

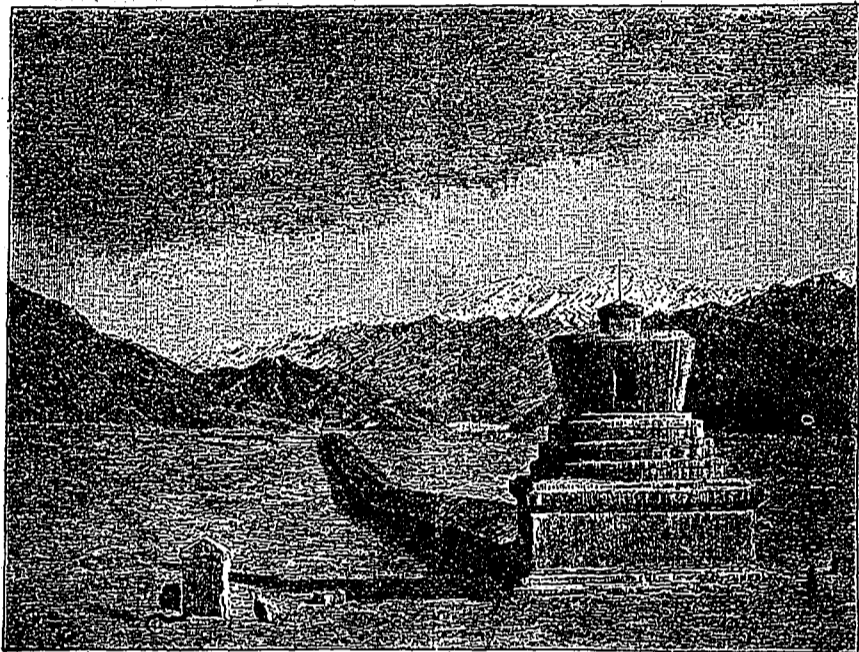
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A Manupani, or Prayer Wall, near Leh, in the Heart of the Himalayas.

PRAYER BY MACHINERY.

A recent traveller in Western Thibet, E. F. Knight, remarks that if one were to judge by the number of altars, praying wheels, praying flags, praying walls, and other strange objects constantly encountered by the wayside, one would naturally conclude that this was the most religious country in the world. But the explanation, he says is that the religion is all outward and visible; the praying of the inhabitants is performed for them by the idols of their own making, and devotion and doctrine taking material forms in stocks and stones.

The roads that cross these arid wastes are lined with manis, of which a typical one, in the Indus valley near Leh, is represented in the illustration. This mani is a massive wall, or embankment of stones, some ten feet high, and having a sloping roof. Every one of the large flat stones that form this roof is elaborately carved, in the pictorial characters of Thibet, with the inscription "Om mani patmi om"—the most commonly-employed prayer in this country. The translation of these mystic syllables is merely "O, thou jewel in the Lotus O!" If a native be asked what this phrase signifies, he will reply that he does not know, but that the words are very holy, and the repetition of them is a sacred duty. One explanation is that each of these six syllables represents one of the six spheres in which a soul can be reborn, and that, by constant repetition of them, the doors of each of these spheres may be closed, and hence Nirvana be obtained on death. These long walls of stone, some a mile in length, are found everywhere in Ladak, generally at the entrance of villages, but sometimes far away from any habitation. The thousands of stones composing a mani will all pray for one of the faithful, or rather, by their magic power, lessen the periods of purgatory for him and bring him nearer Nirvana whenever he

walks by them, provided that he take care to leave the mani on his right hand. Thus it is that a road always divides on approaching a mani, a path running on both sides so as to accommodate a traveller coming from either direction. The two structures at the ends of this mani are large chortens, or sarchophagi, containing the ashes of pious Lamas.

Most of the devotion of this strange people is literally carried on by machinery. Wheels containing rolls of prayers are turned by water power, and every time the wheel revolves it is working out the salvation of the man who put it up. On the tops of the houses wave flags inscribed with prayers, performing a like function; while many other artifices are employed to hasten the "Perfect Rest."

Frequent religious carvings are to be seen on the face of the cliffs. A good specimen of these is the idol of Chamba, a colossal figure cut out of an isolated rock near the monastery of Mulbeck, on the road from Kashmir to Leh.

