BIRD ISABELLA LUCY

AMONG THE TIBETANS

Isabella Bird

Among the Tibetans

Bird I.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
THE START

The Vale of Kashmir is too well known to require description. It is the 'happy hunting-ground' of the Anglo-Indian sportsman and tourist, the resort of artists and invalids, the home of *pashm* shawls and exquisitely embroidered fabrics, and the land of Lalla Rookh. Its inhabitants, chiefly Moslems, infamously governed by Hindus, are a feeble race, attracting little interest, valuable to travellers as 'coolies' or porters, and repulsive to them from the mingled cunning and obsequiousness which have been fostered by ages of oppression. But even for them there is the dawn of hope, for the Church Missionary Society has a strong medical and educational mission at the capital, a hospital and dispensary under the charge of a lady M.D. have been opened for women, and a capable and upright 'settlement officer,' lent by the Indian Government, is investigating the iniquitous land arrangements with a view to a just settlement.

I left the Panjāb railroad system at Rawul Pindi, bought my camp equipage, and travelled through the grand ravines which lead to Kashmir or the Jhelum Valley by hill-cart, on horseback, and by house-boat, reaching Srinagar at the end of April, when the velvet lawns were at their greenest, and the foliage was at its freshest, and the deodar-skirted mountains which enclose this fairest gem of the Himalayas still wore their winter mantle of unsullied snow. Making Srinagar my headquarters, I spent two months in travelling in Kashmir, half the time in a native house-boat on the Jhelum and Pohru rivers, and the other half on horseback, camping wherever the scenery was most attractive.

By the middle of June mosquitos were rampant, the grass was tawny, a brown dust haze hung over the valley, the camp-fires of a multitude glared through the hot nights and misty moonlight of the Munshibagh, English tents dotted the landscape, there was no mountain, valley, or plateau, however remote, free from the clatter of English voices and the trained servility of Hindu servants, and even Sonamarg, at an altitude of 8,000 feet and rough of access, had capitulated to lawn-tennis. To a traveller this Anglo-Indian hubbub was intolerable, and I left Srinagar and many kind friends on June 20 for the uplifted plateaux of Lesser Tibet. My party consisted of myself, a thoroughly competent servant and passable interpreter, Hassan Khan, a Panjābi; a *seis*, of whom the less that is said the better; and Mando, a Kashmiri lad, a common coolie, who, under Hassan Khan's training, developed into an efficient travelling servant, and later into a smart *khītmatgar*.

Gyalpo, my horse, must not be forgotten – indeed, he cannot be, for he left the marks of his heels or teeth on every one. He was a beautiful creature, Badakshani bred, of Arab blood, a silver-grey, as light as a greyhound and as strong as a cart-horse. He was higher in the scale of intellect than any horse of my acquaintance. His cleverness at times suggested reasoning power, and his mischievousness a sense of humour. He walked five miles an hour, jumped like a deer, climbed like a *yak*, was strong and steady in perilous fords, tireless, hardy, hungry, frolicked along ledges of precipices and over crevassed glaciers, was absolutely fearless, and his slender legs and the use he made of them were the marvel of all. He was an enigma to the end. He was quite untamable, rejected all dainties with indignation, swung his heels into people's faces when they went near him, ran at them with his teeth, seized unwary passers-by by their *kamar bands*, and shook them as a dog shakes a rat, would let no one go near him but Mando, for whom he formed at first sight a most singular attachment, but kicked and struck with his forefeet, his eyes all the time dancing with fun, so that one could never decide whether his ceaseless pranks were play or vice. He was always tethered in front of my tent

with a rope twenty feet long, which left him practically free; he was as good as a watchdog, and his antics and enigmatical savagery were the life and terror of the camp. I was never weary of watching him, the curves of his form were so exquisite, his movements so lithe and rapid, his small head and restless little ears so full of life and expression, the variations in his manner so frequent, one moment savagely attacking some unwary stranger with a scream of rage, the next laying his lovely head against Mando's cheek with a soft cooing sound and a childlike gentleness. When he was attacking anybody or frolicking, his movements and beauty can only be described by a phrase of the Apostle James, 'the grace of the fashion of it.' Colonel Durand, of Gilgit celebrity, to whom I am indebted for many other kindnesses, gave him to me in exchange for a cowardly, heavy Yarkand horse, and had previously vainly tried to tame him. His wild eyes were like those of a seagull. He had no kinship with humanity.

