

**A GLIMPSE OF ANOTHER WORLD:  
A JOURNEY THROUGH WESTERN TIBET (1938)**

F. BAILEY VANDERHOEF, JR.



EDITED WITH A FOREWORD BY JOSÉ IGNACIO CABEZÓN

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## FOREWORD

In the spring of 1938, two young American explorers, Wilbur L. Cummings, Jr. (1914-1943), and F. Bailey Vanderhoef, Jr. (b. 1913) set off on an expedition into Tibet. Leaving from the small Indian hill station of Kalimpong, they crossed the Himalayas – their principal goal, to document the religious art and the famous “lama dances” at the monastery of Palkhor Chöde, located in the city of Gyangtse in western Tibet. Their photos of the yearly festival of the unveiling of the monastery’s famous massive silk tangka appeared in the June 12, 1939 edition of *Life* magazine, some of the first color images of Tibet to appear in the American popular press. Mr. Vanderhoef later compiled a narrative of the journey. This is the document that you have before you. Written in a lively and engaging style, it brings to life the details of this amazing trip in a manner that is characteristic of the travel narratives of the period. It is in many ways a unique document.

I have edited Mr. Vanderhoef’s memoirs, but apart from standardizing the phonetic rendering of Tibetan words, adding some hyperlinks, and correcting a few minor factual details, I have avoided substantially changing the manuscript. My decision to edit with a light hand was a conscious choice on my part, believing that the chief value of this document lies in the fact that it is a record of one individual’s views and impressions of a journey undertaken at a specific point in history. Some of the factual details of Mr. Vanderhoef’s book would undoubtedly have to be corrected in light of contemporary scholarship, which has obviously come a long way since 1938. A few of the hyperlinks will hopefully serve to provide the reader with a bit more up-to-date information. Some of the author’s views in this work – his opinions about Himalayan peoples, Tibetan religion, Tibetan art, etc. – are, by today’s standards, somewhat dated. But we must remember that this chronicle was written seventy years ago: when the British still controlled India, when scholarly writing about Tibet was scarce, and when European and American attitudes about “the Orient” in general, and Tibet particular, were very different from what they are today. As a window into an American explorer’s impressions of the peoples, cultures and landscapes of Tibet and the Himalayas, however, Mr. Vanderhoef’s memoirs provide us with a richness of detail that is rare to find among travelogues. Instead of viewing this text as a registry of facts, I encourage the reader to see it as a window into the experiences of its author at this very specific point in time. From this perspective, the memoirs provide us not so much an objective, scholarly perspective on the people and things that the traveler encounters, but rather the subjective viewpoint of the traveler himself. The book is not so much a factual lens focused on Tibetan culture as it is the image of Tibetan culture as this is reflected (and refracted) on the surface of the mind of a young American explorer with very limited access to scholarly knowledge about Tibet. But perhaps I overstate my case by emphasizing the subjective, since some of Mr. Vanderhoef’s descriptions and photo-documentation – from the headdresses worn by women in Western Tibet, to the interior of temples, to the Tibetan art of papermaking – are indeed interesting ethnographic contributions in their own right. However one chooses to read this document, I can guarantee the readers that they are not likely to get bored, for Mr. Vanderhoef has an evocative way

of presenting his travels that captures people, places and even the flora and fauna of the region in a most vivid way.

*A Glimpse of Another World: A Journey Through Western Tibet* is being published to celebrate the opening of an exhibition at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art from April to August of 2008. That exhibition, *A Tibet Expedition 1938: Selected Gifts from Two Explorers*, commemorates Mr. Vanderhoef and Mr. Cummings' gifts of paintings, sculpture and ritual objects to the museum, a collection that comprises an important part of SBMA's permanent Tibet collection. These objects were brought back from the trip documented in these pages, and some of them are specifically mentioned here.

The publication also coincides with a special academic quarter focusing on Tibetan and Himalayan art at UC Santa Barbara, made possible by a grant from the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation. In the 2007/2008 academic year, the Rubin Foundation generously funded an initiative at UCSB to increase undergraduate exposure to Tibetan and Himalayan culture, especially its great artistic traditions. This funding allowed for a Tibetan artist in residence, the Ven. Yeshi Dorje, during the spring quarter. It also brought Dr. Christian Luczanits to the University, where he taught a course on Tibetan and Himalayan art history. As part of this initiative, moreover, a select group of UCSB students toured the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, where they saw the artifacts that Mr. Vanderhoef and Mr. Cummings brought back from their trip. These students also received special tutorials on Tibetan and Himalayan art, and they subsequently shared their knowledge with students in the Santa Barbara public schools in the form of class presentations and workshops. This joint venture between a university, a museum, and a philanthropic organization – all in the service of the community – represents for me a model of inter-institutional partnerships. I consider myself lucky to have been a part of this collaboration.

Finally, I would like to thank the individuals who have worked to make this publication a reality: first and foremost, Mr. F. Bailey (“Billy”) Vanderhoef, himself, who so graciously agreed to the publication of the work and to the dissemination of his important collection of photographs in digital form. Special thanks also go to Susan Shin-tsu Tai, Elizabeth Atkins Curator of Asian Art at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Susan took time out of her busy schedule to arrange for me to meet Billy during a pleasant summer afternoon in 2007, an afternoon whose memory I will long cherish. Susan also continued to serve as a liaison between Billy and those of us at UCSB who were working on his memoirs. Thanks as well to Ms. Pam Melone, Billy's caretaker and longtime family friend, for her help with various details along the way. A number of different students and colleagues have also played a role in this publication. Joy Davis created the maps found in the Appendix. Rohit Singh worked on the scanning, digital conversion and initial proofing of the document. Paul Hackett, Janet Rockwell, and Michael Cox helped to proof the final document. I would like to thank all of these individuals for their contributions.

José Ignacio Cabezón  
UC Santa Barbara  
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## *Chapter One*

### A GLIMPSE OF ANOTHER WORLD

There I stood looking out of the window of one of the upper rooms of a house in Kalimpong, a small border town in Northern [Bengal](#). How I came there must wait, for it is more important that I explain why. Perhaps, if I just describe what I saw through that window, it will in some measure explain what had drawn me half way around the world, for to me there were many things beckoning: mystery, beauty, adventure; but there is no point in just saying so. I must describe it all.

I remember it was a large window, running all across one end of the room, and before this window stood a table bearing a shallow bowl of spring flowers. The thin curtains stirred in the fresh night air and billowed inwards. Outside, the world was flooded with moonlight. Twinkling and immeasurably high and calm against the stars was the white peak of [Kangchenjunga](#), between withdrawn ghostly clouds. Beside me, the crystal pennants of a candlestick stirred in the breeze and tinkled against each other, as though to give voice to the cold vision of the snows. Behind that snowy rampart I knew was Tibet, strange and dark with its veil of mystery stretching far into the north across barren plateau and guardian mountains. It seemed the greatest human presumption to think of venturing beyond those snows.

As far back as I can recall, I had always wanted to go to Tibet, and I can remember, during the years away at school, how Bill Cummings and I had planned a thousand times the trip we should some day take. Then, for a time, our lives ran apart, and although we had never quite forgotten our mutual desire, its accomplishment seemed extremely remote. But, in the fall after Bill got out of college, luck played right into our hands, and almost before we knew it, our dreams had begun to be a reality. The museum for which I had done some work on a previous trip suddenly produced more work for me to do - this time, in [Indochina](#), and then, strangely enough, in Tibet. So, with this legitimate excuse, and with Bill at loose ends, we jumped at the chance and were on our way almost before we realized it.

When at last we reached Calcutta, after the completion of the work at [Angkor Wat](#) in Indochina, we began to investigate the necessary procedure for entering Tibet. Up until that time we had been able to learn nothing, for Tibet does not have any representatives in foreign countries and there is no such thing as a visa for Tibet. Even in Calcutta what we learned was of rather a negative nature - namely, that we would have to find out the correct procedure from the political officer of [Sikkim](#), a little state lying between the borders of Tibet and Bengal. That is why we went to [Kalimpong](#). We had been given a letter to some English people who lived there, and when they heard that we wanted to enter Tibet, they kindly asked us to stay with them while we made our preparations. In

Calcutta, that at least sounded like a lead, so we left for the little mountain town.

Early in the morning after leaving Calcutta, we awoke on the trail and looked out on the northern corner of the flat, fertile plain of Bengal. It was just the kind of country that we had been traveling through all night, but now we began to see to the north the rising blue hills that were the foothills of the Himalayan Range. Just as the sun came up, we arrived in the little town of [Siliguri](#), which is the head of the main railway lines. The big trains go no farther, for they cannot get into the hills; and from here, if one is going to [Darjeeling](#), there is only the little narrow gauge railway that twists back and forth in the most incredible convolutions to attain the seven thousand foot elevation of Darjeeling. However, our way did not lead in that direction, and after a small breakfast in the station, we hired a car and started off to the northeast into the hills. Almost at once, we began to climb into the foothills. They are called foothills only because of their position, for actually they are mountains of good size, though when compared with the Himalayas, they are less than pygmies, and so must content themselves with the title "foothills." We drove for some two hours up into the hills along the course of the [Tista River](#), the air growing cooler all the time. In the deep forest, mossy and fresh, the sunlight filtered through a canopy of leaves in patches of dancing gold. Shadows of coolness played about the orchids and the maiden-fair ferns which grew from every rock and tree.

The road wound up and down, nearer then farther from the river, and at last down again to where we crossed a narrow bridge to the other side and began the steep climb to Kalimpong. It was a lovely clear morning, and the sun shone with that wonderful, slanting, golden softness that makes dim shadow in the folds of the hills and lights with a halo of dew every blade of grass. Gradually, we rose out of the tropical forest into a more temperate climate. Lovely little thatched wooden houses clung to the hillsides, surrounded by endless tiers of terraced land, bright with yellow rice shoots, falling away into the valley. On every spur of the hills was a row of one hundred and eight slender bamboo poles with long strips of prayer flags fastened to them, and clumps of bright bamboo against the morning sky. Then, as we rounded a bend and came in sight of the roofs of Kalimpong, we saw, far to the north, soaring to incredible heights into the bright sky, the glistening Himalayan peaks of [Kanchenjunga](#) and [Siniolchu](#), like a glimpse into heaven. There are no words to describe such beauty.

In a few minutes, we were in the town of Kalimpong, the last outpost of British India situated on a steep ridge some five thousand feet high overlooking the Tista Valley. As opposed to the officialdom of Darjeeling, Kalimpong is purely a missionary town, and one might almost say that it owes its very existence to one remarkable man, Dr. Graham, a Scottish Presbyterian. Fifty years ago, Dr. Graham came to Kalimpong, which was then no more than a tiny village of native houses. With nothing but wonderful personality, a sense of loyalty and justice toward the people, and his open, broadminded understanding of all, he settled and started his work. Today, Kalimpong is a happy and prosperous town. On the ridge above it is the [St. Andrews Colonial Home](#), where Dr. Graham takes care of more than six hundred Anglo-Indian orphans. He takes them at any age, gives them homes where they are brought up with love and understanding, as well as an education that trains them to become good, independent citizens. At eighteen



years of age, they are placed in positions, being sent to all parts of the world, where they can start for themselves, equipped to make their own lives. Dr. Graham becomes their “father,” and his help and understanding are theirs always. He is virtually the King of Kalimpong, for besides his work in the Homes, the whole town turns to him for the solution to their problems and the administration of justice. He is venerated as few Europeans are ever venerated by an oriental people.



**Figure 1: Dr. Graham**

Dr. Graham has a married daughter who also lives in Kalimpong, and it was this woman and her husband who had been good enough to ask us to stay with them while we made our arrangements for the Tibetan trip.

I must say that when we finally saw Kalimpong, our amazement was boundless. When you consider that it is an outpost of British India; that it lies some distance from the nearest rail-road, on a spur of hills that not so long ago was part of the primitive country of Bhutan; that it is a town existing because of missionary work and the small amount of trade that the Tibetans bring down from the wild plateau, you picture in your mind something quite different from what it actually is. I do not believe that there can be more beautiful or picturesque country in the world. There is just one main business street, which winds along the very saddle of the hill between two higher peaks, and all along the spurs of the hills and the little peaks are houses. A bright crowd of Tibetans mingled in the street with Indians, [Lepchas](#), [Bhutanese](#), and the little donkeys of the wool caravans tasseled with bright crimson yak's tails and bells. We finally arrived at the Odling's, a spacious, lovely home, set in the midst of terraces and gardens of the sort we dream about in our climate but can never achieve. I cannot begin to describe the kindness of those people to us. We were given another breakfast, sitting in the sunlight on the front terrace and looking across at the snowy mountains, and I thought that there could be nothing in the world like Kalimpong.

I still think so.



**Figure 2: Our hosts, the Odlings.**

We were immediately taken in hand by the Odlings, who were the first people we had met who could tell us anything about the procedure for obtaining the permits to enter Tibet. The Political Officer of Sikkim is the only one empowered to grant these permissions, and as fate would have it, he was leaving [Gangtok](#), the Capital of Sikkim, for a trip into Bhutan on Monday; and if we were to achieve our end without waiting for his return, we would have to see him there before he left. It was then Saturday morning.

Sikkim is a semi-independent state lying between Nepal and Bhutan, along the Tibetan border, and we had to have permission to enter there even for one day. But this Mr. Odling obtained for us by telephoning the authorities in Darjeeling. We planned to make the trip to Gangtok and back the following day. We also wired to the Political Officer and received word that he would see us.

The question of foreigners entering Tibet is rather an involved one, largely for the reason that it is not possible to approach the Tibetans directly. From the time that England first began to have interests in India, they have tried to reach some trade agreement with the Tibetans, in order at least partially to open the country. But, the Tibetans, isolated and locked away behind the great mountains, were extremely jealous of any outside interference, and they would have nothing to do with the British. This distrust of the British was the outstanding difficulty in all the early dealings with these people. The Chinese, under the Manchus, undoubtedly to further their own ends, had told the Tibetans

that the British Government was ruthless and land-grabbing, and so the Tibetans would have nothing to do with them. In the record made by the [Japanese Buddhist monk Kawaguchi](#), we have the report of a conversation he had with the [Thirteenth Dalai Lama](#) about the year 1901, in which we get an idea of the fear the Tibetans then had for the British:

But political thoughts are working most busily in his (the Dalai lama's) mind. He seems to fear the British most, and is always thinking how to keep them from Tibet. He seems to give full scope to all designs calculated to check the encroaching force of the British. I could plainly see this while remaining near him.

It is a fine tribute, therefore, to British diplomacy and the way they handled the Tibetan situation that we find only eleven years later this same Dalai Lama, when forced to flee from his capital, choosing to put himself in the hands of the British for help and safety. However, back in 1774, [Warren Hastings](#) sent [George Bogle](#) as his emissary to the [Tashi Lama](#) and the [Dalai Lama](#), hierarchical rulers of the country, to try to persuade them to reach some agreement. This and a subsequent attempt were entirely without success. In later times, dispatches sent by the [Viceroy](#), asking that they at least be granted permission to discuss the matter, were completely ignored, and the dispatches returned unopened. Finally, in 1904, the [Younghusband](#) Military Expedition was sent in as far as Kampa Dzong, just inside the border, and from there, it sent requests to the Tibetan Government that they send down representatives to negotiate. This request also was completely ignored. And inasmuch as the British had learned that the Tibetans were negotiating in some way with Russia, they decided to send the [armed Expedition](#) into the country to negotiate some treaty of peace with the Tibetan Government. The Expedition went in and had several encounters of little importance on the way. When they finally reached [Gyangtse](#), one of the three large towns in Tibet, the Tibetans put up quite a fight, but eventually were subdued.

Strangely enough, the Tibetan Government still chose to ignore the Expedition, and it was necessary to proceed still farther into the interior, to [Lhasa](#). Arriving there, they were frustrated again by the fact that all the important Tibetan government officials had fled, and there was no one left for the Expedition to negotiate with. In the end, Colonel Younghusband rounded up the most important people who were left in the city and made them sign a treaty. The trade centers of [Yatung](#) and Gyangtse were to be opened up, and British Officials appointed to them to maintain permanent diplomatic relations with the Tibetan government. It was also stipulated that British subjects approved by these officials would be permitted to go both to Yatung and to Gyangtse. A demand for the right to have a permanent representative in Lhasa raised such a furor that it had to be given up, but only on condition that no other foreign representatives should be admitted to Tibet.

The Younghusband Expedition returned at once to India and, save for the two trade centers, Tibet remained as isolated as ever before. Since that time, the relations between the British and the Tibetans have improved enormously; but, of course, the Tibetan government still retains the right to break off relations should

they so desire. In this case, they would no doubt have advances made to them from Russia, which is exactly why the British want to maintain their hold in Tibet. They believe that a free and independent Tibet is the best buffer to safeguard the northeast frontier of Indian.

Under this treaty of 1904, the Political Officer of Sikkim retains the right to allow British subjects of whom he has approved to enter Tibet as far as Gyantse. In actual practice, this has been applied also to non-British subjects if they appeared trustworthy and had no political interests in Tibet. But, in several cases, this trust has been broken, and the people admitted have conducted themselves dishonestly toward the British and antagonistic to the Tibetans. In short, they have several times made for strained relations between Britain and Tibet, which never have been too solidly knit. As a result of this, the British, of late years, have almost consistently refused permission, which is both in their interests and within their full right to do. Sad to say, most of the individuals who have entered under trust and have later seen fit to break their word (given to the British) have been Americans; and so, in the face of this, we were at a distinct disadvantage in our dealings with Mr. Gould, the present Political Officer. All of this we learned from the Odlings on that first day, so we knew what to expect; and I can never begin to be grateful enough for their interest and help, which was the decisive factor making it possible for us to enter that historically isolated country.

\* \* \*

It was a clear and sunny morning, and we set out early for Gangtok in a dilapidated little Ford. Elizabeth Steele, an English girl who was staying with the Odlings, elected to come along with us, and we were only too delighted; for not only would it make company for us, but she had met Mr. Gould, the Political Officer, and as it turned out she put in an invaluable word for us when he was extremely doubtful about doing anything to help us.

Our way took us down the hill again toward the Tista River, and just before we reached the bridge that we had crossed the previous morning, we turned sharply off the road onto what was little more than a cart track. This took us straight north along the Tista valley. Down in the valley, it was insufferably hot after the coolness of Kalimpong; and the dense tropical foliage almost cut out all light from the sun, making a deep gloom along the road, like a submarine landscape, and one could imagine that the butterflies were brightly colored fish. At times the road became no more than a tiny ledge over the river, and we would have to get out and guide the driver between the brink and the steep rocks of the bank, or push the car out of some muddy or rocky mire in which we were stuck.

After several hours, we reached [Rangpo](#), a little town on the border of Sikkim. We stopped to show our passes and then continued on our way. Sikkim is the most exquisite little country. Starting at the Tista River, only some four hundred feet above sea level, it shoots up in incredible hills to twelve and thirteen thousand feet. The great [Kanchenjunga](#) commands the entire western horizon when the weather is clear, so that the natives hold the vast mountain in great reverence. All of this is within the space of only a few miles. Kanchenjunga, or in the more correct spelling, Kanchendzonga, means "the great icy treasure house of

the five precious substances"; and because of the commanding aspect of this mountain, it plays a large part in Sikkimese Buddhism. There are many ceremonies and dances held in its honor, and it is easy to understand this reverence on the part of the natives, for it is a truly magnificent sight. Though it is only the third highest mountain in the world - well over twenty-eight thousand feet - it is far more impressive than Everest by reason of the fact that it stands a little to the south of the main line of the Himalayan range, and so stands by itself, in awesome dignity.

From the deep tropics there, we could see, only a few miles away, one of the very highest points on earth, where the cold is so intense and the wind so merciless that as yet no men have conquered it. In this snug little valley were picturesque villages, with their wood and bamboo houses perched on the precipitous hills with green terraced rice fields all around them. The existing Sikkimese are a dying race, for they are incurably lazy and do not seem to have the initiative to develop the natural resources of the country. To this end, the Nepalese, a most industrious people, have been allowed to settle in Sikkim and have almost succeeded in conquering the country. The land has remained by hereditary ownership in the hands of the original Sikkimese, and they still hold most of the official and governing posts. But, the hard-working Nepalese have more or less taken over the country, otherwise, and have certainly succeeded in making it far richer than if the Sikkimese had been left to themselves. Besides these, there are the [Lepchas](#), a simple, industrious, nature-worshiping people, who are in no way equipped to compete for a living. They have almost completely disappeared with the coming of the Nepalese, and now are to be found only in the remotest villages, where they live like simple children and do not even attempt to rival the more virile races that have taken over the country. Those who are actually Sikkimese are the descendants of the Tibetans who conquered the country from the Lepchas, and are in turn being conquered by the greater industry of the Nepalese.

As in other parts of their empire, the British have encouraged the native rulers to build roads and rest houses called Dak Bungalows. These bungalows are found throughout India; and though Sikkim is a semi-independent country, there is, of course, the Political Officer in its capital, and the British have enough influence to cause bungalows to be built here, also. The roads are another matter, however, for it is a terrific task to build them in such country, where there are not only frightful hills to be graded, but also the constant destructive force of the fierce rains. These rains serve to gash out large sections of the road every year, so that the job of maintenance is a difficult one, a constant and heavy drain on the coffers of the Maharaja. All along the way, we saw men and women at work and wondered how they had ever managed to build the road in the first place. A deep bed of broken rock must be put down first for drainage, then filled on top with a finer cracked rock. All of this work is done [by girls and women with little hammers by hand](#), and then carried in big wicker baskets by men to where it is needed. One would think that it would take years to build even a mile at that rate, but they do seem to get along with it. And, in the few years that they have been at it, they have made a fairly passable road, except at a few places where it is almost impossible to do anything because of the formation of the land and the course of

the river.

In the middle of the morning, we reached the end of the road along the river, and then began the long, tedious climb up to Gangtok. We had to stop many times to give the gasping Ford a rest and let it cool down. To our utter consternation, the driver, a Nepali, speeded this process along by scooping cold water in a bucket from the stream along the road. Opening the hood, he would throw the water over the broiling hot motor. The first time he started to do this, we tried to stop him forcefully, but were too late. And to this day, I do not know why he did not manage to crack the entire cylinder block; but, as we later learned, it is a common custom in this extremely hilly part of the world.

By twelve-thirty, we had reached the top and found Gangtok very much like Kalimpong, stretched along the saddle of the hill, with the bazaar clinging to the very edge of the brink. [The Residence](#) where the Political Officer lives was slightly removed from the town along the ridge; but when we arrived there, we might have been back in England. There was a very attractive [house](#) set in the midst of lawns and gardens, and the most gigantic wisteria vine going right up over the front of the porch, one mass of purple clusters.

Bill and I were in a state and trying to be on our best behavior, but it was a difficult task when we remembered how many of our plans depended on just how we impressed the political Officer. Elizabeth Steele really saved the day for us by keeping up a perfectly steady flow of delightful conversation, which by lunch had served time to break through the ice of officialdom. All through the meal, Mr. Gould was most affable and delightful. I sat next to [Hugh Richardson](#), who is the Trade Agent at present, and had a most interesting time getting the first really authentic reports of Tibet that we had had so far. It was fascinating to me, and I rather left Mr. Gould to Elizabeth, as the conversation would certainly keep general until after the meal. To our blank horror, when coffee had been served on the porch, Mr. Gould announced that he would take his nap and see us later on! Thus our agony of doubt was prolonged indefinitely, and we decided in the meantime to go off to the town and see the [bazaar](#).

By the time we returned to the Residence, it was already time for us to be starting back for Kalimpong, but Mr. Gould had not yet put in an appearance. When he finally came, he was again very official, and our hearts sank. He led us out onto the lawn and, walking back and forth, began to ask us questions. I felt like a small boy back at school who had received a note to see the "headmaster." I expected that Mr. Gould would contemplate his toes for a few minutes and then say, "Now, Vanderhoef," and then follow with a long dissertation on my misdemeanors or my bad marks for the last period. In the end, however, he merely pointed out why it was difficult to grant permission to go into Tibet. He also told us that he was extremely doubtful that we would be approved by the Government of India even if he recommended us. When we convinced him that we were not going in search of the Lost Race of the Chaldeans or some of the mysterious centenarians in the mountains, he began to look at us in a better light. And when he saw the things I had done for the museum on a previous trip into Afghanistan and realized that we really were going to do some serious work, he finally agreed to do all he could to procure the permit for us. Then, with his official duties over, he kindly asked us to stay for tea. I discovered that he had

been previously on the Northwest Frontier, knew Afghanistan, and had actually been in Quetta during the frightful earthquake there some years ago. I was never so glad that I had been in Afghanistan and could talk somewhat intelligently about the situation on the Northwest Frontier. It was far later than we had planned when we finally left for the return trip, but we did feel that we had achieved a great deal, so were in high spirits as we started once more down into the valley.

It was pitch dark before we had gone half way, and, on some parts of the road, it was far from pleasant to have the car tipped at a precarious angle in getting past some slide caused by the rains – and to know, by the roar of it, that the river was just below. Once, the very ledge gave way under a rear wheel, and I thought we were done for. But, with sublime indifference, our Nepali drove the car on before we had time to sink too far. Many times we had to get out and move some bullock carts which had been left right in the road. These carts, which are practically the only mode of transport, just stop at night when it is dark, or when the driver gets ready for his supper. They never give a thought to what might come along the road, just unhitching the wagons wherever they stand. I thought we would be all night pushing our way between them, but after a while there did not seem to be so many, and by nine o'clock we were back in Kalimpong, having a delicious dinner.



**Figure 3: A rainbow over Kalimpong after an afternoon rainstorm**

In all probability, it would be several weeks before we heard anything about the permissions, so we began to make plans to fill in the interlude. Kalimpong, we discovered, was fascinating. The hamlet is the last outpost of British India and is situated on a steep ridge some five thousand feet high, overlooking the Tista Valley. It is a great center of trade for Tibetans, for it is the first town they come to after crossing the passes from the forbidden land. It is the place where they trade their wool for the products of India, which they carry back across the high mountains.

For the first time in our travels, we had lost the feeling that we wanted to be getting on. Anywhere else, I am sure, the prospect of waiting a number of weeks for the permission to proceed with our plans would have evoked a feeling of resignation, but not in Kalimpong. From the moment we arrived there, we had fallen in love with it, and the fact that we ever left at all speaks well for our strength of will. Some places one goes to because there is something interesting or beautiful to see, and others because of the people there. In still others, there is some intangible atmosphere which makes one feel at home, contented and happy. Kalimpong, however, is unique because it offers all these things, and to think back on it now, it is one of the happiest places in the world. To begin with, Kalimpong is situated on a steep ridge some five thousand feet above sea level, looking out over the converging valleys of the Tista and the Rangit rivers and, beyond that, to the rampart of glacier and snow that is the Himalayan range. It is not hard to imagine then that nature had connived to give to this corner of the world a feeling of vastness, infinite space, and awesome beauty. There is no room for cramped, restricted feelings in a view that presents to the eye a panorama of two hundred miles of snow capped mountains against a sky that is endless space. It is a world fit for gods to inhabit. A mere mite of a man must have surroundings in his own scale to inhabit, however, and these too are there. Out of the rich semi-tropical earth of the hillsides springs the intimacy of the village with its many houses visible here and there amongst their gardens, flowering shrubs and trees, while over it all is poured the blessing of the rich yellow sun of India to flow down the hillsides and mingle, glistening, with the rivers.

There is a bustle of life and activity in the village too, for it is a center where the Tibetans exchange their wool for rupees or for products of the outside world. All day long the little caravans of donkeys and men come down out of the high passes following the crashing glacial streams that rush toward the sea. And you can hear them coming, for the men sing loudly above the tumult of the water, and the bells hung about the necks of the donkeys throw a texture of happiness over the whole scene. There is other activity, too, for in the streets meet the many races of the hills: Tibetans, Lepchas, Bhutanese, [Marwaris](#), Nepalese, Bengalis and Chinese. It is a bright picture of colorful clothes in the market places, to say nothing of the shops, themselves. Bright heaps of saffron and cumin, peppers and curry before the food shops all add their brilliance to the scene. In one shop, we watched for hours while a Tibetan silversmith, in his deep red robe and his turquoise earrings, hammered out little silver bowls and dishes and candy boxes. In others, sleek Chinamen would show us lengths of brocade, delightful porcelains or little willow root tea bowls. It was all a scene of happy industry, but



there was something else that we had not seen before on our travels. It was nothing tangible, nothing that you could put your finger on, but something of the people that you caught in the glance of an eye, or the smile of some face, or in the tone of a voice. It was as though there were some guiding genius looking after Kalimpong that made people happier, made them get along better and trust each other; and, in a way, there was, as we learned before very long.

As mentioned earlier, Kalimpong is a missionary town, and one might almost say that it owes its very existence to Dr. Graham. Fifty years ago, Dr. Graham came to Kalimpong, settled and started his work. On the ridge above the town is the St. Andrews Colonial Home, where Dr. Graham takes care of orphans. He is revered as few Europeans are ever venerated by an oriental people. White people and natives in Kalimpong are bound together by a mutual trust and understanding, and it has made it one of the happiest places in the world.

Our host and hostess, the Odlings, are doing other wonderful work in Kalimpong, as we might have expected, for Mrs. Odling is Dr. Graham's daughter. Some years ago, Mr. and Mrs. Odling organized a group of the native population with the idea of trying to keep alive many of the native crafts which were fast dying out because the natives themselves could not find markets for the things they were able to make. Cheap industrial products from the commercial center of India were entirely killing the market for the native arts of Northern Bengal. However, the Odlings had a sufficient imagination to see that many of the native products, if adapted to modern tastes and more modern uses, would be in demand at least among the more wealthy classes in India and certainly among the English living there. Starting with next to nothing, save a lot of good will, much imagination and a great deal of ability, they have in the succeeding years developed the Kalimpong Arts and Crafts into a major undertaking. Its name is known all over India, and the employment it has made for the natives has brought unheard of prosperity to Kalimpong.

Our favorite place of exploration was the large group of buildings along one hillside which now houses the Odling's Kalimpong Arts and Crafts. Lepchas, Tibetans, Sikkimese and Bhutanese all work together there producing the things that the Odlings design, and for which there is a steady market. One section is devoted to rug making. As it arrives in the wool caravans, the Tibetan wool is washed, combed, spun, dyed and made into rugs. Any expert would be proud of the result, for they are woven in the most attractive modern patterns adapted from old Tibetan designs; and, moreover, Tibetan wool is the best in the world for rug making. The climate of Tibet produces a wool that is almost like silk, and it contains a large amount of oil, so that it wears extremely well. The oiliness makes the hairs flexible so that they are not easily worn off by steady scuffing. Other parts of the industries are devoted to lace making, weaving fabrics, tooling leather, making furniture and a number of other things, from lamps to women's hand bag. In all of this work, they have managed to keep away from the arty crafty flavor that so often spoils attempts to revive native crafts. The Odlings' house, a model of modern equipment, and furnished in the most sophisticated simplicity, with indirect lighting and the most attractively designed, built-in furniture, had amazed us at first. It was like the Englishman who asked the American if he was much troubled by attacks from the Red Indians. But the geographical position of

Kalimpong had led us to believe that it would be a primitive frontier country, and instead, we found such modern luxuries as indirect lighting. All of this, of course, was the product of the Odlings' own ingenuity and the craftsmen of the Industries. If we had known the Odlings before we began our saga in Kalimpong, we would not have been surprised, at all; but to find such things in a remote Himalayan village was, at least not what one would expect. Besides the material things that have come out of the industries, there is the rare good instance of having turned an ideal into a reality. Dr. Graham did this once by creating the St. Andrew's Colonial Homes, and now it has been done again by the creation of the Industries, which have given employment to the natives who had always been particularly poor. It makes one feel good just to know what is being done in Kalimpong.

## *Chapter Two*

### VISION OF THE SNOWS

In those first days, while we were exploring Kalimpong, we were also making other plans. Just on the chance that the permissions for Tibet would be forthcoming we thought it wise to make a sort of test trip. We wanted to know the men who would be our servants on the long trip, get used to their ways, learn how to handle the whole problem of pack train, baggage, supplies, and all the other details and get some idea of just how little we would need in the way of foodstuffs. So we were making arrangements to go off for a week or more into western Sikkim, to more or less camp out and get everything running smoothly. Again, the Odlings were absolutely invaluable to us, for they knew of trustworthy men who would go along as cooks; Surdar, or head man; Syce, or grooms for the horses; and muleteers. Also, they put us on the track of a man who could provide horses and pack animals. We got more than enough food and planned to keep careful check on just how much we used. On the basis of that, we could figure on supplies for the other trip.

So in about a week we set out one morning for Darjeeling in a baby Austin. The whole bundobust (that is what we soon learned to call the little caravan – literally it means “arrangements”) had gone on ahead the day before and would meet us along the road into Sikkim, as we did not want to take time for that part of the trek that was more or less uninteresting. It always seems to be sunny in Kalimpong; and yet, just across on the next range of hills, at Darjeeling, it is usually foggy and damp and cold. This we began to discover as we climbed up out of the Tista valley once more. At first, there were only patches of mist and sunlight as we wound up the incredibly steep road toward Darjeeling, and as yet it was lovely and warm and balmy. Along the hillside, we passed through endless tea gardens. They were quite right, I decided, to call them gardens rather than plantations, for I don’t think I have ever seen anything so lovely as they looked that morning. In countless rolling terraces the deep green bushes grew, giving an effect of the most perfect landscape gardening. Little brooks ran amongst the shiny leaves to moisten the soil, and above all were taller trees giving a checkered shade to the whole scene. Most of the shade trees were covered with bright orange blossoms like flame trees. Now and then, giant clumps of cryptomeria made patches of deep gloom amongst the pools of sunlight; and through all the trees were endless vistas of the rolling hilltops, here dropping thousands of feet down to the river, and there soaring up against the clouds and the blue sky. It was a heavenly part of the world.

At last, we reached the top of the hill and came into the little village of Lopchu, and then the fog began to settle down in earnest. It was like air blowing over ice, damp and penetrating. Through a hole in the mist, we could see Darjeeling, still far off on another ridge, shrouded in cold mist; and back across

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the other way, Kalimpong was in the warm sunlight. There could be no more stunning situation for a town than that of Darjeeling. Perched seven thousand feet high on a sharp ridge, it looks out over miles of magnificent rolling green hills; and behind all this, the snowy peaks of the Himalayas stand stark against the horizon. But, alas, we were not to see them that day, for the whole town was fog bound. As we ate a quick lunch, the waitress pointed into the fog and explained that the mountains were over there when it was clear. But that was small consolation, and we were soon off on another six miles down the opposite hill to where our bundobust was waiting.

We found it in a tiny village at the foot of another hill, and, after paying off the driver and telling him to be back for us at the same time just nine days hence, we set about packing up the last minute things and then set off up the steep trail. I have often thought since that making that trip was the wisest thing we ever did, for, if there had been nothing else gained, we did at least get ourselves into condition for crossing the high passes into Tibet, and for the tedious climbing where the road is too steep or too narrow to use the horses. Actually, we hardly used the horses at all on that trip. Bill and I led off long the trail, followed immediately by our two horses, each with a syce, or groom. Next came the muleteers with the pack animals, and finally Aku, the surdar, who was in charge of the whole thing. Aku was a wonder. He is, actually, a Tibetan, though he has lived most of his life in Sikkim. I haven't the vaguest idea how old he is, but his face is one meshwork or wrinkles made deeper by perpetual grin. Aku always wore a small skull cap on his head, with a coral button on top of it, and a bright red sweater. That first day, we were planning to climb up the eight thousand feet to Tonglu, where there is a dak bungalow. The trail wound back and forth along the face of the hills, and under the canopy of bamboo or great moss-covered trees to which were clinging cool, scented orchids like showers of bright butterflies. Maiden hair fern and whole banks of tiny wild strawberries and violets lined our way. Before we reached the top, the clouds settled about us, as though jealous that we should see too many of the beauties in the mountains, but making the occasional vistas through the softly drifting clouds all the more enchanting.

By the time we arrived at the bungalow, the cold was frightful. Not that it really was so cold, but it was so damp that it rendered clothes almost useless and seemed to get to our bones. We had had the good fortune to get two sleeping bags in London that originally had been made for use on an Everest expedition. Unlike most sleeping bags which are huge and bulky when rolled up, and not particularly warm, these were made of very light but windproof material tufted heavily with goose down. They roll up into a tiny package, but when opened and fluffed up they become the warmest nests imaginable. However, on that first night, we discovered that even these were not proof against dampness, for they seemed utterly powerless against the cold until we got up and dried them thoroughly on the inside, before the fire.

