

AN EVANGELISTIC TOUR
TO THE
TIBETAN BORDER

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In this article I propose to give a summary of our observations on a recent evangelistic tour to the Tibetan Border that was for us, at least, a very interesting and important journey.

In the early morning of May 15th, 1929, Mrs. Steiner and I left Sirkha, one of our stations, on a three-weeks' tour. We had never before been beyond Sirkha. No motor car, or any other wheeled vehicle, can travel on the roads this side of Almora. The only modes of travel in this part of the Himalaya mountains are in a *dandy*, on a pony and walking. It is difficult for either *dandy* coolies or a pony to carry one up and down the steep ascents and descents of the region of our tour. Our pony from Dharchula for some reason did not appear and we both decided to go on foot. The length of our tour was about 125 miles.

Our party consisted of nine people. Besides Mrs. Steiner and myself there were an Indian evangelist, a Tibetan evangelist, a cook, four coolies, (two of them Christians) one carrying our tent and bed, one our food, one our bedding and clothing, and one the effects of our evangelists - each carried eighty pounds on his back.

This section of the "Roof of the World" is one long series of ranges and peaks. Look where you will, you see mountains on all sides. Villages are in river valleys and on mountain sides. The weather was delightful. Evening showers purified the air. It is possible that May is the best month to make such an evangelistic tour towards the border. Near our goal we found quite a number of snow-slides still lying, but these have melted before this time. We encountered no wild animals, although some prevail. But we saw flocks of pigeons in altitudes of 11,000 and were told that wild guineas are plentiful.

We were surprised to find vegetation luxuriant in high altitudes. I never saw a more dense forest in my life than is the one at Rungling Pass at 10,000 ft. altitude. There I saw a tree five feet in diameter. Forests extend to altitudes of 12,000 ft., near the border. A tree called "*phunk*" is the last one to be found. It is said to be very hard and therefore useful for building purposes as well as for firewood. Beyond this altitude one has to carry his firewood with him, if he desires to cook.

According to Bell, the great authority on Tibet, that land that has tenaciously kept the Christian religion out for centuries, has six great outlets through six gates—one into Kashmir, one into the United Provinces, one into Bengal, one into Assam, two into China. The second of these openings into the United Provinces lets the Tibetans over the Highway leading through our Mission Field and right past our two stations, Dharchula and Sirkha. This highway must not be compared with the highways of America. This road is not paved, neither metalled, nor piked. Bridges are still lacking over some smaller streams. In many places the road is not more than two feet wide. In fact we passed over sections where the road was not more than one foot wide, and on one side of which the mountain rises hundreds of feet while on the other side we looked hundreds of feet downwards to the Kali River with its rapid current that no one ventures to cross. And yet thousands of flocks of goats and sheep laden with the exports and imports of Tibet annually pass over this difficult road with comparative ease and rapidity. Near Malpa we received a veritable shower-bath falling along forty feet over a precipice two hundred feet above. It no doubt is the only bath many travelling Tibetans ever receive.

The scenery is beautiful and over-changing. With every turn and twist the road reveals new and fascinating pictures. Here is a gorgeous valley. Yonder a magnificent snow-capped range. Glorious sunrises illumine towering peaks, while darkness still prevails

in valleys below. We believe that no grander pictures are seen on earth's domain, and no sublimer paintings are found in the great art galleries. All speak of the beauty of the handiwork of the Creator. But grander than all of nature's beauty in these Himalayas, are the spiritual possibilities hidden within the souls of the Bhotiya, Tibetan, and Nepalese men, women and children that pass along these ancient roads. Each one is worth more than the whole world, according to the valuation of the Master. It is the urge within our very being, created there by the Holy Spirit at the command of Christ, that carried us forward in rest and composure. The task is none too severe. The cost is none too great.

