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BLACK RIVER OF TIBET

by

JOHN HANBURY-TRACY

Foreword by

ADMIRAL SIR WILLIAM GOODENOUGH, G.C.B.

With 24 Illustrations

THE TRAVEL BOOK CLUB

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TO
BLANCHE

INTRODUCTION

BY

ADMIRAL SIR WILLIAM GOODENOUGH, G.C.B.

THAT two men should get so far from the beaten track that it was eight months before they heard of the death of the King of England and Emperor of India is of itself remarkable in these days of easy communications, especially so in a country so close to India itself. That, being so far, they should find other tracks as sure and beaten as our own, though in a different manner, discloses to all who care to read, fresh interests and greater understanding of mankind.

Even the mystic East has become well known of late years, but it is a knowledge that never palls, of a people and of places that have a civilization entirely their own. Many have fallen under the spell of that still hidden land, Tibet. To consider its geography in its widest sense, its mighty mountains and rivers, its fauna, the taking of whose life is forbidden both by law and custom, its beautiful flora, and most of all its human inhabitants, comprises a study of delight, whether the reader knows the East or not. How many know how Tibet is governed, of the relations between the Dalai Lama and the Tashi Lama, of the contemplative worship that constitutes so much of the life of this distant land? Each book that brings fresh light on such knowledge, especially if it is written by one who has an affection for its people, asking nothing from them, is a welcome addition.

John Hanbury-Tracy was no newcomer to travel when he set out with Ronald Kaulback. Both were and

still are young in years but ripe in experience and bold in execution of their purpose, and it is safe to say that they have left a good impression of the Englishman behind them.

John Hanbury-Tracy knew his surveying well, and that part of his work, especially when for some weeks he was separated from Ronald Kaulback and working on his own, is of great value to the geographer. The Sudan had seen him as a junior official, he had climbed in the Alps, navigated the Danube by canoe to the Black Sea, worked his passage from Constanza to Liverpool, and walked across part of Lappland. All this had given him values of proportion as well as hardihood and self-reliance. He has given us the results of his travels when both with his friend Ronald Kaulback and when by himself he was in Tibet for the best part of two years.

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* *Photo: Ronald Kaulback.* † *Photo: John Hanbury-Tracy.*

A WORD OF THANKS

To the Tibetan Government, for courtesy at all times; to the Royal Geographical Society, for unfailing assistance, advice, and moral support; to the British Museum of Natural History, for the classification of specimens of flowers, insects, and reptiles; to Ronald Kaulback, who taught me many things; to numerous friends in India and Burma, who made departure smooth and home-coming joyous; to Lewa and Nyima Töndrup, our servants and also our friends, at whose loyalty I have never ceased to wonder; to the nameless legion of coolies and pack-animals who at one time or another made the whole thing possible—thank you.

JOHN HANBURY-TRACY

CHAPTER I

The Beginning of Things

The fatted calf is dressed for me,
But the husks have greater zest for me . . .
I think my pigs will be best for me,
So I'm off to my styes afresh.

The Prodigal Son (Kim).

“ALL Tibetan babies are wrapped in butter when they're born, because of the cold.” Or so a friend of mine was taught at school. Not an entirely misleading statement, for it infers that butter in Tibet is as plentiful as mud in Egypt. Which it is; it is used for cleaning boots, though not for wrapping babies.

But at the end of 1934, I should have accepted any such statement with only mild incredulity. My mental picture of Tibet at that time was of the vaguest, rather like an ancient news-reel, in which a scene or two dance fitfully through a fog of dots. North of the Himalaya I knew, or thought I knew, was a cold bleak land where the wind blew unceasing; a country of grey horizons meeting the sky, and mile after mile of stony plain often deep in snow. Dirty people clad in felt, and yaks, like misshapen Highland cattle, trudged across those dreary barrens. The roof of the world. And somewhere near the centre lay Lhasa, the Forbidden City. There were Lamas, who indulged in mysterious rites, and the country was ruled by the Dalai Lama, a reincarnation, concerning whom articles appeared occasionally in *The Times*. A

rough outline, approximately true. But I did *not* know that Tibetans still struck sparks from steel; that many of them had never heard of Europe; that, conversely, there were whole towns of which Europe had never heard; that there were valleys fairer than the Engadine, and others, where vines grew, as thirsty as any Arabian wadi. Nor did I know that it was still a debatable point how far the Himalaya extended eastwards, or that feudalism was still a living force. And I never imagined that I should one day find several flowers unknown to science, and see the footprints of that scandalously improbable creature, the "Abominable Snowman".

But the way to all that, and more, was opened when my friend Ronald Kaulback invited me to be the other half of an expedition to Tibet. "How long should we be out there?" I asked. "Two years," replied Ron. "You must come. We'll sail for Bombay at the end of February." We had another glass of beer, for our meeting had taken place at the bar of my club, and by lunch-time I was booked for Tibet.

Over lunch Ron explained further. We would map the unknown upper reaches of the Salween river, and try to reach the source. The restaurant receded and Tibet drew nearer, in imagination. "Good Lord, look at the time," said Ron suddenly, and we returned to London with a bump.

"Don't forget February," he hallooed through the Piccadilly traffic, and then I did not see him again for a few days.

But the Salween river? I had never heard of it. And why would it take over a year to reach the source? I searched about for a map of Asia, and opened it at Burma. Yes, there it was, a large river flowing into the sea a short way east of Rangoon; the Salween. I followed it up, northwards. It crept along the edge of Burma. There were dots in places, and that meant it was unexplored. I began to like the Salween immensely. Near the north-

eastern corner of Burma the mountains seemed to be trying to strangle three great rivers, the Yangtze, the Mekong and the Salween. Beyond that the rivers spread out in a fan, with the Salween as the left-hand or western rib. Together they drained an enormous area. Up there, in eastern Tibet, nearly everything was marked in dots, both roads and rivers. Several place-names had an interesting note of interrogation after them. Even the mountain ranges were drawn in tentatively, and heights were hardly shown at all. A few routes were definite, routes followed by European travellers. But there was a lot of blank space between. And, except at two or three points where it had been crossed, the upper course of the Salween where it was called the Nak Chu (Black River), some hundreds of miles in length, was entirely conjectural.

So that was to be our field of work for the next two years. Our line of approach to it, as I had heard at lunch, was to be from Rangoon through the hill jungles of northern Burma, and then over the rim of the Irrawaddy basin into south-eastern Tibet. It seemed a long preliminary trek. Why could we not go straight from Bombay across India by rail to Calcutta, and then east again by rail to Burma, through Assam? But there was no rail. Between Assam and Burma was an area marked with the names of native tribes, the country of the Nagas. More hill jungle. The quickest way was to the rail-head at Myitkyina in Upper Burma and then north on foot.

Ron knew that route already, for in 1933 he had taken the opportunity of going with Captain Kingdon Ward, the botanist and explorer, up through the border hills of Assam into Zayul, the most south-easterly province of Tibet.

His permit, unfortunately for him, had not been in order. While Kingdon Ward continued north Ron had to turn homewards. It was the height of the monsoon.

The Assam route was blocked. So in the worst of conditions he crossed the Diphuk La into Burma, in charge of a sick companion older than himself. Weakened by fever and leeches, and exceedingly hungry, for he had lived on cucumbers and a little rice for some weeks, he eventually arrived at Fort Hertz, grimly nursing two extremely rare and very much alive vipers in his shirt, for the benefit of the London Zoo. The vipers died, at which Ron, like Niobe, refused all comfort, for he has a real affection for snakes. But he himself reached England and had the honour of lecturing to the Royal Geographical Society. At the age of twenty-five he had made his name as an explorer and was thoroughly determined to get back to Tibet.

Three months were spent in remote designs and immediate activities. We had both of us studied surveying at the R.G.S. under Mr. E. A. Reeves, who has instructed nearly every traveller since the time of Stanley. So the map and the appliances for making it were our chief concern. The R.G.S. lent instruments. A wireless receiving set was built, specially light so that it could be carried by one coolie, batteries and all. This was not intended to brighten our leisure moments, but strictly to obtain the time-signals from Rugby or Saigon, from which to calculate longitude. Even with special long-life batteries we would only be able to use the set a few minutes every week. Ron and Mr. Flower (Mr. Reeves' successor) put their heads together over a theodolite and evolved some minor miracles.

"Would you mind," said Ron to me, "looking up in the library the records of all travellers in south-east Tibet and south-west China?" There was always a chance we might never reach the Salween and would be forced to seek other fields. It would be redundant to explore the explored. So I assented lightheartedly. In one afternoon Asia made me feel giddy, and after three weeks, I began to realize I might still be looking up records by

the time the expedition returned. Then we discovered a map compiled by the Survey of India, with the routes of all previous travellers neatly traced in red, and we bought it for three and sixpence.

People at dinner-parties were apt to look at us with mild inquiry. "What are you doing now? Oh, you're going to Tibet—how lovely!" Clearly intimating that they were far too reliable to attempt such a wild-goose chase themselves, and anyway they had offices in the City. I felt humbled, and rather envied their comfortable sense of assurance. But we found refuge in the R.G.S. and in the British Museum (Natural History), who provided little cardboard boxes filled with sawdust for packing insects, over which scientists would later spend hours of study with a microscope.

It was certainly not going to be a glorified walking-tour, work of all kinds lay ahead. But though many people were encouraging, there were many more who did not see eye to eye over it, and were crushingly polite. At bottom of course nearly all exploration springs from a desire to wander, a desire which is as potent in human nature as love or hunger, but he who wanders without a valid excuse is labelled Beachcomber. So public opinion has ever forced those smitten with the curse of Ishmael to present new excuses, excuses which, curiously enough, have repeatedly been responsible for new empires, new trade routes, additions to science, and fresh luxuries for the critics. And as for the sons of Ishmael, they have often found that the excuse has ceased to be an excuse at all and become a real purpose with attendant responsibilities. And then they have found themselves respectable citizens and are secretly amused.

With the goddess of Science as a sure shield against the barrage of questions we pushed forward our little plans. But the goddess made her own demands. Entomologists wanted us to look out for a particular species of tipulida, and that I discovered meant a daddy-long-

legs. Above all things we must not break its legs. Botanists asked us to collect every possible kind of leguminous plant, meaning, to a non-botanist, those that looked like sweet peas or vetch. While ornithologists wished to know how high above sea-level a certain type of diver, minutely described, built its nest. And Ron was to collect rare snakes, in a jar of "pickle". Already there was a glimmer of respectability about our schemes.

Other more mundane but no less important matters had to be attended to: the questions of stores and medicines. From past experience Ron knew the heavy cost of coolies, so weight must be reduced to a minimum. Sixty pounds is a fairly well recognized load for a coolie in Asia, although the porters of Darjeeling have been known to carry telegraph-poles across passes 15,000 feet above the sea, and I have heard of a woman who transported a piano for ten miles on her back. But we could not count on miracles, and aimed at leaving Fort Hertz with not more than fifty coolies, each carrying 60 lb.

Ron cornered his family doctor, who gave valuable advice, and the result was three loads of medicines and surgical instruments. We ordered a dozen bottles of whisky, for high days and holidays, but not even the firm supplying them could tell us the weight of one full bottle, although the quantity was known to a fraction of a fluid ounce. So we took a bottle home and weighed it ourselves. There was to be a plum-pudding for each birthday, and one at Christmas, and a small supply of Quaker Oats and tinned herrings to wean us gently from the flesh-pots of civilization. Chocolate rations were carefully worked out, a quarter of a pound per week each, forty pounds in all, for that was to be our sole supply of sugar, so we thought. There were minor crises: unnecessary books that turned up, and necessary boots that didn't; the wrong films for the right camera; and a hair-tearing quest for "presents for the natives". We suffered the normal birth-pangs of any expedition.

Amid the final lunatic whirl between shipping-offices, banks, box-rooms, tent-makers, banks, shipping-offices, we listened to such well-meant inquiries as: "I suppose you'll ride Lamas in Tibet?"—"Have you arranged petrol dumps?"—"Do bring me back some blue poppies," and "I wonder if you'll run across my nephew, he's in China too?" Somebody sent us a pocket set of Snakes and Ladders, just in case, and somebody else a ducal picnic basket.

There was a morning of drizzle at Victoria Station, at the end of February, 1935—porters carolled "Mind-yerbackspliz" and I murmured to someone: "Yes, send letters to Calcutta, poste restante, but we shan't get them till we return"—a copy of *Lost Horizon* was shoved into my hand, two years' supply of toothpaste was left behind, and the train moved out. Red brick suburban houses slid by, a butcher's cart on its rounds, and the clipped hedges of Kent. Good-bye till 1937.

Then kaleidoscope . . . "The Channel looks beastly" . . . grey plains of France and wind-swept docks at Marseilles . . . Port Said, and a ship moving silently between straight canal banks . . . deck-tennis, and flying-fish in the Indian Ocean; then Bombay in hazy heat and Indian policemen with yellow caps . . . a train full of dust, fans twirling . . . Calcutta.

It is the last week in March, and hot humanity mills and grills on the Calcutta dock: white-capped Bengalis, lamp-black Madrassis; there a hawk-eyed, hook-nosed Pathan, with reddened beard and sugar-loaf puggaree; here a huddle of Burmese priests, in orange robes with orange parasols, and a greasy mendicant Saddu, whining alone; sad-eyed women, their foreheads streaked with vermilion, stand patiently with infants at breast amid bundles of all sizes and shapes, and a Chinese merchant smiles blandly . . . babel, and smells of moist skins and warm dust roused to life by a soft early sun.

In an oasis of official dignity at the foot of the ship's gangway an undersized doctor Babu, wearing an outside topi, stands and lays down the law.

"It is departmental regulation. This man cannot sail with those spots on his chest. Smallpox. He must be detained."

"But, Babu, it's not smallpox. Those spots are leech bites."

Doctor Babu is adamant. Medical examination will take place later. Meantime regulations must be obeyed, and the Rangoon boat is going to leave without Nyima Dorje, our cook. A cook-less expedition! this is farce at the outset. Ron exhorts, his Aunt Joan entreats, the Babu looks mulish, and through it all Nyima Dorje stands by with open shirt, a look of distress on his small flat face. On his chest clusters of pinkish-white spots, the cause of all the trouble, show plainly. They are souvenirs of Sikkim, where leeches swarm in the hot damp forests. The ship's siren booms its warning note. Five minutes to sailing time! Entreaties grow feverish, and in the end of course Aunt Joan wins; Nyima Dorje is consigned to the quarantine cabin, hot and indignant. The ship moves silkily down the Hoogli river, greasily swirling.

I have not yet introduced Aunt Joan, who is Mrs. Townend, an untiring Himalayan wanderer and an equally untiring secretary of the Himalayan Club, eastern section. Without her discreet generalship more than one high-level expedition would have remained in a slough of despond on the flat plains of India. She had engaged our three servants and arranged to pay their wives in their absence, swept us to and fro in Calcutta, and now swept us and them on the way to Rangoon. Thank you, Aunt Joan.

And on the high seas the expedition begins to get acquainted. Two of its members have never been in a ship before, two brown, pug-nosed, wiry little men, and

they are suitably and unashamedly impressed. Sitting on a hatch on the fore-deck they look rather insignificant beside a group of tall, white-swathed Punjabis. In their khaki shirts and shorts one might think they were Boy Scouts on an outing. But they are famous in their way, and one of them knows it.

Lewa, he of the square jowl and barking voice, is a Sherpa from Nepal. He has not seen his village since he was fourteen, when he came to Darjeeling to work for Englishmen who like to climb hills, the great hills he has always lived among. A rugged character and great powers of endurance set him much in demand as a porter. He was one of the "Tigers" of Everest. He has travelled the Himalaya from Sikkim to Kashmir, and has hauled more than one famous mountaineer up the last steps of a climb. He has been sirdar on several trips, and helped to save the remnants of the disastrous German expedition to Nanga Parbat in 1934. Now he is our sirdar—a rough-and-ready sergeant-major. He has a fine reputation, and means to keep it up.

Nyima Töndrup (he answers to a shout of "Neema-Tundoo") squats beside Lewa wearing a dilapidated felt hat. His features appear to have arrived by accident in a face originally designed by Nature on the lines of a pudding. He is a Tibetan, spasmodically pure and engagingly simple. In his kit-bag beside him he has a silver medal with a black and green ribbon, which he imperturbably earned while imperturbably carrying British stretchers in Waziristan. Discharged with honour from service he went home to Lhasa to spend his emoluments. He spent them unstintedly, and trekked southwards again. On the way he encountered the first Everest expedition coming up from Darjeeling. Someone told him that coolie wages were three rupees a day, and he promptly signed on. He has been on one expedition or another ever since, winning high praise for dogged service. He is Lewa's shadow, and has known him for

years. He ought to be paying taxes to the Tibetan government, but he has not done so for fourteen years. He has been engaged as my personal servant and general factotum. He is entirely at peace. He thinks he is going to China.

Nyima Dorje, "Thunderbolt Day", stewing in unmerited quarantine, is another Sherpa. He is very nearly five feet tall, and his nose is almost one with the contours of his cheeks. On other expeditions he has been a tough little porter. He has also been attached to the kitchen, as opener of tins. Now he has been promoted to cook, but there are not many tins in our boxes. We hope for the best. Much of our future well-being depends on him. He says loftily he has been in a ship before, for half a day on the Ganges. He looks about sixteen years old, but is in fact thirty-one. Lewa is thirty-two, Nyima Töndrup forty-one. They all have homes in Darjeeling, and speak rough Hindustani to us.

The ship thrums on. A straw-coloured moon floats high in the night. The moon-glade is a shimmering ladder on the water, reaching away from the ship. Stars come in clusters, and Ron tells me some names: Betelgeux, Procyon, Capella . . . we shall need them later on, their movements will be timed with a stop-watch, measured to a fraction of a second. We sit at ease, and I think of long marches ahead. I accept another drink. "Carpe diem . . ."

I study a phrase-book of Hindustani, and am glad to find that it is not an entirely new language to me; many of the words have Arabic roots. The word for "yesterday" is the same as the word for "to-morrow", and "the day before yesterday" is the same as the "day after to-morrow". That is delightful.

Down on the foredeck passengers and baggage are almost indistinguishable. But Lewa and Nyima Töndrup still sit. They do not sleep much at any time. Already they keep a jealous watch on our boxes. Lewa's dour

features relax into a grin. He is reminiscing. Nyima Töndrup makes a good listener.

.

We landed at Rangoon on March 31st, and I promptly and incontinently went down with fever. Between bouts of bedside manner in the sick-room Ron endured protracted agonies at the Customs, threading his way through an intricate maze of flaming red tape. Each separate item of stores—and there were forty-odd boxes, not including personal effects—had to be listed under one of 250 different headings. At midday he looked wan, at tea-time he sagged at the knees, and at dinner-time he went to bed muttering: “Peas green, tins six, soap toilet, packets four.” But on the following evening we both dropped limply into a train, saw the Shwe Dagon pagoda slip past like an illuminated merry-go-round, and left the rest to the Burma railways. I took a night-cap of atebirin, and groaned at the thought of a mountain pass. The servants looked horribly energetic. They had all bought Gurkha hats, like Australian army hats without the emu feathers, and strutted proudly.

Burma has long been a treasure-trove of vicarious thrills. Dacoits, dope, ruby mines, pagodas, and centipedes of fabulous habits simply ask to be exploited. But romance eluded us. The flying-fishes did not play for us on the way to Mandalay, and the temple bells were dumb. Mandalay was just a railway waiting-room where we played “Jutland” for hours and drank tea with tinned milk. But at dawn the next morning the train stopped at a wayside station and I saw brightly skirted men with wide Mongolian features warming themselves at a tiny fire under a bamboo shelter. The air was cold and fresh. I breathed deep. We were bound for the hills, beyond administered territory, and the novelists might revel for all they were worth in the paddy fields and temples.

The train trundled on between matted green walls, and came to an uncompromising stop at Myitkyina. Rail-head. The word rang bells in the mind, it opened up pleasing prospects of frontiers and something beyond them. But rail-head also meant work, as I realized at 6.30 the next morning when I came down on to the lawn of our temporary abode to find Ron wrestling with a refractory tent and yards of guy-rope. It stood up. All three tents stood up. We were getting on.

For a week we unpacked, sorted, weighed, cursed, repacked and resorted. Trunks were emptied and the contents meticulously parcelled into loads of 60 lb. each and listed. Our money was all in bank-notes for the time being. But in Tibet only solid silver would be accepted, so two years' finances would have to be carried in Indian rupees. The notes would be changed at Fort Hertz. Ron sped to the bazaar and ordered seven stoutly built little wooden boxes, each to carry 2000 rupees, an ample load for one man.

Myitkyina (pronounced Mitchinar), situated in a bend of the Irrawaddy, consists of a native bazaar, some half-dozen European houses, a club, a polo ground, a hospital, and the cantonments of the Burma Military Police. From our point of view it consisted secondarily of the bazaar, but primarily of Mr. J. K. Stanford's house. He and his wife did everything possible to make us comfortable, cheerfully assuring us that it was quite the worst time of year to set out for northernmost Burma —“ so have another beer while you can ”.

The bazaar was ransacked for pots, pans and the ninety and nine inevitably forgotten articles, and on the sixth afternoon we straightened our backs and locked the last padlock. We were ready for loading up. There was an expressionless interview conducted over bags of rice with a Chinese merchant who was in complete control of the Fort Hertz mail service, and we were promised twenty-seven mules for transport. The only mules

reasonably available in Upper Burma come from Yunnan, and only Yunnanese muleteers can cope with Yunnanese mules. So it is that British Burma depends on celestial China for the last links with her outposts.

A car road, open to traffic in the dry weather, runs north from Myitkyina to Sumprabum, half-way to Fort Hertz. Beyond that is plain mule-track, a few feet wide. A native clerk did once venture to drive an Austin Seven along that mule-track. Over the worst bits the car was carried like a Sedan chair on poles by a rescue party. The rescue party failed badly when a herd of wild elephants approached along the necessarily one-way path. The leader of the herd lifted the Austin Seven's roof with his trunk and peered in at the driver. Fortunately his curiosity was sufficiently satisfied and the driver was unmolested, but no one has since motored to Fort Hertz. We hoped to motor as far as Sumprabum, but the regular car was already bespoke. However, the owner of a veteran vehicle was induced to take us two stages along the road.

The servants set off on foot with the mules, and we then spent two days on a visit to a game reserve. We saw saing, hog-deer, and barking-deer, the latter the most persecuted beast of the jungle. With the exception of a few birds it was the only time I saw game of any sort in Burma.

On April 10th the Stanfords entertained us to a fare-well feast—then we shook hands. “ Good-bye, a thousand thanks.”—“ Hush,” they said smiling. “ Don't wake the baby, she's asleep upstairs ” . . . and the expedition tip-toed down the drive to the father of all cars.

“ Really off at last,” we said almost in the same breath as we bumped along through flat green jungle. I found an extra square inch of room between my rucksack and bedding-roll, and settled down almost comfortably. And then a nasty uneasy suspicion crept through my mind. I pondered. I glanced at Ron. Had he got . . . ?

“ I suppose you’ve got the money all right?” I remarked, trying hard to appear off-hand.

“ Yes,” he said. “ The fifty chips for food on the way to Fort Hertz. You’ve got the rest, haven’t you?”

I gulped. The rest? I had ten French francs, a five rupee note, and sixpence.

Then slowly I realized, and more slowly confessed, that the wad of notes, which Ron had handed over to me in a last-minute rush, had been left in my helmet case, locked and deposited at the Stanfords’ house until such time as we returned to civilization. Pioneering blunder No. 1!

An oppressive silence reigned until we reached the Rest House at Wehsi, broken only by a brief-spoken decision to send the father of all cars back for the helmet-case. The next day it caught up with us. And at Wehsi the day ended in a positive orgy of blunder. There had been a miscalculation. The servants had not expected us so soon. There was no supper, no light. With Nyima Töndrup holding a wavering flare I fumbled over stores books and keys, opened kerosene tins and unscrewed boxes. We dined at 10.30 p.m. So far so bad.

CHAPTER II

Early Days

THE Upper Burmese jungle is a dead world. Or it appears to be in the sun-drugged days towards the end of the dry weather. Before leaping heat has unwrapped the mists white-browed gibbons claw shrieking through the trees; "hou-hou", their high impersonal calls make chorus. One rarely sees them, and they chivvy away to safe green depths. But a bolder group may cling like trailing moss on a high naked tree and jeer as you trudge along the road below: "Wh-whoo-haaa-whoo-oop"—they are urchins. Even they disappear as the early freshness is killed by a crackling brown-paper noon—and everything sleeps. Everything except a dead white sun and a string of mules driven by blue-smocked Chinamen with straw parasol hats. The leading mule has a mirror on his brow, to reflect the sun and scare away tigers, and behind him bells jingle in monotone. A happy muleteer bangs a gong, and sings a flat nasal song; like a dog's howl it floats to the tree tops. Lewa finds this irresistible, and beats an accompaniment on a frying-pan. There are no fleeing herds of deer, or bright-feathered birds, and snakes do not coil on the branches. The forest is matted, dead yellow below and all tones of green above. You can see but a few feet into it, between huge ace-of-spades leaves, creepers, and dry whispering stems of bamboo. All life escapes from the glare, which beats on wave after wave of huddled green puff-balls. These are the Kachin Hills. The wide scythes of banana trees hang limp. There is a bird that calls dully: "Roo-Roo", and an undertone of insects, as of a humming

telegraph-pole. Gay butterflies hover drunkenly where wild beasts have made water. . . .

In the last three weeks of April we marched through the panting jungle, stopping each night at a rest house, starting each morning on the road. The mules would scatter to graze, and trot back to load at loud cries and the encouraging slapping of corn bags. I at least felt certain qualms for the safety of our survey instruments when I realized that the loads were fastened with leather thongs to a sort of inverted cradle, which was not girthed to the mule at all, but merely lodged into the wooden pack-saddle. Equilibrium did the rest. But the mules seemed sedate, precipices were few, and the system had been in use for countless generations, so one soon became, outwardly, as assured as the muleteers themselves.

On account of the dry conditions we were only able to do single stages of eleven to thirteen miles, to give the mules adequate time to graze. We had hoped to do double stages, and so put Burma behind us before the monsoon broke in late May or early June. This ambition to avoid the rains, with the consequent myriads of leeches and unpleasant marching conditions, formed the background of our hopes during the trek through Upper Burma.

At each halt the boxes were ranged in rows, and a certain question would recur: "I say, have you got the screw-driver handy?" or the cigarettes, a collecting-box, or a bandage; and then lists would have to prove their worth. We were settling into harness. The marching sweated the sugar fat from our bones. Each day we sloughed off a mental skin, and slipped another inch into the new life. Tibet seemed a longish way as yet.

On the road we would collect insects, and once by the river we chased a monitor lizard. It vanished over some rocks, leaving a trail in the sand, a slight furrow, with little five-toed imprints on each side. The flesh is prized by Kachins and Chinese alike.

The local Kachins appeared shyly. They wear a short coloured jacket and skirt. Each man carries a "dao", a square-ended sword, not only as a weapon but also as an all-purpose tool. Their villages—just two or three long huts of plaited bamboo—lie tucked away out of sight of the main road, buried in the forest. These people worship the Nats—the spirits of Nature. Not far from a village, a burial ground, or Nat-house, will often be found; a simple bamboo shelter. Within are a crude image, a cross-bow, painted bison horns, or the antlers of deer, the whole scrupulously clean; sacred toys of children in time, made for gods who were old when Christianity was young. The Kachins have gradually pushed the true Burmans farther and farther south, as they themselves have been pushed from the north, and the hills are their own.

On cool evenings we would fish, for the Mali Hka (the western branch of the upper Irrawaddy) flowed a few miles away. It is a beautiful river, with high rock banks and stretches of sand. It runs swiftly, broken by rapids such as the mahseer love. We would return in darkness, and the jungle was then awake. There were rustlings, and we would hear the cry of a small beast dying in fright. One night I came back to find a swarm of bees on the wall of my room. I stepped delicately, like Agag, and slept in peace, thankful for a mosquito-net. Almost without fail a thunderstorm would break each evening, with an overture of one appalling crash, and then peal after peal echoed over the hills. Palm trees tossed passionately in the wind, and rain bombarded the roof. Remarks were made in a shout, and Lewa would dash across from the cook-house with the inevitable curried fowl draped in a ground-sheet.

On the fifteenth day the forest opened; to the north lay a plain, and far beyond it a half-circle of peaks, cool and white, the very edge of Burma. When I had gazed at them from the rest house veranda for half an hour,

rapturously content, old Nyima Töndrup came up bursting with the news that there were some mountains over there, with snow on them. He was always wonderfully quick. And the next day we came on a neglected tragedy, and realized the clean breath of the snows was still very far indeed. A tenfold butcher's shop smell on a hot day in a back street issued from a wayside hut. Something was wrong. I offered to investigate, being rather short-sighted about smell. Inside the hut was a corpse, an Indian, not a Burman, to judge by the man's all-white dress. But in any case, the face was invisible. It was covered by a teeming layer of white maggots. He had probably been dead two or three days. The jungle is a forcing-house.

We passed on quickly and soon came to a ferry across the Nam Kiu (the upper end of the Mali Hka). Two slit-eyed Shans, handling split bamboos, poled the dug-out canoe between rapids. Lithe, small-boned men they were, cat-like, and wearing only a loin-cloth. They stood straight as darts, and gave pliantly to the unlooked-for lurches of the long shallow boat. They never poled in time, but each anticipated the other's movements, as the two hands of one body.

The rest house of Nawng Hkai stood on the farther bank, and that evening at sundown black river-haunting buffalo wallowed deep to their muzzles and laid flat horns on the amber surface. A small naked boy danced on the sands, and threw stones—a black imp etched on a plate of old gold.

On April 28th we walked into Fort Hertz. The place belies its name. There is no fort, no more than there is a port at every Cinque Port. I had half-hoped for stockades, or at least a wall and a watch-tower. On a low plateau above an expanse of tall grass a group of red-roofed bungalows baked in the heat. And that was all, except for a small bazaar on the side of the hill.

Power, the police commandant, slaked dusty throats and made all things easy. Obedient to his orders the head clerk appeared at the rest house, with an escort of two Gurkhas and a gang of coolies, staggering under loads of bullion—a Gilbertian scene. Then we packed those wooden boxes, and wedged the coins tightly to prevent the slightest sound of chinking, which might be the devil's own music to some little tribesman. The mules were paid off, supplies laid in, and coolies engaged.

For a month we would be dependent on man-power alone. Fort Hertz was take-off; next stop Tibet. Already the journey began to develop into a game of leap-frog on a huge scale, with mountain passes for humped backs. And the first humped back would be the Diphuk La¹ on the frontier 14,280 feet above sea-level. Fort Hertz lies at 1500 feet. The first whole leap to Shikathang, in Zayul, would be a long one—twenty-five days at the least. The route ahead of us through the country of the Khanungs was well known, but from the Diphuk La to Shikathang it was imperfectly mapped.

On a rain-lashed morning Lewa barked orders at a row of mild little Khanungs. He was enjoying himself. There was some jockeying for the diminutive cash boxes, but they were dropped like hot pennies as soon as lifted. Less deceptive loads were then sought with an air of pained surprise. The last cane head-band was adjusted, the last box lifted on the last brown back, and the long file of sixty-three coolies slip-slapped out of Fort Hertz. Power was at his office, the doctor at his hospital; there were no farewells. Some of the girl porters giggled; they had collected rolls of tinfoil and stuck them daringly in their ears.

The first weeks in May were a repetition of the last weeks in April, but with differences: the hills were more abrupt, the forest heavier, the rest huts dilapidated, the native Khanungs more “jungly”, and it rained. On

¹ La is Tibetan for pass.

most days it rained, and rain meant pests. As we padded along the dank spongy path that first afternoon, I saw on the leaf-mould what appeared to be headless fungi, like short black boot-laces, waving in a breeze. But there was no breeze. The things were alive; they were leeches. In the evening we picked a half-dozen slug-like forms from our insteps and from between our toes. They stretched elastically and came off with a little plop. The blood then spurted freely, for the leech, being lazy and a glutton, injects a chemical to bring an easy flow and a quick-service meal. He is sly, too, for his puncture is hardly felt, and he can gorge quietly till you feel a swelling in your boot. But his bite turns septic at once. He can slip through a puttee, a woollen stocking, or a lace-hole.

And that day the rain roused other sleepers. A coolie, hearing rumours of reward, brought in a tiny black and grey viper on a string of bamboo. Ron was overjoyed; till late at night he pored over reference books and counted scales by the light of a torch. All the way to Fort Hertz he had said harsh things about the dry weather which kept every snake abed. But each day now a new trophy was brought in, a snake, a lizard, or a toad, and the pickle-jar grew full. In 1933, Ron caught a black viper which answered no known description. Unfortunately it died, and at the time he had no pickle-jar, but there must be many such secrets still hidden away in the remote forest depths of northern Burma. And not only secrets of reptiles, but of four-footed creatures as well, such as cats and squirrels, and certainly of insects by the score.

Science is an exacting task-mistress, but it seemed to me her requirements were being stretched to the limit when one evening a bloated and lively Russell's viper was hung on the wall during dinner, a few feet from the table. It curled itself in knots, and looked thoroughly resentful. I regarded it anxiously between mouthfuls of

soup. Ron said it was company. The next morning, by which time it was dead, the bamboo collar was found to be more than half-frayed through. It is Asia's second most poisonous snake.

Daily the track led over fold after fold of hill jungle; a harsh drenched land. Some slopes were so steep it seemed impossible that they could hold the wads of vegetation. . . . There was a valley choked with giant bamboo, green slimy columns draped in moss, smelling of charred wet paper . . . there were villages where the bobbed-haired, soft-featured Khanungs came out to be doctored for sores and fever, the younger ones sturdy, the older ones heavy with opium . . . there was a river, swollen with snow-water, and a long cane bridge that sagged . . . and there were points of blue light that hung and swooped in the darkness, fire-flies in hundreds.

On May 13th, we saw clear up the Nam Tamai valley to high snows ahead, and on the 15th we met Tibetans—short, sinewy men in shapeless brown garments of felt, girded at the waist. To eyes accustomed to true jungle folk, clad in thin rags and skins, they appeared distinctly dressy.

These Tibetans have overflowed into Burma for reasons which do not always bear the closest inspection. They live in two or three tiny villages up the Seinghku valley, which leads to the Diphuk La. There are others in the adjoining Adung valley. By the princely payment of one rupee per year in hut tax they have become British subjects—officially; but the Tibetan Governor of Zayul is not so sure. While the point still remains debatable, the outcasts refrain from advertising their presence any more than is necessary. A leech-infested jungle is in many ways preferable to a Tibetan prison. And being in a cul-de-sac they find themselves delightfully neglected by the Burma government.

They are men of influence in a small radius, and the headman, one Mitsck, persuaded a gang of reluctant

Talangs from the lower Adung to carry our goods as far as Shikathang; reluctant because the Diphuk La was still under snow and they had no boots. A gift of an empty stores-box, complete with padlock, waived all objections. Mitsek, eager to curry favour in the eyes of the Burma government, decided to come too, in order to supervise the tribesmen. The proposal was greeted with lamentations by his wife. She knew only too well there was no food obtainable in the Di Chu¹ valley, on the farther side of the pass, and she nursed an unworthy suspicion that we intended to include "Escaloppe de Mitsek" in the menu.

We made gentle inquiries about leeches, were they active higher up? "Mangpo, mangpo" (many, many), said Mitsek, and opened and shut his fists in life-like imitation of the little crawling horrors. We unpacked ski-ing trousers and anklets in preparation for a grim three days.

A Khanung interpreter had accompanied us from Fort Hertz, but he now returned, bearing our mails and also our shot-guns. Hunting in Tibet, owing to Buddhist law, is officially taboo, but the law is occasionally evaded and the chase discreetly practised. In Zayul it is flagrantly practised. The numbers of serow, goral, takin, musk-deer and bear which inhabit that forested province are an irresistible attraction to a sporting population—and the governor winks an eye. Zayulis are individualists, which most Tibetans are not. But we were guests, and to arrive in the country with a gun would be as indecorous as to come to a dinner party with a packet of sandwiches.

On May 17th, we set out from the last rest house in Burma. It was only a bamboo hut some twelve feet square and sadly in need of repair, but to us it represented the last link with newspapers, electric light, clean sheets, arm-chairs, wheeled vehicles and all the other appurtenances of a world overburdened with gadgets.

¹ *Chu* is Tibetan for water or river.

We crossed the Seinghku by a cat's cradle bridge of bamboo; there were two or three stems to walk on, and a dilapidated hand-rail on either side. Then for three days we climbed by a villainous path through the last of the jungle. We crawled over and under rotting logs and clung to staves of bamboo wedged in short stretches of cliff. At all times the path was so narrow that we brushed against the vegetation, from which leeches wriggled and crawled towards us in loathsome swarms. There were leeches on our legs, leeches in our shirts, and leeches in our hair. Mitsek had not exaggerated. It was not by any means the worst time of year for these pests—that would be in the rains from June to September—but we each picked off some 200 in a day's march. We carried little bags of salt, for salt is really effective on a leech's tail—he curls up and dies when touched with it, for it absorbs his moisture. To enliven the proceedings we organized a competition—the biggest bag would win a dinner at the Savoy on our return. Ron won easily, but I claimed a foul on the score that he was walking in front.

On the second day we stopped at Meting, a Tibetan village, and the last village in Burma. There were a few barley fields and half a dozen wooden houses, not unlike ramshackle chalets; the place seemed almost luxuriously appointed. The villagers were building us a temporary shelter, and one aged man paused in his work to stick his tongue out at me, with an imbecile expression. I assumed he was suffering from senile decay, and carefully took no notice.

“Look pleasant,” said Ron. “He's saying how-d'you-do.”

Recovering from my surprise, I returned the salute.

“No, no,” Ron expostulated. “You mustn't do it yourself. It expresses respect to a superior.”

Life in Tibet, I reflected, evidently bristled with social pitfalls.

The third day was the climax of jungle scrambling; but I may have been prejudiced: I had a septic ankle from a leech bite, limped the whole way and was utterly exhausted at the end. In seven hours we covered under six miles—perfectly normal going for this part of the world. On May 20th, we finally broke clear of the forest. Leeches that sucked and flies that bit were temporarily things of the past.

Where Burma and Tibet look each other silently in the face, both countries merge into a savage Switzerland. Gaunt peaks of incredible steepness stand capped in mist. Thin scrub creeps up the valleys, and purple gentians follow the retreating snows. We camped some three miles below the Diphuk La, by a tiny herdsman's shelter at over 13,000 feet. The hut was choked with ice, and the jungle porters sat shivering, pathetically like the monkeys whose skins they wore.

For a week we stayed in camp, waiting for better conditions on the pass. Summer came rapidly. Each day the slopes showed wider patches of black, which leaped quickly into vivid green; and the white shroud crept upwards. The whole party was in holiday mood, infected by the sparkling air of the heights, and relieved to be out of the orchid-house atmosphere of the jungle. Tibet itself lay over the very next ridge! Ron went so far as to submit to a haircut at the hands of Lewa. It was thorough. Not a shred of hair was left on his head, thus saving infinite trouble. To add to our joy the sun shone on occasions, and we sat out in a temperature of 70° F.

From the Diphuk La we would start work on the map. Thus far the regular Indian Survey extended. Ron fixed the position of the camp by astronomical observations, while I wrestled with the wireless. I twiddled frantically, but economy in weight had been our undoing. The set was too weak. I could elicit no response from it beyond a succession of plaintive howls and some inter-

mittent Morse. Sorrowfully we jettisoned it; we would have to depend on chronometers for our longitudes. But the Talangs were overjoyed; they broke the batteries on rocks and extracted the metal to make tips for their cross-bow shafts. These would later be dipped in the intestines of a long-dead pig, one of the most powerful poisons known. Normally these shafts are mere sharpened stakes of wood, but the metal was a gift from heaven. We had jettisoned feverishly since leaving Fort Hertz, for coolie wages were eating into our funds. Loads must be cut down; with this end in view we ate steadily through our stores and fed royally on tinned products for some weeks. When they were finished we would live on the country. If Tibetans could live in Tibet, then why not we?

By May 26th the snow on the pass had melted sufficiently to make easier going for the coolies, and we moved off. After a short climb we reached the summit. Mitsek had carried up a stick with a tattered prayer-flag; he planted it by a cairn on the pass, muttered a short prayer, and scattered some barley in the wind. The gods were appeased. A snow-covered slope dipped sharply away from our feet; far below were sombre pine trees. We sat down, and in the simplest manner possible tobogganed into Tibet.

The Di Chu valley is a backdoor of Tibet, and like most backdoors, it is narrow and neglected. Merchandise is handed furtively down through its dense pine forests—human merchandise in the form of slaves from Upper Burma. The trade is not large; four captives are considered a fair reward for a risky enterprise. The risk comes from both ends, from poisoned arrows and from a wrathful Tibetan governor, but there are Zayulis hardy enough to take the chance.

Other merchandise is takin meat. From a naturalist's point of view the takin is one of the major mysteries; it

is half-goat and half-antelope, of a reddish-brown colour, and sometimes darker. It rarely descends below 9000 feet, and its habits are largely unknown. Scarcely a dozen specimens have been shot by Europeans. To a hunter of Zayul, however, the matter is simple. He knows that on late summer nights the takin will come down in hundreds to drink at hot springs, especially at a time of new moon, and he lies in wait with a battery of guns and traps. More than that is not his concern. In the Di Chu valley there is one such spring, known as "Tsa-Chu-Kha", "The Place of Hot Water"; close by it we came on a deserted hunters' camp; bleached bones and thick black horns, heavily corrugated, lay strewn about, for trophies are scorned by the Zayuli—to him they are only another kind of bone.

For four days we tripped and stumbled down the Di Chu valley; at times the path was non-existent, and tempers were frayed; we scrambled over boulders in the river itself; there were bogs, and rotting logs which bridged wild torrents; tiny sand-flies bit with maddening persistence. Several coolies went sick; they had consumed the rations we gave them and ate raw jungle roots, which turned their stomachs. Others took over the loads of the sick men, who sat by the path to vomit. On two nights there was barely enough space to pitch our small Whymper tents, and clearings were made; knobs of wood and stones bulged beneath our camp mattresses, even with thick layers of pine twigs as insulators. We had septic leech sores as legacies of Burma, Ron on his toes and I on the ankles; each morning and evening we doctored them with Antiflogistin, and it was a daily torture to pull off the pus-soaked bandages. One night I awoke with a sense of acute discomfort; a tick had embedded itself between my toes, and was quietly browsing. There is only one effective method of removing ticks, and that is to hold a lighted match under them for as long as you can endure the scorching of your own flesh

at the same time. My tick was in a strategic position; I got scorched, it didn't. I severed its body with a pair of scissors and after an hour's work succeeded in digging out its head and jaws.

Mapping was difficult in the forest. We were making a route traverse with range-finder, compass and clinometer. This involves selecting some prominent object as a forward mark, which may be recognized again within the next mile or two, and by which a new station can be fixed from which to take a round of bearings, distances, and elevations. At each station a fresh forward mark is selected and its position fixed with the instruments. The method is extraordinarily quick, and as accurate as plane-table sketching. It is well suited to a country of deep, bare valleys such as the greater part of eastern Tibet. But it is as much hampered by forest as any other system, and in the Di Chu landmarks are few. To make matters worse, dense mist would come sweeping down, and we would have to wait hours for a chance of a sight. But at times the sun shone, and rhododendrons of a delicate pale pink nodded gaily over the roaring white-water river.

On the fifth day we emerged on to a wooded spur; as we peered through the trees we experienced all the dawning joy of seeing "a land flowing with milk and honey". We had reached the confluence of the Di Chu with the Rong Me Chu.¹ Three hundred feet below a broad valley basked in the sun; a yellow river raced away to our left, towards the dark forests of Assam; paddy-fields glistened like polished steel; cattle and horses grazed in unfenced meadows, and pine forest swept proudly towards a jagged white skyline. Tibet at last! My nerves tautened with the feel of it, as though touched by wind-driven snow. It seemed too good to be true, after all the weeks of planning and the long trek through the silent jungle. So much might have gone wrong, so

¹"Lower valley river." In the Assam part of its course it is called the Lohit, and is a tributary of the Brahmaputra.

much hadn't, unaccountably. In a few weeks we would cross rivers and passes now marked on the map with those fascinating queries, and others undreamed of in the western world. What was Ron thinking? We never talked much. Our normal conversation was a mixture of "shop", reminiscences, and casual bad-wording. But every point in that valley must have brought back memories to him. With wild whoops we glissaded down over loose gravel and earth, and then trudged along up the left bank of the tumultuous Rong Me Chu.

The jungly Talangs were open-mouthed with astonishment; they had never seen so much flat ground in their lives. "Is that a Tibetan Dzong, of which we have heard?" they asked innocently, pointing to an empty field. A Dzong is a fort, and a governor is a Dzongpön, or "Lord of a fort".

We camped four miles short of Shikathang, in parkland where tall pines stood in mellow bracken. Just below our tents a bamboo fish-trap made a long rippling V in a backwater, and three men in grey felt came smiling. One went on to Shikathang to inform the Dzongpön of our arrival.

"It's lucky," said Ron, "that we've got a short march to-morrow. To arrive in the morning is propitious."

We seemed to have dropped from the skies into the feudal world of Tibet.

CHAPTER III

Frontier Province

IT was May 31st. We passed through fields where brown-skinned peasants worked stripped to the waist; broad grins of welcome spread over their grubby irregular faces, and one man in five had a monstrous goitre.

On the farther side of a stream we were greeted by a corpulent gentleman with a wispy black beard. A Hom-burg hat, several sizes too small, reposed on his nearly bald head, and a dark blue "chupa", like a voluminous dressing-gown, draped his comfortable figure.

He bowed. We bowed. Lewa sprang to interpret. The gentleman was secretary to the Dzungpön of Shikathang; he had come to escort us over the last two miles with an array of ponies. With a smile he motioned us to mount. We did so, and I was immediately sorry. Ron had warned me of the terrors of Tibetan saddles, but I had been slightly sceptical. They are saddles of Little Ease, made of wood; two parallel rungs form the seat, which is covered with a blanket more as a courtesy gesture than as an aid to comfort. The sufferings of the uninitiated are naturally extreme. Our ride was mercifully short, and as we rode into Shikathang we put up a brave pretence of enjoyment for the benefit of the assembled populace.

We felt rather like Martians arriving on the Earth, outlandish but received with tact. The assembled populace, however, was comparatively unmoved. They had seen at least three Europeans before, when Kingdon Ward, Ron and Brooks-Carrington passed through in

1933 on their way up the Rong Tö Chü¹ to the Ata Kang La. Ron and Brooks-Carrington had to turn back from the pass, as I have related, but Kingdon Ward continued north to Shugden Gompa, and north again to the Salween. From Shugden Gompa he also travelled south to Sangachö Dzong and back, and then returned home over the Ata Kang La.

Older inhabitants may have remembered Colonel Bailey, who made an epic journey from China into south-eastern Tibet in 1912. He crossed into Zayul to the south of Sangachö Dzong, and went north to Shugden Gompa. He returned down the Zayul river, and continued down the Lohit to Assam. Colonel Bailey was the first white man to make the overland crossing from China to India through south-eastern Tibet.

Apart from Europeans, few if any of the inhabitants can have remembered the Indian pundit Kishen Singh, better known by his official cipher A-k. In 1878, when white men were still barred from Tibet, and when the interior was one vast mystery, A-k set out quietly from Darjeeling. His superiors in the Survey were officially ignorant of his plans, but unofficially they hoped great hopes. He was Kim's own spiritual brother. For four and a half years he disappeared into the unknown. Then one November day he turned up in Darjeeling, carrying pictures of rivers and routes in his mind. For seven months he worked to set those pictures on paper. He had passed through Lhasa, crossed Tibet, and penetrated far into Mongolia. Returning south he had kept nearer to China. Sometimes he had marked logs, and floated them down great rivers. These were picked up near the estuaries in India or Burma by men set to watch for them. In this way he learned later what rivers he had crossed in their upper reaches. He had been robbed of compass, papers and money. He had reached Shikathang, and thought he was nearly home. But in those days

¹ "Upper valley river."

the Mishmis of Assam were persistent headhunters; he could not pass south through their territory. Burma was equally out of the question. Patiently he had turned northwards to the China Road, which runs from Lhasa to Peking, crossing the Ata Kang La on his way, and counting his steps on a rosary. He had reached Lhasa, then India. His report was written in concise official language. He was one of the greatest explorers of all time, and his name is not entirely forgotten.

The first white man to enter Tibet was the Portuguese Jesuit, Father Andrade, about 1626. The first to enter Lhasa were Grüber, an Austrian, and d'Orville, a Belgian, in 1661. They travelled from Peking, and approached Lhasa from the north. But A-k was the first explorer, i.e. map-maker, in south-east Tibet.

Shikathang has altered little since the days of A-k. There are three or four long wooden houses, built on low piles, and one banana tree which is the pride of the place. Each season the fruit appears hopefully, but with monotonous regularity it fails to ripen. We pitched our tents in a field in the centre of the village, and sent Lewa with our credentials to the Dzongpön. Soon afterwards a string of servants, with strangely misshapen faces, came with deep wooden trays containing presents of food. There were eggs, walnuts, butter, brick-tea, soda, crushed rice, and tsamba, the latter being parched barley flour, the staff of life in Tibet. There were presents from the Dzongpön, presents from a vice-Dzongpön, presents from the secretary and presents from a deceased Dzongpön's widow. We were provided with an acute transport problem and food to last us for weeks.

It was all very cheering, and as O.C. commissariat I looked with loving pride on a pile of nearly 200 eggs. I ordered omelettes, and we awaited them pleasurably. A series of startling reports issued from the kitchen; Nyima Dorje came up bursting with indignation, bearing a handful of eggs. "All bad, sahib," he wailed, and

demonstrated by cracking one against the tent-pole. There was a noise like a pistol shot, followed swiftly by others as Nyima Dorje vented his wrath. Weakened by laughter and the appalling fumes, we ordered him to cease fire. The gift of eggs was evidently a polite convention and no more, and we had unwittingly ruined the local stock-in-trade, which was meant to be returned by each guest.

The next day we paid an official call on the Dzongpön. He was about to move up in a few days to his summer residence at Sangachö Dzong, which lies at 11,296 feet. Shikathang, at 4610 feet, provides him with a warm winter residence. The peasants of the Rong Me, probably about 300 in number, live in the neighbouring village of Rima, and in other smaller villages scattered up and down the valley. Shikathang is Government House, deserted in mid-summer and autumn.

Ron was delighted to find that the Dzongpön was his old friend Shödung Kharndempa, whom he had met in 1933. He welcomed us wearing a long robe of plum-coloured silk, with the long turquoise and gold pendant of the official classes in his left ear. There is a belief in Tibet that he, or she, who wears no earring will be born in the next life as a donkey. To avert this calamity both sexes do the best they can in the way of aural adornment. The types of earring are strictly regulated for each class, as are the forms of dress. No peasant would dream of wearing silk, even if he possessed it, and no Dzongpön would wear a peasant's felt chupa. The earrings of the lower classes are about as thick as a fair-sized knitting-needle, and one method of punching the necessarily capacious hole is to lay the unfortunate victim's ear against a block of wood and fire a sharpened stake into it from a gun at point-blank range! With Kharndempa was a little alert old man, named Tasong Tsang; he was shortly due to take over the reins of office from Kharndempa.

We sat round a low table, and Lewa interpreted. Our servants spoke the Lhasa dialect, the "lingua franca" of Tibet. Ron had a fair knowledge of Tibetan, and could write, but a sustained conversation was beyond him. I was still coping with Hindustani in order to converse with our servants. Hindustani can be "picked up", Tibetan must be carefully studied.

Gifts of friendship were handed to Kharndempa, accompanied by khatas, the white cotton scarves which signify the purity of the friendship. Etiquette in these things is not merely a question of good manners. To come empty-handed on a visit to an official is to be classed automatically as a man of the lowest sort. It is a mistake to suppose that high officials in Tibet are content with cheap trash for presents. Many of them send a courier annually to India, and they know a thing or two about European luxuries, even if they have never left their own country. We did our best by Kharndempa and gave him, among other things, a clock, a bottle of whisky, and an assortment of tinned foods. We had brought a whole load of presents, of various grades, from whisky and clocks to combs and mouth-organs.

Polite salutations occupied the best part of an hour, while Tibetan Ganymedes plied us with walnuts, and tea made from Chinese brick tea, mixed with butter, soda and salt. This startling but invigorating brew formed a staple part of our diet in Tibet. The butter should be of a certain vintage if the mixture is to be up to standard. To appreciate it you should banish your preconceived notions of tea and reflect that you are drinking rich salty soup. Then it is excellent. The host does not wield the teapot in Tibet; as soon as your china or jade bowl is an inch less than brim full, the waiting Ganymedes advance to replenish it. And walnuts are served ready shelled, a point to be noted by European hostesses.

Flies buzzed through lattice windows into the simple little room, decorated with scroll paintings, and hung

with rifles; compliments of an extravagant nature passed back and forth. Kharndempa asked how was the big Rajah of Belait (the King of England), and we asked if a new reincarnation of the Dalai Lama had yet been found to rule Tibet. Kharndempa said no, there was nothing official as yet, although search was being made far away in the Koko Nor district, to the north-east. That region had been selected for the search according to custom by the high Lamas of Lhasa, who had seen it depicted in the sacred lake south-east of the capital.

Our host asked about our plans. We explained briefly. We wished to travel right up the Rong Tö to the Kangri Karpo La. This was a pass never before crossed by Europeans. On the farther side we would be out of Kharndempa's province, and we wished to continue northwards to the Salween through the unexplored province of Poyü, which is divided into the three districts of Potö, Pome and Pemakö; en route we would cross the Ngagong Chu, a tributary of the Tsangpo (the Brahma-putra).

Kharndempa told us the Kangri Karpo La would be blocked by snow for some weeks, and invited us to visit him at Sangachö Dzong. We accepted gratefully. The journey would give us a wonderful opportunity to plunge straightaway into the unknown. The ordinary route to Sangachö Dzong is up the Zayul river, but we could take the alternative route via Lepa. In 1933, Ron had crossed the pass from the Rong Tö Chu to Lepa, travelling alone, but from there to Sangachö Dzong was fresh ground. Kharndempa graciously said he would send word to the headmen that we should be supplied with coolies from village to village. Once good relations have been established with a Dzongpön all obstacles, except natural ones, are swept aside. To quote the words of the French missionary, Abbé Huc, who with Gabet travelled to Lhasa in 1844: ". . . The system of enforced labour is

in a most prosperous and flourishing state; the Thibetians coming into it with entire willingness and good grace." We arranged to meet Kharndempa at the beginning of July. From Sangachö Dzong we could cross back into the Rong Tö by the unexplored Podung La.

Then the question of exchange was broached. Tibet is serenely unaffected by the chaotic fluctuations of modern financial systems. Good silver is good silver, the matter is as simple as that. Kharndempa arranged that we should get eight Tibetan silver trangkas for one Indian rupee, and that coolies should be paid at the rate of three trangkas a day. There is a lot to be said for feudalism. Tibetan trangkas, minted at Lhasa, are frequently made from melted rupees. They are unmilled coins, stamped with a simple design in Tibetan characters. It is a curious fact that only the rupees with a crown on the King's head are considered valid in eastern Tibet. The crownless Edward VII coins are politely but firmly refused as inferior articles.

Business over, an excellent meal was served. There were little communal bowls containing noodles, mushrooms, strips of boiled pork, chillies, small dumplings, and a kind of pickled cabbage. We were presented with chopsticks and private bowls to help ourselves. Ron is an expert with chopsticks, but Kharndempa saw I was getting little to eat, and with charming consideration sent for a silver spoon. It is good manners in Tibet to show every sign of enjoyment when eating, and the more noise you make the better. Your host is then convinced that his food has been appreciated. But the practice of belching in your host's face as a sign of goodwill, customary in some parts of Asia, is considered rather outré in Tibet. You may belch all you can, but not in your host's face. Good behaviour in Europe inevitably means uncomfortable behaviour; now we let ourselves go, and rejoiced in the freedom of Asia.

The meal was washed down with chang, a somewhat

wishy-washy beer made from barley, followed by little cups of rice spirit. The spirit tasted of nothing less than turpentine. Ron drank it for politeness' sake. He turned white, then pea-green. In as unflurried a manner as possible we took our leave, and the leader of the expedition retired to the wide open spaces, where Nature was a blessed mother.

There was another member of " Government House ", a deceased Dzungpön's widow, addressed as Chamkusho, " your lady excellency ". She invited us to her apartment, simply furnished with low bearskin-covered benches, a wooden table, and an altar with two or three " dablangs ", silver caskets with a small aperture in which an image is placed. Smilingly she served us with dough-cakes and noodles, but after the custom of most Tibetan women she would not eat with men. Buddhism imposes no law of purdah; the women of Tibet occupy much the same position in their households as the women of Western Europe, but they are considerably more self-effacing. I was attracted by the dablangs on the Chamkusho's altar; two of them were covered with fine filigree work. Rather hesitantly I asked if I could buy, but our hostess was delighted and sold me one which contained a little ball made of a lama's bones, crushed to a paste and dried, a talisman of great worth.

For nine days we lived a life of ease, exchanging calls with the various members of Government House. On the day before our departure Kharndempa sent us a courteous invitation to witness a court of justice in action. We had bought Tibetan chupas, and donned them for the occasion. Kharndempa was seated on the veranda of his house with Tasing Tsong. We sat close by. In the courtyard the prisoner knelt in the dust, with two stalwart servants guarding him. There are no regular police in Zayul, the Dzungpön's orders are executed by his personal staff. Kharndempa put curt questions to the prisoner, who answered in a quavering voice. He knew what he

was in for. Two other servants stood by with long raw-hide whips.

