

Lhasa

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(PLATES III AND IV)

(The Summary of the Stein Memorial Lecture given on 11th October, 1945, illustrated by thirty lantern slides.)

ALTHOUGH Tibet is a large country, over 900 miles in its greatest length and over 800 miles in its greatest width, with a frontier of over 2,000 miles, very little was known about it before Sir Francis Younghusband's Expedition in 1903-4. The reason for this is its frontiers of high mountain ranges, some of them the highest in the world.

By far the greater part of Tibet consists of the great Northern Plateau of the Chang Thang, a barren country at a height of 15,000 feet, mostly unexplored, and inhabited only by a few nomad herdsmen and roving robber bands. Within its mountain barriers, Tibet itself is also of a mountainous character. This will be seen from the diagram of the route from the plain of India at Silliguri to Lhasa, a distance of 360 miles, within which five successive ranges have to be crossed by passes varying from 14,390 feet to 16,800 feet.

Another factor which has led to the isolation of Tibet is its rigorous climate, which has deterred the people of India from entering it, and also deterred its own people from going down to the unwonted heat of the plains.

But the main cause of the seclusion of Tibet is that its government has excluded all foreigners from entering the heart of the country, the Province of Ü with the capital at Lhasa, and of Tsang with its headquarters at Shigatse ; for such explorers who have succeeded in traversing portions of the Northern Plain have always found themselves stopped and turned back by the frontier guards when they reached the borders of the Central Provinces.

The city of Lhasa stands 11,850 feet high on a small level marshy plain, surrounded by mountains, on the bank of the Kyi-Chhu River, a tributary of the Tsang-po, which, when it reaches India at the eastern end of Assam, is known as the Brahmaputra.

As seen from a distance, the outstanding feature of Lhasa is two rocky peaks standing out from the level plain. The one surmounted by the Potala, with its golden roofs glittering in the

sun, and the other, the Chag-po-ri, or "Iron Mountain", surmounted by the Temple and College of Medicine.

One enters Lhasa by a gateway, the Par-go-ka-Ling, passing under a massive Chhorten, between the Potala and the Temple of Medicine.

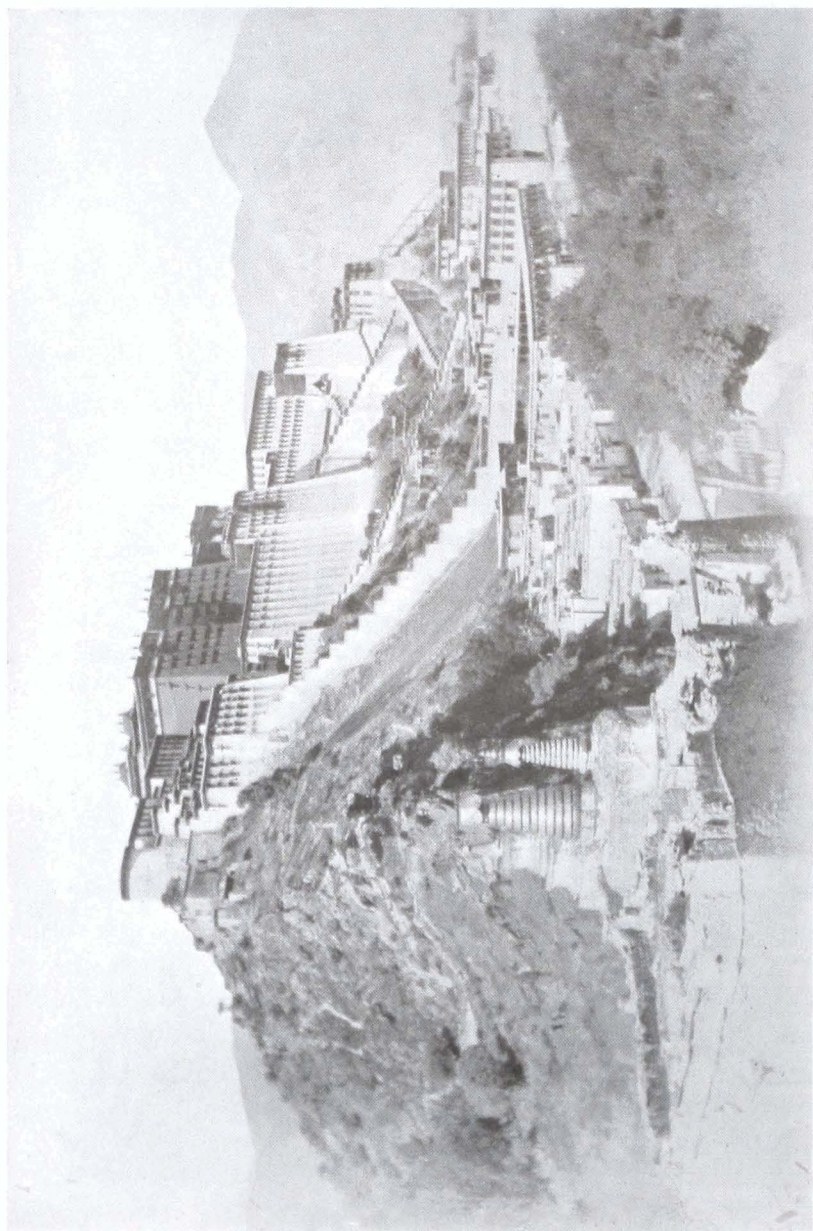
The Potala, the City, and the Chag-po-ri are surrounded by a road called the Ling Khor, "Circle of the Lings," about six miles in length, by which pilgrims circumambulate the sacred city clockwise in the direction of the sun. This direction must also be observed in the case of every sacred place or object in Tibet, keeping the sacred object on the right hand. Some of the more devout do this, measuring their length on the ground, for which they wear, fastened on to their hands and knees, padded shoes studded with iron nails, making a clattering sound as they go.

