

LANDS OF
THE THUNDERBOLT

RECENT TRAVEL BOOKS

**THE WORST JOURNEY IN
THE WORLD' (ANTARCTIC,
1910-1913)**

By **APSEY CHERRY-GARRARD**. With
Illustrations and Panoramas in Colour,
and many Maps. Two Volumes.

THE HEART OF ARABIA

By **H. ST. J. PHILEY**. With many
Illustrations. Two Volumes.

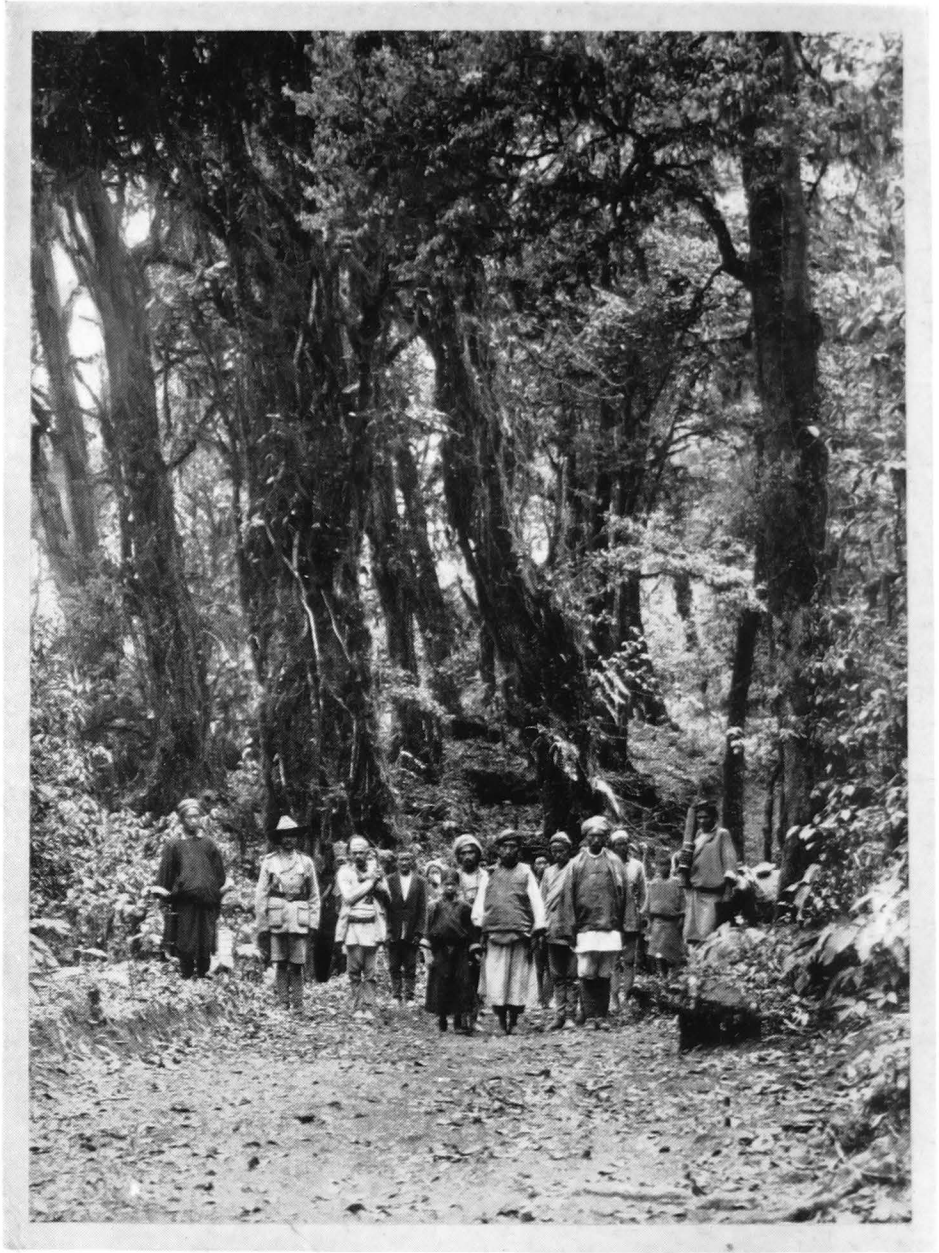
FREQUENTED WAYS

By **MARION I. NEWBIGIN**. With Maps
and Illustrations.

