

IN THE LAND OF

NASHI SACRED SCROLLS. *Studying these rare pictographs, Quentin Roosevelt traces Buddha's journey through hell. The completion of one of these scrolls used to require six months' work by a skilled dtomba, who remained in a religious trance. The art has long since disappeared and these scrolls are now seldom seen. To secure them author Roosevelt trekked through China to temples of once-feared devil priests*

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THE DEVIL PRIESTS

A one-man expedition to China's inaccessible and forbidding hinterland secures ancient pictographic scrolls which reveal the heretofore obscure history of the secluded Nashis

By QUENTIN ROOSEVELT

Two years ago my mother and I spent a month in China. She had been ill, and always refers to the visit as "Grandma's Rest Cure." In that short space of time we traveled over 3000 miles by plane, we had several narrow escapes from death by air, by water, by shellfire and by bombs, we became refugees, and we ended with a severe earthquake in Manila.

After my return to the States I became interested in some curious scrolls and manuscripts that my father had brought back from western China. They had been stored in the attic for ten years, but my recent trip to China stimulated a new curiosity about them. I learned that they had been painted and written by the Nashis, a people of whom practically nothing is known. The writing is pictographic and bears no relation to any other known writing, past or present. These scrolls and books reveal a civilization over 1000 years old that reflects many of the cultures with which it came in contact, and which have since disappeared. Today the Nashis, what is left of them, live on and around the plain of Li-kiang between two 12,000-foot mountain ranges in a little loop on the upper Yangtze River. Their actual beginnings are obscure and can only be guessed through their unreliable histories. They are generally supposed to have left their original homeland about the time of Christ, and journeyed down the Mekong Gorges and eastward until they finally settled where they are now. Here they lived a more or less independent life until the advent of the Chinese magistrates some 500 years ago. They still have a hereditary king who has a certain amount of pomp but no power.

Several articles have been written about these interesting people and their literature by Dr. Joseph Rock, but so far as I could find the only specimens of their books in any museum were a few given to the Fogg Museum in Boston by my father, and a collection at the Congressional Library in Washington. Because of their scarcity various other museums became interested and offered to contribute to an expedition that I was willing to undertake to collect as many as possible.

On March 4, 1939, I left Seattle and after incidental adventures in bombarded China found myself, within scarcely more than a month, gliding down upon the city of Chungking, far in the interior.

(Right) FORCED by poor flying conditions to remain in Chengtu, Roosevelt made the most of his time by purchasing Tibetan curiosities such as the sacred manuscript held by this Tibetan lama

After a stay of a few days in Chungking I had the opportunity of meeting W. L. Bond, head of the Chinese commercial airline. One evening Bond took me aside and said, "How would you like to fly up to Lanchow?" I was interested for several reasons, first because there was no regular airline to Lanchow, and second because it is probably the most difficult place in the whole of China to get permission to enter. Bond went on to explain that in a day or so a special military Douglas was going on a trip for the Military Aviation Commission. It would be flown over an unusual route, directly over the Tsinling Shan between northwest Szechwan and southwestern Kansu, and in easy sight of the Amnyi Machin, a huge unsurveyed mountain range of northern Koko Nor, which when sighted about two decades ago by Pereira, the British explorer, was heralded as a possible rival to Mt. Everest as the world's highest mountain.

Since Lanchow is one of the most powerful air bases in China, no foreigners, except a few Russians, have been allowed on the airfield, and I anticipated difficulty about permits. With Dr. Kung's help, however, a visa was quickly granted. General Mao, of the Aviation Commission, was consulted, gave his consent, and said that the plane would leave the next day. At six o'clock the following morning I was at the airfield, and shortly afterwards we took off.

Our first stop was Chengtu, which was as far as my mother and I had gone two years before. Here we refueled and hopped off again, but after a short time were obliged to return to Chengtu because the clouds were too high for the plane to climb over them.





(Left) AMNYI MACHIN—a challenge to the ambitious mountaineer. This huge unsurveyed mountain range of northern Koko Nor had previously been heralded as a possible rival to Mt. Everest as the world's highest mountain

(Right) A MODERN STEEL BRIDGE spanning the Yellow River at Lanchow. Beneath this relatively modern structure float primitive goatskin rafts, the only means of navigation. The bustle of the new and the old in this faraway Chinese city does not hide the significant fact that Lanchow is one of China's most powerful air bases and consequently one of the most difficult places in all China to enter



(Left) THE ABODE of a living Buddha. Monasteries housing monks of various sects offered excellent hunting grounds for the author in his search for ancient Nashi scrolls. Although monks chanted from sacred books and displayed Tibetan sacred banners, devil masks, and many other things, they were generally unwilling to part with these possessions

(Right) A LIVING BUDDHA in his ceremonial robes. Although Tibet is ruled by one living Buddha supreme, the Dalai Lama, there are a number of local Buddhas



Since many of the peaks in this region are uncharted and above 20,000 feet, it is unwise to proceed in a fog on dead reckoning, so we were forced to spend the night there. As the next day also was bad for flying high, I spent the morning buying skins—snow-leopard and golden monkeys and Tibetan lynxes—also some Tibetan manuscripts and bronze vessels. While I was there I saw a delightful baby giant panda, recently captured west of Chengtu.

