

SECRET TIBET



BY FOSCO MARAINI

Translated from the Italian by ERIC MOSBACHER



Foreword by BERNARD BERENSON

Illustrated with seventy photographs by the author



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With gratitude to my master

GIUSEPPE TUCCI

With affection to my companions

REGOLO MOISE *and* PIERO MELE



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CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <i>Foreword by Bernard Berenson</i> | xiii |
| I. FROM NAPLES TO YOGA | 3 |
| Naples harbour: ploughing through books. At sea: Vildo and the beginning of things. Still at sea: "How much on the water-measurer?" Alexandria: the Greek Gnostic and the Negroid prostitutes. Cairo: granite, sarcophagi, millenniums, and garlic. The Red Sea: "I hate science, for instance." Massawa and Djibouti. Aden: miracles, Mexico, nomads, plaster. At the gates of India: how to escape from maya | |
| II. INDO-GOTHIC AND INVISIBLE JUNGLES | 20 |
| Bombay: knowing the world with one's nose. Bombay: making oneself understood. Elephanta: a face, the all. Elephanta: the world as cathedral and the world as womb. In the train between Bombay and Calcutta: masculine trains and eunuch trains. Calcutta: "Perhaps want boy for massage?" Siliguri: at the foot of the Himalayas | |
| III. FROM FERN TO GLACIER | 40 |
| Sikkim: from fern to glacier. Gangtok: dinner with the maharajah. Changu: Verlaine and the wind-men | |
| IV. THE METAPHYSICAL ADVENTURES OF PRINCE GAUTAMA | 57 |
| The Natu Pass: the entry to Tibet. At Chubitang: implication and explanation. Approaching the Kar-gyu monastery: the symbolism of chortens. The Kar-gyu monastery: some notes on Tibetan Buddhism | |
| V. RANCID BUTTER AND THE EXOTIC IN REVERSE | 91 |
| The Kar-gyu monastery: what does Lama Ton-gye see? | |
| VI. INNER LIFE OF A TIBETAN VILLAGE | 105 |
| Two ways of travelling. The ex-official Lobsang: pride and prejudice. The living Bodhisattva. Visit to the living Bodhisattva. The | |

CONTENTS

headman Mingyur; why not export coral? Afternoon at the torrent. The Kar-gyu lama; fingers like a corps de ballet. The tailor Tob-chen; the privilege of initiates. Visit to a hermitage: serenity of a meal in a skull. Mrs. Yishe; mechanical wizards and pharmaceutical saints. The Pak-jan monastery: the Six Good Things, and the little girl with the harelip

- VII. METAPHYSICS AND POLITICS
IN UPPER ASIA 137
- The Dung-kar monastery: "Who is your protective deity?" The Ling-ma plain: secret life of a Bodhisattva. A note on the Tibetan theocracy. The mechanism of theocratic succession. The Dung-kar monastery: monstrous couplings protect the meditating doctor
- VIII. REBELLIONS, EXECUTIONS, AND
BLACK MAGIC 168
- Chumbi: shall we be put in prison? Yatung: a feudal lord on the bridge. Note on the Tibetan government. The story of Lungshar
- IX. THE PRINCE GIVES HIS EYES
TO THE BEGGAR 187
- Yatung: a village holiday. Yatung: the legend of Thrimikunden
- X. THE MYSTERIOUS BON-PO 197
- Pemogang: the original Tibetan religion
- XI. THE VISIONS OF THE DEAD 206
- Lama Ngawang; "At bottom you are civilized people like us." The Visions of the Dead. The masks. Expiation. A dragonfly memory. Flying in the clouds and plunging into entrails. Last day at Yatung: Lama Ngawang's gift
- XII. ON THE ROAD TO LHASA 224
- Phari: the wind blows heedless of prayers. Tuna, Dochen: some of the most beautiful places in the world. Samada: Mara's last temptation of the Buddha. Samada and Iwang: the origins of Tibetan art. Gyantse: golden roofs gleaming in the distance. Philosophical duel between Tucci and the Khampo. The sinfulness of meat. Protective horrors. The Kum-bum. Solitude as poison; solitude as flame. Milarepa, wizard, hermit, and poet. The fortress captain's horrible possessions. Leopardi in the heart of Asia

CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| XIII. ACROSS THE HIMALAYAS; | |
| RETURN TO THE WEST | 263 |
| The Tang-kar valley: Noble Faith's disapproval. In the nomads' tent. The Tang-kar pass: Anthony Trollope in the Himalayas. Lachung: the witches of Jampel. Gangtok: welcome by Scarlatti. Tashi-babu; antiquities and revolutions. The princess reads the hermit's poems. "Why should I sign my work?" Love and polyandry; at the dance of the lamas. Lunar rainbow | |
| XIV. MECHANICAL WIND-MAN | 293 |
| Asia disappearing down below | |
| SOME USEFUL BOOKS | 297 |
| INDEX | 299 |



ILLUSTRATIONS

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Relief map of the journey</i> | ENDPAPER |
| <i>Outline map of Southeast Asia</i> | ENDPAPER |

PLATES FOLLOWING PAGE 50

1. India, the Greece of Asia ("The Marriage of Siva and Parvati," at Elephanta)
2. The forest has its own personality, its own desires, whims, and hatreds (Sikkim)
3. The forest absorbs (Sikkim)
4. Pandim (?) from Mangan
5. Walls scale the mountains (Gyantse)
6. The Tibet of mystery, secrets, and death (Wall painting, Dung-kar monastery)
7. Lama of the Kar-gyu sect
8. The Tibet of sun, deserts, and glaciers (Chomolhari, from Tuna)
9. Princess Pemà Chöki Namgyal
10. Mystery in the form of drama (Masks, Kirimtse monastery)
11. Habitual thief (Gyantse)
12. Space and silence (Lake of Rham)
13. Yatung

ILLUSTRATIONS

14. A matron wearing her jewels
15. The body is like a garment which one puts on and takes off (The living Bodhisattva of the Dung-kar monastery)
16. The gesture of reasoning (Statue in a temple at Rin-chengang)

PLATES FOLLOWING PAGE 114

17. Ancient fresco in the Kum-bum
18. A street in Chumbi
19. Mid-afternoon rest (Gyantse)
20. "Much ink for little gold; much gold for little ink."
(The Tibetan functionary Tob-wang)
21. The doctor at Gyantse
22. The Asia of Marco Polo (The lama of Ngor)
23. The mule driver of Kham
24. Modern militarism on the roof of the world (Yatung)
25. Son of the rock (Fortress at Gyantse)
26. A polyandrist (Gyantse)
27. Pleasures of a summer day (Gyantse)
28. Prince Thondup Namgyal at archery practice
29. His highness Sir Tashi Namgyal, maharajah of Sikkim
30. Spectators at the play (Yatung)
31. Actress-dancer
32. "The ears of young women hearken not to the cymbals of the temple but to light songs."—Milarepa
(Peasant girls, Samada)

ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES FOLLOWING PAGE 178

33. "Lamas" of the Bon-po—"the Etruscans of Asia"
34. The ponderous tomes of a Tibetan library
35. "The demons and serpentiform gods squat on my severe and powerful shoulders."—the sixth Dalai Lama (Lama Ton-gye, Kar-gyu monastery)
36. The West explains; the East implies ("The Buddha Crowned," Gyantse)
37. "In solitary stony fastnesses among the mountains, there is a strange market, where one can barter the vortex of life for boundless bliss."—Milarepa (The hermit Tsampa Tendar)
38. Places without names (Himalayan camp at 15,000 feet)
39. Solitary horseman (Gyantse)
40. Caravan, pass, crevasses (Seba pass, Sikkim)
41. "The divine territory of Gyantse"—Tibetan inscription
42. "Victory over the army of hostile demons!" (Wall painting in the Kum-bum)
43. Sacred dances at Kirimtse
44. "The Temptation of the Buddha" (Samada)
45. The Precious Protector—the thirteenth Dalai Lama (Wall painting at Gyantse)
46. The doctor's daughter, wearing her dead mother's jewels
47. Schoolchildren; craftsmen (Gyantse)
48. The Kum-bum: "The great pagoda, the very sight of which leads to liberation"—Tibetan inscription

ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES FOLLOWING PAGE 258

49. The brightness of the stars and the fire of love (Painting, Gyantse)
50. (Left) Carved human bones; (Below) Butter worked in subtle patterns
51. *Danse macabre*
52. Watching the caravan of the living Bodhisattva (Yatung)
53. Monastery (Gyantse)
54. The voice of the trumpets fills the valleys
55. Trumpets in Tibet have the function of bells in the Western world
56. Reading the sacred books (Temple, Gyantse)
57. "Om mani padme hum!" ("Hail, oh jewel of the flower of the lotus!") Tarchos with sacred inscriptions
58. A chorten: stone, symbolism, beauty
59. The need for the horrible
60. "The Wheel of Life"



I TATTI, SETTIGNANO, FLORENCE

March 23rd, 1950

DEAR FOSCO,

I have just finished your book on the journey to Tibet. I have read many travellers who have written about the top of the world and its forbidding approaches of mountain or desert. Even my favourites, the French Abbé Huc of a hundred years ago and the more recent Japanese Ekai Kawaguchi, have not succeeded as you have in making me forget that I actually was not with you. Only Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*, Freya Stark's *Valley of the Assassins* and Mildred Cable's *Gobi Desert* have taken me along with them as you did while I was reading you. I have been drenched to the skin, frozen stiff, disgusted with smells, nauseated with food, have been dropping with fatigue, refreshed by the ozone-laden morning air and gladdened by the warmth of a summer day. Above all I was there with you when you talked to Tibetans, lay and ecclesiastical, mystics, scholars, theologians, minstrels, shopkeepers, beggars, artisans and artists, proletarian priests and monks, peasants and shepherds. Like you, after getting used to their gorgeous raiment, their dirt, their rags, their bad smell, I encountered fellowmen singularly like ourselves.

Culturally this is the best recommendation for travelling. It is so difficult to get over the deep-rooted conviction, amounting to an axiom, that we only and alone are rational human beings and that no foreigner, not even another Westerner, is quite that. It takes readily sympathetic and continuous contact to bring it home to us that there are folk as good and true and intelligent as without questioning we assume that we are.

To achieve as much we must travel as wanderers in the way you have while in Tibet, and not, as more and more we are doing now, transported like letters in well-sealed post-bags, by so-called *rapides* or worse still by air, neither seeing nor hearing anything beside the clatter and whizz of the vehicle that is dispatching us from one busi-

FOREWORD

ness or amorous engagement to another in a fake sameness, a sameness calculated to ignore, if not to repel, spiritual interest or mere curiosity of any kind.

One would be tempted to expect travelling in the old sense of the word to be coming to an end but for the young of the impoverished heirs to culture, who walk and hike, "enchanted Wanderers," sleeping in hostels or in the open, and looking and seeing, and enjoying and listening and learning.

How well you write! How you succeed in conveying every kind of information and sensation and evocation! You have managed to make me eager to flirt with the young Sikkim princess, half Westernized yet longing for Lhasa, not as for a Holy City, as it is for us Europeans, but as for a fashionable and pleasure-loving Paris. And your return flight from India to Italy, from Calcutta to Rome, what evocations, the names of the places you pass!

Hitherto distance has lent enchantment to names of countries and cities, has evoked longing—*dahin*, thither—for the far away, the almost unreachable, unattainable, that would demand courage and skill and ample means and luck as well as cunning to realize. And time—the Siva, the preserver, the destroyer of all that is—is now more and more and still more ignored, all but abolished by modern transport.

Italo Balbo descended from his airplane at Gadames and asked the sheikhs, who had gathered to do him homage, how long it took them to go to Tripoli. "Twenty-eight days." "I have come here in three hours." "Then what do you do during the other twenty-seven days?" They lived while they travelled. He only flew.

There perhaps is a vital difference between past and present. In the past one lived whatever one did. Now one lives not as a condition independent of deliberate activities, but only, if ever, in the interstices of action.

This is not your case as a traveller, and let me thank you, beside congratulating you yet once again, for all the fascinating observations and suggestions your book has given me.

Sincerely yours,
BERNARD BERENSON

SECRET TIBET



FROM NAPLES TO YOGA

Naples harbour: ploughing through books

THERE is a great bustle on the quay, opposite the little ship. The lorry with the expedition's baggage has arrived from Rome, and packing cases, sacks, and boxes are piled all over the place, all labelled "Professor Tucci's Expedition to Tibet." A crane hoists it all on board, while one of the professor's assistants, armed with spectacles, pencil, and notebook, carefully checks it, with the air of one scrutinizing Tokharian verbs in some ancient manuscript or deciphering rare Chinese ideograms.

I arrived at the last moment, with my wife, in Piero Mele's car. Piero's mother said good-bye to him at the hotel. How sensible of her! Saying good-bye at a railway station is supportable, but quayside farewells can be appalling. When you are leaving people you love it is far better to say good-bye without waiting for the interminable departure of a ship. That was how I saw my mother for the last time, long ago in 1938, when I sailed from Brindisi for Japan, and left her standing on the quay. The last inquisitive onlookers went away, the last customs officials went back to their offices, but there she stayed, a small, thin, lonely figure, standing on the quayside. It grew nearly dark, and she was still there. I looked at her and looked at her, and then I couldn't see her any more. I never saw her again.

Meanwhile they are going to pull up the gangway. All the baggage is on board. Giuseppe Tucci, the well-known Italian explorer, has two minutes left. He duly makes his appearance, says good-bye to his assistants, who have come from Rome to see him off; to his son, who waves his handkerchief; and to some Neapolitan friends, who have come down to the harbour for the occasion. He is a little man, half-way through the fifties, with a strange philosopher's head of

hair and a moustache. By rights he should dress in a style more reminiscent of the eighties, but he doesn't take much interest in his appearance. Under his arm he has the inevitable book. I am prepared to swear that within five minutes he will be curled up in some corner, reading it. Reading it? That's not the right word. To describe the process properly you'd need some such phrase as "ploughing" through it. Yes, Tucci ploughs through books. I've often watched him. He sprinkles them with pencil notes, underlines passages, reads the paragraph headings aloud, grows furious if the author says anything stupid or exclaims "*Perdinci!*" if a phrase meets with his wholehearted approval. Then, when the book has yielded all it can, like a field of wheat after a huge harvest, it falls worn and exhausted to the deck.

At sea: Vildo and the beginning of things

Vildo jumps up on me and licks my hands.

This Vildo is the kind of dog that, the uglier it is, the more you are called on to admire it. Of its colour, which is a kind of faded brownish-violet, the less said the better; of the abundant hair with which nature provided it all that has survived the shears is a tuft on its head, a brush on its tail and spats round its paws. The expression on its face is, in a way, pathetic; every now and then it seems to exclaim, "Why did they make me look like this?" But it doesn't take long to find out that Vildo is stupid. Now, a stupid dog, unless it is beautiful, is unforgivable. Vildo's master and mistress are Americans, husband and wife, very rich and very reserved. They have on board a car as long as a battleship. They occupy the captain's cabin. They have the esoteric air of those who belong to the great world of fashion. They are going to India.

People keep on going into the bar, as happens on a ship soon after it has left port. Soon the bell will ring, and they'll go away, and it will be quiet again. All the same, it's curious to note how well one can concentrate on the most recondite subjects—Tibetan, for instance—

when there's movement going on all round one. I've just found a beautiful and profound expression, *kun-shi*, which means the primary origin, the first cause, of all. This is not, as one might expect, God, but soul, mind, the beginning of awareness. We of the West have always conceived of the mind as a kind of mirror of a kind of external world, while the Tibetans (the heirs of India) have from time immemorial been idealists *à l'outrance*. It is the self that creates the world, and any other proposition is preposterous. The mind is not a mirror, and the external world is illusion.

While I drink a whisky in the bar with Piero, who comes to keep me company, Vildo turns up again. With regard to this animal, let me state that I can accept almost anything as being a projection of my ego, but not Vildo. For me Vildo is an uncreated, eternal being, and I refuse to create such monstrosities even from the most unconscious depths of my unconscious. I return to the study of Tibetan. Passengers walk to and fro, and a number of boys run about noisily. There is a feeling of excitement in the air. Tibetan is a pleasing language; it has no singulars, plurals, genders, or articles, to say nothing of other complications possessed by the grammars of more familiar languages. But Tibetan has its honorifics, its terrible honorifics. For instance, in speaking of an ordinary person, "to die" is *shak-pa*, but in the case of an important lama it is *ku-shing lashpheap-pa*, while in the case of the Dalai Lama it is *ku-shing-la chip-gyu nang-wa*, which means "to ascend honourably with one's own body into paradise."

Here is Vildo for the third time. It appears that the derivation of the name is Deauville, turned back to front: Deauville, Villedeau, Vildo. No, Vildo, we shall never be friends; you're too ugly and too stupid. Or perhaps we shall be friends, just because you're such a wretched little beast?

We have definitely left Naples behind. Time has changed its rhythm. We saw Capri; then night fell. There's always a special feeling about a first night on board—who has not looked out to see the last light of evening over the steely sea? *Partir, c'est un peu mourir*,

etc. The new life hasn't started yet. On the other hand, when you're taking part in an "expedition," it's the first moment when you can sit back with a sigh and think, Well, at any rate it's started.

Still at sea: "How much on the water-measurer?"

During these first few days I've managed to find out one or two things. I've found out, for instance, who is the most important person on board—the person most worth cultivating, a Machiavellian would say. It's Vildo. The American couple are the king and queen of the ship, and attention is paid to every word they say; and Vildo is the king of the Americans, and the least of his desires is instantly fulfilled. When Vildo sleeps, there is universal quiet. When Vildo wants play or exercise, there is general commotion. Vildo dislikes fish, and fish is therefore not served. Vildo's frightened—keep still, everybody, please! Vildo's in a hurry, please get out of the way! Vildo, in short, is our king. When he plays, how human he is! When he runs, how swift! And when he stands still, how perfectly divine!

Meanwhile my Tibetan studies have yielded interesting results. For instance, "what is the time?" in Tibetan is *chu-tsö katsö*, the literal meaning of which is, "how much on the water-measurer?"—a reminder of the time when the clepsydra was used to mark the passage of the hours. At *druk-tang-cheka*—that is to say, at half-past six—the first gong sounds. I go down and change, and then return to the bar for the usual cocktail with Jane and Piero.

The peculiar thing about Jane, Vildo's mistress, is that though her hair is white, she has a young face. Her complexion is fresh, her eyes bright, and her smile is both kind and malicious. She is certainly nearer fifty than forty, or perhaps her fiftieth birthday is a memory. The skin of her hands is certainly that of an old woman, but her cheeks and her expression are those of a girl. She is witty, has been round the world, admires Thornton Wilder, believes in the transmigration of souls, knows all the most fashionable Paris tailors and despises New York café society.

Her husband is Vildo's complete slave. Jane treats the dog as if

he were a human being. She treats him affectionately, but never sloppily. But Mr. Millicent's behaviour to the dog is never anything but sloppy. It is sufficient to mention the little beast in his presence to see him turn to treacle. He is a tall man, of Levantine appearance, with spindly fingers that look like slender asparagus. Am I mistaken, or does he wear a gold bracelet? Also he has long, thin, extremely white legs, with a few black hairs here and there, large hips, and false teeth, and he carries round an extraordinary number of ciné and ordinary cameras.

Alexandria: the Greek Gnostic and the Negroid prostitutes

At first they wouldn't let us disembark. "Italian passport? Certainly not!" said an Egyptian policeman, who was as rude as he was plump. But we were eventually allowed to set foot on *terra firma*, thanks to the intervention of the Italian authorities.

Alexandria is a city which can truly be said to possess a frontage. Alexandria's frontage faces the sea and consists of the magnificent Queen Nazleh parade. The appearance of classical Alexandria, during the centuries when she was one of the chief cities of the world, was always, according to the archaeologists, distinctly Hellenic, and there is a fundamentally European look about the new Alexandria which has sprung up in the last hundred years, with its wide, traffic-filled streets, its big modern buildings, fine shops, and squares in which there is space to breathe. The tall Negro porters at the Hotel Cecil, with their white shirts and red fezzes, look as if they are there so that the good traveller may exclaim, "Here be lions!"

There are, however, no lions anywhere in the neighbourhood. The only exotic thing about Alexandria is the fez, which is worn by practically every male. It is a most becoming form of headgear, and must give a lot of poise and self-confidence to those who wear it. The real fez type is the plump, middle-aged Levantine man-of-the-world, slightly sinister if you look only at his eyes, but amiable enough if you look at his lips and cheeks. The fez also sets off to advantage

all the thin young men with a fanatical gleam in their eyes and all the wise old men with beards and golden spectacles. The aesthetics of the fez are complicated and full of subtle nuances. Mr. Millicent bought himself a fez immediately. Levantine as he is in appearance, it suits him admirably.

We dined last night at Pastroudis, an excellent restaurant frequented by all the best people in Alexandria. The best people in Alexandria consisted of an extraordinary crowd of Nordic blondes, looking as sure of themselves as exclamation points, accompanied by stout, elderly pashas. There were also people from the provinces who were just fat, and bourgeois families, the members of which devoured dainty morsels with greed. Jane was all of a quiver with excitement. "Just look at the girl's hat over there in the corner!" she exclaimed; or, "Have you seen Beauty and the Beast?" Meanwhile the meal was exquisite. The tournedos could not have been bettered.

Beauty and the Beast were sitting next to us. They were a couple of *nouveaux riches*. Their riches must have been so recent that hardly an hour could have elapsed since their acquisition. The man wore a dark blue suit and a pair of screaming yellow shoes, and the woman a greenish dress which had obviously been made for a person of normal proportions and not for one of her monumental bulges, which seemed to be attempting to escape simultaneously in every direction. She had pounds of lipstick on her lips and phalanxes of pearls on her neck and wrists. It must all have happened so suddenly that the couple had not yet had time to recover from the shock. They sat motionless and silent, in a kind of dazed happiness.

After dinner Jane, Piero, and I set out to explore Alexandria. I don't know how, but a Greek, who spoke all languages terrifyingly quickly and terrifyingly badly, attached himself to us. He was an educated man, but he was dirty, dribbled continually, and picked his nose in a most shameless manner. As the evening progressed we went from respectable places to less respectable places, and finally to very unrespectable places indeed. Meanwhile the Greek kept talking to me rapidly, in a low voice, like one hurriedly making a painful

confession on the point of death. He talked about classical Alexandria and the library of the Ptolemies. Then he recited verses from Callimachus, and told stories showing a refinement of intelligence and imagination. Finally he ordered some green drinks.

As we descended down the path of evil, passing from streets which were simply dark to narrow alleys and stairways with stinking gullies running right down the middle of them, the Greek became more spiritual and transformed. First he assured me that the distance between the earth and the sun had been known at Alexandria two thousand years ago, and then he mounted to the empyreans of Gnosticism. We went into a revolting den, where we were surrounded by horrible, Negroid prostitutes—Jane explained that she wanted to see life unsterilized and in the raw, and things that were millions of years old—but the Greek seemed entirely unaware of his surroundings, so much was he carried away in talking about the Abyss.

“What imagination, what daring was possessed by the Gnostic fathers, Basilides and Valentinus!” he exclaimed. “God, the origin of all things, the key to the universe, they called the Abyss! Here in Alexandria even the sand is sanctified by the great things of the spirit. Madame, messieurs, I am proud to declare myself a Gnostic; my only wish is to be worthy of the glorious dust on which we tread, the dust of destroyed masterpieces, of crumbled papyri, of courtesans and scientists and martyrs, of queens and poets. . . .”

Meanwhile two of the wretched women had started dancing, very badly indeed. They were naked, or nearly naked, and they danced to the sad and monotonous singing of a huge woman dressed in black, who beat a drum that she held on her knees. Nobody except this one-woman band seemed to take the slightest interest in the proceedings. Her monumental bosom heaved and quivered behind its covering of black cotton, and in her piglike eyes, which were sunk like two pins in fat, there were gleams of an increasingly obscene frenzy. The Greek continued with his monologue as remorselessly as a gramophone record. He said such fine things that I felt compelled to go over to the window for a moment, to look at the stars and breathe the night air.

“The Abyss fertilizes the Eternal Silence, don’t you see,” he said, “and that is how everything is born. She, you, I, they, the old woman with the drum, even that creature who is dancing there, all of us are children of the Abyss and of Silence. The Abyss is our father and Silence our mother. It is to them that we shall return. . . .”

A sinister-looking Negro flashed a knife, because he thought he had been inadequately tipped. Jane screamed, and we fled ignominiously. The Greek Gnostic stayed behind with the Negroid prostitutes.

Today Jane, her husband, Piero, Vildo, and I all motored to Cairo. Where did that brand-new American car come from? It was not the car that Jane and her husband have on board, which is dark blue; this one was light grey. Jane and her husband are delightfully mysterious. I had never thought that Americans could be mysterious, because mystery is the sign of old civilizations. This, I feel, opens up new fields for thought and speculation.

After the usual squalid suburbs we emerged into the desert. There is no country round Alexandria. You pass straight from the built-up area into the desert, from crowds to solitude. Before us lay 120 miles or more of asphalt road, as black as a river of pitch, stretching straight across the yellow sand as far as the eye could see. At sunset we stopped for a moment and got out, to stretch our legs and take photographs. After several days on board ship and then in a crowded city, it was a precious moment alone with nature. Long, blue shadows lay across the orange-coloured sand, and there were green transparencies in the sky. The sun, a red ball of fire, settled down on the horizon without a halo, without the slightest sign of haze.

Cairo: granite, sarcophagi, millenniums, and garlic

We are at Cairo. Before I go on there is something I want to add. Last night, after the sun had set, when we got into the car again and went on our way, our Moslem driver turned on the wireless, because there were some prayers he wanted to hear, on I don’t know what station. So we crossed the desert to the chanting of an astonish-

ing, deep bass voice. We travelled for mile after mile listening to the Koran. Outside there was a thin, crescent moon.

But to continue. Today we saw the pyramids. It is always curious to see for the first time something with which you have been familiar in pictures since childhood. When I first arrived in Japan, for instance, I was astonished to find that Fujiyama, which looked such a smooth and kindly mountain in illustrations, was rugged, grim, and rocky. The pyramids were also different from what I had expected. For one thing, they are coloured. Black-and-white photographs and the illustrations in school geography books give us an impression that they are greyish, which is completely false. Actually they are brown, the colour of baked clay, or even tawny. When first seen in the distance they are as impressive as mountains, and the light plays bluish tricks between their summits.

Then they are not smooth; their sides are furrowed, so furrowed that when one is near them they look as if they were built like steps. That is because men and time have stripped them of their ancient outer covering. I climbed the steps to the top of the biggest pyramid, the great pyramid of Gizeh, without any difficulty.

At the top I sat down and looked about me, as one looks at the panorama from a mountaintop. I saw the Nile, and other pyramids in the distance, a whole geology of pyramids. I didn't know whether to think about ancient kings or the mysterious forces of nature. But I was not on a mountain, but on a man-made pile of two million blocks of stone, each weighing two and a half tons. A mountain can fill one with marvel or terror at the subterranean forces that lifted it into the sky. The pyramids fill one with never-ceasing astonishment at the slow deliberation with which those gigantic edifices were erected by the hand of man; at the subtle, mathematical, astronomical, geomantic framework, like a hidden spider's web, which in its mute and enduring tracery invisibly supports the colossal weight; at the buried and forgotten suffering of which these blocks might tell if they could remember the days when the arms, chests, and shoulders of slaves transported them, hoisted them, and fixed them in the place which, after thousands of years, they still occupy today.

I was followed to the top by a filthy and importunate Arab, whose breath stank of garlic (“me guide pyramids, gentleman give bak-sheesh?”), and I couldn’t shake him off. He followed me all the way down again, and into the chamber at the very heart of the pyramid which served as Pharaoh’s tomb. We crept on hands and knees down dark tunnels until we reached the sepulchral chamber in the centre of the great edifice. The silence was terrifying. Granite, sarcophagi, millenniums, and garlic.

The Red Sea: “I hate science, for instance”

We embarked again at Port Said, and soon afterwards we were in the Suez Canal, another impressive piece of man’s handiwork—endless expanses of sand on either side and this streak of blue water cutting straight across them.

Jane, sitting in a deck chair, was combing Vildo. The conversation led to a comparison between the Suez and the Panama Canals.

“I prefer Suez,” Jane said. “It’s grander. You’re aware of man’s handiwork at every step. It’s one long, continuous, breath-taking gash, tearing Asia and Africa apart. It’s not a canal, but a wound made by a surgeon’s knife.”

“So the sea is the earth’s blood, is it?” I exclaimed pompously, with a laugh.

“Yes. Is that a commonplace? Commonplaces are often great truths. Perhaps you’re too young. In the second half of your life you go back to commonplaces with affection. . . . Keep still, Vildo darling!”

Vildo was leaping about like a little dragon, trying to catch a fly in his mouth; every time he missed his teeth snapped together, sounding like the shutting of the lid of an ivory box.

“I agree about commonplaces,” I answered. “But I prefer Panama. It has so many curves; you go through real forests. And then there are all those lakes and islands. In the Panama Canal it’s worth staying on deck and watching, because the landscape keeps chang-

ing. Here, after five minutes, you know it's going to be exactly the same for the next hundred miles; in fact until next day."

Next day we emerged into the Red Sea, the blueness of which was worthy of the Mediterranean. It was still relatively cool; the real heat would begin only in two days' time, when we neared Massawa.

I spent a long time this evening on deck, talking to Giuseppe Tucci. "I only like things that contain a mystery," he said to me, while a fierce, metallic sun rolled along the horizon. Mount Sinai was visible in the distance, a haunting, violet apparition suggesting divine manifestations and infernal terrors in that land of hermits, relics, rocks, and cypresses. "I'm interested in everything that is inexplicable, tangled, obscure," Tucci went on. Then he added, as if he feared he might have given himself away, "I hate certainty and clarity. I hate science, for instance!"

Giuseppe Tucci adores paradoxes; they make him happy. But they are a need of his intellect, not of his whole personality. If Giuseppe Tucci really hated science, he would not be Giuseppe Tucci, and he would not have left for posterity a row of standard works as a monument to his immense labour, study, and researches. Perhaps he does not want to be believed when he talks; what enchants and stimulates him is the sound of his own voice, the linking of logical propositions into strange syllogisms, the drawing of the last conclusions from every premiss.

To get to know Giuseppe Tucci properly, you have to see him as he is now, on a voyage. His cabin is transformed into a library, a study, a sanctum. The steward who makes his bed every morning has to move with special care to avoid disturbing his piles of books and papers. On top of the proofs of a book due to appear shortly there is probably to be found a Bengali treatise on logic or a German dissertation on ancient Chinese poetry; elsewhere sheets of typescript lie mixed with the thick, veined paper of a Tibetan work on Yoga, while volumes of Valéry or a translation of Huizinga crown the pile.

Giuseppe Tucci is an almost unique example in our day of the new humanism in which Chinese philosophers like Chuang-tse, Tibetan poets like Milarepa, Japanese dramatists like Chikamatsu, are not merely exotic ornaments of a distant civilization, but living voices in the mind, as Plato or Lucretius or Plautus have traditionally been through the centuries. In this Giuseppe Tucci is two or three centuries ahead of contemporary Europe.

“You believe in science,” the professor concluded. “In other words, you’re the victim of an illusion. Science postulates a self and a non-self linked in an immutable relationship. What a childish thing!”

The sun had disappeared behind the peaks of Sinai. Tucci rubbed his hands and went on emptying all content from the non-self.

Massawa and Djibouti

At Massawa there is the infernal heat normal in these parts. The heavy, humid sultriness of the tropics has now closed down on us. Here too we had difficulty before we were allowed to disembark. But when we at last set foot on shore, we found ourselves in an entirely Italian town, with the usual advertisements for Fiat cars, Peroni beer, and San Pellegrino orangeade, and people talking with the accents of Sicily, Piedmont, or Venetia.

Many Italians travelling in our ship disembarked yesterday evening, and there are now very few passengers left on board—a few Swedes and Swiss, the American couple, and ourselves. I spoke to a few inhabitants of the place. They talked sadly, as was natural, but I thought they also felt that their labour would not turn out to have been in vain, but that something would remain, was bound to remain, and that in any case they would pull through, with the patience and energy characteristic of the Italian countryside. The liking with which the natives spoke of the Italians was moving.

From Massawa we went on to Djibouti—a short journey, entirely devoid of interest. At Djibouti there was great excitement. We arrived about midday, and went ashore. When we returned to the ship for dinner we found everything—at any rate in First Class—in a

terrible state of commotion. What had happened, when I was able to reconstruct the facts, turned out to have been as follows. At about three o'clock in the afternoon Vildo had apparently left the cabin alone and gone wandering about the deck. The hold was open, and the little beast had fallen into it, nobody knew how, and broken a leg. When Mr. Millicent came back from Djibouti and found Vildo looking as if he were dead he was so overcome with emotion that he fainted. Complete panic seems to have reigned for a good ten minutes. Nobody knew what to do first—whether to look after poor Vildo or to bring round his unfortunate master. Jane divided her efforts between blowing in her husband's face and taking the poor dog in her arms and cuddling it.

By the time we arrived the worst was over. Mr. Millicent had almost completely recovered. "What a fright I had!" he exclaimed. "When I saw Vildo, I thought he was dead! Dead!" Jane had recovered her calm and her ready wit. Vildo, covered in bandages, seemed to be supremely happy.

Later in the evening Piero Mele and I went ashore again. We had an amusing conversation with a Somali, who talked to us at length about the time when "the Italians were here." "Then things very good," he said. "With no one else eat like with Italians." He meant that when the Italians were here he had enough to eat, while now he was hungry, poor chap.

Aden: miracles, Mexico, nomads, plaster

During the short crossing from Djibouti in Africa to Aden on the coast of Arabia the whole ship was mobilized on Vildo's behalf—the nurse for injections, the kitchen for special dishes, the dispensary for ice. Vildo, covered with bandages and with a supremely contented expression, sat enthroned in a deck chair, with all the majesty of a gouty old maharajah. At mealtimes Mr. and Mrs. Millicent took turns at staying with the precious little invalid. Jane would have her meal first, swallow it hurriedly, and then disappear. A few moments later her husband would arrive, wearing an expression of acute dis-

tress. At night they apparently took turns sitting up with Vildo. Even Jane seemed to be losing her usual sense of humour.

At cocktail time Piero proposed a toast. "Here's to Vildo's health!" he said. "Yes, and to my defeat," remarked Jane. "Soon, perhaps, a small miracle will be needed."

"Or a nurse?"

"My husband would never permit it. Trust Vildo to a nurse! Are you crazy?"

The word "miracle" started a conversation behind our backs. Every now and then we caught snatches of it.

"We know so little about things that I take the liberty of believing in miracles—real miracles, I mean, the suspension of natural law, or things happening contrary to natural law, or what you will."

"That's something I can't accept. It would mean the complete abdication of the intellect. The things we don't yet understand we call miracles. There are so many things that are miracles for primitive people but no longer miracles for us—thunderbolts, earthquakes, and comets, for instance. In relation to a future, higher stage of humanity, we are still primitives. Our miracles will form part of their science."

Meanwhile Jane was talking to us about Mexico.

"It's a country you ought to visit," she said. "It's the only civilized country in the Western Hemisphere."

"Civilized because it's good at civil war?"

"Perhaps; or perhaps because the people have the courage to have faith; and also because it's like Alexandria, in the sense that your Greek friend talked about; full of the dust of artists, emperors, etc."

We reached Aden in the morning. At seven o'clock Mr. Millicent was ready and waiting, dressed all in white, though he generally wore shorts all day long until it was time to change for dinner. He ordered a motor launch and went ashore to make arrangements for Vildo to be operated on by the best vet in the place. An hour later he came back to fetch Vildo and take him ashore. We learned later that he was not present at the operation. "I should have died if I had seen him suffer," he said.

We went ashore too. The bazaar at Aden provides the most lively, the most kaleidoscopic spectacle of all the ports of the East. Shepherds, nomads, and brigands from Yemen and the Hadhramaut come down to the city to see, to buy, to satisfy their curiosity, and to enjoy themselves, and mingle with the crowd of Somalis, Hindus, Jews, and Negroes. You often see tall, thin young men with extraordinarily fine features and long hair, wearing garments of extraordinary colours over skins the colour of old bronze, and carrying scimitars and daggers.

We were due to leave at midday, and we went back on board. The ship was ready, and everyone was waiting. Waiting for whom? For Vildo, of course. The operation must have been more complicated than had been expected. One o'clock came, and half-past one, and still no sign of Vildo. The captain was in a black mood. Eventually a motor boat appeared, making the most appalling din. Mr. Millicent was standing in the bow, with Vildo in his arms, and Jane was sitting under a green sunshade in the stern.

As soon as all three of them were on board Jane saved the somewhat delicate international situation. With all the charm and naturalness in the world, she invited the captain and officers to cocktails. Who, in the circumstances, could nurse a grudge against a lady like Mrs. Millicent? Vildo was all covered up in plaster, and obviously felt more important than ever. Perhaps he did not notice the looks that were cast at him every now and then. Luckily for him, he's a stupid dog. An intelligent dog would have died of embarrassment.

At the gates of India: how to escape from maya

We are nearing Bombay. Up to Aden the distances between one port and the next were short; after Aden we spent several days crossing the Indian Ocean. At this time of year—it is March—the water is calm or barely ruffled, an expanse of blue under a clear sky; in a few months' time, in the monsoon season, it will be in a state of perpetual commotion, a horrible greenish or yellowish colour, under a low, white sky that is both stifling and dazzling.

Vildo is decidedly better; he runs about the deck, limping because of his plastered foot, and the Millicents take their meals together again. I have struck up a friendship with a young Sicilian doctor, who is on his way to India to act as medical officer to a Catholic mission; but he tells me that his real object is to study Yoga.

"You see," he concluded after a long tirade, "I have always been most interested in the fact that certain states of mind can influence the state of the body. How is it that the sick can be cured as the result of a psychological impulse? Yoga may be able to teach me many things."

Remarks that at home would appear wild or fantastic are already beginning to make sense. In fact the outline of the Ghat mountains, which rise behind Bombay, is already visible on the horizon; we are really at the gates of India. Nothing could express better than Yoga the inner spirit of the country we are approaching. Yoga stands for India in all her philosophical profundity, her metaphysical flights, her moral daring, her perennial sense of man as an inseparable identity of mind and body, her self-assurance in the midst of the mysterious, the confidential terms she is on with death, and her admirable symbolism.

Yoga offers the sage a way of escape from maya (the illusion of transient things, designed to perish) into a fullness of being that transcends becoming. Long and sustained effort enables him to pass one by one through the eight stages that lead to liberation. During the process he can have no rest; there can be no truce for any part of his being. His body must slowly be trained by prolonged ascetic practices to become like a musical instrument, able to vibrate to the hidden impulses that govern the breath of the universe. His intellectual faculties must be purified by progressive renunciation of all false aspirations until they attain awareness of a life beyond forms and ideas; and his subconscious must undergo a prolonged education until the thinking individual is able really to annihilate himself, disappear into the object of his thought, into the eternal, the infinite, the One.

Jane joined our group with Vildo in her arms. We all observed

FROM NAPLES TO YOGA

with pleasure that there was in the dog's appearance a certain look of philosophical profundity. So, little beast, it does you good to suffer? At least you're human in that!

Bombay is now just visible, a white streak on the sun-beaten shore of India. In an hour we shall be in port.



INDO-GOTHIC AND INVISIBLE JUNGLES

Bombay: knowing the world with one's nose

THE British have always been very proud of Bombay, on the whole with good reason. It is still the Indian city in which one is most aware of Western influence. It has wide streets, tree-lined squares, parks, and walks along the seashore. Also it has certain features that movingly reveal the homesickness for London felt by the Victorian architects who built the greater part of it.

Certainly it is a town without a history. From that point of view, compared with Delhi or Benares it is devoid of interest. In 1661 Charles II of England received the island on which the city now stands as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza. All it had to offer was a few huts, and perhaps one or two Portuguese trading stations. Bombay sprang into prominence only about a century ago, when British banks started opening branches there, and the first railway lines were built into the interior. The population quickly increased from two hundred thousand to a million, and then to a million and a half.

For a hundred years Bombay was the façade of the British Indian Empire. When you approach from the sea one of the first buildings you see is the Gateway of India, a kind of triumphal arch in which twenty different styles are unhappily united. Actually the whole of Bombay is ugly, but its ugliness is of a kind that may soon become interesting. It is not entirely improbable that a century hence tourists may seriously consider this city to be a gem of the fantastic Indo-Gothic style. Our generation is still too near that which created these hybrid monsters, born of a union between Reims, Cologne, and Uppsala on the one hand, and Gwalior, Jodhpur, and Tanjore on

the other. But our grandchildren may contemplate the telephone-company and bank palaces, the Protestant churches, the stations and the hotels, all the temples of the Biblical-industrial-railway civilization of the nineteenth century, with the same sophisticated and slightly perverse pleasure with which we visit the Doric-baroque cathedral of Syracuse or the Tuscan-Moorish Panciatichi villa in the Val d'Arno.

We stayed at the Taj Mahal, the big hotel made famous by Louis Bromfield's novel *A Night in Bombay*. Calling a hotel by that name in India is rather like calling an Italian hotel the Cà d'Oro or the Villa d'Este. It recalls one of the most perfect architectural gems of India, the tomb that the Mogul Emperor Shah Jahan built at Agra for his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal. The architecture of the hotel appears to have been due in great part to an Italian, Geronimo Veroneo. Colonel Moise, finding himself surrounded in a mere hotel with all these famous and romantic things, all these exotic words and moving and imperial memories, was most impressed, and would talk of nothing else. When we went down to dinner we passed a Parsee lady of most uncommon beauty, draped like a goddess in a lamé dress, and the good, enchanted colonel kept on muttering, "Just like in a novel, just like in a novel!"

The Taj Mahal is a vast edifice built to make an insupportable climate less insupportable. Not only is the climate of Bombay intensely hot, it is extremely humid, and therefore debilitating. It used to be said that the life of a man in Bombay was two monsoons. That was when tropical diseases reigned unchecked. Nowadays, with improved methods of building and improved hygiene, the saying is no longer true. But the heat remains the same—oppressive to the point of prostration. That is why innumerable fans in the Taj Mahal continually stir the air in the spacious corridors. Everything is open and ventilated, so that the most fleeting draught may find encouragement to evaporate an extra milligram of moisture from the perspiring skin of the guest.

The ventilation also circulates perfumes, to say nothing of smells. Some of them are aggressive smells, to which one is not accustomed;

they are disturbing to the nose as Oriental music is disturbing to the ear. I maintain that it is primarily through the nose that an alert sensibility is able to detect Bombay's greatness as a continental metropolis. It is outside the Taj Mahal, along Hornby Street, at the Boran bazaar, or in the bewildering alleys of Kamatipura, that you have the liveliest sense of this phenomenon. You find yourself surrounded by Afghans and Bengalis, peasants from the Deccan and mountaineers from the Himalayas, Parsees and Hindus, mysterious, small, dark Tamils and big, turbaned Sikhs with long beards and a spirited look in their eyes. There too you are assaulted by smells—a confusing, overwhelming ocean of smells. But in the Taj Mahal it is different. Here, comfortably seated in an armchair, with half-shut eyes, you can detect in all their olfactory splendour ten different civilizations in half an hour, each one perfectly distinct, and you can study the characteristics of each and make subtle classifications.

An Indian girl passes in white trousers, wearing high heels and a sari. Her fingernails are scarlet and she carries a bag—European influence. She leaves in her wake a scent of cheap eau-de-Cologne, but underneath it is a suggestion of sandalwood and indefinable spices, and perhaps of garlic. Next there comes a tall and emaciated Hindu, a longitudinal caricature of Mr. Nehru. He suggests pure spirit, refined by thousands of years of ablutions and vegetarian diet, but he too leaves something in his wake—a faint suggestion of cloves. For a time nothing else happens. Then a North European passes, identifiable by his cigar, his perspiration, and a whiff of hair oil. Next comes a group of Moslem business men, with moustaches, pomaded hair, and a confident, potentially martial, crypto-aggressive air, but, strangely enough, with a sweetish, effeminate scent.

Bombay: making oneself understood

What real basis for unity can there be among four hundred million people, varying in race, culture, and religion, some of them

incredibly remote from one another? The subcontinent is a geographical unity,¹ but there is no unity whatever about its population. For the overwhelming majority of its inhabitants the very idea of India is a relatively new thing. So fragile is it that when the British departed it promptly split into two: India and Pakistan.

The most serious problem is that of language. The fact that in India alone there are fifty million people who speak Bengali—a highly developed language with a notable literature, sixty million who speak Hindi, twenty million who speak Marathi, twelve million who speak Oriya, and more than sixty million who speak the Dravidian languages, gives a faint idea of the problem facing the government.

A linguistic map of India gives the most significant clue to its age-long history. To the north there extends the compact group of languages associated with the latest invaders—Aryans, speaking languages akin to those spoken in Europe. While in the West Latin developed into Italian, French, Spanish, etc., in the East there developed out of Sanskrit, and parallel with Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Gujurati, Pathani, and many other languages and dialects. For thousands of years this group has been expanding southwards at the expense of the southern languages belonging to the Dravidian group, which has nothing in common with the Indo-European group. That Dravidian languages were once spoken throughout India is proved by the fact that there are still people, such as the Brahui, for example, in isolated and backward areas in the north who speak Dravidian dialects.

In India men have always come down from the north. Successive waves have pushed on one another's heels at intervals of centuries. Hence the south represents the most ancient and indigenous level, the substratum underlying all the rest. The really autochthonous level, or the level older than all the rest, the Munda-Polynesian level, has been completely pulverized. First the Dravidian invasion and

¹ Compare Italy. The Himalayas correspond to the Alps, the plain of the Ganges to the Po valley, the Ghat mountains to the Apennines, Ceylon to Sicily, Bombay and Calcutta to Genoa and Venice.

then the Aryan have left only small groups of people scattered about in the Deccan who still speak its dialects.

India claims in all more than two hundred more or less distinct languages; in Europe there are barely fifty. Also India is faced with a difficulty that Europe does not share. In addition to all these different languages, she has several different alphabets. The speakers of Urdu and the languages of the northwest use characters of Persian origin. Speakers of Hindi and the related group use Devanagari characters; and the languages of the south are written in the Tamil alphabet.

Today I have been busy all day arranging for the unloading of the expedition's baggage and its transport to Calcutta. It consists of one hundred and sixty-eight separate pieces, including packing cases, boxes and packages of various sorts. Giuseppe Tucci's diplomatic technique is admirable. He knows exactly when to lift the thing to the national level and talk of "the Italian expedition," and when to reduce it to the level of a mere private scholar's journey in search of self-improvement and talk of "Professor Tucci's expedition to Tibet." It is worth pointing out, without implying any reproach, that one of the chief difficulties which has faced all explorers, from Marco Polo to Stanley, has been their relations with governments and other authorities, all jealous and suspicious of one another. In this respect the good explorer represents the triumph of individualism over the inevitable pettiness of the constituted powers. He is often the champion of science and humanity against superstition and reaction.

The Bombay stations are interesting places in which to observe Indian everyday life. People from all parts of the huge peninsula are to be seen in the bustle. To return to the language question. I noticed that clerks and travellers used English a great deal. At a certain level of education English has really become a *koinê*, a common language. At lower levels of education everyone gets along as best as he can by using his own language, eking it out, if necessary, with expressive gestures.

Elephanta: a face, the all

The sea is like the human body. It can be the most beautiful thing in the world, or the most dreadful. The Mediterranean, with its clear water, its rocky promontories plunging down from the blue sky to the blue, clear depths, reminds one of the bronzed flesh of young men or women used to the open air and the breath of the wind on their healthy bodies. But the sea of Bombay is an old sea, in a state of putrefaction, yellow, evil-smelling, and covered with filth. The idea of falling into it is disgusting. It smells of refuse, drains, and excrement.

Such was the septic stretch of water that we crossed, beneath a white and dazzling sky, in a broken-down old boat with a broken-down old engine, oozing oil from every pore, towards the island and caves of Elephanta. But an ugly beginning often enhances one's subsequent pleasure. When we landed on the wooded islet it at once struck us as very beautiful. We slowly climbed the stairs—it was very hot—and walked up an avenue of flowering trees. Many-coloured birds looked at us inquisitively from the branches. The hill became steeper and eventually precipitous. We had reached the caves.

These caves were carved with immense labour out of the living rock; it is impossible to contemplate them without astonishment. Superficially they can be compared with some of the *pietra serena* caves at Monte Ceceri, near Florence, or with the Cordari caves at Syracuse, but the caves of Elephanta are completely regular, far deeper, and much more mysterious. Moreover, they are not natural, but a man-made church of the spirit. For centuries they were used as a temple. Pilgrims still gather there every year in February; and the memorable sculptures that adorn the walls speak of great human things—myths, cosmologies, life, sacrifice, poetry, beauty, and death.

We advanced between the monolithic columns towards the end of the biggest cave, where there stands a colossal bust of Siva, with

three heads, feebly lit by distant reflection. The precise meaning of this magnificent statue of the Hindu god has been the subject of prolonged discussion. The face on the onlooker's left is probably intended to represent the god in his fierce aspect as a destroyer, that on the right his aspect as creator, while the middle one represents him as the Absolute. One thing is certain; no statue of such vast size anywhere in the world is infused with so much spiritual greatness. I think it was James Joyce who said that what mattered about a work of art was the depth from which it sprang. Contemplating this statue, you feel a depth that in our civilization only a few have attained (one of them was Leonardo). In its consummate beauty of outline, its deliberate, cosmic, slightly ironic tranquillity, as is appropriate, for the universe is primarily terrible—fire and ice, pain and destruction—it is an imaginative conception of the Absolute in terms of man's own features that has never been exceeded by the human mind.

Elephanta: the world as cathedral and the world as womb

India is the Greece of Asia. India was for the East what Greece was for the West, for us; that is to say, the birthplace of all the philosophical ideas and all the influences in art and poetry which for thousands of years determined, and to an extent still determine, the intellectual life of millions of men. Moreover, India was something else as well. Greece did not give to Western civilization the religion that subsequently became its very life blood, but in Buddhism India gave to the Asiatic continent its most tremendous civilizing influence.

In connection with the parallel between Greece and India, and to underline the different character of the two civilizations, let me recall Grousset's phrase—*l'Inde, cette Grèce excessive*. In Greece everything tends to harmony. The Parthenon is a symbol for the arts, and the *Phaedo* and the Ptolemaic theory can be said to be the same for thought. Greek mathematics and geometry also concentrated on the finite and the measurable, shunning, as if it were

intellectual sin, investigations that led in the direction of the infinite or the infinitesimal.

With India, *cette Grèce excessive*, it is different. Everything is immoderate, gigantic, teeming, sublime, and terrible. Counterparts to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are to be found in the form of poetic continents, with tens of thousands of verses, in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Indian architecture offers us Tanjore (the jungle in stone), Indian painting the caves of Ajanta, Indian sculpture its wealth of fantastic symbolism. Indian philosophy with sublime madness investigates subjective universals, and Indian mathematics succumbs to a special fascination for the immensely big and the immensely small. In India you sometimes know what you are starting out from, but you can never tell where you will arrive. In Greece the world was always brought back to the measure of man; the Greek tended to make of the universe a comfortable home—a warm, welcoming, reasonable, intelligible, human home. In India man strives to adapt himself to a phantasmagoria of universes fleeing away from him in spirals beyond the horizons of the mind, towards the mysterious horizons of the unconscious, with its unknown powers.

The cult of Siva is one of the most vivid and original products of the Indian mind. It fuses Aryan India, with its insistence on logic, system, and light, and nocturnal, feminine, subterranean Dravidian India, with its intuitions, its language of symbols, its fantasy, its magic, and its sensuality. The cult of Siva presents us with the world as cathedral and the world as womb at the same time. We find in it simultaneously the crystalline, mineral vastness of a great stone nave, shaped subtly in accordance with mathematical lines of force, and the twilight of the alcove, the fertile, mysterious, warm, incomprehensible, and desirable obscurity of the womb.

How can one briefly summarize the philosophy associated with Siva? In the world of our experience we are aware, on the one hand, of light, beauty, happiness—all that we mean by good; on the other there is darkness, ugliness, suffering, and death—all that we mean by evil. Thus there are two aspects to life, and every religion and every philosophy is definable in terms of the position it takes towards

this dichotomy. The universe can, for example, be conceived of as an eternal struggle between the opposing principles of good and evil; alternatively it can be conceived of as being fundamentally good. If the latter position is adopted a formidable problem arises—that of the origin of evil. Epicurus succinctly expressed the difficulty more than two thousand years ago. If, he said, God desires to overcome evil without being able to, He is impotent; if He is able to overcome evil and does not wish to, He is evil. Finally, if He has both the power and the wish to overcome evil, how is it that we can be aware of the existence of evil? The Indian school of thought of which we are speaking solves the problem by attributing to the Supreme Being (Siva) a total personality not only beyond both good and evil, but intrinsically both good and evil. He is both Siva (the Benevolent) and Bhava (the Prosperous), but he can also be Kala (Time), the great destroyer, or Bhairava, the personification of terror and death.

Siva thus represents the wild and untameable forces of nature, simultaneously pitiless and beautiful, destructive of life and fecund with life at the same time; he is the cruelty and ferocity of the laws that govern life, but at the same time he represents the indomitable impulse which causes life always to spring phoenixlike from the ashes and the ruins. Siva haunts cemeteries, the abode of death and dissolution, like an ungirdled ascetic, but wherever youth blossoms and flourishes he is also to be found. The *lingam*, the phallus, signifies his presence, as does a flower or a happy child. Destruction and creation, life and death, good and evil, extreme suffering, serenity and extreme pleasure, all find their final reconciliation in him. Every apparent contradiction is resolved in the compassionate and terrible, ferocious and loving, cruel and tender, but above all eternally mysterious Absolute.

The words with which Siva is invoked in the *Harivamsa* express a profound inspiration: "I adore thee, father of this universe, through which thou wanderest along invisible paths, terrible god of thousands of eyes and a hundred armours. I implore thee, being of the

various aspects, now perfect and just, now false and unjust. Protect me, thou only god, escorted by wild beasts, thou who art also delight, the past and the future . . . who owest thy birth to thyself alone, oh universal essence!"

The gigantic bust of Siva at Elephanta is the artistic expression of this philosophy. The three heads do not represent three persons, but the three diverse aspects of a single being; he appears sibylline and august as Siva (the Absolute); fierce and implacable as Bhairava (evil, destruction, and death); serene and smiling as Vishnu (life, beauty, serenity, joy). The artistic catharsis is complete; the features of the separate faces convey their inner world of feeling by the barest suggestion.

Another notable piece of sculpture in these caves represents Siva in the dance of Tandava, the dance in which Indian thought has tried to symbolize the eternal process of the universe's creation, conservation, and destruction. The great relief has been sadly mutilated; all that remains is a torso, and the sculptor's intention can barely be made out. It is sad to recall that the vandalism that damaged this and other sculptures at Elephanta was mainly the work of white men. The isle of caves is, alas! too near Bombay. Unlike other monuments of Indian art, discovered by the West in less troubled times, we have information about Elephanta from as early as the end of the sixteenth century, and only a few years later the Portuguese Diogo de Couto wrote his work, *Do muito notavel e espantoso Pagode do Elefante*.

The attitude of rude and bigoted European traders when confronted with these colossal monuments of a civilization profoundly different from their own is easy to imagine. Some must have felt contempt; others must have had a confused idea that they were carrying out an act of purification of some sort in destroying what they no doubt took to be idols. Others may have been moved by sheer whim. No doubt there were also other impulses that combined with these to impel them to smash and shatter these ancient stone figures. In any case there is no need to go so far back to find ex-

amples of fanatical short-sightedness. Up to a few years ago the official guide book of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, speaking of Indian art, said: "The monstrous shapes of the Puranic deities are unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic representation." Anyone with even the most superficial acquaintance with Indian art can see the incredible absurdity of such a statement.

On the other hand, one must admit that learning to appreciate the art of a foreign civilization is a long and difficult task. I had the opportunity for several years of observing the difficulties experienced by Japanese students in trying to understand Western painting and sculpture. Then I shared with them the opposite experience, gradually penetrating in my turn the atmosphere of a civilization different from my own. It is an experience for which one must prepare oneself with an open mind and with humility, and with confidence in the common essence of all mankind.

Besides, until a few decades ago it would have been practically impossible to penetrate beyond the outer forms into the minds of these peoples who created artistic idioms different from our own. All the elements for understanding were lacking. Little was known of their history or of the interior life expressed in their literatures, religions, and songs. In three generations orientalists have quietly opened up whole continents for our edification, revealed whole realms of thought and aspiration, and demonstrated that European civilization is not the only civilization, aped by a variety of deviationary and exotic quasi-civilizations, as our fathers used complacently to believe, but merely one civilization among many. It is now possible to approach arts different from our own from the inside, following the path taken by those who created them, and thus to arrive at any rate at a partial understanding of them.

In the future we shall perhaps attain a new, truly universal humanism, and talk of Assisi and Elephanta, Botticelli and Li Lung-mien, of the dance of Tandava and the Deposition, as of temples, personalities, and motives all alike profoundly significant in the life of the human spirit.

*In the train between Bombay and Calcutta:
masculine trains and eunuch trains*

According to the psychoanalysts, dreaming of speeding trains indicates an unconscious concern with virility. No great imaginative effort was required for this discovery. What could be more virile, more youthful and crazy than a train hurtling through stations and plunging through mountains in a headlong, exciting clatter of metal, with the sensation of irresistible power and will? The most virile railway journey in this sense is undoubtedly that along the Ligurian coast; the train, hurtling along the escarpments of the Apennines and the rocky seashore, massacres houses, hills, cliffs, bridges, walls, trees, roads, unexpected crowds, churches and markets, and the result is a sense of exhilaration bordering on intoxication.

But the least virile train I have ever travelled in is this one, transporting us across the plains of India. It moves slowly, pants, stops, and then ambles on again a little way, but the landscape is so vast, the world so huge, that you don't have the impression of any real movement. Meanwhile the compartment is filled with dust and smoke. Tucci manages to read, but he is a hero of the printed word, and is an exception. The three others, including myself, look out of the window in astonishment at an endless landscape of shrivelled trees, black rocks (the basalt covering of the Deccan), peasants' hovels, and cows.

Calcutta: "Perhaps want boy for massage?"

Bengal is two-thirds the size of Italy and has a bigger population. You get a vague impression of this immense mass of humanity, this dense population, on the train journey to Calcutta. Since early morning brushwood has given way to rice fields. It is obvious at once that every square inch of land is exploited to the utmost, and supports the maximum possible population. The warm, humid air, the water flowing everywhere, guarantee that the only limitations to vitality and reproduction are those imposed by space.

As our train proceeds the whole life of the countryside is revealed before our eyes. We see work being started in one village and completed in the next. Here we see a man coming out of a house with two buffaloes; in the next village we see a man exactly like him, again with two buffaloes, on his way towards the rice fields; in the third village a similar man has already started work. It's the same with the women going down to the canal to do their washing, with the boys with their fishing nets, the girls with their boxes, and the youths cycling along the canal banks. One great plain stretches all the way to the horizon, with endlessly repeated rice fields, canals, villages, and palm trees; and so it continues beyond our horizon to the next, and so on for thousands of villages and thousands of miles. Humanity is like a close-knit tissue; lifelike sand; an anonymous thing. But if the train stopped and we got out and spent only a few days in the first village we came to, how many individualities we should discover, what stories and intrigues! (Meanwhile to the man at the plough looking at us we are a trainload of humanity, only one of many that pass every day—humanity flowing like a river, an anonymous river of faces.)

Calcutta was always the really serious thing about the British Indian Empire. Englishmen went to Calcutta to make their pile. Bombay offered a quiet life to not excessively ambitious administrators, but Calcutta always had something dramatic up its sleeve. Moreover, the history of the two cities is entirely different. Bombay rose and flourished as a prosperous port, in which business thrived. Its only enemies were microscopic; bacilli and the viruses of tropical diseases. But Calcutta can be said to have been born as a fortress, was many times assaulted, sacked (in 1756) and recaptured, and had many bloodthirsty changes of fortune. "Calcutta was the true centre of government and Bengal the base from which the English between 1757 and 1859 expanded their dominion by wars with Indian powers," wrote the historian Dunbar. Calcutta has known plotting and treachery and corruption without end. Even the British, often cruel in their colonial wars and hard in their administration, but not given to double-dealing, succumbed to the influence of the

place, and Clive prepared two different copies of his treaty with Mir Jafar, one true and one false, to use in his complicated intrigues with the local potentates.

Physically Calcutta came into existence gradually, emerging more or less concentrically from the marshes of the Ganges delta. In remote times the whole area must have been covered with tropical forest, a green tangle of rank vegetation battenning on continual death and decomposition. A tree falls and rots; thousands of plants and animals immediately invest, assault, and occupy it, prospering in their turn. The cycle is frantic, fierce, voracious, and it is infused with an all-pervading carnality expressed in the rich colour of animal life and the triumphant, magnificent, perverse luxuriance of fruit and flower. Today the jungle has disappeared, but it has not been conquered.

From the union of physical surroundings such as these with a people as intelligent, as sensitive to beauty and imagination, as sensual, speculative, and versatile as the Bengalis, there emerged the most baroque features of late Hinduism; the adoration of the feminine energies, the codification of magic and the occult in erotic forms, cruel sacrifices to the evil forces in the universe. Thus the ancient jungle, gradually eliminated by the hand of man, reappeared in an intangible but a thousand times more luxuriant form. I do not believe that there is any great city which is more of a jungle than Calcutta—the metropolis of tooth and claw, tyranny and blackmail, suffering, evil, and asceticism. You feel it in the air, something intangible but very definite. The lianas, the orchids, the snakes, the forest with its blood-curdling screams and dripping green mysteries, survive invisibly under the wood, the concrete, and the asphalt and between the railway lines.

This morning Piero and I went out to buy various things needed for the journey. The main entrance of the Great Eastern, the principal Calcutta hotel—it's certainly very Eastern, but it's not very great—leads out onto a dirty, crowded street, full of noisy trams and crowded with people of every type. No sooner were we outside than a boy approached us. We knew what he wanted to offer us, but there

was no point in chasing him away, because another and more persistent one immediately attached himself to us. ("No want girl? Perhaps want boy, for massage?") The only way to get rid of them was to jump into a taxi driven by a venerable, bearded Sikh.

I don't know why, but all the taxi drivers in Calcutta are Sikhs. Even in the face of the phenomena of modern life, the various groups in India tend to keep together rather than to disperse. The Sikhs come from the Punjab, in northwest India. In the reeking jungle of Calcutta they are as solid and comforting as rocks. Unlike the Bengalis, they always wear turbans, often in delicate pastel shades à la Boucher or Marie Laurencin. As they look like Old Testament prophets or old men of the mountains, the pastel shades strike a curiously incongruous note. The Sikhs are forbidden to shave, and consequently have enormous beards, which are pitch-black in their youth but in old age turn perfectly white.

Our prophet took us to the Kodak shop in Park Street. Park Street is a small, orderly oasis in the teeming metropolis. It has some fine shops, and you see nurses pushing white children in prams. There is a certain sense of spaciousness and well being about Park Street, at any rate on the surface. But you only have to walk a few yards, towards the New Market, for instance, to plunge once more into the depths of the jungle. You see the most shameless riches side by side with the most abject poverty and squalor. Every few yards you come upon the victim of some horrible disease, or a beggar trying to attract the attention of passers-by in the most dramatic manner possible. This morning in Chowringee, the principal street, we saw a nearly naked, armless man, with legs which were presumably paralysed, rolling along the pavement, thus imprinting on his chest, stomach, legs, and back the stains of the red spittle spat out by all the betel-chewers. From a distance this made him look as if he were lacerated and covered with blood. He was accompanied by a naked and indescribably dirty little girl of eight or nine, who followed or preceded him, carrying a tin for alms. The two were singing, or rather shouting, a kind of duet. The man sang one verse, and the girl the next. All the verses were the same, slow and inexora-

ble. It was appalling music, not without a certain beauty of its own. A tall, smartly dressed, fair woman, carrying a painted wooden horse under her arm, suddenly emerged from a shop and nearly stumbled over the body of the man rolling on the pavement and singing.

In the midst of all this squalor and vice, wealth and destitution, orgiastic cults and cruel sacrifices, in the midst of this world of death, dances, and epidemics, there survives, as is appropriate, I might even say inevitable, a fine tradition of learning. I shall not deal here with the museum (which is incidentally extremely interesting), the various universities, the hospitals, and the botanical garden; I shall mention only the lunch we had with Chatterji. Chatterji is a Bengali, an old friend of Tucci's, and he teaches philology at Calcutta University. He's a man of about fifty, of average height, sturdy without being stout, dark-skinned and dark-haired. He dresses in Indian style and wears spectacles. One is immediately struck by his wide forehead and intelligent eyes. He has the pleasing appearance of the scholar. He arrived at the hotel today while Tucci was out, so I received him; we sat in the lounge and talked.

Chatterji has an excellent knowledge of English. As often happens with men who have devoted their whole lives to humane studies, he started talking immediately, as if we were old friends, recalling persons, books, places, and events.

"Yes, yes, Rome," Chatterji said. "I had a friend at Rome once; his wife was a Pole, I think, or something of the sort. He started a literary review called—I can't remember what it was called, but the name's of no importance. On the cover it had a star and a wave. I liked that very much. When I was in Rome I told my friend that they were very fine symbols indeed. The star reminded me of Emerson: 'Hitch your cart to a star.' . . . There's a poem of Tagore's, you know—it moves me every time I read it—I can't remember at the moment what it's called, but the title's of no importance, but what it's about is this. It's a conversation between a star in the sky and a little oil lamp in an ordinary Indian house. 'You, little lamp, are the star of the house. I, little star, am a lamp in the sky,' and so

on. That sort of thing may strike you as slightly rhetorical, but Indians find it very moving.”

Beside us, sitting at the next table in the lounge, were some fat, suave, suspicious-looking individuals, with smiling faces and evasive eyes. They wore European clothes, and leaned forward in their armchairs when they spoke, to avoid being overheard. What were they? Foreign-exchange smugglers? White-slave traffickers? Dope dealers?

“In every Indian home,” Chatterji continued, “a lamp is lit by the woman of the house as soon as she awakens every morning. It’s a beautiful rite, ancient and full of poetry. The lamp is taken into the family chapel, and is then used to light other lamps. It’s an intimate little domestic ceremony that greatly appealed to my Italian friend—what was his name? Oh, well, it’s of no importance. . . . I told him all about it in English, and he liked it so much that he said he would translate it into your language.”

There was movement at the next table. An individual who seemed to be the gang leader had arrived. He was a little man, getting on in life, very carefully dressed, and Chinese-looking. The fat men all got up when he appeared, and then sat down again. Nobody spoke. It seemed as if some sort of plot were being hatched. Finally one of the men produced a packet of photographs from his wallet and started passing them round.

“Symbols are a very important thing in life,” Chatterji went on, wiping his spectacles with a corner of his dhoti. “The star and the wave! But man is more important than symbols, just as the living are more important than the dead. I remember a dinner party to which I went once in Florence. I sat next to an American lady, who kept going into ecstasies about old Italian music and old Italian poetry. In the end a young man of your country said with a laugh, ‘My dear lady, modern Italians exist as well!’ I recalled that little incident some time ago when I was asked to go to Udaipur, in Rajputana, to give a lecture. Udaipur, you know, is rather like Florence, a city famous for its great artists and warriors, and for all the heroes who defended our country against the Moslem invaders five hun-

dred years ago. At Udaipur there are sacred memories of memorable events at every step—”

Our neighbours had lit cigarettes and ordered drinks (lemonade and soda, as today was one of the prohibition days). The photographs continued to circulate. The little Chinese-looking man seemed to be particularly interested in one photograph, which he kept looking at. Every now and then he murmured something into the ear of one of the others. The remainder of the gang kept whispering and plotting, looking around them and drinking lemonade and soda.

“My dear Chatterji!” said a well-known voice behind my back. It was Professor Tucci, who had arrived at last. After they had greeted each other, we sat down again and the conversation was resumed for several minutes. Then Colonel Moise and Piero arrived, and we could go in to lunch. Meanwhile our neighbours had departed. As we rose I noticed that they had dropped a photograph. I could not resist the temptation of picking it up and looking at it. It was the photograph of a model of a lady’s shoe. (This evening I told Piero the story. “Don’t be silly,” he said. “They obviously dropped the photograph on purpose. It’s an alibi!” On reconsidering the matter I decided to adopt the Mele interpretation as being in harmony with the spirit of the place.)

Our lunch, in the big, air-conditioned restaurant attached to the hotel, resolved itself, after a few minutes’ general conversation, into a dialogue between the two lions of learning. It was an intellectual feast of the kind one rarely has the opportunity of attending, and I tried hard not to miss anything that was said. A remark about words in everyday use brought up the subject of the Munda languages, and from there it was but a step to the Dravidian languages. They mentioned works written by their colleagues. “I agree with Schmidt, but only on general lines—” Tucci was the more scientific, in the German tradition, Chatterji more of a humanist, in the classical sense. When he recalled some colleague, he always produced some visible and picturesque image that made him vivid to the mind. “So-and-so passed through Calcutta two or three years ago,” he would say. “He’s a tall, fair, silent man, with a little round wife, always dressed in

white, just like a tennis-ball, bouncing round him all the time!" Then he would revert to quoting Kalidasa or the Kangyur in the course of comparing remote and present-day literatures and drawing conclusions that served to reconstruct the history of Asia.

The restaurant waiters numbered about fifty. They wore white, caliphlike uniforms, with a kind of little red fez turban perched on top of their heads. They moved silently, on bare feet. The whole thing was less like a meal than a ceremony—a coronation, or something of the sort. A solemn-looking doge with a little white moustache placed before me a tureen containing an almost invisible soup, in which there floated (or flew?) a small green leaf. At the next table was a party of Parsees, the women rather beautiful and the men rather fat. A few tables away sat a family of Europeans, all of them looking washed and dried out in the witches' cauldron of the monsoons. The husband, who looked like a decent, professional man of about thirty-five, looked washed out; the wife, with her almost repellently whitish skin, looked washed out; so did their daughter, a little girl of seven or eight. How sad white children look in this part of the world!

The lions of learning continued. Both of them were in magnificent form. They were terrific. From the Munda languages they passed to Tibet, the Ugurs, and the Nestorian Christianity of Central Asia. They mentioned Sir Aurel Stein, Marco Polo, and von Le Coq, made excursions into Bactria and Persia, taking in Manichaeism, ancient coinages and unpublished texts found in Himalayan monasteries. They followed Greek motifs across the steppes and oases of Central Asia. They laid the whole of Asia bare before us, took it to pieces, dissected it, and put it together again in space and time. They revealed links and affinities, unexpected relationships, facts that threw light on whole orders of other facts. They filled the map of Asia with life and movement and turned history into a luminous fountain. With the eyes of gods, playing with ages and peoples like toys held in their omnipotent fingers, we watched the unrolling of the immense pageant of the past.

Chatterji traced the name of Rome in its passage across Asia. "In

Syria," he told us, "it was known as Hrim. Chinese merchants, venturing to the extreme west of the Asian world, met merchants venturing to the extreme east of the Mediterranean world. They spoke of the empire of Hrim, but the Chinese could not pronounce the name correctly; the 'H' became 'Fu,' and Hrim was transformed first into Fu-rim and then, undergoing still further adaptation to the Chinese mouth (which can pronounce 'l' but not 'r'), it became Fulin. That is the name the Chinese still use for Rome."

Chatterji was delightful. He talked and talked, forgot to eat, then hurried frantically to consume the invisible soup. Whenever anything fascinates him he becomes completely oblivious to his surroundings. But he is by no means blind. When the beautiful Parsee woman at the next table got up, he caressed her with the look of a connoisseur and lost the thread of his argument. He's altogether simpler and more human than Tucci, but certainly no less learned. His intellectual equipment is of the first rank, and Tucci listened to him with great attention. Every now and then he produced from beneath his white cotton dhoti a copy of the *Acts of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* and noted in pencil on the cover the titles of books or articles quoted in the conversation. When he put the document back in its place again he revealed the primitive landscape of a vast, hairy belly just at the height of the ethereal soup.

Siliguri: at the foot of the Himalayas

We left Calcutta for Siliguri last night. We travelled all night on the Darjeeling Mail, the express to the north which runs with a great clatter of metal through innumerable stations. We crossed two frontiers: from India into Pakistan, and from Pakistan into India again. Now that the world is tending to unite, is not this division of the subcontinent a retrograde step? But it must be admitted that, accustomed as we are to seeing the world in political categories, we are not in a good position to judge peoples who still see the world almost exclusively in religious categories.



FROM FERN TO GLACIER

Sikkim: from fern to glacier

WE have arrived at Siliguri, and are now very near the Himalayas, which loom steeply and commandingly over the plains of Bengal. In a few days' marches, in less than a week, you can travel from a land of palms and tree ferns to a land of snow and ice. In the pages that follow I have gathered together notes written at various times in the state of Sikkim, between India and Tibet, to give some idea of one of the most beautiful journeys in the world; from valleys sunk in mist and rain to mountaintops glittering in brilliant sunshine.

Between Dikchu and Mangan. We are following the course of a tremendous ravine through which the Tista runs. In quality the Tista is a mountain torrent; in size it is a big river. Imagine the Adige or the Po in flood plunging through a twisting gorge, carrying uprooted tree-trunks and whirling them along as if they were twigs. We are several hundred feet above sea level, and the heat is stifling. The air sweats and weeps; everything seems to be liquefying. But for the leeches and mosquitoes, we could walk naked, but because of them we have to keep well covered up, and our clothes stick to our skin. We are hemmed in all round by the green and dripping forest, and the mist dissolves everything we see—the slippery, rotting earth, the leaves, the tree-trunks, the trees, both near and distant—into a uniform, mysterious grey, which takes away the individuality of everything and suffuses a vague carnality over everything. Green tendrils and canopies, stretching up to the dense foliage of the trees, conceal sinister vegetable hollows, into which I look in the way a layman searches a wound with his eyes. Every now and then you come across masses of white orchids hanging from the boughs. They

are beautiful but sinister—flowers with poisonous scent, the kind of flowers to send to an enemy. Then there are the snakes, which stop and glide silently away, and pulpy fruits, which drop in the dripping silence with a squelch. The forest is alive; individually and collectively it is alive. It is alive in the tree-trunks covered in lichen and moss and clothed with ferns, in the butterflies, in the constant squeaks and pipings, in every sudden and inexplicable rustle. You feel that the forest has its own personality, its own desires and whims, its own hates, its own hunger and weariness and languors, its own hidden eyes. Once you have penetrated into it, you cannot escape it. Its green tentacles enclose you in an agonizing embrace.

How shall one describe the strange excitement induced by the luxuriant vegetation, the monstrous tree-trunks covered with dripping lichen, the caress on one's hand of those huge, shiny leaves, the feel of the bark, the intoxication of the smells and perfumes? At the same time, how express the revulsion provoked by so much teeming, gliding, creeping, turgid vitality? Who could put into words the fear of death that lurks everywhere? Not of death because of any specific danger, but of death in a subtle, all-pervading sense. Nowhere else are life and death so intimately united and intertwined. Here a fallen tree provides nourishment for the thousands of living things that batten on its decomposing fibre; a whole population of fungi, insects, worms, ferns, moss, lichens, and moulds; there a snake glides noiselessly between carnivorous flowers; there a butterfly flies solemnly and capriciously, finally settling on the yellow carcass of an animal; here is an ambush, a trap—secret, stabbing, evil; here are both splendour and horror. Baudelaire would have been delighted with it.

*Serré, fourmillant, comme un million de'hlmintes
Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démons . . .*

and he would at once have drawn the great parallel between the tropical forest and the heart of man.

Mangen. Glory and liberation this morning? For a moment the clouds lifted, and after many days we saw the blue sky again, and there, at an incredible height, nearly 24,000 feet above our heads,

frighteningly far away and near at the same time, we saw that divinely pure and unsubstantial thing consisting only of shape and light, the sparkling pyramid of Kanchenjunga.

Nearing Sing-hik. Yesterday's unforgettable vision lasted only for a moment. Then the mists closed down again, plunging us back into our stifling, subterranean world of green, drizzling semi-darkness, pregnant with the aggressive smells of the forest. Trees, trees, millions of trees. This evening, while day was slowly turning into night, I heard some blue pigeons singing in the distance. Their chirping is musical and exquisitely sad, with strange transpositions into a minor key of a motif that they repeat at long intervals in a delicate tone which would have delighted Debussy.

