

YOUNG DAYS IN
TIBET

by

TSEWANG Y. PEMBA



JONATHAN CAPE
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE
LONDON

FIRST PUBLISHED JULY 1957
SECOND IMPRESSION 1957

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN IN THE CITY OF OXFORD
AT THE ALDEN PRESS
BOUND BY A. W. BAIN & CO. LTD., LONDON

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
I THE CHUMBI VALLEY	13
II THE DONKAR MONASTERY	28
III THE ORACLE OF THE DONKAR MONASTERY	37
IV ECCENTRICS, FESTIVALS, DANCES, MINSTRELS AND CUSTOMS	44
V 'MIGOU' OR THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN	58
VI ON THE ROAD TO LHASA	62
VII LHASA AND ITS SIGHTS	73
VIII THE DALAI LAMA	88
IX LIFE IN LHASA	95
X FESTIVALS, DANCES AND CUSTOMS IN LHASA	110
XI TIBET AND THE OCCULT	120
XII FAREWELL TO LHASA	125
XIII SCHOOL IN INDIA	134
XIV BACK TO TIBET	144
XV CHANGING YEARS	151
XVI BORDER TIBETANS	155
XVII THE CHUMBI VALLEY AGAIN	159
XVIII THE LURE OF MODERNISM	166
XIX SEEDS OF CHANGE	173
XX IMPRESSIONS	178

Dedicated to my parents

PEMBA TSERING and TSERING YANGCHEN

INTRODUCTION

TIBET has been a source of mystery and interest for a long time. Ever since the first hardy explorers penetrated its closed frontiers, tales have appeared in many books regarding its strange rites, its perpetual concern with the things of the spirit and the mind, its lamas living amongst cliff faces and granite walls, its smells and dirt, its total absence of sanitation and similar lack of inhibition amongst its happy-go-lucky people. All these have built up a legend about this country deep in central Asia. When I was a student in London, I was sometimes called upon to give an account of 'your strange lamas living up to hundreds of years', 'the fabulous city of Lhasa', mysticism, clairvoyance and the occult. I did my best to satisfy the questioners, although they were a bit disappointed when my accounts were not so hair-raising as the tales of the explorers and adventurers. To some people Tibet was synonymous with 'Shangri-La'.

So I decided that when I had the time I would write something about Tibet as seen by a Tibetan. To write a bald tale giving details of its geography, climate, food, clothes, past history, etc., would be merely to repeat the writings of travellers and would bore the reader. Moreover these subjects have been thoroughly dealt with in the numerous books on Tibet. I thought that if I told my own story from my earliest days it would give a fairly broad perspective of the country and its habits, and would be made more interesting by descriptions of some of the lovable and eccentric characters in which Tibet abounds. I hoped it would interest readers to know about the lives Tibetan boys and youths live, how they react to the outside world,

INTRODUCTION

especially the Western world, and the changes in their habits and thoughts as they come in contact with the stream of modern life.

I was lucky enough to see most of the big cities in Tibet and to spent some years in Lhasa. In writing about Tibet, it is impossible not to say something about the impact of Chinese Communism; in fact, the changes produced by the Chinese will have a permanent effect upon the country, for good or ill. The Tibet of today is in the throes of a revolutionary change. It is no longer the Tibet whose virtues and vices are so familiar to readers of books. The Tibet of old is dying, and its place will be taken by a Tibet that will be little different from any modern Asiatic country. Most of my story deals with the Tibet I knew, as a boy and as a youth, that had been the same for generations; the country that has attracted so many people just because of its centuries-old sleep. I shall most probably not see this Tibet again.

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

I

THE CHUMBI VALLEY

I WAS born in Gyantse, a town in the province of Tsang, about a hundred and fifty miles from Lhasa. It is on the trade route to India which passes through south Tibet and the Himalayas. My father Pemba Tsering was a clerk in the British Trade Agency in Gyantse. The establishing of trade agencies in various towns in Tibet was a clause in the treaty signed between Tibet and Great Britain after the Younghusband Expedition of 1904. I hear that my father regarded me as a lucky child, because shortly after I was born he was promoted to a new post in Yatung, a town in south Tibet.

Thus it was that we moved from the flat, dry plain of Gyantse to the sunny valley in which Yatung lay. The Chumbi Valley is not easy to forget. Everybody who has had a happy childhood must have memories of some place that seldom fail to strike chords of nostalgia and longing. No matter how drab the place or how intemperate the climate, that childhood place is always sunny, young, innocent and gay. The people and things that belonged to it may be dead and gone long ago, buried in time, never to return again — but the memory of them always remains.

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

Lo! some we loved, the loveliest and the best
That Time and Fate of all their Vintage prest
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to Rest.

The Chumbi Valley is claimed to be the loveliest in all Tibet. European travellers agree with this, some even going into raptures about its idyllic beauties.

Yatung lay at an altitude of 9000 feet, low for Tibet, and was situated in a narrow part of the valley. Steep slopes covered with rhododendrons and pine forests rose around the town. The houses were made of timber, with stones placed over the roofs, from which prayer flags of various colours fluttered in the breeze. These houses bear a striking resemblance to Swiss chalets except for the prayer flags. Europeans could easily imagine themselves to be in a Swiss valley town.

Our house was situated on the slopes away from the town. Near by was a trickling stream, which flowed through a marshy gully just behind the house. Prayer flags festooned it and offerings were placed there for the deities that were supposed to have their abode in the stream. As boys we used sometimes to find clay images among the rocks near the place, and were told that these contained the powdered bones of dead human beings. A huge rock towered over the house, and its grim shadow fell over it at sunrise. This rock had a curious shape like some monster, and it was believed that a demon dwelled within it. In front of the house were long white pieces of cloth on which Buddhist scriptures were stamped. It is believed that every wave and flutter of these flags carried the sacred texts into the wind to spread them to all parts of the world.

THE CHUMBI VALLEY

On waking up early in the morning, I had to say 'Please give me some milk!' in English. My father would also tell me to 'Close the door' or 'Get my pen', and give other orders in English which I had to obey. My father spoke English well, and he was keen that I should learn this language that was then playing such an important role in the world. It was the time when the British Raj in India was in its heyday, and British influence in Tibet was mounting. He thought that when I grew up I would find English a very useful language to know. This was far-sighted of him, because years later I was to use this language more than my mother tongue, and it opened many worlds to me.

In the evenings my father, who liked music, would play gramophone records to us. My favourite records were 'Shout for the gallant major' and 'It's a long way to Tipperary!' Life is quite strange, for years later, in 1953, I went on a holiday to Ireland with some friends. Tipperary did not lie directly on our route, for we kept more or less to the coastline, but I insisted that we go there even though it meant turning inland; to visit Ireland and not to see Tipperary seemed to me inexcusable. So as we drove through Tipperary, my mind went back to my Yatung days, and I had the pleasure of humming the tune.

When I was about four years old I went to the local school. It had some thirty boys of all ages and we learnt reading, writing, arithmetic and English. Our way of learning to write was simple, but served its purpose quite efficiently. We had to gather a pile of pebbles, and make the letters out of these. It was a very pleasant school, and I have only happy memories of the place.

One day my father left for Lhasa with some British officers and we had to stand by the wayside and wave pretty

flags to the 'yellow-haired, turquoise-eyed' folk as they rode off to Lhasa. Now I realize the pretty flags were Union Jacks.

Someone of whom I have vivid memories was my grandmother. She was a wonderful character. She must have been about sixty-seven years old then, a sprightly old lady with black hair even at that age. She was from the Tibetan province of Kham, which is in eastern Tibet. Kham is the Wild West of Tibet, and is reputed to breed Tibet's toughest fighters as well as its most swashbuckling characters. What Texas is to the United States, Kham is to Tibet. Granny used to be very religious as she was coming close to her eternal home, and so had to earn enough merit to atone for her past sins.

Tibetans have an elaborate set of beliefs concerning the after-life and hell. I shall not go into any hair-splitting regarding the form of Buddhism practised in Tibet. Some call it Lamaism. Another question which one could discuss for a long time is whether Buddhists really believe in a personal God, the existence of a soul, and whether Tibetans really worship the hundreds of images found in their monasteries and homes, or whether they regard these only as symbols. These questions seem to me rather academic; what I hope to write about is the way the majority of Tibetans feel about these questions, and about Buddhism as practised in Tibet by most of the people.

A central belief of Tibetan Buddhism is that of the transmigration of souls. Tibetans believe that when a man dies his soul is reborn into this world. The form in which it reappears depends on the past deeds of the person, and the amount of merit he has stored up in his past life. If he has been good and followed the religion, done charitable deeds, prayed in his old age and so on, he may be born in the

THE CHUMBI VALLEY

'Higher World of the gods'. If he has led an ordinary life, he will be born again into the world of the humans. A life of sin may lead him into hell, and he may be born as a creature in this region; or he may be born as an animal. One of the worst sins is the taking of life, any kind of life, be it an insect, animal or human. Tibetans regard all living beings as creatures who are related to each other by the thread of life. Thus the transmigration of the souls or spirits affects the whole living universe, 'the world of sentient beings' — fowls, fishes, animals, all that live and move. All are dying and being reborn according to their lives in this world. It is not made too clear how an animal may be said to live a 'good' or 'bad' life.

This belief of Tibetan Buddhists is best illustrated by a religious painting known as the *Sibar Kholo* or 'The Wheel of Existence'. It is a wheel held in the embrace of Shenji, the ruler of the Dead. Shenji is represented as a ferocious god with fangs. In the circle are shown the milestones of human existence — birth, marriage and death. When a person dies, he is led before Shenji. There his past good deeds in the form of white pebbles are weighed against his evil ones represented by black pebbles. Upon this weighing depends his next rebirth.

A good person goes to the abode of the gods. A bad one is stripped naked and led by devil guards to the various zones of hell. In the hot hells the person is boiled alive, and in the cold ones he is drowned in icy lakes. He may be hurled from a precipice on to sharp stakes. A man who has abused the religious texts is crushed under piles of these tomes. Sometimes human beings are sawn into bits or quartered. All these gruesome details are depicted with great accuracy in this painting.

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

A man of greed may become a *Yidag*. This is a creature with a huge belly but a narrow gullet, who is always hungry and wanting to satisfy his ravenous hunger. But he is unable to do so, and is thus tortured by his desires. This is indeed an ingenious symbol of human greed.

After a person has undergone the appropriate punishments of hell, he is born again as a man, and has another chance to strive for a higher birth. The aim is that all living beings, cows, dogs, birds, human beings and even gods, should reach *Tong-pai-nyi* (the Void), and so pass from this endless round of births and deaths, and the sufferings which are inseparable from the act of existence. Tibetans believe that life itself is suffering. We may be happy sometimes, but on the whole anguish and pain cloud the total field of existence in this universe.

Thus, this belief in the round of births and deaths, a man's place in the hierarchy of existence being determined by his past deeds, the punishment of sins in hell, and the accumulation of merit by constant prayers and meditation for a higher birth — all these coloured the whole religion of Tibet and permeated the mind of the country.

So throughout the day Granny would be murmuring her prayers, spinning her prayer wheel and turning her rosary. All day, that is, unless she was busily occupied in distilling illicit liquor! Now this was an art whose dark secrets paced only Granny's brain. Nobody in Yatung could make it as well as she could, nor so potent. It was made from barley.

I remember these brewing sessions very well. Granny would be in the dark recess of our huge kitchen, quite oblivious to the world, supervising like some benign witch from *Macbeth* the making of her masterpiece. Smoke, acrid

THE CHUMBI VALLEY

smells, explosions and bitter curses would issue forth. All I remember seeing of this process, in case a connoisseur should want to know details, is a vision like the proverbial Judgment Day, with Granny surrounded by huge bronze cauldrons wrapped in jute bags. After a long time she would emerge, tired but unbeaten, looking triumphant like a surgeon who has just successfully carried out an heroic operation. Soon the glad tidings would spread that Granny had made her 'arrack' and buyers would hurry to take the stuff away before it all went. The buyers had a ritual all their own. They would dip a finger into the 'arrack' and light a match. If the liquor burnt with a long blue languorous flame their eyes would light up, and a profound look of admiration would come over them as if to say: 'Good old Granny, she's done it again!' Granny never drank, and always talked about the evils of drinking. Her 'arrack' was very popular amongst the gay blades of Yatung, so I suppose she had to work overtime at her prayer wheel to atone for her sins!

Like children of all lands we loved stories. Every night we would wait anxiously for Granny to finish her prayers, and then crowd round her. We would lie at her feet on the hearth in front of a roaring fire, and she would begin her stories. She had a wonderful knack of telling them, accompanied by the appropriate gestures and war cries that chilled our blood. The tales were about bandits in Kham, feuds, horse thieves and border skirmishes. They certainly made our evenings thrilling. These stories were to us what the cinema and television are to children in the West. Our eyes would be leaden with sleep, but still we would beg Granny to continue. We never had any story-books to read, and until the age of nine I did not read a single story. There are

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

no books of this type in Tibet. Tibetan books are hand printed on native parchment, the letters being carved on blocks of wood. This is a laborious process. Thus, people are very selective in what they print. Most of the books in Tibet are of a religious nature, although some of them are the stories on which the Tibetan *Achi Lhamus* or operas are based. Our knowledge of English and the Indian languages was too poor for us to read stories in these tongues.

After returning from school in the evenings or during our holidays, we would play our own games. Like children all over the world we spent most of our energy on them. One of our games was 'War'. In this the boys and sometimes even girls were divided into two teams, the warring sides. Each side would have a vague territory, and the idea was to invade the enemy's land in order to capture as many prisoners as possible, and to inflict heavy 'casualties' upon them by bombarding anybody of the opposing side, that we saw, with stones! It is quite surprising that we sustained only slight bruises in these strafings; I now see it could have been quite dangerous. The fun would start when we captured a prisoner. We would rope the poor wretch and drag him to a hillock. There he would be held down by several boys, and lashed with Tibetan whips, in the manner of the punishment meted out in our prisons. It was a great disgrace to be captured, but once captured a boy was considered a coward if he yelled out or cried during the whipping. However, even tough boys sometimes found the treatment too unpalatable and would bawl out loud enough to frighten a yak, and their parents would rush out to get us, and it was our turn to run for the nearest cliff face.

We were also very cruel to animals, I am ashamed to say. The things we did to them would not make good reading to

THE CHUMBI VALLEY

say the least; we were little brutes. When I was in Britain I used to hear of boys being sent to reformatory schools for 'unspeakable' cruelty to animals. They were described as 'bloodthirsty uncivilized little wretches', and several newspapers gave full details of what these boys had done. All I would like to say is that their crimes were fairly childish and innocent compared to what we did at about the same age. I mention these things in order to give a proper perspective to my account. Many people imagine childhood to be an innocent romp spent singing sweet nursery rhymes, blowing bubbles, and playing at cowboys and Indians. I hope people will not think that Tibetan boys are sweet cherubic creatures taking flowers and sundry offerings to the local monastery.

We led a wild healthy outdoor life. We would go climbing around the Chumbi Valley picking berries, and wandering in the forests. We were close to nature, and knew the lore of the woods and the mountains. We made our own bows and arrows, and used the sheep and the donkeys as our targets! But as regards the sexual side of the picture, I can honestly say that in Yatung we were quite innocent.

As I have said before, Yatung lay on the trade route to India, and was a colourful town in those days. To see a mule train arrive was an exciting event, with the thunder of the galloping horses and mules raising clouds of dust, mingled with the hollow toll of the bells tied round the necks of the animals and the fierce growls and barks of the huge mastiffs with thick yak-hair collars. The muleteers drove their pack animals with loud whoops and shrill whistles, hurling stones at the mules if they went on the wrong road or rested on the wayside. Sometimes an animal's load would fall off, the muleteers cursing and sweating would seize the animal, pick up the heavy load and bind it on again. The

strength and the toughness of these fellows was quite incredible. They usually came from Kham and were a race apart. They wore pigtails which they usually wound round their heads and tied with a thick red ribbon. Their faces were weatherbeaten and lined by the hardships, pleasures, passions and harsh experiences of one of the most hazardous trade routes in the world. Beaten by rain and dust storms, burnt by the sun and frozen on icy windswept passes, they had a sinew and a toughness which cannot be obtained by sucking vitamin tablets and doing physical jerks. They had the smell and the virility of old Tibet, and as boys we all wanted to be muleteers one day. They wore very capacious cloaks which looked like a cross between a Roman toga and a Scottish kilt, carried long broadswords tucked in their belts and smaller swords at their sides. They were quick-tempered and knife fights used to occur in Yatung, adding greatly to our boyish delight.

When these muleteers arrived at their halting place for the day, they piled all their loads to form walls, and tied their mastiffs to these to act as guards. The mules were all tethered together using an intricate system of pegs and a single rope. The muleteers would then make the Tibetan tea which has become proverbial in the West. Boiling water is poured into a long wooden cylinder. The tea comes in the form of hard dry bricks, brownish in colour. These are crumbled into the water. Butter is then added, and some salt to flavour the mixture which is churned vigorously by a piston inside the cylinder. The tea is then ready, and Tibetans consume many cups of this delicious stuff. Europeans say it can be tolerated if one imagines that one is drinking 'soup of rather a noxious variety'. In Tibet, travellers like these muleteers, choose food that can be easily

THE CHUMBI VALLEY

carried about and will not turn bad, food that is at the same time nutritious and consumes the least amount of fuel in preparing it, for fuel is scarce. The muleteer carries a bag of *tsamba*, the main part of his diet. This is roasted barley flour. Some tea is mixed with *tsamba* in a wooden bowl or a leather bag called a *thangu*. The *tsamba* is then kneaded into lumps of dough. The dough is eaten with dried meat and perhaps raw turnips. There may also be dried peaches or apricots. *Chura*, which is made from cheese dried until it is hard as rock, is chewed by young and old the whole day long, and is the Tibetan equivalent of chewing-gum. *Chura* gives hard jaws and fine teeth.

In Yatung we also saw Amdos, a tribe of people who came from almost the same region as the Khambas. The Amdos were tall men who did not tuck their swords in their belts but wore them hanging at their sides. They were completely shaven except for two long locks curling round their ears. Their faces were streaked with black paint. My mother told us that Amdos kidnapped little children, so we kept clear of them.

There were also quite a number of Sherpas in our town.

In Yatung there was a British Trade Agency similar to the one in Gyantse, so we sometimes saw Europeans. Most of them were British. They built a tennis court, an ice skating rink, and played hockey, soccer and polo, the latter being played on small Tibetan ponies. There may be quite a number of the proverbial English colonels who have played 'polo in Poona', but I daresay not many who have done so in Yatung! Outside the town, in a quiet secluded area there was a simple cemetery for Europeans who had died in Yatung. At that time there were about eight tombstones there. Thus, far away from home in such a strange place

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

these people found their rest. They had all come a long way, some seeking adventure, others serving their Empire, and some for the sake of science and knowledge, but all shared a common grave in a strange foreign soil, perhaps 'some corner of a foreign field that is for ever England'.

Yatung had a varied climate. The spring was lovely. The whole countryside would be a mass of flowers, and the grass and the air smelt of youth. Summer would bring delicious berries on the shrubs among the rocks, and would be the time for expeditions into the woods for mushrooms. The waterfalls around the valley foamed and sprayed. Everything was sunny and drowsy, and the summer breezes were soft. The Chumbi Valley could certainly inspire a poet to dreams of a 'Shangri-La'.

This peace would soon be shattered by the autumn winds. The morning would be calm. Then a sudden breeze would arrive, twisting the prayer flags. The breeze changed into a strong wind, driving the townspeople indoors. Trails of dust would sweep through the town, and the roaring whistling wind twisting the bare branches of approaching winter would rattle the windows, and tear away the roofs of houses, crashing stones down into the dusty cobbled streets below.

Winter was bitterly cold, with heavy falls of snow. The waterfalls would freeze into grotesque tortured shapes. The mule trains had to plough through terrible snowbound roads, and the muleteers cursed thickly. It was the worst part of the year in Yatung, but for us boys it provided an endless source of excitement. This was the time to make snow figures, to have snow fights and to slide down the steep pine-covered slopes.

Once during such a winter it was very cold and we were

THE CHUMBI VALLEY

all huddled around the wood fire in our thick fur-lined clothes. Granny was telling us a story, as it was so cold that our activity was numbed. I was suddenly drawn from my land of imagination by the sad melancholy blowing of a conch far away on the other slope. We ran out and asked Granny what this sound was. She pointed to the far slope and said: 'Look boys! across there just below the place where you pick your mushrooms, and went for a picnic this summer, can you see a party of people? See that bundle that they are bearing upon their shoulders—well, it is a dead man, and that is his funeral. White *khadas*' (ceremonial scarves) 'are wrapped around his body and the single *khada* held by the priest walking ahead and tied to the corpse is to guide him on the White Path, so that he may not stray on to the Black Path that leads to hell. He will be cremated a little farther along the valley, and tonight his soul will be led by the demons that inhabit the cremation grounds to Shenji, the Ruler of the Dead, where he will be judged. *Om Mane Peme Hum!* May all sentient beings find their goal! We must all go the same way some day. I will be gone soon, for I am getting old. Nothing can alter that!' We went back to our room, and in the warmth of the fire and the excitement of Granny's tale, we forgot all about Shenji, death and the melancholy sound of the conch.

It is always written in the books on Tibet that religion plays a central role in the daily life of a Tibetan. Hence people get the impression that everybody in Tibet is a hermit of some sort, doing their daily dozen of Yoga before breakfast. Religion certainly plays an important part in the lives of Tibetans, but it does not prevent them from getting fun out of life. They take their religion seriously but also with a sense of humour. Moreover the religion is wide,

tolerant to an astonishing degree, and has no strict finicky little rules and regulations.

From our youngest days we were surrounded in our homes by a religious atmosphere which is not found in the homes of Western countries. Every Tibetan home, no matter how poor, has a private chapel. Even if the owner has only a single room to live in, one finds a corner which is kept clean and where a few images, a photograph of the Dalai or Panchen Lama rest beside a burning lamp. In the wealthier families, a room is kept spotlessly clean in which there is a shrine with figures of the Buddha and saints of Buddhism, figures made of solid gold or silver. In front of this shrine butter lamps burn day and night, and bowls of water in little silver vessels are arranged in rows. The best fruits from a basket and any delicacies are left on the shrine for a few days before being eaten by the household. In the morning, after tea is made, a little is poured into a silver bowl and offered at the shrine.

On waking up, Mother used to say a short prayer. Then, after washing, the first thing that she did was to chant some prayers and prostrate herself in front of the shrine several times, saying prayers as she did so. Sometimes, more in imitation than with religious fervour, we used to prostrate ourselves in a similar fashion and receive nods of approval from Mother. At breakfast Granny said a short grace, and after dipping the forefinger of her right hand into her tea would raise it and flick it three times to the three most precious things of Buddhism (Buddha, the scriptures, and the body of monks). In the evenings Mother spun her prayer wheel and chanted her prayers. Just before going to bed she again said a short prayer. Thus it was that, although we did not directly take part in the various services, there was a

THE CHUMBI VALLEY

constant religious atmosphere in the house. Example, I suppose, is better than precept.

Whenever Granny went to the local monastery for fasting and saying special prayers, we accompanied her, and saw all the religious rites and ceremonies carried out there. I have many memories of the smell of incense, the flicker of butter lamps and the chanting of men, women and monks.

II

THE DONKAR MONASTERY

IN Tibet it is the custom to have at least one son in the family made into a monk. The boy is sent into the monastery when he is about seven or eight years of age. I think it would be of interest to give an account of my cousin who became a monk, and also something about his monastery, since Tibet is famous for these institutions.

My cousin, Thubden, was a youngster just like us, not a child displaying any definite leanings towards religion. He was an ordinary boy who loved the boyish pranks and games that we enjoyed. Then one day his mother told him that he had to become a monk at the Donkar Monastery, a few miles from Yatung. She had spoken to the person in charge of admitting new pupils, and when it was seen that the boy looked healthy and intelligent, he was granted a place. My poor cousin heard the news in silence, and wept bitterly, saying that the idea of becoming a monk did not appeal to him. But the decision was final, and my cousin's tears could not change his mother's mind. One day Thubden was told that he would be leaving for the monastery the next day. His hair was shaved, and the next day his mother took him off to his new home. We were sorry to see him go because he was such a nice person to play with.

THE DONKAR MONASTERY

About a month later Thubden came home on a few days' leave in his new monk's habit of red. He told us that he was very unhappy in the monastery. He was not allowed to play any games but had to behave like a grown-up, although he was only eight, he said. He had to get up very early, say a great many prayers and do heavy menial work. The food was not good and he felt very home-sick. He said that he and five other boys were under one teacher who looked after their welfare, taught them to read and write, and gave them religious instruction. This man, Thubden said, was a hard taskmaster.

About a year later I went to the monastery to see Thubden, and also to attend their annual celebrations. At this time the ritual dances of the Donkar were carried out. It was considered a great honour to be chosen for these dances, and we were delighted to hear that Thubden was to be one of the dancers. Granny felt very elated indeed to hear this news.

It was decided that Thubden's mother, some friends and I should go ahead a day before the celebrations, and the others should join us the next day. So off we went on horses through the Chumbi Valley up towards the Donkar Monastery. How well I remember that road — past the Chorten Karpo, now in ruins, once the headquarters of the Chinese occupying forces in Yatung. This valley also saw some action between the British forces of the Younghusband Expedition and Tibetan soldiers. Soon we saw the Donkar Monastery. This was the monastery in which the Dalai Lama spent some months when he came down from Lhasa planning flight to India, at the time of the Chinese Communists' entry into Tibet.

The monastery is situated high above the valley. Tall and

imposing, like other Tibetan monasteries it bears the character of Tibetan architecture, for it has been so built that it gives an impression of growing out of the very rocks. It looked peaceful and serene, with its fluttering prayer flags.

High above the monastery amongst craggy precipices little dots could be seen. These were the *Tsamgams*, for the meditation of hermits. Some of these hermits stay in their cells for years, their food being pushed in once a day through a narrow hole in the cave wall. Eagles that soar outside their cells are their only companions, and their only world that of the mystic.

As we rode up towards Donkar it got windier and very dusty. We eventually arrived at the monastery, and I was glad to see Thubden again. But now he appeared very grown up, and very different from the wild youngster of our gang. It was strange to see him quite at home amongst the crowds of monks both young and old. Thubden's teacher told his mother that she had a promising son, who was bright and intelligent.

That night I had a terrible toothache and gave vent to the most awful yells that nearly brought the monastery walls down, so the people in our party gave me a pipe to smoke. The smoke tasted very pleasant and the pain gradually disappeared. I fell into a deep sleep, and woke up late the next day feeling much better. I suspect the thing that I had to smoke was opium, so I can say that I nearly became an opium addict at a very tender age!

The next day my cousin took us round the monastery. We went to the entrance of a long room where monks were chanting. They were drawn up in two rows wearing saffron-coloured woollen capes and peaked hats which looked like Roman helmets. At the far end of the room was an altar

THE DONKAR MONASTERY

where hundreds of butter lamps burned. There were also rows of silver bowls filled with water. The lamps signify the destruction or burning away of all evil, the water serves as an offering to Buddha. The monks held religious books in their laps as they sat cross-legged, and chanted from these in deep sonorous voices, bowing rhythmically as they chanted. It was most effective. The chanting stopped at times, and then there would be the playing of monastic music. Cymbals clashed, drums started beating, the *gyalings* (reed instruments) sounded forth shrilly, and to these was added the blare of the *dongyers*, which look like alpine horns. The music had a strange quality about it, something spiritual like church music in the West, and was very pleasant to listen to. At intervals the monks drank tea from their wooden bowls. The air had the odour of incense.

