

# MY SEVEN YEARS IN TIBET

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WHEN I left Europe in 1939, as a member of the German Nanga Parbat Expedition, I certainly never thought that I would stay in Asia for thirteen years. The leader of the expedition was another Austrian, Peter Aufschnaiter, and we were to reconnoitre the Diamir face of that difficult mountain. The Diamir side of Nanga Parbat is well known in the history of the Himalaya, for it was here that Mummery and his Sherpas lost their lives at the end of the last century. Actually we found a trace of the disaster—just a piece of wood at an altitude of 20,000 feet.

After several months' reconnaissance, we returned to Karachi where we waited in vain for our freighter to take us back to Europe. The clouds of the second World War were gathering so we made an attempt to reach Persia, but were caught after traversing several hundred miles of desert. Soon we were all behind barbed wire and fortunately nobody had an idea for how long.

Personally, I contemplated escape from the very first day. When we were transferred to another camp, I jumped off our lorry convoy, but was discovered immediately. In 1941 we were brought to a camp near Dehra Dun at the foot of the Himalaya, whose very situation was to me an invitation to escape. The proximity of the Himalaya, and beyond them secret Tibet, was too great a temptation to someone who had roamed through those mountains before. All my life I had been interested in that mysterious country and had devoured all the books about it. Now I had the chance to get there, and perhaps beyond, to China and maybe even the Japanese lines. Plans for such an escape needed careful preparations. I started drawing maps, making shoes and rucksacks and other essentials. I studied a bit of Japanese, Hindustani and Tibetan, all of which saved me from boredom. By the spring of 1943 I was ready, and one night an Italian General and I climbed over the barbed wire. For a few ghastly seconds we got entangled, but by the time the Gurkha guards started shooting we had reached the jungle. For three weeks we marched only by night. Then, a few days short of the Tibetan border we were caught and brought back to the camp. On our return journey I made another attempt, dropping down from the second storey of a forest bungalow, but after forty-eight hours I was rounded up again.

Back at the camp I passed twenty-eight days in solitary confinement, the regular penalty for breaking out. Then I started preparations all over again. For months I drew maps and collected the necessary paraphernalia. Winter passed swiftly and when spring—and with it the "escape season"—began, there were quite a number of candidates for the Escapers' Club. Two friends of mine, who spoke fluent English, aimed at reaching Burma by crossing the plains of India. But the remaining five, including myself, wanted to win through over the Himalaya to Tibet. We planned a common escape, and agreed that once outside everybody should go his own way.

In April 1944 five of us dressed up as Indians, and two as English officers. Ostensibly, we were members of one of those (to us) familiar squads for

repairing the barbed wire. When we looked at our make-up, we could hardly repress our smiles: we carried ladders, pots of tar and rolls of barbed wire, and could hardly believe that everything had gone so smoothly when at last we stood in the jungle and got rid of our stage properties. The others went in twos but I decided to try alone. After crossing several passes (see Route 1) I came to the upper regions of the holy Ganges, here called the Bhagirati. Following the pilgrims' route, made famous by Kipling's *Kim*, I reached the last village this side of the Himalaya. It had taken me ten nights and the name of the place was Nelang, standing at 11,000 feet. At this time of the year it was still uninhabited. But to my delight my four camp comrades had chosen the same route and we were all united again, until one of the party had an attack of mountain sickness and decided to return to the prison camp.

After a day's rest, during which each told his story, Kopp from Berlin, Treipel from Salzburg, my friend Aufschnaiter and myself set off. During our earlier journeys we had all of us encountered leopards and bears, but now the greatest difficulty became the shortage of food. On top of that each of us carried between 80 and 100 lb. on our backs and we were feeling the effect of the rarefied air. Once we went up the wrong valley and lost several precious days, but at last on May 17 we stood, the four of us, on top of the Tsangchok La, a 17,200 feet high pass over the Himalaya. Here at last we were on the frontier between India and Tibet, for so long the object of our dreams. As the stone cairns and prayer flags showed, we stood at the gates to an entirely new world. We were near starvation and our only wish was to reach some inhabited place and get something to eat. All round us we saw nothing but mountains, gorges and again mountains. We intended to present ourselves to the Tibetans as neutrals and as such we hoped soon to meet some district officer. But it took us several more days walking before we reached the first Tibetan village, a group of six houses called Kasapulung. Here everything was exactly as we had read so often in travel books on Tibet. The people were extremely inhospitable and even denied us entry into their houses. They refused to sell us any food, and only by threats did we succeed in buying the oldest billy-goat available. We had to pay a shamelessly high price, to which we agreed only because we wished to enter the country in a friendly way. The first Tibetan officer we met wouldn't hear of our staying; the word "neutrality" was of course unknown to him. We appealed to the higher authority of the Abbot at nearby Thuling, but to no avail. Accompanied by a Tibetan soldier, we were escorted back over the Himalaya to the Indian border at Skipki. Here we passed ourselves off as American soldiers, bought fresh supplies, and Aufschnaiter, Kopp and myself made a new attempt. Treipel however had had enough and returned to the camp via Simla.

So it was that, striking north from Skipki, we crossed the Himalaya for the third time over two passes of 18,000 feet, and came eventually to the upper regions of the Indus. Here we turned southwards again and reached Gartok, the capital of Western Tibet. The name "capital" is rather pretentious for the two hovels of which Gartok consisted, but the two viceroys who lived there ruled over a country at least as large as Great Britain. They were the first cooperative officials we had met, and after ten days' negotiations, we continued our march with the help of travel permits. We had to give our word of honour that under no circumstances would we go to Lhasa from their

province. Nevertheless, we were very happy because our permits took us roughly in the right direction, south-east through Tokchen to Tradun. And at last we had official transport.

For a whole month we saw no inhabited place of any size. Our route took us through desolate country, past nomad camps and isolated *tasam* houses where one could change yaks and find a lodging. After some weeks we came within sight of Mount Kailas (22,000 feet), the holy mountain where many pilgrim roads converge. We passed many cairns built, a few stones at a time, by passing pilgrims, and also the typical *chortens* of Tibet which mark the tombs of the high lamas. Some pilgrims come thousands of miles and spend a lifetime on the way, covering the route by the length, or even by the breadth, of their bodies. We met two such holy travellers who had come from the Province of Khan, 2000 miles distant. Prostrated, face downward, they creep the same way back, and some never see their native land again. Their only food is flour or butter tea which they get from nomads or other pilgrims. Sometimes rich men pay a "professional prostrator" to do the journey for them—this member of "The Club of Queer Trades" wears wooden iron-lined gloves and a great leather apron. Among the people we met on our way was a young couple on their way to Kailas: round their necks they wore silk scarves, and the woman had a brocade sunshade and shawl, for Tibetan women do not like to appear sunburnt, even powdering their faces to simulate a fair complexion.

