

THE BOAT TRAIN

BY

THE COUNTESS OF LIMERICK

SIR MALCOLM CAMPBELL

MRS IRENE NOEL-BAKER

VICE-ADMIRAL SIR CHARLES CARPENDALE C.B.

HELEN SIMPSON : RONALD KAULBACK

MRS JOAN WOOLLCOMBE : WALTER F GILES

MRS GABRIELLA MELVILLE

MARY AGNES HAMILTON

COL. S P JAMES : MRS WILFREDA LEAKEY

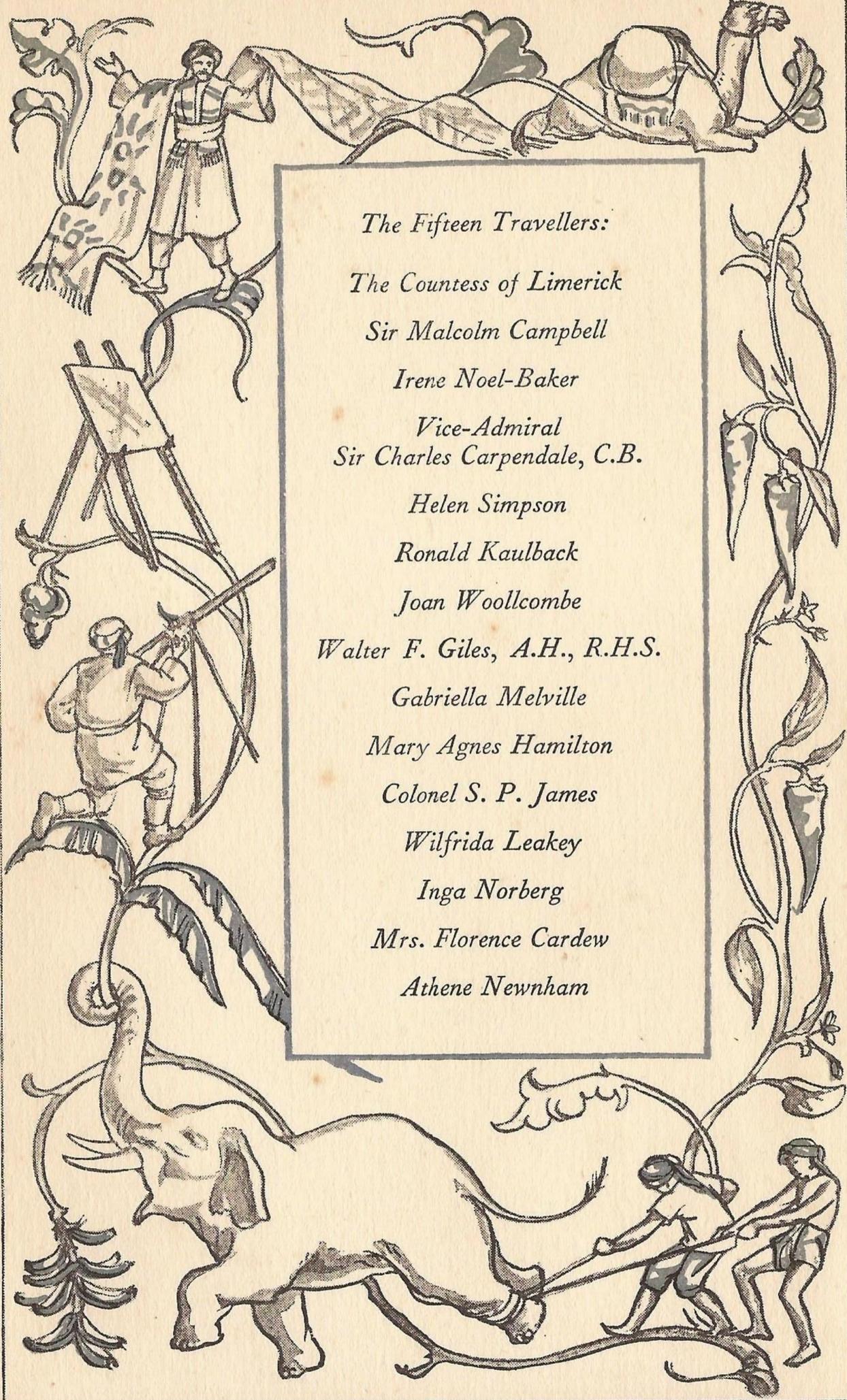
INGA NORBERG : MRS ARTHUR CARDEW

MRS ATHENE NEWNHAM

EDITED BY

MARY AGNES HAMILTON

DECORATIONS BY BETTY AYLMER



The Fifteen Travellers:

The Countess of Limerick

Sir Malcolm Campbell

Irene Noel-Baker

*Vice-Admiral
Sir Charles Carpendale, C.B.*

Helen Simpson

Ronald Kaulback

Joan Woolcombe

Walter F. Giles, A.H., R.H.S.

