



MUSTANG, The Forbidden Kingdom

EXPLORING A LOST HIMALAYAN LAND

————— By Michel Peissel

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To Marie-Claire

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M. P.

— Contents

1	“The Mule Gun Is on the Yak”	15
2	Great Peaks and Little Blisters	32
3	Trail to Tibet	49
4	“Even Great Lamas Have Fleas”	62
5	Castles in the Clouds	76
6	Tibetan Warlords	93
7	Demons at the Gate	112
8	Medieval Reception	128
9	Walls of Lo Mantang	144
10	All the King’s Men	162
11	The Buddha Who Is Next to Come	183
12	Magic and Medicine	201
13	Man’s Five Funerals	217
14	Search for a Secret	233
15	Kings Like Pearls on a String	249
16	The Gold Kanjur	263

17	The Ghosts of Tsarang	276
18	“Crystal Clear Mountain”	292
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	309
	INDEX	313

— Illustrations

COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS

The author on his way to Mustang	<i>frontispiece</i>
	<i>facing page</i>
The caravan of yaks	30
Calay, Tashi, and Kansa by the author's tents	30
The great gorge of the Kali Gandaki, from Tayen	64
A Khampa warrior	64
Our caravan approaches the door chorten of Tsarang	97
The monastery of Tsarang	129
Detail of ancient Tibetan religious painting depicting monasteries	129
The city of Lo Mantang from the south	160
Trumpets and cymbals resound during the ritual of the chasing of the demons at Lo Mantang	176
Pemba walking within the walls of Lo Mantang	176
Our landlady at Lo Mantang holding Pemba's eldest daughter	177
The great Khampa lama rides out to visit the King of Mustang	224
A caravan from Tibet passing the ruined forts of Tri	224
Gate chortens of the monastery of Garphu	257
The monastery of Nyphu	257
The isolated monastery of Lo Gekar	265
The huge chorten of Tangya, surrounded by lesser chortens	280

MONOCHROME PHOTOGRAPHS

	<i>facing page</i>
Mount Annapurna from the north	31
The Kali Gandaki River emerges from a natural tunnel	31
Our yaks negotiate a difficult passage	65

	<i>facing page</i>
The fort of Tsarang	65
The Lama of Tsarang reading from a prayer book	96
The son of the Lama of Tsarang, himself destined to monastic life	96
The author before the ruins of the Duke's Fort, near Lo Mantang	128
The city gate of Lo Mantang	161
The Lama of Lo Mantang officiating in the demon-chasing ceremony	161
	<i>following page</i>
The author seated with the late King of Lo, Angun Tenzing Tradul	176
Jigme Dorje Tradul, present King of Lo	176
Lobas in a sunny corner of Lo Mantang's main square	176
	<i>facing page</i>
Horse and yak caravans make their way out of Lo Mantang	225
The monastery of Namgyal	256
A lonely rider in the Valley of Death	256
Plowmen prepare the king's fields at Phuwa	264
A volume of the gold Kanjur of Lo	264
Prehistoric cave dwellings overlooking Yara	281

DRAWINGS

	<i>page</i>
Royal apartments on the roof of the main assembly hall, Monastery of Tsarang	104
The Hell of Hells	118
Reincarnation into animals	119
Interior courtyard, monastery of Namgyal	149
Lo Mantang	158
The lonely monastery of Samdruling	206

MAPS

Mustang and adjacent areas of Nepal and Tibet, showing the author's route from Pokhara to Lo Mantang	34
The author's route in Mustang, also principal towns, villages and isolated monasteries	89
Mustang, showing monasteries, tracks, trade routes, and passes	109
The four Worlds, as conceived in Lo	137

MUSTANG, THE FORBIDDEN KINGDOM

— “The Mule Gun Is on the Yak”

THE GODS LIVE there, and for thousands of years priests, monks, and scholars have gone there to die. The Himalayas for centuries past have fascinated all men, while still today their lofty peaks keep hidden many a mystery.

For six months I had been living in the shadow of the great mountains, settled in the small capital of Nepal. With spring, in Kathmandu the mist rises and the clouds open up to reveal the glittering mass of this vertical continent of the snows stretching two thousand miles across Asia. Incessantly I had been looking above the town's pagodas and over the green hills to the white barrier; but my eyes did not rest upon the glamorous summits; my mind focused behind and beyond them. I was searching for something . . . for a dream, a dream that thousands have had before me. I dreamed of a lost horizon, and felt that somewhere there existed the last land unspoiled, untouched, and ageless—a world yet unexplored.

To entertain such dreams in 1964 seemed foolish. This is the account of the journey I undertook in the spring of that year. . . .

On the 23rd of April I was awakened by someone knocking at the door of the cement bungalow in which I lived in Kathmandu. “*Esive, sahib,*” came the voice of the bearer. It was five o'clock; and as I exchanged the night's warmth for a cold bedroom I realized that the day had finally arrived. That day I had so long been looking forward to, and which suddenly I dreaded.

We had to catch a plane at six. It was gray and dark outside, and I suddenly knew that this would be the last time in many months that I would get up to any form of warmth. My wife also arose; although ex-

pecting a child she had insisted on flying with me to the isolated village of Pokhara, so as to be able to spend "just one night in my tent," and see me off.

Quite soon the shuffle of boots on the cement floor announced the arrival of Calay. He hardly looked businesslike in the clothes I had bought for him. Large baggy white pants hid his bowlegs, tucked into blue socks that protruded over leather climbing boots. He wore a checkered lumberjack shirt and a bright pink sweater that belonged to my wife. Calay was my cook and sirdar, the only servant I had been able to find in the entire valley of Kathmandu ready to join my risky enterprise. I thought I knew Calay well, but over the past months I had begun to doubt his dependability—as I had begun to doubt everything, including my own capability to carry out the project I had undertaken, and which now, indeed, at 5:00 A.M. appeared to me to be pure folly.

The sitting room of our living quarters looked like the depot of a bus station. Two large shiny steel trunks stood beside two great wooden boxes that Calay and I had nailed together the night before. Bulky kit bags lay about the floor. A great wicker basket crammed with saucepans and plastic jugs leaned against a table. It was all there—my small world, the little universe that from now on would be my only link with a semblance of civilization.

A few minutes after Calay's arrival, Tashi knocked on the door. His eyes, puffed up from sleep, seemed like two slits in his boyish face. At least he had turned up, and only now was I sure that he, too, was coming. He was dressed in smart narrow black trousers and a spotless white shirt. I wondered if he fully knew what he was in for. Tashi was Tibetan, twenty-one years old, and the most sophisticated young man I had met in my entire stay in Kathmandu. He was a refugee in Nepal. He called himself an Amdo Sherpa—that is, an Amdo from the east. This made him officially a Chinese citizen.

But say this to Tashi and he would get angry, and then laugh, explaining confidently that the Amdo Tibetans were once the rulers of the world, a race of kings. . . . I wondered what living three months with an Amdo Sherpa would be like. Tashi would be my only real companion, and he spoke only Tibetan. As for Calay, I knew that I could expect little companionship from him. All I hoped was that he would be as efficient as he had been in 1959, when I had taken him to the Everest district of Nepal. There Calay had proved invaluable for his courage and honesty. These qualities were characteristic of the mysterious Tamang people, and I had believed then that Calay would

die to protect me. But now, five years later, it seemed that he had changed. He was now twenty-seven, my own age, and an old man by local reckoning, and his outlook seemed to have been affected by such evils as envy and ambition. My wife had begged me to find someone else, but I blindly trusted in Calay, recalling the hardships we had lived through together. Besides, no one else would come.

The equipment and cases were loaded onto two jeeps. To the roar of the engines we left the grounds of the Royal Hotel and bumped out into the street, where already many coolies were silently jogging beneath their bamboo poles on their way to obscure destinations in the bazaar.

I wondered whether our plane could take off, for the sky was low and dark, smothering the valley of Kathmandu in damp mist like an airtight lid resting upon the tall green hills that surrounded this small island of civilization lost in a chaos of mountains and peaks.

The little airport building was bustling with activity that contrasted with the early hour. Everyone looked at me suspiciously as Calay, under my supervision, loaded our cases onto the scales. Six hundred and fifty pounds of excess baggage! I paid for it out of a small blue zipper case heavily laden with silver coins, for paper money, I knew, is often shunned in the remote corners of Nepal, and would no doubt be unknown where I was going. The plane would be delayed three hours because of the weather. I fumed, while everybody looked at me as if I were some sort of baggage master. I wanted to tell them that I was off on an expedition, about to walk off the map, but it would have been useless. I nervously puffed away at my cigarettes, knowing that I had over a hundred packs in my steel cases—which now sat out in the rain under the wing of an antique DC-3. Standing by my equipment was Calay, shouting orders to airport attendants. I suddenly felt proud of him.

I hardly dared to believe that at long last I was set to go. In my pocket I hugged the precious piece of paper that it had taken me six months to acquire: a duly signed permit that allowed me at my own risk (this had been spelled out quite clearly) to venture into the forbidden territory of Mustang. Endless negotiations had been necessary to obtain this card that authorized me to strike out across the strategic border zones where neutral Nepal met Communist-occupied Tibet.

A war was on, I had been reminded, and it was not the Chinese army that I feared most. Strangely enough, my main concern was the Khampas, or "Khambas," as the fearful name is pronounced. In Kathmandu this name had begun to echo like a cry of alarm. The fierce

reputation of these rough bandit tribes now extended beyond the snowy barriers down to the hot lands. Since time immemorial, long before Marco Polo's day, this name had spread panic in Tibet. The Khampas were considered the plague of central Asia, and a deadly menace to all travelers. Now, through a succession of unexpected events, they had become the last defenders of the land of the Dalai Lama. They were now on Nepal's borders, fighting the forces of Peking—but the Khampas were an unruly lot and a menace also to Nepalese traders or to any foreigner who might cross their path. To enter the border zones they held was, I had repeatedly been told, to court disaster; it was everyone's opinion that they would arrest my small party, kill us, or at least rob me of my possessions.

Also, I still feared that the Nepalese authorities might change their minds. It seemed impossible that I should have been the first foreigner to be granted a permit to reside at length and to travel at will in the forbidden kingdom of Mustang, the most isolated and unexplored corner of the Himalayas. Mustang was, I felt, the true lost kingdom I had always dreamed about. It was by accident that I had first heard its name mentioned in Nepal. Nobody really knew anything much about Mustang beyond the fact that it was forbidden to go there and that its territory started over sixty miles on foot behind the 26,000-foot Annapurna range and Mount Dhaulagiri, which are among the highest mountains on our planet.

There is nothing quite so exciting as what is forbidden, and I had immediately become fascinated by Mustang. At first it seemed impossible that such a place could exist in our era of space exploration. When I located it on a map it seemed even more fascinating. Its territory of some 500 square miles stuck out in Communist-held Tibet. Only one trail linked Mustang to Nepal, and my estimates, which later proved correct, showed that Mustang must be the highest kingdom in the world, with a mean altitude of 15,000 feet.

As for the area's identity as a true kingdom, this also seemed surprising, yet it was supported by brief references in literature on the Himalayas. The earliest reference to Mustang I could find in Western literature dated from 1793. In his book recording his travels, W. J. Kirkpatrick, the first Englishman to visit Nepal, mentions having been told of the Kali Gandaki River, of which he notes: "The source of the river is said to be situated to the northward of Mookti, in the direction of Moostang." To this he adds, "*Moostang is a place of some note in upper Tibet or Boot.*" Nine years later, in 1802, F. Buchanan mentions "Mas-tang, a Lordship in Tibet," which he explains is "the territories of the

Bhotiya chief, called the Mastang Raja." From that time on the name "Mastang," or "Mustang," as it was spelled after 1852 crops up occasionally. All these references indicate the independent status of the mysterious "King, or Raja of Mustang who is a Tibetan."

The West had to wait 159 years after Kirkpatrick's first comments on the land before the first white man ever set foot there. This was as late as 1952, when in the course of his lengthy travels in the Himalayas the Swiss geologist Toni Hagen became the first foreigner to reach Mustang, of which after a brief visit he wrote, "It is so remote as to be virtually independent."

What was Mustang really like? Who exactly was its king? What were the limits and extents of his territory and his power? These were questions that in 1964 were unanswered. The answers I had set out to discover. Over the more recent years since Toni Hagen's first visit, Mustang had become forbidden territory owing to political complications with China and the Khampas, and it was against all probability that I had been granted as a great favor the first authorization ever given by the Nepalese government, which controls access to this lonely land, to reside there at length. Before me, countless well-known climbers, explorers, and anthropologists had been refused a permit to proceed to the area.

Nevertheless, most of my worries still lay ahead along the two hundred miles of treacherous trails over the Himalayan range.

Finally, at midday, we boarded the rickety DC-3 that would take us to Pokhara, and thus save us eight days' additional journey on foot. I fastened my safety belt with the habitual sensation that in a few minutes we would be disintegrating. As we rumbled down the airstrip I held my wife's hand, while Calay smiled with a calm air of importance, and Tashi—who had seen his first plane but a few years before and had never ridden one—stared out of the window, relaxed and delighted.

In a great swoop we gained altitude to fly out of the enclosed valley, passing above the neat brick houses of Kathmandu—the sacred Yam-bula of the Tibetans—a city of artists that had for centuries radiated its craftsmen all over the East. We flew above the great Tibetan Buddhist shrine of Bodhnath, where months earlier I had gone every day to take Tibetan lessons with a young Khampa, a member of the much-feared warrior tribe.

It was at Bodhnath that I had first become acquainted with Khampa soldiers, those very people who—so everyone said—would cause my

venture to fail. How, I now wondered, had I ever become involved with Tibet and Tibetans?

There was nothing in particular, it seemed, to guide me to the abode of snows. As a child in England, it seemed that my destiny was given to rain rather than snow, and when I recall with what reluctance I had to be dragged by my Nanny up the hill to our house, and with what pleasure and relief I discovered the existence of escalators when I was six, it seems that climbing was just the thing I was not made for. I have always believed I was made to be wheeled, pushed, or pulled around the world, and my aversion to strenuous exercise had always brought me to congratulate myself for having been born well into the era of mechanical transport.

I owed my present situation no doubt to the craving for the exotic that was inspired in me by the rather dull and too tame surroundings of our Hertfordshire home. There I rapidly grew tired of spotting songbirds or field mice, ridiculously small compared to the gigantic monsters I invented upon my pillow before falling asleep. I grew up wanting to be brave and chivalrous in a world of tender loving care, Nanny, girl guides, mothers and nuns, and "Don't play there or you'll get dirty." In brief, I liked being a naughty boy, and there is truly nothing quite so naughty as doing what one should not do, such as getting involved with Tibet and Tibetans, and roaming over the Himalayas on foot in the second decade of jet travel. Further, there was nothing more forbidden than going to Mustang, a remote area fenced in by a Chinese army.

It had taken me time before I got that naughty. Things really began to work in that direction when, having skipped a law class while studying in Paris, I drifted into a dusty bookshop near the church of Saint-Sulpice. I had gone there for shelter from the street rather than with any particular idea in mind. When the door had closed behind me with the embarrassing tinkle of a bell, I realized that I was in an Oriental bookshop. The Orient had always given me a slight shudder, connected, I suppose, with the uneasy feeling I get when looking at Chinese statuettes, furniture, or paintings, an art so foreign and complicated as to bring about the same sickly effect as that of an over-rich, sweet pudding.

There was also Kipling, but I had never really savored his little Orient, as he depicted mainly a top contemporary breed of men—old British colonels like those who had attempted to play with me in parks in England and from whom my Nanny had pulled me away. India and colonels for me wore mustaches, and there was nothing (except

perhaps Chinese statues) that gave me such a dubious sensation as mustaches.

These were, at any rate, the sincere though mostly erroneous ideas I held of the East when I found myself faced by M. Prevoisin in his musty bookshop. I was surrounded by scholarly Chinese works whose graceful characters, I felt, could conceal only evil and mysterious contents.

"What is it that you are looking for?" asked a subservient and, I felt, slightly Oriental voice. I hate being taken aback, and out of the blue said I was looking for a Tibetan grammar. I then did not even suspect the existence of a Tibetan written language, and felt positive that there was no such thing as what I had requested.

Well—it served me right. M. Prevoisin shuffled off to a dimly lit corner of his shop, grabbed with rather surprising energy a perilous-looking ladder, and before I had time to back out of his store he was handing down to me a small green book—Bell's *Grammar of Colloquial Tibetan*. "Will this do?" he asked from the height of his squeaky perch.

"Exactly what I want," I said, astounded. "I'm sure you don't sell many of these," I added with the smug air of an Oriental scholar.

"You'd be surprised how many I sell," answered the now detestable M. Prevoisin. "All kinds of crackpots come and buy them, not to study but because they believe there are mysterious properties attached to Tibetan words!"

I paid, and walked out angrily. I had been fooled.

I have since then lost all my watches, scores of lighters, and every pen I have owned. I lose everything, and have become quite famous in the small world of my family for being absentminded. But I never, never, it seemed, was able to lose Bell's *Grammar of Colloquial Tibetan*. It just followed me, always popping up unexpectedly, until finally I began to read it.

Snobbery did the rest, as I slowly felt the excitement of those who belong to a secret world. At first I used my grammar for impressing girl friends with such empire-building phrases as "The mule gun is on the yak." Then the obsession began, and I dreamed of telling a Tibetan that a mule gun was on the yak, just to see what his reply might be. I now had all the answers: "Clean all brass ornaments," or "Monks are lazy," to cite but two. In Bell's *Grammar* I held British colonialism in a nutshell, the last sentences of the grammar reading, "The British Government desires to maintain amicable relations with other governments," followed by "They will make every endeavor to pick a quarrel

with the Tibetan government,” and as final policy, “Our government has no aim other than the maintenance of the *status quo!*” *Status quo!* How colloquial can you get? I wondered, as I pored over the mysterious pages of Sir Charles Bell’s work. So far out from the habitual *La plume de ma tante*.

It then dawned on me that it would be a naughty thing to do to go to Tibet myself. Here my troubles began, and I was whisked off to another university in an endeavor to store up knowledge that was forever taking me further from mule guns and yaks.

It was only through a clever piece of treachery, and a succession of accidents, that I managed to divert my heavily burdened scholastic yak from the righteous track of academic study onto the path of adventure. When in Mexico, through rather unpredictable circumstances completely foreign to Tibet, I found myself thrown into an adventure that was later to brand me with the dubious title of an explorer. After having trekked down the little-known, jungle-covered coast of Quintana Roo in eastern Yucatan, I found myself bearing once again the yoke of academic studies, or at least the study of Business Administration, at Harvard. Although after each class I would whisper to myself that “the mule gun was ready,” it seemed to me that my yak was being replaced by the intricate steel cogs of heavy industry and that, compared to IBM accounting sheets, my mule gun was slightly antiquated. Was I not in the Atomic Age? Nevertheless, I refused to accept the *status quo*.

It was then that one day, in the brightly lit library of the Harvard Business School, I suddenly saw creeping over my balance sheet a small caravan of Tibetans, slowly and silently making their way from the margin to the credit column, cutting in and out of “debits” before facing me with the indisputable total that I had to do something about all this.

Soon afterward, in New York, I had the pleasure of meeting His Holiness Tagster Rimpoche, the brother of His Serenity the Dalai Lama. Seated in a taxi with His Holiness, cruising down Second Avenue, I attempted to test some of the Bell phrases. I was in the process of counting up to ten for the amusement, or more likely the boredom, of my holy friend—when the driver twisted around. Having overheard me, he started counting on his fingers in German, adding “I, too, come from the Old Country,” a remark that slightly surprised the brother of the Dalai Lama. The Old Country—yes, Tibet was in many ways the oldest country, and suddenly I felt an aversion to taxis, and yearned for travel by caravan.

I now started taking lessons with a Tibetan—probably the only Tibetan in the United States besides Tagster Rimpoche. He was a diminutive young man of about seventeen, the son of a Tibetan minister. After some unusual circumvolutions, he had ended up in a college of sorts in New London. From Harvard I now drove down to New London quite frequently. The State Department, who were no doubt also for the *status quo*, had to be consulted by phone before each of these visits, which were even more suspicious to them than they were to my own family. With my young teacher I would go to a nearby bar in a hotel. There a gruff granny-type barmaid once came up to us and abruptly asked, "Where's your identification?" in a rude voice. I had described as best I could what an I.D. was to my friend, who had none, explaining that to drink alcohol in Connecticut one had to be twenty-one. "Okay, kid," said the old woman, "just write your age and place of birth on a piece of paper." Upon which my professor wrote down his age and the word "Lhasa." The woman picked it up, looked at it, and scribbled "Conn." (for Connecticut) under the name of the Tibetan capital, thus performing one of the most staggering geographical connections I have ever seen.

This only brought me to ponder that between Harvard and Tibet there lay more than one sea and that I had yet to travel a great deal to get there. In fact, to go to Tibet soon proved impossible, as the Chinese were already partly in control. It was then that I spotted in my world atlas the small Kingdom of Bhutan, which glared at me with an insolent eye that belied the fact that it had no diplomatic relations and was closed to the outside world. Obviously, here was the land of mystery I had dreamed of conquering with my mule gun.

I immediately set about preparing an expedition to go there. With the help of the Dalai Lama's brother I secured the necessary letters of introduction to the prime minister of Bhutan, and eventually—thanks to the generosity of a distinguished traveler and mountaineer from Cambridge, Massachusetts—I found myself in a position to go out to Bhutan, accompanied by an anthropologist from Harvard and Bell's *Grammar*.

Physically I hardly felt prepared, after months in a swivel chair, to climb the Himalayas, but at twenty-two I thought I had the aggressiveness to overcome all obstacles. I was prepared for everything except having to fight barehanded 600,000,000 Chinese, who waited till I embarked for India to invade Tibet and take over Lhasa, regardless of any trouble this might cause to Connecticut! My plans for Bhutan were shattered, but not my ambition, as from Kalimpong (the

Indian gateway to Tibet) I suddenly decided, on meeting Tensing, the conqueror of Everest, to go to Everest myself with my companion Alain Thiollier, and to carry out our anthropological survey there instead of now inaccessible Bhutan.

After countless troubles and sixteen days of climbing, I finally was able to tell the Tibetan-speaking Sherpas that "my yak gun was under the mule," to their great hilarity. There, within three months, began my lasting passion for Tibet and its peoples, for the Himalayas and their majestic world.

Back in Europe, for a long time, there lingered in me a nostalgia for the open-faced smiles of Tibetan people, and a deep attraction to their religion and manners. I now had friends who answered to the names of Tsering, Tensing, and Norbu, and I was lost forever to the world of debits, credits, and calculators.

As I was new to anthropology, I endeavored to acquire at the Institute of Social Anthropology at Oxford the necessary background to put to greater use the chances that I hoped would be available to me. But the sixteenth-century beatitude of Oxford's quads, and the tepid warmth of countless pints of beer, only made Tibet drift more remotely than ever into a background of polemics bespattered with elaborate diagrams of fictitious kinship patterns applicable only to extinct Eskimo tribes.

In the meantime, in Tibet proper, death was rampant, as the nation stood alone, fighting China. Communism was "liberating" central Tibet, apparently from itself, while at Oxford—as elsewhere—few people cared that a lonely civilization was falling victim to a political fury engendered by European schools of thought.

Obscurely, an International Commission of Jurists gathered to calm the conscience of the world, proving that Tibet was the victim of genocide, so that the so-called civilized nations could wash their consciences clean, knowing that at least, to help Tibet, ink had been spilled. One more obscure pamphlet was published to be filed into oblivion. The uncut pages of this book read that monks were being covered in wool and set afire, others were sent out for forced labor to die in obscurity, while thousands more were deported and drowned in the great human ocean of China.

In the meantime Tibet was ringed off by India, sealed outside history to prevent evidence of the mass murder of its population from glaring out to blind a world that allowed machine guns and planes to spit down death on yaks, few or none of which, unfortunately, had any such contraptions as mule guns. For three years after the flight of the

Dalai Lama, inside Tibet there raged a bloody war that pitted the last un-Westernized civilization against the latest of the convert nations to Western mechanization and armaments. With great courage, fierce Khampa soldiers from the warrior tribes of eastern Tibet fought on against the Chinese, unknown and unnoticed. Anyhow, Oxford won the boat race.

Of going to Tibet there was no chance, as for foreigners to witness genocide would be unwelcome. The Himalayan range was turned into a wall of shame far greater and more distressing than the cement one in the central European city of Berlin.

My only hope to use the little knowledge that I possessed of this culture was to visit some of the areas of the greater Tibetan ethnic region: either Bhutan or the Tibetan areas of India or Nepal. But all this was optimistic thinking, as for political reasons to go even to those areas was considered by London and Washington to be impossible, owing to restrictions of a political nature on foreign travel.

After leaving Oxford I spent over a year preparing for a departure that, as time went by, not only seemed every day more remote, but in fact became so while I slowly got bogged down in the complicated apparatus of university requisites, the hesitations of foundations, and the effects of other people's advice and opinions on a subject about which they knew little or nothing.

All told, after two years of effort and countless frustrating interviews I had to conclude that I could expect no support from either foundations or learned societies. Once again I realized that if I were to leave it would have to be on my own and with financial means I did not possess. It is far easier today, I concluded, to find money to study tame mice in a laboratory than to venture into the truly unknown fields of research and exploration. Somehow, unknown areas have little value for the books of tax-dodging philanthropical accountants; nobody believes in their existence. After all, even the moon has lost its mystery today.

Eventually, with my wife and more optimism than means, I set out for the Himalayas once again. In India we were fortunate to receive the much-sought-after and rare honor of being invited to visit the secluded Kingdom of Bhutan, as guests of Prime Minister Jigme Dorji and his wife. I was again close to the realization of my dream when Jigme Dorji, who was to be our host, was ruthlessly assassinated. With his death my hope of visiting Bhutan, the Land of the Dragon, was shattered once more.

Months passed, and in Kathmandu I began to develop a more ambi-

tious project. As we now flew in the Dakota toward Pokhara, a small town lost in the hills of central Nepal, I wondered if I were not being again too ambitious. I was now headed for the heart of the Tibetan border troubles, for a practically unexplored area never before visited at length by any foreigner, a kingdom that projected dangerously into Communist-held Tibet. This was the area known on the inaccurate maps of the Himalayas as Mustang.

Bumping through the clouds, the plane advanced with great green hills at its wingtips. On these terraced pyramids clung the poor little villages of Nepal, the Hindu kingdom in the shade of the Himalayas, whose northern frontier contains the greatest peaks of our planet, such as Mount Everest, Dhaulagiri, and Annapurna, the incredible snow-covered masses called Himal in Hindi. This was the great Kang-ri of the Tibetans, which I now planned to cross to reach forbidden Mustang.

Soon the plane began to circle above a cloud-filled valley, green and freshly laid out with rice fields dotted with neat brick houses with thatched roofs. This was Pokhara.

When the door of the plane opened, a fresh breeze smelling of foliage came to greet us. The grassy field in which we stood was crowded with humanity—peasants in baggy white trousers and black fez-like hats; women with rings of gold in their noses; a whole mass of medieval faces, the majority of whom had come on foot from miles away just to see the show; that is, the airplane. For in Pokhara there are no cars, no electricity, nothing mechanical or modern except the great silver birds that once a day rumble in with a cargo of foreigners, Tibetans and Nepalese merchants, along with pigs and mattresses and other trifles that link this area of Nepal with a modern world that, so the people are told, exists outside the confines of their ravined hills and terraced rice fields.

Pokhara, for me, just meant the beginning of a trail that stretched in my mind right out of Nepal. The peasants of the airfield did not belong to the followers of the Dalai Lama, to the Tibetan world for which I was headed.

A young police officer came up and asked my purpose in Pokhara. My heart beat as I fumbled for the permit, a small piece of brown Nepalese paper on which were printed the cabalistic Devanagari signs that spelled Tukutchu, Dolpo, Manang, and Mustang. Four words, of which only one was really my true goal, my wish and dream—Mustang. Tukutchu was a town halfway on my route; Dolpo and

Manang two Tibetan-speaking districts beyond the frosty barriers of the Himalayas that now barred our horizon to the north, while Mustang, more remote than the other two areas, lay far beyond the world of the monsoon, sticking out and above the great Tibetan plateau into Chinese-occupied territory.

The official could not read, but he smiled, saying, "*Himal Jhane*" (Going to the snows). I nodded.

At the airport our equipment was packed into a squeaky oxcart behind which Marie-Claire, Tashi, Calay, and I walked to the center of Pokhara. We passed women washing clothes, smiling children, and small shrines to obscure Hindu divinities nestled beside pools where buffaloes wallowed in mud. It was the habitual Hindu universe that seems steeped in lethargy. No, this was not the world I had come to seek. My dreams were set upon a more savage and remote universe.

As we advanced, Tashi suddenly tugged at my arm and pointed out to me three men—Khampa soldiers. They walked like great robots, swinging their powerful arms and leading three tall horses with big silver-inlaid saddles partly covered with brightly colored carpets. These Khampas stood a good six feet in height, head and shoulders taller than the small, barefooted Nepalese, who suddenly seemed minute and ragged in comparison. The Khampas wore great heavy boots and flowing khaki robes that flapped like whips as they walked, advancing with their feet slightly apart as if to trample the grass to extinction. Like all Tibetans, they had the characteristic heavy gait of those used to pacing up mountains. Unlike Tibetans of Lhasa, their features were not Mongoloid, but straight, with large, fierce eyes set beside beak-like noses, and long hair braided and wound around their heads, giving them a primitive allure. They walked proudly, their posture erect. Children scuttled out of their way, and seeing the Nepalese stare at them, I realized what is meant by fear. I felt strangely attracted to the Khampas, but the sight of them now angered as well as pleased me. The anger was the result of my fear—fear that they might stop me, rob me, or kill me; the pleasure arose from the fact that they were fighting in one of the noblest of all causes. They were desperadoes, men destined to almost certain death, the only men to stand face to face with China. To quote Bell's *Grammar*, "The Khampas are the bravest Tibetans."

They passed without so much as looking at us.

After having crossed half of Pokhara, the oxcart turned into a side street and onto a patch of grass before a great white stuccoed building in Occidental style. This unexpected structure had once been the summer home of a Rana, a member of the family that had ruled over

Nepal for a century until 1950, when the legitimate Gurkha King of Nepal was reinstated on his throne after a small revolution.

The house now belonged to the Serchans. I had an introduction to this family of merchants from the brother of the King of Nepal, H.R.H. Prince Basundhara. The Serchan family are famous from Kathmandu to Lhasa. They are the Venetians of the southern slopes of the Himalayas, merchants who instead of launching ships send out great caravans to weather the trails of the Himalayan plateau. Their home is Tukutchu, a large village six days north of Pokhara, the gateway between Hindu Nepal and the central Asian expanse of Tibet, Mongolia, Russian Turkestan, and eastern China.

The Serchans, I had been told, could assist me on the first leg of my journey from Pokhara to Tukutchu.

A servant ushered me into the great mansion where Nepalese furniture and mats were mingled with Tibetan carpets and ancient wooden chests, contrasting with the European exterior aspect of the residence.

A small, jovial-looking man came to greet me, bowing Hindu fashion and beckoning me to sit beside his cushion. To my pleasure I discovered that Indraman Serchan spoke Tibetan, and soon we were conversing in the pleasant-sounding language of monks and nomads.

"You are on a long journey?" my host queried.

"Yes, to Mustang," I answered. A silence followed.

"The trail is hard and long," Indraman said. He then explained to me that two traders had been found shot in Mustang. The route, he pointed out, was now considered unsafe because of the Khampas, and owing to them and the Chinese, trade between Nepal and Tibet had been much reduced. Consequently Indraman's family had moved down to Pokhara and in recent years had shifted their business from Tibet to the Indian border and Kathmandu.

All this was hardly comforting. I hurriedly inquired about finding coolies in Pokhara to come with us. No porters could be found to go up to Mustang, Serchan informed me, as the area was too high and cold and the porters might die in the passes we would have to cross, where there would still be snow at this time of year.

If we were prepared to wait, Serchan said, he was expecting a caravan of ponies with loads of salt to come down from Tukutchu, and we could return north with them to that town, where he suggested we try to secure yaks.

Since the absence of any telegraph or modern postal service made the arrival of this caravan uncertain, I preferred first to try to find coolies of my own to go to Tukutchu.

In the meantime, Calay had set up our tents in front of Serchan's house, and we prepared for a first night in camp. Going through the bazaar with Tashi, I picked up the last commodities we would need—kerosene for our lamps, two padlocks, and some pencils. With this accomplished, we were now, I hoped, set to leave.

The following morning I escorted my wife back to the airstrip. Watching her fly off, I felt that my last link with the outside world was broken. I returned to my small camp universe.

I found Calay in a bad mood. He claimed that he needed an assistant, a cook-helper, a request that I felt was exaggerated, as he only had to cook for two. I had planned on acquiring an additional servant once we arrived in Tibetan-speaking territory, as such a servant would be most useful in bargaining with the local inhabitants. But Calay, who now had been spoiled by previous parties and larger expeditions, began to sulk, explaining that Bhotias (Tibetans) were lazy and no good and that he had here a friend who would be perfect. I finally gave in and asked to see his "friend," who, Calay said, was like himself a Tamang.

At first sight of Calay's friend, I shuddered. Before me stood a loincloth-wearing character about forty-five years old, his skinny features marred by an eye that drooped sightless in a dead stare. I could not dream of hiring such a scarecrow. His appearance was repulsive, and I felt his whole aspect was that of a crook, except that he lacked the black eye patch he should have worn.

Out of weakness, though, I gave in. Kansa now became the not too decorative addition to our party, as cook-helper and auxiliary coolie. When I pointed out that he would no doubt die or fall sick from the cold in Mustang, it was suggested that I buy him clothes. This done, Kansa looked a little better, and unknowingly I had acquired a most valuable addition to our small party. Kansa became the good grandfather of our group. All we needed now were porters.

It was only at four in the afternoon that, thanks to Calay, some turned up. They appeared from the bazaar looking like a bunch of desperadoes, rough, husky fellows, quite different from the usual lean coolie. Although I felt that strength was a definite asset for porters, it did seem to me that these men looked a little too strong to be just plain, honest coolies. My presentiment was not far wrong.

The porters were six in all; as we had ten loads, I was about to have Calay search for more when they agreed to take double loads, asking the outrageous fee of 12 to 15 rupees a day, four times the regular coolie wage in Kathmandu. I eventually agreed, skeptical that

they could ever carry such loads, the heaviest of which weighed 120 pounds, for the six days we should need to reach Tukutchu. I paid them advances and made them swear to turn up the next morning at dawn.

That evening I strolled about the bazaar with Tashi. Tibetan was now my only mode of expression, and I was already steeped in a strange world. I tried to share my fears and apprehensions with Tashi, my only companion. This, however, was not as successful as I had hoped. A thousand questions, worries, and doubts assailed my mind.

"What do you think about Kansa?" I would ask Tashi, hoping for a reply to comfort me.

"I don't think," replied Tashi.

"Is he a good man?" I rephrased my question.

"I cannot tell; I do not know him," was Tashi's reasonable reply.

"Have we forgotten anything?" I asked again.

"I cannot tell; you are the person to know," came Tashi's blunt answer.

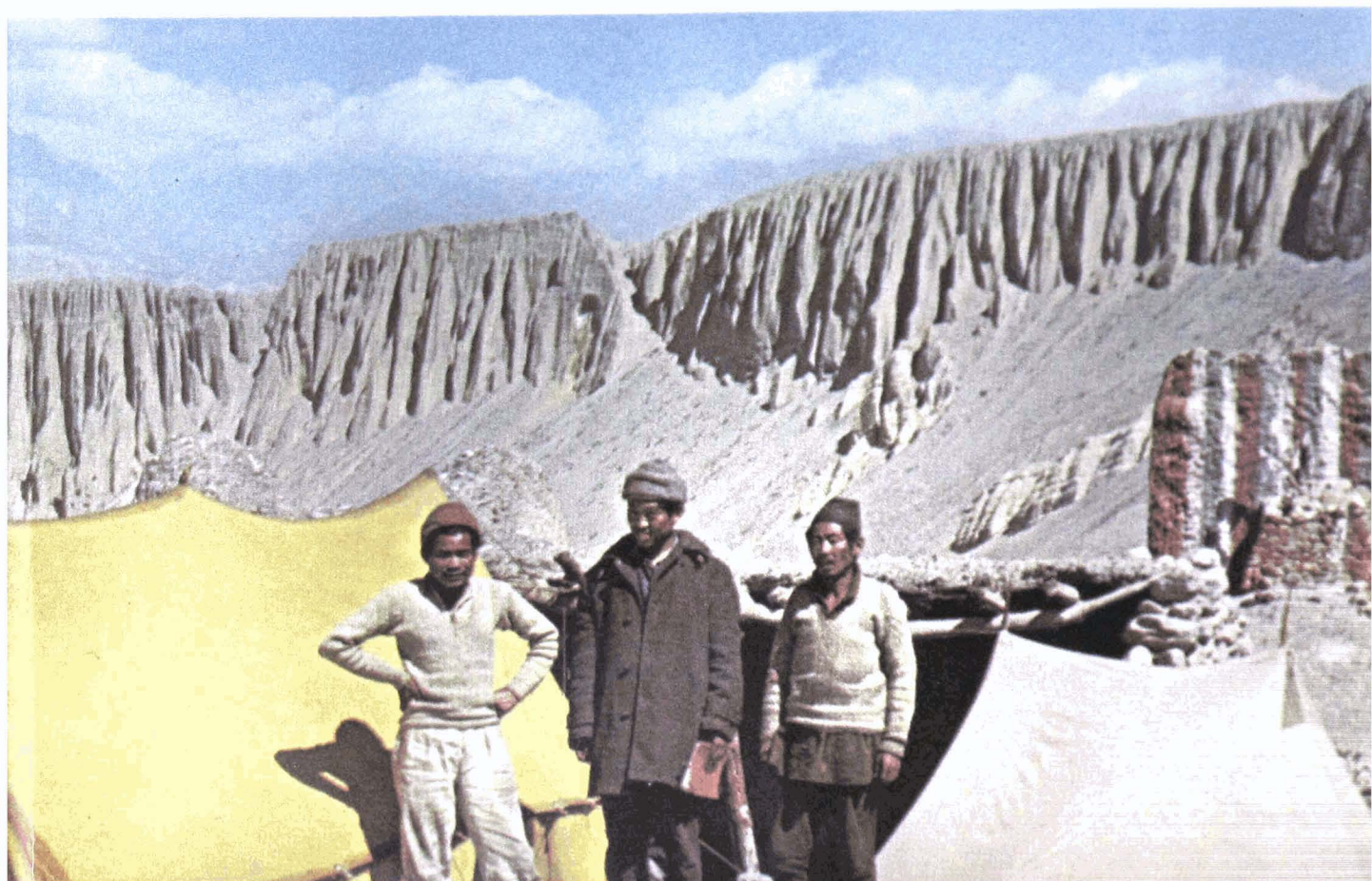
I started to wonder if I should get anywhere with him after all. Finally, Tashi straightened everything out with the remark: "You always ask if I think this or I think that. We in Tibet never think. How can I think about what I do not know?"

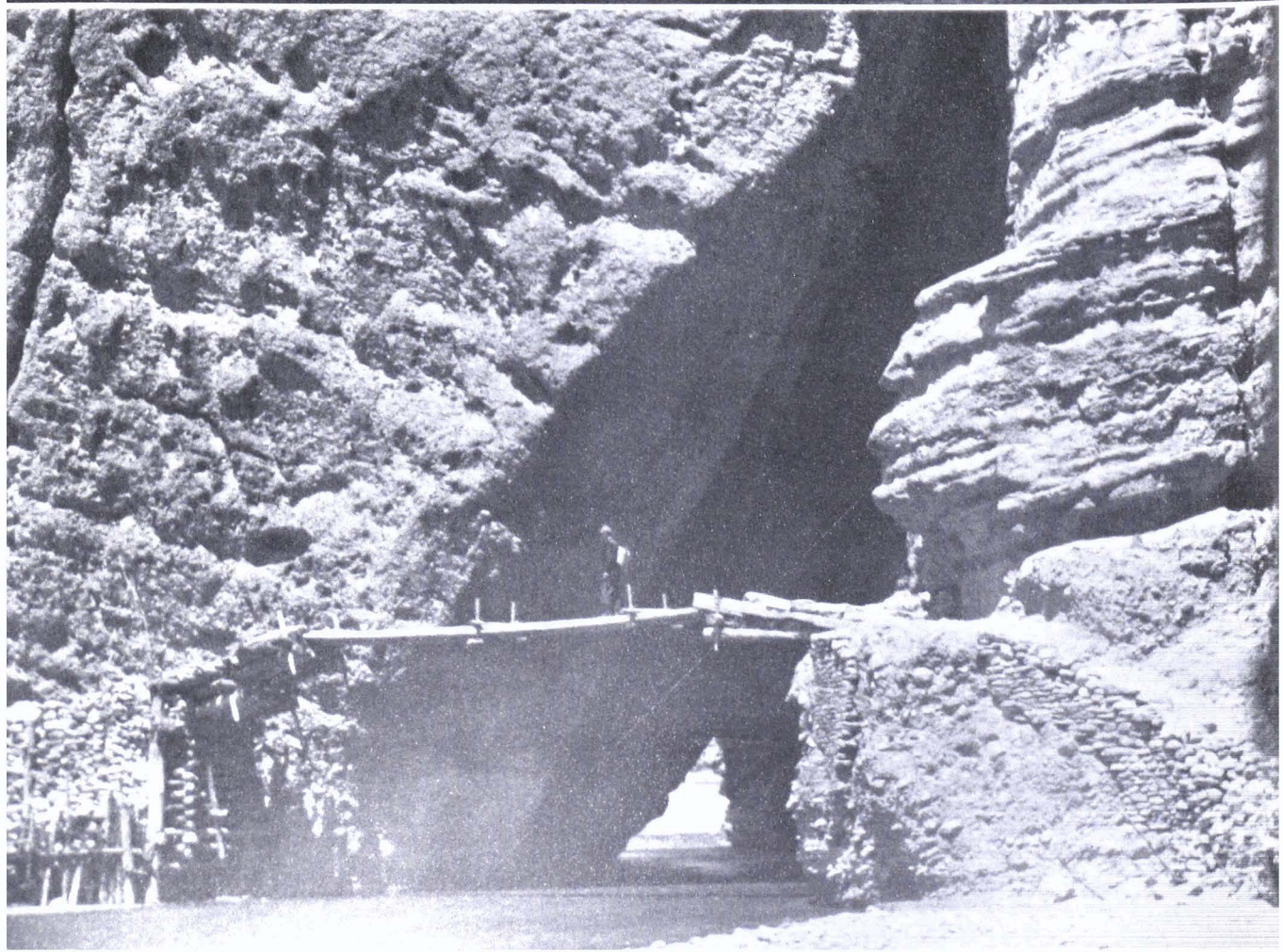
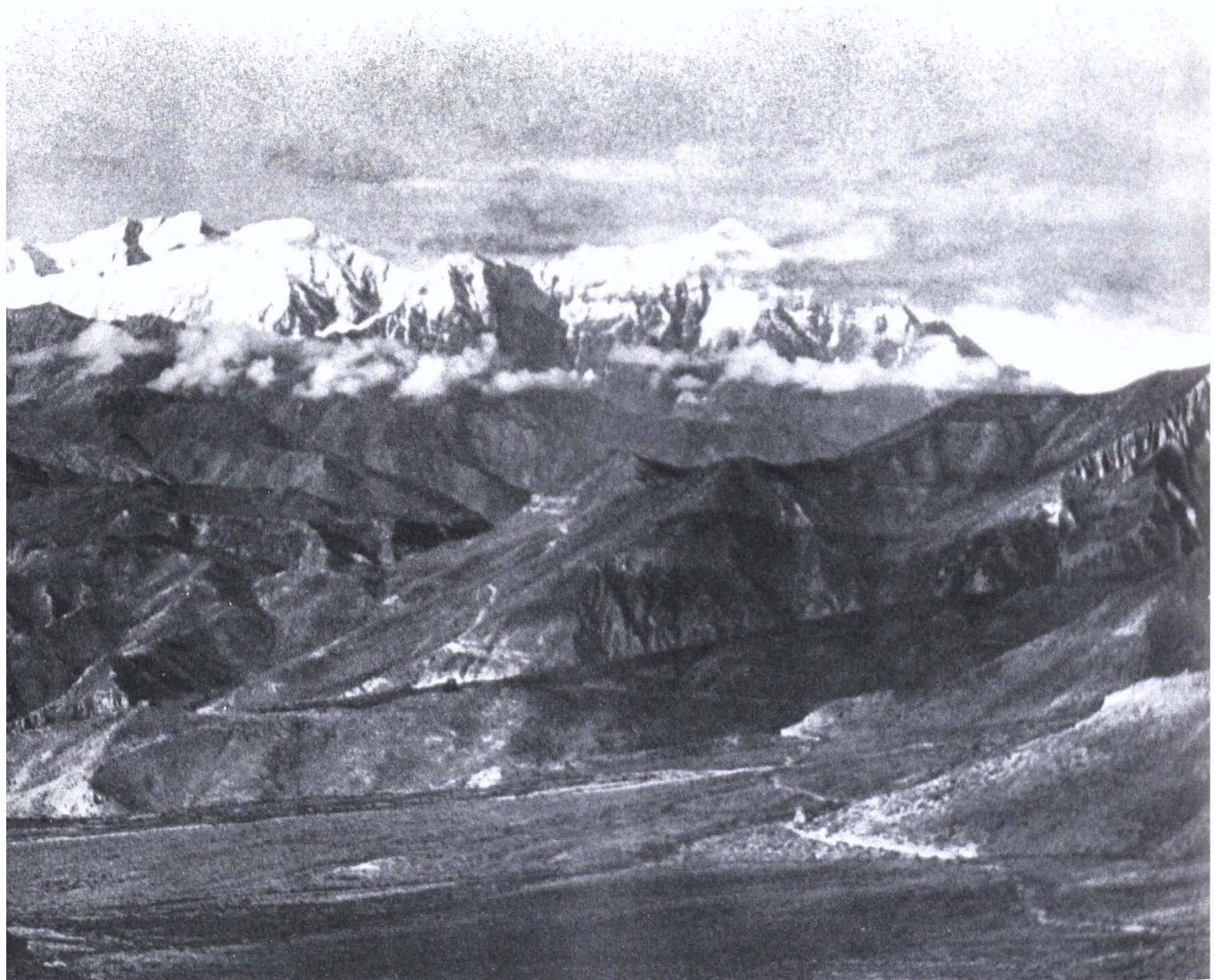
Then and there I got my first small lesson in fatalism. Why worry? Why think?

But I worried the following morning when at ten o'clock the coolies had not turned up. It was eleven when they strolled in and began arguing all over again about the loads and the price they would be paid. Finally each one got a different rate, evaluated according to the size and weight of his pack. At twelve o'clock the porters, Kansa, and Calay filed out into the main street of the bazaar, heading north, and were soon out of sight. I stayed behind with Tashi to be treated to a meal by the Serchans.

An hour later we struck out in turn. This was the grand departure, but we strode unnoticed through the bazaar, hurrying to catch up with

ABOVE: *The author's caravan, with its slow-paced yaks, took two weeks to cover the journey from Pokhara to Mustang's capital, Lo Mantang. The route led through the great valley of the Kali Gandaki River.* BELOW: (Left to right) Calay, Tashi, and Kansa by the author's tents. A peasant looks on.





our porters. We were passing through the outskirts of town when suddenly I saw a lot of familiar-looking boxes, bags and equipment lying by the roadside. To my horror, I realized that they were mine. There they lay without so much as anyone in sight to guard them.

I was now in quite a rage. Where was Calay? Where were Kansa and the porters?

My questions were answered half an hour later, when all my men turned up, grinning. They said they had "been eating"!

At last we were off. In my mind lingered some slight regrets that it was not a more grandiose departure; the waving crowds were decidedly absent as we slowly marched out through the outskirts of Pokhara, the air-age bazaar.

Still unnoticed, we filed past a small field hospital. The doctor who lived there was probably the last European we should pass on the route to our destination, which lay over two weeks' journey away at the end of a long and arduous trail that would take us slowly up, over, and beyond the great peaks. I was now not only leaving civilization behind but also taking a step backward in time—for a plunge into an obscure land in the unknown reaches of the Himalayas. There I was, with no mule guns and no yaks yet, and not at all sure that the Khampas or the Chinese were for the *status quo*. On what was to come neither Bell's *Grammar* nor any other book could brief me, and nothing could have lessened my anxiety.

If only I didn't think—like Tashi, I thought!

ABOVE: Mount Annapurna (26,506 feet) from the north. Few foreigners have ever seen the north face of the Annapurna range. BELOW: The Kali Gandaki emerges from the natural tunnel beneath the huge portion of cliff that has fallen across the river. On the typical bridge, constructed without nails, stands Tashi.

— Great Peaks and Little Blisters

I SHOULD LIKE to describe the first day's march with heroic undertones, suggestive of a fast gait and valiant spirits. But this would not be true. We were not really marching, but strolling slowly so as to remain within shouting distance of the recalcitrant porters, who trudged along behind us at a snail's pace. Looking at them, I sweated out of sympathy for their loads, although I had made sure that I had only my hat to carry.

New shoes, it seems, are all born mean, and for some reason I had picked the meanest of the lot. Their soles were laden with spite, and little pinches of hatred for the lowest part of my panting anatomy. At each stop I doctored with surprise and compassionate attention little blisters that begrudged me my entire enterprise.

When my knees started asking how much farther we would have to go before taking a taxi, I suddenly had to sit down beside the narrow trail—crushed under the realization that this inferno would continue for two weeks, that all the high ridges and passes were to come, and that each step forward would entail coming all the way back. When, hopefully, I asked Tashi if he was tired, trusting to find in his answer an excuse for admitting my own shameful exhaustion, he would just shrug my supplications off with a "No, not at all." He had, I remembered, fled from China to Nepal right across Tibet on foot, and was therefore in practice.

There was, of course, the scenery to keep me distracted, but this always ended up in my stubbing a toe on a malicious root. Also, beastly little hollows tripped me up and forced me to keep my eyes carefully on the footpath, a haphazard ribbon of caked mud that occasionally revealed the prints of barefoot fellow travelers.

The track we were following took us along the rocky banks of a great mountain torrent whose gushing waters thundered deafeningly in our ears. The sun, the wonderful sun so longed for back in Hertfordshire, beat down pitilessly. In point of fact, we were crossing beautiful countryside, as I noticed when—after three hours of punishment—I had grown stoical enough to start enjoying my surroundings.

My heart beat with excitement when I reflected upon the adventure on which I had embarked. I suddenly felt free, and experienced a quiet beatitude, interrupted only by an occasional misplaced stone that brought me down to reality. Tashi walked before me, and when he too started to show the stigmas of perspiration on his shirt my heart warmed to him. Tashi—my only friend. I thought how much there was I wanted to share with him, how much I could tell him, but I knew he would never understand.

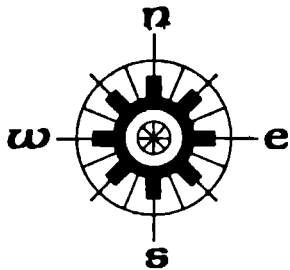
We passed through a little village set about a communal pasture of cropped grass. I was about to tell Tashi how much I thought this looked like some little English village set about its green. But the words never came. I realized that I could not share with him my past; neither he nor Calay were of my world, nor was the language they used or anything about them. I would, I realized, have to change, and change slowly I did as we edged out of what had been my universe into a strange new world introduced by the trail—that little footpath that linked my destiny with a foreign realm. A realm of the lands where distance is measured by paces, and customs are rooted in a remote past that is still ever present—a world that had been familiar to travelers of the eleventh century, and reached by roads like those paced by Marco Polo or ridden upon by Ghengis Khan.





“*Kypo re?*” (Pretty?) I prompted Tashi.

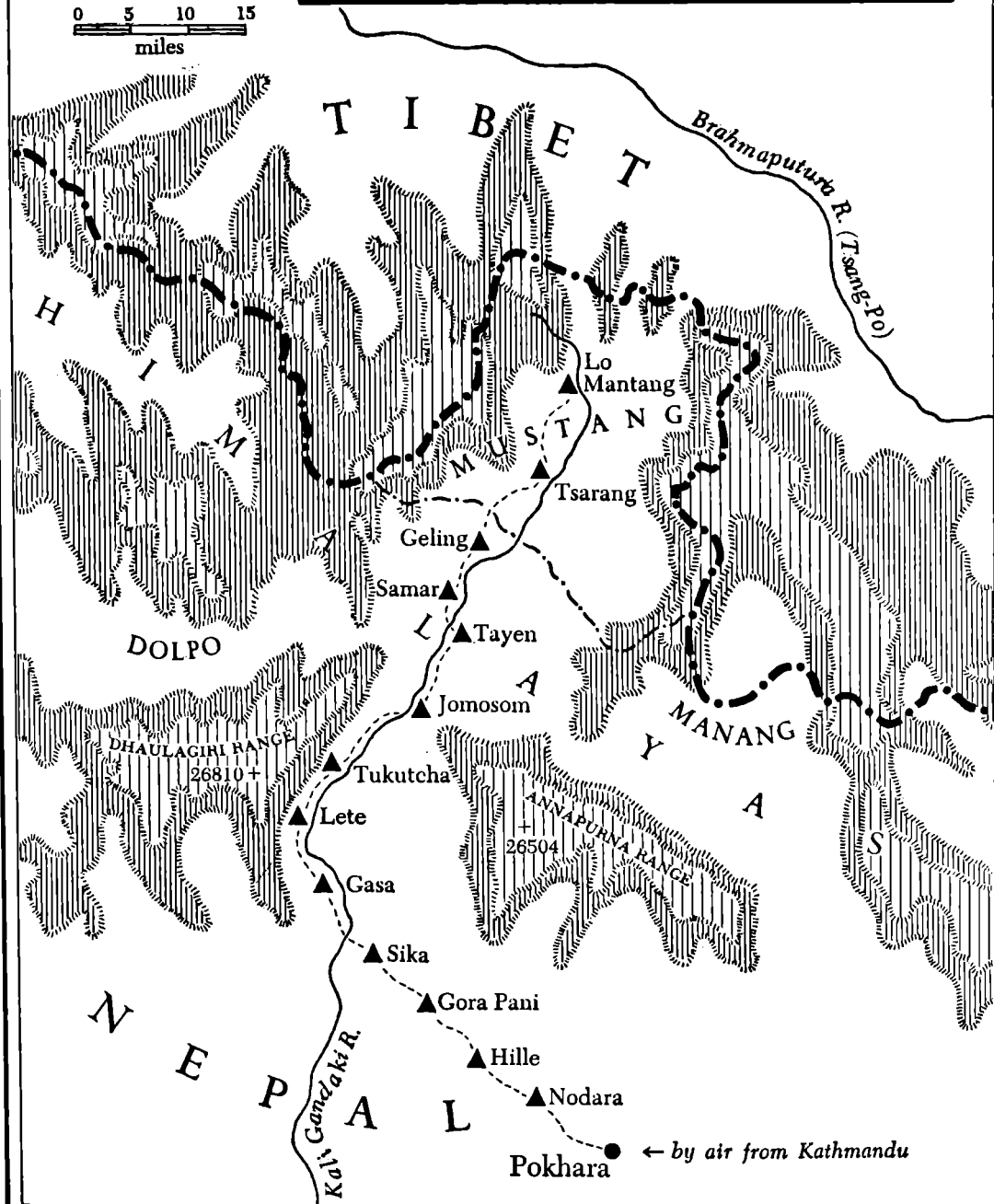
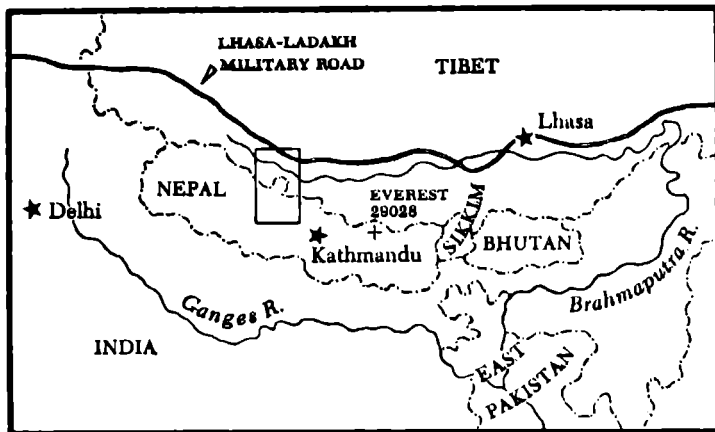
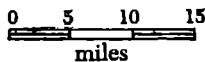
“*Shita kypo*” (Very), he answered, his eyes lighting up. I had made contact, and we began talking. Not about cars, mathematics, or the stock exchange, but about the road and our small caravan with its kit bags, our ambitions, and our apprehensions.

Tashi was persuaded that this life he was now living was a bad one. Believing in reincarnation, he felt he had lived many lives before, and hoped to live many more and better ones in the future, but this incarnation, he now explained to me, had been a mess from the start.

Tashi had been reborn twenty-one years before in an Amdo village in northwest China set high in lonely hills surrounded by Chinese towns. His father was the headman of the village. Tashi came to his mother shortly after the death of her second eldest son, and for this reason he believed that his mother, from the start, begrudged him



-  elevation over 18000 feet
-  elevation over 19000 feet
-  author's route
-  campsite



his existence. She vowed that her son Tashi should never marry, and somehow he was given the impression that he was never any good—unlike his elder brother, who succeeded in all his exams at the local monastery, and was whisked away from his home at an early age to study in a lamasery in central Tibet. Tashi was a Bon, a member of the oldest religion of central Asia, whose origin is lost in the mists of ancient times long before Buddha made his entrance into the world. The Bon religion is the root of countless myths and beliefs of sorcery and magic that have not only been traditional from time immemorial in central Asia but from there seem to have spread into the barbarian Europe of pre-Christian days.

One day, when Tashi was fourteen, he went into the village to spend the day with some other boys. At dusk he was about to return home when some of his fellow villagers brought him the chilling news that his father had been arrested by Chinese Communist politicians who had come up from one of the outlying Chinese towns, and taken him away prisoner. Tashi fled with friends, changing his Amdo cloak for Chinese dress. All Amdo Sherpas spoke Chinese, and now Tashi called himself "Seven," from the amount he had weighed at birth. Under this Chinese pseudonym, and in the guise of a merchant, he now sought with his village friends to lose himself in the anonymity of the Chinese masses. Riding on trains (the first he had ever seen), buses, and trucks, he now drifted across China, mingling with the masses in great bazaars, in towns and villages, drifting past telegraph offices and checkpoints, sleeping in small, dirty inns, and eating in sidestreet restaurants with his friends, who fortunately had some money. They traded in dyes and other small goods that could be picked up here and sold there. Hiding the fact that they were Amdo Sherpas, of northeast Tibetan stock, he and his friends escaped the eye of the law. Like all Tibetans, Tashi was not going to take any Communist nonsense curtailing his religious and civil rights as a Bon Po and free man of a race who had once, as he believed, "ruled the world."

Wandering southward and then north again, Tashi finally made his way to the Sining district and the Tibetan border where, still disguised as a Chinese, he got a ride on a truck traveling over the newly constructed road that runs across Tibet to Lhasa. He arrived in the

Map of Mustang and adjacent areas of Nepal and Tibet, showing the author's route from Pokhara to Lo Mantang, capital of Mustang.

Tibetan capital in 1957. There he shed his disguise. Thus Tashi reached Lhasa. But before he could reach Nepal, where our paths were to meet, his life was to follow a trail of blood and misery.

When Tashi arrived in Lhasa, all was quiet in the Tibetan capital and in central Tibet, while to the east Amdos and Khampas were vigorously fighting the Chinese invasion. Battles raged in eastern Tibet, and the sound of guns slowly reached the capital. In Lhasa, Tashi found his brother and his mother, who had also miraculously escaped to the fragile security of the Holy City. For six months Tashi lived in a monastery, perfecting his writing and knowledge of Tibetan scriptures. Although a Bon, he was admitted into a Buddhist monastery of the Gelupa sect. At this time the Amdo and Khampa warriors began falling back upon Lhasa. There was now open revolt in eastern Tibet. Vast areas were in the hands of rebellious Khampa warriors who were standing off the Chinese. Consequently the Peking government adopted a more aggressive attitude toward the central Tibetans, even asking the Dalai Lama to send troops against the Amdos and Khampas, his brothers and followers. The Dalai Lama refused, after which rumors circulated that the Chinese were going to try to abduct the God-King of Tibet.

Khampa soldiers entered Lhasa in great numbers. Traditionally the enemies of central Tibetan governments, and also famous bandits, they now became the defenders of the Holy City. Khampas and Amdos, among them Tashi, were given arms and trained within the secluded gardens of the Norbulinka, the summer palace of the Dalai Lama. The greatly increased population of Lhasa was tense, and wild rumors circulated, while the Chinese now listened perplexed to the sound of the Tibetans training in the use of firearms. Regular Tibetan Army units then moved into the summer palace, joining the warriors in their training. Now a serious rumor got around that the Dalai Lama was to be abducted by the Chinese. Unanimously, the population gathered around his palace to protect their king and god. The Chinese garrisons tried to negotiate, but popular tension was too great, and the evident conflict of ideals and ideologies permitted no agreement to be reached. The Chinese signified this by firing, on the 17th of March, 1959, two mortar shells into the sacrosanct enclosure of the Dalai Lama's summer palace. These mortars did little harm, but they infuriated the soldiers within the palace. Among these was Tashi, who had now learned how to fire a rifle.

Although Tashi was unaware of it, on the same night when the two mortar shells had been shot into the palace, the Dalai Lama, taking ad-

vantage of a great dust storm, had secretly fled his capital and was making his way into exile. A short distance from Lhasa, the god-king found an escort of Khampa warriors, who led the royal caravan slowly over high passes and through deep valleys, covering up their tracks, until finally, thirteen days later—to the surprise and amazement of the world—the Dalai Lama safely reached the Indian border. He had eluded the Chinese, who from the air had attempted to seek out the fleeing monarch.

In the meantime, in Lhasa, the situation deteriorated when two days after the departure of the Dalai Lama, news of his flight became public. The Chinese began a mass bombardment of the Norbulinka and other areas of Lhasa. Tashi saw Tibetans standing outside the walls of their temples mown down mercilessly by machine guns and other modern firearms. Tashi himself took part in various unsuccessful attempts against the Chinese positions. The dead were legion; and when all was lost, Tashi fled the city, sometimes finding concealment behind the corpses of humans and animals that lay in great numbers on the barren plain surrounding Lhasa. With three friends, harassed by Chinese snipers, he headed for Shigatse; on the way, one of his friends died from a bullet in the stomach.

In Shigatse, as if by a miracle, Tashi again found his brother and mother. After he had been there six months, the Chinese—who had now reduced many of the still independently fighting Khampa warriors—arrived at Shigatse, and Tashi and his family fled west. Penniless, they walked for two months, living like beggars, until they arrived in the Tibetan province of Kyrong, which borders on Nepal. There they stayed until they had no alternative but to flee to Nepal as refugees. Tashi's brother Sonam continued down to New Delhi with a few other monks, while Tashi went with his mother to Kalimpong. They were not to meet again, as Sonam, whose superior intelligence attracted attention in Delhi, was taken to England to work as a Tibetan scholar at the London School of Oriental and African Studies. Kalimpong, the Indian market town on the Tibetan border, had been for many years the departure point of all trade from India to Lhasa, and the center of Tibetan business with India. Here Tashi settled down with his mother.

Although Tashi knew nothing of our Western civilization, his clever mind soon caught on to its ways. For the survival of his mother and himself he set about going into business. The Tibetans are born merchants, and Tashi's father, who had often negotiated business between Tibet and China, had given him a good business sense. Soon Tashi, although only eighteen, was taking trains down to Calcutta, from

whence he returned with shirts and wrist watches to sell in Kalimpong. He also traded in Tibetan tea, traveling hundreds of miles in strange, foreign India, striking bargains, many of which were profitable.

While other refugees filed into camps set up for them in India, Tashi shunned this alternative, which he thought humiliating. He was too young to do what many Tibetan soldiers did, Khampas in particular. They returned unnoticed to Tibet, there to fight in small groups against heavy odds, keeping alive the struggle of the Tibetan people. Of this struggle the outside world knows little. After the sensational international headlines referring to the Dalai Lama's flight, the interest of the press shifted to other subjects, while in fact the resistance of the Tibetan people as a whole body was only just beginning.

India, still attempting to preserve its friendship with Mao, censored much of the scanty news that filtered over the Himalayas concerning the Khampas' resistance in western and southern Tibet. Although all Western free nations abandoned the Tibetans publicly to the Chinese, a certain degree of assistance was secretly given to the Khampas, in particular by the Nationalist Chinese regime in Formosa (Taiwan), which enrolled a fair number of Amdo Tibetans into its army, and then redirected them, through parachute missions and by other means, into Tibet. In Formosa there gathered mostly Amdo Sherpas, like Tashi, Chinese-speaking Tibetans. The Tibetan Army still existed, operating beside the Khampa warlords.

On a business venture, in 1961 Tashi came to Nepal, only to have the Indian government a month later, refuse him permission to return with his mother to India. Penniless, he could carry out little or no business in Kathmandu. There he encountered some of his fellow countrymen, and was approached by a Taiwan-financed agent to join the secret guerrilla force for the liberation of Tibet from the Chinese Communists. Against the will of neutral Nepal, much resistance was being organized in the Himalayas. Of this I knew little or nothing when I lived in Kathmandu in the comfort of the Royal Hotel. What was going on in Tibet was taboo, and even diplomatic officials were uncertain as to the extent of the movements directed against the Chinese there.

Tashi, paid by Formosa, was sent out with friends in 1962 on scouting missions over the Nepalese border into the Kyrong district of Tibet, where he joined guerrilla fighters.

On Taiwan subsidies Tashi survived until the fall of 1963. At that time an internal dispute broke out between Khampa warriors and Taiwan-paid freedom fighters. The former turned upon the latter, killing many on the excuse that they were in a way pro-Chinese.

The root of this dispute lay in the fact that Formosa claimed Tibet as Chinese Nationalist, while the Khampas—like the Dalai Lama—rightly claimed that Tibet was truly an independent country, and subject to neither Chinese regime.

The Amdo Sherpas in Nepal were obliged to flee and back down before the greater number of Khampas. Tashi suddenly found himself alone, without subsidy, a man marked by the Khampas, confused, and in great poverty.

It was about that time that, walking through the narrow brick-paved streets of Kathmandu, I spotted a small café where, it seemed, a large number of Tibetans were gathered. I entered, avid to try out some of the phrases I had learned in Bell's *Grammar*.

In a dark room curtained from the street I found a whole assembly of Tibetans sitting at small wooden tables. Some wore the characteristic Tibetan gowns of wine-colored material, with high boots; others wore Chinese zip-sweatshirts, and a few had Nepalese-type Occidental clothes. One of them was a handsome, smiling young man—Tashi. Immediately we became friends, and later I spent many an afternoon chatting with him, or playing mah jongg in the little café, which I learned was the main hangout of Amdo people in Kathmandu. Tashi spoke Hindi, but not a word of English, and at first our conversation was limited, but as time went by I became more fluent in Tibetan.

Two months after this encounter, and at the end of six months of negotiations, I suddenly received from the Nepalese government the unique permit, refused to countless mountaineers and scholars, to go and reside in Mustang, where I had planned to make a cultural survey. As I was to be alone on this trip, a fellow anthropologist and friend having let me down at the last minute, I sought a companion among my Tibetan friends. I needed one not only for reasons of companionship and security but also because, although I now had fairly well mastered colloquial Tibetan, I was ignorant of the intricate literary language.

But when I asked the various Tibetans I had been taking lessons with if they could come with me, all refused for fear of the Khampas. Other Tibetans from Kathmandu, they explained, had ventured north and run into the Khampas, who had robbed them or taken them prisoners. The Khampas claimed that as they were fighting for their country, no other Tibetans should be allowed to travel around doing business or interfering with them. One after the other my acquaintances backed out, with excuses that soon began to frighten me also.

It was then that Tashi agreed to go with me, despite the protests of

his mother. He was well aware that being an Amdo Sherpa, he was running considerable risks by entering areas occupied by Khampa soldiers, but as he said, "With you we can always fool them." It was I who now was not so sure.

But it was too late to worry—both of us had committed our fate to the trail that was slowly leading us to a remote, little-known, and incompletely explored territory. Nepal is like a gigantic stepladder leading to the high peaks that separate it from Tibet; we should now have to climb up and over the ladder and beyond the great mountains.

Our small party had nothing in common with the large expeditions that usually set out to conquer peaks or to explore the remote areas of the Himalayas. But what I lacked in equipment and numbers, I felt was well replaced by the knowledge I now had of the Tibetan language, one that relatively few foreigners have mastered. I hoped that the ability to speak Tibetan, and the permit I had secured for an extensive stay in Mustang, would make possible for me a unique immersion in the little-known world of the small Kingdom of Mustang, one of the most isolated communities of central Asia. Known to Tibetans as the Land of Lo, it is so forgotten as not even to be mentioned in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

I was not even certain that Mustang was a small nation. What was its king like, I wondered—that man called the Mustang Raja by the Hindus, but whose true title was Lo Gyelpo—Gyelpo in Tibetan meaning "king?" These were some of the mysteries I hoped to solve, but of what awaited me I knew little or nothing. Perhaps I was in for a disappointment, and the area would prove just a conglomeration of uninteresting villages lost in the most remote corner of Tibet and Nepal. The Chinese, I knew, had respected Mustang's boundary, by virtue of the fact that for many years Mustang had been a loose tributary to the Gurkha kings of Nepal, but here my information ended.

It was not only distance that accounted for Mustang's isolation, but also political considerations. Today, with planes and helicopters, there exist no truly inaccessible areas. Even in the past, when man was used to walking, there was no distance a man could not cover with his legs. The true obstacles to travel, in Marco Polo's time as today, were often political ones. It was easier for Marco Polo to walk to Mongolia than it is to go there today, again for political reasons.

If Mustang has been left unexplored, it is due to the fact that Nepal itself was closed to foreigners (with rare exceptions) until 1950, while Tibet also was forbidden territory. As Mustang is twenty-two days' walking distance from Kathmandu, over the most rugged of Hima-

layan trails, it is not really surprising that it has remained unexplored and far less known than either the upper Amazon or New Guinea. There are indeed few or no places in the world that have remained as little explored as the higher reaches of the Himalayas and the remote areas of Tibet, while today, for political reasons, Mustang is more inaccessible than ever. After Toni Hagen, barely a dozen Westerners had ever reached this land, and those few remained only a few days, or a week at most, and thus had insufficient time to explore either its extent or its customs and origins.

The thought that I might be the first to do this did little to obliterate my fatigue or speed up the porters, who now had quite disappeared out of sight behind us. After walking four miles in the boulder-strewn dry bed of what was sometimes a mighty torrent, we had begun to climb. Our progress was slow, and I found myself panting like an old ox just to keep up with Tashi, who trotted on ahead—a constant reminder of my poor physical condition.

We were now climbing up a gigantic stairway whose steps were cut into the rock and worn smooth by the bare feet of countless coolies. I cursed the hills, and must have looked rather ill, for Tashi asked me if I had “gas sickness,” which is the Tibetan way of expressing the trouble one gets in breathing at a high altitude.

“Don’t be silly,” I panted, “I’m just a little tired.”

“Try sucking pebbles,” Tashi told me, introducing me to an old Amdo recipe against altitude sickness. Sucking pebbles no doubt has the same effect as chewing gum in a plane, but I was in no state to be encouraged. We had now emerged from the zone of jungle foliage into a region of rice terraces, and a beastly drizzle more than ever before made my whole venture seem like a picnic *manqué*.

An hour and many cramps later, it was nearly dark when we struggled through a narrow cobblestoned street lined with a small row of dingy houses. We had reached Nodara. My first thought was one of relief—the first day’s walk was over.

It was still dark the following morning when in a thick mist laced with rain we made our way up—up—up again in a silent world of shadows and ghosts scented with the bitter odor of damp clay. We were still heading west, crossing narrow gorges in our attempt to join up with the great Tibetan trade route that would lead us north across the Himalayan chain.

There is a strange poetry in the landscape of Nepal that could be captured only with water colors. Steeped in mist, moist and green, the ravined Himalayan foothills are like a Gauguin painting of light and

dark greens climbing one on top of the other. In a matter of hours one passes from jungle foliage to pine trees, from hot, sweltering, enclosed valleys to windswept pastures upon rounded peaks. There is not in the entire country a flatter piece of land (except the terai jungle on the Indian border) than the fifteen-mile-long valley of Kathmandu. Because of this topography, which rules out even mule transport in favor of the human foot, the entire land remains today a succession of lost, closed valleys and minute worlds that have hardly any contact with each other. Here live a large variety of the races that compose Nepal's population: people growing rice or corn according to the altitudes at which they live, fighting for their crops against howling monkeys, and protecting their few precious water buffaloes from leopards.

When the mist cleared we found ourselves going down a very steep descent. As we trudged downhill, there came to me the eternal dilemma of climbers: "Which is more unpleasant, to climb up a hill or to walk down?" I asked Tashi which he preferred.

"Going down when I'm climbing up; going up when I'm walking down!" he answered. I had finally found the solution.

For four hours we marched down, and still the trail plunged ever lower into a green inferno. I regretted each step of this descent, as it meant that we would soon have to climb right up again. We were now headed for a place called Hillé; the name sounded appropriate, but the place never seemed to arrive.

Finally we reached the bottom of our descent. The air here was tropical and terribly hot. We crossed a perilous, swinging bridge made of two long steel chains that supported thin steel straps over which moldy planks were set. On the other side were three large stone houses and a small bazaar. It seems quite miraculous to see a few manufactured goods in such a lonely place. There were cigarettes, the eternal Motor and Bus Stop brands—awful weeds. Then I discovered a tin of sweets. We spent a quarter of an hour counting them out by the hundred and paying twenty pies apiece. This would no doubt be the last call for sweets, and I love sweets.

Alone with Tashi, I proceeded up the bed of a torrent that ran down a series of huge boulders, cascading in leaps and bounds from pool to pool. We finally stopped to have a swim and bath. Tashi had a toothbrush, and we washed without knowing this was to be our last bath for two months.

Completely refreshed, after about an hour, still seeing no signs of our coolies, we proceeded on up the narrow valley, but realized the bath had also taken away all our energy, and our progress was very

slow. We were musing about things in general when I asked Tashi, "Are you afraid of dying?"

To my surprise he burst out laughing, saying, "In ninety-nine years all living creatures, humans and animals alike, that are living today will be dead," and adding, "Should the whole world then be frightened? That would be ridiculous." I asked Tashi what he thought about death. "I don't think," he answered. "Nobody knows why he is born or why he will die."

Such a philosophical outlook, however, did not stop Tashi from saying quite frequently that he was "scared of the Khampas." We talked the problem over again, and decided that he should pretend to be a Sherpa of Nepal, a member of the Tibetan-speaking tribe of the Everest district, from which come most of the porters and climbers who assist large Himalayan expeditions. Nobody must find out Tashi's true Amdo Sherpa origin. The funny thing about this decision was that I knew the Sherpa area around Mount Everest, but Tashi had never been there. I briefed him as to the village where he was now supposed to have been born—Namche Bazar—so that in case we ran into Khampas, he would know what to say. But Tashi was still fearful that he might encounter some Khampa soldiers he had met in Lhasa, or who had seen him in Kathmandu and would recognize him as an Amdo Sherpa, and as having fought for the Taiwan Chinese.

Climbing over a small ridge, at last we discovered that we had arrived. Hillé is neither a town nor a village, only a stopping place upon terraced fields. Here we found three dozen horses grazing, the pack animals of a caravan that had camped for the night. Along the track area were three huts made of bamboo mats. These, we found out, were little inns temporarily set up by Thakalis, people from Tukutchá.

Bending down, we entered one. Inside, neat mats lined the earthen floor, surrounding a clay hearth framed with dazzlingly spotless brass pots and mugs. A plump, rather sweet young woman greeted us. She spoke Tibetan, as do most people from Tukutchá. A handsome man beside the fire was joking with the woman, and we joined in, asking if there was any *rakshi* or *chang* (Tibetan beer) to drink.

After having drunk two large glasses of hot *rakshi* (distilled alcohol), a brew of whose origin I preferred to remain ignorant for questions of hygiene, we both felt better. My Tibetan—with the drink—had greatly improved. We strolled over to where a group of caravaneers were lighting fires, sheltered by the stacks of their ponies' harnesses and their loads. But the muleteers were not very talkative, and after a while we returned to our lass in the small bamboo shelter.

It was dark, and rain began to fall, but still there was no sign of the coolies. Had it not been for the warming effect of the rakshi, which slowly filled me with a placid fatalism, I would no doubt have been quite anxious.

By now I was starving, and decided to risk eating some of the local food—a foolish thing to do when one considers that awful world of bacteria that since Pasteur has haunted meals in the tropics.

When we had finished eating, we heard a noise outside; then, with a grin on his face, Calay erupted into our shelter. “Where are the coolies?” I anxiously asked.

“They have stopped down the path, and are too tired. Very slow, very bad,” Calay answered. I told him that at any cost he should stay with the porters and bring them up. “Yes, sahib,” Calay said, disappearing into the night, not to be seen again till the next morning.

When very late our pretty innkeeper turned in to sleep beside her fire, it became evident that the coolies were not going to show up. I decided not to worry myself to death, but to take calmly the fact that the coolies had no doubt killed Calay and run away with our things. I could not have cared less, but had another rakshi, and knew that whatever had happened, I was not going to walk another step that night. Calay had left his rucksack behind, so I took his sleeping bag; Tashi lay down on a mat with a local rug over him, and we fell asleep immediately.

The following day I awoke shivering. It was four in the morning, and the plump-featured Thakali innkeeper was busy lighting the fire. I had not had time to shake off the cramps imposed by sleeping on the ground, when to my relief Calay appeared, followed by one-eyed Kansa and six porters with my effects. Calay busily got to work cooking our morning meal of rice and dhal—tasteless lentils boiled, like everything else, with a little curry. By Himalayan standards Calay was a good cook, although I never did like his specialty, which he had served to me on my first expedition. It was chocolate cake packed with garlic—and it had drained a special store of chocolate that I had been greedily keeping as a source of incentive, courage, and “something to look forward to.” Before leaving Kathmandu I had given orders that this gastronomical oddity was never to be served to me again. Now we were eating only rice and occasionally eggs or a mangy chicken that we bought on the way. I planned to keep all our precious canned stores for Mustang.

Stuffed with rice, we now set out on our third day’s march, still heading eastward, and attacking one of the steepest climbs of our journey

—five thousand feet upward. We first crossed two swinging bridges, over which one of the coolies had to be led blindfolded, then we scrambled up a gigantic stone stairway. The porters were hopeless; one of the younger ones was limping, and his every step was like a bullet shot into my tender heart, while my more arrogant self kept on screaming that he walk faster. We hoped by nightfall to reach the summit of the mountain that now was the last barrier on our path before we reached the sacred Kali Gandaki River, which we would follow north till we reached Mustang.

Toward midday, exhausted, we stopped beside a spring, and Kansa, who had walked along with us, set about preparing a meal that should certainly go down in the annals of gastronomic disasters. I was quietly relaxing and awaiting the coolies—ever postponing in my mind the hour when we should strike up the nasty hill again—when a mule suddenly clattered into sight to the sound of tinkling copper bells. Soon the air became alive with the clang of thousands of bells, as one after the other a long line of mules slithered down the steep trail, with the lackadaisical steps of daydreamers. The pack animals were richly decorated with elaborate harnesses festooned with bells and red tufts of wool. On their foreheads were small woven mats, in which were inserted medallions with the Dalai Lama's effigy. We counted twenty mules before a gruff-looking Khampa, whistling wild calls to the animals, came into sight. He wore an unusual Tibetan-type shirt made of nylon camouflage parachute cloth. He passed, looking at us with suspicion, and when we asked where he was going, he did not even have the politeness to say *Ma la* (down), the usual vague answer given to inquisitive waysiders. He was followed by more mules and more muleteers, all as grim and as arrogant; for practically half an hour the track jingled with a seemingly endless mule train composed of over a hundred animals. I was now witnessing one of the controversial secret Khampa caravans that keep the armies along the Tibetan border supplied. They were no doubt going down to purchase grain, in which—as had been rumored in Kathmandu—firearms are often concealed. The large size of the caravan confirmed our worst fears as to the number of Khampas along the border. For a long time there lingered in our minds the image of the great mule train, which we now realized could be nothing else but the sign of a well-organized military group. The blunt, insolent attitude of the Khampas toward our rather naïve questions was a good sign that these men meant business. Our encounter with these fierce soldiers was only beginning, and all of a sudden our own caravan seemed very small indeed, but perhaps not small enough not to

excite the envy and curiosity of these warriors, who are so notorious in Nepal for stealing.