Over several more passes we came to the source of the Brahmaputra, here called the Tsangpo. Always marching along the northern face of the Himalaya we reached Tradun, the terminus of our Tibetan travel permit. From here we had the most beautiful view of Dhaulagiri, Annapurna and Manaslu, and Aufschnaiter and myself decided to stay as long as possible. Kopp accepted an invitation from the Nepalese Government, went to Katmandu and of course ended back in the prison camp soon afterwards. We sent applications to Lhasa, but the Tibetans permitted us only to travel a few hundred miles further east, and again crossing the Himalaya, we came to the village of Kyirong, eight miles from the Nepalese border. The district officers expected us to leave Tibet immediately for Nepal, but they had not counted on our persistence, and Aufschnaiter and myself stayed eight months in this most wonderful place. Amidst the Himalaya 9000 feet high, the contrast between the glaciers which flow right down to the village and the flowering rhododendron woods through which they pass, is incredibly beautiful. In the thick woods you find a number of hot springs and on one of our daily excursions I found tracks of some being above the tree line. Though Tibetans often told me of the *khangmi* or *migo*, which is what they call the mysterious "abominable snowman," personally I believe the tracks to be of bears in winter and of the huge langur monkey during summer.

Around Kyirong were about sixty monasteries, some of them perched on rock faces like birds' nests. Milarapa, the famous Tibetan poet-saint, lived here in the twelfth century, and that is why Kyirong is especially holy. We had plenty of time to observe the peasants who, like most other Tibetans, live mainly on *tsampa* and butter tea. *Tsampa* is made by parching barley in hot sand and then grinding it to a tasty flour with a handmill. It can then be mixed with beer, milk or curd, but Tibetans really prefer butter tea. They

boil coarse tea with salt and soda for hours on end and put the brew in a churn. A lump of butter is added, and the resulting emulsion is the famous butter tea. Unfortunately the butter is always rancid and the brew tastes unpleasant at first, but one gets used to it and even comes to love it. The Tibetans would prefer fresh butter, but it sometimes takes months and often years to reach its destination. They get milk and butter from the female yak, the yak being a long-haired sort of oxen, which likes the cold and rough climate.

In Kyirong we heard from Nepalese merchants that the war was over. But Aufschneider and I didn't think of giving up our freedom so easily. As Europeans of the twentieth century, it was far too fascinating to live here in the Middle Ages. But the Tibetan officials wanted us to leave, so we decided to make a try for China via the northern plains. The greatest obstacle in this plan was the crossing of the Tsangpo. We knew there were big wooden ferry boats to be found, and we hoped to come on one, for the Brahmaputra at 12,000 feet is already a considerable stream. The previous summer we had swum through the Tsangpo once, when the Tibetans refused us the ferry, but now it was winter and moreover we carried packs of some 90 lb. The commonest way of travelling on the Tsangpo, or crossing it, is in a yak-hide boat. The boatmen carry their heavy boats, weighing some 200 lb. over passes 18,000 feet high to Lhasa or from wherever they come.

We made a dramatic departure from Kyirong, for the Tibetan authorities had not relented, and a close watch was kept on our movements. Again we marched only by night; the temperature never rose higher than  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ . ( $-4^{\circ}\text{F}$ .), and we felt it worst when wading through rivers. Despite the cold, we continued sketching and, since we were passing through absolutely unknown country, Aufschneider took the bearings of the mountains. In the first nomad settlement we reached we got new provisions and also bought a yak. It was a wicked animal. I led him with a nose-ring and Aufschneider tried every way to increase his speed of 2 miles per hour. He used to rush at me and try and toss me, but fortunately his horns were so wide that I always ended up by sitting on his forehead. We crossed the Himalaya for the fifth time at the pass of Karola (18,000 feet); our yak forced us to an ice-cold bivouac on top of the pass, but we were rewarded with a magnificent view of Mount Everest which stood close to the south in the moonlight, and the first rays of the sun on its summit were an unforgettable experience. After a few more days of walking we reached the Tsangpo valley. The Tsangpo was indicated only by a dotted line on our maps, and we were rather surprised to find a huge chorten at the point at which we struck the river. It was like a miracle to discover that we had arrived at a place where a hanging rope bridge crossed the stream. We strode over ourselves, persuaded the yak to swim, and after a few more passes came again to the big caravan route, leading from Western Tibet to Lhasa. We paused at Sangsang, for here we had to come to a great decision. Our money was running out, it was quite clear that we should never reach China and a great desire to see Lhasa had arisen in us. Along the main caravan route we could have got there in about four weeks' walking, but not daring to do this, we decided to try the northern plains, which Tibetans call Changthang. Sparsely inhabited by nomads and robbers, not even the local people venture to go there during winter time. It

was December 2 when we set out; the inhabitants of Sangsang thought us absolutely mad, and it was certainly a good thing we didn't know what difficulties lay before us. We struck north across the Transhimalaya range and walked on through snow and ice. Not knowing the real danger of brigands we disregarded the warnings of the nomads and this nearly cost us our heads. We walked right into their arms and escaped only with the greatest of luck. The following weeks were the hardest in all my life. We marched 20 to 25 miles daily in temperatures around  $-40^{\circ}$  C. ( $-40^{\circ}$  F.), we hardly ever slept and our food consisted only of dry meal and raw yak meat. We hardly ever slept because of the cold, and it was a relief when we at last reached the northern trade route, called "Gold Caravan Road." Of course there was no sign of a road, but from now on we knew that every now and then we would meet nomads and could buy mutton or beef. Formerly Tibetans used to dig gold in these regions, but their only tools were gazelle horns, and eventually they gave it up. Only the caravan route keeps the name. In the distance we saw the mountains of the Nyenchenhanglha range running up to 24,000 feet, and we wondered how we would overcome this obstacle. We passed by the great Nam Tso Lake and crossed the big range over the Gurring La, 20,000 feet high, and probably one of the highest passes in the world.

