

THE
PEOPLE OF TIBET

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A noble family of Lhasa tracing its descent for 1400 years

Seated on left, two small sons, who are Living Buddhas, with teacher behind and boy servants in front.

Mother and brother's wife beside them

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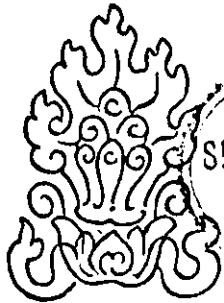
BY

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and Present*



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TO
'THE YELLOW AND THE GREY'
IN THE LAND OF SNOW'
THE CLERGY AND THE LAITY
OF TIBET

PREFACE

IN an earlier volume¹ I have written about the history, and especially about the modern political position, of Tibet. The present book is an attempt to speak about the life of the people in their own homes.

The busy round of official duties does not allow much time for gathering knowledge about the social and domestic intimacies which form the well-springs of national life. But in Tibet we were at any rate fortunate in this that when, by one means and another, we had gained the friendship of the Tibetans, our official positions were no bar to friendly intercourse, as happens sometimes in other countries. On the contrary, they served as letters of introduction to this most exclusive of peoples. We had no wish to menace their independence, but rather to help them as far as conditions allowed. So we became friends.

I should not dream of attempting a complete study of Tibetan domestic life. A miscellany of facts, and occasional ideas to clothe those facts, are all that I can offer. But such as I have garnered during a residence of nearly twenty years, in conversation with my Tibetan acquaintances, I have obtained by speaking to them in their own language, not through interpreters. The latter both limit an inquirer's range, and lead, unconsciously, to many errors. I would fain hope that others also may continue to contribute from their store, so that in time the Western world may come to a fuller understanding of this remote but interesting people.

In order to keep this volume within moderate limits I

¹ *Tibet Past and Present.*

have had to exclude from it many aspects of Tibetan life. These I hope to deal with in a subsequent book or books. The religious life, indeed, in its highways and byways might well need a volume of its own.

Though the white man's life and customs were penetrating Sikkim, yet Lhasa and Tibet generally were, during the years of my residence, practically untouched. Shut off from the outer world by their immense mountain barriers, Tibet still presented a virgin field of inquiry. We could observe the real, inner life of the people, and that but little changed during the last thousand years. Now that the country is opening little by little, it will in course of time become increasingly difficult to separate the national ideas and customs from foreign importations.

The area of Tibet is large. Intercourse of one part with another is restricted, for the country is difficult and the means of travel are primitive. It follows that manners and customs vary in different districts and provinces. So a custom or interpretation need not be condemned as inaccurate because another sojourner has seen or heard it different elsewhere.

I write words as they are pronounced in Lhasa rather than after the complicated Tibetan spelling. One instance will suffice. The Tibetan name for Sikkim is pronounced *Den-jong* and I write it accordingly. The Tibetan spelling, transliterated in the usual style, is *Hbras-ljongs*. I feel sure that most readers will prefer the former.

The photographs are mainly my own. For permission to use others I am indebted to Mr. Macdonald, Mr. Martin, and Mr. Rosemeyer. To Mr. Tshering Phuntsog and Negi Amar Chand, and especially to the late Kazi Dausamdub of Gangtok, I am indebted for translations of

Tibetan and Bhutanese histories; to Mr. L. H. Dudley Buxton, Reader in Physical Anthropology, Oxford, for a sketch of the mountain masses of Tibet; to Miss M. K. Grindrod for a careful index. And among my many Tibetan friends who have aided me, the Tsen-drön, Ku-sho Ne-tö, Ku-sho She-sur, and numerous others from the Dalai Lama downwards, I must make especial mention of Ku-sho Pa-lhe-se. Not only did he place his full and intimate store of knowledge at my disposal during our years in Tibet together, but he journeyed also from his home in Lhasa to mine in Berkshire and checked the book throughout, correcting errors.

NOTE

THE Tibetan words used in this book should be pronounced as in English, subject to the following limitations and exceptions:

a when ending a word or syllable as the *a* in *father*, e.g. *tsa-tsa*. Otherwise as *u* in *rub*, e.g. *Cham*, pronounced like the English word *chum*.

e when ending a word or syllable as *é* in French, e.g. *Rim-po-che*, *Drepung*. Otherwise as in English, e.g. *Den-sa*.

ō as *eu* in French *peu*.

u as *oo* in *root*.

ü as *u* in French *sur*.

ai as *eye*.

ny as the initial sound in *nuisance*.

ng and *ts* as in English. They are frequently used in Tibetan to begin words. Say *coming in*, eliminating the first four letters *comi*. Similarly, *weights*, eliminating *weigh*.

Hyphens have been freely inserted throughout the book to show where syllables end.

Amban denotes the high Chinese official stationed in outlying dependencies, or in regions claimed as such, e.g. in Lhasa or Sining.

Dzong. A fort, the head-quarters of a Tibetan district. In it reside the *Dzong-pön* or *Dzong-pöns* with their staff.

Dzong-pön, i.e. 'Governor of Fort'. The Tibetan official in charge of a district. In some districts one holds sole charge; in others two exercise joint control.

Kung. A hereditary title given to the father, or to one brother, of each Dalai Lama, corresponding somewhat to the title of *Duke* in England.

Ka-sho. Honorific form of address, applied to the upper classes, especially to officials. Joined to *Cham*—or the higher form *Lha-cham*—it is applied to ladies also.

La = a mountain pass.

Chu = river.

Tso or *Nor* = lake. *Tso* is the Tibetan, *Nor* the Mongol word.

