

From the French missionaries Evariste-Régis Huc's and Joseph Gabet's stay in Lhasa from the 29th of January to the 15th of March, 1846:

Evariste Régis Huc »Travels in Tartary, Thibet, and China During the Years 1844-5-6«

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What a happiness at length to find ourselves in a hospitable land, and to be able to breathe a free air, after living so long in China; always in constraint, always outside the law, always occupied with plans for tricking the government of his Imperial Majesty.

The sort of indifference with which our declaration was received by the Thibetian authorities did not surprise us in the least. From the information we had received of the position of strangers at Lha-Ssa, we were convinced we should have no difficulty in the matter. The Thibetians do not profess, in regard to other people, those principles of exclusion which constitute the distinctive character of the Chinese nation. Everyone is allowed to enter Lha-Ssa; everyone can go and come, and engage in commerce and industrial pursuits without the least restraint. If entrance into Thibet is forbidden to the Chinese, this prohibition must be attributed to the government of Peking, which, to show its complete adherence to its narrow and suspicious policy, forbids its subjects to penetrate among other nations. It is probable that the English would not be excluded more than any other nation, had not their invasive march into Hindostan inspired the Talé-Lama with a natural terror.

We have already mentioned the many and striking analogies between the Lamanesque worship and the Catholic rites—Rome and Lha-Ssa—the pope and the Talé-Lama, {155} might furnish further analogies. The Thibetian government, being purely Lamanesque, seems in some sort framed upon the ecclesiastical government of the Pontifical states. The Talé-Lama is the political and religious head of all the Thibetian countries; in his hands is all the legislative, executive, and administrative power. The common law and some rules left by Tsong-Kaba, serve to direct him in the exercise of his immense authority.

As soon as we had presented ourselves to the Thibetian authorities, declaring our characters and the object which had brought us to Lha-Ssa, we availed ourselves of the semi-official position we had thus taken, to enter into communication with the Thibetian and Tartar Lamas, and thus, at last, to begin our work as missionaries. One day, when we were sitting beside our modest hearth, talking of religious questions with a

Lama who was well versed in Buddhist learning, a Chinese dressed in exquisite style suddenly appeared before us, saying that he was a merchant and very desirous of buying our goods. We told him we had nothing to sell. "How, nothing to sell?" "Not anything, except indeed those two old saddles, which we do not want any longer." "Ah, exactly; that is just what I am looking for; I want saddles." Then, while he examined our poor merchandise, he addressed to us a thousand questions about our country and the places we had visited before we came to Lha-Ssa. Shortly afterwards there arrives a second Chinese, then a third, and at last two Lamas, in costly silk scarves. All these visitors insisted upon buying something from us; they overwhelmed us with questions, and seemed, at the same time, to scrutinise with distrust all the corners of our chamber.

We were at our dessert—that is to say, we were about to rinse our cups with some buttered tea, when the two Lamas, the pretended merchants, made their re-appearance. "The Regent," they said, "awaits you in his palace; he wants to speak to you." "But," cried we, "does the Regent, perchance, also want to buy our old saddles?" "It is not a question about either saddles or merchandise. Rise at once, and follow us to the Regent." The matter was now beyond a doubt; the government was desirous of meddling with us—to what end? Was it to do us good or ill, to give us liberty, or to shackle us? to let us live or to make us die? This we could not tell. "Let us go to the Regent," we said, "and trust for the rest to the will of our heavenly Father."

At the farther end of an apartment, simply furnished, we perceived a personage sitting with crossed legs on a thick cushion covered with a tiger's-skin: it was the Regent. With his right hand he made us a sign to approach. We went close up to him, and saluted him by placing our caps under our arms. A bench covered with a red carpet stood on our right; on this we were invited to sit down—we complied immediately. Meantime the gilt door was closed, and there remained in the saloon only the Regent and seven individuals, who stood behind him—namely, four Lamas of a modest and composed bearing, two sly-looking, mischievous-eyed Chinese, and a person whom, by his long beard, his turban, and grave countenance, we recognised to be a Mussulman. The Regent was a man of fifty years of age; his large features, mild and remarkably pallid, breathed a truly royal majesty; his dark eyes, shaded by long lashes, were intelligent and gentle.

When we were seated, the Regent gazed at us for a long while in silence, and with a minute attention. He turned his head alternately to the right and left, and smiled at us in a half mocking, half friendly manner. This sort of pantomime appeared to us at last so droll, that we could not help laughing. "Come," we said in French, and in an under-

