

## Hilda Wade.

BY GRANT ALLEN.

### X.—THE EPISODE OF THE GUIDE WHO KNEW THE COUNTRY.



W E toured all round India with the Meadowcrofts: and really the lady who was "so very exclusive" turned out not a bad little thing when once one had succeeded in breaking through the ring-fence with which she surrounded herself. She had an endless, quenchless restlessness, it is true: her eyes wandered aimlessly: she never was happy for two minutes together, unless she was surrounded by friends, and was seeing something. What she saw did not interest her much: certainly her tastes were on a level with those of a very young child. An odd-looking house, a queerly-dressed man, a tree cut into shape to look like a peacock, delighted her far more truly than the most glorious view or the quaintest old temple. Still, she must be seeing. She could no more sit still than a fidgety child or a monkey at the Zoo. To be up and doing was her nature—doing nothing, to be sure; but still, doing it strenuously.

So we went the regulation round of Delhi and Agra, the Taj Mahal and the Ghats at Benares, at railroad speed, fulfilling the whole duty of the modern globe-trotter. Lady Meadowcroft looked at everything—for ten minutes at a stretch; then she wanted to be off, to visit the next thing set down for her in her guide-book. As we left each town she murmured mechanically, "Well, we've seen *that*, thank Heaven!" and straightway went on, with equal eagerness and equal boredom, to see the one after it.

The only thing that did *not* bore her, indeed, was Hilda's bright talk.

"Oh, Miss Wade," she would say, clasping her hands, and looking up into Hilda's eyes with her own empty blue ones, "you *are* so

funny! So original, don't you know! You never talk or think of anything like other people. I can't imagine how such ideas come up in your mind. If I were to try all day, I'm sure I should never hit upon them!" Which was so perfectly true as to be a trifle obvious.

Sir Ivor, not being interested in temples, but in steel rails, had gone on at once to his concession, or contract, or whatever else it was, on the north-east frontier, leaving his wife to follow and rejoin him in the Himalayas as soon as she had exhausted the sights of India. So, after a few dusty weeks of wear and tear on the Indian railways, we met him once more in the recesses of Nepal, where he was busy constructing a light local line for the reigning Maharajah.

If Lady Meadowcroft had been bored at Allahabad and Ajmere, she was immensely more bored in a rough bungalow among the trackless depths of the Himalayan valleys. To anybody with eyes in his head, indeed, Toloo, where Sir Ivor had pitched his headquarters, was lovely

enough to keep one interested for a twelve-month. Snow-clad needles of rock hemmed it in on either hand: great deodars rose like huge tapers on the hillsides: the plants and flowers were a joy to look at. But Lady Meadowcroft did not care for flowers which one could not wear in one's hair: and what was the good of dressing here, with no one but Ivor and Dr. Cumberledge to see one? She yawned till she was tired: then she began to grow peevish.

"Why Ivor should want to build a railway at all in this stupid, silly place," she said, as we sat in the veranda in the cool of evening,



"YOU ARE SO FUNNY!"



"I'm sure *I* can't imagine. We *must* go somewhere. This is maddening, maddening! Miss Wade—Dr. Cumberledge—I count upon you to discover *something* for me to do. If I vegetate like this, seeing nothing all day long but those eternal hills"—she clenched her little fist—"I shall go *mad* with ennui."

Hilda had a happy thought. "I have a fancy to see some of these Buddhist monasteries," she said, smiling as one smiles at a tiresome child whom one likes in spite of everything. "You remember, I was reading that book of Mr. Simpson's on the steamer—coming out—a curious book about the Buddhist Praying-Wheels: and it made me want to see one of their temples immensely. What do you say to camping out? A few weeks in the hills? It would be an adventure, at any rate."

"Camping out?" Lady Meadowcroft exclaimed, half roused from her languor by the idea of a change. "Oh, do you think that would be fun? Should we sleep on the ground? But, wouldn't it be dreadfully, horribly uncomfortable?"

"Not half so uncomfortable as you'll find yourself here at Toloo in a few days, Emmie," her husband put in, grimly. "The rains will soon be on, lass: and when the rains are on, by all accounts, they're precious heavy hereabouts—rare fine rains, so that a man's half-flooded out of his bed o' nights—which won't suit *you*, my lady."

The poor little woman clasped her twitching hands in feeble agony. "Oh, Ivor, how dreadful! Is it what they call the monsoon, or monsoon, or something? But if they're so bad here, surely they'll be worse in the hills—and camping out, too—won't they?"

"Not if you go the right way to work. Ah'm told it never rains t'other side o' the hills. The mountains stop the clouds, and once you're over, you're safe enough. Only, you must take care to keep well in the Maharajah's territory. Cross the frontier t'other side into Tibet, an' they'll skin thee alive as soon as look at thee. They don't like strangers in Tibet: prejudiced against them, somehow: they pretty well skinned that young chap Landor who tried to go there a year ago."

"But, Ivor, I don't want to be skinned alive! I'm not an eel, please!"

"That's all right, lass. Leave that to me. I can get thee a guide, a man that's very well acquainted with the mountains. I was talking to a scientific explorer here t'other day, and he knows of a good guide who can take you anywhere. He'll get you the chance

of seeing the inside of a Buddhist monastery if you like, Miss Wade. He's hand in glove with all the religion they've got in this part o' the country. They've got noan much, but at what there is, he's a rare devout one."

