

CHAPTER III

A FAMOUS TIBETAN MONASTERY

ONCE more I have crossed the Himalayas, proceeding downward to India.

It is sad to leave the bewitching region where during several years I have lived a most fantastic and captivating life: though, wonderful as this entrance house of Tibet proved to be, I know that I am far from having obtained even a glimpse of all the strange mystic doctrines and practices which are hidden from the profane in the hermitages of the "Land of Snow." My journey to Shigatze has also revealed me the scholastic Tibet, its monastic universities, its immense libraries. How many things are left for me to learn! And I am leaving . . .

I go to Burma and spend days of retreat on the Sagain hills with the Kamatangs, the contemplative monks of one of the most austere Buddhist sects.

I go to Japan where I dive into the calm of the Tōfoku-ji, a monastery of that Zen sect which, for centuries, has collected the intellectual aristocracy of the country.

I go to Korea. Panya-an; the "monastery of wisdom" concealed in the heart of the forest opens its door to me.

When I went there to beg temporary admittance, heavy rains had washed the path away. I found the Panya-an monks busy repairing it. The novice sent by his abbot to introduce me stopped before one of the workers as muddy as his companions, bowed respectfully and said a few words to him. The digger, leaning

on his spade, looked at me intently for a while, then nodded his consent and began to work again, without taking any more notice of me.

"He is the head of the hermitage," my guide told me. "He is willing to give you a room."

The next day when I returned to Panya-an, I was led to a completely empty cell. My blanket spread on the floor was to be my couch, while my dressing-case could be used as a table. Yongden was to share the room of a young novice of his age, which, excepting for a few books on a shelf, was as little furnished as mine.

The daily routine included eight hours of meditation divided in four periods of two hours—eight hours of study and manual work—eight hours devoted to sleep, meals and recreation according to individual tastes.

Each day, a little before 3 a.m., a monk went round the houses, striking a wooden instrument to waken his brothers.

Then, all met in the assembly room, where they sat in meditation facing the wall.

Diet was truly ascetic . . . rice and some boiled vegetables without any flavouring. Even the vegetables were often missing and the meal consisted of plain rice alone.

Silence was not compulsory as it is amongst the Trappist, but the monks seldom spoke. They did not feel the need of talking nor of spending their energy in outward manifestations. Their thoughts remained fixed on secret introspections and their eyes had the inward gaze of the Buddha's images.

I go to Peking. I live in Peling-sse, formerly an imperial mansion, now a Buddhist monastery. It is situated next the large Lamaist temple and near the stately temple of Confucius, several miles distant from the Legations. There, Tibet calls to me again.

For years I have dreamt of far-away Kum-Bum

without having dared hope I would ever get there. Yet the journey is decided. I will cross the whole of China to reach its north-western frontier into Tibetan land.

I join a caravan composed of two rich lamas and their respective retinues, who are returning to Amdo, a Chinese trader of the remote Kansu province with his servants, and a few monks and laymen who are glad to benefit from the protection that numbers ensure on the unsafe roads.

The journey is most picturesque. Besides other incidents my travelling companions supply abundant matter for amazement.

One day, the gigantic head of our caravan entertains some Chinese harlots at the inn where we have put up. Slender and short, clad in pale-green pants and pink coats, they enter the lama's room like a family of Tom Thumbs going into the Ogre's den.

The "lama" is a *ngagspa*, a follower of the very heterodox sect of the magicians, scarcely belonging to the clergy, and a married man.

A harsh and noisy bargaining takes place with the door wide open. The cynical, yet candid terms of the borderer of Koko-nor wilderness are translated into Chinese by his imperturbable secretary-interpreter. Finally, five Chinese dollars are accepted as honorarium; one of the dolls stays over night.

Our libertine companion is also hot tempered. Another day he quarrels with a Chinese officer. The soldiers of a neighbouring post invade our inn, guns in hand. The lama calls his retainers, who arrive with their own guns. The inn-keeper falls prostrate at my feet beseeching me to intervene.

With the help of the Chinese trader, a member of our travelling party, who knows Tibetan and acts as my interpreter, I succeed in convincing the soldiers that it is beneath their dignity to pay the least atten-

tion to the stupid actions of a barbarian from the Koko-nor wilds.

Then I remonstrate with the lama against a man of his rank compromising himself with vulgar soldiers. Peace is restored.

I become acquainted with civil war and robbery. I endeavour to nurse wounded men left without help. One morning I see a bunch of heads—those of newly beheaded robbers—hung above the door of our inn. That sight arouses philosophical thoughts about death in my placid son, which he quietly expounds to me.

The road ahead of us is blocked by the fighting troops. I think I shall be able to avoid the vicinity of the battles by going to a town named Tungchow situated several miles away from the direct road to Sian-fu.

The day after my arrival Tungchow is besieged. I could watch storming enemies climbing the city walls on high ladders, while defenders hurled stones down on them. I seemed to be living in an ancient picture depicting the wars of olden times.

I escape from the besieged town during a tempest when the army remains sheltered on the other side of the walls. My cart rushes madly through the night; we arrive at the shore of a river beyond which we expect to be in safety. We call the ferry-man. For answer, shots are fired at us from the other bank.

I have an amusing remembrance of a tea-party with the governor of Shensi. The enemy surrounds the city. Tea is served by soldiers with guns on their shoulders and revolvers in their belts, ready to resist an attack that may occur at any minute. Yet, the guests talk calmly with that exquisite and apparently serene courtesy which is one of the fruits of the old Chinese education.

We discuss philosophical questions, one of the officials speaks French perfectly and acts as my interpreter. Whatever the feelings of the governor and his party

may be in this tragic situation, their faces remain smiling. The conversation around the tea-table is that of litterati enjoying the intellectual game of exchanging subtle thoughts in a dispassionate way.

How wonderfully refined and civilized are the Chinese and how lovable, in spite of the faults that can be found in them!

I came out, at last, from the troubled area. I am in Amdo, settled in the precinct of the Pegyai Lama's palace, in the Kum-Bum monastery. . . . Again, I plunge into Tibetan life.

"Salutation to the Buddha.

In the language of the gods and in that of the lus,¹
In the language of the demons and in that of the men,
In all the languages which exist,
I proclaim the Doctrine."

A few lads stand on the flat roof of the assembly hall, they have hastily recited the liturgic formula and, simultaneously, lift the conches to their lips. Each of them take turn at breathing, while his companions continue to blow. And so is produced an uninterrupted bellowing whose sonorous waves, rising and falling in successive crescendi and diminuendi, spread over the still sleeping monastery.

Above the peristyle of the hall the young novices, wrapped in the clerical toga, are silhouetted on the bright starry sky like a row of unearthly dark beings who have alighted to call the dead from their slumbers. And, truly, the silent *gompa* with its many low-roofed whitewashed houses appears, in the night, as a vast necropolis.

The musical summons dies away. Moving lights appear through the windows of the princely *garbas*² and noises arise from the *tashas*³ squatting around

¹ Snake demi-gods who live in the lakes and the ocean and are said to be the owners of fabulous wealth.

² Grand Lama's mansions.

³ Houses of ordinary monks.

them. Doors open, a hurried stamping of feet is heard in all the streets and avenues of the monastic city: the lamas are going to the morning assembly.

As they reach the precincts of the hall, the sky grows pale, the day breaks. Taking off their felt boots, which they leave outside, piled here and there, each of them hastens towards his place.