Dusk fell before we reached the summit of the great mountain, and still our porters were nowhere in sight. We were now on the edge of a thick, damp forest of great rhododendron trees veiled in long strips of humid moss. It was quite dark when our men finally appeared. They wanted to stop, but I urged them on, and for two dark, mysterious, and cold hours we wound our way over shaky bridges, up deep canyons veiled in foliage of Wagnerian gloom, beneath great trees draped in humid veils of moss like gigantic Christmas trees decorated in a hurry by some obscure divinity of Valhalla. Rocks and stones alike were carpeted in moss in this humid limbo of the lands of eternal mist. There was, it seemed, nowhere any place for us to camp and lay our weary heads. The coolies grumbled more and more while I alternately pleaded and shouted to keep them moving, surprised at my own arrogance, which I felt was worthy of Kipling's colonels whom I so much disliked.

Finally, struggling along, we could go no farther, and I sent Calay to search for a piece of flat land for our tents. Soon he reappeared from the darkness and guided us over slippery rocks to a small table of land on the edge of a fast-flowing torrent. Here, by the weird light of storm lanterns, our tents were hoisted, and despite a small drizzle that chilled our now numb bodies, we managed to light a great fire. Night now closed upon us, and the flickering fire illuminated in prancing light the mossy curtains overhanging us. Seated in my open tent, I peered at the drawn figures of the half-bare porters who hugged their ribs about the fire. What was I doing here? I wondered. Just then Tashi came and placed an infected cut on his leg under my nose. Soon I became the "Doctor Sahib," bandaging Tashi, trying to mend the swollen foot of one of the younger porters. I had finally put away my surgical instruments when Calay announced that we were going to have noodles for supper.

"Noodles!" I started. "But we have no noodles."

"I make noodles, sahib, with flour—Swiss man teach me how."

Thus, tired, harassed, miserable and cold in the dripping rain somewhere up at 8,000 feet, I learned the secret of Italian housewives as Calay, working on one of our steel cases, explained to me, in a mixture of Nepali, Tibetan, and Swiss, how to make noodles. Tashi was delighted, noodles forming in Tibet a festive dish, and one he knew well from China. Had I been a true British colonel with mustaches, I would have given Calay an O.B.E. or some medal for showing "such con-

stancy at his post in the face of adversity," for the noodles were delicious, and the night slipped away in the pleasant dreams that inevitably accompany great weariness and a good digestion.

The following day, with the sun, the Wagnerian forest of the night before was transformed into a gay, romantic wood. The tall trees, which had slimy red trunks, were for the most part rhododendrons in bloom. Cresting the hills around us were their pink and bright red blossoms, while fallen flowers littered our path.

After two hours, we finally reached Gora Pani (Horse Watering Place), where a long, low house stood by a spring, just below the pass marking the top of the mountain. It was here that we should have slept the night before; already we had fallen behind on our tentative schedule to Tukutchu. The coolies were proving that their loads were too heavy, and the youngest coolie was now completely lame. At Gora Pani they stopped to have their food, while I proceeded with Tashi and Kansa to the pass that marked the watershed beyond which lay the Kali Gandaki River. From the summit of the pass I was happy to see the first real signs of the Tibetan Buddhist faith, prayer flags hung on a bush beside a characteristic pile of stones thrown there by devout travelers.

As we stood at the pass, the surrounding mist suddenly opened up to reveal before us the now very close, white mass of part of the Annapurna range. All at once the dramatic elements that make Nepal so unique a country were thrust before us. Awe was my first reaction at the sight of these glacial monuments, 26,000 feet high, that so dwarfed our small persons, and I thought with anguish that we had yet to press through and over such great obstacles into the mysterious regions beyond them.

After a few hours, we emerged from the rhododendron forest onto the first small cultivated fields. Here monkeys by the dozens lurked among the higher branches, spying upon the crops of corn sown on small shelf-like terraces rising against the forest. Children and old people sat in the fields beating kettles with sticks to protect their crops from the monkeys. The noise they made echoed hollowly against the sheer sides of the surrounding hills that slowly rose before us to the great snowfields of the Annapurna range. Sitting before this admirable landscape, I once more awaited the porters. This time, when they arrived, they flatly announced that they would go no farther.

There is nothing more trite and hackneyed than the "white man" being abandoned by his porters. In the innumerable books on Africa I had devoured as a child there was always a picture of the "white

sahib," pith helmet on his head, surrounded by large boxes, while disappearing into the jungle could be seen the legs of fleeing porters. Unfortunately, in my case the picture was not quite so harmonious. I was surrounded by the cases all right, but the porters, instead of running away, just sat there shouting and demanding higher wages, while I argued frantically to keep my men. But the youngest porter was really so lame that his closest friend wanted to go back with him, and the others did not want to go along without these two. They said I was no good, that the loads were too big, the road very bad, the food too expensive, and the Khampas too many. All this was explained beneath the blooming rhododendrons while stupid monkeys stared at us.

I soon was fed up, and felt like telling them to go to blazes and be off, but the image of myself sweating under a heavy load, or growing roots on this lonely hill, was too much. With all the talent I had acquired at Harvard, I negotiated. But to no avail. Finally three porters demanded their wages, and were off. The other three grumbled but remained behind. I was in a mess. There was nothing I could do but sit down and contemplate my luggage.

Trail to Tibet

WE ALL SAT there for a long time, until a party of Nepalese men and women trotted by with much laughter. Immediately Calay went to work, and with some fast talking latched onto a girl, her boyfriend, and her brother. Soon these three feeble-looking characters joined us, ready to share the loads. The girl was so small and slender, that in Europe she would have gone down as a frail beauty while out here she was simply considered anemic. When in Rome, however, do as the Romans do, so I hired the girl along with the two men, and our group continued on down. We could not yet see the Kali Gandaki River, but we sensed its presence somewhere below us, locked in a deep gorge.

It was ten the following morning—on our fifth day of marching—when, coming down a zigzag trail, we finally reached the bottom of this gorge. For some time our ears had been humming with the roar of rushing water. Now suddenly below us appeared the foaming, sacred Kali Gandaki, flowing swiftly between vertical gray cliffs. I welcomed this sight as a great achievement, for it was this mighty river that would now lead us north to our distant destination. From here on, the track would cling as closely as possible to the riverbed, making its way up with the river to Tukutchá, and then in gigantic steps ever higher up to the 13,000-foot plateau where stood Mustang, dominating Nepal and Tibet. Before me many a foreigner had trudged up this river as far as Tukutchá, the first of these being members of the French 1950 expedition to Annapurna, who had made Tukutchá their pivot point in exploring the Dhaulagiri range, and eventually climbing Annapurna. Since then many other foreigners had followed this natural passageway up to Tukutchá, among them Professor von Fürer-Haimendorf of the

London School of African and Oriental Studies, under whose guidance I had prepared my own expedition. He had lived nearly a year in Tukutchá, studying the culture and customs of the Thakali race.

For millions in India, and all over the Hindu world, the Kali Gandaki is a sacred river. Up its course come many pilgrims, who slowly make their way to the sacred shrine of Muktinath, situated behind Mount Annapurna, two days northeast of Tukutchá. Although the shrine of Muktinath is small in size, its fame is tremendous, because here in a little temple are sheltered three great miracles: a burning stone, a flaming spring, and blazing earth. For centuries these three elements have been burning, and although today we know that the burning water, stone, and earth are caused by natural gas leaking through the soil, this knowledge has done little to dim the sacred name of this distant shrine. Even more renowned are the *salegrami*, the sacred stones found in the bed of the Kali Gandaki River north of Tukutchá. All through India, these fossil-covered stones have been treasured for centuries and valued far higher than gold because of their miraculous religious powers. With the shrine of Muktinath, they have contributed to making the Kali Gandaki one of the great sacred rivers of the Himalayas.

For those who do not believe in the magic property of stones, the Kali Gandaki also has a profane claim to fame. In scientific terms for our statistically minded world, the gorge of the Kali Gandaki is "the greatest canyon on earth," its depth far exceeding that of any other, be it the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River or the mighty gorges of the Zambezi. This is because the Kali River runs through what has recently been termed the "great Himalayan breach," a passage that cuts right through the middle of the highest part of the Himalayas, between the Annapurna range and 26,810-foot Mount Dhaulagiri. These two peaks crowd on either side of the river, towering 18,000 feet above it, barely six miles from the river on either side. Thus at Tukutchá, the sloping walls of this incredible canyon rise over three miles above the riverbed. This is one of the steepest drops in the world!

Despite all the claims to fame and the wide reputation of this river, it retained a mystery—in that no Westerner had ever seen its source. On some of the rare and inaccurate maps of this region, it is shown springing up in Tibet; on others its source is shown farther south in Mustang. Where it actually did begin nobody knew. I had been asked in Kathmandu upon my departure to try to find the answer to this question, and now, looking at the river, I hoped that I might be the first Westerner to see its source.

For us, reaching the river marked a change in our course. Up till now, since Pokhara, we had been marching west, crossing hills and gorges running from north to south; this had resulted in our having to scale high ridges and then to clamber down into deep gorges. Now this roller-coasting up and down was to end for a while, as we joined the great Tibet-India trade route. For thousands of years the great canyon of the Kali Gandaki has been one of the major passageways linking the world of the high Tibetan plateau with the lower tropical lands of India. Along this route had passed since time immemorial the exchanges of men and goods between the two cultural and physical divisions of Asia.

The footpath that we had been following now became a wide track. We passed more frequently large caravans with their shouting, whistling muleteers. Most of the people we now encountered were of Tibetan stock, and to my delight practically all spoke the language of Bell's *Grammar*. On passing us they would shout out, "Where are you going?"

"*Ya la*," we would answer (meaning "up"). "And you?"

"*Ma la*" (meaning "down").

Although such information seemed obvious, I soon found out that these self-evident replies satisfied most inquirers. Quite often we would stop to have a chat with the rugged muleteers, but when we did not stop we would just wish the travelers a good road, saying "*Kale phe*," which means "Go slowly" or "Take it easy."

As we gradually left the Hindu world behind, I felt more and more in my element, and could not help making an unconscious comparison between the sturdy, open-faced Tibetans we met, and the sly, timid, ragged Hindus of the south.

Along the trade route up the Kali Gandaki, I soon found myself taken into the life of the track and absorbed by it. This was a world apart, composed mostly of traders from all regions of northwestern Nepal, and occasional pilgrims on their way north, with whom we would team up, exchanging ideas and news. Our world was now one of discussions about places to stop, conditions of bridges, and business. Along the track everybody was friendly, and I felt drawn to fellow travelers by the strange bond arising from our common problems. In particular, our nightly halts now took on a new character, as we often shared camping sites with rough traders with whom we gathered around small fires as the cold rose up from the nearby river. At first I found all these men very inquisitive, and even quite rude as they asked to buy my shirt, my jacket, or other objects from our equipment, every

man inquiring how much this and that had cost me, where I had bought it, and whether I would sell it to them. I had always thought our modern world was very money-minded, but now to my aggravation I realized that so were the Tibetans. I got quite angry at a fellow who was putting me through the same mercantile questions, and I rudely shook him off under the impression that he was trying to pull a fast bargain on me. That same night Tashi explained to me that I should not get angry, as in Tibet to ask such questions was considered quite normal and polite. I then understood that by cross-examining every person encountered on the track, these medieval businessmen kept informed on market prices. In fact, this business talk was the basis of all exchanges and commerce in regions where no telephone and no stock-market listing could keep anyone informed of current commercial rates. Many of these traders were out on journeys that would last four or five months, some of them going from Tukutchu to Darjeeling in India—hundreds of miles away. In the course of such travels market prices were apt to change, and it became essential for such men to keep posted on current prices in areas for which they were heading. Quite frequently—like cargo ships—these traders would exchange merchandise en route, buying here and selling there a wide variety of goods—trading salt for wool, wool for clothes, wheat for rice, according to what they considered would yield a higher profit in the regions they planned to cross. I was later told how some rough Tibetan-speaking traders from Manang, having discovered in Kathmandu that glass bangles and beads were made in Czechoslovakia, sent out a yak caravan to Europe to buy this precious merchandise! These traders, of course, had not the slightest idea about passports, and possessed only the smallest notion of geography; but they did not worry about distances, having been raised to travel on foot tens of thousands of miles. This group on their way to Czechoslovakia was eventually turned back in Russian Turkestan!

I now realized to what extent the merchants I was encountering were the direct heirs and descendants of those of the Middle Ages. Marco Polo would have felt very much at home here, and later, on re-reading his books, I was struck by how much of his story is filled with confidential business tips on what to buy here and what to sell there, Marco Polo's own travels having all been supported by his clever handling of various commercial operations en route. In many respects Marco Polo's travels had been no different from the journeys undertaken by these men who now were my companions on the road up the Kali Gandaki.

I soon found myself thinking in the same terms as the traders and, remembering some of the business practices I had learned at Harvard, I began to regret that I had not loaded down my men with profitable goods that I could sell right and left. I was also surprised to see the money used by these merchants. Many had Nepalese and Indian paper rupees, but a lot of them handled silver coins from all over the world, money here being directly equated to its weight in silver. I thus saw old French silver francs, American silver dollars, Egyptian piasters, Chinese dollars, and ancient Austrian schillings, for the most part coins that in the West could be found only in collectors' hands. Here they were still actively traded, and to be found in everyone's pockets!

The trade route offered many other surprises, such as "service stations"—a series of small stalls by the side of the road with shoemakers ready to change a sagging sole of the great boots of the Tibetan merchants. A special caste of Thakali people ran inns along our track. These hostelries were spotlessly clean, and although they offered none of what our hotels usually provide—such as beds—they did have good stocks of rakshi, and soon our evening stops had an air of medieval debauchery, as in high spirits Tashi and I would start great discussions with passing Tibetan-speaking people.

Our first night's stop by the Kali Gandaki was marred by the rather unpleasant fact that we had lost Calay. Since before our midday halt, he had completely disappeared. I asked the lagging coolies if he had stayed behind, but they said, No, he had gone ahead. I now became quite anxious. In many places our track rose steeply above the river, and the slightest slip would mean instant death. At one particular place we had walked for half a mile in a groove literally scooped out of the face of a vertical cliff; here also a slip would prove fatal. In some parts the track had been swept away by small landslides, and in others it buried itself in the lofty cliffs through small tunnels in order to keep alongside the river that was ever more deeply enclosed between the great peaks.

Had Calay died or had he run away? I wondered. I then remembered an argument we had had that morning, in which I had quite justly said that he was becoming lazy; then I recalled with misgivings what my wife had predicted when she urged me to find another servant. All this worried me a lot as I marched ahead, inquiring of those we passed whether they had seen a young Nepalese in European clothes, including a pink sweater. You can hardly miss a bright pink sweater on a small trail. But nobody had seen Calay. I could not imagine what had happened to him. Maybe he had stopped by the

road and got drunk; maybe he had been killed; or maybe—which was more probable—he had just tripped and plunged headlong to a watery death. For despite our leisurely pace, we were following one of the most difficult trails of the Himalayas. No end of superlatives could be justified in describing the hair-raising ledge along which we walked, overlooking a deep abyss, or the terrible, rickety bridges that swayed over foaming water hundreds of feet below.

That evening I became more and more disheartened as repeated questioning failed to locate anyone who had seen Calay. Finally I called a halt and we erected the tents. Tashi was to sleep in the large tent, keeping an eye on our baggage, as bandits are no mere myth in the Himalayas. The Khampas, with their very old reputation as caravan robbers, were now increasingly numerous along the trail.

Just before I retired, a peasant came to our camp and pleaded that I go into his rickety home where his wife lay dying. Unable to assist her, I gave a pill to the woman just to comfort her, and returned to my tent more depressed than ever. We tied both tents together so that if anything happened in one, it could be felt in the other. But I could not sleep, feeling that at any moment either Calay would arrive or we would be attacked.

When, next morning, there was still no sign of Calay, I was really most anxious. Two miles down from where we had camped, we had passed the first Nepalese checkpost on our route. This consisted of a little hut with one soldier who represented—for many miles around—the Nepalese government. His principal duty was to control foreign travelers who might try to go north into the forbidden border areas. I knew that any too close contact with these checkposts could cause us more trouble than advantages. But now I resolved to seek the law in hunting for Calay.

It was a fine morning, and the deep valley of the river was still partly in shade as I sped off back to the checkpost. I peered into ravines, thinking of Calay, and inquired again if there were any signs of him, but all to no avail. At the checkpost they had not seen him either; I gave his description and reported that he was missing. There was nothing else I could do, and now I climbed all the way up again to try to catch up with Tashi and the porters.

Having regained the spot where we had slept the night before, I now clambered up a steep slope rising high above the river, then scrambled down to a perilous-looking bridge—two tree trunks resting upon other trunks—spanning a gulf over a hundred feet deep. Here I found Tashi waiting for me; the porters had gone ahead. We were now

in complete disorganization, I thought, and as if to confirm my fears, at that moment there arrived ten fierce-looking Khampas in khaki wind-breakers of Occidental make, and mean-looking Chinese caps, stolen no doubt from the enemy. This caused us to push on forward, and turning a bend, I suddenly ran into a bowlegged, smiling Calay.

I was so angry that all I could say was, "What time is it, Calay?" "Eten," he answered in broken English.

There was nothing more I could say. Calay then explained that he had overtaken us and had gone very far, having lost us too. I never knew the truth of what had happened, but suspected that Calay had been drinking at one of the wayside inns, had gone to sleep, and then tried to catch up with us after nightfall, thus missing our camp.

We then entered a village that we found was entirely occupied by Khampa soldiers who were, we saw, working on improving the track and building a wooden bridge over the Kali Gandaki. When I inquired why and for whom they were doing this work, they were quite mute. I later learned that they were acting on their own initiative to improve their supply route to the border. It must be said that in Kathmandu official sources had denied the presence of any Tibetan soldiers in this part of Nepal. It now became apparent that not only were they there in great number but also that they were policing the districts, controlling those who passed, and banning all commerce that a few foolish merchants might still be attempting to carry on with the Chinese. In short, the Khampas were acting like a foreign occupation army, tolerated by the local inhabitants, who dared not raise a voice when the soldiers cut down their trees or settled in their houses. We were now quite nervous about these encounters, Tashi fearing at every moment that he might be recognized as an Amdo Sherpa. I alone dared talk to the Khampas, who appreciated my knowledge of Tibetan, which they also spoke, but with a peculiar nasal twang very reminiscent of an American accent. A senior soldier came and asked me for medicines. I was practically obliged to comply with his rather insistent request, and bade him and the sick members of his party to follow me to the village farther upstream where I planned to stop for a midday meal and where I could get at my cases. This they did, escorting me in an uncomfortably large number down to the bed of the Kali Gandaki, where I witnessed gangs of Khampas working on a temporary dam to divert the river from what was to be a pier of the new bridge they were building.

Up the other side of the river, we proceeded to the village of Gasa. This was one of the first large Thakali villages I saw, and I was most

impressed by its beauty. Its houses were all of stone, built in Tibetan fashion with flat roofs, upon which women were beating newly reaped barley. Walking along the track through the village was like walking in a small snowstorm as the chaff fluttered all over us, glistening in the sunlight.

Near a little spring I stopped, and Kansa cooked another infamous meal, which made me conclude that to be a good cook one needs two eyes. In the meantime, I tried to diagnose the complaints of the Khampa soldiers who crowded around us, and gave out medicines. It was hard to believe that any of them were ill, as they looked so much stronger, taller, and bigger than the average Nepalese or Thakali. Many of them complained of pains in the back, the knees or stomach. At a loss to diagnose the trouble, I gave out intestinal antiseptics, thinking that they might be victims of amoebic disturbances. Although they were grateful and quite friendly, I could not gather from these men any information as to their number or their purpose in the area. Secretly I wished to make some kind of contact with their leaders, to guarantee our safe passage through to Mustang.

Having eaten, I anxiously awaited the coolies' arrival, half expecting that the Khampas had stopped them en route. But they turned up late as usual. Now, by all reckonings, we would have to take seven, and not six, days to reach Tukutcha. Already I felt as if we had been on the road for months, and Mustang seemed more and more remote.

It was only late on the seventh day after leaving Pokhara that we came in sight of Tukutcha, the capital of the Thak region. For the last four days we had been struggling to keep as close as possible to the Kali Gandaki River, though this sometimes proved impossible when the gorge became so narrow as not to allow a passage by the water. In these places we would have to struggle up and over the great ridges that fell to the water's edge; in other parts we followed the riverbed, which at times extended like a great white stony plain a mile wide, and well enclosed by vertical rock faces.

We were now surrounded by vegetation recalling to perfection the Alps, a land of pine forest and steep grazing grounds rising to the snows visible above us on all sides. Just before Tukutcha we entered the deepest cleft of all, being by now level with the peaks of the Annapurna range.

We encountered on our way many prosperous-looking villages sprawling out upon low alluvial terraces beside the river. These little tablelands, enclosed by the lofty peaks, had small fields of barley and buckwheat. As we progressed northward and therefore higher, I wit-

nessed the seasons changing from village to village. In one, the harvest was already made; in another the wheat was in process of being reaped; in yet a third, to the north, it was barely ripe. In a few hours of marching, one could set back the agricultural calendar a week. In the same manner, the calendar of history had been gradually turning backward ever since our departure, as we marched into a medieval past. In Thak there rose in me a feeling that we were about to step into a new universe—we were no longer on the outskirts of Nepal and India, but reaching those of Tibet. The pole of attraction was no longer Kathmandu or Pokhara—but Lhasa.

These signs came with the first yaks, then the first small monastery, the first monks, then an occasional prayer flag and a chorten—the domelike stone structure so typical of Buddhism, and which symbolizes the one Buddha. Clothes, too, had changed, and everything indicated that we were on the threshold of a new world. We were now well into one of the most remote corners of Nepal, right in the midst of the great mountain chains, and by the time we came in view of Tukutchá the peaks towered so vertically above us that we could not see the summits. Waterfalls careened down the sides of the greatest canyon on earth, falling as if from Heaven to the river that wound its way like a small rivulet through a great bed of bone-white pebbles. The huge width of the riverbed indicated to what tremendous size this torrent grows when the monsoon breaks loose. At its worst, the monsoon can, in a three-month period, let 300 inches of rain fall, in other words, nearly ten metric tons of water per square yard, enough to flatten a Sherman tank into tinfoil. This same monsoon more often than not cuts off Tukutchá from the rest of the world and indeed isolates great parts of Nepal from all outside contact as bridges, tracks, and often whole villages are swept away by the rains.

The Khampas we now encountered were all busily at work trying to improve the small trail, reinforcing its ledge-like portions and strengthening the bridges, all these efforts so that they could keep operating their mysterious secret supply caravans during the monsoon.

Tukutchá stands on a tongue of land protruding out over the vast riverbed. Its stone walls are visible from afar, and as we approached we sighted large two-story houses built against the mountainsides, with square courtyards. The main street of Tukutchá was most impressive, with its enormous houses—the homes of the Serchans and other merchant kings—lining the trade route, down which all day and much of the night tinkled the nostalgic sound of the bells of countless ponies, mules, and donkeys. Tukutchá is a true caravan town, an important

terminus and junction in the vast network of trails that cover the Himalayas.

The town looked deserted, and indeed so it was, as most of its wealthy inhabitants had gone down to live in Pokhara and Kathmandu, leaving their ancestral homes to caretakers, who now paced about the empty galleries and through the vast storerooms of these houses that had once been abustle with the trade in wool and salt from Tibet. Times had changed for Tukutchá, and in its decline we could witness one of the first effects of the Chinese invasion of Tibet.

A letter of introduction to the Serchan who held the title of Suba (district officer) now made it possible for me to occupy two rooms in the vast, empty house of the Pokhara branch of the family. The suba, who called himself with pride Secretary to the King of Mustang, was a rather gruff, fat, and unpleasant man. The polite reception he gave us was, I felt, dictated only by the respect due to my royal recommendation from the brother of His Majesty the King of Nepal. The suba boasted that he could aid and direct us in Mustang, but we soon found out that his so-called functions as secretary to the king were self-delegated and that since the Khampas had arrived his power had been curtailed in areas to the north, as he himself had not dared venture to Mustang since their arrival. The Serchans, it seemed, were no longer lords of the trails, which were now in the domain of the mysterious, aloof, independent Khampas.

I was anxious to carry on, but again I had the problem of coolies. Mine were to stop here, and after being paid they disappeared. The most rugged porter that had come from Pokhara with us was dead drunk, having on the last stages to Tukutchá slouched from one inn to the next, brightening his road with rakshi, and consequently he had stumbled the rest of the way, falling with his load into the river when we forded it. Thanks to his shouting, our entry into Tukutchá had been much remarked, and lacked, I feared, the dignity necessary to impress the suba into violent efforts to assist us farther north. "Tomorrow we shall see," had been his answer to my queries about fresh transport.

The following day we saw nothing, and realized that again it was on our own wits that we would have to rely. We had three possibilities—to find porters, yaks, or ponies. I weighed the pros and cons of men against beasts: A man meant a 70-pound load, a faster pace but much trouble and discussion; a yak could carry a 90-pound load, but is very slow; while a horse takes a 70-pound load, but requires long stops for grazing.

Beyond any doubt yaks were the answer, but search where we

wished, there were none in Tukutcha; all we could do was to wait. Soon, at the sight of the first pair of horns, Tashi and I rushed out! There they were—four great big black beasts, looking every bit like fighting bulls. Shaggy, dark, and powerful—very similar to their owners, four rough-looking peasants dressed in Tibetan garb, with long black hair falling on their shoulders, plaited into loose, greasy pigtails.

Immediately we put our proposition to them. At first they demurred, stating that they came from a village called Geling, just south of Mustang, and that they had to return there. But we were determined under no circumstances to let these men go, and offered them a reasonably large amount of money. In the end, we agreed to spend two days in their village if they could then take us to our destination two days farther northward. A stop at their village, after all, would be a good introduction to the area we were headed for, and it would prove helpful in finding out exactly where Mustang began, culturally and ethnically, as I yet had no precise idea of its geographical limits.

Thus no sooner had we arrived in Tukutcha than we were already getting ready to set out north again. The six-day march from Tukutcha would lead via Geling to the capital of Mustang, the fabled walled city, Lo Mantang, where lived the enigmatical king of the land.

That evening, the yak owners—Tsering Pemba, Tsering Puba, Pasang Pemba, and Tsewan Tendruk—came over to our temporary quarters, and in a long parley in the Tibetan language we once more discussed the price and the size of the loads. The peasants, we noted, spoke a strange sort of Tibetan, a dialect the like of which I had not yet encountered. They spoke of their village with great enthusiasm, and guaranteed that we would soon agree that it was the finest in the world. I found Geling on my map under the distorted name of Giligaon.

Our maps (the Indian Survey 1926 ¼-inch maps) now became quite deceptive. Because Nepal was a closed and forbidden country until 1950, all geographical data on these remote and inaccessible areas were gathered by secret agents, the mysterious Pundit informers. These were Indians of Nepalese stock who were trained by the British to travel in disguise over Tibet and the Himalayas, with notebooks hidden in prayer wheels, and with sacred Buddhist rosaries with 100 beads, instead of the customary 108, for counting their paces. In their walking sticks they hid thermometers that at night they would slip into their boiling kettles to make altitude readings. Thus equipped they would set out as pilgrims, leaving India for journeys that sometimes lasted up to six years. Overcoming incredible hardships, always in disguise and

fearing discovery, they paced every valley and every pass of the inaccessible reaches of the Himalayas. Many of these Pundit explorers' names have remained secret to this day, as they were referred to only by numbers or initials.

When one considers under what conditions these men worked, it is amazing how accurate their maps were. Before them no one had ever set out to measure, explore, and map the remote areas they crossed. Today theirs are still the only detailed printed maps of those areas. Evidently many errors crept into the maps these agents inscribed at night upon the rolls of paper they concealed in their prayer wheels, but on the whole the information they brought back from their journeys was surprisingly accurate.

An account of the mysterious kingdom for which I was headed was written by one of these "native explorers" who made his way in disguise to the Land of Lo and to its capital Lo Mantang. It was later transcribed by a British officer in India, and published in 1875 in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*. This forms the first eyewitness account of the "place of some note in . . . Tibet" about which Kirkpatrick had heard when he went to Nepal in 1793. The "native explorer," whose name is unknown, explains that the Raja of Mustang "is a Bhot" (Tibetan) and that he pays tribute both to the Nepalese and to Lhasa.

It was still dark outside when on the morning of the ninth day after our leaving Pokhara, I was awakened by the booming voices of the yak men we had hired the day before. Unlike the quiet, respectful Nepalese, they were a boisterous, noisy, and friendly group. They treated me with little deference, remarking jokingly "If you sleep all day we'll never arrive." In haste I got up, and soon was in the courtyard of the house, where stood the four great beasts of burden that were now to form our new caravan. The yak men gave me four small wooden sticks, and asked me to lay one on each of the large packs of our equipment. After I had done so, each man recognized his personal stick marker, and without discussion accepted the load that had thus been assigned to his yak. I was delighted by this peaceful means of settling who should carry what; but I soon realized that if the yak men were well disciplined, I could not say as much of their animals, which angrily pulled and tugged at the ropes attached to large rings of bent juniper wood that ran through their noses.

A yak, according to the dictionary, is "a domestic animal." The ones we had hired soon proved to be exceptions; they were about as domesticated as wild tigers. After various unsuccessful attempts at hoisting

the heavy packs onto their shifting backs, we had to move out of the courtyard into the street. There, with Tashi holding the nose of one nervous brute, someone gripping its horns, and two people on either side of it, our two steel cases were finally secured upon one of the yaks. When the final knot had been tied, everybody let go and jumped clear of the infuriated beast. The yak immediately darted off, kicked up its heels, stopped dead, and then—after having made sure that I was looking at it—began a solitary rodeo aimed against my poor baggage, which thumped and banged alarmingly against the animal's sides. Still kicking its heels, the yak charged out of sight. I heard a crash, and closed my eyes in pain. I knew what had happened. I found my packs thrown off beside the track, and the yak now peacefully grazing on a flat grassy patch on the outskirts of Tukutchu.

This unsuccessful operation was repeated with each of the other three yaks, until at last the luggage survived the rodeo test and remained on the backs of our animals, which then began to graze. Finally, through great shouts and the throwing of stones, our "transport animals" got under way, like a bunch of cows going to be milked. They advanced with a reluctant pace that seemed to beat the rhythm of eternity, pausing here and there to smell blades of grass or small wildflowers. I have called them yaks, but I now learned that they were actually not full-blooded yaks, but dzos, a dzo being a crossbreed between a yak and a cow. Dzoes, I was told rather ironically by Tashi that morning, are much quieter and tamer than yaks!

— “Even Great Lamas Have Fleas”

FOR THOSE WHO develop high blood pressure rushing about Paris or New York, in and out of taxis, planes, and buses, it would be a marvelous therapy to purchase a yak and follow it around on errands. Its frustratingly slow pace would be the best possible antidote to our modern age of rush. I now realized how comparatively swift our coolies had been; at least they understood that the fastest way from *A* to *B* is in a straight line. The dzos cared nothing for this, and would loiter right and left with great disregard for my temper. Their bad manners were equaled only by the charm of the yak men. All of them were dressed in rough homespun woolen cloaks falling to their knees, covering red- and gray-striped trousers tucked into great boots of red woolen cloth attached to rough leather soles, over which straw had been stuffed for greater comfort.

The morning was cold, and the sun lit only the summits of the snowy peaks above us as Tukutchu slowly slipped out of view behind us, its sprawling houses standing silent in the dark shadow of the gorge. As previously mentioned, we had been told that it would take us six days to get to Lo Mantang, not counting the two-day halt we planned to make in Geling. Again I braced myself for a long, long walk.

From Tukutchu we headed for the small town of Jomosom; its name is a Nepalese deformation of the Tibetan “Dzong Sarpa,” which means “New Fort.” This was the first reference to the presence of a fort we had encountered, and it announced that we were entering the land of feuding principalities. Today the area north of the Thak region is known by the name Baragnune, this time a Tibetan deformation of the Nepalese for “Twelve Villages.” These twelve villages are all of Tibetan-speaking people of Buddhist religion, and except for a small

number of Gurungs, we would from now on encounter only people of Tibetan stock.

Little or nothing is known of the customs and inhabitants of these twelve townships of the upper Kali Gandaki. I was now moving into areas seldom or never visited.

The scenery was still relatively green, with small, swampy fields by the river's edge, cut by the deep canyons of torrents falling down from the ice fields above us. Small rows of chortens announced a few villages, the most remarkable being Marpha, a hive of neat whitewashed houses bordering a paved street alongside which ran a canalized swift stream, access to all the houses on one side of the street being by means of stone slab bridges.

On our way up the left bank of the river, we came to a rickety bridge fashioned in typical Tibetan manner with great beams that thrust out from stone anchorages, rising one on top of the other and protruding ever farther across the river in cantilever fashion till two large tree trunks could join the topmost beams together.

Toward midday we were not far from Jomosom, where I knew we would have to stop because of the presence of a checkpost. This was a small cantonment of Nepalese soldiers whose principal task was to control those who wanted to go north beyond Jomosom, which marked the limit of the areas within Nepal readily accessible to travelers and foreigners. We were now about to enter territory that, owing to its proximity to Tibet, is considered a strategic and politically unstable area. My heart beat at the thought of the checkpost. Jomosom, I knew, possessed a transmitting and receiving set in contact with Kathmandu, and I feared that since our departure my permit might have been revoked for some political reason.

The first house we encountered turned out to be the checkpost. Several thin, sorry-looking soldiers sat before it, looking miserable and wearing great long scarves wrapped about their noses to keep out the cold of the howling wind that rushed up the narrow gorge of the Kali Gandaki. My impending arrival, so I discovered, had already been announced by the various traders and travelers who had overtaken us on the road.

The captain in charge of the post was absent, I was told when I entered the small room that served as reception office. I was asked to show my permit, and it was passed from hand to hand among the illiterate soldiers who shivered and stamped their feet on the dusty floor of the small stone shed. They could, it seemed, make neither head nor tail of my document.

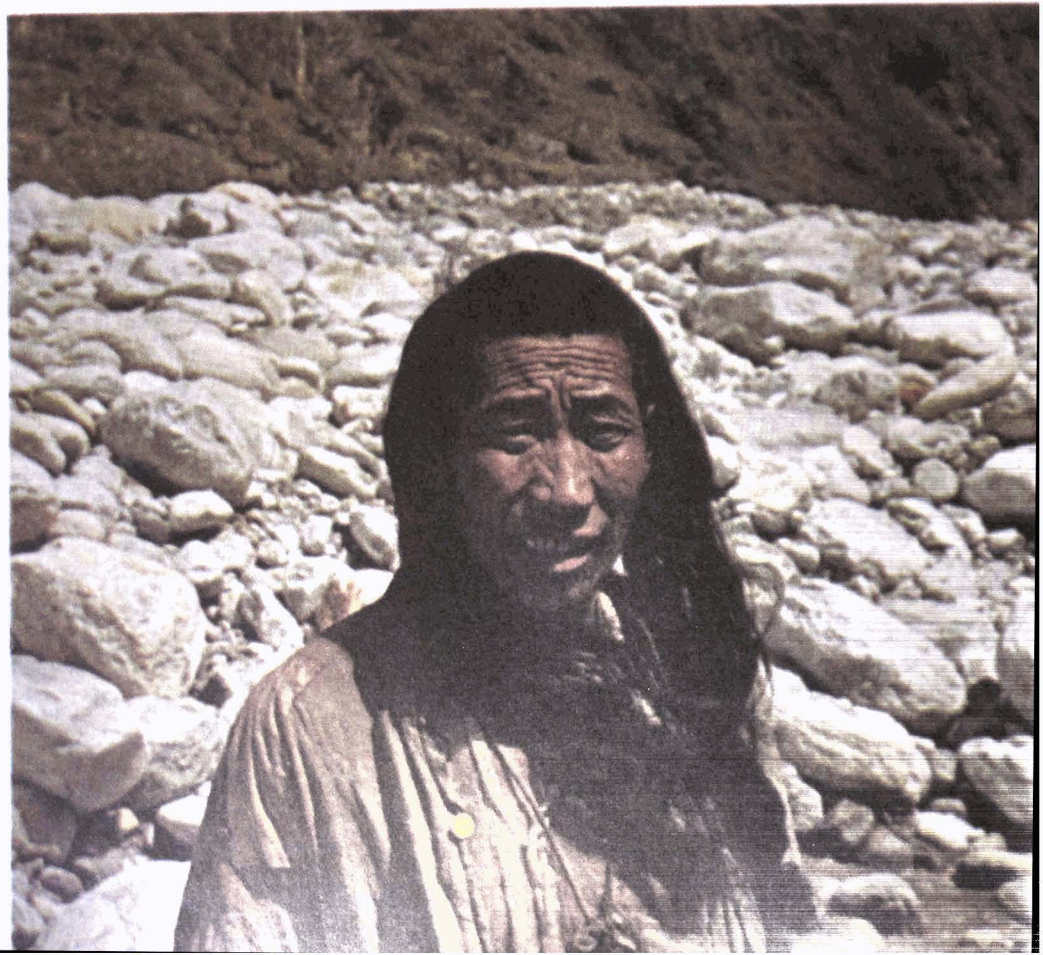
Anxiously I waited, trying to be polite and kind, but with a sort of guilty feeling creeping over me, for although in clear letters the name Mustang was on my permit, it still somehow seemed too good to be true that I should be the first to be authorized to go to, and live in, that land from which so many foreigners had been barred.

My anxiety only increased when a voice announced that the captain in command was in sight and coming. All my fears were dispelled, however, when I discovered that the captain, who had spent many months in forced isolation in this lonely post, was overflowing with kind and friendly feelings. A Gurkha, he had served in the Indian Army under Britain, and like many Nepalese veterans of the famous Gurkha regiments, he had traveled a great deal and spoke a little English. He was full of recollections of the outside world, proudly exhibiting his knowledge of areas outside Nepal and translating his own conversation with me into Nepalese so that his soldiers could benefit from his knowledge and admire him for it. He then talked about the godforsaken post that had now fallen to him, and how he was here practically alone in the defense of Nepal's most touchy border.

When I explained that I was off to Mustang, he took a long time to examine my permit, and then ceremoniously informed me that he was proud to meet someone who liked his country so much as to go to such trouble and pains to visit such distant regions. "You are the first person I have met to get this permit," he added naively. "You must have good connections in Kathmandu, because we usually allow no one to go to Mustang."

I was so relieved by this cordial welcome that I immediately sent Calay out to buy the best rakshi he could find, and soon I was drinking merrily with the captain in a house I rented for the night. The yaks were unpacked; a small fire was lit by a Thakali woman, and seated on our inflated air mattress we conversed in the friendliest of terms. Between drinks and jokes, the captain, coming back to his duty, reminded me to steer clear of the border, while I attempted to get some official

ABOVE: *The great gorge of the Kali Gandaki, seen from the village of Tayen. In this photo, taken in early spring, the riverbed is practically dry; only a small ribbon of water meanders between the canyon's sides. Beyond the village are the ruins of a huge fort that once defended the trade route to Mustang and Tibet.* BELOW: *A wild-looking Khampa warrior, his long hair unbraided, stares at us as we go up the Kali Gandaki.*





information about the Khampas. “They are not as bad as most people think,” the captain said. He agreed that the Khampas were good soldiers and that in view of all the hardships they had suffered, there was little that the Nepalese could do but accept them in their land.

Soon the strong effects of the rakshi drowned any reasoning on my part, and when my guest left for his lonely cantonment, I was in a complete state of befuddlement due more to tension, fatigue, and altitude (we were at 10,000 feet) than to the rakshi.

The following morning, feeling none the worse for the preceding night’s orgy—which I put down as a sound anthropological inquisition into the effects of native drink at high altitudes—I set about trying to find our yak men. But look where we could, we saw neither yaks nor their boisterous owners. I therefore set out with Tashi to visit the village, which, although not pretty, presented two great points of interest—a Bon Po temple and a tiny store, the last place where we could buy anything like safety pins or string.

Tashi was in a great state of excitement, for he had learned that there was a famous Bon Po lama in the district, a holy man of great repute, by the name of Shote Khembo. This was, Tashi said, “a good omen,” adding that the lama could bring him good luck, religious merit, and protection for our joint enterprise. I myself was greatly pleased at the prospect of meeting a high lama of the pre-Buddhist Bon sect, one of the oldest religious groups of Asia, though little known to the West. Full of anticipation, we walked over to the little Bon Po temple, whose presence here in a predominantly Buddhist area was unique.

Finally we found the structure, a small, square, rather dilapidated building formed by a little closed yard giving onto a small rectangular chapel. Surprisingly, a Gurung woman in Nepalese dress opened the door, and we learned to our disappointment that the holy monk had gone for a short pilgrimage to Muktinath, or rather Chu Mig Gya Tsa Gye, as it is called in Tibetan, meaning “the 108 springs.” The lady permitted us to look over the temple and at the venerable lama’s books. Tashi was delighted, as he felt that from those books alone he could get religious benefit. This he achieved by placing the numerous volumes gathered by the lama upon his head one at a time. Thus strength-

ABOVE: *Our yaks negotiate a difficult passage between Samar and Geling.*
 BELOW: *The fort of Tsarang seen through the door chorten of the town.*

ened, we then examined in detail the poorly designed frescoes of the chapel. I was initiated into the rather nebulous cosmogony of the Bon Po, which although it disclaims alliance with Buddhism, has finally through the years adopted many of its exterior symbols, and has also borrowed many Tantric Buddhist rites and divinities. When I remarked on this to Tashi, he angrily declared that just the contrary was true, as all the Buddhist sects of Tibet had borrowed their beliefs from the Bon religion, though they had since warped them in error and stained them with heresy and sin. As I did not feel ready to be a martyr for the Tibetan Buddhist faith, I accepted Tashi's declaration.

On returning from the small Bon Po temple, I found Tsering Pemba loitering about the house where we had slept. Tsering Pemba was the tallest of our yak men. His wild appearance and bony features, which made him look more like a Basque peasant than like an Asiatic, were fiercely outlined by a beautiful mop of black hair that hung down to his waist. Unlike our other three yak owners, he seemed to have given up the tedious practice of braiding his hair into a pigtail; and the result was that it hung around his head like that of a scarecrow, a resemblance much fostered by the fact that he had lost one of his front teeth. On seeing him I tried to get angry, asking in a hard voice, "Where are the yaks?" But my fury was destroyed by his disarming smile and his statement that "animals had to graze" and that we could set off only when they had finished. I had not considered that such fantastic beasts as yaks had to eat. Noticing my bad mood, Tsering asked me to come and have a drink of chang (Tibetan barley beer) with him at the small store. His straightforward manner was disarming, and so friendly that I realized that in handling Tibetans I would have to shed the arrogant *barah sahib* (great white man) outlook on things that I had adopted toward the lazy coolies we had hired in Pokhara.

The little store was in fact only the house of a Thakali trader, who for the benefit of the small checkpoint had imported such small commodities as pins, cigarettes, and cloth from Pokhara. I noticed, stacked in a corner of the trader's house, a bundle of light beige material. This was, I discovered, a pile of Tibetan gowns of the color worn by the Khampas. Waiting for the yaks, I tried one on, and eventually bought one of these vast flowing robes, light khaki in color with dark blue lapels and lining.

From that moment onward, until my return to Nepal two months later, I never wore anything else. This not because of any affectation as to "going native," but because I rapidly discovered that the Tibetan cloak, called a *chuba*, is one of the most amazing and efficient garments ever invented.

It is one of those pieces of apparel that the Americans would call convertible, the British versatile, and the French *incroyable*. At least those are its qualities for him who knows how to tie a knot with his teeth with both hands behind his back! This is but one of the intricate gymnastics required to fasten it properly.

At first sight a chuba is very much like a dressing gown that has been cut ten times larger than what would ordinarily be considered necessary. By this I mean that if you slip it on, it hangs down to the floor, its sleeves fall right over your hands to below your knees, while your shoulders disappear, and the collar opens to below your navel.

Having slipped it on, one has to go into remarkable contortions to give it a neater appearance. This is achieved according to well-ordained movements that use both the prehensile qualities of the human chin, the tight grip of one's elbow, a wriggle of the thigh, and the firm grasp of two hands—with variations depending on whether you are a Khampa, an Amdo, a Drokpa, or a plain Lhasan.

One first grabs the two wide, loose sides of this robe, and bends them back to form two pleats in the rear (three pleats if you are an Amdo—two are Lhasan style). Holding the pleats in back, one grabs with one hand a belt, usually made of cloth—to do this, one supports one pleat with the elbow. Then with the hand whose elbow is pinned, one fastens the belt, passing it adroitly with a crippled gesture to the other hand, which is holding the other pleat in the back. Let me remind you that in the meantime both your hands are lost somewhere in the extra long sleeves, so that the finger movements have to be done blind, through the material.

When the belt is fastened, provided you have—all through this very tricky and painful operation—managed to keep one of the collar flaps pinned in place with your chin, then you are in business. All you do is pull up through the belt the ample slack that now forms a pocket all around the waist; you then turn up your right sleeve, and away you go.

Such exercise is well rewarded by the now multiple use the chuba can be put to. You can throw away your gloves, as the long sleeves protect the hands from the cold wind and keep them warm. No need of pajamas, because all you need do is untie the belt to have a vast, roomy sleeping bag. When it rains, you just pull the collar up over your head. There is plenty of slack around your waist, and here, on dry days, you carry your flint and steel striker (matches are unknown). Here, in this waist pocket that runs all around you, you also keep everything from your prayer wheel to your spindle for spinning yak wool, not to mention all the other whatnots a Tibetan will carry with him.

If you are very aristocratic, however, you never roll up the sleeves of your chuba—a subtle sign that you never have to use your hands for a living. If it gets too warm, you simply slip off one sleeve and let it dangle down your back. If it really gets sweltering hot, then you slip off both sleeves and knot them around your waist. To ride a horse, you simply untie your belt, which gives the chuba the vast amplitude necessary for equestrian gymnastics.

I suppose a zip jacket is easier to wear, but it certainly is not so practical. There was, for myself, one more advantage in wearing a chuba—I was not so conspicuous as I had been, and this proved a benediction all through my trip. On wearing a chuba, my Tibetan improved noticeably; although this might be an illusion, I sometimes think it was due to the very good tailor who had made my khaki Tibetan cloak.

Very proud, I returned to where Calay was basking in the sun, while Kansa was working like mad packing our stuff into the thick brown-and-white yak-wool bags furnished by our yak owners, who at every stop took precious minutes sewing the bags up to close them properly. At long last, the yaks had finished their grazing, and after the habitual rodeo we and they set out once again upon the trail.

Our path now led us deep into the great gorge of the Kali Gandaki River. As we progressed, gone were the green slopes rising to snow peaks. We were entering a parched, desert-like void, composed of huge yellow mounds and great towers of rock, rectangular in shape, the soaring masses of eroded cliffs, barren and dry. The sky along the horizon to the north was blue and crystal clear. We had left behind for good the world of vegetation, moisture, and greenery, to step onto the edge of the great barren central Asian plains, toward which we slowly climbed. Ahead of us extended a seemingly endless landscape that I knew stretched right across Tibet and Sinkiang into Mongolia. The Kali Gandaki was now a mere stream, turning about the bone-white floor of the riverbed, between the ocher cliffs that enclosed us on both sides. From alpine scenery we had now passed into a world reminiscent of the Grand Canyon with its hues of red, brown, and yellow. As far ahead as we could see stretched the great cleavage of the valley, making its way like a rectangular groove in a sandpile. Somewhere ahead and high above us was Mustang, and now, as we approached, my excitement knew no bounds. Soon we would be crossing beyond Nepal's frontier into the thumblike projection dominating both Tibet and Nepal, the territory of the mysterious King of Lo.

Walking up the riverbed, we soon came in sight of the village of

Kag, a Tibetan-style fortress town. Rising upon a small level piece of land where a tributary rushed foaming into the Kali Gandaki, Kag appeared like a great massive white box. This box, we saw as we approached nearer, was formed by houses joined together, forming from the outside a practically windowless bastion. Just before this impressive white mass commanding the two rivers rose a great rectangular red building, a monastery that presented an equally forbidding façade of inscrutable high walls.

Kag, I was later to discover, had been an important fortress town in the past, one of the most advanced bastions of the Kingdom of Mustang. I greeted the sight of it with joy, as it made clear that we had now left behind all contact with the Nepalese Hindu world and had entered the land of Lamas and Buddhism.

There was nothing here to recall the thatched Nepalese houses, with their slanting roofs; gone were water buffaloes and the small dark-skinned people squatting by the roadside; gone were the phallic shrines, rice-eating peasants, and all the sickly mystery of the Hindu world that had always given me the same dubious impressions as the Chinese statues of my childhood. The fortlike appearance of Kag spoke of a more valiant and warlike race, expressing in the majesty of geometrical sturdiness a taste more robust and less over-richly refined.

One by one the yaks now forded the river, coming against the barrier of the town's houses. They found their way through a narrow, dark passage that gave access to small interior courtyards, streets, and tunnels that wound their way into this town, whose massive plan spoke of war and testified to its border position.

The houses were three stories high, forming one great mass closed to the outside world. Built of stone and *chan* (Tibetan molded clay cement), the town gave an impression of permanence that is so lacking in the structures of the tropics.

I was rather unpleasantly surprised to see in the dark tunnel streets and the small squares lit by little openings between the buildings, the silhouettes of numerous Khampas who placidly stared at us from the narrow doorways. The town, it seemed, was completely controlled by them. I pretended not to notice them, hoping that my equipment would also pass unnoticed. Presently, from the subterranean streets, we emerged through a doorway, flanked by two large prayer wheels, on the other side of town. Here we stopped to prepare our midday meal, while the yaks were taken into the dark courtyard of a neighboring house where they were given straw.

Having swallowed our habitual dose of rice, we set off once more—

Tashi, Calay, Tsering Pemba, Tsering Puba, Pasang Pemba, and Tsewan Tendruk, their respective yaks, two small donkeys and two calves that had joined us at Jomosom along with a smiling, very handsome boy of about ten with long braids and wearing a miniature chuba. This was the son of Tsering Puba. He was very amused by me, and only later did I find that what he liked best about me was my nose. If I had known how much attention my Occidental nose, "large" by Oriental standards, was later to attract in Mustang, I would certainly have left it behind in Pokhara.

Kag marked an important point on our road. Up till now we had been following the ancient and much traveled route through the great Himalayan breach of the Kali Gandaki River. This road leads to the districts of northwest Nepal. But at Kag the road splits in three, one branch setting out east to Muktinath, the sacred shrine with the flaming stones and water, and then continuing beyond Muktinath to a 17,000-foot pass leading to Manang, the district famous for its unfriendly people. On our return we could, if we chose, reach Kathmandu by this northeastern route, which skirts the Annapurna range by the north. The second branch of the track led westward across the Dolpo and the Mugu area, a vast extent of land between the Dhaulagiri range and a secondary range on the Tibetan border. This corridor is a pastoral land where live the little known Dolpo people studied by Professor David Snellgrove and Corneille Jest. Both these scholars, in their past travels, had been refused permission to go to Mustang, for which the third road headed, the road that continued north up the great barren canyon of the Kali Gandaki. The river now changed its name, being called by all the Tsangpo, or "clear one," a term given very generously in Tibet to large rivers when they are not simply called *chu*, which means "water."

Very few foreigners had traveled up the route we were now taking. The first person to do so was that disguised native Indian explorer who counted on his prayer beads every pace of his road. The second traveler on record to come here was the amusing Japanese monk Ekai Kawaguchi, who in 1898 tried secretly to enter Tibet via Mustang. He was a scholar who wanted to study Buddhism in Lhasa. In those days the Chinese and the Tibetans had banned all travel to the holy city. As it turned out, he never was able to cross from Mustang into Tibet, but he remained in a monastery in Mustang for nearly a year, after which he went to Dolpo, and at last, from there, smuggled himself into Tibet. Then, fifty-four years later, in 1952, there came up this same trail the rugged Swiss geologist Toni Hagen. This man performed in Nepal one

of the most amazing series of exploratory journeys ever undertaken in this century. In the course of six years he wandered 18,000 miles on foot over all of the Himalayas' least known trails. At one point this brought him to rediscover Lo Mantang, the capital of Mustang, in which he was the first European ever to set foot. After him only a few foreigners had ever come this way, among them the Austrian climber Herbert Tichy, and the famed Italian Tibetan scholar Professor Giuseppe Tucci, who spent a day in Mustang's capital, and returned from this kingdom after a brief visit of only six days. About this short journey Professor Tucci published scanty notes and sparse information on his short visit.

We would have to travel yet two days more along the partly dry riverbed before we would reach the foot of the high plateau on which stood the land of Mustang. To get there, we would have to climb up a steep ridge above the gorge of the Kali Gandaki, which would become too closely walled in and narrow to follow, and then we would cross four passes, over 13,000 feet high, that would lead us to the forbidden kingdom.

We were now entering an arid desert area, devoid of rain, in sharp contrast to the damp, humid southern slopes of the Himalayas. A majestic loneliness pervaded the barren, tormented landscape, making me feel all of a sudden the great burden of my venture. My fears, as I walked, came to the surface again. Dwarfed by the magnificence of nature, my party seemed so terribly small and defenseless in the face of such dangers as Khampas, bandits, and the like. I could not help but feel that if even the Serchans hesitated about going up to Mustang, there was good reason why I also should be fearful of the track.

We had been patiently following the riverbed all day, pushed along by a ferocious wind from the south, when the yak men pointed to the summit of a sheer cliff. There stood Tayen, where we planned to make our evening stop.

Leaving the riverbed, we painfully made our way up a barren, steep gravel slope, slipping and sliding as we panted up. Halfway up, I spotted above us the great bastions of a ruined, ancient fort. Three of its rectangular towers were still standing, joined together by a great high wall pierced here and there by windows. The whole building was about three hundred feet long—the largest and most impressive structure I had yet seen in the Himalayas.

Soon we came to a series of small chortens in the shape of giant upside-down tops, gaily colored in white, red, and yellow. I then noticed that above us yet another great ruin dominated the village, which

stood as though caught between these two massive forts that had once been the town's main defense.

The sun was setting as we marched in single file under a tall, deep archway into the narrow, alley-like streets of Tayen. The houses were rectangular, block-shaped buildings with flat roofs, clustered together to form a fortified town much like Kag.

I set out with Tashi, despite our weary limbs, to explore the village and its forts and talk to its inhabitants. To our surprise we found that it was only with the greatest difficulty that we could make ourselves understood. "They speak the funniest Tibetan I have ever heard," Tashi declared. "I can hardly make it out."

It seems that Tayen, in ancient times, had been an independent fortress town, one of many we were now to encounter. These towns formerly made the banks of the upper Kali Gandaki north of Jomosom (the New Fort) a chain of heavily defended castles. Here had lived minor warlords, no doubt levying taxes and feuding among themselves. The course of the river was (to use an analogy of Dr. Snellgrove) like that of the Rhine Valley with its castles that had once belonged to independent and feuding barons. These defenses would now mark the entire approach to the Kingdom of Lo.

When I returned to where I had left Calay, I found such a crowd that we practically had to fight our way to the tents. These were badly erected inside a cattle shelter. Children by the dozens stared at us from various rooftops and walls, watching our every movement. Such crowds were soon to become our everyday lot. Although this audience unnerved me at first, I soon became accustomed to "living in public" in what I called "the cinema"—I being, for the occasion, the star.

Exhausted, I would have fallen asleep quite fast that night in the lonely village of Tayen, had it not been for the fact that just before we turned in, twenty small donkeys, with loud clanging copper bells, were let into our corral. They spent all night shaking their heads, just to make sure that we could not sleep. Several times that night inquisitive donkeys also stepped onto the guy ropes of the tent, and at dawn it became a matter of urgency to get up before the tent completely collapsed, and smothered us to death under the small hoofs of the noisy animals.

Such are the little hardships of Himalayan travel, far more annoying than the fear of falling sick, over a cliff, or even into the hands of bandits. Most annoying of all is the perpetual harassment by fleas and bed-bugs. Although Tayen is 11,000 feet up, and therefore has practically no flies and few bugs, we had carried up with us from hotter climates

quite a zoo of parasites. For some reason, I had only a few compared to Tashi, who was always scratching away like mad.

Jokingly, I told Tashi that he should be ashamed of having so many fleas. Tashi thought my remark not funny at all, and getting quite angry he told me one of the Tibetan facts of life: “Even great lamas have fleas!” “Sorry,” I said, and was immediately stung by one of my own insects! But after learning from Tashi that “even great lamas have fleas,” I always felt a certain comfort in scratching my own parasites.

I had by now come to know Tashi almost like a brother. At night we shared the same small tent, and this intimacy, plus our mutual reliance upon each other for everything, had wrought a very close bond of friendship between us. Tashi and I were always joking at each other, for if the Tibetans—be they Amdos, Khampas, or Lhasans—have one common quality, it is a great sense of humor and love of having fun. This humor is neither nasty nor stupid, but quite refined. It ranges from funny stories to practical jokes. Again I am sorry to say that my nose was the object of much of Tashi’s laughter, while I would tell Tashi that he “looked Chinese.” This would always get him mad, and then he would laugh, asking nervously, “Do you think the Khampas might think I’m Chinese?”

I understood Tashi quite well. He was, I remarked, extremely fond of his appearance, and as—like most Asiatics—he did not have to shave, he could always look perfectly neat even in moments of great stress. He had what a *mondain* European would call “flair for clothes.” Since I had put aside my duvet jackets, pullovers, and anoraks for the Tibetan chuba, and as we were sharing wardrobes, Tashi now dressed himself in the more elegant elements of my outfit, so that I—with my two-day beard—in my Tibetan gown, looked like the ragged Tibetan servant of some rich Japanese mountain climber—Tashi. When Tashi put on his dark glasses, and what with his dandy-like crop of hair, he looked anything but Tibetan, and indeed almost too Western for my liking!

There was one thing that always surprised me about Tashi. Every time I would say, “I think we shall reach such a place at six this evening,” he would answer, “No, we’ll get there at five-thirty.” When I said I thought it would take us longer, he would answer with assurance, “No, at five-thirty,” adding, “I know; you see, I am a little bit lama.” Whatever I did or whatever happened, he was always right, even when his estimates were four hours different from mine. It was quite unnerving, as it seemed that Tashi could read the future. I soon

began to rely completely on his predictions, which more often than not proved to be exact—so Tashi really was “a little bit lama.”

After getting underway the following day, Tashi and I separated from the porters to make our way across the Kali Gandaki to a large monastery, Gumpa Kang, that lay on the opposite bank from Tayen. With some difficulty we crossed the freezing river of melted snow water. We then climbed up to arrive upon a high tableland where stood the monastery, backed against a cliff ribbed with sheer, fluted column-like formations that looked like the gigantic pillars of an Egyptian temple. The *gumpa*—as monasteries and temples are called in Tibetan—was a sizable structure freshly painted white, and rectangular in shape.

The monastery was deserted, and we found ourselves facing a locked wooden door recessed into a small porch painted with various divinities. As no one was in sight, we tried to find a means of breaking into the edifice. We eventually opened a small door that led to the second floor. Here were a succession of dark, empty rooms. In eerie silence, interrupted only by the howling of the wind outside, we gingerly made our way from room to room till we came upon a side chapel where stood three gilt statues of lamas squatting majestically on lotus-flower pedestals. They seemed to frown upon our intrusion, so we pushed our exploration further, passing through a creaky door leading to a vast gallery that looked down into the main temple—whose altar was occupied by a huge squatting figure of Maitreya, the Buddha who is next to come, and whose eerie face glared level with the shaky gallery upon which we stood.

Chills ran through us as the wind flogged the doors we had left ajar, and our feeling of guilt added to the suspense of this sneak visit into the lonely monastery of Gumpa Kang. Finding a ladder made of a notched tree trunk, we climbed through a small opening onto the roof of the *gumpa*. From there we commanded a splendid view back over the route by which we had come. Down below us we could see the minute dots of Calay, Kansa, and our yaks, like ants embarked for eternity. Looking north, mountains barred our horizon. My heart beat when I thought that beyond those mountains lay Mustang. At our feet to the left we could see faintly three small villages built about green fields on a terrace by the river.

We now set off to join our caravan, and made slow progress up the great gorge until an abrupt cliff barred our route—here the river seems to disappear! On approaching, I saw to my surprise that a huge red cliff had broken off from the western flank of the canyon, and was lean-

ing against the opposite wall across the river, which emerged from below this huge natural bridge. The block that for some reason had become detached, and keeled over to rest upon the vertical cliff opposite, was some 400 feet high, 200 wide, and 1,000 feet long. Man had taken this opportunity to build a bridge over the river at its exit from the natural tunnel.

Any progress up the Kali Gandaki now was impossible. It was here that we were to climb above its great canyon. The track led to a village that dominated the natural tunnel, but our yak men chose to go via an alternate route that followed the course of a small tributary of the Kali Gandaki. Turning to the right, we began making our way up the bed of this small stream, which was enclosed in a deep gorge. The sides of the canyon were so steep and so close together that in many parts the sunlight could not reach us, and we advanced as if in a cave, from whose bottom we could only occasionally glimpse a bit of blue sky above.

My thoughts were wandering as I walked behind Calay, when suddenly I heard an explosion, followed by two great thuds. Two boulders had fallen from the cliff top above and landed between Calay and me, missing us both by only a few feet! This was rather a shattering experience, and we now crept along with our necks tucked in. Such falling rocks would mean immediate death, and there was little that we could do but hope that the gods were with us. Calay was quite shocked, and kept giggling, repeating, “This stone kill Calay, yes, could kill Calay.” I agreed, and hoped that we would soon pull out of this treacherous trap. Looking up, I saw that above us another track clung to the sheer vertical face of the cliff, resting on logs planted in the rock. Had someone on that track pushed the boulders down upon us? I wondered.

The log path led, we were told, to the village of Gyaga. Presently we discovered that we would have to clamber up a similar precipitous path on the other side. How the yaks ever negotiated this shaky and dizzying scaffolding along the cliffside passage I shall never know.

Exhausted and thirsty, we finally emerged onto the brink of a rounded hill high above the gorge. Here the track spread out in a series of little parallel paths created by the hoofs of yaks and goats. Going up a gentle rise, we reached a pass. Here stood a pile of stones, each of them thrown there by a grateful traveler to thank and glorify the gods of war who haunt such high and lonely places. In thanksgiving, with my own prayers, I tossed another stone onto the heap.

Castles in the Clouds

THE CLIMB WAS over, and from the top of the pass we looked into a new universe. It was an amazing view of an incredible landscape. Before us lay the great central Asian highlands, extending as far as we could see to the north in great undulating waves of rounded peaks wearing caps of snow, like foam on a sea after a storm. We were already looking into Tibet. At last we had reached the roof of the world, or rather the edge of that roof. To our left rose some lofty peaks, more angular than those to the north. These were part of a chain that extended into Tibet, and formed the western border between that country and Mustang. Only a dozen miles separated us from Chinese-occupied Tibet, to the northwest. Soon we would be surrounded on three sides by the hostile Gyami, as the Tibetans call the Chinese.

Descending a gentle slope, we came in sight of a poor little village of white houses set upon a ledge, from which rose a great red cliff dominated by the fairy-tale ruins of a castle. This was evidently the village of Sa-mar, whose name means "red earth." There were about ten houses set about a small clump of willow trees whose drooping, fragile leaves were just starting to appear after the winter's lethargy. The temperature was bitterly cold; here on the high plateau spring was only just beginning.

At Sa-mar we now entered upon the third stage of our journey. The first stage had been over the eroded green hills from Pokhara to the Kali Gandaki River. On the second, we had marched up the green bed of the river between the great peaks to Tukutchu, and after passing the monsoon limit had climbed the deep, barren gorge. Now at last we had reached the confines of the great steppes of rolling land, that would—after three more passes—bring us to the border of Mustang.

My joy and relief at having reached Sa-mar were soon marred by two rather unpleasant events. As soon as we entered the town, I noticed something strange. In a minute I knew what it was. Sa-mar is a very small village, and it was crowded—crowded with Khampas who hung about in dozens at the doorways of the houses. All were in khaki chubas, many of them wearing Tibetan shirts of parachute camouflage cloth. Most of them wore regular army boots, and altogether they were more martial looking than any Khampas I had seen before. I also noticed a change in the attitude of the local people. Here in Sa-mar they were not out sitting in the street, but seemed to shy away from the soldiers, who acted as if they owned the village, like an occupation force. Was this a regular army? I wondered. Were they freedom fighters or bandits? Tashi was frightened, and turned toward me with a look of anxiety. There was but one thing to do, I thought: to push on and not stop here. I took Tsering Pemba by the arm. "We'll go on," I said. But he answered, "No," telling me in a low voice that there was "a *magar*" on the way and that the Khampas had already destroyed the caravan stopping point beyond Sa-mar!

For the first time I had heard the word *magar*. In Tibetan, *ma* means "war," *gar* means "camp." Army camps! Tsering Pemba told me there were more than ten *magars* in the surrounding area. It meant that all the rumors we had heard about the Khampas massing in the areas south of Mustang were true.

There was no doubt that we were in territory partially under the control of the Khampas: men who, I knew, were considered a race of warriors, and professional hereditary highway robbers . . . men whose courage was said to be equaled only by their brutality. Because of the Khampas in Tibet, traders always team together, as they did in Marco Polo's time, for protection. Now that I found myself in the midst of their army, part of which had taken refuge in the Himalayas, it suddenly became evident to me why the Serchans did not go to Mustang any more, why the Tibetans in Kathmandu had refused to come, and also why the Nepalese government forbade access to these areas in turmoil. I now understand what was meant by the words, "a politically unstable area," as I witnessed the reality of Tibet's continuing struggle against Chinese invasion, a struggle denied or kept secret by those few who had any factual knowledge of its extension into these lonely areas. It was the same war that had begun in 1954 in Kham, in eastern Tibet. Here in these most-inaccessible reaches of the Himalayas these men were still resisting the Chinese in clandestine operations. These were the last of the Khampa soldiers fighting the Chinese, but also the same

men who had shot Tashi's friends because they were fighting for Taiwan. Could I expect them to be sympathetic toward social anthropology, or grasp that my mission was neither political nor commercial?

I was worried, and when I looked at Tashi and asked, "How do you feel?" he whispered, "*Bjeeginduk*" (I'm scared).

I expected that at any moment one of the Khampas, most of whom were great tall fellows, would come forward and do or say something. But nothing happened except that just as we reached the village a local peasant came toward us, pulling out his tongue in respect as he approached me, his hands cupped before his chin. "*Coochi! Coochi!*" he said. "*Smen treginduk, narungi pumo shiegingduk*"—(Please, I beg you, give me medicine; my daughter is dying). The man then added, "Come and live in my house and spend the night; I will give you wood and whatever you please."

Forgetting the Khampas, I followed the man, who told Tsering to bring the yaks along. We entered a walled courtyard surrounding a small white house with tiny wooden windows. From the house came the tinkle of a bell and the hammering noise of a bass drum. I was greeted by a woman, the mother of the child, who begged me to enter. Bending low, I got inside, and in the dark fumbled up a steep flight of steps that led into the main living room of the house. Getting accustomed to the dim light of four little butter lamps burning on the floor, I saw a tall handsome monk, a Khampa, who was reciting prayers accompanied by an assistant hammering away with a bowl-like striker at a vast circular flat drum fixed to a pole.

Was this the ceremony for the dead or the last rites? I wondered. In a corner, wrapped in innumerable rough woolen shawls, lay a prostrate figure. Should I try to do anything for the dying child? If I gave the girl a pill, and she died, I would be responsible. If I gave her something and she got better, the Khampa lama would be offended, and then God knows what would happen. It was altogether an awkward situation, just the kind I did not need, what with the Khampas outside and a long day's march in my legs.

"*Narung amji mindu,*" I told the mother (I'm not a doctor). "*Coochi, coochi,*" the woman begged, a look of desperation in her eyes. The monk kept on chanting, and the drum beating a staccato that would surely make anybody go out of his mind in such confined quarters.

"Let me see the girl," I said, approaching the corner where the sufferer lay. The mother lifted the coverings, and I stared into the glazed eyes of a girl of about fourteen whose open mouth gasped for air in irregular grunts, saliva dribbling down her chin. Looking at me,

the girl whimpered. The mother began talking to her, saying, "Now you will be well," while I reflected that the girl was about to die, or so it seemed, as her heart beat so irregularly it seemed as if it were about to stop at any moment.

Looking at her did me little good. I know little about diseases or wounds, except for such obvious ailments as cuts or boils. I questioned the mother. She explained to me that her daughter had coughed a lot and now could not breathe and that this was a fairly sudden affair. I had but two effective pills, aspirin and antibiotics. I decided on both. It is, of course, quite illegal to practice medicine on one's own, but I knew only too well that this was the last chance for the child, and I made up my mind to help her.

With people who have never taken any modern drugs or medicines, the doses to be used should always be minute. I thus explained that the patient should take half of a sulphanilamide pill now, half the following day, and another half pill the next. This, I said, would hardly cure the girl, but would help. I then gave her a quarter tablet of aspirin to help her sleep, as her mother complained that she was weak from being unable to rest. I was now in a sweat; the room was stuffy and smelled of soiled bedclothes and rancid butter from the lamps. After seeing to the administration of the dose of sulphanilamide that would spell death or salvation for the girl, there was little more I could do except try to find excuses to cover up my inadequacy in case the remedies failed to work. I made my way to the door.

Outside, I found all our equipment unpacked, and the yaks munching hay. The owner of the house explained that he would give us a room upstairs, next to that of the patient. I kindly declined, as I had no intention of living through the poor girl's agony, or hearing all night the sound of drums and bells as the monks tried to expel the demons that had allegedly taken hold of the child.

Setting out to hunt a campsite, I soon located an ideal one near the brook under the willow trees. There I had Calay erect the tents, while Kansa reluctantly brought the bags over from the sick girl's house. Needless to say, all my movements were watched with unsympathetic eyes by the Khampas, who now closed around us, jabbering comments, while Tashi and Calay erected our good strong, sturdy tents. Just what a Khampa needs, I kept thinking.

The soldiers were joined by some villagers. I realized that my knowledge of Tibetan would, in case of trouble, be my only hope. What went on in the soldiers' minds? They could not, I was sure, be thinking any good. Neutral Nepal was opposed to them for being on its terri-

tory; they have no allies in their solitary fight for freedom, and know no friends! "No good man," Tashi whispered to me unexpectedly in broken English. He dared not speak Tibetan, for the crowd would have immediately known from his accent that he was an Amdo. Calay, who had been informed of Tashi's position, spoke to him in Nepalese. All our movements were uneasy as a hundred eyes stared at us as our tents were erected and the shiny, rich-looking steel cases were brought over, with the bright copper Bunsen stove and aluminum pots. The atmosphere was unbearable. Finally, an old woman came forward and grabbed my arm, saying, "*Coochi, coochi, trojo naginduk smen tregiduck*" (Please, please, my stomach hurts. Give me some medicine).

The tension seemed to drop. Others came forward, children and adults, asking for medicine, displaying blisters and sores. There was little I could do but comply. Asking the people to stay outside, and saying in a loud voice that I would give them medicine but that they should wait, I entered our large mess tent.

As soon as I had disappeared, I heard a rush of feet, and from all sides people leaned on the tent, nearly bringing it down. I told Calay to chase them off while, fumbling for my keys, I opened one of the steel trunks. Children stuck their heads under the canvas; there was a great rush at the door. Calay hesitated to use brute force, and the old woman with stomach trouble slipped in, followed by a cohort of children. I found some stomach pills and gave them to her, also dealing out a handful of aspirin to the other villagers at the door. I was back in the tent when suddenly a great tall, elegant-looking Khampa poked his head past the canvas door flap, cupped his hands in polite salutation, and without more ado marched in, followed by two fierce-looking companions. The villagers had respectfully withdrawn, which was not a good sign. I remembered what I had been told about the Khampa warlords. There was no opposing their wish.

My first reaction was to thank God that Tashi was not inside the tent, after which I prepared myself for an interview that I felt sure would be unpleasant. "Are you a trader?" was the first question my visitors asked. The Khampas were evidently keen to know who I was and whether I was headed for the Chinese border or not. When I said "No," they abruptly asked what I had in my cases. "My food," I told them, afraid that they might start envying my equipment. A silence followed, and then I was asked the purpose of my visit, which I tried to explain in simple, straightforward terms. After another long silence, the eldest Khampa said, "We have many ill in our camp. Give us some medicine." I began to explain that I had very little and that I could not

give out medicines without knowing for what sickness, to which I added that if they wanted any medicine their *pombo* (leader) should come and see me. I made this last remark in the hope that by contacting their leader I might be able to obtain a safe-conduct pass, which would allow us to cross the Khampa-occupied areas without trouble. The soldiers, of course, were too aware of the clandestine aspects of their organization and too suspicious to blurt out to a stranger the name of their *pombo*. The handsome man answered evasively that they had "no leader," adding, "We are all here independently, every *magar* on its own."

How many *magars* are there?" I queried naïvely. "Many," came the noncommittal answer. I soon realized that I should get nowhere asking such questions; these men were fully aware of their precarious position as the unwanted guests of Nepal, from whose territory they carried on their military activities. My visitors then repeated their urgent request for medicine.

In the past, I knew, the Khampas had received some medical aid through the Red Cross, but recently this aid had been switched to the hands of the Swiss government, who—to escape the criticism that "arms were being smuggled to the Khampas along with medicine by the Red Cross"—had simply stopped the flow of medical aid to the Khampas, whose number, condition, and positions were a mystery in Kathmandu at the time of my departure.

I repeated again to the men that I could give them but little medicine, and that only if their leader contacted me. I took this firm stand because I soon realized that if I began giving out my small stock of medicines right and left, I would soon find myself in trouble, not only from lack of medicines but from acquiring an obligation to give some to all the soldiers I would now encounter. This, I knew, I would be unable to do. The situation was getting more and more uncomfortable, as the tent was surrounded by Khampas, but from my visitors' attitude I saw with relief that my strong stand had been a good one. They were apparently unable to speak for their chief or take a decision on his behalf. Now, I thought, they would either rob me or I would soon be hearing from their leader. I had made sure that they clearly understood that my mission here was to study the customs of Mustang and that I despised the Chinese. The soldiers eventually became quite polite, asking if I could just give a few pills to their comrades present in Sa-mar. This I could hardly refuse, and I was soon dispensing medicine to a small group of healthy-looking men who complained of pains in the stomach and joints. I naïvely diagnosed this as amoebic trouble; only

later did I discover that most of these men were suffering from syphilis, the result of intercourse with prostitutes picked up in the course of their ten years' fighting all across Tibet.

After eating in public, surrounded by the crowd, and drinking some excellent Tibetan barley beer offered to us by some villagers, Tashi and I retired into our tent. It soon became apparent that we had chosen our campsite poorly, for a howling wind arose, banging with extreme violence upon the tent and ripping out many of the pegs. The weather was extremely cold—the freezing weather of the Tibetan spring. Outside the tent I could hear the barking of great Tibetan black mastiffs, whose sinister howls echoed hollowly right into our fragile canvas universe. Tashi was terrified and worried. He asked me what I “thought” about the Khampas, repeating that he was scared, till finally I had to admit that I myself did not “feel too good.” That night I again cursed M. Prevoisin in his bookstore, and wondered why he had not sold me a volume on Japan; so that I could have been sipping sake in the lobby of a warm hotel, and talking to beautiful Geisha girls, instead of lying in a tent at 12,000 feet in the freezing wind, miles from nowhere and on the edge of the great Tibetan void.

Outside, all was quiet except for the wind and the barking of dogs. I felt as if I had been deposited by some satellite on a hostile planet. All was strange around me. I was nervous and trying to sleep, when Tashi rolled over and, sticking his small nose above the edge of his sleeping bag, matter of factly said, “*Chilula dre yo-a-re*” (There are ghosts outside)!

“Ghosts outside!” I repeated, as a dog barked again.

Closing my eyes, I could see the trail, the never-ending dark trail, winding over the rolling hills, climbing up passes, plunging down deep into canyons, a trail on which I imagined ghosts were slowly trekking past barking dogs.

For the first time I fully realized that night was made for ghosts. In our Western world, night is the time for turning on the electric light, and with light, night is gone. But here, with only small butter lamps for lighting, night was a time to sleep, not only because sleep is essential but also because by night one cannot fully live. By night one cannot see, and in preference to being blind, man locks himself under the shelter of a blanket, resigns his consciousness, gives up his existence, and cedes the world to those who live outside in the dark, to the ghosts. Night means fear, and the only effective antidote for fear is sleep. If reality is what one can see, then by night the world is unreal and disappears, and necessarily something must take its place. What can take

its place but ghosts of the unknown? And there is nothing quite so frightening as the unknown.

A small sheet of nylon and cotton now sheltered us from the night, its ghosts, and their mysterious sounds. Tashi confided to me his beliefs in the numerous demons of night and day, of soil and sky, that haunt the great expanses of the high, barren Tibetan plateau from Mongolia to Mustang, from Samarkand to China.

People have called Tibet the land of spirits, of magic, of mystery. I now understood that this was true, not only of Tibet but also of all lands whose people live with a deep religious faith. For it is faith that makes belief in such things as ghosts possible. This is not an exclusively Tibetan phenomenon, but one found all around the world, and which existed particularly in medieval Europe, where faith created an atmosphere akin to that of Tibet today. He who believes in God with "all his soul and all his might" must necessarily believe in the Devil with equal conviction. Those who spend their days praying with the intensity of a strong faith void of modern cynicism and skepticism must believe in the existence of demons. I felt for the first time the depth of belief in the supernatural characteristic of the Tibetans. I also understood better the Europe of the Middle Ages, the days of knights and castles, of dungeons and torture chambers, the times of honest virtue and cruel vice, the days when facts were white or black, not yet reduced to a uniform gray by the skepticism that brought about the crumbling of faith before determinism and analytical thinking. Suddenly I knew, or at least felt, that outside our tent hid the werewolves of my childhood, once again as real to me as they had been in the minds of the people of the Middle Ages. Ghosts still existed in this lonely village overlooking the four horizons of the world, and that night I believed it.

I had nothing to distract me from fear, nothing to occupy my worried spirit, no true companion with whom to share my hopes and alleviate my worries. I became as convinced that there were ghosts outside as I was sure that by day there was God to protect me from falling stones and highway robbers.

"In my country, too," I told Tashi, "there are ghosts at night," adding, "I'm not afraid of ghosts." Soon I was drifting into the refuge of sleep, without which man would go mad.

The following dawn I understood better the world I had come to study. I had learned the meaning of fear as a direct product of faith. The fear of God, the fear of demons, the fear of famine, of cold, of fire, and of war. In Tibet faith equals fear; this inspires hope and religion.

It is faith free of doubt and questioning, it is the capacity to believe in the supernatural as a reality that is the foundation stone of a society of the medieval type. In such a society the incredible is believed, the unusual is not questioned, and the amazing is regarded as commonplace. I was now in the world of the 1,086 Tibetan demons that haunt man and beast and that are realities to the peasants and to Tashi, as they would have to be for me if I was to share the life and culture of Mustang.

The following morning, dawn brought back life to the village, and with the sunrise the dogs fell asleep. But I could not help carrying into the day my anxieties of the night. The Khampas were still there. I encountered one soldier washing by the stream that ran by our camp as I myself ventured to attempt a compromise between my European washing habits and those of the Tibetans, which are limited if not nil.

Although the Khampa appeared to be washing, the people of Samar and our yak owners seemed to know nothing of the detergent properties of water. Having dipped my hands into the freezing stream, I understood why, and decided that I would wash tomorrow. Only my deep dislike for mustaches, and recollections of my wife's repeated insinuations that beards were awful, made me decide not to indulge in those hairy appendages. I therefore shaved once every three or four days, a complicated process that attracted large crowds of the local people, who, like most Asiatics, are beardless.