In a tiny village, in the very bottom of the crease between the hills, we found it. Six or eight picturesque little carved wooden houses along both sides of the road comprised the village; and against these, our animals were tied amongst what looked like incredibly huge piles of luggage and food boxes for a week's trip, but there was no sign of any of our men. The little Austin came to a grinding stop

in the middle of this scene, while terrified ducks and children and chickens fled in all directions in a storm of feathers and dust. In less time than it takes to tell, there was no sign of life in the little village, and presently, when no one appeared, Bill began to shout loudly "Aku! Aku!" Aku was our headman. He would be in charge of our bundobust and also the cook. But where had he gone? We both began again "Aku! Aku!" This cry went on for some minutes, and finally, as though called by our incantation, Aku appeared like a genii from the doorway of a house at the end of the street. He wore the same sheepish grin that we were to know well before long, and looked as though he had just swallowed the canary; but, in truth, he explained that he had just swallowed a few cups of tea and some barley beer. Aku's grin was such that you could not be stern for very long; besides, he presented a most commanding appearance. It was hard to judge his age because his face was a mass of deep wrinkles, made permanent by the everlasting grin; but he must have been fifty. He was tall and large, and his height was the more increased by a high and beautiful brocade skull cap surmounted by a coral button. His treasure, however, was a brilliant scarlet sweater that we never once saw him without. His costume was finished by jhodpur breeches of huge black and white checks and a large multicolored golfing umbrella with a silver handle, which he brandished at the slightest infraction of his commands by those two lesser creatures, the grooms, or syces. These two appeared hurriedly upon a shout from Aku, looking like a Tibetan version of Mutt and Jeff; and there was no mistaking that they knew who the boss was. The smaller of the two was a miserable creature named Mela, who had a consumptive cough as constant as Aku's grin and less spirit than an oaf. His costume was almost too nondescript to merit attention, but if you can imagine a Palm Beach suit along Prince Albert lines that has been worn through a major military campaign, without refurbishing, you will get some idea of Mela's appearance. Gyaltzen, the muleteer, followed Mela and presented a very different appearance. He was a true Tibetan, and a husky one, at that, which we were glad of after having seen Mela. Gyaltzen wore his native costume, which consisted of the long heavy woolen coat, or chuba, held in at the waist by a sash of purple silk. Under that he wore a shirt of bright orange and good warm trousers and stout shoes. It was a practical costume and far better looking because it belonged in that country. By way of adornment, Gyaltzen wore the typical huge gold ring of an earring, set with turquoise in one ear and a lump of plain turquoise in the other. His hat was a battered felt fedora, held in place by his long pigtail that he had tied across his hat and under his chin.

At last, all the members of our party had put in an appearance. Meanwhile, our driver, who had remained in the background all this time, was still remaining quiet, until he was told whose duty it was to unload the stuff we had brought in the car. No one made a move to do anything. Obviously, it was necessary to tell each man what his duties were and then set him to doing it.

"What are we waiting for Aku?"

"We go now, sir?"

"Of course we go now. Hurry up. It will be dark before we get in"

"What we do now, sir?"

"Look here, Aku, you are supposed to be running this bundobust. Go and help the driver take that stuff out of the car, and tell Gyaltzen to pack all the boxes

on the mules, and tell Mala to get the horses ready. We start in five minutes. Quick now!"

"Burse," said Aku, finally moved to action. Burse was Aku's inevitable reply to any and all of our orders, and we were some time figuring it out. It was simply what a Tibetan tongue did to the phrase "Very good, Sir."

Once he took the initiative, Aku proved to be efficiency, itself, and in short order, things began to get done. Bill and I, meanwhile, sat down on the steps of one of the houses and watched the proceedings. With the appearance of our men, some of the inhabitants had begun to assemble. Apparently, they were all busy extending the road beyond the village, for there were all the men, women, and children carrying baskets of cracked rocks or the hammers with which they did the tedious work. To the children, we must have appeared like pale faced freaks, for they stood and stared at us with limpid, unblinking eyes. Several of them had hands full of what looked like some sort of nuts that they were eating greedily. We motioned to them to let us see them, but they fled in terror. The mother one of them saw our interest, however, and, catching one of the children, she cuffed it savagely in the ear and, taking all the nuts it had in its hand, brought them for us. We tried to ask what they were, but she could not understand; but when we tried them, we found them delicious. They were like green almonds in shape and size, but somewhat more tender when bitten into; and their taste was quite indescribable, but suggestive of cashew nuts with a slight flavor of Angustora Bitters.

Shortly thereafter, Aku announced that all was ready to leave. But first, we had to arrange with the driver to return at the same time one week hence to take us back again. Bill went confidently up to him. "You come back for us here a week from today at the same time. Understand?"

"No, Sahib," said the driver pointing toward the trail. "No road. Car not going "

"No! NO!" explained Bill. "You go home. Come back one week."

"No, Sahib," wailed the driver. "No can going. Car sick. No to drink."

"He's hopeless, Bill," I shouted. "Get Aku to tell him. Aku!"

"Burse."

"Aku, tell driver go home. Come back one week for take us. Home. Understand?"

"Burse," said Aku, who fell into a long discussion with the driver.

"Come on Bill," I said, "let's us start. They'll never get finished if we wait forever."

We started off up the hill on foot, motioning to Mela and Gyaltzen to follow with the horses and mules. The trail was a steep one. Our immediate objective was to reach the Bungalow at Tonglu, where we would spend that first night at an elevation of some eight thousand feet. The distance there was on some six miles; and the village from which we started was only something over a thousand feet high, so we would have to climb over a thousand feet in every mile. We had not gone far when Aku caught up with us and reported that he had explained everything to the driver. Bill and I were still chewing on some of the nuts that the children had had, and still wondering what they were.

"Aku," said Bill. "What are these things we are eating. Do you know?"

"Flower, sir," said Aku over his shoulder.

"Flour?" said Bill, incredulously. "They don't look like flour. They're something that grows."

"Yes, sir," put in Aku. "These flowers growing much in this country."

"He must mean they are some kind of flowers," I contributed intelligently. "Maybe they are the buds. They look sort of like buds, don't they?"

"Yes, they buds," added Aku. "I get them," heading off into the woods at the side of the trail. He was back in a minute carrying a handful of sprays of the most gorgeous orchids. "This the flower, sir," he grinned, handing some to each of us; and he was quite right, for the little unopened buds at the ends of the spray were exactly like the ones we had been eating.

"Ye gods. I've heard of lotus eating," said Bill, incredulously, "but this is a new high. They're good though, aren't they," he continued, munching on some of the new buds. So, we went on up the trail in high spirits that afternoon, munching meditatively on our orchid buds. I could remember orchids in New York at five dollars a blossom, and the thought of having eaten at that rate several thousand dollars worth could not help but give one a feeling of contented affluence.

Early in the morning, we started on the hike to another place called [Sangdakpu](#), fourteen miles away and twelve thousand feet up into the very heart of the foothills of the Himalayas. The day was misty for the most part, but so enchantingly unreal and beautiful did the mist make the scenery that we did not mind it in the least. Strange, stunted mountain pines would appear in the mist, and then, suddenly, the thin veil would draw aside, and, for a second, they would stand stark and clear against a vast view, tumultuous mountains falling away to the south. In the far distance were the plains of India, flat and simmering in the tropical sun. As we went ever higher, the trees changed to strange stunted shapes, and the tropical bamboo disappeared. In their place now were giant rhododendrons – not bushes, but great trees that could not be encompassed with your arms. In full bloom, they were then, too, for spring was just beginning in those heights. Masses of blossoms surrounded us on all sides, for we were literally walking under the great trees: white, palest pink, flame color, orange, and, finally, one of a deep wine red. Even in the mist, those trees were an incredible sight, covering the hillsides with bold streaks of blended color.

We reached Sangdakpu at about three o'clock, and, almost immediately, the clouds came in as thick as a London fog; so we spent the rest of the day inside, trying to keep warm. In the morning, we were awake at five-thirty, for the [view of the mountains from Sangdakpu](#) is supposed to be the best of any thereabouts, taking in as it does, Everest: at the west of the range right through to the eastern end, a panorama of something well over two hundred miles of snowy peaks, the highest in the world. Many times one can see these mountains and not be particularly impressed by their immensity; for, from most places where they are visible at all, there are the foothills in the foreground which, themselves, would be huge mountains in any other part of the world, but which here only serve to give a false impression of the size of the Himalayas.

The great peaks are usually more than half blocked out by these high foothills. But, from Sangdakpu, if the weather is clear, one can see right over the

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intervening ridges and get the full sweep of the mountains, starting from the plain almost at sea-level and towering to twenty-nine thousand feet. But, our luck was not with us on that morning, for we were not granted even a glimpse through the dense mist. We spent the whole day at Sangdakpu hoping that it would lift and taking short walks over the surrounding hills. But lift it did not. And it was just as bad the next morning when we set out once more, this time for [Phalut](#), another four thousand feet up and twelve miles away. We arrived there in time for lunch, but still the whole world seemed to be hidden by the obscuring fog. It was bitterly cold up there, so we built the best fire we could in the drafty bungalow and kept our eye on the weather conditions, hoping for a change. A bitter wind was blowing from the ice fields that now were quite near us, and about three o'clock, we bundled up in everything we possessed and climbed up on the high hill just behind the bungalow. There was a ruined old Chorten, or heap of prayer stones, at the top, with a few tattered prayer flags stuck into it on poles. So, we settled down next to it, as the weather showed signs of breaking. It seemed as though we were on the very top of the world. We could look down on every side when the mist cleared for a minute or two: to our right was Bengal, before us was Sikkim, and curving around behind were the steep valleys of Nepal. Before us was the most magnificent spectacle of sky and clouds and vast distances. One second, all was cloud and darkness, the next the world was blazing with light. Clouds, like a vast golden mast, stretched away in the most majestic play of color over the dark valleys. In one little valley, rain was falling in torrents, while in the next, there was bright sunlight. We, ourselves, were suddenly in blinding snow and hail. The next minute, it would be gone, and soft veils of mist would blot out the entire world. Next, the mist parted for a minute, and we saw a brilliant, white cloud, high up against a blue patch of sky. But suddenly and incredibly, we realized that it was the peak of [Kangchenjunga](#). For just a second, it cleared a bit, and what a beautiful sight! Just as suddenly, it was blotted out again, and we went back to the bungalow to get warm. That one tiny glimpse was worth the whole trip. It was like a glimpse into another world, so great was the contrast of the clear sunlit brilliance of it to the dark fog-bound rocks upon which we sat. It was almost sunset when we went out again. I don't yet know why we went out again at all, but we did, and walked out around the corner of the bungalow. The whole sky to the north was diamond clear, and of a blue so pure that it was not a color at all, but merely the conscious essence of blue. Against this, shining with crystal brilliance, were the five peaks of Kangchenjunga, clear to the level of the plain, the icy treasure house of the five precious substances, as the Tibetans call it. We both stopped, utterly aghast. The first thing we felt like doing was to weep from the pure joy of the thing. It is of such utter and appalling beauty that it is like a severe physical shock when you first see it. It does strange things to one just to stand and look at something so completely beautiful. First you feel like crying, then that feeling turns into an almost hysterical joy, and finally your every mental process seems to become clarified, simplified as though everything had been put into perfect order; as though every thought, at its very inception, became a reality, and you are left at peace and utterly relaxed.

We sat there and watched the five peaks turn from dazzling crystal white to gold, and then to shell pink. Gradually, the pink turned to mauve as the



shadows crept swiftly up the snowy walls of glaciers and peaks. And finally, as the sun went below the rim of the world, the whole mountain melted into the blue of the sky, as though by an actual dissolution of substance. Then, what had been before us was only blue deepening sky and one pale star.

The next days fury of frightful gales and torrential rains made us decide to postpone our trip back to Sangdakpu. Such rains and storms are impossible to imagine. Nepal is well named "the land of the thunderbolt." Drenching, solid walls of rain beat about the house all day, and ran down the hills in torrents. We had wondered the day before why the bungalow had been placed where it was. On a hilltop which commands one of the most magnificent views in the world, they had seen fit to place the bungalow with its back into a bank and its front windows looking straight into another hill. With all day on our hands, we pondered this. Finally, Bill was moved to action. He got out his water colors and wrote, in fine illuminated Roman script across the white space below the mantel, this little poem that he concocted:

Who built this house had little mind  
Or what might be the true intent.  
He put the windows all behind  
And hurried off whence he was sent.

When he had finished, we felt much better. I hope the architect takes a little trip into the hills one of those days. Even the protection of the hill could not explain why the bungalow was so placed, for merely by turning it forty-five degrees, it would command the whole view of the Himalayas.

The next day, we started out on the long hike back to [Tonglu](#), twenty-six miles. We had to go through all the way because, against the original plan, we had stayed two nights at Phalut, and so would have to do the double stage in order to make connections with the car on the following day. It was a miserable trip, for before we had gone many miles, we were soaked through; and even our shoes were squashing with water. If we had stopped at all, we would have become hopelessly chilled, so we kept right on and finally arrived at Tonglu at about five in the evening. Altogether, the conditions on that trip could not have been much worse. But, actually, we were glad it had been that way, for it showed us just how well we were prepared for the trip into Tibet and showed us many things which we improved before setting out again. The next day found us back in Kalimpong by tea time.

### *Chapter Three*

#### INTO THAT OTHER WORLD

Because all trace of our requests for permission to enter Tibet had apparently sunk into a mire of officialdom in Delhi, we were destined to spend several more weeks in Kalimpong. More completely delightful weeks I can not remember. The house seemed always full of interesting people, and no sooner would one leave than another would arrive. We kept ourselves busy at one thing and another, but mainly in arranging every last detail for the start of the trip.

At last, on June 5<sup>th</sup>, we received word that the permissions had been granted. That was a most exciting day, and we decided to set right off, as we wanted to be in Gyantse for the yearly festival, beginning on June 17<sup>th</sup>, called Saga-Dawa, which would correspond to our Easter. It would mean doing double stages the whole way. But, we were really eager to be off, so the departure was set for the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup>.

It was nearly one o'clock on the eve of our departure before we finally got to bed, with all our packing done and every last thing ready; so, it was hideous to be called at five-thirty. Our hosts, in their unfailing hospitality, got up to see us off and had a good breakfast ready for us. It was a beautiful morning when, at nearly seven o'clock with everything packed into the car, we waved goodbye, started down the hill and were once more on our way to Gangtok. We had planned to have Aku go on ahead as soon as we got word of the permissions two days before, so he was to meet us at the end of the road just beyond Gangtok. After a week of rain, the Tista valley looked quite different than it was before; all was dripping wet, and the river itself had become a seething torrent crashing between its twisting banks. In many places, the road was only just passable, and several times, we had to clear it, ourselves, where slides had fallen the night before. Our driver this time was a Lepcha and quite characteristic of his race. When we encountered one of these obstructions, he would stop and just blow the horn, hoping that some of the road workers would appear and clear it away. We, of course, were in no mood to wait for their doubtful appearance, and we had to get out, ourselves, and begin throwing the stones and rocks down the bank before such a possibility even occurred to the driver. Even then, he was no very efficient worker, for he removed perhaps one stone for every six that we got out of the way and seemed completely exhausted by the time the road was clear. The poor dilapidated old car nearly expired before we had finally climbed the seven thousand feet to Gangtok.

At the Residency, where we went to get our permits before going on to find Aku, we found Hugh Richardson, the Trade Agent. Even then, there were details that made him want to postpone our leaving for some days; but, in the end, he agreed, and once more, we set out for the end of the road. Our bundobust was

much the same as before, save that we had now ten pack animals and what looked like an appalling amount of baggage for a three months trip. Actually, there was very little that could be dispensed with, for the bulk of it was food, our cameras, and equipment. Of course, as we went along we would have less as the supply of food was consumed. We had Aku and two men to look after the horses. One of the grooms was new, for we had found that the valley people are unable to withstand the altitude or the climate of the Tibetan plateau. So our whole party was made up of people of Tibetan stock. Besides these, there were three muleteers.

By two o'clock, we were on our way. And right from there, the road went steadily upward, which it would continue to do almost until we reached the plateau of Tibet. The trail, at places, was no more than a narrow ledge clinging to the precipitous mountainside; but it was the most beautiful country. For a long time, as we wound along the hillsides, we could look back and now and then see the golden finials of the roof of the Gangtok monastery shining in the afternoon sun; but before long we were too far into the mountains. In the middle of the afternoon, black, threatening clouds piled up in the peaks above us, and loud rolls of thunder echoed through the hills. Before we knew it, the rain came, softly at first; then gradually, it turned into a torrent. I discovered then that I had been stupid enough to leave my raincoat behind, so I made a poncho by cutting a hole in the middle of one of the rubber sheets that we used to cover the baggage. Fortunately, we had several extra ones; and, in the end, I think it was better than the raincoat would have been, for it came right down over my feet in one piece, and there were no openings for the rain to come through. It was too late that day, however, before I had it ready, and I was completely soaked. Bill had on trousers and a jacket that were supposed to be waterproof, but nothing could withstand a rain like that, and he was soon in the same condition. Even our thick felt hats were as nothing before these torrents. The rain came straight through them, most uncomfortably ran down our faces and ended by running down our necks in cold rivulets. That was a miserable afternoon, for we had not yet had enough practice to know how to cope with such a downpour. It also demonstrated the futility of patented rainproof clothing, for we found that the Tibetans in their felt-like clothes were far drier than we were. The thick, felt-like cloth made from the native Tibetan wool is especially waterproof because it contains so much oil. If you can manage, as they usually do, to have two layers of this material, you are almost sure to stay dry; for, although the first layer may get pretty wet, the water tends to run right off, and the second layer will not absorb water from the first. Well, we were perishingly cold and miserable by the time we had covered the ten miles to the dak bungalow at [Karponang](#), and were not long in getting out of our clothes. Aku, with infinite foresight, had tea ready almost immediately, and after that, we began to come back to life. That night, the bungalow looked like a Turkish bath as our wet clothes steamed before the fire that was so pathetic I thought it could never dry that vast quantity of wet material.



**Figure 4: Approaching the dak bungalow at Karponang.**

By seven o'clock the next morning, we were on our way again. There was no sign of the rain of the night before, except for the torrents cascading down the steep mountain sides and crashing over sheer precipices into the valley below. The trail wound steadily uphill. In some stretches, this trail became almost non-existent where sheer rock faces made it necessary to construct a sort of wooden catwalk along the perpendicular walls. Wooden timbers were driven into holes in the rocks and then covered over with a sort of corduroy road; all this was little more than shoulder-breadth wide, with only the flimsiest railing of thin branches protecting us from the rocky abyss below. It was agonizing to watch the animals insistently walking on the extreme brink of these narrow walks, but we soon noticed that they knew what they were doing. They are so used to carrying packs over just such trails that they have learned the safest course. If they walk too close to the cliff, one side of their protruding packs is apt to be bumped against some prominent stone – not that they would mind that – but the bump, we noticed, was very likely to throw them off balance and increase the danger of their going over the edge. So, they walked on the very brink, depending on their own surefootedness. This same thing applied to the horses, and I could not get used to

looking down on one side and seeing no solid ground – only the rocky cliff some thousand or more feet straight below. It was infinitely more pleasant to walk. Long stretches of trail of that sort lasted most of the morning. Now and then, the trail would widen out where some stream crashed down between the rocks and sent clouds of cool spray shooting across the path. But, in other places, torrents of water issuing from somewhere high up on the cliff face would fall outside the narrow ledge where we were making our precarious way. Tibet certainly is well isolated from the rest of the world when you realize that this is the main and safest way to get over the passes.

Late in the morning, we came out into another narrow valley, but the trail widened, and we were, at least, away from the dizzying cliffs. The earth was bubbling with moisture and the ground was strewn with deep purple and golden primroses. Tiny miniature iris made patches of rich color in upland meadows, and the sun, when it broke through the scudding clouds of mist, set every leaf and tree sparkling with dew drops. By lunch time, we were near the head of the valley and came to a beautiful little lake set in a hollow of the hills. Just at the edge of the lake was the small bungalow of [Changu](#), where we stopped to eat our sandwiches and to rest the men and animals before starting the afternoon's march that would take us up over one of the high passes into Tibet, the [Nathu La](#).

Beyond Changu, there was little sign of trees, for we were nearly at fourteen thousand feet. The vast mountains were smooth with a covering of moss and patches of stunted shrubs of rhododendron and azalea, and here and there a tiny lake of clear emerald water appeared in the hollow of the hills. The whole land was covered with a carpet of minute flowers which had thrust up their heads into the retreating snow. Anemones, cowslips, forget-me-nots and blue bells were in such abundance that the hills in the distance looked faintly tinted with powdered colors. One of the loveliest things was the dwarf Rhododendron Nivea. These pigmy shrubs grow upon every rock and in every crevice where they can obtain a hold. They were just then covered with minute blossoms of the palest peach pink, and a whole bush was so small that it could be held on the flat of one's hand and then not cover it. Millions of tiny white, blue and yellow stars rested on the green carpet of the moss as we wound through the vast hills, between rocks or over the smooth upland fields.

Somewhere down behind us along the trail, Gyaltzen was singing some queer Tibetan song whose haunting tune seemed a perfect accompaniment to the spacious lonesomeness of the country about us and the simplicity of its barren hills. Gyaltzen's song was joined by a chorus of echoes in all that emptiness and went rolling off among the mountains sliding down the lap of the wind into nothingness.

“Aku, what was that song Gyaltzen was singing?”

“That a song of [Milarepa](#), Sahib,” called back Aku over his shoulder, pulling up his donkey. When we came up to him he continued. “Milarepa, Sahib, was very holy man in Tibet many many year ago when the world was young. It is written that Milarepa was first man to go to top of Mt. Everest. He was very holy man, Sahib.”

“You mean this Milarepa climbed Everest all alone,” put in Bill.

“Oh, he not climbing,” said Aku, aghast. “Milarepa was very holy man.

He going up on beam of light.”

“Do you believe that, Aku,” I questioned.

“Who knows, Sahib. Many things can happen. It is so written in the holy books,” concluded Aku, as though deciding the whole matter, and with that, drew away ahead again. I looked out over that infinite panorama towards Everest. “Many things can happen indeed,” I thought to myself suddenly realizing with a shock the unreality of the whole world in which I found myself. It was almost as though I were dead and suddenly found myself living on a different plane of existence. After all, perhaps this was more real than anything I had known before. Our much vaunted western scientific viewpoint all at once seemed narrow and prejudiced. Whatever it was, certainly it could not claim to give us the deep contentment, the simple faith or the natural poise that was evident on every side in this land hardly touched by so called “Civilization.” Had we not perhaps lost sight of the real values in our restless scramble for knowledge and control of our material surroundings. In any case, just to bask in the reflected light of such faith and poise as Aku’s made something relax within one.

Almost imperceptibly as we climbed higher and higher, the world changed from the softness of spring and the carpet of flowers. At first, there were only patches of snow in the shadow of rock, but then there were long stretches of snow and ice melting slowly. Later, the entire hillsides were covered in ever deeper snow where the animals had to pick their steps carefully to avoid slipping on the steep trail. Before we knew it, the clouds, which had been only a thin fleecy blanket far above us about the tops of the mountain, changed into a dark grey ceiling and the snow began to flurry about us. Higher and higher we went while all the time the wind increased in force, beating the snow against us and going through our clothes like a knife. Aku, upon his tiny donkey, had finally put up his gay golfing umbrella, and for a while we saw it bobbing ahead, like an incongruous ghost. But it was not long before the wind grew too strong and threatened to turn it inside out, and presently Aku disappeared altogether in the swirling snow and clouds. Fortunately, the horses seemed to know by instinct how to keep on the trail, for I could neither see it nor keep my face straight against the pelting snow enough to look. We were soon both so numb that it really made little difference what happened, but presently I was surprised to see a few patches bare of snow and then a voice calling, “Here, Sahib. Here, Sahib, top of pass.”

Almost immediately, Aku emerged from the gloom plastered with wet snow, so that he looked like the spirit of winter. And behind him was a big [cairn of stones](#) stuck full of twigs and branches from which hundreds of tattered prayer fags whipped and snapped in the gale. Tibetans have such a cairn at the top of every pass and one must add a stone or a flag to it to pass auspiciously on one’s way. We got down, leaning against the wind, and each placed a stone near the top of the pile. Our men were better prepared, for they all took from their jackets little flags printed with some prayer and, with stiff fingers, fumbled with some twig as they tied them there. All around near the top of the pass the ground was quite innocent of snow, for the wind whipped it off before it could land. The rocks of the cairn and the twigs moaned and sang a ghastly dirge as the gale rushed across the peak into the emptiness and I shuddered at the utter desolation of that spot. With the visibility zero, one felt a million miles out in space, cut off completely

form from the earth. We lay against the wind and wobbled like nine pins with its gusts until the numb fingers had tied the flags to the fluttering twigs. Then, we quickly got hold of our bridles and started to lead the horses down, this time walking to keep the circulation going. We had crossed the barrier. We were in Tibet. At that moment the limit of visibility was perhaps two yards, but before long we began to get down out of the snow. The country around us looked exactly like the one we had left on the other side of the pass, and not at all like the picture of Tibet we had in our minds. There is quite a margin of fertile and reasonably temperate land just on the Tibetan side of the mountain barrier. It exists only because there is some light backlash of the warm air which sweeps up over the mountains from the plains of India. Small dribbles of this air managed to get over the high mountains, and in the monsoon there is always a backlash of rain, so that, for the short distance that these conditions reach into the Tibetan plateau, there is a reasonable amount of fertility and moisture in the soil. For six miles more, our way led us down from the pass and into pine forests where the ground under the trees was covered with purple iris growing in such abundance that there was nothing but this rich color as far as one could see. But there were only moments that afternoon when the fog permitted us any view at all. At last, we reached the bungalow at [Champithang](#), and after supper we were glad to get into our sleeping bags. It had been a hard climb that day.

What a morning we awoke to! The clouds were just beginning to scatter before the early morning sun, while the deep forests of fir and pine stood dark against the clear blue sky. Wraiths of mist rose from the forest floor that was lush with the murmuring wetness of spring. We were off along the trail by seven o'clock. The deep shade of the forest was like the dimness of a cathedral nave, with the massive trees making a gothic arch high above us. Slantwise between the trunks, the sunlight, turned to golden substance by the soft mists, lighted with iridescent brilliance a mille-fleur pattern of spring flowers between the roots of the trees. The cool fresh smell of spring filled the air. It seemed as though we had stepped into another world, and indeed we had, for far behind toward the sky was the pass and the [mountains deep in snow](#), cutting us off from the world we had known as effectively as any barrier; and, at once, we felt a complete sense of detachment. Life flowed more easily in the same ageless pattern that it had known for untold centuries. As we walked along in the early morning on the soft springy humus of the forest trail, the whole world seemed to be fresh and clean with the scent of pines and the soft sighing of the wind through the branches. In little clearings and glades along the way were dense patches of yellow primulas or long vistas of iris. It was the enchanted forest of a fairy tale.

Far below us on a spur of the hill, we saw the golden cupola of a monastery glinting in the sun against the dark background of trees. Even then, we heard the sound of [long Tibetan trumpets](#), calling the monks to morning prayer. Rich and full notes they were that wove around each other in weird rhythm and echoed back and forth across the valley.

After an hour or so of walking down the winding trail, we came out on a flat piece of ground at the edge of which stood three Chortens, or sacred shrines, looking like giant squat stone bottles with golden stoppers. We got off our horses to look at them, and there, just below us, was the monastery, its courtyard filled

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with sunlight and its golden cupola flashing. Perched on its crag surrounded by pillars of cedars, cryptomeria and feathery tamarak, it looked out over the valley far below. A broad, swift river glistened below, with the village of [Rinchengong](#) along its sides. White chortens shining with gold and bright colors were all along its banks. As we continued downward, the sighing of the wind in the pines and the thunder of a great waterfall added final touches to the atmosphere of enchantment. The rich, sleepy smell of the pines in the sunlight were soothing, while the clarity and the cleanliness of the world and the fresh, cool wind, made all one's senses come alive. You felt like shouting in the sheer beauty of it all.

At last, we rounded a bend in the trail and came upon the entrance to the monastery. Banks of stately cedars threw the scene into speckled shade, and through this was the brilliance of the flashing gold on the monastery. Its windows, with their pleated curtains hanging on the outside, added splashes of color. Beside the gate of lacquer red with its huge brass rings and massive hinges was a water trough with a great bronze spout in the form of a dragon's head, from which a jet of pure water splashed into the tank. In the gateway stood the Abbot, bowing as he greeted us and surrounded by other monks in their dull red and purple robes. The abbot presented a most striking appearance. He was clad in a long and voluminous white woolen robe caught in at the waist by a bright scarlet band of silk. But the most striking thing was his hair. This apparently had never been cut in his fairly long life, and the vast accumulation had been drawn up in two massive horns extending diagonally upward from each side of his head and wrapped about with a criss-cross of red ribbons. Across his extended arms, he held out to us a filmy white silk ceremonial scarf as a token of greeting. It was a bad moment for us. We had not thought to come to a monastery so soon and had not taken any scarves out of our baggage. It is a Tibetan custom to present one of these whenever you go calling, so that you do not come empty handed. To most people, if they are of high rank, this offering should be in the form of a present, but to a monastery, it is customary to give money. As the old Abbot gave us the scarf, he said something.

"Aku, what did he say," I asked, apprehensively.

"He say he wish to greet the great American sahibs, and wish to give the hospitality of this Gompa (Monastery). Now, Sahib, you must give him one scarf."

"But Aku," I whispered, "we haven't got any scarves; they are still in the luggage."

"Tsk-Tsk-Tsk," clucked the outraged Aku, "but you must give some money, sahib."

Bill dug into one of his pockets and produced a few rupees which he handed to the Abbot with a bow. The old man accepted the money with the usual audible sucking in of breath that denotes respect, but there was still a rather cold austerity in his manner. Obviously, he was not going to be satisfied until we had done the right thing and presented him with a ceremonial scarf. Suddenly, I had an idea. I had in my jacket pocket a huge and gaudy handkerchief that I had been using as a sort of caulking around my neck to keep the wind out. Getting down from my horse, and assuming all the signs of respect and reverence I was capable of, I whipped out this handkerchief, laid it across my arms, and advanced with



much dignity toward the Abbot. At once, his face was wreathed in smiles and the attitude of the whole group turned into one of real welcome. His face was saved, to say nothing of ours, and the gaudy handkerchief was to them just an American version of the Tibetan greeting scarf. The old man mumbled something else to Aku,

“He say he want American sahibs to have tea in Gompa,” Aku told us, beaming, himself, now that we had not disgraced the party. Bill and I conferred a minute. It was a great temptation, but we had so much to do that afternoon that we thought it unwise to delay so long.

“Aku, thank the Abbot very much for his kindness and his hospitality and tell him that we are in a great hurry and will not be able to stop now. However, we would be glad to stop and see him on our way back to India.”

Poor Aku was not the best of interpreters, and this was almost too much for him. He thought for a minute, as though trying to get that complicated message all straight in his mind, and then burst into a voluble flow of talk directed at the Abbot. The whole thing was having a good effect, we could tell, because, although we could not understand a word, the sibilant in-drawing of breath and the delighted glances that darted toward us and then back to Aku were obviously sighs of pleasure. When at first Aku finished, the whole group turned their attention toward us and sucked particularly loudly. Then they all backed away a few paces and, bowing up and down, watched us intently, while Aku told us that they were delighted and would await eagerly for our return. Then, it was our turn to be delighted, so we smiled broadly and waved to them as we started off and had Aku thank them again for their kindness. In spite of the rigid etiquette, we had come out alright, and one could not help but like those people for their simplicity and their honest wish to offer hospitality, once one had exchanged the proper token of respect.

We later learned that the old Abbot was an adept at certain yogic practices, especially [Tumo](#). Tumo is the ability to produce enormous quantities of body heat through some control of the mind. To strengthen his powers, the old Abbot goes out on a winter day and wraps himself in wet and frozen sheets. Then he proceeds to melt the ice and dry the sheets, one after another, by producing body heat. He is renowned in all the countryside for his powers, though no one was able to explain exactly what was gained.

As we twisted slowly along the trail down the mountain side, Gyaltsen began to sing another Mantra, or prayer, and the infectious beauty and brilliance of that morning started us singing, too. Ours was probably the first performance of “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” in Tibet, but one had to sing something. So, we went along singing and humming happily to ourselves. Pretty soon, Gyaltsen came up and began to chat with Aku. They would both pause occasionally and were obviously listening to our song. Before we realized what was going on, suddenly, Gyaltsen was humming happily the tune of “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes.” We both stared at him in amazement, for it would have been less surprising had he suddenly begun to recite Shakespeare.

Aku broke into our amazement: “Sahib, Gyaltsen like that Mantra. He want you teach him what it mean.”

Bill and I looked at each other with our jaws hanging.

“My god,” said Bill, “he thinks it’s a prayer. It makes you feel disgustingly profane when you think...”

I started to laugh.

“Shut up,” snapped Bill. “He thinks you’re laughing at him.”

I swallowed my mirth and turned towards Aku.

“Aku, tell Gyaltsen that it is a very difficult Mantra, and I do not think we could teach it to him. Besides, it is a mantra of the Jerome Kern sect, and a good follower of [Padmasambhava](#) would not want to sing it.”

“Burse,” said Aku, turning seriously to Gyaltsen.

Bill and I were silent for a time, both of us probably thinking about the same thing: how absolutely poles apart we were from these people, and yet not so far that we could not see many things in their way of life that were perhaps ahead of us, if one considered such things as real contentment and faith desirable. It had never occurred to Gyaltsen, when he had heard us singing, that we were not singing a prayer. Every form of art was to him merely a means toward an expression of faith. So it was in our own Christian world at one time, and for what gain had we left a way of life that obviously made these people happier than our own. Bill was looking about as glum as I felt. “What’s eating you?” I said.

“You know,” he replied “I’ve just thought of something. Have you asked yourself how that old Abbot knew we were coming and how he knew we were Americans? He was waiting at that gate when we came around the corner and he could not possibly have seen us coming; and even if he had, how did he know we were Americans?”

“Gee,” I said brightly. “Golly. He did. Didn’t he? That’s pretty creepy, isn’t it? He couldn’t have known, could he? Say, Aku,” I asked, turning toward him, “did that Abbot know we were Americans or did you tell him.”

“Oh yes, Sahib. He knowing. I not telling him. He knowing, Sahib.”

“But Aku,” put in Bill, “how could he know?”

“Who can say, sahib. He is very wise man. He maybe knowing many things,” and with that comforting answer, Aku busied himself with one of the pack mules whose load threatened to slip off over his head.

“Well,” I said turning back to Bill, “all I can say is that I hope he doesn’t know the original use of that ceremonial scarf.”

Before long, we came to the foot of the mountains and out into a narrow bordering of wheat fields along the river. It was the [Chumbi valley](#) and one of the few really fertile parts of the country. The climate in most of the remainder of Tibet is too severe for any of the grain crops save barley, which seems to be particularly hardy. This is grown in several of the fertile valleys, but even then, its growth is restricted, for much of it never has time to ripen, and has to be cut before the grains have matured. Only part of it can be used; the rest is only good for feeding animals. Strangely enough, though, there is a considerable quantity of wheat grown in the Chumbi valley, but hardly any of it is used by the Tibetans. They prefer to import rice from Sikkim and India and barter their wheat for it. There was room for only about three rows of narrow fields on each side of the rivers and very small fields, at that, for each little patch of grain, usually about seventy feet square, has to be surrounded by high stone walls as a protection against the wind. At the very edge of the river, we now came into the village of

[Rinchengong](#). [The people](#) we met along the road smiled broadly when we appeared and greeted us and stuck out their tongues, which is a sign of respect in Tibet. Only the lower classes indulge in this strange form of greeting; but when they are of very low class, they make it even worse by pressing their right ear forward with flat, opened hand. The result is appallingly ugly. I wondered how such a custom had ever originated. When we greeted them back, they laughed uproariously, no doubt because our accent was not all it should have been.

The village was most picturesque with its queer square houses of sun-dried brick, all the windows curtained on the outside. But, we discovered later that most of the houses in the Chumbi valley are far ahead of houses in many other parts of Tibet, for they have an ample supply of wood to help in the construction. There is, literally, not a stick of wood beyond this narrow fertile area. Now and then, one sees a tree that has been planted near a house and has managed to exist by careful watering and coaxing; but this is rare, and for the most part, once one has reached the plain, there is complete desolation.



**Figure 5: A Tibetan couple spinning hand-held prayer wheels.**

On leaving this village, we passed a prayer wall and Aku insisted on our

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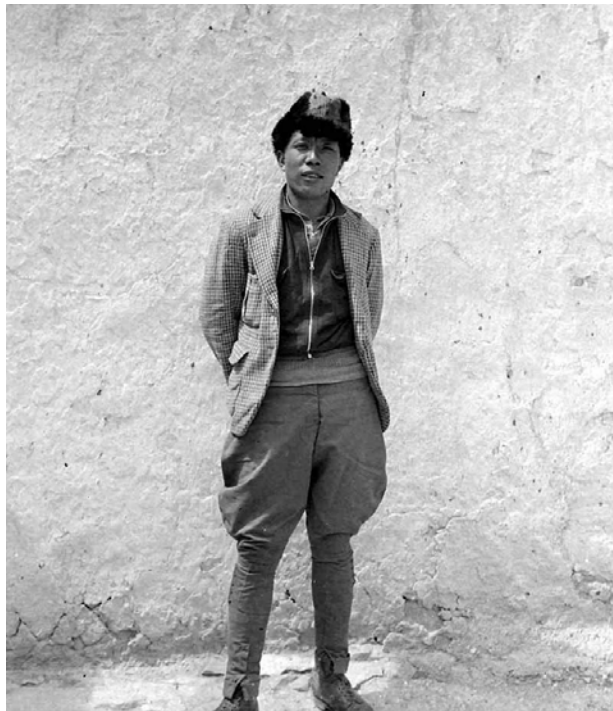
going to the right of it. It is a very common thing to build a prayer wall in Tibet, for one thereby attains great merit, and each person that passes does, likewise, by passing to the right of it. Sometimes there is a row of [prayer wheels](#) set into these walls, which, if you give them each a spin as you pass, will lay up a good store of merit for you in the great beyond. Usually, these prayer wheels contain a long strip of paper inside with Buddhist mantras, or prayers, on them, like the well known [Om Mani Padme Hum](#), or “Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus.” It is surprisingly like the Hail Mary of the Catholic Church, but of that more later. Nearly everyone has one of these little handheld prayer wheels. They are arranged with a weight on one side and set into a spike-bearing so that they can be spun while held in one hand. We saw people all along the road walking and, at the same time, spinning their prayer wheels and reciting or chanting mantras. They must be able to lay up a huge store of merit in a trip of two hundred miles or so. Some of the prayer wheels we saw were of exquisite workmanship: of silver with inlays of gold, representing the eight lucky symbols; or else, with the mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum* carved in beautiful characters around the sides. It is certainly a remarkably convenient way of praying, and if you have sufficient funds to hire enough monks to spin prayer wheels for you, your direst crime can be rendered as nothing. That, of course, is all very convenient for the monks.

