A JOURNEY TO WESTERN TIBET, 1929

By E. B. WAKEFIELD

(This is the second and concluding section of this narrative, the first part of which appeared in our last number, *A.J.* 66, 118.)

NEGOTIATIONS with the Garpons, interviews with the few Niti traders who were already established at Gartok and official correspondence kept me fully occupied for a week, and it was not until August 5 that I was able to set off, with a full staff and better tents, for my inspection of the marts. The four most important marts are, from north to south, Daba, the two Gianimas and Taklakot; and there was little time to spare if I was to visit each of these while trade was still in progress. Neither of the two routes from Gartok to Daba (660) follows a direct line. One makes a northerly and the other a southerly circuit; and I decided to follow the former, as it would take me via Tuling where, I was informed, a number of traders from Mana in British Garhwal came annually to do their business. There are two routes to Tuling marked on the map. The first, which was followed by Captain Rawling in 1904, crosses the mountains to the west of Gartok by the Ayi La (18,700 ft.) and comes south via Dunkar to Tuling. The second, which was followed by Mr. Mackworth Young in 1912, crosses the same range of mountains by the Bogo La (19,220 ft.) and follows a more direct line to Tuling. 'Within a few miles of the Ayi La', wrote Captain Rawling,[1] 'other passes cross the range, but none has an altitude of less than 18,500 feet. They are all much of a muchness, presenting a gradual ascent on the northern side and a terribly severe descent on the southern face of the range.' On the advice of the Tibetans who were to supply our transport animals I decided to cross one of those other passes, known as the Sazi La. The proposed route would be shorter than the route by the Ayi La and less arduous than the one by the Bogo La. Our first difficulty was in crossing the flooded Gartang; the banks of this river are not high, and the water which had been brought down by the recent heavy rains spread far and wide over the Gartok plain. It was only through the skill of our guide that we reached the high land to the west of the plain without loss or damage to our baggage. At one place we were not out of the water for over half a mile, and those who did not follow almost exactly in the footsteps of the guide quickly found themselves labouring in deep water and quick-sands. The ascent of the Sazi La two days later was accomplished in almost ideal conditions; there was a warm

[1] Page 277 of his book, *The Great Plateau* (1905).

sun, the wind was not too cold, and the snow was crisp and firm under foot. It never occurred to me that any of the party would find difficulty in crossing the pass, and I took advantage of the splendid conditions to climb the Sazi mountain, a snowy dome which rises above the pass to the east. It was only later that I learnt that some members of the main party had had to have assistance in reaching the top of the pass. The descent to the south was exceedingly steep, but, as it was over screes devoid of snow, it presented no difficulty. That night Raghu Das, who had accompanied me to the top of the Sazi mountain, suffered so severely from snow-blindness that he had to be held by several men from attempting to knock out his brains against the rocks. The Doctor treated his eyes with a solution of cocaine and eventually, though he got no sleep, the man had some relief from pain.

The country in the neighbourhood of Dunkar consists of large fantastically-shaped mountains and ridges of mud, intersected by deep water-made channels several hundreds of feet deep. The action of rain water has pitted these mud mountains in such a way as to leave numberless pinnacles standing up vertically. (Plate 7) The Dunkar monastery, once a fort, crowns the summit of one of these ridges of mud, whilst the inhabitants of Dunkar live either in houses on the banks of the stream below or in caves in the side of the ridge. The stream, until about 2.0 p.m. each day, is a gently-flowing rivulet of clear, fresh water; in the afternoon, however, melted snow from the mountains above turns it into a muddy torrent resembling nothing so much as a Westmorland beck in spate. The next march was to Tuling (634), the ecclesiastical capital of Western Tibet.[2] The Sutlej was crossed, 1½ miles above Tuling, by an iron chain suspension bridge said to have been built by Divine agency some 300 years ago. The monastery possibly dates from the eleventh century, but nobody at Tuling could tell me anything about its history. The monks averred that it had been built by a god in a single night, but the Changsud, or factor of the monastery, an official appointed from Lhasa every three years, assured me that this was only a pious invention on their part. The truth of the matter was, he said, that men had started building the monastery, and found that, for every foot they built by day, a foot was added mysteriously by night. The monastery is not a single building, but a collection of them; they are solid structures of stone and mud and, for the most part, are painted red. (Plate 8) There are four large temples with the entrances guarded, as at Rudok, by grotesque human figures three or four times life-size. The walls of the temples are covered with frescoes representing gods and men, angels and devils; whilst all round are statues and statuettes, in brass or gold and often studded with turquoise, of the seated Buddha.

[2] Hamond, *G.J.*, vol. 99, p. 5, and Harrer, *Seven Years in Tibet*, record their impressions of Tuling.

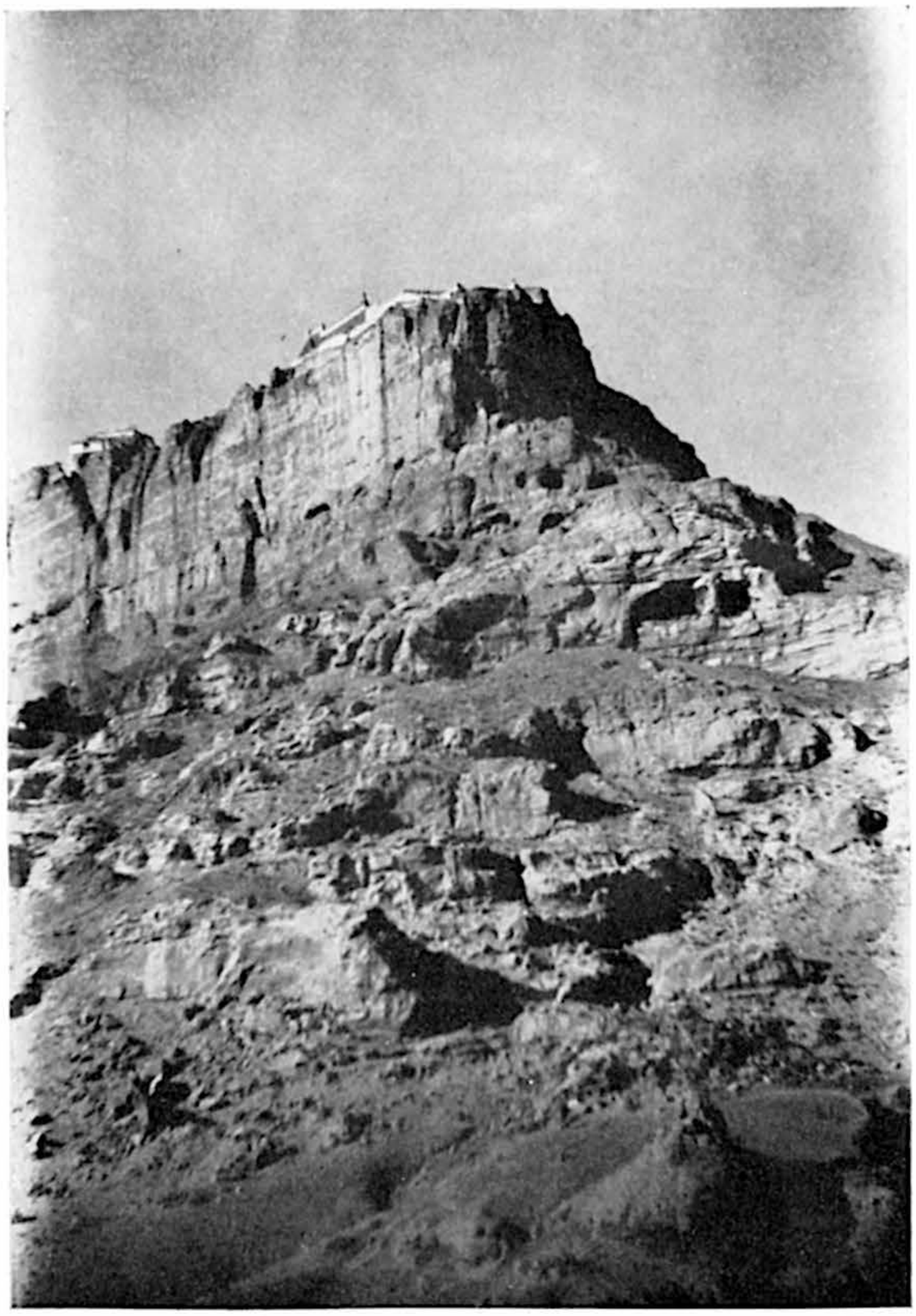
Outside the four main temples are some twenty chapels; these, too, are filled with images of Buddha whilst their walls are covered with frescoes. In one of these chapels was a pile of demoniac masks; in another was a collection of high hats surmounted with miniature imitation skulls; and we also saw a cupboard full of human skulls which were used by the Lamas to drink from on certain festivals. One of the images of Buddha which we saw was quite 50 ft. high; some images were given multiple arms and legs—one of them actually had thirty-two arms and sixteen legs—and there were several representations of a huge and unpleasant-looking black devil trampling humans underfoot. It seemed to me that many members of the Hindu pantheon had intruded into this sanctuary of Buddhism. The magnificent wooden beams which supported the roofs of the largest temples were said to have come from Bashahr. But I saw also a store of wood containing one or two large, properly sawn tree trunks; and I was told that this wood had been taken from the Sutlej, and that the store was renewed every year with wood rescued from the river. I am still puzzled to know where this wood can have come from, for I saw no trees near the Sutlej above this point; but the truth of what I was told was vouched for by one of the monks who had himself assisted in the work of salvage. The Khanpo was not in residence at the monastery when I was there; but I was hospitably entertained by the Changsud, who had pleasant recollections of his last meeting with Europeans. He had been a small boy when the British Expedition had gone to Lhasa in 1904, and he and his friends had followed the soldiers collecting souvenirs and being given novel dainties to eat.