tone, "this gentleman seems a good fellow enough; our affair will go on very well." "Ah!" said the Regent, in a very affable tone, "what language is that you speak? I did not understand what you said?" "We spoke the language of our country." "Well, repeat aloud what you said just now." "We said, 'This gentleman seems a good-natured fellow enough.'" The Regent, turning to those who were standing behind him, said, "Do you understand this language?" They all bowed together, and answered that they did not understand it. "You see, nobody here understands the language of your country. Translate your words into the Thibetian." We said, that in the physiognomy of the First Kalon there was expressed much kindness. "Ah! you think I have much kindness; yet I am very ill-natured. Is it not true that I am very ill-natured?" he asked his attendants. They answered merely by smiling. "You are right," continued the Regent; "I am kind, for kindness is the duty of a Kalon. I must be kind towards my people, and also towards strangers." He then addressed to us a long harangue, of which we could comprehend only a few sentences. When he had finished, we told him that, not being much accustomed to the Thibetian language, we had not fully penetrated the sense of his words. The Regent signed to a Chinese, who, stepping forward, translated to us his harangue, of which the following is the outline. We had been summoned without the slightest idea of being molested. The contradictory reports that had circulated respecting us since our arrival at Lha-Ssa, had induced the Regent to question us himself, in order to know where we came from. "We are from the western sky," we said to the Regent. "From Calcutta?" "No; our country is called France." "You are, doubtless, Peling?" "No, we are Frenchmen." "Can you write?" "Better than speak." The Regent, turning round, addressed some words to a Lama, who disappearing, returned in a moment with paper, ink, and a bamboo point. "Here is paper," said the Regent; "write something." "In what language—in some letters in your own country's language." One of us took the paper on his knees, and wrote this sentence: "What avails it to man to conquer the whole world, if he lose his soul?" "Ah, here are characters of your country! I never saw any like them; and what is the meaning of that?" We wrote the translation in Thibetian, Tartar, and Chinese, and handed it to him. "I have not been deceived," he said; "you are men of great knowledge. You can write in all languages, and you express thoughts as profound as those we find in the prayer-books." He then repeated, slowly moving his head to and fro, "What avails it to man to conquer the whole world if he lose his own soul?"

While the Regent and his attendants were indulging in their raptures at our wonderful knowledge, we heard on a sudden, in the courtyard of the palace, the cries of the crowd and the sonorous noise of the Chinese tamtam. "Here is the ambassador of Peking," said the Regent, "he wishes to examine you himself. Tell him frankly what concerns you,

and rely on my protection; it is I who govern the country." This said, he quitted the saloon with his retinue through a small secret door, and left us alone in this judgment-hall.

The idea of falling into the hands of the Chinese made at first a disagreeable impression upon us; and the picture of those horrible persecutions which at different times have afflicted the christendoms of China, seized upon our imagination; but we soon recovered our spirits in the reflection that we were alone, and isolated as we were in the midst of Thibet, could not compromise any one. This thought gave us courage.

After waiting a few moments, a young Chinese, elegantly dressed, and of very graceful manners, came to inform us that Ki-Chan, grand ambassador of the grand Emperor of China, wished to examine us. We followed our amiable apparitor, and were ushered into a saloon decorated in the Chinese style, where Ki-Chan was seated upon a sort of throne, about three feet high, and covered with red cloth. Before him was a small table of black laque, upon which were an inkstand, some pens, some sheets of paper, and a silver vase filled with snuff. Below the throne were four scribes, two on the right, and two on the left; the rest of the saloon was occupied by a great number of Chinese and Thibetians, who had put on their holiday dresses to attend the inquiry.

Ki-Chan, although sixty years old, seemed to us full of strength and vigour. His face is, without contradiction, the most noble, elegant, and intellectual we have seen amongst the Chinese. When we took off our caps to him, and made him one of our best bows, "'Tis well, 'tis well," he said; "follow your own customs. I have been told you speak correctly the language of Peking. I want to talk with you for a moment." "We make many blunders in speaking, but your marvellous understanding will know how to remedy the obscurity of our words." "Why, that is pure Pekinese. You Frenchmen possess a great facility for all learning. You are Frenchmen, are you not?" "Yes, we are Frenchmen." "Oh, I know the French; there were formerly a great many of them at Peking; I used to see some of them." "You must have known them, too, at Canton, when you were imperial commissioner?" This reminiscence furrowed the forehead of our judge; he took an abundant pinch of snuff out of his box, and threw it up his nose in a very bad humour. "Yes, that is true; I have seen many Europeans at Canton. You are of the religion of the Lord of Heaven, are you not?" "Certainly we are; moreover, preachers of that religion." "I know, I know; you have come hither, doubtless, to preach that religion?" "We have no other object." "Have you already travelled over a great number of countries?" "We have travelled over all China, Tartary, and now we are in the capital of Thibet." "With whom did you live when you were in China?" "We do not

answer questions of that sort." "And if I command you to do so?" "We should not obey." Here the irritated judge struck the table with his fist. "You know," we said, "that Christians have no fear; why seek, then, to intimidate us?" "Where did you learn Chinese?" "In China." "In what place?" "A little everywhere." "And the Tartar, you know it? where did you learn it?" "In Mongolia, in the Land of Grass." then, turning to us, he said: "It is night, you must be tired; it is time to take supper; you may go; to-morrow, if I want you, I will send for you."

The ambassador Ki-Chan was quite right, it was very late, and the various emotions which had been furnished to us in the course of the evening had not by any means supplied the place of supper. On leaving the Sinico-Thibetian pretorium, we were accosted by a venerable Lama, who informed us that the First Kalon awaited us.

The Regent was alone; he bade us sit down near himself on a rich carpet, and endeavoured to express by his words, and still more by his gestures, how deep an interest he felt in us. Above all, we clearly understood that he was making arrangements to keep us from starving. Our pantomime was interrupted by the arrival of a person, who left, upon entering, his slippers at the door; it was the governor of the Cashmerian Mussulmen. After having saluted the company, by raising his hand to his forehead, and pronouncing the formula, "Salamalek" he leant against a column, in the centre of the room, which supported the ceiling. The Mussulmen governor spoke Chinese very well; and the Regent had accordingly sent for him to act as interpreter. Immediately upon his arrival, a servant placed before us a small table, and supper was served up to us at the expense of the Thibetian government.

