

## RUSSIA'S TIBETAN POLICY.<sup>1</sup>

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THE attitude of the Tibetan people toward their country by no means does them credit. So far as my limited observation goes, the Tibetans, who are sufficiently shrewd in attending to their personal interests, are not so sensitive in matters of national importance. It seems as if they were destitute of the sense of patriotism, as the term is understood by ordinary people. Not that they are totally ignorant of the meaning of "fatherland," but they are rather inclined to turn that meaning to their own advantage in preference to the interest of their country. Such seems to be the general idea of the politicians of to-day.

The Tibetans are more jealous for their religion. A few of them, a very limited few it is true, seem to be prepared to defend and promote it at the expense of their private interest, though even in this respect the majority are so far unscrupulous as to abuse their religion for their own ends. In the eyes of the common people, religion is the most important product of the country, and they therefore think that they must preserve it at any cost. Their ignorance necessarily makes them fanatics and they believe that any one who works any injury to their religion deserves death. The hierarchical government makes a great deal of capital out of this fanatical tendency of the masses. The holy religion is its justification when it persecutes persons obnoxious to it, and when it has committed any wrong it seeks refuge under the same holy name. The government too often works mischief in the name of religion, but the masses do not of course suspect any such thing—or even if they do now and then harbor a suspicion, they are deterred from given vent to their sentiments, for to speak ill of the religion is a heinous crime in Tibet.

<sup>1</sup> This article forms the seventy-first chapter of a large and interesting volume entitled *Three Years in Tibet*, published by the Theosophist Office of Adyar, Madras, in 1909.

In general the Tibetan women are highly selfish and but poorly developed in the sense of public duty. One might naturally suppose that the children born of such mothers must be similarly deficient in this important point. I thought at first that the Tibetan men were less open to this charge than their wives and sisters, but I soon found this to be a mistake. I found the men not much better than the women, and equally absorbed in their selfish desires while totally neglecting the interests of the state. A foreign country knowing this weak point, and wishing to push its interests in the forbidden land, has only to form its diplomatic procedure accordingly. In other words, it has only to captivate the hearts of the rulers of Tibet, for once the influential cabinet ministers of the hierarchical government are won over, the next step will be an easy matter. The greedy ministers will be ready to listen to any insidious advice coming from outside, provided that the advice carries with it literally the proper weight of gold. They will not care a straw about the welfare of the state or the interest of the general public, if only they themselves are satisfied.

However, foreign diplomatists desiring to succeed in their policy of gaining influence over Tibet must not think that they have an easy task before them. Gold is very acceptable to all Tibetan statesmen, but at times gold alone may not carry the point. The fact is that Tibet has no diplomatic policy in any dignified sense of the word. Its foreign doings are determined by sentiment, which is necessarily destitute of any solid foundation but is susceptible to change from a trivial cause. A foreign country which has given a large bribe to the principal statesmen of Tibet may find afterwards that its enormous disbursements on this account have been a mere waste of money, and that the recipients who were believed to have been secured with golden chains have broken loose from them for some mere triviality. It is impossible to rely on the faith of the Tibetan statesmen, for they are entirely led by sentiment and never by rational conviction.

The Russians conduct their Tibetan policy with consummate dexterity. Their manœuvres date from a long time (at least thirty years) back, when Russia's activity toward Tibet began to attract the public attention of the powers concerned. Russia has selected a highly effective instrument in promoting her influence over Tibet.

There was a Mongolian tribe called the Buriats, which peopled a district far away to the northeast of Tibet toward Mongolia. The tribe was originally feudatory to China, but some time ago it passed under the control of Russia. The astute Muscovites have taken

great pains to insinuate themselves into the grateful regard of this tribe. Contrary to their vaunted policy at home, they have never attempted to convert the Mongolians into believers of the Greek church, but have treated their religion with a strange toleration. The Muscovites even went farther and actually rendered help in promoting the interests of the Lamaist faith, by granting its monasteries more or less pecuniary aid. It was evident that this policy of Russia originated from the deep-laid plan of captivating the hearts of the priests, whose influence was, as it still is, immense over the people. From this tribe quite a large number of young priests are sent to Tibet to prosecute their studies at the principal seats of Lamaist learning. These young Mongolians are found at the religious centers of Ganden, Rebon, Sera, Tashi Lhunpo and at other places. There must be altogether two hundred such students at those seats of learning; several able priests have appeared from among them, one of whom, Dorje by name, became a high tutor to the present Dalai Lama while he was a minor.