We then went through various shrines and chapels. One such shrine was magnificently carved and painted. In it were a huge image of the Buddha in the centre, and at his sides his chief disciples Sharifu and Mongayfu (Sariputra and Monggalana in Indian). Also in this shrine were the photographs of the Dalai and the Panchen Lamas, and images of Tsonkapa, the founder of the Gelukpa sect to which the Donkar and the majority of Tibetan monasteries belong. He was also a reformer of Tibetan Buddhism. On either side of the shrine were tomes of the Tibetan religious books, the *Kangyur* and the *Tengyur*. The former contains the religious teachings of the Buddha and is in a hundred volumes, the latter is almost an encyclopaedia, containing treatises on philosophy, magic, the occult, medicine and science. It is in two hundred volumes. Tibetan books consist of loose leaves made of thick parchment, the whole being held between two flat pieces of wood and tied together

with a saffron-coloured cloth. At these shrines we had to prostrate ourselves thrice and touch our heads against them.

We also saw images of the Goddess Doma, of the fierce blood-dripping Chana Dorji who symbolizes those who defend the faith, and the *Cha tong* — *chen tong* (the image with the thousand hands and the thousand feet) signifying the all-seeing all-feeling Buddha. We also went into a room where Thubden's mother gave some money for lamps to be burnt in her name and prayers to be said. Soon Thubden told us to be quiet because we were going into the presence of the Geshe Rimpoche, the incarnate lama of the monastery. He was someone respected throughout Tibet and was said to possess miraculous powers. We went in silently. He was an elderly lama with a kindly face. He said a few things to Thubden's mother and then blessed us by laying both his hands upon our heads. He then asked a monk beside him for red and green silk ribbons. He took each ribbon, made a knot in the centre, blew into it and said a few prayers wishing the wearer of the ribbon a long and virtuous life, and tied it round the neck of one of his visitors. The males were given the red and the females the green ribbons.

These ribbons are called *trungas*, and much valued by Tibetans. Here I must give an example of the Tibetan's ability to take his religion with a sense of humour. It is traditional that the *trunga* be worn until the first louse appears in its silken folds, when it may then be discarded without committing a sin! This is also a very hygienic proposition, I must say.

The next day was the Cham or monastic dance, and I asked Thubden to tell me what dance he was going to do. He said: 'Tomorrow I shall be doing the *Gyuktra* dance, you

THE DONKAR MONASTERY

know, the one in which the dancer has a stick in each hand and has to spin them round and round between his fingers. It is quite a difficult dance, and we have been practising it for months. There is another boy doing it with me, so I won't feel self-conscious. But what I am scared about is in case I drop the sticks during the dance tomorrow. You know what happens, we get beaten with the whip if we drop the stick. That's what makes me scared!

'You are just joking, Thubden!' I said, because it sounded so cruel.

'No, I am not! Last year Tamding dropped it twice, and he could not sit down for weeks. And some years back someone dropped it and ran away from the monastery as he was so scared of the beating.'

'Aa! You won't drop it, you had the strongest grip amongst us, and nobody could twirl a stick round his head as well as you could!' I tried to reassure him, but I felt a bit worried about Thubden.

The next day I was woken up by the blowing of *gyalings* and *dongyers*. The music was very haunting and I could have stayed in bed for a long time just listening. But I was too eager to see what was happening in the monastery to laze around in bed.

The whole place was in a fever of excitement, with monks in their ceremonial dresses running round adding the final touches in readiness for the dance. Outside the monastery gates traders and vendors from the surrounding districts had already set up their stalls, selling tea, cakes, sweets and other odds and ends. Beggars in hordes had arrived to make the best of the day as people were more charitable on this occasion. Inside the monastery a huge canopy had been erected over the courtyard where the dance was to take place. The

people jostled and pushed to get to their places. The air was filled with the smell of burning incense.

Then a hush settled over the monastery, broken suddenly by the sound of the *gyalings*, *dongyers*, drums and cymbals. The Geshe Rimpoche was coming in procession to take the seat of honour. Preceded by two young monks carrying bowls of incense, the Rimpoche walked solemnly to his seat. The dance began.

The dancers wore extremely elaborate costumes, and many had on masks of various designs. The Shanags wore tall broad-brimmed hats and silk and brocade gowns. All the dances had an historical or religious background. They concerned the lives of Tibetan saints and lamas, and the struggle between good and evil. They depicted the scenes of hell and the punishments given to wrongdoers. The dances were notable for their dignity and the solemnity with which the monks carried out their various roles.

In one dance, the *Lokhor-chu-nyi*, the characters of the Tibetan calendar were shown. In Tibet, each year is given the name of an animal such as pig, tiger, ox or dragon. There are twelve such animals, and thus their names come in twelve yearly cycles. Dancers wearing the appropriate animal masks took part.

The skeleton dance was another interesting one. Four or five young athletic monks were dressed in tightly fitting costumes on which were painted the bones of the body, giving a skeleton-like appearance. Each dancer wore a grinning skull as a mask, and pranced about uttering wild shrieks.

These creatures are supposed to dwell near cremation grounds and graveyards, and lead the souls of the dead to Shenji. As the dancers came out into the courtyard, the air

THE DONKAR MONASTERY

became full of whistling which is thought to attract these creatures. When we were boys we were forbidden to whistle in the night for this very reason.

'The *Gyuktra* is next,' said Thubden's mother excitedly. The music started and two boy monks came out whirling sticks above their heads, and leaping about at the same time. Soon the tempo of the music increased and the whirling and the dancing became faster and faster. But the dance fortunately went smoothly, the boys did not drop their sticks and I was very happy.

After this dance I was in the mood to watch the antics of the *acharas*. These folks were the monastery equivalent of circus clowns. Wearing ragged, ill-becoming clothes and grimacing masks, they ran around doing or trying very hard to do acrobatic tricks, to the great delight of the crowd, who always appreciated buffoonery. Sometimes an *achara* picked out a yokel from the crowd and started to chase the scared fellow round the courtyard as if he were after a victim for a human sacrifice, accompanied by the roars and the guffaws of the onlookers. The *acharas* also controlled the crowds, and by adding a humorous vein whenever fights occurred usually ended the quarrels. Sometimes an *achara* threw a 'bomb', or set off some crackers near a herd of women causing general collapse and hysterical screaming.

The dances ended in the evening, and the time drew on for the *torgya*. A huge triangular image made of barley dough and butter, painted flaming red and surmounted by a skull, was carried by several monks. Many others, chanting and playing the various monastic musical instruments, followed in procession. The *torgya* is believed to carry away all the evil from the monastery. After a little while the outskirts of the monastery were reached, and there

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

the *torgya* was put down. Some incense was burnt, the chanting became louder, the *dongyers* blared forth a challenge, and an old monk set the *torgya* on fire with burning oil. As it burned, some of them carried it towards a precipice. The chanting became incessant, the *dongyers* shook the ground, the *gyalings* trilled shrilly, the cymbals and the drums made an ear-piercing din, and amidst bloodcurdling screams and yells the roaring flaming *torgya* was hurled down the precipice.

III

THE ORACLE OF THE DONKAR MONASTERY

IN the night. Thubden and I sat down on the roof of the monastery 'So you didn't drop the sticks! I knew you wouldn't!' were my first words to him. He smiled and nodded, and soon he and I were talking just as in our days before he became a monk. Gone was his grown-up manner, and I was glad to see that the old Thubden had not changed. 'Tomorrow,' he said 'you will see the oracle of Nanga Punzee, and I think you will be excited by what you see.'

'Who is this Nanga Punzee?' I asked him, and he told me something that remains as vivid in my memory as on that evening. I must tell this in some detail, as it is a strange story — perhaps it is not fair to call it a story as it is of recent origin and many people can testify to the facts concerning the happenings that gave the Donkar Monastery its oracle. It is something that only a place like the old Tibet could have given rise to in these so-called modern times. Thubden said that it was absolutely true; however, I leave it to the reader to believe it or not. For myself I think such a person as Nanga Punzee really existed; there is too much evidence for one to doubt it as at that time there were many people who knew him.

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

This is the account that Thubden gave me:

'Some years back a middle-aged man came to the gates of the Donkar Monastery. He had come from Mongolia, having walked all that way to become a monk at the monastery. He was very poor and ill in body but his face bore the lines of a strange personality, as if he were gifted with supernatural powers. He was destined to play an important part in the future of our monastery. He asked for the monk in charge of admitting new monks. This monk told his pupil to bring in the newcomer, took an instant dislike to the strange Mongolian, and told him to clear out, because although he admitted monks he did not admit beggars. Nanga Punzee, for that was the name of the Mongol, was greatly hurt and disappointed. He had struggled through so much hardship to come to the Donkar, and here he was treated like a street dog. He begged to be allowed to stay as he had nowhere to go, and said he was willing to do any menial work that he was given. But the monk was not impressed by any of these hard luck stories, and, abusing and kicking him, threw him out of the monastery. At the monastery gate, Nanga Punzee fell down on his knees and asked a group of four other monks who were standing there to help and plead for him. But these monks were no better, and they beat him and pushed him away. Nanga Punzee slowly got up, and a new defiant look came into his eyes. He cursed the five monks and told them that within the year all five would die. Then he went away.

'Nothing was heard of Nanga Punzee again, but one day some villagers found him dead. He had perished from starvation and disease. He, who had left home and all that he loved in order to come to our monastery, had died like a street dog. The villagers threw his dead body into the river

ORACLE OF THE DONKAR MONASTERY

that runs close to our monastery. Carried by the rushing mountain torrents, the body got stuck between some rocks and remained there for some days. Some herdsmen who were grazing their yaks near by saw the body, and started to use it as a target for stoning. After a few days the body had gone and it was never seen again.

‘A few months later the herdsmen one by one died from a strange fever. They were delirious, and in their delirium they uttered terrible shrieks, and clawed and clutched at the walls as if they were being pursued by demons. The herd of yaks also perished from disease.

‘In our monastery the monk who first saw Nanga Punzee, and treated him so badly, fell ill. He was gripped by a fever that became steadily worse, and made him delirious. The monastery was filled with his screams, and nobody understood his illness. He died.

‘A few weeks later a young monk in our monastery went into a trance and began to jump about, beating his breast and making weird noises through clenched teeth. The on-lookers saw that he held his right hand in a strange fashion, with four fingers stretched out. The Geshe Rimpoche came to see the strange incident. The Rimpoche thought that the monk was acting as a medium for the spirit of a dead person. He was not sure what the gesture of the hand signified.

‘Some time after this another monk died in a similar way. Later the monk medium again went into a trance, and this time the crowd saw that the medium held his hand with three fingers stretched out.

‘The Rimpoche made inquiries to find out whether the two dead monks were connected in any way with a crime against any person that had died recently. The only thing

people could think of was the ill-treatment of Nanga Punzee, and the curse he had uttered. They described the strange deaths of the tribesmen who had stoned the Mongolian's dead body.

'It was concluded that the spirit within the medium was that of Nanga Punzee. The three outstretched fingers were taken to mean that he had three more victims on whom to take revenge. The Rimpoche thought that the only way to pacify the spirit was to make Nanga Punzee an oracle at our monastery, speaking through the monk medium, and thus to give him after his death the admission into Donkar which he had so desired during his life. This might make him forgive the other three monks, and spare them a horrible death. And so with many rituals an oracle was installed in our monastery, the first that Donkar ever had.

'However, Nanga Punzee did not seem easy to please, because one more of the monks he had cursed died in the now familiar manner. When the medium went into a trance the next time he had only two extended fingers. The Rimpoche spoke to the oracle and asked the spirit to forgive the other two, but the medium shook his head. The two monks died some time later, one of them in the usual way and the other in a more merciful manner; he died by falling down some stairs and cracking his skull. Strangely enough, in his next trance, the medium had both his fists tightly closed. Nanga Punzee had at last taken revenge on all the people who had been so cruel to him during his lifetime. He had done this in a terrible fashion. He was now at peace, only to serve our monastery with his supernatural powers.

'From that day the oracle of Nanga Punzee became famous throughout the country, and pilgrims and lay people came from many parts to seek his advice, and to get his blessing.

ORACLE OF THE DONKAR MONASTERY

Donkar became wealthy, as we received many offerings and gifts. Now our monastery seldom does anything without asking for the oracle's blessing and advice.

'Later a shrine was built near the place where Nanga Punzee died. All Tibetans who pass this place on horseback must dismount and say a short prayer at the shrine. There are many cases of people who forgot to do so, and then met with accidents or became ill.'

This was Thubden's story and it is a strange one. Many people will smile at it, I myself am not quite sure what to make of it.

Thubden told me that the next day the oracle would go into a trance, and Nanga Punzee would be asked to bless the people who had attended the ceremonies.

The oracle took place in the afternoon. The young monk who was the medium wore a helmet of silver with plumes and a silk costume with an apron on which a fierce figure was embroidered. On his chest was a bright round piece of metal. He sat on an elaborate seat, and was surrounded by four monks. There was the usual sound of *gyalings* and the clash of cymbals, and the smell of incense. Soon the medium became pale and the crowd of people stood silent. The monk then began to shiver and this gradually became more violent. The attendants pinned his arms down, but he began to writhe and struggle. Froth appeared at the corners of his mouth, his face became red and bloated, and his eyes rolled about giving an inhuman appearance to his whole face. Then he uttered little stifled cries through clenched teeth, and spasms like those which occur in an epileptic attack shook his whole body. He gave little shrieks and his struggles became very violent. Then with one tremendous heave he freed himself from the attendants, one of whom was dragged

about in his attempts to hold the medium. The crowd instinctively drew back. Nanga Punzee was once more in their midst. The medium now very red, frothing and breathless, did a slow awkward dance and banged his head several times against the stone pillars, bruising himself, but he seemed unaware of pain. He then seized two swords from an attendant and hurled these in different directions. The crowd knew what was coming and moved away as the medium threw the swords. I heard that formerly he sometimes threw a huge hook at the crowd and if it caught any woman by her hair, she was regarded as a witch, and had to undergo a purifying ceremony at the monastery. When I was there, he did not throw the hook. The medium then returned to his seat and sat there shivering and shaking.

Near the medium stood an old monk. Someone would come cringing forward and address himself to this monk asking such questions as, what would be the outcome of the forthcoming harvest, or whether his son who was ill would get well. The monk acted as an interpreter, and 'talked' to the medium in shrill monosyllables that we could not understand. The medium replied in the same 'language' but in a more harsh, strained tone, stuttering his words. The old monk then gave the inquirer the medium's answer. Afterwards we all went and received the blessings of the spirit of Nanga Punzee. The medium then quietened down and began to sweat profusely. His face became stony and pale, he fainted and was carried away to his chamber by some of his attendants.

There were quite a number of these oracles in Tibet. The most famous was the oracle of Nechung in Lhasa. When I was in Lhasa I met the medium of this oracle who was related to some friends of ours.

ORACLE OF THE DONKAR MONASTERY

An amusing incident happened to me in Lhasa. One day there was an oracle near by, and my mother took me there to be blessed. I saw the medium writhing and foaming, and I hid away. My mother, however, pulled me out and presented me in front of the medium, and requested his blessing and advice. At that time I was a wee scoundrel, dirty in body and mind, a regular Lhasa urchin. The medium laid a hand upon my head and said in a solemn voice (for this medium spoke the Tibetan language!), 'Be clean in your body and mind, my son.' I was appalled at the truth of this counsel and just tottered away. If ever an oracle spoke wisely it was that one.

I also remember making a medium's costume in Lhasa and imitating in fun what we had seen. There was a woman who, whenever she saw us thus apparelled, used to say: 'Please go away, because whenever I see that costume I go into a trance and faint!' She was really serious about this, and others told us that she had mediumistic powers.

IV

ECCENTRICS, FESTIVALS, DANCES, MINSTRELS AND CUSTOMS

LOVABLE eccentrics are quite common in Tibet. Such a one was X. He always went about carrying a dagger in his stocking like a Scottish dirk. His dagger, he would confide secretly to his friends, was painted with deadly poison. One scratch from it, and the unhappy victim died a horrible death. He also carried a pistol, fully loaded. When questioned as to the reasons for his arming himself thus as if a war was on, he would gravely reply that everybody wanted to kill him. He expected an assassin around every street corner or dark alley. Today there would be no hesitation in diagnosing him as a case of paranoia. Anyway, there he would be with his poisoned dagger and loaded pistol, more of a menace to himself than to man or dog. My mother used to be worried about him, and did her best to assure him that there was no man in the whole town more liked than he, and that the last thing anybody would attempt would be a murder of our beloved X. But he was deaf to these assurances.

One dark night, riding home, he was passing a place reputed to be haunted by both ghosts and bandits. He suddenly saw a strange thing looming in the darkness.

ECCENTRICS, FESTIVALS, DANCES, CUSTOMS

Thinking it to be a bandit or a ghost, he whipped out his pistol and fired a couple of shots at point-blank range into this thing. His horse shied at the sound of the shots and threw him. He was a poor horseman. He broke an arm and lost consciousness.

The cold dawn revealed a dead bandit, a bandit with a tail: in other words, a cow! Poor X had to limp home on foot and also pay compensation to the owner of the dead bandit. From that day he undertook a general disarmament programme, to the betterment of his health and greater safety of the local bovine population.

Perhaps an account of the different festivals we used to enjoy will not be out of place here. I have already described the festivals that took place at the Donkar Monastery.

The birth of Tsonkapa is celebrated throughout Tibet. He was the founder of the Yellow Hat sect; he reformed Tibetan Buddhism and laid down strict rules and regulations to be followed by his disciples. On his birthday butter lamps are burnt by the hundred in every home, and special prayers are said. I remember our house glittering with lamps and thick with the aroma of incense, and the chanting of Granny and Mother. My sister Nozin, my brother Norbu and myself went about carrying 'joss sticks', muttering prayers and singing hymns. The whole of the Chumbi Valley used to be dotted with lights. It was a marvellous sight.

The festivals at the time of the Tibetan New Year are the biggest. Just before the New Year a pot of wheat is planted for each member of the family. The young shoots that will appear in time for the New Year signify youth. These pots are cared for daily, watered, left out in the sun and at night are kept warm in the clay ovens.

As the New Year approaches the housewives begin giving their houses a regular spring cleaning. The walls of the kitchen are decorated with white flour, the designs of the decorations being traditional patterns. The *yundru* or swastika is a favourite because it is regarded as a symbol of good luck. A special feature of the New Year or *Losar* is the making of pastries and cakes of intricate designs. These are piled in front of the altar and put in the main rooms.

On the 29th of the twelfth month a special form of noodles is made, the *Gu-thu*, into which are put stones, a piece of wood, wool and other things, all wrapped in dough. One lump of dough is made in the form of a woman carrying a baby, but the one that attracts the greatest attention is the *Sima Rango*. This is a woman with an enormous head-dress. It will soon be evident why this figure is so notorious.

When the *Gu-thu* is ready in the evening the whole household sits down to a hearty meal. There is a saying:

‘*Gu-thu thung nay na nay na!*
Gu-thu thung nay she nay she!’

(‘Having consumed the *Gu-thu* who cares if one is ill! Having consumed the *Gu-thu* who cares if one dies!’) There is some wisdom behind these lines for it is traditional on that night for nine huge bowls of the stuff to be swallowed!

The *Gu-thu* is stirred thoroughly by the person who is serving it, and he is blindfolded. He dishes out a portion into a big bowl. One takes it away and with great excitement searches in it for the lumps of dough. A piece of wood means a new house in the coming year, wool stands for new clothes, stone denotes either good health or a miserly disposition, depending upon how one interprets it. The

person who gets the woman with the child is sure to have a child that year; of course, when Granny got it, it meant a new grandchild. Everybody hopes that they will not find the dreaded *Sima Rango* in his bowl. The person who is thus singularly blessed has to buy *chang* (barley beer) for the house, and is generally the butt of all jokes throughout the evening. When at last *Sima Rango* turns up in someone's bowl, there is much laughter and hooting.

After the meal all the pieces of dough are collected on a separate plate, and a large lump of dough is kneaded which is rubbed over the bodies of every member of the household, so that all the evil and the bad luck of the old year may go into it. The lumps of dough are now put into a container. One person carries this, the others all carry lighted torches made of hay dipped in oil. The party then rushes out amidst the explosion of crackers and shrill whistling. There is much banging of plates, and the people yell '*Bamo thun shuma! Bamo thun shuma!*' (Witches let's see you come out!) The screaming, whistling and yelling of war-cries come to a climax, the dough container is hurled into the darkness, and the party returns home to drink the *chang* provided by the victim of *Sima Rango*. There is much dancing and carousing that night.

On New Year's Day we used to get up very early, usually being woken by the voice of a Dekar, a type of strolling minstrel. To hear the Dekar the first thing in the morning is a sign of good luck. The Dekar is offered a *khada*, a sum of money, and is swamped with *chang*. After this a *chang-kway* is made for the household. This, I suppose, could be called an alcoholic porridge. It contains the inevitable *chang*, raisins, barley, nuts and other ingredients. The *chang-kway* is made only on *Losar* day, a shame!

We all then used to go out to explode crackers. Soon parties of children would arrive in pairs, one carrying a jar of *chang*, and the other a decorated wooden box containing barley, sweets and rice.

They greet one by saying '*Tashi dele phunsum tso*' to which the reply is '*Ama bhatro kunkham sang*'. This is the traditional New Year greeting of good luck and health. The child carrying the *chang* pours a little into one's palm, and after sipping this, a pinch of the barley is taken from the wooden box and thrown thrice into the air as an offering. The children are then given some money and *khadas*.

Friends then call. There is great merry-making for the rest of the day. Skipping and playing with a type of shuttlecock which is kicked into the air with the side of the foot are the traditional games of the *Losar*.

At the time of the *Losar*, the traditional dances such as the *Sengi* (Lion Dance), the *Mabcha* (Peacock), and the *Yak* are performed by the local men and boys. The town resounds every evening with the drums and the cymbals of the dancers at their rehearsals.

The dancers go around visiting house after house, and I remember with what excitement we used to wait for them to come to our house. It is a dark night. Soon we can hear the distant sound of drums, and the clash of cymbals. There is the glimmer of lights amongst the pine trees. A crowd of people are coming up the hill, the ones in the front carrying lanterns of various colours, red, blue, yellow. The drumbeats become louder and the lantern-bearers form a circle which the *Sengi* enters. The dance is done by two men and is quite strenuous, requiring agility and speed. The two men are covered by a long piece of embroidered cloth, one dancing as the tail and the other as the head of the lion. The

ECCENTRICS, FESTIVALS, DANCES, CUSTOMS

lion's head, made of bamboo and papier mâché and festooned with ribbons, has a gaping mouth that opens and closes in a hungry realistic fashion, being worked thus by the dancer inside. The huge rolling eyes and flared nostrils give the creature a fierce look. To a catchy rhythm produced by the drums and cymbals the lion prances and lunges about.

There is also a *Dhatwata*, usually played by a boy. He wears a mask to look like a little Chinese boy, with rosy cheeks and an impish grin. He also has a round lump on his forehead which I suppose could be diagnosed as a dermoid cyst! He wears a fur coat and a bandolier of bells. In his hand he carries a wand. The *Sengi* lies down as if having a snooze. The *Dhatwata* approaches the animal and touches him with his wand. The *Sengi* suddenly wakes up and appears annoyed. This is repeated several times, the *Dhatwata* getting bolder and bolder. Eventually it ends up by the little wretch climbing on to the back of the king of all beasts, and the *Sengi* good-naturedly gives the imp a ride as if to reward him for his audacity! It is quite a simple dance but much appreciated by the crowd. I have seen the Chinese do a similar dance, and in London I saw a troupe of Japanese ballet dancers doing a Lion Dance which somewhat resembled the one I have just described, so I suppose this dance is universal in the Far East.

As boys we used to make our own *Sengis*, and went around visiting our neighbours and getting some cash for the *Losar*, very much like the 'Penny for the guy, sir!' children that I used to meet in the foggy dark November evenings in the streets of London. After the *Losar* we burnt our *Sengis* according to tradition, but snatched a bit from the burning mass to keep as a talisman.

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

The Peacock Dance is very graceful, the music for it being provided by a flute. The Peacock, also made of papier mâché and bamboo, struts about, flaps its wings, and pecks at the ground.

Tibet is full of strolling minstrels and wandering friars. Such a one is a *Lama-mani*. He is a monk who goes around the country telling the stories of the Tibetan religious epics or the operas. When the *Lama-mani* has gathered a large enough audience he unrolls a painting. In it are depicted all the characters of the story, and so the tale is illustrated. Oddly enough its closest relative is probably the modern comic! However, there is no mass hysteria in Tibet yet for banning 'Horror *Lama-manis*'. The painting ready and the audience quiet, he starts telling the tale in a sing-song voice, pointing to the painting at the appropriate places with a metal rod. Each of the audience contributes some money at the end of the story. It is a wonderful form of entertainment.

Sometimes a troupe of Khamba dancers would come to the house. The men, fine athletic-looking fellows, wore nets of string over their 'kilts' and carried bells in their hands. The women, husky and tanned, played drums. There were many movements in these dances. The men would go spinning round and round to the thudding of the drums, then stop and do a handstand, and hop around on their hands whirling their legs in the air, going faster and faster as the tempo of the music increased. Others would hop on bent legs like Cossack dancers. Some would spin round and round on one leg, take their broadswords and, tucking the tip of the sharp weapon under one armpit, turn somersaults.

After the dances Granny always made a point of in-

ECENTRICS, FESTIVALS, DANCES, CUSTOMS

quiring from which Kham district the dancers came. If they came from anywhere near Mankham, Granny's home town, she would ask for news of any people she knew. Kham was in those days a journey of about three months from Yatung, and the road was dangerous because of bandits. News was very scarce, and Granny was always delighted to hear anything of her old friends. Once we heard that a friend of hers had been killed by bandits. We did not tell this to her as we thought it might upset her.

Nowadays the Chinese Communists have built a road through Kham to Lhasa, and the journey does not take more than a few days. And Jyekundo, once an isolated outpost on the Kham—China border, is in a few years to boast the biggest aerodrome in Asia.

One evening my mother was not too well, and she went to bed. The next morning, in the early hours, I was woken up by my Granny who with great delight told me that a fourth child had been born into our family, a little girl. I went into Mother's room, and held the bundle within which was wrapped the cause of all this excitement. My mother was given steaming bowls of chicken soup. Of course, she had no doctor to look after her, Granny having acted as a midwife. Childbirth in Tibet is taken as a matter of course. I used to hear of husky young girls going off to cut wood, and being suddenly seized with labour pains. They would have their babies in the forest, walk home and be back cutting wood after a day or two!

In Tibet the equivalent of the christening ceremony is the *Vangsay*. This falls on the third day after birth for the boy and the second for a girl. It is not a religious ceremony. Friends come along and offer *khadas* to the parents and the child. The child does not automatically take the surname of

its father as in the West. Usually the infant has one of its names after the day of its birth, thus it may be Nima Tsering (Nima — Sunday, Tsering — Long Life) or Dawa (Monday), Mingma (Tuesday), Lhagpa, Phubu, Passang, Pemba, etc. Readers of Himalayan climbing will notice that these names are quite common amongst the Sherpas, for they use the same system as the Tibetans in naming their children. It is also a custom to ask a holy monk to bless the child and to give it a name. Thus my sister was named Norbu Doma, the Jewel Goddess, but we shortened it to Norden.