We discussed the matter fully for two or three days before we made our minds up. Lady Meadowcroft was undecided between her hatred of dulness and her haunting fear that scorpions and snakes would intrude upon our tents and beds while we were camping. In the end, however, the desire for change carried the day. She decided to dodge the rainy season by getting behind the Himalayan passes, in the dry region to the north of the great range, where rain seldom falls, the country being watered only by the melting of the snows on the high summits.

This decision delighted Hilda, who, since she came to India, had fallen a prey to the fashionable vice of amateur photography. She took to it enthusiastically. She had bought herself a first-rate camera of the latest scientific pattern at Bombay, and ever since had spent all her time and spoiled her pretty hands in "developing." She was also seized with a craze for Buddhism. The objects that everywhere particularly attracted her were the old Buddhist temples and tombs and sculptures with which India is studded: of these she had taken some hundreds of views, all printed by herself with the greatest care and precision. But in India, after all, Buddhism is a dead creed: its monuments alone remain; she was anxious to see the Buddhist religion in its living state; and that she could only do in these remote outlying Himalayan valleys.

Our outfit, therefore, included a dark tent for Hilda's photographic apparatus; a couple of roomy tents to live and sleep in; a small cooking stove: a cook to look after it; half-a-dozen bearers; and the highly recommended guide who knew his way about the country. In three days we were ready, to Sir Ivor's great delight. He was fond of his pretty wife, and proud of her, I believe; but when once she was away from the whirl and bustle of the London that she loved, it was a relief to him, I fancy, to pursue his work alone, unhampered by her restless and querulous childishness.

On the morning when we were to make our start the guide who was "well acquainted with the mountains" turned up—as villainous-looking a person as I have ever set eyes on. He was sullen and furtive. I judged him at sight to be half Hindu, half Tibetan. He had a dark complexion, between brown and



tawny: narrow slant eyes, very small and beady-black, with a cunning leer in their oblique corners; a flat nose much broadened at the wings; a cruel, thick, sensuous mouth, and high cheek-bones; the whole surmounted by a comprehensive scowl, and an abundant crop of lank black hair, tied up in a knot at the nape of the neck with a yellow ribbon. His face was shifty: his short, stout form looked well adapted to mountain climbing, and also to wriggling. A deep scar on his left cheek did not help to inspire confidence. But he was polite and civil-spoken. Altogether a clever, unscrupulous, wide-awake soul, who would serve you well if he thought he could make by it, and would betray you at a pinch to the highest bidder.

We set out, in merry mood, prepared to solve all the abstruse problems of the Buddhist religion. Our spoilt child stood the camping out better than I expected. She was fretful, of course, and worried about trifles: she missed her maid and her accustomed comforts; but she minded the roughing it less, on the whole, than she had minded the boredom of inaction in the bungalow; and, being cast on Hilda and myself for resources, she suddenly evolved an unexpected taste for producing, developing, and printing photographs. We took dozens, as we went along, of little villages on our route, wood-built villages with quaint houses and turrets; and as Hilda had brought her collection of prints with her, for comparison of the Indian and Nepaulese monuments, we spent the evenings after our short day's march each day in arranging and collating them. We had planned to be away six weeks at least: in that time the monsoon would have burst and passed: our guide thought we might see all that was worth seeing of the Buddhist monasteries, and Sir Ivor thought we should have fairly escaped the dreaded wet season.

"What do you make of our guide?" I asked of Hilda on our fourth day out. I began somehow to distrust him.

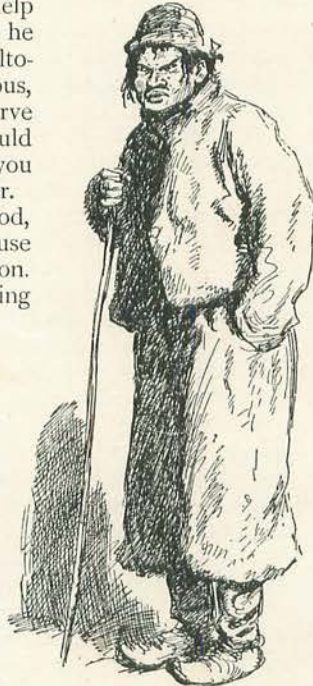
"Oh, he seems all right," Hilda answered, carelessly—and her voice reassured me. "He's a rogue, of course: all guides and interpreters, and dragomans and the like, in

out-of-the-way places, always *are* rogues: if they were honest men they would share the ordinary prejudices of their countrymen, and would have nothing to do with the hated stranger. But in this case our friend Ram Das has no end to gain by getting us into mischief: if he had, he wouldn't scruple for a second to cut our throats: but then, there are too many of us. He will probably try to cheat us by making preposterous charges when he gets us back to Toloo: but that's Lady Meadowcroft's business. I don't doubt Sir Ivor will be more than a match for him there: I'll back one shrewd Yorkshireman against any three Tibetan half-castes, any day."

"You're right that he would cut our throats if it served his purpose," I answered. "He's servile, and servility goes hand in hand with treachery. The more I watch him, the more I see 'scoundrel' written in large type on every bend of the fellow's oily shoulders."