On 15 January 1946 we saw the golden roofs of the Potala, gleaming in the distance, and we felt inclined to drop down on our knees like the pilgrims. Almost two years had passed since we broke out of the camp. We had walked on foot about 1500 miles, and crossed sixty-two passes between 17,000 and 20,000 feet. Our first full view of the Potala, that unique palace of the Dalai Lamas, was unforgettable. More than a thousand years ago a castle stood on the same rock, but it was the great fifth Dalai Lama who had it built in its present form. The Dalai Lama died before the Potala was completed, and the government kept his death a secret for many years; the population would not have worked for a regent, for government work gets no pay and is considered a sort of tax. On top of another rock stands the second landmark of Lhasa: the medical college on the Chagpori. The Tibetans have quite a knowledge about herbs and their usefulness, although surgery is entirely unknown.

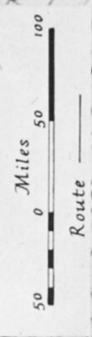
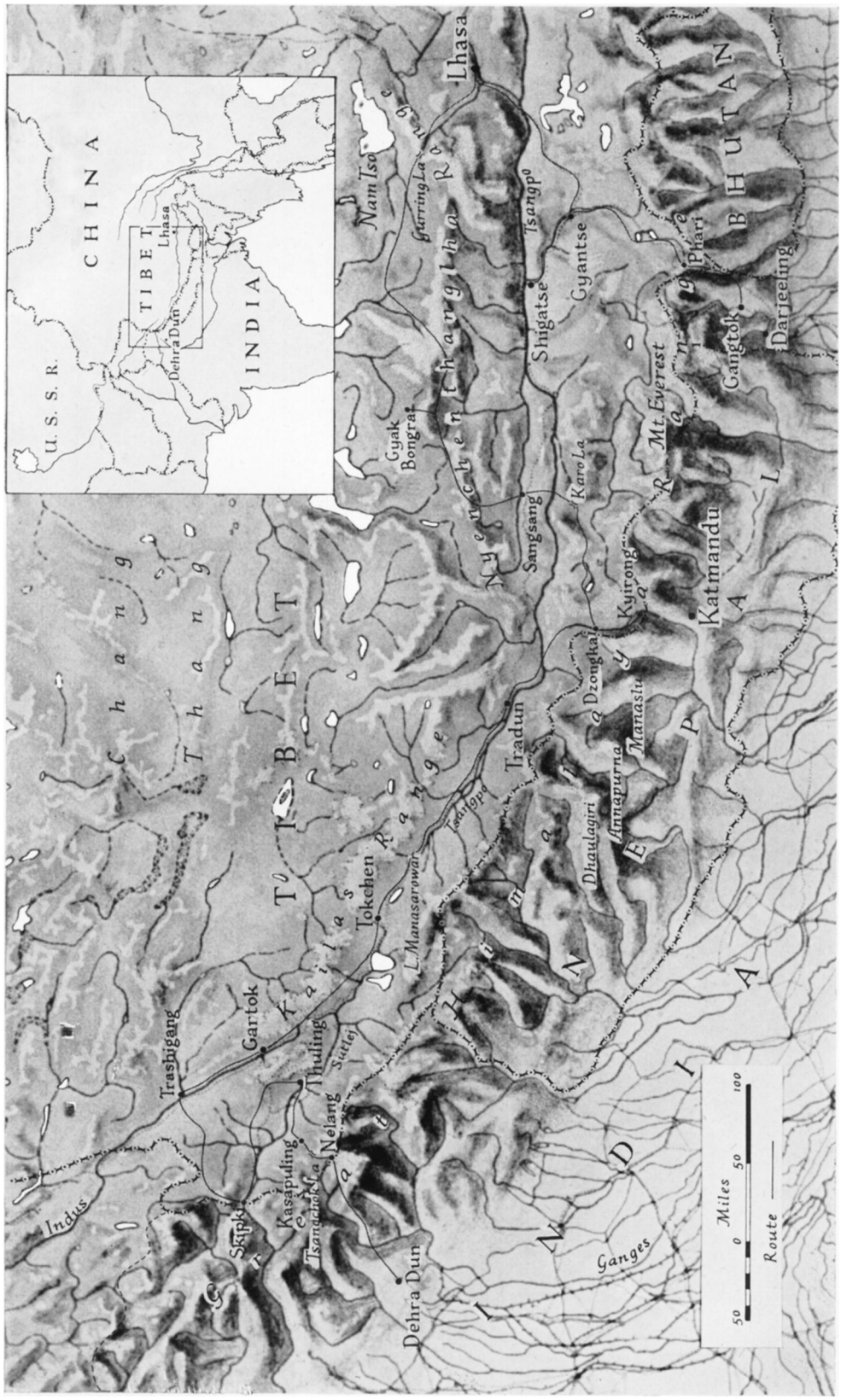
Now at last we stood at the gates of Lhasa. We had often heard of police guarding the entrance to the holy city, but in fact only a few beggars held out their hands to ask for alms. A few steps brought us to the first houses; hesitantly we approached one and asked for refuge. With screams and abuses, we were sent away and only after crossing almost the entire town did we venture again to enter a courtyard. But the same unfriendly reception greeted us. In spite of the uproar we decided to sit down and simply refused to budge: that day we had walked 26 miles without anything to eat, and our blisters had grown to the size of a hand. Presently a change in the atmosphere showed itself: those who had turned us away from their houses when we entered the city now atoned for their inhospitality by approaching us with tea and tsampa-meal. We didn't look very trustworthy, with our huge beards and wearing sheepskin which was in rags. But we were soon surrounded by a huge crowd; then, when we had been there some time, a richly clad Tibetan addressed us in fluent English, and promised to take us to his house, provided the government would give its permission, for even a member of the nobility

could not give us asylum without the permission of the magistrate. Apparently he succeeded, for after a short while servants came to accompany us to the nobleman's house. Here, for the first time, we saw the immense difference between the Lhasa aristocracy and the common people. Servants rushed in and out piling up a variety of food in front of us, which disappeared in a manner contrasting sharply with our noble surroundings, and during the next few days the house was full of visitors. None came without a present, for once you are officially admitted, Tibetan hospitality knows no limits. Although under a kind of house-arrest during these first days, we were soon asked to call on the parents of the Dalai Lama. Our host instructed us how to present the white scarves; for when paying visits or submitting a petition, one has to give silken scarves. The mother of the Dalai Lama received us sitting on a small throne, and though of humble origin, she looked the picture of aristocratic dignity. After their son was discovered to be the incarnation of the Dalai Lama, the closest relatives of the young God-King automatically became the nation's First Family. The government presented them with large estates and a great amount of jewellery; some of it, in solid gold ornaments weighing about 40 lb. Lobsang Samten, the Dalai Lama's elder brother, who did the interpreting, spoke Tibetan quite fluently, yet with the strong mountain accent which we had learned from the nomads and peasants 1000 miles distant, and which could hardly be understood by the Lhasa high society. The Dalai Lama's youngest brother, who was born after our arrival in Lhasa, was also recognised as an incarnation; their father died soon after we arrived in Lhasa. I was amazed how little grief seemed to befall his kin: the Tibetans do not mourn for their dead in our sense of the word. Sorrow at the parting is relieved by the prospect of rebirth, and little respect is shown to the corpse which is dismembered and given to the birds to dispose of. One day's ride from Lhasa is the mountain on the top of which only members of the aristocracy and high lamas are dismembered and given to the vultures.