The road from Tuling led us through a country of gigantic castles and towering pillars of mud such as we had seen near Dunkar; and after nightfall on the second day we arrived at Daba (660). In Tibetan *Da* means an arrow and *Ba* a place; the tradition is that a Lama of the neighbourhood, on being consulted as to the location of a new town that was to be founded, drew a bow at a venture, and the place where the arrow fell became the centre of what is now the town of Daba. The houses are built on ridges along the face of high mud cliffs, whilst on top of the cliffs are the monastery and Jongpon's residence. The plain below, watered by a broad stream of snow water from the mountains to the South-west, is marked out by white boundary stones into a number of fields in which barley is grown. There were no traders at Daba this year and I only stayed there long enough to interview the Jongpon's agent before starting off for Nabra (668), a grazing ground in a lonely valley where the traders from Niti in British Garhwal had all congregated this year. There are no houses there; just two lines of white tents, perhaps fifty in all, where the traders live, and round about a few of the black tents of woven yak hair used by the Dokpas, or Tibetan shepherds. One of the disputes which I was called upon to settle when

I was at Nabra concerned the respective claims of two traders to the exclusive right of trading with the Senior Garpon. The first trader produced a written agreement, drawn out thirty years ago on properly stamped paper, by which the Senior Garpon, in consideration of certain payments made to him, pledged himself and his successors in office to buy Indian goods from one man only, the name of this man being explicitly stated. The present owner of the document had either inherited or purchased it from the man in whose favour it had originally been made out, and had got it endorsed by another Senior Garpon only three years ago. The second party to the quarrel claimed that his agreement with the Senior Garpon, also binding on the Senior Garpon's successors in office, went back fifty years; and, though he could produce no documentary proof at the time, the testimony of all the other traders was on his side. This was the first of many disputes resulting from the Arat or Mitr system of trade which came before me for settlement. The Arat, or goodwill, system is an old one and is regarded with the greatest respect by traders from Garhwal and Almora. Indian traders make what is called 'Gambiya Satta' with Tibetans. Each party drinks some 'Chang' (a kind of beer brewed from barley) in which there is a small admixture of gold dust, and after this ceremony the two parties and their families remain from generation to generation each other's Arats or 'Mitrs'. The normal implication of the relationship thus formed is that the Tibetan party has pledged himself not to sell his wool or salt or borax to any party but the one which has entered into the sacred contract with him; but the pledge on the side of the Tibetan, as in the dispute to which I have alluded, may be that he will never buy goods from any one but the trader with whom he has made Gambiya Satta, or from members of his family. The obligation imposed on the contracting trader and his family is that they will, from year to year, purchase all the goods that the Tibetan party may have to sell. The advantages of the contract are obviously on the side of the trader; and traders will pay a reliable Tibetan who owns large flocks of sheep a big sum of money for the privilege of becoming his 'Arat'. These 'Arats', like the goodwill of a business, can be sold at will by traders, and the Tibetan never disputes the privileges of the man who purchases the exclusive right to trade with him. Written agreements with Tibetans are rare, but the acknowledged rights of any trader to be the 'Arat' of a Tibetan are regarded as sacred and inviolable. One of the commonest forms of dispute arises when some Tibetan has inherited flocks from his mother as well as his father, and the traders who were the Arats of his mother's family and those who were the Arats of his father's family both claim the exclusive right of trading with him. Such disputes are generally settled by reference to Panchayat; the Tibetan's preference in the matter is never under any circumstances taken into consideration.

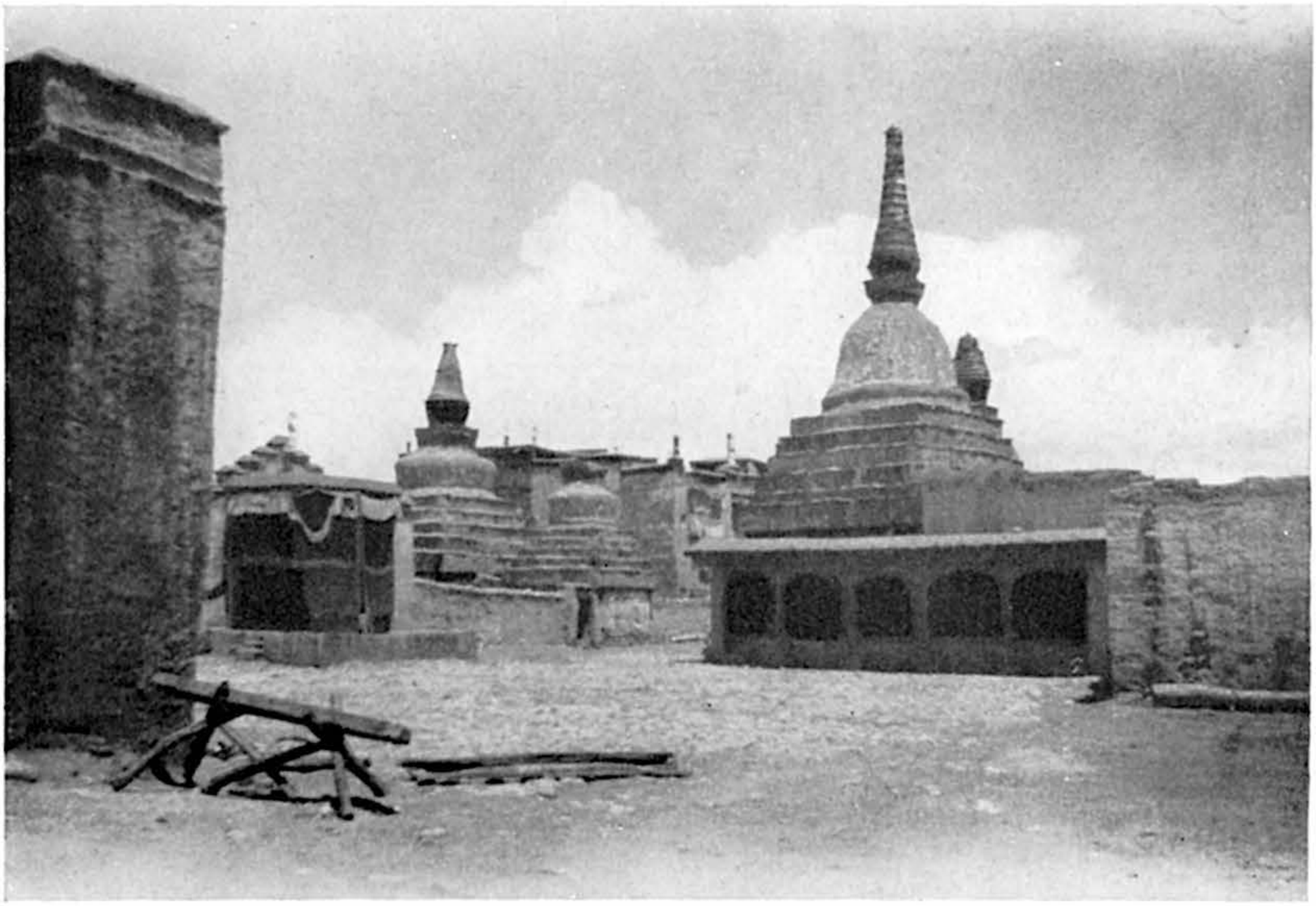
While I was at Nabra there was some excitement over the capture of three Tibetan thieves. It appeared that for some ten days a party of beggars, three sturdy men and some women and children, had been loitering about the camp and living on the generosity of the traders. Three days before I arrived at Nabra they all disappeared, and with them went a large quantity of wool, food and other things. The traders reported their loss to the Jongpon's agent at Daba; and he, probably on account of my impending visit, armed some servants and sent them in pursuit of the thieves, who were captured and taken to Nabra on the day following that on which I had arrived there. The three men, brought before the servant of the Jongpon who was in charge of the mart, had confessed to their crime, and when I arrived on the scene, were on their knees in front of his tent, swaying to and fro, with hands bound tightly behind their backs and tears streaming down their faces, crying out every few seconds 'Ponbo chu chakor; Ponbo chu chakor'—'Ponbo, have mercy, have mercy upon us'. Behind them were the women and children of the party, shrieking and wailing, throwing themselves into attitudes indicative of the deepest despair, and endeavouring by every means in their power to kindle a spark of pity in the heart of their judge. The wretched creatures had, indeed, much to fear. As soon as the sanction of the Jongpon's agent at Daba was received, each of the thieves would, in turn, be stripped and tied face downwards on to a framework of wood; on either side of him would stand a man with a leathern thong, and these two men would give each thief alternate lashes on the tender part of the thighs; after the first pair of strokes the number 'One' is called, and so the beating goes on, each pair of strokes counting as one, until the number of strokes ordered by the judge has been completed. Men who are beaten generally lose consciousness before the hundredth stroke and are unable to walk for weeks afterwards. I was surprised that the thieves I saw had confessed their guilt; but I was told that if they had not taken this course they would have been beaten until they did, and at the end of it all would have received just as severe a sentence; so that confession is generally made at an early stage of the proceedings. When thieves or dacoits are captured, members of their family are also punished—a custom which ensures that family influence will invariably be exercised on the side of law and order. The thieves whom I saw in custody were not beaten until after I had left; nor did I take advantage of a subsequent opportunity which was offered me of seeing this form of punishment administered.

