To Lhasa in Disguise

An Account of a Secret Expedition Through Mysterious Tibet

William Montgomery McGovern

To Lhasa in Disguise

A secret traveller to the Tibetan capital of Lhasa, the author of this unusual volume was forced to live, dress and behave as a Tibetan in order to remain undetected. Because of his unique perspective, he is able to provide an excellent description of the diplomatic, political, military and industrial situation of the country in the 1920s. His account of life in the "Forbidden City of the Buddhas" contains a wealth of compelling stories and fascinating information.

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DR. WILLIAM MONTGOMERY McGOVERN

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DEDICATION
TO WILLIAM DEDERICH, ESQ.

DEAR MR. DEDERICH,—

It would seem to me quite wrong that this book should go out without being dedicated to you, for not only were you the kindly patron through whose unfailing support and co-operation the whole journey through Tibet was made possible, but it is entirely owing to your insistence that the present book has been written.

I had intended to write a somewhat technical volume dealing with the scientific results of my journey through Tibet, with special reference to anthropology, both physical and social, omitting all matters of merely personal reference, but you have persuaded me that you, and perhaps some others, would be interested in reading a plain account of some of the personal experiences which my secret expedition to Tibet entailed.

It certainly was interesting to be forced to see Tibet, and the Tibetans, from the Tibetan point of view, to live as a Tibetan for months when a false word or act would have given me away; to be forced to study their quaint customs, not merely from a dry, dull, scientific standpoint, but also that I might journey amongst them without being detected, and so I have given way to your arguments and, departing from my custom with previous books, have tried to describe some of the varied experiences which I encountered during my secret expedition to the Sacred City.

I have, therefore, put off to a subsequent volume discussion of the more technical side of my exploration work, detailed notes on the physical geography of the country, and the comparative anatomical measurements which I made with the view of ascertaining the exact racial position of the people.

In the same way I have postponed detailed treatment of the minute points of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy—a subject which greatly interested me—and have tried to make the present volume one which can be read with interest and enjoyment and not merely be used as a book of reference.

At the same time I have tried to include in this work something which would make it of more lasting worth, numerous notes of personal observation of various aspects of the country and of the people. I have tried to weave through the record a general but accurate description of manners and customs and beliefs, including some of the extraordinary institutions which exist in the government of Lhasa.

Finally, I have tried to give an adequate description of the great transformation which has taken place in Tibet during the last few years, so that I hope it can be claimed that my book gives to the general public its first exact information concerning the present diplomatic, political, military, and industrial situation in a country which occupies such an important strategic centre that it is of interest to all students of Asiatic and world affairs.

This work is sent out in all true humility. I make no pretence to style or to fine writing, but if you and others can get any pleasure from reading of adventures which took place, and observations which were made on " The Roof of the World," I shall feel more than repaid for all the trouble which the writing of this book has entailed.

You and I both know how much I am indebted to Mr. J. E. Pryde-Hughes for his constant and efficient help in the preparation of the book.

WM. MONTGOMERY MCGOVERN.

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CHAPTER I

TIBET AND THE TIBETANS

FOR many years Tibet has been the mysterious unknown country, and Lhasa, its capital, the Forbidden City of the Buddhas, into which entrance by adventurous explorers was sought in vain.

Both nature and the inhabitants have co-operated to make entry into the country well nigh impossible. A huge table-land, whose average altitude is 15,000 feet above sea-level, as high as the summit of Mont Blanc, the highest peak of Europe, it is surrounded and intersected by even greater mountains, many of them over 20,000 feet high, shrouded in perpetual ice and snow.

Tibet has an area of over one million square miles, but though it lies between the two fertile countries of India and China, so bleak and so cold is it that nearly the whole land is a desert devoid of trees and plants, producing only patches of sparse grass which serve to support the deer, the wild ass, the yak, and herds of cattle and sheep. Barley, a hardy plant, is the one cereal grown, and even this flourishes only in the milder parts ; but hidden within the ample bosom of this arid land are vast, and almost untouched, stores of natural mineral wealth.

Scattered over this huge territory are groups of natives fiercely jealous of every intruder. Many of them are nomads moving here and there with their flocks. Others form communities dwelling in settled villages. Nearer the larger towns, perched on high hills or precipitous cliffs, are to be found

gigantic stone castles, of quaint old-world design, which frown upon the countryside.

Even more numerous than the castles are the monasteries, for Tibet is the country of monks. One man out of every four is a priest, and such persons dwell together in vast buildings placed far away from other habitation. But such institutions, instead of being havens of peace, are the centres of turmoil. Many of their inhabitants become what are known as fighting monks and spend their time in brawling.

Wild, reckless men they are. Sometimes one monastery will wage war against another, and sometimes these ecclesiastical swashbucklers will pour into the towns, and seize and hack to pieces some unpopular governor. The monasteries, having hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of inhabitants, overawe the districts in which they are placed.

It is the monks who are fiercest in hatred of outsiders; it is they who present the greatest danger to the would-be explorer of the inhabited portion of Tibet, for in their foreigner-hating zeal they are apt to ignore any safe-conduct which might be granted by the civil authorities to a stranger.

In the very heart of this gloomy land is the sacred city of Lhasa. Here lives the Dalai Lama, who is both the Emperor and the High Priest of his people, who regard him as an incarnate god. In his magnificent palace, the Potala, he dwells on public occasions surrounded with all the pomp that befits a living deity, and receives in audience the pilgrims who come from every part of Tibet to bring rich offerings and to adore.

He who would seek to penetrate into Lhasa must first overcome the tremendous physical difficulties which bar the way to the threshold of Tibet, and even if he rise victorious over ice and snow, gnarled crag and precipitous cliff, he finds upon arrival on the plateau an angry populace which bars the way and insists on an immediate return.

