

BEYOND THE VALE OF KASHMIR

By

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DEVIL DANCERS OF TIBET

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NATURAL HISTORY

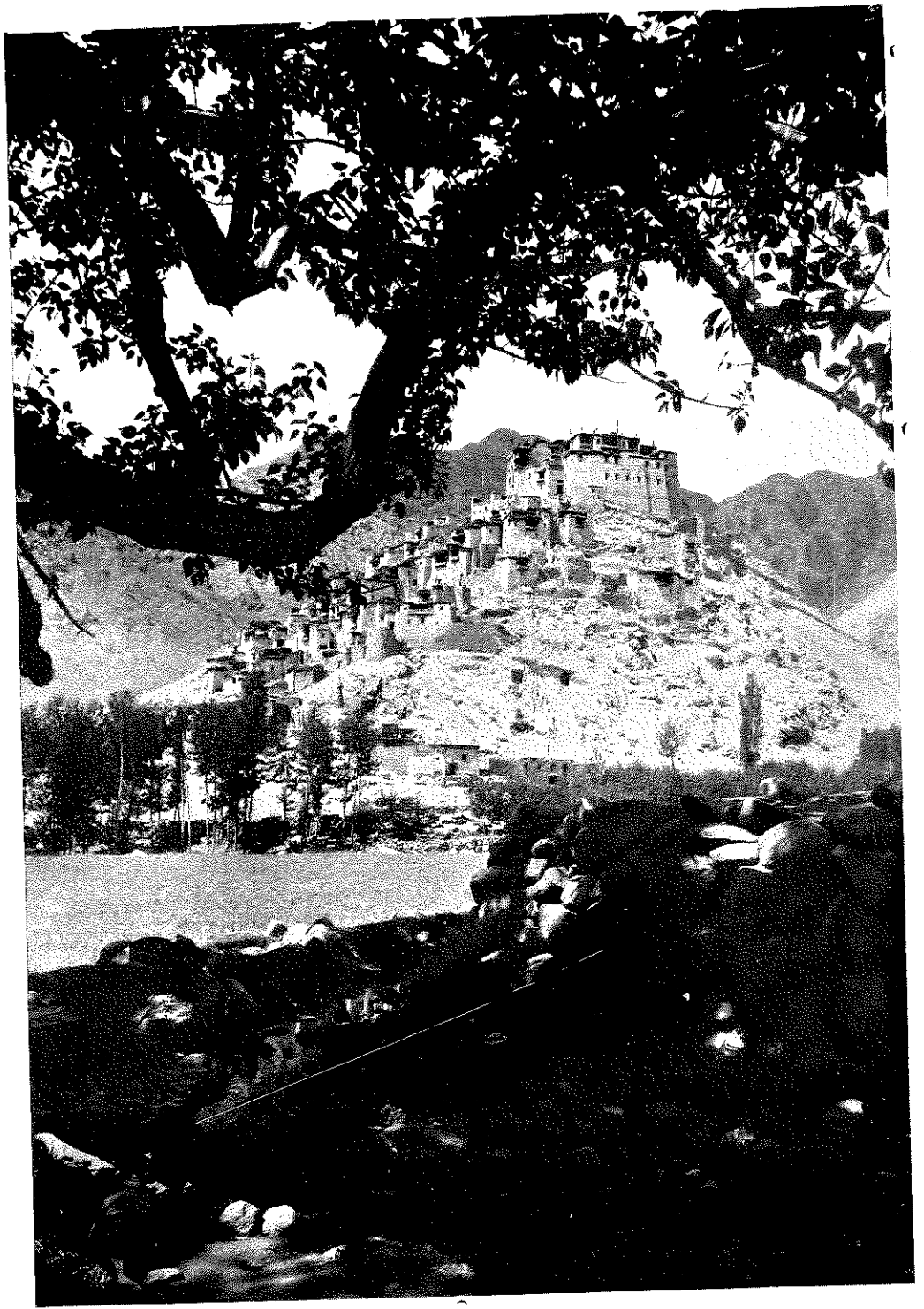
The Journal of The American Museum of Natural History

VOL. XXXII, No. 1

JAN.-FEB., 1932

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NEW YORK, N. Y.



A LAMASERY IN LADAKH

These religious houses are often located in the most inaccessible places—on peaks, on cliffs, or overlooking deep ravines. The lamas, or monks, form so large a part of the population that it has been said that the backwardness of the country is largely due to withdrawal of these able-bodied men from productive labor

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VOLUME
XXXII

NATURAL HISTORY

NUMBER
ONE

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BEYOND THE VALE OF KASHMIR

A Journey Over the Mountain Trails from Kashmir to Ladakh—The Peoples of the Valleys and Plateaus—The Devil Dancers of Western Tibet

BY WILLIAM J. MORDEN

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ONE might say that there is a personality in trails. The trails of our own Rockies, for instance, are as different from those of the Trans-Himalaya as Pittsburgh from Peshawar—as Boston from Benares.

The Himalayan trail—or road as it is usually called—from Srinagar, in Kashmir, to Leh, in Ladakh, (or Western Tibet) is a way of ever-changing beauty and charm. It is a distinctly Asiatic charm.

But before I try to take you with me along this mountain route, let me refresh your mind a bit concerning its geography and the history of the country through which it passes.

North of the Punjab of India, beyond the Pir Panjal Range of the western Himalaya, lies the Vale of Kashmir. Well watered by the melting of snows heaped on the peaks that surround it on all sides, it is a land of forests and flowers, rightly called "The Happy Valley." The ancient city of Srinagar on the placidly flowing Jhelum River, is the starting point for journeys into the interior.