I was also nervous that morning as to how the sick girl was. Timidly I ventured to her home, and there was rewarded by the same depressing sight as the night before—a desperately ill and dying person. I did not insist, and walked away, not knowing whether I had saved the girl's life but hoping she would survive at least until our party was a safe distance away. On leaving her house, I noticed above the door the carved magical inscription *A ka sa ma ra tsa shen mara ya phé*, which is one of the most efficacious remedies against demons, and a protection worth any Yale lock of the West against the "ghosts that walked by night." Was it the sacred inscription or my medicine? I would never know, but the girl eventually recovered.

I used simpler expressions when the yaks were not ready by nine, and it was only thanks to many quite Occidental epithets that I got our little party moving once more, headed for Geling, our yak men's village on the border of the territory of the King of Mustang.

We now progressed along the side slopes of great mountains that rose to our left, and whose snow-covered summits rose to 20,000 feet

above us. The track had lost its aspect of a footpath to become a large sandy series of parallel lines traced by strolling herds of yaks and goats. We would alternately climb up one shoulder of a mountain, then slide down another to the bed of a torrent, negotiate a tricky bridge, and go up again in long swooping curves—up and down. By clinging to the high westerly ranges we avoided the deep eroded canyons that bordered the Kali Gandaki to our right.

On the way we encountered numerous Khampas patrolling the track. On one occasion, the tinkle of bells and the clatter of hooves brought in sight two superbly dressed cavaliers, Khampas of high rank, no doubt, who saluted me with great smiles and deep, respectful bows. I returned the greetings, but discouraged any further exchanges.

We were then passed by an endless caravan of mules, with its whistling muleteers walking one behind every set of twenty animals. They were no doubt going to get supplies somewhere in Nepal. Although during the night the weather had been very cold, now by day from the spotless sky above us came a crushing heat, that of the sun through the thin air of high altitudes. I had to slip out of the sleeves of my chuba. I now felt the effects of the altitude, as I got very rapidly out of breath, and distances appeared to me much greater than they really were. We were now at 13,000 feet. There was little or no vegetation about us, save small, tortured juniper trees, which more often than not appeared like bushes whose distorted forms would have made perfect models for the background of rather sickly Chinese paintings. As we progressed, even these trees began to vanish, leaving around us only brown, rock-strewn earth generously mixed with sand.

At about eleven, one of the yak men took my arm and pointed to a hill directly above us, saying "*Khampa magar*," and there, high and aloof, I could distinguish the outlines of some tents below strings of prayer flags hanging like pennants for a feast. The sight gave me a shudder, while I hoped nobody would take notice of our passage. Scanning the hilltop, I could see no sign of activity, as most of the camp was hidden from our view. I nevertheless felt sure that a lookout must be watching our every move.

A little farther down we came upon a great pile of wood by the roadside. My yak men explained that this was the Khampas' camp stockpile, adding angrily that this was their village's wood, as the *magar* was on the grazing grounds owned by the community. Tsering explained to me the helpless resentment of his fellow villagers toward the Khampas, who, he said, "steal our cattle, take our wood, and stop us from grazing yaks on the high pastures—they use them now for

their own horses and yaks." Angrily, Tsering seized an armful of wood and placed it on his yak.

The slow pace of the pack animals so bored me that I decided to walk ahead of my men, and began with great energy climbing up alone toward a pass. The top looked very near, but proved quite far off. Only after walking an hour did I finally reach the summit, marked by a pile of bleached stones thrown there in homage to the war gods. Having placated these gods with my own contribution, I reflected that I had better in the future do something also to placate the Khampa warriors.

When I reached the top of the pass, my heart began to pound with new excitement, for now, suddenly, the territory of Mustang was revealed to me; a new world now lay at my feet. At Sa-mar I had seen an endless sea of snow-covered peaks set one behind another, but now I could see clearly what lay between these peaks. Filling the horizon before me was a land unlike any I had seen before.

Before me spread an awful desert, the worst I could ever have imagined, painted yellow and ocher, a succession of countless barren, wind-eroded crags overlooking deep gorges and canyons cutting across an inferno of parched soil, like deep scars in a vast sandpile.

It was like a vision of the Grand Canyon, without cactus or water, painted in vivid colors. For miles around, as far as I could see, there was not a single blade of grass, a tree, or a bush. All was one gullied expanse of desolation combining the horrors of desert and high, arid mountains, of barrenness and cold. A terrible wind whistled in my ears, spitting sand as it whipped across this parched landscape, howling in the canyons and buffeting the hills, carving them into sinister towers bleached like dry bones.

I found myself thinking aloud: "This is Mustang! You are mad. You will find nothing here but waste. How will you survive in this hell of rock and clay?" However hard I strained my eyes, I could see nothing that could attract my heart, nothing suggestive of charm or comfort, nothing to rest my sight from the flaming glare of sun-scorched, wind-blown hills. Far ahead of me, I knew, beyond the flat horizon, lay Tibet. To the right and left I could see ranges of rounded, ancient-looking snow peaks, the first waves of an endless sea of mountains, between which Mustang stretched like a barren causeway leading to Tibet.

I had been prepared for a relatively barren land, but this was beyond everything I could imagine. How could any humans live here? This terrain was far more desert-like than Tibet, as it had been described to me. What I had below me was just chaos, and in my

surprise I failed at first to grasp the strange beauty of such a land.

For a moment I wondered how I could ever explore this ungrateful area, at best the abode of eagles, if of any life at all.

The wind whistled by, penetrating my clothes and freezing upon me the sweat of the ascent. I tried to find shelter behind a stony projection, where I sat dazed and stunned by the wind. I felt depressed and disheartened; only when I had regained my breath did I begin to feel a tingle of excitement arising from the challenge of what lay ahead. After all, this land, however barren, was now mine to explore. I felt elated by the idea that if all went well, I would soon know every crag and waterhole, every trail and pass of this terrible place; my place, the land I had longed to visit. I slowly began to see its weird beauty, its grandeur that spoke to the soul, coming from the wind and the sandstorms whose billowing clouds arose from the fissured sides of the canyons. Where the inhabitants of Mustang lived I could not tell. Somewhere before me were the towns and villages of the Kingdom of Lo, hidden in the creases of this tormented landscape, a land yet unexplored.

I got up and climbed to a lookout point just above the pass, where the wind almost pushed me over. From there, to the south, I now saw, as if below me, the Annapurna range. I could also see, between the great peaks, the breach of the Kali Gandaki gorge, leading down to a land lost in clouds. At my feet a vertical abyss fell to the dry bed of a torrent somewhere out of sight.

I was beginning to wonder what had happened to the yaks, when Tashi came up the pass. He muttered a few prayers, walked the wrong direction around the mound of stones (a Bon Po profanation), and smiled when he saw me. His Occidental appearance, with his dark glasses and my Western clothes, seemed out of place.

"Here is Mustang," I proudly shouted, pointing north. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"Beautiful is not," answered Tashi with disgust, hardly taking time to look at the admirable view. "All stones, dry, horrible country. What do they do here, the people—eat stones? This is surely unhappy country."

I felt very let down. "Don't you see," I tried to explain, "how grand it is? How wide and wild? I like it," I said, trying to convince Tashi and myself.

"It is ugly, sinful land, the most awful I've ever seen," Tashi insisted.

"What *do* you like?" I asked, quite irritated.

"Trees and grass are happy; this is just stone," Tashi explained. The

following day I discovered he had written in his notebook, "Mustang is as barren as a dead deer." For Tashi trees and grass were happiness, happiness in Tibet being synonymous with beauty. By those standards Mustang was definitely the saddest country on earth, or at least what we saw of Mustang from this pass as we prepared to enter into this strange land.

When the yaks appeared, we pushed on along the track, which now clung to the precipitous side of a cliff leading along to a small ledge above the deep gorge below us. The approach to Geling is so ravined that the track clung to the high slopes of the towering snow peaks that mark Mustang's border with Tibet to the west, so as to avoid the deep gorges farther eastward toward the Kali Gandaki. At this precipitous and perilous passage I waited for the animals to pass first. When one reached my level, I saw that Tsering Pemba was rubbing his hands through the hide of his yak and then running them through his hair; to my horror I smelled kerosene. In a moment I understood that one of our cans had burst.

Tsering Pemba had never seen kerosene before, and thought it made a good perfume. Immediately I called him to unpack the yak, while he commented that his "animal was all wet." So were our sleeping bags and air mattresses, which dripped kerosene. Fortunately, yak men do not smoke, or we would all have gone up in flames. The rope attaching the cans had cut through them, and I had now lost three gallons of kerosene, about one third of the precious store we had carried all the way from Pokhara.

The animals came to a halt, and we set about trying to patch the leak. After the usual loading rodeo, we proceeded down a steep canyon, across the dry bed of a stream, and past huge cliffs. It seemed we would never arrive at Geling. At last, in a small closed-in flat plain, we came to a mass of broken stone walls and the ruins of three stone huts. This, our men explained, had been a caravan halting place, but those who had lived here had fled because of the Khampas. Here we left the main track to Mustang to go up a small slope to Geling, a mysterious village that we gathered was independent of the King of Mustang. As we climbed slowly up, expecting that the next bend would at last reveal the settlement, a horse came toward us at a fast trot, its mane

Map showing the author's route in Mustang, also principal towns, villages and isolated monasteries.



flowing in the wind. Reaching our first animals, the rider stopped to talk to one of the yak men, then rode up and addressed Tashi.

"A Khampa chief orders you to go right away to Geling and see him! Hurry, hurry!"

Tashi repeated what the man said. "A Khampa wants us to report right away in Geling." What did this mean? My heart beat faster; the arrogance of this request stung me. I was both nervous and angry. I told the emissary to tell the Khampa to wait, that I would see him later, when I had established camp.

This answer was dictated more by fear than by arrogance. When the horseman had galloped out of sight, I turned to Tashi. Could I ask him what he thought? Tashi beat me to it. "I'm scared," he said in a low voice. "What are you going to do?"

"I'll make the soldier wait," I answered. "Who do they think they are?" I added angrily, to hide the fact that I too was "scared." I purposely slowed my pace.

Having crossed a small secondary pass, we now descended the edge of a barren shoulder of rock, coming upon a large chorten, one of those religious mounds the Buddhists call "supports of worship," painted with red ocher.

From there we caught the amazing sight of Geling, and a happy sight it was with its "grass and trees," Tashi agreed. My own delight was marred by a slightly sick feeling. Somewhere in the village awaited a Khampa. What did he want of us? Who was he?

Slowly and reluctantly we walked toward the village, which appeared like a tapestry with pink, red, and striped ocher motifs hung upon the background of a soaring yellow cliff. The colored designs were formed by the painted ruins of an ancient fort, two monasteries, and various chortens stuck upon the vertical side of a mountain, at the foot of which lay a soft green carpet of grass where small springs rose through the ground. Around the grassy patch rose some thirty spotless white houses, trimmed like dominoes with the black outlines of little walls of brushwood around the edges of the flat roofs. Black windows dotted the faces of these stone and whitewashed dominoes. Here and there about the houses rose the wisps of slender willow trees, barely budding, fringed with green as if by coppery smoke.

A cold fright seized me as slowly and reluctantly I stepped toward this fairy-tale village, this oasis where I now knew an encounter with the Khampas was inevitable. I thought of Tashi, and how easily his identity could be determined; I remembered accounts I had read of how Westerners had been killed by Khampas, or robbed of all their

possessions.* Was I not in a trap? Behind me, on the hilltop, rose the *magar*. My only road of escape was cut. Who would, I wondered, ever come here to assist us? No one; nobody could. I could expect no assistance from Chinese-occupied Tibet, which surrounded us on three sides, nor from Pokhara, 140 miles down the trail.

I put these gloomy thoughts out of my mind as we reached the edge of the grassy patch, where from small depressions in the soil foamed clear cold springs, collecting into a rivulet that sped through Geling, lined with sparse trees and occasional bushes.

I called wild-looking Pemba Tsering, asking him if we could stay in his house. He agreed, and the yaks were slowly led to a small enclosed courtyard around the square house that was Pemba's home. Children swiftly gathered, and my yak men were greeted with cries of welcome by their offspring and friends. Everyone asked them who we were. They answered proudly that I was "an important man, a pilgrim, a scholar," using the words they knew that could describe best an anthropologist.

In the courtyard of Pemba Tsering's house our things were unpacked. I expected the Khampas to arrive at any moment. Nothing happened—they had probably received my message. One tent was set up, and the kitchen established under a shelter that had served for animals. Tsering's two children, both as dirty as he and with the same scruffy hair, gaped in surprise at us.

What I had anticipated in Kathmandu had now happened. My boxes, tins, utensils, and tents had become my only shelter and link with the outside world. Kansa inflated my air mattress, which could be bent to form a seat. I had the steel boxes arranged as a table. I was preoccupied with comfort and with establishing a semblance of decency here in this remote area. Was this a subconscious effort to find about me something to which I could cling? It seemed so long ago that I had last seen a table, a chair, and all the little oddities that our customs have made seem like essentials. Our strange customs—women with red paint on their mouths, our way of sitting erect, with legs dangling, our use of surgical-like tools to eat, our habit of eating only three times a day, with different food at each meal.

Tsering Pemba came over with two turnips as a present, adding that a servant of the Khampa Gyaltzen had arrived to announce that Gyaltzen was on the way to see me.

"Gyaltzen is a great man," Pemba whispered in my ear. "He has a

* See, for example, Heinrich Harrer, *Seven Years in Tibet* (E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1954), and André Migot, *Tibetan Marches* (E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1955).

very swift horse that speaks and understands the human voice." I guessed that this man must be an important lord. I quickly told Tashi to slip out and take a long walk so as not to be seen.

I now seated myself behind my two steel cases, comfortably settled on my air mattress. I pulled up a sleeve of my Tibetan chuba, lit a cigarette, and asked Calay to prepare tea. This done, I felt quite proud of my tent, my world, my servants. I wondered, however, whether I could be proud enough to impress a warlord whose horse was not only swift but could talk. I would give him tea and all the Lhasan hospitality I had learned about from Tashi. Orientals are great diplomats; I would rush nothing. I would say nothing, and let him speak. But my courage drained away when Calay announced "a Khampa."

— Tibetan Warlords

IT IS GOOD to receive in a tent, because your guest has to bow low to enter. "He who bows is already vanquished." Looking up, I was surprised to see before me a small man, handsome and stocky. Every line of his face looked steel hard, but he wore a smile—a Tibetan smile, warm, and I hoped sincere.

I waited a minute (thinking it would be more dramatic) and then calmly said, "*Shu-a*," pointing to Tashi's mattress, which I had laid out on the other side of the steel cases. There was a silence, during which I examined my guest.

Seated, he did not look as martial or as savage as the other Khampas I had met. He had cut his hair, and wore a black leather jacket and a modern cap whose flaps were raised. In the center of this cap shone a gold medallion with the image of the Dalai Lama. Only his strong boots spoke of anything military, along with the hardness of his face, which at first hid the fact that he was still quite young. Like many Khampas he had European-looking features, powerfully chiseled. On his wrist glittered a gold Omega watch.

There was no mistaking that this man was a leader, a chief, and was familiar with foreigners. Under his jacket he wore a Chinese-made zipper shirt, no doubt stripped from a dead body—loot like the package of Chinese noodles Calay soon brought in, together with three great hunks of dried meat. These I learned were presents from Gyaltzen. He had discreetly left them at the door, with Oriental politeness. I would have to be on my guard. I thanked Gyaltzen for his presents. "They are small," he answered politely, "as we Khampas have little here to offer."

Then came the questions: Was I on a long journey? Where was I going? What nationality was I? When I answered, "French," Gyaltzen

frowned. I explained that my land was near England. Gyaltzen knew about England, also about America. Are the French friends of Russia? I answered that we were not friends of China, thinking this was what he was driving at.

"I have read in the Kalimpong press that France is a friend of China, that now French chief talks to the Chinese." I was in a mess. It was true, Tashi had told me, that in one of the printed circulars published in Kalimpong in Tibetan, news had got around that the French were the friends of China—a result of the great fuss that had been created in the international press two months before my departure about French recognition of Red China.

What could I say? Fortunately, Gyaltzen was better informed about world politics than I had expected. I had before me a true leader, a man who had lived at the Dalai Lama's exiled court in India, a man who no doubt had seen more of the world than certain Western secret agencies would like to have known.

The fact that I spoke Tibetan was my only hope for straightening things out with my visitor. I was cross-examined, and soon realized how with typical Oriental subtlety the Khampa had managed to get control of the interview. I had planned to receive him with cold dignity, but with presents left outside he had taken a slight edge, and on the subject of France and China I found he had the better of the conversation. I was now obliged to justify my presence here. "I have come," I explained, "to study the customs of Mustang, to write a *pecha*, a book on the land. . . ."

This said, the conversation got to medicines, and once again I tried to secure information as to who was the chief of the Khampas in the area.

I received evasive replies. Gyaltzen was not the "chief"; he was only the head of the *magar* of Sa-mar, the one I had passed. The other *magars* were all independent and had their own leaders. I gave medicines to Gyaltzen, and asked that he give me a paper that would help me along with the other warlords. But my visitor refused, saying that he had no authority over the other soldiers.

Having said this, he rose, bowed politely, and walked out. I heard his famous horse gallop away, but did not hear it speak, as Tsering Pemba had said it could.

I had met the first and most friendly of the Khampa warlords. This was not my last encounter with Gyaltzen, nor the end of my troubles, but I breathed more freely, and when Tashi popped up from where he was hiding I told him with relief that things looked better.

“Never trust a Khampa,” answered Tashi, adding, “I know. I am a little bit lama.”

“*Ya dong tang lu chang*” (Let there be arrow shooting and song with beer). “Do the donkeys stop and rest and make merry? Do the animals in the field drink beer? No! I say to you you are not animals. Each year, from the fifth to the seventh day of the third month, you must drink and sing and be merry, for you are not animals, and having toiled you must make merry, for such is the wish to the people of Angun Zampo, Ngorchen Kunga Zampo, and Kalun Zampo, the three who were called great [*zampo*].”

As he finished reading, the spokesman rolled up his three-foot-long scroll, tucked it in the pocket of his chuba, bowed, touched his knees, straightened up and bent down again, touching the ground. Then he prostrated himself before the Gemba, the big, rough-looking “head-man” of Geling, who, half drunk, motioned to the man to leave before grabbing with hazy accuracy a wooden pot from which he poured another drink into his silver-lined cup. In an adjoining room women began to sing a slow, syncopated melody that mingled with the clatter of ladles against copper caldrons as men passed through the crowd pouring out chang. Smoke twined its way above the squatting crowd, feebly lit by small butter lamps.

“Drink, for you are not mules but men; mules do not drink, and the chang is good. Let the women sing, for that is the wish of the Three Holies.”

There I was, sitting with my drink of chang and making merry, crouched among villagers, all facing the Gemba, who majestically exhibited his arrogant drunkenness, inviting all to admire his wit. Those next to him laughed politely, among them a small, obsequious monk and two very old villagers—one holding in his hand a cup, while the other spun a cylindrical prayer wheel. They beamed from seats slightly lower than that of the menacing Gemba, facing the assembly of villagers.

We had not known of this celebration until quite late, when Tsering Pemba came in with a smile to announce the festivities of “arrow shooting and song with beer,” informing us that all the village was to gather in a house where drink would flow freely and the women would sing. Then, unexpectedly, we found ourselves following a group of men and women through a small door that opened into a vast room crowded with the dim shades of red gowns and rough yellow homespun chubas. We were followed by a tall, handsome man who had unrolled—to the

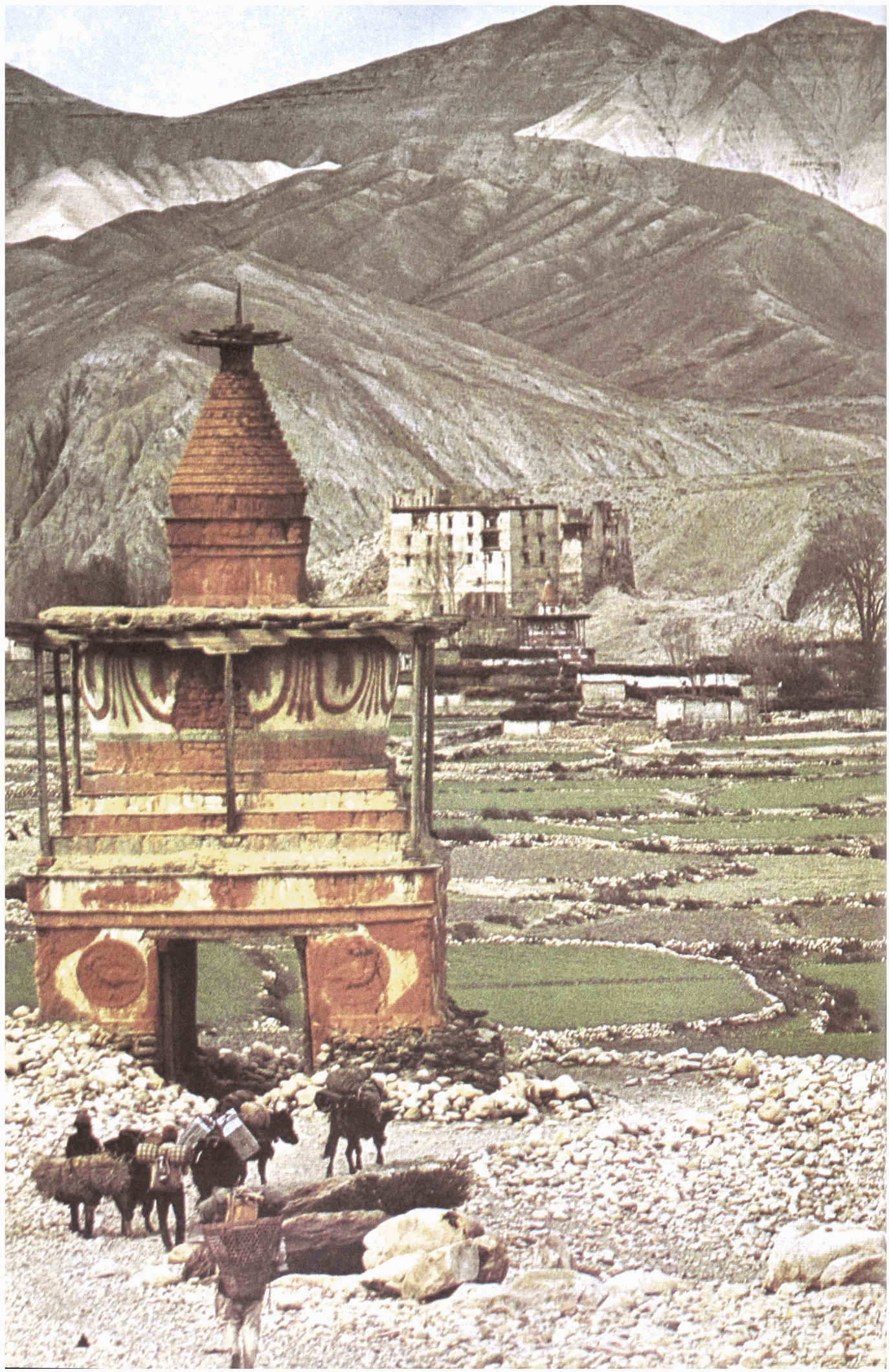
pleasure of all—a lengthy scroll, and had read his composition, which showed wit and well fitted the occasion. Before the Gemba he had read his oration, and now the orgy was in full swing.

The Gemba was among the biggest men I had ever seen in the area. About forty years of age, his great face was wedged upon a frame over six feet high, and weighing no doubt 250 pounds. He now exhibited himself drunk, but no one smiled or laughed, because they feared him. He was cruel, rough, and intelligent, a combination that made him the worthy illegitimate heir to the family function of “King of Geling.” This title he had acquired because he had married the wife of the ex-king. He was an evil man, a drunken brute; but with long hair crowning his rough features, he looked every bit as I would have expected the leader of an isolated village such as Geling to look.

The faces of the crowd glittered in the light of the soft lamps in the smoky room—faces of wisdom, faces weatherbeaten and calloused by hardship and struggle, faces with the nobility of a pure race, faces disheveled and arrogant with the twinkle of genius. Not a dull eye in the crowd; one could read each man’s character from his face. There were the cruel, tough leader, the obsequious monk, the philosophical grandfather, the arrogant youth, the timid farmer, the sly businessman, and an old, old monk so shriveled up as to seem unreal, with parchment skin creased to breaking point. Never in my life had I fallen into such a court of ruffians. It was like a dream. Even today when I recall that first night in Geling, it seems as though I were watching some film for which all the actors had been made up and costumed as a horde of primitive men from the pages of an epic of Genghis Khan. They were just tanned enough to be handsome, just ragged enough to look real, while in the room the smoke floated about between floor and ceiling in the manner so dear to film producers. It could not be true, I said to myself over and over again. It could not be true. But it was true, and the women continued to sing, peeping out at the assembly of men from the adjoining room, where incessantly the chang was ladled out into the extended cups. “Drink, drink, for you are not animals. Drink and

ABOVE: *The Lama of Tsarang, second son of King Angun Tenzing Tradul of Mustang, reading from a small prayer book.* BELOW: *The son of the Lama of Tsarang, himself destined to monastic life, hugs a fine gilt image of the fifteenth-century founder of the monastery of Tsarang, the Lama Ngorchen Kunga.*





sing, for this is the arrow-shooting chang song festival, as ordained to the people by the Three Holies—Angun Zampo, Ngorchen Zampo, and Kalun Zampo.”

Voices were raised more loudly; the Gamba shouted, boys scuttled to his service, and the obsequious monk bent over in a self-conscious manner to receive in his ear the spittle of the drunken giant, who beamed and grimaced, alternately menacing and smiling. The crowd smiled or frowned in accordance with the moods of the headman, all busily drinking. I tried to make myself inconspicuous, with apparent success, as I had already been asked by my neighbor if I was a Khampa. Tashi looked strange, perhaps a little too Chinese. But there were no Khampas here, only men from the small isolated village of Geling, who according to age-old tradition had come to make merry.

Chang is a good drink, and Geling a good village—so I reflected when I stumbled out late that evening, rather high myself. “In ninety-nine years we shall all be dead. Never trust the Khampas,” I said to myself, remembering that “the mule gun was on the yak.” Here I was drunk in my blasted tent with lazy Calay, and Tashi so reserved, and all this mess about having to walk so far to get here; why could I not have taken a taxi?

Thus I slept that night on the edge of Mustang, lost deep in one of the first great eroded canyons of this land that was so ugly to the eye—so barren and cruel, so grand and forbidding. The following day I would be going to Mustang—entering its territory. I don’t think, for I am like the Khampas—look at my khaki robes, look at my servants, my tent, my home. I am a Drokpa, a nomad; I am a lone traveler, a warrior; I am greater than Marco Polo because I am not a *psong pa* (merchant). No, I am not a ruddy merchant; to the blazes with the Harvard Business Schools and their mean, marginal profits. It’s *ya dong* and *lu chang*, and man needs to celebrate and to make merry. Even when he is an educated Westerner out to study anthropological data in a remote area. . . . I was quite drunk!

Tashi was shocked, and I fell asleep.

Two days later, after having spent hours questioning the villagers and discovering many of the secrets of this small, solitary community, I was walking up a pass above Geling. We had set off again. A terrible

Our caravan approaches the door chorten of Tsarang.

wind was howling, and snow fell sideways, like the lashes of a whip, against my chuba. My eyes were half closed, and in my hand was a stone to throw onto the pile that I knew was before me up on the col—the col from whose summit in ancient times a great boulder had been rolled down to mark impartially with its course the borderline between the township of Geling and the Kingdom of Lo.

I threw my stone onto the summit pile. It went down with a *plonk!* Then I heard two other *plonks*—and there I was, looking into the muzzle of a machine gun, a sub-machine gun with a steel frame stock; and there was a rifle, and there were two Khampas in great khaki chubas like my own. My heart stopped. A faint curtain of snow separated me from the menacing weapons that were just three yards away. “Never trust a Khampa.” What should I do? “*Kale phe*” (Take it easy, go slowly), I said, completely taken by surprise.

Now what do you do when you are a Khampa, with a machine gun in your hands, walking up to a high pass with a rifle-carrying friend? A snowstorm is blowing, and all of a sudden, when you throw your two stones on the mound of the war gods, you hear three *plonks* instead of two? Well, obviously you grip your machine gun tighter, with finger on the trigger, and then you see a Khampa with a long nose and yellow eyes, and he just looks at you, grins, and says, “*Kale phe.*” What do you do then, if you are a Khampa?—a soldier who has been fighting alone since 1954, fighting 600 million Chinese who have stolen your house, your wife, and your children, have sent you into the wilds, chased you right across Tibet into the highest and most hostile area of the Himalayas, to a land called Lo you never knew existed, and which is the unhappiest place on earth. What do you do when a foreigner says, “Take it easy”?

Well . . . you don't shoot, because you are also taken by surprise. So there we stood, all three of us, amazed. Thus stupidity saved me. For who could be more simple-minded than I, to say to two armed thieves, “*Kale phe*”?

Amazed, the soldiers answered, “*Kale phe,*” stood there for a while, and then all of a sudden, as if waking up, tried to conceal their weapons, and in good Buddhist fashion walked around the left side of the pile of stones, prodding before them the small yak they had just stolen; while I passed on the other side—and thus entered Mustang.

My heart now beat with the combined excitement of my encounter and the warm sense of anticipation that came from knowing my desti-

nation was near. At long last I was about to tread the soil of the Mustang of my dreams.

Reality was a little harsher than what I had imagined, as the snow lashed about me with whipping force, and the cold pushed by a gale wind wound its way into my chuba. Tashi's sentence came to my mind: "Mustang is as barren as a dead deer." The great carcass lay before me, streaked only by the trail, that never-ending ribbon that slithered up and down the desolate hillside like the trail of a shaky rocket across the eroded mountains, the great sweeping hills terminating at the rims of deep, bottomless canyons, eroded beyond repair into human-like forms worthy of Gaugy's architecture. I was now walking in a surrealistic painting peopled by gigantic inanimate figures and faces roaming a weird temple of great fluted columns, endless spires, and jagged, sawlike projections.

Somewhere not far away lay my destination, the place whose name had beat in me along every step I had taken over the past two weeks. Only those who have trudged on foot for weeks can understand what magical properties the mind gives to the notion of destination. On the track my body and my mind knew no rest; every halt carried with it a flavor of impermanence, and the knowledge that there was yet more road to come, more energy to be spent, more hours to be consumed by movement.

I felt weary and tired, and the weight of loneliness hung upon me. Still two more days before we would arrive at the capital of Mustang, two more days that now seemed eternal. Two more days before at last I should be relieved of the burden of the responsibility of seeing my equipment and my men through to our destination. We were headed for the town of Tsarang, a dot on the map whose reality I could not yet imagine. After the beauty of Geling, I was ready for a disappointment. Perhaps I should never reach this goal. I felt as if ninety-nine years had elapsed since the morning in Kathmandu when I had realized that my ties with the outside world were breaking. In ninety-nine years, as Tashi had said, every living thing I now knew would be dead. I might die too, I thought, before reaching my goal, like the pilgrims who set off in the evening of their lives for journeys with no return—like those Tibetan monks who wander from shrine to shrine, from monastery to monastery, until one day, on a strange track, Death appears from behind a ridge, and there the trail ends, while the dying pilgrim sees light and understands that at last he has arrived.

Are not all our lives a trail to some elusive, unknown goal that we find and discover only with death? I thought of the long trails that had

taken me all around the world, all through my yet short life, across sea, desert, jungle, and marsh to the little track that now rose before me endlessly, up above all the lands of our planet. The incessant wind howled through my mind, through my body, as it tried to bare me of my clothes, to lay open my very bones so that they might also litter the track like those of the animals whose skulls mingled with the ghostly white rocks along the wayside.

Fighting against the wind with eyes half shut against the biting snow, we made our way like a caravan of ants, infinitely small, fragile, and slow. Down a deep descent we came into view of an abandoned, ruined village stretched out like a new reminder of death and the inhospitality of the land—the carcasses of houses and walls. Then the animals were passing the wall of a tall, ruined fort whose arrogant tower stood mysteriously contemplating a past as secret as the present of the feudal kingdom we had entered.

We reached the tip of a flat glacial tableland that sloped gently up to our left where in the distance I could see the white outlines of a few houses. This was the town of Gemi, which we were to by-pass and visit later.

Our small caravan worked its way down a deep gorge, over a small, fast torrent by a rickety bridge composed of tree trunks resting upon large boulders. With caution, and directed by the yak men holding their animals' tails, our pack train made its way across the bridge, and up a zigzag path that rose to the entrance of a deep, walled-in valley.

Our track now led up this valley, between bright red and pink cliffs. Ahead of us stretched, solitary in the barren countryside, a wall three hundred yards long and gaily painted in red and yellow. This was a prayer wall, the longest I had ever seen. Sealed into its sides were countless thousands of flat slabs of stone carved with the ever-repeated sentence *O mani padme hum*, and the invocation *A sha sa ma ha*.

Its great length and varied colors gave this gigantic prayer wall the aspect of a long snake making its way through the valley. When I inquired what the wall was called, I was informed that it represented the intestines of a demon that had been killed many, many years ago by the saint Ugyen Rimpoche. This saintly Bhodisatva had come in time immemorial to the Land of Lo, which was then full of demons. Seizing one of these demons, he had dismembered it, throwing its heart deep into the ravines of Mustang, where later there sprang up a monastery by the name of Gekar. Then, taking the demon's lungs, the saint had thrown them aside to form the red and pink cliffs that now hemmed us on both sides. As for the intestines, they were thrown to the ground

where now stands the great prayer wall. From the day of the visit of this saint, Mustang became holy land. On this point Tashi agreed, because according to him "only saints could eat stones, and as far as we could see stones were the only things that grew in this barren land."

In Buddhist Tibet one must always walk around shrines clockwise, or pass them to one's left. From now on, our track would be dotted by innumerable prayer walls, and those sacred mounds, of various shapes, called chortens. These monuments are copies of the tombs of ancient India, similar to that in which Buddha is supposed to have been buried. Such replicas are found all over Tibet and other Buddhist countries, where they have come to represent the Buddhist faith—innnumerable characteristics of the doctrine having been incorporated into their design. The first of these chortens contained the relics of Buddha, but now they usually contain either the relics of a saintly lama or religious texts that have been buried in them.

As we advanced into the red-sided valley, we could see before us a great chorten shaped like an inverted top. This valley led to a distant village appropriately called Tramar (Red Cliff). Before reaching the chorten, we turned to the right, beginning a great ascent that led to a high pass. Thus slowly we scaled one more *la*, as passes are called in Tibetan, the fourth high pass since we had climbed up from the bottom of the Kali Gandaki River gorge onto the barren plateau that marks the summit of Asia, dividing the valley of the Tibetan Brahmaputra from the Indian side of the Himalayas.

As usual, the howling wind increased in force as we reached the summit of the pass and began to descend a barren slope. All about us was parched yellow clay strewn with small round stones. Surprising as it may seem, we were walking on what had once been, unimaginable aeons ago, the bed of a sea. The loose composition of the sandy soil with its rounded pebbles accounted for the ease with which water and wind had eroded the land about us into unusual shapes. There was no vegetation to retain the loose earth of this treeless land.

In the late afternoon, when it seemed that we should never arrive, we rounded a shoulder of a hill, and there below us, framed in an expanse of tormented, deserted mountains, lay Tsarang. The town appeared as if by magic, as though a great artist—having tired of the barren land—had set about to paint a fairylike illustration upon the rugged backdrop.

I hardly dared believe my eyes when I gazed down upon Tsarang, looking like a delicate miniature of reds and greens, spotted with white, painted by an overconscientious illustrator of children's books. There rose upon a crest, dominating a steep gorge, a great castle five

stories high. It was in apparently good condition, its windows looking down upon neat little white houses nestled in its shade. The castle was worthy of Europe's elegant medieval structures. Rectangular in shape, it was near the romantic ruins of an older building that shared the same rocky heights. The small houses were set in what seemed an excessively green carpet that ran up the gradually sloping bed of an ancient glacier. As if the castle were not enough to convey an idea of medieval grandeur, to its right, upon a slightly lower rise, stood the challenging form of a huge monastery painted brick red and pink. The principal structure of the monastery, around which cowered smaller buildings, was painted in gay vertical stripes of red, white, and blue-gray. To welcome us into this little haven of the past was a series of three great chortens, vividly decorated and painted in bright orange and red ochre. The first of these chortens opened at its base to form an archway door.

Near the houses a few trees added to the scene the happiness that Tashi had described to me. The town was like an oasis of green upon the moonlike surface of the hills. Its castle gave me the first indication that on coming to the land of Lo I had headed for one of the most picturesque and unusual places on earth. The setting sun set aglare the golden gable ends upon the corners of the roofs of the monastery, while it caught the fluttering featherlike shapes of countless prayer flags stuck upon every rooftop and every monument in the town. From the whole place there floated a strange, sweet smell of vegetation and greenery.

My enthusiasm knew no bounds. Never had I seen a structure so large and imposing as the fort of Tsarang in all my stay and travels in the Himalayan areas. It reminded me that I was now treading the land of a king, a ruler in the true ancient tradition. Like a small ship pulling into harbor, we all marched in neat file through the door chorten to the edge of the green fields, and into the fairy tapestry of Tsarang. The combined beauty of the town, contrasting with its surroundings of great cliffs and mountains outlined by snowy summits on all sides, reassured me. All the energy spent in coming here had been worthwhile.

As soon as we reached Tsarang, I was swept into the habitual problem of deciding where to set up camp or whether we had better sleep in a house. Finally it was agreed that we would put up our tents on the edge of a small irrigation canal that bordered a field sown with green wheat.

With Tashi I set out immediately on an exploratory walk through the town. As we passed between little square white houses, peasants came

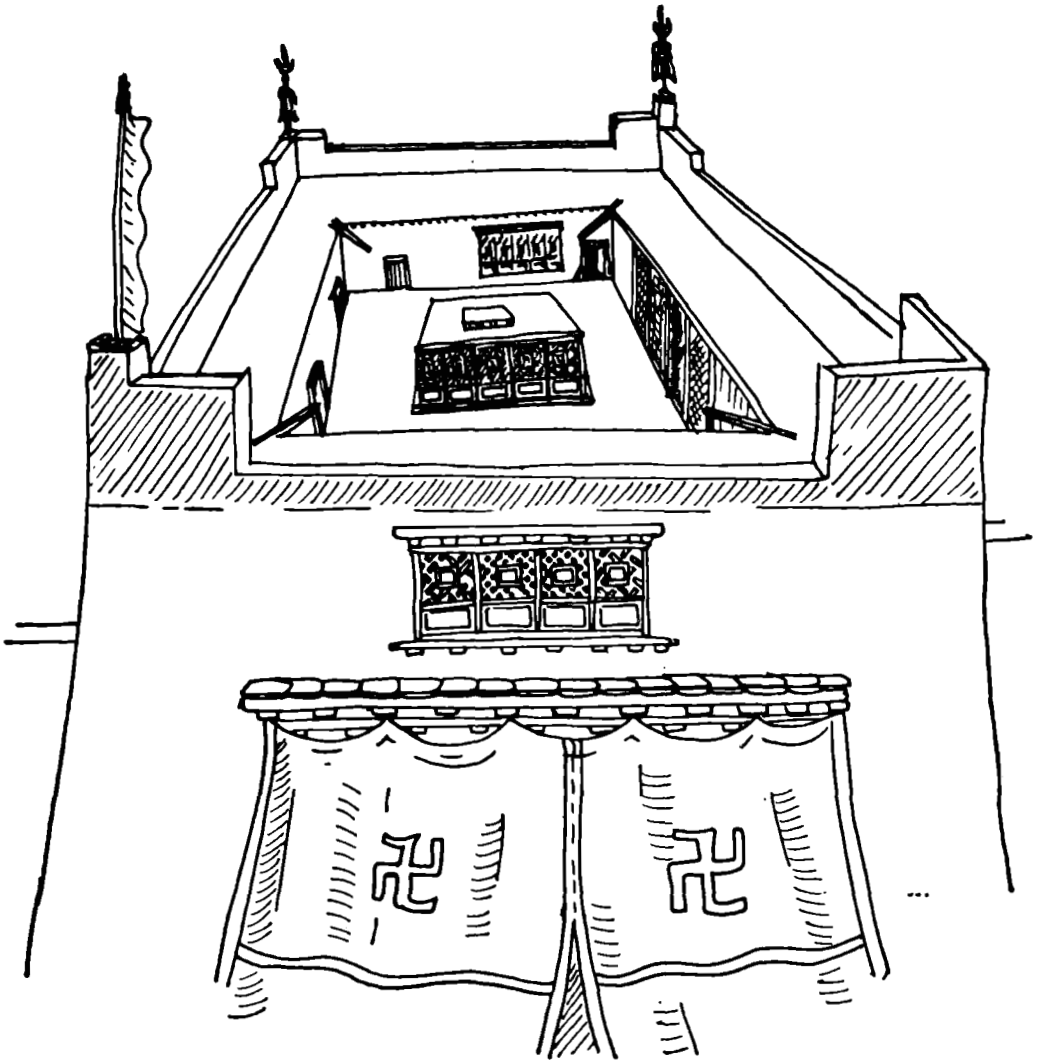
out in groups to salute us, putting out their tongues to show respect. I always had trouble getting used to this Tibetan custom, and had to refrain from wanting to return such an unusual and apparently incongruous mark of respect. But such is the custom; I had to put up with the feeling of being a doctor, as the roadside was perpetually littered with great rough-looking characters humbly sticking out their tongues as far as they could. The inhabitants of Tsarang, who greeted us in silence (you cannot talk with your tongue out), all wore rough homemade chubas, some yellowish, the color of natural wool, others red. A few had sheepskin cloaks with the wool turned inside, a far more reasonable arrangement than the fur-outside custom we have in the West. The women wore striped aprons over red chubas, and many had on their heads little Dutch-like bonnets of dark red material. But what was most striking in their features was the twinkle in their eyes and the open honesty of their features. They had the look of someone you have known for years and who is just waiting to run into your arms with affection. Although this honest appearance can be very misleading, in general the people were warmhearted and open. They did not hide behind curtains or doors as we went by, as is so common in many rural areas of Europe. They simply came forward to satisfy their understandable curiosity, and express their sincere respect by putting out their tongues. A few peasants called out, "Where are you going?" We answered proudly, "Lo Mantang," and passed on.

It was evident that we could not hope to see Tsarang in an evening, and as it was my intention to come eventually to live here, and study the village and its buildings, for the present we just meandered around the small passages between the houses. In this manner we arrived at the foot of the great castle. There we realized how large this building actually was, for the lowest of the four rows of windows was about thirty feet from the ground. The building had more the aspect of a palace than that of a truly fortified castle. When we asked who lived here, we were told that it was the King of Lo's palace but that it was only rarely occupied by him.

Not having found an entrance on the façade, we pushed off toward the monastery, and up a small incline that led to a gateway beside the huge striped building. There a great mastiff with a red frill around its neck made a desperate lunge for us. Fortunately, its collar had a chain attached to it, and we walked within tantalizing distance of the great black monster through the gateway.

Tashi explained to me how the Khampas trained these fierce Tibetan mastiffs to fight in battle with them. The dogs, he said, were taught

how to jump on a rider and knock him from his horse. I believed this, as the dogs we had begun to encounter since Sa-mar were all of tremendous size and proportions. They looked like a cross between an oversized black Eskimo dog and the most vicious strain of German police dog, and were not at all like the small Lhasa long-haired terrier so prized in England as *the* dog of Tibet. These mastiffs soon became a plague to us, as in every street and before every house they would rush at us. It became necessary for us to carry around two or three sizable stones for self-defense, as many of the dogs were not tied up.



The main assembly hall of the monastery of Tsarang, showing the royal apartments upon the roof. The central square structure on the roof is the skylight of the assembly hall below; the five latticed windows at far right are those of the chapel cell of the Lama of Tsarang.

Having skirted the guardian of the gate, we found ourselves in a narrow alley that ran alongside the vast central building of the monastery. We hoped someone would come out, but nothing stirred in what seemed to be a deserted place of worship. I had been told that here in Tsarang lived one of the sons of the King of Mustang who was the abbot of the monastery. Advancing a little, we came upon what appeared to be the main entrance of a huge temple, an enormous door concealed behind a gigantic yak-wool brown veil that dangled thirty feet high and across the porch of the temple. On it had been sewn two white swastikas, a typical Buddhist emblem, but, as with the putting out of tongues, I could not forget its unpleasant Western connotation.

Since the place seemed deserted, we got up a little courage, and decided to investigate this monastery on our own. This decision was to prove foolish, as we now proceeded up a rickety flight of steps that led to a small, dark, narrow landing. With guilty consciences we paused here. Three closed doors and yet another flight of stairs led off this landing. Hearing nothing, and noticing that the doors were locked with archaic Tibetan padlocks, we slowly ventured up the flight of steps, thinking that at least we might get a view of the village from somewhere up here.

I had just poked my nose above the last step when a small boy appeared. For a moment he seemed dumbfounded, and stared with awe at my unusual Western face, probably the first he had ever seen. Then, as I smiled, he made a sign that we could come up—an act that we had already accomplished on our own.

We found ourselves in an open courtyard bordered on all sides by intriguing bay windows, crisscrossed with wooden laths arranged to form intricate designs. These latticed windows were closed by paper glued to them from the inside. The child now beckoned us to follow him through a low door, whose posts were elaborately decorated with flowery designs, and above which hung a striped red-and-blue valance of the kind one hangs in the West to hide curtain rods.

We now made a fatal mistake as bending low, we entered through the door. Straightening up, I discovered to my horror that I had thus introduced myself uninvited into the inner sanctum of the apartments of the abbot of the monastery. I was in a small rectangular room whose walls were covered with elaborate frescoes representing in bright colors prancing divinities surrounded by serene Buddhas. To one side against a wall was a raised gilt altar upon which rested numerous complacent Buddhas, eyeing me serenely. Their serenity contrasted rather

remarkably with the definitely upset and angry features of two monks, whom I suddenly noticed seated facing the altar and veiled by the smoky, incense-laden atmosphere of the chapel.

I felt like a naughty boy trapped in the principal's office. One of the two monks was seated cross-legged on a high wide throne-like chair facing an equally high, narrow pulpit. His angry looks were somewhat aggravated by his curious hair style. Instead of being shaven like any reasonable Tibetan monk, and rather than wearing long pigtailed wound around his head like any self-respecting layman, he wore a scraggly mane that at best looked like the overgrown hair of a romantic artist, or to be more accurate the scrawny mop of a beatnik. His stern features and high seat gave me the dreaded certainty that this was the "Abbot," the son of the King of Mustang, and that by breaking into the monastery and the privacy of his chapel I had made more than a *faux pas*; I had committed a sacrilege. To make it worse, I did not have a *kata* with me. Without a *kata*, I felt naked—not that the silk ceremonial scarves are to be worn, but to visit a high official without one is a serious offense. This sin, along with that of our unannounced appearance, was, I felt, sufficient to jeopardize the whole future of my project. For though I had secured the permission to go to Mustang from the Nepalese authorities, I still very much needed the approval and permission of its king to remain and study there. Now what to do?

I was about to bend low and mutter some phrase, when, as if to accentuate our misbehavior, the two monks began rattling off a prayer with strange monotonous grunts as if Tashi and I did not even exist (which is what I wished). Stupidly we stood until the great bang of a drum and the tinkle of a bell announced the end of the oration. At this time I made an extra deep bow and mumbled something like, "Thank you, excuse me," after which I turned to Tashi and whispered that he should use High Honorific Tibetan in explaining to the lama that we had come to invite him to our camp—a timely piece of thinking that suddenly came to me.

Tashi was as embarrassed as I, and the stern look on the lama's face relaxed only a little when I had spoken a few words. The monk was no doubt surprised at my knowledge of his language, and perhaps, also, was amused at the ridiculousness of my utterances.

Tashi now did his bit, and the lama asked us to sit by his side on some square cushions. The lama spoke, no doubt using the sophisticated language of Tibet, as I missed much of what he said. Tashi answered meekly, punctuating each sentence with "*La les*" (It is so) and "*La les Tudeche*" (Yes, thank you).

Tashi explained to me that the lama was sorry that he could not offer us tea. If we could come later it would be more convenient for him, but he could not come to our tent camp.

Needless to say, we scrambled down the three flights of steps in great haste, our minds full of guilt and mixed sentiments. It was dark outside, and we stumbled through the town to the barking of dogs until we reached our camp.

The bright light of the kerosene lamp that shone upon the yellow canvas, and the bubbling of rice, warmed our spirits a little.

"How bad is it, do you think, not to have come announced?" I asked Tashi.

"*Yapo mindu*" (Not good), he replied. "*Teutso digpa*" (A little sinful). A little sinful! We had to do something to straighten out all this mess. We had barged in like clumsy tourists—a wonderful way to acquire the affection of a living divinity, a saintly reincarnation!

Tashi explained to me—which only made matters worse—that the lama could not come to our camp because he was in the process of executing a vow; for three years he could not leave the monastery—in fact, not even the room and adjoining courtyard. Such vows of confinement, I knew, were quite frequent among Tibetan monks; and they are often accompanied by the formal interdiction of seeing outsiders, and also of cutting the hair, which accounted for the lama's strange hair style.

After eating, Tashi and I set out to the monastery again, hoping on our way to find someone in the village who would sell us a kata, the white silk scarf we should present to the lama. With luck we found a man who agreed to sell us two.

Hair combed and kata in hand, we made our way back to the monastery. By night it loomed higher than ever, outlined in black against the sky. We scuttled up the creaky stairs into the small prison chapel of the lama. Bending low and extending my arms with "respect and modesty," to use the expression of Tashi, I now presented the scarf, wrapping up inside a couple of twenty-rupee notes, an offering to the monastery that I hoped might help placate the lama.

The scarf and the gift were not so much as touched by the monk, a bad sign. We were bade to sit down, and immediately we were offered Tibetan tea in silver cups standing on silver pedestals that were placed before us by a ragged scullion monk. Our visit was short and our welcome cool, although our host had trouble masking his curiosity as to my mission and purpose. He could hardly recall having seen a foreigner in these parts. He seemed to have forgotten the brief encounter

he had had with Dr. Snellgrove, who came to Tsarang before me, and spent one night there before turning south, as he had not been permitted to go to the capital of Mustang.

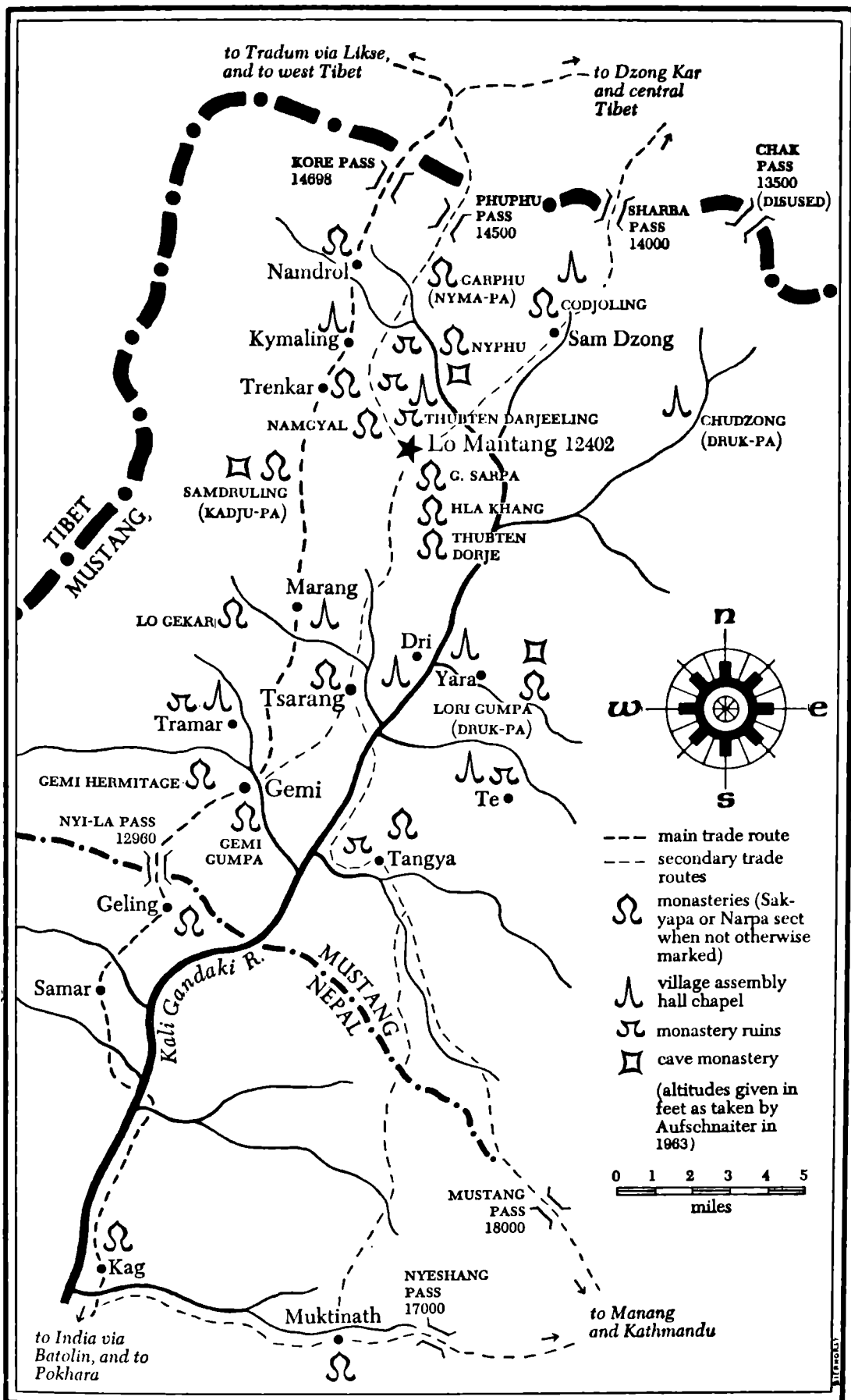
When I left the monastery after our second visit, I was in very low spirits, and nothing could have persuaded me that in a month's time I would become great friends with the Tsarang Lama, sharing for a while his solitary confinement, and acquiring in him one of my best friends in this strange kingdom.

"The Day" finally arrived—the great last day. We had yearned so much for it that now we could hardly contain our impatience. At the crack of dawn everything was ready, and we set off down a steep ravine and up the other side. From there we now overlooked the great fort of Tsarang with the entire north face of the Annapurna range in the background, a vision that few foreigners have had the pleasure to contemplate. This north face of the Himalayan range is visible only from Tibet and Mustang, and is in a sense as unknown as the dark side of the moon. Unlike the Himalayas seen from the south, from the north the main range rises unannounced by foothills, simply springing high above the great Tibetan plateau. The Annapurna range was now the barrier that isolated us from the rest of the civilized world, and it was hard to believe that we had started out on foot from its other side. How different the view now from that of Pokhara—how much more spectacular!

Our reveries were interrupted by the galloping of three horses coming toward us in a cloud of dust. Drawing near, they slowed down a little. Their riders wore vivid-colored silk shirts under their khaki chubas. I caught a good look at three highly distinguished-looking Khampas, with great black boots and impressive, circular fur hats. Tsering Pemba expressed my sentiments by remarking naïvely, "They are like kings"; and like kings they passed by without so much as taking any notice of us.

Toward one in the afternoon we began attacking a steep col, and soon reached a ridge from where we had a breathtaking view on all sides. We now looked right into Tibet to the north, to the east, and to the west. To the north, the land sloped down and disappeared behind a low ridge—this was the northern border of Tibet and Mustang,

Mustang, showing monasteries, tracks, trade routes and passes.



barely ten miles away. From this ridge the land rolled down to the mighty Brahmaputra, where Chinese soldiers were garrisoned. Tactically we could already have been surrounded by Chinese troops, as we were well advanced into the narrow territory of Mustang that thrusts out like a thumb into Tibet. To our right and left, half floating in haze, were countless rounded peaks, barely crested with snow, stretching out one behind the other as far as we could see.

"Beautiful," I said hopefully to Tashi, but Tashi just stood looking over this sea of peaks. Then he turned to me and said, "My heart is ill to see those snow peaks, and to think that there somewhere my father is a prisoner—that there is my land." Tashi seemed on the point of weeping; all he could do was gaze and repeat, "It makes my heart ill." I felt in me a sudden deep anger at the cruel fate that had befallen the "land of the snows," which now suffered in a war whose aims its population could hardly understand. I felt strangely grateful to the Kham-pas, whose image of brute force so well represented their sense of outrage against those who had taken their land, their religion, their wives, and driven them all across Tibet to the lonely refuge of this barren land—the last remaining soil of the Tibetan plateau to be free of the Chinese.

After this vision, it seemed that the yaks were walking backward and that we would never arrive. Our impatience was great, and with the anticipation of our arrival, all of a sudden my legs seemed to give way, and I felt the accumulated fatigue of the journey.

Coming up a little hill, I reached a narrow passage between two bluffs, a natural gateway through which slithered the dusty trail. From here I now surveyed all the north of Mustang and could see well into Tibet. Turning my eyes down, I suddenly spotted below me Lo Mantang! So elusive had been this goal, so uncertain had I been of getting there, so remote had been this place, that I found myself dumbfounded. All my anticipation had prepared me for an anticlimax. I had feared I would be let down by this first sight of the capital, toward which we had been marching for fourteen days. But what I saw was beyond description—as were the emotions that flooded me as I stood in the howling wind that raced through the narrow corridor.

At first I could not believe my eyes, and felt like the incredulous medieval travelers looking for the first time at Rome. Not even my wildest flights of imagination could have pictured what lay before me. It seemed that I, too, was living a legend, the age-old legend that has haunted the mind of man for generations and that in our times of modern stress has increased as a form of escapism: the legend of a lost

city—of a lost fortress hidden in the folds of the Himalayas—of a Shangri-La, the Paradise Lost, the land where ageless men thrive beyond the borders of our busy, unromantic world. A place where time hangs frozen upon an enclosed secret universe.

— Demons at the Gate

I HAD FOUND this closed universe, and the mythical fortress of a lost planet; for there in a lunar landscape of barren crests, with jagged contours, stood, serene, majestic, and awe-inspiring, the great mass of a fortified town, whose rectangular geometric bastion enclosed in its shelter a whole city. Not a house, not a building could be seen beyond the great, apparently doorless wall, marked at regular intervals by arrogant rectangular towers.

The city appeared like one huge fortress, more impressive than the Crusaders' forts that dominate the scenery of the Middle East. The whole town was like one great cement block laid down upon an inferno of barrenness by the hand of some warring god. The impression it gave from without was one of impregnability, while the walls that spoke of arrogance also suggested the security they afforded to the houses packed like cubes within their shelter. No houses rose above the walls, only the looming form of a white palace and three pink masses of monasteries. In this vision was contained all the mystery and charm of a lost world, of a universe that spoke of war and battle against both the elements and time. The capital was like the last keep and recess of man against nature and the world.

I stood dumbfounded, my mind flooded with confused impressions. In rhythmic sweeps the wind lashed against me, chasing itself down the track and hill that led to the edge of the plateau upon which arose the town; on its way it built up twirlers of dust that rustled and swished as they grew and then were dissipated in a great cloud of dust stretching out across the Plain of Prayer (as I later learned the plateau was called) and beating against the wall of the town. As far as I could see there was not a tree, nothing that could speak of life. The town

itself seemed as if fossilized in the silence of the wind's drone; not a living being or animal was in sight.

While I was standing, Tashi had reached my side, and now we looked together at the promised land. How strange it felt to be here alone, with a Tibetan, two medieval servants, and a group of rugged peasants who seemed like romantic representations of biblical tribesmen—all contemplating a citadel that to me spoke of shelter, comfort, and the end of our weary journey.

"Mantang, Mantang," said Tashi. "For so long we have spoken this name, for so long it was but a word, and now it is here." To his remark there was nothing I could add. Tightening my chuba around me more closely against the flying sand, I started off toward the town. Slowly descending into the lost valley was like entering a subterranean Atlantis. As I drew nearer, I could distinguish more clearly the shape of the monasteries and the form of the bastions that loomed higher and higher.

Through the wind it seemed that I heard the wail of a trumpet and the clash of a gong. When the track came to a deep ravine that cut off our view of the flat plateau on which stood the town, I stopped and waited for the yaks, Calay, one-eyed Kansa, and for Tashi so that we might all penetrate this fortress together as a proud caravan should. Instinctively I felt all the emotions that had been common to many a weary caravan in the past. We were now a well-knit, small world, bound by a secret unspoken friendship, and mettled by the difficulties and length of the trail, and all of a sudden I felt a glow of pride. I had guided our small ship to port—to safety.

There have been few occasions in life when I have felt such a complete sentiment of harmony and satisfaction, for there is nothing so sweet as the end of one's worries, and the realization that one's dreams are accomplished, that all is ending in a climax of perfection.

Our caravan formed upon the flat Plain of Prayer surrounding the town. This was divided into small fields, where the sparse tender green shoots of wheat were just sprouting. The great wall loomed above us, not allowing us to see what lay within its folds. An arrogant blank wall faced us, as if hostile and refusing us entry. From within came the sound of clashing cymbals and drums, while the wail of flutes and horns rose in a harmonious din that seemed to emerge from nowhere to echo upon the surrounding hills. To our left towered three great pointed snow peaks; to the north our horizon was limited, above the wall of the town, by the crests of two forts. To our right the Plain of Prayer sloped toward a precipice beyond which rose a perfectly white,

wind-eroded mountain; behind this loomed rounded, old-looking peaks, one beside the other, stretching out into infinity.

The track circled the wall, and turning behind the northern side led us to an angle where it formed an L-shaped bend; here was the gateway, the one and only entrance to Lo Mantang—a great corridor through the thickness of the bastion. Two huge wooden columns with ornate capitals marked its entrance, while a tall, open wooden door stood at the other end. This one gateway—the only breach into the city—is, as I soon found out, closed every night against brigands. Thus it shelters the inhabitants of the capital of the highest kingdom of our planet.

One by one the yaks trudged through this doorway, and then came to a stop. . . .

At last I had reached the elusive “territories of the Bhotiya Chief,” the “Lordship in Thibet” mentioned by Buchanan in 1802, the land that had been for centuries a mystery to the world. This was the capital of the kingdom Sven Hedin, the famous Swedish explorer of Tibet, described as the Land of the King of the South. Oldfield in 1880 wrote of the “small principality” of “Mastang.” For all these years it had escaped the notice of scholars, while Nepal attempted to make the world forget its autonomous character. In his *Sketches from Nipal*, Oldfield, who spent thirteen years in Kathmandu, mentions quite frequently the mysterious principality beyond the confines of Nepal and the Himalayas, stating clearly that although “it pays a small annual tribute to Nipal, [Mustang] is *not* [in italics in text] within its frontier, nor does it form any part of the Gorkha dominions.” The great scholar of Nepal and Buddhism, Brian Hodgson, notes, “In Nipal all services, but especially all military service, is by annual tenure, and all tenure of lands attached only to actual service,” adding that “An exception to this rule, is in the case of the so-called Rajah of Mastang, a Bhotia who holds a small tract in perpetuity. . . .”

Undisturbed and unexplored, Mustang has continued to thrive. But what exactly is Mustang? What are its history, its origins, the reasons for its existence? How is it that the area should remain till today so little known? How has it remained so autonomous that in 1952 Toni Hagen should note that it was a virtually independent land, while in 1961, when the King of Nepal abolished the states of the small rajas of Hindu Nepal, he made exception for the King of Mustang, to whom he reaffirmed his title and the privileges pertaining to his office in juridical and tax-levying practices?

Our track had come to an end, yet wearily I became aware that only now was my journey beginning. Only now was I to start to explore both the past history and present culture of an area about which only a few paragraphs had ever been written! I now felt that this was a land far more impressive than I had been led to believe, and one that surely held many valuable secrets. Here in Mustang, I felt, existed a world even older than Tibet, a form of life even less scarred by modern interference than that in almost any other part of the globe, and now it was mine to study and explore.

Who, I wondered, had built this city? Who were its kings, how did they live, these men and women isolated in the great stone and clay ship of the walled capital or in its surrounding villages? I found myself in a world of the past whose ancient values I would have to discover and record, so that they would not be forgotten, if the Chinese should overrun the Khampas and pour over Mustang, effacing its traditions and culture forever. I knew these traditions and customs were more than the fossilized quaint images of antiquated ideas; they were the heritage of years of knowledge and development. The customs of Mustang were the fruit of generations of ideas, thought, and reflection. They should be understood and shared before oblivion or interference erased them.

I was given little chance to rest from my journey, for no sooner had we passed through the city gate than I was assailed as if by the hallucinatory vision of a dream. Our small column of men and yaks came up against a massive wall of red, yellow, and blue chubas. The distant wail of trumpets that had echoed from the surrounding hills now became a true din marked by the grim clashing of cymbals whose metallic sound rang hard upon the massive four-storied façade of a great white palace overlooking a small square within the shelter of the city's mighty bastions. The wind died down, and we found ourselves thrown into the midst of a large celebration to which had flocked over a thousand men, women, and children, forming a colorful crowd resembling a painting by Breughel. Before us spread a sea of faces, brown and calloused by wind, snow, and sand, contrasting with the beaming, dirty faces of little children who clung like grapes upon the rooftops of the houses that closed in the square before the palace.

Taken aback by such a spectacle, I simply stood in silence, staring at the sea of faces. Over an ocean of greasy pigtailed I could distinguish the wavering crests of the pointed red hats of monks, moving around in the center of the square.

What on earth, I wondered, was going on? Everyone was so preoccupied that at first even the arrival of a foreigner went unnoticed. Only

a few adults stared at me in surprised amazement, with the slight air of someone being disturbed. For a moment I forgot about the problem of where to unload our animals or where we should pitch our tents. I threw myself into the crowd, and my Tibetan chuba aiding, succeeded in pushing my way practically unnoticed to a vantage point where I could take in what, like a film, was going on before my eyes.

Never had I seen such an array of colors as the crowd presented. Now their attentive gaze followed the gestures and movements of a high officiating lama who stood in the plaza amid two rows of seated monks. The lama was dressed in a gold, blue, and red brocade gown in which was woven the fearful image of Mara, the god of death. He also wore a wide-brimmed black hat with two raised cutout dragons standing upon two human skulls.

Red-dressed monks hustled around in attendance, preparing intricate offerings, which they placed at the feet of the lama, who then chanted spells over them. Smoldering juniper wood burned in the offering plates, and its fragrance mingled with the intoxicating sound of a strange orchestra, the sound of wailing horns made of human bones.

I stared at the faces of those who would soon be my friends, companions, and acquaintances in this lonely land. To my joy I noted that there was not in the crowd a single person wearing any dress that told of modern Western influence. The women were, it seemed, wearing their finest clothes for the occasion; many looked quite superb in hand-woven sleeveless chubas over bright, loose silk blouses imported, no doubt, by caravan from China via Lhasa. Around their waistbands were tucked two aprons, one short and hanging down in front, the other caught in the belt and hanging down to the ground behind. These were gaily striped in bright, narrow bands of blue, red, green, and yellow. A large number of women bore upon their shoulders dark-blue capes whose pointed ends were adorned with golden triangles of luxurious brocade framed with a border of bright green cloth. The capes were closed above the breast by huge oval silver clasps embossed with peacock designs. As for jewels, many women were literally smothered with ornaments of silver and precious stones, the most common of these being necklaces of bright orange coralline stones alternating with turquoises. Often these necklaces were partly hidden under silver and gold relic boxes, many the size of a large camera. On their wrists the women wore ivory-white bracelets made of truncated conch shells. All these jewels, though, were outshone by their headdresses, which were composed of a leather strap running down the central parting of their hair and falling down their backs, and studded with huge

turquoises, many of them the size of a wrist watch. On some of these Egyptian-type headstraps I counted as many as thirty-two such turquoises—quite a fortune!

The men, on the other hand, were simply dressed in variously colored chubas, mainly white or wine red, although here and there I noted, as a rather unpleasant surprise, finely dressed Khampas sporting great round fur hats.

To me, though, the clothes were not so interesting as the faces of the crowd, the wild-looking features of a hardy, friendly race. The many children smiled at me with healthy, mischievous faces, wearing miniature chubas like the adults', along with clumsy boots of woolen cloth sewn to soles woven of yak-hair twine.

All had come to gaze at and participate in a small manner in the ceremony. This, I soon gathered, was the third day of a three-day ritual known as "The Chasing of the Demons." Usually held on the Tibetan New Year, this year it had been delayed until the first days of the Fourth Month.

I told Calay to stay with the yaks so I could watch while the High Priest went about building his elaborate offerings set in five semispherical iron pans. While he did this, the seated monks alternately recited prayers and played their instruments. The town echoed with the shrill, morbid sound of the human bone whistles, cut by the booming noise of large cylindrical drums fixed on the end of long handles and struck with a curved baton. In one corner of the square two monks blew into huge long trumpets that rested upon an ornamented wooden stand covered with ghastly designs of skulls surrounding the grim god of death—Mara.

Death in Mustang, as in Tibet, is viewed by the masses with a mixture of dread and hope. It is the god of death who holds up the wheel of life, the circle in which men live and die to be reborn again, until eventually, hopefully, one day this cycle of rebirth is broken by the liberation of Nirvana.

It is Mara, the terrible god of death with his necklaces of human skulls, who spins the dizzy inferno of life, and it is in the fear of death and rebirth that men live. For death is not an unknown terror, but the beginning of life again, life that can be terrible or at best bad. For man after death is reborn again according to his past into one of the six spheres of existence, none of them pleasant. The worst possible rebirth is in hell, where he will suffer endless tortures. There his tongue will be plowed through by a team of yaks, or his body crushed in a caldron, or sawn in two by animal-faced demons, to be later hanged or buried



The Hell of Hells.

alive in a lengthy torture that lasts until a new death projects the victim again into a new cycle of the wheel of existence. There are three comparatively happy spheres of existence, and three places of woeful rebirth, the worst being the hell of tortures. The second worst is the world of unhappy spirits where man thirsts and suffers anguish; in this existence, when man drinks, he cannot quench his thirst and his mouth is ever afire. The least awful of the woeful spheres of rebirth is to be reborn as an animal. But here still one suffers, as animals are put to work, beaten, hunted, and killed. Nor do the other spheres of existence present much consolation. The best of these is to be born again a man, or one can be reborn to the heavens, but there, although life goes on peacefully and happiness reigns, it is always overcast by the terrible certitude that death will soon plunge man again into hardships of life and that once more the smiling, fierce god of death, Mara, will spin the infernal wheel of life.

In Mustang everyone lives under this belief, and under the terror of the succession of rebirths into various unpleasant forms of existence. Salvation is found only in Nirvana, in the breaking away from the lengthy and uncertain process of the wheel. To achieve this Nirvana, this fusion with the absolute, various methods are available—most of

them reserved to the clergy, while man has to content himself with accumulating merit and living through the cycles that he hopes will one day bring him to liberation. The monks use such short cuts to salvation as yoga practices, magic, logic, and meditation, while the common man is left to the resources of invocation, prayer, and kindness. However complicated is the high philosophy of Buddhism, for the simple man the path is simple too, for rules are set down that control and guide his conduct as the wheel of life spins round and round. Goodness, kindness, control of the passions, and the quest of the benedictions of lamas are his way to perfection and Nirvana.

Among the living lurk the demons, the spirits of the other spheres of existence; for this reason humans do not kill animals, but also, for the same reason, they believe in the presence of the spirits. To rid oneself of the spirits there is nothing like calling on the aid of the high priests. This was what was happening on the first day of the Fourth Month when we entered Lo Mantang. The monks had been getting ready to drive the evil spirits out of the town.

As I gazed at the ceremony a shriek arose, and suddenly, parting the crowd, three demons in flamboyant robes and hideous masks danced



Reincarnation into animals.

into the center of the square, slashing the air with swords and intoning spells over the assembly. Twice, three times, four times they danced about the square; then another loud shriek rang out, and standing up, all at once, the crowd rushed for the city gate, scattering my yaks in the process. Following the crowd came the monks and the High Lama in more orderly procession—musicians first, followed by the prancing demons. Just outside the door, the High Lama, holding a sacred dagger and a metal symbol representing a thunderbolt, danced around in circles, muttering magic formulas.

I was swept along with the villagers out of the town, as the procession moved out into the fields. Leading it were three men bearing long, thin banners of red, blue, and yellow that fluttered upon long poles. Then came the monks with their instruments, a young monk lugging the stand of the long trumpets, which had been telescoped for carrying. These were extended and set up again upon a barren, flat piece of land facing the white mountain at the end of the plain on which stood the city. The shriek of horns echoed over the barren hills, while the crowd stood a respectful distance away, their backs to the mighty walls of the town. By charity, no doubt, two old beggars—a woman and a man—were allowed to stand close to the monks. One hobbled around with pads on his hands, dragging his ragged self about with surprising agility; the old woman mendicant bent upon her stick, and punctuated the ritual with shrill, bone-chilling screams of joy.

I had handed my black-and-white camera to Tashi, asking him to take as many pictures as he could of the proceedings. I took my other camera to take color pictures. As much as I hated the idea of bursting into such a ceremony, I could not miss bringing back records of this unique display. For here was not only a religious ceremony, but a great festival that deeply involved every one of the area's inhabitants, including the beggars.

The demons had followed the crowd, and once more danced about with their swords, fighting and attacking the throng, which they forced to retreat. All eyes were on them, while the High Lama kept chanting and preparing his secret rites. First, water was served to him in a silver cup; of this he drank, spilling the remainder upon the earth. He now stood out alone before the assembly of monks, before the crowd, his back to the town, facing the east and the great sea of snow-clad peaks behind the white eroded mountain at the end of the fields. His great sleeves fluttered in the wind; his dragon hat waved menacingly with its two skulls. He was handed a bow and a sacred arrow with colored tassels. With this he danced; then he boldly stepped forward and shot an arrow in the direction of five platters bearing offerings, that stood

before him. The arrow planted itself by these; the lama then seized a sling of yak's wool, placed a stone in it, and then in a great ruffle of silk sent the stone flying toward the east.

At this moment a great blast of the deep horns announced the arrival of soldiers; a group of fifteen men advanced wearing fur hats and elaborate blue-and-gold silk chubas. In their hands they carried great muskets with long forked prongs at the end. These were the usual guns of Tibet and Mustang, the forks serving as bayonets and being used as rests when shooting from the saddle by leaning over from one's pony. The warriors, a fine lot of tall, arrogant-looking men, crouched by the lama, ready to fire. The priest was then given, one by one, the five offering platters, which he threw to the ground, where they broke in a cloud of dust; as they fell, the soldiers fired their guns.

From this colorful scene enacted against the barren landscape arose a feeling of grandeur and mystery, while the bark of the muskets echoed against the deserted hills. One after the other the offerings were smashed, and when the last rifle shots died out, a blood-chilling cry rose from the crowd while, screaming, the demon dancers fled. They ran and ran, little dots of color against the dry ochre earth, until to general applause they disappeared behind the great city wall.

Mustang was rid of its demons. The crowd filed back into town, followed by the monks and the soldiers.

I had been so swept away by the incredible and improbable spectacle of the monks, music, and crowd that I dared not believe my eyes. Even today I have trouble in believing in the reality of that day. This was so perfect a climax to the long journey that had led me to Mustang, that it seemed quite unreal. . . . I was about to follow the crowd into the town when suddenly somebody grabbed my arm, and I heard in Nepali the words, "Do you have a pass?"

My heart jumped, and I slowly came back to earth and to the problem that had been burning in the back of my mind since my departure. Turning around, I saw the dark, emaciated face of a Hindu whose eyes peered over the ruffles of a long scarf wrapped two or three times around his face. He was wearing an oversized khaki army coat, with its collar turned up, over a striped pair of pajamas that flapped in the cold wind, and worn tennis shoes. I was as much startled by the incongruous sight of the man as by his request. My surprise was even greater when he informed me that he was the head of what he called the "checkpost of Mustang." The man bade me follow him.

This I did. I had noticed that Lo Mantang was in the shape of a large L, or rather a rectangle with a square cut out of one corner.

Here, in the corner of the cutout, stood the great city gate, while in the space outside the walls rose a large rectangular structure that I discovered to be a small palace. This was occupied as a checkpoint.

I had been told in Jomosom and Kathmandu that there was in the capital of Mustang a small detachment of Nepalese soldiers, supposedly a border-patrol party. Passing a wooden door, I found myself in the rectangular courtyard of the small palace outside the wall. A low gallery around the yard had served as a stable; here were now a dozen soldiers, thin wiry Nepalese recruits who sat on their heels beside small fires. Used to the warmer lower altitudes of Nepal, they were all suffering—judging by the sound of their coughs—from tuberculosis, and certainly did not seem very martial. As for the so-called checkpoint official, I discovered to my surprise that he was an Indian by nationality.

From the courtyard I was shown into the main building of the palace, a two-story structure built around a second sheltered yard. From a gallery around this enclosure, on the second floor, I was ushered into a small room. In this messy room lived the checkpoint official, who, I soon gathered, regarded his tour of duty as some form of penitentiary sentence, since he never—as I observed later—ventured out of his rooms, where he spent all his time barricaded from the cold and from the local population. As for the soldiers, they were technically, during their stay in Mustang, under the direction of the king, who as colonel of the Nepalese Army overruled the low-ranking officer detached from Jomosom. The soldiers' presence in Mustang was no more than symbolic, as there were not enough of them either to defend the border from the Chinese or to have their authority respected by the Khampas, the only true military force in the area. In fact, they never ventured outside their garrison. With this small checkpoint Nepalese control and influence over this land began and ended. All authority in other matters, I soon found out, rested in the king and his feudal administration.

For a moment I worried whether the overzealous checkpoint official might not attempt to curtail my plan of study, either by limiting my field of action to the capital of Mustang as marked on my permit, or by giving vent to false ideas that I might be interested in the Chinese. Fortunately, nothing occurred, and I was not to see the members of the checkpoint again until the end of my stay.

On leaving the checkpoint, I entered the town again through its massive gate leading to the main square at the foot of the tall palace, where stood my yaks. Tsering guided me to a house where Calay had,

of his own accord, set up our lodgings, having had the pack animals unloaded.

Night was falling as I was shown into the dim courtyard of a clay house. The first floor was reserved for animals, which, under the shelter of a gallery, were tied up against a crude manger. Taking a dark passageway, I stumbled up a flight of stone steps, then up a shaky ladder made of a notched tree trunk. This led to the roof of the house, onto which opened two rooms. In one of these I found Calay busy blowing upon a fire of brushwood. He explained to me that if I wished we could stay in this house. The owner had agreed; one room would serve as kitchen, while we would sleep in the other. Tashi showed me toward it.

Bending down through a rough, low wooden door, I found myself in a dark room. Its floor was of beaten clay, dusty but dry; its roof of wooden beams was supported by a central post. Against the far wall rose an altar—a steplike piece of furniture topped by an open cupboard on whose various shelves were dozens of fine bronze and wooden sculptures of monks and divinities, the central figure being a wooden figure of Maitreya, the Buddha “next to come.” On the steps of the altar were seven silver bowls, and to the right, in a corner, stood great rectangular books bound between heavy wooden planks. “*Lhakhang*” (A chapel), Tashi explained. The room seemed grim but otherwise fairly airtight, and with a cold wind outside, the prospect of sleeping in a tent seemed more unpleasant than usual. I therefore agreed to these strange lodgings, my mind too busy with the events of the day to worry about comfort.

There were countless details I wanted to know about the ceremony we had witnessed. I was also anxious about the Khampas, the check-post, and the King of Mustang, not to mention “Chinese spies,” of whom Tashi had now become fearful. There was no doubting that, regardless of the great, massive twenty-foot-high wall around us, Mustang was an open city, a center of intrigue and instability. I was also worried about what we should do about seeing the King of Mustang, and what might be his reaction to my wish to study his country.

Up till now I had been used to sleeping at sunset with my mind concentrated on the following day’s march, but now a thousand and one problems confronted us. There were problems of whether we could find enough food, of when and how to see the king, and how to go about the exploration of this lonely land—providing, of course, that my movements were not hampered.

I planned for us to remain three weeks, or longer if necessary, in Lo

Mantang. That should be time enough to get acquainted with the city and its life. Then I proposed to set out with minimum loads to investigate the areas north of Lo Mantang, along the northern border with Tibet, where lay, so I had been told, many small villages and monasteries. After that, if all went well, we would move down to Tsarang to stay there for a week to ten days before setting out for other districts.