In the old days various well-known explorers tried, by means of devious routes and various disguises, to escape being turned back at the frontier, and some, indeed, succeeded in passing far into the interior, but only to find that sooner or later, before reaching Lhasa, the abode of the Gods, that they were detected and further progress barred. Among the most noteworthy of

these explorers were the Swede, Sven Hedin, and the illustrious American scholar, W. W. Rockhill.

In the last few years a few have been more fortunate. Sir Francis Younghusband, Sir Charles Bell, and General Pereira, for example, penetrating to the goal, have been able to throw a great deal of light upon many hitherto unknown aspects of Central Tibetan life. The Younghusband military expedition of 1904 to Tibet, particularly, was destined to alter greatly the internal history of the country. But in each case the torchlight which illuminated for a moment the Tibetan darkness has been extinguished, and once again and, in fact, more than ever is Tibet the mysterious unknown country and Lhasa the Forbidden City of the Buddhas.

In recent years both country and capital have become more particularly worthy of study, owing to the curious developments which have taken place there. While retaining the glamour of mystery which belongs to a country ruled by monks, many of whom are worshipped as gods, a country which shuts the door on all intruders from without, it is now worthy of the interest of the student of diplomacy, politics, and economics.

We are all aware of the extraordinary transformation which Japan underwent during the course of the latter part of the last century, when from a quaint kingdom of fable, closed to the outside world, it became a first-class modern power, with all the equipment and organization of the West.

A similar transforming movement is now taking place in Tibet—a movement which may have an important influence upon the political future of Eastern Asia. Until 1912 Tibet was a vassal of China, without a standing army or adequate munitions of war. To-day the Chinese have been expelled, and Tibet stands alone and independent. She has a new army, an army ever growing in numbers, well drilled, well disciplined, and armed with rifles, either imported from Europe or made in the Lhasa arsenal. Regular postal communications have been opened between the principal towns, and Lhasa itself is possessed of telephone and telegraph, quaint and crude to be sure, but workable; and that last instance of modern European culture, paper money, is now being printed.

The government has also undergone considerable development. The Dalai Lama, the Supreme Pontiff of Tibetan

Buddhism, is now in fact, as his predecessors were in name, the absolute ruler of the country. Tibet has long been possessed of two curious bodies, a council of shapés or secretaries of state, constituting a cabinet, and a Tsongdu, or National Assembly, the Tibetan Parliament or Congress; but in the last decade both these bodies have undergone an interesting evolution, making them correspond more closely to their European counterparts, and even in distant Tibet constitutional crises are by no means unknown. What is most curious is that these modern movements seem to have had no effect in rendering Tibet less exclusive—in fact, in some ways the ring grows tighter. In previous years the Chinese at least were admitted to Lhasa, and now even these are excluded. The new institutions, such as the post and the telegraph, are employed as the most efficient means of keeping the European intruder out, as in this way constant communication between the frontier and the capital is ensured.

To the adventurer and the explorer, therefore, Tibet at the present moment presents a fascinating field of research. In my own case I was equally interested by Tibet as the luring past, and as the womb of the unborn to-morrow. As an anthropologist I became fascinated by the Tibetan people, with their customs, their language, their religion, and their literature. All of these are in some way unique. As one who had studied some of the modern developments in diplomacy and statecraft in the other countries of the East, I was anxious to study the changing institutions of this hidden, theocratic empire, and to see what effect these developments might have upon the relations of the surrounding peoples.

In bygone years I had devoted much time to a theoretical study of the Tibetan language and customs, in the hope that this would the better enable me to carry on exploration at first hand. But it was my privilege to utilize this stored-up knowledge and to continue my studies under very peculiar conditions. Circumstances forced me to cross an 18,000-feet pass into Tibet in mid-winter, at a time when it was blocked with snow and supposedly closed to all travellers, even natives. Arrived in Tibet, I had necessarily to disguise myself as a Tibetan coolie, and to travel as such through the heart of the country. During the latter part of this secret journey the

Tibetan Government learned of my escapade and ordered a sharp watch to be kept for me at all the villages. The caravan with which I was travelling, in the humble capacity of servant, was several times stopped and examined without my being discovered.

At last I arrived in Lhasa. Here I was foolish enough to reveal myself voluntarily to the authorities, with the result that the monks in Lhasa led a popular riot against me, and the civil Government, in an attempt to protect my person, was forced to declare me a prisoner of state until the popular clamour had subsided.

After a six weeks' stay in Lhasa, I was permitted to return to India, an escort being given me in order to ensure my safety. In this way my adventure came to an end, but in the meantime I had been able to secure numerous priceless manuscripts, had met or seen all the principal persons in the sacred city, and had had unequalled opportunities for studying the inner life of the Tibetan people and the working of their institutions.