In addition, I had as escort an Afghan or Pathan, a soldier of the Maharajah's irregular force of foreign mercenaries, who had been sent to meet me when I entered Kashmir. This man, Usman Shah, was a stage ruffian in appearance. He wore a turban of prodigious height ornamented with poppies or birds' feathers, loved fantastic colours and ceaseless change of raiment, walked in front of me carrying a big sword over his shoulder, plundered and beat the people, terrified the women, and was eventually recognised at Leh as a murderer, and as great a ruffian in reality as he was in appearance. An attendant of this kind is a mistake. The brutality and rapacity he exercises naturally make the people cowardly or surly, and disinclined to trust a traveller so accompanied.

Finally, I had a Cabul tent, 7 ft. 6 in. by 8 ft. 6 in., weighing, with poles and iron pins, 75 lbs., a trestle bed and cork mattress, a folding table and chair, and an Indian *dhurrie* as a carpet.

My servants had a tent 5 ft. 6 in. square, weighing only 10 lbs., which served as a shelter tent for me during the noonday halt. A kettle, copper pot, and frying pan, a few enamelled iron table equipments, bedding, clothing, working and sketching materials, completed my outfit. The servants carried wadded quilts for beds and bedding, and their own cooking utensils, unwillingness to use those belonging to a Christian being nearly the last rag of religion which they retained. The only stores I carried were tea, a quantity of Edwards' desiccated soup, and a little saccharin. The 'house,' furniture, clothing, &c., were a light load for three mules, engaged at a shilling a day each, including the muleteer. Sheep, coarse flour, milk, and barley were procurable at very moderate prices on the road.

Leh, the capital of Ladakh or Lesser Tibet, is nineteen marches from Srinagar, but I occupied twenty-six days on the journey, and made the first 'march' by water, taking my house-boat to Ganderbal, a few hours from Srinagar, *viâ* the Mar Nullah and Anchar Lake. Never had this Venice of the Himalayas, with a broad rushing river for its high street and winding canals for its back streets, looked so entrancingly beautiful as in the slant sunshine of the late June afternoon. The light fell brightly on the river at the Residency stairs where I embarked, on *perindas* and state barges, with their painted arabesques, gay canopies, and 'banks' of thirty and forty crimson-clad, blue-turbaned, paddling men; on the gay façade and gold-domed temple of the Maharajah's Palace, on the massive deodar bridges which for centuries have defied decay and the fierce flood of the Jhelum, and on the quaintly picturesque wooden architecture and carved brown lattice fronts of the houses along the swirling waterway, and glanced mirthfully through the dense leafage of the superb planes which overhang the dark-green water. But the mercury was 92° in the shade and the sun-blaze terrific, and it was a relief when the boat swung round a corner, and left the stir of the broad, rapid Jhelum for a still, narrow, and sharply winding canal, which intersects a part of Srinagar lying between the Jhelum and the hill-crowning fort of Hari Parbat. There the shadows were deep, and chance lights alone fell on the red dresses of the women at the ghats, and on the shaven, shiny heads of hundreds of amphibious boys who were swimming and aquatically romping in the canal, which is at once the sewer and the water supply of the district.

Several hours were spent in a slow and tortuous progress through scenes of indescribable picturesqueness – a narrow waterway spanned by sharp-angled stone bridges, some of them with

houses on the top, or by old brown wooden bridges festooned with vines, hemmed in by lofty stone embankments into which sculptured stones from ancient temples are wrought, on the top of which are houses of rich men, fancifully built, with windows of fretwork of wood, or gardens with kiosks, and lower embankments sustaining many-balconied dwellings, rich in colour and fantastic in design, their upper fronts projecting over the water and supported on piles. There were gigantic poplars wreathed with vines, great mulberry trees hanging their tempting fruit just out of reach, huge planes overarching the water, their dense leafage scraping the mat roof of the boat; filthy ghats thronged with white-robed Moslems performing their scanty religious ablutions; great grain boats heavily thatched, containing not only families, but their sheep and poultry; and all the other sights of a crowded Srinagar waterway, the houses being characteristically distorted and out of repair. This canal gradually widens into the Anchar Lake, a reedy mere of indefinite boundaries, the breeding-ground of legions of mosquitos; and after the tawny twilight darkened into a stifling night we made fast to a reed bed, not reaching Ganderbal till late the next morning, where my horse and caravan awaited me under a splendid plane-tree.