Between Sing-hik and Tong. The people that live in these valleys, the Lepchas, are small, furtive, and silent. The excesses of nature in these parts—the terrifying rivers, the destroying, devouring forests, the ice-bound peaks vanishing into the sky—seem to have completely overwhelmed and subdued those who came to live here in ancient times. Or was it only by creeping, hiding, evading, that adaptation was possible? Today I heard a barely perceptible rustle behind my back, and two barefooted men emerged from the dense green undergrowth. One was aged about fifty; the other was his son. Both had long hair, as is still the custom in these parts, but neither had the trace of a beard. The boy, whose name was Gu-lung, was nineteen years old, but he behaved like a girl of thirteen or fourteen, full of shyness, timidity, and blushes. The Lepchas now number only a few thousand, and most of them are to be found in the neighbourhood of Mangan, Sing-hik, and along the valley of Talung.

The government of Sikkim is in the hands of a small ruling class of Tibetans who invaded the territory from the north some centuries ago. On the whole they are vigorous, enterprising people. The majority of the population of Sikkim, however, consists of recently immigrated Nepalese. Like the Lepchas, they are little men, but they are extremely active, and spread all over the place like human ants. There is some resemblance between them and the Japanese. (Nepal, the Japan of India!) They are gradually spreading east and west. They

work hard, cooperate with each other, organize themselves, multiply, and always talk Nepalese. In the country they always go about armed with a curved blade called a *kukuri*. I bought one yesterday from two Nepalese who looked at me unpleasantly. I thought that buying their weapon from them was the one means of enabling me to rest really peacefully. The *kukuri*, complete with sheath, subsidiary dagger, flint and steel, etc., weighs about five pounds.

Following our stony mule track we come across Lepcha dwellings every now and then. They live in huts, of the kind typical of all southeastern Asia, built on piles of varying height. From Japan to Java, from Burma to Bengal, the details vary but the structure is the same.

At one point we met some Tibetans by the side of a stream. They had erected a tent, had been bathing, and were eating and drinking. When I greeted them in Tibetan they insisted on my joining them to drink some *chang*. The differences in character between the human groups that inhabit these valleys are most marked. The Lepchas are small, shy, silent, childish; they are always concealing themselves and know all the secrets of the forest. The Nepalese are small and silent, too, but they are active and vigorous, continually bestirring themselves like ants. The Tibetans are big, noisy, expansive, the least Oriental of Orientals, men made to stride like giants over their endless plateaux, always ready to drink, sing, or believe in a miracle; merchants, bandits, monks, and shepherds.

Near Tsungtang. The world seems to consist of nothing but water and vegetation. Stones and rocks are so completely covered by the forest that you never see them. Only where there is flowing water is the mountain rock laid bare. Today we had a little sunshine, and I went down to the Tista for a bathe. The air is still very hot, but the water, which comes straight down from the glaciers, is freezing. The strength of the current was frightening, and it was impossible to swim. All one could do was to take a dip between some huge boulders near the bank where the waters were less swift. Not far away a rope bridge, of the kind used in these parts, was suspended over the ravine. It danced about in an alarming manner, and only the

Lepchas are able to use it with confidence. The abundance of water in the valleys of the eastern Himalayas is a terrifying thing. Everywhere there are waterfalls, torrents, whirlpools, springs. You have the distinct impression that these mountains are still fabulously young, that the levelling-out processes are still extremely active, that everything is moving, plunging, slipping, and sliding downhill. Actually the water carries away fantastic quantities of earth and sand and rolls down masses of rock, thus destroying the colossal mountains bit by bit every day.

Lachung. The last mists and the first fir trees. Suddenly we are in another, a more familiar world, in surroundings that recall the Alps, Italy, beautiful and distant Europe. Even the huts are no longer built on piles and covered with straw. But for some typical signs which show that we are in a Buddhist country, the cottages in front of us might be in the Bernese Oberland or the Val d'Aosta.

Beyond Lachung. Once more we are in the midst of a thick and apparently endless forest, but how different it is from the forest we were in only two or three days ago! We have now reached a height of 9,000 feet, and instead of being surrounded by the alien and exotic, the stupendous and the horrifying, we are now among vegetation consisting of conifers and rhododendrons. The contrast could not be more complete. The only obstacle that confronts the teeming life in the never-ending heat and humidity down below is the lack of physical space. Every form of life has to make its way at the expense of other forms of life; life thrives on death, and the thief and the parasite, the blood-sucker and the crafty, fatten and multiply. Up here the struggle for life is different. It is less a struggle of the species among themselves than a struggle of all against the elements—wind, frost, rock, avalanches, storms. The consequence is that the essential character of the two forests is diametrically different. The forest we are in now is tall and dry. Here craft and cunning no longer count for anything, because what is needed for survival is strength, toughness, innate vigour. In human terms the forest down below is like a big city in which craft and racketeering prosper, but up here we are

among life lived in the sun and the wind, the big things in the face of which it is useless to lie.

Up a lateral valley. Rhododendrons! In the Himalayas the rhododendrons are trees as tall as lime or walnut trees. Instead of being humble little plants, as in the Alps, they form thickets that cover whole mountainsides. From May to July they bear superb pink, pale violet, or bright yellow flowers, flowers delicate almost to the point of decadence. This morning I left the mule track, the paths, the last traces of the passage of man, and spent hours climbing a lateral valley lost in the forest. At this distance from any inhabited place nature is intact, wild and full of mystery. I had to climb over the trunks of some trees that had recently been struck down by a storm, and others that had been lying there for years, covered with lichen and moss. Every now and then a frightened bird emerged from the foliage and flew away. The dry leaves, the pine needles, the fallen branches, crackled when I walked on them. Finally, in these recesses of the primeval forest, suitable for battles between bears and giants or for the yells of savages, I came upon whole gardens of sumptuous rhododendrons, rich, infinitely refined and languorous, having a texture that was something between flesh and silk, tinted with delicate colours—a festival that has been quietly prepared every year for ages, for nobody at all.

Beyond Yumtang. We are among the last trees, and the first snow is visible in the distance. This morning we set out at dawn. Strange lichens, pearly with dew in the early morning light, hung from the plants in the forest.

Nearing Samdong. The trees suddenly disappeared. Thickets of rhododendrons accompanied us for a time, and then we came to the open spaces, the high mountains. But who were those sulphur-coloured personages climbing up the mountainside? They looked like flamens on the way to a solemn reunion on some remote summit. They were *chu-kar*, strange plants belonging to the *Poligonaceae*, which grow in isolation up to incredible heights, up to 15,000 feet and more, in the moraines, beyond the last meagre pastures

in which only grass, sedge, and tiny alpins can survive. The porters told me that the pith of the chu-kar could be eaten raw. I tried it, and it was refreshing. Whoever brought you up here, superb, exotic plant worthy of a greenhouse? Perhaps you are a last greeting from India.

Sebu-la (17,224 feet). Our first real meeting with Central Asia was with a yak, the great, hairy, tame, slow, abstemious, and agreeable beast of burden of Tibet. It was grazing peacefully at the foot of a colossus 21,000 feet high and was perfectly at home. Then we came to the first snow, and we camped for the first time in frost. We set out for the Sebu pass yesterday at dawn, and soon the sun was illuminating the ice palaces of Chombu, the last important mountain in these parts still unconquered by the feet of man. Last night we camped beside a little lake, in the still waters of which unknown and unnamed peaks were beautifully reflected. It was strange that the lake did not freeze; perhaps it is fed from warm springs. At Samdong, not far away, there are several such lakes.

We are only a few miles from the valley of the Tista, which we spent the last few days climbing, but how infinitely remote seems the world that we left down below! There we were oppressed by the enormous overhanging mountains, the exuberance of the vegetation, the low ceiling of clouds that weighed down on us like a horrible penance. Here we breathe the open sky and see the giants of the eastern Himalayas—Kanchenjunga (28,146 feet), Kangchenjau (22,700 feet), Pauhunri (23,180 feet), Chomolhari (23,930 feet), and, in the extreme distance, Everest (29,002 feet), shining like sublime and brilliant islands in a boundless sea of space. We can turn round and say: There is Tibet, there is Nepal, and over there is the huge expanse of India. We are on terms of intimacy with the breath of the continents.

The valleys down below were hot and wet, full of a voracious, imperious or cunning, aggressive or insinuating vitality. Up here we are in a realm of ice and clarity, of ultimate and primordial purity. How great is the difference between night and death here and down below! Down below night is even more alive than day. Night turns

the valley into a huge maw. You seem to be surrounded by strange secretions; you feel the touch of strange breath upon you; invisible desires and terrors entwine themselves into the dense tissue of branches, leaves, and soil. But up here the night is nothing but light and space. Everything lies motionless in the great frost, with only the stars shining, or the moon gliding along channels of ice or sheets of blue brightness. Time and matter seem no longer to exist. Hence here death immediately suggests eternity. Down below death is decomposition, a minor, unimportant phase in the cycle of living; it is the state which permanently gives nourishment to the vortex of new lives. Up here night has the solemn, crystalline dignity of the great truths; it is mind, God.

The porters accompanying us are Bhutias (Tibetans) from Lachung. They are strong, simple, cheerful fellows, perfectly attuned to these places. They face the climb without complaint; on the contrary, they regard the enterprise and its difficulties as a personal challenge, which they cheerfully accept. In the evening they sing round the camp fire, and they sing on the passes, loudly, in chorus. The valleys far below are buried in mists, which from above are seas of cloud. How sudden was the transition! A few days ago we could stop to admire the reflection of a ray of light on a butterfly's wing. This evening one of the porters picked up a handful of snow and let it drop bit by bit to the ground. The crystals flew lightly away, reflecting the light of the sun setting between the peaks in gleams of green, pink, and gold.

Gangtok: dinner with the maharajah

In this Himalayan landscape, with its dizzy extremes and excesses, it is appropriate that by way of contrast there should be a toy capital, with a toy bazaar, toy gardens, and toy houses, set among tree ferns and wild orchids on a hillside among the clouds. Such, indeed, is Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim. We reached Gangtok several days ago. It is connected with the rest of the world by telegraph line, it

is at the end of a motor road (70 miles from Siliguri), it has a post office, a hospital, and the maharajah's palace. All the same, you feel out of the world. The whole thing is a fairy tale.

Yesterday we were invited to the palace. We were received without any formality, and it was a very agreeable occasion. This evening we were invited again, this time to dinner. We were twenty-six at table. I watched the maharajah, small, thin, and elderly, as delicate as a little bird and as noble as a coat of arms, draped magnificently in his brown silk Tibetan robe, bend over his plate, peering through his thick spectacles, and follow up—with notable skill, it cannot be denied—some peas which tried to escape the points of his fork.

All Gangtok was present at the dinner in honour of Professor Tucci and his companions: the Political Officer and his wife, the maharajah's private secretary, and the heads of the various noble families who hold the reins of government of the tiny state of Sikkim. Every now and then the maharajah turned and spoke to Mrs. Hopkinson, the wife of the Political Officer of the Indian government. I think the subject of their conversation was butterflies. The butterflies of Sikkim are extremely beautiful and incredibly varied. His Highness Sir Tashi Namgyal, Maharajah of Sikkim, though of Tibetan origin like the whole ruling caste of Sikkim, is a perfect representative of the small, secretive type of humanity that peoples the valleys at the feet of the giants of the Himalayas. He loves fine things, rare stones, lacquer, and jade, which he caresses with the thin fingers of a refined ascetic, and he passes as quietly from room to room of his palace as if he moved by levitation. I could not take my eyes off him as he tackled his peas; it was an exquisite, microscopic struggle; something between a game of chess and the infinite pains of the miniaturist; something between a secret rite and a piece of court ceremonial. But now the struggle was finished. The last pea, defeated and impaled on the fork, was raised to the royal lips, which opened delicately to receive it, as if about to give, or receive, a kiss.

The dining room was a small one. The big oval table and its twenty-six diners practically filled it. On the walls were *tang-ka* (Tibetan pictures on cloth), depicting scenes from the legend of the

Buddha. They belonged to a series called the Tse-pa chu-ni (The Twelve Episodes of the Life), and were of notable, but not exceptional, beauty. The magnificent Tibetan sense of colour was reflected not only in our hosts' pictures, but also in their clothes. The maharajah, besides his brown silk robe, which was held round his waist by an orange sash, wore black velvet Mongolian slippers with green flourishes. The princesses Pemá Chöki and Sönám Pal-den, to say nothing of the wife of the Lachag Taring, were dressed in Tibetan style and wore rich golden *kau* (boxes for amulets) on their necks. The men all wore silk robes of various colours, and all had red, orange, or yellow silk sashes round their waists.

Among all this splendour and delight for the eye we Europeans looked like penguins. When will Western taste revert to expressing itself in the richness and colour of the people painted by a Bronzino or a Holbein? The black and white evening clothes of the twentieth century are a grim and horrible thing. In the company of intelligent Asians who stick to their magnificent costumes one can feel only an acute sense of shame at our stupid abdication. It is said that colour is stupid and effeminate. One might as well say that love is effeminate.

Tibetan is the language of the palace, and to a large extent life is lived in the Tibetan manner. The title of maharajah attributed to the Dren-jon-gi Gyal-po ("king of Sikkim" in Tibetan) is one of the few concessions to Indian usage. Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, is undoubtedly the local Paris from which fashion, etiquette, and customs emanate.

Opposite the maharajah was seated the Princess Pemá Chöki, his second daughter (the eldest is married to a high Tibetan functionary and lives in Lhasa). As the maharajah is separated from the maharani, Pemá Chöki acted as hostess. She is twenty-two, her name means "lotus of the happy faith," and she is as pretty as her mythical name. She is intelligent, proud, and high-strung. Her black hair, gathered into a plait in the Tibetan style, provides the frame for a slender, pale face, and eyes that are now intense and penetrating, now unexpectedly languorous. Her mouth is small and expressive,

passing from smiles to disappointment, from the seriousness of a thoughtful moment to laughter at a misunderstanding, with the quick changes of mood of an alert and active mind.

When dinner was over Pemá Chöki rose, and one noticed that she was small. But her Asian dress made her look taller. Besides, she is so well-proportioned that it is only when standing close to her that you can tell her real height. She wore a robe of violet silk, with a sash round her waist and an apron of brilliant, electric colours. The golden kau she wore was thickly studded with diamonds. Pemá Chöki's personality was tastefully expressed in a few innovations immediately perceptible to an experienced observer. Instead of the traditional *lham* (coloured cloth slippers), for instance, she wore elegant black leather French sandals, and her fingernails were painted red.

After dinner we went into the drawing room, and I found myself next to Pemá Chöki, who talks excellent English. She knows about the West from books and study but has never been outside Asia. At school she learned English stories and poems by heart (she went to school at Kalimpong), and now reads *Life*, *Vogue*, and the *Reader's Digest*. She confused Colbert (Claudette) with Flaubert (Gustave) and Aristotle with Mephistopheles. But of Tibetan culture she knows every aspect. She adores Buddhist ceremonies and has a special veneration for Milarepa.

"Just imagine," she said, as if talking about some catastrophe that had happened only yesterday, "Milarepa [who incidentally lived a thousand years ago] dwelt in a cave in the Himalayas, among snow and ice, winter and summer. I go into the mountains sometimes myself, but I shouldn't like to stay there always! Milarepa had one single possession: a pitcher for water. One day the pitcher fell and broke into a hundred fragments. Instead of complaining or despairing, Milarepa sang. He said to the pitcher, 'You were the only thing that I had. Now that you're broken, you have become a lama and preached an admirable sermon on the impermanence of things!' . . . Rather divine, isn't it?"

A servant dressed like a genie of the woods passed with a tray.



1. India, the Greece of Asia
“The Marriage of Siva and Parvati” at Elephanta



2. The forest has its own personality, its own desires, whims, and hatreds (Sikkim)



3. The forest absorbs (Sikkim)



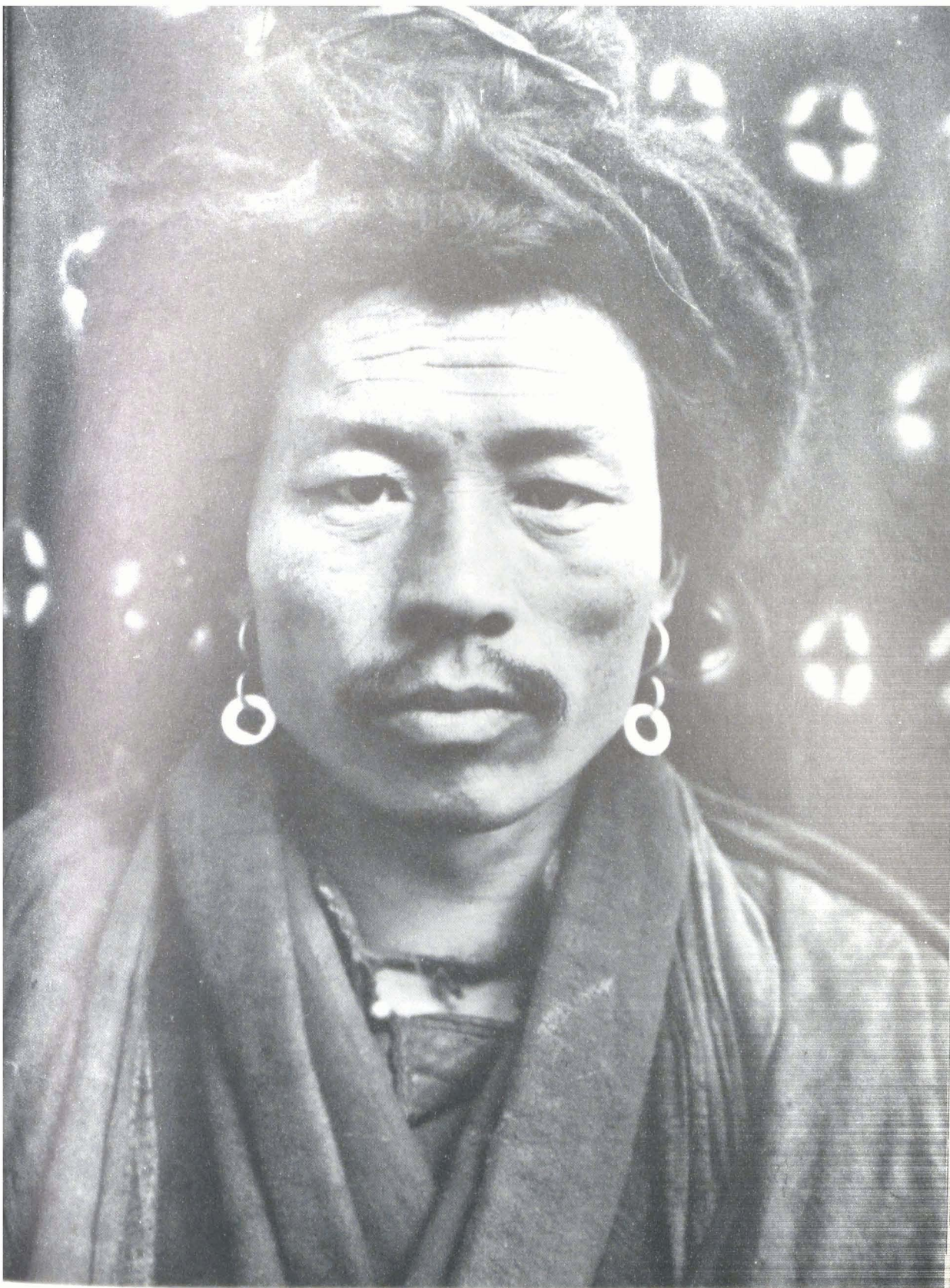
4. Pandim(?) from Mangan



5. Walls scale the mountains (Gyantse)

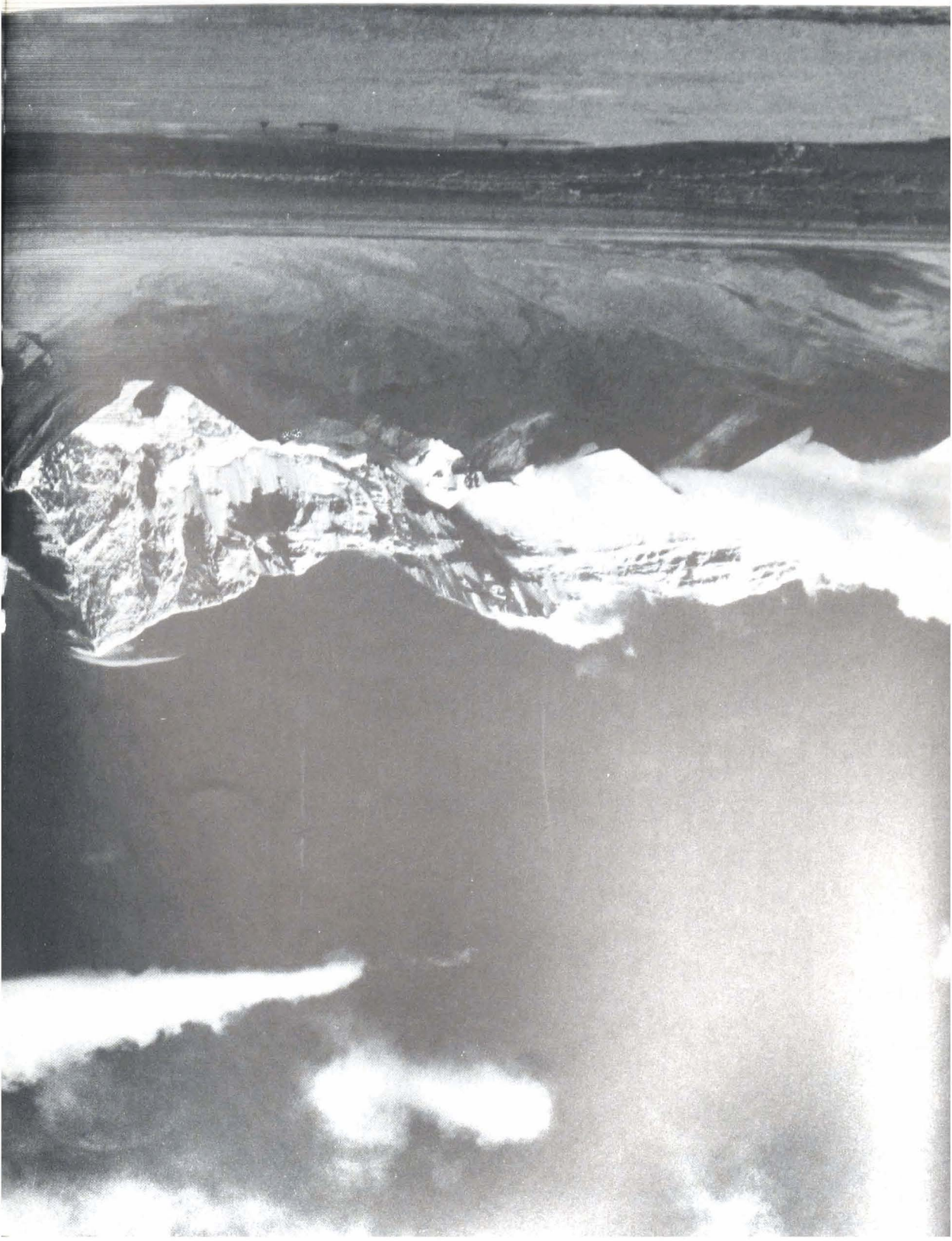


6. The Tibet of mystery, secrets, and death (Dung-kar monastery)



7. Lama of the Kar-gyu sect

8. The Tibet of sun, deserts, and glaciers (Chomolhari, from Tuna)





9. Princess Pemà Chöki Namgyal: "Am I foolish to think that a lama must be handsome to lead the mind to faith?"

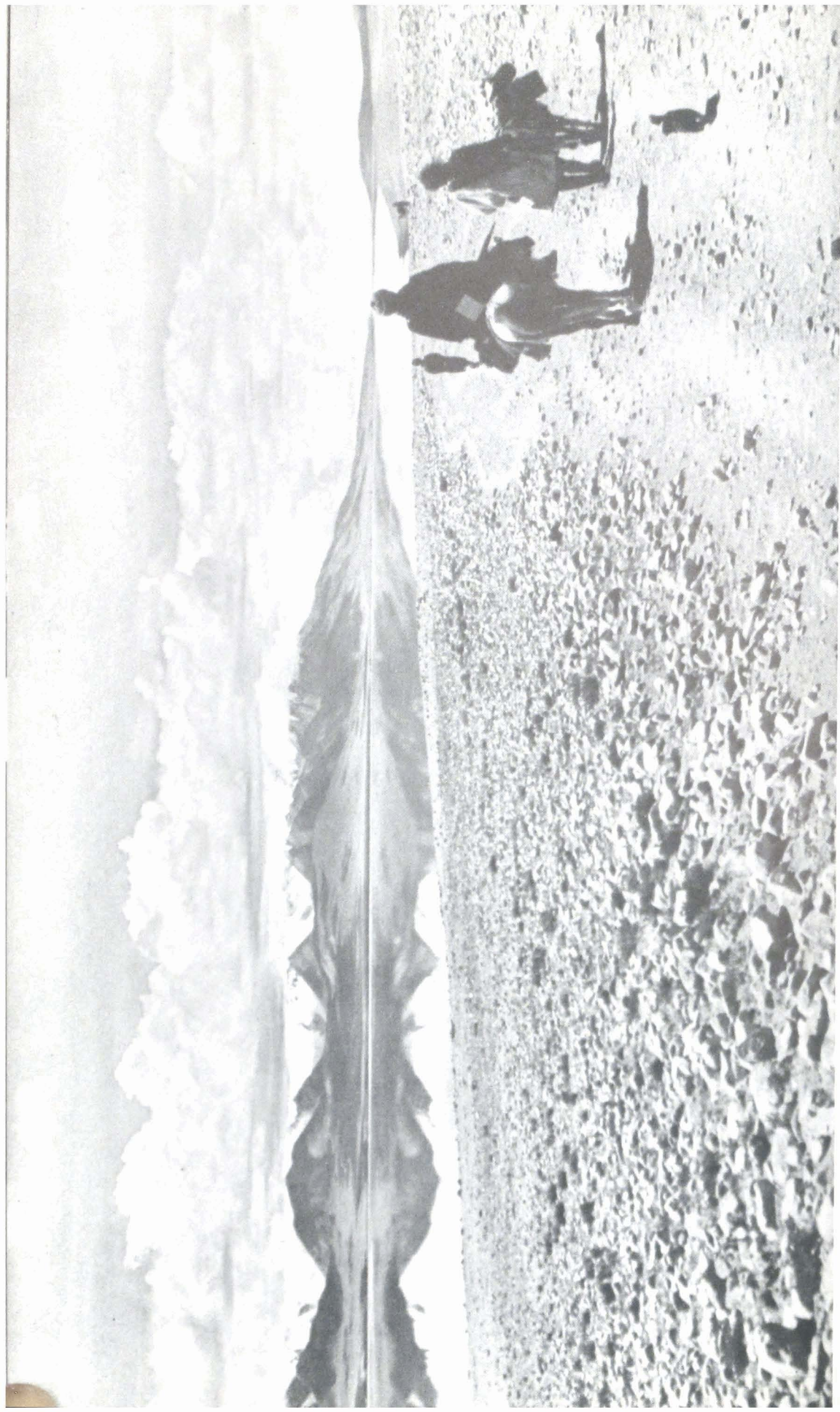


10. Mystery in the form of drama—Masks, Kirimtse monastery





11. Habitual thief (Gyantse)



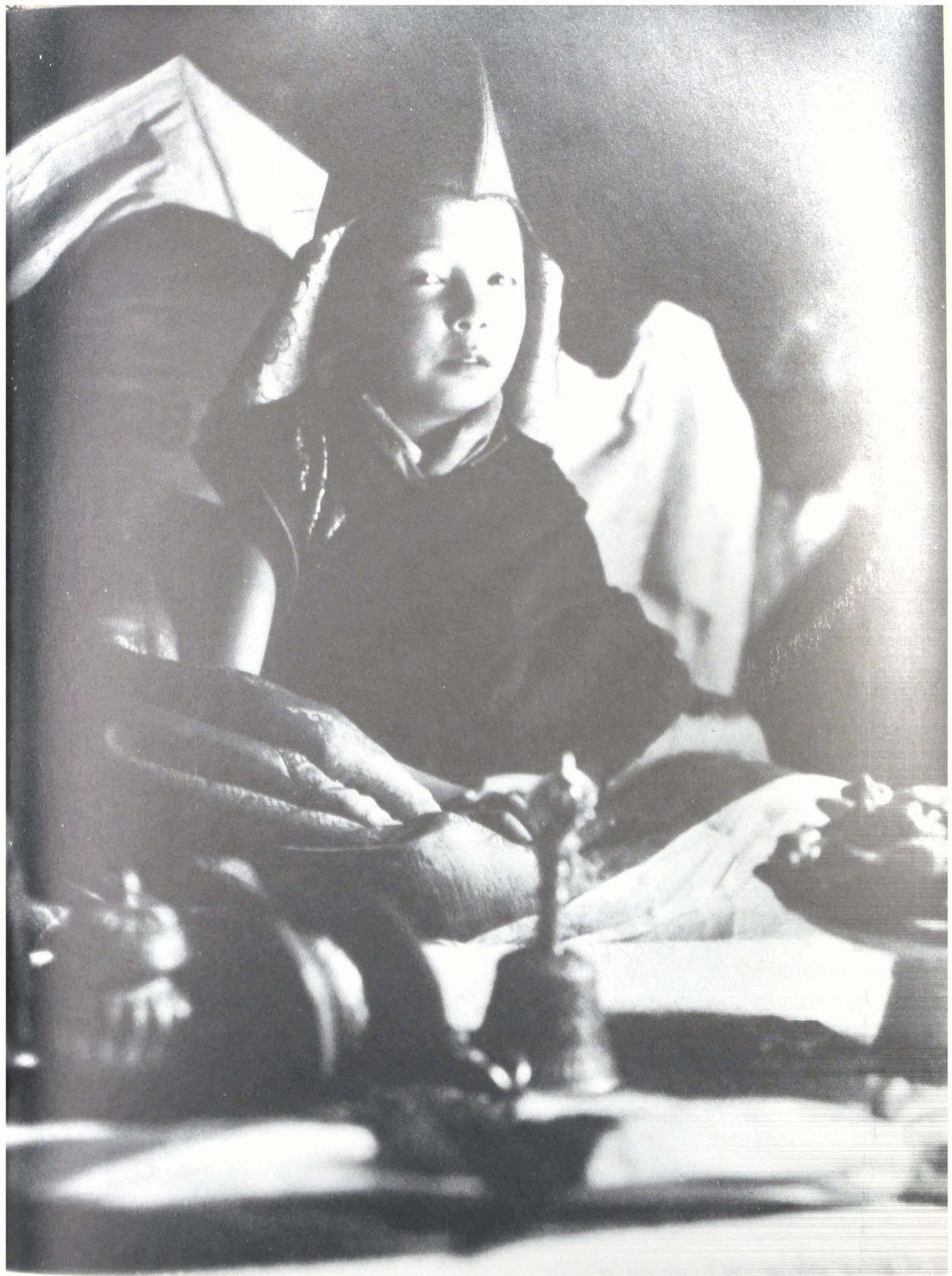
12. Space and silence (Lake of Rham)



13. Yatung



14. A matron wearing her jewels



15. The body is like a garment which one puts on and takes off.
The living Bodhisattva of the Dung-kar monastery



16. The gesture of reasoning.
Statue in a temple at Rinchengang

The princess invited me to take a drink and continued, "In a few days' time there's going to be a wonderful ceremony at the monastery; you simply must come! A new lama has arrived from Tibet. He has such a beautiful voice! And then he's really handsome. Am I foolish if I suggest that a lama should be handsome, to help him to lead the mind to faith?"

Pemá raised the glass containing the liqueur that we had brought with us as a gift from Italy and laughed. She was well aware that her last remark had been delightfully frivolous. Without knowing it, she had repeated a question asked a thousand years before by Sei Shonagon in the journal she kept as a lady at the court of the Fujiwara in Japan.

The princess then talked about her visit to Lhasa two years ago—the gorgeous processions of lamaist archbishops and abbots, the singing, the incense, and the music. "Imagine an important ceremony in a big temple," she said. "Imagine a gathering of all the highest dignitaries of the Church and all the principal families of Lhasa. Well, right in the middle of the blessing a servant came and fetched me, or rather I suddenly noticed him making signs to me from the other end of the temple. As I was sitting nearly in the front row, I almost died at the thought of getting up and treading on the feet of all the grandest ladies of Tibet. The wives of several *sha-pes* (ministers) were there, and several relatives of the Dalai Lama. Terrible, wasn't it? Also I wasn't sure that my hair was tidy. But the servant kept on making urgent signs to me, and I thought that something terrible must be happening at home—perhaps the house was burning down or thieves were trying to break in. Heaven knows what it might have been!"

"And what did it turn out to be?"

"All it turned out to be, after I had trampled on the toes of a large number of important people, was my puppy, which was bringing up all the rice she had been given an hour before. I expect there were dogfish fins in it, which she detests! What a predicament! All I could do was to shut her up in the only place available at the moment, the *gön-kang!*"

The word *gön-kang* struck a discordant note. As I listened to the princess's description I had been imagining the scene in the lamp-filled temple, with the gold brocade, the psalm singing, the silk-robed lamas, the clouds of incense, the gilded statues, the crowd of dignitaries in all the splendour of ecclesiastical and feudal Tibet, the Tibet that still belongs to the Asia of Marco Polo. A *gön-kang*, however, is a dark, crypt-chapel such as is to be found in every monastery; it is the abode of the *yi-dam*, the tutelary deities—a mysterious recess, where the stink of the rancid butter of the offerings on the altars is even more sickening than usual. At the entrance are hung the decomposing bodies of bears, wild dogs, yaks, and snakes, stuffed with straw, to frighten away the evil spirits who might desire to pass the threshold. The carcasses fall to pieces, and the whole place is as disgusting as a space under a flight of stairs with us would be if it were full of rubbish covered with cobwebs, ancient umbrellas that belonged to great-grandfather, and fragments of bedraggled fur that had been worn by a dead aunt. On top of all, of course, there is the rancid butter. Pictures of the gods are painted on the walls. At first sight you would say they were demons, monsters, infernal beings. They are, however, good spirits, protectors, who assume these terrifying shapes to combat the invisible forces of evil.

The association of Pemá Chöki with a *gön-kang* struck me as a criminal offence. It was impossible to imagine anything lovelier than the princess at that moment, with her colour, her jewels, and her youth, and impossible to imagine anything more revolting than a *gön-kang*, a dark, dusty pocket of stale air, stinking of rancid butter, containing skinless, greasy carcasses, with terrifying gods painted on the walls, riding monsters, wearing diadems of skulls and necklaces of human heads, and holding blood-filled skulls in their hands as cups.

The princess once more raised the transparent glass to her lips, sipped, smiled, and continued, "But you don't even know what a *gön-kang* is!" She then gave me a full description. She spoke of bones and dances, of *dri-dug*, the sacred knife, of *dorje*, the thunder-

bolt, of garlands of skulls, of sceptres of impaled men. In her was Tibet, the secret and untranslated Tibet; Tibet, the land of exaltation, beauty, and horror, the land of open sky and stony wastes and fetid gön-kangs, of lofty peaks sparkling in the sun and of places where dead bodies are hacked to pieces to provide meals for the vultures; land of simplicity and cruelty, of purity and orgy.

Changu: Verlaine and the wind-men

Pemá Chöki and her brother, Prince Thondup, decided to accompany us towards Tibet to do some skiing in the mountains. Climbing up to Changu with Pemá Chöki was a continuous process of discovery, both charming and exhilarating. She was no longer a fairy-tale princess in her toy palace, surrounded by Tibetan pictures painted on precious cloth, surrounded by jade and chairs in the worst English colonial taste. Now she was a simple and sturdy companion, breathing the thin air of a 12,000-foot altitude and laughing in the sun, her head covered with a fur cap of the kind worn in the high plateaux in winter. Who would have suspected that there was so much strength and determination in her pearl-and-porcelain body?

Today there was snow all the way up to the mountaintops, from whence the wind kept carrying away minute crystals that glistened in the sun. I was still haunted every now and then by the gön-kang story. How reconcile the divine purity and serenity of these mountains, the infinite sweetness of sky and space, with the stinking, blood-thirsty horror of the lamaist phantasmagoria? Yet both were Tibet. How reconcile those monstrous tutelary deities with the grace of Pemá Chöki? Perhaps the mystery of Pemá Chöki was to some extent the mystery of Tibet, and perhaps she could give me the clue to its solution.

This evening we spent hours round the camp fire sipping *chang*, the Sikkim beer brewed from millet, from tall bamboo cups called *paip*. We talked of Verlaine and Keats. I admired the princess's knowledge of Western culture, though laughing with her every now and then at some mistake. Is not a temple containing a Greek statue

the same sort of thing to her that a Chinese pavilion, or a pagoda, is to us—namely, the extreme of the exotic?

Next, I don't know how, Pemá Chöki started talking about things more truly her own; about *lung-pa* (wind-men), for instance—monks who, after years of extreme asceticism and strenuous preparation, succeed in freeing themselves almost completely from the weight of the human frame and are therefore able to travel hundreds of miles in a single day.

"In fact, they can make a complete circuit of Tibet in a week," Pemá assured me.

She also told me how a storm arose if you threw a stone into certain lakes, and about a witch who was buried near a Lhasa monastery.

"Though she died such a long time ago," the princess said, "the top of her head sticks a little way out of the ground every day. Just imagine, she actually has fleas in her hair! The lamas exorcize her every day, but she is stronger than they!"

This, and not little temples with imitation Greek statues or cardboard-and-paste gardens painted by English governesses, is the soil in which Pemá Chöki's mind has its real roots; a soil honeycombed with ancient dead, where esoteric poems and thaumaturgic revelations can come to light any day, where there are gods who make love in the midst of fire.

It was natural that the conversation should come round to poisons. "Be careful on your travels," the princess said. "In Tibet you never know. There are poisons that kill without anybody's noticing them. In Tibet it is believed that poisoning a person who is fortunate or rich or powerful means that his fortune or wealth or power accrues to the poisoner. Sometimes poisoning is done for still more subtle reasons. People try to inherit sanctity that way. A great sage runs the risk that some madman may try to poison him in the hope of getting for himself the sage's priceless advantage over ordinary people—his superior position in the cycle of birth and death. Several attempts were made to poison my uncle for that reason!"

“What? The famous thaumaturge whom I’ve heard so much about?”

“Yes.”

I poked the fire, and we drank more chang.

Pemá Chöki continued, “Poisons, you know, are almost living things. You smile? You don’t believe it? Ah, but you don’t know what strange things happen in these parts! I know a wizard who had prepared some poison to kill a rival. But, as it happened, this rival was taken ill and died a natural death just a day or two before the stars said the poison would be ready and effective. Well, there was no way out. When a poison is ready, it has to be used. The wizard had either to give the poison to somebody, or die himself. The poison was ready and waiting. It was hungry, don’t you see? So the wizard gave it to his daughter. Poison is like a living thing. It’s alive, and has a will of its own. Terrible? But everything’s terrible in Tibet!”

Everything’s terrible in Tibet! The phrase used by pretty Pemá Chöki awakened memories and echoes in my mind. It was true, true. The silence, the space, the temples crowded with gods, like ships crowded with crazy people stranded on a crazy coast. . . . But the mystery of Tibet now started taking on a new light. Because of this new friendship I began to see things, no longer from the outside, but from within. I began to be able to feel them, and when one begins feeling, is one not nearer to understanding?

Pemá talked about her uncle again. “He was the most extraordinary man I have ever met. I remember that when I was a little girl he lived in a completely empty room and flew—”

“Weren’t you afraid? Did you actually see him?”

“Yes. He did what you would call exercises in levitation. I used to take him in a little rice. He would be motionless in mid-air. Every day he rose a little higher. In the end he rose so high that I found it difficult to hand the rice up to him. I was a little girl, and I had to stand on tip-toe. . . . There are certain things you don’t forget!”

The *chowdika*r of the shelter had thrown a lot of wood onto the

SECRET TIBET

fire, which blazed up. Warm and still full of light, we all went out for a moment to breathe the night air. A huge, dazzling moon rode in the night sky. All round us was nothing but the starry silver of the snow. As we walked the ice on the path crackled beneath our feet. It seemed to be a scream in the silence.



THE METAPHYSICAL ADVENTURES OF PRINCE GAUTAMA

The Natu Pass: the entry to Tibet

ONE of the passes by which one can gain entry to Tibet is the Natu-la, a few miles from Changu. It takes you across a grim, stony saddle surrounded by gloomy, ragged mountains. At the top of the pass is a big cairn, some stakes, and hundreds of little coloured flags on which Buddhist prayers are printed by woodcut. When a caravan goes by everyone adds a new stone to the pile, crying, "*So-ya-la-so!*"

When we reached the cairn the sky had darkened a little and sunset was approaching. Pink and brown snatches of cloud floated above us, as in seventeenth-century paintings. The air was cold. Ahead, in the direction of Tibet, was the clear sky normal in those parts, now distant from Bengal; it is the wind coming up from India that brings damp, clouds, rain, and snow to these mountains. Piero Mele had reached the top before me, and was already putting on his skis. It was April, there was still snow about, and we wanted to make our entrance into Central Asia in a solemn and sporting manner. Before going on I turned for a moment to look back on the valleys from which we had come. They were already hidden by the violet mists of evening. Good-bye, Sikkim! Good-bye, pretty Pemá Chöki!

I cannot say I enjoyed the descent. I was suffering from an attack of mountain sickness, and every now and then I had to stop. Piero kept making fun of me, but as soon as the snow came to an end he helped me by carrying my skis. We walked for a good stretch along the muddy, stony mule track, and then it grew dark. The first small thickets were succeeded by bigger ones, and then we came upon the black outlines of some fir trees; we were down to tree level

again. We reached Chubitang, our destination for the night, very late. Tucci and Colonel Moise were there already, warming themselves by a magnificent fire of dried branches.

Every time I cross the Natu-la I think of Paljor and his standing corpses, an incident that served as a most appropriate introduction to these remote parts of Asia. It happened several years ago. We had reached the pass in a thick mist. The air was full of obscure menace. The contorted, weather-worn rocks loomed out of the grey mists like the shapes of mysterious beings who had stopped and were waiting for us. It was most disagreeable.

“They look like *ro-lang*,” said Paljor, who was carrying the sack containing my cameras. He smiled knowingly, wanting me to believe that he did not really believe in *ro-lang*, but I’m sure that at heart he did believe in them. *Ro-lang* are “standing corpses”—a horrible idea, a characteristic product of the diseased and sinister Tibetan imagination, which revels in bones, blood, and death—all the pleasures of the slaughterhouse. Nothing pleases it more than the thought of troops of demons engaged in liturgical rites among dismembered parts of the human body, skeletons and entrails, disporting themselves in lakes of blood, using skulls as sacred symbols. The Tibetan imagination enjoys the macabre, delights in the revolting, intoxicates itself with tortures described with voluptuous relish and realism. In a way the *ro-lang* incident was an appropriate welcome extended to us by secret Tibet.

On the other hand, how surprising and unexpected all this was! Travelling in Tibet, over those wind-swept plateaux, where the sun, with his escort of light and happy clouds, is the lord of space, where everything is clear, limpid, and crystalline, where there are no mysterious forests or long-drawn-out northern twilights, you would expect to find a people whose interior world was in more apparent harmony with their natural surroundings. You would expect to find the serene reasoning of the Greeks, a cult of beauty of Doric simplicity, a courageous spirit of luminous analysis, southern, sunny empyreans, mythologies in which gods as august as the Himalayas revelled in metaphysical harmonies the essence of which was ex-

treme abstraction. You would expect Tibet to generate in the human mind the daring of the highest flights of Western mathematics.

There is a theory, as ancient as man's first reasoning about his own environment, according to which a country's landscape and climate in some way explain not only its inhabitants' physical appearance, but also their character, philosophy, religion, and art. From Hippocrates (*περὶ ἀέρον, ὕδατεν και τόπον*) to Rätzel, from Polybius to Taine, it has been regarded as a self-evident proposition, not even worthy of discussion.

That man must be influenced by his environment is undeniable, but to define its influence is another matter. "*Une vie d'analyse pour une heure de synthèse!*" exclaimed Fustel de Coulanges. The time for synthesis is still a long way off, though no one seems to be aware of it. I open a volume of history at random and find the phrase: "It seems reasonable to say that the Parthenon could have arisen only on the soil and beneath the sky of Attica." (H. Berr.) The proposition could be interpreted as follows: Given a people of great intelligence, living in a country endowed with clear and brilliant sunshine and a much-indented coast, a climate in which everything appears in sharp outline, where everything is clear-cut and the whole atmosphere encourages objectivity and discourages vague dreaminess and the unbridled flow of the imagination, the natural result is the Parthenon. The Parthenon is the result of the spontaneous flowering of a civilization guided by clear and luminous ideas to harmonious and simple goals. Should we not expect from the same environment a cult of the rational in philosophy, of the nude in art, of the measurable in geometry? And as for the gods, it is only natural that they should be comprehensible, reasonable, anthropomorphous. . . . The argument is perfect, too perfect.

The difficulty is that the whole argument could be applied to Tibet. Tibet is a vast, rocky country, a kingdom of the sky and the sun, where the wind blows for days with no obstacle other than the ice-bound, deserted crests of the *kang-ri*, the "snow mountains," where rain is rare, and mist exceptional, where there are no forests, where everything seems a glorious symbol of the most crystalline ration-

ality, of serene and harmonious thought. Will not the interior life of the inhabitants of such a country resemble the nature that surrounds them? Ingenious and deluded theorist, your logical castles in the air will receive blow after blow from each successive contact with the Tibetan soul, and will end by being mercilessly demolished.

“How do you become a ro-lang? And who becomes a ro-lang?” I asked Paljor.

“If you are struck by lightning and killed, sometimes you become a ro-lang,” the young man replied. “Your body stands upright, with its eyes closed, and walks. It walks straight ahead, and nobody can stop it, or make it change direction. In any case anyone who touches a ro-lang falls sick and dies. Ro-lang wander about the mountains. They stop only if someone throws a shoe at them. . . .”

This last remark broke the tension, and I laughed heartily. But that too was characteristic of the country. The sudden transition from the macabre, the grotesque, the obscene, to the comic, the sudden burst of laughter, was something essentially Tibetan. Paljor, however, remained serious. For him the throwing of the shoe was a magical act, an act of exorcism, a rite, and not a ridiculous anticlimax as it seems to us.

At Chubitang: implication and explanation

At every stage along the caravan route to Lhasa you find a visitors' book. At Chubitang, when I turned over the pages, I found the names of many people I had met in Tibet or Sikkim—Granger, for instance, a huge Englishman, as vast as a peninsula. I met him ten years ago at Gyantse, where he was in command of the company of Indian soldiers which the British government obtained the right to station there in 1904 to guard the caravan route. (The right passed to the Indian government on August 15, 1947.) I made his acquaintance one morning, and at about three o'clock the same afternoon I found two horses outside my house. One of the horses was ridden by an impressive, black-bearded Sikh, wearing a violet turban (just like the prophets who drive the Calcutta taxicabs); the other

horse was for me. "Mr. Granger say you come play polo." Play polo? I had never done such a thing in my life. Naturally I plunged headlong into this new experience. True, at 12,000 feet even horses start panting quickly, and we had to have frequent rests. But it was an exhilarating game.

Granger had been overcome with a sudden and immense admiration for Giuseppe Tucci. "That professor of yours, he's rather formidable, isn't he?" he exclaimed. He had spent two years in Tibet without taking any interest in the country, but he now suddenly developed a passionate interest in Buddhism. In the middle of a game of polo, whenever our horses brought us close together, he would shout questions at me. "I say, what is a Bodhisattva, old boy?" or "Hullo! How much would a copy of the Kangyur cost?"

The Kangyur is the scripture of Tibetan Buddhism, and normally consists of one hundred and eight volumes. The Tangyur, which consists of the commentary on the scriptures, consists of two hundred and twenty-five volumes. The two together represent a small cartload of printed matter. That reminds me of the occasion, ten years ago, when Professor Tucci and I climbed the Natu pass with I don't remember how many mules loaded with learning. The poor beasts, used to carrying wool, tamely climbed the hill with all those stories of myriads of gods, magic formulae for initiates, subtle disquisitions, and visions of fire and bloodshed on their backs. The Tangyur, after being buried for some time in the belly of a ship, between boxes of spices and bales of cotton, eventually arrived in Rome. Who of the million of inhabitants of the capital of Italy knows that there lies, mute and dumb in the heart of that city, this fantastic universe of unexampled imaginative wealth? But what is a book which hardly anyone ever reads? Paper—the beautiful, fascinating, primitive paper of Tibet, with irregular fibres as big as veins.

Mr. and Mrs. Nalanda must have passed this way a few days ago. What a strange couple! He is a ceremonious German Jew, getting on in years, who came to the East about twenty years ago. He adopted a Buddhist name and the Buddhist faith, and he wears a kind of

generalized Indo-Tibetan robe, very distinctly yellow in colour. He wears a rosary on his wrist, and his grey hair is slightly wild, suggesting a modest music master who had not allowed himself to be entirely subdued by convention. His wife is much younger than he; she is by no means unattractive and sometimes actually rather pretty, with a white skin and black eyes and hair, just like the Parsees of Bombay. She too dresses in Tibetan style. They wander from monastery to monastery, copying pictures and living on roasted barley flour. They are rather heroic, rather ridiculous, and rather extraordinary. They do not seek excessive publicity for themselves, which means they are sincere, but fundamentally they are disloyal to the West, which is sad.

Studying the East and loving it does not involve being converted to it and renouncing one's own civilization. The glory of the West is science, not just science in the ordinary meaning of the word, but in a deeper sense—knowledge of the world that surrounds us. It is right that the West should dissect the East, as it dissects the concepts of right, good, and time, or the structure of plants and the chemistry of the stars, and in doing these things it is perfectly loyal to and consistent with itself. Europe is Leonardo, Descartes, Leibniz, Bach—the world as thought and cathedral; it is Cervantes, Titian, Shakespeare—the world as activity, colour, and passion. But in all its aspects the Western world is a world of explanation, while the Eastern world is that of implication. The West is centrifugal, living in an unstable, dynamic equilibrium; the East is centripetal, drawing into itself. It will therefore probably survive us for a long time. But the true European should not leave his place in his own civilization, in spite of the crazy, meteoric course to which it is committed.

A year ago Pemá Chöki passed this way, through Chubitang, on her way back from Lhasa. She travelled alone, with five servants. What a tiny caravan! She told me about her journey the other night, sitting by the fire, in the Changu refuge. It would have been delightful to have met her for the first time in real Tibet, on the Tang-pun-sum, for example, that endless plateau, exposed like a great bowl to the sky at the foot of Chomolhari, its greenish peaks of ice standing out

against the bright purple of the rocks. First I should have seen the caravan like tiny dots in the distance; gradually the dots would have transformed themselves into men, horses and yaks. Then I should have heard the animals' bells and the servants' voices; finally I should have seen Pemá Chöki, Lotus of the Happy Faith, for the first time, riding a horse, her eyes fixed on the distance, her head in the sun; beautiful, strong, and as fragile as jade. Then she would have disappeared into the immensity of the plain. Last of all I should have heard the voices of the men, for whom she was a delicate and precious thing to protect and defend and guide over the Himalayas.

*Approaching the Kar-gyu monastery:
the symbolism of chortens*

Coming down from the Natu pass into Tibet, we descended upon the Kar-gyu monastery. "Descended upon" is the right expression. The track suddenly grew steep, and, coming round a spur of the mountain, we saw, many hundreds of feet below us, the monastery roof, crowned by its gilded pavilion (*kenchira*) sparkling in the sun. Still farther below we saw the Amo-chu, a huge Himalayan torrent, flowing swiftly and white with foam.

It is a lovely spot, in its Alpine fashion—different from the sad, misty solitude of the first outposts of the Himalayas, and different again from the yellow, sunny, heroic Tibet of the high plateaux. This Tro-mo valley, like many similar spots in Bhutan, Upper Sikkim, and Nepal, is a delightful reminder of the Italian Alps. Torrents wind their way between steep, wooded mountainsides, and every now and then the ground is broken by precipices on which an experienced eye can detect the traces left by the passage of ancient glaciers. But we are not in the Alps. Even in its minor outposts the proportions of the Himalayan world are on a fantastic scale. There is something primordial, fabulous, and excessive even about this ordinary, fir-covered slope. One is aware, as if it were whispered or suggested, of the close presence of giants 24,000 feet high.

A little way above the monastery there are some *chortens* (Plate

58) which give a typically Tibetan aspect to the place. *Chorten* is the name given to the walled towers, anywhere from 6 to 50 feet high, which are as typical of Tibet as *torii* are of Japan or big crucifixes are of many Alpine valleys. All three are of religious origin and poetical significance. Small and insignificant though they may be in the face of the grandiose nature which surrounds them, they suffice to give form and atmosphere to a whole landscape.

In the Alps in Christian Europe a crucifix where two paths meet gives a meaning to the mountains and serves to place them in history. The crucifix speaks for a whole vision of life; it recalls the cosmic drama on which the West has been nurtured for two thousand years—the drama of God's creation of man, man's rebellion and fall, God's sacrifice of His Son to redeem His creatures by suffering.

Similarly a *torii*, the simple structure of wood and stone that stands over the entrance of a *jinja* park, a Japanese Shinto shrine, suffices with its few roughly hewn beams and its stone columns to give a poetic note to what would otherwise be no more than a clump of trees in the plain or a small wood in the mountains. A *torii* suggests by implication and remote association the vague and mysterious world, ill-defined to the intellect but full of emotional content, of the Kami, the Higher Ones; it also recalls the world of ancestors (who are Higher Ones too). It stands for continuity, union with the invisible, the archaic, the remote, with myth and the very soul of the world, which is revealed above all in trees, in the lofty foliage of the cryptomerias, where the wind murmurs secrets and the stars stop at night.

Similarly in Tibet a *chorten* gives life to a whole mountainside, to a recess in the rocks, or to a waste at the foot of an ice-covered peak, swept by the winds that blow at an altitude of 15,000 feet. Very exceptionally a *chorten* is the last resting place of a venerated lama, sometimes it contains ashes and bones, but generally its contents are sacred pictures or writings. To Tibetans the *chortens* that they pass on their travels—they are always careful to pass them on the left—stand for their religion itself. They remind them of another grandiose cosmic drama, so different from the Christian one—

the drama of myriads of beings who, passing through the cycle of birth and rebirth, travelling down the tormented and troublesome river of life and death, turn their steps, first doubtfully and hesitantly, groping in the dark, and then consciously and deliberately, in the direction of enlightenment, the state of Buddhahood. The chorten is primarily a symbol, something that fills a valley with serenity, as the presence of a loved person spiritually illuminates a house.

In Tibet you find chortens of all ages; new ones still freshly white-washed, and old ones falling to pieces, ravaged and twisted by the passage of centuries. An old, wind-worn chorten, rising against the endless background of ochre, yellow, and red mountains fading away into the blue distances and sparkling with snow, is a thing of pure poetry. Perhaps it is the poetry which always resides in works of man which embody a dream or myth; in temples (dreams of the gods), fortifications (dreams of glory), in palaces and gardens (dreams of beauty and pleasure). In these Himalayan valleys the chortens have a special charm that they do not possess in the sterile climate of the high plateaux. With the passing of the years they become covered with plants and flowers; a bush often finds a home between the stones. They thus become delightfully romantic places, worthy of an Asian Piranesi, endowed with the subtle vein of melancholy always found when the work of man is being silently taken over again by nature.

But what exactly is a chorten? The Tibetan word means literally "receptacle for offerings"; it is the Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit *dhatugarbha*, which was corrupted to *dagaba*, from which our own word "pagoda" derives. Thus its origin, like the origin of practically every spiritual motif in Tibetan civilization, is to be sought in India. It was the custom in India from time immemorial to bury the bodies of particularly venerated Buddhists, or important relics, in stone mausoleums called *stupas*. In Tibet the stupa underwent a process of lengthening and gradually assumed the shape that is now characteristic. Its purpose and its meaning also underwent a transformation. It became less of a tomb or reliquary and more of a cenotaph, and was built "to recall some special fact, or for the salvation of him

who erected it or of his relatives, or as a votive offering or expression of gratitude" (G. Tucci).

In addition, a chorten is a symbolic structure accurately representing in miniature the whole lamaist cosmology. Each part of it represents one of the elements of which everything consists, and into which bodies are resolved again after death. The base of the structure represents earth, the tower water, and so on. At the top are two objects that look like a sun and a crescent moon, but the crescent moon stands for air, the atmosphere (the inverted vault of heaven), and the sun is a flame, symbolizing space, the ether, the last and most subtle of the elements.

The Oriental love of symbolism—or rather the indispensable Oriental need of symbolism—means that other things can be, and often have to be, read into a chorten. It is thus not just a straightforward ideogram, but an esoteric one, from which knowledge is to be derived in the form of mystery and rite, an abstruse process transmitted from master to disciple within a restricted circle of privileged initiates. Moreover, interpretations vary according to the different schools, and there is always the possibility of still more difficult and recondite interpretations; the esoteric of the esoteric. What one mind has conceived (or has received by revelation) is passed on to a few adepts, a few chosen disciples, in the course of centuries. Such is the East; a world which is a constellation of secluded and exquisite gardens for the élite; an élite that lives on a few roots or a handful of flour roasted in a cup formed of the hollow of a skull; an élite covered in rags, living in freezing cells, surrounded by perilous mountains and grim precipices.

The Kar-gyu monastery: some notes on Tibetan Buddhism

I should like at this point to describe the Kar-gyu *gompa* (monastery). It is neither very big, nor very old, nor is it a celebrated goal of pilgrims, nor is its abbot politically important (there are monasteries in Tibet whose abbots are politically important). But the fact that

it is an ordinary, average monastery, just like hundreds of others in Tibet, perhaps makes it the more interesting. About sixty monks live in it, including about thirty student-monks. It is not very rich, though it enjoys various sources of income (investments, flocks, donations); and the walls of its temples and chapels are adorned with frescoes or carvings of about two hundred and eighty different divinities.

To describe that celestial multitude, so extraordinary in appearance and yet so much alike, would create intolerable confusion in the reader's mind. I shall therefore suspend my narrative and give instead some details about the religion of Tibet.

Lamaism represents an important philosophic and religious complex within the far vaster orbit of Buddhism. From one point of view, because of its rites and its institutions culminating in a pope, the Dalai Lama, it could be said to correspond with Roman Catholicism in the Christian world. But in other respects it has greater affinities with the Protestant Churches. Lamaism, unlike Catholicism, is a relatively recent development among the various Buddhist sects, dating from the seventh and subsequent centuries of our era; also it is to a great extent a "reformed" variety of Buddhism. However, all such comparisons, however external and superficial, are inexact, and no real parallel can be drawn.

Buddhism, as a historical phenomenon, represents one of the most grandiose edifices of the human spirit. It is sufficient to point to the influence that it has exercised in the course of twenty-five hundred years in countries as diverse as India, Ceylon, the Indo-Greek kingdoms of the generals of Alexander the Great, Central Asia, China, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, Indo-China, Siam, the East Indies, and parts of Siberia. It has inspired whole literatures, and an art to which we owe some of the most noble and inspired works of man. Consider what a vast and complicated task it would be to write a general and all-embracing history of Christianity, tracing its influence in every form of human activity, following all its mystical and philosophical developments, the growth and development of its religious communities and organizations, its influence on the art,

the political and social history, the ordinary life of the people of a whole continent. The material offered by a study of Buddhism is no less vast, either quantitatively or in its universal implications.

If, therefore, we wish to understand Lamaism, we must start with him who initiated the great movement of which Lamaism is only a part; that is to say, with Gautama Buddha, the Enlightened One. He was born in northern India in the sixth century B.C., and lived, preached, and died at the foot of the Himalayas, in what is now border territory between Nepal and Bihar. The most ancient documents, written in Pali, enable his life story to be reconstructed in reasonably detailed fashion. This is not the place to discuss the controversies among orientalists as to which episodes in his life are historical, which are imaginary, and which are merely probable. In certain cases legend has special rights which no one will wish to deny. I shall therefore follow the story of his life as preserved by Tibetan tradition, adding some information established by modern research.

The Twelve Episodes of the Life (of the Buddha) provide one of the themes which have most frequently inspired Tibetan artists. They deal with this theme in twelve scenes, often divided into two big frescoes or grouped into one big one, in which the following incidents can be observed:

(1) *The future Buddha resolves temporarily to abandon his celestial abode to be incarnated on earth.*

We are thus at the outset plunged into myth. We shall see later that as Buddhism developed it was unable to resist the temptation to deify its founder. Here he is presented as a supernatural being from the start.

(2) *Queen Maya sees in dream a white elephant descending from heaven.*

A little white elephant is the emblem of gentleness, and for many centuries the child Buddha was represented exclusively by this charming symbol. According to the biographies Queen Maya (the name means "admirable virtue"), who was then aged forty-five and had previously had no children, conceived miraculously. Her vision of the little white elephant was a kind of Annunciation. Gautama was

now about to begin his terrestrial life. Where, how, in what stratum of society was he to be born? His father, according to legend, was a great king. But it seems much more probable that he was a small rajah (the word is the same as *rex*) belonging to the Sakya clan (Sakya means "the powerful"), who occupied a limited area of land at the foot of the Nepalese Himalayas. His name was Suddhodana, and he lived at Kapilavastu. Maya, the Buddha's future mother, and one of her sisters became Suddhodana's wives. They were the daughters of a feudal lord whose home was not far distant from Kapilavastu. When Queen Maya felt that her time was approaching she left for her parents' house, but when she reached the park of Lumbini her son was born.

(3) *Sakya-muni* (in Tibetan, Sakya-thupa, "the ascetic of the Sakyas") *is born while his mother is in the act of picking an olive branch.*

The new-born child, according to the legend, immediately rose to his feet and walked seven paces towards each point of the compass, exclaiming, "This is my last reincarnation!" He was given the name of Siddhartha (He Who Has Attained the Goal). Queen Maya died barely seven days after giving him birth, so he was suckled with his little cousins by his aunt and foster-mother, Prajapati. Legend describes how it was prophesied to his father that the little Siddhartha was destined for great things: to be a conqueror of empires or a Buddha. King Suddhodana, fearing the latter alternative, had his son brought up isolated from life in the refined, luxurious, gilded cage of the palace.

With the birth of Prince Siddhartha we reach an important point in the story, at which tradition, historical documents, and archaeological research confirm one another. In 1895 there was discovered at Lumbini (now Rummidei) the commemorative pillar erected by the Emperor Asoka in 249 B.C., i.e., little more than two hundred years after the Buddha's death, when the traditions must have been very much alive. An inscription on the column records that the emperor exempted the village of Lumbini from taxation, because "here the Buddha was born."

(4) *The young Siddhartha confounds his masters by the exceptional knowledge he displays for his age, and he defeats his contemporaries at wrestling and athletics.*

5) *Prince Siddhartha marries Yasodhara.*

Gautama was then aged nineteen. Yasodhara was his cousin, the daughter of a maternal uncle. After several years a child was born, Rahula. The biographers all speak of the retired and luxurious life lived by the young prince, who, free from every care, passed his days in the tranquillity of shady gardens or in the pleasures of love. But a profound dissatisfaction with the uselessness of such an existence, and the feeling that reality must be very different from what it might appear from inside the palace walls, seem gradually to have made headway in Siddhartha's mind. Tradition has synthesized what must have been a long inner struggle into three episodes, which constitute the sixth picture.

(6) *Prince Siddhartha, during his walks in the park, sees a wretched old man on the point of death, a corpse, a sick man, and a mendicant ascetic.*

These experiences bore fruit in a mind of exquisite sensibility, inclined by nature to observe the world as a philosopher. Life, he discovered, was not as it seemed to be in the gilded cage of the palace, in the shade of the trees, among the perfume of the flowers in the big garden, or in Yasodhara's jewelled arms. Beyond the precincts was a world of tears and pain, of ugliness and decay, of suffering and death. The nature of the man who was both sage and saint, who was Bhagava (the Eminent One), was here revealed. He did not try to retreat into the unreal world into which he had been born, to make of it an oasis in the wilderness of suffering. He saw that reality lay not in shady retreats, silken clothing, luxury, the pleasures of security, youth, and love, but in wounds and sores, painful, livid flesh, poverty and care, old age, disease, and death. He decided to withdraw into solitude and meditate, to cut himself off from the world, and put himself into contact with ultimate truth and find for mankind a way of liberation from pain.

(7) *Prince Siddhartha leaves his father's palace and enters the forest as a beggar.*

This was the great renunciation, the first of the fundamental acts with which Gautama affirmed his personality as the future Enlightened One. Tradition has taken charge of this moving episode and made of it one of the supreme masterpieces of human poetry. Siddhartha takes his departure in the middle of the night. He goes on tiptoe to embrace his son, but the child is clinging to its mother, and he cannot touch one without waking the other. After gazing long at these two creatures, who are still infinitely dear to him, he leaves in silence. Channa, his faithful groom, and Kanthaka, his white palfrey, are waiting for him outside. Siddhartha leaps on his horse, and the gods make a carpet for its hoofs with their hands, enabling him to leave the town without being seen or heard. At dawn, in the open country, the prince hands to Channa his perfumed clothing, all the precious things that he has with him, puts on a beggar's cloak, and with a few strokes of his sabre cuts off his hair. The great renunciation is complete. Siddhartha no longer exists. His place has been taken by Gautama, the ascetic of the Sakyas.

(8) *Sakya-muni seeks truth by way of asceticism.*

After the great renunciation Gautama sought for a teacher. He became the pupil first of one famous ascetic, then of another, but their teaching did not seem to him to lead toward the goal which he had set himself. He therefore shut himself up with five faithful companions in a forest to the south of Patna, where he lived for six long years, mortifying his body with the cruellest privations—one grain of rice a day—until he was reduced to a skeleton. One day he collapsed, and remained unconscious for many hours. When he came to himself he realized that this was not the path that led to true wisdom, and he went to a neighbouring village in search of nourishment. His companions called him a coward, a weakling who abandoned the struggle, and left him. This grieved Gautama, but he persisted in his conviction. While sitting under a pipal tree he found germinating within himself supreme and final illumination.

(9) *Mara tempts Buddha for the last time.*

Gautama remained under the pipal tree for many, many hours. As often happens just before a supreme crisis, he went through a period of intense anguish and dismay. Having tasted once more the simple pleasure of a bowl of rice, he asked himself whether it was really worth while renouncing life for a goal that was perhaps unattainable and was certainly remote. He thought of the family he had left, his past life of ease, the comforts to which he could at any moment return if he abandoned the goal on which he had set his heart. When Mara saw that this simpler form of temptation was vain, because Gautama had attained complete enlightenment and had passed beyond the cycle of rebirth, he tempted him to vanish into *nirvana* and leave mankind in the darkness of ignorance and sin. But Mara was frustrated again, for the Buddha had decided to bring enlightenment to the world. This intense, inner struggle, which makes Gautama an immediate, real figure to us, a man like ourselves in the fullest sense, not a dim, hieratic figure belonging to another continent and another age, has been transformed by tradition, and is represented as the final assault upon Gautama, intended to break his will, by Mara and his demons in their innumerable aspects, some terrifying, some monstrous, and some almost irresistibly voluptuous. The artists represent Gautama in this scene as serene and immobile, while around him there rages the maelstrom of illusory forms.

(10) *Gautama finally becomes the Enlightened One.*

The sage, having won his last, supreme battle, was aware of an infinite peace; he was now the Enlightened One. The causes of suffering were now known to him with a terrible clarity, and he had seen the way that must be followed to obtain liberation from it.

(11) *The first sermon in the Park of the Gazelles at Benares.*

After spending further time under the tree, the Buddha decided to announce his doctrine to his former masters. But these were dead. So he made for Benares, to search for the five companions who had forsaken him. He found them there, in the Park of the Gazelles, proclaimed his doctrine to them, and converted them. Henceforward the life of the Buddha was a continual apostolate. For forty-five years,

except during the annual rainy season, which was reserved for meditation and communal study, he was continually travelling about, followed by an ever-increasing band of disciples, converts, worshippers, and admirers.

(12) *The Buddha's death.*

When he was nearly eighty years old the Buddha felt the end approaching. He gathered his disciples and spent his last hours with them, and then passed finally into *nirvana*.

There are two possible attitudes to life, and every individual can be said to base his life on a compromise between them. On the one hand there is what we may call the pagan attitude, according to which the world is *this* world, to which the good, the true, the beautiful belong (or will one day if they do not now); the sun, harvest time, the traffic in the market-place and the ship's prow cutting through the water, the girl at the window and the artisan in his shop, the plough, the hammer, and the sword. In contrast to this is the spiritual attitude, according to which the real centre of the universe, the true reason for living, enjoying, suffering, loving, and hating, is invisible and lies elsewhere; this world is a place of transit only, and life is a testing period, an ordeal to be overcome, or an illusion, or a puzzling ideogram, or possibly a cruel farce; we breathe among shadows and for shadows, what seems most real is least real, the real truth is not discernible by the senses but belongs to the remote, the future, the eternal. The doctrine of the Buddha, like that of Christ, belongs definitely to the second category. Life is pain and tears, this world is but the illusory scene of transient episodes concerning impermanent, changing aggregates, involved in an endless drama.

The Buddha, like Socrates, Christ, and many other "Great Initiates" (to use Schuré's celebrated phrase), left no works written in his own hand but proclaimed his teaching by word of mouth to his disciples or to the crowd. Buddhism therefore has its own problem of the scriptures. Which among the many books, all of them written centuries later, faithfully reflect the master's words? And, when the choice has been made, how much interpolation is there, how much

fantasy, how much poetical embellishment? To reconstruct the Buddha's teaching in its original form one must turn to the canon preserved by the Buddhists of Ceylon. It is written in Pali (which is related to Sanskrit) and is called the Tri-pitaka. The title itself takes us back to a rural age, when sages disputed about metaphysics in the shade of the trees or walked barefooted through the fields from village to village. Tri-pitaka means "three baskets," because the complete scriptures, bound in volumes of palm leaf, could be contained in three receptacles.

The first, the Vinaya, the "repository of discipline," contains monastic disciplinary rules, and so forth. The second, the Sutra, is the "repository of sermons" and probably contains the most ancient material, that most directly inspired by the master; the third and last, the Abidhamma, the "repository of metaphysics," contains philosophical discussions, and is the least ancient of the three.

To understand the Buddha's teaching, which, like all the sublime things which have really influenced the history of the world, is essentially simple—its essence is contained in the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Twelve Causal Connections (the Chain of Causation)—one must bear in mind a most important point. The Buddha did not appear suddenly out of the blue; he did not emerge as a colossal figure of thought in a speculative void. He belonged to the rich Indian philosophical tradition. The term "Buddha" had been used to honour sages and seers before him. Just as Christ spoke a language intelligible to his listeners and used Western terms and ideas—soul, creation, paradise—so did the Buddha speak to his disciples of *karma*, *arhat*, and *nirvana*. The idea of the soul was common to Greco-Roman philosophy and to Christianity; it was part of the common patrimony of a whole civilization. Similarly, terms like *samsara* and *karma* were used not only by Buddhists, but by Jains, and the philosophers of the *Samkya* school, the dualists of their age.

Samsara means rebirth, but has far deeper implications than that. It indicates the theory of the transmigration of souls and the "vortex of life" (Tucci) in which that transmigration takes place. *Samsara* is thus the complicated, irrational, unstable universe, in a state of

continual becoming, the realm of suffering and death; it is the realm of matter and decomposition, of ephemeral pleasures and blinding passions. Man, and indeed all living things, are bound to samsara by the cycle of birth and rebirth, by ignorance (*avydia*) and attachment (*upadana*). All the efforts of the sage must be directed to the liberation of man from samsara, from all illusory hopes.

An *arhat* is one who has attained liberation and "loses himself in *nirvana*" (Tucci). There is a subtle distinction between an arhat and the Buddha. Neither is any longer subject to rebirth, but the Buddha is by far the superior of the two. He is an active force, simultaneously enlightened and enlightening, while the arhat is he who takes advantage of his teaching, is liberated, but as a follower walking in the Buddha's footsteps, inasmuch as the Buddha preceded him. He has freed himself from his burden of *karma* and finds rest in *nirvana*, disappearing from the scene of life.

What are *karma* and *nirvana*? They are subtle concepts, riddled like Gothic spires by centuries of disputation. *Karma* originally meant "action," but then assumed the meaning of "the effect of action," including the merit or demerit which everyone acquires in the course of his existences in this or in other worlds. Liberation from samsara signifies the final annihilation of one's karma; good or bad modifications of one's karma decide one's progress or regression in future births.

When karma is exhausted, all that remains is *nirvana*. This term now has certain associations for us; it implies a sense of dreamy reverie or a vague, ecstatic plunge into the void. Indian interpretations of the term, however contradictory, are far more precise. Ontologically it is a mere limit. It is that which remains after the annihilation of psychic activity; it is total liberation from samsara. Like the infinite, it can only be defined negatively. In the Tri-pitaka it is used to indicate entirely different psychological states. Sometimes it implies true annihilation, sometimes it is something indefinable, transcending all experience and thought, and at other times it is described more materialistically, as a state of ineffable peace and serenity. The Buddha, wisely concerned with the far more human and

immediate problems of suffering and of the way to liberate mankind from attachment to life, did not trouble about this, or about many other eschatological and metaphysical problems, and left no opinions about them. Did Jesus concern himself with establishing grades and hierarchies of angels?

It should, however, be borne in mind that this summary gives an idea of only certain aspects of each principle. Nothing is more foreign to the Eastern spirit than codification and intransigence in philosophical and religious matters. There are a thousand paths to truth, just as there are many paths to the top of a mountain. True, there are a tremendous diversity of schools and a wealth of differing and conflicting interpretations. One should, incidentally, consider the baffling wealth of material with which, say, a Chinese student would find himself confronted if he set out to write about the concept of the soul in the West. What a distance from the atomists to Plato, from St. Paul to Descartes, from Dante to Freud! But fundamentally every thinker in the West, whether he denies the soul, idealizes it, or reduces it to atoms, whether he turns it into an afflatus or an essence or a chemical formula, has come to terms with it. The various philosophies and schools of thought bear the same relation to the cultural foundations of the civilization from which they derive as the laws of a people bear to that people's customs.

At this point let the Buddha himself announce the true foundations of his doctrine, the Four Noble Truths about pain, as he did in his sermon at Benares. The first truth declares that existence involves pain; the second declares the origin of pain; the third the possibility of the extinction of pain; and the fourth the way that leads to the extinction of pain.

(1) Now this, monks, is the noble truth of pain: birth is painful, old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, sorrow, lamentation, dejection, and despair are painful. Contact with unpleasant things is painful, not getting what one wishes is painful. . . .

(2) Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the cause of pain: the craving which tends to rebirth, combined with pleasure and lust, finding

pleasure here and there, namely the craving for passion, the craving for existence, the craving for non-existence.

(3) Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of pain, the cessation without a remainder of craving, the abandonment, forsaking, release, non-attachment.

(4) Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the way that leads to the cessation of pain: this is the noble Eightfold Way, namely right views, right intentions, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

This is the noble truth of pain. Thus, monks, among doctrines unheard before, in me sight and knowledge arose, wisdom arose, knowledge arose, light arose.”¹

The last of the Four Truths foreshadows the Eightfold Path, which is the basis of and guide to the Buddhist good life. *Right views* means not falling into heresy. Heresy could take three main forms; one might doubt the reality of suffering or conceive it to be a negative aspect of pleasure or enjoyment; one might mistake the impermanent for the abiding, the changing for the stable, the transient for the eternal; or one might succumb to illusions about the existence of the soul as something individual, that survives and is transmissible. This last is one of the most thorny and difficult points in the whole Buddhist doctrine. But there is no doubt about it; it is clearly and repeatedly stated that the so-called soul is only an unstable compound of the five elements of which the universe is made, and that at death these are dispersed and return to whence they came. Only the karma survives and remains active, providing the nucleus round which the elements of a new being—in the course of centuries the elements of innumerable new beings—will congregate. But this karma is not consciousness, it is not a self; that is pure illusion. In the age-long journey through samsara towards liberation karma provides the only thread of personal identity.

