TIBET

My Land and My People: The Autobiography of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Edited by DAVID HOWARTH. [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962. xv + 255 pp., 25s.]

ALTHOUGH the lives of famous Lamas have, for centuries, been written by pious disciples, autobiography is not a usual literary form in Tibet. These memoirs of a Dalai Lama are, therefore, something new and the more so in being aimed at the Western world which was formerly regarded as "outside," not only politically but also in religion and manners.

Since the rising at Lhasa in March 1959 compelled him to seek safety in India, the Dalai Lama has been preoccupied with the plight of thousands of refugees who have continued to stream into India and Nepal, away from the confusion, ill-treatment and starvation which followed the crushing of Tibetan resistance by the Chinese. And so, although the book is entitled *My Land and My People*, its emphasis is on recent events and on Tibet's claim to the consideration of the world.

The translation, originally done by the Dalai Lama's highly competent interpreter Kazi Sonam Topgay, has been "edited" by David Howarth with such sympathetic fidelity to character that, whatever else one may remember, it is dominated by the Dalai Lama's personality, by his swift independent intelligence and his unaffected goodness—one might say saintliness—warm with sincerity and humility but, at the same time brisk and active. Here is evidence of the success with which the Tibetans choose and train their Lamas and of the fine material on which they can draw. Something of the gaiety and charm of the Dalai Lama's manner is lost in writing but the style does catch his concise directness and rapidity so that those who have met him will recognise that this is not only what His Holiness wrote but, also, almost as he wrote it.

First there is a gentle sketch of his simple home on the remote border between Tibet and China. But a Dalai Lama has only a short lease of childhood before he is taken from his family and plunged at the age of five or six into endless ceremony and an intensive and exacting education. In this Quest for Enlightenment, as he calls it, the Dalai Lama's eager intellectual curiosity and powers of observation led him far beyond the limits of a traditional Tibetan education. When he was only twelve he was studying every piece of machinery on which he could lay hands—and his hands are noticeably deft. At the same time, as your reviewer knows, he had a precociously serious and mature interest in the ways of the outside world, and he was attempting to learn English. In all this he was setting the pace, for—apart from Heinrich Harrer whose influence, even though short-lived and not even mentioned in this book, must have been valuable—there were few people who could help him. Isolation

was in the Tibetan blood, as he says. This was, he thinks, a mistake; but the—too brief—chapter describing the land and the people is significantly headed "Peace of Mind," and few who knew Tibet before 1950 would disagree with His Holiness' conclusion that "with all the faults of the system, Tibet was among the happiest of lands."

It was also the home of a people with a strong individuality, conscious of their distinctness from their neighbours in race and culture. Its historical relationship with China is rightly stated to have been not on any western model, fluctuating and undefined, and never to have justified the claim that Tibet was part of China. The Dalai Lama emphasises that from 1912 until 1950 his country was enjoying real *de facto* independence; but he appreciates that this was not given legal international form.

And so, he turns to the events of 1950 to 1959. The story in general is now fairly well known but it has a new sharpness and colour when seen through the eyes of the Tibetan protagonist. The Dalai Lama's account of the invasion in 1950, of his visits to China and India, and the disturbances and his escape in 1959 are especially valuable; so are his comments on personalities he met. What impresses him in a man is a sense of undeviating conviction. In spite of some naive and mischievous remarks about religion, he found this in Mao Tse-tung and cannot believe that Mao approved the violence done to Tibet. Chou En-lai appeared simply as smooth and ruthless; and Nehru as a brilliant statesman but lacking in spiritual fervour. The description of Chinese actions in Tibet shows a lack of preparation for dealing with a non-Chinese people; misunderstanding or disregard for Tibetan national and religious feelings; hurt complaints about Tibetan obstruction of attempts to help them; progressively embittered disillusionment and occasional outbursts of that frenzied rage to which the Chinese sometimes, astonishingly, succumb. In contrast, the grave and steadfast courage of the elderly Tibetan Ministers, Lukhangwa and Lobzang Tashi, is a paradoxical reminder of Roman senators confronting barbarian invaders.