In large monasteries, the gathering monks number several thousands. A strange, shabby, ill-smelling crew, offering a strange contrast to the sumptuousness of the gold brocade vests worn by the dignitaries and the jewelled cloak and rod of office of the *tsogs chen shalngo*, the elected ruler of the *gompa*.

Hanging from the high ceiling, from the galleries and against the tall pillars, scrolls of painting show countless Buddhas and deities, while a host of other worthies, saints, gods and demons, may be vaguely discerned on the frescoes which decorate the walls of the dark edifice.

At the bottom of the hall, behind rows of butter lamps, shine softly the gilded images of former Grand Lamas and the massive silver and gold reliquaries which contain their ashes or mummified bodies. A mystic atmosphere envelops men and things, veiling all vulgar details, idealizing the attitudes and the faces. Whatever knowledge one may have acquired regarding the shortcomings of many of the monks assembled there, the sight of the assembly itself is most impressive.

Now, every one is seated cross-legged, motionless, the lamas and officials on their thrones whose heights vary according to their rank, and the common ecclesiastic folk on long benches nearly on the level of the floor.

Chanting begins, deep toned in a slow rhythm. Bells, wailing *gyalings*,¹ thundering *ragdong*,² tiny drums

¹ A musical instrument like a hautboy.

² A kind of huge Theban trumpet.

and big drums on which the cadence is beaten, at times accompany the psalmody.

The little novices, seated at the extremity of the benches near the door, hardly dare to breathe. They know the hundred-eyed *chöstimpa*¹ soon detects any chatting or playful gestures, and fear-inspiring are the rod and whip that are hung at hand, next his high seat.

Chastisement, however, is not for little boys only, and full-grown members of the religious Order may well receive at times their good share of it.

I have witnessed queer performances of that kind. One of them took place in a monastery of the Sakya sect during a solemn festival.

Several hundred monks were assembled in the *tso-khang* (assembly hall) and the usual liturgy and music was going on, when three men communicated something to each other by gesture. As they were not seated on the front bench, they thought themselves sufficiently screened by the monks placed in front of them. The slight motion of their hands and the looks they exchanged would, they believed, not be noticed by the *chöstimpa*. But most likely, the patron gods of the lamaseries invest these stern officials with a supernatural keenness of sight: the *chöstimpa* had seen the culprits and started towards them.

He was a tall, dark Khampa² with athletic features, and standing on his high seat, as on a pedestal, looked like a bronze statue. Majestically, he took down his whip, descended from his throne and strode across the hall with the air of a destroying angel.

He passed before me, tucking his toga above his elbows. The whip which he clutched in his large hand was made of several leather ropes, each the size of a forefinger and ended by a knot.

¹ An official who enforces discipline in the *gompa*, especially during the religious ceremonies.

² A native of Kham, in Eastern Tibet.

Having reached the place where the culprits awaited their unavoidable chastisement, he grasped their necks from behind, one after the other, lifting them brutally from the bench.

It being impossible even to think of escape, the resigned fellows moved to the passage between the rows of monks and there prostrated themselves, their forehead against the floor.

A few strokes of the whip sounded on the back of each one and the fearful personage, with the same supreme dignity of demeanour, returned to his seat.

However, only minor offences, as breach of silence, incorrect attitude, etc., are punished in the assembly hall. More severe penalties are carried out elsewhere.

A much appreciated intermission cuts the long service: tea is brought in steaming hot, flavoured with butter and salt, according to the Tibetan taste. It is carried in large wooden buckets whose bearer walks along the rows. Each *trapa* produces his own bowl, kept till then under his vest next his skin. The bowls are of special patterns which vary according to the sects. No china or silver ornamented bowls are allowed at the assembly. The highest dignitaries must use a plain wooden one. Yet even that rule, meant as a symbolic remembrance of the renunciation and poverty enjoined by the original Buddhist discipline, is avoided by the astute lamas. The bowl of the richest among them is truly in wood, but some of these wooden utensils, made of special timbers out of the excrescences that grow on the trunk of certain trees, are highly prized and may cost as much as the equivalent of £6 in local currency.

In wealthy *gompas*, the tea is generously buttered and the monks bring with them, to the assembly, a small pot in which they blow a certain quantity of the butter that rises to the surface of the liquid. This they use at home or sell to be put again in tea or to

fill the lamps used in the house. Not the altar lamps, for which new butter is required.

Trapas bring also some *tsampa*¹ from their own houses, and this flour, together with the tea provided free, constitutes their breakfast.

Upon certain days, *tsampa* and a piece of butter are distributed with the tea, or a soup served instead of tea, or even the meal includes both tea and soup.

The inmates of the famous lamaseries enjoy a rather large number of these special breakfasts offered by rich pilgrims or by wealthy Grand Lamas belonging to the monastery itself.

On such occasions, hills of *tsampa* and huge heaps of pieces of butter, sown in sheep's stomachs, fill the *gompa's* kitchen to overflowing. The spectacle is still "greater" when it is a question of soup, for then a number of sheep's carcasses amounting sometimes to several hundred are cut up for the gargantuan broth.

While living in Kum-Bum and in other monasteries—though, as a woman, I was not allowed to take part at the monastic banquet—a pot full of the special dainty of the day was brought to my house whenever I wished.

It was in that way that I became acquainted with a certain Mongolian dish made of mutton, rice, Chinese dates, butter, cheese, curds, sugar-candy, and various other ingredients and spices, all boiled together.

This was not the only sample of their culinary science with which the lamaist "chefs" treated me.

A distribution of money takes place, sometimes, during the meal. Mongolians greatly outdo Tibetans in their liberality to the clergy. I have seen some of them leave more than ten thousand Chinese dollars at the Kum-Bum monastery during their visit.

So, day after day, in the frosty morning or the warm summer dawns, that peculiar lamaist matins is per-

¹ Flour made with roasted barley, which is the staple food of all Tibetans.

formed in countless *gompas* all over the immense territories¹ of which Tibet itself is but a small part.

Each morning, half-awake lads, together with their elders, are bathed in that curious atmosphere which is a blend of mysticism, gastronomic preoccupations and anticipations of a dole. That beginning of the day in the *gompa* gives us an idea of the character of the whole lamaist monastic life. In the latter we find also, always present, the same ill-assorted elements: subtle philosophy, commercialism, lofty spirituality and eager pursuit of coarse enjoyments! And these are so closely interwoven that one endeavours in vain to completely disentangle them.

Youngsters brought up amongst these conflicting streams of influence yield to one or other of them according to their natural propensities and the way in which they are directed by their masters. Out of that early, rather incoherent monastic training, issue a small élite of litterati, a number of idle, dull, sleepy fellows, wanton braggarts, and a few mystics who resort to lonely hermitages and life-long meditations.

The majority of the Tibetan *trapas* and *lamas* do not, however, belong exclusively to any of these different classes, they rather harbour in their mind—at least in potentiality—all of these various characteristics, and, according to the circumstances, one or another appear on the stage to play its part.

Plurality of personalities in the apparently single individual is, of course, not peculiar to Tibetan lamas, but it exists in them in a remarkably high degree, and on that account their discourses and behaviour provide the attentive observer with continual matter for wonder.

Tibetan Buddhism differs widely from Buddhism as seen in Ceylon, Burma and even China or Japan. So, also, lamaist monastic dwellings have their own quite

¹ The whole of Mongolia, parts of Siberia, of Manchuria and even of European Russia.

peculiar aspect. As I have already mentioned, in Tibetan language, a monastery is called a *gompa*,¹ that is to say a "house in the solitude," and this name is entirely justified.