Within this circular road are the four Royal Monasteries, the Tenge-ling, the Kunde-ling, the Tsomo-ling, and the Tsecho-ling, situated round the city. In the heart of it is the famous Temple of the Jo-wo Khang, the Mecca of the Buddhists of Central Asia and as far as China and Siberia; from it Lhasa, which means "The Place of the God", takes its name.

On the cliff-face, beneath the Chag-po-ri, is the Rock of the Thousand Buddhas, on which are carved images of Buddha, varying from a colossal size to a few inches, many of them coloured.

The Potala, the Palace of the Dalai Lama, is probably the most impressive building in the world. Massively built of stone, it is 900 feet long and rising 500 feet from the plain (or 70 feet higher than the Cross on the top of the Dome of St. Paul's Cathedral), is crowned with Golden Roofs that glitter in the sun. Wide flights of steps, contained by strong revetting walls, lead up to it; and its impressiveness is largely due to the impression they give of massive strength.

The upper central part of the building, containing the Chhorten Shrines of the three Dalai Lamas who had obtained their majority and had exercised personal rule, is coloured a dark crimson from which the Potala is known as the Pho-dang Mar-po, "The Red Palace." The Golden Roofs are over this portion of the building. The rest of the building is white-washed annually before the New Year's Festival. A maroon-coloured band runs along the top of the building, as in all the leading monasteries and other important buildings in Tibet. This band is formed by willow shoots tied



THE POTALA (SIDE VIEW).



THE NEW-YEAR BUTTER TORMA IN THE JO-WO KHANG.

together in bundles mixed with mortar and their ends cut even, as in a truss of hay, which gives a close matt surface, on which the golden monograms show up clearly.

Although the late Dalai Lama, who died in 1933, was the thirteenth Grand Lama and the eighth Dalai, there were only three Chhortens, those of the Fifth, Seventh, and Eighth Dalais ; as the Sixth was deposed, on account of his profligate life and did not die in Lhasa, and the last four before the time of the Tibet Expedition had all died under mysterious circumstances on or before attaining their majority, so as to keep the Government under a perpetual Regency, which was more easily controlled by Chinese and other influences. The late Dalai Lama attained his majority and ruled, as it was found necessary to have a stronger rule to resist the attempts of China to impose and strengthen its authority. Since his death in 1933 his Chhorten Shrine has been added, and it has been fully described by Mr. Spencer Chapman, who accompanied Sir Basil Gould in his Mission to Lhasa in 1936, in his book *Lhasa, the Holy City*.