Gabriella Melville

Mary Agnes Hamilton

Colonel S. P. James

Wilfrida Leakey

Inga Norberg

Mrs. Florence Cardew

Athene Newnham

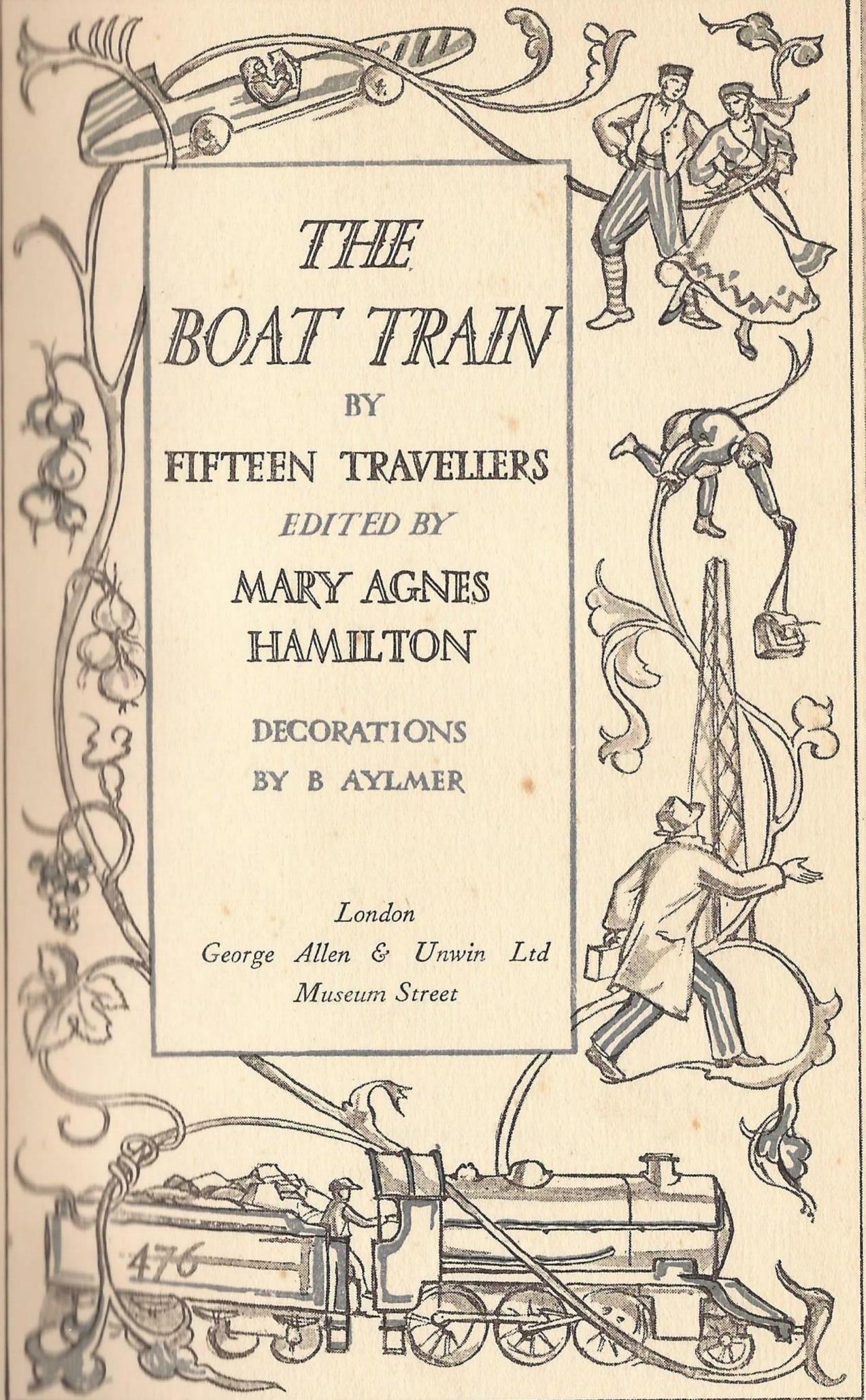
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HAMILTON**