Our way from the village of Rinchengong led up along the river. Beside the road, we came upon a group of men building a new Chorten. When they saw us, one old fellow, who looked a hundred and fifty years old, rushed out begging us to give him some money so that they might carry on their great work. We gave him a rupee or so, being as yet unacquainted with the usual scale of gifts in Tibet. The old man seemed completely overcome. He bowed almost to the ground, and backed away, muttering, “Salaam, sahibs, salaam,” and intoned a long string of Tibetan prayers for us. Quite unconsciously, he backed straight into the river up to his middle and stood there muttering his prayers until we were out of sight. On our return through this valley some two months later, we were gratified to see that we had apparently contributed magnificently. They had built one of the most pretentious and most magnificent chortens that we had seen along the whole way.

Early that afternoon, we came into the town of [Yatung](#). The first good-sized town we had seen in Tibet, Yatung is the center of the wool trade that exports the wool down to Kalimpong. As deficient as Tibetans are in capital and trade, they are not altogether blind to it. There exists a monopolistic control of the wool trade in the hands of a few men in Yatung. They demand a cut from all the traders who bring wool down to be sold, and in return, they find a buyer for it in Kalimpong. But woe to the man who tries to sell his wool directly in Kalimpong. As a result of this, [Yatung](#) is a fairly important town in Tibet, though not a very big one.

We had arranged to pick up an interpreter in Yatung because we had been informed of a really good one who lives there. Ugden Tondrup La was the son of a merchant of Yatung, and by reason of the fact that he had had the rare privilege, for a Tibetan, of going to a university in Calcutta, he suited our needs perfectly as an interpreter. He will be known as Ugden from now on, and that brings us to the reason why we had given up any idea of learning the [Tibetan language](#) for ourselves. In the first place, it is an extremely difficult one to learn.

The pronunciation of the words is such that it is well nigh impossible for a westerner, unless he is particularly gifted, to attain a comprehensible proficiency. Like the Chinese language, there is that exceedingly difficult question of inflection – a rising or falling inflection giving an entirely different meaning to the same word. Moreover, the words are not pronounced phonetically the way they are spelled. Frequently, the last or the first two or three letters of the spelling are ignored in the pronunciation; but this is not always so. Therefore, it is necessary to learn for each word not only its meaning visually, but also its meaning orally.



**Figure 6: Ugden Tondrup, our translator.**

Besides this, there are three different ways of saying everything. One way is used when addressing common people or equals. Another, called the Honorific, is used for higher classed people and nobles. And the third is used for addressing only the very highest class, such as the Tashi Lama and the Dalai Lama - this is called the High Honorific and does Chinese one better, which has only the first two ways. The job would have taken us years, so we gave it up entirely and decided to rely upon an interpreter.

Ugden was soon found in the village and came to see us. He spoke English very well, and, as you shall see, he proved invaluable to us. We decided to remain in Yatung for the rest of that day. It was necessary for us to see the government officials there just to make sure that we would be able to find room in the rest houses or bungalows along the way. It was all rather vague, but in the end,

they assured us that there was no one else on the road, so we would have plenty of room. It actually consoled us little, for we had heard tales of various people arriving at rest houses from time to time, only to find them filled to overflowing with the penetrating odoriferousness of members of a wool caravan.

## *Chapter Four*

### HISTORY

In recent years, the Tibetan Government has undergone some rather important changes that are due in part to the increasing power of England there, and with it, the greater knowledge of the west; and also to the final freeing of Tibet from the Chinese, who for centuries have been trying to gain complete control. Actually, the more recent developments in the governing of Tibet are the natural outcome of the evolution of the country. But when we know a little about the past of Tibet and see the direction in which it is moving, it becomes evident that Tibet is destined to take an important place in the world before many decades are passed. For that reason, and because the history of Tibet is fascinating in itself, a short outline here will, I think, help to build a frame into which we can later put the picture of Tibet as it is today.

From the very start, Tibetan history is interesting, and we find that there is nothing new under the sun. In ancient legends that have their origin far back in the dimness of time, the Darwinian theory was already in existence. According to these legends, the Tibetans believed themselves to be descended from a monkey. This monkey was an incarnation of the Compassionate Spirit, and when one day he met a she-devil he addressed her as follow: "Because of my actions in a former life, I have been reborn into a demon, and since I am under the control of the God of Lust, I love you greatly." After a great deal of discussion with his spiritual guides, this monkey, who was the Compassionate One incarnate, married the she-devil. They had six children, who were fed on sacred grain so that, by degrees, the hair on their bodies decreased, their tails diminished, and at last disappeared entirely. This legend, as it is written down in all the old Tibetan chronicles, is astonishingly parallel to Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, though it is perhaps stated with less scientific foundation. Nevertheless, such a theory could not be evolved without a good deal of keen observation and knowledge, something that one would not have expected to find in Tibet at such an early time. In the light of western science, the Tibetans are of the Mongolian race that have inhabited the Mongolian plateau from the very beginning of history. At a later date, there was considerable mixing with people from the south, probably from Assam, for today the Tibetans belong to the same linguistic group as the Burmese.

In the earliest times, the Tibetans lived an almost entirely nomadic life, moving from place to place with their herds as the seasons demanded. And, of course, at that time, there was no centralized government, only a great body of separate tribes. There is no very definite knowledge of these early times, for the Tibetans have a rather poor historical sense. Most of their early writings have to do with religious subjects that are composed of myths and legends: some perhaps true, and many undoubtedly false; but all of them vague enough to be of little help in gaining a true picture of the beginning of Tibet. Even today, the monks are

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forbidden to read histories, as these are considered unimportant and would lead to the neglect of religious work.

Very surprisingly, Herodotus, the father of History, refers to Tibet, though not actually by name. He states that in a country to the northeast of India lived a race of giant ants who passed their lives digging gold out of the hills. They were, he states, often attacked by strangers who coveted their gold, but they gave chase and usually killed the robbers. The basis of this story is probably quite sound, although Herodotus was not entirely right about their being ants. However, in western Tibet, there is some gold digging still going on, and, because of the severity of the climate, the miners work hunched up in their thick black blankets of yak hair, and they might easily be mistaken at a great distance for giant ants. In any case, during all these early centuries of Tibet, the people were hardly more than half wild nomads who were ruled by a succession of kings, of whom only the vaguest of legends remains. It was not until the seventh century that under [King Songtsen Gampo](#) Tibet was drawn together into a nation, and his reign really marks the beginning of Tibetan civilization. This first important king conquered Upper Burma and parts of China, and his power became so great that he forced the Emperor of China to give him a princess in marriage. He also had, as a wife, a princess from Nepal. Now, these two queens were Buddhists. But, although Buddhism had entered Tibet some centuries before this time, it had never obtained a hold, and the main religion continued to be [Bon religion](#), which was a mixture of animism and devil worship. Now, however, under the new king, whose two wives had converted him to Buddhism, the Buddhist religion began to spread and take hold throughout Tibet. Until this time, there was no written language in Tibet. But when some of the Buddhist scriptures were brought from India for Songtsen Gampo, he realized that there was no way of spreading his chosen religion unless there was a written language. Accordingly, a script was invented on the basis of the Indian alphabet then in use in Kashmir, and it is said that the King, himself, retired for four years in order to learn how to read and write.

Monasteries were set up in various parts of the country and their power began to grow. Besides introducing Buddhism, this first great king also established a code of laws:

“The high should be pressed down, and the poor should be governed according to a reasonable system. Establish measures; cultivate the land and teach the people to read and write. Establish good manners. Fine those who quarrel. Compensate for murder. Make thieves pay nine-fold the amount of the stolen property. Banish one who commits rape to another country and cut off one of his limbs. Cut out the tongue of a liar. Make the people to worship God, to respect and repay the kindness of their parents, the loving mother, the old father and the uncle. Return good for good. Do not fight with gentle people. Read the scriptures and understand them. Believe in karma; forsake everything that is irreligious. Help your neighbor. Drink in moderation. Be modest. Pay your debts promptly and do not use false measures. Do not listen to your friend's wife. If there be a ‘yea’ and a ‘nay,’ take the gods as witness.”

These laws were introduced with great revelry and joy, and it is said that the doctrine spread over the whole land as the sun and the moon over the earth. This religion that was accepted as the state religion was the form then prevalent in Nepal, and it was probably mixed with nature worship. However, the old Bon religion had too strong a hold to be ousted, all at once, and eventually this, too, became a part of Buddhism in Tibet.



Songtsen Gampo's Chinese queen introduced many foods from China, and while missionaries brought the new religion, there came, also, many of the native arts of India. The king built himself a palace on the hill where now stands the [Potala](#) of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa; and his own chapel, which is still there, is one of the most important shrines in Tibet. This first great king made for himself one of the most important places in Tibetan history.

More than a century after the reign of Songtsen Gampo, another great king ruled over Tibet, Trisong Detsen. Besides setting up sound codes of civil and criminal justice, this king had the Tantric Buddhist [Padmasambhava](#) come from Uddiyana in India to help in spreading Buddhism in his realm. At that time, there was considerable opposition to having Buddhist teachers enter Tibet from the south, for it was well known that the people of Nepal and India had great knowledge of the black arts. However, Padmasambhava was well acquainted with all the mysticism and ceremony and charms of the Tantric doctrines of Buddhism; and these fitted so well with the old Bon religion of Tibet that he was accepted and eventually was instrumental in giving Buddhism a firm hold in Tibet. The monastery of [Samye](#), which is some fifty miles from Lhasa and which he helped found, is still an important institution in Tibet. Padmasambhava is the patron saint of the [Red Hat sect](#) of Tibetan Buddhists, which he founded there. He is one of the most important of the Tibetan saints, for his statue is as often found on the altars as that of the Buddha, himself. Although the next king in line was not important, his rule is interesting as being one of the earliest attempts at democracy.

This king, [Mune Tsenpo](#), ordained that the wealth of the country should be shared equally among all persons. By legislation, this was actually accomplished; but, it was of short duration because, before many months had passed, those who were wise and intelligent and clever began, again, to amass more than their share of wealth until the country was right back where it had started. Twice again after this, the wealth was divided equally among the people. But each time, the wealth came back, again, to those who were better able to handle it; and the inequalities became more apparent each time because the poor had become lazy during their time of riches and so became poorer than ever. The country was getting into worse and worse shape, and finally, the unfortunate king was poisoned by his mother.

Towards the end of the ninth century, under King [Ralpachen](#), Buddhism, again, was given a great impetus. The priesthood was organized, and under this more stable form, it grew enormously. Many temples were built, and, by now, the old Bon religion had been so absorbed by Buddhism that, although many of its forms remained, it was merely a part of the Buddhist religion. Perhaps this King was a little too zealous for the cause of Buddhism, for it was he who set up the system of choosing lay families to contribute to the support of the monks. In any case, he was assassinated by his brother, [Langdarma](#), who had always been an outright enemy of Buddhism. When this brother came to the throne, he proceeded at once to abolish Buddhism in Tibet. The Buddhist Church was pretty strong even then; but it was no match for the outright enmity of the ruler of the country. So, for a long time, the monks went back to their homes, the monasteries were closed, and all religious ceremonies came to a standstill. However, underneath it

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all was a strong religious feeling among the people, and especially among the monks. And so, when he had reigned for only three years, Langdarma was murdered by one of these monks. This monk, an old legend tells us, smeared his horse with charcoal, and, putting on a long black cape lined with white, he rode into the capital to find the king. When he saw him standing in a park near the city, reading an inscription on one of the stone pillars that had been placed there to commemorate the reign of some of his predecessors, he approached the king and began a strange dance that he had devised just for the occasion. The king became interested in the spectacle and turned to watch it. When the monk had finished the dance, he came before the king, and while he bowed low before his sovereign, he drew from beneath his cape a bow and arrow and shot him. Then, turning quickly, he jumped upon his horse and plunged into the river that runs near the capital city. The charcoal was washed from the horse, and the monk turned his cape inside out, so that he now appeared to be clad in white, and made his escape.

As we look back now on the history of Tibet, it is evident that this early time was the period of Tibet's greatest power. The three mighty kings, Songtsen Gampo, Trisong Detsen and Ralpachen had made Tibet a power second to none in Asia. In fact, in the reign of Trisong Detsen, the borders of Tibet extended to the Arabian and Turkish Empires. Nepal and Turkestan were under her power, and she had even captured the capital of China at [Chang-an](#) in 763 A.D.

It is strange that the unifying power of the Buddhist religion, which was probably largely responsible for the growth of power of Tibet, eventually caused her decline. The Buddhist prohibition against the killing of any living creature gradually sapped the martial spirit of these warlike people. Moreover, it would seem strange, at first, that the Tibetan conquests at this time never touched India. But, when we realize that the Tibetans have a great fear of hot countries, we begin to see the reason for this. Accustomed as they are to the cold, vigorous climate of the Tibetan plateau, they are not constituted to withstand the hot, malarial and disease ridden lowlands of India, and they do, indeed, die like flies when they venture there. Nonetheless, Tibet was, at the death of Ralpachen, one of the mightiest powers of Asia. It is only as the result of the short-sighted policy of the murdered king, Langdarma, in checking Buddhism that Tibet, again, lost its power. After his death, there was no one with sufficient influence to hold the country together under a centralized rule. The whole land was broken up into many sections, each ruled over by a local chieftain, and there was constant warfare between these districts. It was like the medieval period in Europe, where communities lived in strongly fortified towns on the hilltops and tended their fields on the plain below. And often, it was the straight feudal system where the peasants turned in the entire product of their labors to the local lord, in return for protection from the other warring states.

However, during all this period, the priests were not idle, and they kept up their work of spreading the Buddhist doctrines among the people. Although there was no organized form to the Church, it had considerable power among the general mass of people who were always anxious to believe in mysticism, spirits and strange rites. Throughout this period, the Sakya monastery was one of the strongholds of Lamaism, and even at that time its fame must have been widespread. More important, however, for the history of Tibet, the great [Kublai](#)

[Khan](#) invited the [High Priest](#) of the [Sakya Monastery](#) to his court in A. D. 1244 and became converted to Lamaism. In recognition of this, he gave to the High Priest the sovereignty of all Tibet, and so began the rule of the Priest-Kings.

This rule of the Priest-Kings lasted unbroken for only about eighty years, but during this time, many teachers of the Tantric form of Buddhism came from India, and this form of the religion took firm hold throughout the country. The Sakya Monastery was, of course, the initial seat of power during this time. And since it had obtained its power from the Chinese Mongol Emperor, it was also largely dependent upon him, with the result that many Chinese and Mongolian forms were incorporated into the religion. In 1345, the power of the Sakya monastery was overthrown, and the second monarchy was set up under King Jangchub Gyaltsen.

Under him, the religion flourished. But he succeeded in discarding many of the Chinese and Mongolian forms that had crept in, and so it came back to the purer, original form of Tibetan Lamaism. This new dynasty, however, the Sitya Dynasty,<sup>1</sup> although it ruled for some three hundred years, was always more or less dependent upon China. The spread of the Buddhist faith had robbed the Tibetans of their martial strength.

Throughout Tibetan history, we find that religion plays a major part. At this point, a word on the conditions of religion in Tibet will help to make clear the subsequent developments that led again to the rule of the Priest-Kings that has lasted until the present day. The form of Buddhism that came into Tibet from the seventh to the ninth centuries was, of course, that which was then prevalent in India; namely, the Tantric or Doctrinal form. From the pure, original expression of Buddhism, this Tantric form was developed by the priesthood in India as they tried to gain power for themselves, and, of course, was no more than a debased representation of the original teachings – full of mysticism, the black arts and evil spirits that had been devised by the Indian priesthood simply to give them power over the people. When this religion came into Tibet, it was further mixed with the old Tibetan Bon religion that was largely based on nature worship and served to make Buddhism almost unrecognizable from its pure and early form. So we find in Tibet at that time that the Tibetan Lamaism of the Red Hat sect was an almost unrecognizable descendant of the early Buddhist teachings of India. There was a definite need for reform, and this reform came under the leadership of [Tsongkhapa](#). He founded a new seat, the [Yellow Hat sect](#) of the Lamas, into which he introduced all his reforms. These Lamas were forbidden to marry or to drink any kind of alcoholic beverage. Their lives were governed by a far stricter code of morals than that of the old Red Hat sect. Tsongkhapa founded the monastery of [Ganden](#). Disciples of Tsong-kha-pa founded [Sera](#) and [Drepung](#), both built later. The latter is the largest of all, having ten thousand monks or more, and these three are considered “The Pillars of the State.” Although Tsongkhapa was only the head of the new sect and could in no way yet be called the ruler of Tibet,

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<sup>1</sup> JC: In fact, Jangchub Gyaltsen ushered in what is today commonly called the Pakmo drupa period, which lasted for approximately one hundred years. It is unclear where Mr. Vanderhoef came across the reference to a “Sitya” dynasty, although one might conjecture that it had to do with the fact that Jangchub Gylatsen had the title “Tai Situ.”

he had started a movement which eventually became the power of the land. It overthrew the old government of the Red Hat sect and is still today the ruling power of Tibet.

The monastery of [Tashi Lhunpo](#), which was later to become the seat of the second most important Yellow Hat Lama, was founded by [Gendundrup](#), the pupil of Tsongkhapa. Moreover, it was at the death of Gendundrup in 1474 that the curious reincarnation method of succession evolved. The legend tells us that as Gendundrup was dying he told his disciples that he would be reborn immediately in a certain place. It was soon learned that a boy had been born in the particular place that the dying priest had specified. If that had been all that occurred, the disciples might not have given particular credence to the words of the dying man; but it so happened that, as soon as the child could speak, he expressed the desire to be taken to Tashi Lhunpo. There could be no further doubt that the child was, indeed, the reincarnated Lama, for Tashi Lhunpo was the very temple where Gendundrup had died. Accordingly, the child was brought to Tashi Lhunpo and brought up there and eventually installed as the successor to Gendundrup.

It was during the life of second successor to Gendundrup, [Sonam Gyatso](#) that the title of Dalai Lama was first given to the incarnated rulers of Tibet. This Sonam Gyatso spread the new religion of the Yellow Hat sect even into the Mongolian State; and in recognition of this, the Mongolian Chieftain, [Altan Khan](#), gave him the title Dalai Lama Vajradhara, meaning "The all embracing Lama, he who holds the thunderbolt."

Although the power of the Yellow Hat sect was growing, as yet its high Lama was not the ruler of Tibet, for the Red Hat sect still had the sympathies of the king. It was not until the fifth incarnation, [Ngawang Losang Gyatso](#) that the Yellow Hats finally obtained control. He persuaded one of the powerful Mongol tribes to help him, and in 1642, he finally overthrew the power of the Red Hat Lamas and assumed the sovereignty of all Tibet. It was Ngawang Losang Gyatso who began to build the great palace of the Potala in Lhasa, on the hill where there were only the ruins of the palace Songtsen Gampo, Tibet's first great king, who had built his palace there back in the seventh century. Now, the rule of the Priest-Kings was, at last, firmly set up, and Tsongkhapa's Yellow Hat sect became the power of the land. It is interesting to note that it was during the reign of this fifth Dalai Lama that the first Europeans entered Tibet. [Albert d'Orville](#), a Belgian, and [Johann Grueber](#), an Austrian Jesuit, traveled from Peking straight across Tibet, stopping at Lhasa for a time and then going on into India via Nepal. Grueber later described the Lama Losang Gyatso in none too complimentary terms when he called him "the devilish god-the-father who puts to death such as refuse to adore him." This was probably prompted by the fact that the Lama refused to be converted to Christianity or to have anything to do with it.

Now that the Dalai Lama was firmly established as the ruler of the country, an era of peace was ushered in. The many forts on the hilltops spread throughout the country fell into disuse, and under this orderly form of government, the whole country was drawn into a more civilized scheme of trade and civil justice. As yet, the Dalai Lama did not trouble himself with secular matters and the greater part of his time was spent in religious observances. The more earthly

considerations of governing were given over to the chief minister, [Sangye Gyatso](#), who was apparently a man of great ability.

Succeeding Lamas were chosen according to the theory of reincarnation, so that the people believed firmly, and still do, that they were being ruled by the same great soul always, one which was half divine. This belief on the part of the people, of course, gave immense power to the Dalai Lama, and it must be remembered that he was considered the head of the Buddhist Church not only by the Tibetans, but by the Chinese and the Mongolians, as well. The latter, by their great faith in the Dalai Lama, gave Tibet enormous power over China, for China was afraid of an alliance among the Mongolian peoples against them. In all that part of the world, the word of the Dalai Lama had enormous power, but this power was limited largely to religious matters except where Tibet was concerned. Nevertheless, it was a power for the Chinese to reckon with. The Chinese Manchu Emperor, [Kang-hsi](#), wished for the right to choose the Dalai Lama. But when he realized that the Mongolians would not recognize his choice, but only the one chosen by the Tibetans, themselves, according to the reincarnation theory, and would actually consider his choice an imposter, he did not dare to go through with the idea, fearing that it would rouse the Mongols. Instead, he decided to conquer Tibet. His army was defeated by the Tibetans and the Mongolians, and he at once chose another tactic, realizing the difficult position he was in. He accepted the Tibetan choice for the Dalai Lama and then sent a huge army into Tibet, saying that it was only for the purpose of enthroning the new Lama. The opposition was removed and of course the army moved into Lhasa. A garrison of two thousand was left in the city, and this, of course, lent considerable weight to the Chinese Emperor's word. These Chinese residents, who remained in Lhasa to take care of the interests of the Emperor of China, later murdered the regent of Tibet. The Tibetans, then, murdered the Chinese residents known as [Ambans](#), but the Emperor [Chien Lung](#) then sent an army and restored the Ambans with still more power. So, the Chinese influence over Tibet steadily increased throughout the years, and, indeed, it was not until the British entered Tibet and the Chinese became weakened at the fall of the Manchu Dynasty that Tibet was finally free of them.

This power of the Chinese in Tibet reached a climax in 1910. In February of that year, a Chinese army of mounted infantry arrived in Lhasa and, for no apparent reason, began to shoot and destroy property. The situation became so intolerable that the [Thirteenth Dalai Lama](#) was forced to flee with his six ministers and made his way as quickly as possible to British India. He was received cordially by the British Officials in Darjeeling and was even given a house at their expense. This fact may seem strange at first, but it must be remembered that England had for some time tried to strengthen her bonds with Tibet. There are some eight hundred and fifty miles of frontier between Tibet and India over some of the most difficult country in the world from the military point of view. Now England knew that Tibet had no desire for conquest toward India, but if China or even Russia gained control in Tibet (which was then a very likely possibility), they might one day find themselves with that frontier to defend. Accordingly, England had been trying to help Tibet shake off influences of China and Russia, but the Tibetans for some reason were most suspicious of the English.

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The Tibetans cannot be blamed for being suspicious of the British and for good reason. Some years previous the British Indian Intelligence Service had dispatched an Indian by the name of [Sarat Chandra Das](#) to Tibet for the secret purpose of making a survey of the country. The Indian went in disguise as a Tibetan and had done a good deal of work before he was detected. Eventually the rumor spread about that he was an Englishman and that he was making a study of the country for purposes of later military conquest. Moreover, the British had other agents in Tibet besides Sarat Chandra Das, though their purpose was not what the Tibetans supposed. The British merely wanted to know more about the country to which they had not been able to gain admission, and they had to resort to sending agents in disguise. It was a simple matter for these agents to bring complete records of their findings back to India, for disguised as they were, they of course carried prayer wheels. At the border, they merely twirled these and mumbled prayers to themselves, and no one suspected that, instead of prayers, inside the drum of their prayer wheel were long strips of paper bearing the required notes. In any case, the suspicion arose that the British had agents in Tibet and that they were contemplating a military conquest of the country. Therefore, the Dalai Lama at that time did everything in his power to keep all British influence out. It was only in the years immediately before the flight of the Dalai Lama that the British gained any degree of friendly relations with the Tibetans. How much they gained became apparent when the Dalai Lama chose to put himself and his ministers in their hands at the time of his flight, and the British, seeing their chance to cement relations, offered every courtesy and aid to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. For this wise action, the English gained more good will and respect from the Tibetan people than any other situation could have brought about. The idea that the British would treat the Tibetan ruler and semi-divine religious leader with such respect when he was in their power touched the Tibetans deeply, accustomed as they were to the cruder methods of the Chinese.

No sooner had the Dalai Lama reached Darjeeling than he sent requests to the British Government in India, and even to the King Emperor, to take action against the Chinese; but all of these requests were refused. At that time, it was the British policy to keep the Chinese out of Nepal and Bhutan; or, in other words, they wanted to keep them on the other side of the Himalayas. This policy did not include keeping Tibet free from Chinese aggression. During the year and a half that the Dalai Lama remained an exile in Darjeeling, the Chinese were strengthening their power in Tibet. The Dalai Lama, in his exasperation over the refusal of the British to help, began to dicker with Russia, thus making it difficult for the British to show even a friendly attitude toward the Government of Tibet. But through it all, there was no open breach. Many factions, even in such monasteries as huge as Drepung, where there are some ten thousand monks, were openly in favor of the Chinese, as were many of the high officials; but this probably was due to the fact that their homes and families were in eastern Tibet, near the Chinese border, and they were unwilling to jeopardize them by remaining loyal to the Dalai Lama. However, among the people, in general, there was an unshakable faith in their ruler. In refusing to order an organized attack against the Chinese, which he believed was opposed to the Buddhist aversion to taking lives, he gained added respect among the people; and, in the end, when he finally did

order resistance, he was openly criticized for it. However, his power was still greater than the armies of China, and by early 1912, the Chinese had been so weakened in Central Tibet that the Dalai Lama was able that summer to return to his capital. On his arrival, there was a showdown with the Chinese, and, in the end, their armies were defeated and sent out of the country. The great monastery of Tengye Ling, which had most strongly opposed the cause of the Dalai Lama, was closed and its land and possessions confiscated by the Government. So, the Dalai Lama strengthened his power, and by the end of that year, Chinese influence remained only in the extreme eastern portion of the country.

It is perhaps difficult to understand how this man, the Dalai Lama, could wield so much power without seeming to have actual military might behind him. To the Tibetans, however, he is more than just an ordinary ruler; and, indeed, his position is quite unique. Considered as he is the Vice-Regent of Buddha and the recognized temporal ruler of divine origin, his actions are beyond dispute among the mass of the people who believe this implicitly. Moreover, in this particular case, he was a sincere and deeply religious man of great ability. This last Dalai Lama was the thirteenth reincarnation of the student of Tsongkhapa, who founded the reformed, or Yellow Hat, sect of Buddhism. There was a prophecy made by a wise hermit many years ago that there would be no more Dalai Lamas after the death of the thirteenth. This thirteenth Dalai Lama died in 1932, and an unprecedented time has elapsed without there being any sign of a successor. (When I wrote the above sentence, there had been no new Lama found. But already, before I had finished this book, I had to amend the history of Tibet, for since then, word has come that the [fourteenth reincarnation](#) has been found in a remote village of the Kokonor district. As usual, the great soul has reincarnated into a child of humble birth, and even now he is being brought to Lhasa to pass the final tests which will determine whether or not he is to become the ruler of Tibet, and so carry on the long line of Priest-Kings. Many people have thought that the prophecy would be fulfilled and that there would be no more Dalai Lamas, but I have never found it easy to believe that the Tibetan people are willing to drop belief in their semi-divine ruler. In fact, even before we left Tibet an edict was issued from Lhasa stating that there was to be no further hunting, fishing, shooting or killing of any kind throughout the country until the new Lama was discovered. That is usually a sign that the Regent and the Kashag, or cabinet, believe that the infant is about to be found, and so there must be no killing so that the vibrations throughout the county will be peaceful and, according to the Buddhist faith, auspicious for the correct choice of the coming ruler. So it is reasonably certain now that the rule of the Priest-Kings will continue yet awhile.

In any case, there is more democratic and a more representative form of government taking shape under the Regent, and this, if it can survive the absence of a Dalai Lama, may yet be progressive enough to make Tibet a growing power in Asia.).

## *Chapter Five*

### ACROSS THE PLATEAU

[Yatung](#) is an extremely picturesque little town nestled in the very bottom of the narrow Chumbi valley, with the steep Mountains rising abruptly on either side. A rushing river runs right through the center of the town, with the most incredibly swift current I have ever seen. It is called the [Woma](#), or Milk, river because of the whiteness of the rushing water. There was one bridge across, connecting the two sides of the town, and on crossing it, we had a good chance to see the river. The valley being quite steep, the water flows with unbelievable force, and even the huge boulders at its sides were not firmly enough rooted to stand against the weight of the water. We noticed on the return trip, when there had been a great deal of rain, that the river did actually dislodge huge boulders weighing many tons. Now and then, we could hear a thunderous noise as a great stone loosened and rolled down the stream bed until it became lodged, again, for a time. Most of the houses in Yatung are of wood, and although they have an unmistakably Tibetan style of their own, still, they did remind us of the houses of a Swiss village; for, in general outline, they were very much the same, and the roofs were held down with rows of stones in the true Swiss fashion.

The next morning, we had endless delays in getting off. It is the custom in Tibet to hire new transport animals for the baggage after each day's march. In our case, since we were doing double stages, it meant changing pack animals on starting in the morning and again at the midway point where we usually stopped for lunch. You are permitted to take your own mount right through, but you are obliged to change the transport animals so as to give business to each village along the way. It is one of the few means the people have of making a living. However, that morning at Yatung, we began to see that it had definite disadvantages for the traveler, for when the local muleteer arrived with his animals, he refused to load them, saying that some of our boxes were too heavy. Before leaving Kalimpong, we had carefully apportioned the contents of each box so that they would be of equal weight, and none would be over the prescribed two maunds, or one hundred and sixty pounds. Actually, most of them were well under that weight; but the two boxes of food supplies were just about up to the figure. We had planned it so that these two boxes would go on one mule, so that they would be balanced, and it was not, in reality, an unusually heavy load. We had divided up our baggage among more animals than we actually needed, for the purpose of making better speed. However, this particular muleteer must have got out of the wrong side of bed, for he flatly refused to have anything to do with us; and pulling up his tethering stakes, he rushed down the hill with all his mules over the bridge, where he disappeared into the town. Inasmuch as he had arrived, in the first place, a full half hour late, it was more than aggravating to see him disappear



again. Aku thought that it was not the weight of the boxes that had displeased him, but the fact that we were going the long stage of twenty-six miles to [Phari](#), which was mostly up hill. There should have been a night spent at [Gautsa](#), half way up the valley, and it seemed that our muleteer had a brother living there and had planned to have a good feast with him on the way. Well, there was no point in wasting time, so we went, at once, to see the officials, and miraculously, before long, the muleteer, a very chastened man, came back up the hill in the company of the head transport agent of Yatung, who was berating him within an inch of his life.



**Figure 7: Crossing a river near a waterfall.**

It was after nine o'clock when we finally got off. Nearly all day, we continued up along the Chumbi valley, following the thundering milk river. At only one place was the trail level, at all. Not far beyond Yatung, we came out on the [Lingma plain](#), a small area of flat, marshy land, speckled here and there with yaks or the tents of herders, and completely enclosed by the sharp flanks of mountains. On one of these was the [Dungkar Monastery](#), veiled in clouds and remote. We stopped briefly at Gautsa for a bite of lunch and ate it at the foot of a huge waterfall cascading down from the high rocky mountain-side above us. In

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the afternoon, there was a long, steep climb up the valley over the most abominable piece of trail I have ever seen. The trail was made to withstand the raging river, but was not designed for swift travel. It consisted of huge, rounded boulders set into a bed of soft, oozing mud, so that the horses had to pick each step and place their hooves with infinite care either exactly on or exactly between the rocks. It was a tedious process. Along the road, we saw, when we had time to look, hundreds of the loveliest mountain flowers. The most beautiful of all was a true miniature iris. These little plants stood only about four inches high and the deep purple blossoms were about the size of your thumb nail. In every respect save size, they were exactly like the iris we know.

Late in the afternoon, we reached the head of the valley, and with astonishing abruptness, the whole appearance of the country changed. In place of the narrow valley with its steep tree and bush clad hills, there were now low, smooth rolling hills, utterly barren save for a green covering or short grass. The valleys were broad and flat. And far in the distance, we were treated momentarily to a glimpse of the snowy cone of [Chomolhari](#), that one outcast of the Himalayas which, because of its isolation, is the more magnificent as it rises stark alone out of the flat plains. The clouds drew across it again, however, so we had just a glimpse; but that was enough to tell us that we would be very late getting in that night, for Phari is at the base of that mountain which had seemed so far away.

Our horses were exhausted by the time we reached this smoother ground, so we got down for a time and walked. It seemed most tediously slow progress that we were making, for there was nothing by which we could judge the size of the hills through which we were going; not a tree nor any other thing gave a clue to distances, and we seemed to be hours crossing what we had taken to be fields, but which turned out to be wide plains. In some places, the ground was full of holes made by prairie mice. These were very tame little creatures, and they would stand up on their haunches until we were almost upon them, then scamper into their holes. They were tailless and looked more like guinea pigs than mice. On an on we went, and it was wearisome after the long day to be progressing hardly at all. After what must have been at least an hour we seemed to be in the same place. Objects ahead of us did not appear to be a bit closer; in fact, they seemed constantly to draw away as we went toward them. Another few hours and darkness overtook us. Before long we could not see the ground, at all, and stumbled over the stones. So, we got back on our horses, for they seemed better than we were at seeing in the dark. At the setting of the sun, it had become bitterly cold, and a piercing wind swept down across the hills, so that, occasionally, we would have to dismount and run in circles to keep the blood going. So we progressed, without seeming to get anywhere, for mile after mile. Fortunately, it had not been pitch dark very long before the moon rose above the mountains, and we were able to make better time. Finally, in the distance, we made out the mass of the [Phari Dzong](#), or fort, against the sky. There were no lights in the town. It seems strange at first to see towns at night without a light burning anywhere; but one soon gets used to it in Tibet, for the Tibetans usually go to bed when it gets dark; and, moreover, they have no means of lighting – save butter lamps, which give the poorest of light and are chiefly used as votive lamps in the temples.

It was ten o'clock before we got into the bungalow at Phari, and after the

long day of fourteen hours, we were ready for bed after the sketchiest of suppers.



**Figure 8: The Town of Phari, as we were approaching it.**

We planned to be off early the following morning, for from now on, our way led across flat plains, and traveling was most comfortable in the early morning and until about noon. Usually around mid-day, the wind grows in velocity until it becomes almost a cyclone. Journeying is next to impossible under such conditions. The same thing happens every day. The wind across the great plateau of Tibet is almost incessant, though it attains its height in mid-afternoon. So, before five that morning, we were up and dressed while it was still dark. As we were eating a hasty breakfast, a great din arose outside in the courtyard. There were two red robed [monks](#), each with a double drum and begging bowl, chanting some prayer that sounded more like a tobacco auctioneer than anything else I can think of. These [drums](#) that the Tibetan monks use are quite strange, and they are used, also, in some of their ceremonial dances. The tops of two human skulls are fastened together so as to form a sort of two-sided cup, and over each cup is stretched human skin. A little padded weight is fastened where the two skulls are joined, and by a [twisting motion](#) this weight can be made to fly back and forth, striking the drum faces. Apparently there is a different resonance produced by two skulls, for one is male and the other female, and a very peculiar sound is produced. These two monks chanted without stopping until we were ready to go. We gave them a coin or two, but even that did not serve to interrupt the even flow of their chant, and they were still at it as we rode away. Phari, unlike most Tibetan towns, is built right in the middle of the plains. Usually, a site is chosen where the Dzong,

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or fort, which is a part of all important Tibetan towns, can be placed on a high rock or hill, with the town itself nestled about the bottom. Here, however, there had been no such place available, so the Dzong was built up artificially, very much in the style of our skyscrapers, and rose out of the middle of the plain in symmetrical setbacks, surmounted by a short, square tower. Though it is not actually tall or large, it gives a very striking impression. The square, symmetrical lines of most big Tibetan buildings lends them a very imposing air.

Phari, however, has the unpleasant reputation of being the filthiest town in the world, and on our return, when we had more time to inspect it, we found that its reputation is well founded. Because of its climate, everything is frozen up for at least nine months out of the year. As a result, there is nothing in the way of drainage. Every bit of refuse is merely thrown out of a window into the street, where it remains until spring, when it sinks into the mud and joins the refuse of previous years. Needless to say, over the years, the level of [the streets](#) is raised, so that often only the tops of the doors and windows of the houses are visible along the street, the rest being buried in the ever mounting pile of filth. Eventually, the whole first floor is rendered useless by this gradual building up of the ground level. Far from putting an end to the practice of throwing everything into the street, the Tibetans get around the difficulty by just building another story on top of the house and converting what had been the second floor into the street floor. So, over the years, Phari has literally built itself up on its own filth. It was not so bad on this first visit of ours, for the streets were still frozen hard; but on our return in July, our horses were almost up to their knees in slime as we passed through the streets, and we were forced to hold our breath until we got once more into the open.

