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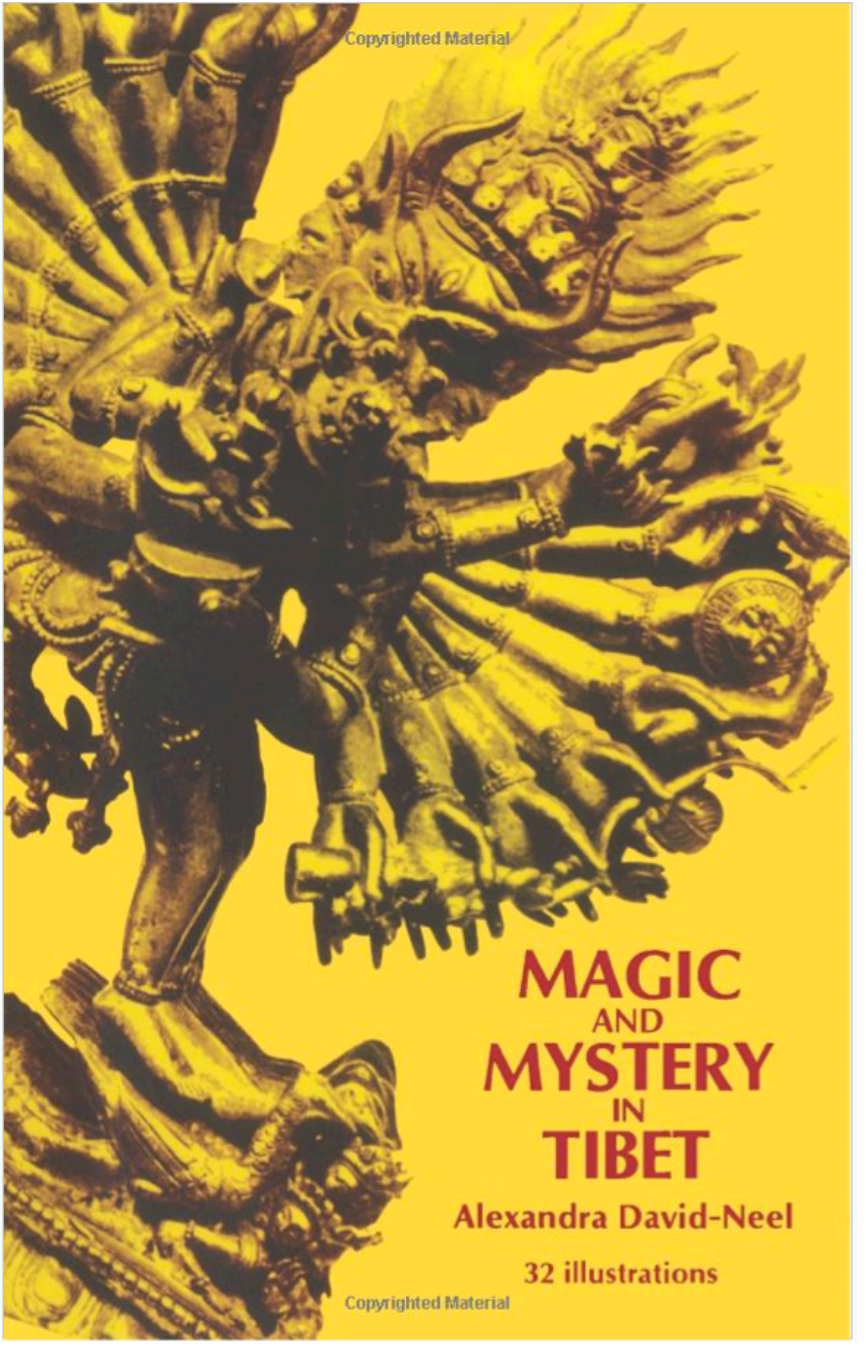

MAGIC AND MYSTERY IN TIBET

Alexandra David-Neel

32 illustrations

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THIS is the *believe-it-or-not* story of a strange land and a mysterious people. It records the author's fascinating experiences while traveling for fourteen years through forbidden Tibet. It is a thrilling story, told without bias or exaggeration, by one of the foremost of women explorers.

Alexandra David-Neel is the only European woman to have been honored with the rank of a Lama. She speaks and writes all of the Tibetan dialects fluently, and is a practising Buddhist.

Having become, as she explains, a complete Asiatic, and being recognized as such by the people among whom she has lived, she has gained the complete confidence of the most important Lamas of the country. Her knowledge of Tibet and its people comes to her, therefore, at first hand.

She reveals here how Tibetan mystics acquire the ability to live naked in zero temperatures by generating a protective body heat similar to that produced by the bee; how they can run incredible distances without rest, food or drink; how they can talk to each other over vast distances without implements of any kind by a strange sort of telepathy; how they learn to float in air and walk on water; how they bring corpses back to life; and how they can actually create animate objects by *thinking* them into existence.

MAGIC and MYSTERY in TIBET

CLAUDE KENDALL
PUBLISHER

MAGIC

and MYSTERY in

TIBET

by

ALEXANDRA
DAVID-NEEL

author of

MY JOURNEY TO LHASA

---

with an Introduction by DR. A. D'ARSONVAL

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FIRST AMERICAN EDITION

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

In English

My Journey to Lhasa

Initiations and Initiates in Tibet

In French

Voyage D'Une Parisienne À Lhassa

Parmi Les Mystiques Et Les Magiciens Du Thibet

Initiations Lamaïques

La Vie Surhumaine de Guésar de Ling, Héros Thibétain

Le Modernisme Bouddhique et le Bouddhisme Du Bouddha

Les Théories Individualistes Dans La Philosophie Chinoise

Socialisme Chinois—Le Philosophie Meh-ti et L'Idée de Solidarité

In German

Arjopa

Heilige und Hexer

In Spanish

A Través de la China Misteriosa

INTRODUCTION

FOR many Westerners Tibet is wrapped in an atmosphere of mystery. The " Land of Snows " is for them the country of the unknown, the fantastic and the impossible. What superhuman powers have not been ascribed to the various kinds of lamas, magicians, sorcerers, necromancers and practitioners of the occult who inhabit those high tablelands, and whom both nature and their own deliberate purpose have so splendidly isolated from the rest of the world? And how readily are the strangest legends about them accepted as indisputable truths! In that country plants, animals and human beings seem to divert to their own purposes the best established laws of physics, chemistry, physiology and even plain common sense.

It is therefore quite natural that scholars accustomed to the strict discipline of experimental method should have paid to these stories merely the condescending and amused attention that is usually given to fairy tales.

Such was my own state of mind up to the day when I had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of Madame Alexandra David-Neel.

This well-known and courageous explorer of Tibet unites in herself all the physical, moral and intellectual qualities that could be desired in one who is to observe and examine a subject of this kind. I must insist on saying this, however much her modesty may suffer.

Madame David-Neel understands, writes and speaks fluently all the dialects of Tibet. She has spent fourteen consecutive years in the country and the neigh-

bouring regions. She is a professed Buddhist, and so has been able to gain the confidence of the most important Lamas. Her adopted son is an ordained lama ; and she herself has undergone the psychic exercises of which she speaks. Madame David-Neel has in fact become, as she herself says, a complete Asiatic, and, what is still more important for an explorer of a country hitherto inaccessible to foreign travellers, she is recognized as such by those among whom she has lived.

This Easterner, this complete Tibetan, has nevertheless remained a Westerner, a disciple of Descartes and of Claude Bernard, practising the philosophic scepticism of the former which, according to the latter, should be the constant ally of the scientific observer. Unencumbered by any preconceived theory, and unbiassed by any doctrine or dogma, Madame David-Neel has observed everything in Tibet in a free and impartial spirit.

In the lectures which, in my capacity as professor of the Collège de France, succeeding my master Claude Bernard, I asked her to deliver, Madame David-Neel sums up her conclusions in these words :

" Everything that relates, whether closely or more distantly, to psychic phenomena and to the action of psychic forces in general, should be studied just like any other science. There is nothing miraculous or supernatural in them, nothing that should engender or keep alive superstition. Psychic training, rationally and scientifically conducted, can lead to desirable results. That is why the information gained about such training—even though it is practised empirically and based on theories to which we cannot always give assent—constitutes useful documentary evidence worthy of our attention."

Here, it is clear, is a true scientific determinism, as far removed from scepticism as from blind credulity.

The studies of Madame David-Neel will be of interest to Orientalists, psychologists and physiologists alike.

DOCTEUR A. D'ARSONVAL

Member of the Académie des Sciences and of the Académie de Médecine
Professor of the Collège de France
President of the Institut Général Psychologique.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IMMEDIATELY after the publication of my account of my journey to Lhasa, many persons expressed a wish, both in articles devoted to my book and in private conversation, to know how I came to live among the lamas, and also to learn more about the doctrines and practices of the mystics and magicians of Tibet.

In this book I attempt to satisfy their friendly curiosity. This task is however fraught with certain difficulties.

In order to answer these two questions in the order in which they have been put to me, I have started by describing the events which brought me into contact with the religious world of the lamas and of the various kinds of magicians who surround them.

Next I have tried to group together a certain number of salient points concerning the occult and mystical theories and the psychic training practices of the Tibetans. Whenever I have discovered in the rich store of my recollections a fact bearing on these subjects, I have related it as it came. Consequently this book is not a record of travel, for the subject does not lend itself to that treatment.

In the course of such investigations as I have pursued, the information obtained on one particular day is sometimes not completed till several months or several years later. It is only by presenting the final results of information gathered in various places that one can hope to give an adequate idea of the subject I am describing.

It is my intention, later on, to treat the question of

Tibetan mysticism and philosophy in a more technical work.

As in my previous book *My Journey to Lhasa*, the Tibetan names are generally transcribed phonetically only. The few cases in which the Tibetan orthography has been indicated will show how the correct pronunciation deviates from the spelling.

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MAGIC and MYSTERY in TIBET

CHAPTER I

TIBET AND THE LAMAS

"WELL, then, it is understood. I leave Dawasandup with you as interpreter. He will accompany you to Gangtok."

Is it a man who is speaking to me? This short yellow-skinned being clad in a robe of orange brocade, a diamond star sparkling on his hat, is he not, rather, a genie come down from the neighbouring mountains?

They say he is an "incarnated Lama" and heir prince of a Himalayan throne, but I doubt his reality. Probably he will vanish like a mirage, with his caparisoned little steed and his party of followers, dressed in all the colours of the rainbow. He is a part of the enchantment in which I have lived these last fifteen days. This new episode is of the stuff that dreams are made of. In a few minutes, I shall wake up in a real bed, in some country not haunted by genii nor by "incarnated Lamas" wrapped in shimmering silk. A country where men wear ugly dark coats and the horses do not carry silver inlaid saddles on golden-yellow cloths.

The sound of a kettledrum makes me start, two hautboys intone a melancholy minor tune. The youthful genie straddles his diminutive courser, knights and squires jump into their saddles.

"I shall expect you," the lama-prince says, smiling graciously at me.

I hear myself, as if I were listening to some other person, promising him that I will start the next day

for his capital, and the little troop, headed by the musicians, disappears.

As the last murmurs of the plaintive melody die away in the distance, the enchantmen that has held me spellbound dissipates.

I have not been dreaming, all this is real. I am at Kalimpong, in the Himalayas, and the interpreter given me when I arrived stands at my side.

I have already related [1] the circumstances which had brought me to the Himalayas. Political reasons had, at that time, led the Dalai Lama to seek refuge in British territory. It had seemed to me a unique opportunity, while he was stopping at the Indian frontier, of obtaining an interview and getting information from him about the special type of Buddhism that prevails in Tibet.

Very few strangers have ever approached the monk-king hidden in his sacred city, in the Land of Snows. Even in exile, he saw no one. Up to the time of my visit, he had obstinately refused an audience to any woman except Tibetans and I believe, even to this day, that I am the only exception to this rule.

As I left Darjeeling, in the early rosy dawn of a cool spring morning, I little guessed the far-reaching consequences of my request.

I thought of a short excursion, of an interesting but brief interview ; while, actually, I became involved in wanderings that kept me in Asia for full fourteen years.

At the beginning of that long series of journeys, the Dalai Lama figures, in my diaries, as an obliging host who, seeing a stranger without the walls, invites him to see over his domain.

This, the Dalai Lama did in a few words : " Learn the Tibetan language," he told me.

[1] In a previous book, *My Journey to Lhasa.*

If one could believe his subjects who call him the "Omniscient," [1] the sovereign of Tibet, when giving me this advice, foresaw its consequences, and consciously directed me, not only towards Lhasa, his forbidden capital, but towards the mystic masters and unknown magicians, yet more closely hidden in his wonderland.

At Kalimpong, the lama-king lived in a large house belonging to the minister of the Rajah of Bhutan. To give the place a more majestic appearance, two rows of tall bamboo poles had been planted in the form of an avenue. Flags flew from every pole, with the inscription *Aum mani padme hum !*, or the "horse of the air," surrounded by magic formulas.

The suite of the exiled sovereign was numerous and included more than a hundred servants. They were for the most part engaged in interminable gossip, and quiet reigned round the habitation. But on fête days, or when visitors of rank were to be received, a crowd of busy officials and domestics poured out from all sides, peering at one from every window, crossing and recrossing the large plot of ground in front of the house, hurrying, screaming, agitated, and all so remarkably alike in their dirty, greasy robes, that a stranger could easily make awkward mistakes about their rank.

The splendour, decorum and etiquette of the Potala were absent in that land of exile. Those who saw this road-side camp, where the Head of the Tibetan theocracy waited for his subjects to reconquer his throne, could not imagine what the Court at Lhasa was like.

The British expedition penetrating into the forbidden territory and parading his capital, in spite of the sorcery of the most famous magicians, had probably led the Dalai Lama to understand that foreign barbarians were masters in a material sense, by right of force. The inventions that he noticed during his trip through

[1] *Thamstched mkyenpa.*

India must also have convinced him of their ability to enslave and mould the material elements of nature. But his conviction that the white race is mentally inferior remained unshaken. And, in this, he only shared the opinion of all Asiatics—from Ceylon to the northern confines of Mongolia.

A Western woman acquainted with Buddhist doctrines seemed to him an inconceivable phenomenon.

If I had vanished into space while talking to him, he would have been less astonished. My reality surprised him most; but, when finally convinced, he politely inquired after my "Master," assuming that I could only have learned of Buddha from an Asiatic. It was not easy to convince him that the Tibetan text of one of the most esteemed Buddhist books [1] had been translated into French before I was born. "Ah well," he murmured at last, "if a few strangers have really learned our language and read our sacred books, they must have missed the meaning of them."

This was my chance. I hastened to seize it.

"It is precisely because I suspect that certain religious doctrines of Tibet have been misunderstood that I have come to you to be enlightened," I said.

My reply pleased the Dalai Lama. He readily answered any questions I put to him, and a little later gave me a long written explanation of the various subjects we had discussed.

The prince of Sikkim and his escort having disappeared, it only remained for me to keep my promise and make ready to start for Gangtok. But there was something to be seen before moving on.

The evening before, I had witnessed the benediction of the pilgrims by the Dalai Lama, a widely different scene from the Pontifical benediction at Rome. For the Pope in a single gesture blesses the multitude, while

[1] The *Gyacher rolpa*, translated by Ed. Foucaux, Professor at the Collège de France.

the Tibetans are far more exacting and each expect an individual blessing.

Among Lamaists again the manner of the blessing varies with the social rank of the blessed. The Lama places both hands on the heads of those he most respects. In other cases only one hand, two fingers or even only one finger. Lastly comes the blessing given by slightly touching the head with coloured ribbons, attached to a short stick.

In every case, however, there is contact, direct or indirect, between the lama and the devotee. This contact, according to Lamaists, is indispensable because the benediction, whether of people or of things, is not meant to call down upon them the benediction of God, but to infuse into them some beneficial power that emanates from the lama.

The large number of people who came to Kalimpong to be touched by the Dalai Lama gave me some idea of his widespread prestige.

The procession took several hours to pass before him, and I noticed that not only Lamaists but many people from Nepal and from Bengal, belonging to Hindu sects, had joined the crowd.

I saw some, who had come only to look on, suddenly seized by an occult fervour, hurrying to join the pious flock.

As I was watching this scene, my eyes fell on a man seated on the ground, a little to one side. His matted hair was wound around his head like a turban, in the style common to Hindu ascetics. Yet, his features were not those of an Indian and he was wearing dirty and much-torn lamaist monastic garments.

This tramp had placed a small bag beside him and seemed to observe the crowd with a cynical expression.

I pointed him out to Dawasandup, asking him if he had any idea who this Himalayan Diogenes might be.

"It must be a travelling *naljorpa*," [1] he answered; and, seeing my curiosity, my obliging interpreter went to the man and entered into conversation with him.

He returned to me with a serious face and said:

"This lama is a peripatetic ascetic from Bhutan. He lives here and there in caves, empty houses or under the trees. He has been stopping for several days in a small monastery near here."