We therefore now set about making ourselves at home. Stepping out on the roof in front of my chapel room, I could look across the countless rooftops of the other houses of Lo Mantang. The summits of the surrounding houses, like our own, were all bordered with a thick fence-like barricade of thorny brushwood that sheltered the rooftop terraces. Around me I could see, limiting the town, the top of the great wall of the city, thick and rugged, and made of *chan*—packed clay and stones shaped in wooden forms.

The houses were all painted white, with the exception of the little square chortens that sat on the four corners of every rooftop. These were painted red, and had planted on their summits thin poles supporting long, featherlike strips of printed cloth—prayer flags. The beating of these flags in the cold evening wind soon became the background music of our eventful stay in Lo Mantang.

As night fell I could hear, rising from the narrow alleys below us, the tinkle of bells as mules, horses, and donkeys were driven into the city at the end of the day from the surrounding hills. Little children pushed the animals along, and as they progressed through the town they disappeared on their own accord into the narrow doorways leading to the ground-floor stables of their owners' houses.

I had the steel cases and air mattresses transferred into the chapel bedroom where Tashi and I would sleep. When I asked Tashi if it would not be sacrilegious to sleep here, he explained that in Tibet, on the contrary, the chapel room of a house is always given to visiting dignitaries—among whom, of course, I was included. Although isolated, Lo Mantang was often the host to wandering monks from Tibet. For their sake the rules of hospitality were maintained, and every home was quite willing to welcome occasional pilgrims or Tibetan traders. I was, I found out later, the first foreigner ever to sleep within the walls of this medieval city.

I felt at home when, Calay having shut the wooden door of our kitchen, I found myself locked in with my small portable world, Tashi, Kansa, Calay, and our provisions. We huddled around the fire warming ourselves, conscious of the bond that united us in this strange

land. Tea was soon boiling, and I decided to open as a treat a can of fruit, one of the few I had brought along. This delicacy aroused in me gastronomical memories of days of plenty, when far away in civilized lands I had been able to order what I wanted.

Boiled rice topped off this dinner, and with a kerosene lamp Tashi and I retired into our freezingly cold chapel. I had placed my sleeping bag snug against a wall, when Tashi stopped me, saying that it was irreverent to do so and that I should sleep only with my head toward the altar. It was too cold to consider changing our clothes for sleeping, so we just changed our socks and slipped into the relative warmth of our sleeping bags. In the eerie yellow light the strange idols grinned at us above our heads, while from outside the barking of dogs reminded us that here also the ghosts roamed at night, immune to the defensive qualities of the great wall or to the demon-chasing spells of the monks. In the distance I could hear the deep hammering sound of drums and the tinkle of bells, a sound repeated over and over from various quarters of town, as in each house the head of the family said his night orations in his private chapel. I was now truly in the land of the gods. I fell asleep with a deep feeling of loneliness, and a diffuse sense of excitement as to what lay ahead.

That night I had the impression that rats were crawling over me, but I was too tired to bother. By contrast, at dawn I was awakened by water falling on my face. When I opened my eyes, I saw the rough, weatherbeaten face of a man bending over me. I was about to shout when the great boom of a drum suddenly dispelled the last haze of sleep. I then realized that the man was in the process of performing his morning ritual, for now he muttered prayers and banged again upon the large drum. He had just finished filling—over my sleeping body—the seven little silver offering cups set on the altar. Sleeping in a chapel as an honored guest had, I soon realized, certain disadvantages.

A biting cold wind came through the open door, and neither Tashi nor I lingered in getting up. It was five-thirty, and the sun was just rising to the east above the sea of distant snow-capped peaks. Our terrace faced east, while to the right of us—blocking our view—rose the four stories of the king's city palace. The king, we had been told, did not live in town, having taken up residence in his summer palace two hours north of Lo Mantang. Above the houses the prayer flags fluttered in the sun, and already the tinkle of ponies and cattle leaving the enclosed city were audible as they slowly made their way out through the gate.

While Calay prepared tea, I stumbled down the ladder to go for a stroll. Halfway down, a rather natural urge checked me, and I asked

Tashi where I could relieve myself in the town. Till now a convenient bush or large rock had afforded the necessary privacy, but in the town or around it on the windswept flat plateau there seemed to be no possibility of finding such a place. I was both greatly surprised and relieved when Calay showed me that "our house" had a toilet! Such conveniences, which are unknown to the Hindu world and much of the globe, were, I discovered, general in Mustang. Although affording less comfort than the conveniences of the Ritz, they are both clean and hygienic. In Mustang one measures the decency of the toilet and the wealth of its owner by its height, the toilet room being a small square cubicle situated above a deep, narrow walled-in shaft. In the center of this cubicle is a small rectangular hole, while at ground level the shaft opens to the outside of the house by a small door through which each day are thrown hay and leaves that cut out all odors, and when the manure thus created has accumulated sufficiently, it is carried out by menial individuals into the fields. Thus Lo Mantang, despite its crowded houses, is quite a clean place, and does not smell more than the usual farm. This surprising cleanliness is also due to its altitude (12,600 feet); at this height there are relatively few bacteria in the soil, water, or air. We who live at lower altitudes and in warmer climes forget the role of bacteria in causing putrefaction, and therefore bad odors. In Mustang I soon observed there is little or no putrefaction. Cow dung, for instance, does not rot and mold, but dries hard where it has fallen, like all rubbish; and this accounts for the fact that with minimum sanitary precautions, neither the towns nor villages of Mustang offered any of the repulsive odors that usually greet the visitor in the villages and towns of the rest of Asia.

In broad daylight I was able to inspect our lodgings in greater detail. On the first floor below us were several dark rooms lit by small windows. Here lived the owner of the house, an old widow whose weatherbeaten features gave her the appearance of a witch. She shared the house with an old distant relative, the very man who had spilled water on me at dawn. In one of the rooms there lived a paying guest, a young Khampa. At first I rather disliked the idea of his presence, but we soon became quite friendly, and later I passed many a pleasant evening in his company.

The floor above the stables was dark and smoky, whereas the top floor was very light and quite pleasant. Our house adjoined one of the low outbuildings of the king's palace, while a small street ran around the other two sides of our building, which was backed up against another house. The whole town was a compact mass of houses standing

one against the other, cut by narrow passageways that made their way around the houses and sometimes passed beneath them. Lo Mantang at first sight had all the coziness of a busy, well-erected hive, with its little passageways and cubicle-like homes. The town was split in two horizontal levels, the sunny level of the rooftop terraces upon which were performed many of the household chores by day, and the dark ground level of the little alleys leading to various small open squares in the different districts of the city. The dark intermediate levels of the second floors of the houses were reserved for the winter months, sleeping and keeping warm. The houses were thus well equipped for the rugged climate—as by day the sun was very hot, while the nights were freezing cold.

Toward ten o'clock, a young man elegantly dressed in a red chuba poked his head over our roof terrace and, seeing me, came up the ladder grinning broadly. This young man was named Pemba. He came to inform me that the King of Lo had sent two horses to take us to his summer palace. I was both thrilled and grateful for this auspicious-sounding consideration. Calling Tashi, I got ready to set out to see the king. For many days now I had been rather nervous at the prospect of meeting this unusual monarch. According to Oriental protocol, I knew that I should bring him a present, and this had worried me greatly, as I had been unable to decide in Kathmandu on anything that might be suitable for such a man as the "Highest King on Earth," the King of Lo. A sudden fit of inspiration had brought me to take a rather gastronomical solution; I would give him one of two bottles of whiskey that I had been offered by friends on my departure. Although, surely, the King of Mustang had never heard of such a drink, I felt that a race that likes to drink as the Tibetans do would certainly not despise the water of life of Scotland. It was, perhaps, an odd present, but I thought it would be worth risking. I felt very much like some man from another planet suddenly thrown into the Middle Ages, and was quite surprised not to feel more out of place in this land of ponies, monks, and feudal kings. Tashi and I had discussed this meeting over and over, and he was, I could see, as curious as I to meet the monarch, and also very nervous.

— Medieval Reception

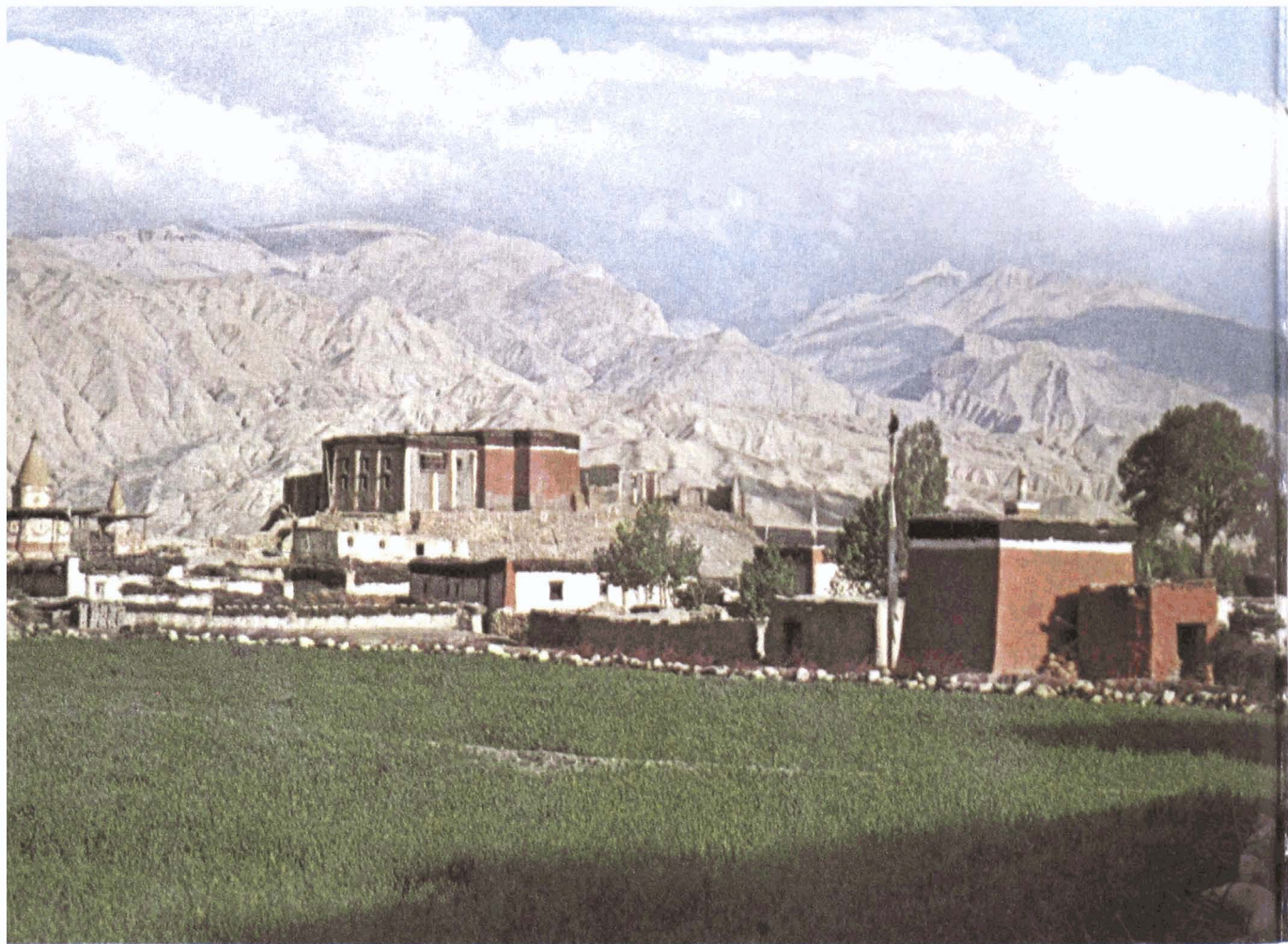
ALTHOUGH I HAD brought along 850 pounds of equipment, I had forgotten to bring katas. Already in Tsarang such an oversight had proved very embarrassing, and now the problem cropped up again. It is customary to honor a distinguished person with a very elaborate silk scarf. I had none, and there seemed little prospect of finding one here of sufficient quality to do me honor at the court of the King of Lo.

This oversight was fortunately remedied by a dirty-looking monk who had climbed up on our roof and had been staring at us for a while. I turned to him and asked him if he could procure one for me. The monk immediately produced from the folds of his red chuba a dirty off-white rag. This would not do. I had Tashi explain that we wanted two of the very best katas available in town. The monk said he would try to find one, and disappeared down the shaky tree-trunk ladder with great agility. I had Tashi fix my khaki chuba in the "Lhasan style," with two pleats in the back, and I looked (so I thought) very smart. I had shaved and wore below my Tibetan gown a clean shirt and a tie—rather odd apparel for such a lonely place.

"How do I look?" I asked Tashi. He seemed to approve. I turned down both sleeves of my chuba so that they would cover my hands, and thus vouch for my being an aristocrat not needing to use my hands in any manner. This rather proved a drawback when I tried scrambling down to the ground floor, where in the courtyard waited two small

The author before the desolate ruins of the Duke's Fort at the foot of Ketcher Dzong near Lo Mantang.





horses with elaborate saddles of silver-inlaid wood resting upon brilliant orange carpets—the royal horses.

I nervously awaited the return of the monk, who eventually came up with two cheap cotton katas. Having no choice, I bought them—at least they were clean. Outside our house I mounted one of the ponies, and Tashi the other. We were given instructions as to how to find Trenkar, the king's summer residence. At a brisk trot we passed down the narrow alley, across the plaza before the palace, around a corner, and through the majestic city gate. Outside the portal, between the small palace of the checkpoint and the city wall, were a long succession of chortens and prayer walls; we followed these to the left, and then turned behind the north wall of the city out onto the windswept plateau. I felt like a great conquering warlord myself, with my orderly galloping in my tracks, as we made our way rapidly down a steep trail to the bottom of a deep ravine. The sky was a clear blue above the tall peaks that soared eight thousand feet above us to the west. Fresh snow had fallen on these summits during the night, and reached down to within a very short distance of the town.

We followed a little icy brook up through its narrow gorge until it emerged upon a vast, flat plain enclosed between the great snowy peaks to our left and a barren ridge that ran from the north down the center of Mustang, to our right. The extremity of this ridge stopped short of Lo Mantang, and was crested by the two ancient fortresses I had seen the day before, rising above the city. Who had built them? I wondered, peering at their majestic forms dominating the 13,000-foot-high valley through which we were now riding. This wide valley was the highest flat land of Mustang, and its end marked the northern border of the kingdom, barely six miles away. The floor of the valley abounded in springs, the sources of the little torrents that made their way south. Around the springs were small patches of green grass on which were grazing small herds of yaks and others of ponies and mules. The track clung to the western slope of this open valley on the shoulders of the great peaks that now rose directly above us. This series of peaks, marking the western border of Mustang, continued north-

ABOVE: *The huge monastery of Tsarang once counted 1,000 monks. In the foreground the tender green of recently sown barley.* BELOW: *Detail of an ancient Tibetan religious painting, or tanka, which depicts monasteries similar to those found in Lo.*

ward beyond Mustang, getting lower and more rounded as they disappeared behind the ridge that marked the beginning of the incline toward the Brahmaputra River in Tibet. It was tantalizing to feel Tibet so near on all sides, an impression that was also frightening as, I reflected, from the surrounding ridges most certainly Chinese soldiers were peering at us through field glasses. I was not wrong in presuming that the Chinese knew all about my presence in Lo Mantang. Although the border between Chinese Tibet and Mustang is considered a great barrier in Western circles, this border is, in fact, only a vague notion to the inhabitants of Lo, who, I found to my surprise, circulate quite freely between Chinese territory and their own land, while the Khampas and the Chinese sit on either side, arms drawn and on the lookout. This state of affairs was very typical of the medieval concept of war held by the local inhabitants, who observed the opposing parties with relative indifference. A few days after my arrival, as I was walking through the streets of Lo Mantang, an old woman had come up to me, saying, "Please tell me—under whom are we?" Although she understood little of modern politics, she was well aware that with the Khampas around something was wrong. What, I wondered, did the King of Mustang think of all this? Certain circles had told me that the Nepalese eyed him with suspicion. There had even been rumors that this monarch was too friendly with the Chinese, as he directed the destiny of his country with a certain disregard for formal East-West alliances, running his land, as in the past, by steering a course between Tibet and Nepal in order to preserve his autonomy.

Along the track, we passed to our left the great bastions of two other large, ruined fortresses, standing dusty brown in color against the brown hill. These were the ruins of the two ancient forts of Tri, the lower fort and the upper fort, about which we were later to read in obscure, forgotten manuscripts. Passing these ruins, we came upon a small group of three chortens, one white, one red, and one gray; these had been erected to the gods of the soil, the sky, and the earth. From here we now caught sight of Trenkar. The seat of the summer palace, Trenkar is a village of two dozen white houses set about two massive rectangular structures, one an assembly hall, the other the king's summer residence.

Later we discovered that this village is a private estate of the king, and its inhabitants serfs attached to the royal land, who have no right to dispose of their own lives, working and toiling on the king's property from father to son, without being allowed to leave the king's service.

We stopped a peasant to ask where the king dwelled. The man was

dressed in a fine homemade chuba of white goat's wool. He pointed a respectful finger to the larger of the two white structures of Trenkar. Clattering up a flight of stone steps, we reached a flat terrace overlooking the valley, and upon which opened a large wooden portal—the entrance to the king's residence. Here we dismounted. There was nobody in sight, and hesitating to enter uninvited, we stood with our horses overlooking the valley and the ridge (now quite close) that marked the actual top of the world where the land began to slide down to Tibet. I was amazed here again, as in Tsarang and Lo Mantang, at the harmony and beauty of the buildings of Trenkar. It reminded me how rightly I had been told that in all Asia the Tibetans are perhaps those who possess the most sophisticated and spectacular architecture. All the buildings were of respectable size, gracefully symmetrical and geometrical, the walls leaning slightly inward, giving an impression of both force and elegance. Neat black-framed windows regularly dotted the large surfaces of the whitewashed walls. There was no doubt that Mustang was a highly sophisticated land like Tibet, a land abounding in scholars and intelligent men, a land bound by sophisticated legal and moral codes, a land with a civilization of its own, and one whose culture—be it in literature or architecture—has not been without many great achievements. It is good to remember, in terms of architecture, that the Dalai Lama's palace in Lhasa, the Potala, is practically nineteen stories high, and was built over three hundred years ago. Therefore it was much higher than any building in Europe until skyscrapers were erected in Belgium and Germany after 1950! What will our modern skyscrapers look like when they too are, like the Potala, three centuries old?

Who, I wondered, had founded this Kingdom of Mustang? In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Tibet had been divided into many small kingdoms, but in the literature on ancient Tibet I had not yet encountered a reference to this Land of Lo. Not that Mustang was too small to be mentioned, for by Tibetan standards the capital and the surrounding towns and villages are large. Even Lhasa has only 35,000 inhabitants, while Gartok, the capital of western Tibet, has just forty-odd houses. In between western Tibet and the central Lhasa region is a long expanse of land, following the Brahmaputra River, that is practically uninhabited. Here live nomads around the few rare, small villages, such as Tradum, the closest Tibetan village to Mustang, which has only twenty houses and a small monastery with ten monks. By such standards Mustang was therefore a large and important state—in fact, the most significant between central Tibet and the far western prov-

inces. There was no doubt that Mustang had played an important role in Tibetan culture, and was the center of such culture for hundreds of miles around. I was amazed that such a land should have escaped notice and study, for the monuments I had seen so far all spoke of an impressive past and an active present. As for Mustang's allegiance to the Gurkha kings of Nepal, this was evidently but a recent measure of convenience and had no effect on the local culture. Nepalese was not spoken by the inhabitants, and none of the Hindu customs of Nepal have ever reached this isolated land, well guarded as it is by the length and difficulty of the trail between it and Nepal and by a cultural bastion of Tibetan-speaking villages stretching from Geling as far down as Tukutcha.

Before the palace doors Tashi briefed me as to how I should present the kata correctly—bending low, and advancing with one hand holding the scarf out, the other keeping the opposite end toward me, so that my gesture would reflect reserve and modesty. I was to deposit the scarf before the king. He would then decide whether to touch my scarf—a sign of acquiescence, or whether to leave it alone—a mark of cool indifference. Best of all, the king could place it around his neck—a sure mark of good feeling toward me. Which of these receptions would be mine, I was about to find out.

Through the gateway a small ragged boy, his face smeared black with dirt, came out and told us that we should come in. An old manservant, sticking out his tongue, also came forward and took our horses. We now followed our young guide into the courtyard beyond the door. Here rose a huge pole with a long prayer flag, a strip of white cloth tacked along the mast and printed with prayers and the delicate figure of the "horse of the winds." We had taken only a few steps when a great shaggy mastiff made a lunge at us and caused us to freeze in our tracks. The child dashed for the huge dog and kept him pinned down, while we slowly edged our way to another door set in a large rectangular building at the end of the courtyard. By this door two other dogs were attached, while four husky puppies strolled around in the sun by their parents. This second obstacle was passed after some hesitation and barking, and we found ourselves going through a tall, dark passage into an interior courtyard. Around this rose two sets of galleries, one on top of the other; on the ground floor were horses under the shade of the lower gallery, while all around above opened great latticed windows whose frames and laths were gaily painted green, yellow, and blue. Despite these decorations the whole building had a dilapidated look, and was not overimpressive. We now turned, under the gallery,

to a door leading up a flight of rough stone steps that led to a small landing on the first floor. Here, turning right, we emerged upon a rooftop patio enclosed on all sides and sheltered from the wind. At its far end, under an overhang, was another set of latticed windows closed from the inside with rough brown Tibetan paper. We headed for a low door beside these windows, and, bending down, entered.

Immediately, I was seized with a deep feeling of anxiety. This interview, I was well aware, would decide my entire stay in Mustang, and tell me whether all the efforts I had expended to come here would be fruitful or not. The inhabitants of Lo, although friendly, were quite reluctant to answer the many inquisitive questions I had put to them on the history and customs of their land. For them, such information was the special domain of scholars, and the property of the king. To tell a foreigner such details as who was the first King of Mustang, for instance, would in their eyes be meddling with affairs of state. Later it was spelled out more clearly to me that the inhabitants feared that by revealing what was in the sacred domain of historical tradition, they might well be opening themselves to criticism from the king and the higher nobles. Such hesitation could, I knew, be overcome only by the king himself. At all cost I would have to obtain his approval. How, I wondered, could I explain to the king the purpose of my visit, and make him understand that I sought all this information for purely unpolitical reasons? Would he not take me for a spy, an evil thinker, or perhaps the advance agent of some distant political group, searching for new means of subjugating the area? I could hardly justify my curiosity in the eyes of the king or his population in terms of what this information meant to our Western scholars or universities. The present troubled times in Mustang, and an ancient tradition of seclusion, could well mean the refusal of my requests.

What would be the opinions and reactions of a king whose traditions and life were completely at variance with the modern world outside? For King Angun Tenzing Trandul, with whom I was about to have an audience, had little in common with any other monarch alive today. Only Marco Polo's reports of his visits to the ancient courts of central Asia and China could have briefed me as to what I might have to contend with.

There was no doubt that I was living a moment that had its parallel only in times long since past and that if Mustang was a forgotten state, forgotten also were the ways and means of dealing with the sovereign of such a state.

Raising my head, I found myself in a vast room barely lit by the pale

sunlight that filtered through the translucent paper glued against the latticed windows. As my eyes grew accustomed to the light, I noticed four painted wooden columns supporting the low roof straddled with beams decorated with yellow, blue, and golden designs. The floor of the room, like those of all houses in Mustang, was of hard-beaten earth.

To one side of the room, huddled together, were twenty-odd men, some sitting on carpets, others standing against a barren wall. All these men stared at me in silence. I realized that this was the king's court, composed of an odd assembly of nobles and peasants, men who had come to watch their monarch and present to him the innumerable small problems of his state. Facing this little crowd were two men seated cross-legged upon cushions set on low, wide, thronelike wooden chairs. For a moment I hesitated—which was King Angun Tenzing Trandul, King of Lo? Before both men were set small chest-like tables, upon which rested fine silver teacups. The younger of these men, seeing my hesitation, raised a sleeve of his chuba in the direction of the older man seated with his back to the window. Not a word was spoken, and nervously bending low and advancing in a crouched position with one arm extended, I deposited my kata upon the edge of the chest-like table at the feet of the king. Walking two paces backward, I then straightened myself, while with a little more elegance Tashi came forward and presented his own kata.

An uneasy silence followed. The old man did not move for a while, then with what I guessed to be a smile, showed us—with a rather regal gesture—two carpets by his side. We took our seats, I clumsily pulling in my legs under me, with some difficulty. In this position, having straightened out my chuba, I now sat facing the young man seated on the king's left side.

Still not a word was spoken, and I could feel the eyes of the court staring at us, while I quickly glanced at the king. He returned my look with an equally inquisitive stare, and the situation was slowly becoming embarrassing. In my mind I quickly registered the unusual surroundings. The king sat facing the group of men who were crowded on one side of the room, while four or five small dogs roamed about undisturbed between them and the king over a small open expanse of beaten clay floor. By the side of the king's table a dove cooed in a crude wooden cage. The room presented a startling combination of wealth and medieval primitivism. Nothing stirred but the dogs until, to my surprise, two chickens tiptoed rather disrespectfully around the king's throne, one hopping up by his side and fluffing its wings on the wooden back of the ornamented throne. This particular chicken worried me, for

from its perch it forgot itself upon the edge of the royal seat. Nobody seemed to worry, and the silence became heavier and heavier to bear. Above the young man before me I noted two modern military rifles hanging on the wall.

The king then leaned slightly, and picked up a beautiful silver jug ornamented with embossed designs, and having a narrow neck. Slowly bringing this jug to within a foot or so of his face, to my surprise—he spat in the jug! Having thus gracefully cleared his throat, the king uttered the simple words, “*Kare ré?*” (What is it?)

“We come to pay our respects to Your Majesty,” Tashi uttered shyly. We had agreed that he should speak first, as he was familiar with the high honorific language of Tibet, which is used when addressing nobles and court officials. This language differs substantially from the colloquial Tibetan that I knew. Tashi, I could see, was quite nervous, as he tried to hide his hands in the sleeves of my Western windbreaker, which unfortunately were not quite long enough. Hands are always embarrassing, and I was quite grateful to be able to conceal my own in my vast chuba.

The king was an elderly man of about sixty-five. Like all his subjects, he wore his hair long, braided and wound atop his head, tied together by a rather startling pink ribbon. He wore a simple, elegant, dark-red chuba of fine material, lined with curly lamb’s wool.

His face was that of a rather stern, tired-looking person, with heavy eyelids slightly drooping over kind, dark eyes. To break the silence, which now was unbearable, I ventured to say, “Excuse me, but I speak Tibetan like a peasant.” On hearing me, the king seemed slightly startled, and no doubt was a little shocked because I had addressed him in what could be considered a vulgar, disrespectful way, for I had used the language of his poorer subjects. A slight shuffle of surprise, however, and some whispering from the men who gaped at us, enabled me to guess the good effect of my having spoken in Tibetan. The king now smiled, and the ice was broken.

I relaxed a little, and the king asked where I came from. “I am French,” I said. A blank expression met my answer. “I come from very, very far away,” I explained.

“Is France near Lhasa, or near the island of America?” came the king’s strange question. There was no doubt that His Majesty had never seen an atlas and that, like most Tibetans, he was ignorant of the fact that the world is round. For Tibetans, the world is in the shape of a flat half moon, with its straight side facing north. This semicircle is called the Universe of the South, and is believed to be surrounded by

water in which float various islands. Tibetans who have heard of such barbaric places as England or America believe that these lands are small islands. The center of the world is considered to be Lhasa, which is placed in the upper center of the half disk. I could hardly imagine where France could be placed in this strange world concept, so I simply stated that it was "near England, but different." A rather concise definition of my homeland, that certainly would have met with little approval in the circles of General de Gaulle.

The king seemed satisfied, and asked me what was the purpose of my visit to his land. I let Tashi carry on from here, explaining that we had come "to visit your country, to study its history, and customs, and see its monasteries and their books." The king seemed delighted, while all those present nodded in approval. The court of men, who made our interview seem rather formal, were a mixed lot—all of them with sympathetic rugged faces, whether finely dressed nobles or dirty, rugged peasants. Among them were also a few children, along with the little fellow who had introduced us into the place. He was, I found out later, a sort of page, a kind of adopted child of the king's household, maybe an illegitimate son of one of the royal family.

This ragged child now came up to the king, and taking a large earthen teapot from a small stand full of red-hot charcoal, poured tea into the silver cups that had been placed before us upon low wooden tables. The king bade us drink, and with the usual forced smile by which I dissimulated my none too enthusiastic liking for Tibetan tea, I sipped a little, my heart filled with the dread certainty that no matter how much I drank, my cup would always be filled again to the brim immediately after I had relieved it of some of its nasty contents.

Having satisfied his curiosity as to our mission, the king abruptly asked me, "Will the Chinese invade Mustang?" I was rather taken aback by this question. I explained in my vulgar language that I was not a Nepalese government official but that "I should think that the Chinese would respect their treaty agreement with Nepal, which in 1961 set the Himalayan border so as to include Mustang as Nepalese territory."

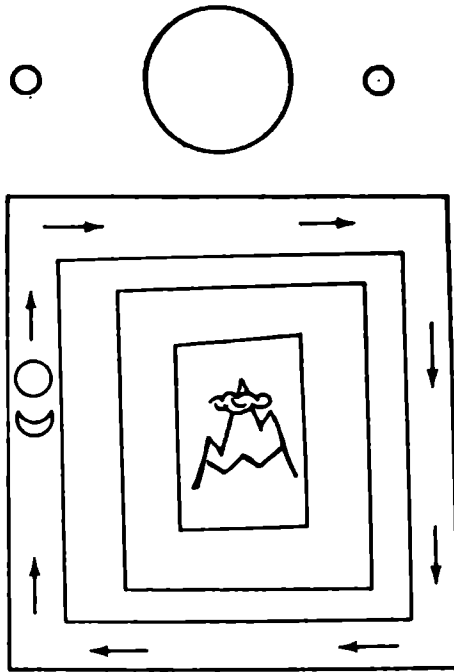
"I and my people are afraid," the king explained in a calm voice. "We hear the sound of great explosions from the other side of the

Map of the four Worlds as conceived in Lo, with that of the World of the South enlarged, showing the location of Mustang.

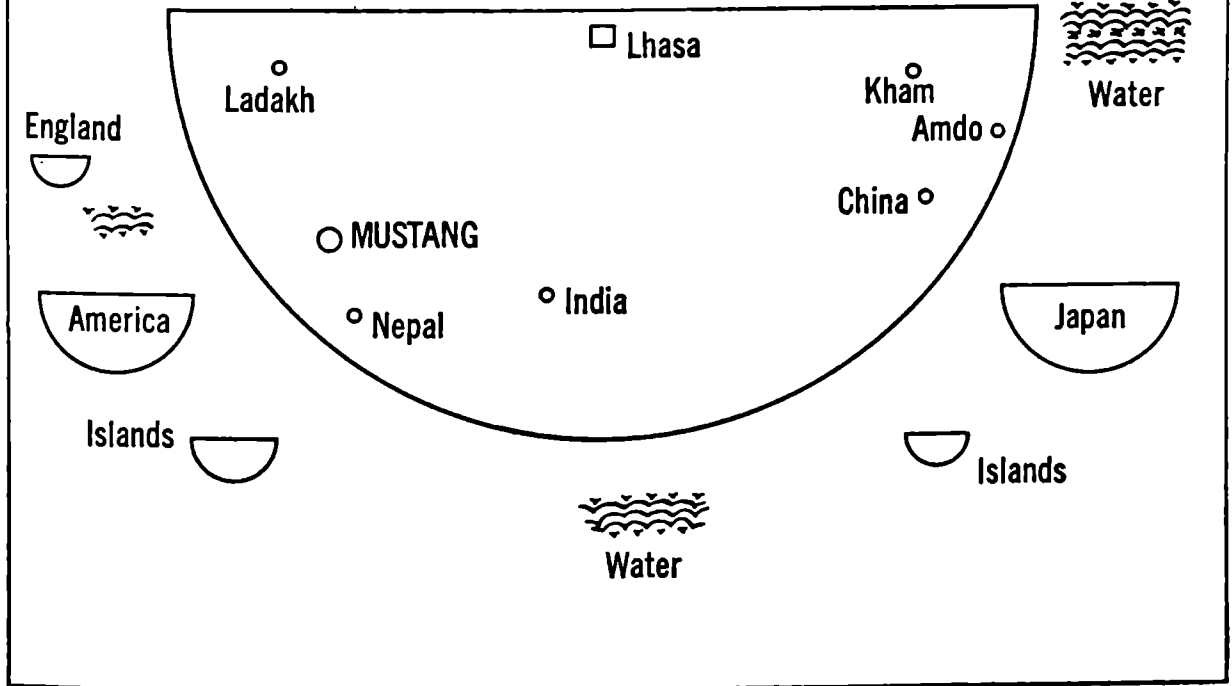
NORTH

WEST

EAST



World of the South



SOUTH

border, and they frighten us very much, bringing the hills crashing down."

The young man seated in front of me, who I now gathered was the king's youngest son and brother of the Lama of Tsarang, now spoke. He explained to me in detail that the Chinese were very bad people, because among other things they had stolen three of his horses. He had complained of this theft to the Chinese, only to be answered that the horses were no doubt stolen by the Khampas. I soon realized that there was considerable concern over the Chinese, who, the prince explained, had many soldiers at Liksé, just a few hours on horseback from Mustang's northern villages. At this camp had been seen trucks, rumbling monsters whose lights could be seen at night from a nearby hilltop.

Our conversation was interrupted by various members of the assembly present, who came forward and bowed before the king, lying down on the ground in the unusual Tibetan form of respectful salutation, as I had seen done in Geling. Many of those present, having satisfied their curiosity about us, left the assembly, while an old peasant came forward and sat a little to my side. He was one of the king's counselors or friends, for he now participated in our conversation.

Tibetans are never very much in a hurry, and after having been invited a dozen times to drink the salty Tibetan tea, we were brought little china plates, and offered cooked salad, of a type that I later discovered was a weed commonly found growing in the wheat and barley fields.

At first, conversation was slow and hesitant, but now we were all quite at ease, and the king's son, Jigme Dorje, proved quite talkative. He inquired whether we had found suitable lodgings, excusing himself for not having already provided us with good accommodations. He even went on to suggest that we stay in Trenkar as his guests, but this I politely refused, as I intended to remain in the heart of bustling Lo Mantang for my studies.

Unlike the courts of the classical Hindu and other Oriental monarchs, that of the King of Mustang was simple and crude. Nevertheless there arose from the room an atmosphere that did not lack grandeur. I realized that the courts of the early French and English kings in the eleventh century must have been little different from this one. Legends and fairy tales have caused us to forget that in Europe, before the Crusades and introduction of luxuries such as spices, carpets, ceramics, and silks from the East, the dukes and barons of Europe lived in bare stone rooms with straw on the floor and open fires; that horses slept in the same rooms as the nobles, who also must have had a few chickens

in their palace assembly rooms, as in Mustang. European kings and lords, before becoming the spoiled, sophisticated monarchs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were above all warlords, large landholders, and men close to their people, who drank out of cow's horns and ate on wooden plates. Few kings of France before 1300 could even read!

I felt strangely at ease after a while in such an environment. What should have startled me did not when I recalled all I had read of our own European history, which is so filled with such characters as the King of Mustang, and with such situations as border wars and horse-riding warriors. The Khampas, the Chinese, and the Tibetan-Indian crisis were seen in Mustang as but a repetition of what had been the history of the world in ancient times, and of what had been the history of medieval Europe. Only for me did this conflict assume any such great significance and consequence as that of an ideological war involving the entire world. For the King of Mustang the present trouble was a matter of monasteries being burned, of horses being stolen, together with an unexplained fear that great cannons and rumbling, wheeled monsters might spell something unusual for his arrow-shooting, religious people.

I learned from the king that he had had three sons. His eldest son, Angdu Nyingpo, had been crowned king fourteen years ago, but three years ago he had died. Now King Angun Tenzing Trandul ruled again, awaiting the appropriate time when he would again relinquish his throne to his youngest son—Jigme Dorje, as his second son was the lama of Tsarang.

His Majesty King Angun Tenzing Trandul had—I now learned—been quite frequently to Nepal and once to India. His journey to India had been to visit the holy shrines of the Buddhist faith, while in Kathmandu, though he rarely went there, he maintained friendly relations with the King of Nepal, whose brother Prince Basundhara, had come to Lo Mantang a year before my arrival to pay a visit to the lonely vassal state.

The king's few trips abroad had done little to change his habits and dress; the only modern thing about him was a pair of horn-rimmed glasses he had purchased in India. The only other modern objects I saw in the palace were the two rifles hanging on the wall. Mustang's isolation no doubt accounts for the lack of the slightest Western influence upon it. To its geographical remoteness must also be added the characteristic reluctance of Tibetan people to adopt Western ways. All around our planet, primitive and other peoples have swallowed hook,

line, and sinker all modern devices and influences. To appear Western is the greatest ambition of most of the inhabitants of underdeveloped countries, with the exception of Tibet. For in Tibet, although the *London Times* has reached Lhasa for a quarter of a century, and although the Dalai Lama was familiar with the radio and other Western technological developments, the country as a whole did not adopt Western practices. On the contrary, Tibet closed its borders to outsiders. If Tibet was forbidden country, it was not because the Himalayas were too difficult to cross but because efficient Tibetan governmental control was capable of keeping out inquisitive intruders. To refuse Western influence as such is not necessarily a virtue, but it has been most instrumental in keeping the Tibetan people's character and culture free from the degeneracy that has befallen many of the other cultures of Asia. Tibetans do not foolishly abandon their traditions to parody those of the "man of the West," nor have they sacrificed their cultural integrity in favor of importations from the West. This is because the Tibetan mentality is proud, traditional, and discriminating, the people having enough judgment and pride not to swallow everything new or different in a sheer desire to prove that they are what they are not. There is nothing quite so ridiculous as an Indian with Western clothes or a Japanese with a bowler hat and tailcoat. The King of Mustang, I could see, was not the type to copy Western ways. As for his subjects, they had never seen such common articles as a kerosene lamp or a box of matches; tinderboxes and flints produced fire when they needed it. When I repeated that I was interested in history, the king kindly agreed that I could later consult books he had on the subject. He then volunteered to answer any questions we might have about Mustang. This last offer was to prove rather embarrassing, for when I asked the monarch a few questions, he gave me good but incomplete answers, and I dared not insist on securing the details.

It was thus the king himself who first spoke to me of Ame Pal, who was soon to become for us the cornerstone of a riddle that took many weeks to solve. The king explained that the state of Lo was founded by a certain Ame Pal, a warrior who had built the great fortress of Ketcher Dzong, which we had seen standing upon the steep mountain dominating Lo Mantang. The king then proudly told us that he had the same "bones" as Ame Pal. In Tibet, when you have the same "bones" as someone, you are his descendant, and the king explained that he was the twenty-fourth ruler in direct line since Ame Pal.

"When did Ame Pal live?" I asked, curious to get more details.

"Very, very long ago," was the king's vague answer. I then took him

by surprise by asking who were the "Three Holies."—Angun Zampo, Ngorchen Kunga Zampo, and Kalun Zampo.

"Who spoke to you about them?" the king asked, startled.

We explained to him about our brief stay in Geling, and about how the "Three Holies" had ordered man to drink "because he was not a mule." The king smiled, adding that Angun Zampo was the son of Ame Pal, while Ngorchen Kunga Zampo was a great monk who was responsible for the bringing of religious teachings into Mustang many, many years ago. *Kalun* means minister, and the third Holy was the great minister of the king of those times. "The three men were so remarkable that we call them the Three Holies." I was now much excited, and asked the king for permission to write down what he was saying. This granted, I proceeded to question him further. There was one problem I wanted very much to solve: exactly when and why Mustang had become a vassal of Nepal. The books I had read gave conflicting theories about this, and even the Nepalese were unable to answer the question precisely.

By all logic, Mustang, being on the northern side of the Himalayas and of Buddhist faith, should have escaped Hindu control in the past. Dr. Snellgrove, in one of his books, stated that it was on the occasion of the first Tibetan-Nepalese War in 1792 that the principality of Mustang had come under Gurkha vassalage. But all I had observed so far seemed to discredit this declaration. Further, Dr. Snellgrove had said that after this war one of the sons of the King of Nepal had been named Raja of Mustang, and placed on its throne. Now, this was in direct contradiction to all those early chroniclers who spoke of the Raja of Mustang as a Bhot, a Tibetan, and there were no indications whatsoever that a Hindu monarch's son ever came to the throne or even that it was at the end of the Tibetan war that Mustang became a vassal to Nepal. The king gave me only a small clue. He explained how after twenty-four years of war Mustang had become indebted to the Raja of Jumla—Jumla being an ancient, mysterious Himalayan principality on the southern slopes of Mount Dhaulagiri—which once ruled over all western Nepal. Thus Mustang paid taxes to Jumla for some twenty years, then the Gurkha kings conquered Jumla, and thus Mustang transferred its tax payments to the Gurkhas of Nepal, and has continued them ever since. The Nepalese therefore never conquered Mustang; they accepted only the obligation to protect it, and received its tribute, as had Jumla. This occurred in 1795, after the Nepalese-Tibetan War. I was now getting some valuable information that later would lead to our solving many mysteries about Lo.

There was much more I wanted to learn, but I feared that my curiosity was straining the kindness of the king. However, he went on to explain that Mustang was divided into seven provinces, or rather seven districts, and that each district had its head, who collected the king's dues. On hearing this, I made the mistake of asking the king if I could see the various accounts or be told the amounts of the duties paid by the people of Mustang to the king. Having asked this, I saw by the king's looks that I had been overcurious. I stopped my questioning, realizing that I had better learn about all this from someone else.

In the course of our conversation, the king had beckoned a tall, handsome man to his side. This man was no doubt of a noble family, judging from his fine blue chuba and the gold and turquoise ring in his left ear. He came forward and sat at the foot of the king's low table. Turning to me, the king said he would give us a letter for the abbots of the monasteries of Mustang. The young noble took a great sheaf of brown paper, a silver inkwell, and a long silver tube out of his chuba pocket, and prepared to write to the king's dictation. From the long silver tube he extracted two pens of wood sharpened to a flat-edged point. With one of these he began writing with great application upon the corner of the table. The decree written down, the king took the large piece of paper, read it, and searched around for the royal seal. This could not be found, so Jigme Dorje handed him a small silver signet. This was pressed against a greasy red paste, and fixed at the bottom of the royal decree. The sheet of paper was then folded over and over to form a long, narrow coil about an inch thick, and this was given to me. It was only that evening that Tashi and I opened it. In fine Tibetan longhand written in ink made of smoke black and butter, we read:

“That in all of Lo by decree of the King the Frenchman who is two [Tashi and I] is to be shown by Lama or Trawa [monk] all things in Monasteries as they are ignorant of them, and be allowed to see books. The King of Lo said.”

Below this command was the seal of the royal household in red, a series of concentric circles surrounding a spiral.

Repeating “*Tudeche, tudeche*,” I thanked the king, slightly cupping my hands before my face. The king then mentioned that his son, Jigme Dorje, was ill. I was now quite proficient in elementary Tibetan medical terms, and I inquired about his trouble. On learning that he suffered severe stomach pains and that he had trouble keeping any food down, I rapidly diagnosed dysentery—a verdict I felt was con-

firmed when Jigme Dorje explained that he had been ill since he had come back from Kathmandu that winter. It is well known that tourists from the Northern Hemisphere often catch what is called the "local disease" when they go to the tropics, and this is also true of the Tibetans, who because of the healthy air and climate of their land, and its relative freedom from bacteria, readily catch dysentery every time they go down from their hills. In fact, in Tibetan the name for diarrhea is nearly synonymous with "going to India." The monks visiting the sacred Indian shrines catch it, and many die later on from this holy disease associated with pilgrimages. Jigme Dorje, who was thirty-five, had never been to India, but had been a few times to Kathmandu. I dwell on this rather unpleasant subject because of its upsetting consequence. I had in my baggage in Lo Mantang tablets of a well-known general intestinal disinfectant, highly recommended for all such troubles, against which I myself had not been immune during my stay in Kathmandu. Without thinking twice, I said I would bring some the following day.

We now prepared to depart, after learning from the king himself that I was the first foreigner to have been granted permission to stay at length in his kingdom. I expressed my gratitude for this privilege, and then tried to leave. I say "tried to leave" because I had spent hours with my legs tucked under me, and one of them now refused to move. It was with a bad limp and in paralyzing pain that I scrambled up, took from my chuba the cumbersome bottle of whiskey I had put there, then struggling along on my good leg made my way to the king's desk and deposited my bottle there with a reference to its being "medicine for the heart." Walking backward, Tashi and I made for the door.

— Walls of Lo Mantang

OUTSIDE, IN THE sunlight, I hardly dared believe the success of our audience with the monarch of the "highest kingdom on earth," the last surviving Tibetan ruler of Asia, the world's last feudal king. So far all had gone very well, and we had another interview arranged for the following day, as well as a promise that we might consult books on the land. What more could I wish for? Tashi gave me his own impressions of our interview. He found, so he said, the king not "very educated," and that he spoke with a strong "accent of Lo." Apart from this, he had found the interview interesting, reminding him only too much of his own country and Lhasa. According to Tashi, everything in Mustang was similar to Tibet, except that there were too many stones, not enough greenery, and everyone was dirty and rather barbaric. Tashi himself, I now knew, was of the best education by Tibetan standards, and was rather intolerant of the cruder types of people we were meeting in this godforsaken region, so much more "backward," as he said, than Lhasa. Lhasa after all had a tennis court, a market with Western goods, and electricity in some houses, plus bicycles and one car, brought to the Tibetan capital in 1937. Mustang, on the other hand, was ignorant of the slightest of these "modern things."

At the palace gate we found our ponies, which we were instructed to turn over to Pemba in Lo Mantang. With shouts of joy I galloped ahead of Tashi, unaware that my gaiety was soon to be marred by strange happenings at the palace.

I noticed with what dexterity the small ponies galloped over the stony tracks, which would have tripped up any horse from the West. On my first expedition to the Himalayas, I had already had the opportunity of admiring the skillful gait of the small Tibetan horses, and

their tremendous resistance. I reflected how appropriate it was that the word "mustang" was known throughout the Western world as the name for the wild North American pony. The name "Mustang" was also given in the Second World War to the fighter-plane companion of the Spitfire, and now Ford had just produced a sports car called the Mustang. While people in Detroit had no idea that there existed a small kingdom called Mustang, the King of Mustang had never heard of the Ford Motor factory, nor was he ever likely to hear of it. At one time I had wondered whether the name "mustang," for the wild horse of North America, might not have been derived from the fame of the horses of Lo Mantang. But this idea, I soon found out, could not be correct, as the name "mustang" was used for the wild horse before the name "Mantang" was deformed into "Mustang" in 1850. "Mustang" comes from the Spanish word *mostrengo*—wild one. As for the quality of the local horses in Mustang, I learned from the king's son that the best of them came from the Amdo region of Sining in northeastern Tibet.

There was little doubt in my mind that my stay would be fruitful and exciting. Mustang, I realized, was truly an independent cultural unit, a small nation completely untouched and unspoiled, one of the last lands of our planet to have survived up until 1964 unexplored and unstudied. I now hoped that, thanks to the little scroll I had in my pocket, the history of this land would soon be revealed to me. I did not realize the strange problems I would be up against, for I had momentarily forgotten the great barrier of time that separated me from this country—still steeped deeply in superstition and the mentality of the past, and that in Mustang even the king was ignorant that the world was round. . . .

Rapidly Lo Mantang came into sight, its great walls presenting from the north a hostile barrier. Once through the gate, the cold wind dropped, and we were relieved to find that Calay had some food ready for us.

The following morning we woke up to find that it was freezing. Calay came to complain of the cold, and was satisfied only when I gave him a warm shirt of my own. We realized that our chapel bedroom was more drafty than we had thought. Further, to our disgust, it was full of rats, pious religious rats and mice who thrived on the barley grain that every night would be scattered about the altar as religious offerings. There was little we felt we could do about this. The location of our house was ideal for getting to know intimately the town, its people, and life; and the rats, we felt, like the cold, were but one more un-

pleasantness we would have to put up with. Going on an expedition, as I had already noted earlier, is like doing penance in a monastery. In many ways my life was that of an ascetic: the poor food, the hard bed, the lack of comfort and other inconveniences. After years of living in Western tameness, I felt deeply the rigors and hardships of my new situation. In a way I could not help but like these hardships—which gave me a new sense of the true values of life. I began to appreciate the beauty of a drink of cold, clear water, the frugal simplicity of a monastic diet of plain rice, the pleasure of getting up at the crack of dawn. One by one I got rid of the customs and habits that had been mine in the past, except for smoking; even in this I had to refrain a great deal, as to smoke in a house in Lo is considered sinful, while to do so before a monk is very, very bad indeed. The Tibetans are perhaps one of the only peoples today not to be afflicted with this expensive habit. I nevertheless clung to my cigarettes as a great treat.

I soon discovered that this life of small hardships is the common fare of the Lobas, who live a life quite devoid of excessive pleasures. This austerity, though, is never marred by sad faces, and one of the characteristics of the people with whom I now lived was their love of laughter, and their propensity for making jokes. I was, naturally, the victim of many of these jokes; good-natured laughter greeted all the little mistakes I made—wearing my chuba wrongly, or pronouncing words with a funny accent. To my pleasure I discovered that the local people expected me to be like themselves. For the most part, they had never seen Europeans. Toni Hagen, Professor Tucci, and the few other persons who had come here did not stay long enough to be seen by everyone; in fact I was surprised to discover how largely unnoticed their brief passages had gone. Their journeys having been made some time before mine, few children had ever seen a white face. It was thus my face that attracted more jokes and attention than anything in my customs and habits, which by now I was slowly molding to those of the Lobas.

I would often grab, for fun, disrespectful boys who would drop, as I passed, the words “Long Nose” or “Yellow Eyes.” To the Tibetans and many of what we call the yellow race, we Westerners are known as “yellow eyes” for our pale eyes. As for being called “Long Nose,” this appellation was just an extension of what had been whispered at me when I was young in boarding schools in France, England, and Canada, my family having endowed me with a nasal appendage that, though hardly worth its name in comparison with Cyrano’s, certainly

deserved to be qualified as large and handsome. I now, more than ever, was reminded of the prominent role it played in my face.

Having found no horses to rent to return to the king's palace, for we had gotten up late and they had already been driven out of town to graze, I decided with Tashi to go out to Trenkar on foot. There is nothing like walking to take in the charm and dimensions of a place, and strangely enough I already missed our long marches. I was now in top physical condition, and felt that if necessary I could walk around the world. This was a condition that unfortunately was not going to last. Till now I had been too involved in menial preoccupations and daily routine to realize what the effects of altitude were upon me. Living at 13,000 feet had, I soon discovered, disadvantages other than the fact that water would boil at a low temperature.

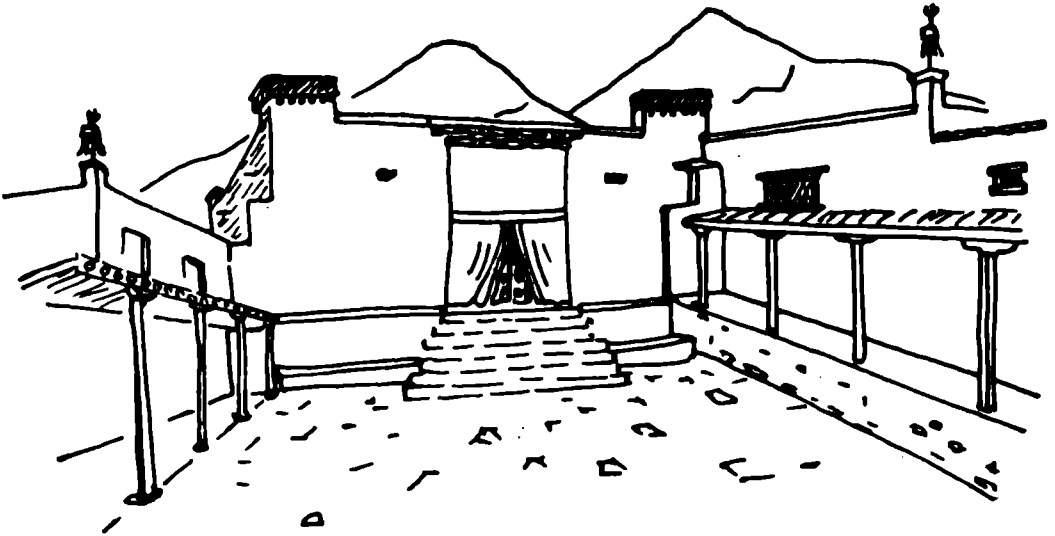
The walk to Trenkar is not a long one; nevertheless in the cold thin air it soon proved quite strenuous. Passing the main gate of the city, we walked completely around the town, noting that its great wall was in fairly good condition. From the outside it was impossible to guess that the high wall sheltered cozy houses. Every fifty yards or so a great square tower protruded from the wall, while a small ledge on its summit allowed one to walk all around the edge on the inside. At the southwest corner, on the outside, were two mighty trees of the willow family, the only ones visible for miles around; the scarcity of trees was well confirmed by the fact that these two leafy monsters both had names by which they were referred to lovingly by the city's inhabitants. In their great branches sat gigantic ravens, the size of large eagles. The raven is one of the few birds to be found at the highest altitudes in the Himalayas. These birds have the strangest of all cries, resembling the vibrations of a kettle drum. There were other birds in the town, mostly small sparrows whose chirps would greet us at dawn. These sparrows were quite domesticated and lived only in the villages and towns of Mustang, as nowhere outside these inhabited spots could they be expected to find grain and shelter. The sparrows, like most of the other birds we saw during our stay, were migratory, birds being apparently more sensible than men; they could not stand to live too long in such an arid place. Tibetans and the Lobas have a particular affection for animals and birds. Because of the belief that they are low reincarnations of human beings, they are never, or very rarely, killed. Consequently, nearly all animals become quite tame, animals that we in the West, with our love of shooting, have forced to become wild. In Mustang, whether it be doves, sparrows, or ravens, all these birds would eat out of your hand or stand within inches of humans, going

about their own business with confidence. The migration of birds is used by the inhabitants of Mustang to determine the seasons, and everyone there knows what month it is according to what feathers are fluttering around. This harmony between men and animals is one of the most touching and pleasant aspects of the Tibetan area. Although often crude and rough in appearance, the Lobas have been polished to a gentle mildness by their religion. The sturdiest of muleteers could rarely be seen beating their animals. In fact all animals, whether the great black mastiffs or horses, were all well treated, fed, and cared for, the Tibetans lacking the brutal spitefulness of so many other peoples, who seem to avenge their own wretchedness and misery by taking it out on donkeys and other animals, which are heartlessly beaten.

The general kindness and softness of customs in Mustang were soon to strike me as exceptional. Apart from occasional disputes between husband and wife, which like family rows all around the world would bring raised voices, I never heard a person scream or shout; even the children had very civilized manners. In fact the only person I knew to get consistently angry in Lo Mantang was myself, and Tibetans consider bad temper as a characteristic of Westerners. Take, for example, the reactions of a docile European to missing his train; he will invariably swear under his breath. Who in our lands can stand to be frustrated without giving vent to anger? I soon had to master my own temper when, having raised my voice against one of the innumerable people who stopped to stare at me and my small party, I heard myself told by a peasant: "I cannot understand; you are a great man, how is it that small things like myself deserve your wrath?" After that, I learned to be tolerant, realizing that by getting mad I was only debasing myself and that it was stupid to be bothered by trivialities.

Having left the flat glacier plain on which stood the capital, we now made our way along a small irrigation canal, which passed over crude aqueducts and wound a sinuous path along the edge of a steep ridge. This was the waterway that brought to the city fields the necessary water for the growing of the crops. Irrigation canals and ditches are elaborate affairs in Mustang, where all flat land lies above the deep gorges in which run the torrents of melted snow, the only water to be found in the otherwise arid mountains. All towns and villages, except Trenkar and the northernmost parts of Mustang, are situated above the water level, and it is one of the people's most troublesome burdens to maintain these life-giving irrigation ditches. I was later to see some remarkable feats of engineering to keep small villages supplied with

water. The canal that irrigated the fields of the capital was itself four miles long. Drinking water, on the other hand, was fetched daily by the women from the deep ravine below the town fields.



The interior courtyard of the monastery of Namgyal.

As on the previous day, we passed on our way to Trenkar the massive rock mountain on which perched the innumerable white cells of the monastery of Namgyal, whose red-painted main chapel dominated the surrounding landscape. Climbing up and behind this rock promontory, we found ourselves again upon the flat, wide valley that marks the top of Mustang. Here we could see, to our left, at the foot of unnamed snow peaks, the village of Trenkar, while to our right and north, about four miles distant, were two other small villages.

Despite my resolve, I lost my temper, and Tashi was outraged himself, when we were kept waiting more than half an hour outside the palace doors. Finally we were allowed in, and proceeded to the throne room. We found the king and his son seated as before upon their great cushioned thrones. This time there were fewer witnesses to our interview than on the first day. The king was quite friendly, and I gave his son, who was indeed looking quite sick, the pills I had promised. All seemed to be going well, but when we asked the king if we could see the books he had spoken to us about the day before, he told us that they were not history books, that anyhow they were only books of legends, and that he had nothing accurate about his kingdom. He then

added again that he would answer all our questions. I was very taken aback by this sudden change, and most disappointed that we were not shown the promised books. Was the king lying, or was it true that he had no history books? We were hardly in a position to contradict our royal host. To the questions we now put to His Majesty, we received only rather inaccurate answers, and more than ever my curiosity was stung as to the true and exact history of Mustang. The king for the first time mentioned to us that in very ancient times there had existed in Mustang four great forts in the hands of warring chieftains. These ruined forts could still be seen, and their names had been preserved, but who had lived in them nobody could tell us. Whether they had been inhabited by Tibetans or Hindus we could not find out; all we were told was that Ame Pal had conquered these forts, and unified all these chieftains to form Lo. We left the king with mixed sentiments, worried as to why he had lied to us the previous day, and afraid that for some unknown reason we had fallen into disfavor. I tried to find out what Tashi thought of all this, but all he could answer, in a rather superior voice, was that the king was "not a learned man" and that we had better try to get our answers from the monks of the monasteries.

On our way back, we turned up toward the monastery of Namgyal, perched upon its great rocky bastion overlooking Lo Mantang. Reaching a saddle at the foot of the monastery, we found ourselves in a small hamlet of spotless white houses built about an impressive mansion, large and rectangular. This house, we learned, belonged to the village Gamba—the local lord, a man of wealth. Climbing up a stony path, we reached the entrance to the monastery. Here great dogs barked at us, and we kept them at bay by throwing stones until a ragged old monk, dressed in a dark red cloak, came hobbling toward us. He was the doorkeeper, and willingly let us into the monastery.

This was composed of ten little cell-like houses set upon the side of the great hill surrounding a central "Tso-khang"—the main reunion temple. We approached this through a wooden door leading into a vast stone-paved yard on which the assembly hall opened through a great porch. As in Tsarang, a large, dark-brown yak-wool curtain sheltered the porch, in whose recess were elaborate frescoes, recently painted. When we inquired how many monks there were in the monastery, we were told that there were fifty-two. As we could not see a soul around the place, we asked where they were. It was explained to us that the monks (*trawas*) all lived at their homes, coming to the monastery only on occasions when it was their turn for duty, or on other special occa-

sions, so that in fact there were only four monks living in permanent residence all year round.

This monastery was of the Ngorpa sect, a subgroup of the great Sakyapa sect of Tibet, mostly famous for its having converted Kublai Khan (Marco Polo's host), and spreading Tibetan Buddhism to Mongolia. The Sakyapa is one of the great ancient sects of Tibet, the oldest of which is the "Old One," the Ningmapa sect. These various religious groups are very similar in their teachings; only the student of the intricate Tibetan Tantric religion can note the differences between them. In terms of doctrine, the principal distinction between, say, the older sects such as the Sakyapa or Ningmapa, and the reformed sect of the Dalai Lama, which is the Gelupa, is that the older sects—known as the Red Hats—admit that since phenomenal existence is but an illusion, life is itself hardly important. Such views allowed many abuses to seep into the Sakyapa and the Ningmapa sects; monks began eating excrement and doing everything the wrong way round. Among other things, some of these old sects allowed certain of their lamas to marry. The Gelupa (Yellow Hats) sect, which is of more recent creation and to which a large majority of Tibetans belong, came into being in a reformation movement against these spiritual abuses, to reaffirm a religious conduct better adapted to the common man. This reformed (Yellow Hat) sect admitted that life was an illusion, but held that as such it should nevertheless be bound by strict laws, which would be valid for us poor humans in our illusory state of man; and that salvation could also be achieved by good and virtuous practices of devotion. Mustang had not felt the effects of the reforms that had swept Tibet since the fourteenth century, as we encountered only monasteries of the Sakyapa sect, and its subgroup the Ngorpa, with the exception of three: one of recent creation that had reverted to the ancient Ningmapa sect, one of the Kadjupa, and one, of all things, of the little-known Drukpa sect—in other words of the sect of Bhutan!

Inside the assembly hall, we were surprised to see that all the walls had been recently painted with elaborate frescoes. These were done in very bright, shiny paint, and represented countless figures of famous lamas, divinities, and demons, arranged around five large figures representing Buddha in different positions and identities. In these Buddhas, in fact, no attempt is made to represent the living Buddha of India, but rather a notion of Buddhahood in general—as in Tibet, there is little consideration for the historical Buddha, representations of seated god-like figures being symbols of the doctrine more than of any particular man. The five Buddhas are associated with the four cardinal points and

the center of the world, thus expressing the universality of Buddhahood. In Tibet the number five is considered sacred, and many religious symbols are arranged in groups of five. Another sacred number is 108; thus the Tibetan scriptures (Kanjur) are arranged in 108 volumes. The sacred Kanjur was set in the Namgyal Gumpa behind the main altar in pigeonhole-like niches, forming a checkered background to the wooden figures of famous monks that lined the altar. The number of beads in the Tibetan rosary is also 108, and many women in Tibet and Mustang plait their hair in 108 small strands, thus incorporating the sacred number into their persons.

In a corner of the temple we found a large wooden chest in which were neatly stacked thirty volumes bound in wood. These were the annals of Sakya, the religious history of this ancient Tibetan sect, a set of volumes that I later learned in Europe are very rare. The books were unfortunately too numerous for us to read, and held too sacred for us to be allowed to buy them. We cross-questioned the old keeper of the monastery, but found to our disappointment that he was a rather ignorant old fellow, who knew little about the history of his monastery or even about the intricacies of the doctrine to which he had devoted his life. Before taking our leave we gave him a few Nepalese rupees, in exchange for which we were each given a handful of barley to throw on the altar while the monk muttered prayers and banged on a large drum. Having performed this rite, we bade the old fellow goodbye, intending to return and examine this large monastery more thoroughly.

Scrambling down the barren, dusty yellow hill, we made our way to the deep ravine that runs along the north wall of Lo Mantang, hastily climbing up the other side and through the gateway into the windless shelter of the town.

My arrival in Lo Mantang, and my being the first foreigner ever to settle there, caused a great commotion among the town's inhabitants. Our names were on everybody's lips, and everyone wanted to come and look at us. The old lady who owned our house was only too pleased by the new popularity we brought to her lodgings, and would let anyone in "to have a look." Our privacy was perpetually invaded by men, women, monks, and children who scrambled up to our sunny terrace, sat cross-legged in one corner, and stared at us—with charming smiles. Laughter and little gasps of amazement, along with running commentaries, accompanied all our actions. At first I found this most annoying and tried to scare away these spectators by throwing them nasty looks, but this proved quite ineffective, as every time I turned an angry face at them, they simply smiled back—putting out their tongues

in respect—and then carried on with their comments about my equipment, my servants, and the strange objects that composed my baggage. I soon became used to my celebrity and to leading a “public life.” I even began to like our “cinema crowd,” which followed us practically everywhere we went.

In the shelter of the great wall of Lo's capital, I set up a plan of studies and a schedule for my investigations. Each morning I would leave the town before the wind became too strong, and explore the countryside and the ruins of ancient forts that surrounded the city. In the afternoons I would visit various artisans or dignitaries, while my evenings were spent in the company of acquaintances—in their houses or in mine. In establishing my schedule, I discovered that in Mustang Sundays are unknown—there is no periodical day of rest for the inhabitants, as there is in other countries. Life in Mustang is regulated only by the seasons, and the numerous religious festival days scattered unevenly around the year. Mustang, like Tibet, has two calendars—the official lunar calendar that begins in February and has twelve months of thirty days, and an agricultural calendar that varies from region to region, southern Mustang having a different agricultural calendar from the northern areas around Lo Mantang. As the lunar calendar is shorter than the solar year, a month is added every three years to make up the difference. I had arrived in Lo Mantang on the last day of the third lunar month, which in the agricultural calendar was already the fourth month.

The day after I arrived, I made friends with Pemba. I had met him first when he came to inform us that the king had sent two horses to bring us to the summer palace. It was sympathy on sight, and our friendship was much increased by the fact that Pemba and I were the same age and shared the same passion for anthropology; that is, Pemba was as interested in the customs of his land as I was. Pemba was a true self-made scholar, a rare achievement in a land where most people study and read only as a matter of religious practice and principle. Pemba was really brilliant, and his inquisitive mind had brought him to undertake all kinds of studies and research about Lo—on his own.

Pemba's father had recently died, leaving his son a large house just next to ours, in fact so close that we could speak to each other from our rooftop terraces. Two dozen small fields about Lo Mantang gave Pemba sufficient wealth to be comfortable by local standards, and what with two baby daughters and an exceedingly pretty wife, Pemba had everything one could want to be happy. Happy Pemba certainly was, always joking, laughing, and in a good mood, liking good beer,

and thoroughly enjoying life. He was in a way similar to and yet very different from Tashi—of pleasant disposition, Tashi was nevertheless a little too serious ever to be entirely relaxed, while Pemba never seemed to have a care or a worry. On the other hand, Pemba's short frame and round face contrasted with Tashi's slim, elegant build.

Pemba was of a noble family, a social advantage that gave him more privileges than actual wealth. The greatest of these privileges, as Pemba told me jokingly, was that he could "marry one of the king's daughters." But, as he explained, the four daughters of King Angun were all pretty ugly and ten years older than he, besides being married, so as far as Pemba could see, that privilege did him little good. Another of the privileges that fell to Pemba as a member of the Lumbo (Duke) class was that he could own a three-story house in Lo Mantang, while the ordinary man could have only a two-story house not exceeding the great city wall in height.

Thus Pemba's house had three stories, the third being, like our own, composed of a chapel and annex room opening onto the roof. Such privileges and distinctions, I later discovered, spread out all through the population, which is segmented into over thirteen different classes, each with special duties to the crown, and certain privileges. The social organization of Mustang was on the whole fairly democratic despite its feudal character. There is in Mustang very little difference in behavior between high-ranking people and low-ranking peasants, with the exception of the monks and lamas, who form a world apart. Mustang is much too small and poor to support a very wealthy aristocracy or to know such social cleavages as exist in Europe or in other lands of Asia where caste spells night and day between various individuals.

Pemba was clever and intelligent, and had since childhood been very curious about everything. As soon as he had learned to read, he had devoured every book he could lay his hands on.

There are in Tibet, and also in Mustang, a surprising number of books; they are found in every house and in great quantities in monasteries and the homes of nobles. Some of these are manuscripts, others printed with wood blocks. Nearly all are of a religious nature—sacred texts and their commentaries, listings of divinities, and prayers for all and every occasion—but there are also countless biographies of monks that give a great deal of information about life in past times, along with guidebooks for pilgrimages, storybooks, and books of poetry, not to mention history books—although these are quite rare.

Pemba had a fine collection of storybooks full of imaginative and colorful tales, many of which he later told me as we sat about our fire

drinking sugary "Western tea." He was also interested in medicine, having read many treatises and worked with the two "doctors" of Lo Mantang. He had considered becoming a doctor himself, but had abandoned this "because it took me too much time to go out searching for the various herbs, insects, and minerals necessary for this intricate trade." Pemba read for pleasure everything he could find, and this had increased his knowledge of his own land and his culture. Unlike the monks, who tend to be single-minded, he had an amazing scope of knowledge. He also wrote books, mostly for his own children, illustrating them with marvelous drawings done in simple, perspectiveless, traditional Tibetan style.

Pemba had never left Mustang, a fact rather surprising since I discovered later that nearly all the people of Lo—for trade or other reasons—traveled a lot into Tibet and Nepal, while most aristocrats go to study in Lhasa when they are young. He nevertheless had a great curiosity about my land, equal to that which I had about his country and its customs, and we soon became inseparable.

To Pemba I owe much of the insight I was to get into Lo Mantang. Gay and handsome, always laughing, Pemba was friendly with everybody in town, and through him I rapidly got to know practically every family. This was a fairly easy proposition since there were only 152 families within the city walls; as each family included grandparents and children, with occasionally certain servants, there were about a thousand inhabitants in all.

While many Lobas are quite tall, Pemba was short; his face had a rather angelic look with its broad features fringed by his long black hair wound around his head. As for his clothes, they were never the same two days in a row. Pemba's chubas and boots would change color and quality from one day to the next. At first I thought that this was because he had a very large wardrobe, but soon I realized that this was one of Pemba's manias; he had a passion for buying and selling clothes and novelties, carrying on at all times a small trade with his friends.

This strange habit of his was, I soon found out, shared by many of the young aristocrats of Mustang. There are in the Kingdom of Lo no shops or stores, and while the majority of the people make their own clothes, the wealthy aristocrats have a great liking for finer clothes imported from Lhasa or other distant regions of Tibet. As Lo Mantang is too small to justify being visited by merchants specializing in luxurious chubas or elaborate boots, all these fine articles are rare. The prestige of clothes from "abroad" (Chinese Tibet) is nevertheless so great that

a constant small business is carried on among the noble families of the country, who exchange among themselves the finer pieces of clothing that they possess.

As I had already noted, everybody is a trader at heart in the Himalayas, and ready to sell his shirt to buy a new pair of boots from a passing trader or from a friend. This mania is easily explained by the fact that there being no markets where these items may be bought new, the only chance one has of possessing such goods from afar is to buy them from anybody you meet who has what you want. This petty hand-to-hand trading accounts for the wide distribution inside Tibet of the various goods of each region. This trade extends also to small household objects such as silver teacups and their stands, brass kettles, wooden drinking jugs, and so on—all those objects that are made only in specific areas, often separated from one another by hundreds of miles. In Lo there are practically no artisans, while in Tibet artisans are far and few between, as in the Europe of the Middle Ages, where knives came from Toledo or Sheffield, porcelain from Saxony, silk from China, glass from Venice. Because of the distances between producers and eventual consumers of luxury goods, and because of the absence of distribution outlets, the cost of the slightest manufactured object from afar is very great in Mustang, as it was in ancient times in Europe. I was amazed to discover how much Pemba paid for his clothes. There is in Tibet a certain snobbery over luxury goods. The best Tibetan boots, Pemba told me, are made by Chinese bootmakers settled in Kalimpong in India; the silks come from China; the brass pots from Eastern Tibet; the silver cups and jewelry are made by Nepalese artisans working in Lhasa, every region having its specialty famous all over Tibet.

Pemba was a shrewd small-time trader, and frequently would tell me with great joy how he had made a shocking profit on a coat he had bought for practically nothing and then sold to his best friend for ten times what he had paid for it. At first I considered such "bargains" as outright crookedness, but soon I found that the people who were thus robbed considered their bad luck as very funny—bargaining being a social game that knew no rules and no such thing as "fair prices"; in fact, no object in Lo had a true price! Maybe a pair of boots bought in Lhasa had cost only 20 tranka (a tranka is a silver coin used in the Himalayas and minted in Lhasa, worth about the same as an Indian rupee, or 12 cents) but to buy such a pair in Mustang, either you would have to go to Lhasa—a four-month journey involving considerable cost and danger—or you had to be ready to pay the price asked, which of course would depend on how much you wanted the boots

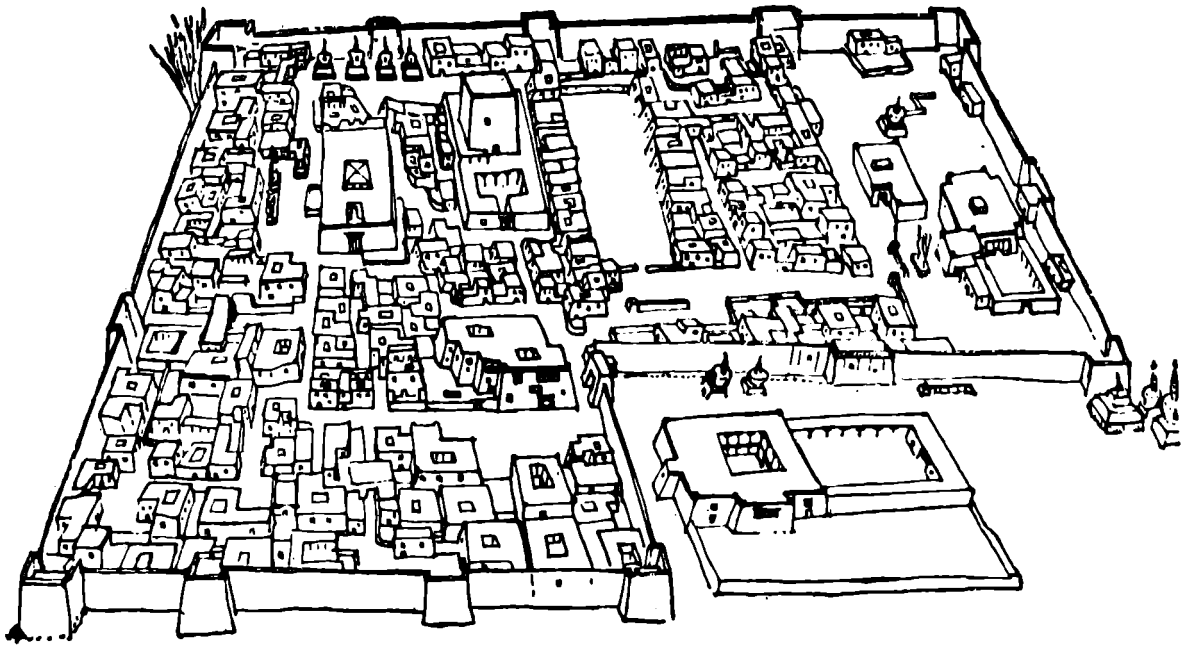
rather than on any true value basis. The mechanics of such business, I must admit, were more difficult for me to grasp than they had been for Marco Polo, who like any self-respecting Venetian knew how to make outrageous profits, and was never bothered by such modern gimmicks as "fair-trade prices."






Books are also a precious item, much sought after and frequently exchanged. Tibetan books are mostly printed in the monasteries of eastern and western Tibet, many, many miles away from Lo. They are very, very expensive. The cheapest way for the local people to buy a book is to purchase great reams of rough Tibetan paper made in southern Tibet or Bhutan, then walk for months to the various monasteries who have the wood-carved text plates, and there pay monks to print the books on their own paper.

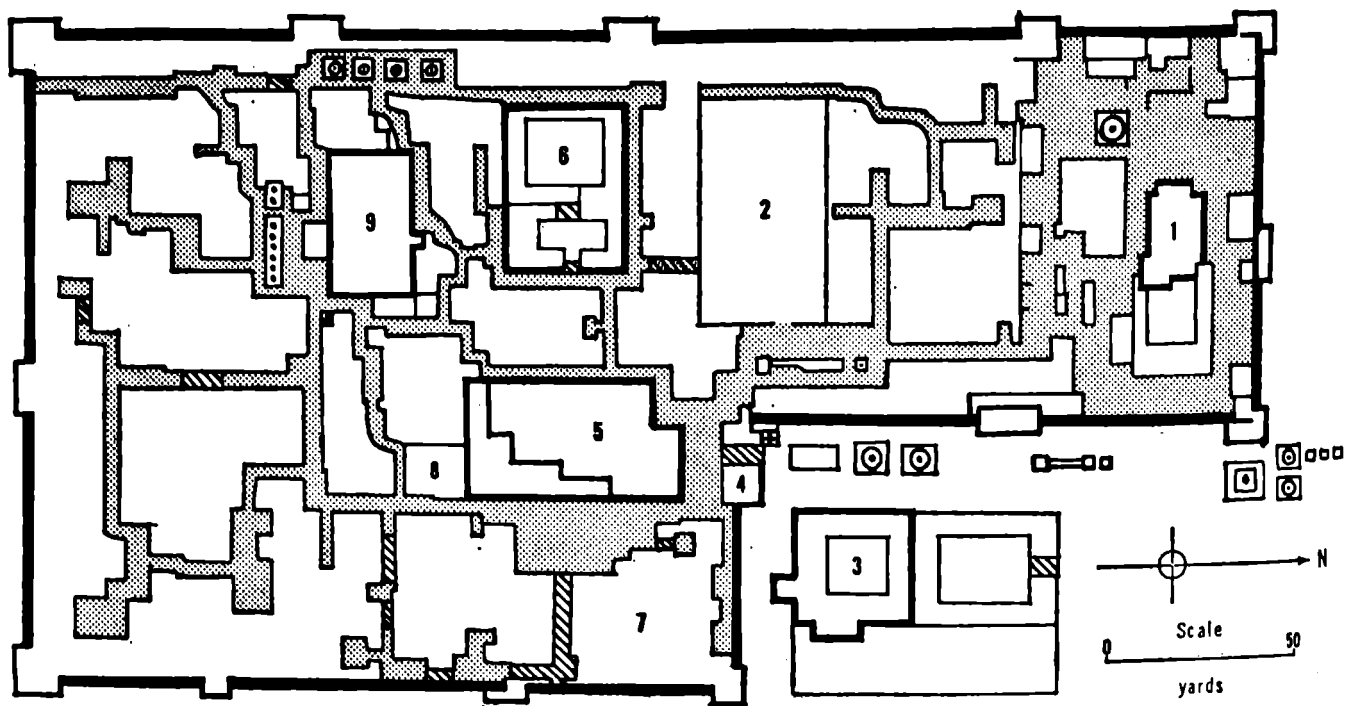
Through Pemba I learned all about these market techniques, and very much more. I soon spent most of my days in Pemba's company, and with Tashi we formed a trio that never stopped laughing. I found to my own surprise that I was now acting practically like a Tibetan, and little in my behavior or language set me apart from my two friends.

Pemba knew a lot also about the history of Lo, and with him—like detectives—Tashi and I were able to piece together slowly the amazing story of the land. Pemba had gathered much of his historical knowledge because of his great love—his wife, Nyma.

Before she was married, Nyma had been the lady-in-waiting to the ex-Queen of Mustang, the wife of King Angun's eldest son, the late King Angdu Nyingpo, who had died six years before my arrival. According to age-old custom, all the queens of Mustang came from Tibet. The ex-queen (who after the death of her husband had gone to live with her two daughters in Kathmandu) when she had come to Lo had brought along with her a young girl from her home town of Shigatse. As Pemba explained to me, "I immediately noticed her, because she was better dressed and more beautiful than the Loba girls." Pemba fell in love with Nyma, and in Tibet there is no prejudice against a love marriage. The queen, nevertheless, wanted to test Pemba to see if he was worthy of Nyma. For this the king hired him to work at the palace as a secretary, to help him with official business. Thus for a year Pemba worked at the late king's residence in the palace outside the walls, where now the checkpoint was housed. There he increased his knowledge of his country, while the queen kept a close eye on him, and finding him intelligent—which he indeed was—she allowed him to marry Nyma.



ABOVE: *Lo Mantang*. BELOW: *Plan of Lo Mantang*. (1) *New Monastery*, (2) *Monastic Field*, (3) *Check Post Palace*, (4) *Town's only door*, (5) *King's Palace*, (6) *Hall of gigantic statue*, (7) *Tsewan Rinzing's house*, (8) *Author's residence*, (9) *Assembly Hall*. [KEY:  *Alleys*,  *passage ways beneath houses*,   *chortens*,  *prayer wheels*.]



Nyma was as sweet as could be, truly charming, and I cannot help but recall Pemba and his wife as a true example of a handsome, happy couple. Perhaps I should here note a fact that surprised me a great deal in Mustang. Whereas in other parts of Asia women are treated very often like slaves, and segregated when not locked up, in Tibetan countries women hold a very high rank in society, being in many respects practically the equals of men. Women often hold official positions in the administration of villages, and even of the state (Tibetan queens having played leading roles in the land's history). They also participate in all social functions, which lends to daily life in the Himalayas a charm that is absent in many Asiatic countries. As a Frenchman I was naturally very appreciative of this trait of Tibetan culture, a true sign of civilization.

