

CHAPTER XVI

TACHIENLU, THE GATE OF THIBET

THE KINGDOM OF CHIALA, ITS PEOPLE, THEIR MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

THE town of Tachienlu is situated in long. $102^{\circ} 13'$ E., lat. $30^{\circ} 3'$ N. *circa*, at an altitude of about 8400 feet. By the most direct route it is twelve days' journey from Chengtu Fu, the provincial capital, on the great highway which extends westwards to Lhassa. It is the Ultima Thule of China and Thibet, where a large and thriving trade is done in the wares of both countries. It is also the residence of the King of Chiala, who governs a very considerable tract of country and exercises a strong influence over conterminous states peopled with Thibetans. The first Occidental other than Roman Catholic priests to visit Tachienlu was the late Mr. T. T. Cooper in 1868. Since that date it has been visited by many scores of travellers, and has become fairly well known to the outside world. It is a more than ordinarily interesting place, and though much has been written concerning it the subject is far from being exhausted.

The present town is built in the narrowest of valleys at the head of a gorge, down which the river Lu cascades, falling some 4000 feet before it joins the river Tung, 18 miles distant. A branch of the Lu River bisects the town, being crossed by means of three wooden bridges, and is joined immediately below the north gate by another stream, which flows from the Ta-p'ao shan snows. The town is hemmed in on all sides by steep, treeless mountains whose grassy slopes and bare cliffs lead up to peaks culminating in eternal snow. On the whole, the situation is about the last in the world in which one would expect to find a thriving trade entrepôt. Formerly, Tachienlu occupied a site about half a mile above the present town, but

about 100 years ago it was totally destroyed by a landslip, due to a moving glacier. Some day a similar fate will doubtless overtake the existing town.

Notwithstanding its great political and commercial importance Tachienlu is a meanly built and filthy city. It is without a surrounding wall, save for a fragment which runs across near the south gate, and it has no west gate. The narrow, uneven streets are paved with stone in which pure marble largely figures, though this is only evident after some heavy downpour has washed away the usual covering of mud and filth. The houses are low, built of wood resting on foundations of shale rocks. The principal shops are by no means of imposing appearance, and, indeed, the only places noteworthy are two Chinese temples and the palace of the local king. The latter consists of several lofty semi-Chinese buildings of wood with sloping roofs and curved eaves surmounted by gilded pinnacles, the whole structure being situated in a large compound and surrounded by a high stone wall. The residences of the Chinese officials are poor, ramshackle places, and the same is true of the various inns. In the latter most of the business is transacted. Some inns that I visited contained valuable collections of porcelain and bronze-ware, and an extraordinary number of old French clocks. Very few of the clocks were in working order, but many were of large size, and how they all reached this remote place is a mystery to me.

The population of Tachienlu consists of about 700 Thibetan and 400 Chinese families and, with its floating members, is reckoned at 9000 people. In and near the town are eight lamaseries boasting 800 lamas and acolytes. The population is very mixed, consisting of pure Thibetans, pure Chinese, and half-breeds. Very few purely Chinese women are to be found in Tachienlu.

As seen in and around Tachienlu the Thibetans are a picturesque people. Of medium height and lithely but muscularly built, they have an easy carriage and independent mien. The young women are usually sprightly in manner, always cheery, with dark-brown eyes and finely cut features. Both sexes are fond of jewellery ornamented with turquoise and coral, but they are strangers to soap and water, and personal



TACHENLU; SITE OF FORMER TOWN IN FOREGROUND

cleanliness is neither appreciated nor practised. Meat, milk, butter, barley-meal, and tea constitute the favourite food of these people ; they are also fond of Chinese wine. Everybody carries on his or her person a private eating-bowl, and the average Thibetan disseminates an odour strongly suggestive of a keg of rancid butter ! The everyday dress of these people is a loose, shapeless garment of dull red or grey woollen serge, sometimes sheep-skins are substituted in part. Top-boots of soft hide with the hair inside usually encase the feet and lower legs of both sexes. The men wear their hair in a queue wound round the head and ornamented with beads and rings of silver, coral, and glass. A large silver ear-ring with a long silver and coral pendant usually decorates the left ear. The women wear their hair parted down the middle and made up into a number of small plaits, which are gathered into a queue, bound at the end by a bright red cord, and wound around the head. Silver and coral are lavishly used in their coiffure and about their persons generally. When in holiday attire these people are more gaily dressed, red-coloured trimmings to their garments being then much in evidence, whilst the wealthy affect silk and fur robes. Ornaments of silver and gold, inset with coral and turquoise, are most profusely worn. The lamas shave their heads and wear a raiment of coarse serge of a dull red or brownish colour. This has no shape, being simply a large piece of cloth thrown over the right shoulder, leaving the left bare. A similar piece of cloth is wound two or three times round the waist and reaches down to the ankle, forming a kind of pleated skirt. They are usually bareheaded and bare-footed, and each lama carries in his hand a rosary and a small praying-cylinder. They swagger through the streets with an insolent mien, and lack the good manners so delightful in the ordinary unsophisticated Thibetan. The lamaseries are usually very richly endowed with land, and most charmingly situated midst groves of Poplar and other trees. Nearly all Thibetan families of affluence maintain a lama on the premises to perform by proxy their religious duties. Many other lamas find employment as temporary chaplains to less wealthy families on occasion of marriage, illness, or death.