As we went off across the plain that morning, however, Phari looked very interesting and attractive in the first rays of the morning sun. Inside their own country, the Tibetans are great travelers, and we met many of them crossing the plain in the direction of Phari. Most of them were walking. The husband led a mule or donkey on which was tied all his worldly possessions, while his wife carried the youngest infant on her back. The rest of the family, some of them tiny children, walked along at a great rate and were often even forced to run to keep up with their father, who seemed to give no thought to them. They all seemed happy and gay, though, and were usually dressed in their best and brightest clothes, for they were probably going to visit relatives in another town. Both men and women in Tibet wear a long garment called a [chuba](#), which is like a long, loose coat reaching nearly to the ground and usually made of native wool. This coat is tied by a belt around the waist, and in the fullness above the belt, the men usually carry all their possessions, so that they bulge like a sack full of hardware. The [women's coats](#) are often sleeveless, for they wear underneath, if they are sufficiently well off, a shirt of some bright colored silk. Most of the women also wear, at all times, the characteristic [headdress](#), of their province. In this case, they were [arcs of wood](#) about two feet across, which went high up over the head. Another carved piece of wood bound in bright red felt runs across the bottom of this arc and rests on the head. The whole thing is held on by the woman's hair, which is parted in the middle and drawn out all along the arc in braids. At the edge of the arc, these braids are joined together and fall into one long, thick braid,

from the ends of the arc beyond the shoulders. These headdresses are excruciatingly uncomfortable to wear, for the hair has to be pulled at considerable tension where it is bound on the arc to keep the whole thing on and upright. As a result, Tibetan women are afflicted with almost constant headaches, though their vanity seems to be a much stronger force, for they are rarely seen without these headdresses; and we frequently saw women plowing in the fields with them on.



**Figure 9: Women with traditional headdress.**

If the woman is wealthy, all the wooden parts of this headdress are studded with great lumps of deep red coral and turquoise, and the opening is strung with bands of seed pearls; all of which must add to the agony, for the added weight is considerable. Married women wear, in addition, a woolen [apron](#) woven in stripes of most vivid colors imaginable, so that altogether they are very colorful. Both the men and women wear [boots](#) of felt or thickly woven wool, the top part of which ties around the legs. The sole is usually made of heavy wool woven in a special way, so that it is very thick and shaped to the foot. Sometimes,

they are made of yak hide. I would infinitely rather walk bare-footed than wear Tibetan boots, for the toe is usually turned up at a terrible angle and altogether they are very ill-fitting. We noticed, however, that the Tibetans appear to get along well in them, for they have developed a sort of rocking gait. Instead of using their toes or articulating their feet, at all, they merely rock over them from the rounded sole of the shoe up onto the turned up toe.

Towards the end of the morning, we reached the extremity of the plain that, when we had started, seemed but a little distance away. There, we began to climb up a gradual slope between the hills towards the [Tang-La](#), well over sixteen thousand feet above sea level. We met many [caravans of yaks](#) coming down out of the hills, with bales of wool on their backs. They are the most peculiar animals. For all their great size, it was fascinating to watch how nimble and sure-footed they are. Their hooves are like those of the mountain goat, and the yaks are just about as agile on rocky and precipitous slopes. Altogether, they reminded us very much of the American buffalo, though the long hair from their flanks, that often trails on the ground, gives them an even more massive look. Their peculiar tongues have tough, sharp barbs on them, so that the yaks can pull up the tough stunted grass of the barren plateau and mountains.

As we crossed the pass, it began to rain, and we were afraid we were in for another wetting. But, as we started down onto the wide plateau, the wind began to increase, and before it, the clouds were driven away. Then, for the first time, we saw the vast mountain of [Chomolhari](#) rising straight up just beside us. We had been skirting its very base all morning, and yet had no idea that it was so close. Now, as the clouds parted, we saw its towering snowy peak of twenty-five thousand feet blazing in the sunlight far above us. It seemed incredible to think that right where we were on the pass, we were higher than the highest peak in Europe; and yet we were looking up at what seemed like the most magnificent of mountains. Even when we got right down on the [Lingma Tang](#) plain below us, we would be higher than the peak of the Matterhorn. Below us stretched what looked like an interminable plain – flat, lifeless and utterly barren. There was no horizon in that desolate waste save where the sky met the arc of the earth. Soon after we got down on the plain, we came to a little adobe hut, surrounded by a wall of yak dung, and, since the wind was already strong, we decided to take a little rest in the protection of one of the walls and have our lunch there. It was far nicer outside than in the smoke blackened hut. Its ceiling was hung with drying carcasses, while outside we could look straight above us at the dazzling snows of Chomolhari as we ate. A mail runner went by as we sat there, and I wondered how any human could have the endurance to run across that plain. He went along at a steady jog trot, mile after mile, which is something of a feat when you remember that the entire plain is above 14,700 feet. It was probably no more for him, though, than if he had been at sea level, for he had lived all his life in Tibet and was thoroughly acclimated. However, the Tibetans often show the most astonishing endurance.

By the time we had finished our lunch, the wind was blowing a gale; so we got off at once, wishing to put as many miles behind us as possible before it got any worse. That was a hard afternoon. With each minute, the wind grew furious. It was not like most winds, gusty and buffeting from all sides, but it swept

along without a pause in one direction, pelting us with dust raised by the feet of our animals until our faces felt raw, which indeed they were, as we found when we got in that night. But we did discover a curious thing about that wind. We had put on our raincoats which served as additional windbreak. In my case, this was the rubber poncho that I had made from one of our rubber sheets, and, in the gale, I found it difficult to control the ends. One of these suddenly broke loose and began to flap against my horse's side. He bolted, and in the confusion of trying to control the raincoat and pull in the horse, my hat blew off. I expected to see it disappear over the horizon in no time before that fierce wind; but to my surprise, it shot away twenty yards or so until it had reached about a foot above the earth, when it suddenly stopped and fell gently onto the bare ground. The wind was still blowing just as hard as before, but there it sat as calm as you please, while one of our muleteers took his time about going to catch it before it blew away again. However, he knew what he was doing far better than I, for when he gave it back to me he said, smiling broadly, "Thing not blow away if on ground." I thought he was being funny, but then I suddenly realized what he meant. The whole plain was loose with grit, and here and there a tiny clump of stubble grass; yet, there was no dust in the air save that kicked up by the animals. Even the occasional blade of grass I saw hardly blew at all in the wind, and for about a foot and a half to two feet above the ground, there was no wind. It seemed to sweep along just above the earth, leaving a perfect calm below. You could have laid down there and been totally unaware that a gale was raging just above you. It was a great discovery, for after that, we stayed to windward of the animals and so escaped the pelting of the dust that they were throwing up into the windy air.

All afternoon the wind grew in violence and made us miserable. For, although we had found how to avoid being pelted with sand, it was still impossible to get out of that cold, biting wind which blew with relentless fury. There was nothing as far as the eye could see to break the sweep of it, and so on it came, drumming in ones ear, whistling down one's collar, until one was in a state bordering on insensibility. Around four o'clock, we saw in the distance the first thing that had broken the horizon for many hours. It was the little village of [Tuna](#), where we should spend the night, nestling as though for protection at the foot of a low hill which was no more than a slight rise of the ground. It was a welcome sight, however, and we hastened our pace with the enticing idea of shelter before us. Tuna is a very small village, we soon discovered. There are just a [few houses](#) and the omnipresent rows of walls built of yak dung, which is the only obtainable fuel. Just on the other side of this village, we came to the [rest house](#), which providence and actual necessity had planned with an enclosed courtyard in the middle. I will never forget how utterly quiet it seemed when we got inside that enclosure, and the wind was no longer roaring in our ears. For a time, we seemed to have gone partially deaf, for even our own voices sounded dim and far away, and all other sounds had sunk into a dead stillness. But what a welcome relief it was. When we finally got inside the bungalow, we looked at ourselves in a mirror, and already we looked like ancient Tibetans. The skin of our faces was a dull red of a purplish hue; the skin was drawn and wrinkled, and our noses were almost denuded of any skin at all. We had not realized that the wind was having such an effect, and as we later discovered, the sun at that altitude burns entirely differently

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from the way it does at the seashore. It is an extremely deep burn, almost like that from X-rays, and very painful until the skin becomes toughened.

Our contentment in the shelter of the bungalow was short lived, for no sooner were all our things unpacked than it was discovered that by some oversight our indispensable sleeping bags had been left behind at Phari. Aku told us this news looking as though we would immediately hang him, and in fact we felt very much like doing that very thing, for it was Aku's job as head of the bundobust to see that everything was packed correctly on leaving, and that nothing was left behind. High altitudes do peculiar things to ones temper and ones emotional stability, and often the slightest and most trivial thing sends one into a towering rage. Such a thing as the thought of sleeping without our sleeping bags was no trivial thing at that moment, when you consider that we were some 14,700 feet above sea level. Tuna, in fact, is the highest town in the world, and what is more, it is situated just where it gets the full brunt of the winds that sweep icy-cold off the mountains. We had even anticipated, and been told, that it would be the coldest night on our entire trip, and there we were without our sleeping bags. It was far from a pleasant prospect. We really lit into poor Aku and then took the quite unreasonable attitude of, "Well, you have forgotten them, now you just think up some way of getting them back." Aku suggested that we go back to Phari as we might be able to get there before too late in the night. But, of course, that was out of the question inasmuch as we already had done two stages that day; and moreover, I should rather have faced the prospect of certain death by freezing than going out on that plain with cold night coming on. Finally, we issued the ultimatum to Aku that he was to have the sleeping bags at Tuna by the next morning before we left, or else. Aku went off mumbling, and we were left to get over our rage. It is funny when I look back over it how really excited we got over many unimportant things which at lower levels would have meant nothing at all. But up there, one's every reaction is different. In this particular case, I really think we had occasion to be furious, especially when later we saw Aku and all the men unrolling their voluminous sleeping bags and crawling into the delicious warmth.

Our supper that night was another low point in existence. At the altitude of nearly fifteen thousand feet, water boils at such a low temperature that it is quite possible to put your hand into a furiously boiling kettle without its feeling unbearable. As a result, all the food we ate that night could have been boiled until doomsday without ever becoming more cooked than it actually was. The rice was like hard little nuts, the vegetables that had come out of a can were all right, though stony cold by the time they got to us, but the tea had to be boiled for some time before the water began to be tinted with the infusion, and its taste was in no way improved by the long boiling. But, as I say, the altitude does things to one's patience, and all these inconsequential things served to send us both into a towering rage. We sat at the supper table like two dark clouds, saying not a word, and just brooding furiously. The sight of all the men getting into their nice warm beds did not help our frame of mind at all.

Before Aku got into his, he came in, looking very warm, and announced that he had found a man in the village who had been persuaded to go right back to Phari, get the sleeping bags, and return with them as soon as he could. He had even arranged that the man should have a fresh horse on leaving and another at



Phari for the return trip. Aku thought that he ought to be back by four or five in the mornings, for the horse would not be heavily loaded, and the man would not have to adapt his pace to the slowness of a bundobust as we had done. Meanwhile, we had to try to exist. Windows are almost unknown in Tibet. By that I mean windows as we know them, with glass in them. However, as a special gesture to the comfort of the British Trade Agent, glass had been installed in most of the rest houses, though it is of dubious advantage. Owing to the fact that the Tibetans do not have glass windows, they are not very adept at making them. The result was that, at Tuna, we found that, besides the loosely fitting frames, there had been no putty used in placing the glass, and the wind whistled through almost as badly as if there had been no glass at all. The Tibetans never have an abundance of windows, and those that they do have are merely square holes in the sides of their houses. Over these in the winter time, they hang heavy woolen or felt blankets of a coarse texture that serve, to some extent, to break the force of the wind and keep out some of the cold airs. As a hang-over from this custom, we found that the rest house, in spite of its windows, had these heavy felt curtains. We put on every stitch of clothes that we possessed and laid down, shivering with the cold. Eventually, we decided that the curtains would at least keep us warmer, if they did not keep the house warm; so, we pulled them down, each taking two, and wrapped ourselves in them, despite the greasy, buttery smell that came from them. In spite of all our efforts, however, we never managed to get warm, and it was the most miserable night that I can remember. Before going to bed, we had brought in a large supply of yak dung for the fire, but soon discovered that it is not the ideal fuel. Once you get it going, it burns hotly for a very short time; but, very quickly, all the fuel in it is consumed, and a vast quantity of ash is left. We had thought to keep it burning all night. But after having gotten up several times to dig out the ashes and put on more fuel, we hardly began to feel warm before it was necessary to get up again and repeat the process. So, we gave it up as a bad job and simply stayed in the blankets. This was no pleasure, either, for besides the none too flowery smell, the texture of yak wool is coarse and scratchy, and, against our denuded and tender faces, it was like red hot sand. Moreover, the blankets did not keep us warm. The hours passed with agonizing slowness; certainly, I never spent such a long night. The crowning insult was that when morning finally came and we called in Aku, he informed us, smiling broadly, that the man had returned about five o'clock with the sleeping bags. The poor devil was nearly dead from exhaustion and cold, and had had to be revived with Arak, the strong, fermented barley drink of the Tibetans, after which he lapsed into a dead drunk. When we realized that the sleeping bags had been there two hours while we shivered in our yak blankets, it was just too much. Aku explained that he had not wanted to wake us so early. By then it was too late to explain that we had not slept a wink the entire night, so we dropped the whole thing. But it was hard to reconcile ourselves to the loss of the two hours we might have had in the sleeping bags, when we might at least have warmed up before starting out on the next day's march.

When we looked outside, however, all the troubles of the night before were soon forgotten. Spread below was the Lingma-Tang, or the plain of the Weeping Elephant. The sun was just rising, and in its bright orange light the dazzling peak of [Chomolhari](#) stood out bold against the early pale blue sky. The

plain for the most part was still in shadow, but across it, where the passes in the distant mountains allowed the sun to break through, were wide bands of red on the darkness of the plain. Behind the peaks, a few full white clouds moved slowly across the scene, lighted to a rosy pink by the sun; while every ice field and glacier on the mountain seemed to blaze with a light from within. It was a magnificent climax to a hideous night and a promising prelude to the coming day.



**Figure 10: Chomolhari, as viewed from the Lingma-Tang Plain.**

Bill, with infinite fortitude, braved the cold outside and succeeded in getting some fine color movies of that spectacle. They are wonderful to look at now, but when I realize the sheer force of will that went into the making of them, I wonder how he ever brought himself to do it. I, for one, would not have been tempted outside to take a picture if it had the moon suddenly landing on that plain.

After a little breakfast and some tea we felt far better and soon were ready for the road again. This time, we were taking the best care of our faces. Before I had seen Tibet, I used to laugh under my breath at things people resorted to in protecting themselves from the elements. "Sissies," I had thought; but I soon learned better. The Tibetans, themselves, who should be hardened to the climate if anyone could be, put on leather masks covering their entire faces, leaving only a

hole for the end of the nose and two holes for the eyes, over which they wear goggles. In the windy parts of Tibet, they wear them the year round, when they are required to be outdoors for any length of time; and in the winter, they are necessary in almost every part of the country. The Tibetan climate is so dry that even in winter there is no snow or rain. Only intense cold prevails and an absolutely relentless wind. It is like a perpetual dust storm, for the wind everywhere does not keep just above the ground, as we had found the day before. It is impossible to venture outdoors then without a mask to protect the face, goggles to protect the eyes, and a cloth tied over the mouth to filter out some of the dust. So that morning, we looked like monsters in all our protective equipment. Cold cream was smeared on our faces and hands. We had big handkerchiefs tied up over our faces to just below the eyes and tucked into our collars below. Huge Everest goggles protected our eyes, and our hats were pulled down as far as possible.

It was hard at first to get used to breathing through the cloth, for at that altitude we needed all the air we could get into our lungs. Even the little added difficulty of breathing through the cloth was most annoying. The morning was fairly pleasant, for there was far less wind. We were skirting the plain and going along the edge of the hills which bordered it. These grew steadily bigger and steeper as we progressed and served to some extent to break the sweep of the wind.

Towards noon we saw off on the plain what we thought at first was the mirage of a lake. Then we looked on the map and found that it really was a lake, and a big one at that, called [Lake Dochen](#). It was quite strange how unreal it looked, for it seemed to be quivering across the flatness of the plain. The quivering was, of course, caused by waves of hot air rising from the sun-baked ground, and I suddenly realized the amazing changes in temperature one undergoes within a short space of time in Tibet. After that, we took note of it, and though it was summer and supposedly the most temperate time of year, we found that many times the thermometer showed drops of sixty degrees between noon and evening. As soon as the sun sinks, it becomes bitterly cold, and this can hold true even in the middle of the day if you get into a shadow out of the direct rays of the sun. Because of the clarity and rarity of the air, there is little or no irradiation. That is, the air is never warm itself, and what heat one does feel is the result of its radiating or reflecting from the ground, or the rocks, or directly from the sun, itself. I remember particularly going through the Red Idol Gorge. One minute we were in the sunlit valley and it was insufferably hot, and the next we had stepped into the shadow of the narrow gorge and it was bitterly cold. There was no warmth being radiated to us from the ground or the rocks and we were out of the direct sunlight. Since the air was too thin to hold any heat, it was intensely cold in that shadow, though, only a few feet away, where the sun was shining, we would be roasting hot. We often noticed that if we stood facing the sun when it was not directly above, our backs fell in shadow. Although our faces were burning in the sun, our backs soon felt cold. Often as we rode along, the right foot would be in shadow of the horse and would soon ache from the cold, while the left boot was so hot one could hardly hold a hand to it. Because of the clarity of the air, the sun's rays have terrific power. A black object left in the sun will almost

immediately become so hot that it cannot be picked up in the bare hand. This clarity also makes for the most astonishing contrast of light. Shadows become inky black where in most places they would be just vague patches. The hills and mountains stand in bold contrast where there are light places and then black shadows, so that it looks almost like a lunar landscape. The sky is so dark a blue that at times it appears to have no color at all, but is just a black void. It is the dust particles and moisture in the air that make the sky light and blue and give a softness to shadows. These are lacking, as in Tibet the air does not suffuse light in the shadows; and so unless the sun is falling directly upon an object, it is in almost complete darkness. We were told that if you look up from the bottom of a pit in Tibet in the middle of the day, just so that the sun is not shining directly into your eyes, you can see the stars, though it is daylight all around you. Although we had no opportunity to test this, I can well believe it.

As we approached the lake, I was amazed to see that there were hundreds of seagulls wheeling around in the air and walking on the shore. The lake, as are most in Tibet, was quite brackish, and where it had dried and receded, there was a wide white margin of salt and other minerals left along the shores. How the seagulls ever came there, I do not know.

Along the margin of the lake we came upon the little village of Dochen, and here we stopped for a time to change our pack animals and have a bite of lunch. Dochen was just a typical small Tibetan village - a few narrow streets running between the whitewashed buildings of adobe clay. Some of these buildings were three stories high, and most of the lower walls of the houses were covered with yak dung where they had been put to dry until needed for fuel. Nowhere in sight was there any living plant, and I wondered how the people managed to exist at all. The ground was hard and caked, making agriculture extremely difficult, and the barrenness of the place was depressing to me. Not one tree or any other green thing was in sight to relieve the bleak austerity of the hills.

After rounding several spurs of the mountain that ran out onto the floor of the valley, we came to the end of the lake and there found a small stream. We had left the great plain of the Weeping Elephant. As soon as we entered the divide between the mountains, we were once more in the grip of the wind, for it seemed to concentrate in that narrow valley and rush downward to the plain below. Adding to the strange wildness of the scene were several chortens high on the mountain's flank at the side of the road. Along the banks of the stream were narrow borders of moist land where things could be grown, and although they were not more than thirty yards across, the soil was sufficiently fertile to attract the Tibetans; so we found one tiny village after another all along those pathetic fields. A thin crop of barley was coming up, which probably would never have time to ripen before the cold of winter returned, but every inch of land possible to cultivate was used.

Toward evening we came down to the lower end of that pass between the mountains and saw before us another wide plain, though not so wide as the one we had left. At its edge was the town of [Kala](#), where we were to spend the night. As we approached, the most gorgeous spectacle was going on far out on the plain. From behind a spur of the hills to the west, a huge jet of dust was being thrown into the air, where it was lit like a curtain of gold by the setting sun. It grew and

grew as it moved slowly out onto the plain, like the approach of a dust storm. Finally, we came down beyond the spur of the hills that had hidden its source from our view. At the western end of the valley was another divide leading up onto the plain that we had left, and apparently through this the wind was blowing with enormous force. Confined to the narrow pass, its velocity was increased so that it was literally blowing out the valley and carving a new divide through the mountains like the one through which we had come. Apparently this began every afternoon when the wind had reached sufficient velocity. The little valley was so placed that the wind sweeping across the plain above ran straight into it. Rendered more intense where confined, as in a funnel, it literally tore up the earth and sand and tossed it straight onto the lower plain.

We did not waste much time in getting into our sleeping bags that night, for it was forty-eight hours since we had had any real sleep, and plenty of hard going in between. What a luxury it was to be once more in a warm bed. That was a much better night than the one before. We were off early in the morning and started eastward across the plain. There was a low range of hills at its end, and after crossing these we came down once more into a valley with a stream at its bottom. It was another outlet of the lake on the high plain, and this time the valley was wider. Vast bare and rocky mountains rose at either side, sometimes leaving only a narrow gorge through which the river had cut its way, but more often a fairly wide river bed. As before, where there was any fertile land, the Tibetans were making the best use of it. The Tibetans, however, are not good agriculturists, largely, I suppose, because they are to such a great extent a nomadic people. We saw all along that valley the ruins of huge houses. Originally they must have been the headquarters of big landowners, for there was always the grain storage tower and the sheep pens as well as the house. Now, however, these are for the most part ruined and deserted; only a few poor miserable hovels still exist just at the side of the stream among the fields. The whole valley – and indeed it looks as though the whole country – is drying up, for we could see around the ruins of some of the great old houses and the dim outlines of stone walls that once marked fields. Far out from the stream some of these fields were, but they have long since dried up. Nearer to the river are other fields with less ruined walls, but just as dry and dead, and it is only at the banks of the stream that any fields are green today. One can see the whole story of the drying up of the valley in this gradual recession of the fields. There is no longer enough water to support more than a few. However, one sees on the hills wandering herds of sheep and goats; but only a few, and these eke out a miserable existence from the sparse grass which has all but disappeared from the fields. The sheep pens along the ruins of the old farms indicate that not so long ago a huge number of these animals could be supported in the valley, where now only a few roam over the hills. We passed a few sad looking and almost deserted Gompas or monasteries, along the road. There, a few aged willows remain where they were planted to give a little shade from the burning sun. But these are fast going as the monasteries become deserted for lack of people in the vicinity to support them. Most likely the Tibetans themselves are responsible for the drying up of their country by the ignorance of the necessity for keeping a balance of nature. Apparently they worked the valley to death. They put on the hills far more sheep and goats than the hills could support, with the result

that they were soon eaten bare and no longer draw rain. When the rain ceased to fall, the river shrank and the fields dried up, and, gradually, the desert encroached on what had been a fertile valley. This evidence of the country's drying up is apparent all through Tibet, and it will not be long before it is an uninhabitable waste of desert. Even now the birth rate is falling very quickly because the land is simply unable to support the people.

It was a weird spectacle, that valley, littered with the ruins of a far more prosperous past. The barren mountains looked down on the empty granaries, the deserted monasteries with their few remnants of trees and the tumbling walls of once prosperous farmers' houses. Meanwhile, the sun shone down with relentless baking heat as though to dry up the last remnants of greenness and fertility.

All day, our way led down that valley, twisting and turning between the mountains wherever the stream had found its rays. The mountains were often of astonishing formation, where one could see the strata of the rock twisted or broken and thrown up at incredible angles. One wonders at the titanic forces that were let loose to form them when the Himalayas were thrust up 26,000 feet through the earth's crust over which originally rolled the waves of the sea. The incredibly vast mass of the Himalayan range cannot be believed until seen. And, strangely enough, it is really too big even to be seen, for it is not just the mountains, but all the earth through which they were thrust that has been raised higher than any other part of the world, making the huge plateau of Tibet. [Waddell](#), one of the first English travelers in Tibet, noticed this and remarked on it when he said that the mass of the Himalayan range, and the land that had been thrust up to such huge heights with it, was so great that it actually threw off center the gravitational pull of the entire earth. The waters of the Indian Ocean are drawn up by it into the bottle neck of the Bay of Bengal so that one has actually to sail uphill to reach Calcutta.

That night we stayed in the rest house of [Khangmar](#), just at the base of a mountain that had been neatly cleaved in half. All across the flat side, where it had been split, were the most amazing [strata marks](#) which looked like the graining of a giant piece of wood. The Chowdar, or caretaker, of the rest house told us that the strange marks had been made by Guru Rinpoche with the point of his finger just to show his noteworthy powers.

The next day would be the last stage of our journey, for we were to reach Gyantse that night. From Khangmar our way led on down the same valley and finally through the Red Idol Gorge which was supposedly frequented by demons. The gorge is the narrowest part of the valley where the rock walls close in, leaving only room at the bottom for the river to squeeze through in great turbulence over the rocks. Here it is that brigands always lurk in wait for the unwary traveler, for the narrowness of the pass makes a perfect place for attack. That, I suppose, is the basis of the idea that the gorge is filled with demons. At any rate, many of the giant boulders that line the divide have been carved into [figures of saints](#), to protect the travelers, and painted in bright colors that seem to blend with the brightness of the intense sunlight on the hills. Every hole and cranny in the rocks is full of sticks bearing prayer flags and withdrawn from the direct sun by its own shadows. The Red Idol Gorge is a most picturesque sight. It is dark and ghostly, with its many white flags and the strange carved figures along

its sides; while just beyond is the blazing sun throwing it all into vivid contrast. We met no brigands, I am glad to say, and when we reached the other side the valley at once broadened out. We were approaching the wide valley at the northern end of which is the town of Gyangtse.

We stopped for a bite of lunch at the little rest house of [Saugang](#) and then were soon on our way again. As we came ever closer to the wide valley the land took on a more fertile look. All along the road were masses of iris, pale blue with white under petals. They grew out of a hard, packed-looking earth that did not appear to have the slightest trace of life or moisture in it. But the iris somehow existed, and very well at that, for there were whole fields of them tinting the land a pale blue and scenting the air with a delicate smell like that of clear, fresh, spring water. It was like coming back to life to see growing things again.

## *Chapter Six*

### BALLET OF GODS AND DEMONS

As we passed by a town that was at the edge of the valley a short distance from the road, we met some pilgrims on their way to Phari. They greeted us with broad grins, and I am sure they must have been highly amused, for we did look like beings from another world with all the things we were then wearing as protection against the sun. Ugden stopped to talk to them, and soon he came galloping up behind us to say that there were dances going on at the monastery in the town and did we care to go and see them. We had, of course, been doing double stages all the way just in order to see these dances in Gyangtse. They are supposed to be given on the seventeenth of June, and on that day they are given all over the country. It was only the sixteenth, though, and we could not understand why they were being given. Then Ugden explained that we had been misinformed and that the dances are always given on the thirteenth day according to the Tibetan calendar, which is really the fourteenth, according to ours. It meant that we were actually too late to see the dances in Gyangtse, as they were being given that very day, but such was our luck that we did not miss them anyway. We sent Ugden off to the monastery to see if we would be allowed to attend, while we followed more slowly. After a few minutes we came to the monastery, and it was a most picturesque sight. It is situated in a narrow, wild looking valley leading off to the west. Behind the Gompa, the bare and incredibly rugged hills rose sheer out of the narrow valley, most of them topped with weird ruins of towers or some ancient Dzongs, or forts. All of these were in sharp brilliance against the dark blue sky. At the very entrance to this valley was the Gompa, or monastery, surrounded by a high wall tinted to a rich mulberry color and with a wide band of blue running around the top of it. Beyond, the golden cupolas of the monastery itself and the many golden emblems, or the eight lucky signs, gleamed blindingly in the intense sunlight. We stopped to take it all in as Ugden went ahead to see if we would be allowed to enter. It was a most unearthly sight. The almost cubist architecture of the buildings and their color blending so well into the hills of the valley that it seemed more as though they were natural formations than products of man. And the light was so intense that one could not really see anything plainly. It was like a sudden vision - one partly clouded by earthly things, so that it was never clear, but strange and beautiful behind a concealing wall of blazing light and shimmering heat.

Soon Ugden beckoned to us and we rode forward. It was all right for us to enter. To our amazement, instead of dismounting, we rode directly in through a huge portcullis forty feet high and found ourselves between the outer wall and the walls of the enclosed buildings. Directly inside the gate were giant, brightly painted, and grotesque statues of the “kings of the four regions of space”,



protecting the gate against the evil intruder. We stopped at the middle of the inner wall before a huge gate of red lacquer, decorated with hinged and giant bosses and rings of brass. And even as we dismounted, we began to hear from within the clash of cymbals, the dull beat of drums, and the almost imperceptibly deep Om-Oms of the huge Tibetan trumpets. A crowd, curious about us, had gathered around by now and suddenly a huge giant of a man appeared with a long cattle whip in his hand. He was a policeman, or, more correctly, he was like the old Roman Lictor, for without hesitating he lashed into the crowd and drove them away from us. When they had retreated sufficiently, he grasped one of the great brass rings on the gate and gave it a resounding thud against the panel. Immediately the gate was unfastened from within and swung open groaning on its hinges.



**Figure 11: The dancers on the steps of the Gumpa.**

Inside was a scene of medieval splendor and barbaric color. Across one side of the great courtyard was a long, frescoed loggia where [the musicians](#) sat holding their brightly painted drums and their highly polished cymbals and long

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trumpets. Directly opposite them was the main facade of the Gompa, rising four stories and hung with vast billowing panels of brocade, their golden threads blazing in the sunlight. Massed on the steps and in the balconies running along its front were the high Lamas and Nobles, dressed in their most gorgeous robes of red and yellow, plum, gold and scarlet, and women with their high headdresses richly studded with coral, turquoise and pearls. In the court, itself, were the Lama dancers grouped around a tall mast, from which hung huge brocade prayer flags. They were getting ready to perform the dance of the Black Hat Lama, in which is depicted the struggle between the powers of good and the powers of evil. The Yellow Hat Lama, wearing the traditional yellow peaked hat of the Tibetan Church, represented the powers of good, while the Black Hat Lama represented all the evil forces. The latter was standing just in the center of the courtyard. He wore a full costume of gorgeous, brocade shot with gold thread, with long trailing sleeves and strips falling from his shoulders. Around his waist he wore an apron made of beads and amulets carved from human bones, while on his head was a huge black hat from the top of which sprang golden flames surrounding a human skull.

As we watched this scene, spellbound, the music was booming forth in what is surely the most weird and impressive music in the world. Two huge [trumpets](#), fifteen feet long, were making a wave of sound that seemed to spin on an uneven axis and shake one's very bones with their deep vibrations, which just hover on the brink of the inaudible. Like a pair of tuning forks just out of tune, the two trumpets played against one another so that the pulsating waves kept time to the beating of the drums and cymbals. The Head Man of the town had apparently seen us come in, for almost at once a Lama came toward us and asked if we would care to join the Head Man on one of the balconies to watch the dance. We went up at once inside the Gompa and came out on a wide balcony, where low divans of rich Chinese carpets were arranged near the railing. The Head Man greeted us with smiles and bows, and we sat down beside him while he offered us our first chang, the partially distilled barley beer of Tibet. Our cups were porcelain, set in a base of silver, ornamented with gold figures; and the lid was the same, surmounted with a ball of coral. The drink looked too good to resist, and actually, after we got used to it, we got quite fond of chang. We had a perfect view of the courtyard, and almost at once the dances began. The music burst forth in a tumult of sound. At the same time, the Yellow Hat Lama strode forward and flung a dorje, or thunderbolt, at the feet of the Black Hat, trying to exorcise him and destroy him. Thereupon the Black Hat drew a shining sword as a signal to all his legion of devils to attack, and these, in their grotesque masks of beasts and demons, began to dance around the Yellow Hat in a strange, whirling fashion like dervishes, their brocaded robes flying out around them as they danced wildly in ever widening circles. All at once, the Yellow Hat advanced again with strange gestures of incantation and threw another thunderbolt at the evil spirit as he stretched his hands high above his head in a last effort to exorcise the devil and his horde of demons. Now the music rose to an absolutely mad pitch. It thundered through the courtyard and out amongst the mountains until it seemed the very earth would be rent apart. But the magic spell of the Yellow Hat had worked, and where the earth split apart the Black Hat and all his crew of demons rushed into

the abyss and back to the underworld. With a last thrilling climax, the music crashed forth, and then the dances came to an end. It was a most impressive sight. All the time I kept thinking what a marvelous ballet it would make, for what we saw was a perfect ballet, yet a thousand times stronger because it was real. It meant something to all these people, and to them it was part of their lives. When we finally left, thanking the headman, our lictor friend was still with us, and soon made a way clear for us through the throng by a liberal use of his whip. Strangely enough, the people did not seem to resent it at all, but rather took it as a matter of course. Actually, it is a common thing in Tibet, and we almost got to accept it ourselves, though we were never on the wrong end of the whip, which might have made a difference.

## *Chapter Seven*

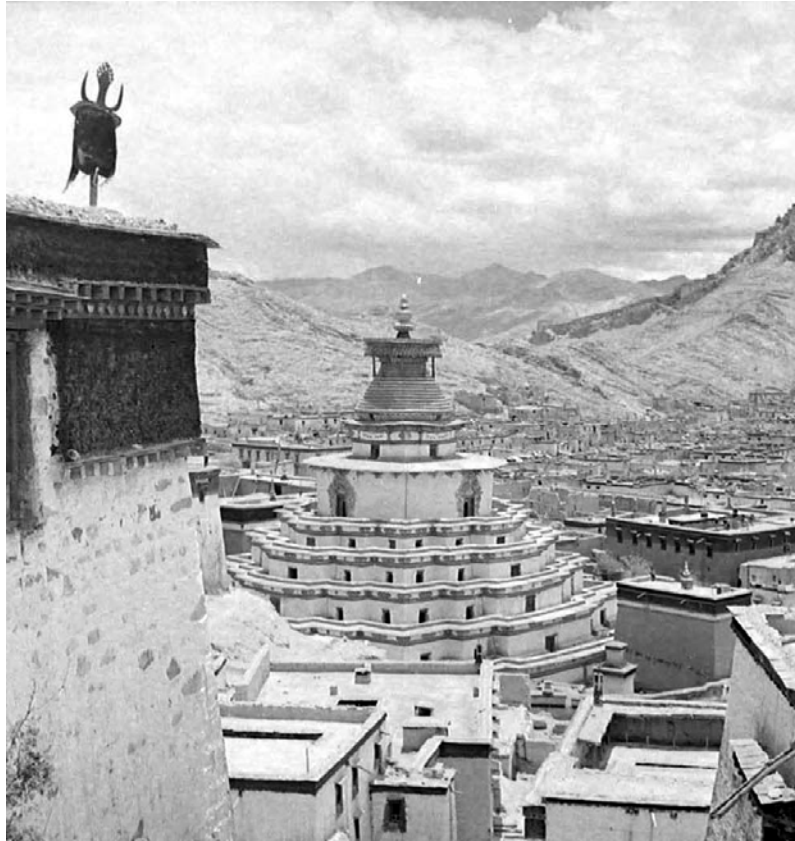
### WE REACH OUR GOAL

In another hour, we came out on [the plain](#) and saw in the distance the magnificent [Gyangtse Dzong](#), or fort, perched high on its rooky crag above the town. It was still some miles away, but our goal was in sight at last. The plain in which Gyangtse is situated is one of those rare fertile areas in Tibet. Most the floor of the valley was planted in barley, which seemed to be doing quite well; but even there, it rarely has a chance to ripen before the winter comes. Wherever a patch of ground was not cultivated, it was a solid mass of blue iris, and here and there along the valley, we came across a tree standing beside a house. It was a most welcome sight to see growing, green things after the days we had been traveling between barren dry hills. It was sunset before we came near Gyangtse, and the Dzong in the evening light was a lovely sight. Again, the strange, almost cubist, architecture made the buildings blend into the rock so that you could hardly tell where one left off and the other began. Behind this high Dzong was the town, nestled in a fold of the hills, with a long sinuous Chinese wall running along their crest. Within this enclosure made by the wall and the hills was the great Gompa, or monastery, of Gyangtse, one of the most interesting in Tibet, and the immediate goal of our trip. Nearby rose the great golden chorten, the largest chorten in Tibet, its whole top section made of burnished, gold.

There is a [small British garrison](#) kept in Gyangtse to protect the person of the Trade Agent, and just before we reached the town, the lieutenant came out to meet us. He invited us to dinner at the [fort](#), which we gladly accepted as a welcome change from our rather restricted meals. The lieutenant took us to the [rest house](#), where we were to stay while in Gyangtse, and then went off, saying that he would send a man at eight o'clock to show us the way to the fort. So, our life began in Gyangtse, and before long, we were comfortably settled in the little bungalow.

We had not brought anything with us in the way of alcoholic liquors, as they would have meant an enormous addition to our baggage, so it was delightful to be offered highballs and cocktails at the fort. Innocents that we were, we had our usual share and had a really delightful evening. About ten-thirty we said good night and started to walk back to the bungalow. To our surprise, no sooner had we got out into the fresh air than we began to feel as drunk as lords. It was altogether impossible on the drinks we had taken, but there was no denying the fact that we were drunk. At last it dawned on us that at the altitude of over fourteen thousand feet a very little liquor goes a long way, especially if you are not used to it. We had simply not thought of it, and while we stayed indoors, it was all right; but, upon going out into the fresh air, it struck us like a blow on the head, and we were

literally reeling by the time we reached the bungalow. What is more, the effects of the drinks brought on mountain sickness, of which we had hitherto not had a touch. However, it certainly came on that night and made it one of misery. We learned a great lesson about the effect of altitude that evening, and thereafter were much more careful. It was the only time, however, that we were bothered by the rarified air at all, so we considered ourselves lucky.



**Figure 12: Gyangtse Dzong in the distance.  
In the foreground, the tiered chorten.**

When we awoke - or, rather, came to - in the morning, it was as though we were waking up in another world - if not another world, then another age, at least. Now that we were really in Tibet and completely away from the outside world, the atmosphere of the place began to assert itself. We felt at once as though we were living in, and had suddenly been transported far back into the middle ages. In customs, mode of life, and the pace of living, it might have been Europe in the tenth century. There was not one thing to give even a hint that we were living in the twentieth century. Many days' journey and a high barrier of mountains separated us from the nearest radio, motor car, or railway, and it is surprising how little we missed those things, and how quickly we adapted

ourselves to another mode of life.

