EVERYBODY has heard of the Dalai Lama. Yet this eminent specialist in controlled metempsychosis, dwelling on the highlands of Asia, is certainly the most mysterious and the least photographed of the few theocrats now living in the world.

Paul Valéry says somewhere that priests are _préposés aux choses vagues_; but the Dalai is charged with things very exact and concrete: those of government. Though he constitutes a visible symbol of celestial worlds—a real living god, in fact—he administers a most respectable portion of the earth's surface; and his influence extends not only over Tibet but over Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and parts of Mongolia, Siberia, Manchuria, and China. How did he attain such an exalted position?

I purposely say “he.” Even though we must look back several centuries to find the origin of this political power, we must not forget that theoretically it is still held by the same man who founded it. The whole Tibetan system of government is actually dominated by the theocratic principle of reincarnation. Bodies change, but the soul is always the same. If, for instance, in speaking to the Dalai one should happen to refer to the past history of his predecessors down the centuries, etiquette requires that one should not say: “The Great Fifth Dalai founded the Potala nearly three hundred years ago,” but: “Your Holiness founded it, some time ago.” It is indeed a miraculous cosmic masquerade: a body is the make-up; a human life the role. But the actor dwells unchanging, eternal, a pillar of the Absolute.

And who is this actor? Here politics become tinged with metaphysics and shine with that celestial glamour which gives the Dalai his peculiar charm. According to Mahayana Buddhism as found in Tibet, the Absolute, personified in the remote and rather uninteresting Adi Buddha, emanates five beings, the Five Celestial Victors or Dhyani Buddhas. These in turn each emanate a celestial Bodhisattva, who by now is sufficiently removed from noumenal sublimities to take an interest in the world and in man. Amitaba, one of the five Dhyanis, emanates Avalokitesvara (Tibetan: Chen-re-zi; Chinese: Kwan Yin; Japanese: Kwannon), and the Dalai Lama is Avalokitesvara himself.

It must further not be forgotten that a Bodhisattva is a being on the verge of becoming a Buddha who, in the Tibetan conception, renounces this divine beatitude, descending to earth and submitting to the drudgery of reiterated reincarnations so as to help all men on their way to salvation. Among the five Dhyani Bodhisattvas, Avalokitesvara is moreover, the very God of Mercy.

The Dalai is thus backed by a portentous halo of divine benevolence which would make his acts seem inspired by the loftiest and most compassionate love of humanity, even if in practice they are just the contrary. To tell the truth, Tibetans are often fiendishly cruel, and
the Dalai seems no exception. When Ekai Kawaguichi—the Japanese monk who secretly visited Tibet in 1900/02—was subsequently found out to have been a foreigner, many people who had befriended him were tortured. His Holiness the Dalai even had some pairs of eyes gouged out by way of punishment!

A picturesque and imaginative official Tibetan genealogy provides a series of over sixty earthly reincarnations for Avalokitesvara. The divine origin of the power held by the Dalai Lama has thus conveniently been pushed back into the depths of legendary history. The most exigent intellect of Central Asia could hardly resist the emotional compulsion of such a hoary tradition which takes its life from the very origin of things, descending indeed from the sky. In reality, the genealogy is very short, dating only from the sixteenth century. While there have been 124 Emperors of Japan and 266 Popes in Rome, the present Dalai Lama is only the fourteenth of his series.

Prior to the seventh century of our era, when Buddhism was first introduced to the highlands beyond the Himalayas, little or nothing is known of Tibet. It seems that the resistance of the native Bon religion was very strong, proving that an indigenous culture was not altogether lacking. At that time the Tibetans were notorious for being warlike brigands; and one of the kings, Srongtsan-Gampo, forced a Chinese emperor to a humiliating peace in which he obtained a princess of the blood in marriage. Another princess had been given to him previously by the King of Nepal.

