Gyamdruk, The Do Khyi

"Tomu from Tibet and other dog stories"

His name was `Gyamdruk` and he was a splendid specimen of a Do Khyi. His colour was black and tan, and above the eyes were two tan spots, which in Tibet are known as the eyes that never sleep. His coat was as soft as thick velvet and he had an outsize in legs. His head was large and noble and closely resembled that of a Newfoundland.

I write in the past sense for he died some time ago at Edinburgh, but the adventures he went through before he reached England would appear to be worth recording.

Some years ago my wife and I went on a trip to Leh, the capital of Ladakh or Lesser Tibet, seventeen marches from Srinagar, Kashmir. We were already interested in Tibetan Mastiffs as at that time we owned one which was in England and we hoped to be able to procure another of these dogs when we arrived at Ladakh. I shall forbear from giving a description of our march to Leh, as this route has often been described by writers better able to wield a pen. Suffice it to say that Ladakh is a land where rain is an unusual event, the sun shines for a great part of the year, and it is not too hot in summer; where the people are almost invariably cheerful and posses a sense of humour, and both the men and the woman are simple and attractive to look upon; where laughing and joking is a habit, and quarrels seldom occur; where there is hardly any illness and the scenery is magnificent. It sounds too good to be true, does n´t it? But if you ever get the opportunity, I should advise you to go there and see for yourself. On arrival at Leh we were disappointed to find that, although dogs of all kinds and shapes abounded, no true Do Khyi was to be seen. There were many dogs which go by the general term of `Tibetan Bhotia`- big, savage brutes which have undoubtedly a large strain of the Do Khyi in them. These animals are mostly owned by the Tibetan nomads who wander with their flocks and herds for a great part of the year over an immense, desolate region known as Chon Ton.

However, two days before we were due to start on our return journey, I was taken to the house of a rich Tibetan trader. In the course of our conversation I asked him if there was any chance of obtaining a real Do Khyi. `I have a good dog in my back yard, `he informed me, `but he is not for sale.` The trader took me outside, and there, tied by a long rope to a ring in the wall, lay a large black-and-tan dog, which, on our approach, sprang to his feet and started barking, the note of the bark being deep and muffled. He was little more than a scarecrow, emaciated in body and with a staring coat, but he was handsome and in one glance I recognized him to be of the true breed, and I was determined to posses him, if possible. He wore a red ruff round his neck like that of a Punch-and-Judy-show dog, and I was informed that all valuable dogs in Tibet wore these ruffs as a protection for the throat in the event of a fight. He was in such poor shape that it looked as if his legs were scarcely strong enough to support his body.

`No, I` m afraid I could n`t consider parting with him`, the Tibetan replied to my request. “That dog came from the village of Pempo, two marches north of Lhasa, and he was over three months on the journey here. Besides, he cost me a lot of money.”

On further inquiry, I discovered that the dog had been tied to that wall ever since he had arrived from Lhasa. For two years the poor chap had been lying there exposed to the biting wind and cold of the Ladakh winter and the heat and glare of the summer. It seemed incredible. Never once had been let off for exercise or to gambol and playas dogs are wont to do.

`But has he no water?` I asked. `Oh, he never has water,` I was informed. `He is given suttu three times a day`. And I was told that suttu was a mixture of flour and water of the consistency of porridge. As he lay there, I looked into his eyes, and in them I read that the joy of life had departed. I saw nothing there but a look of dull, hopeless despair. I pleaded and argued for the possession of him, but all to not purpose. The trader was adamant.

`No. I can´ t sell him. I must consider my name. What would other people think of me if I sold him after all the trouble I have to get him?` So with a sad heart, I returned to our camp in the lovely grounds of the Residency, and related to my wife the meeting with that poor dog.

The upshot of our conversation was that she and I sallied forth next morning on a visit to the trader, determined somehow or other to possess ourselves of the Do Khyi.

He took us out to the back yard, and the dog sprang to his feet; on this occasion not only did he bark, but, at the same time, he wagged his tail furiously, as if he had an intuition that negotiations for his release were being attempted. I glanced across at my wife and saw that look of determination on her face which, with her, usually foretells success. I was almost sorry for the trader, for I knew then that he was to part with his dog. Somehow, I believe that the man felt the same thing, because he surrendered almost immediately. `All right,` he said `you can buy the dog, but I paid a lot of money for him.`

We named a sum probably considerably more than the animal had cost, to which the owner agreed, and the dog was ours.

