

The Forbidden City.

COLONEL YOUNGHUSBAND'S MISSION.

The country through which Colonel Younghusband's mission is advancing into Tibet is so little known to the outside world that the account of the roads through it which Mr Douglas Freshfield gives in the "Geographical Journal" is particularly welcome. It is, on the whole, of a very satisfactory character. It dispels some picturesque illusions which have been widely spread by imaginative persons, and it encourages the expectation that the mission and its escort will have a fairly easy journey to their present destination at Gyantse. The distance from our railway base at Siliguri in Sikkim to that point is only 213 miles, while the road to Lhasa itself does not exceed 327 miles. The passes are of great height, it is true, ranging from over 14,000ft to over 19,000ft, but they afford no serious difficulties to ordinary travellers, and the Chinese defences, which have been raised here and there to protect them, are beneath contempt. The Tibetan regular army consists of 4000 soldiers, who were armed, at all events up to a very recent date, with nothing more formidable than matchlocks and pikes, and who are warranted to be a very peaceable set of men. Our real enemy is the cold, which has already cost us some loss amongst the transport animals, but, severe though it is, it does not put a stop to ordinary traffic during the winter months. The climate is distinctly healthy, and although some of our native troops suffered to some extent from bronchitis and other affections of the lungs when they were quartered at Gnathong in 1888, it agreed very well with the force as a whole. The best proof that the obstacles which the mission will have to overcome are not of the formidable kind with which we have been threatened, is that parties of travellers from Lhasa to the British frontier do not usually spend more than a fortnight on the road, and that with despatch it can be covered in eight days, while the journey to Gyantse is not more than a week's or ten days' travel. The roads on our own side of the frontier have been much improved within the last few years, while within the Tibetan border those between the chief towns are good mule tracks, or at the worst do not fall below the average condition of an Indian by-road.

Two main roads run from India to Shigatse, Gyantse, and Lhasa. When the mission was first despatched it advanced by the shorter route which leads to Khamba Jong up the valley of the river Lachen. The Tibetans had appointed to send their delegates to meet Colonel Younghusband at Khamba Jong, and as this route continues longer in British territory than the other, and is quite practicable for a small party, he elected to travel by it. The conduct of the Tibetans, which has led to the despatch of a considerable escort with the mission on the present occasion, is doubtless fresh in the public mind. They

kept Colonel Younghusband waiting for months without sending the promised emissaries to negotiate with him, and finally they made an insolent demand that he and his party should withdraw to British territory, and refused to have any further dealings with him until he complied with this condition. He did withdraw, but it has been only to advance again with a force amply sufficient to protect him from further insult, and to ensure that the negotiations shall be carried on at whatever point in Tibetan territory we may choose to name. For this second advance the Chumbi route, which enters Tibet sooner and is easier for a large body of men, has been selected. That it is well suited for the movement of a much larger force than we are employing may be gathered from the fact that the Tibetans used it in 1838-39 to invade Sikkim. Since the time of Warren Hastings and, doubtless, for many hundreds of years before his day, it has been the chief gateway through which the trade of Tibet and India has passed to and fro. The bridge on the River Tietsa in Sikkim, which is thirty miles by cart-road from the railway base at Siliguri, is the point at which the ascent begins in earnest. Twenty-two miles further on the wheel-road ends at Pedong, but it is succeeded by a fair horse-road "metalled in places and bridged throughout" up to Gnathong, where our troops passed the winter of 1888 at an elevation of 12,000 feet. Infantry, baggage, animals, and mounted artillery can reach Gnathong, we are assured, without difficulty. One more day's march over the Jelep La, an "easy, smooth pass," 14,400 feet high, where the bridge-path has been lately repaired by our engineers, and Yatung, on the Tibetan side of the great range, is reached. The Tibetans are bound by treaty with us to keep an open market at Yatung, but the only signs of the market as far seem to be the Chinese Customs commissioners. Chumbi itself, which is only twenty miles from Gnathong, is described by all writers as situated in a delightful valley which enjoys a warm and dry climate and is very fertile and highly cultivated. The road from thence to Pari, the last point which we have heard that the mission has reached, ascends 4000 feet in the 21 miles which it covers. It is used at all seasons by mule caravans and passes through numerous villages.

The rest of the way to Gyantse appears to be easy enough. There is another pass to be crossed at the great elevation of 15,700 feet, but the Tang La, as it is called, is described as a "gradual and hardly noticeable ascent." Except in the valleys, the country is wild and barren. The sun is hot and the nights are very cold, but we have again the experiences of the Tibetans in 1888 to guide us as to the military capabilities of the route. Major Iggulden tells us that they kept the transport of their force on the Jelep La, which had of course to pass through this region, in "first-class working order. They had a thousand yaks and 500 mules working supplies up regularly from Gyantse." It will be strange if we cannot march easily over a road which the Tibetans were able to use for the supply of a considerable force during a long period. The valley at

Gyantse is said to be extremely rich. Its name Nyang means, we are told, "the Land of Delicacies"; and Chandra Das, one of the native explorers to whose courage, patience and observation we owe so much of our small knowledge of these wild regions, draws a picture of it which goes far to justify its name. The general conclusion to which Mr Freshfield's most instructive paper comes is that, except from possible suffering on the Jelep La and the Tang La, there is little to fear for our troops, and that if the passes are crossed in fair weather the mission may have a pleasant winter at Chumbi or Gyantse.

Lamas, who are the real rulers of Tibet. As may easily be imagined, this system of polyandry gives rise to a vast number of complicated questions regarding parentage, inheritance, and cognate matters. These are settled by a long and elaborate code of laws, which have been perfected for a thousand years. One husband always has a priority, usually the oldest, and as long as he occupies the position of husband the others are expected to stay away. He indicates that he is in residence by hanging his boots and his bow and arrows outside the door.

Last in Lhasa.

Appropos of Colonel Younghusband's mission in Tibet, it is interesting to recall the fact that the Rev. Kawaguchi Kei-Kai, an enlightened Japanese priest, is the latest individual that has succeeded in penetrating into this mysterious city of Lhasa. He went there as a Buddhist priest, and, after inspecting Lhasa thoroughly, he entered the University of Sera, a mile and a-half from the capital, intending to graduate there. He stayed in the university fifteen months, when his relations with the outside world were discovered. He was then obliged to flee for his life. Since then he has written some of his observations of Tibet in Indian and Japanese papers, and is compiling a large volume on the subject of his travels.

Most curious of all are the revelations which the Rev. Kawaguchi makes concerning the practice of polyandry, the strongest domestic institution in Tibet. Polyandry means the possession of one wife by many husbands, exactly the reverse of polygamy. It is fostered and encouraged by the priests and

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