

A BOOK-PROCESSION OF THE TIBETAN LLAMAS, AS SEEN AT DARJEELING.*

Road on 6th August 1924.

The subject of this paper is suggested by the Tibetan Oxylograph, which I produce here for inspection.

Introduction.

It was kindly presented to me about two years ago by my friend Mr. Framroz Merwanji Mehta, M.A., LL.B., Solicitor, of our High Court. I have presented it to the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute. Nobody in Bombay could then tell me what it was. Fortunately, Prof. Sylvain Levi, who was amongst us at the end of 1922, on its being shown to him, kindly wrote a Note on it at my request. The Note has been published in the original French with my translation in the second number of the Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute. The object of this paper is to describe a Book-procession, which I had the pleasure of seeing, in connection with a *gumpa* or monastery near Darjeeling, wherein a number of such oxylographs were carried round the village.

In my paper, read before this Society on the 24th June

Processions Common to all Ages and all People.

1914, on "A Devil-driving Procession of the Tibetans, as seen at Darjeeling, and a few thoughts suggested by it,"¹

I have spoken at some length on the subject of the part played by processions in the religious and social life of a people. The State, the Church and the School, the three great institutions of a country or nation, which influence the life of that country or nation, have their own processions. I have seen, and not only seen, but have taken part in

* Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol. XIII, No. 2, pp. 146-52.

¹ Journal of the Anthropological Society, of Bombay Vol. X, pp. 209-229. *Vide* my "Anthropological Papers," Part II, pp. 124-45. *Vide* the "Jam-e-Jamshed" of 8th July 1913.

many processions. But out of all the religious processions I have seen, I remember with pleasure, rather vividly, two. The one was that, seen on 20th November 1889, at Constantinople in connection with a Greek Church there and in honour of St. George. The other is a Tibetan book-procession which forms the subject of this paper and which I saw in connection with a Tibetan *gumpa* near Darjeeling, on the 4th June 1919.

Among many people, pious thoughts are associated with their scriptures. Some attribute, at times, miraculous influences to their possession on certain occasions. We see many a people touching their eyes and foreheads with their sacred books out of reverence for them. Their book of Scriptures, is their book of books and is spoken of as *the* book. (a) For example, the English word for Christian scriptures is Bible, which word comes from *biblia*, a book. They are so named because they are believed to form "the Book, *par excellence*". In Daniel (IX. 2), in the account of the Captivity, the word "books" is meant for the holy books. (b) The word *ketâb* (کتاب), *i.e.*, a book, is similarly used among the Mahomedans for Scriptures. For example, the Christians, Jews and the Magusis (Magians, Parsees) are spoken of as the *Ahl-i Ketâb*, *i.e.*, the people who possess scriptures. (c) Then take *granth* (ग्रन्थ), the Sanskrit word for a book. It is used by the Sikhs for their Sacred Scriptures which they call "*granth*." They speak of this *granth* respectfully as *granth saheb*. (d) The Mahrathi speaking people similarly use the word *pothi* (पोथी), which means a book, for their sacred books. They speak of the *pothi* to be read at a gathering and mean thereby, the *kathas* of their Purânas. (e) *Nask* (نسخہ) (Pah. نسخہ or نسخہ P. نسیخہ) the Avesta word for book, is specially applied to the Avesta Scriptures. Again, take the word for Mahomedan scriptures. It is *Qur'an* (قرآن), which from *qarâ* (قراء) reading, at first, simply means reading. Then, it is "Reading *par eminence*,"

the Reading of the Scripture. We thus see that processions and books singly have a kind of significant connection with religion. That being the case, sacred books, when carried in a procession have, as it were, a double signification of efficiency and religious meritoriousness.

Having said a few words about processions and books, I will now describe the Book-procession which I had the pleasure of seeing, not only of seeing but of taking part in, on 4th June 1913. My frequent visits to the *gumpa* at Labang and my inquisitiveness about their religious services seemed to have favourably impressed the head Lama and we had become friends. So, I could take the liberty of accompanying the procession and even walk in the front with the head Lama, a position from which I could observe all that happened during the progress of the procession.