"Oh, yes; he's a bad lot, I know. The cook, who can speak a little English and a little Tibetan, as well as Hindustani, tells me Ram Das has the worst reputation of any man in the mountains. But he says he's a very good guide to the passes for all that, and if he's well paid will do what he's paid for."

Next day but one we approached at last, after several short marches, the neighbourhood of what our guide assured us was a Buddhist monastery. I was glad when he told us of it, giving the place the name of a well-known Nepaulese village; for, to say the truth, I was beginning to get frightened. Judging by the sun, for I had brought no compass, it struck me that we seemed to have been marching almost due north ever since we left Toloo: and I fancied such a line of march must have brought us by this time suspiciously near the Tibetan frontier. Now, I had no desire to be "skinned alive," as Sir Ivor put it: I did not wish to emulate St. Bartholomew and others of the early Christian martyrs: so I was pleased to learn that we were really drawing near to Kulak, the first of the Nepaulese Buddhist monas-



"THE GUIDE."



teries to which our well-informed guide, himself a Buddhist, had promised to introduce us.

We were tramping up a beautiful high mountain valley, closed round on every side by snowy peaks. A brawling river ran over a rocky bed in cataracts down its midst: crags rose abruptly a little in front of us. Half-way up the slope to the left, on a ledge of rock, rose a long, low building with curious, pyramid-like roofs, crowned at either end by a sort of minaret, which resembled more than anything else a huge earthenware oil-jar. This was the monastery or lamasery we had come so far to see. Honestly, at first sight, I did not feel sure it was worth the trouble.

Our guide called a halt, and turned to us with a sudden peremptory air. His servility had vanished. "You stoppee here," he said,



"HIS SERVILITY HAD VANISHED."

slowly, in broken English, "while me-a go on to see whether Lama-sahibs ready to take you. Must ask leave from Lama-sahibs to visit village: if no ask leave"—he drew his hand across his throat with a significant gesture—"Lama-sahibs cuttee head off European."

"Goodness gracious," Lady Meadowcroft cried, clinging tight to Hilda. "Miss Wade, this is dreadful! Where on earth have you brought us to?"

"Oh, that's all right," Hilda answered, trying to soothe her, though she herself began to look a trifle anxious. "That's

only Ram Das's graphic way of putting things."

We sat down on a bank of trailing club-moss by the side of the rough track, for it was nothing more, and let our guide go on to negotiate with the Lamas. "Well, to-night, anyhow," I exclaimed, looking up, "we shall sleep on our own mattresses with a roof over our heads. These monks will find us quarters. That's always something."

We got out our basket and made tea. In all moments of doubt, your Englishwoman makes tea: as Hilda said, she will boil her Etna on Vesuvius. We waited and drank our tea: we drank our tea and waited. A full hour passed away. Ram Das never came back. I began to get frightened.

At last something stirred. A group of excited men in yellow robes issued forth from the monastery, wound their way down the hill, and approached us, shouting. They gesticulated as they came. I could see they looked angry. All at once Hilda clutched my arm: "Hubert," she cried, in an undertone, "we are betrayed! betrayed! I see it all now. These are Tibetans, not Nepaulese." She paused a second, then went on: "I see it all—all, all. Our guide—Ram

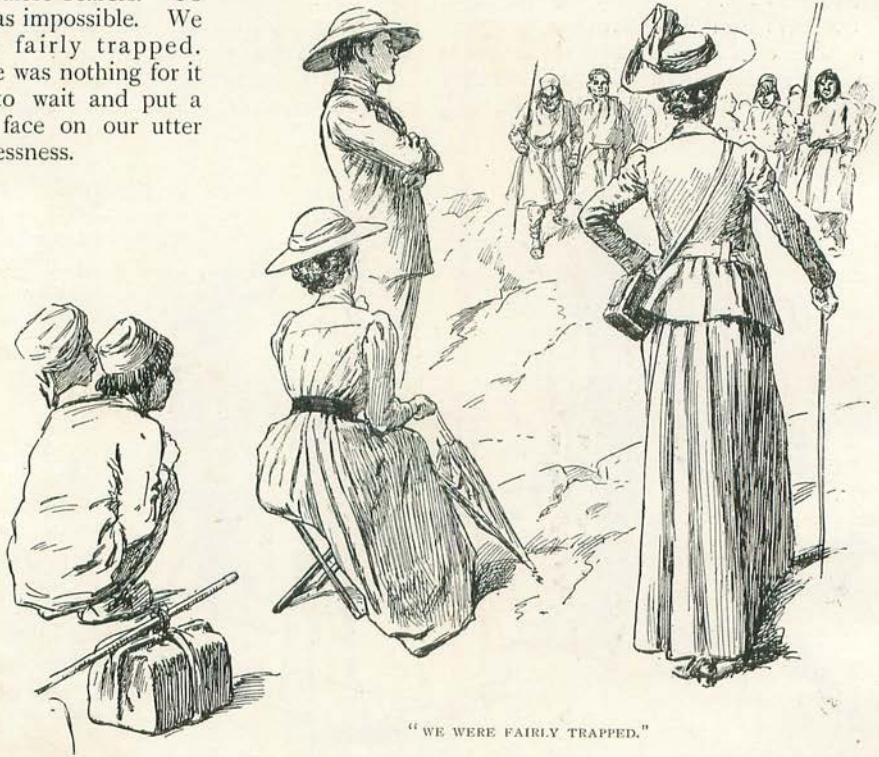
Das—he *had* a reason after all for getting us into mischief. Sebastian must have tracked us: he was bribed by Sebastian! It was *he* who recommended Ram Das to Sir Ivor!"