Right intention must include the desires not to harm other living beings, to emancipate oneself from slavery to the senses, and to love one's neighbour. *Right speech, right action, right livelihood, right*

¹ Edward J. Thomas's translation, in *Early Buddhist Scriptures*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1935.

effort, more immediately concern conduct. Here one may recall the Buddhist decalogue, consisting of five commandments for laymen (thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not rob, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not lie, thou shalt not drink alcoholic liquor), with five additional precepts for monks, who are forbidden to accept food outside the prescribed hours, to attend spectacles of music, songs, or dancing, to use garlands, perfumes, pomades, or scent, to sleep in high or wide beds, and to accept gold or silver. For monks abstinence from sexual relations is also assumed.

Right mindfulness indicates the awareness of the fundamental truths that every man must always carry with him. Finally *right concentration* concerns the higher activities of the spirit; meditation must culminate by way of various states of ecstasy in the abolition of sensibility and consciousness. These final stages of perfection can, of course, be achieved only in the ascetic life of the sage.

The final important theory of primitive Buddhism may be considered as a completion and an explanation of the second truth about suffering. This is the Twelve Causal Connections (*pratitya samutphada*), which explain in complicated and somewhat obscure fashion the fundamental reasons why desire, attachment to life, and consequently suffering perpetuate themselves.

Consideration of the broad outlines of this primitive Buddhism shows that it was essentially a pessimistic philosophy rather than a religion. Life and the universe are nothing but evil, pain, and ugliness. The gods are mentioned, true, but as poetical, decorative figures possessing the majestic, frigid, and crystalline impersonality of principles that govern the universe. Primitive Buddhism provides a scientific, dispassionate analysis of the causes of suffering and a dispassionate, scientific search for the remedy.

The thing that marks it off so sharply from the Brahmanism of its time is its insistence that liberation is not attainable by way of propitiatory rites, liturgies, sacraments, which are not the path to virtue and sanctity; liberation is attainable only by the deliberate, inner development of the self. It is useless to pray, weep, make sacrifices, mortify oneself, or attempt magical practices, for none of these things

is effective; the only thing that is effective is right thought and right action. Moral abasement and evil do not offend any god, but only harm those who succumb to them. It is a metaphysics based on morality, with the human personality and its will for virtue and purification elevated to a supreme place and put in the very centre of the All.

On the practical level primitive Buddhism is also more of a philosophy than a religion. It sanctions, indeed encourages, the monastic life but admits no priesthood. No image, no professional intermediary, must intervene between man and the truth. The life of the coenobite, remote from the temptations of the world and free from family ties, is the best suited for meditation and the gaining of understanding, but the monk is a selected soldier, not an exorcist or a possessor of secrets.

In conclusion, if we wish to understand the main lines of Buddhism as Gautama probably understood them, we must bear in mind as the fundamental points the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the concepts of samsara, karma, arhat, Buddha, and nirvana.

The great propulsive force of Buddhism was not due to its novelty or originality, because nearly all its constituent elements were to be found in contemporary Indian thought. Its strength derived rather from its lofty moral sense, the universality of its message, its serene philosophical tone, its scorn for the miracle-mongering, the theatrical excesses, of ascetism, and above all the personality, so strong, so human, and so fascinating, of the prince-ascetic Gautama Sakya-muni.

As we know, he was opposed to the establishment of a church or priesthood, with the result that after his death the large number of disciples who had gathered about him in his long life of preaching very soon divided along the lines of different interpretations of the master's sayings. As happens when a spiritual movement is alive and deeply touches the hearts of men, Buddhism became diversified and complicated, and many variations arose. True, for several centuries there was a succession of patriarchs, twenty-seven in all, down to

Bodhidharma, who visited China in A.D. 526, but their authority seems to have been recognized in only a very general sense. Every three or four generations the more responsible elements tried in vain to arrange a council to discuss and settle controversial points: at Rajagriha soon after the Buddha's death, at Vaisali about 370 B.C., at Pataliputra in 246 B.C. Meanwhile a slow but inexorable trend began, transforming the original philosophy into a religion, the original order into a church, the master into a god, nirvana into paradise, and the psyche into a soul. There also developed a notable tendency to believe that karma must be modifiable by prayer.

With the conversion to Buddhism of the Emperor Asoka (269–232 B.C.) the philosophy of Gautama entered upon its triumphant career as a religion of the masses. In the year 261 Asoka proclaimed it to be the state religion, set up monuments and inscriptions, and established monasteries and temples throughout India, caused learned men to assemble the first canon (it is from this that the Pali Tripitaka derives), and himself became a monk. The Buddhism of Asoka's time was already notably different from primitive Buddhism. The emphasis was very definitely on ethical and moral virtue, on the good life; there was much less pessimism and hatred of life, and much less was heard about the ideal of nirvana. Buddhism had undergone a humanizing process and regarded life and living creatures with greater benevolence. Processions and ceremonies had crept in, a priesthood existed in embryo, exorcism was practised, benedictions were given, dreams were interpreted and horoscopes read.

After the collapse of Asoka's empire Buddhism frankly headed away from Gautama's agnosticism or atheism towards a metaphysical polytheism. In the popular imagination, always receptive to the supernatural, the Buddha was irresistibly transformed from master into Lord, and solar myths, fire cults, ancient autochthonous fantasies, and immemorial legends contributed to his idealized figure. From the Enlightened he became the Enlightening One, the spreader of light, in other words, God. A parallel development took place in the speculations of the philosophers. They ended by taking less interest in the Buddha than in the state of Buddhahood. From an in-

dividual he was transformed into a category, and Gautama became one Buddha among many. The story of Gautama gave way to a science of Buddhahood. The individual Gautama disappeared, to be replaced by a symbol, a manifestation of the absolute.

The fundamental division of Buddhism into two great branches, the Hinayana, or Little Vehicle, and the Mahayana, or Great Vehicle, dates from this time. The Hinayana stood for faithfulness to the Buddha's original doctrines, was opposed to theistic developments, and adhered loyally to the arhat ideal; it was the right hand of Buddhism. Its fortune in the course of centuries was far inferior to that of the Mahayana. It survives to the present day, though in a much-modified form, in Ceylon, Burma, and Siam. The Mahayana accepted theistic, magic, mystagogic developments with alacrity, almost with enthusiasm, did not oppose the incipient sacerdotalism, and proclaimed that salvation was available not only to a few chosen ascetics, but to all (hence its name, the "Great" Vehicle). The Mahayana substituted the adoration of a vast empyrean of gods for Gautama's agnosticism. It adopted symbolism again and tended to attach greater importance to the recitation of sacred formulae than to the performance of meritorious actions.

Simultaneously it abandoned the philosophical rigour of primitive Buddhism for religiousness of a more popular type. But in doing so it became more human, more well-disposed and helpful to humanity; it no longer misanthropically, though for the most sublime motives, turned its back on life. Thus the ideal of the arhat (the worthy), preoccupied with his own individual liberation, his own escape from the world of samsara into nirvana, gave way to the active, compassionate, warm-hearted principle of the Bodhisattva (He Whose Essence Is Enlightenment). A Bodhisattva is a being who has reached the stage of perfection and is on the point of escaping for ever from samsara, but deliberately renounces nirvana to remain among his fellowmen, who are still the slaves of ignorance, desire, and attachment to sensuality and illusion, to help them to attain the final goal.

As for the scriptures, Mahayanic Buddhism always maintained the

doctrine of multiple revelation. Men are diverse and times are diverse. What may be suitable for one individual in one social environment at one level of education may be of no use to another individual a hundred years later or a thousand miles away. The traditional scriptures (those accepted by the Hinayana) are undoubtedly genuine, but the Buddha preserved more profound or difficult doctrines for other times, and gnosis, or direct knowledge of spiritual mysteries (*prajna*), for the elect. It was thus that it was possible for the works of a Nagarjuna or a Vasubhandu (two of the greatest thinkers of Asia) to exercise so much influence and obtain so much agreement across the centuries. The acceptance of this progressive principle, opening the way to every conceivable development of thought, unquestionably gave the Mahayana a metaphysical vitality, a lasting power of seeing new visions, creating new myths, and making fresh imaginative excursions, fresh plunges into the realm of psychological introspection, while the Hinayana remained secluded, conservative, traditionalist in a time without duration.

By the first centuries of the Christian era Mahayanic Buddhism can be said to have become completely unrecognizable. Innumerable celestial Buddhas, together with demons, giants, heroes, and saints, competed for the favour of the religious. The category of Bodhisattvas had been enormously enriched, both "from below" (human beings who had become divine) and "from above" (terrestrial manifestations of celestial Buddhas). Thus the transition from agnosticism to theism had been completed by a further transition to polytheism, idolatry, and demonology. Every Buddhist doctrine had been radically transformed—including the doctrine of karma, for example. The universe was now peopled with gods, who had all the characteristics of human beings. They had wills and feelings, could be moved or offended, could make up their minds, could punish or forgive. That being the case, they could be propitiated, and prayer and sacrifice acquired a value. Karma was no longer the impassive, immutable, practically physical law that it was in primitive Buddhism. Doctrines of grace and forgiveness arose. Karma actually ended by becoming transferable, and there arose the conception of a

collective karma, in which the merits of a Bodhisattva served to wipe out the deeds of sinners.

In short, while the Hinayana takes as its starting point the immediate world of suffering and change (samsara) and then considers an absolute (nirvana), the Mahayana takes its departure from the absolute, the empyrean of eternal Buddhas and archetypal ideas, and descends to samsara, a world that is pale, dim, and unreal in the light of ultraterrestrial perfection. The Mahayana therefore imagines a whole series of states intermediary between the absolute and the immediate world of everyday experience. Every one of the celestial Buddhas in whom the unity and immutability of the absolute is reflected has three primary manifestations. He has his own ideal form as the Logos (*dharmakaya*); he has a form of perceptible perfection (*sambhogakaya*); and finally he has a terrestrial, phenomenal body (*nirmanakaya*).

At this point there took place the third and final stage of the evolution of Buddhism, under the influence of the philosophy set out in the Tantras, the sacred books of the cult of Siva, dating from the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. The Mahayana had grown gradually out of the Hinayana, and the Vajrayana (Adamantine Vehicle) now developed out of the Mahayana in the same way. The Tantras are the final fruit of Sanskrit literature; fruit so overripe, so heavy with scent and sweetness, that it is on the point of turning into poison and putrefaction. They can be said to be the final triumph of autochthonous India, the dark, mysterious India of jungles and snakes, female deities and orgies, phallic cults and magical practices, over the serene Aryan India, the Himalayan India of pastures, cattle, epic poems, and patriarchs.

In form the Tantras consist of dialogues between Siva and his Female Energy, who has many names, one of which is Durga (the Inaccessible). Nominally they deal with the Five Great Themes (the creation of worlds, the destruction of worlds, religion, the acquisition of supernatural powers, and union with the Absolute). Actually they are mainly concerned with ritual matters, mystical and magic ways of acquiring occult powers, the use and meaning of formulae and

enchantments, the uses of letters of the alphabet, esoteric diagrams and talismans, and the symbolism of gestures (*mudra*).

The philosophy of the Tantras is fundamentally a pantheistic monism. Its essential postulate is the identity of the self and the Absolute. To state it as simply as possible, the universe is pervaded and permeated by a single spirit, a single secret and profound power. It is therefore the ascetic's task to turn this to his advantage. Here there arises the connection between philosophy and Yoga. There is not only identity between the spiritual self and the universe, but between the body as microcosm and the universe as macrocosm. Truth is not a thing to be learned but a thing to be lived; it must become an inner physical experience, a trance. The ascetic therefore aims not just at evoking and dominating the secret forces that govern the universe, but at making himself one with them. Long and complicated rituals, lifting him from one mystical level to the next, enable him finally to identify himself for a short time with the divinity invoked.

An idea typical of the Tantras is that of the Energy which emanates from a god; it becomes something external and objective and ends by incarnating itself in a female body (*shakti*). Metaphysically a shakti is the line of force according to which the One, the Absolute, differentiates itself and acts. A shakti is generally represented as engaged in a carnal embrace with the god who generated her and has become her mate. This orgiastic symbolism became enormously popular, and initiates read innumerable meanings into it. Perhaps the most widespread and best-known interpretation is that the male divinity represents *karuna*, compassion, while the female stands for *prajna*, gnosis, or perfect knowledge. Gnosis means a lightning intuition of the truth which leads to liberation, but that is nothing if it is not intimately united with the active, altruistic force of compassion, which causes him who knows and sees to immolate and sacrifice himself for him who does not know and does not see. Such unity can adequately be represented only by the symbolism of a lovers' union. That is what the eye of the initiate reads into the amorous embrace which confronts him on the altar.

Another thing emphasized in the Tantras is the terrifying aspect assumed by benevolent deities in order to combat and overcome the powers of evil. Many lamaist divinities are as frequently represented in their terrifying aspect (*tro-wo*) as in their pacific aspect (*shi-wo*).

Our path is now complete. It was this Buddhism of the Adamantine Vehicle which penetrated into Tibet and still reigns undisputed there today. This makes less unintelligible the profound contrast between the interior world of the Tibetans and the crystalline splendour of their natural surroundings. Tibet is like a living museum. In the darkness of the Tibetan temples there still survives the India which was transplanted there more than a thousand years ago. It is an invisible jungle of the spirit, invisibly fossilized among the ice.

I have thus tried very briefly to summarize the life of the Buddha and what can reasonably be supposed to have been his teaching, as well as the transformations which it underwent before it was introduced into Tibet. (Its introduction was chiefly due to the efforts of Padma Sambhava in the eighth century A.D.) I shall now try to give a picture of the universe as it might appear to the mind of a Tibetan, restricting myself to the figures of primary importance in the lamaist empyrean. The picture I give is a simplification, and the beliefs I describe should not be taken to be dogma. There is a Tibetan proverb which says:

Lung-pa re re, ke-lu re, Every village its own dialect,
Lama re re, chö-lu re. Every lama his own doctrine.

Every teacher, every school of thought, has a private point of view on all these problems.

The internal impulse of Buddhism towards more and more distinctly theistic forms had been working itself out through the centuries along two substantially different lines. On the one hand there was the popular trend continually to accept and incorporate new protective deities, new demons, and new furies into the mythology. On the other there was the philosophical trend, which one way or another had necessarily to culminate in an absolute, uncreated pri-

mary essence. It seems to me to be a matter of surprise that the complete fulfilment of this process was delayed until the tenth century of our era, when it was finally achieved by various Nepalese schools. Perhaps it shows how profoundly rooted in Buddhism was agnosticism—the belief that the ultimate reality of the universe lay in the physics of karma.

The Nepalese schools finally gave a name to the One, the External, the Uncreated, the Svayambhu (the Existing-for-Himself). They called him the Adi Buddha, or first Buddha. An Adi Buddha is commonly accepted in present-day Tibet, but a different personality, at any rate a different superficial personality, is attributed to him by each of the three most important sects.

The Gelug-pa (the Virtuous), those of the Yellow Sect, so-called because of the colour of their hats, identify the Adi Buddha as Vajradhara (He Who Holds the Lightning; in Tibetan, Dorje-chang), “the indestructible lord of all mysteries, the master of all secrets.” Vajradhara is represented in a sitting position, wearing a jewelled crown and the clothing of a young Indian prince. As symbols he holds a thunderbolt and a mystical bell in the attitude known as *vajra-hum-kara*. He is often shown united with his shakti, Prajna-paramita (Perfect Gnosis).

According to the Kar-gyu-pa lamas (Those of the Oral Tradition), the Adi Buddha is Vajrasattva (Whose Essence is Light; the Tibetan equivalent is Dorje-sempa), a metaphysical personality very similar to Vajradhara, represented in art in very much the same way. However, the Nima-pa sects (the Ancient Ones) consider a very different figure to be the Adi Buddha, namely Samantabhadra (Universal Kindness), who is pictured as completely naked and coloured dark blue, embracing his shakti, who is also naked, but white.

It is truly an impressive experience to penetrate into the stuffy and venerable darkness of a temple, where the silence seems to be a positive thing, having a solidity and a consistency of its own, and there, in its innermost depths, on a golden altar, among dragons, lotus flowers, brocades, peacock feathers, the flickering of butter burning in tiny cups, and butter worked into elaborate shapes and

patterns for offerings, to find oneself face to face with the Absolute, the Ultimate, the First, the Eternal, the Everlasting, and the All-Pervading, in the form of a bejewelled prince voluptuously embracing his own shakti. What fantastic imagination, what metaphysical daring, to represent the most abstract possible concept, a concept definable only by negatives, like mathematical infinity, by the most concrete, the most carnal picture that it is possible to imagine; to symbolize that which is without beginning and without end by that which is *par excellence* ephemeral and fugitive; to identify extreme serenity with extreme passion, the crystal light of the stars with the fire of love, the invisible and the intangible with the intoxication of all the senses; and to recall the oneness of the universe, to awareness of which the mind only rarely attains, as a result of a supreme effort, in a flash of illumination, by a representation of the moment in which all thought is lost in the most complete annihilation.

On the one hand, then, we have the adamantine purity of the Adi Buddha, on the other samsara, the transient, uncertain, painful, irrational world. But between these two extremes there are mediators, phases of transition. The first step between the One and the multiple, between being and becoming, is the differentiation of the Adi Buddha into his five manifestations or reflections, the Five Dhyani Buddhas (Buddhas of Meditation). These exist motionless, meditating, almost like Platonic ideas, archetypes of the real, in their "body of the law" (*dharma-kaya*) in entirely immaterial form.

Each Dhyani Buddha presides over one of the five epochs of the world (*kalpa*). Each of these epochs lasts for thousands of years; the number varies from school to school. Three kalpas have now passed, and we are now in the fourth. From each of the five Dhyani Buddhas there emanate one of the five colours, one of the five elements, one of the five senses, and one of the five vowels. Each one of them presides over a point of space, is seated on his own mystic animal, has his own mystic symbol and his own mystic flower, and has his hands arranged in a mystic gesture. All the elements which, according to Indian thought, constitute the universe, all the immutable germs of the mutable and of becoming, originate from one of

the Dhyani Buddhas. The colours and the physical elements are as important as the senses and the syllables; macrocosm and microcosm turn out to be interchangeable, to be projections of each other, phases, moments of the identical All.

The Dhyani Buddhas are represented as ascetics, monks, unadorned, without tiaras or jewels; they are seated in the adamantine position, the position of most profound meditation. Very rarely they are represented as united with their own shaktis. When this occurs, they are represented as richly adorned, with all the attributes of royalty.




The Dhyani Buddhas represent the first stage in the cosmic process of differentiation; they are static, and stand for the thought and order behind the multiple universe. The next stage is the stage of dynamic creation, represented by the Dhyani Bodhisattvas. Each Dhyani Buddha generates a Dhyani Bodhisattva, and each Dhyani Bodhisattva creates a universe, a samsaric universe, over which he presides. The Dhyani Bodhisattvas exist in "bodies of absolute completeness" (*sambhoga-kaya*), and are therefore represented in adorned form, with all the attributes, ornaments, and sumptuous clothes of princes. Each has his own shakti but is rarely pictured with her. The Dhyani Bodhisattvas often assume their terrifying form, which is perfectly consonant with their nature. A Dhyani Bodhisattva is Buddhahood in action; his terrifying form indicates his full participation in samsara as a militant hero engaged in the conquest of evil. In his pacific form he is karuna itself, benevolent compassion and compassionate benevolence; the hand stretched out to help all living things, to guide them to liberation.

The last stage, a most important one, is that in which the Absolute puts on flesh and blood and comes down to live and suffer among men. Once in every kalpa each Dhyani Buddha generates a Manushi Buddha, a terrestrial Buddha, who appears among mankind as a gentle, yet glorious, prince of the faith and with his inspired words and the fascinating example of his life provides illumination for those who do not yet see, converts heretics, and liberates the slaves of desire and attachment from the tyranny of their own selves. A

THE METAPHYSICAL ADVENTURES OF PRINCE GAUTAMA

Manushi Buddha, according to one ancient doctrine, is nothing but appearance, as his body is a *nirmanakaya*, a “phenomenal body” only, an illusion; his real essence is truth, law, the adamant nature of the Adi Buddha. This doctrine is distinctly reminiscent of that of the Docetae, who maintained more or less the same proposition with respect to the body of Christ in the early centuries of Christianity.

THE BUDDHAS OF THE FOURTH EPOCH, THE PRESENT

| Category | Sanskrit name | Tibetan name | Usual Aspect | Notes |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dhyani Buddha | Amitabha | O-pa-me |  | Incarnated in the Panchen Lama |
| Dhyani Bodhisattva | Avalokitesvara | Chen-re-zi |  | Incarnated in the Dalai Lama |
| Manushi Buddha | Sakya-muni | Sakya-thupa |  | The Prince Siddhartha of history, who became the ascetic Gautama |

Thus each of the five great ages into which the history of the universe is considered to be divided is conceived in the mind of a Dhyani Buddha, is created by a Dhyani Bodhisattva, and is blessed by the apostolate of a Manushi Buddha. Pictures of the Dhyani Buddha, the Dhyani Bodhisattva, and the Manushi Buddha of our own fourth epoch appear on page 89. It is worth while to impress them on one's mind, because we meet them over and over again wherever we go in Tibet—in art, literature, religion, everyday life, past history, and present-day politics.

The most striking thing about all this is the strange destiny of Gautama, the Buddha. All the historical evidence points to the fact that throughout his terrestrial life he preached a courageous, rigorous, agnostic philosophy based on a grim diagnosis of the innermost nature of man, denying the soul and binding all that man feels to be most human and most sacred, all the good and all the evil of which he is capable, to the mysterious thread of karma. Throughout his life he sought to disillusion men, to liberate them from their false faith in gods, and to lead them back to looking into themselves and to feeling themselves to be the masters of their fate. Yet here we see him transformed into the emanation of an emanation of an emanation—a god in a fantastically elaborate and complicated system of other gods, a celestial actor in a stupendous, cosmic drama, preceded by others and followed by others.



RANCID BUTTER AND THE EXOTIC IN REVERSE

The Kar-gyu monastery: what did Lama Ton-gye see?

THE Kar-gyu gumpa consists of a number of buildings built in a small, level area on the slope of the mountainside. A few leafy trees grow there, the residue of a wood which must once have covered the place. The spot has been sacred for centuries but the monastery is recent.

Opposite the entrance is a fountain where the animals stop to drink. It should be remembered that in the Buddhist universe animals are *sem-chan*, "living beings," just as much as man, and there is no categorical distinction between the animal and human worlds. All are capable of eventual salvation; all are potential saints. An animal is simply a more limited being than man, a less individualized being, entirely taken up with the elementary, brutish necessities of feeding, sleeping, and reproducing itself. But the spark, the essence, that today sleeps in an ox or a mule will shine tomorrow in a man or shed light on the whole universe in a Buddha. The Buddhist world is thus fundamentally an optimistic one. There is no final distinction between the elect and the rejected, and there is no trace of Calvinistic predestination; or rather there is predestination, but only in the sense that in the long run, after thousands and thousands of years, all beings will attain enlightenment, will be Buddhas, and will be dissolved into the Absolute.

The running water of the fountain turns a prayer wheel, and every revolution of the prayer wheel rings a little bell; it has a sharp and cheerful note. The "wheel" consists of a drum half a yard high, on which Sanskrit letters are painted in gold. Inside it are innumerable tightly rolled pieces of paper, with thousands of texts printed on them

by woodcut. The commonest is the celebrated *Om mani padme hum*, which is usually translated "Hail" (*om*), "O jewel" (*mani*), "in the flower of the lotus!" (*padme*) "Hail!" (*hum*). The jewel, according to the current interpretation, represents Chen-re-zi, the Dalai Lama. It is as if at every turn of the wheel the phrases were repeated aloud as many times as they are written within. As the prayer wheel works by water power for twenty-four hours a day, one could work out for oneself how many pious ejaculations were "uttered" in the course of a month or a year.

Ingenious applications of this principle of mechanical prayer are to be found throughout Tibet. Before laughing at it, one should bear in mind that it is a minor popular manifestation of Lamaism. Every religion that makes a deep impression among men and women relatively unaccustomed to thinking and analysing necessarily has aspects like this. Should we condemn Christianity because of the prayer put up to St. Anthony by an Italian peasant woman, beseeching the saint's aid in finding her lost needle?

At the entrance to the monastery we were met by a well-nourished lama, who looked like the manager of a thriving Tuscan estate. He was Yul-gye (Victorious over the Country), the *om-tse*, or rector, and he had obviously been waiting for us.¹ He was a tall, strong, energetic, and rather crude individual, aged about fifty. When he laughed he was jovial, and when he moved he looked as if he were about to scale a mountain or seize a demon by the throat. He was certainly a terror to the seminarists, the pupils at the monastery. He smiled at me, because I was a foreigner with rupees in my pocket. (Fearing that his benevolence might cease, did I not promptly hand him a silver coin? It would seem that fundamentally one ought to be tough like him in life.) When I caught sight of him while he thought I was not looking at him I saw that his features hardened and made a mental note of the resemblance between his square jaw and his great knotty fist. The boy pupils at the monastery must instinctively have noted it too. Meanwhile they were hovering about,

¹ I here describe a visit to the monastery paid after April 24th, 1948, when the expedition came down from the Natu-la and passed the monastery without stopping.

not knowing whether to yield to their fear of the om-tse and go away or to satisfy their desire to approach and observe the white man more closely.

Some European writers seem to create the impression that lamas are a class consisting exclusively of more or less fabulous sages or ascetics, all capable of the most extraordinary supernatural feats. Nothing could be more false. The ecclesiastical world of Tibet is alive and various, rich in personalities of every calibre, strength, and colour. It is, in fact, so much like the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical world that the missionary Abbé Huc was struck by the resemblance as long ago as 1845. True, you find the ascetic who has mortified his body until it has become a subtle instrument of hidden psychic forces, almost a sensitive, living human tentacle stretched out into the super-human and supernatural. But you also find the acute, well-nourished abbot who will solve a psychological or economic problem for you in the twinkling of an eye, the acid, disagreeable disciplinarian, the good-natured simpleton, the learned doctor who knows the Kangyur and the Tangyur by heart, though lacking the slightest interior spark; and you find, too, the blessed of God who gets drunk, sings, plays, makes love, and yet has wisdom in his folly. But is it not a thousand times better that this should be so? Who can take an interest in abstractions when there are men of flesh and blood to get to know? The lamas are not what we should like them to be; they are not museum pieces, unreal figures painted on ivory or parchment, but human beings, with their defects and qualities, each with his own distinct individuality, coloured by the subtly different light of a civilization based on premises different from ours.

We passed under the arch of the entrance gate and found ourselves in a sunlit yard, with green grass growing among a few irregularly placed plants. It was full of a delightful sense of peace, the kind of peace that belongs to such ancient, venerable places. A large number of *trapas* (a *trapa* is an ordinary monk, as distinct from a lama, "master," who has to have studied and passed certain examinations) appeared at the entrance to the kitchen—an immense, smoky, sooty place, with fantastic cauldrons and huge, perfectly

black beams disappearing into the darkness of the roof. Other traps appeared on the steps. They all smiled, most of them shyly, waiting for me to say something or make a friendly sign. The Tibetans are really xenophobes of a most curious kind. Their xenophobia is exclusively abstract and theoretical. They close their country to foreigners, and the most rigorous laws are issued from Lhasa to keep them out, but when a white man arrives in their midst they greet him with enthusiasm and make a tremendous fuss over him.

To the Tibetans a white man represents a world of fascinating mysteries. To them we represent the exotic in reverse—the exotic of airplanes, cameras, clocks, penicillin, a world of controllable, repeatable miracles. (A lama can learn to suspend himself in mid-air by levitation, but only after years and years of preparation and the severest ascetic ordeals, and even then he may not succeed. But anybody can fly in an airplane.) Our exotic characteristic in Tibetan eyes is our magical mastery of the elements. We are a mythical people, in alliance with superterrestrial and subterranean demons, who give us superhuman powers as part of heaven knows what sort of diabolical pact. The om-tse left us for a moment, no doubt to warn the father superior of our arrival. The seminarists immediately swarmed round us, all wanting to see and hoping to touch my camera. I was hardly able to make headway through the throng. Meanwhile I breathed lungfuls of *foetor tibeticus*.

Foetor tibeticus consists of various ingredients, the basis of which is the extreme dirtiness of the Tibetan person and Tibetan clothing. The universal smell of rancid butter gives it a finishing, lyrical touch. The dirt is ancient, stupendous, and three dimensional. Tibetan arms, thighs, feet, and backs are ingrained and encrusted with the filth of months and years. Each individual's covering of dirt seems to be lovingly cultivated, perhaps for the purpose of creating a more lasting monument of the body or of studying the geology of dirt in its slowly acquired and complicated stratifications. In the end the dirt must acquire an individuality, a personality of its own; you must feel that there are two of you inside the outer covering; and that a time will come when it, the thing, the crust, will constitute

a shape, a negative, from behind which you will creep secretly one night, leaving it leaning against the wall, as ugly and buttery as a ro-lang.

Butter (like bones and silence) is one of the most characteristic features of Tibet. It seems impossible that the thin female yaks, grazing among stones and sand, should produce such an enormous flow of butter. But Tibet is full of it. It is on sale in the most remote villages; it is used for offerings to the gods in every temple and private chapel; it is carved in masterly fashion into statues and complicated ornamental patterns and then coloured with extraordinary delicacy; it is burned in lamps, and taxes are paid with it; women spread it on their hair and often on their faces; it is always an acceptable gift; it is mixed with *tsampa* (roasted barley flour) for food and with tea for drink. In Tibet there is butter, butter everywhere. It is used all the time, for every conceivable purpose, and you can never get away from it.

Bones are as universal in Tibet as butter. Many more animals die or are killed in other countries than in Tibet; but nowhere else in the world, so far as I know, do you see so many carcasses, skulls, thigh-bones, vertebrae, and ribs scattered along the roads, outside the houses, along the mountain passes. There is no reason whatever in the nature of things why this should be so; it is just a curious cultural trait. The bones of animals are not buried, or hidden from sight, or destroyed; they are just left, like stones on the road, outside the doorstep. Children play with them, or throw them at one another. I suggest that there must be an active side to this apparent passivity; the Tibetans must positively like having bones lying about. They must regard them as a kind of flower, a decoration, a comfort, a pleasure. Are they perhaps a reminder of the illusory nature of the temporal world, from which man must escape if he desires salvation? Who knows?

The third characteristic feature of Tibet, after the butter and the bones, is the tremendous silence. Modern physics talks of a four-dimensional space-time continuum. Tibet consists of a four-dimensional space-silence continuum. There is the yellow, ochre silence

of the rocks, the blue-green silence of the ice peaks, the silence of the valleys over which hawks wheel high in the sun, and there is the silence that purifies everything, dries the butter, pulverizes the bones, and leaves in the mind an inexpressible, dreamy sweetness, as if one had attained some ancient fatherland lost since the very beginning of history.

The om-tse appeared on a balcony and called out, "*Kushog-sahib!* (Sir-sahib) The Great Precious is waiting for you!"

On hearing his voice the seminarists, who had been excitedly crowding round me to look in the view-finder of my Leica, disappeared in a flash. Guided by the om-tse, and escorted by various other monks, I finally reached the room where the Rimpoche (Great Precious) Nge-drup Dorje (Blessed Thunderbolt) was due shortly to appear. Actually he was not the real head of the monastery. Its real head was a personage of the name of Thupden Oden (Perpetual Light of the Doctrine of Buddha), who lived about a hundred years ago. His terrestrial career was distinguished by so much sanctity, so much penetrating wisdom, so many conspicuous signs of approaching final illumination, that after his death he was considered to be a Bodhisattva. It is a great and fine thing for a monastery to have a real Bodhisattva as its head! It is like giving hospitality to an ambassador of the Absolute or having one's own personal representative in the adamantine halls of the cosmos—a sure and comforting link with the indubitable and the permanent.

In what way did Thupden Oden return among mankind? Not long after his death he was reincarnated in another body, that of a child. His rebirth, his presence in a new terrestrial guise, was revealed by a series of miraculous events. The child grew, and was educated with special care at the monastery and in Lhasa. He reached manhood, controlled the destinies of the community for many years, and eventually died.

Not many years ago, in 1937, Thupden Oden was reincarnated for a third time, once more appearing in the person of a child. There was, of course, no question of birth and death in our sense of the word, but only of the passage of the same spiritual essence, the

same Bodhisattva Thupden Oden, from one garment of flesh and blood to another. So he now looks at the world through the eyes of a slender, thoughtful boy of nine. Until he reaches his majority the temporal direction of the community remains in the hands of the regent, the Rimpoche Nge-drup Dorje. Later we shall see how all this is repeated, on an incomparably vaster and more magnificent scale, in the case of the Dalai Lama and the government of Tibet itself.

While we waited for the Great Precious a young lama named Ton-gye (High Goal) showed me the various chapels. I have rarely seen in Tibet such a perfect incarnation of the ideal of monastic beauty as Ton-gye (see Plate 35). He was handsome and impressive, and wore his long black hair carefully gathered behind his head. His beardless features had a serene, mythological beauty, somehow suggesting the South Seas. He was shy and solemn, embarrassed and august. His togalike monk's robe fell around his body in classic curves.

We returned to the room. Next door there was to be heard the hurried footsteps, the agitated rustle of robes and soutanes, the brief, pregnant silences that foreshadow the approach of an important and long-awaited ecclesiastical personage. The om-tse came in, told me to stay where I was, and to have my sash ready. In Tibet it is the custom, when you pay a visit to an important person, to present him with a white silk sash (*ka-ta*). He presents you with a similar sash in return. The exchange is accompanied by many bows and smiles, and by the studied and carefully graduated signs of deference that Orientals so much love.

A few moments later I heard the slow footsteps of an aged man wearing sandals, and the Great Precious appeared in the doorway. He was a vigorous giant of eighty-four, a real human oak tree, whose vitality and intact faculties shone through his lively, acute, penetrating eyes. He wore a robe of hemp-coloured Bhutan cloth with simple coloured stripes, a cloth of great archaic beauty, and a turban of artificial hair, as is worn by the monks of the Kar-gyu sect.

After pausing for a moment at the threshold, to allow time for the full effect of his presence to make itself felt, the Great Precious

advanced solemnly towards me. I realized at once that I was confronted with a consummate master of choreography, and in offering him my sash I tried to play my part to the best of my ability. But evidently I committed some gross error of etiquette, because everybody burst out laughing. To save the situation I recited a greeting in the most highly honorific terms, and this seemed to satisfy the old man, who muttered something and went and sat in his own lacquered chair. A horrible European chair, reminiscent of a cheap café, and a small table, both of which clashed dreadfully with the Tibetan atmosphere of the place, had been prepared for me. How sad it is the West is always represented in Asia by the cheap, the ugly, and the trivial!

“Where do you come from?” the Great Precious asked me.

“From a country named Italy, *Italia-yul*.”

“That is good, because if you come from *Italia-yul* I shall be able to talk to you freely in our language!”

It is amazing how news spreads about these valleys. Europeans and white men in general are so rarely seen here that they are the object of much curious attention. They are mysterious beings, representatives of a still more mysterious and remote outside world, populated with magical, terrible, and at the same time desirable things. The white man in Tibet is therefore closely observed and studied, even in his most intimate and irrelevant characteristics. People in distant villages, where you have never set foot, know how old you are, what you like to eat, whether you are rude or polite, mean or generous, equable or bad-tempered, whether you like sleeping, whether you read a lot, whether you are fond of drink, whether you visit the monasteries with respect, whether you like the local girls, whether you go shooting, and whether you give good tips. Thanks to Professor Tucci, Italians now enjoy the reputation in Tibet of being students and connoisseurs of every aspect of Tibetan civilization, and they naturally conclude that all Italians talk Tibetan as excellently as the illustrious *geshe* (doctor) from Rome. However, the Great Precious had undue confidence in my grasp of Tibetan

grammar and vocabulary, and I had to ask him to speak more slowly and simply.

“But where exactly is *Italia-yul*?”

While sipping my cup of Tibetan tea I did my best to explain to the Great Precious the position of Italy in relation to other, better-known places in the world. It was a difficult task, because his knowledge of geography was majestically vague.

“But where is America?” he exclaimed, after I had given him a long explanatory dissertation, eked out with gestures and illustrations, using a cup to show where India was and the teapot to show the position of the British Isles.

“America is in another direction,” I explained.

“So Italy is near *Ripin* (Japan)?”

“No, Rimpoche, it’s here, much nearer England.”

“In any case it’s a very long way away, a very strange place.”

There came to my mind the Tibetan treatise on geography called *Dzamling Gyeshe Melong* (Mirror of a Complete Description of the World) which was still used in schools until not so very long ago. It contains this curious passage about Sicily. In Sicily “there is a high mountain; from among its rocks a big fire comes out. This goes to the ocean and returns to the rocks. It does not burn grass or trees, but burns gold, silver, copper, and human beings. And there is a certain kind of grass, which grows in no other place. If a man eats it, he dies of laughter.”² Could this be a distant echo, not only of Etna, but of the vines cultivated with such excellent results at its feet?

There was a pause in the conversation, and out of courtesy to my hosts I felt it my duty to eat one of the oily, buttery biscuits, covered with fur and dust, which I was offered. They must have been standing on some shelf in the monastery for months, and I found them unspeakably disgusting. I tried not to think about them (though one or two pieces I had to send down by force), and meanwhile I

² Quoted by Sir Charles Bell, *The People of Tibet*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928; page 8.

watched the Rimpoche's face. What character there was in his eyes! He was certainly not the ascetic type of lama, superior to the things of the world, but a successful prelate, drawing contentedly to the close of a brilliant career, a connoisseur of men, their weaknesses and their secret motivations.

Meanwhile a monk entered the room with a letter. The mail from India had just called at the monastery and gone onwards on its way to the north and to Lhasa. The letter bore an Indian stamp, and the address had obviously been written by a European. The Great Precious, after examining the outside of the envelope for a long time and then opening it with a hand that was extraordinarily firm for his eighty-four years, saw that the letter was covered with writing that he was unable to decipher; he therefore turned to me and asked me to read and translate it. It was from those old acquaintances, the Nalandas. They had spent a few weeks at the monastery some months previously, and now they wrote saying that they were well, and that they had left Calcutta for western Tibet. They asked for news of the lama so-and-so and the trapa so-and-so, and how was the Great Precious, and the little living Bodhisattva? Everyone in the room seemed delighted at the letter, and the names mentioned in it were immediately on everybody's lips.

Raising my eyes at this point, I noticed that the young lama Ton-gye seemed extremely agitated, almost beside himself. As I picked up the envelope to put the letter back in it, two or three photographs which I had not noticed fell from it, face downwards on the table. The lama Ton-gye pounced on them like a flash, picked them up, hurriedly glanced at them, hid them in the folds of his robe, and left the room. The others smiled. I never found out what those photographs were. Were they photographs of Ton-gye taken by Mrs. Nalanda, or were they portraits of the dark, sibylline Tantric Devi Nalanda, with her half-quizzical, half-sad smile?

When my visit to the Great Precious was over I was taken by the om-tse to see Thupden Oden, the little living Bodhisattva, for a moment. Opposite the monastery was another smaller building in which the boy, his instructors, and the seminarists lived. I was received by

a big, youngish, Chinese-looking lama, who was vigorously chewing betel. It made his whole mouth look red, as if he were spitting blood. This vice, the results of which are so horrible to look at, though they are completely harmless, is spreading rapidly among the Tibetans who live along the caravan route from India to Lhasa. The big lama courteously invited me to drink a cup of tea with him in his room. It was an extremely agreeable room, obviously the sanctum of a scholar.

Big square cushions (*den*) about nine inches thick, which the Tibetans use for chairs, lay along one wall. Perhaps the lama slept on them at night. In the daytime he sat on them, cross-legged. At the end of the room near the window was the place where he generally worked—a small, low, square table, with many books and papers, an inkpot and pens. Tibetan books are long and narrow, and are hand-printed. The pages are wrapped in a piece of cloth and “bound” between two wooden boards. Many more books were piled on another table in the corner. There was also a little shrine with offerings of rice and butter. On the walls were a number of pictures on cloth, of which one was very beautiful—the terrifying form of Pal-den Lha-mo, vividly painted in gold against a black background. It was superbly done; a masterpiece of diabolical metaphysics expressed in symbols.

Talking to the lama, I discovered at once that he was a man of learning, a real mine of information. It was a pity to be in a hurry and to have to leave. Also the room was so delightful. You felt in it the serene, detached-from-the-world atmosphere characteristic of rooms lived in by men who live for knowledge and study. It reminded me of similar rooms I have known in other parts of the world; of Giorgio Pasquali's, the Greek scholar's, “den” on the Lungarno at Florence; and Hiromichi Takeda's little home at Kyoto. Hiromichi was twenty-four years old, a philosophy graduate, and an assistant at the university. He had only recently married, and he lived with his wife, Namiko, in two rooms. One of them was filled to the ceiling with books, and books had started invading the other; only the tiny kitchen was still free of them. I spent whole afternoons

with Hiromichi, talking about everything under the sun, in a mixture of Japanese, French, and German. We agreed to collaborate in writing a life of Leonardo da Vinci for the Japanese. Then the war came.

The dictators who believe that such untidy places, crowded with books and papers, are the breeding ground of the worst crimes against their tyranny are perfectly right. It is in such places that there germinate the first seeds of new ideas, which by way of books establish contacts and sympathies beyond the narrow limits of nations. He who has lived quietly among his books often emerges from the four walls of his study with more inner strength than he who has spent his youth shouting in the market-place; and it is in such places that one is perhaps more aware than anywhere else of a universal solidarity among men, even if they belong to remote civilizations.

“Kushog, shall we go up and see the little Great Precious now?”

We walked through a few rooms in silence. The child had not been forewarned (or had the whole thing, perhaps, been carefully stage-managed?).

We found him in a square room, bare of furniture, but containing many golden ornaments. He was seated on a cushion in front of a tiny carved wooden table, painted in many colours, reading the huge pages of an ancient book. He was a thin, slightly built child, pale, not handsome, and rather sad-looking, simply clothed in his reddish-brown monk's robe. I don't know why, but I felt infinitely sorry for him.

“He's barely nine years old,” the lama said as we went downstairs again, “but he's already incredibly learned. He certainly knows more than I, who am his teacher, and more than many monks who have spent all their lives in study. Don't you think that's an additional proof that he's the Great Precious Thupden Oden returned among us once more?”

The smile of the humanist and expounder of the scriptures was subtly ironic, and his resemblance to the classical type of Chinese scholar leaped more clearly than ever to the eye.

“Be careful, the stairs are steep,” he went on. I had in fact ceased for a moment to look where I was going, and had been trying to look him in the eyes.

We descended once more to the courtyard. A strange noise came to my ears, like the creaking and grinding of an old mill wheel. At every turn, keeping time with the sighing and groaning of the wood, a bell rang. I went towards the little chapel built in the corner of the courtyard, entered, and saw that the sound came from a huge wooden drum, at least nine feet high and obviously very heavy, which a poor old blind woman, sitting on the ground, was turning by rhythmically pulling two cords.

The om-tse came and joined us. He told me that the drum contained a *mantra* (magic ejaculatory prayer) written out millions and millions of times. “It is the mantra of Dorje-sempa,” he said. “The words are *Oma swa sato hum*. The meaning? No one knows exactly, but repeating it does good. Every time it turns, it’s as if it were repeated an almost infinite number of times. It does good all round here; and the old woman earns herself a supper in the kitchen, ha! ha! . . . Are you tired, old woman? . . . She works all right. . . . The trapas will look after you all right at supper this evening, old woman!”

With his huge, bony hands the om-tse gave two vigorous pushes to the drum, which for a moment moved faster. The old woman moved backwards, straightening her back. She smiled into the void, as the blind do.

My visit to the Kar-gyu gompa happened to coincide with one of the big Buddhist festivals. In the big temple, on the ground floor, I found two rows of seminarists (*tsun-chung*), sitting cross-legged on their high cushions. A lama stood at the end of each row, one with a drum, the other with a trumpet; there was even a prefect (*u-cho*) to direct the singing and reading in chorus. It was all very austere and very solemn. There was a complete lack of the slovenly, casual reading often to be observed in other monasteries—the presence of the om-tse had been noticed at once. As soon as he appeared the boys became models of perfect behaviour.

The om-tse walked slowly up and down the temple with his great hands behind his back. There was revived within me the fear with which a not dissimilar father of a teaching order, one Novelli, known as "the vintner," used to inspire me and my companions when I was a boy in Florence. Poor little chaps, taken away from their mothers and forced to act the thaumaturge, among terrifying symbols and diabolical miniatures made of butter! I stayed for a long time watching them, as if I were one of them.

The reading went on rhythmically. The prefect intoned a few phrases solo, in a low, sonorous voice, and the others intoned the responses. At moments one might almost have been in a Catholic church. Then, without warning, a lama sounded the *gyaling* (silver trumpet), and one of the students sounded the *kangling* (trumpet made from the thigh-bone of a sixteen-year-old virgin), and the universe collapsed into a thousand pieces, among the craziest dissonance.



INNER LIFE OF A TIBETAN VILLAGE

Two ways of travelling

THERE are two ways of travelling. One is to cover a long distance in a short time, taking in the general outline of mountain and valley and the most obvious characteristics of the people. The other is to stop, go deeper, strike root to some extent, and try to imbibe from the soil the invisible spiritual sap which nourishes the inhabitants of the place. Both are perfectly legitimate, both can be sources of pleasure, and both can lead to useful knowledge and useful comparisons.

We have just arrived at Yatung, which the local people call Shasima, possibly a name of Lepcha origin. It seems that we shall stay here for some time. Does this mean an opportunity for travel of the second kind? Yatung is situated nearly 9,000 feet above sea level, at a point where the valley of the Amo-chu, up which the caravan route climbs in the direction of Lhasa, divides into two. It is an ugly village, without any special character, but the surrounding country is rich in unsuspected beauties, and many other villages, higher up or lower down, can truthfully be called ancient centres of a secluded, static, mountain-valley civilization such as is often to be found in the Alps.

A noisy torrent runs along the bottom of the valley. Its source is not far away—the glaciers of Pauhunri (23,180 feet)—and it is swollen by several tributaries. The valley is narrow, enclosed between tremendous cliffs reaching to 12,000 feet—well below the permanent snow line. The outlook is Alpine. There are firs, pines, pastures, and rhododendrons. The climate is on the whole damp. For several months of the year (the summer monsoon) there is a great

deal of rain, but even then the sun shines brilliantly every now and then in the clear sky of these high altitudes.

As is normal in villages of the Buddhist Himalayas, a row of *tarchos* (see Plate 57) stands at the entrance to Yatung. A *tarcho* is a long pole to which there is nailed a cotton pennant on which innumerable sacred phrases are printed by woodcut. The wind moves them, "utters" them, and fills the air with good. The idea of the quasi-physical spreading of a spiritual aura is a beautiful one, and the *tarchos* are themselves very beautiful. They stand tall, white, and glorious in the sun, and the gay whistling of the wind through them is cheering and refreshing to the traveller.

A man who wishes to set up a *tarcho* starts by buying the material for the flag. Cotton is rationed, and the other materials are rather dear. He then takes it to a monastery, where a lama prepares one of the wooden matrices which are invariably to be found in monasteries, inks it, and prints the required prayers on the customer's material in return for a small fee. The next step is to procure a pole and erect it, or have it erected, in the desired place, with a lama officiating. All this takes time and money; it is a "sacrifice," and "sacrifices" are required by all religions. A *tarcho* can be erected as a votive offering, to ask a grace, or out of religious fervour. All the inhabitants generally contribute to the maintenance of the long row of *tarchos* at the entrance to a village.

At first sight Yatung seems to present no features of interest. It consists of four rows of half-timbered cottages, roofed with shingles, flanking two longitudinal streets, of which the bigger, with its little shops, constitutes the bazaar, the market. The goods on sale are few and of poor quality, except for the Tibetan paper, which is a fascinating tissue of vegetable fibre. As for antiquities, the time has passed when one could buy for a few rupees good pictures and statues, brought secretly to the market by unscrupulous monks.

Tibet is a completely feudal country; there is a hereditary caste which shares political and economic power with the lamas. But at Yatung the elegant world of the feudal nobility of Lhasa, Shigatse, Gyantse, and Gangtok is practically unrepresented. Apart from a few

retired officials, the inhabitants (there are about four hundred and fifty of them) are small traders, artisans, shopkeepers, mule-drivers; and there are a number of peasants and woodmen. Thus we have an opportunity here of studying the everyday life of the Tibetan common people.

The ex-official Lobsang; pride and prejudice

But there is no doubt that we are in Tibet. Not only the tarchos but the smaller flags (*lung-ta*) waving in the wind outside all the doors and houses strike the eye immediately, giving something of a festive air to the squalid little village. No house has more flags and pennants than the house of Lobsang, whose flags are more brightly coloured and better kept than anybody else's.

We have now been here for three weeks. Every now and then I go and see Lobsang. He is a curious type.

"Good-morning, good-morning!"

Lobsang, seated on his bed-sofa, continues placidly and attentively turning his little prayer wheel. He and I have known each other for a long time; we first met ten years ago. The last time I saw him he was an important intermediary between the British and the Tibetans; he was working as an interpreter, and all important "international" affairs passed through his hands. But now he has retired from public life and bought this cottage and a little land on which to live. I don't know if he is married; he seems to have no family. With the years he has become exaggeratedly pious; he spends half the day in prayers, in edifying reading, and in murmuring ejaculatories.

"Good-morning, Lobsang, how are you? How many thousands of millions of prayers this morning?"

Lobsang laughs, and continues almost defiantly to turn his prayer wheel, which consists of a small brass drum decorated with the Eight Glorious Emblems (*thrashi te-gye*); that is to say, the Golden Fish, the Umbrella, the Conch-Shell Trumpet of Victory, the Lucky Diagram, the Victorious Banner, the Vase of Ambrosia, the Lotus of Immortality, and the Wheel of Law. Inside it there is a long, tightly

rolled scroll of paper on which Lobsang himself wrote out ten thousand times (with a fountain pen!) the sacred formula *Om mani padme hum*. The little drum serves the same purpose as the much bigger ones to be found in the monasteries.

“Well, how is Lobsang?”

“So-so, so-so! How would you expect a poor old man to be?” Then he livens up. “Tomorrow an Incarnated One, the Doctor of Tro-mo, is passing through Yatung—a fortunate event for our little village, lost among the mountains!”

“We shall go and see him together, Lobsang. Meanwhile I’ve brought you some photographs that I took ten years ago.”

“Oh, thank you! I’ll fetch my spectacles. You weren’t in a hurry, were you?”

We both laugh. Lobsang is small and thin, rather worn-looking, and extremely Mongolian in appearance. He wears his long, silver-lined hair in two plaits around his head. He might be a retired secondary schoolmaster, or stationmaster, or minor official of some kind; a man who has worked hard all his life, been reasonably successful, grown old, and has now started asking questions. Why are we alive and why do we suffer? But it is too late. He will never set out now on the enterprise of trying to find out. Papers, documents, officialdom have exhausted his strength. All that is left is the rosary and an inarticulate faith. Besides, Lobsang has always been a pessimist. Now he shakes his head, and repeats in a voice that has grown greyer than ever his discouraging views about absolutely everything.

“What do you think, Lobsang? Shall we get to Lhasa?”

“The ways of the Tibetan government are involved and intricate. At Lhasa they have special fears and antipathies that nobody understands. Much gold for little ink, much ink for little gold. It all depends. That’s what governments are like! On the other hand, don’t you see how attachment to things leads to unhappiness? The more you think of Lhasa, the unhappier you become. Mark my words, it’s all illusion. Don’t allow yourself to become the slave of anything!”

Lobsang, while giving his personal interpretation of the Buddhist

Four Noble Truths, puts down his prayer wheel and starts combing his long hair with the nicety of an official scrutinizing a document.

"I wash my hair once a week!" he announces with a certain pride. Having been in contact with the British for so long, he has acquired unusual habits of cleanliness. He now looks like a village old maid dressing up for the fair. His face is invisible, being completely covered by his hair, which falls forward like a waterfall onto his knees while he continues meticulously combing it. When he considers that he has combed it enough, that is to say when every single hair is perpendicular and parallel, he divides it into two with his hands, and his face reappears in between, like someone coming out of a tent.

Then, with the conciliatory smile of the Mongolian who wants something, he asks, "But after all, why do you come to these parts? Why do you spend so much money and put up with so much discomfort? Why?"

How often have I been asked that question! To humble folk it suffices to answer, "A pilgrimage"; to the educated, one can explain the real reasons: one can talk of studying art, ethnography, or philology. But what is one to say to a man such as Lobsang, who has lost his primitive innocence but has not acquired enough education to understand? People of his type always suspect espionage, secret deals, international intrigue.

The door opens and Sönam appears. Sönam is a village lad, aged about twenty, who cooks and cleans for Lobsang. As Sönam enters he makes a hurried movement, trying to hide something. But it is too late, we saw. It was a cigarette-end that he threw into the street. Lobsang blazes up.

"Haven't I told you a hundred times not to smoke? The next time I catch you smoking you'll get the sack! You know you're not to smoke! What does our holy religion say, to say nothing of your health? Don't you know you're spoiling your chances of a satisfactory rebirth? Rebirth? You'll end up as a *yi-dag*, or worse, you'll go to hell!"

Sönam scuttles into the kitchen like a scalded cat, while Lobsang continues to unburden his feelings to me on the abominable vice of

smoking. It's strange that the Tibetans should be so hostile to the cigarette, while the little Chinese pipe, though not positively favoured, is nevertheless largely tolerated for laymen. The very word *shikre* (as the Tibetans pronounce "cigarette") is said to be ill-omened. *Shik* means to demolish and *re* to tear, and it is thus a combination of very sinister ideas, indicating that the thing concerned will bring evil and ruin to the country.

"It is also known that smoke is displeasing to the spirits, and that is really serious," Lobsang continues, completing his right-hand plait and starting on the other one.

Moreover there are the unambiguous words of a famous book, the *Lohi Chö-jung* (*Religious History of the South*):

There is one evil custom which is the forerunner of the Tempter himself. It is spreading among the general population as well as among the garrison forces. . . . It is the unceasing use of the evil, stinking, poisonous weed named tobacco. The smoke from this drug defiles the sacred objects of worship, the Images, the Books, the Relics. It weakens the Gods above, causes fighting among the Spirits of the Middle Air, and injures the Serpent Spirits below. From this cause arises an endless cycle of epidemics, wars, and famines in the human world.¹

Lobsang is unable to reconcile himself to Sönam's desire to smoke.

"You know," he says, "Padma Sambhava foresaw smoking a thousand years ago and more. In his great foresight he knew that men would one day succumb to that extreme and incomparably stupid vice. Smoke, smoke . . . he spoke of it in a *terma*."

Meanwhile Lobsang's toilet has been advancing steadily towards its completion. One plait is finished, and the second nearly so. When three-quarters of the work is done, Lobsang's deft and agile fingers insert into the hair a number of silk ribbons, coloured pink, cobalt green, and sky blue. The ribbons on each plait end in a long, many-coloured tassel, and this makes the final effect very decorative when he winds the plaits round his head.

"*Terma?*" Lobsang continues, noticing my puzzled expression. "*Termas* are books, thoughts, works, which the great sages of the

¹ Quoted by Sir Charles Bell, *op. cit.*, page 242.

past wrote for the illumination of future ages. . . . Sönam! Hi! Sönam! Is tea ready? . . . Would you like Tibetan or Indian tea?"

"If it is all the same, I should prefer Tibetan."

"Sönam! Sönam! *Pö-cha kesho!* (Bring Tibetan tea!) . . . The great men of the past foresaw everything. Every century has its vices, so they wrote books adapted to every century. They wrote books in which they gave remedies for all the vices of man and buried them in the mountains, underneath rivers, among the ice peaks. When the time comes, somebody discovers them. Thus we know what to think about all new things!"

Lobsang has reached the consummation of his labours and has started winding the plaits round his head. He rises, fetches a little mirror, and resumes his seat. He holds the mirror on his knees and starts fixing the plaits in place round his head with hairpins.

"When I was young," he says, "I would not believe in these things. But now I am convinced of them. We are all surrounded by mysterious events. Our ancestors knew better than we, so why should we not follow them?"

"What happens if a terma is discovered before its time?" I ask.

"That is terrible, terrible!"

Lobsang now has a hairpin between his lips and is holding his arms behind his head, putting the finishing touches to the meticulous labours of the last half-hour. As soon as he is able to remove the hairpin from his mouth and put it in his hair, to keep the last piece of multi-coloured silk in place, he goes on, "Do you know the story of the Abbot Ken-rab?"

Meanwhile Sönam brings me a jade cup with a cover shaped like a pagoda and a curious lotus-shaped silver saucer. I open it, and the boy pours the brew that Tibetans call tea from an elaborate brass pot.

"The Abbot Ken-rab," Lobsang continues, "dreamed that he heard a voice saying, 'Go to such-and-such a mountain and walk a hundred paces beyond the first waterfall. There you will find a revelation.' The Abbot Ken-rab at first took no notice. Then the voice became more insistent, and finally the abbot decided to obey. He

climbed the *kang-ri* (snow mountain), walked a hundred paces beyond the waterfall, and found a smooth, flat stone, which looked as if it had been shaped by man, in a place where certainly no one had ever been before. His monks raised it, and underneath they saw an ancient wooden box. They opened it and found a book. . . . Once upon a time I did not believe in these things—drink your tea, it'll get cold—but now I'm convinced of them. . . . Just when the Abbot Ken-rab was about to turn the pages of the book terrifying screams were heard, and green fire started issuing from the hole in the ground, threatening to burn them all alive. . . .”

I sip the tea brew—made of butter, soda, salt, boiling water, and tea prepared in a bamboo drum—and accept an oily, fur-covered biscuit, which I swallow with difficulty.

“But I don't understand,” I say to Lobsang. “Why did the Abbot Ken-rab have the dream?”

“Exactly,” says Lobsang. “That is the point.”

He rises and puts the mirror back in its place. His hair is now in perfect order, and he can proceed with the no less elaborate ceremony of putting on his Tibetan clothes, which he wears with the solemn dignity of a Chinese scholar.

“Zat is ze point,” he continues, in his bad but fluent English, while he puts on a fine silk robe over his shining white shirt and trousers and ties it round his waist with a silk sash.

“The question was studied for a long time,” he continues eventually. “Many lamas were consulted, and many well-known oracles, and eventually it was discovered—just imagine it!—that one of the monks had been stealing offerings, and that the tutelary deity of the monastery had therefore been deprived for a long time of the altar offerings which were his due. To avenge himself the tutelary deity had therefore caused the abbot to dream of the ill-omened discovery of a future *terma*. Tutelary deities are very malicious sometimes!”

As he says this, Lobsang carefully smooths out with his hand part of the edge of his *chuba* (robe) in which there seems to be the suggestion of a crease. Then he sits down again.

“So that nobody ever knew what was in the book?”

"No! There are certain things that one must not know. Would you like some more tea? Even you strangers ought to have great respect for the gods, you can never tell what will happen. Do you know the story of Williamson?"

"The Political Officer who died at Lhasa in 1936?"

"Yes. You think he died because he had a weak heart and an altitude of 10,800 feet was too much for him? Nonsense, my dear sir! He died because he had photographed the gods in a gön-kang, a shrine of the tutelary deities. You may not believe it, but it's a fact known to everybody in Lhasa and Tibet. . . . Please help yourself to another biscuit; they're fresh. Sönam baked them; he's a good lad. . . . A few hours before Williamson died a perfectly black figure entered his room and snatched his soul. . . . Won't you have some more tea? No? Once upon a time I used not to believe in these things, but gradually I became convinced, there were too many facts for me to do otherwise. Well, shall we go out? Let us walk down to the bridge, if you agree."

Lobsang is now ready for the calm and devoted day of a Buddhist personage in retirement. He has little to do with the people of Yatung. He is aware, and rightly aware, of being one of the few civilized persons in a small community consisting of people of every sort except the right sort. He stays at home, or walks about his garden. Once a day as regularly as clockwork he walks down to the bridge, saying his prayers on the way, with his rosary of stones held in his hands behind his back. After eleven o'clock in the morning he is always as ready and prepared as if the regent of Tibet, or the representative of a foreign power, or one of the five or six most important lamas in the whole of Central Asia, were about to pay a ceremonial visit to his house.

The living Bodhisattva

Lobsang told me yesterday that an Incarnated One was coming. The importance of the event was immediately made clear to me this morning by the extraordinary fact that the whole population turned

out to clean up the village. The Incarnated One was coming! The Great Doctor!

From early afternoon all Yatung was in the street. The air was cool and the sun shone brightly in an Alpine sky. All the boys were happy and excited and ran about more vigorously than usual, and the girls all wore aprons (*pang-den*) of electric colours. Two rows of white stones had been laid along the street, to help to keep evil influences away. Branches of cypress were burning in braziers outside every door, filling the air with scented and amazingly blue smoke.

The famous personage was thus received under a smoke-filled sky. He was preceded by a long procession of monks on horseback, servants with rifles and bandoliers, well-nourished abbots, beasts of burden carrying sacks of tsampa; others carried books, shrines, sacred pictures. The yellow robes, the crimson silk hats, the brown and black fur hoods, stood out in explosions of colour against the heavily scented blue smoke which hung over the village almost as if there had been a fire of cigarettes.

Suddenly there were shouts of "There he is! There he is!" The boys rushed forward to see, the women went down on their knees, the men bowed, wheels whirled giddily. The Great Doctor, wearing an ample, yellow silken robe and a hat of gilded metal, appeared out of the blue haze, riding a little white horse. He was twelve years old. He was enchanting.

Visit to the living Bodhisattva

I paid my respects officially to the living Bodhisattva. The famous little doctor sat cross-legged on a kind of throne, covered with silks and Chinese brocades, in the middle of a temple (see Plate 15). In front of him were offerings, as well as the double drum (*nga-chung*), the ceremonial bell (*tril-bu*), and the bronze thunderbolt (*dorje*). The temple was dark, deep, mysterious. People passed the little doctor in silence, bowed, and received a blessing. Those who made



17. Ancient fresco in the Kum-bum



18. A street in Chumbi



19. Mid-afternoon rest (Gyantse)



20. "Much ink for little gold; much gold for little ink."

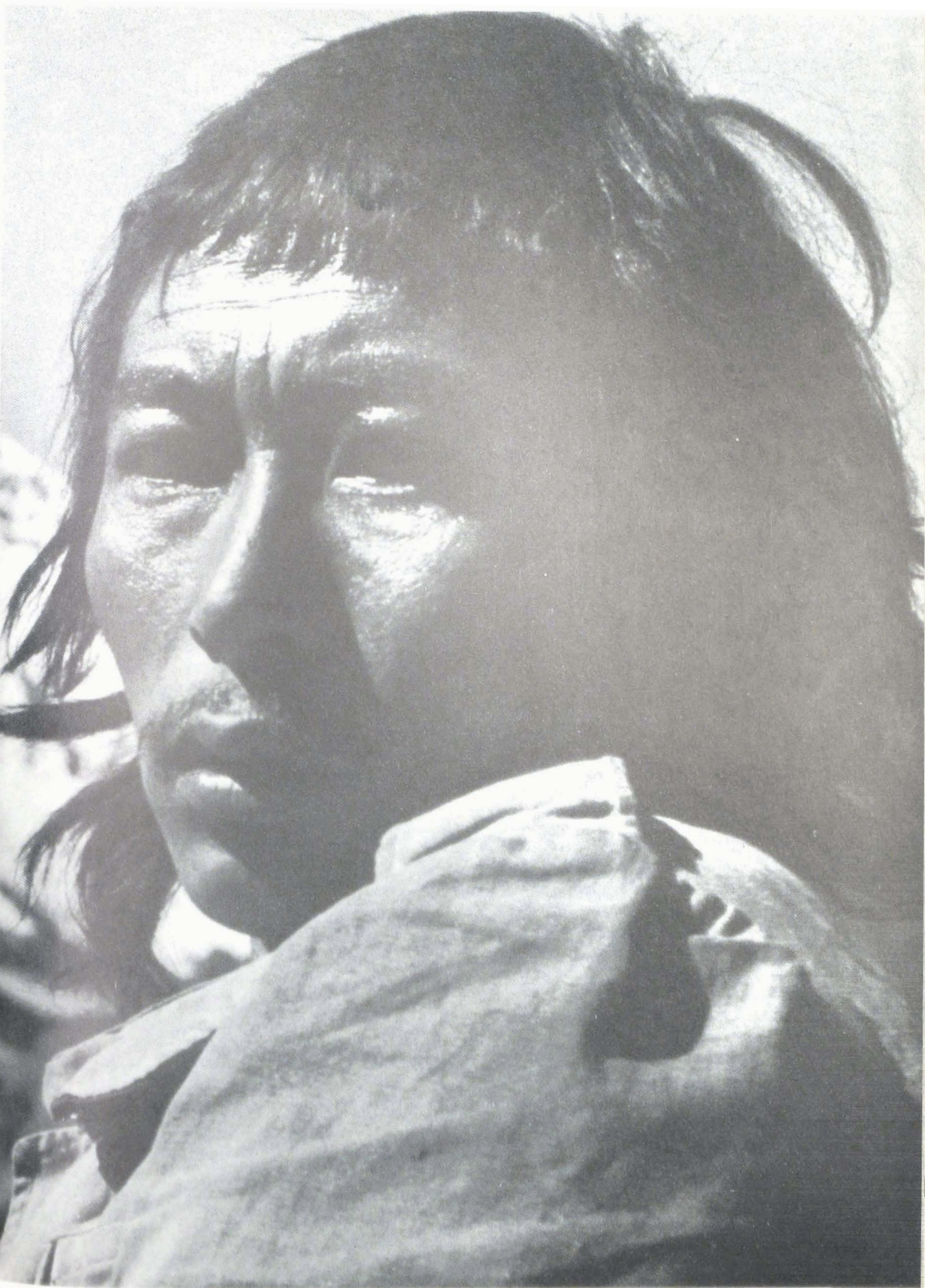
The Tibetan functionary Tob-wang



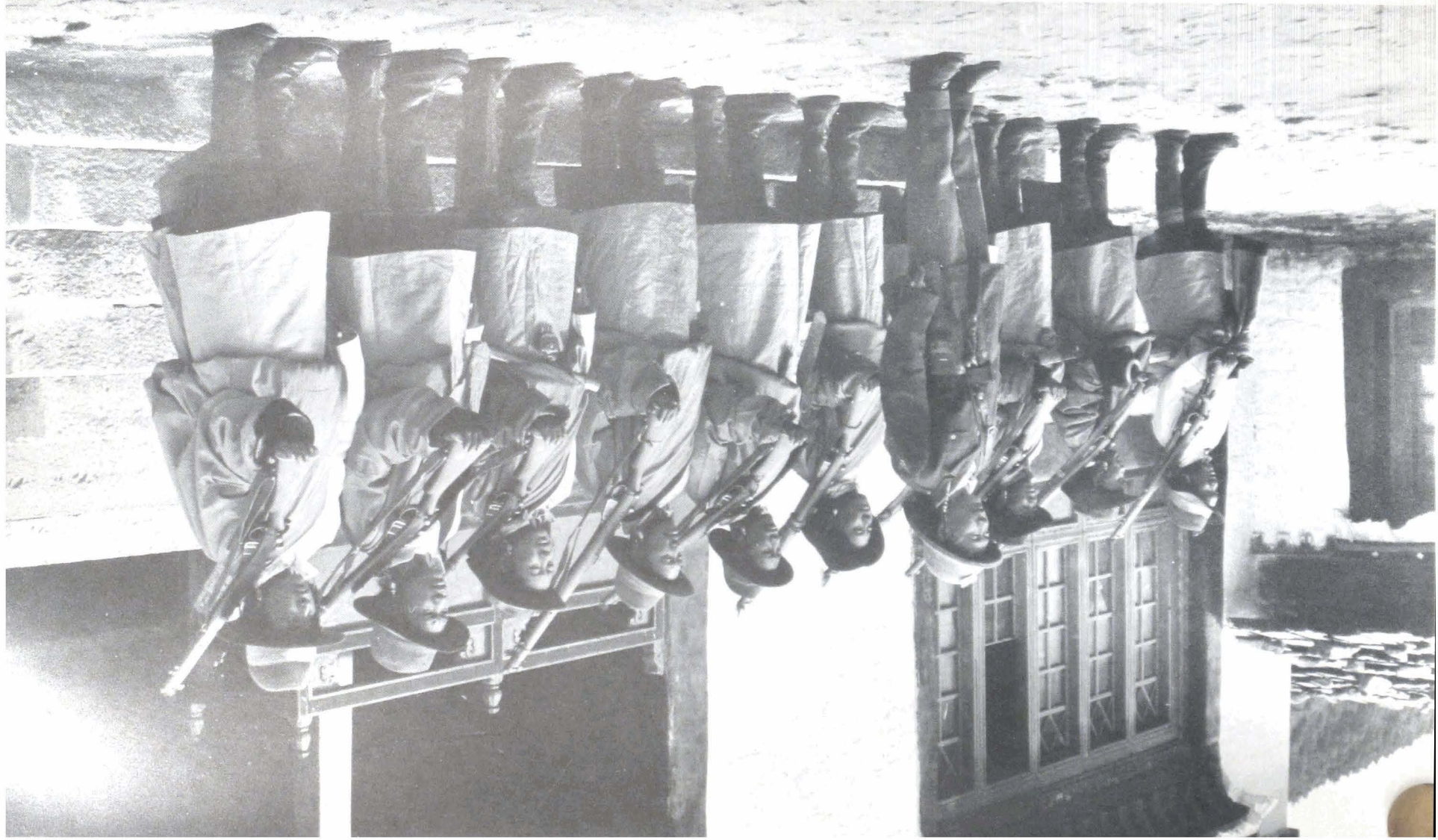
21. The doctor at Gyantse: He knows all about the local plants, which he uses to concoct dozens of different potions



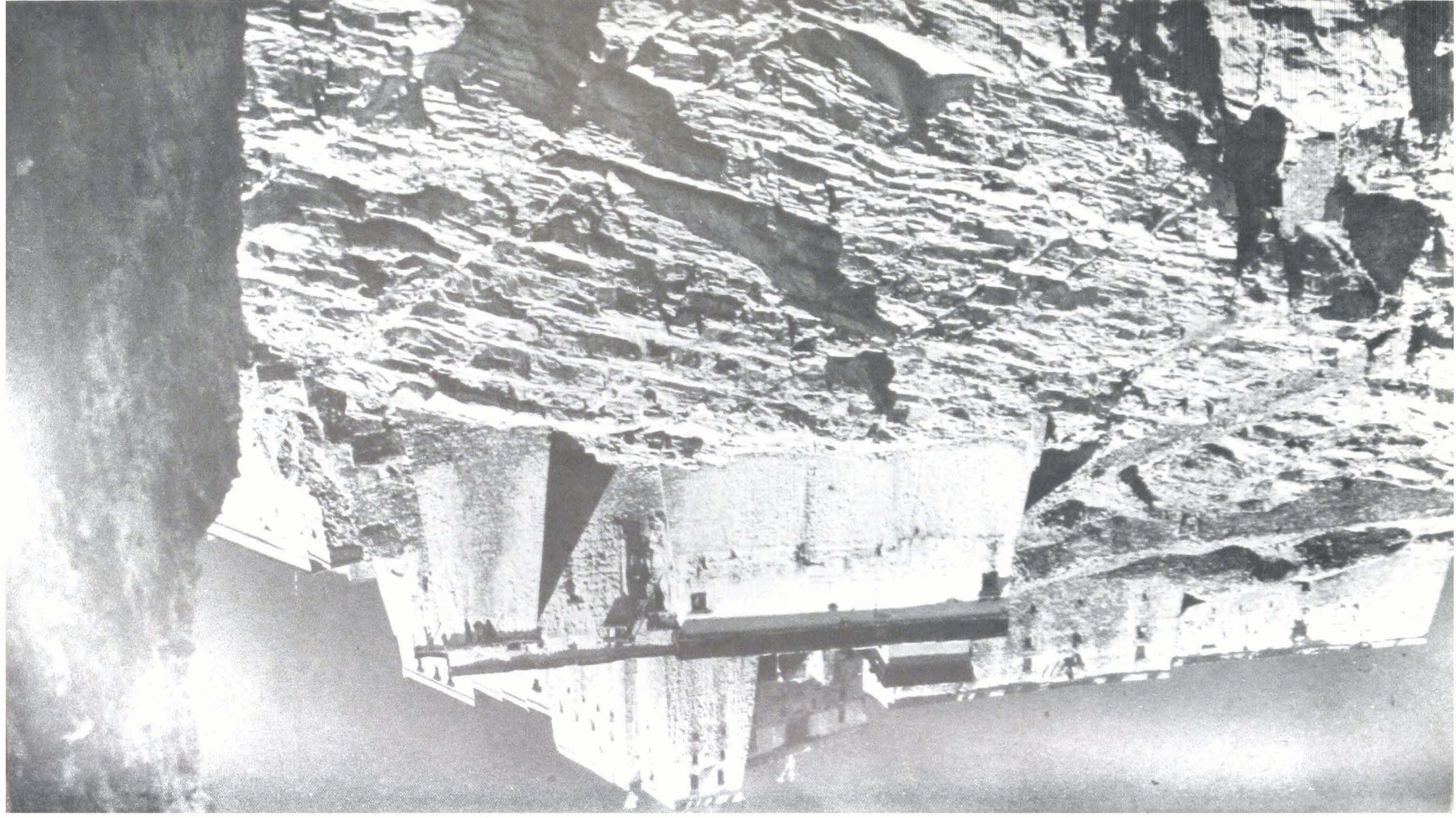
22. The Asia of Marco Polo. The lama of Ngor



23. The mule driver of Kham



24. Modern militarism on the roof of the world (Yatung)





26. A polyandrist (Gyantse)



27. Pleasures of a summer day (Gyantse)



28. Prince Thondup Namgyal at archery practice

29. His Highness Sir Tashi Namgyal, maharajah of Sikkim: He passes from room to room of his palace as quietly as if he moved by levitation





30. Spectators at the play
(Yatung)





31. Actress-dancer

"Maiden, if you cross the mountain, you will see the palace of the king of Lotusland."—Tibetan sacred play



32. "The ears of young women hearken not the cymbals of the temple
but to light songs."—Milarepa
Peasant girls, Samada

a sufficient offering received in return a white silk sash (*ka-ta*). The child laid his hands on everybody's head. On the walls you caught glimpses of the frescoes of Buddhas, meditating serenely in their hieratic composure, and of terrifying gods dancing in lakes of blood, drinking ambrosia from human skulls made into cups.

The doctor's full name was Ngawang Lobsang Gyalden Jigme Chöki Wangchuk. He was the son of the Enche Kasi of Gangtok. Soon he would be going to complete his education in one of the big monasteries of Lhasa.

I offered a few rupees to one of the monks, and received a sash from the hands of the little living god. There was not a trace of uncertainty, not a shadow of doubt, in the child's handsome, bright eyes. He knew he was one of the elect. He had never thought otherwise.

The headman Mingyur; why not export coral?

Mingyur, the *gong-thu* (headman) of the village of Yatung, cannot stand the ex-interpreter Lobsang. I have never found out how the antagonism between them originally arose. But the retired official's way of life, his living apart and aloof, like an offended king in exile, might have been specially designed to irritate the representative of authority in any little community anywhere in the world. Lobsang's manner does not suggest pride or superiority; he does not put on airs of any kind; but his behaviour subtly suggests dissatisfaction, the dissatisfaction of a man who has looked about him and seen that everything is beneath his notice, so much beneath his notice that there is no need even to show it. On the other hand the people of the village have allowed themselves gradually to be impressed, both by Lobsang's retired life and the ever more conspicuous manifestations of his piety. Mingyur's authority has suffered in consequence. Discussions often end by somebody's suggesting that they go and see what Lobsang has to say about it.

"But who is this Lobsang?" Mingyur then shouts, losing his

temper. "He's done nothing but cause trouble and confusion all his life, and now, just because he plays the holy man, you all bow down and worship him!"

"Lobsang is Lobsang," the people reply. This statement, however stupid and unreasonable, is incontrovertible and final.

