

SIKKIM



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COSMO PUBLICATIONS

New Delhi

INDIA

1997

CHAPTER IX

The Antechamber of Tibet

MARCH, 1936, found us back again in the Himalaya, as the prophets had foretold; or rather two of us, Richard Nicholson and myself, for of the other members of the old party, Ted Hicks and Colin Kirkus were not free to join us, and Charles Warren had been yielded up, grudgingly, to the Everest expedition. "A little regret is not out of place in making an offering," as Aramis said in *The Three Musketeers*.

In the interval between the two journeys, not only had our study of the Tibetan language continued with unflagging diligence, but also there had been a good deal of general reading and thinking round the subject of Tibet and its institutions. A path was beginning to be cleared through the maze of new and exciting impressions that we had collected, so that they could be sorted into some degree of order and related to our ordinary life.

One thing was evident to us; we could never more remain indifferent to those doctrines which underlay the Tibetan culture. The little that we had learned at first hand was evidence enough to prove, beyond hesitation, that a precious treasure lay there: only he could hope to find the key, who first earned the freedom of the Tradition through a mastery of the language, and through real sympathy with the mode of life and outlook of its votaries.

Our return into Occidental society, after having spent some months separated from it, made it possible to examine in a new and critical light many institutions that had hitherto been taken for granted. Indeed, reversion to the old conditions came in many ways as a shock, for the restless, noisy daily round seemed strangely futile after the manageable pace to which we had accustomed ourselves. We missed the quietness and the physical well-being of the mountain life, and we looked round

in vain for an adequate substitute for that sense of poise which, more than anything, distinguished the people among whom we had lately stayed.

As soon as we began to make definite plans for another visit to the East we invited two more climbers to join us, J. K. COOKE, a very able mountaineer with whom I had been associated both in the Alps and in Wales, and F. S. CHAPMAN of Greenland fame, a keen field ornithologist, who after leaving us, accompanied the Political Officer of Sikkim to Lhasa as private secretary, and finally capped his varied adventures with a first ascent of the lofty peak of Chomolhari. The medical officer's place was filled by Dr. R. ROAF of Liverpool who, though he had done but little mountaineering, shared many of our other interests, especially the artistic ones. He was gifted as a linguist and in a short time managed to make considerable headway with his Tibetan, to which a Balliol accent lent an original flavour.

The projected expedition was to be divided roughly into two parts. First, we wished to attempt one or more of the peaks situated near the margin of the Zemu glacier in Sikkim, before the arrival of the monsoon about June. In the second half Cooke and Chapman were to be free to continue climbing in the north of Sikkim if they wished, while the other three of us devoted ourselves to Tibetan studies. Permission to enter Tibet proper was solicited from the Government of India, who promised to take an early opportunity of forwarding our application to the Lhasa authorities. The district for which we required a passport was called Hlobrak, which means Southern Crag. It is a valley adjoining the north frontier of Bhutan and is reputed to be both of extraordinary natural beauty and to contain a number of ancient monasteries of great interest, in one of which we hoped to be allowed to stay and receive instruction.

Hlobrak is famous as the birthplace of one of Tibet's great divines, Marpa, who, like the founder of the Spiti temples, earned the rare title of Translator, from having brought back doctrinal books to his country from India. He is still more renowned as the spiritual guide of Tibet's most popular saint and national poet, Mila Repa. The latter had started life as a notorious sinner. When his father died, his uncle and aunt seized on the inheritance and drove Mila and his mother out

into penury. The widow vowed vengeance and called on her son to show himself a man by exacting a cruel punishment from the usurpers of his patrimony. But his uncle only mocked the youth saying, "If you are many, declare war on us: if few, cast spells on us!" The young man took them at their word and went in search of a sorcerer able and willing to teach him the art of black magic. Eventually he found his man and became initiated into the mysteries of witchcraft. When he felt his powers sufficiently matured, he made his preparations and launched spells against his uncle's house, condemning all who dwelt there to perish except two, his uncle and aunt, who were to be spared so that they might experience the anguish of their loss to the full. At that moment a feast was in progress and the horses belonging to the guests were stabled on the ground floor of the house, as is still customary in Tibet to-day, while the family entertained their friends on the first floor. A maidservant, sent down on an errand and deluded by the spell, imagined she saw a scorpion as big as a yak tugging at the central pier that formed the main support of the building. Unhinged by terror, she rushed shrieking from the stable, and her alarm communicated itself to the horses; upon which all the stallions hurled themselves madly upon the mares and a terrible fight ensued. The whole house was shaken so violently that it toppled down, burying all the company under the ruins except the wretched aunt and uncle.

