

Mt. Kailash

Twenty Days Inside Tibet

To few is granted the privilege of seeing the inside of Tibet. The gates of Tibet are closed tight to evangelism, the gospel and missionaries. Without a passport from the Government of Tibet no European can cross its borders. Should anyone venture to cross the border on the Indian side without a passport, he would neither have the approval nor the good will of

either the government of Tibet or India. In doing so his life would not only be in danger, because of no protection on the part of the Indian government, but also without doubt he would close Tibet tighter not only against himself but against other Europeans and missionaries as well.

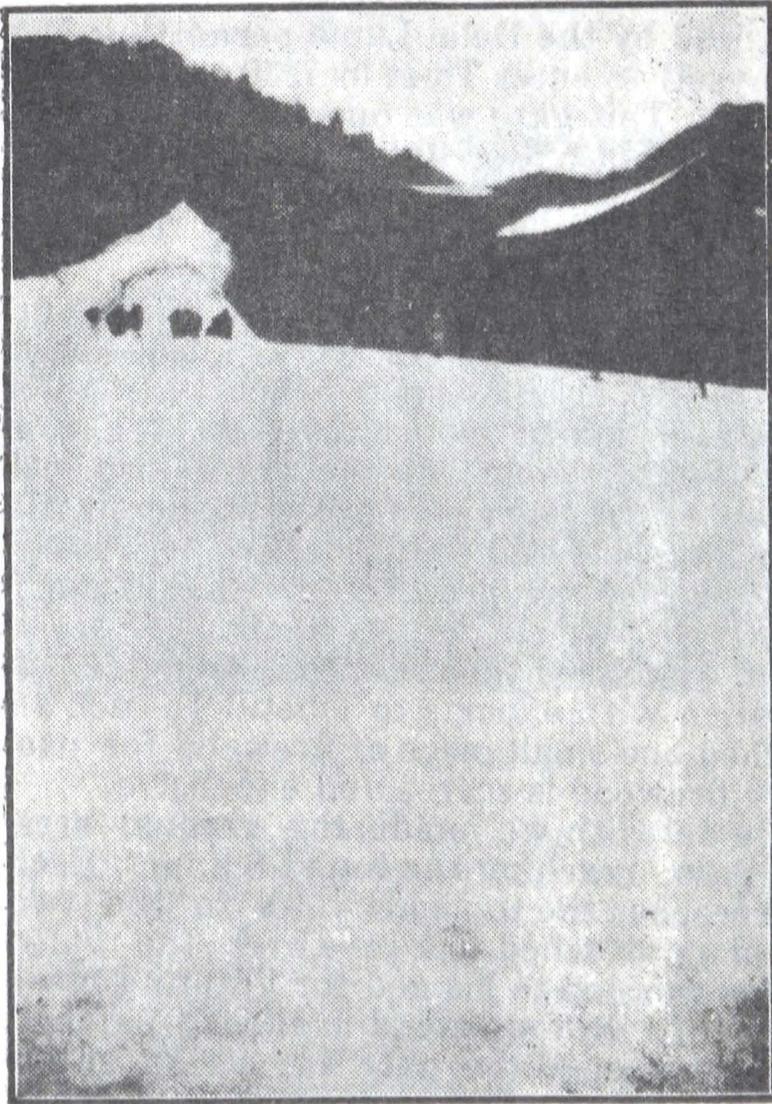
1930 is the year of the great "Kumb" Mela held at Mt. Kailash, Tibet once every twelve years. It will not again be held until 1942. This Mela can be visited only a few times in a lifetime, and less often in the career of a missionary. It was therefore a rare privilege for Mrs. Steiner and the writer to spend twenty days inside Tibet, and a rarer opportunity to do so in 1930, the year of the Kumb Mela.

Annually hundreds of pilgrims visit Mt. Kailash, sacred to both Hindu and Tibetans. But during the Kumb Mela year thousands of pilgrims from all over Tibet, India and China venture a pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash. It is the belief among Tibetans and Hindus that a pilgrimage to Mt. Kailash and the doing of the road that encircles the sacred mountain brings as much merit as a pilgrimage will annually and collectively during the intervening eleven years.