The month of June is one, in which, according to the Tibetans, some events connected with the life of Buddha occurred; so, they celebrate the occasion for three days. The third of June 1913 was the day for their Devil-driving procession and the 4th of June was one for the Book-procession. Having driven away the devils and demons from the town on the preceding day, they had, on the 4th of June, the procession of taking their religious books round about in the streets of the village, with a view that the religious books may usher in blessings upon the people during the next year. The Book-procession was longer than the Devil-driving procession of the preceding day. It started, from the Gumpâ near Lebang, known as the *gumpâ* of Bhutia-basti, at about 8 a.m., in the morning. The *gumpâ* possessed 110 books.

The Tibetan Buddhist Scriptures are said to be of two classes: 1. The Kahgyur and 2 the Tang-yur. The former are scriptures proper and consist of about 125 volumes. They are said to be the Tibetan translations of some old Sanskrit

Tibetan Scrip-
tures.

books, the translation having been made about 1000 years ago when Buddhism entered into Tibet. The latter, *i.e.*, the Tangyur consist of about 250 volumes and they are generally the commentaries of the scriptures by learned Lamas. According to Dr. Waddell, some of the large volumes weigh as much as 10 to 30 pounds. They are about 2 to 2½ feet in length and about ½ to ¾ feet in breadth. Some of these volumes contain about 400 pages or even more. As we see from the Oxylograph produced here, these books are not like our modern books. They consist of loose leaves or folios. When both the pages or sides of a leaf are read, they place the leaf apart and take up the next leaf. The book, so formed, of loose pages is placed between two boards of wood, which are very tightly fastened. The volumes are covered by pieces of beautifully coloured cloth. We like to keep in our library books well or beautifully bound. They like to cover their books with beautifully ornamented pieces of cloth. There are pigeon-holed shelves on both sides of the idol of Buddha on the altar. It is each of these pigeon holes that contains a volume covered by beautifully coloured pieces of cloth. The Tibetans have two large libraries, the one in the palace of Dalai Lama at Lhasa and the other in the palace of Tashi Lama.

Now, it is these books of the monasteries, that are carried out and taken round the village once a year in a procession. They are preceded by a number of Lamas who play upon a variety of musical instruments, all producing the loudest possible noise. Some of the long blowing instruments are about 8 feet in length. For such a long instrument, there is always a carrier, who, walking in front of the player supports it. The head Lama of the Gumpa was dressed in a majestic looking dress and was walking in a dignified way, next after the band of the above players of music. He was followed by a person, who carried in a tray a small idol of Buddha, seven small cups, a lamp, three moulded forms of flour, burning fragrant alloe wood sticks. All these

The Procession
proper.

were followed by a long row of women who carried the books of the monastery, each woman generally carrying one volume. The Bhutiâ-basti at Darjeeling is situated on the slope of a hill, and the procession was a sight worth-seeing, when watched from an elevated place. The villagers went to each of the women carrying the books and placed their heads under the volumes, thus invoking, as it were, the blessing of the sacred volumes upon himself or herself. They did the same thing with the tray. After doing so, they bowed and paid their homage to these sacred things with both their hands. A man walked near the Lama with a vessel containing some sacred water. The Lama carried in his hand a fan-like bunch of peacock-feathers. He dipped this fan in the sacred water now and then and sprinkled the water on the heads of the villagers, and this was taken to be an act of blessing. Some villagers tried to have some water in the hollows of their hands and drank it. The head Lama sprinkled the water at the entrance and at the end of each street, and at some principal places in the streets. I noticed, that at one time, the sacred water in the kettle-like vessel, having been well-nigh exhausted, the head Lama stopped at a water-pipe on the road and filled up the vessel again. The few remaining drops of the sacred water in the vessel were believed to purify or consecrate all the new water.¹ The procession stopped at the *chaitya* of a deceased pious man and recited a prayer and rested for a few minutes. A person carried in a vessel their favourite drink, *marwâ* which, both in look and effect is like our Indian toddy. It is a very mild intoxicant. The head Lama and others refreshed themselves with it.