The news did not take long to reach the ears of the old widow, who hastened to the scene of the disaster and added her triumphant gibes to the torments of the hapless pair. To escape the consequences of his crime Mila Repa had to flee the country; but in exile he began to be tormented by remorse. His highly sensitive and spiritual nature craved to understand the true meaning of life. A chance acquaintance happened to mention to him the name of Marpa the Translator, and Mila instantly experienced, as many young Tibetans still do, a conviction that he, and he alone, was the Master to lead him into the Path of Truth. He set out at once for Hlobrak where Marpa, who is represented in pictures as a rather stout, choleric-looking man, already expected him, having sensed his approach through second sight. Mila offered himself body and soul to his Lama, and prayed that he would impart to him his special doctrine. "What!" cried Marpa, feigning anger. "Do you think I am

going to hand over secrets which I brought all the way from India at great trouble and risk, to the first comer, to one moreover who is a wicked sorcerer, the slayer of I know not how many human beings? It is only after a long probation that I may, if I see that you are really in earnest, instruct you in the doctrine." Mila, having agreed to his terms, awaited his commands.

The Lama, who discerned in Mila's enthusiastic personality a wealth of possibilities which were only waiting to be released as soon as his past misdeeds had been expiated, deliberately put him through a testing that would have broken the spirit of any ordinary man, treating him with the utmost harshness, snubbing him on every possible occasion, and displaying a shortness of temper and despotic capriciousness which belied the deep respect that he really felt for his disciple. Marpa is still held up to admiration as the type of an uncompromising trainer of character, who shrinks from no discipline that he thinks likely to aid the spiritual development of his pupil. If few men have quite equalled Marpa in his almost ruthless interpretation of a preceptor's duties, many of the modern lama-teachers to-day would be found to act on his principles to a surprising extent.

One of the first measures taken by Marpa will perhaps astonish my readers, though to a Tibetan it would seem more natural. He ordered Mila Repa to use his magic arts to coerce the people of a village who, so he said, had offended him in some way. Mila, who was by this time consumed with shame for the murders that he had perpetrated by his sorcery, crimes which he now appreciated at their true worth, suffered the pain of realization a hundredfold, now that he had to repeat them in cold blood; but, like a true pupil, he never for a moment dreamed of disobeying his master. The strange-sounding command was really a means of bringing home to Mila, in a way that no mere precepts could have done, the real enormity of the sin of violence, revealing it to him in its true colours. The sole object of a genuine Lama's training is realization; whatever does not conduce to that end is a waste of time. Innocence, if due to nothing more than ignorance of evil, is considered worthless. Not the new-born baby, but the experienced sage is the Tibetan ideal. It must be admitted that in the history of these events, Marpa got out of a difficulty by restoring to health the men, rats and birds that had suffered from his so drastic experi-

ment. He then invented a fresh series of tests. He ordered the building of a house on a certain site and specified the exact design. Mila was to erect it unaided, bringing every stone with his own hands. When after infinite toil it was completed, Marpa came along and said casually: "Who ordered that absurd building to be put up there?" "It was your Reverence," answered Mila. "I must have been crazy when I said it. Pull it down and re-erect it here." This episode, with variations, was enacted again and again. Mila was even made to replace the stones where they had come from, miles away, carrying them on his back.

At last when the young man had proved that, though pushed to the limit of endurance, his steadfastness was utterly unshakable, his formidable tutor relented. Mila could hardly believe his ears when he heard the news that the coveted initiation was to be his at last. Then, in the centre of a *Khyinkhor*, or Sacred Circle, Marpa admitted his favourite pupil into the Order and cut his hair with his own hands.

There follows one of the most moving passages of the whole story, the description of the parting of the old Lama from his beloved disciple. After the stern lesson of Mila's cruel labours, the poignant tenderness of this farewell is strangely affecting.

Mila Repa's autobiography, which he dictated later on to one of his own pupils, is the great masterpiece of Tibetan prose and has fortunately been competently translated into English, and into French still better. It gives a more vivid notion of how the Tibetan mind works than any other book that I know, and as a picture of daily life it holds good to-day, though these events happened about the time of William the Norman.