For the next five days we marched up the Sind Valley, one of the most beautiful in Kashmir from its grandeur and variety. Beginning among quiet rice-fields and brown agricultural villages at an altitude of 5,000 feet, the track, usually bad and sometimes steep and perilous, passes through flower-gemmed alpine meadows, along dark gorges above the booming and rushing Sind, through woods matted with the sweet white jasmine, the lower hem of the pine and deodar forests which ascend the mountains to a considerable altitude, past rifts giving glimpses of dazzling snow-peaks, over grassy slopes dotted with villages, houses, and shrines embosomed in walnut groves, in sight of the frowning crags of Haramuk, through wooded lanes and park-like country over which farms are thinly scattered, over unrailed and shaky bridges, and across avalanche slopes, till it reaches Gagangair, a dream of lonely beauty, with a camping-ground of velvety sward under noble plane-trees. Above this place the valley closes in between walls of precipices and crags, which rise almost abruptly from the Sind to heights of 8,000 and 10,000 feet. The road in many places is only a series of steep and shelving ledges above the raging river, natural rock smoothed and polished into riskiness by the passage for centuries of the trade into Central Asia from Western India, Kashmir, and Afghanistan. Its precariousness for animals was emphasised to me by five serious accidents which occurred in the week of my journey, one of them involving the loss of the money, clothing, and sporting kit of an English officer bound for Ladakh for three months. Above this tremendous gorge the mountains open out, and after crossing to the left bank of the Sind a sharp ascent brought me to the beautiful alpine meadow of Sonamarg, bright with spring flowers, gleaming with crystal streams, and fringed on all sides by deciduous and coniferous trees, above and among which are great glaciers and the snowy peaks of Tilail. Fashion has deserted Sonamarg, rough of access, for Gulmarg, a caprice indicated by the ruins of several huts and of a church. The pure bracing air, magnificent views, the proximity and accessibility of glaciers, and the presence of a kind friend who was 'hutted' there for the summer, made Sonamarg a very pleasant halt before entering upon the supposed severities of the journey to Lesser Tibet.

The five days' march, though propitious and full of the charm of magnificent scenery, had opened my eyes to certain unpleasantnesses. I found that Usman Shah maltreated the villagers, and not only robbed them of their best fowls, but requisitioned all manner of things in my name, though I scrupulously and personally paid for everything, beating the people with his scabbarded sword if they showed any intention of standing upon their rights. Then I found that my clever factotum, not content with the legitimate 'squeeze' of ten per cent., was charging me double price for everything and paying the sellers only half the actual price, this legerdemain being perpetrated in my presence. He also by threats got back from the coolies half their day's wages after I had paid them, received money for barley for Gyalpo, and never bought it, a fact brought to light by the growing feebleness of the horse, and cheated in all sorts of mean and plausible ways, though I paid him exceptionally high wages, and was prepared to 'wink' at a moderate amount of dishonesty, so long as it affected

only myself. It has a lowering influence upon one to live in a fog of lies and fraud, and the attempt to checkmate a fraudulent Asiatic ends in extreme discomfiture.

I left Sonamarg late on a lovely afternoon for a short march through forest-skirted alpine meadows to Baltal, the last camping-ground in Kashmir, a grassy valley at the foot of the Zoji La, the first of three gigantic steps by which the lofty plateaux of Central Asia are attained. On the road a large affluent of the Sind, which tumbles down a pine-hung gorge in broad sheets of foam, has to be crossed. My *seis*, a rogue, was either half-witted or pretended to be so, and, in spite of orders to the contrary, led Gyalpo upon a bridge at a considerable height, formed of two poles with flat pieces of stone laid loosely over them not more than a foot broad. As the horse reached the middle, the structure gave a sort of turn, there was a vision of hoofs in air and a gleam of scarlet, and Gyalpo, the hope of the next four months, after rolling over more than once, vanished among rocks and surges of the wildest description. He kept his presence of mind, however, recovered himself, and by a desperate effort got ashore lower down, with legs scratched and bleeding and one horn of the saddle incurably bent.