Even if these matrimonial successes were only a legend, they admirably symbolize the two influences which have contributed toward building the Tibetan civilization: India and China. It seems that both these royal spouses were devout Buddhists and soon converted the youthful king, who sent for teachers and books both from India and China. Later, in 746 A.D., the Indian sage Padmasambhava was summoned to instruct the existing Buddhists and convert the remaining Bon worshipers. Buddhism then took that firm hold of the country which it has held to this day.

When I say Buddhism, one must not think of the beautiful and highly ethical teachings of Gautama, which modern scholarship has restored to something like their original form. As probably stated by the master himself in his first sermon at Benares, they may be summed up in four points: (1) human experience is essentially one of suffering; (2) the root of all suffering is desire; (3) suppression of desire means suppression of suffering; (4) this final goal is reached by the path of the Eight Virtues.

Such a philosophy can be easily criticized as negative; yet it evinces a noble virility not without a certain heroic beauty of its own. Man stands alone with his suffering in a great cosmos, perhaps cold and barren from a human point of view but wonderfully pure. There is no cajoling of gods or saints to obtain a good place in another life, no hope in supernatural grace or miracles. Actions and thought alone are of value. The system is scientifically complete, it works independently of all supernatural interference. Original Buddhism seems to have been not so much a religion, in the accepted sense of the word, as a philosophical theory.

But man is by nature a creator of gods. Such a mythological void did not satisfy many of Gautama’s successors, and a fertile theogony proceeded most speedily. Considering the number of gods and goddesses known to northern Buddhism, one might even speak of an industry of gods. By the time Padmasambhava introduced the religion of Buddha to Tibet, the original philosophy had become a polytheistic and metaphysical jungle, with a vast and picturesque pantheon living in intimate symbiosis with demons of all descriptions and fiends of all appearances.

As we have seen, the Buddhists of later times spoke of an Adi Buddha and of five Dhyani Buddhas who emanate Bodhisattvas; these, finally, were considered
to manifest their presence five times on earth, in five different living beings (Manushi), one for each Kalpa or age of the world. Gautama was only the Manushi of Avalokitesvara for the Kalpa in which we are still living, namely, the fourth. Thus the philosopher who had preached a lofty, serene, stoic way of deliverance without gods, ended by taking a humble place as the emanation of an emanation of an emanation in a vast congress of supernatural beings.

And what supernatural beings! Nearly all emanated female energies (Shakti), with whom they hastened to engage in fantastic celestial orgies of bejeweled obscenity. Morals and ethics were superseded by sacrifices and appeasement or, worse, by sorcery and magic. The Elysian social climber no longer needed to behave well or be good; all he had to do was repeat certain formulas and perform (correctly) certain ritual acts. The original teachings were no longer recognizable.

This form of religion was promptly accepted in Tibet. Gradually the power of the monks became paramount. The ancient kingdom broke up into a number of independent fiefs, the lords of which actively fought each other. When Kublai Khan, in the thirteenth century, wished to receive the blessing of the greatest Church in Asia, he invited the lama of the Sakya monastery (near Shigatse) to his court. In return he granted this religious ruler the temporal sovereignty over Tibet. Thus the priest-king tradition was established.

However, that tradition did not become a driving force in the country until two centuries later. Buddhism, as a religion, had sunk to a degenerate form of devil worship, and the power of the Sakya lamas had once more dwindled to nothing in the face of the turbulent feudal lords, until a great reformation, which had both religious and practical results, was undertaken by Tsong-kapa (1358-1417), the founder of the "Yellow sect." A centralized hierarchy and administration, a sound educational curriculum, strict supervision, and a high moral tone (marriage and concubinage were forbidden) combined to give this organization an outstanding position in the religious life of Tibet.

Tsong-kapa's nephew, Gedundub (1391-1475), was the first Great Lama of the Yellow sect. At his death the succession was shrewdly based on the theory of reincarnation; but the extension of this idea to the metaphysical refinement of appearing as an Avalokitesvara in the flesh seems to date from the fifth Great Lama, Nagwang-Lhozang (1617-1682).