Mila Repa became one of the greatest saints and by his extreme power of concentration, succeeded in telescoping into the space of a single earthly life, all those stages of Being that must precede the Supreme Illumination of a Buddha. He spent most of his remaining years in reclusion in caves, some of them not far from Mount Everest, where one can still meet a few of his spiritual children. There he meditated upon the Truth for the good of all creatures. The Order of Lamas which Marpa and he founded on Earth is called *Kargyudpa* or Verbal Tradition Order. It hands down, in golden succession, doctrines which perhaps represent the richest manifestations of Tibetan thought. The saint has revealed his most intimate musings in a collection

of religious poems, characterized by an extreme succinctness of expression. The autobiography is also a model of brevity; the style is vigorous and free from padding and the dialogue positively scintillates.

It was to the scene of St. Mila's apprenticeship, to the mountain valley hallowed by his footsteps, that we hoped to go, and, perhaps to receive there some faint reflected glimpses of the teachings which he had dared to face in their dazzling effulgence. As soon as our Sikkim plans had been sanctioned by the India Office we set out, at the end of February. Had we been Tibetans we might have felt dismayed by bad auguries, for the ship sailed on the last day of an unpropitious year, by Tibetan reckoning, instead of the date originally fixed, at the beginning of a new year. We had been promised that we should sail under our old friend Captain O'Connor, who had taken us out in 1938; but at the last moment his ship was ordered to South Africa.

After an uneventful voyage we landed at Calcutta, buoyed up by hopes, little dreaming that we were fated to be thwarted in every single item of our programme: that we should fail on our peak, and be unable to set foot in Tibet; that our arrangements would work less smoothly than when we came out, quite inexperienced, three years before; and that luck would only turn at long last, when we had left our chosen ground, and migrated to the opposite end of the Himalaya, where, at P'hiyang in Ladak, a spiritual descendant of Marpa of Hlobrak would instruct us!

At Siliguri on the edge of the plain, where passengers for Kalimpong detrain, the sight of the flat-nosed, high-cheek-boned faces of the hill-men filled us with excitement. We packed into a car driven by a Nepali chauffeur, and sped off along a road bordered by dense jungle, said to harbour tigers and elephants. A sharp turn into the hills, and the river Tista, flowing between banks overgrown with luxuriant tropical foliage, came into view. There we saw the polished leathery leaves of wild banana and of the indiarubber plant, palm-like cycads that called to mind remote geological ages, the light fronds of bamboo, screwpines or *Pandanus* and creepers in amazing variety. The trees, covered with ferns and orchids, exhibited the characteristic phenomena of damp tropical vegetation; fine air cables like telegraph wires, buttressed roots and subsidiary

trunks growing out of the ends of branches so that a whole grove might really be but a single tree. Monkeys played overhead, and here and there huge butterflies, known hitherto only from collections, flitted past. But at the moment of our arrival, owing to the failure of winter rains, the country was suffering from drought and our car raised clouds of fine dust. This was to prove our undoing on the mountain later on, for the belated rains arrived in May and tailed on into an early monsoon, producing a very short and unsettled climbing season.

The opinion of the bazaar folk at Kalimpong was that one might have expected as much, because it was the year appointed for another Everest expedition. The mountain spirits would, of course, send bad weather; anyone in their place would do just the same. Perhaps also a Tibetan magician was amusing himself with the time-honoured pastime of making hail! Mila Repa had resorted to it in his unregenerate days.

Having once spent some weeks in the forests of equatorial South America, I was expecting to find the jungles of the Tista valley equally prolific, since the rainfall of Sikkim is enormous, some 120 inches in the outer ranges. They were, however, on a markedly smaller scale. The trees themselves were perhaps half the size, and did not produce the stately cathedral-like impression of the more highly developed tropical rain-forest. Creepers also, though numerous, were mostly of the fine jasmine type. Thick-stemmed lianas were relatively few: I noticed the rattan or climbing palm and the pothos, a scandioid member of the arum family, and another creeper with broad heart-shaped leaves. On the whole, much more light penetrates into these forests, so that the plants have a less severe struggle to reach it and are not forced to resort so generally to complex expedients like air roots, such as appear in great profusion in forests where even the smallest gleam of light is precious. By the Tista there were open paths which on the Essequibo of Guiana would have been roofed over by creepers in less than a couple of seasons. Insects too, though common and splendid, did not hover round in anything like the same numbers. It must be supposed that the slightly higher latitude (27° North, actually outside the tropics), the sharper division into seasons (the dry season tends to act somewhat like a winter) and perhaps also the proximity of the plains of India, which are comparatively poor in species, have jointly conspired to water down

the intensity of Nature's energy : but even so, the forest is of great magnificence, such as temperate vegetation, even at its best, does not quite equal. The beauty of the latter may not be less perfect in itself, but its possibilities are more limited. If temperate woods resemble the Pastoral Symphony of Beethoven, tropical forests are a fugal concerto of Bach or a six-part anthem by Palestrina.