"Why do you think so?" I asked, low.

"Because—look for yourself: these men who come are dressed in yellow. That means Tibetans. Red is the colour of the Lamas in Nepaul; yellow in Tibet and all other Buddhist countries. I read it in the book—'The Buddhist Praying-Wheel,' you know. These are Tibetan fanatics, and as Ram Das said, they will probably cut our throats for us."



I was thankful that Hilda's marvellous memory gave us even that moment for preparation and facing the difficulty. I saw in a flash that she was quite right: we had been inveigled across the frontier: these moutis were Tibetans—Buddhist inquisitors—enemies. Tibet is the most jealous country on earth; it allows no stranger to intrude upon its borders. I had to meet the worst. I stood there, a single white man, armed only with one revolver, answerable for the lives of two English ladies, and accompanied by a cringing out-caste Ghoorka cook and half-a-dozen doubtful Nepaulese bearers. To fly was impossible. We were fairly trapped. There was nothing for it but to wait and put a bold face on our utter helplessness.



"WE WERE FAIRLY TRAPPED."

I turned to our spoilt child. "Lady Meadowcroft," I said, very seriously, "this is danger, real danger. Now listen to me. You must do as you are bid. No crying: no cowardice. Your life and ours depend upon it. We must none of us give way. We must pretend to be brave. Show one sign of fear, and these people will probably cut our throats on the spot here."

To my immense surprise, Lady Meadowcroft rose to the height of the situation. "Oh, as long as it isn't disease," she answered, resignedly, "I'm not much afraid of anything. I should mind the plague a great deal more than I mind a set of howling savages."

By that time the men in yellow robes had almost come up to us. It was clear they were boiling over with indignation; but they still did everything decently and in order. One, who was dressed in finer vestments than the rest—a portly person, with the fat, greasy cheeks and drooping flesh of a celibate church dignitary, whom I therefore judged to be the abbot, or chief Lama of the monastery—gave orders to his subordinates in a language which we did not understand. His men obeyed him. In a second they had closed us round, as in a ring or cordon.

Then the chief Lama stepped forward, with an authoritative air, like Pooah-Bah in the play, and said something in the same tongue to the cook, who spoke a little Tibetan. It was obvious from his manner that Ram Das had told them all about us; for the Lama selected the cook as interpreter at once, without taking any notice of myself, the ostensible head of the petty expedition.

"What does he say?" I asked, as soon as he had finished speaking.

The cook, who had been salaaming all the time, at the risk of a broken back, in his most utterly abject and grovelling attitude, made answer tremulously in his broken



English, "This is priest-sahib of the temple. He very angry, because why? Eulopean-sahib and mem-sahibs come into Tibet-land. No Eulopean, no Hindu, must come into Tibet-land. Priest-sahib say, cut all Eulopean throats: let Nepaul man go back like him come, to him own country."

I looked as if the message were purely indifferent to me. "Tell him," I said, smiling—though at some little effort—"we were not trying to enter Tibet. Our rascally guide misled us. We were going to Kulak, in the Maharajah's territory. We will turn back quietly to the Maharajah's land if the priest-sahib will allow us to camp out for the night here."

I glanced at Hilda and Lady Meadowcroft. I must say their bearing under these trying circumstances was thoroughly worthy of two English ladies. They stood erect, looking as though all Tibet might come, and they would smile at it scornfully.

The cook interpreted my remarks as well as he was able—his Tibetan being probably about equal in quality to his English. But the chief Lama made a reply which I could see for myself was by no means friendly.

"What is his answer?" I asked the cook, in my haughtiest voice. I am haughty with difficulty.

Our interpreter salaamed once more, shaking in his shoes, if he wore any. "Priest-sahib say, that all lies. That all dam-lies. You is Eulopean missionary, very bad man: you want to go to Lhasa. But no white sahib must go to Lhasa. Holy city, Lhasa; for Buddhists only. This is not the way to Kulak: this not Maharajah's land: this place belong a Dalai-Lama, head of all Lamas; have house at Lhasa. But priest-sahib know you Eulopean missionary, want to go Lhasa, convert Buddhists, because . . . Ram Das tell him so."

"Ram Das!" I exclaimed, thoroughly angry by this time. "The rogue! The scoundrel! He has not only deserted us, but betrayed us as well. He has told this lie on purpose to set the Tibetans against us. We must face the worst now. Our one chance is, to cajole these people."

The fat priest spoke again. "What does he say this time?" I asked.

"He say, Ram Das tell him all this because Ram Das good man—very good man: Ram Das converted Buddhist. You pay Ram Das to guidee you to Lhasa. But Ram Das good man, not want to let Eulopean see holy city: bring you here instead;

then tell priest-sahib about it." And he chuckled inwardly.

"What will they do to us?" Lady Meadowcroft asked, her face very white, though her manner was more courageous than I could easily have believed of her.

"I don't know," I answered, biting my lip. "But we must not give way. We must put a bold face upon it. Their bark, after all, may be worse than their bite. We may still persuade them to let us go back again."