Apparently the prisoner had set off on a journey with his wife; he had arrived at the destination but the wife had not, and she had never been seen again. His explanations were unsatisfactory. Kharndempa gave a brief order. In complete silence a rope was bound round the prisoner's ankles. He was jerked to the ground, face downwards, and one of the guards put the end of the rope under his foot, round to his back, and over his shoulder in the manner of a mountaineer, and hauled tight. The other guard squatted down and held the prisoner's head in his lap. The man was firmly pinned. It was horribly neat, done quickly but with deliberate movements. The whip holders faced each other on either side of the prisoner, and one of them bent down to bare the buttocks.

A small knot of peasants watched dumbly from over a fence, and a fly buzzed in the veranda. No one spoke, I felt rather sick.

Kharndempa bowed his head ever so slightly, and the first whip swung and fell with a little "phut" on the grubby flesh, raising a spurt of dust as it licked over on to the ground. Swiftly the other followed, and then alternately: Ssss-phut—Ssss-phut. The victim moaned a prayer, his voice rising now and then to a little stuttering shriek—and somebody counted the strokes dully, flatly: "Chi . . . nyi . . . sum . . . shi . . . nga . . ."

"How many will he get?" I whispered to Ron.

"It's a hundred as a rule, the first time," he replied.

"Good God!" I thought.

The flogging continued. One executioner struck back-handed, with a curiously supple twist of his shoulder. At fifty, Kharndempa held up a hand, and again interrogated the prisoner: still no good. Kharndempa appeared to be lecturing him for his untruthfulness in the tone of a kind uncle to a spoilt nephew. The whips started again.

No blood was drawn, there were only welts. At last it was all over, and the prisoner was escorted away tottering. The next day, if he still lied, he would get 200 strokes, and more the day after, if he held out.

Kharndempa wrote a report of the case to send to Chamdo, the capital of all Kham.¹ This would be transmitted to Lhasa. The man would ultimately be banished, a worse punishment for a Tibetan than might be supposed, for he sickens and dies easily at the low altitudes of other countries.

The case had been instructive. Kharndempa was barrister, judge, and jury in one. His method of extracting the truth was rough if you like, but he was dealing with a rough people who understood that method only. Argument would have been useless, the prisoner merely said "no" to everything. It was an obvious case, but one over which a more civilized court might have failed for sheer lack of circumstantial evidence. There was not even a corpse, far less a witness as to possible motive. It was simply a case of "Missing Wife—Hopeless Search". But if someone is missing in Tibet, it means he or she is dead; a stranger in a village or an encampment excites remark at once, and only the villages and encampments support life. You cannot lie hid in a Tibetan village; at the most there are only twenty houses, normally some five or ten, and all of them full. It follows that Tibet is a most unpromising field for a successful career of crime, if practised alone. The only successful criminals are the nomad robbers who infest the great Northern Plateau.

We took tea with the judge after the court was over. Kharndempa had ill news for us. There is a rope-bridge to be crossed at Shikathang if one wishes to travel up the Rong Tö, and the rope-bridge was broken. A new one was being made; the cost would be put down to

¹A loose term for the whole of south-eastern Tibet. The inhabitants are called Khampa, "Men of Kham".

us. We blanched at this. A whole new bridge to pay for? We expected a stupendous bill! Later that day we were vastly relieved to hear that the cost was about 1s. 10*d.* The material was bamboo, of which there are quantities on the higher slopes of the Rong Me, and the rope had taken but a day or two to make.

CHAPTER IV

Fresh Fields

ON a gusty morning with scudding rain, we stood with our loads by the bridge-head. The bamboo rope, lashed to a post, stretched in one sagging curve across the foaming Rong Me Chu, some 70 yards wide, to a sort of landing-ground formed by a huge boulder, some 30 feet lower than ourselves. The loads went first, in pairs, suspended from a wooden slider. They rocketed across, and I watched them go, feeling as though I was at the dentist's waiting my turn. Ron was devastatingly cheerful. He was strapped to a slider, one leather thong under the armpits, another under the buttocks. There was a moment of scrabbling to clear the cliff's edge, and he sailed away. Before I knew what was happening sinewy hands were tying knots round my hips, and grubby faces smiled encouragement. There was a moment of suspense . . . feet left the ground . . . we're off! committed! . . . The rope rushed up towards me like a lighted high road at night . . . I glimpsed the river below . . . the slider smoked, and rumbled . . . it was wildly exhilarating . . . and then bump; it was over almost as soon as begun, and I crawled out of my festoon of straps. There is nothing so bad as anticipation, and nothing so good.

The coolies hoisted their loads, and we set off up the right bank of the Rong Tö Chu. It was June 10th.

For four days we marched through pine forest by a wide easy path. Now and then we passed low piles of flat stones, inscribed with prayers or bas-reliefs of the Buddha, touched in with pastel shades. The path looped

round them. These are mani piles. They must be circumnavigated in a clockwise direction, and when passing them on the road you leave them on your right. The Wheel of Life, to which according to Buddhism we are tied through countless reincarnations, turns clockwise, as the sun, and all temples, shrines, mani piles and holy places of every degree must be circumnavigated in this direction. Anyone who carves a mani-stone and adds it to a pile acquires great merit and the blessing of the gods. You may pass a dozen or more such piles in a day's march; there must be countless thousands all over Tibet. There is one at every village, and at some villages there is a "chorten" as well, a bulbous dome raised on tiers of steps, with a spire, sometimes gilt, and in the south shaded by a wooden roof. They often contain the relics of Lamas, or may be merely symbolical cenotaphs erected on a sacred spot to the glory of Buddha.

In those first days I would stop with interest to examine these mani piles, and would pause at sight of a chorten rising white on a hillock, stirred by contact with strangeness; but we soon came to regard them as familiar objects in the landscape, and blessed a religion which bescaughters a country with landmarks so convenient for makers of maps!

In the Rong Tö we put up each night at a village, but one evening Ron was marching a long way in front and with Nyima Töndrup following dog-like at my heels I missed my way to Dri, our objective for the night.

In darkness we reached the wrong village. I was desperately hungry and tired to the limit. Naturally nobody expected us, dogs barked and suspicious voices answered our requests for shelter. At last an aged crone plucked up courage and descended with a flickering butter-lamp. She conducted us through a sea of mud in the wood-walled yard, kicking and thumping a somnolent mass of cows and pigs to right and left, till we reached the foot of a ladder under the house. As though

entering a ship we reappeared through a hatchway in the floor of the kitchen, dimly lit by a fire in a square bed of earth. Shadowy felt-clad figures lurked in the corners, and another crone, with bare flaccid breasts, stirred a steaming bowl hung on a hook from the smoke-grimed beam. Buttered tea, milk, boiled rice and tsamba were produced; my hosts were charming; I was tired but content, and joyously shared their simple meal. There was no meat. They laughed and chatted. The old crones chuckled at some dubious joke.

There is nothing of the "impassive Oriental" about the average Tibetan. He is a simple life-loving soul; revelling in broad humour of a schoolboy nature; unwashed, unkempt, working always in the open with simple tools; gay, sad or frightened with the simplicity of a child, and like a child believing in spirits, hobgoblins, and demons all round him, in the trees, in the rivers, and in his towering awe-inspiring mountains.

I could not count how many people there were in the room; we sat in one shapeless jumble of humanity around the fire, which gave the only light. The smoke covered us all without comment, and wavered up and out through the ingenious double roof, which dispenses with the need of a chimney. My next-door neighbour laughed hugely at my fumbling efforts to knead tsamba. Tsamba will never bind to form cake or bread, as wheat flour, so you half-fill a wooden bowl with tea and top it up with tsamba. Poking it first gently with the forefinger, and then kneading it vigorously with the hand, you eventually produce a tea-coloured dough which you eat in great lumps. You can mix it with butter and carry it in your coat on a journey; you can flavour it with chillies, or mint, or carraway or any spice you may have; you can offer it to the gods, you can feed it to the horses. It is the all-purpose food par excellence, but by itself it has no taste at all. Even the redoubtable Huc remarked that: ". . . tsamba is not a very toothsome affair". I kneaded



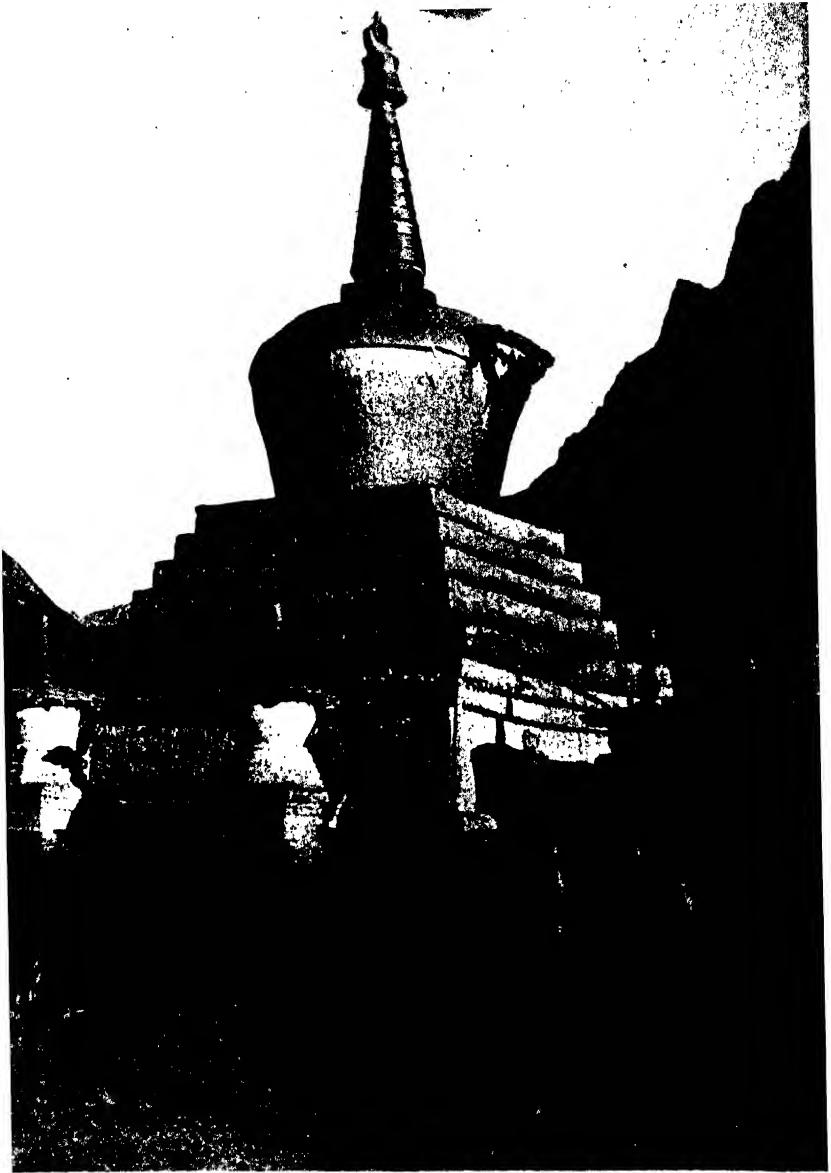
(Above)

*Mani-stones—a common
sight in Tibet*

(Below)

*Weaving in Eastern
Tibet*





*The great chorten
at Nakshö Biru*

hard, but only covered myself with tea and tsamba; defeated I handed my bowl to Nyima Töndrup, who mixed with the skill of long years.

Someone produced a squeaky one-string fiddle, and the youngest member of the party, a youth of fifteen with a goitre the size of a grape fruit, was induced to do a little halting, stamping dance. Then we all lay down with the sudden weariness of infants, and slept where we had sat. Nobody washed, nobody undressed, but chupas were loosened a little. Somebody gave me a sheepskin, for I had only my shorts and a shirt, and the night was cold when the fire died. In the darkness I felt as though a thousand ants were swarming over my skin. I flung the covering away. It was crawling with fleas.

Long before dawn the fire was lit with a scraping of flint and steel, and when the sun came softly all but the crones had gone to work in the rice fields. I stretched stiffly, breakfasted on a mess of barley and milk, and gave my raddled half-naked hostess a few trangkas for the night's lodging. She grinned and protruded her tongue in thanks.

As the sun leaped up to a turquoise-blue sky we tramped back with a guide to the village where Ron waited. My flea-bitten legs were an object of mirth, but I was glad of my night out in a family circle of Zayul.

These Zayuli Tibetans are of very mixed origin. The province was formerly a penal settlement, as it is considered distressingly hot by most Tibetans. No self-respecting Tibetan will live at much less than 10,000 feet if he can help it, and the villages of Zayul are rarely higher than 7000 feet, the majority at between 4000 and 6000. The criminals were set to work in the rice fields, thus killing two birds with one stone. Zayul is the only rice-growing district in Tibet, and provides the bulk of the rice consumed in Lhasa. Zayulis of both sexes are normally of an ugliness so remarkable as to be interesting; an ugliness which is by no means standardized. The

criminals came from various parts of the country, and constant intermarrying with border tribes has produced a weird variety of stature, feature and cranial measurements, enhanced by goitres of every shape and condition. As though in compensation for their physical diversity Zayulis are almost uniformly agreeable by nature. When they advance in greeting with upturned palms, face-splitting grins and protruding tongues they almost seem to be reassuring one for an uncouth appearance which is no fault of their own.

The development of the Zayulis is rather anomalous: by the standards of the rest of Tibet they are boorish and backward, especially in matters of religion; but they have a certain contact with India; quite a number travel annually to Sadiya, some of the richer ones have been as far as Calcutta, and a few have made the long journey to Fort Hertz. They have thus acquired a rather quaint veneer of sophistication, manifested in Homburg hats, umbrellas, cigarettes, cotton cloth, and a knowledge of Indian currency, things unknown to Tibetans deeper in the interior, who have developed their own arts and craft to a greater extent, and are more religious.

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On June 15th we crossed by rope-bridge to the left bank of the Rong Tö Chu, and straightway struck difficulties. Tibet is the apotheosis of conservatism. On any main route transport is catered for, and in the villages a room is usually reserved for chance visitors. But once you strike off on a little used path you meet with bewildered stubbornness, passive opposition to further progress, and complete lack of organization. The route to Lepa from the Rong Tö is a by-way, and at the village of Traba, a few miles from the mouth of the valley leading to the pass, we were promised transport in a manner that was conciliatory but wholly negative in purpose. For four days we waited. For four days the headman

prevaricated. There would be coolies the next day, or the day after; yes, he would do all he could; but perhaps the pass to Lepa was blocked, he had heard it might be; would not the sahibs find it easier to continue up the Rong Tö by the main path, on the right bank? Tired of being palmed off with the vaguest of promises, we threatened every kind of awfulness from the authorities, and coolies appeared like lightning.

On June 19th, we moved off for Lepa, and marched up the left bank of the Rong Tö Chu. The next day we left the wide main valley with its terraced rice fields, its darting parakeets, its rugged white-capped mountains and proud green pines, and turned east up a narrow split of a valley where visibility was almost nil. Rain came in sheets, for the monsoon was now well under way. We climbed steeply; at all times the path was wretched, and sometimes twelve inches deep in mud and water. Sandflies were murderous, the forest dense. On June 21st we camped short of the pass at 12,121 feet in a rock-bound gully of incredible steepness. There were a few square feet of flat ground; the coolies slept under an overhanging cliff; the only wood available was rhododendron scrub, and that soaked, so fire-lighting was difficult; it was bitterly cold; rain fell heavily; a most uncomfortable camp.

The next morning we struggled up to the pass, the Dzogu La (13,750 feet), a nick in a ridge of gaunt granite pinnacles, and dropped steeply to a valley gay with flowers. There were rhododendrons, scarlet, mauve, cream and pink, and great bunches of yellow primulas.

We had decided to reserve our collecting activities until we reached unexplored country, since Kingdon Ward had ransacked Zayul for flowers and insects. Later we might hope to find specimens new to science, but in Zayul it was unlikely. However, we stopped now to collect a few plants, including the pale yellow *Primula melanodonta*; and in the forests lower down Ron found

a little delicate mauve flower, *Pleione scopulorum*. On our return we found that the only other specimen of this plant in the British Museum had been collected in the Adung valley in Upper Burma by Kingdon Ward. It had never before been seen in Tibet.

But we did not confine ourselves to the higher botany. Among the rhododendrons were great clumps of wild rhubarb, and in the forest were young bamboo shoots, welcome additions to the menu.

We dropped through mist to the little village of Lepa, lying in an oasis of fields at the bottom of a deep forested valley, and there we stayed for eleven dismal days. Mist blanketed the hills. Survey work was impossible. We needed a star observation for latitude, but the stars seemed to have disappeared for good. Ron sat hunched by the fire, playing countless games of patience. I wrote letters. The servants yawned. Apathy and mist enveloped us. Would we ever move?

Lepa is isolated even for a Zayul village: the Dzogu La is closed from January till the middle of June; the Lepa Chu, running close to the village, flows south to the Zayul river through an impassable gorge; to the north, at the head of the valley, the pass to Sangachö Dzong is closed from October to July. There is no way out to the east. For nearly six months in the year the tiny community is cut off even from the remote world of Zayul. The most travelled inhabitant had been out of the valley four times in his life. But there are compensations. Tax evasion is possible, and Lepa, at 9310 feet, cannot grow rice. Rice will not grow much higher than 6000 feet in Zayul. So Lepa cultivates wheat, which is traded in the Rong Tö for rice. Even wheat will not grow higher than about 10,000 feet. Barley will grow at 14,000 feet. The wheat flour was a boon. We had no bread, but ate unleavened Indian chupattis. Our flour gave out soon after leaving Shikathang, and for several days Nyima Dorje had served up some rather soggy slabs

made of wild buckwheat. Now we revelled in whole-meal flour, ground out on a primitive quern.

The days of waiting were rendered even gloomier by reports of the pass to the north. It was said to be still closed. No one had ever crossed so early in the year. It was unheard of. This proved to be a matter of tradition pure and simple, and nobody had yet been within miles of the pass that year to test its condition. In spite of this blank wall of pessimism we announced that we would start for Sangachö Dzong within the next few days, and the village woke to activity. The journey would be an opportunity for trade, with travelling expenses paid by us, and Tibetans have a keen commercial instinct.

In the courtyard of our house a primitive treadle lathe, made entirely of wood, was coaxed to creaking life, and a craftsman set to work turning out the small wooden bowls, called "purba", used by every peasant for his tsamba and tea. A small boy worked the treadle, the craftsman held a long spike of soft steel under his armpit, and a dozen smoothly rounded bowls were completed in a day. They would be sold at Sangachö Dzong, where the scanty wood is used only for fuel. A thriving export trade in various wooden articles is carried on from forested Zayul to other almost treeless parts of Tibet. Lhasa depends on Zayul for her best class purbas, as she does for her rice, although cheap Japanese porcelain bowls are regrettably ousting the home-made articles. The purbas of the well-to-do are lined with silver, and they are then extraordinarily similar to the "mazer" bowls of our own Tudor times. The best bowls are made from "Dzaya", a speckled wood. Others are made from maple, walnut, and commoner woods.

Life at Lepa was still further brightened when our house caught fire. For some hours we had vaguely suspected, and were finally convinced, that our normal allowance of smoke had exceeded its limits. Then we realized that the floor-boards round the open hearth were

smouldering merrily! Immediately all was bustle, and Lewa had the time of his life. Floor-boards were ripped up. Water was thrown impartially about the house, wherever there was fire and wherever there was not. Nyima Töndrup was quite incoherent, and dashed madly about, effecting nothing. A frightful hammering started below, and the house shook. It was Lewa, rapidly disintegrating the floor with an axe, and apparently the supporting piles too! He treated the wood as a personal enemy. The damage done by the actual fire was inconsiderable, but the rescue party left a scene of wreckage fearful to see.

At last the weather cleared, bearings were taken, and on July 4th we set off up the valley of the Lepa Chu. Our baggage was now carried on dzos, which are half-bred yaks and ordinary cattle. For three days we marched through thick forest, climbing steadily. Sand-flies, as usual, made our survey stations a purgatory.

On July 7th we broke clear of the trees, and approached the snout of a great glacier more than a mile wide. Snow peaks towered on either side, gleaming in the sun. It was a world of blazing white, and we had come upon it all unawares. The coolies had said nothing about a glacier. That there was one we knew from the milkiness of the Lepa Chu, but we had never expected anything of this size. It proved to be some seven and a half miles long, the second longest glacier east of the Tsangpo. That day we had the satisfaction of making considerable alterations in the map. It had never previously been suspected that the high snow range, which is crossed by the Ata Kang La, continues so far south between the Rong Tö and the Zayul river. Farther south the mean height of the range decreases, and sweeps through Burma and Java to form the Malay Arc, an extension of the Himalayan uplift.

The surface of the glacier was granular and level, with narrow longitudinal crevasses, and the dzos climbed

easily over it, the coolies droning unending monotonous prayers, and twirling their prayer-wheels: "Om mane padme hum, om padme hum" ("Oh, the jewel is in the lotus"), the chants rose and fell in the thin crisp air.

The glacier flowed down in a tumbled ice-fall from the north-west, and we turned off it, crossing the lateral moraine, and continued up a wide alpine valley. We climbed steeply, laboriously, legs ached, and backs. Then the gradient eased off and we had an easy last lap as we approached the pass, the Duk La (13,990 feet). Relieved from effort, we could appreciate the little blue-mauve anemones and the yellow primulas scattered over the gently swelling slopes; we might have been treading some Alpine pasture, but here no white man had ever set foot, nor had the Duk La even been heard of.

Came that expectant stillness known to passes, the stream was reduced to a trickle, then silenced. The breeze marked time, lapped afresh over the summit, and a new world of peaks and glaciers opened to our gaze, while a few feet farther down little chortling streams broke out, springing to new life, eager to reach the dark green forest glimpsed far below.

There are no bad passes. Each one, from the very smallest, brings a sense of great purpose. For a few golden moments the humble muddler is no longer someone doing this job or that, and he can say to himself: "You are merely you." His mind takes wings, serenely detached from the humdrum abodes of men. "Down there, what a little fellow I was," he thinks as he pauses for breath, "I shall never be the same again," but down he goes to the valley, visions of food and a fire before him, a very simple human. The descent is a retreat from the sublime. The note was pitched too high, and it cannot be sustained.

Some such consciousness impels the Tibetans to build votive cairns of sticks and stones, with wind-torn flags, on the summits of their passes. Up there even the

dullest peasant feels that he is somehow different, and he puts it down to the gods. But hobnobbing with gods is short-lived. With a muttered prayer the peasant adds his stone to the pile, and passes on. Once more he has been allowed to pass safely by the seats of the mighty.

Muscles relaxed, boots felt lighter and Ron hummed a song as with lengthened strides we swung down the farther side of the Duk La, speeding our descent with an occasional glissade over talus or snow. A flock of snow-pigeons swooped down from a gully, skimmed low, chasing their shadows, and vanished. Noiseless they were. We stepped off the scree and entered pine forest. As the shadows lengthened, we reached the cattle camp of Santsam (11,856 feet), just a hut or two in a forest clearing close to the Jalhong Chu, and drank buttered tea by a blazing fire.

Next morning we left camp at 8.30, and climbed steeply for four and a half hours up the north side of the valley, towards the La Sar (14,932 feet).

At the top coolies and animals were standing aimlessly about. A huge snow cornice blocked the gap, and it was impossible to lead the pack animals round to the right or left. If not exactly a "knife-edged" ridge, an expression which I think should be reserved for a ridge where it is possible to sit "à cheval"—the La Sar is at any rate extremely steep, and especially to the north. On that side it is a scramble even for an unloaded man.

To all appearances, the party was stuck, and most of the party sat down.

One or two of the more energetic coolies sliced slabs of snow with their swords in a half-hearted manner, gazed blankly at that monstrous mound, and then, seemingly appalled at the task, went and joined the sitters. There was a general atmosphere of "Well, here we are. What's to do?" A wind sprang up and the sun disappeared. Good sitting places were at a premium. Clearly the gods of this pass were not pleased.

Then quite suddenly a chorus of suggestions arose, and everyone spoke at once. It was decided to attack that cornice in force, and a phalanx of swords descended upon it, led by our ancient ice-axe in the hands of Nyima Dorje. We had brought that ice-axe from England largely for the sake of appearances, for were we not a mountain expedition going north of the Himalaya? But public opinion in Zayul remained unimpressed and decided it must be either a weapon of defence or an agricultural implement. In any case a gadget.

After an hour's work a section of the cornice finally gave way and bounced down the hill with a noise like thunder; everyone felt the work had been his own idea from the start, and everyone felt pleased. The animals were lowered step by step down the slippery slope, with a coolie clinging grimly to the tail of each beast, and we ourselves forged rapidly ahead, for there was little enough left of the day.

From the top of the pass, as though through the wrong end of a telescope, we had seen green fields and brown huts far below at the mouth of a boulder-strewn valley. That view was now lost, shut off by towering crags of limestone.

We rested in a close-cropped meadow by a yak herd's hut, and Nyima Töndrup fetched cheese. Cheese in Tibet is full of surprises. It all starts in the same way, as a simple mess of curds, but it can be found in varying stages of advancement towards a brick-hard maturity. As curds it is excellent, a dish for a king, and above comparison with its base cousin junket. With time it acquires the consistency of a spongy putty, soft and white, and is still very good. It goes through a horrid middle-age, when it smells and feels like rubber, and finally it becomes an off-white circular brick with a hole in it, and is hung like dried figs on a string. And there are intermediate stages. This time we got rubber.

We marched on down the narrow valley; a rushing

torrent ran far below. We were in a drier land now, forest gave place to scrub, and the few trees stood aloof on the higher slopes. As though emerging from a tunnel, we came in sight of green barley fields flecked with sunlight, and human habitations. The rock walls fell back. A chorten gleamed white on a dull green hummock far out in the wide main valley of the Zayul river. We crossed a trickle of water where peasant women waited to fill their stove-pipe wooden pots. A group of monks, in red-brown robes of felt, came softly up the path on an evening stroll, fingering their rosaries. Utterly unexpected, a sheer white wall, leaning slightly back from the vertical and roofed with wood, loomed up on the ridge to our right. A few steps farther and we saw it was one side of a great four-square building. My first thought was, "Good Lord! somebody's built a hotel!"

"Typical Tibetan architecture," remarked Ron with composure.

It was my first sight of a Tibetan monastery, and I had the sensation of entering a lost world, undisputed by the plain fact that two Englishmen had seen Sangachö Dzong before us.

CHAPTER V

Among the Yellow Hats

ON the morning after our arrival I strolled out early to look round Sangachö Dzong. It was July 9th and a warm lazy sun threw long streamers of blue shadow behind buildings and trees. The open valley was a bright jewel, a harmony in palest green and light brown. The ridge, on which the lime-washed Dzong and the monastery are built in line, stretched out like the paw of some giant beast from the southern flank to the Zayul river, which here flows in a trough with sheer sides, 185 feet deep. Away to the west a group of snow peaks, the mountains of Ngagong, looked down from the head of the valley. In the barley fields at the base of the ridge, and not far from a cluster of houses, a few diminutive brown humps appeared in the green. Now and then a hump would heave and straighten, and a black head would bob up, only to dive back a few seconds later into its green burrow.

The temples and monasteries of Buddha in Tibet almost invariably occupy the most commanding position in any given stretch of valley.

“Gön-pa” in the Tibetan tongue means “a solitary place”, and is the word that is used for a monastery. All suffering, said the Buddha, comes from Thirst: the desire for success, for gratifications of the passions, for a future life. Thirst, and so suffering, must be suppressed, an ideal which can only be achieved in a monastic existence. Meditation is essential to true enlightenment, and isolation is favourable to meditation. So the monasteries of Tibet are usually built in lofty positions, remote from the common run of men. The building should be set on

the axis of the hill, and it is desirable to have a lake in sight, even though it be some miles distant. The door of the temple itself should face east, to catch the first rays of the sun; the next best direction is south-east, then south. The north is wholly bad. A waterfall is of good omen, and the main door should face it. These things add to the virtue of the place. The site should not be drained by a stream, for thereby all virtue escapes. Food and water can be brought by a feudal peasantry, who may often be seen toiling wearily up-hill with their burdens. Near Sangachö Dzong there are roughly 100 houses, comprising several villages, scattered up and down the valley, each of which takes its turn to work for the monastery without reward for two or three days. Monks are rarely seen working in the fields.

We were bidden to breakfast at the monastery, and were conducted to a long low room, dimly lit by paper-covered windows, with padded mats round the walls, in front of which stood low wooden tables. We were given buttered tea in china bowls, and little heaps of boiled rice, rather clammy, with melted sugar on top, the latter a great delicacy. The room smelt of parchment and dust and stale incense, and things very old, as in a little-used library.

The lama of Sangachö Dzong came in, and he was the only lama but one we were to meet in Tibet. There is a widespread belief in Europe and India that lamas are to be encountered everywhere in Tibet. We read of "Lamasseries" (a hybrid word) housing thousands of lamas, and every simple peasant from Tibet is labelled "lama" in the bazaars of India. In actual fact there are probably scarcely more than five hundred lamas in the whole country, for the word denotes either the incarnation of a deity, or a monk who by strenuous study and devotion to his religion has raised himself intellectually and spiritually above the mass of his fellows. So lama is not a word to be used indiscriminately. One

might as well speak of archbishops when meaning curates or lay-brothers. But at Sangachö Dzong, the lama was without doubt a lama. He was one of the small class of "self-made lamas", and as such entitled to great respect. He was known generally as "Sera Geshi"—"the learned one of Sera"—for in common with many other priests of high standing he had received his early education in Sera Gompa,¹ the monastery of the Wild Rose Fence. This monastery is two miles north of Lhasa, and now holds some 3000 monks, but it was once a small affair surrounded by wild rose bushes.² We took an immediate liking to Sera Geshi. "Of good port" most aptly describes him. He was no thin scarecrow of a priest, but humanity itself, and his sixty-odd years sat lightly upon him. We learnt that there were 108 monks at Sangachö Dzong, and that the place had been founded some 400 years ago.

Sangachö Dzong is a Yellow Hat monastery, that is to say its monks belong to the sect of the Ge-Luk-pa, or "Virtuous Style", which is now the dominant sect in Tibetan Buddhism. Its leader was Tsong-ka-pa (1358-1419) "The Man from the Land of Onions", which is the district of Amdo, near the borders of north-west China. There is a tradition that Tsong-ka-pa was taught in his youth by Nestorian Christians, but the matter is not certain, although he may well have come in contact with those priests from Mongolia, where they were strong at that time.

However that may be Tsong-ka-pa was a remarkably well-trained man, a gifted writer and a forceful orator. He set out to reform the religion. Since its introduction to Tibet in the seventh century A.D. Buddhism had suffered its ups and downs, and in the fourteenth century was at a very low ebb, corrupted by various forms of magic and sensuality imported from India. Tsong-ka-pa preached the return to the pure religion as taught by

¹The conventional spelling of Gönpa.

²Sir Charles Bell: *The Religion of Tibet*.

Gotama Buddha. Although he could not entirely drive out the magical doctrines he succeeded to a great extent. Women and alcohol were eschewed, and his followers lived an altogether more austere life than the older priesthood. He founded the great monastery of Ganden, near Lhasa, and selected yellow hats for his priests, to distinguish them from the red hats of the unreformed sect.

There are a few Red Hat monasteries still in eastern Tibet, but they rarely contain more than about thirty monks. Certainly in Kham the Red Hats appear to be regarded with distrust by the peasants. They are feared for their magical powers, but not respected as are the Yellow Hats. The few we saw seemed to me to be rather degraded specimens. They are by no means celibate.

Our repast concluded, Sera Geshi gathered up his robes, smiled and beckoned us to follow. We passed down a steep flight of slippery steps, crossed a paved courtyard, and approached a low curtain slung across the temple doorway. We were invited to look in. In the half-light could be seen two rows of monks squatted on either side of the main aisle, before each a low table supporting a pile of manuscript prayers and a bowl of tea. Like breakers on a beach their voices rose and fell, sonorously intoning the Buddhist invocations. In the dim interior burned hundreds of butter-lamps, little cups of brass with floating wicks, which gave a Rembrandtesque effect of deepened shadow in the recesses, whence the points of gilded images gleamed faintly. And over all hung the acrid smell of burning yak-butter mingled with the heavy perfume of Chinese incense.

With a party of monks, Sera Geshi led us inside, and we were shown prayer books, two feet long with wooden covers an inch thick: a rice-bowl made from a human skull: rows of gilt Buddhas, impassive of countenance: little offerings of tsamba mixed with butter: a monk's ceremonial hat, of dull yellow felt with a ridge

of wool, in shape like a fireman's helmet: scroll paintings of various deities wonderfully intricate: monstrous leering devils, painted black with red eyes and red mouths, trampling their victims: great drums, with long handles, absurdly like warming-pans, and backward curving drumsticks: a cupboard full of devil-masks, worn once a year at religious dances when the spirits of the old year are driven out. Then there were thigh-bone trumpets, skull-drums, pyramidal chortens containing the relics of lamas, smaller chortens typifying the Buddha's mercy, a suit of ancient chain-mail and a bunch of tufted spears, a stuffed yak and a stuffed goat.

I became increasingly bewildered as we passed from room to room. Devoutest worship of a lofty ideal mixed with rank ju-juism! It seemed a hopeless muddle. We came again to the courtyard and I blinked in the strong white sun. It was surely a lost world, although it had all been seen so often before. We salaamed to Sera Geshi and as I bowed over his hand he suddenly gave my beard, which was sprouting nicely by now, a tremendous tweak! I was taken completely by surprise. It was as though an archbishop had punched one in the ribs during a service. I looked up and old Sera Geshi was chuckling with delight, his own white beard waving in the wind. We went off shaking with laughter. Even if it was a lost world, there was one not-so-young schoolboy among its high priests.

Rumour had it that Kharndempa was due to arrive from Shikathang in two days, three days or five days, nobody knew precisely. There was talk of a brawl among the monks at Drowa Gompa, a small monastery lower down the valley of the Zayul river, and the Dzongpön had to settle the dispute.

But what did a day more or less matter? As the weeks went by and telegraphs and news retreated to a vague sub-existence beyond the jungle-clad border hills

to the south, we became gradually attuned to a new sense of time—or a very old one. Time was now reckoned in months, and distance in days. That would go on for two years, and then somehow one would return to Europe, and docket the days with appointments again. Meanwhile, we treated time with respect, as people do in high Asia, and time, reacting kindly, never harassed us. I never knew if it was Wednesday or Friday. It was immaterial. But dates and months were carefully chronicled.

The breath of an older world lives on in Tibet; a world of caravans creeping slowly over valley and pass by routes unknown in the west, of towns dimly known the one of the other, of quiet deep-seated feudalism, and of soft unhurriedness, so that two months' journey on foot is as nothing. In a normal day you will set out from a valley, climb to a pass one mile high, and drop to a new valley below, and you will have covered but ten miles as the crow flies, after twelve hours of weary work. A merchant will set out from Lhasa, on his stocky little pony, for eastern Tibet; he may be three months on the road, nine months, a year, who knows? It doesn't matter, simply because it doesn't matter! In four months of the hardest travelling you could just, but only just, cross the country from end to end, a distance as long as that from London to Constantinople.

We waited for Kharndempa, our host, and worked on the map. Living was good: wheat, barley, rice, sugar, tea, chillies and even cigarettes could be obtained, from stores bought from traders. The monks of Tibet, though cloistered from the vulgar world, have a nice sense of business. The sugar came from China, in little brown hemispheres like mud-pies; it is known as "red sugar". The cigarettes were from India, strong and rank, and stale after weeks of travelling, but nevertheless a boon. Cigarettes show an enormous profit to the traders of Zayul. In the bazaars of Gya-khar (the Tibetan word for India), five can be bought for one pice, about one-

twelfth of a penny, but in Zayul the price is about a halfpenny for five.

For meat we had mutton and pork, and one day a goat was bought for the whole party. The butchering was simple: Lewa stretched the victim on the gallery outside our room, Nyima Töndrup sliced its throat with a kukri, and Nyima Dorje hauled the corpse into the kitchen. Meat supplied direct from producer to consumer, a long-cherished ideal in many Western countries.

CHAPTER VI

An Oracle

OUR immediate plans were clear: as soon after Kharn-dempa's arrival as courtesy permitted, we would cross the Podung La back into the Rong Tö valley, and then proceed up the Zayul Ngu Chu¹ to its headwaters, cross the Kangri Karpo La and so reach Shingke Gompa in Pemakö, a monastery a few miles from the point reached by Bailey and Morshead in 1913, and as yet unvisited. From there we would turn north through Poyü, which was said to be a semi-independent state, and eventually some weeks or months later we would reach the Salween, a few miles beyond Shopando, a place of importance on the China Road.

We now heard that the Podung La was still blocked by snow. Accordingly we decided that I should go and inspect it while Ron stayed to work on the map.

I set off on July 12th with Nyima Töndrup and three coolies, and that night we camped in a tributary valley of the Zayul river. Nyima Töndrup's skill in the culinary art was an unknown quantity. "I have not practised for ten years," said he. "Shall a curry be made?" I gave leave to do so, and he produced a solid pudding of rice and meat, which had a distinct taste of curry.

The next day we had a stiff climb, at first through woods, then over treacherous scree, and finally up a glacier, which was crevassed in places. It rained heavily, and near the top we ran into a snowstorm. We reached the pass at 12.30 p.m. after an ascent of six hours. Visibility was nil, but as far as I could make out the pass

¹ The upper western branch of the Rong Tö Chu.

was open. We made a rapid descent and reached Sangachö Dzong again about 5.30 that evening, where I reported "All clear" to Ron.

The "merry widow" had arrived, having come on ahead of the Dzongpön's party. The Dzongpön himself would arrive in two days, or perhaps three.

The caravan had been fired on by bandits. One had been captured, and was now languishing in irons. A hundred years ago his punishment would have been simple, and effective. At the back of the Dzong, visible from our room, was a ruined mud tower, formerly a scorpion pit. Bandits and other malefactors were lowered in from the top. They took three hours to die.

The tower of scorpions is now but a grim reminder of other days. It was the only one of its kind I ever saw, and there are probably not many others, for scorpions only exist in the warmer low-lying areas such as Zayul. Flogging, as we saw it carried out at Shikathang, is now the usual form of punishment. Nearly every man (not a woman) involved in a case stands a chance of a flogging, even witnesses if their evidence is considered unsatisfactory. In the case of more serious crimes the malefactors may be mutilated, by the gouging of one eye or both, or by the severance of ears, nose, or the hands from the wrist. Theft is often punished, with poetic justice, by the severance of the hands. Capital punishment is hardly ever inflicted, since the taking of life is contrary to Buddhist doctrine.

At last on July 15th there was a general stir. A long file of riders could be seen approaching across the plain. Kharndempa was about to arrive. The riders mounted the ridge, horse-bells jingling, perched high on their hard-peaked saddles, with heels, not toes, thrust back into shortened stirrups. First came a group of servants, with slung rifles, mostly Lhasa men, with pig-tails, in black, brown or dark blue chupas and knee-high

soft leather boots. . . . Then, after an interval, came Kharndempa himself—a Tibetan of rank rides always near the middle of his retinue, his cooks and house-servants are sent in advance—then came more servants, then Tasang Tsang. Both the Dzongpöns wore silk, rather faded.

The rear was brought up by four or five retainers, also armed, and proudly bearing emblems of Western civilization: an ice-axe of Lewa's, a relic of the ill-fated Nanga Parbat expedition of 1934, and bartered in Shikathang for some cloth, then Ron's discarded topi, with its new owner's pigtail protruding quaintly below, and a pair of field-glasses, in leather case, presented to Kharndempa by Captain Kingdon Ward in 1933. The ponies all walked up the steps and in at the main door of the Dzong as though it were a Noah's Ark, and the riders bent low under the great wooden lintel.

As soon as he was settled in Kharndempa received calls from senior monks and village headmen, who came in submissively, bearing khatas. The khatas of the poorer men were merely touched with the fingers, then flung back to their owners with a lordly gesture. To return the khata of a man of rank, or even of some lower officials, would be a bad breach of etiquette.

For days we had heard a great festival was to be held in the Gompa, but exactly what was to take place was difficult to ascertain. Was it to be a devil dance? If so, we felt we were in luck. But it turned out to be even stranger than that.

July 16th was the great day, and at an early hour a party of monks assembled on the top floor of the Dzong. They sat on either side of a long low board covered with symbolical offerings of tsamba and butter, and for two full hours prayed without stop, their chanting accompanied by a gong and little rattling skull-drums. Two other monks appeared, carrying curious wide-flaring clarinets of silver and copper, studded with turquoises.

And then two other monks, with acolytes—" . . . and thick and fast they came at last, and more and more and more ". The last party drew my attention most: they carried what appeared to be two huge metal funnels, tall and narrow, and a wooden frame shaped like a lyre. The funnels were set on end. A monk gripped the top of one and pulled, and a length of copper piping shot up. Telescopes? . . . or refreshments? The monk pulled again, joint number three came to view, and the whole contraption was lifted and one end rested on the lyre-shaped frame. The other funnel was treated likewise. Comprehension dawned! They were trumpets, and with cup-like mouthpieces two inches in diameter! The monks prepared for action . . . their cheeks blew out . . . burrrgh—arrrrgh—urrrgh . . . a deep-bellied, brassy roar vibrated over the building and out to the valley beyond. With long pauses for breath this performance was repeated at intervals, apparently independently of the chanting nearby.

Kharndempa invited us to accompany him to the temple, and met us on the steps of the Dzong. He was in full dress, wearing a long robe of purple silk, high at the throat, called a " gyasok ", and his official head-gear, in the form of a lampshade, of white silk, with red silk cords hanging from the top, and surmounted by a badge of gold and turquoise. In our ordinary cloth chupas we felt like very poor relations.

We were to witness the oracular ceremony of the Mönla Chenmo, " The Great Prayer ".

As we passed under the arched gateway into the flagged courtyard of the temple, a final blare of trumpets thundered from the roof . . . and then silence. Sera Geshi approached, salaamed to the Dzongpön, and the whole party filed round the temple in a clockwise direction—in accordance with Yellow Hat law.

In the subdued light within the temple it was difficult at first to piece out the scene, but as our eyes grew

accustomed we discerned a figure of barbaric aspect seated on a high throne a few yards back from the doorway. Motley gone mad! a clowning fiend! "What on earth is it?" I whispered to my companion. But he was too absorbed to hear anything. I felt curiously tense. We were in the presence of something savage and awesome.

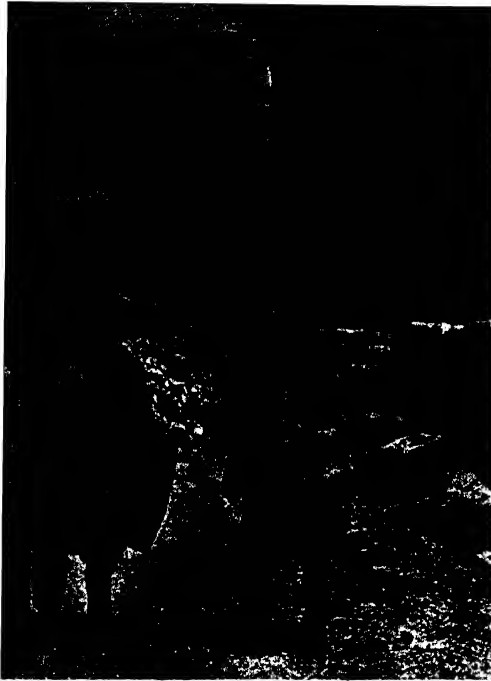
The figure sat motionless on his many-cushioned throne, enveloped in a flowing garment of overlapping silk panels, intricately embroidered in red, gold, green and yellow with writhing patterns of devils and dragons. In his left hand he clutched a bow, in his right a trident, and on his head was imposed a monstrous crown, set with three skulls and silk banners of every hue which swept and hung over his shoulders to mingle with the panels of his dress. He represented the Nechun Chökyong, the Spirit of Divination. His yellow face was oddly puckered. To right and left stood groups of monks, solemnly chanting. Some held upright the great long-handled drums, beaten with backward-curving sticks, and others wielded cymbals and skull-drums.

The drumming, gonging, rattling and chanting grew louder and louder. It formed an almost tangible body of vibrant sound, which called out, fiercely insistent, then wavered, diminished, and took strength again. It had a drugging effect, and brought to mind that noise of a surging sea which seems to beat on the ear-drums during the last moments of consciousness before one surrenders to an anæsthetic, and that black sphere which expands and contracts before the eyes, rhythmically pulsing.

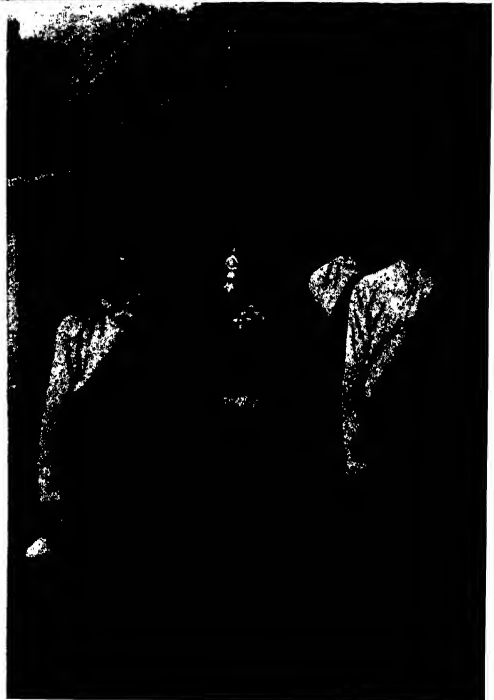
My friend turned to me and whispered, "He looks as if he's going into a trance." I shook myself out of my slightly dazed state, and glanced at the figure on the throne. One could see clearly now. The man's pupils had turned upwards into his head, he breathed heavily, in great gasps, his nostrils dilated, and his hands quivered; from time to time he gave a little impatient thump on



*Shödung Kharndempa,
Governor of Zayul, with
Ronald Kaulback and
myself (with beard)*



*Tibetan soldiers;
one carries a
prong-gun*



*The "merry widow"
at Sangachö Dzong,
in full dress, with her
family*

the floor with the trident, and sometimes his head rolled and sagged forward, at which attendant monks stretched anxious hands to save that fantastic head-dress from falling. He gave every indication of being in a trance-state. His reactions were the same as those of mediums I have watched.

Then suddenly he leapt a clear nine feet from a sitting position on the throne (an almost superhuman feat in view of his voluminous garments and with that massive headgear, probably weighing many pounds). He landed neatly on the floor without losing his balance, whirled round once or twice and then danced slowly away into the inner chamber of the temple, followed by several monks still vigorously drumming. After a minute or two he came back, twirling slowly and grotesquely, down the main aisle. His arms were outstretched, his eyes unseeing. Apparently exhausted, he sank heavily back into his place on the throne.

To judge by the slight disorder among the ranks of monks this move was unpremeditated, for the drummers, who were evidently appointed to keep up the vibrations preserving the trance-state, seemed taken unawares and rushed excitedly after the dancing figure to maintain close contact.

After a slight pause there took place a ceremony of benediction. The Dzongpön, the senior monks and ourselves, filed before the seated figure, bowed our heads and placed our palms together, and received each a khata round our necks. As my turn came I looked up and scrutinized the face of the "medium": his eyes were mere slits, only the whites showed. Repeatedly he puffed out his cheeks and blew heavily, while beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. His hands, as he presented the khatas, moved jerkily and with utter weariness.

The peasants, of whom there was a sprinkling in the temple, followed after us, their benediction being swiftly

effected by a vigorous thwack on the shoulders with a short mace.

Now the drums and cymbals were silent, and Sera Geshi approached the throne. He mounted the dais and, standing close to the medium, seemed to question him in suppliant, almost child-like whispers. He waited for the answer with lowered head, and repeated it to a monk close by, who wrote it down on a slate.

Remote and alone they were, the gaudily apparelled figure and the sombrely clad lama, unconcerned by the silent intent audience of monks and peasants.

For some minutes the murmured conversation continued, but at last the medium emerged from his trance. He was relieved of his head-dress and heavy robes, given a drink of tea, and allowed a few minutes' rest.

Once again he was robed, this time to represent the spirit Karmathrinle. In his right hand was placed a sword, and on his head a tall mitre-like hat of deep yellow papier-mâché, reminiscent of the headgear worn by the Guards in the late eighteenth century. On this occasion he went more quickly into a trance. After a few minutes he stood erect on the dais, brandished the sword aloft, a figure of demoniac fury, and hurled the weapon with tremendous violence through the open doorway into the courtyard without. Inscribed in chalk on the paving-stones were various mystical signs. Each represented some portent, and the sign by which the sword fell marked the omens, good or ill, for the ensuing year. Sometimes, it is said, Karmathrinle's aim is not so accurate. He has been known to miss the doorway, and the sword, flying haphazard through the air, has struck and severely wounded an onlooker.

There followed further benedictions, whereby we received in cupped hands a few grains of barley, and then the ceremony was at an end. Kharndempa went the round of the several chambers in the temple, and we with him; on each of the chief images a khata was

reverently laid. This concluded, the whole party adjourned to the reception room, where Kharndempa, with Sera Geshi dictating, copied down the prophecies received from the medium. The report would be sent to Lhasa, and compared with the prophecies from other monasteries. The collated reports would assist the government to frame their policy for the coming year. That year, 1935, the prophecies were good. There would be no war. That was all we were told.

The medium who acted as oracle was a monk selected by vote in the monastery. He had been in solitary meditation for twelve months, eating only a little rice daily, and had thus attained a curiously exalted state of mind. And that is about as much as we are ever likely to know of this strange ceremony. Tibet has her mysteries, and perhaps it is as well that they should remain undisclosed to this prosaic modern world.

This particular ceremony of divination is doubtless based on old Tantric rites. Buddhism, in the form it entered Tibet from India, was already adulterated with Tantrism, which is based on magic and various forms of self-hypnotism, having as their object a vision of a god or goddess. Salvation could be achieved by this close communion with the deities. Buddhism had scant chance of reaching Tibet in the original pure form as preached by Gotama the Buddha, which teaches essentially the suppression of self and the necessity for wisdom rather than faith. Ignorance, anger and lust, represented by the pig, the snake, and the dove, are the cardinal Buddhist sins. The pure Buddhism eschews worship and is essentially tolerant of other religions. But in Tibet it had to contend with Pön, the indigenous faith of the country. Pön-ists believe in innumerable spirits inhabiting mountains, rocks, rivers, trees, clouds, the air, and the interior of the earth; a belief entirely natural to a simple people living among the most majestic and awe-

some scenery in the world, frequently in solitude. Not unnaturally Tibetans accepted the form of Buddhism already tinged with Tantric magic. Even to-day, after over a thousand years of Buddhism, the old beliefs have by no means been driven out; all Tibetan peasants have a profound belief in the spirits of nature, which must be worshipped or propitiated according to their natures. The strongholds of Pön are in south-eastern Tibet and in the border countries of the eastern Himalaya. Tantrism is not to be confused with Pön; Tantrism came from northern India, Pön is native to Tibet; Tantrism is an acute study of the occult, Pön is nature worship and sorcery. Tibetan Buddhism has absorbed Tantrism; it is still fighting Pön.

CHAPTER VII

Au Revoir

IN the next two days we heard bad reports of the Podung La. It was said that on the farther side, where I had not been, the descent was by a steep ice traverse. Heavily loaded coolies were sure to be killed, and Kharn-dempa urged us to go north to Shugden Gompa and cross south into the Rong Tö valley by the Ata Kang La. We could then continue up to the Kangri Karpo La. The Ata Kang La had been crossed by the Indian pundit A-k in 1882, and by Kingdon Ward in 1933. It was a well-trodden pass. But if the Podung La, our cherished new route, was ruled out, then there was no other way.

It was a deep disappointment, but Ron settled down to consider the route from Shugden Gompa. "Of course," he said, as he pored over the map, "once we are at Shugden Gompa it will be a sore temptation to do the Ngagong Chu. We can do its source, where it starts from the lake at Shugden Gompa, and we shall reach it again at Dashing, in Poyü, but in between there'll be a blank of about seventy miles. I don't see how we can fit it in though, without losing a lot of time."

He went on with his work, and I continued to look at the map. "It's going to be a sore temptation . . ." Ron's remark started to ferment in my mind. Could that Ngagong Chu be managed, now a vague dotted line, bordered by two or three highly conjectural villages? Suppose we were to separate, and while Ron carried out our original route over the Kangri Karpo La, could I not go straight down the Ngagong Chu? We could meet later at Dashing.

“Ron, look,” I said. “I have a scheme; I hope you won’t think it too crack-brained . . .” And I outlined the plan. Ron grinned. “I thought it would be a temptation,” he said. But he accepted the idea calmly, rather to my surprise, for my knowledge of Hindustani was still weak, of Tibetan almost nil.

“There are two drawbacks,” Ron went on. “Bailey tried to get home that way in 1911, and then down through Abor country in Assam, but he couldn’t get transport from Shugden Gompa. If we can find coolies who’ll go into Poyü, it ought to work out all right, and between us we should get a good idea of the range between the Zayul Ngu Chu and the Ngagong Chu. Then there’s another thing: would you mind waiting at Dashing for a fortnight or perhaps more? From Bailey’s information it is only seven days’ march from Shugden Gompa to Dashing, but the Kangri Karpo route will probably take at least three weeks.”

“I can always go bug-hunting,” I replied.

“Well,” said Ron, “then it depends on the coolies.”

So we left it at that, and I was impatient to reach Shugden Gompa.

We arranged to start on the 19th, but Sera Geshi, who had discovered the delights of chocolate, came to call on us. He declared the 19th to be unpropitious for travelling. By no means must we start on the 19th. It happened to be the 18th day of the fifth month by the Tibetan calendar, a most unpropitious date for the start of a journey. In any case, said Sera Geshi with finality, it was the year of the Female Wooden Pig and that was entirely bad for travelling from beginning to end. We had better stay put. And Sera Geshi finished his slab of chocolate with relish.

Eventually it was admitted that we might start on the 20th, and arrangements were made for transport by means of pack-ponies and dzos.

On our last day at Sangachö Dzong we were involved

in a round of social duties, to say farewell to our many friends. The first call was on Sera Geshi at eleven-thirty in the morning. In a simple little room with plain boarded walls we sat cross-legged on padded mats and rugs opposite our host, and were plied with pieces of cold pork dipped in a piping hot sauce of chillies, together with rounds of unleavened bread. The room was stamped with the character of an ascetic. It was clean and neat, with scant elaboration, but at the far end, in slight shadow and occupying the whole of one wall, stood an altar of wood laden with a profusion of dablangs, butter-lamps, gilt figures of Buddha and coloured plaster images of innumerable deities, strewn over and draped with khatas. There was an image of Chenrezi, patron god of Tibet and incarnate in the Dalai Lamas, with four hands symbolic of his power and supernatural character, and with a thousand eyes and eleven heads, for it is Chenrezi "whose face looks every way", and his head was split in pieces with grief at the sight of depraved humanity. Next to him was his consort Dröma, goddess of mercy and queen of heaven, most beloved of deities; among her many attributes she is "The Dispeller of Grief", "The Completely Perfect", "The Excessively Vast", and "The Three-World Best Worker". There was also a figure of Tsong Kapa, and on the wall at the side were two photographs; one was of the late Panchen-rinpoche, known to Europeans as the Tashi Lama, the reincarnation of Öpame, Buddha of Boundless Light. The Tashi Lama is held by some Tibetans to be higher in religious matters than the Dalai Lama himself, for Öpame is the spiritual guide of Chenrezi. The other photograph was of the last Dalai Lama, the thirteenth in succession. The Grand Lama Sönam Gyatso was the first to receive the title Dalai (properly Talé), at the hands of a Mongol king in the middle of the sixteenth century, and although this title is commonly used by Europeans, it is almost unknown to Tibetans,

who usually refer to their god-head as the Gyawar-
inpoche, "The Great Gem of Majesty".

Sera Geshi noticed our interest in these things and tenderly lifted down a plaster image of Chenrezi, saying we should take it with us for protection on the road. His round bearded face was full of thought for us, and though at first we did not wish to take one of his treasures from him, he pressed us so earnestly we could not well refuse, and we thanked him warmly. Unfortunately the image was broken later by rough travelling. "With Chenrezi you will be safe," said Sera Geshi. "I myself have said a prayer for your journey, and all in the monastery are to pray too. The road is full of danger, and how do you know what strange Dzongpöns may do to you? Stay in Zayul; here you are known, here is your home."

"Bless his old heart," I thought. "What a delight he is." We would have done anything to please him, but the map called us on. On the morrow, we said, we must leave, but somewhen, somehow, we would return to Sangachö Dzong, and at that time we never dreamed we would be returning home that way, fifteen months later.

At length we left, but not before we had presented Sera Geshi with our contribution of twenty rupees, stuck edgewise in a little mound of rice as custom decreed. A lama of his standing is not averse to accepting a small gift of money, for though the monastery may be well supported, his own private means are often small, and little luxuries such as sugar are pleasant to an old man in winter.

We placed our hands in those of the Geshi, and he gave us his blessing, like a father to his sons. Then turning down the narrow path to the temple, we once more entered the long low reception room, where the monks gave us a farewell feast. The next time we came, they said, would we bring paints for their religious scrolls, especially red and gold, for these were hard to obtain in

Zayul? They seemed to use a form of distemper, and had never heard of oil colours.

The series of meals at short intervals was already beginning to tell on us; even Ron's ostrich-like constitution was feeling the strain. By one o'clock we had already had three full meals, including breakfast, and we were billed for three more visits, with the almost certain prospect of a banquet at each. I quailed at the thought. But courtesy was a duty; these people had done so much for us, and to refuse what was offered would be the worst of manners.

After the monasterial meal there was a short respite, and then we visited Kharndempa in his room in the Dzong. He was engaged receiving revenue, but smilingly motioned us to be seated until the business was concluded. On the floor at his feet sat a servant, who seemed to be immersed in a complicated game of counters: on a spread mat he sorted and grouped a collection of shells, short lengths of polished wood with curious markings, bean-pods, and round discs. These were the tallies used in tax-collecting. Close by stood another servant, who checked his work on a frame fitted with black beads sliding on bars, much the same as the apparatus used by children in England when learning to count, only this was not so simple, for it came from China, the home of intricate gambling and ingenious puzzles. I was fascinated, and felt that with these methods account-keeping would be a constant source of enjoyment, instead of a burden.

