

## PREFACE.

THE following pages give an account, inadequate no doubt, yet I would fain hope, so far as it goes, intelligible and authentic, of Central Tibet, its capital, its Grand Lama hierarchy, and its dreamy hermit-people, as they appear to one who has had exceptional advantages for making their acquaintance.

It is now nearly a quarter of a century since I paid my first visit to the mystic land beyond the Himalayas. Soon thereafter, on my return from the war in Burmah (1885-86), where I had had an opportunity of examining the primitive Buddhism of King Thebaw's late subjects, I was stationed for some years at Darjeeling on the borders of the Forbidden Land, where there was a floating colony of several thousand Tibetans, Lamas and laity, fresh from the sacred city, and in daily communication with it. The curiosity naturally aroused by the sight of these strange people, with their picturesque caravans and encampments, was farther stimulated by echoes of the theosophist belief that somewhere beyond the mighty Kanchenjunga there would be found a key which should unlock the mysteries of the old world that was lost by the sinking of the Atlantis continent in the Western Ocean, about the time when Tibet was being upheaved by

the still rising Himalayas. Here more obviously and indisputably must lie the key to many unsolved problems in the ethnology, natural history, and geography of the "Roof of the World." At Darjeeling also I made the acquaintance of several of the Survey spies, those brave men who, carrying their lives in their hands, are engaged in what Kipling calls "The Great Game," the exploration of the most savage and least known parts of the Trans-Himalayan valleys, and I heard from their lips the stirring narratives of their adventures.

To turn these hitherto neglected opportunities to best account, I set about learning the Tibetan language and collecting information wherever available. Awakening from my first surprise at finding how little is certainly known as to the religion of the country, and how unlike it is to the Buddhism of Burmah, from which I had freshly come, I undertook a comparison of the Tibetan beliefs and rites with those which pass under the Buddhist name in other lands, devoting much of my holiday leave to the prosecution of the enquiry in Ceylon, China, and Japan; whilst, with a view to acquire information of a more secular character, I tramped many hundreds of miles along the mountain tracks of the Tibetan frontier, at various points from Garhwal and Nepal in the west, to Assam in the east, where the valley of Central Tibet ends in that of the Brahmaputra River, often at great altitudes, sometimes sleeping in caves to evade the frontier guards, and on several occasions penetrating some days' journey into the territory of the Lhasa Government, eliciting

information about the tribes,<sup>1</sup> topography, and natural history<sup>2</sup> of those regions. Although my attempt to reach the mystic citadel in disguise in 1892 failed, yet during these years of preparation I had accumulated such accurate pictures of the land that my ultimate entry into its capital, when it came, seemed but the realisation of a vivid and long-cherished dream.

The reader will, I trust, excuse these personal references, which are made in no boastful way, but merely to explain the somewhat peculiar position in which I found myself as a member of the advance column of the recent historic expedition to Lhasa. The circumstances enumerated opened to me an intercourse with the Lamas, native chiefs, and people met with on the journey, which would have been impossible to one not similarly prepared beforehand, and put into my hands a means of interpreting much symbolism, custom, and myth which would have been quite incomprehensible to the uninitiated.

Amongst the wealth of photographs of this book, all taken by myself, with one or two exceptions, are some unique ones, direct from Nature, by the "colour-process," which give vivid and truthful pictures of the marvellous colouring of the originals. The clever sketches by Mr Rybot, a member of the Expedition, after the style of the Bayeux tapestries, will be appreciated.

<sup>1</sup> *Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley*. Calcutta, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> My large collection of the birds of the South-Western Tibet borderland is now in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow University, and is analysed by me in the *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, pp. 198-234. Calcutta, 1894.

An unusually full Index has been added for convenience of reference.

I take this opportunity of expressing my great indebtedness to my friend Dr ISLAY BURNS MUIRHEAD, and to Mr JOHN MURRAY, for much-valued assistance in revising the proofs.

L. A. W.

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