Beyond Malpa lies Budhi, seen in the distance, hanging as it were on the side of a mountain which rises 2,000 feet or more above it. The climb of this steep and rugged mountain has paid. Reaching the top, behind one is a wide expanse, overlooking the large and beautiful Kali river valley below; before one is a broad level plain—a veritable green meadow with grazing cattle and horses. In this meadow we found fragrant flowers growing wild, such as wealthy American house-wives purchase at high prices from florists for display in drawing-rooms. At the farther end of this plain, one enters a dense forest at an altitude of 11,000 in which the Tibetan road changes to a Park Driveway, which the Boards of Commissioners of National Parks in Europe and America would be glad to include in their domains.

Garbyang, the largest city in Bhot, situated on the banks of the Kali, may some day be no more, for during a rainy night it may slip into the river below. Two years ago one day a crack formed right through the length of the place and the outer houses sank two feet.

At Najang and again at Garbyang we crossed the Kali River into closed Nepal, because the road on the Indian side is no longer passable. These detours were

opened a decade or two ago, against a strong protest on the part of the king of Nepal. At the former place we travelled in Nepal for one half mile; at the latter for a distance of eight miles. Every white man travelling along this road in recent years has walked on Nepal soil, whether he knew it or not. We found no guard at either detour. Nepal, oh Nepal, when will you swing your barriers open everywhere to the gospel?

On government orders bridges have been built across the Kali by Bhotiyas. These are simple suspension bridges, minus steel ropes. Two ten inch logs, two feet apart, are placed on two huge rocks in the Kali. Crosswise on these logs are laid firewood and stone, but no landing for protection is made. One shivers a little when crossing these shaky bridges over the deep rapid current ten feet below. The builder of each bridge collects a revenue of one pice for each goat and sheep that crosses, more for larger animals and two annas for a cooly load in the season of Bhotiya and Tibetan exports, as a remuneration for his services of erecting bridges.

Mid-day meals were varied. Two experiences will suffice. One day we found our cook preparing our meal on a huge snow slide in the Kali. On it in the bright sun we relished our meal. Our cook being young and spry, he usually reached the halting places first. On another day we discovered him cooking our food at a spot in a camping ground, where hundreds of flocks of goats were being put up for the night. Mrs. Steiner scarcely found a clean rock to spread her table cloth. And just as the cook was dishing out the food the wind changed, and a very obnoxious odour appeared. Before investigation we found a dead horse had been left to the elements. Not much urging was required to resume the journey quickly, not only for us, but also for our helpers, some of whom have come from the filthiest race we know of in the world.

Travelling on, we reached the frontier. The postal line ends at Garbyang, seventeen miles from

the border. Civilization appears to cease there. For more than a week we were beyond postal communication with the outside world. A peculiar feeling comes over one with the realization that he is so shut off and can no longer communicate with his children in school fifteen days journey distant.

On our return trip we had the good pleasure of meeting Mr. and Mrs. H. Ruttledge, and their two little daughters. Mr. Ruttledge is Settlement Officer and was formerly Deputy Commissioner at Almora. They were on the way to outposts on the Frontier on Settlement business. It is certainly delightful to meet Europeans in these distant recesses.

Hospitality extended to us was more than we had expected. Gifts of food, consisting of rice, *dal*, potatoes, flour and *gur*, were freely brought to our tent. In one village the *malguzar* sent his younger brother to the forest to shoot a pigeon for us. The *Patwari* of Byas and his two nieces each sent us a full meal and frequently visited us. On Sunday these two nieces, just graduated from the Normal department in the Girls' Mission School of Almora, attended our Sunday School and church services. One of the wealthiest merchants and traders of Bhot invited us to a Tibetan tea and then extended an invitation to us to accompany him to Lipu Pass on the border the next day, as he was going to Taklakot, Tibet. This we graciously accepted and he furnished ponies for the trip.