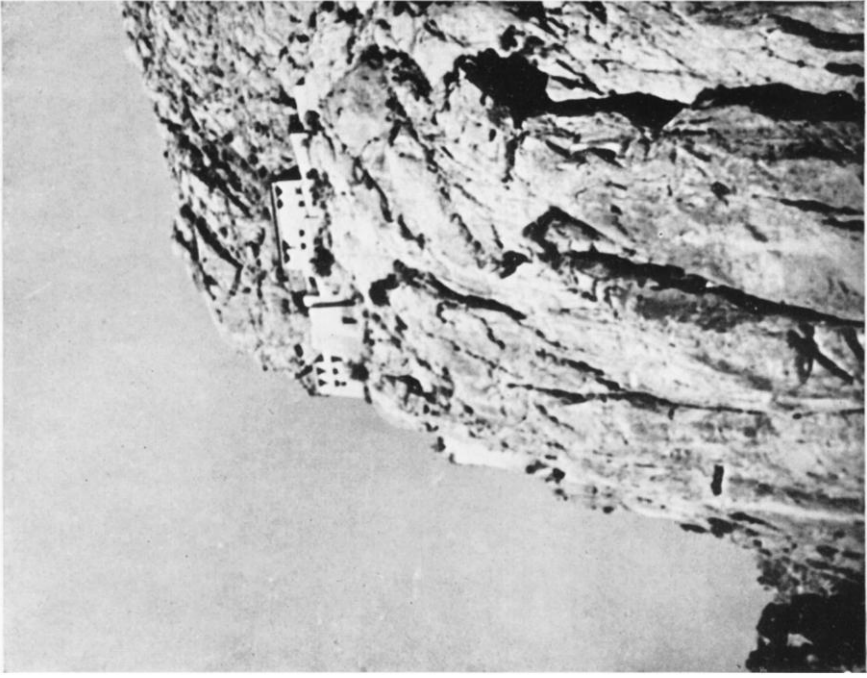
In the meantime we had moved from our first quarters to the palace of Tsarong, one of the country's richest men who, for his services to the late Dalai Lama, had been presented with large estates. He was married to three sisters, which is extraordinary even for Tibet where you can find any form of legal marriage. Normally, a woman marries all the brothers of a family, thus preventing heritage disputes. Another way to avoid a division of estates is that father and son marry the same woman. Once it took me quite a long time to find out how it was possible that one girl's mother was also her sister-in-law. Women of the Tibetan aristocracy have no political rights whatever, but they enjoy their lives and have a full social existence. They take trouble with their appearance, and always have plenty of magnificent jewellery; I have seen the wives of high-ranking Tibetan officials loaded with gold ornaments, sometimes up to the value of thousands of pounds. Women in less important walks of life, though not allowed to wear pearls, still have fine ornaments and decorate their hair with colourful tassels. There is a big difference between the children one sees begging in the Lhasa streets and the young aristocrats. The children of the Tibetan nobility have each a personal servant, brought from the father's family estate, and given full care of the child's well-being.

As I say, Tsarong owned large estates. But actually he did not own them, since everything—land, mountains, valleys, animals, flowers—belong to the Dalai Lama who is not only the king of the Tibetans but their living god. The way in which, after the death of a Dalai Lama, his successor is found, is certainly one of the last mysteries of our time. Prophecies and oracles play a great part in the selection of the new Dalai Lama, and it would take too long to explain all the details of this procedure. It is a common mistake to assume that the new Dalai Lama has to be born exactly at the hour of death of his predecessor. Often years pass by until the new ruler is found. During this interval, a regent rules the country, but a sigh of relief heaves through the nation when at last the new Dalai Lama enters his residence with oriental pomp. It is a fine sight to see the Dalai Lama riding through the capital in a procession preceded by the cooks wearing similar hats to their European colleagues. Just in front of the Dalai Lama's palanquin, walks the chief abbot, one of the most powerful men in the country, and then follows the richly adorned sedan chair, carried by thirty-six bearers. These processions take place twice a year, in spring and autumn. But the main event in Lhasa is the New Year, the great celebration in which the whole population shares. During the three weeks of New Year festivities, the secular government retires and the capital is ruled only by monks. The population of Lhasa is about 25,000, but during this time monks and pilgrims bring it to three times this figure. Twenty per cent. of the male population of Tibet are monks who live in monasteries. Sometimes the streets of Lhasa are crammed with them, and it is better for a foreigner not to move about too much. During their religious performances they are likely to get into a state of religious ecstasy which may become dangerous. Once you get to know their language however there is nothing fierce about them. I never saw people laugh as much in their daily life as the Tibetans do. The keeping of law and order is entrusted to monk-soldiers, called Dob-Dobs. They pad their shoulders and darken their faces to look even fiercer than they actually behave. They make frequent use of their whip and stick, and I often wondered why the masses take their whipping so patiently. The culminating moment of the New Year celebration is when the State Oracle staggers through the streets in a trance. It is then that this young man is possessed by a god who utters oracles and prophesies through his mouth. These monks die young, for the mental and physical strain of these seances is killing.

