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What Made Tibet Mysterious?

Notes on Tibet's Topography, History and Religion



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This diagram represents a north and south line about 3,000 miles long, from the Siberian plains running over the mountains and across the Tibetan plateau to the plains of India, both plains being near sea level. Scale about 600 miles to an inch.

The elevations are on a scale of about 25,000 feet to an inch.

Newark, N. J.
NEWARK MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
1921—1922

Tibetan Exhibit at Free Public Library in December Will Portray Little Known Elemental Civilization

More Than Eight Hundred Objects Brought Here by American Missionary, Dr. Albert L. Shelton, to Give Insight Into Interesting Life of Isolated People of Long-Forbidden Land.

THE principal event of the year at the Free Public Library will be the Tibetan exhibition to be opened by the Museum Association on December 7. It will be the most notable display shown at the library since the Colombian exhibit of three years ago. With more than 800 objects brought from Tibet by the American medical missionary, Dr. Albert L. Shelton, an opportunity such as has never before been enjoyed will be afforded to Newarkers to get a closer insight into the interesting life of the isolated people of the long forbidden land, a land that in its mountain fastnesses has sheltered elemental races and civilizations, while other peoples of the world were moving forward in the path of progress.

The forthcoming exhibition is to be held under the auspices of the Contemporary of Newark. There is to be a private view on Tuesday, December 6, with the formal opening on the following day.

This large collection includes paintings and pictured scrolls, rich in glow of color, from lamaseries (monasteries) and temples, together with all kinds of articles used in the elaborate ceremonies of public worship or private devotion—censers, incense burners, altar lamps, bowls and other vessels for holy water, prayer wheels, sweet-toned bells, cymbals, trumpets, some made out of human bones, drums made from the crowns of skulls, offering bowls, prayer beads like rosaries, charm boxes, images of Buddha, of gods, goddesses and demons, begging bowls and hoods of the monks or lamas and, last but not least, valuable

sacred books. It contains clothing and other articles illustrating the domestic life of the people—earrings for women and men, finger rings, head dresses, coats, dresses, belts, curtains brocaded satin, mirrors, churns, snuff boxes, teapots, bowls, pitchers, wine bottles, locks and keys, seals, coins, bridles, saddles and harness, saws, etc. There is a headsman's knife used by the executioner, swords, guns and other military accoutrements. Among the clothing is some that was worn by a one-time living Buddha. There are also numerous photographs taken by Dr. Shelton which admirably aid in illustrating the topography of the country, its social types and national customs.

Dr. Shelton's Career.

Dr. Albert L. Shelton, to whose efforts the possession by Newark of this valuable collection is due, was born in Indiana about forty-six years ago. The family moved to Kansas, where he was brought up on a farm. When he was 17 he began teaching school and three years later he himself entered the school at Emporia. While he was securing an education there he carried newspapers, acted as janitor, cut wood, herded cows, tended furnaces, tutored and otherwise covered his expenses. He married a pupil he had met in the Normal School. Later he secured a scholarship in a Kentucky medical school, worked his way through the medical course and after being graduated as a physician he became medical missionary under the Foreign Christian Missionary Society. Following his or-

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dination as a minister when he was 28 years old, he and his wife went to China. They ascended the upper Yangtze River and then crossed the mountains to Tatsien-lu. There they learned Chinese and Tibetan and Dr. Shelton practiced medicine. There also their daughters, Doris and Dorothy, were born.

From there they journeyed later over fourteen mountain passes into Batang in Tibet, where the children grew up with the Tibetan language as their native tongue. A hospital was opened. The people were instructed in sanitation and hygiene and all sorts of beneficent activities were started by Dr. and Mrs. Shelton, the latter having also been engaged in the translation of portions of the Scriptures into the Tibetan language.

Twice in their eighteen years of service they have returned to the United States. Their daughters are at present at school in California but are later to rejoin Dr. Shelton who has obtained permission from the Dalai Lama, the head of the government of Tibet, to open the first medical school at Lhasa, the capital of the country. It is to be the beginning of the introduction of modern medical knowledge and efficiency into this isolated land in place of its old-time reliance on charms, magic and other useless and mischievous methods that have come down from dark and distant bygone times.

The Switzerland of Asia.