During, and after the repast, there was much inquiry about France and the countries we had visited. Then the Regent, pointing to the pictures that adorned his room, asked whether we could ourselves paint any such. "We cannot paint," was our answer; "study, and the preaching of the doctrine of Jehovah are our only occupations." "Oh, don't tell me you cannot paint; I know that the people of your country are very skilful in that art." "Yes, those who make it their employment; but our clergymen are not in the habit of exercising it." "Though you may not follow this art specially, yet you are not quite unacquainted with it; you can, doubtless, draw geographical maps?" "No, we cannot." "How! on your journey did you never sketch, did you never make a map?" "Never." "Oh, that is impossible!" The pertinacity of the Regent in questioning us on this subject, made us pause to reflect; presently we expressed the surprise we felt at all these inquiries. "I see," he said, "that you are straightforward, honest men; I will speak frankly to you. The Chinese are very suspicious, you are aware of that: you have been long enough in China to know it as well as I do; well, they believe that you

are travelling through foreign kingdoms, on purpose to draw maps of them and to explore them. If you do draw, if you do make geographical maps, admit it without fear; rely on my protection." Evidently the Regent was afraid of an invasion; he fancied, perhaps, that we were charged with laying down the route for some formidable army, ready to overwhelm Thibet. We endeavoured to dissipate his fears, and to assure him of the extremely peaceful views of the French government. We admitted, however, that amongst our effects there was a great number of drawings and geographical maps, and that we had even a map of Thibet. At these words, the face of the Regent was suddenly contracted; but we hastened to add, in order to quiet him, that all our drawings and maps were printed, and that we were not their authors. We took the opportunity to speak to the Regent and the Cashmerian governor, of the geographical knowledge of the Europeans. They were greatly astonished when we told them that, with us, children of ten and twelve years old possessed an exact and complete idea of all the kingdoms of the world.

The conversation extended far into the night. At last the Regent rose, and asked us whether we did not feel in want of a little repose.

[The governor of the Katchi visited them the next morning:] He then added, in an undervoice, that all these difficulties were got up against us by the Chinese, against the will of the Thibetian government. We answered the governor of Katchi, that we had not a single manuscript map; and we then gave him, in detail, a statement of all the articles that were in our trunks. "Since they are to be examined to-day, you will judge for yourself whether we are people to be believed." The countenance of the Mussulman brightened. "Your words," he said, "quite reassure me. None of the articles you have described can at all compromise you. Maps are feared in this country—extremely feared, indeed; especially since the affair of a certain Englishman named Moorcroft, who introduced himself into Lha-Ssa, under the pretence of being a Cashmerian. After a sojourn there of twelve years, he departed; but he was murdered on his way to Ladak. Amongst his effects they found a numerous collection of maps and plans, which he had drawn during his stay at Lha-Ssa. This circumstance has made the Chinese authorities very suspicious on this subject. As you do not draw maps, that is all right; I will now go and tell the Regent what I have heard from you."

Three Lama ushers soon came and announced to us the order of the day; viz., that our luggage was to be inspected. We submitted respectfully to the orders of the Thibetian authority.

We requested the Regent to honour us by entering the apartments of the French missionaries. The Regent took a seat in the middle of our

room on a gilded chair, which had been brought from the palace for this purpose, and asked whether what he saw in our room was all we possessed? "Yes; that is all we possess; neither more nor less. These are all our resources for invading Thibet." "There is satire in your words," said the Regent; "I never fancied you such dangerous people. What is that?" he added, pointing to a crucifix we had fixed against the wall. "Ah, if you really knew what that was, you would not say that we were not formidable; for by that we design to conquer China, Tartary, and Thibet." The Regent laughed, for he only saw a joke in our words, which yet were so real and serious. A scribe sat down at the feet of the Regent, and made an inventory of our trunks, clothes, and kitchen implements. A lighted lamp was brought, and the Regent took from a small purse which hung from his neck, a golden seal, which was applied to all our baggage. Nothing was omitted; our old boots, the very pins of our travelling tent, were all daubed with red wax, and solemnly marked with the seal of the Talé-Lama.

When this long ceremony was completed, the Regent informed us that we must now proceed to the tribunal. Some porters were sent for, and found in very brief time. A Lama of the police had only to present himself in the street and summon, in the name of the law, all the passers by, men, women, and children, to come into the house immediately and assist the government.

When enough labourers were collected, all our goods were distributed among them, and the room was completely cleared, and the procession to the tribunal set out with great pomp. A Thibetian horse soldier, his drawn sword in hand, and his fusil at his side, opened the procession; after him came the troop of porters, marching between two lines of Lama satellites; the Regent, on his white charger, surrounded by a mounted guard of honour, followed our baggage; and last, behind the Regent, marched the two poor French missionaries, who had, by way of suite, a no very agreeable crowd of gapers. Our mien was not particularly imposing. Led like malefactors, or, at least, like suspected persons, we could only lower our eyes, and modestly pass through the numerous crowd that thronged on our way. Such a position was, indeed, very painful and humiliating; but the remembrance of our holy Saviour, dragged to the pretorium, through the streets of Jerusalem, was sufficient to mitigate the bitterness with which we were afflicted. We prayed to him to sanctify our humiliations by his own, and to accept them in remembrance of his Passion.