We set off from Nabra on the morning of August 15 and, having visited the small mart of Shibchilam (702) on the way, arrived at Gianima Khargo (732) on August 19. There are no houses at this place, which is entirely uninhabited for ten months in the year. At the



DUNKAR.

PLATE 8



COURTYARD OF MONASTERY AT TULING.

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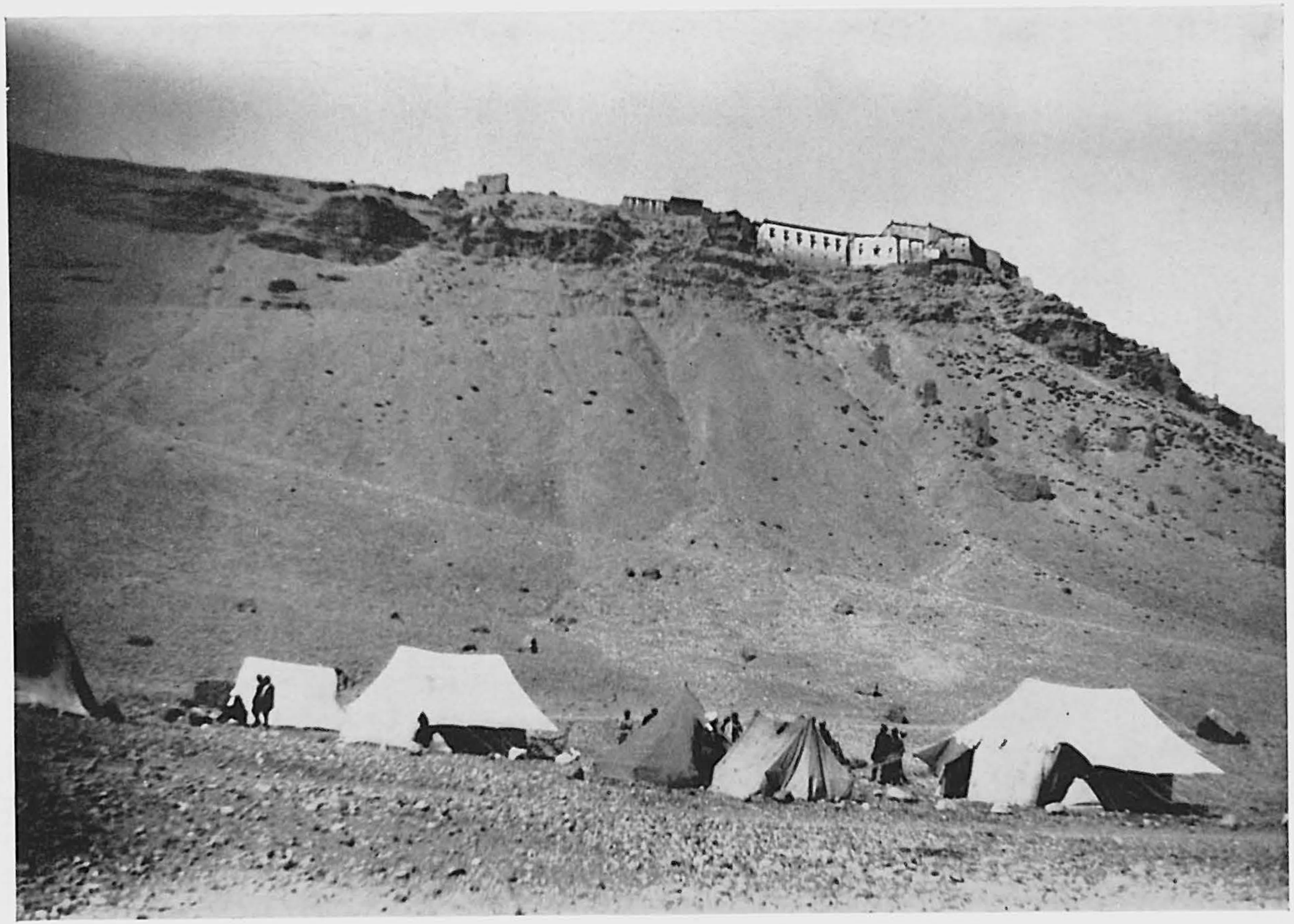
time of my visit, however, there were pitched there hundreds of tents belonging to Johari traders, and a lesser number belonging to Dokpas, officials and traders from Lhasa. To the north of the tents I was surprised to see a large lake, many miles in circumference, which was not marked on my map; the river, which *was* marked on my map, could, I found, be jumped across with ease. I halted three full days at Gianima Khargo and made many new Tibetan acquaintances. The Kharpon of Kyunglung, who was administering the mart on behalf of the absentee Daba Jongpon, was a small, bearded man, officious and obsequious. Of higher rank was the Chachho, a young man from Lhasa of good birth and exceptional intelligence, whose duty it was to collect taxes from the Dokpas. The traders from Lhasa were big men with hard faces, but were frankly delighted at the interest I displayed in them and their possessions and took a childish pride in showing me their treasures. Some of these traders were armed with most up-to-date and powerful rifles; at Gianima Khargo I saw guns or rifles from England, America, Germany, India, Russia, China and Japan. Those who could not afford guns of Western pattern carried matchlocks of Tibetan manufacture with prongs of wood attached on which the barrel is rested when aim is being taken; and the Dokpas who could not afford to buy a native matchlock carried, as a precaution against dacoits, wooden poles fitted out to look like guns.