Mr. Maconochie of the Panjāb Civil Service, and Dr. E. Neve of the C. M. S. Medical Mission in Kashmir, accompanied me from Sonamarg over the pass, and that night Mr. M. talked seriously to Usman Shah on the subject of his misconduct, and with such singular results that thereafter I had little cause for complaint. He came to me and said, 'The Commissioner Sahib thinks I give Mem Sahib a great deal of trouble;' to which I replied in a cold tone, 'Take care you don't give me any more.' The gist of the Sahib's words was the very pertinent suggestion that it would eventually be more to his interest to serve me honestly and faithfully than to cheat me.

Baltal lies at the feet of a precipitous range, the peaks of which exceed Mont Blanc in height. Two gorges unite there. There is not a hut within ten miles. Big camp-fires blazed. A few shepherds lay under the shelter of a mat screen. The silence and solitude were most impressive under the frosty stars and the great Central Asian barrier. Sunrise the following morning saw us on the way up a huge gorge with nearly perpendicular sides, and filled to a great depth with snow. Then came the Zoji La, which, with the Namika La and the Fotu La, respectively 11,300, 13,000, and 13,500 feet, are the three great steps from Kashmir to the Tibetan heights. The two latter passes present no difficulties. The Zoji La is a thoroughly severe pass, the worst, with the exception perhaps of the Sasir, on the Yarkand caravan route. The track, cut, broken, and worn on the side of a wall of rock nearly 2,000 feet in abrupt elevation, is a series of rough narrow zigzags, rarely, if ever, wide enough for laden animals to pass each other, composed of broken ledges often nearly breast high, and shelving surfaces of abraded rock, up which animals have to leap and scramble as best they may.

Trees and trailers drooped over the path, ferns and lilies bloomed in moist recesses, and among myriads of flowers a large blue and cream columbine was conspicuous by its beauty and exquisite odour. The charm of the detail tempted one to linger at every turn, and all the more so because I knew that I should see nothing more of the grace and bounteousness of Nature till my projected descent into Kulu in the late autumn. The snow-filled gorge on whose abrupt side the path hangs, the Zoji La (Pass), is geographically remarkable as being the lowest depression in the great Himalayan range for 300 miles; and by it, in spite of infamous bits of road on the Sind and Suru rivers, and consequent losses of goods and animals, all the traffic of Kashmir, Afghanistan, and the Western Panjāb finds its way into Central Asia. It was too early in the season, however, for more than a few enterprising caravans to be on the road.

The last look upon Kashmir was a lingering one. Below, in shadow, lay the Baltal camping-ground, a lonely deodar-belted flowery meadow, noisy with the dash of icy torrents tumbling down from the snowfields and glaciers upborne by the gigantic mountain range into which we had penetrated by the Zoji Pass. The valley, lying in shadow at their base, was a dream of beauty, green as an English lawn, starred with white lilies, and dotted with clumps of trees which were festooned with red and white roses, clematis, and white jasmine. Above the hardier deciduous trees appeared the *Pinus excelsa*, the silver fir, and the spruce; higher yet the stately grace of the deodar clothed the

hillsides; and above the forests rose the snow mountains of Tilail, pink in the sunrise. High above the Zoji, itself 11,500 feet in altitude, a mass of grey and red mountains, snow-slashed and snow-capped, rose in the dewy rose-flushed atmosphere in peaks, walls, pinnacles, and jagged ridges, above which towered yet loftier summits, bearing into the heavenly blue sky fields of unsullied snow alone. The descent on the Tibetan side is slight and gradual. The character of the scenery undergoes an abrupt change. There are no more trees, and the large shrubs which for a time take their place degenerate into thorny bushes, and then disappear. There were mountains thinly clothed with grass here and there, mountains of bare gravel and red rock, grey crags, stretches of green turf, sunlit peaks with their snows, a deep, snow-filled ravine, eastwards and beyond a long valley filled with a snowfield fringed with pink primulas; and that was Central Asia.