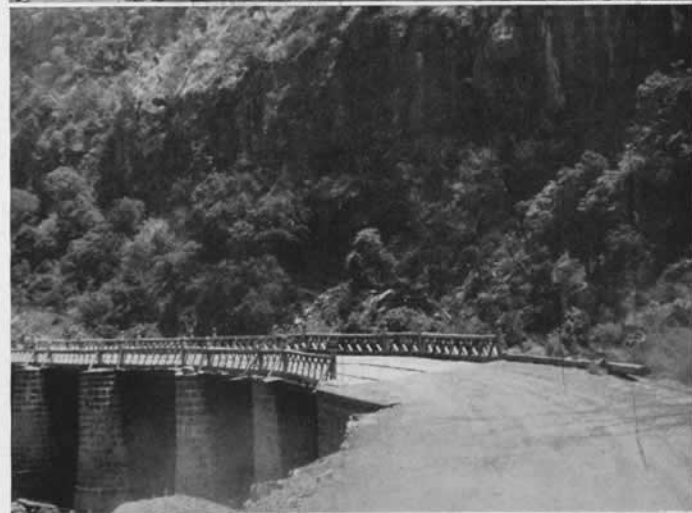
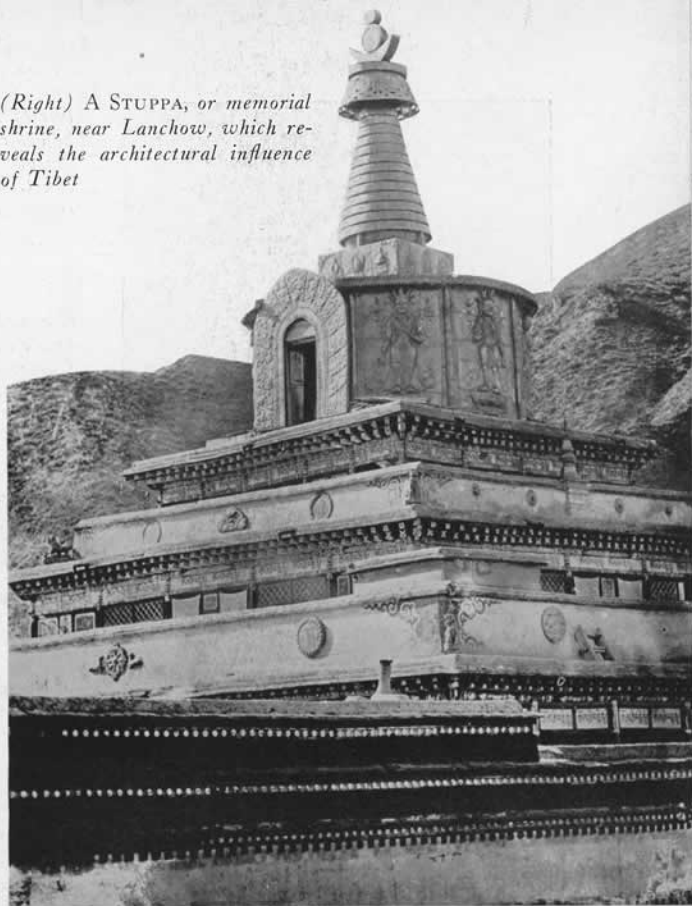
The next morning we really did get started and climbed to about 19,000 feet. Here we had a perfect view of the big mountains in eastern Tibet and Koko Nor. Far to the southwest was the Minya Konka, glimmering faintly with its sheen of snow, while directly to the west were other snow-covered peaks. As we got farther north an enormous bulk of white mountains with crowning twin peaks gradually came into view. Much higher than the surrounding ones, this was the famous Amnyi Machin, unsurveyed and exceedingly high. As we sailed along over the white blanket of clouds, an occasional peak would poke its head through directly beneath us, and I was glad we were above it.