This great priest obtained from the hierarchical government some twenty years ago the honorable title of Tsan-ni Kenbo, which means an "instructor in the Lamaist Catechism." There were besides him three other instructors; but he is said to have virtually monopolized the confidence of the young Lama chief. Nor was this confidence misplaced, so far as the relation of teaching and learning was concerned, for the Mongolian priest surpassed his three colleagues both in ability and in learning, and as he omitted no pains to win the heart of his little pupil, the latter was naturally led to hold him in the greatest esteem and affection.

The Tsan-ni Kenbo returned home when, on his pupil's attaining majority, his services as tutor were no longer required. It is quite likely that he described minutely the results of his work in Tibet to the Russian government, for it is conceivable that he may have been entrusted by it with some important business during his stay at Lhasa. Soon the Tsan-ni Kenbo re-visited Lhasa, and this time as a priest of great wealth, instead of as a poor student as he was at first. He brought with him a large amount of gold, also boxes of curios made in Russia. The money and the curios must have come to him from the Russian government. The Dalai Lama and his ministers were the recipients of the gold and curios, and among the ministers a young man named Shata appears to have been honored with the largest share. The name of the Tsan-ni Kenbo had been remembered with respect since his departure from Lhasa,

and his re-appearance as a liberal distributor of gifts completed his triumph.

The Dalai Lama was now ready to lend a willing ear to anything his former tutor represented to him, while the friendship between him and the young premier grew so fraternal that they are said to have vowed to stand by each other as brothers born. The astute Tsan-ni did not of course confine his crafty endeavors to the higher circles alone; the priestly classes received from him a large share of attention, due to the mighty influence which they wield over the masses. Liberal donations were therefore more than once presented to all the important monasteries of Tibet, with which of course the priests of these monasteries were delighted. In their eyes the Tsan-ni was a Mongolian priest of immense wealth and pious heart, and the idea of suspecting how he came to be possessed of such wealth never entered their unsophisticated minds, so they had nothing but unqualified praise for him. When at rare intervals some inquisitive priest asked the government officers about the origin of the Tsan-ni's fortune, the latter would inform him with a knowing look that the Mongolian Lama was regarded with something like regal respect by his countrymen, who vied with each other in presenting gold and other precious things to that venerable priest; there was nothing strange about his acquisition of wealth. And so the government and priesthood placed themselves at the feet of the Tsan-ni and adored him as their benefactor.

The Zaune's program of "conquest" was really comprehensive and included a general plan intended for the masses. It was based on an old tradition of Tibet and involved no extra disbursements on his part. It must be remembered that a work written in former times by some Lama of the new sect contained a prophetic pronouncement—a pronouncement which was supported by some others—that some centuries hence a mighty prince would make his appearance somewhere to the north of Kashmir, and would bring the whole world under his sway, and under the domination of the Buddhist faith.

The Tibetan prophet bequeathed us this important forecast with the idea that when the Tibetan religion degenerated, it would be saved from extinction by the appearance of that mighty Buddhist prince, who would extend his benevolent influence over the whole world. I should state that this announcement is widely accepted as truth by the common people of Tibet.

The Tsan-ni Kenbo was perfectly familiar with the existence of this marvelous tradition, and he was not slow to utilize it for

promoting his own ambitious schemes. He wrote a pamphlet with the special object of demonstrating that "Chang Shambhala" [the name of the future great country given by the prophet] means Russia, and that the Czar is the incarnation of Je Tsong-kha-pa. The Czar, this Russian emissary wrote, is a worthy reincarnation of that venerable founder, being benevolent to his people, courteous in his relations to neighboring countries, and above all endowed with a virtuous mind. This fact and the existence of several points of coincidence between Russia and the country indicated in the sacred prophecy indisputably proved that Russia must be that country, that anybody who doubted it was an enemy of Buddhism and of the august will of the founder of the new sect, and that in short all the faithful believers in Buddhism must pay respect to the Czar as a new embodiment of the founder, and must obey him.