On August 23 we marched the few miles which separated Gianima Khargo from Gianima Chakra (738), the mart of the Darma traders. Here, too, there are no permanent houses, but the traders pitch their tents on the shore of a large lake (also unmarked on any map) for the period of the trading season. A number of Nepalis visit this mart, not to trade, but in charge of yaks used for purposes of transport. The Nepalis are racially akin to the Tibetans, and many mixed marriages take place. The male offspring of such marriages become Nepalese subjects and the female offspring Tibetan subjects. This arrangement is probably an ancient one, dating from the days when Nepal was an independent, fighting nation and wanted men, while Tibet, as is evident from the long-established and almost universal practice of polyandry, has always been short of women. My four days at Gianima Chakra were almost entirely occupied in the settlement of disputes amongst traders. The Darma men are a dissolute set of drunkards, but endowed with unexpected tenacity of purpose; and they prosecute with vigour, when sober, the quarrels they have started in their cups.

We left Gianima Chakra on August 28 and arrived at Taklakot (780) on August 30. (Plate 9) This is the biggest mart in Western Tibet, and the traders from Chaudans and Biyans who frequent it stay there for six months in the year. Their houses have stone walls, being roofed with canvas, and the traders live in comparative comfort. There are several



CAMP AT TAKLAKOT: JONGPEN'S PALACE ABOVE.

thousands of acres of cultivated land round Talkakot, more than in the whole of the rest of Western Tibet, and on this land barley and peas are grown. Taklakot, probably because of its proximity to the Indian border, is by far the most advanced district in Western Tibet; fields are walled off from each other; there are bridges across the rivers and streams; the houses of the wealthier Tibetans, no less than the monasteries, are solidly built, of stone; there are smooth tracks across the hills; and the whole place is redolent of a prosperity which I had seen nowhere else in Western Tibet. There are, too, other signs of alien influence; the uses of soap, unknown further north, are familiar to Taklakot Tibetans; the women paint their faces; and the institution of false law-suits is far more common than elsewhere in Western Tibet. The Tibetans of the Purang Jong, whose capital is Taklakot, and those of the Rudok Jong, differed very markedly in many of their characteristics. The southerners were smaller in build, more agile of wit, quick to anger, seldom truthful and never reliable. The northerners, on the other hand, were large-bodied, dull-minded and easy-tempered, slower both in the making and breaking of promises than their southern compatriots. These distinctions apply, of course, only to the Dokpas; for the officials are recruited almost entirely from Lhasa. The Purang Jongpon, whose palace looks down on Taklakot from the crest of a high ridge to the north, had returned to Lhasa the previous year to fill the post of City Magistrate there, and his agent was in some doubt as to whether it was or was not his duty to come and call on me. In the end curiosity overcame pride and, having sent a number of servants in front to make certain that due preparation had been made to receive him, he arrived at my tent with an air of rather self-conscious condescension. He very soon thawed, however, under the influence of some brandy, and before he went he had assured me that he would come and see me every day until I left. Further good-feeling was created by an impromptu shooting match between his servants and the Gurkhas, and he proved really grateful for my offer to clean his rifles and those of his staff which, he said, were so choked with dirt and rust that it was dangerous to use them. My work at Taklakot, where I stayed for six days, was not made easier by the reluctance which traders and Tibetans alike displayed to telling the truth.

In judicial cases the examination of Tibetan witnesses led to continual surprises. No Tibetan of the lower class has the least idea of his age, and on many occasions their guesses must have been quite twenty years wrong. Again, it was impossible to find out the name of a witness' father if he were dead, as no Tibetan dares to provoke the anger of Heaven by speaking the name of a dead man, and for a son to mention the name of his dead father, or for another man to give the name in the presence of the son, would constitute a gross breach of piety. An oath to

GURLA MANDHATA FROM WEST SHORE OF LAKE MANASAROWAR.

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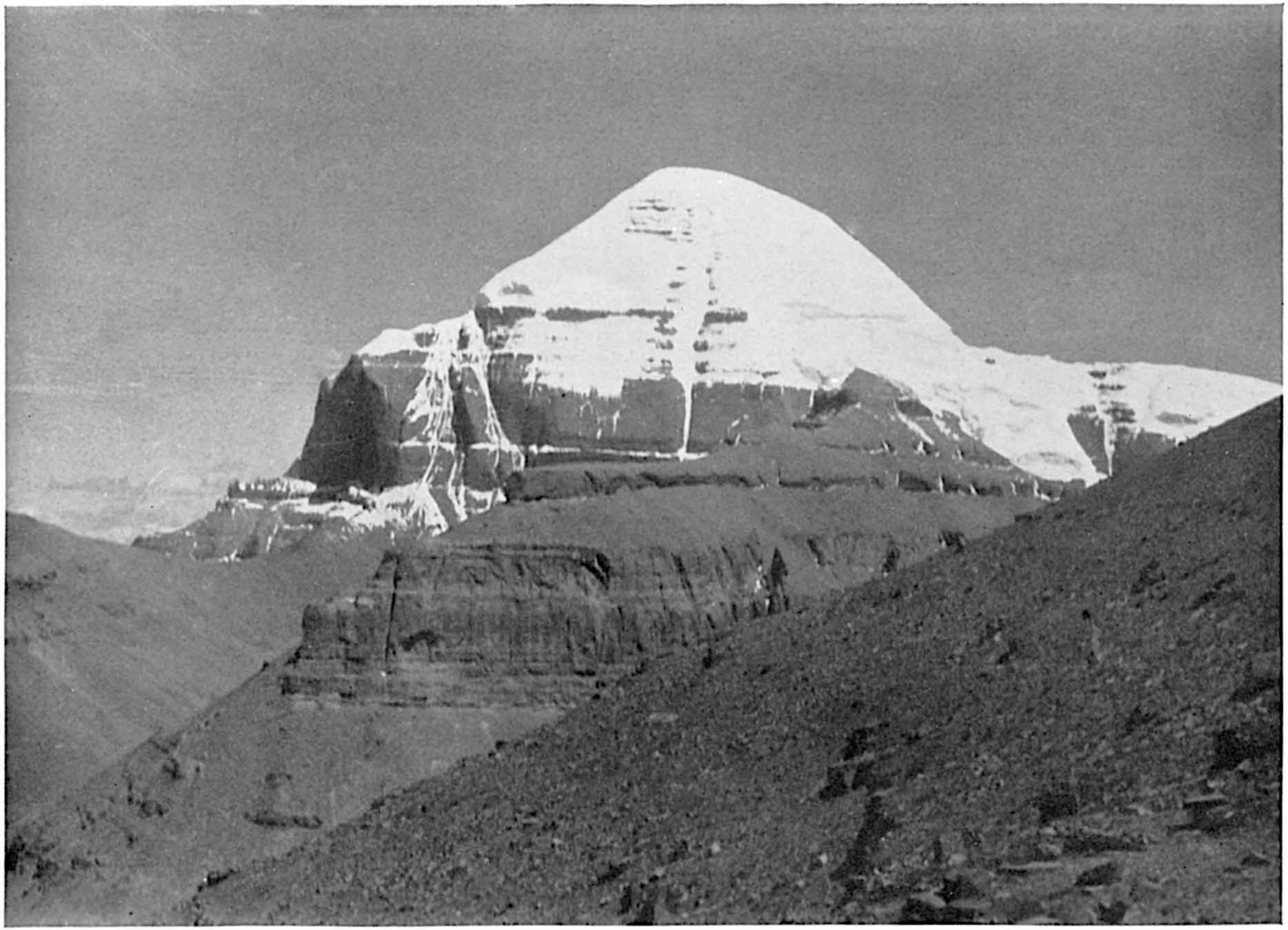
speak the truth appeared to be violable at will unless the words were spoken down the muzzle of an empty gun barrel, held in such a way that it pointed upwards. I did not find that any one who took an oath in this way told anything but the truth, and witnesses who did not propose to speak the truth invariably refused to take an oath in this form. The origin or significance of this strange custom I was unable to discover.