The men in yellow robes motioned us to move on towards the village and monastery. We were their prisoners, and it was useless to resist. So I ordered the bearers to take up the tents and baggage. Lady Meadowcroft resigned herself to the inevitable. We mounted the path in a long line, the Lamas in yellow closely guarding our draggled little procession. I tried my best to preserve my composure, and above all else not to look dejected.

As we approached the village, with its squalid and fetid huts, we caught the sound of bells, innumerable bells, tinkling at regular intervals. Many people trooped out from their houses to look at us, all flat-faced, all with oblique eyes, all stolidly, sullenly, stupidly passive. They seemed curious as to our dress and appearance, but not apparently hostile. We walked on to the low line of the monastery with its pyramidal roof and its queer, flower-vase minarets. After a moment's discussion they ushered us into the temple or chapel, which was evidently also their communal council-room and place of deliberation. We entered, trembling. We had no great certainty that we would ever get out of it alive again.

The temple was a large, oblong hall, with a great figure of Buddha, cross-legged, imperturbable, enthroned in a niche at its further end, like the apse or recess in a church in Italy. Before it stood an altar. The Buddha sat and smiled on us with his eternal smile: a complacent deity, carved out of white stone, and gaudily painted; a yellow robe, like the Lamas', dangled across his shoulders. The air seemed close with incense and also with bad ventilation. The centre of the nave, if I may so call it, was occupied by a huge wooden cylinder, a sort of overgrown drum, painted in bright colours, with ornamental designs and Tibetan letters. It was much taller than a man, some 9ft. high I should say, and it revolved above and below on an iron spindle. Looking closer, I saw it had a crank attached to it, with a string tied to the crank: a solitary monk,



absorbed in his devotions, was pulling this string as we entered, and making the cylinder revolve with a jerk as he pulled it. At each revolution a bell above rang once: the monk seemed as if his whole soul was bound up in the huge revolving drum and the bell worked by it.

We took this all in at a glance, somewhat vaguely at first, for our lives were at stake, and we were scarcely in a mood for ethnological observations. But the moment Hilda saw the cylinder her eye lighted up. I could see at once an idea had struck her. "This is a praying-wheel!" she cried in quite a delighted voice. "I know where I am now, Hubert—Lady Meadowcroft—I see a way out of this! Do exactly as you see me do, and all may yet go well. Don't show surprise at anything. I think we can work upon these people's religious feelings."

Without a moment's hesitation she prostrated herself thrice on the ground before the figure of Buddha, knocking her head ostentatiously in the dust as she did so. We followed suit instantly. Then Hilda rose and began walking slowly round the big drum in the nave, saying aloud at each step, in a sort of monotonous chant, like a priest intoning, the four mystic words, "Aum, mani, padme, hum," "Aum, mani, padme, hum," many times over. We repeated the sacred formula after her, as if we had always been brought up to it. I noticed that Hilda walked the way of the sun: it is an important point in all these mysterious, half-magical ceremonies.

At last, after about ten or twelve such rounds, she paused, with an absorbed air of devotion, and knocked her head three times



"ABSORBED IN HIS DEVOTIONS."

on the ground once more, doing poojah, before the ever-smiling Buddha.

By this time, however, the lessons of St. Alphege's rectory began to recur to Lady Meadowcroft's mind. "Oh, Miss Wade," she murmured, in an awestruck voice, "ought we to do like this? Isn't it clear idolatry?"

Hilda's common sense waved her aside at once. "Idolatry or not, it is the only way to save our lives," she answered, in her firmest voice.

"But—ought we to save our lives? Oughtn't we to be . . . well, Christian martyrs?"

Hilda was patience itself. "I think not, dear," she replied, gently but decisively. "You are not called upon to be a martyr. The danger of idolatry is scarcely so great among Europeans of our time that we need feel it a duty to protest with our lives against it. I have better uses to which to put my life myself. I don't mind being a martyr—where a sufficient cause demands it. But I don't think such a sacrifice is required of us now in a Tibetan monastery. Life was not given us to waste on gratuitous martyrdoms."

"But . . . really . . . I'm afraid . . ."

"Don't be afraid of anything, dear, or you will risk all. Follow my lead: I will answer for your conduct. Surely, if Naaman, in the midst of idolaters, was permitted to bow down in the house of Rimmon, to save his place at court, you may blamelessly bow down to save your life in a Buddhist temple. Now, no more casuistry, but do as I tell you! 'Aum, mani, padme, hum,' again! Once more round the drum there!"

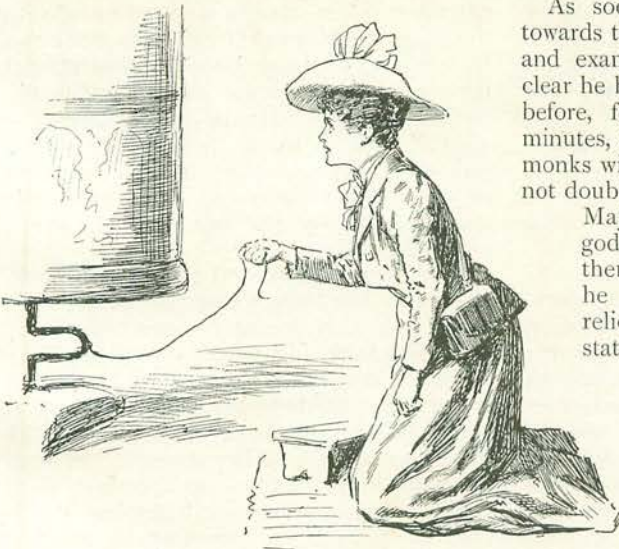
We followed her a second time, Lady Meadowcroft giving in after a feeble protest. The priests in yellow looked on, profoundly impressed by our circumnavigation. It was



clear they began to reconsider the question of our nefarious designs on their holy city.