Shortly after noon we began to leave the high mountains and clouds and crossed a wide stretch of snowy grassland, which tapered off into abrupt little mountains, gorges and occasional emerald green lakes. There were no trees on the yellowish gray mountains, and the only signs of life were numerous walled fortresses placed at strategic intervals on the cliffs. All at once we found ourselves over the narrow basin of the Yellow River, with Lanchow lying below us, hemmed in with sharp dusty hills. As we came down I could see the goatskin rafts, the only means of river navigation.

I was met at the plane by a representative of the Foreign Ministry and a representative of General Chu Shao Liang, the military governor. The latter invited me to stay at his residence, an impressive place which had been the palace of a Ming prince. It had seven courtyards with a large garden at the rear against the massive city wall. This section of the city wall is supposed to be a section of the Great Wall of China, which runs through Lanchow and out to the northwest. My room was directly against the Old Wall, and in the garden outside were two police dogs and an assortment of wild animals in bamboo cages, including bear, wildcat, deer, fox, leopard, etc. Two sentries were on guard.

My stay in Lanchow was spent in driving about the city exploring the suburbs, and crossing the Yellow River. The city itself is very old with some characteristics of North China, and some Mohammedan. There are many Sino-Mohammedan mosques and everywhere in the streets can be seen the long faces and prominent noses of the worshipers of Islam with traces of Caucasian blood. In the streets a common sight is the blue "covered wagon" hoods of two-

(Right) A STUPPA, or memorial shrine, near Lanchow, which reveals the architectural influence of Tibet



(Middle right) A SECTION of the new Burma road over which many supplies and munitions are transported from Rangoon to Chiang Kai-shek's government

(Right) POSSIBLY antedating the travels of Marco Polo is the tribute road which may be seen in the background

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(Left) ALTHOUGH this young Tibetan sported an old-type revolver, he evidently felt that a charm box was necessary to combat the miscellaneous devils of the Tibetan world against which bullets have no effect. Roosevelt found that the little charms in such a box were considered sacred and not for sale

(Below) TWO STREET SCENES in the ancient city of Talifu, which lies beside the smooth highway of the new Burma road. In far southwestern China, within 100 miles of the Burma border, this ancient city was once a Mohammedan capital. About a decade ago an earthquake devastated prosperous Talifu, sparing little of it from ruin except a well-built city wall and a few imposing gates



wheeled carts pulled by horses, while more unusual are the beautiful rickshas with purple and silver cloth cushions and silver butterflies inlaid in the body. All the rickshas in the city seem to be made in this fashion and I do not remember seeing a single one that was shabby or dirty.

After I returned to Chungking, I started out along the Burma road in a new Buick sedan lent me by Mme. Chiang Kai-shek's brother, T. L. Soong, whose Southwest Transportation Company sends caravans of trucks over this road from Rangoon, carrying supplies and munitions to Chiang Kai-shek's government. I was traveling with a Mr. Liao of the Company, who was to accompany me the whole way, acting as an interpreter.

We stopped the second night at Talifu, once an ancient Mohammedan capital, which was devastated by an earthquake about a decade ago. Little remains now of the once prosperous city except a few imposing gates, a well-built city wall, and a sea of ruined stone houses. The surrounding plain is inhabited almost entirely by an ancient tribe called the Minchias, different from the Chinese who live in the city itself, both in language and customs.

In Talifu I enjoyed a comfortable night at the China Inland Mission. The next morning I went around with Mr. Wagner of the Pentecostal Union, to the Chinese magistrate to go through the necessary red tape and formalities and at the same time presented my credentials for an armed escort. Shortly afterwards I discovered that General Sheuh Wha, to whom I had a letter, was in town. He is the Commander-in-Chief of the unsettled northwestern section of Yunnan, and is a man of considerable power. I found him to be pleasant and kindly. He told me

that he was going to Li-kiang in a few days and invited me to go with him.

Off we went two days later, I astride a huge mule provided by the general, and he riding in his large chair, carried by four coolies marching in single file. Its roof was covered with black and red cloth and its sides were equipped with mosquito-netted windows. The arms of the chair had silver knobs, and the chair itself was covered with a large Tibetan wolfskin. A tiny police dog puppy was the general's constant companion in the chair and divided its time between yelps of boredom and a deep sleep in the old man's lap. The swinging of the conveyance made it impossible for the little dog to stand up, and it sat most of the time with its legs straddled, looking confused. I was amused to hear the chair-coolies cursing at the extra weight of the dog, and singing songs in Chinese, explained to me by my interpreter, which would have shocked the general if they had been in a dialect he could understand.