Proudly isolated on summits beaten by the wind, amidst wild landscapes, Tibetan *gompas* look vaguely aggressive, as if bidding defiance to invisible foes, at the four corners of the horizon. Or, when squatting between high mountain ranges, they often assume a disquieting air of laboratories where occult forces are manipulated.

That twofold appearance corresponds to a certain reality. Though nowadays the thoughts of the monks may be mostly occupied by mercantile and other vulgar cares, Tibetan *gompas* were not, originally, intended for such earthly-minded folk.

The hard conquest of a world other than that perceived through the senses, transcendental knowledge, mystic realizations, mastery over occult forces, such were the aims for the pursuit of which were built the lamaist towering citadels and those enigmatic cities concealed in the maze of snowy hills. Yet nowadays mystics and magicians must be looked for mostly out of the monasteries. In order to escape an atmosphere that has become too much permeated by material cares and pursuits, they emigrate to more remote, inaccessible places, and the discovery of hermitages entails, sometimes, all the hardships of a real exploration. Nevertheless, with a very few exceptions, anchorites begin life as novices in the regular religious Order.

The boys whom their parents destine for a clerical life are taken to the monastery at the age of eight or nine. They are given as wards to a monk of their own family parentage or, failing a relative in the monastery, to some intimate friend. As a rule, the

¹ Spelling *dgon pa*.

tutor of the novice is his first teacher and, in many cases, his only one.

However, wealthy parents, who can afford generous recognition to the tuition of an erudite monk, either entrust the guardianship of their sons to such a one, or make an arrangement to the effect that the lads be sent to him to be taught at appointed hours. Sometimes, also, they beg for their sons the favour of being admitted as boarders in the house of an ecclesiastic dignitary. In that case, the latter will more or less supervise the youths' education.

These novices are supported by their parents, who send to their tutor's house the usual supply of butter, tea, *tsampa* and meat.

Beside substantial provisions, rich Tibetans send to their sons various dainties: cheese, dried fruits, sugar, molasses, cakes, etc. Such treasures play a great part in the everyday life of the boys lucky enough to possess them. They allow of countless bartering, and many services can be bought from poor and gourmand fellow-students with a handful of shrunk, stone-like apricots, or a few bits of desiccated mutton.

Young Tibetans begin, in that way, the apprenticeship in the tricks of trade while they are spelling out the first pages of religious treatises. One may guess that their progress in the former science is, often, more rapid than in the latter.

Entirely destitute boys become *geyog*,¹ that is to say that in exchange for menial work, they get teaching and sometimes also food and clothing at the house of a monk. Needless to add that, in this case, lessons are, as a rule, rare and brief! The professor, who is often illiterate or nearly so, can only teach the lads to memorize parts of the liturgic recitations, which they mangle dreadfully, and whose meaning they will never understand.

¹ "Servant of virtue" or "virtuous servant."

Numbers of *geyog* remain without being taught anything at all. It is not that their work as servants is heavy, but the carelessness natural to their age prevents them from asking for lessons which are not imposed on them, and they spend their many leisure hours playing with other little fellows of their own condition.

As soon as they are admitted to a monastery the novices have a share in the income of the *gompa*¹ and in the gifts made by the devotees to the community.

If, when growing older, the novice feels inclined to study and if circumstances allow, he may seek admission to one of the monastic colleges. There are four of them in all, large lamaseries.

As for the youths who belong to smaller *gompas* where no such colleges exist, they may at any time get leave to go and study elsewhere.

The subjects taught are: Philosophy and Metaphysics in the *Tsen ñid* college; Ritual and Magic in the *Gyud* college; Medicine, according to Chinese and Indian methods, in the *Men* college; and the Sacred Scriptures in the *Do* college.

Grammar, arithmetic and several other sciences are taught outside of these schools by private professors.

Both junior and senior students of philosophy hold discussions at regular dates. Often the latter take place in the open, and in all large lamaseries a shady garden, surrounded by walls, is reserved for that purpose.

Ritualistic gestures accompany the controversies and are a lively part of it. There are peculiar ways of turning one's rosary around one's arm, clapping one's hands and stamping when putting a question: there are other prescribed ways of jumping when giving an

¹ As I have given in another book, *My Journey to Lhasa*, a large number of details regarding the organization of the lamaseries, their source of revenues, information about their tenants, etc., I omit them here.

answer or replying to one interrogation by another. And so, though the words exchanged are usually but quotations, and only do honour to the memory of the controversialists, their antics and challenging attitudes create the illusion of passionate debates.

Yet, all members of the Philosophical College are not mere parrots. Amongst them one finds eminent litterati and subtle thinkers. They too can quote for hours from countless books, but they are also able to descant on the import of the old texts and bring forward the results of their own reflections.

A noteworthy feature of these public contests is that, at the end of them, he who has been acknowledged the victor is carried round the assembly riding on the shoulders of his defeated opponent.

The College of Ritualistic Magic is generally the most sumptuously housed of the *gompa's* scholastic institutions, and its Fellows, called *gyud pas*, are held in high esteem. They are believed to know the special technique which enables one to propitiate the fierce deities and subjugate evil spirits; and the protection of their monasteries is entrusted to them. The *gyud pas* belonging to the two great *Gyud* Colleges that exist at Lhasa, act in the same capacity on behalf of the State. Their appointed duty is to attract prosperity to Tibet and its ruler, as well as to shelter them from all bad influences and malignant undertakings.

Gyud pas are also entrusted with the task of honouring and serving the aboriginal gods or demons, whose good will or neutrality had been previously won by promising them perpetual worship and attendance to their needs. They must, also by their magic art, keep the untamed evil spirits bound in captivity.

Though for lack of another word in the English language we are compelled to refer to the *gompas* as monasteries, they do not in the least resemble a Christian monastery. Excepting the fact that the inmates of

the *gompa* are celibates and that the monastery owns property, I hardly see a point in common between the Christian and the Lamaist religious Orders.

As to celibacy, it must be remembered that all monks of the *Ge-lugs-pa* sect, familiarly called "yellow cap" sect, are celibate. But in the various "red cap" sects celibacy is only enjoined on fully ordained monks called *gelongs*. Married lamas or *trapas* keep, outside of the *gompa*, a home where their family lives. They have also a dwelling-place in their respective monasteries where they stay occasionally, at the time of religious festivals or when retiring for a period of religious exercises or meditation. Wives are never allowed to cohabit with their husbands in the enclosure of a monastery.

Lamaseries are meant, just as the *vihāras* of Ceylon or the monasteries of any Buddhist country, to house people who pursue a spiritual aim. That aim is neither strictly defined nor imposed and common to all *gompa*'s dwellers. Humble or lofty, as it may be, the goal of each monk remains his secret and he may endeavour to reach it by any means he chooses. No devotional exercises in common, nor uniform religious practices are enjoined on the inmates of the lamaseries. The only rules that exist are of a lay character, relating to the good order, the keeping up of the monastery, or the attendance of the members of the *gompa* to daily or occasional meetings. These assemblies themselves have nothing to do with the celebration of a cult in which each one present joins for his own sake and from which he expects good fruits for himself. When lamaist monks meet in the assembly hall, it is, beside hearing communications from the monastic authorities, to read parts of the Scriptures for the benefit of the monastery, the State, or the supporters and occasional benefactors of the *gompa*. Such readings are credited with happy results in bringing prosperity,

averting illness and calamities, and keeping away malevolent beings.

As for the ritualistic ceremonies, all of a magic nature, they are also performed for some aim in which the celebrants have no share. It is even believed that none can perform them for his own sake. The most proficient *gyud pas* are compelled to call a colleague when they wish to have these rites celebrated on their behalf.