In our family we all have the surname of Pemba, my father following the Western style of naming which became fashionable. Some families get their children's horoscopes done at birth at the local monastery after paying a sum of money. This is an intricate document that tells the future of the child in great detail, the lucky and unlucky years, what years to be careful about, etc. Superstition abounds in Tibet about the welfare of children. Whenever a child goes out a dash of soot is painted on the tip of its nose, in order to keep away evil spirits. When guests arrive they are not supposed to go and admire the child immediately on arrival. The year thirteen and every multiple of thirteen are *Ka* years, unlucky years in which there may be many mishaps. In order to ward off this evil prayers are said at the monastery, and the person wears saffron-coloured clothes with the moon and the sun embroidered at the back. If a child continually falls ill, sometimes its name is changed.

I have described our visits to the Donkar Monastery, but I have not said very much about the monastery itself. People in the West are astounded at the number of these institutions in Tibet, and the vast number of monks in the country; they

ECCENTRICS, FESTIVALS, DANCES, CUSTOMS

perhaps think of our monks and monasteries as being similar to those in their countries. When I was in Britain I had the opportunity of visiting a few monasteries there, including one on the Isle of Wight.

The monks in these British monasteries are all adults, and enter them, of their own free will, because they feel they must devote their lives to religion and to serving the God they believe in. The monasteries are closed, secluded places where discipline is strict and life is hard. The monks spend almost all their time in prayers, meditation and the study of theology. They lead fine lives and bear all their hardship and discipline with patience. Almost all these monks were good people, some saintly and learned. The atmosphere around their monasteries was peaceful and serene. Although I do not believe in any religion, I could not help admiring these monks. I may disagree with their philosophy and their beliefs, but their way of life and bearing was generally noble and saintly.

The beliefs held by these monks were all the same. Each of them belonged to an order, and all lived according to the traditions of this order.

I particularly remember one monastery that I visited. During the meal the monks maintained silence, and one monk read out portions from the scriptures. After the meal we all had to go in procession along the cloister to the chapel while the monks chanted prayers. There each of the monks in turn made a genuflexion towards the altar, and then went away to his cell. They had about an hour's recreation each day.

The monastery had no social intercourse with the people of the surrounding district, except when a few visitors came, or when the monks talked to the lay brothers. Women

seldom came to the place, and the monks of course never had their meals with women visitors.

The Tibetan monastery makes a very strong contrast with these closed monasteries of the West. Most of the monks are from poor homes, and have been made into monks by their parents when they were boys. In Tibet it is considered a thing of great merit to have at least one son in the family a monk. Also, the monastery provides a livelihood for the young boy. To poor families the monasteries are extremely useful institutions where their children are fed, clothed and educated without paying anything — and, if they are specially talented, the monastery will do its utmost to develop these talents to their fullest extent. Through sheer hard work and ability a boy can rise to one of the highest posts in the country, a thing quite impossible for an ordinary non-aristocratic layman.

The discipline in the monastery is not too strict. Sometimes the boy monk can come home to spend a few days with his parents and relatives. As he grows up and starts learning the religious texts, he can keep an open mind about them and need not believe all that they say. A few monks are even atheists in the strict sense. As long as they obey the monastic rules, their beliefs are left to themselves.

Sometimes parties of monks are called to say prayers at people's houses when someone is ill or dies. They live in the house for several days and may go about the town. When people visit the monasteries, men, women and children get a very hospitable reception, and the monks, although celibate, mix freely with them. At the times of the monastic dances, families may sleep in the rooms of any monks they happen to know.

The monastery may own houses and lands in the surround-

ing areas, and so the monks must see to the harvesting of the crops, and go out to the towns to find buyers for their surplus grain. Some monks even go to the border states to trade for their monastery.

Since monks do not enter the monastery voluntarily, they are not a selected group of people devoted to God and to religion as in the monasteries of the West: there are sheep and goats among them. Some of the monks are very saintly and learned, and devoted to their way of life. Others are lazy, stupid and mere parasites. The majority of them are good people because they have been brought up in a religious atmosphere from their youngest days. Some monks break their vow of celibacy, and have to leave their monastery and return to ordinary life. Tibetan monks thus mix more with the ordinary people, and do not have so strict and secluded a life as those in the monasteries of the West. This 'laxity' applies equally to religious beliefs. There is a very wide toleration in the monasteries in Tibet.

We visited the monastery in Yatung when it held its annual feast, about which I have written in some detail. But every now and then or on some important religious day, we would go there for a *Chonjal* (literally — to meet the religion). The monks would be very kind to us, and they would give us food and tea, as well as show us around. We were lucky to have Thubden, my cousin, to explain the significance of many of the rituals.

Sometimes we would go out for a *Lhabso* (offerings to the gods). The whole family went to this. The night before the *Lhabso*, the people of the house get their prayer flags ready. Pieces of cloth of different colours are strung on a length of string: blue, red, white, yellow and green signifying the five elements — sky, fire, cloud, earth and water

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

espectively. Bags of *tsamba* or barley and *chang* are also carried, as well as incense.

When one arrives at the special place where the *Lhabso* takes place, usually out in the open in the mountains, incense is burnt in a special oven-like structure made of clay.

Then the men climb trees or put up poles on which to string up the prayer flags. After this all stand in a circle, with a fistful of *tsamba*. Then we all chant together. 'So . . . solo, so . . . solo . . . *Kyi kyi solo — Lhai gyalo.*' This chanting is done in a strong resonant tone, and at each part a little of the *tsamba* is thrown up into the air. At the last part there is a tremendous yell and the rest of the *tsamba* is rubbed over the face of your nearest neighbour! This is known as taking your religion with a pinch of salt I suppose.

After the *Lhabso* there is singing and dancing. Some of the menfolk dice and gamble. The women chatter as in any part of the world. Liberal quantities of *chang* are drunk by all, and the day ends with everyone rolling home singing songs. Thus the *Lhabso* or 'Offerings to the Gods' ceremony is by no means something solemn and quiet! It is really more of a picnic.

Although this chapter is supposed to include eccentrics, I would be the last person to call Ajou, Granny's second husband, an eccentric! He was an immensely tall strong Khamba. I knew him as a sprightly old gentleman. We were always asking Granny to tell us the exploits of Ajou during his youth. In our house there used to be a rusty old cutlass, with brown stains on it. Ajou killed a man in Kham with this weapon during a quarrel, almost slicing him in two with one back-handed stroke. In his young days Ajou's physical prowess was the talk of the surrounding district. When crossing waters that swept away horses, he would

struggle and haul the animals to the other side. If a loaded mule fell, he could lift it bodily and put it on its feet again. Once he went down to Calcutta to buy some sheets of corrugated iron. In order to make these less cumbersome to carry, they are folded. Usually this is done by means of a heavy hammer. After Ajou had bought his sheets, he nonchalantly began to fold them with his bare hands, flabbergasting the shopkeeper, who had never seen such a feat of strength before. He told a local circus, which immediately sent some people to hire Ajou as a strong-man. Some of Ajou's friends saw these men coming and, thinking they were the police, warned Ajou. He quickly packed up his goods, and took the first train home. When the Chinese Nationalists invaded Tibet many years back, they were extremely cruel, but they were so impressed by Ajou's strength that they spared him, and put him in charge of their horses, and gave him a Chinese rank.

V

MIGOU OR THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

IN Yatung one found quite a number of bears, both in the forests and close to fields of buckwheat which they are fond of. The farmers make it a point before they go to bed to beat on pots and pans in order to scare any bears away. Fires are lit for the same purpose. There were many badly scarred people going about who had been mauled, woodcutters having the worst of it. It was said that if a bear saw you, the thing to do was to lie still and pretend to be dead. I don't think bears are so stupid as not to distinguish between dead and living. I am sure that nobody in Yatung really believed in this valuable advice.

Talking of animals there is that hoary old question about the existence of the *Migou*, by which I mean the Abominable Snowman, although I don't know what is abominable about this creature that does nobody any harm, does not meddle in other people's affairs, and does not indulge in football pools! *Migou* is the Tibetan name; in that country I have never heard it called by any other. The name *Yeti* is probably a Sherpa name for this strange and mysterious thing. I think it will be quite unnecessary for me to advance a theory about the *Migou*. It would be just another theory; as with ghosts, I shall believe in this creature when I see

'MIGOU' OR THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

one face to face — perhaps an uncomfortable experience to say the least. But it will be interesting to relate the local tales and beliefs regarding this creature that has stirred the imaginations of so many people. So much so, that an expedition for the express purpose of finding it was carried out a year or so back, and caused some excitement.

From my youngest days I have always heard people talk about the *Migou*. Yatung and the surrounding district is thought to be one of its haunts, especially a place called Chumpithang, about twelve miles away on the road to Sikkim. The *Migou* is thought to be a large ape-like being that lives on berries and fruits on top of mountains, and migrates down to the warmer lower areas during the cold winter months. It is supposed to be attracted by the smell of grilled meat, and whenever we went to Chumpithang people always warned newcomers not to grill any meat. The *Migou* is said to have a long tuft of hair hanging from its forehead; so if you are chased by one you must run downhill; then this tuft covers his eyes and he cannot see you. This piece of secret advice is given gratis!

The *Migou* is regarded as a sacred animal, but to see one is bad luck. The creature is never discussed at night, when people are afraid even to mention the name. I used to hear many stories of *Migous* capturing human beings — children for adoption, men for husbands and women for wives. From this one may safely conclude that the creature has strong paternal, maternal and amorous instincts! I have not heard of men capturing *Migou* females for wives. The shortage of women in Tibet is not as acute at that! The *Migou*, having captured a woman or man, takes this unfortunate person to its home situated amongst precipitous heights no man can climb, and so makes its victim a prisoner. If the

person does what the *Migou* demands, it brings food, stolen money and jewellery in return.

The Geshe Rimpoche of the Donkar Monastery, of whom I have already written, used to meditate high amongst the mountains once a year. He said that the *Migous* brought to him his food, fetched wood and drew water for him.

I know of only one person who has seen an ape-like creature which may be a *Migou*. He is a very trustworthy dour sort of person, not given to flights of imagination. He was a servant of ours. He was once going to Yatung, and was passing Tsonga Lake, about ten miles from Chumpithang. It was a cold snowy day. He heard crackling twigs in some woods on his left. He looked and saw a strange sight that scared him greatly. An ape-like creature about five feet in height, with a red face and yellow hair, was standing up and gazing at him! The thing then ran across the road and disappeared into some other woods. When he arrived in Chumpithang he heard that a *Migou* had been seen by several people in that area. His honesty is not to be doubted, so the incident is probably perfectly true.

These are the things that I heard about the *Migou*. Probably an ape-like creature exists in the snows of the Himalayas. Since fewer *Migous* are being seen, the species is probably dying out. However, many so-called *Migous* may be just bears. Bears sometimes walk on their hind legs, though only for a few seconds, and someone who sees one of these animals in such a posture may be so scared that after getting a fleeting glance he runs away thinking that he has seen a *Migou*. If he had only looked for a little longer, he might have seen the animal drop back on all fours again.

Perhaps, like the Loch Ness Monster, the mystery of the

'MIGOU' OR THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

Migou or the Abominable Snowman will never be clarified. But I think there is more substantial evidence for the existence of the *Migou*, or shall I say an ape-like creature, than there is for the Loch Ness Monster! Perhaps the Scots will say, 'Sez you'.

VI

ON THE ROAD TO LHASA

ONE day my mother told me that all of us were soon leaving for Lhasa to join Father. I was not very excited because I did not want to leave Yatung, and Lhasa was just a far-off place from which most of the wealthy traders set out.

And so we departed for Lhasa. We must have been a party of about twenty, as our family had linked up with some other people who were also going to Lhasa. It was just as well to have a big party, because of the danger of meeting bandits on the road. For the same reason some of the men carried guns. Until Gyantse the danger was negligible, but beyond that it was not so. I shall not give a detailed account of the journey as regards halts, mileage and geography because all this has been well covered by European travellers in their books on Tibet. What I shall do is to describe interesting bits of the road, relate incidents that occurred along it and give accounts of local history.

Going up the road to Lhasa from Yatung we passed the cemetery for Europeans that I wrote about earlier. Soon we were close to the Donkar Monastery, and after a while on a wide plain, green and criss-crossed by meandering rivers. About an hour later we arrived at the shrine of

Nanga Punzee, the strange oracle of the Donkar Monastery. Everyone dismounted at the place, and said a few prayers.

That evening we were at Phari, literally 'The Hill of the Pig'. It is aptly named; the place was certainly very dirty. The town is situated at an altitude of 14,000 feet, and some Europeans have called it 'the highest and dirtiest town in the world'. It has a *dzong* or fort. Each of the main towns along the route have these *dzongs*, with their officials, the *dzongpons*, who collect taxes, send reports to the Central Government at Lhasa, and administer justice — whippings!

When we got to Phari, I had a splitting headache. It may have been the excitement of the journey or the altitude. My mother told me that if my headache did not get better she would pack me off to Yatung, as it looked as if I would be a nuisance for the rest of the journey. This threat worked, for my headache went away.

The next place of interest after Phari was the plain of Guru. This was the scene of a battle between the British and the Tibetans during the Younghusband Expedition of 1904. The Tibetan version of the battle goes as follows. The two forces were camped fairly closely. A truce was called and peace talks were arranged. The Tibetans were to come to the British camp to discuss some points. The British warned them that if there was any treachery on their part, they would open fire on the Tibetan camp, and had all their guns trained on it.

When the Tibetans arrived, a British officer went out to receive them. He stretched out his hand in greeting and gripped the hand of the Tibetan Commander. A Tibetan soldier who was ignorant of these customs thought that his commander was being made a prisoner. He drew his sword and cut off the officer's hand. At this the British forces

opened up with all their guns, and in a matter of minutes slaughtered the Tibetans like sheep. It was a massacre.

Many rubbed the blood of their dead comrades over themselves and feigned death. That night women and men of the surrounding districts came like scavengers to steal from the dead. One wealthy Tibetan officer who was pretending to be dead wore a very valuable ring which opened in a special way he alone knew. A woman stooped over him in the darkness, saw the ring, and tried to pull it off. She could not do so. Then she took out a knife to cut off the finger. At this the man whispered to the woman to keep quiet, took off the ring and gave it to her. He implored her not to inform the British that he was shamming dead.

This version of the Guru battle is the Tibetan one. In Britain I met Colonel F. M. Bailey, who had taken part in it, and he thought that this version was not true. He gave me an account of the affair and showed me interesting photographs taken at the time.

On this journey we did not go to Gyantze, which lies on the usual route, but made a detour. One evening we arrived at the bleak village of Ralung. There were a few houses, and everything around was cold, dark and windy — just loneliness, and the wind whistling and getting lost in the surrounding wilderness. The room we stayed in boasted an iron stove which was the showpiece of the place. But this showpiece was not as efficient as it looked: it threw up a smokescreen that made all of us weep! And the fuel in the stove was dung!

Near Ralung there is a nunnery. In many parts of Tibet one sees nuns with their cropped hair, reciting religious verses at the doors of houses. They accompany this with vigorous clapping. Clapping is a mode of driving out

ON THE ROAD TO LHASA

devils in Tibet. There is an amusing story about this. How true it is I don't know.

During the last war China was fed with vital supplies by American planes flying over the 'hump', that is, across the eastern Himalayas, to Chungking. The flying conditions were among the worst in the world. One night an American plane had engine trouble, and found itself over Tibetan territory. The only hope of escape was to make a hazardous crash landing. Fortunately the pilot managed to crash on a sandy patch, and only one member of the crew was seriously hurt. They then cautiously made their way to a Tibetan village, very apprehensive as to the reception they would get. The villagers had never seen such queer people as the Americans before. They all turned out in a crowd, and, as the Americans shuffled into the village, began a thunderous clapping in order to drive out these devils from another world! At this rousing welcome, one American turned to another, beamed and said, 'These guys sure like us!'

From Ralung to Nangartse is the toughest single day's journey. We had to cross the Kharu-La Pass, 16,600 feet high. I remember a very barren rocky region. In the middle of this were two cairns across which strings of prayer flags were whipped by the whistling wind. It was terribly desolate, everything being enclosed in a stony silence broken only by the moaning of the cold biting wind. There was no sun. As we passed under the prayer flags we all shouted '*Lhai-g yalo! Lhai-g yalo!*' (Victory to the Gods!) and screamed '*Ky i . . . ii . . . i*', at the same time throwing stones on the cairns. Tibetans always do this when crossing passes.

Some time later we arrived at Zara, a place hidden in a valley, deeply entrenched among high mountain ranges. It

was almost as desolate and lifeless as the Kharu-La Pass. There were about three houses there. Zara is a place for resting the horses and for feeding and watering them before setting off for Nangartse. One may ask why human beings live in such a place as Zara, a worse habitation could not be imagined. But the place does a brisk trade in selling fodder, and in feeding hungry travellers. The area surrounding it is notorious for bandits, and one would think that these inhabitants ran a great danger of being cut to pieces by them. But the Zara people are in league with these cut-throats. If a caravan is a large well-armed one, then only strict business is done, but a small party is good prey for them.

We then made for Nangartse. This town is at an altitude of 14,000 feet and is situated on the western shore of Yamdrok Tso (*Tso* means 'lake'). There is a *dzong* there. The house we stayed in was a large two-storeyed one, and quite a luxury after Ralung and Zara. In the courtyard below we saw some children sitting cross-legged, holding books. They were at their morning lesson, for there was a school in Nangartse, which was enterprising for a place as isolated as that.

The next day we rode along the shore of the Yamdrok Lake, which is the biggest lake in Tibet. It is shaped like a scorpion. As we traversed the stony path, the steel-grey waters stretched far away below us. It was a very calm day and the surface of this lake, famous in legend and song throughout the country — the Loch Lomond of Tibet — was smooth and unruffled. The weather was bright and sunny. Wild geese swam gracefully on the water, and did not worry about the travellers, for in Tibet the taking of wild life is considered a sin. Everywhere there was a strange peace and serenity in the very air we breathed. What a change

from the loneliness of the Kharu-La Pass and the desolation of Zara, only a few miles away! Some of the people in our party mumbled prayers. On the far shores we caught glimpses of monasteries. Occasionally we passed flat rock faces on which were carved the mystic words '*Om Mane Peme Hum!*' A monastery on the shores of the Yamdrok must be the ideal place to spend one's last days in the contemplation of this universe and its strange ways, and the ebb and flow of life.

In winter the lake freezes and the ice is so strong that men and pack animals travel safely across it.

We left the shore of the lake and began to climb up to the Khamba-La Pass. Turning round one catches a last glimpse of the Yamdrok Lake and the wind rippling its surface. The pass is 14,900 feet high.

The next day we arrived at Chaksam Drukha (*Chaksam* — iron bridge; *Drukha* — shore of boats). At this we crossed the Tsangpo River for the first time. The Tsangpo after a long winding course becomes the Brahmaputra of India.

Why is this place called the Iron Bridge? Thereby hangs a sad tale, though I cannot say whether it is completely true. Up among the cliffs there is a fairly modern girder bridge. Some years back, in the time of the last Dalai Lama, Tibet decided to keep up with the times, and to start modernizing, though on a small scale. They thought it would be a good thing to build a modern bridge at this place, so that people need not cross the river by the cumbersome boats. This girder bridge was ordered from India, and all the parts had to be carried on the backs of animals and human beings. It must certainly have been a back-breaking job, especially crossing passes such as I have just described. The parts arrived, the place to erect the bridge was worked out, and

builders began to span the river with this modern masterpiece that was to be the pride and joy of Tibet. But later, when the river changed to its present course it was too much to start again, and dismantle the bridge in a renewed attempt to span the elusive water. So they left it where it stands now, looking lost and lonely, as if it had just missed the last bus!

When we arrived at the river I saw a huge wooden boat, square in shape, with a carved horsehead at each end, something like a Viking ship. The boat looked rickety, and it certainly leaked. All the horses and mules were pushed into this, and the muleteers had a hard job trying to persuade some of the mules to go in. When the boat was fully loaded it went across, sinking deeper and deeper as the water leaked in. But the boatmen did not seem to be bothered. The boat just made it!

We crossed in a Tibetan coracle made of yak-hide bound around a wooden frame, very light and durable. A single boatman rows the boat, singing a song as he goes across. These boats are quite numerous on the Tsangpo. There is usually a boatman, his boat and a goat. When he goes downstream he rows. Coming back the current may be too swift to row upstream. So he carries his boat, and his goat comes by his side carrying his food, salt and clothes.

Having crossed the river we rode across a sandy stretch and were soon on our way to Chushul. On the road we met my father, who had come from Lhasa to meet us. He had a good look at Norden, who had been born a month or so after he had left for Lhasa on that day when we had waved Union Jacks at the party of British officers, whom he accompanied. Norden was about a year old by this time. It was certainly a hard journey for an infant of that age, especially to cross a 16,000-foot pass like the Kharu-La, and to go

through all the cold, wind and storms of the Tibetan Plateau. But Tibetans survive all this. I have heard of little beggar children in rags and without shoes walking all the way from Lhasa to Sikkim, a distance of about 350 miles, and crossing these passes in winter. Their hardships must have been incredible. We in our complete winter outfits, and riding on horses, felt the gnawing of the winds and the cold that seemed to pierce fur and leather. What those poor children must have suffered, walking barefoot, can be imagined. Yet they did it. Sometimes one almost feels that it is not only Everest heroes who deserve all the clapping and the medals!

It was good to see my father again. We halted at Chushul, which is about thirty miles from Lhasa. My father opened a tin of fruit for us to celebrate the occasion. Tinned food was imported from India, and was considered a great delicacy. I was specially addicted to the syrup in these tins. (Later, in Lhasa, I remember digging a nail into one and slyly sucking at the opening daily. One day Father decided to give us another treat, and lo and behold, when he opened the tin, the contents were bad! He thought the rough journey to Lhasa which the tin had undergone was to blame for this phenomenon. If he had looked at the other side of the tin, he would soon have spotted the cause of this tragedy, and the tale would have had a sad ending for me!)

Our next stop was Nyethang. Near this place we saw a number of caves, outside which rough looking characters were sunning themselves, some sharpening their knives, and others preparing their midday meals on open fires. I was told that they were robbers. They certainly gave us long, sharp looks. One particularly attractive young lady in our party was very frightened by the looks she received.

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

Lhasa is not very far from Nyethang. In fact this village was the last stop before one entered the city. So perhaps it will be interesting to tell of the daily routine when we travelled. Some people may want to know what we did on the long journey, and how we passed the time on horseback.

As we rode along someone would tell a story or crack jokes. Sometimes we passed places where controversial incidents had occurred, like the plain of Guru where the British and Tibetans fought. There would then ensue quite an argument. At other times people mumbled prayers. Occasionally there would just be silence, only broken by the toll of the mule bells. All this was perhaps very much like the times of Chaucer and the *Canterbury Tales*. Perhaps some day a book of *Lhasa Tales* may be quite interesting.

Before we arrived at our stop for the day, a servant would ride ahead to get rooms ready and tea made for us. When we got there we would have some tea and a light meal. The servants then took all the horses to water them, and when they returned would take them to the stables and give them their fodder. I have many memories of clouds of dust rising against an evening sky, and the thud of hooves as the horses galloped towards a stream. Two men riding bareback accompanied them, and yelled at the mass of horses. When they arrived at the stream these men would start whistling, at which the animals would dip their noses in the clear pebbly water and take long cool draughts, quenching the thirst of many hours on the Tibetan roads.

The next morning we would be up very early in order to avoid the dust storms that frequently occurred in the later afternoons. The horses would be saddled and loaded, and once more the caravan would be off for the next stop, and the next and onwards to Lhasa.

ON THE ROAD TO LHASA

This journey that I have described took place some years ago, and until fairly recently conditions remained the same. But we live in a strange world, and things can change overnight. With the coming of the Chinese Communists, a motor road has been built from Lhasa to Phari, and it will be further extended. Cars now go along the roads where once the hooves of horses beat down. Soon there will not be the cry of muleteers nor the thunder of mule trains. Travelling will certainly be far more speedy and comfortable, but the romance of the road to Lhasa will be lost. Zara, the bleak desolate village in league with bandits, where everything was dead except the moaning of the icy wind, will now probably have a petrol pump! Romance has been driven to the grave by speed and the neon glitter of the modern age. The road to Lhasa will join the fable of 'The Golden Road to Samarkand'.

To carry on with the journey; after rounding a bend in the mountains we crossed a flat dry plain and caught our first glimpse of the Potala. This is the winter palace of the Dalai Lama and was built about twelve hundred years ago. It is white and dotted with windows. Many Europeans have said that there is no sight more impressive than this sudden vision of the Potala. Others have remarked that no capital city in the world offers such a magnificent approach as Lhasa, with its fortress palace dominating the surrounding plain. Perhaps there is something in this. One certainly is captured by the sheer beauty and symmetry of this product of Tibetan architecture.

Moving towards Lhasa, I saw some boys and girls with baskets upon their shoulders, stooping to spear something from the ground with an instrument that looked like a pitchfork, and then throwing the catch into their baskets. When

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

we came close I found that they were picking up dung to be used as fuel. There is a shortage of wood in Lhasa, so dung plays an important role in the local economy. On the right we passed successively the huge sprawling monasteries of Drepung and Sera. The former, with about six thousand monks, is the biggest in the world. These monasteries are situated in the foothills and look white and impressive.

We passed some willow trees on the road. Soon we turned from the main Lhasa road and headed towards Dekyi-Linka (The Park of Happiness) where the British Mission or legation was stationed. My father worked there. The house where we were to stay was built of bricks and had a flat roof. A stable adjoined it, and in front grew a willow tree. Close by was a hospital run by the British. A hundred yards farther up the road was the home of the officer in charge of the legation, and the wireless station. It had a beautiful garden, and near it there was a stretch of sand and a river. A lone crane sometimes stood gracefully on this sand-strip silhouetted against a deep blue Tibetan sky. The Norbu-Linka (The Jewel Park), the summer residence of the Dalai Lama, was not very far off, with a straight road leading to the Potala. The Potala loomed large and solemn not far away, and towered over us, and we had a good view of the pinnacle on which was situated the 'Medical College' of Lhasa.

VII

LHASA AND ITS SIGHTS

OUR life in the exciting city of Lhasa started. The road to the city ran close to Dekyi-Linka. After going about a hundred yards through some woods, we reached the main road. Soon we passed a shallow lake that froze in winter, but in summer was the haunt of wild geese and ducks. We then went under an arch over which a *chorten* was erected. (A *chorten* is a Tibetan religious building that is found all over Tibet and the surrounding regions.) There would usually be a group of beggars sitting in a row just beyond the arch. They were all old, and some of them were blind. Immediately on the left was the gigantic Potala, which has been so often and so adequately described by European travellers. At the foot of the Potala were the Government buildings, the prisons and the dungeons. On the right was the Lhasa park, full of willow trees. Farther along we passed two small Chinese pagodas, in which were two stone tortoises. Between these was an obelisk on which Tibetan characters were carved. The inscriptions are supposed to give accounts of the victories of Tibetan kings over China and Nepal.

The road then led to the Yutho bridge, designed in the Chinese fashion. The city of Lhasa proper lay about a

hundred yards from this bridge, about which there is a story. Years ago a Tibetan king ran away with a Chinese princess to make her his bride. The Chinese pursued him, and after many months arrived at the Yutho bridge. The capture of the couple now seemed to be inevitable. It was then that an old woman came forward with a ruse. She carried a basketful of tattered old shoes and a walking stick in her hand. She approached the Chinese soldiers, meeting them on the bridge. The Chinese asked her whether she came from Lhasa, and if so, how far away it was. She replied that she could not tell exactly the distance to Lhasa, but it was an immense way off. She showed them the basketful of old shoes and said that she had used up all those pairs since she left Lhasa! This astounded the Chinese, and feeling despondent they returned to China.