With Pemba and Tashi, I set about investigating the fortress city in which we lived. I wanted to begin my work by making a detailed plan of the town. I was never a cartographer or much of a draftsman, but from this first attempt at mapping, I soon discovered that the hardest type of city to map is a walled city. Because of the wall around Lo Mantang, nearly every street and small alley was a dead end. Further, because of the wall, we could never get an outsider's point of view on exactly how the little alleys twisted and twirled about the tightly packed houses. Added to all this was the problem of the passageways that disappeared under houses in dark, narrow tunnels, then would bend before emerging into the daylight, leaving me at a loss to figure exactly where I stood.

Many of my first days in the town were thus spent pacing every dead end, pencil in hand, trying to remember in which direction I was facing and how to draw the paths in my notebook. This arduous task, however, had its rewards, as very soon I knew exactly each little alley and every house of the town, meeting all its inhabitants as crowds of onlookers gathered around me in each street to look at my "drawings." The alleys, I soon discovered, were like the legs of a spider tied into knots. This being, I realize, a rather vague description, one had better look at the map. The contours of the town are very simple, Lo Mantang being a great rectangle, 320 yards long by 170 wide, set lengthwise north to south, with the northeast corner cut out, thus giving the town its shape of a fat L.

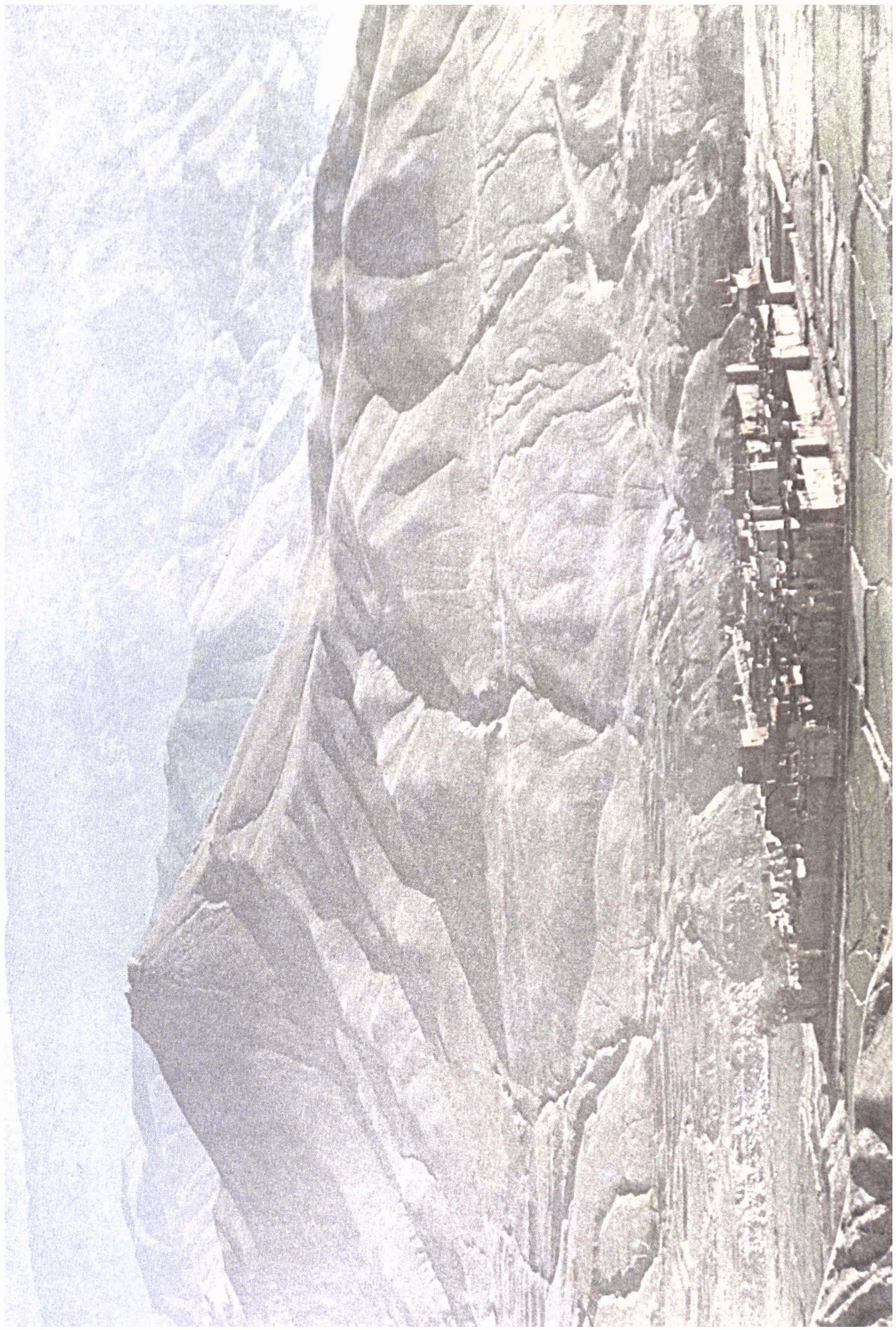
In this town were contained 120 houses, packed one against the other, wall to wall. One could circulate nearly all around Mustang from rooftop to rooftop, if it were not for the barriers of brushwood that formed little walls around the roofs of the separate houses. Owing to

the almost complete absence of trees, firewood is a rarity in Mustang, and consists largely of the scraggy roots of thorny bushes that grow near the damp snow line. But even this wood is hard to find, and the rooftop provisions are rarely used except in the winter. The usual tinder for the fires of every house is yak dung, though even goat excrement is sometimes used. Yak dung, like cow dung, when dry gives a very good flame, and makes a fire that surprisingly has a pleasant smell, reminiscent of certain incense.

The little alleys meandering around the town were rarely more than two yards wide, except where they opened up to form house-lined plazas, which were the focal points of town life. Lo Mantang itself, Pemba explained to me, was divided into four different sections, Potoli, Kutang, Kymaling and Chantang. The smartest of these districts was the one where stood the royal palace, near the town gate overlooking the main square called the "De," where I had seen the demon-chasing ceremony performed on my arrival. Each district, I found, had its particular customs, prayer meetings, and festivities directed by four laymen called "Loeum," who were in charge of the spiritual direction of their district. The nobles' three-storied houses (twelve in all) were fairly evenly distributed all around town, while the poorest quarter was in the narrow part of the L around the so-called "new" monastery. The two other monasteries, which were old and partly abandoned, were situated in the smart parts of town. Inside the wall were also a small set of eight chortens, situated by the largest religious assembly hall, known as the Mustang God House, behind which stood three very large chortens. Although the great white mass of the king's town palace towered five stories high, it was outdone by a huge windowless monastery whose central rectangular structure rose to a height approximating six stories, and was indeed an impressive sight, visible from far outside the town walls.

This was the framework of "my city," into whose life I was now drawn. By Western standards, Lo Mantang, with a population of approximately one thousand, would hardly be called a city, but as the center of the life of Lo, and because it contained all the administrative

The city of Lo Mantang (12,600 feet) as it appears coming up from the south, surrounded by the irrigated barley fields on the Plain of Prayer. Above the town looms the hill of Ketcher, crowned by the circular fortress built in 1380 by Ame Pal, founder of the Kingdom of Lo.





offices of a small capital, it deserved to be so described. Within its sheltering walls members of every social and professional group lived according to their timeless ancient traditions—a way of life lost everywhere else in the Himalayas since the Chinese occupation put an end to the age-old culture of Tibet proper. When I say every profession was found in the city, this is in fact wrong, for I discovered that in Lo there were about twenty families of the Gara tribe. This tribe, although ethnically Tibetan in physical aspects, are treated as outcasts—the Garas being the blacksmiths of Tibet. While all social classes in Tibet benefit from a strangely democratic status, the Garas since time immemorial have been regarded as pariahs, and are not allowed to live within the city wall of Lo Mantang. Besides being blacksmiths, they also operated water mills for grinding grain; therefore the houses of the ten Gara families attached to Lo Mantang were situated north of the city, at the bottom of the deep ravine that ran outside the north wall. Each of these houses, built beside the torrent, incorporated a water mill. Apart from these Garas, all the inhabitants of Mustang lived a very close-knit life confined by the sheltering wall of their impressive fortress town.

ABOVE: *The city gate of Lo Mantang.* BELOW: *The Lama of Lo Mantang officiating in the demon-chasing ceremony.*

— All the King's Men

AT FIRST I wondered how I could ever come to understand the unusual laws and customs that regulated this beehive of strange red- and white-robed people from another world and civilization. But as days went by, with many talks with Pemba, and thanks to the warm, friendly attitude of all the townspeople, I soon began to lead the life of a Loba myself, and to grasp the subtleties of the social organization of this little capital of the highest kingdom on earth. Isolated by more than two weeks' journey on foot from any large center of Tibet or Nepal, Mustang lives on today like a small world of its own, governed by laws and customs that regulate a close-knit, self-supporting society.

People in Mustang, under the king's rule, are divided into four classes: the nobles, the monks, the peasants who own their own fields; and at the bottom of the social ladder the landless peasants and servants, the serfs belonging to the king, and the domestics of the wealthy families. To these classes should be added two outcast tribes: the Shembas, scorned because they are the "butchers" of Tibet and kill animals; and the lowest group of all—the Garas.

These various classes, with the exception of the monks, who have their own hierarchy, are all divided into subgroups according to their duties toward the king and the state. The noble families are of two kinds: the Lumbos (Dukes), and the Gembas (Barons).

The dukes furnish the various administrators of the seven small districts into which Lo is divided. Those who are not heads of districts have official functions at the king's court, such as secretary or head of the royal household. These dukes obey the king's "right arm," a minister who is the spokesman for the king. Under the dukes come the Gembas, who are hereditary village headmen, each district having two,

three, or four villages—each with a Gemba—who obey the dukes. Then come all the peasants, the *missé*, or “people,” of Mustang. They are grouped according to family, each family unit having a different title according to the taxes in kind they pay to the king, or the services they perform for him. Some families have to provide the king with soldiers when he wants; others have to carry his effects when he travels, also being at his disposal for carrying his letters around the kingdom. Poorer families have to furnish the king with certain amounts of wood, others to look after his cattle, while yet others have to take care of his four palaces and forts for a certain number of days a month. Other people have to pray for the king, that is, to recite prayers in the public square for the benefit of His Majesty.

The basic unit of society is the *trumpa*, or house—the family unit. Family life, I soon discovered, is organized in an unusual and very intelligent manner. Mustang is by all standards a relatively poor country; cultivated land is rare there as in most of Tibet. For this reason, when a man's son gets married it is practically impossible for him to go out and live on his own, there not being enough arable land to create new fields. To overcome this situation, and also to keep the vitality of the land in a state of balance, the family lives according to an unusual code.

If a man has three sons, he gives his house and all his land to the eldest son. The second son becomes a monk, and the third must either live with his elder brother or become a monk or a servant or trader working for his brother or for a noble.

This system accounts for two of the peculiarities of life in Tibet and also in Mustang, one being that as a result of this system there are very many monks. The other is that many young men live with their elder brothers; and they share not only his house and land, but even his wife—sleeping with her and marrying her also. This explains the unusual custom of polyandry in Tibet, where a woman will have two, three, and sometimes four husbands, as she may marry all the brothers of a family, who all live together under the same roof.

This unusual social system has allowed the Tibetans to maintain a high standard of living in a basically poor region. The efforts of families to keep their land undivided explain the healthiness of the Tibetan economy, and why their standard of living exceeds that of the surrounding countries of Asia, where squalor and poverty are the lot of the majority.

I was later to investigate many of these families, and to study their way of getting along, and how this small nation lived its well-ordered

life. Another unusual custom also contributes to the vitality of the Lobas. A man, when his eldest son gets married, "retires" and hands over to his son the administration of his household and land. In this manner children do not have to await the death of their parents before leading an independent life, and this guarantees that at all times strong, ambitious young men lead the country. Such a system was greatly criticized by the ancient Chinese writers, who said, horrified, "In Tibet only the young are respected, while the old are pushed aside." This, of course, is not true; old people being highly respected, and their advice looked up to. But this system does avoid the abuses of the "old tyrannical patriarch," which all too often, in other parts of the world, cause children to be frustrated most of their lives and to have to await old age before they can make any decisions affecting the family property.

It is in this social context that the life of people in Mustang must be understood—a land of opportunity for the young. It is for this same reason that the old King Angun Tenzing had ceded his throne to his eldest son who, as I have already mentioned, died after having led his country for eleven years. The old king had taken over the crown again when Angdu Nyingpo died, but—as I was told—was soon to name his youngest son, Jigme Dorje, in his place, so that the land would again have young and aggressive leadership.

I made another surprising discovery. In Lo everybody led a triple life. Whether nobles or simple folk, their lives were divided into three activities. In spring, everyone works his fields, plowing and sowing; in summer a large part of the population leaves the villages and towns to live in tents near the grazing grounds of their horses, mules, donkeys, and goats. In winter, when it is too cold to work the soil or graze the cattle, most inhabitants of Lo—with the exception of women and old people—go out trading with their animals, traveling far into Tibet and Nepal. The winter is the best time to move about, as the rivers in Tibet are either frozen over or very low, and thus can easily be crossed, while in Nepal the weather is sufficiently cold so that the Lobas, accustomed to living at high altitude, do not catch the warm-weather diseases of the lower lands. These three aspects of the lives of the inhabitants of Mustang have worked together to give the Lobas the combined intellectual traits of peasants, nomads, and merchants. Such a rounded and diversified life has spared them many of the defects that are usually characteristic of those people whose lives are molded by the monotony of a single occupation. From their agricultural habits the Lobas have acquired the virtue of endurance, while from their annual nomadic

spells they have gained the philosophical detachment that is so characteristic of those who live a shifting life. From trading journeys undertaken during the winter, the Lobas have acquired broadmindedness and a spirit of enterprise. Such a combination of interests and skills is, I believe, highly unusual, and it did not take me long to realize that despite Mustang's "looking as barren as a dead deer," life in that land is surprisingly rich and eventful.

If a man's mind is often molded by his occupation, so is the spirit of a nation shaped by the nature of its inhabitants' way of life. For this reason, I found that the prevailing spirit of the land I had come to explore was surprisingly dynamic and well rounded. Both poor and rich alike were broadminded, clever, and reliable people. These traits, which I feel come in large part from the varied lives that the people lead, are also common to many parts of Tibet, and I believe this is one of the principal reasons why to all foreigners the inhabitants of the roof of the world have appeared as a happy and remarkably well-balanced people. The books of travelers to Tibet, whether written in the seventeenth century or today, all agree on this point. If it is usually rather foolish to generalize, I feel it can nevertheless be affirmed that the Tibetans stand out as exceptional—or rather as having produced a society most harmoniously balanced and marked by pleasant qualities. They usually are broadminded, reliable individuals, hard-working but at the same time given to laughing and liking to make merry.

I had arrived right in the middle of the agricultural part of the year. Spring had just begun, and although it snowed on various occasions during the first weeks of my stay in the capital, this snow rapidly melted in the valleys. On the other hand, the surrounding mountains (for the most part over 19,000 feet high) were still covered in snow, and for this reason the cattle had not been taken out to the distant high grazing grounds. Each day all the livestock of Lo Mantang was driven outside the city walls to scrounge around for the little grass and greenery that could be found upon the edges of the surrounding fields and banks of the small streams and irrigation canals.

The outlook for the cattle in Mustang was bad, and nearly all those to whom I spoke on this subject were very worried. In the past the King of Mustang had an agreement, established with the governor of the Tibetan district of the "White Fort," that allowed the Lobas to graze their yaks rent free upon the green slopes of the Brahmaputra, just north of Mustang. Now, with the Chinese having established a large garrison in that area at Liksé, and all the horrible stories about what they were doing, the Lobas no more dared to bring their cattle

into Tibet. This unpleasant state of affairs was aggravated by the problem of reaching the high grazing lands in Mustang itself—since the Khampas had settled their military camps there. Everyone in Lo Mantang was afraid of the Khampas who, as I myself had witnessed, were not above stealing cattle. The future for much of the Lobas' livestock looks bad, and it is in this respect that the people of Mustang have had to suffer most from the political turmoil consequent upon the Chinese invasion of Tibet.

I soon found out that for the Lobas, Tibet is a green land, more grassy and fertile than Mustang. This contrast is due to the howling winds that every day at noon race over Mustang. These winds come from the south, funneled through the gap between the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri ranges, and pass over Mustang with tremendous force. By then they have lost most of their humidity upon the great snow ranges. On the other hand, beyond Mustang this wind loses its force, and any moisture it does contain condenses and falls as rain upon Tibet. This southerly gale, which balances the high pressure of the southern side of the Himalayas with the low pressure of the Tibetan plateau, was as precise as a watch, starting at midday when the air over Nepal would get warm, and ending after sunset when Nepal would get colder. Living in Mustang was like sitting in the midst of a gigantic draft upon a stool before the opened door of the great Himalayan breach.

The city of Lo Mantang has been shaped both by the climate and by the occupations of the land's inhabitants. All houses turn their sides to the southern winds. The ground levels, second floors, and rooftops of the houses reflect the occupations of the inhabitants. The ground floors are dedicated to herding and commerce; here are kept the goods of passing caravans, alongside the animals. The second floors are all closed except for small, narrow windows; here the people live in winter. During the warmer seasons everybody lives upon the roofs, where the wheat is beaten and flailed in the wind, while in summer most of the household activities are performed there in the shelter of the stacks of firewood that act as windbreakers. The great city wall itself, I discovered, is more than just a military defense and a protection from cattle stealers and Khampas. Without the wall, life in the town would be quite unbearable, because of the wind that is particularly strong across the flat plain where the town stands; and one could dream of no better protection against sandstorms than a mighty town wall.

In no time I began to appreciate fully the snugness of the city, a port of shelter in the great barren steppe and eroded landscape of Mustang.

Three days after arriving with Tashi, and upon the suggestion of

Pemba, I went to pay a call on Tsewan Rinzing—"a very important man, who knows a lot about everything," as Pemba pointed out.

Tsewan Rinzing was our neighbor, or rather lived just across the road from us in a large three-storied house facing the king's town palace, the other side of the main square of the city. With a notebook concealed in the folds of my chuba, and followed by Tashi, I clambered down the tree-trunk ladder from our terrace out into the square.

The façade of Tsewan Rinzing's house was most impressive, the access to its ground floor being guarded by a heavy wooden door set below two large windows adorned with curtains on the outside. Why Tibetans have curtains on the outside of their windows is a mystery that I have never solved. These are usually made of very strong woolen cloth, drawn taut by ropes across the exterior of the window, and these blinds are cut so that a small rectangular flap can be rolled up to form an opening. Usually red, blue, and white frills hang above these blinds, giving the houses a gay, inside-out look.

As might be expected of the house of the "richest man in town," the great wooden door was locked. After much banging, an old ragged woman, waving a huge key shaped like a chorten, managed to open the door by releasing a large, ornamented, bottle-shaped Tibetan padlock, and we were allowed in. That is, we walked in once we had made sure that the woman had securely grabbed the ferocious watchdog.

We found ourselves in a narrow shaftlike courtyard, around which ran three layers of open galleries. That on the ground floor was occupied by four sturdy horses, while a steep, narrow stone staircase led us to the second-floor gallery. Following this, we came to a small, low wooden door, by which one entered into a large room barely lit by a narrow streak of sun that threw a smoky shaft of light into the room from a hole in the ceiling. The walls of the room were black from smoke deposit; great brass pots glittered in a large, rough open cupboard against one wall. In the center of the room rose the fireplace, a square marked out by wooden beams surrounding a small clay tripod on which rested a pot. On two sides around this square central hearth were laid out rectangular mattresses covered with carpets. Each of these mattresses was of a different height, and arranged so that six people could sit on different levels—according to rank and importance. On the lower end of the couch was a woman breast-feeding a small infant, while in the place of honor was Tsewan Rinzing.

Tsewan Rinzing was exceedingly handsome. His features had not the slightest trace of slant eyes or any flat Mongolian traits; his nose was thin and straight, and were it not for his long hair he would have

passed for a suntanned European. He wore an elegant dark-blue chuba over a spotless white silk Tibetan shirt with a high collar closed by a round gold button. His eyes were kind, and he was most friendly—very willing to impress us by his generosity. Immediately he ordered the woman before him to prepare us some tea with milk and no salt. This woman whom I had taken for a servant, was in fact his wife, and the baby she was nursing was Tsewan Rinzing's seventh child, only three weeks old. Crouched in the room, beneath the sunbeam, one of his sons was busy doing his homework under the prodding direction of an old monk. With a wooden stick he was writing on his "white" board, copying letters like nearly every child in the world, with his hand tight around his pen and his tongue pursed over his lips. Instead of writing with chalk on a blackboard, he was scratching with water white dust that he had spread over a wooden plank, so that the letters he was etching came out black against the white chalk-dust background.

Tsewan Rinzing was very proud of his children. Our conversation soon rambled from the weather, to our purpose in Lo, and then to whether I had any medicine for his wife and her child. Mrs. Rinzing—I should have said "Lady" Rinzing—had a problem. She was no longer in her youth, and apparently she had no milk, or not enough, for her child indeed looked very sickly, and it was everybody's opinion, including that of the mother, that it was going to die. There was, of course, nothing I could do even though Lady Rinzing, one of the four daughters of the King of Mustang, quite shamelessly showed me her rather sad-looking dry breast.

My medical incompetence having been affirmed, Tashi and I attacked simultaneously the great question that was now haunting us: that of the mysterious history of the Kingdom of Lo, which we had been trying to piece together since our arrival. Immediately on hearing our question, Tsewan Rinzing put his hand to his lips, refusing to speak. In doing so, I noted that he wore a thick green jade ring, not on his finger but on his thumb—later I was to see many such rings worn on the thumb. About an inch long, these rings impede the free movement of the thumb, and are considered for this reason to be a mark of aristocracy—somewhat like wearing one's sleeves over one's hands, one more symbol to show that their owners do not have to use their fingers or hands for rough work. My little gold wedding ring seemed rather proletarian in comparison with Tsewan's jade thumb ring. On his other hand Tsewan had a ring such as Tashi wore, a long, flat, twisted gold coil. These spiral gold rings are not mere decorations, but in fact represent ready cash. Their length can be increased or shortened when

needed, and they are considered a convenient way of carrying a little reserve of gold around, rather than putting it into the unsafe breast bulge of the chuba—the only pocket in a Tibetan's garments.

As son-in-law of the King of Mustang, and as the son of a now dead "spokesman of the king"—a brilliant scholar—Tsewan Rinzing had everything a man could desire in Lo Mantang. We soon found out also that he was very conscious of his wealth and importance. As usual our conversation rapidly floated to money matters, and Rinzing inquired whether I had any equipment I could sell to him. I answered that I was not a trader, but that eventually I would be interested in exchanging certain elements of my equipment for books, if there were any on history. Tsewan Rinzing's eyes immediately lit up, and when we had finished drinking our strong, butterless tea, he took us out of the main living room of his house to his large private chapel situated on the second floor.

It was quite impressive, sporting an elaborate gold and red altar supporting over four dozen fine gilt sacred images, while around the altar were the racks of a large library. The principal books there were the 108 volumes of the Kanjur, the Tibetan canon. We were, of course, more interested in the smaller volumes that littered the racks. But Tsewan Rinzing did not seem to want to let us touch any of these, and was busily trying to show me the numerous painted scrolls that hung on the wall of the chapel, facing the large latticed window that opened onto the town square and the king's palace. These were rather poor works of art, and I immediately explained that I was not interested in buying any; Tsewan Rinzing asked outrageous prices, about twice as much as the paintings would be worth, even in an antique dealer's shop in Europe where Tibetan *tankas* are quite expensive.

Tsewan Rinzing was the first and last person in Lo who ever tried to sell me a religious object. While I admired his fine chapel, he proudly showed me the floor. This was very smooth and seemed like a modern cement floor. My host went on to explain how his father had brought back from his studies in Lhasa a formula by which, mixing five different kinds of clay from various parts of Lo, one could make this hard, strong "earth floor."

Leaving the chapel, Tsewan took us up to the top floor to a small side room—his private study and also a storeroom for his most precious possessions.

All along a wall facing a large latticed window, against which were set out square cushions, great wooden chests, some painted and others covered with thick leather hides, were piled three and four high. Above

these trunks, and resting on them, were countless amazing objects, and I felt as if I had been introduced into the secret attic of a medieval castle. There were two long muskets with great forked twin bayonets attached to their ends, and a fine bow with a set of arrows. This bow, gracefully curved, was clearly a weapon made for war and not for pleasure. Its swooping lines reminded me of the bracket-like bows I had seen in illustrations of Genghis Khan's warriors, and I was intrigued as to where it came from. Tsewan explained to me proudly that he used it at the annual arrow-shooting and chang-drinking festival, held on the 14th, 15th, and 16th of the seventh Tibetan month, and one of the great lay festivals of Lo Mantang. Arrow shooting, I discovered, was the favorite sport of Mustang, these contests drawing large crowds.

While we were talking of the rifles and the bow, Tsewan opened one of his chests and put into my hand a nasty-looking German Luger pistol. This weapon was a surprising contrast to his medieval arsenal. Tsewan had bought it from a Khampa, and wanted to know if it was really made in America, America being, as I had already noticed, the only country in the world for the Lobas outside England, India, China, and Tibet. I tried to explain that it was made in Germany, but I saw that this meant nothing to Tsewan, and he seemed rather upset that it was not American.

With great enthusiasm I begged Tsewan to show me more of his treasures, and this he readily did. With strange flat keys he set about opening the intricate little Tibetan padlocks that closed each box. One was full of books, and contained three fine silver hollow penholders. Another contained, among various pieces of rich silk brocade, a half-dozen silver knives, whose yard-long sheaths were elaborately decorated with religious symbols. Yet another chest held his wife's finest clothes, which he promised she would wear if we could take a photograph of her in them. In a corner of the room we found some large, wicked-looking swords; while from a different box Tsewan took out the finest of his treasures—two gold and silver boxes shaped like a large keyhole. These were very fine reliquaries of the kind used by all Tibetans when they travel, and in which are placed small sacred images of a divinity or lama. Tsewan explained to me how rare they were, and soon I was fully persuaded that even the Lobas are as materialistic as we are. A bolt of silk, a silver cup, a sword—all such objects were prized, admired, and sought after with as much passion as we in the West cherish our cars, our washing machines, and all the other goods we possess.

All this was fine, I finally told Tsewan, but what about the history of

Lo? He explained to us that he had not dared mention the subject before his wife and children, because the king would object if he knew that Tsewan had told us the secret things about the past of the land. To give our host confidence, we said that the king had already told us the history of Mustang and that all we wanted were a few details. I then showed him the king's letter, which he read with ponderous consideration. Thus persuaded to speak, he began giving us a slightly different version of what we already knew—how Ame Pal had founded Lo. Tsewan lingered on the names of the four ancient fortresses that had been inhabited by independent rulers when Ame Pal first conquered them. These fortresses were called Pura Chachagam, Kara, Purang, and Rari Dzong—four names with which we were soon to become familiar. Unfortunately, his information was still too vague, and after many polite salutations we took leave of Tsewan Rinzing and his wife, still mystified about the land I had come to explore.

On clambering up to our living quarters, I found myself face to face with what appeared to be a goat. Calay smilingly explained to me that he had thought it would be a good idea for us to buy it, as the meat was very good and would keep quite long. A dirty old man clung to the tugging animal, grinning at Calay's explanation. It now proved to be a sheep, although it looked just like a goat—all the sheep in Mustang, both rams and ewes, have horns and long scraggy coats. The horns were very long and slightly flat and twisted, giving them a cruel and dangerous look. How the beast had ever been carried up the tree-trunk ladder to the roof remained a mystery that I did not want to see repeated in reverse, so I finally gave in, and before I knew it found myself holding one end of the rope—while Calay paid a terribly high price for the animal, which later proved to be very thin under its woolly coat.

Now our troubles began—what to do with the sheep on our third-floor terrace. We had originally planned to eat it, but to do this it had to be killed. Calay, I knew, would not do it, as being a Tamang he was also a Buddhist and would never kill an animal in cold blood. As for Kansa, a wink from his good eye told me that I could expect no help from him. Tashi immediately reminded me that he was "a little bit lama," and so I was the only one left to perform the bloody sacrifice. Although I could invoke no religious motive for not doing this task, I pleaded that it was below my dignity. At this point in our discussion our old landlady popped up the ladder, and as usual sat in silence, staring at us with her toothless grin.

This grin had since our arrival been haunting us at every mealtime;

and in the evenings, in the flickering light of our small fire, it had taken on such witchlike proportions that one night Calay could stand it no longer, and with Tashi came to explain his fears to me. "The old woman is poisoning us; she is a witch," he charged. Calay then pleasantly reminded me how in the Sherpa village of Namche Bazar, we had already in 1959 run into a horrible woman who had actually poisoned many people. Poison is (I have forgotten to say) a deadly weapon used quite frequently in the Himalayas. In fact, murder by blows, arrows, or gunshot is very, very rare in Tibet, but poisoning is a common criminal practice. To poison is of course a clean business, while to shed blood is revolting.

However, poison was obviously no solution to our problem with the sheep. We desperately needed a Shemba; only one of these outcasts could do the dirty work of putting the sheep in our pot.

This called for a new expedition through town. It so happened that a strong young man who had come earlier to ask me to cure him of a boil was a Shemba. Thus for only a small fee (the intestines of our sheep) the animal became mutton, and Calay inherited a woolen rug. The blood of the animal had no sooner been swept off the dusty terrace, before the disapproving grin of our landlady, when Pemba popped up through the hole in the roof leading to our terrace.

"The king's son," he told us excitedly, "is very, very sick. He is dying, and people have told me you gave him medicine, and they say that you are responsible."

Slowly I realized what he had said. The king's son was dangerously ill, and everyone knew I had given him medicine! What if Jigme Dorje did die? I would, of course, be blamed. While I considered this unexpected turn of events that could spell disaster to our whole project, Tashi cheerfully added, "You should never have given him any medicine; people here are not as educated as in Lhasa." We were evidently in a mess. There was, I felt, only one thing that we could do—return to the king's palace again, with better and more potent medicines, such as antibiotics. At all cost, the king's son should not die. Maybe, anyhow, this illness was not so serious as Pemba seemed to say. But when I cross-questioned Pemba, I received the discouraging answer that Jigme Dorje was "*shita, shita naginduk*" (very, very ill), also being informed that the two doctors of Lo Mantang had been called to the summer palace. As I knew that the local doctors' medical kits included dried frogs like those Pemba had shown me in his own pharmaceutical collection, there was, I felt, little hope of their being of much use.

No matter how hard I tried that evening, I could not drive away my

anxiety at the consequences this illness might have for us. The rice at supper, despite its being enhanced by a bit of scraggy mutton, tasted worse than usual. When I retired with Tashi to our grim chapel bedroom, my spirits were very low. Tashi did little to comfort me, but repeatedly expressed disapproval of my having ever meddled with the king's son in the first place.

Once again I felt very lonely. It was now nearly three weeks since I had left Pokhara, and this seemed like an eternity. During these three weeks I had lived in a world so detached from what had been my life in the past that I often wondered whether it was really I who was up here sleeping in a cold, dusty room with rats running around mysterious divinities, beside whose feet I rested my head upon a leaky air mattress. My own identity, I felt, had slowly slipped away from me—had not Tashi the night before told me that in my sleep I had cried out, "Quick! Quick, come here!" Yes, he had insisted that I had said those very words, and I found myself stunned to realize that I had actually spoken out loud in my sleep *in Tibetan!*

By night as well as by day I was completely absorbed by my unusual surroundings. I noted that I was slowly acquiring Tibetan habits, such as automatically crouching down with my hands cupped before everyone I encountered. I had also found in the strange Himalayan language phrases all my own, and acquired a liking for special kinds of Tibetan beer—frequently looking forward to having a good drink of chang in the evenings, having discovered that our landlady had a very tasty brew. It soon became necessary for me frequently to take my wife's photograph out of my steel trunk to remember that somewhere miles below us, beyond the great snow peaks, past the endless trail down beyond Tukutchu, outside the reach of yaks, in a world without demons—I had a wife, a family, and a land that was my own. A land where "even great lamas" did *not* "have fleas," whatever Tashi might think as every night, sitting on his sleeping bag, he tried to rid himself of the nasty beasts that added to our discomfort.

As usual a chilling draft woke me at dawn. Fully awake, I remembered the impending danger involving the king's son. I sent Tashi to try to find two horses before they were led out of town to graze. In the frosty morning, big drums were already echoing from the "New Monastery." Women exchanged gossip from the rooftops. It had snowed again upon the peaks to the east, but the sky above us was spotless blue, pale and infinite, stretching all around us, and resting on the lofty summits of our enclosed universe.

I rummaged into my steel trunks to find the medicine box in which I

had carefully stored in Kathmandu those little modern miracle makers—penicillin, aspirin, antibiotics—the small pills of the white man, medicines whose fame has spread farther than anything else from our civilization. Although no doctors had ever found their way to Mustang, the fame of white men as healers—a fame that bordered on magic—had preceded me into Lo. Since we had left Pokhara I had been constantly approached by sick and suffering individuals who placed their faith in my capacities as a doctor, an exorciser of demons. In the West we often talk of “witch doctors” when we think of Africa and primitive tribes, while these same people think of us as medical wizards! But he who can save a life, can also—in the logic of the local people—take one, and thus the suspicion fell on me that I had caused the king’s son’s desperate condition.

Tashi soon returned with two ponies; with a bottle of antibiotics and more intestinal pills tucked into the folds of my chuba, I rode off again through the great door, out into the open. The sun was setting afire the eastern wall of the town, while the barren hills around us gleamed in the bare morning light. Passing at the foot of Namgyal monastery, we struck out toward Trenkar.

Clattering up the stone steps to the summer palace, we dismounted. We were too late! Already beside the door smoldered a small yak-dung fire next to three stones painted red with clay.

There was nothing we could do. This small fire was a sign, a warning, that within the palace someone was desperately ill, and that absolutely no one would be allowed inside. This strange custom of lighting fires before the doors of the homes of sick people had already been explained to me. I now cursed this custom, although it has its virtues. In this manner visitors are kept away from the sick; thus epidemics are curbed, diseases isolated to a certain extent, and ghosts—the causes of all diseases—are chased away.

There was no hope that my medicines would be accepted by a servant, and even less that they would be taken by the king’s son. His life now rested in the magic properties of dried frogs and medicinal plants, as well as in the prayers of the monks of Lo, who would be solicited to pray for the health of the royal prince—so that the snakes and small demons would leave his body.

We were about to leave, disheartened, when an elegant-looking man of about thirty-five came to the palace gate. He asked us what had brought us here, and I replied that, having heard of the poor condition of the king’s son, I had come with medicines.

The young man (the secretary of the king) was the same person

who had written the king's order for us on our arrival. I now discovered that he was the son of the old woman who owned our house in Lo Mantang.

He kindly explained to us what we already knew—that Jigme Dorje was very sick and that we would not be allowed into the palace. But he agreed to try to see if the king could come and see us outside. We were now taken around the palace, through a doorway in a high wall that surrounded the "happiest place in Lo," according to Tashi, the king's private gardens. This garden, in fact, was nothing more than a small enclosure planted with about forty willow trees. In our damp Western Hemisphere such a small plantation of trees would go unnoticed; but here in Lo I had to agree with Tashi that I had never seen anything quite so beautiful. In this barren land we had forgotten what trees were like, and I truly agreed that "trees are happiness," as Tashi put it. In Lo, trees are considered a great luxury. A small irrigation ditch ran through the garden, while little canals brought water to every tree. Without irrigation, trees would not have grown here, and they were tended with all the care and pride that we give in Europe to flowers.

A servant brought out some carpets, which we placed under some of the trees, and we sat down. Our host returned half an hour later, only to explain that the king could not come and that he did not want our medicines. This sounded pretty bad, but we were cheered up to hear that the king had given orders that we be served tea in his garden. Shivering with cold, we admired the trees with the king's secretary. He informed us that at midday a religious festival was going to be held in the village around the summer palace. Our host strongly suggested that we attend the ceremony, an invitation we readily accepted.

Outside the garden, we found the villagers assembled in groups of ten to twenty, squatting in the sun and sheltered from the cold wind by the walls of the houses. They were all dressed in their best clothes—the women wearing their turquoise headdress and many jewels, covered by their dark blue capes with gold brocade trimming.

This was the last day of "Newné," the second of four religious observances—Gienye, Newné, Gétsu and Gelung. The first two of these are reserved for laymen, and the last two practiced by monks. Newné consists of a set of five rules, which are generally observed over a short period of time. In Lo these consist of not eating or speaking for forty-eight hours, praying, taking nothing without giving, and abstaining from sexual intercourse. This practice is observed twice, and sometimes three times a year by the majority of the population of Lo. The two higher codes, which form the vows of a monastic order, consist of

thirty-six rules for Gétsu, and 250 for the fourth, Gelung. These rules cover such interdictions as not eating meat or drinking alcohol, and abstaining from women. The highest order involves confinement for long periods of solitary meditation. Unlike our European religious vows, such observances can be discontinued, and are not binding until death. Yet it is understood that monks, on going to live in a monastery or on being dedicated to monastic life as children, should observe at least the rule of abstinence from women and from eating meat, along with the elementary rules—never to kill any living creature or to take without giving, and so on.

I had, up to this time, been under the impression that the lay folk of Mustang practiced their religion only in a rather superficial manner. But now I realized that all the population took part very sincerely in the strict Newné observances.

It is a general custom that on the last day of doing Newné the villagers prepare *tomas*, edible religious offerings, which after having been blessed by a monk are distributed to everyone present (even to those who do not partake in the actual performing of Newné). These religious cakes, which vary in size and name, are generally made of tsampa mixed with butter, and shaped like hearts or tiny round balls like cherries, painted red with melted butter colored by a red powder made from a small berry. The shaping of these religious cakes is a real art, some *tomas* being decorated with flowers made of butter, as elaborate as the most intricately decorated Italian pastries. Many such *tomas* are reserved strictly for the divinities, and exhibited for months in monasteries in ratproof cupboards! We were led to the small chapel of Trenkar, a little red assembly hall painted with religious motifs. Here twenty people, directed by four monks, were busy mass-producing great piles of large *tomas* the size of a baseball, and smaller ones the size of cherries. With great speed, men shaped the balls from

ABOVE: *Wailing trumpets and clashing cymbals resound during the three-day ritual of the chasing of the demons at Lo Mantang.* BELOW: *The author's close friend Pemba walking within the walls of Lo Mantang.* OVERLEAF, ABOVE: *The author seated with the late King of Lo, Angun Tenzing Tradul.* BELOW: *Jigme Dorje Tradul, the present King of Lo and Raja of Mustang.* OPPOSITE: *In a sunny corner of Lo Mantang's main square, women spin goats' wool as men twine yak hairs into material for boots. A shy young woman at right hides her face from the camera with a basket.*









flour and butter, and others dipped them in a red greasy mixture. All the butter and barley was contributed by the villagers, or taken from the grain grown in sacred fields set apart for such occasions. These fields, called Newné fields, are "religious land" belonging to the community. The fields are used, in a sense, as "social security." Whenever there is a desperately poor family, the community gives them the Newné fields to look after, allowing them to keep two thirds of the crops. In this manner there are no starving poor, as they are given land on which they can live. In Lo Mantang each of the four sections of the town had its own Newné fields.

Although Newné is a lay observance, to make all the prayers and virtues acquired really worthwhile and to increase them a thousand-fold, a lama or some high monk is necessary to give the "Lung," a blessing for the multiplication of virtues, or the "Wang," an offering ritual that will make the merits acquired more efficacious.

The village of Trenkar was now awaiting the arrival of a very pious and holy lama, who was to perform the ritual of the "Wang" of long life that would top off the two-day Newné, and so, it was hoped, assure the recovery of the son of the king. The tinkle of bells soon announced the arrival of the High Lama. He came, preceded by a Khampa soldier with a broad fur hat leading the way on a fine pony, and followed by a pack pony, while the rear of this small procession was brought up by a red-robed monk. The Great Lama was wearing a silk robe of bright orange, his head crowned by an intricate helmet of red and gold enamel. He looked every bit like a most important bishop, which indeed he was—as in hushed tones it was explained to me that this was a Khampa lama of the Sakyapa sect, of exceedingly great virtue, a "very clean" lama, as a peasant explained to Tashi while we stared at him riding ceremoniously into the village. His arrival was immediately followed by great activity; a huge white tent with dark-blue trimmings was erected; then cushions and furniture were laid inside it with many carpets for the monks to sit on. Soon the great tent (over fifteen yards long) looked like a chapel into which monks with drums and flutes came to sit on either side of the lama. I wanted very much to witness the ceremony, and on approaching I was asked to take a seat with Tashi at the foot of the Khampa priest.

Our landlady at Lo Mantang holding Pemba's eldest daughter, who is eating grains of roast barley.

Looking at his stern features, there was no doubting that this lama was a great and sophisticated scholar, and even Tashi declared that "he was a very educated man." Our great scholar, however, took little notice of us. After having angrily shouted at the villagers who were attempting to enter the tent, to get away, he sternly set about preparing the ceremony. This was to be the benediction of "long life." In strictly religious terms this meant a guarantee of fruitful reincarnations. Before the Great Lama were laid out the sacred instruments necessary for the function: a copper symbolic thunderbolt, a bell, a ritual vase surmounted by a peacock feather, a small silver bowl full of sacred barley, a small double-sided drum, and of course a silver teacup that was refilled throughout the ceremony.

With a great beating of drums, the lama began reciting prayers, and slowly donning a new garment—a bright yellow silk brocade cloak, with embossed patterns of thousands of swastikas. He then placed on his head a yellow silk cap with long earflaps falling down to his crossed knees. Taking the thunderbolt in one hand and the bell in the other, he went about twisting his wrists in slow, mysterious movements, occasionally covering his face with his yellow cloak. Every now and again he interrupted his pensive recitations to shout at the crowd that had noisily gathered at the entrance to the tent.

These preliminary prayers over, all the villagers were allowed to enter the tent and squat on the floor. Everyone, including myself, was given a few grains of sacred barley. Later, to the sound of cymbals and between verses of a religious litany, we all threw this barley upon the lama. The ceremony was now taking on a pious and religious turn, and I felt quite embarrassed, as I was obliged to take part. After about an hour of chants and music to the rhythm of the lama's bell, everyone was cleared out of the tent—including us—after which, one by one, we were ordered to reenter it and go before the priest to receive the "blessing of long life." As guests, Tashi and I were ushered in first. Coming forward, I was asked to bend down low before the lama, who now laid on my head the silver ritual vase with the peacock feather. He recited prayers, and then raised my head, giving me a small strip of yellow cloth that was tied around my neck by an attending monk. I then took my place and watched while one after the other the entire assembly came to get this blessing. Mothers carried their small children on their backs, and the lama placed the vase on their heads also. As each person came by to receive the blessing, they deposited a kata before the lama, who soon was vanishing behind a pile of white ceremonial scarves—many, I noticed, having money wrapped in them. Some people also

brought in objects they wanted blessed—a new dress, a cap, rosaries, a prayer wheel—all these objects being touched by the sacred vase. The ceremony was very impressive. For a whole hour people passed before me to prostrate themselves before the lama, a great number of the men lay down on the ground before the pious man, whose stern features seemed those of a true saint. A devout crowd of strange faces passed before me: a father with his small idiot son, old grandmothers too stiff to bend down, tiny toddlers too young to pay attention, handsomely dressed rich men, and the poorest of peasants. I found myself praying that Jigme Dorje, the king's son, be given a long life and that our worries might come to an end. When all was over, the monk could hardly be seen behind the katas, tokens of the people's respect. To this benediction, I realized, had come over five hundred people from all over Lo.

After a small chat with the High Lama when everything was over, we left, having promised that we would eventually pay a special visit to this high Khampa priest in the isolated and secluded monastery of Lo Gekar, in which he told us he was staying.

The ceremony over, we made our way back to where we had tied our horses, and galloped down to Lo Mantang, deeply impressed by the religious fervor of the crowds we had seen.

After having eaten, I set out with Tashi to explore the great fort of Ketcher, which stood overlooking Lo Mantang upon a barren hill, the last summit of a narrow ridge that cut northern Mustang into two separate valleys—the “eastern” province and the “western” province. This fort had been built by the great Ame Pal himself, and from it in ancient times he had set out to conquer the surrounding fortresses of the area, eventually building and extending the Kingdom of Lo down to Muktinath and south to Tukutchu. We left our horses at the foot of Namgyal monastery, in a saddle between the great peak topped by Ketcher Dzong and two smaller hills—one with the monastery on its summit, and the other with a lesser fort known as the Duke's Fort.

The climb was about a thousand feet, but because of the altitude it took us a great deal of time to reach it. As we rose, slowly below us unfolded an endless sea of tormented earth, and by the time we reached the fort we had at our feet not only Mustang but, so it seemed, the entire world. We could now look down into Tibet in three directions; at our feet to the west was the valley of Trenkar, while toward the northeast—the other side of the ridge—lay another valley dotted with six small villages set about the edges of a small brook, which I now recognized as the long-lost Kali Gandaki River reduced in the

13,000-foot valley to a small stream. Looking south, we could see the neat rectangle of Lo Mantang, with the red dots of its monasteries set within its black and white checkerboard of houses. At the four corners of the town, on the plain, tall chortens had been erected to keep away the evil demons who are believed to lurk in "every corner," be it of a town, a house, or a monastery. This belief in demons living in "corners" was found frequently in medieval Europe!

Like the sloping deck of a mighty ship, from the western peaks the flat Plain of Prayer could be seen abruptly coming to a pointed end where two deep canyons, running either side, met at the same point where the Kali Gandaki came down from the north. Thus the respective gullies of the three streams formed a canyon that we could see burying itself out of sight down a deep shaft. Above this shaft rose tortured, eroded mountains—one white as if of flour, another red, and yet a third bright yellow, against an endless succession of vertical bone-dry hills that formed the tormented central land of Mustang, cut from all sides by gullies of streams draining to the central Kali Gandaki gorge that ran between the western peaks and those distant summits forming our horizon to the east.

All that remained of the fortress on the hill was a network of massive walls eroded by wind and rain, so as to look like the cliffs around us. A great circular wall marked the perimeter of the fort, rising just above the steep slopes of the high hill. I was struck by the unusual circular shape of the fort, and could not understand why it had been built in such a way, while all the other forts we had seen until now were rectangular. It was much later that I learned from an old manuscript that Ame Pal had first built Ketcher Fort square. A powerful chief of a nearby fortress claimed that one of the corners of Ame Pal's fort was facing his own fort and that this was bringing evil to bear upon it. This ruler then obliged Ame Pal to pull down his structure. He then built a new fort, larger and stronger, with a circular wall so as not to offend anybody, and with its door facing east. On the windswept hill we were still able to see the great wall that encircled many inner chambers and old rooms, the fort's gate indubitably being directed to the east. Its impregnable situation guaranteed its owner a distinct advantage over the other forts that lay about its feet, and it was from this very hill that Ame Pal had set out to conquer all the other chieftains of the forts along the trade route from the Brahmaputra River to Tukutchu.

It was also from this fort that after having won many a battle, and having placed all the forts of Lo under his rule, Ame Pal set out to find a site for a city that would regroup the inhabitants of the now unified

land of Lo. He had prayed all night, and then had set off with a herd of sacred goats. According to some storytellers, he decided that where his goats would lead him, he would build his city. Others said that, following his goats, he fell asleep; waking up, he searched high and low for them, when he suddenly saw the goats coming out of the ground in the smooth plain at the foot of Ketcher Dzong. In this he saw a sign of the gods, and there he built Lo Mantang, with its great, impregnable wall. To this day the goat's head has been the sacred emblem of Lo Mantang.

We now retraced the road of the goats down from Ketcher Dzong to where we had left our ponies, then on down to the Plain of Prayer. On our way we passed the bottom of the ravine, where the houses of the Garas nestled by the stream. These houses were built like those of ordinary peasants, facing a small yard. All had a water mill or two incorporated into the house or built into little outhouses over the torrent. Some had small canals carrying the water in even flow to the mills. As a child, I had been fascinated in England by the few old paddle-type water mills still to be seen in the green countryside of Hertfordshire. These mills were run by the weight of water that fell over the edge of a canal into the wide, water-retaining paddles of a great wheel. Others I had seen that were more crude were simply turned by the force of the current running against the lower part of their wheels. I was quite surprised to discover that the Lobas' water mills, or rather those operated by the Garas in all of Tibet, were of a type far more efficient and ingenious than our old European mills. I am not much of a technician, but I soon realized that the Tibetan water mills are not of the paddle type, but operate on a turbine system like that used in modern hydroelectric plants—in other words, they incorporate a technique that is quite recent in the West.

The Garas' mills have no great clumsy wheel, but a small horizontal propeller against whose horizontal blades is directed, through the aid of a hollow tree trunk, a vertical stream of water. Such a system has a far higher power output for the same fall of water than the classic old water mills of the West. No energy is lost by unnecessary cogs and transmission rods, as the vertical shaft holding the horizontal propeller is directly connected to a grinding stone placed just above it. By this system a small propeller two feet wide is sufficient to turn a heavy grinding stone of the same diameter. I spent many hours inside these small mills watching as the barley and wheat were ground automatically, thanks to an ingenious trip system feeding grain into the central hole of the grinding stone. Here were ground not only raw grain, but

also “popped” barley—barley roasted in a large steel pan like popcorn. Once the barley is roasted and popped, it is ground to flour, which tastes very much as warm wheat bread smells, with a slight flavor of roasted nuts. This is *tsampa*, the basic food of all of Mustang and Tibet.

At home that evening, Pemba came over to have a talk about the events at the summer palace. When I explained to him that we had not been allowed in because of the fire already burning outside the palace gates, he seemed quite worried. He agreed there was nothing we could do, but now the problem was serious—this surely meant the king’s son was very sick. Pemba was persuaded that it was the Chinese who were poisoning the heir to the throne. He then told me how when the late king had died three years ago there had been rumors that he also had been poisoned. Some people suspected the Chinese, others the Nepalese, who had at one time considered the late king to be pro-Chinese. Now, apparently, the people of Mustang considered the illness of the new heir as most suspicious. Apparently we were not suspected by all the people, many of them thinking this disease was a political poisoning by either the Chinese or the Nepalese. I was reminded that poison was the “usual way” people were killed in this part of the globe. It made me a little nervous when I remembered that I might well be an unwelcome observer in Mustang, an embarrassing person both for the Chinese and for the Khampas. My presence in this border area—closed off to foreigners because of its political unrest and status as a strategic area—was not without certain hazards. Of course, I had no intention of getting involved with any of these political problems, my mission being strictly cultural. It was a tricky job, however, to steer clear of both the Khampas and those people in Lo Mantang who, I soon discovered, were Chinese sympathizers and agents—a delicate position much complicated by the local suspicion against me because of the king’s son’s untimely illness.

— The Buddha Who Is Next to Come

AT OUR HOUSE I found Calay and Kansa at their habitual place, crouched around the fire of our kitchen. Since we had arrived, neither of them had left this room. Nothing in Mustang seemed to interest them or stir any enthusiasm or curiosity in their simple minds, except for conversation as to when we would return to their sweet, warm Nepal. Both Calay and Kansa complained bitterly of the cold, suffering from its effects more than I. As for Tashi, he seemed in good health, if it were not for the strange fact that he was allergic to "books"! Or at least allergic to the musty Tibetan books that Pemba lent us, and to those in our dusty chapel. Of all afflictions for a scholar this must be the saddest, and later, when I met Tashi's brother, I discovered that he too had the same allergy. As for Tashi, all the time we lived in our chapel bedroom, and each time we examined books, his nose would run and he would show signs of having a bad head cold.

The following morning I set out with Tashi for the New Monastery, or New Gumpa. There we planned to visit the head monk of Lo Mantang, the lama we had seen officiating at the ceremony on our arrival, in his fine silk brocaded gown and dragon-and-skull hat. Despite our royal letter of introduction, we both felt rather nervous at the idea of seeing this impressive monk. We headed for the north side of the town. Here lay the monastic compound, set off from the rest of the town by a rectangular field, the only open space in the city, which belonged to the monks and was cultivated by all the villagers. Behind this field was a block of small houses forming the poorest district of the city, and behind that—enclosed on three sides by the great wall—was the monastery itself. The monastery looked like a small village within the town, being composed of a half-dozen one-storied houses set around two red-

painted central buildings. These little houses were the independent private cells of the monks. Most of them were built snugly against the great clay-colored wall of the city, which enclosed the compound rather like an oversized prison wall. Only at this place could one clearly see the wall from the inside, as in all other parts of town the houses were so tightly packed that only its summit was visible. One of the massive bastions of the town wall had been transformed into a chapel painted red, a portion of the wall on either side of this tower being painted in white, blue, and red vertical stripes about one foot broad—this gave a gay aspect to this section of the impressive, uniformly brown bastion. I later discovered that these vertical colored stripes are characteristic of monasteries of the Sakyapa sect, which are gaily decorated in this manner throughout Tibet.

Our progress inside the monastery compound was halted by the barking of a fierce mastiff. Although from reflex we had hastily picked up some stones, we hesitated to throw them at the “guardian of the temple,” and made a slow but dignified retreat, hoping that some monk would make a welcome appearance. By the time we had backed away down half of the narrow alley that had brought us to the monastery, we were saved by the appearance of a smiling young monk who made a rush for the big black dog, grabbing it with a caution that justified our apprehension. Crouched and clinging to the infuriated animal, the monk called out for us to approach. This we did until I caught sight of another dog—a hideous monster, whose horrible grin seemed directed at me from the entrance of the smaller of the red buildings, which we later learned was the monastery assembly hall.

It was only after a second look that I realized this was the ghastly sneer of a dead stuffed dog, propped up with sticks by the entrance. I was later to see a large number of these revolting stuffed dogs, which are kept in monasteries, no doubt, to ward off ghosts, but are more terrifying to humans, I felt, than a good healthy live dog.

We asked the young monk who had rescued us if His Highness the Lama was in, and to our pleasure we received an affirmative reply. We had already tried to see the High Lama on three occasions in the past days, but every time he had been out—either officiating at a funeral or performing a private religious ceremony in someone’s house.

We were directed to a neat white house backed against the “hill of mortar,” as the city wall is called by the townfolk. As we approached this house, a monk appeared unexpectedly out of nowhere in a manner characteristic of most prelates all around the world. This old monk showed us the way, opening a low wooden door that led into a

small miniature courtyard, a few yards square, in which were growing a few flowers. Although quite luxurious, this was a typical monk's cell, complete with its own walled-in garden for solitary meditation, and surrounded by a small covered gallery. Opening onto this gallery were two large latticed windows, so essential to monastic life as they alone give enough light to be able to read, while the habitual small, foot-square windows more appropriate for the climate are of little use in lighting up inner rooms. These latticed windows, although pretty to look at, are exactly the opposite of what one would expect architects to design for a country that is cold nearly all year round and has never heard of such benefits as central heating or glass, the paper that covers these wooden screens being more often than not punctured, and offering little protection against the weather.

We entered one of the low rooms composing this cell, and here—in all simplicity—we were received by the Lama of Lo Mantang, who was seated on a cushion before a small fire.

Lama is a title given in Tibet to the heads of monasteries—most of whom are incarnate lamas, the living rebirths of illustrious founders of religious orders. This lama though, we discovered, was not an incarnate lama, but held his position for three years as elected leader of the monastery. I had trouble at first recognizing in the rather simple monk before us the fierce figure I had seen prancing around so majestically on the day of my arrival. He wore the usual monastic habit—a great, extra-long, sleeveless chuba hanging down to the ground, over a sleeveless red and gold brocade silk shirt, his arms covered by a cape that hung on his shoulders, and which at every instant he was shifting back into place.

Bending low and presenting, now with accustomed grace, a kata, I handed the lama the royal decree of the king concerning our request to be shown everything in the land. Having read the message and looked upon us—the “Frenchmen who are two”—he cordially invited us to take seats by his side. With shaven head and simple, noble features, the lama looked like all those statues we had seen in so many monasteries and chapels. As he spoke to us, with his left hand he kept playing with the fire, pushing a few dried goat droppings into it or shoving a piece of dung in a little deeper. On the fire a servant monk placed a large clay kettle that was soon boiling. When it was ready, the lama was given salt, which he himself placed in the tea, adding also a little butter taken from a leather bag. As usual, I forced a smile as I accepted my cup filled with this rather unpleasant drink. After an exchange of compliments, we began expressing our admiration for the

monastery, slowly driving the conversation toward the subject of books.

The lama seemed very willing to assist us, especially when I explained that I intended to write a book on his land and that in my country many people were interested in Lo. I had to tell this lie, for I could not have explained that people in the West had never even heard about his land. The lama agreed that we should see some books, but he noted there were none specifically about the history of the country, only about the monasteries. On the other hand, we learned more details about the three Zampos, in particular about the Holy Abbot Ngorchen, the one who brought "religion to Lo," and there "turned many a time the wheel of religion." It was he who—invited by Ame Pal—came to the land and built three large monasteries, one in Lo Mantang, one in Tsarang, and one in Geling. All were of the Ngorpa sect, a branch of the Sakyapa sect founded by Ngorchen himself. Thus we realized that most of the religious institutions of the land were due to the very personal initiative of the great Sakyapa reformer, who had come in person to preach the doctrine in Lo. So we partly solved the mystery about the Three Holies.

We also learned how two monasteries built by the Holy Ngorchen near Lo Mantang were eventually destroyed—one by fire, and the other by an earthquake that diverted a river to cut through the monastery. This we thought to be only a legend till later we were able to see, north of Lo Mantang, how a river that had run past the king's summer palace had indeed changed course and plowed its way in a deep gorge right through the central ridge of northern Lo. In so shifting its course, the river still runs today right through the middle of the great ruins of a monastery called Samdruling. After this cataclysm, and the fire that struck a monastery whose ruins are at the foot of the Ketcher Fort, Namgyal monastery and the "New Monastery" were founded. Through various disputes these two become rivals, Namgyal remaining of the Ngorpa sect, while a dissident Sakyapa group founded the "New Monastery."

After having been entertained with tea, we were taken to an adjoining room containing a large number of books. These, like all Tibetan books, were long, rectangular bundles wrapped in silk, and held between boards. Every time we asked to look at a book, the lama would place it on his head in reverence, and then on Tashi's head before handing it over to us. This little ritual is performed by every Tibetan about to read a book. Books in Tibet are considered to be more than simply written matter; they are revered as sacred in themselves, and

possessing properties that extend beyond their strict meaning. They are held as more sacred than religious statues and images, and for this reason must never be placed below a statue. They are treated with great respect, somewhat as in Europe, during Mass, Catholic priests kiss the scriptures. Nearly all monks in the Himalayas know how to read, but few understand well the complicated grammar and terminology of Tibetan religious texts. For these more ignorant monks, just to turn over the pages of a religious book or to mumble without comprehension the syllables written in them is considered sufficient to gain merit. Although this appears to be a rather strange and naive belief, we have in Europe the same custom whereby in many Christian communities monks and nuns do not understand the prayers they read in Latin, the articulation of prayers without understanding them being believed to confer as much merit as if one understood the meaning.

Although the lama was fairly erudite and understood the texts when he read them, he had never made a deep study of all the books in his monastery, and was unable to give us many details on what we might encounter.

Having little or no knowledge of literary Tibetan myself, I depended entirely on Tashi. Looking over his shoulder, I had him discard those books of a strictly religious character, until we stumbled upon a large biography of the Lama Ngorchen Kunga, the great reformer of the Sakyapa sect. This book, an old volume two inches thick, told of the life of this lama who had come to Mustang in the fifteenth century, and about whom we had first heard in Geling. Its 186 pages were too much for us to read right away, so we took down its name, intending to buy it later or have a copy made by a monk. Glancing through it, we were delighted to see that it contained numerous references to Lo. Altogether we were very happy with our find.

The job of sorting out what was contained in the library being over, and after having drunk what tasted like oceans of salty tea, we were taken out by the Lama to visit the various buildings of his monastery. The entrance of the main temple was veiled with a huge curtain of yak-wool cloth, which when lifted revealed a recessed porch whose walls were covered with elaborate and intriguing frescoes. One of these was a magic square, a checkerboard of various colored squares with letters and syllables inscribed in each square in the manner of a crossword puzzle. The letters were so arranged that in whatever diagonal they were read, they spelled praise to Ngorchen, the Great Lama of the biography. Later, with Tashi, I copied and read a more elaborate magic square in Tsarang. On either side of the door were painted the

king's guardians of the four cardinal directions, fierce divinities that hold watch over the entrances of most monasteries in Tibet. To one side was a finely painted wheel of existence, a disk held in the paws and jaws of Mara, the hideous god of death. The disk represented the various hells, the six spheres into which after death man is reincarnated according to his deeds. The worst of these spheres—"hell"—represented gruesome tortures. The other spheres offered hardly a better lot to man, either by reincarnation into animals who are beaten and shot, or into demons who suffer the pangs of thirst, or gods who suffer the pangs of anxiety. All told, the wheel of life is but suffering, a suffering from which Nirvana is the only escape. The cause of all this was represented by the hub of the wheel of life, a small central medallion showing a bird, a pig, and a snake—the symbols of passion, ignorance, and wrath. I could not help but recall in this drawing the simple carvings above the doorways of our medieval cathedrals, which depict hell and its tortures in similar scenes.

Well aware of what awaited us in case we sinned, we proceeded into the temple. There we ran into two parallel rows of monks in the process of performing a ritual, squatting on either side of the central aisle. What struck me most in this assembly (a feature I found common to nearly all religious ceremonies) was that everybody was eating while they prayed, a small monk passing between the two rows serving hot tea. After each verse of the chants the monks gulped down tsampa flour moistened in tea.

The elaborate frescoes inside the monastery had been repainted quite recently by a monk from the eastern district of Lo. A square cupola in the roof lighted the otherwise windowless hall. From the ceiling and against each beam dangled beautiful painted scrolls and unpainted silk banners, partly concealing the altar, where was enthroned an image of Maitreya, "the Buddha who is next to come," flanked by wooden statues of various ancient Sakyapa lamas. Many of these statues were quite lifelike, and certainly must have been good resemblances of the pious monks they represented. With great pride the lama stopped the ceremony to get the assistance of the monks to unroll for us two huge painted scrolls that hung from the ceiling. These were about four yards long, and depicted in vivid colors various of the sacred devils and divinities of the Tantric heavens, surrounding a seated figure of "Boundless light," the Buddha of enlightenment, holding in his hand a glowing "virtue." We admired these works, and took detailed notes of all the wall frescoes before being ushered outside.

All told, the "New Monastery" well deserved its name, having been

considerably embellished in recent times. Most interesting was a square building next to the gumpa, which contained a large chorten. This chorten, it was explained to us, was very sacred, as it held the remains of a saint—we were guaranteed that if we walked around it, we would be cured forever of headaches! Tashi, having a bad cold, was delighted, and walked around it ten times, while I made only five rounds, noting all the decorations painted upon it.

Having thus acquired merit and sanctified ourselves, we left with the lama to visit the assembly hall, over whose recessed entrance hung the ghastly stuffed dog. On our way over, the distinguished lama stopped, and crouching on his heels, did a little "pipi" under cover of the folds of his robe. He seemed not the slightest bit embarrassed as he carried on talking to us while crouching. I was myself quite shocked, but was thus able to conclude that under their lengthy red chubas, monks did not have underwear!

All during my stay, I was quite frequently shocked by the mixture of refinement and primitivism found in the Lobas. Whereas such men as Tsewan Rinzing or even Pemba would be literate, reasonably clean, and very intelligent, they would not hesitate to spit on the floor or perform other actions that left me rather shaken.

The assembly hall was rather bare, having badly damaged frescoes on its walls and only three statues, two of which were finely painted wood carvings of famous monks whose names unfortunately had been forgotten, even by the lama.

Our visit to the New Gumpa ended with a brief tour of the small cell of one of the monks, or rather, his private little cottage. Every monk, on joining a congregation, is allowed to build his own lodging, some of which are quite comfortable and large. In this way, monasteries look like small villages, and I later saw a monastery that had some most remarkable large houses. As for the monks too poor to build a house, the community usually gives them a cell in a communal building. Monks are asked to do most of their own cooking and to bring their own food, except on special occasions when in the central assembly hall food is distributed by the monastery as a gift from a wealthy noble or as a handout from the products of fields owned by the monastery. In Lo, owing to the custom that every second child should devote himself to religion, most of the *trawas* (ordinary monks) lived with their families, coming to the monastery only for certain functions. For this reason, in the New Monastery there were less than ten resident monks on the premises, although the monastery claimed to have forty dependent *trawas*.

Our brief visit finished, we set out with one of the monks in search of the "doorkeeper" of the two other monasteries in town: the Mantang Lha Khang (Mustang God House) and the Chamba Lha Khang. These two buildings were the largest and most striking within the city walls, the latter being the great, massive red structure that dominated the town, visible from afar like a gigantic tower, a beacon painted red to guide all travelers to Lo Mantang.

We finally found the doorkeeper, a bent, ragged old man, who seemed to come straight from a painting on poverty. Following him we passed behind the king's town palace, along its blank west wall, until we reached the massive, windowless, barren façade of the Mustang God House. This was a huge rectangular structure, some fifty yards square, whose massive wall, three feet thick, gave it from the outside a forbidding appearance. A mighty door of beams held together by great wrought-iron hinges was the only breach in its otherwise blind façade. The rattling of chains and the clanging of a two-pound key, one foot long, inside a huge metal box, finally opened the door to our ragged old guide, who seemed more like the keeper of hell's gate than the guardian of a sacred temple. With a sinister air of importance, he beckoned us to enter.

We found ourselves in a short yard leading to a high, wide, covered porch. Here I stopped in amazement, for on either side of this vast porch sat two huge statues about four yards tall. With gigantic potbellies, outsized faces and impressive features, these gigantic divinities stared at us reproachfully. These painted clay figures were the Four Kings of the Quarters, the fierce guardians of Tibetan religious temples. Their huge size gave me the impression that I was visiting some great Egyptian cave, and on seeing them we immediately realized that we were entering no normal gumpa, but a monumental structure of very ancient origin. Another door, larger than the first, now barred our route to the assembly hall. Like an ugly insect dwarfed by the fierce guardian kings, the old man got to work once again with his rattling keys, leading the way through the door into a black hole—where apprehensively, as if we were penetrating the dark, cold bowels of the earth, we followed him.

We found ourselves in an eerie silence inside what seemed like an endless cave. The massive walls shut out from us the chirping of sparrows and other sounds of the city, and it seemed that we had been removed into a distant inferno. As our eyes slowly became accustomed to the darkness, I began to distinguish great wooden pillars that formed the vertical columns of what appeared to be a forest. The

assembly hall was of huge proportions, and as we could not see its walls in the darkness, there seemed to be no end to the rows of pillars, which rose twenty-five feet high above the dark damp ground. The beams supported great, carved wooden capitals representing crouching lions. I had never seen anything more impressive than this majestic, empty hall—an eloquent monument to the great architectural genius of the Tibetans. There was no doubting that we were in a very ancient building, a notable example of Tibetan woodcraft, and one of the finest examples of Tibetan architecture. Tashi, who up till now had looked upon the monuments of Lo with the scorn of a man who had been to Lhasa, was, I noticed, visibly impressed.

The building at first appeared completely empty, until, thanks to the light that drifted from a high rectangular skylight, we noticed against the far wall the dim outline of ghostly, gargantuan divinities peering down through the darkness toward us, their bodies gleaming in pale gold. The central figure, of gilt bronze, was that of the Sakya sage, the historical Buddha of India. To his right sat the Buddha who is next to come—the tiara-wearing image of Maitreya; next was a fine chorten covered with paintings. To the left of the central image rose two more divinities aligned with the others upon a raised pedestal, forming a long row of giants who seemed to reproach us for our intrusion.

In eerie silence we passed these statues in review. While doing so, we had a feeling of being watched, and this impression was confirmed by our discovering that the high wall around us was painted with the enigmatical figures of twenty-foot high Buddhas, the five Buddhas of Universality. These seated divinities were painted in the soft tones characteristic of ancient frescoes, and surrounded by countless images of monks and demons, some meditating cross-legged, others astride horses surrounded by flames. Animal-headed devils stared at skulls, and a whole host of spirits pranced around with fierce looks contrasting with the serene faces of the Buddhas.

The vast empty hall became slowly populated by these divinities, as now—like children—we paced this huge picture book, accompanied by the guardian of the temple, who pointed the more frightening divinities out to us with his crooked, dirty fingers.

We were before perhaps the oldest and most beautiful works of art of Mustang, which would deserve a place among the masterpieces of Tibetan art. "Only the most beautiful monasteries in Tibet have comparable painting," Tashi commented. "But in Tibet you would never see such a beautiful gumpa uncared for and abandoned."

I secretly wondered whether it was not a blessing that this great

assembly hall was abandoned. Had monks still lived and prayed here, no doubt they would have found it necessary to "renovate" the frescoes, replacing with shiny and less beautiful designs those drawn by monks dead since at least four centuries. Although techniques have hardly changed in Tibet over the years, and designs have remained the same, there is a certain quality and finesse in the art of centuries ago that cannot be found in more recent creations.

On leaving the great assembly hall, we followed the doorkeeper two blocks toward the gumpa with the huge tower six stories high. This building was composed of a large, low, rectangular edifice from which protruded the great towerlike structure with inward-sloping sides.

A small door led us through a dark passage into a great cloister, an interior yard bordered by an open gallery supported by immense wooden columns as tall as those supporting the roof of the assembly hall. The capitals of these columns were shaped like inverted brackets, and carved with Sanskrit formulas in ancient Sanskrit characters. For centuries there existed no Tibetan writing, all written texts being in Sanskrit, which was in many ways the Latin of the Buddhist world. Tibetan was never written until an alphabet was invented in the seventh century by the famous Tibetan scholar Thonmi Sambhota, using Sanskrit letters for inspiration.

The rooms and building around this cloister were in a bad state of repair. In front of us a door giving access to the ground floor of the tower was blocked by loose stones; our guide told us that we could not enter there, but took us up a small flight of steps onto the roof, which ran around the cloister and also around the tower. The tower now emerged above us in one great, windowless mass.

Opening onto this roof, a small wooden door allowed us to enter the second floor of the tower. We found ourselves upon a gallery. All was dark, and it was with a shock that I suddenly saw looming before me the frightening figure of the most colossal statue I have ever seen. Although we were more than twenty feet off the ground, there loomed up into the tower from the ground a huge fifty-foot-high figure of Maitreya, "the Buddha who is next to come." Its hands, half the size of my body, were raised below the face in the position of turning the wheel of life. Its gigantic face stared at us from the lofty dimness above, while from its outsized fingers dangled countless katas thrown there by devout pilgrims. The statue was all the more impressive in that we could not see its base below us. Fifty feet high, and representing a seated figure, its proportions were truly monstrous. The head alone was as big as a stout man. Painted gold, with gilt copper plate over its arms and shoulders,

the huge Buddha glimmered in eerie reflections. At first I had trouble in grasping its exact contours, these being so large and so cramped inside the tower—which, apart from the gallery on which we stood, was entirely filled by this massive divinity.

Even an agnostic could not have helped but feel in this unique sanctuary a feeling of mysticism, of some supernatural force emanating from the mighty form of the Buddha—who would come in the future and, like the Sakya sage, show the way to Nirvana for all humans caught in the dizzy whirlpool of existence with its fearful impermanence and terrible cycles of reincarnation. It seemed that the statue could see straight through the walls, across over the town at its feet, and out upon the universe. It was with trouble that I took my eyes away from its hypnotizing face to inspect the walls around me. These, to our pleasure, we found to be covered by twenty-four mandalas, paintings in geometrical designs resembling flowers whose petals are the figures of various Buddhas and their attending divinities. Although these mandalas covered the immense surface of the walls, the individual drawings of divinities were only a few inches in size, painted with the care of a miniature in dark reds outlined with fine gold trimmings. A whole book could be written about these mandalas, beyond doubt the work of the finest Tibetan school of artists. We made a detailed examination of those that were within our reach, while our guide chilled us to the bone by banging with great energy upon a drum that lay in a corner—its hollow sound echoing with a sinister pitch against the imperturbable figure of Maitreya. With a certain degree of relief, we finally stepped outside. But even here I was haunted by the image we had seen, and from that moment on I could not look at the great red tower without seeing in its place the colossal figure which, so it seemed, was the living guardian of the town.

Tashi had been as impressed as I by this temple, and although as a Bon Po he had little reverence for things Buddhist, he nevertheless confessed to me that beyond doubt such a great statue must have remarkable powers. Our curiosity, we felt, had not been satisfied enough about the gigantic statue, and we planned to go secretly to the gumpa and inspect the ground floor, which we had not been able to visit.

Three days after our first visit, we set out in the calm hours of midday to perform this task. There was nobody in the small alley before the monastery, and with little trouble we slipped through a gap in the wall into the vast cloister. Here, with guilty feelings and in fear of being caught, we began dismantling the loose stones that blocked the

ground-floor door. One by one we took them down, until there was enough room for Tashi, then for me, to slip in.

We found ourselves in a great corridor that encircled the base of the tower. Here we found the traces of ancient and badly damaged frescoes. A large door led us below the second-floor gallery into the tower. Above our heads, on the far wall, we could see the mighty feet of the great Maitreya, while a huge rectangular pedestal filled one half of the lower level of the tower in which we stood.

From the ground floor we could get only a distorted view of the statue, as the gallery above us came close against it. But the sight was all the more impressive, and remains for me today one of the most remarkable things I have ever seen. We later discovered that this great statue had been erected upon the orders of none other than Ngorchen Kunga, and was one of the oldest religious monuments in Lo Mantang.

After our sneak visit, together with Tashi I set out to see if we could walk all around Lo Mantang upon the badly eroded edge of the great wall. We had both decided that we would not leave a stone unturned in the town, and so set out in search of a house that backed against the wall. Having found one, we begged the owner to let us onto the roof. From there, with a little hoisting, we reached the small walk along the wall's summit. Resting upon ancient and rotten crossbeams of wood, this overhanging walk had in many places crumbled, and it was only with considerable trouble that we managed to make our way to one of the corner towers. From there we now admired the town below us. The houses were so tightly packed that all we could see from our high position was what looked like brown clay fields, enclosed by hedges of firewood—the houses' rooftops. Above them rose the great tower housing the colossal idol and the king's castle.

Pushing our investigation a little further, we were obliged to clamber down upon the roof of a house, and the noise of our feet found us face to face with its owner wagging an angry finger at us. He was soon joined by a young monk with a friendly face, and wearing a fine sheepskin-lined chuba of dark red silk. The monk thought our feat of gymnastics in clambering along the wall quite amusing, and came up to show us a "secret way out of town": how from the rooftop of the house we were on, we could scale the wall and, by a succession of footholds, climb outside along the edge of a tower. In case of Chinese attack, this could, I mused, prove a good escape route.

Soon we became quite friendly with the young monk, who explained to me that he had seen many people of my race, for he had studied in a monastery in Sikkim, the little Tibetan principality attached to India, east of Nepal.

This young monk, we discovered, had traveled a lot, having been to India on pilgrimage and studied in Lhasa and in Bhutan. He told us that he was the abbot of a monastery called Samdruling, about four hours' walk southwest of Lo Mantang, and he invited us to visit him there.

That evening I explained our encounter to Pemba, and he said he knew the lama well and suggested that we go there the following day. He added that we might find some interesting books in his monastery. But there was, Pemba explained, a problem about this visit. He then whispered to us that the monk was living in a perpetual state of fear, because a group of Khampas had taken over his small monastery, and that he was obliged to live in their company.

This news only sharpened our desire to go and visit the widely traveled lama. We made plans to leave at dawn.

That same evening I had a long talk with Pemba about life in general in Lo, and in particular the problem of "girls," a subject on which men all around the world, and particularly in France and in Tibet, are very prolix.

I asked Pemba how a boy went about courting and marrying a girl in Lo Mantang. I had noticed so far that the young unmarried girls, although not at all shy, stayed pretty much to themselves. They would loiter in small groups out in the streets in front of friends' houses, where they would often amuse themselves by singing. The men, I had noticed, though also not at all bashful, would generally not be seen with unmarried girls. Yet whenever a young man saw a pretty girl, he would shout out embarrassing phrases like, "Here comes the most powerful ladykiller in the world; watch out, pretty lass!" To this the girls usually answered laughingly, "It takes a better man to impress me." Such flirtatious conversations were common, and Calay in fact showed that he was quite good at this sort of talk whenever we traveled with him in Lo. Calay considered himself a Don Juan, and boasted that he had women in every district of Nepal.

Pemba explained to me how a boy went about marrying a girl. First of all, he would meet her often, and they would have little chats secretly, like all lovers in the world. Then, when he felt he was ready to get married (a good age being twenty-two for a man, and about twenty for a girl), the suitor would steal silently at night to the house of the girl, and there with great caution he would knock at her window or the door of the house, whispering, "Let me in, let me in." On hearing this, the girl would rush to the door, and shout at the top of her voice, so that her father could hear, "Go away, go away! I will never let you in!" Of course this usually frightens the suitor, who whispers back,

"Don't make so much noise." The young girl then screams at the top of her voice, "Go away. Never, never will I let you in!"

Now, if she does not love the young man, or does not want to get married, she simply does not open the door, and that is the end of that. But if she likes the young man and wants to marry him, then at the same time that she is shouting to wake up her father, she opens the door.

Although this sounds contradictory, this tactic is to gain her father's approval. If the father is opposed to the wedding (he usually knows whom his daughter is in love with, Lo Mantang being a very small place), he comes to the open door and chases away the suitor. If, though he has heard his daughter cry out, "Go away, go away!" and heard the door slowly being opened, he does not appear, the girl considers that he has given his consent. The suitor slips into his loved one's house, and secretly they go to bed with each other. This is now considered somewhat like an engagement. To use Pemba's words, "The following day the boy will tell his father, 'I have slept with so-and-so's daughter and liked it, and like her; we want to get married.'" This sets in motion the complicated ritual that will precede the wedding.

The day after having been told by his son that he wants to get married, the father of the prospective groom goes alone with a bottle of chang to see the parents of the young girl, and informs them that his son wants to marry their daughter.

The father of the bride then answers cautiously, "My daughter has many suitors [even if this is not true]; I will not give her to your son." He adds, however, "If my daughter likes your son, then it is all right. I will consult her first."

That evening the father of the bride asks his daughter, "Do you like this young man or not?" The girl is very much ashamed, and if she likes the boy she buries her face in her hands, which is understood as an affirmative reply. If she does not like him, she says so, and cries.

If the girl agrees, the following morning the girl's father goes with a pot of chang and a pot of tea to visit the boy's parents, and gives his agreement to the marriage.

The day after this, the boy and his father go to the fiancée's house, and the father of the boy places a little butter upon the forehead of the girl in sign of ownership, while his son gives a kata to the girl's brother—or to her father if she has no brother—and then they leave.

The day after this, the fourth day in this exchange of compliments, the boy goes again to the girl's house with his father. There they all drink chang, and the bride's father gives his future son-in-law a small

sermon to the effect that he should look after his daughter. The son's father answers that the girl should behave, and never sleep with another man. From that day until the wedding, the boy may stay in his fiancée's house, and is allowed to sleep with his bride to be; a custom which I must say is rather unusual, all the more so since the official wedding may come about only six months or a year after this. The exact day of the wedding has to be determined by the lamas upon solicitation by the boy's father.

I was, unfortunately, not able to attend a wedding during my stay in Mustang, and thus missed one of the most interesting aspects of family life in Lo. But Pemba, who had been to many a wedding, made up for this by explaining all the details to me. Surprising as it may seem, the lamas have little to do in the marriage ceremony, which is considered a lay affair in which the church has little or nothing to say.

I learned that a young man, after having slept with his bride while awaiting the wedding, can change his mind. Virginity is not prized in Tibet as in so many other countries; and as the betrothal customs showed, sexual morals are quite loose in Mustang.

On the day of the wedding, the father of the groom goes to the young girl's house early in the morning, bringing beautiful clothes for the bride to wear, along with earrings and jewels. The wedding garments are like ordinary attire, but of the finest material; a sleeveless chuba, a silk blouse, a cape, and two aprons.