Mingyur is a wizened old man in his sixties, but he is much better preserved than Lobsang. He is generally regarded as a fool, but I suspect that the truth is that he is the only really honest man among all the traffickers and smugglers along the caravan route. He is to be seen going about his affairs every day; his own and those of the community. He is always dressed in Tibetan style, the style worn by the country folk: a woollen chuba, an unbleached cotton shirt, and leather boots. He wears his hair short. He is what is known as a moderate and sensible man—he is a traditionalist without going to extremes, religious but not to excess, a drinker but in moderation, etc., etc. He is certainly less educated, less curious, less subtle, less everything than Lobsang, but he is simpler and more human.

Now and again I go to his house for a chat. Mingyur's family consists of an exceedingly ugly but extremely devoted and attentive wife, and an apparently endless number of children. There must be at least nine or ten of them, but I don't know; in any case a very large number for a by no means prolific country such as Tibet. The two eldest girls—Pemá Chödrön and Pemá Sandup—who are about fifteen or sixteen, would be very nice girls if their heads had not been turned by the fact of being the headman's daughters.

Mingyur's house is more or less typical of those of the relatively prosperous inhabitants of Yatung. You first enter a room used as a storeroom, full of saddles, tools, sacks of merchandise, all the things characteristic of the romantic, feudal life of this country. You then enter the kitchen, a dark, sooty place, with the Eight Glorious Emblems crudely painted in white on the wall; and finally you reach Mingyur's own room, which also serves as parlour and chapel. In its capacity as parlour a number of the thick cushions which the Tibetans use for chairs are arranged around the walls, as well as a few small lacquered tables for tea and biscuits. In its capacity as chapel

it has a beautiful little carved and gilded wooden altar, with a few statuettes (Padma Sambhava, Chen-re-zi, Sakya-thupa); and on the wall there are two or three *tang-ka* (pictures painted on cloth), and some photographs of lamas and celebrated temples, as well as a view of Lhasa. His chapel is every Tibetan's pride. The chapel in the house of a feudal lord often rivals those of the temples in richness of decoration, number of statues, pictures, books, precious cups, and wealth of offerings.

Mingyur sees in me, as a European, primarily a mechanical wizard. Every time I go to see him he asks me to repair either an old alarm clock that won't ring, or an old padlock that won't open, or an old electric-light bulb that won't light. In spite of my many protests and failures, he is never discouraged. He always wants me to try again. Also he always has a list of English words which he doesn't know how to pronounce, and he always and invariably makes the same mistakes in trying to pronounce them. Yesterday I finally managed to repair the alarm clock, whereupon Mingyur invited me to dinner.

I insisted that the meal should be in Tibetan style; that is to say, that it should consist, not of the dishes which the rich cause to be served on special occasions and which are practically the same as Chinese, but of what ordinary Tibetans eat on ordinary occasions. Mingyur and I ate in the parlour-chapel. Every now and then his wife came in to serve us, stayed a few moments to exchange a few words, and then vanished into the kitchen again; the children stood in the corridor, peeping round the door. They enjoyed themselves hugely, laughing outright at all the errors of etiquette that a foreigner inevitably makes at meals.

"Go away! Go away!" Mingyur would shout, and silence would reign in the corridor for a few moments. But imperceptibly then the door would open again, and the face of a child of three would appear in the opening, with an expression of infinite curiosity in its eyes.

Mingyur taught me to pour tea into *tsampa*.

"You wanted to see how we Tibetans eat, didn't you? This is an

ordinary, everyday meal. A poor thing, isn't it? You Westerners are all rich, but we are all poor!"

I tried to convince him that this was not so, but it is the general belief, and there is little one can do about it.

Tsampa is simply roasted barley flour. Every Tibetan family keeps a stock of it, and Tibetan travellers always have a small sack of it in their baggage. You take a small handful, put it in your bowl, and pour over it the requisite amount of hot tea; you then mix it with your fingers into a dough of the consistency of fresh marzipan; and you then, of course, add butter, again mixing it with your fingers. Finally you eat it in small mouthfuls. Does it sound revolting? It's a thousand times better than the tragic messes with high-sounding French names served in Indian restaurants. True, you need a certain amount of appetite, and a certain capacity for adaptation. But if you travel you don't lack the former, and if you lack the latter you don't travel.

Mingyur likes talking business. Like all Tibetans, he is full of sound commercial ideas.

"Why don't you export coral from your country?" he asked. "They say Italian coral is the best in the world. At Lhasa they're crazy about coral. You could sell it at very high prices!"

"That's certainly an idea."

"You could take turquoises in exchange. Here they're very cheap. Isn't there a demand for them in your country?"

Mingyur's eyes shone with pleasure. A good business deal gives almost physical pleasure to a true Tibetan.

Mingyur's wife brought us a dish of yak meat, roasted and cut in pieces. Yak meat, mutton or goat, salted, smoked, and dried in the sun in the sterile air at 12,000 feet, is one of the principal foods of the Tibetan people. In a country where cattle-rearing is so widespread and agriculture often so difficult, because of the cold and the dryness and the poverty of the soil, it is natural that meat should be an important, if not exclusive, article of diet.

But for centuries this has confronted the Tibetans with a grave moral conflict. The first commandment for all Buddhists is: Thou

shalt not take life. How, then, can a Buddhist reconcile himself to the taking of animal life, even if it be to feed his own children or parents? All monks, incidentally, claim to be vegetarians, and, within certain limits, they are. But laymen make no pretence to be vegetarians, and for most of them meat is an important article of diet. Clearly custom is the practically unalterable foundation on which the characteristics of a civilization are based. Buddhism did not make the Japanese less warlike, and Christianity did not make the Latins less sensual. Similarly Lamaism was able only partially to modify the Tibetans' taste for meat.

Certain fundamental rules and fictions are nevertheless observed. Butchers constitute a kind of caste apart; they live in a state of inferiority and are considered in various ways to be "impure." But, fortunately for them, the sin, the bad karma accumulated as the result of their activities, is considered to be shared by the whole community. Being divided among so many heads, each individual's share is small, infinitesimal—practically nil. In the Wa-pa-ling quarter of Lhasa Mohammedan butchers (of Chinese descent) are employed. For these people slaughtering animals is no sin.

This always reminds me of the Japanese monks who called wild boar *yamakujira* (mountain whale); this enabled them to eat it as if it were a creature of the sea. Other abbots and monks used to engage in long religious ceremonies aimed at securing the rebirth of slaughtered animals at a higher evolutionary level, thus enabling them to claim that slaughter actually benefited the beasts. Another Japanese memory is of the big religious ceremony, conducted at the expense of the Imperial University, which used to take place every year at Sapporo, near Hokkaido, in one of the biggest temples of the city, when the monks prayed for all the animals killed for experimental or other purposes in the medical and scientific departments of the university. I used to accompany Professor Kodama (whose assistant I was), and we attended the service with much solemnity and ceremony, dressed in black, and prayed for the frogs slain by our colleague the physiologist and for the guinea pigs slaughtered by our colleague the pathologist.

To return to Tibet, here is a proverb that reflects the general way of thinking in regard to these problems:

Sha-di nying-je-chen kyi sa, nying-je chang-chup lam ne dren.
 If its flesh be eaten by one of merciful mind;
 It will be led on the road of pure and perfect mercy.²

Human nature inevitably won the battle, but to justify itself appealed to the noblest part of itself, generosity.

Dinner with Mingyur came to an end. I forgot to mention that we should really have eaten with our fingers, but the mistress of the house insisted on providing us with those foreign inventions, knives and forks.

Afternoon at the torrent

The surroundings of Yatung are as beautiful as the village itself is ugly. The valley is like any Alpine valley. The same steep mountainsides climb up towards the sky, with the same woods of fir, larch, and pine, the same flower-filled meadows, the same torrents, the same rocky crests standing out in the sun. But, as you get to know the place better, you discover that there is also something different. Perhaps it is the latitude (we are on the same latitude as the Fezzan, in Libya); when the sky is clear there is much more light than in the Alps—more fire in the air. Also, everything is more grandiose and primitive. The woods are more like the primeval forests that must have covered Europe in the Magdalenian period; huge torrents dash wildly and noisily downhill; and the silence, the distance, and the heights are all on a heroic scale.

Spring is over, and with it the mythological flowering of the rhododendrons. Summer has started now, and the wild roses are out. The roses grow in tall, dense thickets, covered with petals of delicate colours, creamy-white or a pale pinkish-red. You see them everywhere, but particularly along the river. And down below, among the grass, there are millions of strawberries.

² Quoted by Sir Charles Bell, *op. cit.*, page 219.

The Kar-gyu lama; fingers like a corps de ballet

Tibetan men normally wear their hair long. The only men with short hair are the monks of the Yellow Sect and some of the "modernists" along the caravan route. The monks of the Kar-gyu sect, in addition to their own hair, which is very long as it is, wear a kind of turban of artificial hair.

A few days ago a tall, smooth, clean-shaven mysterious lama belonging to that sect appeared at Yatung. He spends his time going from village to village. A long way away, in eastern Tibet, he has a wife and five children, a fact which greatly scandalizes a friend of ours, a lama of the Yellow Sect, the Gelug-pa, the Virtuous, who fulminates against the slackness and immorality of the Kar-gyu sect, whom he calls cheap magicians. The newcomer is undoubtedly a wizard, as is asserted by popular repute and confirmed by something indefinably serpentine and faunlike which he constantly betrays in his person. Also, there are his hands. They are long, supple hands, the hands of a thaumaturge or alchemist, and no effort is required to imagine them in the act of transmuting metals or summoning up demons from the bowels of the earth. His whole art consists of charms and exorcisms, in the power he is said to exercise over the obscure forces of evil by which every Tibetan feels himself surrounded. He goes from house to house offering his services. He knows how to ingratiate himself with the women, walks barefooted, keeps appearing suddenly out of nowhere, and you never know what he is thinking.

Today he conducted the *Barche-serwa* ceremony, which is always observed before starting on a journey. For lack of a temple of his sect in the village, he used the house of an acquaintance, Sandhup. Sandhup, however, was not present; he suffers from rheumatism and had gone up to Phari Dzong for the sake of the hot baths, and his wife therefore did the honours. The parlour served as chapel; a medium-sized room, containing many hard cushions for sitting on, a cupboard and an altar, as well as a number of brass teapots, photo-

graphs (the thirteenth Dalai Lama, the regent, the temple of Bodhgaya), and a number of rifles, saddles, and sacks of grain. There was a feeling of age-old silence about the room, and it stank of butter. The ceremony lasted for hours and hours. Every now and then the endless chanting was interrupted by strokes on a drum. The lama formed offerings, consisting of tsampa dough and butter, into strange shapes with his fingers. Some were placed on the altar, others thrown out into the street to placate the spirits.

Two things struck me with an almost terrifying vividness, which I shall never forget. One was the deep, cavernous, subterranean voice with which the lama read his invocation to the terrifying gods; the other was the play of his hands in the various mystic positions in which he placed them according to the deities being invoked. His fingers were now snakes, now members of a corps de ballet. The rest of the man was forgotten, absent, left outside in the dark, but those hands of his lived a life of their own in the centre of an immense, deserted Tibet, as infinite as space and as deep as the jungle.

The tailor Tob-chen; the privilege of initiates

Tob-chen is the tailor of Yatung. He is also an antique dealer, an actor, a smuggler, the happy father of a family, a forger, a pillar of the whole neighbourhood, a corrupter of youth, and a patron of the local monasteries. Sometimes he makes a chuba or an *onju* (shirt), but the widespread ramifications of his affairs keep him constantly on the move up and down the valley. If you want meat, butter, petrol, cigarettes, Tob-chen is your man. If you want a statue, a picture, a carved mask, or some jade cups, Tob-chen is your man. If you want a piece of forest, a monastery, a girl, a rare book, pearls, or a martyr's bones, Tob-chen is your man. I don't believe there's anything in the world he couldn't get for you, naturally in return for a suitable fee. Woe to him who falls into Tob-chen's bad books! He is as ingratiating, humble, and charming to his superiors—rich men, lamas, or those who give him money—as he is haughty, rude, over-

bearing, and unpleasant to the poor, to strangers, and to those who owe him money. He is less than forty, fat without being flabby, has drooping moustaches, and can pass instantaneously from his ingratiating smile to Jesuitical compunction or the icy reserve of an offended statesman. He lives in a house near the bridge. His wife is ugly, gentle, and kind-hearted. Some people like him, a few fear him, and perhaps nobody hates him. But nobody trusts him.

If Lobsang to some extent represents the upper classes, at any rate in his manners and because of a certain largeness of view, and if Mingyur can be said to belong to the petty bourgeoisie, Tob-chen belongs frankly to the people; not to the labouring, honest people of the countryside or the mountains, but the people of the seaports, the bazaars, and the caravan route. I met him today in the street. He was advancing solemnly with a companion, with his usual air of one basking in the prosperity, peace, and serenity of the righteous. He was dressed in what he takes to be European style; that is to say, he wore a shrieking pair of American yellow shoes, violet socks, green trousers coming to below his knees, a violet pullover, and a filthy white shirt. Planted comically on the top of his head was a yellowish soft hat, from under which there descended an untidy, dusty pigtail, which had not been attended to for months.

As he approached his smile expanded from the broad to the ineffable. With a low bow he then said to me, "Why not come along and see me this evening about that little matter?"

Talking to a foreigner in the presence of a third party and hinting at "little matters" and other mystifications is all part of a complicated behaviour pattern intended to put him on a pedestal in relation to his fellow villagers.

Tob-chen's house is typical of the houses of the people in this part of Tibet. We are still in the Himalayas and there is no lack of timber. The walls are of stone, but the roof, the stairs, the balconies, the floors, and the fixtures are all of wood. I went up a few steps, passed through the so-called shop, where from time to time Tob-chen makes a coat, singing as he works, walked down a long dark corridor

crowded with sacks, saddles, tools, odd pieces of furniture, skins full of butter, old rifles, and boxes containing heaven knows what, and eventually reached the kitchen.

"Come in! Come in! No, don't come into the kitchen, it's dirty! Come upstairs! You'll excuse my humble home, won't you? I'm only a poor man!"

But I stopped, enchanted. The kitchen belonged to a world of fairy tales and witches. It was black and sooty, with enormous pots, pans, and sinks. On the smoky walls someone had crudely but effectively drawn the Eight Glorious Emblems. A whining child came up to me and said something that at first I could not catch. But then I made it out very distinctly. It was the word "Baksheesh!"

I went upstairs and entered Tob-chen's sanctum: his sitting room, chapel, den, office, antique shop, food store, and opium parlour. I sat down on one of the big cushions. Tob-chen started rummaging in his sheepskin-covered boxes. His wife brought up the inevitable tea and biscuits. A blue Bodhisattva looked at me from an altar of carved, lacquered, and gilded wood. I think the Bodhisattva was Tse-pa-me (Life without Limits). He had a sly expression, of a kind rarely found in Tibetan sculpture; it made him a suitable accomplice for Tob-chen.

As soon as his wife had gone, Tob-chen started producing silk handkerchiefs from a package. Finally he produced a statuette of Chen-re-zi, the Bodhisattva of mercy, who is incarnated in the Dalai Lama. I had seen it a few days before and recognized it at once.

"But, Tob-chen," I exclaimed, "I saw that statue at the ——— monastery!"

Tob-chen indicated by signs that I should talk more quietly.

"I'm sure you will appreciate," he said, "that every now and then the poor monks need to have a beam or a wall repaired and haven't got the money."

"Of course! But I always thought it was forbidden to sell things belonging to a monastery."

"Certainly it is. That is to say, it's forbidden to fools to sell them. *We* know secret ways."

How much technical, professional competence there was in that "we"!

"But what about the gods?"

"They'll shut one eye. After all, we've all got to live! Don't you know the Tibetan proverb? *Lha dre mi chö-nang chig* (Gods, devils, and men all behave in the same way). Do you mean to say that they won't understand and forgive?"

Tob-chen rose and lit a number of little butter lamps in front of the statuette of Tse-pa-me.

Visit to a hermitage: serenity of a meal in a skull

In a rugged valley high up in the rocky fastnesses above Yatung, in the shade of clumps of fir trees which cling like birds' nests to the mountainside, are the hut-cells of a hermitage, the *ri-trö* of Chumbi.

I went there this evening; only the tree-tops were still lit by the golden gleam of sunset; the high mountain on the other side of the valley was already plunged in shadow. The place seemed to be deserted. The path climbed through grass and between tree-trunks. Every now and then I saw a little hut-cell. Was it empty, or inhabited by a silent hermit? Suddenly I heard a voice and saw just above me a man's face peering out of the window of a tiny hut that seemed to be practically hanging from the wall of rock.

"Kushog-sahib!" he called out. "Come up here! Rest for a moment, there's no hurry; and there's no one in the *ri-trö*."

I climbed a few more yards, and found waiting for me at the entrance of the hut a young-looking lama, short of stature, whose manners and appearance were immediately pleasing. His hut was really minute. It was no more than a wooden box, one end of which rested on piles while the other rested on a ledge of rock. I almost feared that my extra weight might topple it over.

Lama Gedul belonged to one of the nonreformed sects, and therefore wore his hair long. He was preparing a modest supper—boiled herbs and a little *tsampa*, which he would later eat out of a skull. The skull was there, shaped into a bowl. It was smooth and clean,

resembling old ivory. There were also a few books, a few liturgical objects, and two or three paintings. Through the window there was a view of distant snow-capped peaks.

Mrs. Yishe; mechanical wizards and pharmaceutical saints

Let us return to the high society of Yatung. The male pillar of this society is, as we have seen, Lobsang, and Mrs. Yishe is his female counterpart. She is the widow of a man who played a big part in relations between Tibetans and foreigners; he was actually Lobsang's superior. His widow, a majestic, matronly figure, is now the supreme and undisputed social arbiter of the village. Unlike Lobsang, who shuts himself up in his embittered old age, Mrs. Yishe is a cheerful and sociable old lady, and she is therefore generally popular.

Mingyur, the village headman, cultivates Europeans in their capacity as mechanical miracle workers (repairers of rusty and gangrenous alarm clocks, locks, padlocks, and fountain pens); but for Mrs. Yishe Europeans are primarily purveyors of the miracles of the chemist's shop (pills, powders, injections, creams, and lotions). Most Asians, in fact, tend to vary between Mingyur's view of us and Mrs. Yishe's. We are not more civilized, or more profound, or even more industrious than they. But we are more surprising, more diabolical, more fortunate. We are alchemists; we have found the philosopher's stone and have bound ourselves by secret pacts to the serpentine spirits of the lower regions. Kings and ministers of state are perfectly willing to applaud from their ringside seats at the circus acrobatic feats which they could not possibly emulate. But, when the performance is over, the kings and ministers remain kings and ministers, while the poor acrobat, when he leaves the ring, is nobody at all. From the point of view of the inner recesses of the Oriental mind, we are the poor acrobats and they are the kings and ministers. Dante, Bach, the Roman Empire, the Renaissance, Shakespeare, Leonardo, the Gothic cathedrals, and St. Francis make little impression on them. But a Kodak—what a prodigious thing!

The fault is ours. We sent to Asia adventurers, soldiers, merchants, administrators—men who were either ignorant, or bigoted, or intent only on gain, or, alternatively, kept to themselves without paying any heed to “the natives.” The only ones who concerned themselves with these were the missionaries, but their work—carried out, it is true, with great self-sacrifice and often with supreme heroism—was to teach a universal religion, not to present a picture of European civilization. The only people who have done anything in the latter field are the French.

One of the few Europeans who have realized the existence of this problem is Marco Pallis, who is writing a book on this subject at Kalimpong which will be invaluable to the Tibetans. Marco Pallis is Greek by origin, English by education, and speaks excellent French. He is, therefore, a European in the sense the word will have when the so-called nations of today are reduced, as they ought to be reduced, to the status of provinces in a greater continental unity. Marco Pallis first got to know Tibet in the course of a climbing expedition a few years ago. He promptly fell in love with it, and since that time has dedicated himself exclusively to studying it. A book of his, *Peaks and Lamas*, was very successful; and he is now writing a little book, to be translated by a lama, intended to introduce the essence of European civilization to the Tibetans, whose knowledge of it is restricted to arms, the wireless, films, and pills. Who else has tried to do so much for Europe in Asia? Very few. This sense of lay mission is extremely important for the mutual understanding of the peoples and for world peace; it is as important as a religious mission. So long as East and West fundamentally consider each other barbarians, there can be no basis for the most elementary understanding.

As for Mrs. Yishe, she has no real need for any kind of pill or medicine. Her big, well-nourished frame was built to take her through the years to a healthy and dignified old age with a minimum of trouble. But to her pills are as important as a sacred rite; something both simple and mysterious, belonging partly to the world of magic (like exorcism), partly to the world of scientific wonders (like

matches). If there is no illness, it is necessary to invent it. Pills and powders must be taken, and injections are absolutely essential.

Mrs. Yishe, being grateful for her examination by our doctor, Colonel Moise, and for all the medicines with which the expedition has provided her, came to see us today in all her splendour as a former lady of high society in Lhasa, a city a long way from Yatung and as fabulous as Paris or Rome could possibly be from a small town in Sicily. Her jet-black Mongol hair was held up and displayed by a *patruk*, a support made of wood, velvet, and coral, and round her neck was an infinity of jewels. Gold and turquoises provided the keynote. The turquoises in her big earrings (*elkor*) were Alpine blue in color; they were bright, alive, stupendous. Her box for relics and benedictions (*kau*) was of gold, studded with precious stones and turquoises. The equipment corresponding to the contents of a European woman's handbag was suspended from her left shoulder—a number of tiny silver cosmetic appliances. Mrs. Yishe had about her a value equivalent to several thousand pounds, and was naturally very proud of it.

Conversation was difficult at first, and there were a number of those painful pauses which are usual between Asians and Europeans on formal occasions, but then Mrs. Yishe chanced upon a felicitous subject. The subject was horoscopes. The Tibetan mind is continually occupied with horoscopes, which give them endless joy, hope, and fear. Horoscopes are, of course, by no means an alien or unusual thing with us. I know a number of perfectly intelligent and well-informed people who frequently consult astrologers and the like before making difficult decisions. (The reader, if he considers for a moment, will find that he himself knows a number of believers in astrology.) There is a universal need to lean on something outside ourselves and to relieve the mind of the supreme burden of decision. But in Tibet it is all much simpler and more natural, and no one is ashamed of it. Talking about horoscopes is like talking about the latest fashions or the latest film or yesterday's football match.

In working out a Western horoscope the fundamental thing is the date of birth. This establishes which constellation was then in the

ascendant, and what were the relations between it and the planets. In Asia horoscopes are worked out on a different principle. (This might be the subject of a fascinating comparative study!) To understand the Asian system, it is necessary to explain that in Tibet, as in China, Japan, Korea, and other Eastern countries, the calendar is divided into a sixty-year cycle. Each year of the cycle is designated by associating one of the Twelve Animals with one of the Five Elements. Here is an example:

Twenty Years of the Sixteenth Sixty-Year Cycle (1927–1987)

| | | | |
|------|--------------|------|-------------|
| 1945 | wood—bird | 1955 | wood—sheep |
| 1946 | dog—fire | 1956 | fire—monkey |
| 1947 | fire—pig | 1957 | fire—bird |
| 1948 | earth—rat | 1958 | earth—dog |
| 1949 | earth—ox | 1959 | earth—pig |
| 1950 | iron—tiger | 1960 | iron—rat |
| 1951 | iron—hare | 1961 | iron—ox |
| 1952 | water—dragon | 1962 | water—tiger |
| 1953 | water—snake | 1963 | water—hare |
| 1954 | wood—horse | 1964 | wood—dragon |

A realistic significance is given to the various animals and elements, and proportions are worked out which serve as data for working out the horoscope. There are antagonisms between certain animals, for example, between the rat and the horse, the hare and the bird, the snake and the pig; and there are certain affinities among the elements. There is, for example, a “maternal” affinity between water and wood, because wood does not grow without water, which is therefore its “mother”; there are also “filial” affinities (the opposite of the preceding), “friendly” affinities (fire is the “friend” of water, because fire warms water), and “hostile” affinities (earth is the enemy of water, because earth confines water), and so on.

Other factors that have to be taken into account include time factors (the day and the hour), because there are favourable and unfavourable times. The second, fourteenth, eighteenth, twentieth, and twenty-sixth days are always days of ill-omen, and the ninth is a good day on which to undertake a long journey but not a short one. There

also have to be taken into account certain combinations to be obtained with the fifty-four hexagrams (of Chinese origin), to say nothing of the influence of the constellations and the planets and the attitude of certain well-known evil spirits. Finally the *me-wa* (magic square) has to be consulted, the age reversed is calculated, and data connected with the "celestial rope" and the "terrestrial dagger" are taken into account. The whole is then considered under five separate headings: life, body, power, fortune, and intelligence. As the final result depends on so many variables, a Tibetan horoscope is obviously a matter of extreme complication, and naturally the lamas insist on being very well paid for it.

*The Pak-jan monastery: the Six Good Things,
and the little girl with the harelip*

One of the characteristics of ancient, settled civilizations which have had a long development and have reached—at any rate relatively—a kind of final stability is the special significance attributed to certain numbers. In the West the classical world invented and handed down to us the Seven Wise Men, the Three Graces, the Seven Wonders of the World, the Nine Muses, and so on; Christianity added the Ten Commandments, the Four Evangelists, the seven sins and the seven virtues, to quote only a few. In the East, Chinese civilization presents us with a whole universe as tidily and permanently arranged as the goods in a chemist's shop, with its Two Principles, Four Forms, Eight Trigrams, Four Books, Five Canons, Three Kingdoms, eight classes of spirits, six dynasties, and so on.

But we live in a world of continual change and evolution. Everything is dying and being reborn. We have, perhaps, acquired a Bergsonian sense of time and becoming, but we have certainly lost the Parmenidean sense of being and eternity. Such numbers have therefore lost their meaning for us, and there is no basis for fresh ones to establish themselves. From this point of view we read Dante with a purely archaeological interest. The only real modern number of this kind that belongs entirely to ourselves is the ninety-two elements, but

these are undergoing too much modification by physicists to assume the final, rocklike stability in the mind that other spiritual or material numbers had in former centuries.

Tibetan civilization (perhaps the only civilization of another age to have survived intact into our own time) is naturally permeated with such numbers and similar symbols. I have already referred to the Eight Glorious Emblems (*thrashi te-gye*), the Twelve Animals, and the Five Elements. Other important signs and symbols are the Three Precious Things (*kon-chok sum*): Senge, Chö, Gedun (Buddha, the Faith, and the Community); to say nothing of the Seven Gems: the Wheel, representing the symmetry and completeness of the Law; the Jewel, which procures every good thing desired; the Jasper-girl, who fans the air so that her prince may sleep and remains beside him with the constancy of a slave; the Gem of a Minister, who ingeniously administers the affairs of the realm; the White Elephant, symbol of the sovereign power; the Horse, which perhaps symbolizes the coach of the sun, i.e., "a dominion over which the sun never sets"; and the Gem of a General, who throws back the forces of the enemy. Then there are the Seven Personal Gems, the Eight Glorious Offerings, the Five Sensuous Qualities, the Five Good Fortunes, the Sixteen Disciples of the Buddha, the Ten Directions of Space, the Twelve Episodes in the Life of the Buddha, the Four Truths, the Five Dhyani Buddhas, with which are associated the Five Colours, the Five Symbols, and the Five Vowels—you never come to the end of them.

In this, as in other cases, a student who went to the heart of the matter would find elements of Indian origin closely linked with elements of Chinese origin. Tibet, that high, remote country, lying at the heart of the biggest continent, is a living museum, and therein lies its great fascination. Visiting Tibet, getting to know it, means travelling in time as well as space. It means for a brief while living as a contemporary of Dante or Boccaccio, Charles d'Orléans or Jean de Meung; breathing the air of another age, and learning by direct experience how our ancestors of twenty or twenty-five generations ago thought, lived, and loved.

Today, when I visited the Pak-jan monastery, near Yatung, I discovered the existence of a number which I did not know; that of the Six Good Things—nutmeg, cloves, saffron, cardamom, camphor, and sandalwood. An old lama of the monastery happened to mention them while I was sipping a cup of Tibetan tea, which always tastes abominably of smoke.

Pak-jan is very near Yatung—barely a quarter of an hour away. First you go northwards, mounting the caravan route, and then cross a little bridge, passing over a torrent and a tiny pond full of magnificently green water plants; then you climb a steep slope and see above you on a small piece of level ground the group of houses of which the so-called “monastery” consists. It was so unlike what such places in Tibet are supposed to be like that it is worth describing.

At first sight you would think you had come to a farmhouse. The stones in the yard had been worn by generations of footsteps and threshing; there were goats and sheep, and cows going to and coming from pasture. Rakes, shovels, stakes were leaning against the wall. A big Tibetan dog, which was chained, kept on barking till one of the family came out and told it to keep quiet.

Yes, one of the family. The monastery belongs to the Nima-pa sect (the Ancient Ones) and is inhabited only by an old lama, his wife—a little woman who is all bows and smiles, and five or six sons and daughters who work in the fields and take the beasts to pasture. There is always something moving about the combination of husbandry and religion. Is not the raising of plants and animals the continuation of God’s work? That may be true in the abstract, but the impression made on the visitor to Pak-jan by the lama of the place was far less elevating.

I do not say he was a bad man, but his lined, discontented face betrayed a long-standing, bitter grudge against life. Perhaps he had had a vocation and lost it; or perhaps he had never had a vocation, and became a lama just as one might become a trader or a clerk. Perhaps he had ambition and now felt himself a failure in this remote and inaccessible spot. I do not know. On my first visit he received me coldly, but after I gave him a tip he became servile.

He must have been about sixty, and he was tall, dirty, slovenly, and clumsy, with long, rapacious hands and long, filthy fingernails. His woollen robe was greasy, worn, and covered with stains, and he kept a whole store of things between the folds of the material and his chest. His expression was that of a suffering cab horse which still had enough spirit left to bite. Strangely enough, however, his family was immediately likeable. The eldest son, who was aged about twenty, was a strong-looking lad, almost clean-looking, with a high forehead and intelligent eyes, and the eldest daughter was pretty. There was a whole series of other boys and girls, down to a little girl of three, who had a pronounced harelip, which completely spoiled her face. Every now and then the old man picked up the poor little thing and cuddled her. A look of unexpected tenderness then came into his dead-looking eyes.

“Can one visit the *lha-kang*?” I asked.

“Certainly, certainly, come this way.”

The old man led the way. We mounted two steps, went through a gateway and entered a dark, damp little yard onto which the kitchen opened. The lama disappeared and returned a moment later with some very beautiful Tibetan keys in one hand and a handful of roasted seeds in the other. He offered me the supposed delicacy.

“Take some,” he said. “They’re good for you!”

They may have been good for me, but they stank of staleness and rancid butter. I had no alternative but to accept some from that grimy hand, the slightest lines of which were deeply ingrained with black.

The *lha-kang* (“the house of the god,” the temple) was a big room next to the kitchen. The heavy wooden door, which creaked when it opened, might have been the door of a granary or of a storeroom in which fruit was put to ripen or demijohns of olive oil were kept. But when the lama lit a tiny lamp there glimmered at the other extremity of the great cavernous hall the gold of a dusty statue, covered with ceremonial shawls which were all falling to pieces. It was a statue of Padma Sambhava, the sage who introduced Buddhism into Tibet in the eighth century and is an object of particular veneration to the

Nima-pa sect. Beside it were other statues, and there were big frescoes on the walls, representing ascetics with tigers on the leash and esoteric gods engaged in mystic embraces. From the ceiling there hung masks, sashes, and pictures painted on silk.

Everything in the place was old, smelling of rancid butter and space that had been enclosed for ages. It was all falling slowly to pieces and turning to fine dust, which went up one's nose and mouth and subtly made one cough. The pictures, barely lit by the priest's tiny candle, took the mind into the fantastic metaphysical empyreans of Lamaism, so remote in one sense from the farmyard outside, the kitchen next door, the cows, the farming implements, the ordinary, simple, everyday things outside, the children playing and running about (I could hear their voices) between a pile of turnips and the sheaves of straw. But there they were, the last overripe fruit of thousands of years of subtle intellectual labour; Dorje-sempa (Whose Essence Is Lightning), the personification of the Original Principle of the Universe, sitting erect and rigid in the ritual position of meditation, while his own Female Energy, holding in her left hand a skull full of blood, clothed in fluttering, precious robes and glittering with gold and jewels, abandoned herself with an infinite, divine voluptuousness to his arms, which were active as if in dance. . . .

"Papa! Papa!" whined a small child who had crept noiselessly into the temple on bare feet. "Mama says she can't find the key for the flour. Have you got it on your ring? Mama wants it!"

The tired old lama, with an expression of unspeakable boredom, searched for a long time between his robe and his chest. Then he found the key and gave it to the child, who disappeared.

On either side of the mystic pair of cosmic lovers were a number of supremely Tantric representations of Padma Sambhava, in the form of ascetics surrounded by flames, engaged in meditation, or escorted by wild beasts. They were fine pictures, having a strange, intoxicating force; they were among the best in the valley.

"May I take a photograph?" I asked.

The lama immediately realized that I had admitted his prerogative in the matter, and that he was therefore in a position to ask me for

something in return. His eyes brightened, and his long, filthy fingers became animated.

“All right,” he said, “but leave something . . . *shomé* . . . for the lamps.”

The magnesium flash startled him violently. After a moment’s terrified silence, he unexpectedly turned on me in a towering rage.

“Get outside!” he shouted. “Go away from here! Don’t you realize you’ve been disrespectful to the saints? The sudden light must have terrified them, and they’ll revenge themselves! And on whom? Not on you, because you’ll be a long way away! They’ll revenge themselves on us, don’t you understand . . .” The tone of his voice was already dropping and turning into a whine. . . . “They’ll revenge themselves on us, I tell you, and we’ll have to pay because of you, all because of your imprudence. . . .” His voice had dropped completely and become abject. . . . “Give me another two rupees because of the flame photograph!” he finished up.

The whole gompa, the lama’s house, the temple, the apartments of honour, must have known much better times. Perhaps that accounted for the lama’s mean, grasping behaviour. Nothing is more humiliating and degrading than continued lack of money. Any man subjected to it for a long time, condemned to impotence in the face of the slow disintegration of things, ends by degenerating and becoming brutalized. We went up to the first floor, where there were a number of chapels and the apartments of honour. The maharajah of Sikkim was the patron of the place, and everything up here was pretty well looked after. While I sipped a cup of tea from a jade cup the lama disappeared. He reappeared soon afterwards with something hidden under his robe. With an air of great secrecy he produced a carved wooden mask, painted in bright colours. It was ugly, and in any case he asked me a crazy price for it, equivalent to about eight pounds, so I didn’t even consider it.

We went on talking for a while. From the ornaments on a silver vase we jumped to the Seven Gems, and from there to the Six Good Things. I could tell that the old lama was pondering other ways and means of extracting a little money from me. Nets of that kind can be

spread with style and dignity, but he had neither one nor the other, and besides he was dirty, slovenly, ugly, and depressing.

The door opened and the little girl with the harelip came in, with a green apple in her hand. The old man picked her up and held her to his chest, and his eyes moistened.

“Haven’t you got a medicine, you who have so many medicines, for her mouth?” he said. “Now you hardly notice it, but when she’s older no one will want to marry her, and she’ll be very unhappy. It’s sad, sad!”

We went downstairs again. As we passed through the temple door the lama took me aside and whispered in my ear, “If you give me a little more money, you can take another photograph with the flame.”



METAPHYSICS AND POLITICS IN UPPER ASIA

The Dung-kar monastery: "Who is your protective deity?"

CHAMPA is a young trapa and is studying theology. He lives in the Dung-kar (White Conch) monastery, a little way to the north of Yatung. He is about twenty years old, he is tall and thin, and, as he belongs to the Gelug-pa, he keeps the hair of his head closely shaven. His skin is naturally encrusted with the perennial and universal Tibetan dirt. He is delicate in health, takes an interest in many things, was born in Sikkim, talks a little English, and in his youth was a Christian—I do not know whether Protestant or not. He reminds me a great deal of some of the Japanese students with whom I lived for so long. He has the same pathetic good will, the same tragic lack of direction and personality, the same emotional and intellectual extravagances, the same reverential fear in the face of any kind of superior.

Champa comes to see me every now and then with books. We translate Tibetan songs together; he explains Tibetan phrases and expressions to me, tells me about his life and, above all, asks me questions about the outside world, about which he is shyly but intelligently inquisitive. He doesn't confine himself to questions such as "What do you eat?" or "What are your houses like?" Yesterday he asked me, "Are the people of your country more fortunate and happy (*thrashi-pa*), or are the people here?"

It is a difficult question to answer. Happiness obviously does not depend on greater technical complications, and obviously one can be happy with very little and wretched in the midst of abundance. Each civilization must have its own typical, average man, however hard it may be to define him, and on that basis it should be possible

to make comparisons. I should say without hesitation that the Tibetans of the Tro-mo valley have a thousand reasons to consider themselves more fortunate and happy than the poorer inhabitants of the big cities of Europe. They are not rich, but neither are they poor. They have no newspapers, wireless, or cinemas, but they have professional story-tellers, wandering minstrels, and a popular theatre, and in the fine season they can go for excursions along the rivers, drink chang, and sing until late at night. Finally they live in a profoundly stable society, in which relations between individuals, between individuals and the community, between man and the universe, are a solid reality, which nobody either doubts or insists on.

The other day Champa suddenly asked me, "Who is your *yi-dam* (protective deity)?" In Tibet not only does every sect, every order, every monastery, have one protective deity or more, but every individual lives under the constant protection of his own personal protective deity. He may have chosen his *yi-dam* for himself, but more probably his *yi-dam* will have been indicated to him by his *guru*, or spiritual director. (*Guru* is a Sanskrit word, possibly related to the same root as the Latin *gravis*.) Champa's question struck me for two reasons. In the first place, I have no particular *yi-dam* (though, if I had to choose, I think my choice would fall upon Dū-kor, the Wheel of Time, because what is more mysterious than time? Eternity is intelligible, I should say obvious, as is being. But the really insoluble puzzles are time and becoming, the world, the multiple, and the finite). In the second place the question interested me because it reflected Champa's conception of life.

A man is in the first place the universe that he carries about inside him. Every one of us has, or rather is, such a universe, whether big or small, simple or complicated, childish and imaginative or mature and analytical; no one is without one. Our inner universe takes shape slowly in childhood, in the course of our upbringing and education, and is permeated through and through, to its profoundest depths, by the civilization which nourishes us. There is no such thing as "natural" man; there is only "civilized" man. We are Europeans, not only because we use concepts such as right, romanticism, or parliament,

or because of our reactions when confronted with the naked human form or the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, but because we walk like Europeans, make love like Europeans, hail a friend on the other side of the street like Europeans. For a time, believing that Champa and I, because we used the same vocabulary, spoke the same language, I was led astray, but this question was like a sudden ray of light illuminating an otherwise invisible abyss.

Champa has often invited me to visit the Dung-kar monastery, and today I decided to spend the day there and eat with the lamas. It is a big monastery, fairly recently built, and rises over the untidy stones of an ancient moraine that blocks the valley of Tro-mo. Above the moraine there must once have been a lake, but this has completely disappeared, leaving a long, green plain (*Ling-ma-tang*), which serves as pasture for herds of yak. Steep bare mountains rise all around, and in the distance you see snow peaks gleaming in the sun. It is, in short, a place of great romantic beauty, where the mind can be profoundly moved.

The Ling-ma plain: secret life of a Bodhisattva

When I was within a quarter of an hour of the monastery I came upon a number of young monks gathering strawberries; Champa was among them. I don't know why, but he always looked slightly out of place in the company of other young men. He was gathering strawberries with the air of one construing a difficult text.

"Bravo!" he said when he greeted me. "You have done well to come at last. But we are not at the gompa; we are staying down here for a week's holiday. The Rimpoche" (the little living Bodhisattva) "is here too, and wants to see you. Have you brought the medicines? There are many who want them!"

Where the Ling-ma plain began we found a whole encampment, consisting of those little white tents of Chinese origin, with big blue flourishes on them for ornament, in which the Tibetans delight in spending the fine summer weather in contact with nature, resting, eating, drinking, and singing. If they are monks, they also set aside

hours for reading and meditation; if laymen, they dance and flirt, while the children run about or squabble for biscuits. Does this love of camping represent the survival of a custom among a people who were nomads up to not so many centuries ago? Very probably it does. Thousands of years have to pass before a characteristic propensity of a civilization finally disappears. The peoples of the Mediterranean have been cultivators and town-dwellers for many more centuries than the peoples of Northern Europe. That is why the natural centre of life in Southern European countries is the agora, the market place, while in the North the need to have frequent contacts with nature is still so very much alive.

As soon as we reached the camp I was made to sit down in a tent, open at one side, in the place allotted to guests. Soon afterwards the father superior arrived, with his three assistants—the father superior who would direct the monastery until the little Incarnated One reached the age of eighteen. After the usual greetings, tea was brought in. The father superior was an elderly man, inclined to stoutness. He was bald and had small, sharp eyes. The lower part of his face clearly indicated strong will and practical sense. He was no mystic but a conscientious administrator and an efficient upholder of monastic discipline.

One of his assistants immediately struck me because of his un-Mongolian features. As soon as the conversation permitted, I asked him where he came from. "From Ladak," he replied. In other words, he came from western Tibet. He had a distinctly Caucasian caste of countenance, so to speak; he might have been a South Italian peasant. He was tall, dark-haired, olive-skinned, with a big nose and big eyes and, so far as I could judge, a dolichocephalous skull. The fundamental difference between the Mongolian and the Western face is that in the former the flesh is modelled compactly on the bones, while the skin of the latter is slacker, forms folds, hollows, valleys. An aged Mongol can be very lined, but the lines are creases in, not undulations of, his facial landscape.

The father superior suffered from rheumatism, and described his symptoms in detail. Fortunately Colonel Moise had examined him

several days previously, and I had brought with me the medicines he had prescribed. A week of camp life in a meadow which was damp by day and dripping wet at night was not likely to help him, and I told him so. But he said he couldn't help it. "We are on holiday, you see." Other monks with other complaints asked permission to come in. They complained of indigestion or toothache, and one had an infected spot on his knee—in short, their complaints were mostly trivial. Colonel Moise says that on the whole the health of the inhabitants of the valley is excellent. The only disease that works havoc every now and then is smallpox. The Tibetans are very much afraid of it but are only just beginning to have themselves vaccinated.

Champa, who had disappeared for a time, returned to the tent and announced that the Rimpoche was ready to see me. We went out. The little Bodhisattva was seated outside a tent on a small throne of cushions. In front of him was a carved and gilded wooden table, with a jade teacup, a bronze thunderbolt, and various other liturgical objects. The abbot sat beside him. He too had a throne of cushions and a little table, but both were slightly lower than those of the Rimpoche. The height at which one sits has enormous importance in Tibet. No one, for instance, is allowed to sit higher than the Dalai Lama. Only when the Dalai Lama is a minor is his theological instructor allowed on certain occasions to occupy a seat higher than his. I offered a silk sash to the little Precious One, and then squatted at one side.

Some pilgrims had arrived from the country and the mountains to pay homage to the Incarnated One, bearing gifts. Men and women prostrated themselves before the little throne, then crept forward, rose, without looking the little god in the face, and placed their offerings—generally money or butter—in his hands. The child immediately handed it to the abbot.

There really was something divine about Ngawang Lobsang Choden, though in a sense different from that which there might have been for the nomads or shepherds who prostrated themselves before him. It was the divinity of the dawn, of newly opened flowers, of all the things that contain the beauty and mystery of burgeoning life.

I watched him for several minutes. The thing that so movingly illuminated his child's face, the look in his eyes, was his unquestioned awareness of being a god, his complete faith in the myth, his absolutely certain knowledge of having come down to earth on a mission of mercy, the continuous joy of playing a part in a just and marvellous fairy tale. He did not make a movement that was vulgar or ostentatious. There was no flicker of doubt or hesitation in anything he did. It was all completely and perfectly natural.

How I should have liked to be able to follow attentively the child's inner development, to find out about the first doubts that were bound one day to cast a shadow over his mind, to share the pain that must inevitably accompany the collapse of that delightful fiction! How would it happen? Would it come as a single, heart-breaking blow, from the love of a girl, an illness, the reading of a book? Or would it be a slow, inexorable process? And then what would happen? What would be left? Opportunism, perhaps. ("Life has given me this enviable position; let me take advantage of it.") Or perhaps a truly religious feeling. ("It is not for me to judge, but no matter, I can do good.")

The pilgrims went away. The little Bodhisattva covered his head with a tall hat of yellow silk, lined with many-coloured Chinese brocade, and I hastily took some photographs. Then, with complete naturalness, he removed his hat and handed it to a monk, who took it with signs of almost exaggerated reverence, descended from his little throne, removed his ceremonial garments, called a companion of his own age, and had himself brought a ball.

"Come," he said to me. "Would you like to play? Teach me how to play ball!"

I was a stranger, I did not count, he need have no inhibitions in front of me. So we played ball. Ngawang Lobsang Choden who, sitting on his throne a few minutes earlier, had been thousands of years old, with an infinity of lives behind him, who had renounced nirvana and deliberately returned to be reincarnated on earth for the good of mankind, had turned into a happy, high-spirited boy, red-checked and out of breath from running about.

A note on the Tibetan theocracy

Ngawang Lobsang Choden, Trul-ku (Phantom Body) of the Dung-kar monastery, belongs to the chief Tibetan sect—the Established Church of Tibet, so to speak—the Gelug-pa. What distinguishes this sect from other groups of lamas, and how did it obtain political power?

Tibet makes its first appearance in history in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. as a monarchy. The first kings were pagans (Bons). Then, according to tradition, King Srongtsan-gampo married a relative of the emperor of China and a daughter of the king of Nepal. Both these princesses were Buddhists, and they converted their husband to their faith. This centuries-old tradition, whether or not it corresponds to fact, points to a gradual infiltration of Buddhism into the country and also symbolizes the double origin of Tibetan civilization, from India on the one hand and China on the other.

A hundred years later Padma Sambhava carried out his great missionary work. Tibetans call him Guru Rimpoche (the Great Precious Master), and Buddhism was definitely established on the high plateaux. The efforts of King Lang-darma (an Asian Julian the Apostate) to reconvert his people to the worship of the ancient Bon gods were vain. After a very short reign he was killed by a disguised monk, and Buddhism resumed its peaceful penetration. After Lang-darma's death the monarchy disintegrated; it survived only in a few principalities at the western extremity of Tibet, on the borders of Kashmir.

For a long period after the collapse of the monarchy the history of Tibet is turbulent and obscure. In many places the ancient Bon shamanism reasserted itself, while the Buddhist monks tried to introduce some civilization into the country, amid the endless struggles and rivalries of the local lords. The eleventh century was marked by a great religious revival. A number of inspired missionaries (Atisha, for example) came up from India, Rinchen-tsangpo traversed the length and breadth of western Tibet, and ascetics such as Marpa and

Milarepa had incandescent inner experiences among the ice of the Himalayas.

All these men started movements on which they left their personal imprint. The followers of one started distinguishing themselves from the followers of another, and thus the first sects were born. In the last resort the Kar-gyu-pa (Those of the Oral Tradition) look back to Marpa and Milarepa; and from Atisha stem those who became the reformers, the Gelug-pa of today.

In the thirteenth century the abbot of Sakya, a big monastery in central Tibet, obtained special favours at the court of Kublai Khan. The well-known competition organized by the Mongol emperor, who wanted to give his people a religion and desired to choose "the best," will be recalled. The emperor, as a sensible, practical man, summoned the representatives of the most important faiths then known in Central Asia—Buddhist monks, Nestorian priests, Moslem sages—and caused them to compete in performing miracles. According to tradition the abbot of Sakya was the only one who was able miraculously to raise a cup of wine to the emperor's lips without touching it. The result was that the Mongols adopted Lamaism, and the abbot of Sakya was invested with political and temporal power over Tibet (A.D. 1270).

A century passed, and the country once more relapsed into disorder; there was civil anarchy, and a general relaxation of monastic discipline. The country was, however, regenerated by the tireless labours of Tsong-kapa (1357–1419), who impressed certain features on the life of the country which are still perceptible in general outline today. On the one hand he imposed monastic discipline (establishing celibacy, abstention from alcohol, and vegetarianism) and on the other, as a result of immense labour in the fields of philology and exegesis, he unified doctrine and established a final canon of the scriptures. He also caused some of the biggest Tibetan monasteries to be built—Galden, Sera, and Depung, near Lhasa, and Tashilhumpo at Shigatse. Finally he left the Gelug-pa solidly astride the path to a prosperous future.

The theoretical assumptions on which succession by reincarnation

is based had been present for centuries, but hitherto it had not been generally practised. Only after the death in 1475 of Gedun-dup, Tsong-kapa's nephew, the second head of the order and the first Grand Lama, was his successor, Gedun-gyatso, held to be his reincarnation. With that the system, which was destined to become so widespread in Tibet, can be said to have been definitely established as one of the country's most characteristic customs. The system was subsequently declared to have been retroactive, and Tsong-kapa and the ancient Tibetan kings as well, were proclaimed to have been reincarnations of Avalokitesvara (Chen-re-zi).

The third Grand Lama of the Gelug-pa sect converted Altan Khan, a Mongolian prince, and in 1517 secured from him the title of Dalai, "the Ocean," implying wisdom, which his successors still bear. Up to the middle of the seventeenth century the power of the Gelug-pa sect, though it had grown very great, was not acknowledged by any of the greater sovereigns (Mongolia, China) and was bitterly disputed by the Tibetan lords of the province of Tsang at the very gates of Lhasa. Chance had it that in 1635 a Dalai Lama of tremendous energy and extreme breadth of vision, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso—"the Great Fifth," as the Tibetans still call him with pride—reached his majority. As soon as he was able to find a pretext he allied himself with the Mongols, obtained the submission of the lords of Tsang, and secured the temporal overlordship of all Tibet (1640). A few years later the emperor of China also recognized him as the spiritual and temporal ruler of the vast country of the snows. It was during this period that the building of the Potala, the Buddhist Vatican, was begun, and Tibetan civilization assumed the general aspect that it still preserves today.

The death of the Great Fifth was concealed for several years by his able but unscrupulous minister, Senge-gyatso, who was able to complete the building of the Potala undisturbed. Senge-gyatso also chose the successor, who became the sixth Dalai Lama. At this point one of the most romantic episodes in the history of the country began. The young Dalai Lama, brilliant, intelligent, and handsome, very soon turned out to be in love, not with asceticism, study, and mortifica-

tion of the flesh, but with life and flowers, passing and perishable things, women, wine, and song. He celebrated his joyous and pagan worship of samsara in exquisite poems, which rude censors have tried a thousand times subsequently to destroy. But the Tibetan people still have them in their hearts, and every generation repeats them in moments of delight.

There were some, naturally, who said at once that a mistake had been made, and that he could not be the true Dalai Lama. But there were others who said, and still say today, that, on the contrary, he was undoubtedly the true Dalai Lama, and that his conduct was a trap set to test the faithful. However, rival sects, who resented the power enjoyed by the Gelug-pa, proclaimed that the thing was a scandal. They caused the Mongols to enter Tibet in force, and the Mongols slew the poet Dalai Lama. The Chinese took advantage of the period of confusion that followed to establish themselves firmly in the country, and the Chinese emperor Yung-chen was able to add the vast territory of Tibet to his dominions as a vassal state (1727).

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Tibet was strictly dependent on the Celestial Empire, and the Chinese *amban* (representative) at Lhasa supervised the nomination of every new Dalai Lama. Between 1805 and 1874 there were no fewer than four Dalai Lamas, each of whom died mysteriously just when he was on the point of reaching his majority and assuming effective power. However, the thirteenth Dalai Lama, Tupden Gyatso (1876–1933), succeeded in surviving the critical moment of the assumption of power, and turned out to be another notable figure in Tibetan history. By playing his cards skilfully among the Chinese, the Russians, and the British, he succeeded *de facto* in restoring his country to *de facto* independence. The present Dalai Lama was born on July 6th, 1935, in eastern Tibet, and is therefore still very young.

The mechanism of theocratic succession

The procedure by which a new pontiff is chosen is unique in the world. He is chosen neither by election nor by hereditary succession;

instead the old Dalai Lama is held invariably to be reborn in a new body. The essence of the theory is that first the Yellow Sect and subsequently all Tibet have been governed, not by fourteen different Dalai Lamas, but by fourteen successive appearances among mankind of the same spiritual entity, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (in Tibetan, Chen-re-zi), the embodiment of Compassion and Benevolence. Bodies are fundamentally nothing but garments, which are put on and taken off and are discarded when no longer serviceable.

"We are very fond of this system," Lobsang once explained to me. "It combines the advantages of the hereditary principle with those of elections. It has all the advantages of the hereditary principle, in that it guarantees social stability. It has all the advantages of an electoral system, as with every Dalai Lama a fresh start is made, and there is no question of becoming the slave of a class. And consider the profound sense of unity that the system has ended by giving our country! The Precious Protector" (the Dalai Lama) "may be born in the house of any citizen, rich or poor, townsman or countryman. Potentially we all take part in the system. It is nobody's privilege. We thus combine popular democracy with metaphysical monarchy. The father of the Great Fifth, for example, was a humble peasant of Chung-gye."

Though this procedure of succession by reincarnation was only definitely established in comparatively recent times—the sixteenth century—it represented the crystallization of ancient trends and the final convergence into a vast body of usages, rites, and ceremonies of genuine classical Buddhist elements and other native elements peculiar to pre-Buddhist Tibet. Europeans commonly believe that when a Dalai Lama dies—the expression that the Tibetans use on such an occasion is that he honourably ascends to paradise with his own body—the spirit of Avalokitesvara immediately reappears on earth in the body of a new-born child. This is by no means correct. The maximum period envisaged for the reincarnation of ordinary persons after their death is forty-nine days. In the case of a Bodhisattva the period can be much longer; it is often as much as two years.

However, the difficult task of finding the baby in whom the

Bodhisattva (He Whose Essence Is Enlightenment) has gone to reside eventually presents itself; and at this point there comes into play one of the most typically Tibetan institutions, linked by direct descent to those of the ancient shamans, who were the priests of Tibet before the advent of Buddhism. I refer to the institution of the oracle. Upon the Dalai Lama's death the most important lamas in the country meet in solemn conclave, and the first thing they do is to consult the oracles. There is actually an official state oracle at the Nechung monastery, less than four miles from Lhasa, whose pronouncements have a supreme value. However, when the state oracle has been consulted the search is still only in its earliest stages; it is a long and arduous process and may last for years. It is interesting to note that it varies from occasion to occasion, and that there are always miraculous natural signs of various kinds which have to be taken into account. The search by no means consists of the pedestrian application of a stereotyped formula; it is rather the expression of a living spiritual reality which in every new situation embodies itself in different outer forms.

In the case of the thirteenth Dalai Lama—that is to say, in or after 1878—the Nechung oracle fell into a trance, as is usual in such cases, and actually revealed the names of the baby's father and mother. But in Tibet names do not help very much. Except in the case of noble families, surnames do not exist, and there are thousands of Dorjes and Drolmás. At this point the oracle of Samye (one of the oldest Tibetan monasteries, traditionally founded by Padma Sambhava in the eighth century) declared that "the mountain near the house of the reborn Precious Protector has the shape of an elephant." For the removal of doubt, however, more precise information was required. As always happens in human affairs, any power—whether that of money, prestige, or arms—causes various parties to arise who try to obtain control of it. Thus some (the pro-Chinese) declared that the reborn Bodhisattva would be found to the east. Others (the anti-Chinese) maintained that he would be found to the west. A third group felt confident that the most likely place was Tak-po, in southern Tibet. The Nechung oracle was consulted again, and actually

mentioned Tak-po by name. However, it was just as well to obtain some less general clue.

In southern Tibet there is a lake called Chö-kor-gye in which it is said to be possible to foresee future events. A Tibetan gave to Sir Charles Bell the following description of the visions to be seen in it:

“The water of the lake is blue. You watch it from the hillside. A wind arises, and turns the blue water into white. A hole then forms in this white water; the hole is blue-black. Clouds form above this hole and below the clouds you see images showing future events.”¹

It was thus that the important Lama of Gyu (one of the Lhasa monasteries) was called upon, with various doctors of theology, to scrutinize the lake. At first the committee seems to have been disappointed; the lake was frozen, and there was nothing to be seen. Fortunately, however, a wind soon arose and swept the snow from the ice. The ice shone like a mirror, and presented the vision of a house and a flowering peach tree. That same night the Lama of Gyu had a dream. He dreamed that he saw a mother with a child of about two years old in her arms. A few days later the lama, travelling along the lake-side, saw a peach tree in flower (an extraordinary thing at that time of the year), and next to it a house. Inside it he found the mother and the child of whom he had dreamed.

In other words, the new Dalai Lama had been found. But, to make sure, a careful examination of the child was necessary; there were some special signs that he must have on his body. The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is always represented with four arms, and the child, if he really is an incarnation of the divinity, must have fleshy protuberances on his shoulders or shoulder-blades. Sure enough, the child had such protuberances. Also his ears must be longer than the average, for such ears are a sign of wisdom. Sure enough, the child had long ears. Then the palms of his hands must have tiny imprints in the shape of a shell. This sign was also not lacking. The child, having passed the first examination, had then to be subjected to the second and final one. He must distinguish correctly between personal possessions that had belonged to him in his previous life—his

¹ *Portrait of the Dalai Lama*. London: Collins, 1946; page 40.

rosary (*threng-wa*), his small liturgical drum (*nga-chung*), his bell (*tril-bu*), his bronze thunderbolt (*dorje*), a handkerchief, a teacup—and exact duplicates of all these objects. Only after the child had passed all these tests, and after the Nechung oracle had confirmed the fact, could the discovery of the new pontiff be announced, and only then could his solemn installation take place.

The search for and discovery of the fourteenth Dalai Lama was quite different. In 1935, two years after the thirteenth Dalai Lama's death, the regent, after a long period of vain searching, visited the Chö-kor-gye lake in the hope of seeing a vision that might be of assistance. The results were strange. The regent distinctly read in the lake the three syllables "*a-ka-ma*." Next he saw a three-story monastery, with a gilded roof and turquoise tiles. He also saw to the east of the monastery a winding road leading towards a bare, pagoda-shaped hill. Facing the hill was a little house with eaves of a type unknown to him. The meaning of this vision was discussed for a long time by the most learned theologians of Tibet, and it was finally decided that it indicated, but only vaguely, the probability that the new incarnation had taken place to the east of Lhasa. Meanwhile consultations both of the state oracle and of other minor oracles (which are held sometimes to be more effective) actively continued.

At this point a miracle of the kind to which Tibetans attach great importance occurred. It should be noted that, while the bodies of ordinary mortals in Tibet are normally hacked to pieces on special mortuary hills, so that birds and animals can feed on them, the bodies of Dalai Lamas and a few other personages of exceptional importance are embalmed. Pending the completion of a special mausoleum, the body of the thirteenth Dalai Lama had been placed on a throne in a hall of the Potala, where the thousands of pilgrims who always gather at Lhasa could do homage to what for fifty-nine years had been the terrestrial garment of Avalokitesvara. Now it happened that on several mornings the monks who watched over him found that the dead Dalai Lama's head and body, which normally faced the south, were facing east. The theory that the new Dalai Lama would appear to the east of Lhasa immediately gained great favour.

The appearance of other signs that pointed in the same direction led in the spring of 1937 to the dispatch of various groups of lamas to search the eastern regions of Tibet. Each party took with it objects that had belonged to the previous Dalai Lama, as well as exact duplicates of them with which to make the requisite tests. The child-candidates were finally reduced to three. One died before he could be examined; another fled, weeping in terror at the sight of the lamas—a very bad augury indeed—and this left only one. The leader of the deputations, the Trul-ku Kyi-tsang, realized as soon as he approached the house where the child lived that he had reached his goal. He actually saw the three-story monastery which the regent had seen in his vision at the lake several years before. He saw the gilded roof and the turquoise-coloured tiles, the winding road and the house with the unusual roof; and, when he was told that the monastery was dedicated to the sage Kama-pa, he realized the meaning of the two syllables “*ka*” and “*ma*” that the regent had read in the Chö-kor-gye lake.

Before entering the home of the presumed new Dalai Lama the Trul-ku Kyi-tsang disguised himself as a servant. When he approached the door he found a child playing there. The child at once rose and ran towards him, crying, “Lama! Lama!” and seized a necklace which had belonged to the thirteenth Dalai Lama. Presumption was now approaching certainty, but the Trul-ku Kyi-tsang, desiring absolutely final proof, still said nothing. He summoned the members of the deputations, and in their presence caused to be presented to the child, who must have been about three years old, the various objects that had belonged to the thirteenth Dalai Lama and their facsimiles. The child chose the right one every time. Finally there remained only a walking stick and its copy to choose from. To the general consternation the child chose the wrong one, but then shook his head and dropped it. He then seized the right walking stick, from which he refused to be parted. The usual signs of good omen were naturally detected on his body. The fourteenth Dalai Lama had been found.

For various reasons the important news was kept strictly secret,

and it was not announced in Lhasa until September 1939, when the little god was on the point of arriving in the capital and it was too late for any dissident political faction to put forward any rival candidate. The meeting between the emissaries of the Lhasa government and the caravan with whom the child was travelling took place to the north of Nagchuka before dawn on September 20. The small group of monks, ministers, secretaries, and soldiers who came from Lhasa found the child sleeping in a litter, accompanied by its parents and escorted by a group of Chinese Moslem pilgrims on the way to Mecca by way of Lhasa.

The *sha-pe* (minister) Bhondong placed a ceremonial white sash in the hands of the Trul-ku Kyi-tsang, so that he might offer it to the little Dalai. Even a Tibetan minister is not allowed to offer a sash directly to the supreme pontiff. Near Nagchuka the caravan found an encampment and a throne prepared. The child, soon after he was awakened, was placed upon the throne with great ceremony. The minister Bhondong prostrated himself three times before him, presented to him a letter from the regent recognizing him as the Dalai Lama, and offered him symbolic gifts appropriate to the occasion. The little living god continued his journey to Lhasa in the gilded palanquin of the Dalai Lama, greeted at every village on the way by crowds of the faithful prostrating themselves. The journey was made as quickly as possible, in order to arrive at Lhasa before the eighth month (Tibetan style), which, in that year of the Earth-Hare, was considered to be extremely ill-omened.

From the day of his installation in the Potala an entirely new life begins for this child selected by fortune. Instead of the humble country cottage, the kitchen, the farmyard, the fields and the flowers, the games with little friends of the same age, he now occupies a whole suite in the vast complex of palaces, temples, mausoleums, dungeons, halls, passages, libraries, and kitchens of which the Potala consists. His parents are also given a suite in which to live, and his father is honoured with the title of *kung*, or duke, but after the first few months both he and the child's mother see less and less of their

offspring. The new Dalai Lama, like every other monk, must die completely out of civil life; even his name is changed. The fourteenth Dalai Lama's name at birth was Lhamo Dhondup, but that humble appellation was replaced by a long series of magnificent epithets, such as the Holy One, the Tender Glory, Mighty in Speech, of Excellent Intellect, Absolute Wisdom, Holding the Doctrine, the Ocean (of Wisdom), etc.

The first important ceremony in which the new Dalai takes part is that of the reoccupation of the throne left vacant by his predecessor. The ceremony is called the Prayer for the Power of the Golden Throne. It is worthy of note that during the interregnum the usual meals are served every day on the little table beside the throne, as a way of recalling and emphasizing that the pontiff is not dead but absent, and that nothing of him has changed, except that transient and unimportant thing, his body. The essence of the ceremony is the lamas' appeal to the Dalai to reoccupy his throne, which he had left a few years earlier.

The ceremony begins before dawn, as is usual on great occasions in Tibet, where the early hours of the day are held to be the most propitious. The various personages start filing into the hall of the Golden Throne room. All round there gleam the gold and the carved wood of the altars; sound is muffled by the silk pictures and cushions and the woollen carpets. Gradually the hall fills. There are the sha-pes—three laymen and one lama—there is the regent (the *pöi-gyalpo*, "king of Tibet"), there are the abbots of the great monasteries—thin ascetics with flaming eyes, plump, self-satisfied dignitaries, lean disciplinarians—the heads of the principal noble families, and the foreign delegations. Finally silence is imposed, and the holy child, arrayed in his ceremonial vestments, is brought into the hall, lifted on high, and placed on "his" throne with affectionate solicitude. Everyone prostrates himself; Tibet has now officially consecrated its new Dalai Lama. Sir Basil Gould, who was head of the British delegation at the Prayer for the Power of the Golden Throne in 1940, relates that the child's composure and gravity during the

endless hours of the individual blessings were really moving. It must be remembered that the little pontiff was then barely four-and-a-half years old.

After the discovery and installation of the new Dalai his education begins. This is a very severe process, and every detail is rigidly prescribed. Henceforward, except for his little brothers, who are seminarists, too, he is surrounded only by monks. He plays, of course, as every healthy, normal child must do, but he has to get used to long hours of study, penitences, and public ceremonies. He is attended by a chamberlain, a master of the household, who tastes all the food set before him, a court chaplain, who makes offerings to the gods on his behalf, a controller of the kitchen, a chief physician, a librarian—in short, a whole court with a very rigid and elaborate etiquette, from which women are completely excluded.

The young Dalai learns reading, writing, and the elements of arithmetic. Soon the time comes when he has to spend his first periods of retreat in the company of an instructor in theology. As soon as he is old enough, he starts receiving instruction in the theory and practice of state administration, but above all he reads, re-reads, interprets, and comments on religious books, from the innumerable volumes of the Kangyur to the writings of Tsong-kapa. He often attends the theological disputations which take place either in the Potala or in the big monasteries of Lhasa. Before attaining his majority he must pay a visit to one of the sacred lakes of Tibet, to receive a vision concerning the future events of his "reign."

The principle of succession by reincarnation has gained enormous favour in Tibet. After its first application to the leaders of the Gelug-pa sect, it was soon applied also to the abbots of the monastery of Tashilhumpo, that is to say, to the Panchen Lama, often incorrectly referred to by Europeans as the Tashi Lama. The Panchen Lama is, after the Dalai Lama, the most important figure in the spiritual life of Tibet. The two pontiffs are linked in a metaphysical interdependence, which explains many things about their mutual relations. While the Dalai Lama is the incarnation of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, the Panchen Lama is the incarnation of the

Dhyani Buddha Amitabha. But if we recall what was said in Chapter IV it is evident that the spiritual prestige of the Dalai Lama must be less than that of the Panchen Lama, on whom he is spiritually dependent, because in the last resort Avalokitesvara is only an emanation of Amitabha.

The fundamental distinction between a Dhyani Buddha and a Dhyana Bodhisattva must also be remembered. The former lives on the plane of the Logos, that of pure thought; the latter represents the dynamic moment of creation, contact with "the vortex of life." The same distinction has been held to apply to the functions of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama on earth. The Dalai Lamas, as is only natural, have been quick to seize on the point. "You, O Panchen Lama, are my spiritual superior," the Dalai Lama says in effect. "That is perfectly true and is universally admitted. But your function is to remain in the sacred, silent field of the invisible. Remain therefore at Tashilhumpo and enjoy your ineffable beatitude. Leave to me, who am a mere emanation of yours, the affairs of the world, which are too low, too transient, too insignificant to be worthy of your attention." The Panchen Lama was naturally unable to accept such a situation, particularly after the Dalai Lama succeeded in getting rid of the Chinese in 1912 and becoming really independent.

The consequence was that the relations between the two pontiffs gradually became strained to breaking point. In the course of time the Dalai Lama became identified with pro-British policies and the Panchen Lama with pro-Chinese policies. In 1923 the Panchen Lama actually had to leave Tibet and take refuge at Kum-bum in Mongolia. In 1935 he died, to reappear not long afterwards in a new "phantom body," the tenth of the series, who is today represented by a boy of fifteen.

It is a grave misfortune for a country to harbour two powers of equal or similar influence. A time comes when there is a schism, the people are faced with conflicting loyalties, and the result is chaos. Just as in the nineteenth century white men played on the rivalry between shogun and emperor in Japan in order to force the country

to open itself to international trade, so it is foreseeable that, when a foreign power wishes to enter Tibet, it will start by using as a lever the rivalries existing between the two supreme pontiffs, the Dalai Lama at Lhasa and the Panchen Lama at Tashilhumpo.

Apart from these two supreme luminaries in the Tibetan firmament, there are many other living Bodhisattvas. In the past two centuries the system of succession by reincarnation has spread amazingly. At the present time every monastery of any importance has its own Incarnated One, its own "phantom body." There must be several hundreds of them. There is also a living woman Bodhisattva, Pal-den Lha-mo (the Glorious Goddess), who lives in a monastery on the shore of Lake Yamdrok. When the young Dalai Lama goes to the lake of Chö-kor-gye to receive his vision, he stays at the monastery of Pal-den Lha-mo.

Pal-den Lha-mo as a divinity is one of the Eight Terrible Ones. She is considered to be a special protector of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. The Sanskrit name signifies "the Adamantine Whore." She is always represented in her terrifying aspect, as a frenzied enemy of the forces of evil. She sits sideways on a white mule wading through a sea of blood. She is hideously ugly, is frantic with rage, and is coloured blue. She wears garlands of skulls and crowns of bones, carries a fan of peacock's feathers, two dice with which to play for human lives, a number of snakes, many jewels, a tiger-skin, a sceptre, and a skull carved into a cup, which is full to the brim with blood and smoking entrails; she holds it in front of her mouth, which is distorted into a savage grin. Her present terrestrial incarnation is, however, said to be a pretty, pale, and rather sad-looking girl. She is rarely visible, and then only at a distance, in the mysterious darkness of the temple.

One can hardly imagine any encounter in the world more strange, and in some ways more moving, than the brief, single, ceremonial meeting between the Dalai and the incarnation of Yamdrok-tso—two adolescents, both the prisoners of rigid monastic conventions, each the prisoner of a different myth. One of these myths is vast, beautiful, and noble, the other terrifying, nocturnal, and primi-

tive. Each is a mere symbol, an incident, a "phantom body" in an incredible metaphysical phantasmagoria, a crazy game of symbols. Each is the gilded prisoner of the ceremonial and the etiquette of courts and monasteries. But they are also two human beings and they are young. What must their feelings be during their brief encounter?

The Dung-kar monastery: monstrous couplings protect the meditating doctor

My intended visit to the Dung-kar monastery the other day stopped short at the Ling-ma-tang, but the "summer holiday" of the little Bodhisattva of Tro-mo is now over, and the monks have all gone back to the monastery. Champa, who came to fetch me, assured me of this, so at eight o'clock this morning we set out from Yatung, talking busily.

The road followed the bottom of the valley, and all along the torrent thickets of roses were in glorious bloom. Every now and then we came upon a tarcho singing in the wind, or saw a chorten or a *mendang*. *Mendangs* are sacred walls, containing the ashes of dead lamas, liturgical objects, relics of various kinds, or the scriptures. On top of them stand long rows of stones, crudely carved to represent the most popular divinities—the Buddha Amitabha or the Buddha Akshobhya, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara or the Bodhisattva Manjusri, the Manushi Buddha Sakya-muni or Maitreya, besides terrifying male or female figures, among whom Vajrapani is the most common and Vajravarahi is frequently to be met.

For a while the road continued between vertical walls of rock, on which there were sacred carvings (the biggest represented Padma Sambhava). *Om mani padme hum* was also painted hundreds of times in vivid colours. You can never get away from signs of religion in Tibet. Nearly every caravan driver whom we met had his *kau* (for relics) with him and wore a small talisman round his neck, even if he was brazenly smoking a cigarette. Many caravans were to be seen on their way down to India with loads of wool. Wool is the chief Tibetan export. It provides the government with a certain

amount of dollars, which it uses for the purpose of slowly (and for the time being wisely) modernizing the country. Lhasa already has a power station, a hospital is projected, and bridges are being built. The only thing they draw the line at is proper road-building and the introduction of power-driven vehicles. If these were admitted, they say, what would happen to the mule drivers? The truth of the matter is that the Tibetans prefer isolation and independence to communications and inevitable subjection. Given the world as it is today, it is difficult to blame them.

We came across the ruins of the old Chinese military station, which fell into decay after 1904, when the British military expedition led by Colonel Younghusband penetrated to Lhasa. China seems infinitely remote from here, but every good Chinese still considers that these villages are part of China.

We left the caravan route on our right and went down to the little village of Galigang, consisting of about forty houses, lying among well-kept barley fields. There are many variations in the local architecture, which is pleasing in its rustic style (see Plate 18). The walls are built of stone and earth, with a huge wooden roof and big, wooden-framed windows. The walls are whitewashed, and the timber of the architraves, the roofs, the windows, and the doors acquires a good, honest, brown patina in the course of time.

From Galigang we continued our descent to the stream and then started climbing again up a steep path that wound its way between rocks and thickets. There were endless strawberries, and roses in bloom. Champa climbed slowly; his health is poor, and he has to avoid fatigue. Every now and then we stopped, looked down at the valley, and exchanged a few words. A frightened horse, its ears erect, dashed past us downhill, and disappeared. Then a boy carrying a stick appeared, very out of breath. "Your horse is down there!" Champa shouted.

When we finally reached the monastery we were met by a furious barking of dogs. Tibetan watchdogs are enormous, ferocious beasts; fortunately they are chained in the daytime. We went down an entrance passage and came to a big courtyard surrounded by

wooden cloisters. The entrances to all the temples are in the courtyard, which also serves as a threshing floor. A monk was unloading sacks of grain from a horse, and a number of farming implements were lying about. The monastery, like all those of the Yellow Sect, receives big subsidies from Lhasa, mostly in kind, and it possesses land of its own, which the monks either cultivate themselves or lease to farmers.

Two lay craftsmen were working at the entrance of the biggest temple. One was stamping out clay statues of various divinities; these, after being dried and painted, were to be sold to the faithful. The other was a painter, who was engaged in touching up the frescoes. In one corner of the courtyard some carpenters were noisily sawing and hammering at tables. Clouds of blue smoke were pouring through the kitchen door. A young monk, wearing a big, shiny black apron of indescribable filthiness, appeared at the door with a huge saucepan, which he hung on the wall in the sun.

Champa had disappeared, having gone to fetch the custodian. While I waited a number of students surrounded me and started excitedly shouting, "*Par! Par!* (Photograph! Photograph!)" Champa returned with the custodian, and we mounted a few steps to the portico to be found outside every Tibetan temple. The walls were completely covered with frescoes. I recognized the Four Kings of the Directions of Space, as well as the Two Protectors, Vajrapani (Chana-dorje) and Hayagriva (Tamdrin) in their terrifying form, next to the door. The Four Kings (gyal-chen de-shi) are mythical figures who are to be found associated with the Buddha legend in the earliest-known documents. Paintings of them in India, in the great stupa of Sanchi, date back to the second century B.C. The Tibetans like painting them as warriors, following models from Central Asia, each one of them in his own colours and with his own symbols. Kuvera (the north) is yellow, holds a banner in his right hand and a mongoose in his left. Virudhaka (the south) is either green or blue; his symbol is a sword, and on his head, instead of a helmet, he wears an elephant's head. Dhritarashtra (the east) is white and plays the lute, and Virupaksha (the west) is red, and carries a little

chorten in his hand. These figures rarely have any individuality; they are generally lost in a maze of colour, ornament, and symbols, giving a most lively decorative effect, like tapestry.

Every style is a language, and every language has to be learned. When, in the course of time, one has grown accustomed to this idiom of lines and colours, the finest examples of the paintings in which the Four Kings appear strike one as the expression of a tumultuous joy in the lovely, rich, transient things of the world. Generally, of course, these paintings have a mere decorative purpose, similar to those of the king, queen, and jack in a pack of cards, or succumb to the grotesque—an ever-present danger in Tibetan art. But when the artist takes fullest advantage of the traditional pattern, the Four Kings present him with a notable opportunity for celebrating the glorious but relatively commonplace themes of life such as strength, achievement, abundance, and for avoiding the two Tibetan poles of horror on the one hand and ascetic mysticism on the other. The Four Kings, covered in shining armour, sit in their flowery gardens, among flags, musical instruments, arms, gifts, jewels, corals, silks, precious stuffs, heraldic animals, and symbolic ribbons, making music with lutes, flying banners, playing with exotic animals, secure lords of a distant, golden age.

All the dreams of Tibetan merchants and brigands are expressed on these walls—wealth and the pleasures of this world, which Buddhist teaching condemns as useless, harmful, and sinful. It is interesting to note that the Japanese who resemble the Tibetans in many ways but are more martial, have always emphasized the aspect of the Four Kings—whom they call Shi-tenno—that is sculptural in form and threatening in character. In other words, they emphasize strength and action rather than colour and abundance.