Mt. Kailash is situated approximately 60 miles north of Lipu Lekh Pass on the border, nearly at 81° longitude east and 31° latitude North. The altitude of Mt. Kailash is 22,028 ft. A road encircles Mt. Kailash 25 miles in length. And the doing of the encircling of Mt. Kailash on this road is called the "Perikrama," (accented on the second syllable). The highest point on this road is 18,500 ft. near Lake Gauri Kund, which remains frozen during the whole year.

We are told that all lamas of Tibet receive their appointment to a lamasary during the Kumb Mela year for the following twelve years by some head lama of Lhasa. Meeting Lama Pateram of Simla on the Perikrama, he said, "I receive my appointment from Lama Itwara of Lhasa."

On May 27, 1929 at 8 a. m., standing on Lipu Pass on the Tibetan border when I could go no further, I



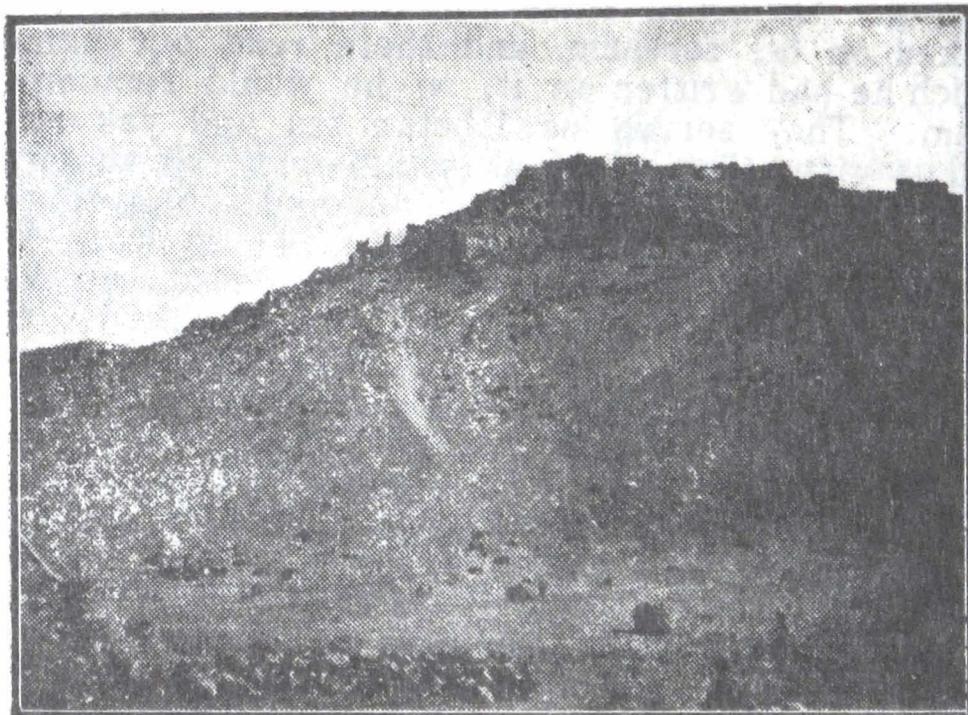
Approach to Lipu Lekh Pass

stepped inside ten feet and claimed Tibet for Christ. With one other Christian by my side, I read Mat. 28:19,20 and my life-verse—I John 3:16 and planted the Cross of Christ with my cane and crosspiece in the snow, and waving my hand towards Lhasa, I breathed a fervent prayer that God may get permission very soon to open this gate for us. My prayer took flight to Lhasa and in less than eleven months

came a passport from the Tibetan Government, authorized by the Delai Lama permitting Mrs. Steiner and myself to enter Tibet in 1930 and to go inland for 60 miles. This gate was open only temporarily. And when we went out on July 28th at 3 p. m. the gate closed tight behind us again. Whether it will ever open to us again we do not know. This will depend on the prayers of God's children.