The general was an extremely kindly man and a pleasant traveling companion. He neither smoked opium nor drank. He was not fond of exercise, and often admitted that he would much rather sleep in his chair than ride his stallion. That he was a man of action, however, was shown by his past record in dealing with bandits, as he had never been bested by any of them in a fight. He was a firm adherent to the Lamaistic cult of the Red Cap, and often spent several days in retirement in the monastery of Wen Feng Sse near Li-kiang. Later, when I visited that monastery I was shown a photograph of him in prayer, with a strange protuberance coming out of his head. Although the monks were convinced it was a holy manifestation, I am sure it was a defect in the lens.

(Below) PACKING up the caravan to press on by pony into a territory where Buicks fear to tread

(Below, right) GENERAL SHEUH WHA, a powerful figure in Yunnan, who accompanied the author into the interior. He rode in a sedan chair with silver trimmings, his constant companion a tiny police dog puppy



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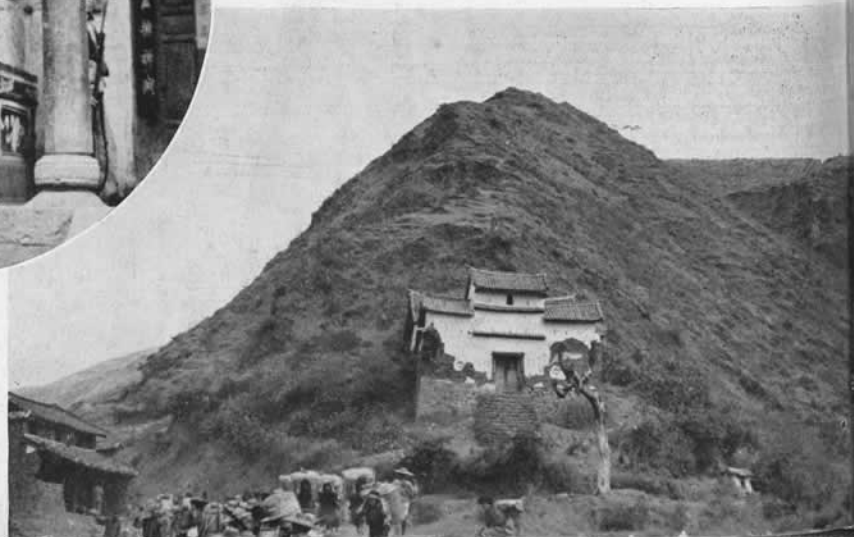
(Above) WINNOWING grain in the streets of Niu Kai, a village near the heart of a bandit-infested district

(Below) TWO NATIVES operating a primitive grain mashing machine. Daily life went on in Niu Kai although 150 brigands had been causing trouble in the surrounding hills



(Left) AN EXAMPLE of religious statuary in a Niu Kai temple. Beyond this village Quentin Roosevelt proceeded with triple troop escort

(Right) A FORTIFIED HOUSE near Hsai Ping



We arrived at Shi-tso late the same night, where we stayed at the elaborate house of Mr. Yin, a merchant who lived half of the time in Shi-tso and half in Li-kiang. Our beds consisted of boards on saw horses, but I had become accustomed to this by that time. At dinner I had a slight shock when I discovered that one of the dishes consisted entirely of caterpillars, considered a great delicacy in these parts.

Two days later at Niu Kai a tall, gaunt Chinese captain came up and saluted the general. He was in charge of the bandit suppression activities in the surrounding territory, and had come to make his report. With him came some of his half-Tibetan troops, dressed mostly in furs, who stood respectfully in the background as the general and his captain had a council of war. Apparently there were some 150 bandits who had been creating trouble recently in the hills around Niu Kai.

After much consultation it was decided that we should continue with a tripled troop escort through the dangerous country. Niu Kai had often been the scene of battles between Chinese troops and bandits, in which the general had taken part. Once he took the city from the famous bandit, Chang, and he showed me the exact spot where he had beheaded him.

I was walking beside the general and telling him, through an interpreter, of the wonderful things to be seen in America, when suddenly an old woman rushed from the crowd and flung herself at the general's feet, weeping and beating her head on the ground. Her son was in one of the bandit groups, and she was imploring mercy for him. The general said that he would give her son three days to return to the fold, but if, at that time he had not returned, he would not be spared. On my return trip I was told that he was still with the bandits.

Most of the day the general seemed worried. He told me afterwards that he was carrying a large number of banknotes to the forces of Li-kiang, and was afraid for their safety.