Our first duty was to arrange for an interview with the local Governor, the [Tibetan Trade Agent](#), who was the most influential man in the city, and from him we had to obtain permission to go into the monasteries to do our work. So, soon after breakfast, we went off to town with Ugden to arrange an appointment.

The bungalow where we stayed was about half a mile outside the town on the plain in a little compound of poplar and aspen trees, and our way led across the fields toward the Dzong. We found the Khenchen's, or Governor's, house quite nearby on the plain before we reached the town, and, like the bungalow, it was surrounded by a wall, inside of which stood the house in the midst of trees. Ugden went up to the red lacquer gate and we saw him talking to someone. After a few minutes he came back where we were waiting on the road and said that he had made an appointment for two o'clock. We then had the whole morning to fill in, and although we were still feeling a bit shaky after the festive night, we did not want to waste any time, and the town did look interesting, so we went on to explore it. As we came around the corner of the huge towering rock on which the Dzong is perched, we came in full view of [the town](#), nestled behind it in the crook of the hills.

One main street led through the center of it, bordered by the cubist houses all painted white with a dark band of maroon around the top. From every roof bunches of prayer flags stuck up on dry branches fluttered in the wind. The houses looked surprisingly large as we walked along the street, but it was a false impression, arising from the fact that most Tibetan houses are built around a courtyard. About this large inner court the rooms are ranged on two or more levels of balconies, so that actually there is very little living space. Moreover, the idea of the courtyard in the middle gives a false impression of attractiveness, as we soon learned. Instead of being paved or grown with grass and a little garden in the middle, the courtyards of most of the houses are simply mud, which, by reason of the cows and mules tied inside, soon become an unpleasant mire of filth. The great majority of the houses contain no wood except the doors and a few beams. All the rest is built of mud or adobe that, because it does not bake very hard, soon wears and becomes extremely irregular, so that the buildings give more the impression of caves than houses; and this is emphasized by the sparing use of windows made necessary by the frightful cold. We soon decided that Tibetan houses looked far more attractive from the outside. One thing must be said, however. Most houses have a chapel, and this one room is kept scrupulously clean. They are like a pleasant oasis in the midst of the filth.

All around the streets we looked for shops, but actually there were none. Under several of the houses, we did find tiny cellar rooms, dark and musty, where some staple foods were sold, as well as things like shoe laces and boot polish. The boot polish surprised us at first, for we had not yet seen a Tibetan who had given thought to the appearance of his feet, but we soon discovered the amazing use of the boot polish. It is believed to be a cure for the frightful pack sores that the mules get carrying their bales of wool. They rub the boot polish into the raw wounds, like an ointment, not, of course, having the slightest idea of its real purposes. The black is said to be particularly effective.

Well, that and a few other unimportant things made up the entire

contents of the stores. On market days, the merchants came to town and set up booths right in the street. But again, there is little for sale but staple foods and a few cheap importations from Japan. Actually, the average Tibetan is so poor that he can not buy anything but the sheer necessities; and, if he happens to have a little extra cash, he usually puts it into jewelry for his wife or some utensils for his cooking. The jewelry is all made to order, as are the better grades of utensils, for none of the merchants have sufficient capital to keep a stock of wares. Even if you should want to have something made of silver, you would have to get the silver somewhere else, for the merchant probably would not have it. Or you might just give him silver coins which he would melt up and pound out into whatever you ordered.

The main street was divided into two parts with a high wall down the center. On each side, between the buildings and the wall, half the space was a mud road, while the other half was an open drain of a none too savory odor, for all the refuse of the town goes into it. The only thing that saves the situation at all is the scavenger dog. Miserable, mangy beasts, often crippled and left to eke out a horrid existence, they do eat most of the refuse which would otherwise make the place impossible. Besides, there are vultures and huge crows who do their part. The poor crows, whether from their breed or from the rigors of the climate, seem to have perpetual sore throats. Their vocal chords must be full of the irritating dust, for their weird croaking is far from what it should be. It is not at all uncommon to find the carcass of some unfortunate mule, horse or cow left quite untouched in the street until the depredations of the dogs have pulled it to pieces; but the bones and the tougher bits of flesh remain for some time before they are finally ground into the dust and disappear.

Nevertheless, even with all its filth, Gyangtse is a picturesque town, and in many ways very strange and beautiful. In many places along the streets are brightly painted prayer walls with carved figures of saints set into them. Most of the houses have their cluster of prayer flags waving from every corner of the roof, and here and there a little shrine or chorten lends a queer flavor. High above all of this is the great Dzong. Like a fairy tale castle atop a rook, its walls and parapets make a hard, geometric pattern against the sky. Right across the ridge behind the town the Chinese wall winds over the hills, and just inside this, clinging to the hillside, are the many buildings of [the monastery](#): the monk's houses, the little hilltop shrines, the great granary, and the gorgeous [golden topped chorten](#), making up a settlement almost as big as the town itself. As is the case everywhere in Tibet, there is such a huge number of [monks](#) in proportion to lay people that the latter are worked almost to death to support the Church. The monks are not required to do any productive work. It is their place to pray and to keep away the demons that cause all manner of ill luck and sickness; so they are busy over their holy scriptures, while the rest of the population struggles to support them.

After lunch we got our presents together and set out for the house of the Khenchen. Ugden had instructed us a great deal in Tibetan etiquette, but this was the first time we had met an important Tibetan official. We arrived at the gate of the house, and a servant appeared to take the gifts which we had brought. As gifts for the more important officials, we had brought several attractive looking, but inexpensive, gold plated watches and, in this case, had added a gold chain and a

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pencil to hang at the end of it. These, the servant took on a tray and beckoned us into the courtyard. We had our ceremonial scarves, or kata, hung across our extended arms in the Tibetan fashion, for one never pays a call without this ceremonial scarf. As we stepped into the courtyard the Ken-chan came from the door of the house, itself, and bowed as we approached. The servant went ahead and announced us, holding the tray with our gifts high in front of him, for it is not good form for the person you are calling on to see what you have brought until you have departed. The Khenchen acknowledged the gifts, which he did not see, with a nod and then motioned them aside, as though to say that he was more interested in us for ourselves than he was for what we had brought him. The servant then took them into the house. When we came up to him, he held out his arms palms downward, and we laid the ceremonial scarves across them. Thus our Tibetan greeting was accomplished, and he motioned us into the house. Here we seated ourselves on low divans covered with Chinese rugs, around a low brightly painted table, and the [Khenchen](#) began to ask us questions. He was a tiny little man with a brown wrinkled face and intensely bright little eyes. He wore a long robe of tufted purple silk with a wideband of chartreuse silk around his waist. It is Tibetan etiquette to serve tea to callers no matter what time of day, and one must not get down to the business of the visit until after the teacups have been taken away. He offered us both Indian and Tibetan tea, and since we knew that sooner or later we would have to drink the Tibetan tea, we thought we might as well try it now; and moreover, it was diplomatic to appear, at least, to like the Tibetan way of doing things. It took some courage to come to the decision, however, for we had heard about Tibetan tea and did not anticipate it with any relish.

The tea is made from a low grade of brick tea from China. A great brick of this pressed tea is first boiled until all the essence has been extracted from the leaves, and it becomes an extremely strong brew. This is then placed in a long [churn](#) with a huge quantity of rancid [yak butter](#). Flavor is brought out by the addition of salt and soda, and the whole thing is churned until the butter is well mixed with the tea. It is then decanted into large tea pots and kept hot over little braziers. Tibetan workmen and people of all classes always have their tea with them, even when they are at work, and every half hour at least they have a cup of the hot brew. This is particularly so in the winter time, for it is the only way they have of keeping warm. There is not sufficient fuel in Tibet to allow fires for warming the houses, with the result that the people must wear heavy padded clothes and have the heat inside themselves. Tibetan tea is very well suited for this purpose, for not only is it drunk hot, but the butter contained in it is rich in calories, and the tea itself so strong that it is very stimulating.

Almost immediately, the tea arrived, and lovely little porcelain cups were set in front of us. They had a base and lid of silver with gold designs worked into them. The Khenchen, himself, had one of pure gold that could not have been worth less than a thousand dollars. It was an exquisitely worked thing, very finely cased, with a jade button at the very top of the lid. He passed the lid around for us to see, and we found that it was very thick and, therefore, very heavy; and, of course, we exclaimed over it, which pleased the Khenchen enormously. This started us off in conversation. When the tea was poured, we took some at once, as though we had always had Tibetan tea; and, surprisingly enough, we found that it



was quite good and certainly gave one a very warm feeling inside. If you just gave up the idea that it was tea and accepted it as some sort of soup, it was very palatable; so, we were much happier than we had expected. The cups were the starting point of the conversation, and we asked the Khenchen where they were made. He told us that he had been, twelve years before, the Abbot of the monastery in the province of [Kham](#), which is just on the border of China, and that he had had the cups made there, besides most of his silver and other utensils.

The province of Kham is renowned in Tibet for the skill of its craftsmen, and as we later came to realize, most of the best things in Tibet come from Kham. Probably the Chinese influence and the actual presence of Chinese workmen is responsible. In any case, the Tibetans have not got as many centuries of culture behind them as either China or India, and so what they have developed is largely borrowed from one or the other of these neighboring countries. Often it is modified by the Tibetan, but there is little or nothing that can be called pure Tibetan culture. The Khenchen showed many things that he had had made in Kham, and most of them were lovely, especially two silver tea pots and his prayer wheel that stood in a rack on a little side table.

At last, the tea cups were taken away and we got down to the business of our visit. We told the Khenchen that we had come to Tibet to do some work for a museum in our country and that we would like to have permission to study the paintings and other art objects, particularly in the Gyantse monastery, and to take some pictures of them. Also, there were several other monasteries not far away in the valleys, and we asked to do the same there. He was very much interested when he learned that we could take pictures of the paintings in their natural colors, and we had to make a simplified account of the whole process, using only terms that the Khenchen knew, which was no small job. By the time it had been relayed to him through Ugden, I have my doubts if it meant very much. In any case, the Khenchen appeared to understand perfectly, and in the end he granted us the permissions that we had requested. When we left, the Khenchen saw us to the door and lifted the heavy padded curtain that hung across it. We said good-bye, and the Khenchen went back into the house, where we heard him giving some orders to his servant. Ugden laughed and explained that the Khenchen had been very impatient to see what we had brought him, and that as soon as he went back into the house, he had called his servant to bring the tray quickly.

## Chapter Eight

### LAMAISM

Upon leaving the Khenchen, and now that we had his permission to enter the sacred precincts of the monastery, we could not wait any longer to explore it; so, we set out at once for the tower. At the far end of the main street, we came to [the great gateway of the monastery enclosure](#). A high wall runs right through the town dividing it from the monastery grounds, and this gate was much like the one we had passed through on entering the monastery at Naining, painted red with great brass bosses and rings. Just inside was a sort of entry way upon the walls of which were frescoes of Tibetan demons supposed to scare evil spirits who might try to enter the sacred enclosure. From these our way led along a street between the houses of the monks until we came to [a square](#) where the monastery, or Gompa, itself stood. Unlike the other buildings, the Gompa was painted [mulberry color](#) with a band of black around it near the top. It was a square building of large proportions, and rising from the top of it were [several other levels](#) surmounted by golden ornaments of the eight lucky signs, and a huge gold finial over the very top of the central shrines. In the front was a sort of [inset porch](#) supported by a series of brightly painted pillars, and at either side, two of the four gods of the four points of the compass. On the roof above this entrance was a huge gilded [gong](#) that a monk was beating, calling the monks to prayer. The sound of it rolled out in booming waves over the town. The Abbot had appointed a monk, who was really the caretaker of the Gompa, to take us around and show us all we wanted to see. He came out when we approached, as he had obviously been expecting us, and we were ushered into the Gompa.

Once inside the doors, we were indeed in another world: a world of dim shadows and mystery, and of things that echoed only out of the ages of the past. Flickering flame-lit darkness revealed, as though in a trance, the whole weird picture of the Tibetan religion, the religion of demons and black magic over which only a veneer of Buddhism clings. As we meandered through the great dim, echoing rooms, where only the chinks between the shadows hinted at queer images or ancient dust-covered volumes, all that other world fell away. Time rolled back with the dull chanting of the monks. The illusion was complete. We were in centuries long past, centuries called the dark ages, when ignorance, superstition, spells and alchemy had not yet been transmuted into a new age.

Inside the porch, we came to a small vestibule where the walls were brightly painted with the [wheel of the law](#) and all the signs of the Tibetan zodiac. At one side, a stairway led up into the darkness, and straight ahead was another pair of massive doors. There, two other monks joined us carrying tiny butter lamps whose yellow flames gave hardly as much light as a match. Our guide swung open the doors into a central hall. This was a huge room taking up the

whole middle of the building. The center was quite bright, for it was lighted by a clerestory window set into the roof above. Tall pillars rose up into the gloom, covered with a dark red material that had been tailored to fit them, and in long rows between these were the low red mats upon which the monks sat at their chanting, each with a little wooden bowl of tea before him. As the sides the room receded into complete blackness and as our feeble butter lights threw a dim glow over the walls, we could faintly see the merest suggestion of frescoes that covered them. In the center of the three remaining walls were doors leading into other shrines. From the ceiling hung huge banners and clusters of brocade strips like gigantic tassels, adding still further to the gloom. The whole atmosphere was so full of the fumes of rancid butter and smoke from the altar lamps that, on all sides, distance receded into a dim obscurity. We passed on into the shrine at the back. There was almost complete darkness. Only the face of a huge Buddha towering above us was visible with a ghostly pallor from a tiny window somewhere above. On a long altar of silver below the image were many rows of butter lamps, casting only the feeblest upward glow, and rows of tormas, or butter carvings, among the countless silver bowls of water. Again, only the center alone was lighted at all, and only as our dim lights were held up here and there about the room did it reveal the painted and gilded images of long dead Lamas or the dull tints of some ancient *tangka*, or painting, hanging high upon the walls. The atmosphere was stifling with age and dust and closeness.

In another room the golden chorten that held the body of some former Abbot gleamed dully with a thousand ghostly sparkles from its jewel encrusted top. Our way was lit by the monks carrying tapers of incense and their small butter lamps as we passed into another shrine. The dancing flames cast shadows over the dully frescoed walls, and the strange dark images of demons, past Lamas or walls of books reaching into the darkness, with their little name tabs of gold brocade gleaming like dull eyes. Upon the altars were neat rows of the tormas, a vase of reedy grasses and peacock feathers, and rows of gleaming golden vessels. Large butter lamps, their wicks in pools of amber light, cast a dim glow upon the hall and filled the air with a strong rancid smell. On we went from one chapel to another opening off from the main hall, seeing things undreamt of and stranger than one could have guessed at in our world: dim rooms with rows of pigeon holes reaching into the darkness above; tier upon tier of books between covers of gorgeously carved and gilded wood, glowing with the gold threads of rich brocade; and containing knowledge perhaps forgotten, perhaps remembered by only a special few; or perhaps merely senseless words, mantras, or endless prayers. Watching over each room was the dim, serene face of the Buddha, lost in the high gloom.

The last part we visited was a part of the Gompa hidden away, unused, and almost forgotten. Few people have ever bothered to go there, but it was the strangest of all. To us, it seemed to exemplify all the mystery and the atmosphere of magic of the old Gompa. Certainly we learned in that old forgotten part of the Gompa that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy." Where the monk took us was a sort of dungeon - a junk room, you might say - where for ages have been deposited all the strange and useless things that had come to the monastery. Out in the vestibule, we turned to the right under

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the stairway into a long dark passage. At its end, where we could see nothing, the monk unfastened a tiny door down near the ground, and stooping low we passed through an immensely thick wall into a huge, lofty chamber, all blackness save for a feeble light coming in through tiny holes far up near the ceiling. This light, and the glowing wicks of the butter lamps, revealed a maze of dust and rubbish piled high and hanging grotesquely from the ceiling. As our eyes became accustomed to the dimness, strange forms began to shape themselves : high up, a vast bird, bigger than any flying creature that we know, looked down with hollow eyes, its huge wings drooping under their load of dust; a set of Chinese armor, fit for a goliath, crumpled grotesquely in a corner; the skin of a leopard marked, not with a leopard's spots, but with the mystic syllable, OM; the skin of an armadillo; the head of a huge bat, resting upon a chest crammed with dried branches that seemingly had grown there, naturally, and whose leaves bore the sacred emblem of the footprint of Buddha. A huge python's skin hung over the tattered banner of one of the Mongol hordes. The chain armor of a Tartar Chief rested amidst a whole confusion of dust and age and impenetrable mystery - a ghostly thing mummified, half human; things that are so far beyond the understanding that it is no use merely to describe them. There are some things so far beyond the rational that they are better left alone unless they can be understood. When we were surfeited with these strange sights, it was good to go out in the clean air again, away from the stench of ages and of things forgotten beneath their blanket of dust.

When one speaks of Tibetan Lamaism, one is apt to think merely of red clad Lamas sitting in meditation in some remote monastery. That may be a true enough picture, as far as it goes; but I wanted to know a little more about it, and it became an interesting surprise to me how little I could find out in the general run of books on Tibet. Inasmuch as religion plays an extremely important part of every phase of life in Tibet and is closely related to its history, it is very worthwhile to know something of it if one is interested in the study of this strange country.

As a matter of fact, the religious part of Tibetan life and history takes such an important place that several volumes could be filled without going very deeply into this complex and interesting subject. A Tibetan library may have hundreds upon hundreds of volumes containing the Lamaist views on logic, philosophy, astrology, mathematics, medicine, and so forth, almost covering the fields of human knowledge. Most of these sciences were probably brought originally from India or China and were then interpreted by wise Lamas of the past with considerable insight. But I am sorry to say that I do not believe there are many Tibetans at the present time who possess the knowledge or the brilliance of their forefathers. These once great libraries are now hardly more than adornments to their religious faith, and it is very seldom that they are taken from their shelves for serious study. Be that as it may, some knowledge of Tibetan Lamaism is indispensable to a study of Tibet, and I will try to give here only the outline of the subject, a sort of pass key to the rest of the book.

As I have indicated before, behind all of the present day Lamaism is a sort of shadow of the old native Bon religion, with its demons and the worship of the powers of nature that satisfied the universal desire for religion in the Tibetan before Buddhism penetrated the barrier of the Himalayas.

It was not until the eighth century, under the great King Trisong Detsen, that Buddhism gained any real hold in Tibet. At that time in Uddiyana (in India), there lived a man known as Padmasambhava. He was, at this time, considered the greatest student of the form of Buddhism which had been developed from the original pure Buddhism by the Indian priesthood in their efforts to gain power over the people. In these efforts, the priesthood had made the people believe that certain rites, prayers, mystic signs and incantations - known only to the priests, themselves - were absolutely necessary for the perfecting of souls. So, the religion took shape in the forms of these rites, prayers, mystic signs and incantations, and it was all set down by the priests in doctrinal tracts known as Tantras. All this of course made Buddhism an almost unrecognizable descendant of the simple original teachings of the Lord Buddha, but it did give the priesthood the handle they needed to extract their livelihood from the people through the tale of the religious forms they had created. The Tibetans, of course, knew nothing of this and could hardly be expected to realize at the outset that they were getting a rather debased form of Buddhism.

Padmasambhava was summoned to Tibet to teach the Buddhist religion. In point of fact, the Tibetans at that time would most probably have scorned the simplicity of original Buddhism, for they were still a simple people who needed complex rituals in order to gain any understanding of things religious. Padmasambhava found a fertile field for the seed of his Tantric doctrines among Tibetans, who appreciated them because they resembled in many ways the ritual of their own Bon religion. It is true that Buddhism was not altogether new in Tibet at this time, for, nearly a century before, King Songtsen Gampo had sent scholars to India to bring back all of the Buddhist teachings, which, eventually, were compiled into two collections known as the Kangyur and the Tengyur. These two, the Kangyur and the Tengyur, are the names of two sets of books that to this day are the backbone of any Tibetan religious library. There are usually the mystical number one hundred and eight volumes in each set,<sup>2</sup> and these contain all the Buddhist teachings along with tantric doctrines of that time. Many scholars believe that, at this early time, much of the Buddhist teachings, which have since been lost in India, was taken into Tibet. There, they were later translated and then, through the usual evolution under the priesthood, lost their original essence. But many believe that these original teachings may one day come to light in some ancient Library of Tibet, and so bring into the world again some of the pure teachings which have been lost. In any case that is beside the point.

Padmasambhava had something of the showman in him, for with virtually the same doctrines which had come to Tibet in the Kangyur and the Tengyur, he organized the priesthood, and Buddhism began really to take hold and spread throughout the country. At the advice of his kinsman, Shantarakshita, Padmasambhava had the monastery of [Samye](#) built. This was Tibet's first monastery, and the founding of Samye marked the beginning of the Red Hat sect

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<sup>2</sup> JC: This is approximately true of the Kangyur, the collection of texts considered to be the Buddha's word; but the Tengyur, the collection of treatises or commentaries, is about twice that size. The two collections were actually compiled centuries after Songtsen Gampo.

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of Buddhist Lamas. Later, there were other sects formed, all very similar, but having some differences in belief or external ritual. The most important of these schools was the [Kargyupa](#) sect. While the Red Hat sect based its teachings on the pure Tantras as brought by Padmasambhava, the Kargyupa sect mixed with these Tantras some of the teachings of the Sutras, other doctrines and rituals and beliefs from India, as well as the secret mantras, or prayers. If I have seemed to condemn all the ritualistic forms attached to Buddhism by the Indian priesthood, I have not intended to do so. It is the motive of gain and the practice of selling these forms to the people that I condemn rather than the forms themselves. It is true of every religion, I think, that a certain amount of ritual and symbolism is absolutely necessary. People of various degrees of mental and metaphysical development require various degrees of this ritual and symbolism to help them toward an understanding of the basic truths which they have not the comprehension to grasp. A simple people must have as their idea of God some image that they can recognize, so they make God in their own image. It is a simple form, an idol. The simple mind can fix itself on such an idol; whereas, it takes a more developed mind to go straight to the concept of God as an omnipresent force, or universal law, or any such intangible theory. As a concept of God progresses from the human form, we have the instance mentioned before, where the Buddha was represented merely by the wheel of the laws. Gradually, as the mind progresses in comprehension, the need for any tangible symbol grows less until it is no more than an inexpressible but fixed idea in the consciousness. This is the road along which all must travel, according to the Buddhist belief, in order to reach the stage of enlightenment attained by the Buddha, when one is no longer bound by the wheel of rebirths. When the mind can reach so far toward this unadorned and inexpressible symbol of God, it then is God; and so understands God; and so merges with the God-essence of the universe from whence it came.<sup>3</sup> According to the pure Buddhist beliefs, that is the goal of all lives. But ritualism is a part of the road that is indispensable to the individual until he has passed over it, and so it is foolish to think it can be done away with. A trained-mind can hold mathematical symbols and carry out complex problems, while an untrained mind must resort to writing down the symbols in tangible form. Rituals, then, are the tangible symbols developed by the priesthood to represent the various mental processes involved in the approach of a mind toward a oneness with God. That is fine, so long as the priesthood remembers it, and so long as each individual realizes that an effort must be made to see beyond these tangible forms before the mind can comprehend the meaning of religion and go on to the next step. Again, like the mathematical symbols, they are of little use until one comprehends the laws which govern them. When that point is reached, the symbols themselves are not of prime importance, but merely a convenient means to an end.

In Buddhism, as in all religions, rituals are the means, while the end is that final perfection of the soul or mastery of life. In Buddhism, these steps are all shown in the symbolic rituals, the various stages of this development. In the life

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<sup>3</sup> JC: In fact, what Mr. Vanderhoef describes here is more akin to “Hindu” [Vedānta](#) than to Buddhism. Buddhism, even Tibetan Buddhism with its extensive pantheon, does not accept the notion of God.

of Gautama Buddha, we see this graphically illustrated. He experimented with means for bringing the human mind into contact with the God-mind. By many means, he failed. The practice of excesses by which the mind should know all through experience was of no avail; nor was the persecution of the body sufficient to free the mind. Finally, in meditation, he found the means. By a conscious effort, he turned the mind in upon itself until a complete realization of self came to be the God he was looking for. He found that a complete realization of self meant a true realization of God. They were one and the same. He had reached the stage of enlightenment. Socrates pointed out the means when he said, "Know Thyself"; and Martin Luther came close to the truth when he said, "I am that I am." He might as well have said, "My mind is the God-mind." That sounds like the highest conceit, but the idea persists that God is the all-pervading consciousness of which every mind is but an expression. Therefore, it follows that a mind's full realization of itself brings about the discovery that it is an expression of God.

Buddha's purpose, then, was to help mankind to transcend earthly misery and free it from the wheel of life, which meant many reincarnations of development. The means was to turn the mind upon itself in order to attain a complete realization that it is God; and the goal was for all to reach that stage of development and enlightenment where they could become part of that God-consciousness and so be freed from the necessity of rebirths and then misery. All of this was too tenuous a conception for the general run of people - hence, the tantric doctrines of ritual. It makes little difference what these rituals are, for there is an extraordinary similarity in the rituals of all the religions of the world. This similarity is natural because, the end of all religions being the same, it follows that the means are apt to be, at least, similar.

It is interesting, however, from an historical point of view, to note that, in Tibetan Lamaism, there is a great deal of the ritual of the Roman Catholic Church. This is not just a chance similarity, for it was actually taken from the Catholic Church. There are records of the existence of several centers of the Christian faith on the Chinese border of Tibet at about the time that Padmasambhava came to Tibet. Being one of the great students of ritual at that time and realizing the need for it, he undoubtedly took over a great deal of this Catholic ritual and incorporated it with the tantric doctrines in his Red Hat sect of Tibetan Lamaism. Strangely enough, the teachings of these Tantras upon which Lamaism is founded are just the opposite of our ideas of evolution. It is a theory of retrogression, and I am sorry to say that the Tibetan Church has rather too closely fulfilled its own teachings. It cannot be denied that there have been some big minds throughout its history. Tsongkhapa, the great reformer, was one of these, and there were others. But the religion became so overburdened with complex ritual and extraneous beliefs that the fundamentals were hopelessly buried. The means, by degrees, became the end, and the true goal was lost sight of; so that now, the vast majority - and one might almost say all of the people, including the priesthood - have little conception of it. Only the external forms remain, and only a very few wise men see beyond. However, that is getting ahead of the story.

Padmasambhava established Buddhism on a firm footing, and he is much venerated still as the father of the Tibetan Church and is often known by the more affectionate title Guru Rinpoche, meaning Precious Master. The Precious Master,

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on the other hand, was not a man of the most unimpeachable morals. Indeed, there was so little of the ascetic about him or his personal life that it would have caused a true follower of the original teachings of Buddha to turn over in his grave. As a result, the early sects of Lamaism that he founded were not very strict about the behavior of the monks. As the religion spread during the succeeding years, it also grew in power; so that by the end of the ninth century, when King Ralpachen reorganized the priesthood on a firmer footing, the Church was a power to be reckoned with. Langdarma, the brother of Ralpachen, soon afterwards tried to abolish the religion altogether, but as we saw earlier, his attempt was not successful. He not only lost his life, but his death broke the country up into many small warring states above which only the Church presented a united front. Eventually, when in the thirteenth century the high priest of the Sakya monastery converted Kublai Khan to Lamaism, he was given in return the sovereignty of all Tibet. And so Tibet became a religious hierarchy where the Church was all powerful. This state of affairs lasted almost unbroken from that time and is the case in Tibet today.

All this time, while the Church was growing in power, what small restrictions surrounded the behaviors of the monks was steadily dissolving. For supposedly religious ascetics, their morals were scandalous: they were allowed to marry; they were much given to the drinking of alcohol; and, altogether, the monasteries were dens of iniquity. It may very well have been the temptation to join the Bacchanalian life of the monasteries that had produced the enormous growth of the Church, but amongst the higher minded there was a growing feeling that religion was in a decline, and that something should be done about it.

In the early years of the eleventh century, [Atisha](#) founded a reformed sect called the [Kadampa](#). Its influence led to the founding of the semi-reformed sects, the Kargyupa and the Sakya. It was the last named that gained control when Kublai Khan made its high priest, the head of all the Tibetan religion, which virtually made him the supreme authority of the country. Further reforms only came in the fifteenth century, when Tsongkhapa, who took over the Kadampa sect, went even further with the reforms than Atisha had done. It was Tsongkhapa's new version of the Kadampa sect that became the [Gelugpa](#), or the Yellow Hat sect of the Lamas. As was seen in the outline of the history, this sect gradually became the most important and has remained so to this day. The Dalai Lama, himself, is supposed to be a reincarnation of one of the disciples of Tsongkhapa.

So much for the development of the outward aspect of Tibetan Lamaism. But what of that inner aspect which must, in the beginning, have been the prime reason for its existence? As I have already hinted, while the Church grew in strength, until it became the ruling power of the country, its external forms, likewise, grew to such proportions that they have almost completely buried the simple basic truths of the original Buddhism. I think it is safe to say that there are extremely few Tibetans alive today who would recognize the original teachings of Buddha as the basis of their religion. In all fairness, it must be said that the Christian faith is today probably a far cry from the original teachings of Christ; but, there is just one difference. Christ, for the most part, had simple and relatively uneducated people as his first disciples, and the interpretations that they put upon the teachings of Christ are the most direct source we have of what those



teachings were. On the other hand, Buddha was fortunate enough to have the scholars and the wise men of his time to record his teachings, and there can be little doubt that these men had far better equipped minds for interpreting these exclusive conceptions at the basis of this religion than did the early followers of Christ. So, there undoubtedly exists in the world a far more accurate account of the teachings of Buddha than there is of the teachings of Christ. And it is, therefore, more than ever, a surprise that the present day Tibetan Lamaism is such an unrecognizable offspring of these early teachings.

To begin with, the Tibetans are an extremely superstitious people, and the lengths to which they will go to ward off demons is quite extraordinary. This tendency, of course, makes it an easy matter for the monks to think up and impose on the people endless expensive ceremonies which serve both to drive away demons and to fill the pockets of the monks. There are a great number of these demons, each with some unpleasant power which he turns against the people. One may cause sickness, another will cause floods, and yet another is responsible for the hail storms which destroy the crops, and so on almost indefinitely. For instance, there is a certain class of monks called the [Ngakpas](#),<sup>4</sup> one of whose duties is the prevention of these destructive hailstorms. It is believed that the demons make vast quantities of hail out of the snow during the winter and store it away somewhere in the sky so that it will be all ready to throw down on the crops when they have grown large enough to make the damage considerable. It is the job of the Ngakpa to prepare a counter attack against the day when the hail will fall. In his spare time, he makes countless little pellets out of dried mud, and, while he is making them, he recites some incantation which is supposed to be particularly effective against the demon of hail. In the vicinity of most agricultural towns, there is usually a Hail-Subduing Temple, built on the highest point of land available, so that it will be near the destructive demons. And when the storm threatens, the Ngakpa retires to this temple with his pellets to be ready.

If it does indeed look like hail, the Ngakpa throws himself into a fury and makes the most frightful threatening gestures to drive away the demons with their hail. If, however, the storm persists in coming, the monk goes into a perfect frenzy of attack against the demons of the hail, and as the first stones fall, he flings some of his magic pellets skywards into the clouds, screaming and gesturing furiously in defiance of the storm. If, as sometimes happens, the hail abates and passes over without much damage to the crops, the Ngakpa is acclaimed widely and is usually the recipient of gifts from the grateful farmers. On the other hand, if the storm persists, in spite of the greatest efforts of the monk, he is disgraced and unhappily for him he is liable to a fine according to the extent of the damage done by the storm. In view of this last fact, it would seem that it would not be worthwhile to be a Ngakpa, but the monks always find a way of turning everything to their advantage. In this case, it is quite legitimate for the Ngakpa, in a season which has brought very small amounts of hail, to extend his income by levying a hail-prevention tax on the farmers. This more than makes up for his times of ill-fortune, because all are forced to contribute. In like fashion, some expensive form of protection prevails to cover almost every thinkable

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<sup>4</sup> JC: In fact, Ngakpas are usually not monks, but non-monastic priests.

contingency of human existence.

It is small wonder that, with so many extraneous beliefs, superstitions, and complex forms of ritual, there is very little time left for thought about the basis underlying the religion and the true meaning of life. To the Tibetan, these external forms are the sole end and purpose of religion; and if they can manage through this life to contend successfully with the demons and, at the same time, turn enough revolutions on their prayer wheels to amass a sufficient store of good fortune in the great beyond, then they are content to go on doing it endlessly. As a matter of fact, they are the happiest people that I have ever seen. Tibetans are always ready to smile and laugh, and their sense of humor is practically unquenchable. Whatever they are doing, they sing while they are at it, whether it be in the fields or in the shops, and altogether their good humor is quite infectious. Moreover, it is impossible to say that they are not a religious people, whatever form that religion happens to take. They are a deeply religious people, and, indeed, religion is the major factor in their lives. In a country that has virtually nothing of entertainment, the Church with its pomp and ritual, and its ceremonies and its dances becomes the only outlet from the humdrum existence. And no one who has seen the reaction and the religious devotion displayed by the people to any of these ceremonies can help realizing that there is something very worthwhile in it all. In a sense the Tibetan Church has developed into what it is because of the kind of church that the Tibetans need. Tibet is a medieval country. For many centuries the flow of ideas, as well as of material things, has been held apart from it by the geographic barriers that cut it off from the rest of the world. It is only natural, then, that all things Tibetan should develop along their own lines, and that the whole process should be slowed down for lack of impetus given to any culture by the exchange of ideas with another.

## *Chapter Nine*

### SAGA DAWA

On the hill behind the monastery of Gyangtse, there is an enormous stone pylon which has a flat sloping side facing the town and the plain. Though the building itself serves the double purpose of a granary, it was built for the ceremony of Tangka day on the fifteenth day of the fourth month, called Saga Dawa, when the monks hang on the pylon an [enormous Tangka](#), or banner, bearing a picture of the Buddha. It is in celebration of the day on which Buddha attained enlightenment, so it is the equivalent of our Easter, and it ushers in a week of festivities. Most of these Tangkas are small, perhaps four or five feet at the outside, and they are usually painted. But this is a very special one, for it is in three sections, the center section measuring about a hundred feet square, and the two side panels a hundred by about twenty feet. Moreover, instead of being painted, it is made entirely of brocade which has been cut to bits and then sewn and applied upon a base to make the picture. Unfortunately for us, the great Tangka is only hung on the pylon from six in the morning until eight, and is taken down again for another year before the sun ever reaches it. This greatly increased the difficulty of photographing it. Additionally, the height of the pylon made it extremely hard to photograph and avoid distortion. So we looked through the town in search of a place to put the camera during the ceremonies on the following morning. It had to be a place that was as high as possible, yet not facing directly into the sun, for that would have been disastrous. At last, we found a good position, or rather the only possible position on the roof of one of the Lama's houses. We asked his permission, telling him what we wanted to do on the following morning, and then when all our plans had been made we went back to our bungalow. It was quite strange that ever since leaving the Khenchen's tea party we had been feeling much better. In fact, the effects of the night before seemed to have completely disappeared. Perhaps it was something in the Tibetan tea. On second thought we decided that was just what it was. The soda in the Tibetan tea had been just what we needed and had not thought to take ourselves. After that we were great devotees of the warming beverage.

About dawn, we were up and getting ready to set out for the town. The sun was just beginning to send long rays across the fields of green barley as we started across the plain, and all across the flat land hung a blanket of mist. The air was icy cold, but as the sun began to rise higher, a new warmth came into the air. From the plain, the great pylon where the ceremonies would take place was not visible, and it could not be seen until we reached the corner of the Dzong whether or not the Tangka had been put up. Even when we did come in view of the pylon, we could not tell if the Tangka was there, for those intense shadows of Tibet made the whole west side of the pylon almost as dark as night. Besides, the mist that hung over the town cast a strange glare where it came into the sun, making it

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impossible to see beyond. At last we came to the monastery/enclosure, and looking up we saw that the Tangka was indeed being raised. The whole hillside was alive with townspeople who had come to witness the ceremony. Almost immediately we were in the midst of a great crowd of people all dressed in their gayest clothes and all going in the same direction toward the hill and the pylon. What a vivid scene it was in that early morning light – the shadows in the streets and then the bright flash of color as a group of people came into the intense glare of the sun. Everything seemed to be a blaze of color. We finally reached the house of the Lama who had offered his roof for our work. He was already at the door when we arrived and soon we were on the roof setting up our camera. In the house below, the monks were saying their morning prayers or cooking their breakfast over a little brazier. But before long, they were all on the roof, intrigued by the process of taking pictures. From the roof top we could see the people coming from every part of the town, streaming through the streets and up the hill in a colorful procession, and far up above the huge pylon, blotting out a great portion of the sky, the monks at the top looked like flies as they worked to pull the Tangka to its final position. At the Tangka's base, a great throng was already gathered. The townspeople were all below, and the monks, in their red robes, stood on a stone platform just at the base of the pylon. Many monks had on their bright yellow peaked hats and some were playing on the long Tibetan trumpets, so that the whole valley seemed to vibrate and pulsate with sound. Just as we had arrived, a great procession of the monks had left the monastery enclosure and started out into the town. They were to march completely around the town, chanting, and then, when they got back again to the monastery, they would go up to the great pylon and finish the ceremonies.

As we waited, for the light was not yet strong enough to take any pictures, we could hear them now and then as they went through the streets of the town. The dull murmuring of their many voices came in the still air like the roar of surf, and then died away to nothing as they disappeared behind walls or hills. The monks whose roof we were using were hospitality itself. It seemed that they had made things for us to eat, and soon they came up with several dishes of what Ugden told us were candies. We had to take some of them, though they were none too pleasant and not what I would call candies. Tibet is one of the few countries in the world, if not the only one, where there is no such thing as a sweet in the diet of the people. They do not even know sugar except in a few things imported from India or China, and they seem to have no taste for sweet things at all. The candies were made of grain, cooked into little pellets with some sort of adhesive pastes and some other things which I could not identify, and they had no taste whatever save an insipid glutinous flavor.