CHAPTER II

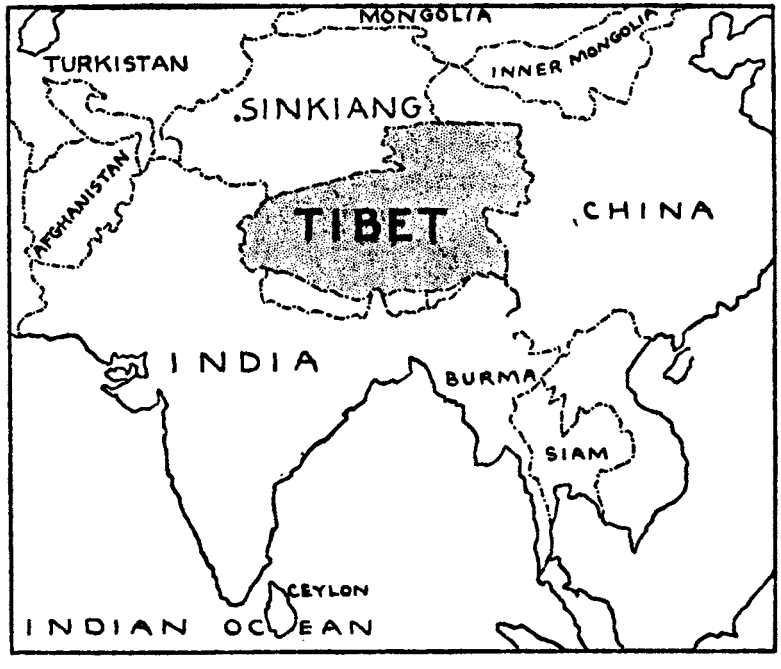
THE FIRST ATTEMPT

THE journey which was destined to have this adventurous end started in a much more conventional fashion. It was, in fact, but the sequel to an earlier open expedition by a party, consisting of five Europeans engaged on scientific research, which penetrated one hundred and fifty miles inside the Tibetan frontier, and managed to acquire a great deal of scientific material before it was stopped and turned back by the order of the Tibetan authorities. It was only through this expedition, of which I was a member, that I gained the necessary experience and information to enable me to carry out my journey in disguise, so that it is necessary in the first place to give a short account of this first attempt to reach the Forbidden City.

In 1921 Mr. George Knight, F.R.G.S., conceived the idea of organizing a research mission to Tibet to carry out a thorough survey of the country and the people.

It was first of all necessary to get in touch with someone who was in a position to organize and finance such an expedition. After several disheartening failures to secure such support, Mr. Knight obtained the hearty co-operation of Mr. William Dederich, F.R.G.S., who was a friend of the late Sir Ernest Shackleton, and who had rendered that great explorer practical help in the organization of Shackleton's 1914 Antarctic expedition. Mr. Dederich is not only a generous patron of scientific exploration, but a man whose administrative ability renders him of great assistance to an expedition faced with the complicated problems of equipment and organization. By his aid the idea was soon placed on a stable basis and active steps could be taken towards sending out the exploring party.

At first the personnel of the new expedition consisted of four persons, viz. Mr. G. Knight, the leader, who was also to look after botanical and zoological research; Captain J. E. Ellam, the co-leader, who was to devote himself to the study of the political and religious institutions of the country; Mr. Frederic Fletcher, who was to act as geologist and also transport officer to the party; and finally Mr. William Harcourt, who was appointed cinematographer, for it was realized that in modern times a living pictorial record of the land and



the people should be an integral part of every scientific expedition.

At a somewhat later period—in fact, only a short time before the date fixed for departure—I was asked to join the mission as general adviser, as it was thought that my previous residence in the Orient and my knowledge of the Tibetan language and customs might prove useful. Through the kindness of Sir

E. Denison Ross I was able to secure leave of absence from my University, and was thus enabled to accept the invitation.

We had then to decide upon the direction by which Tibet was to be entered. Three places at once suggested themselves. One was to advance from the east through China. Another was to go from the west through Kashmir and Northern India. The third was to start from Darjeeling, and to pass through the small semi-independent state of Sikkim, which lies between the larger countries of Nepal and Bhutan, and over the Himalayas into Tibet proper.

This last was the route eventually selected, because it would bring the expedition into immediate contact with the central portion of Tibet and with its two great cities, Shigatsé and Lhasa. This route was the more preferable because, as a result of the Younghusband expedition, the Indian Government had secured the right to send certain specially-selected persons to two places inside of Tibet itself. The first of these places was the town of Yatung in the Chumbi Valley, just inside the Tibetan frontier. The other was the city of Gyangtsé, a hundred and fifty miles in the interior. Persons permitted to travel to either place were required to go in a direct line, without deviating in any way from the main trade-route.

The India Office and the Government of India were approached on the subject, and after some negotiation gave us the necessary permission to travel to Gyangtsé, there to apply to the Tibetan Government for further permission to proceed to Lhasa and other portions of the interior, but refused to give us any further support or recognition.

In July 1922 the party set sail for India. It was found impossible for all the members to go out together, so it was agreed to make Darjeeling our rendezvous. Fletcher and Harcourt, however, accompanied me on the s.s. *Nellore*, and after touching at Malta, Port Said, Colombo, and Madras, we arrived at Calcutta in the middle of August. It was then, of course, the height of the Indian summer, and on many occasions the thermometer registered 110° in the shade.

I have always had a fondness for tropical heat, but my companions suffered so much from it that, after collecting the boxes which had been sent out from England and making

a number of further purchases necessary for camp life in Tibet, we went by rail to Darjeeling, where before long the whole of our party assembled.

Darjeeling lies on an outer spur of the great Himalayan range. It is over 7,000 feet above sea-level, and even in summer is delightfully cool. For this reason it was made the summer capital of the province of Bengal: Calcutta, of course, being the winter capital. The chief objection to Darjeeling is its great rainfall, most of which occurs during the summer months, which is the period of the rainy season all over India.

Sixty years ago Darjeeling (properly Dorjeling—the Temple of the Thunderbolt!) consisted of an insignificant village, forming part of the territory seized by the British Indian Government from the little independent hill state of Sikkim by way of reparations. Reparations in those days seem to have been a matter more easily and quickly settled than now!

Darjeeling has had a very rapid development and is now a flourishing city. A large portion of the land seized along with Darjeeling, land which is known as British Sikkim, is laid out in tea plantations, supervised by Europeans, who use Darjeeling as their supply base and frequently ride in for dances and other festivities: their club, the Planters' Club, is a very important institution.

Apart from these, the resident European population is very small. The more important officials of the Bengal Government have villas scattered along the hillsides, but these are occupied chiefly in summer, at which time the hotels and boarding-houses are also packed with visitors. The native population is much larger and is more permanent.

