

large presents to the monasteries. They asked me, therefore, not to be so suspicious.

I said it was difficult not to be suspicious when they persistently kept us at such a distance. I then addressed them in regard to religion, and asked them if they had ever heard that we interfered with the religions of the people of India. They admitted that we did not interfere, but they maintained, nevertheless, that it was to preserve their religion that they adhered to their determination to keep us out.

As the Buddhist religion nowhere preaches this seclusion, it was evident that what the monks wished to preserve was not their religion, but their priestly influence. This was the crux of the whole situation. And it entirely bore out what Mr. Nolan, the Commissioner of Darjiling, had observed many years before*—that it was “the breaking of the beggars’ bowl” that was in question, the loss of these presents from Mongolians and others.

So far the conversation, in spite of occasional bursts from the monks, had been maintained with perfect good-humour; but when I made a sign of moving, and said that I must be returning to Tuna, the monks, looking as black as devils, shouted out: “No, you won’t; you’ll stop here.” One of the Generals said, quite politely, that we had broken the rule of the road in coming into their country, and we were nothing but thieves and brigands in occupying Phari Fort. The monks, using forms of speech which Captain O’Connor told me were only used in addressing inferiors, loudly clamoured for us to name a date when we would retire from Tuna before they would let me leave the room. The atmosphere became electric. The faces of all were set. One of the Generals left the room; trumpets outside were sounded, and attendants closed round behind us.

A real crisis was on us, when any false step might be fatal. I told Captain O’Connor, though there was really no necessity to give such a warning to anyone so imperturbable, to keep his voice studiously calm, and to

* See p. 63.