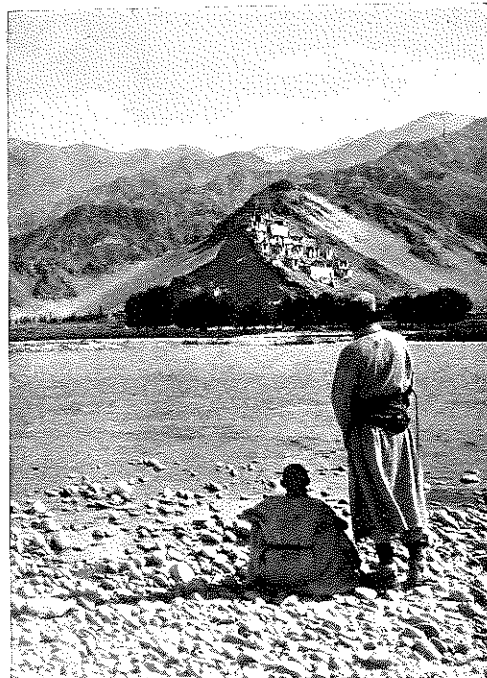
Ladakh lies north and east of Srinagar. Leh, its capital and chief city, is a distance

of 240 miles across the mountains, a journey of more than two weeks at the ordinary rate of travel.

There is evidence that Aryan Dards once had scattered colonies in Ladakh, and for some five hundred years it formed part of a Tibeto-Dard Kingdom. Then came a Central Tibetan dynasty, inaugurated about 900 A.D. Ladakhi kings ruled the land until 1840, when the Dogra army of Gulab Singh, the Maharajah of Jammu, conquered it. When Jammu and Kashmir were consolidated into a single state, Ladakh became part of the domains of the Maharajah of Jammu and Kashmir.

But Ladakhis have little in common with the Aryan Hindus and Mohammedans of Kashmir. They are a mongoloid people—Tibetan lamaists who acknowledge the Dalai Lama at Lhasa as the spiritual head of their church. The country, too, is entirely different from that south of the mountains; the highlands of Ladakh continue uninterruptedly into Tibet, for there are no natural geographical divisions between the two.

My trip to Ladakh was one phase of a



A SMALL LAMASERY

Perched high on a cliff, this detached structure lies well off the main trade route among the barren hills

summer's collecting in the Himalaya. In Srinagar I engaged my Kashmiri staff of five men, purchased stores and supplies, hired tents and camp equipment, and generally made my *bandobast*, (pronounced "bundobust") as arrangements are called in India. I left Srinagar late in April.

My way at first led up the lovely Sind Valley, where the mountains were clothed in deep forests of conifers, and where the gushing streams were crystal clear. In the Vale of Kashmir fruit trees had been in bloom and the picturesque houses were gay with purple irises growing on their sod roofs. But as we went higher up the Sind, signs of winter were more frequent. We began to cross snow-slides, and by the time we reached Baltal Rest House, five marches from Srinagar, we were traveling on snow much of the time.

Baltal is just at the foot of the Zoji La, the pass which leads a traveler in one

great step from the forested regions of Kashmir to the bleak and barren wastes of the Tibetan highlands. The high range which the Zoji traverses intercepts the moisture-laden clouds that come over India from the distant ocean. The Vale of Kashmir gets the benefit of this moisture, but beyond the great mountain wall rain almost never falls, and even the winter snow is so light that by mid-summer many ridges over 16,000 feet in elevation are entirely bare.

Like Tibet proper, Ladakh is largely a high, rocky desert, where one may ride for hours and see no vestige of any growing thing. Here and there inhabitants of the infrequent villages have led water in tiny canals from snow fields far up some valley to irrigate the little green oases which are a welcome relief from the surrounding desolation.

Along the road to Leh the traveler may use government Rest Houses at the end of



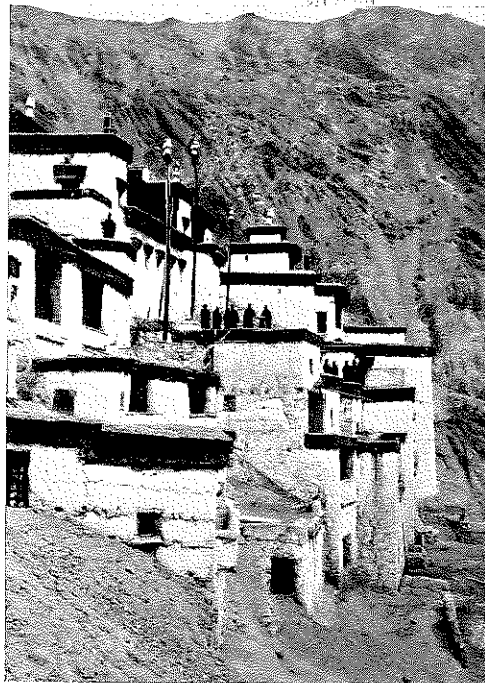
MR. MORDEN AND A LAMA

On the road to Himis Mr. Morden paused at the Tiksay Lamasery for a visit

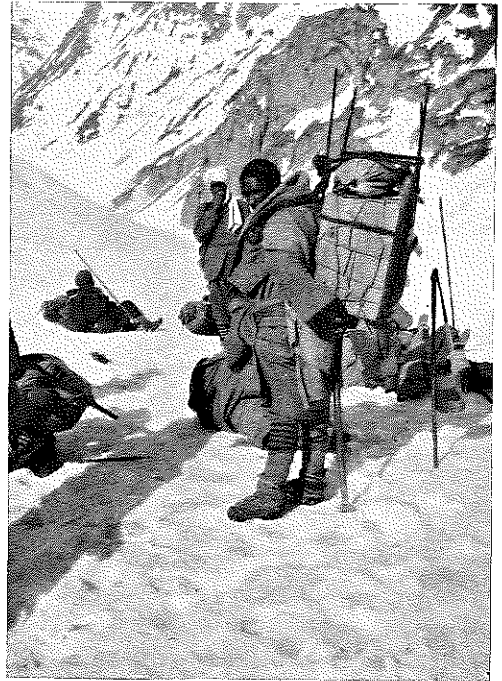
each stage of ten to twenty miles, or may pitch a tent in an adjoining grove of poplars. These little government-owned "Maharajah's gardens" are pleasant encampments and are often used, for some of the Rest Houses have permanent inhabitants. As Mrs. Morden's bearer put it, "Memsahib, there are many little animals, hopping, hopping—biting, biting."