A short distance away one went under a gate and then one was in Lhasa. Mounds of garbage were strewn on one side, and mangy dogs fought for titbits. Men urinated in the open by just standing against a wall, and women squatted down to follow suit! For defecation they showed more reserve, but not very much more! I must say that this type of activity is not peculiar to Lhasa alone. It is quite universal throughout Tibet, and in all strata of society. I mention it specially here in order to contrast it with that ethereal vision of the Lhasa first seen, with the Potala like a tower from some fairy myth. Otherwise I may create an impression of a 'Shangri-La' or a 'Valhalla'. But having mentioned these peculiar customs of our Tibetans, I must say that they are not wholly without attractions. They are certainly unhygienic, and some may say that they are 'barbaric', but the Tibetan I am glad to say has a very frank, open approach to matters that are quite natural, such as

urination, defecation and sex. He never believes these things to be shameful, or to be hidden. In fact his approach is the opposite, something robust and Rabelaisian. Even in the highest society jokes which more narrow-minded people may term 'smutty' are freely exchanged between ladies and gentlemen, amidst roars of laughter and applause. A good raconteur of these choice jokes is very popular, and treated with the same awe, reverence and deep admiration as the master of after-dinner speeches.

Since we are on this subject let me say something about that most popular hero of Tibetan mythology, Aghu Temba. *Aghu* means Uncle, so he is Uncle Temba. A better uncle no man could have. Vast tomes as well as 'thrillers' have been written on Tibet, but nobody has mentioned this fabulous name, which is a pity. Aghu Temba deserves a place beside the Rabelaisian heroes of this world for all time. He is considered a god, and certainly had more sense than many other gods. He wanted to help and to instruct the yokels of the world, but he saw realistically that these people had no time for learned serious teachings or solemn sermons, which made them either laugh derisively or yawn like a cave. They were only interested in sex and 'smutty' stories. So Aghu Temba told a series of stories which contained these two as the sauce. These stories are quite unprintable, but they bubble over with wit, laughter and an immense knowledge of the minutiae of sexual physiology and anatomy! Each of these stories contains a moral which is far better absorbed when served so palatably than if it were couched in the form of a bald, sterile sermon. I suppose Aghu believed in the end justifying the means — and what means!

These stories are well known all over Tibet by young and old, by men and women, and sometimes women tell them

with great relish. They are often told at parties, and certainly break the ice! Perhaps it is better to look at sex in a humorous manner than to treat it as taboo.

I have wandered far from my description of a visit to the city of Lhasa. There were all sorts of people in the streets. The ordinary residents of Lhasa were very gay, witty, sharp and flamboyant, like those in any big city. The women were not very much behind their menfolk in these respects; in fact Lhasa prided itself on having the gayest, prettiest and perhaps the 'loosest' women in Tibet. Most of the people were shopkeepers or traders, chattering away in their Lhasa accent, the 'Oxford accent' of Tibet. The women managed most shops and were excellent at their job. There were goods of every type, Western products such as watches, cameras, binoculars, perfumes and cosmetics of the most sophisticated varieties. Tibetans have a childlike delight in novelties such as a combination of a fountain pen and a torch, or a musical cigarette box. Once someone of a high family sets the fashion by buying a certain brand of goods, then everyone else insists on that brand and will not take any other, no matter how superior in quality it may really be.

Just before the winter festivals connected with the New Year, one saw many *Abu-hwas*. These are nomadic folk who come to Lhasa at the time of these festivals. They wear thick fur clothes, and the women have long braided hair. The wearing of fur clothes in Tibet is considered a prerogative only of barbarous tribes such as the *Abu-hwas*, whereas in the West it is a good sign of a big bank balance or an impending bankruptcy. The *Abu-hwas* stride around gaping at the shops, usually with one muscular arm bare, or stripped to the waist, for they find even Lhasa at an altitude of 12,000 feet hot!

Many Mohammedans from Ladakh have their permanent homes in Lhasa and they have their own mosque. They are mostly traders, and out-Lhasa the Lhasans in the dexterity of their salesmanship. The Khambas of Lhasa have their quarters at Banashong. There were a few Chinese shops which were very clean. Several restaurants sold *bhalis* or pancakes as well as pastries and cakes. The favourite foods in the restaurants were *momos* or dumplings, and *thukpa*. There were a few opium dens, though Tibetans are not such opium smokers as the Chinese.

The Jhokhang is the biggest temple in the city. It is called this because it enshrines the idol of *Jho*, and *khang* means a house. My mother took us several times to visit the temple, to pray and to get the blessings of the gods there.

We dressed in our Sunday best, and went off to the temple. There were many people there and we joined a long queue. The inside of the temple was ill-lit and greasy, and there was the persistent smell of rancid butter from the numerous butter lamps. We would come to an idol, usually of a huge size, at whose feet butter lamps burned. Shadows flickered on the impassive faces of these images. Someone in our party would whisper what the idol was, and give a brief history of this forbidding figure. We would crawl slowly in the dim light to the foot of the idol and gently touch it with our forehead. Then mother would give a sum of money to the monk in charge to burn lamps for her, and we would move on.

After a while we came to the idol of *Jho*, which was an immense figure sitting cross-legged. Tradition has it that it was stolen from China and brought to Lhasa by a Tibetan king. It is reputed to be the biggest idol of the *Jho* in Tibet. It certainly was an awe-inspiring figure.

We then came to a little dark room with a greasy curtain. We went in, and had to pay about a penny to get the monk to draw the curtain and to show us a rock face, 'growing' from which was the figure of an animal. Its head and neck suggested a goat. There was no tail or body to the animal. There was a legend concerning this figure. Ages ago there was a lake where Lhasa now stands. The wife of a Tibetan king cast a magic ring into this lake, over which Lhasa was built. In the construction of the city, a goat rendered Trojan service by carrying loads of stones and bricks. It is said that this goat will appear when the world is in bad times. It is believed that the goat growing out of the rock is the incarnation of that goat. When Granny was in Lhasa only the goat's ears had appeared. The world must thus be heading towards evil times, and perhaps the saviour of the world may be in its birth pangs in an obscure dark corner of the temple of *Jho* in Lhasa!

Near this place was a greasy slab of rock, and we saw several people putting their ears to it and listening with attentive faces. It was said that people singularly blessed were able to hear the sound of geese on the Yamdrok Lake. Strain as I could, I heard nothing that resembled this sound. The simple conclusion was that I was not singularly blessed, which I do not find difficult to believe.

Next we passed rows of statues, amongst them King Tsong-Sanganpo, the greatest king in the history of Tibet, and his Nepalese and Chinese wives. This king, who ruled before the advent of the Dalai Lamas, lived around A.D. 700 and waged war on many countries, conquering large parts of China, Nepal, northern India and reaching Persia. It was in his reign that the building of the Potala was started. The Nepalese wife was responsible for introducing Buddhism

LHASA AND ITS SIGHTS

into Tibet, and giving the country its written script, which closely resembles the Devnagiri script of India. The Buddhist religion toned down Tibet's martial spirit, and the Tibetan Empire gradually dwindled after the death of the king. His Chinese wife brought in the sophistications of civilized life. Hence it is that such things as the Tibetan clothes of high officials and the food at banquets resemble the habits and the customs of the vanished Mandarins.

Before the introduction of Buddhism, the Tibetan religion was a form of ritualistic devil worship called the Bon religion, which still exists in some parts of Tibet and has tinged the Buddhism of Tibet, giving it a special colour of its own. Tibet took unto itself the religion of India and the culture of China, and planted these seeds in its own soil, a soil different from that of any country in the world. The genius of the Tibetan people acted upon it, and flowered forth a civilization that is unique. It led to strange paradoxes and contradictions. Side by side with the most abstruse and pure philosophies, there was a web of superstition; the killing of any living thing was condemned, yet the justice meted out to wrongdoers was barbarous in the extreme; there was hardship, but there was happiness and an exuberance of vigorous life; there was backwardness, but freedom to lead a gay, carefree existence; there was ignorance, but there was wisdom. Such was Tibet.

Leaving these statues of past Tibet, we went up another storey and got out into the fresh air. The main interest here was the shrine of the Goddess Pel-Lhamu. The goddess was a large serene-looking idol made of gold, which wore a necklace consisting of ropes of pearls. The strangest feature about this idol was the hundreds of brown mice that ran all over it. The mice are thought to be the special pets of

the goddess. Strange to say, they do not do the idol any harm. When a mouse dies its dead body is preserved and used in the making of an ointment which is thought to be very efficacious for ulcers of all types. We all had to go into the shrine and touch our foreheads to her feet in the usual fashion, already described. This is not so pleasant when mice run over your neck. After seeing this shrine we all came out into the sunshine and joined the Lhasa crowds.

The houses of the wealthy officials were luxurious, although the surroundings were very dirty as there was no drainage system in the city. Water stagnated in the streets, refuse was dumped anywhere and the smell during the blazing noon was the typical Lhasa 'once smelt never forgotten' aroma.

Situated within a few miles of Lhasa are three of the largest monasteries in Tibet, and for that matter in the world. They are Drepung, Sera and Ganden. As I have said, Drepung and Sera are close to each other at the foot of the mountains that surround Lhasa. Ganden is about thirty miles outside Lhasa. Each of them houses about five thousand or more monks.

These three monasteries have been compared to the parts of a Tibetan book. Ganden represents the leaves of the book, as it is famous as a seat of learning. Sera is the two blocks of solid wood that guard the leaves: it produces warriors and fighters that defend the faith of Tibet. Drepung, as it holds the monasteries of Tibet together, is the cloth that is bound round the text.

The warrior monks of Sera and Drepung are known as *Duptows*. One saw these *Duptows* in the streets of Lhasa and in the narrow alleys of their monasteries. They were tough-looking characters with dirty greasy clothes, their faces

LHASA AND ITS SIGHTS

painted with black streaks. These monks were the wooden-brained folk of the monasteries who, having been unable to make any headway with their religious studies, and possessed of much brawn, became the hewers of wood, the drawers of water, and the fanatic fighters when their monasteries were in trouble. In their spare time they retired to a ground behind their monastery to practise sports. Latterly they also took to training themselves in the use of firearms.

Every year Sera and Drepung had a sports meeting, in which bloody fights broke out. A favourite weapon of the *Duptows* was the Tibetan key. Western readers may wonder how people can fight with keys. They will, I am sure, change their minds when they learn the mammoth size of a Tibetan key, especially those used to lock the gates of monasteries, which are about a foot long and a pound in weight. Leather thongs are attached to them which the monk fighters wind round their wrists. The keys are slung with considerable force at the skulls of opponents during free fights. They can be dangerous weapons at close range, enough to crack even the thick skull of a Tibetan tribesman. Tibet, I imagine, is the only country where the adage 'A used key is always bright' does not apply!

Ganden I never visited, although my sister Norden and others went there once. Of Sera and Drepung, where we went several times, I have memories of hordes of monks, the dirt and squalor of the narrow alleys, the endless round of little and gigantic shrines that we visited, prostrating ourselves at the feet of the idols, and touching them with our foreheads. Sera's chief deity was the horse-faced Tamding, and there was an immense statue of this god.

In one part of Sera there was a mound beneath which we were told was the dead body of a Chinese general. About

1910, when there was fighting between the Chinese and the Tibetans in Lhasa, a man rode in great haste towards this monastery and told the monks that he had heard from spies that the Chinese were going to attack Sera that night. The monasteries incidentally were the focal points of resistance to invaders and gave them many a headache with their fanaticism and fighting prowess. When Sera heard of the threat, they assembled all their monks and made preparations to meet the attackers. Their arms were primitive, for they had no weapons except spears, swords and slings. They ordered the monks to collect boulders, and to place them all along the parapets of the monastery.

During the night they saw the Chinese gradually making their way towards the monastery. The monks pretended to be unaware of any danger, and did not show themselves. A group of Chinese soldiers reached a part of the monastery. The commander of this group ordered his men to throw kerosene on the monastery wall, and bent down to set light to it. Suddenly a huge boulder came hurtling down from the heavens, and flattened the unfortunate commander. At this the Chinese lost heart and fled. The monks, uttering wild shrieks, chased the Chinese, and used their slings with great effect. It was a victory for Sera, and to commemorate this a mound was built over the dead body of the commander.

In Sera there was a group of *chortens*, and it was believed that if one went round these a number of times all the sins of the past were washed away. It certainly seems an easy way to escape a gruelling and uncomfortable interview with Shenji! Judging by the crowds that swarmed round these *chortens*, the world is certainly not short of sinners.

Drepung did not have such a spectacular encounter with

LHASA AND ITS SIGHTS

the Chinese as Sera, but it was attacked. The Chinese brought their cannon and lined them up outside the monastery, threatening to raze it to the ground if it did not surrender. Drepung sent up special prayers to its guardian saints and many offerings were placed on its altars. Then, as if in answer to these prayers, a terrific hailstorm occurred which lasted for several days. When it stopped the Chinese guns were useless. The monks attacked and drove the Chinese away.

Talking about the war with the Chinese, in Dekyi-Linka there was a grand old man who was employed as a mail-carrier by the British legation. He had served Tibet during the Sino-Tibetan war and had many interesting stories to tell of that time. The Tibetans became short of cannon and resorted to using hollowed-out tree trunks bound with iron. The wooden cannon lasted about two or three rounds and then cracked. They were with typical Tibetan humour dubbed *Mergyo Kukpas* (fool cannon), and there is a little ditty extolling the power of these instruments of war that could even fracture the leg of a frog in a well! When the Chinese Revolution occurred in 1910, the Chinese garrison in Tibet went to pieces. The Tibetans rose up and added the finishing touches to the demoralization of the soldiers. The Chinese Amban, Governor of Tibet, was allowed to return home. My friend the old veteran had the pleasure of carrying his palanquin for a part of the journey. He said that all the bearers were out to annoy the fat soft Amban and they rocked and shook the palanquin in such a manner that the poor man howled with pain as the honourable bones rattled and grated!

The Linkor is the name given to the walk around the outskirts of Lhasa, and it is about four miles long. Consider-

able merit is supposed to be accumulated by making this round. One sees a great variety of people on the walk, most of them pilgrims. They all mumble prayers and spin their prayer wheels, *Abu-hwas*, Lhasa folk, and worshippers from far and near who have come to Lhasa, 'The Abode of Gods' and the Mecca of Lamaism. Some devout fanatics believe that the more strenuous the walk, the greater the merit obtained. So instead of walking they prostrate themselves, get up, prostrate again and so on right round the Linkor. Some can be seen prostrating at right angles to the road, taking a side step and prostrating again, which makes the task extremely gruelling. One saw many of these people, their faces dusty and bruised, their eyes tight with pain and their mouths set hard. It is said that a man once prostrated his way from Lhasa to Budh Gaya where the Buddha obtained his enlightenment, a distance of almost a thousand miles, winding through snowbound passes and tropical plains. It is amazing into what paths religious devotion can drive human beings throughout the world.

For refreshments on the way there were delicious turnips to be bought. We came across a rock face with two large holes in it. These holes were polished and greasy, and I was told to rub my knees in these holes, as any pains and aches at these parts of the anatomy would be miraculously cured! Here is certainly a tip for harassed orthopaedic surgeons who have patients with intractable arthritis of the knees! Send them off to the Linkor to rub their knees at these rocks.

At another place there was a slab of rock resting against a wall. One goes under the rock and rubs one's back against its smooth surface, which is believed to cure all backaches. All this probably indicates the great incidence of rheumatic aches and pains in Tibet, for the Linkor certainly specializes

LHASA AND ITS SIGHTS

in orthopaedics! It thus draws as many patients as pilgrims.

The Linkor terminates just below the Chokpori, close to Dekyi-Linka. The Chokpori is the sharp steep hill on which the 'Medical College' of Lhasa stands. It had a small number of students who were taught the Tibetan art of medicine, magic, philosophy and other subjects, the course extending over ten or twelve years.

Near the foot of the Chokpori is the special spring of the Dalai Lama from which his drinking water is obtained. I remember the water there to be very cool and refreshing.

Just below the Potala is the jail of Lhasa. I went there with some friends to see what the place looked like. There was a deep dark pit in whose depths a human voice could be heard. It was a dungeon for criminals, some of whom were destined to spend their whole lives within these holes. Capital punishment as such was abolished some years back, because the Buddhist religion does not allow the taking of human lives, a tenet that, like most religious tenets, is certainly not strictly followed. Anyway it would be far more merciful to give a quick death than to let men linger in such an abominable hole for years.

Before capital punishment was abolished, the ways of execution in Tibet were chosen from the following; being hurled from a precipice; being sewn up in a hide bag and thrown into the river; or being quartered — a very appetizing menu I must say, for a country regarded by so many as the 'spiritual' nation *par excellence*! However, there is always the example of one of the most civilized and cultured nations in the world, China, having the most exquisitely painful set of tortures. Similarly, in spite of the oft-spoken spirituality of Tibet and the noble regard of Buddhism for all living things and its abhorrence of all forms of suffering,

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

Tibet had a cruel and terrible form of justice. People were whipped for petty crimes, the lashings amounting sometimes to two hundred or so, and were deformed for life. Monks who stole were pilloried, and had to sit in the Lhasa streets and beg for food. One saw quite a number of these gentlemen basking in the sun with a lapful of *momos* or dumplings, patiently bearing their yokes and the jeers of the gaping crowds. When I was at school in India and was being taught the history of Elizabethan times, my innocent friends had some difficulty in understanding what a pillory was, a thing that to me was all too familiar! Many criminals had their hands chopped off, and the bleeding stumps immersed into boiling oil to arrest the bleeding. Others were shackled in pairs and had to beg for their food. People who were involved in attempts to overthrow the state suffered a gruesome form of punishment. They had their eyes gouged out.

Justice was very much a matter of how influential one was in the country and how heavy a purse one could give as a bribe to the Government. There was a great deal of bribery.

The prison that we saw was, I suppose, what one would call a communal prison. Men and women lived in close intimacy as evidenced by the number of children playing happily in the prison compound. The women sat busily knitting and weaving, and some of the men made rope-soled shoes. They seemed happy enough.

When we were there, we heard a woman shrieking in the compound and appealing to the 'tourists' above. 'The *Deba Shung*' (Tibetan Central Government) 'has no justice . . . I am quite innocent, but I have been locked in here for years . . . just for nothing . . . just for nothing. . . .' Someone told us that the woman had seduced a high-ranking

LHASA AND ITS SIGHTS

monk into the pleasures of the world, and so committed a terrible crime against religion. I suppose it takes two to make love, but most probably the monk got away with little punishment except being thrown out of his order.

VIII

THE DALAI LAMA

THE system of the incarnate lamas is unique to Tibet. Some beings by leading pure lives are in a position to cross the threshold and reach Nirvana. But they give up this opportunity, and come back into the world of humanity in order to help those who are struggling to reach the same state, and to guide those who are straying from the path of virtue. These are the incarnate lamas, the holiest of whom are the Dalai and the Panchen Lamas. But there are many such incarnate lamas or *trulkus* in Tibet. The lamas are therefore worshipped almost as gods, and a blessing from them, or a *trunga* gives the recipient considerable merit.

Before a Dalai Lama dies he may give some indication as to where he will be born again. He may give the name of a town or mention a direction. Sometimes intimate friends of the Dalai Lama will remember that when he passed through a certain region he remarked on the beauty and the peace of the place, and how desirable a spot it was for his next incarnation.

When he dies, the national oracle of Tibet, the Nechung Oracle, goes into a trance and throws a sword. The direction in which this sword is thrown is noted.

Some time later high-ranking lay officials and the chief

THE DALAI LAMA

monks of the big monasteries in Lhasa go to a lake near the city and watch the lake surface. It is believed that they see visions in this lake, houses, towns, forests, etc., indicating the place where the Dalai Lama will be reborn. Sometimes the houses or the surroundings may be quite characteristic of a certain part of Tibet or its border lands.

After about five years or so preparations are made to send out search parties. During this time special prayers are said throughout Tibet for the quick return of the Dalai Lama to the world of human beings.

The search parties go in the direction of the places which have been indicated by all these rites and rituals, as well as the words of the Dalai Lama before he died or 'passed into the field' as the Tibetans say. When they arrive at the places most likely to be the home of the new incarnation as suggested by all the evidence, they ask for any boys who were born in the same year as that in which the Dalai Lama died, and whether anything strange has been connected with the birth of these boys. It is not believed that the spirit of the former lama passes directly into that of a new-born baby as he dies, so that these children need not be born on the exact day.

The parents of some of these boys may have strange things to tell. In the case of the present Dalai Lama, it was said that on the day of his birth, the pillars of the room in which he was born were swathed in rainbows. A peach tree blossomed overnight although it was winter. As the boy grew up, he always talked about his home far away in Lhasa. The searchers also noticed that the surrounding countryside was similar to the visions seen in the lake. When they went into the house a little boy came running towards them and recognized them, calling them by their names

although they were disguised. He asked about the welfare of some of his old servants in Lhasa, and inquired after the condition of favourite animals in his menagerie in Lhasa. All this astonished the searchers. They then produced some of the personal articles of the past Dalai Lama, such as a rosary, a pair of spectacles, a walking stick and others. Each of these articles was paired with another identical in shape and colour. They asked the boy to choose any toys that he wanted, and spread these articles in front of him. He chose entirely correctly except in the case of the walking stick, about which he looked perplexed. The searchers had no doubt that this boy was the true reincarnation, and they told his parents so. They sent the news to Lhasa and preparations were made to receive him.

When there are several boys with whom are connected stories of miracles, the searchers usually select the one who appears to be the most likely. Some time ago, in such cases, the officials used to put the names in a golden urn and pick one out with a pair of chopsticks.

The parents of the Dalai Lama may be poor people. In many cases they have been poverty-stricken peasants. Then overnight all this is changed, for they become the Honourable Great Parents of the God-King of Tibet, and their other sons become *Kungs* (Dukes). They are all given estates and houses, and henceforth join the aristocracy. It is indeed a Cinderella story.

When the Dalai Lama was brought to Lhasa, we all went outside the city to see the procession that bore the new God-King. I remember the place white with tents. Most of these tents were extremely elaborate, but the special tent for the Dalai Lama was decorated with peacock feathers.

After some time in Lhasa, the Dalai Lama was formally

THE DALAI LAMA

installed, the ceremony taking place in the Potala. Everybody remarked on the ease with which the four-year-old boy carried out the complex rituals of the ceremony. They were impressed with his dignity, his lack of self-consciousness, and the great interest that he took in his surroundings. There were also many stories about how he recognized some of his old servants, and his knowledge about the different rooms in the Potala and the Norbu-Linka. They had no doubt that this boy was the true reincarnation of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

The young boy is looked after by old monks whose trust and loyalty are beyond question. He is treated as if he were a grown-up, and has few companions to play with. His brothers are the only ones who can freely mix with him and provide some companionship. He begins to lead a strictly disciplined life, and spends a great deal of his time in prayer. He learns to read and to write, and after a few months of this is put under a learned monk scholar, who instructs him in all the intricate and abstruse theology of Lamaism. So before the age of ten, he may have tackled the huge volumes of the *Kangyur* and the *Tengyur*, and may be studying philosophy, magic, metaphysics and the occult.

While the Dalai Lama is a minor, that is until he has attained the age of eighteen, the country is ruled by a Regent, who is an incarnate lama himself. This Regent is chosen from one of the smaller monasteries around Lhasa.

Once the Dalai Lama comes of age, he has full power over the country in all matters, and his word is absolute law. The National Assembly of Tibet may debate matters and send up resolutions for his approval, but he makes the final decision. Since the Dalai Lama had absolute power over the

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

religion as well as the government of Tibet, and was also revered and worshipped as a god, his power was immense.

When I was in Lhasa the then Dalai Lama was still a minor. The Regent was the Reting Rimpoche, who came from the Monastery of Reting. He was also an incarnate lama. He came from a very poor family.

The boy was a strange one; from his youngest days he talked about his monastery far away, and said that his people would come to take him back to his real home one day. He said that he had vast estates and many horses. His parents thought that the child must be mad, for how could such poor people as they even dream of wealth?

One day the parents went out to fetch some firewood, and told the boy to watch the porridge that was cooking, and make sure that it did not boil over. The boy began to play about, and forgot to keep an eye on the porridge. Suddenly he heard the pot spluttering and boiling, and did not know what to do. He quickly took off his cloth garter, and tied the mouth of the earthenware pot as if it was a leather bag! When his parents returned they were astounded to see this, and were certain that the boy was the incarnation of some demon to possess such powers.

One day they saw their son busily driving pegs of wood into hard rocks. He did this with such ease that they were quite astonished. The boy seemed very excited, and said that as he was expecting a great caravan of horses that day, he was just fixing up something to which the horses could be tethered. He said that the people he expected were his own men, who would take him to his home. The parents thought that this was the height of insanity. However, that day, the search party sent out to find the incarnate lama of Reting arrived! The boy welcomed them, recognized some of the

THE DALAI LAMA

people in the party, went through the usual tests, and was acknowledged as the new incarnation. He was then taken to his monastery near Lhasa.

When I was in Lhasa he was in his thirties. Some years later he was suspected of being involved in an attempt to overthrow the Government and was arrested. He died in the Potala.

I have tried to give as faithfully as possible the beliefs regarding the incarnate lamas. All the details concerning them such as the miracles, their birth and so on are absolutely believed by almost all Tibetans, or shall I say *were* believed, since Tibet is now rapidly changing. Tibetans did not doubt them, and they were accepted without question. To the modern world, all these beliefs about the transmigration of souls, the reincarnation of lamas, the seeing of visions in lakes, the blossoming of peach trees in winter, the prophecies of oracles, the sudden change from peasant infant to the God-King of a nation and so on, may seem absolutely fantastic, something that could happen thousands of years ago in the days of Cassandra, or the Babylonian Empire, but in the twentieth century seems more like a dream! I shall not argue about how true these miracles and visions are, for one can discuss and ponder over such things for a long time. All I shall say is that until a few years ago, and possibly even today, a whole nation believed everything connected with this system of the incarnate lamas and practised the rituals embodied in the system, and its life was dominated by it. It is a strange and unique fact; it sounds like a fairy tale. But if one goes into the history of these beliefs and the philosophy behind them, they do not seem so fantastic. Great and profound philosophers have at some period of their lives expounded things which on the

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

surface appear ridiculous. A close study of the reasons behind these fantasies makes one take a more lenient attitude towards them, and one begins to see how some people may believe in them.

IX

LIFE IN LHASA

LIFE in Dekyi-Linka was very pleasant. In those days Tibet was pro-British, and the British legation gave many parties to the officials and their wives. The cinema showing silent films was very popular, and the small room where they were shown used to be packed with officials, their wives, children and hordes of servants. The first motion film I ever saw starred Charlie Chaplin. There were many reels with him as the hero, sometimes a criminal one, as in *Easy Street*. He had a terrific following in Dekyi-Linka, and people always yelled for the *kuma* (thief). This was because one of the funniest reels showed Charlie as an escaped convict! His numerous tricks and acrobatics to elude the law nearly brought the roof down.

Some documentaries were also shown. From these we knew what the cities of the West looked like, especially London. I remember quite well one particular reel that showed soldiers marching extremely smartly, rows and rows of them, all in perfect line. I think they were British Guardsmen, and the ceremony in which they took part was the Changing of the Guard. The precise marching of the guards and their meticulous turnout brought forth many sighs of admiration from the Tibetans present. From these

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

films and from magazines we got an idea of what houses in European countries looked like and what cars, aeroplanes, railways and ships were.