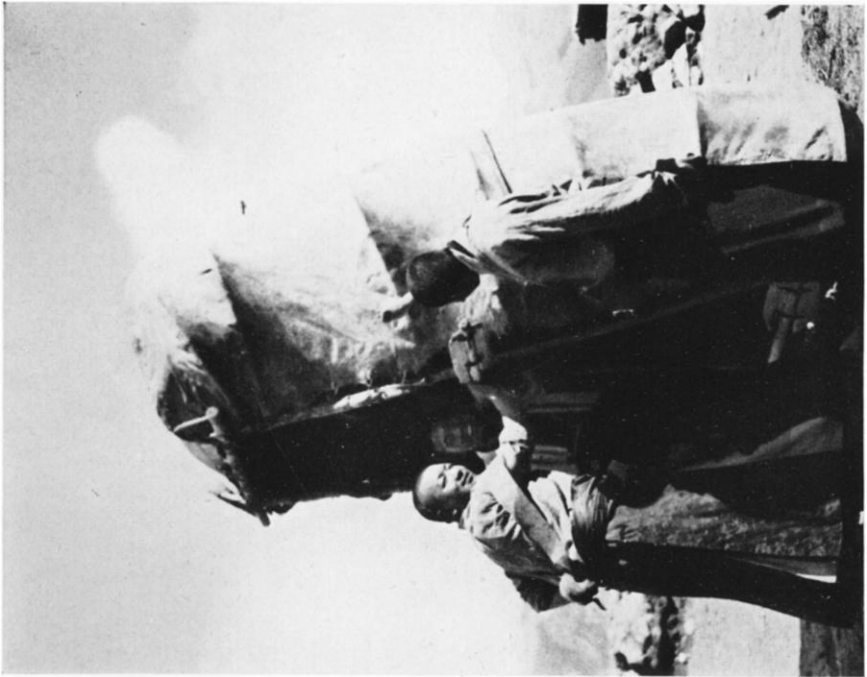
There are many more festivities in Lhasa during the year, on one of which a huge banner is displayed on the Potala. This building houses the banner which is hoisted only for two hours every year. Embroidered with gold and silver brocade, it is so heavy that thirty monks are needed to carry it. Below the banner, monks perform a religious dance, wearing ornaments of human bones, and thousands of picturesque masks are to be seen. I would give you a very incomplete picture of the Tibetans if I did not stress the overall importance of religion in their daily life. In no other country in the world do people pray and offer as much as they do in Tibet. The prayer wheels are kept going constantly, rolling in their drums millions of "Om-Mani-Padme-Hum," the Tibetan prayer formula which may be translated as "Hail, oh jewel in the lotus flower!" Sometimes the prayer-wheels are turned by wind, sometimes by water, often by hand. Not all of the three hundred thousand