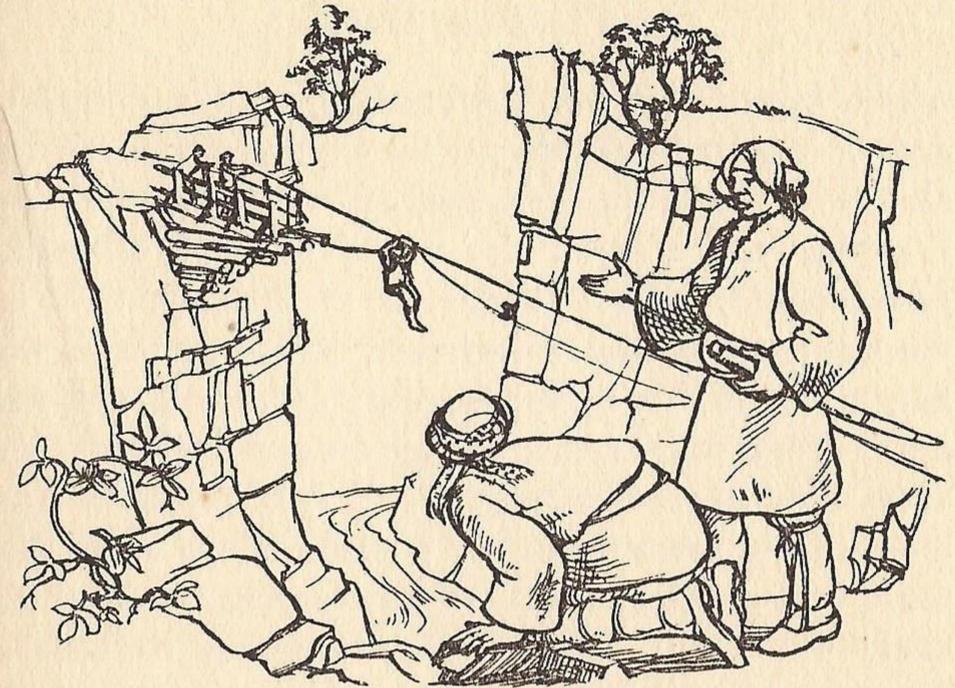
DECORATIONS
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London
George Allen & Unwin Ltd
Museum Street



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that strange forbidding country, at the people's capacity for terror. It is a poor soil; they are always near hunger, and those who are near hunger are near disturbing visions, as the saints who fasted in the desert discovered. Savoy is mountainous; mist lingers a long time in the valleys, contorting the shapes seen through it. The beauty of the country is threatening; in spring there is a constant muttering of falling stones and snow that is terrifying to a newcomer. Going through those valleys in the train for home, the comfortable express, I could understand how belief in witchcraft would die hard. I could understand even the fantastic wizard who, sixty-five years ago, killed a child so that he might go about unseen among his neighbours.



VI

EXPLORING IN TIBET

By RONALD KAULBACK

SOUTH-EASTERN TIBET, I suppose, is probably the least-known part of Asia, and when Captain Kingdon Ward, the famous botanist, asked me to accompany him on an expedition to explore some part of it, it is needless to say that I jumped at the opportunity. At the last minute we were joined by B. R. Brooks-Carrington, who was to take a natural colour film of the journey, so that eventually it was a party of three who set off to India. Some weeks later, in Calcutta, we picked up our three Tibetan servants, who had come down to meet us from Darjeeling, and took the train to Sadiya, in north-eastern Assam—a very trying journey of three days across the plains,

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where everything was uniformly brown and dusty. Sadiya has lately developed into quite a metropolis, and now boasts the presence of no less than seven European and about a dozen native shops, all built of corrugated iron, and hideous to look upon. It is the last town in Assam, however, and, once there, we began to feel that at last we were nearly off, and we set to work with terrific energy on our final preparations. First of all, our baggage had to be repacked into loads of not more than sixty pounds apiece, as that is the greatest weight a coolie can carry in the kind of country through which we were going to travel. Then, besides all the packing, we had to buy several hundred pounds of rice, flour, cooking-oil, etc., to feed the coolies as well as ourselves on the long trek before we actually reached the Tibetan frontier.