The sun rose higher and higher, but the Tangka always would remain in the shade, making it almost impossible to get a picture of it. Before long we heard the monks again singing in the streets, and as we looked down over the town, we saw them once more approaching the gates of the monastery. When at last they entered the sacred enclosure, it was a signal for the ceremony to reach its climax.



**Figure 13: The giant tangka on display at the monastery of Gyangtse.**

From the pylon, the musicians broke into loud, vibrant playing of the trumpets, accented with the drums and cymbals. The hundreds of voices of the monks on the hill joined with those still in the streets below, and the giant gong on the roof of the Gompa beat a slow, rhythmic pace to which the monks marched slowly up the hill. Before them went several of the dignitaries of the monastery carrying long brocade banners hung from poles and tall eight-tiered sacred umbrellas. All the time, the trumpets rolled out a flood of weaving sound as a background for the pace set by the giant gong on the Gompa. On the pylon, the vast figure of the Buddha looked down over the scene. The Tangka was a blaze of colors yellow, bright blue, green, red and outlines of black. About the great central figure were patterns of giant flowers, and amongst these, other smaller figures of Buddhist saints. One of the side panels was missing. It was stolen some years ago under the most mysterious circumstances, and, indeed, it is very strange how anyone could have made off with a thing that, even when folded, weighs many hundreds of pounds and must equal in size the body of a cow. In any case, it disappeared, and no one has ever found a trace of it. Some say the Chinese took it;

some say the English took it. But, it has always remained a mystery, for it never appeared on the market, and it would have been a very conspicuous thing to dispose of. The right side panel represents the standing figure of the Buddha Maitreya, or Buddha-to-come.



**Figure 14: Two young monk-musicians during the festivities.**

At last, the long procession reached the platform at the base of the pylon, and then the ceremony reached its climax. The music burst forth in still more powerful volume, and all the monks joined together in a strange chant, singing in low voices that reminded us very much of a male choir intoning Gregorian chants in a Catholic Church. It is so like the hum of a giant swarm of bees; and then, added to this, came the voices of the thousands of people on the hill, until the whole valley seemed to burst with sound. We had to act fast, then, and take our pictures, for it would not be so long before they would be lowering the Tangka.

It was a wrench to pull ourselves away from that marvelous scene and pay attention to our work. As we finished, the singing came to an abrupt end, the music stopped, and at once, the throngs began to stream down from the hill. We quickly left the roof and started up the hill toward the pylon, for we wanted to have a close look at the great Tangka, and I wanted to get some motion pictures of the process of taking it down. Built into the top of the pylon is a row of great wooden rollers over which the ropes, attached to the top of the Tangka, pass; and thus it is pulled up and let down. When we saw it closely, it appeared to be the most amazing piece of work. Every bit of the picture was made of pieces of brocade cut to fit exactly a previously made plan and then sewn together with incredible neatness. It was simply painting with cloth, and must have been an immense task. Beside the work involved, the Tangka must have cost an enormous sum to make, for it is entirely composed of the finest and richest of brocades. We were interested to find that parts of it were made of Genoese velvet, some of Florentine cut velvet, some of Persian gold tissue, some even of French seventeenth century silk brocade, besides bits of Chinese, Indian and even Japanese material.

Eventually, I climbed up on the Chinese wall that runs around the back of the town and there found a good place to get the motion pictures of the monks taking down the great Tangka. The light was terrible for any kind of photography, and besides, I was panting so furiously by the time I had pulled myself to the top the wall that I could hardly hold the camera steady at all. Gradually, bit by bit, the Tangka was lowered and as it came down it was folded into a neat bundle. The monks worked furiously over it, and it was quite a task, for the thing is enormously heavy. When there was nothing left that I could see from the wall, I went back and joined Bill, who had stayed by to take some close-ups. And then we went down the hill to the Gompa, for Ugden told us that there would be another procession when the Tangka was brought down, and that sounded as though it would be worth seeing.

We stationed ourselves just to one side of the Gompa, on a wall at the corner of the street where the Tangka would come down. While we waited, another procession was going on around the Gompa, itself. The high dignitaries of the Church led off with their sacred umbrellas and their prayer wheels. They were followed by many monks, and finally by most of the townspeople, all twirling their prayer wheels and chanting softly as they marched clockwise around the Gompa. It was a gorgeous sight, for behind all this scene was the gleaming mass of the great golden chorten above its brightly painted terraces of white. Trumpets sounded again from the hill, and we saw that the procession had started down with the Tangka. At last, they came into view up the street: again, there came the sacred umbrellas; and then, a great closely-packed body of monks bearing on their shoulders a network of poles; and resting on these, wrapped in its huge bag made from the hides of yaks, was the great Tangka, undulating like a giant serpent with the rhythm of the monks who were carrying it. It passed by us and was carried right into the darkness of the monastery where for another year it would remain.

That was the beginning of the great festive week of the year. During that week, people came from all over the province, and even from all over Tibet, to join in the continuous round of religious ceremonies, horse racing, archery,

contests, [gambling](#), sports of all kinds and much drinking of chang beer. The lid is off the town for that week and the sky is the limit.

At four thirty the next morning, the horse races were to take place. I cannot imagine why they have them at four thirty in the morning, but in any case, we wanted to see them. We learned on returning from the Tangka ceremony that the Khenchen would that afternoon place his seal on the chosen horses, and we went along to watch. Not far from the bungalow on the plain, we found that a whole town had sprung up since early morning - a town of tents. Since there are no hotels in Gyangtse and not nearly enough room for all the people who cook for the week of celebrations, they must bring their own shelters, and so they make a whole town on the plain in front of the city. Some of the [tents were made of yak hair felt](#) and were mean and dirty, but in another part we found what was almost like a street of magnificent houses. The feudal lords from all around that part of the country had come with their entire families and their retinue of servants. These feudal lords, exactly like medieval Europe, have huge holdings of land somewhere in the vicinity that is worked by their vassals, over whom they have absolute power. It is the pure feudal system, and, over the years, some of these families have amassed huge fortunes for themselves. [Their tents](#) bespoke their wealth, for they were magnificent affairs – big enough to hold fifty or more people and all made of heavy white cloth upon which was applied bold designs of dragons, good luck signs, or all manner of things in bright blue and red and green. Often, they had several tents: one for sleeping, [another for entertaining](#), and always one in which the servants lived and the cooking was done. They entertained constantly, for on that week, they met all their friends whom they probably had not seen since the year before. As we walked past them, we saw them holding court inside their huge tents. Bright little tables were all around the edge, painted in green and gold, and behind them the ever present low divans covered with heavy fur or Chinese rugs. At a higher one at the back of the tent sat the owner surrounded by his wife and daughters and relations, all dressed in their brightest clothes and with their magnificent hairdressing studded with heavy jewels. Tea was constantly being passed about in beautiful cups, and laughter and gaiety sounded out in the street.

Besides the Khenchen, who holds the nominal title of Trade Agent, there are two other [Dzongpons](#), or governors, of Gyangtse province. From amongst all the horses that had come with the visitors from the outlying districts, these two Dzongpons chose teams to compete on the following morning. The Khenchen put his seal upon each one chosen so that there would be no confusion as to which team they belonged and no substitutions. This process was going on in a great roped off square in the middle of the town of tents. All the entries were gathered at one side. One by one they passed through and were either chosen by one of the Dzongpons or rejected. As they were chosen, the old Khenchen placed his seal on each horse. All about were groups of people laughing and talking and drinking *chang*. Old friends came together, as did relatives living in widely separated districts. So, they all met and made up parties and danced and drank and watched the sights, and, in general, had a good old home week. Everyone was in high spirits, and the Tibetan love of gambling was given free rein wherever a group got together with a set of dice.

That night, we went to sleep hearing the festivities going on, just outside



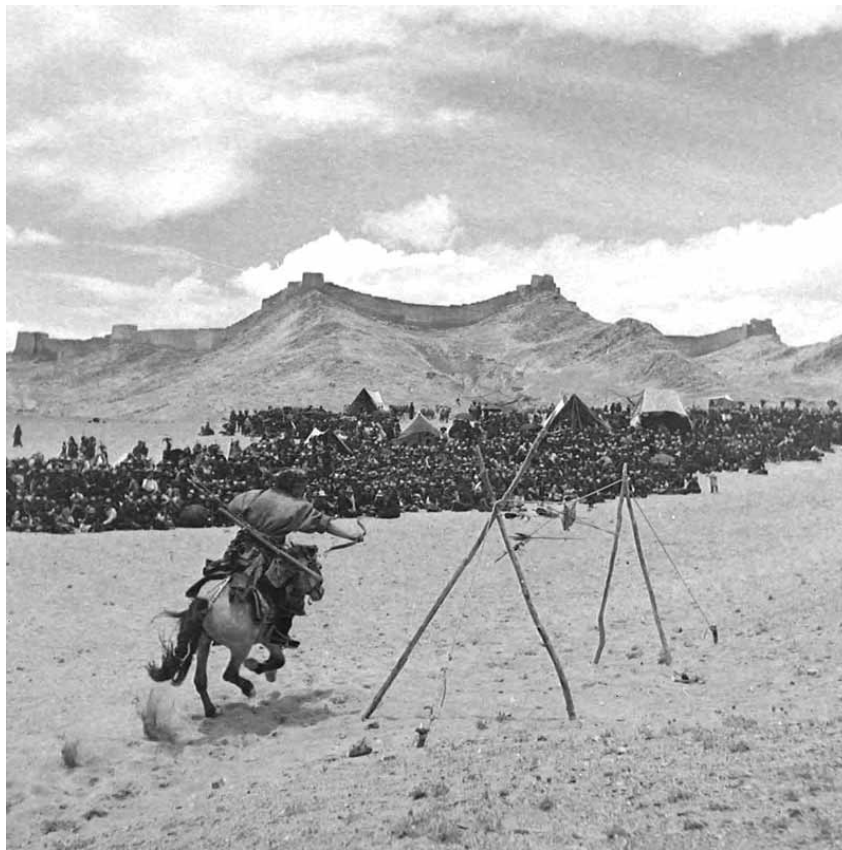
the wall around the bungalow: laughing and singing crowds who, I am sure, got no sleep that night. At three o'clock, Aku woke us to start out for the horse races, and, although it was an ordeal to get up in the cold of the morning with the pale moonlight still shining outside, we did not want to miss one thing of interest in that astonishing country. We were off across the fields by a quarter to four. Faint tinges of pink were beginning to tint the wispy clouds in the eastern sky as we passed through the dark streets of the town and began to climb the steep rocky slopes at the base of the Dzong. High above us the dark mass of the great fort stood against the moon, while in the east the huge mountains were carved in black against the pale green sky, where the watery stars flickered and dissolved one by one into the light of day. At last we reached a ledge under the battlements and settled down among throngs of people who already covered the rocky slopes.

Far away, about five miles to the southeast, in the dark fold of the mountains, a tiny point of light told us where the men and horses were encamped and from which spot the race would begin. More than an ordinary horse race, we learned that the spectacle was really a reenactment of an historical event, although nobody now seems to know just what event it portrays. It seems, however, that it was on June sixteenth that Genghis Khan encamped with his vast Mongolian horde just at the foot of the mountain where the horses were now gathered. In the darkness before dawn, on the morning of the seventeenth, the great horde swept across the plain and, at dawn, they captured the fort. So, ever since, the Tibetans have reenacted that historic morning, though they have actually forgotten its significance. Suddenly, a stir went through the crowd around us. The tiny point of light in the distance had been extinguished, which meant that the race had begun. We strained our eyes, but in the darkness it was not possible to see a thing in the shadow of the plain. Then gradually, as the light became brighter, we began to make out one after another of the tiny black specks that were the horses. Gradually they became clearer, racing here and there over the plain, across a river bed, then hidden for a time behind a hill. Then they would emerge again with a trail of yellow dust behind them.

On and on they came, as the sun rose higher and higher behind the hills. And then, just as the sun set the topmost pinnacle of the fort aflame with yellow light, the first horse came dashing through the streets of the town and along the steep roadway that runs up the back of the Dzong. As we looked above us, the sun was now setting the walls of the Dzong ablaze with light. Behind, the clear blue sky still held a paling moon, and all along the ramparts of the fort were the archers, the personal guards of the Dzongpons, in long chartreuse robes of silk and hats of brightest fringed scarlet. What a sight they were in the full sunlight against the intense sky! We could almost imagine it was the same June sixteenth when Genghis Khan stormed the fort, for such was the splendor of the ancient custom of Tibet that had not changed through the centuries.

As the last horse struggled up the steep roadway and disappeared into the fort, we scrambled along the rock and followed the crowd inside. There at last, in one of the high courtyards of the fort, the horses and the throng gathered. At one side, over the plinth of a huge doorway, were the [Dzongpons](#), seated behind a long table of bright lacquer. They were dressed in robes of bright brocade: one in yellow, one blue and one in red, representing the Khenchen. Wide brimmed hats

were on their heads, made of brocade having a heavy fringe of scarlet silk and hanging from the top of the crown, upon which was a bright jeweled ornament. Behind them were the archers in their chartreuse and scarlet robes in the sunlight; while behind these were the dramatic walls of the fort and the blue sky. In the court yard was the throng of men and horses, and to these the Dzungpons were giving the prizes. As each winner received his prize, he turned and clattered out of the fort. At last, the throng began to leave. We walked back down into the town to our horses, and there we waited to watch the Dzungpons, with all their retinue, come down, mount their horses, and gallop away.



**Figure 15: Shooting arrows at a target during Saga Dawa festivities.**

That same day, the archery contests were held, and, after we had had some breakfast, we rode off once more to watch the festivities. We went on our horses, for the scene of the contests was some two miles away on the plain behind the hills that enclosed the back of the town. In that particular part of the valley, there is no water, and so no cultivation; and the ground is bare and sandy. When we arrived, we found that the entire population had congregated to see the fun. There must have been more than ten thousand people strung out along the plain on

either side of a shallow and gradually sloping ravine. A course was marked out for the horse, and all along this, like the lists at a medieval tournament, were the tents of the feudal lords and nobles. These had been brought out just for the day so that they could entertain even while watching the contests. It was a very gay scene. The bright tents and the brighter costumes made a great contrast to the drab sand. The intense sunlight and, in the distances, the towering Chinese wall, running like a giant serpent over the hilltop, stood out sharply against the blue sky, where fleecy clouds scudded and their shadows raced across the plain. People were still streaming across the foot of the hills on their way to the town, and soon the contests began.

A gun fired somewhere down the ravine. A cloud of blue smoke swirled into the air and the next minute a horseman appeared riding at full tilt up the grade. His horse was gaily decorated with a silver mounted saddle and bright red tassels made of yak's tails; while the archer himself wore a long robe of yellow brocade and the bright scarlet hat of silk fringe. Across his back was a loose bow and a quiver of arrows, and he held a huge and ancient flint lock. As he swept up the ravine, he fired and hit the small target suspended between two poles; and then, since he had shot the one shot from his muzzle-loading gun, he quickly flung it over his shoulder, whipped out his bow and shot an arrow, tipped with a white tuft of eagle's down, at a second target a little way up the course. Then, he streaked past and came to a stop at the top of the hill. One by one, they came on after him, while the crowd cheered; or jeered just as loudly, if he were unfortunate enough to miss the target.

Several days after the archery contest, we received an invitation, while we were having breakfast, to call on the Dzungpon Kusho Choktay at ten o'clock the same morning. We started off about a quarter of an hour before the appointed time. Choktay has a house on the edge of the plain just at the foot of the Dzung. Dzungpon means literally "keeper of the fort," and so the Dzungpon usually lives in or near the fort. Inasmuch as there are two Dzungpons in Gyangtse, only one of them lives in the fort itself, but of him more later.

We arrived at the house of the Dzungpon Kusho Choktay. Going in through a huge gate, we found ourselves in a spacious courtyard, around two sides of which were the stables with rows of stalls. The remaining sides were made by the house and by a frescoed loggia, in which was the entrance leading through to the garden. We had, of course, brought presents, so we waited in the court while Ugden got from the servants the proper tray for the presentation of gifts. When this appeared, to our surprise, we were ushered not into the house, but through the loggia into the garden. Such a scene as then confronted us one does not expect to see in this prosaic twentieth century. Kusho Choktay was holding his morning court. Usually, the garden contains only a few poplars; but, this week being the big week of the year, it had been transformed for the festivities. A great tent, solidly applied with designs in blue and scarlet, stood at one end in a group of trees. The whole enclosure was covered with green grass, rose bushes, hollyhocks. Many varieties of flowering mountain shrubs were all about, and all of these, including the sod, we later learned, had been brought by mule-back from the Chumbi valley, about a hundred and thirty miles away, just for the days of the festivities. Inside the tent, the color and magnificence was almost impossible to

describe. The top was lined with pale blue silk with a cloud design and the side walls with heavy coral shantung silk. A gorgeous Chinese rug covered the ground, and on all sides were low divans covered with smaller silk rugs.

Choktay came forward to meet us. He was a surprisingly young man with a well cut and typically Mongolian face. His hair was braided into two strands, brought around his head and woven at the top with cords of red silk into a chignon. From one ear hung a long slender earring delicately made of gold and turquoise, while the other ear had only a small button of turquoise. His long full robe was of stiff golden brown brocade, and his boots, with their turned-up toes, were of brown leather with floral designs of green. We went into the tent, where he motioned us to be seated. Almost immediately his wife appeared. Probably, there are many Tibetan girls who are good looking; but, invariably, there is that glistening surface of dirt and grease covering them, so that any beauty is well concealed. Only amongst the highest classes and the nobility is it considered good form to bathe. In any case, Mrs. Choktay was most attractive. She was small and neat and very vivacious; a most infectious smile continually lit her face. Her jacket and skirt were maroon brocade, her shirtwaist with full sleeves of bright peacock green. She had on the usual brightly striped apron of married women. Around her neck were eight strands of magnificent pearls, divided at intervals by huge deep red coral beads. From this necklace was suspended the [Gau](#), the one piece of jewelry that almost every Tibetan woman wears. This is usually a square, flat metal box measuring three or four inches across, and was originally intended to carry prayers folded inside it, or other amulets or charms to protect the wearer from all evil forces. Depending upon the means of the wearer, these [Gaus](#) may be very simple or extremely valuable; but almost every woman has one of some kind, even if it is only made of copper. The majority of them are silver set with turquoise. Mrs. Choktay's was made of pure gold, beautifully chased in the middle and having a wide border around the edge of exquisite turquoise carved into the shapes of flowers and leaves. From her left shoulder hung a cascade of graduated pearls held with a clip of emerald jade and divided in the middle by a huge carved emerald. At the bottom was a tassel of emeralds and rubies. She alone wore nothing on her head and her hair was braided simply into two thick braids meeting at her knees in a red tassel. As soon as Mrs. Choktay had been seated, tea was brought, and we chatted gaily through our interpreter, Ugden. Soon, other guests began to arrive: men in long robes of brocade; and women in every brilliant color; some with the high arched headdress of Gyangtse province strung with pearls, coral and turquoise; and some in the [Lhasa headdress](#). In this, the hair is caught up above the head along two horns, from whence it falls in two black cascades at either side of the face and down the back, where it is joined with a loop of pearls. At the very back of the head is a triangular frame studded with coral, turquoise and pearls, and one point of this sticks up between the horns. With this headdress, they wear two huge gold and turquoise ornaments, like [long earrings](#), that are fastened just above the temples and fall down on either side of the face against the cascades of hair.

When this group had gathered in the tent, it was truly an incredible sight. With the sunlight filtering softly through the canvas, it was a scene of amazing beauty and splendor. Choktay left us immediately after his tea, on the plea that he

had some urgent affairs to attend to, but not before he had extracted from us the promise to stay to lunch. The temptation was too great for us, and we acquiesced almost immediately. When he had gone, games were brought out and we played them with Mrs. Choktay and some of the other guests. Checkers, parcheesi and dominos seemed strangely out of place in those surroundings, but they did serve to pass the time and add a good deal of laughter and fun. All the time the games were going on, *chang* was being served, and no sooner would the servant fill our cups than some fun-loving Tibetan would shout at us, "Tashi-Delek," the Tibetan equivalent for, "Here's mud in your eye." In return, we would have to teach them our version, which they thought was wonderful when Ugden explained it. So, after that, it was, "Here's mud in your eye," and the novelty of the thing spurred the drinking. Each time we made the gesture to take a sip, someone would shout, "Tung Dak!" which, roughly, means "Bottoms up." And so things progressed very nicely, and it seemed no time at all until Choktay returned. It was one-thirty, and lunch was served. One result of this little interlude, I must not forget, however, for it was most amusing. When we returned to India we were told that shortly before, an important Tibetan Official had been entertained by a certain important representative of the British Government. At the end of the dinner, there was the usual toast to the King-Emperor; whereupon, the Tibetan Official rose and seriously proposed the toast, "Here's mud in your eye." It broke up the party.

When lunch was brought in, we were rather dismayed to find that the implements provided were a queerly shaped spoon and some chop sticks. Never having tackled a meal with them before, it did not look like a happy prospect, especially when such things as peas and rice were set before us. Fortunately, Kumar Chime of [Taring](#), the young scion of an important family with estates near Gyangtse, was sitting beside me and undertook to instruct me in the use of chop sticks. At first, I met with little success; but then, suddenly, I got the knack of it, and it was as easy as anything. In the end, we rather felt that chop sticks were an improvement over our implements, for one cannot gobble huge quantities at a time. The process of eating is inevitably spread over a greater time, and the fact that you can take only a smallish morsel at a time makes it easier to enjoy each delicious bit. Twelve or fourteen dishes were placed in a circle in the middle of each table, and a bowl containing a soup with noodles in it and tiny bits of peppered omelet floating on top was placed before each person. Everyone dipped into the circle of dishes in the middle and took what he wanted, either eating it directly or putting it into the soup, making a sort of stew. The things we ate were, for the most part, entirely unrecognizable, but a few we knew: there were peas mixed with bits of shredded meat; braised celery in spiced meat of some kind; thin slivers of yaks tongue; and chopped sea slugs. Most of the food eaten by the higher classes in Tibet is imported from China.

Altogether, it was one of the most delicious meals I have ever eaten. It was deliciously cooked, most delicately flavored, and altogether extremely light, though we consumed a large quantity. Every few minutes the dish in the center of the circle of dishes was removed and something different put in its place. This central dish was the theme, while the other little dishes were the melody playing around it; and, indeed, that is the way it was planned. Each new dish was so flavored as to complement the one before, and so the whole sensation was most

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agreeable. After the meal, each guest, according to custom, was required to drink off a large bowl of chang, which, after all we had consumed before the meal, was almost too much for me.

We had noticed that many of the women wore in their necklace one or more [strange oval beads](#) with queer black and white markings on them, and we had wondered what they were. The Tibetans often pay the equivalent of several hundred dollars for a single bead, and attach great importance to them as charms. They are, of course, extremely rare, and, hence, their value if there is any demand at all. But no one had been able to tell us what they were or where they came from. Choktay said they were natural stones found in the ground in certain parts of Tibet. He even said that they did not have to be shaped, as they were found just as we saw them except for the hole which had to be drilled. They did not seem like any sort of natural formation that we had ever heard of, for the markings on them were peculiarly regular and geometric: sometimes little triangles; sometimes straight bands ran around them; or, often, perfect squares. And they looked like polished glass, though they were opaque. We never did get an explanation of them, and it was just by chance when I returned home I came upon a reference to them, as used in Chinese medicine. It appeared that they are stones formed in the gall bladder of sheep and goats, called bezoar stones. And, of course, that had given rise to the Tibetan belief that they were found in the ground, for they are actually found in the ground where the animal died and, of course, have long outlived its other remains. The fact that a single one of these beads may bring as much as several hundred dollars indicates the Tibetan woman's love of jewelry. The amount they have is often quite astounding. In fact, the wife of an important official when dressed in all her finest is hardly able to stand up for the weight. When fully adorned, she may represent several Lacs of rupees, which would mean in dollars anywhere from sixty to a hundred and sixty thousand.

The subject of the strange beads led from one thing to another, and before we left, Choktay sent to his house and had brought another thing which was as strange as many things in Tibet, and equally without explanation. What he showed us looked at first like an ossified brain, from one side of which protruded a stump of a bone. Actually, the protruding bone was the butt end of a shed horn, and the part with the convolutions like a brain was actually part of it. In other words, the whole thing was some sort of a malformed horn, which had undoubtedly killed the animal to which it had belonged by pressing into the brains. The amazing thing was that the convolutions on the lump of horn made an exact relief map of Pu Dong, one of the holy places of Tibet, as it was shown on an actual relief map. How can one explain a thing like that? All the while we were studying it, Bill and I were both beginning to feel the effects of the chang, which was still fermenting inside of us. And so after saying our goodbyes, we beat a hasty retreat and vowed that we had learned finally that it was not for us to drink any alcoholic beverages, no matter how weak, as long as we remained in that altitude. Chang, especially, was not the drink for us. Inasmuch as it takes only two or three days to make chang, and it is primarily a fermented drink, fermentation has only progressed in part by the time one drinks it. The rest of the process goes on inside, with dire results to someone who has not been brought up on it. In any case, we felt pretty limp for the rest of that day.

## *Chapter Ten*

### STRANGE SIGHTS AND STRANGE TEMPLES

The big Tomasha was over. Gyangtse began to settle back into its every day life, and only a few of the tents of the local lords remained on the plain when we woke next morning. As if by magic, that whole town on the plain, where for a week there had been several thousand people and all the festivity of the year's big celebration, had disappeared into thin air. We made our way toward one of the few remaining tents about ten o'clock the next morning to pay our call on [Tendong](#), the Dzongpon of the north. These two, Kusho Choktay and Tendong, with the Khenchen, or Governor of the Province, are the top ranking politicians in Gyangtse. As we approached close to the little group of tents, I again lost all sense of time and period, and for a minute I felt as though we were on our way to pay our respects to one of the Mongol Chieftains, Genghis Khan or some one of the powerful Mongols who with their hordes swept conquering across Asia and made the roar of a great tumult at the very back door of Europe. There was something wild about it, something that savored of the broad flat steppes in the days of the barbarous horde.

A servant stood before the flap of the tent against the bold designs of flowers and dragons. He wore heavy leather boots with turned-up toes and a long chuba of heavy wool held around the waist by a band of scarlet brocade. In one ear was a heavy golden ring open on one side and studded on one of the ends with a bright lump of turquoise, and his long black hair was braided down his back with strips of scarlet thread and a coral button at the end. He held out a red lacquer tray as we stood before him to receive our gifts and then, lifting the silken tent flap, he ushered us inside. It was the large tent that Tendong used for entertaining. The room must have measured about twenty feet square, and around this on three sides were low divans covered with the skins of snow leopards. Before these were many little tables of red lacquer decorated with gilt carvings and brightly painted flowers.

The designs on the outside of the tent showed through as dull shadows and made one feel as though one were enveloped in the leafy shade of a forest. Tendong rose to greet us, and when we had carefully laid our ceremonial scarves across his extended arms, he motioned us toward a divan. We all sat down behind the little tables, while a servant brought the beautiful Tibetan tea cups. It is the custom to offer tea to your guest in Tibet, no matter what hour of the day it may be, and indeed to the Tibetan it makes very little difference, for they drink tea all day long. In the winter, when it is cold, tea is the one means of keeping warm. A well-to-do Tibetan will drink from thirty to seventy cups of tea a day, depending upon the time of the year and the severity of the weather.

Tendong was a most delightful host, and we found that he talked easily and was very interested in anything that we could tell him about America. The entire output of Tibetan wool has of late years been bought by America, but sad for Tibet, the New Deal, with its drastic curtailments of business, has caused an almost complete collapse of the Tibetan wool market. After asking us all about this situation, which would eventually impoverish Tibet if no other outlet was found for the wool, Tendong demanded to know how it was that such an enlightened people could endure for a minute to be ruled by such a foolish government. We found this rather an impossible question to answer, and so the subject was changed. Tendong explained to us that he had at his home on the Dzong a photograph that he wanted to show us when we came to have lunch with him. It was, he said, reputed to be a picture of a building in New York called The Empire State Building. Was it, he wondered, a real building? Surely there could not be, as it said, a building more than a hundred stories high and capable of holding thirty thousand people. Had we ever heard of it? When we explained with some pride that what he had heard about it was quite true, and told him that we had been to the top of it in little rooms that shot upwards at the rate of twelve hundred feet a minute he seemed quite interested. But when we had finished, he wanted to know why, if our country was as large as he had heard, people wanted to live on top of each other. For surely if they wanted to live in high places, there must be plenty of mountains on which they could build their houses. Again, we found it very difficult to explain and remarked that we had better be drinking our tea. We did not meet Mrs. Tendong that day, but we were invited to lunch at their house on the fort some days hence. We went away hoping that Tendong would have forgotten about the Empire State Building by that day, but trying, nevertheless, to think up a good excuse to justify our living habits if he happened not to forget.

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**Figure 16: A woman spinning wool for use in a carpet.**

Bill and I had wanted to buy a few good Tibetan things to take home with us, but it became apparent to us the first time we went into the town that there were no shops that had anything like the things we wanted. What we particularly wanted to pick up were some old Tibetan Thankas, or paintings, old books with finely carved wooden boards, some good old bits of Tibetan silver, or anything in fact that was distinctively Tibetan. But none of the shops had anything like this. What we found were just the commonest sort of commodities, such as grain, shoe laces, atrocious sweets, brick tea or cheap pots and pans manufactured in Japan. Bill wanted to have some butter lamps made, such as are used in the monasteries to light the altars, so we set out for town to find a silver smith. After much inquiry, we found a tiny alley running off the main street between two houses. It was hardly wider than one's shoulders, and, after walking for thirty feet or so, it turned sharply to the right. And there, tied to the corner, was a cow, lying right in the road; we had to climb over her before we reached a door. But, at once, we knew that we had reached our goal, for from within came the incessant chink-chink of the hammers and the hush-hush of the bellows feeding the forge. Ugden went ahead and we followed, stooping low through the door, and found ourselves in a

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small room open to the sky at the top. Sitting on the floor around two of the walls were an old man, the grandfather; a middle aged man, his son; and a young boy, the grandson. In spite of the skylight, the place seemed dingy, for everything was covered with soot and grime. And in another little room at the back, we could just make out in the gloom the mother of the household, spinning wool with a little spinning top suspended from her hand. Her daughter was busily combing wool into straight fluffy lengths ready to be spun, while with her foot she rocked the youngest grandchild. Such was the domestic scene into which we stumbled. But all of this, we had to take in the split second before they became aware of us, for when we were noticed, our presence seemed to send them into a panic. The women shrieked and, dropping the baby, the wool and the comb, they began to stumble crazily about the room with no apparent purpose, their tongues stuck well out at us all the time, and their eyes never leaving our faces, though they stumbled into any number of things. The three men rose quickly to their feet, spilling as they did so all of their tools into their respective fires and also sticking out their tongues. The young boy seemed to have been completely overcome by our appearance, for he dashed with speed born of terror and disappeared out of a side door into another part of the house. We had Ugden explain that our intentions were of the best and that we merely had come to order some things that we wished made.

This seemed to reassure the terror-stricken family, for the men stooped to recover their tools from the fire and the women, regaining their senses, brought a chair and a box for us to sit upon. When Ugden informed them that we wished to have some butter lamps made and asked if they had any plans to show us, they conferred amongst themselves and then sent the boy out on the run to fetch one that they had recently made for a man living nearby. In a very short time the boy came back with it. It turned out to be just what Bill wanted, so we began to negotiate for the making of five just like it. First there was the question of getting the silver. The silversmith was, of course, far too poor to be able to keep that much silver on hand. Eventually, we found that he could use our silver rupees. We had brought only silver rupees, as these are the only form of Indian currency that the Tibetans know or will accept; and, strangely enough, the Tibetans use a unit of measure in their silver-smithing that is just equal to the weight of a silver rupee. So, our computations were simplified, and we handed over a good sized little pile of silver coins to be converted into butter lamps. It seemed to us like a rather peculiar way of doing things. But, as though he had always used this method of obtaining his silver, which, indeed, he had, the silversmith took a certain number of coins for each butter lamp, and then began to melt these into three lumps, leaving three lumps over for later use in decorating. Needless to say we did not watch the entire evolution of the butter lamps on that one morning, but every time we went into the town, we would stop by at the silversmith's and so saw each successive stage. When he had his three lumps of silver, he began to hammer flat over an iron bracket that was fixed in front of him, and these he eventually shaped into the bowl, the cone shaped bottom and the tubular stem of the butter lamps. At first, of course, they were plain, unsymmetrical and unadorned shapes, but by degrees, with the use of tools of many shapes and a constant hammering, these took on flutings and the lovely lotus petal shapes of the regular [Tibetan butter](#)

[lamps](#). Finally, the three sections were fastened together, and then the three coins that had been left over were melted up and hammered into thin strips. These were made into tiny pressed decorations for the outside of the cups. One of the most interesting things was the method used for gold plating, for we had not understood how plating could be done without the use of electricity.



**Figure 17: Our silversmith, holding one of the butter lamps he made for us.**

Many of the Tibetan things we had seen had been very attractively decorated with embossed medallions of gold on an otherwise plain silver surface, and we were much interested to see how this was done. First, the portion to be plated was rubbed thoroughly over with mercury, so that a good coating of the mercury adhered to the silver surface. Then, the required quantity of gold was filed into tiny shavings and mixed thoroughly with another small quantity of mercury so that it formed an amalgam. This amalgam was then worked carefully into the surface that had been prepared with the coating of mercury, so that the two mixed together. Finally, the spot was heated in the fire. The tiny particles of the gold melted and ran together, and, at the same time, the mercury went off in

the form of vapor and left the surface overlay plated with gold. From where the Tibetans ever got the method, I do not know, for it shows a knowledge of chemistry that I do not believe they have. Perhaps the trick was learned from the Chinese.

After our visit to the Kenchen, we had obtained his permission to go through the monastery and all the other shrines in the part of the town where the monks are, and we soon decided to avail ourselves of this. Ugden sent off a messenger to say that we would go one afternoon, and right after lunch we set out to see the [great golden chorten of Gyangtse](#). This is the largest chorten in all Tibet and is famous for the great golden tip which rises in impressive grandeur from out the midst of the other religious buildings. It is know also as the [Kumbum](#), or shrine of the ten thousand images. As we made our way through the town, we could see it looming high above the other buildings, and it is impossible to describe the magnificence of that great golden cupola glinting blindingly in the sun against the blue sky and the pink Chinese wall that encloses the town. The great chorten stands just to the left of the [main Gompa](#), and its bottom part is composed of square set back terraces, each a little smaller than the one below, until the point is reached where a square tower comes out of the top, supporting the golden cupola and the strange umbrella-like top.

We found an aged monk asleep in the vestibule, with a large black hat, but he awoke hurriedly at the sound of our voices and called to someone inside the building to make the lights ready. In a few minutes, a young monk came out holding several little butter lamps. He was only an infant, and he hardly seemed old enough to walk. It seemed strange that he was already wearing the heavy red robes of a monk, but it is the common custom in Tibet to enter the monastery at the age of four years to obtain the full religious training. After a minute or two, the monk toddled off into the gloom of the building and we followed with the older monk. It was difficult, at first, to see anything inside, for the light was insufficient after the glare of the sun outside. Gradually, however, we were able to make out in the gloom the walls covered with frescoes of wild looking gods and demons. The altar at one end looked like a rococo altar in a German Cathedral, transformed into an oriental dream, and, therefore, even more strange and awe-inspiring. We passed from one to another of these little shrines, stepping from one out onto the terrace, until we came to the door of the next. Each time, we had to wait in the darkness until our eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and that was in one sense a trial. The little shrines had not been opened in heaven knows how long, and when we stepped into them, there arose all about us, like a heavy blanket of oppression, the thick and fetid smell of the yak butter in the altar lamps. It was an almost choking smell, and each time we had to hold our breath as long as possible, which was not at all long at that altitude. However, the Shrine of the Ten Thousand Images was a veritable pantheon of Tibetan gods and demons, and, as we went from one to the other of the shrines, we began to get a clearer picture of it all. It takes a long while, however, to see enough of these images and paintings before one is able to tell one from the other. The whole of Tibetan art is regulated by canons which say just how each image should be represented, and the result of this is that many of the images seem almost identical. The difference between one image and the next may only be in one of the articles held by one of the many hands. But after a while,

when one gets to know these signs, the study of Tibetan art becomes intensely absorbing. The very fact that every image has a form of its own, even down to the details, makes it possible for the artist to represent in his work a complete story in symbols; and, when one can understand this, what at first seemed like the most stereotyped piece of work takes on an extremely interesting story of its own.

By the time we had made a thorough study of the dozens of shrines that afternoon, we were feeling quite sick from the smell of yak butter. So, we went back to the bungalow to think over all that we had seen, trying to correlate in our minds the vast and complicated pantheon of Tibetan gods. I think I can say that it was a noble effort, but it was some time before the thing resolved itself into a form that we could understand at all.

## *Chapter Eleven*

### TIBETAN ART

For the very reason that the iconography of Tibetan religious art is probably the most complex in the world, it is also the most interesting. When one knows enough about it to at least get an idea of the meaning in any particular painting or image, it becomes all the more fascinating. The reasons why it is so complex a study are many. First, Buddhism came into Tibet and eventually took unto itself the already complicated forms of the old Tibetan Bon religion. Second, in that Bon religion, and later in Tibetan Buddhism, itself, there came a good deal of Hinduism, through the close connection of Tibet with India and Nepal. So, we find in this one religious art, at the same time, parts of Buddhism, Hinduism, and the old Bon religion.