Commercially, Tachienlu is a most important centre,

enjoying a monopoly of the trade between this part of China and Thibet. The value of the trade is estimated at about one and three-quarter million taels. The Thibetans bring in musk, wool, deer horns, skins, gold-dust, and various medicines, and take in exchange brick tea and miscellaneous sundries. The trade is largely one of barter, but much less so than that of Sungpan Ting. Sycee and Indian rupees were formerly the only coinage current, but the Chinese during the last few years have been minting in Chengtu a rupee of their own for the special purposes of this trade-centre. Its use has been insisted upon, and, in consequence, the Indian coin has been ousted from the field. Most of the "bigger" trade is in the hands of the lamaseries on the one hand, and Chinese from the province of Shensi on the other. About 30 li to the north-east of Tachienlu gold is found at an altitude of about 11,000 feet, and placer-mining is carried on there. The gold-washing is done in exactly the same way as elsewhere in Western China, but the method of paying the miners is peculiar,—the arrangement being six baskets for the owner of the mine and a seventh for the miners. Silver also occurs at this same place. The Thibetans hold the view that gold and other precious metals grow, and that their death may result if too much is removed at any one time. How far they actually believe in this superstition is a moot point, but at times it serves as an unanswerable argument. Nine years ago a difference of opinion in the matter of assessing the profits arose between the Chief of Chiala, owner of the mine, and the head Chinese official at Tachienlu, who was apparently over-avaricious in the matter. The Chief very quietly advanced the above theory, and closed down the mines for an indefinite period! Gold in great quantity occurs in the state of Litang, west of Tachienlu; much also is mined around Th'ai-ling to the north of this town.

Being on the great highway from Peking via Chengtu to Lhasa, officials are constantly passing through Tachienlu, and the political importance of the town is very great. Although only a city of the second class the head Chinese official has the local rank of Prefect (Chiung-Liang Fu), and holds the post of commissary for the Chinese troops stationed in Thibet. Although Batang, 18 days' journey westwards, is more accurately

the frontier town, Tachienlu is actually the "Gate of Thibet." The country around and beyond is physically purely Thibetan in character, and is ruled by native chieftains. Garrisons of soldiers and a few resident Chinese officials protect the interests of the Celestial empire and keep a sharp eye on the actions of the local rulers.

It was stated at the commencement of this chapter that the King of Chiala resides at Tachienlu, and perhaps a few details concerning this kingdom and its people may be of interest. According to the Guide Book of Thibet this State came under Chinese influence during the Ming Dynasty, about A.D. 1403, and its Chief was given the rank of a second-class native official, with control over the tribes west of the river Tung and southwards to Ningyuan Fu. "The Manchu Dynasty, in consideration of the above, made the then Chief a third-class native official, with power over three trading companies. New chiefs, chiliarchs, and centurions to the extent of fifty-six were created. This illustrious Chief now controls six subsidiary chiefs, one chiliarch, and forty-eight centurions." Since the date of this appointment the Chinese have increased their grip over these regions, to the curtailment of the Chief's power and authority. Nevertheless, the Thibetans of this region acknowledge this Chief as their supreme ruler, and in domestic affairs his authority is absolute. His native title is "Chiala Djie-po" (King of Chiala); his Chinese title, "Ming-ching Ssu," which may be translated "Bright-ruling official." The King and Chinese Prefect (Fu) are supposed to be colleagues, but in reality the King is subordinate, and when paying official visits must make obeisance before the Fu. In what little dealings I had with them I found both to be courteous and obliging, but suspicious and jealous of one another.

The present King is a slimly built, intelligent man, about forty odd years of age. He took considerable interest in our collecting work around Tachienlu, and with his brother, who is a hunter of much renown, paid us many unofficial visits. He was never tired of watching my companion, Mr. Zappey, fixing up his birds' skins. My own work amongst flowers interested him but little. As a parting gift Mr. Zappey stuffed and mounted a Hoopoe for the King, who evinced almost childlike pleasure

on receiving it. In return, he made Mr. Zappey and myself several presents, and urged us to visit his country on a future occasion. We found that these Thibetans possessed keen and accurate knowledge of the birds and animals of their country, which made them enthusiastic hunting companions. During the reign of the former king, his brother, the present Ruler, was banished, and suffered dire hardships during his exile, and often wanted for food. The missionaries stationed in this neighbourhood on more than one occasion assisted him, and I understood from them that he had not forgotten their kindly help. The history of the family is a tragic one. The present King's brother was supposed to have been poisoned, and two sisters died early deaths, the result, it is said, of immoral associations with lamas.

The state of Chiala is of considerable size, comprising practically the whole of the territory lying between the Tung River, Chiench'iang Valley, and the Yalung River from lat. 28° to 32° N. The five Horba states in a measure also come under the influence of the King of Chiala. From all I can learn this region has the best right to be considered the kingdom of Menia, or "Miniak," of European maps. The whereabouts of "Miniak" has considerably puzzled geographers, but the evidence seems to point to the kingdom of Chiala as representing it in the greater part. North-east of Chiala is the large and prosperous state of Derge, famed for its copper, silver, and swordsmiths. Monsieur Bons d'Anty, French Consul-General at Chengtu, visited Derge in the autumn of 1910, and on his return gave me a most interesting account of this region. He informed me that Derge is a region of much cultivation, surrounded on three sides by snowclad ranges. The various industries for which the state is famous are not carried on in towns, but by the peasants individually in their homes, and from thence carried to towns for sale. In the valley of the Upper Yalung, abutting on the north-west frontier of Chiala and the south-east frontier of Derge, is a wedge of country known as Chantui, peopled by a race of Ishmaels, whose hands are ever turned in conflict against their neighbours. A similar people occupy a wedge of country in the Drechu valley north of Batang, where they are known as



MANI STONES

the Sanai tribe. Monsieur Bons d'Anty considers that these people are of Shan origin, and remnants of an aboriginal population of this region. This authority has spent many years in studying the ethnological problems of this borderland, and is most competent to express an opinion. It is well known that the Shans formerly ruled in western Yunnan, and there is no reason why they should not, in the distant past, have ascended the valleys of the Yalung and Drechu and established themselves there. But whatever the origin of these people of Chantui and Sanai, they are dreaded by their neighbours, who regard them all as robbers and murderers (Ja-ba) quite beyond the pale.