The inside of the temple is enormous and, as usual, dark, mysterious, impressive; a place of secret, perhaps obscene, perhaps cruel and bloodthirsty ceremonies. But there was nothing of all that now. Three boys were running about between the long benches. One had a biscuit and the others were noisily trying to get it away from him. The custodian, a wizened man of about fifty, his face marked by

smallpox, called out, "Quiet!" and the boys ran away in terror. At the end of the temple were some huge gilded statues. In the centre stood Maitreya (Champa), the Buddha of the future, the apostle of the fifth kalpa, and next to him was Tsong-kapa (1357-1419), the founder of the Yellow Sect (Gelug-pa). There were several lesser statues, among them one of the Tro-mo Geshe (the Doctor of Tro-mo), who had been reincarnated ten years ago in the person of our little friend Ngawang Lobsang Choden.

It is very obvious that the Yellow Sect is the most powerful religious institution in Central Asia. Its temples are better tended, their fabric is kept in better repair, their pictures are—only too often—not only retouched but completely repainted, and all the liturgical objects are of great richness. Here, for example, were enormous solid silver cup-lamps for burning butter, and there was one that certainly weighed several pounds. Tibetan goldsmiths' work is beautiful, barbaric, rather dark, with reddish gleams in it; it is gold worthy of Agamemnon's treasure or Theodoric's breastplate. It has nothing in common with the cold, scientific, gleaming golden ornaments worn by ladies in Europe. You really feel that it is the sacred treasure of the earth, and you understand at once why the extraction of gold is forbidden in Tibet. "The fields lose their fertility if the gold is extracted," they say. Next to the principal temple, in a chapel which was lighter than usual—it was a new one—lay the body of the Doctor of Tro-mo, embalmed and buried in a high chorten completely enclosed in silver. The paintings round the walls were not yet finished. The general effect was pompous, macabre, and rather vulgar.

The paintings in the principal temple were modern too, but they were the work of a painter who was at least occasionally inspired. When you talk about Tibetan painting in Europe, people generally turn up their noses if you mention anything more recent than the eighteenth century. That is a mistake. The old artistic tradition is very much alive in Tibet; the cultural context on which pictorial expression is nourished is robust and vigorous. In the West the Romantic movement has led us into a cult of personality, an often absurd worship of personality, and we therefore view with suspicion

the phenomenon of artists who use, not a specially created individual idiom, but an idiom that has been breathed in and assimilated with centuries-old traditions. This is a prejudice on our part, and it is this prejudice that we should suspect, rather than the capacity of living artists to express themselves and create works of value in an anonymous grammar and syntax.

Two of these frescoes were particularly striking. The first is to be found on the great wall of the Chö-kyong (Protectors of the Faith) series; these are monstrous and terrifying champions of religion and virtue, surrounded by blood and fire in the perennial struggle with evil. It represents the two Shin-kyong skeletons (see Plate 6) engaged in an orgiastic embrace. The motif of the mystic embrace is here applied to the two skeleton companions of Yama, the king of death and the infernal regions; a tremendous invention in which Lamaism has perhaps reached the extreme limits of its macabre fantasy. The artist put the ferocity of a jaguar and the sensuality of a bacchante into his conception of the theme. But he possessed a strength superior to the fable with which he was dealing, for he treated it with detachment, with a clear, scientific line, as if he were composing a design with acanthuses and lilies instead of with bones and lust.

Champa and the seminarists—who had crept back quietly into the temple—followed me while I took my photographs. I tried to find out whether these pictures raised any emotion in them, and, if so, what kind of emotion, but it was a difficult task. They seemed completely indifferent. The boys were absorbed in examination of my camera, a far more mysterious thing to them than Tantric emanations. Champa explained the meaning of the pictures to me, but in the tone of a guide saying, “On the right is St. John with the eagle, and underneath St. Catherine with her wheel and martyr’s palm.” Perhaps they see with eyes very different from ours. I always remember how struck I was by the remark of a Japanese friend, who one day said to me, “What a bloodthirsty, violent religion yours must be, with that tortured man suspended from two pieces of wood on every altar!” Europeans and Americans born in a Christian en-

vironment and brought up to accept it as a religion of love have been inoculated by centuries of familiarity against the cruel first impression made by the crucifix, and a reaction such as that of my Japanese Buddhist friend, whose conception of the divine was contemplative serenity, takes us completely by surprise. But to hear such a startlingly different point of view is a valuable and important experience.

Another notable item among these paintings is that part of them which contains a stylized and idealized portrait of the Doctor of Tro-mo who died more than ten years ago. The sage, wearing his brownish robe and yellow mitre and holding in his hands two heraldic lotuses, out of which there grew a spade and a book, was sitting absorbed in profound meditation, while in a nimbus all round him Tantric deities in their terrifying aspect danced, clasping their shaktis in orgiastic embraces and copulating with the perfection of a metaphysical rite, adorned with jewels, wearing the skins of wild beasts over their shoulders and with snakes round their waists, and holding in their hands scimitars, skulls, blood-covered corpses, thunderbolts, hearts newly plucked from living bodies, lightning flashes, hangmen's nooses, sceptres, rosaries, and flowers.

These were the Dharmapala, the Chyö-kyong, the Protectors of the Faith of the Gelug-pa sect. To the left there stood a dark-blue Dü-kor (Wheel of Time) with twenty-four arms and three heads. His shakti, who had eight arms, was coloured yellow. She too was standing, abandoning herself to him with head thrown backwards. The pair of mystic lovers were trampling on dead bodies, symbolizing conquered passions, in their dance. To their right, also standing and painted in blue, was Dem-chog (Renowned Felicity), with twelve arms. His shakti was nude, but adorned with innumerable jewels, and in her hands she held a ritual dagger and a skull. Still farther to the right, but lower down, was Dorje-chi-che (Terrifying Lightning), the martial aspect of Manjusri (the divine substance of wisdom) and Lamaism's supreme effort in monstrosity. He was represented with sixteen legs, thirty-four arms, and nine heads, trampling on animals, while he drew to himself a shakti who held in her

left hand a blood-filled skull-cup. In the middle of his forest of arms, his liturgical objects, necklaces of skulls, legs, animals, jewels, sexual organs and skins of wild beasts, there stood out, clear, grotesque, and monstrous, his central bull's head, with flames for hair, with the third eye of mystic wisdom, and above his head, as a crest, the small head of Manjusri. The Divine Doctor, protected by these and other champions of the faith in terrifying splendour and horrific glory, meditated angelically, crowned by a halo of little white clouds and rainbows.

"Kushog," a student came and said to me, drawing me aside by the arm. "The abbot has rheumatism. He wants you to come and give him the medicine you promised. Besides, tea is ready. Come quickly!"

I asked Champa why Bodhisattvas and celestial Buddhas in their terrifying aspect were painted thus, in intimate union with their own shaktis; I was curious to hear what the popular interpretation of the deep and complicated Tantric symbolism might be.

"They are more effective if worshipped so," he replied in his curious English.

"More effective because they are happier like that?"

"Yes, that is the reason."

I wanted to go to the rheumatic abbot straight away, but Champa insisted on my first visiting the smaller temple on the other side of the courtyard. "There's no hurry," he said. "He won't get rid of his pains at once anyway, he always has them." This temple had interesting genealogies of lamas painted on the walls, but the most notable thing in it, from one point of view, was a lacquered, polished, wooden statue of the new divinity, Namka-bazin, in his terrifying aspect. The history of this new and entirely local divinity gives some idea of how alive and creative Tibetan Buddhism still is, even in its less elevated, popular, superstitious forms. In 1920 or thereabouts a lama, after receiving his fee for teaching in Sikkim, set out to return to Tibet with the money. But near Phari he was waylaid by a footpad. The lama refused to surrender the money, and the result was a struggle in which the unfortunate lama was killed. When a

just man is killed, according to Tibetan superstition, he acquires extraordinary evil powers, and he has to be continually propitiated. In a few years the cult of this lama spread throughout the valley of Tro-mo, and statues and pictures of him are frequently to be found. He also appears as one of the principal characters in masked dances at various places, at Kirimtse, for instance.

"Aren't you coming, kushog?" the seminarist kept whining, dragging me by the arm. "The abbot's got rheumatism!"

"You've still got to see the butter carvings," Champa said to me. "Go away, you little nuisance!" he said to the seminarist. "Go and tell the abbot we're just coming!"

We mounted a creaking staircase to the gön-kang, the chapel of the tutelary deities of the place. Among skinless, decaying carcasses, shining statues of terrifying gods consumed with metaphysical rage, cryptic, symbolical frescoes, old armour, masks, liturgical instruments, and rancid relics, in the still, silent, stuffy atmosphere, was a cupboard containing the butter carvings—butter worked into complicated patterns, filigrees of tall flames, landscapes, empyreans, groups of saints, all of them coloured (see Plate 50).

"But don't you realize the abbot's got rheumatism?" the seminarist wailed. I had no alternative but to go with him. We went up to the apartment of honour, where the abbot was waiting. When the visit was over ("You see, when I bend it hurts here . . . at night I feel pains there . . . if I turn over my neck creaks . . ."), we went to the suite of the little Great Precious. But today he was engaged in meditation and was not to be seen. So the seminarists took me up to their quarters, to the "classroom," where several boys were reading aloud a treatise on Dorje-chi-che ("*Dorje-chi-che-gyi choga chat-sang* . . ."). The master, a dusty, tired-looking monk of about thirty, slowly read out a phrase, and then the pupils repeated it after him in chorus, and so it went on for hours. This was their lesson.

The "classroom" was a room with very big windows, and it must have been infernally cold in winter. The pupils sat cross-legged on the floor, each with his own book in front of him. The light was poor, and everything seemed to be intended to mortify the senses. All

round the walls were shelves with hundreds of statues of Tsong-kapa, all alike, all ugly, all gilded and all dusty. In the middle, in the place of honour, in an altar-cupboard enclosed in glass, was a big statue of Tsong-kapa.

"It's a miraculous statue," the bored master assured me, his eyes brightening a little as he spoke. "Do you see its head? Every year it grows a little. The yellow hat has had to be enlarged three times. We don't know what it means, but it's a great miracle."

The boys, delighted at the interruption of their lesson, enjoyed watching that extraordinary, exotic creature, a foreigner, and seeing me drink Tibetan tea amused them immensely. Their life must be very hard. They get up at dawn, and an hour's lesson follows. They then go down to the temple, where they drink tea, eat a little tsampa, and say prayers for about two hours, sitting on the long, cold benches. After this there are three hours of reading "in class," with the master intoning the text while the boys follow him in chorus—a primitive and stupid way of teaching but one which in the long run produces a certain effect. At midday they drink tea again and have another light meal, after which they rest in the courtyard. In the afternoon there is more reading, and at last, about six o'clock, it is time for dinner.

It was just six o'clock, and I was able to be present at the meal. I felt very sorry for the poor boys. They sat in rows on the ground in a cold, dark corridor. Each had two wooden bowls before him, one for tsampa and tea, the other for a dish of vegetables—boiled vegetables prepared without any condiments. There were no spoons or chopsticks; they ate with their fingers. A draught of cold, damp, stale air came up from below; the smallest boys—they were eight or nine years old—drew their robes round their shoulders. Each boy helped himself to tsampa from his own little bag. One boy's bag was nearly empty—he evidently came from a poor family—and another, who evidently came from a richer family, passed him a handful of his own tsampa. It was a moving little incident; it was over in a second, and nobody noticed it.

The meal took only a few minutes. It was a barbarous, stoical, ex-

cessively ascetic experience. All the same, the boys did not seem unhappy. They devoured the vegetable course greedily. Then, after putting their bowls away, they dashed down to play in the courtyard, shouting. I was left alone with the prefect. He told me he had syphilis. Could I get him some injections?



REBELLIONS, EXECUTIONS, AND BLACK MAGIC

Chumbi: shall we be put in prison?

YATUNG is an entirely modern village; Chumbi, which lies a few miles lower down the valley and is nowadays a far less flourishing place, is the poor but dignified seat of the ancient local nobility. It is only a village, a modest little village, but it has five or six fine, solidly built, patriarchal houses. The type of building is the same as elsewhere in the valley: sturdy walls, sloping slightly inwards, with a huge and complicated wooden roof, and broad windows with rectangular wooden patterns painted in many colours running round them.

The residence of the *tsong-chi*, the local representative of the Tibetan government, is outside Chumbi, beyond a wooden bridge that spans the torrent. It is a kind of long, low, small fortress. Elsewhere in Tibet it would be the residence of the *dzong-pons*, the fortress captains. There are always two of these, the captain of the east and the captain of the west. The Tibetan theory is that they keep an eye on each other. Here, however, in view of the special position of the Tro-mo valley and its relations with India, the position is occupied by a *tsong-chi*, who is a commercial agent. The commercial agent is now away—he is, of all places, in America. Some enterprising young men belonging to the Lhasa nobility, acting on the initiative of the merchant Pangda-tsang, succeeded in persuading the Tibetan government of the advantages that might accrue from sending an economic mission to the United States, and the mission left at the beginning of 1948. Each of its members was provided with an enormous sheet of paper, bearing the regent's red seals, to

serve as passport. A Mr. Tob-wang was left behind at Chumbi as the commercial agent's deputy.

Mr. Tob-wang sent for us—not, that is to say, for Professor Tucci, but for Colonel Moise, Mele, and myself. Our position is ambiguous and undefined. They have refused to let us go to Lhasa. Professor Tucci, being a Buddhist, is the only one who has received a permit. The rest of us, though we have made repeated applications for permission to accompany him, have not even been granted a regular permit to remain on Tibetan soil. We could not imagine what Tob-wang might want of us. When we went to see him he might even throw us in prison.

"You don't know anything about Orientals," I told Piero Mele, to frighten him. "They invite you to tea, talk to you for half an hour about art and poetry, and then signal with their eyebrows to their retainers and tell you're under arrest."

"Rubbish!" Piero replied. "You'll see that all he wants is to have a fountain pen or a padlock repaired."

"That's what you think! Well, you may be right. But I can't help remembering what happened to me in Kyoto in 1943. After we had been confined to our house for a whole month, under continual police supervision, one fine morning towards the end of October Mr. Iwami, the chief of the aliens department, came to see us with six or seven unpleasant-looking companions. 'Good-morning, Mr. Maraini, how are you?' he said to me very politely. 'Can we drop in for a moment?' I let them in, and they all sat down in the drawing room. We talked about one thing and another for a few minutes, and Mr. Iwami noticed that the gramophone was open, and that there were some records lying about; we had been listening to some music the evening before. He picked up one of the records, and said, 'Do you like Mozart? . . . I am very fond of him indeed,' he went on, without waiting for an answer. 'Unfortunately my pay permits me few luxuries, but whenever I manage to lay a little money aside I buy records of Western classical music. I like Beethoven too. Do you know the Sixth Symphony?' Meanwhile my wife, who had heard

the voices—Japanese houses are built of wood, and you can hear everything—got up and came downstairs to see who the visitors were. Iwami greeted her in the most florid Japanese, with all the ritual *gozaimasu*, and went on talking about music. The maid came in and served tea, and the conversation continued—it was conversation of a kind more usual at five o'clock in the afternoon than at eight o'clock in the morning. 'You see,' Iwami remarked, 'in the Sixth Symphony Beethoven reminds me of our great painter Kano Eitoku,' and he went on talking about art, nature, and serenity. He emptied his teacup, but saw that we had not quite emptied ours, so he waited for a moment. Then, not suddenly, but quite slowly and firmly, and completely changing his tone of voice, he said, 'Get up!' He now used the familiar *kimi* instead of the more respectful *anata* in addressing us. We got up, and he went on, 'From this moment you are no longer dependent on your embassy [foreigners in Japan are always "dependent on their embassy"], because we do not recognize your government. You are now dependent on the Imperial Japanese Government, and you must take orders from us. Get ready to leave, with your children, and as little baggage as possible.' Then he turned to two members of his tough-looking escort and said, 'You stay here! Watch them; they are enemies!' "

Meanwhile, as I told this story, we had reached Chumbi. We immediately started noticing all sort of ominous signs. An untidy-looking soldier who had been squatting at the entrance to the village got up when he saw us and hurried off.

"D'you see?" I said to Piero. "He's gone to warn them that we're coming. They're getting ready!"

"Nonsense!" replied Piero. "He's gone to fetch a broken alarm clock or an aunt who's got rheumatics!"

We crossed the bridge, crossed a wide space where about a dozen desperadoes were cleaning arms, shoeing horses, or sitting and smoking in the sun, and entered the courtyard. A big gate, with a huge and complicated lock, slammed behind us. Two louts came forward to meet us.

"The ku-tsab is expecting you. Come along!" they said.

We mounted several steps, passed through a big gateway with many-coloured decorations, and entered a secondary courtyard, where the ku-tsab's rooms were. Another servant showed us into a room, where chairs had been prepared for us; a high one for Colonel Moise and two lower ones for Piero and myself. We were in a living room typical of the Tibetan lesser nobility or bourgeoisie, with sofas built up of cushions, low tables beside the window, cupboards against the walls, a few pictures painted on cloth, a little altar and small pieces of furniture of carved and gilded wood. In one corner we noticed a rack containing about twenty rifles; there were also some big pistols, and some swords and daggers.

"Mark my words," I said. "They've got everything ready! They'll talk to us about flowers and poetry for half an hour, and then they'll throw us into prison. Did you bring a file?"

Piero shook his head and started getting really annoyed. He looked at Colonel Moise, who, however, was completely calm, as usual. Eventually we heard footsteps and the ku-tsab Tob-wang made his appearance. He greeted us cordially and made us sit in his own place near the window. He was a tall, strong man of about forty, with a serious and, if you like, ambiguous expression. He was dressed in Tibetan style, with long hair, and on his left ear he wore the gold and turquoise earring which denotes the Tibetan official. Conversation was difficult, and there were a number of awkward pauses.

"How do you find Yatung?" Tob-wang asked. "It's a poor village; there's nothing there. It's a real shame that they won't allow you to go to Lhasa. There you'd see the finest things that our country has to offer."

I looked at Piero. This was a bad beginning; these compliments were exceedingly inauspicious.

Colonel Moise asked me to explain that we, for our part, had the liveliest desire to go to Lhasa, but that a great deal depended on him, Mr. Tob-wang, and the reports on us that he might send to his government. Tob-wang assured us that he had already sent most favourable reports about us to his government, and that he had done everything he possibly could.

The conversation continued in the same way for some time. Two boys poured out tea and offered us Indian biscuits, which are considered a great luxury. Then Tob-wang opened a box and produced a padlock.

"For some time I have been entirely unable to open it," he said. "Would you be capable of performing the miracle?"

Piero looked at me with a triumphant smile.

One after another we examined the obstinate padlock. While this was going on I noticed that several of the desperadoes whom we had seen in the open space outside were quietly filing in and gathering at the dark end of the room. Tob-wang kept on talking. He must have thought that my Tibetan was much better than it is, because, after the first few phrases, which he pronounced slowly and distinctly, he started talking rapidly, and I had difficulty in following him. He kept a little way away from us, but did not assume any air of particular importance. He kept harping on the same theme. "If it depended only on me, you'd be in Lhasa already, paying homage to the regent." Piero passed the padlock to Colonel Moise. As he turned to do so he too saw the men obstructing the exit. He looked at me, and I replied with a nod of my head, as if to say, "I told you so." That, after all, was the Oriental procedure, and something disagreeable might well be in store for us. Tob-wang suddenly turned towards the band of cut-throats.

"Let those who have some illness to cure step forward," he said. "The *amchi-sahib* (doctor-sahib) will examine them!"

When I translated the phrase Piero looked at me in triumph over the top of the teacup he was holding to his lips. Padlocks and rheumatism! He had been perfectly right and had every reason to gloat.

Yatung: a feudal lord on the bridge

Last night a messenger from Mingyur, the headman of the village, came hurrying to see us, with the news that the *lachag* Jigme Taring was going to pass this way today. So this morning Piero and I went down to the bridge to wait for the *lachag's* caravan and take some

colour photographs. The weather has been perfect all day, with a deep blue sky and small, cheerful clouds in their perennial course from peak to peak of the Himalayas.

Jigme Sumchen Wang-po Namgyal Taring is aged thirty-seven and is a nephew of the maharajah of Sikkim, but he belongs to the Tibetan branch of the family and lives in Lhasa. He has not yet reached very high rank (he belongs to the fourth of the seven grades of Tibetan officialdom), but he is a member of one of the most important Tibetan families and moves in the highest society. His father, Taring senior, the maharajah of Sikkim's elder brother, died some years ago. I remember him at Gyantse in 1937. I was invited to visit him at Taring (the Tibetan nobility nearly always draw their names from one of their estates), on the way to Lhasa. I rode for hours across the deserted plain, 12,000 feet high, before seeing fields in the distance, and then a low palace-fortress, surrounded by many other low houses. This was Taring. Meanwhile the weather had deteriorated, and a big storm came on. The Tibetans fear hail as one of the greatest scourges, because it sometimes completely destroys their wretched crops. A peasant was standing on the roof of his house, desperately blowing, like a Triton, into a big white shell, "to drive the storm away." But the storm did not seem to be intimidated by this procedure, and soon thunder and lightning started, and a terrific downpour, but no hail.

I entered Taring as the first drops were falling. A servant took my horse, and another led me through various courtyards which betrayed all the signs of flourishing agricultural life—sacks, saddles, farming implements. We climbed the usual steep Tibetan wooden steps (they are just like Japanese steps), walked down a long veranda, where a number of women were working at their looms (they greeted me by putting their tongues out, as is still the country custom), and finally I was introduced into the "prince's" apartments. So far I might have been on a farm, but when I crossed the threshold I found myself in a suite of Tibetan drawing rooms, the baroque richness of the decoration of which reminded me of eighteenth-century Palermo drawing rooms. The ceilings were supported

on columns and entablatures painted in the vivid, joyous colours of Tibet—blue, green, orange, yellow; innumerable pictures painted on cloth, some of them of notable beauty, were on the walls; the furniture was carved and gilded, decorated with Chinese motifs (dragons and peonies) and Indian motifs (the lotus, the Eight Glorious Emblems); and cup-lamps of massive silver for burning butter stood in front of the small gilded altars.

The Tibetan style of furnishing is elaborate and luxurious; it can easily degenerate into heaviness, clumsiness, and overelaboration. But when it is carried out with taste it has a bold, barbaric fascination that can hardly be excelled. It is a style which seems natural to a country of boundless plateaux, to a people who set out on 2,000-mile journeys on horseback as if it were the most natural thing in the world, who are used to violent gales and extreme cold, who pass with ease from the rigours of asceticism to hearty enjoyment of life, who laugh, play, fight, drink, make love, kill, repent, believe in miracles, and are, in short, full of an inexhaustible vitality. A great deal of the merit of the Tibetan style is due to the taste of Tibetan artisans; their liking for ornamentation on the one hand and their feeling for colour, materials, surfaces, on the other. Tibetan teapots, for instance, look like fantastic little round fortresses of brass and silver, with dragons entwined round the spout or handle; they are always a symphony of various metals; and the same applies to their coffee pots, beer jars, cups, travelling flasks, water jugs, trumpets, boxes for amulets, and a hundred other articles of everyday use. Their painting and sculpture are in Indian or sometimes Chinese style, partially Tibetanized, but in their furnishings the Tibetan spirit expresses itself with much greater freedom.

I remember little of old Taring's conversation during my visit, which was very brief. The storm passed over us, and we sipped tea and ate biscuits and dried fruit to the accompaniment of flashes of lightning. Then I left for Gyantse and went through another tremendous downpour on the way.

But to return to the bridge at Yatung. At eleven o'clock a boy

came running along, shouting, "They're coming!" Sure enough, a cloud of dust appeared along the road towards Chumbi, and soon we could make out the individual horsemen; the caravan was coming. The cloud of dust grew nearer, and through it we could soon make out the people's faces. "There they are! There they are!" The little boys all round us jumped with excitement and clapped their hands with glee. When Jigme Taring passed he greeted us. He was dressed in Tibetan style, though, as usual, he wore a European felt hat. He was followed by his wife and a niece about twenty years old, a very pretty girl, and by two guards, each with a rifle and a big metal-work kau slung round his neck. There were also various other servants, a number of mules with baggage—big trunks and boxes covered with skins, sacks, and shrines.

That is how a Tibetan lord travels; in a slow, solemn, brilliant, fairy-tale caravan, reminding one of the three Magi, Benozzo Gozzoli, Carpaccio. I stood among the boulders of the dry river bed, with the bridge high above me. Against the clouds and sun the passing figures were explosions of colour. I reflected sadly that within a few decades these same people would be passing this way in motor cars, in horrible clothes not designed for them, and that all that I was seeing and admiring would be nothing but a memory. However, for the time being Tibetan civilization is alive and vital.

In India, China, and Japan customs, habits, local peculiarities, are subject to the continual impact of all the alien things—railways, ready-made clothes, mechanical toys, illustrated papers—which modern industry pours upon the world. These things have a bewildering, disintegrating effect on those ancient cultures, causing them rapidly to decay. The world is in a state of constant flux, and the foundations have been swept away. True, there is abundant vitality, but there is also abundant confusion and ugliness. Ours is an unhappy age of transition. Everywhere the world is passing from age-old equilibriums, in which moral and aesthetic standards had been slowly evolved, to other, future equilibriums that cannot be foreseen. They too will ultimately find their centre and acquire their own

ideals and standards. But by then we shall have been dead for a long time. Meanwhile Tibet is an exception. How much longer will it be able to endure?

Note on the Tibetan government

In Europe Tibet is always thought of as a strange country, exclusively populated by mysterious sages, who pass their time performing incredible miracles in endless, rocky wildernesses where rare blue poppies bloom. It is thought of as a country of monks governed by monks. It should, however, be remembered that only a tenth of the population—a high proportion, it is true—is professionally associated with the various religious bodies, and that, though the Dalai Lama is the head of the state and the government and the Panchen Lama and the trul-kus (Phantom Bodies) have a voice in every important decision, there are laymen who occupy places of great importance in the public life of the country.

The ultimate control of all ecclesiastical as well as civil affairs lies in the hands of the Dalai Lama. Immediately under him are the two principal organs of government, the Ecclesiastical Council (*yik-tsang*), consisting of four clerical members, and the Council of Ministers (*kashag*) which consists of four members, of whom three are laymen and one clerical. Two prime ministers act as intermediaries between the two councils and the Dalai Lama—an Ecclesiastical Prime Minister (*chi-kyap chempo*) for religious affairs and a Prime Minister of State (*lon-chen*) for civil affairs. These two officials are, however, less important than might appear; the real seat of power is in the two councils. The ministers (*sha-pes*) of the lay council (*kashag*) do not have separate portfolios but exercise general control over all political, judicial, and fiscal affairs. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the control of the *chigye lon-chen*, is a relatively recent creation, but it appears to have advisory functions only. Foreign affairs have always been under the direct control of the Dalai Lama or the regent.

Finally there is a National Assembly (*tsong-du*), which meets

only to deal with exceptionally grave and important matters. It has about fifty members, who include many of the most important personages in Lhasa. It should not be forgotten that the abbots of the great monasteries—Sera, Depung, Galden—being able to count on the complete loyalty of several thousand monks, constitute a formidable political force and sometimes show their independence. In the last resort, however, the functions of the National Assembly are advisory. After the resolutions presented to it by the kashag have been discussed, they are submitted to the Dalai or the regent for final decision. Power is thus extremely centralized.

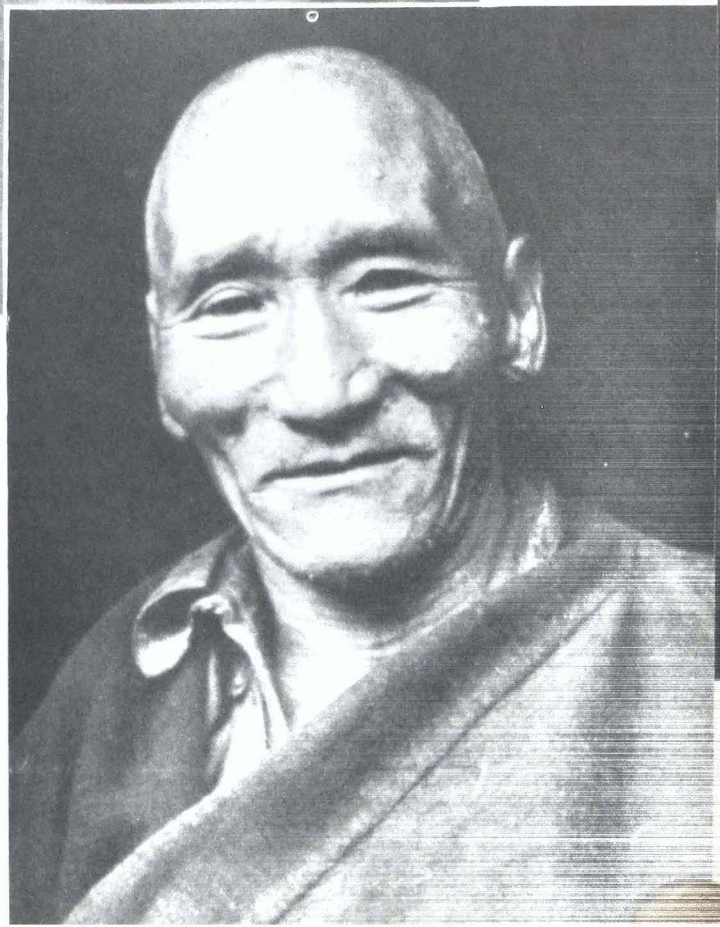
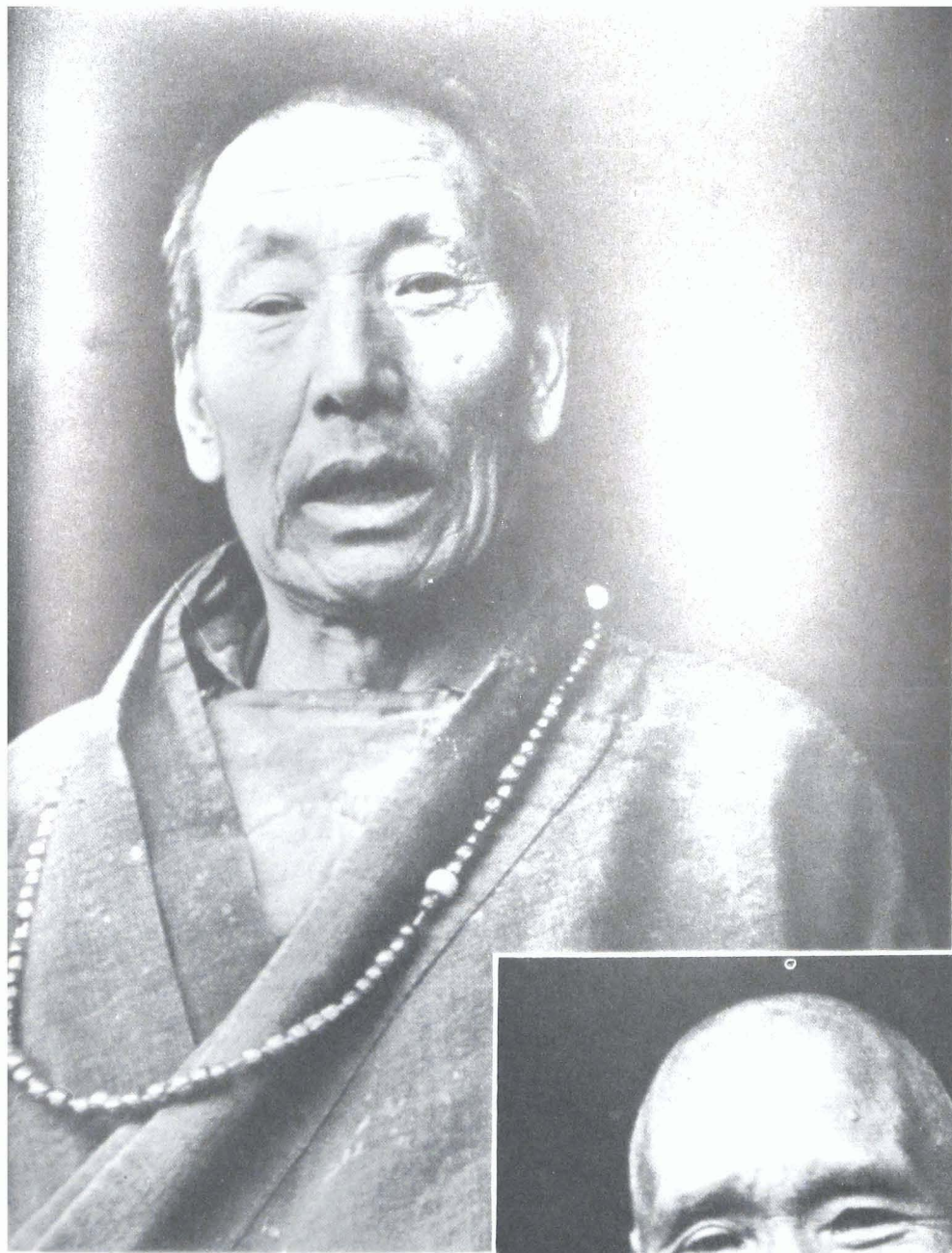
The country is divided into five provinces—U-tsang (Lhasa and Shigatse), Gartok (western Tibet), Kham (Chiamdo, eastern Tibet), Chang (Nagchuka, northern Tibet), Lhoka (Lho-dzong, southern Tibet)—and in each the representative of the government is a *chi-kyap*. The *dzong-pons* (captains of the fortresses) are subordinate to the *chi-kyaps*. The functions of a *dzong-pon* are on the one hand to maintain order and on the other to see that the taxes (generally paid in kind) are duly paid into the Treasury. The *dzong-pons* enjoy great independence; also all the revenue they succeed in collecting over and above the amount due to the government is their own personal property. The position is therefore sold by auction to the highest bidder. I have already mentioned that important posts in places distant from Lhasa are always doubled, the intention being that the two officials keep their eyes on each other.

Apart from the monks, the most important class is that of the *gyerpá* (landowners), who constitute the great and small nobility. It is interesting to note that their ownership of the soil is theoretically not absolute. The primary condition is that the family must regularly supply one or more of its members to the government service. Young nobles are sent for a few years to a special school in Lhasa to complete their education and are then admitted to one of the ministries. They enter as officials of the seventh, or lowest, grade, but if a young man has the necessary ability he may rise rapidly to the higher grades (*de-pon*, *sha-pe*, *chi-kyap*, etc.). There was one case in Tibetan history of a layman's becoming re-

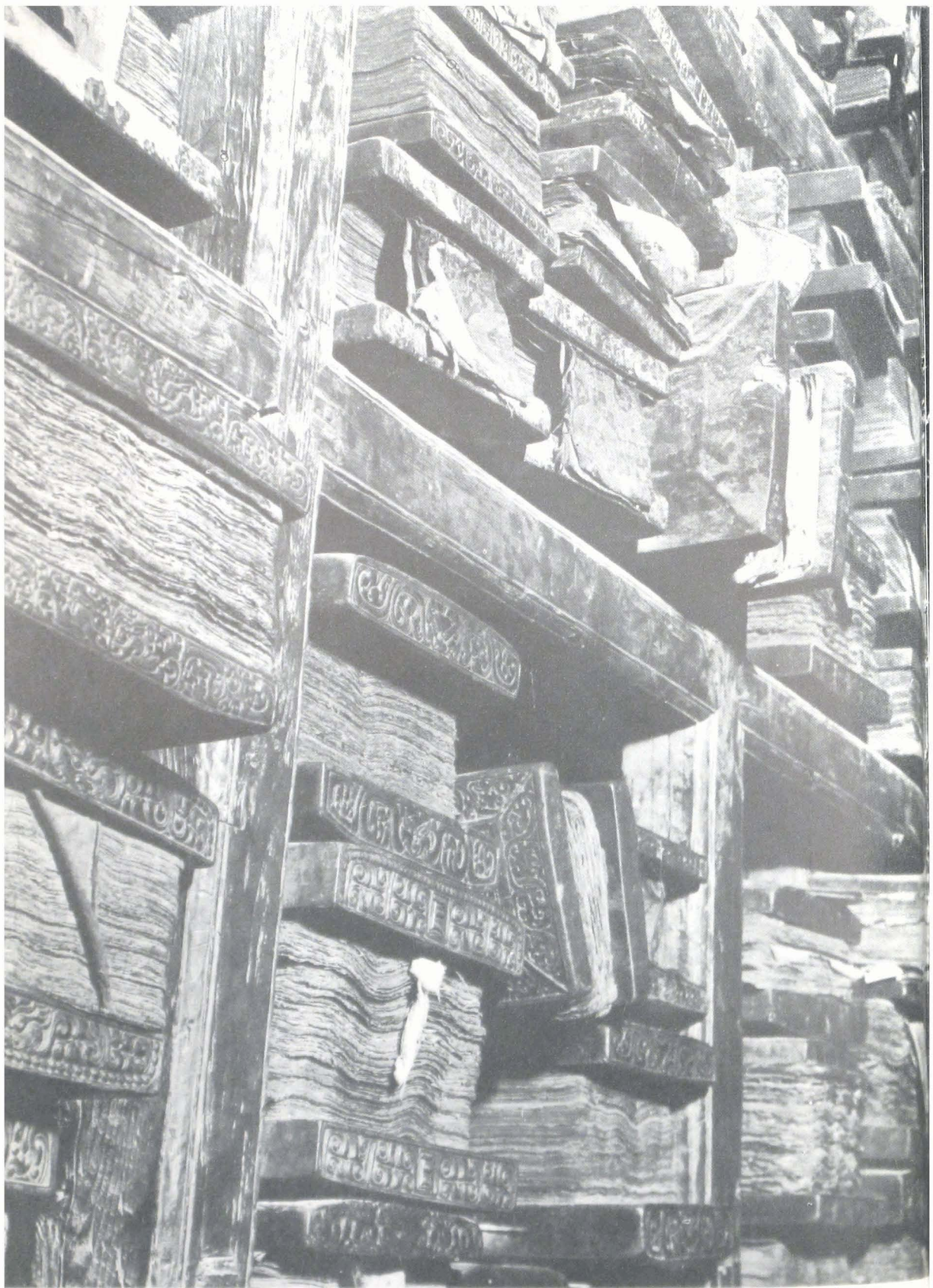
gent for a brief period. A boy belonging to the humbler classes—the peasants or artisans—who wants to make a career in the world can always enter the church. If he enters a monastery and distinguishes himself he may be sent to a special school in Lhasa for ecclesiastical officials. Government officials, except the dzong-pons, receive small annual salaries, say about fifty to seventy-five pounds a year. It is assumed that the rest of an official's income is supplied by his family, or that alternately he supplements it by accepting gifts, which are normal, indeed obligatory, in dealing with Tibetan officials.

The leading nobility in Tibet consists of a very few families. One very ancient and exclusive group consists of descendants of the ancient Tibetan kings (sixth and seventh centuries A.D.). The Lhagyari, Rakashar, and a few other families belong to it. The heads of these families are accorded religious and civil honours. There are also noble families founded by men of humble origin who at various times rendered special services to the state and were rewarded by lands and titles. Some of these are of quite recent origin. As an example, let me tell the story of Tsarong Dzasa. He was born in 1885 of a humble family and entered the service of the Dalai as an ordinary servant. He promptly attracted attention because of his exceptional gifts of intelligence and character, and he accompanied the Dalai to Mongolia in 1903. His great hour came in 1913, when the Dalai was fleeing to India, pursued by Chinese troops. With a handful of soldiers and monks he succeeded in holding up the Chinese at the Chaksam ferry, thus giving the Dalai time to reach a place of safety. A year later, when the Dalai returned from India, he was appointed *dzasa* and commander-in-chief of the Tibetan army. Two years later he was appointed a sha-pe. After 1925 he fell out of favour for a while, but he has always remained one of the most influential figures in Tibetan political life. He is distinctly progressive in outlook, speaks English, is always friendly to foreign travellers, and favours a policy of gradual modernization.

A third group consists of descendants of the families of successive Dalai Lamas. The Potrang family, for instance, is descended from the brother of the seventh Dalai (1708–58), and the Punkang fam-



33. "Lamas" of the Bon-po—
"the Etruscans of Asia"



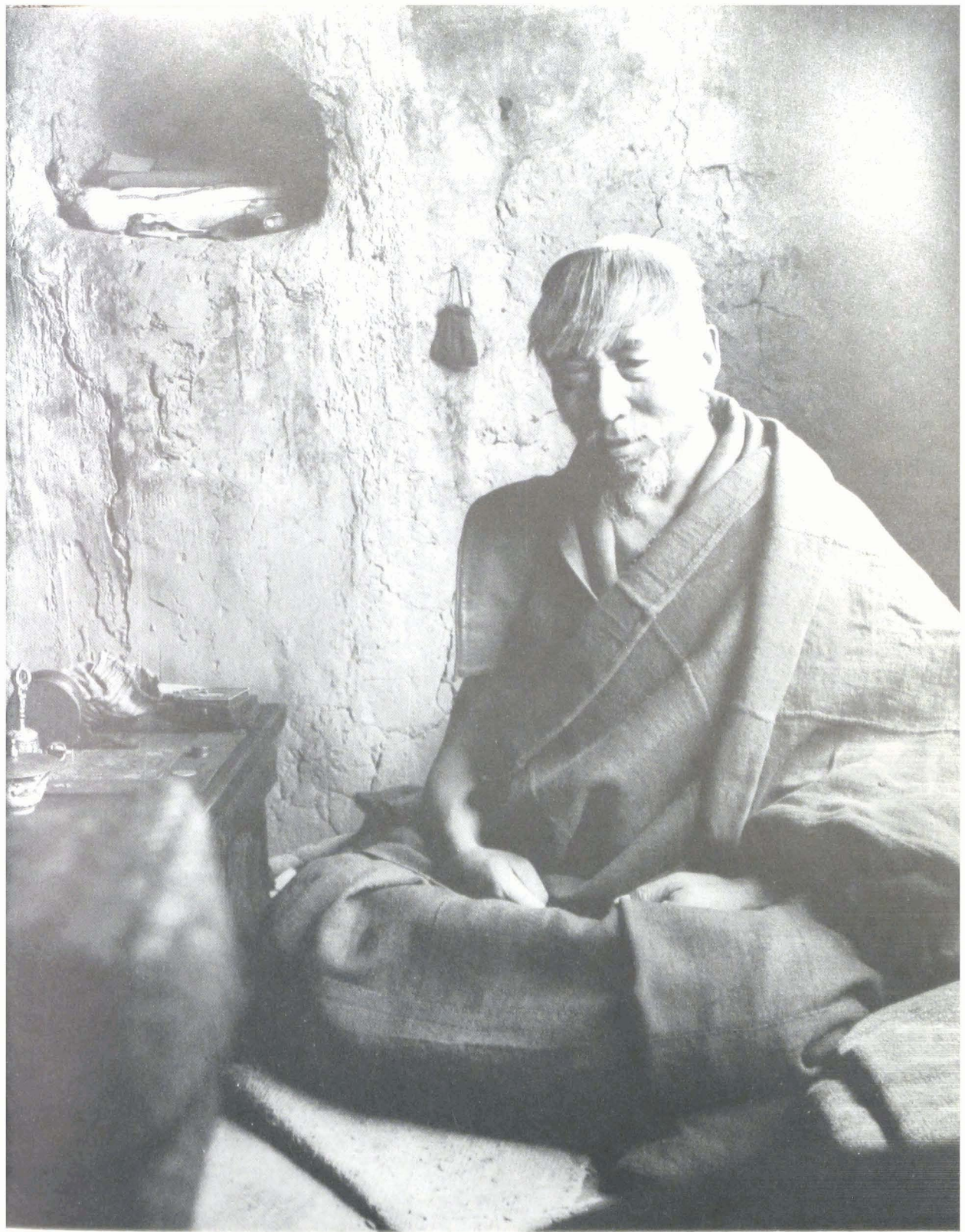
34. The ponderous tomes of a Tibetan library may bear such titles as “Feast of Joy for Perfect Youths”



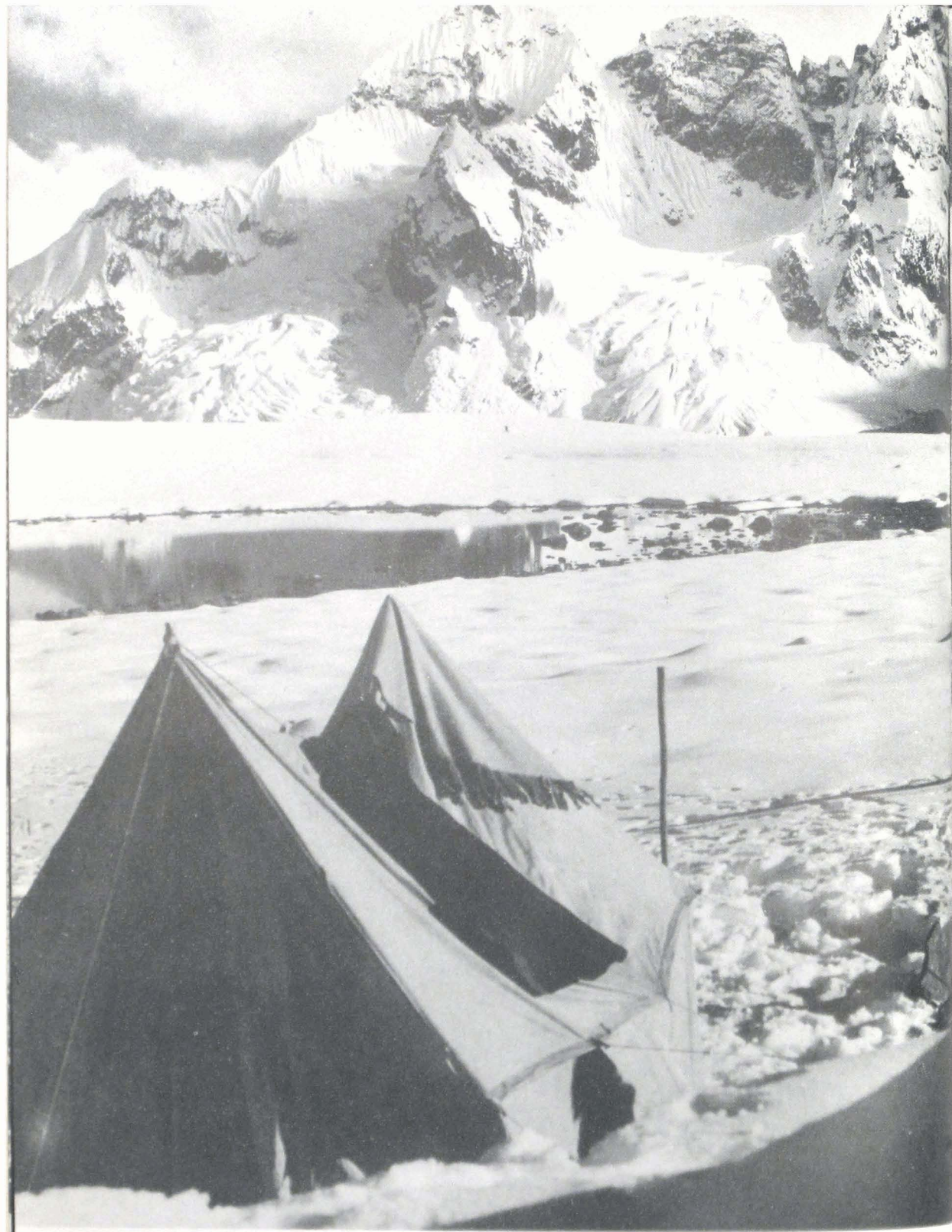
35. "The demons and serpentiform gods squat on my severe and powerful shoulders."—the sixth Dalai Lama
Lama Ton-gye of the Kar-gyu monastery



36. The West explains; the East implies.
"The Buddha Crowned" (Gyantse)



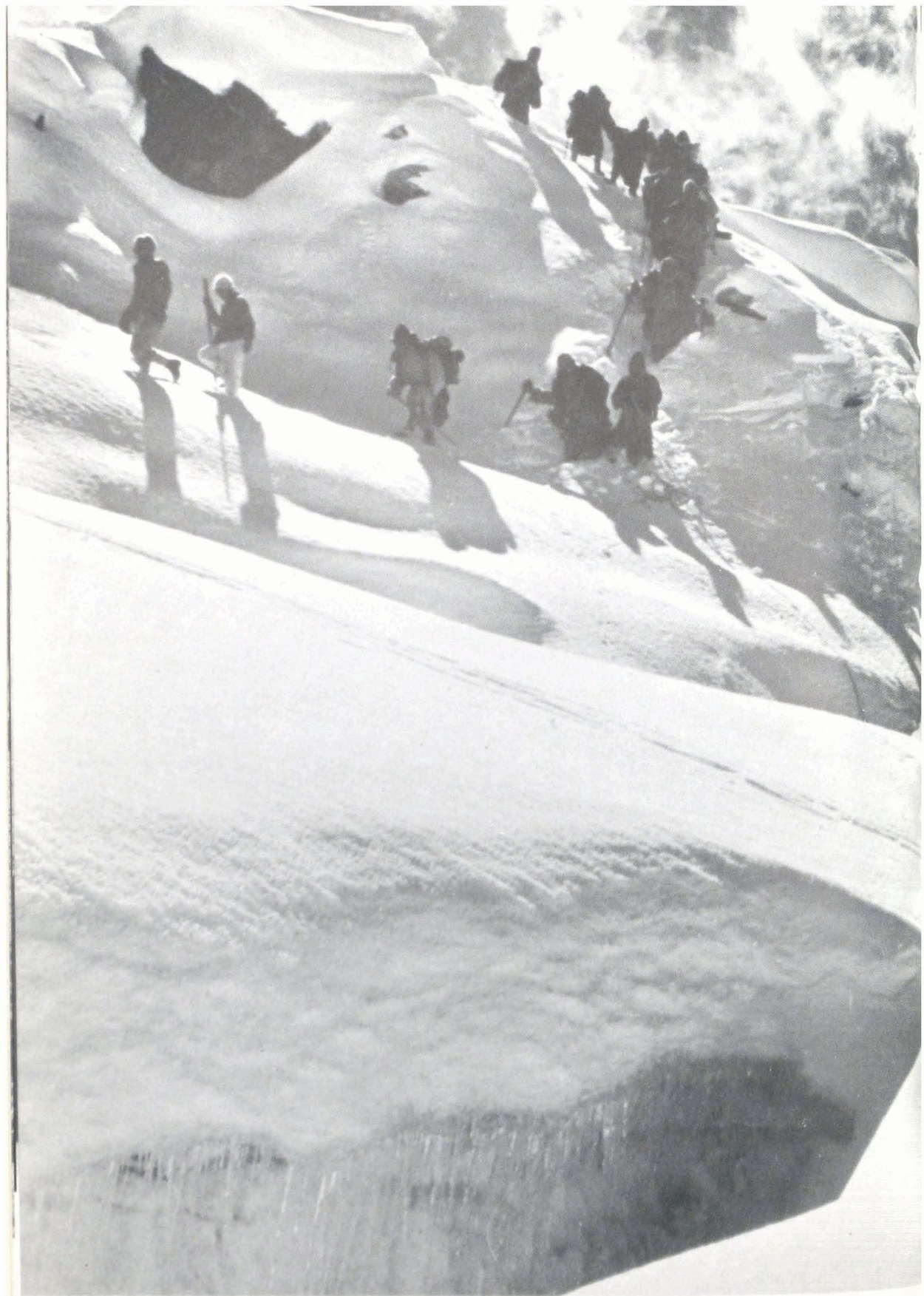
37. "In solitary stony fastnesses among the mountains, there is a strange market, where one can barter the vortex of life for boundless bliss."—Milarepa
The hermit Tsampa Tendar



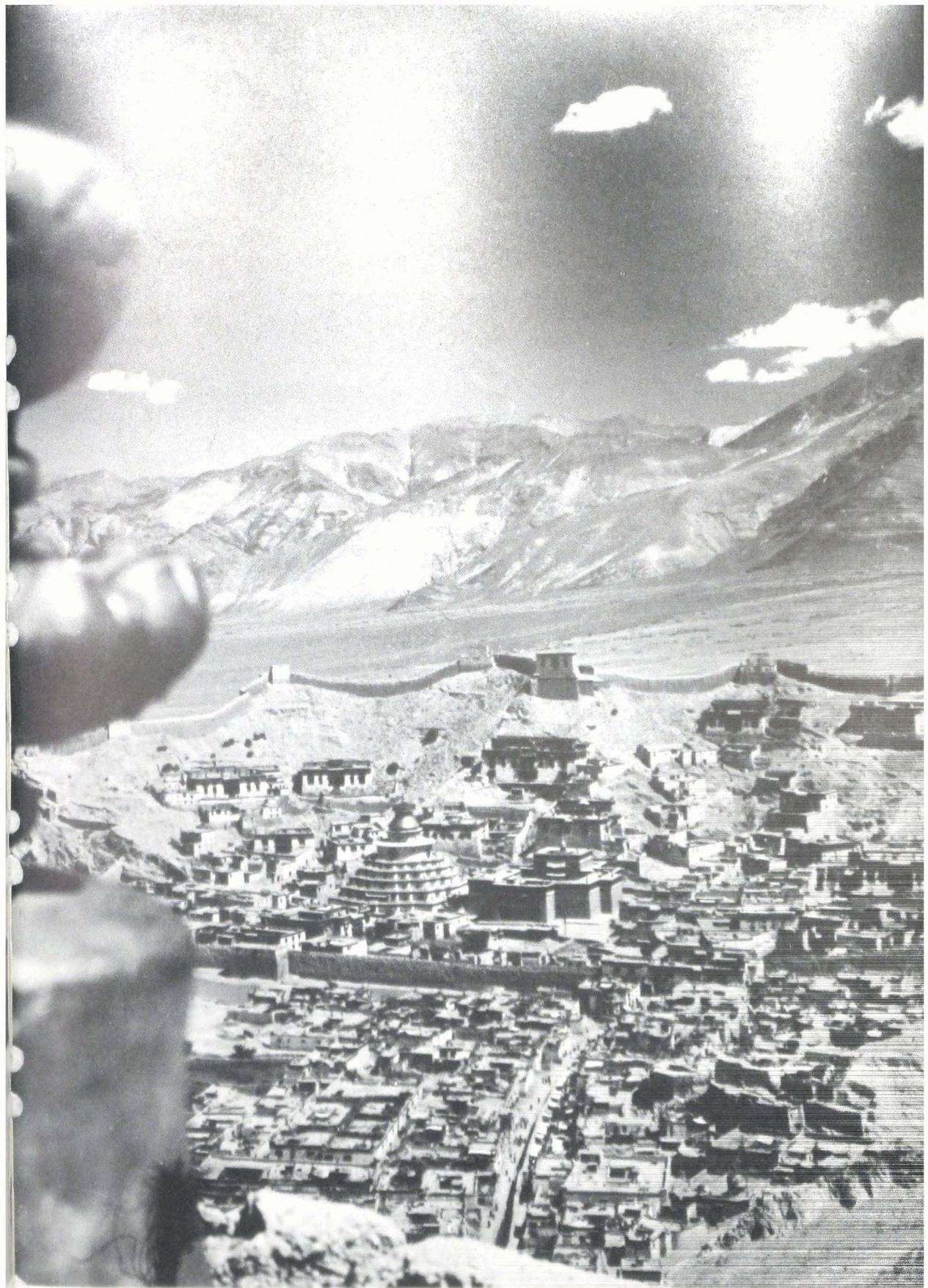
38. Places without names (Himalayan camp at 15,000 feet)



39. Solitary horseman (Gyantse)



40. Caravan, pass, crevasses (Seba pass, Sikkim)



41. "The divine territory of Gyantse"—Tibetan inscription



42. "Victory over the army of hostile demons!" (Wall painting in the Kum-bum)



43. Sacred dances at Kirimtse





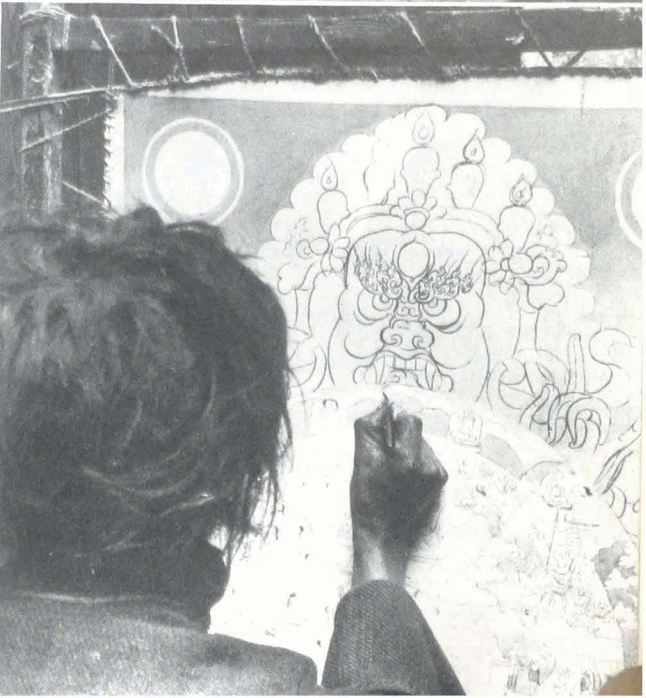
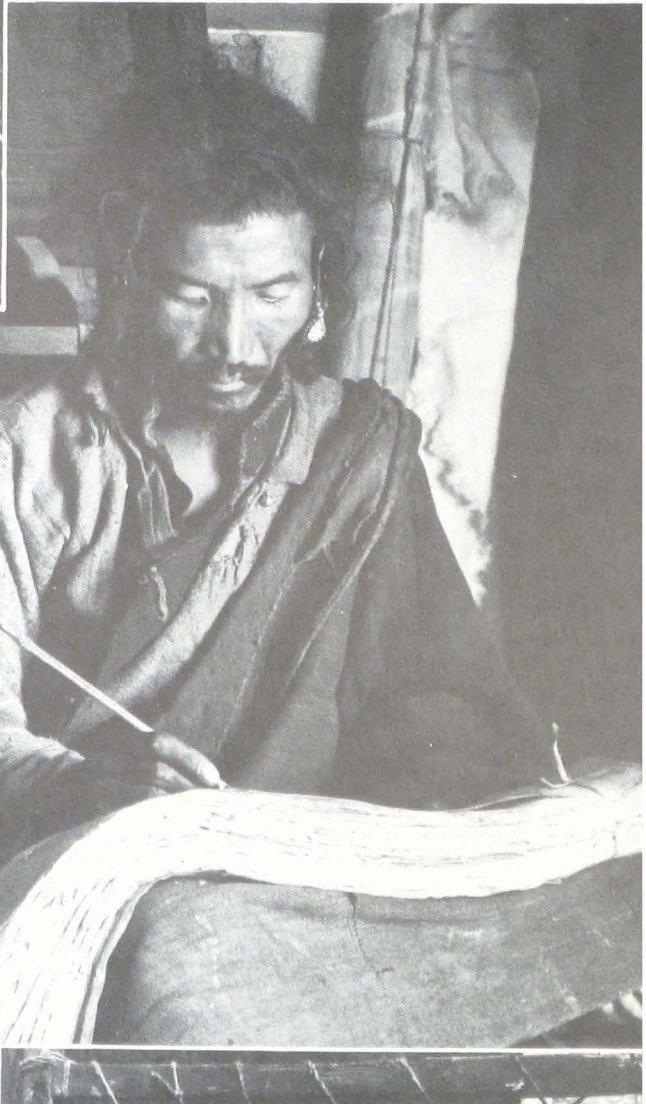
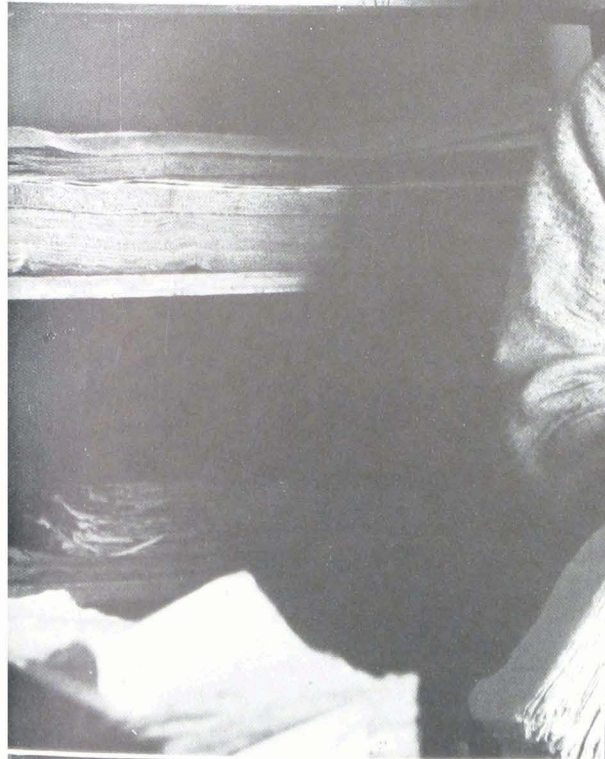
45. The Precious Protector—the thirteenth Dalai Lama (Wall painting at Gyantse)

44. "The Temptation of the Buddha" (Samada)



46. The doctor's daughter, wearing her dead mother's jewels

47. Schoolchildren; craftsmen (Gyantse)





48. The Kum-bum

"The great pagoda, the very sight of which leads to liberation"—Tibetan inscription

ily from the brother of the tenth (1819–37); one of the most influential families, the Lhalus, are descended from the union of two branches, one descended from the family of the eighth, and the other from the family of the twelfth, Dalai. So far the only one to have received gyperpa privileges is the Pangda-tsang family, because of the important position they have come to occupy in commerce. The Pangda-tsang can well be called the bankers of Tibet. The recent economic mission to the United States was the result of the initiative of the present head of the family, and the thriving woollen export trade is to a great extent in the family's hands.

Once a noble family has established itself, there is no reason why it should ever disappear. When there are no sons to carry on the line the daughters, even after marriage, can retain their father's name. In such cases the son-in-law is adopted into his father-in-law's house, as is also the custom in Japan. That is what happened in the case of Tsarong Dzasa, whom we mentioned above; his original name was Namyang Dazang Damdu, but he assumed the name and rank of the Tsarong family when he married the eldest daughter of Tsarong-shape, an important official.

Tibetan life, viewed as a whole, is typically mediaeval. It is mediaeval in its social organization—the predominance of the church and the nobility—and its economic basis is agriculture and stock-breeding. It has the colour and incredible superstition of France and Burgundy, the two most perfect examples of European mediaevalism; it has a mediaeval faith, a mediaeval vision of the universe as a tremendous drama in which terrestrial alternate with celestial events, a mediaeval hierarchy culminating in one man and then passing into the invisible and the metaphysical, like an enormous tree with its roots among the stones and its leaves lost in the blue of heaven; mediaeval feasts and ceremonies, mediaeval filth and jewels, mediaeval professional story-tellers and tortures, tourneys and cavalcades, princesses and pilgrims, brigands and hermits, nobles and lepers; mediaeval renunciations, divine frenzies, minstrels, and prophets.

I must add that to me the Tibetans seem to be really happy people

—so far as people can be happy on this earth. Happiness does not necessarily depend on social structure or system of government, as our contemporaries seem to think. To me it seems to be primarily a question of equilibrium between the world by which man is surrounded and the world which he carries in his heart. We live in an age of terrifying disequilibriums, and should be equally unhappy under kings, presidents, popes, or tribunes of the people, whether organized in republics or empires, soviets or theocracies. Our science offers us one picture of the universe; our traditional religion another. Physics and chemistry have advanced a thousand years ahead of the social sciences and the education of the will. Europe *caput mundi* is living through the agony of a noble decline. Ideals and standards are in a state of continual flux; professional standards and ideals, sexual standards, class ambitions, the kind of life that people aim at at different ages—all important elements in a stable society—are subjected to constant criticism and revision; everything is changing, becoming, perpetually fluid. New equilibriums unknown to us are perhaps on the way, in which future generations may perhaps find greater peace. But we are caught up in the grinding of the gears. Some of us succeed in extricating ourselves, but the majority are crushed.

The story of Lungshar

The passing of the feudal lord Jigme Taring and his caravan lasted only a moment. Later we called on him during his stay in the country. He gave us news of friends at Gangtok, and told us many interesting things about Lhasa. We asked him to support our application to be admitted to the capital, and he said he would do what he could, but I know there is a limit to the value of such promises. A permit to visit Lhasa is obtainable because of special merit, as in the case of Giuseppe Tucci; otherwise it is simply a matter of chance. It depends on the political constellation of the moment. If the foreigner's arrival happens to fit in with it, well and good. Can it be used by somebody to score over a rival or to spite him in some way?

Can it be exploited as a victory of one faction over another? If so, the permit is granted. Otherwise it isn't.

This brief contact with the world of Lhasa nobility reminds me of the story of Lungshar, a recent incident in the history of Tibet which throws light on many aspects of this extraordinary country. The thirteenth Dalai Lama died on December 17, 1933, after a very short illness. So unforeseen was his death that it caused a terrible shock in Lhasa and throughout the country. Moreover his death was accompanied by several signs of ill omen. An atmosphere of dark apprehension and portent hung over the city. It was rumoured that for several hours the dead pontiff had been miraculously resuscitated; then it was whispered that the *dronyer chempo* (great chamberlain) had committed suicide by swallowing powdered glass, because he felt himself responsible for not having foreseen the Dalai's illness. Meanwhile, while the people cowered in their houses or gathered in the temples to pray, a desperate struggle for control of the government began among the few individuals who collectively held the reins of power. One faction, consisting of a group of monks supported by a number of laymen, advised the kashag to appoint as Prime Minister Kumphel-la, who for several years had been the dead Dalai's favourite. Kumphel-la, a young cleric aged twenty-eight, had a big following among the monks of the younger generation, and was known as an open, frank, though impulsive man.

This plan was, however, violently opposed by a second party, whose leader, a layman, was named Lungshar. Dorje Tsegyal Lungshar, who was born in 1880, had been sent to England in 1913 with three Tibetan boys whom Sir Charles Bell intended should have a Western education. After his return to Tibet he had a brilliant career, and in 1925 succeeded Tsarong Dzasa as commander-in-chief. Lungshar first of all tried to have Kumphel-la condemned to death for having poisoned the Dalai Lama. He failed to prove the accusation but succeeded in having him exiled and various of his partisans imprisoned.

The government was theoretically in the hands of the young regent, the trul-ku of the Reting monastery, and the kashag, but

Lungshar very soon succeeded in completely dominating the scene. An intelligent man, who knew something of the Western world, having lived in England for a year, he probably had ideas that were too revolutionary for monkish taste, and he soon made many enemies. His efforts were mainly directed to strengthening the tsong-du, and he relied on the support of the abbots of the three great monasteries of Sera, Depung, and Galden to dominate the ecclesiastical party. Perhaps he imagined that the tsong-du might become a sort of parliament; in any case he tried to use it as an instrument against the Council of Ministers. The members of the council, led by the aged sha-pe Timon, naturally became his mortal enemies.

Very soon it was murmured in Lhasa that Lungshar was aiming at some completely unconstitutional form of power, and it was even whispered that he wished to overthrow the dominion of the lamas and make himself king of Tibet, or alternatively to found a republic. What his aims really were is unknown. Perhaps he aimed at an oligarchical form of government exercised through the chief figures in the National Assembly, while he pulled the wires behind the scenes. If he had succeeded in this he would have been faithful to an ancient Oriental practice, and perhaps this would have satisfied him. One thing that is clear is that he was a Tibetan nationalist (which in a way was an innovation). He showed it repeatedly by the firmness of his attitude to Chiang Kai-shek and China.

For a few months at the beginning of 1934 Lungshar's fortunes seemed to be rapidly in the ascendant. His constant endeavour was to strengthen the tsong-du at the expense of the kashag. But perhaps he overestimated his own influence in the National Assembly, and on May 10, 1934, when he put forward a series of points intended to strengthen his followers' position, the tsong-du first supported but then repudiated him. The sha-pe Timon saw that his time had come and organized a counterattack. In the name of the Council of Ministers he invited Lungshar to the Potala for a discussion. Lungshar went to the Potala with a small armed escort but was promptly arrested and accused of having tried to subvert the government and establish a Bolshevik regime.

At this point in the story we suddenly revert from the twentieth century to the middle ages. In the struggle to disarm Lungshar one of his boots was torn off, and some pieces of paper fluttered to the ground. Lungshar struggled free for a moment and managed to seize one piece of paper and swallow it, but the others were picked up. Written on them were the names of the sha-pe Timon and various other personalities in the government. This was black magic. In the Tibetan view trampling on the name of one's enemy is one of the most detestable and effective ways of doing him harm. This discovery was fatal to Lungshar; all his supporters abandoned him when they heard of it. The sha-pe Timon and the council then instituted repressive measures. There were many arrests, and Lungshar was condemned to a horrible punishment; his eyes were put out, and he was thrown into a cold, damp prison in the basement of the Potala. In spite of the appalling conditions his strong constitution kept him alive for several years. He was released in 1938, but died soon afterwards.

The most tragic part of the story is that the man who risked his life to modernize Tibet should have finally ruined himself because of his archaic faith in black magic. Strange and complicated conflicts arise in the mind of a man torn between two civilizations. We often tend to think that changing a man's outlook on life is as simple as giving him a bicycle instead of a mule, or a flashlight instead of a torch, but there could be no graver error. One can drive powerful cars and win races, like Prince Bira, discover unknown bacilli, like Kitasato, new atomic secrets, like Yukawa, or new properties of light, like Raman, while belonging to a world quite different from ours. Changing a man's fundamental outlook means changing an interior world whose individual roots go back to his infancy and whose social roots go back for thousands of years. Tradition, in its widest sense, is a gigantic, secret, and irresistible force; it colours, though for the most part we are entirely unaware of it, all our thoughts, feelings, likes and dislikes, and all our decisions and actions. An individual torn from the spiritual soil of the civilization in which he was born is very like a man who has been shipwrecked.

From the little that we know of him, we can say that Lungshar was a tragic example of the millions of men in our lifetime who have been partially but not entirely uprooted and have not been able to establish new roots.

The result of these tumultuous events was, as often happens in such cases, a cautious, rather colourless government, which continued for year after year to keep a careful balance between Chinese and British influence. In recent years no notable figure has appeared on the Tibetan political scene. The young Regent Thupden Jampel Yishe Gyatsen (born in 1911), the trul-ku of the Reting monastery, was for several years an important force in the progressive sense. But he encountered continuous and obstinate opposition from the older generation, and from the abbots of several of the great monasteries. So great was the pressure to which he was subjected that he was eventually forced to resign. He was succeeded by an aged reactionary, the Takta Rimpoche. In 1947 a plot against the new regent was discovered, and shortly afterwards the abbot of Reting died in mysterious circumstances. Tibet was thereupon divided into pro-Reting and anti-Reting parties, and the result was actually bloodshed. The monks of Sera, loyal to the memory of the abbot of Reting, wanted to march on Lhasa. The government had to undertake a regular siege of the monastery in order to restore discipline. Sera was machine-gunned and finally subjected to artillery bombardment.

The triumph of communism in China has confronted Tibet with the prospect of direct relations with yet a third powerful neighbour—Russia. Thus the future of Tibet is to an extent linked up with that of the world. The Tibetans' chief concern is to maintain their religion and their independence.

The international status of Tibet has been a matter of discussion for decades. There are at least three conflicting theories on the subject. The simplest is the Tibetans' own theory. They claim to be a completely independent, sovereign state, owing no allegiance to any foreign power. In 1935 the kashag categorically and officially denied having ever admitted Chinese suzerainty—incidentally a de-

lightly Asian way of stating negatively a proposition intended to be understood in a positive sense. In July 1949 the Chinese mission at Lhasa was coldly invited to go away and had no choice but to leave the capital.

The Chinese, however, have always maintained that Tibet forms an integral part of their dominions, and that not only Tibetan foreign affairs, but her most important domestic affairs as well—including the discovery and installation of a new Dalai Lama—are subject to supervision and ratification by the Chinese government. In 1942 the Chinese firmly and explicitly refused to have any dealings with the newly established Tibetan foreign ministry. China has sought on every possible occasion to affirm the right of suzerainty over Tibet which she claims to have inherited from the Ching dynasty. Chinese ambassadors and ministers have repeatedly tried to meddle in Tibetan internal affairs. Soon after the death of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, for instance, General Huang Mu-sung through a subordinate presented to the kashag fourteen points, in which he demanded, among other things, that a Chinese adviser to the Tibetan government should be established in Lhasa, that the Tibetan government should consult the Chinese government before entering into relations with other countries, and that the Chinese government should be consulted about the appointment of officials of the grade of sha-pe and above. The kashag replied negatively to all these points, which were incompatible with Tibetan sovereignty, thus implicitly affirming their own absolute independence.

Great Britain has for about thirty years supported the principle of Tibetan internal independence within the "orbit" of Chinese suzerainty and has given varied and somewhat inconsistent interpretations of this conception. In practice Britain has treated Tibet as an independent state. On the whole, for a generation up to 1948 British influence was the strongest and most conspicuous of the foreign influences on the country. From Colonel Younghusband's military expedition in 1904 and the official visits paid by Sir Charles Bell, Colonel Bailey, Mr. Williamson, Sir Basil Gould, and their respective missions, up to Mr. Richardson's residence in Lhasa, the

contacts between the two countries have been continuous and important. The British, always meticulously respecting the religion and customs of the country and treating the Tibetans as "gentlemen" (the Chinese only too often betrayed their contempt for them), achieved considerable popularity in Lhasa. But British relations with Tibet have now passed into the hands of the government of India, which does not seem to understand the importance of the thirty years' work of peaceful and beneficent penetration bequeathed to it by Britain.

Finally, the sudden Tibetan curiosity about America and the various journeys to Tibet undertaken by Americans are of great interest for the future development of relations between the two countries.



THE PRINCE GIVES HIS EYES TO THE BEGGAR

Yatung: a village holiday

THIS morning there was a festive air about Yatung, because a play was going to be performed. But the "stage" and the players were not yet ready; preparations were still in full swing. When I crossed the bridge I saw three men running towards me. They were Losel, Paljor, and Sönam. They had obviously been drinking, particularly Losel. They were singing at the top of their voices the current popular song:

Chang tung arak tung . . . Drinking chang and drinking arak . . .

"Kushog-sahib!" Losel shouted. "We've come to fetch you! It's Kenrab's birthday. He says he met you ten years ago, when you first came this way, and he wants to see you again. We're drinking and singing. Look what a lovely, sunny day it is! Won't you come? Yes, I knew you'd come! I told you the kushog-sahib would come!"

We walked for half a mile along the river. It was a perfect Tibetan summer morning, luminous and serene. Light, pearly galleons were navigating in the sky. Not only the village but the whole universe seemed to be on holiday; you felt it in the air. Near the stream we came upon two tents (you can't have any kind of celebration in Tibet without tents) and a whole gathering of men and women, boys and girls, children and old women. It was a regular village outing—a side of Tibetan life that few Europeans know or imagine exists. It was neither sublime, nor thaumaturgic, nor hieratic, but simply gay, pagan, and innocent.

"Sahib, here, come and sit down, make yourself at home!" They laid a carpet for the guest. "What would you like? Do you drink

chang?" Of course I drink chang. It's a light, milky beer, refreshing and very mildly intoxicating. "No, thank you, no arak for me." Arak is strong but has a flavour of petrol and leaves you with a headache. "Hullo, Kenrab, how are you? No, you don't look a day older! What? Oh yes, let's hope to meet like this every ten years, another ten times, *lho gya-tampa*, a hundred years of friendship!"

The girls had taken off their *lhams* (Tibetan coloured-cloth slippers) and were wading up to their thighs in the icy water of the river. They started singing a song at the top of their voices, but after a few verses they stopped, burst out laughing, and started splashing one another. The men protested, but the girls took no notice. Tibetan women are independent and have minds of their own. Eventually one of the girls fell and was pulled out of the water wet through. She took off her bright green vest and remained bare-breasted in the sun. This caused an uproar, and laughter that seemed as if it were never going to end.