This last-mentioned pontiff was a man of great energy, of ruthless ambition, and perfectly adapted to succeed in that atmosphere of transcendent Machiavellism so typical of Tibet. After having attained a strong position as head of the great Depung Monastery, he persuaded a Mongol prince, Gosri Khan, to conquer the country, an enterprise which seems to have been completed quite easily. Naturally the barbaric potentate, who was under the spiritual sway of the monks, ended by presenting Tibet to the Great Lama (1640) and by granting him the Mongol title of Dalai, meaning "(vast as) the ocean." Ten years later this sovereignty was also recognized by the Chinese Emperor.

To give this newly acquired power of his a dignified setting, the "Great Fifth" (as he is known in Tibet) built a majestic stronghold near Lhasa, which he called—after the mythical Indian residence of his celestial self, Avalokitesvara—the Potala. He also set out to invent picturesque legends magnifying his own power and drastically limited that of the other sects, which ended by acknowledging his supremacy as the head of the Lama Church.

Only one lama, the Panchen ("Great Gem of Learning") or Tashi Lama, living at Tashilumpo (near Shigatse), was allowed to hold a position in some ways comparable to that of the Dalai in Lhasa. Here philosophical niceties come in again: the Panchen is considered to be the incarnation of Amitaba, one of the five Dhyani Buddhas, and actually the "fa-
"... looks very brave... eyebrows very high... very keen-eyed"

The caravan routes leading to Lhasa are nothing but stony trails winding across empty wastes, along the shores of silent lakes or over the slopes of wind-swept mountains.
The Sakya Lama, Kublai Khan himself, in the 13th century, gave political power to the lamas of Sakya. It is perhaps because of this that even now their surroundings are more regal than monastic.

A hermit's life of meditation is the supreme ideal of all lama sects. He who has chosen the great road is often enclosed in a small room for years on end, devoting all his energies to exploring unknown depths of the spirit. Tsampa Tendar has lived for eight years in his cell high up on the side of Mount Shopta near Gyantse.
The fifth Dalai perfected the system of succession by reincarnation. It is interesting to note that the other sects started at once to copy such an excellent idea; now there are several hundred “living Buddhas” in Tibet and Mongolia, every monastery wishing to have its own. Indeed, the whole past history of Tibet has been readjusted on incarnation lines. The ancient king Songtsan-Gampo was fitted into the series of Avalokitesvara’s lives on earth, and Tsong-kapa was declared to have been a living Manjushri, or “God of Wisdom.”

Thus we see that the actual political power of the lamas is a comparatively recent acquisition. It is also amusing to notice that while Comte, the French philosopher, used to say that man proceeds from a theological to a metaphysical and lastly to a positive stage, in Tibet exactly the reverse has happened. The kingdom was succeeded by the Sakya pope and ended in the Lhasa living god.

The sixth Dalai (1683-1706) seems to have been a most entertaining youth who passed most of his time elegantly carousing and making love in the gardens around Lhasa. He wrote many poems, which are still popular in Tibet. The elders of the Church said that, for once, the reincarnation must have been mistaken, and the remarkable Dalai was soon deceived and ultimately killed.

As one faction believed him really to have been Avalokitesvara’s soul, a long period of disturbances ensued. The Chinese were also dragged in, and finally the Emperor Kang Hsi sent up an army. He restored some order but curtailed the power of the lamas by appointing two representatives (Amban) with great power.

The men in the political game were now the Dalai, the various party leaders among the heads of the principal monasteries, the principal feudal lords, and the two foreign representatives. The Machiavellian game of chess on the roof of the world continued, now even more varied and entertaining, mingled with treason, assassinations, and torture, against the invisible background of subtle theological theories and in the dubious glamour of celestial glory.