Three miles up in the air, near the top of the world and with an area greater than that of France and Germany combined, is the table land of Tibet, walled in by giant mountains that make the Alps seem small. The maximum elevation of the Tibetan plateau is 17,600 feet, more than 2,000 feet higher than Mont Blanc, the monarch of Europe's mountains, and higher than our Rockies. On the southern border of Tibet the world's loftiest summit, Mount Everest (29,000 feet) in the Himalayas, casts its mighty shadow over the land.

Despite its extensive area it has a small population, the inclemency of its climate, its scanty pasturage and the poorness of its soil resulting in its supporting only about 6,000,000 people. Great portions of the country are uninhabited except by wild beasts. The city of Lhasa itself has a population of only 15,000 to 20,000.

This fastness amidst eternal snows became from early times a refuge for more backward peoples. For ages in-

vasion after invasion and unceasing struggle for possession of the rich alluvial plains of Northern India went on. Weaker races that stood in the way were destroyed or reduced to servitude. But none of the conquering peoples coveted the stern and largely desolate mountain land or envied its possessors so long as at the foot of the mountains were the broad campaigns of India.

Some sixteen centuries or more before the Christian era the Aryan invaders entered India from the northwest, followed at later times by successive streams of the same race. They gave the Sanscrit language and in large part the Brahman religion to India. In the fourth century B. C. the armies of Alexander the Great poured into the country. About the date of the Christian era came the Huns. In the middle ages the onrush of the Mongol hordes brought terror and desolation in its path. The Mohammedan conquerors followed. Then came Tamerlane and still later the Mogul conquests. The struggles of all these peoples took place in the plains far below the mountain fastness of Tibet.

If we look at a geographical diagram giving a sectional view of Asia from north to south it will show us the loftiest and most extensive plateau in the world, a tableland rising like a towering citadel above the plains below. None of the invading hosts ever crossed it to enter India. No one wanted the three-mile climb up that mighty bastion. Genghis Khan, the Mongol conqueror, worked all around it by way of Bokhara and Afghanistan when he invaded India.

These conditions allowed the inhabitants of this lofty plateau to remain unmolested while world historic struggles raged near at hand. Primitive and elemental groups were preserved and afford us opportunity today to study early cultures and types that have elsewhere passed away. It is not impossible that in the more ancient stocks among the people of Tibet there may be something in common with the Accadians and Sumerians, who laid the foundations of Babylon and created the civilization that later Semitic peoples seized and appropriated. The earliest Babylonians were a broad-skulled (brachycephalic) people. They gave to the world industrial arts, including the working of metals. They were exceedingly religious but profoundly superstitious, devoted to the efficacy of charms and incantations, to an elaborate ritual and ceremonial in public worship and haunted by dark and terrible fears of demons and other powers of evil. The Tibetans, the purer elements of which are of the broad-skulled type, have similar characteristics.

Wives With Several Husbands.

Another indication of primitive con-

ditions is the prevalence of polyandry. It is usually carried out by the brothers of a family having one wife in common. Generally the elder brother is considered the father of the children and the other brothers as uncles. As a rule there is harmony in these families, but sometimes one husband will drive another out. The wife has a position of importance, but she is also likely to find she has to serve several masters instead of one. The children of such families do not seem to be numerous, three or four being the average. Such a system would naturally lead to an excess of unmarried women. There is a partial offset, however, through a certain amount of polygamy, but the tendency is to a large proportion of unmarried women. In addition to this almost every family gives one son to the church to be brought up as a lama (monk), so that one-seventh of the people consist of these celibates.

Polyandry has generally arisen in conditions where the struggle of life was hard, whereas polygamy was more of a luxury of the rich and had, therefore, less widespread effects. In Tibet, while among the plain people a wife may have four or five husbands, a king, prince or other high personage does not so share his wife with others, but has one or more wives who are the wives of himself alone.

Claim Descent From Apes.

The Tibetans are a genial, kindly, easy-going people, fond of dancing and gaiety; honest withal, but lacking in initiative and energy. They have been successful in the working of metals—iron, gold, etc.—and in the manufacture of the articles they use in domestic life and for religious purposes. Beside the older Tibetan stock other types are found due to infiltrations from China on the east, Mongolia on the north and India on the south. But the old Tibetan character has in general dominated and modified the others.

