

TREASURE OF THE SNOWS

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Throughout Sikkim again thunder the huge trumpets! For all it is a great, a solemn day. Let us go to the temple to see the Dances of the Great Day of Homage to Kinchinjunga.

From all parts of Sikkim many peoples gather in their strange and varied attires. Here are the Sikkimese, in their short red garments with their conical, feathered hats; here are the sober Bhutanese, startlingly like the Basques or Hungarians; here stand the red-turbaned people from Kham; you can see the small round caps of the valiant Nepalese Gurkhas; the people of Lhasa, in their Chinese-like long garments; the timid, quiet Lepchas, and many Sharpa people; all types of hill-men from all parts come to pay homage to the Five Treasures of Kinchinjunga, which points the way to the sacred city of Shambhala.

Trumpets are roaring. The drums beat. The crowd shouts and whistles. Enters the protector of Sikkim, in a huge red and gold mask, with a short spear in his hand. Around the fountain, from which the sacred water is drawn each morning, the impressive protector of Sikkim turns in a slow benevolent dance, completing his magic circles. Perhaps he is peering into the religious situation of Sikkim. In each monastery in Sikkim, at the same hour, the same sacred dance of the protector is being performed. Finishing his role, the protector joins the picturesque file of musicians.

Again sound the trumpets and the roar of the crowd. Then the protectress emerges from the temple. As a Kâli or Dâkini, with skulls adorning

her head, in dark garment, the deity outlines the same circle; after performing her invocation, she also seats herself beside the protector.

Again the crowd shouts and cries. One by one the protectors of the Five Treasures of Kinchinjunga emerge. They are ready to fight for the holy mountain, because in its caves, all treasures are guarded for centuries. They are ready to guard the religion, which is supported by the hermits who send their benevolent blessings from mountain depths. Radiant are the streamers on the garments of these guardians. They glisten as snows glowing in the rays of the sun. They are ready to fight. They are armed with swords and protected with round shields. Begins the dance of the warriors—reminiscent of the dances of the Comanchis of Arizona; the swords are brandished in the air; guns are fired. The population of Sikkim may rejoice—beholding how the treasures of Kinchinjunga are guarded. They may be proud—never yet has the rocky summit of this white mountain been conquered! Only exalted keepers of the mysteries, high Devas, know the path to its summit. The guardians finish their dance; they divide into two parties. In slow tread they march, intoning a long song; they boast and bet. Each tells us of his prowess: 'I can catch fish without nets'—'I can ride over the world without a horse'—'None can resist my sword'—'My shield is strong.' And again follows the short dance of warriors. They pass into the temple. Both the protectors rise and again, after several encircling dances,

enter the low door. The performance is over.

Now is the power of Kinchinjunga disclosed in another way. One sees bows and arrows in the hands of the people. The old joy of Sikkim—the ancient art of archery,—is to be demonstrated. Far off are the targets. But the hill-men still know the noble art and the arrows shall reach the hearts of Kinchinjunga's enemies. The festival is over. The long giant trumpets once again are carried into the temple; drums, gongs, clarinets, and cymbals are silent. The doors of the temple are closed. This is not Buddhism; this is a homage to Kinchinjunga.

And when we see the beautiful snowy peak, we understand the spirit of the festival, because veneration of beauty is the basis of this exalted feeling. The hill-people feel beauty. They feel a sincere pride in possessing these unrepeatable snowy peaks—the world giants, the clouds, the mist of the monsoon. Are these not only a superb curtain before the great mystery beyond Kinchinjunga? Many beautiful legends are connected with this mountain.

Beyond Kinchinjunga are old menhirs of the great sun cult. Beyond Kinchinjunga is the birth-place of the sacred Swastika, sign of fire. Now in the day of the Agni-yoga, the element of fire is again entering the spirit and all the treasures of earth are revered. For the legends of heroes are dedicated not so much to the plains as to the mountains! All teachers journeyed to the mountains. The highest knowledge, the most inspired songs, the most superb sounds and colours are created on the mountains. On the highest mountain there is the Supreme. The high mountains stand as witnesses of the great reality. The spirit of prehistoric man already enjoyed and understood the greatness of the mountains.