This shrine has involved the extension of the central red portion of the building on its western end, but, as is shown by Mr. Spencer Chapman's photograph, it has not in any appreciable way affected the outline of the building or its general effect.

The name "Potala" is not Tibetan, but is the name of a hill on the southern promontory of India believed to be the abode of the Bodhisatwar deity Avalokiteswar, who under the name of Chen-re-zig, is the most popular deity in Tibet, and is regarded as the guardian of the country. He is represented in his images as having eleven faces. The first Dalai Lama, after he was made ruler of Tibet and given the title of Dalai by the conquering Mongol Prince, Gushi Khan (whose aid he had called in to defeat and suppress the rival earlier non-reformed Red-Cap sect in A.D. 1641), claimed to be the Incarnation of Chen-re-zig, and, therefore, called the palace which he then built "Potala" after that deity's reputed abode.

It is curious to note that the French Lazarist, Father Huc, who visited Lhasa in 1846, mistook the meaning of the name Potala, and wrote : " The palace of the Tale Lama deserves, in every respect the celebrity which it enjoys in the entire world. . . . This mountain bears the name Bouddha-La, that is to say, the mountain of Bouddha, divine mountain."

He is equally incorrect in his description of the building ; for he says : “ It is terminated by a dome entirely covered by plates of gold and surrounded by a great peristyle, of which the columns are equally gilded.”

The Potala was commenced in A.D. 1643, and was built on the site of the old fort and palace of the early Tibetan kings, which had been destroyed in previous wars.

Inside the red portion of the building there is a large courtyard, on to which the top five storeys of the building open, and over them are the Golden Roofs.

The shape of the Golden Roofs is Chinese. They are made of copper overlaid with a plating of gold, and atop of each are three pinnacles. The edges of the eaves at the bottom of the roofs are elaborately ornamented in deep *répoussé* work.

The lower storeys of the building are a labyrinth of dark passages off which are treasuries, storehouses, record-rooms of archives, arsenals, and quarters for their guards and a printing press. Each of these lower storeys is reached by a wooden ladder from the storey below.

The upper red portion contains the two throne-rooms, chapels, a monastery of about 150 monks, of which the Dalai Lama is the Abbot, and the Chhortens of the Dalai Lamas, which go through the four top storeys, with chapels opening from them. The rooms on these top storeys are lofty rooms with staircases. Inside this upper part of the building there is a large open courtyard with pillared galleries round it, with doors opening from them giving access to the shrines and chapels.

The New Throne Room is about 60 feet square. The lofty wooden pillars are wrapped round with red cloth, as is usual in Tibetan monasteries. The “ Throne ” is merely a wooden frame-work on which to put cushions. The gallery and the walls are painted in bright colours. It was in this room that the Treaty with Tibet was signed at the time of Sir Francis Younghusband’s Mission.

The Old Throne Room, which is in the same part of the building, is similar. In it the Dalai Lama receives and blesses pilgrims by touching them on the head with a tassel. The base of the Chhorten of the Fifth Dalai Lama adjoins it, and through a grill can be seen the masses of valuable votive offerings that have been offered at the shrine.

The wood carving of the cornices of the corridors is painted in

bright colours. The iron-work on the doors is very elaborate and beautifully finished.

The Chhorten of the Fifth Dalai Lama is about 40 feet high, and runs through four storeys of the building, each of which has a chapel opening on to it. It is said to be made of silver, and is gilded, and covered with precious stones, turquoises, coral, lapis lazuli, and hung with strings of pearls. In it is the embalmed body of the Lama.

The town of Lhasa is half a mile from the Potala. The houses are solidly built of stone with flat roofs, all of much the same height of three storeys; so that there are no outstanding buildings. Even the famous Temple of the Jo-wo Khang is so built round with the Government Council Chambers, and storehouses for archives, Government armouries, etc., and quarters for the Lamas that only its entrance shows, and its Golden Roofs, similar to those of the Potala, cannot be seen from the road.

The town is mostly hidden by the groves of large willows and poplars and walnuts in the parks between it and the Potala, which are a favourite resort of the well-to-do citizens for picnics, for which they pitch brightly coloured tents.