When we arrived at the tribunal, the Chinese ambassador [Picture: Carrying goods to the Tribunal] attended by his staff, was already in his place. The Regent addressed him: "You want to examine the effects of these strangers; here they are; examine them. These men are neither

rich, nor powerful, as you suppose." There was vexation in the tone of the Regent, and, at bottom, he was naturally enough annoyed at this part of policeman which he had to play. Ki-Chan asked us if we had no more than two trunks. "Only two; everything has been brought here; there remains in our house not a rag, not a bit of paper." "What have you got in your two trunks?" "Here are the keys; open them, empty them, and examine them at your pleasure." Ki-Chan blushed, and moved back. His Chinese delicacy was touched. "Do these trunks belong to me?" he said, with emotion. "Have I the right to open them? If anything should be missed afterwards, what would you say?" "You need not be afraid; our religion forbids us rashly to judge our neighbour." "Open your trunks yourselves; I want to know what they contain; it is my duty to do so; but you alone have the right to touch what belongs to you."

We broke the seal of the Talé-Lama, the padlock was removed, and these two trunks, which had been pierced by all eyes for a long time past, were at last opened to the general gaze. We took out the contents, one after another, and displayed them on a large table. First came some French and Latin volumes, then some Chinese and Tartar books, church linen, ornaments, sacred vases, rosaries, crosses, medals, and a magnificent collection of lithographs. All the spectators were lost in contemplation at this small European museum. They opened large eyes, touched each other with the elbow, and smacked their tongues in token of admiration. None of them had ever seen anything so beautiful, so rich, so marvellous. Everything white they considered silver, everything yellow, gold. The faces of all brightened up, and they seemed entirely to forget that we were suspected and dangerous people. The Thibetians put out their tongues and scratched their ears at us; and the Chinese made us the most sentimental bows. Our bag of medals, especially, attracted attention, and it seemed to be anticipated that, before we left the court, we should make a large distribution of these dazzling gold pieces.

The Regent and Ki-Chan, whose minds were elevated above those of the vulgar, and who certainly did not covet our treasure, nevertheless forgot their character as judges. The sight of our beautiful coloured pictures transported them quite out of themselves. The Regent kept his hands joined, and preserved a continuous stare with his mouth open, whilst Ki-Chan, showing off his knowledge, explained how the French were the most distinguished artists in the world. "At one time," he said, "he knew, at Peking, a French missionary, who painted portraits that were quite alarmingly like. He kept his paper concealed in the sleeve of his robe, took the likeness as it were by stealth, and, in a whiff, all was done." Ki-Chan asked us if we had not watches, telescopes, magic-lanterns, etc. etc. We thereupon opened a small box which no one had

hitherto remarked, and which contained a microscope. We adjusted its various parts, and no one had eyes but for this singular machine, in pure gold, as they took it to be, and which, certainly, was about to perform wondrous things. Ki-Chan alone knew what a microscope was. He gave an explanation of it to the public, with great pretension and vanity. He then asked us to put some animalculæ on the glass. We looked at his excellency out of the corner of the eye, and then took the microscope to pieces, joint by joint, and put it in the box. "We thought," said we to Ki-Chan, with a formal air, "we thought, that we came here to undergo judgment, and not to play a comedy." "What judgment!" exclaimed he, abruptly; "we wished to examine your effects, ascertain really who you were, and that is all." "And the maps: you do not mention them." "Oh, yes—yes! that is the great point; where are your maps?" "Here they are;" and we displayed the three maps we had; a map of the world, the two hemispheres upon the projection of Mercator, and a Chinese empire.

The appearance of these maps seemed to the Regent a clap of thunder; the poor man changed colour three or four times in the course of a minute, as if we had shown our death warrant. "It is fortunate for us," said we to Ki-Chan, "that we have met with you in this country. If, by ill luck, you had not been here, we should have been utterly unable to convince the Thibetian authorities that these maps are not our own drawing. But an instructed man like yourself, conversant with European matters, will at once see that these maps are not our own work." Ki-Chan was evidently much flattered by the compliment. "Oh, it is evident," said he, at the first glance, "that these maps are printed. Look here," said he to the Regent; "these maps were not drawn by these men; they were printed in the kingdom of France. You cannot distinguish that, but I have been long used to objects, the productions of the Western Heaven." These words produced a magical effect on the Regent. His face became radiant, and he looked at us with a look of satisfaction, and made a gracious movement with his head, as much as to say, "It is well; you are honest people."

We could not get off without a little geographical lecture. We yielded charitably to the wishes of the Regent and the Chinese ambassador. We indicated with our fingers on the map of Mercator, China, Tartary, and Thibet, and all the other countries of the globe. The Regent was amazed at seeing how far we were from our native land, and what a long journey we had been obliged to make, by land and water, to come and pay him a visit in the capital of Thibet. He regarded us with astonishment, and then raised the thumb of his right hand, saying, "You are men like that," signifying, in the figurative language of the Thibetians; you are men of a superlative stamp. After recognising the principal points of Thibet, the Regent inquired whereabouts was Calcutta? "Here," we said,

pointing to a little round speck on the borders of the sea. "And Lha-Ssa: where then is Lha-Ssa?" "Here it is." The eyes and finger of the Regent went from Lha-Ssa to Calcutta, and from Calcutta to Lha-Ssa. "The Pelings of Calcutta are very near our frontiers," said he, making a grimace, and shaking his head. "No matter," he added, "here are the Himalaya mountains."

The course of geography being ended, the maps were folded up again, placed in their respective cases, and we passed on to religious subjects. Ki-Chan had long since become acquainted with these matters. When he was viceroy of the province of Pe-Tche-Ly, he had sufficiently persecuted the Christians, to have numerous opportunities of making himself familiar with everything connected with the Catholic worship; and he accordingly now displayed his knowledge. He explained the images, the sacred vases, the ornaments. He even informed the company that in the box of holy oils there was a famous remedy for people at death's door. During all these explanations the Regent was thoughtful and abstracted; his eyes were constantly turned towards a large host-iron. These long pincers, terminating in two large lips, seemed to act powerfully on his imagination. He gave us an inquiring look, seeming to ask us if this frightful implement was not something like an infernal machine. He was only re-assured upon viewing some wafers that we kept in a box, for he then comprehended the use of this strange object.