At last the great day came when everything was ready. The coolies picked up their loads (which they carried by means of straps going across their foreheads), and away we went, turning back to take one last look at civilization before a bend in the path hid it from sight. The next three weeks were rather heavy going. We were marching up the valley of the Lohit Brahmaputra—a part of the country inhabited only by the surly Mishmi hill-tribes—and the path was no more than a narrow streak of slippery mud, which stretched on and on, over and under fallen trees, in and out of precipitous ravines, and across the faces of cliffs. Almost the whole way we were plunging through so dense an undergrowth of great bramble thickets that we could seldom see more than three or four yards round at a

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time; and our difficulties were further increased by the leeches, which attacked us in large numbers, so that on many of the marches we moved along with legs streaming with blood.

All things come to an end, however, and towards the last week of March we came out of the forest on to some gloriously open terraces, and, reaching the Tibetan frontier, we crossed the river by a rope bridge, and camped at last in open country on the other side. These rope bridges are most interesting, and are amusing things to cross. They consist of a single rope of twisted bamboo stretched over the river from one bank to the other. Each man has a wooden slider which he slips over the rope, and to which he fastens himself by a pair of leather thongs. Then, if the two banks are more or less of a height, he pulls himself across hand over hand; but if, as with that bridge, there is a considerable slope in the right direction, he just lets go and shoots merrily over. The great trouble is that with a train of coolies it takes a very long time before everyone is safely on the other side, as each load and each coolie has to go over separately. As a matter of fact, on this occasion it took us about five and a half hours. When my turn came, it occurred to me that I was considerably heavier than any of the others, and that, with all that slope, I was going to land with great force at the bottom. Accordingly, I posted a couple of stray Tibetans on the far bank to act as a buffer. I tied myself on, and let go. Long before I was across I was travelling with enormous velocity, like some weird comet. My two buffers grew visibly pale

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at my approach, but stood their ground like men. I hit them with a tremendous crash, sent them both flying, and bounded back two or three yards up the rope before finally gliding to rest. The two trusty men picked themselves up from the rocks and kindly helped to untie me from the slider, and then, shaken to the core, I tottered away. Though I should hate to blame them for it, it is a fact that from then on I was tormented by fleas.

Once across the river the path became quite good, and two days later, after a stiff climb of about a thousand feet, we dropped down on to the level floor of the Rima Valley, where we were met by ponies which the Governor of the Tibetan province of Zayul had sent out to us. Riding in state—though rather uncomfortably, for the saddles were only of wood and the stirrups far too short—we came to his headquarters, and were welcomed by the Headman, who took us into his house for rest and refreshments. These consisted of buttered tea, walnuts, and a kind of crude rice-wine, which tasted like a mixture of creosote and methylated spirit. Buttered tea is a very favourite drink in Tibet. The tea itself comes in bricks from China, and is broken up into small pieces and boiled for a long time. It is then strained into wooden churns in which it is violently mixed with rancid butter, salt, and soda. The resulting liquid looks not unlike soup, and, strange to say, is really very good, besides being extremely warming and sustaining. Apart from that, the Tibetans live mostly on barley flour and, up to about seven thousand feet high, on rice. The barley

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flour they mix with the tea into a thick sort of dough, which they roll between their hands into balls. As washing is very much of a neglected art among them, the colour of the dough-balls can well be imagined. When they can obtain it they are very fond of meat, but that is something of a luxury.

The villagers (at least in the south-east of Tibet) are almost entirely self-supporting. They grow their own crops, breed their own cattle and pigs, weave cloth on primitive looms, and make up their own clothes. Their houses are built entirely of wood, without nails or metal of any kind, and stand on piles some eight to ten feet in height. The space underneath is used as stables for the animals at night—a practice which tends to make the atmosphere in the rooms above decidedly close, to put it mildly. The only things they are forced to import from other districts are tea, salt, knives, jewellery, and guns, all of which they exchange for rice or wheat. The guns they favour are venerable-looking weapons, made up of about five feet of gaspipe wired on to a roughly shaped piece of wood, and fired by a match. They have no sights, and are magnificently inaccurate. Indeed, as guns they are of very little use, but the mere fact of possessing one gives its proud owner a great sense of superiority. I went out once with a Tibetan hunter to see how he managed matters. It appeared that the first thing to be done was to set a number of snares in hopeful places, which he did on the evening before the hunt proper. The next morning, before dawn, we set out from the camp and cautiously took up our position under a convenient bush, where