After we had finished our second tour round the drum, with the utmost solemnity, one of the monks approached Hilda, whom he seemed to take now for an important priestess. He said something to her in Tibetan, which, of course, we did not understand; but as he pointed at the same time to the brother on the floor who was turning the wheel, Hilda nodded acquiescence. "If you wish it," she said in English—and he appeared to comprehend. "He wants to know whether I would like to take a turn at the cylinder."

She knelt down in front of it, before the little stool where the brother in yellow had been kneeling till that moment, and took the string in her hand, as if she were well accustomed to it. I could see that the abbot gave



"SHE TOOK THE STRING IN HER HAND."

the cylinder a surreptitious push with his left hand, before she began, so as to make it revolve in the opposite direction from that in which the monk had just been moving it: this was obviously to try her. But Hilda let the string drop, with a little cry of horror: that was the wrong way round—the unlucky, uncanonical direction: the evil way, widdershins, the opposite of sunwise. With an awed air she stopped short, repeated once more the four mystic words, or *mantra*, and bowed thrice with well-assumed reverence to the Buddha. Then she set the cylinder turning of her own accord, with her right

hand, in the propitious direction, and sent it round seven times with the utmost gravity.

At this point, encouraged by Hilda's example, I too became possessed of a brilliant inspiration. I opened my purse and took out of it four brand-new silver rupees of the Indian coinage. They were very handsome and shiny coins, each impressed with an excellent design of the head of the Queen as Empress of India. Holding them up before me, I approached the Buddha, and laid the four in a row submissively at his feet, uttering at the same time an appropriate formula. But as I did not know the proper *mantra* for use upon such an occasion, I supplied one from memory, saying, in a hushed voice, "Hokey—pokey—winky—wum," as I laid each one down before the benignly-smiling statue. I have no doubt from their faces the priests imagined I was uttering a most powerful spell or prayer in my own language.

As soon as I retreated, with my face towards the image, the chief Lama glided up and examined the coins carefully. It was clear he had never seen anything of the sort before, for he gazed at them for some minutes, and then showed them round to his monks with an air of deep reverence. I do not doubt he took the image of her gracious Majesty for a very mighty and potent goddess. As soon as all had inspected them, with many cries of admiration, he opened a little secret drawer or relic-holder in the pedestal of the statue, and deposited them in it with a muttered prayer, as precious offerings from a European Buddhist.

By this time we could easily see we were beginning to produce a most favourable impression. Hilda's study of Buddhism had stood us in good stead. The chief Lama or abbot motioned to us to be seated, in a much politer mood: after which, he and his principal monks held a long and animated discussion together. I gathered from their looks and gestures that the head Lama inclined to regard us as orthodox Buddhists, but that some of his followers had grave doubts of their own as to the depth and reality of our religious convictions.

While they debated and hesitated, Hilda had another splendid idea. She undid her portfolio, and took out of it the photographs of ancient Buddhist topes and temples which she had taken in India. These she produced



triumphantly. At once the priests and monks crowded round us to look at them. In a moment, when they recognised the meaning of the pictures, their excitement grew quite intense. The photographs were passed round from hand to hand amid loud exclamations of joy and surprise: one brother would point out with astonishment to another some familiar symbol or some ancient text; two or three of them even in their devout enthusiasm fell down on their knees and kissed the pictures.

We had played a trump card. The monks could see for themselves by this time that we were deeply interested in Buddhism. Now, minds of that calibre never understand a disinterested interest; the moment they saw we were collectors of Buddhist pictures, they jumped at the conclusion that we must also, of course, be devout believers. So far did they carry their sense of fraternity, indeed, that they insisted upon embracing us. That was a hard trial to Lady Meadowcroft, for the brethren were not conspicuous for personal cleanliness: she suspected germs, and she dreaded typhoid far more than she dreaded the Tibetan cut-throat.

The brethren asked, through the medium of our interpreter, the cook, where these pictures had been made. We explained as well as we could by means of the same mouthpiece, a very earthen vessel, that they came from ancient Buddhist buildings in India. This delighted them still more, though I know not in what form our Ghoorka retainer may have conveyed the information: at any rate, they insisted on embracing us again: after which the chief Lama said something very solemnly to our amateur interpreter.

The cook interpreted. "Priest-sahib say, he too got very sacred thing, come from India. Sacred Buddhist poojah-thing. Go to show it to you."

We waited, breathless. The chief Lama approached the altar before the recess, in front of the great cross-legged, rapidly-smiling Buddha. He bowed himself to the ground three times over, as well as his portly frame would permit him, knocking his forehead against the floor, just as Hilda had done: then he proceeded, almost awestruck, to take from the altar an object wrapped round with gold brocade, and very carefully guarded. Two acolytes accompanied him. In the most reverent way, he slowly unwound the folds of gold cloth, and released from its hiding-place the highly sacred deposit. He held it up before our eyes with an air of triumph. It was an English bottle!