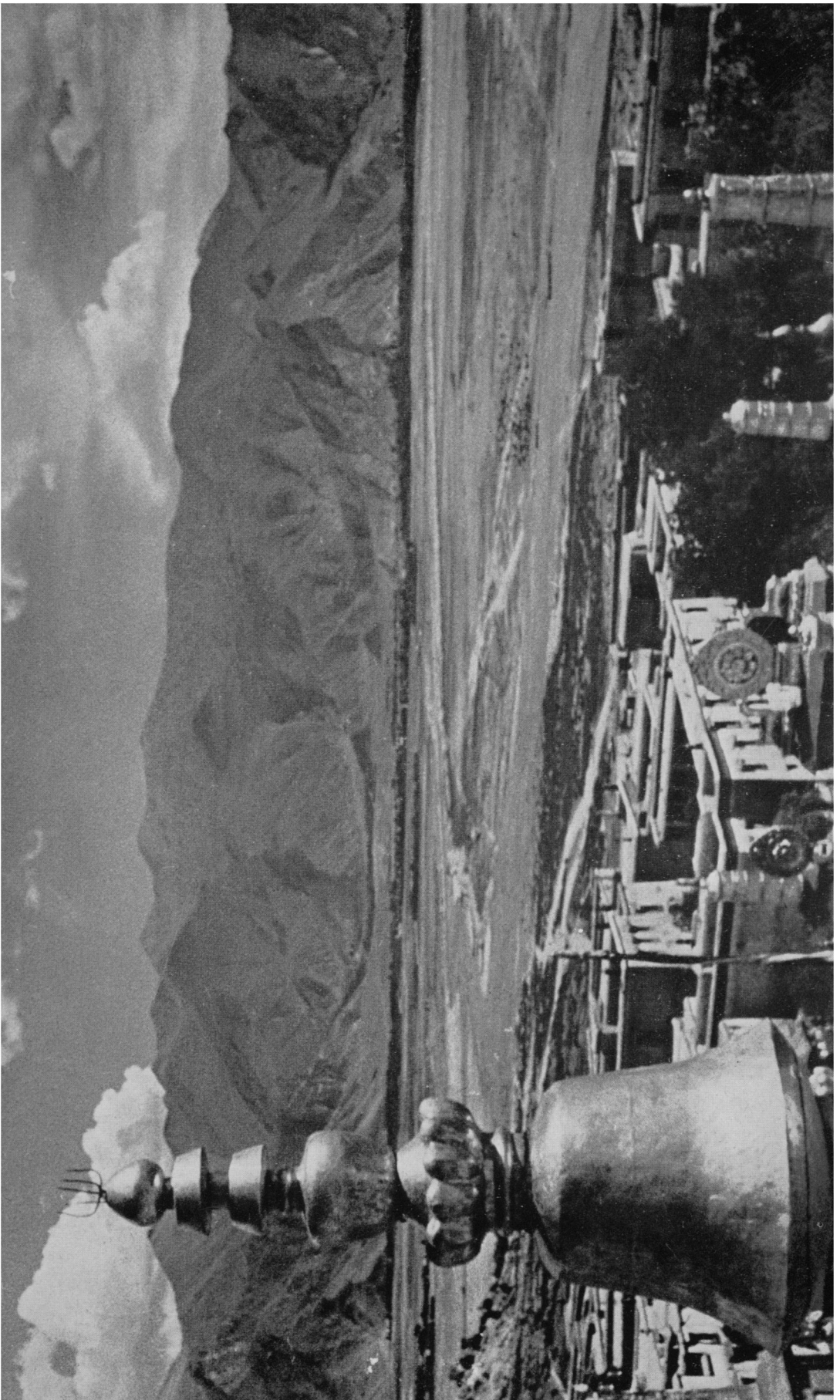


*Kyetsang, typical mountain monastery*



*Tibetans with yak hide boat*

*The plain of Lhasa beyond the golden roofs of Sera Monastery*



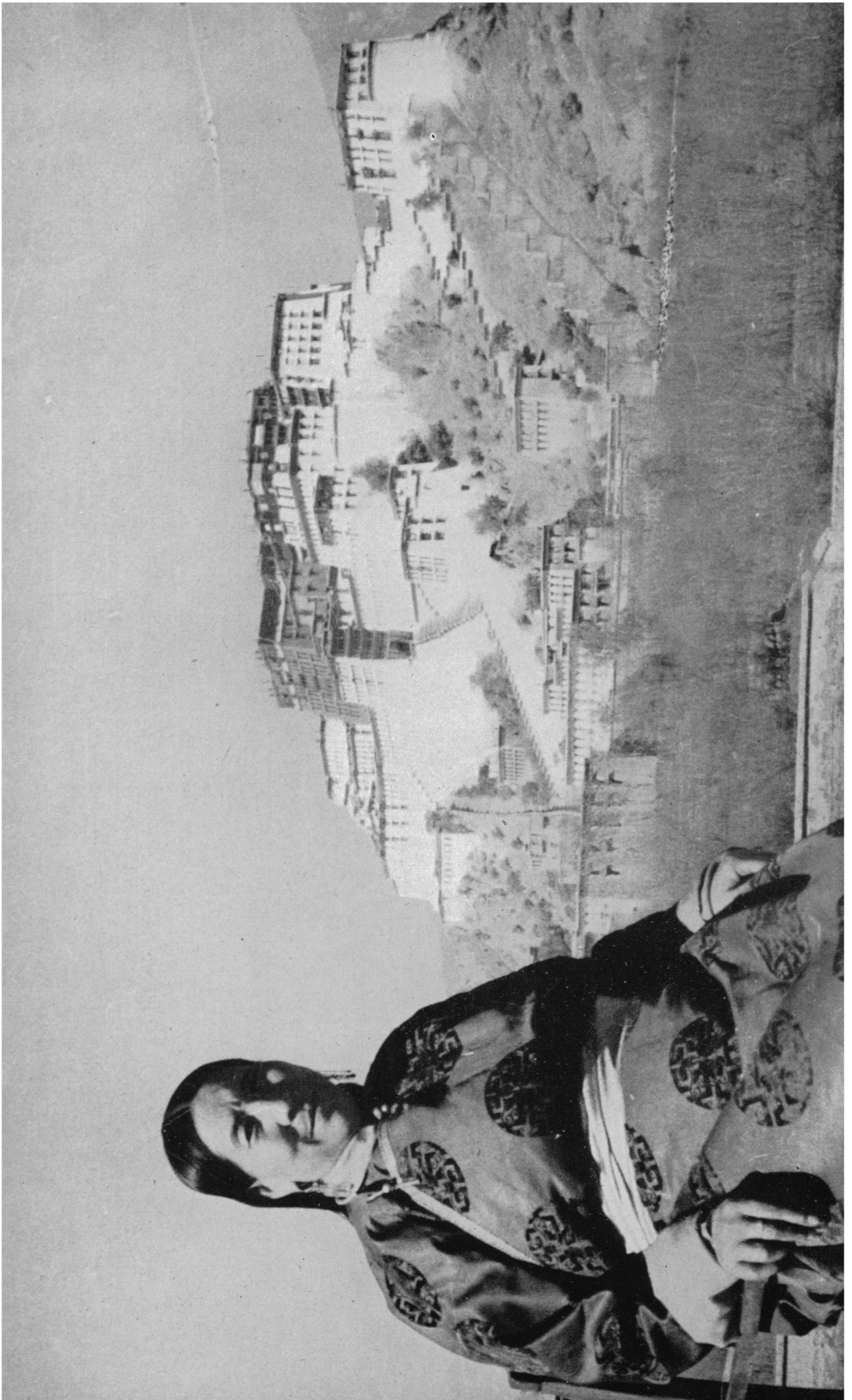


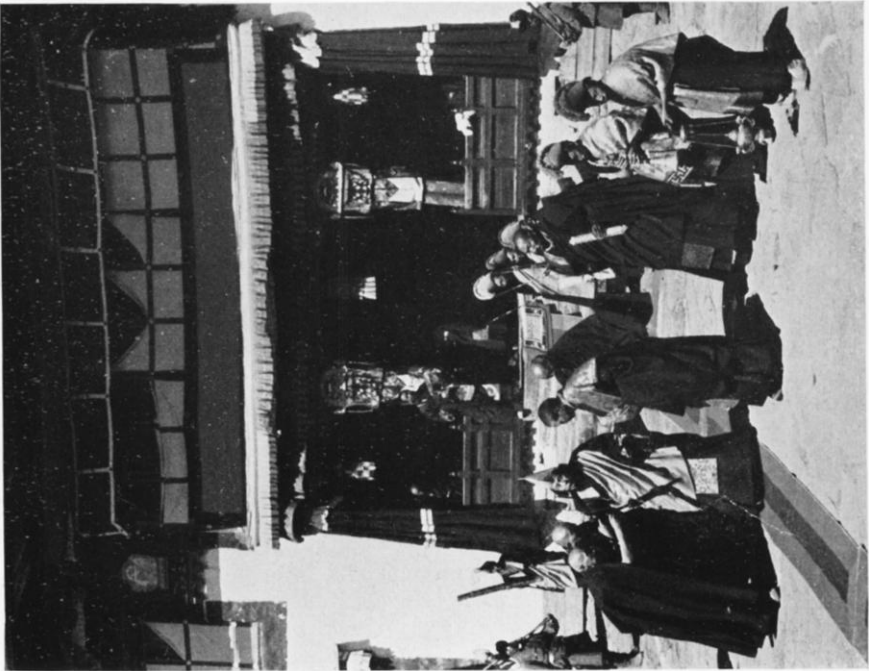
*The Dalai Lama's sister with Peter Aufschneider*