But to return to the Zoji La. In summer a wide pony trail zigzags up from Baltal to high above a ravine and brings one out to a rocky valley at the summit. But until about the end of May the pony trail cannot be used. The winter route ascends steeply up the gorge, where avalanche snow accumulates to great depths.

We hired coolies for the crossing, for ponies cannot negotiate the winter trail. To avoid the danger of avalanches, which is greater when the snow is soften-



THE LAMASERY OF RIRDZONG
Of the Yellow sect of lamas whose robes are red, but whose caps and sashes are yellow



KASHMIRI COOLIES ON THE ZOJI LA
Crossing the pass that leads from the wooded valley of Kashmir to the barren wastes of the Tibetan highlands

ed by the heat of the sun, our coolies started from Baltal at 2 A.M., each man with his load of sixty pounds. My staff and I followed a few minutes later. A waning moon in a cloudless sky illuminated objects in its light but accentuated the darkness once we entered the gorge.

I was unfamiliar with Himalayan travel then, and although the exertion of trying to keep on my feet while fighting my way up the steep snow slide took most of my attention, I was deeply interested in the sights and sounds around me. The amazing sharpness of the shadows, the towering cliffs which seemed to overhang us, the tremendous depth of the snow up which we climbed, and the roar of water rushing far beneath, all combined to give me a feeling of unreality.

We soon began to overtake our coolies, who stopped frequently to rest their loads on T-shaped sticks which they



LAMAYURU

The situation of this lamasery is very striking. The area of cultivation lies at the foot of a steep slope, while a village clings to the hillside at the top of which the lamasery is perched

carried. As we passed each group, my shikari encouraged them with shouts of "*shabash! shabash!*"—"well done!" All the coolies were cheery and returned his greeting with jokes and laughs. Had I been packing sixty pounds up that snow slope, I would have thought it nothing to joke about.

Dawn came as we reached the summit, 11,578 feet above the sea. From there to Matayan was but a few miles, though the rapidly softening snow made foot travel fatiguing. We were glad to reach the Rest House and even gladder that we did not have to go farther that day.

As we progressed, the mountains became less rugged and the country more and more barren. At first the people we met in villages were not mongoloid types, for the earlier stages of the road pass through part of the territory of the Dards, an Aryan race. But beyond Kargil, the ninth stage from Srinagar, we began to

feel that we were in Ladakh. Our pony men were Tibetan in feature, the villages had prayer-flags fluttering from each house, and now and then we passed a red-robed lama industriously twirling his prayer-wheel. Instead of the usual greeting of India and Kashmir, "*Salaam, sahib,*" we were now welcomed by the Ladakhi salutation, "*Julee.*" That is the respectful form—my return greeting was "*Ju.*"

Ladakhis are a jolly, pleasant people. They are mild mannered and as hospitable as any race I have met. Dirty they certainly are, but in that respect they differ only in degree from most Central Asians. The friendly Ladakhi, with his complete lack of religious prejudice and his ready laugh, is altogether a very likeable chap.

Ladakhi men wear queues of their own hair with added strands of horse-hair braided into them. They keep the appendages well oiled, with the result

that there are always greasy smears down the backs of their gray woolen coats. Their summer and winter headgear is a sheepskin-lined cloth cap with ear-pieces that are usually worn turned up in warm weather. Seen from a distance, these flapping ear-pieces look remarkably like horns.

Behind each ear a Ladakhi woman wears a large, flat piece of sheepskin with the fleece turned outward. These ear-pieces protrude straight out from the head and give the wearer a most odd appearance. A woman's headdress is especially striking. It takes the shape of a flat leather covering which forms a point over the forehead and in the back hangs down to about the waistline. This whole contraption is thickly studded with turquoise. We were told that a woman would put her entire personal fortune into her *peyrak*, as the headdress is called.

Although Ladakh is far from being a

wealthy country, Ladakhis seem to have a less fierce struggle for existence than is the case, for instance, in the neighboring district of Baltistan. The chief reason is said to be the practice of polyandry, which effectually prevents any increase in the population.

When a Ladakhi marries, his two next younger brothers become secondary husbands of his wife. Should there be more younger brothers than two, the others cannot share the wife of the eldest, but must either get out and hustle for a living or enter the church. A fortunate few are taken on as *maggas*, or special husbands, by heiresses who, because they had no brothers, have inherited the family fortune.

The two minor husbands of a wife are little better than slaves of their elder brother. If the eldest dies, the common wife may, if she chooses, divorce the other two by the simple ceremony of breaking a



LADAKHI WOMEN

The flat headdress, called the *peyrak*, studded with turquoise matrix and silver, often makes up the entire fortune of the wearer

string tied between her finger and that of the corpse. It is customary, I believe, for her to make each a present of a sheep before the final parting.

Polyandry is responsible for some amazing family trees. I was told that if one asks a Ladakhi who his father is, he will quite glibly rattle off a string of names.

We saw our first lamasery, or monastery of lamas, during our tenth march. It was high on a cliff face and reminded me of nothing so much as a swallow's nest, for so far as I could see there was no way of reaching it by anyone not provided with wings. However, as little of the building projected outside the sheer rock wall, doubtless there were interior tunnels and galleries with an entrance somewhere from the rear. Tibetan lamas almost invariably build their monasteries in most inaccessible locations, though

whether for the sake of the isolation conducive to profound meditations, or for the view, would be hard to say.

A few miles beyond Shergol, at the little village of Mulbek, there is a detached rock perhaps fifty feet high. One side has been smoothed off and on it is deeply carved a colossal figure of a god. A small temple nestles against the foot, while holes in the rock face show that at one time a larger building covered the figure.

Our Kashmiri staff were Mohammedans, and therefore hugely disdainful of everything Buddhist. Mrs. Morden's bearer, with fine biological indifference, looked at the carving for a time, and then said scornfully,

"That very bad goddess, memsahib. She eat up all the trees and grass in all this country. That is why this country so bare."

The memsahib smiled a bit skeptically and Aziza earnestly added,

"That is true, memsahib, that is true!"