In addition to cinema-going, the ladies played badminton, and some of the men joined in tennis and football matches.

Christmas or *Enji Losar* (English New Year) was a time we always looked forward to, because we would all get fascinating toys, brought to Lhasa from India for the British legation. In the morning there was a tea-party for the children of the Tibetan officials, after which we all assembled in a large room. There we would see an old man with a long white beard and a kindly face, dressed in a long red coat, presiding over a pile of toys. This was, of course, Father Christmas. We would dash forward eagerly as our names were called. The genial soul would give us a pat on the head and hand over a gift. We could not wait to open our parcels, and see what surprises they held! I remember getting a tank, and was told that these things could pierce mountains, and that the country of France had the greatest number of them.

In the evening there would be a cinema show, and invariably, to our great pleasure, the *kuma* would be there to make us all roar with laughter. The adults had their own kind of fun in the evening. Much Scotch whisky would be consumed, and there would be Western ballroom dancing which at that time was becoming very fashionable in Lhasa; novelties such as the 'Palais Glide' and 'Boomps-a-daisy' had been introduced.

In Dekyi-Linka I became quite friendly with a British surgeon. One day he found us doing the Tibetan style of long jumping. In this we build up a sloping mound of turf and after a long run do a take-off from this mound. I suppose he wanted to tell us that the Western way of doing long

jumping was different. He would point to the mound shake his head, and say, 'Too high! Too high!' I was not sure what he meant at that time.

I often saw him pick up a stone, run a distance and then hurl the stone overarm in a peculiar fashion. I could never fathom what he was up to. Alas! it was my first introduction to the game known as cricket, which I came across at school in India, and which in Britain makes fanatics sit up all night to hear broadcasts from Australia.

This same surgeon was a very fine swimmer and had a reputation for this all over Lhasa. He was the only man who dared to dive into the turbulent waters of the Tsangpo river during the summer months, when it is swollen by the melting snows. Thus he did much to enhance the prestige of the British people. Another unnatural habit that he had was to have a bath every day, a phenomenon unheard of in Lhasa.

As I said before, there is a shortage of wood in Lhasa, and every park had a person to look after the willow trees, to see that no urchins climbed up them to mutilate the branches. We had many escapades with the person who looked after the willows of Dekyi-Linka. His daughter was the woman who I said was thought to possess occult powers.

Soon after I arrived in Lhasa, the Government decided to establish a small school run on Western lines in Dekyi-Linka. We had about eight boys specially selected by the Regent who then ruled in Tibet, as the incarnation of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had not at that time been discovered. We were taught English, arithmetic, general knowledge and English literature. We also did P.T. every morning.

We used to play football quite often. One day we were having a game when a boy kicked the ball into a little river that ran close by. Another player who was a good swimmer

jumped into the river and swam towards the ball. A group of monks were watching us play, and some boy monks started to stone the person who was swimming to get the ball. We retaliated and soon a free fight took place. My brother Norbu had his forehead slashed by a stone. However, the young monks got the worst of the fight and began to call upon the older monks to help them. When these came out, we ran away and called our own people from the legation. This could easily have led to a serious affair, but fortunately the older people had more sense, and settled the fight.

On several occasions we would be playing when someone would shout excitedly '*Sho! Kundun — chibgyur—nangi!*' (Come on! The *Kundun* is coming!) *Kundun* means the Presence, and it was thus that most of the Tibetans addressed the Dalai Lama. We would dash off to the Norbu-Linka road about a hundred yards away. There would be a big crowd there, lining both the sides of the road. Incense was burnt at intervals along the route. On each side of the road was a rough chalk-line on which small stones were placed. The people had to stay behind this line.

Soon we would hear the beat of drums and gongs. At the far end of the road a cloud of dust appeared which came closer and closer. We heard the noise of horses' hooves. A solemn monk rode ahead carrying a whip, and shouted in a voice pregnant with authority 'Bow down! Take your hats off!' The people, cringing and scared, obeyed.

The atmosphere became tense as the palanquin of the God-King drew near. The palanquin was saffron coloured, and a monk carrying a tall umbrella made of peacock feathers shaded the Dalai Lama. The bearers were laymen, about twelve in number, wearing blue dresses and wide red hats. They walked with a strange gait which was supposed to

produce the minimum of discomfort to the *Kundun*. Just in front of us were a reserve group of bearers, and as the palanquin drew near they quickly slipped in and took over. Nobody is allowed to photograph the face of the Dalai Lama as he sits in his palanquin. I only caught a fleeting glimpse of him. To the people who stand with heads bare and bowed their God is passing by. For having seen him so closely, whose very sight is full of merit, they will enjoy a higher birth in their next existence. Perhaps no monarch or pope has ever enjoyed such absolute power as the Dalai Lamas of Tibet. Even when they were boys every man and woman bowed before their supreme authority. Who knows what mysterious force is responsible for this incredible power!

The palanquin was followed by the horses from the Dalai Lama's private stable, horses that were giants compared with the ordinary Tibetan ponies. More noblemen in all their finery came next, wearing gorgeous clothes which made this procession a feast for the eyes. The personal bodyguard of the Dalai Lama in their Western uniforms marched smartly by with fixed bayonets, with their brass band. The clouds of dust receded into the distance as the procession headed towards the Potala. The crowds dispersed slowly, and the road was quiet once more, as if oblivious of the hooves that beat upon it, and the feet that bore the God-King of Tibet.

Lhasa in the summer months was an arcadia. The cool breezes, the willow trees and the green parks made a lovely setting for fun and gaiety. A favourite pastime during these months used to be picnicking. One carried to the picnics the traditional curd and pancakes, without which a picnic is not worth its name. The grown-ups carried flasks of our friend *chang*, which was a wonderful stimulant to gaiety. A nice shady spot was selected, and here the adults sat down to a

spot of dicing. After *chang* had put them in a merry mood, there was lusty singing and dancing. Sometimes someone had a gramophone bought in India, and played Chinese and Tibetan records.

During the summer every year Lhasa had its *Zamling-che-sand* (the Birthday of the World). The whole of Lhasa took a holiday for about a week, from cabinet ministers to shopkeepers and workmen. Perhaps hard-worked, baggy-eyed civil servants in the modern countries will lick their lips with envy at these words. But that is the price one has to pay for power and the fight to be on top of the world, to be included in the team of the Big Four or big what you will. A national holiday in these countries, involving the heart of the nation, and going on for a whole week or more, would result in the loss of huge sums of money, and the country might be paralysed.

The people of Lhasa camped amongst the willow groves in hundreds of tents. During the day there was dancing and singing, and many games. People invited each other into their tents, and many a maiden found her future spouse during this unique festival.

The 'Lhasa Orchestra' was kept very busy during this time. This orchestra consisted of four musicians, whose melodies were accompanied by a bevy of five dancing girls. The instruments consisted of a Tibetan guitar, a flute, a fiddle and something that looked like a xylophone. The 'girls' had an average age of about forty years, and were not raving beauties by any means. They had sweet voices, however, and they danced in a pleasant fashion. Some of the tunes had a delicious cadence. The dancing was done on a piece of plank so that the tapping of the feet, which is the heart of Tibetan dancing, may be heard. The women tapped

their feet, at first slowly, but faster as the tempo of the music increased; all the time their bodies and their arms swayed gently and gracefully. As I said before, the women were certainly not Queens of Sheba, but they danced very well. I suppose Tibetans are practical; when they want dancing, they could not care less what the dancers look like as long as they can dance! One finds so many so-called actresses and dancers in the West, who certainly look ravishing, but who are as devoid of dancing and acting ability as the Sahara is of Eskimos. Each of the dancers had a nickname, and they were popularly known as 'The Crow', 'The Cat' or 'The Paper Flower' for obvious reasons. This orchestra and the dancers were very popular, and they monopolized all parties. Several recordings of these dancers were made recently, which are much appreciated by those Tibetans who can afford to pay for them.

And so after a week of merrymaking and feasting the refreshed Lhasa folk went back to their homes and their daily tasks.

When a person fell ill in Tibet, the monks were called in. They carried out various rites to determine the cause of the illness. They might find it to be due to the malice of evil spirits, or the annoyance of gods that the patient had offended, or it might be because the patient was in his *Ka* year, his year of bad fortune. Anyway special prayers were said for him, and if he died the monks said that the gods were too angry to accept the propitiations; if he recovered the monks obtained all the credit. The Tibetan doctor as such was seldom called. He usually gave some herbs. In the field of surgery there was almost nothing. Branding people with red-hot pieces of iron was a favourite remedy for backache and any other bodily pain. So also was blood-letting for

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

headaches and heart diseases. Every family had *rebus* or pills, which were regarded as a cure-all. These pills contained herbs, pastes and the excreta of the Dalai, Panchen or other incarnate lamas.

During the past twenty or so years modern medicine has made a great mark in Tibet. The British legation hospital in Lhasa used to have a busy time. At first the people were suspicious, but this barrier was gradually broken down. Sometimes patients attended by the monks or the herbalists were brought in when their condition was too far gone. Surgery was a real boon to the Tibetans. Vaccinations and inoculations were fully accepted by the people. I remember a British eye specialist who had a reputation there as someone who could make the blind see, and was thought to be a miracle worker. I think the operations he carried out were cataract operations. When the patients were better and were able to see again, they used to prostrate themselves before the hospital. Perhaps it is true to say that of all the things of the modern world that permeated into Tibet, medicine was the one that encountered the least opposition and prejudice.

For a long long time the monks opposed any modern influence in Tibet. The reason for this is obvious. The power of the monks depended upon their grip on the mind of the country. The reins of education and knowledge were in their hands. So long as this lasted the people would not question the religious teachings of the monks. In the ways and the knowledge of the modern world they saw the seeds of destruction. Modern knowledge was something pernicious, something that could tear away the twin pillars on which they based their power and security, ignorance and superstition. The monks were clever, and knew that revolutions were not the only things that produced changes in the world. Things can

be wholly altered by seemingly paltry happenings. Something trivial and innocent that is new may contain the seeds of future revolutions. They knew what the thin end of the wedge was. That is the reason for their behaviour which at times may seem childish. For instance, soccer was a popular game in Lhasa once, but later it was banned on the pretext that after a soccer match Lhasa had a very bad and destructive hailstorm. The gods were said to be angry at the playing of a foreign game in Tibet. At certain times of the year the monks forbade the wearing of any Western shoes or hats, items that were fashionable in Lhasa. The school that was opened at the time that I was in Lhasa was later closed because the monks objected to the teaching of modern subjects. However, times are now different, for the Chinese Communists are pushing on with their policy of rapid change in Tibet without any effective opposition from the monks. They are impotent in the face of such a powerful country.

One day a strange Indian came to Dekyi-Linka. He was very tall and emaciated, and badly frostbitten. His clothing was in rags. He spoke very little Tibetan. He came to the legation to get help, being an Indian National, and to be treated in the hospital for his frostbite. He told my father that he had come to Tibet on pilgrimage, and had been to many of the holy places, having recently visited Samye which has the oldest monastery in Tibet. He had suffered terribly on the wintry passes. Wherever he went he droned in a sad monotonous voice, '*Om Bhagwan! . . . Om! Bhagwan! . . .*' (Oh! Almighty God!) So we called him Om Bhagwan, and a horde of mischievous children was always hopping at his heels shouting out this name. Om Bhagwan was given a place to sleep in a stable near by. He was not a saintly ancient by any means. He was always yelling and complaining

in a high falsetto whenever there was the slightest delay in obeying his commands. He wanted milk, eggs, 'Jelabies' and his favourite dish, which was *halua*. He soon became a complete nuisance. One day he became very ill. My mother said that if the old man died he was unlikely to get a decent funeral.

In Lhasa, when a man died, his body was given over to a special group of people known as *Ragyapas*. These people were the disposers of the dead, and they lived outside Lhasa in houses made of hundreds of horns plastered together with mud. They carried the body to a place away from the city where they hacked it to pieces and fed these to the huge vultures that hovered around that area. There may be a religious basis to this seemingly gruesome and barbaric form of funeral! Buddhists are great believers in charity, and it is thought that the last charitable deed a man can do is to have his dead body fed to the vultures. I suppose the contribution of one's corpse to a department of anatomy is also a very charitable deed. If one could get the Tibetans to think in a modern way, and persuade them to be charitable in a modern manner, I do not see why medical schools in the future Tibet should ever be short of bodies!

The Tibetan *Kanglang*, a form of trumpet used in religious ceremonies, is made from the human thighbone. It was well known that the *Ragyapas* did a brisk trade in this commodity with the local monasteries, and the longer the bone the higher the price. One can thus understand that the *Ragyapas* prize a lanky corpse! So my mother thought that if Om Bhagwan died, he would be a gift from the gods for the *Ragyapas*.

She was right. One day poor Om Bhagwan died, in the cold of Tibet far away from his hot humid plains. The

Ragyapas were called in and they were paid a good sum to dispose of his body in a proper fashion. I had a last glimpse of Om Bhagwan being trussed up and carried away on the back of a husky *Ragyapa*, who I thought looked particularly pleased. But Om Bhagwan never reached the vultures, for some days later the mutilated body of an Indian was found a few miles away from Lhasa. It had no legs!

One night I suddenly woke up to find my father with a miserable face. 'Our horses have just been stolen!' he said. Horses are just like cars in Tibet and I could well understand why he looked so glum. We had three horses in the near-by stable, the place where Om Bhagwan once slept. We had the Sino-Tibet war veteran and another servant sleeping there. They had stayed up late that night chatting, when they heard the stable door creaking. No sooner had the veteran got up to see what was the matter than a stone came hurtling through the darkness, knocking him senseless. At this the other fellow ran out and suffered a similar fate. The thieves must have untied the horses and run off, because the other servant came to his senses to hear the sound of galloping. He yelled out for help, telling our household what had happened. The menfolk of the place quickly saddled other horses and rode off in pursuit. A mile or so away on the fringes of Lhasa was a sandy place where the roads branched, one going towards Lhasa and the other heading away from the city towards some remote villages. The pursuers naturally thought that our horse thieves would take the smaller of the two roads, and followed that. But they were wrong because they saw nothing although they rode the whole night. The thieves had pulled a fast one, and we never saw our horses again. Our servants went to an old woman who, by using the beads on her rosary in a certain

way, could sometimes predict where lost articles could be found. But even her occult art was of no use.

Talking of thieves, a favourite method of 'burglary' in Lhasa was as follows. The burglar worked away and gradually unloosened a brick or two from the wall of a house, the Lhasa brick being soft, especially after a rainfall. They then took a stick to which a piece of cloth was attached, passed this through the breach, and waved it about. This precaution was taken in case the room they intended to 'invade' had people sleeping in it. The cloth was supposed to tickle the faces of the sleepers and wake them up, allowing the thieves to get away before they have entered the room. Of course, this clever manœuvre would fail disastrously if the occupants had their heads towards the opposite wall!

When this waving of the cloth did not bring about an uproar in the room, the burglars crawled in and ran off with their spoils. Though this method seems naive, it must have been effective, because one so frequently heard in Lhasa various people bemoaning the loss of this or that after their houses had been broken into.

There is an interesting story about this business. A woman of property lived alone in a remote village. One night she woke up to find something brushing against her forehead. Looking up she saw that it was a rag attached to a stick and this stick came through a gaping hole in the wall. She knew what this meant. However, she was a true Amazon; she did not scream her head off in the fashion usually characteristic of the females, but silently got up and unsheathed a long sharp Tibetan broadsword.

A thief stuck his head in cautiously to survey the field, but before his mouth could water at the sight of the juicy goods in the room, his head was off! The second thief probably

thought that his friend had been stuck in the breach, and gave him a gentle push into the room. When his pal still seemed unduly silent, he looked in to see what was the matter and he, too, was decapitated. We heard that the Tibetan Government gave this brave but perhaps undesirable type of woman a gift and a title.

In the autumn months it was very windy in Lhasa, and this was the season for kite flying, which was almost a national sport in the country. Greybeards as well as youngsters engaged in it. The kites were flat and diamond-shaped, and one did not see the slow box-like kites that children in Britain play with. They were made of tough Tibetan parchment with bamboo frames. The string was specially treated with glue and ground glass, and was thus razor sharp. Tibetans spent a great deal of time and money upon their kite flying.

The first kite of the season was sacrificed to the gods. A stick of incense was tied to the string near the kite itself, and lighted. The kite was then flown, and as it went up high, high into the sky, the incense gradually burned the string. The kite then flew away, and such a stray kite, if captured, was prized as being sacred.

Kite fights used to be very exciting and people backed the different contestants. Such fighting required great skill in manœuvring, as well as a really sharp cutting-edge to the string. There were many 'aces' in Lhasa who boasted of their kills. During some fights the rooftops of the town became crowded, and in the streets the people stopped to gape and admire the skill of the fighters. If a kite refused to fight and ran away the crowds yelled and jeered derisively! As soon as a kite was cut, there was a great shout of *Tanga Yeota!* (Sliced!) which can be compared to that ferocious chant of

'Timber!' when a wicket is smashed by a speed demon during a cricket match. When three or more kites got entangled together, the excitement was quite feverish, especially when all three were *Tanga Yeotas!*

About once a month we had a very lovable visitor to Dekyi-Linka. He was a young man, always cheerful and full of gaiety, but he was totally blind. He used to come round with the latest gossip, and his news bulletins covered every subject from revolts that were simmering in the country, to the bankruptcy of a certain aristocrat on account of his luxury-loving mistresses. Wherever he went he sang in a rich and melodious voice, with a poignant tone which perhaps only the blind possess. He accompanied his songs by hitting two stones together rhythmically. He had a serene air and was always frank with his views, and did not have that false cringing attitude which Tibetans of lower social rank adopt towards their superiors. We would give him some money and then he would be on his way to wander round Lhasa seeking alms and entertaining his numerous patrons with his wit, gossip and wisdom.

One day some friends of ours invited me to spend a few days at their house just outside Lhasa. I rode off with a party of people past the monasteries of Sera and Drepung, and after a few hours arrived at a pleasant grove. There was a monastery there where the medium of the Nechung Oracle stayed. As I mentioned once before, he was the greatest oracle in Tibet, and had a weighty say in all matters of national importance. I met the medium, an elderly monk, only once.

Every evening there was archery amongst the guests. Some of the arrows had bulbous hollow ends. As the arrows were shot, air passing through these ends produced a hum-

ming sound. These arrows were aimed at round leather targets.

Several times in Lhasa, there were rumours of invasion. Once we heard that Kazakhs from Sinkiang were marching upon Lhasa. News flew about thick and fast. The leader of the invading force was said to be an Amazon with breasts that hung to her waist. Her army was so huge that it took a whole day to review it, and was armed with strange secret weapons of immense power. The Tibetan Government sent out a detachment of crack troops to oppose this force, and what did they find? The vast army turned out to be a ragged band of starving men, women and children who had fled from Sinkiang and were on their way to seek asylum in India. They carried a few rusty ancient rifles! Lhasa was certainly a great place for sensational rumours.

The Tibetans were always confident of repelling any invasion. They had full confidence in their gods, and it was believed that in any war the very gods of Lhasa would march into battle, and special incantations and rituals against the enemy could wipe out battalions with disease and earthquakes. I must say that the gods of Tibet were pretty quiescent in the recent invasion by the Chinese Communists, and the secret rituals were impotent to check their advance.

X

FESTIVALS, DANCES AND CUSTOMS IN LHASA

DURING the summer months the *Achi Lhamu* shows were popular. These were like the operas of the West, but were performed in the open air. There were various troupes that performed these operas, but the most popular was the *Kyumu Lunga* troupe. These people, like circus folk, had a tradition of their own. They lived as families and the art of performing these *Achi Lhamus* was passed from generation to generation. The women did not take part in the dances, but played the musical instruments. They also managed the wardrobe. The female parts were played by men and boys.

The stories of these operas were based on Tibetan historical and religious themes. There was a very amusing one about King Tsong-Sanganpo and his conquests, both territorial and amorous. The ingredients of these operas were tragedy, comedy, romance, religion, mysticism and magic, and thus they appealed to the Tibetan mentality. Performances were given for the Dalai Lama and other incarnate lamas. Most of the ones I saw were done for the Reting Rimpoche, who, as I have said was then ruling Tibet, while the discovery of the new Dalai Lama was awaited.

They were indeed wonderful performances, with the sun

FESTIVALS, DANCES, CUSTOMS IN LHASA

blazing down on the cobbled courtyard of the monastery. They lasted about five days, and interest grew as the story unfolded itself. At the end of the last day the actors came to the spectators, and gifts were presented to them from the various aristocratic families of Lhasa. Then there would be the singing of a form of 'Auld Lang Syne'. A haunting memory that I have is of an opera performed in a remote place outside Lhasa. There were craggy mountains all around us, and snow began to fall softly. And as the snow fell, the players chanted their song to the rhythm of a Tibetan guitar. It never fails to give me a twinge of nostalgia for the Tibet I knew as a boy.

Later I saw several such operas performed at the Norbu-Linka, the summer palace of the Dalai Lama. At such times the actors put on their best performances, and the costumes were extremely lavish, being provided by the Government itself. At the end of each performance the Dalai Lama's personal bodyguard, in their European uniforms and playing bagpipes, presented arms with fixed bayonets, and then marched to their barracks to the sound of martial music. I used to know some of these tunes, and years later was amused to find that they were 'God save the King', 'Auld Lang Syne' and several Scottish airs whose names escape me, though I heard them played at the Braemar Gathering in 1952, while I was a student in Britain. The nooks and corners of the world where European and especially British influence have penetrated are astounding and even grotesque at times!

Now that I have mentioned Norbu-Linka perhaps I should say something more about the palace and the crowds that go there to get the blessing of the Dalai Lama and see the operas.

On a visit to this summer residence of the Dalai Lama, to receive the blessing of the *Kundun*, we dressed in our best clothes. The women had to conform to certain dress and hair styles. Immense crowds queued outside the heavy gates. There would be women in their cumbersome head-dresses, men and children from every part of Tibet anxious to receive the blessings of their God-King, something that the majority of Tibetans hungered for. For this many of them travelled on some of the worst roads in the world, suffering hardships. Once they had been blessed by him death held no fears. For some of the people it was thus a great day in their lives.

At the various gates the rush of the crowds became uncontrollable. The men quarrelled, and the women screamed that the children were getting trampled to death. The controlling of the crowd lay in the hands of the Dalai's monk bodyguards. These were giants who tried to look still more imposing by wearing heavily padded gowns. The Dalai Lama had a menagerie in which besides other animals he had some tigers. On one of his walks round the palace, a tiger escaped from its cage which had not been properly latched and attacked the Dalai. His bodyguard immediately fought with the animal and controlled it, but he was badly mauled by the ferocious beast. He now stood towering before the crowd, and in a voice of thunder yelled at the people to calm down but to no avail. When his shouts failed to bring order he brought down his thick heavy staff with considerable force upon the heads of the pilgrims. They received what are known colloquially in Tibetan as 'walnuts' on their poor skulls. I remember a woman getting a direct hit upon her head-dress, scattering the corals on it amongst the crowd.

FESTIVALS, DANCES, CUSTOMS IN LHASA

Eventually we arrived at the room where the Dalai Lama sat upon an elaborate throne. He was a solemn rosy-cheeked boy, but no different from our urchin friends of Dekyi-Linka. He was surrounded by several elderly monks, who now and then bent down and whispered to him. We went in a silent file towards his throne, and he blessed each of us with a stick to which some coloured ribbons were tied. Then we passed on, and a monk gave each of us a silk *trunga* which we tied round our necks.

We came out of the throne room into the sunshine, admiring the flowers, the lakes and the pavilions of the God-King. Norbu-Linka certainly was a very beautiful place, and lived up to its name of 'Jewel Park'.

We passed the barracks of the Dalai's bodyguards, and some of the soldiers were drilling. There were also two soldiers who were standing at some distance from each other, waving flags. Now that I think of it, they were probably signalling to each other, though how effectively I cannot say, because they would have had to signal to each other in English, a language that was double-Dutch to most of the warriors there.

At the New Year Lhasa became a great converging point for the monks. They all came in for the *Monlam*, the Prayer Festival. Monks from Sera, Drepung, Ganden and lesser monasteries all came streaming into the city, and the monk population rose to about 20,000. The monks took over the running of the city, and instituted their own 'police' armed with heavy staves, who were certainly 'stave happy'. I remember going with my mother to see the monks at prayer in a great courtyard. I do not remember why we went on that particular occasion, but it was certainly an experience! I have never seen such a huge collection of monks, all

chanting away. After the prayers, we went down a narrow passage. The crowd squeezed into it and nearly trampled us to death. We heard that on one of these occasions a small boy did suffer such a fate.

The number of monks that take part in the prayers is best illustrated by an amusing but perhaps macabre story. The monks were given *thukpa*, which is something like porridge, during a break in the prayers. This stuff was prepared in a giant cauldron stirred by several monks. Once a boy monk who was stirring this brew fell in accidentally and nobody noticed his absence. The *thukpa* was served, and all the monks licked their lips, and remarked how delicious the gruel tasted that day. The reason for this was not far to seek, for a monk discovered a well-boiled human finger in his bowl! What marvels fill this world of ours!

On the fifteenth day of the first Tibetan month, a unique ceremony took place in Lhasa. Some writers have called it the 'Butter Festival', a very apt name but one that I have not heard Tibetans use: to them it is known simply as 'the Offerings of the Fifteenth'.

All along the streets of Lhasa each of the aristocratic houses of the city had built their offerings. These consisted of wooden frames bound with leather on which stood various images and decorations, all made of butter coloured in different ways. Some of these offerings were quite intricate, with puppets and other gadgets. They were all about thirty feet high, and in front of them many butter lamps burned. We went round the town before it had become dark, and saw the finishing touches being put to these offerings, which were to be inspected by the Dalai Lama himself.

The streets became more crowded, and we returned to

the home of a friend of ours. We went up to the roof and had a look at the street below us, which was a blazing row of flickering lights and the play of shadows upon jostling masses of monks, wild tribesmen, laymen and shrieking women, all pushing and lunging to see the offerings. Soon the crowds grew quieter, and we were told to come down from the roof-tops, as the Dalai Lama would soon be coming, and no soul might watch him from a level higher than his palanquin. I am afraid our party were heretics as regards this rule. We stayed on the top storey, put out the lights and drew the curtains. We saw the Dalai Lama pass below us. He was followed by many dignitaries. All the soldiers who were in Lhasa took part in a march round the city that night, carrying fixed bayonets.

After this the crowd really let themselves go, and packed the streets, surging here and there, carrying everything before them. A group of people who lived on the bank of the Tsangpo River, opposite the Potala, now went about holding hands and singing at each of the offerings. After each song the crowd made way for them and they went on to the next offering. They were really the only ones who could wade through this dense crowd, all on the strength of their singing. There was great merrymaking that night.

However, the festival was not only devoted to innocent singing and dancing, because many of the young virgins who crowded into Lhasa that night to see the offerings must have gone home with their first initiation into the world of love, lessons obtained in the parks and the dark roads of the city and its outskirts that night! Our servants used to brag amongst themselves about their amorous adventures of the night before, on the morning after! The next day the butter of which the images were made was scrapped and dumped

away, a tremendous waste. The wits of Lhasa have a little ditty about this festival. 'If the offerings of the Fifteenth have any guts, let's see them all come out in the sun!'