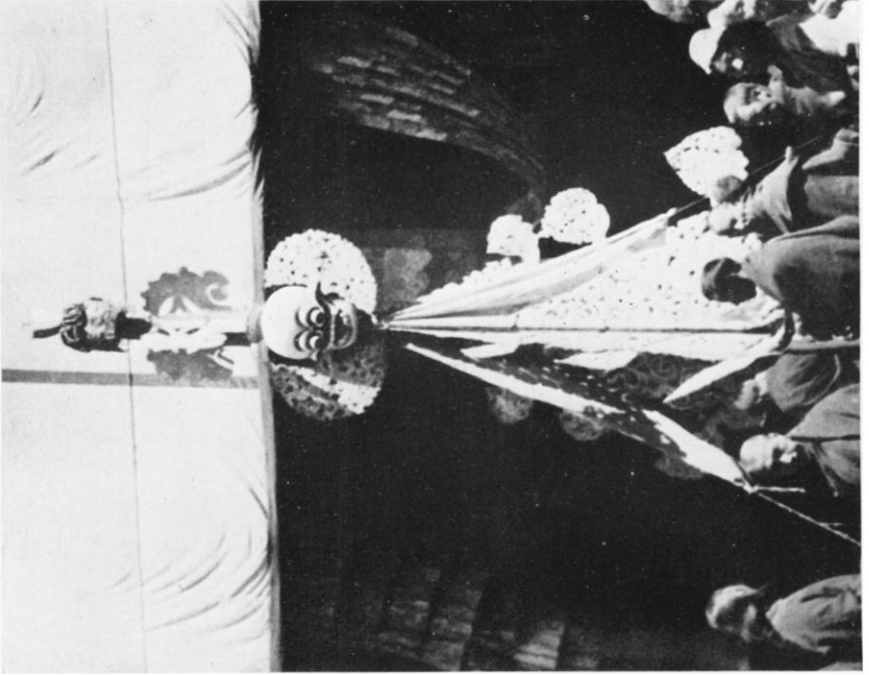
*Heinrich Harrer*

*The mother of the Dalai Lama; beyond, the Potala*





*The Dalai Lama with his courtiers*



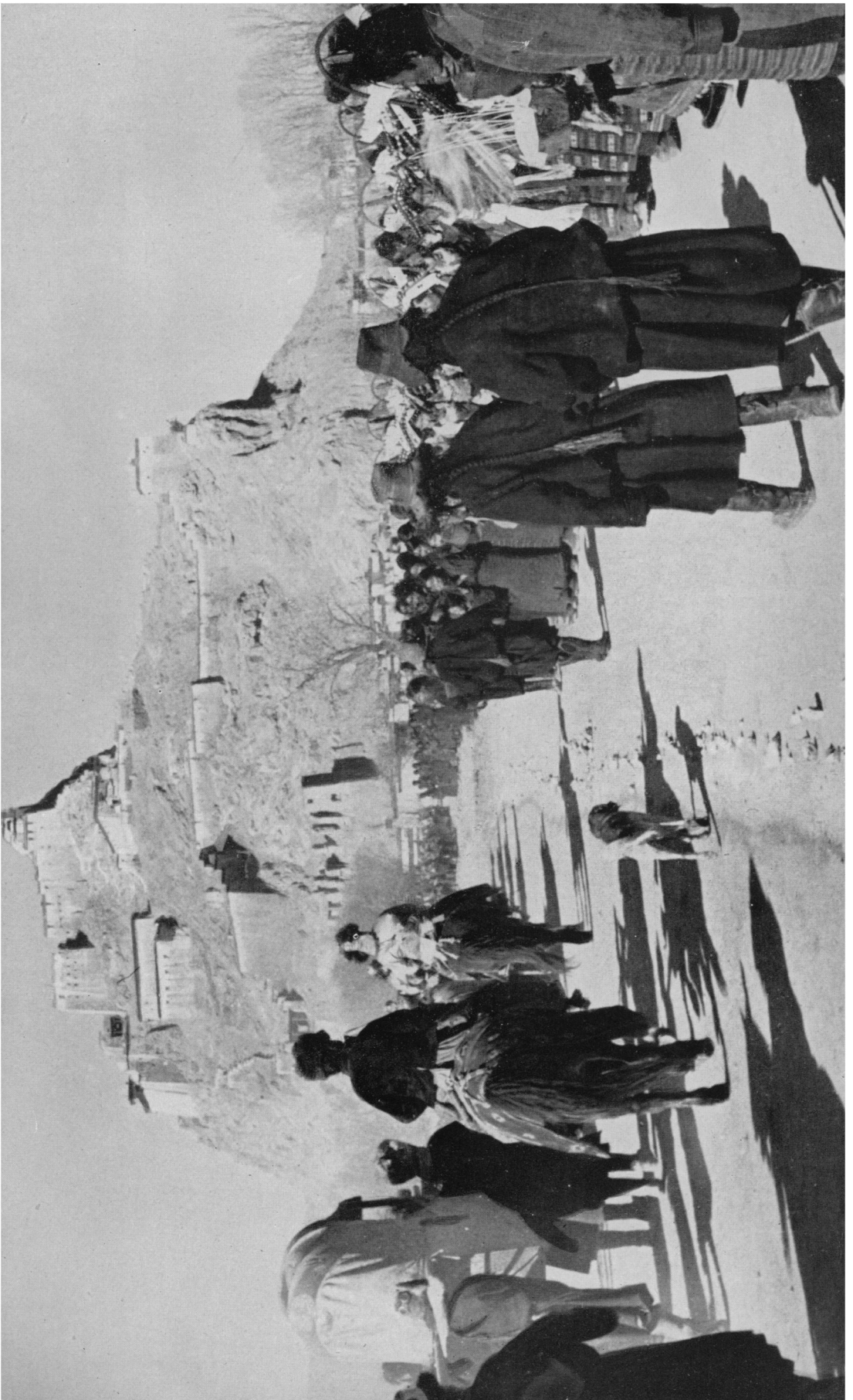
*Effigy, made of butter, carried in procession*



*Reviewing the Tibetan army before the Chinese invasion*



*The flight of the Dalai Lama from Lhasa at dawn*



monks in Tibet are scholars and divines; only a few of them actually know the Tibetan scripts, and the majority are servants in the big monasteries. There are religious houses in Tibet which house up to ten thousand monks.

Lhasa street scenes are full of variety, and one has ample opportunity to observe all classes of the Tibetan population, especially during the New Year festivities. The Tibetans are of Mongol race, but their eyes slant less than those of the Japanese or Chinese. The beggars are a great feature of the life of Tibet; there are more than one thousand of them in the capital alone, and their main characteristic is laziness, for they prefer sitting in the sun to hard work. Since nobody turns them away, they earn a day's living by one or two hours of hard begging. On Buddha's birthday, convicts are permitted to beg in the streets, chained together with iron bands. Children of the street, clad in rags, looked pathetic to us at first, but their unkempt look is part of their profession, since they are beggars too. But Lhasa is not entirely a city of mendicants; the shops are full of goods where the well-to-do can obtain everything they want either for use or for amusement. You can buy anything in Lhasa's stores, from binoculars to American gramophone records. In a country where modern sanitation is unknown, Elizabeth Arden cosmetics are most popular and easily available. Everything is man-handled in Lhasa, the invention of the wheel is regarded as too new to be safely adopted; I tried to make my workmen use some kind of wheel-barrow when I was building an embankment, but they preferred to carry the heavy material to and fro.