My thoughts returned to the vagabond when the prince and his escort had disappeared. I had no definite plan for the afternoon, why should I not go to the *gompa* (monastery) where he was staying, and persuade him to talk? Was he really mocking, as he seemed to be, at the Dalai Lama and the faithful? And if so, why? There might be interesting reasons.

I communicated my desire to Dawasandup, who agreed to accompany me.

We went on horseback and soon reached the *gompa*, which was only a large-sized country-house.

In the *lha khang* (the room containing the holy images) we found the *naljorpa* seated upon a cushion in front of a low table, finishing his meal. Cushions were brought and we were offered tea.

It was difficult to begin a conversation with the ascetic, as his mouth appeared to be full of rice; he had only answered our polite greetings by a kind of grunt.

I was trying to find a phrase to break the ice, when the strange fellow began to laugh and muttered a few words. Dawasandup seemed embarrassed.

"What does he say?" I asked.

"Excuse me," answered the interpreter, "these *naljorpas* sometimes speak roughly. I do not know if I should translate."

[1] *Naljorpa* (written *rnal hbyorpa*), literally: "He who has attained perfect serenity," but usually interpreted: an ascetic possessing magic powers.

" Please do," I replied. " I am here to take notes ; especially of anything at all curious and original."

" Well, then—excuse me—he said, ' What is this idiot here for ? ' "

Such rudeness did not greatly astonish me as, in India also, certain *yogins* make a habit of insulting anyone who approaches them.

" Tell him I have come to ask why he mocked at the crowd seeking the benediction of the Dalai Lama."

" Puffed up with a sense of their own importance and the importance of what they are doing. Insects fluttering in the dung," muttered the *naljorpa* between his teeth.

This was vague, but the kind of language one expects from such men.

" And you," I replied, " are you free from all defilement ? "

He laughed noisily.

" He who tries to get out only sinks in deeper. I roll in it like a pig. I digest it and turn it into golden dust, into a brook of pure water. To fashion stars out of dog dung, that is the Great Work ! "

Evidently my friend was enjoying himself. This was his way of posing as a superman.

" Are these pilgrims not right, to profit by the presence of the Dalai Lama and obtain his blessing ? They are simple folk incapable of aspiring to the knowledge of the higher doctrines——"

But the *naljorpa* interrupted me.

" For a blessing to be efficacious, he who gives it must possess the power that he professes to communicate.

" Would the Precious Protector (the Dalai Lama) need soldiers to fight the Chinese or other enemies if he possessed such a power ? Could he not drive anyone he liked out of the country and surround Tibet with an invisible barrier that none could pass ?

" The Guru who is born in a lotus [1] had such a power, and his blessing still reaches those who worship him, even though he lives in the distant land of the Rakshasas.

" I am only a humble disciple, and yet——"

It appeared to me that the " humble disciple " was maybe a little mad and certainly very conceited, for his " and yet " had been accompanied by a glance that suggested many things.

My interpreter meanwhile was visibly uneasy. He profoundly respected the Dalai Lama and disliked to hear him criticized. On the other hand, the man who could " create stars out of dog dung " inspired him with a superstitious fear.

I proposed to leave, but as I understood that the lama was going away the next morning, I handed Dawasandup a few rupees for the traveller to help him on his way.

This present displeased the *naljorpa.* He refused it, saying he had already received more provisions than he could carry.

Dawasandup thought it right to insist. He took a few steps forward, intending to place the money on a table near the lama. Then I saw him stagger, fall backward and strike his back against the wall as if he had been violently pushed. He uttered a cry and clutched at his stomach. The *naljorpa* got up and, sneering, left the room.

" I feel as if I had received a terrible blow," said Dawasandup. " The lama is irritated. How shall we appease him ? "

" Let us go," I answered. " The lama has probably nothing to do with it. You, perhaps, have heart trouble and had better consult a doctor."

Pale and troubled, the interpreter answered nothing. Indeed there was nothing to be said. We returned, but I was not able to reassure him.

[1] Padmasambhâva, who preached in Tibet in the eighth century.

The next day Dawasandup and I left for Gangtok.

The mule path that we followed dives right into the Himalayas, the sacred land which ancient Indian traditions people with famous sages, stern magicians, ascetics and deities.

The summer resorts established by foreigners on the border of these impressive highlands have not yet modified their aspect. A few miles away from the hotels where the Western world enjoys dancing and jazz bands, the primeval forest reigns.

Shrouded in the moving fogs, a fantastic army of trees, draped in livid green moss, seems to keep watch along the narrow tracks, warning or threatening the traveller with enigmatic gestures. From the low valleys buried under the exuberant jungle to the mountain summits covered with eternal snow, the whole country is bathed in occult influences.

In such scenery it is fitting that sorcery should hold sway. The so-called Buddhist population is practically Shamanist and a large number of *mediums*: Bönpos, Pawos, Bunting and Yabas of both sexes, even in the smallest hamlets, transmit the messages of gods, demons and the dead.

I slept on the way at Pakyong, and the next day I reached Gangtok.

As I neared this village-capital, I was greeted by a sudden and formidable hail-storm.

Tibetans think that meteorological phenomena are the work of demons or magicians. A hail-storm is one of their favourite weapons. The former use it to hinder pilgrims on their journey to holy places and the latter, by this means, defend their hermitages against intruders and keep off faint-hearted candidates for discipleship.

A few weeks after my arrival, the superstitious Dawasandup confessed that he had consulted a *mopa* (diviner) about the unexpected attack of hail upon the otherwise gloriously sunny day of my arrival.

The oracle declared that the local gods and the holy lamas were not hostile to me, but that, nevertheless, I should meet with many difficulties if I attempted to live in the "Land of the Religion," as Tibetans call their country.

A prediction very generously fulfilled!

His Highness Sidkeong Namgyal, hereditary prince of Sikkim, was a veritable lama: abbot of a monastery of the Karma-Khagyud sect and a *tulku* [1] believed to be the reincarnation of his uncle, a lama of saintly memory.

As usual, he had donned the monastic garb while still a child, and spent a part of his youth in the monastery of which he was now the head.

The British Government having chosen him, in preference to his elder brother, as successor to the mahârajah his father, he was put in charge of an anglicized Indian as guardian and teacher.

A short stay at Oxford and a trip round the world completed his heterogeneous education.

Sidkeong tulku [2] knew English better than his mother tongue: Tibetan. He spoke Hindustani fluently and, also, a little Chinese. The private villa he had built in his father's gardens resembled an English country house imposed on a Tibetan temple. The same contrasts were repeated within. The ground floor was furnished according to English taste, while upstairs there was an oratory with Lamaist images and a Tibetan sitting-room.

The young prince was very open-minded. He immediately became interested in my researches and facilitated my task with great zeal.

The first part of my stay in Sikkim was devoted to visiting the monasteries scattered through the forests.

[1] *Tulku*, a lama of high rank whom foreigners call a "living Buddha." See Chapter III, "The Living Buddhas."

[2] In Tibetan language, titles or other honours follow the name.

Picturesquely situated, usually on the spur of a mountain, their aspect impressed me deeply. I liked to imagine these rustic dwellings inhabited by thinkers liberated from worldly ambitions and struggles, who passed their days in peace and deep meditations.

I did not, however, find the monasteries quite what I expected. The monks of Sikkim are for the most part illiterate and have no desire to be enlightened, even about the Buddhism which they profess. Nor, indeed, have they the necessary leisure. The *gompas* of Sikkim are poor, they have but a very small income and no rich benefactors. Their *trapas* are compelled to work for their living.

Foreign authors call all members of the Lamaist clergy indiscriminately lamas, but this is not the custom in Tibet. The only monks who have a right to the title of lama[1] are the ecclesiastical dignitaries such as the *tulkus*, the abbots of large monasteries, the heads of the great monastic colleges and monks who hold high university degrees. All other monks, even those who have been ordained as *gelong*, are called *trapas* (students). Nevertheless, it is usual to give the courtesy title of lama to aged and learned monks when addressing them.

In Sikkim, a number of *trapas* whom their colleagues held to be learned men were capable of celebrating a few religious rites. They taught the novices to recite the liturgy and received as fees gifts in kind, more rarely a little money and, often, merely the domestic service of their pupils. However, the exercise of their priestly functions was the main source of their income.

Orthodox Buddhism strictly forbids religious rites, and the learned lamas acknowledge that they cannot bestow spiritual enlightenment, which can only be acquired by personal intellectual effort. Yet the majority believe in the efficacy of certain ritualistic

[1] Written *blama*, which means "superior"—"excellent."

methods of the healing of the sick, securing material prosperity, the conquest of evil beings and the guidance of the spirits of the dead in the other world.

The funeral ceremonies were the principal duty of the Himalayan monks. They celebrated these rites with zeal, even with pleasure ; for they include one or two banquets offered by the family of the dead to the monks of the monastery to which he had been attached. The officiating *trapas* also receive presents of money and in kind at the house of the dead man.

Now, the peasant clergy of these forests are generally poor and ill-fed, and it is difficult for them to suppress a thrill of delight when the death of a rich villager promises them several days' feast.

Grown-up men usually dissimulate their feelings, but the child-novices who guard the cattle in the woods are amusingly frank.

One day, while I was sitting not far from some of these youthful herdsmen, a far-off sound of wind instruments reached us.

In an instant the boys who had been playing stopped, listening attentively. Again, we heard the same sound. The children had understood.

" The conches ! " said one of them.

" Some one is dead ! " another answered.

Then they kept silent, looking at each other, their eyes sparkling with pleasure.

" We shall have meat to eat," one of the boys whispered.

In many villages, the lamaist priest comes into competition with the sorcerer, though as a rule this leads to no animosity. Generally, each has more or less faith in the worth of his rival's methods. Although the lama is held in higher esteem than the *Bön* sorcerer, a follower of the ancient religion of the aborigines, or than the *ngagspa*—magician, assimilated to the official clergy—these latter are, nevertheless, believed to be

more skilful in dealing with the demons who harm living beings or the spirits of the dead.

An unforeseen incident led me to discover how the spirit of a dead man is drawn out of his body by the officiating lama and directed on the right road in the next world.

I was returning, that day, from an excursion in the forest when I heard a sharp brief cry, unlike that of any animal known to me. A few minutes later, the same cry was twice repeated. I advanced slowly and noiselessly in the direction of the sound and discovered a cabin which had been hidden by a slight rise in the ground.

Lying flat between the bushes, I could observe what was going on without being seen.

Two monks were seated under the trees, their gaze lowered in an attitude of meditation.

Hik ! cried one upon a peculiar abnormal shrill note. *Hik !* repeated the other after a few minutes. And so they continued, with long intervals of silence, during which they remained motionless between the shrieks.

I noticed that a great effort seemed required to produce this sound, which apparently came up from their very entrails. After having watched them for some time, I saw one of the *trapas* put his hands upon his throat. His face expressed suffering, he turned his head to one side and spat out a stream of blood.

His companion said a few words that I could not hear. Without answering the monk rose and went towards the cabin.

I then noticed a long straw standing straight up on the top of his head. What did this ornament signify ?

While the *trapa* entered the hut and his friend had his back to me, I escaped.

As soon as I saw Dawasandup, I questioned him. What were these men doing ; why did they utter this strange cry ?

That, he said, is the ritualistic cry that the officiating lama shouts beside a man who has just died, in order to free the "spirit" and cause it to leave the body through a hole that this magic syllable opens in the summit of the skull.

Only a lama who has received, from a competent master, the power of uttering that *hik!* with the right intonation and required force, is capable of success. After *hik!* he shouts *phat!* But he must be careful not to articulate *phat* when he is only practising, like the monks you overheard. The combination of these two sounds invariably leads to the separation of body and spirit, so that the lama who pronounced them correctly over himself would immediately die.

This danger does not exist when he is officiating, because he acts by proxy, in place of the dead—lending him his voice, so that the effect of the magic words is felt by the dead man, not by the lama.

Once the psychic power of drawing the spirit out of its corporeal envelope has been conferred, by a competent master, upon a disciple, the latter must practise the uttering of *hik!* in the right tone. It is known that this has been attained when a straw stuck in the skull stands up straight as long as desired. For by shouting *hik!* a slight opening in the skull is produced and the straw is placed in it. In the case of a dead man, the opening is much larger. It is sometimes large enough to introduce the little finger.

Dawasandup was much interested in all questions concerning death and the spirit-world. Five or six years after I knew him, he translated a classic Tibetan work on the peregrinations of the dead in the next world.[1]

Several foreigners, Orientalist scholars or British officials have employed Dawasandup and acknowledged his ability. However, I have good reasons to think

[1] The "Bardo Tôd Tol."

that none of them knew the real peculiarities of his character as I did.

Dawasandup was an occulist and even, in a certain way, a mystic. He sought for secret intercourse with the Dâkinîs [1] and the dreadful gods hoping to gain supernormal powers. Everything that concerned the mysterious world of beings generally invisible strongly attracted him, but the necessity of earning his living made it impossible for him to devote much time to his favourite study.

Born at Kalimpong, his ancestors were hillmen: Bhutanis or Sikkimeeses from the Tibetan stock of the invaders. He got a scholarship and was educated at the High School of Darjeeling, established for young men of Tibetan origin.

He entered the British Government service in India and became interpreter at Baxe Duar, on the southern frontier of Bhutan. There he met the lama whom he chose for spiritual guide.

I got some idea of this teacher from the accounts of Dawasandup, who venerated him deeply. He must have resembled many lamas whom I have met later on, harbouring in his mind a mixture of learning and superstitions, but, above all, a good and charitable man.

He was distinguished from his colleagues, however, by having had as master a veritable saint whose death is worth relating.

This holy lama was an anchorite who practised mystic contemplation in a secluded spot in Bhutan. As it is often the case, one of his disciples shared his hermitage and served him.

One day a pious benefactor came to see the ascetic and left him a sum of money to purchase winter pro-

[1] Feminine deities. Dâkinî is their Sanskrit name used also in Tibetan mystic literature. Their Tibetan name is *mkah hgroma*, pronounced *Kandoma*. They are often styled "mothers" and are said to impart esoteric profound doctrines to their devotees.

visions. His disciple, urged on by covetousness, stabbed him and ran off with the silver. The aged lama was still alive, and came to his senses soon after the murderer had gone. His wounds caused him excruciating suffering, and to escape this torture he sank into meditation.

Concentration of thought is carried so far by Tibetan mystics that it becomes anæsthetic and they do not feel anything ; or at a lower degree of power they can thus greatly lessen their pains.

When another disciple of the lama went to visit him a few days later he found him rolled up in a blanket and motionless. The smell from the festering wounds and the blood-stained blanket caught his attention. He questioned his master. The hermit then told him what had happened, but when the man wished to get a doctor from the nearest monastery he was forbidden to do so.

" If the lamas and villagers happen to hear about my condition they will search for the culprit," said the ascetic. " He cannot have got far. They would find him and, probably, condemn him to death. I cannot permit this. I wish to give him more time to escape. One day he will, perhaps, return to the right path and, in any case, I shall not have been the cause of his death. So do not tell anyone what you have seen here. Now go, leave me alone. While I meditate, I do not suffer, but when I become conscious of my body my pain is unbearable."

An Oriental disciple does not discuss an order of this kind. The man prostrated himself at his guru's [1] feet and left. A few days later the hermit, all alone in his hut, passed away.

Although Dawasandup greatly admired the conduct of the holy lama, such moral summits were not for him. He humbly confessed it.

[1] *Guru*, in Sanskrit, the spiritual father and guide. This word is used by Tibetan mystics, especially in book language.

Drink, a failing frequent among his countrymen, had been the curse of his life. This increased his natural tendency to anger and led him, one day, within an ace of murder. I had some influence over him while I lived at Gangtok. I persuaded him to promise the total abstinence from fermented beverages that is enjoined on all Buddhists. But it needed more energy than he possessed to persevere. It was impossible for him to resist his surroundings ; where men say that to drink, and leave one's reason at the bottom of the cup, is the proper thing for a faithful disciple of Padma-sambhava.[1]

When I met Dawasandup he had left the Government service to become head master of the Tibetan school at Gangtok. He was too extraordinary for words in this rôle.

His passion for reading literally tyrannized the man. Wherever he went he carried a book with him and, absorbed in it, he lost himself in a kind of ecstasy. For hours he would forget where he was. His learned translations, his long conversations with lamas and the celebrating of occult rites constantly distracted him from attending to his school. Indeed, he often seemed to have forgotten its very existence.

Sometimes for a whole month he did not set foot in the schoolroom, abandoning his scholars to the care of an under master, who followed his example in neglecting them, as far as he dared without risking his job.

Left to themselves, the boys played and wandered in the woods, forgetting the little they had learned.

However, the day would come when Dawasandup, severe as a Judge of the Dead, suddenly appeared before

[1] Padmasambhava belonged to the degenerate sect of tantric Buddhism. Yet, nothing proves he was naturally intemperate, as some of his followers wish to make us believe, to justify their drunkenness.

his pupils, who trembled in every limb, knowing full well what they had to expect.