Magic for personal purposes, meditation and exercises connected with spiritual life, are accomplished privately by each monk in his own dwelling. None but the teacher whom he has chosen has the least right to interfere in that matter. No one either has any right to ask any account of the lama's views. He may believe whatever doctrine he deems true, he may even be an utter unbeliever; this concerns himself only.

There is no church or chapel in the lamaist monasteries, for, as it has been explained, no worship is done in which the laity joins or even merely attends.

Beside the assembly hall there exist a number of *lha khangs*, that is to say "god's houses." Each of them is dedicated to a deity or to some Buddhist worthies, historical or mythical. Those who wish it pay courteous visits to the images of these exalted persons. They light a lamp or burn incense in their honour, salute them with three prostrations and depart. Favours are often begged during such visits, but not always, and a number of these polite meetings are the outcome of disinterested reverence.

Before the images of the Buddha boons are not requested, for Buddhas have passed beyond the "world of desire" and, in fact, beyond all worlds. But vows are taken and spiritual wishes expressed such as: "May I be, in this life or in the next one, able to distribute a quantity of alms, to contribute efficaciously

to the welfare of many," or "may I be able to understand the meaning of Buddha's doctrine and to live accordingly."

There are a larger number than one would suppose who, when raising a small lamp in the gesture of an offering before the Buddha's image, ask for no more than spiritual insight. Though they may make but little practical effort to reach it, the mystic ideal of salvation through enlightenment remains alive amongst Tibetans.

To the complete spiritual freedom of the lamaist monk corresponds a nearly equal material liberty.

The members of a monastery do not live in community, but each one in his own house or apartment, and each one according to his own means.

Poverty is not enjoined to them as it was to the early Buddhist monks. I must even say that the lama who voluntarily would practise it would enjoy no special regard on that account; quite the opposite. Anchorites only may indulge in that kind of "eccentricity."

Yet, absolute renunciation, as India—and may be India alone—has thoroughly understood it, is not an ideal altogether foreign to Tibetans,¹ nor do they fail to pay homage to its loftiness. Stories of youths of good family who leave their home and take to the life of religious mendicants (and especially, the story of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, who gave up his estate and princely rank) are listened to with the deepest reverence and admiration. But these stories, relating to facts which took place in times long gone, are regarded as belonging to another world that has no connection whatever with that of their wealthy and honoured lamas.

One may be ordained in any grade of the religious Order without becoming a member of a monastery,

¹ The ascetic poet Milarespa (eleventh century), the most popular of Tibetan saints, is an instance.

though this seldom happens, and only when the candidate is of an age to know what he is doing and intends to live as an anchorite.

Admission in a *gompa* does not confer any right to free lodging therein. Each monk must build his dwelling or purchase it from a previous owner, unless he inherits it from a relative or from his own teacher. Poor monks rent a room or two in the house of a more wealthy colleague. In the case of students and of learned or old *trapa*, lodging is often granted free to them in the houses of rich lamas.

The poorest ones who, beside a shelter, need also board, engage themselves in the service of wealthy members of the monastery. Their condition depends on their ability; some may be clerks, others cooks, or stable boys. Those who succeed in becoming stewards of a *tulku*, often become important and wealthy persons.

Learned monks belonging to poor families may earn their livelihood as teachers, as artists if they are gifted at painting religious pictures, as resident chaplains at the houses of rich lamas or laymen, or by occasionally performing religious ceremonies at householders' homes. Besides these various professions, divination, astrology, drawing horoscopes may be reckoned amongst their sources of income.

The lama doctors create very favourable situations for themselves if they show their skill by curing a sufficient number of distinguished people. But even with a smaller amount of success, the medical profession is a lucrative one.

However, the profession which looks the most attractive to many is trade. The great majority of those lamaist monks who are not especially religious minded, become traders. If they lack the money needed to undertake a business of their own, they engage themselves as secretaries, accountants, or even as mere servants of a trader.

Transacting business, in a more or less unostentatious way, is to a certain extent allowed in the monasteries. As for those of their members who have a really big business they obtain leave from the authorities of the monastery to travel with their caravan, and open shops or branches wherever they like.

One may think that trade does not fit in very well with religious pursuits, but we must also remember a monk has very seldom chosen his own profession. Most of them are led to the monastery as little boys, and it would be unjust to reproach them for not following a mystic avocation which has never been their own choice.

Trading on a large scale is carried on by the lamaseries themselves as a means of increasing their income. They barter and sell the products of their land and cattle which they receive from their tenants. To these are added the revenue derived from the big collections called *kartik*. These collections take place at regular intervals, each year or every two or three years. The lamas resort, also, to occasional appeals when building a new monastery, or a new temple in an already established lamasery, and for various other purposes. Small monasteries merely send some of their monks in the neighbouring regions to beg alms, but in large *gompas*, going to *kartik* takes all the forms of an expedition. Groups of *trapas* may go from Tibet to Mongolia, spend months travelling across the country and return like triumphant warriors with hundreds of horses, cattle, gold, silver and goods of every description, all offerings from the devotees.

They have a peculiar custom of entrusting, for a time, a certain amount of money, or a quantity of goods, to an official of the monastery who must traffic with that capital so as to provide for certain special expenses out of his profit. As an instance, he must supply during one year, or more, the butter needed to keep

burning the lamps of a particular *lha khang*, or he must give a fixed number of meals to the whole community or, again, support the expenses of building repairs, horse fodder, reception of guests and many other things. At the end of the period, be it one year or three, the capital entrusted to him must be given back. If the man who has received it, as a deposit, has been able to make more profit than was needed to cover his expenses, so much the better for him, he can keep the balance. But if he has expended more than his profit, he must pay it from his own pocket. In any case, the capital must remain intact.

The administration of a large monastery is as complicated as the administration of a town. Beside a population of several thousand men living between their walls, these *gompas* own large estates inhabited by tenants to whom they owe protection and over whom they have the right of justice. A number of elected officials, helped by clerks and a kind of police body, all clerics, assume the care of these temporal affairs.

A big personage called *tsogs chen shal ngo* is the elected head of the *gompa*. To him belongs the infliction of punishments on those who infringe monastic rules. It is he who grants leave, dispensations and admission to the *gompa*. He is assisted by several other officials. All of them wear ceremonial cloaks adorned with precious stones and carry massive silver sticks encrusted with golden ornaments and inlaid with turquoise and coral.

The policemen, called *dobdobs*, are well worth special mention. They are recruited amongst the athletic unlettered braggarts whose fathers have placed them as children in the monastery when their place ought rather to be in the barracks.

Brave with the wild rashness of brutes, always on the look out for quarrels and mischief, these impudent

scoundrels have all the picturesque characteristics of medieval ruffians.

The badge which they favour is dirt. Grease, they think, increases the martial appearance of a man. A true brave never washes himself, nay more, he blackens his face with the greasy soot that sticks on the bottom of the cauldrons, till he looks like a real negro.

Sometimes poverty is responsible for the ragged garments worn by the *dobdob*, but he often deliberately tears his monastic robe, to look—he thinks—more terrible.

Nearly always when putting on a new dress, his first care is to make it greasy. Tradition commands it. However costly the material may be, the *dobdob* kneading butter in his black hands, spreads it all over his new clothes.

These strange fellows consider that nothing can be more elegant than a robe and a toga which has become as shining as velvet and stiff as armour, by the careful and constant application of dirt and filth.