On July 2nd Mrs. Steiner and I left our summer station, Sirkha, on a five week evangelistic tour to Byas in Upper Bhot and Tibet. Altogether thirty individuals joined our group on the tour inward and outward, some for the entire trip, others only for part of the journey. Among others with us were two evangelists and four Tibetan Christians. En route to the border we preached in the villages and administered medical aid to many. Approaching the border we passed thousands of sheep and goats, each one laden with exports to Tibet. To each animal was attached one small piece of firewood for use in Tibet where firewood is scarce and expensive.

On July 9th we made the gradual ascent up to Lipu Pass, reaching the top at 8 a. m. Each Bhotiya as he reaches the top adds a rag to the two floating streamers attached to a rope over the gateway as a gift for worship to his god for granting him a successful ascent. But we stood in silence before Almighty God, who opened the gate for us to enter, praising Him for being able to open it so soon, and anew dedicating our lives to Christ and the Tibetans praying that for Christ's sake Lipu may open to us permanently even as the door into Nepal opened permanently to us on February 10, 1930. We then entered Tibet, descending several thousand feet abruptly into a valley. At Pala, five miles from the border, are stationed five watchmen, but these paid no attention to our progress. By 3 p. m. we arrived at Taklakot at the other end of a long valley ten miles from Lipu. Approaching Taklakot we entered the fertile river bottom several miles long and a mile



Castle of the King of Taklakot

or more wide with healthy looking growing grain. Overhead the sky on that beautiful day appeared in a denser blue than we ever saw it before. Taklakot is a great commercial centre, where Bhotiyas of our Field to the number of two hundred spend their summers bartering with Tibetans for the latter's exports of wool, salt and borax in exchange for their imports of rice, wheat and cloth. Upon our arrival some ten of our Bhotiya friends informed us that the king of Taklakot had received word from Lhasa of our coming and with instructions that he should not hinder our progress inland.

The king of Taklakot resides in a castle on the cliff above. Adjacent is a large monastery of 300 lamas of all ages from six to sixty. A visit to the palace of the king proved to be of unusual interest. The queen and princess also appeared. The king told us that he had received word from Lhasa of our

coming. He asked what our names are and then looked on his forearm, and there read our names which he had written on it, so he would remember them. They served us Tibetan tea and yak milk, and as gifts they gave us swan eggs. Swan eggs come from the lakes farther inland and are presented as gifts only to Europeans to show their respect. We had a friendly visit. The king also opened the way for us to see the lamasary. In this lamasary are many rooms of worship. In one of these we saw the largest prayer wheel our eyes ever beheld. It is made of paper and its measurement is $7\frac{1}{2}$ ft. by 5 ft. In Tibet every lama has his prayer wheel made of brass, which he keeps revolving whether standing or walking. In these prayer wheels are prayers. They believe by revolving these prayer wheels they acquire merit, and that the prayers in them will do for them, what their hearts are not able to pray for. Lamas take great pride in keeping their brass prayer wheels polished. On the roof of this lamasary are several pinnacles made of gold which are seen glistening from a distance.

The king also showed his interest in our party by offering us his personal riding ponies clad in expensive saddles, ornamented bridles, and costly rugs, and his pack mules for our luggage to Mt. Kailash and back. He also sent along a reliable servant as groom and protector against robbers. To have this servant as protector was an asset on a journey infested by marauders. The king also offered us his \$200 pistol for the journey inland. But we thanked him very much for his kind offer, and said that "we are not afraid for our God can protect us. And should some one steal it, we would not have the money to replace it."

A peculiar feeling comes over one, when first walking on soil in a land hitherto forbidden to enter. First entering Tibet, about which we had heard so many robber tales, we confess that we went about with fear and trembling. The first meal in Tibet we



Riding Ponies and Pack Mules of the King of Taklakot. L. Rakastal to the right

ate being watchful, and the first night we passed sleeping reluctantly. But we soon learned that many rumours were without foundation. So that we soon came to walk about as leisurely, to eat our meals as calmly, and to sleep as soundly as we do in India. In fact, I wonder whether one's life is not as safe in Tibet as it is in some of the cities in the plains of India, where most outrageous acts have taken place during the last few months.