The father of the bride makes a little speech, saying, "Your son and my daughter are not to fight," adding, "Your son is not to boss my daughter around," a phrase we would hardly hear at a Western wedding, where it is usually underlined that the wife owes the husband obedience. As previously mentioned, Tibetan and Loba women have a high status; they are never treated as slaves, and seldom treated harshly. If this occurs, a divorce can be easily obtained, the husband having merely to pay the bride's parents the equivalent of fifty dollars for the marriage to be annulled.

When the bride is dressed, all her friends place katas around her neck, while the boy's father comes forward, and in a gesture that no doubt reenacts the ancient custom of stealing brides, places a ceremonial arrow with tassels in the girl's dress behind her neck.

The bride is then ready to go to her husband's house, where all the guests have assembled. If the house is distant, and the couple wealthy, a white or gray horse is used to transport the bride. The horse is led by a young boy who is not a member of the family and whose parents are still living. Slowly the procession makes its way. Along the route old

women gather at intervals, holding out bowls of chang and singing special songs of advice to the bride. As she reaches these singing women, the bride stops and dips her finger in the chang, flicking it three times around her, thus spreading drink to the gods.

Following the bride come the two fathers-in-law and the other male members of the bride's family. A band of drummers and flute players follows the procession, and firearms are shot to make noise. When the bride reaches the door of her future husband's house, she dismounts. There on the doorstep a lama awaits to throw grains of rice three times at her, thus purifying her and making sure that she brings no evil into her husband's house.

As the bride enters the doorway, the groom's mother gives her turquoises as a gift. If the family is wealthy, they will give the bride a long headband of turquoises. When the bride gets to the foot of the ladder or stair leading to the second floor, the bride's father shouts out, "Bring the belt," and from above the guests lower a long cloth belt, over which the bride climbs up.

In the meantime the groom, or grooms if the girl is marrying several brothers, awaits seated at the place of honor in the house beside the fire. The bride's father comes up to him and says, "I am giving you my daughter," and so he does, and the bridesmaids sing while the young girl takes her place beside her husband or husbands. The arrow that was placed behind her neck is taken away by the bridegroom's father. The bridesmaids then sit on the side of the husband, while his friends sit next to the bride.

Before proceeding with the festivities, the boy's father hands over to the father of the bride the right leg of a sheep wrapped up in a kata, and to the girl's mother the left leg of the same sheep, distributing the remains of the mutton to the other members of the bride's family. Having done this, the boy's father shouts, "I have given you meat, now give me money [the dowry]."

Up till now all the presents have come from the boy's parents; it is now time for the bride's father to give him his presents and the dowry. This usually consists of a number of sheep or yaks, or perhaps a field and horses, according to the wealth of the family. Having informed the assembly of these presents, the father of the bride gives a kata to the bridegroom, and the marriage is considered concluded. All the guests shower katas and occasionally presents upon the newly married couple, or trio, as the case may be, and a feast begins in which there is much drink, song, and dance.

It took me little time to realize that in Mustang the problem of sex is

not smothered in vastly inhibiting taboos. The men relish off-color jokes, for the most part amusing and quite innocent, which pointed to the fact that Tibetans and Lobas are much more broadminded in these matters than most people around the globe.

In Mustang a pretty girl is publicly praised for her more endearing characteristics, and one will occasionally find a young girl of loose habits ready to seduce any handsome traveler, and even a foreigner. Although I noted no professional prostitutes in Lo Mantang, it was generally recognized that certain women were rather light. Because of polyandry and the large number of monks, there are a fair number of unattached women in the land, who can hardly be expected to lead a completely chaste life.

The fact that women are treated with respect and given a high role in society has brought about a great deal of freedom of manner and speech between men and women, who, as I have said, often mix socially. My interest, though, was not in such sexual problems so much as to discover how polyandric families got along.

I soon discovered that such marriages are not considered the best sort. Most young bachelors I met preferred the idea of having their own wife to themselves, but these polyandric marriages are primarily good "business" propositions—their justification being economic. As I have mentioned, the basis of social life rests on maintaining one's estate undivided through inheritance by the eldest son. The younger brothers, finding themselves dispossessed of any worldly goods, have either to become monks or servants of their brothers or other men. In preference, therefore, to being merely a servant, many younger brothers prefer to marry their elder brother's wife.

These polyandric marriages are always made with the consent of all involved. When a man marries, his younger brothers are consulted. If they like the same woman, and the girl agrees, they make a common marriage—all involved participating in the marriage ceremony. The elder brother, nevertheless, retains the privileges due his rank, while in other matters everything is shared.

As there is no means of determining exactly who is the father of the children, they all call the eldest husband "father," and the other fathers "uncle"—*au* (paternal uncle.)

I often wondered how the husbands took turns in accomplishing their duties toward the common wife, and discovered that this delicate question is solved in a strange manner.

In Mustang pajamas do not exist, and everyone goes to bed completely naked. This is an ancient custom, perhaps originating with the

Drukpas—the nomads of Tibet—who as a rule always undress completely and live naked in their tents. Now when a woman has two or three husbands, I was surprised to learn that all three or four sleep together in the same bed, or rather upon the same mattresses set out by the fire at night. As for the performing of amorous duty, it is anybody's choice, with no rules or turns; all is done in the family and in the group. A startling revelation!

Polyandry in the long run gives women great prestige and authority. There are also many other advantages attached to this form of family life. It is very much owing to this system that overpopulation has been checked in Tibet—a woman with three husbands does not necessarily have more children than if she had only one husband.

As for the chance of becoming a widow, this is very much reduced; and with two or three men to earn the family's bread, or rather tsampa, life is easier for everyone. Although to men of the West the idea of such family life shared with others appears rather unpleasant, the people in Mustang grow up with this kind of marriage in mind, and are ready for it. Also, brotherly love, like friendship, is a very strong tie in Mustang.

Of all relationships, friendship is in Lo one of the most powerful. There even exists a religious ceremony by which two men bind themselves as friends for life. Once this bond is made it is rarely broken, and I was frequently able to admire the solidarity and force of friendship among men. Later a monk was to ask to be united with me by the unbreakable bond of friendship, to which I consented.

Despite the rather free attitude to sexual matters, on the whole the people of Lo were very discreet and reserved in public in manifesting love and affection. One would rarely see a man and wife kiss, either in the streets or in the intimacy of their home. They have in these matters a great reserve, and sentiments like anger or love are rarely expressed publicly.

— Magic and Medicine

TO ME, THERE was not a "normal" thing in Mustang. Everything, from weaving to cooking, from astrology to printing, and down to how objects were weighed and measured, was new and fascinating to me. Fully aware that I was being exposed to a unique culture, and benefiting from the advantage of being able to communicate in Tibetan, I tried my best to note and write everything down. This involved a considerable amount of work. There was, it seemed, no act of life in Lo that did not require its special religious ritual or have its special magical significance. Whether it was to build a house or plow a field, all these actions were accompanied by rituals whose origins, as well as their forms, I had to record.

To this heavy schedule, and the strain of perpetually using a difficult foreign language, I also added much physical exertion. The total result was that I grew very tired of rushing about or spending hours with my legs cramped below me upon mats that quite frequently had fleas, while I interrogated a monk, a doctor, or simply a trader or herder.

The rough diet that was my daily fare, the cold climate, the altitude, the absolute lack of comforts, and constant exertion soon made me seek some form of relaxation. This led me to participate in the games of the local people, which for adults and children alike are limited to the thousand and one different forms of gambling.

Gambling for money is an affliction of the Himalayas, and there is nothing a Loba will not gamble on, whether it be how many donkeys will pass the city gate in the evening before a yak appears or a Tibetan game of dice played with little bone sticks and beans. I am not a gambler, but I was delighted when I discovered that Calay had in his private possessions a pack of cards. I began playing cards with him,

Kansa, and Tashi, at night around the kitchen fire, delaying as long as possible the moment of retiring into our freezing chapel and its damp sleeping bags.

We started by playing an innocent Nepalese game, until we received a visit from Osher. Osher was a young Khampa, six foot two, handsome, and with fine long, healthy black hair. He lived in the same house as we, and very soon we became friends. Osher had the straight, clean-cut features of a tanned young man from the American Midwest; his face always showed a friendly smile, and his manners could well be described as cool. He was lanky and phlegmatic, and when he was not combing his long hair he would come to sit by our fire, and chat.

A Khampa, he spoke Tibetan with a nasal twang similar to the American accent in English, and we soon discovered that he loved to play cards for money.

I had been greatly intrigued by Osher since our arrival. His smart, lanky figure stood out in contrast with the rougher Lobas. Osher had beyond doubt come of a wealthy family in his homeland thousands of miles away on the Chinese border. Exiled from his home, he had fought for many years with the Khampa soldiers, and now was part of the mysterious army settling in western Nepal. Why, I wondered at first, did Osher live alone in Lo Mantang?

Osher always wore a combination of Tibetan clothes with an assortment of Western garments picked up on battlefields. Under his khaki chuba he had a Chinese zipper sweatshirt; he wore European army boots, yellow socks, and a pair of blue trousers tucked under his boots. On his arm he wore an Omega watch. Playing cards with him, I noticed that he always had a wad of several thousand rupees in Indian and Nepalese notes. He was by all standards rich. Exactly who paid him was a secret that we never cracked. All we knew was that he belonged to the secret army of the Dalai Lama.

It was only after a few weeks that I discovered that Osher lived in Lo Mantang as a purchasing agent for the Khampa military camps. His particular function was to buy horses for the warriors up in the hills. He spent most of his time looking for good prospects and bargaining with horse dealers. We could see that he bought only the best horses, as each one—before being taken to the hidden *magars*—was left a night or two in the stables on the ground floor of our house. Osher paid cash for his purchases and paid well; some of the horses he bought he paid 2,000 rupees for, which is nearly 400 dollars!

Osher, like all the Khampas I met, was mute and secretive about his activities, his leaders, and their camp. Like all of them, although he

might appear primitive to a Westerner because of his long hair, he was in fact fully aware of what was going on, both in China and outside, and was a well-disciplined soldier. Although I knew he was buying up horses, I never got from him any details as to where they were sent or for how long he had been doing so. To my questions he would answer with pleasant smiles and silence, proposing a game of cards to change the subject.

Very soon, thanks to Osher, I realized we were running a small gambling joint in our kitchen, and eventually I had to put a stop to the card games we played every night with ever higher stakes. This was, I thought, hardly proper, so we gave up our games, not without regret on my part, as I got tremendous pleasure from learning the Tibetan expressions used in playing cards. Miles from anything I had ever known, here I was—turning over aces with a Khampa warrior, an Amdo scholar, a Tamang cook, and a one-eyed porter. All this in the dim light of a brush fire on the third floor of a ducal house, set within a stone's throw of the king's town palace, while a locked city gate protected us from the barren hills and the hissing winds.

My daily life had now fully transported me into a world of alien values, in which I was surprised to discover I had found my place—not so much in playing cards as in living at ease and drinking greasy tea amid robed monks and simple peasants.

Inside the sheltering wall of Lo Mantang I was momentarily able to forget the grave problems of the Khampas and the fact that they were at war with a nation of 600,000,000 inhabitants whose troops surrounded us on three sides. Like most of the Lobas, I was only partially aware of the great conflict that was associated with the little area I was in—a strategic zone, a forbidden land. The Lobas took the war in their stride, as they had faced before the invasions of Mongol bandits and the various attempts of outsiders to conquer their forts. Most of the past skirmishes had ended in favor of Lo Mantang, and people still recalled how the city wall had repelled the bullets of the famous Tibetan bandit Sopo Gaden Sewan.

My peaceful isolation in Lo Mantang, however, was soon to end. To begin with, we left the shelter of the town to go to the monastery of Samdruling, to visit—together with Pemba—the young lama, the priest who had studied in a monastery at Sikkim.

We left for Samdruling at the crack of dawn on May 20th. It was snowing. Since our arrival this had been a frequent occurrence at dawn, but as the snow never stuck, we took little notice of it. But by the time we had walked a couple of miles out on the barren plain

southwest of Lo Mantang, the small snowfall had turned into a blizzard. Freezing cold, I slogged through three inches of damp snow in a pair of glorified yachting shoes. Although their thick soft rubber soles were most comfortable, their canvas tops were less than waterproof, and our progress now became not only slow but painful.

Leaving the Plain of Prayer, we began climbing southward up a wide, barren valley. I envied Pemba, who was wearing a large fur hat with flaps he could pull over his ears. As for Tashi and me, we had on our heads woolen caps that were soggy and uncomfortable, while the eternal wind filled our exposed left ears with ice, making this outing as unpleasant as it was mysterious and gloomy in the driving snow and low visibility. In this storm the landscape took on a look of desolation beyond what I had imagined possible. It was with a sigh of relief that, following Pemba, we took refuge in a cave. Here I cheered myself with a cigarette, thinking how fortunate and comfortable our ancestors of the Stone Age had been in their solid rock, draft-proof dwellings.

One of the main points of interest in our excursion was that Pemba had promised that, on our way to the monastery, we would pass the ruins of two ancient forts. Leaving the shelter of our cave, we inspected the first of these, standing upon a rocky outcrop above the valley we had been following. Beaten by snow, the badly damaged ruins were as nostalgic as they were sinister. This fort was called Rari, which means Goat Hill; and all matters considered, I was rather delighted to leave the place to the goats.

Sloshing ankle deep in snow, and occasionally soaking my feet in little streams whose black, icy water ran treacherously under cover of fresh ice, we advanced as if forever up and up the sloping valley.

Suddenly, as we progressed, I saw arising out of the eerie wilderness a vertical narrow cliff that seemed like a tall ship plowing down the valley. Soon I could distinguish on this wedge-like cliff the beautiful, crested ruins of a great fort, clinging onto the summit of the mound like the forts of the Crusaders I had seen in Cyprus. Ghostly and majestic, veiled in the snow, this ancient bastion of man's arrogance seemed brought to life. As we continued our upward march, the ship-like fort seemed to drift down on its solitary fogbound route behind us.

I could not help but wonder what I was doing here in this desolate land, living a dream that occasionally bordered on a nightmare; while at other times it would run its course so unreal and enchanting that I surprised myself thinking it all an illusion. Everything I witnessed was so perfect, in such harmony with all around me, that there was never

an off-color note to bring me back to my former self, nothing to break the harmony of this land where the people fitted in so well with their surroundings, living a life in accord with their needs and their beliefs—the whole structure forming such a solid entity that I began to wonder whether any other form of life was possible.

On the way to Samdruling I felt like a pilgrim, and our cold, unpleasant march in the snow that morning gave me a feeling of penance. It was impossible to escape the influence of the pervasive faith of the Lobas. When I saw a cluster of great chortens looming through the snow ahead of us, I found myself welcoming the sight with feelings of devotion, and praying. The solitary chortens announced that we were near our goal.

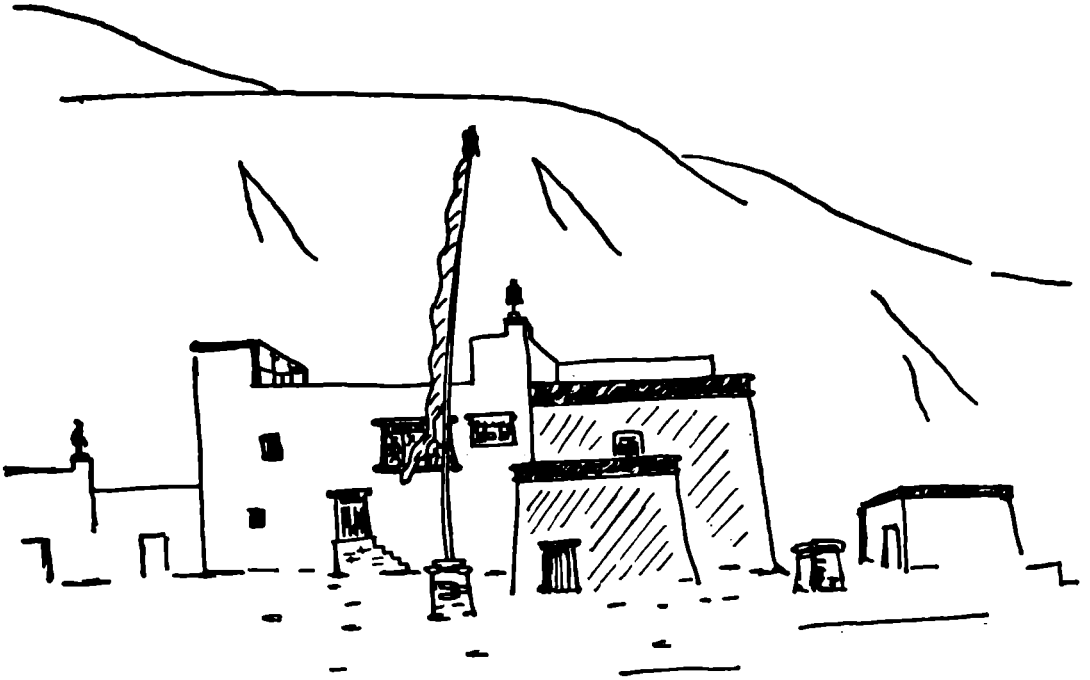
Beyond the chortens we began to descend the edge of a steep little valley, emerging upon a platform above a torrent. Here, neatly braced against the steep sides of the valley, lay the monastery of Samdruling, faintly outlined through the snow in gray and red. A strange feeling of desolation and loneliness hung about the place, and I recalled what Pemba had said about the young lama living here in fear with the Khampa soldiers who had taken over his monastery.

We entered the gumpa through a low door leading into the white side of the building. Here we found ourselves in the usual courtyard, and made our way up a flight of steps into a vast, chilly room. There we found the young lama. On my entering, four great husky Khampas in khaki Tibetan clothes filed out discreetly, no doubt embarrassed by my presence. For the Khampas I fully realized I was an unwanted person, an inquisitive nuisance. One old Khampa with a refined face and short European-type hair remained seated by the lama, who welcomed us with a smile.

The evident sogginess of my shoes attracted long overdue attention to my wet and freezing feet. I was allowed to take off my shoes and socks, and try to thaw my feet before a yak-dung fire, with my back against a punctured paper-covered latticed window, harassed by an icy draft. A strange coincidence, I reflected, that the Tibetan word for a cold (cough) is *lo*. I should catch pneumonia, I thought, remembering with a shudder that at this altitude pneumonia would mean an inevitable speedy death. By now I was yearning for a good cup of hot, salty Tibetan tea, which did not fail to arrive.

Our conversation with the monk was made quite uneasy by the presence of the old Khampa and a few other sturdy, aggressive-looking soldiers who had come back to inspect me with a curiosity that bordered on arrogance. One of these soldiers was dressed in a Chinese high-

collared jacket and baggy trousers. For a moment I wondered whether he was a spy, but soon found out that he had taken his clothes from a Chinese soldier he had shot in a battle. This particular man had a mean, nasty look on his face; his rough-hewn features with their salient cheekbones and dark, hard eyes gave him the stern air of a Chinese mandarin from some fierce Oriental war painting.



The lonely monastery of Samdruling.

No doubt because of our hostile audience, the young lama's conversation with me was very cautious. I discovered that this young monk had traveled all over Tibet, and into Nepal and India. Like the medieval scholars of Europe who wandered from university to university in quest of knowledge, he had gone from monastery to monastery, also visiting numerous shrines and acquiring through his travels a greater knowledge of the various methods of salvation. Nearly all intelligent lamas in Tibet live this life of wandering scholarship, leaving their "home" monastery for many months in quest of enlightened masters who will teach them the various tantras and the magical methods of meditation necessary to achieve the absolute.

The Lama of Samdruling had stayed a long time in a monastery in

the small capital of the state of Sikkim, whose American-born queen is the former Hope Cook. Sikkim is partially attached to India, and many foreigners are to be seen there. Proudly the young monk told me of meeting men and women from the West. In particular, he informed me that he knew what we in the West did with children; he had seen how we placed our young children in baskets with wheels and pushed them about the street. This custom the lama had not quite understood, taking a pram to be some sort of device for special medical treatment. The lama also boasted a few words of English, "elephant," "thank you," and "Mister," a vocabulary as surprising as it was small. He pointed out to me sheets of a Hindu newspaper that he had stuck on the wall of the room, beside two Tibetan texts printed in Kalimpong entitled "Freedom"—no doubt a political pamphlet. I was also shown a fountain pen, a great treasure, and later in an adjoining room a pane of red glass, the first glass I had seen since my arrival in Lo. As trivial as these objects were, I found myself as delighted to see them as the lama had anticipated. They became for me little links with my own world, and I realized once more how much I felt cut off from what had always been my environment. I found myself looking at the fountain pen with real admiration, thinking what a clever piece of handicraft it was.

The Khampas began asking many questions about what I was doing in Mustang. I sensed in their manner of speaking a certain antagonism toward me, and felt as if I were being accused. My answers also appeared to me as rather shaky. How could I hope that these soldiers would believe I had come all this way just to write a book about a land which they—as Khampas—considered godforsaken and uninteresting? I again became very worried and anxious, not so much for myself as for Tashi, and held my breath at the thought that they might cross-question him. As usual he had told them he was a Sherpa of the Mount Everest district, and then sank into silence lest his sophisticated accent give him away as something more than a simple pleasant guide. I felt slightly at a disadvantage before the well-dressed and severe-looking soldiers, what with my socks off and my bare feet stuck before the fire. I nevertheless managed to stay clear of too much embarrassment, and learned that the Khampas had a camp of tents some two hundred yards up the torrent from the monastery. Considering the weather, I reflected that they must be pretty hardy to survive in tents at such an altitude.

Once again I was flooded with mixed sentiments regarding these men. I could not help but admire their courage, while at the same time I objected to their cold aggressiveness. Secretly I would have liked to

have their confidence, to know more about their operations, and the history of the battles they had fought all across Tibet. In our times of modern mechanical warfare and huge anonymous armies, these men stand out as the last of the romantic warriors, whose ponies still race across the steppes fighting battles where sheer individual courage has yet its place. But, however romantic this might seem, I also realized that they faced one of the cruelest fates—that of anonymous death in a war of which the outside world was almost completely ignorant. No one would ever sing their glory or mourn their deaths. They had long since abandoned not only their land but also their families, to keep up their solitary fight against the Chinese.

The soldiers' presence, I now plainly felt, bore heavily upon the young lama, and it was evident that he was closer to being the Khampa's prisoner than their host in this lonely monastery.

When my feet had finally thawed a little, the lama suggested that we go to a small chapel on the second floor, where he would show me the books he possessed. Momentarily leaving the soldiers, we climbed down to the courtyard through which we had come, and took a second flight of steps that eventually led us into a long, narrow room opening onto the courtyard by a long, latticed window. A wooden screen on which a fierce-looking tiger was painted guarded the entrance to the chapel. Inside, all along one wall rose a shelved altar on which were arranged countless images, in copper and gilt wood, of various divinities and monks, while at the far end was stacked an important-looking pile of books. What most struck me on entering were two small masks hung on each of two central columns that supported the roof. On the foreheads of these masks was painted the famed "third" eye.

Samdruling Gumpa, I learned, was of the Kadjupa sect, the only one of its kind in Mustang. Its origins were associated with a nearby cliff where had lived a nun whose virtue and sanctity were renowned for miles around. At her death the monastery was built, and the present young lama was the sixth reincarnate monk of this monastery since its foundation.

Rapidly Pemba and Tashi got to work taking the books from their corner and giving them to the lama, who rested the volumes on their heads before they could begin untying the boards and unwinding the silk that bound the sheets of paper. These long strips are printed lengthwise on both sides, and as the characters are quite small, it was soon evident that we could not read them all. Pemba and Tashi translated the titles for me, and the lama explained in a few words what the books contained. The process of translating literary Tibetan into the

colloquial language, I could understand, was both a lengthy and no doubt inaccurate process. I could nevertheless get a fair idea as to which books interested me—which ones might contain historical information about the land of Lo. For many days Pemba had been telling me that in this monastery was a history book that told all about Lo in the past. I avidly asked to see this book, but at first it seemed no one could find it, and I became rather depressed at the thought that it might have got lost. To cheer me, the lama added that many books had been stolen when he had gone to Gangtok and had to leave the monastery without a guardian.

After about ten dusty volumes had been banged on the low table in front of us by Pemba, at last the much-wanted book was found.

I anxiously prodded Tashi to tell me what was in it. With much application Tashi, helped by Pemba, read sentence after sentence. The book had about forty pages, and I urged Tashi on, as the first sentences were of a general nature, thanking the gods and invoking the intercession of famous Buddhas. Finally, we reached the interesting passages, and I could hardly wait as Tashi stumbled through the phrases to make them comprehensible to me.

The book was apparently the biography of a monk called Tenzing Ripa. As usual, there were no dates, so I could not at first determine when he had lived. But I got excited when I heard the name Chachagam mentioned, the very name of one of the ancient fortresses conquered by Ame Pal, and whose ruins we had seen a few days previously lying east of Lo Mantang, on the plain overlooking the deep gorge where the Kali Gandaki met with the stream running north of Lo Mantang. I was now getting my first written confirmation of what had been told me in varying legends by the king and other people in Lo.

It appeared that the first part of the book was a genealogy of Tenzing Ripa, a lama whose ancestors had been nomads in the Tibetan district of Guké until one of them was called in by Ame Pal to become the fort chief of Chachagam. This man's son was named the head of another fort in the district, called Guké Puran Katum Dzong, whose ruins we were to find later. This man slept with the Queen of Mustang, and was killed. As Tashi read on, I became familiar with the medieval organization of these forts, all under the leader of Lo—Ame Pal. One of the parents of the lama was later named head of the great fort of Muktinath, which in the text is mentioned as being in lower Lo—the first written indication we had of the Kingdom of Mustang's having extended that far south. The lama then told how at the time he was born

a dispute arose between the king and ministers of Lo and the ruler of the fort of Kag, the town we had passed after leaving Jomosom, two days north of Tukutchá. To fight this rebellious chieftain, the King of Lo had called to the rescue the armies of the kings of Jumla, the ancient kingdom situated on the southern slopes of Mount Dhaulagiri, and which later was to conquer Mustang. "The armies of Jumla," the biography reported, had seized all the crops of the land (no doubt to feed themselves). On defeating Kag, the King of Mustang seized everything inside the village. Here in Kag the monk lived as a child, and the terrible poverty that reigned after this battle was such that Tenzing Ripa wrote, "My father being dead when I was seven years old, my elder brother eleven, we were like the sons of the third hell"—referring to the worst state of the wheel of life, the hell of hells. The book then went on to explain how everyone was so poor that, in order to eat, the mothers had to pawn their own children as collateral for loans of food.

I was convinced that this manuscript was of the highest interest, and decided that at all costs I must purchase it. This, Pemba whispered in my ear, could be arranged if I left it up to him. As we were reading through the text, the Khampas had entered the chapel, as if to check that I was really concerned with religious and cultural matters only. Apparently satisfied that I was, they walked out again, so that we were now alone once more.

The feeble sun had begun to peep through the mist outside, and we decided to take this opportunity to visit the main temple adjoining the living quarters of the monastery. This proved a sorry sight; through a hole in the roof a cold wind whistled into the dim room on whose walls the last traces of frescoes were peeling, while old painted prayer banners stirred in the draft. In a corner lay the sinister form of a discarded, pierced drum, joining in desolation split wooden offering bowls upon the altar. In another corner of the temple stood four large yak-hide packing cases, used by the young monk on his travels, in which he packed his belongings and books. It is the custom for monks to bring their own books to the monasteries where they study. In most monasteries Tibetan monks are left very much to themselves, having to choose their own teachers and supply their own books and paper, if not to build their own cells or houses in the monastery compounds. On the other hand, the monasteries all over central Asia welcome any passing monk or roving scholar for as long as he wishes, often regardless of which sect he belongs to, and he can thus benefit from any teachers and the large lending libraries owned by the monasteries.

On considering the small, uncomfortable, and desolate monastery of Samdruling, its unwanted squatters, the Khampas, and its lonely position, I felt that it would not be long before its young lama would travel again to some distant monastery in search of more congenial company or more pleasant surroundings.

When the sun had finally made a permanent appearance and started to melt the snow, we prepared to leave. Pemba had borrowed from the lama a great circular drum inside a soft leather case, which he intended to take home in view of the religious ceremony of Newné that was soon to be held in his house. Hugging the clumsy drum, Pemba followed us out with the lama, down the deep ravine and up to the other side. Here we were to look at the original cell of Ani Pemo, the holy nun of Samdruling, who was so saintly that she ate only stones, and once every eleven days one grain of barley for her survival.

At the foot of an eroded cliff, climbing up a tree-trunk ladder, we entered a small, shallow cave in which was another ladder leading up a narrow underground shaft to a small dark, circular cave from which extended three corridors. We were now in an underground, man-made monastery or nunnery composed of intercommunicating rooms situated one on top of each other. The main room was a vast square hallway cut out of the cliff; one part of this room had fallen down into the abyss below in a landslide. In the back of this hall a wooden lattice-work screen isolated a dark room, where stood an ancient wooden altar, a couch, and low tables, besides a great wooden chest that contained books. Here Ani Pemo had lived in meditation and fasting, if one discounts the stones. At a later date a large congregation of nuns had lived in these mysterious caves. Outside once again, having said goodbye to the lama, leaving him to his annoying Khampa friends, we counted more than fifty dark openings in the cliff, the windows of cells in what had once been a huge underground place of worship.

Still filled with the awe that had inspired us in the dark, damp passageways and humid cells, we set out in the sun for Lo Mantang, all of us rather pleased to be headed back to more hospitable company. Lo Mantang, I felt, was now truly my home, and on such outings in the cold and the wind I would often yearn for the shelter of its walls. As we marched down upon a narrow ridge toward Lo Mantang, we saw spread before us all the northern part of Mustang, a spectacular view that spoke more to the heart than to the senses, its cold, desert-like grandeur contrasting with the warm, picturesque type of landscape I was accustomed to in Europe. Because of the absence of trees and the barrenness, objects that seemed near turned out to be miles

away. This was the case of a ruined fortress standing upon a small peak known as the "Hill of the Gods." Called Piu Dzong, this was one of the many ancient forts of Lo. I had noticed that around these forts were no signs of past habitation or even of cultivation. I was later to find out that they had been built mostly by nomadic peoples who gathered their tents around these defensive structures, into which they withdrew in time of danger. The oldest of these forts dated from the tenth and eleventh centuries, and were served by semi-independent chiefs obeying the fort ruler of the Tibetan town of Dzong Kar, before they fell under the rule of the kings of Mustang—whose control varied according to the ups and downs of the history of the land.

The wind was howling as we made our way through the empty, barren rooms and little chambers of the fort—half eroded by wind and water. The structure commanded an incredible view. In the shelter of a crumbling wall, Tashi, Pemba, and I sat down for a rest. Pemba as usual was full of energy; taking off the yak-skin cover from the drum he had been carrying, he began to hit it with great force, and sing a slow-rhythmed Loba song. It had taken me some time to get used to the songs of Mustang; the songs the girls would sing in the evening gathered in small groups were quite melodious, but those sung by men were unusual and rather dissonant to my Western ears. Pemba sang in a broken voice, sometimes reaching high pitches as if yodeling, marking each verse with an abrupt ending. As in most of the songs of mountain people, the last word is shouted and then cut short so that its echo can be heard quite clearly. As for the rhythms of Loba songs, they are quite heavy—like most music of boot-wearing people, rhythms that can be stamped with heavy shoes upon the ground, as opposed to the rather wispy rhythms of barefoot people. Pemba having run out of songs, Tashi took over with a melody from his land, and very nearly gave his true identity away to Pemba, who had already been quite suspicious that Tashi was not simply a Sherpa. As for myself, I could in no way evade having to give a performance of Western tunes, and after a rather dismal attempt at a popular classic, I preferred to volunteer to learn a Tibetan song. After this, I amused both Tashi and Pemba by inventing my own songs in Tibetan, not without a certain success; the Tibetan language being monosyllabic, it is quite easy to rhyme, and I was quite pleased with my Tibetan verse on rather worn themes of lovers' moanings. By the time we left the lofty heights of Piu Dzong and made our way down to Lo Mantang, we were all very excited, each of us singing at the top of his voice to the howling wind as we raced down the smooth, stony hills.

Sheltered at last from the wind, we entered the town gate. In the main square we ran into a rough peasant carrying the skin of a huge snow leopard slung upon his back—the animal was white with black spots and measured nine feet in length. The man had just shot it with an old musket, partly skinned it and stuffed it with straw, and was bringing it to the New Gumpa—the monks there would no doubt hang it up in the temple as a defense against demons. The fierce beast looked particularly gruesome, with blood still on its skin around its mouth. Although the Lobas never kill animals or even insects, it is understood that in self-defense or in protecting one's herds one can shoot such dangerous animals as snow leopards. This particular one had been shot as it attacked goats grazing above Lo Mantang.

The following day I set out with Pemba to visit one of the two doctors in Lo Mantang. These doctors were regarded very highly by all the local people, not only as medicine men but as being very learned. Both had studied their trade in Lhasa, where under expert guidance they had gone through all the Tibetan medical texts. In Lo the profession of doctor encompassed also those of the chemist, botanist, alchemist, and also, to some extent, the magician—although problems of magic relating to healing were generally considered the province of the monks. With a great deal of common sense, when someone was ill in Mustang he called first the doctor, then later if necessary the monks, according to whether the doctor diagnosed a demon or a worm—a *du* or a *bu*. In the West we have come to scorn the primitive medicine of foreign lands, and to us most of the remedies and practices of these medicine men appear foolish and inefficient. In fact this is generally not true; these doctors' knowledge of medicinal herbs is often staggering, and borders on scientific exactitude. As for the ability to diagnose various diseases, many of them are as skillful as most Western physicians, and sometimes more so. It is on the side of treatment that they are usually weaker.

What often dismays us in primitive medical practices are all the magic rites, the spells, witchcraft, and strange rituals in which they are shrouded. This magic and witchcraft are in fact devices used by the medicine man; they are necessary, not for curing the sick, but to safeguard the interests of the medicine man himself. We often forget that a doctor, even in the West, has three goals. The first is to cure the sick, the second to preserve his trade and business, and the third to provide some protection for himself in case his patient gets worse and even dies.

These three points are also the concern of primitive doctors. As they

have no medical associations that can ensure them against reprisals in case they make a mistake; as, further, they have no medical organization that can help maintain their monopoly as doctors, they have to provide their own protection. This is done by the introduction of divinities and strange rituals into their scientific practice as a refuge in case the actual medicine does not work. If something goes wrong the doctor can blame the moon or some supernatural force, while the complicated ritual into which he incorporates the medicinal treatment so mixes up the patient that he never exactly gets to know what was the plant the doctor used in the cure. This gives the primitive doctors a means of retaining the monopoly of the secrets of their trade, an important point when one recalls that most medicinal plants grow wild and are easily available to anyone who might learn what plant to use for any particular disease.

With this in mind I set out with Pemba to try to pierce some of the well-guarded secrets of Tashi Tsushan's trade. This doctor was a lanky man of about forty, who received us rather coolly in his neat house. I discovered he did not like me too much, because since my arrival I had—without knowing it—been his rival, as many people had come to me for treatment, and no doubt with my pills I had succeeded where he had failed.

I managed to patch up this rivalry only when I agreed to exchange some of my medical secrets, or rather some of my medicine, for information concerning the doctor's own prescriptions.

Seated around a smoky fire, I heard all about the great problems of worms and demons. "Small, small worms, so small that they cannot be seen," the doctor told me, are the cause of most diseases, or rather are the instruments of diseases, because what gives you these worms are the demons. To treat the worms, you must treat the demons. By knowing what kind of worm is involved, one can learn what demon is acting up.

Therefore to identify the demon one first diagnoses the worms. (The analogy here between the small worms and microbes is too coincidental for us not to suspect that a certain Western influence has seeped into Tibetan medicine, although this is not proved.)

I learned that there are 1,080 evil demons that cause 424 diseases attributed to various worms. As for children's diseases, there are 15 special ghosts for these. To all these diseases one must add the 360 calamities, accidents such as falling down a ladder, getting burned, drowning, falling off a horse, and so on, caused by one's karma (inherited disposition from previous lives). To fight such demons and

worms the doctors possess countless medicines, and also the assistance of eight medical gods, the leader of whom is Sanji Mela—the patron of doctors.

The doctor then explained to me that in Lo he could not “cut people up” to see inside them, as our doctors do, but had to rely on exterior signs. For the diagnosing of all diseases the pulse is felt, and the patient’s urine examined, a practice current in China for over two thousand years. One also looks behind the patient’s ears to diagnose lung trouble, at his tongue for liver and eye complaints, and at the mouth for heart ailments. By these examinations one can determine the kind of worm involved and what demon has caused the disease. The doctor then gives two prescriptions. One is for medicine; the other identifies by name the particular demon who must be chased away by the monks.

An unusual urine test is often performed to determine what medicine should be given. The herb or chemical (gold dust, sulfur, and so on) is placed in the patient’s urine. If it sinks, the medicine is not considered good; if it floats it is also not given; but if it mixes with the urine it is considered appropriate.

As medicines, I was shown a dried frog, the hair of a deer, sulfur, iron ore, gold oxide, saltpeter, and countless herbs and roots. But by far the most exciting medicine, and I believe the most potent, was—penicillin! To my surprise I found that penicillin in a disguised form had been known for centuries in Mustang, and no doubt also in Tibet.

I had noted that whenever a distinguished guest is given a cup of tea or chang to drink, the host places a small piece of butter with his finger on the edge of the cup as a sign of respect. This gesture is also made by the Lobas every New Year in respect to their homes: some butter is placed on the central post that supports the ceiling of their living rooms. Each year butter is thus added to the post in little blobs. This butter soon becomes green with mold. This natural home-grown penicillin is the very prescription given for infected cuts and sores. The doctors instruct their patients to take this moldy butter from the pillar and place it on cuts and wounds.

After visiting the doctor I felt sure that one could find reasonable justification for most medicines that he employed, but on the other hand the magic and mysterious aspects of his trade, used to fool the patients or to protect himself, are for the most part phony. There are also many taboos, things not to do so as not to catch a disease—one must not, for example, boil water or food near a small child, or he will get sick; one must never wash below the waist, and so on and on.

I left Tashi Tsushan's house quite convinced that he was not such a fool as I had been presuming, but I nevertheless felt that if the king's son's life rested entirely on his talent, he might die yet.

The royal patient's health, I was told by the doctors, now rested in the hands of the monks who were trying through prayer to intercede against the demons. I was sadly reminded that illness was often the consequence of bad deeds accumulated in past lives, which according to the theory of karma had to be worked off through one's successive lives. The idea that man is conditioned by actions in past existences, along with the belief in reincarnation, is one of the cornerstones not only of Tibetan Buddhism but also of the Hindu religion of India.

In talking about sickness and disease, demons and worms, with Pemba, I learned that in Lo Mantang there lived eight real live witches, who were publicly known to be in communication with evil demons whom they occasionally directed against the townspeople, causing them to get ill. These witches for the most part were old widows who had "gone bad." When a man or woman in Lo becomes too old to work, he or she usually becomes a *manitrakin* or *manipa*; that is, they devote the last years of their lives entirely to reciting prayers for the king or the nobles. They receive food and lodging just to spend their day turning a prayer wheel and slipping rosary beads through their fingers for other people. I met many such old people, with weather-beaten faces so lined and rough as to appear like the leather of old shoes. The old folk who are not pious, however, and not professional prayer sayers, soon become suspected of witchcraft. They are believed to acquire an intimate knowledge of demons, and although they are very much feared and disliked, they are not tormented or chased away, because they can also heal if one pays them to ask the demons to de-camp.

As in every other part of the globe, diseases in Lo are usually followed by death; as Tashi had told me so plainly, "In ninety-nine years all living creatures must die."

Death in Lo Mantang has many meanings, and is interpreted in many ways. The disposal of the dead, and the manner in which one dies, give rise to many elaborately strange and often ghastly rites.

— Man's Five Funerals

DEATH IN OUR Christian culture, despite our faith in an afterlife, is always a subject and cause of fear. Death, it has been said, is the only inescapable reality in our lives—and so with the Lobas. Despite their belief in reincarnation, nothing can attenuate the fear that death inspires, and although Tashi was very philosophical on this subject, Pemba shared with me a certain fear and apprehension of death.

For the Lobas, death is a lottery in which the wheel of life is spun once more, its six losing numbers revolving, to impose finally one of the six forms of rebirth. Death is generally considered a malediction, at least as opposed to a long life. The Tibetans all wish to live to be very, very old, and even believe that in the world at its creation man was made to live one hundred years. There is even a divinity called "Uncle One Hundred Years Old" who is revered in Tibet, and although the monks pray for fruitful reincarnations, the people understand these ceremonies as a means of extending one's life. One should, everybody feels, live to be a hundred. But in Mustang, despite that fact that there are few epidemic diseases, people do not live to be very old. As in Tibet, a person seventy years old is rarely to be found.

Tashi explained this fact to me in recalling that we were now living in the universe of the South, one of the four world universes. This world of the South in which we now are, according to Bon Po beliefs, is on its wane. Men through their sins have lost the virtue they inherited at creation, and soon our world will flip over and a new universe will take its place, whose primary characteristic is that everybody will live to be a hundred.

Man is made up—according to Buddhist belief—of fire, earth, water,

and wind. Pemba explained this to me by saying, "A man is hot, and this is the fire in him; if you scratch your skin it becomes white, and this is because there is earth in the skin which you scratch away; as for the water, you find it when you spit; and the wind is present in the lungs." By Tibetans, wind and spirit are often considered the same—as by the ancient Greeks, whose word for soul and wind was the same, *alma*.

When a man dies, monks are immediately consulted. It is they who will guide the soul through the Tibetan purgatory, a period of judgment and fear lasting three days, preceding the rebirth. It is also they who determine what shall be the funeral.

In India the Hindus burn their dead; the Parsees expose them to rot in the sun and be eaten by scavenger birds; in the West we bury them; while sailors throw corpses into the water of the sea. The Lobas and the Tibetans practice all four of these forms of disposal, which return the human body to one of the four elements of which it is composed—fire, earth, wind, and water.

It is the monks who determine which burial will be given to the deceased: whether the body shall be buried, burned, thrown into a river, or cut up in small pieces and fed to the birds, so that it becomes wind, disappearing into the ether.

When a man dies, he is laid down inside his house on a mat. Under his body is placed salt, or in the case of the poor, sand; this so as to absorb the water from the corpse. Ordinary monks (*trawas*) are immediately summoned; according to one's wealth, four, eight, or sixteen monks attend the wake. For as many as seven days the body lies exposed in the house, with the mat upon which it lies surrounded by little butter lamps.

On the third day of this vigil a high, saintly lama, at great cost, is called to the house of the deceased. He generally comes with a tent, which is erected upon the flat roof of the house. In this tent the lama will perform the divination that shall determine, according to the hour and circumstances of death, what type of funeral shall be given the corpse. With the high lama comes his escort of monks, and the house is arranged for a large ceremony, in the course of which many religious cakes and round balls of rice will be made, to be blessed and then offered to all the poor families in the neighborhood.

The presence of a high lama on the third day is necessary, because only after three days in a purgatory of fear is the dead man's destiny finally determined. The wheel of life, having been turned, comes to a stop.

It is believed that with every child born there are a ghost and a god born at the same time, the ghost dressed in black with a black bag on its shoulder, and the god dressed in white with a white bag. All through the man's life this pair, his "guardian demon and angel," keep count of their protégé's good and bad deeds, the ghost picking up black stones for every bad deed and placing them in its bag, and the god doing the same with white stones. It takes roughly three days for these good and bad deeds to be counted, three days in which the dead man lies in dread as to his fate. Will he be an animal, a suffering god, a titan, a tortured spirit? Or will he simply be reincarnated as a man? Of course, if he was a saint he will at death join the absolute and escape, through Nirvana, the grip of the wheel of life.

The lama, on arriving at the dead man's house on the third day, is often asked to inspect the corpse, because it is believed that if the dead person was very, very saintly and has attained Nirvana, then his soul will have escaped through the top of his head. If the corpse's hat has fallen off by the third day (a rare happening, as dead people hardly lose their hats!), then it is a sure sign that the man was a saint. A relatively good man loses his spirit through his eyes; if the spirit leaves through the nose, you go to the world of titans; if it leaves through the mouth, one is sure to become an animal; if through the rectum, one is destined to be reincarnated in hell; while if the spirit leaves through the heart with pain, then one is to become a man again, born in pain.

So it is that one's spirit, or rather one's identity is reborn again in the wheel of life. The lama's main duty is to see that the inert body is returned to one of the four elements—fire, water, earth, or wind.

The most highly considered of these four ways of disposing of a corpse is to have it burned. In such a case, the body is tied up in a crouching position, with a stick to keep the head up. Outside the house a large clay tripod is made. Steel rods are placed upon the three clay supports of the fireplace, and the body set on top, covered with a great white sheet dipped in incense water so that when burning it will smell good. The lama performs these preparations; then the body is covered with wood (never with dung, the habitual fuel), and the son of the deceased or a close relative sets fire to the funeral pyre at midday. Nine times the lama sprinkles the fire with eight different offerings—wheat, barley, rice, linseed, buckwheat, linseed oil, a special rampant grass, and sesame seed. The ninth time all the remaining grains, herbs, and oil are thrown into the fire together. After he has done this, the lama must be given a large amount of money or a new wardrobe by the family before he leaves.

Eleven or twelve days later, one checks to see if the fire still has hot ashes; if not, one breaks the clay fireplace and searches for bones. The lama is then called again, and the bones are brought into the house to be blessed, and are then ground into a fine powder. This human bone powder is mixed with clay, which is shaped into small chortens or molded to the shape of a divinity. These mortuary ceramics are then distributed about the countryside, either on top of a hill or on the side of a chorten, a river, a cave, according to what the lama prescribes.

The second best type of funeral, and no doubt the most gruesome, is that of being fed to the birds. The body of the deceased is taken to the summit of a lonely hill. There it is laid out naked upon a large stone, and its arms and legs hacked off. The dead man's hair is then burned, while his flesh is left exposed to be eaten by eagles and vultures. Ten or eleven days after the birds have begun their horrible feast, often aided by stray or wild dogs, a good "friend of the family" goes up and gathers the remaining bones and the skull, which he crushes into a horrible paste with the brains of the deceased, so that everything can be eaten by the birds, and nothing whatsoever will remain of the deceased, whose body is considered "gone to the wind."

A rather bad form of burial is to be disposed of in water. In this case the corpse is thrown into a river with a stone around its neck, and kept underwater by more stones thrown on top. The last form, and the most despised, is burial in earth. The body is placed in a deep hole in a sitting position, the grave being dug in a "hot and sheltered place" and a prayer flag being placed on top of the grave.

When Pemba described to me all these gruesome practices, I thought that I had had my fill; but then I learned that the Lobas have a fifth way of disposing of their dead, even more ghastly than the four classical ways.

The evening I found out about this fifth method of disposing of corpses, I nearly died of disgust. As usual, I had been asking Pemba questions about all the varied aspects of life and customs in Mustang. I had noted that inside his house many of the great dark wooden cupboards were decorated with little designs of flowers and chortens drawn in dotted white lines. I asked Pemba what this meant.

"Oh," he explained, "we make these drawings every year during the annual New Year celebrations. They are done with the finger dipped in tsampa." I thought this quite interesting, and looking around I noted, also done in white tsampa, a long rectangle on the wall, in which was written *O mani padme hum*.

"Do you do this on the New Year too?" I asked.

"No, no!" explained Pemba. "It is because there in the wall lies my eldest brother. He died when he was seventeen—eight years ago." I laughed, unbelieving, and pointed to another similar inscription in a smaller rectangle, and asked what it was. To my surprise and horror I realized that Pemba was not laughing. "That is my younger brother; he died when he was nine. You see, when a man dies, and has no grandsons, or if his sons die before they have male children, then they are placed in salt, wrapped in a blanket, and buried inside the walls of the houses. I have only two girls, when eventually I have a son then a man who is not of the family will come, break the walls there behind the inscriptions, and take the bodies secretly to a distant place and throw them away. Thus, the lamas say, the ghosts are satisfied and will leave the house, and my newborn son will live to be very old."

On hearing this I felt sick, as I realized I had been eating under the dead body of a child—although that did not disgust me so much as the crushing realization that night in our chapel bedroom that above my air mattress, there was upon the wall the inscription in white *O mani padme hum*. On looking closer, it was plainly visible that under the inscription, in a long, coffin-shaped rectangle, the wall was slightly recessed. Without knowing it, I had been sleeping under a corpse, for our landlady had not yet had any grandchildren! As interesting as this information was, I certainly wished I had never learned it, and even Tashi, like myself, felt upset. We immediately decided that we should move into the kitchen to sleep. But the following day I reflected, "Why think?" and placidly decided, for our few remaining nights in the capital, to stick to our tomb-chapel-bedroom. As Tashi reminded me, the Buddha had said, "Life is but pain."

Small children also have a particularly unusual form of burial. They are often embalmed, and also placed in the wall of their parents' house to remain there until the death of their parents. This particular custom is found in many other parts of the world, even in Mexico, where the Tepozteco Indians keep the dried, mummified bodies of small dead children hung up in their houses wrapped in rags.

For forty-nine days after the death of a parent or close relative there is a period of mourning, a time during which fine clothes cannot be worn, and one cannot be merry or partake in joyful gatherings. One cries and mourns the lost person, and neither men nor women can spin, weave, or make clothes during this period. Then, one year to the day after the relative's death, the Lobas prepare many rice balls and hold a big feast in which this rice is distributed to the poor and to all present,

much chang is drunk, all members of the family come to offer katas to the bereaved relative and make merry, and all is forgotten as life commences again.

Death follows life, and life begins again by birth. Never have I seen children so much loved as in Mustang, but also never have I seen children so neglected in the matter of hygiene. On the other hand, all the children in Lo (at least those who survive) are about the healthiest children one can see anywhere. This apparent contradiction of healthy children in unhealthy surroundings puzzled me for a long time. Finally I was forced to conclude that good dirt is healthful. Imagine a child who is rarely if ever washed, covered with caked mud and earth through which rosy cheeks can be seen, and who stuffs his five dirty black fingers into his mouth, sucking grains of roasted barley picked off the floor—or from the greasy folds of his mother's never-washed chuba—and you have a picture of a happy, healthy young Loba. The Lobas are a happy-natured people. They love animals, which they never mistreat (at least rarely); as for children, they adore them. Small children are always to be seen in the arms of their fathers and mothers, and are taken everywhere by their parents. Unlike India, where fathers are rarely seen with their children, the Lobas are proud to take their young sons and daughters with them to the fields or to social gatherings; even the town council is attended by small children with their great, rough, husky fathers.

There is no doubt that the education of young children, the love they receive, and the way they are treated is one of the greatest factors influencing the mentality of a people. This fact has often been overlooked. While anthropologists have often tried to establish a relation between the characters of the individuals of a nation and their religious beliefs or social and political organization, I think that the character of a national or ethnic group can be traced much more to their attitude to children than to anything else. A child who is beaten, treated harshly, told to keep quiet, ignored or snubbed by adults, and kept at heel by his parents until they die, can hardly develop into a well-balanced, broadminded man. The Lobas and the Tibetans, I believe, are typically such well-developed and very stable individuals; they have pleasant dispositions and few or no inhibitions. This is not because they are saints, but because frustration is reduced to a minimum in children and young adults alike. I have already mentioned how the older generation knows so well how to give their sons a chance early in life, and how in a way social life is dynamic—as opposed to the rigid, frightening, codified life encountered in so many other lands where

children and young adults always have to bow before arrogant, stubborn, and often "gaga" elders, patriarchs, or the like. Not so in Lo. As for the sexual inhibitions that plague the mentality of so many peoples, they are quite nonexistent in Mustang and in Tibet. Sex is considered good, and can even be a great virtue, a means of salvation, for some of the higher practices of Buddhism include sexual "paths" to the achievement of Nirvana. There is no doubt that a social system based on the "middle road," like that indicated by Buddhism, which is against excesses in all fields, does yield many good dividends.

When a young mother is with child everyone rejoices, although it is recommended that she not expose her condition publicly to foreign men in the latter months of her pregnancy. When she is about to have her child, she is confined to her house alone with her husband, whose duty is to assist her in childbearing. Only in extreme cases is the "doctor" called in. Women have their children in a crouched position on hands and knees, the husband helping in the contractions by grasping his wife's waist.

The mother, after having a child, is given a lot of hot butter to drink (to close the womb), and practically immediately after giving birth she is up and about. Little or no fuss is made about her condition. Little fuss is also made about the child. On the third day after his birth, a lama is quietly called to the house, and with no rejoicing or great ceremony he is given a name, one of the many names—as we shall see—he will receive. Some of his hair is cut off by the lama, and that is all.

Why is some of his hair cut off? I could not find this out. It seems to be a custom among many peoples all over the world, who usually shave all the hair off the head of a newborn child, for various reasons which no doubt all have a common origin in one of the great basic myths of humanity.

There are exceptional cases, however, when a newborn or small child receives special attention; that is when an oracle or prognostication declares him to be the reincarnation of some great lama. It is in accordance with the principle of reincarnation and Tantric Buddhist beliefs that saintly monks who have achieved the absolute refuse Nirvana so as to be reincarnated again on earth to help humans along the path of ultimate Buddhahood. Therefore, when a famous and saintly lama dies, his reincarnation is sought in a newborn child. It is in this manner that the Dalai Lama and all other Tibetan lamas, the heads of innumerable monasteries, are "re-found." Any child can be a potential reincarnate lama, and many mothers dream that their sons will be discovered to be small living saints dedicated to the salvation of mankind.

Very rapidly I became familiar with nearly all the children and adults who lived within the shelter of the wall of Lo Mantang, though my interests and studies brought me mostly into contact with the monks, the high officials, and the more "important" people in town. As Lo Mantang was the relatively wealthy capital of the small state of King Angun Tenzing, the dukes of the kingdom preferred to live here.

I saw a lot of Kama Rabgye, a noble of some ability who spoke good Nepalese and acted as interpreter for the king on his rare visits to Kathmandu. I received confirmation from him that the King of Mustang still pays each year his "tribute" to Nepal. This tribute is the token of submission of Mustang to the Gurkha crown. This submission must be understood in a medieval rather than a modern sense. It was a custom in ancient times, and until recently in the Himalayas, for small independent states to recognize a greater power as their "ally." This status entailed no loss of independence, the tribute simply expressing ties of friendship. Until 1962 Mustang paid to Nepal 896 Nepalese rupees a year (about \$100), and two horses. This sum is so minute that it could be only a token payment. Two years ago this payment was changed. Mustang no longer gives two horses, but instead an additional 80 rupees (\$10). Whoever in Mustang negotiated this recent modification was an astute businessman, as a good horse is worth at least 1,000 rupees. The King of Mustang is allowed in return by Nepal to collect any amount of taxes and money from his people, and dispose of this sum. Unlike other areas of Nepal, Mustang pays no "land" tax to the King of Nepal. As already noted by Brian Hodgson and many other scholars of Nepalese history, the status of Mustang is unique: that of an independent principality within Nepal.

Nepal, a Hindu state, was in the past divided into numerous semi-independent regions headed by local Hindu rajas, who after the Gurkha conquest of 1773 paid taxes to the Nepalese king. But their status, as described by Nepalese law and the writings of the aforementioned scholars, was definitely different from that of Lo, which—as a

ABOVE: *Preceded by a Khampa soldier, and followed by a servant monk, the great Khampa lama rides out to pay a visit to the King of Mustang.*
 BELOW: *Coming down from Tibet heavily loaded with salt, a caravan of mules with their gaily decorated harnesses and bells pass the ruins of the upper and lower forts of Tri, near the king's summer residence.*





Tibetan-speaking, Buddhist state—has maintained its privileges, even when the small Hindu states were incorporated in the Nepalese kingdom.

In 1962 there still survived in Nepal certain local Hindu chieftains. When the King of Nepal overthrew his cabinet in 1962, and took into his hands in a more authoritarian way the reins of his country, he promulgated what is known as the "Raja Abolition Act." But in this act a clause states that the ruler of Mustang preserves his titles, his functions, and his privileges in questions of justice and of taxation. This places Mustang in a unique situation in regard to Nepal, and has made Mustang one of the last official feudal states on our planet.

In recent years various attempts have been made by the United States to make use of the strategic advantages of Mustang's location. In particular the Americans have been keen on setting up in Mustang a wireless station that could "listen in" to Tibet and China, and serve as a warning post. But Nepal, a neutral nation, has curbed this ambition, while the Chinese have made several protests on this subject. Nevertheless helicopters have flown over Mustang, and landed there on four occasions in an abortive attempt to set up a small radio station by air. That Lo had remained so unaffected as of 1964 was really a small miracle in itself.

What so pleased me in Mustang was that I did not have to imagine anything. Up till my visit to Lo I had spent most of my life imagining things. . . . how the Tower of London had been in the Middle Ages . . . what Versailles was like in the time of Louis XV . . . how New York was as a Dutch colony. All the buildings I admired in Athens, Mexico City, or Rome required that I look at them more with the imagination than with my eyes, because otherwise I would have wondered what the citizens of Athens were doing with a chicken-wire fence around their main temple—whose absent roof (although rather original) is not worthy of the modernism proclaimed by the white marble statues outlined with the red gleam of a Coca-Cola sign. In fact we have in the modern world all become half blind and half deaf from necessity if we are to admire beauty. We are obliged to shut out the ever-invading ugliness of misplaced modern machinery and other

Like ants, a caravan of horses, in single file, and yaks, in a cluster, make their way out of Lo Mantang into the ocean of barren hills and snowy peaks.

items—cars, tin cans, electric lines. Only the camera relieves this tragic state of affairs, for the camera is half blind and can blot out the unwanted to show only the beautiful, caught fleetingly as one passes among automobiles and buses, between television antennas and water towers. Few people who have not been to India know that a monstrous steel bridge stands beside the famed Taj Mahal. This metallic neighbor, to which one must add the rattle of the trains, hardly embellishes the Taj—one of the so-called wonders of the world.

In Mustang, it seemed that there was nothing that tarnished the general harmony, a harmony not only of buildings and objects but also of people. The Lobas struck me as men and women whose minds were still thoroughly their own, and who were at peace with their own world, a world built upon standards that fitted their surroundings. There are no doubt still some people on our planet severed from much contact with the outside world, but most of these people are “primitive.” In Mustang, I was not among half-naked illiterates or savages, but in the midst of a real civilized world all of its own. Never once was I given any reason to think of these people as “simple-hearted!” The Lobas, like the Tibetans, have an acute and critical judgment of themselves and of foreigners. I shall always remember what the members of a Tibetan family of Lhasa had told me of one Western “adventure” writer whom they had met in Lhasa—“He is a sensationalist”—which was certainly an apt qualification. The Lobas are far from being naïve—quite the contrary, they share with the Tibetans a sharply critical turn of mind—and even the crudest peasants displayed more wit than I would have expected. Although they perform religious duties with a docile obedience that often seems to us Westerners to border on sheer superstition, they are also not afraid to criticize that same religion, its leaders, and their own ideas. Their tolerance toward other creeds and customs, and their straightforward attitude toward foreigners are all signs of this same critical judgment. In Lhasa each year plays were held in which the highest monks and ministers were laughed at and criticized. As in the Rome of the Divine Aretino in the sixteenth century, pamphlets circulated in Lhasa whose humorous and pointed criticism of the government and religious establishment kept in check abuses by high personages.

The ability to judge one’s faults and criticize one’s own institutions is, I believe, one of the greatest signs of civilization. It is a sign of an awareness that is unfortunately lacking in most peoples and cultures, who rarely can lift themselves above national conceit or dispassionately examine their institutions.

In terms of standards of living, the Lobas' is much higher than that of any rural people in India, and no doubt China. Every man had a house that, if it would not have met the exacting standards of our Western civilization, would nevertheless show more square feet of living space per person than is usually allotted in modern urban developments in the West. Houses in Lo are sturdy and well built, like their inhabitants, who do not seem to suffer from any of the habitual anemia and food deficiency endemic in the great masses of population of the underdeveloped world.

As my stay in Lo Mantang came to an end, in the evenings I would roam about the narrow streets of the city, passing before the houses of the people I knew and chatting with the occupants. The last rays of the setting sun would linger in one of the corners of the main square in front of the king's palace. Here the women would congregate, spinning wool with great dexterity as they gossiped. The men, on the other hand, would gather just within the main gate, where the sun's rays also shone until sunset. As they talked, these men would twine yak's wool around a short stick until they had made a thick strand, which later would be wound into a mat for making soles for shoes. At dusk children ran and screamed all over town, when not playing "needles" just outside the town gate. Every man in Lo has attached to his waistband a small leather case in which he keeps needles—large needles used in mending the harnesses of yaks, mules, and horses, and smaller ones used for sewing the yak-cloth bags in which all goods are packed for transport. Children also have their small needle-holders, and would play with their needles as Western children play with marbles, trying to throw them into small holes in the ground.

Just before dark, the tinkling of bells would announce the arrival of the donkeys and horses brought in from the grazing grounds by the town's "public" herders, who took care of everybody's animals. With their return, the men would move outside the gate to watch their animals being driven in. There was incessant activity near the gate. With nightfall occasional caravans would arrive to camp outside the city on their way to Tibet, tying their animals to long woolen cords strung along the ground between steel pegs. I admired very much how the drivers of herds of pack goats would call each animal by name, singing a slow, steady song to each one as they grabbed it by the horns and secured it to the ropes on the ground.

Despite what I had been told about trade with Tibet being completely halted, it now appeared that many Lobas passed freely into Chinese Tibet and that the salt trade was still active. Every day would

see the passing of flocks of three to four hundred goats, loaded down with salt in small bags upon their backs, coming from Tibet. This salt, and also borax, came from the great salt lakes north of the Brahmaputra. The Lobas had, it seemed, a monopoly on its transportation from the banks of the great river at a place called Liksé, just a few hours from the border of Mustang, down to Tukutchá.

Talking to these salt traders, I learned that in Liksé was a Chinese army camp with "great houses underground like caves" (no doubt fortifications of sorts) and that people were not allowed into the military part of the camp. Later I had the opportunity of meeting a middle-aged noble of Lo Mantang who had frequent contacts with the Chinese. He told me how he had been informed in Liksé that the Chinese had said that "Mustang and the area north of the Annapurna should all be Chinese, down to Jomosom, where the Nepalese have their large checkpoint." This man, who it appeared was on the best of terms with the Chinese, was nevertheless quite anxious about the state of affairs. One evening I saw him saddling his horse before his house, and asked him where he was going. "To Liksé," he replied, telling me that on horseback he would reach there the following morning, stopping to sleep in Mustang near the *sem sem*, as the border is called. Two days later this man was back, and he invited me to come to his house.

I went there with Tashi, thinking this would be but a simple short visit, and hoping that we might learn something about the situation the other side of the border. His house was a large, freshly whitewashed, three-storied affair with windows neatly outlined in black paint, and four red rectangular chortens at each angle of the house. On entering the living room, we were surprised to see five men seated there, with the Head Lama of Lo Mantang, who had been performing a private religious ceremony and was now eating, seated in the place of honor. My host welcomed us warmly, and we sat down to what should have been a friendly chat.

It so turned out that our conversation became none too friendly. Before the Lama and those present I was put through much inquisitive questioning, and then bluntly told by my host, Shewo Cheuzang, "The Chinese know everything you are doing." I had nothing to hide—my activities had been plain enough—but out of curiosity I asked, "How do you know the Chinese know all that I have been doing?" The man then replied rather naïvely that he had told them. I had already suspected Shewo Cheuzang of entertaining rather too amicable relations with the Chinese, and this made me slightly uneasy. But my uneasi-

ness was nothing compared to the embarrassment of what followed.

Before me was seated a handsome but rough-looking man. He was quite evidently very tipsy from chang, and began to speak in the gruff manner characteristic of drunks. Addressing himself to Tashi, he said, "Where are you from?" As agreed, so as not to have any trouble with the Khampas, Tashi said he was "a Sherpa." Upon which the drunken man said, "You are not a Sherpa; you speak like someone from Lhasa." Tashi protested, adding that he was born in "Namche Bazar." A silence followed; then lifting his wooden bowl of chang, the drunkard addressed all those present: "He is not a Sherpa. As you all know, I am a Sherpa!"

I felt like falling through the floor. I had to do something quickly to stop this conversation, so I addressed the man, but soon realized that I could in no way change the subject—the drunk obstinately insisting that Tashi was not a Sherpa. I could see Tashi was blushing, and as annoyed, or rather as scared, as I was. If his true identity was found out, there was no telling what might happen, especially if the Khampas were to discover it. I decided to take the risk of accusing the drunkard myself.

"Where are you from?" I asked him.

"I'm a Sherpa," he said.

"Where were you born?" I added quickly. The man then named a small hamlet north of the main monastery of Thyangboche near Mount Everest. Bluffing, I declared to the assembly: "This man is not a Sherpa. I know Khumbu, the Sherpa country, well, and have never heard of his so-called village." This, of course, put the drunkard in a rage, and as people seemed to want to believe me rather than him, he got extremely angry. I was lucky enough to find out that this "Sherpa" had left his land many years ago, and thus pushed my point that he was not a real Sherpa. The drunkard got into a frenzy, and I seized the occasion to say publicly that "drunkards talk too much and speak like fools." To this statement the assembly agreed, and by force I managed to silence the man's dangerous inquiries about Tashi. By then, sweat was on my back. It is time we left, I thought; and was about to go when the Lama of Lo Mantang addressed Tashi, saying, "I knew the Lama of Thyangboche," (Thyangboche is the principal monastery of the Sherpa country.) Now, to my horror, I heard Tashi mutter, "I don't know the monastery!" Not to know the monastery would be impossible for any true Sherpa, and even more so for a man from Namche Bazar, just a few miles away. All seemed lost; I feared Tashi had now completely given himself away!

"Tashi has lived nearly all his life in Darjeeling," I quickly added. Tashi, fortunately catching on, went on to tell how he had spent most of his life in Kathmandu and in India, and had in fact left Sherpa country as a small child when his father died. My legs were weak when finally I found myself outside Shewo Cheuzang's house. We had had a very close shave.

I realized that my situation in Mustang was more delicate than I had thought. I was the first foreigner to reside in Lo, and my presence had naturally caused a lot of gossip. The tense situation in Lo, where both Chinese and Nepalese sympathizers lived together with anti-Chinese Khampas, only added to the fact that my presence was misinterpreted by certain people. Furthermore there still hung over me the suspicion that the illness of the king's son had been my doing, and news from the palace was that there was no improvement in Jigme Dorje's condition.

Very rapidly the time I had allotted for my stay in the capital drew to an end. Within the sheltering wall of the town I had come to forget that I had yet to explore the seven districts of this minute kingdom. There were the large monasteries to visit, the great forts to inspect, and I had set my heart on seeing every building and village of this land. My study was only just beginning, and what lay before me was the true exploration of the area. I would now be taking trails never trodden by a Westerner, visiting villages tucked away in the unexplored folds of the barren chaos of the land of Lo. I had lived now for three full weeks in the company of lamas and high officials; it was time that I observed the lives of the simpler peasants of the land. There were still thousands of questions unanswered, and I now would seek those answers in the barren hills.

Calay had become quite used to our living quarters, and was reluctant at the idea of setting out again "on the road." I must admit that I myself, after six weeks away from the small amenities of the civilized world, felt a certain weariness from the austere life we had been living. I now felt the effects of the altitude quite strongly, slept poorly, and was constantly out of breath. The idea of going to all the villages of Mustang crushed me at first, but my curiosity was too great, and I felt I must make the best of the unique opportunity I had in being in this forbidden land.

I decided that we should first visit the area north of Lo Mantang, right along the Chinese border—the eastern and western districts of Lo. Pemba had agreed to come along with us; he was much excited at the idea of guiding me in his own country. He added that he wanted to

see some friends, and guaranteed to find me a book that would give me all the secrets of the history of the kingdom.

This particularly excited me, although I was slowly giving up hope of ever solving the mysteries of Mustang's past. Already the king had deceived me with promises of books; then, through cross-questioning everybody, I had obtained a hundred and one variations of the land's history, which I had almost concluded had been forgotten. When was the kingdom founded? Who were its early kings? When did they begin to pay a tribute to Nepal? These were some of the many questions I feared would remain unanswered. I dearly needed many more facts to make my study a complete and detailed one. I trusted Pemba, but felt that he did not exactly understand what I meant by a history book. But he insisted to the contrary, saying that there existed a handwritten register that had been kept through the ages by various monks and that had been lately in the hands of a monk, now dead, who had lived in Tsarang. After first telling me this book was still in Tsarang, Pemba now said it could be found in a monastery north of Lo Mantang. I did not know what to believe.

It was understood that we would leave most of our luggage in Lo Mantang in the care of Tsewan Rinzing, who hoped for this service to receive one of the two tin buckets I had brought from Kathmandu. He had coveted these buckets as if they were of gold. Our trip north would last six days more or less, after which we would return to Lo, spend three more days there, and then go south to Tsarang, from where I would explore the other four districts of Mustang.

Pemba insisted that I consult a small book he owned to decide whether the day we had chosen was auspicious for travel. He produced an ancient Tibetan almanac. I learned that the first day of the month is a good day to "work," while on the second I should put "clay upon the hearth to receive gold and silver." The third of the month is a good day for travel, but unfortunately on our planned day of departure the calendar just said it was "an auspicious day for washing one's hair." Was this a bad omen? I did not know, but we decided we would leave anyway. The little almanac was full of amusing advice such as when was the best day to get married, to move into a new house, or to paint a holy picture. It also gave recommendations such as: "Go to the king's palace and you will become great," or "A good day in which to cure your sick animals by having a lama come and blow upon a horse's skull and bury it under the doorstep." For the twenty-second of the month there was the sound advice, "Read and you will become learned," while for the twenty-third the book contained the surprising advice

that it was a "good day to build a fort." We had, of course, no such intentions, and we simply left Lo without any fuss, accompanied by one porter.

Search for a Secret

MY PLANNED EXPLORATION of the eastern and western districts would, I knew, take me within a few thousand yards of the Chinese border, and Pemba remarked, "You had better not wear your khaki chuba, or you might be mistaken for a Khampa." There had been, I remembered, an incident in 1961 in which the Chinese had violated the frontier of Mustang, and had accidentally shot a Nepalese. North of Lo, we were told, we would find no Khampas, as their camps were all to the south, a safe distance from the Chinese.

The northern part of the small rectangle that is Mustang is divided, as I have said, by a vertical ridge of mountains that separates the flat, valley-like basin of the western district from the eastern district, which is composed of a half dozen villages set beside the minute Kali Gandaki River, and to the northeast stretches up to the Tibetan border in a succession of eroded hills and deep canyons. In this barren portion of the eastern district is found only one village, called Sam Dzong, which means "Border Fort." This isolated settlement lay right against the northern border of Mustang with Tibet.

It was barely dawn when we set out from Lo Mantang. My mind was filled with the excitement that always accompanies a departure. Once again I was to become a wanderer and pilgrim. I was also excited by the idea of approaching the border, although I had no intention of going right up to it, as the international situation was so tense that my appearance within talking distance of the Chinese posts could very well cause an international incident.

Passing at the foot of Ketcher Dzong, we walked up the western district through the small village of Phuwa, east of Trenkar where the

king's summer palace stands. Phuwa, like the settlements we were about to see north of Lo Mantang, derived its livelihood from the barley, buckwheat, and a type of linseed plant from whose seed oil is extracted. The planting season was just over for barley and buckwheat, but men were still plowing to plant linseed. I was amazed that anything whatsoever grew in such a climate, yet Pemba told me that the crops came very well and very rapidly, thanks to irrigation and to the hot sun that warms much more at high altitudes than in the lowlands, so that certain barleys ripen in a matter of weeks.

In Phuwa I had a long chat with an old peasant whose wife was busy weaving a striped cloth upon a large wooden loom. To the sound of the shuttle, I was told how the peasants of Lo rotate their crops—planting one year wheat, the other barley or linseed—and how plowing was the privilege of men, while women did the hoeing and raking behind the plow. The plows used have a steel shoe attached to the cutting end of the share. This is quite progressive compared to the customary all-wood plow of India and Nepal, and considering that in the United States eighty years ago pioneers were reluctant to use steel plowshares because they feared that they would “sour the earth.” Yaks and dzos are used in plowing, never horses or mules. The fields are plowed in one great spiral, starting from the outside and turning around and around until one is in the center of the field. This circular method of plowing saves energy, usually wasted in our lands where at the end of each furrow the plow must be lifted and turned around.

Agriculture is divided in Lo into planting and herding. The plowing and planting season begins on an appointed day, determined each year by the monks, in the Fourth Month (May). The plowing is then followed by sowing and repairing of irrigation canals that will bring water to the fields. Every year a village man is appointed “head of the fields.” His duty is to supervise the communal work on the irrigation canal, and also to see that there arise no disputes about land rights and tenure.

In the capital, men are appointed by the “head of the fields” to live in tents outside town to keep a twenty-four-hour watch over the water flow in the irrigation canals. Because of their presence outside the walls, the town gate is not locked at night until the fields have been sufficiently watered. Every owner of at least sixty *sang* of land must furnish one person for irrigation work. A *sang* is about one pint, a measure of volume that corresponds to a set weight of gold. It is the volume that filled with barley weighs the weight of the gold unit. For a long time I wondered how one could own one pint of land, until I

found out that land is measured by volume. You buy one pint or ten pints of land, as you please. Land is measured by the amount of grain it takes to sow it. Thus one pint of land is the area that can be sown by one pint of barley. When buying or selling land, one calls in the "head of the fields" and asks him to determine how much land the field represents. He then sets out and sows the field by hand, counting how many pints are needed. According to this volume of grain, the size and price of the field are determined.

When the exact day considered auspicious for the planting festival has been determined, two boys and two girls set out in their best clothes for the fields. The boys plow one furrow, followed by the girls, who break up the lumps behind the plow with rakes. This operation performed, great celebrations are held, with bow and arrow contests or, as in Phuwa, horseback-riding competitions in which one has to throw stones at an effigy of a yak's head made of tsampa. The priests then go out to the fields, where they erect stone cairns painted with red clay that will stand guard over the crops. Upon the cairns they sprinkle holy water.

Apart from a festival that marks time for "weeding," the wheat grows practically by itself, and only at harvesttime is there any great activity. I was much surprised to see that the tools used for agricultural work were very similar to those used in Europe. In most of Asia short-handled hoes are the principal tool used for working the soil, but the Lobas have such tools as spades, rakes, long-handled hoes, axes, and scythes, very similar to those used by European peasants.

It would be rash to develop on this basis a theory that would link Tibet with Europe, but it is certain beyond doubt that there are a great many similarities in agricultural techniques. A greater parallel can be drawn between Tibetan agricultural customs and European than between, let us say, Chinese or Indian customs and Tibetan.

More unusual and important to the Lobas are their herding activities and care of cattle. These seem to reveal a remote nomadic origin. There seems little doubt that the first inhabitants to settle in Mustang were nomads, probably members of a wandering tribe similar to those that still inhabit the areas just north of Mustang in Tibet. From this original nomadic culture many customs have survived, and many Lobas still live in tents in summer, watching their flocks and herds. They attach a greater importance to cattle than to planting, the value of cattle lying both in their use as transport animals and in their role as providers of milk, cheese, and meat—essentials in the Lobas' diet.

To the care of animals great attention is given. There were two

“horse doctors,” or general veterinarians in the capital. The part played by animals in religious beliefs is considerable. The goat is the protective divinity of Lo Mantang, the horse’s skull the best defense against ghosts; while the language of the Lobas contains over thirty different terms for goats. This is one of the surest signs of pastoral nomadic origins, as the language is the best reflection of the original occupations of a nation.

Since my arrival I had been greatly struck by the absence of trees in Lo Mantang. There was not in the entire kingdom a single tree that had not been planted on purpose, or which grew without being cared for. These few trees were to be found only by irrigation canals or in the private gardens of the king or wealthy nobles. This state of affairs seemed in direct contradiction with Loba architecture, as all the houses and buildings of the capital contained many wooden beams. I could hardly believe that all these beams had been carried up in the past from Tukutchu, over forty miles away, from whence all wood for construction comes today. I later learned that it is a scientific fact that over the past hundred years the climate of Mustang has been changing very rapidly. Lo is suffering from the general drying up of the Tibetan plateau. The water level of lakes and rivers has been receding considerably over the past century, and forests are disappearing. This drying up of Tibet is part of a worldwide phenomenon that is visible also in the Sahara, the deserts of America and Asia. Three thousand years ago there were forests in the Sahara and jungle vegetation in the deserts of Egypt, and less than two hundred years ago trees were still found in fair quantity in Mustang. But now we were in a complete desert; as the king had told us, “Lo is a poor country *now*, we have no trees, no water.”

This “drying up” has affected Lo all the more dramatically because of the high winds that predisposed Mustang to being a parched land. It is the cattle more than the crops that have suffered. In the past, great herds of yaks lived in Mustang. These have now been partly replaced by goats, especially since the greener pastures of Tibet have been closed to the Lobas; and now that the Khampas have taken over the high grazing grounds, there is little or nothing for the local yaks to eat. Goats are always the forerunners of deserts, and indeed many people attribute to them the desert condition of the Sahara and of Persia, as goats eat everything down to the roots, thus taking away the last support of the topsoil, which, after goats have grazed, is rapidly swept away by rain.

Only irrigation has allowed the Lobas to keep up their planting

habits. The few rivers and torrents of Mustang are for the most part fed by melting snow from the high peaks that form its western border with Tibet. This has given the local streams a strange pattern. In the morning the rivers are small and clear; as the day advances and sun melts the snow their flow increases and the water becomes dirty yellow or gray; the peak of the water level is reached toward three in the afternoon, after which the water subsides and the color changes again. This daily phenomenon is quite unusual, and makes every torrent a changing artery with varying color and varying flow.

After a long chat in Phuwa, I moved on with Calay, Kansa, Tashi, and Pemba—plus an old horse carrying our tents—to Kymaling, the next village in the western district, several miles north.

We continued to follow the central ridge of mountains that cut northern Mustang in two, walking up the dry bed of what had once been a wide river, which had disappeared (so I was told) because of an "earthquake." At one point we found a deep pool of water fed by a small spring. Here Pemba showed me with pride some "water chortens"—tufts of a special kind of aquatic weed that rose from the bottom of the pool and mushroomed out upon the water's surface somewhat like a chorten built wide at the top.

After having admired the "water chortens" we reached the brim of a deep chasm cut down about fifty feet into the soft rubble of the plain. Here a swift and ample stream flowed through a narrow gorge right across the central chain of hills separating the western and eastern districts of Lo.

I could now verify the legend that this river's course had changed. It was plainly apparent that either an earthquake or some cataclysm must have split the high ridge of hills and thus diverted the river into its new course. With great difficulty we found a small track that led us down to this torrent, which we forded with our shoes off, climbing the other side to reach Kymaling.

This small village was divided into two parts; two clumps of white houses separated by a patch of green communal pasture. Halfway between the two sections of the village stood a solitary house, the Tso Khang, or meetinghouse, which also served as chapel.

Near this meetinghouse we decided to set up our tents, and to spend the night and afternoon exploring the charms of the village and studying some of its particularities. We had by sheer accident stumbled into Kymaling on the third day of a Newné festival of prayer and fasting. All the villagers were in their finest clothes, crowding about the meetinghouse, where sacred cakes were being distributed.

We rapidly learned about the various social classes into which the village inhabitants were divided, inquiring as to how many "wood carriers" there were—men who gave the king his yearly store of firewood—also how many soldiers and king's messengers lived in Kymaling. Each family still had its "duties" toward the king, while the village, although it had no "noble" families such as dukes, did have two elected "headmen" of high social position.

Our arrival started a small riot, as most of the villagers had never seen a foreigner. As usual I was given all the sick to take care of, and offered much firewood in compensation for my medical treatments. In fact, we were given so much firewood that we had a big bonfire burning around which crowded all the children of the village. They shouted and sang, when not trying to enter our tents, really making a nuisance of themselves; as Tashi reminded me, "Now the cinema has begun again." We would have to get used to living a public life once more.

The next day we set out early, passing by an abandoned village along the western portion of the great trade route to Tibet, which splits at Lo Mantang to form two branches, one up each side of the central crest between the two northern districts. Into Tibet from Lo there are four so-called "passes," although the word "pass" is an overstatement to describe any point on the low, flat ridge that forms the northern border of Mustang with Tibet. The only real sign of one's reaching Tibet is that the small dry beds of water courses fall north, toward the Brahmaputra River, instead of south. In fact, Mustang's northern border zone is really a flat, low tableland, barely eight hundred feet higher than the site of the king's summer palace.