First, they had to stand in line in front of their examiner, who then questioned a boy at one or the other end of the line.

If the child gave an incorrect answer, or none at all, his comrade next in line might answer, and if his solution was right, he was ordered to slap the ignorant in the face and take his place.

The victim was again questioned. If he did not show more learning than the first time, the third in line was called up, and if successful, would be told to slap his comrade and take his place.

An unlucky urchin, stupefied by these repeated brutalities, reached the end of the row, having received a dozen blows.

Not infrequently it happened that several boys, standing side by side, were incapable of reciting their lessons. In that case, the most " erudite " of the group distributed all the slaps, and if all the children showed themselves equally ignorant, Dawasandup himself chastised them all.

Certain pupils hesitated to give a friend a hard blow and only made a pretence of striking him, but Dawasandup was on the look out.

" Come up here ! " he would say, with a little ferocious laugh. " You do not know how it is done, my boy. I'll teach you." And bang ! his large hand would strike the poor lad full in the face. Then the boy had to demonstrate, on his friend's cheek, that he had learned the lesson given by his terrible teacher.

Sometimes the faults to be punished were not connected with the pupil's work. In that strange school, devoid of all discipline, the inventive mind of Dawasandup discovered transgressions to rules which had never been made. In these cases, he used a specially long and heavy stick, ordering the culprit to stretch

DAWASANDUP AT HIS SCHOOL AT GANGTOK

BOYS OF DAWASANDUP'S SCHOOL

out his arm and keep his hand open. Then the boy received on his palm the number of strokes fixed by his master.

As he manœuvred his weapon, Dawasandup executed a kind of savage war dance, marking each stroke with a leap and a wild exclamation of "han!" So, with the active though unwilling co-operation of the victim, whose pain caused him to stamp, writhe and yell, the punishment looked like a devilish ballet.

Arriving unexpectedly at the school one day, I witnessed one of these scenes, and the children, who became familiar with me, frankly described their teacher's educational methods.

After a few days of this active professorship, Dawasandup would again abandon his pupils.

I could tell many other stories about my good interpreter, some quite amusing, in the style of Boccaccio. He played other parts than those of occultist, schoolmaster and writer. But, peace to his memory. I do not wish to belittle him. Having acquired real erudition by persevering efforts, he was sympathetic and interesting. I congratulate myself on having met him and gratefully acknowledge my debt to him.

I may add that Dawasandup is the author of the first, and up to now, only English-Tibetan dictionary, and that he ended his days as professor of Tibetan at the university of Calcutta.

My joy was intense when the prince *Tulku* announced that a real Tibetan doctor of philosophy from the famous university of Trashilhumpo [1] was coming to live at the Enche monastery, near Gangtok, and that he also expected another lama—a native from Sikkim, who had studied in Tibet—to return shortly to his country.

I soon was able to meet these two men and found them learned and distinguished scholars.

[1] Near Shigatze, the capital of the Tsang province.

The doctor of philosophy's name was Kushog[1] Chösdzed, and he belonged to the family of the ancient kings of Tibet. He had been some years in prison for some political offence, and attributed his delicate state of health to poisoned food absorbed during his incarceration.

The prince of Sikkim held men of learning in high esteem. He was glad to receive the refugee and appointed him abbot of the Enche *gompa*, with the further duty of teaching grammar and sacred literature to about twenty novices.

Kushog Chösdzed was a Gelugspa, that is to say a follower of the reformed sect founded by Tsong Khapa, about A.D. 1400, familiarly known as the sect of the "Yellow hats."

Foreign writers who describe the doctrines and religious practices of the "Yellow hats" as completely opposed to those of the "Red hats" would have recognized their error on finding, at Enche Monastery, a Gelugspa abbot presiding over monks of the Red sect and chanting the liturgy with them.

I do not know whether this lama gave himself assiduously to meditation and should be classed as a mystic, but he certainly possessed extraordinary erudition. His memory resembled a miraculous library, where each book was ready at the asking, to open at the desired page. Without the slightest effort he could quote texts by the dozen, on any matter connected with Lamaism, Buddhist philosophy and Tibetan history or secular literature.

This is, however, not an unusual feat in Tibet, but his perfect understanding and subtle comprehension of shades of meaning was quite uncommon.

Whether from fear of being thought obtrusive or from pride of birth (his rank being higher than that of his protector), the lama seldom visited the prince at his

[1] *Kushog*, Tibetan equivalent of Sir.

villa, and only to consult with him about affairs concerning the monastery.

Sometimes he came to see me, but I generally went up to his *gompa*, which stood on a spur of the mountain that dominated Gangtok.

After several conversations, the lama, suspicious as are most Orientals, devised an amusing stratagem to test my knowledge of Buddhism and the extent of my understanding of its doctrines. One day when I was seated in his room, he took out of a drawer a long list of questions and with exquisite politeness asked me to answer them at once. The subjects treated were abstruse and had certainly been chosen with the intention of embarrassing me.

I passed the trial honourably, my examiner seemed content. He then confessed that up to this moment he had not believed me to be a Buddhist and that, not being able to discover my reasons for questioning the lamas about their religion, he had feared that my designs were evil.

After this he seemed quite reassured and manifested great confidence in me.

The second lama who arrived shortly after this at Gangtok came from the monastery of Tolung Tserphug, situated in the region of Lhasa. He had studied there in his youth, and returned later as secretary to the Head of the sect of the Karmapas, one of the most important " Red hat " sects.

He was called Bermiag Kushog (the Honourable of Bermiag) because he was the son of the Lord of that place, one of the rare members of the Sikkimeese nobility who belonged to the aboriginal race called the Lepchas.

Like Kushog Chösdzed, he had received the higher ordination of *gelong* and was a celibate. He was chaplain to the mahârajah and, as such, occupied an apartment in the palace.

Nearly every afternoon he crossed the gardens and went to the villa where the crown-prince lived. There, in the sitting-room furnished according to English taste, we had long conversations on topics quite foreign to Westerners.

I like to recall these talks which gradually enabled me to lift the veil that hides the real Tibet and its religious world.

Sidkeong Tulku, always wearing his brocade robes, presided, seated on a couch. A table was placed in front of him, and I sat opposite, in an arm-chair. We were each provided with a little bowl of fine Chinese porcelain, with a silver saucer and a cover shaped like a pagoda roof, studded with coral and turquoises.

At a short distance from the prince, the Honourable of Bermiag, majestically draped in his garnet-coloured toga, had an arm-chair and a bowl with a silver saucer, but without a cover. As for Dawasandup, who was often present, he squatted tailor fashion (in the East they say " like a lotus ") at our feet and his bowl, placed upon the rug, had neither cover nor saucer.

The complicated and very strict Tibetan etiquette was thus obeyed.

While that learned and fluent orator, Bermiag Kushog, talked, we were lavishly supplied with Tibetan tea, the colour of faded roses and flavoured with butter and salt. Rich Tibetans always have a bowl of this tea near at hand. A popular expression to describe wealthy people is : " Their lips are always moistened with tea or beer." However, tea only appeared in these reunions, out of respect for my orthodox Buddhist principles.

A young attendant brought in a large silver teapot. He carried it around shoulder high and lowered it to the level of our cups with studied gestures, as if he was performing some religious rite. A few sticks of incense burning in a corner of the room, spread a penetrating

fragrance unlike any I had ever smelt in India or in China. Sometimes, a slow solemn melody, at once melancholy and subdued, reached us from the distant palace temple. And Bermiag lama continued talking, describing the lives and thoughts of some sages or magicians who had lived or were living to-day, in the forbidden land, whose frontier was so near. . . .

To Kushog Chösdzed and to Bermiag Kushog I owe my first initiation into the creeds held by the Lamaists regarding death and the beyond : creeds unknown to most foreigners.

As one of these lamas was " Red hat," and the other belonged to the " Yellow hat " sect, by listening to both, I was sure of acquiring information that represented the general opinion and not that of any one particular sect or creed.

Moreover, in the years that followed, I had numerous occasions, in different parts of Tibet, of questioning other lamas on this subject. For the convenience of the reader, I will put together some of this information in the following summary.

Death and the Beyond. The profane generally imagine that Buddhists believe in the reincarnation of the soul and even in metempsychosis. This is erroneous. Buddhism teaches that the energy produced by the mental and physical activities of a being brings about the apparition of new mental and physical phenomena, when once this being has been dissolved by death.

There exist a number of subtle theories upon this subject and the Tibetan mystics seem to have attained a deeper insight into the question than most other Buddhists.

However, in Tibet, as elsewhere, the views of the philosophers are only understood by the élite. The masses, although they repeat the orthodox creed : " *all aggregates are impermanent* ; no ' *ego* ' *exists in the person, nor in anything*," remain attached to the more simple

belief in an undefined entity travelling from world to world, assuming various forms.

The ideas of the Lamaists regarding the condition of man immediately after death differ from those held by the Buddhists of the southern countries: Ceylon, Burma, Siam. They affirm that a certain time elapses between his death and his rebirth among one or other of the six kinds of recognized sentient beings.[1]

According to popular belief, the class of beings in which one is reborn and the more or less happy conditions in which one is placed among them, depend upon the good and evil actions one has accomplished during one's previous existence.

The more enlightened lamas teach that man—or any other being—by his thoughts and actions, creates affinities which, quite naturally, lead him to a kind of existence in keeping with the nature of these affinities.

Others say that, by his actions, and above all, by his mental activity, he modifies his very substance and so acquires the characteristics of a god, an animal, or of any kind of being.

So far, these views differ very little from those expressed among Buddhists. The following lamaist theories are more original.

In the first place, the great importance given to cleverness by certain Mahâyâna Buddhist sects is still more emphasized by Lamaists.

" He who knows how to go about it could live comfortably even in hell," is a very popular saying in Tibet. This explains more clearly than any definition or description all that the lamas mean by *thabs*, i.e. " method."

Thus, while most of their co-religionists believe that the fate of the dead is mathematically fixed in accordance with their moral character, the Lamaists declare that he who knows the proper " method " is capable

[1] See page 260.

of modifying for the better his *post-mortem* fate. In other words, he may cause himself to be reborn in the most agreeable conditions possible.

They say: "as agreeable *as possible*," because in spite of cleverness, the weight of past actions has considerable force. In fact, it is often so powerful that all the efforts of a dead being, or of an initiate devoted to his welfare, are unable to stop the "spirit" from precipitating itself into a miserable rebirth. We shall have an illustration of this difficulty a little later.

Starting with the idea that "method," the "savoir-faire," is of an essential importance, the Lamaists think that after having learned the art of living well, one must learn the art of dying well and of "doing well" in other worlds.

Initiates acquainted with mystic lore, are supposed to know what awaits them when they die, and contemplative lamas have foreseen and experienced, in this life, the sensations that accompany death. They will, therefore, neither be surprised nor troubled when their present personality disintegrates. *That* which is to continue, entering conscious into the next world, will be already familiar with the roads and bypaths, and the places to which they lead.

What is this "*that*" which continues its way after the body has become a corpse? It is a special "consciousness" among the several distinguished by Lamaists. The "consciousness" of the "I," or according to another definition "the will to live."

I shall use the term "spirit" for the traveller whose peregrinations in the next world we are to follow. This term is far from conveying exactly the idea which learned Tibetans embody in the words *Yid kyi rnampar shespa*. But it has the advantage of being familiar to Westerners and, indeed, there is none more suitable in any European language.

I said that—according to Tibetans—a mystic initiate

is capable of keeping his mind lucid during the disintegration of his personality, and that it is possible to him to pass from this world to the next fully conscious of what is happening. It follows that such a man does not need the help of anyone in his last hours, nor any religious rites after his death.

But this is not the case for ordinary mortals.

By ordinary mortals, we must understand anyone, monk or layman, who has not mastered the " science of death," and these are, naturally, the great majority.

Lamaism does not abandon these ignorants to themselves. While they are dying, and after they are dead, a lama teaches them that which they have not learned while they were alive. He explains to them the nature of the beings and things which appear on their way ; he reassures them, and, above all, he never ceases guiding them in the right direction.

The lama who is assisting a dying man is careful to prevent him from falling asleep, or from fainting or falling into a coma. He points out the successive departure of the special " consciousness " attached to each sense, viz. consciousness of the eye, consciousness of the nose, of the tongue, of the body, of the ear. That is to say he calls attention to the gradual loss of sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing.

Then, the task of the lama is to make the " spirit " spring out of its envelope through the top of the head ; for if it leaves by any other road, the future well-being of the man will be greatly jeopardized.

This extraction of the " spirit " is produced by the ritualistic cry of *Hik !* followed by *Phat !* Before uttering the cry, the lama must concentrate his thoughts and identify himself with the man who has just died. He must make the effort which the man himself ought to have made, to cause the " spirit " to ascend to the summit of the skull with sufficient force to produce the fissure through which it can escape.

Initiates who are capable of making the "spirit" rise for themselves, utter the liberating cries of *Hik!* and *Phat!* when they feel their end approaching, and so free themselves without help.

They are also able to commit suicide in this way and it is said that certain mystics have done so.

The disembodied "spirit" then begins a strange pilgrimage. The popular belief is that a journey really takes place through lands that really exist and are peopled with real beings. But the more learned Lamaists consider the journey as a series of subjective visions, a dream that the "spirit" himself weaves under the influence of his character and his past actions.

Certain Lamaists assert that, immediately after the "spirit" has been disincarnated, it has an intuition, fugitive as a streak of lightning, of the Supreme Reality. If it can seize this light, it is definitely set free from the "round" of successive births and deaths. It has reached the state of *nirvâna*.

This is rarely the case. Generally the "spirit" is dazzled by this sudden light. He shrinks from it, pulled backward by his false conceptions, his attachment to individual existence and to the pleasure of the senses. Or, else, the significance of what he has seen escapes him, just as a man, absorbed by his preoccupations, will fail to notice what is going on around him.

The ordinary man who has died while in a faint, does not immediately understand what has happened when he becomes conscious again. For several days he will "talk" to people living in his former dwelling-place and he will be astonished that no one answers him or seems to be aware of his presence.

A lama of the monastery of Litang, in Eastern Tibet, told me that some dead men had communicated through the intermediary of *pawos* (mediums) the fact that they had tried to use objects belonging to them. They wanted to take a plough to work their fields or

to reach their clothes which were hanging on a hook and put them on. They were irritated at not being able to carry on the life to which they were accustomed.

In such cases, the " spirit " of the dead is disoriented. What can have happened to him ? He notices an inert body similar to his own and sees the lamas chanting around him. Is it possible that he is dead ?

Simple people believe that the disincarnated " spirit " must go to a sandy spot and observe his footprints on the ground. If these footprints are reversed, that is to say if the heels are in front and the toes turned backwards, he can no longer doubt that he is dead.

We may well ask how a " spirit " can possess feet ?— It is not really the " spirit " which is provided with limbs, but the " ethereal double " to which he is still attached. For Tibetans, like Egyptians, believe in the " double."

During life, in a normal state, this " double " is closely united with the material body. Nevertheless, certain circumstances may cause their separation. The " double " can, then, leave the material body and *show* itself in different places ; or *being itself invisible*, it can accomplish various peregrinations. With some people this separation of the " double " from the body happens involuntarily, but Tibetans say that those who have trained themselves for the purpose can effect it at will.

The separation, however, is not complete, for a strand subsists, connecting the two forms. The link persists during a certain length of time after death. The destruction of the corpse generally, but not necessarily, brings about the destruction of the " double " in the end. In certain cases, it may survive its companion.

In Tibet, one meets people who have been in a state of lethargy, and are able to describe the various places in which, they say, they have travelled. Some have only visited countries inhabited by men, while others can tell of their peregrinations in the paradises, the

purgatories or in the *bardo*, an intermediary region where "spirits" wander after death, while waiting to be reincarnated.[1]

These curious travellers are called *delogs*, which means: "one who has returned from the *beyond*." Though the *delogs* vary in their descriptions of places and events, they usually agree in depicting the feelings of the pseudo-dead as definitely pleasant.

A woman whom I met in a village of Tsarong had, some years ago, remained inanimate for a whole week. She said she had been agreeably astonished by the lightness and agility of her new body and the extraordinary rapidity of its movements. She had only to wish herself in a certain place to be there immediately; she could cross rivers, walking upon the waters, or pass through walls. There was only one thing she found impossible—to cut an almost impalpable cord that attached her ethereal being to the material body which she could see perfectly well sleeping upon her couch. This cord lengthened out indefinitely but, nevertheless, it sometimes hampered her movements. She would "get caught up in it," she said.

A male *delog*, whom my son had met in his youth, gave a similar description of his state.

Evidently, the *delog* is not really a dead man, so that nothing can prove that the sensations he experiences in his lethargy are the same as those felt by the dead. Tibetans, however, do not seem to be troubled by this distinction.