Whoever beholds the Himalayas recalls the great meaning of mountain Meru. The Blessed Buddha journeyed to the Himalayas for enlightenment. There, near the legendary sacred Stupa, in the presence of all the gods, the Blessed One received his Illumination. In truth, everything connected with the Himalayas reveals the great symbol of mount Meru, standing at the centre of the world.

The ancient people of wise India discerned in the splendour of the Himalayas the smile of mighty Vishnu, who stands as a heroic, indefatigable warrior, armed with discus, mace, war-trumpet, and sword. All the ten Avatâras of Vishnu were consummated near the Himavat. The most remote and oldest of them is the Avatara Dagon, the man-fish, who saved the forefather of the earthly race, Manu. As far back as the time of the first cataclysm, the flood, Burma remembers Dagon, and claims that the Dagoba dedicated to him is more than three thousand years old. Then came the Tortoise,—the pillar of heaven—which in the depths of the ocean of space, assisted the great upheaval which endowed the earth with the radiant goddess Lakshmi. Then came the ponderous earthly Boar; then the unconquerable Nrisimha, the man-lion, who saved Prahlâda from the wrath of his sinning father. The fifth Avatara, Vâmana, the dwarf, triumphed over another king, Bali, who like Prahlada's father tried to possess the throne of Vishnu. The sixth Avatara, bearing the name of Brahman, is the great warrior Parashurâma, said in ancient scriptures to have annihilated the race of Kshatriyas. The seventh Avatara appeared as Râma, the mighty beneficent king of India, extolled in the *Râmâyana*. The eighth Avatara is Krishna, the sacred shepherd, whose teaching is glorified in the all-embracing

Bhagavad Gita. The ninth Avatara, the blessed Buddha, is the great Avatara predicted by Vishnu as the triumph of wisdom and the destruction of demons and sinners by their own Karma. Vishnu's tenth Avatara, not yet manifest, is the future Maitreya. A great horseman, saviour of humanity, the Kalki Avatara, shall appear riding on a white horse; resplendent, with his triumphant sword in hand—he will restore the pure law of righteousness and wise rule on earth.

The advent of the resplendent day-goddess, Lakshmi, Vishnu's bride, has ever rejoiced the Indian heart, even as do the Himalayan summits. Vishnu's second Avatara, the blue Tortoise aided in stirring up the great ocean of space, indicated in the *Mahâbhârata*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Vishnu-purâna*. To restore to the three regions of earth, air, and heaven, their lost treasures, Vishnu commanded the Devas, sons of heaven, sons of fire, to join the dark demoniac Asuras in stirring the cosmic ocean in order to create the sea of milk, or Amrita, the heavenly nectar of life. The Devas, in glowing sheen, came to the edge of the sea which moved as the shining clouds of autumn. And with the help of the great One, they uprooted the holy mountain to serve as a churning-pole. The great serpent Ananta offered himself as a rope, and the mighty Vishnu, assuming the form of an immense Tortoise, made a pivot for the pole. The Devas held the tail of the serpent and the Asuras approached the head; and the great creative churning began. The first creation of this tumultuous labour was the divine cow, the fountain of milk shown in the Vedas as rain-cloud, which conquered the drought. Then was manifested Vâruni, Vishnu's crystallized radiance. Then came the Pârijâta, the source of all heavenly fruits. Afterwards

rose the moon and was possessed by Shiva. At this moment conflagration, destructive fumes emitted by this process, engulfed the earth and threatened the whole universe. Then Brahmâ, the creator, arose and bid Shiva manifest his power. Shiva, for the sake of all existing beings, swallowed the poison self-sacrificingly and became Nilakantha, the blue-throated. Then appeared Dhanvantari bearing the precious cup of Amrita. Hark and rejoice! After him came Lakshmi the effulgent, herself. Radiant, surrounded by her celestial attendants, glowing as a lustrous chain of clouds! At the same time, the gray rain clouds, the powerful elephants of heaven, poured water over her from golden vessels. Amrita was manifested and the eternal battle over the treasure of the universe began. The Devas and Asuras clashed in battle but the Asuras were vanquished and driven to Pâtâla, the gloomy recesses of earth. Again came joy and happiness to the three worlds—the festival of gods and men.