On September 6 we left Taklakot for our visit to the small marts in the neighbourhood of the Holy Lakes. We followed the pilgrim route which passes the tomb of Zorawar Singh, crosses the high plain to the west of Gurla Mandhata (25,325 ft.) and descends to the shore of Lake Rakas Tal at a place known as Langak Tunkang (822). The season for pilgrimages was over, but the track was a well-trodden one and there were still belated Lamas from far distant monasteries who were only now starting on their return journey. I myself made a detour to visit the mart at Thokar (Thakkur; Thui) on the southern shore of Lake Manasarowar; but my Tibetan guide could not manage the whole distance, the going was more difficult than I had expected, and I did not complete the 28-mile march until long after sunset. From Langak Tunkang we set off at dawn for Barkha (844). On the way all the party bathed in the cold but holy waters of Lake Manasarowar (Plate 10) and thus obtained remission of sins past, present and future. Many sacred treasures were also collected by members of the party: (i) pebbles from the shore of Lake Manasarowar which are sewn up in a bag and hung round the necks of ponies before they are left to graze on the mountains, so that they will not stray, or be attacked by wild beasts, or stolen; (ii) parts of fish thrown up on the shore of Manasarowar, which, when burnt, relieve by their smell all pain, whether of man or beast, and are a sure remedy in every case of sickness; (iii) water from Manasarowar, which, drunk by the dying, ensures their immediate entry into Heaven; and (iv) sand from the Manasarowar shore which is placed in the mouth of a dead man to prevent him being re-born into the body of an animal. All these and many other potent and holy charms were collected in the neighbourhood of the celebrated lake, sacred alike to Buddhists and Hindus. Near the Jiu Monastery we crossed the stream, deep and fast flowing after recent rains, whose existence has so often been disputed by geographers and which empties the surplus water of Manasarowar into the neighbouring lake of Rakas Tal; and thence we pressed on to the village of Barkha, hidden in a shallow depression in a dreary plain.[3]

[3] Numerous accounts of these two holy lakes have been published; a summary of early visits is given in *H.J.*, ii, p. 103*. See also *G.J.* vol. 71, p. 439 and *A.J.* 60. 257. The whole of this region has been enthusiastically investigated by Swami Pranavananda (see *A.J.* 61. 110) and recorded in his *Pilgrim's Companion to the Holy Kailas and Manasarovar* (1938) and *Exploration in Tibet* (1939).



Photo, T. S. Blakeney

MT. KAILAS, FROM ABOVE DARCHAN.

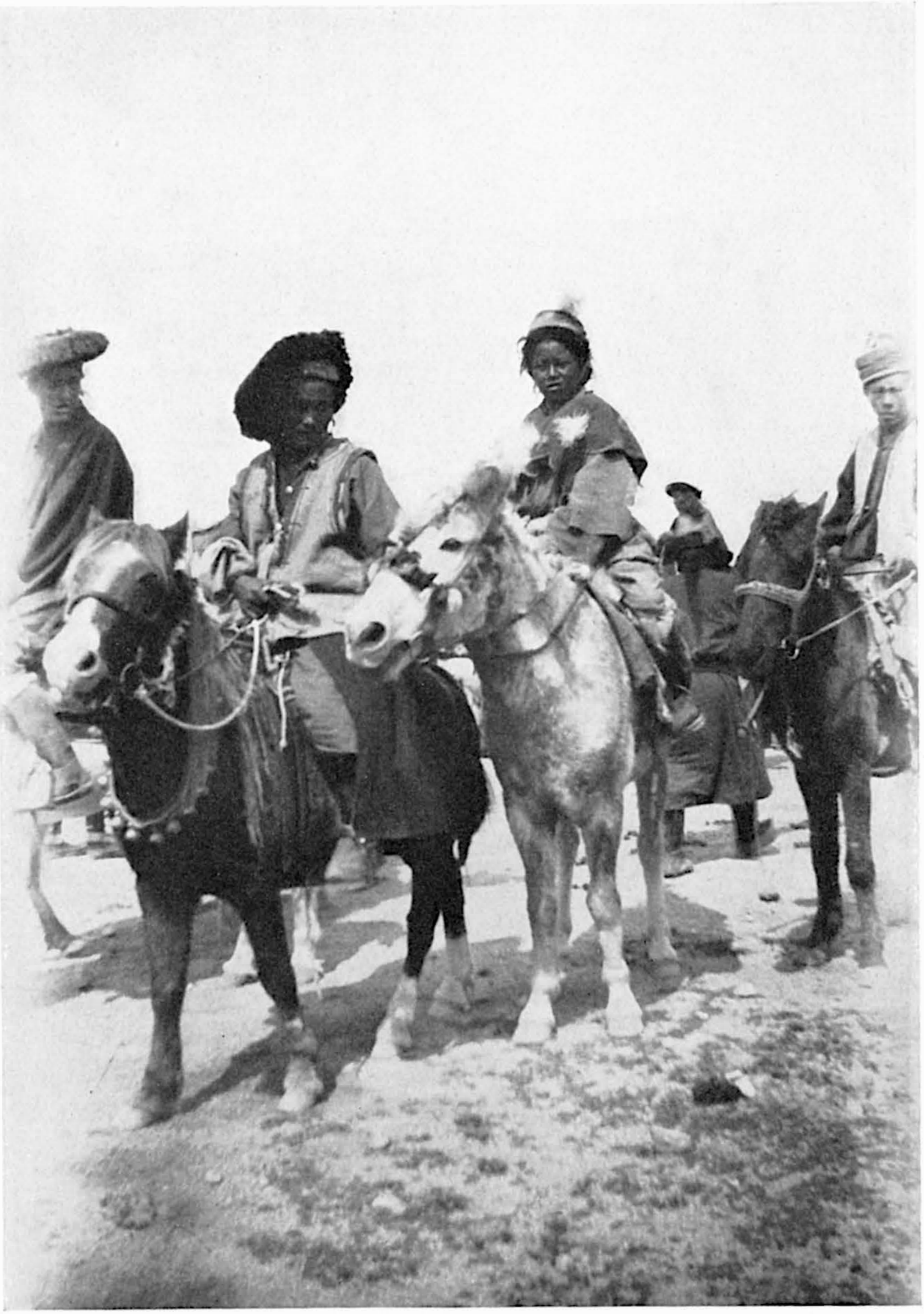
I took advantage of our one day's halt at Barkha to walk over to Darchan to inspect the small mart there. I was accompanied by several members of the party who were anxious to see the monastery at the foot of Mt. Kailas which marks the beginning and end of the pilgrim's circuit round the Holy Mountain. (Plate 11) The monastery is a Bhutanese Endowment and claims for itself and its lands and all the people connected with them complete independence of Tibet. It is normally administered by a Bhutanese official known as the Dashok, but the post has been vacant for the last two years and control of the mart as well as the monastery is now in the hands of an elderly Lama. This Lama, a handsome, well-built man with a refined face and a short beard slightly touched with grey, entertained us with real grace and courtesy. I presented him with a few small presents on behalf of the Indian Government and gave him Rs. 4/– the price of a sheep, on my own account; the other members of the party also gave him small sums of money. Thereupon, having lit candles in front of the shrine, he said prayers for each of us individually as well as for the benefit of the Government of India. Later our names were written in a large book so that he might remember to pray for us every day for a period of time proportionate to the amount of our contributions. There were only four Lamas resident in the monastery, but at least twenty children were playing in the precincts. Children, except in the vicinity of monasteries, are rarely seen in Western Tibet, and the rate of infant mortality must be very high. Each family is expected to supply one boy to be trained, from the age of about ten, for the monastic life, but I was told that, in practice, recruits for the monasteries are only compulsorily conscripted from families in which there are at least two other sons to help the parents in looking after their flocks and herds.

At Barkha we had joined the main Lhasa–Leh trade route and from there to Gartok (952) we were able to follow a well-defined track. On September 10, the day we left Barkha, some of the party were involved in an incident which might have had unpleasant consequences. The Doctor, with two unarmed Chaprassis, had ridden on ahead of the main party when he heard the report of a gun, and a bullet, so he states, passed within a foot of his head. Immediately afterwards a rough-looking Tibetan emerged from concealment and, approaching the Doctor, asked him who he was, what he had with him, and other similar questions. The Doctor replied that he was a member of the staff of the British Trade Agency and that the rest of the party, well armed, was following close behind. The Tibetan now began to reload his matchlock, so the Doctor rode off with all speed, closely followed by the Chaprassis. The Tibetan pursued him for a short way, and then, thinking better of it, turned aside to look at a Kiang which had been pulled down by his dogs and was now being mauled by them. It was