At last all was over; the servant made a bundle of his tallies, protruded his tongue in token of respect, and left the room. Kharndempa relaxed, took tea, and begged to be excused for the delay. An important message had arrived that day from Chamdo, and we were astounded to learn that the courier had covered the distance of nearly two hundred miles in four days over difficult country. Ponies, held ready in relays, were changed six

times a day, and the courier's coming was announced from afar by a circlet of bells on the pony's neck. So the postal system of Genghiz Khan exists to this day in Tibet, although the great Mongol never conquered his southern neighbours.

His system of couriers was naturally far more effective in the flat steppes of central Asia than it is in the mountainous gorge country of south-eastern Tibet. The Mongol relays could go at full gallop the whole way, and a thousand miles could be covered in ten days. By this means the invading hordes in Russia and Turkestan were in constant communication with the capital at Karakorum in Mongolia; whereas in south-eastern Tibet the ponies must often be led for hours at a slow walk up the roughest of paths to cross ridge after ridge rising 6000 feet or so above the valleys. And eastern Tibetans have not the enormous herds of horses at their command which the Mongols had.

Mercifully our meal was preceded by tea and talk for half an hour, and Kharndempa was as usual a perfect host. He showed us with pride a specimen of the recently issued Tibetan paper currency, a 50 trangka note, worth about 9s. 4d. These notes are used by the merchants of Chamdo, Lhasa and Gyantse, and are never seen by the peasants, who recognize only the silver and copper coins. In some parts of Tibet lumps of silver, in the shape of ponies' hooves, are used for money.

We were rather depressed to think that the country might be "going modern". Is the paper currency a portent of business efficiency in Tibet, and will the people of Kham soon know the meaning of invoice and double-entry? Will mule-trains run to time and Dzongpöns have their filing-cabinets? And where will it end? I had a horrid vision of a deodorized and white-smocked Khampa milking an unhappy yak in a hygienic stall. I shuddered. Tibet is happy in her ways, let her remain so. Let her use her bundles of tallies. Keep out the ledgers.

Kharndempa's food was as perfect as ever, and after many salutations we left, feeling distressed in our lower regions.

The next visit was to Tasong Tsang, but we did not stay long, for he was ill and tired, his leg badly bruised by a blow against a rock while riding. The journey up had exhausted him, and he was but a shadow of the jaunty old man we had known in Shikathang. His doctor, a monk, stood in the room, and Ron forbore to offer any medical advice. Months later, we heard that Tasong Tsang had died of blood-poisoning.

After another pause for breath we visited the "merry widow", and here formality was laid aside. We all laughed and chatted, and Lewa cracked jokes of a broader nature which made our hostess wriggle with delight and hide her face in her hands in mock embarrassment. She had her own turn, and said Ron should marry a Tibetan wife, who could carry the bridal bedstead over mountain passes!

The room was stacked with luggage: great wooden boxes covered with yak-hide, bulging leather sacks, and saddle-bags, gay with red and green. The Chamkusho was going to Lhasa within the month, and she was pleased as any child. Lhasa meant home, comfort, tasty food, and the society of her own kind—all the joys of the capital after provincial Zayul. There would be picnic-parties, very elaborate, for the élite of Lhasa reflect very closely the tastes of our own Elizabethan times, and they have but recently discovered the delight of riding out of town for an alfresco meal in some shady grove, accompanied by many servants and a rich equipage.

So the future was bright for the Chamkusho, and she was all a-twitter with excitement over the journey. One hundred yaks would be needed, for she was taking all her household effects, and there were some massive wooden chests and cupboards. Eight days' travelling over steep passes and the China Road would be reached at Lho-

dzong; then in three weeks, or a little more, she would again see Lha-sa (the "Holy Place") after five years' exile. Bowls of "momo" were brought, dough-pies stuffed with chopped mutton and spiced with wild garlic, served in soup, so delicious that we banished the thought of an uneasy night and ate heartily.

The party broke up with smiles and bows, and we returned to our room to sink heavily into camp-chairs. The guests at a Neronian orgy can scarcely have felt more surfeited.

Nyima Töndrup, that light of Asia, world's best unconscious humorist, trotted in with the plates.

"Dinner, sahib?" he queried.

CHAPTER VIII

Tableland

IT was with feelings of concern that I viewed the group of stocky little ponies assembled for our benefit on the morning we left Sangachö Dzong. It was said to be two long days' journey to Shugden Gompa. Our short ride at Shikathang had already convinced me of the hardihood of Tibetan horsemen. There were the same wooden saddles, thinly disguised with a piece of cloth, and at sight of them I felt thoroughly depressed.

"Are we expected to ride the whole way?" I asked despondently of Ron. But he laughed at my fears with the unfeeling assurance of an accomplished horseman.

"It'll be all right," he said; "remember they don't really trot; it's a sort of jog-trot."

Worse and worse, I thought. It was an honour, of course, for the Dzongpön to have provided ponies, and I consoled myself with that as best I could.

Kharndempa himself saw us off from the steps of the Dzong. We mounted, and filed slowly down the hill to cross the river. Even on England's gentle acres I have never achieved true riding ease, but for the next few minutes I endured the tortures of the damned. The path was steep, and far from uniform in gradient. I had liked that path when walking; now I had a grudge against it, the pony, the saddle, Tibet, and the world in general. Going downhill, I clutched the back of the saddle, my whole body on the rack, my bare knees chafing on the wooden frame. Ron turned round, gave one look at the picture of gloom I presented, and almost fell off his pony with laughter.

But the ride was not long; on the farther side of the little valley, on the crest of a ridge, we came to a prayer-gate, really a gateless frame with various invocations carved on the cross-beam. There we dismounted, and I breathed a sigh of relief. The ponies had been lent by Kharndempa for one mile as a gesture of courtesy to his departing guests; beyond the prayer-gate the path dipped abruptly over the ridge beyond the immediate purview of the Dzong. We had been given khatas as we left, and these had to be worn round the neck until we were out of sight of Sangachö Dzong, when they could be removed.

And this time it was really good-bye. The life of the monastery and the Dzong was left behind, and almost immediately we slipped back into our own little water-tight existence. We were on our own again, and there was work in the field to be done: range-finder, compass, level, and field-book were brought out. . . . "North ridge foot 1200 yards; confluence 600; bearings: 283, 39; elevations: 0, 2." And so it went on from point to point along the undulating path, mapping, observing, recording. One curtain had dropped and another lifted, revealing a new prospect, new hopes. Would we obtain those coolies at Shugden Gompa, enabling me to go down the Ngagong Chu into Poyü? Throughout the march that question was like a sky-sign in my mind . . . sometimes I hoped for snags . . . surely there would be no coolies available? "Funk," I said to myself. "You're scared you can't do it. You're for it all right, and you'll find it most undeniable fun."

A few miles up the valley we crossed a wooden bridge to the left bank of the Zayul river. By the bridge-head a man was seated, patiently working on a new mani-stone with a primitive chisel. The limestone rock was scored white with the beginnings of letters to form the mystical phrase, "Om mane padme hum". Another soul would be a step nearer to freedom from the Wheel of Life. We gave alms and passed on.

It was high summer, July 20th, and even at 11,000 feet we sweated gently as we climbed from the river level. The last of the outlying villages was left behind, and soon we came in sight of Podung, that queenly peak to the south-westward, and the glacier up which I had gone a few days before. There was no mist now—peak and pinnacle shone stark in the sunlight.

We entered a narrow valley, choked with forest and rhododendron scrub, and saw some monkeys: a species of macaque, fat reddish fellows, with stumpy tails. It seemed absurd, for only a few miles farther, after steady climbing, we came out on to bleak moorland where long-haired yaks cropped the scant grass and half a dozen stone huts, roofed with turf, seemed to cower into the hillside for warmth.

In one of these huts we also cowered for a few minutes, while grey clouds raced overhead and a stinging wind blew down from the pass. We were glad of the hot milk brought to us in wooden bowls by the yak-herd's wife, who appeared from half underground, her matted hair over her eyes and her face smeared with pitch to protect her skin from the winds. The milk gave us heart for the climb to come, and although it contained great gobbets of hair and flakes of charcoal it was rich with a good strong smoky flavour.

The hut was built rather in the open-work style, and I doubt if even Mr. Therm could have coped with the searching draughts which crept through every gap in the stones. In winter those huts would be swallowed in snow; the yak-herds come up for the grazing only in the three summer months, June, July and August.

Emerging into the open was bitter, and I deplored my flimsy shorts. It is difficult to achieve a happy mean of clothing suited to the entire range of climates which may be encountered on a day's march in the gorge country. You may, for example, leave camp at 9000 feet at 6.30 a.m. on a late summer morning with the thermometer

registering a comfortable shade temperature of 58° F.; you march along the valley and by midday it will be 85° F., without a breath of wind. You might be in the tropics. You turn up a side valley to approach a pass and the temperature diminishes gradually until at the summit, at 14,000 feet, it is 5 degrees above freezing-point, with a howling wind blowing, apparently, straight from the Arctic; there you wait for half an hour or more to take bearings and barometer readings. The day is now far gone and you camp a few miles below the pass on the farther side. At the camp, in the evening, the temperature is 50° F.; during the night it drops 2 degrees below freezing-point, and the next morning at 6.30 it is only 2 degrees higher. Then you make a short march of six hours to the valley below and arrive in time for lunch, with the thermometer hovering round 80° F. and the heat striking up from the rocks as though from a furnace.

Perhaps the Tibetan coolie has found the best solution: on a warm day he will slip the top half of his woollen chupa or reversed sheepskin from his shoulders and walk stripped to the waist, the folds bulging from his hips like panniers, but even so those garments must be terribly hot in the summer. The majority of peasants are so indifferent to changes in temperature that they will trudge cheerfully along on a blazing June day, wearing many thicknesses of felt, oblivious of the sweat streaming from every pore, while on a winter's day, with the thermometer many degrees below freezing-point, they will sit placidly in the open in a state of semi-nudity. Nyima Töndrup was of the same crazy disposition: he would march contentedly through a snowstorm in a thin cotton shirt and the next day wear two sweaters in stuffy heat without a sign of discomfort. When I asked why, he merely grinned. I think it was often just a question of convenience; he had forgotten to pack his sweaters, so he wore them.

From the hut we headed north-west up a wide sweep-

ing valley, over grass and scrub of a dull olive-green. To our left a gaunt limestone ridge stretched tumbled fans of iron-grey scree far into the valley, and through a gap in this ridge we could see, on the farther side of the Zayul river, a magnificent line of splintered rock pinnacles and snow-crested heights, rising to over 19,000 feet, between which hanging glaciers clung in white and blue-grey tiers, crumpled, torn and pitted. These peaks, the coolies said, are the haunt of evil spirits. They form part of the divide between the Rong Tö Chu and the Zayul river, and the Podung La spans a low gap in the line. Our way led gently upwards, but some three miles ahead the valley floor rose sharply and stopped at a stony ridge, bleak against the skyline. A depression in the ridge marked the pass, the Dzo La. From Bailey's map we knew we would only cross a spur of the main Tsangpo-Salween divide by that pass; on the farther slope all streams would still be tributary to the Zayul river.

We reached the crest of the Dzo La in failing light at seven in the evening. I remember little of the ascent, except a feeling of conviction that the theory of gravity was profoundly true, and a determination to make the next step, and the next; but never to look ahead to see how far it was to the top. At times we moved in a world of mist, which eddied to and fro, and the view was then limited to a few square yards of sandstone talus. Monasteries, forest, Burma, England might never have existed, only that area of dull red stones was real, and Ron's back a few yards ahead, and Nyima Töndrup's laboured breathing a few yards behind. We were bound to go on for ever; but it didn't matter, it was very peaceful, though monotonous.

At the summit we returned to reality and took barometer readings. Calculations later showed this pass was 15,832 feet above sea-level, the highest we had so far crossed, and 50 feet higher than Mont Blanc. A

forward bearing was hastily fixed to pick up on the next day. Lewa and Nyima Dorje, with the coolies and dzos carrying the baggage, were by now far ahead. Nobody in our party knew where they had camped. They were somewhere below and before us, in a great trough of grass-land edged with bare rock and snow.

Descending at a trot, we crossed a stream the colour of café au lait, an infant Brahmaputra. Dusk came, then night, pursuing swiftly, and we stumbled over cattle-tracks and stones, playing follow-my-leader. We shouted, but no answer was heard. There was a feeling through the darkness of great space on every side, as though walls had fallen; we were out of the gorge country; this was tableland, the Ngagong plateau.

At last we heard voices, saw wavering firelight, still distant, and then burst into a circle of humanity, rousing a bustle of activity, with brown, slant-eyed men, sharply shadowed, throwing more logs on the fire and screwing up their eyes at the smoke. Lewa sprang forward with two store-boxes, as chairs, and another as a table. Gratefully we stretched hands and feet to the blaze, where Nyima Dorje, his head half inside the pot, stirred vigorously at a stew. How delicious was that mess of mutton, turnips and chillies, eaten in the open at ten o'clock at night on a windy plateau two and a half miles above the sea! How soul-satisfying was that first long pull at a rank cigarette! and how rich was relief from fatigue! Fifteen miles of track lay behind us, and nearly five thousand feet of climbing. Comfort is surely like sweet cake, delightful at intervals, but disgusting as a diet.

Morning was sweet in the uplands. The air pricked our nostrils, and thin columns of smoke rose like grey thread from the brown, hump-backed tents of the herdsmen. A woolly yak-calf, three days old and scarce awakened to life, lay and blinked in the sun among a romping group of puppies and leather-smocked, straddle-

legged children. Yellow primulas, dwarf asters, some with black, some with yellow centres, blue poppies, edelweiss, and pink-and-white button-mosses covered the downland.

We returned up the valley to pick up our fixed point, and then marched all day north-west over the wide valley-floor, bounded by glaciers. We crossed the scarcely perceptible watershed; all streams now flowed towards the Ngagong Chu, tributary of the Tsangpo; we had left the Lohit basin. Yaks in hundreds were grazing, orange-beaked choughs wheeled in the air and uttered their shrill, sad cries, and marmots, rolling with fat, sat up on their hind legs, then lolloped off to their burrows and disappeared with a whisk of their rat-like tails, so absurdly small for such lumbering creatures. Safe in their holes, they would poke out their heads with an air of "Who's there?" and emit peal after peal of derisive whistles, ending in a throaty chuckle. These marmots are about three feet long from snout to base of tail, much larger than the Alpine type. Sad to relate, these cheerful beasts are hunted by beggars and travelling friars who roam the countryside, but only when there is nothing better to eat, for the flesh is fat and oily. One method of killing them is to divert a stream into their burrows; a man stands by with a cudgel and strikes them down when they emerge half drowned. This practice is, of course, strictly illegal.

We passed a great cave, called Phukgu, used for centuries as a camp-ground, and then towards evening, on the crest of a rise, we checked in great wonder: a thousand feet below was the Ngan Tso, great lake of the Ngagong tableland, black and still, with a faintly metallic lustre, and patched with silver light, in the shadow of a limestone peak to the west; the sun, dropping slow, cast a warm yellow radiance on the white-washed walls and gilt spires of Shugden Gompa, high on the eastern side, 500 feet above the water.

Lewa had gone ahead as usual with the baggage, and he sent ponies back to meet us. We mounted thankfully, undeterred in our weariness by the spartan saddles. We had marched twenty-six out of thirty-six hours. . . . There was a bridge to cross . . . a long slow climb in semi-darkness . . . white chortens loomed ghost-like, and a long row of prayer-barrels . . . then a courtyard, and flares . . . a mixed smell of pigs, dung and rancid butter, and at last a pan of live charcoal to huddle over. Then Ron's voice, drowsily: "Kingdon Ward said this place was stiff with bed-bugs," and we were asleep before dinner.

CHAPTER IX

The Parting of the Ways

THERE were no bed-bugs.

Coolies were available for the Ngagong Chu, and I felt like a rather inexperienced swimmer about to take a plunge into a pool of unknown depth.

We made plans: Ron would take Lewa and Nyima Dorje with him, Nyima Töndrup would be my sirdar, cook and general factotum. I reflected glumly on Nyima Töndrup's would-be "curry", but hoped for better things. And if he failed, it would at any rate be a pleasure to see our cook once more when the expedition re-assembled. Our meeting-place would be a good nineteenth hole after a round of gastronomic bunkers.

Ron would take the bulk of our cash, for the Pobas, the inhabitants of Poyü, were said to be light-fingered, and if it came to a row Lewa had a more intimidating personality than Nyima Töndrup. Lewa kept an eagle eye on every box and bundle; Nyima Töndrup was apt to play dormouse. So we counted out 2000 silver trangkas (about £18, 15s.) into a soft leather bag made of musk deer skin, which I locked away in one of my iron-bound cases. Afterwards, as a precaution, I changed it daily to a different box, and felt like a conspirator.

Ron's route would be the longest, so to save the extra coolie wages I would take all but a few stores, and most of the medicines. When all was arranged, Ron's party had nineteen loads, mine twenty-two. Then we waited for two days until the coolies could come in from outlying villages to Shugden Gomba.

We were in a new land, a step nearer the heart of

Tibet. Gone were the lop-sided, wooden-roofed chalets of Zayul, the bamboo thickets, the rice-fields, the sheltered valleys and green parakeets. Instead we saw low flat-roofed houses, of mud and stones, built half underground, huddled together, and dark as night within. From a distance they seemed to be covered with bare scaffold-poles; these were the racks for the harvested barley. The people were taller, and of purer breed—they were true Khampas. There was more uniformity in their clothing, they wore a plain sheepskin or chupa, and looked less like a collection of tramps than the Zayulis, with their heterogeneous assortment of hats, coloured cloth, and pieces of goral, serow or bear skin. Magpies in swarms hopped cheekily about on the biscuit-coloured roofs, with a sidling gait, bent on pilfering, or perched in a row on the back of a yak, to pick straw from the shaggy hair, and protested raucously when disturbed. Partridges whirred across the scrub at over 13,000 feet, and choughs and rock-pigeons were common. Fat grey hares ambled among the juniper bushes, comfortably immune from molestation, for the higher forms of life, excluding some domestic animals, may not be destroyed in the neighbourhood of a monastery. And winds had swept the air clean.

Hundreds of feet below the monastery a narrow river thundered through a short rock-bound gorge—the Tsengo Chu, one of the largest source streams of the lake.

I envied Colonel Bailey, the first Englishman to have seen that monastery and the quiet lake below. Each morning soon after dawn the white and grey mountains were mirrored like stalactites in the cold still water. Then about eight o'clock, a breeze would spring up from the south, and the lovely picture would vanish, as though wiped away by an invisible hand.

The Ngan Tso is almost the only lake of any size in all south-eastern Tibet—it is seventeen and a half miles long—not large as lakes go—in two great arms, the

southern half lying north and south, the northern east and west. The greater part of Kham is seamed by gorges and deep valleys, with high grasslands between, but Ngagong, in which Shugden Gompa is the focal point, is a tableland all over 12,000 feet high, of rounded, rolling hills, with great stretches of grazing country, bearing signs of intense glaciation. It is ringed by snow-covered mountains, some over 20,000 feet, between which glaciers creep. The district extends from the Dokha La in the north to the Ata Kang La and the Dzo La in the south, a distance of about forty miles. The outlet of the Ngan Tso forms the western extremity. To the east is a vague, almost uninhabited hinterland, culminating in the lofty range which divides the Tsangpo and Salween basins. The lake has formed in a trough of the tableland: along its eastern shore runs an undulating scrub-covered ridge, so that when you approach it from that side you come on it suddenly—and marvel. At the southern end the Lhagu glacier, flowing down from the Ata Kang La, ends abruptly in a great ice-cliff, visible from Shugden Gompa, and about half-way along the western shore the gaunt limestone peak of Ngagong, its upper ridges eternally sheathed in ice, flaunts the sky, rising sheer from the water's edge to over 17,000 feet. This mountain is prominent for miles around, and from it the district takes its name.

Shugden Gompa is in charge of a minor official, who takes his orders from Pashö, a first-class Dzong somewhere to the north, but whose exact position is as yet unknown. The people of Ngagong were formerly under Sangachö Dzong, but they petitioned to be placed under Pashö.

On our immediate domestic horizon lay Ron's birthday on July 23rd, and I looked round for a present. There was nothing that would be a surprise. Among our stores was an exciting-looking parcel, given by Ron's mother under strict injunctions that it was not to be opened before his birthday, but every item of our other belongings

was known intimately. Books were communal property. Then I hit on an idea: chocolate! At that time the opening of the weekly quarter-pound chocolate ration was an eagerly awaited event. Later, we did not feel the need of it, forgot about it for weeks, and doled out the surplus supplies as gifts to officials. I instructed Nyima Dorje to make such a "kek" (cake) with my ration as had never been seen. There was no baking powder, but he grinned, wiped a dribble from his nose, and set to with a will in the soot-laden kitchen. A sheep was slain, there would be a feast.

The great day dawned and we opened the mysterious parcel. There were Terry's chocolate, butter-scotch, and Romary cheese-biscuits, unheard-of luxuries, and Ron's mother had actually put in two packets of each. It was a nice thought. Ron divided the spoils. Later, the servants came in, suppressed excitement writ large on their faces, with Lewa proudly bearing what he called a "Nepali Kek". It was a heavy pudding of tsamba, butter, and Tibetan cheese, with a pink sauce made from a vegetable dye poured over the top. It was divided with due ceremony among the five of us, and with equal ceremony we all munched our portions. After two mouthfuls I felt I had had the fullest meal of my life; I feigned enjoyment as long as I could, and secreted the remains. Baksheesh was distributed, and at intervals during the day we were plied with chang, buttered tea, and hot milk. Then came the birthday "kek", rather soggy and tasting of pear-drops, "iced" with chocolate and butter. It was a parody of a cake, but vastly appreciated by Ron. Finally we tackled a gargantuan evening meal of mutton soup, several sausages, black with blood, a steak and kidney pie, and a Christmas pudding. Nyima Dorje had his own ideas about a feast. At dead of night we fled to the primitive latrine: a low room of mud and wattle, with two or three oblong apertures in the floor. A howling draught whistled up through the apertures,

and one clung to a rope to avoid falling into the pit below, where pigs and cur-dogs groped.

The next morning, still feeling somewhat shaken by that frightful orgy, I set out for the western end of the lake. "Expect me at Dashing any time after August 27th," called Ron from the roof of the Dzong.

"All right," I answered. "Drop in for a week-end sometime."

Ron had arranged to leave Shugden Gompa for the Ata Kang La two days later.

I set my stop-watch, took a compass-bearing, and was off. The wood and gold roofs disappeared behind a bluff, and immediately I felt very much alone. Ron was a wonderful companion and I would miss him. I concentrated on the map-work.

I was to make only a compass-traverse of the Ngagong Chu, and of any tributaries I found. It was better that Ron should take the range-finder, and our mountain aneroid, for of the two routes the Kangri Karpo would almost certainly be the more difficult to map. My compass traverse could be checked between Shugden Gompa and Dashing, to be fixed by astronomical observation. It was unlikely that I should have a pass to cross, and I could estimate the heights of villages on the way down the river.

But there were several things to find out: was there another pass over the range to the south of the Ngagong Chu, besides the one of which Bailey had heard in 1913, and by which Ron would cross to Dashing? Was there a route leading north to the China Road? Were there any big tributaries flowing from the north? Where did the Tsangpo-Salween watershed lie, and how was it aligned? How many Dzongs were there in Poyü? Who governed Poyü? Would the people be agreeable to a stranger? They had an unlikeable reputation for robbery.

There was a job on hand, and my spirits rose. I thought of those lines:

“ To possess in loneliness
The joy of all the earth,”

Who wrote them? Questions, questions, and ahead was an unknown land.

I settled down to the march, and felt good earth and rock through my boots, and sun upon my arms. . . . That night we slept in the little village of Yöpa, with fourteen houses built of wood, for we had turned the elbow of the lake, the fjord-like walls had closed in, the climate was noticeably warmer, and fir¹ and larch grew in abundance along the shores. The sweeping winds from the Ata Kang La were baffled, and this was already a milder land. Near a village called Rau, at the bend of the lake, I had seen men breaking up a raft of building wood, floated up from near the outflow.

For the first day and half of the second my baggage was carried on dzos. After that, it was said, there was a deep and difficult gorge to negotiate. Only men on foot could pass.

On a morning of mist we approached the end of the lake, which grew ever narrower until, with a roar of rapids, it merged almost imperceptibly into the yellow, swollen torrent of the Ngagong Chu, fifty yards wide, and flowing at about seven knots.

In a grassy meadow the coolies sat down firmly for lunch, and invited me to join them. Thus far, I gathered, Kingdon Ward had come in 1933, and beyond was unexplored country. The pack-animals would now be sent back, and the coolies needed refreshment for their labours to come. They had a grudge. The Pobas were allowed guns, but edicts from Pashö were so stringent that they themselves dared not possess any. So they kept on the right side of the Pobas when visiting their country.

¹ *Picea Likiangensis*.

But they were Khampas, and proud of it, and one of them displayed his long Khampa sword, a straight-bladed weapon in a battered wooden sheath, covered with leather, and with a handle of worn grey shark skin. This shark skin comes from China; it is not really "shagreen", but is the rough unpolished skin, with a surface as of numerous small pearls, which provides a good grip on a sword hilt. Poyü was a foreign country, the first village in it would be reached the next day, and quarrels had been known to arise between Pobas and Khampas.

We entered a gorge, with sheer cliffs 1000 feet high; at times the path crept round the precipice on shaky galleries, two or three feet wide, supported on ledges or horizontal wooden piles, built out from the rock. Once we crossed a side-gorge and a gallery zig-zagged into it, 500 feet down. I could have dropped a pebble on the head of the leading coolie, 300 feet below. We forded the stream at the bottom and another gallery led dizzily upwards. It looked like a series of herons' nests set one above the other up the almost vertical cliff, for at times the man-made structure petered out, and one scrambled over bare rock, seeking hand-holds. The coolies experienced considerable difficulty with their heavy loads, and worked hard. After nearly an hour we had only covered 200 yards in horizontal distance.

Up the side-valleys to the south of the gorge I could see traces of old glacial moraines, and now and then one of the snow peaks forming the high range to the south, which runs W.N.W. parallel with the river. It is evident that the upper levels of the Ngagong Chu valley are glacier-worn, while the gorge has more recently been carved out by water.

We met two traders returning up the valley from Dashing, bound for their homes in Zayul. They were heavily armed, with prong-guns, knife and sword. This route is one of the chief communications of Poyü with the outside world, for though it is unfit for animal trans-

port, and though snow lies three feet deep there in winter, yet it is open all the year round. Trade between Zayul and Poyü is, comparatively speaking, brisk, but it seems to be the Zayulis who take the initiative in the matter.

I began to wonder where we would find some flat ground to sleep on. Would we lie head to toe on the path? There was nowhere else apparently. But towards evening we came to a narrow terrace of level turf by the river's edge, where there was just sufficient room for a tent and two fires. I wrote up my diary and worked out the distances timed by the watch, and then, like the coolies, lay down, did nothing, and lived at my ease. Two yards away the Ngagong Chu sang the song of a great river on its way to the sea. When would that floating stick reach the Bay of Bengal? The cliffs rose on either side for 1000 feet. We were still in the gorge. How far would it go on?

It looked dark and mysterious ahead. What would Dashing be like? And what of the Pobas? Before I left Ron had said, "I shouldn't wander about by yourself any more than you need. Nobody knows much about these Pobas, and what is known is bad." I felt a little tingle of apprehension now, and it was like a glass of strong wine; combined with the keen sense of solitude—which in itself is the most finely distilled luxury of life—it imparted an under-current of expectancy even to moments of inaction. Were we running into a hornet's nest, Nyima Töndrup and I? And if we were held up anywhere it would be a difficult business to get in communication with Ron; until we met again at Dashing we would be as out of touch with each other as we both were from India. But speculation was fruitless; the thing was to go on and see. I switched my thoughts from the world of reality and dipped into *Alice in Wonderland*. All our books had been carefully chosen, with a view to reading them time and again. I had the two "Alices", a

translation of the *Koran*, *Tristram Shandy*, and a pocket volume of Shakespeare's historical plays; while Ron had several of Kipling's works, *Handley Cross*, and "Saki's" short stories. The only failure, from our point of view, was Saki, for his stories depend on an element of surprise at the end, and once that is known they lose their savour. But *Tristram* I read half a dozen times at least during the journey. The opening of a new cash-box was always a moment of literary anticipation, for our money had been packed with old copies of the *Overseas Daily Sketch*, *The Field*, *The Weekly Times*, and *The Fisherman's Gazette*, kindly supplied by Power at Fort Hertz. Sometimes we had news as recent as October, 1934, and we would take a studied interest in the doings of the Arsenal nearly twelve months before, or, when all else was read, in the account of "a nice little catch of tench in Derbyshire".

CHAPTER X

First Steps in Poyü

IN 1901 the late Dalai Lama, under the influence of one Dorjief, made overtures to the Tsar of Russia. There were rumours of a secret Russo-Chinese agreement by which China would hand over her ill-defined suzerainty in Tibet to Russia in return for the Tsar's support. The British government in India grew alarmed, the peace of the immensely long frontier from Kashmir to Burma was liable to be disturbed, and in 1904 the Younghusband Expedition was dispatched to treat with the Tibetan Government. The Dalai Lama fled to Mongolia. The expedition reached Lhasa after some fighting, and a convention was signed by which, among other concessions, a trade mart was established at Gyantse in Tibetan territory.

Then the expedition withdrew, leaving the Tibetans slightly surprised at being treated so leniently. Their monasteries were not destroyed, there was hardly any looting, and the invaders had paid handsomely for supplies. Definitely unoriental behaviour. On the whole the expedition left a favourable impression.

But now China felt her outlying province was slipping from her grasp, and in 1905 a campaign was launched under the command of General Chao-Erh-Feng. The Chinese invaded eastern Tibet: monasteries were ruthlessly destroyed, men were flogged, and whole villages were burnt to the ground. The Khampas, good fighters over a short period, but undisciplined and poorly armed, offered little resistance. Kham lay in the grip of Peking.

The conquerors penetrated south of Shikathang and encroached on the frontier of Assam. They actually crossed into the Delei valley, in the Mishmi Hills, and established a small post there. But those grim hill jungles proved too inhospitable even for a Chinaman, and the post was soon after abandoned. In 1910 Lhasa was taken, but in 1911 the Chinese revolution broke out, the invading troops mutinied, and were eventually repatriated through India. By 1912, Tibet had achieved a greater measure of independence than ever before.

The yellow tide ebbed, leaving in its wake a ravaged land. It was an almost superhuman campaign, food was scanty, transport laboriously slow, and the lines of communication enormously long. Scarcely another army in the world could have achieved what the Chinese did. The conditions were entirely to their liking; it was a case of continuous guerilla warfare, in which they have always shown themselves proficient, as has been exemplified in the war against Japan.

On the third day's march from Shugden Gompa I came on a simple reminder of that time of struggle: a prayer-gate, leaning drunkenly to one side, and a ruined stone wall a few yards long. At one end of it were the unscalable cliffs, at the other the unnavigable river. The gateway to Poyü. It looked a pathetic little defence, but in that gorge, with the narrow path the only possible line of approach, a small well-equipped force could have kept an army at bay indefinitely.

"Here the Poba-log fought the Gyami,¹ sahib," said Nyima Töndrup in his mixture of Hindustani and Tibetan, and to make sure that I should understand thoroughly what had happened, he knelt behind the wall, rested his stick on it, and assumed an attitude of alert defence. It always took a long time for an idea to penetrate into his dear old head, but once it was there it stayed there, and he would explain repeatedly and at

¹ Chinamen.

great length the marvellous new piece of knowledge, partly, I think, because he thought it must surely be as difficult of comprehension as he himself had found it, and partly in order to prove to himself that he had really got the hang of it.

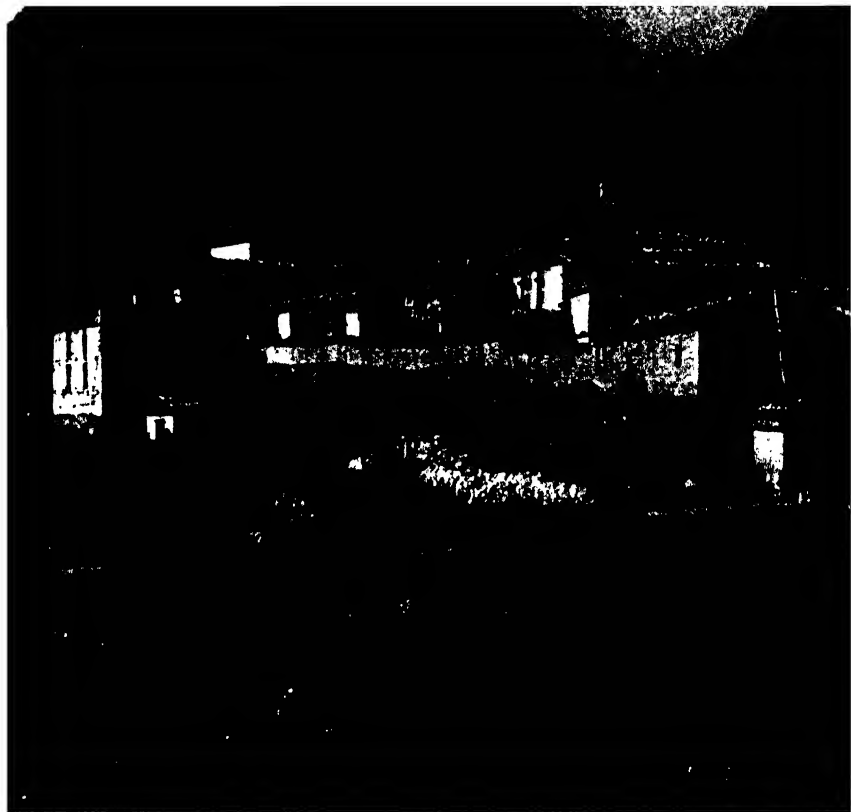
A few hundred yards beyond the prayer-gate we came suddenly upon the mouth of a forest-filled side-valley to the south, dominated from the far end by a majestic snow-peak, which then, and for several days afterwards, hid its head in a scarf of white cloud. "Kangkarhlamo" (Sacred snow goddess), said the coolies. It was the home of "Ne-ri", the mountain-spirits. All the peaks round the valley were the homes of Ne-ri. We stood at about 11,500 feet and the top of Kangkarhlamo must have been at least 10,000 feet higher.

We crossed the river by a fine wooden bridge, solidly constructed on the cantilever method. During the march I had already had an opportunity of admiring Poba handiwork. In four miles we had crossed no less than six bridges, as the path swung from side to side of the gorge. They were all firm and well-joined.

On a little headland, covered with short turf, at the confluence of the stream from the side-valley, the coolies dumped their loads and wiped the sweat from their brows. It was broiling hot. I marked down a shady spot with lush grass and weeds under a fir-tree, and lay at full length. With a howl of anguish I got up. The innocent-looking weeds were nettles of a particularly vicious brand. They were like no nettles I had ever seen, their long leaves were hairless, and they had no serrations. I felt a profound fool. Why hadn't I read botany at Cambridge? To solace myself I plucked some fruit from the wild gooseberry-bushes which grew in profusion among the junipers and dog-roses. At least I knew a gooseberry when I saw one. I swallowed a handful--and wished I hadn't: they were sourer than lemons. I flung the rest away in disgust and sat down in



*On our way up the
Migtö valley towards
Kangkarhlamo—"The
sacred snow goddess"*



*The walled monastery
at Chö Dzong, an un-
known town in Poyü*

the sun. Botany was out. But the coolies were eating the gooseberries happily, their taste unvitiated by a civilized diet of over-sweetened foods.

Nearby stood a building, with stone walls and a sloping wooden roof. I had thought at first it was a barn, but was told it was a temple, called Mi Gompa. The caretaker approached, with toothless gums and a face like a dyspeptic cab-driver. He invited me to go inside. He had the look in his eye of a head waiter who confidently expects a tip from a wealthy patron. Flattered by this unfounded belief in my financial position, I entered the temple, and was taken completely by surprise. On the walls were the most delicately painted stylised frescoes of Buddhist deities that I had yet seen in Tibet; the colours were still fresh and untarnished. I asked who had done them and was told they were by a man, long since dead, from Mig-tö (Upper Mig), the village up the side-valley, whither we were bound. The first village in Poyü, home of reputed bandits, had sheltered a master-craftsman. Land of contrasts! There were no monks, but the temple was used as a place of worship by the local inhabitants.

I decided it was time to move on to Mig-tö, and told Nyima Töndrup to rouse the coolies to action. There was some talk, and Nyima Töndrup turned to me with a look of distress.

"These men say this is the end of the day's march," he reported. "From here another stage begins, and they will want more money."

This was absurd, we had marched a little over five miles, and the arrangement had been that the Ngagong coolies would take my loads to the first village in Poyü in three days.

"Nyima Töndrup," I said, "this is bad talk. I will pay at Mig-tö, but for three marches only."

There was further argument . . . the coolies looked sullen . . . and then: "They say they will go back

from here, and wish to be paid. The Pobas will take the loads on to Migtö."

Was I to be left sitting at Mi Gompa with my twenty-two loads, and no one available but the caretaker of the itching palm? This was just the sort of thing that happened to inexperienced explorers.

"Very well," I said. "They can go back. But in that case there will be no pay at all."

I sat down to await events, and prayed fervently that they would accept my conditions. If they went back I might be stranded; for all I knew the Pobas might refuse to work; I had to retain these men till I knew the Pobas' attitude. After half an hour's discussion, they agreed to go on.

A mile up the narrow valley I met a party of five Pobas, who had heard of my coming apparently without any visible agency, and my first encounter with these people was pleasant. They carried a padded rug, which they spread on the path, and I sat cross-legged on it smoking my long Chinese pipe and feeling rather like Alice's Caterpillar, but not nearly so wise.

The Pobas sat round and grinned amiably. Conversation was at a standstill. How to while away the time until my coolies, trudging slowly along at two miles an hour, should catch me up? I decided to "astonish the natives", and passed them my field-glasses. They had some difficulty over the focusing, but once they had mastered it, there were cries of wild delight, they flung out a hand towards the mountains, then pressed the hand to their eyes, and with upturned thumbs expressed pleasure at seeing well-known landmarks appear suddenly a few inches before them. This was cheap glory, and I felt slightly ashamed. I handed round cigarettes: flint and steel were produced, and a piece of tinder set glowing. They held the cigarette and the tinder together at arm's length, and were vastly puzzled that the cigarette did not produce smoke immediately, so I demonstrated

with a match. With a hissing intake of breath they drew in the fumes, then blew out their cheeks, coughed and spluttered, their eyes watered . . . and they handed the cigarettes back. With an air of relief they brought out their own snuff-boxes.

These people were not remarkably different in appearance from the Khampas, except that they wore their hair long to the shoulders instead of in a pigtail, and they were somewhat shorter in stature. One of them had frizzy hair, which gave him the appearance of a cavalier of Stuart times. We Europeans are apt to talk rather loosely of Tibetans, but in the country itself it is only the inhabitants of the two central provinces of Ü and Tsang, with their capitals at Lhasa and Shigatse, who are esteemed to be Tibetans. The Khampas and other tribes are regarded rather as country cousins, a distinction which they themselves seem to accept. The government of Kham is in the hands of Lhasa, and in general only subordinate officials are Khampas. The Lhasa Tibetans form a ruling caste in the eastern provinces. There are differences of race, custom, dress and dialect, which become more clearly apparent on closer acquaintance.

Tibet is said to be as full of dialects as a monk's coat is of lice, and in Zayul the dialects of the Rong Tö and the Zayul river are distinct. The speech of Ngagong is different again, and when Nyima Töndrup came up with the coolies and attempted to engage my new Poba acquaintances in conversation he almost wept with despair. It was not merely a question of accent or pronunciation, many of the words were entirely different.

We reached Migtö soon after mid-day, and the headman, who had a goitre half the size of his head, wheezily offered me his kitchen as sleeping-quarters. I sat down on a rug with a bowl of tea, scratched, scratched again, picked two lice from my stocking and elected to sleep on the raised threshing floor outside. The headman

agreed to provide transport and I paid off the Ngagong men.

I had thought there might be a pass leading into the Zayul Ngu Chu valley round the east shoulder of Kangkarhlamo; up there I could see a broad saddle, from which a great glacier swept down some three miles into the valley. The headman said no, there was no pass, and in any case nobody was foolish enough to go on to the glacier, for that was the home of the Ne-ri—but, yes, there was a path to the end of the ice. I felt it was my duty, in order to complete the map, to get as near the crest of that range to the south as possible; Kangkarhlamo was quite evidently on it, and as yet I had been unable to get an intersecting bearing to fix its position, so on the next morning I engaged the headman's son to show me the path to the glacier, and together we trudged up the valley. We reached a point on the lateral moraine, and then I saw that it was not only Ne-ri which prevented the intrusion of mere man on that virgin peak. About a mile from where we stood was an ice-cliff, fully 500 feet high, its jagged spires glistening in the sun. I scanned it at length through my glasses, but could see no way up that grim barrier. The rock walls on either side appeared equally impregnable. Disappointed, I returned to the village.

The headman brought tea.

“How many Dzongs are there in Poyü?” I inquired.

“Five,” was the reply.

Five! in an area that, as far as anyone knew, was roughly only the size of Wales. It was incredible news—but it proved later to be correct. On further inquiry the headman admitted that only two were first-class Dzongs. You have to squeeze information from a Tibetan peasant: he will answer a direct question with very fair accuracy, but he will rarely volunteer a single word. Then it is difficult by inquiry alone to learn of anything beyond a ten or fifteen mile radius, for the peasant travels widely

in his own district, but only occasionally goes over its borders.

“ How many days is it to Sum Dzong?” I asked.

“ Four,” answered the headman.

(Bailey had heard of Sum Dzong in 1913; it was said to be east of Dashing.)

“ And is there a Dzongpön there?” I went on.

“ Yes.”

“ Big or small?”

“ He is a ‘ Manager ’,” Nyima Töndrup translated. This word, so oddly out of place, meant a minor official. Nyima Töndrup had a most refined vocabulary: latrine was always the “ gusl khana ”, the bathroom—and not a bath within 200 miles!

“ And where is the big Dzongpön?” I asked.

“ At Chö Dzong,” was the reply. I had never heard of it, nor, as far as I knew, had anyone else. Then, “ Is there another way from Ngagong into Poyü?”

“ Yes.”

“ Over a pass?”

“ Yes.”

“ What name?”

“ Gotsa La.”

That was interesting—would I have time to reach it?

“ Is there snow here in winter?” I went on.

“ Yes.”

“ How deep?”

“ So deep,” and the headman pointed to the threshing-floor, six feet above the ground.

“ How do you move about then?” I asked.

He rose and pulled from a corner a pair of primitive stilts, pine branches with one smaller branch cut off six inches from its base. It is the only instance I have ever heard of stilts being used in Tibet, and in other districts they would scarcely be needed, for in the dry climate of the Chang Thang (North Plain) and in the Lhasa district snow never lies at any depth, except in occasional drifts,

and in the warm moist valleys of the extreme south-east it turns to rain. But Poyü is still south of the great Tsangpo-Salween divide, against which the last of the monsoon strikes, and most of the valleys lie at well over 10,000 feet.

I tried to explain the construction of snow-shoes and skis, and the headman politely feigned interest.

Nyima Töndrup came for orders for the evening meal. We had with us a piece of mutton, and at Yöpa, with his head on one side, Nyima Töndrup had suggested curry. Reluctantly I consented. The next evening he had poked his head into my tent and inquired gently: "Iss-stew, sahib?" The result of the experiment was a stew, with a flavour of curry, and now he had a really bright suggestion—curry.

The next morning the headman complacently announced that a bridge a short way below Mi Gompa had been swept away by the river, which was now in flood, and what was I going to do?

"You will repair the bridge," I answered. But no, that could not be done, not for two months at least, when the floods went down.

"Faced with difficulty," I reflected, and: "The expedition was held up—impassable gorge—marooned!"

The Ne-ri were having their own back. With two villagers I went down to Mi Gompa, crossed the river to the right bank, and went 400 yards downstream to inspect the broken bridge. It was a depressing spectacle: two battered stumps projected from either bank and between them foamed the Ngagong Chu; there was no bamboo with which to make a rope-bridge, as at Shika-thang, nor could I afford to buy sufficient yak-hides with which to make a leather one, and there was no way down the gorge except by the path on the left bank.

Then the two villagers pointed to the cliff facing us, and let out a wild halloo: far up among the scrub I saw two figures, a man and a woman. They had crossed the

ridge west of Mi Gompa and were attempting to descend the crumbling gorge face. We watched breathlessly. They came inch by inch down a pitch of rock, then disappeared among some bushes. A few seconds later they emerged at the head of a narrow sloping platform, flanked by a rock wall and covered with loose earth and stones, which ended in a lip with a sheer drop to the river 400 feet below. The man advanced cautiously, the woman holding his belt. Some of the loose stones slipped and cascaded over the lip, to fall with a splash into the river less than 100 yards from where we sat—and the man clung to the rock wall. I could not for the life of me make out what he was trying to do; there appeared to be no feasible way down from where he was, but then he took off his felt boots, slipped his chupa to the waist, and gingerly approached an almost vertical gully at the side of the platform. It looked suicidal, but somehow he crawled into and round the gully, followed by the woman, spread-eagled against the cliff, and before long they reached a grass-grown ledge whence the rest of the descent was simple. It was a superbly skilful exhibition, and we had front-row seats. There was then a possible way for unloaded men, but how about my boxes? A white man is ever tied to his luggage, and I blasphemed against the paraphernalia of even such a small scientific expedition as ours. How pleasant, I thought, to travel as a free agent with a chupa and a bag of tsamba!

I returned to the village and interviewed the headman. "Could not the coolies lower the loads down the cliff with ropes?" I asked. He thought not. "Then a bridge must be made," I flung back. "Somehow I must move on." He remained stubborn, but I bellowed at him, flourished my credentials, and threatened every kind of awfulness from the authorities, and eventually he agreed to form a "committee" (*sic* Nyima Töndrup), and discuss the matter with the other villagers. He disappeared with his committee like a tortoise into its shell,

and for four days all my inquiries made via Nyima Töndrup met with the response that the committee was still thinking things out, the processes of thought, I have no doubt, being helped, or hindered, by liberal potations of chang.

I waited anxiously for the committee's decision. If I could not continue down the Ngagong Chu, I would have to persuade the Pobas to carry my loads back to Shugden Gompa, and they do not care to leave their own district. From Shugden Gompa I might be able to make my way again into Poyü by that other route over the Gotsa La of which the headman had spoken. I might then strike the Ngagong Chu lower down, and proceed up it to the broken bridge; that would complete the map of the river. But I had no idea how long all that might take, it might be weeks; in any case it would involve a double journey, up the river and down it again to Dashing, and might exhaust my funds before I reached the rendezvous. Ron had by now crossed the Ata Kang La into Zayul, and was heading for Dashing. I could not wait indefinitely at Migtö. Would the committee agree to try the cliff route? It was hard enough for unloaded men, as I had seen; it would be doubly difficult with loads. But it was the only solution to my predicament.

CHAPTER XI

Starts and Stops

I MOVED camp down to Mi Gompa. Up till then I had found the valley of Migtö a truly delightful spot: the rushing stream, the quiet village, and Kangkarhlamo standing sternly aloof; beautiful though these things were in themselves, they were yet further enhanced by that magical quality of remoteness which will invest even the dreariest spot with an elusive charm—for a time. But now it all turned sour on me. I wanted to get on, and I was balked of activity. Enforced idleness took the edge off my Arcady. A party of wandering minstrels came to relieve the tedium of waiting: three women with a plaintive fiddle, cymbals, and a skull-drum, but after listening a few minutes to their monotonous dirge, I decided that my solitary vigil was the lesser evil, and immersed myself in *Alice through the Looking-Glass*—for the *n*th time of reading—would I also become “an aged, aged man, a-sitting on a gate”?

Nyima Töndrup sat and smoked, picked lice from his sweater without a trace of animosity, and made occasional calls on the committee. Our piece of mutton, oppressed by the heat, announced its malodorous presence to the world at large, and curry was no longer merely an alternative to “iss-stew”—it became an urgent daily necessity.

Now and again I made excursions up the valley, and one day I picked my way up a narrow side-gorge to emerge on to open pasture-land, dotted with sheep and dzos. In the hot summer months the main wealth of the community was banished to the higher levels, and

the valley was left to the goats. I returned to find my camp the centre of activity: fires had appeared as if by magic, and an army of coolies was assembled. The headman announced that the committee had at last consented to transport my baggage by the cliff route. On the next morning, August 1st, we climbed by a steep path to the top of the ridge. From there we had a magnificent view down the great gorge with the river a yellow thread some 800 feet below.

And then the descent began. The men, about forty in number, crawled down in small parties, grouped themselves on ledges a few inches wide, and lowered the loads one to the other with ropes. It was a magnificent piece of work, and took them about three hours. There were several women coolies, and for greater freedom of movement they slipped their chupas to the waist, displaying firm, rounded breasts; they laughed, and climbed like cats.

The Tibetan peasant lives in the belief, fostered by a feudal code, that no person of higher social standing than himself is capable of real physical exertion. A lord should take it easy. Thus it was that when my turn came to make the descent one coolie took a firm grasp of the seat of my shorts from below, another gripped my shirt collar from above, and two or three stood here and there on ledges with arms outstretched and open mouths, ready to act as fielders in case of accident. I had produced a length of yak-rope, but Alpine technique still remains an unsolved mystery in Poyü; if you want to hold on to anything while climbing in Poyü, you just grab the next fellow's sleeve and shout. But the foreign Pönpo (Lord) appeared to want his rope used, so used it should be. Light-heartedly, with whoops and halloos, my would-be helpers wove it round their feet, and round my neck, my arms and legs; it got caught up on shrubs, and dangled in knotted heaps over the precipice; those above yelled instructions to those below, and those below

yelled scorching abuse at those above; the air was thick with advice, guffaws of laughter, curses, loops of rope and flying stones. Nothing I could do would divert their well-meant attentions and let me descend alone. My hat was knocked off by a stray end of rope—it sailed down into the abyss, was deftly caught by one of the fielders and, travelling up from hand to hand, was respectfully placed on my head again by retainer No. 1, the master of the shirt collar. Two poles had been placed across the vertical gully and, weeping with mirth, I crawled across on hands and knees, the master of the shorts still firmly at his post. I felt like a performing bear. Nyima Töndrup came down with his boots tied round his neck and an almost forgotten frying-pan in one hand. Somehow we all collected together at the bottom, tea-bowls and tsamba-bags appeared, and everybody decided it was time for lunch. The general feeling was that a good time had been had by all.

The next village was Mig-me (Lower Mig), and from there I was told the path was a mule-track. It was not. At Migme the gorge had widened, the valley was moderately wooded, and the village stood in scattered groups on a wide alluvial fan, brought down by a glacial torrent to the south; but beyond it the river gradient steepened, the cliffs closed in, and some six miles from Migme the path snaked up and along the gorge-face by precarious means. There were galleries, ladders made of logs with rough steps cut out with an adze, the "common or garden" ladder of all south-eastern Tibet, and at one point an upward-sloping ledge of rock with footholds polished by countless generations. I defy the most gymnastically inclined mule to complete the course of that crazy thoroughfare. I remember reading a Swiss climbing guide in which an ascent of average hazard was described, with delicate under-statement, as "eine luftige Kletterei", a somewhat airy climb. The words convey an adequate idea of the main road from Migme.

We rounded a dizzy bluff and looked down on the river more than 2000 feet below. The cliffs, about half a mile apart, rose another 2000 feet above us. From that eagle's nest position one felt the world had been tip-tilted—the eye was drawn irresistibly up or down, vertically or diagonally, by rib after rib of soaring rock wall. The horizontal dimension was put clean out of court, and the ranks of pine-trees, many of them dead and starkly white, standing stiffly at attention like well-drilled soldiers, served only to accentuate the impression.

But it was the swan-song of the Ngagong Chu gorge, one last dramatic gesture: we dropped to the river, marched two miles along the bank, turned a corner—and the twenty-mile gorge was but a memory. In front of us lay wide fields, an open valley with distant prospects, and wooden houses raised on piles—the village of Gyong.

“*August 3rd*: One day's wait at Gyong, while the headman sent for coolies. Many fleas.” So reads my diary, and those intimate enemies seemed to move in a body from the headman's dwelling to my bedding-roll and remained there for days. Among our stores we had four small tins of Keatings', but we had set a condition on their use—a catch of fifty fleas between the hour of rising and breakfast. That minimum was reached more than once, but always we said, “There will be worse to come later”—some day that precious powder might be worth its weight in gold, and so the tins were never opened until the last month of the journey.

The Pobas are more than usually prone to the exasperating custom, hallowed by tradition, of cutting up a day's march into several stages, at each of which a lengthy wait for fresh coolies is entailed. With the mulish rigidity of a trade's union ruling each village is forbidden to trespass by one step upon the transport preserves of the next, and as a result our progress down to Sum Dzong was painfully slow.

We started off with a swing from Gyong at 7 a.m., but three miles down the valley at Rada Gomba I found an awning erected close to a bridge and a concourse of people awaited us. Chang was produced. My hosts were charming. There would be a change of coolies, and a little, a very little wait.

Up a valley to the south I could see a purposeful-looking path, leading, it was said, over the Kephuk La to the Zayul Ngu Chu. For one wild moment I entertained the idea of crossing the pass and bringing off a chance meeting with Ron on his side of the range. But it would have been a very long chance: he was most unlikely to be so far up the valley already, and no particularly useful purpose would have been served.

After an hour's wait we moved off. The coolies crossed the bridge, moved at a brisk jog-trot for 500 yards to the next village of Kephuk, and deposited their burdens with satisfied smiles which said more plainly than words, "That's that". Then they ambled happily homewards, leaving me to my fate, and I regarded their departing backs sourly. Within half an hour three of the new coolies appeared, two decrepit wrecks with swollen veins on their legs, and a depressed stripling of ten. My pile of baggage reposed forlornly in the dust. I exhorted the headman to collect the necessary coolies, with the only result that he disappeared for another half-hour. One of the wrecks said he had a friend called Lopsang who might help, and he also disappeared—"and then there were two", I reflected, and forbade the others to move. I fell into a torpor, drew pictures in the dust, and a miasma of nodding ease settled over the two coolies, Nyima Töndrup, and me. An army of ants crawled unnoticed over a naked, calloused foot. A soft blanket of inertia insulated us from impatience, and the voice of ages seemed to say, "Hush, there is always time."

At long last the men arrived and we got under way again. "Now," I thought, "this time we're really off,"

and for three full miles we made steady progress over an arid plain, bordered by scrub-covered hills.

Then by a pile of mani-stones, close to the village of Sangru, the coolies unloaded. There would be a change-over, and a wait. I sighed resignedly, and sat down. With almost indecent haste a party of seventeen men appeared immediately and prepared to shoulder their loads. "Blacklegs," I murmured: such eagerness was positively shocking. But my rising hopes of a quick get-away were doomed to disappointment: the seventeen formed the total male population of Sangru and there was no one to take the remaining five loads. The Kephuk men absolutely refused to assist, although, after some vociferous argument, two of them did volunteer each to carry a bucket. Everybody unloaded again, sat down and discussed the position. Half an hour passed. Finally some of the stouter members took double loads and we reached journey's end at Da. It was rather under a mile from Sangru.

I pitched camp in a grove of peach-trees, hoopoes fluttered round, and the villagers came to allay their curiosity—chiefly about my beard, the rumour of which had by now apparently spread throughout Poyü. The average Tibetan's face is almost hairless, although some achieve the ghost of a moustache at each end of the upper lip. Even a wispy beard—such as Sera Geshi's—is a phenomenon, and the prerogative of aged men. Safety razors are useless gifts to take on a journey in Tibet, although a pair of tweezers is sometimes welcomed. Thus it was that my facial growth achieved a distinction all its own, enhanced by the seemingly incredible tale that I was only twenty-four years of age. It was frequently whispered that I was in reality Ron's father.

It was my turn to be curious when I saw that some of the villagers of Da had vaccination marks on their upper arms. How had they come by them? Tibetans are especially liable to smallpox, and I knew that at one

time a clinic had been established at Gyantse and British doctors had given injections and instruction in the preparation of lymph. The Tibetans had been keen to learn all they could, in spite of the fact that until comparatively recent times sickness was always ascribed to the influence of evil spirits, and the services of a priest were required, who could write a charm on a piece of paper to be screwed into a ball and swallowed on a propitious date. However, the Tibetans were quick to realize the benefits of Western medicines. But in Poyü, a month's journey from Lhasa! I was told that they had been treated at Sum Dzong by a Tibetan doctor with vaccine brought from Calcutta.

The Pobas then became interested in a tattooed snake on my right fore-arm. A snake, they said, was the Spirit of Thunder. From this the talk naturally led round to medicines. Had I any to give? A variety of wounds, sores, and skin diseases was displayed for my inspection, and I dispensed bandages, zinc ointment, sulphur ointment and acriflavine in return for butter and eggs. Those that complained of aching joints were given quinine, and those with headaches were treated simply with phenacetin and castor oil. One or two of the applicants were rather vague about their symptoms, and it turned out that they desired medicine for any illness which they might have some day.

The next day there was a wait and a change of coolies, and then another change of coolies and a much longer wait, and finally the longest and most exasperating wait of all: Sum Dzong was in sight, less than a mile away, when the coolies suddenly sat down and announced they had reached the end of their stage. Laws of the Medes and Persians! But it was more than a matter of custom: the coolies came from a small village called Djota with a largely female population, while the next Tom Tiddler's ground belonged to a community both numerous and hefty, and between the two there was a constant feud, with the hearties momentarily in the ascendant.