A curious tradition exists among them as to their origin. It is the frank claim that they are descended from apes, which has an interest in connection with the teachings of anthropology and the proximity of Tibet to the cradles of the human race. An ape from India, these stories tell us, and a female demon from the Himalayas were the parents of six children which in time increased to 500. A famine came upon them until a friendly deity, Chenresig, declaring that he would be their protector, procured for them supplies of five kinds of grain. As the consequence of eating this grain their tails and the hair on their bodies grew shorter and shorter until they finally disappeared. The monkeys began to speak, became men and clothed themselves with leaves.

Today the more peculiarly Tibetan types are said to have some resemblance to the American Indians. There are also Chinese types and others that show thoroughly western physiog-

nomies and might easily pass for Europeans.

Racially the Tibetans are classed as Turko-Mongols. With the exception of some Mongol and semi-Chinese dialects the languages spoken in Tibet belong to the linguistic family known as Tibeto-Burman, which is one of the divisions of the Turano-Scythian languages.

The Forbidden Land.

The situation of Tibet made it easy for the country to become a "forbidden land." During the middle ages a few Roman Catholic missionaries visited that country, but even in the course of several centuries their number was very small. The first Englishman to enter Tibet went on a special embassy in 1774. In 1811 Thomas Manning made his way from India to Lhasa, the capital, being the first Englishman who had reached the holy city. But he soon had to leave it. During the nineteenth century Europeans were constantly prevented from entering the country or speedily expelled if found in it. In 1844-1846 two French missionaries made their way to Lhasa from China, but were soon deported back again. In 1866 the Abbe Desgodins entered eastern Tibet, but was prevented approaching any closer to Lhasa. Later still a Russian officer explored portions of northern Tibet, but was unable to penetrate southward.

Although treaties provided for the security of trade between Tibet and India continual hindrances to this trade occurred on the Tibetan side. Consequently in 1904 the Indian government sent a mission under Sir Francis Younghusband with an escort to arrange matters with the Tibetan government. The British party met with opposition, but it reached Lhasa, where a convention was agreed to settling the questions at issue. Confirmatory agreements were made with China as suzerain and with Russia, the latter guarding against danger from pro-Russian or pro-British activities in Tibet by providing that neither country should have a representative at Lhasa. The British troops were withdrawn. The results were most happy and did much to remove the prejudices of Tibetans against Europeans.

Dr. Shelton mentions Tibetans who told him how, after being taken prisoners in the fighting, the British nursed them in the hospitals, sent them safely back and gave them money to take them home. Nothing had done so much to lower the bars of the forbidden land, and now Dr. Shelton's years of healing service as a medical missionary has carried this feeling still further and secured for him admission to Lhasa and opportunity to open his hospital there. The British-Russian treaty, however, still seems to prevent any activities of British or Russian missionaries in Tibet. There is probably fear on the part of the British that church missions in Tibet might be a means of political exploitation and propa-

ganda. So that to some extent the bars are still up.

A Wonderland of Religion.

Religion is everywhere in evidence in Tibet. Its all-absorbing dominating character strikes every visitor. It is, however, religion of a deeply superstitious character, marked by an intense belief in ghosts, devils, charms, incantations and in the efficacy of strange mechanical expedients to ward off the powers of evil that surprise the stranger. The prayer wheel is an illustration. It may be large or small. There are small ones, about the size of an alarm clock, that can be set on a table. Inside the wheel is a roll inscribed with prayers and pious ejaculations, repeated over and over again, such as the "Om mane padme hum." It is believed that the mechanical turning of the wheel gives efficacy to the prayers that are written within. You call on a Tibetan friend. He receives you, and, seated with the table and prayer wheel near at hand, as you both talk—business of pleasantries or other matters—he does not fail to give the prayer wheel occasional twists, so that the conversation and mechanical praying go on together. Large prayer wheels are sometimes run by water power, thus securing continuous offering up of the prayers. Prayer flags are an equivalent aid to prayer. Prayers or religious ejaculations are inscribed upon them. In large numbers such flags are strung on cords. All Tibet is more or less awash with these countless flags wafting the prayers to heaven or to the gods, demons or spirits to whom they are addressed, while at the same time serving as a very pleasing and graceful decorative feature.

The devotion of Tibetans to charms, spells and magic is so deep-rooted that some of the lamaseries (monasteries) have schools for the teaching of magic to those who are to become lamas (monks) and who are to derive their incomes partly from the exercise of this art. Their temples or places of worship are supposed to be haunted by the goblin ghosts of mischievous ecclesiastics who formerly ministered there.