INCA LAND

By **HIRAM BINGHAM**. With Maps and
Illustrations.

CONSTABLE & CO. LTD.



Frontispiece.

THE SIKHIM WOODLAND.

"The enchanted forest of one's childhood's dreams."

LANDS OF THE THUNDERBOLT

SIKHIM, CHUMBI & BHUTAN

BY THE

EARL OF RONALDSHAY

P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.

HON. D.LITT. CALCUTTA; HON. D.L. DACCA
PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

AUTHOR OF

'SPORT AND POLITICS UNDER AN EASTERN SKY'; 'ON THE OUTSKIRTS
OF EMPIRE IN ASIA'; 'A WANDERING STUDENT IN THE FAR EAST,'
AND 'AN EASTERN MISCELLANY'

CONSTABLE AND COMPANY LIMITED

LONDON

BOMBAY

SYDNEY

1923

Printed in Great Britain by R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, Edinburgh.

PREFACE

SOME explanation of the title which I have given to this volume is, perhaps, called for. The countries described are situated in the Eastern Himalayas on the northern borders of Bengal. They contain some of the most impressive mountain scenery in the world; and if their interest lay solely in their physical characteristics, they would be worthy of the homage of the most blasé traveller. Of Sikhim—the scene of the greater part of the excursions described in these pages—it has been said that it is probably the most mountainous country in the world; that within its small compass—it has an area of less than 3000 square miles—it rises in a tumult of ranges from 700 to 28,000 feet; that in a two hours' scramble one can descend from Alpine gentians to tropical bamboos; that the higher altitudes are ice and rock, the lower a wilderness of forest ridges and precipitous gorges, with seldom a level space and barely room for a footpath by the side of their torrent beds.¹

But the interest of these countries by no

¹ Mr. W. H. Buchan in *Blackwood's Magazine* for April 1912.

means lies solely in their scenery, magnificent though it is. They possess also an unusual human interest by reason of the curious lines on which the thought of their people has developed, and of the strange customs and practices to which that thought has given rise. The peculiar bent of their minds has been produced by the meeting of two fundamentally opposed ideas concerning the nature of things which, instead of rebounding when they met, coalesced. Those ideas were rationalism on the one hand and superstition on the other. The former was represented by the metaphysics of early Buddhism; the latter by the demonolatry which, under the name of Bön-pa, passed for religion in primitive Tibet. It is true that the former had already undergone large changes as a result of contact with thought akin to that of the latter, before ever it penetrated the mountain regions; but the process of coalescence was completed after it had done so, and it is only in these countries that the thought and practice which are the products of this process have survived.

The man who more than any other was responsible for this paradoxical combination of ideas was a Buddhist missionary known in India as Guru Padma Sambhava, and in Tibet as Guru Rimpoché. The story of his mission, during which were laid the foundations of the elaborately organised religion to which the term *lamaism* is

usually applied, is told hereafter. He became a power in the land, and one of the chief emblems of his might was the *vajrah*, or symbol of the thunderbolt of Indra. In Tibet the word *vajrah* became *dorjé*, and as time went on it became one of the most common of all the emblems associated with priestly power. It is almost always to be found among the objects on the altars in the temples. It is an essential object on the tables of the three priestly office-bearers whose duty it is to officiate at the temple services. The abbot or spiritual head of a monastery bears the title of Dorjé-lopon, "the wielder of the thunderbolt or sceptre." In Bhutan the title of the spiritual head of the country, known to the outside world as Dharma Raja, is Druk Gye-po, the meaning of which is the "Thunder king," that is to say, the king of the Drukpa or Thunderer sect of Buddhists; and his motto, engraved in the centre of his official seal, is *Bdag Druk Yin*, signifying "I am the Thunderer." And finally, Darjeeling, the name of the famous hill-station which was the starting-point of all the expeditions which form the subject matter of the following pages, is commonly said to be a corruption of Dorjé-ling, "the place of the thunderbolt," the name of a monastery which once stood on a well-known eminence in the modern town, now known as Observatory Hill. In the interests of historical accuracy I should, perhaps, add that I believe

the commonly accepted explanation to be incorrect. A derivation seldom heard, but which I have the best of grounds for believing to be correct, is that which attributes the word Dorjé in the first half of Darjeeling to the name of a lama, Dorjé-rinzing, who founded the monastery which once stood on Observatory Hill. The shrine was subsequently removed to the Bhutia Basti, where it remains to this day; but the former site retained the name of "the place of Dorjé lama."