Such is said to be the tenor of that particular writing of the Tsan-ni Kenbo. It seems to exist in three different versions, Tibetan, Mongolian and Russian. I have not been able to see a copy, but it was from the lips of a trustworthy person that I gathered the drift of the exposition given in the pamphlet. Indeed the Tsan-ni's pamphlet was preserved with jealous care by all who had copies of it, such care as is bestowed by a pious bibliographer on a rare text of Buddhist writing. I knew several priests who undoubtedly possessed copies of the pamphlet, but I could not ask permission to inspect them, for fear that such a request might awaken their suspicion. The one from whom I confidentially obtained the drift of the writing told me that he found in it some unknown letters. I concluded that the letters must be Russian.

Tsan-ni Kenbo's artful scheme has been crowned with great success, for to-day almost every Tibetan blindly believes in the ingenious story concocted by the Mongolian priest, and holds that the Czar will sooner or later subdue the whole world and found a gigantic Buddhist empire. So the Tibetans may be regarded as extreme Russophiles, thanks to the machination of the Tsan-ni Kenbo.

There is another minor reason which has very much raised the credit of Russia in the eyes of the Tibetans; I mean the arrival of costly fancy goods from that country. Now, the fancy goods coming from British India are all cheap things which are hardly fit for the uses for which they are intended. The reason is obvious; as the Tibetans cannot afford to buy goods of superior quality, the merchants who forward these to Tibet must necessarily select only

those articles that are readily marketable. The goods coming from Russia, on the other hand, are not intended for sale; they are exclusively for presents. Naturally therefore the goods coming from Russia are of superior quality and can well stand the wear and tear of use. The ignorant Tibetans do not of course exercise any great discernment, and seeing that the goods from England and Russia make such a striking contrast with each other they naturally jump to the conclusion that the English goods are trash, and that the people who produce such things must be an inferior and unreliable race.

I heard during my stay in Tibet a strange story the authenticity of which admitted of no doubt. It was kept as a great secret and occurred about two years ago. At that time the Dalai Lama received as a present a suit of episcopal robes from the Czar, a present forwarded through the hands of the Czar's emissary. It was a splendid garment glittering with gold and was accepted, I was told, with gratitude by the Grand Lama.

The Czar's act in giving such a present is open to a serious charge. If he presented the suit as a specimen of an embroidered fabric, then that act amounted to sacrilege, for the bishop's ceremonial robe is a sign of a high religious function, and when a person receives it from the superior head of the holy church it means that that person has been installed in the seat of a bishop. On the other hand if the Czar presented the suit from religious considerations his act is equally inexplicable and deserves condemnation, for he must have been perfectly aware that Lamaism is an entirely distinct religion from the state religion of Russia, and that the head of the Tibetan religion therefore has nothing to do with such an official garment. It was really a strange transaction. On the part of the recipient there were extenuating circumstances. The fact is, he must have been entirely ignorant as to the real nature of the present. He must have accepted it merely as a costly garment with no special meaning attached to it. I am certain he would have rejected the offer at once had he had even a faint inkling of its nature. He was therefore a victim of ignorance and perhaps of imposition, for the Tsan-ni Kenbo, who knew all about this present, must have made some plausible explanations to the Dalai Lama when the latter asked him about it. Shata, the premier and bosom friend of the Tsan-ni, probably played some part in the imposture.

Who is Shata? Shata, whose name I have before mentioned, is the eldest of the Premiers and comes from one of the most illustrious families of Tibet. His house stood in hereditary feud with the great monastery Tangye-ling, whose head, Lama Temo Rin-

poche, acted as regent before the present Dalai Lama had been installed. At that time the star of Shata was in the decline. He could not even live in Tibet with safety, and had to leave the country as a voluntary exile. As a wanderer he lived sometimes at Darjeeling and at other times in Sikkim. It was during this period of his wandering existence that he observed the administration of India by England, and heard much about how India came to be subjugated by that power. Shata therefore is the best authority in Tibet about England's Indian policy. His mind was filled with the dread of England. He was overawed by her power and must have trembled at the mere idea of the possibility of her crossing the Himalayas and entering Tibet, which could hardly hope to resist the northward march of England, when once the latter made up her mind to invade the land. He must have thought during his exile that Tibet would have to choose between Russia and China in seeking foreign help against the possible aggression of England. Evidently therefore he carried home some such idea as to Tibetan policy when affairs allowed him to return home with safety, that is to say, when his enemy had resigned the regency and surrendered the supreme power to the Dalai Lama.