We halted for breakfast, iced our cold tea in the snow, Mr. M. gave a final charge to the Afghan, who swore by his Prophet to be faithful, and I parted from my kind escorts with much reluctance, and started on my Tibetan journey, with but a slender stock of Hindustani, and two men who spoke not a word of English. On that day's march of fourteen miles there is not a single hut. The snowfield extended for five miles, from ten to seventy feet deep, much crevassed, and encumbered with avalanches. In it the Dras, truly 'snow-born,' appeared, issuing from a chasm under a blue arch of ice and snow, afterwards to rage down the valley, to be forded many times or crossed on snow bridges. After walking for some time, and getting a bad fall down an avalanche slope, I mounted Gyalpo, and the clever, plucky fellow frolicked over the snow, smelt and leapt crevasses which were too wide to be stepped over, put his forelegs together and slid down slopes like a Swiss mule, and, though carried off his feet in a ford by the fierce surges of the Dras, struggled gamely to shore. Steep grassy hills, and peaks with gorges cleft by the thundering Dras, and stretches of rolling grass succeeded each other. Then came a wide valley mostly covered with stones brought down by torrents, a few plots of miserable barley grown by irrigation, and among them two buildings of round stones and mud, about six feet high, with flat mud roofs, one of which might be called the village, and the other the caravanserai. On the village roof were stacks of twigs and of the dried dung of animals, which is used for fuel, and the whole female population, adult and juvenile, engaged in picking wool. The people of this village of Matayan are Kashmiris. As I had an hour to wait for my tent, the women descended and sat in a circle round me with a concentrated stare. They asked if I were dumb, and why I wore no earrings or necklace, their own persons being loaded with heavy ornaments. They brought children afflicted with skin-diseases, and asked for ointment, and on hearing that I was hurt by a fall, seized on my limbs and shampooed them energetically but not undexterously. I prefer their sociability to the usual chilling aloofness of the people of Kashmir.

The Serai consisted of several dark and dirty cells, built round a blazing piece of sloping dust, the only camping-ground, and under the entrance two platforms of animated earth, on which my servants cooked and slept. The next day was Sunday, sacred to a halt; but there was no fodder for the animals, and we were obliged to march to Dras, following, where possible, the course of the river of that name, which passes among highly-coloured and snow-slashed mountains, except in places where it suddenly finds itself pent between walls of flame-coloured or black rock, not ten feet apart, through which it boils and rages, forming gigantic pot-holes. With every mile the surroundings became more markedly of the Central Asian type. All day long a white, scintillating sun blazes out of a deep blue, rainless, cloudless sky. The air is exhilarating. The traveller is conscious of daily-increasing energy and vitality. There are no trees, and deep crimson roses along torrent beds are the only shrubs. But for a brief fortnight in June, which chanced to occur during my journey, the valleys and lower slope present a wonderful aspect of beauty and joyousness. Rose and pale pink primulas fringe the margin of the snow, the dainty *Pedicularis tubiflora* covers moist spots with its mantle of gold; great yellow and white, and small purple and white anemones, pink and white dianthus, a very large myosotis, bringing the intense blue of heaven down to earth, purple orchids by the water, borage staining whole tracts deep blue, martagon lilies, pale green lilies veined and spotted with brown, yellow, orange, and

purple vetches, painter's brush, dwarf dandelions, white clover, filling the air with fragrance, pink and cream asters, chrysanthemums, lychnis, irises, gentian, artemisia, and a hundred others, form the undergrowth of millions of tall Umbelliferae and Compositae, many of them peach-scented and mostly yellow. The wind is always strong, and the millions of bright corollas, drinking in the sun-blaze which perfects all too soon their brief but passionate existence, rippled in broad waves of colour with an almost kaleidoscopic effect. About the eleventh march from Srinagar, at Kargil, a change for the worse occurs, and the remaining marches to the capital of Ladakh are over blazing gravel or surfaces of denuded rock, the singular *Caprifolia horrida*, with its dark-green mass of wavy ovate leaves on trailing stems, and its fair, white, anemone-like blossom, and the graceful *Clematis orientalis*, the only vegetation.