The great Darjeeling market-square is the famous meeting-place for people of every race and caste. There is a substratum of the old Sikkimese population. Sikkimese are really Tibetans who, in comparatively modern times, have migrated and settled south of the Himalayas. They have kept the appearance, the language, and the religion of their Tibetan ancestors, and for their benefit there are three Lama (Tibetan Buddhist) monasteries in the neighbourhood of the city. In recent years numerous settlers have arrived from the Indian plains. These,

of course, are either Hindus or Mohammedans, and for their benefit there have been erected a Hindu temple and a mosque in the heart of the city.

An even larger number of people come from without the bounds of British India. These include immigrants from the still independent parts of Sikkim, and from Bhutan, Nepal, and Tibet. Tibetans are to be seen all over the town and attract a good deal of attention from the tourists. Many of them have brought down curios from their native lands which are sold at enormous profit to European visitors.

Our party stayed for some three weeks at the Labyrinth, a small residential hotel, and it required all of this time to complete our preparations. Knight and the other members of the expedition frequently visited the market-place in order to secure those supplies which had not been procured in either England or Calcutta.

I, for the most part, was engaged in " going native," spending long hours with the Sikkimese and Tibetans who are resident in Darjeeling. A number of the Tibetans were lamas, or priests, who had come down to India to go on pilgrimages to the holy places of Buddhism. Buddhism has long died out in India which is, however, frequently visited by Buddhists of other lands, who love to walk in the footsteps of their Master, dead these two thousand five hundred years.

These long conversations served both to practise my Tibetan colloquial language, and also to add to our scanty stock of information about the conditions existing in the Forbidden Land. The good manageress of our hotel, a dear, stout old Scotch lady of strict Presbyterian doctrine, with singular views on " the heathen," often lifted her hands in horror when she saw my private sitting-room crowded with weird pilgrims who had come from north of the Passes, with the odour of the mountains still strong upon them.

The Umdze, or Dean, of one of the local Sikkimese temples was one of the most frequent of my visitors, and as he had already been to Shigatsé and to Lhasa, the goals of our journey, and therefore knew the way, I at length engaged him as my secretary, and procured for him leave of absence from his temple so that he might come with us. It is considered very impolite in Tibet to call a man by his name when he possesses

a title of any sort, so he should have been called Umdze-la ("la," *lit.* "lags," being a term of respect which may mean either Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Master). But this was too much of a mouthful for our party. So they christened him "Toby," and Toby to the end of the journey he remained.

One of the most useful of our informants in Darjeeling was Laden La (*lit.* "legs, ldan lags"), a very well-known character in this part of the world. The son of an insignificant Sikkimese landowner, he entered the police force while a boy, became a police sergeant, and eventually was given a commission as captain, and became deputy and acting superintendent of police. Shortly after our arrival in India he was made an honorary A.D.C. to Lord Lytton, the Governor of Bengal, a unique honour for a native. His unofficial position, however, is even greater, and we found him the uncrowned king of the whole Darjeeling district.

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It is almost entirely at his order that Darjeeling remained nearly free from the Gandhi movement that swept over the whole of India.

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Fortune has brought him into very close touch with the highest Tibetan officials. The two great potentates of Tibet, the Trashi Lama of Shigatsé and the Dalai Lama of Lhasa, have both made visits to India, and in both cases Laden La was lent to them by the Indian Government to act as a guide and guard. As a result of this Laden was made an honorary chamberlain of the Dalai Lama's Court, and was given the rank of Depön, or General, in the new Tibetan army, and a few months after my return from Tibet he was actually called to Lhasa to organize, for the Dalai Lama, a police force for the capital.

We found him an exceedingly acute and able man, and so soon as he was good enough to grant us his favour we found things mysteriously expedited, for not only did he give us letters of introduction to various people in

Tibet, but he enabled us to secure able and faithful servants.

We had next to arrange for our transport. Wheeled traffic of any sort was of course impossible over the passes, and is unknown anywhere in Tibet. For ourselves and our bearers we secured ponies, and for the major portion of our transport, mules. We intended to keep to the great high-roads even after entering Tibet. Along these high-roads it is always possible to hire animals, and as this was cheaper and less troublesome, we decided against purchasing any horses, particularly as any animals we might purchase in Darjeeling would be unfit for use on the high plateau of Tibet. For the first part of our journey riding-ponies were to cost us five rupees, and transport mules three rupees, a day.

We were now in a position to start on our journey. In any case we should have to pass through the semi-independent state of Sikkim on our way to Tibet, but it was decided that our main party should take the short-cut which lay through the south-east of this little country, while I was to start a few days earlier and make a detour in order to visit the Maharaja, or King, of Sikkim, at his capital of Gantok, rejoining the main party at Yatung, just inside of the Tibetan borders.

I was anxious to start on September 5, but this was an unlucky day, according to Tibetan calculations, and Toby insisted that I wait until the next day, which was more auspicious. The Tibetans are grossly superstitious, and arrange all their affairs with reference to lucky and unlucky days. These are calculated both with reference to the days of the month and also the days of the week. Thus, for example, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays are bad days on which to start some new undertaking, while Mondays, Wednesdays, and Sundays are considered fortunate. The ninth, thirteenth, nineteenth, and twenty-ninth days of the month are considered of particularly good omen, and Toby pleaded that we postpone our departure until the nineteenth and also a Sunday, doubly favourable. He seemed very much surprised that I refused to sacrifice two weeks in order to start things properly. At last he consented to come on the sixth, a Wednesday, provided that we started at nine o'clock, which the calendar declared to be an opportune hour.

In case urgent business makes it necessary for a Tibetan to start a journey on an unlucky day, he will, on some preceding lucky day, have a hat or some other article of clothing sent on ahead a mile or two on the road, because it is thought that in this way the gods can be beguiled into believing that the man himself started on the correct occasion.