Shata was soon nominated a premier, and the power he then acquired was first of all employed and abused in destroying his old enemy and his followers. The mal-administration and unjust practices of which those followers had been guilty during the ascendancy of their master furnished a sufficient cause for bringing a serious charge against the latter. The poor Temo Rinpoche was arrested for a crime of which he was innocent, and died a victim to his enemy.

Shata is an unscrupulous man and is resourceful in intrigues. But he is nevertheless a man of vigorous mind and does not hesitate about the means, when once he makes up his mind to compass anything. He is the best informed man in Tibet, comparatively speaking, in diplomatic affairs, and so he must possess a certain definite view about the foreign policy of Tibet, and his pro-Russian tendency must have come from his strong conviction, though this conviction rested on a slender base. This tendency was of course stimulated and encouraged by the Tsan-ni Kenbo, who did not neglect to work upon the other's inclination when he saw that it was highly favorable to him. Shata on his part must have rendered help to his Mongolian friend when the latter wished to offer the strange present to the Dalai Lama. I do not say that the other ministers approved of Shata's acts in this significant transaction, or even of his pro-Russian

policy. On the contrary some of them may have deprecated both as being opposed to the interests of Tibet. But they could hardly speak out their minds, and even if they did they could not restrain Shata, for the simple reason that the executive authority practically rests in the hands of the senior premier. He very seldom consulted his colleagues, still less was he inclined to accept advice coming from them. Under the circumstances they must have connived at the acceptance of the bishop's apparel, even if they knew about it.

China's loss of prestige in Tibet since the Japano-Chinese war owing to her inability to assert her power over the vassal state has much to do with this pro-Russian leaning. China is no longer respected, much less feared, by the Tibetans. Previous to that war and before China's internal incompetence had been laid bare by Japan, relations like those between master and vassal bound Tibet to China. The latter interfered with the internal affairs of Tibet and meted out punishments freely to the Tibetan dignitaries and even to the Grand Lama. Now she is entirely helpless. She could not even demand explanations from Tibet when that country was thrown into an unusual agitation about the Temo Rinpoche's affair. The Tibetans are now conducting themselves in utter disregard or even in defiance of the wishes of China, for they are aware of the powerlessness of China to take any active steps against them. They know that their former suzerain is fallen and is therefore no longer to be depended upon. They are prejudiced against England on account of her subjugation of India, and so they have naturally concluded that they should establish friendly relations with Russia, which they knew was England's bitter foe.

It is evident that the Dalai Lama himself favors this view, and it may safely be presumed that unless he was favorably disposed towards Russia he would never have accepted the bishop's garment from the Czar. He is too intelligent a man to accept any present from a foreign sovereign as a mere compliment.

The Dalai Lama's friendly inclination was clearly established when in December, 1900, he sent to Russia his grand chamberlain as envoy with three followers. Leaving Lhasa on that date the party first proceeded towards the Tsan-ni Kenbo's native place, whence they were taken by the Siberian railway, and in time reached St. Petersburg. The party was received with warm welcome by that court, to which it offered presents brought from Tibet. It is said that on that occasion a secret understanding was reached between the two governments.

It was about December of 1901 or January of the following

year that the party returned home. By that time I had already been residing in Lhasa for some time. About two months after the return of the party I went out on a short trip on horseback to a place about fifty miles northeast of Lhasa. While I was there I saw two hundred camels fully loaded arrive from the northeast. The load consisted of small boxes, two packed on each camel. Every load was covered with skin, and so I could not even guess what it contained. The smallness of the boxes however arrested my attention, and I came to the conclusion that some Mongolians must have been bringing ingots of silver as a present to the Dalai Lama. I asked some of the drivers about the contents of the boxes, but they could not tell me anything. They were hired at some intermediate station, and so knew nothing about the contents. However they believed that the boxes contained silver, but they knew for certain that these boxes did not come from China. They had been informed by somebody that they came from some unknown place.

When I returned to the house of my host, the minister of finance came in and informed him that on that day a heavy load had arrived from Russia. On my host inquiring what were the contents of the load, the minister replied that this was a secret. I took a hint from this talk of the minister and left the room. I had however by good chance discovered that the load came from Russia, and though I could not as yet form any idea about the contents, I tried to get some reliable information.