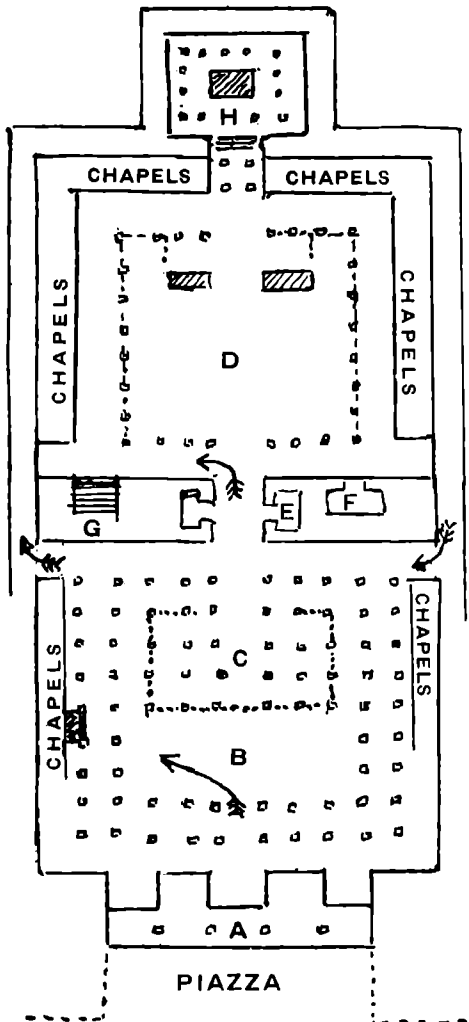
The town of Lhasa is entered by the Yu-tok Zampa, the "Turquoise Bridge", a covered bridge across an old channel which drains the marshes on the north, and flows into the Kyi-chhu River, but is now partly silted up. It is roofed with greenish blue tiles, from which it takes its name. The glaze of which is said to have been made from melted turquoises. It is in no way striking, though the Chinese consider it to be one of the beauties of Lhasa. A guard is stationed at it to examine, if necessary, persons entering the town.

The Temple of the "Jo-wo Khang" ("The House of the Master"), is, on the exterior, an inconspicuous building not higher than adjoining buildings, so that even its golden roofs, which are similar to those of the Potala, cannot be seen anywhere from the road. It contains the famous image of Buddha, from which Lhasa, "The Place of the God," takes its name.

The Temple consists of a vestibule and two courts, beyond which is the Holy of Holies containing the Shrine of the Image of Buddha. The surrounding portion of each court is roofed over, supported by the many tall wooden pillars, and over them in the Inner Court is a second storey, and above it the Golden Roofs. Part of the centre

of each of the courts inside the pillars is open to the air, and covered by a canopy.

This is the only source of light as buildings adjoin the Temple



PLAN OF THE JOWO KHANG.

on every side and there are no windows. Round each of the courts are a series of small chapels containing the altars of various deities.

In the First Court on the lower shelf are "Torma" offerings made of butter, and on the upper shelves rows of hundreds of silver

butter-lamps, and on the floor are heaped the robes of the Lamas, thrown down after services.

An elaborate "Torma", about 12 feet high, is made of butter elaborately shaped upon leather on a wooden frame-work. It is made annually to ensure the prosperity of the New Year.

Part of the centre of the First Court is enclosed by a metal grill, inside which are shelves for thousands of small silver butter-lamps and offerings.

A dark passage of about nine paces leads to the Inner Court. At the side of it is the chapel and shrine of the "Lu", the "Water-Serpent", who keeps under control the waters underlying Lhasa. There is a large slab which is lifted on certain occasions; the sound of water can then be heard under it, and offerings are thrown down to it.

The walls and beams of both the courts are covered with indistinct paintings faded with age and obscured by the accumulated grime of the thousands of butter-lamps. The whole Temple and the floor are covered with grease from this cause.

In the Inner Court there are two Images of Maitreya (in Tibetan "Jampa"), the Buddha yet to come. The one to the right is of colossal size. Maitreya is always portrayed as seated in a chair, with the legs down, in the Western manner, unlike all other Buddhist Deities who are seated with legs crossed.