I was told a good tale of a Tibetan who took a long journey with his wife. He so arranged the matter that he arrived at and left each town *en route* on a lucky day. While still on the journey the poor wife died (was this part of the good luck ?) and the delay caused by this event upset the whole schedule, so that the man was held up for several weeks at a little village waiting for the next series of auspicious dates to come round again.

On the sixth a special service was held in Toby's monastery at daybreak, and at his earnest invitation I attended this ceremony in order to receive the special blessing of the abbot. Armed with this blessing, I returned and made the final preparations for the departure at the fateful hour of nine. This took place without mishap. Toby, Lhaten, my bearer or personal servant, and I trotted away on our ponies, and we were followed by two coolies on foot who carried the baggage, for I was travelling light and required no mules.

At first the way lay through the damp, hot, luxuriant forest which characterizes the southern slopes of the Himalayas, conditions in such marked contrast to the bare, treeless, arid, lifeless plateau of Tibet, which lies just north of that magnificent range of mountains.

From the Tibetan point of view our start may have been very propitious, but personally I considered it very unfavourable, for after we had gone a mile or two it began to rain, and in fact continued to pour down for the rest of the day. This very much hindered our progress, and we had to stop at the little village of Peshok. The next day we continued on our way. An important milestone was reached when we came to the Tista River. It is spanned by an imposing-looking bridge, but one which is really ramshackle and unsafe. There is a cart-road which goes as far as Kalimpong and Gantok. but

when the carts reach this bridge they have to be taken apart and hauled over. Here I was instructed by Toby on two important points of Tibetan etiquette. He would not allow me to ride over the bridge, but insisted that I get off my pony and walk across as a sign of reverence to the gods of Tibet.

In the middle of the bridge we found a number of paper prayers fluttering in the breeze. Toby brought out three such printed prayers which he had carried with him, and tied them on to the others, and at the same time he threw a couple of copper coins into the river as an offering to the deities which dwell therein. This last is an important custom which the Tibetans share with the ancient Romans.

We next ascended a long slope, and found ourselves in the afternoon in the town of Kalimpong. This is the last outpost of the British-Indian Government and an important city of trade. It has been called the Harbour of Tibet, for while neither European nor Indian trader is allowed in the heart of the Forbidden Land, the Tibetans are free to come down to India and sell their goods—chiefly wool—and take back with them cheap knick-knacks for sale in the markets of Shigatsé and Lhasa. Kalimpong serves as the meeting-ground for Indian and Tibetan traders just arriving or returning to Lhasa, the secret city, so that to see the caravan leaders coming in from the north was like having communication with another, unseen, half-fanciful world.

In order to promote trade, the local authorities organize various fairs in Kalimpong, which are attended by hordes of people of all races, chiefly Bhutanese, Sikkimese, and Tibetans, and the anthropologist has only to go to Kalimpong to find abundant material for the study of types.

Kalimpong differs from Darjeeling in many ways. In the first place, Kalimpong is part of the territory seized not from Sikkim, but from Bhutan, and is, therefore, the centre of the district known as British Bhutan. It is some 2,000 feet lower than Darjeeling (being 5,000 feet above sea-level), but has the advantage of being much less damp than the latter city.

The social distinction between the two towns is even greater. Darjeeling is essentially an official post, and therefore the

missionaries play a very minor and subdued part even in the social life of the place. In Kalimpong, on the other hand, things are very different. Here the missionaries reign supreme. All the important buildings belong to the Scotch Presbyterian Mission, which also owns large tracts of land in the district. The senior missionaries form the local aristocracy, overawing even the British–Indian officials, and Dr. Graham, the head of the Mission, is the uncrowned king of Kalimpong, the arbiter and dispenser of justice even to those not inside the Christian fold. Dr. Graham has won this unique position largely as a result of his forceful, and tactful, personality, for from the purely missionary point of view the Tibetan peoples form a singularly unpromising field and very few converts have been won.

Considering this and other facts, it is curious that the Tibetans prefer Kalimpong to Darjeeling as the base of their communications with India, but certainly the fact is undisputed, and there is, therefore, good reason to suppose that Kalimpong will gradually rise and Darjeeling gradually sink in importance.

From Kalimpong the caravan-road leads on direct to the Jelap Pass and the Chumbi Valley in Tibet. This was the road destined to be followed by my main party, but in order to visit Gantok, I had the next day to descend once more to the Tista Valley and follow for many miles the course of the Tista River. In the afternoon we reached the frontier of Sikkim. We were stopped by some Sikkimese frontier police and had to show our passes permitting us to enter the country.

For many years the British Government has had diplomatic relations with Nepal and Bhutan, but both these countries have maintained their independence. Sikkim, on the other hand, though also nominally independent, has come much more closely under British influence and control. The Maharaja of Sikkim recognizes the nominal suzerainty of the Emperor of India. An English Political Officer is resident in Gantok, the capital, and wields a great deal of influence; but Sikkim, in common with other so-called native states, is still entirely autonomous on nearly all local and internal matters, possessing her own laws and courts of justice, her own ministers and council of state, her own system of taxation, and her own defence force;

and no European can pass within her borders unless armed with a special official pass.

I noticed, however, that the gendarmes, or soldier-police, who demanded our passes were Nepalese who, though in the pay of the Sikkimese Government, could not even speak the Sikkimese language.

Soon after crossing the frontier it began to rain very heavily, so we halted for the night at the village of Rangpo, situated in the heart of the warm, moist Tista Valley. This part of Sikkim has an infamous reputation for malaria and other tropical fevers, so we took great care to boil our water and to wrap ourselves up in mosquito-nets, for the air was black with germ-carrying insects.