After crossing the Tista, the road winds upwards in numerous bends, including one figure of eight, to a ridge 4,000 feet high with the bazaar of Kalimpong straggling along its crest. Most of the upper levels have been cleared for cultivation, and the hillsides are terraced with maize. The area, both the outlying hamlets and the bazaar itself, is a jerry-builder's paradise ; most of the hutments consist of a few planks, sheets of corrugated iron and old bits of tin. The cultivators are largely Nepali settlers, who are diligent agriculturists. Many of them look not unlike the Garhwalis whom we met in 1933, while others show in their features traces of Tibetan admixture. They have cheery expressions and energetic movements ; one can recognize them at a glance for a virile and pushing race ; but they must be rather a menace to the existence of less aggressive races whose territory they peacefully penetrate. We were told that their presence does constitute a problem, both for Sikkim and even in closed Bhutan, and that Nepali settlement has had to be limited to certain areas, otherwise they would overrun the whole place ; but whether the measures taken are adequate or not remains to be proved. Though nominal Hindus, they do not spare the wild animals, but slaughter them mercilessly. Gurkha troops are notorious as poachers ; but they are pleasant fellows and their "sporting" character endears them to the Europeans who see in them something more familiar than is normally to be found in Asia.

Kalimpong, which once belonged to Bhutan, but was part of a district annexed to British territory in 1865, owes its commercial importance to its position as a terminal of the Lhasa-India trade route. Thousands of mules and ponies come and go, bringing the wool of Tibet to India and carrying in exchange cotton, manufactured goods and also silk and other Chinese products. In Kalimpong's rambling street of shops many races rub shoulders, Bengalis and merchants from Marwar celebrated for business acumen, neat little Nepalis and high-

cheeked Tibetans, lanky bullet-skulled Bhutanese in short striped tunics, heroic-looking Khambas their broadswords swinging from their belts, lamas trading on behalf of their monasteries or intent on a visit to Buddh Gaya in Bihar, where the Victorious One obtained His final revelation. The best shops, neatest, cleanest and most tastefully arranged are those kept by Chinese; the smiling faces of their owners strike a friendly note as one walks through the bazaar.

The European residents differ from those of an ordinary Indian hill-station in being less stiff, more free and easy, in fact much more like the same people in England. No jaded government comes here to recuperate, there is no cantonment and no club. The presiding genius of Kalimpong is The Very Rev. Dr. J. A. Graham, sometime Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Having come out as a missionary, his attention was drawn to the crying evil of unwanted children of Anglo-Indian parentage, who, like Kim of old, hung about the streets of India, deserted and neglected. Dr. Graham came to their rescue and, starting from small beginnings, built up a wonderful organization to deal with the problem. The boys and girls are fostered, educated and eventually placed in suitable trades or professions, in all parts of the world, where most of them have made good. Many firms, as well as private persons, have recognized the great public benefit of this work, by becoming regular subscribers to its upkeep. It is a moving experience to visit the Homes in company with the saintly man who acts as father to this huge family. The unfeigned joy that lights up the rows of faces, as he pushes open the doors of successive class-rooms, the general atmosphere of health and confidence, the pleasant cottages among which the children have been subdivided in small groups, instead of being allowed to grow up under barrack conditions, all these things make the St. Andrew's Homes deserve the much-abused name of Charity. General Bruce once said to me: "It is the finest piece of welfare work in India."

I was privileged to make a number of close friends in Kalimpong. I have not named them, but I trust that this intentional reticence will not be mistaken for forgetfulness. I am thinking of three households, which are rarely out of my thoughts for long.