The people of Djota prepared for a good long wait; they refused to be caught poaching, and meanwhile not a single hearty appeared. It was a ludicrous situation. I exhorted Nyima Töndrup to remember he was now a full-blown sirdar. "Be like Lewa," I said. "Get angry and shout." But Nyima Töndrup suffered from an impediment to effective shouting—he would start off with a fine bluster, then would lose heart half-way and finish up on a note of mild entreaty. Defeated, I sank to bribery and offered an extra trangka per man for that bare mile to Sum Dzong. We crossed Tom Tiddler's ground.

At Sum Dzong a comfortable room had been prepared, clean and well lit by a wide lattice window. The headman salaamed, bearing a khata and a square wooden trough containing tsamba, and I realized that a stranger in these parts can never arrive quietly and without warning; his presence is heralded for miles around from village to village, and when he turns up no one is surprised. This rather blunts the edge of any Cortez-like aspirations, but it has its compensations in creature comfort. A foreigner may come to London with nobody the wiser but the passport officer and the hotel clerk. He is at liberty to carry out whatever schemes he will, and to return as unobtrusively as he came, unless he is a criminal of note, and even then. . . . But in eastern Tibet one has about as much privacy as a film star arriving from Hollywood, and while I sipped my tea there were scufflings outside, and every knot-hole in the wooden walls was an eagerly sought point of vantage for some shining eye.

Nyima Töndrup announced the "Manager", who entered all out of breath after climbing the steep stairs. He had come from Lhasa only six months previously, and regretted it. He missed the plains and wide prospects of his native district; the deep valleys and hanging glaciers of Poyü were to him like prison walls. In Poyü

a man could not ride to the horizon, he ran like a mouse along the bottom of a ditch. Mentally I demurred: Poyü is so like a wilder, steeper, more jagged Austria, shorn of railways, smooth paths, pretty-pretty inns and tourists, and inhabited by a mediæval, haphazard and rough-living peasantry, and I was wholly content to be in it. Cur-dogs and ants are the two real disturbers of comfort; there are no leeches or bed-bugs, or mosquitoes, and only a few fleas. The Manager—his real rank was Chandzö—sighed wearily; he had six more years to go, and I but a few weeks.

“And where,” I asked, “is Chö Dzong?”

“Two days’ march up the valley to the north,” was the reply.

Sum Dzong stands at the junction of a wide valley, lying north and south, with the main valley of the Ngagong Chu. I learnt that the Manager, whose district extended to Migtö, was subordinate to the Dzongpön at Chö Dzong. Dashing lay two marches down the main valley, and it was only August 5th. I had time in hand, and decided to find out more of the country to the north. It was all unmapped. I would go to Chö Dzong, and pay my respects to authority. The Manager said he would arrange about transport, and left me to my solitary meal of stew, with my two remaining Romary biscuits as a savoury.

So Poyü was governed from Lhasa, apparently in the same way as any other district of eastern Tibet. Why then these rumours of a semi-independent state, and of Poba barbarity, of which I had seen no sign? Was it merely a peasant’s mistrust of his neighbour, a sort of clan spirit? There was more to be learnt here. That night I awoke with an uncomfortable feeling of dampness. A steady drip of rain-water from the roof was rapidly forming a small lake in my blankets. The room was not so “ritz” as it seemed at first sight. Wearily I shifted my bed and spread a ground-sheet over it.

Sum Dzong is a square-walled enclosure, with a three-storey guard-house at each corner, and within are the wood-roofed temple, with a single gilt spire like a long thin radish, the Manager's house, built about a fly-ridden courtyard where pigs wallow in the mud, and numerous small dwellings for the 100 monks. The walls are barely more than 200 yards long, with a coping of wooden tiles, and a huge door pierces one side. The whole place has an air of crouching defence. All this, said the aged abbot who called on me, was new. In the Chinese invasion Sum Dzong was sacked, and the original monastery, containing many treasures, was burnt to the ground. The abbot himself, with other villagers and monks who escaped, had taken to the hills, and for weeks they had lived like animals. But he laughed when he related how a rival force of Chinese had appeared on the scene, and the two parties had nearly wiped each other out. "There was much blood," he said. But the glories of Sum Dzong were gone, and the new temple held nothing of interest.

On the second day I lunched with the Manager, and had quite the nastiest meal I had yet tasted in Tibet; it was a mucilaginous mass of half-cold rice, with small pieces of pig rind, of undoubted antiquity, to which a few scraps of gristly meat adhered, the whole but partly cooked and covered in flies, both alive and dead. And the tea was cold, with a glutinous scum of butter swimming on the surface. Tibetan tea is as temperamental as champagne. Mixed well in the churn, with the right proportions of salt, soda and butter, and if possible oil of walnut, and kept warm in a thick earthenware pot on a pan of charcoal, it is nectar at any time of day, and almost, as is remarked with such depressing regularity of hors-d'œuvres, "a meal in itself". But allow it to grow cold and the butter will float like sargasso on a sea of chill horror.

Being rather short of presents, I gave the Manager a thick woollen shirt and a few tablets of quino-plas-

moquine, cathartic compound, and salicylate of sodium. On each packet he wrote down, at my dictation, the nature of the pains for which it was to be used, and for his own sake and the prestige of British medicines, I hope he did not mix them. I departed with his assurance that my coolies would be ready on the morrow, and that a minimum number of changes would be entailed on the road to Chö Dzong.

CHAPTER XII

A Governor of an Outpost

THE coolies assembled at an early hour on August 8th. Just before we left, the Manager came rushing up with a gaily-plumaged cock in his arms as a parting gift. I should have been warned by his evident eagerness to be rid of the creature that all was not tender that crowed, but I thanked him profusely, for it was the first fowl I had procured in Poyü. Inevitably it was tucked like an infant marsupial into someone's chupa, and it regarded me with a rheumy eye whenever I passed it.

We crossed the Chö Dzung Chu, the affluent of the main river, and marched northwards in bright sunshine up a broad level valley, over extensive grazing grounds covered with sheep, cows, goats and horses, and interspersed with patches of holly-oak and juniper.

Three lateral moraines stretch like ramparts at intervals across the valley of the Chö Dzung Chu from tributary valleys to the west. The glaciers forming them have retreated, but the moraines are of comparatively recent date, geologically speaking, for though grass-grown, they are not yet covered by trees. A glacier of enormous length must at one time have flowed down this valley, as far as Sum Dzung at least, for there the ice-worn bed, since eaten away by the river, can be seen like a terrace on the hillside.

On August 9th, I breasted a ridge and paused to rest. The coolies and tottering donkeys were far ahead, for I had stopped several times to take bearings. It was an expectant moment. What lay at the end of the march?

To the north-west I saw a sweeping valley, lightly wooded in places, and some three miles up it, huddled together at a bend in the milky-blue river, was a collection of wooden huts, half-buried in cornfields and dominated by a rambling fort-like structure. There was a shimmer of gold on the roof.

So that was Chö Dzong, the unknown capital, and somewhere in those buildings dwelt the Dzongpön, arbiter of destiny in the district.

An hour later a wrinkled Poba showed me to my tent, pitched in a little grassy enclosure, pleasantly shaded by a huge walnut tree, under the walls of the monastery.

Nyima Töndrup's faithful moon-like countenance peered out from a crowd of long-haired peasants, and shaven monks.

"Sahib," said he, "his honour the Dzongpön is sorry, there is no house; will the Sahib be pleased here? Here is his honour's servant."

An official-looking man stepped forward, his hair in a pigtail in the Lhasa style, and in his left ear was a heavy ring of turquoise and silver.

Could I, I asked, visit the Dzongpön on the morrow? Yes, it would be arranged.

In a corner of the field was a circle of trodden earth, and I asked what it was. With all seriousness Nyima Töndrup informed me it was the riding-school for the young monks. I would have given anything to see an instruction class of long-robed Buddhist monks, but it was not to be.

The official retired. And now for plans. A knowledgeable headman was called, who answered my questions patiently. What of this Gotsa La of which I had heard at Migtö, did it exist? Yes. And what of the route? Where did it lead, and in how many days? Eastwards to Rangbu Gompa, in five days' march. Good, then by crossing that pass I should join up with Kingdon Ward's route of 1933, for he had passed through Rangbu

on his way north to the Salween from Shugden Gompa. Anxiously I counted up days, and cash in hand. Yes, even with a day's wait here and there for coolies, I could return and reach the rendezvous at Dashing comfortably by the end of the month, and my little store of silver trangkas would just cover the cost. And where did the valley lead to beyond Chö Dzong, to the north-west? To the Gangri La, was the answer, and so in five days to Lho Dzong on the great China Road, and there was also a path to Chumdo, in western Poyü, another first-class Dzong—yes, there was a fork in the valley, so, and the headman drew a rough Y in the earth with a stick. Unknown and tantalizing routes, but iron laws of time and finance put them beyond my reach. The Gotsa La it would be, and could the headman find coolies? Yes, and furthermore he would sleep by the baggage, for the villagers were uncertain. I gave him a present, some cigarettes and a mirror, and we parted friends.

Later that evening a peasant came furtively. He had a skin to sell, and if caught with it would be flogged for hunting. We closed the tent door, and he drew from his chupa a beautiful snow-leopard skin, with a tail fully three feet long. He wanted sixty rupees for it, he had risked so much, but they can be bought in Calcutta for the same price or less, and we failed to strike a bargain. He slipped away into the night.

I rolled into my blankets with a pleasant feeling of accomplishment, and of anticipation. Chö Dzong was on the map for the first time, and in four days at most a new pass to cross. Life was good. But exploration is an entirely relative business, these roads and passes were known to hundreds of Tibetans, and had been for centuries, if not to us. A journey to America would still, I suppose, be exploration for a Tibetan. How was Ron, I wondered, fifty miles or so away to the south? Had he crossed the Kangri Karpo La yet? I blew out the flickering butter-lamp, and spent a night only slightly disturbed

by the surviving fleas of Gyong, still lingering tenaciously in my bedding.

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At dawn a whispering group squatted under the walnut tree. They were the younger monks, and acolytes of six years old and upwards, in mulberry coloured duffle, shyly keeping their distance but overcome with curiosity. They had never seen a European before. One chubby infant, bolder than the rest, peered round the tent-flap, finger in mouth. I looked up and he fled away chuckling, tripping over his robe. One and all vanished like smoke when breakfast was brought, for to watch a stranger at meat would be a breach of courtesy.

At ten o'clock came the Dzongpön's servant to fetch us. Along the encircling monastery wall our little procession filed, past a deep blue pool where two ducks, the first I had seen in Tibet, preened themselves in the sun, and so to the low, two-storeyed Dzong, built round a courtyard.

In the gallery a well-built man awaited me, and ushered me through a curtain into an airy room, hung with rifles, pieces of embroidered silk, and one or two religious banners. The Dzongpön motioned me to a cushioned seat, placed high with charming consideration for European peculiarities. "Shuden-ja (please sit down)," he said, and placed himself cross-legged on a low couch, covered with a bear-skin. Nyima Töndrup sat slightly apart, on a padded mat, prepared to interpret.

My host was about thirty-five years old, smooth-faced, his skin astonishingly white in comparison with the local Pobas, for he was a Lhasa man of rank. His shining black pigtail was bound carefully round his head, and from his left ear hung a long, delicately shaped pendant, of gold and turquoise, with a pearl in the centre. Clad in a long robe of plum-coloured silk, with one sleeve thrown back to expose a white jacket of fine silk, he presented a

refreshing figure of courteous sophistication, in striking contrast to the lice-ridden, dirt-caked villagers of Poyü.

Among other things I gave his honour a hot-water bottle. He was genuinely delighted with this. Tibetans of rank are so instinctively polite, it is difficult always to gauge their exact feelings. On one occasion we presented a Dzungpön with a small and cheap thermos thinking, in our ignorance, it would be a novelty, and it was accepted with every sign of pleasure. Imagine our confusion when we realized later that he possessed a quart flask handsomely cased in leather, brought from Calcutta by his own courier!

But there was no doubt about the hot-water bottle. His honour examined it carefully, laid it by his side, and patted it serenely. "Di yakpo re (this is good)," he said, "the winter here is cold, colder than in Lhasa, and then I must wear a thick coat indoors all day. But now I shall carry this about in my coat. There are no comforts here. Food is poor. Does the sahib come to collect flowers, as I have heard other Englishmen do?"

"Yes, for they are not as we have in Belait," I replied in Hindustani. "Also, I like travelling."

"That is good," he said. "I, too, love a journey, as all Tibetans. But here I must sit so much alone in the Dzung, and my wife and two small sons remain in Lhasa. I shall not see them for three years; they could not come here, to this country of rough people."

For him Poyü was nearly as remote as it was for me. Even the mail-carriers take twenty-five days to reach the capital. "But why," he continued, "do you walk? There are horses here." No Tibetan of rank ever goes on foot, if it can be avoided.

"I like to walk," I replied, "and it is easier so to collect flowers."

He smiled politely. Surely the English were very odd!

"And you are only two men, one sahib and one servant, and travel without rifles? I would not. See!

Four months ago, I was attacked in my own house by the Pobas," and he pointed to the window-frame, where bullet-marks could clearly be seen. "I had ordered a bridge to be built," he explained, "but the people refused to work, so I fined them. Then they came and surrounded the Dzong."

"Have you a guard here?" I inquired.

"Now, yes, but not at that time," he answered. "However, I had better rifles than the Pobas," and he indicated the weapons slung on the wall, four Russian magazine rifles, and one Japanese of .276 calibre, also a Belgian revolver. They had probably all come via China.

"So I drove them off," he said, and smiled with quiet satisfaction.

"Alone?" I asked, amazed.

"Oh yes, they are such good rifles."

It was all said so simply and I liked him for it. I expressed my admiration.

"After that," he went on, "I sent to Chumdo, where there are a hundred soldiers, and asked for some men. Now I have a guard of ten, and one officer."

I remembered now having seen a man wearing a khaki shirt among the crowd by my tent, but he wore an ordinary chupa over it, and I had not guessed he was a soldier.

Poyü, I gathered, had long been the Ireland of Tibet, in it but not truly of it. Passing merchants were robbed and killed, and trouble was the order of the day. The Pobas had all the advantages of home rule; they played havoc in their own mountain fastnesses and raided neighbouring tribes. Hence the disturbing rumours we had heard at Shugden Gomba. Lhasa was long-suffering, but at last she took action against the unruly province; there was some fighting, and Poyü was now under effective military control. One thing was clear: I had the Lhasa government to thank for my easy journey down the

Ngagong Chu. But I was glad it was not my job to collect the taxes.

After an hour I moved to go, but the Dzongpön pressed me to stay; his was a lonely task and a hard one. The people of the central provinces, and especially of Lhasa, are thorough-going "cockneys". They work in the outlying provinces not from choice, or from distaste for town life, as so many of our own frontier officers do, but under constraint of orders from the Kashag, the Council. They sigh for the pleasures of the metropolis, and it is even rather *infra dig* for a Dzongpön to learn the dialect of his district. Nevertheless, they are loyal to their position. Lhasa to them is by no means the hidden city it appears to Europeans, it is a place of all the luxuries, with electric light in some houses, a telegraph line to India, and good food and society.

The Dzongpön was surprised to learn that Hindustani was not my own tongue, he was under the impression that the language of India was the language of its rulers, and was puzzled when I searched for a word in my phrase-book of Hindustani. He was eager for news of India, and of the world outside Tibet. I, who had begun to think I was out of touch with things, was regarded as a purveyor of current topics. Was China at war? he asked. Not as far as I knew, I replied.

"I have heard of air-carriages," he said, "but have never seen them. Will they ever come to Tibet?"

I tried to explain the difficulties of taking off at high altitudes: "The air must be heavy, as in Hindustan. Here in the hills it is light, and will not lift the machines as they rush forward. But every year some new thing is discovered to improve the air-carriages. So in time perhaps they will come."

To ride in an aeroplane seemed to be his heart's desire, and he asked keenly about them. How big were they? How many men could sit in one? How far could one travel, and in how many hours? To the last question

I answered: "From here to Calcutta between sunrise and midday."

"I have never been to Hindustan," he said, "I would like to go, but it is difficult to obtain leave from the Kashag."

I was surprised at this, but it is a fact that though beggars and traders may travel freely down to the plains, the high-class Tibetans only go south on pilgrimage to the Buddhist shrines or on special missions. Every member of an aristocratic family, if he does not enter a monastery, becomes a government servant by virtue of his birth, and his official duties do not permit of long absence from the country.

Having inquired of my plans, the Dzongpön said he would send word through the district that I should be well received, and I was duly grateful.

A tasty meal of noodles and chopped pork, spiced with chillies, was served, and soon after I took my leave.

I then visited the "Manager" of Chö Dzong, who was in charge of local affairs and under the Dzongpön.

All this officialdom was proving a drain on my supplies of presents. Rather foolishly we had not anticipated meeting many authorities, and had come unprepared for the social life. Our best gifts, such as they were, had gone in a lump to our friends at Shikathang, and on this visit to the Manager I parted with my hat. It was a travel-stained green "pork-pie", a disreputable object, but a more acceptable gift than might appear, for the cheapest bazaar-bought Homburg from India is regarded in eastern Tibet as an adornment of great price and, except in Zayul, only those of a certain social standing possess one. Hence my battered headgear, which had first seen the light of day in Jermyn Street, was regarded as distinctly "du dernier cri", and the Manager smirked self-consciously at the applause of his friends when he perched it on his head. I may have committed a social blunder. It should have been given perhaps to the

Dzongpön. I now sported a Tibetan hat of brown felt with gold braiding and flaps of black fur, which I judged rather smart, but it was not until many weeks later that I learnt it was a coolie's mode of the lowest sort. "There is a form in these things, madam, there is a form."

CHAPTER XIII

Over the Divide

SEVEN-THIRTY a.m. on August 11th found me with the tent dismantled and boxes piled sheltering from the rain under the great walnut tree. We were to have started soon after dawn. Two coolies had so far made their appearance. At 9.30 I was still under the walnut tree, it rained harder than ever, and my coolies numbered five. . . . By 10.30 we were off. After marching some three miles down the left bank of the Chö Dzong Chu we turned north-east up the winding defile of the Jolo Chu, barely thirty yards in width. Across the narrow way at one point stood yet another reminder of the Chinese invasion, a barricade of stones and a chorten.

The coolies' backs steamed in the rain; my hat smelt of wet cat. I wondered if Ron, far away to the south near the frontier, was having the same weather, and had met leeches; on the very edge of the Assam jungles it was more than likely, and I was glad to be in pleasanter lands.

The defile widened to a steep forested valley, with terraced cultivation at the near end: there were peas, barley and turnips. Clusters of houses stood scattered over some two miles up and down the valley, comprising the village of Jolo (11,500 feet). Arrived at our abode for the night I felt in my haversack for my camera. With a sinking feeling I realized it was no longer there. I must have left it at one of my survey stations en route from Chö Dzong, ten miles back. It contained a good half of my pictures of Poyü, there was no possible chance of getting a new one, and we had another whole year in

Tibet. I cursed myself for a fool. With surprising willingness two Pobas volunteered to go back and look for it. Before midnight, having retraced three-quarters of the route, they returned with the small leather bag containing camera and a few trangkas for daily expenses. Everything was intact, and I gave a substantial reward. Poba dishonesty seemed to me more than ever a myth.

The next evening we turned north from the Jolo Chu and camped at about 12,500 feet in a densely-wooded ravine at the head of which the sharp saddle of the Gotsa La could be seen. Tall clumps of the yellow *Primula sikkimensis* grew by the stream, and many rhododendrons, but the latter were long since over. I was surprised at this turn off the main valley. I had expected to go up to the end where I could see snow peaks and a glacier. We would then, it seemed, cross only a rib of the range by the Gotsa La, and in that case there must be another pass before we reached Rangbu Gompa. On inquiry from the coolies I found this was so, and moreover, there was another pass, called the Yoni La, near the head of the Jolo Chu. That was good news, I could vary the return route from Rangbu. This excursion north of Sum Dzong was proving huge fun. I was travelling blind, for the area in question as marked on the Survey of India maps was sheer conjecture. Nine times out of ten one knows roughly what to expect when crossing a new pass, but the tenth may be stark revelation.

The fire sputtered in the damp night air, sending showers of sparks to die in the darkness. I reflected on things far away—a dinner with my brother on guard at St. James', the skirl of pipes, soft light on cut glass; the caw of rooks in English fields, lawns striped by the mower; evenings at Cambridge, with good company and beer, and wild schemes seriously discussed; headlights splitting the night, as a car rushes over the downs with a very particular She; then theatres, the rustle of silk, the mad noise of London, and peoples' faces drawn with

hurry. It was another world, "all put be'ind me, long ago and far away"—or so it seemed. But I was not alone:

"The birds have all flown to roost in the tree,
The last cloud has just floated lazily by;
But we never tire of each other, not we,
As we sit there together—the mountains and I."¹

Peace; I absorbed the ecstasy of silence through every pore, smoked a pipe and was content to be.

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At dawn we started for the pass, with mist wreathing the valley. There was a steady plod through rain-soaked woods, then up over open scree, where the only vegetation consisted of a few thistly plants, with pale blue flowers, known to botanists as "Meconopsis Horridula".

The final part of the ascent was tremendously steep and, as a result, my estimation of height went hopelessly astray. When we reached the summit I judged it to be rather under 15,000 feet, but the following year we came up to it again from the north and found by instruments that it was 16,383 feet. There was no snow on the pass itself, but a few patches lay high up on the ridge on either side.

And now came a surprise. Barren hills rolled northwards, rank on rank in regular folds, with not a sign of permanent snow and no outstanding peaks. A wide, treeless valley, green with summer pasture and flanked by bare grey slopes, ran down to the north-east, while behind me to the south the deep-gorged valleys of Poyü, streaked with glaciers and brimming with forest, lay wallowing in slow-shifting vapour. It was a rich contrast. Sunlit space to the north and misty troughs to the south. And then it dawned on me that we were on the Tsangpo-Salween divide itself! Yes, the coolies said, that stream to the north-east led away to the great river, the river whose source we hoped to find. A trickle of water oozed

¹By the Chinese poet Li-po, translated by Professor Giles.

out from the stones, pressed flat by winter snows, on either side the pass. "So you," I thought, "go down to Bengal, and you to Burma." It was a moment of chuckling, thigh-slapping glee. This great range, watershed of two of the world's greatest rivers, had taken me completely by surprise. I had no earthly right to such luck, and was glad I had not been so efficient as to calculate how near it might be.

As though blindfolded I had stumbled on one of the geographical secrets of Tibet, the true position of this part of the divide. That it was the backbone of a range and not a rib was indisputable; the difference in the country on each side proved that beyond doubt. It was impossible, as yet, to estimate its trend, but it was clear that for some miles it ran N.W.-S.E., for Kingdon Ward had crossed it in 1933 some fifteen miles north of Shugden Gompa, and I was, I knew, at least thirty miles north of the latitude of Shugden Gompa. Was it part of the Himalaya? It seemed unlikely. It was too far north. Then what happened to it farther west, or north-west? Did it form part of that range, marked tentatively on the map as the Nyenchen Tangla, which lay between the China Road and the upper reaches of the Salween? We must cross it again on our way north from Dashing to Shopando. Much would be made clear when I met Ron again, and we could settle down to draught the map. Meanwhile the relation of this range to others was a puzzle.

A pass is not normally a place to linger on, but the gods were kind and the wind dropped, so I sat by the summit cairn and savoured that moment of discovery to the full. Far to the south and south-west lay the Tsangpo, some 1800 miles in length; somewhere to the north lay the Salween, and none knew how long that was. A-k had crossed it ten days north of Lhasa, and it was already a fair-sized river, some 1500 miles from the sea. That was the highest point in its course it had been seen. Would we ever reach the source?

The divide was a striking example of the way in which a range may barricade the rainfall, and concentrate the moisture on one slope, affecting the country and its inhabitants. In this case, the monsoon from the south-west spends the last of its force on the southern side, with the result that Poyü is rain-washed and the valleys are deeply eroded. The snow on the heights does not evaporate, but consolidates into glaciers, often steep and hanging, with jagged ice-falls, so that easy passes are few, the people are cut off, and communication is chiefly along the valleys. And there seems to be a connexion, as in other mountain countries, between goitres and glaciers. Goitres can be cured by a course of iodine, but do glaciers destroy iodine in the water or in the soil? However that may be, in Zayul and Poyü, where all water is milky with the rock-flour ground out by glaciers, and where tea tastes muddy unless you load it with butter and salt, there you see monstrous goitres pendulous or protuberant from the necks of one in five of the inhabitants. Whereas to the north of the divide, where glaciers are few, this unsightly malady is rare, as I very soon found. The Dzongpön of Chö Dzong was worried that he might contract a goitre during his service in Poyü; I gave him some chlorogen, more as a faith cure than anything else.

On the drier north side of the range the high valleys are great open depressions, the weathering of the sides has not lagged so much behind the scouring of the bottom by the stream, so that the slopes are gentler than in Poyü, where the powerful torrents have cut down quicker than the valley walls could wear away. To the north there is only deep erosion where the streams have gathered volume and sought the levels of the main rivers below. In the wide uplands you can slip across low hog-backed passes, and all but the poorest men ride.

As we marched down from the pass we saw a herd of capering ponies being driven towards camp by a

rider with a long whip, and yaks and sheep grazed on the hillside. We had left the "rong-pa", the valley men, and were among the "drok-pa", the pasture men, or herdsmen. The peasants of eastern Tibet fall naturally into these two classes, and mutually benefit each other. The milk, cheese and butter of the herdsmen are exchanged for the corn, turnips and other products of the valley men. Above nearly every village there is a drokpa camp somewhere up the valley, and these camps move from pitch to pitch as the pasture is eaten down. For the next two days I saw no houses, only the low herdsmen's tents, like mole-hills in the distance, and on closer view, with their numerous guy-ropes, like giant brown beetles or Gulliver pegged down by the Lilliputians.

We came to the confluence of a tumultuous river, the Dü Chu, flowing to the north, and camped for the night. Fresh transport came up from the lower valley, mostly cows of weedy appearance. The path down the valley, I was told, led to the Lho Dzong, on the great China Road, in five days' march. The Dü Chu, of course, joined the Salween. I was sorely tempted to follow it down, but decided to stick to my original plan of exploring the route to the east.

The next morning, August 14th, we turned upstream to the south, past a mile-long lake, the Yarku Tso, dammed by an avalanche, over which the outflow spills in milk-white rapids. There was an uncanny silence about that lake. Pine-trees stood sombrely by the water's edge, and the only living creatures were pigmy hares,¹ a few inches long, with wizened dwarf faces and tiny ears, scuttling over boulders like clockwork toys. These quaint little beasts live a nomadic existence in the uplands between 10,000 and 15,000 feet. They push up in the warmer months, following the spring grass, digging new burrows as they go. In the winter they retreat to

¹ Ochotona

lower levels, but they do not appear to hibernate, as marmots do, and can be seen in hundreds even in December. Several of their skins, sewn together, make a warm lining to a coat, but they are said to be skimpy eating.

Leaving the lake and its few trees, we turned south-east up the open, level valley of the Yarku Chu. Along the meandering trail a large fat man rode towards us, followed by two servants. With a heave and a gasp he dismounted and salaamed. I felt embarrassed that he should take so much trouble to get down and greet me, and sensed his puzzlement at my democratic walking. When two Tibetan gentlemen meet on the road they smile courteously and bow, but remain in the saddle. When a minor official or trader meets a gentleman he rides up to him and dismounts to give his greeting, the gentleman acknowledging the salute without dismounting. A low-born peasant, if riding, will dismount some distance before and walk up leading his horse, then bow with upturned palms and protruding tongue. So in this case a ticklish question of etiquette was satisfactorily solved with some physical effort by the corpulent rider.

He was the "Manager" of Khangyü, a second-class Dzong down the Dü Chu valley, whither he was returning from Shugden Gumpa. I was surprised to learn that this district north of the divide is technically still part of Poyü, for it pays taxes to Chö Dzong although the people are Khampas. Tibetans show scant regard for what we call "natural frontiers"; they cannot afford to, for there are too many. So authority sweeps easily over the passes, and then will often undiscoverably cease midway down a valley. Farther south the Tibetans' conception of a suitable frontier is more understandable: they have at times penetrated down the southern slopes of the Himalayas, notably in Bhutan, Assam, and Burma, as far as a rather indefinite line where the pine forest ceases and the jungle, anathema to Tibetans, begins—an arrangement which is entirely acceptable to the native hill

tribes, who depend on the bamboo of the jungle as an Arab on his camel, but which is apt to provide some knotty problems for government surveyors.

We camped in a grassy hollow at about 14,000 feet where a stream cut down from the barren heights above. Fuel was scarce, there was only scrub, which burned fitfully, and Nyima Töndrup barricaded the kitchen from the searching wind with a rampart of boxes, and fanned the fire furiously with a plate.

Herdsmen came in with fresh butter from the scattered camps, and a mile up the valley some fifty yaks moved slowly to water, driven by small boys with slings.

I felt free and very much at home in this high-level grassland, and was loath to return to the villages.

Other passes led from this valley over the great range: the Yoni La, by which I would return to Jolo and Sum Dzong, and another direct to the Ngagong Chu, some forty miles to the south; to the east was the Deu La, our route to Rangbu, across a rib, and farther up the valley was an alternative way over the Tsaphuk La, by which I could return and so make a rough figure-of-eight course. And there were one or two smaller ones, used only by the drokpa in moving their cattle.

We were due to change coolies for the next pass, but when the question was broached the drokpa looked slightly pained. Their yaks apparently were not intended to be beasts of burden, they were destined only for the higher purposes of milk production and reproduction. A dispute arose, a man rode back to Khangyü for the Manager's verdict, and early the next morning we straggled on towards the Deu La with our collection of lean kine.

We climbed to a bleak world of scree, the bare knees of the Earth. Just so might Scotland have looked after the Ice Age, before the first wisps of grass pursued the retreating glaciers. But where common grass failed a wild garden flourished: blue poppies, dwarf asters,

primulas, and a small yellow gentian speckled with green clustered by a trickle of water and formed a narrow winding strip of bright colours between sandstone slopes bare as the desert. Then even the garden failed, and there was nothing to relieve the hard glare of the scree.

A perishing north-east wind blew across the Deu La (16,780) with teasing snowflakes, and we none of us lingered. I saw snow mountains away to the east, and I asked what they were called. But they had no names; very few mountains have in eastern Tibet, except those which possess a religious significance and are objects of pilgrimage, or one or two which are more than ordinarily prominent. In a country which is nearly all mountain you do not bother to name every one—we in England have so few, and we are more particular in these things. But passes are different; they are links of humanity, and are often given some pretty apt designation such as the White Snow Pass, the Vulture's Difficulty, or the Pass of Golden Earth. So too the smallest grazing-ground is of more importance to the peasant than the lofty peak above it, and you may find that your tent is pitched at the Place of Salt, or the Place of Meeting Streams.

We passed down a broken valley, one of Nature's slag-heaps. Scree and boulders lay haphazard as though some giant had been playing chuck-farthing with them, or had dumped out-size gravel down the slopes, and then got tired and left it all. Soon we joined another valley as bare as and deeper than the first; the stream tumbled and jostled its way down a great trough, cut and ploughed and torn by water and waste from the stony wilderness above. How could anything grow there when every shred of moisture-holding sand or dust was washed away to the valley below? You could see the processes of erosion going on all round. Gradually this great mountain mass is being weathered and carried away as so much rubble to the plains and the sea. How long will it be before these wild waters acquire the even,

gently graded condition of the sluggish Thames? Waterfalls and rapids are signs of youth in a river—the Thames is well on its way to maturity—but these rivers and streams of Tibet have a fine long period of turbulence before them. Headlong they rush to the flats of India and China in a series of leaps and drops, narrowing to a gorge, then expanding on to a plain, or pausing a while in a lake, always scouring, scouring, working their own destruction, adjusting the uneven gradient to a staid curve, until in ripe middle age they will flow sedately in one gentle sweep from watershed to estuary. The silt of ages is carried out into the sea, and desposited there on the bottom in readiness for the next great upheaval, when the bed of the Pacific, the Atlantic, or who knows what ocean, may be squeezed and forced up just as the Alps, the Caucasus, and Himalaya were forced up from the bed of that great Tethys Sea æons ago. Shells tell the story of how that sea overflowed and spread when the land masses on either side pushed up the soft bed: the little nummulites, found in the Himalaya at 16,000 feet, are also found in Hampshire. So the soft deep-sea ooze, where the shells of a myriad creatures dropped and coalesced, becomes with exposure the hard immensity of mountain limestone over which we scabble our way in a blizzard of snow. Oyster shells and Oberland, they are all one: just a reshuffling of calcium, carbon and oxygen. And the great plains, as of India, older than the mountains and the cause of all the trouble, are flat and soft to the plough.

There is an image of immortality in the mountains, but it is only an image: parts of the Himalaya are rising, and the Alps are crumbling away, blasted and split by frost and eaten away by water. Nothing is permanent, but in a fluid world of building up and pulling down, of ceaseless change and birth and life and death before our eyes, the mountains do at least have the appearance of eternal, indestructible mass. The

very sight of slopes, shifting the loads of snow and water, should warn us of the illusion, but our minds let down a shady blind against the glare of time, and we are able to enjoy and climb and sweat and freeze and feel nearer the marrow of things. The awful insulation of streets is for a time forgotten, and we feel naked, skin to skin with the earth.

As a yellowing sun haloed the ridges, we descended from the barrens and crossed an undulating plateau where sheep grazed and trickling streams led off to irrigate patches of barley. Beyond a rise of white earth and stones a valley opened out on a scale that baffled the eye: huge buttresses of sandstone, grey-mauve, yellow and red in the evening light, swept across the sky-line and dropped into space, for the valley-floor was deep out of sight.

We reached the rise, where a low mani-pile crowned the ridge, and looked down into immensity: a reddish trough, originally perhaps some fault or line of weakness in the Earth's crust, fell away to a wide, flat plain 2000 feet below, chequered with emerald barley fields: dust-brown houses, like low stacks of cardboard boxes, lined the shores of the sea of green, where the dry slopes swept down and stopped. A yellow-grey river, the Ling Chu, ran down from the south and curled away north-east, and ribbons of tracks met, separated, and met again, like ants' causeways, tracing light streaks in the darker earth, and branching aslant up the hillside to disappear questingly over a ridge. Three miles to the north on a bubble of ground a white building stood gaunt, a pale nipple on a swelling brown breast. It was the Dzong of Trashitse, The Prosperous Summit.

Down and down we swung, away from bleak space to the runways of men. Sweet scents of herbs and shrubs met us in the fields, juniper, mint and carraway. A herd of goats stepping delicately down the hillside, on tiny footholds, looked inquiringly at us, bleated in alarm with

wide nostrils, and skeltered away. Just as sunset we reached the village of Deu, seven miserable huts, crowded together and jostling for elbow-room on a knob of rock by the bank of the Ling Chu. A woman lit a bunch of green fir twigs in a clay oven, sending a column of smoke to the gods, and a black dog barked hoarsely from a rooftop, rattling his chain and shaking his red cloth collar, so like a clown's ruff.

We avoided the village as the plague after one glance; it was a rank warren and its second name was vermin. Why do people who live in the most open countries build the smallest houses? Perhaps they like to have all four walls close at hand to touch after a day with nothing nearer than the horizon, some dim sense of contrast calling for the maximum human contact in the minimum space. In a tiny house or tent you are a master, you survey your dwelling all at the same time, it wraps you like a coat, and best of all when you're tired, nothing is out of reach. As I sat in my tent in a meadow close to the village, I stretched out an arm to put down my compass and field-glasses in one corner, pulled off my boots and put them in another, picked out my chupa from the bedding on which I sat and wrapped myself in it, opened the lid of one box to find diary and pencil, used the lid of its neighbour as a dining-table, and finally went to bed by lying down instead of sitting, with the simple addition of a blanket. Not to move was the height of luxury.

CHAPTER XIV

Return to Poyü

THE Ling Chu, I was told, flowed north to the Salween, and to the south lay the road to Rangbu and Shugden Gompa. So I was on surveyed ground again, for by this route A-k had travelled on his great journey, when he had turned back from Shikathang, crossed the Ata Kang La and was on his way to Lhasa via the China Road, working as a mule-driver in a rich man's caravan. And in 1933, Kingdon Ward had passed this way to reach the Salween.

In brilliant sun we turned south up the valley, close to the turbulent river. It isn't the cold, or the wind, or the dirt that are most noticeable in Kham, though I had pictured all these things in England when thinking of Tibet. It is the light, the piercing clear light, which cuts every object sharp in its masses, and shines on rivers, dust and grass; not the unblinking light of the desert with a sky of hot hard tin, but a sparkling light, as of sun through a fountain, with a hint of blue. The light dances in the spring, dries you in summer, glares hard in the autumn when the grassland is parched yellow, and strikes brisk and clear-cut in winter when a man may bask in the sun but shiver in the shade a few feet away.

Each village—and there are several—in the Ling Chu valley is perched on some outcrop of rock, for every scrap of soil must be kept for cultivation. The soil is poor and scanty, and taxes must be paid in kind. What a different land this was from forested Poyü! Even if I had not seen the flow of streams, it was clear that a

great range had been crossed. People, houses, crops and animals were different—the watershed had left this land just short of sterile. No large trees grow in the valley—there were two at one village, but they were conspicuous for miles; paths led up to right and left to higher valleys, where patches of woodland remained above the denuded area. Each year the villagers make their life harder by cutting down their supplies of wood on the lower slopes, and the paths will grow longer till they reach the limit of timber. In many parts of Tibet there are strict regulations as to wood-cutting, but here the burden of taking thought seemed to rest with the villagers, and they were evidently a short-sighted lot. In contrast with the swaggering Pobas, they looked poor and depressed, their houses were mean hovels low to the ground, many of the children suffered from ophthalmia, and lean dogs yelped from the roofs.

Rangbu Gompa is in harmony with its austere surroundings. Severely plain, tall and long with sloping walls like some truncated white pyramid, and with wooden eaves, the monastery dominates the valley from a low hill in the centre. A stream runs down from the mountains to the west, close to the walls, and on to join the Ling Chu. Nearly touching the monastery is the Dzong, four-square and two-storied, with a flat roof from which you can look into the central yard below, soggy with mud and manure, where the baggage animals wait.

In Tibet you can almost count the roof as a floor in the house: it is used for so many purposes—a cheerful, friendly place where you winnow the barley, spread peas to dry, do weaving, sit and twirl a prayer-wheel, or merely sit. And in summer, if you happen to be up there at bed-time, you just lie down and sleep on it. In the rainy south-east, where roofs must slope, the threshing floor serves the same purpose. In England, thanks to our climate, the roof is a neglected contrivance which is only remembered when it leaks; and its social possi-

bilities remain unexploited. Which is a pity. There is a holiday atmosphere about a roof-top which dies in a room. All work there is a pleasure, and the loins of the mind are ungirded. Asia has found it out long ago, and throughout the East the latest scandal or government secret is openly discussed on long, hot nights above the stifling houses. "Tell it not in Gath, whisper it not on the house-tops." The best we do is to make a roof-garden, of a few lugubrious flower-boxes, shown hastily to guests after lunch.

West of Rangbu runs a broad swampy valley, and that way, I was told, led the path to the Tsaphuk La, an unexplored route. It was August 16th, and I would have to wait a day for coolies, before I could cross back into Poyü.

Each day now Nyima Töndrup began to liven up. He was of the type that will carry on till all's blue, happy with a little, mentally chewing the cud. He would never admit to fatigue or cold, but if I were to remark, rather fatuously, that it was undoubtedly cold that day, he would be only too glad to please, and reply, "Yes, it is." Content to be under orders, he would sit for days by the baggage, his mind one happy blank, while we made some excursion from the base. Dishonesty was beyond his mental powers. All things came alike to him: after crossing a pass at 16,000 feet he would fuss round in the evening, straightening my bedding, as though he had never been anything but a housemaid all his life, and when he came back from Everest, where white men win fame, he went to work as scullion in a hotel kitchen in Darjeeling. When we first started off from Shugden Gompa he was clearly distressed. Lewa, his guide and mentor, could no longer be sought for advice; now he would have to make great decisions, consider seriously just where the camp-chair should be placed, and in which pot he should boil the soup. He must count boxes and swear at coolies. Initiative was not his strong point, and

I thought I was in for a harassing time. When the coolies sat down to rest, he would sit down too, pull a bamboo pipe from his stocking, and look woodenly into space, never suggesting a move. More than once I had to turn back in the evening to round up stray coolies. But as the days went by he slowly crawled out of his dreamy cocoon: he walked with a brisker step, spoke sharply to coolies, made a fine show of bustle at the morning start, and even asked a question or two on his own as to routes and passes. Responsibility had edged his woolly nature.

And now at Rangbu I heard him giving tongue in a tone of authority; someone was even pleading to him. I looked into the kitchen to see what was up. He was squatting on his heels, fishing eggs from a basket and popping them into a basin of water. As bad egg after bad egg floated to the surface Nyima Töndrup's objurgations grew ever more lurid. Opposite him sat a peasant, protesting weakly as each dud was laid aside; he had never seen this trickery before, they were undoubtedly good eggs, he declared, and he had carried them a whole day's journey. For months they had been preserved for just such an occasion as this to sell them. He almost wept. A final hoary veteran all but bounded out of the water. "Kukpa, fool," scoffed Nyima Töndrup, "you are only a Khampa, an eater of lice, di yakpo ma re," and he tossed the antiquity into its basket. Five out of twenty-five passed the test. I congratulated him; eggs had not come my way for several days.

There was no resident official at Rangbu, and the Dzong, it was said, was used only as a rest-house by the Dzongpön of Pashö when he toured the district. On the morning of August 17th I heard the Pashö mail-carrier was about to leave for Shugden Gompa immediately. This was more than ordinary luck, for I had a chance of sending a letter home. The postman was the first Tibetan I had seen who seemed really badly worried about being

on time. There was good reason: he had taken over the mail from a colleague, and he had to do the next stage in one day to Shugden Gompa, over twenty miles to the south. I asked him to wait a few minutes while I hastily wrote a letter that he could pass on to Kharndempa for me. I sealed the paper, addressed it hopefully to London, packed it in a biscuit-tin, and the mail went off with a stamping of hooves. There was no knowing how long it might be before we should get such an opportunity again. Kharndempa had kindly taken charge of our last batch of letters, in July, but they had to wait until the path was clear through the Mishmi Hills, and, as we heard later, they arrived in England early in 1936. My letter from Rangbu was never heard of again; it did not reach Kharndempa.

About three-quarters of a mile from the monastery and the Dzong was a smart white building, very new in appearance. It was a La-brang, a "Lama's house", where an Incarnation of a spirit dwelt alone with his servants. La-brangs, of varying importance, can be seen all over Tibet. The Lama may be a complete hermit, with his food brought to him from a neighbouring monastery, or as in this case he may now and then make excursions into the surrounding district, or be visited with a suitable offering and a request for a special prayer for rain, health, or a safe journey. The little cells, high up on the slopes above a monastery, are also often called La-brangs, where the monks retire for meditation, to purify the soul. Every monk is required to spend part of the year in meditation; it may be only a few weeks, or several months. The nature of the confinement ranges from the absolute silence of the darkened cell into which food and water are pushed through a shutter, to the comparative ease of a furnished room where conversation with servants is indulged in. Many laymen of higher class are also expected to spend a certain time in abstinence and prayer in this way.

On August 18th I pushed off for the Tsaphuk La, heading west up the swampy valley.

We swung north-west, came again to the drokpa country, green and fresh, with straggling herds, and after a short march of only seven hours, pitched camp in a meadow ringed with stunted scrub.

The next day we marched three miles up the broad expanse, with a trickle of a stream in the centre, and then the valley branched; we turned west up the left-hand fork, then north-west again, and there ahead was a steep semicircular basin of dull-red sandstone, muddy with melting snow and scored by tiny rivulets—it was a typical corrie or cirque, the birthplace of a long-vanished glacier.

Rain come on, sullen, stinging and soaking; it formed pools in my hat, cascaded down the back of my wind-jacket, and matted the hair of the baggage animals. Our party crawled up the side of the basin, a string of insignificant blobs against a waste of sodden bare earth and broken rock. My beasts of burden were poor creatures, thin bony cattle, scarcely higher than a man's waist, and they stopped to blow heavily every few yards.

The summit of the Tsaphuk La was no sharp ridge but an exposed rump of shale, a few hundred yards across. I judged this pass to be higher than any we had yet crossed since leaving Sum Dzong, and put it at 15,500 feet. We never came to it again, but when in the following year we took a boiling-point reading on the Deu La, which gave a result of 16,777 feet for that pass, I realized that the Tsaphuk La must be close on 17,000 feet, if not higher.

It was snowing hard on the pass, visibility was nil, so I crouched by the summit cairn to wait for a chance to take bearings, and the coolies went ahead down the farther side. The cairn was a purely psychological shelter; it was barely three feet high and the wind whipped over and round it, raising goose-flesh on my knees. But in that

harsh lonely expanse it gave me the illusory assurance of being behind the wall of a house. I lay down, huddled on the stones, and wondered how long I should have to stay. I wished I had studied the art of that particular sect of Tibetan priests who are proficient in generating internal heat by some mysterious process of mind over matter. With only a thin shirt or in complete nakedness they will sit for hours in the open in the depths of winter, to all appearances without a sign of discomfort. The act is one of religious merit and requires years of intensive training, but it had always seemed to me a somewhat dismal way of spending the time. An expert of course would have scoffed at my childish half-hour in a temperature a degree or two above freezing-point; that was a tyro's exercise. Twenty-four hours at something below zero would be nearer the standard of an ace. But with the best will in the world I could not generate, my own stores of internal heat ran uncomfortably low, and after three-quarters of an hour I was glad to see the storm lifting. A few minutes longer and I was able to take a bearing down the valley.

The path led down a narrow trench, a gash in a land of black scree, and two hours later I caught up with the coolies and we came out again into the spacious pasture valley of the Yarku Chu, two miles above the point where we had turned off to ascend the Deu La. To the south, at the head of the main valley, I could now see a wide glacier, but there was said to be no way over it to the Ngagong Chu, as I thought there might be. No doubt a way could be found by a fully equipped mountaineering party, intent only on climbing, and when conditions were just right; but the Tibetan peasant does not regard mountaineering as a sport, any more than the London bus-driver regards motoring as a sport. The Tibetan can get about mountains as well as anybody, especially barefoot, and has probably greater endurance than any Swiss guide. He lives and works among moun-

tains, and gets a deal of fun in his vigorous healthy way, but he regards a pass from an entirely practical standpoint. The top of the mountain has no particular attraction for him, unless he can acquire merit in this world or the next, or both, by planting a prayer-flag up there, and bunches of tattered flags can frequently be seen on the most seemingly inaccessible summits. The Tibetan cannot rely on a supply of tourists to make mountaineering a paying profession.

Continuing down the Yarku Chu, we passed the mouth of the valley leading to the Deu La, and connected up with our previous route; I shut my compass and experienced the full joy of a busman's holiday. For nearly eighteen days on end I had counted every step of the way, checked distance with the stop-watch, taken cross-bearings on every possible ridge, village or stream—and I had begun to feel stale. But now, retracing the route down the Yarku Chu, I could march with the simple joy of the foot-loose.

We stopped a mile or two short of the Yarku Tso, that silent lake, and crossed to the left bank by a steeply sloping bridge built of two or three logs, the cracks between loosely filled with mud and a stone or two scattered on top for no apparent reason but to make the surface worse. The crazy structure dipped sharply from a beetling rock to the bank on the farther side, and the animals snorted and jibbed, their eyes wide with terror. They had every justification, for the rain had turned the logs into a Wembley water-chute. We pulled at horns and pushed at rumps, and dragged them over by main force, skidding crab-wise. At the confluence of a clear-run stream, we reached a camp-ground of long rank grass—and then dusk came with sudden rain before there was time to unload. In fifteen minutes there was not a stick of dry wood left. The coolies struck flint and steel, and anxiously nursed a glowing piece of tinder in a bundle of twigs. At last, after half an hour's effort, a smoky fire

was set going and we huddled round it under the tent-fly. The simple flint, steel and tinder succeeded where the flame of a match would have failed and left us fireless for the night.

By some miraculous stroke of fortune the die-hard drokpas of the Yarku Chu had changed their guardian attitude towards their beasts, and the next morning their spokesman brought along a string of fine yaks to transport my baggage over the Yoni La to Jolo. Standing shoulder-high above the diminutive mountain cattle, they looked like St. Bernards among a pack of lap-dogs. The mountain cattle returned rather ignominiously to Rangbu.

It was the first time we had had full-blooded yaks for transport, and although the half-bred dzo is said to be hardier and to have more endurance than its cousin, I soon appreciated the magnificent powers of these beasts. They swept up the steep narrow valley towards the Yoni La with an effortless, unconsidered gait which made short work of the ascent, and very soon, as I had to stop frequently for work, they passed clean out of sight.

Long after the coolies and animals, I reached the summit of the Yoni La (16,500 feet) at 2 p.m. A biting wind blew through the narrow nick in the ridge. There was nothing to indicate that one was on the crest of a great range: the final ascent was steep but short, one climbed out of a comparatively insignificant dell, and the path on the farther side dipped sharply down to a shut-in pasture valley. I had thought that by crossing this pass we would come into the head of the Jolo Chu valley, over the great mountain block of tumbled snow and ice which I had seen on the way up from Chö Dzong, but it was evident that, as in the case of the Gotsa La, this pass was only on the northern lateral lip of the valley. The head was apparently impassable. There were only a few patches of dirty looking, fast-melting snow on the peaks around, and I realized that these two passes crossed a short low

break in the range, the higher points of which rise to 20,000 feet. I had been extremely lucky to have reached Chö Dzong just at the right time of year to do these routes to Rangbu Gumpa. The Gotsa La and Yoni La are only open from the end of June to the middle of September, and for nearly nine months all access to Poyü is closed from the north-east. The steep approaches must be swept by avalanches till late in the spring. Even in the summer months a sudden snowfall would render them sufficiently difficult, but 1935 happened to be a dry year.

We reached Jolo late that evening, after a gruelling march of more than twenty miles. Continuing down the valleys of the Jolo Chu and the Chö Dzong Chu we reached Sum Dzong again on August 22nd. There I found the Manager engaged in a glad reunion with a long-lost brother; pending the alcoholic festivities I waited one day, perforce, until transport could be arranged for the journey to Dashing. We moved off again on August 24th, down the valley of the Ngagong Chu, and soon entered thick pine forest such as I had not seen since we left the Rong Tö in June.

I looked forward to meeting Ron again at Dashing, and to hearing the news of his trip over the Kangri Karpo La, and then to starting off together on the last lap to the Salween, our still distant goal. But anticipation was tinged with regret that my month of solitary exploring was drawing to a close. The essence of discovery is solitude. Lone travelling means busy travelling, there is scant chance of boredom; on the other hand the necessity for constant decisions, with no opportunity for discussion, can be extraordinarily wearing, and—well, anyway, I looked forward to seeing Ron.

The day ran its course: there was an interminable wait for fresh transport at a village where horse-flies swarmed and bit, and the children suffered from scabies . . . a dusty march in the stale heat that follows noon . . . the cool depths of the forest again . . . a bridge

of rough-hewn planks over a glacial torrent which pierced the valley with a shaft of chill air . . . other glaciers to the south . . . and then pine trees silhouetted black against a fanciful apricot sunset, and shadow-stencilled slopes.

At the close of the day I caught up with the transport to find a harassed Nyima Töndrup attempting to cope alone with half a dozen fractious dzos. The drivers had inconsequently left them to their own devices. Boxes lay strewn about the undergrowth and the happy animals were feeding unconcernedly with pack-saddles askew or under their bellies and loose tie-ropes wreathed in festive disarray about their horns and feet. One mild-eyed malingerer paused in a succulent meal of leaves to regard me with an air of: "What about it?" I set off in pursuit. There followed one crowded hour of strenuous work. Dimly I realized that up till then a blank wall of ignorance had separated my baggage-animals and me: I merely said to a headman: "Let there be transport," and there was, and the rest was left to the coolies, with the result that we arrived in camp sometime. It was really no more difficult than sending for Carter Paterson. But now the dzos behaved like the Lower School when confronted with a new science master: they tried every experiment they had never been allowed to do. They cavorted, they set off for the deep forest and became involved in it, they shed their saddles, they lay down and sulked. When we arrived wearily in camp with our band of truants I was out for blood: there would be no payment for the six beasts in question. The coolies blandly smiled agreement. In any case they were being paid more money for the rest of the transport than they had ever dreamed of. When a Tibetan official travels he requisitions his baggage-animals as by "droit de seigneur", and the peasants are bound to comply. Feudalism is so simple. What we paid for our transport was in the nature of a windfall to the peasants. True,

the Dzungpön took a commission, for were we not travelling through his estate? And the headman probably took a further percentage, but the peasants at least got something, and went home rejoicing. So my deduction was accepted with equanimity. When the gods have given you a mine you do not complain if it turns out to be silver and not gold.

CHAPTER XV

Rendezvous

A SHORT march the next morning brought us to Da-shing, "The House in the Wood"; a singularly apt name, for in truth the houses are so surrounded by trees that all the approaching traveller can see is a jumble of sloping wooden roofs with the gilt spire of the Gompa rising from the centre. It was August 25th. I was two days ahead of time.

We crossed the Ngagong Chu by the finest bridge I saw during our whole journey in Tibet. It was about ten feet wide and fifty yards long, built on the cantilever principle. The bases were solidly buttressed in a bed of stones and cleverly pinned with wooden wedges. There was not a single nail in its construction.

The average bridge in Tibet is a fortuitous affair: floods come suddenly and permanency is therefore frequently an undesirable feature. A few logs are set across a stream, their ends resting perhaps on a pile of stones on each bank. Occasionally heavy stones are placed on the logs, rather ambitiously, to prevent wobble. There may or may not be a surface of gravel and stones, or of small branches. One picks one's way warily. Not infrequently the structure sways from side to side, and to ride across some is to experience a distinct thrill. The smallest bridges consist of one log only, entirely suitable for bare feet, but calling for Blondin-like qualities in the wearer of boots. If the stream is shallow you avoid the bridge altogether and wade. Sometimes the matter is left to the caprices of Nature, and you must skip nimbly along a fallen tree, polished smooth by long wear and made

slippery by spray, and you battle a way through projecting branches or, renouncing pride, you go on all fours. The longer bridges, those across the great rivers, often consist of a series of wooden towers built in the river or on small islands, or of a chain of low mounds, like beavers' dams, connected by a narrow cat-walk. These seem to say: "Try me at your own risk. You may fall through, who knows? You will not be the first, nor the last." A hand-rail is a luxury. Rope-bridges are in a class by themselves and a crossing of one is an event, especially if you have much luggage, when the business may take the best part of a day. The equipment of slider and leather thongs must not be forgotten, unless you are agile, in which case you swarm across sloth-fashion. Those wishing to cross may often wait hours for their turn, but what of it? It is an opportunity to gossip, sit in the shade, sleep or beg. And on occasions there is a spice of entertainment, as when a passenger sticks in the middle.

Rope-bridges require attention, and on the whole they are carefully looked after. In the south-east, where bamboo is abundant, the making of a new rope is the work of a day, but farther north, where yak leather is used, it may take several weeks or even months. In either case a weak spot, caused by a frayed strand, would be disastrous, and so the neighbouring village is usually appointed to keep these bridges in repair, and receives a government grant for doing so. The wooden bridges are left to themselves for years, and prayer-flags are often hung in streamers across the water, on the upstream side; those who arrange them acquire merit, and the winds waft the prayers to the gods who, it is hoped, will prevent damage by flood. What need of repairs if the Heavenly Ones are left in charge? As a natural result, the bridges in time take on Heath Robinson attitudes.

But the Pobas are of a practical turn of mind, and evidently have some inborn engineering skill. Their



*Crossing
rope brid,*



(Above)

*The Salween valley,
an impassable stretch*

(Below)

*Tibetan troops at Chumdo.
"They looked smart but
uncomfortable."*



wood-carving and painting are also of a higher standard than is found in most parts of south-eastern Tibet, though hardly comparable to the standards of Lhasa. In the small temple at Dashing, which I visited soon after my arrival, the mural decorations were extraordinarily good. As in many temples the Wheel of Life was painted on the wall to the left of the entrance.

There was formerly a much larger monastery at Dashing, but the whole place is now a nest of ruins—it was destroyed when Lhasa took action against Poyü—and long grass grows between the roofless shells of once strongly built stone houses. The present wooden dwellings of the monks sprawl among the ruins.

A mile to the east of Dashing I had seen a wide, thickly forested side-valley running due south. It was the way to Shingke Gompa, over the Chindru La. That would be Ron's route from Pemakö, and I asked if there was any news of his party: "Another sahib, a big man, is he yet at Shingke?" But the headman had heard nothing. Eager to oblige, he related how two foreign Pönpos had come to Shöwa, the old capital of Poyü, many years before. He was referring to Bailey and Morshead. They had come up the Ngagong Chu as far as Shöwa in 1913, and from there onwards the river was already mapped. I sent a man with a note for Ron to Shingke, four days' journey, telling him that I had reached the rendezvous and was ready to slay the fatted yak when he turned up.

And then I prepared to wait. The days stepped leadenly. There was nothing on earth to do, except collect insects, and that I did *ad nauseam*. There were green grasshoppers in the fields, three inches long, and several species of bugs and beetles in the undergrowth, but few butterflies.

Dashing is 9088 feet above sea-level. We had descended again to the pine forests of sub-Alpine type. Round Dashing itself there are cultivated fields, with

stone walls between, or hedges of stacked thorn. Beyond this oasis of light is the forest, columnar, shadowy, silent. The damp smears your face like a sponge. One thousand feet above the river are bamboo thickets among the pines, growing on swampy ground where terraces form catchment basins. The bamboos are so many bunches of spears, close-packed and splintered, which tear a shirt to ribbons. Five thousand feet above the river you reach dwarf rhododendron scrub, eighteen inches high, and then grass, and then scree. There are no flat pastures. The cattle graze in tiers, and the ravines are corrugated with their tracks. Jagged peaks rim the valley, some so steep that no snow can cling.