In all this art, there is, of course, the image of Buddha. But right away we run into trouble due to the many forms of the Buddha image in this complex iconography. To the early Buddhists, there was just one image, that representing Gautama Buddha, who attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and later founded the Buddhist religion. In some parts of India, at such early Buddhist sites as Sanchi and Barhut, it was believed that it was impossible to represent the Buddha in human form. So, they satisfied themselves by using merely the symbol of the wheel of the law to represent him. However, the Tibetans always portray the Buddha in human form, and they probably have taken over the descendant of the image which was developed by the Gandharan school of art in the northwest of India in the first years of the Christian era. It is impossible to say how this school of art developed the image. There is a legend that tells the story of a king long ago who ordered an image of the Buddha, but the artists to whom he gave the commission found themselves unable to represent his divine face. Buddha, seeing their difficulty, told them to bring a linen cloth and hold it before him, and on this he projected a shadow of his image so that the artists were able to fill it in later and color it. This legend is, of course, startlingly like the one we have concerning the origin of the image of Christ. However, the Gandharan school was based largely on the art forms of Greece, which came to the Indian subcontinent in the wake of Alexander the Great. With these new art forms, Indian artists did produce some of the earliest Buddhist images, which, in the succeeding centuries, have spread all across Asia. In this image, we find the greatest simplicity. The Buddha is shown with the protuberance of an Ushnisha on top of the head and with no adornment, save the curly hair. There is the Urna, or third eye, on the forehead and the elongated ear lobes denoting wisdom. This is the same sort of image that we find representing the exalted one in Tibetan art. In these paintings, his body is golden, and he has a halo around his head; but, otherwise, there are no adornments at all.

Why all the complication, then? In later times in India, the Mahayana form of Buddhism developed [five celestial or meditative Buddhas](#). These may correspond to the five elements, and to the five senses, and each one is supposed to reign over one of the five cosmic periods of time. Moreover, each of these has a "Human Buddha," or earthly representative, who will manifest himself in human form on the earth during his rule of one of the Cosmic Periods; and also a meditative Bodhisattva, or saint, whose duty it is to help humanity along the way of life. Now, all of these are represented in Tibetan art by images that are basically similar. However, each of the celestial or meditative Buddhas has a color, a mudra, or hand position, a situation, and a particular thing that he sits or rides on. This is all prescribed by the Tibetan art canons, and so it is possible to tell them all apart.

Celestial Buddhas	Color	Mudra or Hand Gesture	Position	Vehicle
Vairocana	White	Teaching	Center	Lion
Akshobhya	Blue	Attestation	East	Elephant
Ratnasambhava	Yellow	Charity	South	Horse
Amitabha	Red	Meditation	West	Swan
Amoghasiddhi	Green	Fearlessness	North	Garuda

These five celestial Buddhas, who will rule the five great Cosmic Periods of time, are supposed to have emanated from a single great Cosmic Buddha who is the aggregation of the natural laws of the universe. The three first celestial Buddhas are supposed to have already ruled for their allotted time. It is now the period of Amitabha, and it was his human Buddha, or earthly representative, who incarnated into Shakyamuni, the Indian Prince who founded the present era of Buddhism. Next will come the last of the five celestial Buddhas, Maitreya, or the Buddha of Love. When the cosmic period of Amitabha is over, Maitreya will manifest himself on earth through his human Buddha.

So much for the Buddhas in Tibetan art; and if we had only these images to consider, the task would be an easy one. However, besides these Buddhas, there are sixteen Arhats and a long list of Tutelary gods. The [sixteen Arhats](#) were taken over from China, for they never appear in Indian art. Arhat means "a deserving one," and these figures represent sages who have reached the fourth step in the path toward Nirvana. They are supposed to have miraculous powers, and they have reached the point, according to the doctrine of reincarnation, where they are no longer bound to the wheel of life and so are not subject to rebirth; they are immortal. Originally, there were only four Arhats, and they were supposed to be the guardian kings of the four kingdoms at the four cardinal points of the compass. They were the rulers of the four regions of space, and it was their duty, entrusted to them, to preserve the law after the death of the earthly representative of Buddha. Gradually, each of these Arhats took on three others, thus raising the total to sixteen. Each of these Arhats can be recognized by a particular attribute.

Arhats	Attributes
Angaja	An incense burner and a fan
Ajita	Part of his robe is put over his head. He is in meditation.
Vanavasi	A fan
Kalika	Two gold pendants in his hand
Vajriputa	A fan in one hand; the other raised in a Mudra of charity
Badhara	A book
Kanakavata	A coil of rope
Kanakabharadvaja	Usually bald and in meditation
Bakula	A rat with a jewel in its mouth
Rahula	A crown
Chudapanthaka	He is in meditation
Pindolabharadvaja	A book and alms bowl
Panthaka	A book
Nagasena	A vase and a wand
Gopaka	A book
Abheda	A small stupa

In general, these attributes serve to identify the Arhats, though there are sometimes variations which throw one off.

Inasmuch as the Mahayana school of Buddhism came strongly into Tibet with its cult of Bodhisattvas, they hold an important place in the Tibetan art. The word bodhisattvas has nothing to do with the word buddha, though often it is believed to be simply another spelling. The word bodhi means “highest consciousness.” It was under the bodhi tree that the Lord Buddha attained enlightenment. Sattva means “essence or embodiment,” or a living creature. Hence, Bodhisattva means “a creature having the highest consciousness.” Tibetans believe that Bodhisattvas are super beings whose compassion causes them to vow not go on farther along the road toward Nirvana until all mankind was saved. This belief has made their cult extremely popular. It has something in it of the Christian idea of sacrifice. There are eight of these bodhisattvas which occur relatively often in Tibetan paintings; but of these eight, there are three which are important: (1) Maitreya, the future Buddha; (2) Avalokiteshvara, the all compassionate one; and (3) Manjushri, the lord of wisdom.

It is said that the exalted Lord, before he came from heaven to earth to fulfill his reincarnation as the Gautama Buddha, gave to Maitreya his own bodhisattva’s diadem as a sign that he was to be his successor. It is firmly believed that this Buddha will eventually come to earth to continue the teachings of Gautama. During a recent troublesome time in Tibet, the Tashi Lama<sup>5</sup> caused to be erected near the monastery of [Tashi Lhunpo](#) a huge golden statue of Maitreya, hoping in this way to hasten the day of his coming to earth. Maitreya is frequently represented in Tibetan paintings as sitting on a throne [in western fashion](#), with his legs down, to signify that he is already preparing to get up and come down to

<sup>5</sup> JC: That is, the Panchen Lama.



earth.

[Maitreya](#) is represented in three forms in Tibetan paintings. He wears, usually, the clothes of a bodhisattva, which consists of loose trousers of thin draped material and only a shawl across his shoulders. There is a [crown on his head](#), and he wears a gold necklace and bracelets. On his crown, or on his forehead if he is not wearing a crown, is almost always a [stupa](#). In this costume, he may be [standing](#), his right hand making the sign of charity and his left hand holding the amrita vessel, the amrita being the liquid of immortality. In another form, he may be [seated](#), dressed the same way, but now his hands are in his lap in the sign of meditation and holding the amrita vessel. The third form shows how important Maitreya is considered, for he is shown almost in the same manner as a true Buddha. Now, instead of the usual Bodhisattva costume, he has on the simple monastic robes of the Buddha and is without ornament. His hands make the [sign of teaching](#). The only way that we can tell that this is Maitreya and not a true Buddha is the small stupa which is actually painted on his forehead, and the two blossoms, or naga flowers, that always appear in pictures of bodhisattvas, just behind the head.

[Avalokiteshvara](#) is the most popular of all the bodhisattvas in Tibet. He is believed to have sprung into being from the celestial Buddha Amitabha and come to earth for the deliverance of mankind from all suffering. The Dalai Lamas are supposed to be reincarnations of Avalokiteshvara, and the palace of the Lamas at Lhasa, known as the [Potala](#), is said to have been named after Mount Potala, which was the residence of Avalokiteshvara in India. This bodhisattva is usually represented with [many arms](#) to represent charity. In each palm is an eye to represent Omnipresence, and he has many heads to represent Omniscience. Occasionally, in older paintings, we find representations of Avalokitesvara with only two pairs of hands; but these are infrequent in newer paintings. Avalokiteshvara can always be spotted by the [rosary which is in one of the hands, and by the lotus flower in another](#), and he is always represented in the regular costume of a bodhisattva.

[Manjushri](#), or the Lord of Wisdom, was the spiritual guide of Tsongkhapa, who, as we saw in an earlier chapter, was the great reformer of Tibetan Buddhism and the founder of the Yellow Hat Sect. Knowledge or wisdom is venerated greatly by Tibetans. Indeed, if a Tibetan wishes to be particularly complimentary, he will often refer to you as "Learned One." Since Manjushri's realm is infinite knowledge, he is one of the greatly venerated Bodhisattvas. He is usually represented sitting upon a lotus throne in the [garb of a bodhisattva](#). His color is yellow, and in one hand, he holds a fiery sword; while in the other is a blue lotus, upon which rests a book to signify his knowledge. Because he was the pupil of Manjushri, [Tsongkhapa](#) is represented with all these attributes in all Tibetan paintings. There are several other types of paintings of Manjushri, but he can always be recognized by the sword and the book which appear always with him; and, of course, he can be told from Tsongkhapa, in this respect, because, although the latter has the same attributes, he is not a bodhisattva, and so he is dressed in his monastic robes. Anyone who displays great knowledge is suspected of being an incarnation of Manjushri. For instance, when Songtsen Gampo, the first great King of Tibet, desired to have a Tibetan alphabet made, he

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commissioned Thonmi Sambhota to do it. When the latter finally accomplished this by using the Kashmir alphabet, he was thought to be a man of great wisdom, for who could think of inventing symbols by which one might read thoughts. Accordingly, he was proclaimed an incarnation of Manjushri, the Lord of Wisdom.

Appearing very frequently in Tibetan paintings are the tutelary deities. Every Tibetan usually has one of these [tutelary deities](#) as a sort of patron saint to protect him through life, and he may show particular respect to any other of them at a particular time, depending upon the particular trouble which the other tutelary deity is supposed to have under his control. These tutelary deities are of the most wild and horrid aspect. Often they appear in sexual embrace, and they always have most hideous faces and hairy bodies. They wear many heavy ornaments and are usually surrounded by flames. There are many of these hideous deities, and their many attributes are far too complicated to go into here, though as a group they are unmistakable. Even with as little to go by as there is in this short outline, Tibetan paintings can be far more interesting than they would be to the casual observer. What would have appeared a stiff painting of meaningless figures now becomes full of meaning and tells a certain story of Tibetan history. One soon forgets that the paintings at first seemed stiff and stereotyped; for it is not just painting, it is a highly developed form of pictorial writing. Each painting has its own tale to tell, if we only knew the symbols by which to read it.

## *Chapter Twelve*

### MORE CEREMONIES AND A DISCOVERY

The next morning, we felt sufficiently recovered from the smell of the shrine of the Ten Thousand Images to go back and begin work in earnest, making color reproductions of some of the frescoes. That presented more of a problem than we had thought, for when we had actually got the camera set up in the first shrine, we found that the shrine was so narrow that, even with the widest angle lens we possessed, it was almost impossible to get far enough away to obtain a fair-sized portion of any of the walls. Besides, the darkness in the shrines necessitated long exposures, some of them up to twenty minutes. But, in a way, that proved a blessing, for once we had opened the shutter, we could go out onto the terrace and breathe the fresher air. Another thing helped: we opened the doors of all the shrines in which we were going to work, and so gave them a fair airing before we began our work in them. However, it was a long job because in many of the shrines we had to take the frescoes in several sections due to the narrow space. It looked as though we would have many days of work to keep us busy before we had any sort of record of the paintings we wanted. And little did we know the fascinating discovery we were soon to make, something that would add so much to our work. As it was, we went right on working on the paintings in the Kumbum, not altogether satisfied with them, as they were of altogether too similar a style to make a comparative record of different periods; but as there was nothing else about, they would have to do.

Then one morning, Ugden came in to say that there was to be a big religious ceremony and prayer festival in the Gompa. Monks had come from many of the surrounding monasteries, and even the [Regent](#) and many important officials had come from Lhasa to be present. Of course, we decided to go ourselves, and so we set out at about nine o'clock when we heard the great Tibetan trumpets on top of the Gompa begin to vibrate forth and send rolling waves of sound echoing across the valley. When we finally entered the enclosure of the monastery, it was a bustle of activity. We had apparently arrived with the late comers, for the monks were scurrying down from the side streets and from all directions. Their hurrying feet sent up great clouds of dust in the huge court, and, through this dust, their deep red robes and their yellow peaked hats made masses of rich color. Some of them even had on voluminous capes of yellow, with a deep fringe from the collar, and they were all scurrying to take their places inside the Gompa. Up on the roof of the Gompa, against the huge golden pinnacle and the golden top of the great chorten, stood two other monks blowing the [Tibetan trumpets](#), and another accenting their rhythm on a giant burnished gong with a padded hammer almost as big as himself. They were the biggest trumpets I have ever seen. They must have measured twenty feet long, for the two monks stood far back on the roof while the

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mouths of the trumpets rested on two brightly painted racks set on the parapet. The notes were so low that I felt I was not hearing them with my ears at all. They seemed too deep a vibration to be audible, for one's whole body responded to their immense volume. The sound of the gong was the same, but it had a harsher, more clanging note above its mellow depths that lent an exciting pitch to the tumult of sound.

Arranged before the steps of the Gompa were countless sacks of grain. Ugden informed us that the monks were receiving their yearly allotment of the grain that had been paid into the monastery by the land holders. As we watched, one of the high Lamas who was overseeing this process gave each monk his share in a sack or in a wooden bucket, while clouds of the yellow chaff, stirred into the air by the wind and the hurrying feet, made a bright golden aura in the clear sunlit air. Finally, the last of the monks disappeared inside the Gompa, and we followed to watch the ceremony.

The huge red doors into the congregational hall were thrown open, and we stood looking inside as the monks took their places. The walls in the far corners were dim and obscured by the smoke of the many butter lamps. But close by, we could see the red and painted columns rising up into the brightness above, where the clerestory windows sent slanting shafts of light through the blue smoke, touching here a bit of gilded wood, there a dim tassel of brocade; and finally, making bright patches on the dull red mats that lined the floor between the columns. On these thick padded mats, the monks were taking their places cross legged, each with a wooden bowl of butter tea and a small silver butter lamp with a tiny flame riding on its amber fluid.

The High Lama came out from the main shrine at the back and took his place on a high throne to one side of the door at the back. His golden throne was covered with a canopy of bright brocades and before him, on a sort of lectern, he had some of the holy scriptures. For some minutes he sat as though in meditation, and then took up from the lectern a beautifully worked silver vase into which had been inserted a bunch of peacock feathers fixed into a handle. This he took out, and, dipping it into the vase, he began to flick the holy water on the monks as he passed from row to row. It was another bit of ceremony borrowed from the Catholic Church. He chanted in a low voice some blessing as he walked from row to row, and, as each monk received the blessing of the holy water, he took up the chant, so that there was an ever increasing hum of voices. As we turned to go up above to watch, it sounded for all the world like an old Gregorian chant. Up a narrow flight of stairs that was no more than a fixed ladder, we came out on an inner part of the roof just below the clerestory windows, where there was a small balcony just under the edge of the roof, looking down into the congregational hall. This balcony widened at the ends, forming two little enclosures, and seated there were the High Dignitaries of the Church. The Regent was in a costume of bright orange brocade and velvet, with his head on a Panama hat, upon the front of which was a magnificently jeweled plaque the size of one's hand. On the tables before each of these dignitaries was a book of the scriptures and a golden teacup, while servants stood close by with trays of sweetmeats. We saw our friend [Taring Rinpoche](#) seated next to the Regent, and he rose when he saw us and beckoned us to come over to him. He wanted to show us, he said, some of the sacred scriptures

that had only just been taken out of the Library for the occasion and that we would not have a chance to see again. Several of the books were on the table before him and the Regent, and he asked us to sit down and examine them. Taring Rinpoche was a delightful old man and very handsome. Rinpoche means "Precious One," and is a term sometimes given to important officials of the Church. Taring Rinpoche is the Abbot of the monastery of Taring, just some [twelve miles from Gyangtse](#). The books were really interesting and perfectly beautiful. They were, on the outside, like some of the books we had seen on the [shelves of the Gompa Library](#). Each book, which consists of loose pages of an oblong shape, is encased between two thick [wooden boards](#), beautifully carved. In fact, some of the covers of Tibetan books display some of the most delicate and lovely wood carving that I have ever seen. There, one finds scenes from the life of Buddha and any number of religious subjects. The very finest ones are, almost invariably, the very old ones. Once they were gilded; but now, through age and long years of handling, the gild is mostly worn away, so that the wood is bare and smooth and has here and there bits of the red undercoating for the gold. Only in the deepest crannies do bits of gold appear, dulled with the patina of time and dust. But these book covers are things of exquisite workmanship that age has only served to make more beautiful. There is usually a band of brocade around the boards to hold the book closed when not in use, and the leaves themselves are wrapped in a [little tailored jacket](#) of the most lovely old Chinese brocade. From one end, a little [brocade tab](#) hangs out between the boards, bearing the name of the book in neatly written characters. But the pages themselves are also lovely. Just inside the brocade jacket the front page rests on the top of the pile. There usually is some small painting on this first page, and over it is fixed a tiny curtain of brocade that comes down to protect the painting.

Inasmuch as the Tibetans are only able to make paper of a certain thickness, each page is often made up of several thicknesses glued together and held so by thin strips of paper or hide [pulled through and tied](#). In addition, the surface of the pages is finished with a mixture of charcoal, glue and egg, so that it is like jet and polished to a dull gloss. On this surface, the scriptures are written with a mixture of pulverized gold and white of egg. The wide margins are usually decorated with geometric lines done in the same gold, and the tiny strips that hold the paper together are tinted a bright red. They are lovely looking pages. When a painting occurs among the pages of the books, it is usually set between the layers of paper, and then the top black page is set out away to reveal it when the little brocade curtain is drawn aside. Those books that the Rinpoche showed us were the finest I had seen, and my enthusiasm pleased him and the regent enormously. I tried later to procure just one good book to bring back with me, but although I got several fairly good covers, I never succeeded in getting a really fine book. Such books as those we had seen are almost all the property of the monasteries, and, since the monasteries are the only institutions in the country which seem to have plenty of money, they are not eager to sell their books.

As we were talking to Taring Rinpoche and the Regent, the sound of the chanting grew steadily louder from below, and finally, we just sat quietly and watched. The High Lama, at last, returned to his throne with his vase of holy water, and then for a minute the singing ceased. In the quiet, we saw the monks

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raise their tea cups, and, since they did it all at once, the noise of their sucking was like an engine letting off steam. It is the polite thing to do in Tibet to make a good loud sucking noise when drinking your tea or soup; and when this is multiplied several thousand times, it is weird in effect, and it seemed slightly incongruous in a religious ceremony. In a minute the monks put down their cups.

There was a short silence and then a few low words from the High Lama; whereupon, the chanting began, again, with renewed vigor. It was one of the most impressive things I have ever heard. Like an expert choir of several thousand male voices, they intoned their strange Buddhist hymn. At times it was no more than the hum of a vast swarm of bees, and then it would rise to a crescendo of sound; but all within very narrow limits of key, until it became almost hypnotic in its monotony. The roof where we were sitting was a sort of sunken middle section of the main roof of the Gompa. All around us were other shrines above which was the highest part of the roof. It was like a sort of elevated courtyard. In the middle was the large square construction of the balcony, looking down into the Gompa; and above it were the clerestory windows, and finally, the roof, upon which was found the golden pinnacle of the Gompa. Around at the back of this central construction, and running around all but the front side of it, was a long empty hallway, completely dark, and seeming to serve no purpose, for it merely went in at one side and ran straight around to the other without an opening of any sort leading off from it; and since it would have been easier to walk across the front to get to the same place, we could not understand its purpose.

On the first day we had come to the Gompa, we had wondered about this; but with only the light of the butter lamps, it had seemed that its walls were unbroken and quite black. Now, as we sat there in the little balcony listening to the monks, the fumes of the butter lamps began to come up stronger and stronger, mingled with the smell of the tea, and we decided to walk out into the courtyard and get some fresh air. The inviting shade of the dark hallway around the back drew us into the hall, and we stood there listening to the chanting. The smoke and the fumes still found us, for they poured up out of the Gompa and into the hall where we were standing as though into a chimney. But it was not as bad as in the balcony, and so we stayed there.

It had become our habit when looking for frescoes to carry one of those gasoline lanterns that pump up and have a mantle over the lens so that they give a fairly bright light, and now, as we waited there, we decided to light it and have another look at the dark hallway behind us. It was then that we made our discovery.

As the light sputtered and grew brighter, we began to see strange markings on the walls. There was one little place that seemed to have some sort of an inscription painted on it, but the surface was so covered with a patina of grease and smoke that we could not make out what it was. But our curiosity was aroused, and, with a little spit on a handkerchief, we managed to wipe off the worst part of the dirt; and what appeared was a sort of small square cartouche about the size of the palm of your hand. Inside the square were written some characters. We called Ugden to see it. At first, it did not make any sense to him, for he said he thought it was a very old Tibetan script of which he knew only a little. However, we were so interested that Ugden tried hard to decipher what the inscription said. "It seems to

say, King (I cannot make out his name) carrying the sacred Buddhist scriptures down a river in the Island of Ceylon accompanied by some monks.”

Bill and I both examined it closely. “But why,” said Bill, “put a little inscription like that in the middle of a bare wall unless...”

“Wait a minute,” I put in, “of course. There must be something else that we can’t see. That writing must refer to something. Come on, let’s investigate.”

Sacrificing our handkerchiefs on the altar of curiosity, and calling forth a good supply of spit, we tackled the filthy wall. In a short time, we realized that we had discovered some old paintings that had been hidden for heaven knows how long under their blanket of dirt. In the small area just above the inscription, we soon had uncovered an ancient painting of some men in a strange round little tub of a boat floating down a blue, wavy river between green banks where ducks and birds appeared among the grasses. It was the “King carrying the sacred Buddhist scriptures down a river in the Island of Ceylon accompanied by some monks.” Moreover, it was by far the finest bit of fresco that we had seen in Tibet. We could hardly wait to uncover more of the painting, for it was impossible to tell how much there might be along the walls of those long hallways. Now that we knew that there might be something there, we could see, at intervals where the dirt had been rubbed, that there was something underneath that looked like painting; but we did not want to go ahead and clean any more of the walls until we had the permission of the Abbot. Of course, the ceremony was still going on, so we could not just then bother the Abbot with what we had found. However, we waited around looking carefully over every inch of the wall. The more we looked, the more frescoes we discovered, and it began to look as though the entire walls of those hallways were covered with paintings. If they were all as good as the first bit we uncovered, eventually we might uncover around seven hundred feet of wonderful frescoes.

In our excitement, we had forgotten all about the ceremony and the chanting, and when finally we saw the monks coming out of the main hall, we had not even realized that the singing had stopped. Luckily, our old friend Taring Rinpoche came back into the hallway to see us and say goodbye, for he was going back to his own monastery. We explained to him what we had found and showed him the bits we had uncovered. He became very much excited and interested, and, in the end, he had the caretaker of the monastery brought over to see them, also. He, too, was much excited, and when we asked if we might clean parts of the walls to see what was there, we met with no objections. The caretaker, in fact, had not known of the existence of these paintings, and as he said, they had probably been invisible for a hundred years or more. They even had water brought for us and bits of old rags, and right then and there we began carefully cleaning the paintings with the damp cloths. It was a most exciting process, for what we uncovered became more and more beautiful as we got the dirt away.

The paintings were obviously of great age. It is difficult to give any definite date to things in Tibet, for many reasons; but, it is a fair guess to say that the [monastery of Gyangtse](#) was built not later than the fifteenth century, and probably before. Moreover, from many signs, it appeared that the frescoes were either put in contemporary to the building of the monastery, or certainly not much later; in which case, they would be in the neighborhood of five hundred years old.

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It is difficult to believe that these monasteries are so old and have changed so little, but that is often the case in Tibet. For instance, one can still see the ancient monastery of Samye that was built by Padmasambhava in the latter part of the eighth century. Many parts of the present monastery are the original ones that were put up twelve centuries ago. In the main hall of the monastery are huge columns made of the solid trunks of enormous cypress trees now blackened and polished by the centuries. There are no such trees now within several hundred miles of Samye, for the Tibetan climate is drying up. But way back in the eighth century, it was quite a different thing.

The frescoes we uncovered made a sort of history of Tibet. One got a sort of picture story of the beginnings of the Tibetan people, and then a great part of the walls was taken up with the reigns of the legendary King who ruled before the beginnings of Tibet's real history. Other parts told of the life of Buddha and of the spread of his doctrines over the world. Many of the things depicted we could not place at all, for they were probably old legends now forgotten. But all of these paintings were interesting and some of the most decorative wall paintings I had ever seen. The style was quite peculiar and quite unlike anything else, so that it was rather difficult to place. They were probably a mixture of Indian and Chinese influences, flavored with a bit of Tibet; but, there was something in them that suggested the illuminated pages of a Persian manuscript. That probably was the flavor of the compositions as a whole, for the details were unmistakably Indian and Chinese. The colors were lovely and amazingly fresh, considering the scum of dirt under which they had been buried for so long: rich Indian reds, oxidized copper greens, the blue of lapis lazuli, and dull earthy yellows. All were made from the natural earth pigments that are so pleasing in their easy blending, after the harshness of the artificial dyes and aniline colors. Altogether, they made some of the most decorative walls it is possible to imagine. Much of our time after that was spent in making many reproductions of the most interesting sections of those walls.



### *Chapter Thirteen*

#### MORE PARTIES AND SOME GOOD LUCK

It was several days after our discovery of the frescoes that Mr. Richardson gave a big Tomasha, or party. We woke in the morning to find a huge gay Tibetan tent being erected outside the bungalow, and on the porch just outside the doors of our dining room a long marquee was being rigged up. I should perhaps describe our home in Gyangtse and its surroundings, so that you can get some picture of the Tomasha. First of all, [the bungalow](#) was built around three sides of [a small courtyard](#). In the middle section were our rooms, a living room, a bedroom, bath and a dining room; and next door was another apartment – the same, only not so large. In the two wings were the kitchen, the quarters where the servants slept, and some store rooms. All of the building was of adobe brick and had been put up in 1904 to house the staff of the military expedition under Younghusband. It was crude, but quite comfortable and, actually, far more than we expected to find in an out-of-the-way place such as Gyangtse. The whole thing stood in a sort of small park. A wall ran around the entire enclosure at some distance from the house, and along the wall was a double row of poplars and some Lhasa aspens, which served as a wind break and made our little domain a sort of haven of quiet from the constant wind outside. In one corner of the enclosure, there was quite a grove of the aspens; while all the space between was green lawn, in which were growing clumps of wild Tibetan iris. These were just at their full bloom then and made a delightful pattern of drifts of pale blue in irregular patches beneath the trees and across the sunny stretch of lawn. Only where the English owned the land was there any such attempt at trees or a garden, and it is impossible to say how inviting our little enclosure looked in the midst of the barrenness of the country round about. When we went out after breakfast, the marquee was stretched across the porch overlooking this lawn; and under it were many little Tibetan tables and chairs grouped around them, and, here and there, large pots with different kinds of flowers to add a splash of color. The big tent was over at one side of the lawn near the grove of aspens, its strange designs on the roof and sides making a very picturesque scene. We had to take a day off from our labors, so we stayed by all morning and watched the preparations.

At about twelve o'clock, the guests began to arrive. One of the first to come was our friend Taring Rinpoche. We saw him approach along the road leading to the bungalow. He was sitting astride a white horse, enveloped in voluminous robes of dark red; and on his head, he wore a golden hat with a wide flat brim and a strange pagoda-like top. Beneath his red robes, he wore a silk shirt of bright mustard yellow, and here and there worked into the tailoring of his outer coat were pieces of beautiful gold brocade. He is a fair looking old man with white

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hair and a very light complexion, and he greeted us as he came in with his usual friendliness. After Taring Rinpoche, the guests came thick and fast: Mr. and Mrs. Choktay, with Mrs. Choktay's mother and sister, and her husband, who is Kumar Chime of Taring. [The Tarings](#) are a very important family in Tibet. Kumar Chime's elder brother, [Jigme](#), is the head of the Tibetan army, and one of the important Officials in Lhasa. Jigme married into what is probably the top ranking family in Tibet, and it was he and his wife, [Mary Tsarong](#), who later very kindly asked us to come to Lhasa, an invitation which we were extremely sorry not to be able to accept at that time. Another man came with his entire family, all delightful people. This was Dele Rabden, who was the private secretary to the Tashi Lama of Shigatse. The Khenchen, or Tibetan Trade Agent, whom we had visited on our first day in Gyantse, was there, and many others. In all, there must have been fifty or sixty when they were all gathered under the marquee, and the ceremonial Tibetan tea began to be served. Everyone was in holiday mood, and as usual we began to play games, such as parcheesi, peggety,<sup>6</sup> checkers, or Mahjong.

Everyone, I am sure, had consumed at least six cups of tea when lunch was served at about one thirty, and we all made our way toward the big tent across the lawn. I was very much pleased to find myself seated between the delightful Mrs. Choktay and Taring Rinpoche; while just across the narrow table from me was the [Rai Sahib Wangdi](#), who was the secretary to the British Trade Agent, and so was most helpful in interpreting for me. Taring Rinpoche wanted very much to come to America, and so he wanted to know all about it and how long it would take to get there from Gyantse. Everyone was in high spirits and conversation was not at all difficult. We talked so much that I did not notice what we had for luncheon; and moreover, Mr. Richardson had planned to have each person use the implements he was most used to, so with a fork and knife I had to concentrate less on the actual process of eating. After the lunch, while drinks were served under the marquee, a group of musicians entertained us, and then some girls and men performed some [Tibetan dances](#). After that, there was an archery competition in which everyone competed; but that was much more fun to watch than to participate in, for I found that I was not particularly skilled with a bow and arrow. However, it was the most picturesque scene as the groups of brilliantly clad men stood in the lawn among the clumps of iris and shot their arrows with long Tibetan bows. Everyone had such a good time that no one wanted to be the first to go. The sun was casting long shadows of the aspens across the lawn when the first guests began to depart; but there seemed to be an inexhaustible source of chang, and it was dinner time when the last guests rode off along the dusty road toward the town. It had been a grand party, and Mr. Richardson was a superb host.

It was raining the next morning after the Tomasha; but every one was glad, for in that climate each precious drop of moisture is like gold. The fields of barley beyond the enclosure of our bungalow had been stunted and dry, but, already when we went out that morning, the stalks were standing straighter, and the fields looked greener and more fertile. It was a leaden sky, and the wind blowing the clouds up from the south was a clear sign that the monsoon had set in; for when rain reaches the dry plateau of Gyantse, it means that the southern

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<sup>6</sup> JC: Or "peggity," a kind of Chinese Checkers. See [here](#).

watershed of the Himalayas is buried in clouds and a teeming torrent of rain. We went off, in spite of the weather, to get on with our work in the Gompa; and, as we went across the fields toward the town, it was impossible not to notice the different aspect the entire scene took on in the softened light of a cloudy day. Colors were bleached out to a monotonous grey. There were no longer the stark creases in the flanks of the mountains, and they looked now like nothing more than dull heaps of mud. Even the golden top of the Shrine of the Ten Thousand Images looked lifeless and dull. In fact, the only thing that seemed brighter than before were faces of the people working in the fields. They were working furiously to construct irrigation ditches, and already there was beginning the flow of water that was coming down out of the hills. But the true character of the Tibetan scene was gone. It is that harsh sunlight flowing through air of diamond brilliance, and making patterns of black shadows and glaring highlights. The brilliance of light that makes intense colors soften and clashing colors vibrantly blending is what gives Tibet its flavor.



**Figure 18: The dak bungalow at Gyantse where we stayed.**

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For several days the rain came down with steady persistence; not a heavy rain, but a slow steady weeping of the clouds. As if by magic, the flat fields at the bottom of the valley turned from yellow to green. No rain was of any avail to make the mountains green, for there was no vegetation to come to life on their gaunt sides, though in the softened light their thin sides at least seemed more rounded. Then, one evening, a servant brought a note from Kumar Chime asking us to come to his house for lunch the following day, and, of course, we sent back word that we would be delighted.

On the following morning, we got on our horses, and Ugden, Bill and I set off toward the northeast, along the road that leads to Lhasa. The Taring family are large land holders in Tibet, and [this place](#) was one of their estates and their main home. The family had dwelt in the great house there for many generations. It lies in a little valley some eight miles distant from Gyangtse, so that we had to start in good time in order to get there before lunch. Just before we left the bungalow, a wretched looking old man came along with a basket full of junk to sell to us. We did not want to take the time to look over his things that looked like the worst kind of cheap Tibetan wares, but we had rather gotten in the habit of investigating everything just in the hope of sometime coming across something good. Out from a mass of filthy rags, the old man took one after another of mostly worthless things; and when we were about to go, he brought out something which caught my eye as, at least, interesting. It was a little cabinet about eight inches high that, quite obviously, was of French or English workmanship. It was made, I thought, of brass or ormolu and had originally been intended for an inkstand with a little compartment inside for cards. I was so surprised to see anything of European make that I was at once interested in it. It was so dirty that it was almost impossible to tell anything about it. Moreover, part of the top was broken and one of the legs was coming off, and the metal panel from the outside of one of the little doors was altogether missing. However, it was a curious enough find, and I asked the old man where it had come from. Ugden murmured to him for a time and then said, "He says it came from the palace of the Tashi Lama in Shigatse, Sir, and he says it is made of gold; but I don't think so, Sir. He is not a good man. I would not buy it." I felt that Ugden was quite right, and as a rule Tibetans of the ignorant classes think that anything that is made of brass is gold. I really wanted to buy the thing just as a curiosity, so I told the old fellow that he was crazy, that it was made of brass, and that I would give him twenty rupees for it and no more. Bill said, "You're crazy," and I began to think so myself, but the old man just sat and moaned at the insult of my offer for his golden cabinet, and I decided that we had better be getting along. Not realizing it at all, that was the best tactic I could have thought of, for no sooner did we start out of the door than the old man said I could have the cabinet for twenty rupees. It was too late then to say that I didn't want it, anyway, so I paid him quickly and threw the cabinet into a chair, and we set out. It was hardly raining at all that morning, though the sky was still grey as we left Gyangtse. We crossed endless fields until we came to the edge of the valley, taking great care all the time not to disrupt the carefully constructed mud ramparts of the irrigation ditches. Once out of the fertile area, we made better time, and for a while followed up the dry bed of an old water course. Soon, the high Gyangtse Dzong disappeared from view, and we went over a rise between the hills

into another valley. The clouds grew thinner as we went along, and it looked as though the sun might break through at any minute, as indeed it did soon after we sighted the Taring house nestled in a group of trees at the far end of the valley. Wide fields of barley surrounded the house on all sides, and the spaces along their edges were solid masses of blue iris. Nearby was a good-sized village that consisted of the houses of the tenants, all of them quite neat, clean and far more pleasant than the houses around the town of Gyangtse.

As we approached the house and went in through the wall leading into the court where the stables were, the people in the fields rushed close to have a look at us. Not often do they see white faced westerners in this remote place, but their good natured smiles and their tongues sticking out at us kept us from being too conscious that we were for the moment Exhibit A. Once inside the stable courtyard, servants hurried out and took our horses; and Kumar Chime came through a door to greet us, and at once led us back through another door into the garden. It was like a little oasis in there. For in the years that the Taring family had lived there, they had coaxed a fine grove of willow trees out of the stubborn soil; and little irrigation canals wound about amongst natural plantings of flowers under the trees. Lovely blue iris was everywhere and would have been the envy of any garden, for they made solid banks of blue in the shade beneath the trees. Since the oasis was quite large, one felt that there could not be a dry desert just beyond the walls. First, we were led through the garden to a little house set apart by itself in a thick grove of trees; and this, Kumar Chime told us, had been built by his family just to entertain westerners. The little house was, indeed, built along western lines, and inside, instead of the usual Tibetan low tables and divans, were regular European chairs and tables. We certainly should have felt at home, except for the fact that we had become so accustomed to the Tibetan style that we had to become accustomed all over again to the western style. In any case, we were given ceremonial tea in the western style, with cream and sugar instead of yak butter and soda, and we conversed happily about the pictures on the wall: the British Houses of Parliament, the Paris Opera House, and the Cathedral of Mont St. Michel. Kumar Chime's very attractive young wife came in presently with her young daughter. [Daisy](#) (strangely enough, that was the young wife's name) asked if we had enjoyed Mr. Richardson's party a few days before, and I couldn't help thinking that, had Daisy been a westerner, and human nature being pretty much the same the world over, she would almost certainly have said, "My dear, did you see Mary – that Dress – wasn't it simply awful; and of course that hat – well, really! She must be at least fifty, you know." There is something to be said for an attractive national costume that can be worn with equal grace by women of all ages. It overcomes the dire results of bad taste with which we are inflicted, and certainly tends to keep tea time conversation on a more charitable and a more civilized plane.

After tea, we were led to the main house for lunch. The great house, itself, is a high three storied building constructed around an inner courtyard. It was a huge house, for we went into only one side of it, and yet there seemed room enough there for many families. Most of the living rooms are on the second floor and open onto a balcony overlooking the courtyard; while the hallway is on the outside of the building, quite the reverse of the arrangement we would have in the

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west. We went straight up stairs and into a large and beautiful room with windows all across one side looking out into the court. Two beautifully carved and painted columns supported the richly decorated ceiling and served to separate the main room from a little alcove in the window where a low table had been set for luncheon. Right across the side of the room opposite the windows was a wide built-in cupboard that was brightly painted on the front, while on its red lacquer top were several beautiful little shrines, some religious vessels and a row of butter lamps burning before a lovely golden figure of the Buddha seated in meditation. At one end of the room was the raised throne for the family patriarch, richly upholstered in Chinese brocade of deep blue and yellow and with the usual canopy over it; while nearby was a low table on which was a complete set of religious implements in silver, used by the patriarch each day in obtaining the blessings for his house.

