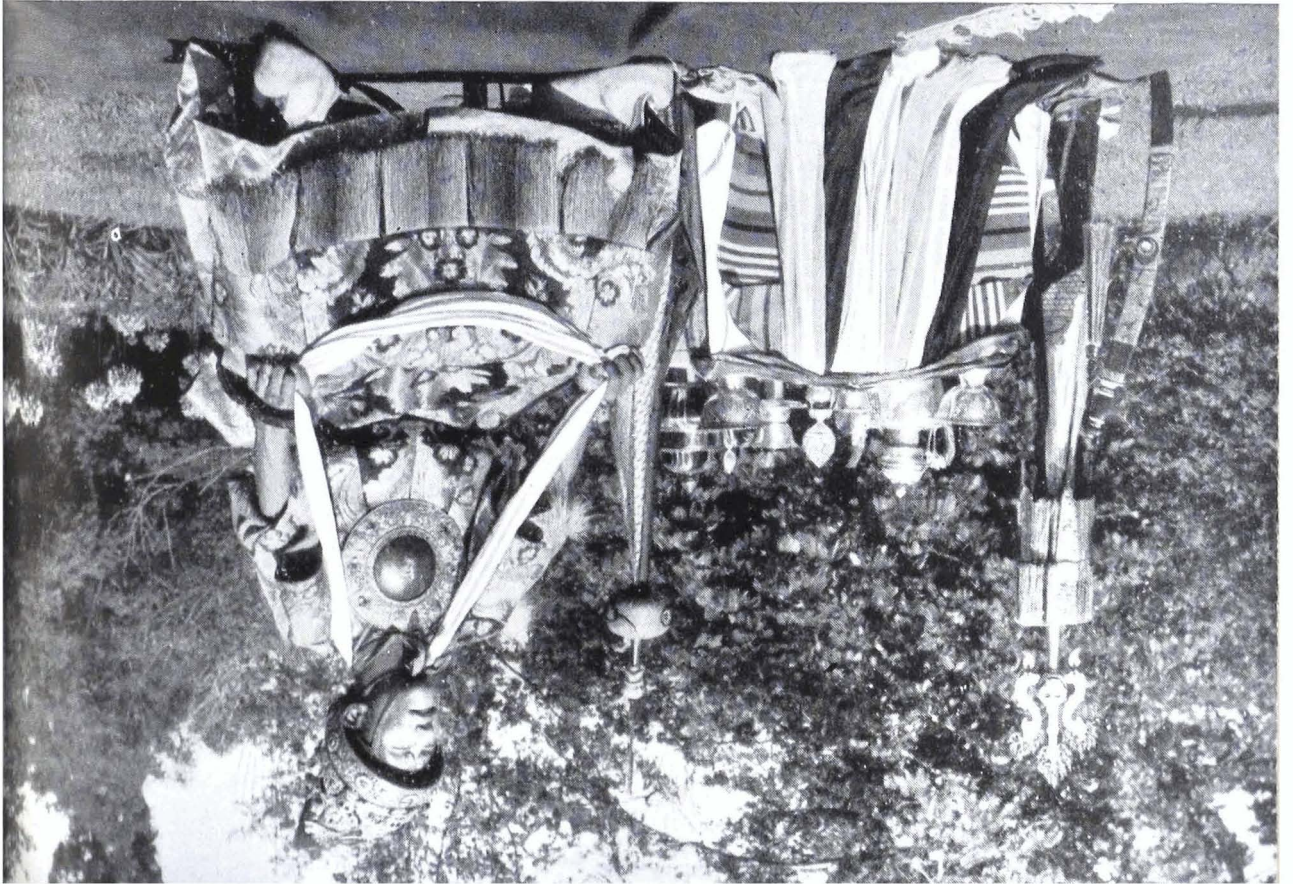
In the summer of 1953 some Indian mountaineers made a curious discovery in a lamasery on the Nepalese-Tibetan frontier. The priests of this monastery preserved in their shrine a large dried scalp alleged to be that of a Snowman. The scalp was sparsely covered with reddish hair and exhibited the oval shape characteristic, according to statements by the natives, of a *migo's* head. The Indian climbers suc-



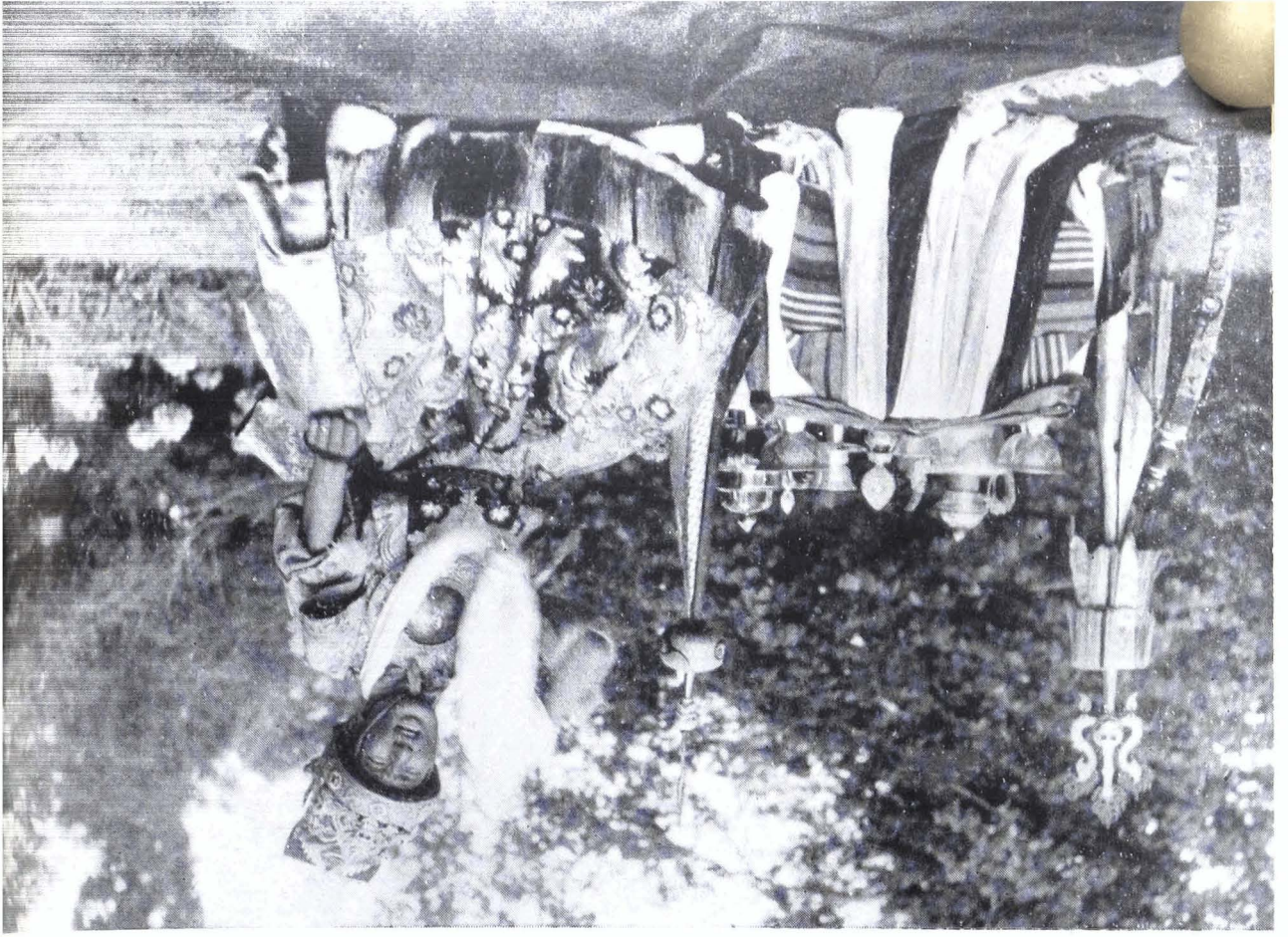


A lama helps the oracle-priest to put on his ritual garments





The beginning of the ceremony : the medium's face starts to change



Shaken with convulsions, the seer flings the *khatag* into the air



ceeded in taking photographs of the scalp and in carrying a bunch of its hairs away with them. As far as I know, subsequent examination of this evidence failed to identify the hair and scalp as those of any known animal.

A year later an expedition set out with the aim of finally solving the riddle of the Snowman. Several British, American and Indian zoologists took part in this enterprise. The mountain landscape of Northern Nepal was combed for weeks on end, but all efforts were fruitless. The Snowman was not caught. Fortunately, I almost feel like saying, for to many of us the Snowman is something more than an unexplained phenomenon : it is one of the last mysteries left in our world, which has become so prosaic.

## Bhutan—The 'Land of Dragons'

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KESANG, 'Good Destiny', the present queen of the Himalayan State of Bhutan is called. Her husband Jigme Wangchuk, the 'Fearless Mighty One', rules one of the most inaccessible territories in the world, a realm that has been visited by only a dozen Europeans in the twelve centuries of its history and has far more right to the title of The Forbidden Kingdom than Tibet, its northern neighbour. I made the acquaintance of the present King and Queen of Bhutan in 1950. Jigme Wangchuk—who at that time was still Crown Prince—I met on an estate in Scotland, where he was spending part of his trip to Europe. I got to know Princess Kesang, the younger daughter of the late Bhutanese Prime Minister Raja Dorje (he died in 1953), the same year in Kalimpong, where I was also a guest at a party on the occasion of her wedding with Jigme Wangchuk. It was an unusual, colourful gathering such as can perhaps only be found in this out-of-the-way corner of Asia. Hundreds of guests—Sikkimese, Tibetans, Bhutanese, Indians and a few Europeans—had assembled one October evening in the palatial residence of the Bhutanese Prime Minister to bid Princess Kesang farewell.

The pretty, dainty Princess was the first Bhutanese girl to leave her homeland, where medieval conditions still prevail, and visit Europe. She spent a considerable time in London, where she was presented at Court, and travelled extensively in Central and Southern Europe. Princess Kesang had acquired many Western ways and liked Western music and dancing. But on the evening of the farewell celebration she became once more a charming Oriental fairy-tale princess as she walked about among the guests, accompanied by her attendants and dressed in a long brocade robe embellished with flashing, exotic jewels.



It was a balmy, star-bright night; the guests were scattered in little groups across the lawn in front of the brilliantly illuminated palace. Suddenly the dull booming of a trumpet mingled with the cheerful hubbub. Louder and louder grew the sound, silencing talk and laughter. An eerie figure emerged from the darkness into the centre of the rapidly widening circle: a Bhutanese in black garments reaching to his knees. His face was covered by a sombre devil's mask. In his left hand he carried a big lama drum, which he beat with a hooked stick held in his right. He was joined by other black-clad masked figures, until a dozen of them had formed a circle on the lawn. The Bhutanese devil-dancers began to move to the rhythm of the drumbeat. At first they went slowly and hesitatingly, striking the drums with their sticks in time to the measured step of the dance. Suddenly the drumtaps ceased and the dancers stood petrified—but the next moment they sped forwards, as though released from a spell. They wheeled across the open space with great leaps, rotating on their axis, and at every gyration they beat their drums with all their force. Faster and faster went the mystic round; then the tempo slowed down again, and the host of dancers hopped back into their circle, only to whirl round the lawn once more with renewed vigour to the rumbling of the drums. Then the drums rose to a shattering crescendo, and after a final deafening crash, like a clap of thunder, the dancers left the circle one after the other with long bounds and vanished again into the darkness. My neighbour, the Crown Prince of Sikkim, explained the significance of this fascinating display to me in a whisper. It was an ancient religious dance, allegedly created by the great exorcizer of demons Padma Sambhava, performed by the soldiers of the Bhutanese fort of Pharo Dzong in honour of Princess Good Destiny.

Those who know Bhutan's internal situation take the Queen's name to be a good omen for the future of this isolated country. They hope that the royal couple, with their European education, will be prepared to carry out a series of urgently needed reforms; for only in this way will Bhutan be able to preserve its autonomy amidst the new currents raging round its borders.

The Bhutanese call their country *Drugyu*, the 'Land of Dragons'. The name Bhutan, under which this kingdom figures in the atlas, is derived from its Indian title. It is about 200 miles long and 100 miles across at its widest part. The Land of Dragons is cut off from the Land of Snow, its northern neighbour, by the Himalayan chain, and the many ranges that branch off from the Himalayas in a southerly direction divide Bhutan into a series of broad valleys. The overwhelming majority of the population of Bhutan, which is estimated at about 300,000 all told, is concentrated in the three largest of these valleys, which are called after Bhutan's major towns Ha, Pharo and Punakha. Besides the Bhutanese proper, who are of Tibetan origin, the Land of Dragons is inhabited by a few aboriginal tribes, who have never yet been studied, and large numbers of immigrants from Nepal. The winter capital of Bhutan is Punakha. Electric light, drainage and similar Western innovations are still unknown in far-away Punakha. The capital's only modern installation is a small radio transmitter, which maintains contact with the Bhutanese palace in Kalimpong. In summer, when the heat of the monsoon extends to Punakha, the King and the Government transfer their seat to Tashi Cho-dzong, the 'Fort of Happy Religion'.

Little information is available concerning the mode of life of the Bhutanese and the history of their country. What there is consists mainly of reports by British Government officials who visited Bhutan in the course of their duties. Native sources are few, because the ancient chronicles and their printing-blocks have been destroyed by earthquakes, fires and—above all—frequent wars.

Bhutan is said originally to have been a Hindu maharajadom, which was conquered by Tibetan troops in the ninth century A.D. The Tibetans drove out the Indian rulers, as well as most of their subjects, and pulled down the Hindu buildings. According to the chronicles, which are confirmed by the reports of visitors to Bhutan, the ruins of these thousand-year-old structures still rise above the soil at certain points. Not far from the Bhutanese capital, Punakha, for example, the natives point out the foundations of a building

which they call Chagkhar Gome, the 'Doorless Iron Castle'. It is said to have been the residence of the Indian ruler Naguchi, who took a hundred of India's most beautiful women to be his wives.

The Tibetan soldiers liked Bhutan so much that they refused to go back to Tibet. These deserters were called *Milog*, 'Those who did not Return'. Later their number was augmented by the arrival of more Tibetans. Here too, as in Sikkim, the lamas found fruitful soil for missionary work. After years of conflict between the various sects, the so-called Dugpa sect—a branch of the Kagyupa order, to which reference has already been made—finally emerged victorious and established itself as the Bhutanese State Church. A series of important monasteries went up on the soil of Bhutan, the best known of which is Tagtsang Gompa, the 'Tiger's Den Monastery'. It stands in the west of the Land of Dragons on top of a crag several hundred yards high.

The liturgical language of the Bhutanese lamas is Tibetan. They worship the same divinities as the priests of the Land of Snow, apart from certain local tutelary deities such as Jagpa Melen, 'Robber Fire-Fetcher', a red demon with flaming hair. The head of the Dugpa sect was formerly a dignitary bearing the Indian title Dharma Raja, 'King of Religion'. Like the Dalai Lamas the Dharma Rajas were subject to the law of reincarnation. When a Dharma Raja died his reincarnation was sought among Bhutan's newborn males. From the beginning of the sixteenth century onwards Bhutanese affairs of State were directed by the current Dharma Raja in conjunction with the so-called Deb Raja, the lay king. Understanding between the two was frequently far from perfect, however; their disputes furnish the chronicles of Bhutan—which bear accounts of bloody struggles for power among the nobility on almost every page—with an additional grim chapter. The double reign came to an end in 1907, when, for the first time in Bhutanese history, no reincarnation of the recently deceased Dharma Raja was found. The Deb Raja was thereupon elected sole ruler by the assembly of provincial governors, and the hereditary monarchy vested in his male descendants.

The first Europeans to make contact with Bhutan were Portuguese. An old chronicle relates that a host of foreigners from the land of 'Porduka' came to Bhutan during the reign of the second Dharma Raja. They presented the Dharma Raja with 'an appliance by means of which distant objects could be clearly seen', as well as several muzzle-loaders, cannon and gunpowder. Cannon were still unknown weapons at that time in the Land of Dragons, and their noise alone was sufficient to rout the King of Religion's many enemies.

The next meeting with Europeans was far less advantageous to the Bhutanese. In 1772 a Bhutanese army attacked the maharajadom of Cooch Behar, a British protectorate. The Bhutanese were thrown back by the British troops that hurried to the Maharaja's assistance. Two years later a peace treaty was signed between Bhutan and Britain through the mediation of the Panchen Lama. But there was no end to the disputes between the two countries, in the course of which Britain annexed a good deal of Bhutanese territory. The maltreatment of a British diplomat led in 1865 to the outbreak of open warfare, which ended, after initial setbacks to the British, in the total defeat of the Bhutanese. Anglo-Bhutanese relations gradually improved during the ensuing decades, and in 1904 Bhutan received British support in her war with Tibet. In 1910 an agreement was signed between Britain and the Land of Dragons regulating future relations between them. Henceforth Britain assumed responsibility for Bhutan's foreign affairs, and so drew her out of the Chinese sphere of influence.

After the British withdrawal in 1949, a pact was signed between the Governments of Delhi and Punakha making the Republic of India Bhutan's protecting power. India undertook to represent Bhutan abroad, as Britain had previously done, but not to interfere in Bhutan's internal affairs. The kingdom also retained its own army and currency. In addition, the New Delhi Government declared its willingness to contribute the sum of half a million rupees annually to Bhutanese finances; and as a further gesture of friendship India returned to the Bhutanese part of the territory annexed by the British. Bhutan's partial sovereignty has also been

recognized by some Western governments. Thus American immigration laws permit the entry of four hundred Bhutanese annually into the United States—an extraordinarily high figure in view of the fact that the immigration quota for the whole of India is exactly the same. Up to the present, however, not one Bhutanese has made use of this right. . . .

Two important events have occurred in Bhutan during the last few years—though the world was too busy with other problems to notice them. Early in 1952 the second absolute monarch of Bhutan died after reigning for almost thirty years; and power passed to his young successor, Jigme Wangchuk. In obedience to custom, the body of the old King was mummified in a large receptacle filled with salt and interred three months later on a day calculated to be auspicious by the Court astrologers. The new King's accession to the throne was solemnized on October 28 of the same year. The change of ruler took place at a moment when the political situation in Central Asia was undergoing a radical metamorphosis as a result of Tibet's surrender to Communist China. Great adroitness will be required to steer Bhutan through the crises that already loom ahead. There have been a good many clashes on the Tibeto-Bhutanese border, because the Bhutanese—reversing established custom—refused to allow the Tibetan nomads' herds to graze on their side of the frontier. The export of paper and rice to the Land of Snow has been stopped. Bhutan was Tibet's chief source of rice, so the country's new masters found themselves faced with serious supply problems. Bhutan has also had certain internal difficulties to contend with. A group of Bhutanese, dissatisfied with conditions in their own country, emigrated to the adjacent Indian province of Assam and founded the Bhutanese Congress Party, modelled on the Indian Congress Party, with the aim of introducing a series of radical reforms.

It is to be hoped that the young royal couple will succeed in bringing Bhutan's internal situation into line with the more progressive conditions obtaining in the States on its borders and so reducing the danger of revolutionary upheavals. It will not be easy to carry out such reforms, for in medieval, feudal Bhutan the word of the superstitious lamas

still carries tremendous weight. The quarrelsome nobility, who maintain mercenary troops armed with swords, bucklers and muzzle-loaders in their strongholds, may also be relied upon to oppose every attempt to curtail their power. Fear of penetration by alien influences, which might have put an end to the old traditional ways, led the Bhutanese to hermetically seal their frontiers against Europeans for centuries. Bhutanese law made it compulsory, under penalty of severe punishment, to apprehend and deliver to the authorities any foreigner found inside the country. Perhaps the tide of future reforms may finally open the frontiers of the Land of Dragons, making this country—which is still geographically, ethnologically, and in many other respects, terra incognita—accessible to exploration and research.