We had seen our first *chortens* near Shergol, and as we went farther along the trail, these became familiar sights. Chortens are monuments erected sometimes in memory of a saint or lama, sometimes as a receptacle for sacred relics, especially the ashes of departed lamas. After the death ceremonies, which take several days, the corpse is cremated and part of the ashes are mixed with clay and moulded into various shapes. If the deceased has been a man of prominence, the tablet containing his ashes is placed by itself in a chorten constructed especially for it; those of ordinary individuals are tossed with others into an old chorten. The five divisions of a chorten represent the elements: earth, water, fire, air, and ether.

Chortens are sometimes built by the pious to "acquire merit," as the saying is. But apparently no merit is acquired by repairing an old chorten, for many of them—constructed, as they are, largely



A LADAKHI "ACQUIRING MERIT"

Prayer wheels are found in every monastery, and the devout person who turns them from right to left receives the benefit of the prayers they contain

of dried mud—are in various stages of dilapidation. Devout Tibetans always pass to the left of a chorten, as they believe they thereby “acquire merit.” Irreverent sahibs sometimes refer to the contents of chortens as “potted lamas.”

Mani-walls are another familiar sight as one travels farther into lama-land. These long, low structures of stone and mud have their tops and sides covered with flat rocks, on which are carved in Tibetan characters variations of the Buddhist prayer, “*Om mani padme hum.*” One must always pass to the left of a mani-wall to obtain the benefit of its prayers; to pass on the right is supposed to un-say them all and put one just that many in arrears. When a mani-wall or chorten occurs along a trail, the trail usually divides, so that a traveler may pass on the left going and the same returning.

In all Ladakh I saw no place whose situation is so spectacular—I might almost say dramatic—as that of Lamayuru. As one approaches the village from a cañon, one’s first sight of the place is a large and very impressive chorten at the end of a long mani-wall. Then more chortens. The trail makes a turn and there ahead lies Lamayuru. High up a steep mountain-side straggles a village of Ladakhi huts, with prayer-flags fluttering from poles and housetops. Queer little streets ascend steeply, sometimes through tunnels dug in the rock. Above, perched on the edge of a sheer cliff, the lamasery surmounts the whole.

The Tibetan word for a monastery is *gompa*, literally “a secluded place.” Our English word “lamasery” seems to be a corruption of the two words, “lama”—a Buddhist priest or monk—and “serai”—an inn or hostel. Lamayuru gompa was once the stronghold in Western Tibet of the ancient Bon religion, the early form of devil-worship which flourished over the whole country before Buddhism was introduced about A.D. 650.



AN ALTAR IN A LAMASERY

The large bowl at the left is filled with *ghee*, or clarified butter, which in this particular case is being used as fuel for the chapel lamp

There are two principal sects of lamas, the Yellow and the Red. The Yellow lamas, to which branch belong the Dalai Lama of Lhasa and the equally holy Panchen Rimpoche of Tashilhumpo, are dominant in Tibet proper. The Red lamas of Ladakh acknowledge the spiritual leadership of the Dalai and Panchen lamas, but are less ascetic in their personal conduct and rituals.

It is difficult for a Westerner to understand the tenets of lamaism. Before the coming of Buddhism, the peoples of Tibet, like many others similarly situated, considered that all misfortunes were the work of evil spirits and devils. Demons were responsible for storms, blizzards, and avalanches. Devils of the air caused the bitter winds that blow across the vast plains of the Tibetan plateau. If a person fell ill, it was the work of a malignant spirit which had to be propitiated or

driven out before recovery was possible. They saw demons behind each rock—and there were many rocks.

Buddhism, though the official state religion, at first made small headway. Padma Sambhava, popularly known in Tibet as Guru Rimpoche, the "Precious Teacher," is supposed to have overcome the malignant demons and to have obtained their assistance. He incorporated into the Buddhist ritual many of the deities, beliefs, and practices of the Bon religion, so that present-day lamaism is far removed from the teachings of the Gautama.

The lamaist pantheon comprises innumerable gods, demi-gods, saints, demons, and various deified evil spirits. Some came from India, some from the old Bon religion, while others are local to special districts. Each locality has its own particular godling, who is especially revered and who is supposed to protect his people against wandering evil spirits. The chief gods are the Buddhas; next come the Boddhisattvas, those who have attained Nirvana, or heaven, but have renounced it to assist mankind in its struggle for salvation. From these the descend-

ing scale includes hordes of gods and demons of varying degrees of power.

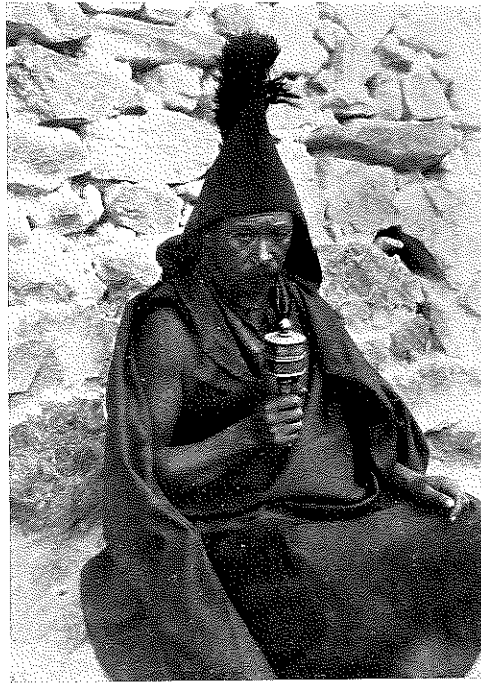
A belief in reincarnation is basic in the lamaist faith. Upon departing this life,

the soul of a lamaist is reborn into one of several spheres. The chief of these is *Lhayul*, or region of gods, the lowest *Nyalwa*, the hells. By "acquiring merit" in various ways the soul may, in a long cycle of rebirths, free itself from earthly bonds and enter Nirvana.

For various sins the soul may return to earth as one of the animals or even a lower form of life. A good Buddhist will not kill, for fear he may be condemning some unfortunate soul to another rebirth. One day I noticed one of my Ladakhi coolies industriously "reading his shirt." Quite evidently the hunting was good, but each time he carefully placed his little find on a rock beside him. I inquired why, and

was informed that my coolie did not know but that some of them might be his friends or relatives, condemned for their sins to a rebirth as "cooties." I thought of some people I knew—and wondered what their next incarnation might be!