A meal was spread on the grass. The men went on talking, and the women sat down and started to eat, calling their husbands, brothers, and fiancés. The men eventually allowed their attention to be attracted and squatted on the grass too, each taking a bowl and helping himself to food and drink contained in about fifty receptacles of various kinds, all tiny—bowls, cups, plates, and pots—which were spread on a kind of tablecloth. It was a real Tibetan feast. There were Chinese noodles, rice, meatballs, meat cut into crescents, squares, slices, many kinds of vegetables, boiled and fried, tsampa, butter—the everlasting butter—as well as arak, chang, and tea.

We ate and drank. A monstrously filthy beggar approached, his face twisted into a grotesque, inexpressive smile. He was covered in rags and sores, carried a saucepan, a rosary, and a prayer wheel, and had a worn-out American soldier's cap on his head. He made innumerable jerky little bows, putting out his tongue and making gestures with his thumbs. An old woman filled her bowl with scraps and gave it to him. He thanked her but then whined something. He wasn't hungry, he was thirsty; he wanted chang. This made Kenrab

angry, and he sent the man away, but the old woman sent a child after him with a bottle of chang.

By this time everyone had drunk a little too much. The girls had started chasing one another about among the thickets of wild roses, laughing and shrieking, making an infernal din. Babies cried and their mothers suckled them. The men lay supine on the grass, looking like wine skins put out to dry. The old women spread scraps of butter left on the plates on their hair.

Suddenly someone remembered that today was *ache-lhamo* day. Someone else called out, "*Gyok-po! Gyok-po!* (Hurry! Hurry!)"

At first nobody moved, but then everybody got up, as if a magic word of command had suddenly penetrated into their stupefied minds. In a few moments they were all hurrying back to the village. Kenrab, who had waked up too, took me by the arm and said, "Kushog-sahib, you must come to the *ache-lhamo* too. Come along! Come along!" The whole valley was swaying, the mountains were collapsing, and the forests were green flames. I ate millions of strawberries and dipped my head in the river. When we got back to the bridge we all felt a little better.

Yatung: the legend of Thrimikunden

In Tibet theatrical performances take place in the open air. The sacred mystery plays (*cham*) are performed in the courtyards of the monasteries and the profane plays (*ache-lhamo*) are performed in the public square. The distinction between the two categories is by no means well defined, and the plot always comes from Buddhist hagiography. Sacred plays are always acted and danced by monks, but profane plays are often given by wandering players, who go from village to village. They are also often performed by the villagers themselves. Once or twice a year they stop work, close their shops or drop their shovels against the wall, and act, sing, or dance.

The actors of Yatung, though amateurs, are very good ones. Needless to say, the chief actor, master of ceremonies, and leader of the chorus was Tob-chen, the tailor. The play started at eleven

o'clock this morning and was not due to finish till six o'clock this evening and when we arrived Tob-chen, though he had already been acting for three hours, showed no sign of fatigue. Every now and then he stopped, called to a child to bring him some chang, swallowed a cupful, and then went on again. The whole population of Yatung was present, as well as many people from the surrounding valleys, to say nothing of a number of chance spectators, travellers from Lhasa, Shigatse, or Gangtok, who happened to be passing through. Some spectators sat on the ground on mats and others on carpets. Many watched from the roof-tops and windows. The seats of honour on these occasions are generally those in tents, erected, I think, by the municipality.

Spectators came, stayed a while, drifted away, came back, ate, drank, and slept. Many brought low tables with them, on which they put teapots and cups. Women knitted and suckled their babies and old men smoked and chatted. The shepherds from the mountains looked on in fascinated astonishment, and the local fashionable young men talked, laughed, and argued, to show how used they were to theatrical entertainments. Everyone naturally knew the play by heart. Every now and then an actor would say a few lines with particular spirit, or sing particularly well, or dance with special fire and virtuosity, whereupon there would be applause or laughter. There was an atmosphere of complete rest, of delightful and total relaxation, such as could only be the result of customs that had been alive for centuries. The conventions of the whole thing had become part and parcel of the social organism, had become people's reflexes and instincts.

I asked Kenrab to tell me the story of the play, but he was too drunk, and had gone to sleep; so Mingyur Dondup, who speaks a little English, explained to me in detail all that was going on.

The hero of the play was the pious Prince Thrimikunden, the scene was laid in India, and the time was immemorial antiquity. Even the female parts were played by men. They all wore handsome silk costumes, and some wore masks. The audience's imagination had to make up for the complete lack of scenery; there was not even

a placard, as there might have been in Elizabethan England, to indicate that we were supposed to be in India.

Thrimikunden (the Immaculate) was destined to be the son of the king of Betha, but when the play opened he was still unborn. Meanwhile the king, though a fortunate and powerful monarch ("he has five hundred wives of noble lineage, five hundred wives of great wealth, five hundred wives of perfect beauty, while his wants are attended to by three thousand servants and he reigns over sixty vassals and possesses the *gö-do-chöng-jom*, the jewel which fulfils all desires"), was in despair because he had failed to become the father of a son. The oracles whom he consulted advised him to invoke the Three Precious Things, Senge, Chö, and Gedun (the Buddha, the Faith, and the Community), and to sacrifice to the eight classes of demons and give many alms. One happy day the Queen Gedun-tsangmo (Virtuous and Good) had a premonitory dream, after which she announced that:

The pure and vast palace of my body
Shall be the receptacle of a son having infinite wisdom.

Thus Thrimikunden was born. No sooner was he born than he exclaimed, "*Om mani padme hum.*" At the age of five he already knew the scriptures, understood astronomy, and delivered inspired discourses on the transient nature of human affairs and the universal reality of suffering:

Alas! I live again the infinite sufferings
Of the whole abyss of transmigrations.
I suffer for the creatures who are led astray
By the deceptive thirst for gold. . . .
I commiserate with him who does not know how to free himself
From his self-centredness
In the flaming city of desires. . . .
I am afflicted with the sorrow of husbands and wives
Deceived by the hope of remaining together for ever.
I pity those whom self-love
Binds to their country;
For their country is only
A temporary camp in a stony waste.

But little Thrimikunden was not satisfied with merely proclaiming in verse the sublime truths of Buddhist philosophy. He wanted to act, to help his fellowmen, and he therefore ardently implored his father to allow him to give away as alms to the poor and needy all the wealth contained in the state treasury, which was sterile and useless so long as it lay idle locked up in strongboxes. The old man was much moved by his son's words, and gave him *carte blanche* to do as he liked. However, the wicked minister Taradze intervened, reminding the king that, though alms-giving might seem a very fine thing, his son's proposals were fundamentally harmful, because they would result in the impoverishment of the state. Might it not be advisable instead to find the young prince a wife?

When he is married
He will be attached to wealth. . . .

However, Princess Mende-tsangmo, who was chosen to be his bride, though she was extremely beautiful,

White in colour and of sweet odour . . .

was as devout as Thrimikunden himself. Far from encouraging him to practise economy, she encouraged his charitable ways. Very soon three children were born to the happy couple—two boys, Leden (Virtuous) and Lepel (Good and Noble), and a girl, Lenzema (Good and Beautiful). The little family was the ornament of the whole kingdom.

Where there was so much happiness, it was natural that evil should be lurking. The neighbouring King Chin-thri-tsangpo, jealous of Betha's power, started scheming to obtain the jewel that fulfils all desires. Having heard of Thrimikunden's unlimited generosity, he decided to take advantage of it; accordingly he sent a brahmin to ask him for the jewel. The brahmin travelled over mountain and plain and finally presented himself to Thrimikunden and made his request. After some hesitation, the prince gave him the jewel.

When the king, his father, heard of this, his rage knew no bounds. Thrimikunden was handed over to the royal torturers, who dragged him, as well as the pious Mende-tsangmo and her children, round

the city, whipping them. Meanwhile the ministers gathered at the palace and discussed whether the guilty prince should be skinned, whether his heart should be torn out, or whether he should be cut in pieces bit by bit. But the good minister Dewa-tsangpo rose to speak; he persuaded the king to forgive his son and give him some milder punishment. The result was that the prince was condemned to twelve years' exile on the Duri-hashang mountain, a wild, savage spot, populated by demons. Thrimikunden prepared to depart and bade a moving farewell to his aged mother.

When Kenrab and the rest of us reached the little open space by the bridge where the performance was in progress Thrimikunden and his family were in the hands of the torturers. The five unfortunates, bound to one another, were making their way bent and shamefaced round the square, while the torturers pushed them and went through the motions of whipping them. It was curious to see an important Oriental judicial principle in action—that is, making the whole family pay for a crime committed by the head of a household.

The action developed extremely slowly. That is why the play lasted for eight hours. The actors began every one of the innumerable scenes by formally presenting themselves to the audience. They then walked once or twice all round the open space, keeping time with the drum and plates. Finally, the leader of the chorus—our old friend Tob-chen—intoned a long running commentary which described in full what was going on, while the actors acted in a kind of pantomime a scene which took the action forward by one step. Then there was another dance, the actors presented themselves all over again, there was another pantomime accompanied by a running commentary, and so on until sunset.

The scene changed slowly from the kingdom of Betha to the demon-haunted mountain. The spectators' imagination had to supply the deep, wooded valleys, where the silence was broken only by the howling of wild beasts, the tall, snow-covered peaks, the huge rivers dashing over precipices, the glades where nature grew milder for a moment and the caravan halted for the night.

Thrimikunden left his father's kingdom with a large escort, but

very soon he met people who begged for alms. He started by giving away all the wealth that he had brought with him, and when it was exhausted he gave away his horses and elephants as well. The royal exiles were reduced to advancing through the mournful, desolate mountains on foot. Mende-tsangmo had a moment of dismay but recovered from it, and when Thrimikunden decided to send her home she refused to leave him. When they reached a glade with lotus flowers in bloom Mende-tsangmo went into ecstasies:

You who rise out of the mud untouched by the mud
Smile with delight, lotuses adorned with stamens. . . .

This peaceful interlude did not, however, last long. Thrimikunden's generosity was like an inescapable doom. "Only thus do merits acquired in past lives rise up to bear their final fruit." More beggars appeared in the forest, and the prince, having nothing else left to give away, gave away his children. However absurd this incident may seem to us, the fact that the author meant it, and that it was in harmony with the Buddhist outlook, was shown by the intensity of the feeling which he put into the mouths of his characters. The grief of this father, who sought to find peace in the repetition of religious truths ("no union can last for ever"), was vividly portrayed; so, too, was the children's horror at being handed over as slaves to unknown men; and so was the mother's anguish; she turned on her husband like a wounded animal and cursed him for his utter devotion to a superhuman ideal. But then she asked his forgiveness and sought consolation in accepting the sacrifice.

The audience had grown most attentive; I saw dozens of rapt faces. Dondup explained every phase of the action to me with admirable clarity. I don't know whether I was more moved by the play or by its reflection in the eyes of the children, shepherds, women, and old men. All this part of the story, which grappled with immense, eternal human themes, was full of the most exquisite and profound poetry. Above all, it dealt with the great theme of the conflict between celestial and terrestrial love. Generous deeds were done and agonizing farewells spoken in an atmosphere of continuous miracles

and superhuman phenomena. The limitations of nature were broken through; birds talked, rivers brought tidings, flowers understood, the wind gave counsel. Finally the Tibetan imagination gave rein to one of its favourite themes—monstrous, terrifying demons—and masked dancers leaped screaming and pirouetting about the square, while terrified children clung shrieking to their mothers' necks.

Kenrab woke for a moment from his heavy sleep and looked at the demons.

"Kushog won't believe me," he said, "but *kang-chen ri la*, on the big ice-mountains, demons dance just like that. I've seen them with my own eyes!"

Then he fell asleep again. I'm quite convinced that Kenrab had seen demons. Who does not project his own interior universe into the outside world?

Finally the grand ladies of the neighbourhood arrived: the post-master's wife—a little Nepalese woman covered with golden necklaces and bracelets, Mrs. Yishe, and the headman's daughters. It is considered smart to make one's appearance in the middle of the afternoon, when the sun is not too hot and some of the most stirring scenes in the play are just coming on, and you can say, "But my dear, you should have seen last year's performance at Shigatse!" or "But this is absurd! Now, in Lhasa . . ." Women had their babies slung round their shoulders (just as in Japan), and when the babies woke they rocked them gently without stopping talking (just as in Japan). Tob-chen, the "king," not of the plot but of the production, grew tired at last. Every now and then he sat down, had a drink of chang, and said his lines holding his hat in his hand, like an old man saying his prayers in church while thinking about something else.

The drama neared its end. Thrimikunden's sufferings were by no means ended, but now at last he was on his way home again. But at this stage he was faced with his hardest, his most sublime ordeal. Coming down the Hashang mountain, he met a beggar, and all he had left to give him was his eyes. (The dance of the beggar with his eye-trophies in his hands was unforgettable.) Then miracles started happening. Thrimikunden reacquired his sight and found his chil-

dren again. The wicked King Ching-thri-tsangpo repented and returned the jewel to the king of Betha, and everything ended in glory.

The last lines were sung after the sun had disappeared behind the fir trees on the mountainside. The actors, exhausted after eight hours of poetry and dancing, took off their costumes and removed their masks, and the boys were at last able to run across the square, shouting and laughing.



THE MYSTERIOUS BON-PO

Pemogang: the original Tibetan religion

WRITINGS on the walls reveal the soul of a country. It is natural that Italy, a country of excessive individualism, should present the traveller with the sight of walls painted all over with the letter *W*, standing for *viva* (long live) so-and-so, and the letter *M*, standing for *morte* (death) to so-and-so, and the *W*s should be frequently turned into *M*s and vice versa, the whole frequently ending up in an indecipherable scrawl. It is natural that in certain northern countries much addicted to discipline the traveller should find inscriptions in the parks with the word *schön* (beautiful) and an arrow; and it is equally natural that in India, where faith in the purifying power of words is an age-old tradition, slogans such as the following should be written up in the stations: "Be well-behaved, because only thus will you be able to gain the confidence of others."

In Tibet you see inscriptions of all kinds, chalked on the walls, painted on the doors, formed of rows of white pebbles on the mountainsides, and carved in the walls of rock. But they are always religious: "Hail, O jewel in the flower of the lotus," or "Long life to our Precious Protector" (the Dalai Lama), or "Honour the Three Precious Things" (Senge, Chö, Gedun—Buddha, the Faith, and the Community). Swastikas, whether pointing right or left, are also often to be seen. The swastika is a very ancient symbol, which the Germans took from the East; in China, Tibet, and Japan it is everywhere associated with Buddhism. The swastika pointing to the right is used by the Gelug-pa; the "unreformed" sects generally use a swastika pointing the other way.

Sometimes, however, you see the left-pointing swastika in villages or on the doors of houses that do not belong to any of the lamaist

sects. In such cases, instead of the familiar *Om mani padme hum*, you find the variation *Om matri salei du*. There will be the same mendangs, the same chortens, the same tarchos, and you may even find a small monastery in the neighbourhood, but you will certainly be in an area where the ancient, original cult of Tibet, the Bon cult, has survived.

Everything connected with the Bons is extremely interesting. After centuries and centuries Buddhism has succeeded in extensively modifying it (and undergoing its influence in turn). Buddhism has eliminated it altogether from vast areas and circumscribed it in others, but it has not succeeded in doing away with it completely. Here and there you still find families which are Bon by tradition, and districts or villages which are exclusively Bon. Pemogang (Knee Hill), not far from Yatung, is predominantly inhabited by Bon-po, adherents of the Bon religion. I went to it this morning. From Yatung I followed the caravan route for a little way, left it at the bottom of the valley, and clambered for hours up a stony mule track that wound its way between dried-up shrubs and past rocky precipices. Down below me the valley opened up in a manner that grew more grandiose every minute, while the roar of the torrent faded into a deep, continuous, but indistinct murmur. The peaks across the valley seemed simultaneously to rise and acquire ever more magnificent proportions. In the distance was Kundugang, covered with snow and ice. I came to a wood of fir trees, and emerged onto a plateau at the foot of some high mountains. Here, among fields of barley and grazing cattle, were three villages, Kiritmse, Gangku, and Pemogang. Kiritmse and Gangku are normal Tibetan villages, with their little Buddhist temples. But Pemogang is an exception; it is a refuge of the Bon-po.

As the morning advanced the weather, which had been magnificent at first, gradually deteriorated, and when I reached Gangku (the Nine Ridges) the sky was overcast. The landscape was grim. Pemogang was visible in the distance, at the other end of the plateau. It is a village of about twenty houses, and all its inhabitants are peasants. I approached it by a path that wound its way among thick-

ets of wild roses and fields of barley, but it still seemed incredibly remote.

Anyone who tries to search out the hidden soul of the places through which he travels knows how profoundly a place is inhabited by its gods. True, God created man, but men also create God. Indeed, the supreme and final goal of every civilization is the creation of God. Poets' visions are sublimated in His person, cathedrals of thought are erected about Him, and the most sublime and consummate expressions of beauty are directed towards representing Him. Finally God returns among mankind, filling the valleys, the seas, the forests, and the cities with life and aspiration.

Perhaps because Buddhism is a religion of such vast and profound significance, perhaps because Buddhist art, like Christian art, has conferred upon humanity some of the most memorable testimonials of the heights to which inspiration can mount, perhaps because of the number of great men who have endowed it with space, light, and metaphysical pride, perhaps for these as well as other reasons of which I may be unaware, I have always found something familiar and likeable about the villages of Tibet, almost as if I had been born and bred there instead of in Florence. But as I approached Pemogang I felt it to be a small stronghold of an unknown universe, possibly a hostile universe, possibly a stupid or mean or evil one. The little I knew about the Bon-po was not encouraging. In ancient times they practised human sacrifice. There were strange links between them and the Manichees and shamanism. Their world was populated by good and evil forces, engaged in an eternal struggle. According to popular repute, they were necromancers and exorcists, snake-breeders and experts in the preparation of poisons. They were the occult, demonological Etruscans of Asia.

A few years ago I had similar feelings when for the first time I approached an Ainu village, in Hokkaido, in northern Japan. I knew about those primitive aborigines' cult of certain vague personifications of fire, the sea, mountains, water, various illnesses, the huts in which they live; and finally of the cult of the bear which is carefully

reared in every Ainu village and is then killed and eaten at a ceremonial feast as a way of establishing communion with the invisible—a wild and barbarous form of theophagy. But then I got to know the Ainu better, and grew familiar with their legends and their world, and gradually the valleys and mountains of Hokkaido started talking to me with their own voices. They were no longer just a place, an area on a map, and my sense of the unknown, my suspicions, diminished. The Kamui, the Ainu gods, turned out, like the Ainu themselves, to be simple, impulsive and adventurous, playful or ferocious, but quick to forgive, and in any case entirely irrational. They were brothers of the wind playing among the leaves in summer, of the noise of the torrents in spring, of the roar of the avalanches in winter; vague personifications of nature, of ancestral memories, of primitive philosophical intuitions, at the centre of which there was the idea of *ramat* (spirit), the secret link between the heart of man and things.

But here was Pemogang. Life here was no different from what it was in Gangku or Kirimtse. Women were working in the fields. As soon as they saw me they called out, "*Par! Par!* (Photograph! Photograph!)" A white man in these parts is primarily Homo photographans. There were two noisy old women—as noisy as all old women are in Tibet—and a girl of fifteen or sixteen covered in rags, which were tied round her waist with a piece of string; every movement revealed her fresh and healthy but horrifyingly dirty body. Soon there arrived the usual horde of Tibetan children, who do not know the meaning of shyness. They jump on you, snatch things from your hands, drag you by the clothes, out of pure high spirits and cheerfulness.

The houses of Pemogang were poor. The path connecting them consisted of nothing but mud, stones, and cow-dung. The village had the characteristic smell of small Alpine villages. There were some broken-down chortens and many stones with *Om matri salei du* written on them. Eventually I met a man. He looked like a peasant, but there was a certain stiffness about the way in which he approached me, and he looked at me as if to say: What is this intruder

doing here? I asked him where the village temple was, and he suddenly became smiling and servile, but his manner was not inwardly servile; it seemed to be adopted in the hope of doing a stroke of business. He spoke to me with an air of patronizing superiority, of ill-concealed contempt, a state of mind which I rarely came across among the lamas.

There was nothing to distinguish the outside of the temple from any of the lamaist temples. It was a square building, with a big timber roof and a small gilded pavilion (*kenchira*) on top. The entrance was under a portico, and there were the usual decorative wall paintings. I noticed at once the Four Kings (*gyalchen de-shi*), similar in every way to the lamaist Four Kings, and four female divinities who preside over the seasons, the blue Yagi-gyemo (Queen of Summer), the yellow Gungi-gyemo (Queen of Winter), the green Tongi-gyemo (Queen of Autumn), and the red Chigi-gyemo (Queen of Spring). These Four Queens seem to have a special importance in the Bon religion, but they are painted to look exactly like the lamaist female divinities, that is to say, their appearance is ultimately based on that of Indian divinities. I had hoped, vaguely, it is true, and without any justification from anything that I had read or been told, that the Bon religion might have developed at least some elementary independent artistic expression of its own, but I was completely disappointed.

Actually it was completely unreasonable to have expected anything else. Only a very few supreme civilizations have been able to create truly independent artistic idioms of their own. Practically nothing was produced, for instance, by the pre-Buddhist Japanese spiritual world and the world of Shintoism (the native cult of the Japanese archipelago). The nation's artistic efforts were from the first directed to the celebration of Buddhism. The matter is more important than one might suppose. Unless a principle of thorough-going iconoclasm is adopted, as in the case of Islam, the common people, the great mass of believers, if not the philosophers, require their divinity to have a form. The choice and adoption of that form by a civilization is a process of incalculable consequence.

As soon as I set foot in the temple I saw that every detail of the architecture, iconography, and sacred furnishings had been taken from Lamaism; I believe that the liturgy is also very much the same. There were the same drums, the same trumpets formed of human thigh-bones (which when possible have to be the thigh-bones of a sixteen-year-old virgin), the same lamps for burning butter, the same little throne for the chief lama, the same white shells for use as trumpets, the same benches for the celebrants, the same wooden masks for dances, everything, in fact, was the same. If I had not known I was in a Bon temple, I should have had difficulty in believing it. There was even a big, glass-fronted bookcase full of books, exactly like those in which the Buddhist Kangyur is kept. This bookcase, however, contained the mysterious scriptures of the Bon-po, which Giuseppe Tucci will be one of the first to investigate.

My companion told me that he was the Lama Yulgye—even the term lama (master) is taken from the rival religion—and he gave me long explanations in a singsong voice, rather as if he were repeating verses which he had learned by heart and only imperfectly understood. Pemogang must be very remote from the world, because he looked at my camera with great apprehension. He knew what it was but seemed very uncertain whether to allow me to photograph his gods or not. At last my eyes got used to the darkness, and I saw that the walls were completely covered with frescoes, and that at the end of the temple there were some big and extremely ugly gilded statues.

As I started seeing better I noticed some differences between these and the paintings and statues usual in Buddhist temples. The names were all different too. The figure that appeared most often was that of Tömba Shenrab, the master and revealer of the Bon doctrines. His place in this religion corresponds to that of Gautama Buddha in Lamaism. In one big fresco to the left of the entrance he was actually shown with sixteen disciples in a group which exactly followed the celebrated and frequent motif of the Buddha with his sixteen arhats.

Against the bottom wall of the temple were some huge statues, standing in a big, gilded shrine. On the left was Tömba Shenrab

again, looking like Buddha. Next to him was a still bigger and more impressive statue, of notable ugliness and clumsiness, representing Pema-chung-ne (Emerged from the Lotus?). It was covered with gilt, and stood half in and half out of the shrine.

"Tömba Shenrab is exactly like Buddha," I remarked.

"Certainly," replied the "lama" Yulgye. "All our gods have a Buddhist counterpart."

Actually he did not use the word "Buddhist," a word which does not exist in Tibetan. The word they use is *chö*, faith, religion. Yulgye referred to Buddhism as "the faith of the Gelug-pa." I don't know whether the Bon-po always refer to Buddhism in this way, or whether Yulgye did so to make his meaning clear to me.

"Pema-chung-ne, for instance, is the same as Champa (Maitreya), the future Buddha, the messiah of love," he went on.

"But Bon is one thing and Buddhism another, isn't that so, Lama Yulgye?"

"Yes," he answered. "We were here first." He said this as if it were a fact well known to everybody. "Ours is the real religion of Tibet," he went on. "Buddhism came from India. In any case, we all aim at the same goal. It's as if I went to Lhasa by way of Phari and you went by way of Kampa. The route is different, but the destination is the same."

This was a very fine parable, but if first impressions are to be trusted, I do not like the Bon religion. There is something uncanny about it, though that is only an impression, I repeat. Perhaps it's the feeling that it is a primitive religion, which only came to have proper temples, scriptures, ceremonial, and art because of contact with its Buddhist neighbour. Finally there is the fact that no great human spirit has expressed himself in it—a sure sign of inferiority. Its spaces have never been illuminated—they have remained gloomy and nocturnal.

We have only limited information about the ancient Bons, mostly contained in the *Kesar* of Ling, an enormously long, warlike, chivalrous poem dating from the fifth century A.D. It is certain that cruel human sacrifices were practised, and the spirit of the age seems to

have been not just robustly barbarous, but savage in the extreme. There is continual talk of eyes being torn out, of blood being drunk from skulls, of tortured enemies, of trophies consisting of parts of the human anatomy offered as gifts to victorious kings, and so on. When a Ling soldier captures a Hor spy he gloats over the tortures he is about to inflict on him:

The blood of the liver will escape from the mouth.
 Though we do not injure the skin,
 We will take out all the entrails through the mouth.
 The man will be alive, though his heart will come to his mouth.

When Buddhism at last came to the country and modified the customs of the wild mountaineers and introduced the light of Indian civilization, the Bons were obliged to abandon their human and animal sacrifices and instead use *tormá*, little statues made of dough, consisting of barley flour, butter, and water. This very much resembles what happened in the third century A.D. in Japan, when terra-cotta statues (*haniwa*) were substituted for the men and women who used to be buried alive when the Japanese sovereign died.

The struggle between the two demiurges of good and evil is fundamental to the Bon conception of the universe. Their theogony is thus definitely derived from Iranian and Manichæan sources. It is not for nothing that the Bon-po agree in attributing the origin of their faith to western Tibet. Their cosmogony and their rites, however, go back to the primitive and undifferentiated cults of central and northern Asia known under the generic name of shamanism. For the Bon-po, as for the shamans, the heavens are an entity of supreme importance. The heavens are wisdom and power, the visible aspect of divinity. From the heavens—that is to say, from one of the nine heavens—there descends to earth a rope (*mu-tag*) along which exchanges between this and the next world take place; the dead mount it to their ultraterrestrial destination.

The Bon mythology is exceedingly complicated; it enumerates an endless number of occult spirits or divinities, nearly all hostile to man; these spirits are jealous of their possessions—lands, trees, rivers—and it is necessary to propitiate them by continual sacrifices.

For this reason, among others, Bon priests have always been exorcists and necromancers, easily falling into trances, which are understood to be possession by or communion with the divine spirits. Perhaps the Tibetan love of masks is of shamanistic origin. In many places, outside as well as inside Tibet, the shaman, when possessed by a spirit or a god, covers his face with a mask as a symbol of the total alteration of personality that takes place in him.

On my way out I noticed on the walls near the entrance a series of four terrifying divinities—the lama could not tell me their names. My first reaction was to say that the differentiation of the gods into terrifying and pacific categories had also been copied from Lamaism. But on reflection it occurred to me that it was the reverse that was probably true. In fact, ancient Tibetan legends say that when Padma Sambhava preached Buddhism in Tibet he converted, not only men, but also a large number of local genii and demons, who were thereupon accepted into the faith, maintaining their terrifying aspect as its champions and defenders. All that contains profound elements of truth; it means, in other words, that Buddhism did not replace the pre-existing religion overnight but instead absorbed many of its features. This provides an explanation for a great deal of the savage, bloodthirsty, barbarous, satanic spirit of Tibetan art, which represents the survival of an ancient Asian substratum, of which the Bon religion is an important element. Thus, considering these pictures a second time, they can be regarded as the only really autochthonous feature, perfectly attuned to the secret spirit of a grim, sinister religion, all snakes, exorcism, and magic spells.

We went outside. The sun was shining again. Little red and yellow wild flowers were growing in the spaces between the big stones that formed the paving of the village square. It was a liberation. In the distance the icy summit of Kundugang gleamed for a moment in a clear sky, and then heavy midday clouds covered it again. The women working in the fields were singing.



THE VISIONS OF THE DEAD

Lama Ngawang;

“At bottom you are civilized people like us”

KIRIMTSE is a tiny village lying on the same plateau as Pemogang. But while Pemogang has a Bon temple, at Kirimtse there is a fine Buddhist temple, belonging to the Nima-pa sect (the Ancient Ones). One might have expected a certain rivalry between the two villages, but I could find no trace of such a thing, at any rate on the surface. The people of Kirimtse say that the people of Pemogang are Bon-po just as casually as the people of an Italian village might say of those of the next village that they were water-diviners, or were good at grafting, or some such thing. In other words, they talk of them as a group of neighbours who happen to have special characteristics but are fundamentally the same as themselves.

Only one person made a slight grimace when I told him I was going to Pemogang; he was Lama Ngawang, of Kirimtse. But Lama Ngawang is a rather special individual, and a law unto himself. He is an old grumbler, with an incredible number of years on his head and incredibly few hairs in what might be described as his beard. His opinions are always ready, clear and precise, and he always states them in a very forthright manner.

I shall not easily forget our first encounter. I came down from the mountains that enclose Kirimtse on the west. The weather that afternoon from bad had become appalling. I remember the clouds growing greyer and greyer, the mountain that rose interminably until it vanished into the clouds and finally the rain which came down and laid a grey mist over the whole landscape. Eventually I felt I had lost my way. Fortunately I came upon a chorten. I stopped, heard voices, and found I was just outside the village. I went straight to the

monastery-temple. It was a big, solid, white-washed building, with high walls enclosing a courtyard, which one entered by passing through a wooden doorway. The courtyard was deserted. I was wet, cold, hungry, and tired. I called out. An old woman appeared on a wooden balcony.

"Come in!" she said. "There's a fire alight!"

I went up the creaking stairs and found myself in a smoky room, half kitchen and half sacristy. An old lama was sitting in the corner near the window. His spectacles were perched on the tip of his nose and he was reading prayers aloud. Every now and then he broke off to sip a little tea, but his attention was not distracted, and he did not so much as look at me.

"Lama Ngawang is reading the scriptures," the old woman whispered, with great and obvious reverence. "Don't disturb him! Sit here near the fire and dry yourself. But where do you come from? What have you been doing in the mountains at this time of day? Don't you know there are *rii-gompo* (mountain demons) who suck one's life out and leave one empty? Drink a little tea! The lama won't be long."

Her lama-husband—it is normal for the lamas of the Nima-pa sect to marry—continued reading impassively. My clothes steamed and started getting dry, and I felt better every minute. It was getting dark and the kitchen-sacristy filled with shadows. It was an irregular-shaped room, blackened with soot. Against one wall were pots and pans, flour sacks, a pile of logs, bowls, saddles, Tibetan slippers, cups, and packets of tea; on the other were books, a few pictures on cloth, statuettes, a little drum, lamps, peacock-quill pens, offerings of butter, a bronze thunderbolt—in short, everything needed by a pious lama in the exercise of his duties.

Soon afterwards, while I was holding a cup of tea between my fingers to warm them, I felt a hand on my shoulder and heard a low, almost cavernous voice.

"*Oé! Oé!* And where do you come from?"

It was Lama Ngawang, who had got up and walked barefooted over to the fireplace. Later I found out that he started practically

every sentence with "*Oé! Oé!*" in the tone of voice of one saying, "My boy, just you listen to me!" The first time I heard it it struck me as rude, and it made me take a momentary dislike to him. But I soon discovered I was mistaken; the lama was an enchanting old gentleman. He was one of those persons of great faith and great directness of speech, who know exactly what they want, and want it because it reflects their unshakeable idea of what is good and right.

The next time I went to see him the weather was fine. The temple courtyard was flooded with warm, bright sunshine. All round I saw flowers growing in rusty old petrol tins. Who knows how they had got there? The courtyard naturally served also as a threshing floor, and herbs and beans had been laid out to dry in the sun.

I went upstairs to Lama Ngawang. He greeted me with a broad smile, the kind that comes from the heart. He had not believed me when I had said I would come back. But here I was. He was delighted.

"Will you have some tea? *Oé! Oé!* Drolmá! Bring some tea for the *chiling-pa* (foreigner). But you were really crazy to come up here so late the other day, and in the rain too! Who knows what you might have met on the mountains at night! Did you say *Om mani?*"

The lama looked hard at me.

"Yes, yes, of course I did."

It would have been impossible to have answered no. Who would have had the heart to disappoint an old man with such a firm and impregnable faith? To Lama Ngawang everything was obvious, clear, beyond dispute. Soon afterwards he asked me about my country.

"Are there monasteries where you come from?" he asked. "*Oé! Oé!* You don't come from a barbarous country, do you?"

"No, I do not come from a barbarous country, Lama Ngawang," I answered. "In my country there are many monasteries."

"And many lamas?"

"Many lamas."

"And you read the scriptures?"

"We read the scriptures."

"Bravo, bravo, then you're like us, you're a civilized people too!"

Oé! Drolmá! Did you hear? They're like us! They're civilized people too!"

I suppose I should have explained the difference between the two countries in religion and in so many other things too, but I lacked the courage. The lama's happiness at what I said filled his face with light and warmth. I thought of how Christians of former ages must have looked when merchants from Central Asia told them of scattered communities of faithful Nestorians in the empire of the Mongols. Lama Ngawang is a straightforward, simple man, who has lived in an isolated village in the mountains for seventy years and more, and to have undeceived him would have been useless and cruel.

Then we went down to see the temple. On the steps we were stopped by an old village woman, who was accompanied by a little girl. The old woman spoke rapidly to the lama. When she had finished he turned to me.

"*Oé!* The little girl is ill, you must cure her," he said.

I tried to explain that it was impossible, because I was not a doctor.

"What? You're not a doctor? But you *chiling-pa* are all doctors! When need be, we are all doctors too. . . . And you have so many extraordinary medicines! *Oé!* *Oé!* Have a look at the girl, and prescribe her a good medicine!"

I had to give in, and try to find out in my own way what was wrong with the girl. Alas, no very great medical knowledge was required. She was thin, pale, flushed, and said she had pains in her chest. I made her spit on a piece of paper, and she spat blood, bright, purple blood. Poor little girl! What could anyone do for her? Air better than that of Kirimtse would be hard to find. I said she must rest and eat well.

"I know what is the matter with her," Lama Ngawang announced. "There is some devil who wishes her ill. I shall exorcise him. Drolmá! *Oé!* Drolmá! Bring me the *damaru* (the little drum)!"

The exorcism lasted for some time. When the old woman and the girl had gone Lama Ngawang stood at the temple door with his feet apart, looking like an ancient tree that had survived appalling tempests. With a threatening gesture he said something about the

“accursed demons who never leave us in peace.” The effect of his words was that it must be clear to all, in heaven and on earth, that he, Lama Ngawang, and they, the demons, were irreconcilable enemies.

The Visions of the Dead

In the little temple of Kirimtse, as in all other Tibetan temples, there are many frescoes. Two are of special interest. One shows the Great Paradise of Padma Sambhava; the other shows the Visions of the Dead. Let us for a moment contemplate the painting of the Visions of the Dead, and consider what are the effects on a civilization of adopting a belief in a single mortal life, and compare it with the effects of a belief in successive incarnations.

Belief in only one life—the Western belief—leads to a strained, tense, hectic outlook. Time presses, and our single, never-to-be-repeated youth runs through our fingers like pearls dropped irremediably into an abyss. Loves and hates swell to the size of irremovable mountains. Virtue adorns the soul like a flashing sword and sin weighs it down like a lump of granite. Everything is unique, final, immense. Finally death presents itself, not as a stage in a journey, but as the end, an event of outstanding, terrifying importance.

The career of the individual is thus simple but full of care and responsibility. Creation is followed by life in time. There is freedom of action, and one's deeds can be salutary or harmful or actually fatal to the eternal principle within. Finally death cuts short the process of becoming, and henceforward the past is congealed and irremediable. Sin inexorably claims its punishment. Earthly life is followed by the Judgment, and beyond that there is eternity. We have made our single appearance on the stage of life, to which there is no return. “You only live once,” as popular wisdom puts it. You only die once too.

But a belief in reincarnation, in a succession of lives, leads to an outlook both more grandiose and less dramatic, to a broader but cooler picture of the universe; a calming, pain-destroying picture,

full of time and patience. In such a universe there are certain cruel questions which lose their sting, including the cruellest of all questions—why should innocent children suffer? In such a universe the suffering of children enters into the order of things; it is the consequence, the punishment, of evil done in previous lives. The whole picture is more serene and more logical. Life is not so much an episode as a state; true, it is theoretically a provisional state, but a provisional state that lasts for an untold number of centuries. The cosmic life of man could, as a theoretical minimum, consist of one terrestrial life only, but in ordinary cases it consists of innumerable successive lives. Death is therefore not a tragic, supreme culmination, a single, fearful event, a crucial moment from which there is no return, but is, like life, an experience that is repeated at certain intervals, a normal transition to which one must become accustomed, a process as natural as sunset at the end of day. Hence Buddhists have always been great thanatologists, great students of death. Preoccupied as they are with the problem of escaping from the flux of becoming in order to attain the ineffable serenity of being, they have been able to study death with the simplicity and detachment of an industrialist studying a phase of production. To them death is not a mystery but a problem.

The results of their long and profound labours in this field of intellect and intuition were collected as early as the fourteenth century in a book that is of cardinal importance in the spiritual life of Tibet. This is the *Bardo Tö-döl* (the Book That Leads to the Salvation of the Intermediary Life by the Sole Fact of Hearing It Read). Like a Baedeker of the world beyond, it gives astonishingly detailed descriptions of the visions that appear in the mind of the dead, from the first until the forty-ninth day after it has left the body; that is to say, until the moment when it is on the point of entering a new bodily envelope. These visions constitute a synthesis of the lamaist conceptions of reality and of the universe. From the purity of the undifferentiated absolute, of which gleams are obtained in the first stages of this temporary life after death, there is, as time passes, a gradual transition to ideal thought, then to individuated thought, and finally to matter. Just as the West, considering life from the biological

aspect, sees the development of the species repeated in the development of the individual, so does Lamaism, looking at life from the cosmic aspect, see in this intermediary state of life after death (*bardo*) a repetition of the evolution of reality from the absolute (Buddha) to illusion (samsara).

Let us try to be more specific. After death, as we have mentioned, the conscious principle enters upon an intermediary stage of being, which lasts for forty-nine days. From this it can either emerge into liberation (nirvana) or return to samsara, the vortex of life. The *Bardo Tö-döl* tries to set it on the path of esoteric knowledge of the fundamental Buddhist truths, enabling it to experience "an immediate revulsion from the phenomenal plane of existence and an impulse towards the sphere of the absolute" (Tucci). The fundamental truth of Buddhism is that samsara, the vortex of life, is nothing but empty appearance and illusion, that only the absolute really exists, and only by identifying oneself with it—becoming Buddha—can one be liberated from samsara.

The crucial phase in the cosmic history of the individual occurs in the first days after death. The conscious principle becomes aware of a pure, colourless luminosity. He who recognizes the absolute in this and is able to fuse himself with it is saved and has ended his cycle of lives. The alternative is descending a step towards the multiple, towards becoming, illusion, and suffering. In the days that follow, the whole cosmic evolutionary process is represented in vast, symbolical visions which the conscious principle gradually experiences as it detaches itself from the body. The possibilities open to it present themselves in successive dichotomies, alternatives of liberation and enslavement. Understanding the first means re-entering the cycle of rebirths at a higher level; being bound to the second means being dragged lower because of the operation of karma.

On the walls of the temple of Kirimtse are large-scale paintings of the terrifying gods, terrifying to the conscious principle of him who is still bound to the illusions of life and believes he really sees them, but mere shadows to him who has reached a sufficient stage of maturity to understand their essential vacuity. These paintings

show a stupendous population of fantastic forms, not creatures of the artist's imagination, but painted according to meticulous instructions set forth in the scriptures. Above all there are the Heruka, the terrifying manifestations of the Dhyani Buddhas, dancing in union with their own shaktis. Around them is unleashed a maelstrom of witches, with the heads of crows, tigers, scorpions, dogs, and other fantastic, raging animals.

The Lama Ngawang raised his lamp—the temple was very dark—and threw light on the pictures. In the uncertain, tremulous light the monstrous figures seemed to come to life.

“*Oé! Oé!* Examine them well!” the lama said to me, turning and looking at me over his spectacles. “Examine them well, because one day you too will see them! When that happens, you mustn't be afraid. *Oé!* They are nothing but imagination, shadows, fantasies. If you remain perfectly calm and don't get frightened, it means salvation.”

“But at bottom I'm afraid of death, Lama Ngawang.”

“*Oé!* You are foolish, *kuk-pa du.*” He looked at me severely again over his spectacles. “Everything dies, it's nothing to be afraid of! Who knows how many times you have died already! You must always be ready. If you die here, I'll read the *Bardo Tö-döl* in your ear, and you'll see that it'll help you. *Oé!* Look well at the figures, they are void, nothing, illusion!”

The Lama Ngawang went to the end of the temple, took a piece of incense, lit the end of it from the lamp he held in his hand, put it in front of a statue to Padma Sambhava, bowed, and we went out.

The masks

Not far from the temple of Kirimtse there is a little gön-kang where the masks for the sacred dances are kept. When I mentioned the place, which I had heard about from a peasant to whom I talked on the way, Lama Ngawang turned out to be entirely opposed to my proposal to visit it.

“What? You want to go to the gön-kang? No, no, it would be an act of madness! *Oé! Oé!* The gods there dislike being disturbed. Good

heavens! The gön-kang? What are you thinking of? Besides, you would be running a grave risk; you don't know what might happen to you. You might become ill, you might even die. *Oé!* The gods of the gön-kang are very touchy; even a trifle can upset them!"

I knew that it was useless to tempt him with money. Lama Ngawang is incorruptibility personified. The first time I saw him I noticed a fine painting on cloth in the apartment of honour behind the kitchen, a portrait of a lama to whom some monks were bringing offerings. I asked the Lama Ngawang if by any chance he would be willing to sell it, but I found myself up against a brick wall.

"*Oé!* Where are we? What? Sell a saint?"

Today, after a great deal of insistence, I succeeded in getting him to agree to let me enter the gön-kang to see the masks and pictures. I hoped to be able to photograph them. Should I succeed? Lama Ngawang gave the keys to a peasant who accompanied me.

"No, no, I shan't come with you," he said firmly at the monastery gate. "I shall have nothing whatever to do with it! *Oé!* The gods there are very easily angered. Don't they have tutelary deities in your country? Well, then—"

The peasant opened the big locks of the gön-kang door. Behind it was another door, on which there was an extremely effective painting of the face of one of the terrifying deities. We entered through it. Inside the place was small, dark, ancient, low-ceilinged, and full of old armour and the carcasses of animals. On the walls were frescoes of local demons, painted with a fine vigour, and in a corner was a gilded pavilion with some statues. The masks, about thirty of them, hung from the ceiling, carefully wrapped in cotton handkerchiefs. I asked the peasant, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, to take some of them down, because I wanted to photograph them. The young man grumbled, but obeyed.

As the dirty, greyish cotton handkerchiefs were removed those fantastic personages with the soul of the wind and the look of wood came alive in the darkness of the temple. There were the terrifying gods, there was Namka-bazin (the murdered and deified monk),

there were masks representing the *shi-trö* (the visions of the dead), huge bird faces, faces of mythological dogs, faces of animals of the forest. The peasant forgot the ritual prohibitions, put on one of the masks, and did a few steps of the ritual dance. It was not he who danced, but the face.

With some difficulty I persuaded the peasant to take the masks outside and to put them on, so that I might photograph them. Suddenly I heard somebody shouting from the corner of the square outside the *gön-kang*. It was Lama Ngawang, who had come to see what was going on and had "caught" us.

"Put back the masks immediately!" he shouted. "Don't you know they must never see the light? *Oé!* Are you mad? Now evils will descend upon the whole village! If anyone is ill, the fault will be yours! If the harvest fails, the fault will be yours! If animals die, the fault will be yours!"

I tried to calm him.

"Lama Ngawang, I assure you nothing will happen," I said. "If anything happens, it will be my fault. I'll take all the evils upon myself!"

Lama Ngawang approached me, looked at me very seriously, and said nothing. He had understood. He had understood from the light-heartedness with which I spoke that I did not believe. I felt at once that I had hurt him. I was very sorry for it, but I had no chance to remedy it. The peasant interrupted our silent colloquy.

"Did you hear, Lama Ngawang? Did you hear? The foreigner takes all the evil upon himself! Don't worry!"

They laughed. They looked at me as if I had the plague, and they were glad.

Lama Ngawang accepted the situation. He forgot the anger that he had perhaps felt for a moment. He let me go to the devil as the expiatory sacrifice. I even managed to photograph him against the inner door of the *gön-kang*, next to the face of the terrifying god.

"*Oé!* Don't forget to send me a copy!" he said when I said good-bye. But he spoke coldly. I had disappointed him.

Expiation

The other evening, when I got back to Yatung, I found waiting for me a letter from Pemá Chöki, from Gangtok. She described at length the celebrations that had taken place, at court and in the temple, in connection with the dedication of a new chorten. I answered describing my visit to the Lama Ngawang and told her how I had finally managed to photograph the masks.

At ten o'clock this morning the post came again. There was another letter from Pemá Chöki, sent by express post from the palace at Gangtok. She told me she was greatly worried at my having dared to take photographs of the gön-kang, and at my having carried the masks out into the daylight. "At times the gods can be a bad medicine," she wrote. "I implore you to go back to Kirimtse and have a *kar-sö*, a purification ceremony, conducted by the lama. If you don't believe in these things, please do it all the same for my sake. I'm worried." I was touched by the princess's letter. Apart from her evident concern for me, it was like being asked by a child, "How is it that Father Christmas doesn't get dirty when he comes down the chimney?" or, "Is it true that little Jesus has the loveliest toys in the whole world?"

This morning I woke up shivering, and with a bad pain in my back. It must have been a touch of lumbago. Piero produced a most plausible explanation, reminding me that yesterday it was very cold and damp. But I immediately remembered my light-hearted promise, a few days ago, to take upon myself all the evils that might ensue from the removal of the masks from the gön-kang. Then I laughed. Then I felt frightened. It was very stupid. But we are all surrounded by the unknown. Could my promise really have had some occult significance? My reason said, "Nonsense." But what is reason worth, after all?

So I climbed up to Kirimtse under the midday sun (which chased the pain away and made me feel better immediately). I found Lama Ngawang sitting in his usual place beside the window, reading.

Drolmá, his wife, was boiling *chu-kar* plants in a big saucepan, to dye some woollen cloth red. I drank a cup of tea and waited.

"So you've come back?" the lama said to me eventually. "How are you? *Oé!* Have you heard that a mule has died at Pemogang? Luckily they are Bon-po at Pemogang. Otherwise they'd say it was because of the masks. And you? Why aren't you ill?"

"As a matter of fact, Lama Ngawang, I've got pains in my back."

"Just as I said! Just as I said! That's all right! If you're ill after your act of stupidity, we can rest assured that we shan't have to suffer the consequences."

The lama's manner towards me had changed greatly for the worse. During my first visits I had felt in him the gladness of a man speaking to a distant brother, to whom he is linked by the same faith, and I had not had the courage to undeceive him, because I had felt how much this meant to him, and I did not want to spoil his pleasure. But now we had become strangers. The only link between us was a link in a game of magic. I had performed certain acts, said certain words, set in motion a concatenation of inevitable cause and effect. He was an onlooker. His only surviving interest in me was as a participant in the unhappy incident with the masks; I was a pawn in his game of chess with the invisible.

"Lama Ngawang," I said to him after some time, as I ate one of the fried biscuits which Drolmá offered me, "I've come up here because of that business the other day, when we took the masks outside. Now I want you to say a *kar-sö*, to pacify the gods of the *gön-kang*, in case they're offended. . . . I've brought you five silver rupees."

Lama Ngawang turned towards me, bent his head forward so that his glasses dropped to the tip of his nose, looked at me, smiled, and opened his arms.

"We'll do it straight away," he said. "*Oé!* Drolmá! Bring me my cloak, we're going downstairs!"

Then he looked at me again, as if to say, So I made a mistake after all.

"*Oé!*" he said. "You've done well to come so soon. Bravo! Bravo!"

Our former friendship was re-established as firmly as ever. I knew it was based on a misunderstanding, but I was glad.

A dragonfly memory

In Buddhist countries every kind of life is sacred. In Tibet, where there are no dangerous wild animals, this simply means that the animals on the mountains live fearlessly side by side with man. On my way up to Kirimtse yesterday I came upon a flock of wild sheep (*argali*). They allowed me to approach to within a few paces of them and then calmly moved away; they did not run away. I must say that, however idyllic I found this state of affairs, my instinct would have been to "take" one of them. I do not shoot, but I can see that hunting has deep and natural roots in the mind of man. Fundamentally it offers the satisfaction of getting something of value—food, skins, a trophy—quickly, and perhaps easily, without the labour and patience required to produce it; an important element is the satisfaction to be obtained from the contest between man and animal—and here the sporting element enters, the assertion of skill and strength; and finally there cannot be altogether absent a sadistic element—pleasure in bloodshed and the infliction of pain and death; and in that hunting often resembles love and always resembles war.

Travelling in Buddhist countries reminds one of problems which have never excessively preoccupied our own civilization; one of them is whether it is or is not legitimate to kill animals, and another, closely though not necessarily connected with it, is whether one should restrict oneself to a vegetarian diet. It must be admitted that there is something inherently repugnant about depriving any creature of life. Even the fly which is now buzzing about my head and annoying me, which I shall certainly kill soon if I can catch it, will suffer, will not want to die, will struggle for its unknown little satisfactions, its own tiny world, and there will be something reprehensible about my almost unthinking act.

On the other hand it is sufficient to look about one to see that life is

organized on the principle of struggle, aggression, and death, that equilibrium among the species is maintained by mutual destruction; and we, not being the authors of life, cannot hold ourselves responsible for the horror implied in this. If all animals were herbivorous and man alone was a killer, our line of conduct would be clear. But such is not the case. It is sufficient to think of the many animals of entirely different species whose bodies are constructed as efficient machines for killing, who cannot live if they do not kill, whose senses are specialized organs for seeking out prey, whose teeth are built to tear flesh, and whose intestines are constructed to digest it. All we can do, then, is to accept.

In this connection I shall always remember an incident that happened to me a few years ago, in Japan. One of my little daughters was sitting beside me on the grass, near a field of rice. The country before our eyes was basking happily in the sun, and not far away there was a group of thatched peasants' houses, surrounded by a thicket of bamboo. The landscape was as peaceful as it possibly could be.

I noticed among the blades of grass a praying mantis, a big, green insect with a deceptively pious and innocent appearance. A few seconds later a dragonfly alighted near it. The praying mantis pounced on it, and started eating it. The dragonfly struggled, tried desperately to escape, but the big green insect immobilized it with a slow, mechanical movement; the poor dragonfly's wings lay open, like human arms in an attitude of hopeless anguish. The mantis's jaws then systematically and with the most complete indifference set about the destruction of one of its victim's huge eyes. It gradually emptied one socket and then the other. It was a horrible sight. It filled the valley in which we were sitting, just as if the poor dragonfly had been able to scream. I thought of setting it free, but what would have been the use? Thousands of other praying mantises were devouring thousands of other dragonflies in just the same way in thousands of other places. It wasn't that particular case that was important. It was the law.

My little girl, who was playing, did not notice what was happening

just beside her. Suddenly she looked up and said, "Papa, how good God must be! What He's done is all so beautiful, isn't it? He made the sun for us, and the rice and the flowers, even the straw for the roofs. He's so good, isn't He, Papa?"

She turned to me, wanting confirmation. I got up and took my little girl by the hand. I wanted to go away, and we went. I didn't want her to see the last remnants of the dragonfly between the praying mantis's legs, though I'm sure it would not have disturbed her innocent and still completely anthropomorphic faith.

"Yes, darling," I said to her. "God is so good."

Besides, it is sufficient to examine, even for a very few moments, what happens beneath the surface of the sea to be struck by the ferocity of every form of life there. The muraena, lying in wait among the rocks for an unsuspecting sargo or gilthead, is an unforgettable sight. Who has not felt fear at the sight of an octopus, gliding among the rocks, ready to seize its prey in its tentacles? Who has not seen a wounded fish being pounced on by its healthy companions? In appearance the world under the sea is a dreamy blue colour, with fairy-tale illuminations and tremulous, delicately shaded reflections. In reality it is a pit in which struggle never ceases, where silence reigns only because pain is not accompanied by cries or groans.

It may be objected that man is an exception in nature, that he must create new orders of events, more noble and elevated realities. Yes, but first we must put our own house in order, eliminate war, and improve social conditions in such a way that there need be no more outbursts of base and violent instincts; after that it will be time to think of the animals. In our present state of civilization what we can do for our humblest companions is to spare them needless suffering. I must note with sadness that, in spite of the lofty ideals professed in Buddhist countries, animals do not suffer less than with us. In one way they suffer more. While on the one hand innumerable excuses are found to justify a carnivorous diet, on the other no one will risk the "sin" of removing an old or sick animal. The result is that you see animals about that are living skeletons, a pitiable sight. They won't kill them,

but they neglect them. This applies not only to Tibet, but, to a lesser extent, to Japan also.

Flying in the clouds and plunging into entrails

I was sitting at midday in a field at the foot of some huge fir trees, near Kiritse, eating buttered *chapati* (Indian-style biscuits). High up towards the sun some crows were flying. They stood out black against the white clouds or disappeared into the blue of the sky. Slowly they approached. They flew lower, circling, following one another, grazing the tree tops; the raucousness of their continual cry could not conceal that it was an expression of happiness. How enviable was their freedom from the restrictions of weight, their freedom of the air.

An eagle appeared out of the blue and started circling over my head. It must have seen something among the trees. It used the wind to keep itself aloft, only rarely beating its wings, circling in solemn, slow spirals. Then it dived nearly down to earth, grazed the tree tops, suddenly changed direction, checked its flight, and then started off again. I saw its head and hooked beak turning this way and that with continuous, decisive, proud movements, and I heard the rush of wind between its wings. The crows went on flying, seeming to have no fear of it. While they were alone in the sky they had seemed the quintessence of grace and lightness, but now, in comparison with the eagle, they looked heavy and clumsy. The crow has a big body and small wings; the eagle's wings, in comparison with the size of its body, are enormous. The crow has to beat its wings hard to gain height, and it propels itself through the air in a laborious, monotonous, and pedestrian manner. The flight of the eagle is all intelligence, grace, agility, and power. It uses the wind to gain height without moving its wings at all, and in descending it displays a superb mastery of space.

It grew late, and I had to return to Yatung. Soon after I set out I had a strange encounter. Peasants had thrown a dead mule among

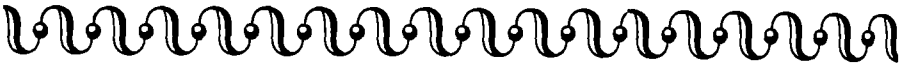
the rocks. About a dozen big, whitish vultures, so intent on their meal they took no notice of me, were swarming on, around, and actually inside the carcass. They were fighting and pushing one another, squawking all the time. Their movements and their voices were horrifyingly human. The most skilful or most fortunate bird managed to get right inside the dead beast's stomach and hacked savagely with its beak to detach the last remnants of the abdominal cavity and the intestines. The whole carcass shook and rocked, seeming to have a ghoulish life of its own. Eventually the vultures left outside managed to dislodge the "inside" bird, which emerged all spattered with blood, with a big piece of entrail hanging from its beak. A horrid battle followed, because the others tried to snatch it from him. They struck one another with their beaks, squawking savagely, and there was a furious beating of wings. The stink of the carcass reached to where I stood. Two birds next managed to get inside the dead mule's stomach, where another battle took place. The carcass, which was balanced unsteadily on a slope, shook so much that eventually it overturned and fell. The two vultures inside it came out, terrified, shrieking, all covered with blood and scraps of putrefying flesh. The others moved away a little, and then they all fell on the carcass again.

Some time passed. One of the birds must have assuaged its appetite. It looked satisfied, and detached itself from the fray. So heavy was it that its departure reminded me of that of an air liner loaded with passengers. It took a long run downhill to gain speed before opening its wings. When it was air-borne it flew off in a slow curve, slowly gaining height, and disappeared like an archangel into an empyrean of clouds and sunshine.

Last day at Yatung: Lama Ngawang's gift

The time came for us to leave Yatung, and today we left. The porters arrived and selected their loads. Many acquaintances came to say good-bye. The ku-tsab sent us a big loaf and some bottles of arak from Chumbi, and Mingyur was there with a white silk sash.

A man came hurrying from Kiritse. "Lama Ngawang sends you this gift," he said to me, handing me a parcel. I opened it. It was the portrait of the lama that I had so often admired in the hall of the Kiritse monastery and had tried in vain to buy. Tears were in my eyes when I packed it among my things. I shall keep it always in memory of old Lama Ngawang, a straight, upright, generous, and just man. What does the faith in which one was born matter? Civilizations present us with pictures of the universe just as they teach us how to eat certain foods, to dress in a certain way, to have certain ideals in connection with women when we make love to them. But in the last resort all that matters supremely is heart and character.



ON THE ROAD TO LHASA

Phari: the wind blows heedless of prayers

PHARI is a town of wretched cottages built round the first big Tibetan fortress that one meets coming from the south.¹ It is about 13,000 feet above sea level, in the middle of a yellowish valley at the foot of Chomolhari (23,930 feet). An idea of the scale of these tremendous empty spaces can be had from watching the winding trail that climbs towards Lhasa, along which tiny little black lines can be seen in the distance. They are not ants, but whole caravans of yaks and mules on the way down to India or up to the deserts of Central Asia.

Sometimes the traveller comes across a place where he says to himself: Here a city should be built. The Bay of Naples would be such a place if Naples were not there. A place where a city should be built is the plain of Phari. Obviously there could be no economic justification for a big city here, at a height of 12,000 feet, but aesthetically it would be incomparable. One's imagination cannot help filling the immense plain with avenues, squares, arches, towers, and gardens, all against the background of the isolated and miraculously lovely pyramid of Chomolhari; a whole, living city at the foot of the red rocks and greeny-blue ice of Chomolhari glittering in the sun.

Instead of a big city, however, the first thing we came across when we reached the plain yesterday was a nomad's tent. It made the space round us look ever barer, the cathedral of ice still more remote, immense, and sacrosanct. Moreover, the experience was so unexpected. After hours of weary climbing up a winding valley enclosed between dark mountains we turned a corner and found ourselves suddenly, and before we were expecting it, in an entirely new world. There

¹ This chapter refers to an earlier journey than that of 1948.

were no limits about us but the sky; no more roaring of torrents, but complete silence. Then, after some hours of walking across the open plateau, Phari (Pig Mountain), with its square fortress, appeared in the distance. But it was rather like seeing a distant island or cape when out at sea. You see it, and go on seeing it, but you never seem to reach it.

We rested at Phari today. I must again insist on the sense of space. After days in the depths of the Himalayan valleys it is a marvellous experience to find oneself on the Roof of the World. The expression "roof of the world" is so apt. It is very like climbing the innumerable stairs of an ancient palazzo in an Italian town and finally coming out onto the terrace, and being suddenly surrounded by the sky, with a sea of roofs at one's feet. In the neighbourhood of Phari the valley gradually slopes towards a number of big orange-coloured, dome-shaped hills. The simplicity of their shape, with nothing to break their surface or outline, makes it extremely difficult to form any real idea of their dimensions.

Chomolhari, like every high mountain, is alive all the time. It changes in character and appearance from hour to hour; often from minute to minute. When I went out at dawn this morning it was a huge black mass standing out against the eastern light; the cold magnificence of its icy peaks stabbed into my mind like a sword. A little star was still shining in the sky, right over the summit. It was the only touch of colour in a spectral, sidereal spectacle of frozen purity and space. Later in the day the mountain seems to be changing its dress all the time. It is just like a beautiful, temperamental woman, now playing with subtle wisps of cloud, now putting on bright cloaks or veils, now sulking and hiding itself, now coming out and smiling again. It can be splendid, sublime, mysterious, cold and forbidding, melancholy, spiteful, generous, sinister; or, as at sunset yesterday, it can become a palace of pink biscuit, decorated with wisps of blue silk.

The grey stone fortress is in perfect harmony with the valley. Its walls slope slightly inwards, standing like a barbarian solidly planted with his legs apart. The portico and the windows are painted in

vivid colours, red, orange, and green. On top a golden pavilion glitters in the sun. But the village is horrible. It must certainly be one of the filthiest places in the world. The hovels of which it consists are built (but "built" is altogether too grand a word—it implies thought) of earth, and an incredible amount of dirt is left lying about in its winding alleys—bones, excrement, rags, kitchen refuse, old tin cans, all among endless expanses of black mud. It is cold and windy all the year round, and the water is generally frozen, so the people never wash. The public toilets consist of wooden frameworks, open to the four winds. As the air is so dry, so cold, and so sterile, solid, pointed hillocks of faeces accumulate underneath.

The wretched, squalid houses of Phari are adorned with innumerable poles and sticks, supporting thousands of little flags with prayers and pious phrases written on them. The wind "utters" and "sings" them. There are prayers in white, red, blue, and yellow, old, ragged, and neglected prayers, prayers for things long since dead and forgotten, and brand-new prayers, full of anxiety and trepidation, for things that may yet be altered and put right. The wind plays indifferently upon them all, tears them, wears them out. It blows and blows—who knows where? who knows why?—towards the huge, hungry horizon.

Some houses, built of masonry and bigger than the others, are of recent construction. On the roof of one of them, which is not yet finished, many women are working. They beat the mud-cement rhythmically with their hands to harden it, keeping time by singing in chorus. It is always the same tune, a beautiful one, full of strange half-tones. The wind now brings it near, now blows it away and makes it almost inaudible, now brings it near again. It seems to give a physical sense of the infinite—song, caravans, desert, sky.

Tuna, Dochen:

some of the most beautiful places in the world

Let us be clear what we mean by the word "beautiful." If we include under it only gardens, hills and villas, fountains and flower-

beds, sea coasts and green, gentle country, if, like Lorenzo the Magnificent, what we want is

*un verde praticel pien di bè' fiori
un rivo che l'erbetta intorno bagni . . .*²

if that is what we want, the Tang pass, the immense Plain of the Three Brothers, the surroundings of Tuna, the lakes of Dochen, the ice-walls of the Himalayas are ugly. The beauty of Tibet is strong, elementary, sublime. It concedes nothing; it is unrelenting.

We crossed the Tang pass (13,800 feet) yesterday in storm and mist. Then, as we descended on its northern side, the sky cleared, and all day long we crossed a deserted plain. There was nothing but stones, stones, stones, and a few blades of grass; and the horizon. On one side Chomolhari stood supreme, with its red precipices covered with ice and snow. Ahead of us in the distance there arose other mountains of contorted shape. The colours were crazy: the red, yellow, ochre, orange of the stones, the sand, and the rocks; the delicate green of the grass, where the glaciers descended; the blue of the distance and the sky; the brilliant whiteness of the snow. Then there was the everlasting wind, perpetually caressing your face, hands, and body and tirelessly murmuring and singing in your ears.

Tuna is the name of a group of six or seven houses standing at the edge of the sky. One was almost afraid to speak; the clip-clop of the mules' hoofs on the stones, men's voices, disappeared without echo in the midst of this immensity. The crests of the Himalayas were an unforgettable sight this morning. Everyone knows how a beautiful thing is improved by isolation. Any work of art is seen to lesser advantage when surrounded and overwhelmed by twenty others. In the Alps the mountains are crowded; no mountain, unless you are quite close to it, can be seen in isolation. But here Chomolhari rises at the edge of an immense plain, imperial, magnificent, alone (see Plate 8). Between Tuna and the first hills there are miles and miles of orange desert. Then suddenly the earth curves and rises; there are some yel-

² A green meadow full of fine flowers, a stream that bathes the grass all about. . . .

low hills, then fields of ice, and then the red rocks rise supreme, in a sparkling framework of snow. The giants of the Himalayas are surrounded by an infinity of space and air. Two of the most tremendous sights in nature—deserts and ice—are here combined. The desert, all fire and colour, climbs and fades into the ice. The sparkling ice descends to adorn the stones. A ring of green shows where they meet. Water makes the wilderness flourish.

Dochen—a day's march farther north—is a village with very few houses, some of which look like fortresses. It is cold there, and the wind blows. The solitude penetrates into the rooms, creeps under your blankets at night. It is not a negative thing, a mere lack, but a positive entity, almost with a voice and a face. The village lies on the bank of the lake of Rham. Tibet, apart from being a country of huge mountains and boundless deserts, is a country of many great lakes. The Rham-tso is liquid sky that has fallen among the dry stones. When I walked along its banks today the wind died down (a rare event in these parts), and the mountains were reflected in the water with extraordinary clarity. I seemed to be walking along the edge of an abyss of light.

Samada: Mara's last temptation of the Buddha

Two days' march beyond Dochen we reached Samada. The plateau is no longer flat. Grim, savage, uncanny mountains, a fit background for shrieks, martyrdoms, and visions, are broken by valleys—still at a height of 12,000 feet and more above sea level—which drop down till they finally reach the great River Tsang-po, as the ultra-Himalayan portion of the Brahmaputra is called. Here and there we saw houses, and we came to the first meagre fields of barley; we were approaching a domain of men; a domain sacred for more than a thousand years to thought and art. In this area there are some small and ancient monasteries of exceptional interest—Kyangphu, for instance, which goes back a thousand years, and Iwang. But for a long time now they have been neglected and almost completely abandoned, and priceless art treasures are going to ruin. Several of these

monasteries are practically closed; the key is kept by a peasant in the village, who will open the door if he is tipped. But the lamas, the ascetics, the learned doctors, the abbots, are there no longer. Perhaps the powerful Yellow Sect, having inherited these temples from other, lesser sects, looked upon them as stepchildren, fit to be kept just alive, out of charity. Where masters and disciples once gathered for philosophical disputation the crows now perch, crying raucously, and children play among the weeds and wild flowers growing in the courtyards.

The Kyangphu monastery is half an hour from Samada. The heat of the day had begun when we reached it, and the quiet coolness of the place was very refreshing. Only some peasant-caretakers live there now. Sacks of grain were piled in the hall, and on one wall was a painting of great but now forgotten beauty. We went from chapel to chapel, our footsteps echoing in the empty rooms and corridors. The old doors creaked when they were opened, and let fall showers of dust. Every now and then Tantric deities, dimly illuminated by a skylight, appeared in all their metaphysical monstrosity. In the excitement of exploration Professor Tucci and I separated. While I was climbing a staircase, leading I don't know where, he called out, "Come here, come and see!"

I went down, and found Professor Tucci in a chapel.

"Did you ever imagine that anything like that was conceivable?"

The scene which faced us was indeed remarkable, not for its beauty, but because of the crazy fantasy of the artists who conceived it. At first I found it bewildering and unintelligible. We were in a little chapel crowded with sculpture, as crowded as a cave might be with stalactites. It was an infernal dance of wooden monsters, painted in vivid colours.

"It's the temptation of the Buddha," Tucci explained. "It's Mara tempting the Buddha for the last time, before his final enlightenment."

Sure enough, at the bottom of the chapel there was a fine statue of the sage, serene and victorious, having attained the plane of the Absolute and freed himself for ever from the illusions of substantial-

ity and becoming, while Mara (love, attachment, death) wove fantastic spells about him, conjuring from the most turgid depths of the imagination a whole population of monsters, half animals and half men, some grotesque, some lustful, some cruel, some stark, raving mad; every one of them quivering with some passion or excitement, in dramatic contrast to the serenity expressed in the features of the Buddha (see Plate 44).

The subject is a common one in Buddhist art, but so disconcerting a "temptation" can rarely have been carried out in sculpture. One was reminded of Hieronymus Bosch and the monsters of Palagonia in Sicily. The dissociative technique was admirable. Many modern artists have believed themselves to be making an extraordinary discovery in taking the human form and treating its elements—eyes, nose, mouth, limbs—as independent entities, which by adding, subtracting, amputating, getting inside them, could be welded into new harmonies and constellations. But here, carved in all innocence centuries ago, were torsos turned into faces, eyes grafted onto trunks, whole festoons of eyes; there were also pigs' breasts, dogs' shoulders, beings with three bodies or four heads, polyphemuses and hydra-headed monsters, a whole fairground of triumphant monstrosity; forms which would be but toys if each one of them had not been endowed with a soul. Their expressions were often incomprehensible to us. What was moving them? What was disturbing them? Were they crying, laughing, screaming, lowing like cattle, grinning? Were they terrified or raving mad, passionate or vengeful?

Samada and Iwang: the origins of Tibetan art

Samada and Iwang are two ancient monasteries, full of artistic treasures.

The "Temptation of the Buddha" at Samada yesterday struck us like a Grand Guignol scene. But its success, let us admit it, was primarily a *succès de scandale*. We discovered the really beautiful things later. One terrifying god might have been the work of one of the Japanese sculptors of the Nara period, who created the gigantic

and powerful Nioo figures out of wood. Then there were the multiple Buddhas grouped round the figure of Vairocana, serene and absorbed in that mystical world of theirs which no words of ours are capable of describing.

Today's discoveries at Iwang were no less impressive. It is a little monastery, surrounded by a wall of earth and stones, a haunt of big blackbirds, standing on the lower slopes of a huge, deserted, reddish mountain, on which blue Tibetan poppies grow. The place is almost completely abandoned, and only a few shepherds live there. The old woman who came and let us in was dishevelled and filthy beyond description. Tall, tangled weeds ran riot in the little courtyard and along the walls. The sacred furnishings had entirely disappeared. Nothing was left in the chapels, which were perpetually exposed to the storms, except statues and wall paintings. It was one of those places which fill you with a sense of marvel and reverence as soon as you set foot in them.

The abandoned state of the monastery, its remoteness, seemed to make all the more vivid and tangible the presence of the sages who once lived and meditated and practised asceticism there, the ancient artists who gave body and shape to sublime ideas centuries and centuries ago. There came to mind the words of a great Japanese poet:

Ah! the grass and the wind!
And here among these stones
The shadow of a dream.

The occasion that suggested these lines to Basho was a visit to the ruins of a fortress, but they were perfectly adapted to Iwang. "The shadow of a dream." The feeling, so dear to Pascal, that man is a fragile, perishable, transient thing, wretched in the extreme, though great; great even in the shadow of his dreams.

At Iwang there were two chapels of extreme interest; that in "the Indian style," and that in "the Central Asian style." These are the artists' own descriptions of their work, believed to have been done in the fourteenth century. Both contain very fine work indeed. The statues with their heavy drapery (a distant echo of Greek influence)

have a mature patina of old gold, strange gold with a suggestion of violet in it, and constitute a whole exquisite and refined landscape of scattered lights and colours; while the frescoes, with their warm, rather primitive and violent colours, provide a barbarous contrast, emphasizing the precious and civilized quality of their neighbours.

Samada, Dregun, Iwang have been a continuous discovery. Nobody knew that these monasteries contained important works of art, things of such ancient and noble beauty. Tucci was radiant. These have been two red-letter days for him, and two unforgettable days for me. On such occasions Tucci is electrified. Every now and then he mutters an excited phrase pregnant with meaning, in terms which are all muscle and sinew, like a mathematical formula. This is followed by a long silence, and then there comes a flood of unexpected comparisons, memories, imaginative flights. The professor's intellect is like a lambent blue flame.

During those few hours the art of a thousand years acquired meaning and depth for me. I followed in my imagination ancient pilgrims climbing up from India, carrying a bag of grain and a load of books, men imbued with a strange fervour, on their way to the crystalline solitude of the heights. I followed caravans of merchants along the silk and gold and wool routes. I followed the yelling Hor barbarians, who came up on horseback from the north, sacked, destroyed, burned, and looted, and then suddenly vanished again into the deserts from which they came. I followed in my mind the age-long wandering of nomads from horizon to horizon.

All these men, or groups of men, carried in their minds a picture of the world and an artistic idiom in which to express it. Thus was the civilization of India brought to the high plateaux from the south, and that of Central Asia, with weak and distant echoes of Greece, from the north, while later there was Chinese penetration from the eastern valleys. As a result of all these contacts Tibetan art, properly so-called, gradually took shape and assumed its individuality. Tibet today is like a living museum. Situated in the middle of Asia, it has, in spite of its remoteness, in some way reflected every spiritual movement of the continent. Every such movement has had its

Tibetan episode. Whole orders of facts that have disappeared elsewhere still remain intact here, fossilized but alive.

Every now and then Tucci called me, inviting me with a word, a gesture, a look, to join in his enthusiasm for a picture or a statue. He insisted on my photographing all that was photographable, while he copied inscription after inscription. "Look!" he would exclaim. "There are some archaic forms in this phrase, most interesting, *mya* instead of *gna*!" Even the grammar of a language intelligible only to the learned can, in certain circumstances, in the company of certain people, become exciting, when "creation" is involved, opening up centuries of history, detecting echoes that have rung from one end of a continent to the other.

Gyantse: golden roofs gleaming in the distance

Yesterday afternoon we reached Gyantse after several days' travel.

It was not yet midday when the valley, which we had been following for several days' marches, slowly widened out and transformed itself into an open plain. At first there were only a few isolated human dwellings, but gradually they became more frequent, and eventually they became a normal feature of the landscape, and we were surrounded by fields of barley and other crops. At the foot of the grim, rocky, yellow mountains that rose in the distance in every direction the green of the valley broke off sharply, as if it were a lake. After so much travelling in the wilderness the soil, which at home would have seemed wretched and meagre, struck us as a marvel of fertility; in talking of the low poplars, the humble willows, that were to be seen every now and then, one was almost tempted to use the word "luxuriant." The white gentians and edelweiss growing between the cultivated plots seemed equally extraordinary.

The route—it was still an extremely irregular mule track—grew populous. We had a distinct feeling of "arriving," of having left a now remote world, traversed great solitudes, and of now entering another, different world, a world entirely *sui generis*, a shut-off, isolated, archaic world. Though the route grew populous, there were

no vehicles. Peasants passed, little local caravans of yaks and mules, and occasionally a lama on horseback, wrapped in his brownish robe and accompanied by junior clerics or servants; then we would pass a group of wandering players, or a local lord with his escort, or pilgrims, or a shepherdess, or merchants.

The houses became still more frequent, and handsomer. Some were country villas or the residences of nobles. In the distance there came into sight some low hills, among which there gleamed some golden roofs. "Gyantse!" the men exclaimed. We went on walking for a long time. We were tired, it was hot, and I was thirsty. The golden roofs gleamed more brightly. Now we could see the white walls of the monasteries, and soon we made out the city walls, which climb over the hills like the Great Wall of China. Finally the wind brought us the deep voice of the long trumpets being sounded in the monasteries. We crossed a stream. Thousands of little white "prayers" sang in the wind. The golden roofs gleamed like drops of sunshine fallen among the hills. It was like coming out of the wilderness into a land of fable, approaching a fairy-tale city. The yaks' bells tinkled, and round us men and women were working in the fields.

In our machine age rapid means of transport have deprived arrivals of all significance. Apart from certain places approached from the sea—Naples, New York, Rio—a city wraps its railway lines, its wires, pipes, and tubes about us before we ever get a chance of seeing it. True, the airplane has restored a certain dignity to the all-important experience of arrival, but is a momentary experience only; a few panoramic glimpses, a brief vision of giddily revolving houses and squares, the population reduced to tiny dots creeping about. But no one who has not experienced it knows what it means to arrive in a famous and beautiful city after days and days of travel by means of the most primitive means of locomotion, on foot or on horseback; to catch a first glimpse of a city on the distant horizon; to approach nearer and start to be able to pick out its most famous monuments; and then, instead of penetrating rapidly into it, to allow it gradually and slowly to enclose and absorb you, with all the fascination of an almost human personality. Who can tell

what arrival at Florence must have been like for our grandfathers, coming down by carriage from the hills of Bivigliano into its enchanted valley? Gyantse today revived for us those exquisite, lost sensations. It should be added that it lies in a remote situation, difficult to reach, in a valley of great beauty, and that we came to it on a glorious July afternoon; and it will be understood that the experience will remain one of our most vivid and precious memories.

Philosophical duel between Tucci and the Khampo

The first thing we did today was to pay a visit to the Khampo, the head of the big group of monasteries that constitutes the sacred city of Gyantse.