In the Dalai Lama's own behaviour can be seen the interaction of his temporal and spiritual aspects. Soon after power was thrust on him at the age of sixteen in a moment of crisis, he had to consider how best to soften the impact of Chinese occupation. He decided on a blend of seeming acquiescence in Chinese proposals and quiet insistence on Tibetan rights. Chinese publications before 1959 show how effective this was; but at least by 1957, the Dalai Lama must have been under pressure to take advantage of the growing success of violent resistance and to come out in open defiance. His struggle until the last moment to avoid the fatal open outbreak must have needed resolute determination, and the strain can be seen in those temporising letters to the Chinese Commander, at the eleventh hour. In the light of long Tibetan experience

this was sound policy. Its other aspect, the abhorrence of violence—which inspires His Holiness with reverent admiration for Mahatma Gandhi—was the fruit of centuries of religious training. The Dalai Lama consciously embodies a spirit of gentleness and compassion. He has never expressed hatred even for those who have done so much harm to his religion and his people but is intent on his duty to help them to achieve better lives until the promised coming of another Buddha. Here, perhaps, is a hint of the "mystery" that Western minds expect and want to find in Tibet. But it is no mystery to the Tibetan. He is moved by feelings of reverence and gratitude to Lamas who undertake rebirth in order to help others towards deliverance; and something would be wrong if they did not continue to reappear. The Dalai Lama does not question this nor examine why the choice fell on him or what it feels like to be a Dalai Lama. Nor does he expound any deep esoteric meanings of his faith. The short note on religion is concerned only with the essentials of Buddhism and the conduct it expects—something like the public sermons which were a regular feature of Tibetan life. This reticence may disappoint those in search of Secret Tibet; but introspection is not a Tibetan habit; and advanced religious instruction is an inviolable, personal relationship between master and chosen pupil to whom it is not imparted without long preparation.

The Dalai Lama's thinking and his judgments are inevitably conditioned by his upbringing in that world where, as he says with some understatement, "spiritual matters were regarded as no less important than material matters"; and, although his quick perception lets him see what is happening, circumstances have deprived and continue to deprive him of the experience needed to assess fully the motives of this "outside" world of tough opportunism. On the other hand some "outsiders," uneasily aware of the incompatibility which has made the world "too small for any people to live in harmless isolation," seem anxious to avoid looking too closely at the unprovoked and unpardonable violence done to Tibet by finding such excuses as "it was inevitable that Tibet should be brought into step with the world" or "reforms were long overdue."

The Dalai Lama readily admits that Tibet was far from perfect and he was aware of inequalities, which he intended to remedy. This is no belated attempt to close the stable door. He had been thinking of these problems when the Communist threat was still fairly distant. Characteristically his concern is not primarily with the materialist gospel of higher standards of living, but with social justice. Communist charges of brutal oppression in Tibet will be discounted by anyone who knew the country before 1950. Cobbett and de Tocqueville on conditions in England and Ireland less than 150 years ago make far more distressful reading than anything your reviewer saw or heard in Tibet; and it is cynical and

unconvincing to suggest that forcible annexation was necessary to bring about improvements or that the Tibetans as a whole have welcomed the change. Even the clerical conservatism of Tibet contained the seeds of its own change. One of its strongest supports was popular devotion to the Dalai Lama. The convention of finding him in a humble home lessened the risk of a challenge from a powerful lay family; but it also contained the possibility that such a child, brought up as the incarnation of compassion and given autocratic powers, might become an embarrassing champion of less privileged people. The Dalai Lama looks back to the improvements initiated by his predecessor and there can be no doubt that, given the opportunity, he would have gone much further. As it is, the violent destruction of the Tibetan pattern of government, society and agriculture has resulted in famine, and misery unknown before. There is a long way to go before the "efficiency, material progress and grey fog of uniformity" which the Dalai Lama saw in China, are imposed on Tibet.