During my stay there, I spent every available moment in

trying to improve my Tibetan. Having picked it up in the western provinces, and gone on building upon that foundation, my ear was not attuned to the dialect and accent of Lhasa, which is the lingua franca of educated Tibetans everywhere. I had several teachers at Kalimpong; one of whom, an elderly layman, used to come and coach me on the hotel veranda. One day, as we were sitting at our lesson, I happened to see an ant crawling up the hem of his gown and picked it off and put it on the grass. "You have done well," said the teacher. "I rejoice to see that you did not unthinkingly squash the ant. You must be familiar with the doctrines that enjoin respect for life however lowly." "Yes," I answered, "I have heard the popular saying that any insect you see has probably been at some time one or both of your parents." This is a way of expressing the idea that all beings are continuously passing from one state to another, according to the actions which consciously or unconsciously affect them, so that all living things are brothers, and all things whatsoever, one. This doctrine will be explained in detail in the chapter on the Round of Existence.

While at Kalimpong I had many opportunities of investigating the attitude of the Tibetans towards animals, as not a day passes but long trains of mules or ponies come and go along the caravan route. I had already noticed in 1933 that Tibetans acted kindly and thoughtfully towards their animals, and that ill-temper, cursing and beating seemed unknown among them. This first opinion was reinforced by what I heard and saw at Kalimpong, in Sikkim and later in Ladak. I consulted several British residents so as to check my facts. I think one is safe in declaring that genuine cruelty is uncommon and that in their relations with the animal world, the Tibetans might serve as an example for many other races. Their theoretical position is sound from the start. Animals are sensitive beings, differing in degree, not in kind, from ourselves, and must be treated accordingly—so runs their teaching. Hunting or fishing are discountenanced by the law, and foreigners admitted into Tibet are obliged to give a pledge that they will respect this prohibition. Wild animals are in consequence often very tame. Feeding of birds and fishes is considered a pious act. Meat-eating, though general because of the scarcity of other kinds of food on the plateau, is only admitted as a regrettable necessity, and the stricter lamas and any others who abstain

from it altogether are much respected. The trade of butcher is in very bad odour, though, with the sophistry which comes so easily to mankind, Mussulmans are allowed to practise it at Lhasa, but outside the city boundary.

Pack-animals travelling along the trade-routes suffer from frequent sores caused by the rubbing of the wooden pack-saddles. I have seen many bad open wounds, while there is hardly one mule or pony that does not show some patches of white hair where an old sore has healed over. In Europe a bad sore on a horse is taken as clear proof of cruelty. Should not the same be said here? I think that a different construction should be put on the evidence, and that the evil is almost entirely due to the nature of the ground over which packs must be transported. The paths are often strewn with boulders; successions of high mountain passes must be crossed where blizzards overtake the travellers; early or late in the season deep snowdrifts add to the difficulties. I was told that a driver is usually put in charge of from twenty to thirty mules; the men battle hard to help their animals, but the task is beyond one man's strength. If the ponies themselves were like the nervous creatures that we know over here, the number of casualties would bring all traffic to a standstill; but the Tibetan pony or mule is as tough as his master. When he falls over, if there is no one at hand to help, he just scrambles up and goes on his way. One English resident also told me that the animals eventually become hardened to the pack-saddles and that the second-growth skin is less liable to sores than before. An improved saddle was once designed; but it was impossible to get it tried seriously, as the existing pattern is time-honoured and slightly cheaper too. We know over here how difficult it is to overcome the conservatism of simple people.

In Southern Europe, where sores on animals are common, we find them invariably associated with emaciation from under-feeding, beating and goading, and especially with the habit of leaving the pack-saddles on day and night out of sheer laziness. In Tibet, I regard the sores, though not in any way defensible, as a comparatively minor evil, among the many evils by which man, as Schopenhauer said, has "turned the Earth into a hell for the animals," both because the sores seem to recover under good treatment on reaching home, and because they are chiefly the outcome of extremely hard conditions of life, which the men

also endure in equal degree ; they are not caused by malevolence, indifference, denial of the animals' just rights, or, as so often happens, simply by indolence. All this mitigates the evil considerably, and though one would not exactly choose to be born a mule on an Asiatic caravan route if one could avoid it, I continue to rate the Tibetans high in their treatment of animals. Above all, they admit the right principle, so that, in case of abuse, there is something to appeal to.