The label on it shone with gold and bright colours. I could see it was figured. The figure represented a cat, squatting on its haunches. The sacred inscription ran, in our own tongue, "Old Tom Gin, Unsweetened."

The monks bowed their heads in profound silence as the sacred thing was produced. I caught Hilda's eye. "For Heaven's sake," I murmured low, "don't either of you laugh. If you do, it's all up with us."

They kept their countenances with admirable decorum.

Another idea struck me. "Tell them," I said to the cook, "that we too have a similar and very powerful god, but much more lively." He interpreted my words to them.

Then I opened our stores, and drew out with a flourish—our last remaining bottle of Simla soda-water.

Very solemnly and seriously I unwired the cork, as if performing an almost sacrosanct ceremony. The monks crowded round with the deepest curiosity. I held the cork down for a second with my thumb, while I uttered once more in my most awesome tone the mystic words, "Hokey—pokey—winky—wum!" then I let it fly suddenly. The soda-water was well up. The cork bounded to the ceiling: the contents of the bottle spurted out over the place in the most impressive fashion.

For a minute the Lamas drew back, alarmed. The thing seemed almost devilish. Then slowly, reassured by our composure, they crept back and looked. With a glance of inquiry at the abbot, I took out my pocket corkscrew, and drew the cork of the gin-bottle, which had never been opened. I signed for a cup. They brought me one, reverently. I poured out a little gin, to which I added some soda-water, and drank first of it myself, to show them it was not poison. After that, I handed it to the chief Lama, who sipped at it, sipped again, and emptied the cup at the third trial. Evidently the sacred drink was very much to his taste, for he smacked his lips after it, and turned with exclamations of surprised delight to his inquisitive companions.

The rest of the soda-water, duly mixed with gin, soon went the round of the expectant monks. It was greatly approved of. Unhappily, there was not quite enough soda-water to supply a drink for all of them: but those who tasted it were deeply impressed. I could see that they took the bite of the carbonic-acid gas for evidence of a most powerful and present deity.



That settled our position. We were instantly regarded not only as Buddhists, but as mighty magicians from a far country. The monks made haste to show us rooms destined for our use in the monastery. They

pictures were produced: and Hilda, to keep up the good impression, showed them how she operated. When a full-length portrait of the chief Lama in his sacrificial robes was actually printed off and



"THE SACRED DRINK WAS VERY MUCH TO HIS TASTE."

were not unbearably filthy, and we had our own bedding. We had to spend the night there, that was certain: we had at least escaped the worst and most pressing danger.

I may add that I believe our cook to have been a most arrant liar—which was a lucky circumstance. Once the wretched creature saw the tide turn, I have reason to infer that he supported our cause by telling the chief Lama the most incredible stories about our holiness and power. At any rate, it is certain that we were regarded with the utmost respect, and treated thenceforth with the affectionate deference due to acknowledged and certified sainthood.

It began to strike us now, however, that we had almost overshot the mark in this matter of sanctity. We had made ourselves quite too holy. The monks, who were eager at first to cut our throats, thought so much of us now that we grew a little anxious as to whether they would not wish to keep such devout souls in their midst for ever. As a matter of fact, we spent a whole week against our wills in the monastery, being very well fed and treated meanwhile, yet virtually captives. It was the camera that did it. The Lamas had never seen any photographs before: they asked how these miraculous

exhibited before their eyes, their delight knew no bounds. The picture was handed about among the astonished brethren, and received with loud shouts of joy and wonder. Nothing would satisfy them then but that we must photograph every individual monk in the place. Even the Buddha himself, cross-legged and imperturbable, had to sit for his portrait. As he was used to sitting—never, indeed, having done anything else—he came out admirably.

Day after day passed: suns rose and suns set: and it was clear that the monks did not mean to let us leave their precincts in a hurry. Lady Meadowcroft, having recovered by this time from her first fright, began to grow bored. The Buddhists' ritual ceased to interest her. To vary the monotony, I hit upon an expedient for killing time till our too pressing hosts saw fit to let us depart. They were fond of religious processions of the most protracted sort—dances before the altar with animal masks or heads, and other weird ceremonial orgies. Hilda, who had read herself up in Buddhist ideas, assured me that all these things were done in order to heap up Karma.

"What is Karma?" I asked, listlessly.

"Karma is good works or merit. The



more praying-wheels you turn, the more bells you ring, the greater the merit. One of the monks is always at work turning the big wheel that moves the bell, so as to heap up merit night and day for the monastery."