It is, however, immaterial to my present theme whether the true derivation is from "the place of the thunderbolt" or "the place of the lama named thunderbolt." Either theory bears witness to the fact that in lands in which symbols are at a premium the thunderbolt takes a prominent place. And in any flag or coat-of-arms designed for lamaism, in accordance with the traditions of heraldry, it would most assuredly appear as a conspicuous object. So much in explanation of the title.

The volume has been conceived as part of a larger whole which is designed to give some idea, not merely of the physical characteristics of the Indian empire, but of those subtler differences between East and West which are to be found in the thought and attitude towards life of its peoples. And from this point of view it is incomplete apart from its companion volumes. From a narrower point of view it may be regarded

as self-contained. That is to say, viewed simply as a narrative of travel in somewhat out-of-the-way countries of great natural charm, and among people whose strange characteristics give them an unusual interest, it is complete in itself and is intelligible without reference to either of its companion volumes.

It has become almost a convention that a preface to a volume of this kind should conclude with the author's acknowledgements to a variety of persons for various services. Where I have been indebted to others for information or for opinions, I have acknowledged my indebtedness in the text. Such acknowledgement as I feel to be appropriate to this preface I prefer to make in the form of a dedication. I dedicate this volume (without permission) to the Elder, the Cavalry Officer, and the Sardar Bahadur, the almost constant and altogether delightful companions of the rambles of which these pages are the record.

But one word more in explanation of the invocation with which this volume opens. According to an ancient legend a request went forth from the famous University of Nalanda to the great Buddhist masters throughout India, from the mountains of Kashmir to the palm groves of Ceylon, that they should compete in composing a hymn in praise of Manjusri, the god of Wisdom. Five hundred learned teachers

x LANDS OF THE THUNDERBOLT

responded to the invitation; and when the five hundred hymns were examined it was found that they were identical, differing not by so much as a single word: an interesting parallel, it may be observed, with the case of the seventy-two Jews who, according to an ancient tradition, confined in separate cells, produced the seventy-two identical Greek versions of the Hebrew scriptures which came to be known as the Septuagint.

The obvious explanation of this apparent miracle was accepted, namely, that the five hundred composers had each and every one served but as the mouthpiece of Manjusri himself. Hence the vogue which this celebrated hymn enjoys to this day. For the translation I am indebted, with the exception of a few verbal alterations which I have ventured to make, to an erudite scholar of Sikkim, Kazi Dawa Samdup.

I should, perhaps, add *pro forma* that the illustrations are from photographs taken by myself.

RONALDSHAY.

January 1923.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

	PAGE
THE COMING OF SUMMER	1

CHAPTER II

ACROSS THE PLAINS.	6
----------------------------	---

CHAPTER III

A GREAT ASCENT	10
--------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV

THE RIM OF THE AMPHITHEATRE	15
---------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V

HISTORY OR STORY?	25
-----------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI

THE LIFE OF BUDDHA	36
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII

THE DOCTRINE OF THE THERA VADA	46
--	----

CHAPTER VIII

THROUGH THE FOREST TO TASHIDING	65
---	----

xii LANDS OF THE THUNDERBOLT

CHAPTER IX

	PAGE
LAMAISM IN PRACTICE	73

CHAPTER X

RAJAGRIHA—THE KING'S HOUSE	82
--------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XI

NALANDA—A GREAT UNIVERSITY	92
--------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XII

THE FATE OF INDIAN BUDDHISM	98
---------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XIII

THE ROAD TO CHUMBI	109
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIV

NECROMANCY	120
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER XV

TO GANGTOK, AND MORE ABOUT LAMAISM	126
--	-----

CHAPTER XVI

FROM GANGTOK TO THANGU	140
----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVII

THE WAY TO THE ETERNAL SNOWS	157
--	-----

CHAPTER XVIII

AMID THE ETERNAL SNOWS	172
----------------------------------	-----

CONTENTS

xiii

CHAPTER XIX

	PAGE
A JOURNEY TO PHARI	183

CHAPTER XX

BHUTAN—A CENTURY AND A HALF OF HISTORY	197
--	-----

CHAPTER XXI

INTO A MEDIAEVAL WORLD	220
----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXII

PARO JONG	235
---------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIII

THE OUTSTANDING GLORY OF BUDDHISM	248
---	-----

INDEX	259
-----------------	-----