There is a gruesome character in the fondness of Tibetans for the crowns of skulls as dishes or drums, for trumpets made out of human thigh bones, especially if these parts of human anatomy come from the body of a near and dear relative. In the collection at the library there is quite a little graveyard in the way of human remains worked up into articles of general use, among these being aprons made of bones from the hand and elsewhere strung together. These latter are worn by the monks in the exercise of their religious duties.

Public worship is marked by the most elaborate ritual and ceremonial. Mixed up with all these features is a certain amount of more distinctively Buddhist teaching. Lamaism is, however, the best name for the national religion. It claims to be Buddhism, but is far removed from

the original doctrines of that great teacher.

Buddha, who was contemporary with the Chinese sage Confucius and whose great religious work dates from the early part of the fifth century before Christ, sought primarily to purify and simplify the religious ideas of his time. With the dying out of the Aryan stock that gave its northern vigor to the life of India, its influence was gradually supplanted by that of the older peoples—the Mediterranean stock that had affinities with the present brunet populations of southern Europe and the still older and more swarthy Dravidian and Negrito populations, who were more deeply superstitious. Outbreeding of the higher races by the more primitive peoples went on and led to the decline of both Brahminism and Buddhism.

Corruption of Buddhism.

Buddhism has probably retained its greatest purity in Burmah. In India, its birthplace, it became corrupted with superstitious elements drawn from the older popular religions. Gods many and lords many were introduced, dark and debasing rites and usages crept in from the older faiths, complicated and senseless ritual and ceremonial, abhorrent to all the teaching of Buddha, gained ground, with attention to idle and endless repetitions of sacred phrases and prayers rather than deeds. Charms, incantations, magic and the mechanical religious aids that have been already referred to gained ascendancy. The multiplication of words was held to count, and in public worship entire chapters from the service books would sometimes be rushed through with the most remarkable dispatch by the ingenious expedient of each monk intoning at the same time a different verse so that an entire chapter would be chanted in the same time as a single verse.

Strange pranks were played with the ancient doctrine of reincarnation. Buddha held that deliverance from the endless round of fresh incarnations and from the sorrows and evils of life could only be found by a change of heart that involved an entire break with all earthly desires even of life here or hereafter. He who by such renunciation, by a life of contemplation and the sole pursuit of holiness had found redemption from his own lower self, had attained "Arahatship," and his "karma" (character) could not pass on to any other individual in another life, that is, after "Arahatship" there would be no rebirth.

But in the corruption that went on the return to earth of Buddhas or spirits of Buddhas was accepted. Deities of all kinds became associated with them. It was in northern India that this decadence began, and it was this corruption of Buddhism that was accepted in Tibet and there merged with the older religion. Dr. Shelton says of the Tibetans that they are "perhaps the most religious people on earth. Their faith is nominally Buddhism, but in reality it is more truly

a veneer of Buddhism over the old Bon religion, a religion of devil worship. They are exceedingly superstitious, believing in ghosts and in the daily interference of devils in their affairs."

The Temporal Power.

Originally Tibet was ruled by kings and chieftains, but in the middle ages the abbot of the Sakya Monastery gained control and was recognized by the Mongol ruler, Kublai Khan, as the tributary sovereign of the country and the ecclesiastical head of Buddhism. Thus was established the temporal power of the Dalai Lama, the pope of Tibetan Buddhism, who lives at the capital, the holy city of Lhasa. He is looked on as more than an ordinary mortal, as nothing less than a reincarnation of the spirit of the Buddhas. When he dies the names of all the children born in Tibet since his death are sent in. After solemn ceremonies and a week of prayer, names are drawn, the first being that of the child that is believed to be the reincarnation of the lately deceased Grand Lama, the infant being recognized and brought up as the Dalai Lama.

Religion, being the dominant feature of Tibet, naturally calls for especial attention. But there is not space to tell all of the wonderful story of the immense lamaseries, almost villages in themselves; of the celibate lamas and great abbots, of the impressiveness of the service at the great cathedral at Lhasa, with the Dalai Lama, the chief abbots and other leading dignitaries officiating with the most elaborate ceremonial, the chanting of the service, the tinkling of the soft-toned bells, the clash of cymbals, the blare of trumpets, the glow of altar lights, the aroma of incense, the rich vestments of the lamas, the mystic rites and the many other points of interest of this strange form of religious faith.