(Right) THE AUTHOR'S pony caravan threading along a mountain pass beyond Talifu. Two passes of about 12,000 feet impeded progress to Li-kiang, where the ancient documents were sought



(Below) THE MARKET place at Yoso. The people are Minchias, an ancient tribe differing from the Chinese in both language and customs



(Below) THE PORTALS of a town on the expedition's itinerary



(Below, right) A DOWNHILL VIEW of the "one-pig" town of Kwang Shan, where the author slept among chickens, horses, cows, and goats, with rats scurrying around under his cot



At Chien Chuan, a walled town similar to Talifu but smaller, we stayed over night at the treasury, where I ate my first fried locusts. They were rather good, with supposedly high nutritive qualities, and reminded me of shrimps.

The next day's stage was a short one, and we spent the night in a little one-pig village called Kwang Shan. After being met by the village headman in his bare feet, we put up at a little peasant inn. We slept in the same enclosure as the chickens, horses, ducks, cows, pigs and goats, to say nothing of the inevitable rats that scurried around under my cot and ate some biscuits hanging on the wall in a little bag near my head.

Too steep to ride

At four o'clock in the morning we arose and started on the longest and most difficult stage of all—90 li (30 miles) across altitudes of about 12,000 feet to Li-kiang. We started off by walking up an incline too steep for the horses to carry us, until we overlooked the entire valley of Chien Chuan and the pass to Niu Kai far beyond.

After a few hours riding along the top of the ridge, we began to drop down until it became so steep we again had to abandon our horses. We stopped for lunch at La-She-Ba, a little village halfway down the slope. Here I saw my first Nashi women, with the curious goatskins hanging on their backs and the nine brilliantly colored disks attached to the hairy side of the skin. I noticed for the first time the difference between the Nashi and Chinese women. The former seem less Mongoloid in general appearance, and are on the whole better looking from an Occidental point of view. Their figures, dumpy and shapeless to a degree, are accentuated by the voluminous and unflattering garments they wear.

The Nashi town of Li-kiang is an ancient settlement and probably existed before the Nashis conquered this land at the time of Christ, when they migrated from Chong, a city north of Atun-tse, and settled in and near the plain of the Li-kiang—"Beautiful River." For several centuries their *yamen* or king ruled here undisturbed, until the Chinese took over. The streets are passably clean, and beside all the larger ones run little streams, confined neatly between banks of fitted stone. The streams, spanned at intervals by little stone bridges, are so clear that the neatly laid pavement of stones on the bottom could be seen, although the current was swift. The houses in general resemble the ordinary Chinese house, but at each end, coming vertically down from the apex of the roof at the ridgepole, is an intricately carved board about four feet long, supposed to keep out devils. At the bottom of the piece two fishes are represented. No Nashi I spoke to could explain the meaning of the carvings on this board, and all I could gather was that the general effect was beneficial.

One of my father's friends, Mr. James Andrews, was in charge of the Protestant Mission in Li-kiang. He had spent almost 20 years in the Nashi country and knew perhaps more about the Nashis than any other living man, and I hoped he would be able to tell me how to go about finding the Nashi manuscripts and scrolls. We discussed the possibilities of collecting in and around Li-kiang. I was disappointed,

when at first he seemed pessimistic about my finding any books and scrolls. These old documents, as I have said, are extremely rare and scientifically important because almost nothing is known of the Nashi people whose history they reveal. Furthermore, the art of making the books has died out, and the scrolls which used to take a skilled *dtomba* six months to make while in a trance, are scarcely ever seen now. The writing, unlike anything known elsewhere, resembles superficially the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, but it has a certain action and humor that separates it at once from anything so stylized. The characters, at first glance, look like a child's picture book, a sort of Mickey Mouse. There are many little drawings of cows, horses, birds, tigers, dwarfs, and strange gods, that show a vigorous and refreshing artistic style.

I was exceedingly anxious to collect these books and scrolls because they often tell in the course of recitation the history of various Nashi heroes. They are the sacred manuscripts of these people and also contain charms to find lost objects, services for a dead farmer or his cattle, and other chants sung in innumerable rites and ceremonies.

Difficult to buy

Mr. Andrews said that for many years the pictographic books and especially the long painted scrolls had been extremely rare and because of this the priests, or *dtombas*, would be unwilling to sell any of the books or scrolls they might have. However, he promised to send for a *dtomba* he knew and to commission the latter to go out into the country and buy up everything he could. No Nashi manuscripts could be bought in the city of Li-kiang itself.

The *dtomba* arrived and proved to be an old man with large, simple features and a spinachy beard. He seemed fairly optimistic about getting what I wanted and agreed to be back with whatever he could find in a week.

One of Mr. Andrews' missionary workers came in to tell us that he had located a priest who had a quantity of pictographic books, also paraphernalia used by *dtombas* during ceremonies, and one of the long scrolls.