The next day we continued on the Gantok road, and halted at another little Sikkimese village that evening. On the way we stopped to rest for a few minutes from time to time, and on these occasions we began to be troubled with leeches. These horrible bloodsucking little creatures were hidden in the undergrowth, but they must have smelt our presence, for as soon as we stopped they began coming towards us with great rapidity in their curious form of locomotion. Although they look like black earthworms, instead of gliding along the ground in snake-like fashion, they rise on their tails until they are absolutely perpendicular, then, arching their heads down to the ground, bring their tails up to their heads. They thus measure their distance along the ground. It is really comic to see these tiny creatures, without legs, walking along a path, the head and tail taking the place of legs.

In spite of my vigilance, two or three attached themselves to my body and began thirstily sucking blood. I wanted to tear them off, but my bearer Lhaten would not allow me to do this, as the flesh comes off with them leaving a nasty wound which refuses to heal for many days thereafter. In accordance with his instructions, therefore, I had to allow the creatures to continue their ghastly work until he prepared a little bag filled with salt, and, dipping this in water, let the brine trickle down on to the leeches. This had a magical effect. The loathsome creatures shrivelled away into seeming nothingness, leaving only a little clot of blood which we easily wiped away.

We found the road surprisingly good, but our day's destination proved to be an insignificant little village. We stayed here in comfort at the little Government rest-house, fitted out in an entirely European style. Official rest-houses are scattered all over the inhabited part of Sikkim.

CHAPTER III

BRITISH INFLUENCE IN SIKKIM

WHEN the Indian Government carried through one of its punitive expeditions against Sikkim, it forced the Maharaja's Government to undertake to construct, and to keep under repair, a number of high-roads throughout the country in place of the casual tracks which were hitherto to be found, and also to erect a number of these official rest-houses. All the people of Sikkim benefit from the roads, but for the most part gain nothing from the rest-houses, for although the Maharaja himself and one or two of the higher members of his Court are permitted to use them, they have been erected chiefly for the benefit of the British Political Officer and his staff, and also for other European travellers who are given permits from the Government. This rest-house (or dak-bungalows) system forms part of the general policy of the Indian Government, which has forced a number of rulers of other native states to erect similar institutions.

These dak-bungalows are really dainty little villas, with a sitting-room, two or three bedrooms, and outhouses for the use of the traveller's servants, and animals. They are quite nicely furnished though, in accordance with Anglo-Indian custom, every traveller brings his own bedclothes, and also a retinue of servants who cook for and serve him, as each rest-house has only a *chowkidar*, or caretaker, in attendance. Supplies must be procured by one's own servants in one of the local bazaars.

Early the next morning we continued our journey. We had for some time a level road, and so I tried to get my pony to canter, but found that these hill-ponies have only one pace, viz., an amble, something between a fast walk and a trot, and nothing will induce them to break into either a real trot or a

gallop. They are able to keep up their amble all day, however, and can in the long-run outdistance any pony with more orthodox means of locomotion.

The summer rains had washed portions of the road away, and I noticed a number of labourers repairing it. These also, I noticed, were Nepalese and not Sikkimese. In fact, during the last few years the number of immigrants from Nepal has been so great that the Nepalese inhabitants of Sikkim far outnumber the Sikkimese.

In the early afternoon we began another long ascent, and a few hours later found ourselves at last in Gantok, the capital of Sikkim. I duly installed myself in the dak-bungalow, and a few moments later the private secretary of the Maharaja called to welcome me in the name of his master, and to state that His Highness would receive me in audience the next morning at eleven. Later in the evening five servants arrived from the palace bringing presents of food, so that I was made to feel quite a guest of state.

The next morning at the appointed time I walked along the ridge over to the Maharaja's palace. This consists of two buildings, one built in Tibetan style, and the other in European style ; but it is significant that the European house is the only one now in use.

I found the Maharaja a very affable young man of about twenty-five, pale, thin, and rather nervous and anæmic-looking. Affairs of state did not obviously hold particular interest for him, though, however, he felt bound to take them as seriously as possible. His hobby is photography, and he spends a good deal of time in playing with his pet animals. Much more impressive and imposing was his wife, the Maharani, a Lhasa woman, who obviously had a good deal to say in the government of the household.

The Maharaja was educated at St. Paul's School, Darjeeling, and speaks excellent English, but in deference to his lady we spoke a good deal of Tibetan together. The Maharaja spoke Tibetan with a marked Sikkimese accent, using a number of local words, but was quite intelligible. What he thought of my accent Heaven only knows !

The present ruler of Sikkim came to the throne quite unexpectedly.

His predecessor was his brother, a young man of great talent and charm, who was educated at Oxford and who had travelled very widely. He was very much struck by Japan, and was very anxious to marry a Japanese woman. The India Office, for obvious diplomatic reasons, refused to permit such a match. It is interesting to note than the India Office had the power to do this. The young Maharaja then tried in vain to marry a Burmese princess, but in the end he was forced to take a Lhasa lady. In spite of his modernist tendencies, his secular position, and his state of marital bliss, he enjoyed the distinction of being regarded as an incarnation of divinity by both Sikkimese and Tibetans. This was the result, not of his kingly position, but of a rather interesting chain of circumstances, which deserve narration.

It is well known that the abbots of the leading temples in Tibet are regarded as incarnations of various deities, or, more technically, of various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. When such a person dies he is supposed to be reborn again almost immediately. A search is made for the sacred child who, when found, is at once recognized as the new abbot, a regent being appointed to administer his duties during his minority.

In some cases the selection of the child is done purely by lot. In other cases the old abbot, shortly before his death, will give some indication as to the place, or family, in which he intends to be reborn.