Secular Life of the People.

Tibet has its mountain passes, its mountain torrents, its grazing lands on the plains or mountainsides, and its cultivated lands in the valleys below. There are no railways or great highways (wagon roads). The yak, a mountain ox, serves as the beast of burden, and as it is covered with wool like a sheep it serves more than one purpose. This yak, or woolly ox, is also a survival, perhaps, from the days of the woolly elephant. It thrives in the high, bleak altitudes and dies off on removal to warmer regions. In addition to the yak, heavy loads are also carried long distances on men's shoulders, the men under these weights climbing and descending the mountains, even old men stepping out cheerily under these heavy burdens.

Tea from China is carried all over Tibet either by yaks or men. It is the national and popular drink, but is brewed in a way all their own. So universal and

extensive is its use that it is often prepared, especially in lamaseries, on a wholesale scale in great vats large enough to hold a man; in fact the Chinese have in some cases boiled Tibetan prisoners alive in such cauldrons.

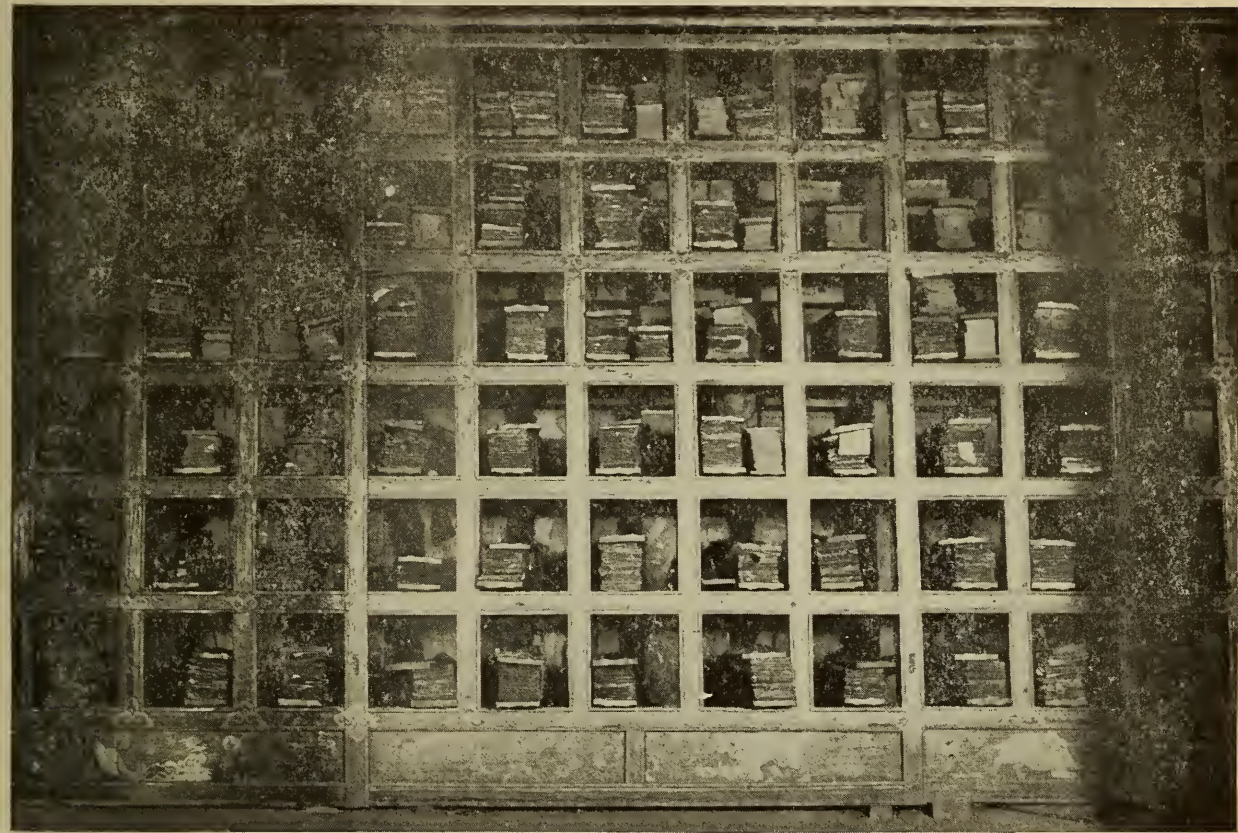
The sojourn of Dr. Shelton, an American, in Tibet at the seat of government with the full approval of the Dalai Lama is an unusual occurrence, especially when British and Russian diplomatic agents are excluded under the treaties. Dr. Shelton's presence there may not impossibly lead to many beneficent results in addition to the value of his services in introducing the healing art of the civilized nations into Tibet.