Crossing a raging affluent of the Dras by a bridge which swayed and shivered, the top of a steep hill offered a view of a great valley with branches sloping up into the ravines of a complexity of mountain ranges, from 18,000 to 21,000 feet in altitude, with glaciers at times descending as low as 11,000 feet in their hollows. In consequence of such possibilities of irrigation, the valley is green with irrigated grass and barley, and villages with flat roofs scattered among the crops, or perched on the spurs of flame-coloured mountains, give it a wild cheerfulness. These Dras villages are inhabited by hardy Dards and Baltis, short, jolly-looking, darker, and far less handsome than the Kashmiris; but, unlike them, they showed so much friendliness, as well as interest and curiosity, that I remained with them for two days, visiting their villages and seeing the 'sights' they had to show me, chiefly a great Sikh fort, a *yak* bull, the *zho*, a hybrid, the interiors of their houses, a magnificent view from a hilltop, and a Dard dance to the music of Dard reed pipes. In return I sketched them individually and collectively as far as time allowed, presenting them with the results, truthful and ugly. I bought a sheep for 2*s.* 3*d.*, and regaled the camp upon it, the three which were brought for my inspection being ridden by boys astride.

The evenings in the Dras valley were exquisite. As soon as the sun went behind the higher mountains, peak above peak, red and snow-slashed, flamed against a lemon sky, the strong wind moderated into a pure stiff breeze, bringing up to camp the thunder of the Dras, and the musical tinkle of streams sparkling in absolute purity. There was no more need for boiling and filtering. Icy water could be drunk in safety from every crystal torrent.

Leaving behind the Dras villages and their fertility, the narrow road passes through a flaming valley above the Dras, walled in by bare, riven, snow-patched peaks, with steep declivities of stones, huge boulders, decaying avalanches, walls and spires of rock, some vermilion, others pink, a few intense orange, some black, and many plum-coloured, with a vitrified look, only to be represented by purple madder. Huge red chasms with glacier-fed torrents, occasional snowfields, intense solar heat radiating from dry and verdureless rock, a ravine so steep and narrow that for miles together there is not space to pitch a five-foot tent, the deafening roar of a river gathering volume and fury as it goes, rare openings, where willows are planted with lucerne in their irrigated shade, among which the traveller camps at night, and over all a sky of pure, intense blue purpling into starry night, were the features of the next three marches, noteworthy chiefly for the exchange of the thundering Dras for the thundering Suru, and for some bad bridges and infamous bits of road before reaching Kargil, where the mountains swing apart, giving space to several villages. Miles of alluvium are under irrigation there, poplars, willows, and apricots abound, and on some damp sward under their shade at a great height I halted for two days to enjoy the magnificence of the scenery and the refreshment of the greenery. These Kargil villages are the capital of the small State of Purik, under the Governorship of Baltistan or Little Tibet, and are chiefly inhabited by Ladakhis who have become converts to Islam. Racial characteristics, dress, and manners are everywhere effaced or toned down by Mohammedanism, and the chilling aloofness and haughty bearing of Islam were very pronounced among these converts.

The daily routine of the journey was as follows: By six a.m. I sent on a coolie carrying the small tent and lunch basket to await me half-way. Before seven I started myself, with Usman Shah in front of me, leaving the servants to follow with the caravan. On reaching the shelter tent I halted for two hours, or till the caravan had got a good start after passing me. At the end of the march I usually found the tent pitched on irrigated ground, near a hamlet, the headman of which provided milk, fuel, fodder, and other necessaries at fixed prices. 'Afternoon tea' was speedily prepared, and dinner, consisting of roast meat and boiled rice, was ready two hours later. After dinner I usually conversed with the headman on local interests, and was in bed soon after eight. The servants and muleteers fed and talked till nine, when the sound of their 'hubble-bubbles' indicated that they were going to sleep, like most Orientals, with their heads closely covered with their wadded quilts. Before starting each morning the account was made out, and I paid the headman personally.