At Gunji, eleven miles from the border, Dr. M. A. Sheldon had an out-station. This we found in ruins. From here I made one day a detour to Kuti, ten miles away, on an inspection trip to ascertain whether there is a possible road over a Pass, 18,000 feet in altitude, into Darma, another river valley in our Field. The *malguzar* gave me an affirmative reply and we may some day "go over the top," for Mr. Ruttledge has written me since that he and family have gone over it into Darma with all their coolies successfully.

At Garbyang our mid-day rest on Sunday was disturbed by the beating of drums. Looking out to see what it was all about, we saw an army of fifty or more marching, and we were told that they were going to a neighbouring village to tear down a house. And so, innocently, we have been drawn into this affair as witnesses. We do not know what will be the outcome.

En route we met many Tibetans of many types. Preaching in Nabi we saw a number of Tibetans begging. We were told that these were in reality robbers. On British territory they beg alms of us, but on Tibetan soil they would rob and kill us. In Nabijol we found three Tibetan Lamas going from house to house begging and propagating their religion. These three wished to know nothing about our religion. We saw a number of Tibetans children residing in villages who favour boys and girls whom we know in America. In one village a twelve-year old Tibetan boy—with a native guitar in hand, the shape of which is similar to that of an American guitar, kept our attention while he sang with a clear note and beat time perfectly with his feet.

People of Bhot have their own customs, beliefs and superstitions. Some are peculiar to Bhotiyas, others not so vitally different to some in the West. In one Bhotiya camp, the front entrance of every tent was adorned with a piece of meat hanging in the sun. We were told that the Bhotiyas smoke their meat or rather dry it for future use in that way. Every pass and mountain top has its flag made of cloth, like carpet rags, and hanging on pole and cord. It, no doubt, is placed there as an expression of gratefulness to their gods for having given them climbing grace each time they ascend. Crossing the stream from Nabi to Rungkong we noticed two cords stretched along the edges of the native bridge. And when we inquired of the villagers as to the meaning, they told us that it indicates that two of their fellow villagers died in the river valley last winter, and when they

returned home to Rungkong in April, they stretched these cords across, so that the spirits of the dead would know which way to come back and would also know that they are welcome. On a Monday I wished to close a bargain for a pony which Mrs. Steiner rode to Kala Pani and liked, but the owner, a Bhotiya woman, would not close the transaction on that day, saying "I will do it tomorrow. We Bhotiyas never buy and sell on Mondays. If we do so, harm will follow." This superstition is not so different to the beliefs prevalent in more enlightened countries, even America, about "Friday," "13," is it? As our camp had left for the next village, I could not wait for Tuesday and had to leave without a pony.

En route we preached in all villages and many camps to Bhotiyas, Tibetans, and Nepalese, who eagerly listened to message, and song. Our party preached in three languages, Hindi, Pahari and Tibetan. Bhotiyas and Tibetans were thrilled when they unexpectedly heard songs in their own tongue. Most frequently we all went together to hold meetings, but in larger towns we separated. Mrs. Steiner held her meeting in quarters reserved for the women, our Tibetan evangelist preached among Tibetans, and the Indian evangelist and I among Bhotiyas. In this way hundreds heard the gospel in a day. Malpa is only a camping ground like a tourist camp in America, but we preached to many there, because the camp is always full.

In one village we found a widow weeping because her only child was ill with fever and no one cared for her. It was our opportunity to point her to the Great Physician who cares, and she was comforted. On our return to Singkola we found that the child had recovered. In one village the land-owner and tenants, to the number of fifty came to our tent with village papers seeking my advice as regards a difficulty with some neighbouring village. After he was fully satisfied, it gave us an excellent opportunity to tell about the One to whom all difficulties can be taken, and they

listened attentively. Just as we were in the act of closing the meeting a drunken Bhotia appeared. He was in that state reached by some drunkards when they think they own the whole world. He thought he could preach better than any one else, and that he could thrash the whole crowd. Villagers tried to stop his disturbance, but to no avail. Meeting him later in the day again, when he was partly sober, I gave him a little temperance lecture. On our return journey, he was sober, felt very much ashamed of himself and tried to show us many favours to compensate for his ill-doing. In Budhi, after preaching in two centres, Mrs. Steiner was stopped on her way to the tent by some women, saying, "We have not heard you sing today. We would like you to sing." So we had another meeting with more present than in the two previous ones. The result of our evangelistic meetings is very encouraging, because the heart hunger was very manifest. May God bestow his blessing upon this Gospel seed !