When the dying man has taken his last breath, he is dressed by putting his clothes on backwards—the front of the gown fastened on his back. Then he is tied up, with his legs crossed, or his knees bent and touching his breast. In the villages, the body, dressed in this way, is usually placed in a cauldron. As soon as the corpse has been taken out for its journey to the ceme-

[1] The existence of such a region is denied by orthodox Buddhists.

tery, this cauldron is hastily washed, and soup or tea is often prepared in it for the funeral guests who do not seem troubled by fear of infection from the corpse.

In Tibet, funeral ceremonies occupy many days, and though the high altitude of the central and northern provinces retards decomposition, in the hot and damp valleys, corpses kept for a week or longer spread a putrid odour.

This does not in the least affect the appetite of the officiating *trapas*, who continue to advise the dead, signalling the roads he should follow and those he should avoid in the next world. They take their meals facing the departed one. One may even say they eat *with* him, for the chief monk invites him by name as follows : " Spirit, come here, immediately, and feed yourself."

In the wooded regions of Tibet, the bodies are burned. The inhabitants of the vast barren northern and central regions, where cowdung is the only fuel available, abandon the corpses to the beasts of prey, either in cemeteries reserved near the villages, or anywhere on the mountain solitudes.

The bodies of high religious dignitaries are sometimes preserved by the double process of salting and cooking in butter. These mummies are called *mardong*. Swathed in clothes, their faces painted with gold, they are placed in mausoleums of massive silver, studded with precious stones. A pane of glass is sometimes fitted in these cases, on a level with the head, so that the gilded face can be seen. Other Grand Lamas are incinerated with butter and their bones preserved in rich caskets. All funeral monuments, in Tibet, take the form of *chorten*, which are imitations of the stûpas which the ancient Buddhists of India built over their holy dead, or other precious relics.

In obedience to Buddhist beliefs in the excellence of charitable deeds, Lamaists find, in the funerals, a fitting occasion for a supreme act of charity. The dead

A TIBETAN FUNERAL—CUTTING THE DEAD BODY INTO PIECES TO FEED THE VULTURES AND WILD BEASTS

man wished—or is supposed to have wished—that his body should serve as his last gift, to nourish those tormented by hunger.

A work entitled: A guide for the "spirit" of the dead in the next world,[1] expounds the subject as follows:

(1) The body is transported to the top of a mountain. It is dismembered, the four limbs being cut off with a well-sharpened knife. The entrails, the heart, the lungs are laid out on the ground. The birds, wolves and foxes feed themselves upon them.

(2) The body is thrown into a sacred river. The blood and the humours are dissolved in the blue water. The fish and the otters eat the flesh and the fat.

(3) The body is burned. Flesh, bones and skin are reduced to a heap of cinders. The *Tisas*[2] are nourished by the odour.

(4) The body is hidden in the earth. Flesh, bones and skin are sucked by worms.

Families who can afford to pay the officiating monks, have the religious service repeated every day, for six weeks following the funerals. After this, an effigy is made with a light frame of sticks, supporting clothes that belonged to the deceased. A sheet of paper represents the face. The portrait of the dead person is sometimes sketched upon it; more often a printed paper sheet is bought, ready made, in a monastery. There are two models: one being the picture of a man, the other that of a woman. The name of the departed is written under the drawn portrait or the printed picture.

There is one more, final, religious ceremony, at the close of which the officiating lama burns the paper

[1] Tse hdas kyi rnamshes thog grang.

[2] The *Tisas* are demi-gods who feed upon odours; but while some of them nourish themselves with sweet fragrances, others prefer odours which are offensive to us, such as that of burnt flesh.

sheet, or face of the dead person. The clothes in which the effigy was dressed are given to the lama as part of his fee.

After this symbolic incineration, the ties which might still have attached the deceased to this world are considered to be definitely severed.

Tibetans keenly desire avoiding any intercourse with the dead. Peasants use especially precise words to get rid of them. Just before the corpse is carried out of the house, a meal is served to him and an aged member of the family harangues him, in these words :

" So-and-so, listen. You are dead, be sure of that. You have nothing more to do here. Eat copiously for the last time. You have a long road to run and several mountain passes to cross. Take strength and do not return ever again."

I heard an even stranger discourse.

After having duly told the dead man that he no longer belonged to this world and bidding him never to reappear, the orator added :

" Pagdzin. I must tell you that your house has been destroyed by fire, everything you possessed is burned. Because of a debt you had forgotten, your creditor has taken your two sons away as slaves. Your wife has left with a new husband. As it would sadden you to see all this misery, be careful not to return."

I listened in astonishment to this extraordinary list of calamities.

" How did this series of misfortunes happen ? " I asked an assistant.

" Nothing at all has happened," he answered, smiling maliciously. " The farm and the cattle are intact and the widow is sitting quietly at home with the sons. We invented that tale to disgust Pagdzin so that he will not think of returning to his home."

This seemed rather a naïve stratagem for people

who credit the " spirit " with the faculty of seeing what is going on in our world.

In liturgical terms far more solemn than those employed by the villagers, the lama also advises the departed one to follow his road without looking backward. But this counsel is for his own good, while the common people only think of avoiding the occult presence of a ghost which they consider dangerous.

During the celebration of these various ceremonies, the " spirit " travels through the *Bardo.*

He beholds, in turn, radiant beautiful beings and hideous forms. He sees diversely coloured paths and a crowd of strange visions. These apparitions frighten him, he is bewildered and wanders at random among them.

If he is able to hear and to follow the advices of the officiating lama, he can take a road that will lead him to be reborn among the gods, or in some other pleasant condition—just as the initiate may, who has entered consciously into the *Bardo* after a careful study of its " map."

But men who have not learned anything about the *Bardo,* and who enter it while absorbed in their regret at leaving the material world, can hardly profit by the counsels given to them.

So they miss the opportunity of escaping the mathematically rigid consequences of their actions. The roads to celestial happiness are behind them. The wombs of human and of animal beings are offered them and, deceived by their hallucinations, they fancy these to be pleasant grottoes or palaces. Thinking they will find an agreeable resting-place, they enter one or another of them and thus determine for themselves the conditions of their rebirth. This one will become a dog, while another will be the son of distinguished human parents.

According to other beliefs, the great mass of people

who have not obtained *post-mortem* spiritual illumination, by seizing the meaning of the vision which arose before them immediately after death, travel like a frightened flock of sheep through the phantasmagoria of *Bardo*, until they reach the court of Shinje, the Judge of the Dead.

Shinje examines their past actions in a mirror or weighs them under the form of white and black pebbles. According to the predominance of good or of evil deeds, he determines the species of beings among whom the " spirit " will be reborn and the particular conditions that shall accompany this rebirth, such as physical beauty or ugliness, intellectual gifts, social standing of the parents, etc.

There is no question of " skilfulness " in saving oneself here, for the judge is impartial and inflexible.

In fact, even at the time when " skilfulness " may be helpful, it only acts within the limit permitted by the power of past actions. I have already mentioned this limitation and will, now, give an amusing illustration of it which is characteristic of Tibetan humour.

A Grand Lama had passed his whole life in idleness. Although he had been given excellent tutors in his youth, had inherited from his predecessors an important library and had, moreover, always been surrounded by men of learning, still, he scarcely knew how to read. This lama died.

In these times there lived a strange man, a miracle-worker and rough-speaking philosopher, whose eccentricities—sometimes coarse—often exaggerated by his biographers, have given birth to a number of stories in the style of Rabelais, much appreciated in Tibet.

Dugpa Kunlegs, for such was his name, travelled under the guise of a vagabond. Having arrived at the bank of a brook, he saw a girl who had come there to draw water.

Suddenly he attacked her, and without saying a word he tried to violate her.

The lass was robust and Dugpa Kunlegs was approaching old age. She defended herself so vigorously that she escaped him, and, running back to the village, told her mother what had happened.

The good woman was most astonished. The men of the country were well behaved, none of them could be suspected. The brute must be a stranger. She made her daughter minutely describe the wicked wretch.

While listening to the girl, the mother wondered. The description of the man corresponded, in all points, to that of Dugpa Kunlegs, this eccentric and saintly lama whom she had met during a pilgrimage. There was no doubt possible. Dugpa Kunlegs, himself, had wished to abuse her daughter.

She began to reflect on the strange behaviour of the holy one. The common moral principles which rule the conduct of ordinary men do not apply to men of supernormal wisdom—she thought. A *doubtob* [1] is not bound to follow any law. His actions are dictated by superior considerations which escape the vulgar observer. . . .

So she said to her daughter :

" The man you have seen is the great Dugpa Kunlegs. Whatever he does is well done. Therefore, return to the brook, prostrate yourself at his feet and consent to anything he wishes.

The girl went back and found the *doubtob* seated upon a stone, absorbed in his thoughts. She bowed down before him, excused herself for having resisted him when she had not known who he was, and declared that she was entirely at his service.

The saint shrugged his shoulders.

" My child," he said, " women awake no desire in

[1] A sage and wonder-worker.

me. However, the Grand Lama of the neighbouring monastery has died in ignorance, having neglected all occasions of instruction. I saw his 'spirit' wandering in the *Bardo*, drawn towards a bad rebirth, and, out of compassion, I wished to procure him a human body. But the power of his evil deeds has not permitted this. You escaped, and while you were at the village, the asses in that field near by, coupled. The Grand Lama will soon be reborn as a donkey."

The majority of the dead men heed the desire of their families, as expressed during the funeral, and do not return. The latter conclude that their fate, in the next world, has been definitely settled and, probably, to their satisfaction.

However, some departed ones are less discreet. They frequently appear in dreams to their relatives or their friends and strange things happen in their former dwellings. Tibetans believe that this shows the "spirit" to be unhappy and calling for help.

There are lama diviners who can be consulted in such cases. They order the rites to be celebrated, the gifts to be bestowed upon the clergy, and holy books to be read, to comfort the unhappy "spirit."

Nevertheless, many people, especially in those remote regions near the frontiers, fall back on the practices of the ancient Böns[1] for such cases. They think that the dead man, himself, should be listened to. So a *medium*, male or female (*pawo* or *pamo*), is summoned to lend his voice to the departed one.

Spiritualistic seances, in Tibet, do not resemble those of the Western countries. Neither darkness nor silence are required, sometimes they are held in the open air.

The *pawo* begins chanting, accompanying himself with a little drum and a bell. He dances, first slowly, then faster and faster, and, finally, trembles convul-

[1] The shamanist aborigines.

sively. A being of another world, god, demon or spirit of a dead person, has taken possession of him.

In a kind of frenzy, he utters broken sentences, which are supposed to convey that which the invisible being wishes to communicate to the assistants.

Since it is of the first importance to know exactly who is speaking through the *medium*, and what he is saying, the most intelligent men of the village are called upon to listen attentively.

It sometimes happens that different gods or spirits take possession of the *medium* one after another. Once in a while, the latter, under the impulsion given to him by one of these beings, will suddenly attack one of the public and beat him mercilessly. This correction is always accepted without any resistance being offered. Tibetans imagine that it is meant to drive out a demon that has lodged himself in the man without his being aware of it. This undesirable guest has, however, been discovered by the spirit animating the *medium*.

The departed ones who suffer in the next world usually limit their performances to giving an account of their misfortunes.

At a seance, where I was a spectator, I heard one say : " I met a demon upon my road who dragged me into his dwelling. He made a slave of me. He forces me to work hard, without stopping, and ill-treats me. Have pity on me ! Set me free so that I may reach the ' Paradise of the Great Bliss.' "

The mother of the man who was supposed to be speaking, as well as his wife and children, wept bitter tears.

Families who receive supplications of this kind, think of nothing but how to liberate the unfortunate captive.

It is a complicated affair.

First, one must get into communication with the demon and negotiate the ransom of his prisoner.

The chosen intermediary is often a Bön sorcerer. He informs the relatives of the unhappy " spirit " that his

demoniacal master demands the sacrifice of a pig or a cow, before setting him free.

Having offered the victim, the Bön enters into a trance. His " double " is supposed to visit the dwelling-place of the demon.

He travels ; the way is long and hard, full of obstacles. This, the sorcerer indicates by his contortions. But unlike the *pawo* he remains seated, moving only his head and his bust. A flow of hurried words are uttered, telling the various incidents of his adventure.

He is even more difficult to understand than the *pawo*. The cleverest listeners find it hard to make out the sense of his words.

The Bön has accomplished his task ; now he has seized the " spirit " and prepares to take him away. The demon has received the ransom demanded, but he usually breaks faith and tries to hold on to his slave. The sorcerer fights him, one can see him struggling and panting, one can hear his screams.

The family and friends of the dead men follow the phases of the drama with the greatest anxiety. They are overjoyed when the sorcerer declares that he has been successful, and has led the " spirit " to an agreeable place.

But the first attempt does not always succeed. I have witnessed several performances where the sorcerer, after having simulated extraordinary efforts, declared that the " spirit " had been taken away from him by the demon.

In this case, all rites, sacrifices . . . and the payment of the Bön's fees, must begin all over again.

When a lama is called upon to save a " spirit " from slavery, no sacrifice is performed for redemption and the rites that are celebrated ignore all negotiation. The lama, who is learned in the magic ritual, considers himself powerful enough to compel the demon to release his victim.

Under the influence of Buddhism, the inhabitants of Tibet proper have given up sacrificing animals. This is far from being true of Tibetans living in the Himalayas who have only a thin coating of Lamaism and have remained practically Shamanists.

The beliefs of the learned lamas and of contemplative mystics differ greatly from those held by the masses about the fate of the " spirit " in the next world.

To begin with, they consider all the incidents of the journey in the *Bardo* as purely subjective visions. The nature of these visions depends on the ideas the man has held when he was living. The various paradises, the hells and the Judge of the Dead appear to those who have believed in them.

A *gomchen* of Eastern Tibet told me the following story upon this subject.

A painter whose principal work was that of decorating temples, often painted the fantastic beings with human bodies and animal heads, who are supposed to be the attendants of Shinje. His son, who was still a very young child, often stayed beside him while he worked and amused himself looking at the monstrous forms appearing in the frescoes.

Now it happened that the boy died, and entering the *Bardo*, met the terrible beings whose images were familiar to him. Far from being frightened, he began to laugh.—" Oh ! I know you all," he said. " My father makes you on the walls." And he wished to play with them.

I once asked the lama of Enche what would be the *post-mortem* subjective visions of a materialist who had looked upon death as total annihilation.

" Perhaps," said the lama, " such man would see apparitions corresponding to the religious beliefs he held in his childhood, or to those, familiar to him, held by the people among whom he has lived. According to the degree of his intelligence and his *post-mortem*

lucidity, he would, perhaps, examine and analyse these visions and remember the reasons which, during his life-time, made him deny the reality of that which now appears to him. He might, thus, conclude that he is beholding a mirage.

"A less intelligent man in whom belief in total annihilation was the result of indifference or dullness, rather than of reasoning, will, perhaps, see no vision at all. However, this will not prevent the energy generated by his past actions from following its course and manifesting itself through new phenomena. In other words, it will not prevent the rebirth of the materialist."

My many copy-books filled with notes, showed that I had worked a great deal since I had come to Sikkim. I thought I might allow myself a holiday. Summer was approaching, the warmer temperature tempted me to undertake a trip in the north of the country.

The road I chose was an excellent mule track leading from Gangtok to Kampa-dzong and on to Shigatze, in Tibet. Rising gradually from the travellers' bungalow of Dikchu buried in the tropical jungle, on the bank of the Tista, it follows a tributary of this river up to its source, passing through enchanting landscapes.

At about 50 miles from Gangtok, and at a height of 8,000 feet, this road crosses a village called Lachen, which occupies a prominent place in my experiences of Lamaist mysticism.

This little group of cottages is the most northern in Sikkim, the last which the traveller meets on his way towards the high passes of the Tibetan border. It is inhabited by sturdy hillmen, who combine a little farming, in the valley, with the rearing of yaks [1] higher up on the Tibetan tableland, where they spend a part of the year under tents.

[1] Yak, the hairy Tibetan ox.

Perched on a mountain slope, a humble monastery dominates the villagers' dwellings.

I visited it the day after my arrival, but finding nothing of interest in the temple, I was about to leave when a shadow darkened the luminous space of the wide-open door : a lama stood on the threshold. I say " a lama," but the man did not wear the regular monastic garb, neither was he dressed as a layman. His costume consisted of a white skirt down to his feet, a garnet-coloured waistcoat, Chinese in shape, and through the wide armholes, the voluminous sleeves of a yellow shirt were seen. A rosary made of some grey substance and coral beads hung around his neck, his pierced ears were adorned with large gold rings studded with turquoises, and his long thick braided hair touched his heels.[1]

This strange person looked at me without speaking, and as at that time I knew but little of the Tibetan language, I did not dare to begin a conversation. I only saluted him and went out.

A young man, my general factotum, was waiting for me on the terrace of the monastery. As soon as he saw the lama descending the steps of the peristyle, behind me, he prostrated himself thrice at his feet, asking for his blessing.

This astonished me, for the lad was not usually lavish with such signs of respect, and honoured none, in this way, but the prince *tulku* and Bermiag Kushog.

" Who is this lama ? " I asked him as I returned to the travellers' bungalow.