The religion of the people of Chiala is Lamaism, both the orthodox "yellow" and unorthodox "red" sects being represented, but the former are the more numerous and powerful. Some one has described Lamaism as "mechanical," a most descriptive term, since the religion consists in the main of turning praying-wheels by hand, water, or wind, counting beads, and the continual muttering or chanting of the mystic hymn, "Om mani padmi hum." Lamaism draws its inspiration from Lhasa, where all the priests repair for study, the head of the sect being the Dalai Lama. Aided and abetted by Chinese authority, the King of Chiala has never submitted to the Dalai Lama in temporal affairs; he has maintained his freedom and right to govern his own people untrammelled by Lhasa interference, in spite of the dire threats and treachery on the part of lamaseries within his jurisdiction. In 1903 the Dalai Lama issued an ultimatum to the King of Chiala threatening to take from him and the Chinese by conquest all the territory west of the Tung Valley. The British Expedition prevented the carrying out of this threat. The Dalai Lama undoubtedly had designs of territorial expansion at the expense of China's vassal states. The Chinese knew this, and it was fortunate for them that Great Britain stepped in and broke the power of Lhasa De. I was in Tachienlu during 1903 and 1904, and from what I saw and heard there it was plain that the British were unwittingly pulling China's "chestnuts from the fire." The Chinese were not slow to perceive the advantageous position they were in after the power of the Dalai

Lama was dissipated. Almost immediately a "Wardenship of the Thibetan Marches" was established, and a war of conquest engaged upon against certain wealthy lamaseries in Litang and other states, who owned direct allegiance to Lhassa, and heretofore had boasted their independence of China. This war was relentlessly and victoriously pursued under the leadership of Chao Êrh-fêng, and resulted in the extension of Chinese authority over a very considerable tract of country. Indirectly the King of Chiala's position has been very much weakened as the outcome of these conquests.

The state of Chiala is made up of mountain, dale, and plateau, being essentially a highland country affording good pasturage for yak, sheep, and horses. A chain of snowclad peaks traverses it near its eastern boundaries. It is a region where altitude regulates the mode of life, the wealth, and marriage customs of its people. The inhabitants are less nomadic than the people to the north and west, but, in common with all other Thibetans, their wealth is represented by herds of yak, horses, and cattle, and flocks of sheep and goats. They are great hunters of Musk-deer, Wapiti, Bear, and other animals, the commercial products of which they trade to the Chinese. The same is true of the medicinal roots and herbs, which grow abundantly in these uplands. Where altitudes admit, agriculture is practised, but is supplementary to grazing and relatively unimportant. Wheat, barley, oats, buckwheat, peas, and Irish potato are the chief crops. During the winter months these Thibetans live in well-built houses situated in the valleys, and in the spring they migrate to the uplands. The nomads do not move about aimlessly, but have clearly defined regions and are subject to responsible head-men. Where agriculture is carried on the womenfolk mostly remain to look after the crops and to do other work pertaining to the farmstead.

Wealth and convenience decide which form the matrimonial alliance shall assume among these people, and polygamy, monogamy, and polyandry obtain. Above 12,000 feet altitude polyandry is the rule, and in many places women so united wear distinguishing and honorary badges. Such women are usually the business and ruling heads of their

establishments. This custom of polyandry is characteristic of Thibet, and the following note on the subject, written by a friend who has spent many years of his life among these people, is worthy of much thoughtful study :—

“ So many able men have written about polyandry that what follows will be without interest to those who have studied the system ; but to the great mass who are comparatively unacquainted with Thibet and her customs these notes may be of some value. The writer has spent several years among Thibetans and cognate tribes, and has lived for months alone on the wild steppes as well as in the more civilized and well-cultivated valleys.

“ The term ‘ polyandry ’ is here applied (*a*) to women living permanently, and cohabiting legally, with more than one man ; (*b*) to those who have been, or are, married temporarily to more than one man or companies of men.

“ The former, true polyandry, is confined to the pastoral nomads of the grassy plateaux ; the latter, quasi-polyandry, is rampant in all the commercial and political centres on the border and throughout Thibet. In both cases a low conception of the relation of the sexes has made it possible ; and climate and political conditions have made it desirable.

“ The past hints, and the present proves, that indifference to female virtue connotes the people known as Thibetans and tribes of common origin, and I understand it to be the indirect cause of polyandry. From time immemorial the Thibetan has been taught that the female is a kind of Pandora’s box, in which are all the evils that have cursed mankind. All down the ages woman seems to have been the slave of man : dangerous because of latent evil, but also valuable on account of her ability to render him service. In the old barbaric days, when prowess was the prime virtue and a thoroughgoing communism the rule, woman was only a tribal asset, like the animals she tended. Then came religion, a deification of all that rude minds could not explain. It was probably the mysterious Bönpa of to-day which lingers in the lonely valleys where nations meet, and which could have been no friend of virtue if the accounts of orgies in its temples before indecent idols are true, and the unseemly dress of young women and

barren wives either demanded or sanctioned by it. Explain it as we may, the fact remains that Thibetan women are to-day, as they seem to have been in the time of Marco Polo, the most immodest of their sex, and the Thibetan men strangely indifferent about matters which other races demand as essentials.

“ All outside work is done by the women, who represent the coarser element of Thibetan society, and their language is often filthy in the extreme. The domestic arrangements make no provision for privacy. Men and women must eat, live, and sleep perforce in the same apartment, and there is no effort on the part of the male to shield the female from conditions which are inimical to virtue.

“ The morality of the Thibetans has made such a system possible. This will not be denied by any one who knows them even slightly ; but it will sound strange to many when I say that the climatic and political conditions are such that the reformer is puzzled to think of anything to offer as a substitute ! To the untutored Thibetan mind it must seem absolutely necessary. Undoubtedly the high altitudes are unfavourable to women. The Thibetan views woman very much as he does an animal, *i.e.* she can do so much work. Living and working at 12,000 feet altitude and upwards requires the strongest material. Woman very imperfectly fulfils these requirements, and maternity and nursing, apart from unfitting her for work, would be well-nigh useless, since infant mortality would be abnormally high. On the relatively thinly populated plateaux the conditions obtaining are emphatically against woman being wanted in numbers. Here robbing and escaping from robbers is the normal condition. It will be evident at once that family duties are not only inconvenient, but interfere with the woman's efficiency personally, and at the same time misdirect the energies of the male portion of the community.