We were now moving out of the flat valley of the western district up onto the low tableland that would lead eventually down into Tibet. No more than three or four miles separated us from Tibetan territory. Coming over a small hill, we spotted the northernmost village of Mustang, Namdral, which appeared like a dream of gay colors in a barren yellow expanse of stones. Its few white houses, pink monastery, and several large red chortens clung to the almost vertical face of a steep embankment that fell to a small trickle of water. This brook flowed down from grassy grazing lands against the northernmost peak of Mustang's western frontier with Tibet. These grazing grounds were the king's property, covered with marshy-type grass that grew in little clumps in the humid soil. Here, I was able to determine with certitude, was the source of the famous but mysterious Kali Gandaki River!

It was for me no small joy to discover the very springs of the river that formed farther south the greatest canyons on earth. Although its

source had long been suspected to be in Mustang, or maybe a little beyond in Tibet, I had now located it precisely, and felt most happy at this privilege. Contrary to what I could have expected, no shrine or any monument marked the source of this sacred river, a good proof that man's curiosity rarely extends beyond what is readily accessible. Despite the fact that for thousands of years Hindus have been following the river north up to Muktinath, to visit there the miraculous burning shrines and to collect the sacred fossil stones at the foot of Annapurna, no one, it seemed, had pushed right on to its source, which I felt surely deserved a monument. There were only two small, lonely houses just below the spring, which was within sight of Namdral.

This lonely village struck me as the most poetical and dreamlike place in Mustang, the last bastion before Chinese-occupied Tibet. A small hamlet, Namdral is truly situated upon the roof of the world. It is set upon a steep embankment whose summit is level with Chorten Marko, a large chorten that marks the border between the most forgotten kingdom in Asia, and Tibet.

I would have liked to walk up to the fictitious line of the border, stare down upon the great Tibetan Brahmaputra River, and look at the Chinese; I refrained from walking the last thousand yards for understandable reasons, and later had to climb a peak farther inside Mustang to get this view down onto the mighty Brahmaputra. Anyhow, a little above the village I could already look well into Tibet to the northeast and west, while facing south, all of Mustang was now at my feet. Its terrain looked like an ocean of tormented waves, a fossilized sea pouring down from where I stood between two lateral chains of mountains, and ending against the snow-white islands of the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri ranges that rose in the distance to the south. Over fifty miles separated me from those summits, which appeared as if they were below me, and I had a sensation I had never felt before—that of standing above the entire world, half of which sloped at my back down to Tibet and Mongolia, the other half falling down before me into India and a tropical universe. If there ever was a roof to the world it was here, and I could not help but feel that I had truly found the "lost horizon"—a little world secluded and hidden in one of the most inaccessible reaches of our planet.

The indescribable beauty stretching around me was of a grandeur that spoke to the soul and fulfilled my wildest dreams. It was only the barking of a dog that brought me back to reality, and the result was that with the howling wind that flogged against me I became filled with a sense of solitude that recalled depressing thoughts. Perhaps I

would never see again the seemingly unreal world of my past; I might never be able to bear witness to this panorama that I had been given the pleasure of contemplating. It pained me not to be able to share with anyone the overwhelming sentiments that arose in me, and even today I find that words just add a tarnish to those moments when, standing in the wind, I felt that I had reached the summit of the world.

From Namdral we followed the nascent Kali Gandaki River to a bend of its flat bed, where rose a cluster of small whitewashed houses in two compact groups. They stood in a small barren plain of sunbaked clay dotted by the black stains of two large yak-hair tents. I approached one of these. It was shaped like a hexagon, held up by ropes running over the tops of poles planted in the ground outside the tent. Smoke issued from a slit in the roof; a small child playing outside rushed inside crying, when on catching a glimpse of me he imagined he had seen a monster. Two rough-looking men stepped out and beckoned me to come inside.

These people were nomads from Tibet who had just come down from their land to buy sheep. The floor inside the tent was covered with hides, around a long hearth on which smoldered a yak-dung fire. I was asked to sit down and offered tea, which I managed to refuse, leaving after having taken a quick mental note of the tent's interior arrangements.

We now headed south again, this time down the eastern district, a wide valley lined by steep eroded cliffs against which nestled half a dozen small villages whose houses were visible from afar, like black and white dominoes thrown in clusters upon the edge of the flat bed of the small Kali Gandaki River.

We headed for what seemed like the first village, where Pemba told us was Garphu, the monastery whose young incarnate lama was his friend. Here Pemba promised us all we would like in the way of books, a promise that I shrugged off as just pleasant talk. By now I had long since given up all hope of finding the historical information I so much desired!

We now followed the left branch of the great Tibetan trade route south. This wide track would have needed few improvements to allow wheeled vehicles to pass—which reminded us that in less than an hour a Chinese army, even on foot, could be upon us from the northern border we were leaving behind us.

A line of three large rectangular chortens painted white, and

crowned by red and maroon stripes, formed three majestic gateways to the monastic village of Garphu. Stopping under these gateways, we noted fine mandalas painted upon the ceilings. The village, along with its chortens, had been repainted a few days before our arrival. It is a custom that on a set day each year all the buildings of a village are repainted. This operation has a religious character, and accounts for the remarkably neat aspect of all the villages in Lo. To paint a house in our lands is a difficult operation, because we have a brush complex, and even paint rollers and paint sprayers are difficult techniques compared to the Loba method of painting. The Lobas simply prepare pails full of chalk-mix, and then go to the roofs of their houses and pour the paint along the walls—a speedy operation whose final result is as neat as brush painting.

The striped monasteries we had seen were all painted in this manner, pails of different colored paints being spilled onto the wall from the roof. Crude brushes are used only for finishing touches. This technique, of course, applies only to the painting of monuments and buildings on the outside, delicate brushwork being done for frescoes and interior decorations.

Garphu was by far the neatest, cleanest, and most beautiful village we had seen so far. All the windows of the small rectangular houses were smartly outlined in black, while above the windows hung colorful frills of striped cloth over blinds of white material bordered with dark-blue ribbons. Adding to the charm of Garphu were the neat red, yellow, white, and blue prayer flags that fluttered gaily above each house or were tied to strings spanning the narrow streets.

We discovered that this was indeed no ordinary village, all the houses being the dwellings of the monks and their families. Garphu, although not the largest monastery in Mustang, is the most active and dynamic. Strangely enough, it is neither of the Sakyapa sect (like those of the rest of the kingdom) nor of the Kadjupa sect (like the lonely monastery of Samdruling), but it is of the very ancient "old sect," the Ningmapa. It was quite recent, having been founded only twenty years prior to our visit. There is a certain tendency in the western Himalayan areas for the "Old Red Hat" monasteries to be more successful than the more recent sects, and in Garphu this sect had been adopted by certain Lobas. One of its main characteristics is that it tolerates marriage for its monks, a fact that has drawn to the monastery certain men who otherwise would not have contemplated religious life—although most of the monks who headed this monastery were celibate.

One of these was a tall stout man with shaven head and a severe

look, who greeted us at the door of a fairy-tale house with fine latticed windows whose crisscross work was gaily painted, and bordered by a cheerful new frill of cloth. Climbing a flight of steps to the door we were bade to enter through the dark ground-floor rooms, and climbed to a second-story landing, open to the sky, through which we were ushered into a large living room, furnished with shiny brass pots whose rims were inlaid with silver. Around a small fire, upon bright orange carpets, were seated three men, two old monks, and a young man about my age with long hair hanging loosely down on his shoulders with a grace recalling that of a slightly effeminate dandy of the eighteenth century. I was at a loss to determine which of the three men was the lama, the head of the monastery, not knowing before whom to bow. In Mustang, as in Tibet, formal presentations are unknown, as social class and rank can be determined on sight, and a visitor is expected to recognize the correct dignitary from his dress and comportment. I, of course, made a blunder, and turned my attention to one of the older monks, only to be shown my mistake by a reproachful look directing me to the true lama—the young man with long hair. Little or nothing in his appearance could have led me to guess his rank, as I did not know then that the Ningmapa sect is one of the few that permit monks to have long hair.

I rapidly corrected my mistake, and began talking in polite tones to the young lama. My subservient attitude was soon wiped away by the young man himself, who with a smile, and rubbing his hands, suggested, "How about a good drink?" in a forthright manner that was, I felt, anything but holy. This was Pemba's friend, and soon Pemba, Tashi, the lama, and I were seated together around the fire, the old monks having been dismissed so that we could be by ourselves.

In the course of our conversation, I was amazed by how modern Pemba and the lama appeared. I had the feeling of being among my own kin, as if I were having a drink with friends my age in Europe. In the past I had liked to consider myself modern because I very often took planes, drove a sports car, and frequented nightclubs with great energy in an endeavor to keep up with all the latest dances. But here I found in two Lobas a modern frame of mind and outlook on life similar to my own. I realized that being modern in fact has nothing to do with fashions and gadgets, but really means to be young in ideas and to assume that one's own behavior will set new patterns, new trends. Generation after generation has considered its parents "old-fashioned"; this is also true in Mustang. We like to think of our grandparents or parents as behind the times because they had no cars or wore long

skirts or were born before the existence of radios and planes. But without such inventions, without such changes in customs, we would still consider them old-fashioned, even if the fashions did not change. This was very true in Mustang. None of the customs or fashions had changed, but old people were old-fashioned, and young people united by their brash way of thinking. In our fast-evolving world of the West, upset and changed by new discoveries and inventions, the young immediately equate their lives with the times in which they live, associate the new inventions with their generation—regardless of the fact that older people are the cause of these inventions, and not realizing that fashion has nothing to do with their basic outlook, which is simply the result of youth and its arrogance.

It felt good to be among people my age in the monastery of Garphu. It meant drinking without overdue fussiness concerning principles of politeness. It also meant joking without restraint, laughing at the attitudes of older people, and feeling that one owned the world. Now I never felt “out of place” in Mustang. I had taken in my stride all that today, from a distance, appears so extraordinary, unbelievable, and unusual. My judgment had changed—I no longer noticed a Loba drinking bowl as different from what I had used in the past; I no longer noted how a window differed from those of my world. No, I now noted its quality—whether it was well made or beautiful. The same applied to food. I had now acquired a taste for different types of Tibetan tea, different brews of chang. I became sensitive to small details; as, for example, where I would be told to sit, how I was treated, and a thousand and one other small things that I began to appreciate in the new society in which I lived. I had outgrown the first overwhelming sensations of the exotic, and this left room in my mind now for more subtle perceptions.

I was getting a bit Loba-like myself, proud of my acquaintances, sensitive to fine dress and clothes, admiring luxury, and aware of variations in the wealth, education, manner of speech, and behavior of my new friends.

The lama, our host, casually asked us to stay overnight if we pleased. After a few drinks, he suggested that we visit the monastery in the company of the monk who had brought us into his house. This monk, tall and handsome, was, we soon realized, highly educated; he seemed well versed in the scriptures, and was in fact the actual spiritual director of the monastery. He took us over to the fine assembly-hall temple, where he proudly showed us its new frescoes, which he told us he had painted himself. They were indeed very well executed, in particular a

wall of white and silver line drawings upon a black background, which gave the images of the "fierce divinities" a new life and lent great force to their expressions.

We were told to note the wooden floor inside the assembly hall, as such floors are truly a great luxury in Lo. We looked at it admiringly, treading upon the boards as if they were of the finest marble or the most delicate mosaics. We were then given a grand tour of the monastery village, along narrow paths that scrambled up the side of the cliff, and along which were backed, one on top of the other, rows of little houses. These varied from large homes belonging to wealthy married monks down to small one-room cells. Higher than all the houses was a fine chapel, the "masterpiece" of the lama who accompanied us. Its walls were decorated with garlands of human hearts, entrails, eyeballs, and other horrible bits and pieces, painted in the sinister tones of blue, violet, and red common to anatomical charts of the West. These garlands represented the offerings symbolically presented to the fierce divinities. We left the macabre chapel when our guide was called by a young *trawa* to attend a religious function.

As there was still plenty of daylight left, I went with Tashi for a stroll past the southern end of the monastery and along the foot of the cliff that bordered the eastern flank of the valley of the Kali Gandaki. All was quiet except the chirping of a few sparrows that fluttered about in the late afternoon sun. From the cliffs and scorched stones drifted whiffs of hot air, while already a cool breeze from the valley announced the end of the day.

With Tashi, I walked in silence, wondering about monastic life, and turning over in my mind a dream that had often tempted me. What, I thought, if I should choose to remain here in Garphu, a true paradise of peace and beauty? How many times in the modern world beyond the snow peaks I had spoken with envy of those who spend their lives in peaceful seclusion. Countless times, before this journey, I had dreamed of lonely monasteries hidden somewhere in Tibet. Now, here I was staying in one; here at last I had found a monastery that corresponded to my dreams. In real life, in my past, there had always been an anticlimax at such moments, some small insignificant detail like the honking of a car, or the falling of ashes from my cigarette, to jerk me back to thoughts of a more practical, less pleasant nature. But now nothing interrupted my dreams; they had—I realized—become realities. Slowly over the past weeks I had drifted into a strange state of exhilaration, in which my desires corresponded with reality, a reality that took on fantastic shapes as if issued from my imagination. I had no

more worries, I was just living along like a Loba, fitting into the dream that surrounded me. Like Tashi, I felt I could declare that evening, "I don't think." In silence I soaked in the hot air coming from the rocky cliff. All was well. I had forgotten the Khampas, and the Chinese were not a problem after all.

We turned to the left up a steep canyon that broke out from the east into the flat plain of the Kali Gandaki. Tashi strolled before me as we slowly progressed between gigantic yellow cliffs laid out in flat horizontal layers cut up to form fantastic natural castles. We had not gone far when we spotted a small hamlet of whitewashed houses surrounded by cattle pens. Close to this village, we both simultaneously spotted Nyphu Gumpa, warmly lighted by the yellow rays of the sun. I was jolted from my daydreaming and shaken wide awake—because above us rose a structure that truly was beyond all I could have imagined.

Set in a towering cliff one thousand feet high over the hamlet, the monastery looked like an invention of Walt Disney's exotic imagination. A great portion of the cliff had been painted white over a vertical surface punctured by dozens of little black holes, the windows of over fifty small caves, one on top of the other, in the rock. Right in the center of this group of caves, standing out against the whitewashed cliff, was a large rectangular wall, painted red, that seemed suspended, as if by some miracle, in the air.

We were before the largest and most inaccessible of Mustang's cave monasteries. Nyphu had all the elements one could wish in a mysterious sacred retreat, possessing all the snugness of an underground hive and the grandeur of an eagle's nest.

There were no monks in sight, and an old woman in the hamlet informed us that for the time being no monks lived here but that one of the villagers had keys to the monastery.

We soon found the doorkeeper, an old man, who proved rather unpleasant in refusing to let us in. It was only after considerable name dropping, and assurances that despite our appearance we were not demons, that he reluctantly decided to show us the way in. We climbed a succession of stone steps and wooden ladders to a small rough door snugly fitted into a hole at the foot of the cliff. From there we penetrated into a dark underground warren in which we stumbled up ladder after ladder leading to countless little domed caves, until we reached a vast rectangular room cut into the rock. This was the assembly hall, whose exterior was sealed by the red clay wall we had seen from below. Peeping out a small window, we could see the floor of the

canyon beneath us, and all around enjoy a bird's-eye view of craggy cliffs and distant peaks.

When our eyes had become accustomed to the darkness of the large assembly hall, we noted that at its far end an elaborate altar was in the process of being built and decorated; some of its panels of fresh white wood showed the sketches for frescoes. Above this altar were pigeon-hole racks with many books. Books are really the most sacred things in the Tibetan Buddhist's long list of religious symbols and artifacts, so sacred, indeed, that all kinds of legends circulate about them—books that write themselves, others that read themselves out loud automatically, and books that disappear. It is also firmly believed that if a lama sat on a book (though they never do this, as it would be a terrible offense), all the writing in the book would disappear. Knowing this, we were hardly surprised when the doorkeeper raised considerable opposition to our investigating this library. It was only when Tashi had passed me off as a great "lama" that the simple fellow allowed us rapidly to scan the titles. This done, we explored further the mysterious passages and cells of the monastery, before leaving Nyphu filled with awe and amazement, and hurrying to get back to Garphu before dark.

That evening, until quite late, by the light of a linseed oil lamp, Tashi, Pemba, the learned monk, the young elegant lama, and I pawed over old books in a small, musty chapel of the lama's apartment at Garphu. Sitting in a circle and straining our necks, we followed the learned monk reading the sheets of yellow paper held close to the small lamp. I was very disappointed. Even though we had servant monks running all over the monastery in search of every book and pamphlet, and though Tashi's nose was running from the irritating dust that fell from the pages of the battered old volumes, we could not find the history book we were looking for. I was now completely discouraged, and gave up hope of ever finding the book that Pemba had promised on three different occasions to procure for me.

The King of Mustang had been the first to talk to us about this elusive history book, called the *Molla*—but when on our second visit to the palace we had asked to see it, he had first clearly evaded the subject, and then said the book did not exist. After this disappointment, Pemba had said we would find it in the lonely monastery of Samdruling, where I had frozen my toes in vain and found only a biography that was vague in historical details. Pemba had then brought the subject up again, saying that the *Molla* was in Tsarang and that a friend of his would go and fetch it—only to explain later that it had disappeared. I

now suspected Pemba of having willfully lied once more to us, so that I could take him along to Garphu, where he said we would find the history. I was convinced that this *Molla* did not exist, and received a small consolation when we did find in Garphu a book written by a Lomba lama about his experiences in the wars of the Ladak Kingdom of Guké in ancient times. But even then the young lama refused to sell the book or to have it copied.

I went to sleep that night in a state of great disappointment, feeling somewhat like Sherlock Holmes losing a case. All I had about the history of Mustang were clues—sparse bits of information, most of which were contradictory and unreliable. I had nothing that could give me the facts I so dearly needed to prove to the world that Mustang was and had always been a kingdom, a true nation with a long, continuous history. I felt this was true, but needed the proof—the written proof—to convince myself and others. Before my journey, I had read many conflicting short statements about Mustang, and I did not know what to believe. A particularly puzzling statement I had read was by Dr. Snellgrove, an authority on Dolpo, the region southwest of Mustang. In his book *Himalayan Pilgrimage*,* Dr. Snellgrove states that the present King of Mustang was the descendant of a king placed on the throne around 1795, a king who, he claims, was the son of one of the kings of Nepal. This theory sounded improbable, as the kings of Nepal are Hindus and not Tibetan Buddhists. I also dared not believe the other rumors that claimed that the King of Mustang was placed on the throne by the Nepalese, when an equal number of written references—those of Kirkpatrick, Brian Hodgson, and others—stated clearly that the rulers of Mustang have been Bhotias or Tibetans, from before 1795 until our present times.†

Tashi had been assisting me eagerly in trying to solve these mysteries, mysteries all the more intriguing as all those to whom we mentioned the word “history” would answer evasively, afraid to “offend the king.” We knew about Ame Pal, the founder of the land, and about the Three Holies who followed him; but that was all we knew, except for the names of the ancient forts and monasteries. I had no information about who had built most of them, or when, and none about the more recent kings.

I nearly managed to convince myself that the history of Mustang would never be known, but would remain a mystery like that of so

* Dr. David Snellgrove, *Himalayan Pilgrimage* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1961), p. 196.

† See Bibliography, p. 309, for early references to Mustang.

many of the Himalayan districts. But each time I gave up hope, someone would again mention the famous *Molla* containing the names of all the kings and all their deeds. And here in Garphu, once again, this book was nowhere to be found.

— Kings Like Pearls on a String

THE FOLLOWING MORNING I snooped around the monastery, and gleaned from the learned lama details about the monastery's organization and administration, but nothing new about the history of Lo.

We were packing our things to leave at eleven in the morning, when suddenly Pemba started to act a little strange. He was in good spirits because he had sold his chuba and boots to the young lama of Garphu for a shockingly high price, and had bought other boots from him for a low price. In spite of the fact that I felt he had let me down about the history book, he came over to me to have a chat. Then, on the outskirts of the monastery, he took me by the arm and whispered in my ear, "I think I have found the *Molla*."

"It's impossible!" I answered. "You saw the books yesterday. They were not interesting, and the 'learned' monk and the young lama said there was no history."

With the air of a conspirator, Pemba told me that the learned lama, the spiritual director of the monastery, had told him that he had a history book.

"Well, where is it?"

"Well, you see," continued Pemba, "he says that you cannot see it, as he does not want the head lama to know he has it."

"Can't we buy it, or just look at it and maybe copy it in a hurry without anyone noticing?" I asked. Pemba decided to see the learned monk about this proposition.

He soon came back to say that the lama might sell it. This depended on the price that we would pay, and on the condition that no one should know about it. I agreed to keep silent, and to a price of thirty

rupees, about five dollars, and sent Pemba to inform the monk. He returned to tell me that he had seen him, and he had changed his mind. Apparently the monk was very nervous about selling the book or letting us see it. I was now skeptical about this whole affair, but I told Pemba that I would pay more for the book if we could have a look at it first.

I had just finished saying this, when the learned lama passed near us, discreetly approaching to say that he would sell us the book for eighty rupees on the condition that we never mention that he had sold it to us. I told him that I agreed on one condition, that we might look at it first. The monk was annoyed, being afraid that we might be caught looking at the book, and then he would get into terrible trouble. This whole affair was taking on the aspect of a mysterious farce, and I could not help but feel that we were being led down a blind alley once more.

It was finally agreed that Tashi and I should go down to the fields below the monastery and find a discreet place behind some stones, where we could look at the manuscript, which Pemba would bring down to us. With a feeling of guilt we passed a few monks pottering around the edge of the assembly hall, arriving at a little ditch that sheltered us from the monastery. We already knew that privacy was a rare thing for us in Lo, and soon two children, driving some yaks, came to our hideout to stare at us with the habitual amazement caused by my "long nose" and "yellow eyes," and Tashi's Western dress. We had just managed to get rid of the children, when Pemba darted over the mound of earth that hid us from the monastery. He sat between us, and looking around to see that there were no witnesses, started to fumble in the great folds of his chuba. From it he extracted a disappointingly small book, composed of eighteen pages of coarse paper, about seven inches long and two inches wide. "This is the *Molla*," he said excitedly, in a hushed voice.

I realized that he was as eager as I was to read it. History, I now knew, is kept secret in Lo, as are the secrets of the medical profession and other trades. History is just not public property, and Pemba was dying to learn more about his land.

In hushed voices, Pemba and Tashi began reading the first page aloud. This page was illustrated with three seated figures. With great excitement, Pemba read out the names inscribed under the figures: "Angun Zampo, Ngorchen Kunga Zampo, and Lumbo Kalun Zampo"—the Three Holies with whom we were now quite familiar. My heart leaped as I urged Pemba on. The pages were quite dirty, and the characters difficult to read—especially names, as these were written in pale

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"How religion came to Lo, and the order of the ranks in that kingdom."

We were really on to something! Just at that moment, someone passed and stopped before us. Quickly Pemba slipped the manuscript into his chuba pocket, while we tried to look innocent. The intruder passed on his way.

The manuscript was taken out again, the right page found, and the translation slowly continued. "How religion and politics in Lo are held by the kings, and particularly how the religious kings came to Lo." I listened more closely.

"The kings are like pearls on a string. . . ." My heart jumped again. "Molla prayed to a group of monks: 'Please listen!'" read the text (a rather unnecessary plea). "Here is the voice of the big assembly of lamas; teachers and all monks, please listen!

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I urged Tashi and Pemba on. I now discovered that Gunde Nyma Bum had two sons, both of whom wanted to be monks, but were not allowed to practice their religion because of the Demon Black Monkey, the leader of the fort of Mustang. These two brothers prayed and had a son. . . . "This son," said the history, "was truly an incarnation of Chenresi," and he was named Ame Pal. When a man, Ame Pal asked the Demon Black Monkey of Mustang to build a fort, and was given a piece of land in Ketcher the size of "a yak's skin measure of grain" [land being measured then as now by the amount of grain required to sow it].

My excitement now knew no bounds; with Ame Pal I was entering known ground. The *Molla* was beginning to conform with some of the legends and stories we had been told.

Thus Ame Pal was given land on which to build his castle, this land being the hill that dominates the Plain of Prayer. Here, the history explained, Ame Pal built a palace with one of its corners directed toward the Demon Black Monkey's residence in Mustang.

"The Demon Black Monkey leader was very angry, and said, 'You little vagabond, I gave you land, but if it is good that you build your house there, it is not good that the corner of your house is directed toward my palace.'" Ame Pal was ordered to pull down his palace, and "having done so he erected a great fort with a fortified circular wall and a door facing east." It was the very same fort we had visited, and which is still called Ketcher Dzong—whose ruins clearly show a great circular wall with only one opening to the east.

"Then by the grace of the three jewels [Ame Pal] had three sons, the eldest Angun Tenzing Zampo, the youngest Tsepe Sichun, and the in-between Tsetin Trandul. Tsetin Trandul when he was sixteen did many deeds both good and bad. Whenever he met a woman, he either beat her or slept with her. One day Dutrena Radjin [Demon Black Monkey] and he fought and [Tsetin Trandul] killed the Demon Black Monkey of Mustang. All the people present were afraid and bowed before Ame Pal's second son with respect, saying, 'Now you are our chief; now we seek refuge in you as you are our chief.'" Three years after, he became king and gathered many soldiers, and conquered the forts of Chachagam, Kara, Piu, and upper and lower Tri [the great ruins near the king's summer palace], and Gelung [the fort of Geling where we had stayed on our way up with our yak men]. "He conquered all these castles, and while so doing all other little villages came under him. Ame Pal and his sons then discussed building a capital with shrines, statues, libraries," and so on. They decided that a

High Lama would be needed to consecrate these religious buildings. Thus the youngest son was left in charge of one of the conquered forts, and the two elder brothers, along with a minister (one of the Three Holies) set out for Tibet to implore the greatest monk of those times, the reformer Sakya, Ngorchen Kunga, to come to Mustang. This delegation spent seven years studying in Tibet. Only after repeated written invitations from the old Ame Pal was the great Lama finally persuaded to come to Lo.

The *Molla* was now setting everything straight in my mind. I now knew approximately the date of the foundation of Lo (1380), and at what period Ame Pal lived, as I could turn to the biography of the famous Sakyapa Lama, his birth date being known, and his journeys to Lo recorded in his biography.

I bade Tashi and Pemba stop reading. I now knew enough to realize that we had made a unique find, and the eighty rupees I handed secretly to the learned monk in Garphu for the manuscript were the best-spent funds of my entire journey.

Later, in more relaxed circumstances, I had the book read out to me from beginning to end. The *Molla* proved to be a recently compiled history of the land, written by a certain "Ayupa, monk of Tsarang," who had signed his name on the last page, which brought the list of kings and their deeds up to date, as it mentioned Angun Tenzing, King of Lo, and his three sons.

I now possessed three books about Mustang: the *Molla*, the biography of Ngorchen Kunga (one of the Three Holies), and that of the monk Tenzing Ripa. With these three texts, and what I had gathered right and left from interviews, inscriptions, and observations—I finally found myself in command of much of the written history of Mustang from about 1380 to our present day. I was also able to date this history, or at least many of its events. This is no easy task with Himalayan history, as the Tibetans count time in cycles of sixty years, rarely specifying which cycle a date belongs to. Thus, for example, a date like Shing Druk, the Wood Dragon Year, can be either 1964, 1904, 1844, 1784, 1724, and so forth.

At long last I had the necessary elements to prove to the world that Mustang was truly a kingdom worthy of that name, truly a land with a long, continuous history of independence and autonomy.

The *Molla* confirmed that there had been twenty-five kings of Mustang; that the first Ame Pal had lived between 1380 and 1450; and that the forts of the upper Kali Gandaki were for the most part built prior to 1420, at which date Ame Pal, with the aid of his son, subjected to his

rule the wild chieftains settled in the castles upon the barren hilltops. It told also how Ame Pal sent his sons and many letters to bring to Lo the great Lama Ngorchen Kunga; and how, after much hesitation, this lama "saw a sign in the sky and so went to Lo," paying in his lifetime three visits to Lo, in the course of which he founded numerous monasteries—three of which during his lifetime came to have over one thousand monks. Ngorchen further had erected a library where he collected a complete set of volumes of the Kanjur written in gold letters, a work that took over ten years to accomplish. Ngorchen Kunga came to Lo in 1427, 1436, and 1447. According to his biographer, Sanji Pintso, this famous lama had a soft spot in his heart for Mustang. Lo soon became a great religious center, in fact the greatest for miles around. To use the biographer's statement, Mustang became "the same as the excellent country of India during the lifetime of Buddha." Its holiness and the practice of the faith there were compared to Lhasa's. Ngorchen Kunga "stopped the people from hunting and fishing and offering blood and meat." He also "stopped the custom of beer and meat being served to the monks"; in brief, "he turned many times the wheel of the doctrine in Lo."

From the unity of warmongering chieftains there emerged a state, but its history was not going to be uneventful. There were many internal feuds, and beyond Mustang other kingdoms menaced the small state. Because of its highly strategic location, Mustang in the past, as today, had to suffer the pressures of Asian politics. Shortly after Ame Pal had gathered the forts under his rule, from the south came the menace of invasion. Early in the kingdom's history is heard the name of the Kingdom of Jumla. Today Jumla is a small, dirty Nepalese village, situated on the southern flanks of Mount Dhaulagiri, southwest of Mustang. Little or nothing is known about this mysterious Kingdom of Jumla, which has few traces left of its ancient grandeur, but for more than four centuries Jumla was the most powerful state in western Nepal. At one time its power extended into parts of India, and over great portions of western Tibet. It eventually had as subordinates forty-four small Hindu rajas of Nepal, and also straddled the Himalayas. Naturally, it attempted to get hold of the Kingdom of Lo and its long chain of huge fortresses. I myself counted the ruins of over twenty-three fortresses in Mustang. Because of the threat of the state of Jumla, in Ame Pal's lifetime a new capital, Lo Mantang, was built for Lo. Ame Pal, so says the *Molla*, "gathered his people and built a great wall, and some of the inhabitants left their castles, while other castles remained under the protection of the fortified city of Lo Mantang." This

occurred when England was under the rule of Henry V, and Europe in the turmoil of the Renaissance.

Thus the great walled city, whose doors are still closed at night today, was built around 1440—over five hundred years ago. Despite this great wall, Jumla attacked the isolated fortresses, and there often followed periods of great poverty when Lo had to pay compensation taxes to Jumla. But time after time Mustang managed to beat off invasions from the south, while from the north Lo Mantang's solid walls repelled repeated attacks by the noted Tibetan warlord bandit Sopo Gaden Sewan.

The city walls stood fast through the centuries. Peace saw the high castles abandoned for more convenient settlements in the flat glacial plains, where were built new castles like those of Tsarang and of Gemi. Every king added another monastery, a new chorten, or a palace to the numerous existing monuments of Lo.

At times there were two kings of the land married to the same wife, two brothers who often had disputes, after which the kingdom would be momentarily divided. I now knew, from our precious little book, who had founded and who had built nearly all the monuments in Lo—those I had seen, and those I had yet to explore. Throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries Lo's relations with Jumla slipped from amicable to disastrous, then back to normal. This feud lasted over three hundred years, a war similar to those fought during the same time in Europe. Forts alternately passed from one ruler to the other, especially those situated south of the capital, Lo Mantang. Then, around 1740, began a long war with Jumla that lasted twenty years. Under King Anjia Dorje, about 1760, Mustang had to bow its head before the incomparable strength of Jumla, and "fell below Jumla." Now the inhabitants of every village and town in Lo had to give presents to the King of Jumla's representatives, who collected compensations from Mustang. A new period of poverty fell upon the land; the kings now built only prayer walls and small chortens. As the years went by, Jumla itself ran into troubles. Forty years after Mustang's surrender to Jumla and vassalage to this distant state (which affected interior affairs very little), in a small Nepalese town called Gurkha there was born a king, a chieftain, who was to become one of the greatest warriors of the Himalayas. He was Prithwi Narayana Shah, the first of the Gurkha kings. He swept all over eastern Nepal, eventually taking the Kingdom of Sikkim, and then conquered western Nepal, annexing the forty-four little rajas who had been vassals to Jumla.

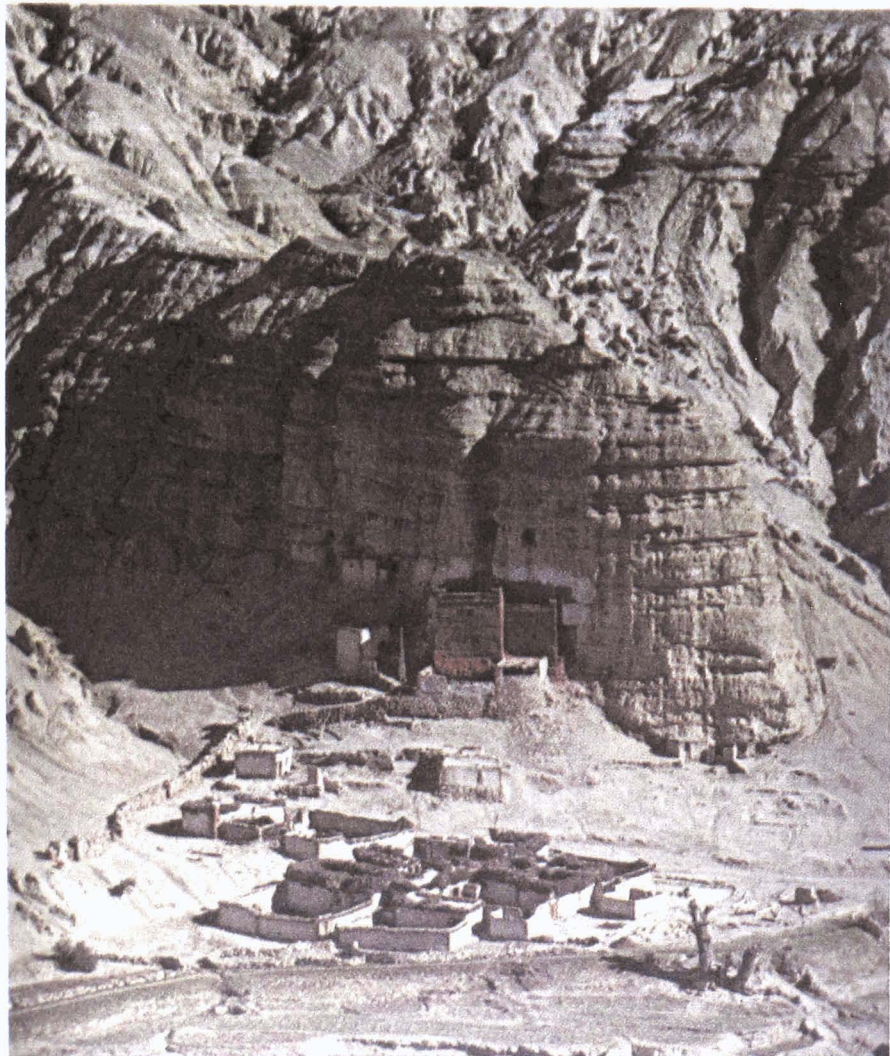
Around 1795, his successor conquered Jumla, and destroyed the

power of Mustang's powerful neighbor forever. Contrary to what certain scholars have assumed, the Gurkha kings never entered Mustang and did not fight the Kingdom of Lo. The King of Lo, on seeing the great power of the Gurkha kings, agreed to pay a tribute to them. In 1802 he went down to Kathmandu, where he was well received. On this occasion the King of Mustang met the Englishman Buchanan. Buchanan notes in his *Account of the Kingdom of Nepal and of the Territories Annexed to This Dominion by the House of Gorkha*: "The upper part of the river, which in the plains of India is called Gandaki, is called Kali, and, rising near a place called Damordur Kund, runs through the territories of the Bhotiya chief, called the Mastang Raja who is, or at least when I saw him in 1802 was a tributary to the Gorkha. . . ." Then he adds, what has proved to be a mistake, "There is reason to think, that since that time [he was writing in 1819] the Chinese have compelled the Raja of Gorkha to cede both Mastang and Kerring." Further on, Buchanan writes, "Colonel Crawford laid down the upper part of this river [Kali Gandaki] from the authority of a Lama, who accompanied the Mastang Raja."

From then on, the King of Mustang accepted the loose supervision of the Gurkha kings, who had little to do with Mustang, apart from accepting annual presents. In the meantime, in Mustang kings succeeded kings. One event of note at this time deserves mention, because it has been misinterpreted by various modern scholars. When King Anjia Thondup of Lo died prematurely, his brother quarreled with the late king's widow. She apparently was pregnant, and the brother claimed that the child was not from her recently dead husband. This quarrel was brought before the Gurkha king in Kathmandu, where the queen went with a delegation composed of members of the seven districts of Lo. There in Kathmandu the queen was given justice, and her son recognized as King of Mustang. The opposing party in the dispute felt very strongly about this, and claimed that this child was illegitimate, some saying his father was a Nepalese. Although this sounds highly improbable, as questions of caste would forbid such a union, it has been used by some as an argument to state that the King of Mustang today is a blood relation of the Gurkha kings. This explains why some people

ABOVE: *The monastery of Namgyal, above Lo Mantang.* BELOW: *A lonely rider on a Tibetan pony comes toward us in the Valley of Death. He had been tracking me for two days so that I might tend his badly frostbitten feet.*





nowadays declare (in secret) that the present king does not really have the "same bones" as Ame Pal. Although there may be a little truth to the claim that the succession was not truly respected, one cannot affirm what has been declared by Dr. Snellgrove, and certain people in Kathmandu, that it was the son of the King of Nepal who was placed on the throne of Mustang. All ancient accounts refer to a "*Bhotia*" king, and although the Gurkhas knew how to take advantage of this dispute (which gave them the final say as to the legitimacy of the son of the Queen of Mustang), it would be stretching the facts too far to claim that the Gurkhas simply placed one of their children upon the throne of the descendants of Ame Pal.

I was now able to determine that the kings of Mustang were always recognized as of Tibetan stock and Buddhist faith, and benefited from a special status of independence as vassals of Nepal. When the second war between Tibet and Nepal broke out in 1855, Mustang sided with the Nepalese Army. This army was headed by the Maharaja Jung Bahadur, of the Rana family, which had recently overthrown the legitimate kings of Nepal, whose descendants were kept shut up as prisoners in their own palace. Jamiam Angdu, the King of Mustang, sent one of his brothers to fight in Tibet beside the Nepalese. From this war, statues and books were taken from the Tibetan monastery of Tsang, and no doubt deposited in those of Lo Mantang. The King of Mustang was praised by the Nepalese maharaja as a "religious noble king." After 1860 the King of Lo died without a child, so the people implored his brother, the Abbot of Tsarang Monastery, to sleep with the queen. He complied, and from this union was born a son, Jambian Pelbar, "who looked well after his kingdom"; reigning until shortly after the birth of his son, Tenzing Trandul, who was crowned when he was a child, about 1905. This very King of Mustang was my host and patron, living in the small summer palace of Trenkar; the twenty-fourth King of Lo after Ame Pal—having retaken his title after the death of his eldest son. The next in line as King of Mustang would, I reflected, be Jigme Dorje, provided he survived his illness—a question that still made me extremely nervous.

ABOVE: *The gate chortens of the monastery of Garphu seen against the snow-capped peaks of Tibet.* BELOW: *High against an eroded cliff, into which its assembly hall and its monks' cells are cut, stands the amazing monastery of Nyphu.*

Thus runs the history of a land of which very few of us in the West have ever even heard—the highest kingdom in the Himalayas, the Land of Lo.

My stroke of luck at finally securing the much guarded secret history book put a new edge upon our quest. I now set off to visit the rest of the "eastern" district. After having purchased the *Molla*, we departed down along the small rivulet of the Kali Gandaki, passing two little villages and exploring en route the remains of two large fortresses standing upon the high cliffs that closed the flat valley floor to the east. Here again I was amazed by the architectural grandeur of the buildings in this land. Although these fortresses were mere ruins, we could still pick out the outlines of great circular walls encompassing numerous buildings, which now were haunted by small twirlers of dust whisked around by the wind.

I could visualize these structures haunted by their ancient inhabitants, men armed with the same old muskets and bows and arrows as those I had seen in the houses of Lo Mantang. I knew now how they had waged wars among themselves before being united under Ame Pal.

I was so excited by these majestic old forts that I inquired right and left where I could find more. It so happened that we had not been able to find any porters at the monastery of Garphu, and therefore put off to the following day the idea of striking out northeast, out of the valley of the Kali Gandaki to the remotest isolated village of Mustang—Sam Dzong—a village whose name announced a fort. It was decided that we would go there early the following day, after camping in a village called Kuse. There we settled in a large new house, where carpenters were still at work assembling windows and doors in the private chapel, which I, as a guest of honor, was invited to occupy. On arrival in Kuse I inquired whether there were any forts around, and was told that there were three up a small deep canyon that branched off east from Kuse.

As it was still early in the day, Tashi and I decided to go and have a look. This canyon was at first similar to the one we had followed a short distance to find the suspended monastery of Nyphu. But soon it proved to be much deeper and wilder; there were no signs of cultivation or of any village; in fact nothing could have grown upon the canyon's rocky floor, which now took on the most amazing hues of red, yellow, green, and white. As the canyon narrowed, its barren sides and the floor of the dry riverbed assumed increasingly exotic forms of sun-baked, colored cliffs and rocks, desolate and lonely. Like two black

specks, Tashi and I made our way up what seemed a Valley of Death, as I mentally termed it, a desert void haunted by tormented skeletons of carved rocks. The sight was so amazing that even Tashi agreed that "some stones can be beautiful"; it seemed that we were trudging through an unreal world. Prompted by what we had been told in Kuse about forts, we kept on marching half an hour, then an hour, and although we could see no sign of a fort, the canyon itself looked like one gigantic fossilized town with huge towering buildings closing in upon us on both sides. Never before had I seen such an array of colors. The red soil of Virginia or of Devonshire would look pale compared to the blood-red streaks of clay that slashed across the pale sandy pinks and dark greens of the earth around us, tinted by the traces of minerals and other side products of nature's alchemy. I felt as if I were walking through the glass cage of a geological showcase of some museum. On our way we could see, towering over our heads, high in the great colorful cliffs, great clusters of ancient cave dwellings. But nowhere was there a sign of the forts promised to us. In fact, these cave dwellings were what the peasant had meant when we asked him if there were any forts in this canyon. We marched for nearly two hours up this strange canyon, until we thought that we might soon cross—without knowing it—the border of China. Looking up the canyon we could now see a ridge hardly a mile before us that, beyond doubt, was the frontier.

We felt that at any moment we might run into a Chinese border guard and real trouble. With Tashi I discussed whether we had not better go back, but the idea that we might find these forts drove us on until, to our surprise, we found a large rectangular chorten standing in the center of the canyon, dwarfed by great eroded rocks. After having rested beside the chorten, we decided we would try to scale the sides of the canyon for a greater view. We were now at well over 14,000 feet, and we thought a few thousand feet more might give us an incredible view. Panting, we slowly advanced up a slippery slope of loose gravel. Once again we were reminded that most of Mustang is composed of a loose conglomeration of rounded pebbles and sand. All this area had been, millions of years ago, the bottom of a vast sea. The fact that it was an old seabed explained the presence of so many fossilized stones—the *salegrami*, sacred stones also found farther south in the bed of the Kali Gandaki River, and which are so prized throughout India for their magical properties. Most of these fossils were of black stone shaped into large snail-like spirals.

Covered with perspiration, we came unexpectedly upon the battered

ruins of a second chorten, set in the middle of nowhere. We had been walking upon a narrow ridge, on both sides of which the land sloped hundreds of feet down into canyons, whose soft sandy sides had been eroded into patterns like those found on arctic oceans where the sea has frozen into pointed, knifelike waves.

We were slowly reaching the summit of the ridge we had been climbing, and already from where we stood we could see over and beyond the surrounding hills. Climbing a last stretch, we sighted, about three hundred yards in front of us and perched right upon the summit of the highest ridge, the easily recognizable form of a square, windowless building painted red, the color of monasteries. No one had mentioned to us the presence of a monastery in this area, while just the idea of a building at such a great height seemed entirely impossible. Between us and this monastery extended a steep strip of land eroded into shapes beyond credibility; one would have thought that there were a thousand stalagmites sprouting from the slope like gigantic needles, leaving no place to walk. I doubt that anywhere in the world could be found such freaks of erosion. The tantalizing image of the monastery just stared at us, lost upon its lonely ledge, surrounded by this quite lunar sea of pinnacles and columns.

Much frustrated, after two bad falls, we came to the conclusion that the monastery was inaccessible. Groping my way to a pinnacle in easier reach, I took some photographs of the strange building and its incredible surroundings. I was looking around for more pictures to take, when I saw slightly to our left, upon a ridge lower than where we stood, the unmistakable ruins of a fort. Neither Tashi nor I realized that we were looking at a Chinese outpost—we were less than half a mile from the northern border of Mustang! We turned back to the Valley of Death, and later found out that the monastery we had seen was a small hermitage called Gumpa Codjoling, which through the trickery of nature and recent erosion had become completely inaccessible to man—isolated and abandoned. As for the fort upon the other ridge, this was called by the local inhabitants Dzong Dzong (Fort Fort), and was (this we later had confirmed to us) a Chinese lookout post, from which all northern Mustang could be observed. Weeks later we were still to be haunted by the vision in the distance of Dzong Dzong upon its high ridge, an ever-present eye of the Chinese, a constant reminder that we were too close for comfort to a neighbor of great size and belligerence.

We were walking out of the Valley of Death on our way back when Tashi spotted a small cloud of dust coming toward us—soon this

proved to be a galloping horseman coming up the canyon. With the wind blowing both the long mane of the horse and the scraggly hair of its fierce-looking rider, the solitary cavalier was indeed a majestic sight in this magical place. He might, I thought, be a Khampa. Reaching us, the man reined in his horse and spoke rapidly. At first I could not understand what he was saying; then, after many repetitions, I understood that he had been searching for me for two days. This determined-looking character then said something about having delivered wood for us in Lo Mantang, because he had heard I liked wood! In Lo Mantang he had been told I had left for the western district, and had followed in our track, only to discover that we had gone back down the eastern district. In short, he wanted to know if I could give him medicine, for which reason he had brought me some wood in Lo Mantang.

It was indeed a complicated story, but when I discovered what was the matter with the poor fellow, I was nearly sick—from disgust at the ghastly wounds he exposed to me, and at the idea that this poor man had been chasing after me on horseback for two days.

He was a rich farmer from a village near Tsarang. One evening he had gotten drunk—a not too unusual state for high-spirited people in Lo. Dead drunk, the man had fallen asleep on the ground, to wake up and discover that his feet had been immersed in an irrigation canal that had frozen during the night! In short, he had frozen his feet six months before I met him. Frostbite produces the most frightening wounds one can imagine. The poor fellow's feet had half fallen to pieces, and only the maggots that ate at his infected wounds had prevented him from developing gangrene and dying.

I myself have a horror of taking an injection, and would rather die than see a dentist. In other words, I am in matters of cuts, wounds, and blood, completely softhearted. Now I had before me a case that surpassed my meager capacities as a pill dispenser. My reputation as a doctor had been acquired only through the ignorance of the natives. In an effort to help this man, who had put such trust in my medical talents as to gallop for two days in pursuit of me, I recalled what I had witnessed in films. There I had seen surgeons wearing masks and slipping on rubber gloves, picking up knives and cutting deep into anesthetized patients. Overcoming my revulsion, I ordered the women of the house where we were staying to get some hot water. I then sought to find bandages; I had none with me, the little cotton wool I had brought along having been left behind in Lo Mantang for us to pick up later. I finally laid my hands on three fairly clean "ceremonial

scarves," and set about trying to clean the man's wounds. I used my large scissors to cut deep through the rotten skin, and the parts that had hardened over the infected blisters. I dared not stop and think what this fellow had endured over the last six months, and the fact that he was still alive could be explained only by the natural hardiness of the men of this land. In any other climate or nation he would have died months ago. For a whole hour I operated, using rakshi as alcohol, ceremonial scarves as bandages, a large kitchen knife as scalpel, and imagination as to what to do. A small tube of penicillin ointment was my only real medical tool.

Finally the poor chap was bandaged; though cut up, bleeding, and miserable, his feet were, I thought, reasonably clean, before he slipped them back into the large special boots he had had made for himself. My first consultation with this patient was over, and without knowing it a tremendous pile of firewood awaited me in Lo Mantang as my salary. I was for the next three weeks to bandage the fellow six times, as he followed me around on my wanderings, and I am proud to say that when I left Mustang a month later, he was actually cured.

— The Gold Kanjur

THE FOLLOWING DAY, leaving one-eyed Kansa and Calay in Kuse, I set off with Tashi and Pemba on a wild picnic that was to lead us to the isolated village of Sam Dzong.

Climbing a ridge over 14,000 feet high, we left the valley of the Kali Gandaki to descend one of its largest affluents, whose canyon we followed in a northerly direction. We passed on our way four huge cliffs in whose faces, situated over three hundred feet above us, were the honeycomb-like holes of small caves. Ever since we had passed the Annapurna range, down near Tukutchu, we had been seeing these "cliff houses," as they were called by the local people. It was in similar cliff dwellings that the monastery of Samdruling and the suspended monastery of Nyphu had been built. I had noticed that stone walls could be seen within the niche-like caves, which were undoubtedly man made. Who, I wondered, had lived there, and when? This mystery truly puzzled me. But no matter how hard I tried to find out, all my questions went unanswered. Some of the local people said eagles lived in the caves, others that they had been monasteries in ancient times; generally nobody knew anything about their origin or purpose. No doubt they were built in prehistoric times by some mysterious race of cavemen about whom nothing is yet known. All my efforts to reach these lofty caves proved failures. The existence of these cave sites is one of Mustang's most intriguing mysteries, and one that I hope some day to solve.

After wandering for hours up a desolate canyon, in which Pemba picked up various stones of different colors for medicines, including virgin iron ore and copper-stained rocks, we finally reached land's end, and the entrance to the little village of Sam Dzong. Although the name

of the village contains the word for "fort," we were soon told that its real name should be *sa som*, which means "earth watchman," in other words—border guard. Its inhabitants mistook me for a government official, and after having asked timidly whether I was Chinese, and received a negative reply, they explained to me the terror in which their village lived. They said there had been shooting around their village, and that Khampas had attacked one of their houses. The villagers had replied to the attack with slingshots and stones. The men then explained that they dared not graze their goats and cattle upon their pastures, as they were afraid of the Chinese border patrols who sometimes came within sight of the village.

The Khampas were not the only problem of the villagers of Sam Dzong. In recent years, considerable erosion of the vertical cliffs that rose just above the settlement had caused storm torrents to run right through its center, washing away some houses and tearing up the small fields at the river's edge. This river, whose canyon was most impressive, was dry half the day, having only a little water until the afternoons, when the sun had melted the snow on the summits of the surrounding peaks.

Later, the headman told me that the village had sent a delegation to the King of Mustang asking for new land to which they could move their village. To this request the king had replied rather harshly, "Even if your houses are destroyed, and you have to live in tents, you must remain in your lands to guard the frontier." I was never able to forget the fear in the faces of these inhabitants of the poorest and most isolated village of Mustang—these hardy, simple men who had fought armed soldiers with stones, and who lived unarmed on this border of fear. The village did not even have a monastery, its place of worship in the past having been Codjoling, the lonely—and now inaccessible—hermitage we had visited the day before.

From Sam Dzong we returned to where we had left Calay and Kansa, and then set off the following day back down toward Lo Mantang. On our way we passed the ruins of Gumpa Tubtiling, set on either side of a steep gully through which ran the fast stream that cut

ABOVE: *Plowmen with a team of dzos prepare the king's stony fields at Phuwa for the planting of barley and buckwheat.* BELOW: *A volume of the gold Kanjur of Lo, over 500 years old. The large letters of its title page, held by the boy, are of solid gold.*





through the central ridge of northern Mustang. The river cut the ruins in half, and were a living confirmation of what was written in the history book we had purchased at Garphu monastery. In this book it was written; "King Ahan Geltsin had five sons. The youngest two both married a woman called Tsusang and lived in Nichung" (an estate belonging to the King of Mustang, which still stands today in the eastern district, north of Garphu monastery). The youngest of this king's sons "went to stay with his eldest brother and he slept with his eldest brother's wife, Ahyum Hlamo. When they lived together the lake of Tri Lung overflowed and destroyed the Monastery of Tubtiling." We had before us the living proof that this was true, as it was plainly apparent from the ruins that the monastery had been cut in two by the torrent.

With the knowledge we had acquired from legend, books, and accounts about Mustang, our tour took on new interest. The *Molla* was rather like a historical guide to parts of this forgotten region; and even dried-up, ruined walls of clay now had a story for us. Exploring Mustang was like investigating a strange old attic, in every corner of which I felt would be hidden a treasure worth investigation. Curiosity and a feeling of possession kept me going, despite the hardships I frequently encountered, but perhaps more fascinating than monuments and places was the atmosphere that pervaded the daily life of the kingdom.

Every place carries with it an atmosphere—a state of mind—that can more easily be felt than described, a something that overshadows all activities and bathes all events in a peculiar light. Some places have a feeling of sleepiness, others one of loneliness and desolation. In Mustang I felt that life was bathed in a certain form of dynamism and enthusiasm, an enthusiasm encountered among the entire population. Pemba was for me the best example of this state of mind. Every morning he would share with me his hopes and ambitions for the day; it was quite evident that he did not know what the words "routine" or "boredom" meant. There was always a good bargain to look forward to, a new festival to plan, a friend to visit or news to be shared. There was nothing static about his outlook on life, nothing of the dreariness encountered in so many parts of Asia, or the sleepiness of so many agricultural communities of Europe and the West. The Lobas were accustomed to broad horizons, travel, business, and a diversified life, and

The isolated monastery of Lo Gekar, surrounded by stones carved with prayers and a wall containing hundreds of small prayer wheels.

there was always something new in Lo to do or to dream about. What we call in the West the "struggle for life," in Mustang is filled with a spirit of adventure and enterprise that would surprise those who consider such lands backward or static.

As I have said, the word for "happiness" is the same as for "beauty" in the Tibetan language, and this is reflected in the people's attitude, and in all they do or build. They attempt to ally beauty and happiness; there was not one house that did not share in this happiness through beauty, if only with potted flowers placed on windowsills, a concession to beauty touching in such a rugged land.

Another characteristic of Mustang is the high esteem in which intelligence is held. To be brilliant, clever, and intelligent are ambitions for the masses in Mustang; people are forever wanting to learn, children forever encouraged to take up interest in intellectual subjects, and the clever always admired and encouraged. We like to think that this is a universal characteristic, but it is not so. In our lands of the West, we consider "hard work" a greater virtue than sheer intelligence. The masses of the West learn more how to "work" than to think, and despite exceptions our education is more directed to "work" than to thought. Not so in Mustang. The man who develops a clever mind does little or no work; monks are admired because they use their brains, and to be able to live only by one's brain is a true virtue. In many areas in the West people are distrustful of intelligence, "eggheads" are considered a kind of freak; while the superior school student is apt to be called a "grind." In Lo the child who shows the slightest disposition to scholarship is immediately placed in the hands of a clever monk or packed off to a monastery.

Never had I heard before such sharp judgments about intelligence as in Lo, an attitude also found in Tibet. Mothers would tell me, talking about their sons, "This one is intelligent; this one is stupid and quite dumb"; and people would always mention first a person's "intellectual capacities," frequently saying of someone, "He is very learned and very quick-witted," when we would usually say, "He is very rich," or "He is very strong," or "He is a hard worker." Cleverness is one of the principal characteristics by which Tibetans and Lobas are judged. The Lobas are also rugged individualists and critical judges. This makes them very difficult people to handle as a group or as a nation. Two Tibetans rarely agree on anything, and few institutions get the whole backing of the masses. This trait accounts for the innumerable religious sects, groups whose differences are often minute and the product of small variations of opinion.

Intelligence is also equated with virtue; a brilliant man is generally assumed to be a virtuous person. Also, intelligence is the principal norm applied in the search for "reincarnated" lamas, when children are examined to see if they may be the reincarnation of deceased "Bhodisatvas."

Prestige is gained by intelligence more than by wealth or strength. If the monks are held in esteem, it is most generally for their superior knowledge. High and important lamas will often be boycotted in favor of a humble monk judged "more intelligent" or "more clean and virtuous." This state of affairs has a great influence on the people, whose values are above their simple surroundings and whose aspirations are on an intellectual plane.

A good wit is also very appreciated, and the man who can make humorous talk is much admired. I found that little escaped Pemba's critical judgment, and he would willingly make a joke at my expense. Girls were also a frequent topic of conversation and source of jokes among us, with the due reserve befitting married men. Pemba's wife was most beautiful, but this did not stop Pemba from admiring other pretty girls. I was pleased to see that in questions of beautiful women, the Lobas' taste is close to our own in the West today. Fat women are not considered beautiful, as in so many parts of the East, and what Pemba thought a "beauty" was the same girl I would have noticed for her elegance, according to modern standards where slimness is prized.

In many ways I found myself closer to Pemba than to Tashi, who retained a certain "discipline of manner" that I realized was more characteristic of the Chinese environment of the Amdo Sherpas than of Tibet. Pemba was in all subjects and topics quite uninhibited, and I was always amazed to realize that he had *never* left Mustang, not even on a commercial venture, but was simply a truly brilliant product of this lost land. His only contact with the modern world had been when he had seen the helicopters that had flown over to Lo Mantang four years before my visit (on the occasion of the United States' attempt to set up in Lo a radio station to listen in on China). I avidly questioned Pemba on the helicopters' flights to Mustang, and he explained to me how this "great event happened." I must say that his reactions were quite surprising, not at all reflecting the dumb bewilderment that Western technological inventions usually evoke in isolated people.

When the first helicopter flew over Lo Mantang, "all the women and children began to scream and cry, thinking it was the end of the world." Pemba rushed out and looked up, and thought it was a man

twirling his arm above his head and shouting. This was the only interpretation he could reason out, as he had never in his life seen any kind of machine. Then when the helicopter landed near the king's summer place, Pemba with his friends set out to see the monster, taking small tents and planning to spend the night. When Pemba realized that it was a "flying machine," a special "flying boat" with a motor that made a noise, he immediately understood that it was the product of a very advanced technology—nothing magic, nothing mysterious, just a most ingenious assembly of metal and use of power from chemicals. (Pemba knew a great deal about chemicals, such as how to make gunpowder from saltpeter, which is found in Lo. He was also familiar with the many ferrous oxides used in medicines.) "Well," explained Pemba, "that night I could not sleep." Taking out his silver eating bowl, Pemba began to lick it like an animal. "You know," he continued, "I felt that we were so ignorant and foreigners so clever, that I sadly reflected that we were no smarter than cows that eat like this—that we were stupid animals." Such a startling reaction is a certain sign of intelligence. Pemba had fully appreciated that the helicopter was not just a magical device, but proof that somewhere people had developed technology to a far higher point than his own people, and this gave him a sense of shame.

Talking with Pemba, I would often have to remind myself that he was a Loba. His wit and way of thinking were quite modern, little different from my own—and in many points superior; his curiosity and patience often surpassed mine. Although I am particularly curious, and my aim in Mustang was to learn everything about this land and its people, I found myself harassed by as many questions from Pemba as I put to him. How did we do such-and-such back on our country? What did my people think of this and that? In trying to reply to Pemba's questions, I realized what little basic difference there is between France or America, and Mustang. Most of our Western political, religious, and legal institutions are products of our medieval institutions, and thus basically very similar to those of Mustang. We also had kings, nobles, and dukes; we had walled cities and courts of justice of various powers like those of Mustang; we too had monasteries, monks, nuns, doctors, books and texts. We also had royal messengers, an institution that developed into our modern postal service. In fact, I saw that many of our concepts of social life, the family and the nation, our political institutions and religious ones of the present day are but variations of ancient medieval institutions quite similar to those of Lo. Thus the life of a scholar at Oxford is regulated by many laws similar to, and as old

as, those regulating the lives of scholars in large Tibetan monasteries. Our formal legal language much resembles the legal terminology of Mustang's edicts and laws. Only Communism and Socialism are absent in Lo, as are the ideals of social equality, but on the other hand a Loba would have no trouble in understanding the government of England, with its House of Commons and House of Lords, its stratified society, its church headed by the queen. These similarities, I also realized, could not to my best judgment be found in most other Asiatic societies. I could not help but recapture the not so distant past of my own land of France. I do not as a rule like drawing parallels, and there is nothing more boring than hearing people say Mexico is like Spain or that a country "reminds me of home." But here in Mustang I felt that the parallel should be made, if only to show that the Tibetan culture stands alone in the Far East in many ways, much more closely akin to that of medieval Europe than to the culture of its neighbors, whether India, Burma, China, Mongolia, or Afghanistan.

Does this similarity come from any direct contact between European and Tibetan peoples, from some ancient lost tie? This is a question I often asked myself. There are undoubtedly some similarities arising from the fact that the so-called "barbarians" who invaded Europe came from the great central-Asian plains. But perhaps this is too old a link to explain all the similarities between Mustang of today, and for example a small duchy of fifteenth-century Europe.

The cause of this similarity is to be found, I believe, in the mentality of the people; in their prizing the same values as those dominant in Europe, an outlook on life that has slowly evolved into a world with similar institutions corresponding to this frame of mind.

Tibetans are a mystic, religious people, but they also possess a strange paradox, a very independent, critical mentality, and still have in their blood a martial spirit. This was also true of the peoples of medieval Europe, who all knelt religiously before the cross and professed brotherly love, but could never agree—so that that Europe of Christianity, the Europe of the Middle Ages, was also the scene of perpetual feuds and wars.

These basic resemblances in character and institutions, even more than the mystery of forbidden lands, account for the fascination that the Tibetan culture has held for all Europeans who have actually visited this land. There they, like myself in Mustang, have found a reflection of their own world as it was in the past. Of course, the new values that eventually brought about the destruction of feudalism and opened up a path for science, the Industrial Revolution, and a new

technocracy and social philosophy have not yet come to this area. On the other hand, in many ways Tibet was more advanced than Europe was in the Middle Ages, and there seems to prevail now in the Himalayas the same intellectual spirit of enterprise that had marked the first years of the Renaissance.

Six days after leaving Lo Mantang, we wandered back, tired and dirty, through the great gate of the capital. Life there carried on as usual. The men were standing outside the gate, waiting for the cattle to return from the pastures, while the nobles were busy in long tea-drinking sessions discussing the affairs of the kingdom. Immediately, to our great joy, we learned that the king's son was better—the fire was out, and now we could hope to see the king and Jigme Dorje again. I was extremely relieved to be able at last to chase away all the depressing thoughts that had been bothering me.

Once more we took up our lodgings on the top floor of "our" house near the old palace. That night I fell asleep early to the chant of the girls singing in the streets—nostalgic songs about flowers and birds, those two things that mark the seasons in Lo Mantang, the rare signs of life and joy upon the windswept hills. I was snug once more behind the great wall built by Ame Pal.

I dreamed of the strange things I had seen on our trip north: the lonely monastery of Nyphu perched on its high cliff, the spotless Gumpa of Garphu, where tonight—as on every other night of the year—monks would be chanting to the rhythm of great drums and the tinkle of bells. As usual, the silver water bowls of the altars would be refilled with the symbolic offerings to the peaceful divinities, while the fearful gods who required offerings of blood and human flesh would be placated by prayers and sacrificial cakes.

At sunrise I was awakened by the now familiar sounds of the town. To the cry of the communal herder calling the city's inhabitants to let out their animals from the ground-floor stables, I could hear the rattle of chains as doors were unlocked, and the yaks and donkeys were let out to wander through the narrow streets of the town to the gate, where in one herd they would be driven out to graze. Drums announced the morning prayers of the monastery, and on getting up I could see monks running about, carrying large shiny horns to perform a religious ceremony in someone's house. The children could then be heard shouting, making that universal noise familiar to school playgrounds. Women settled on the roofs of their houses to dry grain on large mats, while others went down to the town square, where lay the

mashing stones in which—with the aid of a pole—barley could be crushed to the rhythm of hollow thuds. Other women began to file out of the door of the city, carrying on their backs large brass pots enclosed in wooden stands, on their way to fetch the day's drinking water. Later, women and young girls with conical baskets set out to gather in the fields a small weed with which an excellent salad is made. Some would also search for nettles to make nettle soup, a dish that was common in medieval Europe.

With Tashi, I set out early to see the king. I was more nervous than on our first visits, as after what had been said and had happened, we could not tell what welcome we might receive. I became aware that now, after having lived six weeks in Lo, I had begun to feel toward the king a respect similar to that of his own people. I had heard his name mentioned with so much reverence that I had fully grasped the importance of his rank. A medieval king is much more than a constitutional monarch; his power and influence have a mystical quality, and exceed that of any modern ruler. A medieval king, I now knew, is superhuman, a man apart, an absolute monarch.

The trail up to Trenkar was now a familiar one to us. As we left the city door, I saw a woman coming back with her jug full of water. "This is a good omen," said Tashi. "If the first person you see on leaving for a mission is a woman carrying water, you should offer her a kata, as this is a sure sign of good luck." Unfortunately, we had no kata to spare, but carried on quite happy at this good sign.

After a short wait at the door of the summer palace, we were ushered in, and found the king sitting under a little gallery opening into the courtyard on the second floor that led into the usual throne room. His Majesty was busy praying, and performing a morning ritual with a small copper and silver jug resting upon a stand set in a dish full of water. We were asked to sit on a mat to his left, and wait.

When the king had finished, he welcomed us with a smile. With a sigh of relief I discovered that there was nothing standing between us and that obviously at the royal palace nobody had ever believed or fostered the rumors that had run through the town—that we had tried to poison His Majesty's son.

I was struck by what the king represented—he was a direct descendant of the great Ame Pal, the very man who had made this kingdom and whose work had survived unchanged until today. This despite the rockets reaching for the moon, despite the fact that now the shiny dots of satellites were visible almost every night in the sky of Lo.

As usual, we were offered tea to drink, and then presented with some

sheep liver on copper plates, a present brought to the king that morning by a respectful peasant. We had little choice but to accept it; the liver had been badly cooked and was lukewarm and jellylike. I took a quick glance at Tashi by my side, and was pleased to see that he too looked pale in the face and disgusted. For about an hour we toyed with the liver, pushing it around our plates and simulating hypocritical looks of satisfaction.

We were soon joined by Jigme Dorje, the king's son, who announced to us that he was much better, and then politely excused himself for not having been able to take special care of us during our visit. I talked about all we had learned about Lo, and both the king and his son appeared amazed by what we now knew, the old king's amazement being more directed to the fact that a foreigner had taken such pains to learn what he considered "trivial and uninteresting." We then revealed to the king our intention of traveling to the southern districts, and our plan to stay some time in the town of Tsarang.

When, to our relief, our plates of jelly were taken away, Jigme Dorje suggested that we look around the summer palace with him. We were thus introduced into the fine private chapel of the king. Its main altar was a remarkable work of art of carved dragons heavily gilded, while all around the room—painted on small wooden panels—were the works of a "Lhasa artist," as our host proudly pointed out. The chapel was one resplendent assembly of carved gilt wood, like the altars of a baroque chapel. The statues were all of the finest handicraft, studded with turquoise and other semiprecious stones.

When we returned to the sunny gallery, I ventured to ask the king if he would allow us to take a photograph of him. I very much wanted this picture, without which my visit would not have been complete. The king, unfortunately, was seated in the shade of the overhanging gallery; and it was only through very persuasive talk that His Majesty agreed to have his cushions moved out into the sun. Here the king kindly suggested that I sit by his side, and Tashi took a couple of photographs of both of us together.

We were about to leave, when the king asked if we would like to see a book written in gold letters. I had seen many Tibetan books written on black paper with gold ink, but agreed to stay and see this one.

A few minutes later, a tall, strong young man came forward lugging in his arms a huge book that looked like a small chest, about three feet long and one foot thick. This was laid down upon a stand before me. The young man then went about untying a great silk cover that wrapped up the volume. Under this was revealed the book, bound be-

tween two large boards of wood lacquered bright red, and covered with delicate designs in gold.

When this cover was taken off, I was amazed! Beneath the lacquered binding a thick silver plate was revealed, entirely covered with embossed designs encrusted with pure gold figures. I inspected this remarkable cover in detail. Once taken off, it revealed another silver plate on which were attached three overleaves of bright silk. When these were raised, they disclosed the title of the book—two words in letters four inches high, made of solid gold pencil-thick bars applied to the heavy silver frame. This book was a true jewel, the finest book I had ever seen.

I was in for more surprises when, one after the other, the first ten pages were turned—each decorated with the most exquisite illustrations in gold leaf upon thick black paper. Then began the text, in large characters of thick gold paint, raised, as if engraved, above the paper. Tashi told me that this was one of the volumes of the Kanjur. I then realized that I had before me one of the very volumes that the Holy Lama Ngorchen Kunga Zampo had ordered made in Mustang in 1436, according to his biography, which states: "In the Year of the Sheep, he [Ngorchen] made Chaksang his representative in Sakya and went to Lo and returned after six months. At the time in Lo there was no complete Kanjur, so he collected one. . . ." Later, on the lama's second visit in the Year of the Dragon, 1436, his biographer writes, "They [Ame Pal and Ngorchen Kunga] discussed the production of the Kanjur, which they began to write in *gold*. . . ." This work was completed only eleven years later, for [the biography states], "In the Year of the Hare 1447, he [Ngorchen] visited Lo for the third time, invited by the great patron of teaching, Angun Zampo [Ame Pal's son], and they discussed the writing of a whole Kanjur and Tenjur. There was also the *gold Kanjur* * which was completed, and he made a catalogue of these works."

Looking at the great volume, I realized beyond doubt this was one of the 108 volumes of the famed gold Kanjur of Lo; a volume over five hundred years old, a masterpiece of Tibetan scholarship and craftsmanship. Tashi assured me that what the king said was true: "Even in Lhasa one cannot find such a beautiful and rich book as this." When we inquired where the other 107 volumes were, the king told us that to his great regret, before his coming to the throne the gold characters had been removed from their heavy first pages. Thus was defaced one of the finest Kanjurs to be found anywhere.

* Emphasis added.

To Western scholars and museums, such a marvelous work of art would be worth literally a fortune, far more than the weight of the gold letters taken from the first pages. After learning this, we bade the king a touching goodbye, and in the most friendly terms exchanged the wish that we should meet again. I promised to send the king photographs I had taken in his land, and a copy of the book I hoped to write on Lo. Unfortunately, I was a year later to learn of the death of old King Trandul, who was succeeded by his son Jigme Dorje, who now rules Mustang as its twenty-sixth king.

Our last days in the capital were quite frantic. There were all the last details to collect about the city's customs; we also had to say goodbye to all our friends and acquaintances. A month and a week, spent in a small town, is a long time. I knew practically everybody by sight, and to all I now bade farewell. I could not bring myself to realize that I was leaving. I dreaded the thought, knowing only too well that the moment I was gone the image of the city with its huge, improbable walls and unusual people would slip into the hazy world of my memory—and that I should never be able to recapture the true scope of its incredible existence.

The night before leaving, Pemba had organized a dinner party for us. He was really quite upset at the thought of our separation, and I personally felt I was losing a true friend. Pemba had noted that I did not eat the same food as he did, so he secretly arranged for Calay to cook part of the meal he was giving me, thus making sure in advance that I would like it. Such kind attention was most touching, and the meal was a great success. We had cup after cup of chang before attacking with chopsticks a bowl of noodles from China—the package of which Pemba proudly showed to us. This was the first manufactured food I had seen in Lo, and I was told it had come from the Chinese post on the other side of the border.

Pemba's two small daughters played around the cushion on which he and I were seated, facing the small smoky fire, and drinking. Nyma, Pemba's wife, served us excellent barley beer from small wooden bottles, rimmed with shiny brass rings. Without Pemba, my stay would never have been so fruitful. I was indebted to him for the history book of Garphu, for countless stories and tales about Lo, for other books and for a detailed account of many customs and rites. But most of all I was grateful for the friendship that had sprung up between us and had helped me to understand the Lobas, and also myself, a little better. When we were ready to leave, very late that night—his wife having dozed off to sleep with the two children—Pemba took from a little

chest at his side a rough, brown sheet of Tibetan paper; unfolding it, he gave it to me, saying that he had only just finished it in time. Pemba had drawn for me the wheel of life, complete with illustrations of each of the six spheres of woeful rebirth, held within the jaws and hands of Mara, the god of death. The drawing was of medieval simplicity and touching realism, representing in stylized details all the tortures and sufferings of the spheres of existence—of life. I was really overjoyed, and added this huge drawing to the others Pemba had given me; among which was a map of the world he had drawn, showing the location of Mustang, India, Lhasa, and America on the flat half-disk that he believed was the dwelling place of mankind.

The yellow rays of a cold morning sun were just pointing over the eastern peaks the following morning when silently we packed our cases once more and had them loaded upon two horses. Pemba came over, and I gave him as a present an electric flashlight and a supply of batteries and bulbs. In silence we paced together through the empty streets of Lo Mantang, filled with real sadness. For me, this departure was not like a usual one. It was like the sudden awakening from an incredible dream, and I feared that once far away I should not be able to recall its wonderful charm.

At the city's gate, Pemba took out a kata and placed it around my neck. I turned and left, with tears nearly in my eyes. I knew that the same night in Pemba's house a butter lamp would be burning by the place where I had sat and that there on a cushion beside his seat near the fire would remain in memory of me another kata—a custom to honor a great lama or a good friend. . . .

Climbing up a steep track above the Plain of Prayer, I turned around to have one last look at the capital of Lo. Its wall shone in the morning light, which also fell across the huddled terraces of the houses, upon which hundreds of prayer flags glittered like golden feathers. Behind the town, I could see Ketcher Dzong, the circular fortress of Ame Pal; beyond this I could see all the western and eastern districts, with the small white dots of their villages. The land Tashi had called "as barren as a dead deer" was, I knew, populated with beauty and charm, with men, women and children many of whom were my friends.

— The Ghosts of Tsarang

WE HAD LITTLE TIME to regret Lo Mantang, for before us still lay hundreds of miles of tracks to explore in this lonely kingdom, four of whose seven provinces still remained for us to inspect.

Five hours later, we came in sight of the mighty fort of Tsarang. This was the town into which we had stumbled on our way up, and where lived the king's eldest son, the lama whom we had so rudely disturbed on our arrival.

There is something both poetic and sinister in Tsarang. The town itself is most colorful with its large monastery, gaily striped in red and blue, standing out like a flashy beacon before the five-story-high castle erected on a majestic crest a few hundred yards away. These two great landmarks seem like huge ships plowing through an ocean of tender green, in which cluster the white rowing boats of the village houses, anchored about three large chortens that seem like buoys floating on the fields.

Tsarang's name originally came from the words Chaptrun Tsetrang, "cock's crest," the crest being the narrow rocky ridge upon which stands the castle. From the south, the town is reached across a flat glacial plain, while coming from the north one realizes that the monastery and fort are sitting right upon the tip of a huge precipice, four hundred feet deep.

The sinister aspect of Tsarang is that its life is perpetually overshadowed by two huge ghosts—that of the fort, hardly ever used and in a state of disrepair; and that of the huge monastery whose thousand monks of ancient times have now dwindled to barely a dozen. There lived in seclusion the king's second and elder living son, the Holy Lama of Tsarang.

I said "holy," but some people say he is "unclean," others that he is a demon; some say he is a saint, others an unhappy man. Fate has cruelly struck the gay young man that he was, the disrespectful monk who married and lived a profane life—content only to collect church revenues, and never to be seen praying or wearing his lama's robes. He had now paid dearly for his sins. The previous year, after a brief illness, his wife had died, leaving him with a four-year-old son. The Lama of Tsarang made a stand; he publicly took the vow to commence solitary meditation, and to study the Tantric paths of enlightenment for three years in atonement for his past behavior. His vow stipulated that he could not eat during daylight or leave the royal apartments above the deserted monastery of Tsarang. Neither could he in principle see anyone other than his assistant monk, and he must spend most of his time reading works concerning magical practices as a way to salvation. In fact, the lama was not overscrupulous in observing these vows, and so consented to see Tashi and me and a few other people under exceptional circumstances.

You do not have to be a Tibetan or of a sensitive nature to believe that Tsarang's monastery is haunted by ghosts. The wide corridors with narrow small windows; the three huge, dark assembly halls (two of which are abandoned); the cavernous depth of the monastery's kitchens, where still can be seen caldrons large enough to cook soup for a thousand, and pots deep enough to conceal five men; dozens of empty cells; dark storerooms, and narrow passages—all contribute to this ghostly feeling. Even the large assembly hall, the grandest in Mustang, has a certain gloom that could be lifted only by the presence of many hundreds of monks. When a drum echoes among the dusty silk banners that swish about in the draft, or when a cymbal chills the smiles of the huge, bejeweled divinities of the main altar—these sounds are always met by silence, a silence hardly broken by the soft footsteps of the few lonely monks who inhabit the monastery's empty corridors. Retired men, they live in the shadow of their superior, the Lama of Tsarang, who dwells alone there like an eagle, secluded in a world where time is meaningless, an unhappy man, an unclean monk, a widower, and a penitent.

There are certain characters one encounters whom one can never forget. They may not necessarily be remarkable people, but they carry with them such distinctive traits that their memory haunts one for years. Such a personality is the Lama of Tsarang.

We approached the monastery of Tsarang—this time properly prepared with a fine kata—and made our way to the terrace above the

main assembly hall, onto which opened the royal apartments and a small chapel in which the lama was confined. After announcing ourselves to an effeminate-looking middle-aged monk, we waited. From within the chapel we could hear the drone of prayers being recited in a monotonous voice. When the prayers ceased, we were beckoned to come in.

There, as before, was the king's son, the lama, seated upon a high, wide throne, with his back to a latticed window covered with paper. With a broad smile he asked that Tashi and I take seats cross-legged by his side.

I noticed that the lama's hair was a bit longer than when we had been there before. He was not allowed to cut it, and since he had started his solitary confinement it had grown to a length of about four inches, and looked very much like the hair of men in medieval paintings.

The Lama of Tsarang had a nervous habit of always muttering "*haaah haaah haaaa . . .*" under his breath. This gave him the air of some pedantic scholar, always ruminating aloud the processes of his mind. "Haaah . . . You can stay here in the monastery if you like, haaah haaa," he said. "*Tudeche, tudeche*" (Thank you, thank you), I answered, excited but also rather nervous at the idea of sharing the lama's secluded life. The lama then fumbled among some boxes before him on a high pulpit, and from behind a small stack of books withdrew a handful of silver coins. "Haaah haaa . . ." he addressed his assistant, the effeminate-looking monk, "go and see if Tsewan Dorje has some good arak, and buy four trankas' worth . . . haaah . . . *O mani padme hum. . .*" The lama then unexpectedly launched into a long, monotonous recital of prayers, ignoring our presence. Stopping short, he snapped out of his state of prayer with a long, pensive grunt, and said, "Will you take a photograph of me? How long do you plan to stay in Tsarang?"

Thus we settled in the royal apartments of the Tsarang monastery. These were composed of seven rooms, set about a quadrangle, upon the roof of the assembly hall, surrounding the large, square, central skylight of the hall. Calay and one-eyed Kansa were given a large, narrow kitchen, whose walls were partly covered with fine stone carving representing chortens and seated monks.

As for Tashi and me, we were given—as a great honor—a finely decorated, long room beside the lama's chapel-cell. This room had a board floor, a welcome change after the dusty clay floor of our living quarters in Lo Mantang! Beautiful frescoes covered part of the walls,

while in a corner an elaborate magic square was painted, similar to the one we had seen at the New Monastery of Lo Mantang.

The room would have been a dream if it had only been located in the tropics, but it proved quite uninhabitable, as one side was closed by large open panels of crisscross wooden bars, which let in an unpleasant draft and an even more disagreeable cold wind at night. This had, no doubt, been a summer room for use on hot days, but now, as our permanent living quarters, it became so unlivable that we eventually had to use our large tent as a curtain, both for privacy and for our own protection. Mustang is a land of extremes. By day, in the sun, the temperature soars to ninety degrees Fahrenheit, while at night—or as soon as one enters the shade—it falls below freezing. As for the wind, it was forever penetrating our clothes—a howling force, carrying dust and bitterly cold air.