The vagaries of the Afghan soldier, when they were not a cause of annoyance, were a constant amusement, though his ceaseless changes of finery and the daily growth of his baggage awakened grave suspicions. The swashbuckler marched four miles an hour in front of me with a swinging military stride, a large scimitar in a heavily ornamented scabbard over his shoulder. Tanned socks and sandals, black or white leggings wound round from ankle to knee with broad bands of orange or scarlet serge, white cambric knickerbockers, a white cambric shirt, with a short white muslin frock with hanging sleeves and a leather girdle over it, a red-peaked cap with a dark-blue *pagri* wound round it, with one end hanging over his back, earrings, a necklace, bracelets, and a profusion of rings, were his ordinary costume; and in his girdle he wore a dirk and a revolver, and suspended from it a long tobacco pouch made of the furry skin of some animal, a large leather purse, and etceteras. As the days went on he blossomed into blue and white muslin with a scarlet sash, wore a gold embroidered peak and a huge white muslin turban, with much change of ornaments, and appeared frequently with a great bunch of poppies or a cluster of crimson roses surmounting all. His headgear was colossal. It and the head together must have been fully a third of his total height. He was a most fantastic object, and very observant and skilful in his attentions to me; but if I had known what I afterwards knew, I should have hesitated about taking these long lonely marches with him for my sole attendant. Between Hassan Khan and this Afghan violent hatred and jealousy existed.

I have mentioned roads, and my road as the great caravan route from Western India into Central Asia. This is a fitting time for an explanation. The traveller who aspires to reach the highlands of Tibet from Kashmir cannot be borne along in a carriage or hill-cart. For much of the way he is limited to a foot pace, and if he has regard to his horse he walks down all rugged and steep descents, which are many, and dismounts at most bridges. By 'roads' must be understood bridle-paths, worn by traffic alone across the gravelly valleys, but elsewhere constructed with great toil and expense, as Nature compels the road-maker to follow her lead, and carry his track along the narrow valleys, ravines, gorges, and chasms which she has marked out for him. For miles at a time this road has been blasted out of precipices from 1,000 feet to 3,000 feet in depth, and is merely a ledge above a raging torrent, the worst parts, chiefly those round rocky projections, being 'scaffolded,' i. e. poles are lodged horizontally among the crevices of the cliff, and the roadway of slabs, planks, and brushwood, or branches and sods, is laid loosely upon them. This track is always amply wide enough for a loaded beast, but in many places, when two caravans meet, the animals of one must give way and scramble up the mountain-side, where foothold is often perilous, and always difficult. In passing a caravan near Kargil my servant's horse was pushed over the precipice by a loaded mule and drowned in the Suru, and at another time my Afghan caused the loss of a baggage mule of a Leh caravan by driving it off the track. To scatter a caravan so as to allow me to pass in solitary dignity he regarded as one of his functions, and on one occasion, on a very dangerous part of the road, as he was driving heavily laden mules up the steep rocks above, to their imminent peril and the distraction of their drivers, I was obliged to strike up his sword with my alpenstock to emphasise my abhorrence of his violence. The bridges are unrailed, and many of them are made by placing two or more logs across the stream,

laying twigs across, and covering these with sods, but often so scantily that the wild rush of the water is seen below. Primitive as these bridges are, they involve great expense and difficulty in the bringing of long poplar logs for great distances along narrow mountain tracks by coolie labour, fifty men being required for the average log. The Ladakhi roads are admirable as compared with those of Kashmir, and are being constantly improved under the supervision of H. B. M.'s Joint Commissioner in Leh.

Up to Kargil the scenery, though growing more Tibetan with every march, had exhibited at intervals some traces of natural verdure; but beyond, after leaving the Suru, there is not a green thing, and on the next march the road crosses a lofty, sandy plateau, on which the heat was terrible – blazing gravel and a blazing heaven, then fiery cliffs and scorched hillsides, then a deep ravine and the large village of Paskim (dominated by a fort-crowned rock), and some planted and irrigated acres; then a narrow ravine and magnificent scenery flaming with colour, which opens out after some miles on a burning chaos of rocks and sand, mountain-girdled, and on some remarkable dwellings on a steep slope, with religious buildings singularly painted. This is Shergol, the first village of Buddhists, and there I was 'among the Tibetans.'