The Museum Collection.

Before leaving the United States Dr. Shelton at the Newark library gave many details concerning the various objects in the collection. A valuable catalogue has been prepared under the direction of Miss Louise Connolly of the museum and library staff. A further contribution from Miss Connolly is a bright and interesting account of the religion of Tibet in the shape of a synopsis of the volume on "Lamaism," by the British writer, L. Austine Waddell, who spent so many years in the study of the subject of which he made himself a master. Miss Connolly has also prepared a brief sketchy story of Tibet and its people and of Dr. Shelton and his labors.

When on view in December an intelligent consideration of the various objects will be greatly aided by the carefully prepared descriptive labels that will give to the visitor a mass of interesting information. Valuable work has also been done in deciphering such Tibetan words, inscriptions, titles and descriptions as appear in that language in manuscripts, books and other objects through the services of the Rev. Albert E. Andre of Minneapolis, who knows the language and was for fourteen years a Lutheran missionary in China, India and on the southern border of Tibet.

A list is being prepared at the library of the books it possesses on the subject of Tibet and these, of course, can be borrowed or consulted by Newarkers. The following call for special mention: William Carey, *Adventures in Tibet*; A. L. Shelton, *Pioneering in Tibet*; L. A. Waddell, *Lhasa and Its Mysteries, Buddhism of Tibet*; Ekai Kawaguchi (a Japanese Buddhist), *Three Years in Tibet*; Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*; S. C. Rijnhart, *With the Tibetans in Tent and Temple*; O. T. Crosby, *Tibet and Turkestan*. There is also an interesting work by Fielding Hall, *The Soul of a People*, which gives an illuminating description of the Buddhism of Burmah and enables the reader to make comparisons of much significance between the religions of the two countries, a comparison that is of unusual value.



Part of the Library in the Litang Lamasery.

In Kham the sacred Buddhist writings are printed from blocks, such as were first used in China, or are written by hand. The printing of religious books is one of the principal industries of the town of Litang. The Buddhist Bible is a work of 108 volumes and the companion commentary work is of equal bulk.

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Tibetan Houses in the Robber-Infested Bad Lands.

These homes are built primarily for protection. With the exception of the main entrance, there is no opening until the third story is reached. The style of architecture greatly simplifies the problem of defense against marauders.

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Gartok Monastery, Where Thousands of Images Are Made and Gilded for Sale.

The home of idolatry is situated about nine days' journey from Batang. With their crude facilities the monks are unable to apply a cheap gilt to their idols, but are forced to use a rather heavy coat of pure gold.

