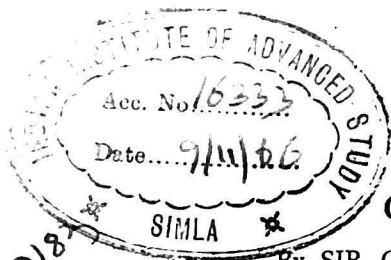


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CHINA AND TIBET

By SIR CHARLES BELL, K.C.I.E., C.M.G.

The following historical note, intended for publication in America, was found among the last papers of the late Sir Charles Bell, who died in British Columbia early in 1945. It now appears for the first time by kind permission of his family.

TWELVE hundred years ago Tibet was one of the most powerful nations in Asia. She fought China on equal terms and frequently defeated her. Then Tibet became gradually converted to Buddhism, a religion which prohibits the taking of life. She took her religion seriously; since then—a thousand years ago—she has never attacked any other country. Her soldiers were disbanded; she found it difficult to protect herself. Still she held on with the help of her Mongol cousins, also by nature a warlike people. But between three and four hundred years ago the third Dalai Lama of Tibet converted the Mongols to Buddhism, and from then the military strength of Mongolia also declined. Yet the fifth Dalai Lama, visiting Peking three hundred years ago, was treated by China as an independent sovereign.

It was two hundred and twenty years ago that the Manchu Emperor, then ruling China, made the first attempt to seize Tibetan territory and hold it, about the same time that Britain was attacking in India. He annexed an area in Eastern Tibet. Since that time other invasions have been made. The most violent and unprovoked was that between 1908 and 1910, when a Chinese army seized Lhasa, the capital; and the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Government fled to India. It is difficult for Tibet to repel modern Chinese invasions, for her population is only about four millions against China's population of between four and five hundred millions—more than a hundred to one. Latterly, Tibet has formed an army for defence, but it numbers only a few thousand men, insufficiently trained and equipped.

During recent years the Chinese have further endeavoured to extend their rule over Tibet by seizing the eastern half, the most valuable half, climatically and agriculturally and with numerous mineral deposits—coal, iron, lead, copper, nickel, zinc, gold; gypsum, asbestos, graphite, and sulphur. China will exploit the minerals for her own purposes, a fact which makes such a large-scale robbery even more shameful.

This seizure they support by the device of marking the land in Chinese maps as two provinces of China, to which they have given the names Chinghai and Sikang. To each such "province" they add part of a populous Chinese province, so as to show a number of Chinese inhabitants in the "province." China's population being dense, and Tibet's but sparse, China can claim a considerable percentage of Chinese inhabitants in the "province," though over 90 per cent. of the area is, and always has been, inhabited exclusively by Tibetans.

The Tibetans cannot make maps. So these Chinese maps are taken by Europeans, Americans, and other foreigners as being correct maps of China and Tibet. By these maps the modern Chinese Government has



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succeeded in making the world believe that Tibet is only one-half as large as it really is. Actually, Tibet covers a million square miles, one-third of the area of the United States, extending to Tatsienlu in the south-east and to the large lake, known as Koko Nor, in the north-east. No doubt much of it is at a high altitude, cold, and infertile, but it is the Tibetans' own homeland, in which they have lived from time immemorial. All of it should be permitted to return to the Tibetan people and their government. Let China keep merely the little bits of their own provinces which they have tacked on to it.

Britain and India have taken from Tibet Ladakh, now included in Kashmir, and Sikkim and Bhutan in the Eastern Himalaya. These also should be allowed to return to Tibet.

Tibet is a shy country, almost hidden, and foreigners are naturally hazy about it; many think that it is a part of China. It is not. Tibetans are of a different race from the Chinese, and of a different religion. In Asia race and religion are the two things that really matter. The connection is far more distant than that between England and Norway. Yet Norway does not attempt to govern England, nor England to govern Norway.

It should be remembered that Asia does not think along European lines. During the fourteen years that I worked as the Government of India's Agent for Tibet, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government always maintained that the Dalai Lama is the spiritual guide and the Manchu Emperor of China his lay supporter. All who are well acquainted with Asia know what this partnership involves. It is the duty of the layman to help his priest in all ways possible, but the priest does not on that account become the layman's servant.

However, when we study the Tibetan treaties and other historical records of the last hundred years, we do find a recognition that the Manchu Emperor was Tibet's overlord. The Manchus were Buddhists in former times, and their Emperor was always so regarded; the Chinese were not regarded as a Buddhist nation. So in 1911, when the Chinese deposed their Manchu Emperor, the political connection between China and Tibet was severed. The Mongols have frequently used a similar argument concerning the connection between China and Mongolia.