The local general invited us to a dinner. About four in the afternoon his bodyguard came to tell us that the feast was ready. The custom was to inform the guests a couple of hours in advance, and then at regular intervals afterwards. We finally went when the bodyguard appeared for the fourth time with a brilliant "Petromax" lantern, which was carried ahead of us in the gloom.

The dinner at the general's house was a small one for about eight people, but it was beautifully cooked and he had some good French wine. I strongly suspect that the wine was pilfered from a foreigner's caravan and then offered for sale in the streets of Li-kiang, but anyway it was excellent. A phonograph played Chinese music in the distance, and the various progeny of the general scrambled over everything to watch the feast for the *Wai-Kuerin*, or foreigner.

Since our worker had no luck in finding either scrolls or manuscripts, we definitely made up our minds to go ourselves the next day. We left on horseback directly after breakfast and headed west across

the plain. Han Hai-tze, as the place was called, was an hour's ride out, at the edge of the basin. The ride was a lovely one. To the north, the Snow Mountain rose in all its glory with no mist to obscure its jagged bulk. The upper half, from about 12,000 feet up, was covered with snow, and stood in sharp contrast to the green of the valley. I stopped next to a little temple and a stone bridge crossing a stream to take a picture, and our horses chose that moment to run away in opposite directions. After fifteen minutes of breathless plunging through paddy fields and creeks, we secured them again, and started off towards the *dtomba's* village, now only a mile or so across the meadows.

The priest's house was one of four or five in the village, and consisted of a stable and living quarters, forming a small court, all made of mud. The old *dtomba* himself greeted us and went up to get his books and possessions. They were all lying about in an extremely musty old loft, with rats eating them and making nests in them. We brought them into the light and began to bargain for them. Gradually we reached an agreement about everything except one set of books which he was planning to use in a ceremony the next day. Unfortunately his long scroll was lent to a friend, since they were very scarce, and he didn't expect it back for a week. He was willing to sell us a crown and some sacred banners, and, on considerable



(Above) AT LI-KIANG ("Beautiful river") the expedition began the long negotiations to secure the sacred documents relating to Nashi history. The region was captured by the Nashis at the time of Christ

(Above) JAMES ANDREWS, missionary friend of Mr. Roosevelt's, with two lamas

(Below) ONE of the sacred books. The writing, unlike anything known elsewhere, superficially resembles ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics

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persuasion, the set of books he wanted to use, but no amount of persuasion would make him sell his bronze cymbal. We finally left, having sent about 200 books and other acquisitions back to the mission on the back of a coolie woman.

The next day we started to the south end of the plain, at the same time sending one of the Nashi mission workers to a small village ten miles to the northwest to collect what he could, but this was a fruitless trip as the *dtomba* we sought was away. For a change we were on foot on stone-paved paths running between the fields. In an hour we got to the southern edge of the basin, and after passing through a group of neat little houses, we stopped at one that stood off by itself. Mr. Andrews' knock at the door brought no response, and we went in. An old woman told us that the *dtomba* had gone over to La-She-Ba to confer with the magistrate about the destruction wrought by a recent hailstorm on his crops. Since everything of interest was locked up in the loft, we could do nothing but start back to Li-kiang.

The next day we made another trip to this priest's house and waited for him an hour or so. We were on the point of departing when he appeared in the distance with a disciple. Millet wine had made him affable and extremely hospitable. With much ceremony he asked us in, offering to kill a chicken for us. We refused politely and sat down on some rude wooden benches in the yard. His eyes were very poor, and he wore spectacles made of ordinary window glass in the vain hope that they might improve his vision. I imagine he must have been more than 70 years old, and he had a long beard, which he stroked meditatively while considering a price.

He showed us one by one his crowns, scepter and ceremonial sword. While doing so he suddenly got the urge to dance. Holding the sword in one hand, and a beautiful bronze cymbal in the other, he an-



(Left) A 70-YEAR-OLD *dtomba* or devil priest of the Nashis suddenly announced that "his tiger was coming up"

nounced gravely that his "tiger was coming up." He then went through a perfectly amazing series of contortions and gesticulations, quite a different man from the feeble old peasant of a few moments earlier.

A sharp old Nashi woman stood in the background, and made bargaining difficult by always putting up his prices and quarreling with his decisions. She would allow him to part with his possessions only when we offered him two pairs of dark glasses to boot. Even at that we discovered he had lent his scroll to another priest, and again our main object was thwarted. We bought some books and a scepter, however, and went back to the town. He promised to bring us the scroll in a day or two.