To the traveler in Ladakh, the acquiring of merit seems mainly to take the form of endless repetitions of the prayer, *Om mani padme hum*. This is uttered millions of times daily, not only verbally but with the aid of mechanical contriv-



A LAMA WITH HIS PRAYER WHEEL

Each revolution of the wheel is supposed to offer a prayer by which the individual who turns it "acquires merit"

ances. It has been well called, "praying by machinery." Almost every Ladakhi one meets carries a prayer-wheel in one hand. Nearly all my coolies and pony-men

busily twirled prayer-wheels at all times on the march or in camp.

Larger prayer-wheels are found in lamaseries, in villages, and even along the trail where passers-by may give them a twist and obtain the benefit of their contents. I saw several instances where enterprising individuals had so harnessed personal "home" prayer-wheels that they were operated by water-power; others were fitted with vanes to catch the nearly constant wind. It rather seemed that these fortunate persons were several jumps ahead on the road to heaven.

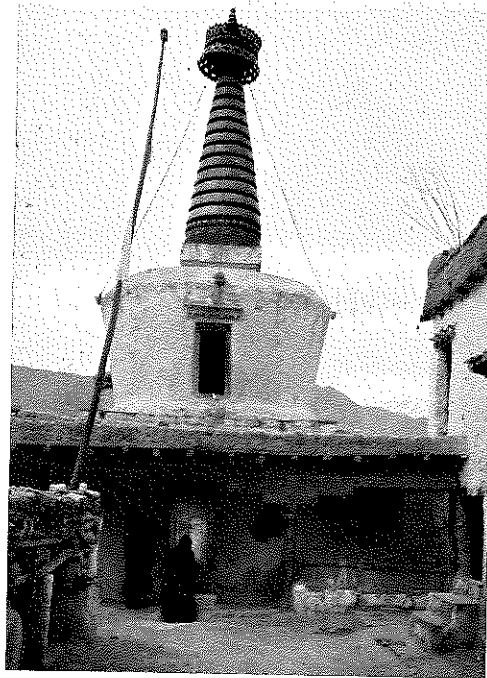
The usual form of prayer-wheel is a cylinder of wood or metal, on the inside of which the invocations are placed. Sometimes the outside surface has prayers painted on it, but generally they are pretty badly weathered. I saw several old American oil tins giving excellent service as prayer-wheels.

Prayer-flags form another simple but supposedly effective method of gaining the requisite celestial credits. They are made by lamas from inked wood blocks and sold to the faithful. Every monastery has numerous prayer-flags; they flutter from houses and from roadside shrines. Villages give the effect of a continual wash day, for long lines of prayer-flags strung on ropes from house to house remind one of nothing so much as handkerchiefs drying in the breeze. But each

flutter helps acquire merit for the devout individual from whose house the flag flies.

The monastic system is the main support of lamaism. All through Tibet and

Ladakh are scattered monasteries of greater or less size and importance. Grants of land, usually the most fertile in the vicinity, form one large source of revenue, while offerings of the pious serve to maintain the lamas in comparative affluence. Youngest sons of families usually become lamas; younger daughters enter the nunneries which form adjuncts of many lamaseries. The resultant drain of a considerable portion of the population into nonproductive pursuits is said to be a chief



A LARGE CHORTEN

Chortens are monuments usually erected to contain the ashes of departed lamas. Ordinarily, little effort is made to keep these in repair

reason for the backwardness of lamaistic countries, such as Tibet, Ladakh, and Mongolia.

I had the opportunity to visit several lamaseries, which differed mainly in details. That at Lamayuru is typical of the lot, so I will try to describe it. We reached its level by a stiff climb up village streets so steep and narrow that in places they are hewn in rough steps out of the solid rock. Deep chasms are crossed by tiny log bridges, while now and then adjoining house walls meet overhead and one falters upward in a dim—but not particularly religious—light.

The gumpa itself perches at the edge of a sheer drop of about two hundred feet.

The edge of the cliff is deeply serrated, and the monastery buildings are fitted into the irregularities, with some of them even overhanging yawning voids on pegs and props. Large prayer-wheels, which should be given a turn in the proper direction, clock-wise, are located at the entrance gates.

We entered a spacious court, enclosed on one side by the main lamasery building of mud-plastered stone and on the others by walls of the same general construction. This court forms the scene of the religious dances of the lamas, the so-called "Devil Dances," so dear to the Tibetan heart. From them he learns of the trials that will beset his soul on its onward path, also the eventual triumph of the forces of religion properly invoked.

We were led by our red-robed lama guides into a dimly-lighted hall, which reeked of incense, clarified butter, and unwashed humanity. The walls and

ceiling were draped with hangings, doubtless once brilliantly colored. Now, however, they were so blackened by smoke and dust that we could discern little about them beyond the fact that they were covered with hideous figures of demons.

At the far end of the room, a more than life-sized image of Buddha, flanked by lesser figures, looked down on the dais occupied during services by the chief lama. The abbot's place was to the left as one faced the altar, while rows of lower platforms down the center of the long room provided space for the lesser monks.

Before the altar, tiers of ledges were covered with dozens of brass bowls. Some were filled with offerings, mainly grain and seeds; others contained clarified butter, in which floated little wicks that burned with feeble flames. To one side stood a larger vessel of butter, evidently used to refill the small lamps from time to time.