The worthy Regent was all joyous and triumphant, when he saw that we had nothing in our possession calculated to compromise us. "Well," said he to the Chinese ambassador with a sneer, "what do you think of these men? What must we do with them? These men are Frenchmen, they are ministers of the religion of the Lord of Heaven, they are honest men; we must leave them in peace." These flattering words were received in the saloon with a murmur of approbation, and the two missionaries, said, from the bottom of their hearts, *_Deo gratias_*.

The next day was still more lucky for us than its predecessor; putting, as it were, a climax to our prosperity. In the morning we proceeded, accompanied by the Cashmerian governor, to the palace of the Regent, to whom we desired to express our gratitude for the manifestations of interest with which he had honoured us. We were received with kindness and cordiality. He told us, in confidence, that the Chinese were jealous of our being at Lha-Ssa; but that we might count on his protection, and reside freely in the country, without any one having a right to interfere with us. "You are very badly lodged," added he; "your room seemed to me dirty, small, and uncomfortable. I would have strangers like you, men come from so great a distance, well treated at Lha-Ssa. In your country of France, do they not treat strangers well?" "They treat them excellently. Oh, if you could but go there some day, you would see how

our Emperor would receive you.” “Strangers are guests; you must leave your present abode; I have ordered a suitable lodging to be prepared for you in one of my houses.” We accepted this generous offer with grateful thanks. To be lodged comfortably and free of expense was not a thing for men in our position to despise; but we appreciated, above all, the advantage of residing in one of the Regent’s own houses. So signal a favour, such emphatic protection, on the part of the Thibetian authorities, could not but give us with the inhabitants of Lha-Ssa great moral influence, and facilitate our apostolic mission.

Our first care was to erect in our house a small chapel. We selected the largest and best apartment; we papered it as neatly as possible, and we then adorned it with holy images. Oh! how our hearts flowed with joy, when we were at length allowed to pray publicly at the foot of the cross, in the very heart of the capital of Buddhism, which, perhaps, had never before beheld the sign of our redemption. What a comfort to us to be able, at length, to announce the words of life to the ears of these poor people, sitting for so many ages in the shadow of death. This little chapel was certainly poor, but it was to our minds that hundredfold which God has promised to those who renounce all things for his service. Our hearts were so full, that we thought we had cheaply bought the happiness we now enjoyed, by two years of suffering and tribulation in the desert.

Every one at Lha-Ssa visited the chapel of the French Lamas; many, after satisfying themselves with asking us a few explanations as to the meaning of the images they beheld, went away, putting off till some other time further instruction in the holy doctrine of Jehovah; but several felt inwardly struck, and seemed to attach a great importance to the study of the truths we had come to announce. Every day they came to us regularly, they read with attention the summary of the Christian religion, which we had composed at the Lamasery of Kounboun, and entreated us to tell them the “true prayers.”

The Thibetians were not the only persons who seemed zealous to study our holy religion. Among the Chinese, the secretaries of the ambassador Ki-Chan often came to visit us, to hear about the great doctrine of the west; one of them, to whom we lent some works written in Tartaro-Mantchou, was convinced of the truth of Christianity and of the necessity of embracing it, but he had not courage enough to make an open profession of faith, whilst he was attached to the embassy;

Whilst we were making efforts to spread the evangelical seed amongst the population of Lha-Ssa, we did not neglect the endeavour to sow the divine seed also in the very palace of the Regent, and this not without the hope of reaping there one day a precious harvest. Since our trial, so

to speak, our intercourse with the Regent had become frequent, and even intimate. Almost every evening, when he had finished his labours of ministry, he invited us to partake with him his Thibetian repast, to which he always added for ourselves some dishes cooked in the Chinese fashion. Our conversations generally extended far into the night.

The Regent was a man of extraordinary capacity; of humble extraction, he had raised himself gradually, and by his own merits, to the dignity of First Kalon. This had occurred three years before. Up to that time he had always fulfilled arduous and laborious [Picture: The Regent of Lhasa] functions; he had frequently traversed, in all directions, the immense regions of Thibet, either to make war or to negotiate with the neighbouring states, or to inspect the conduct of the Houtouktou governors of the various provinces. So active, so busy a life, so apparently incompatible with study, had not prevented him from acquiring a profound knowledge of Lamanesque works.

Everyone concurred in saying that the knowledge of the most renowned Lamas was inferior to that of the Regent. The facility with which he conducted public business was matter of especial admiration. One day we were with him, when they brought him a great many rolls of paper, dispatches from the provinces; a sort of secretary unrolled them one after the other, and gave them to him to read, bending on one knee. The Regent hastily ran his eye over them, without interrupting the conversation with us. As soon as he had gathered the contents of a dispatch, he took his bamboo stile, and wrote his orders at the bottom of the roll, and thus transacted all his affairs with promptitude, and as if for amusement. We are not competent to judge of the literary merit that was attributed to the First Kalon. We can only say that we never saw Thibetian writing so beautiful as his.