" He is a great *gomchen*," the boy replied. " One of his monks told me, while you were in the temple.

[1] Later on, I learned that this is the costume of the anchorites who are proficient in *tumo* (see Chapter VI) and various other branches of the secret lore. The rosary is made of 108 small round pieces of bone, each one cut out from a different human skull.

He has spent years alone, in a cave high up in the mountains. Demons obey him and he works miracles. They say he can kill men at a distance and fly through the air."

What an extraordinary man ! I thought.

My curiosity had been greatly excited by the stories regarding Tibetan *gomchens* I had read with Dawasandup. I had also heard a great deal from the prince *tulku* and from various lamas, about the way of living of the Tibetan hermits, the curious doctrines they profess and the wonders they can perform.

Now I had, most unexpectedly, come across one of them. This was a lucky opportunity. But how could I talk with the lama ? My boy was utterly ignorant of Tibetan philosophical terms, he would never be able to translate my questions.

I was annoyed and excited. I slept badly, troubled by incoherent dreams. I saw myself surrounded by elephants who pointed at me musical trunks from which came out deep sounds like those of long Teban trumpets. This strange concert woke me. My room was plunged in darkness. I no longer saw the elephants but I continued to hear the music. After listening attentively, I recognized religious tunes. The *trapas* were playing on the terrace of the temple. Who were they serenading in the night ? . . .

Whatever might come of it, I wished to risk an interview with the *gomchen*. I sent a request that he would see me and the next day, accompanied by my boy, I returned to the monastery.

A primitive staircase led to the lama's apartment situated above the assembly hall. In front of the entrance door was a small loggia decorated with frescoes. While waiting to be invited in, I examined these with some amusement.

On the walls, an artist, endowed with more imagination than professional skill, had represented the tor-

ments of the purgatories, peopling the latter with a host of demons and victims who grinned and writhed in the most comical attitudes.

In the middle of a panel, lust was undergoing punishment. A naked man, abnormally thin, faced an unclothed woman. Her huge, disproportionate belly gave to this " belle " the appearance of an Easter egg mounted on two feet and topped with a doll head. The lecherous sinner, incorrigible slave of his passions, forgetting where he was and how he had been led there, hugged the infernal creature in his arms, while flames springing out from her mouth and from a secret recess scorched him.

At a small distance from this couple, a sinful woman suffered her chastisement. Bound, in a reversed posture, to a triangle pointing downward, she was compelled to accept the caresses inflicted upon her by a green devil with teeth like a saw and a monkey's tail. In the background, other demons, variously coloured, were seen running forward to take their turn.

The *gomchen* lived in a kind of dark chapel, lighted only at one end by a small window, the ceiling supported by wooden pillars painted red. According to the Tibetan custom the altar served as book-case.

In a niche, among the books, stood a small image of Padmasambhâva, with ritual offerings placed before it : seven bowls filled with pure water, grain and a lamp.

Incense sticks burning on a small table mingled their mystic fragrance with odours of tea and melted butter. The cushions and rugs piled up for the master to sit upon were threadbare and faded, and the tiny gold star of the altar lamp shining at the back of the room showed up its dust and emptiness.

Through my boy acting as interpreter, I tried to ask several questions on subjects I had discussed with the lamas I had met at Gangtok, but it was useless. If only Dawasandup had been with me. The young man

was dumbfounded and unable to find words to express ideas whose meaning he could not grasp.

I gave it up, and for a long time the lama and I sat facing each other in silence.

The next day I left Lachen, continuing my journey towards the north.

Here the scenery, which all along the track lower down had been charming, became simply marvellous. The azalea and rhododendron thickets were still decked with their bright spring garment. A shimmering torrent of blossoms submerged the valley and seemed to be pouring out, on the neighbouring slopes, a resistless flood of purple, yellow, red and pure white waves. Seen from a distance, my porters, whose heads only emerged from the bushes, seemed to be swimming in a sea of flowers.

A few miles farther, the fairy-like gardens gradually grew thin and scattered, till a few rosy patches only remained, here and there, where dwarf bunches of azaleas struggled obstinately for life against the dizzy heights.

The track now entered the fantastic region near the frontier passes.[1] In the intense silence of these wild majestic solitudes, icy, crystalline, purling brooks chatted gently. From the shore of a melancholy lake, a golden-crowned bird solemnly watched my caravan as it passed.

Up and up we went, skirting gigantic glaciers, catching occasional glimpses of crossing valleys filled by huge clouds. And then, without any transition, as we issued from the mists the Tibetan tableland appeared before us, immense, void and resplendent under the luminous sky of Central Asia.

Since then I have travelled across the country lying behind the distant mountain ranges which, at that moment, bound my horizon. I have seen Lhasa,

[1] The Koru la and the Sepo la, both above 15,000 feet.

Shigatze, the northern grassy solitudes with their salt lakes as large as seas ; Kham, the country of brigand-knights and magicians ; the unexplored forests of Po and the enchanting valleys of Tsarong where the pome-granates ripen, but nothing has ever dimmed, in my mind, the memory of my first sight of Tibet.

A few weeks later the weather changed, the snow began to fall again. My provisions were on the verge of giving out, porters and servants grew irritable and quarrelsome. One day I had to use my riding-whip to separate two men who were fighting with knives for a place near the camp fire.

After a few short excursions into Tibetan territory I left the frontier. I was not equipped for a long journey and, moreover, the land that lay in front of me was forbidden ground.

Again I crossed Lachen, saw the *gomchen* and talked with him about his hermitage that was a day's march distant, higher up in the mountains. He had lived there for seventeen years. These plain details my boy could easily translate and I myself could follow a certain amount of his conversation.

However, I did not risk mentioning the demons, said by popular opinion to be his servants. I knew my young interpreter was too superstitious to dare to approach this subject and, probably, also the lama would not have answered such inquiries.

I returned to Gangtok, sad at having missed the opportunity of learning things of real interest regarding the mystery world of Tibetan anchorites, which I had skirted by chance. I did not, in the least, foresee the curious consequences of my trip.

A little while after this, the Dalai Lama left Kalim-pong. His army had beaten the Chinese and he was to go back to Lhasa in triumph. I went to bid him farewell at a hamlet situated below the Jelap pass.

I arrived ahead of him at the bungalow where he

was to stop. There I found many noblemen of the Sikkimeese court in great distress. They were in charge of the preparations for the short stay of the Lama-king, but, as is usual in the East, everything had come too late. Furniture, rugs, hangings were not in place and the distinguished guest might appear at any minute.

Everything was in confusion in the small house, with masters and servants wildly rushing about. It amused me to lend a helping hand and arrange the cushions that would serve the Dalai Lama for a bed. Some of the assistants assured me that this would bring me good luck, now and in lives to come.

Here I had another opportunity of talking with the Tibetan sovereign. His thoughts seemed entirely directed towards political affairs.

As usual he blessed the devotees with his duster made of ribbons, but one felt that his mind had already crossed the mountain pass that marks the frontier and was busy organizing the profits of his victory.

The following autumn I left Sikkim for Nepal and, later on, spent nearly a year in Benares. I had made a long stay there in my youth, and returned with pleasure.

I gratefully accepted the kind offer of the members of the Theosophical Society to rent me a small apartment in their beautiful park. The ascetic simplicity of this lodging was in harmonious keeping with the atmosphere of the holy city of Shiva and quite suited my taste.

In these congenial surroundings, I assiduously resumed the study of the Vedanta philosophy, somewhat forsaking Lamaism which I did not seem to be able to investigate more thoroughly than I had already done.

I had no thought of leaving Benares, when an unexpected combination of circumstances led me one morning to take a train going towards the Himalayas.

CHAPTER II

A GUEST OF THE LAMAS

AT Gangtok I again met Bermiag Kushog. The Lama of Enche had left for Shigatze, in Tibet, and only returned some months later. Dawasandup had been called upon, as interpreter, to follow the Sino—Tibetan political conference that was convoked in India. The maharajah having died, his son Sidkeong *tulku* succeeded him and, consequently, had less time to devote to religious studies. Unexpected obstacles prevented me from completing the journey which I had planned. Everything worked against my desires.

Gradually hostile forces seemed to gather around me. I seemed to be obsessed by invisible beings who incited me to leave the country, insinuating that I should be able to advance no farther, either in my study of Lamaism or upon the actual soil of Tibet. By a sort of clairvoyance at the same time, I saw these unknown enemies triumphant and rejoicing, after my departure, at having driven me away.

I attributed these phenomena to fever or neurasthenia due to brain fatigue and the annoyance at my plans being upset. Some people would, perhaps, have seen in this the effect of occult activities. Whatever it was, I could not overcome this painful state bordering on hallucination. Calming drugs did not relieve me, I thought that a change of scene might be more efficacious.

While I was racking my brain to think of a place where I might stop without leaving the Himalayas, the new maharajah, the lama *tulku*, without guessing that

he was more than realizing my desires, offered me an apartment in the monastery of Podang, about 10 miles away from Gangtok, in the misty forests.

The apartment consisted of an immense room on the first floor of the temple and a huge kitchen where, according to Tibetan custom, my servants were to sleep.

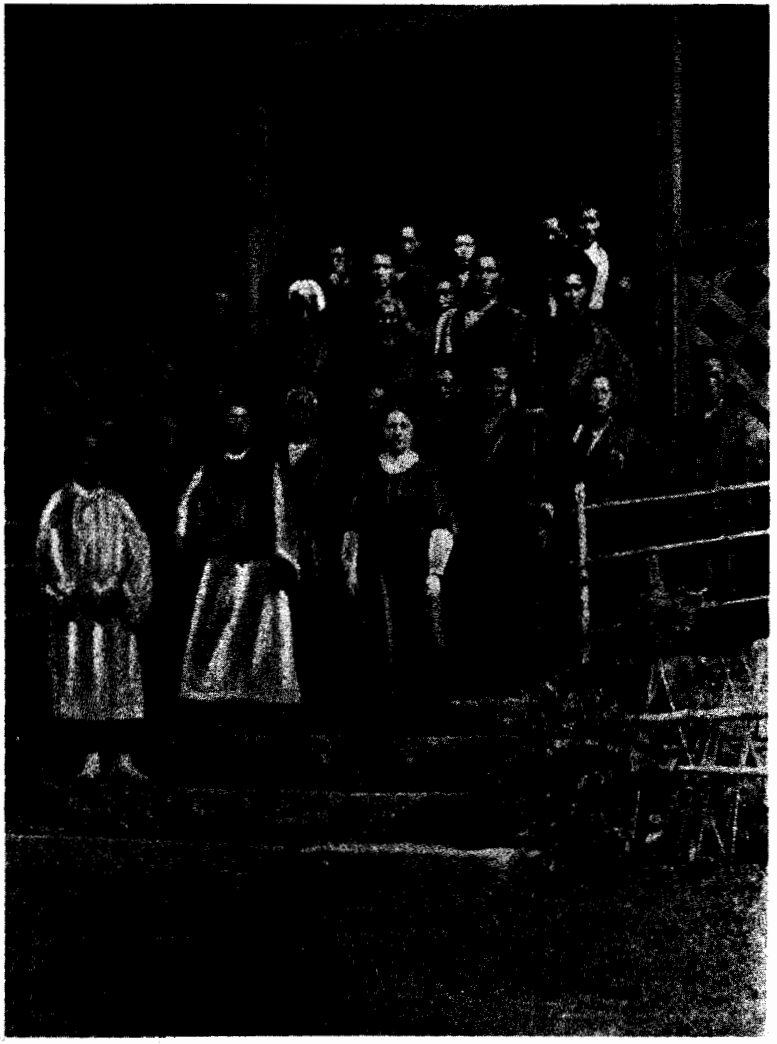
Two large bay-windows let in all the light of the sky, and with equal hospitality they admitted wind, rain or hail through large gaps on both sides, for the framework was too narrow and only joined the walls at the top.

In one corner of this hall I placed my books upon a wide wainscot. I opened my folding table and chair, and this was my "work room." In another corner I hooked my tent to the beams and set up my camp bed. This was my bedroom. The middle of the apartment, too well aired by cross ventilation, became a kind of reception-room for my visitors, when the weather was fine.

The religious music which I heard at Podang twice a day, before dawn and at sunset, enchanted me. The small orchestra consisted of two *gyalings* (a kind of hautboy), two *ragdongs* (a huge Teban trumpet) and two kettle-drums.

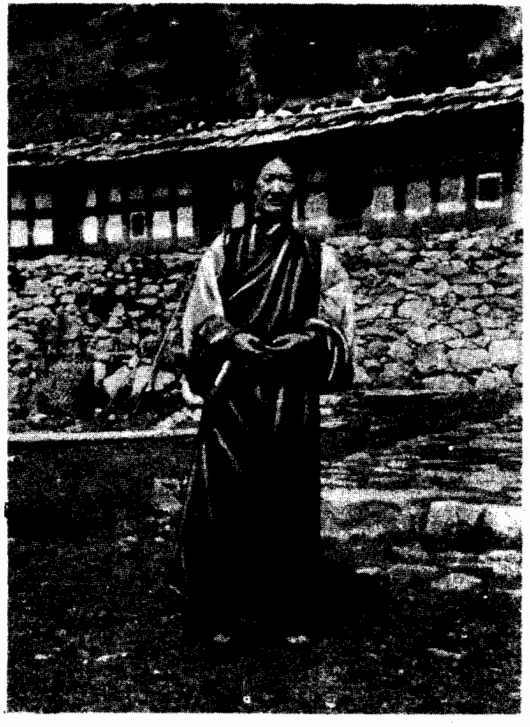
A bell striking a special rhythm, peculiar to Eastern temples, was sounded as prelude. After a few moments' silence the deep-toned *ragdongs* rumbled for a while, then the *gyalings* by themselves sang a slow musical phrase supremely moving in its simplicity. They repeated it with variations, supported by the bass notes of the *ragdongs* in which finally joined the kettle-drums that imitated the thunder rolling in the distance.

The melody flowed as smoothly as the water of a deep river, without interruption, emphasis or passion. It produced a strange, acute impression of distress, as if all the suffering of the beings wandering from world



AT PODANG MONASTERY

From left to right : DAWASANDUP, H. H. SIDKEONG NAMGYAL, MAHARAJAH OF SIKKIM AND LAMA TIELKU, MME. A. DAVID-NEEL. BEHIND THEM MONKS OF THE MONASTERY



THE SANG-YUM (CONSORT) OF A MYSTIC LAMA

A NUN

to world, since the beginning of the ages, was breathed out in this weary, desperate lamentation.

What musician, inspired without his knowing, had found this *leit motiv* of universal sorrow? And how, with this heterogeneous orchestra, could men devoid of any artistic sense render it with such heart-rending fervour?—This remained a mystery which the musician monks would have been unable to explain. I had to be content to listen to them, while watching the dawn come up behind the mountains, or in the darkening of the sunset sky.

Beside attending the daily services, I had the opportunity during my stay at Podang to witness the annual Ceremony of the Demons. In Tibet, later on, I saw the same rites celebrated with much greater display of clerical paraphernalia, but, to my mind, this diminished the picturesque character which they assumed when performed in the shadow of the Himalayan forests. Sorcery loses much of its prestige when seen by broad daylight and in a crowd.

First, the *trapas* took Mahākala out of the cabinet in which he had been shut up a full year, with offerings and charms.

In every lamaist monastery there exists a temple, or a room reserved as a dwelling-place for the ancient deities of the aborigines or those imported from India. The latter have considerably lost rank in entering the Land of Snows. Unconscious of their irreverence, Tibetans have turned them into mere demons and sometimes treat them harshly.

Mahākala is the most famous among the exiled Hindu deities. His original personality is a form of Shiva in his function of Destroyer of the World. Having become a harmful spirit, he is held in slavery by the lamas who compel him to render them various kinds of services and do not hesitate to punish his lack of zeal.

A popular tradition has it that a celebrated lama,

head of the Karmapa sect, attached Mahākala to him as attendant. When this lama was at the Chinese court, he offended the Emperor, who had him tied to the tail of a horse. Dragged behind the animal, and in peril of death, the great Karmapa called on Mahākala to help him. But the latter did not immediately appear. When the lama had freed himself by means of magic words which separated his beard from his chin, he saw Mahākala coming toward him too late to be of any use, and in his anger he hit the poor devil such a blow that though several centuries have now passed his cheek remains swollen even to-day.

Of course, the *trapas* of Podang were not powerful enough to take such liberties, Mahākala inspired them with real terror.

Here, as in some other monasteries, grim wonders were said to happen. Sometimes blood sweated through the boards of the shrine where Mahākala was shut up, and at other times, on opening it, the remains of a human heart or brain were found. These signs—according to the *trapas*—betoken the occult activity of the terrible deity.

When the mask which represents Mahākala—and in which he is supposed to reside—was taken out of the shrine, it was placed in a dark chapel reserved for other kindred malevolent deities. Two novices watched it, repeating without interruption the magic words which prevent him from escaping. Lulled by their monotonous chant, the boys fought with all their might against sleep during the long hours of the night, convinced that if they stopped for an instant repeating the mysterious formula their dreadful captive would take advantage of it to free himself and they would become his first victims.

