

The monastery buildings are enclosed on three sides by low galleries, in which large praying mills, or rather cylinders full of written prayers, were placed close to each other. These buildings were at least a mile and a half long. Innumerable pilgrims, mostly tottering, wasted old men and women, walk from one end of these galleries to the other, setting all these heavy cylindrical mills in motion. From time to time this mechanical offering of prayers is interrupted, the old people kneel and throw themselves full length with outstretched arms and with their faces in the dust. Here and there an old lama would go through the same gymnastic exercises, but he wore a leather glove on his right hand as a protection. Every morning the road from the monastery to the river is full of people, buying and selling all the necessaries of life, from food to images and other objects belonging to their cult. The goods are brought by Tanguts on the backs of yak-oxen. The latter are tethered in groups of several dozen on the bank of the river. The crowd is very mixed. The women wear their numerous small plaits and bright ornaments that almost trail along the ground. Some are rather beautiful with large, white shells or cup-like ornaments of chased silver. The young men, in particular, looked picturesque, draped theatrically in their furs, with a broad, red hem, one sleeve trailing in the dust. Their caps were pushed back over one ear, on their chests they displayed fine cases of chased silver with corals and coloured stones, containing prayers and various medicines, in their ears a ring of silver with corals, in their sashes large swords often of Damascus steel and on their feet red and green boots with upturned toes. The crowd was far from passive. No sooner did we leave a group behind us than we heard hissing, whistling, loud laughter and clapping of hands, and suddenly a stone, surreptitiously thrown from behind, would whistle past our ears. If we wanted to buy anything, we were surrounded at once by Tanguts who did their best to make the seller refuse to strike a bargain, and in the best of cases we had to pay exorbitant prices for the little we were able to buy.

The first temple we visited was Tunkö sy with an enormous gilt image of Buddha in bronze or clay in a sitting posture, the height of two storeys. In front of it stood a row of silver ornaments of beautiful chased work and further on cups with fans of peacock's feathers stuck into some of them, a large dish with a wick burning in butter, other lumps of butter, artistically shaped and coloured, etc. Two rows of wooden columns support the roof, the one nearest the altar being decorated with monstrous, heraldic bronze lions, half the bodies of which projected from the foot of the columns. Huge seated bronze figures representing Sangdi, were placed at some distance on either side of Tunkö. On the left, immediately behind the other row of columns, close to Tunkö's foot, there was a Suburgan tower, a couple of fathoms high, parts of which at any rate were of chased silver. The ashes of the reincarnate Buddhas are said to be laid here, when they die. Long and narrow, coloured, silk ribbons and other draperies in beautiful, dark colours were fastened to the columns. Similar ribbons suspended from the ceiling in the form of tubes give the illusion of more massive columns, set in motion by the slightest puff of wind. Three walls of the temple, but not the wall on either side of the door, were decorated with smaller images placed in niches that extended from the floor to the ceiling. I was told there were 1,000 of them and in any case there were a great many. The doors had massive gilt copper fit-