## The Festival of Kali the Terrible

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WHEN the autumn wind blows across the reaped fields and the mountain peaks let fall the last grey veils of the monsoon, the warlike Gurkhas celebrate the festival of the goddess Kali. Day after day, with no European Sabbath rest, the Gurkhas have worked in the fields, in the scorching heat of the spring and the torrential downpours of the rainy season. Only now that the harvest has been brought in do they find time for a brief rest and celebration. The men dress in spotless white; the women exchange their filthy everyday clothes, reeking of sweat and the smoke of their huts, for flowing garments in glaring colours. Neighbour visits neighbour, and at night the valleys ring with the joyfully excited throb of drums. Swarms of children wander from hut to hut singing a blessing, in the hope of a copper coin or a piece of cake—like European carol-singers. The soloist runs through the song, and after every verse the chorus breaks in with a shout. ‘Dochire!’ they yell, ‘put it on your forehead!’ This evidently refers to the rice which everyone, young and old, sticks to his forehead in a broad band on the highest feast day of the sacrifice to Kali as a good-luck symbol. The rice must be allowed to fall off by itself, hence Nepalis may be seen days after the festival with odd grains of rice adhering to their foreheads. But all this is only accessory to the great, bloody sacrifice that the Hindu priests of the Gurkhas make at this season in honour of Kali the Terrible, wife of Shiva the Destroyer. Two weeks before the feast-day they begin singing the hymns in praise of the bloodthirsty goddess. These sacred verses may only be sung at this period.

I watched the sacrifice to Kali on the Jalapahar, the ‘Burnt Hill’, near Darjeeling in the autumn of 1951. A reserve unit of the Gurkha regiments fighting for the British in Malaya

was stationed here at the time. The goddess Kali is looked upon as a particularly efficacious patroness of warriors; weapons and banners are sprinkled with the blood of the animals sacrificed to her so that, with divine aid, their bearers may emerge victorious from every combat. For this reason the festival of Kali held on the Jalapahar was celebrated with especial solemnity by the soldiers. A sacrificial stake had been rammed into the ground on a flat space between the huts and a wide circle drawn round it with white chalk. The multitude of spectators—most of them Gurkha soldiers and their families—anxiously avoided stepping inside the circle, for it was consecrated ground intended for the sacrifice. A few chairs for invited guests had been placed on one side of the quadrilateral formed by the onlookers. Here sat a white-haired British colonel, the commander of the Gurkha regiment, surrounded by several officers. Behind the rows of spectators the soldiers' rifles and bayonets stood in wooden racks.

Festivities began around 10 a.m. A white-clad Nepali priest entered the open space accompanied by the slaughterer and his three assistants. The slaughterer wore white trousers and a loose orange shirt. An officer sitting next to me explained that the slaughterer was a soldier, chosen for this coveted duty—regarded by the Gurkhas as one of great responsibility—from a mass of applicants. He had been preparing for his task for weeks. The five men removed their shoes before entering the sacrificial circle, in order not to profane the soil previously hallowed by the priests.

The *bijua*, as the Nepali priests are called, began to read a long prayer from a book. From time to time he paused to coax long-drawn, plaintive notes from a conch trumpet. Now the priest fell silent, and the slaughterer took up a great curved knife, the famous Gurkha *kukri*. The ranks of the spectators opened, and the assistants drove on a flock of ducks excitedly quacking. The slaughterer seized the nearest bird; his *kukri* flashed; and the first duck's head fell to the ground. The sacrifice of the rest was over in no time. The slaughterer, quite unmoved, laid aside the blood-bespattered *kukri*. His assistants dragged up a low chopping-block and set it beside the sacrificial stake. The priest reopened his book, and when



the litany was finished he blew his conch again. Now goats were brought in, ten or twelve beasts. They were all spotless black, for black is the goddess's favourite colour. The goats smelt the blood and tugged at their ropes in terror. Their struggles were useless—the goddess demanded their lives. First it was the turn of the smaller animals. One head after the other rolled to the ground, and the pool of blood around the chopping-block grew continually bigger. The twitching black bodies were dragged away and the heads placed in a row in front of the Gurkhas' weapons.

The sun blazed down from a cloudless sky, the heat haze over the sacrificial circle distorted the figures of the priests and his assistants. The heat, the smell of blood and the ghastly spectacle tore at one's nerves. A drunken soldier broke from the ranks of the onlookers and approached the Colonel with unsteady gait. He clicked his heels, saluted smartly and said something in Nepali. The Colonel did not turn a hair. At a sign from him two powerful-looking sergeants hastened forward, seized the soldier by the arms and vanished with him into one of the huts.

'What did he want?' I inquired of the officer at my side. He gave a short laugh. 'Crazy fellow! He asked the Colonel for permission to have his head chopped off in honour of the goddess. Instead of that he'll spend the rest of the festival in the glasshouse. You never know with a fanatic like that: he might end up by throwing himself under the slaughterer's *kukri*.'

Now a cloud of dust rose into the air, and the nearest spectators drew back in fright. The assistants were dragging along a young black buffalo. The beast suspected what was in store for it. It tossed its head this way and that, snuffing the air, and its hooves hammered the sunbaked earth. The men had their work cut out to drag it to the block.

The climax of the ceremony had arrived. The audience stood motionless, even the noise of the children was hushed. A paralysing stillness lay on the open space, broken only by cries and the monotonous notes of a conch from lower down the valley, where other Gurkhas were paying homage to Kali in the same fashion. The priest took hold of a gigantic

*kukri* held in readiness by one of the assistants. He muttered a prayer and handed the weapon to the slaughterer. This was no ordinary *kukri* but a curved sacrificial sword. The rays of the sun were refracted on its gleaming blade, which was painted with magic signs in red. Now the slaughterer tested the sharpness of the cutting edge. He took a pumpkin in his left hand and moved the sacrificial sword gently up and down with his right. The blade was evidently as sharp as a razor, for the pumpkin seemed to fall into thin slices of its own accord. Satisfied by the test, the slaughterer threw the rest of the fruit aside and grasped the handle of the sword in both hands.

His assistants forced the buffalo to its knees. They threw a black cloth over its head and pushed the block under its throat. The slaughterer raised the sword—but no, the moment had not yet come. He brought the weapon down slowly until it touched the hair on the beast's neck. Holding the sword in his right hand, he felt for the buffalo's cervical vertebrae. The important thing was to decapitate the animal with a single blow. A difficult and responsible task, for upon his skill depended whether the sacrifice would go off auspiciously or not. If the blow succeeded it was a good omen, and the slaughterer could expect a rich reward. But if the head did not fall at the first stroke only swift flight would save him from the wrath of the mob.

Now he raised the sacrificial sword high above his head again with both hands and took aim at the buffalo's neck, while the audience waited in breathless silence. The blade flashed and a yell rose from the crowd: the animal's neatly severed head flew through the air in a wide arc and thudded to the ground a few feet away from me. The eyes dimmed, the tongue dangled slackly from the open mouth. The body swayed and fell heavily to the ground. The blood spurted from the severed arteries in powerful jets, deluging the slaughterer, the priest and the onlookers, who jumped back. The assistants took the carcass by the hooves and dragged it round the sacrificial stake to the accompaniment of loud shouts of jubilation. It left a broad, dark-red trail behind it in the dust.

## THE FESTIVAL OF KALI THE TERRIBLE

The severed head was likewise placed in front of the weapons. One of the assistants hastened to the priest and handed him a pair of snow-white doves. Would the holocaust never end? But no, the *bijua* only said a brief prayer and then threw the doves up into the air. They flew off as fast as they could, agitatedly beating their wings.

The sacrifice had been successfully concluded; the great goddess must be content. The audience crowded round the slaughterer, who accepted their congratulations with gay laughter. An orderly brought him to the Colonel, who bound a white turban on the proud Gurkha's head, as a token of esteem, and handed him an envelope containing several bank-notes—a reward for the successful performance of the sacrifice. While the adults left the open space to spend the rest of the feast-day eating rich food and drinking large quantities of beer, a swarm of little Nepali boys took possession of the rifles standing in the rack and carried them back to the armoury. Today, the festival of bloodthirsty Kali, it was the duty of every young Gurkha to take a gun in his hand, at least for a little while. They must get used to carrying weapons early in life, so as to become brave soldiers like their fathers.

## Pilgrims from the Land of the Gods

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THE desire to ensure a better reincarnation in their next life brings thousands of Tibetans to Kalimpong every year. Elegant aristocrats, sheepskin-clad nomads from the banks of the Kuku Nor, traders from Lhasa, mendicant monks from Shigatse, wandering minstrels and dancers from East Tibet—they all make a brief or prolonged halt here to recover from the rigours of the wearisome journey over the Himalayas, before starting the pilgrimage to the holy places of Indian Buddhism. The mendicant monks and strolling players endeavour to replenish their purses during their stay in the border town. The priests go from house to house singing pious hymns of benediction. As they go along they swing their ritual bells and beat their drums shaped like hour-glasses and decorated with long silk ribbons. Their competitors, the itinerant minstrels and dancers, come from the East Tibetan province of Kham. Often whole families earn the expenses for a pilgrimage to India in this manner. Three or four of them provide the accompaniment with drums, cymbals and song, while the rest of the troupe dance. They whirl across the streets and courtyards of the Tibetan quarter in the leaping steps of the Peacock Dance or the Dance of the Little Flower, their faces covered by masks plastered with shells, and with long, knotted cords attached to their belts that stand out like a wheel as they spin round.

The stream of pilgrims is at the flood in winter, when the oppressive tropical heat of the Indian plains makes way for more bearable weather. Even the descent from the stormy, 13,000-foot-high Tibetan plateau into the warmth of the Indian plains represents an immense physical strain for the Tibetans, and many of them bring back from this journey the seeds of a mortal illness. The layers of dirt, which in cold

Tibet constitute an effective shield against the icy wind, change in the humid heat into dangerous colonies of bacteria; the dried meat they carry with them becomes a poisonous breeding ground for maggots; and the infected water of Indian village tanks does the rest. But the desire of the pious inhabitants of the Land of Snow to pray at the places where Buddha Shakyamuni once lived, preached and died enables them to bear every trial with fortitude and even takes the sting from the prospect of an early end. For a visit to the holy places of Buddhism brings the pilgrim great religious merit, and the merciful divinities will therefore vouchsafe him a better reincarnation after the extinction of his present existence.

There are a whole series of Buddhist cult places in India and Nepal visited by Tibetan pilgrims. The most important of them is Bodh Gaya, the place where Buddha received enlightenment under the sacred fig tree. A few years ago the Tibetan Government had a small monastery built there, in which, at certain times of year, a dozen lamas perform rites according to the precepts of the Greater Vehicle for the benefit of the pilgrims.

From Bodh Gaya the pilgrims go on to Sarnath, a place only a few miles from Benares, the holy city of the Hindus. This was the site of the famous Gazelle Park, where Buddha delivered his first sermon. The Indian Emperor Ashoka, a great patron of Buddhism, had two lofty, towerlike memorial shrines erected here: one where Buddha met his disciples, the other where he preached his first sermon. In the latter shrine part of the ashes of the founder of the Yellow Doctrine was later interred, together with a treasure of choice jewels. A group of temples and monasteries, in which some nine thousand monks pursued a pious existence, sprang up around these buildings. In the twelfth century this flourishing centre of the Buddhist religion was sacked by the Mohammedans. The two shrines were partially destroyed, the treasure plundered and the ashes of Buddha thrown into the Ganges. Nearly three thousand monks fell under the swords of the fanatic followers of the Prophet; the monasteries were reduced to ashes. The seven centuries that have elapsed since

then have spread a thick layer of soil over the extensive field of ruins. Archaeologists are today laboriously recovering from the earth images of Buddha marked by the iconoclastic frenzy of the Mohammedans and bowls containing remnants of food—tragic reminders of the sudden fall of Sarnath.

The Tibetans wander reverently among the ruins and circumambulate the reliquaries according to the same ritual they practise in the Land of Snow. The museum in which the objects so far excavated are displayed is for them a temple. They crowd in front of the glass case containing a nobly modelled head of Buddha and silently recite their orisons. Next to it an old nomad woman, filled with reverent awe, may be touching with her forehead the feet of a many-armed idol dating from the last, and rather degenerate, epoch of Sarnath.

When evening falls and the high-wheeled carts of the Indian peasants wend their way homewards, the pilgrims light their fires on the edge of the field of ruins and prepare a modest meal. They squat round the embers and tell one another of their strange experiences on the way. For many Tibetans this journey is undoubtedly the greatest event in their lives. After leaving their medieval world, they make their first amazed acquaintance with motor-cars, railways and many other things that have long ago become commonplace to us.

The booming strokes of a big gong roll across the field of ruins. The pilgrims rise and make their way to the newly built Buddhist temple. There those few monks who today once more live in Sarnath have gathered for their evening service. In yellow robes, their hands and feet in the posture of meditation, they sit on the stone floor. They bow their shaven heads and intone the monotonous litanies. A hundred lights flicker before the life-size statue of Buddha, the altar's only decoration. The chant dies away, the monks relapse into meditation. A quarter of an hour later they rise, each of them takes an altar light, and they move out into the night in long, silent columns. Slowly, shielding the flickering flame with their hands, they approach the great shrine that once held the ashes of Buddha. They make a deep obeisance, their hands sink down, and the night wind blows out the lights.



The climax has been reached. The demon has taken possession of the soothsayer. His face, shrouded by incense, resembles the terrifying countenance of the divinity who animates him





The end of the ceremony.  
Helpers support the fainting  
soothsayer



The Mighty Thunderbolt rides  
on a fire-breathing dragon



From Sarnath the route of the majority of pilgrims leads northwards again. They visit Khatmandu, the Nepalese capital, and the nearby reliquaries of Swayambunath and Bodhnath. Their towers are painted with mysterious eyes that look far out over the plain of Central Nepal. But there are a few other Buddhist cult places, besides these most important centres of pilgrimage, which are visited by many Tibetans—such as Lumbini, the birthplace of the Great Enlightened One, or Kushingara, where Buddha departed from the world. Many pilgrims wander as far as distant Kashmir, which was once a stronghold of Buddhism.

There are also pilgrims of another, rarer type who likewise break their journey at Kalimpong. For the most part they are well-dressed, dignified-looking men with sparse beards, and the goal of their pilgrimage is not the holy places of Indian Buddhism, but—Mecca. In the midst of the Land of the Dalai Lama there is a strong community of Moslems, and many of its members do not shrink from the long exhausting journey to Mecca that will earn them the proud title of Haji. The Mohammedans of Tibet—apart from a few Chinese Hui-Hui—originate from Ladakh and India. But they have a high proportion of Tibetan blood, for marriages with Tibetan women converted to Islam are very frequent. Some of Tibet's most well-to-do merchants are Mohammedans, and even great lamaseries have no hesitation in allowing themselves to be represented by these men in business matters. More than three hundred Muslim families live in the Tibetan capital; about a hundred and fifty in Shigatse; and around a dozen in the important market town of Tsethang, south of Lhasa. All three places possess mosques in which the Koran is read in Arabic. In dress Tibetan Mohammedans are scarcely distinguishable from the Buddhists. The women go unveiled, and the men wear the garments usual among upper class Tibetans, apart from the addition of a fez-like cap.

Formerly the inhabitants of the Land of Snow could visit India whenever they liked, but since 1951—because of the changed political situation—they have had to obtain an entry visa from the Indian frontier police at Kalimpong.

Indian security officers ask detailed questions concerning the goal and purpose of their journey, to prevent infiltration by undesirable elements. Then the visitors are registered and given the necessary papers, which they have to return on recrossing the frontier. The Indian border police have a lot to put up with from the Tibetans. It can happen, for example, that a certain Passang Yeshe, 'Friday's Wisdom', enters India and receives papers under this name. While staying in Kalimpong, however, he discovers that his life is being threatened by a demon; whereupon he hastens to have the 'body change—name change' ceremony carried out by a lama. According to custom he assumes a new name. When this man recrosses the frontier the Indian officials are mystified by the fact that Passang Yeshe is suddenly called Tsewang Norbu, 'Life-Force Precious Stone'.

In the course of the studies I pursued in conjunction with Prince Peter I had a great deal to do with names of this kind. With the support of the Indian frontier police Prince Peter took anthropological measurements of more than five thousand Tibetans entering India, in connexion with which every traveller was asked for his name, domicile, profession and so on. My job was to work out the statistical implications of this information and, in particular, the Tibetan spelling of the local and personal names. As we discovered, very few Tibetans possess true family names. For the most part they bear luck-bringing designations taken from Buddhist terminology, such as Tsering, 'Long Life', Tashi, 'Luck', and Dorje, 'Thunderbolt', which are often combined with the name of their birthday. Hence hundreds of those crossing the frontier were called, as in Robinson Crusoe, 'Thursday' or 'Friday'. Lhamo, 'Goddess', Dolma, 'Redemptress', Yudronma, 'Turquoise Lamp', or simply Chungma, 'Little One', are popular women's names. Naturally, these names are frequently in striking contrast to the real appearance or character of their bearers. Thus a miserable, sickly beggar may answer to the fine name Tashi Norbu, 'Lucky Gem', or a weakminded muleteer proudly call himself Tsering Yeshe, 'Long-Lived Wisdom'. A robber whose right ear had been cut off by Tibetan justice on account of his misdeeds was

called Gewe Gyepo, 'King of Virtue', while a lady of the town bore the name Tsutrim Lhamo, 'Goddess of Morality'. Even the prosaic figures of statistics contain odd pieces of information. Thus it emerged that only beggars came to Kalimpong from the town of Lho-dzong, 'Southern Fort', while amongst the visitors from the province of Amdo, several months' journey away, were two Christians—a nomad and his wife. They wanted to pay a visit to their converter, a Swedish missionary now living in Kalimpong.

By the same method we learned interesting facts about Tibetan marital relationships. The overwhelming majority of Tibetans live in monogamous marriages. Polygamy is far rarer and to be met with chiefly in noble circles. Besides polygamy there is also polyandry, in which a number of men share one or more wives in common. The main cause of polyandry is probably Tibet's peculiar economic situation. The land is poor, and so people form economic units that have a better chance of survival than small, independent families. Families own only a little land, and if this were divided among the male heirs the resulting parcels would be so small that they would not support a family. This problem is solved by the simple procedure of the sons of a family marrying a joint wife. If economic circumstances permit, one or other of the brothers marries another woman later. Custom and sometimes a marriage contract then determine whether she shall be his wife exclusively or held in common with another brother. Marital relationships are generally simplified by the fact that not all the men are home at the same time. Occasionally only one husband may be in the house, while his brothers are away travelling as muleteers or merchants. Jealousy between husbands does seem to occur from time to time, but it is sooner or later suppressed by recognition of the fact that economic circumstances do not permit the family to split up. The question of which of the joint husbands is actually the father of the children in a group marriage does not appear to worry the Tibetans. The eldest brother assumes the position of father of the family, though he is sometimes ousted by a more energetic brother.

In addition to this, the commonest form of polyandry, two

other types are to be met in Tibet. A form of marriage that occurs in the provinces of Central Tibet is the *chamadung*, the 'cross-beam marriage', as the Tibetans call it. During my stay in Kalimpong I made the acquaintance of a young nobleman from Shigatse, who was intending to visit the Buddhist places of pilgrimage in India accompanied by a lady fully twenty years his senior. I assumed at first that the lady was his mother, then I heard to my astonishment that she was his wife—and that his father was also married to the same woman! Of course, this was not the young man's mother, but only a secondary wife to his father. In spite of the difference in age the marriage was considered to be very happy.

Another form of polyandry arises when a woman who has become the main heir of the family possessions takes several unrelated men as her husbands. Despite the number of her husbands the woman, in such cases, is perfectly capable of maintaining her position as head of the family. Marriages of this type may also be happy, as the following example shows. A Tibetan woman living in Kalimpong had married two men, one of whom came from Central Tibet and the other from Kham. As my Tibetan acquaintances told me, the three got on very well together. As a rule one of the husbands lived in Kalimpong with the common wife, while the other was away in Tibet on business. For a long time all went well, but one day the Indian authorities forbade any Tibetan from the Chinese part of Kham to enter India. One of the two husbands of our polyandrous Tibetan woman fell under this regulation at a time when he had the bad luck to be in Tibet on a business trip. When he returned to the border, he was forbidden by the frontier guards to cross into India. The plea that his wife lived in Kalimpong fell on deaf ears. No sooner had the other partner in this odd marital community heard of his co-husband's misfortune than he, too, appealed to the police to allow the wanderer to return. The officials were highly amused by his request, and told him he should be glad to be rid of the other husband and to have his wife to himself. This made no impression on their excited visitor, however. He assured them that they all lived together happily and

that their tripartite wedded bliss was now in serious danger. In the end the husband stranded in Tibet was able to make his way to Kalimpong by an indirect route.