Again, when the British attacked Tibet, or annexed parts of Sikkim, a dependency of Tibet, the Chinese afforded no protection to Tibet. Nor did they help in 1841, when an army from Kashmir, composed of Indian soldiers under Zorawar Singh, their Indian leader, attacked Western Tibet and annexed Ladakh to Kashmir. Nor when the Gurkhas attacked Tibet in 1855. Tibet fought all those wars without any help from China.

In 1912 the Tibetans drove the Chinese invaders out of Central Tibet, and a truce was made. Yuan Shi-kai, the President of the Chinese Republic, thereupon telegraphed to the Dalai Lama saying that he restored him to his former rank. The Dalai Lama replied that he was not asking the Chinese Government for any rank, as he intended to exercise both the temporal and ecclesiastical rule in Tibet. Thus he made clear his declaration of Tibetan independence.

In 1917 the Chinese broke the truce and attacked, but the Tibetans managed to defeat them, and recaptured most of Eastern Tibet. In view

of the overwhelming disparity between the populations of the two countries, they could not dare to attempt to recapture all their territory up to the Chinese frontier. Indeed, the Chinese attacked again, and took back some of the recaptured territory from them. The position of these few Tibetan troops, guarding their own territory for the last thirty years, is most precarious.

In their dealings with Western nations the educated Chinese have shown themselves cultured and courteous, and their humbler brethren patient and efficient. But to the Tibetans and Mongols they have shown themselves harsh, cruel, overbearing. With their treatment of the Mongols I am not going into detail here. But in their invasions of Tibet they have wantonly destroyed monasteries, killed priests, and put to death prisoners of war, whose only crime was defending their own country.

During peacetime too they have been overbearing and cruel. Putting it briefly, they have interfered with the Tibetan religion, tried to change old customs unnecessarily, and treated the Tibetans almost as savages. In a book dealing with his travels in Eastern Tibet in 1917 Sir Eric Teichman, a leading authority on China, noted that an American missionary of long frontier experience had written during the preceding year :

"There is no method of torture known that is not practised here on these Tibetans, slicing, skinning, boiling, tearing asunder and all. . . . To sum up what China is doing here in Eastern Tibet, the main things are collecting taxes, robbing, oppressing, confiscating, and allowing her representatives to burn and loot and steal."

Tibet wishes to govern herself, to live her own life. She does not interfere with other nations in a military or commercial or any other way. The Tibetans are a religious people, a peace-loving people, and they are happy in their independence. Why should another nation by brute force take their independence from them?

Tibet is just as much entitled to her freedom as India and China are. She is entitled to be freed from Chinese invasion, just as much as China was entitled to be freed from Japanese invasion.

The districts of Tibet ruled by the Dalai Lama's government are not only governed better than those Tibetan districts which are subject to the Chinese, but better also than the neighbouring districts in China itself. Brigandage is more effectively suppressed, and the whole tenor of the administration is more orderly.

One of the main obstacles to India's unity and independence arises from her two religions, Hindu and Moslem, in strong opposition to each other. None who has worked in the towns and villages of India can underrate the strength, indeed the violence, of this opposition. In Tibet there is no such obstacle. The entire population is devoted to its form of Buddhism.

Hindus, who form three-quarters of the population of India, have been governed by foreigners, mainly Moslem rulers from the north-west, for the last nine hundred years. Tibet has never been governed by others for more than a few years at a time, and seldom, if ever, throughout the whole country. The people never accepted these outside governments, and threw them off before long. But now Tibet could not hope to resist China's large armies, equipped with modern weapons of war.

Though Tibet insists on governing herself, she will maintain her cultural connection with China. Chinese traders, doctors, etc., will always be welcome, but no Chinese governing officials, and, above all, no Chinese soldiers.

Chinese living in Tibet enjoy the privileges of extra-territoriality. America and Britain have recently renounced their extra-territorial privileges in China, and signed treaties with China to that effect. Will China now similarly renounce hers in Tibet, and sign a treaty with Tibet to that effect?

I have written candidly, and I believe that what I have written is the truth. Those who have lived in Tibet, met leading Tibetans, including the heads of the Tibetan Government, and been really able to converse with them in their own language on these subjects—having also had the privilege of talking to leading Chinese—are hardly to be found. Those who have dwelt only in the great centres of China, or elsewhere, do not understand the real facts. And it is the facts that we must face, however unpalatable they may be.