At the same time it would be easy to misread the motives that govern the Tibetans in their attitude towards cruelty. Their treatment of animals, in which their standard is above average, must not lead us into ascribing to them our own tender-heartedness and inability to witness pain without repugnance. By no stretch of imagination could they be called humanitarians, even when their acts conform to the humane code. With us the chief objection to cruelty is the actual pain inflicted : not so to the Tibetan, whose powers of enduring pain without flinching are great, but who can also look unmoved upon suffering that would horrify us. For him, the feeling of hostility, which leads to the doing of an injury, is far more serious than the pain involved in the cruel act. The two points of view differ profoundly, even if they sometimes approach in their results.

The Buddhist takes for his starting-point the rights of all his living fellow-creatures, rights which he recognizes in theory, whatever may be his own practice. The sinfulness of ill-treatment lies in the ignorant denial of those rights and in the indulgence of anger or self-interest. For our part, we make a marked distinction of principle between the rights claimed for man and those accorded to animals. The latter can vary between moderately full rights—sometimes marred by a patronizing attitude—slight recognition, and non-existence. On the other hand, our objection to pain is extreme. We fear it greatly for ourselves and, by a projection of our own highly-developed sensibility, we recoil from the idea of inflicting it on others.

The Tibetans, on the other hand, take little stock of pain as such. A man who would not commit a cruel act himself, could be unmoved by the severest torture suffered by either man or beast, provided he was convinced that it was inevitable or deserved. If it were purely the result of chance, he would probably feel no strong impulse to seek a way to remedy it. A

man who would put himself to no end of trouble in order to spare his animals, might experience little horror on witnessing an accident to one of those same animals; even a deliberate act, such as a painful penalty decreed by the criminal law, would not stir his feelings.

For us pain is a comparatively rare occurrence: where it exists we try to hide it from public gaze. Our fear of it for ourselves, as well as humane teachings, have sharpened our imagination, so that we no longer feel able to apply it even towards the worst criminals. We only tolerate it openly in war, and to some extent in scientific research; in the latter case our besetting fear of the pain of disease works the other way and overcomes our normal inhibitions. There are of course other horrible cruelties like trapping for furs; but they are allowed to continue because the pain is out of sight and is accepted as an incidental feature. The same applies to some of the measures taken against those wild animals that are counted as "vermin." These remarks apply to England, one of the most humane countries in the world: in many other parts of Europe the attitude towards animals is appalling, both in theory and practice. In some modern States torture for political causes has begun to regain favour; but even there it is not yet safe to inflict it publicly.

It is rare to find in the same person both remarkable stoicism under pain and a quick sensitivity to the sufferings of others. The martyr's fortitude and the tormentor's callousness are ever prone to change places, if fate should so order things. Europeans who travel in independent Tibet should not forget this, in the event of their wishing, for any reason, to have recourse to the protection of the law. They must expect the criminal, in that case, to suffer penalties that may greatly exceed what they themselves would consider just, let alone endure. Whether they are prepared under such circumstances to take the responsibility of invoking the law, is a matter for their own conscience.

The virtues of the Tibetans in their relations with animals, they owe chiefly to their Buddhist principles, which remain unquestioned, even if they are not applied consistently. Were such to be the case, indeed, it could not but bring about the abolition of all cruelties. But of objection to pain for its own sake, there is little, and inhuman practices, **h**ollowed by custom,

such as the slaughter of animals in certain districts by suffocation, do not stir the public conscience.

One of my pressing duties after my arrival was to go over by car to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, and introduce myself to the Political Officer, Mr. B. J. Gould, who controlled the issue of passports into Tibet. He had very bad news for us. A report had arrived concerning an untoward incident on a different part of the frontier which, it was feared, had annoyed the Lhasa authorities. In consequence the promise of forwarding on our application for a permit to go to Hlcbhak could not be fulfilled. It was a great blow: all our plans were in the melting-pot. There was, however, nothing to be done now but to carry on with our immediate programme of climbing in Sikkim. We spent several days at Gangtok organizing transport. Mr. Gould most kindly offered two of us the hospitality of the Residency and its lovely garden.

During our stay in Gangtok, H.H. the Maharaja of Sikkim received us several times and treated us with every possible consideration; I would like to express to him the grateful thanks of all our party. I am myself specially indebted to him; for when a chance remark made him aware of my cherished desire to embark on a genuine study at first hand of the Tibetan doctrines, for their own sake and not out of mere scientific curiosity, he spoke encouraging words which I have not forgotten.