only when he had gone some way that the Doctor remembered the revolver with which he was armed. Recovering his courage, which had temporarily deserted him, he returned and, accompanied by the Chaprassis, crept up quietly behind the Tibetan. When they were only a few yards away the Tibetan, hearing their footsteps, turned round and raised his gun; but the Doctor fired first, to one side of the Tibetan, and the latter, now thoroughly frightened, allowed himself to be disarmed without more ado. Travelling with our party for purposes of security was an official, an agent of the Purang Jongchung, and he and I held a joint enquiry into the matter on the spot. We decided to keep the dacoit, for dacoit he clearly was, in custody till the following day when we would have an opportunity of discovering from local Dokpas what they knew about the man. The next day we were fortunate enough to meet a servant of the Barkha Tarjum, in whose territory the offence had been committed. I was faced with two alternatives; either I could take the dacoit with me to Gartok and hand him over to the Garpons to be punished, or I could send him back to be dealt with by the Barkha Tarjum. The adoption of the former plan would necessitate keeping the dacoit under strict supervision, night and day, for nearly a week, and at the end of it all the Garpons might insist on my being present when a hand or foot was cut off; whilst if I sent the man back to the Barkha Tarjum he could not be punished with more than a severe beating and we should not have the trouble of looking after him. The Tarjum's servant, indeed, anxious to display his zeal in the cause of justice, begged me to stay for another hour and see punishment inflicted then and there. This, for many reasons, I was unwilling to do. I told the Tarjum's servant that I appreciated his kind thought, but that I was perfectly content to leave the case in the hands of his master who would, I had no doubt, deal with the delinquent as he deserved. And I thereupon handed over the dacoit into his custody. I heard subsequently that the dacoit was sentenced to 100 stripes; so that he would, in fact, get 200. More serious in Tibetan eyes than the crime of attempted dacoity was the slaughter of the Kiang; for a recent edict of the Government at Lhasa has strictly forbidden the smoking of tobacco or the slaying of wild animals throughout Western Tibet on the ground that these practices tend to shorten the life of the reigning Dalai Lama.

The dacoit was handed over to the servant of the Barkha Tarjum at Sharlachakong (877), a place famous for the red clay which is found there and transported to Lhasa in immense quantities every year. This clay is supposed to have wonderful medicinal properties and, when applied to wounds or sores on animals, heals them instantly. We left Sharlachakong on September 11 and, after visiting on our way the celebrated monastery and sulphur springs at Tretarpuri, arrived

at Minsar (Menze) (902) on September 13. We were compelled to halt there for one day as no yaks were available. Some had been requisitioned by the Jongchung for the carriage of his goods, but the greater number, nearly two hundred, had been hired by Johari traders at Gianima who were moving on to Gartok for the Annual Fair. The Minsar Tarjum was most courteous and made energetic efforts to collect yaks for us. He had been to Calcutta as well as to China to trade on behalf of the Lhasa Government and was an exceptionally intelligent man. In his present appointment he received no salary but was expected to make what he could by hiring out the hundred and six Government yaks which were under his control. In the terrible winter of 1927, he told me, all except eight of these yaks had died, and he would have to replace them at his own expense before he was relieved of his post. When an official hands over charge to his successor he is expected to be able to account for every item entered on the list which he signed when he embarked on his tenure of office. In this list are entered details about the lands and other properties which are vested in the official for the time being; but the most important item is that which concerns population, and each official is bound, under penalty of a heavy fine, to hand over to his successor as many head of men, women and children as were entrusted to his care by his predecessor. There can be little doubt that the population of Western Tibet has decreased greatly in the course of the last hundred years, and these provisions concerning the number of subjects handed over by one official to another were probably designed by a Government which viewed the decrease in population with anxiety and hoped, by these means, to check the evil. The provisions are entirely ineffective. An official taking over charge is paid a round sum by his predecessor to overlook the discrepancies between the actual number of the inhabitants within his jurisdiction and the number recorded in the charge sheet; and when this official's term of office expires he pays a similar sum of money to his successor for the same indulgence on his part. The existence of the provisions explains, however, the resentment which local officials show when their subjects, unable to withstand oppression any longer, flee either to another part of the country or to British territory. If the fugitives are recovered they are punished with such severity that for many years afterwards others are deterred from pursuing a similar course. At least two months are spent in stock-taking and the examination of accounts when any important official, such as a Jongpon, is relieved of his office; and the retiring official, before he returns to Lhasa, normally spends a full year extracting money overdue on account of taxes, recovering interest on loans (at 25 per cent per annum), and collecting debts due to him on other accounts from his subjects. I was surprised to learn that the inhabitants of Minsar and the neighbourhood own allegiance



THE BOY WHO WON THE GARTOK HORSE RACE.

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not to the Dalai Lama but to the Maharajah of Kashmir. Formerly, I was told, the forty families resident in the Minsar district used to supply eight men to the Tibetan Army, but now, being subjects of the Maharajah of Kashmir, they are exempt from this obligation, though they are still compelled to provide free transport for Tibetan officials travelling through their territory. Every year the Lumbardar of Rupshu or some other petty official from Ladakh comes to Minsar to collect the tribute due to the Maharajah of Kashmir. The tribute consists of sixty sheep, twenty goats, ten kids, six yaks and sixty lamb-skins; whilst a sum of sixty rupees is paid, half in rupees, half in tankas, on account of the travelling expenses of the Ladakhi official who collects the tribute.

We left Minsar on September 14 and arrived at Gartok (952) on September 17, the day before the Charchan, or Annual Fair, began. All the officials of Western Tibet either come in person or send their representatives to Gartok on the occasion of the Charchan, and the Garpons are busy hearing law-suits and transacting other official business for many days on end. The Charchan proper, however, only lasts for two days and these are devoted entirely to pleasure. The great event of the Charchan is the horse-race, which is run after the moon has set and before the sun has risen over the neighbouring hills on the morning of the first day of the Fair. I was determined to see the race, and at an early hour of the morning of September 18 I set off with Raghu Das and the Jemadar across the Gartok Plain. The starting point of the race is at Nakyu, some seven miles to the south-east of Gartok; the course, which is about seven miles long, leads at first over a boulder-strewn plain, but the latter part of it is over an excellent surface of gravel and sparsely-growing grass; it ends at a point about three miles from Gartok beneath the mountains to the north-east. It was a still, cold morning and the moon was full as we made our way across the plain to the end of the course and, as we went, I was told stories about the great race and its long past. There are prizes for the first five ponies to come in, and the owner of the winning pony receives Rs.300/–, presented by the Lhasa Government, and a pony, presented by the Chumurti Pon; the owner of the last pony to arrive is given a basketful of dung—a prize symbolic of his pony's position in the rear of the others. The contest is open only to officials, though whether this is a rule which is really ancient, or whether it is a limitation imposed comparatively recently by the Garpons to limit the entry and ensure that only those officially subordinate to them can compete, I do not know. On this occasion the twenty or thirty ponies entered for the race certainly belonged to members of the official class only. The ponies are ridden by small boys of 12 or 13 years of age, generally from Rudok, where they are specially trained for the occasion; their clothes are

bound tightly to them to prevent their flapping in the wind; the racing colours of the owner, however, are not worn by the jockey but are painted on his mount. The first prize is so valuable that the Garpons make great efforts to win it and use every means, scrupulous or otherwise, to achieve their object. Sometimes their retainers are stationed near the end of the course to prevent other competitors arriving first; more often other ponies are not allowed to start until those which belong to the Garpons have already covered one or two miles. The pony with the most celebrated history was a chestnut from Minsar which, after winning the race two years in succession, appeared so likely to win in the future also that the Garpons attempted to buy it. The owner was naturally unwilling to sell and managed for a time to keep the pony for himself while the two Garpons quarrelled as to which of them should have the privilege of buying it. Eventually the Garpons settled their difference by a compromise; each was to own the horse in alternate years. And the real owner had now no longer any chance of keeping the pony for himself. The bargain finally driven was that the Garpons should hire the pony each year, for the day of the race only, for Rs. 16/–. The pony actually won the race for five more years, so that the Garpon's investment was a profitable one. It is said of this pony that in the race it used to lead its opponents by such a distance after two or three miles that it could afford to stop and graze off favourite patches of grass. Another celebrated pony, which belonged to the Senior Garpon, had run in the race several times. On the last occasion that it ran its girth broke, its rider was thrown and killed, and the pony finished the course on its own, coming in an easy first. As it belonged to the Senior Garpon, it was awarded the prize. As we walked across the plain I heard these and many other stories about the race; but soon we arrived at the finishing-point, guided thither by the flare of torches; and there, in the gathering light of the dawn, (for the moon had set while we were still on our way), standing about a small Shamiana (pavilion) in which the two Garpons were sitting, we saw a crowd of about seventy men and horses. The men were dressed in the most picturesque clothes, donned only on this great annual occasion, and wore elaborate and gaily-coloured head-dresses. We had not been there more than ten minutes, and the sun had not yet risen above the neighbouring hills, when the first of the competing ponies came in sight, closely followed by a second. Dismounting near the Garpon's Shamiana the boy who had ridden the winning pony received the congratulations of the Senior Garpon, who owned the animal (Plate 12). The second pony, which belonged to the Rudok Jongpon, arrived, tactfully, some fifty yards behind the winner. Eight ponies completed the course; two others were seen careering across the plain in the direction of their grazing ground near Gartok itself; while the rest had given up after covering half the course.