In the centre of the Inner Court there is a bright mass of holy-hocks, stocks, asters, and snapdragons planted in large Chinese vases. The people of Lhasa are fond of flowers, and one sees them planted on the window-sills of some of the houses.

From the Inner Court a passage leads to the Holy of Holies, the shrine containing the famous Image of Buddha is protected by a guard of monks who stand before a chain curtain of iron links, fastened down by several padlocks, the key of each of which is held by a separate official. Usually the Image can be seen only through the links of this curtain. I was conducted over the Temple by the Head Abbot who had had the curtain lifted so that the Image could be seen, and I was able to take a photograph of it with a flashlight. I have described the Image in *JRAS.*, October, 1938.

The Chinese say that it was given by the King of Magadha to the Emperor of China for his assistance in driving out the Yavanas and was brought to Lhasa by the Emperor's daughter in A.D. 620, when she married the Tibetan King Srongtsan Gampo. Whether

it was brought by her or by his Nepali wife, there is no doubt that it came from India. It is also said to represent Buddha as a child at the age of eleven. But the Image is a broad-shouldered thick-necked adult, and from the attitude (*mudra*) and open mouth it is Buddha preaching.

The Image is about twice life-size. It is hung over and studded with precious stones, and its crown, presented by the reformer Tsong-Khapa early in the fifteenth century, is covered with large uncut gems.

On the shelves in front of it are large butter-lamps of solid gold, more than a foot across, as well as other golden ornaments.

The Gilded Dragons on either side were presented by one of the Chinese Emperors.

Outside the Shrine along the ambulatory round it colossal figures of Deity "Guardians" loom from the darkness.

THE BELL. From the roof of the narrow passage leading to the Holy of Holies there hangs a large bell which has a special interest of which the Lamas were not aware; for cut into it are the words "Te Deum Laudamus", and it is, therefore, the only remaining relic of the Catholic Mission which existed in Lhasa for fifty-five years from A.D. 1716 to 1760, and was allowed to build a chapel. The Abbot could not or would not give any information about the bell, or how it came to be placed there, and though we made inquiries about the Mission, when in Lhasa, no information about it could be obtained, or even of it having existed.

In an upper storey round the Inner Court reached by a stone staircase are two shrines; one of the Terrific Goddess Palden Lhamo, who corresponds to the Hindu goddess Kali, and the other, of the merciful goddess Dolma, "The Saviour." The Image is made of gold and is draped with rich brocades and hung with jewels. In front of it are golden butter-lamps, among which numbers of small light brown mice are running about. They are believed to be the spirits of former Lamas who have served the Shrine.

The Tibetans believe that Queen Victoria was an incarnation of this Goddess. They knew her effigy from the Indian rupee, and were at first unwilling to take rupees bearing the head of Edward VII. Dolma is a very popular deity in Tibet, and is very common as a woman's name.

All the Tibetan shops in Lhasa are kept by women, even the butchers' shops, though men do the cutting up of the carcasses.

The goods are displayed on the road, sometimes on trestles, but more usually spread out on the ground. Chinese shops are indoors with a counter.

A curious feature of Lhasa are the Ro-gyapas, " Corpse-carriers," who are also the general scavengers. They are compelled by custom to live in low filthy hovels, scarcely high enough to stand in, built entirely of the horns of sheep and cattle, where they live on the outskirts of the town in indescribable squalor. Their chief duty is to cut up the corpses, which is the usual method of disposing of the dead, as only the bodies of high officials and Lamas and those who have died of an infectious disease are burned. The corpse is carried in a sack on the back to the " Cemetery " by the Ro-gyapa, or by a member of the deceased's family, if he wishes, and is then placed on a stone slab and cut up by the Ro-gyapa, and the pieces are thrown to be devoured by dogs and vultures, and, in Lhasa, also by pigs. I was told that a special breed of dogs like wolves used to be kept for the purpose, but that they have become extinct. A Lama accompanies the body and chants funeral prayers. There are five such cemeteries around Lhasa. The Ro-gyapas are said to demand exorbitant fees for their services, though they are supposed to be paid by the State.