This set me thinking. I soon discovered that no matter how the wheel is turned, the Karma or merit is equal. It is the turning it that counts, not the personal exertion. There were wheels and bells in convenient situations all over the village, and whoever passed one gave it a twist as he went by, thus piling up Karma for all the inhabitants. Reflecting upon these facts, I was seized with an idea. I got Hilda to take instantaneous photographs of all the monks during a sacred procession, at rapid intervals: in that sunny climate we had no difficulty at all in printing off from the plates as soon as developed. Then I took a small wheel, about the size of an oyster-barrel—the monks had dozens of them—and pasted the photographs inside in successive order, like what is called a zoetrope, or wheel of life. By cutting holes in the side, and arranging a mirror from Lady Meadowcroft's dressing-bag, I completed my machine, so that, when it was turned round rapidly, one saw the procession actually taking place as if the figures were moving. The thing, in short, made a living picture like a cinematograph. A mountain stream ran past the monastery and supplied it with water. I had a second inspiration. I was always mechanical. I fixed a water-wheel in the stream, where it made a petty cataract, and connected it by means of a small crank with the barrel of photographs. My zoetrope thus worked off itself, and piled up Karma for all the village whether anyone happened to be looking at it or not.

The monks, who were really excellent fellows when not engaged in cutting throats in the interest of the faith, regarded this device as a great and glorious religious invention. They went down on their knees to it and were profoundly respectful. They also bowed to me so deeply, when I first exhibited it, that I began to be puffed up with spiritual pride. Lady Meadowcroft recalled me to my better self by murmuring, with a sigh, "I suppose we really can't draw a line now; but it *does* seem to me like encouraging idolatry!"

"Purely mechanical encouragement," I answered, gazing at my handicraft with an inventor's pardonable pride. "You see, it is the turning itself that does good, not any prayers attached to it. I divert the idolatry

from human worshippers to an unconscious stream—which must surely be meritorious." Then I thought of the mystic sentence, "Aum, mani, padme, hum." "What a pity it is," I cried, "I couldn't make them a phonograph to repeat their *mantra*! If I could, they might fulfil all their religious duties together by machinery!"

Hilda reflected a second. "There is a great future," she said at last, "for the man who first introduces smoke-jacks into Tibet! Every household will buy one, as an automatic means of acquiring Karma."

"Don't publish that idea in England!" I exclaimed, hastily—"if ever we get there. As sure as you do, somebody will see in it an opening for British trade, and we shall spend twenty millions on conquering Tibet, in the interests of civilization and a smoke-jack syndicate."

How long we might have stopped at the monastery I cannot say, had it not been for the intervention of an unexpected episode which occurred just a week after our first arrival. We were comfortable enough in a rough way, with our Ghoorka cook to prepare our food for us, and our bearers to wait: but to the end I never felt quite sure of our hosts, who after all were entertaining us under false pretences. We had told them, truly enough, that Buddhist missionaries had now penetrated to England: and though they had not the slightest conception where England might be, and knew not the name of Madame Blavatsky, this news interested them. Regarding us as promising neophytes, they were anxious now that we should go on to Lhasa, in order to receive full instructions in the faith from the chief fountain-head, the Grand Lama in person. To this we demurred: Mr. Landor's experiences did not encourage us to follow his lead: the monks for their part could not understand our reluctance. They thought that every well-intentioned convert must wish to make the pilgrimage to Lhasa, the Mecca of their creed: our hesitation threw some doubt on the reality of our conversion. A proselyte above all men should never be lukewarm. They expected us to embrace the opportunity with fervour. We might be massacred on the way, to be sure; but what did that matter? We should be dying for the faith, and ought to be charmed at so splendid a prospect.

On the day-week after our arrival the chief Lama came to me at nightfall. His face was serious. He spoke to me through our accredited interpreter, the cook. "Priest-



sahib say, very important; the sahib and mem-sahibs must go away from here before sun get up to-morrow morning."

"Why so?" I asked, as astonished as I was pleased.

"Priest-sahib say, he like you very much: oh, very, very much: no want to see village people kill you."

"Kill us! But I thought they believed we were saints!"

"Priest say, that just it: too much saint

sanctity which had never before struck me. Now, I had not been eager even for the distinction of being a Christian martyr: as to being a Buddhist martyr, that was quite out of the question.

"Then what does the Lama advise us to do?" I asked.

"Priest-sahib say he love you: no want to see village people kill you. He give you guide—very good guide—know mountains well: take you back straight to Maharajah's country."

"Not Ram Das?"

I asked, suspiciously.

"No, not Ram Das. Very good man: Tibetan."

I saw at once this was a genuine crisis. All was hastily arranged: I went in and told Hilda and Lady Meadowcroft. Our spoilt child cried a little, of course, at the idea of being enshrined, but on the whole behaved admirably. At early dawn next morning, before the village was awake, we crept with stealthy steps out of the monastery, whose inmates were friendly. Our new guide accompanied us. We avoided the village, on whose outskirts the lamasery lay, and made straight for the valley. By six o'clock we were well out



"SAHIB AND MEM-SAHIBS MUST GO AWAY."

altogether. People hereabout all telling that the sahib and the mem-sahibs very great saints: much holy, like Buddha. Make picture; work miracles. People think, if them kill you, and have your tomb here, very holy place: very great Karma: very good for trade: plenty Tibetan man hear you holy men, come here on pilgrimage. Pilgrimage make fair, make market, very good for village. So people want to kill you, build shrine over your body."

This was a view of the advantages of

of sight of the clustered houses and the pyramidal spires. But I did not breathe freely till late in the afternoon, when we found ourselves once more under British protection in the first hamlet of the Maharajah's territory.

As for that scoundrel, Ram Das, we heard nothing more of him. He disappeared into space from the moment he deserted us at the door of the trap into which he had led us. The chief Lama told me he had gone back at once by another route to his own country.