It was a magnificent morning; the colour of the sky was indescribable. I don't know whether it was the height (12,000 feet), our closeness to the tropics, or the dryness of the air (the reasons the physicists give to explain the blueness of the sky are incidentally extremely complicated and abstruse); the fact remains that this morning it was of unsurpassed splendour and vividness. The day's colour-scheme could be divided into three levels; the cobalt and turquoise of the sky above, the ochre and orange of the rocks, the walls, the mountains round us, and the green grass below. Those are the colours of Tibet, blue, orange, and green.

We are lodged in the little bungalow, a little way outside the city, which is used by passing officials, the Political Officer from Gangtok, and the few other foreigners who occasionally pass this way. It seems very comfortable. The professor has a room and a study to himself, and there is also a room I can use as a dark room, an invaluable thing for a travelling photographer, because film can be developed the same evening, and unsuccessful "shots" can be retaken next day.

When you emerge from the bungalow you see facing you about half a mile away the *dzong*, the fortress of Gyantse (see Plate 25). It rises from a great yellow rock, surrounded by steep cliffs; "rises from" is the right phrase, because it looks less like a man-made

building than a special kind of rock, a fantastic example of natural geometry, a new kind of hilltop. Its colour, surface, and "feel" are all rock.

Architecture is perhaps the form of art in which the spirit of this country has found its most original outlet. It is certainly the aspect of Tibetan culture which is most in harmony with its surroundings. Its distinguishing marks are the simplicity of its vast surfaces, its elementary, Babylonian lines, its grandiose and solemn proportions, its buttresses, and the tendency to build walls sloping inwards, suggesting a man standing with his legs apart, firmly planted on rock or on the ground. It is a courageous and noble architecture, simultaneously suggesting both a fortress and a monastery. It is not just an expression of brute strength; there is mind behind it, a desire for religious isolation, a sublime sense of beauty, with no trace whatever of frivolity or the baroque. It has the same beauty as the horizons and colours of these high plateaux. The Potala at Lhasa, the Buddhist Vatican, is said to combine in the happiest and most consummate manner all the best characteristics of the Tibetan architectural style.

When we walked round the bottom of the rock on which the fortress rises, we came suddenly upon the city of Gyantse (Plate 41). The shops and the houses of the lay population are on the plain, and standing in a semicircle among the hills are the temples, the monasteries, the libraries, the retreats, and the big chorten called the Kum-bum (the Hundred Thousand—the word "pictures" is understood). The second, the sacred, city is separated from the lay city by a huge, thick wall of mud and stones. Both are protected by big walls that climb over the hills towards the north.

When we reached the first houses, we were greeted again, as we were yesterday, by the sound of trumpets being blown by the monks in the monasteries. In Tibet trumpets and bugles more or less correspond to our church bells. Like church bells, they can fill a whole countryside with something which is more than just sound, a physical vibration in the air, but has powerful emotional overtones. On a more physical plane we were greeted and assaulted by the usual

horde of Tibetan children. Thus we penetrated into the city preceded, accompanied, and followed by a whole army of grinning, leaping, laughing, and shouting urchins. People crowded to the doors of their houses, because a white man is still an unusual spectacle in these parts. Nearly every woman wore on her head a big *patruk* of wood and coral (Plates 26 and 32); the men all wore a round earring, making them look like pirates. Here and there we saw a Nepalese or an Indian, and occasionally a girl of rather suspicious appearance, painted like a doll, and there were many beggars with prayer wheels, which they whirled giddily.

To enter the sacred city we had to pass through a huge wooden door in the wall. Monks immediately came forward to meet us, for they had already heard of our arrival. First we were shown the Great Temple and the Kum-bum, and then we were taken to the Khampo, the abbot-administrator of the sacred city. Three different sects—the Sakya, the Sha-lu, and the Gelug-pa—live peacefully side by side in the sacred city of Gyantse, each with its own temples, monasteries, and retreats, but the Khampo, who is sent direct from Lhasa, is the undisputed head of them all.

We were led through narrow alleys, across courtyards, down passages, up steep steps, until we finally reached the Khampo's apartments. We were shown into a room where we sat on cushions and awaited that dignitary's arrival. The room was small and self-contained. The ceiling rested on wooden pillars, the capitals of which were decorated with the usual vivid but harmonizing colours. There were many pictures on the walls. On one side of the room was an altar, books, a statue, and in the middle some furniture. A shaft of blinding light, reflected from a white wall opposite, came through the window and lit the room with all the cheerfulness of the summer morning.

When the Khampo entered with rustling robes and took his seat on his own little throne this shaft of light illuminated his face from below. He was a man of about forty, fat and short; his features suggested a strong will, few scruples and great self-control. Perhaps nothing so clearly reveals a lama's character as the way in which he

sits down. There are the ceremonious lamas, who take their seats slowly and delicately, carefully arranging the folds of their garments about them with broad, decorative gestures; and there are the ascetics, whose robes, by some secret virtue of their own, seem to fall into folds exactly as they are depicted in the statues of the Buddha. Finally there are the strong men, the born leaders, like the Khampo, who enter hurriedly, sit down anyhow, and then quickly adjust their robes to leave their hands free, as if to seize invisible battalions of demons by their horns or direct the building of an enormous palace on a mountaintop. It should be added that the character of the Khampo's round and sometimes almost jovial face was sensibly modified by a noticeable admixture of fat, and that there was a calmness about him which led one to suspect Asian habits of dissimulation and observant watching and waiting.

After the exchange of the usual courtesies, Tucci and the Khampo embarked on a conversation that swiftly left the earth and mounted to exalted philosophical altitudes. Every now and then I managed to catch a phrase which I could understand, but I was like a man who has lost his way in a forest at night and is able only occasionally to glean some idea of his whereabouts from an occasional light. It struck me that in metaphysics, as in other things, the Khampo was a colonel rather than a philosopher. I could see from his face and gestures that he was marshalling his arguments like rooks and knights in an invisible game of chess. They seemed to be less thoughts and intuitions than well-learned rules of logic and dialectics. He reminded me of some Dominican who knew his *darii ferio* completely by heart and was deploying his scholastic syllogisms with skill. Apart from that, there was also the difficulty of the language, which at that level was no joke even for Giuseppe Tucci.

The arrival of tea and biscuits interrupted the learned disputation, and the Khampo and the professor started talking of simpler things; our journey, our programme at Gyantse, Tibetan gastronomical habits. Finally we left, with the Khampo's permission to photograph anything we liked in the sacred city and a flavour of stale fried biscuits in our mouths.

The sinfulness of meat

We have recently struck up a friendship with the Tibetan doctor of Gyantse (Plate 21). I don't know what his name is, but everyone here calls him the *am-chi*, the doctor, and we do the same. He is a man of about forty, tall, thin and bony, who always bends forward when he walks, as if he were just about to fall or were miraculously leaning on the air. His normal expression suggests that he is ready to accept imminent disaster with resignation, but he often smiles, and then his appearance changes completely. His face lights up as instantaneously as a room when the light is switched on, and he seems to be able to switch on his smile whenever he likes.

Today he came to fetch us, and we went "to town" together. It was market day. Stalls were lined up along the principal street, near the entrance to the monasteries, and there was a big crowd. I noticed that butcher's meat was openly, almost ostentatiously on sale. The adaptation of the Buddhist conscience to this must be so long-standing as to have become ingrained. Or is the theory that the sin of meat-eating would only be encouraged by repression? If it were rigorously forbidden, would a plate of meat have all the attraction of forbidden fruit? It is interesting in this connection to note that Europe, with its obsession with chastity and sex, has for ages produced works of art which Asians find completely shocking; to a Chinese or Japanese who has not yet adapted himself to our conventions, not only Rubens, but even Giorgione or Botticelli, is pure pornography.

Hwuy-ung, a mandarin of the fourth button, wrote from a Western city on September 8, 1900, to a friend in China:

The pictures in the palace set apart for them not please cultured mind of my venerable brother. The female form is represented, nude or half nude. This would obtain fault from our propriety. One fraction of this indecency would in the streets gather a crowd of watch-street men, and occasion a scene of disorder; in the palace anything may be depicted, and girls and children contemplate it. . . . Morality with these strange people is not a fixed thing, but question of time and place. They have statues

of plaster, and some of marble, in the public gardens and in this palace, most of them naked. In the winter's ice it makes me want to cover them. The artists not know the attraction of rich flowing drapery.³

But to return to the market. It had little to offer except cheap and shoddy goods from India and gimcrack products of Chinese factories. Occasionally, however, you saw pleasing examples of Tibetan craftsmanship—Derge teapots or jars, Lhasa silver, and a few antiques. Every stall-holder also had a heap of rough turquoises, often big, but rarely of a really beautiful blue. Many women were selling at the stalls—not attractive girls employed to attract a little extra custom but matrons with faces disfigured with layers of butter, who displayed their prosperity by wearing rings with stones of exaggerated size and heavy and ostentatious amulet boxes. I watched them bargaining with their customers. Their frank and confident manner again demonstrated, if there were any need of such demonstration, the equality of the sexes so characteristic of Tibet.

Indian rupees circulate in the market as freely as Tibetan tranka. Rupees are actually much sought after. The Tibetan coinage is brass and silver; there used to be gold coins too but these have now vanished from circulation. The silver coins have an attractive archaic look. There is also paper money—notes of ten, fifty, a hundred, and five hundred tranka; they are huge notes, covered with fantastic patterns in bright colours, showing the Tibetan lion, the mountains, the Eight Glorious Emblems, as well as impressive stamps and seals.

The doctor's house is near the market; it is, indeed, right that such an important personage should live in the centre of the town. From our point of view he is an amateur, working on purely empirical principles, but at Gyantse he is *the* doctor. He is an intelligent and cultivated man. He knows all about the local plants, which he uses to concoct dozens of different potions, and from the roots of which he extracts various active principles as remedies for many ills.

³ *A Chinaman's Opinion of Us and His Own Country*, written by Hwuy-ung, Mandarin of the Fourth Button, translated by J. A. Makepeace. London: Chatto & Windus, 1927; page 61. (By permission of A. G. Tourrier.)

He has a great respect for Western medicine and, like most Tibetans, a blind faith in injections.

He has been a widower for several years, and lives with an old servant, a daughter twelve years old, and an assistant. He moves with great dignity among his thousands of possessions; the am-chi is one of those men who solemnize everything they touch. As soon as you look at him his smile lights up. At heart he must be a very sad man. It is immediately obvious how devoted he is to his little daughter. She appeared for a moment when we arrived, but her father packed her upstairs to change and make herself beautiful. The am-chi has many books, some of which interested Professor Tucci. The two talked for a long time, looking through book after book. The am-chi wore his big scientist's hat all the time and did not remove it in the house. In the East a hat is a symbol rather than a head covering. Then he sat down opposite the little family altar, on which there were offerings, little cups for holy water, a prayer wheel, some religious books wrapped in pieces of cloth, artificial flowers, ceremonial silk sashes, and two big pictures on poles. The cracks in the wooden partitions between one room and the next were plastered over with old English newspapers.

Nima-üser, the little mistress of the house, came down again. She had changed her dress and put on her dead mother's jewellery, and she came and sat with us. She was an adorable child. She was shy, but not so shy as to hide completely the pleasure of feeling herself so important. When the servant brought tea she rose, arranged the cups, and offered us biscuits. Then she sat down again, like a little statue (Plate 46), admiring her father, of whom she was obviously extremely fond.

Protective horrors

Photography is a double-edged weapon, a dangerous thing to practise in these parts. At first no one would agree to be photographed, and a few days ago a man made as if to pick up a stone and

throw it at me because I persisted in trying to photograph him. But now that I have given away some prints, badly printed in the bungalow, I notice a complete change. Not only do people allow me to take all the photographs I want, but many seek me out and insist that I photograph them. I foresee that very soon I shall have no more peace. One of the most persistent of those who besiege me is a young monk, who calls on us several times a day. Fortunately he is a likeable, friendly, and always good-humoured young man, and we have started using him as a guide. His name is Kumphel, and he is, I think, twenty-four or twenty-five years old.

Today Tucci and I went to see and photograph the gön-kang belonging to the great temple of the sacred city. As usual, it was a dark cellar, full of horrors. The black statues of the terrifying deities were covered with dusty rags, the straw-filled carcasses hanging on the wall were falling to pieces. Masks and ancient swords and halberds were standing about, mingled with offerings of rancid butter. Terrifying, bloodthirsty shapes were painted on the walls. After only a very short time in a gön-kang you feel oppressed as if by an incubus, and you long for daylight and the sun as a drowning man longs for air. But I have often noticed that lamas seem actually to like being in such places. Today I asked Kumphel whether he did not feel frightened in such surroundings.

“On the contrary,” he answered. “One always feels fine in a gön-kang, one is more protected here than anywhere else. The terrifying gods are our guardians!”

It is always fascinating to see things through other people's eyes, particularly if they are very different from one's own. Kumphel's answer showed how much more important in life are the things you believe in than the things you see. What you see or feel you simultaneously incorporate into your inner landscape. Western thought, twenty centuries behind Eastern thought, has now become thoroughly convinced of this. But too little attention is still paid to the fact that it is the cultural constant rather than the individual variable which is the decisive factor in the transformation which the cosmos undergoes in the psyche. In other words, if we had been

born and bred in a lamaist environment we too no doubt would find a gön-kang the most comforting of places. To give an opposite example, what we consider to be the agreeable strains and exertions of games and sport appear to most Orientals to be either simply crazy or a form of punishment.

All our activities are "cultural"; there is no such thing as "natural" man. I am incapable of blowing my nose or admiring a sunset without revealing a whole tradition, an attitude towards society and the world. But one becomes aware of this only by leaving the greenhouse of one's own civilization—the greenhouse in which the most random little plants end by taking on resemblances to the oaks of the absolute.

The Kum-bum

The Kum-bum (the Hundred Thousand Pictures) is one of the most famous temples and one of the most interesting monuments in Tibet. If the Potala is the Vatican of Upper Asian Buddhism, the Kum-bum is its Assisi; it is a sanctuary not only for the faithful, for those for whom the myth is alive, but for the whole of humanity, for the men of all times and all countries who believe in beauty and bow before the mystery of inspiration.

The Kum-bum is very striking, even from a distance. The whole of the upper part is gilded and glitters in the sun, and the rest of the building is white or painted in vivid colours. When you go nearer you see that two big, enigmatic eyes are painted on the dome; these give it personality and presence. The Kum-bum is essentially a chorten, a pagoda. As a piece of architecture it certainly lacks the slender, lyrical quality of Japanese pagodas, which are delicate timber trceries, rhythmical poems of roofs and spirals. The Kum-bum is Tibetan; that is to say, it is static and massive, like a mountain or the pyramids. It could be Egyptian or Aztec; solid rock, carved and painted by the hand of man. Like the Potala, it marvellously expresses the final, immutable, hierarchical feeling of Tibetan civilization.

But the architecture of the walls and dome is only one aspect of the Kum-bum. What really counts is its invisible architecture. As we have said, it is primarily a chorten; in other words, it is a reasoned and systematic synthesis of the Buddhist universe; the physics of the metaphysical; an exotic *Divine Comedy* in stone, proportions, and colour. The pictures which adorn practically every wall of the seventy-three chapels which open onto the four levels of the Kum-bum take up, develop, and put the finishing touches to the fundamental themes expressed by the architectural structure. Thus the Kum-bum as a whole conceals the complexity of a living organism. Leibniz said that the difference between man-made mechanisms and natural ones lay in the fact that the former were mechanisms only on the surface, while the latter, however much they might be dismantled, always remained mechanisms. The Kum-bum, like a natural mechanism, is even in its remote recesses and most fugitive aspects a cosmography, a guide to the Buddhist heavens and ultra-heavens. It is therefore also called the Chö-ku, "the Embodiment of the Faith."

The structure rests on a massive foundation measuring 108 cubits (108 is a sacred number; there are 108 volumes of the Kangyur, 108 signs of Buddhahood, 108 votive lamps, etc., etc.). This foundation is called the Lunar Lotus, because on it, in the last analysis, there rests Dorje-chang, the absolute, which is represented in the form of a statue concealed in the highest chapel of the Kum-bum and is "serene, beatific, lunar." The basement "symbolizes the fusion of the two elements from which there arises the thought of enlightenment, that is to say, praxis (*upaya*) and gnosis (*prajna*), or the two aspects of being, beatitude and unsubstantiality (*mahasukha* and *sunyata*)." ⁴ The next section of the building, resting on this, symbolizes "the four imperturbabilities of the Buddha"; succeeding stories are built concentrically on this one. Each has five faces, each bearing the symbol of one of the five Dhyani Buddhas: the lion of Vairocana (Imperturbability), the elephant of Akshobya

⁴ These and the following quotations are from G. Tucci, *Indo-Tibetica*. Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1932; IV, 1.

(the Ten Mystic Forces), the horse of Ratnasambhava (the Thaumaturgic Powers), the peacock of Amithaba (the Ten Dominant Capacities), the eagle of Amoghasiddhi (the Force of Non-attachment).

This symbolical counterpoint (the broad nature of which I have only hinted at) is continued, extended, and echoed from the bottom of the structure to the top. It develops like a dance, or a fugue. The paintings, which are often of great beauty (Plates 17, 42, 49), respond to the symbols, the measurements, the proportions, like groups of instruments responding to other groups of instruments in an orchestra, and thus the symbolic structure rises to its summit, where Dorje-chang is enthroned, the absolute, the beginning and the end, the All. Thus the whole universe is reproduced in the Kum-bum for the edification of the faithful; it is at once Bible, planetarium, encyclopedia, museum, and temple; the sum of Tibetan knowledge. The pious visitor, ascending from one level to the next, enjoys the advantages of progressive illumination at every stage.

The first story symbolizes the "four coefficients of consciousness," the second that of the "four renunciations," and the third that of the "four elements of mystic power." On the fourth story the Tantric doctrines are expressed in sacred diagrams called *mandala*, which have as much meaning to an initiate as the complex symbols of an equation have for a mathematician. Finally, the pictures in the shrines immediately under the dome "are intended to express by symbols those Tantric experiences which lead to the realization of the absolute and undifferentiated unity of the coefficients of supreme illumination; that is to say, of practice and mystical gnosis"—a union which, as we know, is represented by the hieratic embrace.

At the extreme summit of the structure, in a shadowy cell the walls of which were also covered with paintings, which, however, are no longer discernible today, the statue of Dorje-chang, the symbol of the absolute in its essential immutability, smiles its mysterious smile. Having thus completed the ascent of the monument and arrived in the presence of the supreme principle of all things, the visitor has passed through the various stages of phenomenal life and, by means of mystical knowledge, he has in the process reunited himself with that cosmic, colourless, and undiffer-

entiated awareness of which Dorje-chang is the symbol. The mystic, having completed in reverse the evolutionary process which leads to the birth of all things, has therefore annihilated it by becoming aware of it, himself merging into the light which gives existence to everything (Tucci).

We spent several days tirelessly studying and measuring the Kum-bum. The temple has been known for many years, and many travelers have briefly described and even photographed it, but no one has ever taken the trouble to examine it thoroughly and in detail. Tucci faced this task with his incisive character and his formidable learned equipment (Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese; knowledge of Asian history and symbological and artistic technique). We rise early, go to the Kum-bum, work indefatigably through one chapel after another. Tucci copies inscriptions, makes copious notes, and from time to time seeks a lama's help in a piece of artistic, symbolical, or palaeographical interpretation; meanwhile I photograph all that is photographable, and make notes too. In the afternoon work goes on in the same way. In the evening the professor transcribes and arranges his notes, while I develop the pictures taken during the day. At an altitude of 12,000 feet it is an exhausting routine. But the continual sense of discovery, of intellectual adventure, and the pleasure of contributing knowledge of this masterpiece of Eastern civilization to the civilization of the West are a continuing spur.

"Stay in this cell," Professor Tucci said to me this morning, "and choose some detail from the frescoes for a photograph that will show the spirit of the whole, while I go in there to go on copying inscriptions. Do you know that they are of exceptional interest? They reveal the names of the artists who painted these walls. It's the first abandonment of anonymity by classical Tibetan art. We shall be able to study influences and derivations. We may be able to discover some personality more alive than the rest."

I was left alone with my camera, tripod, flashlight, and other equipment of a twentieth-century craftsman, in front of some wall paintings of the most penetrating beauty. I was in the chapel of the Maitreya, the future Buddha, the embodiment of charity. In front of me was a whole population of divine and human figures. They

represented the heaven which the god would renounce, to descend again among mankind and resume his apostolate. The artist had taken a humanist's delight in giving life to his theme. He had shaken himself free from the schematic, hieratic formalism so often associated with it, and made the figures move and breathe. He set them in a real world, under a real sky, in a real spring. How much Chinese influence there was in all this! In the neighbouring chapels the Indian style predominated—flesh and cerebrality, sensuality and symbolism, nudity, contortions, monstrosities; a metaphysical filigree of jewels, couplings, caresses, and blood for esoteric connoisseurs. But here China made a glorious entry. Here was not just space, but earth and sky. Here were portraiture, proportion and serenity, humanity and ceremony, instead of cryptograms and syllogisms. Here were men as individuals, not as phases or states or categories; and the universe was a home, a place in which one lived.

While I was working in the chapel, into which a warm, bright ray of sunshine entered, I heard footsteps. A bent old man entered, carrying a shabby bag. He greeted me with a smile, and did not seem at all surprised at seeing me there with all my equipment. He was completely absorbed in his visit to the Kum-bum, and looked at the gods with mystic emotion. For him they were not walls or frescoes, but a window. I asked him where he came from. He told me the name of the place, and added, "*Taring po* (Far away)." Then he said good-bye and left.

Solitude as poison; solitude as flame

This morning we went up to the retreat of the monks, a group of little houses on the mountainside above Gyantse, at a height of nearly 15,000 feet. We walked for hours, surrounded by nothing but rocks and stones, and occasionally we saw blue poppies. On the way we stopped at one of the little mortuary hills on which the bodies of the dead are hacked to pieces and then left to be devoured by birds of prey. A body had been left there only the day before yesterday, but this morning nothing remained; the birds had quickly finished

their macabre feast. Nothing was to be seen but some stains of fat on the smooth stones, warm in the sun; and there was a certain slaughterhouse smell hanging about. Death here is like the end of a wave that has broken on the shore.

After visiting the chapels of a *ri-trö* (hermitage) and a short rest, we continued on our way. We climbed a desolate, windy slope of rock until we reached the hermits' cells. Imagine a bare, remote mountainside, with nothing in sight but rock and sky, and no sound but that of the wind. Such were the surroundings in which we found some tiny houses, situated a short distance from one another, each with its little cell for meditation. Nowadays there are not so many hermits as there used to be. Today, indeed, we found only one, Lama Tsampa Tendar (Plate 37), who had not left his narrow prison for eight years.

His little house was like a box. It had a courtyard two square yards in extent, onto which the door and window of the cell open; the hermit must see nothing of the world outside, nothing of that which is mere illusion, a transitory state of non-being. I sat down for a moment near Lama Tendar. Apart from the surrounding walls, all I could see was a little triangle of sky, with some bright clouds, among which a big bird was flying in slow curves. Who knows if the Lama Tendar ever looked longingly or with regret through that little triangle? To me it seemed the most delightful sight imaginable in that tomblike cell. Perhaps it was to resist the last glimmer of temptation that, when the lama meditated, he drew over his eyes the little visor that he now had perched on his brow.

Solitude is such a powerful experience that it leaves indelible marks on those who have experienced it. It acts on some like a stimulus, refining the flame of their spirit; but in ordinary mortals the flame grows dim or is extinguished. It is like some kinds of poison, which in certain proportions on certain organisms have a marvellous tonic effect, while on others the same dose is fatal. Who has not heard of people who have "died" of loneliness—Europeans isolated in remote places, or persons of sensibility and culture exiled in spiritual deserts of provincialism and ignorance? For such peo-

ple human contacts become abnormal, tormenting experiences, and disorder and idleness eat like gangrene into their lives.

But Lama Tendar is a great and supreme lord of the white oceans of silence. You felt instinctively, without need of argument or proof, that solitude and ascetic discipline had had an exquisitely purifying effect on him; that he had emerged victorious from the experience. In any case our call upon him was exceedingly brief. We spoke little, and made no reference to the greater things. It is a fact that our relations with people are to a large extent conducted at the level of the subconscious. Vague hints and intuitions reinforce the feelings of like or dislike that we have for people, the often instinctive feeling we have about people that they are either good or bad. Lama Tendar emanates peace and benevolence almost as if they were physical realities; he radiates an inner light.

He is undoubtedly the strongest personality whom we have met on our travels. It is not for nothing that he enjoys a reputation for sanctity, and that on certain religious festivals people make the long climb up the rocky mountain in the hope of receiving his blessing. We too were blessed when we left, and it left us with a feeling of deep peace. The ultraterrestrial forces are no respecters of emblems or hierarchies. Any religion can be a vehicle between God and man, just as any religion can deteriorate into magical or commercial practices or be turned into an instrument for tormenting one's fellowmen.

How I should have liked to be able to talk freely to Lama Tendar without the obstacle of language! There were so many things that I should have liked to ask him—about life, and all the things that agitate us, about death and love, about the powers of the earth and of the invisible. In an obscure way I felt that his answers would have been memorable and profound. As it was I brought away only a mental picture and some feelings, and the memory of a smile which was different from all other smiles.

Today, according to our way of looking at things, a hermit's way of life seems an incredible thing, almost an enormity. But hermits once played an important part in the West, in the history of Christianity. The theoretical justification for the hermit's life is sound

enough. If God is everything and the world is vanity, why not renounce vanity and illusion and live entirely for the eternal? For centuries religion reached its loftiest heights among hermits scattered from the Thebaid to Cappadocia, from Sinai to Palestine. St. Paul of Thebes, St. Anthony, and St. Hilary had innumerable followers and disciples in the West. The social trends inherent in the West caused the hermits almost completely to disappear. Today their practices strike us as monstrous, and their attitude to life seems indefensible. But would it be surprising if, after the fifth or sixth world war, there occurred a revival of dwelling in the desert? Perhaps the only way of escape from the madness of society might then be to take refuge from it.

Milarepa, wizard, hermit, and poet

The subject of hermits inevitably reminds one of Milarepa ("cotton-clad Mila"), one of the most extraordinary personalities that Asia has produced. Tibet has contributed to history at least two names of world significance—the sixth Dalai Lama, living god and poet, an outburst of joyful paganism in a gilded cell, and Milarepa, wizard, hermit, poet, philosopher, sinner, a tumultuous soul ever in anguish or frenzy, with an unlimited capacity for both good and evil, and unbounded spiritual energy.

For nearly a thousand years Tibetans have been deeply moved by Milarepa's life story, written by his pupil Rechung. It is a kind of thriller at mystical level, full of crimes and visions, fisticuffs and metaphysics, written in a tone now of esoteric poetry, now of crime reporting, now of hagiography, but always with a human warmth and vividness which is compelling even to a sophisticated modern reader. Milarepa's early childhood was a happy one. He was born about the year 1030 in a prosperous or actually wealthy family in Himalayan Tibet. But his father died when he was seven, and his troubles began. His mother was the dominating figure in his early life. She was devoted to her family, but was extreme in everything, given to cursing, weeping, hating, threatening suicide, and her appe-

tite for revenge was not exhausted even when her son had killed by magic no fewer than thirty-five of her personal enemies in the village.

What drove her to these excesses was this. When her husband died he left his property to the care of his brother and sister-in-law, to look after until Milarepa should grow to manhood. But the brother treated the property as if it were his own and forced Milarepa, his younger sister, and his mother to work for him. "In summer, when the fields were cultivated, we were my uncle's servants," Milarepa said. "In winter, when the wool was carded, we were my aunt's servants. They fed us like dogs and worked us like donkeys."

One day, when Milarepa had reached the age of fifteen, his mother sold a small piece of land and invited all their relatives to a feast. When it was over she read out her husband's will and invited her brother-in-law and his wife to restore Milarepa's rights. But her unscrupulous brother-in-law declared that he had only lent the property concerned to her husband many years before, and that he therefore owed nothing, either to Milarepa or to his mother. Lacking any way of obtaining redress, the widow and her two children had no choice but to go away and live in extreme poverty, derided rather than pitied by the rest of the village.

One day Milarepa came home drunk after a feast. His mother fell into a rage, flung a handful of ashes in her son's face, struck him with a stick, called on the spirit of her dead husband, so that he too might be disgusted at the spectacle of his son's drunkenness, and collapsed fainting on the floor. Her daughter hurried to her assistance and Milarepa recovered from his drunkenness. "Then I too wept many tears. Weeping, we rubbed our mother's hands and called her. After a moment she opened her eyes and rose." It was only a moment's weakness on his mother's part. Her strength promptly returned. She devised a plan. Her son must become a wizard, and destroy his accursed relatives by spells.

So Milarepa departed in search of a master to teach him the magic arts. His mother sold another plot of land, and gave him a turquoise and a horse. "You must have an implacable will," she told him when she bade him farewell. "If you return without having shown

your magic power in the village, I, your old mother, will kill myself before your eyes." After much travelling Milarepa found a wizard, who was, however, unable to satisfy him, so he went in search of another. Eventually, after long months of devoted and exhausting study, he was initiated into the black arts. The great day arrived. In Milarepa's village his uncle invited a crowd of people to attend the celebration of his son's marriage. Milarepa's magic worked from afar, and the house collapsed. The letter that Milarepa's mother thereupon wrote him was rather like a war communiqué: "Thirty-five people were killed in the collapse of the house. The people here therefore hate me and your sister. Therefore make hail fall . . . then your old mother's last wishes will have been fulfilled."

Milarepa grew to manhood surrounded by implacable hate and excessive love; he knew poverty and riches, death, black magic, and revenge. Then he underwent the remarkable experience that has left an indelible mark upon so many exceptional characters, both in the East and in the West—the phenomenon of conversion, a total upheaval of the personality as a result of which the forces in the mind that were previously devoted to evil, or to success or glory on the earthly plane, are suddenly directed towards good, to glory on the eternal plane. "I felt my mind full of remorse for the evil I had done with magic and the hail," said Milarepa. "I was haunted by the doctrine (of the Buddha), and I even forgot to eat. If I moved I wanted to be still, if I was still I yearned to move. At night I could not sleep."

Milarepa turned his back on his previous life and set out to find a master, a guru, to guide him to mystic wisdom. After various vicissitudes, he met Marpa, the translator of Sanskrit texts. Just as the first part of his life had been dominated by his passionate and vengeful mother, so was the second part dominated by the far more memorable figure of Marpa, a doctor learned in esoteric knowledge, a pugilist, a violent, quarrelsome, proud, temperamental man, eternally dissatisfied because of the unattainability of perfection, given at times to drunkenness, unfairness, or cruelty, a kind of natural genius with the spirit of lightning and the splendour of a storm. Every now and then Marpa's wife appears in the narrative, a good,

kind, maternal woman, who tried to protect poor Milarepa from her apocalyptic husband's lightning and thunder, for Milarepa was subjected to the most pitiful ordeals in the course of his preparation for initiation. In one way Marpa's wife became a kind of mother to Milarepa, at any rate in the more sweet and consolatory implications of the word, because he never wavered in his frantic attachment to his real mother, his almost sexual love for her.

Marpa and Milarepa were bound by the relationship, so dear to the East, of master and pupil. Marpa was the guru, the guide, and Milarepa submitted to him body and soul, in thought and deed. Marpa, who had detected the great possibilities in Milarepa, tested his constancy of purpose by subjecting him to the most searching ordeals. He made him build houses, then ordered him to pull them down, erect towers and then destroy them while they were still incomplete. He deceived him, struck him, cursed him, sent him away, brought him back again, derided him, but sometimes changed his tone and praised him; though this too seemed to have been but mockery when he started persecuting him again. Finally, after many hardships, after Milarepa had twice run away from his hard master and twice returned, the time came for his initiation. Marpa gave his pupil a maxim to be kept always brightly burning in his heart: "Be ardent; fly the banner of perfection."

In the long run the continued association of two such strong and decisive characters as Marpa and Milarepa was bound to be impossible. After Milarepa's initiation into the Tantric mysteries he therefore left his master. Their farewell, as was natural in the case of a friendship in which there had been so much love, hate, and violence, was moving. At the moment of parting the two men felt all the strength of the bond that had kept them together. The pupil's veneration for his master was coloured with a new affection, the master's confidence in his pupil was warmed by new friendship.

The only thing that still bound Milarepa to the world was his desire to see his mother again. So he returned to his native place, but he found his house destroyed, and all that was left of his mother was her bones. His sister had gone away. Dzese, the fiancée of his dis-

tant childhood, had waited for him, but as a result of his conversion their lives had drifted so far apart that there could no longer be any question of marriage, so Milarepa left the village again, "with his mother's bones between his clothing and his breast," and composed a poem about the vanity of life.

Country, home, the paternal fields,
 Are things belonging to an unreal world.
 Who wants them may have them . . .
 I, a hermit, go in search of liberation.

Milarepa sought refuge in a cave in the mountains and devoted himself to the life of the ascetic with all the fire that had inspired his passionate and revengeful youth. Every day he took less food, until in the end he lived on nettles only. Months and years passed; his clothing wore out and was not replaced, so that he was partially naked; his unshorn hair grew wild and unkempt, his untended nails grew long, and his body was reduced to a bag of skin enclosing a skeleton; he was ugly, filthy, and looked like a ghost, "with green hair and skin" like weeds. He had abstracted himself from the world and lived in the realm of the absolute, but knew unspeakable intoxications of the mind.

After many years his sister succeeded in tracking him down. She climbed to his cave and was horrified at the state in which she found him. She tried to dissuade him from persisting in such an insane way of life and to persuade him to return among men. She offered him food and tried to clothe his body to protect him from the cold. Milarepa was moved, but his way of life was marked out. The words of Marpa, his guru, sounded perpetually in his ears. He answered his sister with a poem:

Oh sister, creature still so bound to the world. . . .
 This place really is a den fit for wild beasts;
 Anyone seeing it would be filled with indignation.
 My food is that of dogs and pigs;
 Anyone would be nauseated at the sight of it.
 My body is like a skeleton;
 The sight of it would make even a mortal enemy weep.

My conduct seems that of a madman;
And it makes my sister blush with shame.
But my spirit has attained illumination. . . .

Many more years of solitude and mortification of the flesh passed by, and Milarepa attained such a degree of domination over the bundle of nerves which his organism had become that he was able to produce warmth at will and to perform the miracle of levitation. "During the nights of my visions I was able freely and without any obstacle to explore the whole universe, from the abysses of the infernal regions to the most giddy heights. . . . My body was as if incandescent."

One day, when Milarepa emerged from his cave to repair to another and more remote retreat, he broke the vessel in which he cooked his nettles. "I consoled myself with the thought that everything made is by its very nature as ephemeral as that. Understanding that this too constituted an exhortation to meditate . . . I sang:

"A moment ago I had a jug, and now I have it no longer!
This negligible fact throws light
On the whole law of impermanence,
And shows us
What is the condition of man.
The jug, which was my only wealth,
At the moment when it broke
Became a lama
Preaching a marvellous sermon
On the inevitable impermanence of things."

While Milarepa was composing this poem some hunters arrived at his cave and were astonished at finding a human being in such a state.

"Whence comes the thinness of thy body, oh hermit, and this green colour?" they asked. They were full of pity for him, but Milarepa replied, "In your eyes I may appear excessively wretched. You are unaware that no one in the world is happier than I." He thereupon composed for the hunters "The Song of the Horse":

The horse that is my spirit flies like the wind . . .

Milarepa, always composing and singing and moving from cave to cave, eventually reached old age. Every word and action of his remained dramatic, even to the end. A famous scholar, who gave him hospitality during a journey, was offended at the slight worldly respect that the crazy old hermit paid him and gave him poison to drink. The dialogue between the scholar, who had read all the learned treatises and counted for something in the world, and the naked hermit, who owned no books, illustrates Milarepa's supreme contempt for all worldly forms and conventions:

I have the superiority of indifference,
 My audacity knows no obstacles.
 Diseases, evil spirits, sins, wretchedness
 Adorn the hermit who I am.

At last, surrounded by disciples, he abandoned "the cycle of trans-migrations," murmuring his last thoughts:

Do if you like that which may seem sinful
 But helps living beings,
 Because that is truly pious work.

The fortress captain's horrible possessions

It sometimes happens that one wakes up so late at night that it is already next morning. In such cases, if one is not too tired, it is best to get up. That is what happened to me this morning. It must have been about five o'clock. I thought that everyone was asleep, but as soon as I was out of the house I heard a monotonous sing-song of human voices. Not a living soul was to be seen, but in one room Khalil, Tucci's Kashmiri servant, was saying his Moslem prayers, and in the other Norbhu, the cook, was saying his Buddhist prayers. I, a so-called Christian, felt ashamed at being silent in the middle. Is there perhaps a collective way of talking to God in different tongues and languages? I do not know. . . . In the first red of sunrise the mountains were really divine.

At about ten o'clock, the doctor of Gyantse came to fetch me. He had promised to take me to a mountain where "there are

many strange herbs." First we called at his house, because he wanted to show me his stock of "medicines." These were in about one hundred and eighty little boxes, containing a most incongruous variety of objects; stones of various colours, crystals, hollow stones lined with crystals, seeds of unusual shape, dried roots, hair, bits of bone, small fossils. Medicinal qualities were attributed to anything out of the ordinary. The rarest exhibit was, if I understood correctly, an incrustation of dragon's blood, but to my disrespectful eyes it seemed to be an ordinary piece of sealing wax.

The mountain where the strange herbs are is Tse-shen, a hill shaped like a ship, which arises nearly in isolation, in the middle of the plain on which Gyantse stands. A big monastery "grows out of" one side of the hill. The "strange plants" grow on the north side, where there are nearly vertical red rocks and it is shady and damp. When we reached the red rocks and the am-chi showed me the "strange plants," I saw that they were timid little ferns. I picked them carefully for the botanical collection of the University of Florence.

Our respective searches caused us to separate. After a while I saw the am-chi in the distance, wandering alone on the slope against the sky; a passing cloud was just about to obscure him. I don't know why, but I was reminded of a Chinese poem:

The master has gone alone
To search for plants on the mountain
Hidden among the clouds.
Where? I do not know.

I climbed up to the top to find the am-chi. The cloud disappeared as suddenly as it came; it was just a freak of the changeable summer weather. The am-chi was lying on his back, enjoying the warmth of the sun. From the top of the hill there was a superb view of the whole of the Gyantse valley. So vast was the landscape that you had to make comparisons and calculations before being able to appreciate the immensity of its scale. The hugeness of the space before us was shown by the number of different "weathers" that were to be seen between us and the horizon. Where we were it was fine, but over

there it was cloudy, and in the distance there were about a dozen storms to choose from; there was one over there in the valley, another among those mountains, a third on the plateau in the direction of Lhasa; and each one of them was accompanied by a downpour of rain and a stupendous play of light and shade. Meanwhile the am-chi had discovered some more "strange herbs" which he was carefully gathering.

On the way back to Gyantse we saw several groups of tents pitched along the canal banks and little water courses of the plain. It was summer, the time of holidays, excursions, singing, drinking and feasting. The Tibetans enjoy summer just like children. Everywhere there were people undressing and plunging into the water; for a few days their brown bodies would actually be clean. Breasts, legs, shoulders shone in the sun; there was shouting, jokes and laughter; then they would drink, eat, sleep, and above all pass the time in an absolutely carefree manner. Hurry? What an idea! The secret of liberty is to live like a flower or a stone; sheltering from the rain in bad weather, enjoying the sun if it is fine, breathing in the fullness of the afternoon, the sweetness of evening, the mysteriousness of night, with equal joy and wisdom. Perhaps that is why you heard singing everywhere, fine music that faded away into space as if it were spontaneously generated; a tremulous variation of semitones ending in long-drawn-out notes, shouted into the wind, entrusted to the wind, dissolved by the wind.

Everyone knew the am-chi; they greeted him; they greeted us. We stopped for a while at a tent in which relatives of his were staying. They offered us chang and wanted us to stay with them for the rest of the day. It would have been delightful to have done so; nothing is more delightful than basking in the midst of nature, watching the fall of evening reflected in the slow changing of the light, breathing in the smell of the earth and the grass, listening to the wind singing in the branches. But we had to return to Gyantse. The dzong-pon was expecting me, and I could not fail him. Good-bye! Good-bye!

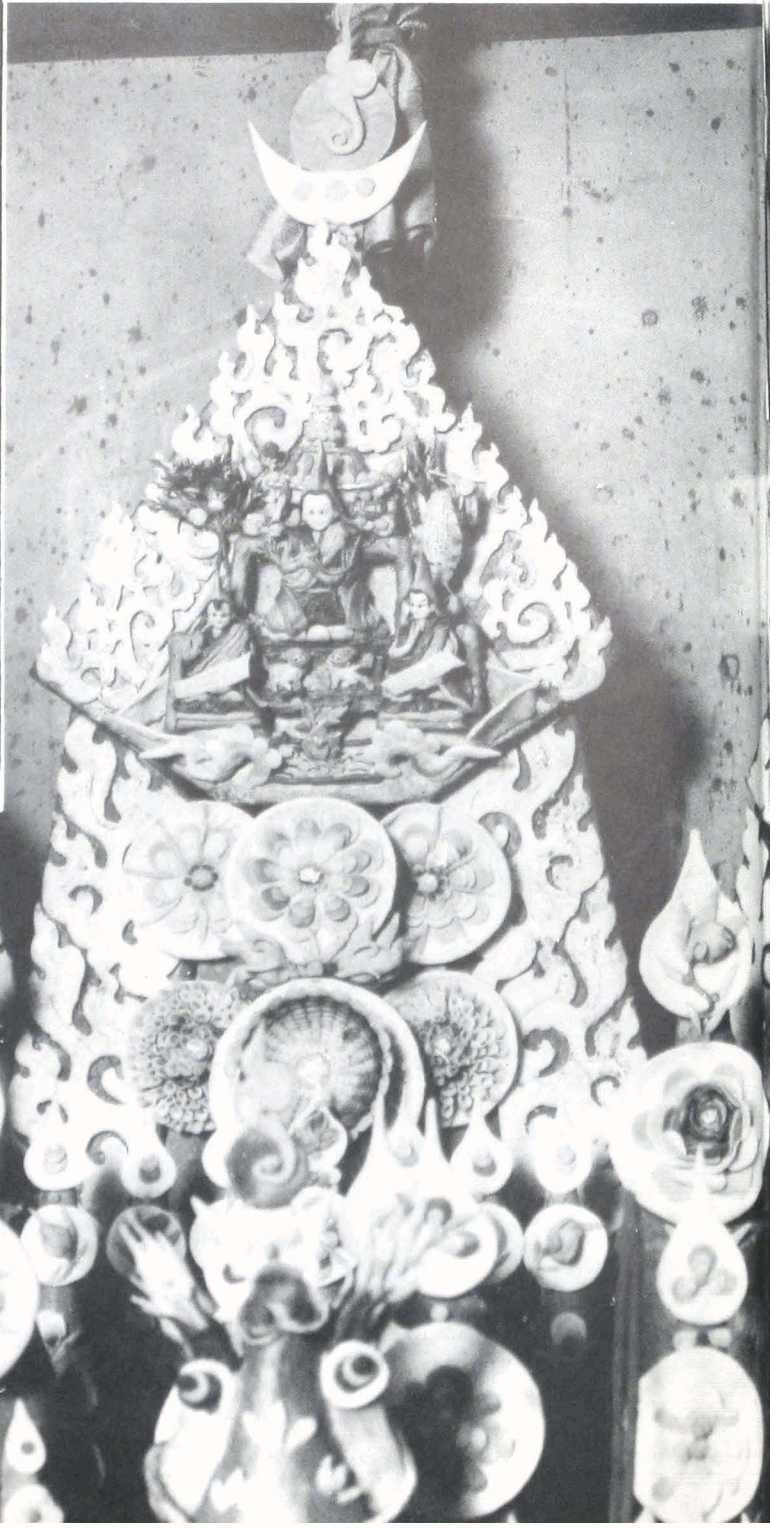
The house of the dzong-pon was a little way outside Gyantse, at the



49. The brightness of the stars and the fire of love (Painting, Gyantse)



50. (Left) Carved human bones.
(Below) Butter worked in subtle patterns

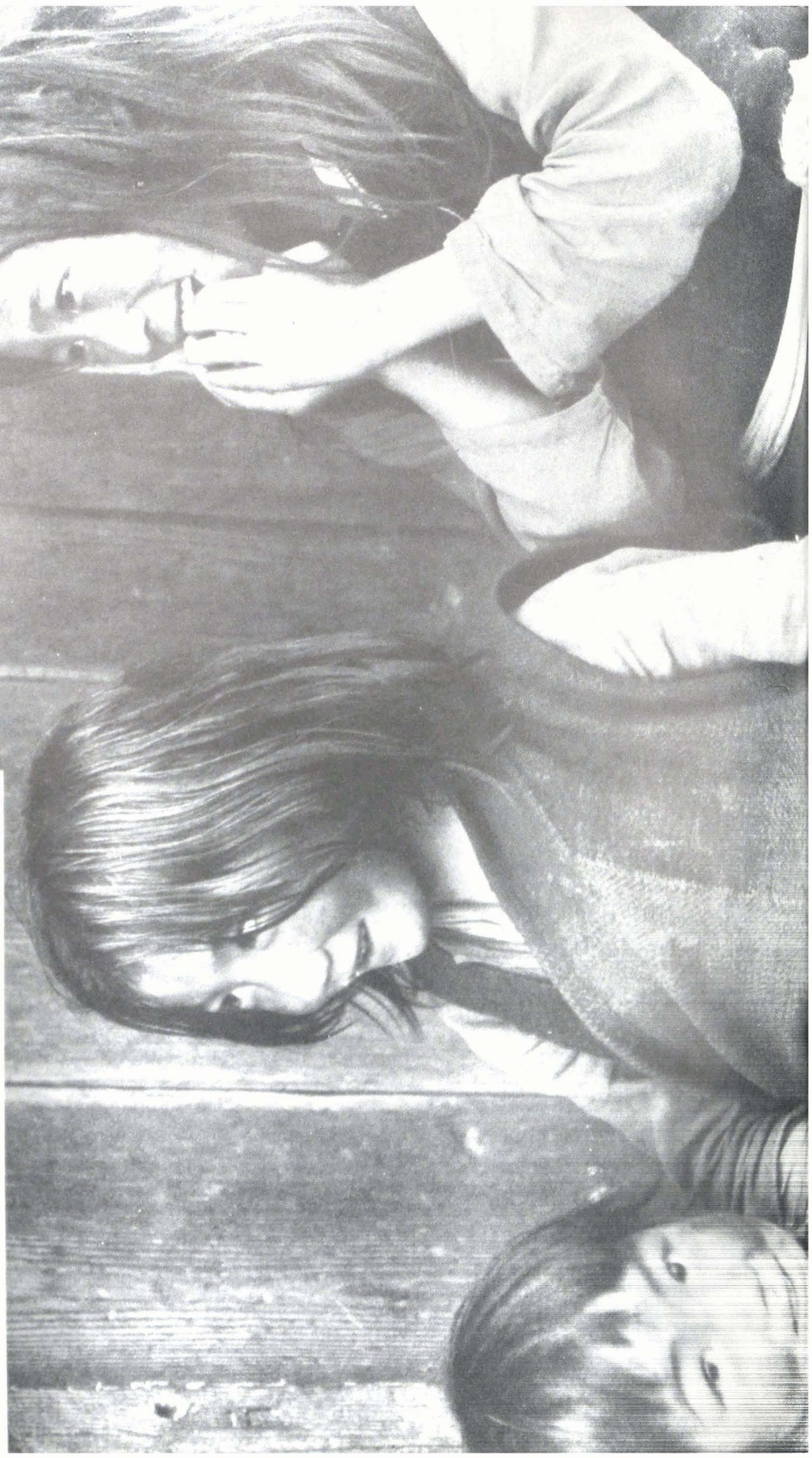


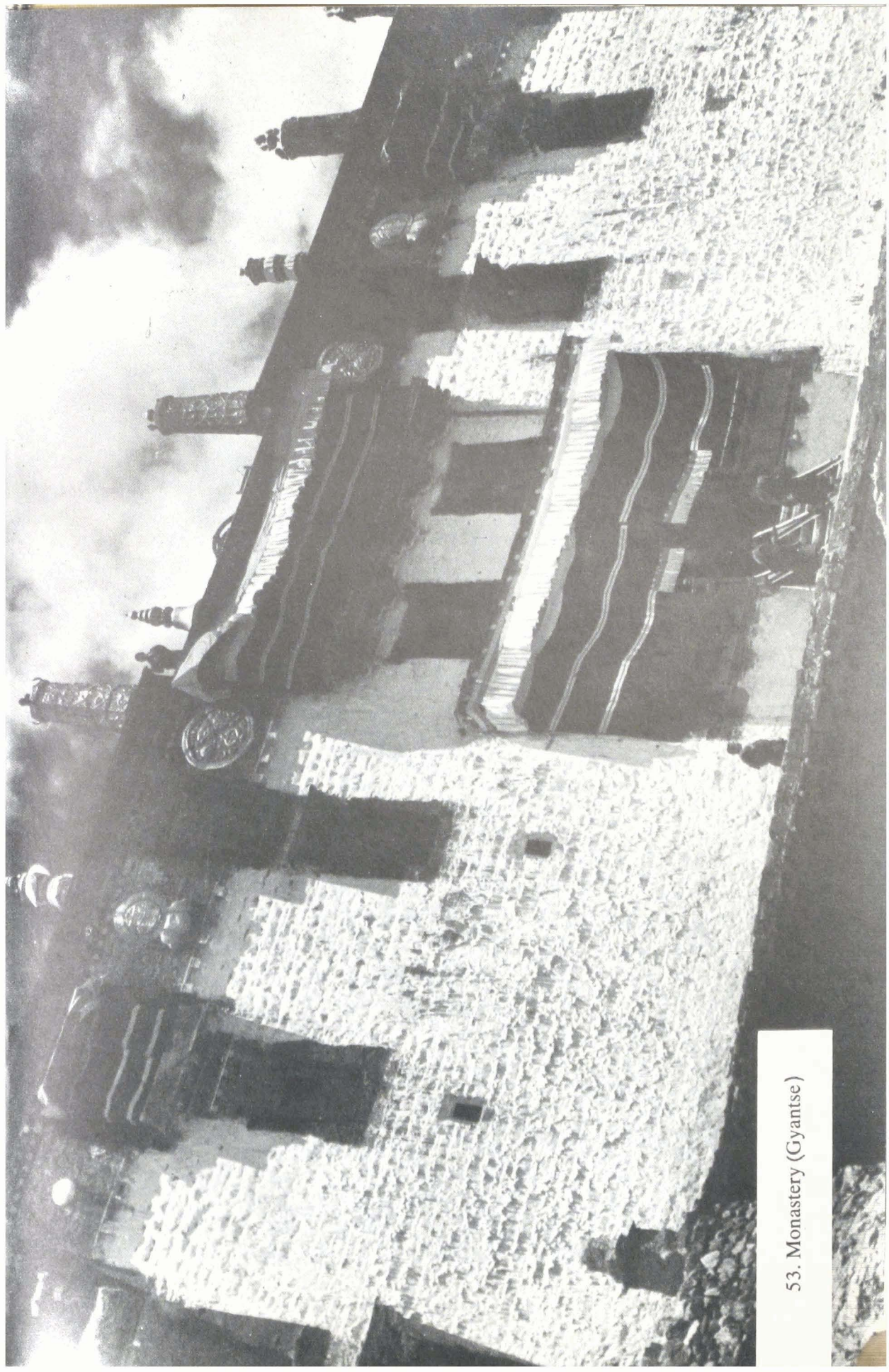


51. *Danse macabre*



52. Watching the caravan of the living Bodhisattva (Yatung)

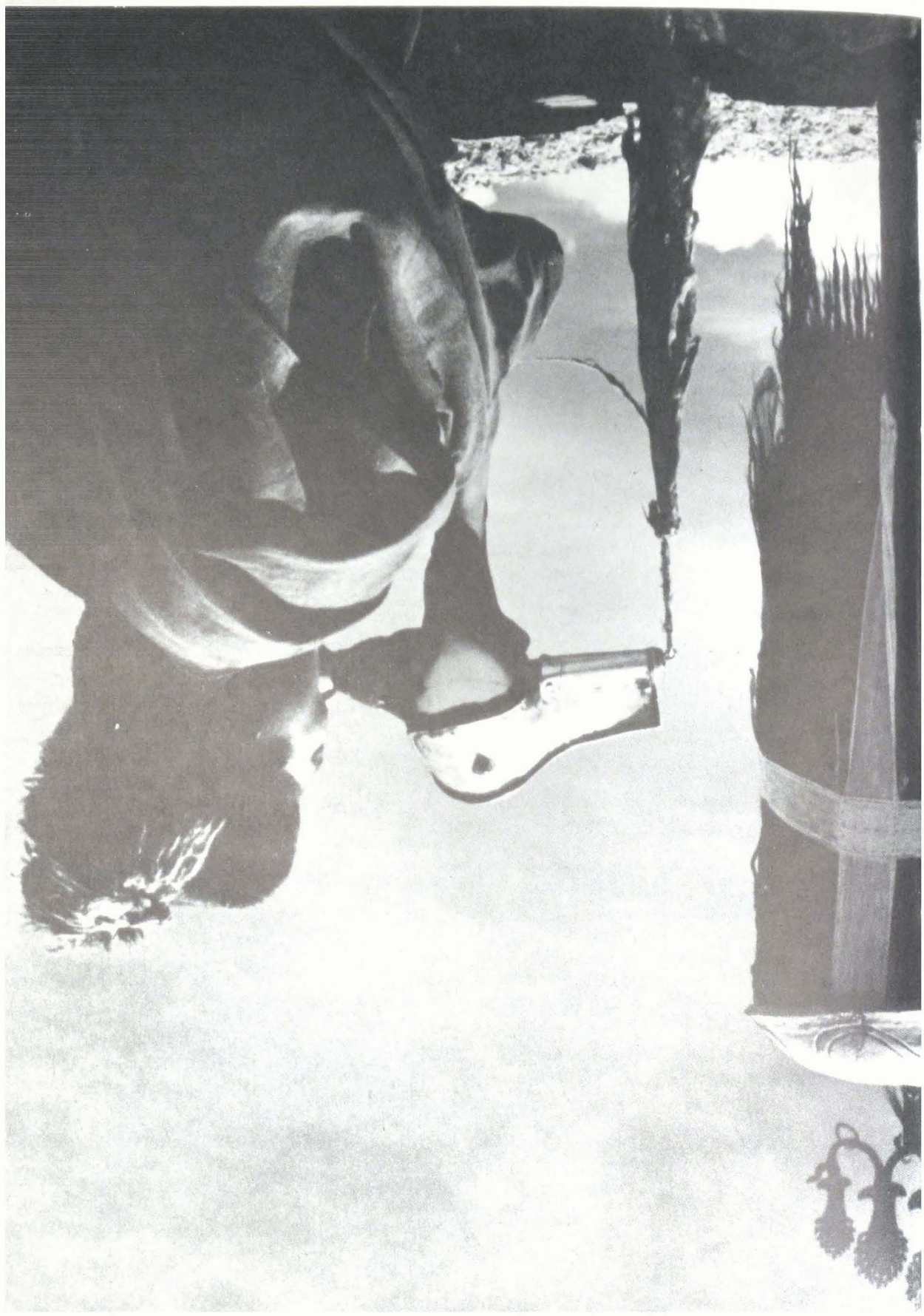




53. Monastery (Gyantse)

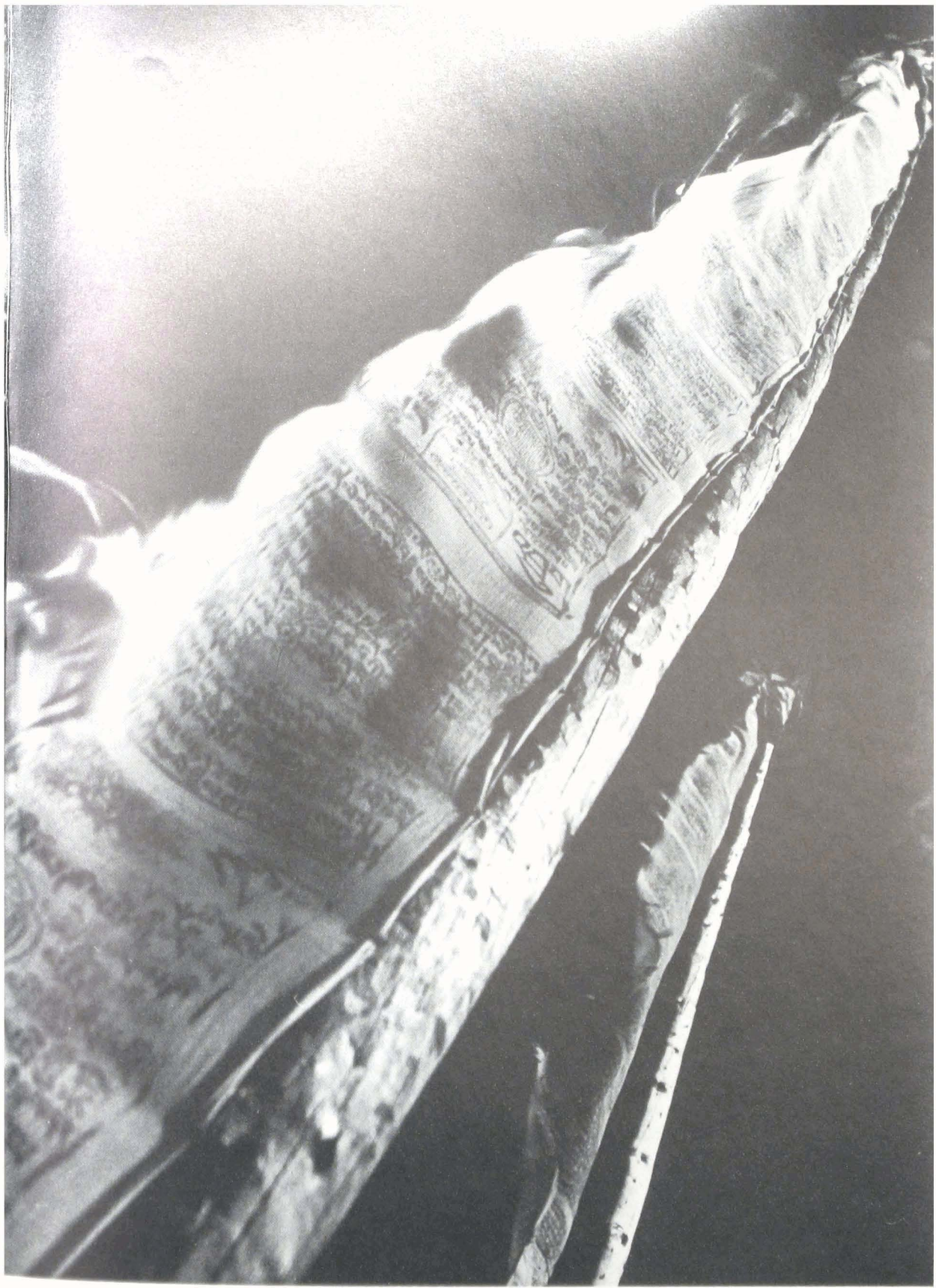


54. The voice of the trumpets fills the valleys

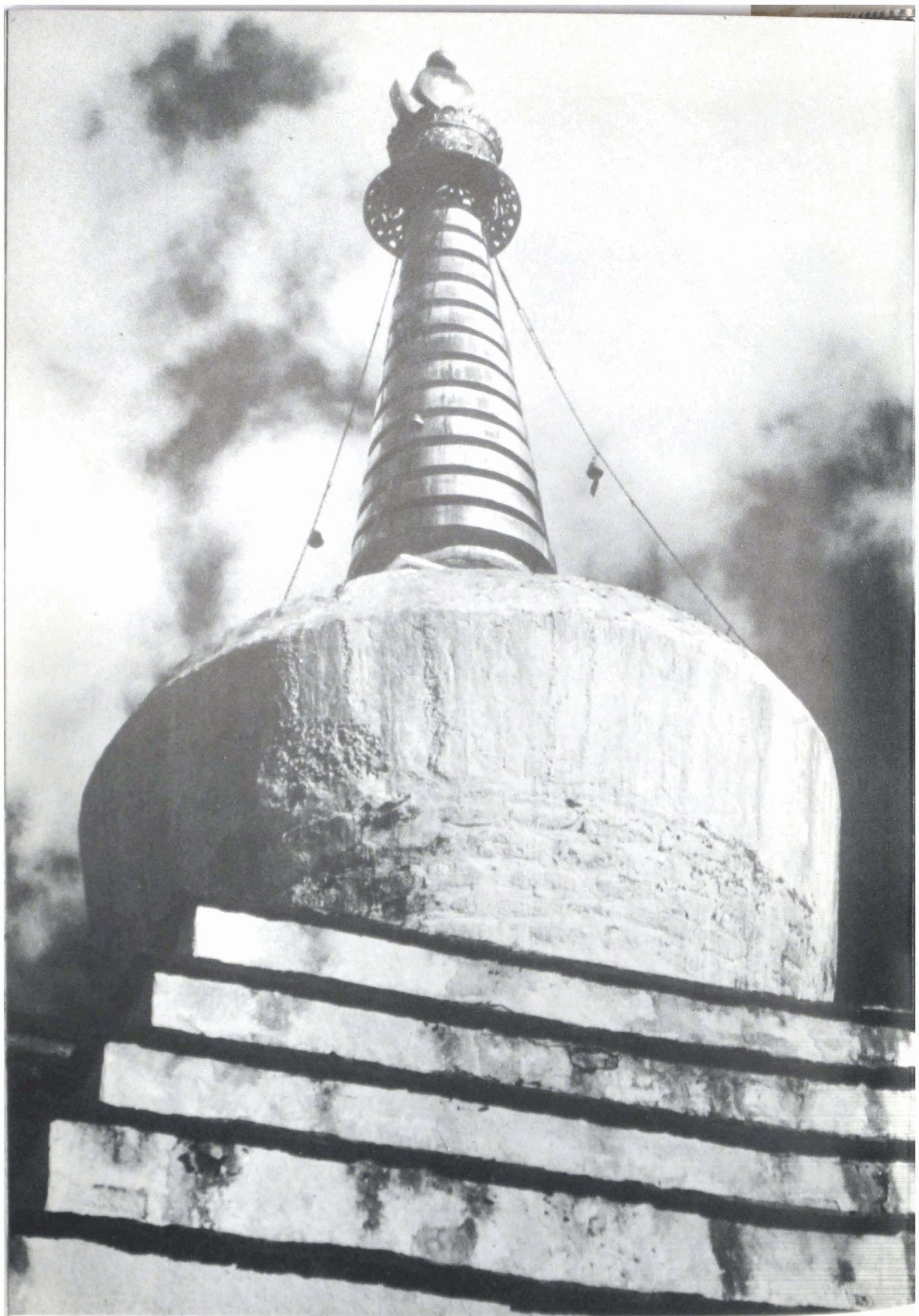




56. Reading the sacred books (Temple, Gyantse)



57. "Om mani padme hum!" ("Hail, oh jewel of the flower of the lotus!")
Tarchos with sacred inscriptions



58. A chorten: stone, symbolism, beauty



59. The need for the horrible



60. "The Wheel of Life"

foot of the rock on which the fortress stands. It is a solid structure of grey stone, the façade of which is covered with a multitude of gaily coloured blinds and awnings of bright material to protect the door and the windows from the excessive light of an altitude of 12,000 feet. Inside the door I saw the classic wall painting of good augury, the "Mongol holding a tiger on the leash," and I walked through a cheerful courtyard, among flowers growing in terra-cotta vases.

The dzong-pon was aged about thirty, and his wife twenty-five or twenty-six. Both were tall, slim, silent, and smiling. The dzong-pon looked more like a gentleman of the palace than a fortress captain, so fine were his manners and so elegant his appearance in his long, light blue chuba, with his plaited, jet black hair gathered at the top of his head in a shining, complicated knot, and the gold and turquoise earring hanging from his left ear. His wife might have walked straight out of one of the ancient diaries kept by ladies of the Japanese court.

Lady Koshosho, all noble and charming. She is like a weeping-willow at budding-time. Her style is very elegant, and we all envy her her manners. She is so shy and retiring that she seems to hide her heart even from herself. She is of childlike purity even to a painful degree—should there be a low-minded person who would treat her ill or slander her, her spirit would be overwhelmed and she would die. Such delicacy and helplessness make us anxious about her.⁵

The hospitality of this Tibetan couple was cordial and exquisite. As I sipped my tea I could not resist looking about me at my surroundings. The drawing-room-chapel in which we were sitting contained the most heterogeneous collection of objects. Apart from a number of Tibetan things (cups, teapots, pictures), which had been chosen with the most civilized taste, there were a number of the most revolting European or quasi-European objects; among other things there were a cheap vase with angels and cupids, for instance, a clock with a marble base and a bronze lion, and a china view of London. Immediately in front of me the striking beauty of a big

⁵ From the diary of Murasaki Shikibu, in *Diaries of Court Ladies of Old Japan*, translated by Annie Shepley Omori and Kochi Doi. New York: Houghton Mifflin; London: Constable, 1920.

Tibetan wall painting was hidden by some modern Chinese oleographs advertising I don't know what brand of cigarettes; one of them was a picture of a smiling, semi-nude blonde of unsurpassed vulgarity. The furniture, in so far as it was not Tibetan, was also a stab in the eye; the lacquered rush chairs, for instance, and a little table with a silk centre on which a sailing ship was embroidered in criminal colours.

The Tibetan things, however, showed a unity and refinement of taste. It was easy to see that each one of them had been carefully chosen from among many others as the best, the finest, the most elegant, the most likely to please the requirements of the most cultivated and civilized eye. But in the face of the things of European origin the most complete and unexpected blindness, a kind of mental paralysis, prevailed. The value which the dzong-pon and his wife attributed to the tasteless bric-à-brac was pathetic. They showed me each object as if it were a trophy or a treasure. For them these things were exotic, the products of the fascinating and mysterious West, which came, not from realms of pearl and ivory, jade and spices, but from the equally fabulous world of microscopes, aluminium, airplanes, and fountain pens. I detected a fleeting look of disappointment in the dzong-pon's eyes because I did not make as much fuss over these things as I should have done—because they did not make me feel "at home." (As a matter of fact there was an undercurrent of that kind of feeling too, but my dominant emotion was shame that Europe always shows its most trivial and rubbishy face to Asia.)

I have noticed the same phenomenon in India, Japan, and China, in fact everywhere. With us it exhibits itself the other way round, in our attitude to Oriental objects. The phenomenon is so constant and so widespread that it leads to broader conclusions, suggesting that there is no such thing as absolute standards of beauty, but that standards are valid only in the civilization within which they are established. Paul Valéry has said that beauty is the supreme degree of appearance. One might paraphrase the thought and say that beauty is the supreme degree of the ways in which a civilization manifests itself, the culmination and fruit of centuries, the quintessence into

which myriads of individual joys and griefs are distilled, the spring at which saps and juices come to the surface after thousands of years of underground wanderings.

The beautiful is that which is declared to be such by the most competent judges in every epoch and every civilization. Who are the most competent judges? The most civilized, those who take the fullest part in the invisible life of the great spiritual organism which nourishes them. But even these, if they venture outside the borders of their own civilization, are at first no better than fumbling, groping in the dark. Time, patience, humility, and good will are needed before the beautiful can be distinguished from the ugly in new surroundings which have not yet become familiar. It is only thus that one can explain the fact that persons of alert and educated taste in their own civilization turn out to be barbarians in another.

Leopardi in the heart of Asia

Imagine two men alone in the heart of Asia. When they have finished painfully masticating their tough chicken and badly boiled potatoes and have drunk their Indian tea, which tastes like dish-water, what do they talk about? What do they do until it is time to go to bed? On some evenings we were too tired to do anything but fling ourselves on our camp beds and close our eyes. On others Tucci was in form, and then the evening was an experience not easy to forget. Sometimes the altitude seemed to stimulate him, almost as if it were a drink, and his conversation bristled with brilliant ideas, unpredictable associations of ideas, bold paradoxes, subtle distinctions, huge generalizations that excavated and reconstructed fantastic cities, while Asia, the whole age-long history of Asia, unfolded itself before our eyes, with its endless succession of empires that rose and fell and religions that grew and decayed, its huge migrations, the development of the languages of its artists and poets. Tucci's conversation admitted one to realms of thought really worthy of the boundless plateaux of Tibet.

We also had moments of homesickness. We remembered excur-

sions into the Abruzzi mountains or little villages in Tuscany, persons dear to us or our favourite Italian poets. One evening I came across a little Leopardi which had gone astray and found its way to the bottom of a trunk. Tucci snatched it from me, as a man dying of thirst might snatch a bottle, and started reading the *Canto Notturmo* aloud, with the worn little volume resting among the pages of an ancient Buddhist treatise. When he had finished reading we both had tears in our eyes. We went outside—"to see the moonlight." Each of us was ashamed in front of the other.



ACROSS THE HIMALAYAS; RETURN TO THE WEST

The Tang-kar valley: Noble Faith's disapproval

THE vicissitudes of the expedition have resulted in my being left alone. Nothing remains for me but to go home.

I set out from Yatung early this morning with a few porters. We left the big valley which the caravan route climbs in the direction of Lhasa and made for places in which few white men have ever set foot. The path was narrow; it mounted, descended again, and crossed patches of marshland in the forest; we had to surmount huge tree-trunks struck down by storms. The path followed a stream and clambered up the side of the valley to avoid overhanging rocks. It was typical of all the paths in this part of the Himalayas. There were good, recently constructed bridges made of big deal beams squared with the adze. The timber still had a perfume.

The weather, which had been fine in the morning, deteriorated. The valley grew dark. The mountaintops were hidden in mist, which crept down among the fir trees growing tall and steep over the mountainsides. Soon it began to rain. We stopped at an abandoned hut. The men lit a fire to dry themselves and boil some water, and the torment of smoke in one's eyes began. Outside it grew darker and darker. The night gradually closed in around us, quietly and sadly, with mist and drizzle.

I have five porters with me. The oldest is Tam-chö (Noble Faith). He is fifty-three years old, small, but still strong. He is much more civilized than the others. He greets me with respect, bows and smiles. The others all call him *apha*, "dad," and I do the same. He wears his hair long, in plaits wound round his head. He dresses completely in the Tibetan style. He wears rag slippers with leather soles (*lham*),

a woollen robe (*chuba*), and a white cotton shirt; on his left ear he wears a big, round earring (*along*); and at his waist he carries a dagger (*tri*). Signs of his religion are not wanting. On his wrist he has a rosary (*threng-wa*), a cloth amulet hangs from his neck, and at his waist he carries a box for amulets (*kau*), containing a sacred statue.

The next in order of age is Si-thar, who is about thirty. He is tall, strong, with rather good features, wears his hair long, and can read and write, having spent some time in a monastery. His clothes are almost completely Tibetan, but foreign infiltration has left its mark; he wears a pair of American army boots. The others are Ten-zin, aged twenty-seven; Tsi-rin, aged twenty-four; and Dorje (Tam-chö's son), who is eighteen. Ten-zin still has long hair, but the others wear it short, in conformity with modern usage. It is interesting to note that the traditional clothing (which in Tam-chö's case is still complete) suffers its first contamination in Si-thar (American boots), and a considerably greater one in Ten-zin (American boots, GI sweater and patches). In the younger ones it is displaced entirely; they wear a horrible collection of Indian-Gurkhan-American leftovers. But all of them wear amulets; a sign that it is easier to change fashions than faith, and that styles of clothing are more fluid than cosmologies.

After dinner Si-thar, who is the minstrel of the company, produced a bottle of arak, and we drank. We also sang. Then we started gossiping about the people of Yatung. The time passed slowly. There were great guffaws when the names of certain girls were mentioned. Mema? She was easy, but ugly. Drolmá? Pretty, but affected; she seemed to think she was the only pebble on the beach. I discovered that the Tibetan ideal of female beauty was still "a face as round as the moon." The models of their ancient literature were unconsciously respected by beings who were outwardly as hybrid, as lost to any sense of civilization, as Tsi-rin and Dorje.

Tam-chö sat in a corner repeating "*Om mani padme hum.*" He scorned our irreverent chatter.

In the nomads' tent

This morning I left the hut early. The sky was still white, and mist hung motionless over the bottom of the valley, but overhead you could see that the weather was going to be fine. Soon the sun's first rays shone on the rocks on the other side of the stream. The forest was bejewelled; glittering pearls of dew clung to the lichens and the spiders' webs. I went on ahead by myself. Tam-chö shouted after me to beware of the bears.

The bottom of the valley suddenly became completely flat. I crossed some marshlike country among enormous trees. I had to take off my boots to wade through lakes of freezing water. It is strange that forests on the flat seem much more mysterious than those on a slope.

When the sun began to shine I stopped near the stream and waited for the others. Running water reminds one strangely of human life. It first emerges so thin and small and devoid of strength. In its infancy it runs sparkling through meadows, among flowers and shining stones. Then the waters gain in weight and vigour and rush downhill; their youth is bold and happy, a time of singing and dancing in the sun, celebrating noisy marriages with tributaries, forming crazy little waterfalls and exultant little lakes. All is joy and high spirits. But gradually the slope diminishes, and the stream grows and becomes a river; youth turns into manhood. Its course is now more regular; it no longer runs crazily but has become sensible and strong. It is less beautiful but has become useful to agriculture and industry. What makes it attractive now is its calm, serene maturity. Enthusiasm, love, passion, beauty, have given way to quiet, useful purposefulness. At last it imperceptibly approaches the estuary; the lagoonlike expanses, the sadness and sweetness of old age. Then it once more mixes with the original waters.

A forest also reminds one of so many things; a nation, for example. But not just for the simple reason that it is a crowd of plants; there is

something deeper and more significant about it. The trees that shine in the sun or whisper in the wind or seem absorbed and thoughtful in the sadness of the mist are the image of that part of a nation that lives visibly in the daylight. But every forest is double. There is the forest that we see, and the invisible forest, that of the roots; a forest of crowded trunks and branches that no wind ever moves, on which no sun ever shines, that never knows the splendour of the snow, the singing of birds, the cries of woodmen, or the voices of children; a buried, motionless, slow-growing, mysterious forest, winding its way between the stones like myriads of snakes. It is this forest which is the primary one; the other forest draws its sap, its life, from the roots. It is the same with a nation. Underneath it, concealed from sight, there is a powerful, obscure, terrible, inverted forest of primordial impulses, traditions stronger than reason, fixed tendencies that never rise up to consciousness but condition acts, unleash wars, lead to atrocities, or alternatively to self-sacrifice and heroism.

“Kushog-sahib! This way! This way!” Tam-chö and the others called out. I rose and followed. We continued our way among huge fir trees. Two hours later the trees had grown smaller, and after three hours we emerged into the open. We were at about 12,000 feet. Before us now was only the bare, high mountain. We stopped to eat and boil water for tea, without which Tibetans do not seem able to live. “But, kushog-sahib, here there’s no wood to boil water,” is a remark sufficient to disqualify as a camping site any place whatever, no matter what other advantages it may have to offer. Tea, incidentally, is also a primary necessity in Japan. During the war, when the civil population was subjected to almost insuperable privations, we often heard the statement: “*Cha-mo-nai!* (There’s not even any more tea!)” which was practically equivalent to announcing the end of the world.

The weather grew bad, as it always seems to do after a certain hour in the afternoon. Clouds closed over the mountains, and it started to drizzle. At about four o’clock we saw in the distance the tents of the nomads of Tang-kar-shimo. As soon as we approached a number of ferocious watch dogs started baying and barking. A woman ap-

peared at the entrance of the camp and then came to meet us. She was Si-thar's sister, the wife of one Dondruk-dorje, part-owner of the herd, so we were welcomed in the tent like relatives.

The porters put down their loads, we took off our wet coats, and squatted on the wild-sheep skins which were spread around the fire burning in a hollow squared out in the centre of the tent. Outside it was raining, and inside the crowded tent it was extremely pleasant. An agreeable, hospitable, more than merely physical warmth seemed to prevail. Our host, Dondruk-dorje, certainly understood hospitality rather in his own way. He had two intelligent eyes, but an impudent face. He was one of those people who find it amusing to tease strangers with jokes and awkward questions which they cannot understand, making everybody laugh with embarrassment. However, we were cheerful, though it was at my expense. The Tibetans are, after all, a fairly wild mountaineering people, capable of great generosity and of great ferocity at five-minute intervals, always ready for a joke, open and frank, but rather given to leg-pulling; sometimes quick with their fists, rarely cruel; emotional, hospitable, superstitious, fond of drink, women, travelling, and splendour.