“ The nomad is a herdsman, continually moving to and fro with his flocks and belongings. The woman, and the centre she forms, would impair the necessary freedom of movement ; it would also follow that she and her belongings would often be unprotected for long periods. Polyandry, by not encouraging permanent settlements and at the same time being the best

security against marauding bands, must seem eminently rational to the nomad.

“ Polyandry also entails the family property. This is very important, as division of the flocks or grazing-grounds would soon ruin every one. Whatever the ideal system for these Thibetans may be, the one which provides one wife, one family, and one flock for all the male members of the family is the most convenient. Anything else would be suicidal. Both polygamy and monogamy presuppose racial increase and the formation of new and independent centres, but polyandry promises the great desideratum of the Thibetan—an almost stationary community and an intact patrimony.

“ In a land of polyandry, priestly celibacy, and nondescript roving, the number of unmarried women must be large. This class, with the Chinese, Lamas, and Thibetan merchants, is responsible for the quasi-polyandry of the plain, which only differs from prostitution inasmuch as it has the sanction of the country and carries with it no odium. The priest is a celibate, as a rule, by profession, but an inveterate roué in practice. Quite a large number of women are required wherever lamaseries exist. In Lhasa, where thousands of students from all parts of the country study for years, the number of women married temporarily, openly, or in secret, to individuals or small communities is very great. The wandering Thibetan merchants form another class who demand a supply of temporary wives for longer or shorter periods. These may often be men who have formed polyandrous unions in the mountains, but the exigencies of circumstances demand their presence on the plain. In other words, there is no reason why a man may not be a polyandrian legally, and in practice a polygamist.

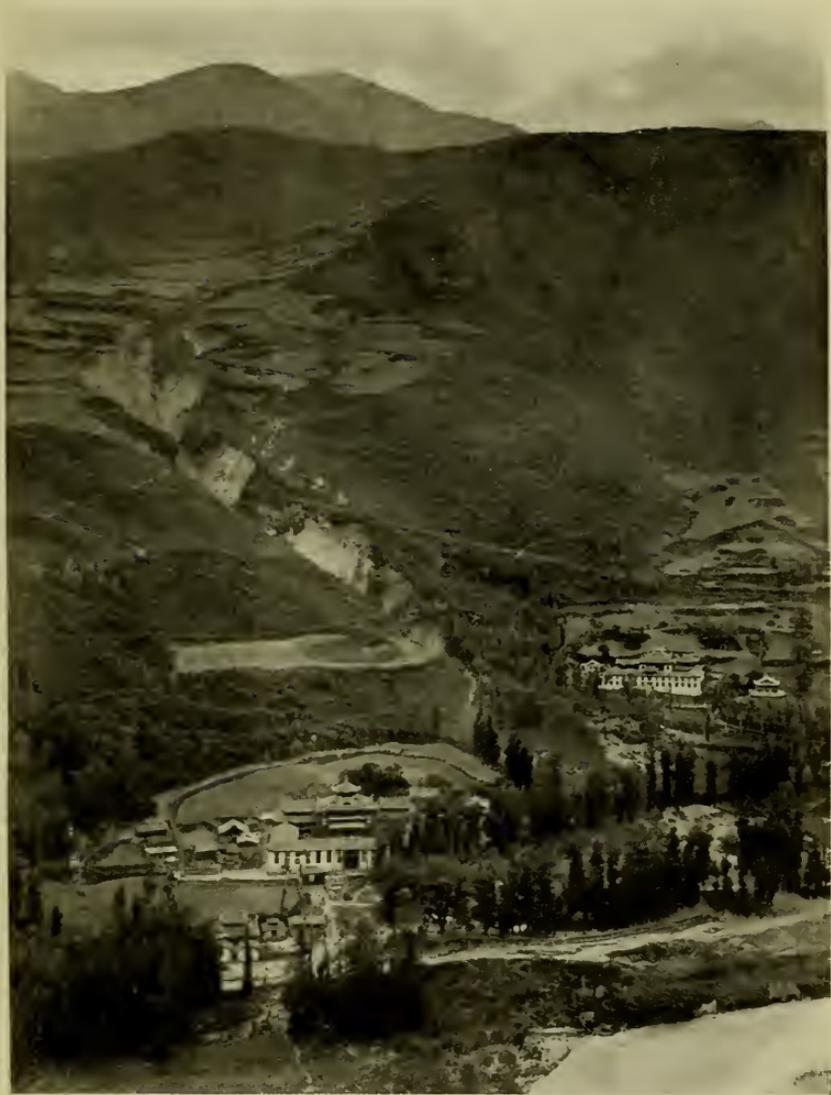
“ But the most interesting phase of this system arises from peculiarities of Chinese domination. Chinese soldiers, officials, and merchants residing temporarily in Thibet form a very large body. These victims of circumstances leave their wives in far-away China. There is a legend that the Lamas have put an embargo on the dainty Chinese woman: but, more probably, her lord and owner has neither the mind nor the money to introduce her to the dangers and hardships of a Thibetan journey. But he rarely, if ever, pines for the wife of his

youth. Polyandry and polygamy meet, and temporary marriages, for one month to three years, are the rule. The highest official and the meanest soldier take advantage of the system. With the former it is temporary monogamy or polygamy, but with the latter, owing to pecuniary limitations, one woman often becomes, *pro tempore*, the wife of a small community of soldiers. These wives or their children, for obvious reasons, are seldom, if ever, brought out from Thibet; the former make new alliances and the children are claimed by the Lamas.