The Regent was very fond of engaging in religious discussions, and they most frequently formed the subject of our conversations. At the commencement, he said to us these remarkable words:—"All your long journeys you have undertaken solely with a religious object. You are quite right, for religion is the thing most essential to man. I see that the French and the Thibetians have the same view on that subject. We do not at all resemble the Chinese, who hold the soul of no account; yet your religion is not the same as ours. It is important we should ascertain which is the true one. Let us, then, examine both carefully and sincerely; if yours is right, we will adopt it; how could we refuse to do so? If, on the contrary, ours is the true religion, I believe you will have the good sense to follow it." This arrangement seemed to us excellent; we could not at the time desire better.

We commenced with Christianity. The Regent, always amiable and polished in his conversation with us, said that, as we were his guests, our belief ought to have the honour of priority. We successively reviewed the dogmatical and moral truths. To our great astonishment, the Regent did not seem surprised at anything we said. "Your religion," he incessantly repeated, "is conformable with ours; the truths are the same: we only differ in the explanations. Of what you have seen and heard in Tartary and Thibet, there is, doubtless, much to blame; but you must not forget that the numerous errors and superstitions you may have observed, were introduced by ignorant Lamas, and that they are rejected by well-informed Buddhists." He only admitted, between him and us, two points of difference—the origin of the world, and the transmigration of souls. The belief of the Regent, though it here and there seemed to approximate to the Catholic doctrine, nevertheless resulted in a vast pantheism; but he affirmed that we also arrived at the same result, and he did his best to convince us of this.

One day, the Regent said to us, "The truth is clear in itself, but if you envelope it in obscure words, one cannot perceive it. So long as we are obliged to communicate in Chinese, it will be impossible to make ourselves intelligible to each other. We shall never be able to discuss the matter to advantage, till you speak the Thibetian language fluently." We quite concurred in the justice of this observation. We replied to the Regent, that the study of the Thibetian tongue was a great object of solicitude with us, and that we laboured hard at it every day. "If you like," said he, "I will facilitate your acquisition of it." And thereupon he called a servant and said to him a few words which we did not understand.

A youth, elegantly dressed, immediately came, and saluted us with much grace. "This is my nephew," said the Regent; "I present him to you as at once tutor and pupil; he will pass the whole day with you, and you will thus have the opportunity of practising the Thibetian language; in return, you will give him some lessons in Chinese and Mantchou." We gratefully adopted this proposition, and were enabled, by this means, to make rapid progress in the language of the country. The Regent was very fond of talking about France, during our long visits; he asked us a number of questions about the manners, customs, and productions of our country. All we told him of the steam-boats, the railways, the balloons, gas, telegraphs, the daguerrotype, our industrial productions, completely amazed him, and gave him an immense idea of the grandeur and power of France.

Our frequent conferences with the Chinese ambassador, the Regent, and the Cashmerian governor, contributed not a little to secure for us the confidence and consideration of the inhabitants of Lha-Ssa. On seeing the number of those who came to visit us, and to be instructed in

our holy religion, augment from day to day, we felt our hopes enlarge and our courage increase. Yet, amidst these consolations, one thought constantly vexed us; it was that we could not present to the Thibetians the inspiring spectacle of the pompous and touching festivals of Catholicism. We were convinced that the beauty of our ceremonies would have a powerful influence over the minds of these people, so eager after all that appertains to external worship.

We were scarcely a month at Lha-Ssa before the numerous inhabitants of this town grew accustomed to speak with respect and admiration of the holy doctrine of Jehovah, and of the great kingdom of France. The peace and tranquillity we enjoyed, the distinguished protection which the Thibetian government extended to us, the sympathy with which the people seemed to surround us, all inspired us with the hope, that, by the aid of God, we might lay in the very capital of Buddhism the foundation of a mission, the influence of which would soon extend itself among the nomad tribes of Mongolia. The moment seemed to have come when the Tartar pilgrims might at length learn, at Lha-Ssa, the only doctrine which can save men's souls, and civilize nations.

As soon as we considered our position at Lha-Ssa confirmed, we turned our thoughts to the means of renewing our communications with Europe in the speediest manner. The path of the desert was impracticable. We had, certainly, managed to cross once, and as it were by a miracle, these steppes infested by brigands and wild beasts; but it was out of the question to think of organising a service of couriers along that frightful route. Supposing, besides, the fullest security that could be desired, the mere length of the journey was a thing to make one shudder. The road by India seemed alone practicable. From Lha-Ssa to the first English station is not quite a month's journey. By establishing one correspondent on the other side of the Himalaya mountains, and one at Calcutta, our communication with France would become, if not prompt and easy, at all events feasible. As this plan could only be put into execution with the consent of the Thibetian government, we communicated it to the Regent, who immediately entered into our views, and it was agreed that in the summer M. Gabet should undertake the journey to Calcutta, with a Thibetian escort, who were to accompany him as far as Boutan.

Such were the plans we were forming for the establishment of a mission at Lha-Ssa; but at this very moment the enemy to all good was hard at work to ruin our projects, and to remove us from a country which he seems to have chosen for the seat of his empire. Having heard here and there words of evil auspice, we comprehended that the Chinese ambassador was secretly plotting our expulsion from Thibet. The vague rumour of this persecution had, in fact, nothing about it to sur-

prise us. From the outset, we had foreseen that if difficulties assailed us, they would emanate from the Chinese Mandarins. Ki-Chan, in fact, could not bear to see the Thibetian government receive with so much favour a religion and strangers, whom the absurd prejudices of China have so long driven from her frontiers. Christianity and the French name excited too forcibly the sympathy of the people of Lha-Ssa, not to arouse Chinese jealousy. An agent of the court of Peking could not, without anger, reflect on the popularity which strangers enjoyed in Thibet, and on the influence which they might one day exercise in a country which China has every interest in keeping under her dominion. It was determined, therefore, that the preachers of the religion of the Lord of Heaven should be driven from Lha-Ssa.