When the race was over, a procession was formed, and the Tibetan spectators (the Garpons referred to them as their 'Army') rode back to Gartok, now in line, now in file, while the boy jockeys circled round them or made dashing displays of galloping in front. Before Gartok was reached a monument, built round bundles of prayers and other sacred charms, had to be passed; and around this the boy jockeys rode perhaps a dozen times very slowly and with bent heads. Nobody knew why this was done. It was the custom, I was told.

At about noon of the same day began a display of riding and shooting which lasted for several hours. The Garpons sat on a dais or platform made of dried mud overhung by a large canopy, while at their feet, at a height above the ground proportionate to their rank, were seated the officials of Western Tibet or the men whom they had sent to represent them. Members of the 'Army' which we had seen at the race earlier in the day, still in the same ceremonial dress, performed feats of horsemanship in front of the Garpons and the assembled crowd. Some, armed with bows and arrows and mounted on fast ponies, shot between two marks set up opposite the dais as they galloped past. Others performed the same feat with Tibetan matchlocks (Plate 13) At frequent intervals the Garpons were provided with refreshment by women chosen, I was surprised to hear, for their beauty; and finally all the performers passed before the Garpons in review, each bowing low as he went by. The evening of that day was devoted to eating and drinking and the revelry was kept up to a late hour. The main feature of the second day of the Fair was the dancing in the evening, which took place in front of a pavilion erected for the Garpons at one end of the Senior Garpon's house. We had seen a troupe of Tibetan dancers giving a performance at Gianima Chakra; then masks had been worn, men and women participated in the same dances, the steps had been vigorous and the music lively. At Gartok we saw a different type of dancing. The steps were without exception slow, rhythmical and dignified; a reed pipe and a drum provided the simple musical accompaniment, the parties of men and the parties of women never joined in the same dance, and the different dances were given by bands of people from different districts. The dresses of the dancers were picturesque in the extreme, but, in the case both of the men and women, the head-dress was the most striking part of their equipment. The men from Purang, for instance, wore high, conical hats of white cloth; whilst the women wore, hanging over their foreheads in front and coming down to their necks behind, sheets of ornamented and finely-chased silver studded with turquoise and fringed with tassels of silk at the end of which were hung small silver coins. At the end of their performance the dancers were rewarded with white scarves, the presentations being made, on behalf of the Garpons, by the Senior member of their scarlet-cloaked staff.

I had decided to leave Gartok for the return journey on September 26, and the intervening days were busy ones as new traders were continually arriving and a number of Tibetan officials also called on me. The most interesting of these were the Sarpon and the Chumurti Pon. The Sarpon's rank is equal to that of the Garpons, though they take precedence of him in their own territory. He administers the goldfields and is, with the Jongchung, the Chief Government trader. Those to whom he wishes to sell must buy—at his price. Not even the Garpons can refuse to buy what he offers them. The Sarpon, unlike the Garpons, is a permanent Government official, and is allowed to take, as his annual salary, goods to the value of Rs.600/– from the Government stock. He is also allowed free transport and food. On the other hand, the taxes which he collects from the gold diggers (each man pays 6 annas weight of gold per year) and the fines which he imposes in criminal cases go to the Government, and not into his own pocket. The present Sarpon is a young man of 26, well-educated and with pleasant manners; he visits Lhasa every winter and returns in the spring with fresh supplies of cloth and tea for sale. The Chumurti Pon, through whose territory we had travelled on our way to Rudok, was also young and intelligent. The ponies of his district are famous throughout the hill country for their powers of endurance. He told me that their numbers varied between 200 and 225, half of them being owned by residents of Spiti. The Spiti men pay one rupee per pony per year for the privilege of grazing their animals on the rich Chumurti uplands; half this sum, eight annas, goes to the Pon, and half to the Tibetan who looks after the pony. In addition to the pony which he gives to the winner of the Annual Horse-race, the Chumurti Pon also gives a prize to the winner of the archery competition. This year the victor was one of the Senior Garpon's servants. The master, however, claimed the prize, the servant was not in a position to object, and the Pon was compelled, much against his will, to present the prize to the Senior Garpon. I was anxious to make inquiries from the Pon about certain dacoities which had been taking place in his district, but he assured me that there were now no dacoits left. Recently two dacoits had been robbing and looting extensively and had terrorised the whole countryside. He, however, had sent a band of twelve armed men after them. The dacoits took refuge in a cave at the top of a precipitous mountain, and there they waited till their pursuers came within earshot. The dacoits them threatened to shoot if any one came nearer; they disclosed the place where the looted goods were concealed; and promised that if they were now allowed to depart in peace they would never again rob a subject of the Chumurti Pon. Their conditions were accepted; the stolen goods were recovered and the dacoits were escorted peacefully beyond the borders of the district. One of the

most interesting traders I met was a Ladakhi whose brother was this year in charge of the Lapchak Mission, an advance party of which I had met near Minsar with fifty yak loads of dried apricots bound for Lhasa. This trader travels from Leh to Lhasa, a journey of 2½ months, every year, and sometimes returns through India. His agents in Khotan and Yarkand supply him with the jade cups which are so highly prized at Lhasa. He told me, with what truth I do not know, that eight years ago a party of European archaeologists went to Khotan and made excavations, taking away with them when they went all the belongings of an old Buddhist Monastery there. Since that time the Buddhist inhabitants of Khotan have been steadily losing faith in their old religion, and this year eight hundred of them were converted to Islam. The trader assured me that the dismantling of their monastery was the sole cause of these Buddhists' dissatisfaction with the old faith and their conversion to the new one.

A heavy snowfall on the night of September 25 made a start on the following morning undesirable and there was also some difficulty in procuring the necessary number of yaks. We got away, however, on the morning of September 27, and made a long march to a camping ground on the further side of the Jongchung La. I had provided the majority of the party with ponies and also followed in the rear myself to ensure that nobody got left behind. The sun had set by the time I reached the place where our tents were pitched. I found that the acting Chaprang Jongpon, who was on his way to Gartok, had also camped at the same spot and I spent an hour in his tent, drinking tea and talking, before I moved on to my own tent. I was then told that two of the Gurkhas had not yet arrived. This was a serious matter as it was a dark night and very cold, we were at a high altitude, and the Gurkhas did not know the way. I ordered rifle shots to be fired immediately and got ready to go out and look for the missing men. Just as I and two others were setting off, however, a hail from the distance announced the Gurkhas' safe arrival. One of them had been unable to stand the strain of the ascent over the Jongchung La and the other had remained behind to help him. When I had crossed the pass they had been sheltering from the wind under cover of some rocks and had thus escaped my notice. In spite of the darkness they had not wandered far from the track and the rifle shots finally shewed them the right direction. I spent most of the following morning in the tent of the acting Jongpon, the nephew of the real Jongpon, an intelligent and courteous young man of 24, extraordinarily handsome and deeply interested in what he learned from me about Western manners and customs. We parted with mutual regret, he to collect his ponies before moving on to Gartok the next day, I to cover before sunset the 14 miles which lay between me and our next camp. The march was an easy one,

Plate 13

Traders at Gartok, carrying matchlocks and bow and arrow.

Plate 14

Photo, Major R. Hamond]

Prayer flags, on summit of Shirang La.

and those who had felt the strain of the previous day's exertions had taken it in turn to ride the ponies. On September 29 we crossed the Laoche La (18,500 ft.), which presented no difficulties. The gradient on the ascent was steep but the surface was excellent, and, though the march was one of 20 miles, there were no casualties on the way. On the following day we reached Shangtse (1008), the summer headquarters of the Chaprang Jongpon. The village, a cluster of mud huts on level ground by the side of a broad stream, was surrounded by fields of barley stubble and, for the first time since we had crossed into Tibet three months earlier, we saw vegetables growing. The monastery was situated in the usual position, at the top of a neighbouring mud mountain, and was said to be very ancient.