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As you ascend the peaks of the Himalayas and look out over the cosmic ocean of clouds below, you see the ramparts of endless rocky chains and the pearly strings of cloudlets. Behind them march the gray elephants of heaven, the heavy monsoon clouds. Is this not a cosmic picture which fills you with understanding of some great creative manifestation? The mighty serpent in endless coils sustains the Milky Way. The blue Tortoise of heaven and stars without number are as diamond treasures of a coming victory. You recall the huge 'Mendangs' in the Sikkimese range, with their stone seats used by the great hermits for meditation before sunrise; the great poet Milaraspa knew the strength of the hour before dawn, and in this awesome moment his spirit

merged with the great spirit of the world, in conscious unity.

Before sunrise there comes a breeze, and the milky sea undulates. The shining Devas have approached the tail of the serpent and the great stirring has begun! The clouds collapse as the shattered walls of a prison. Verily, the luminous god approaches! But what has occurred? The snows are red as blood. But the clouds collect in an ominous mist and all that was erstwhile resplendent and beautiful becomes dense, dark, shrouding the gore of the battle. Asuras and Devas struggle; the poisonous fumes creep everywhere. Creation must perish. But Shiva, self-sacrificingly, has consumed the poison which threatened the world's destruction—he, the great blue-throated! Lakshmi arises from darkness, bearing the chalice of nectar. And before her radiant beauty all the evil spirits of night disperse. A new cosmic energy is manifest in the world!

Where can one have such a joy as when the sun is upon the Himalayas, when the blue is more intense than sapphires, when from the far distance the glaciers glitter as incomparable gems. All religions, all teachings, are synthesized in the Himalayas. The virgin of dawn, the Ushas of ancient Vedas, is possessed of the same lofty virtues as the joyful Lakshmi. There can be also distinguished the all-vanquishing power of Vishnu. Formerly He was Nârâyana, the cosmic being in the depths of creation. Finally He is seen as the god of the sun and at His smile, out of the darkness, arises the great goddess of happiness.

And may we not also notice this link between Lakshmi and Mâyâ, mother of Buddha? All great symbols, all heroes, seem to be brought close to the Hima-

layas as if to the highest altar, where the human spirit comes closest to divinity. Are the shining stars not nearer, when you are in the Himalayas? Are not the treasures of the earth evident in the Himalayas? A simple Sardâr in your caravan asks you, 'But what is hidden beneath the mighty mountains? Why are the greatest plateaux just in the Himalayas? Some treasures must be there!'

In the foot-hills of the Himalayas are many caves and it is said that from these caves, subterranean passages proceed far below Kinchinjunga. Some have even seen the stone door which has never been opened, because the date has not arrived. The deep passages proceed to the splendid valley. You can realize the origin and reality of such legends, when you are acquainted with the unsuspected formation in Himalayan nature, when you personally perceive how closely together are glaciers and rich vegetation. The homage to Kinchinjunga from the simple people does not surprise you, because in it you see not superstition, but a real page of poetic folk-lore. This folk-reverence of natural beauties has its counterpart in the lofty heart of the sensitive traveller who, enticed by the inexpressible beauties here, is ever ready to barter his city life for the mountain peaks. For him, this exalted feeling has much the same meaning as has the conquering dance of the guardian of the mountains, and the bevy of archers who stand vigilant, ready to guard the beauties of Kinchinjunga.

Hail to unconquered Kinchinjunga! Swami Vivekananda said: 'The artist is the witness who testifies to the beautiful. Art is the most unselfish form of happiness in the world.'

Indeed this is a splendid affirmation.