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we waited in a deathly silence. Some time later there was a great crashing in the bushes near at hand as some animal blundered into one of the snares. Instantly, and filled with excitement, the hunter loaded his aged weapon and borrowed one of my few matches. We then remained motionless until the sun rose and it was light enough to see, upon which the hunter stealthily crawled towards the beast, which was, by then, thoroughly roped up and quite unable to move. About five yards away from it he stopped, put up a small tripod, rested his gun on it, lit the match, and took careful aim. There was a huge explosion, the gun leapt into the air, and the bullet landed in the animal's rump. However, he had fired his gun, his honour was satisfied, and with a cry of triumph he dashed forward with a knife and finished matters off. A few other Tibetans soon gathered round, and then, with one exception, the party celebrated the happy ending to the hunt by eating the liver and heart perfectly raw.

We stayed for about a fortnight with the Governor, before pushing on deeper and deeper into the country, following the river valleys, which are the only possible routes from place to place. We gave up living in tents, and slept every night in some village or other, where the houses were always filthily dirty and full of rats and fleas, but, even so, far more comfortable than being under canvas. For some time nothing very exciting occurred, but one day towards the end of April a man arrived who said that there was a native courier close behind us, bringing us letters from Sadiya. We

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were all very thrilled at this, as we had had no news since leaving Assam, and we even went so far as to plan out a special meal to celebrate the arrival of the mail. Day after day went by, however, with never a sign of the courier, until bit by bit all our hopes faded away, and we began to believe that we had dreamt the whole story. It was not until a fortnight later that the mystery was solved by the discovery of the missing courier's body. He had been ambushed in broad daylight when not more than fifteen miles behind us. The bandits had cut his throat, stolen the mail, and thrown the corpse into a deep ravine, where it was found by the merest accident. The letters were picked up some days later by the side of a path, but they were the last to reach us, as naturally no one was unduly anxious to take on the job of mail-runner after that.

At the end of May we came to a most spectacular gorge. Less than fifty yards apart, the rock walls towered up perfectly sheer for about two thousand feet, while between them rushed a foaming torrent of white water. As we stood at the bottom we were in a sort of perpetual twilight, with a thin ribbon of blue sky far above our heads. We climbed up almost to the top by a series of ladders made of notched logs, and then moved on above the river, sometimes using the natural rock ledges, while at others we had to make our way gingerly along flimsy wooden galleries pegged to the face of the precipice. It took us nearly four hours to cover two miles in that gorge, but we were kept from any feelings of boredom by the know-

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ledge that if we were to slip there was nothing between us and a very long drop into the river below. After those two miles, however, the path improved, and we were able to make good speed once more.

Three days later we came to the last village south of the passes at the end of the valley. Within two miles of it was the foot of a big glacier, which came to an end in a cliff of ice some hundred and fifty feet in height, from under which rushed the waters of the river we had been following. We spent a week or so in the neighbourhood of that village, and then marched up by the side of the glacier through a great forest of rhododendron trees to make camp on a small and very uncomfortable ledge at about 13,000 feet. We had to remain there for a solid fortnight of rain and bitter winds, until the snow on the pass above us should have melted enough to allow us to cross over with our coolies. At the beginning of July the way was reported clear, and we climbed up to the top. No sooner had we reached the summit of the pass than the coolies all shouted aloud to the Spirits of the Mountains, asking them to look favourably on the party, and not to send storms and avalanches as we continued the march. That done, they lit a number of little fires in honour of the gods, after which we climbed down the other side, and started to traverse across the dangerously steep slopes of snow which covered the sides of the valley from the top of the mountains to another glacier several thousand feet below. There was only one accident, as a matter of fact, when a coolie slipped and rolled down for a