THE LIBRARY OF A LAMASERY

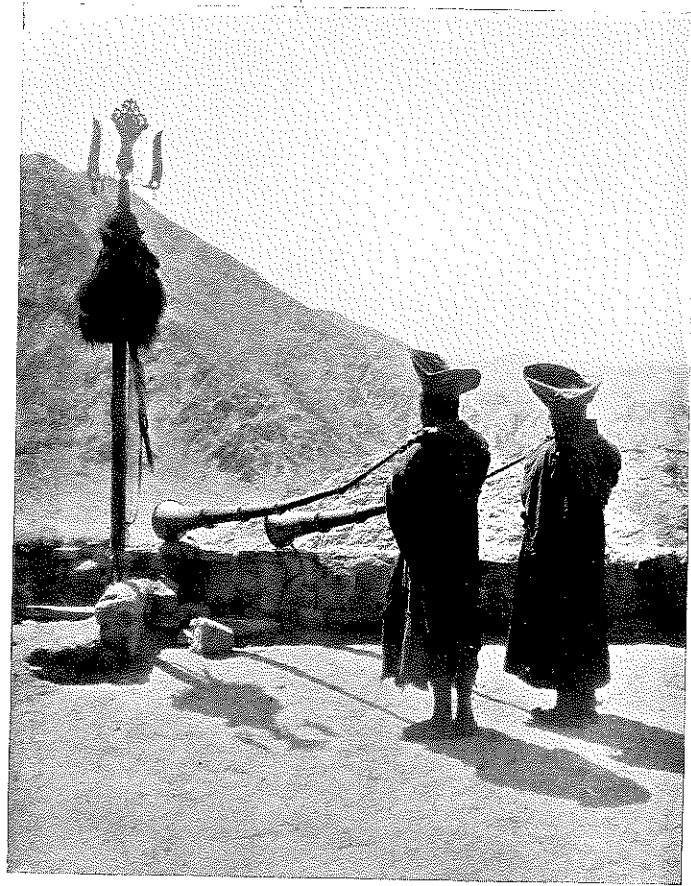
Lettered on heavy sheets by hand, these books form an invaluable record of religious and lay matters

All sorts of offerings to the gods are placed before them. A favorite oblation is a little cake made of flour and butter. Flowers are nearly always present in summer. But one sometimes sees amazingly incongruous objects on lamasery altars. I have seen glass balls, such as are used to decorate Christmas trees, empty tin cans, equally empty beer bottles, kodak film spools, and lumps of lead foil. But I think the prize of the lot was an electric light bulb which had the place of honor in a little gompa away up the Indus. The lamp was not connected to anything, of course, for there are no electric plants in Ladakh. Its possible usefulness to the deity was not apparent to our Western minds, but it was very evidently considered the last word in gifts.

Interesting as Lamayuru had proved to be, we could not linger there, for we were still four marches from Leh.

Just beyond Lamayuru a tremendous stratum of brilliant yellow rock is cut through by the valley up which the trail leads. I had thought that I had seen the ultimate in glorious colorings in the Grand Cañon, the Painted Desert and the Yellowstone, but the Leh Road, particularly the bit just beyond Lamayuru, transcends them all.

We wound down into the depths of a mighty gorge, where the horizon was almost directly above us. We crossed and recrossed the stream several times,



BLOWING THE GREAT SHAWMS

The dawn and the evening are saluted by the booming notes of these collapsible trumpets. They are also sometimes used to welcome important visitors

then began a long ascent, with the trail cut into the face of a sheer cliff. The coloring was superb—great bands of reds and blues alternated with stretches of greenish gray. Now and then, as the cañon changed direction, we caught glimpses of distant peaks. I have heard that this Lamayuru cañon is one of the deepest in the world.

One approaches Leh across a wide, sandy plateau, where the sun's rays beat down so fiercely that an adequate head covering is necessary. As we rode toward the enticing green of the large cultivated area surrounding the town, the most prominent object was a many-



THE COURTYARD AT HIMIS LAMASERY

It is in this court that the Devil Dances are held. This famous religious festival is celebrated annually and lasts three days

storied building on a rocky hillside just behind. I thought it was a lamasery, of course, but it proved to be the palace of former kings of Ladakh. It is a small edition of the Potala, the palace of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa, and it overlooks the Leh oasis as the Potala does Lhasa. A small monastery perches on the very top of the hill above the palace, while far to the northward a great snow-capped range towers into the sky.

I have seen many Central Asian cities, but none more interesting than Leh. I have visited Kashgar, Urumchi, Turfan, Samarkand, and Bokhara. All of them are intensely interesting, though in each are touches of the outside world which somehow do not fit the picture. But as I rode through a gate and found myself suddenly at the end of the long poplar-bordered Leh bazaar street, filled with a heterogeneous mass of people, transport animals, and bales of goods, and

dominated by the palace beyond, I felt that I was truly near the heart of Asia.

Leh is the terminus of trade routes from India, Tibet, and Central Asia. From India and Kashmir come silks and spices; from Tibet wool and salt; from beyond the Karakoram, by the highest trade route in the world, come yak caravans loaded with felt numdahs. Everything is unloaded at Leh.

One sees a most amazing variety of types in Leh bazaar. Lean Turkis from Yarkand and Khotan rub elbows with sleek Hindu merchants from India; Tibetans, Kashmiris, Ladakhis, Baltis, Pathans, Sikhs, Chinese, and nomad *changpas* from the hills jostle one another in the milling crowd. The babel of tongues makes one's ears ring.

We stayed a few days in the comfortable Rest House at Leh, then pushed on to the Himis gompa, twenty-four miles farther up the Indus. Himis is the wealthiest

and largest monastery in Ladakh and one of the few that has a resident *skushok* presiding over it.

A *skushok* is theoretically the reincarnation of a saint who, by pious living and good deeds, has graduated from the cycle of rebirth and achieved Nirvana, but who has renounced his reward and elected to return to earth to assist his fellow mortals along the rough pathway of existence.