By far the most interesting of the sights at Gangtok is the new temple attached to the palace, which has only recently been completed by the reigning Maharaja. Both the structure and the interior decorations and fittings are new. It is significant that a work has been carried through in this little Himalayan principality which would nowadays be well nigh impossible in the capitals of the richest States in the world. Externally the building is plain, built in two stories like all Sikkim temples. The nave, well proportioned and resting on pillars with the usual Tibetan bracketed capitals, is lined with mural paintings by the best contemporary artists from Tibet. Symbolical figures, illustrating metaphysical doctrines, scenes from the life of the Buddha and from local church history, bands and panels of conventional foliage, have all been executed with precision and in animated style. The colours are clean and well blended; the only fault that can be alleged against them is their rather

aggressively new appearance, intensified by the fact that they have had to be overlaid with a coat of glossy varnish, to protect them from the humid climate. It is to be hoped that time will tone this down.

His Highness also showed us his private chapel and his wonderful collection of *t'hankas* or painted scrolls. One of these, illustrating the doctrine of the Wheel of Existence, was the work of his own uncle who is a lama in Tibet. But the crown of all his possessions is a set of *t'hankas* hanging in the dining-room of his house, which are not only the finest of their kind known to me, but rank among the greatest masterpieces of painting anywhere. These are not of recent date: they were executed in Kham, adjoining Western China. Whoever painted them was one of those rare geniuses who show their superior powers as unmistakably in the most insignificant details as in their treatment of human figures and in the general composition. All the better Tibetan *t'hankas* are competently drawn; but in this case there is an extra quality in the actual line which has been granted to few outside the circle of the great artists of China and Japan. In the Maharaja's *t'hankas* Chinese influence is probable. They are slightly less austere and formalized than the ordinary run of Tibetan work. The treatment of trees and landscape in particular suggests an artist who shares the Chinese attitude towards Nature. They are no longer a mere background to set off the figures and illustrate the story: they have been endowed with an individual value of their own. I feel that it is a special privilege to have been permitted by His Highness to reproduce photographs (facing pages 121 and 420) of two of these remarkable *t'hankas*.

The proximity of the new temple has put the Maharaja's present house rather out of countenance. It was erected in a previous reign, at the time when the first wave of imitation of European styles was sweeping over Asia. Possibly the Residency building may have had something to do with setting the fashion; though John Claude White, the first British Resident, who built it, was by no means out of sympathy with the cause of native art. He showed his enlightenment, remarkable for the time, by opposing the introduction of chemical dyes into Sikkim. It is a pity his policy in this matter is not still applied with unrelenting severity. He not unnaturally put up for his own use an English country house, as a reminder of home; but had he

foreseen the effects of his example, he might have acted differently.

Besides the royal shrine, there is a conspicuous monastery on the top of Gangtok hill, to which we paid a call, at the hour of afternoon service. When I knocked on the door to ask admittance, the lama doorkeeper must have been puzzled by my appearance and accent: I suppose I pronounced Tibetan rather differently from an Englishman. I overheard him whispering "He must be from Ladak"—prophetic words, as it happened. I thought of Madame David-Neel when she stayed at Lhasa disguised as a beggar, for she also had been taken for a Ladaki.

The service was not edifying. The lamas who foregathered in the choir seemed bent on getting through their orisons in the briefest possible time. They gabbled mechanically and turned to stare and gossip quite unashamedly. It was the "vain repetition" mentioned in the Gospel, vain by reason of its inattention, for repetition is not in itself harmful and has its uses. In Tibet, the delinquents would soon have heard from the monastic censor, and maybe felt the weight of his whip too! There is plenty of room for reform in the Sikkim lamaseries, real reform, not revolutionary innovation, but a return to earlier practice and a stricter enforcement of rules that already exist. There is a great difference between these two policies.

Unlike so many Hindu and Moslem rulers, the Maharaja and his Court invariably wear their traditional dress. This wise and salutary practice, in keeping with the dignity of a prince, is unfortunately not copied as it ought to be by the officials of petty rank. Postal servants, overseers on roads and, most serious of all, schoolmasters, are frequent offenders. This last case is specially regrettable because of their influence upon the character of their youthful and uncritical charges. I used to meet the schoolboys returning home in the evenings with their satchels: some of them looked in the picture, but far too many were got up as grotesque travesties of European children. There is no law I should welcome more than one which made it a duty of every employee of the State to wear his national costume. The same rule should be applied to school children. Designers of school buildings and Government offices might apply this principle, so far as is practicable, to the style of their architecture and furnishing. It is only long after people have relinquished their

heritage that they begin to feel regrets; but then the attempt to reconstruct the past is only too liable to result in a mere romantic affectation, like the Gothic revival in Europe. The time for devising counter-measures against the evil tendency is now, before it has had time to gather its full force.