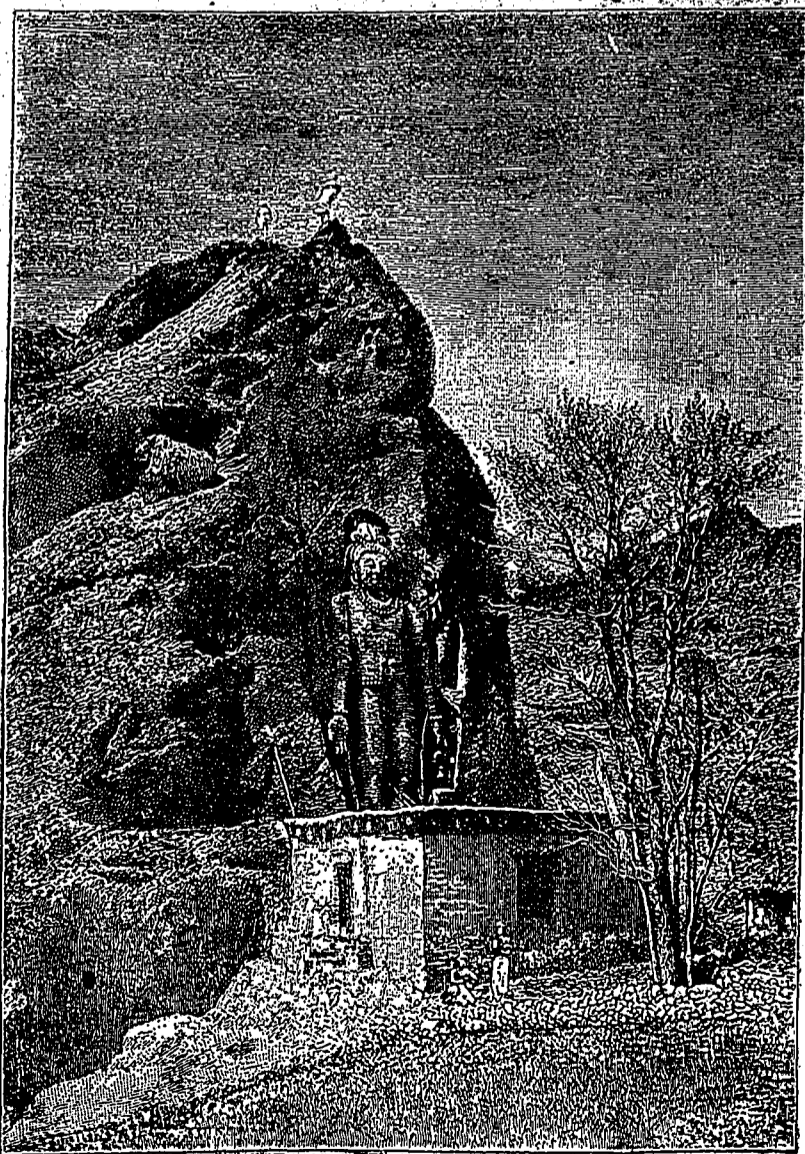
The Buddhist of Thibet has a love for the horrible and grotesque in nature. He builds his monastery on what to ordinary men would appear to be the most undesirable spot possible; he perches it on the summit of some inaccessible pinnacle, or burrows into the face of some frightful precipice. Like the Solitaries of the Thibaid he seeks scenes of desolation, and in this desert country he has no difficulty in finding what he requires. The Lamasery, or monastery, of Shergol is carved out of a honeycombed cliff, forming, with some other cliffs of the same description, a giant flight of stairs on the slope of a bleak mountain of loose stones. The monastery itself is painted white, with bands of bright color on the projecting wooden gallery, so that it stands out distinctly against the darker rocks. There is not a sign of vegetation near; all round is a dreary waste

of stones alone. From this Lamas' retreat the view of the mountains on the other side of the broad valley is particularly fantastic. The slopes from this distance appear quite smooth, falling to the bed of the river in regular furrows and waves, overlapping each other like those one often sees on a stream of lava that has cooled. These undulations are of various vivid colors—great streaks, a mile long, of pink, ochre, white, green, brick-red, and here and there of black. The effect is very curious; it looks as if some Brobdingnagian child had been making experiments with its first box of paints, and had daubed the mountain side with one color after another.

Some of the Lamaseries have Skooshoks, or Incarnations, as abbots. The Buddhists believe that after a man has attained a high degree of virtue, and has thus escaped liability to re-birth in any of the six ordinary spheres, he can, when he dies, either enter the Nirvana he has earned or return to the earth as an Incarnation. Only four monasteries in Ladak have Skooshoks as their spiritual heads, saints who have rejected the desirable Nirvana in order that they may live again to do good to their fel-

low men. When a Skooshok is about to die he calls his disciples round him and tells them where he will be re-born. The disciples after his death repair to the indicated place and pick out the Incarnation, by certain signs and holy marks, from among the other newly-born children. The chosen infant is carried away for ever from home and family, to be educated in the sacred mysteries in the holy city of Lassa. He is then brought to the monastery of which he is the head, and takes up his residence there in a separate building, not busying himself with the worldly affairs of the brotherhood, but dreaming away the long, quiet years until the time comes for him again to die and be re-born in another earthly body. All those who know this country best affirm that Skooshoks and Lamas, as well as people, have an absolute belief in this doctrine of metempsychosis.

It is strange, by the way, that one never hears of Mahatmas in Ladak or in Thibet proper. The Lamas know nothing of the mysterious beings who are supposed to dwell in their midst, and who, while disdaining to manifest themselves to their own people, apparently delight in carrying on a telepathic communication with



A Chorten, or Sarcophagus, containing the Ashes of a Pious Lama, near Leh.