Horse racing, foot races, archery and wrestling provided a great deal of varied entertainment for the folk of Lhasa. Racing was nothing like the 'Sport of Kings' of the modern countries. For one thing, there was no betting. For another, in Lhasa each rider drove a team of horses with the help of a Tibetan sling which could be cracked like a whip. The rider who could drive as many horses in his team as possible past the winning post was the man of the day. One can imagine what an infuriating race it can be, when the horses start running helter-skelter all over the place, at their own pleasure, but some of the spectators seemed to understand this, and extended their sympathy to the rider by helping to round up his horses!

The foot race consisted of a marathon. Everybody seemed to enter for it, young, old and grandpas. There were prizes for the first thirty or so. The winner got such things as grain, butter and tea, and was also rewarded with a special ribbon of honour.

A very spectacular type of contest was that in which young government officials took part. Targets were placed at intervals of about fifty yards, and the contestants had to ride at a gallop down the row of targets. As they got to the first target, they had to fit an arrow quickly to their bow and shoot at it. Before the next one they had to have their Tibetan prong-gun ready and send off a shot with this. It was all very thrilling to watch. The contest demanded good riding ability and split-second movements. Contestants who fell off their horses or missed their targets or got entangled in their weapons received hoots and jeers.

FESTIVALS, DANCES, CUSTOMS IN LHASA

Tibetan wrestling was hilarious in the extreme. I do not know how one could classify this novel form of wrestling, whether Graeco-Roman or Cumberland. The wrestlers faced one another and seized each other round the arms. The idea was to wrestle in this fashion and either by sheer strength or bluff or the judicious use of the legs throw one's opponent in such a way that a part of his body above his waist touched the ground. As soon as this happened, a set of trumpeters blared forth to announce it to the rest of the world.

The fun of Tibetan wrestling lay in the fact that one did not know who one's opponent was until the fatal moment when one entered the cobbled courtyard. The teams were housed in two tents and the contestants were put in a random order. As soon as the trumpet sounded, a wrestler ran out of each tent into the sunlight. They took a good look at each other. The crowds roared with laughter when a mammoth met a midget, and called upon the gods to help the little one, or yelled to the giant in a pleading tone to have mercy on his own grandson facing him. Sometimes the two opponents turned out to be two pals or even brothers, which all added to the fun and the excitement.

The wrestlers went through a strict ritual which, however, was by no means solemn, but was highly entertaining slapstick comedy. The wrestlers, garbed only in loin cloths, pranced about trying to scare each other with tricks demanding strength and agility. They then knelt down and prayed to the gods to aid them in the contest. Sometimes one wrestler finished saying his prayers before the other, and then casually started to leapfrog over the other and imitate his attitude of prayer. Once a wrestler was so sure of beating his puny opponent that he scorned any prayers, and

pretended to go to sleep while the other prayed feverishly! The crowd loved a joker; a good comedian won their hearts, and they did not worry if he lost.

The wrestlers, after they had finished all their tricks, were called together by the referee and made to face each other. They gripped each other and then the contest started. When the opponents were so well matched or such good pals that no decisive result was arrived at after some time, they were sent back to their tents, and came out later in a different order.

Once a little youngster came face to face with a huge shambling giant, and the crowd almost cried with laughter. The little one took a long time to pray, which was quite understandable! When the bout started, the big chap simply lifted the wee one off his feet, carried him in his arms, frantically struggling, and very gently laid him on his back as if putting a baby to bed. The trumpets blared forth and one could almost hear them laughing.

In Lhasa I saw at the monastery of Muru a dance that was only performed once every ten years or so. The dance as usual dealt with the theme of hell, and the punishments which the soul of man undergoes during his sojourn there. The monk dancers were almost naked except for a loincloth. Their bodies were painted, and they had the entrails of sheep wrapped round them. They wore masks which were very frightening. These had three or four heads, each of them ferocious and with large fangs. The victims were played by boy monks in order to emphasize the difference in height between the tormentors and the tormented. The monks pranced and danced round them, hurling rocks made of papier mâché. It was said that these dances were so realistic that during a rehearsal a boy monk had died of

FESTIVALS, DANCES, CUSTOMS IN LHASA

fright. It was a fascinating spectacle, but one that must certainly have made the superstitious folk keep to the tenets of the Tibetan religion. Hell was never better portrayed in all its hideousness and terror than by those weird dances performed at Muru.

On the other side of the Potala was the *Zamgyo Lukhang*. This was a lake in the middle of which was a lovely pavilion built for the serpent gods of the lake by the sixth Dalai Lama. In the old days it was customary to drown a boy and a girl in this lake as a sacrifice to these gods. This gruesome custom was later stopped, and when I was there the day on which this sacrifice was originally carried out was just a pleasant holiday. The people of Lhasa went round the lake in coracles, and much merrymaking and picnicking took place at the grassy lakeside.

XI

TIBET AND THE OCCULT

TO many people the name of Tibet conjures up a country within which lie the secrets of clairvoyance, telepathy and mysticism. Many European writers have written volumes about the existence in Tibet of knowledge concerning these things. It is thought that, hidden within the dark cells of monasteries situated amongst crags and snow, there is an untapped secret lore regarding these matters. The lamas were supposed to deal in miracles, and Tibet was the land where learned monks, who devoted all their lives to the realm of the spirit, had solved the riddles of life, and had understood and mastered the secrets of telepathy, clairvoyance and other occult phenomena. These monks were thought to have comprehended the meaning of life and the destiny of man.

White on a throne or guarded in a cave

There lives a prophet who can understand why men are
born!

Olaf Stapledon even wrote a book about the world of the future, in which Tibet figures as its spiritual champion fighting the forces of materialist decadence. The legend of

'Shangri-La' has grown; a few even thought it was just another name for Tibet!

Many travellers take too many things which are mere hearsay as being truths. They have not the time or the inclination to verify things. When a strange yarn is told them, some think that it will go down well with people at home, and that to doubt the tale would spoil things. I have a fear that many monks have told stories to travellers merely to impress the 'foreigners of the outer religion'!

What are the strange things that have been mentioned in the books on Tibet? There are clairvoyance, telepathy, mysticism, the regulation of the flow of heat in one's body, the running of hundreds of miles without tiring, and the existence of philosophy that comprehends the meaning of life and its final goal. Some of the monks are also thought to have overcome the force of gravity, and to practise levitation. All I would like to say is that I have heard of some of these things, but have never personally seen any of them practised. And I think this is true for the majority of Tibetans. One hears people talk about all this, but nobody has really seen any of it. There is always the old saying about there being no smoke without a fire, so there may be a flimsy basis to all these stories. Hypnotism, some sort of yoga and control of the involuntary muscles of the body by means of conditioned reflexes may all be possible, but many of the stories have acquired a very thick overlay of imagination and sensationalism. I also came across some things that certainly made interesting reading, and I learned several facts about dear old Tibet that I had never heard before.

Tibet has been the land of mystery and romance for a long time, and in many ways it is much misunderstood. The

various travel books about the country have not helped very much in getting the rest of the world to understand it. Travel books suffer from the defect that they must be made interesting and sometimes almost sensational to sell. Travellers only come to pick and choose all the strange and weird things that happen in the country. Something rare and exotic is given a great deal of space. Incidents that happen once in a blue moon are reported as if they were common everyday occurrences in the mysterious land of the lamas. Hence the rest of the world gets a very wrong view of the country, and so has arisen the myth that is Tibet: the myth of lamas living up to donkeys of years, the myth of loin-clothed mystics and hermits leaping from rock to rock in search of the meaning of life, the myth that every man in Tibet is a monk of some sort, the myth of the spiritual nation *par excellence* in this world.

It is certainly true that the Tibetans and the Tibetan way of life are different from any of the nations in the West, but that is true of any country in Asia. It is also true that Tibet has more than its share of mystery, weird rites, exotic customs and strange beliefs, but that the whole of the country is one camp of mystics, hermits and monks is not true. Tibet has for a long time been suspicious of foreigners and remained exclusive. It has led a secretive life. Added to this is the fact that the geography of the country made exploration very difficult, so that large parts of it had never been seen by the 'white' man. It is strange that in the West people regard anything that has not been seen by the 'white' man as being weird, mysterious and primitive.

The moment the so-called 'white' man steps on to this primitive soil, hey presto, civilization blooms forth! So there was Tibet, secretive, exclusive and little touched by

the 'white' man. Many Europeans for these reasons began to see more in it than there was, and coloured the life of the land with their imagination.

Tibet is a country peopled by a simple tough race, full of good humour, a virile outlook and solid virtues. They are also not lacking in superstition, dirt and ignorance. There are a large number of monks in the country, but monks that are not similar in their way of life and outlook to the monks in the monasteries of the West, as has been said before. The religion is basically Buddhism, but it has been tinged with superstition and devil worship, and it has a vast system of rituals and rites. The country has quite an extensive literature, mostly of a religious kind. Its architecture is robust and quite striking. It has an exquisite culture of its own but, culture being a luxury, the most cultured people are the aristocrats. The people are poorly educated in the academic sense, but have sharp intelligence, and are quick to learn the new and complex skills of the modern world.

At present, with the coming of the Chinese Communists and the opening of the country, the nation is undergoing a revolutionary change which will have lasting effects. As the old Tibet slowly vanishes the whole land is in an acute stage of transition. It is leaping from medieval days to the atomic age overnight, and the effect of this on the people and the country is not easy to predict, although it is bound to be striking. What one can say is that the Tibet of old, in spite of all its naive beliefs, had a stability of its own. The lives of the people had a meaning and a purpose. They may have been wrong in their ideas, but they knew why they were born, where they were heading and how they should lead their lives. Their very ignorance gave them a backbone which the modern philosophies do not give. With the

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

present changes Tibet will lose this. Communism may replace this robust philosophy of life, but it will not give the stability of the old Tibet.

As to Tibetan religious philosophy having the final answers to problems of existence that have haunted the greatest and sharpest minds throughout the history of the world, I can only say that it is like any other religion or philosophy. Some will find it completely satisfactory, and will see in it the truths they have always been seeking. They will become firm adherents. To others the same philosophies are full of loopholes, and they will disagree with their tenets. This is the familiar pattern with all the religions and philosophies of the world. For myself I do not think our religion solves any of the riddles of the universe. Perhaps the mystery of life will always remain strange and beyond the mind of man.

XII

FAREWELL TO LHASA

ONE day we saw a queer-looking group of horsemen ride into Dekyi-Linka. The ponies were Tibetan, with Tibetan saddles of a poor quality. The riders, however, were distinctly not Tibetan! They had blond hair, blue eyes and dirty unkempt beards. Hunched over their saddles, the three of them, with a Tibetan, rode into the place. We learnt that they were Germans. I think they were probably anthropologists or entomologists of some sort. The British were always conscious of maintaining their prestige in Tibet, and wherever they went it was with due pomp and ceremony. They would not dream of putting in such a ragged appearance as these Germans.

Soon the stories about these people were the daily topic of conversation amongst the folk of Lhasa. These Germans collected lice! They were said to pay about sixpence for a louse. I must say that many of the Tibetan beggars continually harbouring cohorts of lice almost became millionaires overnight.

Once a very sacred ceremony took place in Lhasa, and the Europeans there were requested by the monks not to photograph a certain image as it was taken round in

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

procession. It was said that the Germans did not listen to this and started to take pictures during the ceremony. The crowd assaulted them and smashed their cameras. They were lucky to get away. After this incident rumours started to fly about thick and fast. It was said that the Germans had radioed to Germany to send heavy bombers to blast Lhasa, and that for fear of this the Lhasa Government had made an official apology.

After some time the Germans left for India. However, just after they had crossed into that country, the Second World War started, and they were interned.

I remember quite well the time when news reached Lhasa about the start of the war. There was already the Sino-Japanese war going on in China. Tibetans backed the Japanese, as they were anti-Chinese. We heard over the radio the news of the fall of France and of the bombing of London. I remember hearing the song 'Wish me luck', and someone told me that it was the song sung by the children as they were being evacuated from London. Tibetans were eager to hear news from the various theatres of war, and to know whether all this would involve their country in the general fighting that was extending rapidly over the whole world.

One day my father told me that we would be leaving for Sikkim soon. At that time I knew a few words of English; in arithmetic I was not too bad, tackling fractions, and solving those problems where the figures are immersed in brackets of all types. I knew some Hindi, which I could both read and write. But I had spent two years or more of boyish activity in Lhasa, and had absorbed the city's throb of life. Most of the time I led a wild carefree life with the urchins of Dekyi-Linka. I had never seen a car, and had

FAREWELL TO LHASA

only slight contacts with Western ways. I had seen only a few Europeans, apart from those on the silent screen of the legation's cinema, but these latter gave me strange conceptions, or shall I say misconceptions—and no wonder, seeing that Charlie Chaplin, the *kuma* and the lads of Easy Street inhabited this screenland. Buckingham Palace, the city of London and other places of the West which we saw on the documentaries impressed me a great deal.

A friend of ours told me that my father intended sending me to school in India, and he thought that it was a very good thing. In the Tibetan schools they only taught the rudiments of the three Rs and considered that a beautiful handwriting was the finest education one could possess. Thus they wasted years of a boy's life in trying to make him write in an exquisite fashion. Discipline was very strict, and the punishments meted out to the boys in these schools were severe. Tibetan schools and monasteries had nothing at all to teach in such subjects as geography, history and science. All they taught were the rudimentary things mentioned above and some literature. In the monasteries they taught theology, philosophy, magic and metaphysics.

At that time Tibetans — at least lay Tibetans of the upper classes — were gradually becoming modern minded. Many of them were considering sending their children to the schools in India, where they would be able to obtain a modern education. These people saw that Tibet could not always fight shy of the ways of the modern world, and must eventually modernize. An education obtained in the schools of India would then be of great value.

The same friend of my father who was glad that I was going to school in India told me that I must try to go to an 'English' school. By this he meant a school run mostly by

Europeans, where the medium of instruction would be English. He said that in that case most of my friends would be 'babas', an Anglo-Indian term for all European and Anglo-Indian children. He warned me that for a few weeks I would be a dumb creature in such a school, because of my ignorance of the language, but after that I would be speaking English like the Sahibs who came to Lhasa. I always wanted to learn English, but at that time I had made no progress. The usual way of learning the language, by first studying the alphabet, and then going through 'cat' with a picture of a cat above the word, and 'fig', with another picture of something that looked like a fruit, but which I had never seen — all this was a very tedious and boring process, and I just got nowhere with this language that fascinated me so much. And so I was very anxious to go to an 'English' school.

The day came to leave Lhasa. We passed the old familiar places that had made me gaze with wonder the first time I saw them. We passed the monasteries of Sera and Drepung and after a few miles saw the gleaming silhouette of the Potala for the last time. With that I left not only the Lhasa of my boyhood but the Lhasa of the Tibet of old, the city that had been the same for generations, the city that had haunted the dreams of so many adventurers; the city with its strange old ways. It had kept away from the turmoils and the revolutions of the twentieth century, and had remained as it had always been. While the rest of the world was going through the deliriums of feverish change, change such as the world had seldom undergone, Lhasa slept its centuries-old sleep, the Rip Van Winkle of Asia, quiet and undisturbed. But it was not to sleep for very long, for in this modern world no nation can enjoy such a luxury. While all the

FAREWELL TO LHASA

world ran ahead and thrashed in the sea of change, Tibet slept on the beach. It is now in this sea, perhaps forcibly thrown in, and having to learn clumsily the strokes that will keep its head above the water. It will be lucky if it does not drown. The Lhasa of old is now dying with the coming of the Chinese Communists. It is changing overnight. For good or ill, Lhasa is being made modern, hygienic, educated, and being permeated with the philosophy and the ways of Communism.

The return journey need not be described as I have covered this route before. I remember two or three incidents on this trip. When we came to the wide plain beyond Gyantse, the town where I was born, I remember galloping at an exciting pace. It was a wonderful ride. Before I arrived at Gyantse I had been thrown off my horse at least three times, but was not badly hurt. At another place it was freezing cold, my hands were numb and could hardly hold the reins. My feet were extremely cold and so my father told me to walk for a while. I dismounted but immediately sank to my knees and had to crawl, amidst general laughter. We wore thick fur clothes, fur-lined boots, and masks lined with fur, with slits for the eyes. We must have looked like Martians.

After about two weeks of continuous travel, we at last descended into the warm sun-soaked Chumbi Valley. How wonderful it was to be back in my childhood home. And to see so many familiar sights! We passed the Donkar Monastery, and after a few hours were in the town of Yatung. Granny came out to meet us, and an old dog of ours wagged his tail. But he was too old to walk; we had to go up to him and pat him. Granny thought that I had grown a lot and become quite a mischievous urchin after going to Lhasa!

Granny herself had grown older and had given up her surreptitious beer-brewing, a fact mourned by many in Yatung. She now said more prayers than ever, and gave me a great deal of advice. She said she knew about my father's intentions to send me to school, and that I must study hard and bring credit to the family. She cautioned me not to forget my Tibetan way of life, and to say my prayers regularly. She said that I must get up very early to study, as the brain was at its best in the early hours of the morning.

We left Yatung after three days and rode up a steep road towards Sikkim. It went past the Kargyu Monastery. This monastery gets part of its water through pipes and it boasts of being the only monastery in Tibet so supplied. There are two chief sects of monks in Tibet, the Gelukpas and the Kargyupas. The majority of monks and the Dalai Lama belong to the former sect, and these are celibate monks. The Kargyupas are allowed to marry.

We passed through heavily wooded country, and here and there saw monkeys. Tibetans believe that human beings are descended from monkeys. A special group of monkeys took to eating a human type of diet. After many generations their tails dropped off and their faces became human. Years later when I came across Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and descent of man, I did not find it difficult to accept. In fact the Tibetans had somewhat anticipated Darwin! After a few hours we came to Chumpithang, a place I have mentioned before as being one of the haunts of the *Migou* or Abominable Snowman.

We left Chumpithang early next morning, and then began to climb. High above us we saw the Nathu-La Pass, which stands between Tibet and India, and is one of the vital passes on the trade route to India. As we rode upwards

FAREWELL TO LHASA

our horses began to pant heavily and had to rest every few yards. We saw here and there the bodies of dead mules which had probably perished of exhaustion on the way up. Clusters of sinister-looking vultures hopped about pecking away at these bodies. Overhead more of them circled round ominously. It was quite eerie. Far below us the Chumbi Valley lay seductive and bathed in sunshine. What a contrast to the tearing freezing winds of the pass and the vultures!

At last we came to the cairns and the wind-bitten prayer flags of the Nathu-La Pass. As we reached the top the wind became still more powerful. Moaning and howling like some creature suffering in hell, it whipped and lashed out at the prayer flags. Our horses turned their heads and doggedly struggled on. '*Lhai-g yalo . . . Lhai-g yalo . . . kyi . . . kyi . . .*' our party yelled as we went over the top. The wind abruptly became calmer as we descended, although it still moaned and howled. Below us was Sikkim, the buffer state that was then a protectorate of British India. The region below the pass was desolate and stony, not a blade of grass growing. We rode on and towards evening reached Changu, with its small lake near by.

Next morning we left Changu and, after rounding a bend, saw below us a land full of sunshine. It was greener than anything I had seen before. We could see some houses, and my father pointed out to me the palace of the Maharajah of Sikkim which was just visible. It all looked very beautiful and warm. After a while it got dark, and for the first time in my life I came across mist, which one does not get in the central parts of Tibet. We spent that night at Karponang. Father told me that the next day we would arrive at Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, and that I would be seeing my

mother, sisters and brother after nearly a year. I looked forward to this very much.

From Karponang the road went down sharply, and the weather became warmer. For the first time I saw bamboos, and thick forests surrounded us. Soon we saw ahead of us a group of figures and in their midst a long object. My father thought that the long thing was a car and the people around were mother and the others waiting for us. There are quite good motor roads in Sikkim. I had never seen a car before, although I had played with toy ones.

We came closer and sure enough it was mother waiting for us with a car. My sisters and brother had grown quite a bit, and they were chatting fluently in Nepalese, which is the most popular language in Sikkim. I felt quite lost in this tongue. We got into the car, and as it started I did not find it very pleasant — I felt giddy and sick, and did not enjoy seeing the surroundings revolving and tossing. My mother was surprised at my reactions, and told me that if a few miles in a car made me as ill as that, I did not stand much chance when I started travelling hundreds of miles, as I might have to do when going to school.

The town of Gangtok appeared to me to be very pleasant. I was struck by the lazy warmth of the air and the greenness of the valleys. The people were different from those I had been used to all my life. True there were many Tibetans, but most of the people were Nepalese, and there were many Indians, some of whom looked very much like our Lhasa pilgrim — Om Bhagwan! The houses were also more Indian in type. Most of them had glass panes, which was a luxury in Tibet, and something which only the well-to-do could afford to have, as glass had to be imported from India. The traffic on the road, with many cars honking their horns, bullock

FAREWELL TO LHASA

carts, etc., made me stare for quite some time, as one never saw any wheeled vehicles in Tibet in those days. I had been used to the sound of galloping, the jingle of the bells of mule trains, the hoarse yells of muleteers and the sight of horses kicking up dust in the streets.

XIII

SCHOOL IN INDIA

AFTER a few days my father got down to the business of sending me off to school. In such 'technical' matters, my mother left it all to my father. She said that she was a good housewife, and could dabble in trade, but that in matters regarding the academic education of her children she was a 'fool'. My father was not too keen to send me to an 'English' school; he thought that the idea was too ambitious, seeing how little English I knew, as well as too expensive. It was also true that only a few Tibetan children had been sent to such schools, and it was considered quite bold to take such a pioneering step. So he decided to send me to a local Nepalese school.

The Nepalese school, however, had no vacancies, and so father was forced to apply to Victoria School, which is in Kurseong, about nineteen miles from Darjeeling. After a few days we heard that there was a vacancy there. We received a prospectus of this 'English' school, and it looked to me very clean and attractive. There was a long list of kit required for each boy, suits, ties and a thing unbelievable and foreign to a Tibetan — a nail-brush!

One day we all left for Kurseong, a trip of nearly a hundred

miles by car. Needless to say, I was horribly car sick, and thought that death was pleasanter than being shut up in a hot box that made one as giddy as a top, and reeked of the foul smell of petrol fumes. But all good things come to an end, as the wise say, and the wonderful car journey ended. Give me a horse any day, I thought; how wonderful it was galloping across those cold windswept plains. At least that was a human way of travelling, instead of this car that was more torture than pleasure.

One day we went up to Victoria, which was some two miles above the town at an altitude of about six thousand feet. It was a big school with spacious playgrounds. It had about two hundred boarders. As we were all dressed in our gorgeous Tibetan robes, rich brocades and silks of brilliant colours, we had a lot of boys staring at us. Most of the boys were either British or Anglo-Indians. Anyway, I saw more *gopsays* (yellow-haired ones) and *mingors* (blue-eyed ones) than I ever had before, and wondered how I would get on with these folk that did not look quite human! I saw many boys running about with nets chasing something, and thought that they were waving flags. Later on I found out that they were trying to catch butterflies. Most of the boys seemed to be playing games I had never seen played before. I felt like a country bumpkin, and I suppose I was one.

The headmaster of the school, a tall friendly Englishman, took us round, and gave me a kindly look, which put new courage into me. He showed us the different classrooms and the assembly hall where the boys studied. Upstairs were the dormitories, with rows of beds neatly arranged. My mother went into raptures at the spotless line of washbasins. She liked the school very much, and so did I. We next saw the dining-room, and then the chapel. My father told the

headmaster that he would bring me to the school the next day, and he agreed.

The next day I discarded my gorgeous robes and got into a pair of khaki shorts and a blue jersey over my khaki shirt; a pretty drab sort of outfit I thought. I had great difficulty in putting on my tie. The knot looked ridiculous each time I tied it but eventually it was presentable. We then went up to Victoria, and my father gave me some advice. He told me to study hard, and that if I failed in my studies he would have no alternative but to make me a muleteer. Little did he realize that it was just the thing I wanted to be! He said that he would take me out for the week-end before he left for Sikkim on his way back to Tibet.

I was taken to a classroom and made to sit at a desk, and then my father left me. I was alone for the first time in my life. At first I sat dead still, and did not dare to move, but after a while I surveyed the surroundings to see how the land lay. My teacher was a pretty, fair-haired, blue-eyed lady, who was very kind to me. Whenever she was close, I noticed her scent, and when she wrote something in my notebook I saw that her hands were white and very clean and that she had pointed nails. The boys around me were real *gopsays* and *mingors*. I now knew that I was in the kingdom of the 'babas' which my friend in Lhasa had told me about. They all stared at me and some, I thought, made fun of me.

We were doing poetry at that time. The page open before me showed a picture of a countryside like Yatung with snow falling. At the head of the poem I could vaguely read 'The Snowdrops'. The whole class was reciting together, and I thought their voices hissed too much. I was then told to read, and stumbled through some lines, to the suppressed merriment of the boys at my awful accent, until the teacher

mercifully told me that I had done enough. One knows how perfect the enunciation of little public school boys is! I thought that they were a lot of skits, but was too lost in this strange world to adopt any aggressive policy. And that was the first lesson over. As soon as the class broke up, the boys crowded round me and belaboured me with questions. I could only stare at them and try hard to look friendly. But I certainly felt like a circus clown who has forgotten his act!

Before I relate any more incidents and impressions, let me say something about Victoria in order to give my account a background. The school was built in 1880 and run by the Government. It taught up to the 'Senior Cambridge', and was modelled on the lines of the English public schools. We were at school for nine months and then had three months' winter holiday. We played cricket, football and hockey, three months of each. There was a system of houses, such as Irvine, to which I belonged, Mallory and Kellas, all named after mountaineers. This was understandable, for the Himalayan snows were only a few miles away, and we saw Kinchinjunga quite clearly when the weather was fine. We were taught in English, had our food in the English style and altogether our way of life was British. Many of the masters had come from Britain with Oxford or Cambridge degrees. Originally the school was meant only for British and Anglo-Indian boys, but this rule was relaxed a few years before I came in.

We got up early with the rising bell. After breakfast there was chapel for the Christians, but non-Christian boys were not forced to attend. We had P.T. and games in the evenings. Studies took place in the evenings in the Assembly Hall. There was grace before and after meals. For punishment there was the British system of 'lines', 'Coventry',

detention and caning. The prefects when I first went in wielded considerable power, and certainly made our lives a misery. Their favourite weapon of assault was the hockey stick!

What I found most difficult to get used to was the strict routine and discipline, the way our lives were ruled by the ringing of bells, and the institution of bounds, by which we were always kept herded together in the school compound, and could go out only with special permits called Exeats. In Lhasa I wandered where I liked with our band of ragamuffins. We were free, we lived close to nature and our lives were not regimented or ruled, but at school one had to get up with the rising bell, go about marching with neat columns of boys.

I was terribly miserable for the first few months. I was not myself and went about the daily routine in a timid, automatic fashion. The language difficulty was another barrier. I could not understand what the boys said, and they just giggled and made fun. I had been taught a few sentences, but their very exactness, which made them stilted, drew roars of laughter.

‘What’s your name, sonny?’

‘My name is Tsewang Yishey.’

The two were said in a gasp and slurred together. They all thought my name was an unpronounceable one, and one particular big chap used to come up to me repeatedly, just to hear me say my name in this queer fashion!

‘What’s your age?’

‘I beg your pardon? I do not know.’ (I was told to use this stock phrase whenever I did not understand what I was asked, and I knew the reply only if the question was put in the form of ‘How old are you?’)

There would be roars of laughter, and much giggling. Perhaps they were discussing the stupidity of a chap who did not know his own age.

‘You don’t know how old you are!’

‘Yes, I am nine years old.’

‘Then why didn’t you say so . . .’, and more laughter.