One day, the ambassador, Ki-Chan, sent for us, and after sundry attempts at cajolery, ended by saying that Thibet was too cold, too poor a country for us, and that we had better think of returning to our kingdom of France. Ki-Chan addressed these words to us, with a sort of indifferent, careless manner, as though he supposed there could be no sort of objection to them. We asked him if, in speaking thus, he proposed to us advice or command. "Both the one and the other," he replied, coldly. "Since it is so, we have first to thank you for the interest which you seem to have in our welfare, in telling us that this country is cold and miserable. But you must know, that men such as we, do not regard the goods and conveniences of this world; were it not so, we should have remained in our own kingdom of France. For know, there is not anywhere a country comparable with our own. As for the imperative portion of your words, this is our answer: 'Admitted into Thibet by the local authority, we recognise no right in you, or in any other person, to disturb our abode here.'" "How! you who are strangers, presume still to remain here?" "Yes, we are strangers, but we know that the laws of Thibet are not like those of China. The Peboun, the Katchi, the Mongols, are strangers like us, and yet they are permitted to live here in peace; no one disturbs them. What, then, is the meaning of this arbitrary proceeding of yours, in ordering Frenchmen from a country open to all people? If foreigners are to quit Lha-Ssa, why do you stay here? Does not your title of Kin-Tchai (ambassador) distinctly announce that you yourself are but a foreigner here?" At these words, Ki-Chan bounded on his velvet cushion. "I a foreigner!" cried he, "a foreigner! I, who bear the authority of the Grand Emperor, who, only a few months' since, condemned and exiled the Nomekhan." "We are acquainted with that affair. There is this difference between the Nomekhan and us, that the Nomekhan came from Kan-Sou, a province of the empire, and we come from France, where your Grand Emperor is nobody; and that the Nomekhan assassinated three Talé-Lamas, while we have done no injury to any man. Have we any other aim than to make known to men the true God, and to teach them the way to save their souls?" "Ay, as I

have already said to you, I believe you to be honest people; but then the religion you preach has been declared wicked, and prohibited by our Grand Emperor." "To these words, we can only reply thus: The religion of the Lord of Heaven does not need the sanction of your Emperor to make it a holy religion, any more than we, of its mission, need it to come and preach in Thibet." The Chinese ambassador did not think it expedient to continue this discussion; he drily dismissed us, declaring that we might rest assured he would make us quit Thibet. We hastened to the Regent, in order to acquaint him with the melancholy interview we had had with Ki-Chan. The chief Kalon had been made aware of the projects of persecution which the Chinese Mandarins were hatching against us. He endeavoured to reassure us, and told us, that protecting in the country thousands of strangers, he was powerful enough to give us the protection which the Thibetian government extended to all. "Besides," added he, "even though our laws did prohibit strangers from entering our country, those laws could not affect you. Religious persons, men of prayer, belonging to all countries, are strangers nowhere; such is the doctrine taught by our holy books. It is written: 'The yellow goat has no country, the Lama no family.' Lha-Ssa being the peculiar assembling-place and abode of men of prayer, that title of itself should always secure for you liberty and protection." This opinion of the Buddhists, which constitutes a religious man a cosmopolite, is not merely a mystic idea written in books, but we have found it recognised in the manners and customs of the Lamaseries; when a man has had his head shaved, and assumes the religious habit, he renounces his former name to take a new one. If you ask a Lama of what country he is, he replies, "I have no country, but I pass my time in such a Lamasery." This manner of thinking and acting is even admitted in China, amongst the bonzes and other classes of religionists, who are called by the generic name of Tchou-Kia-Jin, (a man who has left his family.)

There was, respecting us, a controversy of several days' duration, between the Thibetian government and the Chinese ambassador. Ki-Chan, in order to insure better success to his aims, assumed the character of defender of the Talé-Lama. This was his argument: Sent to Lha-Ssa by his Emperor, to protect the Living Buddha, it was his duty to remove from him whatever was calculated to injure him. Certain preachers of the religion of the Lord of Heaven, animated, no doubt, by excellent intentions, were propagating a doctrine which, in the end, tended to destroy the authority and power of the Talé-Lama. Their avowed purpose was to substitute their religious belief for Buddhism, and to convert all the inhabitants of Thibet of every age, condition, and sex. What would become of the Talé-Lama when he had no worshippers? The introduction into the country of the religion of the Lord of Heaven, does it not lead directly to the destruction of the sanctuary of the Buddha-La, and consequently, to the downfall of the Lamanesque hier-

archy and of the Thibetian government? “I,” said he, “who am here to protect the Talé-Lama, can I permit, at Lha-Ssa, men who propagate such formidable doctrines?”

When those doctrines have taken root, and it is no longer possible to extirpate them, who will be responsible for such a misfortune? What shall I reply to the Grand Emperor, when he shall reproach me with my negligence and cowardice? You Thibetians,” said he to the Regent; “you do not comprehend the gravity of this matter. Because these men are virtuous and irreproachable, you think they are harmless—it is a mistake. If they remain long at Lha-Ssa, they will spell-bind you. Among you, there is not a man capable of disputing with them upon religion. You will not be able to keep from adopting their belief, and then the Talé-Lama is undone.”