Three weeks passed in a fight against boredom. Each morning, through my slit of a window, I caught a glimpse of a distant cousin of the Matterhorn, faintly flushed at dawn, rising naked and alone from the tangled forest. Its summit was nearly two miles above my room, and some four miles away in horizontal distance. Then, regular as clockwork, mists came floating out of nowhere and clothed it, and I would begin the day. Breakfast of boiled wheat and sour milk, with buttered tea. Then just one Indian cigarette, for I was down to my last few packets. I rationed myself to two a day, and allowed Nyima Töndrup the same. I would wander a few miles up or down the valley, return home, read, sleep. "The Walrus and the Carpenter" I learned by heart. I tried to pick up some Tibetan from Nyima Töndrup, but he was an uninspiring teacher. I got a piece of wood to do some chip-carving and hacked it savagely for hours. I sickened of it, went for a walk, and returned to the carving as to a drug. It rained. There was no news of Ron. For three days I had fever, and life then seemed a busy affair, dosing, sleeping and sweating. There is no malaria in Tibet. This attack must have been a hang-over from Burma. One day I climbed up through the bamboos, and tried to return down a stream, as a short way home. I

came to a waterfall and swung ape-like down the side, clinging to trees. There were more waterfalls, worse than the first, and I was forced to turn into the rip-tearing forest. Foolishly, I crossed a cliff of earth. It became so steep I had to cut footholds and handholds, gingerly, lest the whole thing break away. The earth crumbled, and for ten minutes I pawed anxiously for the next step. My left knee began to shake from standing in one position. The traverse of twenty yards took half an hour. That day I felt better, and returned home with an appetite. The fright had revived me.

On September 4th there was a quaint little ceremony: the parading of the temple prayer books round the walls. The monks wore their red and yellow silk embroidered jackets. An acolyte headed the procession, swinging a censer with smoking juniper, then came a monk, blowing a pearly-white conch shell, and after him other monks, bearing banners and gilded images. And then the peasants, bent nearly double under the huge wooden-backed prayer books. Three books formed a load. They made the tour of the walls three times and in an hour the little ceremony was over. The prosperity of the monastery for yet another year was assured by this act of devotion.

That was a red letter day, and after it I was again faced with blank monotony. My money was nearly exhausted, so I could not afford a journey to Shōwa, two days distant, or to Chumdo. The river rushed silkily by in its bed. A row of prayer-barrels spun ceaselessly in a stream. Now and then a rider would pass with jingling bells, hooves pounded across the bridge, and the bells would die away down the valley. At intervals, Nyima Töndrup brought tea. At intervals I dozed. The cigarettes were finished. Flies buzzed. Fleas bit. Mist hung like dripping fungus on the peaks. There was no news of Ron. It rained. I began to feel thoroughly Russian. . . .

“Duck, little brother duck, all things pass away,”

said the wise old peasant, and just as I was wondering if I should have to make a forced march through hostile Abor country down to India, word came from Ron. The messenger said he would arrive the next day, or perhaps the day after. This was followed by a letter from Ron himself, written on September 2nd in Pemakö. It arrived on the 9th. I was overjoyed to get it. He had been held up for lack of coolies, but would arrive on the 10th. On the 10th I heard he would arrive on the 12th. On the 11th I heard he would arrive on the 13th. I gave it up and prepared for another week's waiting.

He arrived on the 12th, at midnight. I had just gone to bed when I heard voices and scuffling. Suspecting thieves, I reached for my kukri, but it was only the first of Ron's coolies. Half an hour later, he arrived himself. I discovered another mangled packet of cigarettes, and although Ron had been marching all that day and half the night, we sat up till 3 a.m., smoking and exchanging news. It was a wild delight to speak English again for the first time in nearly two months. We stumbled over words, laughed absurdly, and both talked at once.

Ron had had trouble with coolies. He had to wait in Ata, Medrong and Purtsang. The last named was a Dawa Shung village, that is to say it owed allegiance to Lhasa alone, and was but loosely answerable to the Dzongpön of Zayul. The inhabitants were prosperous merchants from other parts of Tibet, who had been granted land and freedom from taxation if they would settle in Zayul and raise the standards of living among the boorish Zayulis, especially in matters of religion. A Gompa (monastery) was in course of construction. They formed a practically independent community, and considered themselves above the humble tasks of a coolie. They struck at crossing the difficult Kangri Karpo La, but finally agreed to do so at an exorbitant rate of pay. The pass was rarely used. The year before it had not been crossed at all. As a result the track was almost

non-existent, thickly overgrown, and for several days Ron's party had to cut its way through the tangle.

The high spot of the journey had been the appearance and subsequent behaviour of a nun. Nuns are not rare in Tibet, but are not nearly as much in evidence as the monks. Like the monks they shave their heads. They are usually met wandering about the countryside, and will recite prayers and make prophecies in return for alms. There are only a few convents. This particular nun was travelling alone, and caught up with the party three days from Purtsang. Two days later, she quietly gave birth. A loosely flowing chupa is a singularly discreet garment. It was Lewa who first discovered the addition to the caravan. He had remained in camp while the others went hunting, and heard a thin wail from a bush nearby. The child died the following day. The party moved on, and as they progressed left a pile of firewood at each camp ground for the shameless one, who would follow in a day or two. She crossed the Kangri Karpo La and eventually arrived unemotionally in Shingke, while Ron was still there. The women of Tibet give birth without fuss.

The crossing of the Kangri Karpo glaciers was difficult, and mapping had been hampered by a local compass variation of 23° , evidently due to iron ore deposits. Unfortunately the variation was not constant, and decreased gradually lower down the valley, which made its effects difficult to correct. Maps show the Kangri Karpo La as being 19,000 feet above sea-level, but Ron found this was considerably in excess of its true altitude, which is 15,461 feet. The error was due to the fact that the surveyors from the Assam side of the range had not actually seen the pass at all, and had mistaken another smaller one for it. Over this smaller pass the Mishmis from the head of the Dibang valley in Assam cross into the Zayul Ngu Chu, and frequently harass the villagers of Purtsang. Hardly any trade is carried on by way of

the Kangri Karpo. Zayulis trading with Pemakö prefer to use the Ngagong Chu, as being the easier route.

Shingke, said Ron, lay in dense forest. Leeches abounded. The rainfall was, if anything, heavier than in Zayul. Pemakö, with its warm moist climate, is a fruitful land, and Ron brought maize cobs, tobacco, and a jar of fermented honey. He had eaten sixteen different kinds of mushroom and fungus on his trip, without any ill-effects, and at Shingke there were large ripe peaches. There were a few of the latter at Dashing, but they were small and sour. Shingke is a meeting-place for Khampas, Pobas, Zayulis, and Mishmis and Abors from the un-administered border territories of Assam. There Tibetans and Lo-pa (savages) face each other on the verge of their lands with veiled hostility. The Tibetans call all the jungle tribes "Lopa" who live in the no-man's land between south-eastern Tibet and India. The Abors and Mishmis are the largest tribes, and of these the Abors are still the most bloodthirsty. Tibetans rarely venture through Abor country, which lies to the south and south-west of Poyü. But occasionally, if sufficient numbers can be found, a party of traders or pilgrims will make the journey. Sometimes they get through to India, sometimes they don't. Neither Abors nor Mishmis come as far north as Dashing. They seem disinclined to cross more than one range from their own country.

On the way up to the Chindru La, Ron had put up in a yak-herd's hut, a few feet square. Accommodation was distinctly "chummy". He had slept at close quarters with four women, three children, two men, three cows and an odd goat or two which occupied what space was left over. During the night an avalanche passed by fifty yards away, diverting a stream which nearly flooded the hut. The next morning he caught a multitude of lice in his trousers. After that, my room at Dashing was a positive palace for him.

He had brought a dog, and at first I regarded it warily.

But Balu (bear), as the servants had christened him, was the only sweet-tempered dog we ever met in Tibet, and that was largely because he was an arrant coward. He was also a thief. But when he stole a treasured lump of butter from Lewa, who pursued him with a drawn knife and picturesque Oriental curses, then he decided to reform.

He was a fine-looking beast, black with brown points, something like a chow in appearance. He stood about three feet high, and was perhaps half-way to being a mastiff. The real Tibetan mastiff is the size of a small pony, with a crusty disposition. These dogs are not seen in England, although a few dogs of Balu's type have been brought from Tibet under the somewhat flattering title of mastiff. Balu had a tail that was totally inadequate for any purpose for which a tail might be required. It rested permanently on his back curled in a knot. In spite of his many failings we grew fond of Balu.

Among Ron's coolies, I noticed one who looked superior to the rest. His skin was paler, the colour of breadcrumbs instead of mahogany. He had a tuft of moustache at each corner of his mouth. He wore a Homburg hat, the brim tied up with string in the smartest Zayuli mode, and he talked to Lewa as on equal terms.

"Who is that?" I asked Ron. "That's Trakpa," he answered. "I've taken him on as an extra servant at a wage of a rupee a day. He's a merchant from Purtsang, and wants to collect capital for a trading journey to India. He worked for Bailey before the war and was given a tip of four rupees. He's never forgotten it. So he was quite keen to come along with us. He can read and write Tibetan, and is useful at getting the spelling of place-names correctly. He is also a tailor."

So Trakpa became one of our travelling household, and comported himself with the dignity of a family butler in the best baronial manner. He was a Ba-pa, from the north-east, and fifty-six years old.

The next few days were spent in strenuous work on the map, nine or ten hours a day. We had a lot of leeway to make up, putting our separate routes from Shugden Gompa on paper. The result of those two journeys was a map of some 3500 square miles of previously unexplored country.

On September 16th, Ron set off to Shöwa with Lewa and Nyima Töndrup, to connect our survey with that of Bailey, and thus obtain a check on the work. I stayed at Dashing and carried on in the "map factory".

While he was away my friend, the "Manager" of Chö Dzong, arrived: a sleek, easy-spoken man of thirty, with liquid, shifting eyes and a quick smile. With him came the "Manager" of Chumdo, well groomed and full fleshed, wearing a neat black chupa and white silk underjacket. Since I had last seen him the Chö Dzong "Manager" had travelled on official business to Chumdo, whence he was now returning with his colleague. Chumdo lies up a tributary valley of the Ngagong Chu, two days from Dashing. It is the largest centre in Poyü, and the Dzongpön there controls the western half of the province. It was marked with a query on the maps. We should have to pass it in our way north to Shopando and the Salween.

The two Managers were bound for Lho Dzong, via the Gotsa La, then for Lhasa. They were due for leave, and intended to spend it in a pilgrimage to Benares. There they would visit the Deer Park, where the Lord Buddha preached his first short sermon on the Middle Way to the five recluses two thousand five hundred years ago. A simple sermon, but one which now embodies the ideals of several hundred million people. Benares is second only to Bodh Gaya in the province of Bihar, as the Mecca of Buddhists. At Bodh Gaya there still grows a descendant of the original peepul tree under which the Buddha first received Enlightenment, and every devout Tibetan wishes to visit the sacred spot at least once in

a lifetime. Buddhists from Tibet, Burma, Japan, China and Ceylon can be seen there during any cold weather. It is a curious anomaly that the chief Buddhist shrines exist in a land where Buddhism practically no longer exists. The religion has migrated from its birthplace in India, driven out largely by Mahomedan persecution. But it has flourished in distant lands. The purest form exists in Ceylon, and a few Tibetans have actually been there. It is a far journey for a Tibetan, and a dangerous one, for the numerous diseases of the plains of India spell almost certain death to the people of the nearly germ-free plateaux. But it is a happy death, for to die on pilgrimage is to acquire great merit.

So the two Managers looked forward pleasurably to the next few months, whatever the journey might bring. Tibetans are surely the most religion-loving people in the world, and the most contented. Theirs is not the religious excitability of Islam, but the quiet trust in religion as a background to every act in daily life. One has heard it said that Tibetans are priest-ridden, and that they "live in darkness". This is entirely untrue. Tibetans love their religion with a whole-hearted devotion. To be a priest is an honour, and the people are willing to be dominated by the priesthood, all of whom are monks or wandering friars. Naturally, there are good and bad monks. But on the whole the theocratic system works well, and it produces millions of happy individuals, which is one proof of successful civilization. And it is better to be ruled by god-kings than by coal-kings and steel-kings. If ever Western civilization really penetrates into Tibet, it will be yet another Fall of Man. At the moment Tibet is almost entirely independent economically. Tea, imported from China, has come to be a necessity, and there is an immense wool trade to India, but these things really only affect the upper classes, who are a small but omnipotent minority. The great mass of the peasantry and priesthood live on the

products of their own country, and if the world outside disappeared in a cataclysm to-morrow, they would hardly be affected. The richer ones would have to do without cigarettes, and Homburg hats, and umbrellas, but that would be all. The potential mineral wealth of the country, which is enormous, has scarcely been touched. Mining, say Tibetans, destroys the good earth essences necessary for cultivation. So the peasant lives on the somewhat scanty fruits of his land, and the nomad on his cattle, and neither of them is concerned with the gadgets of a machine age or is compelled to lead an unhealthy life in an office. There is no sickness of the mind in Tibet, and sickness of the body is short-lived. Either you are well or you die, Tibet is no place for incurables. The hardiness of the peasant is something utterly beyond mere fitness acquired by means of artificial exercises and organized games. In many ways Tibet is a crude country, but you never meet a man there with neurasthenia, heartburn, cancer or a complex of any kind. Nor do you meet drug-fiends, share-pushers, pseudo-intellectuals, pole-squatters, crooners, or any other such fungoid growths of modern civilization. There are no new-fangled " -isms ", and no political shirts, either black, brown or red. Nor are decisions made by the wholly ridiculous method of counting heads. Of course on the other side of the picture there are no such amenities as hospitals, restaurants, paved roads, cinemas or telegraphs (except in Lhasa). The postal service is for officials only. Drains there are none, but then the germs of typhoid and dysentery do not live on the plateaux. On the whole there is much to be said for crudity. And if Tibet is an anachronism in the modern world, she is perfectly happy to remain so. Certainly the fevered mass mentality of big cities could not long survive in the rarefied air of the great hills. At those heights man is subdued by his surroundings, and much that is mere froth has a way of vanishing like breath on a window-pane. How

long Tibet will escape the contaminating influence of Progress is problematical. At the moment she does well to import the minor luxuries and to let the more doubtful commodities go hang.

CHAPTER XVI

Garrison Town

RON returned from Shōwa feeling slightly embarrassed. He had met a Princess, languishing in duration vile, who was convinced that the foreign lord had come like "a very parfit gentle knight" to carry her away to distant lands.

She was the daughter of the late King of Po. We had heard rumours of this shadowy figure before, and the gist of the matter was this: there had in fact been a local ruler of Poyü for some years. He was one of the last of the minor princelings who formerly held sway over the Eastern Marches of Tibet, much as the English barons of the early Middle Ages ruled their private fiefs. When the yoke of China was finally thrown off in 1912, the Lhasa government proceeded to extend the Pax Tibetica eastwards, and the princelings mostly disappeared. A few still exist on the ill-defined border of China. Up till 1931 the King of Po was still hale and hearty, and his subjects had a well-merited reputation for brigandage, but in that year Lhasa decided to take the province under direct administration. The King owed allegiance to Lhasa, but he had displayed a lamentable lack of restraint in his dealings with Tibetans who entered his province. There were three months of hard fighting, during which the Tibetan troops had a very difficult time among the maze of mountains. Finally they gained the upper hand, the Pobas were subdued, and the king fled southwards. Subsequently he died of exposure in the Abor Hills. But the daughter was detained as a hostage in the ruined palace of Shōwa,

and she was Ron's Guinevere. His comment was that her allurements were not such as to encourage him in the role of deliverer.

At last on October 1st we moved off from Dashing to Chumdo. The order of our going now began to blossom forth into all the splendour of a feudal equipage. We had realized that officials and others of standing already looked askance at our unseemly preference for marching on foot. It was all right to do so in the provincial depths of Zayul and Poyü, and we were under the erroneous impression that we were saving money. But now we were approaching more sophisticated lands, nearer the centre of Tibet, where those who do not ride are of no account. Lewa had discreetly impressed on us that we must preserve the decencies. The sahibs must not appear as tramps. He was a rabid Imperialist.

So we now resigned ourselves to the distressful wooden saddles, servants included, and Ron took the change light-heartedly, for he is singularly adaptable. I was not so happy. In Tibet only those somewhat below the salt actually control their horses. A gentleman of rank sits serenely in the saddle and his mount is led by a coolie. We felt slightly ridiculous at first, being towed along like so much delicate merchandise, but when in Rome . . . And we soon grew accustomed to it, and would look round angrily if the "chauffeur" was absent. This riding proved to be an economy, contrary to expectation. In Tibet, more than in any other country in the world, not excepting America, you are judged by appearances. But, unlike any other country in the world, your expenses are in inverse proportion to your appearance of wealth. It is an honour to serve a rich man for small reward. The middle man is fair game. It does not pay to look reasonably poor. At the bottom end of the scale, the complete beggar is comparatively well off; he is given alms and nobody expects him to pay for anything. But he has to keep moving.

On October 2nd, the second day from Dashing, we turned north from the Ngagong Chu up the tributary valley of the Potö Chu.

There was a breath of winter in the air now; a chill little wind hustled from the north. The great cold was on its way. Very soon the forest was left behind, and we rode up a wide ice-worn valley patched with scrub; the river ran in ribbons between islands of silt; grass-clad hills swept up to the snows. By midday it was parching hot and we paused to knock wild peaches from a tree; Trakpa brought them to us in a fold of his chupa, as a country woman gathers apples in her apron.

The path ran along a steep scarp. A rider passed hurriedly below, close to the river; he shouted something we did not quite catch, and pointed over his shoulder in the direction we were going. "He says the path is blocked, sahib," said Lewa. A mile farther on we found he was right, or rather the path was not blocked, it had just disappeared. At that point the river swung out in a bend, and it had undermined the scarp, causing a landslide. The ragged ends of the path faced each other across a nearly vertical cliff of grey earth and slate. Nasty treacherous stuff, and some of it still overhung. Now and then the cliff would mutter, and a great clod would hurtle into the river, 100 feet below on the left, raising clouds of dust. We sent a boy to try and find a way round by the hill above, but he soon returned to report it was impossible. There was no bridge, there were no boats. Exploration had temporarily come to a stop. We could see Chumdo two miles away up the valley, a walled town on the left bank, at the point of a confluence, but the western capital of Poyü seemed indifferent to our fate. Dejectedly we returned to a campground some two miles back, near the village of Gotam. Our spirits were raised by the headman, a well-nourished, prosperous-looking individual, who said he would set all

available men in the neighbourhood to work at repairing the path.

Early the next morning we went to watch the engineers. They had done well. Working chiefly with swords, they had cut steps down and along the cliff, and were already nearly half-way cross. They laughed and shouted, although half blinded by dust. A landslip is no uncommon occurrence, and Tibetans are great natural accepters of things as they come. On the farther side another gang had arrived from Chumdo; they were busy hacking deep notches in a log, also with swords, and sang in time with their blows. Soon the log was ready and lowered to meet the new path. It formed a rough ladder up the last stretch of cliff. Leaving the ponies, we hurried across one by one, watching for an opportunity between the showers of slate that still came tumbling.

And so we arrived at the gates of Chumdo on foot, self-consciously carrying riding-whips. People had flocked to see us troop in. They seemed to find us a curious sight. Perhaps we were.

We entered a place that was like one of the less derelict French villages in course of reconstruction after the Great War. There were streets of a sort, that is to say, there were pathways between patched-up houses and entirely ruined houses; one stepped over blocks of stone and between pools of water. All this was the result of the fighting with the Pobas. We were shown to a low, almost lightless room in what appeared to be a caravanserai; dark doorways led from a wooden gallery on the upper floor; there were draughts in our room, and cob-webs; a stone quern and flour-trough stood in one corner. The only other furniture consisted of a few boards resting on blocks of wood; these would later be our beds. The place was uninviting. We felt depressed.

I played with the quern, which was similar to those used in the Hebrides, and then joined Ron on one of the dusty boards to wait for our baggage, which we knew

would take hours crossing the cliff. A young man with an ingratiating smile and a weak chin put in an appearance. He announced he was the Dzungpön's secretary. He wore his chupa long; he was from Lhasa and rather superior about Poyü. He looked, and was, an unhealthily slick townee in this land of robust people. Then he produced a packet of cigarettes, and we accepted them gratefully; things were looking up. Were there any more to be had? Oh yes, he said, and slouched off to return a little later with a box of 500. Housekeeping in Tibet is in the grand manner; you buy sixty pounds of flour at a time, and rice, when you can get it, in the same quantities. There was some spirited bargaining over the cigarettes; they were the cheapest Indian brand, and having reached an agreement, we chain-smoked luxuriously. The tobacco from Pemakö had been somewhat verdant.

At sunset we heard bugle-calls. They struck a pioneering note in this outpost of Tibet; the notes quavered out on the thin air. We felt rather thrilled. A red flag was nailed to a mast on one of the buildings, indicating, not Communism which, praise be, is anathema to feudal Tibet, but a garrison town.

The next morning we put on our best clothes, and visited the Dzungpön. He was a Tsedung, that is to say, an ecclesiastic acting as a government official; so he wore yellow silk. He had that air of velvet authority common to many Orientals. Orders to servants were given in undertones. He ate little, but plied us with sticky sweets from India. He seemed in poor health, and sat curled in a little nest made of a padded quilt. Three alarm clocks ticked away merrily, each pointing to a different hour with happy inconsequence. Some Tibetan swords, embossed with coral and turquoise, hung on the wall, and curiously enough a Cossack one. How on earth had it come there? It may have been brought from Russia by Dorjjeff, the Dalai Lama's adviser before

the War, after his mission to the Tsar. A strip of oil-cloth covered a low table; an altar, with a silver and gilt dablant and brass figures of the deities, was backed by beautiful scroll paintings; and a piece of pink-spotted chintz was slung across the lower half of the open window. It was a strange mixture. Our host had the look of one who communes much alone; his eyes were inward-seeing. He had been educated at Sera Gomba, and was of high rank. It is the custom for many priests who are destined for important positions as abbots of monasteries to do a period of lay governorship as a sort of preliminary canter. This was the case here.

We were only half surprised to learn that Shopando, north of the great range, was subordinate to Chumdo. If any Tibetan district confined itself to natural frontiers it would be a novelty. Ron was in need of some new boots, and our host very kindly said he would have some made by his own craftsmen. A Tibetan governor's retinue is in the nature of a Rotary Club: there is one doctor, one cook, one cobbler, one tailor, &c. There is even a candlestick-maker, if you count the servant who fills the lamps with butter.

The Dzongpön was chiefly busied with the rebuilding of Chumdo. The new Dzong would be ready in a few months.

We stayed eight days in Chumdo (9880 feet), and had a varied time. At Dashing we had eaten our last tin of herrings; stores were now down to chocolate, jam, reserve rations of bully beef, and a few oddments such as Christmas puddings. There was still a bottle or two of whisky. Apart from these luxuries we would now live on the country, and so we laid in bags of flour and rice, balls of butter, red salt from the Mekong cliffs, and meat. Our clothes were becoming very worn. We had wind-jackets and sweaters, but those would not be warm enough when riding. It would be cold already at 16,000 feet at the end of October, when we crossed the range, and a

Tibetan winter is bitter. So we bought chupas of thick red felt, and underjackets buttoning high at the neck. I had some stockings made, like boots of felt. They proved to be a paradise for lice. Ron bought a pair of saddle-bags, of red leather, with green trimmings made from the skin of human buttocks, a rare and costly material. Presumably the skin is taken from corpses.

One afternoon a mixed troupe of dancers turned up to give a performance in the courtyard of the caravan-serai. We sat in state in the gallery, and the populace crowded in round the arena. The inhabitants of a feudal country certainly score on these occasions, for the "swells" pay for the house. The dancing was spirited. There was nothing sensuous about it, none of those stilted, grotesque steps lethargically performed to an accompaniment of wheezy pipes which one associates with dancing in the more languorous climates of the East. These people whirled and swung with the unrestrained grace of the hillman. The breath of great spaces was in their movements. They laughed, leaped and shouted; they banged drums and cymbals in a lively free-running tempo: tumm—tum-tum-tum—tum-tum-tum—tumm. Feet stamped, pigtails thrashed the air, and chupas swung wide like the skirts of Spanish dancers; it was rhythmic athleticism.

No one dancer was ever quite in time with the next, yet the movements slid together, as the separate muscles of a cat ripple to form one harmonious bound. And there was a happy, boisterous concord between audience and performers. It was rough if you like, but then the stage was the earth itself, and the boots were soft-soled. The refined tip-toeing of a ballet dancer would appear effete at those vigorous heights.

Each dance would start slowly, men and women in a circle, with much bowing and swaying from the hips, and they would sing. Then gradually the pace would quicken, as in the Hungarian Czardas, which begins with

a slow movement, the "lassan", and goes on to a quick step, the "friska". They would reach a climax of wild whirling, and then stop, panting and happy.

There were solo turns, and one man squatted down to do that energetic, knee-racking dance of the Cossacks. No doubt it originated in the steppes of Central Asia, beyond the deserts. One could visualize the way it had been picked up: a party of Mongolians, perhaps on pilgrimage to Lhasa, do the dance at an inn, and some Khampa dancers see it and decide to add it to their repertoire. It passes from troupe to troupe, and becomes just another Khampa dance. Khampas are much in demand as entertainers at Lhasa, and the travelling companies roam widely.

The show included "funny business", which took the form of vociferous mutual abuse between an aged crone and a man, each sally being followed by a bout of expectoration, which convulsed the audience, and us. The repartees were beyond us, but they left no doubt as to their unrefined character. That evening we felt curiously refreshed; we realized it was the first time in months that we had had any organized entertainment.

One morning we were invited to watch a parade of the garrison. There were, as we had heard, about 100 men. Now the few soldiers we had previously seen in Poyü were scarcely recognizable as such. They were apt to spoil the effect of a brass-buttoned khaki shirt by wearing some nondescript hat. One or two wore silver badges. But the Chumdo troops turned out resplendent in canary-yellow uniforms, with scarlet cuffs, collars and epaulets, black trousers with a yellow stripe, and yellow hats with black fur earflaps. They were said to be the pick of the Tibetan army. They looked smart, but uncomfortable. The peasants regarded them with awe. The commander's uniform was more or less the same, but of superior cloth, of a mustard-yellow shade. He wore the turquoise pendant of the official classes and, as an addi-

tional flourish, a wide-brimmed Homburg hat. With his junior officers he sat cross-legged on the ground and kept an eye on the manœuvres of his troops. The squad drill was well carried out, despite the handicap of a parade-ground with a distinctly uneven surface, littered with stones. At the finish they piled arms, bound their pigtails round their heads, and gave a fine display of physical jerks.

The commander told us the Tibetan army numbered 50,000, but I think he was out to impress. In a country with a population roughly computed at five millions such an army would be out of all proportion. In any case Tibet is a non-militaristic nation. She has no policy of expansion, and Buddhist tenets are against war. Her army is mainly designed to protect the eastern frontier, from which side alone is she really open to attack. But Tibet was formerly the terror of Asia. In the eighth century A.D. she was at the zenith of her power, and overran China, Turkestan and Nepal; she touched the empires of the Arabs and the Turks. But the introduction of Buddhism sapped her martial ardour. The taking of life was held to be a sin, and Tibet became a peace-loving nation. The success of the Chinese invasion under Chao-Erh-Feng was really due to the fact that the last Dalai Lama ordered the Tibetan troops to refrain from fighting, and resistance was only offered spasmodically by the Khampas. Then, too, the population of Tibet is diminishing, perhaps due to polyandry; she has no incentive to overflow her borders.

On October 12th we turned our faces north to the Salween, and rode out of Chumdo. For the first time we felt we were in striking distance of at least the skirts of our goal.

Nyima Töndrup and Nyima Dorje went ahead to prepare camp, and Lewa rode with us. This became a regular arrangement henceforward.

We travelled up a wide ice-worn valley, the floor of it covered with holly-oak and scrub, the slopes being wooded to 1000 feet above, more thickly on the western side.

Once in the river we saw an otter, rather a rarity in Tibet—it slipped snake-like among shallow rapids, then climbed out to stand glistening in the sun. I noticed that my pony for that day had some curious zebra markings on its legs. Professor T. H. Huxley once made some investigations based on a theory that the horse, the quagga, the kiang and the zebra all originated from a common ancestor. In support of his theory he found a pony on Exmoor with these same markings. What effect, if any, my pony would have had on zoological theory I cannot say.

Towards the evening of the first day we saw a remarkable phenomenon. Stretching along the floor of the valley for about a mile was a series of mounds, about fifteen feet high and thirty feet in diameter. Some were much larger. There were two or three hundred. Most of them were circular domes. At first we thought they might have been formed by erosion, and were due to the presence of some outcrops of harder material in the bed of the old glacier. But then it became evident that they were of human agency, and must be tumuli, or burial mounds. They were fairly regularly spaced, and only occurred in one short section of the valley. Some were crescent-shaped, and others almost rectangular. There were large stones on some of the summits. Arrived at Chimo Dzong, our halt for the night, we made inquiries about them, but could get no information. To the peasants they were just hills. There was no history or legend concerning them. They remain a mystery. It was a pity we could not investigate further, but in any case a proposal to dig would encounter considerable local opposition, for the villagers and priests had established a prior claim by planting prayer-flags on them.

Since the Church had decided they were auspicious eminences it would be a serious matter to disturb them. A special dispensation would be required from Lhasa, if that were obtainable. They must certainly contain objects of interest, be they bones, or pots, or both. They are clearly very old. In the almost complete absence of any early anthropological data in Tibet, due to the practice of breaking up the bodies of the departed and leaving them for the vultures and dogs to devour, any finds made there would be sure to be of considerable scientific value. Much light might be thrown on the early populations of the country. An excavating expedition would have a unique opportunity. So the day ended on a note of interrogation.

Then for a week we approached the range. Glaciers stretched cracked white tongues from the heights. Each day we climbed steadily, following the valley northwards. Each day it grew colder. Each day I walked. I could endure the saddles no longer, and local opinion, uncomprehending, decided I was suffering from a certain distressing and almost universal complaint.

The year was on the wane, and the brief Tibetan autumn dyed the slopes to a vivid patchwork. There was one rose-bush which turned a deep mulberry red, another was flame-colour. There were no gentle half-tones and soft browns lapped in mist. It was not sad. Diamond light danced on bushes and grass, and the high snows shone blue-white. The colours shrieked across the valley. A tiny thorn-bush blushed scarlet in a bed of yellow scrub. Leaves crackled underfoot in the mornings, and the streams ran small and clear, for frost had throttled the glaciers. Only pines were sombre. Peach trees dropped yellow fruit no bigger than plums. They were often hard and sour. Sugar is alien to Tibet. But we relished them, for our systems were drained of the craving for sweetstuffs. Not for ten months did we see fresh fruit again.

On October 16th we were at 11,000 feet, in the last of the woods, and the midday temperature was 70° F. On the 18th we camped in a tiny herdsman's shelter at over 13,000 feet in grassland with thin scrub, and the thermometer registered 42° F. in late afternoon. That night there were 14 degrees of frost, and at 8 o'clock the next morning the temperature had only risen to 20° F.

We approached the pass, the Tungla La. The grass grew ragged, then ceased, and we looked ahead up miles of absolutely barren scree, the stark height of land. We could see the path running diagonally up the last ascent; it looked overpoweringly long. Our string of beasts ploughed up the broken path like a weary black caterpillar. The ponies would plunge on a few steps, then halt with heaving sides. The men climbed stripped to the waist, and sucked lumps of ice from the trickling streams. A glacier in the valley to our right fired blinding light in our eyes. We sweated, and I felt choked by the height. I almost forgot we were approaching an unexplored pass, and only cursed at the body-aching strain of it all. We reached the summit (17,282 feet) in early afternoon, and the temperature was then six degrees above freezing-point. There was a light blanket of old snow. And now it was the Gotsa La over again, only more so, for the fierce dry heat of summer had toasted the open hills to the north, and frost had dulled them. They were the colour of an old lion's coat, forbidding and bleak under shifting grey clouds, with hardly a trace of snow. It was sub-plateau, true Khampa country. We had said good-bye to forest. . . . And that night there was no firewood, only yak dung for fuel, with pungent eye-smarting smoke, and the wind raced down the valley, whipping the scrub. We camped in a low wind-break, a rectangle of stones. The drokpa use these in the winter when the grazing is over and they establish a base. By crossing the pass we had advanced several weeks into

winter. The very kernel of travel, a clean-etched contrast, is in this crossing of passes.

We could now figure out roughly the general north-west south-east trend of this part of the Tsangpo-Salween divide. The Tungla La is over sixty miles north-west of the Gotsa La. A few miles to the north, we knew, lay the Gya Lam (China Road), and beyond it the Salween. But to reach it we must first travel eastwards along the great road to Shopando.

One section of our programme of work, the mapping of the Kangri Karpo La and as much of the province of Poyü as possible, was complete. Now we must turn our attention to the Salween valley. To the north of Shopando it had been explored for some fifteen miles by Bonvallot in 1890. Beyond that its upper reaches, over a distance of several hundred miles, were entirely unknown except at one point. That point was where it was crossed by the Chang Lam (North Road), which runs from Lhasa to Mongolia, and along which several travellers had passed. How far we could travel up the Salween in winter was a matter for conjecture. Passes might be closed. We would have to go on and see. On the China Road, at Shopando, and for a march or two up the Salween, we would be on known ground. Pereira had travelled along the China Road in 1923. The Salween, away to the north-west, was one beckoning note of interrogation.

CHAPTER XVII

China Road

ON October 20th we crossed another lower pass, but still over 16,000 feet, and dropped to the China Road at Pare. Scarcely a road in the accepted sense of the word, for no wheel has ever touched its surface. The slow-pacing caravans depend on yaks, ponies and mules, as they did a thousand years ago. A motor-lorry with independent springing could, with difficulty, negotiate a few short stretches, but it would have to be taken to pieces every few miles, and the pieces transported by yaks, whose highway it is.

Ever since reading *Kim* my imagination had been stirred by "that wonderful upland road, which leads at last into Great China itself". And now here it was: just a few worn tracks, pale streaks in an arid valley; unimpressive, yet an artery of Asia. There are milestones, like shrines, the only ones in Kham. We stopped at a wayside village, low houses of mud and stones, with flat roofs, and dust and dried dung on the paths. Some wandering minstrels were performing in a courtyard. One man placed the points of two swords to his throat; he rolled head over heels, several times. The swords glinted, he shouted; a savage dance. He wore baggy white breeches, and red tassels from the waist; a vagabond of the Road. There was a tang to life here, a pulse. The pageant of traffic left its echo.

But for the rest of the march, the road was deserted. . . . We crossed another pass at close on 16,000 feet; the Gya Lam in this region crosses ridge after ridge running north to the Salween, twenty miles or so away. . . . And

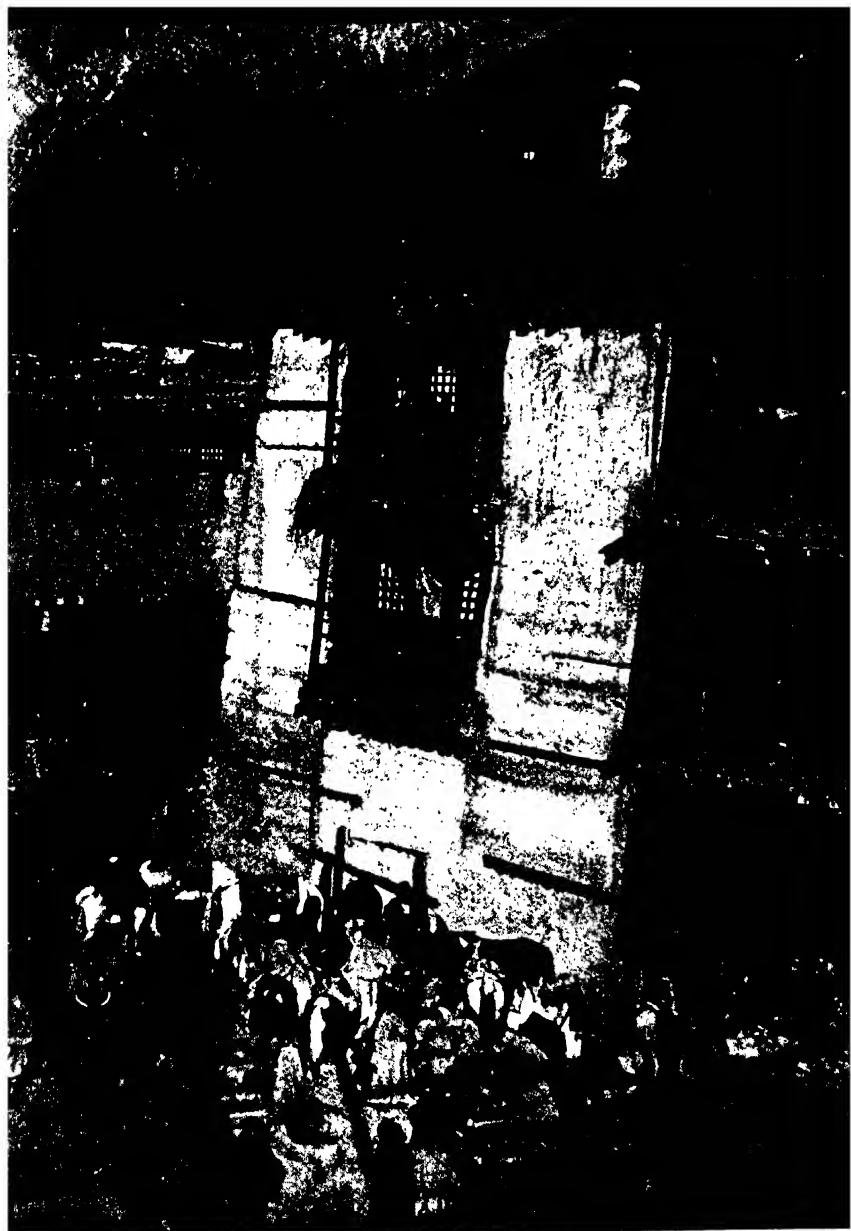
at evening we lodged in a tawny village in a tawny landscape, and ate lying down in a virulent atmosphere of smoke. To stand up was to choke. Smoke seemed a perfectly normal part of daily life. We asked for eggs, and potatoes, but we might as well have hoped for caviar. The greatest delicacy here was a turnip.

The next afternoon, having crossed another ridge, we reached Shopando.

This was the most ambitious attempt at a town we saw on the whole journey. There are 120 houses, packed in one big honeycomb on the fawn-coloured hill. A wall with turrets runs round the back. Chaff-filled alleys twist steeply between the haphazard houses. You can climb by ladders from one roof to the next. Almost in darkness carpenters and smiths work with rough tools, and women sit on the steps, twirling bobbins of wool in scrawny fingers. Mud and manure assail the nostrils, pigs wallow happily, and not only children conduct matters of personal hygiene in the streets.

In the dusty courtyard of the Dzong merchants' caravans unload and rest, load and depart—caravans from Batang, Chamdo, Jekundo, and the Lord knows where. Silently a black, wide-horned head would nose through the massive doorway, gaze blankly about, then another would jostle behind, and yaks, driven over great distances, would pour in, some black, some yellow, some white or piebald, but mostly black. The drivers would come with shouts, and quickly set about loosening the thongs. In a few minutes order would be achieved from the slipshod Asiatic tangle. Nothing appeared efficient, but all was done. Bales of wool in leather sacks, tea packages, felt saddle pads were neatly piled, and the courtyard left once more to a stray dog, a litter of pigs, and the perky magpies. Another stage was finished.

We soon came to recognize the Chinese caravans, with lightly tripping mules, bearing tea-bricks or silk for Lhasa. Or it might be a courier, hastening to Chamdo,



*The courtyard of the
Dzong at Shopando,
on the China Road.
Tibetan houses are
rarely perpendicular*



*Riding in Tibet is a
doubtful pleasure—
The author*

the eastern capital. He would arrive with a clash of horsebells in great bustle, and shout for the watchman, demanding quarters and food. This watchman looked like some early English Bowman, for he had a shining brass nose, attached with string to his ears. His own nose had been cut off by the Chinese. He came in for a rough time occasionally. One courier had barely arrived when he dragged poor old "brass-nose" by his pigtail into the courtyard, and proceeded to belabour him with the flat of his sword. Inevitably a crowd appeared, and everyone spoke loudly. From the wails of the women brass-nose might have been due for execution that very minute. It turned out that the courier had found no wood or water prepared in his lodging. He was delightfully prompt in taking necessary action. Feudalism demands, and gets, implicit obedience.

Almost daily we would hear a cymbal and the challenging cry of a minstrel troupe. Then for an hour or so they would drum and dance, and a gang of peasants, flailing barley on the roof, would rest from their labours and watch. Then the troupe would pass on, east or west. The road is a stream.

There are no shops in Shopando. One man will have some flour, another a piece of meat, a third some cloth, and everybody knows about it, and you can ask him to sell if you wish. Eastern Tibet has no market-days. Only in Chamdo is there any sort of bazaar. For the rest it is a case of pot luck. A merchant may arrive with tea, cloth and trinkets, and the peasants will buy what they can. When they run out of tea they may ask at the next village if anybody has any, or walk into the nearest centre, as Shopando or Shugden Gomba, several days' journey maybe. In the larger places we could usually count on getting tea, red salt, red sugar, "ping" or Chinese macaroni, and flour. In the villages there were always tsamba and butter, and usually meat, but the other things were rare. Eggs were always problematical,

potatoes almost legendary. So housekeeping, though limited in scope, always had an amusing element of chance. But Shopando was the most commercial place we had seen since leaving Myitkyina in April, and the servants relaxed. They went visiting, got drunk, were fined by us, and did it again. But they always did their work, and after each excursion Lewa would return with a peace-offering in the shape of a knife, a dablang, or a silver bowl which he would declare was an unbelievable bargain.

Lewa was a great enthusiast, and inaction was death to him. He could never rest. He was the most unoriental of Orientals, and a magnificent sirdar. He was a "good mixer", and brought his acquaintances to see us. One was a Chinese merchant called Shangda. He looked extraordinarily pallid among the nut-brown Kham-pas, but his complexion was not wholly due to race. He smoked fifty grains of opium a day. Drugs are forbidden to Tibetans, on pain of severe penalties, but in any case their vigorous life precludes them. Opium is sold in Lhasa, but only to the Chinese there. Shangda had settled in Shopando in a neat new house, and married a Khampa wife. The Lhasa government encourages this form of inter-marrying by a substantial grant, and there are quite a number of Chinese colonies in the more important places along the Gya Lam. It is a wise policy, for the Chinaman is industrious wherever he goes, and his standards are higher than those of the Khampa. He is a good source of revenue. It is only military invasion which Lhasa has to fear from China.

We visited the Dzongpön, a minor official, and heard there had been some sort of war between the "Uruss" (Russians) and the "Gyami" (Chinese). Five hundred Russians were said to have taken refuge in Tibet, in the far north. More than a year later, on our return to India and newspapers, we realized that this must have referred to the trouble in Sinkiang, or Chinese Turkestan, north of the Tibetan plateau. A singularly involved rebellion

had been in progress there for some time. But only the slightest ripple of it touched the placid pool of Kham. Sinkiang was as remote as the South Pole.

The Dzongpön of Shopando proved to be the younger brother of Kharndempa's obese secretary. We were surprised to see the secretary himself, but he was no longer obese. He had been very ill, and had come to Shopando for a rest-cure. His cheeks sagged, his complexion was brownish-yellow, his breath foul. The following year we heard he was dead. Syphilis.

Now for the first time in months we were in country where the water ran clear, unadulterated by glacier silt, and we were able to set about developing photographs. Or at least Ron developed and I asked how. Up till then I had been one of the great unquestioning army of photographers who get as far as extracting the exposed film from the camera and hand it over the counter. The rest was a mystery. But Ron instructed me with infinite patience in the art. It may appear unnecessary to have developed films on the spot, but we did not know exactly how long we might be away, and a fixed negative stands a better chance of survival than an exposed undeveloped film.

At Chumdo we had decided to go in for the musk trade as a mild speculation, and now at Shopando the business expanded. I had heard of musk only as one of the heavier scents—connected it vaguely with the musk-rose and the musk-ox. But its real nature had always escaped me. It is a fine powder—usually black, red or yellow—contained in a small skin pouch at the base of the penis of the musk-deer—an animal which is really a kind of goat. The powder has a rather sickly perfume, not unlike ether, and it retains the perfume over a long period. The musk-deer is found along nearly the whole length of the Himalaya, and also ranges far into eastern Tibet. Its habitat is light woods, or even scrub where there are no trees at all. It is a small dark-brown creature,

with thick hair, something like a roe-deer, but with very short horns. The hair is curiously coarse, of the nature of soft quills. The Zayulis have adopted what practically amounts to a national headgear, made of this skin in the shape of a mushroom. It is considered rather stylish, and much coveted by the Mishmis of Assam. The musk-deer is hunted, usually with dogs or traps, between late October and early December, when the perfume is at its strongest. Presumably this is the mating season, and the scent attracts the female. Musk procured in spring or summer is in poor condition, and commands a low market price. The animals are killed in hundreds in Zayul, but in other districts, where monasteries are ubiquitous, with extreme discretion.

Along with many other commodities, such as rhinoceros horn and the roots of several jungle herbs, musk is extensively imported into China as an aphrodisiac. One grain swallowed, it is said, will give astonishing strength. The Chinese have a conservative faith in such aids to fertility. Musk is also employed in the manufacture of incense, and a certain amount goes to Benares, where all the creeds of the East have their temples. A little musk rubbed into a snake-bite is said to be a sure antidote, and a whisk or brush, impregnated with musk, is said to deter any cobra. It is a lucrative trade and, unremarkably enough, in the hands of Calcutta's Chinatown. Would-be European dealers are politely kept out of the ring. The musk is brought down to Calcutta by the hillmen in the pods and sold by "tola" weight, one tola being the weight of one silver rupee. The market price may vary from 7 to 16 rupees per tola, according to season and demand, and a pod may weigh from one to two and a half tolas. So in a good year musk may literally be worth its weight in gold.

"Doctoring" is an accepted factor in the trade, and pieces of liver, dried dung, water, earth and even small stones are inserted into the pod to increase weight, with

pious trust in the credulity of dealers. An indispensable part of a dealer's equipment is a long grooved probe. Unblushing deceivers extract their musk from the pod, pound it up with extraneous matter, and then bottle it, but there is a tacit understanding between hunter and dealer that this loose musk should fetch the lowest price. Its impurity is unquestioned. Sometimes the pods are boiled, but that is a matter for an expert. These depths of duplicity, and many others, carried out with such serene nonchalance, we learned bit by bit through hard experience, affording us some slight insight to the intricacies of trade Asiatic. But all the same we decided to try our luck. "Costeri, sahib," Lewa would announce, and bring in some far-from reluctant salesman, carrying a few hairy pods. Our stock grew gradually. We fondly imagined we were embarking on great undertakings, and would reap rich profits in Calcutta. We must have been a heaven-sent opportunity. We made a fifty per cent loss.

In a few days we would be off for the Salween. The Salween at last! It was said to be two days from Shopando. The weeks behind us seemed like so many beads on a string, leading up to this moment, a prelude. What if the gods turned nasty now? But we held all the cards, it appeared: there were no reports of landslips, broken bridges, bandits, or lack of transport. We had a straight run before us. It almost seemed to be asking too much that we should ever reach the source. But nevertheless we made plans: that source must be somewhere near the heart of the central plateau. Up there, we knew, we would encounter new difficulties. There were no villages, no food, it was a desert, cold and inhospitable. We would no longer be able to hire transport from village to village as we did now. Somewhere we should have to buy yaks of our own, and supplies for months. And then from the source we would make our way westwards right across Tibet, and eventually reach Leh in Ladakh. And so

down to Srinagar by a well-known route. But all that was a long time ahead. In the more immediate future we had no idea how far habitation extended up the Salween. Information was scanty. But there must, we felt convinced, be villages for some distance yet. And so there would be food.

Some of our stores-boxes were becoming sadly battered, they gaped; the worst cases were only held together by rope. And we had made a number of purchases. So we inquired for trunks, rather hesitantly. It seemed an unlikely quest. But we shouted with joy when some large wooden boxes, covered with yak-hide, the hair on the outside, were displayed for sale. We bought them on the spot, and felt absurdly proud of them. Our luggage would no longer be conspicuously outlandish, with "Wanted on Voyage" labels adhering, persistent reminders of another world, It would be of the country. The covering-skins on these boxes are soaked in water, then shrunk on in sunlight, forming a tight fit; an artifice which is allied to the traditional torture, now fallen out of use, of sewing up a man in a wet skin and allowing it to shrink on him, contracting the lungs till he dies. And the locks were simple: you did not turn the key but pushed it to one side. The whole effect was badly let down by a dreadful yellow tin trunk. It was the last box available. It was trade-marked, unfathomably, "Abdul; and "the Abdul" it was always called. It looked rather morose, and sadly out of place on the back of a yak. Its proper milieu was an Indian railway-carriage, with a perspiring Babu resting his feet on it. We felt sorry for it.

Then Ron was still minus presentable footwear. His Chumdo boots, made by the Rotary Club, were works of art, knee-high, of felt, with soft soles, and embroidered like Joseph's coat; but they were many sizes too small. He endured all the agonies of the Ugly Sisters trying them on, but it was clear he was not Cinderella. He had

another pair made at Shopando, on a carefully drawn pattern, but all to no purpose. He began to grow desperate, and I sympathized: "It'll be a cold winter, but a good chance for hardening bare feet." It was not really the fault of the bootmaker: the average Tibetan foot is so small that when he saw the pattern of Ron's foot (size eleven), he could not believe his eyes, decided there must be some mistake, and worked on what to him were more reasonable standards. Small feet are a matter of great pride in Tibet. An English foot is uncouth. An added difficulty lay in the fact that the Khampa big toe is normally considerably shorter than the next toe. But after heated expostulations from Lewa, and cries of bewilderment from the bootmaker, Ron was fitted out.

Preparations were complete, and we were ready to start for the river when Trakpa announced he wished to leave us, reluctantly. We were sorry, he was a good servant, and his local knowledge was invaluable, but we realized he was right. Thus far he knew the country, but beyond he would be far from his base. And he would have to return alone, through possibly unfriendly villages. It was more than ordinary risk. Further, he wished to trade in Calcutta that season. But there was a compensation from our point of view, we could now send our mail in safe hands. We had a fair accumulation of letters, written at odd times, but we now wrote furiously: ". . . Reached the China Road . . . just a step to the Salween . . . four months, we think, to the source. . . . Don't expect any news for a year. . . . We wonder if there's a war on, has Italy decided to fight Abyssinia? . . . Tibetan servant taking this south, it should reach you after Christmas . . ." Ron packed his snakes with extreme care, gave them a final dose of "pickle" for luck, and labelled the box "British Museum". Trakpa looked as if he was entrusted with the Holy Grail. . . . He would take one pack-animal, that was all. And then we were ready.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Unknown Valley

A DRY wind fingers a bare narrow valley, and a teal skims alone down the stream. The road forks; our jingling horse-bells cease: "Salaam, salaam Trakpa, kale gu (go happily)," . . . and we climb steeply aslant to a spur, while Trakpa, bareheaded, leads his pony along the Gya Lam, far down in the valley. . . . At the last bluff he turns and waves up to us, already a thousand feet above the main road. Then he is gone. He will follow the Gya Lam to Lho Dzong; he will turn south to Shugden Gompa, and on to Shikathang. In thirty-five days perhaps, certainly not less, he will arrive with our mail at the first outpost in Assam. Shall we see him again? Will the letters arrive? He is gone, and our party has suffered a loss. . . .

We faced the bleak uplands, riding along the rim of a valley that was all wind-blown space. We rode heads down, crouched in our saddles against the tearing wind. In Shopando we had bought Tibetan saddles, high-peaked and well padded, ornamented with shark's skin and gilt, and riding was now less of a penance. I pulled down my fur ear-flaps, and huddled into my chupa, seeking warmth. We began to know cold, the dead dry cold of a Tibetan winter, the cold of the loftiest plateau on earth, that pinches the body like an over-tight glove, and makes every muscle ache in its shivering effort to produce heat. We could not walk; we would lose caste, and to lose that would mean severe impediments to travel and greater expense.

At our halts for survey work, Ron would read the range-finder, with two coolies gripping the tripod to steady it against the blast; I would lie belly-flat on the path to cover the fluttering pages of the record book, and blow on fingers that refused to write. We had woollen gloves and ski-gauntlets, but they were of little use; you cannot work a range-finder with them, nor can you write. The best gloves were the long swinging sleeves of our felt chupas, in which you can bury frozen fingers. Already we found it was wiser to wear Tibetan clothes when riding in the Tibetan winter. The ponies could rarely go faster than a walk, so for us it was little better than sitting outdoors. . . .

We dropped into the valley, and climbed towards the crest of the farther slope. . . . It was already late when we reached the Chungke La, and the drear light of evening filled a wide mild-toned valley before us, gaunt and treeless; the facing ridge was yellow tipped. Two thousand feet below a blue-green river wound; at that distance it appeared to run sluggishly, in huge curves like some slow-creeping serpent; upstream it was lost in haze, to our right it plunged sullenly into a shadow-black gorge. . . . "Down to a sunless sea." It was the mysterious Salween. We were not really surprised to see it a day earlier than we had expected. Tibet is like that.

We gazed long at the Salween in half-superstitious awe. For seven months we had worked to reach this remote river in the heart of Asia, and now we were face to face with it. We were on a threshold; the threshold of a vast unknown valley, and of a year's death. It was the last day of October. . . .

That evening we slept under the eyes of little fat-bellied gods in the temple at Shopathang, with the fire picking highlights on their polished surfaces. The Salween ran softly a few yards away. The varied life of the China Road was immediately missing. We had slipped into more rural districts, and the quiet was positive, as

when one turns from a busy thoroughfare into a side street where gardens are.

The headman's information was scanty: there was a big Dzong three days ahead, and that was all.

November came in with snow, blustery and uncertain, in the tiny hard-frozen pellets of a continent's heart.

The Salween at Shopathang, and for many miles to the south-east, is called the Gyamo Ngo Chu. The name has been spelt variously by previous travellers, but during our journey Ron obtained the correct spelling from several highly placed officials, who confirmed each other. Gyamo Ngo Chu means the Blue River of China, for it flows in the direction of China, and in winter it is a deep clear blue or green.

At Shopathang a ferry plies across the river, here seventy yards wide. Deep-bellied coracles are sometimes used, made of yak-hide stretched over a wooden frame, but these were out of commission when we arrived. Instead there was a raft, the original thought of a raft, such as one constructed in the halcyon days when a neighbouring canal was the Spanish Main, in imagination. Two logs were set at a slight angle, and braced with wood and thongs, forming a blunt-nosed prow; rough-hewn planks were laid across and secured with other thongs. Cautiously the weird craft was poled and paddled upstream in an eddy, with its crew of six working sturdily on every side. It looked like some monstrous water-beetle, with the legs all out of time, and I thought of the Jumblies going boldly to sea in a sieve. The current in the centre rushed furiously at seven knots; as soon as we struck that the water-beetle lurched and its legs worked nineteen to the dozen to keep it straight, fore and aft, to larboard and starboard. We slipped into slack water again a quarter of a mile downstream, touched shingle with a bump, and jumped ashore with all the heart-felt relief of the man who launched the first boat, and came joyously

to land again. It took sixteen journeys to ferry our loads, a full day's work. The ponies swam across by themselves.

The next day we rode up the main valley; the path climbed high and steep, far above the river, dropped dizzily, climbed again, and dropped again. We crossed two minor passes over sharp-crested ridges running down to the valley; wind-driven snow scurried round the bluffs, stinging and biting, and I was glad of my beard which acted as a mask. The sun shone starkly bright on the fawn-coloured landscape, split by great V-shaped ravines. The Salween valley is water-worn, and of great age; it runs in a vast trough, deep below the level of the surrounding sub-plateau; the villages are mostly hoisted far above the river, on gentler slopes or on tiny terraces, surrounded by fields that grow barley and turnips, oases in the scrub-covered barrens; water is conducted by flumes from streams above, or transported wearily uphill in slim barrels with a spray of fir twigs on the top to keep it from slopping. The rare trees are scarcely more than ten feet high, and the streams are dwarfed by the ravines they flow in. It is a valley of majestic depth, austere, remote, eaten by the wind.

After a march of twelve miles we reached Zimda. The map-making had gone well, it was easy in that open country where the eye soared freely to the skyline; but at Zimda we met with blank disappointment—there was no road beyond. The main path, the headman told us, led north to Idashi, and on to Chungpo Tengchen, where the Dzongpön of the district dwelt. That, we knew, was Bonvallot's route. Only a narrow track led a short way up the Salween to a group of villages, and then stopped. Beyond there was nothing, the valley was impassable. It was incredible soul-deadening news; we ate our supper in gloomy silence. To have come so far, to have worked and planned to explore the Salween and now to find the Salween was unexplorable—this was futility absolute, and the food tasted flat.

There was nothing for it but to take the road to the north, and then follow the main route which runs east and west to the north of the river, a route already mapped by Bower and Bonvallot. At intervals perhaps we could turn down side valleys to the river, and so check its course. But first we would go to the limit of the path.

On November 3rd we wound up the rough path to the village of Daga. The sun struck warm; a pair of yaks were drawing a primitive wooden plough; choughs wheeled and called shrilly. Two thousand feet below the river was hidden in a sinuous precipitous gorge; on the farther side tiny dun-coloured villages were slung like swallows' nests; they were not more than three miles away but it would take a day to reach them. Ahead the valley loomed grey and forbidding, criss-crossed by a series of steep-sided spurs, crumbling and jagged. No wonder the path stopped short! Who but an eagle could perch on those fierce scree cliffs? Even now two great birds circled proudly with slow-beating wings over the lifeless barrens, cutting arcs in the pale blue sky. Would that be our last view of the Salween? Would it remain for ever unknown, big with mystery? It seemed fantastic.