When a *skushok* is about to die, he indicates the place in which he will be reborn as a child. After his death his followers go to the designated village and locate a new-born male child that bears certain marks and otherwise seems the most likely incarnation of the saint. He is left with his family for the first few years of his life. Then, after he has successfully recognized various religious articles that belonged to him in his previous incarnation, he is taken to the monastery

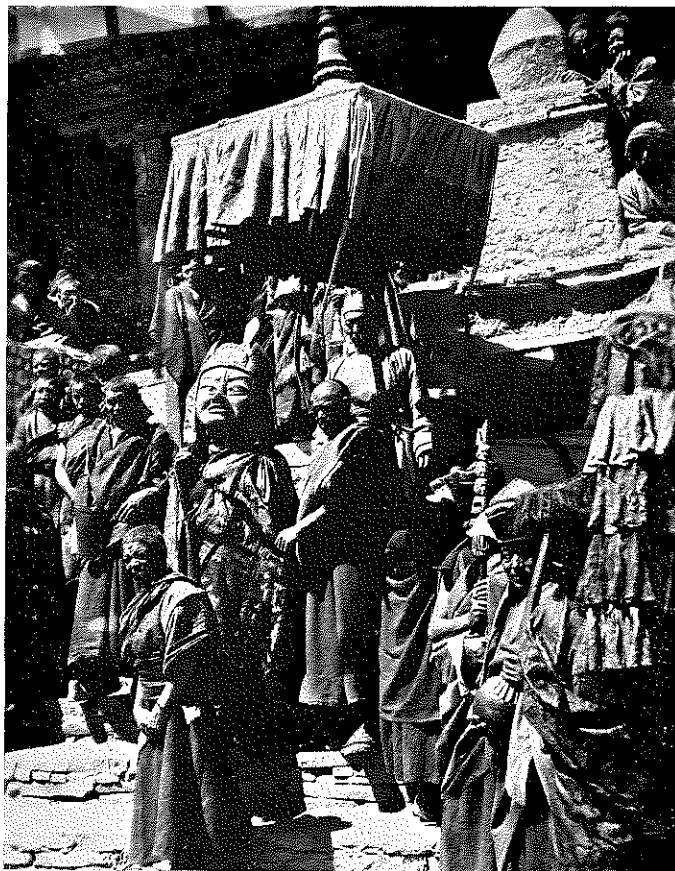
to be educated. Later he is sent to Lhasa for several years to complete his religious education, after which he returns to his own *gompa* as *skushok*. Sometimes a *skushok* presides over several monasteries and spends much of his time traveling between them.

The *skushok* of Himis *gompa* is an alert, forceful man, now about forty-eight years old. He was born in Lhasa and for several years refused to take up his duties at Himis. Although he holds an exalted position in the Tibetan church, his manner to us was quite friendly and without any trace of the arrogance often displayed by Hindu and Mohammedan priests. During our conversation with the *skushok* it was evident that he had some knowledge of the outside world, for when one of us said that if he could arrange an invitation for us to visit Lhasa we would reciprocate by presenting him with a trip to New York, he



THE CENTRAL HALL OF A LAMASERY

Before the altars in the background and on the long, low benches, the lamas sit cross-legged during the services



THE "BENIGN" CHARACTER IN THE DEVIL DANCE
The masked figure represents the church in the Devil Dance. It overcomes the devils who threaten the souls of the departed on their road to reincarnation

takes three days, with services inside the lamastery alternating with dances staged in the great courtyard. Whole families attend, to spend the days in religious pursuits and the chilly nights sleeping out on rocky hillsides.

As we approached Himis, we were conscious of a dull, booming sound that seemed to fill the narrow valley. It echoed and re-echoed from the cliffs about us. At first we could not locate its origin nor hazard a guess as to its meaning. Then we rounded a bend in the trail and saw the gompa high on a mountain-side before us. On its roof two lamas were blowing prolonged blasts on great *shawms*, the huge telescopic horns used to salute the dawn and the night. We were told that it was being done as a welcome to our

asked how much it would cost. On our saying that the fare would be about a thousand rupees, the skushok replied that the fare to London was about that much and that as New York was farther from Himis than London, we must be low in our estimate!

Himis gompa is situated some distance up a narrow gorge which rises sharply from the Indus valley. The monastery is the annual scene of one of the most famous religious festivals in the whole world—the "Devil Dances" of the Himis lamas. Pilgrims come from long distances to witness the performance, as great merit is thereby gained. The affair

party. During our stay at Himis we became well used to the reverberating sound of shawms.

We went over to the monastery early in the morning on the first day of the performance of the Devil Dance, and found the large court already partly filled with on-lookers. Seats had been provided for us and a few other sahibs on a little balcony from which a good view of the proceedings could be obtained. From inside the buildings came prolonged chanting, broken now and then by the sound of drums, cymbals, and horns. As the dances would evidently not begin for some time, we decided to go inside and see what was going on there.

In a large room, lighted from the top only, forty or fifty lamas were seated cross-legged on rows of rug-covered low platforms. They kept up a droning chant, pausing frequently to take copious drafts of tea and barley beer, both of which were brought in large copper pitchers. The measure of the chant was at first slow, but the rhythm rapidly increased until, at the peak of its crescendo, cymbals, and flat drums held aloft on poles, were struck in time with the cadence. When the ultimate effect was reached the music suddenly stopped, to begin all over again in a few moments. Doubtless the service had a significance that was obscure to us.

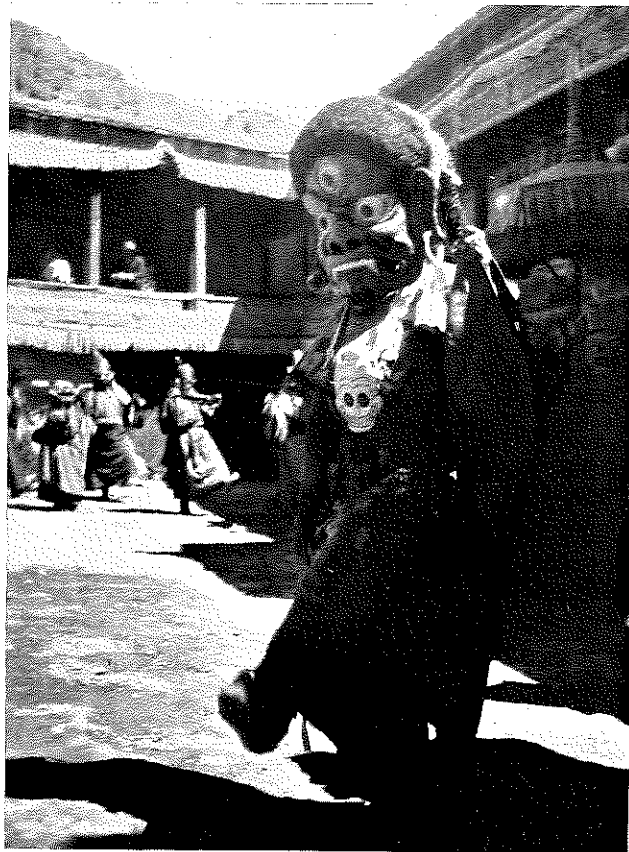
By the time we resumed our seats on the balcony, the court was well-filled with spectators. The orchestra, composed of about twenty lamas with drums, cymbals, bells, and shawms, filed in and took places just beneath us. Then the skushok, escorted by several priests, came down the wide stairway from the main building and ascended the elevated dais reserved for him. On his way across the court the crowds besieged him for a blessing. Several came close enough to touch the bottom of his robe.