Contrary to many Asian countries, women occupy an exalted position in the life of Tibet. Besides conducting the household and rearing the children, many middle-class Tibetan women engage in trade; while aristocratic Tibetan women participate unrestrictedly in the life of their social class. A difference in status between the sexes is visible only in the religious sphere. The lamas speak of the inferiority of the female existence, and their books often refer to woman as *Kyemen*, the 'Lowly Born One'. But if a woman is dissatisfied with her lot she can console herself with the hope of attaining—by the conscientious fulfilment of her religious duties—a happier reincarnation as a man.

## The Last of the Bards

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ONE cool November day I was riding along the road that leaves Kalimpong in the direction of Tibet. Long columns of heavily laden mules passed me, their bells jingling. From time to time I met a troop of Tibetans panting under their burdens: traders, pilgrims, beggars—a sight with which I had long since grown familiar. But then I saw a figure who looked quite different from the other passing Tibetans. He was an old man dressed in a worn fur coat and wearing an extremely odd headgear—a leather hat shaped like a bishop's mitre and decorated in front with symbols of the sun and moon, and little ornaments representing a saddle, a bow and arrow, a shield and a spear. This headgear was a professional badge: the man was one of Tibet's wandering minstrels, who make their way from village to village, from one nomad encampment to another, singing the old traditional epos of the heroic deeds of the legendary King Kesar.

A few weeks later I made the acquaintance of another Tibetan bard. This was a middle-aged man calling himself Champa Sangda, 'Coming-Buddha Master of Mysteries'. Champa Sangda had once been court minstrel to the Regent Reting Rimpoche. The young Regent was very fond of music, and every evening Champa Sangda—who is still reckoned one of the best minstrels in Tibet—had to sing him a few verses of the Kesar epos. When Reting Rimpoche met a violent end the bard fled to Kalimpong in fear of his life. My new acquaintance proved very talkative and never tired of telling me about his deceased master. When old memories awoke in him during our conversations, he often interrupted his narrative to sing me some passage of the epos that had been a particular favourite of the Regent.

This ancient saga seems to have originated in the district of

North-Eastern Tibet inhabited by nomads. From here knowledge of the epos spread not only to the other provinces of the Land of Snow, but also to some of the neighbouring peoples. Today the ballads of the deeds of King Kesar are as well known in the tents of the Mongols as in the Lepchas' bamboo huts. The inhabitants of Western China also sing the Kesar epos in their own language.

The endless stanzas of this saga, which takes several days to recite in full, hold an echo of the time when Tibet was still one of the great realms of Asia. Today it is almost impossible to believe that, in the ninth century A.D., Tibetan armies conquered a large part of China in order to put an emperor acceptable to them on the throne, or that East Turkestan and Nepal were once Tibetan provinces. Tibet has almost forgotten all this: only the old sung legends keep alive the memory of the Snow Land's golden age.

According to custom the singing of the epos begins with a narration of Kesar's birth. His father was the sky-god Dyadshin, his mother an earthly woman named Ginsa Lhamo, who bore the future hero-king of the land of Ling while wandering over the mountains of Tibet. For this reason Kesar was later known, by his full name, as Kesar of Ling. At that time the land of Ling had to pay tribute to the demon king Trampa Lagring, and shortly after Kesar's birth it happened that the demon came in person to collect his dues. The chieftain of Ling now decided to give young Kesar to the demon to eat, and despite his mother's lamentations this order was carried out. But the gods had bestowed supernatural power on Kesar. The demon swallowed his victim, but Kesar stuck in the monster's gullet until he choked.

This was only the first of the many heroic deeds Kesar was to accomplish in the course of his life. He roamed the inhospitable plateaux of Central Asia, accompanied by eight trusty companions and mounted on his omniscient horse, doing victorious battle wherever he saw men oppressed by demons or tyrannical rulers. But he always returned to his beloved land of Ling, whose grateful inhabitants finally made him their king and gave him the pretty young princess Drugmo as a wife.

The young couple's happiness came to an abrupt end when Kesar was ordered by the gods to ride against the great Demon King of the Northern Plain. Kesar and his legions captured his adversary's camp, says the legend. But the demon king's tent was empty, for he happened to be out hunting. Kesar found only his enemy's wife, Queen Mesa Bumkyi, and the handsome young king succeeded in winning her over to his side. His new ally concealed him, and when the demon came home that night from the hunt Kesar emerged from his hiding-place and slew him. Mesa Bumkyi wanted to keep the victor near her, and so she slipped a magic potion into his drink that made him forget all his past. In consequence Kesar remained for many years in the Queen's castle. Meanwhile Gurkar, the king of the land of Hor, was looking out for a bride. A crow was helping him in his quest. The crow flew from palace to palace in all the neighbouring countries examining the princesses. When it returned to its master it reported that of all noble women Drugmo, Kesar's wife, was the most beautiful; for, said the crow, 'when she rises her beauty is like that of a waving banner, when she sits she is like a tent of many colours'.

When King Gurkar heard of Kesar's long absence he resolved to attack the land of Ling and abduct Queen Drugmo. The weak forces Kesar had left behind in Ling suffered a shattering defeat, and the victor carried the weeping Drugmo in triumph to his palace. But the captive queen managed to get news of her abduction to her husband by means of a bird—and now the hero-king remembered everything. With quick resolution he seized his magic bow and fired an arrow in the direction of the King of Hor's capital. The missile bored deep into a rock near the royal tent, and hundreds of artisans tried in vain to withdraw it or at least to saw through the shaft. The ruler and his court naturally wondered who could have shot this arrow, but only the captive queen knew that her distant husband was the archer. She hoped for rescue, but at first in vain, because her rival, Mesa Bumkyi, prevented her lover's departure by giving him another draught of the nectar of forgetfulness.



Finally Kesar's all-knowing horse reminded the hero-king of his duty, and now he returned to lead an army against the ruler of Hor. He was soon marching against the enemy at the head of a mighty host, but on the way Kesar received a command from the gods to send his army home and go forward alone. Countless obstacles barred his path: he had to pass through a forest whose trees grew together on his approach to form a solid wall; then he slew seven she-demons who had turned themselves into beautiful maidens to lure him into a trap; later he slipped between two enormous moving rocks that were trying to crush him.

The King of Hor had a presentiment that the decisive meeting with Kesar was imminent. He had been told in a dream, which was correctly interpreted by his Minister, Shempa, that Kesar was already close to the capital. But this warning was of no avail to the abductor, for Kesar entered the castle in disguise across a long iron chain and slew King Gurkar in single combat. He then returned with Queen Drugmo to Ling, where he lived in peace for many years and reigned so well that his kingdom soon became richer than all the neighbouring countries.

The period of peace came to an end again, however, for Kesar received from the gods the order to march against the land of Jang on Ling's eastern border and vanquish the wicked King Satham. After the first battles with the enemy troops the gods once more commanded Kesar to send home his army, go on alone, and kill Satham with the aid of magic powers. Meanwhile the enemy king repaired with his court to the banks of a lake inhabited by nymphs, to perform a religious ceremony. Here Kesar came upon him. He immediately changed himself into an iron fly, entered King Satham's body, and so killed him.

In a fourth war Kesar defeated the King of the land of Mon to the south, and finally he also vanquished the ruler of the western kingdom of Tasig.

Through the centuries the Buddhist faith has radically altered the mentality of the Tibetan people. Today the Land of Snow numbers far more monks than warriors, and the days in which there was a Tibetan empire and Tibetan troops

advanced deep into the Indian plain are almost forgotten. Nevertheless, the eyes of Tibetans still light up and even the most primitive nomads can listen patiently for hours, when a bard sings the ballad of the heroic deeds of King Kesar.

## Reborn Saints

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THREE Tibetan saints were my teachers. They were revered by the Tibetans as the reincarnations of important personages of Lamaism. *Tulku*, 'emanation', is the designation of such reborn saints, and their title is *Rimpoche*, 'Preciousness'. They are often incorrectly described in travel books as Living Buddhas. In reality very few of these reborn saints are looked upon as incarnate deities, and none of them as reincarnations of the historic Buddha. The vast majority of *tulkus* are held to be reincarnations of famous priests or laymen who acquired special merit in the service of Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, in addition to reincarnations of the demon-exorcizer Padma Sambhava and the apostle Lhatsun Chempo, there are also *tulkus* who are regarded as rebirths of the Minister Thonmi Sambhota, the creator of the Tibetan script, and his master, King Srongtsen Gampo.

The quest for such reincarnations is a highly complicated business. The most important indications followed by the lamas in their search are statements by a dying *tulku* as to the place and circumstances of his next reincarnation, information obtained from oracle-priests, and above all, certain bodily characteristics and behaviour of the child to whom these clues lead them. Dando Tulku, the first incarnate Tibetan saint I met, was discovered as follows:

Dando Tulku came into the world in Dartsendo, a great commercial city on the Sino-Tibetan frontier, as the only child of a Tibetan merchant. Just then the lamas of the local Yellow Hat monastery were seeking the reincarnation of one of their brethren who had died a few years earlier. This lama had been revered as a saint for his miraculous gifts while still alive, so the monks were convinced that he would return to the monastery in a new shape after his death. A deputation

of lamas made a special journey to Lhasa to ask the reigning thirteenth lama where to look for the saint's reincarnation. The Dalai Lama advised the envoys to begin their search in Dartsendo itself. A group of priests therefore went from house to house in the town, looking for the sanctified lama's reincarnation among the male children born after his death. One day they came into the house of a merchant to test his little son. No sooner had the child seen the lamas than he cried out: 'Ah, here come my servants.' The priests were flabbergasted. This must be a most extraordinary child; was he perhaps the reborn saint? They asked the little fellow a few simple questions on religion, which he answered absolutely correctly and with all the seriousness of an adult. Then they examined the child to see if he were physically perfect, for according to Tibetan belief an 'emanation' would make its abode only in a faultless earthly shell. This part of the test was also satisfactory: the child's body even exhibited certain 'beauty marks' which only occur on saints. Finally they placed in front of the lad a number of objects that had belonged to the dead lama, amongst which were several exact copies. In every case the child unerringly picked up the genuine object and disregarded the fake. There could be no more doubt: this was the reincarnation they had been looking for. They would take the boy into the lamasery, where a gorgeous throne stood ready to bear him as he received the homage of the monastic community and the congregation.

Then an unexpected difficulty cropped up: the parents refused to give the lad into the care of the lamas. In the hope of keeping the child they declared that the lamas must be mistaken. Furthermore, they were not willing, under any circumstances, for their sole heir to become a priest. All the lamas' eloquence proved vain; so another deputation was sent to Lhasa to explain the situation to the Dalai Lama. Thereupon the god-king had a letter written pointing out to the parents the sinfulness of their conduct and enjoining them to hand the little *tulku* over to the lamas without delay. On receiving this letter the parents gave in and surrendered the child to the lamas. He mounted the *tulku* throne at the age of

nine, under the name Thubden Lhungrub Legsang, 'Force of the Religious Doctrine, Self-Begotten Good Mystery'. He was better known to the faithful, however, under the appellation Rimpoche Dando Tulku, 'His Preciousness, the Emanation from Dartsendo'.

Dando Tulku did not remain long in his home town. The lamas took him to Drepung, the largest monastery in Tibet, so that he might receive his religious education there; for every reborn saint, and even the Dalai Lama, has to pass through the stages of initiation and all the tests connected with them. Dando Tulku remained at Drepung for twenty years. Meanwhile his father died and his mother sold the family possessions and settled in Lhasa as a nun, to be near her son. In 1947 Dando Tulku went on a pilgrimage to India. No sooner was he back in Tibet, however, than he had to leave for India again, for the current regent, Tagta Rimpoche, appointed the young Tulku head of the newly founded lamasery at Bodh Gaya. At the same time he entrusted him with the task of caring for the spiritual welfare of Tibetan pilgrims coming to India. Dando Tulku stayed at Bodh Gaya during the cool winter months; the rest of the year he spent in Kalimpong. His mother had followed him from Lhasa to keep house for him. I got to know her as well: she was a nice old lady who tirelessly let the beads of her rosary slip between her fingers. She usually wore a dark brown *chuba* gathered with a broad yellow silk sash. Her head was shaven, as is customary for nuns of the Yellow Hat sect. It was a very good thing that her firm hand was there to run the household and the servants, for the Rimpoche was completely absorbed in his religious studies and meditations. I found him an exceptionally friendly, highly intelligent man, who avoided all friction and whom I never heard utter a harsh word during the years of our acquaintanceship. He was convinced that he was a saint and behaved accordingly.

In Kalimpong, Dando Tulku lived with his mother and lama servants in the house of a Tibetan merchant situated on the mountain ridge above the Tibetan quarter. The spacious house-chapel on the first floor had been arranged as a living-room for him. Next to the great gilded altar, containing the

hundred volumes of the *Kangyur* in open pigeon-holes, stood the Tulku's throne—a high seat made of a pile of cushions covered with costly brocade. The Tulku spent the greater part of his day sitting cross-legged on this throne. In front of him on the seat stood a low, richly carved little table with ritual implements and books on it. Above the saint's head was draped a dark red canopy, and the wall behind the seat was covered with costly painted scrolls that were changed according to the nature of the ceremony the Rimpoche was carrying out on any particular day. The space beside the throne was occupied by boxes containing the Rimpoche's various ceremonial garments and cult objects. Next to them lay hundreds of Tibetan block-prints and manuscripts—Dando Tulku's library, which he had brought with him to Kalimpong in order to pursue his studies here.

Opposite the throne, cushions covered with Tibetan carpets lay along the wall as seats for the many visitors received daily by Dando Tulku. On the wall above them hung a few photographs flanked by painted scrolls. The photographs—obviously the work of Chinese wandering photographers—showed dignified-looking lamas in ceremonial dress. One day, when I was visiting Dando Tulku, he explained these pictures to me. There was a shot of the dead thirteenth Dalai Lama; lower down hung photographs of the Rimpoche's teachers and the Abbots of Drepung monastery. Finally we came to a photograph hanging right above the altar. It portrayed a moustachioed lama of about sixty sitting on a throne in the posture of meditation. The Tulku looked at me in silence, as though expecting me to say something this time. I studied the picture closely, but for the life of me could not make out whom it represented.

'Who's that, Rimpoche?' I asked eventually, turning to Dando Tulku.

'That's me,' was the brief reply.

'You, Rimpoche?' I asked in amazement. 'But that's impossible. You're not much over thirty. The lama in the photograph must be at least sixty.'

'But of course it's me,' said Dando Tulku shaking his head. 'Me—in my previous incarnation.'

Every evening crowds of Tibetans marched round the Rimpoche's house muttering prayers. By their circumambulation they were honouring the images in the chapel, the Tulku and his sacred books. This procession included a sheep which Dando Tulku had brought with him from Tibet. The Rimpoche believed that he could tell from the animal's 'demonic look' that it contained a soul of a quite exceptional kind. In order to assist this poor soul to a better reincarnation, the sheep had to 'pray' every evening: it was driven a dozen times round the house by an eight-year-old lama novice.

During my first visit to Dando Tulku I had to rely on an interpreter, for my knowledge of Tibetan was not yet sufficient for a prolonged conversation. From time to time Phu-la, a young English-speaking merchant from Lhasa, who lived in the same house and sometimes acted as the Rimpoche's secretary, assumed the function of translator. After a while, however, I noticed that—in conversation on religious matters at least—I could get along quite well without an interpreter, for I was already familiar with the most important expressions in this sphere. What I still had to learn was the pronunciation. It differs considerably from the written orthography, so that to begin with I could not recognize words I had often seen in print when I heard them spoken by a Tibetan. The Rimpoche, on the other hand, wished to learn English. Phu-la had already taught him the alphabet and a few words, but for the moment the Tulku had got no farther than these rudiments. So I made a similar arrangement with him to the one I already had with Nyima, my other Tibetan teacher. Henceforth I visited the Rimpoche daily and gave him a two- or three-hour English lesson, while he helped me to work through Tibetan texts. Towards evening, when the little lama drove the praying sheep round the temple, I stopped and went down into the Tibetan quarter, to continue the work with Nyima.

When I first came into the chapel to teach the Rimpoche I wondered how these lessons were going to be carried out. Up to now we had sat opposite one another—the Rimpoche up on his throne, I on one of the visitors' cushions with the

interpreter beside me. This time the Rimpoche came down from his elevated seat, pulled up a low table and sat down beside me with crossed legs, laughing unconcernedly—to the utter stupefaction of his servants, who doubtless saw in this a serious breach of Tibetan etiquette. But the Rimpoche immediately sent them into the kitchen to prepare tea. He thoughtfully had me provided with tea made in the European fashion, and not butter tea. When I came back the next day at the agreed time the servants had already learned their role. No sooner had the Rimpoche and I sat down than the first servant appeared and poured out tea, sucking in air and sticking out his tongue as politeness demanded. A servant also stood nearby while we were working, ready to fill our cups from time to time.

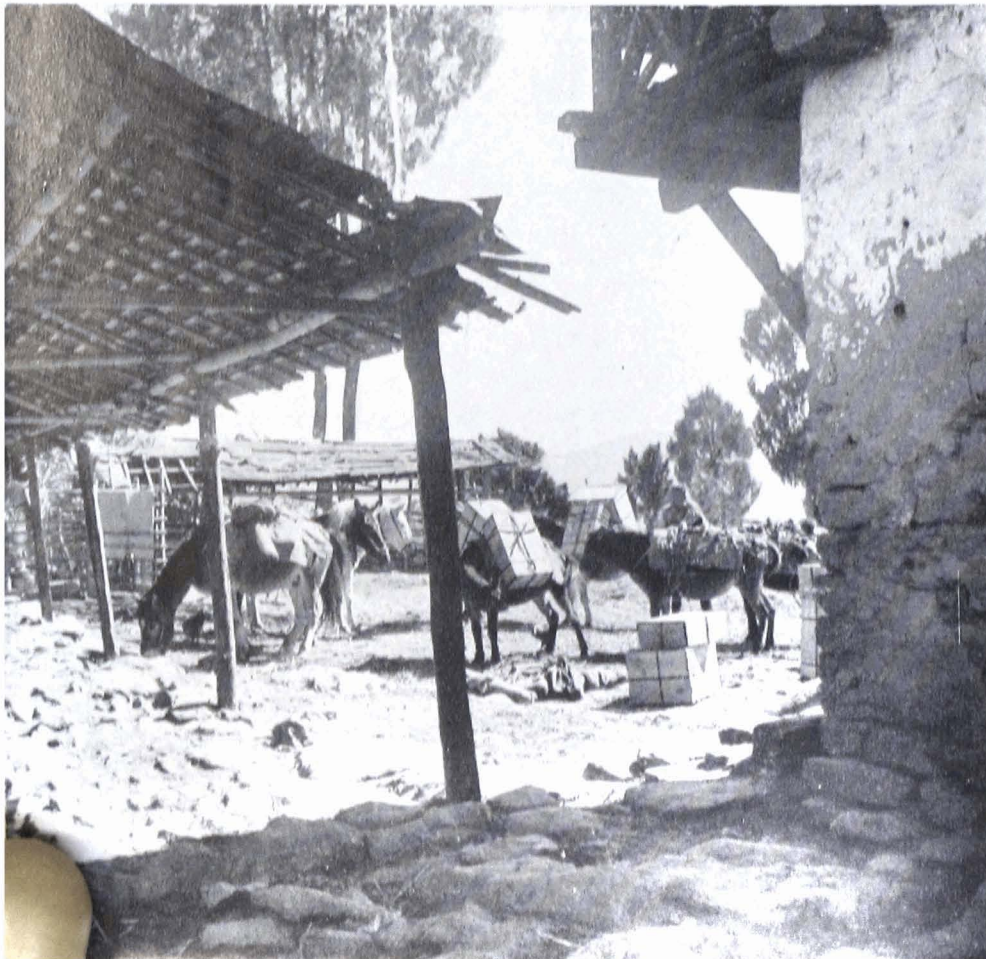
We were occasionally forced to break off our reading because of the arrival of some important visitor. To begin with, the Rimpoche used to hurry back on to his throne. But later, when he had become absorbed in the work and intolerant of interruptions, he remained sitting beside me and got rid of the visitor as quickly as he could. The Tibetans were naturally no little surprised to see a European sitting beside the Saint of Dartsendo. Nor did it escape their etiquette-attuned eyes that the two of us sat at the same level, from which—since in Tibet a person's rank is expressed in the corresponding height of his seat—they drew appropriate conclusions as to my status. The cordial friendship that sprang up in the course of our work together, as well as the fact that the Rimpoche allowed me to take part in all the ceremonies he conducted, soon got around among Kalimpong's Tibetan population. The result was that the Tibetans became far friendlier and more expansive than before. A reference to my friendship with Dando Tulku was enough to make many books available to me in the Tirpai monastery or the Yellow Hat lamasery of Ghoom, where the Rimpoche was a frequent visitor, which the lamas would never have lent me otherwise. Whereas the lesser Lamaist priests were initially very unwilling to show me the treasures of their religious literature—they considered it a heinous sin to let an unbeliever read their holy books—Dando Tulku had no such scruples. I needed only to mention





A master of Black Magic wearing a silver crown





Bhutanese priests perform a masked dance

For the last time I watch a Tibetan caravan set out

in conversation that I was interested in the description of this divinity or that historic event, to find our work-table piled high with Tibetan books on the point in question at my next visit.