Dispirited, we turned back to Zimda. On the way home we put up a covey of great white pheasants, black-capped with a blood-red circlet round the eye (*Crossoptilon Crossoptilon*). They were slow to rise, and would have made an easy mark. It was not the only time we were to look hungrily on forbidden game.

The next day we crossed the Do La (16,665 feet) and looked down on the flat roofs of Idashi, engulfed between the jaws of a steep-sided valley. There were fir woods here, sheltered from the wind, and the season seemed to have leaped back to early autumn, so mild was the evening. But that night there were ten degrees of frost, and the stream was ice-fringed.

The stream from Idashi flowed south-west to the Salween. Was there not a path that way? We asked

eagerly. Why yes, nothing was simpler, the river could be reached in a day, and a path then led up the main valley for at least four days. We felt like reprieved criminals; exploration had been granted a new lease of life! The peasants of the Salween are among the most localized in the world; at Daga they knew nothing except that there was no path beyond their own village.

In the next few days, we travelled roughly west by south, first into the valley of the Su Chu, then into the main valley, crossing pass after pass, and always on a good mule-track. There were days when we moved no more than four miles to the next village, and others when we travelled twelve or thirteen, with a climb of 3000 feet to a windy pass and a drop to a village or a tiny white-walled monastery. At each village transport was changed. Yaks carried the baggage, donkeys and dzos were now things of the past. We rode the stocky little Tibetan ponies; to ride a yak is simply "not done", although a peasant will sometimes take a lift on an unloaded beast.

We learned to respect the Tibetan ponies; they would cut a poor figure in the hunting-field: their necks are short, their noses Roman, their coats shaggy, and their long tails matted with burrs. They cannot trot, nor even canter, but will break into a bone-shaking run if encouraged—the best ones, known as "amblers", are fast and high-stepping, and fetch a high price. But Tibetan ponies can give a fair imitation of rock-climbing over ground that would break an English hunter's lanky legs; they tuck up their quarters, plunge and scramble while you grip their manes, and do everything except stand on their heads; then they put their tiny forefeet together and calmly slide on the descent, while you hold your breath, and balance. They are never shod. More than once, on a particularly steep ascent, we slipped bodily over the tail, saddle and all.

But the yaks are the better mountaineers; they move ponderously, deliberately, and, unlike the ponies, never

halt for breath; they are as much at home on the steep mountainside as on the path itself; they are never killed for meat, but are preserved for transport and for their milk, which is rich and pungent. I never enjoyed hot milk till I went to Tibet. You only get meat from a yak that has died a natural death, so it is vain to expect juicy steaks in the uplands. Meat killed in the winter will last a year. Sometimes it is buried raw in the snow for months, and hung over a smoky fire; it then looks like Bombay duck, but dark brown in colour, and as tough as rope, richly flavoured. You can chew a stick of it happily for hours on the march.

On the road Balu would skirmish between ourselves and the baggage; he seemed loath to be parted over long from the kitchen, and would rush ahead to assure himself it was all right, then scamper back to us with a satisfied air, his long hair rippling in the wind. He delighted to chase stray flocks of goats wildly up the hill, feeling he was a mighty hunter before his lords. Daily he developed; he had been but a scavenger, now he would romp and play, recovering the puppyhood he had never really had. Compared to other animals the dogs of Tibet lead a miserable existence; they are either pariahs, half-naked with mange, or if sturdy they are kept as watch-dogs, which means imprisonment for life; they are chained in a yard or on a roof-top, with the result that they are bored, their tempers are soured, and their throats grow hoarse with barking. It is strange that Buddhism, which forbids the killing of a fly, should allow so much long-drawn suffering. I have seen a goat, crippled in both hindlegs, dragging itself about on its forefeet; yet the villagers would not kill it.

At each village we were given a room, which enabled us to make progress with the paper work, and with the developing of films. For a week we stayed in a temple, draughty and dark, while the villagers circled ceaselessly outside, with a murmuring of prayers and a spinning of

prayer-wheels. It was the end of the Tibetan month, always an auspicious occasion. It was strange to be working inside with modern dividers or fixing-salt while the time-worn incantations were droned without. Would a wandering Chinaman be welcome to set up his bed in an English village church? I think not.

Nearly every village had its dancing troupe, of both men and women, young and old. Dancing takes the place of organized games in the life of the Khampa, and is vigorously enjoyed. Each place seemed to have its speciality turn: at one it would be head-over-heels tumbling, at another walking on the hands, and at a third Cossack dancing. One recurring turn was a frantic mopping and mowing of the pigtail in the dust, which invariably met with applause. The Khampa enjoys nothing so much as a little simple clowning, and his humour is entirely bucolic.

The Salween valley is a haunt of wild birds, even in winter; daily we saw flocks of the great white pheasants, which vary widely in colour, from dull grey with black wing-tips to pure white. They have a comic little crouching run, and in half darkness, with their thick trailing tails like those of farmyard cocks, but elongated, they look like flocks of small sheep. There were partridges (*Perdix Hodgsonii*, and *Lerwa Lerwa*) eagles and hawks of a dozen varieties, rose-finches, orange-beaked choughs, crows, rock-pigeons and numerous small dun-coloured birds. Up till the end of November we saw hoopoes, this at between 12,000 and 14,000 feet. All were extraordinarily tame on account of the rigidly enforced ban on hunting. It was no uncommon sight to see a covey of partridges scratching happily in a backyard. Monasteries, housing from six to three hundred monks, are ubiquitous in the Salween valley, and the peasants dare not violate their laws.

At Kau the shy Salween again refused to be courted. There was a path which followed the left bank for

many miles to Dege, but it was said to run along the edge of the cliff, and was dangerous for loaded men, not to speak of animals; the side streams were already ice-covered. Our baggage, with the results of many months' work, might be lost. Accordingly we decided to turn north up the main route to Dere, and rejoin the Salween later.

On November 18th, we left Kau and rode up a regular monotonous valley, through light pine-woods, and then up on to grass. It was a march of nineteen and a half miles, over-long from our point of view, for daylight was now getting desperately short; survey work was limited to the hours between 8.30 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. This meant that we had to spend two days on a normal march, returning from camp to map the latter end of it, involving an enormous waste of time. We could only finish the shortest marches in one day.

At the cattle-ground of Tsemotse (13,691 feet), the drokpa had set one of their straggling tents for us. These tents never reach to the ground, so we barricaded the foot-wide gap along the bottom edge with piles of boxes and coats; they are made in two or more pieces, with a wide gap in the roof. Altogether they are somewhat airy establishments, but they have one definite advantage: you can build a huge fire inside. That night there were 31 degrees of frost, and we smothered ourselves with blankets and chupas. The next morning, when we were called as usual at six in pitch darkness, with our blankets bristling with frozen breath, it was a supreme luxury for me to watch Ron wrestling with soap and razor, while I, bearded and unkempt, had an extra ten minutes in bed, sybaritically drinking buttered tea.

On November 20th we struck camp, and continued up a bare narrow valley towards the Michen La. We passed a butchers' camp; carcasses and skins lay stacked in rows, and sheep stood ready for slaughter. The people of this district are so orthodox that they will not even kill domestic animals, and the butchers were employed

from a neighbouring tribe to the north. They were wild-eyed men, and surly. We left them to their work, and soon reached snow-covered ground, dazzling in the clear winter sun.

Several times we crossed the ice-covered stream; at first this was a nervous business on horseback. We were not expected to dismount, and it was a matter of pride between us not to do so. Ron's nerves usually held out longer than mine, and I would often take to my feet. Lewa dismounted promptly; as a mountaineer he had no faith in horse-flesh. The ponies would creep across, sniffing the ice, a coolie tugging at the bridle; there would come a sickening little lurch, as a hoof slithered sideways; one would sit tense, expecting a crash; but somehow it rarely happened, and when it did the pony was never hurt.

The yaks were entirely unconcerned, they seemed to have hooves made of rubber, and would approach even sloping ice as though in a dream; they would be rudely awakened by slipping feet, skate crazily for a few seconds, and continue the dream. To live with yaks would be a certain cure for jangled nerves.

We reached the Michen La (16,110 feet) at 1 p.m. It was deep in snow, temperature 21° F.; the cold was bitter, increased by a wind which battered the senses, but we revelled secretly in the keenest and most primitive joy of all, the joy of repelling cold. A short way below the pass, we saw three glaciers; they were the first we had seen in this arid land since crossing the Salween divide, and we were not to see any more for five months.

The march was again long, and for the last hours we rode in darkness, stealing warmth from the ponies' flanks; the frozen iron of the stirrups stuck to our soft-soled boots, penetrating with numbing cold to our feet; we would slip our feet from the stirrups, and swing them to restore circulation; then thighs would ache, we would return to the stirrups, and freeze again. On these winter marches at night I remember longing for warmth with a

fierce hunger, as though for food, and would try to cheat the season by imagining a ship's deck in the Red Sea.

At long last a squat block of single-storied huts loomed black against the feebly white snow: it was the cattle-camp of Rukyithang. Nyima Töndrup came out with a wavering flare and conducted us through back-breaking doorways to a tiny mud-walled cubicle. Our bedding overlapped along two sides, and there was just room for an iron bowl holding a mass of smouldering yak-dung and bones. The only ventilation was a tiny aperture high in the wall; it could not be called a window. Ron, with his 6 feet 3 inches of height, groaned dismally as he lay curled up on his bunk of Little Ease.

The next morning I was none too well, and the day after, November 22nd, I felt the world was at an end. My chest, stomach and back ached, my nose and eyes were streaming, my head seemed full of lead, I wished to vomit but couldn't, and I could scarcely stand. I had undoubtedly been gassed by the fire of yak-dung and bones, and since ammonia was formerly made by heating the hoofs and horns of deer, and then called spirits of hartshorn, it seems probable that I suffered from ammonia-gas poisoning. Ron had escaped, on account of his passion for garlic, which he consumed regularly in sandwiches, and which is said to be a certain cure for this form of poisoning. In the open, or in a tent, these fires of course have no harmful effects, and under those conditions we used them frequently.

Needless to say I did not think this out at the time; I was incapacitated for work and rode ahead with Nyima Töndrup. I remember little of the ride—I was one heap of misery perched on a jolting horse for twelve miles. At last we reached Dere, where there is a small monastery. I took roasted garlic, and iodine in milk to cure the catarrh, and in two days the pains were gone. Long afterwards Ron told me he had suspected pneumonia.

We decided to stay four days in Dere, and then to go north to Pada Sumdo to connect with an east and west route mapped by Bower and Bonvallet. During our stay we mapped the valley down to its junction with the Gyamo Ngo Chu. The days were warm and bright, over 70° F. in the sun at midday, but about 45° in the shade. The peasants were hard at work flailing the barley, aided by the monks. It was the only time of year we saw monks doing manual labour. At these heights, between 12,000 and 14,000 feet, the crops do not ripen until late in October, and there is scant time to gather the harvest before the winter storms begin. The straw is laid on racks in the fields, to be out of reach of cattle; it must be carefully preserved, for between December and April there is no grazing. If the crops fail, as they do in some years of drought, not only are the people short of grain, but the yaks die from lack of fodder, and that is a greater disaster than the loss of a child.

One day Balu disappeared. He had done it before, for half a day or a day, so at first we thought nothing of it. But after two days there was still no sign of him. We grew anxious and made inquiries. The servants went about with worried faces. Lewa, who had cuffed him more than anyone else, was almost in tears. At any moment we expected to see Balu trotting in, making tracks for the kitchen with his usual importunate air—but he never came. Nyima Dorje set out his ration of tsamba and scraps as usual, but it was untouched. When one or the other of us came back from a walk he would ask, "Seen Balu?" and the answer was always "No." Balu left a frightful gap, he had become such a cheerful companion for all of us, strangers together in this remote land. At last we could wait no longer, and on November 28th, we left for Kyirothang, still buoying ourselves with the faint hope that Balu might turn up sometime. He could not have deserted us of his own accord; our kitchen was too attractive for that. He had probably been picked

up in a village, and kept as a watch-dog. We pictured him, poor old devil, chained to a post and hungering for his lost flesh-pots. Poor Balu!

On November 29th, taking Nyima Töndrup with us, and leaving Lewa and Nyima Dorje with the baggage at Kyirothang, we started up a narrow grassy valley to Pada Sumdo. We reached our objective and finished the work only just in time, and turned homewards in failing light. It was an eerie ride in the darkness, perishing cold but windless; a new moon was softly mirrored in the inky stream; the black hill masses were sharp as a woodcut, crouching, seeming to breathe on our necks. No sound was heard but the click of the ponies' hooves, and the sharp jingle of the bells, like sleigh-bells faint in the distance. We seemed marooned in eternity, riding for ever through the night.

Lewa greeted us with his usual cheery bluster. "Andar hai, sahib! (Here are eggs!)" he cried, and produced a handful. We could scarcely credit it. We had not seen eggs since leaving Poyü. Our few potatoes, bought at Shopando, had come to an end some days before, and our diet now consisted of yak meat, occasional mutton, turnips, buttered tea, chupattis, and a daily teaspoonful of jam; monotonous, shorn of frills, but exceedingly healthy. Our chief bugbear was that dreadful vegetable the turnip. The encyclopædia says that the turnip is "a biennial plant, the brassica rapa, the upper part of the root of which develops into a large fleshy bulb of great value for food". Meeting it at every meal for weeks, we came to regard brassica rapa as a personal enemy; we took its large fleshy bulb and we mashed it, making believe it was potatoes; we ate it raw in slices, making believe it was a radish; we curried it, we salted it, we peppered it, all without avail. In spite of every artifice its unlovely, stodgy, colourless personality (of great value for food) always made itself felt. We tolerated brassica rapa, that vulgar cousin of King Potato, only because there was nothing

else to go with the meat. But for one night at Kyirothang it was ousted by an omelette of great memory.

We were but mildly surprised to learn that the eggs were due to the inevitable materialism of a local Chinaman. The Chinaman is to Asia what the Greek is to Africa—he supplies all things at a price. Now and then one gets stranded in the ebb and flow of trade, as the purveyor of eggs; but before long he makes himself indispensable to the district. If the boots there are poor, he quickly becomes a maker of good boots, and if the saddles are poor, he quickly becomes a maker of good saddles; so with liquor, jewellery, weapons, or anything else. He is like a little lump of yeast, leavening the countryside. Always he means to go home some time.

The purveyor of eggs was also the local financier, and we exchanged some Indian rupees. Since leaving Poyü the coins were all of copper; thirty-six copper “shokang” to a rupee. The silver trangkas of the south-east were here greatly prized, and used as personal ornaments by the women.

On November 30th we turned again to the Salween, and headed south-west for Dege. Somewhere up the Salween, we had heard, lay a monastery, called Chamda Gompa. It appeared to be a centre for these parts, and there might be more varied supplies.

As we approached the next pass, the Pang La, we saw a herd of pale-brown mountain sheep far up on the hillside. They were bhurel. With musk-deer, they are the most commonly seen large game in the Salween valley, and though not so tame as other creatures, they will descend to within half a mile of the villages. A fifty-mile-an-hour wind was blowing across the Pang La (15,368) and we lingered not, but passed rapidly down a narrow, steep-sided valley.

On December 2nd we saw the Salween again at Dege, where we arrived in a blinding snowstorm. The gale continued unabated all next day, and although it ceased

to snow, the air was white with wind-whipped flakes. Survey work was impossible; we hibernated in the village for the day. The temperature was a little above zero, and we huddled over a brazier; even with thick chupas it was cold three feet away from it.

We began to wonder how long we should be able to continue open-air work, not so much because of the snow, which in any case evaporated almost as soon as it touched the ground, but because of the sheer impossibility of working instruments of precision in that driving wind and cold. At the moment we could carry on, but if it got much worse, we should be forced, like Cæsar, to "go into winter-quarters".

The day seemed endless. We played countless games of "Jutland", then competed to see how many place-names we could think of beginning with A, then with B, and so on right through the alphabet, until we had had enough, and Ron picked up his balalaika to play a lilting Russian melody that evoked an echo of all space and all storms. I asked for a negro song, and he howled to the roof:

" Oh, ham-bone am sweet,
Bacon am good,
Possum meat am very, very fi-ine!
But, give me, jest give me,
Oh how Ah wish ya would,
A water-melon hangin' on de vine! "

Ron was the only musical member of the expedition. His chief doubt about me as a possible companion had been my inability to sing so much as one note in tune; but as I enjoyed his playing, and as my frightful discords were a source of intense amusement to him for nearly two years, the deficiency proved to be an advantage.

On December 4th the storm lifted; a sudden hush had fallen on the land, and the sun sparkled through air that was still. We moved off for Chamda at 8 a.m. with the thermometer registering 20 degrees below freezing-

point, and descended 1000 feet to the Salween. We had been told we would cross the river on the ice, but as we dropped lower and lower, and saw only loose sheets floating on the swift black water, we felt the report must be another of those highway myths so common in Tibet. Then rounding a bend we came to a narrow gorge, where the water ran deep and slow beneath a great table of snow-covered ice, stretching from rock wall to rock wall. We crossed on foot, in single file, and ascended steeply to the Ma La (14,195 feet), which curiously enough was thickly wooded at the summit.

That evening, as dusk came frigidly, we followed a black path to a black-walled monastery on a sheet of snow: Chamda Gompa.

CHAPTER XIX

The Mountain Men

EVER since leaving Shopando we had heard rumours of a big tributary somewhere to the west. We had doubts of its existence, but now at Chamda the rumours became crystallized. Information was as conflicting as ever: we were told it was only one day's march south to the China Road, but that we could not credit. By our latitude reckoning we were some fifty miles north of the great road, and that meant at least four days' journey in this country. It turned out that it was one day's march not to the China Road, but to another much-used road which ran along the valley of the Ge Chu, the mysterious tributary; we must then have missed its confluence with the Salween by our detour between Kau and Dege.

We decided to spend a few days in Chamda and then turn south to the Ge Chu to explore it from the confluence to the source, if possible; there was just a chance that it might be the main stream, we had better make sure.

Another report stated that there was no path farther up the Gyamo Ngo Chu for some days; or at least there was a bad path, which led in five days over five passes to a somewhat shadowy place called variously Nakshö, Nakchu Sumdo, Biru and Diru; but no one had been that way and no one was eager to go. Altogether the future was delightfully dim.

Chamda Gompa (12,600 feet) consists of a monastery with 120 monks and a village of ninety houses, surrounded by a wall which in places is entirely theoretical. The

monastery was in better shape than the village; the former was being built up, the latter seemed in imminent danger of collapse. I climbed to a hill to take photographs, and from a height of 500 feet the lay-out looked distinctly modern; the houses and "streets" were seen to be rectangular, and the new addition to the monastery, of glaring yellow pinewood, looked like some Greek temple in miniature. In a deep trench the river flowed black, with a convenient ice-crossing at one point.

On December 8th we headed south for the Ge Chu, up a narrow valley with light woods. The streams now flowed between banks of ice, sheet on sheet, and frequently *over* the ice in a thin film; the results were cumulative, so that a mere trickle might be choked by great glistening layers, many feet thick.

We climbed above the tree-line, here about 14,000 feet in the sheltered valleys, and approached the La Gen through deep snow. We dismounted, and the ponies struggled on up to their knees, their breath forming white cloudlets. Before we reached the summit a snowstorm broke, obscuring the landscape and putting an end to survey work for the day. On the pass the temperature was 17° F., and the coolies fidgeted nervously while we stopped to read the barometer. Many people, they said, had died of exposure on the La Gen in winter; they had a fearful belief that we intended to spend the day there, and fished out quaint little poke bonnets of wool-lined cloth. "Do not fear," said Lewa magnificently. "I am here."

The rock strata in the valley beyond showed a striking formation; they were vertical, or nearly so, giving the appearance of cyclopean books in a shelf. The rock was all limestone and slate, as we had seen everywhere since leaving Shopando, with the exception of one or two outcrops of cinnabar red sandstone. None but an expert could make any estimation of strike and dip in these contorted masses.

We camped a few miles short of the Ge Chu, and on December 9th returned towards the La Gen to complete the work. The sun did not reach that narrow valley till 11 a.m., and at 7.30 the temperature was still only four degrees above zero. This meant anxious and laborious work with the ponies at the frequent stream-crossings, for there was as yet no yielding surface-slush; the ice was like glass, even with earth scattered freely. We were both frost-bitten, and my beard was white with hoar-frost; there was no wind; it was the stagnant chill of a refrigerator.

A short way below the La Gen, at about 16,000 feet, we saw some remarkable tracks in the snow. They were so large and so peculiarly placed that we turned aside to examine them closely. There were five sets, emerging from a gully down a tremendously steep slope to the valley floor. Unfortunately they were slightly obscured by drifting snow so that the exact outlines were indistinct, and a photographic reproduction would have been of little use. They were definitely two-footed tracks, and astonishingly like those of barefooted men. Ron placed his out-size boot in one; it was overlapped by the imprint by more than an inch. So they could not be Khampa tracks.

It was just possible that they were made by snow-leopards, with the hind-feet placed exactly in the imprint of the fore-feet—a common habit of great cats—and enlarged by skidding. But snow-leopards are not known to move in packs; they are solitaries. Further, it was inconceivable that they should all have been stalking some prey together; the terrain was void of cover, and the position and nature of the tracks showed that the creatures, whatever they were, were travelling, and travelling fast. In that case the hind-feet would not be placed carefully in the tracks of the fore-feet, but would be inclined to show separately. Nevertheless some of the coolies maintained that they were made by snow-leopards.

Others declared they were made by the "Mountain Men"; this seemed to indicate either bears or monkeys, but those animals do not exist in that part of the country. On further inquiry, it was said that the Mountain Men were a distinct race living among the higher peaks; there was no doubt of their existence. One coolie claimed to have actually seen one: something like a human being, covered with long hair. But they were rare.

This legend has long been current in the Himalaya, but it is evidently far more widespread, and of independent growth. We were some 140 miles north of the Himalaya, separated from it by another great range. It is extremely unlikely that the legend has been handed north from mouth to mouth. The common peasant of those parts has hardly any knowledge even of Zayul.

These Mountain Men were not described by any adjective that could be translated as "abominable"; they apparently kept themselves to themselves, they did not assault human beings, but were better left alone. What then are the Mountain Men? Are they some kind of primitive man? No ordinary animal known to exist in that part of the country could have made the tracks. The snow-leopard theory was clearly unsatisfactory. It has been asserted in a somewhat sweeping manner that *all* tracks of the "Abominable Snowmen" are merely bear-tracks. In some cases in the Himalaya, and in other parts where bears exist, it has been conclusively proved that tracks which the natives claimed were made by the "Abominable Snowmen" were in fact nothing but bear-tracks. But other cases have not been so easily explained, and in the case of these La Gen tracks the bear theory was ruled out of court for the very simple reason that there are no bears in the district, as has been mentioned before.

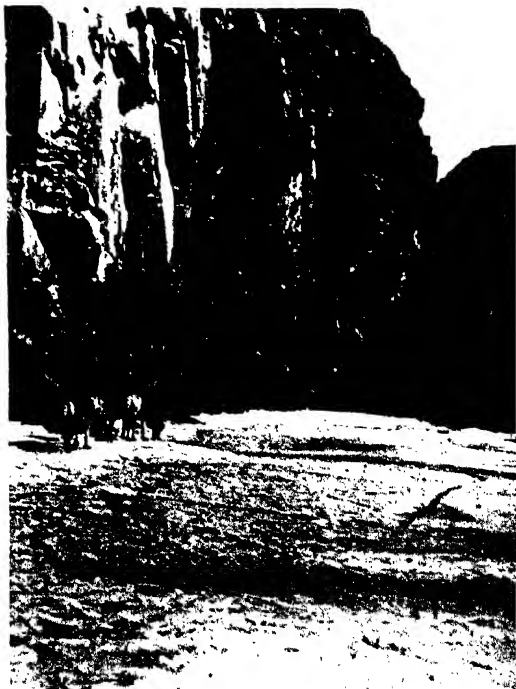
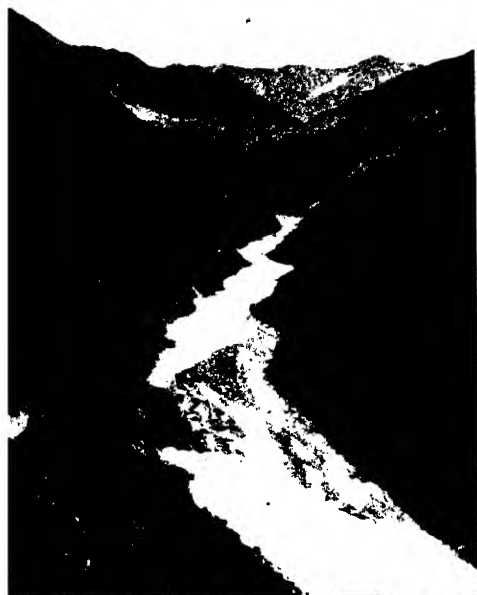
If some as yet unknown species of anthropoid does exist at those bleak heights—well, after all, why not? His food problem would not be insuperable; snow-

leopards and wolves overcome it. Even supposing he is unable to waylay the partridges, which can often be seen at 16,000 feet in the snow, there are yet plenty of bhurel and hares. All these creatures are remarkably easy of approach in that rigorously protected area. One may reflect that as recently as 1869 the last native Tasmanian died out, of an order considerably inferior to the Australian bushman, who is himself almost in the Stone Age. So why not a primeval Tibetan? The whole matter needs closer examination than it has so far received. As far as the La Gen tracks were concerned, one can only say that they were made by "some persons unknown". Every possible inquiry was made, but we could not wait about indefinitely in the hope of seeing a "Mountain Man". And if he does exist, I would rather he were left in peace.

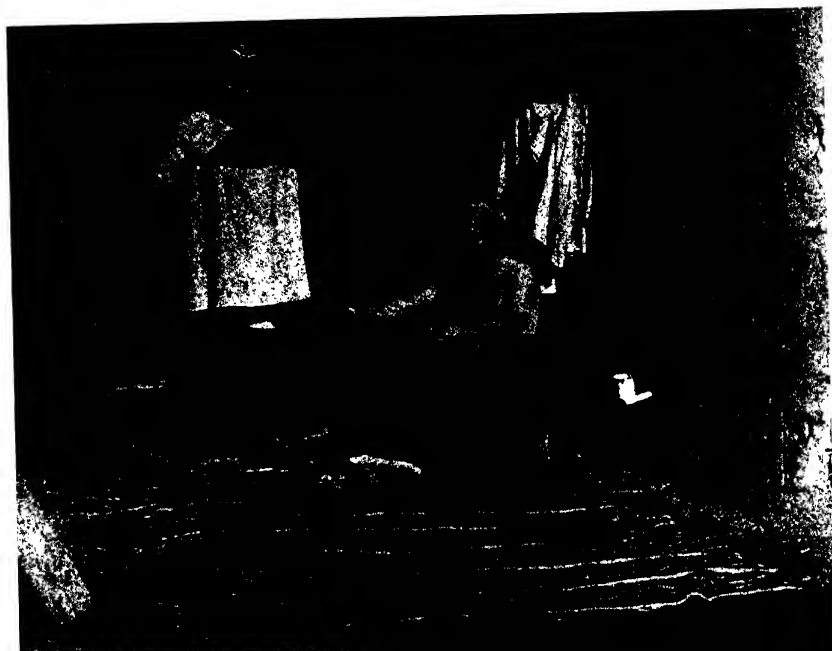
On December 10th we descended to the Ge Chu, and all doubt as to its being a tributary was dispelled. It was about twelve yards wide and seven feet deep, whereas at Chamda the Salween was fifty yards wide and probably twenty feet deep or more. We were told the confluence was only one day's march from Bumthang Gompa, where we stayed for four days, and there was a small Dzong called Sating just below it. There was also said to be a large monastery, Pengar Gompa, farther up the Ge Chu. So another doubt was dispelled: the doubt of the Salween valley being inhabited. Contrarily we had run into a nest of monasteries, dzongs, and villages.

Sating Dzong, which we reached on December 14th, proved to be a long shapeless building on a hill one thousand feet above the Salween. It appeared to have been constructed on no settled plan; like Topsy it just grew. In parts it was single-storied, in parts it was two-storied, and then, as though on a sudden whim, the isolated beginnings of a third storey would crop up on the roof, which itself was on various levels, reached by short ladders. No one floor ran the length of the build-

*The Salween
in winter*



*The frozen
Salween as
a high road*



*My bath in a
monastery
tea-pot*



*Our servants, Nyima
Dorje, Nyima Tön-
drup, and Lewa.
Tibetan version of
"Who's been at my
Enos?"*

ing, but overlapped and strayed, so that you could never say to yourself with certainty, "Now I am on the first floor"—or the second. The ground floor followed the uneven contours of the hill with loving care, and at unequal intervals a first-floor apartment would abut from the whole with no ground floor beneath it, supported stork-like on long wooden poles. The façade was as indented as the Norwegian coast-line, and the roof supported a mushroom growth of prayer-flags, banners, clay ovens with votive fires, and sloping hatchways which did service as chimneys.

To reach the room of the resident Nyeba (minor official or servant) we threaded a dark passage or two, mounted without comment to the roof, skirted a perilous coping, passed the mouth of a hatchway which belched acrid smoke, descended a slippery stairway to a beam-ridden store-room, and greeted our host rather breathlessly. We were handed buttered tea and little twists of hard-bake, while the interminable salutations were tendered by each party; smiling acquiescence followed each expression of incomparable esteem.

We now began to understand roughly the divisions of this part of Kham. Our host told us his district extended to a few miles east of Kau, and included Pengar Gompa. He himself took orders from Biru Dzong (correctly Nakshö Biru), which was controlled by Chungpo Tengchen, which was in turn controlled by Chamdo, which was ultimately at the behest of Lhasa, the seat of all power. The Tibetan government is based on a system of decentralization, necessitated by geographical conditions. Each unit is responsible to the one above it, subject to certain orders of a general nature laid down by the Central Government. Each district supplies a certain amount of revenue, varying according to its capabilities, in money, in kind, or in both. In Zayul the taxes are largely paid in rice, in the Sating district in butter, and 36,000 pounds go annually to Lhasa from this small

area alone in half-yearly payments. The greater part of the revenue is derived from the wool-tax. There are also taxes on hides and tea. A good half of the revenue is spent in grants and subsidies to monasteries, which are untaxed. Of recent years a large part of the remaining half must have been spent on the army. The land and house taxes are peculiarly simple; they are paid direct to the Dzongpön. Roughly speaking, an acre is taxed at 5s. per year, or the equivalent in kind. There is no buying or selling of land; it is granted or withdrawn by the government.

Our host bewailed his fate as governor of so rural and comfortless a district, but there was a ray of light on his horizon; he was soon to go to Lhasa for the Great Prayer festival, which lasts there for about three weeks in February. The capital would be crowded, he would see life.

In spite of his apostrophizing of the district, it yet provides one great delicacy, with which we were served—in little china bowls were what appeared to be desiccated tadpoles, slightly softened by boiling. We regarded the dish with suspicion. What is this? we wondered; but it proved to be excellent, with a taste that was entirely novel, compounded, as far as words can describe it, of hazel-nuts, mushrooms, and buttered toast. It was "thoma", a root which grows in the high grasslands at over 13,000 feet. In the dried state it looks like small pieces of twig, with tubers at intervals. It is best when grilled, and then fried in butter. It is not one of those things of which you can lightly say, as of frogs, "Oh, it's like chicken," or of some deer, "Oh, it's like beef, but tough." Thoma is unique.

It was followed by a meal of rice, two kinds of dried mushrooms (brought from Lhasa), the inevitable raw shredded turnips, noodles, and minced meat, together with some fine white salt from the land of Hor, which lies to the north of Lhasa.

It was the most varied meal we had eaten for months, and the best. We departed to sleep heavily throughout the afternoon, being unaccustomed to eat anything at midday beyond a sandwich. When dinner consists normally of hashed yak-meat and turnips, and when breakfast is the remains of yesterday's hash, there is much to be said for avoiding a further repetition of the menu at lunch.

On December 16th we returned from Sating to Bumthang, and on the 19th we left on the first stage for Pengar. The sky was overcast, with a south-west wind, and it was the warmest morning we had had for weeks; at 8 a.m. the temperature was 26° F. By the river we saw a little dark-brown, white-throated diver, about the size of a Fieldfair. What it could be diving for in the icy waters of the Ge Chu was a mystery.

We had begun to think seriously of Christmas, and felt that we needed something rather special in the way of a roof over our heads for the occasion. Would Pengar provide a better abode than the average rather dismal village hut? At Bumthang we had already exchanged Christmas cards with due ceremony. Ron's gift to me was a little Tibetan painting of a saint, inserted in a sheet of drawing-paper and decorated with a prayer-wheel in ink, effected with all the painstaking accuracy of a specialist in geometry and trigonometry. My contribution was a highly coloured representation of "Father Christmas in Tibet", riding a yak and carrying seasonable offerings of tsamba and turnips. We threatened each other with Christmas stockings, the stocking to be the oldest and smelliest Khampa boot obtainable; but by mutual agreement a truce was called.

On the second march from Bumthang the valley became shallow and open, nearly a mile wide, and we got the full force of a vicious wind which blew down from the west. In the Salween and Ge Chu valleys this wind is almost continuous during the winter. I now had a pair

of loosely woven Khampa socks for gloves, which proved to be more effective than any gloves we had brought from home. The weave was so loose that I could poke a pencil through the interstices and write notes with the glove on. Plain leather is useless for gloves or clothing in this climate; it freezes quickly and seems to absorb the cold. The same is true of windjackets, in a lesser degree. It is essential to have something heavy and thick, preferably felt lined with sheep-skin, which seems to aid the body to generate heat. The requirements for mountain-climbing and riding are quite distinct.

Pengar Gompa (13,360 feet) appeared so comfortable that we decided to spend Christmas there before crossing the next pass on the way to Nakshö Biru. The approach of the festive season was somewhat marred by Ron having the ill-luck to develop toothache, perhaps the most dreaded affliction on any expedition. In his agony, Ron declared he would have all his teeth extracted and a complete set of false ones inserted before his next trip. He is nothing if not thorough. But on Christmas Eve he woke me with a shout of triumph, flourishing a gory tusk! He had wrestled with it in the silent hours of the night, and operated on himself with the extractors. As a result that Christmas in a Buddhist monastery, ninety days' journey from the nearest white man, was a day of great feasting. We had reserved our last tins of peas and beans, and these, with roast mutton and a tinned plum pudding, made a meal that was blessed. As a crowning luxury there was a bottle of rum, rigorously preserved since our liquor ration, half a teaspoonful a day, had given out over a month before. Ron produced his balalaika, and the monastery echoed to the strains of "Good King Wenceslaus". That bottle was very dead before the night was out; it was a worthy orgy on the two hundred and fifty-ninth evening since we had left Myitkyina.

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On December 26th we headed west up the Ge Chu from Pengar. The thermometer showed 6° F. at 8.30 a.m.

Not far from the monastery a monk stood over a smoky fire of fir-twigs, a ghoulish figure was seated close by: it was a corpse, clothed from head to foot in a tight-fitting robe of red felt, and tied to a supporting post at its back. A crude representation of a face was painted in white on the head-covering. The corpse would remain thus for three days, while monks took turns to stand watch for three hours at a time, tending the fire. In this way, according to Buddhist belief, the spirit would be given time to leave the body quietly. The body itself would then be fed to the vultures and dogs; it is clearly a useless object once the spirit has gone, and great merit is acquired by feeding hungry creatures. The soil of Tibet is not cluttered with graves.

We left the last of the scattered villages; the valley was grey, gaunt and spiritless; scrub covered the lower slopes, and shrivelled trees; the high levels were bare as a factory wall; all things were quiet but the wind, and an eagle brooded high over the river.

The Ge Chu split into three valleys, and our path followed the centre one. There was said to be no path farther up the actual Ge Chu, but in any case the source was clearly indeterminate; the river derived from a wide fan of small streams.

In late evening we reached grasslands, where the hills fell back, showing rounded shoulders, and we slept in the cattle-camp of Tsanda (14,726 feet).

On the night of the 27th the temperature fell to three degrees below zero, and by 8 a.m. the next morning it was scarcely higher, yet the ponies and cattle slept out; in the pale dawn I saw the coolies seated in dumb content round their fire of dung, with one shoulder and half the chest bare. The yaks lay tethered in rows, crystallized in hoar-frost, chewing the cud with a peculiar squeak of their teeth, like the chirping of small birds.

A wide valley led from camp to the Thamtsa La, wind-combed and desolate, pearly gold in the thin early sun. All colour was rarefied, lightened; every stone seemed to stand out from its fellows, so pin-sharp was the light. Dwarf hares in myriads scuttled from burrow to burrow before the ponies' feet, their wizened faces, with tiny naked ears, flattened to the ground. We reached the pass, the Thamtsa La, on the crest of the Salween-Ge Chu divide, in mid-afternoon, and dropped quickly to a narrow lightly wooded valley. A monastery, like a stack of toy bricks, rode the crest of a naked ridge; we climbed steeply towards it through a miniature park, just as two monks came out to blow trumpets on the roof.

While we completed the work next day, December 30th, Lewa rode down to establish contact with the Dzongpön of Nakshö Biru, half a day's journey. He returned in glad harmony with all men, speaking with the painful distinctness of the half drunk. Like a conjurer he produced from his chupa four bottles of arak, some cigarettes, and a tin of those hideously sticky sweets known only to Indian bazaars. "Sahib, it is a wonderful place," said Lewa with a flourish; "the Dzongpön is a great lord, and I am his friend," and our man of iron retired with uncertain step to sleep, perchance to dream. He may have been in an impressionable condition, but it was evident we were coming to a place of importance, which offered flesh-pots of a sort.

On New Year's Day, 1936, we rode into Nakshö Biru, through a dust-storm which rasped the open valley like a file. At last we had reached the Nak Chu, "Black River", as this upper part of the Salween is called. We were shown to one of a hundred crumbling mud houses which lay scattered over a tawny plain; ours appeared to be one of a set of ruins, but within was a large comfortable room, open along most of one side to all the winds of heaven.

The governor, no great lord but only a Chandzö, a somewhat minor rank, promptly paid us a visit, bringing presents. He was a little doll-like man, about thirty, with quick narrow eyes, dressed in the usual plum-coloured silk. He was reservedly polite, but asked questions. Where had we come from? and why? He glanced uncertainly from one to the other of us, as though considering something unconnected with the talk. We felt vaguely uneasy.

We had heard there was a Trüku, an incarnation of a spirit, at Nakshö Biru; and the next morning we were invited to visit him. We waited cross-legged in a long narrow room bright with gold images and red curtains. There was a little fluttering, as of birds' wings, and the incarnation came in, a small lightly built boy of twelve, with large dark eyes and full lips; his features were pointed, his ears large. There was nothing particularly holy in his appearance; he looked quite an ordinary mischievous small boy, temporarily overcome with shyness, as he sat on a cushioned seat fondling two Lhasa lion-dogs. His father, a thin, sallow, intelligent man, took charge of the proceedings. He was sophisticated, had been in Gyantse, and met Englishmen. Before the discovery of his son's holiness, eight years previously, he had been of no great account, but now he was a man of influence, and wealth. It was a striking illustration of the peculiar democracy of Tibet; normally class is rigidly defined, but through religion a man of low birth can rise to greatness; he may be born to it, as the Dalai Lama and other reincarnations; he may achieve it by strenuous study, and become the abbot of a powerful monastery; or he may have it thrust upon him, as this father of a reincarnation. Religion, not wealth, is the ladder to success in Tibet.

The father of the Precious One enlivened our stay in Nakshö Biru. Our servants called him "Lama" for short, but that he was most certainly not. He was the

one Tibetan of high position we ever met who would laugh, play the fool, and make jokes of a ruder sort. All these superior accomplishments, he avowed, had been learnt in his relations with British officers at Gyantse. In a tiny room with a roaring sheet-iron stove he entertained us to parties that began as early as four in the afternoon and lasted far into the night. We planned to go down river to Chamda, in order to map that section of the Salween we had left undone by our detour to the Ge Chu. We would then return to Nakshö Biru and continue to the bleak uplands at the source; that country was said to be uninhabited, there were no herdsmen, nothing; wild yak and wild asses roamed the wastelands. It was a grim prospect, but meantime there was a respite: we lay back and relaxed in the warmth of the "Lama's" hospitality.

His food was excellent; there were dried pomegranates from China and even potatoes, for he had a garden of his own, and once he gave us a priceless gift of half a dozen eggs. A hen in these parts is like a scarlet woman in an English village; the poor creature is never left in peace, and everyone knows all about her for miles around. At one place we visited there was a solitary fowl; at long intervals she was transported over a high mountain pass to visit a cock-bird in the next valley, a day's journey distant. The "Lama" had a special brew of chang, made in his own house with yeast from Lhasa; it was brought mulled in a thick black pot. It was the best chang we ever had, pale greenish-white in colour, with a sharp taste like very raw unsweetened cider. "No heel-taps" was another Gyantse accomplishment, and in time the little room with its scroll-paintings and gilt images would grow rose-red and vague. "Come to Lhasa some time," cried our host. "But do not bring wives. I will provide ten beautiful women with painted faces; but the little sahib (this to me) must shave his beard."

The "Lama" was also the local doctor, and the parties would be interrupted now and then by a peasant seeking audience. He would shuffle in with bent back and protruding tongue, and lay a little pile of copper coins on the table. The afflicted part would be indicated with a groan, and the Lama would delve into a bulging bag of tiger-skin; he would fish out a tiny pouch of powdered eucalyptus, cinnamon, ginger, or musk, and measure a portion in a twist of paper. All his stock, except some dried eucalyptus bark, appeared to be in powder form; we sniffed at each in turn, but there were many we could not identify. He was keenly interested in English medicines, especially in liver pills which wrought mightily, and we traded some for turquoises and other ornaments. Syphilis, he said, was the most prevalent disease in the district. The germs of it are among the few which survive the altitude. Goitres were rare, they were a disease of the South.

On January 10th we set off on the seven days' journey to Chamda, travelling light with only four yak, and leaving Nyima Töndrup with the rest of the baggage at Nakshö Biru. There were long stretches of gloomy gorge where we rode along the solid frozen surface of the river. . . there were tiny isolated villages where we slept among straw and saddles . . . there were monasteries, and cattle camps where the herdsmen brought milk . . . there were passes, crossed wearily in a gale of wind, and vast naked valleys where the eye sought refuge in a boot, a button or a bridle, so immense was the space all about one.

In the Salween valley travel is easier in winter than in summer, for the frozen river provides a natural highway for miles at a time; but occasionally there are accidents, and one of our yaks crashed through the ice. It took an hour's desperate work to pull him out, for though his head was free, the broken ice refroze rapidly round him, imprisoning his huge bulk. With a pole

across his horns, and others beneath his body, we eventually prised him out, labouring stripped to the waist. The poor beast was so numbed with cold he could not help us by struggling out; he was just so much dead weight. For an hour afterwards he could scarcely walk.

The winds were now so bitter that we had to build a fire of scrub or dung at every survey station to thaw our hands. We could work for about five minutes and then returned to the fire again. Added to the short daylight, this made travel terribly slow, and we were forced to the regretful conclusion that the season was really over. On our return to Nakshö Biru we might have to lie up for some weeks.

We reached Chamda on January 16th. The reports of the road had been largely inaccurate, although it was true there was a detour of two days to circumvent a stretch where the main valley was impassable. On the outskirts of Chamda we saw the last stages of death in Tibet; a monk had recently died; twenty or thirty vultures stood sleepily about the remains of the corpse on a little platform of mud; on our approach they tottered obscenely away, so bloated that they were unable to fly. Their feathers rustled with filth. Stray dogs and magpies dashed in to finish the leavings. It was the only time we saw vultures in Tibet.

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On January 17th, we turned back to Nakshö Biru by the way we had come. I had contracted a liverish cold and cough through sitting over-long by a yak-herd's fire when halting for a bowl of milk. We had left all medicines at Biru, so for a week I suffered miseries while we travelled back up the frozen river. On most nights, the temperature dropped to zero. Lewa also developed a cough, and we croaked dully in chorus like a squad of bull-frogs as the ponies plodded on their way. On arriving at Biru, I rolled into my blankets, worn out by

coughing, and was more or less dead to the world for two days.

I awoke from coma to find that Nakshö Biru was likely to be the grave of all our hopes of reaching the source of the Black River. We were under a cloud of suspicion as possible Russian spies. . . .

CHAPTER XX

Arrested

THE future was dubious.

The crux of the situation, as we realized later, was my wretched beard.

During our fortnight's absence, the Chandzö had had time to think the matter over, somewhat on this wise perhaps: "These men are not sahibs at all, they are Uruss (Russians). It is well known that Uruss are bearded, and here is one with a beard. Who but spies would travel in the winter? They say they have come from Burr-ma. But that I do not believe. I have never heard of Burr-ma. They have come from the east, that is certain. But sahibs do not come from the east, they all come from Darjeeling, from Kaali-katta, and by the road to Gyantse. Yes, these men are Uruss, and they have in fact come from Siling." (Szechuan, and western China generally. Szechuan has been full of Communist activity for several years.)

It was perfectly sound reasoning for a rather provincial eastern Tibetan, and after all he was only doing his duty. Nakshö Biru is one of an inner ring of frontier towns round the Holy City; it controls three routes from the east. All passing strangers must be watched, and a bearded stranger from the sinister Power to the north was doubly suspect. Further, were not these strangers wearing Tibetan clothes, attempting disguise, and that badly? Oh yes, they were Uruss without a doubt.

So he asked us, politely but firmly, to remain in Nakshö Biru until he could obtain instructions from Lhasa concerning us.

We were dumbfounded. Nakshö Biru is not more than 300 miles from Lhasa, but in winter, when travel is slow, a reply confirming our respectability might take weeks to arrive. Meanwhile we were frankly under open arrest, hopelessly marooned, for transport in any direction could only be obtained through the Chandzö, and only the Chandzö had couriers. We were cut off from all communication with the outside world, even with Chamda or Pengar—certainly for weeks, possibly for months. It was a ghastly prospect. Our paper work would last us for a short time; after that there would be nothing on earth to do.

The news spread, and public opinion responded by raising the price of supplies. A leg of mutton now cost as much as a shilling, formerly the price of a whole sheep, and we were naturally incensed. We were no longer "personæ gratae". It was useless to shave my beard now; suspicion would only be further aroused by the apparent deception.

The "Lama" invited us to dine; he had grim news. The country round the source was difficult in winter; worst of all there was no grazing for the animals. No one travelled on the plateau in winter. In a way that was a consolation; but had it not been for our arrest we could still have travelled up the Black River as far as the edge of the plateau. However, that was not all. In the spring months the wild Changpas (Men of the North) with their herds of yak followed the new grass up from the lowlands of the far north. They were bandits; occasionally they raided the settled villages to the south. A small party of fifteen had once created havoc in Nakshö Biru itself. Merchants bound for China or Mongolia travelled in company, several hundred together. With no weapons and only three servants we should stand a slim chance. The results of nearly a year's work might be lost. And rifles cost £100 each in Kham. If the reply arrived from Lhasa by the end of February, we might just slip through

before the Changpas came south. As far as anyone knew it was another twenty or thirty marches to the source. With unknown conditions farther on it might take considerably longer. We should be leading the Changpas by a very short head.

Meanwhile we could do nothing. We held protest meetings in our room; chiefly, I think, to keep up our spirits. Of course it would be all right! Had we not been warned about Poyü, and again about the Salween valley? Those rumours had been unfounded. The reply must come from Lhasa in a fortnight, three weeks at most. It was absurd holding us up like this, the Chandzö was a simpleton; and so on, far into the night.

The servants, great loyalists, and also great children, went in a body to the Chandzö's house; they sat in a corner of his room saying rude things, while he gave them tea to keep them quiet. Why did he keep their sahibs here? they asked. Oh, it was a great foolishness. The sahibs were Inji sahibs, by no means Uruss. If they were to stay here, they must have eggs, a dozen eggs a day, for such was the sahibs' custom; and there must be mountains of firewood. And more besides till he told them they were bad men and sent them away with a tin of mixed biscuits as a peace-offering.

Lewa was irrepressible. He fixed up a length of wire with a small empty box on the roof of our house, announcing to a wide-eyed audience that it was a "wyer-liss"—he could speak with India! With an air of deep mystery he would place his ear to the box while the audience goggled. Frowning horribly, he commanded silence—he had a message: "Hallo, yes? Ha! The big sahib's wife has had five sons! By the gods it is well to respect my sahibs! Ho, Khampa-log, fetch wood, fetch water, but do not come near to my 'wyer-liss', for it is a dangerous thing and only I know its ways."

The child-like Khampas were profoundly impressed, and public opinion veered in our favour. The boycott

began to drop, and several came to be doctored by Ron, bringing presents of butter and meat; there were wailing children with ophthalmia, and peasants with worms and purulent sores.

We settled down to work on route reports, calculations, and map-colouring, all the desk work of a survey. We managed to do a little, but our room was far from dust-proof, in spite of a curtain slung across most of the window. The wind would snatch up the dry-as-bone earth, with its chaff and its crumbling dung, and drive it screaming down the valley in mad-twisting whorls; in a few seconds our papers, our clothing, our beds, the whole room would be covered in a layer not only of fine matter, but of segments of straw, dried mud in pellets, and frost-hardened manure. One moment the air was still, the next it was like a mad thing, and you would see a water-carrier halt with an arm over her face, her sheepskin dress flip-flapping like a sail.

We put away the papers, and sat hopelessly about smoking, attempting to sleep, or reading the books we had read a dozen times already. To break up the monotony of the day we instituted lunch, of "thoma", marmite sandwiches, or mince-pies with hard-bake pastry. The thoma involved a wary search for small hanks of hair; Tibetan butter is kept in raw-hide bags, which seem to amalgamate with their contents; Nyima Dorje was a poor hand at weeding the butter. Breakfast (on rare occasions of wheat porridge) would be at six, lunch at midday. Then we grew impatient, so that lunch was finally advanced to half-past nine, and a tea of chupattis and jam was instituted to fill up the gap. The meals were beacons in a desert of time.

Sometimes we went for walks; by tacit consent we each selected a different side of the valley; Ron appropriated the south side, I the north. We benefited by the solitude, and would come home refreshed, eager for company and a game of chess or a never-ending dis-

cussion of politics, sport, books, restaurants or religion; the wildest statements would be made in the happy knowledge that verification was impossible. The only difficulty was to remember what side one had taken in a previous debate, for to keep things going one would support a view diametrically opposed to his own, down to the simplest things. Ron would remark, "I could do with an omelette now, *omelette aux fines herbes*, French food's the best in the world." "I don't agree," I would reply at once, taking up the cue, "Now in Germany . . .", and then we would be off, hammer and tongs for an hour. Agreement meant an end to conversation, and boredom.

On occasions one would invite the other to view his side of the valley, pointing out its beauties with all the fond pride of an amateur gardener. "Now if you'd only been here last week. . . . Follow me, this is the best ice-crossing . . . this is where I usually sit."

One day Ron returned from a solitary walk with studied calm: he had dropped into a remote hollow where there was a single hut. Only the herdsman's wife was at home. Seeing a strange figure striding down the hill, she was seized with panic and set loose her five huge mastiffs. They rushed straight for Ron. Luckily he had a staff. He got his back to a cliff, and hurled a lump of rock at the nearest dog. It cracked its skull, killing it outright. At this the others sheered off. He related the whole incident casually, but it must have been a nasty moment. Tibetan mastiffs are a real menace, and do not hesitate to kill a stranger.

My walks gave rise to a curious theory; I usually carried an ice-axe for a walking-stick and would climb a certain hill about 1000 feet above the valley, disappearing over the top to continue along the ridge. Wild rumours spread to the effect that I was searching for gold! It was roundly asserted that I disappeared for hours into the hill, digging a tunnel by some magical means known

only to myself. Tibetans have a great distrust of mining; it disturbs the spirits of the earth.

Lewa was determined to transform our hovel into the home beautiful. He importuned the monks, and returned in triumph at the head of two coolies bearing a large copper cauldron. "A bath, sahib!" he announced as the procession drew up. The cauldron was actually the monastery tea-kettle, used at times of great festival when tea was served out to the populace. It was set up in a tiny mud cubicle, with a blazing fire, and for the first time in ten months we had real hot baths. The "tea-pot" was only just wide enough for one's hips, but wider at the bottom, so that the occupant would have to squat doubled up in it to the neck; in a cloud of steam, with the fire close by, the bather looked like an unfortunate missionary being stewed for a cannibal feast.

Not satisfied with this, Lewa rigged up a "telephone" from our room to the kitchen, out of a set of horsebells and yards of knotted string. Sometimes we forgot the new-fangled device, and bellowed for service in the normal manner. Lewa or Nyima Töndrup would then walk in sedately with all the injured pride of a butler who has been sworn at.

Once or twice the "Lama" invited us to his house. He showed us some copper images of Tsong Kapa, made in Lhasa. One thousand were being prepared for the temple, at the orders of the young reincarnation. They were treated in a curious way; the figures were first heated, and a solution of gold with some acid, possibly aqua regia, was then applied with a split stick. This gave a very pleasing lustrous effect, seeming to produce not merely a gilt veneer, but a sort of alloy of the copper with the gold.

He showed us other treasures; turquoises, of which I was making a collection, and about which I was learning by hard experience; little charm-boxes, of gold, turquoise and pearls; and heavy ear-rings worn by the

élite of Lhasa. Then even these mild amusements were vetoed. The "Lama" sent us a courteous note to the effect that it would go ill with him if he consorted with suspects, although he never doubted our probity. But he continued to send us pots of chang through his servant.

The days passed with wearisome persistence. Sometimes it snowed, an inch or two at a time. The next day it would evaporate, leaving the ground more brittle and crusted than before, ready to blow into dust clouds. At night the temperature dropped to a few degrees below zero, the lowest was -8° F., but by day we could often sit out on the roof. It would be 83° F. in the sun, but 20° F. in the shade.

Towards the end of February the place awoke to unaccustomed activity. Peasants and herdsman trooped in from neighbouring valleys. Beggars of every description appeared like hawks, some in filthy rags, and crippled, others well-dressed and well-nourished, with a haughty air. One acquires merit by giving alms to beggars; as a result they are often far better off than the hard-working peasants. None need beg in Tibet, there is work for all, but with a few simple prayers and exhortations it is easy to acquire the reputation of a holy man. Is the horse sick? or the turnip crop blighted? Then perhaps that beggar with his twirling prayer-wheel can throw out the infecting spirit. He murmurs a prayer, accepts his offering of tsamba, and passes on.

Now they came in swarms, for it was the time of the Lo-Sar, the New Year festival, and in a few days there would be a great dance at the temple. The Tibetan calendar is based on a year of twelve lunar months, with the result that a gratuitous month must be inserted every third year, a rather more wholesale method than our own insertion of an extra day in Leap Year. The New Year is usually sometime in February, and in 1936 February 23rd was the first day of the Fire Mouse Year.

We were invited to the monastery to watch the Devil

Dance. The monks had kindly erected a tent for us on the roof of a building overlooking the great courtyard; keen as we were to get photographs, they were still keener; they had even consulted Lewa as to the best position for the tent with regard to the sun. Thus the great world beyond Nakshö Biru would be assured of seeing the wonders of its temple! To encourage our activities they brought chang and the special twists of hard-bake that are made for the Lo-Sar.

The scene in the courtyard was like a village fair, or the opening minutes of a race-meeting before the shouting begins. Peasants clustered in knots, or sat in rows on the edge of a chalked-out square. Older men basked in the sun against the temple wall. Everybody was in holiday mood. New chupas of felt or sheepskin had been brought out; even the neediest sported a pair of black-and-red felt boots.

The women twittered together with shy, earnest faces, their crow-black hair glistening with butter, twisted into many thin plaits and attached to a wide horizontal band gay with turquoise and coral, which swung low behind them, almost to their ankles. All Tibetans love turquoise and coral; the very poorest can buy a piece or two. There were meetings of friends, from far-off villages. It was an opportunity for gossip! "Kore (Hi, you!) has the barley been good at Narak? . . . Yes, Tserilamo is with child, by a merchant from Chamdo, and she but fifteen. . . . Do you go on pilgrimage this year. . . . Did the yak recover?" Servants of the monastery circulated with tea in long wooden barrels (our bath had been requisitioned) and here and there one saw a gaol-bird in wide wooden collar and leg-irons. There are no regular prisons in this part of Tibet; criminals are clamped into their collars and leg-irons and left to wander about as best they can; they can sleep in their own houses, but no one attempts to free them. There was a ceaseless turning of prayer-wheels, and a subdued hum, the

eternal "Om mane padme hum, Om mane padme hum."

At length a little figure with a green mask, like a hideous Punchinello, bounded down the temple steps and proceeded to clear the centre space with a heavy pole, striking absurd threatening attitudes and thumping any unwary intruder. A laughing game of 'Tim Tiddlers' Ground ensued until the space was cleared and the peasants crowded expectantly round the outskirts of the court. Clearly there was no scheduled time for the curtain to go up; after all the whole day was before us.

Within an hour the first procession issued from the temple: young acolytes wearing curving crested hats of yellow felt, swinging great gilt and silver censers, and others blowing conch-shells; behind them monks, bearing banners, and long-handled drums; then a little group with silver clarinets, which trilled monotonously; a monk with a gong; then slowly, one by one from the great door, with much clumsy capering and wide spreading of the hands, came twenty-four masked figures in gaudy flowing garments; masks that leered and grinned idiotically, masks that frowned and triumphed obscenely, masks of animals that were no animals, but childish nightmares; and among them two figures, leaders of the dance, with the wide black hats of the Pönists, surmounted by skulls and peacock feathers. The spirits of the old year were being driven out, those of the new placated.