Inside Tibet we were treated kindly by Tibetans from kings to the rank and file. No Tibetan robbers molested us, while other travellers have since reported to us how they were robbed. A Hindu Sadhu upon his return from Tibet informed us that he was beaten and then robbed of a hundred dollars, all he had. Someone was praying for us just at the time when we were passing through the robber region, and robbers turned away. Not long ago we received a letter from a friend of ours, who knew nothing of

our proposed tour into Tibet, saying that "We are praying for you now." And that letter was written on the 17th of July, just when we passed through regions of robbers. Their prayers stayed the hands and minds of robbers, for twice robbers approached us and did nothing. Once three robbers on horseback with floating flag and heavily armed, approached our rear, roughly calling, "Are you traders?" When the servant of the king of Taklakot answered them negatively and added that an American man and women were on ahead, and upon inquiry replied that these ponies belonged to the king of Taklakot, they became gentle and rode away. On our return trip, one morning, another band of robbers came up to our tent, examined Mrs. Steiner's waist sleeves and the coat she wore and our water bottle. We in return examined one of their crude and primitive weapons and I drew his long sword out of the sheath and we conversed freely with them. Up till then we were not aware that they were robbers, and so we were fearless. Somehow the Spirit of God kept their hands in check and their minds under control, so that they felt like doing nothing but beg. During our morning prayers, they remained and stood around and listened. After this we parted, they turned to the left and we to the right.

Leaving Taklakot we soon passed the "Hanging City." That town is actually hanging on the mountain side. Large caves are dug into the side of the mountain to which a front is built and painted. Arriving at Ringu, nine miles from Taklakot, at 4 p. m., a Tibetan came running and quickly helped to pitch our tent. On the third day we reached the famous lakes of Mansarowar and Rakastal, each having a circumference of 45 miles. When looking across their waters one does not believe that the distance is so great. But no doubt it is true for we travelled more than a day along their banks. Their waters are clear like those of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Both lakes are sacred to Hindus and they perform



Lake Rakastal—the spots in the foreground are “dhama,” roots of which are used for firewood

religious baths in them. Tibetans do not, but they ought to perform ordinary baths in them. Some pilgrims encircle the two lakes as a religious act. In Lake Rakastal are several islands, on one of which resides a hermit, who has no way of reaching land except in cold winter days when the lake is frozen. Hundreds of ducks were seen sunning themselves on these lakes which we are told winter on the tanks of the Central Provinces. Beyond these lakes beside a

stream is a noted sulphur spring. Travelling on we passed a number of wild ponies. The farther inland one travels, larger and more numerous are piles of stones like pyramids, accumulated at the hands of Tibetans passing by. Each Tibetan adds a stone, and each pyramid is a worshipping place. From Barkha to Darchan at the foot of Mt. Kailash—seven miles—are 30 streams or channels like the delta of the Mississippi, flowing forth from a river between mountains higher up. These again unite to form a river whose waters eventually empty into the Ganges. The ascent from 13,000 ft. at Taklakot to 16,000 ft. or more at Darchan has been very gradual, so gradual that it was scarcely evident as one was travelling along.

Before Mt. Kailash lies a plain of vast dimensions. Distances in Tibet are very deceptive. Walking in this high plain, one really feels that he is on top of the earth, and that the writer is right, when he calls Tibet "The Roof of the World." The atmosphere at Mt. Kailash is rare, so rare that one finds it difficult at meal time and of necessity must rest and then resume his meal. Our health was good, for neither of us was ill a day on the entire tour. We owe our good health more to wholesome food, slow travel, and sufficient rest, than we do to our ability to stand the high altitude.

Another king is located at Darchan. As soon as he heard of our arrival, he caused all the Darchanites to supply us with firewood, a kind of root from an underbrush called Dhama, the only wood available on that side of Taklakot. Not being informed of its coming, we were amazed, when load upon load were piled before our tent. Whether this is a custom or a gratuitous gift we did not learn. Whether it was or not, we had a pleasant visit with the king, and he aided us in various ways.