“The question of Thibetan morality is a very complex one, and it is almost impossible to disentangle the cause from the effect. True polyandry is owing, indirectly, to a low moral perception; but it might be correct to blame it, in a measure, for the more degenerate quasi-polyandry. Whatever we may think of the former, from the standpoint of absolute morality, it is relatively a moral system and solves many problems. To change it without changing the conditions would be tantamount to driving the brave nomad women into the towns to become the temporary wives of Chinese rabble, priestly roués, and peripatetic Thibetans. Perhaps my hinting that polyandry as a system is in many ways well suited to the plateaux will evoke much unfavourable comment, but there are good men, Roman Catholic and Protestant, priest and layman, who have noticed the same difficulty.

“The effect of the system on the women is another question about which we cannot afford to be dogmatic. When young the Thibetan women are often very pretty, but they age quickly and become as weirdly ugly as the mediaeval witches. To say that polyandry is alone responsible for this change would be sentiment unsupported by facts; but undoubtedly this system, combined with hard work, loathsome uncleanness, and often grotesque head-dress tends to give a great many women an inhumanly vile expression.

“The families on the plateaux are very small and many women are barren. This is a blessing in disguise, owing to the impossibility of the nomad country supporting more than a very limited population, and the small amount of arable land capable of relieving the congested centres. Polyandry is both



THE LAMASERIES JUST OUTSIDE TACHIENLU

directly and indirectly the cause of this limitation of offspring. A glance at the system will show how these uncultured Malthusians obtain their end: Three men, for instance, centre their affections on one woman, who in her lifetime rears two or three children. As monogamists each of these men would have had his own wife and probably a total of fifteen children. But another factor has to be taken into consideration: polyandry not only limits a woman's natural fecundity, but in a great number of cases is the direct cause of barrenness.

“About the domestic arrangements I cannot speak authoritatively, but I have never heard internal discord used as an argument against polyandry. It must often happen that one or two husbands are away tending flocks, worshipping at holy mountains, or robbing travellers. But this is an accident; the domestic equilibrium is rarely disturbed by petty jealousies. The defloration of the bride or brides—for there is no reason why two or more sisters should not come into the community—is the right of the elder brother, and the first child is, by courtesy, assigned to him; but the child or children of the union are, in reality, a joint possession. The girls in the community either follow their mother's example, or go into the towns and become the temporary wives of Chinese, Lamas, or wandering merchants. In the former case a dowry is given to the parents, but in the latter the ‘fair one’ makes the most of her time and the simplicity of her husband or husbands.

“Polyandry in one form or other is probably practised whenever Thibetan communities are found. Its existence may be denied emphatically, but closer investigation will only prove the wide distribution of the ‘Münchhausen’ family. However, an exception may be allowed in the deep, populous valleys of Eastern Thibet. Here individualism is the rule, and new centres are formed and thrive without the shadow of a grim Frankenstein disturbing them. So completely has the old dread of offspring been effaced that marriage is always preceded by a tentative period, and maternity alone establishes a girl's right to be admitted into her husband's family. Here the quondam upholder of

polyandry, realizing that the fruitful earth and the fruitful woman bring wealth and strength respectively, becomes a confirmed polygamist. To the student of ethnology this metamorphosis suggests the permanency of the valley Thibetan and the gradual absorption or total extinction of his mountain brother."