In this way many rare books came into my hands. For my study of the cult and iconography of Tibetan protective deities alone, Dando Tulku obtained for me more than a hundred and fifty works previously unknown to scholars. Some of these books were costly manuscripts from the monastery libraries of Drepung, containing artistically executed illustrations. How much I should have liked to make photocopies of these rare works before they returned into the inaccessibility of Tibetan treasuries. But I had to pursue my researches without support from any scientific foundation, and my own modest means did not permit me to purchase the necessary equipment and films. So I had to rest content with spending months of exhausting labour copying out by hand at least the most important sections of the books Dando Tulku had placed at my disposal.

Some interesting event took place almost every afternoon I spent with the Rimpoche. For instance, people came to be blessed. Bowing deeply and loudly sucking in air each of the visitors laid a white ceremonial scarf and a coin on the Saint's little table. The Rimpoche always exchanged a few friendly words with his visitors, asking them where they came from and where they were going, and finally blessed their bowed heads by laying on his hand. Sometimes he took one of the narrow red silk ribbons lying ready at his side, breathed on it, and then placed it round his visitor's neck as a talisman. It often happened that a particularly pious visitor threw himself flat on the ground three times in greeting and touched the floor in front of the throne with his forehead. During the audience he would remain rigidly bowed, only occasionally raising his eyes shyly to the Saint.

Many visitors came to the Rimpoche for predictions. One man wanted to know what demonic influences were responsible for the sudden illness of his son, what should be done to cure the child and whether he would survive the sickness. A trader asked whether the following day would be

a propitious one for setting out on his return journey to Tibet, and a woman inquired how the members of her family who had stayed behind in Lhasa were faring. The Rimpoche had an answer to all these questions. He took three dice in his hand, held them to his forehead for a moment and closed his eyes. Then he let them fall and looked up the result of the throw in his oracle-book. I had been present at this little ceremony so often that I knew most of the answers off by heart. Seven spots always meant a thoroughly satisfactory reply. If 5, 9, 11, 13 or 15 turned up the response was also favourable; with 3, 8, 10, 14 and 18 the position was fair; while 4 and 6 produced an unfavourable reply. But if 12 or 16 turned up the picture painted for the luckless inquirer was grim in the extreme.

When the visitor was a lama the greeting followed a different pattern from the layman's. The lama stepped up to the throne, the Rimpoche leaned forward and the two priests, murmuring greeting formulas, touched foreheads.

Now and again the Rimpoche delivered a public sermon. His throne was moved into the open and a canopy of brightly coloured silk scarves raised above his head. The congregation that assembled for these sermons was generally so large that the small open space in front of the house could scarcely contain it. At the conclusion of the sermon the crowd formed a long queue to receive the Rimpoche's blessing individually, either by the laying on of hands or by touching a ritual vessel.

How great was the esteem in which the Rimpoche was held by all Tibetans I first realized fully when he and his mother came to tea with me one day. I went to fetch my guest and saw that he had put on his best clothes—a brick-red jacket trimmed with gold brocade on the shoulders, over this an artistically draped red robe, and finally a pair of white boots with golden ornaments. At his belt hung the so-called *chablu*, a small metal flask filled with water. The priests sprinkle their lips with the water when they have to refrain from food and drink during religious exercises. The *chablu* is carried in a big square case of costly yellow brocade,

which looks exceptionally decorative on the dark red of the robe. The Rimpoche's mother and the three servants were also in gala dress.

We set off with the Rimpoche between his mother and myself, and the three servants behind us, one of them holding a European umbrella over the Tulku's head to protect him from the rays of the sun. When we reached the shopping street of the Tibetan quarter people came running up from all sides. They jostled one another to touch the Rimpoche's robe with their foreheads as they bowed reverently, while women pushed their children forward to be blessed, which the Rimpoche did in passing by the usual laying on of hands.

During the winter months, while Dando Tulku was at Bodh Gaya, I spent a good deal of time with two other 'reborn saints'. One of them, called Tentong Rimpoche, also belonged to the Yellow Hat sect. He was a few years younger than Dando Tulku. The monastery to which he was actually attached lay in the province of Kham, but he had passed most of his life in Central Tibet. First he was nine years at Drepung, then another eight years in the Lama Gyupa monastery at Lhasa. The inmates of the last-named shrine, who are chosen from among the Snow Land's most gifted priests, receive a special training in the field of occult rites. Hence Tentong Rimpoche was in a position to give me information about things of which even Dando Tulku possessed only a superficial knowledge. My collaboration with Tentong Rimpoche was also based on an exchange of lessons in Tibetan and English.

The third of my teachers who was held to be a saint was officially called Chime Rigdsin, 'Immortal Understanding of Knowledge'; but he was better known to the Kalimpong Tibetans as Nyingmapa Rimpoche, because he belonged to the Nyingmapa sect. According to the custom of this sect he was married. When I knew him in 1951 Chime Rigdsin was about thirty-five; his wife Dolma seemed to be some five or six years younger. From Nyingmapa Rimpoche I learned much about the cult practices of his sect, which have hardly been studied at all as yet and which have preserved up to the

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present day the Snow Land's most ancient religious traditions. Moreover, his mediation enabled me to obtain some extremely valuable Tibetan books, including a collection of medical works which is now in the possession of the Museum for Ethnology, Vienna.

## An Offering to the Mighty Thunderbolt

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'ON the summit of a mountain of skeletons lies a great and terrible field of corpses. This is the field of frightful terror, the land of those who appear in dreadful shapes. . . .'

The big temple drums boom in the rhythm of the chant. The high-pitched rattle of a skull-drum and the whistle of the mountain wind blowing around the lonely house mingle with their dull thudding. Eight lamas have gathered tonight in the Rimpoche's chapel to pay homage to the demonic protective deities of their religion. These are dark powers to which they are directing their prayers, hence the darkness of night is the best time to bring them offerings. The eight priests are sitting on the cushions normally intended for visitors. They hold shallow temple drums which they beat with swan-neck drumsticks. The book of ritual with the text of the prayers and instructions for performing the offering lies on the little table in front of each of them. Beside it stands a hand-bell, a thunderbolt sceptre and also a tea-bowl, which a servant fills from time to time with steaming butter tea. The Rimpoche sits on a high pile of cushions next to the altar, in line with the other priests. My own position is at the opposite end of the line. A little table with a tea-bowl and the book of ritual has been placed in front of my seat as well, so that I can follow the text of the hymns.

'There are countless springs, from which red and white poison flows. Red and white sandalwood trees of luminous, terrifying appearance form an impenetrable palisade round that place. Frightful flashes of lightning flicker in the midst of the swirling and spreading poisonous fumes. The sound of



mortal blows rings out like claps of thunder. A rain of flaring yellow meteors and sharp-pointed weapons pours down. . . .’

The room is only meagrely illuminated by a few butter lamps burning on the altar. Their smoke mingles with the trails of scented smoke from the joss-sticks. Beside the flickering lamps stand several rows of offering-cakes, *torma*, as the Tibetans call them. These are queer-looking objects, made principally from roasted barley meal—the well-known Tibetan *tsampa*. But whereas offering-cakes intended for benign divinities contain honey, sugar and other pleasant tasting foods as well as *tsampa*, in these *tormas* the *tsampa* is mixed with the substances preferred by demonic gods and goddesses—blood, pieces of meat, resin, poisons and beer. Some of the *tormas* are pyramidal. They carry on their apex a grinning human skull made of dough; their sides are decorated with ornaments of coloured butter representing flames and clouds of smoke. Others are trimmed with poisonous thorns or the prickly leaves of poisonous plants. In the middle of the row of *tormas* stands a skull-bowl filled with red-dyed water, a drink-offering to the demons. Beside the skull-bowl lie two bone trumpets made from human thigh-bones. They are sewn up in dried *periosteas* and decorated at one end with a demon’s head of brass. These magic musical instruments, whose howling delights the angry protective deities and frightens away evil spirits, are called by the Tibetans *kangling*. They are supposed to be made from the bones of persons of very high or very low degree who died of an infectious disease or at the hands of a murderer. The most powerful magic effect of all, however, is claimed for a *kangling* made from the left thigh-bone of a sixteen-year-old Indian girl belonging to the priestly caste.

‘During the night-time fires burn there, during the day a black wind blows. A dense mist of pus, blood and fat sinks down. Ravens, owls, screech-owls, crows and other diabolical birds flutter about with the brains of slain demons in their beaks. Their ominous crowing fills the air. Mummies, fresh corpses and those that are already rotting are scattered over the ground. Waves of blood and



fat surge turbulently. Lions, tigers, leopards, black and brown bears and other wild beasts search roaring for enemies of religion.'

The colourful roll-paintings of benignly smiling Buddhas and benevolent-looking goddesses, which normally cover the walls, have today given place to *thangkas* whose predominant colours are black and red. These painted scrolls show tutelary deities of Tibetan Buddhism and the hosts of their demonic helpers. Now the priests direct their hymns to one of these gods, the Mighty Thunderbolt. This is the same mysterious divinity whose picture I once saw in Ghoom monastery. Today, a year and a half later, I am hearing the litanies sung by the lamas in honour of this tutelary deity. First they describe the surroundings of the Mighty Thunderbolt's abode and then his palace itself.

'Four doorways lead into the square palace built of skulls. It is of terrifying splendour. Its four corners are of red agate, the four doors are of green emerald. Bright gleam the door-frames of gold. The bolts on the doors are made of wonderful red corals, the superstructures above the doors are made of pearls moistened with the blood of corpses. The columns and beams inside the palace are completely covered with skeletons, the wall decorations and the ornamentation on the pillars and beams are formed of bones. Garlands of entrails hang from the ceiling. The eaves of the roof are made of skeletons, the parapet of skulls. The Chinese roof is frightful to look upon, for it was built of the skeletons of the fiercest Rakshassa demons. On the balustrade of the roof, which consists of hearts and human heads, stand victory banners made from the carcasses of lions and tigers and from human corpses. Devil-birds settle upon them and terrify the enemies of religion with their voices. . . . Streams of blood flow from the corners of the banners. . . .

'Inside the palace lie the carcasses of horses and human corpses. The blood of the horses and the men runs together into a lake. Human skins and the hides of tigers serve as curtains. The smoke of burning human flesh spreads towards the ten regions of the world. Outside, on a platform, dead men brought back to life and Rakshassa demons leap about,

and the four divisions of divine attendants dance there in the company of skeletons.'

Thus the lamas portray the dwelling of the Mighty Thunderbolt. I had heard the legend of this protective deity's origin some time ago from Dando Tulku. The Mighty Thunderbolt, so the Tibetans assert, is the spirit of a high dignitary of the Yellow Hats named Sonam Gragpa, who lived in Drepung monastery at the time of the fifth Dalai Lama. Sonam Gragpa was a very learned man and enjoyed great popularity among the faithful. But there were many other priests who envied him his fame; some of them even tried to rid themselves of their rival by murder. As attempts on his life grew more and more frequent and there were ever new intrigues against him, Sonam Gragpa resolved to leave the world of his own free will. He informed his favourite pupil of this intention and bade him burn his body on the funeral pyre. Despite his pupil's entreaties Sonam Gragpa committed suicide. He choked himself with a ceremonial scarf.

The pupil did as he had been bidden. On a sunny, cloudless day he made ready to burn his master's body. But he had scarcely set fire to the funeral pile when the smoke began to rise in a vertical column to the sky, where it formed a gigantic black cloud that assumed the form of a threatening hand. When the pupil perceived this sign he fell on his knees and adjured the spirit of his master not to enter a new incarnation, but to assume demonic shape and wreak vengeance on his enemies.

Soon after this occurrence Tibet was visited with every possible misfortune. Men and beasts died of unaccountable illnesses; even the Dalai Lama was not immune from the attack of an unknown evil power, for every time he was about to commence his afternoon meal the food-bowls were suddenly overturned. Therefore the lamas had to blow the long temple trumpets whenever the Dalai Lama sat down to a meal—nothing but their sound scared away the demon.

Astrologers and oracle-priests consulted by the Tibetan Government as to the cause of these phenomena soon discovered that they were the work of the spirit of Sonam Grag-

pa, who was taking revenge in this manner for the wrongs done him during his life. The Government therefore ordered some experienced priests to perform a ceremony that would destroy the baneful spirit. But the lamas sought in vain to fulfil this task. Finally the Abbot of Mindoling monastery, who was particularly well versed in magic arts, was commissioned to render the spirit of Sonam Gragpa harmless. The Abbot took up a position at the foot of the Potala Hill, lit a fire, and actually succeeded, by the repetition of incantations, in luring the demon into the cavity of a ritual burning-spoon and there imprisoning him. No sooner did the demon become aware of the fate that awaited him than he endeavoured to slip out of the trap. To distract the Abbot's attention he caused the mirage of a huge monastery to rise up before his eyes. But the Abbot immediately realized his adversary's purpose and did not allow his attention to be distracted. Sonam Gragpa's fate appeared to be sealed, when the demonic tutelary god Setrap, 'Leather Armour', hastened to his aid.

He suddenly appeared before the Abbot mounted on his magic horse, and thrust his lance under the Potala Hill; it almost looked as though he would tip the whole of the Dalai Lama's palace over. The Abbot was no little frightened, and the spirit of Sonam Gragpa took advantage of this moment to slip out of the burning-spoon. All further attempts to take him prisoner proved vain, and so the only possibility that remained was to persuade him by kind words to abandon his malicious activities. This endeavour was successful. The spirit of Sonam Gragpa was persuaded to become a protective god of Buddhism. He was taken into the Tibetan pantheon under the name Mighty Thunderbolt, and thenceforth he employed his demonic powers only against opponents of the Yellow Hat sect.

Nyima had something to add to Dando Tulku's account. He told me that the suicide story was a later invention, designed to conceal the cleric's murder. In reality Sonam Gragpa—whose name really does occur among the dignitaries of Drepung monastery—was killed by his enemies. A ceremonial scarf was stuffed down his throat—a rather odd

interpretation of the strict Buddhist law against shedding the blood of a priest.

‘. . . he who destroys all evil-doers, the enemies of religion and all demons who place obstacles in the way, he who was able to attain perfect concentration, the protector of the royal faith . . . the terrible Mighty Thunderbolt, whose body is dark red, who becomes as fierce as a gruesome Rakshassa demon and whose gullet is as fathomless as the sky.’

The lamas fell silent. They put their drums aside and picked up the hand-bells and ‘thunderbolts’ that were standing ready. Now, as my book of ritual told me, ‘six mystic hand-movements and six magic incantations’ would follow. These motions and words were to consecrate the offerings which were now—for the most part only symbolically—to be made to the Mighty Thunderbolt. ‘*Om Dharmapala Maharaja Pura Pura Sura Sura Hum Hri! Om Vrajra Rupa A Hum! Om Vrajra Shapta A Hum . . .*’ murmured the lamas, while their hands glided from one mystic gesture into another. They kept their eyes closed, and the tense expression on their bronze faces mirrored the concentration they were giving to the act of consecration. Then they picked up their drums again and enumerated in a resonant chorus all the offerings intended for the Mighty Thunderbolt—the ‘outer, inner and secret offerings, the multitude of which is like unto a cloud’, as the text of the book of ritual has it.

‘Heart’s blood, in which reddish-yellow bubbles rise, one after the other, tremulous blossoms from the organs of the five senses. The spreading clouds of incense and smoke rising from burnt human flesh. The fire of a lamp fed with human fat and with a wick of human hair. The strong-smelling fluid made of brains, blood and gall. The mountain of foods made from the organs of the five senses, of hearts, flesh, blood and bones. The agreeable “offering of sound” of the great temple trumpets, the bone flutes and the skull drums . . .’

With a loud ‘*Tashi sho! . . .* May good luck come!’ the lamas ended the chanting of the ritual, and the rattle of the Rimpoche’s little hand-drum announced that there would now be a pause. The lamas took a deep draught of tea. The Rimpoche half rose from his seat and looked in my direction,

evidently to see whether I had come through the weird ceremony all right.

The break did not last long, for the many protective deities whose pictures covered the walls were likewise waiting for their offerings. But it was already late at night, and I had a long way to go home. When the lamas began to beat the drums once more I quietly left the chapel.

## Oracle-Priests and Demons

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THE tutelary deities of Tibet are numberless, and there is no lama capable of naming them all; for even the most out-of-the-way settlement has its own divine protector, whose name not even the inhabitants of the neighbouring village can give exactly. But among the myriads of Chokyongs, the 'Guardians of Religion'—as the Tibetans call the protectors of Buddhism, the lama temples and the hallowed soil of Tibet—are some who are regarded as especially powerful and therefore enjoy universal honour. Such divinities are Pelden Lhamo, already referred to; the god of wealth, Namtosse; the death-god, Shinje, whose wife is his own sister; Gompo, who appears in sixty-five different shapes; and the armour-clad war-god, Chamsring, with his wife Dongmarma. She is the Red-Faced One who gnaws a corpse and rides on a man-eating bear. All these divinities are described by the Tibetans as 'protective gods who have already left the world'. They are outside the sphere of terrestrial life and therefore intervene in the affairs of Tibet much less frequently than the subordinate, but far more numerous group of so-called 'earthly protective gods'. The Tibetans ascribe to many of the earthly protective gods the capacity to leave their celestial abodes and enter into men and women with mediumistic gifts. They are then prepared to make predictions about the future through the mouths of these oracle-priests.

Many of the earthly protective gods were originally demons of the old Bon faith, who were subjugated by Padma Sambhava and compelled to fulfil this new task. Others again, like the Mighty Thunderbolt, are the spirits of men who died an unnatural death. They were transformed into malignant demons, who were later tamed by the lamas and enrolled in the ranks of the tutelary deities. To this category

belongs the spirit of the treasurer of the great monastery of Tengyeling in Lhasa, which was destroyed by Tibetan troops in 1912 on account of an alleged conspiracy against the Dalai Lama. Together with many other monks, the treasurer met a horrible death during the storming of the monastery: he was flayed alive by the soldiers.

Another dead man's spirit transformed into a tutelary deity is the so-called Great Secretary. He bears this name because he is the spirit of a young man who was once employed as secretary to a noble Tibetan family. In the course of time a love affair developed between the secretary and his master's wife, of which the husband did not long remain ignorant. The latter resolved to dispose of the secretary by murdering him. A festival held annually at Gyantse, in which the servants of noblemen had to compete in a horse-race, seemed to provide a good opportunity for putting this plan into execution. As his secretary's mount he chose the wildest of his hundred steeds. The secretary mastered the refractory animal, however, and even won the race with it. But instead of praise for his success he received the order to ride the race afresh. Again he emerged triumphant. But when he was forced to compete for the third time he fell from the horse and broke his neck. His enraged spirit took immediate revenge on his master: he killed all but one of the latter's horses. The Great Secretary himself revealed why he had spared this one horse, for whenever he enters the body of an oracle-priest the first sentence he utters is always: 'I killed the ninety-nine horses of my master—but I left one for the lady of my heart.'