The Miraculous Tree of Tsong Khapa

The monastery of Kum-Bum owes its celebrity to a miraculous tree. I borrow from the Kum-Bum chronicles the following details about it.

In 1555, the Reformer Tsong Khapa, founder of the Gelugpa sect,¹ was born in Amdo, in North-eastern Tibet, at the place where now stands the great lamasery of Kum-Bum.

A short time after the child's birth the Lama dubchen Karma Dorje prophesied that his career would be an extraordinary one and advised his parents to keep the spot where his mother had been delivered perfectly clean. A little later, a tree began to grow there.

Even to-day, beaten earth is used as the floor in

¹ "Yellow hats" sect. Literally *Gelugpa* means "those who have virtuous customs."

most houses of Amdo, and the natives sleep on cushions or carpets spread on that floor. This makes it easy to understand the tradition according to which the tree grew out of the blood that had been spilled during the confinement and cutting of the umbilical cord.

At first the sapling did not bear any peculiar signs on its leaves, but owing to its miraculous origin, it enjoyed some fame and was worshipped by people of the neighbourhood. A monk built a hut next to it and lived there. This was the beginning of the present large and rich monastery.

Many years later, when Tsong Khapa had already begun his reformation work, his mother, from whom he had been separated for a long time, wished to see him again and sent him a letter to call him back. At that time, Tsong Khapa lived in Central Tibet. During a mystic meditation, he understood that his journey to Amdo would benefit nobody, and therefore he only wrote to his mother. With his letter he gave to the messenger two pictures of himself intended for his mother and his sister, a picture of Gyalwa Senge,¹ Lord of Science and Eloquence, the patron of the intellectuals, and several pictures of Demchog, a deity of the tantric pantheon.

When these objects were being handed to the family of the reformer, the latter, exercising his magic powers from afar, caused the picture of the deities to appear on the leaves of the miraculous tree. The print was so neat, so perfect, according to the legend, that the most clever artist could not have drawn them better.

With the pictures, various other marks and the "Six Writings" (the formula in six syllables: *Aum mani padme hum*) appeared on the branches and the bark of the tree.

This is the origin of the name Kum-Bum: "hundred

¹ More generally denominated Jampeion. His Sanskrit name is Manjushri.

thousand images," by which the monastery became known.

In the account of their journey in Tibet, the French Fathers Huc and Gabet affirm that they have read the words *Aum mani padme hum!* on the leaves and the trunk of the tree.

Now, what kind of tree did these two travellers see?

The monastery's chronicles relate that after the miraculous appearance of the images on the tree, the latter was wrapped in a piece of silk (a "robe") and that a temple was built around it.

Was it an unroofed one? The word *chörten* used in the text does not favour that opinion, for a *chörten* is a monument with a needle-like top and consequently closed.

Deprived of light and air, the tree could not but die. And as, according to the chronicles, the *chörten* was built in the sixteenth century, the Fathers Huc and Gabet at best could only have seen the dried skeleton of the tree. But their description applies to a living one.

The chronicles mention also that the miraculous tree remained unchanged in winter and summer, and that the number of its leaves was always the same.

We read again that, once upon a time, noises were heard inside the *chörten* in which the tree stood. The abbot of Kum-Bum entered it, cleaned the space around the tree, and found near to it a small quantity of liquid which he drank.

These details seem to indicate that the tree was in a closed room but seldom entered, while the wonder of keeping its leaves during the winter (the species to which belongs the Kum-Bum tree has caducous leaves) can only be applied to a living tree.

It is difficult to find one's way amongst these conflicting accounts.

To-day a *chörten* about 40 to 50 feet high (in which the original tree is said to be enshrined) stands in the middle of a gold-roofed temple.

Yet, when I lived at Kum-Bum the lamas said that the shrine had been erected only a few years ago.¹

In front of that temple grows a shoot of the miraculous tree, surrounded by a railing, and is venerated to a certain extent.

Another larger tree, which is also believed to have originated from the miraculous tree, has been transplanted into a small garden before the temple of the Buddha. The leaves of these two trees are collected when they fall, and distributed to the devotees.

Perhaps it is one of these two which the Fathers Huc and Gabet saw. Foreign travellers who go to Kum-Bum, as a rule, do not know the history, or even the existence, of the tree hidden in the shrine.

Some Europeans residing in Kansu (the Chinese province on the border of which Kum-Bum is situated) have told to me that they have read *Aum mani padme hum!* on the leaves of the living trees. However, lamaist pilgrims and the monks of the monastery (about 3,000 men) do not notice anything peculiar about these leaves and even listen with scornful scepticism to accounts of the foreigners' visions of the sacred trees.

Nevertheless, their modern attitude is not supported by the old chronicles, which affirm that all people of Amdo saw the miraculous imprints on the tree when they first appeared, about four hundred years ago.

Living Buddha

Besides the various officials, there exist, in the *gompas*, another class of men who, as a rule, do not take any direct part in the business of the monastery and live more or less aloof in their sumptuous mansions. These are the lamas *tulkus*.

¹ Or rather rebuilt after a fire which destroyed it.

Tulkus occupy a prominent place in Lamaism, they constitute one of its most striking features which set it quite apart from all other Buddhist sects.

The real character of the lamas *tulkus* has never been correctly defined by Western authors and it would almost seem that they have never even suspected it. However, the theories regarding *tulkus* are well worth our attention, for they are far removed from any belief in incarnations or transmigrating spiritual entities and, as we will see, border upon the field of psychic phenomena.

The peculiar religious aristocracy which goes by the name of *tulku* is not of very ancient origin. It is only after A.D. 1650 that it developed in the form which exists at present.

The fifth Grand Lama of the Gelugspa sect (Yellow caps), Lobzang Gyatso by name, had then been newly enthroned as temporal ruler of Tibet by a Mongolian prince and recognized as such by the Chinese emperor. Yet, these earthly honours failed to satisfy the ambitious lama, and he added to them by declaring himself to be an emanation of the Bodhisatva Chenrezigs. At the same time, he established his religious teacher as Grand Lama of Tashilhunpo, affirming that he was a *tulku* of Ödpagmed, a mystic Buddha of whom Chenrezigs is the spiritual son.¹

The example set by the lama-king encouraged the creation of *tulkus*. Very soon, all monasteries of some importance deemed it a point of honour to have, at their head, an incarnation of one or another worthy. However, in setting himself up as a *tulku* of Chenrezigs, Lobzang Gyatso had not been entirely an innovator. Theories affording him some support can be traced in the mahâyânist speculations regarding the mystic

¹ Chenrezigs and Ödpagmed are, respectively, the Tibetan names of the mystic beings called in Sanskrit Avalokiteshvara and Amithaba.

Buddhas and their spiritual family of Bodhisatvas and human Buddhas who are said to emanate from them.

Moreover, since the death (about A.D. 1470) of Gedundub, the disciple of the reformer Tsong Khapa, his successors as head of the "Yellow caps" sect had been recognized as his reincarnations. So, the fifth Dalai Lama was therefore already a *tulku* of Gedundub when he became Chenrezigs' *tulku*.

But even earlier, in the eleventh century, Tibetans believed in *tulkus*. We read in the biography of Milarespa, that one of his disciples, called Bhiraja, convinced that a divine being was incarnated in his master, asked him to disclose his name. Milarespa himself believed that his own master, the lama Marpa, was the *tulku* of Dorjee Chang. He called him by that name repeatedly, not only in his poems, but when addressing him directly.