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APPENDIX I

The Unit of Land Taxation

THE rental of land, whether paid by the tenant to the landlord, or by the landlord to the Government, is based on the *kang*. Each *kang* is an area of land, to sow which a certain quantity of seed is required. This seed-quantity is apparently the same throughout each estate, but varies in different estates, and averages about 40 *ke*.¹ In those parts of an estate where the soil is good, seed is sown more closely than in poor soil. So in the former the *kang* will be smaller in area, in the latter larger.

But in different districts the *kang* may vary greatly. It is small in the poor soil of Pa-ri, large in the more fertile lands round Gyangtse; an indication that the Gyangtse *kang* contains four or five times the seed capacity of its namesake at Pa-ri.

Each *kang* throughout an estate pays the same amount of cash, grain, and supply of transport and porters. Therefore in each estate the taxation of the cultivator depends not on his general prosperity as was the old custom in Sikkim. Nor on the number of members in his household, as was the former system in Bhutan. Nor yet on the area of his land, which latter consideration fixes the main taxation of the cultivator in India at the present day. But solely on the amount of seed which is required for the sowing of his land. Of two families, one may be better off than the other, owning more ponies, mules, yaks, &c., but if their lands are such as to take the same amount of seed, their taxation will be the same. The Tibetan system, in its method though not in its amount of taxation, approximates to that introduced into Sikkim during the closing years of the nineteenth century.

¹ A measure containing about thirty-three lb. of barley or peas and seventeen lb. of barley-flour.

APPENDIX II

The Ser-chok Estate

THIS estate, which was leased by the Tibetan Government for some years to Ku-sho Pa-lhe-se, has its head-quarters at Gyangtse.

Pa-lhe-se, being absent on duty with me, employed an agent (*Chan-dzö*) to look after it. In lieu of pay the *Chan-dzö* received a piece of land worth £90 a year.

Under the *Chan-dzö* were:

(a) The *Lang*, whose income was largely derived from presents given to him by the tenants, worth in the aggregate perhaps £15 yearly. He had to collect the rents, and occasionally to settle disputes among the tenantry, but the bulk of these were decided by the *Chan-dzö*, and important cases by the landlord himself.

(b) The *Tso-pön*. He received a plot of land worth £11 a year, and presents from the tenants under him, averaging £4 a year. His work was the provision of free transport, both porters and animals (ponies, donkeys, yaks, &c.), to authorized Government travellers, the collection of such rents as the *Lang* did not realize, and the settlement of petty disputes.

(c) The headmen (*Gem-pos*), of whom there were ten under the *Lang* with five or six hundred households of tenants in the aggregate. The rent of these was paid mostly to the *Dzong-pön*, but they were included in the Ser-chok estate and Pa-lhe-se was responsible for the settlement of disputes.

Apart from these there were sixteen pieces of home lands scattered here and there in the estate, and containing about a hundred farms. These belonged to the landlord. He managed them through one headman with sixteen assistants. The produce of such farms belonged to the landlord. Those who cultivated them for the landlord received in lieu of wages separate rent-free grants of land.

The estate also owned scattered lands in other districts. These paid the landlord mainly in grain, and to a smaller extent in butter, wool, carcasses of sheep, and money.

The estate paid revenue to the Tibetan Government and to the

chief monastery at Gyangtse (Pal-kor Chö-de) approximately as follows:

I. *Government revenue paid by tenants through the Lang to the Dzong.*

This was paid chiefly in sheep's carcasses, of which about five hundred were given; as well as in butter and wool. And about two hundred pounds in money.

Also transport by animals and men (*tau* and *ula*).

II. *Government revenue paid by home lands of landlord.*

Cash, equal to about two hundred pounds sterling.

60 *ke* of barley-flour.

550 *ke* of barley.

The landlord had also to supply one complete copy of the Kangyur every three years, written by hand, to the Government. For this he employed sixteen writers and one superintendent. These also made the covers for the sacred volumes, the wood for the purpose being sent by Pa-ri Dzong and the Kam-pu Valley, near Pa-ri.

III. *Revenue paid by home lands to Pal-kor Chö-de Monastery.*

This is met as far as possible from IV below.

15,000 *ke* of barley.

2,000 *kel*¹ of butter.

200 carcasses of sheep.

50 boxes of tea.

Mustard oil for burning in lamps.

Firewood.

IV. *Landlord's income.*

From the home lands and the land in other districts.

20,000 *ke* of barley.

1,000 *kel* of butter.

500 *kel* of wool.

500 carcasses of sheep.

Cash, and rents from some tenants for lands let out on rent, might total £250.

Rents from grazing-grounds and profits from cattle let out on the 'No birth, no death' contract,² might total £100.

Profits on 1,500 sheep and 200 goats, for which a fee of one *sho* each has to be paid yearly to the Government.

¹ A weight of about 6 or 7 lb.

² See p. 25.

It will be understood that the above figures are only approximate. Out of his profits the landlord has to maintain a large number of servants for work on the estate at a cost of about £600. Certain offerings to other monasteries and priests are morally incumbent on him, and these will absorb about £150. But on the other side of the account he gains further profit by employing the tenants' *tau* and *ula* on his own affairs, whether trading transactions or domestic necessities.

The tenants' rents on the Ser-chok estate are somewhat lower than those on the Drong-tse estate, because the former originally belonged to a monastery, while the latter was always the property of a layman. In Sikkim also I noticed the same tendency. The rents on monastic estates were usually lower than the rents on those owned by the laity.

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