The Tibetans aver that in the case of many tutelary deities it is extremely difficult to guide their demonic powers into the right channels. Only the effect of the pious oath they have had to swear, and the fetters put upon many of these gods, prevent them from venting their destructive violence on lamas and pious believers as well as on enemies of the Buddhist religion. The following legend gives an example of the disasters that may be caused by one of these half-tamed demons. In the monastery of Chamdo lived a lama to whom the protective god Shangpa, 'Nose-Lotus', appeared one

night. At that time a prince of the Church named Demo Rimpoche was about to take over the government of the country as regent. For some reason Nose-Lotus was determined to have Demo Rimpoche murdered before he could enter on his office, and he had chosen this lama of Chamdo as his tool. He commanded him to travel to Lhasa, to enter Demo Rimpoche's tent on the eve of his accession to the regent's throne, and bring the whole structure down by smashing the centre pole. At the same moment as the tent collapsed he was to slay the Regent by depriving him of his 'life-force' with the aid of magic. Nose-Lotus promised the lama a rich reward if he carried out his instructions successfully. Beguiled by greed for wealth, the lama hurried to Lhasa and committed the murder as planned. He managed to escape unrecognized, and the morning after his return to Chamdo he found in his cell two silver ingots and a lump of gold as wages for his deed.

The wise abbot of the monastery somehow found out the purpose of the lama's journey to Lhasa and the source of his wealth. He did not give the murderer away, but he urged him to get rid of the gold and silver earned by his crime as quickly as possible—otherwise calamity would overtake him. The lama disregarded the abbot's advice. The result was that, a year later, the demonic Nose-Lotus killed the lama and took back the treasure. To prevent a similar incident occurring again Nose-Lotus was forced by a famous priest to swear a solemn oath that he would use his powers only in the interest of the faithful. As an additional security heavy fetters were placed on his hands and feet.

Once a year, on the fifteenth day of the fifth Tibetan month, all the protective gods of Tibet are said by legend to gather on the roofs of Samye monastery for a banquet followed by a game of dice for the souls of men. In the morning of the same day all the oracle priests of the Land of Snow go into a state of ecstasy. The populace streams into the temples to see these priests possessed by the gods and to give them white ceremonial scarves as a token of reverence. Today the festival of the oracle-priests is a Buddhist holiday; but, according to an occult tradition revealed to me by a Govern-



ment official, this festivity conceals within it the melancholy recollection of a severe defeat suffered by Buddhism in the early stages of the Snow Land's history.

In 836 a prince named Langdarma seized power by murdering his brother, King Relpa-chen, a friend of the Buddhists. But in the very first year of Langdarma's reign Tibet was plagued by a series of catastrophes. The King believed that either the gods of the old Bon faith, or those of Buddhism, must be angry over the struggle between the two religions that had been raging for two centuries, and were demanding that he should decide in favour of one or the other. Langdarma therefore commanded that on the fifteenth day of the fifth month all Bon sorcerers and Buddhist priests should call upon their gods to show him by a sign the path he should follow. On this same day it happened that Samye, the oldest Buddhist monastery in Tibet, was struck by lightning. Langdarma interpreted this as a sign from the heavenly powers. He turned to the Bon faith and ordered a frightful persecution of the lamas, which brought Tibetan Buddhism to the verge of destruction. The persecution went on until 842, when the King was assassinated by a Buddhist priest disguised as a Bon sorcerer.

Like the *bongthing* and *mon* of the Lepchas, the Tibetan mediums are believed to be picked for their task by the gods. The chosen fall into violent convulsions and a priest or expert layman has to be called to ascertain by which deity the new medium is possessed. As a rule, say the Tibetans, the divinity gives his name without being asked. Sometimes, however—particularly in the case of evil spirits who have not yet been taken into the ranks of the protective gods—the answer has to be forced out of them. The fingers and toes of the interrogator are tied together with string: as long as the knots hold the demon is compelled to answer. If the medium declares his willingness to act as an oracle-priest in the future, he is generally sent for several years' training in a monastery; if not, the priests perform a ceremony designed to persuade the divinity to look for another medium.

If a new oracle-priest claims to have been chosen by one of the highest earthly deities, the Tibetan authorities subject

him to a series of rigorous tests to convince themselves that he is speaking the truth. A Tibetan from Lhasa told me the following story as an illustration of one such test. The Tibetan Government sent a new oracle-priest, who claimed to be animated by an especially powerful tutelary god, a letter that read: 'Someone born in the Sheep Year is very ill. What shall we do? Please give a clear answer.' To this puzzling inquiry the oracle-priest gave a no less enigmatic reply: 'If it can be mended, mend it. If not, throw it away and buy another one.' It transpired that the medium's response was absolutely correct, for by the words 'someone born in the Sheep Year' the officials who wrote the letter had not been referring to a human being, but to a pair of sheepskin bellows used in their office, which were badly worn and so full of holes as to be almost useless.

The most celebrated among the many prophetic magicians of the Snow Land is Nechung Choje, the 'Religious Master of Nechung Monastery', who occupies the position of State prophet. His residence is the monastery of Nechung, not far from Drepung, one of Tibet's most mysterious religious centres. The demon who animates Nechung Choje during his trances is the three-headed, six-armed Pehar, the leader of all earthly protective gods. There were oracle-priests in Tibet in the pre-Buddhist period, and belief in their powers was so deep-rooted that Tibetan Buddhism found itself compelled to incorporate them and their pantheon into its own religious system. Pehar, too, was allegedly a non-Buddhist demon whom the great Padma Sambhava subjugated and made guardian of the treasure of Samye monastery. For many centuries Pehar dwelt in a shrine erected for him in Samye. At the time of the fifth Dalai Lama, however, he wandered abroad. He settled temporarily in the monastery of Tshel-gungthang, where he became involved in a violent dispute with Lama Shang, a learned priest of this temple. Lama Shang was in the process of having a new chapel built, and because of his quarrel with Pehar he ordered the painters responsible for decorating this sanctuary on no account to include a painting of this tutelary deity. The angry Pehar determined to avenge this slight. He changed himself into a

young man, offered the painters his assistance and soon made himself indispensable. When the work was almost finished the painters asked their assistant how they could repay him. The young man's only wish—a strange one—was that they should paint on one of the walls an ape holding a glowing joss-stick. The artists gladly fulfilled this modest request. When the painting was finished Pehar entered the figure of the ape and set the whole shrine on fire with the joss-stick.

The wise Lama Shang, angered by this malicious deed, wished now to rid himself of his divine adversary once and for all. He made a 'thread cross' and compelled Pehar by incantations to go into this magic trap. He shut the thread cross in a box, which he threw into the waters of the nearby Kyichu, the river that flows through Lhasa and past Drepung.

The box containing the imprisoned protective god was swept rapidly downstream; and when it approached Drepung it was spotted by the fifth Dalai Lama, who happened to be visiting the monastery that day. His supernatural powers enabled him to recognize that the prisoner inside was no other than Pehar himself. He therefore ordered a priest to fish the box out of the water and bring it immediately into the monastery, for he wished to ensure Pehar's services for Drepung. The priest did as he was bid, but as he hastened to the monastery with the box he observed that his burden was growing heavier and heavier. Seized with curiosity, he put the box down and cautiously raised the lid. Pehar instantly slipped out of his prison in the guise of a white dove and vanished among the branches of a nearby tree. The terrified priest hurried to the Dalai Lama and told him of his mishap. The prince of the Church was no little vexed, but since Pehar had himself chosen his dwelling place the Dalai Lama ordered a shrine to be erected round the tree in which the dove had settled; out of this shrine a whole monastery then developed in the course of the centuries.

Several of the European and American visitors to Central Tibet had an opportunity to visit Nechung monastery, but no detailed examination of this remarkable shrine has yet been made. As luck would have it, I made the acquaintance in

Kalimpong of Lobsang Phuntsok, a so-called *tsedrung*, or 'summit secretary', of the Tibetan Government. Lobsang Phuntsok is the son of the former State oracle-priest Gyeltsen Tharchin. The mediums of Nechung Monastery are obliged to remain celibate, but Gyeltsen Tharchin was an exception: he was relieved of his post, became a layman again, and later married. Lobsang Phuntsok had heard a great deal about the history of Nechung Monastery and its magicians from his father, so the information he was able to give me provided a valuable supplement to what I had already learned from Tibetan books.

Three gates lead into the forecourt of Nechung Monastery, of which the middle one is always closed: in front of it stands the tutelary deity Mighty Thunderbolt, waiting to be let in. For, so the legend says, Pehar will soon be promoted to the ranks of the 'protective gods who have already left the world', and then Mighty Thunderbolt will step into his shoes as leader of the 'earthly protective gods'.

Nechung's three-storey main temple with a mighty golden roof contains many interesting things. In one of the chapels, for example, the visitor is shown the tree on which Pehar settled in the form of a dove; and in another room stands a richly ornamented throne, from which the State magician used to make his prophetic announcements. Behind the throne on a small altar stands an old statue of Padma Sambhava. This figure is supposed to be full of magic power. On behalf of Padma Sambhava it sees that the converted demon Pehar honours his ancient oath to protect the Yellow Doctrine in the Land of Snow.

Until very recently, the oracle-priests who ascended the throne in Nechung Monastery intervened decisively in the Snow Land's destiny. Their advice was obtained on every important question of internal or external politics, and their statements had particular importance in regard to the search for a new Dalai Lama. Although, according to Tibetan opinion, Pehar himself spoke out of the mouths of these mediums, who were no more than his passive tools, the oracle-priests were held responsible by the Government for all their pronouncements. It often happened that a Nechung

Choje was punished for a false prophecy by deprivation of his office. Such was the fate, for example, of an oracle-priest who was largely responsible for the deterioration in Anglo-Tibetan relations at the beginning of our century. The advice given by this medium was obviously wrong, for compliance with it led to a war that ended, in 1904, with a severe defeat for the Land of Snow.

If information is required from the Nechung Choje, a few of the highest officials and ecclesiastical dignitaries from Lhasa make their way to Nechung. Once a year, however, the State Magician is brought to the capital in a solemn procession, to take part in the great New Year festivities. Amongst other things he is carried in two processions, which wend their way through the streets of Lhasa at this season, in a total trance.

A new State Magician is also divinely elected. Shortly after the death of a Nechung Choje, the god Pehar is alleged to take possession of a monk of Nechung Monastery or nearby Drepung. Nevertheless, like every other oracle-priest, the object of Pehar's choice has to pass a test—in this case a particularly stiff one. The rules of this test are supposed to have been laid down by the fifth Dalai Lama himself. First the candidate for the dignity of Nechung Choje must, in a trance, twist into a spiral a great sword which, as the Tibetans say, 'not even the combined strength of eighteen men could bend'. Then the new oracle-priest must answer three difficult questions relating respectively to the past, the present, and the future. In addition, he has to exhibit certain marks that occur on every genuine medium of Pehar. When the oracle-priest falls into a trance his tongue curves so far back that its tip is firmly pressed against his palate. The saliva that flows from his mouth is streaked with blood, and on the priest's shaven head appears the imprint of the thunderbolt with which Padma Sambhava once vanquished Pehar.

The Nechung Choje is the Tibetan Government's most important prophetic adviser; but apart from him there are a few other oracle-priests in and around Lhasa, of whose services the authorities also occasionally make use. This

generally happens when the State Magician gives an ambiguous reply, or when the opinions of other leading tutelary deities on some particularly important matter are required. One oracle-priest whose advice is sought especially frequently is the prophetic magician of Samye Monastery. This seer is alleged to be the mouthpiece of the protective divinity Tsiu Marpo, the 'Red Tsiu'. This is a fantastic demon, of whom it is written in the books of the lamas :

'The Red Tsiu has red locks, his body is surrounded by a fiery halo. Shooting stars fly out of his eyes, and a great hail of blood falls from his mouth. He gnashes his teeth, which are as sharp as the ice of the glacier. . . . He wears a robe of red silk, and a girdle of jewels is wrapped round his loins. His head is covered by a turban of red silk, a bowcase of leopard-skin and a quiver of tiger-skin hang at his sides, and on his back he carries a shield of rhinoceros-hide. He puts a red noose round the body of one enemy at the same time as he thrusts a spear into the heart of another. . . . His steed has a brightly coloured saddle, stirrup straps of silver, stirrups of copper, headgear of gold and reins of copper. . . .'

The oracle-priest of the Red Tsiu at Samye occupies a spacious house in which is preserved one of the monastery's greatest curiosities—the Red-Brown Leather Mask, as it is called by the Tibetans. This ancient mask, which is reputed to date from the earliest days of the monastery, is kept in a sealed cupboard that is opened only on some special occasion, such as a visit by the highest Tibetan dignitaries. The Leather Mask represents a three-eyed demon's face contorted with rage. Many Tibetans say that the mask is really made of congealed blood and occasionally awakens to uncanny life. The eyes begin to move, and little drops of blood ooze out.

In the house occupied by the prophetic magician of the Red Tsiu there is a completely windowless secret room. Its door is locked and the lock secured with a seal. This, according to Tibetan popular belief, is the abode of the Red Tsiu. When a man dies, his soul has to crawl through a narrow hole into this room, where it is laid on a chopping-block by the Red Tsiu's assistants and hacked in pieces. Hence the air in

the oracle-priest's house is always laden with the odour of blood, and at night it is disturbed by the sound of blows and the groaning of the souls under the axe. Once a year the old chopping-block is exchanged by the lamas for a new one. A monk from Samye told me in all seriousness that, when the room is opened, the old block is always found to be worn down and criss-crossed with innumerable cuts. There is also supposed to be a closed room in which souls are hacked to pieces on the upper storey of the principal temple at Lhasa.

Another Buddhist protective god, known to the Tibetans as the Red Dzassa, also dwells at Samye. Dzassa is the title of one of the highest classes of officials: legend says that the Red Dzassa is the spirit of a nobleman who once held this office. The Red Tsiu afflicted him with a very painful disease during his lifetime, and the furious Dzassa had a roll-painting of Tsiu Marpo hung up in his room. Whenever he suffered a fresh bout of pain he riddled the consecrated *thangka* with a hail of arrows. When the Dzassa felt his end approaching, he commanded seven of his servants to arm themselves and mount their horses. The moment the Dzassa died the servants and horses also fell down dead. But their spirits galloped through the air towards Samye monastery to take revenge on the Red Tsiu. They slew the tutelary deity of Samye as he fled, and took possession of the building set aside for him. The monks hastened to put an end to the battle of demons that was being fought out within the walls of their monastery. They compelled the spirit of the dead Dzassa to become a protective divinity of Samye, and built a special shrine for him, so that he should relinquish the Red Tsiu's house.

A medium occasionally consulted by the Tibetan Government is the oracle-priest of Lamo monastery, two days' journey east of Lhasa. He is the mouthpiece of the protective deity Tshangpo Lamo, a white figure holding a jewelled scarf and a noose made of lightning. The prophetic magician of Gadong monastery near Lhasa is a kind of weather oracle, whose services are called upon by the authorities in the event of meteorological calamities. The divinity who takes possession of him is an attendant of Pehar bearing the name He with the Wooden Bird. Another ally of Pehar, the King of

the Body, is alleged to animate the seer who lives in the Karmashar shrine at Lhasa. This prophet is closely connected with the great monastery of Sera, and once a year—on the last day of the sixth Tibetan month—he is fetched by the monks in order to predict the events of the immediate future at Sera. A strange custom is adhered to on this journey to Sera: on the way there the oracle-priest is accompanied by professional Cutters-up of the Dead, while on his return to Lhasa various objects bearing some reference to the predictions he has just made are carried in the procession. The text of his prophecies is later made public by being nailed to the door of his shrine.

In Lubug Chushu, a town to the west of Lhasa, lives a remarkable oracle-priest who undertakes in a trance the cure of patients suspected of rabies. Tibetans, who had watched one of these ceremonies, told me that the wizard begins the treatment by moving a mirror over the patient's body 'to discover the seat of the sickness'. Having completed this examination he takes a long dart decorated with coloured silk ribbons. He presses the point against the affected spot and takes the blunt end of the shaft in his mouth, 'to suck out disease and pain'. He sucks vigorously, and after a short time begins to spit blood and pus into a waiting bowl. Finally he sucks out of the patient's body a piece of flesh exactly the shape of a dog. This is the actual cause of the illness. Having removed it, the oracle-priest raises the bowl to his lips and swallows the contents.

Female mediums are comparatively rare. A well-known oracle-priestess lives near Sera. She acts chiefly as adviser to the *Dapdop*, the soldier-monks of this monastery.

The most curious function is probably that exercised by the oracle-priest who lives in the Central Tibetan town of Lungto and acts as a kind of divine money-broker. The divinity who animates him is apparently willing to lend small sums of money to the poor. If someone requires a loan of this nature the priest goes into a trance, and at the climax of his ecstasy old silver coins fall out of his mouth. Money thus obtained must eventually be repaid to the deity. When the debtor is in a position to fulfil his obligations, he must



## ORACLE-PRIESTS AND DEMONS

seek out the wizard again and return the loan to him in silver pieces. The coins are washed and dusted with grated saffron. Then the tutelary deity is called, and as soon as the oracle-priest has gone into a trance he swallows one piece of silver after the other.

## Lhagpa Tondup's Trance

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ON the third day of every new moon the Mighty Thunderbolt entered the body of Lhagpa Tondup. Lhagpa Tondup was a pleasant young Tibetan I met in Kalimpong. Judging by his appearance, I originally took him for a well-to-do trader; until one day I learnt to my surprise that he was a very busy oracle-priest with a big clientele, notably among Tibetans passing through the town. He lived with his young wife in a house on the Tenth Mile, and it was there that I had my first long conversation with him.

The room in which he received me was more like a chapel than a living-room. Against one wall stood an altar, against another a wooden throne with the sumptuous ritual garments worn by an oracle-priest during the soothsaying ceremony. The items of his costume were neatly sorted out in an order that never varied. At the bottom lay a long robe of yellow brocade reaching to the ground and half concealing a pair of white, gold-trimmed boots such as the *tulkus* wear. An apron patterned with dragons and trimmed with fringes, and a kind of cloak of brocade, had been spread out over the robe, and on top of these stood the oracle-priest's helmet. This consisted of a massive silver hoop encircling the lower edge of a tall brocade hat. The circlet was embellished with five small human skulls of silver; the hat bore on the front representations of three human eyes. In front of the helmet lay a small breastplate ornamented with mystic characters; beside it were a coil of red cord—a magic noose for catching demons—and the oracle-priest's great ceremonial ring.

The throne was flanked by two religious emblems: a trident bearing the model of a human skull, and a spear with a triangular red pennant attached. Below the spearhead was a

padding ring of material with three human eyes painted on it.

Next to the throne, over the entrance door, hung a most remarkable object. Fastened to a pair of black yak's horns by a dusty ceremonial scarf was a sword that had been twisted into a spiral. Lhagpa Tondup had once bent it in a trance. Swords twisted by oracle-priests are regarded in Tibet as an exceptionally potent defence against malignant demons. They are known as 'knotted thunderbolts' and hung beside doors to keep out evil spirits. An oracle-priest's ring—it was originally employed by mediums in bending the ritual bow—is also considered a powerful amulet; these rings are especially popular as travel charms among lamas, who carry them when on a journey.

The third day of the new moon, the day on which the Mighty Thunderbolt took monthly possession of his medium, fell just a week after my visit to Lhagpa Tondup. Although Lhagpa Tondup could go into a trance at any time his clients wished and, as he said, 'make the protective god speak out of his mouth', experience had shown that the seizure was always most intense on those days. On this occasion the séance was to be held in the Rimpoche's chapel, and there I had an opportunity of watching the ceremony.

When I entered the chapel that morning, around 10 a.m., some fifteen people were already in the room, amongst them my teacher Nyima. I sat down beside him, and he whispered to me that I was just in time. The Rimpoche, who was to conduct the rite, had that moment opened proceedings by intoning a prayer.

Lhagpa Tondup was sitting on a throne-like seat specially erected for the purpose. I saw that he was wearing the heavy ceremonial garments over his everyday clothes; on his right hand glittered the silver oracle-ring; the red demon-noose was attached to his left wrist. A broad *khatag* with its ends tied together hung round his neck, and the helmet on his head was fastened by a leather strap under his chin. The oracle-priest's legs were planted wide apart; his hands rested on his knees. Lhagpa Tondup's youthful face wore a tense expression, his eyes were closed.