So, though recognized avatars were, at first, isolated cases and not in the regular lineal succession of incarnations, they have paved the way for the Dalai Lama-Chenrezigs and the thousands of lordly *tulkus* who are nowadays to be found all over the lamaist countries.

"Living Buddha" is a current appellation given by foreigners to lamas *tulkus*. Now, in spite of the many books on Buddhism which have been published in Western languages, there still remain a large number of Westerners who take the word Buddha for a proper noun: the name of the founder of Buddhism. To these people, the words "living Buddha" convey the idea of a reincarnation of Gautama the historical Buddha.

There is no Tibetan, even amongst the most ignorant villagers or herdsmen, who entertains such a false view. As for learned lamas, they agree with all other Buddhists, in declaring that the Buddha Gautama (Sakya Thubpa as he is called in Tibet) cannot be incarnated again. The reason of it is that Gautama has entered *nirvâna*, a state which precludes all possibilities of re-

incarnation, for that which is called *nirvāna* is precisely a setting free from the round of births and death.

So much for avatars of the historical Buddha. There have never been any in the past and none exist at present.

Can there be incarnations of *other* Buddhas?—In fact: no. And for the same reason—the Buddhas have entered *nirvāna*. It is, indeed, because they have realized that condition that they are Buddhas. However, while in Southern Buddhist countries the title of “Buddha” is exclusively given to the historical human Buddha, to his supposed predecessors and to his expected successor, Maitreya, Northern Buddhists have imagined a number of symbolic and mystic entities, certain of which are styled “Buddha.” It is these who are said to manifest themselves through avatars, and their avatars may assume other forms than that of human being.

It follows that, according to popular belief, a *tulkus* is either the reincarnation of a saintly or peculiarly learned departed personality, or the incarnation of a non-human entity.

The number of the former greatly exceeds that of the latter. *Tulkus* of non-human entities are limited to a few avatars of mystic Buddhas, Bodhisatvas or deities, such as the Dalai Lama, the Grand Lama of Tashilunpo, the Lady Dorje Phagmo and, lower in rank, the *tulkus* of some autochthonous gods like Pekar.

Tulkus of gods, demons and fairies (*khadhomas*) appear especially as heroes of stories, yet some living men and women enjoy, as such, some local renown. This category of *tulkus* is not reckoned amongst the lamaist aristocracy; one may think that it originated not in Lamaism, but in the old religion of Tibet.

Though Buddhism denies the existence of a trans-migrating soul and considers the belief in a permanent

ego as a most pernicious error, the large majority of unlearned Buddhists have lapsed into the old Indian doctrine which represents the *jīva* (self) periodically “changing his worn-out body for a new one, as we cast away a worn-out garment to clothe ourself in a new.”¹

Based on that belief, lines of successive reincarnations of human worthies² have been recognized. These are styled “rosary of births” or “rosary of bodies”² because they are linked together like the beads of a rosary.

When the *tulku* is considered as the incarnation of a god or the emanation of a spiritual entity who co-exists with him, the reason afforded by “the *self* changing his flesh garment” does not explain his nature. But average Tibetans do not think deeply, and for all practical purposes *tulkus* of celestial personages are considered as true reincarnations of their predecessors.

The ancestor of a line of purely human *tulkus* is called *ku kongma*, he is generally—but not necessarily—a lama.

Amongst the exceptions I may mention the father and mother of the reformer Tsong Khapa. Both reincarnate in male children who become monks and, as lamas, have their seat at Kum-Bum monastery. The lama who is held to be the reincarnation of Tsong Khapa’s father is called Aghia tsang and is the lord of the monastery. When I lived at Kum-Bum, he was a boy in his tenth year.

There exist also nuns who are *tulkus* of departed saintly ladies or goddesses.

By the by, I may say that it is a cause of amusement for the observer to remark how intelligence and holiness often seem to become exhausted in a succession

¹ Bhagavad Gītā, II, 22.

² *Kyai treng* (spelt *skye hphreng*), or more politely *kutreng* (spelt *sku hphreng*).

of incarnations. It is not unusual to find an utterly stupid fellow as the supposed embodiment of some eminent thinker, or to see an earthly minded epicure recognized as the incarnation of a mystic anchorite famous for his austerity.

The reincarnation of the *tulkus* cannot astonish people who believe in a transmigrating *ego*. According to that view, we all are *tulkus*, for the *self*, now embodied in our present form, cannot but have existed previously in other forms. The only peculiarity with *tulkus* is that they are reincarnations of remarkable personalities, that they, sometimes, remember their previous lives and are able, at the time of death, to choose and make known the place of their next birth and their future parents.

However, some lamas see a complete difference between the process of reincarnation in the case of common men and that of the enlightened ones. Men, they say, who have practised no mental training, who live like animals, yielding thoughtlessly to their impulses, are like travellers who wander over the world without any fixed purpose. Such a man sees a lake in the east, and, being thirsty, hurries away to the water. When nearing the shore, he perceives the smell of smoke. This suggests the presence of a house or a camp. It would be pleasant, he thinks, to get hot tea instead of water, and a shelter for the night. So the man leaves the lake without having actually reached its shore and proceeds to the north, the smoke coming from that direction. On his way, before he has yet discovered any houses or tent, threatening phantoms spring up before him. Terrified, the wanderer turns away from the fearful beings and runs for life towards the south. When he deems that he has gone far enough to be safe, he stops to rest. Now, other wanderers pass who tell him of some blissful land of joy and plenty that they intend to reach. Full of enthusiasm, the vagrant

joins the party and goes off to the west. And on the road he will be tempted many times to change his direction again before seeing the enchanted country.

So, continually roaming at random all his life, that simpleton will reach no goal whatever. Death will overtake him on the road, and the conflicting forces of his disordinated activity will be scattered to the four winds. The co-ordinated amount of energy¹ necessary to determine the continuation of a same current of force not having been produced, no *tulkus* can arise.

On the contrary, the enlightened one is likened to a traveller well aware of the goal which he means to reach, well informed, also, of its geographical position and the roads that lead to it. The mind unflinchingly fixed on his aim, indifferent to the various mirages and allurements of the roadside, this man controls the forces begotten by his concentration of mind and his bodily activity. Death may dissolve his body on the path, but the psychic energy of which that body is both creator and instrument, will remain coherent. Pushing forward towards the same goal, it will provide itself with a new material instrument, that is to say with a new form which is a *tulku*.

Here we meet with different views. Some lamas think that the subsisting subtile energy attracts elements of congenial essence and thus becomes the nucleus of a new being. Others say that the disembodied force joins an already existing being, whose material and mental dispositions, acquired in previous lives, provide a harmonious union.

Needless to say that several criticisms and objections may be brought forward against these theories, but the present book is meant only to relate lamaist opinions and not to discuss them. I can only say that all the views I have mentioned are consistent with a number of old Tibetan stories whose heroes determine, by an

¹ In Tibetan *Tsal* or *shugs*.

act of will,¹ the nature of their rebirth and the course of action of their future avatar. This shows that similar theories have been widely spread among Tibetans for a long time.

In spite of the part which a conscious purpose plays in bringing about the continuation of a line of *tulkus*, one must beware of thinking that the composition of the new personality is arbitrarily produced. The determinist idea is too strongly rooted in the mind even of the wildest Tibetan herdsmen to allow of such an idea. Laws are said to be at work during the whole process which proceeds according to natural attractions and repulsions.

More learned lamaists hold another view regarding the nature of *tulkus*. This is, in fact, the only truly orthodox one, which fully agrees with the very meaning of the term *tulku*.