In the meantime, His Holiness is thinking over new constitutional as well as social arrangements for the future in a Tibet which can never be the same as it was. He is influenced by his new experience of democratic ideas and also by the appearance of a politically conscious middle class which came into existence in Tibet to resist Communist domination. One of his proposals—that a Dalai Lama might be deprived of his powers (his ruling powers presumably) in the highest interests of the state—cuts deeply at previous Tibetan religious and political thinking and all its implications do not seem to have been worked out. All must of course depend on the circumstances of a future return to Tibet; but the Tibetan organisation has, in the past, shown considerable flexibility in adapting itself to changing conditions.

It is the Dalai Lama's view that the Chinese seized Tibet with the "more or less clear aims" of securing living room and because of its economic wealth and strategic value for the domination of Asia. "More or less clear" is a prudent saving phrase. Obstacles of climate, distance and terrain have led Tibet's neighbours to try to keep it within their influence rather than to administer or exploit it. Short bursts of Chinese activity there were followed by loss of interest, and withdrawal. Now the Communists have taken on the task of running the country themselves. Little development seems possible without a great increase in population, food production and communications. Abundant Chinese manpower linked with modern technical methods would appear to reduce the former difficulties; but even before 1959 there were hints that the cost was proving uncomfortably high. So there may still be truth in Owen Lattimore's dictum that "Tibet is a zone of diminishing returns for Imperialism." The issue is complicated now by ideology, by the frontier

dispute with India, and by the attitude of China towards the non-Communist world and perhaps also towards the USSR. The swing of the pendulum is likely to be slower this time and it is sad that the Dalai Lama, with his fine qualities of mind and spirit, should be prevented from putting his ideas into practice. Still, he is young; and although it may be difficult to share his calm faith in the ultimate triumph of justice, who dare say there is no hope?

HUGH RICHARDSON.

Tibet and its History. By H. E. RICHARDSON. [Oxford University Press. 1962. 308 pp. 16 illustrations and two maps. 42s.]

THE dust-cover presents this book as "a lucid and straightforward history of Tibet from its beginnings as a separate country in the sixth century A.D. to the present day." It would be more fairly described as a history of Tibet in its relations with China. Ten full centuries of Tibetan independent history are covered in Chapter II in just ten pages, and only when we reach the period of Chinese claims on Tibet are historical problems examined in precise detail. Thus the last two and a half centuries occupy five-sixths of the book.

The author, Mr. H. E. Richardson, lived in Lhasa for long periods between 1936 and 1950 as head of the British and Indian missions there, and as a Tibetan scholar in his own right. Since his return to Britain he has become one of the very few authorities in Tibetan historical studies. He certainly could have written a very much fuller history, covering the whole earlier period in detail. But this present book has been written with a special purpose—as a thesis in defence of Tibetan autonomy and as a strong appeal for the preservation of Tibetan culture. Since the Chinese Communists are actively responsible for present Tibetan misery, it is against the Chinese case, both actual and historical, that most of Mr. Richardson's arguments are deliberately directed. Thus he deals with the history of Tibetan dependence on the Mongols in some detail, so that he may argue the falsity of Chinese claims to Tibetan subordination in those periods (pp. 36–38 and 44–46). After dealing with the Gurkha war of 1788, he is concerned to argue the artificiality of imperial authority in Tibet (pp. 70–72). From page 137 onwards there are constant references to Li Tieh-tseng, for the arguments of his pro-Chinese work *The Historical Status of Tibet* require refutation.

On account of this argumentative aspect of the book and the occasional digs at the Chinese, one might judge the whole thesis as unduly tendentious, but this is not so. Where Chinese claims are not at issue, Mr. Richardson's presentation is a model of conciseness and balance, such as in the useful survey on the structure of the Tibetan government