Two of the Rimpoche's lama servants stood at the medium's side; a third servant, with an open censer in his hand, was causing the aromatic smoke of burning juniper branches to drift into his face. The Rimpoche was sitting apart at a low table chanting an invocation, accompanying the rising and falling melody with a hand-bell. He was calling upon the tutelary divinity to leave his celestial palace and hasten here to receive the offerings laid out for him on the altar and then take possession of the body of the oracle-priest.

'Come hither, Mighty Thunderbolt, and take the *tormas* of meat and blood, the wooden platter with flour and butter and the drink-offerings—Tibetan beer, Chinese tea, fresh milk and sour milk—the "inner, outer and secret offerings" . . . Fulfil the duties imposed upon thee: reveal the future, disclose false accusations, show what fruit various actions will bear, protect the pious and aid them. . . .'

The continually accelerating rhythm of the chant seemed to be affecting the oracle-priest. He shifted restlessly this way and that on his seat and greedily inhaled the incense. The yellow butter lamps on the altar flickered dully through the dense clouds of juniper smoke, the figures of the priests in front of the altar looked like grotesque shadows. The penetrating odour and the shrill tinkle of the bells seemed to exercise an oppressive effect even on the spectators. I saw some of them retreat into the open air. Rivulets of sweat streamed down the pale face of the seer, who seemed on the point of fainting. From time to time his facial muscles twitched, and he buried his teeth in his lower lip as though he were in violent pain. Several times he lifted his hands nervously and tugged at the dangling *khatag*. His lips parted and the rapid breathing, keeping time with the singing, changed into hectic panting. Then he began to throw the upper part of his body quickly this way and that. Several times it looked as though he were going to leap into the air, but he got no farther than a clumsy attempt.

The two lamas beside the throne followed the medium's every movement intently, ready to spring forward at the first sign of collapse. The priest was still rocking to and fro, occasionally flinging himself backwards. Suddenly he

bounded a good eighteen inches into the air and sank heavily down on to his cushion again. During the last few minutes his face had undergone a terrifying change. It no longer bore the slightest resemblance to the familiar, friendly countenance of Lhagpa Tondup. The whole head seemed swollen, the skin of the face was dark red in colour, the thick blue lips were flecked with whitish-grey foam, and the saliva was dribbling from the corners of his mouth, which were drawn down in an expression of cruel contempt. The priest struck his metal breastplate with his clenched fist, until the skin tore and his knuckles were covered in blood. There could be no doubt that the medium was not simulating, but in a genuine and complete trance.

Now the oracle-priest's hands went up into the air as though trying to ward something off. The priest seemed close to suffocation; his panting changed into a deep, gurgling sound.

'That is the voice of the Mighty Thunderbolt,' whispered Nyima in my ear.

'Now he has entered his body, and therefore Lhagpa Tondup is undergoing the agony of Sonam Gragpa, who was killed by having a *khatag* thrust down his throat.'

The gurgling, snuffling noise gradually abated; the medium's movements grew calmer. His cramped hands, on which the veins stood out, rested again on his violently trembling knees. His eyes remained closed, and his rigid, sweat-bathed face resembled a red demon mask contorted with rage.

I was really fortunate to be present at this soothsaying ceremony, for very few white people have previously had an opportunity of seeing a Tibetan oracle-priest at the height of his trance. The presence of unbelievers at such ceremonies is generally discouraged. The Tibetans believe that at this moment a divinity is in the body of the oracle-priest and might be angered at the sight of a foreigner. Moreover, it frequently happens that an oracle-priest seizes the ritual weapons that lie to hand, and rushes at the spectators with them. Tibetans had told me about séances of this nature in which members of the audience were injured or even killed;

and once I heard that, in his frenzy, a medium slashed open his own belly, tore out his entrails and decorated the pictures of the gods with them. When such things happen the lamas say the protective god has punished a sinner or, as in the last case, the oracle-priest himself for some serious transgression. I should now have liked to photograph the medium, but that was impossible—the Tibetans would have regarded it as sacrilege. Two years later, however, after protracted negotiations, I was able to take photographs of all the phases of Lhagpa Tondup's trance at a secret séance held specially for this purpose, and eventually also to make sound recordings of the hymns sung on these occasions.

The Rimpoche ended his chant. He rose from his seat, straightened his cloak and approached the oracle-priest with reverently bowed head, to put a further ceremonial scarf round his neck. This act of veneration was not directed towards the seer himself, but to the protective deity now occupying his body. Then the Rimpoche picked up a porcelain bowl full of China tea from a silver tray and raised it to the medium's lips, presenting the Mighty Thunderbolt with the prescribed drink-offering.

A servant pressed a short sword into the oracle-priest's right hand. The seer placed the point against his hip, where a strong leather strap showed under his brightly coloured apron, and pushed on the handle until the blade doubled up. Then he wearily opened his hand, and the servant caught the falling sword.

Now the Rimpoche began the interrogation. He went up to the seer, laid a hand on his neck and whispered the questions into his ear. The answers were gasped out in isolated, almost unintelligible words. During other séances at which I was present in ensuing years he gave the answers loudly, and sometimes they positively gushed from his mouth, so that the lama whose job it was to put the prophecies down in writing could hardly keep pace with them.

On other occasions the medium made his pronouncements in well-rhymed verses and even repeated passages not clearly enunciated, at the request of the priest conducting the ceremony. It was often very difficult to extract any meaning from

his prognostications; they seemed to me very vague and obscure. The lamas produced an interpretation, but even this could often be understood in more ways than one. The ecstatic babbling of the State Oracle was also, as a rule, taken down by his secretary in a kind of shorthand and later elucidated by a college of priests.

After about ten minutes the Rimpoche retired. The oracle-priest, seized with a sudden restlessness, began to breathe heavily again; he tugged at the tightly knotted *khatag* and rocked his body to and fro. Then he reared up and fell heavily backwards into the arms of the servants, who sprang forward to catch him. His face turned deathly pale, and the whites of his eyes showed. The exhausted and prostrate body was shaken by convulsions; the hands were thrust forward several times with outspread fingers, as though trying to push away some invisible object. Then the twitching subsided, the seer gradually recovered consciousness. Supported by the servants, he sat up with a groan and drank a mouthful of tea.

The séance was far from over. Whereas in this first trance, Nyima explained to me, the medium had been possessed by the Mighty Thunderbolt under his terrible aspect, the same protective deity would now enter into him under his peaceful aspect. The Rimpoche began once more to intone a litany, and the oracle-priest, who still looked thoroughly exhausted, resumed the posture prescribed by ritual, with legs wide apart. The period between the onset and the climax of the trance was much shorter on this occasion. As before, the seer began to gasp and tremble, but this time his movements were much less violent. His pale face wore a slight, friendly smile. Groaning, the oracle-priest gave the information he was asked for; but then he suddenly flung himself backwards with all his weight. Before the lamas who sprang forward had time to prevent it, the back of his head struck the stone wall with a resounding thud. One of the little skulls on his helmet snapped off and rattled to the ground. Eager hands raised up the unconscious seer and removed his helmet. His hair and the back of his neck were covered in blood, but closer examination revealed that the injury was only superficial, for the

strong silver hoop and the leather bands inside it had absorbed most of the impact.

Tea and cold water brought the oracle-priest to his senses. After a quarter of an hour, when he had somewhat recovered, he declared that he was strong enough to go through with the rest of the ceremony. To my astonishment I learned from Nyima that two further divinities were to be called upon. The first was to be Namkha Bardzin, a lesser tutelary deity regarded as a kind of courtier to the Mighty Thunderbolt. On roll-paintings he is depicted as a red-coloured demon armed with a spear and a noose and standing on a decomposing corpse. While the lamas were preparing the oracle-priest for the next trance and piling up a mountain of cushions behind the throne, to prevent a repetition of the accident, Nyima gave me a brief outline of this demon's story. He was, he said, the spirit of a lama who had perished two decades ago during a snowstorm at Phari Dzong. The dead man was found by some shepherds, but instead of treating the corpse with respect they made jokes about the unfortunate lama. His enraged spirit thereupon turned itself into a demon and slew the majority of the blasphemers together with their herds. Eventually the abbot of Dungkar Gompa in the Chumbi Valley succeeded in taming the evil spirit and transforming him into a protective deity of his monastery.

The Rimpoche's bell rang once more; the seer began to twist and turn, gasping, in the convulsion of a fresh seizure. His face turned red, and once again assumed the terrible demonic expression I knew from the first trance. No questions were put to him this time. The onlookers, led by the lama servants, now formed a long queue to be blessed by the medium—or rather, by the protective god that had taken possession of his body. With a deep bow the first priest approached the seer, into whose twitching hands one of the assistants pressed a long red silk ribbon. With some difficulty the medium tied a knot in the ribbon, raised it to his foam-flecked lips and then laid it on the bent neck of the lama in front of him, who immediately stepped back and fastened the ribbon round his throat. These strips of silk with the breath of



a tutelary deity clinging to them are thought to afford very effective protection against evil spirits.

I saw the Rimpoche, who had been standing near the oracle-priest with his back to me, suddenly turn round and peer about the room. When he caught sight of me he motioned to me—I could not believe my eyes—to take my place with the Tibetans in the queue and also receive an amulet. There might be some danger in approaching so close to the possessed medium, but I could not miss such an opportunity to observe him from close up. Besides, the invitation must be regarded as a great honour, and I could on no account refuse it.

The line moved slowly forward. Now it was my turn. I stepped to the front, bowed as I had seen the others do, and as I bent my head I tried to fix the magician's picture as precisely as possible in my mind—the red, sweat-drenched face with the convulsively closed eyes, the thick swollen veins on the temples. . . . Out of the corner of my eye I watched the seer's restlessly fluttering hands—to my horror I saw they were obviously trying in vain to tie a knot in the silk ribbon. The breathing above my head grew more and more laboured. I felt intense fear—not of the weapons that stood within the oracle-priest's reach, but fear that he would perhaps refuse to put the red ribbon round my neck. I had attended several séances in Europe, and almost every time they had ended by the medium declaring in a reproachful voice that I was emitting a disturbing influence which was defeating all his efforts. Was something similar going to happen here? Did the Tibetan medium, too, feel in his subconscious that a sceptical, coldly observant force was in his immediate vicinity? The seconds of waiting dragged on into endlessly long minutes. If I did not receive the consecrated ribbon it might have unpredictable consequences for me. The superstitious Tibetans would certainly say that there was some evil spirit in me, and that the tutelary deity had therefore refused to bless me. No lama would ever lend me a book again or give me any information, much less allow me to take part in another religious ceremony. . . . But I did not need to pursue these thoughts any farther, for now I felt the

ribbon come to rest on my neck. I stepped back with a sigh of relief. Perhaps the slackening of my concentration had enabled the oracle-priest to execute the accustomed hand movements after all.

The blessing was scarcely over when the oracle-priest collapsed in a faint. Now the last divinity was to be called upon, Pawo Trombar, a red-coloured demon who holds a bleeding heart and a victory banner. He is said to be the spirit of a warlord who died in battle. Once more the rise and fall of the chant put the seer in a trance. He twisted convulsively for only a few minutes, then he suddenly opened his mouth and shouted in a guttural voice, '*O-ma, o-ma!* . . . Milk, milk!' A servant hurried off to fulfil his request. He handed the oracle-priest the bowl, and again the onlookers filed past the throne. Each one bowed to the oracle-priest and held up his cupped hands, into which the trembling medium poured a little milk. I watched the people greedily drink the milk and even lick their fingers. The Rimpoche nodded to me encouragingly, so there was nothing for it but to take my place in the queue, which I did with very mixed feelings. But this time everything went off smoothly and I received my portion without a hitch. I drank the milk like the others. Afterwards I heard that this was no ordinary beverage, for the protective deity had turned the milk into an efficacious medicine that would ward off all ills. As before, the seer woke from his trance as soon as the last man in the line had passed him.

This was the end of the ceremony. The priest, who now looked utterly worn out, rose to his feet with a groan, and the lamas helped him take off the ceremonial garments. I could see that the thick everyday clothes he wore underneath were completely soaked with sweat. He staggered into a side-room, supported by two men, and there stretched out on an improvised bed. Meanwhile a lama ordered the garments and the rest of his outfit to be laid out on the chair in exactly the same order as I had seen them on the throne in Lhagpa Tondup's house. While this was going on the Rimpoche intoned a prayer of thanksgiving to the tutelary deities who had today entered into the oracle-priest.

I left the chapel with Nyima in the early hours of the afternoon. As we strolled slowly towards the Tibetan quarter I asked Nyima various questions about the spectacle we had witnessed. Above all, I wanted to know what the oracle-priest had said during the trances. Nyima was unable to tell me, however, for the seer's words had been unintelligible to him also. In any case, he informed me, the replies had not been intended for the ears of the audience as a whole. They concerned only certain private inquiries put by a Tibetan merchant, a friend of the Rimpoche, and his family.

As to the bent sword, he had often seen such things before. At the height of a trance the oracle-priest develops unusual physical strength and so has no difficulty in performing feats of this kind. A state of extreme exhaustion inevitably follows afterwards, however. Oracle-priests who are in great demand therefore die comparatively early as a rule. Amongst clairvoyant magicians of the lower grades there are some who try to impress the audience by various tricks, as Indian fakirs do. They transpierce their bodies with swords and spears, for example, without suffering any harm.

We had almost reached Nyima's house when I asked him a question which had come to my mind several times that day.

'Do Tibetan oracle-priests make use of drugs in order to go into a trance?'

'Well no . . . actually they don't . . .' said Nyima, shaking his head. 'That would be trickery, for according to the doctrine of the Greater Vehicle it is the deity himself who descends into the priest and brings about this unaccustomed condition. But . . .' he stopped and let two approaching lamas go by before continuing in a low voice: 'There are some mediums who secretly take drugs to bring on the trance, for fear that it might not otherwise occur. But if the ecclesiastical authorities get wind of it, they can expect severe punishment. There are also oracle-priests—even among those of the highest rank—who take bribes. They then make predictions that advance the interests of those who have paid them.'

'And what drugs do the oracle-priests take?' I wanted to know.

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Nyima shook his head with a smile. 'I know what they are, but I don't want to tell you yet. My countrymen would never forgive me, if they learned I had disclosed this secret to you. Be patient. On the day you leave Kalimpong I will tell you the names of these drugs.'

## A Mystic Marathon

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FROM time to time I heard some very strange stories from my Tibetan friends. Thus Lobsang Phuntsok, the son of a former State Prophet, told me of his experiences during the performance of the *Cho* ceremony. *Cho*, spelt *gcod* in Tibetan, means literally *to cut in pieces*, and the ceremony is called by this name because the meditant is alleged to offer his dismembered body for the gods, spirits and demons to eat. It is a very protracted ceremony, and Lobsang Phuntsok took many hours to describe it to me in detail. But in broad outline the *Cho* may be summarized as follows:

The meditant goes at night into a graveyard. First he must recall the precepts given him by his teacher. Then he chants the introductory prayer, wielding a hand-bell and a skull-drum, and sinks into meditation. He conjures up before his spiritual eye his personal tutelary deity and unites his 'consciousness' with this divinity. Now it is as though he were floating in the air, and from his position within the deity he looks down upon his prostrate, lifeless body. A goddess of the order of the Heaven-Goers emerges from the body of the protective god and hacks the meditant's body in pieces. The latter immediately invites the whole Tibetan pantheon to a banquet and sets his own body before the countless hosts of his guests. To appease the hunger of the benign divinities he turns his blood into nectar and his flesh into delicious ambrosia. The demonic Guardians of Religion and the evil spirits, whose turn comes next, greedily drink the blood of the corpse, devour the flesh and break the bones in order to suck out the marrow. During this orgy the 'consciousness' must seek to elucidate the causes and effects of fear. Once the

banquet is finished the 'consciousness' discerns on the burying-ground a radiantly new, godlike body. It leaves the security of the tutelary deity and enters into this new mortal frame. The meditant awakes from his trance and ends the *Cho* with a prayer.

The banquet of celestial beings is the climax of the *Cho* rite, but at the same time the hardest test for the meditant. If the 'consciousness' that has been absorbed in the tutelary deity is frightened by the gruesome spectacle, the whole hallucination is dissipated. Madness, or at least severe psychic damage, may result from a meditation that has gone wrong. Hence successful performance of this strange ceremony requires a slow and gradual introduction to the mysteries of the *Cho* by an experienced teacher. For those who master it, however, Lobsang Phuntsok assured me, the *Cho* is a refreshing source of mental and physical regeneration.

I also heard a great deal about *Thumo*, a combination of meditation and a particular breathing technique by means of which Tibetan yogis increase their bodily temperature. *Thumo* is supposed to render the yogi capable of meditating for days on end almost naked in a cold cell, or even in snow and ice, without any ill effects. Furthermore, so I was assured by Tibetans who had mastered this Yoga method, *Thumo* produces a gratifying sensation of lightness. Those who have learned the art of *Thumo* sometimes wear nothing but a single cotton garment known as a *repa*. Such yogis are called *Repa* after this garment; Mila *Repa*, the great poet, was one of them.

The *Thumo* training is concluded by a severe test. The testee, clad only in a loin-cloth, is wrapped in a large linen cloth soaked in ice-cold water. At the same time he eats a bowl of half-cooked *tsampa*. By means of *Thumo* he must dry the cloth, while he renders the half-cooked *tsampa*, which would otherwise cause him intense stomach pains, edible by generating heat. The testee has to dry twelve cloths in succession, and every time his body is wrapped in a fresh cloth he must eat another bowl of *tsampa*.

According to Tibetan assertions many very learned priests, who have devoted themselves for decades to meditation and

the study of the occult sciences, are able to make their bodies rise a short distance above the ground and float in the air. As a valuable preparation to this difficult art, the would-be levitationist is recommended to practise springing quickly to his feet from the posture of meditation without using his hands. This exercise, continued over a long period, renders the body exceptionally light. The highest degree of mastery has been attained when the levitationist can rest on the apex of a pyramid of corn without causing it to collapse. I was frequently told of priests alleged to be able to float in the air—but I never saw anyone do it. . . .

On the other hand, I heard a great deal about a kind of mystic marathon held in the Land of Snow every twelve years. The reports of some travellers in Tibet contained references, echoing Tibetan descriptions, of mysterious runners who are said to cross the country running for days on end without a pause in a kind of ecstasy. There was also talk of a Tibetan yogi alleged to have covered the distance between the capital and a group of monasteries in Central Tibet, for some special purpose, in an incredibly short time. The West received these meagre and often very confused accounts with understandable scepticism. But my conversations with Tibetans convinced me that these fantastic-sounding stories contained a hard core of truth. Priests and laymen, officials and merchants assured me that every twelve years one of the Snow Land's two most important yogis, accompanied by two of his pupils, passed through Lhasa on a cross-country run. They called this mysterious personage Mahaketongwa, the 'Great Caller'.

Rimpoche Dando Tulku told me the same thing about the Great Caller as the Summit-Secretary Lobsang Phuntsok, and my friend Nyima had even been blessed by him once in Lhasa at the house of Minister Kabshopa. When I asked him what impression the Great Caller had made on him, he shrugged his shoulders and said: 'A lama like any other. What stuck in my memory most was the fact that his clothes stank horribly of rancid butter.'

My main source of information about this mystic runner

was Phunkhang Se, the husband of the Sikkimese Princess Kukula; a brother of Phunkhang Se is the highest incarnate priest in the monastery in which one of the two Mahaketongwas resides. The name of this monastery is Nagto Kyiphug, 'Upper Forest, Cave of Joy'. Its inmates, like those of Thelchog Ling monastery, the abode of the second Mahaketongwa, belong to the Kagyupa sect. These two monasteries situated in the Central Tibetan province of Tsang are regarded as the strongholds of Tibetan Yoga. All the monks living in them are given a thorough training in the various Yoga exercises lasting three years, three months and three days. Anyone who wishes to deepen his knowledge receives additional instruction covering six, seven or even twelve years.

The best of the approximately two hundred monks numbered by each of these monasteries is elected Mahaketongwa when a new one is required. The choice depends primarily on his capacities, but the advice of an oracle-priest is also obtained. Every twelve years, always in a Bird Year by the Tibetan calendar, one of the two Mahaketongwas in turn sets out on the mystic Marathon with his two most experienced pupils.