In all these experiences I enjoyed the wonderful companionship of my friend Peter Aufschnaiter with whom I shared not only the seven years in Tibet but practically my entire time in Asia. For him the lure of the East has proved so strong that he decided not to return to Europe and now lives in India as a cartographer and agricultural engineer. Although he was fourteen years my senior, he stood up to the hardships of our travels often better than I did. We made ourselves useful wherever we could in Lhasa, and even received a monthly salary from the Government, for which we were given letters of payment entitling us to a certain sum of Indian rupees or Tibetan *sangs*. Aufschnaiter was building a water channel, and together we mapped the whole town of Lhasa; there were some drawings of the capital in existence, but Aufschnaiter and I were the first people to survey the capital with theodolite and measuring tape. Our map showed how the main temple, the Tsuglagkhan, stands in the centre of the town and how around it runs the small circular road. The great circular road includes the Potala and is 5 miles long. In a corner of the map I added, in Tibetan handwriting, some of the names of over a thousand houses which I collected. A Tibetan-drawn map would be far more picturesque than ours! Aufschnaiter was an agricultural engineer by profession while I had studied geography. But in Lhasa we had to be jacks-of-all-trades wherever western ideas were to be carried out. And so I built a river embankment protecting the summer gardens of the Dalai Lama and constructed a fountain in the garden of Tsarong's house. The Tibetans love their gardens, and this fountain was much admired.

I made one good friend in Lhasa, a monk officer named Wangdu, whose grandfather had been Regent of Tibet. He was not only very intelligent, but also extremely talented in any kind of sport. He joined me in tennis and



ice-skating, and even accompanied me on my mountain-climbing tours. From the summits near Lhasa we had wonderful views of the surrounding mountains, and we found some beautiful spots—for instance, a lake at 17,000 feet, of which the shores were lined with wild yellow and blue poppies.

The Dalai Lama was an ardent photographer, and it was photography which brought the first contact between us. It is difficult to imagine in how simple, primitive and lonely a way the God-King lived. Nobody was supposed to address him, not even a Cabinet Minister. But it was a sign of his strong will when one day he sent me an order to build a small cinema in his summer garden. At that time I had often used his 16mm. movie camera and it was apparent that he now wanted a chance to look at these films. The camera was a present from the British Mission in Lhasa, the only western diplomatic representation in Tibet. For the Dalai Lama, this cinema must have meant a big change in his routine daily life. Otherwise he was confined to the uppermost storey of the Potala, almost like a prisoner. Just below him, the Regent had his quarters, followed by the Chief Abbot and so on, exactly according to rank. Here the Dalai Lama grew up without family and play-mates. His only recreation was a pair of binoculars with which he liked to watch his subjects from afar.

I had often had a glimpse of the Dalai Lama during the processions, but I saw him face to face for the first time during one of the great receptions in the Potala. I sat on a small rug in the throne-room and counted more than seven thousand people filing past their ruler. Everybody was offering presents, poor people just a copper coin while rich merchants carried rolls of gold brocade. Each of them got a blessing from his Holiness and left with a good-luck scarf. During my visit to the Potala I saw the enormous gold statues which were proof of the reverence the Tibetans show towards the Dalai Lamas. One golden Buddha, for instance, is more than nine storeys high.

After having completed the cinema, I was entrusted by the Dalai Lama with handling the projector and showing him the films. And that was the beginning of a real friendship between the fifteen-year-old ruler and myself. I soon found myself teaching him geography, mathematics and English. He was extremely intelligent and eager to learn about our way of living. And although he did put some rather difficult questions, I tried to answer them as well as I could.

Thus my life in Lhasa began to take a new course. But happy though this time was, it was already darkened by political clouds. The Chinese started to threaten Tibet's independence and the Tibetan National Assembly decided to appeal to the United Nations. They took no action however and in the autumn of 1950 the Chinese invaded Tibet. They crossed the border at six different points with a total of twenty thousand troops. Of course it was impossible for the small and outmoded Tibetan army to cope with this enemy and so the Dalai Lama, in December of that year, fled to Gangtok on the Indian border. On this trip I could not help but remember the old saying which I had heard in Lhasa, that the thirteenth would be the last in the succession of Dalai Lamas. Although my friend had been initiated as the fourteenth Dalai Lama, he had to quit the capital. It was his first trip across the country and from near and far his subjects had come to see him, for his

mere presence meant a blessing. Everywhere incense-fires burned and the whole escape route was lined with pebbles to protect the God-King from evil spirits.

When I left Tibet after seven years it was again an escape. This time it was the Communist Chinese I was fleeing from and although I was in a much better state than seven years ago—with servants, luggage and horses—and though I knew that I was returning to my home-country, I felt far from happy. For I probably would never see my friends again. And the Dalai Lama? Officially he is still the ruler of his country. Personally he is a prisoner in his huge palace, a puppet of the new masters of his country. But I hope that perhaps the eternal God of Grace, who is manifested in the person of this young man, will survive this soulless regime as he has survived so many earlier Chinese invasions that over the centuries have swept across the land of Tibet.

## DISCUSSION

*Evening Meeting, 1 February 1954*

*Attended by Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent, Honorary President*

Before the paper the PRESIDENT (Mr. J. M. WORDIE) said: Your Royal Highness, Your Excellency, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen—The lecturer to-night is a man of great resource and determination and his climbs in Switzerland are well known. He was the first man to climb the North Wall of the Eiger, regarded as one of the most difficult feats of mountaineering.

*Mr. Harrer then read his paper*

His Excellency the AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR: It is my privilege to thank the Royal Geographical Society and your President for the honour they have given to my compatriot. An article which I read yesterday in the *Sunday Times* said that the Royal Geographical Society retains its sympathy for the individual and is still a place in which anyone with serious and original ideas may be assured of serious and informed consideration. I think that is exactly what Harrer is feeling. He is above all a mountaineer who takes his task seriously and one who gets into and out of trouble easily. It is one of the nice things after such an expedition to feel safe, and I cannot imagine any way in which one would feel safer than in coming to England and feeling the atmosphere of freedom and appreciation.

Lt.-Col. F. M. BAILEY: It is nearly fifty years since I left Lhasa on the little expedition to Western Tibet which was referred to by Harrer just now. We travelled, as he did, in mid-winter. Temperatures were down to 25° below zero; in his case it was 40°. We went to heights of up to 19,000 feet; in his case it was 20,000 feet; I know what it all means!

We travelled in considerable comfort—though we did not think so at the time—and had tents and warm clothes and warm boots. He had none of those things, and I am amazed at the way he was able to go through that terrible journey with the results he has shown us, and at the way he has been able to increase our interest by the photographs we have seen.

I want to say one thing about the Tibetan Government. I think they deserve some credit for being good enough to put these two refugees into the position to make their way as they did, and of course we admire them for having taken the opportunity.