Then at table there was the complex ritual of knives and forks, and what a fool I made of myself! Putting treacle in my tea, using the fork with my right hand, opening my mouth while eating, swishing down glasses of water with a gurgle and putting my elbows on the table were the highlights of my clowning. It nearly killed my tablemates with laughter, and me with humiliation. And after grace they all mumbled ‘Amen!’ and I just stood still. What a new world I had entered, a world without mercy and understanding, full of ridicule and endless rituals, surrounded by boys who looked completely different from me, and who spoke a tongue that I could only vaguely follow. For the first few days I was in a daze, and felt like a heavyweight boxer suddenly thrown on to the stage to perform the *Swan Lake* ballet.

The longed-for week-end came when I would see ‘civilized’ folk again. It was wonderful. I poured out my heart to my parents and told them I felt like a fish out of water at the school, and how the boys made me the butt of all their jokes. I said that I wanted to leave the school to which I had looked forward so much before. Mother shed the usual mother’s tears, but my father said that everybody felt like that in the beginning, and I would settle down in a few days or weeks at the most. I doubted this, but agreed to give the school a try.

We had a very pleasant week-end, and then the day came

when we had to go back to school, and I bawled away. The parting was tearful to say the least. I did not see my parents again for nine months.

Life had started for me at Victoria. Gradually I got used to the routine. One day my friends asked me whether my father was the King of Tibet, because of the rich gowns he had been wearing when we arrived. Just for the hell of it, I said yes. This put me in a new light with my friends, for I suppose that they were thinking of me as a personality to be regarded with some awe and respect. After that I became more popular, and was tolerated by the boys.

I soon learnt a few things. I learnt that if one wants to be happy in school and save oneself from punishment, one must be meticulous in obeying the school rules. Secondly, if one wants to be popular with one's friends, one must distribute 'tuck' to them, tell them hair-raising tales of Tibet, and stand up for oneself. In the last respect I must say that I did not quite play cricket for I once threatened to stab a chap who was too persistent in ridiculing my uncouth ways! It was only a threat, but it worked, and he did not persist with his game. After a month or so I could carry on conversations with my friends, and gradually I had my own gang of boys with whom I shared all my 'tuck', especially sweets sent to me from Tibet. Their exotic nature and their doubtful taste was a novelty for my pals, and schoolboys will eat anything!

Cricket was the first game of the term and I was quite hopeless at it. I thought that it was too slow and a waste of time. When my turn to bat came — usually at the very end — I went all out to clout the ball as hard as I could, and this invariably ended in my stumps flying to the four winds. Fielding under the burning sun the whole day, getting your

hands sore and your fingers twisted, then one clout and back to fielding, what was the point of this game! Only one thing was interesting: I now knew that the British surgeon who had thrown stones in a funny way was actually trying to bowl. Cricket was not up my street, but we had fanatics of the game as in other parts of the world.

Every three months the boys had their weights, heights and chest expansions taken. I remember standing with the tape round my chest, and the games master encouraging me to breathe more and more. I could not understand what all this excitement was about, but I puffed and puffed. Later I was told that I had the best chest expansion in the junior school. Perhaps it was my thin flexible chest, or perhaps it was the effect of living at an average altitude of 10,000 feet all my life that had done it. But let me assure you that I am no Samson now!

We were taught the usual subjects that are so familiar to those who have been to school. It was very fascinating. Only singing and poetry bored me. Both were too cherubic for my liking. Through these early books what worlds we visited! History — the Egyptian Pharaohs, Rameses in his chariot, the god Amen Ra, the Greeks and the Romans, Horatius defending the bridge, the battle of Thermopylae with a handful of Spartans under Leonidas defying the Persians under Xerxes, whose arrows darkened the sky; Drake, Raleigh, Columbus ('In 1492 he sailed the ocean blue'); Magellan going round the world; Alexander the Great and his horse; the Trojans and the wooden horse; Ulysses and Polyphemus — all this was a vast new world with such interest. These tales would astonish my friends when I got home for the winter holidays.

Geography was another subject I liked and I learned

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

strange and wonderful things: that the world is round, the sun does not move, an eclipse is a natural phenomenon, etc. We also became familiar with Eskimos and igloos, the market in Boston, fisheries in Britain, sheep shearing in Australia, New Zealand butter and meat and the pygmies of Africa.

I enjoyed nature study, examining the structure of leaves and flowers, and going out with our teacher in search of tadpoles. I found that the grounding in arithmetic which I had in Lhasa stood me in good stead, and I had no difficulty in this subject.

Thus it was that after a few months I began to like school and became one of the herd. We cheered and went crazy and hoarse over the victories of our school over others in the district, and tried to be sportsmen, as we were taught the dogma that 'Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton!' We had our school fete, and our annual sports and concert. Indeed, years later I had no difficulty in understanding the conversation of my British friends when they discussed their school days. We spoke the same language, and were brought up on the lore of the British public school. In fact, it was surprising to find that many of the slang words were the same.

The monsoon weather was a curse in Victoria, and we got the full treatment, rainfall of over two hundred inches in a year. I remember that during some soccer matches the ball used to float on the swirling waters! But for us boys nothing could be more exciting than playing in such torrential rain. I remember, one day when I was a student in London, I decided to go out in what my friends called a 'downpour'! The downpour to me was what we would call a slight drizzle in Victoria.

In Victoria, after every concert or during fetes, the British

SCHOOL IN INDIA

National Anthem was played, and we found ourselves singing 'Rule Britannia' and 'Land of hope and glory'. I found them very tuneful, although their political implications were beyond me at that time. We also had a roll of honour, in which were the names of two holders of the Victoria Cross. There were many old boys serving in the war at that time.

Such then was my environment and my way of life, a world as unlike that of Lhasa, where I had been a year before, as anything one could imagine. And I had to adapt myself to it as best I could. The ragged wild laddie was turned into an obedient, disciplined and timid 'British' schoolboy with his school cap and blazer with the school crest on it, which incidentally bore the replica of the head of a yak.

One day after the final examinations in November, in which I did tolerably well and was promoted, the headmaster told me that I could leave for home in a few days. The winter had started, and I was as excited as anything!

XIV

BACK TO TIBET

IT was good to see Gangtok again. After a few days we were on our way to Yatung. What a wonderful change to see the mule trains galloping along the narrow roads with the husky muleteers grinning by their sides, and to hear the sound of the bells on the necks of the animals. The only bell I was familiar with was the school bell, which was certainly not pleasant, unless it summoned one to the refectory to assuage a voracious appetite!

We passed the familiar places, my sister Nozin and I, for Nozin had been left in a day school in Gangtok. We passed the place where I saw my first car nearly a year before, and then there was the sharp climb to Karponang. The Nathu-La Pass was fairly sunny and not at all windy this time. As we crossed over into Tibet, I felt a sting of joy, for far below us was the Chumbi Valley again, the valley that always conjures up nostalgic memories in me every time I see or think of it — for it contains Granny, the Donkar Monastery, the school I went to as a toddler where we learnt to trace out the alphabet with stones, the strange tale of the oracle of Nanga Punzee, and the drowsy summer, hunting for wild berries and mushrooms on the floors of the pine

forests. My *gopsay* friends, Victoria, the playing fields of Eton — all this was forgotten.

We went down quickly and were soon amongst the pine trees and the rhododendrons of Chumpithang. My sister and I hummed 'The British Grenadiers' as we went past the Kargyu Monastery.

Coming into Yatung we saw familiar faces, and all my friends said that they would be dropping in to hear what tales I had to tell of my 'English' school.

It was wonderful to see my parents and Granny again. My father asked me to sing him a few English songs and I showed off, singing 'Hearts of Oak', 'Land of hope and glory' and several others. He flattered me by saying that whatever I had or had not learnt at school, I certainly knew a few songs. What a change to eat human, i.e. Tibetan, food again! At school I had got used to eating all the tasteless dishes of the Sahibs, but I could not stomach porridge and salads! The latter just put me off, eating raw vegetables and tomatoes, and beetroot, that was the limit! Anyway, I had been forced to consume the stuff, for the matron shook and pushed me about, telling me that I was 'a beastly little boy' not to eat such good food. I was astounded at the strength of this Memsahib, and decided that the food must have something about it to give her such Herculean strength and physique! Moreover, I reasoned, were not the Sahibs big and strong and hairy? Therefore I must eat the stuff even if it made me think of yak dung! Reason won the day, and I gradually settled down to my herbivorous diet. But now there was real home food, dried meat and Tibetan tea. I threw off my school clothes and got into my *chuba*. Soon I was roaming about and visiting the familiar places in Yatung. The shackled prisoner was once more free, and there were

no more infernal bells, bells for getting up, bells for meals, bells for studies, bells to go to bed, and bells at your bedside at the school hospital!

There were a great many stories and interesting incidents to relate to Granny and my friends. With Granny I had many arguments. She told me that lightning was caused by the spitting of fireballs by the celestial dragons. These fireballs or *Norbus* (jewels) sometimes struck down trees and if one found them, they were extremely precious, because they granted all the wishes of the possessor. The thunder that one heard, she said, was the roaring of these dragons. I made a complicated explanation about clouds clashing and electric power, but Granny gave me a condescending look, as if to say, 'Poor lad, the things he is taught in that foreign school!' I persisted, and she lost her patience with me. 'If you want to know, I have seen these dragons myself! I saw them in Kham several years ago, and it is such common knowledge that the celestial dragons are responsible for thunder and lightning that I really don't think much of that school of yours. It was good to hear you sing those marching songs but all this rubbish of clouds and other things, well I really don't know.'

That was the start. One day I told her that we had been taught that the sun did not move but that the earth did, that the earth was round, and in an eclipse the earth casts its shadow on the moon. At all this Granny gave a little laugh, in which there was a hint of sarcasm, 'Ho! ho! what utter nonsense, don't be a fool, son! I have always told you to use your eyes. Now look around you. Does the sun move or not? This morning it was there, and now its last rays are falling on those hills. The sun will soon go behind them. Now tell me if the sun moves or not! And look at Yatung

BACK TO TIBET

and its surroundings. It is not round. It is steep here and flat there, but it is nowhere round. If it was round we would all fall off! I will teach you something. The world is flat and rests on the back of a huge serpent. When the serpent moves, the earth above it shakes, that is an earthquake. The serpent cannot shake water so well, that is why there are very few earthquakes in Lhasa, because as you know Lhasa is built upon a lake. And an eclipse is an evil happening. In this a bad spirit eats up the moon. This spirit, however, has a hole in its throat, so that after it has swallowed the moon, it comes out of this hole. When the moon is being swallowed it becomes dark. That is why we all come out making a noise and banging pots in order to scare the evil spirit away. All this is true, and you must believe what our wise lamas say, who know all about these strange things. It is not good for you to go to a school where they teach you such nonsense. People there are probably not so religious as us. They belong to the outer way, and not the inner path like us. They don't even believe what their eyes tell them. The sun is still, the earth is round, there are no dragons in the heavens . . . very wrong, very wrong.'

What my Granny said sounded true to me, for the sun really moved and the world was not round. I could easily see all that. I was believing too much of what the foreign teachers taught me. What I had done at school was to believe all that I was taught without understanding the basis. I had merely learnt and accepted things without questioning them. I had not made it a point to study my books at their very roots, so that I had no answer to Granny, although she in her solid practical outlook was wrong. That was an important lesson that I learnt.

As if to show Granny that I was still a good boy, I took to

saying prayers with her, and spinning her prayer wheel. This created a favourable impression with her.

One day an Englishman and his wife passed through Yatung on their way to India and my parents and I went to have dinner with them. They were both pleased with the correct way in which I handled my cutlery, a lesson that I had learnt the hard way at Victoria, I tell you! I carried on a long conversation with the lady, and she told my father that I spoke good English. That did me no end of good, for I always wanted to speak this language well. They later sent me a model aeroplane with which I was greatly thrilled.

I told my friends all about our school, quickly glossing over my early days there, and the burning humiliations that I had suffered at the hands of the *gopsays* for fear of losing face with my tough gang. I regaled them with stories of films I had seen, redskins, cowboys and hosts of other characters.

One day I suddenly fell acutely ill, and was in a poor condition in a few days. My father called in an Indian doctor, but my mother wanted to call in monks from the Donkar Monastery to say special prayers for me. My father was a very unorthodox Lamaist, in fact he did not believe in the prayers of the monks; he believed in the philosophy of Buddhism. But he thought that it would be better to call in the monks, because if anything went wrong, mother would put the blame on him.

The monks were called in, and for several days through my feverish head went the sound of drums, cymbals, *dongyers* and the sonorous chanting of monks. One day there was a very special ceremony which was performed only when the sick person was at death's door. I was thus pretty close to getting a good view of Shenji, the ruler of the Dead. As I was born in the sheep year, a sheep which was intended for

the slaughter-house was bought by us, and then specially painted. The sheep was then treated almost as a pet. This act 'of giving the sheep its life' was considered a thing full of merit. Some friends of ours then scoured the locality to find a boy of my own age to take part in a certain ritual. As it was believed that in this ritual my disease would be transferred to the other boy, only a very poor family was likely to allow one of their children to take part in it. Anyway, the son of such a family was brought to our house by his mother. The boy was dressed in some of my old clothes which were given to him when the ceremony was over. Then the monks all came chanting to my bedside, and after some lengthy prayers, rubbed a lump of dough all over my body. The disease was then thought to have entered the dough. They carried the dough out and rubbed it over the body of the boy, muttering incantations. They then told the boy to return straight home, and not to turn round at all as he did so. The poor boy did as he was told. We paid the parents some money for the services of their son.

Even after this ceremony I did not get well. Granny was doubtful whether I should live. She took it as a bad sign that the most elaborate rituals had not worked. She also said that as I had taken a sudden turning to religion and the saying of prayers recently, I was probably preparing for the world to come. And she thought that perhaps the gods had not liked my going to a foreign school, run by people of the outer way, who taught me things contradicting the thoughts of the inner way. My family also tried to discover the places where I had played on the day before my illness, in order to find out whether I could have annoyed the local deities that had their homes near streams and rocks. When they found out that the day before my illness I had been

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

awful enough to urinate in the stream where a fierce deity was believed to live they were sure this had brought on my illness. It could be, I thought, but surely the punishment was out of all proportion to my crime, and I had not been aware that the stream I so desecrated was the god's home. For nearly a month I had been racked with pain. I now think that it was meningitis. Anyway, many offerings were placed at the stream, and the forgiveness of the deity was begged for. I suppose he forgave me, because in a few days I became much better, and in about two weeks I was on my feet again.

The time came for me to leave Tibet and go back to the British atmosphere of Victoria for my second school year.

XV

CHANGING YEARS

MY friends at school thought I looked very thin, and no wonder after my gruelling illness at Yatung. Another year started, and this was a pattern to be repeated many times, nine months at school and three months at home. Nine months leading the life of an English public school boy, talking nothing but English, and absorbing only the learning, culture and lore of the West. Then three months at home, talking Tibetan, going to monasteries sometimes, and living in a Tibetan environment. It was no wonder that the Western influence tended to outweigh that of the Tibetan. I suppose we became 'almond-eyed Englishmen'!

The day when we started to do Science was a great day. We did not realize then what a great influence science would have on our lives. We learnt about air pressure, hydrostatics, vacuums and the secrets behind the steam engine, aeroplane and telephone. A new world was opened to us, and we all found it very fascinating. It made clear so many things that had been obscure. Although we were not taught astronomy systematically, yet we came across the subject in discussions. Of course we all wanted to know whether there was life on Mars.

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

The Bengal famine affected our school in that our food was drastically cut down. Just outside our refectory pictures of the starving people were put up, children looking like skeletons, and skin and bone urchins fighting with dogs for bits from the garbage bins. I suppose being boys we were callous. We never thought of the suffering people, but only complained about how few slices of bread we got during meals.

The war was also very much with us. We used to hold concerts and fetes in aid of the Services. We had many soldiers visiting our school, as there was a military hospital in Darjeeling, which was also a popular place for soldiers on leave — perhaps their last leave before they were sent to the sweltering malaria-infested jungles of Burma, or to die cruel deaths under the Japanese. Once an American soldier came to see our school. He wondered whether the perpetual mist which surrounded it ever cleared away! The lobe of his left ear had a bit chewed off, and he told us that the ‘Jerries’ in North Africa were responsible for this. He was a very pleasant person, and gave us the traditional American chewing gum and candy.

Sometimes we used to see trainloads of Gurkha recruits setting off to their training camps in India, and after that the Burma front. There was a recruiting depot near by, and many of these men were raw village yokels, who seemed to be getting a tremendous kick out of their first boots! They waved large handkerchiefs to the people as they went by, yelling ‘*Basa-hai! Basa-hai!*’ (Goodbye!) From their merry faces one would have thought that they were off to a holiday camp, rather than to be trained to fight in one of the worst theatres of war.

We followed the news eagerly, and were given talks

CHANGING YEARS

occasionally on the progress of the war. I had some relatives in the Gurkha Rifles.

When I first went to Victoria the number of Tibetan children in these 'English' schools was very small, and did not include many girls. But within a few years it became the thing to send children to these schools. The majority of them were the sons and the daughters of the aristocratic families of Tibet, and they were subjected to the same sort of teaching and environment as those at Victoria. This was the first time such a large number of Tibetan children had come out to be educated in the ways and the philosophies of the West.

One would imagine that these boys and girls would have a great influence on the future course of Tibet, but it will probably not be so. For one thing, the number of children who came to these schools although comparatively large for Tibet, was not large enough to have any permanent influence on the country. The fact that most of them were from the highest and the most influential families of Tibet may on the surface seem important. But that is not so, for the picture has changed since the Chinese Communists came into Tibet. Probably in the Tibet of the coming years family and the 'blueness' of one's blood will not be deciding factors in the securing of the big posts of the nation.

These children took to their 'English' schools very easily. They all learnt to speak English well, and many of them are far more at home in this language than in Tibetan. Many of them know as much about science, history, geography, mathematics and other subjects as any European boys and girls by the time they leave school. Some are very keen on Western dancing, and are adepts at the latest steps of the samba, mambo and other exotic dances!

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

One who is philosophically inclined might suppose that these boys and girls would have to go through many conflicts: the conflict between the old medieval ways of Tibet on which they have been brought up and the modern environment in which they have received their schooling; the conflict between the religious beliefs of the Tibetans and the modern philosophies. But all this is only theoretical. In practice almost all the boys and girls have picked up the superficial ways of the West, and then have gone back to Tibet to resume their old ways. Their modern schooling and the time spent in fairly modern towns in India during their most plastic years do not seem to have left any deep marks upon their lives.

The modernizing of Tibet with Communism as its philosophy has fallen to the lot of the Chinese. They have built many schools in the country, and one school has over six hundred boys and girls. Many children are being taken to China for further studies. All this will have a far greater influence upon Tibet than that of the 'English' schools.

XVI

BORDER TIBETANS

LIVING in the border regions between Tibet and India is an interesting experience. Many Tibetans have permanent homes in these regions and one sees how Tibetans take to the ways and the skills of the modern world. In these places there is a strong Western influence because of the impact of the old British Raj. Darjeeling, where many Tibetans stay, was the former summer capital of Bengal, and it has its government house where most of the past governors of Bengal and some viceroys have spent many days. Many British people also lived in Darjeeling. Kalimpong, near Darjeeling and about forty miles from the Tibetan border, is similar to Darjeeling. But it has a far greater number of Tibetans staying there, for it is an important centre for trade with Tibet. Mule trains go to and fro between Tibet and Kalimpong.

The children of these border Tibetans go to Nepalese or 'English' schools. They all have Tibetan names, but many of them cannot speak Tibetan very well, and use Nepalese as a mother tongue. The men dress in Western-style clothes, except on ceremonial occasions such as Tibetan New Year when they wear silk Tibetan gowns. The women still dress in the Tibetan fashion. This may be because women are

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

more conservative minded than men, but I think the real reason is that the Tibetan costume is very attractive, and certainly flatters the figure. But some of the women make up in the Western fashion, carry handbags, wear high-heeled shoes, and are as keen over Indian and Hollywood stars as any hysterical bobby-soxer of the enlightened West! Some of these girls, as I said before, do sambas, rumbas and a spot of jitterbugging too! I suppose all these statements of mine must make studious Tibetologists and the sweet ladies who swoon over 'Tibet, with its spiritual ways, its monks and mystics high amongst the eternal snows, practising their yoga, so mysterious, my dear, and so enchanting . . .' tear their hair in rage and shed bitter tears at the degeneration into which 'dear old Tibet' has fallen! But alas, ladies, 'the old order changeth, yielding place to new. . . .'

These Tibetans of the border lands have shown themselves quite capable of handling any machinery and complex apparatus of the modern world. They do well in the schools and hold their own with any of the Indian and Anglo-Indian boys and girls both in studies and games. Some have become doctors and engineers after studying in the technical schools of India. Many of them joined the Gurkha Rifles, and distinguished themselves in several theatres of the last war.

One sometimes sees a wedding in these hills, in which a car heads the party. The front of the car is draped with a *khada*. In the driver's seat there is a Tibetan with fur hat, gown and dagger at his waist, but he chews betel nut. Next to him is a man similarly dressed who carries a bamboo stick, a *thanka* (Tibetan religious painting) of the Wheel of Life, with Shenji, the ruler of the Dead, looking as ferocious as ever although he is being transported in a sleek car! The next car is packed with Tibetans in

BORDER TIBETANS

full national costume, one of them working a gramophone playing Tibetan records through a loudspeaker, in order to create the necessary atmosphere for a wedding. In the following car is the bride in her full, cumbersome wedding costume, and festooned with elaborate Tibetan jewellery. But she wears make-up and high-heeled shoes, and forgive the remark, probably Western underwear too! Thus it is that Tibetans around these regions go all Tibetan — or almost all Tibetan — on ceremonial occasions. After the wedding the men return to their Western clothes and to talking Nepalese.

One sees great contrasts between the Tibetans who live in these border towns and the 'real McCoy' Tibetans who come down to trade, on pilgrimage or with the mule trains: hulking Tibetans who speak no other tongue except the dialect of their district such as Phari, Lhasa or Shigatse, wearing earrings, pigtailed and their voluminous 'togas' looking somewhat wild and grimy. They stare into the shops and at the people around them. Then some 'modernized' Tibetans with well-pomaded hair, Western clothes and talking Nepalese or English go sauntering by with cigarettes in their hands, and chewing betel nut. Near by may be a group of women raw from Tibet, perhaps on their first visit to India, with their plaits, heavy rope-soled shoes and their unpainted open faces. The modern Tibetan misses in these towns are quite a contrast — attractive glamour-girls with their powdered faces, their lipstick and scent, their painted nails, exotic hair-dos and high-heeled shoes. They may be talking in English and discussing the latest Hollywood 'hemen', dance records, boy friends and whether mascara is a good thing.

Such analysis is best carried out in a cinema hall, the

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

cinema being the rage for 'modern' and 'real McCoy' Tibetans. There the girls and boys really let themselves go. And one sometimes sees quite strange things. There may be a tall hefty Khamba, looking tough and leathery, with his elaborate fur hat hiding his pigtails, a long dagger partially hidden amongst the folds of his gown, and wearing long, leather boots, watching a can-can dance on the screen. Then, preening amongst the crowd, there may be an attractive Tibetan girl just down from the passes wearing Tibetan hat, dress and cloth shoes, but so heavily made up that she looks almost like a circus clown. Poor lass, she is probably trying to imitate her more sophisticated sisters who are experts in these cosmetic matters!

These border Tibetans are probably the first 'modernized' Tibetans. When Tibet proper becomes modernized as seems inevitable, the pattern will probably be different, but the people of these regions give some idea of how Tibetans take to the techniques and the ways of the modern world.

XVII

THE CHUMBI VALLEY AGAIN

JUST before I left for Britain for my medical studies in 1949, I went to Yatung once more. We were in Sikkim when we heard that Granny was very ill. My mother and I decided to go and see her. Poor Granny had been troubled with heart disease for some years. Each time she had been on the verge of dying, but her tough constitution pulled her through. This time we knew that it was the same disease, for we heard that her feet and her body were very swollen and she was extremely breathless. We didn't think that she had much chance, and so it was with heavy hearts that we set off for Yatung.

On this journey I decided to walk for a few miles and to cross the Nathu-La Pass on foot. This pass, as I said before, lies between Sikkim and Tibet. I am not trying to say that this was a great feat of endurance on my part, for even children do it, and at mid-winter, but all the same it was quite an experience.

There was some snow, but it was brilliantly sunny, and I had to wear dark glasses to protect my eyes from the glare. I trudged up the snow-covered slope, leaving behind my mother, who rode up slowly. Here and there were a few stunted bushes, otherwise just rocks, snow and ice. I soon

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

came across some Tibetan men and women resting before tackling the next ridge. They sat on rocks with their heavy loads beside them. They were sweating and panting but grinned at me as I went past. These people certainly had strength and stamina, and the women were marvellous. It was pretty tiring just to walk up to the pass, let alone carry such heavy loads. But these people, men and women, are all potential Everest tigers and tigresses!

Soon I came to a part of the track where I could see no man or animal. Everywhere there was a strange peaceful silence, as if the place was the abode of gods, that remained inscrutable and maintained 'a noble silence'. The air was pure, virgin and piercingly cool. Such air, I thought, could cure any lung disease in the world. What a change from the hot humid atmosphere of the Indian plains! All around me were dark blue rocks and the play of soft shadows on the snow. Alone, everywhere silence and the pure air; I could understand why some people yearned for snowy wastes, to be alone and small at the foot of gigantic rock faces, to drink in this silence, and to feel themselves lifted above the paltry busy everyday world of smoke and noise. Soon I was at the top of the Pass, and crossed into Tibet.

When I got somewhat below the Pass, I waited for my mother, and she told me that it was not good of me to rush off so far ahead of her; she was worried. And, poor lady, she had been thrown off her horse at the top of the Pass, although she was a fine rider. We rode down and towards evening reached Yatung. We came to our house, and ran up to Granny's room.

She was lying propped up in bed, and looked thin and weak. She looked sad as she saw us, and said that she would be dead in a few days, and that it was a good thing

THE CHUMBI VALLEY AGAIN

we had arrived just in time. We found her just as we expected, for her legs were very swollen and she breathed heavily.

We contacted an Indian doctor. He did his best, but thought that Granny did not have much chance of survival. She was about eighty-two then, a good age for a Tibetan. Near her bed was her prayer wheel but she had not the strength to spin it. Her rosary lay idle, wrapped round the wheel. She still mumbled her prayers.

Granny was very worried by her swollen legs, and thought that they would burst if the water was not tapped surgically. She said that years before she had known a woman who had such legs, and she had suffered the fate that Granny feared. We tried to tell her that such a thing would not happen, but she worried.

The Indian doctor gave us some pills to give her, but they were probably a bit too strong for her, because she became very ill after them. After that she refused to take them.

One day she must have become a bit delirious, because she said that the house was full of monks who were beckoning to her, and she thought that her time of death had come.

Meanwhile my mother called some monks to say prayers for Granny's recovery. One day there was a special ceremony for her. Early in the morning we had women coming into our house carrying on their backs the huge volumes of the *Kangyur* and the *Tengyur*. Both works have over a hundred volumes. The women who carried these volumes bowed to Granny and then each laid a book gently on her forehead, and carried it away. Strange to say, after this ceremony Granny improved, and became better daily, although she was still confined to her bed. She asked me

what I intended to do, now that I had finished schooling. I told her that I might study to be a doctor, but was not too sure. She urged me to become a doctor. She said that this work was full of good, and that it relieved a great deal of suffering and brought happiness to many. It was also work which was full of merit, and would give me a higher birth in my next round of life. I had long ago ceased to believe in the theory of the transmigration of souls, and had only a vague belief in a vague sort of God, but having a very high regard for Granny I did not want to hurt her feelings by trying to expound my religion, and so I said that I agreed with her.