Eleven years before this severe test—which is supposed to demonstrate the high art of Tibetan Yoga—on an astrologically auspicious day, the three yogis are walled up in separate cells. Their contact with the outside world is limited to a tiny window, through which they receive food and fuel for their lamps—for the Yoga exercises they must perform during these years of solitude include the study of occult writings.

At the beginning of the eleventh month of the Bird Year the cells are opened. The monks accompany the three yogis to Shalu, an important monastery in the neighbourhood of Shigatse, where the Great Caller undergoes a trial. He is brought into a lofty subterranean room, the roof of which contains a square hole leading directly into the open air—it is the exit through which he will leave the cell again a week later. During this period the Mahaketongwa receives neither



food nor drink, and in spite of the icy cold he is left only a loin-cloth.

On the day on which he is to leave the cell, visitors from far and wide gather at Shalu to see this spectacle. The two governors of the provincial capital, Shigatse, also come to watch the trial as representatives of the Tibetan Government. They take up a position immediately beside the orifice leading into the cell, and at a sign from them the Mahaketongwa has to 'float' up to the ceiling and force himself through the opening. If he succeeds in doing this, his body is wrapped in a yak-skin soaked in icy water, which he has to dry by *Thumo*. After he has done this the Mahaketongwa and his two pupils make ready for the journey.

They put on the normal lama's garments, and around each of them is wrapped a silk scarf, to which both the governors affix their seals. These seals are to prove that the yogis have not taken off their clothes to rest on the way. All three wear large shell ear-rings. Their long hair hangs loose on their shoulders, apart from the fact that a few of the Mahaketongwa's locks are bound, on the crown of his head, into a knot from which a thunderbolt protrudes. On their brows they wear magical blinkers, whose long black fringes of bear's hair hang down as far as the nose and obscure the eyes. The Great Caller's pupils are armed with long staves; he himself holds in his right hand a trident decorated with silk ribbons, and in his left a bone trumpet. In addition, a rosary is hung round his neck and he carries in his belt a *phurbu*, a magic dagger for fighting demons.

Accompanied by servants and officials on horseback, the three yogis set out on their long run. As soon as they have disappeared over the horizon the governors begin to write a detailed report on the trial held at Shalu, which is immediately forwarded to the Government in Lhasa.

Running tirelessly, the yogis approach the capital. Couriers ride on ahead to inform the people of the Great Caller's arrival. The route is lined with people in gala dress waiting to

receive the Mahaketongwa's blessing by touching the ribbons on his trident.

Eye-witnesses who had met the Great Caller and his pupils told me that the three yogis did not actually run, but walked in a quick, rhythmic step. There are always young men who, believing that the mystic runners' speed is not really so great, try to race them. But they invariably lose, because they have not the same endurance.

The yogis are allowed to rest for three or four hours at night. They take some food, and spend the rest of the time in meditation. During these pauses the accompanying officials have to take care that the three runners do not fall asleep. The yogis probably derive far more benefit from these few hours of contemplation than if they spent the same time in sleeping.

The Great Caller's first objective in Lhasa is the Potala. At the foot of the Dalai Lama's residence he blows a bone trumpet: at this sign the servants standing in readiness have to open all the doors of the palace and light joss-sticks in every room. As the Mahaketongwa begins to mount the broad flight of steps leading up to the Potala he blows a second blast on his trumpet, and then a third as he goes through the doorway. He runs through the rooms of the Potala scattering consecrated rice as he goes, to scare away the evil spirits that may have settled in the dark corners.

After a brief audience with the Dalai Lama the Mahaketongwa and his pupils repair to the houses of various noblemen, who have invited the yogis to bless themselves and their dependants. Then the three runners leave the capital and visit Samye monastery, whence they return via the province of Lhokha to their starting point. They are said to cover this distance, which would take a fast-moving caravan many weeks, in just a fortnight.

Many Tibetans believe that the three yogis do the run in a semi-trance, or that they know magic formulas which give them 'fleetness of foot'. Most of those whom I questioned,

however, had a simpler explanation. In their opinion the fabulous performance of the Great Caller and his pupils is due primarily to perfect bodily control, acquired by years of strenuous exercise, and the development of certain powers that are actually latent in everyone.

## The Dance of the Gods

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ONCE a year, shortly before the great rains, the Bhutanese lamas of Pedong perform a masked dance in honour of Padma Sambhava. Pedong is a little town north-east of Kalimpong, the first halting-place of caravans on their way to Tibet. The vicinity is inhabited by Lepchas, Nepalis, Sikkimese Tibetans, Sherpas and above all Bhutanese, for the valley of Pedong used to belong to Bhutan. The monastery of the Bhutanese monks stands below the town, amidst the broad steps of the paddy fields. The single-storey temple surrounded by a ring of white prayer-flags is called Sangchen Dorje, 'Great Mystery Thunderbolt'.

It had rained heavily on the eve of the dance, and I was afraid the celebration would have to be cancelled. But the lamas were confident. They had specially engaged a well-known weather maker and were convinced that he would be able to keep off the rain. The sorcerer was a queer customer with a gloomy, threatening look. He wore a red and white striped shawl over his lama's robe and his ears were decorated with fragments of white shell. His long, jet-black hair was artistically plaited with wool and yak's hair and built up into a tall, conical coiffure. Whatever his art may have had to do with it, not a drop of rain fell on the dancing ground. The nearby mountain range of Sikkim was repeatedly shrouded in a veil of rain, but the Bhutanese lamas were able to finish their dance of the gods undisturbed.

A motley crowd in gala dress had been thronging the open space since early morning when the *cham*, as such ritual dances are called in the Tibetan religious language, began around ten o'clock. The lama orchestra threaded its way out of the temple in a long line, to play the so-called *Rol Cham* or 'Music Dance'. The leader of the column, an old man with

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an expressive face surmounted by white hair, was bare-headed and dressed in the normal garments of a priest; the other monks had shimmering, multicoloured mantles over their robes. Each of them wore on his head the brilliant red hat of the Drugpa order. Contrary to the Tibetans, the Bhutanese lamas were barefooted, for shoes are not worn in Bhutan. First came two lamas with long temple trumpets; then followed two with flutes and two with cymbals; and finally ten or twelve with big drums fastened to sticks. Making a great noise, the lamas marched round the open space, halted, turned slowly on their axis, and resumed their circumambulation. They circled the ground three times and vanished into the temple again, after which a smaller orchestra began to play.

Now two sword dancers appeared on the scene. They were dressed in black Bhutanese garments reaching to the knees with broad white cuffs. Two yellow silk scarves trimmed with red ran diagonally across their chests, partially concealed by a large square of green and yellow silk. Each of them wore on his head a richly ornamented, brightly painted helmet. The two warriors bounded across the space with wild leaps. In their right hands they each brandished a drawn sword, in their left a hand-drum with brilliant silk ribbons. Most of the evil spirits, which, in the opinion of the lamas, must certainly have been lurking in the monastery courtyard, had been driven away by the noise of the temple orchestra that had previously circled the ground; the rest would succumb to the blows of the warriors' swords.

No sooner had these two vanished from the arena, than two lamas appeared dressed in colourful garments, wearing stag masks and likewise carrying swords. Stag-headed dancers figure in most Lamaist dances. They are looked upon as emissaries of the Tibetan god of death and judge of souls. The tempo of the music increased, and the stag dancers leapt high into the air with drawn-up knees. After about ten minutes they left the square, and the two black-clad Bhutanese reappeared. This time they had exchanged their swords for ritual bells. Their costume was unaltered, but in addition to the helmets they now wore on their heads a great

five-leafed diadem bearing the images of five different Buddhas. This time their dance was slower and more solemn.

A longish pause followed. The abbot of the monastery sat down on a cushion at the edge of the dancing ground. From this position he was supposed to conduct the subsequent mystic round-dance with prayers and incantations. On a table in front of him lay the usual ritual objects: bell and thunderbolt, hand-drum, demon dagger and also a book containing a detailed explanation of the dance and its deeper meaning. Books of this type are among the most jealously guarded occult writings of Tibetan literature. After tremendous efforts I managed to get hold of one such block-print: I believe it is the first work of the kind ever to come out of Tibet to the West. The book is all the more rare because its printing-blocks were destroyed during the burning of Ten-byeling monastery.

The lama orchestra struck up a deep, solemn-sounding melody dominated by the booming of the temple trumpets. A dancer in a long robe came out of the temple doorway. His face was covered by a large demon mask tilted slightly backwards, for its nostrils served the dancer as eye-holes. A long strand of hair hung down from the forehead of the mask, which was ornamented with a circlet bearing models of five human skulls. In his hands the dancer held a sword and a skull-bowl. The priest began his dance with violent, jerky movements. The spectators watched with awe. In the eyes of these simple people it was not a disguised lama dancing, but one of the frightful demons of the Dragon Land, at whose mercy they believed their life and happiness to be.

Whirling and hopping, the dancer circled the space. When he returned to his starting-point a second demonic figure emerged from the temple and joined him. Together they described a fresh circle, on the completion of which a third demon came out from the darkness of the temple doorway. So it continued, until finally nine masked dancers were racing across the monastery courtyard with ever wilder leaps. Their whirling dance represented the uninhibited activity of the terrible, untamed demons of Bhutan. Now three fresh figures appeared on the scene: masked jesters, who are never

missing from any lama dance and introduce a friendlier note into the grim dance of demons.

Quite suddenly the music stopped, and the demons stood as though turned to stone. The Abbot murmured exorcisms; his hands went through mysterious motions with the thunderbolt and bell. This was the climax of the dance. The words the Abbot was now uttering were allegedly the same incantations with which Padma Sambhava once cast a spell on the demons of Bhutan, before turning them into protective deities of Buddhism.

To the solemn notes of the temple music, the dancers broke into movement again. But the wild, uninhibited action of the demon dance was done with. The masked figures moved round the dancing ground in a long line with slow, measured steps, as befitted guardians of the Buddhist doctrine, and vanished into the interior of the temple.

This *cham* danced by the Bhutanese monks in honour of Padma Sambhava is only one of the many dances performed by the priests of Lamaism. There are dances portraying the assassination of the Buddhists' enemy Langdarma, and others in which the many divinities which he will one day meet in the Intermediate Realm are presented to the eyes of the believer. Recollection of former human sacrifices is awakened when nightmarish skeleton dancers tear to pieces a human figure made of dough. Another *cham*, showing the enlightenment of a cruel hunter by the animal-loving Mila Repa, exhorts the faithful to obey the Buddhist commandment not to kill.

The way and date at which a *cham* is performed varies with the sect and with local custom, but when the New Year—the greatest of all Buddhist festivals—approaches, the solemn notes of the lama orchestra playing for the mystic dances of the monks may be heard from most of the Snow Land's monasteries. The dances of the turn of the year date from pre-Buddhist times. The apostles of the Yellow Doctrine put a Buddhist cloak around them, but the original significance of these *chams* is still clearly visible: they symbolize the victory of approaching spring over the dark powers of the long Tibetan winter.

The Tibetan New Year festival is also celebrated annually at Gangtok with a great masked dance, in which the space before the great royal temple is peopled by dancers depicting black-faced Gompo and the Garuda bird, together with hosts of Black Hat wizards, jesters and skeleton dancers. Apart from this *cham* originating from Tibet, another Buddhist dance, created in Sikkim itself, is performed every autumn at the same place. On the fifteenth day of the seventh Tibetan month, the monks conclude their traditional homage to Sikkim's mountain gods with a masked dance in which Kangchenjunga and his minister Yabdu, represented by priests from Pemiongchi Monastery, perform to a circle of spectators from all parts of the Lepcha country.

The *cham* is introduced by the usual Music Dance. This is followed by a sword dance performed by young warriors from Sikkim's most noble families. They come on the scene one after the other, in medieval-looking costumes and helmets fluttering with little banners, to the shrill call of the Tibetan war-cry, and go through the prescribed movements—'drawing the sword', then 'sharpening' and finally 'striking the waves of the ocean of blood'—with their gleaming weapons. The sword dancers hold the field for nearly two hours. They circle the space in the strictly circumscribed motions of the 'thunderbolt step', annihilating invisible evil spirits with sword blows to prepare the way for the dance of the highest Sikkimese mountain gods.

Accompanied by sword dancers, the first to emerge from the temple doorway is the dancer portraying Kangchenjunga. He wears a red demon mask with an angry cyclopean eye in the forehead. Four long tusks protrude from the half-open mouth. On his head he wears a helmet bearing a small human head in front and ornamented with five brocade flags. His heavy garments are of silk and brocade; on his chest hangs an ornament carved of human bone; on his feet he wears white boots. In his right hand the dancer brandishes a spear, his left hand holds the image of a flaming jewel: a symbol of the treasures supposed to be stored on the five peaks of the divine mountain.

Despite his heavy paraphernalia, the portrayer of Kang-



chenjunga begins his dance with a light, graceful step. While he is describing the first circle round the space, a festally attired servant appears leading a saddled and richly ornamented dun. This is Kangchenjunga's steed which, together with two other horses dedicated to the mountain gods Yabdu and Nyen-chen Tang-la, occupy a place of honour in the King of Sikkim's stables. The onlookers watch tensely: if the animal now starts to tremble it means, according to ancient legend, that Sikkim's protective deities are satisfied with the offerings they have received. Kangchenjunga executes the prescribed dance figures and then sits down on a seat covered with a tiger-skin.

Now the portrayer of Yabdu comes on the scene. His costume is the same as Kangchenjunga's, but his mask is black, and instead of the helmet he wears a head-band with five grinning skulls. In one hand he holds a spear, in the other the image of a torn-out human heart. His mount is led out; it is a black horse flecked with white hair over its hooves. Yabdu circles the space, followed by his steed, and sits down beside Kangchenjunga to receive the sword dancers' homage. Then Kangchenjunga rises to perform his final dance amidst his armed retinue. To the sound of the temple orchestra he disappears into the temple again, followed soon afterwards by Yabdu.

But the *cham* is not over yet. The sword dancers embark on another circular dance, and finally—led by the band of the royal bodyguard—they march three times round the temple, to the accompaniment of singing and loud war-cries. The dance of the Sikkimese gods is terminated by a popular feast. Not until the sun is sinking and the valleys are filling with blue shadows do the spectators make their way homewards, with song and jubilation.

## Thread Crosses and Weather-Makers

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‘IF the clouds are moving from north to south or from west to east, if large clouds break up into smaller ones, or if the setting sun colours the evening cloudbanks red and yellow—then no rain is to be expected. But if thunder is heard from the west, it will rain the same evening. If the roll of thunder comes from the east, it will not rain until five days later. And if thunder sounds from the north, rain will fall at midnight.’

So it was written in a book which a Tibetan weather-maker once lent me. The representatives of this most curious of the Snow Land’s guilds undoubtedly know how to read the signs of nature. This may render their difficult job somewhat easier; but mere meteorological knowledge is naturally not enough for ‘weather-making’, and so—as might be expected—the magicians suffer a good many failures. Nevertheless, a large proportion of the Tibetan people seem to be convinced of the effectiveness of their powers. Even the Tibetan Government employs three official weather-makers, whose task it is to keep the hail away from the Potala, the Norbu Linka—the Dalai Lama’s summer residence—and the principal temple of the city of Lhasa. These three wizards are also permitted to accept commissions from the general public. People turn to them when they want fine weather for a feast or the building of a house, or else when the land is suffering from a drought.

The most important task of weather-makers in the country is to protect the fields from hailstorms. In many districts of Eastern Tibet it is customary for the peasants to engage a weather-maker jointly. If his work succeeds he receives a rich reward; but if the crops are destroyed by hail the wizard goes away empty-handed, and he can think himself lucky if he escapes without a beating from the indignant peasants.

The weather-makers take up their observation posts on the

mountain peaks at the beginning of summer, in order to watch the development of the weather from these vantage-points. They listen to the sound of their hand-drums, which tell them whether a change in the weather is to be anticipated. If the note is high or 'joyful', as the Tibetans say, the weather will stay fine; if it is dull or 'foreboding', bad weather must be expected. If a storm is approaching, the sorcerer fills a shallow bowl, made of an alloy of five precious metals, with water and observes the reflection of the clouds. By certain signs known to him alone, he can tell whether the storm will bring hail. If he sees that danger is imminent, he takes immediate steps to circumvent it. He makes magical hand-movements, mutters incantations, brandishes his demon dagger threateningly and invokes those gods and spirits who are capable of averting the disaster. They bear such names as Eighteen Masters of the Hail, White Celestial Goddess of the East, Nine Sisters of the Lightning, or Daughter of the Wind-God Who Rides on the Wind of the Four Seasons.

The weather-makers themselves say they cannot remove the hail from the clouds. They merely attempt by their spells either to bring the hail down in some place where it can do no harm—as suitable places their books list slate mountains, wooded hills and snowy mountain peaks—or else to keep it in the clouds until the storm has passed over the fields entrusted to their care.

It is said, however, that there are some wizards who can call down hail to the detriment of their fellow-men. Their helper in these evil machinations is the ten-headed planet god Rahu; an image of this deity in yellow rice-dough is therefore the centre of their mysterious rites.

The occult writings of these sorcerers also contain instructions on how to destroy one's foes and their possessions by lightning. Things are not made at all easy for the sorcerer, however. First he must find a spot 'where a black water-spirit dwells'. There he must draw a black triangle on the ground and in the middle of it place an image of a 'king of the water-spirits'. Thunderbolt and demon dagger in hand, he must then call upon the black water-spirit exactly one

hundred thousand times to transfer his 'life-force' to the image. The moment he has succeeded in this, he will see the first flash of lightning.

Keeping off rain is another important function of the weather-makers. They employ various methods to this end—burning mustard seeds, for example, or melting salt on glowing charcoal while repeating incantations. The most difficult task, say the weather-makers, is to produce rain in the event of a drought. Hence this subject is dealt with at particular length in their books. According to these occult writings, the initial choice of a suitable place at which to carry out the conjuration of rain is extremely important. The wizard should take his stand on the pinnacle of a mountain whose slopes contain many springs inhabited by water-spirits. These springs must not have been 'rendered unclean by the presence of a woman or a dog', however. Furthermore, the weather-maker is forbidden to eat meat or garlic before the conjuration, nor may he drink beer. Then he must closely observe the weather: only if there are at least a few signs of possible rain can he expect his conjurations to succeed.

Lack of moisture is generally attributed to vexation on the part of the Lu, the rain-bestowing water-spirits; but various other deities may sometimes be involved. Therefore the magician must observe the colour and shape of the clouds moving across the firmament. If black clouds resembling the locks of angry gods come from the south, the drought is due to the influence of the Mamo she-demons, and ceremonies for their propitiation must be carried out immediately. A brown cloud shaped like a yak driving down from the north points to the activity of the Du devils; while a red cloud looking like a horse indicates the malignant intervention of the Tsan demons.

The actual rain-making ceremonies are long and complicated. In some of them the weather-maker throws pills of dried horse's blood into springs; in others he stands naked on the shore of a lake, wielding his hand-bell and skull drum while he ceaselessly murmurs the following incantation: '*Om! Vajravarahikrotikaliharinisa Ee Ee Hum Hum Jva Jva Phob Phob!*' It is particularly important to ensure the good-

will of the water-spirits, for it is they, above all, who can send the life-giving moisture. If there is a drought it is to be assumed that the water-spirits have been offended by some human sins, or 'hurt' and 'dirtied' by evil deeds. Hence their forgiveness must be asked in prayers, and the sins must be 'washed away'. To this end the weather-maker pours yellow-dyed water over a highly polished metal disc, on which the invisible hordes of the Lu might be reflected.

The weather-maker tries to read the chances of the ceremony's success from his dreams. If he sees in his sleep a grazing cow, a wide river or a woman pouring out water, if he sees himself in new clothes, these are good signs. But if he dreams of a beggar, a conflagration or an empty house, this shows that success will not attend his efforts.

If wide areas of the Snow Land are visited with drought, the Government takes special measures. The monasteries receive orders to hold ceremonies in honour of the water-spirits. The monks read together the three fat volumes of the *Legions of the Water Spirits* and bury offerings to the Lu near springs—*tormas*, gold and silver, pleasant smelling woods and precious stones. The general public also has to take part in rain-making ceremonies. Led by priests, long files of women carrying the heavy volumes of the Buddhist sacred books on their backs move through the fields and round the temples.