The word *tulku* means a form created by magic, and in accordance with that definition, we must consider the *tulkus* as phantom bodies, occult emanations, puppets constructed by a magician to serve his purpose.

I cannot do better than quote, here, the explanation of *tulkus* given to me by the Dalai Lama.

As I have related it in the first chapter of the present book, I met the Dalai Lama in 1912 when he was living in the Himalayas, and asked him several questions regarding lamaist doctrine to which he first answered orally. Afterward, in order to avoid misunderstandings, he told me to write a list of new questions on the points which still appeared to me obscure. To these he gave written answers. The present quotation is taken from the document with which the Dalai Lama favoured me.

"A Bodhisatva² is the basis of countless magic

¹ According to lamaists, that will is determined, depends on causes.

² A being who has attained the high degree of spiritual perfection immediately below that of a Buddha.

forms. By the power generated in a state of perfect concentration of mind he may, at one and the same time, show a phantom (*tulpa*)¹ of himself in thousands millions of worlds. He may create not only human forms, but any forms he chooses, even those of inanimate objects such as hills, enclosures, houses, forests, roads, bridges, etc. He may produce atmospheric phenomena as well as the thirst-quenching beverage of immortality." (The latter expression I have been advised to take in both a literal and a symbolic sense.) "In fact," reads the conclusion, "there is no limit to his power of phantom creation."

The theory sanctioned in these lines by the highest authority of official Lamaism is identical with that expounded in the mahâyânist literature, where it is said that an accomplished Bodhisatva is capable of effecting ten kinds of magic creations. The power of producing magic formations, *tulkus* or less lasting and materialized *tulpas*, does not, however, belong exclusively to such mystic exalted beings. Any human, divine or demoniac being may be possessed of it. The only difference comes from the degree of power, and this depends on the strength of the concentration and the quality of the mind itself.

The *tulkus* of mystic entities co-exist with their spiritual parent. For instance, while the Dalai Lama, who is Chenrezigs' *tulku*, lives at Lhasa, Chenrezigs himself—so Tibetans believe—dwells in Nankai Potala, an island near the Chinese coast.²

The Dhyani Buddha Ödpagmed, of whom the Tashi Lama is the *tulku*, resides in the Western Paradise, Nub dewachen.

Men, also, may co-exist with their magic progeny. King Srong bstan gampo and the warrior chieftain

¹ Written *sprulpa*.

² Pu-to-shang island in the Choushan archipelago, off the coast of Chekiang.

Gesar of Ling are illustrations of this. In our own days it is said that when he fled from Shigatze, the Tashi Lama left, in his stead, a phantom perfectly resembling him who played his part so thoroughly and naturally that every one who saw him was deceived. When the lama was safe beyond the border, the phantom vanished.¹ The three men here mentioned are themselves *tulkus*, but according to lamaists, that circumstance does not preclude the further creation of emanations. These spring from one another and there exist denominations for emanations of the second or the third degree.²

It may happen that the self-same defunct lama, multiplying himself *post-mortem*, has several recognized *tulkus* who are contemporaries. On the other hand, there are lamas who are said to be *tulkus* of several entities. Before dismissing the subject, it may be interesting to remind ourselves that the followers of the docetae sect, in early Christianity, looked upon Jesus Christ as being a *tulku*. They maintained that Jesus who had been crucified was not a natural being, but a phantom created to play that part by a spiritual entity.

So, also, in contradiction with the orthodox tradition which tells that the historical Buddha Gautama is the incarnation of a Bodhisatva who came down from the Tushita heaven, some Buddhists have affirmed that he who is the real Buddha was never incarnate, but that he created a phantom which appeared in India as Gautama.³

In spite of the various more or less subtle theories

¹ See the account of the Tashi Lama flight in my book, *My Journey to Lhasa*.

² *Yang tulku* emanated from a *tulku*; *gsum tulku* emanated from the *tulku* of a *tulku*.

³ The Buddhist sect which held that view was that of the Vetul-laka.

held about *tulkus* in learned Tibetan circles, they are considered, for all practical purposes, as real reincarnation of their predecessors and the formalities regarding their recognition have been devised accordingly.

It happens, not unfrequently, that a lama—often himself one of a line of *tulkus*—foretells, at his death-bed, the country or district where he will be reborn. Sometimes he adds various particulars about his future parents, the situation of their house and so on.

Contrary to the opinion prevailing in the southern schools of Buddhism, lamaists believe that a certain time of undetermined length elapses between the death and the rebirth of a being on the earth. In the interval, the main consciousness, that which causes the rebirth, is wandering in the labyrinth of the *bardo*,¹ seeking its way.

As a rule, it is about two years² after the death of a lama *tulku* that the treasurer, the head steward or other clerical officials of his household, begin to look for his reincarnation. By that time the child who is that supposed "reincarnation" is usually one or two years old. There are cases when the reincarnation is delayed, but these are very exceptional.

If the late lama left directions regarding his rebirth, his monks pursue their researches accordingly; if such directions are lacking, they resort to a lama *tulku* astrologer³ who points out generally in veiled and obscure sentences the country where investigations must be made and various signs by which the child may be known. When the *tulku* to be discovered is

¹ About *bardo*, see Chapter I.

² There are, however, no fixed customs regarding that matter, circumstances decide the turn given to the procedure.

³ Called *tsispa*, a calculator. It is the *tsispa* who draws horoscopes, discloses hidden things, etc. Any ordinary monk may act as *tsispa*, but the discovery of a *tulku* is always entrusted to another *tulku*.

of a high rank, one of the State oracles may be consulted, and this is always done for the reincarnations of the Dalai Lama and the Tashi Lama.

Sometimes a young boy is quickly found whose birth-place and other characteristics answer the directions given by the late lama or the astrologer. In other cases, years elapse without finding anyone, and some "incarnations" even remain undiscovered. This is a cause of deep sorrow to the devotees of the *tulku*, and still more to the monks of his monastery, which, lacking its worshipful head, does not attract the same number of pious benefactors, suppliers of feasts and gifts. Yet, while some lament, that sad plight may be a cause of secret joy to a cunning steward who, during the absence of a legitimate master, manages the business of the *tulku* estate on his own authority and may thus find a way to make his own fortune.

When a child is discovered who nearly answers the prescribed conditions, a lama clairvoyant is again consulted, and if he pronounces in favour of the child the following final test is applied.

A number of objects such as rosaries, ritualistic implements, books, tea-cups,¹ etc., are placed together, and the child must pick out those which belonged to the late *tulku*, thus showing that he recognizes the things which were *his* in his previous life.

It sometimes happens when several children are candidates to a vacant *tulku* seat, that equally convincing signs have been noticed concerning each of them, and they all correctly pick out the objects owned by the defunct lama. Or it sometimes occurs that two or three clairvoyants disagree among themselves as to which is the authentic *tulku*.

¹ Each Tibetan owns a private bowl in which he alone drinks tea. That bowl may be the wooden one of the poor or the costly jade one with golden saucer and cover of the rich, or any of the intermediate kinds, but it is never lent to anyone to drink in.

Such cases are rather frequent when it is a question of succeeding to one of these grand *tulkus*, lords of big monasteries and large estates. Then many families are eager to place one of their sons on the throne of the departed grandee, which brings with it consideration and material profit.

Generally the parents of the *tulku* are allowed to live in the monastery till the child can dispense with his mother's nursing and care. Then a comfortable lodging is provided for them on the monastery land, but outside the *gompa's* enclosure, and they are plentifully supplied with all they need. If the monastery has no special mansion reserved for the parents of its grand *tulku*, the latter are well provided for at their own home.