On one occasion, many years ago, one such living deity grew very fond of a little Sikkimese girl, and declared shortly before his death that he would be reborn as the first male child to whom she should give birth. After the death of the old man, the then Maharaja of Sikkim, learning of the prophecy, married the girl, who in due course gave him a son and heir, who was thus regarded as a deity while his father was still on the throne.

It is surprising that this young ruler whose character was thus swathed in the atmosphere of this quaint old-world divinity should have developed into a man so modern and European in his ideas. In fact, he proved too progressive for his country and his people, and not long after he returned to his native land he died suddenly and mysteriously. Rumour had it that some of his old-fashioned ministers, disturbed by fear of too radical changes gave enough poison to secure that

the divinity moved on to still another incarnation, in order that his younger brother in this life, who was likely to prove more pliable, might come to the throne.

My morning audience with the present Maharaja was not the last meeting I had with him for, learning that I was anxious to push on the next day, he invited me to tea that afternoon in order that I might meet the Englishman who acts as his personal assistant.

This tea-party proved very entertaining, for it was quaint to have such an orthodox English meal in the midst of such other-world surroundings. The personal assistant proved to be a bluff, jolly man of great simplicity, whom I liked immensely. He had, I think, been for many years a non-commissioned officer doing clerical work, and had only recently, upon semi-retirement, taken over his new post.

His position threw an interesting light on the relations between Sikkim and the Indian Government. The senior British official in Sikkim is the so-called Political Officer, appointed directly by the Viceroy of India, and he exercises an enormous amount of power. In theory, however, his post is entirely diplomatic, his office corresponding to that of a minister or ambassador, so that it is impossible for him to interfere too much in the details of everyday internal administration. As a further check on native malpractices, therefore, the Maharaja is given an English " personal assistant." He is nominally a servant of the native ruler, and in theory can be engaged and dismissed by him, but in practice he holds his post at the pleasure of the Political Officer. It is the duty of the personal assistant to act as secretary and adviser to the Maharaja on all matters of State (though in theory his advice may be disregarded), and also to superintend the wheels of the administration and to see that no serious corruption or malpractices take place.

The entire control of matters of State theoretically lies in the hands of the Maharaja, aided by the Council of State, consisting of various ministers in charge of separate departments, and nominees chosen from the Sikkimese landed aristocracy. All the members of this body are, of course, natives, and it is the wise policy of the British Government to allow the native officials to carry out their duties according to their own

desires so long as there is no flagrant injustice and so long as they do not touch on diplomatic affairs.

Very occasionally an important point of policy will be forced on the country by the Political Officer. One such point was an importation of Nepalese settlers into the country.

A few decades ago the population of Sikkim consisted of three or four thousand Lepchas, and a slightly larger number of Sikkimese. The Lepchas are supposedly the primitive inhabitants of the country. A timid, spiritless, nature-loving, childlike folk, they still try to dwell in the hidden forests, far away in the hills. They are probably distantly, but very distantly, related to the Tibetans, but they possess a language and a primitive culture entirely their own.

The so-called Sikkimese are Tibetans, who in the last three hundred years have swept down into the country from the north, conquering and displacing the Lepchas.

Great strapping creatures, most of them are, but incurably " shiftless " and lazy. Sikkim is rich in resources, but neither Sikkimese nor Lepcha could be made to develop these. Consequently the Political Officer of the time, Mr. J. C. White, forced the Sikkimese Government to import Nepalese labourers and other settlers, and now there are nearly ten Nepalese for every one Sikkimese, even in Sikkim. This has proved enormously beneficial to the wealth of the country, but needless to say it proved unpopular among the Sikkimese, who were forced to work in competition with a keen and industrious people. So far, however, the Sikkimese have kept official posts entirely in their own hands.

The Maharaja urged me to stay in Gantok for several days longer, but I told him that it was imperative for me to go on with my journey the next day. He was then kind enough to suggest that I dismiss the ponies and the coolies I had brought with me from Darjeeling, as he would supply me free of cost mule transport for my party to Yatung, in the Chumbi Valley, the great Tibetan outpost.

I was very glad to avail myself of his offer, and the next morning set out for the three days' journey to the Passes. This consisted of a long continuous ascent along a narrow trail which had been cut into the side of the cliffs. In some places the road was only 2 feet wide and we had a sheer drop of 2,000

feet below us. It was a very exciting journey, as my mule would insist on walking along the extreme edge of the road on the very brink of nothingness. In summer the road is frequently washed away, and in winter the path is completely blocked by snow, so that spring and autumn are the only times one can count on getting through. Even in September I found the road in a very bad state and saw numerous Nepalese coolies busy repairing it.

Gantok lies 6,000 feet above sea-level. The next day brought us to Karponang, at an altitude of 9,500 feet; the day after to Changu, with its beautiful lake, 12,600 feet above sea-level; and early the following morning we came to the Natu Pass, which at this point divides Sikkimese from Tibetan territory, and which lies some 14,000 feet above the sea.

The last day the climb was so steep that it was impossible to ride and the sharp ascent had to be made on foot. At such an altitude climbing was terribly fatiguing, and to make matters worse we began to suffer from mountain-sickness, a gruesome exaggeration of the symptoms felt in sea-sickness. I was reminded here of the story of the poor British soldier who took part in the 1904 military expedition against Tibet, and who remarked on the way up that he had always heard that Tibet was a tableland, and that if so, the road up to it must constitute one of its legs.

Very bleak and forlorn is the Natu Pass. In the winter it is oftimes covered by thirty feet of snow, and it seems to be a central area for great winds and thunderstorms. Nevertheless, the view gained from the top was worth all the trouble, the pain, and the fatigue of the ascent. In the distance we could see the snowy cone of the sacred mountain of Chumolhari, at the base of which we knew the real Tibetan plateau started. Immediately below us was the Chumbi Valley, the curious outpost of the Tibetan Empire, which only at this point stretches south of the Himalayan ranges.