The audience stood mute, interested but smiling, showing no sign of awe. There was a holiday, with free food. Solemnly the figures postured, and slowly gyrated, with half turns and bows, moving in file round the court, with long motionless pauses. I was irresistibly reminded of the Griffon and the Mock-Turtle, lugubriously dancing the Lobster Quadrille. Cymbals clashed ponderously from the temple steps; at intervals a gong boomed; long trumpets rumbled.

There was an interval, and the incarnation and his father appeared at a window in the temple; they had a

pair of field-glasses and waved gaily to us. Then the crowd parted, and the Chandzö, in blue and green silk, walked through with his new partner, a Tsedung, recently arrived from Chungpo Tengchen. Many governorships are run in this dual fashion, that each may keep the other in check. It is extraordinarily successful. Lhasa allows no bickering among her servants.

Other dances followed, hour after hour, till the shadows fell and one shivered. There was a dance of six ghoulish figures, wearing death's head masks, a white jacket with red stripes to portray ribs, white tights and boots, blood-red gloves, and a ludicrous skirt like a ballet-dancer's. They represented the breakers of bodies. Nimble they ran hither and thither among the audience, who shrieked in mock terror. They gathered in the centre of the court and pranced like all the demons of a pantomime.

Two soldiers took the stage, in chain-mail, with swords and bows, very similar to the pictures one sees of Genghiz Khan's Mongol troops. They made feints and passes in sham fight. Interminably the performance dragged on. Much of its symbolism was lost on us. We were roused from torpor when two figures appeared dressed as aged men, with long beards. I think it was the incarnation who saw the joke first; he pointed and nudged his father, then pointed across at me. The Lama waved, placed his hand fan-wise under his chin in imitation of a beard; slowly the joke rippled on through the audience, till they were all swaying slightly, shaking with laughter; a sea of faces turned up to our tent and there was a roar like the back-current on a pebbly beach. It was a rout; even the performers stopped to join in the merriment.

We returned home numbed with cold, with cramps in the stomach, but most of the audience had stood happily for seven long hours.

The celebrations continued for another week; troupes of secular dancers performed in our courtyard, packed to

bursting-point with a grubby, smiling audience. We dispensed largesse in the form of chang and tsamba, feeling gloriously baronial.

By March 1st there was a little murmur of spring, the iron-hard land was stirring. A few flies appeared sleepily. Dust storms rioted. The ice on the Salween gaped and one began to walk cautiously along the edge. Streams ran heavy with silt. The air no longer bit hard, it was ever so slightly humid; even nimbus cloud appeared, then retreated shyly. Soon there were only ten degrees of frost at night. We discarded our heavy sheepskins, and wore lighter garments of felt.

Clothes were becoming very worn; I bought back a pair of pyjamas from Nyima Töndrup that I had given him months before in Burma. He had never used them. These sartorial resurrections were among the greater mysteries of the journey. Quite early on we had jettisoned a number of garments in order to reduce loads; the loads were certainly reduced in number, and apparently in weight also, but at intervals the long-forgotten raiment would be brought forth mysteriously from the servants' baggage, to be repurchased by us!

We were by now utterly resigned to our vegetable existence at Nakshö Biru. But on occasions the deep peace was rudely disturbed. The Chandzö had a pet grey monkey, and one evening it elected to pay us a call. At first we regarded it with benevolence; like ourselves it was a stranger in the land, and its antics amused us, as it scrambled over tables and beds, examining all our belongings in turn. But when it had eaten two candles, a valuable drawing pencil, the best part of a tsamba lamp-holder, fallen in the brazier and upset it, and utterly wrecked a mosquito-net carefully arranged to dry films in, then we decided on forcible ejection. There was a wild scramble—out of the window leaped the monkey, reappearing suddenly to gibber with fury—then up on to the roof-top, where Lewa charged about in hot



(Above)

*Devil dance at
Nakshö Biru*

(Below)

Spectator





(Above)

*Farthest west up the Black River.
Pack animals crossing ice in
right foreground*

(Below)

*Down the frozen Su Chu. Retreat
from Nakshö Biru*



pursuit among bales of straw. At last all was quiet. Our visitor had been evicted. In the small hours of the morning the household was aroused by fearful shrieks of a female order. The visitor had returned, and landed hard on the recumbent form of our landlord's aged wife, who slept on the veranda without. She feared devils, and was making the night hideous with her yells. Lewa, suspecting thieves, had dashed out sword in hand, only to stand helpless with laughter at sight of those two, the wrinkled monkey and the aged crone, sitting up face to face and screaming abuse, the one scarcely distinguishable from the other. That was the monkey's final excursion; later we saw it sitting dejectedly in its owner's courtyard, nursing a black eye.

The second week in March brought welcome company; we had long since exhausted each other's stock of stories. Lewa brought the astounding news that two Indian merchants had arrived and were about to pay us a call. "Abdul-log, sahib," he announced complacently. This translated, meant Muhammadans—Lewa's sense of humour was at times purely cockney.

The traders were Ladakhis, thin velvet-eyed men with a quiet lazy manner. They wore the latest thing in Lhasa headgear, truncated cones of blue-green cloth, stiffened with cardboard—the ear flaps of dark-brown fur were tied over the crown with ribbon. They lost no time in selling them to us. Trade was their life-blood.

We chatted peaceably in the sun. It seemed curiously unreal to be talking Hindustani with someone outside our own tiny circle; we had come to regard it as our special privilege in a land where only Tibetan was spoken. This was our first contact with India for nearly a year, and we asked for news. Was there a war of any sort? No, they said serenely. India had no news, although there was some talk of a war between Ittali and Abbasin, wherever those places might be. But it was of no great matter, it did not concern sahibs or the people of Hind.

And that was that. Months later we realized that the peace of Europe had been rocked to its very foundations; here in Kham the whole affair was less than a passing cloud.

The Ladakhis—their names were Muhammad Asghar and Suraj-u-Din—were travelling with the caravan of a Tibetan of rank, one Doring Thajji Kushap, who was on his way to meet the Tashi Lama, and escort him to his own monastery near Shigatse, south-west of Lhasa.

It was some thirteen years since the revered Tashi Lama had fled the country, owing to differences with the Dalai Lama, and taken refuge in Mongolia. He is claimed by many to be the spiritual leader of Tibet; but his temporal power is small. He has a sort of private estate in the neighbourhood of Shigatse, where he controlled local affairs, but was under the ægis of the Dalai Lama and his Council (Kashag). At that time, 1936, the Tashi Lama was said to be in Jekundo—where he has since died—with a large retinue. His reincarnation is now to be sought, and he will inherit the estate.

There had long been rumours of the Tashi Lama's return. The reincarnated Dalai Lama, whose discovery was then vaguely reported, cannot take full authority until he has reached the age of eighteen. Meanwhile Tibet is governed by a Regent.

A rapprochement with the Tashi Lama had been intended, and Doring was to carry out the preliminaries. He seemed in no great hurry. He had already taken nearly two months to reach Nakshö Biru from Lhasa. The caravan consisted of 50 mules and 100 yaks, with 30 personal servants for himself and his wife. He had ten saddle-horses, but only used one; when the Ladakhis asked him the purpose of the other nine, he replied loftily: "Oh, they look well."

The Ladakhis had joined the caravan for two reasons; for fear of bandits and as the only means of reaching eastern Tibet, where they purposed to open up new

trade connexions. Travelling alone, their transport costs would have been prohibitive, and they might quite possibly have been refused transport altogether by local Dzongpöns. But they sighed wearily at the procrastinating caravan.

“ You see, we wish to sell amber in Chamdo, and beyond, where the price is good, twenty rupees a tola. There we may buy turquoises, then return to Lhasa to sell them. If we reach Lhasa before the end of the year we can buy tea there, and sell it at a profit in Ladakh. Then we can go to Yarkand to buy jade. But this caravan is slow, we shall be late in Lhasa.”

I gasped; these little men hurried about the heart of Asia as nonchalantly as though it were the Surrey hills! They had crossed the Karakoram half a dozen times in the ordinary course of business, much as a City worker might catch the morning train. They had moved quietly in and out of Srinagar, Darjeeling and Calcutta. Shades of Marco Polo! What a pother we Europeans make about our own puny travels!

“ Japanese goods sell best here,” they remarked complacently. “ They cost so little.”

We went shopping at their house, and they regaled us with Indian tea and Gold Flake cigarettes; there were electric torches, knives, white sugar, coral, cheap jewellery, notebooks, zip-fastener sweaters, and even some Japanese dolls and a finicky case of scent and soap which they hoped to dispose of to some lady of taste in Chamdo. Wonder of wonders, there was a gramophone, with a heterogeneous assortment of records, including one Chinese, two Tibetan, “ Tipperary ”, some jazz tunes, and two sword dances. The gramophone would be sold if anyone fancied it; meantime its weird scrapings attracted trade.

Greatest marvel of all, there was a cinematograph, referred to as the “ Bioscope ”. That evening they offered to give us a performance. It was a much grander

affair than we had been led to believe. We had understood it to be a magic lantern through which strips of film were passed at great speed. They came staggering up our shaky ladder with a contraption that looked suspiciously like a sewing-machine. The lid was removed, and there in all its glory was the most travelled of film projectors, worked by a hand-cranked dynamo.

A crowd of peasants was admitted, Suraj-u-Din manned the crank. "Sabchiz taire hai?" (Everything ready?), and the great show was on: fitfully the dynamo produced light, shakily the pictures danced on the off-white sheet, and wildly the audience applauded. The films, mostly of French extraction, vintage 1910, and highly hilarious, often jumped fantastically from scene to scene, leaving bewildering gaps in the theme. Occasionally there were halts for repairs, when a film became inextricably tangled in the machinery. The cause of the gaps was made clear: the mangled pieces were cast aside, the ends to be patched together later. Thus a trembling scene of love and passion would be rudely interrupted, its place usurped by a mundane street-scene. But on with the show! these were minor set-backs. Never did a Garbo first night at the Empire enjoy such an enthusiastic reception as did those tattered films, relics of pioneer days in the cinema world, unearthed in the Lord-knew-what junkshop in a Calcutta back-street to delight the eyes of the grimy Khampa peasantry and two marooned Englishmen.

Surely the ghosts of those Gallic actors, who pranced and postured in curly-brimmed bowlers, check suits and sweeping moustachios, were with us to see the huge enjoyment their antics gave to a little huddle of people on a windy night in the far-away Salween valley.

We visited Doring, and played countless games of Mah Jong with him and his Chinese doctor, or with the Ladakhis. The democracy of feudalism is quaint. Now and then a servant would make up the party, and when

he retired to do some work, another would drop quietly into his place. Class in Tibet is so rigidly defined that no one is afraid of losing it, and snobbery is unknown. Doring spoke Hindustani, and was pleasant company. His wife sat serenely in a corner, attending to household duties with her maid; she had a quantity of jewellery, including a little set of silver toothpicks, earpicks, nose-picks, files, and other toilet requisites, on a chain of amethyst, pearls, jade, coral, silver, gold, topaz and garnet. It must have cost all of £200. She joined us at meals, the only time we saw a Tibetan woman eat with men, and played with a collection of lap-dogs and a monkey, each of which had its own special attendant.

For nearly three weeks the caravan stayed at Nakshö Biru; daily it was reported to be moving off; now the wife, now Doring, or one of the servants fell sick, and departure was postponed. One day Doring said he would certainly leave on the morrow; by the evening he had changed his mind, the morrow was unpropitious, he would leave the day after. Theirs was a leisurely progress, and stately.

During this time Nyima Dorje left us of his own accord. We were not sorry. He had constant rows with Lewa, was dirty, and had failed completely as a cook once we started to live on the country. He continued to sleep in our kitchen, got drunk and gambled elsewhere, losing his pay. Later we hired him a horse, and he left with our mail for the south. He eventually arrived in Darjeeling. Lewa and Nyima Töndrup shared the duties of cook, and the household ran smoothly henceforward.

At last, on March 26th, the long caravan moved off, with a glitter of silk and a clash of horsebells. We watched them go from our roof-top, and faced blank days again. We took up weaving at the instruction of our landlord's wife; there was no loom, only three bits of stick, but functioning on the same principle as a loom. Then we

spent hours making up cross-word puzzles for each other. There was no hope now of reaching the source of the Black River. There seemed no hope of leaving Nakshö Biru. We yawned, and suffered from too much sleep. For hours we lay resigned, then would break into a welter of fretful complaints. Life was deadly. We waited.

March 28th.—A courier arrived from Lhasa to-day, but there was no news for us.

March 29th.—Three more couriers arrived. We listened expectantly to the bells, but there was no news.

March 30th.—The Tsedung invited us to a meal about 4.30. At midday he sent to say all was ready, and would we come at once please? He is puzzled at the delay. The three weeks' holiday during Lo-Sar has probably held things up. He will confer again with the Chandzö.

April 3rd.—Spent the whole day weaving, and felt drugged at the end. Humidity has increased, and fresh meat will not keep, so we eat the dry smoked meat. The sight of an egg or potato would make us gasp with wonder.

On April 5th the long-expected letter arrived. We could move on. But to what purpose? The Changpas were by now well on their way south. It was a bitter disappointment. To reach the source of the Black River had been the main objective of the journey. For a year it had been a remote possibility, luck had seemed to be with us, and at Christmas we had been almost within reach of the elusive goal. We had practically taken it for granted that we should yet get there some time, and had even begun to plan the route beyond. Now those fond dreams were smashed. We held a conference, and pored over the map. What was to be done? East of Shopando was a long unknown stretch of the river. Kingdon Ward had reached it near Dzikar, to the north-east of Shugden Gompa, but there were many miles that were still vague.

We planned a route: back down the Ge Chu valley to Sating; from there to Shopando, either by the Salween or the China Road. Then we would keep along the river as far as possible, and eventually cross the divide to Zayul, and return home down the Lohit to Sadiya in Assam. It seemed workable, and there was some comfort in the reflection that the map would be more compact. Instead of a thin red line running across the sheet we would have a solid block of surveyed country; we could connect with routes traversed in the previous summer, and check positions.

A week was spent in preparations and farewells. The Chandzö came to dine. He was vastly interested in our collection of old newspapers and books; they were studied intently with a half-closed fist over one eye, perhaps for shade, or for better focus; we could never make our exactly why, but it is a common habit of Tibetans. Friends of all kinds, from the Lama to the local blacksmith, came with khatas and parting gifts.

On April 11th we dined among piles of packed and half-packed boxes. It was like the last day of term at school.

The next day we moved off in bright sunshine and crossed the river by bridge. Two miles along the road the Lama had posted a servant with dough-cakes and chang. He himself waved from the farther bank. We waved back, and hallooed good-bye. We turned a corner, and I took a last look at Nakshö Biru, with its low mud houses, its huge chorten, and towering prayer-flags. Soon it would be just a memory. From the heights of freedom I felt almost sorry to leave it. The source of the river had eluded us. This was retreat, homeward bound. I whipped up my pony and caught up the others with a jingling of bells.

CHAPTER XXI

War Most Strange

IT was good to be on the road again; good to know the rhapsody of rest from fatigue, when one lay back and stretched aching muscles after ten or twelve hours in the saddle; and good to picture the chains of unknown villages, stretching away and away on our route.

We turned south from the Salween, left the Thamtsa La to the west and crossed its neighbour the Shar La (16,384 feet). The Thamtsa La was blocked by snow. It is curious that more snow appears to fall during April in this district than at any other time of year.

We descended to a half-frozen river; there was no way along the sides. We ploughed through deep slush and water, and the ponies' legs were slashed raw by jagged ice. That night, April 13th, we slept in a tiny dropka settlement at over 15,000 feet. Snow fell; it was bitterly cold; spring had not yet arrived at these heights.

On the way down the valley of the Su Chu, which joins the Ge Chu, the first serious accident occurred to our equipment. A section of the path gave way, and one wretched yak slipped and rolled three hundred feet down a frightful slope to the valley floor and into the river. When we came up the yak was standing horribly still, far below. He could not move. Hours later a coolie reached him; he had broken a horn and one leg. In the evening we heard he was dead. He had taken with him our remaining medicine-chest, the camp table, the tin map-case, Ron's balalaika, and a box containing swords and other oddments. The table was reduced to match-

wood; the box of swords had opened like a dahlia; the balalaika had mysteriously survived; but the medicine-chest was a wreck: a dozen bottles were smashed, including some valuable iodine injection capsules, while the Epsom-salt had emptied itself into the boric ointment and vaseline. The whole was a glutinous mass of ointment, straw and broken glass. By a miracle the map-case had not gone into the river, and we breathed a sigh of relief.

We passed rapidly on down the valley of the Ge Chu to Sating. We were astonished to see a few hardy butterflies, tortoiseshell and yellow, hovering over the withered scrub; warmer days were here at last.

Each day new birds appeared, migrants and others; the first hoopoe we had seen at Nakshö Biru on April 4th. Now the rose-finches returned; there were wagtails, ducks, cormorants, finches of various kinds, a small dust-coloured bird with bright orange tail and stomach, and another that was black, with canary-yellow breast and black and yellow striped wings; there was a pigeon, with wings mottled like a hen pheasant; and always the choughs, black and white or orange-beaked, the magpies, rock-pigeons and white pheasants. The latter never appeared lower than 12,500 feet or higher than 15,000 feet. They rarely fly.

Before the Ge Chu joins the Salween it runs through a deep wooded valley protected from wind, with the only trees of any size we saw west of Shopando. It was strange and curiously relaxing to be among trees again.

We reached the confluence and then Sating on April 19th. The Salween was now a mighty cocoa-coloured flood; between Nakshö Biru and Sating it receives several large tributaries, bringing a mass of snow water and detritus. By contrast the Ge Chu threw a wide tongue of clear blue-green water far out in midstream.

As far as Sating we had been given an imposing escort of one soldier; Lewa had promptly appropriated him as

dish-washer-in-chief, a position which he accepted with great cheerfulness. He was of considerable help in obtaining coolies. In the intervals of dish-washing he told us he had been a private for nineteen years; it was unlikely, and many Tibetans have a love of romance. With a little money, he said, he might buy himself a place as sergeant. Taking the hint, we gave him handsome baksheesh. Now he returned, and we depended on the Nyeba of Sating for the next few stages.

The Nyeba was in a bad way. He had been stoned about the head by recalcitrant peasants while collecting the annual butter tax. The case was too serious for him to deal with personally, and the miscreants had been sent to Chungpo Tengchen. Three had been given 600 lashes apiece, one 500, and a fifth 150. The sentence of 600 is about the limit of punishment by flogging in Tibet; it seems a frightful ordeal by our standards, but the Khampa peasant is considerably hardier than any white man. All of these men had survived, for they had only been beaten on the buttocks. While we were at Nakshö Biru a man was flogged for hunting—300 lashes across the chest. He died. The Nyeba had put in a plea for the five offenders that they might not have their eyes gouged out as well, as the original sentence imposed.

Now that the winter had broken we hoped to continue down the left bank of the Salween as far as Kau, and so complete that unmapped section of the river, about fifty miles in length. But even in summer the path was said to be impassable for yaks or mules. We therefore turned south towards the Gya Lam and Pembar Gomba.

The route was a gigantic switchback over ridge after ridge running away to the Salween or its tributaries; the log speaks for itself:

April 20th: Left Sating, 12,550 feet, at 8.30 a.m. Crossed Rashi La, 15,511 feet. Camp at Tsalung, 13,941 feet, 7 p.m. (14½ miles).

April 21st: Left Tsalung 8 a.m. Crossed Gyayü La,

15,890 feet. Drop 3000 feet to wooded valley. Crossed Parma La, 16,097 feet. Reached Chukhoshi, 12,882 feet, at 6.30 p.m. ($13\frac{1}{4}$ miles).

April 22nd: Halt at Chukhoshi to complete work.

April 23rd: Left Chukhoshi 8 a.m. Crossed Pete La, 14,349 feet. Reached Pangar Gompa, 12,546 feet, at 4 p.m. ($11\frac{3}{4}$ miles).

On April 24th we dropped to the China Road; for the first time in six months, except for one day at Pada Sumdo, we were now in previously explored country. Pereira had travelled along this part of the China Road in 1923.

And the great artery seemed to welcome us back . . . all Kham hinges on the road; here it was lined with stone blocks, and sometimes roughly paved. Like a jagged white scar it ran along a valley that was open, frost-pinched and sun-dried. Hardly a tree broke the desiccated slopes. A low-browed monastery stared from a height, and another was a doll's-house in the distance, limned on brilliant snow. Larks whirred to a turquoise sky; a brown speck moved on a tinder-coloured field—a peasant sowing corn with wide sweeping arm. Yak teams drew wooden ploughs over a tip-tilted terrace, high above a village. A mounted courier rattled past, flicking the stones, and beggar bands moved like ants on the huge brown lawn.

The sun glared down as we rode; the ponies hooves raised slow cloudlets of dust, seeming only to nibble at the vast expanse before us. A glacier dropped in milk-white folds from the heights to our right; we were close under the great rampart of the Salween divide.

As our shadows stretched like giant ghosts beside us on the road, we turned a bluff and came in sight of Pembar Gompa, wall-ringed at the foot of a hill. Wild duck and geese moved lazily about a reedy swamp before it; they took no fright at us at all, riding less than a dozen yards from them. There was no room in the

monastery, and we tunnelled into a dark warren of huts close by. Our room was cramped, lit only by a hole in the roof. We had meant to stay a few days in Pembar, but the reception was discouraging, and the next morning, April 25th, we set out on the last few stages for Shopando.

Everywhere there were beggars, well-fed and swaggering, bold in the security of a profession condoned by society. They crowded the villages, straggled up the stony paths, deep-bowed under huge wicker baskets, and stopped in groups below the passes to cook bowls of tea and tsamba. Their neat packs bespoke the old hand; these were no chance vagabonds; many had been trained to the life from birth. Like a plague of insects they had emerged in the warmth of spring.

Among them were soldiers, in small parties of five or ten, sharing a diminutive donkey for their miscellaneous packs. There was talk of a war, somewhere to the east, possibly with China; nobody knew exactly, but troops were being hurried, as far as Tibetans can be hurried, from Lhasa to Chamdo, there to pick up weapons. It was hard to distinguish the military from the beggars; they wore the same felt chupas, and gay scarlet jackets. Some sported purple trousers, and others patterned chintz round their hats.

Crossing four more passes, we reached Shopando on April 27th, and occupied our old room in the Dzong. Rumours were rife. The governor said the war was not with China, but Russia. How this could be we could not imagine. Had the Russians attacked China in the north-west, and broken through to the south? We lunched with Shangda the merchant. Over pork soup and curried eggs he told us the trouble was in fact with Chinese Reds, probably from Szechuan, anyway it was on the ill-defined border country east of Chamdo. The Sino-Tibetan border is constantly shifting; in 1936 it lay a mile or two east of the Mekong river. West of

that was definitely Tibetan. A large part of the Hsikang province, or Inner Tibet, which includes most of Kham, and is nominally claimed by China, is in fact ruled by Tibet.

Shopando stirred restlessly. Couriers came and went, stamping the dust, shouting orders, and tightening girths. Soldiers arrived, lay about in the courtyard, and left of a sudden. Rather dazedly, rather wonderingly, the road was opening its eyes to Speed. A general was due to arrive, and a quartermaster; there was a bustle to prepare their rooms.

We felt the pinch of martial law: all fresh meat, butter and tsamba had been sent to the hazily guessed-at front. Only meat and butter of extreme vintage was left, and our dishes were heavily doped with curry. To offset this we were supplied with "konyi", little serrated leaves like dandelion leaves, with a peppery flavour. Konyi made an excellent salad; it was neither really wild nor really cultivated, it just appeared in the freshly ploughed fields. And best of all there were eggs, which gave us bad constipation after months without them.

The war news made us alter our plans. We had hoped to go north down the valley from Shopando to the Salween, and continue east along the river to Shabye Zampa. We might, we thought, cut across to Chamdo; it is a large place, second only to Lhasa and Gyantse; there are as many as 300 houses. A Sha-pe, equal in rank to members of the Lhasa council, is in residence there; he is the ruler of all Kham. Chamdo sounded interesting, though it has, of course, been visited by several Europeans. Also, we might explore a long unknown section of the Dzer Chu, the Mekong. We had months of time in hand; we planned to reach Calcutta about December, or January, 1937, the best months for the musk market. We would reach Sadiya in Assam by the Lohit route through the unadministered Mishmi Hills. That route is in any case blocked during the rains from

June till September, and is not really fit for travel till November.

But with Communist trouble on the border we would be ill-advised to go so far east as Chamdo. My dubious beard might arouse the spy fever again. Once bitten twice shy. So we decided to go east along the road to Lho Dzong, drop to the Salween at Shabye Zampa, and continue down the river as far as possible.

Transport in these parts was absurdly cheap, far less than in Zayul. Our expenses, exclusive of servants' wages, now amounted to about forty rupees per month. Nevertheless funds were running low; the long, costly route through Burma was out of the question. Lewa and Nyima Töndrup realized the situation, and gallantly volunteered to forgo their wages until we reached Calcutta, except for living expenses. They had by now completely identified themselves with our own exploratory ambitions. On the road Lewa would ask eagerly, "Has any sahib been here before?" If the reply was "No," he would grin, "Ha, that is good," and swell with just pride. What tales he would spin in the Darjeeling bazaar! But once or twice we were bound to confess, "No sahib, Lewa, but paila, paila (long ago) there came a babu" (the only way of explaining A-k to Lewa). Then he would frown. "Tch, tch; what, a Bengali, sahib?"—with all the devastating scorn of the hillman for the plainsman. "He was a great man, Lewa sirdar," we said, and he would be slightly mollified.

With the first days of May, spring came shyly to the arid land; its frozen core seemed to creak and stretch under a sun that was blinding at noon. Streams ran thick as cocoa. Peasant women slipped their chupas to the waist, and stirred the light pulverized earth, wielding the adze, the oldest of tools. Wooden flumes were broached, and channels of mud criss-crossed the paths, feeding the fields with gurgling life; like a blanket the scent of moist earth drying hotly lay heavy on the air.

I sniffed it, and remembered long days on the Nile, under a harsher sun.

The few willows had shaken out a haze of palest green over their aspiring branches, slender as whips; wizened wild gooseberries showed tiny emerald spear-points, and a plum tree blossomed before ever the leaves were there. Tiny patches of grass, swamp-soaked and rank, sprang up by the streams; green blushes on the leathery face of the land, delicate as the under-feathers of a parakeet.

Collecting now started in earnest. Whilst Ron, as the mathematical wizard of the party, communed for hours with logarithms, I wandered each day up and down the valleys near Shopando, turning flat stones or rummaging in the bushes for beetles, and scooping wildly with a butterfly-net. Inevitably I fell again under the suspicion of gold-hunting.

These activities, which continued throughout the summer, were not without avail. On our return the specimens were examined at the British Museum (Natural History), and it was found that we had obtained several new varieties of butterflies, two new species of ants, one new species of saw-fly, and a large number of new species of beetles, tipulidæ, and grasshoppers. Many insects showed a distinct relation with Northern Chinese and Siberian types, but several others, including the wingless varieties of grasshoppers, were entirely endemic.

On May 5th, in a patch of mossy turf by a stream-bed, I found a little flesh-pink flower, *Primula tibetica*. It was the first flower of the year, a tiny spot of vital colour.

Solar haloes, of rain-band coloration, occurred fairly regularly about this time of year. The sky was usually dead clear, and it could be seen that the halo was unbroken. The diameter subtended an angle of 15 to 20 degrees, varying apparently according to the proximity of the sun to the meridian; these haloes appeared about noon, and lasted from half an hour to three hours. The

bright blue of the surrounding sky was in marked contrast with the greyish-violet colour of the sky within the halo. Not unnaturally the phenomena are regarded as heavenly omens by the Tibetans; they may portend rain, or the birth or death of a holy Lama. One that occurred on May 5th was said, for no discoverable reason, to portend the death of a Lama, whereas another that occurred two days later was said to portend rain. There was no apparent difference in the two haloes.

In spite of their mysticism, Tibetans also regard the heavens from an entirely practical standpoint. In a machineless land the sun and stars are the only clocks; one leaves camp, for instance, at the time of "shining on the peaks", or just before dawn, and direction at night can be taken from the "Seven Big Brothers of the North", the Great Bear. Venus, known as the "Big Morning Light", is also of service. Stars of lesser magnitude are not considered worthy of study.

On May 7th we said farewell to Shopando and set out along the Gya Lam. Passing through Dzetho Gompa and crossing the wind-swept Tekhar La, we dropped the next day to a wide valley red with sandstone dust and green in the trough with shooting corn. Far ahead on the slope of a hill, and backed by sky-flaunting peaks, we saw the long white monastery of Lho Dzong. In the yellowing sunlight of evening it held all the mystery and lonely space of this great Tibetan highway, a highway trodden for a thousand, two thousand years, scarce altered by time, the faintest scratching of man on this high-
uplifted land—the Gya Lam.

We found quarters in a mud- and wood-built caravan-serai, deep in the close-packed village which lies opposite the monastery and Dzong. Mud, as we very soon found, was inseparable from life in Lho Dzong. There was mud in our courtyard, mud in the streets, mud on the roof-top, and, when the rain started, mud in great gouts in our

room, oozing through the ceiling on to beds, tables and floor. And there were oceans and oceans of mud in a central square which we called the "Piazza".

Altogether it was not a particularly inviting spot, but for the time being we could not move any farther. There had been a change of governorship, and the new governor had not yet arrived. Meanwhile only a clerk was in residence, who had no authority to provide transport for us or anyone else. The new governor was expected in a week, which might mean anything from two days to two months.

We were quite prepared to wait. There was a good deal of paper work to be done, and it was an opportunity to collect furiously, both flowers and insects. Botanically and entomologically this district north of the divide had never been touched. Only A-k had been to Lho Dzong, and he had scant chance of collecting, having been robbed of all his equipment some time before. Kingdon Ward had investigated the Salween valley in the neighbourhood of Dzika, nearly 100 miles to the south-east. The material at Lho Dzong might show a certain variation, and so it proved.

But there were minor diversions. On the first morning the air was rent by a fearful high-pitched drone. It was the local school in full swing! A dozen small boys were perched like monkeys on the edge of the roof overlooking the courtyard. With the full power of their lungs they were reciting the Tibetan alphabet as hard as they could go. The method was to take a deep breath, and then away you went fortissimo at top speed, and the devil take the hindmost. Each did his best to raise his piping voice above the others, and each seemed determined to broadcast his prowess to the world at large. It sounded like the most scathing abuse, but was apparently a kind of prep. No master was in sight, but very soon he appeared; a little old toothless man like a shrivelled monkey, paralysed in both legs. He was

carried up to the roof, hugging his porter round the neck, and deposited in a low chair, where he sat dreamily clicking a rosary, from time to time regarding the discordant progress of his pupils with mild benevolence.

The scholars seemed capable of continuing their dirge *ad nauseam*, but after an hour of lusty effort they encountered opposition in the form of a dancing troupe, who burst into the courtyard with loud cries and much banging of drums and cymbals.

In my early ignorance of a year before I had imagined Tibet to be a somewhat silent land; immense spaces with human beings crawling like flies across them, lamas meditating high on the peaks, and that sort of thing. But the caravanserai now shook with a din that compared very favourably with Cup Final Day, a hotel kitchen at high pressure, and Waterloo Station on any Bank Holiday.

The school stopped aghast, regarded the newcomers sourly and then redoubled their efforts. No good. Overcome by the superior volume of noise, they downed tools and craned at perilous angles to watch the performance below, to the dejection of the aged schoolmaster. He, poor soul, protested querulously for some minutes and then, with the happy resignation of the East, joined his scholars complacently on the natural grandstand.

The dancers justified their intrusion; they worked themselves up to a medley of gymnastic frenzy, leaping, tumbling and whirling as though possessed.

The day ended in a storm of profanity when the rain tested our roof and found it wanting. Ron scarcely had room to sit on his bed, so bestrewn was it with basins, buckets, tea-cups, and receptacles of every description to catch the steady streams of muddy water. Fortunately the shower ceased before our room was inundated, and we dined in peace off a leg of pork, its savour enhanced by the satisfying knowledge that it had cost only tenpence.

More or less garbled reports of the war continued

to circulate. A lack of newspapers, combined with a lively imagination, can produce sensations such as the Yellow Press are powerless to achieve after years of concentrated effort. Estimates of the opposing forces varied from 1500 to 40,000; the latter being a flight of fancy only paralleled by the rumour we heard more than once of a formidable party of foreigners, either Russian or English, advancing to meet us. We eventually found we were meeting ourselves, the account of our own progress having, so to speak, ricocheted. A modified version of the same thing was the story of two Englishmen, both bearded, sojourning in Poyü. We felt strangely drawn to those pale ghosts of our 1935 selves.

This gift for glorified news-purveying was given full scope in war-time. One day it would be roundly asserted that a smashing defeat had been inflicted; the next that the enemy lay already between us and Chamdo. As the days went by we came to be part of "our village" of Lho Dzong, and shared in the wonderful gossip, throwing out suggestions, which after going the round would often return to our ears as corroborated fact. The very nature of the enemy was still uncertain. Phiida, a castaway Chinaman, and an orator lost to the world, had a theory of his own. There were two independent forces, he said, one of irresponsible bandits, engaged in looting far away to the north-east, and another part Chinese and part Russian, many of whom were only sixteen years old. This, I suspect, was a figment of his fertile imagination.

Shorn of its trappings, the story appeared to be this:

A certain Khampa officer was posted on eastern frontier duty, in charge of 500 troops and a mountain-battery of two pieces. Wearied by the dull round of military service, he had invited a friend to join him, at the same time giving all his troops indefinite leave. Together the two enterprising gentlemen had decamped into the no-man's-land between China and Tibet, seeking pastures new, and taking with them the 500 very modern

rifles and the mountain-battery of two pieces. Quite inadvertently they left the sights behind. They advertised an attractive career of untrammelled outlawry, and did not lack adherents. A heterogeneous band of indefinite number was soon collected from among the tougher inhabitants of the border, Communists or bandits as occasion served, but never averse at any time to taking arms with a prospect of loot. This company had been creating havoc in the far east; one rumour had it that they had settled down to a life of wine, women, and possibly song; another that the leader intended to occupy the whole of Kham as far west as Pembar Gompa. This last, I think, was a supreme effort of Phiida's. The position was in any case aggravated by the fact that the mountain-battery was the only one in Tibet.

Lho Dzong teemed with soldiers. They arrived amiably in small parties with a yak or a donkey, and awaited events. These were not the smartly turned-out troops of Chamdo. They were in various stages of equipment. One party possessed twelve Homburg hats, six pairs of marching boots, four pairs of grey flannel trousers, three shirts (one with buttons and two without), and one pair of puttees shared between two. The wearer of one Homburg had an embroidered hat-band, and he appeared to be in charge. But they all looked as hard as the mountains they lived among. Tibet is recovering her fighting spirit.

Excitement reached fever-pitch when a courier arrived in a lather of sweat from Chamdo, with an urgent demand for nineteen soldiers. This man was accustomed to travel from Chamdo to Lhasa in ten days, a distance of some 400 miles. He changed horses six times a day, his only sleep being a hasty hour snatched during the change-overs. Having delivered his message, he rode back to Chamdo in the same remarkable time. There he rested. Even in Tibet he was considered rather tough.

Even the courier's frenzied arrival paled into insig-

nificance when a young officer came to stay in "our village". He rode in wearing a gorgeous green silk robe, and carrying a puce parasol. His wife rode behind; she, as became a woman's place, modestly carried a plain black umbrella. The officer was called "Phulung the Warrior", but the name appeared to be rather an expression of pious hope on the part of his parents than a tribute to his own merits. Like the famous Duke of Plazatoro, he commanded his troops from the rear. I hasten to add that he lapsed considerably from the usual high standard of Tibetan officers.

At 4 a.m. on the morning after his arrival, I was awakened with a start by a shattering explosion, immediately followed by a nightmare chorus of all the dogs and donkeys in the place, who were evidently protesting. Ron, quite unwarrantably, slept through it all like a babe. We were later informed that the explosion was caused by a signal-gun, named after one of the Buddhist saints. This angel of destruction was a small mortar minus its base; it was up-ended and stuck in the earth. One bolder than the rest then approached it with a lighted taper, whereupon the whole contraption leaped several feet into the air. But God was great and the casualties were negligible.

After the performance everybody appeared to sleep peacefully until 10 a.m., when the summer morning was disturbed by a band composed of bugles, a pair of bag-pipes, some kettle-drums, and two temple trumpets. Each player appeared to select his own tune independently of the others, and the result was, as the French say, "formidable". I inquired the reason of the music. The warrior was having his lunch.

Towards sunset the music and the explosion were repeated, after which deep quiet reigned once more over Asia.

On May 25th, the officer departed in glory and the village settled down to its accustomed routine of gossip.

Amidst all these excitements we carried on with our own occupations. The range-finder came in for a certain amount of comment. Was it true, we were asked, that one could see a man through a mountain with this excellent instrument? and, if so, would we not go to the assistance of the troops? Regretfully we explained its limited possibilities, and European marvels experienced a slump.

The botanical collection grew daily. The first flower to appear in any quantity was the bell-like magenta *Incarvillea Younghusbandii*. *Primula tibetica* then spread in glorious abundance over the swampy patches close to streams, and a Cambridge blue iris, *tigridia*, was found growing a few inches high in sun-baked ground by the path. Other plants that soon made their appearance were *Orchis hatagirea*, *Iris goniocarpa*, *Iris potaninii*, a *Cynoglossum*, *Lancea tibetica*, *Stellera Chamaejasme*, *Primula Jaffreyana*, *Primula sinoplantaginea*, and a new variety of *Primula articulata*. Farther down the valley, towards the Salween, the open grasslands gave place to light woods, bright with rhododendrons. Among these were *R. Aganniphum*, *R. Cephalanthoides*, and *R. Vellereum*; while on the higher slopes above 14,000 feet, *R. paludosum* spread in great sheets of mauve, the little shrubs being no more than two feet high.

Scopolia Lurida infested the fields in great dark-green clumps, its evil-smelling purple flowers doing their best to hide away among the leaves. It is used in the manufacture of poisons.

Promises of reward aroused an army of willing helpers. One of these was our own water-carrier, an aged man with a goitre the size of a polo-ball, which caused him to wheeze as he walked like an asthmatic Pekingese. In spite of his handicap that man was a go-getter. If one flower earned as much as a trangka, then here was Eldorado, and he climbed the highest hills to eradicate wholesale great wads of primulas. He would return

staggering under a mountainous basket-full, announcing to all and sundry the great riches he was about to earn by his undoubted ingenuity. We discouraged him gently but firmly from deflowering the entire countryside, but paid him for any new specimens. He did, as a matter of fact, bring back several fine species of Rose, Cruciferae and Ranunculaceae.

Ron suffered at this time from two dire afflictions; mild ophthalmia and virulent itch. The ophthalmia caused him to lie in darkness for two days, bathing his eyes, and then all was well, but the itch persisted for several months. It responded to none of the usual treatments. A potent concoction of acetic acid and iodine finally effected a cure.

In spite of these sufferings he continued to expand what I always regarded as his magnum opus. This was a list of names of every village, monastery, cattle-camp, stream or mountain on our route, and many that were not; each name being written in Tibetan characters with English equivalents, as far as possible. There are several sounds in Tibetan which resist accurate transliteration into English. Many and weird are the English versions of some Tibetan place-names, but a knowledge of the language overcomes these corruptions. Each name is usually a compound of definite words describing the place, such as the "Monastery on the Mountain", or the "River of Sweat". Ron was aided in the work by several monks and Dzongpöns, almost the sole literati of the country. Now at Lho Dzong he enlisted the services of an educated but temporarily bankrupt trader called Pulaks. This man, together with his wife, joined our staff for several months, welcoming the opportunity of a trading journey to Calcutta, with all expenses paid.

In the intervals of work I induced Phiida to sit for his portrait. This he was quite happy to do, although his efficiency as a sitter was somewhat impaired by his being a sort of Rowton House for vagrant lice. After

each frantic search for itinerant vermin, I had to reset him in the right position.

The days of waiting grew into weeks, but at last on May 31st the new Dzongpön arrived, a young man of twenty-one with delicately chiselled features. He had that rather flower-like grace of some youthful Chinese. In his room at the fort, looking out over the spacious valley, he told us that as far as he could ascertain all the country to the east of the Salween was in a very disturbed state. Definite news from the front had been held up for some days, as the passes had been blocked by unexpected snowfalls. He would send a courier to Chamdo as soon as the way was open. Meanwhile would we wait at Lho Dzong? We had no alternative.

The bad weather continued for the next few days; it was said to be quite phenomenal for this time of year, and many declared that it was a dispensation of the gods to prevent the enemy advancing west. Either out of gratitude for this divine intercession, or because of a temporarily unlimited supply of mud, nearly the whole population assembled in the courtyard to manufacture the little "Tsaza", or miniature chortens, which are placed in heaps on the mani piles, often under shelter. A communal mountain of mud was prepared in the centre of the yard, and the villagers worked diligently with little metal moulds. The slap-slapping of a hundred pairs of hands was accompanied by incantations of a deafening and lugubrious nature, this to prevent any evil spirits from entering the sacred objects.

At last the news arrived from Chamdo; it was worse than we had expected. The Dzongpön pressed us not to go east, not even as far as Shabye Zampa, but to turn south instead. With numbers of irregular troops roaming the countryside, we were as likely to be robbed by them as by the invading bandits, and the Dzongpön would be held responsible. Would the Salween for ever escape

us? Shabye Zampa would have been another point of contact with the river. Its loss was a sad blow.

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On June 20th we left Lho Dzong and the Gya Lam, and turned south along the route that leads eventually to Shugden Gompa, the route followed by A-k in 1882 on his journey to Lhasa. Our plan was now much the same as it had been when we were forced to turn north from Zimda, nearly eight months before: somewhen, somehow, we would find a way leading down to the river from the main route. The Salween, we felt, was being elusive, perverse. It must be brought to book.

CHAPTER XXII

Holy Estate

ALIVE were the uplands in summer, and young. All the land sparkled. How could I ever have imagined that Tibet was a dreary waste, for ever wind-blown! and how far away, how utterly forgotten, was the skeleton hand of winter. Yellow-breasted larks rose tremulously in sky-aspiring flight, swifts wheeled and darted, tiny crescents in the thin crystal air; butterflies, black and yellow, white, or blue hovered fastidiously from scented shrub to scented shrub, drunk with the fresh short wonder of summer. Leisurely our ponies trod the path, over slopes massed with flowering scrub so recently withered, and over grassland patched with kingcups, white and blue-mauve anemones, primulas, nine or ten inches high, with many-flowered head. There were asters, dwarf, almost flat to the ground; there was a Trollius, and a Peony; in the alleyways between the scrub were geraniums, of two or three species, and high up, where the grass grew threadbare and scant, the little pink and white heads of Polygonum showed an inch or two from the ground. Where the earth was scrawny and baked, seemingly inhospitable, miniature irises, blue, yellow and purple, made oases of sudden colour.

We crossed three passes at over 14,000 feet; to right and left the naked knuckles of the range rose stark, covered here and there by a silky white shawl. On a ridge to the north a group of needle spires pointed like fingers to the sky; made of harder rock, dolomite perhaps, or just a more durable limestone, they had survived the weathering which had worn the surrounding hills to

an even monotony, and stood alone. They could be seen for miles.

We rode along the backward slope of a ridge which cut us off from the Salween. All streams ran south-west, away from the river, later to drain into it by a circuitous route.

All day we rode; the sun beat down, shrivelling the skin, so that great flakes peeled from nose and ears. We were sun-drugged and silent.

On June 22nd, we dropped into a narrow valley where the shrill green of terraced barley-fields broke in waves against walls of brick-red sandstone and grey-white limestone scree. The trough was filled with dog-roses, dazzling yellow and white, while on exposed knolls, open to the sun, a lovely laburnum-yellow shrub grew in profusion. Its lupin-like leaves were silver-green, its twigs thornless. This was *Salweenia Wardii*, first discovered by Kingdon Ward in 1933. He had found it farther to the south-east, and later in the year, in ripe fruit. At the time he thought it was a *Sophora*, but it proved to be an entirely new genus. Now it was in full flower, a truly lovely sight. It appears to be extremely localized, as are many Tibetan plants.

The next day we crossed a bare rock-ragged ridge, and looked down into a scorched valley, deep-cut and worn, aching in the sunlight. Like a livid gash it split the uplands, which seemed to cleave away as salt-soaked flesh from a bone; and as bone the slopes were dry. Vegetation shrank from it, retreating to the topmost bluffs and side-valleys, where light woods spread. Bone dry, with the powdery, brittle dryness of volcanic ash. I moistened my lips. Far below, little flat-roofed dust-coloured villages crouched to the ground, seeking shade among themselves; hard-won fields, precious heirlooms hand-picked of stones, broke the arid slopes in tiny terraces, abruptly green. They looked no bigger than table-cloths. Property, what dour struggles are made

in your name! Two thousand feet below a river raced, yellow and swollen. It was the Dü Chu, and a little wave of wild delight spread through me; here again in its lower reaches was the river whose headwaters I had explored nearly a year before. I felt absurdly possessive about it. But it was a different river now, harsh and turgid with the refuse of weakening snow.

A winding path led steeply down. Only the wiriest scrub grew on the slopes, woody spiny and gnarled; sun-bleached, with silver-grey leaves, and pink or blue and white flowers. Down and down led the path. The heat came up like a muffler, and wrapped us. It rocketed from the stones, and grilled the dust. The saddles stank of sweat. No wind stirred. The glare seemed to creep under one's eyelids and scratch them.

When we reached the river and took readings for altitude the temperature was found to be no more than 76° F., but by contrast with the clean breath of the grasslands above, it might have been anything over 100° F.

A wooden bridge led across the Dü Chu, here about forty yards wide; on the farther side we climbed steeply to the village of Sangönang, where we lodged in the headman's house. Down at 10,000 feet—we thought of it as down after months spent at over 12,000—the atmosphere was sub-tropical. The barley was already two feet high (at 12,000 it was only some four inches). Peach trees and weeping willows surrounded the village, and there were crops of peas, as yet unripe.

We had hoped now to ascend the Dü Chu valley, surveying its whole length, and link up with my 1935 route. But a recent landslide blocked the way. We would have to make a detour, and approach the valley from higher up. We inquired about paths, more especially about a path to Pashö, the elusive Dzong which controls Rangbu and Ngagong. Based on A-k's reports it was placed tentatively on the map some twelve miles

west of the Salween, between Lho Dzong and Shugden Gompa. But A-k had not visited it, he had kept along the road to the west, the road we now were on. The villagers were a surly lot, they declared there was no regular path to Pashö, only a footpath, difficult for loaded men. This was a lie. We were, we knew, on the main route from Lho Dzong to Shugden Gompa. Obviously it led up a steeply inclined valley which we could see to the east. It was the only way. We declared we would go that way, to a place called Shari Dzong that was now spoken of. There we would make further inquiries.

It appeared that the Dü Chu here formed the boundary between the Lho Dzong and Pashö districts. We had, as it were, crossed a Rubicon. Some eight years before there had been open war between Sangönang and the villages on the western bank; even now there was no regular communication between the inhabitants on each side of the valley. We felt we were intruders, our presence resented. We had noticed that the western coolies had stopped at the bridge-head, and others had taken over on the farther side.

If the human population resented us, the animal life welcomed us with open arms. That night I was awakened by minute scufflings, and a slithering of Things over my hands and neck. Bugs! Lice and fleas we had always with us, more or less, but these things stank. I conducted a private war with the aid of a torch on the bloated horrors. The light, and my muttered oaths, aroused Ron; together we battled against the invaders, which crept from every shadowed cranny, and then whisked away like magic when the light was turned on them. We were defeated by sheer force of numbers; the room was fetid with crushed corpses. With sulphurous comments on low-lying valleys we transferred our blankets to the roof, and slept in peace under the stars. We agreed in future to sleep outdoors at any low altitude,

whether it rained or snowed. Any discomfort was preferable to that unknown itching in the dark.

On June 24th we climbed steeply from Sangönang through light fir woods. One of the yaks, apparently infected by the fresh morning air, became skittish, and bucking madly along the path shed his loads into the bushes. One's luggage in Tibet does far more "roughing it" than oneself; it too appears to become skin-hardened to certain things. So we regarded the prostrate boxes callously. They had come to no harm. The yak continued its career of fine freedom, plunging and snorting. A yak is normally such a staid, mild-eyed creature that it is all the more surprising when one becomes touched with joie-de-vivre; their absurd antics could only be paralleled by the improbable spectacle of a dowager duchess tucking up her skirts and doing a Charleston in Piccadilly.

Climbing above the tree-line we emerged on to open grassland studded with scrub. It was a very god-like view we had of the riven, wrinkled land behind us. The wild sweep of the Dü Chu valley sank into a haze of hot yellow dust; the senses reeled at the awesome scale of it. Even from a distance of four miles the eye could not grasp the facing wall at a glance, but swept up and up from yellow-green floor to crest of grey-violet ridge; it was immense, terrific.

That day we climbed five thousand feet in a little over five miles. About noon we reached the Dora La (15,600 feet) on the very edge of all vegetation, and descended over squelching grassland to woods. In water-logged hollows we found the blood-red *Primula vittata*, growing pell-mell with *Primula Sikkimensis*, while lower down, on the edge of the woods, were great ten-feet bushes of *Rhododendron aganniphum*.

Dropping into a narrow limestone gorge, gay with white dog-roses, we emerged into a wider valley, and

almost fell into Shari Dzong, it stood so close to the gorge's mouth. Fantastically, improbably, the village was brick-red, almost salmon pink; not stained by the sunset, but impregnated with sandstone dust; mud and wattle walls, wood-work, chorten, paths, everything was dyed that paint-box colour. I laughed. It seemed curiously changeful and gentle. Even if you live in a slum you can go and see other buildings of different sizes, shapes and colours, but for months we had seen nothing but fawn-coloured mud houses.

And the Nyeba welcomed us, bringing a present of meat, flour and eggs. He at least did not regard us as intruders, but well he might, for the constitution of Pashö is curious, as he told us the next day, over bowls of rice and noodles. The district is in Tibet, but not truly of it; it is the hereditary property of an Incarnation who resides in Lhasa—the feudal fief of a divine baron. No taxes are paid to Lhasa, and at this time the people were happily free of the constant requisitioning of supplies for the troops at the front, which burdened the inhabitants of districts directly controlled by the government. All revenue was paid to the Incarnation, enabling him to pursue his meditations in comfort.

“Which Hla (spirit) is incarnate in his holiness?” asked Ron.

“No Hla,” said the Nyeba. “Long, long ago, a very holy Lama came from Poyü to teach the Middle Way. In time he held all the people, like that, in his hand. His name? Nejo Tempe. He went on a journey to preach to the Gyami (Chinese). There he fell sick, and when he came back to Pashö he died. His body was embalmed, and placed in a chorten, all of gold. It is there to-day, and those who make pilgrimage can see the face of the Precious One through a window at the side. Pashö belongs always to Nejo Tempe. He has been reborn thirteen times.”

Thirteen successions; how long ago did Nejo Tempe

live? The Dalai Lamas have often died young, of suspected and unsuspected causes. In the nineteenth century four died within seventy-five years. But an incarnation of Nejo Tempe had no political importance. It was reasonable to suppose that each lived to a fairly ripe old age: a Lama's is a calm and healthy life; he smokes no tobacco and drinks no alcohol. Allowing for accidents, Nejo Tempe may have lived some six or seven hundred years ago.

It is always difficult to verify any early historical data in Tibet. History, literature, art, all are intimately bound up with religion. Only that which concerns religion is considered of importance. Historical works in Tibet, such as they are, are largely confined to lengthy religious and metaphysical discursions, accounts of miracles, the regulations of monasteries, and such. In Lhasa there are some stone pillars, engraved with early historical events, and Sir Charles Bell¹ has done much research work on these. The monks themselves are of no assistance; they are not allowed to read histories; such studies would interfere with their religious work. The artists of Tibet are temple artists, trained in the conventional intricacies of holy paintings, and the preparation of images. They know to a nicety the exact position that each figure should occupy in the Wheel of Life, with its several Houses in ascending and descending order of birth and rebirth: from the serenity of heaven at the top, with its airy pavilions, its light, its lispings streams, and reposeful figures that sing and play; down through the chaos and suffering of life on earth, with its eternal desires, its fretting, its movement, its lust for gain, its laboured backs; through the kingdom of the beasts, eternally preying and being preyed upon; to the Upper Hells, with its miserable figures shivering naked among icy blasts, crushed between rocks, and lying gashed and bleeding among a maze of knives; and so down to the

¹ Sir Charles Bell: *Tibet Past and Present*.

demoniacal, half-ludicrous Lower Hells, where sins and virtues are weighed in the scales by a monstrous judge, where dreadful penalties are enforced: boiling in oil, sawing in half, extraction of the tongue and all the teeth, transfixing, roasting and others; then through the house of the Suffering Ones, with frightful distended stomachs, emaciated limbs, their bodies on fire within, smoke issuing from their mouths—the penalties of over-indulgence; and round again to the house of the Demi-Gods, eternally warring on heaven; the whole revolving round the intertwined forms of the Pig, the Snake, and the Dove, representing Ignorance, Anger, and Lust, the three cardinal sins; while above the Wheel ethereal figures float in a dream of sea and sky, impalpable, fathomless—those that have gained ultimate freedom from the chains of the Wheel, and have reached Nirvana, the heaven that is no heaven, the negation of all things, the unknowable. All these things, and many more, the Tibetan artist portrays with delicate precision and stylized facility, in tapering strokes that show no hint of perspective. His art is handed down from generation to generation; there is small scope for individual expression. He can draw the saints as he knows they should be drawn, but he would never dream of painting a landscape, a battle-scene, or a portrait, unless it formed part of a religious theme.

All things in Tibet point ultimately to religion, and here in the little district of Pashö the succession of its rulers was prescribed by ancient hierarchical system: when an incarnation of Nejo Tempe dies, or rather “passes to the heavenly fields”, his successor must be chosen in much the same way as is the successor of the Dalai Lama. That is to say, an infant must be found born within a few years of the death of his predecessor; he must have certain birth-marks, and must select for his own use the bell, the sacred thunderbolt, the tea-bowl, and other objects belonging to his predecessor placed

among a variety of such objects belonging to other persons. And the curious thing is that one is always found who complies with the requirements imposed. So an infant from the lowest family in the land may acquire the district of Pashö as his private estate.

We naturally wished to visit the town of Pashö itself, this hidden capital with its chorten of gold, and the window through which the face of the Precious One was seen. One of the last hidden towns of Asia—"something lost beyond the ranges". No one from outside had seen it, not even A-k. Not a city, for no place in Tibet is really that, but at all events a town of many houses—150, 200 perhaps, a great number for eastern Tibet. We had only a vague idea as to where Pashö lay; A-k had guessed its position from hearsay; but it could not be far from Shari. There was a path, said the Nyeba, but at this time of year it was blocked by landslides, owing to the melting snow. Was there no other way? Oh, yes; one could descend the valley from Shari, and so reach the Salween; there was no way along by the river, but there was a rope-bridge. A bridge? Then presumably one crossed back to the right bank lower down in order to reach Pashö. All very fine in theory; in practice it was extremely unwise to use the bridge at all. It had been in a dangerous state for fifteen years; no one had bothered to repair it. Like Mr. Shandy's door-hinge it was just one of those things that never got done, and the place would not have been the same if it had been. Only five days before a friar had attempted to cross; he had slipped off, and arrived on the farther side in a mangled condition. The bridge was clearly accursed.

We might, if we felt like it, order a new bridge to be made; but it would require the leather of 100 yaks and a year's work on the part of fifty men. In spite of the undoubted benefit to Tibetan communications we considered the delay would be extreme. Was there no ferry?—No, the river was unnavigable just now; in a month

or two it would subside a little, and in the winter, of course, one crossed on the ice. Pashö was all but inaccessible. The only approach to it was by a detour to the south, across the Deu La, and down the Ling Chu valley.

We made our base at Shari for a few days, in order to map the surrounding country.

On June 27th we made a short march down to the Salween, as far as the reputationless bridge. The path dropped through a yellow-white gulch; as we descended we seemed to leave all life, all vigour behind us; the air smelt sour, and clammy; the heat beat in waves from parched rock and stones; there was hardly a blade of grass; a few bushes straggled forlornly; we passed a village where the peasants stood at their doors, limp, listless, and yellow-faced; they possessed a tiny oasis of barley, and a few peach trees. What a valley!

We emerged through a mere split in the valley wall on to the bank of the Salween. The temperature was 80° F. in the shade. Sullenly the river slipped by, a deep swirling flood 115 yards wide, laden with all the scourings of the hills. It emerged from a shadowy beetling gorge to our left, where a tiny path, no more than a goat track, led precariously.

At last, for the first time since leaving Sating, we had been granted a glimpse of the river, and were able to check its course. On the face of it the Salween valley would appear to be an obvious line of communication; and so we thought when we first looked at its assumed course on the map. But now we realized that this river was only something to be crossed, and that with difficulty; paths led *down* to the crumbling gorge; only at intervals could they possibly run along it. It is one of the greatest natural barriers in eastern Tibet, a greater obstacle than any mountain range.

We returned to Shari the next day, to find the whole village busily employed in making paper. The raw

material was the roots of *Stellera chamæjasme*, which grows abundantly in the district. The roots were boiled, and reduced to a pulp in a churn. The pulp was then squeezed out between heavy stone slabs and placed on cloths stretched on wooden frames to dry. The resulting paper is coarse and fibrous, with small crushed twigs and pieces of extraneous matter embedded in it, yet as pliable as tissue paper. Its surface is soft and hairy, suitable only for the blunt wooden pens of Tibet. Twelve thousand sheets were being prepared, to be sold in Lhasa and provide revenue for his holiness. The workers, both men and women, laboured without reward, paying their taxes by the sweat of their brows.