Beside a grand lama *tulku*, who is the lord of the monastery, the *gompas* often include several other *tulkus* amongst their members. In the largest of these monastic cities, their number may amount to a few hundreds. Some of them rank high in the lamaist ecclesiastic aristocracy and, in addition to their seat in their parent monastery, they own mansions in other *gompas* and estates in Tibet or Mongolia. In fact, to be the near relative of even the least of them is a connection profitable enough to rouse covetousness in the heart of any Tibetan.

So countless intrigues are woven around the succession to a *tulku*, and, amidst the warlike folk of Kham or of the northern borderland, bloody feuds spring from such passionate competitions.

Countless tales are told throughout Tibet about extraordinary proofs of memory from previous lives and wonders worked by young *tulkus* to testify their identity. We find in them the habitual Tibetan mixture of superstition, cunning, comedy, and disconcerting events. I could relate dozens of them, but I prefer to confine myself to the relation of facts connected with people whom I have personally known.

Next the mansion of the Pegyai Lama, in which I lived at Kum-Bum, was the dwelling of a minor *tulku* called Agnai tsang.¹ Seven years had elapsed since the death of the last master of the place and none had been able to discover the child in whom he had reincarnated. I do not think that the steward of the lama's household felt greatly afflicted by that circumstance. He managed the estate and seemed rather prosperous.

Now it happened that in the course of a trading tour, he felt tired and thirsty and entered a farm to rest and drink. While the housewife made tea the *nierpa* (steward) drew a jade snuff-box from his pocket and was about to take a pinch of snuff when a little boy who had been playing in a corner of the room stopped him and putting his small hand on the box asked reproachfully:

"Why do you use my snuff-box?"

The steward was thunderstruck. Truly, the precious snuff-box was not his, but belonged to the departed Agnai tsang, and though he had not perhaps exactly intended to steal it, yet he had taken possession of it.

He remained there trembling while the boy looked at him as his face suddenly became grave and stern, with no longer anything childish about it.

"Give it back to me at once, it is mine," he said again.

Stung with remorse, and at the same time terrified and bewildered, the superstitious monk could only fall on his knees and prostrate himself before his reincarnated master.

A few days later, I saw the boy coming in state to his mansion. He wore a yellow brocade robe² and

¹ Not to be mistaken for Aghia tsang, the grand *tulku* already mentioned.

² As he had not yet been admitted into the religious Order, he was not allowed to wear the ecclesiastic robes.

rode a beautiful black pony, the *nierpa* holding the bridle.

When the procession entered the house the boy remarked: "Why do we turn to the left to reach the second courtyard? The gate is on our right side."

Now, for some reason, the gate on the right side had been walled up after the death of the lama and another one opened instead.

The monks marvelled at this new proof of the authenticity of their lama and all proceeded to his private apartment where tea was to be served.

The boy, seated on a pile of large hard cushions, looked at the cup with silver-gilt saucer and jewelled cover placed on the table before him.

"Give me the larger china cup," he commanded. And he described one, mentioning the very pattern that decorated it.

Nobody knew about such a cup, not even the steward, and the monks respectfully endeavoured to convince their young master that there was no cup of that kind in the house.

It was at that moment that, taking advantage of an already long acquaintance with the *nierpa*, I entered the room. I had heard the snuff-box story and wished to see for myself, my remarkable little new neighbour. I offered him the customary complimentary scarf and a few presents. These he received with a gracious smile but, apparently following the trend of his thoughts regarding the cup, he said:

"Look better, you will find it."

And suddenly, as if a flash of memory had dashed through his mind, he added explanations about a box painted in such a colour, which was in such a place in the store-room.

The monks had briefly informed me of what was going on and I waited with interest to see how things would turn out.

Less than half an hour later, the set, cup, saucer and cover, was discovered in a casket that was at the bottom of the very box described by the boy.

"I did not know of the existence of that cup," the steward told me later on. "The lama himself, or my predecessor, must have put it in that box which did not contain anything else precious and had not been opened for years."

I also witnessed a much more striking and fantastic discovery of a *tulku* in the poor inn of a hamlet, some miles distant from Ansi.

Roads going from Mongolia to Tibet cross, in that region, the long highway which extends from Peking to Russia over a whole continent. So I felt annoyed but not astonished when, reaching the inn at sunset, I found it crowded with visitors from a Mongolian caravan.

The men looked rather excited as if something unusual had just happened. Yet, with their customary courtesy still increased by the sight of the lamaist monastic garments which lama Yongden and I wore, the travellers immediately gave up a room for my party and made room for my beasts in the stable.

As Yongden and I remained in the courtyard, looking at the camels of the Mongolians, the door of one of the rooms opened and a tall handsome youth, poorly clad in a Tibetan robe, stood on the threshold and asked if we were Tibetans. We answered in the affirmative.

Then a well-dressed elderly lama appeared behind the young man and he, also, addressed us in Tibetan.

As usual, we exchanged questions about the country from which we came and where we were going. The lama said that he had intended going to Lhasa by the Suchow winter road, but now, he added, it was no longer necessary to take this journey. The Mongolian servants who were in the courtyard nodded their assent.

I wondered what could have caused these people to change their minds while *en route*, but as the lama retired to his room, I did not deem it polite to follow and ask explanations that were not offered.

However, later in the evening, when they had inquired about Yongden and me from our servants, the Mongolians invited us to drink tea with them and I heard the whole story.

The handsome young man was a native of the far distant Ngari province (in South-western Tibet). He seemed to be somewhat of a visionary. At least, most Westerners would have so described him, but we were in Asia.

Since his early youth, Migyur—this was his name—had been restless, haunted by the queer idea that *he was not where he ought to be*. He felt himself a foreigner in his village, a foreigner in his family. In dreams, he saw landscapes that did not exist in Ngari: sandy solitudes, round felt tents, a monastery on a hillock. And even when awake, the same subjective images appeared to him and superimposed themselves on his material surroundings, veiling them, creating around him a perpetual mirage.

He was only a boy when he ran away, unable to resist the desire of finding the reality of his vision. Since then, Migyur had been a vagrant, working a little here and there on his way, begging most times, wandering at random without being able to control his restlessness or settle anywhere.

To-day he had arrived from Aric, tramping aimlessly as usual.

He saw the inn, the encampment of the caravan, the camels in the courtyard. Without knowing why, he crossed the gate, and found himself face to face with the lama and his party. Then, with the rapidity of lightning, past events flashed through his mind. He remembered that very lama as a young man, his

disciple, and himself as an already aged lama, both on that very road, returning from a pilgrimage to the holy places of Tibet and going home to the monastery on the hillock.

He reminded the lama of all these things, giving minute details regarding their journey, their lives in the distant monastery and many other particulars.

Now the aim of the Mongolians' journey was precisely to beg advice from the Dalai Lama as to the best way of discovering the *tulku* head of their monastery, whose seat had been unoccupied for more than twenty years, in spite of persevering efforts to find his reincarnation.

These superstitious people were ready to believe that the Dalai Lama, through his supernormal power, had detected their intention and out of kindness had caused their meeting with their reincarnated lord.

The Ngari wanderer complied immediately with the usual test, picking out without hesitation or mistake, among a number of similar objects, those that had belonged to the late lama.

No doubt subsisted in the mind of the Mongolians. On the morrow, I saw the caravan retracing its steps, moving away to the slow pace of the big camels and disappearing on the skyline into the Gobi solitudes. The new *tulku* was going to meet his fate.