It was a truly beautiful room, and Kumar Chime delighted at our appreciation of the many artistic things in it. As we ate the superb meal from the endless procession of dishes, he would bring from time to time some new treasure out of the cupboard along the wall. We were particularly interested in the workmanship and the design of the silver implements, and Kumar Chime had some of the loveliest pieces we had seen. It was all made, he told us, in Shigatse, and, as usual, he said all of his things had been made to order; it was impossible to go out and buy them. His [dorje and bell](#), made of solid silver and of the loveliest design, made our mouths water. The dorje and bell are implements used originally in the Black Hat dances to drive away the demons, but they have become part of the everyday life of the Tibetans and are used constantly to drive away all bad influences. The [dorje](#) is a small object to be held in the hand, and looks not unlike two hands with the finger tips together placed back to back and joined by a center bar; it is the symbolical representation of the thunderbolt. The bell is a small bell, with a handle like half of the dorje fastened to its top. The custom is to ring the bell, which summons the demon within range, and then to throw the dorje or thunderbolt at him and so do away with him. It is of course only a symbolical thing, but it is believed to have great power. It must be remembered that the semi-divine ruler of the country has the title "Dalai Lama Vajradhara," meaning the "All Embracing Lama Who Holds the Thunderbolt." There is the idea of the Dalai Lama protecting his people by the power of the thunderbolt he can wield to confound their enemies, and so the symbolic representation of this thunderbolt contains this idea of the protecting power of the divine Lama. It has a similarity to the thunderbolt of Zeus.

After luncheon, Kumar Chime took us into another part of the house to show us the [private chapel](#). It was a most lovely room, going up two floors with windows far up near the ceiling that sent a subdued light down onto the shrine. Three of the walls were beautifully decorated with paintings, and two rows of magnificently carved and decorated columns supported the roof of solid old wooden beams that were painted dull red and embellished with bright floral scrolls of blues, greens and bright reds. Along the fourth side of the room was a little loggia of smaller columns, behind which were the shelves of books; and in the middle was the shrine, with its many points of flame and its figure of Buddha surrounded by offerings. The carvings and the decorations of the entire chapel

were really lovely, and we asked Kumar Chime who had done the work. One would think that in such remote places it would be difficult to find artists to do such work. Tibetan artists, as a matter of fact, spend a good deal of time traveling from place to place doing odd jobs here and there. They usually travel in groups of two or three, for it is not the job of one man to do the entire decoration. If one man is a good draughtsman, he is probably not a good [painter](#), and vice versa; so, very few Tibetan works of art are the product of one man alone. When making a painting, as I have said before, the strictest canons are adhered to, and this part of the art has become so standardized that the artist has as part of his equipment a set of stencils he uses in making the basic outlines for his pictures. These are usually thin metal plates through which the design has been punched in a series of little lines, and with these, the artist can punch through and make his marks on the prepared surface that is to be painted. He can, of course, change the combinations of these stencils; but the basic lines remain always the same, and actually there is little free hand work in Tibetan paintings. This task, then, of laying down the foundation lines is usually the job of one man, while another does the coloring and the filling in of the design, and still another may be employed to put in the faces. Some of the better artists, who have all the work they can do, even have another man to prepare the canvases for them. They really are not canvases at all. Usually, the Tibetans paint on silk or on some such finely woven cloth; but this is prepared on the surface with a mixture of glue and whiting which, when it hardens, is burnished with a tooth or a piece of agate until it is almost a polished surface. In some parts of the country, mainly in the north, paintings are done on hide. The Mongolians almost always use hide.

In general, the technique is quite similar to that employed by the early Italians, though in this case the finished work is the result of the work of several men. It was one of these wandering bands of artists, then, who did the work in the Taring chapel, and this fact is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to define the different schools of Tibetan art in terms of locality. For instance, an artist from Shigatse may do some work in Lhasa, or one from Khum on the Chinese border may do work in Shigatse; and so, the locality of the painting may give no hint as to the origin of the artist. Hence, the problem of separating schools of Tibetan art into their proper points of origin is almost an impossibility.

Taring was an altogether lovely place, and we hated to leave, but, by the time that we finished seeing the chapel, it was already late, and we would have to set off if we wanted to reach Gyangtse before dark. When we got outside, the clouds were again thick in the sky and the first drops of rain began to fall as we waved goodbye to Kumar Chime and Daisy and set off along the road once more. Before we had gone far, it was pouring rain, and we had to bundle ourselves up in our raincoats and hurry on as best we could.

It was dark when we got back to the bungalow. I had quite forgotten about the little French cabinet that I had bought that morning until I found it on the chair where I had thrown it as we made our hurried departure. When we had lighted our gasoline lamps, I picked it up and began to examine it. The more I looked at it, the more I realized that it was of exquisite workmanship; for in spite of the dirt, I could see that it was made with jewel-like precision. The top, I discovered, opened back on hinges and inside was the place for a small ink bottle,

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the little bottle of sand that was used before the day of blotters; a place for the knife that took the place of the modern eraser; and a place for pen nibs. Below, in the main body, I discovered a little pair of doors on both sides. These were lined with perfect little mirrors and inside the front ones was a space where there had been three small drawers. Only the front of one of these drawers remained, but it was cleaner than any of the rest, and it gleamed with a very gold-like sheen on its beautifully chased surface. Just inside the doors at the back was a tiny painting on glass of a shepherdess and a boy in pastoral meadow. Underneath the main body of the cabinet, between the tops of the legs, I found two little buttons which caused these two pairs of doors to spring open when they were pressed. It was really a fascinating thing, and I decided to clean it then and there to see what it was really like.

First, I unscrewed the legs and took it all apart, and then, with a tooth brush and a bowl of warm water and a little soap, I began to scrub. And what was to my amazement was to find that it was gold, and that on each of the doors and on the sides of the cabinet were small medallions set in most beautiful enamel, each a delicately worked spray of flowers in sapphire blue. Moreover, inside the brass plate of the framework at the top was the inscription, "Made by James Cressnell, London, 1768."

Needless to say, when I had put the whole thing together again, it was shiny and beautiful, and I was all the more interested to know how it ever got to Tibet. It had obviously been a thing of considerable value when it was made, and there must have been some reason why it came to Tibet. Mr. Richardson, the British Trade Agent, came in some days later and was very much interested when he saw the little cabinet. Curiously enough, Mr. Richardson is a descendent of the George Bogle, whom I spoke of in the chapter on the history of Tibet as the man who was sent in by Warren Hastings to try and obtain trade concessions. His mission of course met with little success, but we had talked of it several times with Mr. Richardson and he had told us many interesting things. The curious thing was that later I found out what it was this same George Bogle who had brought my little cabinet into Tibet as a present from Warren Hastings to the Tashi Lama. Besides having that interesting connection, it had another equally interesting one, from the Tibetan point of view.

When the succession of the Tashi and Dalai Lamas is being determined, the infants in whom the old Lama is supposed to be reincarnated are put through several tests to determine whether or not they are the correct one; and, finally, when there are only one or two left to choose from, their names are put into a [golden urn](#) that is kept at Lhasa just for this purpose. Around this urn, the monks pray constantly for twenty three days, and at the end of that time, the High Lama picks out one of the slips of paper bearing a name, and that is supposed to be the next Dalai Lama in succession.

In Shigatse, the procedure is the same in choosing the Tashi Lama, only in that case it was the little golden cabinet sent by Warren Hastings that was used. The drawers had been removed, leaving the main body of the cabinet clear, save for the front of one of the drawers which had been fixed as a sort of little gallery along the edge of the bottom.

In 1926, the [Tashi Lama](#) was forced to flee the country to China, and at



that time, his palace was burned, ransacked and robbed of everything of value. Countless valuable treasures disappeared in this way, and most of them never appeared in the vicinity. The men who sold them no doubt got them out of the country as quickly as they could and sold them as soon as possible. Where my little cabinet had been during all that time, it is impossible to say; but more than likely, the old man who brought it to sell was the one who had stolen it from the monastery of Tashi Lhunpo; otherwise, how could he have known so surely that it came from there. In any case, he had probably kept it hidden for some time, and it was just coincidence that it should come to light while I was there. I was, therefore, able to get for next to nothing so interesting a thing.

## *Chapter Fourteen*

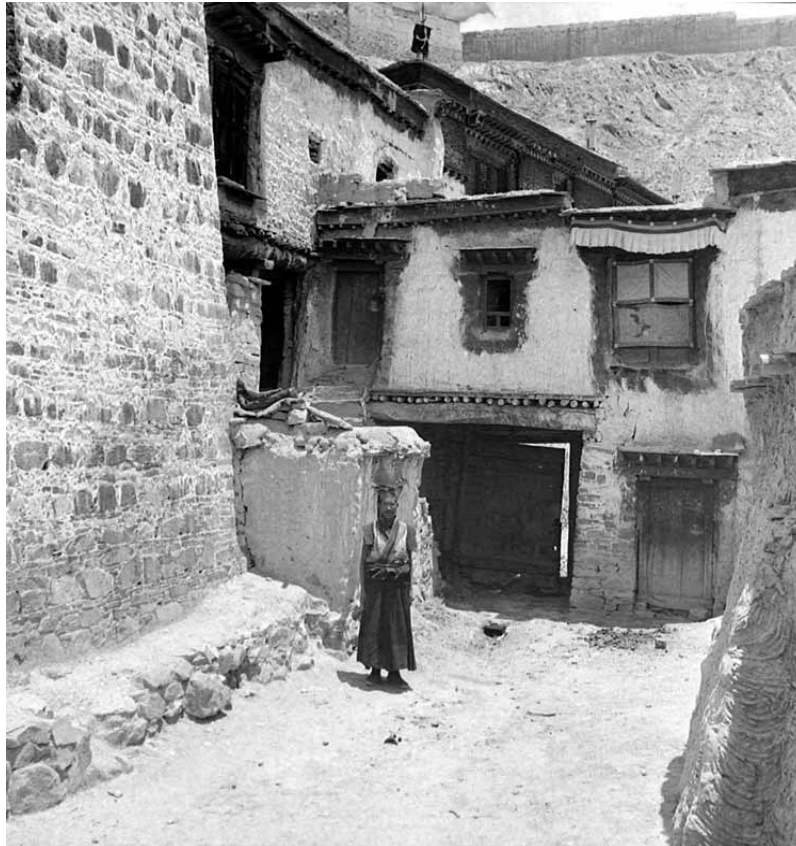
### WE EXPLORE GYANGTSE

As the days passed, we seemed to have little luck in being able to get any interesting Tibetan things to take home with us. As I said, there are no stores in Tibet where these things can be bought, and as a matter of fact the conception of the value of an antique does not seem to have entered the Tibetan mind. But again we were helped greatly by Odlings. Before leaving Kalimpong, Mrs. Odling had given us a note to an important man in Gyangtse whom she had known some years before; and ever since our arrival, we had tried to get in touch with him, but he seemed to be very busy. We had almost given up hope of ever seeing him when one day we received a note saying that he would come to see us that afternoon. When he finally arrived, he proved to be a very jolly person and fortunately had been educated in India. This meant that he spoke English well, and we were able to talk directly to him and explain what it was we wanted. He was a man of some importance in Gyangtse and knew all of the well-to-do people. He was, therefore, in a position to ask them for help where we could not very well do it ourselves. We had been tempted several times to ask different people to sell us some of their things that we particularly wanted, but, of course, it would have been very rude to ask our host if, for instance, he would sell us his prayer wheel or his tea pot. However, our new friend said he thought he could get us some things in this way, and he took down a list of the things we particularly desired. He explained to us that we had come at a very fortunate time, for many of the people in Gyangtse and in most of Tibet, for that matter, were feeling poor due to the partial collapse of the wool market; so, they would be most likely to sell anything for a little cash. We were quite reassured by his explanation, and, indeed, it was not a day later that things began to arrive for us to look over. Surprisingly enough, we soon discovered that the older the things were, the less expensive they were, and that, of course, suited us perfectly. In the eyes of a Tibetan, the old things are just worn-out things, and he would be glad to sell them if he could again buy a new one.

Bill was very lucky one day to get a complete [bone skirts](#) for almost nothing. These skirts are made entirely of beads and medallions made from human bones and delicately carved, and they are worn by the Black Hat Lama in the famous Black Hat Dance. They are extremely rare and difficult to get, for there are not many of the old ones left. The Black Hat Dance, which I described earlier in the book, is now no more than a symbolic dance representing the fight between the powers of good and the powers of evil; but its origin is quite interesting. In the outline of Tibetan history which I gave earlier, I described the assassination of the wicked King Langdarma, who tried to do away with Buddhism, and how finally a

monk found the King in a park near Lhasa and, dressed in a black cape, did a strange dance before the King. The King, becoming interested, turned to watch, and, when the monk finished dancing, he drew from beneath his cloak a bow and arrow and shot his Sovereign. The dance of that monk became what is now known as the Black Hat Dance, representing the fight between the powers of good and evil.

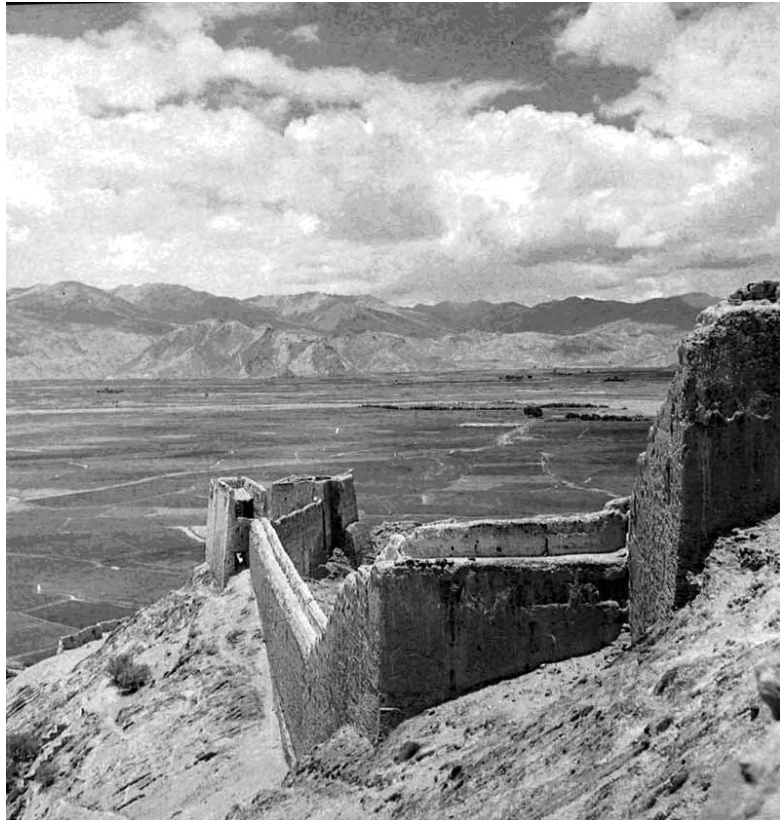
Before many more days had passed, we came to the end of the work that we were to do in the Gompa. We had completely recorded the frescoes, and it was only when we had finished them that we realized how little a record we had of the whole town, in general. It was getting close to the time when we would have to begin thinking about the return to India, as our permissions to remain in Tibet would expire before many days passed. So one day after our real work was done, we decided on an exploration of the town, and taking our cameras, we went to the extreme end of the town with the idea of working our way back and investigating everything that so far had escaped our notice. We first paid a visit to several of the large dormitories in which the monks dwell. There is usually a small, walled-in courtyard just in front of these houses, and out of this a steep ladder staircase goes up outside to a small enclosed porch where the main entrance is located. These houses appear very high from the front due to the steepness of the hill on which they are built. Sometimes, there may be five or six stories in the front, while the roof runs right into the hill at the back. Nevertheless, the fronts of the houses are very impressive. They are painted white, and their rows of [windows](#) have wide wooden cornices across their top that throw long shadows down the face of the buildings. There are curtains, or rather valances, which hang from these cornices on the outside, in pleated folds that blow in the wind and lend accents of color. High up near the roof, there is a wide band of black, and in the white space above this, there are usually large golden plaques with raised designs of the eight lucky symbols; while on the roof itself is one golden pinnacle and a row of giant black tassels made of yak tails suspended on staffs, from the top of which protrude flaming tridents of bright gold. The group of these buildings placed at a variety of angles against the hillside is a most impressive sight; while up at the very top, in a jog in the wall, is a shrine painted a mustard yellow, and to one side, the great pylon where the giant tangka is hung. Behind these houses of the monks, we found at one end an opening leading into one of the huge square towers that break the Chinese wall every hundred yards or so, and climbing up through this, we came out finally on the wide pathway between the parapets of the wall. From there, the whole town was spread out before us; and beyond this was the plain, with its winding river and the wide fields of green barley.



**Figure 19: A monk outside his cell at Gyangtse.**

From our bungalow down on the plain, the Chinese wall had looked like any other wall in size, for there was nothing with which to compare it. But, once we were on its top, we began to see the enormous size of it. We walked along the top of the wall on a fairly wide roadway. Here and there were places where it had fallen away, and only a narrow ledge remained for us to scramble over; but, for the most part, the top was wide enough to walk three or four abreast. In some places, it soared over a hill at such a steep angle that we could hardly obtain footing; and where parts were in ruins, it was ticklish climbing, for the top of the wall, itself, is some forty feet above the ground. Besides that, the hill fell away below in steep, rocky sides. Now and then, we came to one of the square towers that are built into the wall at intervals, and these we found to be perfectly enormous inside. There were five or six floors. The bottom floor, which made one huge chamber about sixty feet square, was fitted up to act as a stable for horses of the army. The next floor above had originally been a space for storerooms and kitchens; and above that, was another floor for the billeting of troops. The very top of the towers was a completely enclosed space, with small sight holes along the outer walls for shooting down the enemy. There was more room for stabling and billeting in the main body of the wall. It was a pretty sound defense against such

weapons as bows and arrows, for the hills to the north dropped straight away from the wall, which made for an almost impossible approach.



**Figure 20: Part of the wall surrounding Gyangtse.**

We continued along the top of this wall, getting many pictures of the town and the surrounding country, and eventually, we came to the spot where the wall runs along behind the top of the great pylon that holds the giant tangka. Like the monk's houses that seem so high from the front, the pylon we found to be only one flight of steps above the level of the hill at the back, and we climbed up to inspect it. On the very top was a wide terrace on the flat roof. Along the front side of this was a covered loggia with several windows looking down on the town. Above the row of windows was a row of twenty or thirty huge wooden pulleys set into the masonry and used to carry the ropes when pulling up the great tangka. It was a perfectly enormous building when looked at from the front. As we looked down at it, sloping gently outward toward the bottom, we realized that it was a really amazing piece of construction. Later, we went down to the bottom and found there a half forgotten and half walled-up door leading inside the pylon. We

crept through into the darkness. At the very bottom, the building was almost completely dark, but we could make out a row of square compartments, like huge coal bins, along each side of the gallery that ran down the center of the building. At the far end, a wide ramp circled upward to another floor that had the same double raft of huge bins. The internal construction of the building was entirely of heavy cypress beams, so arranged that the sloping front wall of the building was supported by the hillside at the back. In other words, the whole building just leaned against the hillside, supported by those huge wooden beams. It was another evidence of the drying up of Tibet, for such beams as had been used in the construction of the building are simply not to be found anywhere in that part of the country now. Moreover, they are too large to have been brought all that distance when the building was put up, so we must infer that there were huge trees growing in the vicinity of Gyangtse not more than four hundred years ago. Moreover, the entire building was once used as a granary. That was the purpose of the giant bins along each floor, and it could have contained far more grain than is grown at present.



**Figure 21: The pylon, built up against the mountain.**

The fact that there were once sizeable forests in that part of the country means that there must have been considerably more rainfall. The presence of forests, in itself, would, to some extent, attract rainfall from the Himalayan region and hold it once it had fallen, so that there would have been more available water for the irrigation of crops, which now simply cannot be grown. We climbed right up to the top, again, looking over floor after floor of these huge grain storage bins. All were absolutely empty, and at last, we came out once more on the top of the building. The view from there was really magnificent, and the town of Gyangtse took on a fairy tale unreality as it spread out below. From the high point where we stood, the hills dipped down in a narrow saddle back ridge to the left, and then suddenly sprang upward, again, into a steep peak, where the vast angular walls and the flashing roof tops and towers of the Dzong stood against the blue sky. Far below these heights, nestled in the hollow formed by that arm of high land, was the town itself, looking clean and white from the distance, with all the roof tops aflutter with their prayer flags flying, giving it a perpetual holiday aspect.

Straight below us were the open courts of the monastery buildings and the rows of the monks' houses, all gleaming here and there with gold; while, from the middle of it all rose the dazzling golden tower of the Shrine of the Ten Thousand Images. The people moved about the streets like tiny ants, and presently, we heard the dull beating of the huge gong on top of the Gompa. It was a diamond clear day after the rain, and the fresh strong breeze that blew across the plain seemed to carry with it the scent of the pine forests and the snowy heights of the Himalayas which lay far beyond the horizon. There was a feeling of fall in the air, and although it was only August, fall comes early to those heights. The crops below on the wide plain were approaching maturity, and we knew that, often, they hardly have time for this before the approach of frost. Far off beyond the haze of green fields and the dull splashes of blue that were iris were the bare encircling mountains, making an unbroken silhouette of stark peaks against the sky.

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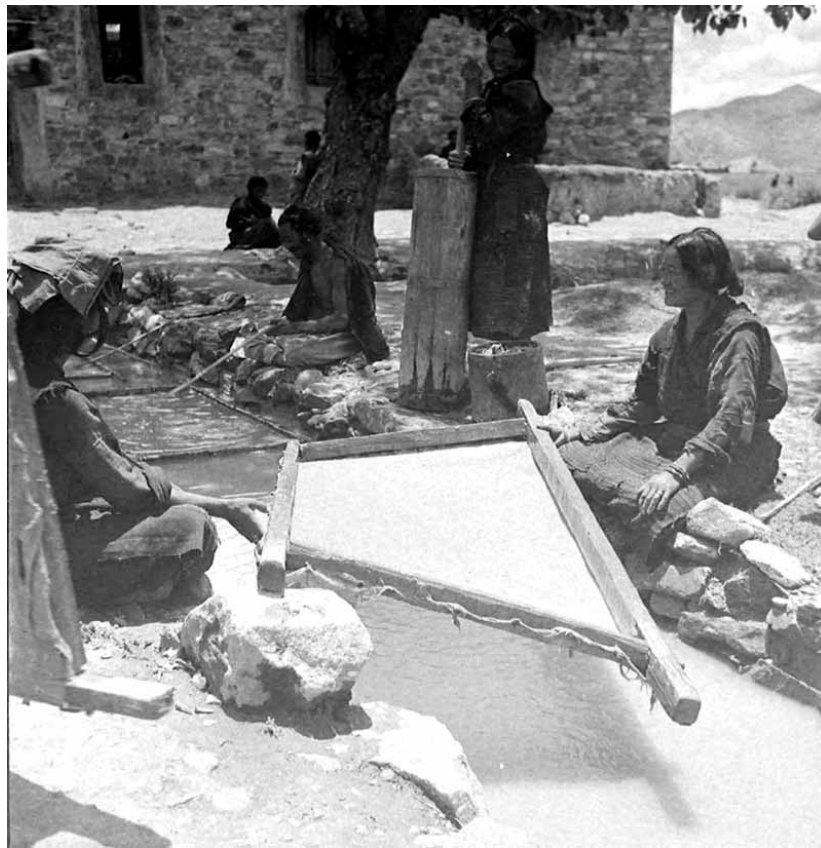


**Figure 22: Soaking the Mulberry bark for paper making.**

One of the most interesting things that we discovered while exploring the town for pictures was the Tibetan art of paper making. The Khenchen, or the Tibetan Trade Agent, had a small paper factory in his back yard, and we went one afternoon to inspect it. I remember that on the very first part of our travels, we had been taken to see a paper mill in British Columbia, and there we saw one huge paper making machine that was capable of turning out miles of paper per day. Now in Tibet, we saw the same methods used that were used when paper was first made in the world. It was a laborious process, taking many weeks to complete, and then for only a minute quantity of paper, compared with what can be produced with modern methods. In the first place, the mulberry bark, of which the paper is made, has to be brought all the way from Bhutan by mule back; and when this arrives in large bales, it is dumped into a trough of water and weighted down with rocks, so that it will soak up the water. Every day or so, these bales are turned over so that they will soak thoroughly; and this process continues for two weeks, until the fibers are softened and slightly rotted. This batch of rotted fibers is then pounded between stone by means of a foot-operated mill, where one stone attached to the end of a treadle pounds down on another flat stone and so crushes



the fibers. One man works the treadle, while another feeds the pulp beneath the stone and keeps it supplied with fresh fibers to pound. When this pulp is thoroughly beaten, it is then thrown into piles and kept wet for another two weeks, so that the fibers are further rotted; and only then is it ready for the actual process of paper making. It is then put into a churn with a large quantity of water and churned to eliminate lumps and make a kind of soup that has an even consistency. This thoroughly broken down pulp is then ladled into flat frames that have cheese cloth stretched across the bottom; the frames are partially submerged in troughs of water.



**Figure 23: A frame being drained.**

One or more ladles of the pulp, depending on the thickness of the paper required, are thrown into these shallow frames. And then girls with forked sticks mix the pulp with the water in the frame until it is perfectly even; and then carefully lift the frames out of the water, allowing them to drain. When the thin layer of the pulp adheres to the cheesecloth, the frames are carried out into the sun to dry. Once it has dried, it is peeled off the cheesecloth, and the paper is finished. The methods are crude, but the paper is not unattractive. It looks not unlike some of

the rougher textures of Japanese paper, and is quite strong. In one way, it is superior to most of our commercially made paper; for, in our process, acid is used in place of the foot treadles to break down the fiber, and this serves both to shorten the fibers and to make them less strong in the finished paper. Some of the acid remains in the paper and, upon contact with dampness, may again begin its work, eventually discoloring the paper, and making it brittle and much less lasting. Tibetan paper contains none of these artificial aids in its production process; and is not bleached – another process that is apt to damage the fibers – and so Tibetan paper will last almost indefinitely.



**Figure 24: Putting the frames out to dry.**

## *Chapter Fifteen*

### HAIL AND FAREWELL

We had only a few more days in Gyangtse. The time seemed to have slipped away with surprising speed, and it was not a happy thought that our days in Tibet were coming to a close. Just being there had done funny things to all our mental processes. It was like being in a room locked away from the world, where neither time nor any particular age existed, and we had to think back merely to remember that there was an outside world. When we did think of it, it was that world that now seemed strange to us. It was not just some place over beyond the range of the mountains, it was a totally different world, just as it would seem if we had been visiting another planet and had at last decided that the time had come for us to return to our own earth. Moreover, it was hard to believe that nearly a year had elapsed since we left New York. No, time had stood still for us. We would now have to leave the middle ages and travel across great distances of time and space to our own world of the twentieth century.

When we consulted Rai Sahib Wangdi about the bungalows for the return trip, we received another blow, for we were told that the Maharajah of Sikkim had decided on a trip into the Chumbi Valley, and so the bungalows that we wanted to use at that end of the trip were already reserved. When we had received the permission to enter Tibet, the date was set when we would have to recross the border, and we had been planning to leave Gyangtse just in time to get us across the border on the appointed day, for we did not want to make any difficulties by overstaying our permit. But now, since the bungalows were taken for those days by the Maharajah of Sikkim, we would have to leave a day earlier in order to finish with the last bungalow on the line before the date of the Maharajah's visit. Besides, it meant doing the whole trip in double stages, while we had planned to do it more slowly and see more of the countryside as we went along. However, there was nothing to do about it, and we had to scurry around in a rush to get all our things ready in time. Everything we had bought had to be carefully packed away in the now empty food boxes, and another had to be made in which to pack our tangkas, or paintings. There were a few odd bits of work to be done. There had been several days of cloudy grey weather and occasional showers of rain, but the day of our departure dawned clear. And, as we stood before the little bungalow poking all the animals and tying on all our possessions, the sun was casting long yellow rays aslant the green fields and these, with a slight covering of frost, burned the world into a shower of dancing lights. It was one of those diamond days of early autumn, fresh and cold and so clear that far-away things seem no more than a stone's throw away. The Dzong stood out against the sky, like a castle in a dream, with its roofs flashing in the sun and dark shadows standing out in black intensity of light along its walls.

For many miles, those gleaming roofs were all that we could see of Gyangtse; and then they, too, disappeared as we wound our way through the hills and started up along another valley. As the day went on, clouds gathered in the sky, and before we had reached that night's halt, it was quite threatening. A cold wind was blowing, and that

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evening, the first drops of rain began to fall, again. Such was to be the weather all the rest of the return trip, for we woke the next morning to an incessant downpour of rain; it was not a heavy rain, but enough to take the pleasure out of traveling, making the cold wind more penetrating, as we had on only the thinnest of clothes. There was no incentive for going slowly on our way, for the cold rain made riding horseback anything but a pleasure. After a few hours, in spite of raincoats and all the protection against the weather, we were cold and miserable. So we moved along at a steady pace and our horses resorted to the amble that is a sort of gait half way between a canter and a trot. It was extremely uncomfortable, but it is the custom of all Tibetan horses, and we had learned that none of our efforts served to turn it into either a trot or a real canter; so we left well enough alone and only hoped to cover the ground as quickly as possible. As a matter of fact, the amble is a fairly easy pace for the horses, and they can keep it up steadily for many hours without tiring, so at a steady amble we covered the ground with reasonable speed. And on most of the trip, we had covered the double stage before lunch time and so had the afternoons to dry our clothes, warm ourselves and get ready for the next day.

All the time, of course, we were drawing closer to the Himalayas. And the nearer we came, the heavier became the rain, so that the last days of our return trip were one steady downpour of heavy rain. We left Ugden again in Yatung, and then, the next morning, we began the climb to the [Natu La](#). It was pouring as it can pour only in the Himalayas, and we made our slow way up the steep trails, and that night at Chubitang, it was like an incessant cloudburst. The rain poured from the roof like a cataract, and the whole world outside was a sea of mud and raging streams; but, in the morning, it had abated, and we started out on the last part of the climb in bright patches of sun that broke occasionally through the clouds.

High up in the peaks, it became still clearer, and the trail was lined with the most exquisite mountain flowers. We were surprised to find orchids up there growing right out of the receding snow. They were the most delicate little spray orchids that grew in banks of moss, and they had the most wonderful scent imaginable. It is funny that we never associate any scent with orchids, and for some reason, the hot house varieties never seem to have any scent. But, in their natural habitat, the orchid family often has the most delightful fragrance of all the flowers I know. These tiny sprays were superb in that respect, and we picked bunches of them to stick in our breast pockets in order to carry the fresh lovely fragrance along with us. Each spray was hardly as long as a pencil, and half way up the stalk the tiny blossoms began, each a perfect little bloom: some yellow, some a sort of copper color, and still others deep burgundy or white.

Before noon, we reached the top of the pass and stopped again beside the cairn of stones and the prayer flags. We were on the very ridge pole of the world. Behind lay Tibet, its steep valleys falling away in the narrow fringe of green and fertile land, and beyond, the endless miles of barren hills and high plateau that reached the far off borders of China and Mongolia. Tibet is still a land of mystery, another world quite apart from our own, and seemingly quite beyond the clamor and bustle of the outside. Nature has protected Tibet well from the passing of the centuries and the turmoils that are so little a part of its life. This conflict and clamor of our world reaches Tibet only as the distant echo of the lapping of an ebb tide, and she remains alone and quietly meditating and brooding in quite another age and in another dimension of space.

We had, as if by some magic, been able to step across that dividing line and have a brief glimpse of what lay beyond. And what we saw there was of such beauty and mystery that we cannot pretend to understand, but altogether an essence that we could take away with us, something like the sacred Amrita in Tibetan paintings, the liquid of immortality, that would add a richness to life in a thousand ways, and a better understanding of the world.

As we stood there for a minute, astride both those worlds, we heard far below the thunderous crashing of some flooded stream as it tore its way down to the Indian plains. Our little party, less than an atom in the vast panorama of the Himalayan peaks, started down the hill. The vast rampart of rock and snow drew across what we had seen of Tibet; but we held tightly to the Amrita vessel, the essence, and started the long descent back to our own world.



**Figure 25: Looking out onto the plains of India from the last peak.**

APPENDIX: MAPS<sup>7</sup>

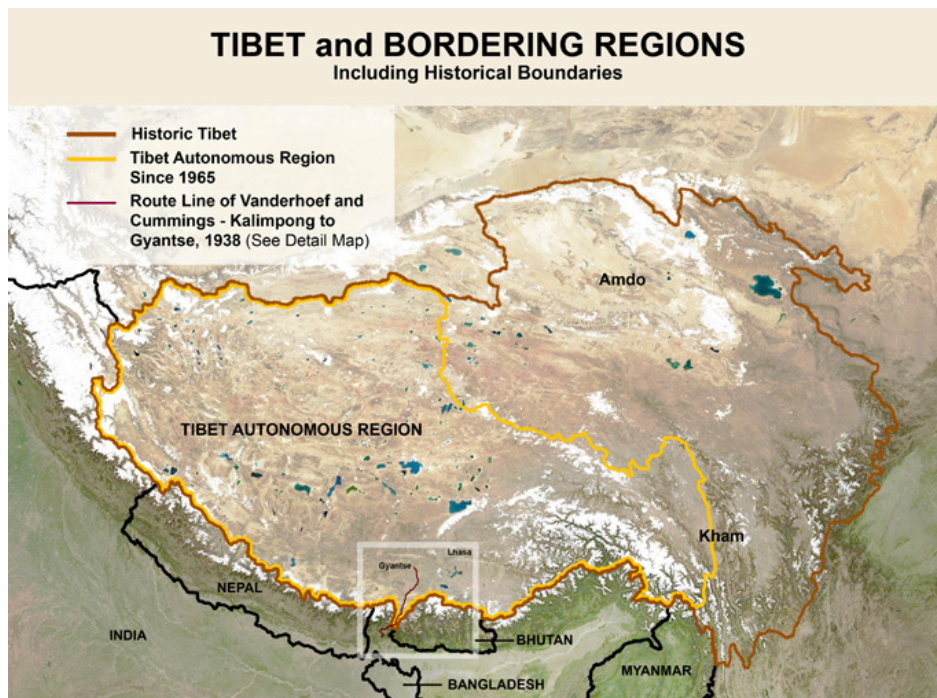
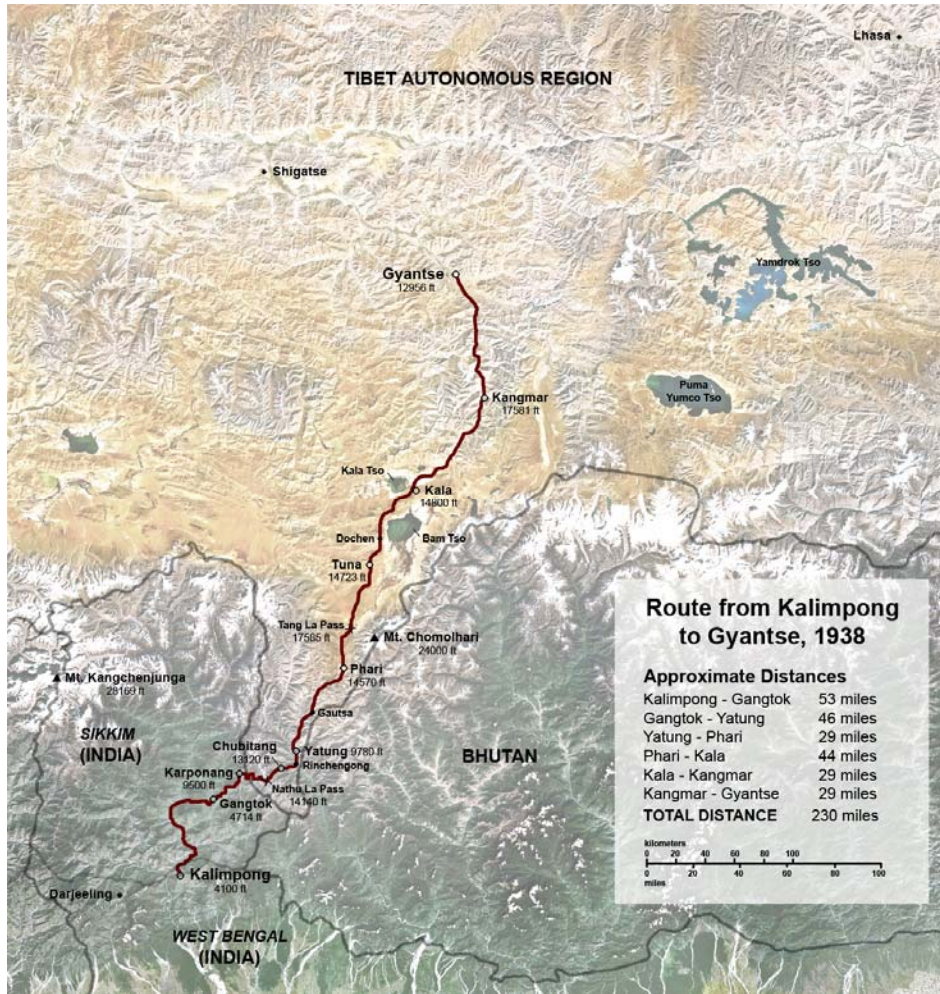


Figure 26: A map of Tibet. See details of the inset in the following map.

<sup>7</sup> These maps were created by Ms. Joy Davis.



**Figure 27: The route that the two explorers followed.**