The poor living god cannot be said to have enjoyed a good time. Four Dalai Lamas, the ninth to the twelfth (from 1805 to 1874), all died very young and in a mysterious way, one at eleven and the remaining three at eighteen. Evidently the exalted position was not conducive to a patriarchal age. The strange haste in the transmigration of Avalokitesvara’s soul is easily accounted for: the political powers preferred to have a mere regent at the head of the state rather than a living god whose hold on the populace would have been too strong for them to cope with.

In 1876 the thirteenth Dalai was born. He soon gave proof of an unusual energy and flatly refused to die at the canonical age of eighteen, like his predecessors. By a clever stratagem he practically got rid of the Ambans, and then he set out to reorganize the government of Tibet independently of Chinese rule.

The Japanese monk Ekai Kawaguchi, who saw the Dalai in 1902, when the living god was about twenty-six, says in his book Three Years in Tibet: “The Dalai Lama looks very brave. His eyebrows are very high, and he is very keen-eyed.” Further on he adds: “I judge that he is richer in thoughts political than religious.”

His reign needed a man rich indeed in “thoughts political”! The hermit country had come into touch with new and formidable forces. At the beginning of the present century, Russian influence had become very strong, especially since the Dalai had fallen under the sway of a Siberian-born Buriat monk called Dorjievi. The British, fearing a threat to their frontiers of northern India, then sent an
armed expedition to Lhasa (1904). The Dalai fled to Mongolia and then to China. The moment the British retired from Lhasa, the Chinese renewed their traditional policy and claimed sovereignty over the country. The Dalai returned to Lhasa in 1909 but had very soon to flee again, pursued this time by the Chinese. He passed the next few years in India. At last, when the Republican revolution in China had made Lhasa untenable for his enemies, he returned to the holy city in 1912.

From then on till about 1920, frontier incidents with the Chinese continued to give much trouble to the Tibetan Government. Later on a period of comparative peace permitted the Dalai to undertake a series of internal reforms and to continue the reconstruction of a power which had been handed to him greatly curtailed. The most notable incident in these last years has been the open dis­sension between the Panchen Lama, who was pro-Chinese, and the Dalai Lama, who was pro-British. The Panchen Lama left Tibet for China and then tried several times to return with the aid of a Chinese escort, but without success. He finally died in exile, shortly after the death of his more fortunate rival, the Dalai, in 1935.

The new fourteenth Dalai has been found at Jekundo, in Eastern Tibet, and was enthroned a short time ago. What does the future hold in store for this young gilded living god, in whose unknown person are concentrated the adoration of humble believers and the envy and hatred of crafty rivals?

Religious Fervor

Louis IX, known to the world as Saint Louis, loved to have the Norman sea rovers baptized en masse and was convinced that there­upon they immediately took a turn for the better. For the solemn ceremony each of them was presented with white garments which they were allowed to keep.

One Easter Sunday there were such crowds of people seeking baptism that there were not enough robes to go round and coarse substitute garments had to be provided in a hurry. A Norman noble­man flung his baptismal robe down in a rage and cried: “The devil! This is the twentieth time I have had myself baptized—but I have never yet been given such rags!”

Friendship

The Duke of Villeroy, a governor under Louis XV, was asked who was going to be appointed Minister of Finance.

“I have no idea who will be given the post,” he replied. “But no matter who it is—I am a close friend and a distant relative of his.”

Death, Where is Thy Sting?

It is hardly news that Veronal, the well-known sleep-inducing drug, is very popular among would-be suicides as it is fatal when taken in an overdose. But it is news that the manufacturers have now taken steps to prevent this misuse. Every tablet still contains exactly the same dose of the effective substances; but in addition to this every tablet now contains a small quantity of a powerful emetic. A sleepless patient taking the proper number of tablets will get his sleep without any unpleasant sensation. A would-be suicide, however, who swallows what he imagines to be a fatal dose of Veronal will simply be very, very sick and probably feel sorry the next day that he ever thought of suicide.