The first dancers to appear were lamas in gorgeous robes, who paced to slow music around the court, swinging lighted incense burners. This seemed to be in the nature of a prelude and did not last long.

Then the music became loud and violent, each musician seeming to vie with the others to see which could make the most noise.

Down the steps dashed troop after troop of lamas in hideous masks. They swirled and gyrated about the court until we became dizzy with the noise and motion. So far as we could determine, there was nothing especially allegorical about this portion of the dance—it seemed just a wild revel of demons.

The masks represented every form of fiend that could be conceived by the most diseased imagination. There were three-eyed faces with great protruding tusks and diadems of death's-heads; there were beasts with horns and antlers such as no animal ever wore; there were serpents; there were huge, grinning skulls; there were cross-eyed faces with the grin of an



A CHARACTER IN THE DANCE

Scores of similar masked figures play their part in the long-drawn-out religious festival



DEVIL DANCERS

These masked individuals represent two of the many evil spirit characters that take part in the devil dance

imbecile. All the masks were of papier-mache and, we were told, were made in Lhasa. They were all brilliantly colored.

The gowns worn by the dancers were, for the most part, of beautiful Chinese brocaded silk, and though some of them were a bit faded, their colors were very lovely. A few of the characters wore necklaces of human bones. All carried either daggers or swords, which they flourished wildly during the ceremony. We noticed that the death's-head was frequently used as a *motif*.

The music became quieter and gradually died away as a figure wearing a huge mask of benign—if cross-eyed—mien slowly descended the stairs. It represented the church and was sheltered by a large canopy carried by four bearers. At

its approach the demons fled and left the court.

Dance followed dance in bewildering sequence. One was supposed to represent lost souls wandering in space and beset on all sides by devils of the air. Another, in which a small effigy of a man was nearly hacked to pieces by fiends, indicated the difficulties in which the departing spirit would find itself after death. In every case the church, a figure representing an incarnation of the Buddha, was triumphant and rescued the victim at the last moment. But as soon as the gracious figure left the scene, the demons returned and the battle for the soul began again.

The performance lasted all day and we heard sounds of chanting at intervals throughout the night.

The following day there were more representations. One consisted of the elaborate smearing of quantities of red paint on two horses and a dog, after which the poor beasts were dragged about the court while the crowd shouted with satisfaction. The meaning of this ceremony was not apparent, but I have read that its significance was similar to that of the scapegoats of ancient Jewish beliefs. I have also read that after the ceremony the animals are considered sacred and are well-treated. I hope so, for they have a rough time during it.

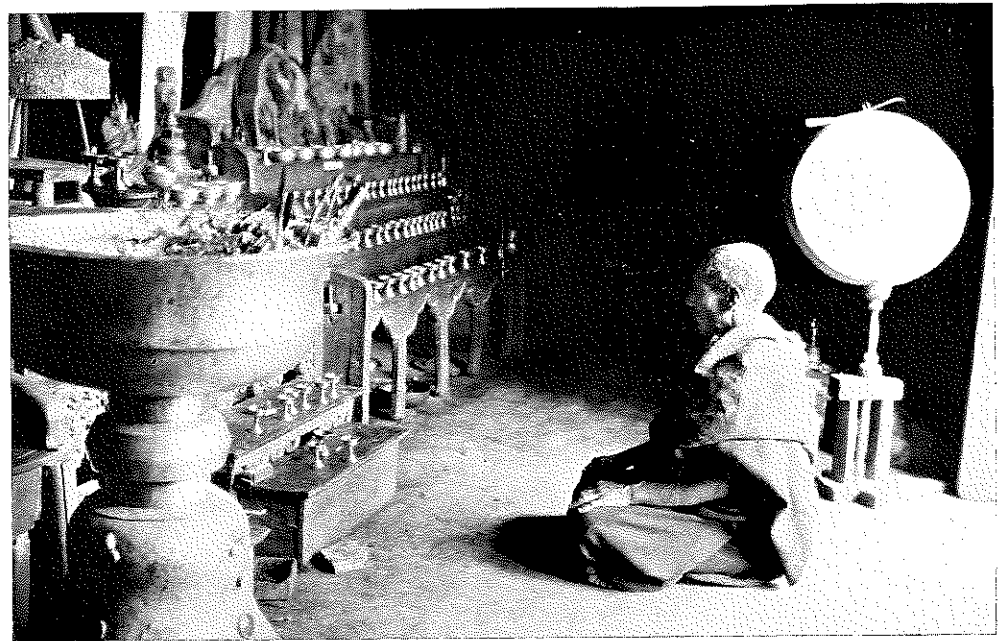
Other dances seemed mere clowning. I remember one particularly, which showed a school teacher bedeviled by his students. The little imps made his life miserable by their antics until they were

chastised by a stern-faced mask, who presumably represented higher authority. The audience thoroughly enjoyed the lighter vein of most of the second day's performances. As for us, we were in rather a daze by the time it ended.

Whether or not the lay Tibetan understands much of the significance of the Devil Dances seems doubtful. But without question they serve to strengthen

the hold of the church. To the traveler from the West they are a part of the picture—part of that weird, fascinating section of the globe, the Tibetan highlands.

As we left Himis, the gumpa shawms again boomed out far up the valley above us—a farewell from the land aptly described by Kim's lama when he said "These are the true hills."



A LAMA BEFORE AN ALTAR AT TIKSAY LAMASERY

On the left is a large brass bowl of *ghee*, and before the altar are many small brass lamps burning with feeble flames. The drum at the right is used during services