

REVIEWS

TIBETAN VENTURE BY ANDRE GUIBAUT (published by John Murray, London) pp. 206, 23 Plates, 2 Maps. Price: 16s. net.

Tibetan venture is an account of the second Guibaut-Liotard Expedition into the little known region of Eastern Tibet, brought recently under direct Chinese Control and incorporated into the Celestial Empire as the Province of Sikang. Tibet is still the land of mystery and though M. Guibaut has not regaled us with accounts of the miraculous powers of the Lamas, which a fellow traveller into Tibet, Madame Alexandra David-Neel has so powerfully described in her books, his book is of absorbing interest.

This expedition was undertaken by two Frenchmen, about the time of the fall of France, primarily for scientific purposes, who traversed 120 miles of unknown territory in the country of the Ngolo-Setas. The starting point was Tatsienlou, capital of Sikang and emporium of Tibet, meeting place of Chinese and Tibetan civilisations. It was from here that so many travellers have set forth, impelled by faith or the spirit of adventure to move into the unknown. It was here that Prince Henry of Orleans ended his marvellous journey across Central Asia. To reach Tatsienlou is itself an adventure; Chengtu is the last place to which modern transport is available. From here it is four days by rickshaw to Yatchow and thence seven days by litter to Tatsienlou.

M. Guibaut provides that rare combination of scientist, adventurer and writer. His descriptions of the terrifying desolation of the Tibetan landscape or the mental strain of moving even on guard in hostile territory are vivid. Ambushed in a lonely mountain pass he barely escaped with his life while his friend and companion Louis Liotard was killed. His description of the days of suspense which led up to this catastrophe and of the ambush itself constitutes a vigorous piece of writing in most appealing language.

In Sikang, Chinese and Tibetans intermingle and M. Guibaut's analysis of how the Chinese are able to maintain their hold on this predominantly Tibetan land with hardly any military force is a striking tribute to their tenacity of purpose and the expanding nature of their civilisation. His accounts of his meetings with Chinese officials form very interesting reading. Peasants and nomads, gold prospectors and soldiers, lamas and officials are all depicted in a masterly fashion. We read of Tibetan monasteries filled with hundreds of monks and novices, their interiors dimly lit, filled with images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the walls covered with paintings depicting forces of Good and Evil, of Gods lasciviously embracing their saktis, of Demons of hideous aspect, filling the soul with terror. We learn of the hypnotic qualities of their religious services and their resemblance to the Roman Catholic liturgy which has been commented upon by many generations of Catholic travellers.

We can recommend this book as a very interesting book of travel, brilliantly written and admirably translated by Lord Sulley.

S. K. D.