In several places, the villagers, gave a holy welcome to the procession, by burning, at the entrance of their street, a fragrant plant which grows in abundance here and which is dried for the purpose. The Lama, occasionally, especially near a

¹ *Of*. the practice and belief among the Parsee priests that a drop (8, 25 qatreh) of consecrated water or gaomez dropped in a vessel-ful consecrated the whole.

chaitya, met with on the road, snapped his middle finger with the thumb, a symbolic expression of driving away an evil.¹ This was a signal for the players on musical instruments to blow their instruments and shells with double the ordinary force.

The procession, having gone round all the streets of the village, returned to the monastery and the head Lama took his seat on a chair in an elevated place. The women who carried the books on their shoulders, went round the monastery three times and then entering into the monastery placed the books there. Then there stood by the side of the head Lama two women, one carrying a religious flag in one hand and a dish of flour with a burning incense stick in the other. The other woman had with her, three large vessels full of their favourite *marwâ* drink which the Lama had consecrated. This drink was distributed freely among the people in cups by means of a wooden ladle.

There were two things that drew my special attention at this gathering and at other ceremonial gatherings of the Tibetans. (a) The first was their ceremonial saluting in the *gumpas*. It reminded me of masonic salutes. Another thing, that drew my attention, was, that at the end of the ceremonial all threw some flour upon one another as a symbol of mutual congratulation.

(b) Then one man, ascending an elevated place, read the names of all persons, great or small, who had contributed to the expenses of the Book-procession, most of the subscriptions being of 8 annas. This was considered to be a necessary function, which, as it were, gave to the subscribers a kind of religious consolation of having the meritoriousness of their religious act publicly announced. I was told that this practice helped the subscriptions on such occasions.

¹ Cf. the Parsee practices of *tachâkri* (ཇ་ཁྱི་རྩི) made during prayers, when the name of Ahriman or an evil power has to be mentioned.

This practice reminds me of a somewhat similar announce-

The announce-
ment of subscrip-
tions in Buddhist
Japan.

ment which I saw in Buddhist Japan, and that in a more substantial way than that of a mere oral announcement. There, in many a

religious place which I visited, I saw huge boards of wood with a large number of names written on them. On inquiry, I was told, that these were the names of the subscribers with the sums subscribed by them. A prominent board placed in a prominent place announced large donations, and other boards announced donations as small as our sums of Rs. 5. I was told, that it was this practice that was believed to bring real religious meritoriousness to the subscribers. Unannounced subscriptions were believed to be, as it were, without their religious merit. We have here an illustration of the proverb that ལ་ཡུལ་ལྟོ་ནི་འགྲུབ་ལྟོ་
i.e., What is written down, could only be read. Something like this was here believed to be true. From this point of view, I was surprised to see, that pious pilgrims, like those to the sacred hill of Chuzenzi near Necco, always took care to write down, or get written down, their names somewhere on the sacred hill, if not on any prominent place, at least on a part of the tea-house, where they rested and ate. It was the writing down of their names at such sacred places, that stamped the pilgrimages with some kind of meritoriousness.

The modern practice or craze of visitors writing down their names on places they visit, sometimes going to the length of a kind of vandalism, seems to be, as it were, a step from a visit of pilgrimage to an ordinary visit. The solicitude or care, with which some visitors write their names in the visitor's books of places visited, seems to be the next step. In some cases, such pilgrims' or visitors' books seem to have unwittingly taken, as it were, a kind of historical form. I have seen in the possession of some of the Pandit guides of the celebrated ruins of the temple of Martand in Cashmere, such pilgrims' or visitors' books, bearing the signature with dates, of many a great man of India, who had visited the ruins of the temple about 75 years ago. For example, you see there the signature of the late Lord Roberts, in three capacities as Lieutenant, General, and Commander-in-Chief.