In the neighbouring hamlets, the peasants were greatly perturbed by the slight semblance of liberty given to Mahākala. They locked their door early in

the evening and mothers bid their children not to stay out after sunset.

Less important demons supposed to be wandering around the country, seeking to do harm, were attracted by the incantations of the lamas and compelled to enter a sort of cage woven of light wood and coloured threads. Then this pretty house was solemnly carried out of the monastery and precipitated, with its prisoners, into a flaming brazier.

But the demons are immortals—fortunately for the sorcerers whose living depends upon them. Next year the same rites must be performed all over again.

A learned lama belonging to a wealthy family of Sikkim had just returned from Tibet. He became head of the monastery of Rhumteck in succession to his brother who had died recently. Custom demanded that he should celebrate certain rites meant to assure the welfare of the dead in the next world, at Podang, the chief monastery of his sect in Sekkim.

The late head lama was an old acquaintance of mine. I had met him at Kalimpong where he had come in the train of the heir prince to pay a visit to the Dalai Lama.

He was a jolly fellow, a veritable " bon vivants " ; who did not worry himself with philosophic problems, kept two wives at home, and appreciated old brandy to the extent of drinking several bottles a day. In possession of a large income, he would buy anything he fancied right and left although ignorant of its use. It is in this way that, one day, the big powerfully built head lama came to see me wearing the hat, trimmed with pink ribbons, of a three-years-old girl.

The new abbot, popularly called " the gentleman from Tibet "—Pöd Kushog—because he usually lived in this country, was quite different from his brother. He had spent his youth studying in various Tibetan monasteries, and even in Lhasa he enjoyed the reputa-

tion among erudite lamas of being a distinguished grammarian. He had also taken high Orders and remained a celibate, which is rare among the Himalayan clergy.

The funeral services over which he presided lasted for a whole week. Happy days for the *trapas* of Podang, who feasted and received gifts !

These ceremonies being ended, in the first month of the year [1] Pöd Kushog proceeded to the annual blessing of the monastery. Escorted by a choir of *trapas* chanting a litany of good wishes, he walked round the buildings and through the corridors, throwing consecrated grain into each room as he passed by.

A few handfuls of barley, cast with a gracious smile and the liturgic wish *tashi shog !* (may prosperity be), rattled against my " tent-bedroom " and sprinkled the table and the books in my " study."

Prosperity ! prosperity ! . . . Duly exorcised and blessed, the monastery should become a branch of the Paradise of the Great Bliss (Nub Dewachen). Yet the monks did not feel quite safe. Secretly doubting their occult powers and even those of the learned grammarian they feared that a few devils might have escaped extermination and be waiting in hiding to begin doing mischief again. They begged the help of one whom they trusted more.

One evening, the *gomchen* of Lachen appeared with all the trapping of a magician : a five-sided crown, a rosary-necklace made of one hundred and eight round pieces, cut out of so many skulls, an apron of human bones bored and carved, and in his belt the ritualistic dagger (phurba).

Standing in the open, near a flaming fire, he drew magic signs in the air with his sceptre-dorje and stabbed the air as he recited incantations in a low voice.

I do not know which invisible demons he was fighting,

[1] The Tibetan year begins in February.

but in the fantastic light of the leaping flames, he certainly looked like a demon himself.

My remedy had proved efficacious : whether change of place had killed the microbes of fever, or the diversion of new scenes had cured the brain fatigue, or my unyielding will-power had conquered conscious beings of the occult world, I, at any rate, was freed from the obsession that had tortured me.

Yet a strange thing happened during my stay at Podang.

Sidkeong *tulku* having become maharajah, wished to make his subjects renounce their superstitions in favour of orthodox Buddhism. For this purpose, he had invited an Indian monk, who belonged to the Theravadin philosophic school, to preach in his country. The missionary had to fight against such anti-buddhistic customs as sorcery, the cult of spirits and the habit of drinking fermented drinks. This monk, Kali Kumar by name, was already at work.

The maharajah-lama, as abbot of Podang, had an apartment in the monastery where he stayed on the rare occasions when he officiated at the head of his monks. He came for two days, during my stay in the *gompa*.

We were taking tea together, late in the afternoon, and talking of Kali Kumar's mission and the way in which he might hope to free the hillmen from their inveterate superstitions.

" It is impossible," I said, " to know exactly what the historical Padmasambhâva, who preached in Tibet centuries ago, was like. But it is certain that his followers have made him the hero of legends that encourage drunkenness and absurd, pernicious practices. Under his name, they worship an evil spirit—even as you do," I added laughingly, pointing out an image of the great magician standing at the far end of the room with an altar lamp burning at its feet.

"It is necessary," I continued, when, suddenly, I could say no more. A third invisible presence had interrupted me. Yet no one had spoken, there was complete silence in the room, but I keenly felt the influence of some occult force.

"Nothing you can do will succeed," said a soundless voice. "The people of this country are mine . . . I am more powerful than you. . . ."

I listened in amazement to these silent words, and I had almost decided that they were only the expression of my own doubts regarding the success of the proposed reforms, when the maharajah replied.

He replied to that which *I had not said*, arguing with the invisible adversary of his plans.

"Why should I not succeed," he went on to say. "Possibly it will take some time to change the ideas of the peasants and the lower clergy. The demons which they feed will not easily become resigned to die of hunger, but, nevertheless, I shall get the better of them."

He was mockingly alluding to the animal sacrifices offered to the evil spirits by the sorcerers.

"But I have not said——" I began and stopped short, for I thought that, in spite of the brave declaration of war the prince had made on the demons, he was not entirely free from superstition and consequently it was better not to tell him what had happened.

However, I do not wish to leave the reader with this impression of Sidkeong *tulku*. He had probably liberated himself from superstition more fully than I supposed.

According to his horoscope, in which Tibetans place complete faith, the year of his death was noted as dangerous for him. To counteract hostile influences, several lamas—among whom was the *gomchen* of Lachen—offered to celebrate the rites prescribed for the purpose.

He thanked them and refused their ministry, saying

that if he must die, he felt capable of passing into another life without their ceremonies.

I think he must have left the reputation of being an impious man. As soon as he was dead, all innovations and religious reforms that he had started were abolished. Preaching was stopped and beer was supplied in the temples again. A lama informed the country clergy that they should return to their former habits.

The invisible adversary triumphed as he had predicted he would.

Although my head-quarters were at Podang, I had not entirely given up my excursions across Sikkim. Thus it happened that I met two *gomchens* from Eastern Tibet who had recently come to live in the Himalayas.

One of them dwelt in Sakyong, and for this reason he was called Sakyong *gomchen*. It is not considered polite, in Tibet, to address a person by his name. All who are not treated as one's inferiors are designated by some title.

Sakyong *gomchen* was picturesque in his ways and open-minded. He haunted the cemeteries and shut himself up for months in his house to practise magic rites. Like his colleague from Lachen, he did not wear the regular monastic garb, and instead of cutting his hair short he wore it rolled up on the top of his head after the fashion of Indian yogins. For anyone except a layman to wear his hair long in Tibet, is the recognized distinction of those ascetics or anchorites who are called *naljorpas* and are believed to seek salvation through the mystic "Short Path." [1]

Up to then, my conversations with lamas had been chiefly concerned with the philosophical doctrines of Mahayanist Buddhism from which Lamaism is derived. Sakyong *gomchen* held them in slight esteem and moreover was but little conversant with them. He was fond of paradoxes. "Study," he said, "is of no use

[1] See Chapter VII.

in gaining true knowledge, it is rather an obstacle. All that we learn in that way is vain. In fact, one only *knows* one's own ideas and one's own visions. As for the real causes that have generated these ideas they remain inaccessible to us. When we try to grasp them we only seize the ideas that we, ourselves, have elaborated about these causes.

Did he clearly understand what he said, or was he merely repeating what he had read or heard expressed by others? . . .

At the request of the prince *tulku*, Sakyong *gomchen* also went on a round of preaching. I had the opportunity of watching him delivering a sermon. I say *watching* rather than *hearing*, for at that time I was far from being capable of understanding all what he said in Tibetan. In this rôle of apostle he was really very fine, the vehemence of his speech, his gestures, the varied expressions of his countenance proclaimed him a born orator, and the frightened faces, bathed in tears, of his listeners was proof enough of the impression he produced.

The *gomchen* of Sakyong is the only Buddhist I have ever seen preaching in such impassioned way. For orthodox Buddhism excludes gestures and vocal effects as unbefitting in expounding a doctrine which appeals only to calm reason.

I, one day, asked him: "What is the Supreme Deliverance (tharpa)?" He answered: "It is the absence of all views and all imagination, the cessation of that mental activity which creates illusions." [1]

Another day, he said: "You should go to Tibet and be initiated by a master of the 'Short Path.' You are too much attached to the doctrines of the *nienthös* (the Buddhists of the Theravadin school). I foresee that

[1] That mental activity which Tibetans call *togpa*, ratiocination, in contradistinction to *togspa* (understanding).

you would be capable of grasping the secret teaching." [1]

"And how could I go to Tibet, since foreigners are not admitted?" I asked.

"Pooh! many roads lead to Tibet," he replied lightly. "All the learned lamas do not live in U and Tsang (the central provinces with Lhasa and Shigatze as capitals). One can find other, yet more learned, teachers in my country." [2]

The ideas of getting into Tibet by way of China had never occurred to me, nor did the *gomchen's* suggestion, that day, awaken any echo in my mind. My hour had probably not yet come.

The second *gomchen* whom I got to know was of an uncommunicative character and rather haughty in his manners. Even the customary formulas of politeness which he was compelled to utter were tinged with a peculiar icy coldness.

Like the *gomchen* of Sakyong he was called after the place where he lived—Daling *gomchen.*

He always wore the regular monastic robes and toga but with the addition of ear-rings of ivory, and a silver *dorje* studded with torquoises stuck in his hair.

This lama spent the whole summer of every year in a cabin built for him on the top of a woody mountain.

A few days before his arrival, his disciples and the villagers round about would carry into the hermitage enough provisions for three or four months. After this, they were absolutely forbidden to approach the

[1] Secret teaching regarding methods of spiritual training and not regarding a supposed esoteric Buddhist doctrine as a few foreigners unacquainted with Buddhist literature believe. There exists no such thing as esoteric Buddhism. All theories expounded in the mystic circles are extant in books. That which is taught secretly to initiates, are ways to make the mind fit to reach enlightenment or, at lower degrees, ways to develop supernormal powers.

[2] As it has been said, the *gomchen* was a native of Eastern Tibet.

gomchen's dwelling. The lama had no difficulty in getting them to respect his solitude. The country people did not doubt that he practised dreadful rites to trap the demons and compel them to give up their mischievous designs against the persons or the possessions of those who worshipped him. His protection greatly reassured them, but they feared that if they went near his hut they might chance to meet some malignant beings answering unwillingly the *gomchen's* summons and not in pleasant mood. Moreover, the mystery which always surrounds the conduct, as well as the character, of the *naljorpas*, inspired them with prudence.

Little inclined as this lama was to answer my questions the desire expressed by the prince—to whom he owed his appointment as head of the small monastery of Daling—compelled him to depart somewhat from his reserve.

Among other subjects that I approached in my talk with him was that of the food permitted to a Buddhist. "Should we interpret the command not to kill, sophistically and continue to eat meat and fish?" I asked.

The *gomchen*, like most Tibetans, was not a vegetarian. He expounded a theory on this subject which I heard again in other parts of Tibet and which is not altogether lacking in originality.

"Most men," he said, "eat like beasts, to satisfy their hunger without pondering upon the act they are accomplishing nor upon its consequences. Such ignorant people do well to abstain from eating meat and fish.

"Others consider what becomes of the material elements they absorb when eating animals. They know that the assimilation of these elements involves the assimilation of the psychic elements which are inherent in them. Anyone who has acquired that knowledge may, at his risk and peril, contract these

associations and endeavour himself to obtain results useful to the victims sacrificed.

" The question is to find out whether the animal elements which he absorbs strengthen the animal propensities of the man, or whether this man will be capable of transmuting these elements into intellectual and spiritual forces, so that the substance of the animal passing into the man will be reborn in the form of human activity."

I then asked him if this explained the esoteric sense of the belief common among Tibetans, that the lamas can send the spirits of the slaughtered animals to the Paradise of the Great Bliss.

" Do not think that I can answer your question in a few words," he replied. " The subject is intricate. Animals have several ' consciousnesses,' just as we have ourselves, and as it also happens in our case, these ' consciousnesses ' do not all follow the same road after death. A living being is an assemblage, not a unity. But one must have been initiated by a proper master before being able to realize these doctrines."

Often the lama cut his explanations short by this declaration.

One evening, when the prince, Daling lama and I were together in the bungalow of Kewzing, the conversation was about mystic ascetics. With a repressed enthusiasm that was most impressive, the *gomchen* spoke of his master, of his wisdom, of his supernormal powers. Sidkeong *tulku* was deeply moved by the profound veneration of the lama for his spiritual teacher.

At that time the prince was full of cares on account of his contemplated marriage with a Birman princess.

" I regret very much that I cannot meet this great *naljorpa*," he said to me in English. " For he, certainly, would give me good advice."

And addressing the *gomchen* he repeated, in Tibetan :

"I am sorry that your master is not here. I really need the advice of some such clairvoyant sage."

But he did not mention the question he wished to ask, nor the nature of his preoccupations.

The lama with his usual coldness of manner asked: "Is the subject serious?"

"It is extremely important," the prince replied.

"You can perhaps receive the desired advice," said Daling *gomchen*.

I thought that he meant to send a letter by a messenger and was about to remind him the great distance that would have to be covered, when his aspect struck me.

He had closed his eyes and was rapidly turning pale, his body stiffening. I wished to go to him, thinking he was ill, but the prince, who had observed the sudden change in the lama, held me back, whispering:

"Don't move. *Gomchens* sometimes go into a trance quite suddenly. One must not wake them, for that is very dangerous and might even kill them."

So I stayed seated watching the lama who remained motionless. Gradually his features changed, his face wrinkled, taking on an expression I had never seen him wear before. He opened his eyes and the prince made a startled gesture.

The man we were looking at was not the *gomchen* of Daling, but some one we did not know. He moved his lips with difficulty and said in a voice different from that of the *gomchen*:

"Do not be disturbed. This question will never have to be considered by you."

Then he slowly closed his eyes, his features changed again and became those of Daling lama who slowly recovered his senses.

He eluded our questions and retired in silence, staggering and seeming to be broken with fatigue.

"There is no sense in his answer," the prince concluded.

Whether by chance or for some other reason, it unfortunately proved that there had been a meaning in these words.

The matter troubling the young maharajah was about his fiancée and an affair with a girl who had borne him a son which he did not wish to break off when he married. But, truly, he needed not to ponder over his course of conduct toward the two women, for he died before the day arranged for the marriage.

I happened also to see two hermits of a peculiar type which I did not meet again in Tibet where, on the whole, the natives are more civilized than in the Himalayas.

I was returning with the prince *tulku* from an excursion to the frontier of Nepal. His servants, knowing that he liked to show me the "religious curiosities" of his country, pointed out the presence of two hermits in the mountains near the village where we had spent the night.

The peasants said that these men had hidden themselves so cleverly that no one had seen them for several years. A supply of food was placed from time to time under a rock, at a chosen spot where the anchorites would take it at night. As to the huts they had built themselves, none knew where they were, nor did anyone try to discover them. For if the hermits were anxious to avoid being seen, the superstitious villagers were even more anxious to keep at a distance from them and turned away from the wood they inhabited.

Sidkeong *tulku* had freed himself from fear of sorcery. He ordered his servants together with a number of peasants to beat up the forest and bring the hermits to him. The latter should be well treated and presents promised to them, but great care must be taken that they did not escape.

The hunt was strenuous. The two anchorites, surprised in their quiet retreat, tried to run away, but

with twenty men on their track they were finally captured.

They had to be forcibly made to enter the small temple where we were waiting with several lamas—among whom was the *gomchen* of Sakyong. Once there, no one could get a word out of them.

I have never seen such strange human creatures. Both men were frightfully dirty, scarcely covered by a few rags, their long hair, thick as brushwood, covered their faces and their eyes shot out sparks like a brazier.

While they looked around them like wild beasts newly caught in a cage, the prince caused two large wicker baskets to be brought. These were filled with tea, meat, barley-flour, rice and sundries. He told the hermits that he meant to give all this to them. But in spite of this agreeable prospect they remained silent.

A villager then said that he thought he had understood that when the anchorites came to live on that hill they were under a vow of silence.

His Highness, who was a prey to sudden attacks of truly Oriental despotism, replied that they might at least bow to him as it is the custom and adopt a more respectful attitude.

I saw his anger rising and, to avoid trouble brewing for the wild " holy ones," I begged him to allow them to retire.

He first resisted my request, but I insisted.