On June 29th we mapped the valley to the south-east of Shari, as far as the Wa La, returning the same day, and on July 2nd we moved off up the valley to the south-west, heading for the Phokar La and the Dü Chu valley. Our plan now was to go right up the Dü Chu valley and cross the Deu La to Trashitse Dzong. The mystery that surrounded Pashö had been largely cleared: we had always taken for granted that it was on the western side of the Salween, as A-k had supposed, but we were vastly puzzled by the fact that it apparently took some four days to reach it from Shari. There seemed no room for it; it would be almost in the Ling Chu valley, and that we knew was impossible, for Kingdon Ward would have seen it. Quite incidentally the Nyeba mentioned that it was not on the western side of the river at all, but several miles to the east of it! We therefore planned to follow Kingdon Ward's route from Trashitse down the Ling Chu to the Salween, cross the river (there was said to be a rope-bridge), and if possible map the left bank as far as the bridge below Shari. Then we would approach Pashö.

On July 3rd we climbed over lifeless scree towards the Phokar La. Mist came down, then it snowed. Survey work was abandoned for the day. The final ascent to the

pass was tremendously steep, snow-covered, in places ice-covered. It looked impossible that we should ever get the ponies up. The baggage animals had gone ahead, and somehow they had managed it. The coolies faced the obstacle calmly; they tugged at bridles, got under quarters and shoved with all their might, crying "Heugh! Heugh!" and clutched at manes, tails and wildly slipping legs. At times the ponies were being all but carried by three or four men. We ourselves were climbing with our knees into the slope, so steep it was. How the ponies ever arrived at the summit was by way of a minor miracle; I only remember a view of scabbling hooves, chunks of snow and ice hurtling away below, and now and then the precariously balanced hindquarters of my pony, a few feet above, which I watched anxiously lest it come hurtling on top of me.

It was 8.15 a.m. when we reached the summit of the Phokar La. Calculations later showed that this pass was at 17,240 feet, the second highest we had so far crossed. The temperature was 35°; we shivered; and down by the Salween, barely twelve miles away, people were already sweltering in tropical heat.

It was a very perfect pass, that Phokar La; a crumbly drop on either side, mysterious in eddying mist, flanked by titanic limestone blocks, gaunt, brooding. "Well," we reflected, "can't see a bloody thing. Have to come up to it again to-morrow." We skidded down over loose shale, at a fantastic angle. Come up to it again to-morrow! What a thought! Our language became increasingly blasphemous the lower we dropped: "It's going to be a — sweat getting up there again." For three thousand apostrophized feet those shale-strewn slopes descended at an angle of about 30°; gloriously easy going on the descent, and we skipped like rams, vying with the leaping, running coolies. Then we entered woods, and the path continued to drop. Towards noon we reached Dzongra, in the Dü Chu valley. In

less than five miles we had descended nearly a mile in height.

The next morning, rather grimly, we set out to re-climb that vertical mile. It was dead against nature. We had crossed the pass, and by all rights that should have been that. But if you once set out with the avowed ambition of surveying unexplored country you cannot leave stray ends of path floating about on the map. It just doesn't work. Your thin red line must be continuous from start to finish, or the map's no good. We paid the price of ambition, and the Phokar La mocked. After an age of grunting, grinding effort over that iron-hard, sun-baked scree we came to within 100 feet of the summit. And then mist settled down, gently, inexorably. Just like that. Words were inadequate. . . . And after the mist, snow. Finding a least exposed spot, we settled down to wait for the storm to blow over. We waited. We must have presented a spectacle not far removed from those pathetic figures in the Upper Hells.

Half an hour, three-quarters, an hour. It was hopeless. Muttering awful things, we trudged down to Dzongra. The whole blessed performance would have to be repeated.

Nearing home, we looked back at the pass. It was smiling serenely in sunlight. It seemed to thumb its nose.

Hoping the Phokar La might recover a more even temper in a few days' time, we went down the Dü Chu valley to fill in the map as far as we could between Dzongra and Sangönang. We returned to Dzongra on July 7th, with the prospect of the Phokar La looming before us like an unpaid bill. We determined to settle the account.

For two days the Phokar La—it was by now invested with a definite personality—resorted to obstructionist tactics. It sat wrapped in mist, and spat at us with angry rain-showers. By July 10th the weather cleared, and we stormed the pass as though it were a fortress. The last three thousand feet were climbed in one and a half hours.

We raced a snowstorm to the summit, and beat it by a short head. There was just time to take a few essential bearings, and then it was Upper Hells all over again.

After half an hour the gods relented and we finished our work. We returned home in triumph, with a holiday feeling; we had wrestled with earth and sky, and won. And in the valley below we had found a new flower, a variant of *Primula argentata*, with canary-yellow, reflex petals.

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During the last days of July we criss-crossed Pashö with a web of measurements. The map expanded, it became far more than a thin red line, and we soon knew this part of Tibet better than many counties in England.

Ascending the Dü Chu, and crossing the Deu La, we reached Trashitse on July 15th. There we made a base, and surveyed the route to Wa and Shari over the Bumgye La and the Kharu La, and also the route south to Shugden Gompa, in order to make the map more complete. Then we waited a few days at Trashitse to take a latitude observation, and to collect insects in the Ling Chu valley.

There is a point of possible interest in the Ling Chu valley: the most famous Tibetan saga is that of Ke-sar, king of the Ling country. It is a saga of astounding length; the recitation of it is said to last several days. It is largely concerned with the victory of Ke-sar over the people of Hor, the nomad country to the north of Lhasa, and gives a picture of the wild, tribal life as lived in Tibet before the introduction of Buddhism more than a thousand years ago. The country of Ling has been vaguely assigned to eastern Tibet or western China. Is it not possible that the Ling Chu gives a clue as to its location? I do not know, I only suggest. On August 9th we packed up and left Trashitse, following the Ling Chu. We would have another tilt at the Salween.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Valley of Heat

AS we descended the Ling Chu, wind, coolth, grass were left behind, as things of another world. Heat smote us like a brazen gong. Temples throbbed. Heat dropped flat from above; heat sprang from below. We rode dumbly, each one in a private cage of roasted cotton-wool, stifling. Lizards scampered over rocks, and once a snake crossed the path, a dry rustling viper, dust-grey, vicious. Blinding glare leaped from the pebbles, from a metallic sky, from rock walls, yellow, grey and red, naked as the face of a quarry. The air was lifeless, cloistered. It hung on the skin like a pricking glove. Heat hammered into your eyeballs from the rock.

At long intervals were villages, and once or twice a monastery, in lone nests of dusty green: the spear-shaped leaves of buckwheat, peppered white with bloom, and the solitary shade of mulberry and peach trees. The corn here was already bleached; up at Trashitse, wind-ravaged and chill, it was still green.

Once we stopped with parched throats by a gnarled pear tree; the fruit was green, tasting only of flannel, each bite puckered the lips. But it refreshed us. We looked up at the cracked valley walls to cool heights above, and gasped for air.

On August 11th we reached Dzikar, sunk in the stifling pit of a deep-gouged valley, tributary to the Ling Chu. Cicadas hummed like buzz-saws. The dark stuffy rooms swarmed with flies, and stank of stale heat. We shared yellow peaches with the flies, and inquired about transport to the Salween. Kingdon Ward had been

here in 1933, and had gone on to the river. We should have to follow in his footsteps, but it would give us another point on the course of the Salween.

Beyond Dzika the already narrow valley of the Ling Chu becomes a gorge of colossal depth; so precipitous and crumbling are the sides that the path is squeezed out to the higher slopes, where it creeps round cyclopean bluffs.

We decided to make another base at Dzika, and travel light from there to the Salween and back, then up the tributary valley of the Wa Chu to the Trakge La and back again. Then we would follow the main road to the south-east, and strike the Salween lower down. This main road leads from Sangachö Dzong, through Shugden Gomba, to Chamdo. At Dzika we found we were once again under Kharndempa's authority. The boundaries of Tibetan districts are wayward indeed. Zayul, having slipped over the divide from Sangachö Dzong into the Salween valley, throws out a tongue far up the river, and curls round to the north of Shugden Gomba, which is under Pashö.

On August 12th we set out for the Salween, leaving Nyima Töndrup at the base. He was highly gratified, and beamed with pleasure as he buckled our girths. Romance had been born in the caravan. Beneath a homely exterior Nyima Töndrup hid the heart of a Romeo, and he had fallen with a thud to the allurements of Pulaks' wife. Now, left alone at Dzika with his innamorata, he looked forward rapturously to a period of dalliance. We had never suspected that one of such ox-like character could be stung by the arrows of Cupid; the whole position was indescribably comic. Lewa, however, had had his suspicions; Sönam, the lady, had been uncommonly eager to go ahead with Nyima Töndrup each day to prepare camp, and Lewa hinted darkly that on hot summer afternoons ——. Pulaks apparently was unperturbed; he and Nyima Töndrup were both Lhasa

men, and so long as nothing occurred "in coram publico" he did not feel slighted.

As we climbed steeply above the village Lewa shouted encouragements of a coarser nature to Nyima Töndrup. Romeo blushed gawkily, giggled, and dashed hastily into the house. . . .

Our path soared to a spur, 3000 feet above the river, so that we saw nothing of it but the arid slash of the gorge; we dropped to a tiny village, with green barley-fields perched in fantastic flights up the hillside. Yet again we climbed, for 2000 feet, leaving the ponies now, for the path was rough. Scrub, nothing but scrub, and coarse grass; no sign of a stream, and the sun was blistering. We reached another spur, in a faint ripple of wind, then climbed slantwise up the face of the gorge, and reached the crest of a ridge covered with fir trees and rhododendrons. Through the trees we saw the immensity of the main Salween gorge, 5000 feet deep. The woods clung to the higher slopes, and the village of Pö, half-way down the gorge, our halt for the night, stood among sun-dried scrub, where lean goats browsed.

That night at Pö was one of unmitigated discomfort. The pests of Tibet are largely domestic, and they rallied in force, with the result that instead of enjoying a well-earned rest after the labours of the day, we spent the night in a sort of haggard Pilgrim's Progress. We started by sleeping on the roof, but we had not been a quarter of an hour in the blankets when we were roused by hosts of both bed-bugs and fleas. A furious battle ensued against the insect world, in which we were worsted. Dejectedly we moved our bedding to a more lonesome-looking part of the roof, where we hoped we should not be pursued. Vain hope. Within ten minutes our blankets were again crawling with vermin. It was clear that the creatures were trooping out to us from all parts of the house. They were quick movers, but Ron had already made a mixed bag of sixty-five. I, with a modest



(Above)

*Gorge of the Ling Chu, near
the confluence with Salween*

(Below)

*A monastery of Eastern
Tibet*





*A Khampa peasant
mending our tea-pot*

score of forty, felt rather piqued. Keatings was of no avail against such bugs. There was nothing to do but keep a light going. We lit our solitary candle; it looked pathetic; it would be finished in an hour. Sleep being denied us we sat gloomily about, and looked sourly at the somnolent bundles of Khampa peasantry. They have the skins of pachyderms. The mind works slowly when roused from sleep, but we soon decided we might as well sit indoors if we were doomed to sit up all night. The only effect was that the myriads of flies, hanging in thick clusters on the walls and ceiling, were roused by the light, and investigated our persons in massed formation. Roused to desperation, we decided to prospect for a level, stone-free spot on the precipitous ground without. The chances were a hundred to one against, but it was our only hope. We had barely reached the door when rain fell in torrents. I now began to feel really haggard. In a silence pregnant with unuttered frightfulness we slumped back to our room. What further kicks had Fate in store for us? But there is a turning-point in all things. Lewa had been roused by the rain, and he hailed us, declaring there were no bugs in his kitchen. We looked blankly about; no, there were none in our room either, for the matter of that. It dawned on us that these bug-infested villages involve a game of Box and Cox. In the early summer the bugs awake, and one withdraws to the roof. In late summer the bugs grow wise and troop out in pursuit. Then one slips back to the house. Strategy. Humiliated, we turned in and had two hours of sleep.

Only wisps of paths, mere goat-tracks, lead along the gorge from Pö. But it is possible to reach the Salween, and next day Ron descended 2300 feet to the river, to take readings for altitude, while I rested a strained thigh-muscle. The river here flowed at 8859 feet. It had dropped rather more than 4000 feet from Nakshö Biru, some 300 miles away, an average of about thirteen feet

per mile; not a very steep drop for a Tibetan river; there are many that drop at 100 feet per mile and more. By comparison, the Thames drops at an average of about one and a half feet per mile. The graded condition of the Salween shows that it is of great age, probably older than the Tsangpo.

On our way back to Dzikar we met a peasant with a young green parakeet, scarcely fully fledged. It looked intensely miserable in the hands of its owner and we bought it outright. We felt the need of a pet. It was nearly nine months since the tragic loss of Balu. The new acquisition was promptly christened Benjamin—it looked extraordinarily like Mr. Jorrocks' pasty-faced varlet. We inquired gently about Benjamin's diet. He was declared to be omnivorous. On our return to Dzikar the parakeet merchant was proved to be a bare-faced liar. Benjamin looked with jaundiced eye on every dainty we offered; he sulked; he yearned for the family circle. But we did not know his address. Peaches, walnuts, mulberries, barley and milk, all were scorned. We began to grow worried about Benjamin. He was not pulling his weight. Ron tried forcible feeding with a paintbrush dipped in milk, but without avail. At night we took Benjamin up to the roof in a basket, and swaddled him gently in a scarf. Two mornings later there was a stiff polly in the basket. Sorrowfully, Benjamin was given a fitting burial, and Nyima Töndrup turned the last sod. Bird-fancying was not for us.

On August 16th Ron started for the Trakge La, while I rested my strained thigh at Dzikar. He returned on the 20th, looking remarkably thinner; he had had stomach-poisoning of an obscure kind, and for three days had lived on invalid diet. But that had not prevented him from climbing to the pass at 17,320 feet, the highest encountered on the journey.

On August 23rd we finally left Dzikar and headed south-east for the Salween. Crossing the Sibü Sharkong

La (14,835) we dropped to the river, and reached Jepa (8790) on the 25th, in the mouth of a wide valley on the right bank. Incredibly there were grapes, small, black, and somewhat sour, but none the less grapes; the vines grew on trellises between the houses, or festooned the peach trees in haphazard heaps. Parakeets screamed. Cicadas whirred in high-pitched frenzy. There were fields of maize. It was the atmosphere of the Mediterranean coast in high summer. This part of the Salween valley is most aptly named Tsa-rong, the Hot Valley.

There is a rope-bridge at Jepa. It bears a constant load of traffic. At all hours of the day men, mules and baggage are slung across. Approaching Jepa we had met three mule-trains which had crossed on their way from Chamdo. For a mile or two here the great gorge relaxes; there is a chink in its armour, and trade pours through.

We now planned to cross to the left bank of the Salween, strike east to Thenthok Gompa (visited by King and Sir Eric Teichmann) and continue north-west to Pashö. Somewhere, somehow, we hoped to find a route which would enable us to map that long stretch of river between Shari and Pö.

On August 26th we assembled at the bridge-head. Boxes were piled, ropes and sliders prepared. The crossing was a lengthy business. The Salween is here seventy yards wide, and the rope-bridge is of the tedious one-way kind. A long guide-rope is attached to passengers or loads, which are then heaved across by a lusty gang on the far side. The more athletic peasants swarm across sloth-fashion, but ladies and gentry are sedately towed. With our thirty loads the whole process took four weary hours.

Proceeding by a crazy path which dipped, climbed, and crept along the precipitous left bank, we reached Tongpar in late afternoon. We had plunged even deeper into the sub-tropics; here there were chillies, mountain-

rice, and pomegranates, as well as grapes and some really delicious yellow peaches, exotic luxuries in this huge precipitous desert. And the next day, on the road to Thenthok Gomba, we experienced all the sudden contrast of the gorge country.

Our path zigzagged laboriously up the monstrous flank of the Salween trough. The sun blazed on parched brown slopes, seamed with downward-sweeping ravines. Soon Tongpar was a tiny speck of dark green far below, on the bank of the yellow-red river. The ground about us was covered with withered dust-grey scrub, broken only by the intense pale-blue flowers of *Ceratostigma Griffithii*, like the dwarf trees of a Japanese table garden, and as delicate. For 3000 feet we climbed as steeply as any mule-track can; then the gradient eased, we saw grass, shrubs that were valiantly green, a few tiny trees, and at last a typical upland settlement, miserably poor, three squat ugly huts pressed to the ground, and a turnip field. Farther up the grass was really alive: there were Delphiniums, shrubs grew closer, and on the Dela La, at nearly 14,000 feet, a wind filled the lungs in glad draughts. Ahead lay regular grasslands, fold after fold, sweeping, fresh and alive. The eye travelled like a hawk. We dropped scarcely a thousand feet to Thenthok Gomba. While the Salween at Tongpar flows at 8600 feet, the Tsayi Chu, not ten miles away, flows at no less than 12,900 feet!

The houses below the monastery were low and cramped, dark and smelling of dirt, as though they had just emerged unwashed from a sordid winter sleep. The fat, two-storied houses of Tongpar seemed very far away. There were no eggs, no fruit; occasionally these luxuries were brought carefully from the tropics 4000 feet below. Grey clouds chased each other across the sky. The air was cold. The empty slopes were bright with *Gentiana sino-ornata*, Cambridge blue and dark blue, in lovely masses. There were snipe by the swampy banks, and

once I was amazed to see a woodcock. Women, with beads of coral and turquoise, were busy weaving on primitive looms; the long narrow warp stretched like a white scarf for many yards to the wall of a house. Sheep and yak droppings covered the alleyways. Children swarmed and played in the mud, their leather jackets reaching only to their hips, leaving grubby little behinds to view. A ramshackle bridge stretched like a beaver's dam across the wide, slow river. Not far from it men were unloading long poles of pine from a raft, brought down the river from higher up, where there were woods. That night the temperature dropped to 49° F.

We hoped to travel up the valley of the Tsayi Chu to Bomda Gompa, where King had been in 1925, on his way to Chamdo. Then we would make for the mysterious town of Pashö, striking fresh ground.

But the next morning our hopes were dashed. We were discreetly refused transport, in the manner of Tibet, thus: the animals would be ready at eight; at eight they would be ready by midday; then they never appeared at all. Why? Was it the Russian scare all over again? A curse on my beard! What a farce to be stopped by an unseemly growth of hair! . . . But we were wrong. A message had arrived from the Dzongpön of Tsawa Dzogang, who controlled this district. The theatre of war had shifted; it had crept to the south: "Please go back. The conditions are uncertain. I cannot be responsible." We had almost forgotten the war since leaving Lho Dzong. The China Road hummed with activity, but no news filtered to Pashö; it was remote, rural. Now the war faced us again, and checked us in mid-stride.

There was only one way left now. We must make for Zayul, and return home. In any case, time and money were running short, and that jungle path through the Mishmi Hills would soon be open.

We decided to spend a few days at Thenthok; the map must be brought up to date, a star observation taken

as soon as the clouds lifted, and here was a new area for collecting. There were few flowers now, but the uplands swarmed with grasshoppers. They rose in clouds at one's feet, and made the air shrill. Some of these were new to science.

The village was riddled with syphilis, possibly due to contact with China, and Ron fixed up a miniature dispensary to give injections. Many cases were hereditary. It was surprising how little the disease seemed to affect these people; some complained of no more than a headache, and not infrequently they were only really ill after the injection. One shy, chubby girl, still in her teens, was extraordinarily eager to come with us, and take the full course of injections on the road. Further, she wished to come to India, and see the great world. To India? Why? It would be difficult for her down there. Well, Nyima Töndrup. . . . Oh! calloo callay, Romeo was at it again! O faithless one! O fickle heart! and where is fair Juliet now? . . . Juliet? . . . well, there was to be a certain event in the Pulaks family, so Romeo was in search of fresh fields. "I have loved thee in my fashion, Cynara." "Ah, Nyima Töndrup," mocked Lewa. "You are indeed a *badmash*, a great rogue," and Romeo blushed in mingled pride and embarrassment, his swarthy skin turning a ripe plum colour. Dear old Nyima Töndrup, he was as open as the sky above, a most lovable character. At one time he was the financier of the party; he had saved about 150 rupees. Two weeks later it was all gone, dissipated in silk and Khampa jewellery, and Lewa scolded him for a child. So for a time the caravan was swelled by the addition of his new light o' love. Later she took fright at the prospect of living in a strange land, and returned to Thenthok.

Before we left for the south the No. 2 governor of Tsawa Dzogang came to call, a plain-featured man with two gold front teeth. He was a Khampa, and lacked the subtlety and delicate manners of Lhasa Tibetans. He

now confirmed a rumour that we had once heard from a chance-met party of traders, to the effect that the Big Rajah of Belait (His late Majesty King George V) was dead. How long ago? He did not know, the news had quite recently come through from Lhasa. Yes, it was definite. . . . We had not been sure of the previous rumour; it might have been mere bazaar talk. It was not till the end of the year that we realized the news was more than six months late.

The governor was a man of progressive ideas, and was anxious to know if the Indian Government intended to build a mule-track up the Lohit valley as far as the Tibetan border, south of Shikathang. Before the Great War an excellent track, built by the K.G.O. Sappers and Miners in 1912, was in existence. Owing to financial stringency it was later neglected, and is now completely overgrown. If the track were cleared, the Khampa governor declared, it would be a boon to eastern Tibet. The Chamdo government would improve their end of the track, and the huge wool-caravans, which now have to make the long journey round by Lhasa and Kalimpong, would find a direct outlet to India. Most of this wool comes from the grasslands of Kham, but there is no presentable mule-track across the north-eastern frontier of India. From Bhutan right round to Bhamo in Burma, there are only the vilest jungle paths. Of these the best, and certainly the most direct, is the Lohit valley route through the Mishmi Hills; even that is only open for some six months in the year, and unfit for animal transport. If the way were cleared the price of wool in India would be lowered, and the wool-growers of Kham would not be burdened by incessant local taxation by Dzongpöns on the road to Lhasa. Apart from wool, yak-hides and musk would be brought down in large quantities. Under present conditions only the merest trickle of trade passes over the north-eastern frontier. The dense hill jungles, some seventy miles in depth, form a tremendous barrier. The

improvement of the Lohit route rests with the Indian Government.

We left Thenthok on September 9th, heading south for the Mar La and Situkha, where we had heard there was another rope-bridge. Once again we were graciously provided with an escort, a servant from Tsawa Dzogang. The escort sported a hat which staggered the quiet countryside; it was a complete Alice-in-Wonderland hat; the foundation was an ordinary Homburg, with the crown pushed up, but it was draped in a piece of lurid pink oilskin. Its owner was inordinately proud.

The escort worked hard. At camp he erected for our benefit one of the aristocratic white Tibetan tents, edged with blue, made of thin cotton. It was no more than a sunshade, and its edges finished several feet from the ground, held down by fragile ropes. We accepted the compliment and sat under the sunshade in a rising wind; it rocked drunkenly. Quietly we ordered our own tent to be erected, and slipped into it just as the aristocratic sunshade collapsed in a sudden downpour.

Crossing the Mar La next day, we dropped down the head of a narrow valley, turned a bluff . . . and were brought up short by a view that made the heart ache in wonder, that stilled the pulse, that drowned all sense of space, time, or the very purport of man. I scarcely dare to trespass, to describe that view of the mighty rift of the Salween, dropping away and away into unutterable space, from snow-capped riven peaks that invaded the sky, down black rocks naked as the moon, over which light slipped glassily, to the lower hills, brown-mauve, smoke-green, dust-brown, in unearthly pastel shades, to the deep mysterious shades of evening in the measureless depths of the gorge, where lay the river we could not see. "This," I thought, "would be the ultimate moment to slip into nothingness, to fade, to become one with the hills and know freedom." We were both very

silent; comment would have shattered the globe of wonder.

Two things, perhaps, can express the scale of that view: those farther peaks, from which the gorge appeared to drop in one titanic curtain, were some 20,000 feet high. The river was little more than 8000. And a ridge on the farther side, which appeared to be no more than a gentle roll of downland, was later found to be 4000 feet above the river. . . .

On September 11th we descended to the searing inferno of the valley, at Situkha.

There was now a gap in our survey of the river, between Tongpar and Situkha. We therefore decided that I should cross and follow up the main road on the right bank, returning if possible down the left bank, while Ron remained at Situkha to work on calculations. We would then move on across the range to Sangachö Dzong.

Taking Nyima Töndrup and Pulaks, and travelling light, I left on September 13th, crossing by the rope-bridge to the right bank. This right bank was not unexplored ground. King had entered Tibet from China in 1925, and travelled up the Salween as far as Lachung, where he had crossed to reach Chamdo.

The journey to Jopa and back should normally have taken but seven days. Actually it took nine. When I arrived at Tongpar on September 17th according to schedule, having crossed the bridge at Jopa again, I was faced with a transport boycott. I scented trouble when I found I was assigned to a singularly dingy hut instead of to the lordly abode where we had previously stayed. There was no firewood, and no headman paid his respects. I passed these things over, and inquired about transport down the left bank to Situkha. Nothing doing. The trouble was twofold: firstly, the villagers had already provided us once with transport, as friends of the government, and quite unreasonably refused to do so again.

Secondly, and more important, there was a case of vested interest: the people of Jepa had bought the transport rights from Tongpar, paying a large sum annually on condition that the rope-bridge at Tongpar, and the route from Tongpar to Situkha, should be closed to all but local traffic. Thus the rope-bridge at Jepa would be used by passing caravans, and the people of Jepa would wax fat on the tolls. These simple but masterly tactics completely euhred my plans. To aggravate matters, Tongpar was run by a Soviet of highly independent merchants who owed allegiance to no local governor, but only to Chamdo. The Soviet's spokesman declared I had much better return to Situkha by the way I had come, via Jepa, Lachung, and Yartak. I said I had much better not. There was a serious difficulty: I had only just enough money in hand for the remaining two marches to Situkha. The five days' march via Jepa was out of the question. Stalemate. For two days the Soviet wrangled, while at intervals I issued fearful threats of retribution from Kharndempa, just to encourage their decision to turn in my favour. I was by now thoroughly determined to explore that route to Situkha. It had not seemed particularly important before.

The period of waiting (a good half of exploration consists of waiting) was somewhat alleviated by a local brew of wine. Wine on the roof of the world! It seemed incredible, but there it was, strong, pungent, and sweet, coarser than the coarsest *vin ordinaire*, but nevertheless wine. It was the first drink with any real taste of alcohol that I had had since Christmas, and I wished Ron had been there to join in the treat.

At last, inevitably, I resorted to bribery. The Soviet were promised rich rewards at Situkha; they relented, and on September 20th I set out with two underfed cows for transport as my end of the bargain. The next evening I rejoined Ron.

During my absence Ron had set up another dispensary,

and collected a numerous clientèle, his prestige being enhanced by the fact that he was entirely unconcerned by the snakes which slid in and about the roofs of the houses, popping out at intervals with an air of mild enquiry. The villagers were terrified of them, but they were as a matter of fact a perfectly harmless species of colubrine snake.

On September 23rd we crossed the Salween to the right bank. Lewa breathed a sigh of relief as he landed from the rope-bridge. Glaciers and avalanches held no terrors for him, but he loathed those wildly swaying bridges more than words can describe. Two days later we looked for the last time on the Salween, and turned west up a narrow valley from Wosithang, heading for the main range. This route, previously unexplored, would give us another point on the Salween-Tsangpo divide.

We reached the Juk La (15,410 feet) on September 28th. It was wrapped in mist, with a little flurry of hard-frozen snow. After the tropical heat of the Salween valley the cold at this elevation was bitter. The temperature was 37° F. Work was impossible in the mist, and we descended steeply on the farther side of the uninhabited valley of the Chumnyö, the Mad River. This river is so called because of the sudden floods which turn it from a gentle stream to a raging torrent nearly half a mile wide, stretching right across the valley floor. At this time the river was low, a few yards wide, but its flood-bed was a tumbled mass of boulders and sand.

At the camp-ground of Gotsong (13,180 feet) the coolies had already built us a primitive shelter of pine branches in the forest. It was more roomy than a tent, and comparatively rainproof. There we remained for ten days while mist and rain enveloped the valley.

Once again among the pine forests of Zayul, sombre, misty and damp, we felt we were well on the way home. The change on crossing the pass had been abrupt; gone

were the naked scarps of the Tsa-rong, eaten by the sun; gone was the dust, the withering heat. All around us were columnar pines, and dark-green slopes overgrown with small heaths; cascades seamed the valley sides, and mist billowed up from the drenched jungles of Assam, screening the high snows. Here the rain-clouds butted against the range, and rising, were squeezed of their moisture, leaving the farther slopes bare.

Now for the last time on the journey we had crossed the Tsangpo-Salween divide. Between us we had crossed it six times, and had no doubt that it was one continuous range. Its crest averages about 19,000 feet in height. The majority of the passes are well over 16,000 feet. Along its entire length it marks a definite dividing line between the forest lands to the south and the sub-plateau to the north and east. It is composed mainly of slate and limestone. It has a general N.W.-S.E. trend. It is a range distinct from the Himalaya, but possibly involved in the same uplift. If the Ngagong Chu had been found to follow a winding course, cutting through a range, there might have been some doubt on the matter; but it does not, it runs straight as a dart for about 100 miles, roughly parallel to the divide. There was a possibility that the Salween had cut through an eastern extension of the Himalaya; it was known to flow in a gorge for at least part of its course, seeming to indicate a break through a range; but that gorge, as we had seen, is practically continuous from Shopathang to Wosithang, and farther south, a distance far exceeding the width of the Himalaya. There are practically no outstanding peaks to the east of the river for many miles; the Salween has evidently ploughed its vast trough in the sub-plateau, and not through a range. The Tsangpo-Salween divide in fact forms a rough T with the eastern end of the Himalaya, which culminates in the peak of Namcha Barwa (25,446 feet). There is no local name for this great divide, but that is no real criterion of whether it

is a range or not, for Tibetans as a rule only give names to isolated peaks and passes. Meanwhile, it remains just the Tsangpo-Salween divide.

The existence of this range, running roughly N.W.-S.E., rules out the possibility of an eastern extension of the Himalaya into China. The theory long held by eminent geographers that the Himalaya end at Namcha Barwa, which has been disputed of late, is in fact correct, while the Malay Arc, running down the west coast of Burma, and on into Java, can evidently be the only continuation of the Himalaya.

CHAPTER XXIV

Homeward Bound

BY October 9th the weather cleared, and we were able to move off from our backwoods shelter at Gotsong.

It had been a tiresome wait, with little to do. We were eager to get on. Everything pointed to India, to home. There was a little feeling of rush, of inevitable descent to the lowlands. In a few days we would be on known ground once more, would link up with our 1935 route at Sangachö Dzong. Then we would descend the Zayul river, already mapped by Colonel Bailey, to Shikathang. Our own world, with its movements, its crowded humanity, and most of all its good food, was in striking distance. We had begun to feel just a little stale, and looked forward to an armchair, a bath, a drink and a dinner *not* cooked in rancid butter. As yet it all seemed very remote, and we felt rather shy of it. We had lost contact for so long. There was a feeling of regret. Tibet had long since ceased to be a foreign land, it was all so familiar, even unnoticed: brown-skinned men, their clothes stiff with dirt; the red robes of monks; white mani-piles; the smells of wood-smoke, musk and dung; the tingling air; bleak passes, snow, proud forest, and sky—could there be another world, where men lived boxed in cities, insulated from all the currents of the earth?

But there was still one more fence to take, before we could finally turn to the south. The route from Shugden Gompa to the Trakge La was as yet incomplete. That left a wide gap on our map. It must be filled in.

Crossing the Drindre La we passed down a deeply eroded forested valley, streaked with glaciers, and on October 10th saw the sloping wood roofs of Zayul again, at the village of Pashö. Making a base at Pashö, we took Lewa and Pulaks with us, and turned west to the Dama La and Shugden Gompa. Nyima Töndrup, like a faithful watch-dog, remained with the baggage at Pashö.

The lower valleys basked in hot sunlight, but winter was creeping over the uplands again. The Dama La and all the Ngagong tableland were deserted and bleak. Yaks no longer roamed the huge expanse; the drokpa camps were lifeless; the marmots had gone to their burrows for the long sleep till spring, and grass and moss were pinched and brown. Grey clouds raced overhead. A few choughs called thinly.

We reached Shugden Gompa in darkness on October 13th. All the next day a tearing wind blew down from the glaciers; it shrieked and moaned round the monastery, exposed on its bluff, and whipped the lake into angry wavelets. We did some survey work in the neighbourhood, but gave it up by midday; it was impossible to hold the instruments steady in that gale.

On the 15th we set off up the narrow valley of the Tsengo Chu for the Trakge La. All three servants had been badly attacked by gingivitis, probably through smoking the infected pipes of peasants. Unfortunately we now had nothing left to treat them with. Nyima Töndrup had been the worst case; his gums turned black, and dripped blood; he was quite unable to eat, but lived on buttered tea. Now at the first camp up the Tsengo Chu, Lewa was completely overcome. He moaned and held his head in agony; his cheeks were swollen, his lips ran with blood and pus. Like some animal mad with pain, he seemed to lose all intelligence, and scarcely heard what we said to him. Finally he ran off to hide in the bushes. It was frightful being unable to help him. Time was the only cure, helped by an

ointment of butter and salt; when the gums have been eaten away the poison appears to die. Lewa was clearly unfit to go any farther. We put him on a horse and sent him back to Shugden Gompa.

The next day we moved up the valley, and camped on the edge of the brushwood, at over 14,000 feet. We were as yet far from the Trakge La (fourteen miles, as calculated subsequently), but there was not a stick of firewood farther on. Beyond, the valley stretched up in barren slopes of scree. Two inches of snow fell that night, and mist hung low in the valley all next day; we waited in camp for a break in the weather, with time hanging heavily on our hands.

The next morning the sky was all but clear, and we determined to rush the pass. The wind blew dry from the south-east; we hoped it would hold. The trail was obscured by snow, and in a few miles ceased altogether. By 2.30 p.m. we had covered some ten miles and the pass was still far ahead up a branch valley. Dark clouds threatened, and the wind had swung to the west. The outlook was grim. It was going to be a race with the light in order to complete the survey on the pass.

The going was now too rough for the ponies; we left them with a coolie, ate some chocolate, and pushed up on foot as hard as we could go. It was a slow, heart-breaking progress. The valley was a dreary waste of huge boulders and scree, half-covered in snow, dead, inhospitable. The blanket of snow made the surface treacherous, it was hard to see whether one was stepping on or between the tumbled blocks; wearily we struggled up, step by step, with aching lungs as the height increased. The gradient stiffened, and snow lay deeper. Every faculty, every nerve seemed numbed; only a dull, animal determination remained, a blind concentration on each next quivering step: "Left foot, so—right knee there—no—slip there, try there" . . . thought came muffled, as through cotton-wool. The light dimmed, the

snow shone feebly, lifeless as the moon—then a view of the ridge, a line of hope—a last stretch of snow, fifteen yards? twenty yards more? . . . endless . . . the mind ticked like a clock . . . the summit . . . stop.

Fatigue dropped like a cloak to the ground, and we set to work: a range taken, a bearing, and an elevation. That's that! Instruments were snapped away.

Now for home, it was already half-past five. We trudged quickly down. The light failed, died; cold and space increased. We blessed a snow-wolf that had picked a careful trail; we followed its tracks for a mile or more; then darkness hid them too, and we stumbled over boulders, slipped on ice, and into streams, and swore. The wind rose, with a flurry of snow; it increased in strength—a blizzard. Visibility was nil; nothing now but blinding snow and inky night; and a cold that killed. Somehow, we knew, if we kept to the trough of the valley we should reach the horses. And after that, there were still ten miles to go. Progress was by touch alone, foot by foot. After an age of stumbling, slipping and swearing we almost fell over the coolie. I have never seen a Tibetan so cold and miserable: he had thought that we were dead, he had almost convinced himself that he was dead. With chattering teeth he collected the ponies from the dark spaces of the night. Like ghosts they loomed towards us. At first we led them, and continued walking to keep warm. The snow drove up the valley, into our mouths, our eyes. After another hour or two we were all but spent, and mounted, leaving it to the ponies to pick their way. Hour after hour went by, in a sort of nightmare anæsthesia. Ron's pony showed black for a time, a dark smear a few yards ahead; then it disappeared, and one was alone in the night. At intervals we called, "Are you there?"—"Yes"—and on again. Cold crept up legs and arms, then even shivering ceased. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered. It was freezing, that was all. It always would be freezing, and

always dark. The hours crept by. One ceased to think. . . . Incredibly a light glimmered, then a voice shouted. The coolies left at camp had come out to look for us! Dazedly we saw the light approach . . . then there were faces . . . we had reached vegetation and someone set fire to a withered shrub; with animal frenzy we flung ourselves at it, crouched over it, absorbing warmth through every pore; talked and laughed wildly with the sudden rush of return to humanity; another shrub was lit, and another, splitting the night with crackling flame; a great ball of tsamba and butter was handed round; we clawed at it, ravenously, deliriously, feeding like beasts, unconscious of everything but the fact that there was food, warmth, humanity; it was a moment of primitive, ecstatic delight. . . . A little later we reached camp, it was half-past one in the morning, seventeen and a half hours since we had started out. . . .

At Shugden Gompa Lewa greeted us with a shout of triumph. He was a different being. He had found an abscess in the angle of his jaw inside his mouth, and driven nearly mad with pain he had taken a knife and operated on himself. He declared he had extracted a ball of pus the size of his fist! Full of cheer, we all set out on the return journey to Pashö. On the night of October 20th, we slept in the cave of Phukgu, black with the soot of ages. It was spacious enough inside, some twenty by fifteen feet, with a low overhanging entrance. The back wall mounted in glistening, blackened steps of rock, like the giant's cave in a pantomime. In a huddled mass of bodies, saddles and blankets, we sat round a blazing fire, while snow fell heavily outside. What dim ancestors of these felt-clad Tibetans, who now sat with us elbow to elbow, had spent other wintry nights in that cave, in the very dawn of human life? Perhaps some creature, half man, half beast, not far removed from the legendary figure who leaves such improbable prints in the snow, the ogre-like, hirsute "A. S."!

We arrived back in Pashö on October 21st, picked up Nyima Töndrup and the baggage, and descended to the main valley of the Zayul river. We reached Gochen on the 23rd. A surprise awaited us, a message from Kharndempa, brought by a servant. He himself was far south in the Salween valley, near Menkong, engaged in settling disputes. We were sorry we could not meet him, but he sent us a friendly letter authorizing us to employ Zayuli coolies from Shikathang to Dening, where the motor road begins in Assam. This was exceedingly gracious of him; without his edict we might have experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining coolies for the seventeen-day trek. Mishmi coolies are notoriously unreliable, lazy, and truculent; and they might have refused to work at all. Zayulis do go south in the winter months for trade, but usually in large parties. The Mishmis are quick-tempered, and feuds constantly arise. As well as the letter our good friend Kharndempa sent us a welcome present of 60 lb. of butter, 60 lb. of rice, and 60 lb. of flour.

Further, he mentioned a mysterious and exciting box which had arrived from India for us by courier the previous March, and which he had kept ever since in case we returned through Zayul. We were thrilled. This was genuine contact with the outside world. Speculation was rife the entire evening as to the contents of the "mystery box". Who had sent it? We felt like children restless with anticipation on Christmas Eve. To avert the jealous eyes of the gods we decided it must be one of our own boxes of mail sent through long ago from the north, perhaps those sent with Trakpa, and now inconsequently reappearing, as things do in Tibet.

The next day Pandora's box arrived. . . . We should have known it! It was from Aunt Joan—Aunt Joan who had stood like a pillar of strength all this time, forwarding our mail through Calcutta to England. With true fellow feeling she had sent us some slabs of chocolate, cubes of Oxo, and pemmican. And there was a letter, with news

as from another planet . . . yes, King George V was dead. Italy had been at war, and everybody in Europe had been at each other's throats . . . sanctions . . . troops in the Canal . . . a General Election; it all seemed utterly unreal, meaningless; and at the time of writing, another Everest expedition was setting out . . . that made sense somehow. Further, there was a note from Calvert, Political Officer in Sadiya, asking us to let him know if we were returning that way, and that we appreciated very much. "I feel as if I were nearly home," said Ron. Yes, the flesh-pots were calling strongly now.

To crown our joy old Sera Geshi came swaying in on a pony from Sangachö Dzong. With difficulty he heaved his portly person up the ladder of our house, beaming all over his benign countenance. He patted our heads and gave the Buddhist blessing. We felt like very small boys returning home from school. Had his prayers been effective on our behalf? asked Sera Geshi; had there been any difficulty on the road, those many months? He apparently knew all our movements, poked us in the ribs and said solemnly it was our own fault that we had had an unpleasant time on the Trakge La. Oh yes, he knew; why go up to the passes in winter? He wagged his holy head—the road to India was very, very bad, personally he disliked this wandering to and fro, he liked to meditate in peace in the monastery—but then he was old, so of course his views were not our views. We parted, he to return to his dim mystic world, dreaming in high Asia, we to the frenzied lands of machines and cities below. Treasuring a slab of chocolate in his robe he passed through the yard, respected on all sides by reverently bowing peasants. To right and left he gave his blessing. Wise man, good man—and some would call him a heathen.

The next day we left for Shikathang, eight days' march down the Zayul river valley, deep-cut and wooded

—always down now, homeward bound, following the river to the hot plains of India. The path was good, the sun soft; it was quiet autumn here, the dour climate of Ngagong lay far above.

Only once was the peace of the afternoon disturbed, when Kharndempa's servant, who had orders to accompany us, came hurtling along on his pony, shouting wildly; he had two bamboo pots of chang attached to his saddle—and would the sahibs like a drink? We refused gently, the pony made a violent swerve into the bushes, and he with the chang disappeared noisily. That evening he never turned up at camp at all; coolies reported that they had found his honour fast asleep under a rock by the roadside, snoring as lustily as Alice's White King. There was not a sign of his horse. Their combined efforts had failed to wake him, and they had left him in peace. The following morning, as we continued on our way through the woods, we heard a frantic jingling of horse-bells, and up came his honour, none the worse for a solitary spree and cold night out. This trip was a real holiday for him; as a Khampa he was used to being ordered about by Kharndempa's Lhasa servants; now, vested with authority, he was able to lord it among the humble villagers.

Daily we descended, away from winter, into the tropics. Pines were left on the higher slopes, and a belt of deciduous trees lined the rushing river. At Chikong the tiny huts were supported on poles, ten feet high, in the style of lower Zayul. They looked like dovecotes on tooth-picks. On the fifth day we saw fields of buckwheat, and great yellow marrows. Golden maize-cobs lay in heaps in the store-houses. Next there were lichees, wild in the forest, and at Dzachung (6336 feet) we saw the dry straw of harvested rice-fields, and chillies, as yet green. At Treba tobacco was grown. Treba was a scene of disaster for Ron: the normal Zayuli house has a wide unfenced veranda, used as a threshing-floor, but at this

tiny village the veranda was conspicuous by its absence. Instead there was only a narrow shelf some three feet wide, with a drop of ten feet below. Ron, taking a stroll after dinner, forgot this important difference, and stepped boldly forth into the night. He landed, silent with surprise, on the back of a hog, which was in turn taking its ease on the local manure heap. The hog uttered a long-drawn squeal of terror and bolted from under its unexpected burden, leaving Ron in undignified squalor on the pile of frightfulness. He climbed back, damp but undismayed, to endure the obvious comments of the expedition's second half on undesirable refuse in the dining-room.

Late the next day, November 1st, we reached Shika-thang, untenanted now but for an aged caretaker and his family. Cobwebs and dust lay thick. Paper strips flapped forlornly from the lattice windows. Lean black pigs and rangy hens groped in the yard.

We made ourselves as comfortable as we could, and waited for coolies to assemble from the surrounding villages. We had ridden for the last time. Only men on foot can pass through the Mishmi Hills.

Comfort was short-lived. On the fourth day a woman, with remarkable lack of consideration, raided a bees'-nest in a neighbouring hut, in an attempt to get the honey. The bees, pardonably enraged, emerged in a fiercely buzzing horde to attack everyone in sight. We kept up a losing battle for some two hours with fly-swats and smoke, but were finally forced to evacuate the house. The servants fled to the river banks, we to a neighbouring hill, where we sojourned, "crying in the wilderness", for the rest of the day. At intervals a furtive rush was made on the kitchen for scraps of food. The invasion ceased by the evening, and we slept in peace, but punctually at daybreak the performance was repeated, and for the next two days we decamped after breakfast with monotonous regularity.

Work was now finished, and for eighteen days we had

nothing to do while the coolies dribbled in from the upper valley. The tedious wait was broken by the arrival of Trakpa from Purtsang. It was a joyful reunion. He had done splendid work, and carried our mail and the snake-box intact to Sadiya, where he had delivered them to Calvert. He was hugely delighted at receiving a large bag of rice from the "Burra Sahib" as a reward for his labours.

Pulaks, in view of the imminent arrival of a possible son and heir, now decided to leave us. Sönam, his wife, could not face the arduous journey through the jungle in her condition. They arranged to return to Lho Dzong.

At long last, on November 20th, the coolies were ready. At 8.30 they came, twenty-seven of them, in a weird variety of garments: cotton jackets, blue, red, green, and off-white, hats of felt, hats of bear-skin, deer-skin and wool, and even a black felt hat of correct diplomatic style! Some had boots, but many had none. There were chupas in every degree of dilapidation. There were short men, lean men, sinewy men, old men and boys; men with goitres, men with paunches, and men with eyes that peered through dust-reddened rims. What a collection of tramps! These lower Zayulis are mixed with every race on the south-eastern borders of Tibet; Khampas, Chinese from Szechuan, Khanungs from Burma, Mishmis from Assam, and the dwarf curly-headed aboriginals who now are slaves. Their skins range in colour from parchment yellow to sepia brown. This intermingling of racial types, added to a certain contact with Assam, seems to have produced a happy independence of character, jovial, boorish, childish, crudely comic, utterly at variance with the servile tranquillity of up-country Khampas. These men are gawky rough-coated mongrels, and like many mongrels they often have the nicest manners of any people you can meet.

Now they argued and squabbled like a pack of children over the division of loads. The business took a good

two hours, and we waited with the long acquired patience of Asia. When they set off in a long straggling file they looked like animated junk-vans: cooking-pots, tsamba bags, pots of chang, sides of meat, skins and cloths of every kind, festooned their already weighty loads. This trip was a chance for trade and their clothes bulged with handfuls of wool, walnuts from Tsarong, bear-spleens, and musk-pods. Food was carried for the entire journey, and the return journey as well. There is nothing to be got from the Mishmis. When our loads were later weighed up for the railway, we realized that many of these men had been carrying well over 100 lb., a magnificent feat on the steep and difficult jungle paths.

We crossed the rope bridge at Shikathang and continued down the right bank of the Lohit for the rest of the trek. For the first four days the path was easy, running for the most part through forest. Banana trees grew incongruously among the pines. At each village there was a grand carouse, singing and dancing continued far into the night. The coolies were looked on as adventurers, and envied for their luck in being selected for the journey. The younger ones, boys of sixteen, were quietly thrilled; they had not the least idea what to expect. Their elders had spoken of the wonders of the Sadiya bazaar (a single street about 100 yards long), of motor-cars, Gurkha soldiers, and fine houses with roofs of iron, but these things were meaningless. If you have lived all your life in a back-street, without books or pictures, an account of a mountain is an improbable fairy-tale.

As we approached the true jungle a bunch of smoking fir-twigs was passed round each little circle at camp; the smoke was inhaled, and passed under the armpits; accident and sickness would thus be averted in the torrid regions below. Each day the valley grew narrower; the steep forested walls crowded in on the river. Wads of dark green vegetation lined the ravines: bananas, bamboos, fig-trees and creepers. Then one climbed out of these

dim alleyways and continued again through pines and bracken, to drop once more into a jungle-choked trench. Then the jungle spread, became more insistent, it lined the valley bottom, and the pines retreated to the upper levels.

At Walong, the last village in Tibet, final preparations were made. Supplies were dumped for the return journey, and a pig was killed; screaming wildly, it was dragged from a yard, and strangled with a rope and stick, made into a tourniquet. It died slowly, with froth at the mouth. This is the usual method in Zayul. Farther north, in up-country Kham, the animals are bound, the chest slit open, and the heart wrenched out, still quivering, by the butcher. There is a grove of orange-trees at Walong; even the ripest fruit is sour, but it was collected eagerly, and chupas became even more shapeless.

Mishmis now appeared on the path, shy, surly little men, dark and independent. The fetid breath of the jungle seemed to ooze from their bodies, loading the air with a little pungent cloud. While we halted for lunch they would squat on a rock like a group of dark-eyed monkeys, silent, aloof, watchful, a pipe in every man's mouth, of bamboo or silver. Always they seemed to choose some eminence. Then they would slip off quietly, with a liquid cat-like tread, their bodies moulded in the abrupt undulations of the path. They were moving up to work in Zayul, to weave baskets, and clear the fields. Until recently they were ruthless head-hunters; now they have quieted down, and behave themselves when in Tibet. But even to-day a single Mishmi is treated with respect by an entire Zayuli village. These were Miju Mishmis, of the upper valley, and more in contact with Tibet; the Digarus of the lower valley tend to deal with Assam.

We had taken our graceless rabble of coolies somewhat for granted, but now by contrast with the neat silent Mishmis they showed up as happy-go-lucky,

down-at-heel tramps. The Zayulis were diverse, the Mishmis uniform: each head of coarse black hair was tied in a top-knot; a sleeveless black jacket, open in front, and simply embroidered, reached to the thighs; a small apron was attached to a string round the waist, a worked bag, on a narrow leather strap, hung on the left hip, a broad leather band across the chest supported an open-sheathed knife on the right hip. The Mishmi, when he meets an obstacle, either vegetable or animal, merely draws his knife straight out in front with the right hand—a lightning flick, with sinister accuracy, and the blade slips to its home with a dry “thock”. They will disappear into the forest, and just become part of it. On their backs they carry an open-mouthed cane bag; a rain-shield, like a section of grass-skirt, covers the top; simple, neat and efficient. Each article is made with canny directness for constant use. Once we asked for eggs. A Mishmi slipped away; he returned carrying a little open-work cylinder of plaited bamboo, containing half a dozen eggs, no bigger than bantams’; the cylinder had been made on the moment.

Each night we slept in the open, in tiny clearings in the all-enveloping jungle, or in patches of tall rank grass, dry and brittle. Blister-flies were numerous, but there were no mosquitoes or leeches. It was a pleasant trek, calm with the sense of a task completed, bright with the prospect of luxury ahead. We talked of the theatres we would see, of our favourite actors, and wondered what it would feel like to ride in a train. “I shall buy a stack of tinned salmon and lobster,” said Ron, “and eat all the way to Bombay.” “. . . and turnips?” I suggested.

We had expected rain; the annual rainfall in these hills is one of the heaviest in the world; at Dening it varies from 220 to more than 300 inches. The record is 24 inches in 24 hours, during the monsoon. Luck was with us; each evening we looked anxiously at the sky.

Should we put up the tent? But every night was clear, and we stared up into the starry vault, deep joy in our hearts.

Mishmis would appear suddenly in camp, as from nowhere, mutely proffering a lean chicken, some eggs, a yam. A handful of tangled wool was traded for the smoked corpse of a squirrel; a Zayuli ate it raw, head and all. Wild animals of any sort are rare in these hills—the Mishmis have practically exterminated them. Then the forest people would sit slightly apart, talking quietly sometimes, in sing-song tones. The very names were sing-song and nasal: Haionliang, Pangam, Halei. Occasionally a woman would appear, with wide silver brow-band, and ornaments of silver, of hour-glass shape, thrust through the lobes of the ears, and a tight black bodice; and always the eternal pipe.

The jungle grew thicker. All pine trees vanished. Long grass steamed in the morning dew. We slogged through inches of mud and water, crept with bent backs along dark tunnels of bamboo, over and under fallen logs, slashed at creepers, emerged on to the river-bank to scale river-worn boulders, white in the sun . . . there were strips of bamboo, a few inches wide, wedged in the cliff . . . saw-toothed palms that arched the way . . . and a last long look at the snows of Tibet, far up the valley. . . . Farewell. . . .

On December 4th we crossed a ridge, dropped to the Tidding river, tributary of the Lohit, in steamy heat, marched a last few miles in the jungle . . . and came face to face with the Public Works Department, Assam Government, in the shape of a bridge suspended on real steel cables, and incredibly, a wide surface that required no careful sense of balance. We walked across, rather embarrassed, into Administered Territory. And on the farther bank the jungle was cleared, to a depth of some ten yards on either side of the path. It was like a garden walk. We felt naked.

Rounding a bend we stopped, and stared in amazement: there ahead was Theronliang; a green clearing, with neat white huts, a Rest House, a clipped lawn, a veranda, long chairs. Against all the rules the huts stood up straight. Of course; white men's houses did that. If a house sagged it was a bad house. I had forgotten. Suddenly we became nervously conscious that there were rents in our shirts, that our shorts were clumsily patched, that we were dirty. I was horribly aware of my beard.

From sheer force of habit we marched in single file, the two of us—across that wide lawn, through the gate, up the steps, and into the Rest House. A sleek Indian appeared in shirt and trousers. Would the sahibs like some tea? It was brought. Tea with milk, in thick china cups, and virgin-white sugar!

“Hey, go easy on that sugar!”

“Why? There's plenty of it now.”

Plenty of everything. Cigarettes, not two a day, wrapped carefully in oilskin, but a whole wonderful tin. Behold the expedition, no longer cross-legged, but seated at its ease in long cane chairs, rapturously immersed in year-old magazines and newspapers. What extraordinary things people did! Race-meetings, golf, night-clubs, dressed-up functions. How fat they looked. The Indian approached softly. “The Burra Sahib left some beer.” There was revelry. . . .

There was a telephone, and Ron handled the absurd instrument, to ring through to Sadiya. Yes, news of our coming had been received. We would be met by car at Dening.

We had some more beer. We had a bath. When the coolies arrived, and brought our bedding into the Rest House, one of them caught sight of himself in a mirror. He let out a wild shriek of delighted embarrassment, and dashed out to fetch a friend. Cautiously another grimy head peered round the edge of the mirror:

another giggling shriek—and then everyone had to be brought along in turn.

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The next morning, in a tropical downpour, we climbed to the Tidding Saddle, at 6000 feet, and dropped to the Dreyi Rest House a short way down on the farther side.

The evening died a thunderous, impassioned death. Black clouds massed over the vast dark plain of Assam, thousands of feet below, over the sullen green forest and the gun-metal ribbons of river. Streaks of livid orange and purple split the furious night. Lightning whipped and flickered. The heavens were racked, and bellowed in agony. In garish splendour the huge expanse below stared for a moment like a dead thing, then vanished. Plain! League upon league of it—and around us the last of the hills, in grim arrested waves. All night the battle went on, and beneath its tumult tiny thoughts raced through my head, quick and whispering: "This is curtain. 'To-night we are still together, the four of us, as in a boat. We have looked into many strange harbours. To-morrow there will be new contacts, a whole new life. We shall see white people again, the first for more than nineteen months. . . . There are plants and insects in our boxes, many rare, some new to science. There are maps: about 3000 miles of route, 25,000 square miles of country, most of it unknown before. And the source of the Salween? Will it be found sometime? . . ."

"The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly—and Lo! the Bird is on the wing."

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On December 6th we approached Dening outpost. English voices issued from the rest house, strangely clear and matter-of-fact. A little later we were being regaled with all the luxuries by kind hosts from Sadiya: Mr. Walker, the Assistant Political Officer, and Captain Bond, the Assistant Commandant. Everything was orderly,

fresh and clean. Captain Bond gave some commands, and Gurkha soldiers stepped up and saluted smartly. We relaxed. Things were out of our hands.

Conversation came in little streams at first, and stopped. Whole chunks of vocabulary were missing, and we heard words now that we had all but forgotten. We asked for news. What has happened in the last two years? Our eyes grew wider as the tale ran on: The Quetta earthquake . . . civil war in Spain . . . Mussolini in Abyssinia . . . Hitler on the Rhine . . . war on the North-West Frontier . . . the Constitution threatened! Soon it became a joke: "Oh, we forgot to tell you, there's another war . . ."

And those Tibetan coolies, seated outside in their accustomed circles so incongruously by the waiting lorries, will they ever know anything of all this; and if they do, what shadow of meaning will it have for them? As inexorably as bird migrants, passing back and forth with the seasons, they will live and work in their mountains. They will drive their yaks, scratch the earth, and spin their prayer-wheels in murmuring faith, happily unconscious of the nerve-ridden world below, which has arrogated to itself the term civilized.

GLOSSARY OF PRONUNCIATION

In general, Tibetan words in this book are pronounced as in English, with the following limitations:

a, short, as in French “*acheter*”; e.g. Da-shing, Shopando.

ch, as in English “*church*”; e.g. Chamda, Nak Chu.

e, when at end of a word or syllable as *é* in French; e.g. Trashi-tse, Dere, otherwise as in English “*men*”; e.g. La Gen.

g, hard, as in English “*gust*”; e.g. Geshi, Gochen.

i, at beginning or in the middle of a word or syllable as in English “*in*”; e.g. Shingke, Sating, otherwise as *ee* in English “*seen*”; e.g. Shari, Mi-chen La.

j, as in English “*jug*”; e.g. Jolo, Nejo Tempe.

kh, aspirated *k*; say “*black hat*”, eliminating first four letters “*blac*”; e.g. Tekhar La.

ng; say “*going away*” eliminating first three letters “*goi*”; e.g. Nga-gong.

ny, as *ni* in “*onion*”; e.g. Nyeba.

o, at end of word or syllable as in English “*hole*”; e.g. Jo-lo, Po-me, otherwise as in English “*long*”; e.g. Dzung, Chikong.

ö, as *eu* in French “*peu*”; e.g. Chö Dzung, Shöwa.

ph, aspirated *p*; say “*loop-hole*”, eliminating first three letters; e.g. Phokar La.

th, aspirated *t*; say “*fat hen*”, eliminating first two letters, “*fa*”; e.g. Thenthok, Shikathang.

u, as *oo* in “*boot*”; e.g. Sum Dzung, Dzogu La.

ü, as in French “*du*”; e.g. Dü Chu.

N.B. Shugden Gumpa, pronounced *Shoo-den*; Kau, pronounced *Ka-oo*.

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