Granny gave me a great deal to think about at that time, and she still does. I was then on the threshold of adult life. I was eighteen, had completed my schooling and was thinking of my future studies. School had brought about a great change in me. What a difference there was between the old Tibet and us. Our whole way of thinking had changed, and our generation was very different from that to which Granny and my mother belonged. I suppose it is the fault of the young to regard its world as the best, and to consider its seniors as old fogies who belong to the primitive ages. But Granny was such a fine person. I suppose the fine products of all religions are the same. Granny believed everything in her religion. She had a serenity and a peace which came from a deep conviction in all that she held sacred. She knew why we were born, what would happen when we died, and that the outcome of our future would be determined by our present ways. Her beliefs may have been superstitious and naive judged by the exact knowledge of modern science, but she was sure. This sureness gave her serenity and peace, for her mind was at rest. She had backbone and strength, and

THE CHUMBI VALLEY AGAIN

this certainty gave her a nobility which those who totter do not possess.

Science makes one think too much, and thinking makes one doubt. Doubt brings about conflicts which engender uncertainty, rob one of strength, make one limp and agitated after the mind has tossed and turned. Too much thought, too much doubt, too many conflicts, crumble away any stability, and paralyse all action. And modern science, which like a drug is irresistible, is nevertheless the fountainhead of doubt. As someone once remarked: 'After all, what does science give us except sadness!' Science is a tide that we cannot withstand. It is something that we must love, in spite of the fact that our mistress may sometimes treat us callously, and take away our cherished dreams. Many people still yearn for the fool's paradise that was this world before the advent of science, and even scientists cannot help but get a twinge of nostalgia for the world that was 'blitzkrieged' by the superior forces of science. But science is young, and the revolution that it has given birth to is still in its infancy. I suppose we of this generation must suffer all the pangs and the frustrations of infancy, as well as all its wonder and delight. The world before modern science may have given all the strength of conviction as well as the certainty possessed by people like my grandmother, but the fruits that we will eventually obtain from science will be greater than those we have so far received from the religions of old. As T. H. Huxley says: 'There is no alleviation for the sufferings of mankind except veracity of thought and the resolute facing of the world as it is, until the garment of make believe by which pious hands have hidden its uglier features is stripped off.' But science is not likely to give that security and that certainty which religion gives. Probably

that is why so many of the fanatic pseudo-modern creeds have so many adherents.

Granny improved quite a bit and we had some urgent work in Sikkim, so we decided to go back. The day we left Yatung was a sad one for me. I had a feeling that I would never see Granny again, and it was true. She died while I was in London. The horses were ready, and everybody said goodbye to her. I said goodbye, and Granny gave me the usual advice about studying hard, and leading a virtuous life. As I got to the door, I turned round for a last look. She was propped up in bed and looked old, and she was looking away. I again said, '*Khaleshu!*' (Goodbye!) She just nodded and did not say anything. Perhaps she also thought that this was the last time that we would see each other. I ran downstairs, and set off.

The Nathu-La Pass was in snow, and as we descended the sky looked extremely gloomy. A storm was threatening, and if we were to be caught in a snowstorm it would not be very pleasant, so we spurred our horses and were soon at Tsongu. The moment we got into the resthouse, a terrific thunderstorm broke loose, and hail pounded down. We quickly had a fire lit, and were soon huddled round it.

After supper, my mother was visited by my aunt, who lived in Tsongu. She was the wife of a man who drove the mule trains carrying mail. She was poor and very simple, but a kindly soul. These mule trains that carry mail between Sikkim and Tibet are very efficient. There are about eight mules, and they travel about ten miles on each journey, not a very long distance, but the roads are treacherous, especially at night. In winter there are snow and howling gales to face, and the roads are slippery with ice. As each team arrives at its destination, another team takes over, and off it goes,

THE CHUMBI VALLEY AGAIN

whether it is night or day, and in all weathers. Once my aunt's husband was caught in a snowstorm, and was thrown off his horse at the Nathu-La Pass. He fell into deep snow, and spent the whole night rubbing his legs and doing a jig to keep the circulation going. Only his tough constitution saved him. The next day rescuers came, and he was alive to tell the tale, having spent a whole night in bitter cold and driving snow at an altitude of almost 15,000 feet.

There was a blazing log fire inside the resthouse. My mother chatted to my aunt. The latter's strong Kham accent was still noticeable, although she had been away from Kham for many years. Outside the hail still came down. There were a few books in the resthouse, built by the British under the treaty agreements with Tibet after the Younghusband Expedition of 1904. I took some of these books to a table, and flipped through them by the light of a hurricane lamp. Among them was Aldous Huxley's *Antic Hay*. So as the representatives of old Tibet talked on, I tried to follow the thoughts and the philosophy of one of the intellectual writers of the modern world, by the light of a hurricane lamp at an obscure halting station close to the Tibetan border. Perhaps it shows how far we had drifted apart. The old and the new sometimes make a grotesque contrast. In Sikkim one sometimes sees a Tibetan muleteer, complete with his pigtail, sword, earrings and long leather boots, struggling to calm his mules frightened at the noise of a sleek car, with a background supplied by bullock carts.

XVIII

THE LURE OF MODERNISM

MANY Tibetans, and especially those who have come into contact with the outside world, are in love with the modern way of life which is capturing the world, and have fallen under its spell. Cars, neon lights, radios, electric gadgets, hygienic surroundings, cinemas, gay restaurants, cosmetics and, last but certainly not the least, lavatories with flush systems! Some of the Tibetans who went round the world on a goodwill and trade mission some years back were struck by the wonderful American highways on which six cars could travel together, the roads dotted at short intervals with telephone kiosks, and so on. One of them said: 'Of course we can't expect Tibet to be anything like this, not even in our dreams, but even an eighth of this marvellous civilization would make us happy!' It is ironical but perhaps characteristic of human nature that the very aspects of Tibet which are balm to weary business tycoons of the West, suffering the pangs of duodenal ulcers, should be condemned and scorned by the Tibetans themselves. All the peace, the quiet, the absence of rush and tear, the freedom from duodenal ulcers are things the Tibetans are ashamed of. They always call themselves 'We Tibetan fools!' because in Tibet there are no cars, trains and what

THE LURE OF MODERNISM

have you. They prefer neon lights, cinemas, cars and flush latrines. Human beings are never satisfied, and 'The grass is always greener on the other fellow's side...'

This love of the modern world and its worship by many Tibetans is sometimes extremely naive. True, the comforts of modern life are admirable. Cities of the West and the East that are the disciples of this god are fascinating and have an irresistible lure. Cinema shows, night clubs, chorus girls, striptease and so on are certainly quite delicious at times; only a puritan would disagree, and he would then probably be a liar! There is nothing decadent in all this provided one gives everything its due proportion. But it is easy to fall in love with this magic of the Western way of life and be so dazzled with its glitter and slickness that one sees it only superficially and falls prey to the belief that everything in the West is good, and this god can do no wrong. Tibetans seeing photographs of London or New York and the busy humming life of these machine-cities, think that the people living there must be clever and super-human in order to lead such complex lives. They imagine that people working in the factories must all be extremely well educated to churn out radio and television sets and other wonders. Yet in fact, after living in London for some years, one begins to think that one has to use one's shrewdness and mother-wit much more in a small isolated village in Tibet than in a modern city. In such a place one has to be a Jack-of-all-trades and master of a couple. One is using one's hands and brain. Judgment, reasoning and wit, all these faculties are continually exercised and tested in the life of a so-called primitive community. There, human beings have a nice balance. They lead full lives and have a feeling of living close to nature, continually pitting all their

brain and brawn against her to exist. In the West the struggle is not to exist, but to live. As someone said: 'Evolution these days is not a struggle for existence but a struggle for pleasure!' This is possibly applicable to modern city-dwellers; it certainly is not applicable to people in primitive countries.

So, in spite of the Tibetan's mistaken belief, the brain is certainly not strained in order to learn the arts, if they may be so called, of telephoning, of boarding a bus, travelling in the underground, pulling a lavatory chain, operating a slot machine or driving a car. The only tricky art is that of riding on escalators, which I found pretty hard going at first!

Some of the Tibetans of the goodwill mission that I spoke about said that the people in the West are well educated and very keen to study. They study all the time, they said. On buses one sees them, men, women and children, all buried in their books; in the underground they may be hanging from the straps or squeezed tight in little corners, but out come their books and they study with grim concentration; even while eating there is no rest from their studies, for in front of their soup or whatever it is, they have their books and study as they eat. Unceasing study all the time — no wonder the Western nations are so far ahead of the rest of the world!

Do geniuses dwell in factories? In these places most of the work is done by machines. I cannot claim to have worked in any giant factories, but during my student days in Britain, we used to work sometimes in the holidays in factories to make a little extra pocket-money. We worked in a little place which canned peas. Now this place was certainly not a big concern, but it was a miniature of most of the factories

THE LURE OF MODERNISM

in the modern world. The peas travelled on a moving belt. One person was employed at a place where this belt curved. The peas at this point sometimes piled up, and the chap had to clear the pile away. That was all he had to do the whole day long! My job was to sit on a stool and contemplate the hordes of peas being transported majestically away on the moving belt. I had to watch out for any bad peas, pick them up and drop them in a drain lying alongside the moving belt. And that was that! There I had to sit all day, and had a chance to study the mentality of the factory girls who worked beside us. My work was incredibly boring, only lightened by the giggles and the light chatter of the pretty teen-aged girls working beside me. They gossiped about pictures, boy friends, dresses and what they were going to do that night — dances, dates, etc.

They were a friendly lot, but by no means intellectuals. Work of the type they did would dull and fog any spark of mother-wit they possessed. Fancy sitting still the whole day, picking out bad peas and dropping them into a drain. What torture! But these girls quite liked it, and especially when 'Music while you Work' came on the air. Work of that calibre was the rule throughout the factory. There was nothing complicated. The peas were tinned and sealed by machines.

We got about £5 a week for this. In the evenings some of the boys gathered in the local pubs, drank beer, gossiped about the latest football results, and played darts. This was the life of the 'clever superhuman beings' that worked in the marvellous factories. I am not at all suggesting that the Tibetans are a clever race, and that the British factory workers are a dull crowd of people. Far from it. All I am saying is that the Tibetan conception of factory work

involving tremendous intellectual capabilities is not correct.

Modern civilization is based on the ingenuity and labour of a few people of exceptional ability. They think out the machines, work out the properties of various metals. Experimenting in their laboratories they penetrate the secrets of nature and adapt theory to technique. These are the scientists and the technicians. Then there are the financial bosses and the executives, who understand the economics of industry, the laws of supply and demand, the organization of factories, the wages and the work of the workers and the installation of those machines that will bring in the biggest profits. Such then are the few at the top who steer the course of modern countries, and who create and renew the way of living characteristic of the modern era. Modern life emanates from them, and is absorbed and put into motion by the masses, by the simple pulling of levers or the pushing of buttons or the picking of bad peas. It may be said that the majority of people in the modern countries are parasites on the labours of a few men of talent and energy. In so-called primitive countries, these few men are missing. The society as a whole is balanced, there are no extreme geniuses nor workers doing dull push-button jobs. Thus what superficially appears to be a society of clever people turns out to consist of a few clever ones and a vast majority doing dull, repetitive work.

Although many Tibetans are keen on modernization, they do not recognize that each modern country has its distinct way of life and its own economic and political creeds, even though these may be understood by only a few people in that particular country. Tibetans on the whole regard all modern countries as having a similar outlook on life, and do not realize that a modern city in Britain, America, Japan,

THE LURE OF MODERNISM

Russia and China may each have all the superficial hall-marks of modernism such as cars, aeroplanes, escalators, telephones, sanitation, hospitals and what you will and yet be very different in their political philosophies and their social doctrines.

Many Tibetans were keen to see their country become modern, but the monks and the backwardness of Tibet held this up. The country remained medieval, the envy of the modern nations and the dream of all who were tired of rush hours, the blare of motor horns, the smell of petrol fumes, the mental photophobia caused by neon lights and the burst of bombs and grenades.

Now Tibetans see the Chinese doing the very things they have wanted to do for a long time. They see before their very eyes the modernization of Tibet and its intercourse with the outside world. They see cars passing in front of the Potala, roads being built everywhere, the country being surveyed and mapped, hospitals, aerodromes and schools being planned. Their children go to such places as Peking, Budapest, Warsaw and Vienna; modern houses spring up and there is a drive towards sanitation and hygiene. Tibet is becoming modernized, that is the magic thought! They do not see that this modernization is inseparable from the political and philosophical dogma which is bringing about the changes that please them, and has brought Communism with it.

At present everybody is excited, but when this excitement is over, what then? Only time will tell whether the thing that Tibet wanted so much was really worth the price she had to pay for it. She could have become modernized slowly and at the same time kept clear of the dogma that is now gripping the country. She could have retained all that

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

was good and great in the Tibet of old, and cut away those things that were useless. The coming of modernism was inevitable, for no country in the world can afford to remain medieval, no matter how romantic this may be. But wishes are seldom granted in this rough and ready world.

XIX

SEEDS OF CHANGE

THE Chinese Communists have brought about several changes in Tibet which are likely to have a deep and permanent effect upon the country. The first is the building of roads for motor vehicles. The most important roads are those connecting China with Lhasa and the other major towns of Tibet such as Shigatse, Gyantse, Phari and Yatung. Putting aside all political prejudices, this is a great feat of engineering, for the roads run through some of the worst terrain in the world, crossing several passes over 16,000 feet. Where there were only snail track roads on precipices, big highways on which two lorries can pass have been blasted from the rocks. Iron bridges have replaced rickety wooden ones. All this was done without the help of any heavy modern equipment, the main power being human labour.

The soldiers who built these roads seem to have been inspired by a fanatical zeal, undeterred by any obstacles of nature. They were bent on building these roads at any cost, and they achieved their aim. One must give them all credit for their work. A journey from Lhasa to Kham in eastern Tibet used to take about two months, where it now takes a few days. The country through which the road passed

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

was bandit-infested, and there were few habitations. Nowadays one hears that all along this route little hamlets are springing up. The building of these roads in a matter of a few years is going to have a revolutionary influence on the country.

I need not labour the importance of good communications, especially in such a closed rugged country as Tibet. In the old days there was very little movement and intercourse either within the land or between Tibet and neighbouring countries. Traders went down to India or to China. Some of the wealthier people went to India to see their children at school, to trade, or on pilgrimage to the holy Buddhist places such as Budh Gaya and Sarnath. There were also the hordes of beggars which, year in and year out, travelled between Tibet and the border countries. But when a distance of forty miles may include a 14,000-foot pass and many mountains and valleys, people seldom travel unless they have an express purpose.

Suppose a person wanted to travel from Yatung to Lhasa, a distance of about three hundred miles. First he would have to hire a horse or mule, which would cost a big sum of money. The journey took about eighteen days, and fodder, food and lodgings had to be paid for during this time. One had to travel with a party or a caravan, because going in twos and threes was asking for trouble; bandits were a real danger along those roads. Even then, the journey involved much hazard and hardship. So there was very little travel; most people stayed where they were.

The power of the Central (Lhasa) Government was very flimsy over many of the outlying parts of the country. There would be a *Dzongpon* appointed to the fort of each district whose job was to collect taxes, maintain law and order and

to administer justice. But because of the difficult communications, reports to the Central Government took many days, therefore the *Dzongpons* wielded considerable power. Many of them were corrupt and exacted extra taxes from the people, saying they were acting on the orders of the Government. The taxes they collected, however, frequently had the mysterious habit of diminishing as they journeyed towards Lhasa, possibly due to the weather. These *Dzongpons* had the power to have anybody beaten for petty crimes, and justice was administered according to the bulkiness of the purse of the criminal. Officially an appeal could be made to Lhasa if anyone thought the *Dzongpon* was not being just, but Lhasa was a long way off, and much money was involved in the process of making an appeal.

Thus the country was ill knit and lacked co-ordination. The only thing that kept it together was its religion and the Dalai Lama. With the building of roads connecting the main towns and reducing journeys to a matter of a few days instead of weeks, the country will be compact and co-ordinated as it has never been before in its history.

There is another important aspect of this road building. China will come very much closer to Tibet, and trade as well as intercourse between the two countries will be greatly increased. China's grip and power over Tibet will be strong. There is talk of building aerodromes in Tibet, and the changes this will bring are not difficult to imagine. It almost looks as if the legendary Tibetan Air Force will spring into reality!

So far religion has had a universal hold, though the country is not the home of hermits, an impression one is apt to get from books on Tibet. But the foundations of religion can be rocked and the whole structure brought

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

crashing down by scientific knowledge and the busy humming life of a modern country. Education and science can in a few years destroy the beliefs of centuries.

The Communists in Tibet have so far made no direct attacks upon the monasteries. In fact in some places they have gone so far as to assist them financially and materially. This they assert is in accordance with their policy of religious toleration. It may be, and it may not. But religion is at present a very important factor in Tibet, and any vigorous policy against it is likely to encounter the resistance and hatred of Tibetans.

The Tibet of the present still owes a considerable loyalty to the Dalai Lama, but it seems that his absolute power and the worship he once received are likely to diminish gradually. The Dalai Lama recently paid a visit to Peking, where he was given a big reception by high-ranking Communist leaders. He has been made a member of one of the biggest assemblies of the People's Republic of China. Times certainly have changed; the God-King, before whom Tibetans bowed in awe and worshipped, is now a member of a political assembly, and is cheered and applauded by peasants at railway stations, and handed bouquets by little boys and girls wearing red scarves. He even attends cocktail parties, where he sips orange juice in the company of distinguished foreign diplomats and Communist leaders. He preaches sermons in the Norbu Linka through microphones.

It seems likely that the power of the monks in Tibet will be gradually diminished in more subtle ways than by direct attack. The monasteries must have their recruits and, as written before, it is traditional in every Tibetan family to have one son in a monastery. Most of the monks come from poor families, and their parents made them into monks

SEEDS OF CHANGE

because the monastery guaranteed them a living, gave them the rudiments of education and enabled them, if they showed any talent or ability, to rise to the highest posts in the country, something otherwise possible only for aristocrats.

The situation is different now that the Communists have opened schools in Lhasa and other towns to which both poor and rich are admitted. As a result, the raw material of the monasteries will be diverted to secular channels. The poor will no longer condemn their children to a life of celibacy in the monasteries. They will send them to the free schools to learn useful trades. The very class of people that provided the monasteries with their life-blood will now give birth to sceptical scientists to ridicule their way of life, and down-to-earth factory workers and teachers to spread the new doctrines.

XX

IMPRESSIONS

WHAT are the impressions of Tibetans who have come in contact with Communists? Several aristocrats of Tibet have paid visits to China recently, and their accounts are very interesting. One had travelled overland on the new highway to China which passes through eastern Tibet. 'I really enjoyed the journey to China on the new road. The roads at some parts were just hewn out of the rock face — it was marvellous. We in the old Tibet could never have made a road like that, and travelling in Tibet was terrible, what with long journeys and the rough roads. Now it is a pleasure to travel.

'China is so advanced and with so much drive, everybody working honestly and getting things done quickly. The people were very kind to us, and they treated us very well. We met many of their leaders and they were all eager to help us. Anyway, it was a wonderful trip, and we were glad to visit China.

'And Lhasa is changing so much these days. We have cars, motor cycles and bicycles now, so Tibet will be very modern and we will be able to face the world without shame. Until now we have been backward and ignorant — we didn't know anything. In the schools the children spent

IMPRESSIONS

years perfecting their handwriting and learning nothing else. It was quite silly. Of course we could send them to the "English" schools in India, but then our children were so far away, and we could see them only every year or two. Now there are good schools in Tibet. In Lhasa a school has been opened by the Chinese recently, to take about six hundred boys and girls. More schools will be built soon. They teach all the modern things, just as in the "English" schools.

'So now our children need not go down to India, and it is a blessing to have them near us, and at the same time know they are receiving a modern education.

'There is talk of building new houses near Lhasa, and the old city is changing. Nowadays there are electric lights in the city, and loudspeakers at street corners. From these we hear broadcasts and music from the Chinese radio stations. . . .'

Yatung is also changing a great deal these days. I had an interesting talk with a person who went there to look after Granny when she fell ill. 'The Chinese soldiers are all very young, most of them look like boys. They spend all their time when they are not working in reading books. They behave quite well, doing any work they are allotted. They don't joke while they work, or sit about in a lazy fashion. They don't mix with us, and all their talk is of a business nature. They ask the price of a thing, buy it and then just go off. There is no chatting or jokes. Most of the soldiers there are from the Kham and the Amdo districts. They dress just like the Chinese soldiers. There are not many real Chinese soldiers in Yatung, and most of these are commanders.' (Kham and Amdo are in Tibetan territory, and these people speak a Tibetan dialect. As I have said, Granny came from Kham.) 'One sees these soldiers working, and they work hard. They are well disciplined. When they are working,

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

one cannot guess who the commander is, because even they carry manure, and do the same work as the soldiers. They have built timber barracks. The soldiers exercise and play every morning and evening. The place is kept very clean. They have their own vegetable plots and work hard at these.

‘Sometimes they show films of war in China, and places in Russia. On their big days they stick posters on the houses in Yatung and go about with loudspeakers, broadcasting in Tibetan. There are many bicycles in Yatung now, and soon there will be cars. The Chinese have built a hospital in Yatung, which is quite good. There are some Chinese doctors and nurses in this hospital.

‘Many boys and girls have left for China. They will be away for a year or two. The Chinese are paying all their expenses. The Chinese visited each family, and said that it would be very good to send their children to China, as they would be educated free and trained to be useful people. When they returned to Tibet, they would all get good posts. So the children went. There was a big ceremony on the day they left. The Chinese gave them a great send-off. They had a big party in tents, and then they left for Lhasa to go by car to China on the new road.

‘The Chinese have opened a school, and teach Tibetan and Chinese. When the Chinese first came they had no barracks, so the soldiers lived in tents and the commanders were billeted in our houses. The commander of the Chinese soldiers stayed in our house, he and his Tibetan wife. He was a young man. His wife came from Kham. She was very glad to hear that your Granny came from Kham. Granny as you know can speak a few words of Chinese, and this pleased the commander. He was kind to her, and sent

IMPRESSIONS

soldiers to fetch wood and draw water for her, as we had no help in the house.

'The commander's wife used to have long chats with Granny and called her "Mother". She said that she longed to go back to Kham. Her husband had been sent to Tibet; she did not know why but duty was duty, and there was no choice.

'After about a month the barracks were completed, and they went away. No, they didn't pay any rent. . . .'

Another interesting account that I heard was from the brother of an old servant of ours. He had worked with the Chinese on the last stage of the motor road to Lhasa.

'The Chinese wanted Tibetan workers, and since the pay was very good, I volunteered. We were divided into groups of a hundred and these were further divided into smaller groups of ten. Each of the latter had to elect someone to be the group leader. Each group of a hundred men had a Chinese supervisor and a doctor.

'When we arrived, the Chinese supervisor told us to work hard and obey the camp rules, not to quarrel or to drink, and to look after our health. He said that the road was for the benefit of Tibet, and that we would all profit from it. The sooner it was finished the better.

'We had to put up our tents on a site selected by the Chinese supervisor. Each tent had a Chinese flag hanging outside on a stick. With twigs we had to build ourselves beds raised from the ground. Some of us were lazy and just put a few blankets on the ground and bedded down for the night. The Chinese doctor inspected the tents every day, and if he found us sleeping like this on the bare ground, he gave us a scolding as if we were little boys. He said that we would get stomach aches and become ill if we slept on the

floor, and said that any person caught doing this would be given no medicine if he fell ill.

'We had to build a latrine about a hundred paces away from the main camp, and any person urinating just here and there had his pay cut. The doctor also told us to drink boiled water, as ordinary water was bad. When we worked we were not allowed to fool about. We could smoke cigarettes occasionally. The Chinese distributed sweets and cigarettes every evening. In the afternoon we had about one hour when we had to rest and lie on our backs. We were not allowed to work or to chat during this rest period. They said that we must rest our bodies. They certainly took care of us!

'Some evenings there were cinema shows, and we saw things about China and Russia. We were also given lectures about working for Tibet and other matters which I could not understand, about Americans being bad people and so on; some of the Chinese sometimes played accordions for us and danced. We were also called upon to sing folk songs, and to dance our Tibetan dances. Some evenings a few of us would be invited by the commander to his tent and we all sat on chairs, and he offered us cigarettes and Chinese tea. He then discussed the building of the road, and asked us if we had any grievances, or if we required any alteration in the camp rules. When we were sick, the doctor examined us, and if we were pretty bad we were allowed to stay in bed.

'When we had completed the road, they gave us a great party. They showed films and there was dancing and singing. Each of us was given soap, cigarettes, tea, sweets and money as parting gifts. They told us to nominate someone from each tent as the one who had worked the best throughout the time that we were employed. We heard that he would be given a title (perhaps Model Worker), and also

IMPRESSIONS

presents. But in our tent we had all worked equally hard, you couldn't say that so-and-so had worked badly, and so-and-so had worked well. We all worked hard. But just for the name we nominated a person. Then on the night of the farewell party, these workers were praised and given silk ribbons. They also received large piles of cigarettes, soap and tea. We made our chap keep the ribbon and so on, but we divided the gifts equally between all of us.'

What do the monks think of the Communists? The few that I have talked to did not have any definite opinions. Some said that in agreements signed with the Communists they had agreed to tolerate the religion of Tibet. The Communists would not hurt monks, in fact some monasteries were being helped by them. A few even thought that Communism was a good thing, for Tibet was becoming modern and at the same time keeping its religion.

Previously, Tibetans could cross quite freely into India. Nowadays they have to have passes, which are examined at the Tibet-Sikkim and Tibet-Indian borders. Each pass has a photograph, details of height, birthplace, father's name, etc., the usual passport information. It is quite strange to see a motley crew of Tibetans going into the frontier posts to get their passes checked. Watching them filing in with their passes in their hands, one realizes how that man whose grave is in Highgate has made his influence felt in every corner of the world. Here was this obscure outpost with these simple Tibetans and their passes, all leading back to that shabby bearded person who spent hours in the reading-room of the British Museum, the same museum that I used to pass so often during my student days in London. These rough, hearty people had never heard of Marx or Lenin or dialectical materialism; all they knew was that one had to

YOUNG DAYS IN TIBET

have these papers or one would not be able to enter India.

Until recently Tibet, with its strange beliefs and customs, gilded lavishly by a legion of writers, was a source of fascination for many people in the outside world. Its isolation, its people, its geography, its religion and its sleep amidst the bustle of the twentieth century — all this made interesting reading material, and a paradise for armchair explorers and adventurers. The old Tibet, even when looked at coldly and studied without any emotion, certainly had the ingredients of romance and mystery in its unique and strange system of the incarnate lamas, its feudal pomp and pageantry, its monasteries and hermits, its altitude and dirt, its tough happy-go-lucky people and its virgin countryside, untouched by the forces of modern life.

Now that the old institutions are slowly crumbling away, it is difficult to predict the future course of Tibet and perhaps unwise to do so. Everything is in a constant flux and things can appear and disappear overnight. But one can say that the present revolution will have a deep and abiding influence; Tibet will in a few years become a modern country, and it also looks as if China's grip will remain as long as China herself is powerful. One thing however is certain. The Tibet of old, the Tibet familiar to the reading world, the Tibet of 'mystery and fascination', is dying.