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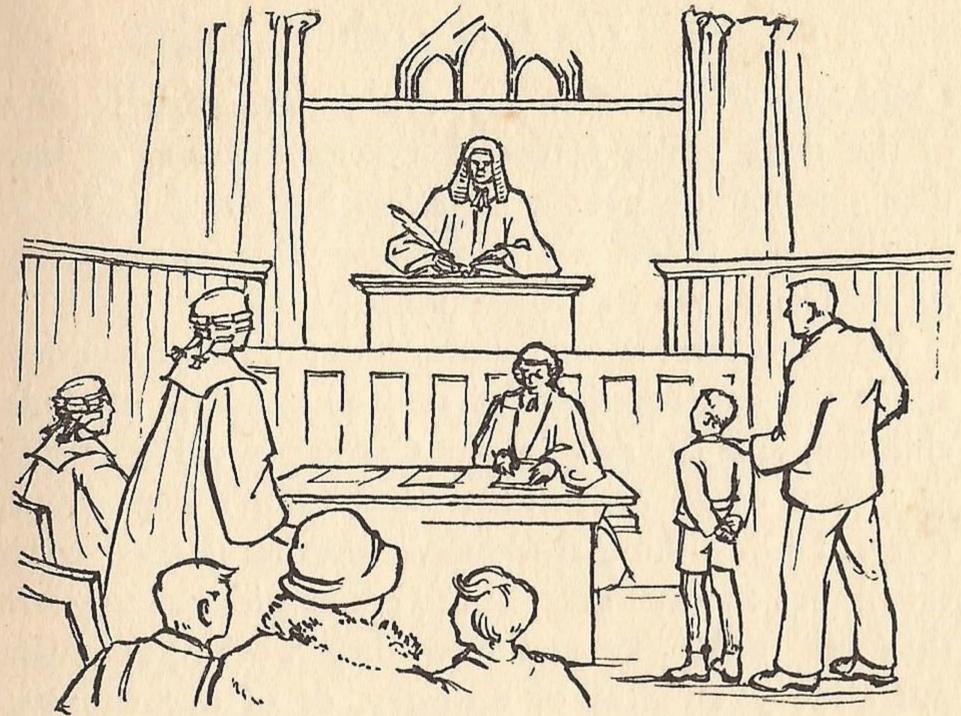
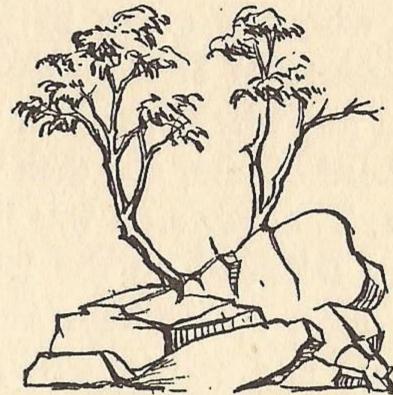
distance of three hundred feet or so, until he was stopped by a rock. He was not hurt, but was extremely annoyed at having to cut steps all the way up, and joined the others, at last, with a face of thunder.

We made camp that night actually on the glacier, as there was no other level space on which to pitch the tents. It was bitterly cold in that place. We were at 14,000 feet, with no less than five glaciers within two miles of us, and nothing to see but snow, ice, and bare, grey granite. The great problem was how to keep our feet warm, and do what we might they were always numb with cold. Brooks-Carrington and I had been unable to obtain permission to go any further than that point, and had to say good-bye to Captain Kingdon Ward, who was going to push on farther north to the monastery of Shiuden Gomba. I watched him dwindle to a tiny black speck on the great snow-field which lay ahead of him, and then we turned south on our way back. The monsoon was in full blast, and the route we had followed up the Lohit Valley was blocked by the rains; so we kept more to the east, followed up a steep and narrow track, and eventually crossed over into Burma.

We travelled straight down through Burma from north to south, finding it so difficult in certain parts of the country to obtain provisions that at one time we were forced on to a slimming diet of corn-cobs and cucumbers for about a fortnight. We arrived in Rangoon at the end of November, and I managed to get home in time for Christmas, while Brooks-Carrington stayed on to take a few more films. Captain

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Kingdon Ward had been a wonderful leader and companion, and we were overjoyed to hear some months later that he had had a most successful time after we had parted company, and that he had been able to accomplish all that he had set out from England to do.



VII

CHILDREN'S POLICE AT WORK IN AMSTERDAM AND PARIS

By JOAN WOOLLCOMBE

I. AMSTERDAM

IN just over two hours you can fly to Holland. I went across by air a few days ago to have a talk with the famous Amsterdam Children's Police. There are exciting contrasts in the trip itself, since the streamlined air-liner gives you the top view of southern England, of the Channel, and of the tidy fields of Holland before she glides down to the tarmac at Schiphol—the airport of Amsterdam. Within little over three and a half hours from London I was deposited on the doorstep of the headquarters of the