CHAPTER XVII

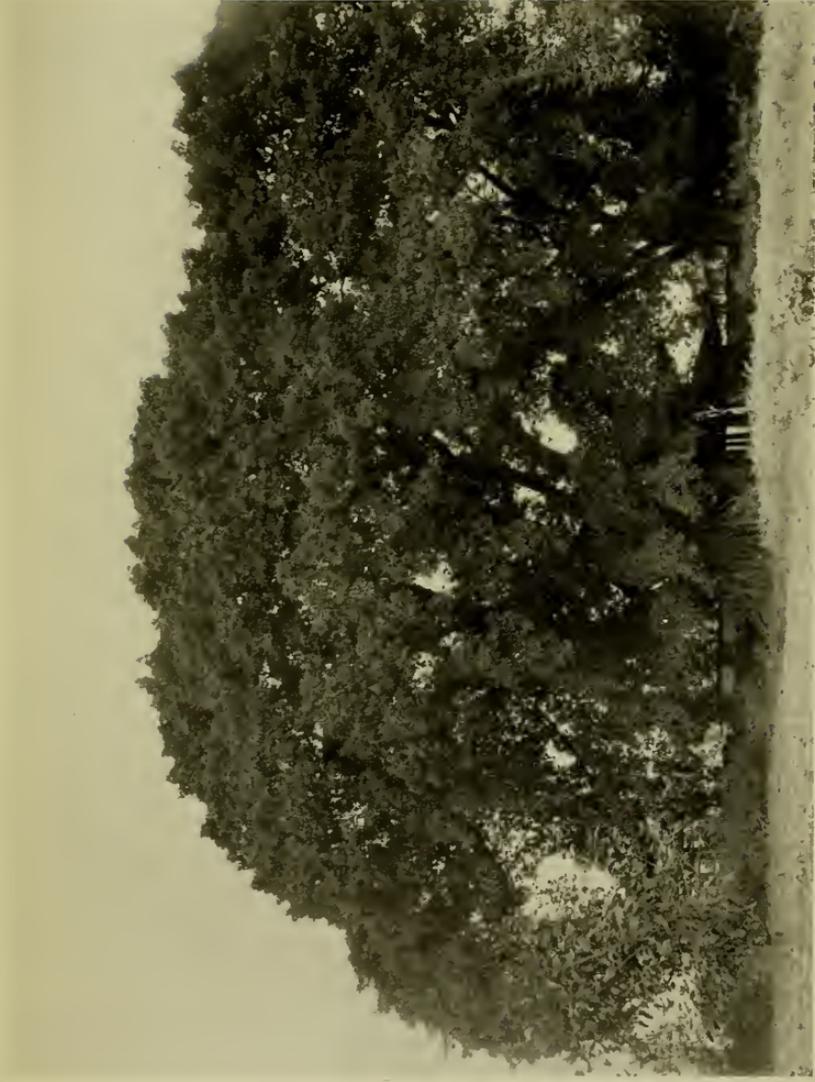
SACRED OMEI SHAN

ITS TEMPLES AND ITS FLORA

THE lofty and sacred eminence known as Mount Omei, or Omei shan, is situated about long. $103^{\circ} 41' E.$, lat. $29^{\circ} 32' N.$, one day's journey from the city of Kiating. A gigantic upthrust of hard limestone, it rises sheer from the plain (alt. 1300 feet) to a height of nearly 11,000 above sea-level. From the city of Kiating a fine view of this remarkable mountain is obtainable during clear weather, the mirage of the plain seemingly lending it additional height. Viewed from a distance it has been aptly likened to a couchant lion decapitated close to the shoulders, the fore-feet remaining in position. The down-cleft surface forms a fearful, well-nigh vertical precipice, considerably over a mile in height! It is one of the five ultra-sacred mountains of China, but the origin of its holy character is lost in antiquity. We are told that in a monastery here the patriarch P'u (an historical personage) served Buddha during the Western Ts'in Dynasty (A.D. 265-317). P'u-hsien Pu'ssa (Samantabhadra Bodhisattva), Mount Omei's patron saint, descended upon the mountain from the back of a gigantic elephant possessed of six tusks. In one of the temples (Wan-nien-ssu) there is a life-sized elephant cast in bronze of splendid workmanship which commemorates this manifestation. Upwards of seventy Buddhist temples or monasteries (either word is applicable, since the buildings are really a combination of both) are to be found on this mountain. On the main road to the summit there is a temple every 5 li, and they become even more numerous as the ascent finally nears the end. These temples are controlled by abbots and contain upwards of 2000 priests and acolytes. The

whole of the mountain is, or rather was, church property, much of the land on the lower slopes suitable for cultivation having from time to time been sold away from the church. Voluntary subscriptions are now the chief sources of revenue of the religious houses, though many of the temples have money as well as land endowments.

Many thousands of pilgrims, coming from all parts of the Chinese Empire, visit this mountain annually. At the time of my visit there were several pilgrims who had walked all the way from Shanghai, some 2000 miles distant, for the express purpose of doing homage before the shrines of Mount Omei. Thibetans and even Nepalese make pilgrimages here. The images and sacred objects are numberless, many of them being of pure bronze or copper. Three mummified holy men, lacquered, gilded, and deified, the elephant above mentioned, and a tooth of Buddha are among the more interesting objects. The tooth is about a foot long and weighs 18 English lb., and is in all probability a fossil-elephant's molar. On the extreme summit of the mountain, the Golden Summit, as it is called, are the ruins of an ancient temple which was built of pure bronze. It is said to have been erected by the Emperor Wan-li (A.D. 1573-1620), and was destroyed by lightning in 1819. Since this catastrophe nine or ten abbots have come and gone, but none has been able to collect enough money to rebuild it. The mass of metal at present heaped around, consisting of pillars, beams, panels, and tiles, is all of bronze. The panels are particularly fine pieces of work. I measured one panel which had dimensions as follows: 76 inches high, 20 inches wide, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick; some of the panels are slightly smaller than this. All are ornamented with figures representing seated Buddhas, flowers, and scroll-work, and on the reverse with hexagonal arabesques. Many of the panels have been incorporated in one of the two small temples which now stand on the crest of the precipice. Wan-li's tablet, which was contained in the ancient bronze temple, is to-day accommodated in an outhouse along with fuel. The crown-piece is detached and lies outside. This tablet is of bronze, but is hollow. With crown-piece and pedestal it measures 90 inches high, 32 inches wide, and 7 inches thick. Another grand relic



THE CHINESE BANYAN (FICUS INFECTORIA) 70 FT. TALL, GIRTH 47 FT.

left to the tender mercies of the elements is a huge bell which stands 54 inches high and is 120 inches round the middle. On the edge of the cliff are two bronze pagodas, each about 12 feet high, and the remains of a third, which formed part of the ancient temple. It is a saddening sight to gaze around on these most interesting relics so ignominiously neglected.

From the summit of Mount Omei, when the sky is clear and clouds of mist float in the abyss below, a natural phenomenon similar to that of the Spectre of the Brocken is observable. I have never seen it myself, since rain fell almost continuously during the week I spent on the summit, but it has been described as a "golden ball surrounded by a rainbow floating on the surface of the mists." This phenomenon is known as the "Fo-kuang" (= "Glory of Buddha"). Devotees assert that it is an emanation from the aureole of Buddha and an outward and visible sign of the holiness of Mount Omei. The edge of the precipice is guarded by chains and wooden posts, but pilgrims in a state of religious fervour have been known to throw themselves over on beholding the Fo-kuang. From this cause the point is called the "Suicide's Cliff." It is the highest and most vertical part of the precipice, which extends in a nearly southerly direction for a couple of miles.

The first foreigner to ascend this famous mountain was the late E. Colborne Baber, who visited it in July 1877, and whose incomparable and accurate account of this region has never been equalled.¹ Unfortunately Baber paid little or no attention to the flora, nor did the equally distinguished traveller and writer Hosie,² who ascended Omei shan in 1884. It was not until 1887 that any plants were collected on this mountain. In that year it was visited by a Rhenish missionary, who was also an industrious botanical collector—the late Dr. Ernst Faber. During a fortnight's stay this enthusiast made a most interesting collection; which was found on critical examination to contain no fewer than seventy novelties. In 1890 an English naturalist, Mr. A. E. Pratt, visited the mountain and collected a few plants. Since Baber's visit many

¹ *Royal Geographical Society, Supplementary Papers*, vol. i.