I believe that this question of costume, external though it may appear at first sight, is a crucial one for India, China, Japan and other nations too. It has become a symbol of something far more deep-seated, a touchstone by which the traditional and anti-traditional souls can be distinguished. That I am not alone in thinking so, is proved by the actions of those to whom, in this matter, I feel most opposed. I call to witness the inveterate Occidentalizers, Kemal Atatürk and his Persian and Afghan imitators, for they, though from diametrically contrary motives, came to the same conclusion as myself. They wished to uproot tradition, to snap the links that bind their people to history. They too felt the power of symbols; that is why they persecuted all the outward signs of native culture and forcibly imposed trousers and bowler hats, Romanized architecture and jazz orchestras. They accepted for a criterion of civilization, conformity to the Western model, and that alone. In their eyes such an object as a typewriter was more than a useful tool to do a certain job; it became invested with mystical qualities, like an emblem of progressiveness in the new era. Their ideals matched their outward trappings. Militaristic nationalism, identification of propaganda with education, hatred of religion and denial of the private authority of conscience, above all the exaltation of feverish action over thought in every sphere, these were their ideas of culture.

In encouraging contrast, I must tell the story of how in 1937 I was visited in my home in Liverpool by the Mongol lama Wangyal, whom I have mentioned before and to whom this book owes so much. He came over in his national dress and always wore it while in England. On the voyage some Indians tried to frighten him by prophesying that he would be laughed at; they even told him that the police would interfere with him if he did not change into European clothes! Not only did no such thing happen, but people who met him, repeatedly went out of their way to comment favourably on his appearance. The only minor criticism I ever heard was over a pair of tan shoes of English make and a Homburg hat that he sometimes wore. I

was asked why he spoiled his beautiful dress with those incongruous additions! That is how it struck English people. I wish some of my Oriental friends would lay this to heart.

To cite one more example, I remember the universal admiration which greeted that noble Chinese Christian Dr. Ti Zi Ku whenever he came over to our country to address the Student Christian Movement. He owed this honour not only to his own rare personality but also partly to the fact that, clad as he was in his becoming national costume, the frame befitted the picture. On the other hand those Indians whom one meets walking along the pavements of London, wearing a pink turban and a black beard, in combination with a check golf jacket and plus-fours, simply appear ludicrous to European eyes, and it is almost impossible to rid oneself of the idea, despite any assertion to the contrary, that this grotesque attempt at imitation masks a sense of inferiority deep down in the heart. It is even more difficult to understand why the Japanese, who are citizens of a great Power, as greatness is judged to-day, continue to act in a similar manner. They are a typical example of what happens to a people when it starts copying, even for a perfectly understandable reason, without discrimination and with unsettling precipitancy. I recently saw a photograph of a ceremony in Korea where the Koreans present were all dressed in their white robes, while the Japanese officials were wearing that most unbecoming of uniforms, the frock-coat of the 'eighties. They looked ridiculous and one could have laughed, were the whole subject not so depressing.

A general reversion to the traditional costume on the part of male Indians, and Chinese and Japanese of the educated classes, especially students and officials—ladies seem usually to have more courage and sounder instincts in these things—would, in my opinion, earn general respect from Europeans. Respect is the first step towards friendship. Slavish imitation is the way to get oneself despised, when all talk of equality or reconciliation becomes futile. Of course certain adaptations for climatic reasons have to be made when travelling abroad, just as our own people do in India. No one suggests walking down Piccadilly in January in a loincloth, or cleaning a motor-car attired in silken raiment. The only thing to guard against is any tendency to make the proposed reform in a defiant or aggressive manner. If the Indian magistrate would one day appear in

his court, or the undergraduate at his lecture in India or at Oxford, wearing his Indian dress in all men's sight, without any fuss, then the lesson would sink in; nor would its motive be in danger of misinterpretation. The Tibetans have shown a sound judgment in this matter. In the border countries, where the two opposing tendencies meet face to face, far-seeing leaders might do much to raise the morale of their weaker followers, and gradually the tide would roll back even from those places where it has begun to encroach on the dykes of tradition.