Geometrical-looking structures of thin wooden rods and coloured threads are frequently employed in the ceremonies of Tibetan weather-makers. The Tibetans call these magic appliances *do*, but in the terminology of the experts they are designated 'thread crosses'. The simplest *do*, which are scarcely two hand-breadths high, consist of a wooden cross the tips of whose arms are joined with threads. But there are other thread crosses, six to eight feet high and looking very much like radar apparatus, which take the priests weeks of labour to construct. The weather-makers employ the *do* chiefly as demon traps to counter the attacks of evil, hail-bringing spirits. They bury animals' skulls containing strips of paper bearing incantations on the mountain peaks, and build over them stone cairns with several of these thread

crosses stuck in them. The approaching hail-spirits are supposed to get caught in them like flies in a spider's web. It is then an easy matter to deprive the demons of their injurious power, or even destroy them by burning the trap.

A Tibetan weather-maker told me how a fellow magician working for the Government in Lhasa kept the hail away from three buildings entrusted to him, with the aid of thread crosses. He took the precaution of constructing cairns bearing thread crosses at regular intervals all round the buildings. When a heavy hailstorm descended on the city one day and covered the streets and gardens with a thick layer of ice, the populace observed with amazement that not a single hailstone had fallen inside the three magic circles. At least, that's what the weather-maker said. . . .

The thread crosses can be used for other purposes as well. In many ceremonies a *do* serves as the temporary habitation of a divinity; the lamas then call it a heavenly palace. The cotton-wool-like fluff which they attach in such cases to the tips of the wooden rods represents the clouds surrounding these celestial dwellings. A wizard can also compel demonic deities to enter the *do* and then obey his orders. The Tibetan sorcerers use at least a hundred different types of thread cross for their dark purposes. The magic instruments generally bear the names of the type of demon they are intended to ensnare. Thus one of these *do* is called the Knotted Thread Cross of the Du Devils, and another the Bloody Thread Cross of the Very Angry Mamo She-Demons. Once the demon has received his orders the magic snare is brought at dusk—this is the time when the evil spirits move abroad—to a cross-road. As soon as the *do* is put down the demon emerges and hurries off to accomplish his work of destruction.

## The Masters of Black Magic

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‘YES, now we ought to have the magic wheel with the sword spokes!’ So said one of my Tibetan acquaintances with a sigh when I talked to him about the Chinese march on Lhasa.

‘What’s that?’ I asked him in surprise. ‘I’ve never heard of it.’

‘It’s a magic weapon of terrible efficacy,’ declared my acquaintance, ‘a great wheel with eight razor-sharp swords as spokes. Our magicians used to employ it many years ago in resisting foreign invaders. The wheel was charged with magic forces and then released against the enemy. It whirled through the air towards the hostile troops, and its swiftly revolving spokes mowed the soldiers down in hundreds. But the devastation caused by this weapon was so dreadful that the Government forbade it ever to be used again. The authorities even ordered the destruction of all drawings showing how it was made.’

The magic wheel with the sword spokes was not the only ‘secret weapon’ used by the Tibetans in time of war. In Kardo Gompa, a Yellow Hat monastery in the neighbourhood of Lhasa, stands a magical apparatus that was last utilized a few years ago—at the outbreak of the Sino-Tibetan war. It is the so-called Mill of the Death Demons, consisting of two small millstones one on top of the other. The lower one is sunk in a base; the upper one, which has numerous magic spells cut in it, can be turned on its axis by means of a wooden handle. The Mill of the Death Demons was used by the Tibetan Government to kill the leaders of the attacking forces. A priest especially skilled in Black Magic was appointed by the authorities to operate the appliance. He spent weeks of meditation endeavouring to transfer the ‘life-force’ of the men he was to kill into mustard seeds. When he

observed by certain signs that he had succeeded in this, he placed the seeds between the stones and ground them to powder while muttering curses. The destructive force emanating from this magic implement is supposed even to have affected the magicians operating it. Some of them are said to have died soon after turning the Mill of the Death Demons.

When threatened by war the Tibetans also call for aid upon their demonic divinities. One of their most powerful allies in the struggle with the Chinese was thought to be the demon Kshetrapala, an attendant of the six-armed Mahakala. Kshetrapala is a repulsive, dark-blue god with flaming hair, who rides on a black bear. His abode is a burial ground full of terrible apparitions. Drawn by incantations, Kshetrapala left his dwelling and mounted a huge *torma* erected for him by the sorcerers of the two Tantric schools at Lhasa.

The reading of prayers and spells went on for three days. Then the offering-cake with the divinity was taken in a long procession led by Buddhist victory banners to a place outside the city, where a pyramid of dry grass had been built. Further magical proceedings followed, and finally the pyramid was set on fire. To the accompaniment of drumming and prayers the *torma* was hurled into the flames. The fire consumed the offering-cake, and the liberated demon sped away in the direction of the threatened frontier. At the same time the priests lowered the victory banners: a sign to all the armies of evil spirits under Kshetrapala's command to launch a mass attack on the Chinese.

While the magicians of Lhasa were giving wrathful Kshetrapala his marching orders, the monks of Samye busied themselves, on Government orders, with another Black Magic ceremony. They gathered the mighty army of the red Tsan demons in four immense thread crosses in order to send them, too, against the enemies of the Land of Snow. Each thread cross stood on a tall stepped plinth bearing portraits of the enemy leaders as well as a multitude of magically efficacious substances—water from a hundred and eight springs, earth from the same number of burial grounds, the skulls of men of very high and very low origin, bones, the



blood and flesh of owls and crows, weapons with which men had been slain, the nose-tips, hearts and lips of men who died an unnatural death, poisonous plants and many other things. After a ceremony lasting seven days the thread crosses were burned, and the army of demons set free.

When British troops set foot on the hallowed soil of the Land of Gods in 1904, the Tibetans employed all their magic devices to destroy the invaders. But nothing happened. . . . The British occupied Lhasa, and after signing a peace treaty withdrew again unharmed. Two decades after this occurrence the Indian province of Bihar was devastated by an earthquake: many British soldiers perished in the collapsing barracks. Now the Tibetans triumphed. The magic devices had worked after all, they said, even though very late in the day. In 1950, at the beginning of the conflict with China, the Tibetan Government ordered the wizards to perform the usual Black Magic ceremonies. But in vain they turned the Mill of the Death Demons; the army of bloodthirsty Tsan spirits was sent against the advancing army to no purpose. The Chinese machine-guns and artillery proved superior weapons in this unequal struggle.

Politics is naturally not the only field in which Black Magic is employed in the Land of Snow. Love is another rich sphere of activity for the sorcerers. For the most part the ceremonies designed to unleash erotic ecstasy are thoroughly repellent and suitable for discussion only in a purely scientific work.

One of my acquaintances told me of a particularly efficacious love potion produced by an old lama doctor at Lhasa—who also used it to his own advantage on his female patients. He filled a glass with water and dissolved in it a few bezoar stones—concretions with a hard nucleus found in the stomach or intestines of certain animals. Then he uttered a particular spell a hundred thousand times, breathed on the water and quickly covered the receptacle. The more often he repeated this procedure, the more powerful became the love potion. He used to mix it with his patients' medicine, or, when opportunity offered, he dropped it in the beauties' eyes—the most effective way of administering it.

As a rule, however, the aims of the magic practices so common in Tibetan life are far less innocuous than in the case just described: all too frequently their purpose is to cause the material injury, sickness or even death of personal enemies. There are plenty of destructive spells that can be cast without any aid from a priest. It is said that a human life can be destroyed merely by writing the victim's name and age on a piece of paper, folding it up and wearing it in the boot underneath one's heel. But it is more effective still to wrap a few of the victim's hairs in the paper, and then slip it under the pedestal of the image of a demon in a chapel of tutelary deities. This is not quite as easy as it sounds, for the lamas take great care to see that no one commits such a crime in their temple.

The occult writings of the wizards are full of instructions on how to injure people. A work known to the Tibetans as the *Diamond Thunderbolt* recommends, for instance, the following method of causing someone to fall ill: 'Draw a red magic diagram in the form of a crescent moon, and then write the victim's name and origin on a piece of cotton cloth that has been used to cover a plague corpse. As ink use the blood of a dark-skinned Brahmani girl. Invoke the protective deities and hold the piece of cloth in black smoke. Then place it in the magic diagram. Brandishing a magic dagger made from the bone of a plague corpse, repeat the appropriate spell a hundred thousand times. Then lay the piece of cloth where the victim sleeps at night.'

The same book also contains the following recipe for producing madness: 'Draw a white magic circle round the summit of a mountain and set in it the figure of the victim, which you must make from the death-bringing leaves of a poisonous tree. Then write the victim's name and origin on this figure with white sandalwood resin. Hold it in the smoke of burning human fat. While you utter the appropriate spell, take a demon dagger made of bone in your right hand and touch the figure's head with it. Finally, leave it at a spot where Mamo she-demons are wont to gather.'

According to Tibetan belief, the many evil spirits and half-tamed demons are only too willing to aid sorcerers in the

destruction of human life—subject to receiving offerings of a very special sort. The so-called 'inner offerings' presented to them in these cases consist of a cake of dark flour and blood, five kinds of flesh (including human flesh), and the skull of an incestuously begotten child filled with blood and white mustard seeds. These three offerings have to be placed on the skin of a raven. Beside them the 'outer offerings'—bowls of blood and brains, a lamp fed with human fat and having a wick of human hair, a doughy mass of gall, brains, blood and human entrails—must be spread out on the flayed skin of a child. In addition to this, poisonous thorn-apple blossoms and human flesh are to be burnt as incense. In the third, so-called 'secret offering', the deities are supplied with symbolic partners for ritual sexual intercourse.

Even the highest protective divinities are not averse to lending the sorcerers their assistance, only in their case the ceremonies required are quite exceptionally difficult. If, for example, a magician wishes to call on the services of the war-god Chamsring, he must first meditate in a burial ground. It must, however, be situated at a point where three rivers converge near three mountains. Afterwards he must continue his meditations at a spot where a river rushes against rocks and where the voices of owls and other night-birds are to be heard.

A whole series of offerings are needed to entice the war-god to receive his instructions. On the twenty-ninth day of any month, provided it falls on a Thursday, the blood of a 'red dog' diluted with water has to be splashed on the place of meditation, which is then sprinkled with red powder. After this the offerings are spread out. First a few animal figures modelled in dough—a red horse, a brown yak, a red goat and a black sheep. With golden ink or with blood wiped from the blade of a sword, the wizard writes on a piece of Chinese paper the magic syllable of the war-god together with the wishes he desires to have fulfilled. He folds the paper, binds it with red thread and wraps it in a red cloth with various medicines, precious stones, plants and scraps of silk.

But this is only the beginning of the offering; for a multitude of other gifts are also required. These include a demon

dagger of sandalwood sheathed in a piece of black silk, and another of copper in a strip of material that was once wound round the handle of a sword; the skin of a 'red goat' inscribed with curses; the heart of a black sheep stuffed with strips of paper bearing spells; various types of offering-cake, and a great many other things.

The four-armed Mahakala is likewise regarded as a potent helper of wizards. To perform the ceremony at which Mahakala is to be requested to kill someone, the sorcerer must put on a black ritual garment and a broad-brimmed hat of the same colour. He then stands a small table covered with the hide of a tiger or a human skin under a canopy of human skins. On the table he places three stones, and on these a shallow metal bowl containing five little piles of black grains mixed with blood. A small triangular platform is erected in front of this table, bearing in its centre a drawing of the victim. On this platform is placed an iron basin containing a *torma*. The *torma* consists of dark flour mixed with blood and charred remains from a funeral pyre. Round this offering-cake are set various foodstuffs beloved of the demonic gods—onions, garlic, human flesh and beakers of freshly brewed beer. Finally, the iron pan must be enveloped in black silk and fresh entrails.

Various other magic aids are then placed round the triangular platform: for example, a figure modelled from earth on which the victim left his footprint. A skull-bowl filled with black and white mustard seeds, powdered medicines and iron dust from a smithy is also effective. Not until all these preparations have been made does the sorcerer begin, at an astrologically propitious hour, with the reading of the appropriate ritual books.

Numerous adherents of the Bon faith—the Snow Land's pre-Buddhist religion, which is almost extinct in Central Tibet—still live in the Chumbi Valley on the north-east border of Sikkim. There are eight Bon temples here, whose priests profess the so-called White Bon, a form of the ancient faith in which a great deal of Buddhist thought has been incorporated. In addition, however, there are also some magicians of the Black Bon, who have a great deal in common

with the shamans of Siberia. They do not enjoy a particularly enviable reputation, for they are believed to possess powers which they frequently employ to the detriment of their fellow men. These masters of Black Magic also have special methods of divination.

One of their soothsaying rites is performed with the aid of two large, shallow drums. If it is desired, for instance, to know how a sick man will fare, what demon is responsible for his illness, and what healing ceremony might be efficacious, one drum is laid flat on the ground and its surface divided into a light and a dark half by smearing one half with soot. The names of demons are written at regular intervals round the edge of the drum, and a grain of corn placed on each of these names. A further grain of corn, representing the sick man, is placed on the boundary between the light and the dark half of the surface. Then the magician picks up the second drum and begins to beat it slowly, watching the grain of corn in the centre of the drum. It begins to move. If it rolls into the dark half there is no point in continuing the ceremony, for the sick man's fate is sealed. He will die. If the grain moves into the light half, on the other hand, he has good prospects of recovery. The wizard has to find out which demon has caused the illness, and by what ceremony he can be persuaded to relinquish his victim. His drum sounds again, and this time he watches the movements of the grains lying on the names of the various demons. One of them jumps the highest, showing which demon is responsible for the malady. Now the last thing to be ascertained is which ceremony should be performed in honour of this angry deity. Uttering incantations, the wizard places a fresh grain on the drum, calls out the name of a ceremony and beats the second drum again. If it continues to lie motionless, it is replaced by a second and another ceremony is named. So it goes on until at last one of the grains begins to jump—a sign that the last-named ceremony is the one to perform.

In a similar manner, a young man anxious to marry may obtain the advice of the gods as to which of his girl friends he should choose as a wife. Again the sorcerer places a row of grains round the edge of the stationary drum, and one in the

centre. The grain in the centre stands for the bridegroom ; each of the others represents a particular girl. As before the magician beats the second drum and watches the movements of the grains of corn. If one of those from the edges moves towards the middle and follows the symbol of the bridegroom, the young man knows exactly which of the girls the gods recommend him to take as his wife.

To destroy a man's life, the Bon sorcerers of the Chumbi Valley make use of a magic horn. First, whoever is employing the magician must get possession of a few of the victim's hairs or a scrap of his clothing. Then the wizard paints on a piece of paper a human figure whose hands and feet are bound with chains. Round his figure he writes various curses, such as 'Cut through his body!' or 'Divide his heart!' In this paper, which has first been wetted with the blood of a woman of ill-repute, he wraps the victim's hair. He then places the packet in the right horn of a wild yak and fills the horn with the following things : the blood of a man, a woman, a goat and a dog, earth from a road-crossing, iron dust from a smithy, water from an underground spring, a piece of the rope with which someone was hung, poisonous roots and a strip of skin from a woman who died in child-bed. Lastly, two live black spiders go into the horn, which is then closed with a stopper made from the hair of a corpse. Finally the horn is wrapped round with black thread in which are stuck poisonous thorns. While engaged in this work the sorcerer must protect his hands with cloths and take care not to touch any of these magic substances. Otherwise the injurious spell would operate against himself.

After a lengthy ceremony in honour of the evil spirits, the magician takes the horn to the victim's house, either at dusk or at dawn. Now comes the most difficult part of his task : he must try to bury the horn unnoticed under the central pillar, or at least under one of the foundation-walls.

The effects of the magic are supposed to make themselves felt three months later. The chosen victim, and frequently the rest of those living in the house, fall ill and are afflicted with other misfortunes. Often, however, warning signs occur before the three months are up, enabling the victim to

recognize his peril. There are said to be no less than eighty-four of these evil omens. Dreams may also contain warnings that danger threatens. If a person dreams that he is riding naked on an ass in a southerly direction, is binding a red turban on his head, is drinking and dancing with the dead, or that a black woman is tearing the entrails out of his body, then it is high time he took appropriate steps to counter the lethal spell.

Priests must immediately be called into the house. They will try to find the magic horn and dig it up. If they succeed, they throw the injurious charm into the river, where its power is totally destroyed. If they cannot find it, the lamas must bury a protective counter-charm under the foundation-walls. As a rule, they will also endeavour to transfer the noxious influence on to a 'scapegoat'. In most instances a figure of dough suffices for this purpose; but occasionally it is necessary to make use of a human being. A penniless beggar may be willing to assume this role for a rich reward. He runs considerable risk, however, for many scapegoats are said to have died a mysterious death after fulfilling their task.

## Hashish and Red Pepper

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ANOTHER winter was drawing to a close, the third I had spent in Kalimpong. Above the southern foothills flickered the lightning of the approaching monsoon storms, and from the forests that were thirstily absorbing the first drops of rain a myriad moths came every evening to form a multicoloured, fluttering curtain over the windows of my study. Caravans and pilgrims were coming and going as always. The Tibetan traders brought wool and musk to the Kalimpong market; but when they returned to their homeland their mules rarely carried the foodstuffs and fabrics that were usually in such demand. Instead they humped spades, pickaxes and shovels over the passes, for the Chinese were busy constructing a network of roads across the Land of Snow. The Dalai Lama was back in Lhasa, and the Panchen Lama had moved into the palace at Tashiltumpo that had been deserted for so many years.

The Chinese had introduced various innovations, but in general things had changed extraordinarily little in Tibet. The nobles still held their estates, the monks in the lamaseries lived as heretofore, and in name at least there was still a Tibetan Government composed of the old familiar politicians. Only the armed forces had been disbanded. The soldiers had been demobilized or enrolled in the Chinese Army of Liberation. One Tibetan delegation after the other travelled to Peking on 'goodwill missions'; in Lhasa, on the other hand, a host of Chinese officials were busily engaged in learning Tibetan and studying the conditions of life peculiar to the Land of Snow. The high-powered Chinese propaganda did not remain without effect: even amongst the younger nobles the new ideas fell on fertile soil. The Chinese, at least up to the present, have been proceeding very cir-



cumspectly in Tibet. They are obviously well aware that the abortive execution of their plans might lead to catastrophe.

The new situation had not troubled my relations with my Tibetan friends, but it was now extremely difficult to obtain religious texts from Tibet. At the same time, I could be more than satisfied with the anthropological material I had already assembled. It would take me several years to study the Tibetan books I had acquired and organize my copious notes. My valuable collection of Tibetan and Lepcha garments, weapons, implements, ritual objects and books, intended for the Museum for Ethnology, Vienna, had already arrived in my homeland. It was time to think about my return to Europe.

In February I left Kalimpong on a last farewell trip to all the places with which I had become familiar. I began with a visit to Gangtok and then roamed from settlement to settlement for three weeks, accompanied only by a bearer. I lived once more in the smoky Lepcha huts, where rats and bugs stopped me from sleeping, and visited old lamaseries to watch again the mysterious ceremonies of the Buddhist monks. In the Git Valley I met my old friends again, the *bongthings* and the hunters; then my route took me to the Sherpa village where I had learnt so much about the Snowmen. In Git I heard that old Manibu Baji was still alive. But he had grown very weak, and was not expected to live to see another winter. I should have liked to visit the Elder of the Lepcha people once more, but there was no time for the difficult journey to Nyim, since my ship sailed from Bombay in a week.

I said good-bye to my teachers, the three Tibetan saints, and wondered to myself whether I should ever see them again. Then, late one afternoon, the time had come. I sat in a jeep that was to take me down to the plains, talking to Nyima, while the driver stowed my baggage. Good Nyima was determined to be present at my departure. We bade one another farewell. The driver had already started the engine, when Nyima leaned over to me and whispered: 'I promised that the day you left I would tell you what the oracle-priests

take to induce a trance. It is . . . a mixture of hashish and red pepper!’

The vehicle jerked into motion. A wide curve, and then Kalimpong disappeared behind a spur of the mountain. The valleys were already beginning to fill with the pale mists of evening, but the icy strongholds of the gods stood cold and unapproachable on the horizon.