A SCANDAL AT TASHILHUNPO

—H. E. RICHARDSON

In 1946, while I was at Lhasa, when Tibetan guests were looking with me at illustrations in various books on Tibet we came across the photograph in Youngusband's "India and Tibet" (1910) of "the Shigatse Abbot" who visited him at Kanya Dzong in 1903. He was identified by my guest at the Skyabs-dbyings, the highest-ranking monastic official of Tashilhunpo and the equi-
valent of the Spön-khab Mön-kpo of the Lhasa administration. Someone remarked that he had been dismissed from his post after his visit to Youngbu-
band; and supposing that to have been due to the failure of his mission, I thought no more of it until, many years later, I came across the inside story in the papers of Sir Charles Bell, now in the India Office Records, where he relates the account given him in 1914 by the famous Lochen Shatras (Bhöd-
spra) of a notorious scandal at Tashilhunpo early in the present century. With the permission of the Director of the India Office Library and Records I have used that note as the basis of this article.

Some time before the British Mission to Lhasa it was reported to the Dalai Lama's government that the Panchen Lama's father had been murdered and that the Skyabs-dbyings was engaged in sorcery against the Lhasa ad-
ministration and was also trying to usurp the authority of the Panchen Lama. The Panchen on being asked whether this repeal that he wanted a thorough inquisition to be made; and accordingly a party of officials headed by Giar-byang Shappe was sent from Lhasa for that purpose. It was discovered that the Panchen Lama's father had an affair with the wife of another prominent Tashilhunpo official, the Gyer-tshang Chen-po. The woman attempted to poison the Panchen Lama's mother who, as David MacDonald records in Twenty Years in Tibet, was a deaf mute so that she could marry the father. But the plot miscarried and it was the Panchen's father and some of his servants who ate the poisoned food. They were saved only by the skill of a doctor known as Buda Amchi who, as I learnt somewhere perhaps in another note by Bell) had accompanied the Skyabs-dbyings on his visit to Youngusband at Kampa Dzong. A dog which ate some of the poisoned food was less fortunate. It died. The Gyer-tshang Chen-po's wife tried to put the blame on her daughter but was found guilty and was banished and heavily fined. The record does not say so but she was probably flogged as well. The Panchen's father, who must at least have been innocent of the poisoning at-
tempt, was fined and imprisoned in Phuntsoling Dzong. These proceedings were presumably carried out by the Panchen Lama's ministers headed by the Skyabs-dbyings; but Gyer-tshang Chen-po, who was more influential than the Skyabs-dbyings, wanted further vengeance and persuaded the Skyabs-
dbyings to send orders to the Phuntsoling Dzonggon to have the Panchen Lama's father killed, which was done by clubbing him to death. In addition to this grave offence of which he was found guilty by Giar-byang Sappe and his colleagues the Skyabs-dbyings was known to have sought to bring the Dalai Lama's government under his influence by means of written magical charms which he kept beneath his seat and also of attempting to usurp the authority of the Panchen Lama. He and the Gyer-tshang Chen-po were heavily fined and degraded. There were probably other lesser figures who received
similar punishment. All the fines were made over to the Panchen Lama.

The official enquiry must have taken place sometime between November 1903 and July 1904. The “Shigatse Abbot’s” visit to Youghusband lasted from July to October, 1903. Youghusband to whom the Tibetan mind and Tibetan ways were a new experience describes him as courteous, kindly in-

tent-minded and lacking in intellect. That judgement seems to under-
estimate the Tibetan ability to mental shrewdness and strength of mind beneath a
genuine calm and self-mastery and an assumed air of simplicity. Inciden-
tally, W. D. Shakabpa states in his *Tibet* that the Shigatse delegation’s visit to

Youghusband was made on the instruction of the Lhasa government. Shakabpa’s history also shows that Gesar-lyung Tse-bzang dan-pi-yug rdo-rje was appointed Shappe towards the end of 1903. In July 1904 he left

Lhasa with the Dalai Lama in flight to Mongolia and, later, China. There

is no indication how long before the enquiry the various crimes had taken place.

A possible sequel to those events may be seen in MacDonald’s *Twenty

Years in Tibet* where he mentions two dismissed officials of the Panchen Lama

who took service under the Lhasa government and were responsible for a great
decay of the troubles between the Dalai and Panchen Lamas.

So far as I know, Bell’s is the only account of the affair but examination

of Chinese records might find some trace of it.

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