CHAPTER II
SHERGOL AND LEH

The chaos of rocks and sand, walled in by vermilion and orange mountains, on which the village of Shergol stands, offered no facilities for camping; but somehow the men managed to pitch my tent on a steep slope, where I had to place my trestle bed astride an irrigation channel, down which the water bubbled noisily, on its way to keep alive some miserable patches of barley. At Shergol and elsewhere fodder is so scarce that the grain is not cut, but pulled up by the roots.

The intensely human interest of the journey began at that point. Not greater is the contrast between the grassy slopes and deodar-clothed mountains of Kashmir and the flaming aridity of Lesser Tibet, than between the tall, dark, handsome natives of the one, with their statuesque and shrinking women, and the ugly, short, squat, yellow-skinned, flat-nosed, oblique-eyed, uncouth-looking people of the other. The Kashmiris are false, cringing, and suspicious; the Tibetans truthful, independent, and friendly, one of the pleasantest of peoples. I 'took' to them at once at Shergol, and terribly faulty though their morals are in some respects, I found no reason to change my good opinion of them in the succeeding four months.

The headman or *go-pa* came to see me, introduced me to the objects of interest, which are a *gonpo*, or monastery, built into the rock, with a brightly coloured front, and three *chod-tens*, or relic-holders, painted blue, red, and yellow, and daubed with coarse arabesques and representations of deities, one having a striking resemblance to Mr. Gladstone. The houses are of mud, with flat roofs; but, being summer, many of them were roofless, the poplar rods which support the mud having been used for fuel. Conical stacks of the dried excreta of animals, the chief fuel of the country, adorned the roofs, but the general aspect was ruinous and poor. The people all invited me into their dark and dirty rooms, inhabited also by goats, offered tea and cheese, and felt my clothes. They looked the wildest of savages, but they are not. No house was so poor as not to have its 'family altar,' its shelf of wooden gods, and table of offerings. A religious atmosphere pervades Tibet, and gives it a singular sense of novelty. Not only were there *chod-tens* and a *gonpo* in this poor place, and family altars, but prayer-wheels, i.e. wooden cylinders filled with rolls of paper inscribed with prayers, revolving on sticks, to be turned by passers-by, inscribed cotton bannerets on poles planted in cairns, and on the roofs long sticks, to which strips of cotton bearing the universal prayer, *Aum mani padne hun* (O jewel of the lotus-flower), are attached. As these wave in the wind the occupants of the house gain the merit of repeating this sentence.

The remaining marches to Leh, the capital of Lesser Tibet, were full of fascination and novelty. Everywhere the Tibetans were friendly and cordial. In each village I was invited to the headman's house, and taken by him to visit the chief inhabitants; every traveller, lay and clerical, passed by with the cheerful salutation *Tzu*, asked me where I came from and whither I was going, wished me a good journey, admired Gyalpo, and when he scaled rock ladders and scrambled gamely through difficult torrents, cheered him like Englishmen, the general jollity and cordiality of manners contrasting cheerily with the chilling aloofness of Moslems.

The irredeemable ugliness of the Tibetans produced a deeper impression daily. It is grotesque, and is heightened, not modified, by their costume and ornament. They have high cheekbones, broad flat noses without visible bridges, small, dark, oblique eyes, with heavy lids and imperceptible eyebrows, wide mouths, full lips, thick, big, projecting ears, deformed by great hoops, straight black hair nearly as coarse as horsehair, and short, square, ungainly figures. The faces of the men are smooth. The women seldom exceed five feet in height, and a man is tall at five feet four.

The male costume is a long, loose, woollen coat with a girdle, trousers, under-garments, woollen leggings, and a cap with a turned-up point over each ear. The girdle is the depository of many things

dear to a Tibetan – his purse, rude knife, heavy tinder-box, tobacco pouch, pipe, distaff, and sundry charms and amulets. In the capacious breast of his coat he carries wool for spinning – for he spins as he walks – balls of cold barley dough, and much besides. He wears his hair in a pigtail. The women wear short, big-sleeved jackets, shortish, full-plaited skirts, tight trousers a yard too long, the superfluous length forming folds above the ankle, a sheepskin with the fur outside hangs over the back, and on gala occasions a sort of drapery is worn over the usual dress. Felt or straw shoes and many heavy ornaments are worn by both sexes. Great *ears*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.