From Shangtse to Miang (1075) our journey was uneventful. The country is intersected by high ridges and equally deep gorges and the tracks which we had to follow were execrable. The villages we passed through showed signs of a prosperity which I had not seen anywhere else in Tibet, except at Taklakot. Villages were still to be found only at long intervals, but those there were possessed fields of barley, while houses built of stone were not uncommon. Villages such as Luk (1045) and Nooh (1056), though insignificant on even a large-scale map, are bigger, more populous and more prosperous than Gartok, Demchok and other places in the Indus basin which would appear, from the map, to be places of much greater importance. The truth is that these villages, being scattered about in country where travelling is necessarily strenuous, are rarely visited by officials, and signs of wealth, such as the possession of a house, are not so fatal as they are at places on the main Tibetan plateau where travelling is easier and officials can make frequent visits of inspection to see whether anybody is acquiring riches of any kind. The ascent of the Shirang La (16,500 ft.) (Plate 14) from the east is always easy, but the descent on the west side was a steep one over treacherous shale slopes. When there is snow about, the western slope of the Shirang La must be extremely dangerous, but we had no difficulty as the snow which had fallen ten days earlier had all, or nearly all, disappeared. The final descent to Miang itself, however, was unpleasant for the ponies and donkeys which were now being used in addition to yaks to carry our baggage. The track makes a steep, zig-zag descent of 2,000 ft., is very rough and too narrow for laden animals. Bedding rolls were torn to ribbons by jagged, projecting rocks and several things were broken or lost when loads fell off, as they frequently did, from stumbling or frightened animals.

The track from Miang to Tiak (1084), a village on the banks of the Sutlej, was again difficult for the baggage animals. It follows the course of a small stream, crossing and recrossing it at frequent intervals. The stream flows between high sandstone cliffs, and at times the passage

TRACK ABOVE THE SUTLEJ, WEST OF TIAK:
MEN AND PONIES ARE ROUNDING A SPUR.

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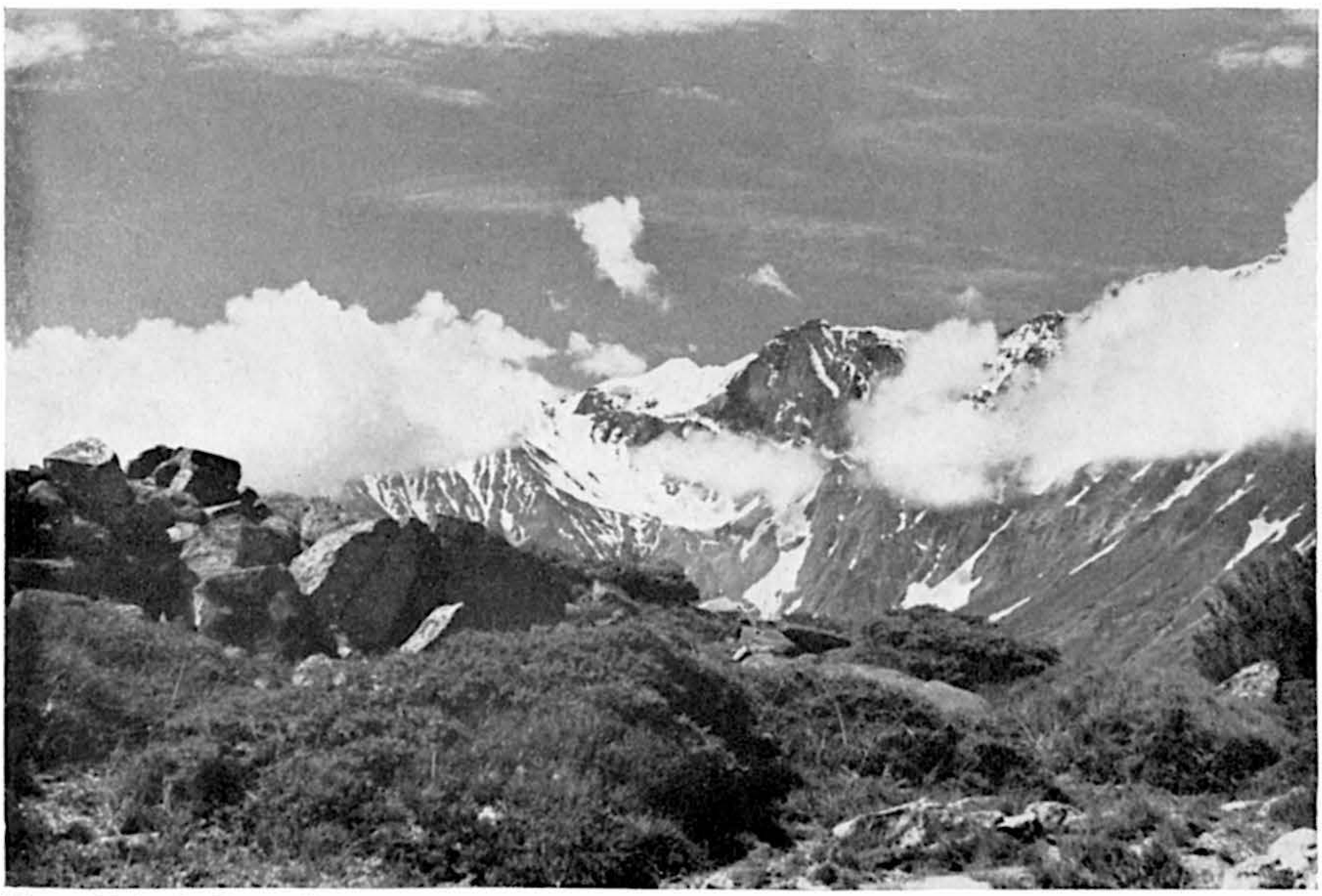
PLATE 16

CROSSING A BRIDGE OVER THE SUTLEJ.

PLATE 17



Photo, Major R. Hamond]

THE SHIPKI PASS.

between the cliffs was so narrow that the track disappeared into the stream and followed that down until there was room for it to emerge on to the banks again. This track is known as the Hindustan–Tibet Road. Between Tiak and Kiuk (1091), however, the track is dangerous as well as unpleasantly rough. The yaks and ponies carrying our baggage crossed the Sutlej about a mile below Tiak; the yaks swam across first and the ponies followed with men clinging on to them. They then followed the left bank of the Sutlej over a comparatively easy track to Kiuk. The track which the rest of us followed, along the right bank of the Sutlej as far as the bridge about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles above Kiuk, was less pleasant. The cliffs were now of rock, and where they descended sheer to the water's edge the track would rise high up above the Sutlej and find a way along ledges in the rock face (Plate 15); where there were no ledges there were rough wooden galleries in the form of scaffolding, the interstices between the poles being covered over with slabs of rock. In more than one place the track ascended or descended over huge slabs of slanting rock with cracks in them which afforded foothold enough for a man but none for a pony. There were three ponies with the party which kept to the right bank of the Sutlej, and the courage and agility they displayed in scrambling up or sliding down these slabs of rock was really remarkable. One man would grasp the bridle of the pony near the mouth and another would hold the animal by the tail, and thus they overcame successfully all the obstacles in their path. The bridge across the Sutlej was a substantial one of the type usual in the hill districts (Plate 16), and the track to Kiuk and on to Shipki (1094) (Plate 17) above the left bank of the Sutlej was comparatively good.

From Shipki to Namgia (1105) we followed the middle route which leads along a cliff face high above the Sutlej. Animals carried the baggage to the highest point of the pass, which was reached before dawn on the morning of October 11. From that point coolies shouldered the loads, though one or two particularly sure-footed yaks carried loads as far as the Hupsang ravine, which is impossible for laden animals. The ponies were with the greatest difficulty hauled up the steep and rough Hupsang ravine, and one of them injured its fore-legs on some rocks; but no serious damage was sustained, and the track leading down to Namgia beyond was broad and easy. We halted at Pooh (1115) where the Trade Agency records are stored, for six days, and left for Simla (1305) on October 19. Marching by the usual easy stages and doubling only one or two of the shortest ones, we arrived at Simla, almost exactly five months since we had left it, on the morning of November 2.