Now I knew one government officer who was one of the worst repositories imaginable for any secret; he was such a gossip that it was easy to worm anything from him. One day I met him and gradually the trend of our conversation was turned to the last caravan. I found him quite communicative as usual, and so I asked him about the contents of the load. The gentleman was so far obliging, that he told me (confidentially, he said) that another caravan of three hundred camels had arrived some time before, and that the load brought by so many camels consisted of small fire-arms, bullets, and other interesting objects. He was quite elated with the weapons, saying that now for the first time Tibet was sufficiently armed to resist any attack which England might undertake against her, and could defiantly reject any improper request which that aggressive power, as the Tibetans believe her to be, might make to her.

I had the opportunity of inspecting one of the guns sent by Russia. It was apparently one of modern pattern, but it did not impress me as possessing any long range nor seem to be quite fit

for active service. The stock bore an inscription attesting that it was made in the United States of America. The Tibetans being ignorant of Roman letters and English firmly believed that all the weapons were made in Russia. It seems that about one-half of the load of the five hundred camels consisted of small arms and ammunition.

The Chinese government appears mortified to see Tibet endeavoring to break off her traditional relation with China, and to attach herself to Russia. The Chinese Amban once tried to interfere with the Tsan-ni Kenbo's dealings in Lhasa, and even intended to arrest him. But it was of no avail, as the Tibetan government extended protection to the man and defeated the purposes of the Amban. On one occasion the Tsan-ni was secretly sent to Darjeeling and on another occasion to Nepāl, and the Amban could never catch hold of him. It appears that the British government watched the movements of the Tsan-ni, and this suspicion of England against him appears to have been shared by the Nepal government.

The existence of the Siberian railway can hardly be expected to give any great help to Russia, if ever the latter should be obliged from one reason or another to send a warlike expedition to Lhasa. The distance from the nearest station to Lhasa is prohibitive of any such undertaking, for the march, even if nothing happens on the road, must require five or six months and is through districts abounding in deserts and hills. The presence of wild natives in Amdo and Kham is also a discouraging factor, for they are people who are perfectly uncontrollable, given up to plunder and murder, and of course thoroughly at home in their own haunts. Even discipline and superior weapons would not balance the natural advantages which these dreadful people enjoy over intruders, however well informed the latter may be about the topography of the districts. Russia can hardly expect to subdue Tibet by force of arms. It was in consideration of this fact that the Tsan-ni Kenbo has been endeavoring to impose upon the Tibetans that audacious fiction about the identity of the Czar's person with that of the long dead Founder of the New Sect, so that his master might accomplish by peaceful means what he could hardly effect by force.

Under the circumstances, something like a reaction seems already to have set in against the pro-Russian agitation ingeniously planned by the Tsan-ni Kenbo. It remains to be seen what steps Russia will take towards Tibet to prevent the Lama's country from slipping away from her grasp.

Apparently therefore the Russian manoeuvres in Tibet have succeeded, and the question that naturally arises is this: "Is Russia's footing in Tibet so firmly established as to enable her with any hope of success to make an attempt on India with Tibet as her base?" I cannot answer this question affirmatively, for Russia's influence in Tibet has not yet taken a deep root. She can count only on the Dalai Lama and his senior premier as her most reliable friends, and the support of the rest who are simply blind followers of those two cannot be counted upon. Of course those blind followers would remain pro-Russian if Russia should persist in actively pushing on her policy of fascination; but as their attitude does not rest on a solid foundation they may abandon it any time when affairs take a turn unfavorable for Russia. For it must be remembered that by no means the whole of the higher classes of Tibet are even passive supporters of the policy marked out by the Dalai Lama and his trusted lieutenants. On the contrary, there are some few who are secretly suspicious of the motives of Russia. The Czar, they think, may be the sovereign who is the incarnate Founder, but his very munificence towards Tibet may have some deep meaning at bottom. That munificence may not be for nothing; if it is, then Russia must be regarded as a country composed of people who are quite godly—a very rare thing in this world of give and take, where selfishness is a guiding motive. Is it not more reasonable and safer to interpret those repeated acts of outward friendship as coming from her ambitious design to place a snare before Tibet and finally to absorb the country? But such ideas are, I say, confined to only a very limited section, and are exchanged in whispers between confidential friends. They do not seem to have reached the ears of the Dalai Lama and the senior premier.