In the meantime I had told one of my servants to bring two bags of crystallized sugar taken from my luggage—Tibetans are very fond of it—I placed one bag in each basket.

" Open the door, and let these animals out," the prince commanded at last.

As soon as they saw a chance of escape, the hermits pounced on the baskets. One of them hastily pulled something from under his rags, plunged his claw-like

hand in my hair; and then both of them flew away like hares.

I found a little amulet in my hair which I showed to my friends and, later on, to some lamas who were conversant in the science of charms. All agreed in telling me that far from being harmful, the amulet secured me the company of a demon who would drive away any dangers on my road and serve me. I could only be pleased. Perhaps the hermit had understood that I begged for him and his companion to be set free, and his strange gift was a token of gratitude.

My last excursion with the lama prince led me again toward the north of the country. I revisited Lachen and saw its *gomchen.* I was now able to converse with him, but there was no time for long talks as we only stopped for one day on our way to reach the foot of the Kinchindjinga mountain.[1]

On the way, we camped on the side of a pretty lake in the desolate valley of Lonak, not far from the highest pass in the world: the Jongson pass (about 24,000 feet high) where the frontiers of Tibet, Nepal and Sikkim meet.

We spent a few days near the gigantic moraines from which spring the snow-covered peaks of the Kinchindjinga. Then Sidkeong *tulku* left me to return to Gangtok with his retinue.

He made fun of my love for high solitary places which led me to continue my journey with the young Yongden and a few servants. I can see him, even now. This time he was not dressed as a genie of the Arabian Nights, but in the kit of a Western alpinist. Before disappearing behind a rocky spur, he turned back toward me waving his hat and crying from far off:

"Come back soon. Don't stay away too long!"

[1] Altitude 28,150 feet. The altitude of the Mount Everest, the highest mountain of the world, is 29,000 feet.

I never saw him again. He died mysteriously a few months later, while I was stopping at Lachen.

The Lonak valley was too near Tibet for me to possibly resist climbing one of the passes leading to that country. The Nago pass (over 18,000 feet) was the most easily accessible. The weather was fair but cloudy and a little snow fell as we were starting.

The landscape, viewed from the top of the pass, did not resemble that which I had seen two years earlier, so gloriously luminous. Now the twilight cast a purple greyish veil over the immense tableland extending, majestically void, from the foot of the mountain toward other ranges standing out indistinctly in the distance. But softly enshrouded in the first evening's shadows the forbidden solitudes looked still more mysterious and irresistibly attractive.

I should have been content to wander aimlessly across this extraordinary region, but I had a goal. Before leaving Gangtok one of the native officials had called my attention to the monastery of Chörten Nyima.

" The monasteries you have seen in Sikkim are very different from those of Tibet," he had told me. " Since you cannot travel freely in Tibet, go at least to see Chörten Nyima. Though this *gompa* is very small, you will get some idea of a true Tibetan monastery."

So I was going to Chörten Nyima.

The monastic habitations of that place fully justified the name *gompa* (a dwelling in the solitude) given, in Tibetan language, to monasteries. It is impossible to fancy any more solitary site. The region in which the monks' houses have been built is not only uninhabited but the high altitude makes a desert of it.

Sandy cliffs curiously carved by erosions, a large valley ascending toward a mountain lake, high snowy peaks, a limpid brook on a bed of mauve, greyish green or rosy coloured pebbles formed around the

gompa an impassible, wholly mineral scenery from which emanated a serenity beyond expression.

Legends and prodigies are naturally in their right place in such a setting. They are not lacking at Chörten Nyima. This very name, which means "Sun shrine," was derived from a wonder. Once upon a time a Chörten containing precious relics was miraculously transported through the air, on a ray of sun, from India to that spot.

In ancient traditions it is related that Padmasambhâva the apostle of Tibet has hidden in the vicinity of Chörten Nyima a number of manuscripts regarding mystic doctrines which he thought it was premature to disclose, for in the eighth century, when Padmasambhâva visited Tibet, Tibetans possessed no intellectual culture. This master foresaw that long after he had left this world, lamas, predestined by their former lives, would bring these writings to light again. Several works are said to have been found in this region and some lamas are still hunting to discover others.

According to Tibetans, one hundred and eight *chörtens* and one hundred and eight springs exist round about Chörten Nyima. All of them are not visible. A large number can only be seen by those whose mind is particularly pure. Wishes made beside these springs, after one has placed an offering in the water at the very spot where it wells up out of the earth, cannot help being fulfilled.

Chöd do (stone offerings) either standing up or piled in the shape of cairns bristle all over the country, and when erected by pious pilgrims to honour Padmasambhâva, these primitive monuments are believed to be indestructible.

The monastery, which must at one time have been somewhat important, is falling in ruins. As in many other places in Tibet, we may see here a result of the destitution of the ancient sects which have not followed

the reforms of Tsong Khapa, whose disciples, nowadays, form the state clergy.

I found only four nuns at Chörten Nyima who belonged to the Nyingma sect (" ancient sect," the oldest of the " red caps "). They lived as celibates but without having been fully ordained and did not wear monastic robes.

Numerous examples of strange contrasts are to be seen in Tibet, but what most astonished me was the tranquil courage of the womenfolk. Very few Western women would dare to live in the desert, in groups of four or five or sometimes quite alone. Few would dare under such conditions to undertake journeys that last for months or even years, through solitary mountain regions infested by wild beasts and brigands.

This shows the singular character of Tibetan women. They do not ignore these real dangers and they add to them by imagining legions of evil spirits taking on thousands of strange forms, even that of a demoniacal plant which grows on the edge of precipices, seizes hold of travellers with its thorny branches and drags them into the abyss.

In spite of these many reasons for staying safely in their native villages, one finds here and there in Tibet, communities of less than a dozen nuns, living in isolated convents situated at a great height, some of them blocked in by the snow for more than half of the year.

Other women live as hermits in caves, and many women pilgrims travel, alone, across the immense territory of Tibet carrying their scanty luggage on their backs.

Visiting the *Lhakhangs* (houses of the gods, where their images are placed) still existing among the ruined buildings of the monastery, I found a room containing a collection of small images made of coloured clay and representing the fantastic beings which surround the " spirits " of the dead as they cross the *Bardo*.[1]

[1] See Chapter I : Death and Hereafter.

Above them, in the attitude of a Buddha meditating, Dorjee Chang was seated naked, his blue body symbolizing space, that is to say, in mystic symbology: Emptiness.

One of the nuns surprised me by explaining their meaning.

"All these are non-existent," she said, pointing out the monstrous forms of the *Bardo's* phantoms. "Mind evokes them out of the void and can also dissolve them into the void."

"How do you know that?" I asked, doubting that the good woman could have evolved this theory by herself.

"My lama has told it to me," she answered.

"And who may your lama be?"

"A *gomchen* living near the Mo-te-tong lake."

"Does he come here sometimes?"

"No, never. The lama of Chörten Nyima lives at Tranglung."

"Is he too a *gomchen*?"

"No, he is a *ngagspa* (magician) and a householder, he is very rich and works many kinds of wonders."

"For instance? . . ."

"He can cure people or animals or cause them to become ill, even at a distance. He can stop, or bring, rain and hail at will . . . Listen to what he did a few years ago:

"When it was harvest time, the lama ordered the villagers to cut and store his grain. Some of them made answer that they would certainly store his barley, but not until they had lodged their own grain.

"The weather was unsettled and the peasants were afraid of hail-storms, frequent at that time of the year. So instead of begging the lama to protect their fields while they were working for him, a number of them remained obstinate, meaning to cut their own barley first.

"Then the lama used his magic powers. He performed a *dubthab* rite, called up his tutelary deities and animated some *tormas*.[1] As soon as he had ended uttering the magic words, the *tormas* flew away and travelling, like birds, through the air, they circled about, entered the houses of those who had refused to obey immediately and caused much damage. But they passed by the houses of the men who had first harvested the lama's barley, without doing any harm.

"Since then, no one dares to disregard the orders of the lama."

Oh! to talk with this magician who shot avenging cakes through space! . . . I was dying with desire to meet him.

Tranglung was not far from Chörten Nyima, the nuns said a day's march would bring me there. But that day's march led through forbidden territory. I had, once more, ventured to cross the border to visit Chörten Nyima, should I push on farther and show myself in a village? If it was known, was I not likely to be turned out of Sikkim? There was no question of starting a regular journey across Tibet. I was not at all prepared for this, and as the matter was only one of paying a short visit to a sorcerer, I did not think it worth while compromising my chance of continuing my Tibetan studies in the Himalayas.

So I decided to return after leaving a present for the nuns and another to be sent to the lama of Tranglung.

My regrets were later on wiped off the slate. For two years later I met the sorcerer and was several times his guest at Tranglung.

Autumn was coming on, snow had invaded the passes, nights under the tent became hard. I recrossed the frontier and was delighted to find myself in a house, beside a flaming fire.

[1] Ritualistic cakes.

The house was one of those bungalows built by the British administration for the convenience of foreign travellers, all along the roads of India and the neighbouring countries under British control. Thanks to them, trips that would otherwise have to be organized expeditions, can be easily accomplished.

The Thangu bungalow, 12,000 feet high and about 14 miles to the south of the Tibetan frontier, stood in a pretty solitary place surrounded by forests.

I felt comfortable there and stayed on, little inclined to hasten my return to Gangtok or to Podang. There was not much more for me to learn from the lamas I had been associated with. Perhaps in normal times I would have left the country for China or Japan, but the war which had begun in Europe just as I was leaving for Chörten Nyima, made it rather dangerous to cross seas ploughed by submarines.

I was considering where I should spend the winter, when a few days after my arrival at Tangu, I learned that the *gomchen* of Lachen was in his hermitage, half a day's march from the bungalow.

I immediately decided to pay him a visit. The excursion could not help being interesting. What was this " cave of the clear light " as he called it, and what sort of life did he live there?—I was curious to know.

I had sent back my horse when leaving for Chörten Nyima and made the journey on a yak.[1] I expected to hire a beast at Lachen for my return to Gangtok. Seeing me without a horse, the keeper of the bungalow proposed to bring his own. The animal, he said, was very sure-footed and would climb the rough steep path that led to the *gomchen's* cave perfectly well.

I accepted and the next day was mounted on a small, not too ugly, beast with a red coat.

Horses are bridled and bitted but yaks are not, and when one rides the latter, one's hands are free. I had

[1] The long-haired grunting Tibetan ox.

kept this habit, and thinking of other things, was putting on my gloves, forgetting to hold the reins as I should have done, especially as I was unfamiliar with the horse's character. While I continued dreaming, the animal rose on his fore feet and kicked his heels at the clouds. Shot through the air, I fell down on a piece of ground, luckily covered with grass, below the path. The hard blow made me unconscious.

When I came to myself again, a sharp pain in my back made it impossible to get up.

As to the red horse, his fit of kicking over he had not budged. Quiet as a lamb, with his head turned toward me, he watched with attentive interest the people busying themselves about me and carrying me into my room.

The keeper of the bungalow was most grieved at my reproaches.

"This horse has never before acted like that, I assure you. It is not vicious," he said. "I should not have offered it to you if I had not been sure of it. I have ridden it for several years.

"Watch me. I shall make it trot a little."

Through the window I saw the beast standing quite still.

His master approached it, spoke to it, took hold of the bridle, placing his foot in the stirrup and sprung, not as he intended, into the saddle, but into the air, where a good kick had hurled him.

Less lucky than I had been, he fell upon rocks.

Men ran to help him. He was badly wounded in the head and bleeding freely, but escaped with no bones broken.

Between his groans, he kept repeating, as he was carried home: "Never, never before has this horse acted in that way!"

This is very astonishing, I thought, as I lay stiff and bruised on my bed.

While I was pondering on this strange manifestation of an animal supposed to be so gentle, my cook came in :

" Reverend lady, this is not natural," he said. " I have questioned the keeper's servant. His master told the truth ; the horse has always been quiet. The *gomchen* must be at the bottom of this. He has demons around him.

" Do not go to his hermitage. Harm will come to you. Return to Gangtok. I shall find you a chair and porters if you cannot ride on horseback."

Another of my men lighted incense sticks and a small altar lamp. Yongden who, at that time, was only fifteen, wept in a corner.

This stage setting looked as if I was dying. I started to laugh.

" Come, come, I am not dead yet," I said. " The demons have nothing to do with the horse. The *gomchen* is not a wicked man. Why are you afraid of him ? Send up dinner early and then let us all go to sleep. To-morrow, we will consider what is to be done."

Two days later the *gomchen*, having heard about my accident, sent me a black mare to take me to him.

No incident marked the trip. Through mountain paths that wound about the woody height, I reached a clearing at the foot of a very steep and barren mountain-side that was crowned by an indented ridge of black rocks.

A little farther up a number of flags showed the place of the hermitage.

The lama came half-way down to welcome me. Then he led me through the loops of the winding path not to his own dwelling, but to another hermitage about a mile away below his own.

He had a large pot of buttered tea brought there and a fire lighted on the ground, in the centre of the room.

The word room might prove misleading, for it was

not in a house that the *gomchen* showed me this hospitality, we were in a small-sized cave closed by a wall of uncemented stones, in which two narrow gaping holes less than ten inches high served for windows. A few boards, roughly hewn with an axe, and bound together with strips of supple bark, formed the door.

I had left Thangu late and it was dusk when I arrived at the hermitage.

My servants spread my blankets on the bare rock, and the *gomchen* took them to sleep in a hut which, he said, was just beside his cave.

Left to myself, I stepped out of my lair. There was no moon. I could only dimly see the white mass of a glacier against the shadow at the end of the valley, and the sombre mountain-tops that towered above my head toward the starry sky. Below me lay a mist of darkness from which ascended the roar of a distant torrent. I did not dare to go far in this blackness; the path was only large enough for a foothold and skirted the void. I had to put further explorations off until to-morrow.

I went in and lay down. I had scarcely time to roll myself in my blankets before the light flickered and went out. The servants had forgotten to fill the lantern with kerosene. I could find no matches at hand and being unacquainted with the formation of my prehistoric dwelling I did not dare to move for fear of hurting myself on some pointed rocks.

A bitter breeze began to blow in through the "windows" and the cracks of the door. A star peeped at me through the gap facing my ascetic couch: "Do you feel comfortable?" it seemed to say. "What do you think of a hermit's life?"

Indeed, its ironical twinkling mocked me!

"Yes, I am all right," I answered. "Thousand times better than all right . . . ravished, and I feel that the hermit's life, free of what we call 'the goods

and pleasures of the world,' is the most wonderful of all lives."

Then the star left off mockery. It shone more brightly and growing larger, lighted the whole cave.

> "That I may be capable of dying in this hermitage
> And my wish will be accomplished," [1]

it said, quoting the verses of Milarespa. And an expression of doubt dulled its grave voice.

The next day I went up to the hermitage of the *gomchen.*

This too was a cave, but larger and better furnished than mine. The whole ground under the arched rocky roof had been enclosed by a wall of uncemented stones and provided with a solid door. This entrance room served as a kitchen. At the back of it a natural opening in the rock led into a diminutive grotto. There the *gomchen* had his living-room. A wooden step led to the entrance, for it was higher than the kitchen, and a heavy multi-coloured curtain hid the doorway. There was no aperture to ventilate this inner chamber; a fissure in the stone through which air may have entered was closed with a glass pane.

The furniture consisted of several wooden chests piled up behind a curtain which formed the back of the anchorite's couch, which was made of large hard cushions placed on the ground. In front of it were two low tables, mere slabs of wood set up on feet, painted in bright colours.

At the back of the grotto, on a small altar, were placed the usual offerings: copper bowls filled with water, grain and butter lamps.

Scrolls of religious painting completely covered the

[1] These verses belong to a poem composed by Milarespa in the eleventh century, while he was living in a cave. It is popular in Tibet and means: If I am capable of living in this hermitage until death, without being tempted to return to the world, I shall have reached my spiritual goal.

rocky uneven walls. Under one of these was hidden the small cabinet in which lamas of the tantric sects keep a demon prisoner.

Outside the cave, half sheltered under protuberant rocks, two cabins had been built that served to store the provisions.

As you can see, the *gomchen's* dwelling was not entirely lacking in comfort.

This eyrie commanded a romantic and absolutely solitary site. The natives held it to be inhabited by evil spirits. They said that some men who had formerly ventured there looking for stray cattle or to work as wood-cutters had strange encounters which sometimes led to fatal consequences.

Such spots are often chosen as dwelling-places by Tibetan hermits. Firstly they deem them a suitable ground for spiritual training. Secondly, they think that they find, there, the opportunity of using their magic powers for the good of men and animals, either by converting malignant evil spirits or by forcibly preventing their harmful activity—at least, simple people ascribe that charitable desire to these "holy ones."

Seventeen years earlier, the lama whom the mountaineers called *Jowo gomchen* (Lord contemplative anchorite) had established himself in the cave where I saw him. Gradually the monks of the Lachen monastery had improved it, till it became as I have just described it.