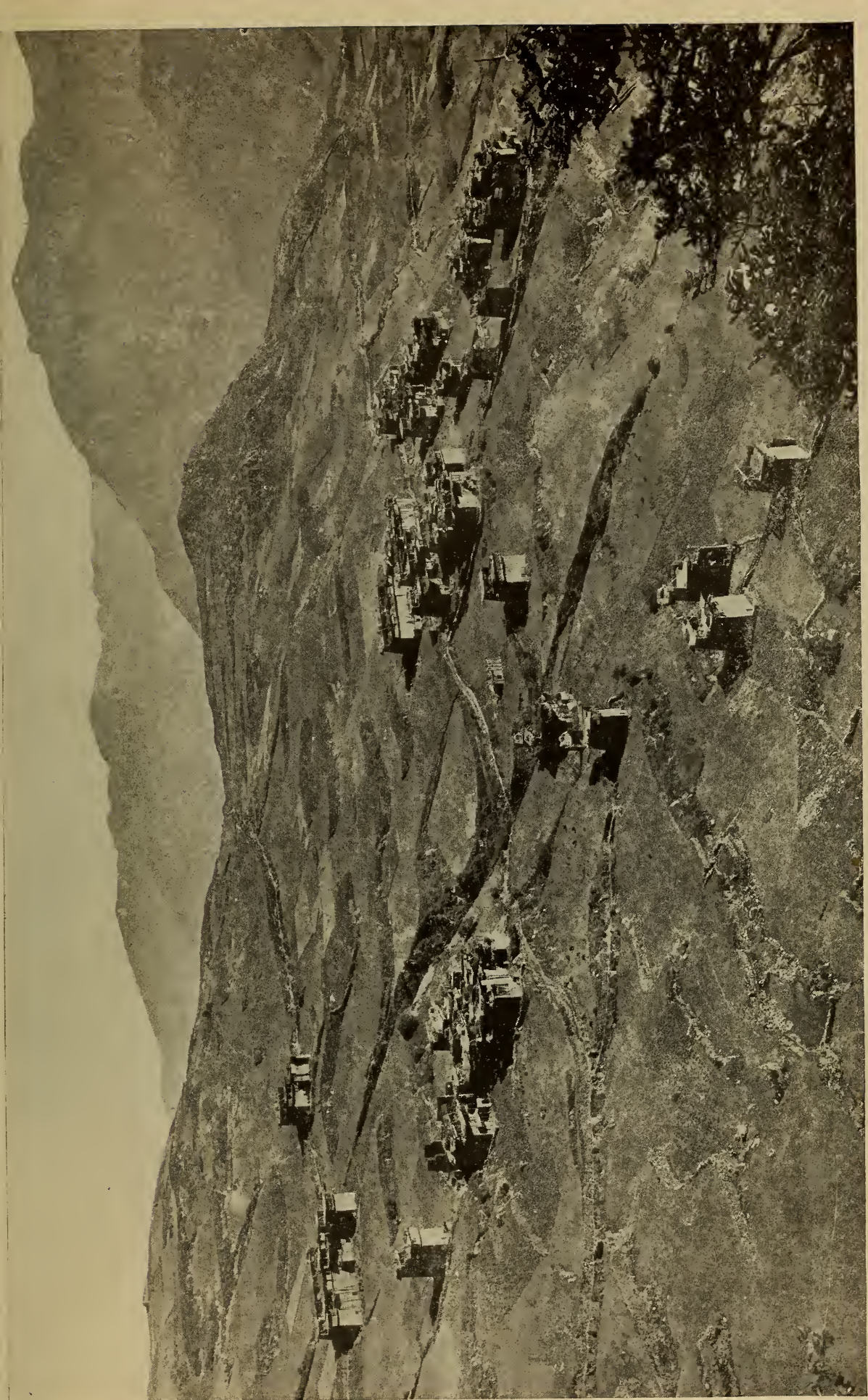
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Bird's-Eye View of Batang Surrounded by Terraced Fields.

The white buildings on the hill are the hospital and residence of the American Mission. Note the head of the horse in the foreground; the photograph was taken from the vantage point of its back.

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Typical Tibetan Village, Showing the Peculiar Distribution of the Houses in Groups Upon the Hillside.
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An Elaborate Chorten (Shrine) Near Batang.

Chortens are a common sight in Tibet and the surrounding lands. In Peking there are large Lama towers similar to these shrines, which are built solid, though they may contain valued relics.

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Men and Women Threshing With Flails on the Roof of a Batang House.

Threshing methods are primitive throughout the East; but with primitive transportation methods and small fields, a modern threshing machine would be useless.

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The Governor of Lower Kham, His Wife and Piper.

This piper was brought down from Chiamdo, a ten days' journey, for the entertainment of the American physician and his family. The Tibetans have adopted the Scottish bagpipes as their national military instrument. It was startling to hear the piper playing "The Cock of the North," "The Campbells Are Coming" and "The Drunken Piper." He played with great skill, for the Tibetan instructors have learned their music in India.



Bandit Brave or Tibetan Troubadour?

The horseman is making a circuit of the walls of a ruined lamasery at Batang. This monastery was once one of the most flourishing establishments in eastern Tibet, but was destroyed by the Chinese during one of their invasions. The Tibetans are not allowed to rebuild damaged lamaseries or to erect new ones, for the Chinese conceive these religious communities to be centers of rebellion.

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A Street Scene in Batang.

Batang, or Paanhsien, derives most of its importance from the Tibetan trade route, which passes through it on its way from Yachow to Chiamdo, connecting the Yangtze Valley with the highlands of Tibet.

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