Mr. Andrews suggested that we visit one of the Buddhist monasteries in the hills around the plain, and we decided on Wen Feng Sse, a large monastery of the Red Cap sect to the southwest. We let out our Tibetan stallions and tore across uneven ground, bridges, creeks and canals, until we reached the hills. A few minutes later it began to rain, and we stopped at the mud house of a farmer. There was scarcely room for the three horses in his courtyard, but we finally managed, with my horse tied up in the cook house and the other two in the yard. The first thing that happened was that Mr. Andrews' horse pulled out the doorjamb to which he was tethered, causing part of the roof to fall down on about a hundred newly-made earthenware pots, breaking most of them. While we were doing our best to disentangle the horse, roof, door, and pots, my horse took fright in the cook house and almost kicked the side out of it. After everything had quieted down, the third horse, tied in the center of the court, laid down and rolled with its saddle on. Mr. Andrews whacked it with his stick to make it stand up again, but in so doing the horse broke its reins and dashed out of the courtyard. Finally it was caught.

We left the farmer's house and rode on towards the monastery. It was in beautiful surroundings and apparently very old. As soon as we entered the mon-



(Above) SPRY for his years, the devil priest went into a wild, spontaneous dance as a prelude to selling his sacred books

astery grounds we found ourselves on a well-tended greensward amid huge pines. A pool made of large blocks of stone lay a short distance in front of the steps leading up to the first gateway. This led into a large open courtyard, flanked by a cloister, and closed at the far end by the main prayer temple. We rode our horses through the first gate, and then into another courtyard on the right, where several of the monks were sitting, working on hats for the novices.

One of the monks took us around to the main hall of worship, and unlocked the big doors. Inside the walls and ceilings were covered with intricate colored painting and Tibetan sacred banners. There were some paintings made of butter, curious things of various designs stretched on thin frames and hung from the ceiling. We climbed up some rickety old stairs to the cupola to see the devil masks, heads of black devils, red devils, deer, pigs, old men, and many other things, which we tried unsuccessfully to buy.

When we came down it was raining and the light was very bad indeed for photography. We visited one of the monks in his cell who was chanting a Tibetan sacred book and beating time on a cymbal and drum. Sometimes they chanted all day without changing their position, and I wondered what their books said and whether they got any interest out of it.

We had heard that there were three men at this monastery who were being initiated as lamas, spending three years, three months, three weeks, three days, three hours, three minutes and three seconds in a cave. During this time they were not allowed to see or speak to another human being. I was curious to see in what sort of place they lived. The monks told us they were on top of the mountain near the house of the *hofu* or abbot of the monastery. Since we hoped to get some prayer banners and charm boxes from the *hofu*, we decided to climb up there.

It was raining hard. We missed the path and spent most of the time on our hands and knees going through thorns and brambles, but we finally found the place and went in. We were not allowed to see

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(Above) ENTRANCE to a monastery near Li-kiang

(Below) THE AUTHOR examining prayer wheels which are set up in the interior



the prospective lamas, but we could hear them chanting and blowing on their horns. They were in a little building over a natural cave, which had no windows or other means of ventilation or light that I could see. The *hofu* was affable but had nothing to sell us. All we got for our trip was a very fine Tibetan dagger from one of the guards.

Evening found us back at the mission, where we were met by a pleasant surprise. The mission worker, whom Mr. Andrews had sent to the northwest the day before, had returned with one of the long scrolls complete. At least part of my quest was now successful.

Four different *dtombas* visited us the next morning. The one we had commissioned to go out and buy for us returned with several books and a few Nashi paintings, but no scroll. We put him to work immediately sorting out 1000 or so books I had acquired by this time. Another priest arrived, with one of the long scrolls, a very good one, and we closed the deal quickly. I wasn't going to let a scroll get into my sight and out of it again. The third *dtomba* appeared with about 300 books, and we bought them after a short altercation about the price. This one also had a cymbal and four or five painted crowns he wanted to sell. Luck was certainly with me that day. The fourth priest was the old man from the southern edge of the plain, and he had brought his long scroll, but it was a very dilapidated and incomplete one, so we let it go.

That same afternoon the mission worker appeared with over 700 more books. Most of these books are made up of 20 or 30 pages about a foot long by four inches wide. Usually the drawings are made with a shaped bamboo twig, and there are two different scripts. One, the She-lu or pictographic writing, is of obscure origin but is believed to have come from the individual drawings of the Tibetan Bon-pa or demon cult. The other, supposedly introduced at a later date, is said to have been invented by Gurba, one of the disciples of the Nashi messiah, Timba Shihloh.