The Regent did not enter at all into these apprehensions, with which the Chinese ambassador endeavoured to inspire him. He maintained that our presence at Lha-Ssa could not in any way be prejudicial to the Thibetian government. “If the doctrine which these men held,” said he, “is a false doctrine, the Thibetians will not embrace it; if, on the contrary, it is true, what have we to fear? How can the truth be prejudicial to men? These two Lamas of the kingdom of France,” he added, “have not done any harm; they are animated with the best intentions towards us. Can we, without good ground, deprive them of the liberty and protection which we extend here to all strangers, and particularly to men of prayer? Can we make ourselves guilty of an actual and certain injustice, through an imaginary fear of some possible evil to come?”

Ki-Chan reproached the Regent with neglecting the interests of the Talé-Lama, and the Regent on his part accused Ki-Chan of taking advantage of the minority of the sovereign, to tyrannize over the Thibetian government. For our parts, in this unfortunate contest, we refused to acknowledge the authority of the Chinese Mandarin, and declared that we would not quit the country without a formal order from the Regent, who assured us that they should never extort from him any such thing.

The quarrel became more and more exacerbated every day. Ki-Chan resolved to take on himself to expel us from the country. Matters had come to such a crisis, that prudence obliged us to yield to circumstances, and to oppose no further resistance, for fear of compromising the Regent, and of becoming, perhaps, the cause of lamentable dissensions between China and Thibet. By further opposing this unjust persecution, we might irritate too vehemently the Chinese, and furnish pretexts for their project of usurping the Thibetian government. If, on our account, a rupture unhappily broke out between Lha-Ssa and Peking,

we should inevitably be held responsible for it; we should become odious in the eyes of the Thibetians, and the introduction of Christianity into these countries would be encountered hereafter with greater difficulties than ever. We therefore considered that it would be better to submit, and to accept with resignation the crown of persecution. Our conduct should prove to the Thibetians, that at least we had come among them with peaceful intentions, and that we did not intend to establish ourselves there by violence.

Another consideration helped to confirm our resolution. It occurred to us that this very tyranny which the Chinese exercised against us, might perhaps be the ultimate occasion of our missionaries establishing themselves in Thibet with security. In our simplicity, we imagined that the French government would not see with indifference this monstrous assumption of China, in daring to persecute Christianity and the French name even among foreign nations, and at a distance of more than a thousand leagues from Peking. We were persuaded that the representative of France at Canton could not omit to make emphatic remonstrances to the Chinese authorities, and that he would obtain just reparation for the violence with which we had been treated. In thinking thus, we poor and obscure missionaries were far from wishing to give ourselves, in our own eyes, the least personal importance; but we do not disguise it, we were proud in the belief that our position as Frenchmen would be a sufficient title for our obtaining the protection of the government of our country.

After having maturely considered these points, we proceeded to the Regent. On learning that we had determined to leave Lha-Ssa, he seemed sad and embarrassed. He told us he greatly wished he had it in his power to secure for us a free and tranquil abode in Thibet; but that alone, and without the support of his sovereign, he had found himself too weak to resist the tyranny of the Chinese, who for several years past, taking advantage of the infancy of the Talé-Lama, had assumed unprecedented claims in the country. We thanked the Regent for his goodwill, and left him to wait upon the Chinese ambassador. We told Ki-Chan that, at a distance from all protection, we had resolved to leave Lha-Ssa, since he was determined to compel us to do so; but that we protested against this violation of our rights. "Well, well," answered Ki-Chan, "you cannot do better; you must depart; it will be better for you, better for the Thibetians, better for me, better for everybody."

The evening before our departure, one of the secretaries of the Regent entered our lodging, and presented to us, in his name, two great ingots of silver. This attention on the part of the first kalon affected us deeply, but we considered we ought not to accept this sum. In the evening, on going to his palace to bid him adieu, we took back to him the two in-

gots. We laid them before him on a small table, protesting to him that this proceeding resulted from no ill-feeling on our part; that, on the contrary, we should always remember, with gratitude, the good treatment we had received from the Thibetian government, during the short stay we had made at Lha-Ssa; that we had no hesitation in expressing our belief that if it had depended on the Regent, we should throughout have enjoyed in Thibet, the most tranquil and honourable repose; but that, as to this money, we could not receive it without compromising our conscience as missionaries and the honour of our nation. The Regent did not seem in any degree irritated by this proceeding. He told us that he understood our conduct, and could appreciate the objection we had expressed; that he would not insist on our accepting this money, but that still he should be very glad to make us some present upon separating. Then pointing to a dictionary in four languages, which he had often observed us turning over with interest, he asked us if this work would be agreeable to us. We thought we might receive this present without compromising in any way the dignity of our character, and we, on our parts, expressed to the Regent how happy we should be if he would deign to accept, as a reminiscence of France, the microscope, which had so excited his curiosity; our offer was kindly received.

At the moment of separation, the Regent rose and addressed to us these words:—"You are going away, but who can know future events? You are men of astonishing courage. Since you have been able to get thus far, I know you have in your hearts a great and holy resolve. I think you will never forget it; for my part, I shall always bear it in mind. You understand me: circumstances will not permit me to say more." "We understand," we replied to the Regent, "the full bearing of your words, and we will implore our God to realize one day the purpose they express." We then parted, our hearts bursting with grief, from this man who had been so kind to us, and by whose means we had formed the hope of making known, with God's help, the truths of Christianity to these poor people of Thibet.

¹ This ebook was transcribed by Les Bowler.
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