² Sir Alexander Hosie, K.C.M.G., H.B.M.'s Consular Service in China.

hundreds of foreigners have ascended Mount Omei, but with the exception of those of Faber and Pratt, there is no record of any one having collected plants during their visits. For this reason alone I hope this chapter will find justification. The mountain and its temples have been well described by Baber and others, and I have no desire to attempt to repeat descriptions which have been made by abler pens than mine. With this prelude I append the following record of my visit :—

It was on the morning of 13th October 1903 that I set out from the city of Kiating intent on investigating the flora of this famous mountain. Traversing the highly cultivated plain, which is intersected here and there by low hills, charmingly wooded, the little town of Omei Hsien (alt. 1270 feet) was reached at the close of the day. The next morning, after journeying 10 li across the plain along a road shaded with trees of Alder and Nanmu, we reached the village of Liang-ho-kou, situated at the foot of the sacred mountain. Here the road bifurcates and both paths lead by different routes to the summit. They are paved with blocks of stone throughout, an undertaking that must have entailed a vast expenditure in labour and money, but it would be impossible to traverse certain of the steeper parts unless paving existed. I ascended by one of the routes and returned by the other, so that I saw as much as was possible of the mountain and its rich flora.

Between Omei Hsien and Liang-ho-kou are a number of truly magnificent Banyan trees (*Ficus infectoria*), known locally as Huang-kou-shu. These trees shelter some old temples and are of enormous size. I measured one, which appeared to be the largest specimen; it was about 80 feet tall, and had a girth of 48 feet at 5 feet from the ground. We also passed some fine trees of Oak (*Quercus serrata*) and Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar formosana*). The sides of the rice fields are studded with thousands of pollarded trees of the Chinese Ash (*Fraxinus chinensis*) on which an insect deposits a valuable white wax. The ditches were gay with the spikes of cream-coloured, fragrant flowers of a species of *Hedychium*, the golden-flowered *Senecio clivorum*, flowers of many kinds of *Impatiens*, and other moisture-loving herbs.

On leaving Liang-ho-kou the ascent began, and journeying slowly three days' hard climbing brought us to the "Golden Summit."

For the purpose of grouping the flora it is convenient to divide the mountain into two regions—(1) from the base to 6000 feet, and (2) 6000 feet to the summit (10,800 feet). Thus divided the flora falls into two well-defined altitudinal zones. The lower zone is made up of such plants as enjoy a warm-temperate climate. Evergreen trees and shrubs predominate, and in the shady glens and ravines Selaginellas and Ferns luxuriate. Of these latter I, in one day, collected over sixty species! The upper zone consists entirely of plants requiring a cool-temperate climate. With the exception of Rhododendron and Silver Fir it is composed almost entirely of deciduous trees and shrubs and herbaceous plants. The belt between 4500 feet and 5500 feet may be termed the Hinterland. Here the struggle for supremacy is most keen and the fusion of the zones most marked. At 6000 feet the boundary line is unusually well defined.

Cultivation extends up to 4000 feet, maize and pulse being the principal crops, with rice relegated to the valleys and bottom-lands. Plantations of Ash trees for the culture of insect-wax extend up to 2600 feet. The foot-hills around the base of the mountain are covered with Pine (*Pinus Massoniana*), Cypress (*Cupressus funebris*), and Oak (*Quercus serrata*). The sides of the streams which meander among these hills are clothed with Alder (*Alnus cremastogyne*), *Pterocarya stenoptera*, and the curious *Camptotheca acuminata*. Around the temples and farmsteads Nanmu and tall-growing Bamboos abound; on the more exposed hillsides the climbing fern *Gleichenia linearis* forms impenetrable thickets, and *Onychium japonicum*, *Melastoma candida*, *Mussœndra pubescens*, are common roadside plants. At 3000 feet all these plants drop out and give place to others. *Cunninghamialanceolata*, which occurs sparingly in the valleys, gradually increases in number, and between 2500 and 4500 feet large areas are covered solely with this invaluable Conifer. Apart from the *Cunninghamia*, the family of *Laurinææ* forms, between 2000 and 5000 feet, fully 75 per cent. of the arborescent vegetation. This "Laurel zone,"

as it may be termed, is composed chiefly of evergreen trees and shrubs, the genera *Machilus*, *Lindera*, and *Litsea* being exceptionally rich in species. Within this zone also occur the following interesting monotypic trees: *Tapiscia*, *Carrieria*, *Itoa*, *Emmenopterys*, and *Idesia*. The evergreen *Viburnum coriaceum*, with blue-black fruits, and five species of evergreen Barberries are also met with found here.

In ascending any high mountain, more especially in these latitudes, it is most instructive and interesting to note the aggressiveness of the temperate flora. Mount Omei offers special facilities for studying this phenomenon. Everything around us looks so smiling that all nature seems to be at peace. In these days, however, every one is alive to the fact that a stern and relentless war of conquest is being continually waged on all sides, and that every inch of ground is contested. It is well that plants cannot speak, or the exultations of the victors and the groans of the vanquished would be too much for humanity to bear! But to note the struggle: The large-leaved Cornel (*Cornus macrophylla*) manages to extend its area nearly to the base of the mountain, being closely attended by several species of Maple, among which *Acer Davidii*, with white-striped bark, is particularly prominent. A Black Birch (*Betula luminifera*), several species of *Viburnum*, *Pyrus*, *Malus*, *Rubus*, and *Prunus* are also well to the fore; but it is in the Hinterland (4500 to 5500 feet) that the main battle between the zones is fought. This narrow belt is extraordinarily rich in woody plants. Of those peculiar to it I may mention *Pterostyrax hispidus*, *Pterocarya Delavayi*, *Euptelea pleiosperma*, *Decaisnea Fargesii*, Horse Chestnut (*Æsculus Wilsonii*), and the monotypic genera *Tetracentron*, *Emmenopterys*, and *Davidia*. At least five species of Maple occur with many fine specimens of each. Several species of *Evonymus*, *Holbœllia*, *Actinidia*, and *Holly (Ilex)* are also common. The bulk of the *Laurineæ* have given up the struggle, their place being taken by Evergreen Oak and *Castanopsis*. In this belt monkeys are common, and are fond of the blue pod-like fruit of the *Decaisnea*, the shining black, flattened seeds of which, however, I noticed they cannot digest.