Fortunately Kandron, Si-thar's sister and our hostess, protected me. She was a huge mare of a woman, handsome in a rather barbaric way. Whenever her husband made everybody laugh by a particularly outrageous remark, she apologized, or made a grimace, or bent her head to one side, as if to say, "Don't take any notice," and offered me milk. It was wonderful *dri* milk (the *dri* is the female of the yak), creamy, smelling of alpine flowers, seemingly the distilled essence of sun, snow, and petals.

Si-thar and the others handed round stinking cigarettes and talked. Dondruk-dorje started making butter, a long and wearisome process. First Kandron poured about fifty pints of milk from a number of earthenware pots into a big cow-skin bag and her husband started the long and hard work of shaking it. Dondruk-dorje, sitting on the ground, beat the skin, rolled it, dragged it this way and that. He went on doing this for about an hour and a half. Then he opened the bag and took out a huge lump of butter. Meanwhile Kandron boiled

the skimmed milk with yogurt to make cheese. This was a long and wearisome process too. She went on lifting huge saucepans, carrying sacks, moving shapes, filling pails, hour after hour.

The weather improved, and milking time came. Dondruk-dorje and Kandron both left the tent. The man went up onto the mountain-side to collect the yaks and dris. I watched his tiny figure in the distance and heard his shouts in the great silence. Above him rose huge towers of rock, and pinnacles of ice, pink in the sunset, outlined the sky. Silence and flowers; larks and flowers; bells and flowers. When the yaks were near enough Kandron guided them towards the tent by throwing stones with a sling. She picked up a stone, placed it between the strings, bent backwards, and with her strong legs planted on the ground swivelled her chest and shoulders from the waist and sent her projectile whistling through the air to land exactly where she wanted it, quite near the yak, on the side where she wanted to frighten it, to persuade it to come home.

When it got dark and the milking was finished, we had supper. The meal was a long and glorious succession of milk dishes: yogurt, whey, rivers of milk, fresh cheese, dry cheese, milk so wonderful that one could almost get drunk on it. As we sat round the fire in the middle of the tent, a kind of beatific torpor eventually came over us, and we could have sworn that bliss had quietly descended upon the earth. Dondruk-dorje and the others went on talking. I gathered scraps of the conversation. The life of the valley passed before my eyes—why Ishe's son wouldn't work, why Ten-zin had sold his calves so early, why the price of butter had not gone up as it should have. It is delightful when you start feeling you're beginning to know everyone in a remote place, and you start feeling almost at home.

There were too many people in Dondruk-dorje's tent, and it was impossible to go to sleep. Besides, who knows how late they would go on talking? Another nomad, who had a tent not far away and shared it with a youth who worked for him, offered me hospitality. I accepted and went with him. Outside it was raining and cold. The darkness seemed solid. In the new tent we lit a big fire and drank tea, and Ri-tar, my new host, talked to me about his yaks. The link

between a Tibetan and his yaks is as strong as that between an Arab and his camels. The yak and the dri are the alpha and omega of a nomad's life in Central Asia. The hair is spun and woven into the coarse cloth of which tents are made, and the milk and cheese products not only serve for daily nourishment but produce wealth.

"I send the boy down to Yatung once a week with about forty pounds of butter," Ri-tar told me. "This year the price is low."

When a yak dies, the meat is eaten. What is left is either dried in the sun or salted. The horns are used to make utensils, and gum is made from the hoofs. The yak and the dri are also used for transport. Every now and then I heard the ringing of bells; this was the yaks and dris moving about; they were tied to a long rope stretched along the ground. Every time the bells rang Ri-tar raised his head and listened. He could tell from the sound whether the animals' movements were normal, or whether something was wrong.

The fire died down and the silences grew longer. The great silence of the world outside penetrated into our tent, and descended into the mind with a feeling of unspeakable peace and serenity. Only the wind occasionally murmured something.

The Tang-kar pass: Anthony Trollope in the Himalayas

This morning we rose early.

How the world changes as soon as the first light of dawn strikes the eyes! The night seems like a memory of a distant and different country; it is like a transition, not from little light to much light, but from one world to another world, with different laws and a different soul. Who knows the night who has not really slept with it? That involves sleeping out, where the night holds undisputed sway. In a house, even with the windows open, the night enters shyly, is humanized, and tends to become a uniform texture of darkness. Really to know the night you have to sleep in a tent, or bivouac. Then you really hear its breath and know its secrets, its changes of mood, its humours and its loves.

When I went outside the tent this morning I stepped into a new

world; a world so fresh and pure that it might have been created only half an hour before. The sharpness of the outlines was almost painful. Up above, the sun had already started firing the ice with splendour—a colour between pink and blue—but the walls of rock in the shadow were still wallowing in night. I felt like singing a paean of victory for all that is great and noble and pure and worthy of dedication and sacrifice in human life. Instead I solemnly drank the milk that Ri-tar offered me, removed with my finger the cream that remained on the edge of the cup and swallowed it.

I should have liked to have gone on looking at the mountains, and to have watched the yellow tongues of sunlight creeping down and setting the channels of ice alight, but Ri-tar would not permit it. He took me by the arm and insisted on my joining him to inspect his yaks and his dris one by one. This one was strong, the strongest of them all; that one produced enough milk to flood a valley; this one was small, but would become very powerful; that one was born in the year when they crowned the Great Protector (the Dalai Lama). The nomad's love of his beasts, the pride he felt for all their qualities, the care he lavished on them, were touching.

After another meal of milk and cheese, we went back to Dondruk-dorje's tent, where the porters were, and soon afterwards we left. Good-bye, Ri-tar! Good-bye, Kandron and Dondruk-dorje! Good-bye, happy nomads, companions of a day in the remote fastnesses of the Himalayas! How beautiful and serene is your life remote from the wicked toils of the world! You will always remain alive in the mind and heart of the traveller who spent such a short time with you; Ri-tar, who showed me his finest yaks with such pride, Sönam, who lit the fire at dawn, Kandron, who slung stones to guide the dri, and you, Dondruk-dorje, who made a final crack at my expense as we departed. Everybody laughed. What had he said? Something indecent. . . .

From the plain where the nomads were living we slowly climbed an interminable valley with ancient moraines here and there. We started feeling the height and had to rest every now and then. The

sky was a solid blue. It seemed to be resting on the mountaintops like a solid, metallic roof. Then clouds suddenly appeared from nowhere. First they were young, light clouds, then they became heavier, darker, and full of menace. I reached the top of the pass ahead of the porters, just in time to see the opposite side. Soon afterwards the mists closed down and it started to rain. The men arrived two hours later—they had stopped for one of their dozen daily teas. We put up the tent and prepared for the night.

We had a meal and slept for a while. A storm, with fine snow and a gale of wind, howled round us for two hours. When we finally awoke it had died down. I went outside. The sun was setting and the sky had cleared; not completely, because angry clouds still hung ominously above, but sufficiently to allow us to catch glimpses of the crests of the mountains about us. It was a grim, wild place, with jagged rocks, thin green sheets of ice, towering peaks that seemed to be poised precariously; a whole geology in a state of becoming; the bare bones of the world exposed to the fury of the elements; ruins and abysses filled with slag; and overhead the moon.

Eventually I went back into the tent while Si-thar made tea. Later on I read for a time. Dante? Milarepa? The *Bhagavad-gita*? No, that would have been practically impossible. When you are living, breathing, touching, treading, digesting the sublime, it is sweet and consoling to take refuge from the sublime. You need a return to normality as a rest from it. On this occasion my defence against the sublime was a novel by Anthony Trollope. I had picked it up at Yatung, where it had been left by some passing traveller; a solid English novel, as innocent and well-disposed as a maiden aunt—two hundred pages to the first shy kiss and another hundred to the marriage and the end. There is also much talk of parishes, benefices, violets, and country walks. How delightful such things are at a height of 15,000 feet in the Himalayas!

Outside was the boundless silence of Asia and gigantic pinnacles of ice and rock towering up to hide the stars, and inside the tent there was this precious corner of provincial Europe.

Lachung: the witches of Jampel

The descent from the top of the Tang-kar pass seemed interminable. Down and down we went, as if descending into the entrails of the earth. First there was ice, then snow and moraines, which were ever more ancient and corroded by the elements. Then we came to huge torrents, meadows, the first thickets of rhododendrons, the first trees. Then down we went through fir woods, and came to the first signs of tropical vegetation, among mist and rain the whole time, and with leeches that attacked our ankles. We descended from 16,500 to 7,500 feet and at last reached Lachung. We were exhausted, and slept like logs.

Lachung is the only important village in this part of Sikkim. Its most notable possessions are undoubtedly some of the wall paintings in the little local monastery. They are recent, the work of a painter whose name, as I found out after a good deal of inquiry, was Jampel Thrashi, and who died about 1940. The dancing witches of the Great Vision of the Dead (*shi-trö*) have not only phenomenal physical exuberance, all the wild and pulsating motion of the dance, but will, personality, distinct attitudes towards the onlooker. Each is endowed with a soul of her own, accursed or mocking, ferocious or sensual, cruel or comic.

As I looked at them I seemed to hear Lama Ngawang of Kirimtse by my side, saying, "Oé! Look at them well! You'll see them one day too! But remember that they are only apparitions, illusions, nothing, and you will be saved!"

Gangtok: welcome by Scarlatti

From Lachung we went down to Tsungtang, half a day's march down a grandiose valley, with enormous waterfalls on either side and forests clinging to the vertical walls of rock. We saw lilies and the first butterflies, and heard the first crickets. We went through the last Bhutia (Tibetan) villages, with apple orchards and thatched

cottages. The girls here are beautiful, tall, slim, healthy, as succulent as ripe peaches. Then we gradually dropped down into territory inhabited by Lepchas, shy, furtive people who practically never appear on the mule track. They hide among the trees or in the undergrowth, and then cross it cautiously, like suspicious, fugitive animals.

From Tsungtang to Sing-hik was another day's march, through forest that was now becoming tropical. We left Sing-hik this morning, and this evening reached Gangtok—a march along nearly twenty-five miles of mule track, starting with a drop of 3,000 feet, followed by a climb of nearly 5,000 feet. It was a killing day in the rain and the accursed, damp heat of the forest. Darkness came down on us while we were still on the way, but when we got to Gangtok how light it was! Of course, electric light, I had nearly forgotten!

It was thus in a way a real return to the West, a resumption of contact with "normal" life, a re-emergence from the middle ages into the age of matches, gasoline, coal, and copper wire. Fortunately the civilization to which I belong did not, as it generally does at its periphery, present itself only under its petty, material aspects. When I reached the bungalow I found a letter from Pemá Chöki waiting for me, with a basket of fruit; and a gramophone, with several records of good music. What a delight! Who else would have thought of such a charming welcome? While I rested I listened to Brahms, Mozart, Scarlatti. It was like bathing in a fresh, clear river after a long period of sweat and fatigue. Nothing could have been more restful and enchanting. Never have I had such a lively sense of homecoming, not just to what is by chance my native country of Italy, but to my true, my greater home, Europe.

Perhaps in the future there will be learned and heated disputes about whether the arts of the East are superior to those of the West or not. Viewing them as a whole, one must acknowledge that in the sculpture and painting of the East there is a spiritual quality far more subtle and exalted than there is in the corresponding arts of the West, preoccupied as we have always been with the myth of "truth." But there is one art which is a supreme exception, and that is music. In music the vicissitudes and struggles of the human soul are en-

trusted to an abstract, almost mathematical language, which is nevertheless capable of expressing them as nothing else can. About music there is no doubt; it is the European art *par excellence*, and in it the spirit of a whole civilization reaches its giddiest heights. The whole torment, passion, heart of Europe are contained in it, as well as the heroic intellect, the proud spirit of analysis on which Europe erects invisible palaces to the sky.

Chartres, Cologne, the Parthenon, Pisa, can be countered with Horiuji, Agra, Peking, Angkor Vat. The Ludovisi Throne, the Ara Pacis, Jacopo della Quercia, can be answered with the Buddha of Sarnath, the Maitreya of Koryu-ji, or the bas-reliefs of Borobodur. Pompeii, the Sistine Chapel, and Botticelli can be answered with Ajanta, the works of Kukaichi or Sesshu. But music towers alone, a splendid and unequalled flower of the civilization to which we belong; an invisible flower, entrusted for its perception to the most analytical, the most solitary, and most noble of man's faculties. Nothing in any other part of the world has ever been created corresponding with the invisible cathedrals of Mozart, Vivaldi, Beethoven.

When I read Dante or Blake, when I am moved by Piero della Francesca or Masaccio, I am certainly proud to be a European. But, when I listen to Palestrina or Bach, there is added to my pride a sense of wonder; the knowledge that no other civilization has ever reached such heights or bestowed such a gift for all future ages and men, and that, even if Europe went down in some frightful cataclysm, music would still remain to proclaim its greatness.

Tashi-babu; antiquities and revolutions

I spent today paying calls and seeing people. After weeks of solitude company is pleasurable. This morning I went to see the Political Officer, who was just about to leave for a brief business visit to Calcutta. I went to see him, not because he is the Political Officer, but because I like him.

"My dear fellow," he said, as we walked down to the village, "these are difficult times for us all. Now they are dismantling the

British Empire, and I shall have to look for a job. What can one do when one is nearly half a century old and has spent the best years of one's life among official documents? I know several Indian languages, and I know Tibetan, but is that any use? Do you think you could find me a job teaching English in Italy, for instance? Just look at what we are reduced to, after being lords of half the earth! Apart from that, I feel old already. You see, India is a great lady, but she sucks the life out of you; you're finished before you notice it. However, that's how it is. You come into the world, you have to dance according to the music, and then the time comes for you to go. That applies to empires and to individuals."

Nearly thirty years in the East had given the Political Officer a vast, calm, and humble vision of things, the kind of vision that a Chinese sage might have. He laughed, stopped and relit his cigar, replied to the greeting of some passing peasants, and went on, "Work? I've no more desire to work, and that's the truth. Not because it's troublesome—actually I like it—but because now it all seems so relative and useless. My real inclination would be to retire, in the Eastern sense of the word. Do you know what I mean?"

"I think so."

"The West has, among other things, an obsession for youth. Even Christ died young, at the age of thirty-three; but the sages of Asia—the Buddha, Confucius, Lao-tse—all reached a ripe old age before abandoning the scene. In the West the old are barely tolerated. They try to imitate the young—'life begins at forty,' and so on. Only Orientals understand the art of living. Every age has its own ideals, myths, and ceremonies. I'm not old in years, but India has aged me in spirit. Do you know what the infallible sign of old age is?"

"No . . . Or is it the feeling that after all nothing really matters?"

"That's it. When you start being convinced that there are very few things that really matter, you are ready to join the sages. But with us retreating to meditate under a tree doesn't make sense. People would just say it was madness or cowardice. With us the only recluses are comic figures—misanthropists or people who regard the world with contempt. But in Asia to retire from life and spend one's last

years writing poems or composing religious hymns or visiting sanctuaries or the tombs of ancient courtesans is a recognized custom. Yes, I should like to spend the rest of my days away from the tumult of life, but not away from the perfume of life. Do you understand?"

Talking thus, we reached the village. The mail for Siliguri was not due to leave for another half an hour, so we called at the shop where Tashi-babu sold "Antiquities and Objects from Tibet." Tashi-babu is a Tibetan. He is a man of about fifty, sturdy and strong, and looks like a man of action. His hair is cropped, though he is not a lama. On the contrary, he is the only Communist in this part of the world. He heads parades and demonstrations against the maharajah, and reads the left-wing Calcutta newspapers. He is a revolutionary more by character than out of any material interest, because he is rich enough.

He appeared out of the back shop while we were examining and talking about a Tibetan picture. After the usual greetings, he gave us a long and clever little sales talk in the hope of persuading one of us to buy it.

"It's all stuff that I'd willingly see destroyed," he said. "It's pure rubbish, the lot of it! I don't even know what it all means. You seem to understand more about it than I do. But I'd be glad to sell it to you, because you'd use it as an ornament. But I wouldn't sell it for anything in the world to these idiots in Gangtok, who believe in it and would take it home to light cups of butter underneath it. . . . Huh! Priests, capitalists, and you English! But now you're going away, aren't you?"

"Yes," said the Political Officer, with a sigh, evidently thinking about his own affairs. "Are you glad?"

"Heaven forbid! It's not you personally I dislike! Have we ever quarrelled in all these years?"

"I suppose not. . . . Or perhaps we have every now and then, because of the millionaire's prices you ask for your antiquities. . . . Tashi, old man, you may seem innocent, but you're as cunning an old rogue as—"

"Well, I've got to live. . . . Besides, you've always got money.

It's the system I hate. The English support the rich, and the rich support the lamas, they're all in league with one another. . . . The lamas ought to go and work in the fields instead of chanting litanies from morning to night. Can you tell me what the lamas have done in the last thousand years? But this Lu— Le— Wait a minute!" He vanished into the back shop and came back with a magazine. "This Lysenko," he went on, "this Lysenko makes wheat grow I don't know how many times in a season. . . . I believe in science, not in all the nonsense in that picture!"

At this point one of Tashi's wives called him, and he vanished into the back shop again. I don't know how, but we started talking about hermits again; perhaps it was because we were looking at the Tibetan picture, in which some ascetics were to be seen, meditating on high in some caves among imaginary rocks, drawn with the most delightful ingenuousness.

"It's a great shame that our world has lost all tradition of solitude," the Political Officer said. "A hermit incarnates the ideal of individual perfection; he is a champion, but on the plane of the spirit; he is a man on intimate terms with God. He's the antidote we need so much in an age obsessed with the masses. . . . Just look at that exquisite touch in the gold that illuminates the landscape! What a sense of magic and vision! . . . But what was I saying? Oh yes, the masses. Man in the mass tends to become zero as an individual. The end-result is the man-formula, Huxley's alpha-plus or beta-minus. He identifies himself with his position. Frankly, hardly a desirable state of affairs."

"I should say it was better to die."

"Don't exaggerate, be sensible. The obstacles are more inside than out."

The driver of the mail van appeared at the shop door. "Just going, sir," he said. So I said good-bye to the Political Officer and wished him a good journey.

"Try to take a photograph of the tree ferns in the Residence garden," he said. "I should very much like to have one."

Climbing up to the village again on my way back to the bungalow I

met a young Indian whose acquaintance I had just made. He is the son of an Indian professional man who has recently established himself here, and he is studying medicine in one of the big universities near Delhi. He has all the terrifying narrowness of vision of the barbarians of the future. He dismisses all tradition with one word, "Rubbish!" From this zero level (which is not the zero level of Descartes, which is so sensitive and alive and so ready to pounce on the least ideal suggestion) he reconstructs the world, using nineteenth-century mechanics as his raw material. As is usual with those who have recently adopted a new faith, he divides everything into black and white. Anything connected with the magic word "industrialization" is white, and anything connected with "feudalism" is black. The young man speaks English well enough, and he can certainly express himself, but he keeps bringing the conversation back to the same thing. How is industrialization progressing in Italy? The Moslems do not understand industrialization. Tibet is feudal, and is therefore not civilized. As for Europe, he says it's completely finished.

The princess reads the hermit's poems

Finding a note from Pemá Chöki waiting for me on my return to the bungalow was therefore a very great consolation. She asked whether I was going to be in later on in the day, because she intended to drop in for a moment to bring me some books. The thought of her—so civilized, so refined, so ready to be moved by any form of beauty—seemed almost sacred in this world of hatreds, racial struggles, religious intolerance, political ferocity, and endless new barbarities, the glittering barbarities of our atomic age shining with gamma rays, an age whose precious stones are uranium and plutonium, an age getting ready for interplanetary flight and the scientific destruction of whole peoples.

I sent the bearer out at once to fetch flowers, while I tidied the room. At four o'clock precisely a long, shining limousine stopped outside the bungalow. Tse-ten, the maharajah's private secretary,

opened the door, Pemá bent forward to get out, advanced a tiny, sandalled foot—good gracious! her toenails were painted red—and jumped out, small, light, and neat. She was also escorted by the Enche Kasi, a thin, bespectacled man of about thirty-five, with an intelligent face and an ironic, observer's look; he is reputed to be the best-educated person in Gangtok.

We went in and sat in a circle at the open window facing the valley. Pemá, in her Tibetan clothes and jewels, looked extremely pretty. A slight excitement shining in her eyes made her irresistible. She wore a dark blue chuba, a red vest, and a pang-den (apron), all in colours which might have clashed horribly if they had not been chosen with imaginative and fastidious taste. Her black hair was gathered in the usual thick plait, as sinuous as a snake, and fell over one shoulder. She wore big, round, flat earrings and had a ring with brilliants on one finger; her fingers were like little fleshy stalks supporting the bright red fruit of her fingernails.

The conversation was at first very formal, but not in a derogatory sense. Formality is abominable when it is an empty shell, but where there is real feeling behind it that feeling can be made more significant by being enclosed in a formal pattern; just as movement can be made more significant when turned into dance, or sound when turned into music. It must be recalled that we are at Gangtok, where Pemá Chöki is "the princess," and that only a few days ago she became engaged to the son of a Tibetan high official. Followed by her little court, but defying many prejudices, she came to pay a visit to a foreigner, including him in the category of passing scholars, whom it was possible for her to visit for the sake of improving her mind.

She brought me a number of books as gifts. I accepted them, raising them to my brow, as is the custom.

"This volume contains the collected poems of Milarepa, as well as his life," she said, carefully adjusting the folds of her pang-den. I thanked her.

Then she continued, talking now with the complete naturalness with which she had talked about magic and poisons a few months before, at Changu, "The whole of Tibet is in the books I'm giving

you. We are so different from what people imagine us to be, you know. Often, when I read books written about us by foreigners, I think that they don't understand us at all. A country of saints and ascetics who care nothing for the world, indeed! Ah, you must read the life of Milarepa if you want to understand us. Greed, magic spells, passion, revenge, crimes, love, envy, torture. . . . Besides, what need would there be to preach the law to us so much if we were always good and full of virtue?"

"But that is just why Tibet is so fascinating," I replied. "Would the Tibetans be at all interesting if they were merely figures in a tapestry or in literary miniatures? The fascinating thing about Tibet is its delightful, disastrous, irrepressible humanity. Perhaps one day I shall write a book and call it 'Secret Tibet.' The secret will be, not the strange things that it will reveal, but the normal things in it—real people, flesh and blood, love, desire, repentance, pride, and cowardice. You know what I mean?"

"Yes, but you mustn't forget that religion and the gods have extreme importance in our country."

"Gods never impoverish a people but always enrich it. The invisible gives meaning and depth to the visible. Man only really lives when he lives in a cosmic drama."

"To sum it all up then, considering that there are so few of us, and that we have created so many beautiful things, might one also perhaps say that the Tibetans are the greatest little people in the world?"

Pemá raised her head and laughed proudly; she was delighted at this idea of hers. Then she grew serious again. She untied the book, took off its lacquered and gilded "covers," unwrapped the cloth that protected it, and finally opened the pages. Her nervous and well-cared-for hands touched with religious respect the crude and archaic paper, printed by woodcut in some remote Tibetan monastery. I asked her to read me a poem. She started turning the pages. I saw that she was searching. I heard her murmuring some phrases, but then she started turning the pages again. She was undecided and knitted her little brows. Finally she found what she wanted, and she

started reading, in liquid and modulated tones. She sounded the tones so emphatically and with such sinuous continuity that she made Tibetan sound very like Chinese. Then we translated together the verse beginning:

I, an old man, am like a box of poems . . .

Here and there the Enche Kasi helped us out with a word, not without a preliminary whispered consultation with Tse-ten. Milarepa's imagery describing his sensations as a hermit during his nights in the frozen wilderness gradually became alive.

"Marvellous, isn't it?" Pemá exclaimed. Then she went on, "Do you have poets like Mila? At school they made me read Tennyson, but I couldn't stand him. How boring! Full of complicated words, without any madness. . . . I've always heard it said that Europeans and Americans are excellent with machines and medicines but are not much good for anything else. Now tell me in confidence, is it true?"

She smiled, bent her head to one side and half-closed her eyes. She knew perfectly well that that was being unfair, and that she was repeating a commonplace in which she did not believe, just as she often knew perfectly well that she was being frivolous, or vain, or malicious, as indeed she was; she was delightful in being it, and in knowing it.

To answer her I thought of Villon, Rimbaud, Blake, Lorca, but ended by reciting to her one of the few things I know by heart:

Votre âme est un paysage choisi . . .

"It must be my governess's fault," Pemá went on. "For years she made me believe that Westerners were all chaste, well-bred, unselfish, religious people, dedicated solely to their duty and to the task of illuminating the darkness of us poor irreligious and uncivilized barbarians. You know, it was a real blow to me when I saw my first film at Darjeeling! I discovered in an hour that you are almost worse than we Tibetans! Tell me, is it amusing in Italy? Most of all I should like to see Egypt, I don't know why. And then Greece. I adore Greek

temples. I've never seen one, but they must be very beautiful. Is it true that they are as white as sugar? Then I should like to see Italy too. Why don't you ever sing? When my brother heard your expedition was coming he said, 'Ah! they're Italians, you'll see how they'll sing! We shall have such a lot of music!' Instead—you know, you were a serious disappointment!"

A low whistle made me look outside. I saw Sönam, the bearer, signalling to me. I signalled back at him, using the code that we had agreed on to indicate that it was time to bring in tea, sweets, and food. We had arranged everything very carefully, but I was trembling with anxiety that Sönam might forget something, or upset the tea, or not know how to serve the biscuits. However, he brought in the tray in the most self-possessed manner, and did everything quickly, skilfully, and silently. He was barefooted but had actually managed to find a pair of white cotton gloves—an unheard-of thing! Well done, Sönam!

While we drank tea Pemá Chöki looked at some of the things that I had brought from Tibet.

"That is a beautiful reliquary. Where did you find it?" she said. "Do you know that these are some very special kau, blessed by a lama who died many years ago, which give protection against knife wounds and even against pistol shots?"

"With us too," I could not help interrupting, "there are certain images of certain saints that are considered to provide infallible protection against certain dangers; against the lava of volcanoes, for instance."

"Really? Afterwards you must tell me all about volcanoes. What terrible mountains they must be! But they must be very beautiful! Perhaps the more terrible a thing is, the more beautiful it is, or am I wrong? Let me tell you the story of the miraculous kau. A few years ago there was a bandit whom nobody could catch. He killed, robbed, and looted on the road from Lhasa to China entirely at his convenience. Eventually his secret was discovered. He had a kau of the really safe kind—bullets simply bounced off him as if he were made of iron. He grew so self-confident that one day he actually went to

Lhasa, got off his horse, and went to the market, among all the people. He was recognized, but nobody dared to touch him. In the end someone tried to lay hands on him, but he defended himself and started shooting. Others started shooting too, but without doing him any harm; the bullets simply slid off him like ice. In the end a lama recited a miraculous formula. The bandit suddenly repented and saw the folly of his ways. He took off his kau, kissed it, and fell at once, perforated by I don't know how many bullets!"

"And what happened to the kau?"

"There was a terrible struggle for it. Many were wounded or crushed in the fray. . . . That is Tibet too! Do you still like us? Ah! we are a strange people!"

The sun was rapidly descending towards the wooded mountains facing Gangtok. I noticed the Enche Kasi and Tse-ten consulting their watches. Pemá rose, and it was time to say good-bye.

"Don't forget the dance of the lamas next week. We shall expect you," she said, getting into the car, which was as black and solemn as a mausoleum.

I returned to my room and put the chairs back in their places. A little red handkerchief was lying on the ground. I picked it up. In the corner I saw written the word *jeudi*. It was simple forgetfulness, not a message. But in its way it was charming all the same.

"Why should I sign my work?"

Gangtok is a little village isolated in the mountains, but, when you get to know it, it turns out to be much more interesting than it might seem at first sight. Its situation in a borderland between India and Tibet means that you meet people of all sorts. On the mornings of festival days the bazaar is a living anthropological gallery. Cheerful big Tibetans, built for the spaciousness of their huge deserted plateaux, pass like horses through the throng of tiny Nepalese and rub shoulders with silent Hindus, and with Moslems from the north-west, who are tall and virile too; but the Moslem's proud bearing seems always ready to take offence.

Regions where two or more civilizations meet always provide plenty of material for observation. Here the West (the Latin alphabet, mechanical inventions, Christianity, trousers and soutanes, monogamy, hygiene, artistic realism, and so on) comes into contact with a number of other complexes: with the Tibetan (Buddhism, economic and social feudalism, long hair worn both by men and women, butter); with the Nepalese, the Hindu, and others besides. How do these civilizations act and react on one another? It is obvious at first sight that material loans are the easiest and quickest to be made, while moral and spiritual influences become effective much more slowly, or not at all. The West is undisputedly dominant on people's heads and feet. Felt hats and leather shoes have been adopted by everybody. Badges (British-Indian military influence), cigarette smoking, the bicycle, and the fountain pen are very common. Also marriage based on romantic love is, I am told, beginning to be a widespread practice.

The general tendency of the Asian peoples, in view of their great cultural traditions, is to accept from the West only its technical advantages. Their attitude towards our spiritual message remains decidedly critical. During the nineteenth century the West inspired respect because of its strength and its success. Only a pathetic shadow of all that remains, and the message has now to stand by itself. The Eastern reply is that, if two thousand years of Christianity have not made us any better than they, have not been able to bring us peace even in our own home, what are the special virtues of that doctrine which make it in any way superior to their own? The mental attitude of many Orientals towards us is admirably expressed in one of Lin Yu-tang's books: "The fact that Westerners, too, have a well-organized social life, and that a London policeman would help an old woman across the street without any knowledge of the Confucian doctrine of respect for old age, comes to the Chinese always as more or less of a shock." ¹

The play of influences is always particularly revealing in the field of art. It was, therefore, with great curiosity that today I went to

¹ *My Country and My People*. New York: John Day, 1937.

see Rig-zin, who is the best Tibetan painter south of Shigatse, at any rate in the opinion of the Enche Kasi and several other people in Gangtok. Rig-zin lives in a Lepcha-type house on the hill behind the bazaar. It is really more of a hut than a house; it stands on piles and is built of stone and timber. When I arrived I found two of his children making mudpies outside the door and his wife sitting at the window with a suckling child in her arms. She greeted me, and showed me into her husband's studio—a tiny room, full of frames, boxes, sacred pictures, and rolls of cloth for painting on. He was working on a big "Wheel of Life" that Piero Mele had commissioned in April and that he was to hand over to me in a few days' time. He had been working on it for a month, and all that remained to be done was some slight retouching. It was a big picture in the traditional Tibetan style; Rig-zin's only personal innovations were three figures he had inserted into the "Life of Men" section, representing an Indian, a European, and a Chinese. Incidentally these three figures, both in line and in composition, were the only ones out of harmony with the rest of the picture, which was otherwise really perfect in its way.

Rig-zin is a little man of thirty-seven, not very likeable, though one felt he had character and an unusual wealth of personality. He is a passionate worker; he did not put down his brushes, but went on painting while we talked.

"Who was your teacher?" I asked.

"I studied for several years with the *che-mo* (head painter) Wang-dü, of Shigatse," he replied, not turning his head, but actually leaning forward till it nearly touched the cloth, as if straining to give the lightest possible strokes of the brush from as close as possible. "Wang-dü now lives at Kalimpong; he's sixty-three. He's a great master. Have you heard of him? But he's old now, he paints very little."

"And how many pictures do you paint in a year?"

"What does it matter? I don't know. Perhaps twenty or thirty. I have a great deal of work. I can't complain. They send for me from all over Sikkim, from Darjeeling, and also from Gyantse and Shigatse. Next month I'm going to paint some frescoes in a new temple at Darjeeling. If only my eyes didn't trouble me! You know, they get

tired and water, and they hurt. Could you perhaps recommend me a medicine?"

"Perhaps, yes. I'll send it up to you tomorrow. But tell me, when you paint a big, difficult, and complicated picture like this 'Wheel,' do you do it all from memory?"

"I've painted so many 'Wheels of Life' now that I do them from memory. But first I studied under a master. Also there's a book, you know, which gives all the details: the divisions, the characters, the animals, the saints, the devils, even the colours. Every colour has a meaning."

"So you can't change anything?"

"Some things, yes. The backgrounds, the landscapes, the positions of the lesser characters, some of the details, some of the colours."

"But there are very fine 'Wheels' and also very poor ones."

"Certainly. You can tell the good painter by the life he puts into his figures. They must fly, leap, run! That is the important thing."

Eventually Rig-zin turned, removed his spectacles, and looked at me for a moment. He is a man completely absorbed in his work; a quiet, calm, obstinate devotee. When he had looked me over sufficiently to size me up and classify me, he put his spectacles back on his nose and resumed his painful and minute labour.

"And does the work take long? How do you start?"

"It's very simple. First you take the cloth, cut it, and spread it in the frame. Then you carefully spread the gum and white lead. When you've finished preparing the background you draw the design with charcoal. Then you spread the colours dissolved in gum. Finally you put in the lighting with gold, and the picture's done. That's all!"

"Then what happens? You hand it over to the customer?"

"Yes, if he pays. Every now and then someone doesn't pay, but all the same I manage to place what I paint."

"Tell me something. Have you ever thought of signing your pictures?"

"Writing my name on them? What an idea! Why should I sign my work? Is that the custom with you?"

Rig-zin stopped his gold work for a moment, and looked at me

over his spectacles. I think he was readjusting me in his mental classification. Then he went on painting.

He changed his brush, took a very fine one, retouched the background landscapes, and became completely absorbed in his microscopic work. Other paintings of his were in the room. There was always a particular felicity, a spontaneous and convincing life about his drawings, but the colours were sometimes abominable. At one time painters used to make their own paints by mixing certain earths. Today all they have to do is go to a shop and buy chemicals. This saves trouble and is cheaper, but the result is criminal. I told Rigin so.

“You are right,” he said. “But what is one to do? You must remember the time and the expense. I’ve got a family to keep, you know.”

So the painter of the “Wheel of Life” was himself caught up in the wheel of present-day life. He depended on industry for his cloth, his colours, his brushes, for everything. But his style was still intact. In his paintings there was not the slightest trace of the influence of the covers of the Indian illustrated newspapers that I saw lying about the house and in the hands of his children.

Love and polyandry; at the dance of the lamas

My manoeuvres to sit next to Pemá Chöki were long and complicated but were eventually successful. First of all the way was blocked by Wangchuk, who insisted on talking to me about cameras. (“I have a Zeiss with a magnificent lens, but I don’t know how to use the shutter.”) Then there was Jigme, who wanted to tell me all about his plan to provide skis for the postmen who cross the Himalayas. (“We should have express service all the year round.”) Finally a big lama was just going to tell me something, but I noticed a place free next to the princess and pounced on it. I reached it just ahead of the Abbot of Tumlong.

Big white tents, with the usual imaginative blue flourishes, had been erected the evening before opposite the big temple of Gangtok.

The central tent was for the guests, and there were many of us. There were benches at the back, armchairs in the middle, and divans in the front row. The dances were about to begin. An orchestra of five or six lamas had been placed in a pavilion in front of the temple. Two young coenobites with strong lungs were going to blow the *tung-chens*, the six-yard-long trumpets which give out notes as deep as distant thunder, while two others were going to blow the *gyaling*, little silver trumpets, which squeak. Then there were drums and cymbals to provide the rhythm.

For a few moments the heavy clouds that hang over the mountains at this season lifted, and Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world, appeared shining in the sun. Everyone considered this a most favourable omen. The dances were in fact being held in honour of the god Kuvera, who resides on Kanchenjunga.

Kuvera, according to the legend, practised extreme asceticism for a thousand years, whereupon Brahma decided to reward him by conferring immortality upon him and making him guardian of the treasures of the earth, with authority to distribute them to men according to his pleasure. Kuvera was adopted by the Buddhists, and later emigrated in the direction of Tibet, undergoing various metamorphoses and being fused with other divinities on the way. He became god of war and of martial strength, as well as the guardian of the north. It was in this composite form that he was honoured as the godhead of the great Himalayan mountain, together with a companion, Maha-Kala (the Great Black One), the commander-in-chief of the Champions of the Faith. So at least I was informed by the Enche Kasi, who came and sat beside us.

The guests' tent was crowded. All the local notables were there, as well as a number of Indians and white men who had motored up from Kalimpong or Darjeeling. I also noticed some wives, or sisters, or daughters, of British or American tourists or residents. In comparison with Pemá Chöki they looked like cart horses next to a highly strung thoroughbred. On such occasions Pemá Chöki, having taken in the situation at a glance, instantly assumes a pose of frightened humility, as if she were a humble flower of the fields that had by

chance found its way into an orchid house. Everyone, women included, searched her out, called her, surrounded her, feeling that they had made a rare discovery, wanting to show her to others and have the pleasure of protecting her. Every now and then, after circulating among the guests, she returned to her seat, and we went on talking. She laughed. She knew that I had seen through her little game.

"Have you ever tried wearing European clothes?" I asked her.

"Papa would never permit it, he's very firm on that point. . . . I tried wearing European clothes just once, secretly, at Darjeeling, but I didn't like them. Papa's too intelligent to tell me outright that the clothes I wear have been modelled for centuries to go with the shape of our Mongolian bodies, to hide our legs, which are too short, and our breasts, which are too small, and emphasize the neck and face, which are often very beautiful. . . ."

The dancing began. Pemá's duties as hostess called her away again. The maharajah set great store on his reception's being a success, and he counted greatly on his daughter's help.

Meanwhile about thirty monks were dancing in the space in front of us. They were dressed as soldiers—soldiers of Kublai Khan, soldiers who might have served in Marco Polo's escort. They wheeled rhythmically round one another in a measured and solemn step called *dorje-dro*, "the thunderbolt step." It was less a dance than a ritual, a grandiose, slightly grotesque, and subtly melancholy performance of a mediaeval mystery play. The monks disguised as warriors cleft the air with their swords, cutting evil spirits in two, three, a hundred pieces. The orchestra gave the rhythm with music which Montaigne would have described as *poisante, sévère et spondaique*.

At one point a herald came forward and slowly sang the invocation to Kuvera: "O destroyer of the enemies guilty of the ten kinds of sin! O prince of the guardians of this noble country of rice! O lord of all the spirits, known by the name of the Summit of Junga! O war-like divinity of martial youth. . . ."

The maharajah, wrapped in his brocade robe decorated with golden flowers and wearing a doge's hat on his head, was sitting rather rigidly on a long blue divan and following every phase of the

sacred mystery from behind his dark glasses. He was heraldic and precise, something between a lily and a scientific instrument. Beside him was the wife of the Political Officer, looking dignified and a little cold, but full of character, a last farewell of Victorian England to the Asia of dream and fable.

In another burst of sunshine Kuvera appeared in person at the temple door, all covered with gold, brocade, and silk, and wearing a red mask that flashed in the bright light; it was beautiful, fantastic, metaphysical. It was a moment of intense excitement for all the Sikkimese. The children shrieked, the girls clapped, the old people who had come down from the mountains held their breath and watched in amazement. Kuvera, impersonated by a great, strong lama who was an excellent dancer, descended the steps and started a long series of evolutions and sudden leaps, with numerous pauses and complicated balancing movements which required months of training. The six-yard-long trumpets broke the silence with a triumphal boom.

Pemá Chöki had quietly returned and was sitting between the Enche Kasi and me. "Look at that mask! Isn't it wonderful?" she said. "It was remade last year. The red lacquer is superb. . . . By the way, what was that lipstick called that I asked you to send me? You've forgotten, have you?"

"Riv— Rab— I can't recall it for the moment."

"It was Revlon, Batchelor's Carnation. . . . Don't you dare forget it again! I'm relying on you to send it to me from Calcutta. Don't forget, will you?"

Now it was the turn of Maha-Kala, the Great Black One. Another herald advanced and sang another invocation to the Principal of the Champions of the Faith. A servant wearing a red-patterned uniform passed with a tray.

"Won't you have some tea?" Pemá Chöki asked me. "It's not Tibetan tea, it's ordinary tea; I ordered it for you."

The servant poured us out some tea. The music ended in a glorious outburst of dissonance between the temple and the sky. The comic, horrible, stupendous mask glittered in the sun.

"I like Tibetan tea," I remarked.

"Nonsense, that's your way of paying compliments; or you do it to give yourself airs as a great traveller! You swallow it like a medicine, and say, 'Good! *yagpo!*' but you don't take me in!"

Pemá laughed, her white teeth flashing in the sunlight. A few moments later she told me about her fiancé.

"Perhaps I'm not in love with him, but we shall get on well all the same, I think. First the family wanted me to marry someone else, belonging to an older family and very rich, but he had several brothers."

"What then?"

"We are in Tibet, where polyandry is practised. A younger brother's wife is also the wife of his elder brother, or brothers."

"And you didn't like the elder brother?"

"No."

"And if you had liked him?"

"Oh! what a lot of questions! You know, you're far too inquisitive. . . . Look at Maha-Kala standing ready at the temple door! Wait for the invocation to finish. Be quiet! If you behave yourself, I'll translate what he says for you."

"But I'm not interested."

"The fierce, proud, unconquered Maha-Kala, victorious over all, today arises to fulfil his duty. . . . Arrows, lances, swords, and every sort of weapons are directed towards the enemy, and glitter and shine. Mountains of corpses are consumed like food, oceans of blood are poured like drink. . . . Let him who sets store on his life keep away from me. Let him who wants to die approach. I shall cut off the red source of life and offer it in sacrifice. I am the destroyer who assuages his thirst with blood. Glory to Maha-Kala, Kiki-huhu, Kiki-huhu! Do you like it? You see what a nice place your Tibet is? You know, we are like the Spaniards, only our bulls are devils; the terrifying gods are our *toreros*. I'm an *aficionada* of Kuvera, the one who danced first. He's handsomer, he's braver, he's more everything!"

The servant passed again, this time with pineapples and melons.

"Won't you have a piece of pineapple?" Pemá asked. "They came straight from Rangpo this morning. Two loads for the Dalai Lama are leaving today. Ah, Lhasa! What beauty! What life! All those festivals! You've no idea how much one can enjoy oneself there!"

"And I thought it was a city of meditation and silence, inhabited exclusively by monks, abbots, and theologians."

"Oh yes! They have those there too, of course, but there are so many other people who have nothing to do with the monasteries and want life to be beautiful. . . . Besides, don't the ascetics practise purity and make sacrifices for us? It's like a bank. They pay in the money, and all of us draw the benefit. That's how they acquire eternal merit."

The dances drew to an end. It started drizzling. Pemá took a small piece of pineapple and carefully raised it towards her lips. But a small drop of juice fell on her brand-new pang-den, made of special Bhutan cloth. She threw the fruit away, called her maid, who was standing at the bottom of the tent, and whispered something to her in Tibetan. Then she laughed and repeated, like a small child going into ecstasies about a remarkable cake, "Ah, Lhasa!"

Lunar rainbow

It is my last evening at Gangtok. It rained all day, but now the weather seems to be clearing up. The moon is painfully opening a path, still a very shadowy one, between heavy, almost motionless clouds. The play of light on the showers across the valley has taken the form of that rare and unspeakably beautiful phenomenon, a lunar rainbow.

A faint, ethereal—I should like to call it silent—curve of light emerges imperceptibly from the dark abysses of the forest and stretches across the sky to fade equally imperceptibly into the patches of light reflected from the roofs above the temple and the palace, where Pemá Chöki lies asleep with her black hair on a white pillow. It is only the ghost, the memory of a rainbow, the faintest suggestion of pink and blue tones, to be guessed at rather than seen, suspended between one nothing and another in the darkness of the night.



MECHANICAL WIND-MAN

Asia disappearing down below

WE had left; we were in the sky. Climbing out of the suffocating monsoon heat of Calcutta into the clear sunlight at 9,000 feet was magnificent. We travelled through a forest of clouds shaped like pillars, towers, enormous mushrooms reminiscent of the Hiroshima mushroom. Every now and then we passed close to one of those superb white monuments, those huge carnal bulges, or plunged into its midst, to emerge suddenly with a sensation of entering a void. I strained to see whether I could make out the Himalayas in the distance, but who could be sure that those distant white undulations were mountains? Down below, between one cloud mass and the next, was a region of many lakes and hundreds of villages, surrounded by yellowish expanses of water. Millions of people down there would not be able to move from their homes for weeks; moving only a few miles meant dragging oneself through mud; lighting a fire was a problem, sleeping in the dry very difficult, burning the dead absolutely impossible. Perhaps someone looking up noticed a tiny airplane in the sky, a tiny airplane that by next evening would be Rome.

We reached Karachi very late. During the night we left again for Iraq. Every now and then, half asleep and half awake, I said to myself, "Down there is Persia; mountains, deserts, estuaries, rivers, cities, mausoleums, rock sculpture, caravans, brigands." Overhead in the luggage rack were Tibetan books and pictures. Milarepa, used to travelling by levitation, would certainly not be surprised at this new experience. If he were now suddenly to arise after a thousand years of trance in a cave of the Himalayas and find himself here, perhaps he would compose a poem about a mechanical wind-man.

What thoughts might not be suggested to him by the life of these ingenious Western barbarians, dominators of samsara, the world of illusion?

With the first light we reached Basra, a trail of palm groves along the united Tigris and Euphrates, between two wastes of boundless orange sand. Then deserts and deserts all the way to Cairo. No more clouds were to be seen; the clearness of the sky was absolute in every direction. At Cairo we stopped an hour for a meal. During the afternoon we passed over Crete, and at sunset reached the heel of Italy. The passengers started moving about, getting ready; we had the feeling that Rome was only a few yards away. Indeed, so it was. After what seemed a moment we saw Capri and, almost before we realized it, there were the lights of Ciampino airport.

“Yesterday we were in Calcutta . . .”

SOME USEFUL BOOKS

INDEX



SOME USEFUL BOOKS

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INDEX

- Abidhamma, 74
Abruzzi, 262
ache-lhamo (profane play), 189 *ff.*
Adamantine Vehicle, 83, 85
"Adamantine Whore," 156
Aden, 15, 16–17
Adi Buddha, 86–87, 89
Agra, 21, 274
Ainu, 199–200
Ajanta, 27, 274
Akshobya, 157, 244
Alexandria, 7–10
Alps, Alpine, 23*n.*, 45, 63, 64, 105, 120, 200, 227
Altan Khan, 145
amban (Chinese representative), 146
am-chi (doctor, of Gyantse), 239, 240–241, 256 *ff.*
America, 99; Tibetan curiosity about, 186; Tibetan mission to, 168, 179
American couple, *see* Millicent
Amitaba, 89, 155, 157, 245
Amo-chu, 63, 105
Amoghasiddhi, 245
Angkor Vat, 274
animals, bones of, 95; Buddhist attitude toward, 91, 118–19, 218, 220–21; *see also* dris, yaks
Apennines, 23*n.*, 31
Ara Pacis, 274
arak (drink), 188
architecture, Tibetan, 106, 123, 158, 168, 201, 236, 243
arhat, 74, 75, 79, 81
Aristotle, 50
art, Indian, 25–26, 27, 29–30; Tibetan, 49, 86–87, 88, 115, 133–34, 159–64, 165, 166, 174, 201, 202–203, 205, 229–32, 244, 272, 274, 285–87
Aryans, 23, 24
Asia, Central, 38; art of, 159, 231, 232
Asoka, Emperor, 69, 80
Assisi, 30, 243
Atisha, 143, 144
Avalokitesvara, 89, 92, 145, 147, 149, 150, 154–55, 157
avydia, 75
Bach, J. S., 62, 126, 274
Bailey, Lt.-Col. F.M., 185
Barche-serwa (ceremony), 121–22
Bardo Tö-döl, 211–13
Basho, 231
Baudelaire, P. C., 41
Beethoven, Ludwig van, 169, 170, 274
Bell, Sir Charles, 79*n.*, 99*n.*, 110*n.*, 120*n.*, 149, 181, 185
Benares, 20; sermon at, 72
Bengal, 31–33, 40; *see also* Calcutta
Berr, H., 59
betel-chewing, 34, 101
Bhagava, 70
Bhagavad-gita, 271
Bhondong, Minister, 152
Bhutia, Bhutias, 47, 272
Bira, Prince, 133
birds, Tibetan, 221, 222
black magic, 83, 150, 183
Blake, William, 274, 281
Boccaccio, Giovanni, 131
Bodhidharma, 80
Bodhisattva, 61, 81, 82, 147, 148, 164
Bodhisattva, living, 156; *see also* Ngawang Lobsang Choden
Bombay, 17, 18, 19, 20–22, 24, 32
Bon, Bon-po, 143, 198–99, 201–205, 206, 217
Book of the Dead, *see Bardo Tö-döl*
books, Tibetan, 99, 101, 110, 111–12
Borobodur, 274
Bosch, Hieronymus, 230
Botticelli, Sandro, 30, 239, 274
Brahma, 288
Brahmanism, 78–79
Brahmaputra, 228
Brahms, Johannes, 273
Britain, British, 19, 60, 99, 153, 155, 181, 184, 185–86

INDEX

- Bromfield, Louis, 21
 Bronzino, 49
 Buddha, *see* Gautama Buddha
 Buddhism, compared with Christianity, 67–68, 73, 74, 89, 91, 92, 93, 202; distinguished from Brahmanism, 78–79; history of, 79–85; influence of, 67, 79; in Japan, 201; Nepalese schools of, 86; scriptures of, 28–29, 61, 73–74, 81–82, 83–85; second stage of, 81–83; teachings of, 73–78, 90, 91; third stage of, 83–85; in Tibet, 85, 143–44, 164; *see also* Adi Buddha, Dhyanī Buddha, Dhyanī Bodhisattva, Gautama Buddha, Gelug-pa, Kargyu-pa, Manushi Buddha, Nima-pa
 butter, 52, 86, 95, 121, 141, 161, 165, 242, 266, 269
 Cairo, 10, 294
 Calcutta, 24, 32–35, 293, 294
 calendar, Tibetan, 129; *see also* kalpa
 Callimachus, 9
 Carpaccio, Vittore, 175
 Catherine of Braganza, 20
 Ceceri, Monte, caves, 25
 ceremonies, Japanese, 119; Tibetan, 103, 121–22, 153–54, 216, 217, 288 *ff.*
 Cervantes, 62
 cham (sacred play), 189
 Champa (trapa), 137, 138, 139, 141, 157, 158, 159, 162, 164, 165
 Champa, *see* Maitreya
 Chana-dorje, *see* Vajrapani
 chang (drink), 53
 Changu, 53, 62, 279
 Channa, 70
 Charles II, 20
 Chartres, 274
 Chatterji, 36–39
 Chen-re-zi, 92, 117, 124; *see also* Avalokitesvara
 Chigi-gyemo, *see* Four Queens
 chigye lon-chen (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 176
 Chikamatsu, 14
 chi-kyap (provincial representative), 177
 chi-kyap chempo (Prime Minister for religious affairs), 176
 China, Chinese, 39, 67, 80, 117, 129, 130, 131, 143, 145, 146, 155, 158, 175, 178, 182, 184, 185, 186, 197, 232, 234, 239–40, 247, 260, 284, 285
 Chö-kor-gye (lake), 149, 150, 151, 156
 Chö-kyong, 162, 163
 Chombu, 46
 Chomolhari, 46, 62, 224, 225, 227
 chorten (walled tower), 63–66, 157, 161, 198, 200, 206, 216, 236, 243
 Chowringee, 34
 Chuang-tse, 14
 chuba (robe), *see* dress
 Chubitang, 58, 60
 chu-kar (plant), 45, 217
 Chumbi, 125, 168, 169, 170
 civilization, Eastern and Western compared, 26–27, 30, 76, 98, 114, 119, 126–27, 130–31, 138, 140, 175–76, 179–80, 199, 209, 210–11, 212, 242–243, 259–61, 273–74, 283
 Clive of India, 33
 Cologne, 20, 274
 Confucius, 228, 275, 284
 Cordari caves, 25
 craftsmanship, Tibetan, 159, 161, 174, 240
 crucifixes, 64, 162–63
 currency, Tibetan, 240
 Dalai Lama, 67, 89, 92, 97, 141, 146–147, 152–55, 176, 177, 178, 179
 Dalai Lama (fifth), 145, 147
 Dalai Lama (sixth), 145–46, 250
 Dalai Lama (thirteenth), 146, 148–50, 151, 181, 185
 Dalai Lama (fourteenth), 146, 150–54, 156–57
 dance, Tibetan, 52, 289
 Dante, 76, 126, 130, 131, 271, 274
 dead, disposal of, 53, 157, 247–48; *see also* stupa
 death, *see* *Bardo Tö-döl*
 Deccan, 22, 24, 31
 deities, 52, 80, 82, 86 *ff.*, 112–13, 134, 138, 153, 157, 162, 163–64, 204, 229, 244–45, 246–47; *see also* under individual gods
 Delhi, 20
 Dem-chog, 153
 de-pon (official), 177
 Depung monastery, 144, 177, 182
 Descartes, 62, 76, 278
 Devanagari, 24
 dharma-kaya, 83, 87
 Dharmapala, *see* Chö-kyong
 Dhritarashtra, 159
 Dhyanī Bodhisattva, 88, 90, 155

INDEX

- Dhyani Buddha, 87–90, 131, 155, 213, 244
 Dikchu, 40–41
 Diogo de Couto, 29
 Djibouti, 14, 15
 Docetae, 89
 Dochen, 227, 228
 doctor of Gyantse, *see* am-chi
 Dondruk-dorje, 267–68, 270
 dorje (thunderbolt), 52, 114, 141, 150
 Dorje, 264
 Dorje-chang, 86, 244, 245
 Dorje-chi-che, 163, 165
 Dorje-sempa, 86, 103, 134
 drama, Tibetan, 189 *ff.*
 Dregun, 232
 dress, Tibetan, 49, 50, 97, 114, 116, 122, 128, 171, 237, 240, 259, 263–64, 279, 289, 292; of hair, 108, 109, 110, 111, 121, 128, 237, 264
 dri, 267, 268, 269, 270
 dri-dug (sacred knife), 52
 dronyer chempo (great chamberlain), 181
 Dü-kor (Wheel of Time), 138, 163
 Dunbar, Sir G., 32
 Dung-kar monastery, 137, 139, 143, 157, 158 *ff.*
 Durga, 83
Dzamling Gyeshe Melong, 99
 dzong (fortress), 235–36
 dzong-pon (fortress captain), 168, 177, 258–60

 earrings, *see* dress
 Eightfold Path, 74, 77–78, 79
 Eight Glorious Emblems, 107, 116, 124, 131, 174, 240
 Elephanta, 25–26, 29, 30
 Emerson, R. W., 35
 Enche Kasi, the, 115, 279, 281, 283, 285, 288
 England, English, *see* Britain, British
 Epicurus, 28
 Etna, 99
 Everest, Mount, 46
 exorcism, 80, 121, 205, 209, 216, 217
 exports, 157

 father superior, Dung-kar monastery, 140–41
 Female Energy, *see* shakti
 Five Elements, 129, 131
 flags, *see* tarcho

 Flaubert, G., 50
 Florence (Italy), 36, 235
foetor tibeticus, 94–95
 food and drink, Tibetan, 45, 53, 95, 99, 111, 112, 117, 118–19, 139, 166–67, 188, 189, 217, 267–68
 Four Kings, 159–60, 201
 Four Noble Truths, 74, 76–77, 79, 109, 131
 Four Queens, 201
 Francesca, Piero della, 274
 Freud, S., 76
 Fujiyama, 11
 furnishings, Tibetan, 101, 116–17, 121–122, 123–24, 171, 173–74, 207, 237, 241, 259–60
 Fustel de Coulanges, N.D., 59

 Galden monastery, 144, 177, 182
 Galigang, 158
 Gangku, 198, 200
 Gangtok, 47–48, 106, 180, 190, 216, 273, 279, 283, 287, 292
 Gautama Buddha, 79, 81, 90, 202, 275; doctrine of, *see* Buddhism; life of, 68–73
 Gedul, Lama, 125–26
 Gedun-dup, 145
 Gedun-gyatso, 145
 Gelug-pa (the Virtuous), 86, 121, 137, 143 *ff.*, 154, 161, 197, 203, 228, 237
 Ghat mountains, 18, 23*n.*
 Giorgione, 239
 Gizeh pyramid, 11
 gold, Tibetan attitude toward, 161
 gön-kang, 51–53, 113, 165, 213–15, 242–43
 Gould, Sir Basil, 153, 185
 government, Tibetan, 108, 176–78
 Gozzoli, Benozzo, 175
 Gnostic fathers, 9
 Granger, Captain, 60–61
 Great Eastern (hotel), 33
 Greece, 26–27, 58–59, 281; influence of, 38, 231, 232
 Greek guide, 8–10
 Grousset, R., 26
 Gungi-gyemo, *see* Four Queens
 guru, 138, 252
 Guru Rimpoche, *see* Padma Sambhava
 Gyal-chen de-shi, *see* Four Kings
 Gyantse, 106, 233–35, 236–37
 gyerpá, 177–78
 Gyu, Lama of, 149

INDEX

- Hadhramaut, 17
 haniwa, 204
Harivamsa, 28–29
 Hayagriva, 159
 Heruka, 213
 Himalayas, 40, 44, 46, 48, 58, 63, 106,
 144, 227, 244, 263
 Hinayana, 81, 82, 83
 Hippocrates, 59
 Hokkaido, 119, 199
 Holbein, H., 49
 Hopkinson, Mr., Political Officer of
 Gangtok, 48, 235, 274–77
 Hor, 204, 232
 Horiuji, 274
 horoscopes, 80, 128–30
 Huang Mu-sung, General, 185
 Huc, Abbé, 93
 Hwuy-ung, 239–40
- Iliad*, 27
 India, Indians, 22, 31, 34, 36, 39, 49,
 60, 83, 85, 175, 204, 237, 240, 247,
 260; art of, 25–26, 27, 29–30; com-
 pared to Greece, 26–27; compared
 to Italy, 23*n.*; languages of, 22–24,
 37, 38; religion of, 27–29, 33
 Indian Ocean, 17
 inscriptions, 197, 246
 instruments, Tibetan, 104, 114, 150, 209,
 236, 288, 290
 Italy, Italians, 14, 15, 98–99, 282
 Iwami, Mr., 169–70
 Iwang, 228, 230, 231–32
- Jains, 74
 Jampel Thrashi, 272
 Japan, Japanese, 3, 11, 51, 64, 67, 99,
 101–102, 119, 129, 137, 155–56, 160,
 163, 169–70, 173, 175, 195, 197, 199–
 200, 201, 204, 219, 220, 231, 239,
 259, 260, 266
 jinja, 64
 Joyce, James, 26
- Kala, 28
 Kalidasa, 38
 kalpa, 87, 88
 Kama-pa, 151
 Kamatipura, 22
 Kami, 64
 Kamui, 200
 Kandron, 267–68, 270
 Kangchenjau, 46
 Kangchenjunga, 42, 46, 288
 Kangyur, the, 38, 61, 93, 154, 202, 244
 Kanthaka, 70
 Kapilavastu, 69
 Kar-gyu, lama, 121–22
 Kar-gyu monastery, 63, 66–67, 91 *ff.*
 Kar-gyu-pa (sect), 86, 97, 121, 144
 karma, 74, 75–76, 77, 79, 80, 82–83,
 86, 90, 212
 karuna, 84, 88
 kashag (Council of Ministers), 176, 177,
 181, 184, 185
 ka-ta (ceremonial sash), 97, 115, 141,
 152, 222
 kau (amulet), 49, 50, 157, 240, 264,
 282–83
 Keats, J., 53
 kenchira, 63, 201
 Ken-rab, Abbot, 111–12
Kesar of Ling, 203–204
 Khampo, the, 235, 237–38
 Kirimtse, 198, 200, 206, 223; temple
 of, 210, 212–13
 Kitasato, S., 168
 Kodama, Prof., 119
 Koran, the, 11
 Kublai Khan, 144, 289
 Kukaichi, 274
 kukuri (dagger), 43
 Kum-bum (temple), 236, 237, 243–47
 Kumphel, 242
 Kumphel-la, 181
 Kundugang, 198, 205
 Kuvera, 159, 288, 289, 290, 291
 Kyangphu, 228–29
 Kyi-tsang, Trul-ku, 151, 152
- Lachung, 43, 272
 Lamaism, 67, 92, 144, 163, 202; *see also*
 Buddhism
 Lang-darma, King, 143
 language, in India, 23–24, 37; Tibetan,
 5, 6
 Lao-tse, 275
 Le Coq, A. A. von, 38
 Leibniz, 62, 244
 Leonardo, *see* Vinci, Leonardo da
 Leopardi, 262
 Lepchas, 42, 43, 44, 105, 273
 levitation, 55, 255, 293
 Lhagyari family, 178
 lha-kang, 133–35
 Lhalu family, 179
 lham (slippers), *see* dress

INDEX

- Lhamo Dhondup, *see* Dalai Lama (fourteenth)
- Lhasa, 49, 51, 62, 105, 106, 108, 152, 154, 156, 158, 171, 172, 177, 180, 181, 182, 184, 185, 224, 263
- Li Lung-mien, 30
- Lin Yu-tang, 284
- Ling-ma-tang, 139, 157
- Lobsang, 107–113, 115–16, 147
- Lohi Chö-jung*, 110
- lon-chen (Prime Minister of State), 176
- Lorca, G., 281
- Lorenzo the Magnificent, 227
- Lucretius, 14
- Lumbini, 69
- Lungshar, 180–84
- lung-ta (small flag), 107
- Magi, the, 175
- Mahabharata*, 27
- Maha-Kala, 288, 290, 291
- Mahayana, 81–83
- Maharajah of Sikkim, *see* Namgyal, Sir Tashi
- mahasukha, 244
- Maitreya, 157, 161, 203, 246
- mandala (sacred diagrams), 245
- Mangen, 41–42
- Manichaeism, 38, 199, 204
- Manjusri, 157, 163, 164
- Manushi Buddha, 88–89, 90; *see also* Sakya-muni
- Mara, 72, 230
- markets, Tibetan, 106, 239, 240, 283
- Marpa, 143, 144, 252–53, 254
- Masaccio, 274
- masks, 135, 202, 205, 213, 214, 215, 217, 242
- Massawa, 14
- Maya, Queen, 68–69
- maya, 18
- meat-eating, 118–20, 239
- Mele, Piero, 3, 5, 8, 10, 15, 16, 37, 57, 169 *ff.*, 216, 285
- mendang (sacred wall), 157, 198
- Meung, Jean de, 131
- Milarepa, 14, 50, 141, 144, 250–56, 271, 279–80, 293
- Millicent, Mr. and Mrs. (Jane), 4, 6–7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15–17, 18
- Mingyur, 115–18, 120, 123, 126, 172, 222
- Mir Jafar, 33
- missionaries, 127
- Moise, Colonel R., 21, 37, 58, 127, 140, 141, 169 *ff.*
- monasteries (gompa), *see* Dung-kar, Depung, Galden, Kar-gyu, Pak-jan, Sera
- Mongols, Mongolia, 67, 145, 146, 155, 178, 259
- Mozart, 169, 273, 274
- mudra (gesture), 84, 87
- Mumtaz Mahal, 21
- Murasaki Shikibu, 259*n.*
- music, Tibetan, 226, 237, 289; Western, 273–74; *see also* instruments
- Nagarjuna, 82
- Nalanda, Mr. and Mrs., 61–62, 100
- Namgyal, Princess Pemá Chöki, *see* Pemá Chöki
- Namgyal, Princess Sonam Pal-den, 49
- Namgyal, Sir Tashi, Maharajah of Sikkim, 48, 135, 173, 289–90
- Namgyal, Prince Thondup, 53
- Namka-bazin, 164–65, 214
- Naples, 3, 224
- National Assembly, *see* tsong-du
- Natu-la (pass), 57, 61
- Nechung, oracle of, 148, 150
- Nepal, Nepalese, 42–43, 63, 68, 237
- nga-chung (drum), 114, 150
- Ngawang, Lama, 206–210, 215, 216–217, 223, 272
- Ngawang Lobsang Choden, 108, 113–115, 139, 141–42, 143, 157, 161, 165
- Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso, *see* Dalai Lama (fifth)
- Nge-drup Dorje, 96, 97–99, 100
- Nile, 11
- Nima-pa (sect), 86, 132, 134, 206
- Nima-üser, 241
- nirmana-kaya, 83, 89
- nirvana, 72, 73, 74, 75, 79, 80, 81, 83, 212
- nobility, Tibetan, 106, 178–79
- nomads, 263–69
- Odyssey*, 27
- Om mani padme hum*, 92, 108, 157, 191, 197, 198, 208, 264
- Om matri salei du*, 198, 200
- Oma swa sato hum*, 103
- om-tse, *see* Yul-gye
- O-pa-me, *see* Amitabha
- oracles, 148 *ff.*
- Orleans, Charles d', 131

INDEX

- Padma Sambhava**, 85, 110, 117, 133,
 134, 143, 148, 157, 205, 210, 213
paip, 53
Pak-jan monastery, 132 *ff.*
Pakistan, 22, 39
Pal-den Lha-mo, 101, 156–57
Palestrina, 274
Pali, 68, 74
Paljor, 58, 187
Pallis, Marco, 127
Panama Canal, 12–13
Panchen Lama, 89, 154 *ff.*, 176
Pangda-tsang, 168, 179
pang-den (apron), 114, 292
Parsee, 21, 22, 38, 39, 62
Parthenon, 26, 59, 274
Pascal, Blaise, 231
Pasquali, Giorgio, 101
Pataliputra, 80
patruk (headdress), 128, 237
Pahunri, 46, 105
Peaks and Lamas, 127
Peking, 274
Pemá Chöki, 49–56, 57, 62, 216, 273,
 278–83, 287, 288–89, 290–92
Pema-chung-ne, 203
Pemegang, 198, 199, 200–201, 202, 206,
 217
Phaedo, 26
Phari, 224, 225–26
photography, 96, 100, 126, 134–35, 136,
 159, 200, 202, 233, 241–42, 246
Pisa, 274
Plato, 14, 76
Plautus, 14
poetry, quoted, 41, 191, 192, 194, 204,
 227, 231, 254, 255, 256, 257, 281
poison, 54–55
Political Officer, see Hopkinson, Mr.
polo, 61
Polo, Marco, 24, 38, 289
Polybius, 59
Pompeii, 274
Potala, 145, 150, 152, 154, 182, 236,
 243
Potrang family, 178
Prajapati, 69
prajna (gnosis), 82, 84, 244, 245
Prajna-paramita, 86
prayers, 92, 103, 108, 157, 191, 197,
 198, 200, 208, 264
prayer wheel, 91–92, 103, 107–108, 237
proverbs, Tibetan, 85, 120, 125
Ptolemaic theory, 26
Punkang family, 178–79
pyramids, 11–12
Quercia, Jacopo della, 274
Rahula, 70
Rajagriha, 89
Rakashar family, 178
Raman, Sir C., 168
ramat (spirit), 200
Ramayana, 27
Ratnasambhava, 245
Rätzel, 59
Rechung, 250
Red Sea, 13
regent, 150, 151, 153, 176, 177; *see also*
 Reting, abbot of
reincarnation, 96, 144, 145, 147 *ff.*,
 210–11
religion, see Buddhism, India, Lamaism,
Shinto
Renaissance, 126
Reting, abbot of, 181, 184
Rham (lake), 228
rhododendrons, 44, 45, 105, 120, 272
Richardson, H., 185
Rig-zin, 285–87
rii-gompo, 207
Rimbaud, A., 281
Rinchen-tsangpo, 143
Ri-tar, 268–69, 270
ri-trö (hermitage), 125–26, 248
ro-lang (standing corpses), 58, 60, 95
Rome, 35, 38–39, 61
Roman Empire, 126
roses, 120, 157, 158, 199
Rubens, Peter Paul, 239
Russia, Russians, 146, 184
St. Francis, 126
St. Paul, 76
Sakya, abbot of, 144
Sakya (clan), 69, 71
Sakya (sect), 237
Sakya-muni, 69, 71, 89, 117, 157
Sakya-thupa, see Sakya-muni
Samada, 228, 230, 232
Samantabhadra, 86
sambhoga-kaya, 83, 88
Samdong, 45–46
Samkya school, 74
samsara, 74–75, 79, 81, 83, 87, 88, 146,
 212, 294
Samye, oracle of, 148

INDEX

- Sanchi, 159
 Sandhup, 121
 Sapporo, 119
 Scarlatti, D., 273
 scriptures, *see* *Bardo Tö-döl*, *Kangyur*,
 Tangyur, *Tantras*, *Tri-pitaka*
 Sebu-la, 46
 sects, *see* *Gelug-pa*, *Kar-gyu-pa*, *Nima-*
 pa, *Sakya*, *Sha-lu*
 Sei Shonagon, 51
 seminarists (*tsun-chung*), 92–93, 94,
 96, 103, 162, 165–67
 Senge-gyatso, 145
 Sera monastery, 144, 177, 182, 184
 Seven Gems, 131, 135
 Sesshu, 274
 Shah Jahan, 21
 Shakespeare, 62, 126
 shakti (*Female Energy*), 83, 84, 86, 87,
 88, 134, 163, 213
 Sha-lu (sect), 237
 shamans, shamanism, 143, 148, 199,
 204, 205
 sha-pe (minister), 51, 152, 176, 177,
 185
 Shasima, *see* *Yatung*
 Shigatse, 106, 144, 177, 190
 Shin-kyong, 162
 Shinto, Shintoism, 64, 201
 shi-trö, 272
 shi-wo, 85
 Sicily, 99, 230
 Siddhartha, 29, 70, 71, 89
 Sikh, Sikhs, 34, 60
 Sikkim, 40 *ff.*, 63
 Siliguri, 39, 40
 Sinai, Mount, 13, 14
 Sing-hik, 42, 273
 Sistine Chapel, 274
 Si-thar, 264
 Siva, 27–29, 83–84
 Six Good Things, 132, 135
 smoking, 109–110, 157
 Socrates, 73
 Sönam, 109–110
 Srongtsan-gampo, King, 143
 Stanley, H. M., 24
 Stein, Sir A., 38
 stupa (mausoleum), 65–66, 159
 Suddhodana, 69
 Suez Canal, 12
 sunyata, 244
 Sutra, the, 74
 Svayambhu, 86
 swastikas, 197–98
 symbols, symbolism, 52–53, 58, 66, 83–
 84, 86, 87–88, 107, 114, 130, 131,
 141, 150, 157, 163, 164, 202, 245
 Syracuse, cathedral of, 21; caves, 25
 Tagore, Rabindranath, 35
 Taine, H. A., 59
 Taj Mahal (hotel), 21–22
 Takeda, Hiromichi, 101–102
 Tak-po, 148, 149
 Takta Rimpoche, 184
 Talung, 42
 Tam-chö, 263–64, 266
 Tamdrin, *see* *Hayagriva*
 Tandava, dance of, 29, 30
 Tang (pass), 227
 tang-ka (pictures on cloth), 48, 101,
 117
 Tang-kar (pass), 269, 272
 Tang-kar (valley), 263
 Tang-kar-shimo, 266
 Tang-pun-sum, 62
 Tangyur, the, 61, 93
 Tanjore, 20, 27
 Tantras, 83–85
 tarcho (flag), 106, 107, 157, 198, 226
 Taring, 173
 Taring, Jigme, 172–73, 174, 175, 180,
 287
 Tashi-babu, 276–77
 Tashi Lama, *see* *Panchen Lama*
 Tashilhumpo monastery, 144, 154, 155,
 156
 Tennyson, A., 281
 Ten-zin, 264
 terma (book), 110–11
 Three Precious Things, 131, 191, 197
 threng-wa (rosary), 150, 264
 Thrimikunden, legend of, 190–96
 Thupden Jampel Yishe Gyatsen, *see*
 Reting, abbot of
 Thupden Oden, living Bodhisattva, 96–
 97, 100, 102
 Tibet, classes in, 177–79; history of,
 143–46, 178, 182–83; international
 status of, 184–86; provinces of, 177;
 silence of, 95–96; *see also* architec-
 ture, art, civilization, food, govern-
 ment, language, music, etc.
 Tibetan people, 43, 60, 106–107, 173,
 174, 187–88, 190, 200, 234, 236–37;
 attitude toward foreigners, 94, 98,
 117, 126, 157, 201, 237; equality of

INDEX

- Tibetan people (*continued*)
 sexes among, 186, 240; lack of cleanliness among, 94–95, 226; everyday life of, 138, 139–40, 179, 258; and medicine, 127–28, 136, 139, 141, 167, 172, 240–41; *see also* am-chi, Lobsang, Mingyur, nomads, Tobchen, Mrs. Yishe
- Timon 182–83
- Tista, 40, 43, 46
- Titian, 62
- Tob-chen, 122–25, 189, 190, 193, 195
- Tob-wang, 169, 171–72
- Tömba Shenrab, 202–203
- Tong, 42
- Tongi-gyemo, *see* Four Queens
- Ton-gye (lama), 97, 100
- torii, 64
- tormá, 204
- tril-bu (bell), 114, 150; *see also* symbols
- Tri-pitaka, the, 74, 75, 80
- Trollope, Anthony, 271
- Tromo, Doctor of, 108, 161, 163; *see also* Ngawang Lobsang Choden
- Tro-mo valley, 63, 138, 168
- tro-wo, 85
- Tsang-po, 228
- tsampa (roasted barley), 95, 114, 118, 121, 125
- Tsampa Tendar, Lama, 248–49
- Tsarong Dzasa, 178, 179, 181
- Tse-pa chu-ni, *see* Twelve Episodes of the Life
- Tse-pa-me, 124, 125
- Tse-shen, 257
- Tse-ten, 48, 278, 281, 283
- Tsi-rin, 264
- tsong-chi (local representative), 168
- tsong-du (National Assembly), 176–77, 182
- Tsong-kapa, 144, 154, 161, 166
- Tsungtang, 43–44, 272, 273
- Tupden Gyatso, *see* Dalai Lama (thirteenth)
- Tucci, Giuseppe, 3–4, 13–14, 24, 31, 35, 37, 58, 61, 98, 169, 180, 202, 212, 229, 233, 238, 241, 242, 246, 261
- Tuna, 227–28
- turquoises, 118, 240
- Twelve Animals, 129, 131
- Twelve Causal Connections, 74, 78
- Twelve Episodes in the Life, 49, 68 *ff.*, 131
- Udaipur, 36–37
- upadana, 75
- upaya, 244
- Uppsala, 20
- Vairocana, 231, 244
- Vaisali, 80
- Vajradhara, 86
- vajra-hum-kara, 86
- Vajrapani, 157, 159
- Vajrasattva, 86
- Vajravara, 157
- Vajrayana, *see* Adamantine Vehicle
- Valéry, Paul, 13, 260
- Vasubhandu, 82
- Verlaine, Paul, 53
- Veroneo, Geronimo, 21
- Victoria and Albert Museum, 30
- Vildo, 4–7, 10, 12, 15–16, 17, 18
- Villon, François, 281
- Vinaya, 74
- Vinci, Leonardo da, 26, 62, 102, 126
- Virudhaka, 159
- Virupaksha, 159
- Vishnu, 29
- Vision of the Dead, 210 *ff.*, 272
- visions, 149, 150, 255
- Vivaldi, Antonio, 274
- Wang-dü, 285
- Wheel of Life, 285, 286–87
- Williamson, Mr., 113, 185
- wind-men, 54
- Yagi-gyemo, *see* Four Queens
- yaks, 46, 95, 267, 268, 269, 270
- Yama, 162
- Yamdruk-tso, 156
- Yasodhara, 70
- Yatung, 105 *ff.*, 120, 168, 187 *ff.*, 198, 222, 263
- Yellow Sect, *see* Gelug-pa
- Yemen, 17
- yi-dag (demon), 109
- yi-dam (tutelary deity), 52, 138
- yik-tsang (Ecclesiastical Council), 176
- Yishe, Mrs., 126, 127–28, 195
- Yoga, 13, 18, 84
- Younghusband, Colonel, 158, 185
- Yukawa, H., 168
- Yulgye (Bon lama), 202, 203
- Yul-gye, Lama (om-tse), 92–93, 96, 97, 103, 104
- Yumtang, 45
- Yung-chen, Emperor, 146