We had, first of all, to make our way down into the thickly-populated valley in order that later we might work our way up its sides until we came to the barren tableland of Tibet proper.

The descent proved nearly as difficult as the ascent. To make things easier, the steeper portions of the road, if it could be dignified by this name, wound round and round in a singularly

sinuous fashion, for even a mule cannot maintain his hold when his tail is vertical over his head. Despite the convenience of this winding path, there are a great many casualties every year among the mule caravans which make their way over the passes.

It was September, and no snow had fallen since the preceding winter, but here and there we came across great patches of snow which even the fierce summer sun had not been able to melt away.

At last, however, we came to the bottom of the valley, and I was able to see something of its picturesque villages and their inhabitants. In many respects the Chumbi Valley is quite unique and is unlike any other part of Tibet. A narrow valley on the south side of the Himalayas, it forms a wedge of Tibetan territory lying between the states of Sikkim and Bhutan. Like these latter countries, and unlike the barren plains of Tibet proper, the sides of its hills are covered with trees, and it receives a very heavy annual rainfall, something which is entirely unknown on the Tibetan plateau.

Owing to the severity of its climate, the only crop which true Tibet can grow is barley. In Sikkim, on the other hand, the staple crop is rice, hence its Tibetan name of Drenjong, or the Rice Country. In the Chumbi Valley the main crop is wheat, and consequently it gets the Tibetan appelation of Tromo, or Wheat Country.

Ethnologically, as well as geographically, Chumbi is quite distinct from Tibet, for though the Chumbi people, in common with the Bhutanese and Sikkimese, are of Tibetan origin, they have a dialect and many customs entirely their own.

They have the deserved reputation of being the most beautiful of all the peoples of Tibetan stock, and many of the young men and women I passed were really remarkably handsome. Unlike the true Tibetans, with whom filthiness is a virtue esteemed by the gods, the Chumbi people are occasionally known to wash themselves.

I was particularly interested in the Chumbi Valley, because it is only by an accident that to-day it does not form part of the British dominions.

After the success of the Younghusband expedition in 1904, it was arranged that Tibet should pay reparations to the extent

of Rupees 7,500,000 (or £500,000) to the British Government. And pending the full payment of the amount, the Chumbi Valley was to remain in the hands of the British Government. It was originally agreed that this sum was to be paid in seventy-five annual instalments, which meant that England would have a seventy-five-year lease on the Chumbi Valley, equivalent practically to annexation ; but things were destined to turn out otherwise.

In the first place the Liberals came into power in England, and in a burst of anti-Imperialism voluntarily reduced the reparations claim to one-third of the original amount. Secondly, China, anxious to get rid of British occupation everywhere in Tibet, came forward and arranged to pay the whole sum immediately on behalf of Tibet. This was eventually agreed to, and so the British occupation of Chumbi came to an end, though the Indian Government reserved the right to keep a Trade Agent there, and to station a small body of Indian soldiers to act as his bodyguard ; but the administration of the district was handed back to the Tibetan officials.

The British agency is placed in the village of Yatung (properly New Yatung), which the Tibetans called Sashima. I reached this place that same afternoon.

Immediately on arrival at the village, I saw a house with a Union Jack flying over it, and knowing this to be the British Agency, I at once set off to make an official visit. I must confess that I went there with a certain feeling of undeserved shame.

In order to protect myself from the bitter morning cold of the Passes, I had put on an airman's helmet, which completely covered all of my face except my nose. In this very high rarefied atmosphere any portion of the body exposed to the sun becomes terribly sunburned, in spite of the intense cold, and so when I pulled off my mask before making my visit I found that my face as a whole had retained its pallor, while my nose was a most fiery red. I looked indeed so like a confirmed toper, that I determined to make a firm display of teetotal principles immediately on meeting the British agent.

My meeting with the Trade Agent turned out to be unexpectedly pleasant and informal. The term Trade Agent is

somewhat misleading. His duties are exactly those of a consul, but he is given his title because he is appointed by the India Office and not by the Foreign Office.

The present occupant of the post is a most charming Eurasian by the name of MacDonald. His father was a Scotch tea-planter near Darjeeling. His mother was a Sikkimese. His wife is a Nepalese, while one of his daughters married an Englishman, so that his family can be considered truly cosmopolitan. His mother's language being but a variation of Tibetan, he speaks that language with great fluency, which makes him an ideal figure for his post—the intermediary between the Tibetans and the Indian Government, though it it is interesting to note that, because of his Scotch blood, and in spite of his personal friendship with the Dalai Lama, the supreme ruler of Tibet, he also is not allowed to go outside of the so-called trade-route, the narrow strip of land that connects Yatung with the city of Gyangtsé, still farther in the interior. Even to him, apart from the two towns of Gyangtsé and Yatung and the direct road which runs between them, Tibet is the Forbidden Land.

There was a rest-house at my disposal at Yatung, but Mr. MacDonald very hospitably insisted upon my staying with him until my main party should arrive from Darjeeling, and in the course of many long conversations with him I secured much useful information.

The next day brought a little excitement in the arrival of Major F. M. Bailey, the Political Officer in Gantok, who has also complete charge of diplomatic negotiations with the states of Bhutan and Tibet.

The British Trade Agent may be called the Consul, or even the Consul-General, while the Political Officer is the Ambassador, save that he is not allowed to visit Lhasa, the capital of the country to which he is Great Britain's diplomatic representative.

In the old days there was an equal ban upon his visiting the little kingdom of Bhutan, but this is gradually being lifted, owing to some very astute diplomatic moves. The Bhutanese were to the surrounding peoples what the Scots robber barons were to the English at one time. No neighbouring district was free from a raid, and they spread terror and desolation wherever