On clearing a dense thicket and emerging on to a narrow



HYDRANGEA XANTHONEURA VAR. WILSONII, 15 FT. TALL

ridge, 6100 feet above sea-level, a magnificent view presented itself. Above towered gigantic limestone cliffs nearly a mile high; below spread valleys and plains filled with a dense, fleecy cumulus, through which the peaks of mountains peered like rocky islands from the ocean's bed; to the westward the mighty snowclad ranges of the Thibetan border, 80 miles distant as the crow flies, presented a magnificent panorama stretching northward and southward as far as the eye could range. The contrast between the floral zones was equally startling and impressive. Below, until lost in the clouds, was a mass of rich, sombre, green vegetation; above were autumnal tints of every hue, from pale yellow to the richest shades of crimson, relieved by clumps of dark green Silver Fir. The whole scene was bathed in sunlight, a gentle zephyr stirred the air, and gorgeous butterflies flitted here and there seemingly unconscious of winter's near approach. The stillness and quiet was most solemn, and was broken only by the warbling of an occasional songster in some adjacent tree or bush. It was indeed a never-to-be-forgotten scene!

At 6200 feet the *Cunninghamia* gives up the fight, having struggled nobly until reduced to the dimensions of an insignificant shrub. A Silver Fir (*Abies Delavayi*) next assumes the sway, and right royally does it deserve the sceptre, for no more handsome Conifer exists in all the Far East; its large, erect, symmetrical cones are violet-black in colour and are usually borne in greatest profusion on the topmost branches. The temples on the higher parts of the mountain are constructed almost entirely of the timber of this tree. It is first met with on Mount Omei, at 6000 feet, at which altitude it is of no great size and unattractive in appearance; at 6500 feet it is a handsome tree. It is, however, between 8500 and 10,000 feet that this Silver Fir reaches its maximum size. In this belt hundreds of trees 80 to 100 feet tall, with a girth of 10 to 12 feet, are to be found. Hemlock Spruce (*Tsuga yunnanensis*) occurs sparingly, but always in the form of large and shapely trees. An occasional Yew tree (*Taxus cuspidata*, var. *chinensis*) and, on the summit, dwarf Juniper (*J. squamata*) complete the list of Conifers growing on the higher parts of this mountain. The unspeakably magnificent autumnal tints already

referred to are principally due to numerous species of *Viburnum*, *Vitis*, *Malus*, *Sorbus*, *Pyrus*, and *Acer*, together with *Enkianthus deflexus*, which surpasses all in the richness of its autumn tints of orange and crimson.

At 6200 feet the ascent becomes increasingly difficult, and having surmounted a formidable flight of steps, 800 feet high, we were glad to rest at the temple of Hsih-hsiang-chüh. All the temples on Mount Omei occupy lovely and romantic situations, but none more so than this, which has one side flush with the edge of a precipice, and the others sheltered by a grove of Silver Fir. The hospitable priests regaled us with tea and sweetmeats and entertained us with much that was curious and amusing. They claimed that it was at this particular place that P'u-hsien Pu'ssa alighted from his elephant to allow the footsore animal to bathe in a near-by pool; the spot to-day is marked by a cistern.

Immediately on leaving this temple two steep flights of steps, followed by a slight descent, led us to a small wooded plateau which shelves away from a vertical precipice. Hereabouts *Sorbus munda*, with white fruits, was a most conspicuous shrub. A climbing *Hydrangea* (*H. anomala*) reaches to the top of the tallest trees. Several other species of *Hydrangea* grow epiphytically on the larger trees and so also do two or three species of *Sorbus*. *Rhododendrons* are fairly abundant, more especially near the edge of the precipice. The first few *Rhododendron* bushes were noted growing at 4800 feet, and altogether I gathered thirteen species on this mountain. But as compared with the region to the westward Mount Omei is poor in *Rhododendrons*. The same is true of *Primulas*, of which four species only were met with.

At 9000 feet the most difficult stairway of all occurs, and I was fairly exhausted when the top of it was reached at 10,100 feet. Winter had laid his stern hand heavily here, and most of the woody plants were leafless. At 10,000 feet Bamboo-scrub puts in an appearance and increases as the summit is neared until finally it crowds out nearly everything else and forms an impenetrable jungle about 4 to 6 feet high.

From the top of the last stairway an easy pathway of planking leads to the summit, which we reached just as the

sun was setting behind the snowclad ranges of the Thibetan border.

A perfect night succeeded the day, and our hopes were high for the morrow. Alas! a thick fog and a drizzle of rain was what we awoke to find. A terrible precipice in front and a more or less shelving away behind was all we could make out of the lay of the land. To find out what the summit is really like, a long walk was undertaken, but resulted in little beyond a thorough drenching. The mountain-top is somewhat uneven, sloping away from the cliffs by a fairly easy gradient. It is everywhere covered with a dense scrub, composed mainly of dwarf Bamboo, with bushes of Willow, Birch, Sorbus, Barberry, Rhododendron, Spiræa, and *Rosa omeiensis* interspersed. Near the watercourses these shrubs are more particularly abundant. Trailing over the scrub *Clematis montana*, var. *Wilsonii*, is very common. At least five species of Rhododendron grow on the summit, but, judging from the paucity of fruits, they flower but sparingly. In places sheltered from the winds fine groves of Silver Fir remain, but in the more fully exposed sites these trees are very stunted and weather-beaten. The dwarf Juniper, with twisted, gnarled stems, is also plentiful in rocky places.

Around the temples small patches of cabbage, turnips, and Irish potato are cultivated, and several favourite medicines are grown in quantity, such as Rhubarb, "Huang-lien" (*Coptis chinensis*), "Tang-shên," and "Tang-kuei."

Here and there on the mountain we passed hucksters' stalls, on which various local products were exposed for sale. These consist chiefly of medicines, porcupine quills, crystals of felspar, sweet tea, and pilgrim staves. The latter, made from the wood of an Alder (*Alnus cremastogyne*), are carved in representation of fantastic dragons and Buddhas. The sweet tea is a peculiarity of Mount Omei, being prepared from the leaves of *Viburnum theiferum*.