

PREFACE

AN apology is needed for the length of this book. When it was passing through the press, a Parliamentary Blue-book appeared containing much important information as to recent developments, and what I had intended as only the account of our relations with Tibet up to the return of the Mission of 1904 I thought with advantage might be extended to include our relations to the present time. The whole forms one connected narrative of the attempt, protracted over 137 years, to accomplish a single purpose—the establishment of ordinary neighbourly intercourse with Tibet. The dramatic ending disclosed is that, when that purpose had at last been achieved, we forthwith abandoned the result.

The reasons for this abandonment have been—firstly, the jealousy borne by two great Powers for one another; and, secondly, the love of isolation engrained in us islanders. I have suggested that our aim should be to replace jealousy by co-operation, and, instead of coiling up in frigid isolation, we should expand ourselves to make and keep friendships.

The means I have recommended are living personalities rather than dry treaties, and what Warren Hastings and Lord Curzon wanted—an agent at Lhasa—is to me also the one true means of achieving our purpose.

I am fully conscious of having made mistakes in that part of the conduct of these affairs which fell to me to discharge. The exactly true adjustment of diplomatic with military requirements, and of the wishes of men in England with the necessities of the situation in Tibet, could only be made by a human being arrived at perfection. Not yet having arrived there, I doubtless made many errors. I can only assume that, if I had never made a mistake, I should never have made a success.