At first the *gomchen* had lived in total seclusion. The villagers or herdsmen who brought his provisions, left their offerings in front of his door and retired without seeing him. The hermitage was inaccessible during three or four months every year, for the snows would block the valleys that led to it.

When he grew older he kept a young boy with him as attendant, and when I came to live in the cave below

his he called near him his initiated consort. As he belonged to the "red hat sect" the *gomchen* was not bound to be a celibate.

I spent a week in my cave, visiting the *gomchen* each day. Though his conversation was full of interest, I was still far more interested in watching the daily life of a Tibetan anchorite.

A few Westerners such as Csöma de Köros or the French Rev. Fathers Huc and Gabet have sojourned in lamaist monasteries, but none has lived with these *gomchens* about whom so many fantastic stories are told.

This was reason enough to incite me to stay in the neighbourhood of the *gomchen.* Added to this was my keen desire to myself experience the contemplative life according to lamaist methods.

However, my wish did not suffice, the consent of the lama was needed. If he did not grant it, there would be no advantage in living near his hermitage. He would shut himself up and I could only look at a wall of rock behind which "something was going on."

So I presented my request to the lama in a manner that agreed with Oriental customs. I begged that he would instruct me in the doctrine he professed. He objected that his knowledge was not extensive enough and that it was useless for me to stay in such an inhospitable region to listen to an ignorant man, when I had had the opportunity of long talks with learned lamas elsewhere.

I strongly insisted, however, and he decided to admit me, not exactly as a pupil, but on a trial as a novice, for a certain time.

I began to thank him, when he interrupted me.

"Wait," he said, "there is a condition; you must promise me that you will not return to Gangtok, nor

undertake any journey toward the south without my permission." [1]

The adventure was becoming exciting. The strangeness of it aroused my enthusiasm.

"I promise," I answered without hesitating.

A rough cabin was added to my cave. Like that of the *gomchen*, it was built of planks roughly hewn with an axe. The mountaineers of this country do not know how to use a saw, nor did they, at that time, care to learn.

A few yards away, another hut was built, containing a small private room for Yongden and a lodging for our servants.

In enlarging my hermitage, I was not altogether yielding to sybaritic tendencies.

It would have been difficult for me to fetch water and fuel and to carry these burdens up to my cave. Yongden, who had just left school, was no more experienced than I at this kind of work. We could not do without servants to help us, therefore an ample supply of provision and a store-house was indispensable since we were facing a long winter during which we should remain completely isolated.

Now these things seem to me small difficulties, but at that time I was making my "début" in the rôle of anchorite, and my son had not yet began his apprenticeship as explorer.

The days passed. Winter came, spreading a coat of immaculate snow on the whole country and, as we had expected, blocking the valleys that led to the foot of our mountain.

The *gomchen* shut himself up for a long retreat. I did the same thing. My single daily meal was placed

[1] To go southward meant to go to Gangtok or to Kalimpong, where a few foreigners reside, and even if avoiding these places, to follow a road sometimes frequented by Western tourists coming to these hills from India.

behind a curtain at the entrance of my hut. The boy who brought it and who later carried away the empty plates left in silence, without having seen me.

My life resembled that of the Carthusians without the diversion which they may find in attendance at religious services.

A bear appeared in search of food and after its first feelings of astonishment and defiance were over, grew accustomed to coming and waiting for bread and other eatable things that were thrown to it.

At last, toward the beginning of April, one of the boys noticed a black spot moving in the clearing beneath us and cried out : " a man ! " just as early navigators must have cried " land ahead ! " We were no longer blocked in ; letters arrived that had been written in Europe five months before.

Then it was springtime in the cloudy Himalayas. Nine hundred feet below my cave rhododendrons blossomed. I climbed barren mountain-tops. Long tramps led me to desolate valleys studded with translucent lakes. . . . Solitude, solitude ! . . . Mind and senses develop their sensibility in this contemplative life made up of continual observations and reflections. Does one become a visionary or, rather, is it not that one has been blind until then ? . . .

A few miles farther north, beyond the last range of the Himalayas which the clouds of the Indian monsoon cannot cross, the sun shone in the blue sky over the high Tibetan tableland. But, there, the summer was rainy, cold and short. In September the tenacious snows already covered the neighbouring heights and soon our yearly imprisonment began again.

What were the fruits of my long retreat. I should have found it difficult to explain, yet I learnt a number of things.

Apart from my study of the Tibetan language with the help of grammars, dictionaries and talks with the

gomchen, I also read with him the lives of famous Tibetan mystics. He would often stop our reading to tell me about facts he had himself witnessed, which were akin to the stories related in the books. He would describe people he had known, repeating their conversations and telling me about their lives. Thus, while seated in his cabin or in mine, I visited the palaces of rich lamas, entered the hermitages of many an ascetic. I travelled along the roads, meeting curious people. I became, in that way, closely acquainted with Tibet, its inhabitants, their customs and their thoughts : a precious science which was later on to stand me in good stead.

I never let myself be taken in by the illusion that my anchorite's home might become my final harbour. Too many causes opposed any desire of staying there and of laying down, once and for all, the burden of foolish ideas, routine cares and duties to which, like other Westerners, I still fancied myself to be bound.

I knew that the personality of a *gomchenma* which I had taken on, could only be an episode in my life as a traveller, or at the best, a preparation for future liberation.

Sadly, almost with terror, I often looked at the thread-like path which I saw, lower down, winding in the valleys and disappearing between the mountains. The day would come when it would lead me back to the sorrowful world that existed beyond the distant hill ranges, and so thinking, an indescribable suffering lay hold of me.

Besides more important reasons, the impossibility of keeping my servants any longer in this desert, compelled me to leave my hermitage. Yet, before parting once more from Tibet, I wished to visit one of its two great religious centres : Shigatze, which was not a great distance.

The famous monastery of Tashilhunpo lies near

this town. It is the seat of the Grand Lama whom foreigners call the Tashi Lama. Tibetans call him *Tsang Penchen rimpoche*, " the Precious learned man of the province of Tsang." He is considered to be an emanation of Ödpagmed, the mystic Buddha of infinite light, and at the same time, a reincarnation of Subhuti, one of the foremost disciples of the historical Buddha. From a spiritual point of view, his rank equals that of the Dalai Lama. But as spirit, in this world, must often yield precedence to temporal power, so the Dalai Lama autocrat of Tibet is the master.

Foreseeing the possible consequences of this journey I put off starting for Shigatze until I was definitely ready to leave the Himalayas.

I went from my hermitage to Chörten Nyima where I had stayed before. From there I left for Shigatze accompanied by Yongden and a monk who was to act as our servant. We were all three on horseback. Our luggage was placed in large leather saddle-bags, as is customary in Tibet ; a pack-mule carried two small tents and our provisions.

The distance was not great. One could easily accomplish the trip in four days. I intended, however, to travel very slowly so as not to miss anything of interest on my way, and above all, that I might absorb in body and spirit as much as possible of Tibet whose heart I was at last about to penetrate, but probably might never see again.

Since my first visit to Chörten Nyima I had met a son of the lama sorcerer who sent ritualistic cakes flying through the air to punish his disobedient neighbours, and I had been invited, if circumstances permitted, to visit him.

Tranglung, the village where he lived, was no more on the straight road leading from my hermitage to Shigatze than Chörten Nyima, but as I have just said, I intended to profit by all opportunities of seeing in-

teresting things that my adventure in forbidden land might bring me.

We reached Tranglung at the end of the afternoon. The village was quite different from any that Tibetan settlers have built in the Himalayas. It was, indeed, surprising to find such a complete contrast at so short a distance. Not only the tall stone houses differed from the cottages made of wood with thatched roofs I had been accustomed to see in Sikkim, but the climate, the soil, the landscape, the people's cast of features and general look had changed. I was really in Tibet.

We found the sorcerer in his oratory, a huge room without any windows, scantily enough lighted through the roof. Near him were several men to whom he was distributing charms which consisted in toys like small pigs' heads, made of pink-coloured clay and wrapped in woollen threads of different shades.

The peasants listened with rapt attention to the lama's endless instructions on the ways to use these objects.

When they had gone, the householder-lama, with a gracious smile, invited me to take tea with him. A long conversation ensued. I was burning to ask my host about the flying cakes, but a direct question would have been against all rules of politeness.

During the few days I remained there, I was told about a peculiar domestic drama and had the rare honour of being consulted by an authentic sorcerer.

Here, as in a large number of families in Central Tibet, polyandry was practised. On the wedding day of the lama's eldest son, his brothers' names had been mentioned in the marriage deed and the young girl had consented to take them all as husbands.

As in most cases, at that time some of the " bride-grooms " were mere children who had, of course, not been consulted. They were, nevertheless, legally married.

Now the sorcerer of Tranglung had four sons. I was not told what the second son thought about his partnership with his elder brother. He was away in journey and most likely all was right with him.

The third son, whom I knew personally, was also travelling somewhere. It was he who had upset the peace of the family.

He was much younger than his first two brothers, being only twenty-five, and he obstinately refused to fulfil his conjugal duties toward the collective wife.

Unfortunately for the lady, this purely nominal husband was far more attractive than the elder two. Not only was he rather better looking than his brothers, but he surpassed them in social position, eloquence, learning, and may be in various other accomplishments that I could not discover.

While the two elders were but wealthy farmers, the third brother enjoyed the prestige attached, in Tibet, to clergy. He was a lama, and more than a common lama. He was a so-called *naljorpa* initiated in occult doctrines, he had the right to wear the five-sided hat of the tantric mystics and the white skirt of the *respas* who are adepts in *tumo*, the art of keeping warm without fire in even the coldest weather.[1]

It was this distinguished husband who refused to fulfil his part, and the offended wife could not resign herself to be disdained.

What made the matter worse was that the young lama courted a girl in one of the neighbouring villages and meant to marry her.

The law of the country permitted him to do so, but if he persisted in this marriage and thus broke up the unity of the family, the young husband would have to leave his father's house and establish a new home for his bride. The priestly son of my host, indeed, did not shrink from the responsibility, and even relied con-

[1] Regarding *tumo*, see Chapter VI.

fidently on his earnings as a sorcerer to make that home comfortable.

But by so doing would he not be setting himself up as a rival to his father? Although the old lama did not express his thought in words, I could read in the expression of his face that he feared a competitor in that obstinate son who refused to please a healthy, sturdy woman of forty, probably not too ugly.

I could not dispute this point, for the wife's features were hidden under a thick coating of butter and soot that made her as black as a negress.

"What on earth is to be done?" groaned the aged mother of the family.

I had no experience in such matters. Though I had met polyandrist ladies in the west, as a rule no family council was called in to settle the imbroglios that result from their affairs. And in my travels I had only been asked for advice by polygamist gentlemen whose homes had become a seat of war.

Since polygamy is also legal in Tibet, I suggested that the young lama might be persuaded to bring his bride home.

Luckily for me, I was then wearing the respected monastic robe, for only this prevented the jealous, disdained wife from throwing herself upon me.

"Reverend lady," cried the old mother as she wept, "you do not know that our daughter-in-law wanted to send her servants to beat the girl and to disfigure her. We had a hard task to prevent her from doing so. Think of people of our rank doing such thing! We should be dishonoured for ever afterwards!"

I could find nothing more to say, so I remarked that it was time for my evening meditation and asked permission to retire to the oratory which the lama had courteously lent to me for the night.

As I was leaving the room I noticed the youngest son, a lad of eighteen, the husband number four. He

was seated in a dark corner and looking at the common wife with a strange half-smile, as if he were saying—"Wait a little, old lady, I have worse things in store for you."

During the following days I wandered idly from village to village, sleeping at night in the peasants' houses. I did not try to hide my identity as I was obliged to later on, on the road to Lhasa. No one here seemed to notice that I was a foreigner or, at any rate, no one seemed to attach any importance to the fact.

My road passed the monastery of Patur which appeared to me immense compared with those of Sikkim. One of the ecclesiastic officials invited us to an excellent meal in a dark hall where we enjoyed the company of several monks.

Nothing there, with the exception of the massive buildings several stories high, was entirely new to me. Nevertheless, I understood that Lamaism as I had observed it in Sikkim was only a pale reflection of that which exists in Tibet.

I had vaguely imagined that beyond the Himalayas the country would become wild, but now I began to realize that on the contrary I was coming into touch with a truly civilized people.

Among the various incidents of the journey, the Chi River, swollen by the rains and the melting snows, was difficult to ford in spite of the help of three villagers who took our horses across one by one.

Beyond the village called Kuma extends a long track of desert land. According to the description of our servant who knew the road well I hoped to camp pleasantly near thermal springs, getting a hot bath and warm earth for bedding. A sudden storm compelled us to set up our camp hastily before reaching this desired paradise. First hail attacked us, then the snow began to fall so hard that it soon came nearly up to our knees.

A neighbouring brook overflowed into our camp. I had to spend the night fasting and standing up most of the time on the small island that was the only spot, under my tent, not invaded by the muddy water. So much for the comfortable sleep I had expected.

At last, at a turning of the road where I had stopped to look at a drunken man wallowing in the dust, my eyes suddenly fell on a glorious vision. In the bluish gloaming, the enormous monastery of Tashilhunpo stood in the distance : a mass of white buildings crowned with golden roofs that reflected the last dim rays of the setting sun.

I had reached my goal.

A strange idea had grown up in my mind. Instead of looking for a shelter in one of the inns of the town, I sent my servant to the lama who was responsible for entertaining the monks' visitors or the native students from the Kham province. How could a foreign woman traveller, unknown to him, awaken his interest, and what reason could she have for requesting his good offices? I had not asked myself this question. I acted entirely on impulse and the result was excellent.

The distinguished official sent a *trapa* to order two rooms for me in the only house next to the monastery. There I settled myself.

The very next day, according to the protocol the requests for an audience with the Tashi Lama were begun. I had to give details of my native country and satisfied them by saying that my birthplace was called Paris.

Which Paris?—South of Lhasa there is a village called Phagri, that name being pronounced Pari. I explained that " my Paris " was a little farther away from the Tibetan capital and stood westward, but I insisted on the point that starting from Tibet, one could reach my country without crossing the sea and that, consequently, I was not a *Philing* (stranger).

This was a play upon the word *philing* which literally means a continent over sea.

I had stayed so long in the proximity of Shigatze that it was impossible to be unknown there, and, moreover, the fact of having lived as a hermit made me somewhat famous in the country. An audience was immediately granted and the mother of the Tashi Lama invited me to be her guest.

I went over every corner of the monastery and, to pay for my welcome, I offered tea to the several thousand monks living there.

The number of years that have elapsed and the chances I have taken, since that time, to visit the large lamaseries, or even to dwell in them, have dulled my impressions, but when I went round Tashilhunpo, I was deeply struck by every thing I saw.

A barbaric splendour reigned in the temples, halls, and palaces of the dignitaries. No description can give an idea of it. Gold, silver, turquoises, jade were lavishly used on the altars, the tombs, the ornamented doors, the ritualistic implements and even on mere household objects for the use of wealthy lamas.

Should I say that I admired this opulent display? No, for it seemed unrefined and childish : the work of powerful giants whose minds had not grown up.

That first contact with Tibet would even have impressed me unfavourably if I had not had ever present before me the vision of its calm solitudes, and known that they conceal ascetic sages who spurn the vulgarities that are the insignia of grandeur in the eyes of the masses.

The Tashi Lama was most kind to me every time I saw him and showered me with attentions. He knew quite well where *my* Paris was and pronounced the word France with a perfect French accent.

My zeal for the study of Lamaism pleased him very much. He was willing to help my researches in any

way. Why should I not stay in Tibet? he asked me.

Why, indeed? Desire was not lacking, but I knew that however great and honoured he was in the country, the gracious Grand Lama had not enough temporal power to obtain permission for me to live in Tibet.

Nevertheless, if I had, at that moment, been as free of ties as I was when I undertook my journey to Lhasa, I might have attempted to avail myself, in some secluded spot, of the protection which was offered to me. But I had not foreseen such an offer. My luggage, notes, collections of photo negatives (why should one think these things important?) had been left behind, some in the care of friends in Calcutta, others in my hermitage. How many things remained for me to learn, how great was the mental transformation necessary to enable me to become, a few years later, a joyful tramp in the wilds of Tibet.

While at Shigatze I met the masters who had educated the Tashi Lama: his professor of secular sciences and he who had initiated him into the mystic doctrines. I also came to know a contemplative mystic, the spiritual guide of the Tashi Lama, highly revered by him, who —if we must believe the stories told about him—ended his life, a few years later, in a miraculous way.[1]

During my visit to Shigatze, the temple that the Tashi Lama meant to dedicate to the future Buddha Maitreya, the lord of infinite compassion, was nearing completion.

I saw the huge image placed in a hall with galleries that allowed the devotees to circle around it on the ground floor on a level with the feet and successively ascending the first, second and third galleries, up to its belt, its shoulders and its head.

Twenty jewellers were setting the enormous ornaments that were to adorn the gigantic Maitreya. They were re-setting the jewels presented by the ladies belonging

[1] See the end of Chapter VIII.