Several elements in one of the scrolls indicate that the Nashis drew parts of their belief from the south, Vedic Indian and pre-Buddhist Burma. Therefore, the study of these people reveals not only interesting facts about their own theology, but also throws light on the little-known faiths from which it drew its form. Some of their gods are elephants with 33 heads, white wish-granting Garuda birds with red beaks and wings, and great dragons with spiked-trees coming out of their mouths, on which are impaled sinful Nashis.

The road of the dead

Some of the scrolls are 40 feet long by eight inches wide. There are generally used for funeral services and are called Hā Zhi P'i. They represent the road the soul of a dead man must travel to reach heaven. He must first pass through purgatory where various ugly demons seek to restrain him from going any farther. If he is lucky and has committed few sins, he may ascend to a serene and thickly populated heaven. Often the scrolls are cut in two lengths, and the priests refer to the sections as "The Road to Heaven" and "The Road to Hell." Appropriately enough, the road to hell is short and easy, while the

road to heaven is long and arduous. The rendering of the Nashi heaven resembles, in the later scrolls, the style of the Tibetan temple hangings, while the hell scenes seem closer to the Burmese paintings.

In former times the "devil priests" who perform the Nashi religious ceremonies held a strong hand over the people, but their power is fading rapidly in the face of Christianity, Buddhism and general indifference.

Mr. Andrews very kindly turned over to me most of the collections he himself had made during the past years. These included many Lolo, Tibetan and Nashi things, all exceptional. There was a large conch shell trumpet mounted in bronze and used by the *dtombas* in their ceremonies, a human thighbone trumpet used by Tibetan lamas in their devil dances, and an unusually good Tibetan charm box complete with charms. These charms are very curious. Usually the Tibetan will remove them when and if he sells the silver outer box. This box contained little figures made from the clay of dead lamas, also funny little seeds supposed to be the beads of perspiration from the brow of Buddha in meditation, and a long cloth, with brown handprints on it, supposed to fit the hands of future incarnations of Buddha. Among the Lolo things was a curious board, covered with strange writing and the picture of a devil, supposed to keep devils out of the house. Since ethnologists until recently have known little about either the Lolo writing or their theology, this board may prove most interesting scientifically. Needless to say I was very glad indeed to get these excellent collections, which ordinarily would have taken me years to acquire.

Tales of robbers

Mr. Andrews told me many tales of his travels in the country, through Tibetan and Lolo territory where few white men dared go. He told me of the tortures inflicted by the Lolos on the Chinese. No Chinese can go through Lolo territory and come out alive. He is either killed or taken prisoner and made a slave. After one woman was taken prisoner, large iron spikes were stuck through her feet and hands to prevent her running away. The Chinese magistrate who was to take charge of Yung-peh, the largest city in the Lolo country, was waylaid en route to his post, and his wife was shot. The Lolos are famous robbers, and they will sit in their watchtowers atop the hills and descend on any caravan that looks fat and rich. I heard in Li-kiang of two French priests that were seized and skinned alive by the bandits. The whole northwest territory of Yunnan is unsettled. Atun-tse, a city northwest of Li-kiang, is invaded and sacked by Tibetans at intervals, and the women and children in the streets are knifed.

After spending ten days in Li-kiang all my missions were accomplished. I started back by caravan. In Talifu I collected a Minchia bridal costume—a great success—after which I piled my numerous boxes into a little bus provided by the Southwest Transportation Company and was off again. Beyond Talifu we roared along the fine highway and it was hard to realize that a scant decade before there had been a civil war raging between armies based at Talifu and others based at Yunnan-fu.

At Yünnan-fu I picked up my furs and other Tib-much more of the spectacular railway than I had on etan collections, and started south toward Indo- the way up.
China. Mr. Patou, head of the railway, very kindly I felt much relieved and thoroughly satisfied when provided a private car for me and my luggage, and I finally was settled on the *Empress of Canada* with the trip down was both comfortable and interesting. my cases, which numbered fifteen by that time, headed It took me three days by the slow train, and I saw for the United States, my journey over.

THOUGH the Nashis dwell in China, their historical documents indicate a previous relation with pre-Buddhist Burma and Vedic India

(Below) THE BEGINNING of a funeral scroll, showing two of the nine pairs of demons guarding the entrance to hell. The "Road to Hell" is short and easy, the "Road to Heaven" long and hard. In "escorting" the soul on its proper course, the

priest places a moulded piece of dough on each demon figure to win its good graces

At left is shown the oldest scroll in the author's possession, dated between the seventh and the thirteenth century. It shows Nashi gods sitting in their higher heaven

(Below) THE SACRED 33-headed elephant in the city of the 33 princes: a scene almost exactly the same as that in the philosophy of pre-Buddhist Burma

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