The Gospel is penetrating Tibet and Nepal. We sold nearly all Gospels we had with us, and we gave away all other scripture portions. Some Tibetans begged for them saying that they would carry them with them to Taklakot and inland Tibetan centres. May these silent gospel messengers sow the seed in the hearts of those who read them, since we cannot enter ! At Garbyang a Nepalese policeman was quietly listening to us and after the meeting asked our Indian evangelist if he would not come over to his village and sing. He accompanied him and not only sang but also preached. This village, Jhagru, lies just across the river in Nepal.

Many brought their sick to us. At Gunji, eleven miles from the border, Mrs. Steiner administered medical aid to more than 150 patients. So many others accompanied these patients that the compound around the tent appeared more like a public sale in America, than an evangelistic tent. It fell to my lot to extract four teeth for as many persons. One old

woman thought that a worm in her tooth was causing all that pain. So after the extraction, she took a stone and broke her tooth into a hundred pieces, but she found no worm. A Tibetan from Taklakot heard of us, and brought his ten-year old son who had sprained his arm severely by a fall down the cliff. We put on a splint made of two pieces of firewood and bandaged it. And he went away happy. May news of our medical work reach the innermost centres of Tibet. In one village we met some Tibetan men and women who had never seen a white woman before, and Mrs. Steiner was quite an attraction.

We all travelled together as far as Kala Pani, the source of the Kali River, seven miles from the border. Kala Pani means "black water." This source is under a huge rock, and we are told that in the rainy season, the water that gushes forth is black. When we saw it, it was as clear as crystal. The altitude of Kala Pani is 12,000 ft. Camping several miles apart we missed our good friend who arranged our party to Lipu Pass and had to ascend alone. It was then decided that it might be better for me to ascend the Pass alone on this initial trip and Mrs. Steiner to venture the climb on some future day.

Accordingly on a beautiful moon-illuminated midnight, May 27th, we arose. Being told that it was very cold up on Lipu, I put on every conceivable garment I had along. After a cup of hot tea, we had prayer with our Christians for fair weather, safe journey and speedy return.

My pony, which evidently had gotten new life because of the chilly night, started off on a gallop without warning and threw our Tibetan evangelist down, who held it before I got my feet into the stirrups and reins into my hands. The pony then ran down a hill and I turned somersault on its back and down over its head, falling on stony ground. The pony passed over me but I escaped injury, no doubt because of my superfluous clothing. Mrs. Steiner thought I was seriously injured or killed. The

escape was miraculous. Undaunted by this experience, I mounted the other pony, and accompanied by three men, two of them Christians, left for Lipu on a steady incline of 5,000 ft. Just before dawn, we approached Lipu. Climbing Lipu brought me in sight of the largest and most brilliant star I ever saw. To take a look at this star is worth the climbing of Lipu. At sunrise we reached the top at 17,000 ft. Now we were actually on Lipu Pass on the Tibetan border. I looked across into the land to which men who know not what they do, say the Gospel shall not be brought. I had now reached what I have sought for many years.

Stepping ten feet inside Tibet, with my cane I planted the CROSS in the snow on Tibetan soil. I read Mat. 28:19-20 and my life verse, I John 3:16, (The Tibetans are my brethren), and offered a fervent prayer that God may soon swing this gate wide open to the messengers of his Gospel.

Standing upon Lipu, I experienced one of the most momentous times of my life, a sacred hour in my innermost soul, epoch-making in my career. Behind me was all my life looking towards this hour, before me lay Tibet and all its future.

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