Noblesse oblige—we had to seem satisfied, while secretly we envied the warmth of Calay's kitchen and bemoaned the chilling splendor of our elaborately painted, icy cage.

A small door at one end of our room, hidden by a fixed wooden screen, led to a passageway on one side of which was a door leading into the lama's chapel, and on the other side the door to the "royal privy," the clean and elegant toilet of the monastery. This was a small cubicle with a window, a view and, of course, a hole in the floor over a narrow chimney-like shaft leading to the ground below. This sanitary installation was, I admit, a very attractive feature of the monastery. Generally all over Mustang, although people never or very rarely washed, sanitation was always quite adequate, a fact that speaks highly for this civilization, when one recalls that Versailles in all its splendor had no bathrooms or toilets.

In Tsarang my first aim was to map the small town and study its inhabitants. But very soon this stay became an occasion for an intimate observation of the monastery and its unusual lama.

The Tsarang Lama's character was a confusing mixture of piety, profane thinking, and originality. I had not been twenty-four hours in Tsarang before I could confirm to myself that he and I had become great friends. I was the first person, other than his small son and assistant monk, to share his isolation.

Monks and monasteries are an aspect of life in Mustang that cannot be ignored, in the same way that the church in medieval Europe could not be separated from the state or isolated from the daily lives of the people.

It is necessary to make here a clear distinction between the Buddhist

doctrine and the institutions that form the "church." The essence of Buddhism is that life is pain and imperfection, that life is an illusion of the senses and an imperfect state, and that man should attempt to disentangle himself from the causes of this pain, which are desire and craving for gratification of the senses. To escape this pain one should practice the eight rules known as the Eightfold Path—rightness of belief, aspiration, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, thought, and meditation. Only through the disentanglement from pain by the use of the Eightfold Path can man attain the absolute, called Nirvana.

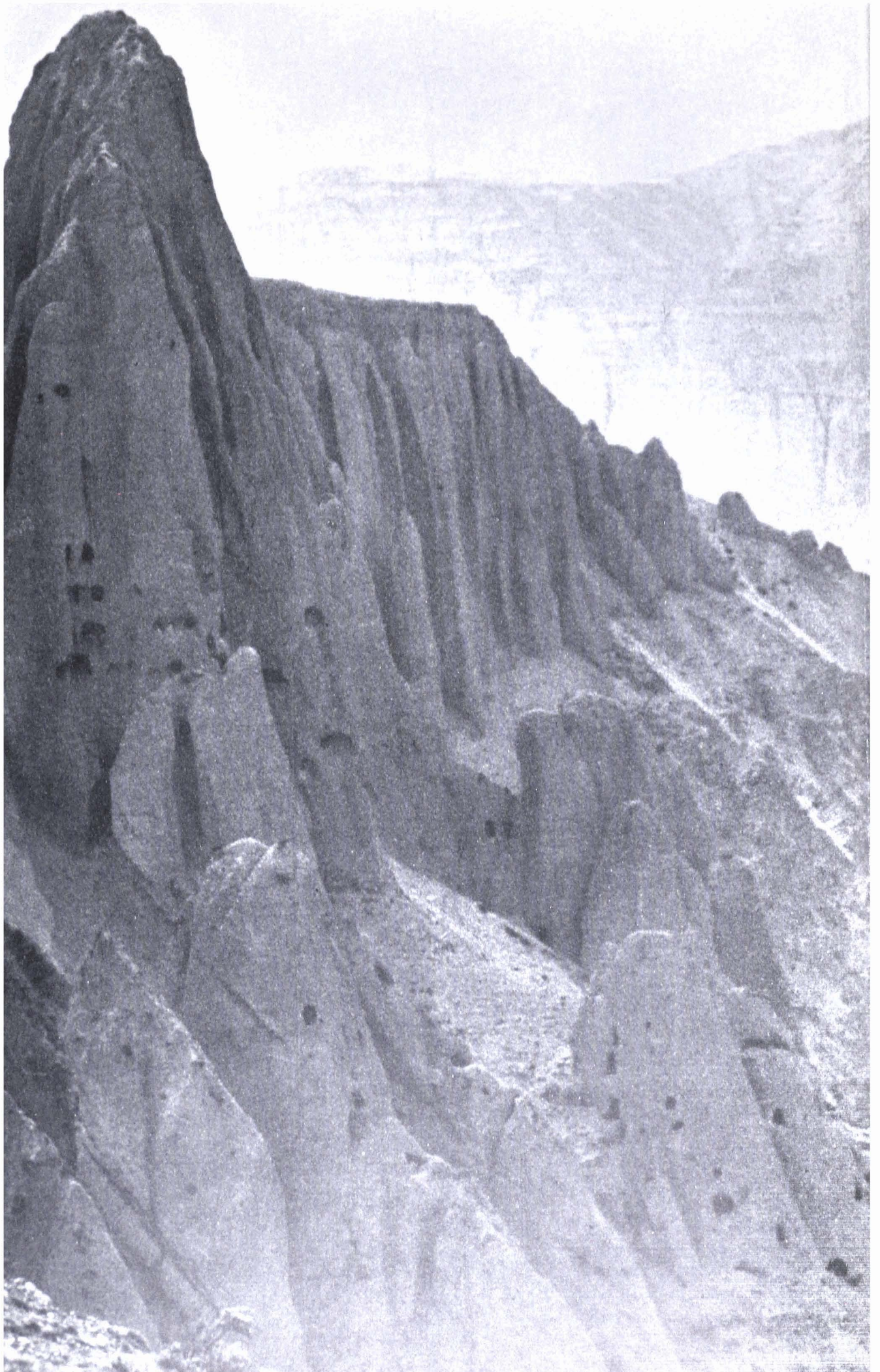
Buddhism as expounded by the living Buddha himself, the historical Sakya sage, is not a religion—there is no mention of God or of a soul. Through the centuries, nevertheless, this doctrine was expanded to include both beliefs existent in India before Buddhism and mostly borrowed from Hinduism, and new concepts elaborated through the centuries. Lamaism, or Tantric Buddhism, as practiced in the Himalayas, has from the simplicity of the original doctrine grown into a most complicated religion whose devotees have been divided into innumerable sects and subgroups. Nevertheless, the general belief behind these various sects is that the state of man is an imperfect one; that only the absolute—the truth, or Nirvana—is real; that existence is but an illusory state; that life is but an illusion of the imperfect senses; and that man should aspire through the application of the Eightfold Path to disentangle himself from the illusion of life to attain perfection; in other words, Nirvana.

The monks of Tibetan Buddhism do not attempt, like the priests of other religions, to make conversions, but simply devote their lives to seeking Nirvana through all their acts and thoughts. The reincarnated lamas, on the other hand, are considered "saints," men who have given up the possibility of reaching Nirvana in order to teach other men the path to the absolute—they return to earth to show the way out of the infernal cycles of the wheel of life.

To Buddhists it is only normal that everybody should long to be a monk, because only monks can give all their time and thought to enlightenment, to the quest of the absolute. This is why to become a monk is an ambition of most Lobas. The ordinary man has to content himself with the difficult path of trying to reconcile his mundane life

The huge chorten of Tangya, surrounded by lesser chortens, all gaily painted with clays of different colors.





with the perfection of the absolute, while monks can take the short cuts offered by the numerous methods taught in the monasteries, physical devices such as the use of Yoga, mystical meditations, or psychological methods of concentration. Through meditation, one can accelerate the process of enlightenment and achieve a kind of state of Nirvana while on earth.

Those who hold the secrets of these mystical, physical, or psychological methods are the reincarnated lamas, the "teachers"; they are believed to be possessed of powers that alone can give the ordinary monk the key to enlightenment. The recital of texts over and over again is an aid to this concentration, and set meditations are also imposed. For example, one sits and contemplates an image of Buddha; one then looks at one's navel and imagines a lotus growing out of it. Upon this lotus one sees an image of Buddha from whose navel emerges another lotus, on which is seated another Buddha from whose navel issues another lotus, and on and on. Psychologically this meditation slowly draws man away from life, from its desires and its illusions, to place the mind in an exalted state of "unworldliness"—this is, in a way, a sort of "pre-Nirvana experiment." It can be carried on best after years of practice, and when one is secluded and left alone. For this reason, many monks have lived in caves or lonely spots, like the Christian hermits who sought to find God in the desert.

By making vows of isolation, one has a greater chance of attaining perfection. Many monks, like the Tsarang Lama, make vows to spend one year, three years, six years, twelve years, or even their entire lives in isolation. Monks have even had themselves sealed up in a cave for twenty years or more, never seeing the light of day, never seeing other human beings, fed through trapdoors, and withering away in meditation—entering a strange world of physiological vegetation and intellectual hallucination.

Unfortunately, a man who has had a wife, who has known all the joys of existence, can bear such a path only with great difficulty. This was the case of the Lama of Tsarang. He was, and fully admitted it, partly incapable of this tremendous effort; and when I arrived in Tsarang, I afforded for him a diversion he badly needed. Consequently

Prehistoric skyscrapers overlooking Yara. The towering cliffs are honey-combed with the man-made cave dwellings of a mysterious race of the past.

he clung to me as the only relief from his painful, self-imposed conditions. Being a foreigner, I was the exception that he needed, the excuse that could relieve him of the stress of his confinement.

At first our conversations rambled on about Lo; the Lama of Tsarang was very keen to learn how his father was, and about the illness of his brother Jigme Dorje. The lama was dying to hear all about his relatives, friends, and the capital of his country. He had been isolated for a little over a year, and was hungry for any news I could give him. To my surprise, I found myself explaining Mustang to a Loba, a rather paradoxical state of affairs.

The Tsarang Lama proved invaluable in assisting me to understand how the "church" operated in Lo. Although neither a very pious lama nor very erudite, the king's son was nevertheless well informed on the organization of religious life.

One must, in studying Buddhist monks and monasteries, forget our Occidental Christian notions of religious communities. One becomes a monk in Lo or Tibet not so much out of vocation as through destiny. A family decides which son will be a monk—usually it is the second son who is so destined, at an early age. When he is nine, the chosen child's hair is cut and he is given a red, ankle-length chuba. The child is then registered at a monastery; this decides to which sect he will belong. He nevertheless stays at home. Here he is given an education befitting his state. Parents pressure him to learn how to read and write, and elder monks are called in as his teachers.

When the child grows older, he either stays at home in the house of his parents or his elder brother or takes up lodgings in the local monastery. The young monk is free to take the vows of his choice—each set of vows, as explained, entailing certain rules of conduct: celibacy, abstaining from certain foods, and so forth.

Monasteries as a rule are headed by a reincarnated lama or a very saintly monk. He is the top spiritual and temporal administrator who supervises the small world of the monastery. Those monks who choose to live in a monastery have each a specific function to perform. The highest in rank after the lama is the *unze*, the monk who regulates the others' lives, assisted by two "policemen" monks who see that his orders are carried out. Special monks are in charge of the monastery's business; they undertake commercial ventures with its funds, being in all respects true businessmen. Other monks take care of the monastery grounds, others of the kitchens, and a great many act as servants to the monks previously mentioned, for pay.

The monks, however, can come and go when they choose, and are not bound all their lives to a single monastery by any superior law or

force. Each provides for his own living, while in turn each is made responsible for the financing of the communal celebrations, at which food is distributed to all the monks who gather in the assembly halls. In turn, they have to go out and beg for money or arrange for grants from rich nobles. In the eleventh month of the year, all the monks registered in a monastery—whether they live at home or at the gumpa—have to reside at the monastery for a thirty-day course in the teachings, and brush-up on their spiritual life. At other times they can roam about on pilgrimages of their choice.

Monasteries own land, the produce of which is distributed as bonuses to the monks. Thus a rich monastery gives out much free food and money, attracting a large number of scholars who meditate side by side, learning from one another.

These monasteries could be better compared with the medieval universities of Europe rather than with our Christian monasteries. The *trawa*, or lowly monk, is just a “student”; his subject is to find the path to Nirvana. He studies more or less where and with whom he chooses, living in monasteries according to his means. If he is very poor, he will seek a monastery that is richly endowed and will give him a “scholarship” in the form of grants of money or food. If he feels he has learned enough in one monastery, he can move on to another. He is usually sure of “finding a room,” but it is up to him to buy his food and pay his other expenses. As for “exams,” they are open to all, and consist of discussions about the religious texts, matters of logic, and problems concerning the doctrine. These tests are usually held in public, a “student” taking a “seat” before all the monks, who question him and try to “confuse” him with tricky questions. If a student can answer all the questions rapidly, he is “given a diploma”—considered passed from one class into the next, there being an almost endless series of degrees that can be reached, from the lower orders to “doctorates” of the fourth and fifth degrees.

Yet no monk is obliged to pass examinations; it is up to him to decide his own life as he pleases. He can get a job to pay for his studies, either working for other monks as a servant, or copying books, or he can go out into villages and perform small religious ceremonies for which he is paid—such as reading prayers at funerals or chasing away demons. Thus a monk is above all a scholar and a free man; what is more important, he is appreciated on the basis of virtue and personal merit rather than on that of rank or age. This guarantees, generally, that the best men can rise within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, however modest their origins.

In Mustang nearly every family has at least one member in the

church. Usually it is the second son who is registered at the monasteries of Lo Mantang, Namgyal, Tsarang, or Gemi. The greater number of these monks stay at home, paying only occasional visits to their monasteries, and taking turns in performing their duties there. Most of them attend to their village chapels. Unfortunately, at the present time the state of teaching in Mustang is poor; the standards are low, except at the monastery of Garphu—where we bought the history book. This monastery—of a different sect from the others, which are Sakyapa—enrolls the fourth and fifth children of large families.

Because of this very loose structure binding monks to monasteries, the state of piety of a monastery depends largely upon its head lama and leading monks. If they are virtuous and intelligent, they produce virtuous and clever monks; if they are unscrupulous and unpius, so are their dependent “students” (*trawas*). These latter often neglect to attend celebrations, and may simply marry and become “unclean and stupid.”

Because of the dissipated youth of the young Lama of Tsarang, his monastery—although the finest in Lo—was neglected; its *trawas*, although numerous, were of little virtue, many having married, while the few brilliant and keen monks from Tsarang had simply gone to study in other monasteries. Only a “skeleton” staff, composed for the most part of elderly lamas, lived in the monastery. Despite this state of affairs, it was evident that with the return of the head lama into his monastery “things were going to change”—at least so said His Holiness to me in one of our endless chats before the red-and-gold altar of his small chapel cell.

Each morning I was awakened at the crack of dawn by the tinkle of a small bell in the chapel adjoining our room, and then shaken to my feet by the great drum the lama would beat during his morning prayers. I would hardly have time for my breakfast—only a cup of tea prepared by Calay, as we had no bread or biscuits. The lama would then send around his secretary. I soon began to loathe this monk; he was obsequious, stupid, and full of flattery. He would creep into our open-cage room at all hours of the day, sit upon my mattress, and breathe down my neck, forever pestering me with such comments as, “Oh, you are a great man, see how quickly you write,” or, “I want to become your best friend. Why don’t you take me to your country, where I can act as your secretary?” Then he would explain how learned he was, while in fact I soon realized that he was both ignorant and stupid, despite his efforts to act importantly. He would walk about the courtyard, bulging out his chest in a childish manner, and swinging a chain he

wore with the monastery's keys. Whenever I did ask him a question, such as the name of a divinity, he would take about a half hour explaining with hypocritical mannerisms that, in the last analysis, he did not know. I soon discovered that the Lama of Tsarang, who was straightforward and quite intelligent (despite his habit of sighing under his breath, and saying "haaah . . ." between each sentence) hated this assistant as much as, if not more than, I did. However, with great constraint and self-control, he never allowed this to show.

The Lama of Tsarang was very fond of his small son, who kept him company. It was a touching sight to see this straggly-haired monk reciting endless prayers with his son fast asleep at his side.

The boy, like all children, was always up to mischief—chasing the hens about the terrace cloister or pulling the tails of the two mastiff puppies that lived on the roof with us. He would, no doubt, have preferred to have other children to play with, and was badly in need of a mother; although he was treated with the greatest kindness by all the old monks, who lived below—where he was allowed to wander, though his father could not. Father and son formed a strange pair, and life on the roof of the assembly hall was a weird combination of scented juniper smoke, gongs, dogs, a small boy—all clouded over by the lama, the shadow of his former self, and the fussing of the effeminate assistant monk. I often wondered how I had ever landed in the midst of this strange world, and if I really had any place there.

For seven full days I remained in the monastery of Tsarang, taking only brief walks out into the small town. This stay turned out to be exceedingly interesting in an unexpected way, and most enlightening as to how the people of Mustang lived: this because, since the lama was forbidden to leave his room, his assistant would every day tell him what was going on in Tsarang or in the various villages nearby. Thus I received an account of the lives of the local people from a Loba's point of view. I was kept informed of forthcoming marriages or I would learn when a man had made a good business deal carrying salt down from Tibet, because he would send up to the monastery a present of money. I was told when animals had been accidentally killed, as the monks would receive a present of a portion of their meat. The lama would not eat it, but his assistant would, and I frequently benefited from the charity of the lama, who would send me meat as a present. In fact, the lama was always giving me presents. He would send over the assistant with eggs—the first we had eaten since our arrival, as chickens are to be found only in the possession of the very rich, who keep them only for eggs; their meat is never eaten, since they cannot be

killed. The lama wanted me to share all his meals with him in his chapel, but I had to discourage his invitations as tsampa and butter were not what I like best; although later I was forced to adopt this diet, since our provisions of rice ran out while we were in Tsarang. The only rice we could find to buy was maggoty, and cost nearly two dollars a pound—an exorbitant price. Already for some time Calay, Kansa, and Tashi had been on a tsampa diet. They complained bitterly, as the roasted barley was so full of dust and sand as to be crunchy and suggest ground glass.

With the lama I drank a great deal of chang and arak. The chang is brewed in a very simple fashion in every household in Lo. Barley is placed in a pot with water and a little yeast. The pot is then sealed, and the mixture allowed to ferment for up to three or more weeks. The pot is then opened, and one takes a handful of the resultant porridge and mixes it with water, which instantaneously gives an alcoholic, slightly bubbling beverage recalling cider. One can also drink the “cream of chang,” the clear liquid in which the barley has fermented. Cream of chang is quite a delicacy. Good chang is really a delicious drink.

In a land with no central heating and few comforts, and after many exhausting weeks of few pleasures, I discovered that alcohol was truly made to “warm” the hearts of men; that is, if used with moderation. I rarely refused to join the lama in sampling chang, and thus I spent many a congenial evening by the light of the flickering butter lamps on the altar in the lama’s chapel, reminiscing about my land, and recalling the world beyond the snow peaks—the world of the West. I surprised myself, imagining my homeland as a Loba would see it, describing mostly the forts and monasteries of France. I explained that each village had its little gumpa; that every small village had a lama (village priest); that while we did not have yaks, we had many cows; and that our horses were larger than those of Mustang, although—as I told the lama—in America and England the name “mustang” is famous for horses. This fact surprised the lama very much.

In terms understandable to a Loba, our civilization did not sound nearly so fascinating as I had always imagined it to be. When I described New York as having houses twenty and forty stories high, the Lama said, “I see, it is something like Lhasa, where the Potala is nineteen stories high.” I had to agree. As for describing Paris—the buildings, I declared, were about as high as the great fort of Tsarang, while many of our own monasteries and churches are hardly larger and usually smaller than the huge assembly hall of Lo Mantang or that of

the Monastery of Tsarang. As for automobiles, they were no secret to the lama and his assistant, as they had been to Bodhnath, the great Tibetan Buddhist shrine in the capital of Nepal, and had seen our mechanical monsters.

"Very clever things indeed," remarked the lama.

Regarding our Occidental conception of life, I could hardly explain without shame that we lived in a world where standards are nearly all economic; that for us wealth spells power, and most people spend their time buying and selling things they hardly need so as to keep going an economy that survives on rather useless things, such as boxed music, television, and machines that wash—a machine whose utility was difficult for Lobas to understand, as they never washed their clothes. Personally I felt quite estranged from my own world by now, although I told the lama what a "happy" country France was—"with so many trees and so much grass." Of course, as a Frenchman, I could not help but mention our local arak, wine, while I also put in a good word for the chang—beer—I had consumed at Oxford.

When one day the subject of food was raised, the Tsarang Lama turned toward me and asked, "Do you eat fish and chicken meat in your country?" I said, "Yes." The lama then burst out laughing, saying, "No, it's not possible that you eat chicken meat!" He did not believe that I could do anything quite so disgusting. I was so embarrassed by his reaction that I dared not tell him that in France we eat not only fish and chicken but also frogs and snails, and occasionally even horsemeat. I preferred to remain in the lama's esteem rather than to admit to these embarrassing customs.

When I explained that in our country the *missé* (people) ruled the land and that they had cut off the head of their king, the lama remarked quite philosophically, "No more than one hand can rein a horse." So I skipped the subject of government instability, also forgetting to mention such subjects as the terrible wars that had bloodied Europe over the past six centuries. Neither did I mention the slums of Western cities, nor the ghastly eight working hours a day, in which employees were obliged to sit chained to the infernal rhythm of an assembly line.

Summing up things that night in my bed, I had to admit that all told life in Lo was certainly no worse than life in the West, while on comparable subjects the Lobas had little to envy from our lands. These thoughts did not prevent me from often yearning to go back during occasional attacks of homesickness. I suffered most in not having a companion of my own race, or speaking a language more familiar to

me, with whom I could share my deeper impressions and my problems. Since what seemed the far-distant day when I had left my wife in Pokhara, I had been completely immersed in this strange new world, and there were a thousand thoughts I would have liked to express, but which had to remain for a while untold, locked up in my "other self," the "me" I had been before. I was experiencing an unusual form of solitude, and also seeing a new person emerge in me—one who knew good change from bad, a good yak from a difficult one, a fine chuba from a crude one. I often mused whether I would ever find the thread that would lead me back to my old self. One afternoon I tried to dance a modern dance in my chuba for Tashi's enlightenment, and for my own amusement; the look of my Loba self dancing an outlandish dance, and the flow of thoughts this act brought back to me, seemed so incongruous as to be strangely obscene, out of place, and in bad taste. At least, such were my Loba reactions.

My manners were quite Loba too. I would never think of smoking in a house or in a monastery, which is "very sinful." As for whistling in a house, this is also very shocking—as ghosts will come. One never says certain words inside a house, and never wears yellow, a color reserved for monks. One never leaves a tool face up, as this is really calling in the ghosts. I knew now most of the do's and don't's.

I would not have broken the law for anything on earth, perhaps because I had a healthy respect for Loba justice. I have never cared for police stations or courts in my own land, and here in Lo I did not feel inclined to become involved with "unmuddling the cotton ball," "cutting the egg in two," or dealing with the "golden yoke." These are the humorous names by which Mustang's three Courts of Justice are known.

"Unmuddling the cotton ball" is the name given to the Court of Monks. A peasant, if he has been offended in matters that concern morality and the church, will go and see the local lamas and ask them for a ruling. If the offense is of a public character, involving disputes about fields, stolen cattle, or similar crimes, then the people of Lo go to those who claim they can "cut an egg in two"; that is, the Village Court headed by an elected judge. In large, important disputes, one can always appeal to the king. This, of course, is a rather risky thing to do, for the King's Court is called the "golden yoke" because both parties usually end up paying a very heavy fine to the king.

Despite these humorous names for the local courts, crime and justice in Mustang are very serious things. The Lobas are basically law-abiding people. Their respect for the law is due both to social constraint—concern for what others will think—and fear of religious

law and its punishments. The extremely severe punishments inflicted on serious offenders are enough to make any criminal "think twice before acting." This was brought home to me by several experiences. One of these came while I was visiting the great fort of Tsarang.

Standing five stories high, on a stony ridge, this fort is the finest in Mustang that is not in ruins, followed by those of the capital and the town of Gemi. Today the Fort of Tsarang is rarely used, except for the chapels inside the massive structure, where certain ceremonies are occasionally held.

One afternoon, with Tashi and a monk as guide, I made my way into the fort. We first climbed up a steep flight of wooden steps, a regular staircase such as we have in the West, going up to lofts. We then got lost in a maze of corridors and rooms, some of which had adjoining toilets. Many of the chambers were dark and windowless—secret store-rooms for the grain given to the king annually by the inhabitants of Tsarang.

We admired the main chapel of the fort, a large rectangular room whose walls were decorated with old frescoes. This was located on the third floor, and lit from above by a large rectangular shaft down the center of the building. On entering the second chapel, a small room opening onto the southern face of the great fort, we were reminded that this structure had been built for war. This was the "defenders' room," a chapel of arms. Above the altar were hanging various instruments of war—half-moon swords; long, thin daggers; great double-ended scimitars, and nasty-shaped head choppers, alongside bows and sets of arrows and old Tibetan coats of mail. There were also head crackers and four muskets. In one corner of the chapel, Tashi uncovered two large shields—one made of yak hide, the other of basket-work. The arms had been deposited here after battles in the constant wars among the various forts of Lo or were gifts to the fierce divinities in atonement for misconduct or gratitude for good luck on the battlefield.

These arms were living reminders of the battles we had read about in the *Molla* and in the biography of the monk Tenzing Ripa. They reminded us that there was war again on Mustang's frontier, where the Khampas were fighting the Chinese, using Mustang's territory as their base of operations. How useless these old muskets—Mustang's only arsenal—would be against a possible Chinese attack with modern machine guns and mortars!

Fumbling around the altar among the swords, our guide eventually gave me a dark-brown object that to my disgust I recognized—by the light of the small window—as a dried-up human hand! It was a morbid

reminder of what happens to those who steal. In Lo it is still the custom to cut off the right hand of robbers on a second offense. I had already seen two other such amputated hands in Lo—one in Geling and one in Lo Mantang. I had also seen a similar human hand in 1959 at the monastery of Pangboche at the foot of Everest in Sherpa country. That hand had been shown to me as “belonging to the Abominable Snowman”—a deliberate lie told to satisfy those “white men” who so foolishly spent large amounts of money in search of the mythical Snowman—an invention of the sensational press of the West. So far, stories of the Snowman had not yet reached Mustang, and the Lobas had not yet learned to take advantage of foreigners and distort truth for financial gain.

It was one of the most pleasant revelations of my visit to Mustang to discover that the inhabitants had not yet acquired a set attitude toward white men, or any complex about them. Indeed, in Lo few people knew exactly what a white man was. For the Lobas I was just a “scholar from a distant land”; often I was taken for a Chinese, a Nepalese, or a Khampa.

If to cut off the right hand of a robber seems a barbaric and cruel punishment, one must realize that it is very rarely inflicted. As the law is so harsh, it is rarely broken, and in any case there are few petty criminals in Mustang such as we have in the West. In the West legal matters are often dissociated from moral law. This is not the case in Mustang, where people are either moral and law-abiding or immoral professional criminals—true bandits. It is against such professional bandits that the severe punishments, such as the cutting off of a hand, are directed.

Time went by rapidly in Tsarang, and I might have stayed on in Lo indefinitely had it not been for small incidents that began to reveal the strain under which both Tashi and I had been living since we set out from Pokhara. Little by little the high altitude, the bad food, the cold, and the heavy exertion had drained away our resistance. Calay was now consistently in a bad mood; only Kansa seemed unaffected, always calm and helpful. Tashi was now an accomplished anthropologist, setting out on his own with a notepad, scribbling down in graceful Tibetan longhand all his observations, and assisting me in a thousand ways in recording the customs of the land. My own endurance, I felt, had its limits, as did my permit for residing in Mustang, and there were many districts of Lo I had yet to see. It was time for us to be on our way.

The weather was now considerably warmer. At midday the sun beat

down upon our rooftop terrace, above the assembly hall of the monastery, with great force. The warmth meant that more snow would melt on the surrounding summits, and this meant more water in the rivers.

When the Lama of Tsarang mentioned to me the problem of high water, I suddenly realized that we should be off immediately to explore the southeastern districts. These are located on the east bank of the Kali Gandaki, and I knew that there was no bridge to cross this river in Mustang. We had little time to lose if we wanted to see these districts before they became isolated and inaccessible because of swollen torrents.

“Crystal Clear Mountain”

THE LAMA OF TSARANG tried by every means to prevent our leaving, declaring that he wanted to “baptize” me; to give me a new name, and to perform with me the rite previously mentioned that would make us “eternal friends.” But we had to leave. The day before our departure the Lama made me promise to return, and presented me with a marvelous Tibetan terrier—an Apso of the finest kind, a little ball of white and gray fluff. He had sent for it to the monastery of Lo Gekar, ten miles away. I was greatly pleased with this present, as fine specimens of Apsos are very rare—those bred in England and abroad being both very expensive and often larger than the really fine ones found in Tibet. I thanked the lama and decided to leave the dog, named Toma, in his care until our return to Tsarang, when we would stay for another two or three days in the monastery before setting out to visit the villages west of Tsarang, and eventually the last town of Lo—Gemi.

Our exploration of the eastern districts soon proved a tricky one. These districts, Dri and Tangya, are both situated within the deep canyons of southeastern Mustang, where the terrain, owing to greater erosion than in the north, is especially deeply ravined. To get from one village to the other called for exhausting climbs up steep, rugged hills, and endless detours around huge canyons. Those from whom we inquired our route told us that we might become stranded because of high water. Also, there again arose the problem of the Khampas. Since our arrival, and during the time of our stay in Lo Mantang, the threat of these warriors had receded into the background. In the capital the Khampas I had met had been only in small groups, and there were no *magars* in the north. But now again we were constantly reminded of

the Khampas' presence in the areas we were headed for. One of the largest *magars* lay on our route, while peasants warned us not to take certain trails for fear of our lives. I had been contemplating eventually returning to Kathmandu by a different route that led out of Mustang along the western ridges, across uninhabited areas, and finally to Muktinath, where we could go northward around the back of Annapurna to Kathmandu. But now we learned that it was impossible to reach Muktinath by this high track, because it was barred by the Khampas' largest camp. Since in such a secluded zone anything could happen, no one—not even the most rugged Loba—ever traveled this route any more.

In Tsarang I had already seen a few Khampas. Some had even come to visit the lama, and I had chatted with them outside his chapel while their requests were relayed to His Holiness.

The lama had told me that these Khampas had come on behalf of their leader to try to buy land in a village that belonged to the monastery. The lama had refused, explaining to the Khampas that they could purchase land only if the government of Nepal gave them authorization, and legalized their situation in Lo, a thing the neutral government would not think of doing, for its own security and in fear of angering the Chinese. The Lama added that the Lobas had no desire or intention to see these men settle more permanently in their country. On the subject of the Khampas, the lama was altogether very worried, as he had heard stories of many thefts and crimes these men had committed against Lobas. On the other hand, unlike most Nepalese, he fully approved of the fight the Khampas were putting up against the Chinese. Like the king, his father, he knew that they were "accomplishing the wish of the Dalai Lama." He also knew that physically the Lobas could do nothing against these husky, well-armed soldiers, who spoke in such loud voices in their funny nasal twang. The Tsarang Lama also could not hide a certain jealousy of the Great Sakyapa Khampa Lama, the most learned and holy lama, whom I had met at the village of the king's summer palace where he had performed the "benediction of long life." The reputation of this Khampa monk had spread all over Mustang, and many people requested him to conduct religious services, rather than the less-educated lamas of Lo. His prestige was considerable, but after all he was a Khampa. Now this lama lived in the monastery of Lo Gekar, from which Toma, the little dog I had been given as a present, had come.

Six days elapsed before we eventually did return to Tsarang and to our rooftop apartment, exhausted and dead tired, and with Calay sick

and Tashi in a bad mood. During those six days I was put to the most severe endurance test of my entire journey, as with very inadequate food, in order to avoid having to cross the swollen rivers, we had scaled three formidable passes, each of them no less than 15,000 feet in altitude.

The journey had begun fairly well. We had gone to the gorge of the Kali Gandaki just below Tsarang, and then had walked down its bed at its narrowest and deepest point. We had progressed in burning heat, in what seemed like an oven, unable to drink the river water, which carried with it too much mud and earth, and unable to find any other source of water. We had collected fossils galore, but wandered a whole day practically dying of thirst, and exhausted from the heat. Then we had climbed up a lateral gorge, in which I was nearly killed by an avalanche of stones that toppled from a cliff just above where I sat resting. The hardships of this first day had been well compensated for, however, by the amazing sight of Tangya, the southernmost and lowest village of Mustang, whose beauty is unforgettable. Situated at an altitude of only 11,000 feet, Tangya's small barley fields were nearly ripe, and composed a gold and green carpet for spotless white houses, all joined together and forming a small fort dominated by a tremendous cliff eroded into huge columns like the flutes of an organ. This cliff towered directly above the village, which is slowly being submerged by the rubble from the rock wall. At one end of this village I saw the largest chorten in all Mustang, a structure nearly fifty feet high, hemmed in by over thirty smaller chortens, all painted in the most vivid red, yellow, white, and blue-gray clays. The inhabitants were most proud of their great chorten and would not leave me alone until I had assured them that it was the finest in the world and had agreed that there truly was no taller structure in the rest of Mustang.

As usual I was assailed by sick people, and as I was taking care of cuts and blisters a tall Khampa came up to our camp, begging me to follow him to a house where one of his companions lay sick. Behind this man I made my way into the compact block of the village houses, passing under buildings and up narrow alleys till, climbing a small flight of steps, I came out onto a sunny terrace from which I could see all the majestic surrounding landscape. "Loneliness" is hardly an accurate word to describe how utterly lost the village of Tangya appears, set as it is within the folds of the gigantic cliffs and overhung by the great peaks.

A room leading off this terrace led me to the bedside of the ailing Khampa. A tall, handsome young man with elegant features ravaged

by fever, he was beyond doubt dying. He had been lying there, so I was told, for four weeks. On my approaching, the stricken man tried to repulse me with a weak hand; he was half delirious from fever and his eyes were those of a startled animal. I wondered what went on in the mind of this suffering youth, how much he had understood of life and its meaning, how much he had grasped of his impending death, a death as devoid of comfort as the rugged life he had led in the hundreds of windswept *magars* through which he had traveled slowly thousands of miles across Tibet to Mustang and to the last *magar*, from which he had been carried down to die in the village of Tangya.

I took the man's wrist to feel his pulse. In so doing, my eyes met his, and I remembered what I had read about dying men's contempt for those who can do no more for them. Death put this warrior above fear and beyond my grasp; it was I who, to him, appeared weak, as he had already transcended life by accepting and overcoming the fear of death. Tashi had told me how Khampas are taught to die laughing, and who can laugh better at the irony of life than a person about to die? I gave the sick man some aspirins and withdrew from the room. Outside, the view was as bleak and overpowering as ever. Truly, it seemed that there was no place in this wild, lunar landscape for man. The air was cold and still. The young soldier, I reflected, would die without ever knowing the outcome of the struggle for which he had given up his life.

That afternoon I made a plan of the village, and talked with some of the senior inhabitants, taking count of all the functions of the different peasants and their duty toward the community and the King of Lo.

The following day we set out in search of a village called Te. We were shown a vague path that soon disappeared as, under a burning sun, we stumbled away from Tangya. All that day we wandered up a great mountain of black earth resembling coal, with occasional streaks of white, salt-like crystals powdered over the surface. We lost our way, got separated, then were turned into the right direction by some unpleasant-looking Khampas who appeared on horseback in the distance. Eventually our small party reached a lofty summit, from which we descended into the bed of what had been a huge landslide. The entire mountain had—a year before our arrival—slipped three hundred feet into a deep gorge below. Like a glacier, the earth had broken into countless crevasses and pinnacles of rock where one layer of earth, about fifty feet deep, had slithered over a more solid layer. We picked our way slowly over this plowed nightmare to find Te, a waterless village built in three parts below the ruins of a monastery, upon terraces

many of which had been dug out to form artificial reservoirs that irrigated the small fields. Here we camped for the night.

Next morning we explored this lonely village, and discovered that the terraced fields led directly to the edge of a precipice. At the bottom of this was a turquoise-green lake, formed recently by the huge landslide that had blocked the gorge below the village. Bathing in this green-blue lake was a huge cliff that had become separated from the adjacent mountain to stand out alone, tall and narrow like the huge vertical carcass of a grounded ship. This cliff was entirely covered with small man-made cave dwellings drilled into the rock. It was quite impossible for us to reach these caves, and once again I had to content myself with looking and speculating at these amazing habitations from some mysterious prehistoric past.

After some tricky climbing along the edge of the precipice overlooking the lake, we crossed the great landslide once again, going down diagonally to the bottom of the gorge. There, to our distress, we discovered that overnight the water had risen. We were blocked; we could not retreat, as the route we had taken to Tangya would undoubtedly be impassable also. This left no choice but to risk wading down the very bed of the torrent. We first stopped on the edge of the swirling rapids and had something to eat; then we slowly entered the rushing, freezing water. Very slowly we made our way along the stony river floor, trying to grip with our feet, which were numb with cold, the evasive stones that were swept away from under us by the swift current. At moments we were waist deep in the surging torrent, and a slip, I knew only too well, would mean drowning. We could only hope that we would not eventually end up in a place too deep to ford. Above us loomed the vertical cliffs of the gorge, which at points narrowed so as nearly to close over our heads. Exhausted, we eventually, after four hours of slow and painful progress, reached the Kali Gandaki. But now we found that we could no longer cross this river or follow its bed up to Dri, the village for which we were headed. Our porter, the man from Tsarang, who now was again back on known ground, suggested that the only thing we could do was to climb up and over the mountain that bordered the northern side of the torrent down which we had come.

We had left Te about six in the morning, and it was now well on toward three in the afternoon. We had been on the way already for nine hours. Wearily, two hours later, we stumbled onto the edge of a perfectly flat glacial plain lying above the deep gorges out of which we had come. The soil here was hard, beaten clay, so level and even that a

large airplane could have landed here without so much as one stone needing to be moved out of its way.

After another two hours of walking we eventually reached a vantage point from where we could look down upon the village of Yara, a hamlet composed of four clumps of white houses precariously perched upon little platforms standing upon a ledge overlooking the deep bed of a dry torrent. When we reached the first houses and started looking for a piece of flat land on which to pitch our tents, the porter from Tsarang announced that he was going back before the temporary bridge over the Kali Gandaki at Dri was swept away. We were, he declared, quite "sick in the head" to wander around at such a time in the year. Nevertheless, at all costs, I wanted to see every corner of Mustang. I let the porter go, arousing Calay's anger, especially when I told him that next day we would carry all our equipment.

The following morning, before setting out, I inspected the vast remains of a great castle whose tall, rectangular towers still stood erect above a dizzy abyss. The ruins commanded an incredible view of the deep gorge by which Yara stood and which wound its way toward the Kali Gandaki between huge stone buttresses rising to the flat, glacial plain, part of which we had crossed the preceding day. The view was quite fantastic, especially since now, to the southeast, I could see the tremendous pyramidal form of 26,810-foot Mount Dhaulagiri, the greatest peak of western Nepal, which, together with the great bastion of the Annapurna range, isolated Mustang from the outside world.

The following day I loaded a pack on my back, as did Tashi. Stumbling slowly along under the burning sun, we followed the torrent flowing past Yara upstream toward the east. There we camped by a small hamlet at the foot of the ruins of another huge fort called Kangra. When we awoke the next morning, we realized that we had camped within a few hundred yards of a Khampa *magar*, and the Khampas turned out in dozens to pester us for medicines and snoop around our camp, making unpleasant jokes.

We pushed on up to the head of the gorge, nevertheless, to visit one of the most unusual and fascinating monasteries in Mustang. This was Lori, a center of the sect prevalent in the land of the Dragon—Bhutan, the kingdom I had so yearned to visit. The presence of this monastery in Lo was explained by the fact that a king of Lo had married a Bhutanese woman, and for her sake had built Lori. Here we listed the books in a sizable library, before setting off to visit a hermitage belonging to the monastery, set inside more mysterious cave dwellings.

After visiting various subterranean chapels, which we reached with the help of wooden ladders, we were ushered into a huge, vaulted circular cave, in which rose a large chorten exquisitely covered with miniature frescoes of the finest craftsmanship we had seen in Lo. The chorten was of highly polished stucco, and filled the entire domed cave except for a small passageway around it for circulation—the dome of the cave itself was painted and smothered with plaster. Outside once more, I felt as if we had visited one of the secret treasure rooms of Ali Baba's cave. I was even more forcefully reminded of the old story when on getting out we were assailed by the "forty thieves"—some two score of Khampas, who wanted to know if I had arms along with me, as they said they "needed them badly." They very reluctantly let themselves be persuaded that I had none.

We then set out down the gorge again, past Yara, to where it met the Kali Gandaki at the village of Dri. Dri is the main commercial town of Mustang, its inhabitants living off the trade with Tibet, and some of the land's wealthiest traders had their homes here. I had, of course, plenty to do, including being obliged by the local duke to risk my life climbing along a cliff to see where a man had just been killed working on the most remarkable system of irrigation canals I had ever seen. These canals followed for miles a small aqueduct along the sides of the vertical cliffs encasing the Kali Gandaki River.

We spent a pleasant night camped in a small "tree garden." The following morning nobody would carry our tents to Tsarang; then I opened a jar of peanut butter, which I mixed with tsampa, with the result that by midday I was sick at my stomach. And Calay took this moment finally to explain to me that he was very, very ill, and had been so for a week! He did, in fact, have a high fever. I was much upset, as he complained of chest pains, and his eyes were bloodshot. It was quite characteristic of Calay that he had not told me he was ill until it was really evident. This fatalism of his now caused him to declare to me with a smile that no doubt he would "die here in Dri," because of the food I had "made him eat." (He had complained bitterly about the tsampa, filled as it was with stones.) Anyway, he added, as a measure of explanation, that he was "all burned up inside" because he had been on too many expeditions, and his heart and lungs could not take the change of altitude.

It was another sick man who saved us, a Khampa I had treated a few days earlier, who out of gratitude agreed to carry our bags over the two steep eroded hills that brought us, at long last, back within sight of Tsarang. By then I envied the peaceful life of those who de-

vote their time to meditation and contemplation. I was dead tired, exhausted, and depressed.

In short, I was just in the mood to be “baptized.” This involved a ceremony that lasted an entire day and—according to the lama of Tsarang—most of the night. Although I slept that night, I must say that I was nevertheless deeply impressed by this ceremony, in which countless butter lamps were burned before the gilt image of Ngorchen Kunga Zampo, and other saintly monks, those same images before which, a week earlier, I had been drinking chang.

The following morning at dawn the lama gave me a small slip of paper. On it was written my new name. In Lo a child is named by a lama three days after his birth. Later his father gives him a name that is used only at home. He may also, when adult, be called by the name of his father’s house. Often, too, he is given a fourth name by a saintly monk—such a name as I had now been given. This name can, if one chooses, remain a secret. Had I wanted to, I could have locked the piece of paper with my new name inside a small bag that I would wear around my neck. Nobody but the lama and I would know it, and when I died—before my body was burned, thrown into a river, buried, or fed in little pieces to vultures and eagles—the lama officiating at my funeral would open the bag, read out my name in commending my spirit to the divinities, and then burn it. Thus no demon would ever learn of my identity, and under this cover I could hope to achieve a happy reincarnation in my next life.

Nevertheless I did not choose to keep this name secret, and thus publicly acquired the name of Shelkagari—“Crystal Clear Mountain.” A name certainly more poetic than “long nose yellow eyes,” by which disrespectful children had called me. A name, nevertheless, difficult to live up to.

Shelkagari . . . how much I had seen and lived through to achieve this title! Now even my name was different, and it seemed that there was less and less of my original self left in Lo.

Time came when I had to leave for good the Tsarang Lama to his solitude and isolation, and the farewell—as with Pemba—was a moment of sadness. This was added to by the mysterious disappearance of Toma, my dog. He had sensed my departure and had hidden; we searched all through the monastery, behind every golden idol in the great assembly hall, among all the painted silk banners, behind the huge drums and horns, high and low in every corner of the monastery—all without success.

At all costs, I wanted to find him. I thought I had searched every-

where, when I noticed a heavy closed wooden door upon one of the landings of the flight of steps leading up to our rooftop quarters. I pushed the door, and found myself in a vast dark room I had never seen before. As I looked up, my heart leaped, and taken by surprise, I froze in my tracks. Above me dangled the hideous form of a stuffed snow leopard, whose face was fixed in a deadly grin. Advancing into the semiobscurity of the room, I noticed before me a small, dusty altar. It looked abandoned, and was covered with fine small images of lamas. Advancing between low-hanging silk banners, I approached the altar. Out of curiosity I picked up a small idol, and inspected the bottom of its stand to see if it bore a seal, a sign that it contained the relics of a saintly lama.

Perhaps it was the ghastly tiger, or perhaps the slightly guilty feeling I had of handling the object of worship. I do not know, but as I was inspecting the idol, I heard a terrible crash—the howling bang of a drum being hit with great force! My blood froze, and I swung around to receive an even greater fright—a few yards away from me, in the semiobscurity of this dusty, abandoned-looking chapel, sat a living ghost, a monk with a Mephistophelean face and ragged hair falling to his shoulders. Instead of being the healthy, sunburned brown of most Tibetans, he was as pale as a ghost, of a livid, dusty gray, staring angrily at me with a look from another world. Never in my life have I been so frightened. With sweeping gestures the monk showed me the door. Only when my heart had regained a more human pace did I realize that I had violated the closed sanctuary of the “living dead,” of a holy hermit, a recluse who, I was later told, was locked up for twelve years in the dusty chapel. A man who never saw any other human beings, who had not seen sunlight for over seven years, and who all that time had never spoken. The true living ghost of Tsarang! I have never forgotten this fright or the ghastly features of this unusual hermit, the embodiment of all that Tantric Buddhism holds of mystery, the representation of the spirit with which the huge monastery of Tsarang is haunted—a heartbreak monastery whose dilapidated sadness is represented by the lonely hermit, an unknown and unnamed monk who has given up life’s impermanence for the quest of a higher spiritual meaning.

Toma, the dog, eventually turned up as if from nowhere. What remained of our baggage, the tents, the kitchen utensils, my notebooks, cameras, and clothes we packed upon two horses, and once again we took the trail of the pilgrims on our detailed study of Lo.

Mustang may appear as a small area on the map, but now I was

coming to feel its true dimensions. In the Land of Lo, distances are increased by the difficulties of climbing at such a high altitude and by the rugged aspect of the terrain. Although I never once wearied of investigating new villages, new buildings, and new monasteries, it was not without considerable effort that each day I set out again in the cold wind or the scorching sun to tread with my now worn boots and tired feet the stony tracks that like little pale threads linked together the small universe of the Lobas. I no longer pictured myself within a context of my European background; it now appeared to me as if I had always been of this land. I lived now by the sun, the strange sun of the great central Asian plateau that guided caravans or sent its rays shafting through the latticed windows of hermitages and monasteries. How could I believe that this was the same sun that rose also above the worldly beaches of Saint-Tropez or that had the very same day set over the spires of New York? I never even entertained such thoughts.

I had yet to visit the villages of southwestern Mustang, Marang and Tramar (which means Red Cliff), and also the monastery of Lo Gekar, about which I had heard so much. There was also the town of Gemi to be seen, the third largest town of Lo, which I had by-passed on my way up.

Each of these places, and many of the individuals we encountered in them, brought us startling new information.

In Tramar we visited one of the estates of the king, a large mansion surrounded by fields and grazing grounds. There was no doubt that the king owned the finest lands of his kingdom and that his power was both hereditary and financial. Again and again I ran into familiar faces, people we had met before, and I now felt the close bond that united all the Lobas. I began to feel the pulse of the small kingdom, the common interest that bound one village with the other. I knew the main themes of gossip and of news; I could hold lengthy discussions with any peasant about the relative merits of one village as compared with another; I was more and more at home in Lo. My medical treatment of sick people began to bear fruit, as in nearly every village I encountered men and women to whom I had given medicine while in Lo Mantang. I now received in return firewood and chang—chang in such quantities that all our evenings were quite gay. I had a particularly great party in the village of Marang, close to Tsarang, where the man with the frostbitten feet lived. He feasted us like kings in his comfortable house. He was a man of means, and the next morning he sent down a horse to our camp to take me the short distance to the monastery of Lo Gekar. Here lived the great Khampa Lama, and here also, just above

the monastery, was a Khampa *magar*, which I visited briefly. There, in tents made of yak-wool cloth, next to modern ones of various shapes and colors, Khampa soldiers were settled. They were organized with military efficiency. At night, on their big stone-enclosed fires, large portions of yaks were broiled by the flickering light of dancing flames. The Khampas treated me well, because of the medicines I had given to them.

The monastery of Lo Gekar was itself a jewel. It had been built over a smaller shrine, and five rooms were decorated from floor to ceiling with countless carved and painted stones set into small wooden frames. Unfortunately the Khampa Lama, with whom I would have liked to have had a long chat, was absent, having been called to a funeral in a nearby village the day before our arrival.

Our time, as usual, was taken up by lengthy inquiries into everything from agriculture to local myths and legends. I now had a book full of these legends; stories about how names had been given to various villages; stories about a hidden paradise near Lo Gekar, where a peasant had found a cave opening into subterranean bliss; and the story of a cave called Ama (mother), because it was there that a child had disappeared, a child whose cry for its mother still echoed at night in the hills.

The porters we hired to help us from village to village also furnished us with amusing stories. For example, the one who told how, on a business trip, he had been near the Indian border, where he had seen—yes, with his own eyes—“a real elephant!” The simple fellow then told us that he was so happy that he gave the elephant a rupee. This story kept us laughing a good while, the porter being unable to understand why we thought this funny—elephants being considered as holy as a divinity by the Tibetans.

I also set about making rubbings of some of the carved stone slabs we encountered. This technique literally fascinated everybody who saw me perform the task, and I would not be surprised if all over Lo people were now making rubbings themselves. I used the local Tibetan paper, and mixed a candle with smoke black, as I had no crayons. Ordinarily there are no candles in Lo, but tallow—especially sheep’s tallow—is well known, and could serve the purpose for any future imitators.

I do not believe, however, that I brought much to the Lobas in comparison to all that they taught me. In fact, I did not wish in any way to influence or change them; and during my entire stay I took the utmost precautions not to violate any of their customs or to commit any of the

excesses and abuses that are common, alas, to foreigners abroad. I had been very fortunate in finding perhaps one of the last places on earth where I was not treading in someone else's tracks. I had, therefore, to be careful not to overpay for all I bought and not to create precedents that could spoil the people in any way. For this reason, I refused to buy or even to try to purchase anything except books in Mustang—this despite the fact that at hand there were treasures in statues, painted scrolls, and other objects that, had I brought them back, I could have sold for a fortune.

When we arrived in Gemi, there was still no improvement in Calay's health. He had now been ill for nearly ten days, and I became seriously worried. My precious store of antibiotics was very low, and I was extremely concerned about him. In Gemi we spent three days, which fortunately saw Calay recover slightly. We also had to recover Toma, the dog given me by the Lama of Tsarang. After acting affectionately toward us for four days, Toma had disappeared after dashing out of the tent. I asked Tashi to catch him, but the dog ran on ahead. Half an hour later Tashi returned to explain that Toma had fled down to the river that ran north of Gemi and that we had crossed coming down from Tramar. Tashi rushed to the narrow plank bridge, but by some amazing trickery Toma dashed across the bridge between Tashi's legs. We were all desperate, and I finally took the risk of sending a man to run all the way to Tramar and if necessary to Lo Gekar, the monastery where Toma was born, in case he might have gone back there. It took this man six hours to get to Lo Gekar, and there he found the little dog, who had run over the high mountain passes, past the village of Tramar, back to his home. The Khampa Lama returned him to our emissary, who carried a note to him. When Toma realized that he had been caught, and was carried back to us in Gemi, he showed his true sentiments. Since he had been given to us he had pretended to be friendly to us; but now, and until we reached Pokhara twelve days later, he refused not only to play with us but also nearly all food, despite the fact that we carried down a small stock of tsampa and butter—his favorite diet.

Gemi was an interesting town. Standing upon the edge of a deep gorge, it still had around it the partly ruined bastions of a great wall, like that of Lo Mantang but in very bad condition. Its fort was handsome; a large part of it contained furniture and books of the king, and its doors were locked with the royal seal. The town for some years had been largely abandoned, owing to lack of water and general poverty, but this state of affairs had changed since Gemi became the central

commissary for all the Khampa *magars*. The trade and business brought in by the great caravans belonging to the Khampas had made the town live anew. Houses were being rebuilt, and new ones erected. This gave work to all the people, and also to the lamas, who had to divine the sites for these houses and oversee their construction. Before building, the local monks were consulted to determine whether the spot where it was planned that the house would go up was inhabited by demons. If it was, a strange ceremony would be enacted to chase them away. The ground plan of the house would be outlined by a small wall of stones, and within the perimeter a lama would draw on the ground a sacred thunderbolt with barley. After this ceremony the house would be built, each of its structural features being appropriately blessed by the monks.

Traveling west of Gemi with Tashi, I visited, rather swiftly, another *magar* and also a small hermitage, Gangkar, which through Khampa funds had recently been enlarged. There three monks were living in complete isolation. One of these monks who was old and blind was learned in local history—in particular about an ancient link between this monastery and Yangser Gumpa, a large monastery in Dolpo. This was the first mention we heard in Lo of formal relations with another area. Apart from this ancient tie, which has in recent times been neglected, the entire land lives autonomously in cultural and religious matters. The Lobas, except for the kings, never marry outside their country, and look upon their neighbors as entirely foreign people.

The day finally came when I had to leave. We had now run out of provisions, of medicines, and indeed of energy. Calay was still sickly, Kansa was fed up, and Tashi was longing for his mother's cooking in Kathmandu. As for myself—Shelkagari—I was indeed becoming as thin as a transparent mountain. I had now spent two months at 13,000 feet in altitude, and walked over 400 miles up and down most difficult trails. Weary and exhausted, my resistance was at the breaking point, and we still had ten full days' march to reach Pokhara again. My stay, although a pleasant one, had been a tremendous physical and mental effort. Solitude and the sole responsibility for the good organization of my small party, along with the nerve-tiring task of playing detective twenty-four hours a day; a constant state of alertness; a perpetual struggle with language and unfamiliar environment, all had begun to tell on me. I now had four thick notebooks filled with information, covering everything from weaving to child care, land tenure to house building, jurisdiction to history, theology and philosophy, anecdotes and legends. I had not, of course, reached anywhere near the

bottom of the store of wealth contained in the Loba culture, but I felt that I had more than scratched the surface on many important points. In Mustang, I considered it to be my task to understand and be able to re-create this land and its civilization, at the same time getting to know and understand its people and their way of thinking. To the best of my capacity, I felt I had achieved this goal.

What was more important, I now was truly able to place Mustang on the map as a definite kingdom with a long, unbroken history and a distinct national character. I could now prove what had long been thought impossible, that beyond the snows of the Himalayas, hidden from the world, there truly exists a lost kingdom—the lost Land of Lo.

My dream had turned into reality. I forgot all the obstacles I had been compelled to overcome, all the disappointments I had encountered before setting out. Without any assistance, either economic or moral, I had accomplished my task, and could prove that in our age of organized work and play, of regimented activities and projects, there was still room for those who look beyond the cloudy horizon of convention. I had needed yaks but had done without mule guns, and could now turn the pages of Bell's *Grammar* with the satisfaction that the *status quo* had been broken. . . .

I felt, and feel today, that I have been fortunate in having been able to explore one of the last uninvestigated corners of our planet. A land yet untainted by technology, a land where the world is not yet believed to be round, and where the soul of man is still considered to be as real as the feet he walks on. A land where beauty and happiness abound, even despite the hardships and privations imposed by nature.

From the Khampas I had learned a new meaning for courage, as the first foreigner to witness at close quarters their organization, and learn about their operations. Before leaving I was again to see Gyaltzen, the Khampa chief who had greeted me on my arrival in Lo. From him I learned much of the courageous acts of these men, these soldiers who are dying but whose last struggles still spell terror on the other side of the border, in Chinese-occupied Tibet—where the resistance of the peace-loving Tibetan people against the materialistic aggression of the Chinese Communists still continues today.

A small delegation of Khampa soldiers came to my tent at dawn on the day of our departure south. Clouds had begun to gather behind the Annapurna range; the monsoon had begun. With presents of fresh eggs and cups of warm tea prepared by the Khampas, I was seen off. Together with one-eyed Kansa, from whom during the entire journey I had never heard a complaint; with Calay, still weak but feeling better;

and with Tashi, his hair now as long as a black mop, I passed under the exit door chorten of Gemi, set against the ruin of the town's ancient wall, and turned south.

Hours later, we reached the summit of the same pass from which I had, two months earlier, for the first time contemplated Mustang. Here I stopped, and turning around—I looked for the last time to the north. Here, as before, stretched the tormented craggy canyons and barren gullies of Lo—caught between the snowy eastern range and the vast western sea of peaks stretching out endlessly into Tibet. In one sweep, my eyes could see over all the seven districts of the kingdom of the great warlord, the great King Ame Pal.

At my feet stretched the land “as barren as a dead deer,” but now I could see through the rocky ridges, down into the deep canyons, and beyond the tormented earth, into the hidden wealth of the land. I could envision Lo Mantang, the massive walled city, with its comfortable, neat houses—that of Tsewan Rinzing, those of the two doctors. I pictured in my mind the great monastery containing the gigantic statue of the Buddha “who is next to come”; the large palace with its eerie halls and dusty chapels. I knew now of the demon traps, the buried horses' skulls, the treasures of the large libraries. Beyond the parched canyons I could see again the old king and his handsome son, the heir to the throne. One after another, there came back to me the incredible visions of Lo: the subterranean monasteries, the painted frescoes of Garphu, the lonely hermitage of Samdruling, the two dozen small villages with their inhabitants. I could see them all, the people of Lo—Pemba and the Lama of Tsarang, the dukes, the counts, the serfs and peasants, the water carriers and wood fetchers, the royal messengers and royal dancers, the blacksmiths and the meat killers, the scholars and the rich traders, the poor shepherds and the old, old women, who tonight, as on every night, would repeat endlessly until death the prayer *O Mani Padme Hum*. Magical words that would echo forever across the Plain of Prayer, and ensure that once again the migration of birds would bring back the new seasons and spell anew the happiness of the harvest, the birth of small yaks, while again and again Mara would spin the infernal wheel of life as the disciples of the Holy Ngorchen Kunga would turn the wheel of religion so that the ghosts would not linger on the doorsteps, so that Mustang might forever continue to be a last recess of piety and faith in a world of turmoil. The Khampas would leave; the Chinese would go; while man from reincarnation to reincarnation would still tread the windswept plateaus, the deep ravines, and the lofty passes of Lo.

Nothing would change, nothing had changed . . . nothing, except that something had broken away, never to be the same—and this, I realized, was I—Shelkagari. . . .

Tepoztlán, Mexico

1966

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Works Containing Early References to the State of Lo, or Mustang

Kirkpatrick, W. J. *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal, in the Year 1793*. London: W. Miller, 1811.

W. J. Kirkpatrick, in 1793, was the first Englishman to visit Nepal. Following a series of itineraries with approximate distances and locations of towns, Kirkpatrick gives what appears to be the earliest mention of Mustang in Occidental literature, writing as follows: "The part of Him-a-leh directly to the north of Beeni is called by the descriptive name of Dhoulager or white mountain.

"Four journies beyond, or northward of Beeni is Mookhtinath (or Sri Mookhtinath) within half a mile of which the Gunduck takes the name of Salegrami, the consecrated stones so called abounding particularly in that part of its bed. The source of the river is said to be situated to the Northward of Mookhti, in the direction of Moostang, and not far from Kagbeeni. Moostang is a place of some note in upper Tibet, or Bhoot, and 12 journies from Benisheh."

Buchanan, Francis Hamilton. *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal and of the Territories Annexed to This Dominion by the House of Gorkha*. Edinburgh: 1819.

The Index to this book refers to "Mastang, a Lordship in Thibet." Of the Kali Gandaki River, Buchanan writes, as previously mentioned: "The upper part of the river, which in the plains of India is called Gandaki, is called Kali, and, rising near a place called Damordur Kund, runs through the territories of the Bhotiya chief, called the Mastang Raja who is, or at least when I saw him in 1802, was a tributary to the Gorkha, but there is reason to think, that since that time the Chinese have compelled the Raja of Gorkha to cede both Mastang and Ker-ring. . . ."

"Colonel Crawford, laid down the upper part of this river, from the authority of a Lama, who accompanied the Mastang Raja. . . ."

Smith, Captain Thomas. *Narrative of a Five Years' Residence at Nepaul*. 2 vols. London: Colburn & Co., 1852.

In a footnote, Vol. I, pp. 53-54, Smith for the first time uses the spelling "Mustang" and refers to "a recent communication from a Nepaul officer, who ac-

panied the mission to England in the year 1850," according to which the limits of Nepal extended beyond the snow ridges of the Himalayas to the north-west, encompassing, among other places, Mustang. In this book Smith also contests Buchanan's assertion that China annexed this Himalayan area.

Montgomerie, Lt. Col. T. G. "Extracts from an Explorer's Narrative of His Journey from Pitorágarh, in Kumaon, via Jumla to Tadam and Back Along the Kali Gandak to British Territory," *The Royal Geographical Society Journal*, Vol. 45 (1875), pp. 355-360.

This article contains extracts from the account of a native explorer whose name is given by Toni Hagen (*The National Geographic Magazine*, March, 1960, p. 375) as Hari Ram; this identification, however, is apparently an error (see below, p. 311). The article includes a fairly long reference (three pages) to Lho Mastang. The narrative refers to "the Raja who is a Bhot"; to a tribute of from 2,000 to 3,000 rupees paid from land revenue to the Maharaja of Nepal; and to a private levy of the Raja of Mastang of 10 percent on goods coming out of Tibet.

Oldfield, H. A. *Sketches from Nipal, Historical and Descriptive*. 2 vols. London: 1880.

Discussing passes between Nepal and Tibet, Oldfield writes (Vol. I, p. 8): "The Mastang Pass is about forty miles to the East of Dewaligiri. It leads to a small principality of the same name at the foot of the Dewaligiri, but on its northern or Tibetan side. The Rajah is tributary to Nipal, and his being so induces the Nipalese to boast that from Gosanithan westward their frontier includes both slopes of the Himalaya.* It is an unfounded assumption of theirs; as the district of Mastang, though it pays a small annual tribute to Nipal, is *not* within its frontier, nor does it form any part of the Gorkha dominions. On the northern side of the pass and on the high road to Mastang is a large village called Muktinath which is much visited by pilgrims, as well as by traders in Tibetan salt. Muktinath is eight days journey from Mastang, and four from Bini Shahr, the capital of the province of Malibum, which lies close under the snow and is directly overlooked by the Dewaligiri. A good deal of Nipalese opium, grown in the western parts of the terai, is smuggled into Tibet by the Mastang pass."

Oldfield's footnote on this page reads: "* The principality of Mastang consists of an elevated mountain valley, lying between the first and the second range of snowy mountains, and is approached from Nipal by the Muktinath Pass."

On p. 175 Oldfield quotes "from a paper of Brian Hodgson dated 1832," as follows: "In Nipal all services, but especially all military service, is by annual tenure, and all tenure of lands attached only to actual service. . . . An exception to this rule, is the case of the so-called Rajah of Mastang, a Bhotia who holds a small tract in perpetuity around Muktinath; it is however rather a farm than a jagir."

Kawaguchi, Ekai. *Three Years in Tibet*. Madras: 1909.

This Japanese monk went up the Kali Gandaki to Tsarang in "the state of Mustang." He spent a full year there, but makes no mention of the king or raja, or of the capital. He has a chapter entitled, "Of Beautiful Tsarang and the Dirty Tsarangese," referring to Tsarang as being "in the province of Lo."

Hedin, Sven. *Discoveries and Adventures in Tibet*. London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1909.

On pp. 77-82, in a chapter entitled "A Peep into Nepal," Hedin gives altitudes and a fair description of Tso-shar, the eastern district of northern Mustang. He writes: "Soon two men appeared, who were in the service of Lo Capu, asking for

information about us. They said that we were in the district Tso ["Tso" means "district." M.P.], and that the river was called Tso-kharki-tsangpo. [Here there is further confusion, the name of the river no doubt having been given as "tsangpo" of Tso-shar (or eastern district), which in Tibetan would be *Tso-shar-ki tsangpo*. M.P.] A village we can see just below our camp was named Nyanyo, and from there Mentang, the residence of Lo Gapu, could be reached by crossing only two spurs of the mountains. He, they said, was a frontier chief, who paid no tribute to the Maharaja of Nepal, but was obliged to pay a visit to His Highness every fifth year. He had 500 subjects. The people for three days farther south were Lamaists and spoke a Tibetan dialect, in which, however, many Indian and Persian words were incorporated."

Hedin, Sven. *Southern Tibet. Discoveries in Former Times Compared with My Own Researches*. 9 vols. Stockholm: 1916-1922.

In Vol. II, p. 115, referring to Kawaguchi, Hedin writes: "However, he continues to a place Pokhara, and over Kaliganga or Kali Gandak to Muktinath and Tsarang, 'a town on a stream, and on an elevated part of the town stands a castled palace, in which lives the king of Lo state,' which, as he says, was an independent state before the Gurkha tribe had subjugated Nepal. It is obviously the same part, south of Kore-la, which was called Lo Gyapo or the King of the South to me by Tibetans of Tradum."

In Vol. II, p. 320, is the account of Sven Hedin's incursion into Mustang over the Kore-la pass, and up to Namashung (near Kusé), called Nama-Chu by the author. Complete details are here given of his encounter with emissaries of the Lo Gyalpo.

In Vol. III, p. 153, Hedin mentions the "native explorer's" visit to Mustang in 1872. Here Sven Hedin notes justly that the unnamed "native explorer" of the article in *The Royal Geographical Society Journal* was not Hari Ram (as has since been suggested by Toni Hagen), as this Hari Ram set out the same year for Tibet by another route.

Tibetan Texts Mentioning Mustang (Lo):

Sanji Pintso. *Biography of the Great Sakyapa Lama Ngorchen Kunga* (1508 or 1568).

All references in this biography to Mustang have been translated by Samten Karmay and are in the possession of M. Peissel, awaiting publication.

Ayupa. *The Molla*.

Manuscript history of the kings of Lo, found in Mustang in 1964. Its translation by Samten Karmay awaits publication.

Biography of the Monk Tenzing Ripa.

Describes his family history in Lo. (Translation to be published by Dr. David Snellgrove.)

Recent Publications Mentioning Mustang:

Hagen, Toni. "Afoot in Roadless Nepal," *The National Geographic Magazine*, March, 1961.

Hagen, Toni, *et al. Nepal*. New York: Rand McNally & Co., 1961.

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Peissel, Michel. "Mustang, Remote Realm in Nepal," *The National Geographic Magazine*, October, 1965.

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Regmi mentions that the Raja of Mustang is a "Sirto Rajya" ("Sirto" means "tribute"). This tribute is a fixed sum; above this all levies fall to the raja.

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The author has in preparation an anthropological report on the social structures of Mustang.

— Index*

(*Italic folios indicate illustrations*)

- altitude sickness, 41
Amdo: horses, 145; recipe against altitude sickness, 41; sense of humor, 73; style of chuba, 67
Amdos, fighting Chinese, 36
Amdo Sherpas, 16, 35; in Formosa, 38; in Nepal, 39
Amdo Tibetans, 16; in Formosan army, 38
Annapurna, 18, 26, 31, 87, 108; French expedition (1950), 49; sacred stones, 239
Baragnune, 62
Bausundhara (Nepal), H. R. H. Prince, 28, 139
Bell, Sir Charles: *Grammar of Colloquial Tibetan*, 21-23, 27, 51
Bhutan, 23, 24
Bodhnath, 19, 287
Bon religion, 34
Bon Po, 66; beliefs, 217
Brahmaputra River, 238, 239
Buchanan, F., 18, 114, 256
Buddhism: belief, 217-219; Eightfold Path, 280; meditation, 281; "middle road," 223; Nirvana, 118, 119, 223, 280, 281; reincarnated lamas, 280-282; Tantric —, 223, 280; Tibetan —, 280
Bum, Gunde Nyma, 251, 252
Calay, 16-19, 30, 53-55
Chaptrun Tsetrang (cock's crest); *see* Tsarang
"Chasing of the Demon, The," 117
Chenresi, 252
Cheuzang, Shewo, 228-230
Chinese (Gyami), 36-38, 76, 110, 115, 130, 228; ancient —, 164; border outposts, 260; crisis, 139, in Liksé, 138, 165; Mustang, 40; Nationalist, 38, 39; sympathizers, 230; in Tibet, 161
chuba, 66-68
Chu-mig-gya-tsa-gye; *see* Muktinath

* Personal and place names have been transcribed phonetically throughout in preference to using the misleading romanization of their Tibetan forms. The scholar of the Tibetan language will, I hope, both excuse and understand the reason for this concession to clarity at the expense of precision. —M.P.

- "cliff houses," 263
 Communism, 24
 contests: bow and arrow, 235;
 horseback-riding, 170, 235
 Cook, Hope, 207
 Czechoslovakia: bangles and beads,
 52
- Dalai Lama, 22, 36, 140, 223; flight
 to India, 37, 38
 Demon Black Monkey, 252
 Dhaulagiri, Mount, 18, 26, 254
 districts: Dolpo, 26, 70, 247; Dri,
 292; Guké, 209; Manang, 26, 70;
 Tangya, 292
 Dolpo people, 70
 Dorje, Prime Minister Jigme, 138,
 139, 142, 143, 257; assassinated,
 25; illness, 172-175, 178, 230; re-
 covery, 270
 dzos, 6, 62, 264
- Encyclopædia Britannica*, 40
 Everest, Mount, 26
- fatalism, 30
 Formosa (Taiwan): subsidies, 38;
 claim on Tibet, 39
 forts: Chachagam, 209, 252; Dzong
 Dzong, 260; Dzong Sarpa (Jomo-
 son), 62, 63; Gelung, 252; Guke
 Puran Katum Dzong, 209; Kag,
 69, 70, 210; Kangra, 297; Kara,
 252; Ketcher Dzong, 140, 179-
 181, 233, 252, 275; Piu Dzong,
 212, 252; Rari (Goat Hill), 204;
 Sam Dzong, 233, 258, 264; Tri,
 130, 252; Tsarang, 65, 102, 108,
 276, 289
 frostbite, 261
- Furer-Haimendorf, Professor von, 49
- gambling, 201
 Garas (outcasts), 161, 181
 Gelung, 175, 176
 Gétsu, 175, 176
 ghosts, 82, 83; of Tsarang, 300
 Gienye, 175, 176
 Gora Pani (Horse Watering Place),
 47
 Gurkha conquest (1773), 224
 Gyaltzen, Khampa, 91-94
- Hagen, Toni, 19, 41, 70, 114, 146
 Harrer, Heinrich, 91
 Harvard Business School, 22
 Hedin, Sven, 114
 hermitages: Codjoling, 260, 264;
 Gangkar, 304
 Hertfordshire, 181
 Hillé, 42, 43
 Himalayas, 15, 18, 19; "wall of
 shame," 25
 Hodgson, Brian, 114, 224, 247
- India: friendship with Mao, 38;
 Tibetan refugees, 38
 Indian survey maps, 59
 Institute of Social Anthropology
 (Oxford), 24
 International Commission of Jurists,
 24
- Jest, Corneille, 70
*Journal of the Royal Geographic So-
 ciety* (1875), 60
 Jumla, 141, 254
- Kali Gandaki River, 31, 49-53, 68-
 76, 209; Kirkpatrick, 18; last bar-

- rier, 45; long lost, 179, 180; Nam-dral, 240; source, 238, 239; Tsanpo, "clear one," 70; "Twelve Villages," 62, 63; ——— valley, 30
- Kang-ri; *see* Himalayas
- Kanjur (Tibetan scriptures), 152, 169, 254, 264, 273
- Kansa, 29, 30, 31
- Kathmandu (Yambula), 15-17, 25, 28, 29; city of artists, 19
- Kawaguchi, Ekai, 70
- Khampas, 17-19, 36-39, 54-58, 77-82; army camps (magars), 77; assistance from Nationalists, 38; fighting China, 27; last defenders of Tibet, 18; mastiffs, 103; political complications with China, 19; problems, 203, 292; resistance, 38; secret caravans, 45; Tibetan-Indian crisis, 139
- kings: Angdu, Jamiam, 257; Bahadur (Nepal), Jung, 257; Detsin (Tibet), Trisun, 251; Dorje, Anjia, 255, 256; Geltsin, Ahan, 265; Gurkha —, 40, 255-257; Nyingpo, Angdu, 139; Pelbar, Jambian, 257; Shah (Gurkha), Narayan Prithwi, 255, 256; Trandul, Angun Tenzing, 133-143, 164, 274; Trandul, Tenzing, 257; Trandul, Tsetin, 252
- Kipling, Rudyard, 20
- Kirkpatrick, W. J., 18, 19, 60
- lama; 181, Khembo (Bon Po), Shote, 65; Kunga, Ngorchen, 187, 253, 254; — of Lo Mantang, 185, 228, 229; reincarnated —, 282; Thyangboche, 229; Tsarang, 96, 277-285
- Lhasa, 23, 36, 37, 57; long-haired terrier of —, 104
- Liksé, 138, 228
- Lobas, 146, 226; agriculture, 234, 235; care of cattle, 235; children's burial, 220, 221; death, 217, 222; funerals, 218-220; house painting, 241; needle holders, 227; pastoral nomadic origin, 236; salt lakes, 228; salt trade, 227, 228; standards of living, 227
- Lo Mantang (capital of Mustang), 71, 158, 160, 161; absence of trees, 236; first helicopter over —, 267, 268; goats, 236; medicine, 213-215; religious center, 254; taxes to Jumla, 255; witches, 216; worms and demons, 214, 215
- London School of African and Oriental Studies, 50
- London Times*, 140
- "lost horizon," 15, 239
- Maitreya, 74, 188, 191; statue, 192-194
- Mara, 116-118, 188, 275
- Mela, Sanji, 215
- Mexico, 22
- Migot, André, 91
- Molla*, 246-254, 258
- monasteries, 282-284; Chamba Lha Khang, 190; Garphu, 240-249, 257, 258, 265, 284; Gumpa Kang, 74; Lo Gekar, 100, 174, 265, 292, 302-303; Lori, 297; Mantang Lha Khang, 190; Namgyal, 149-152, 186, 256; New, 186, 188, 189; Nyphu, 245, 246, 257; Samdruling, 186, 195, 203, 205, 208, 246; Thyangboche, 229; Tsang (Tibet), 257; Tsarang, 97, 104, 129, 277, 285; Tubtiling, 264, 265
- Mugu area, 70
- Muktinath, "the 108 springs," 50, 65
- Mustang (Lo), 17-19, 26-28, 40

Mustang (Lo) (*continued*)

41, 49; agricultural calendar, 153; areas, identity, 18, 19; basic unit of society, 163; birds and animals, 147; books, 154, 157; changing climate, 236; childbearing, 223; courtship and marriage, 195-200; Courts of Justice, 288; disposal of dead, 216-221; education of children, 222; friendship, 200; girls, 267; history of —, 170, 171, 247-251, 253; hygiene, 222; intelligence, 266, 267; kindness of customs, 148; livestock, 165, 166; lunar calendar, 153; map, 35, 109; medicine, 213-215; Nepalese soldiers, 122; noon winds, 166; opportunity for young, 164; political pressures, 254; polyandry, 163; ponies, 144, 145; quarantine, 174; sexual inhibitions, 223; social ladder, 161, 162; social organization, 154; "social security," 177; standard of living, 163; status, 224; "struggle for life," 266; "tribute to Nepal," 224; triple lives, 164, 165; young people, 243

Namdral, 238-240

Nepal, 15-18, 26, 27, 224; Annapurna, 47; Hindu states, 225; landscape, 41; races of —, 42

Newné, 175, 176; — fields, 177; — festival, 237

Nichung, 265

Nodara, 41

Norbulinka, 36; Chinese bombardment, 37

Oldfield, 114

Osher, 202, 203

Pal, Ame, 141, 179-181, 252-258, 270, 271; formation of Lo, 150; leader of Lo, 209; riddle, 140

Peissel, Marie-Claire, 15-17, 19, 27

Peissel, Michel, 2; audience with King of Lo, 133-134; "baptism," 292, 298; beginning of a trail, 26; childhood, 20; entrance to Mustang, 86; Hertfordshire, 20; invitation to Bhutan, 25; Jigme Dorje, 272-274; Kathmandu, 15, 16; King Trandul, 271-274; "my city," 160; problem of coolies, 58; source of Kali Gandaki, 238, 239; Tibetan language, 21-23

Peking government, 36

Pemba, 127, 153-166, 172, 176, 182

Pemba, Tsering, 59, 66, 77; kerosene, 88

Pemo, Ani (nun), 211, 212

penicillin, 215

Plain of Prayer, 112, 181, 204, 252, 275

poison, 172, 182

Pokhara, 16, 19, 26-28

Polo, Marco, 52, 77, 133, 157

prayer walls, 100, 101

Prevoisin, M., 21, 82

Pundit informers, 59

Quintana Roo, 22

Rabgye, Kama, 224

"Raja Abolition Act," 225

Red Cross, 81

reincarnation, 147, 223; into animals, 119

religious observances, 175, 176

religious sects; Drukpa (Bhutan), 151; Gelupa, 151; Kadjupa, 151,

- 208; Ngorpa, 151, 186; Ningmapa, 151, 242; "Old Red Hat," 241; Sakyapa, 151, 184, 186
- Rimpoche, His Holiness Tagster, 22, 23
- Rimpoche, Ugyen (saint), 100
- Rinzing, Tsewan, 167-171
- Ripa, Tenzing, 209, 210
- ritual; "The Chasing of the Demon," 117
- Sakya, annals of, 152
- salegrami* (sacred stones), 50, 259
- Sambhota, Thonmi (scholar), 192
- Sanskrit, 192
- Sempo, Mutre, 251
- Serchan: family, 30; Indraman, 28
- Sewan, Sopo Gaden, 203, 255
- Sichun, Tsepe, 252
- Sikkim, 194, 207, 255
- silver coins, 17
- Sining (Amdo region), 145
- Sketches from Nipal*, 114
- Snellgrove, Professor David, 70, 108, 141, 247
- Swiss government, 81
- Tamang people, 16
- Tashi, 16, 19, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32-39, 41-43; Taiwan subsidies, 38
- Tensing (conqueror of Everest), 24
- Thak, 56, 57; people, 43, 50; villages, 55
- Thiollier, Alain, 24
- "Three Holies," 141, 186, 250
- Tibet (Bhotia), 17-19; books in —, 186, 187, 246; Chinese in control, 23; genocide, 24, 25; great trade route to —, 238; sealed outside of history, 24; "service stations," 53; war, 24
- Tibetan; ethnic region, 25; time count, 253; water mills, 181
- Tibetan-Nepalese Wars (1792), 141; (1855), 257
- Tibetans (Bhotias), 29; belief in supernatural, 83, 84; similarities with West, 268, 269
- Tichy, Herbert, 71
- Toma, 292, 300, 303
- towns: Gemi, 100, 292, 301, 303; Gurkha, 255; Kalimpong (market), 37; Tsarang, 101-103, 105, 108
- trade: Nepal-Tibet, 28; — route, Brahmaputra River to Tukutcha, 180; — route, Tibetan, 240; — route, Tibet-India, 51-53
- Tri Lung Lake, 265
- tsampa, 182
- Tsarang monastery, Abbot of, 257
- Tukutcha (capital of Thak), 26, 28, 43, 49-52, 56-59
- "Uncle One Hundred Years Old," 217
- United States, 225
- Valley of Death, 259, 260
- villages: Dri, 296, 298; Garphu, 241-246; Geling, 84, 88, 90, 91; Gyaga, 75; Kuse, 258; Kymaling, 237, 238; Marang, 301; Marpha, 63; Namche Bazar (Sherpa), 43, 172; Phuwa, 233-235, 237; Sammar, "red earth," 76, 77; Sam Dzong, 258, 263, 264; Tangya, 280, 294; Tayen, 71, 72; Te, 295, 296; Tradum (Tibetan), 131; Tramar (Red Cliff), 101, 301, 303; Trenkar, 130, 131, 147-149, 177; Yara, 281, 297

yak men, 60, 62

yaks, 58-61

Yanchema, Ayun (goddess), 251

Zampo, Angun Tenzing, 141, 250,
252

Zampo, Lumbo Kalun, 141, 250

Zampo, Ngorchen Kunga, 141, 250,
273

Zampos (Three Holies), 95, 141,
186, 250