At Darchan assembled pilgrims from far and near to make the Perikrama. The Perikrama is always made from left to right. Tibetans also always pass the long prayer walls and pyramids on the left side. Tibetans, travellers and pilgrims say that a "trip

around this sacred mountain from right to left brings no merit." The religions of Hinduism and Lamaism are religions of works, not grace as is the Christian religion. Some make the 25 miles on the Perikrama in one day, others in two days, still others in three days, while some take a week, ten days, yea even two and three months. Haste does not count. Time is not gold. "The longer, the greater will be the merit," say the lamas and sadhus. We were advised to make it in two days, so we could cross the three mile snow-belt early in the morning in order to avoid the melting snow in the afternoon, and we did. After crossing the snow-belt some Tibetans, who never before saw a pair of gum boots, saw mine and thought they were wonderful and wished to buy them at once. There were crowds at this mela. Whole towns in Tibet travelled together on the Perikrama. We met 90 Ladhakis who brought good news about the missionaries at Leh.

Five individuals were seen on the Perikrama prostrating. They made the entire Perikrama by measuring their body's length from tip to tip. One healthy lama, about thirty, had only three miles left. We are told that these do it by prostrating, in order to receive acquittal for some great sin. Others bathed in the icy waters of Lake Gauri Kund for the removal of some guilt. Some lamas were talking all the way, they evidently had made a vow. Others would not talk. Aged men and women were seen on the Perikrama. "The more difficult and the greater the effort, the greater will be the merit," they say. Along the bank of a stream we saw the corpse of an old man, who evidently died of exhaustion. He undoubtedly was put into the river by another pilgrim, for his blanket and staff lay on the bank. "To die on the Perikrama brings great merit," these pilgrims say. "And no greater blessing could come to one," they add. During their three day's sojourn on the Perikrama, several swamis returning hailed us, saying, "We never ate, drank, slept, nor answered nature's call and remained barefoot throughout."



Tibetan Robber and his Primitive Gun

On four sides of Mt. Kailash along the Perikrama are lamasaries, each is said to be a watchman, so that no evil befalls the sacred mountain. At one of these I ventured to climb Mt. Kailash, but was prevented, being told that I would defile the sacred mountain. We visited two of these lamasaries. In one of them are forty lamas. It appears that all that these lamas do is sit, eat, drink, and worship the whole day long. Hundreds of little lights are burning that never go

out. One young lama was seen in the act of cleaning these lights and filling them with new butter for another period for which he paid ten dollars. He was a visiting lama and did all this to abolish some sin of his, we were told. Amidst these little lights ah what darkness. About this sacred mountain and on the Perikrama what gloom, what desire for the eradication of sin and what disappointment. Christ alone can satisfy the longing heart.

“Not by might, nor by power, but BY MY SPIRIT, saith the Lord.” While other travellers depended on guns and pistols, we went forth with the “Sword of the Spirit.” The Tibetan government did not permit us to preach publicly and to Tibetans, but the Holy Spirit silently preached into the hearts of Tibetan men, women and children, while we went about His business. Mornings we had devotionals with the Christians accompanying us, and nearly always some Tibetans came listening in. On the three Sundays on Tibetan soil, we conducted church and Sunday School just for ourselves, but Tibetans were attracted by our singing. On the last Sunday more than fifty Tibetans came, standing around as we sang, taught, and preached.

While passing through the lamasary at Taklakot we were amazed when some lamas began to sing a Christian song. Upon inquiry we learned that they heard us sing that song on our evangelistic tour in Bhot a year ago, and remembered it. This is a result of evangelistic tours. I then recalled that last March, when returning from Naini Tal, where Mrs. Steiner and I had gone to re-enter Bradford and Anita in schools, on three different occasions when passing along the road, Tibetans camping began to sing a Christian song. And when we asked them, “Where did you learn that song?” They replied, “We heard you sing it last May up in Bhot.” What will be the fruit of friends in the homeland, who make evangelistic work possible? Eternity will tell.

Leaving the monastery, several lamas followed with a plea that we sing. Soon many lamas collected and some listened on floors above, and four of us standing beside the wall of that lamasary overlooking the valley below, and sang a Christian Tibetan song in a land closed to the gospel. The following day these lamas sent a messenger to our tent for tracts, and we gave him four dozen. These tracts will be silent messengers inside, while we are outside. It is nothing else than BY MY SPIRIT at work. Who can hinder the Spirit from working, where we are not allowed?

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