`he is called "Gyamdruk",` the trader informed us. So the rope was unknotted from the ring in the wall, and gently, and rather fearfully, for we were uncertain as to how he would behave, we led Gyamdruk away. Looking somewhat bewildered, he followed us meekly and without any bother to our camp. Here matters became slightly complicated. We owned two large dogs, which had accompanied us to the journey and we were certain to resent the intrusion of a stranger into the family circle, so we decided that Gyamdruk should live with the servants for the night before our departure.

We prepared a tasty meal of meat and chupatti, and never have I seen a dog enjoy his dinner more. He just sat there afterwards licking his lips and ruminating happily on the strange turn of fortune that had come to him. Later in the day we showed him to the other dogs, but, although he wagged his tail and made a show of friendliness, this was not reciprocated by the pair, who answered him with ominous growls.

Next morning we struck camp and commenced our return journey. We had discussed the arrangements for isolating Gyamdruk from the other dogs during the march. This was necessary, as, owing to his two years` enforced idleness, he was pitifully weak, and the others could easily have killed him. We rode ahead, followed by a servant leading Gyamdruk; them came our baggage

on ponies, and last of all the other two dogs, led by one of the pony men.

There were two difficulties to be overcome, and these caused us some misgiving. Gyamdruk´s muscles were so flabby and weak that we wondered if he could carry out the necessarily long marches. When he walked his poor legs seemed to get in the way of each other. Also, he had never been below 11.000 feet above sea-level, having always lived where the air is dry and thin. It remained to be seen how he would fare on the thicker air down below. Day after day he plodded on. At the outset of each march he behaved like a puppy, but sa the day wore on he became quieter, until he relapsed into a moody silence and just walked. All the same, he stuck it manfully, and each day he appeared to become fatter and in better condition.

All went well until we arrived at Sonamarg, in the Sind Valley. It was our intention to halt there a few days to allow Gyamdruk to become acclimatized, but, on our arrival I was handed a telegram informing me that my battalion had proceeded on field service owing to unrest among the Frontier tribes and instructing me to return immediately. Bad luck, Gyamdruk!

Four marches still remained before we were to reach Srinagar, but, doing forced marches, we arrived there, hot and tired, two days later, and put up for the night at Nedou´s Hotel. Here Gyamdruk saw motor-cars and many other exciting things he had never met before, but the heat was so great and the air so thick that he took little notice of them.

Early next morning, with Gyamdruk in the back seat of our car and our servants following with the other dogs in a second car, we took the road for Abbottabad, in British India. This was such a novel experience for Gyamdruk that we had great difficulty in keeping him quiet. He parted with some of his breakfast at once and got rid of the remainder later, but even this did not subdue him. The consequence was that we arrived at Abbottabad that evening with Gyamdruk in a state of collapse.

He lay on bed and panted, with his poor heart beating at a tremendous rate. My wife forced some whisky down his throat, and this appeared to revive him to some extent. Next morning I departed to join my battalion, leaving Gyamdruk, who was still none too well, in my wife´s care. For three month he remained at Abbottabad, improving in condition every day and filling out in a remarkable way.

It was difficult to recognize him as the same dog we had taken over at Leh in August.

And then began the next stage of his existence, for we had decided to sent him to England, where fresh blood was badly needed to carry on the breed there. We arranged his passage in a P. and O. cargo ship, S.S. Bangalore, commanded by Captain Collings, whom we shall always remember with gratitude. The dog travelled to Bombay with a servant, and was met and taken to the Zoo. Here he remained for three days, until the vessel was ready to receive him.

I heard from Captain Collings to say that all care would be taken of Gyamdruk and that, since he would feel the heat, he was being kept in the coolest part on the ship. Letters came from Aden and Port Said informing me that the dog was standing the voyage well and he had endeared himself to all. The great journey was practically over.

He arrived in England safely and was accommodated in the Hackbridge Kennels for the quarantine period. As we were still in India, we sent him on his release from Hackbridge, to Whipsnade, where he was treated as a pet and was well looked after by Mrs. Bates, the head keeper, who also owned one of these dogs. I understand that he came in for much administration there from the many visitors to the Zoo who peered at him through the bars of his run, and that, to judge by the wagging of his tail, he appeared to appreciate the notice taken of him. While at Whipsnade he was mated once to a Do Khyi bitch, and I think I am correct in saying that all the Do Khyi now in England, about thirty of them, are either his children, grandchildren or Great-grandchildren.

He was sent later to Edinburgh but to our great grief he died there following an operation on an abscess. He was a most docile, affectionate and lovable creature who never wanted to pick a quarrel with any other dog or man, which entirely belied the reputation for savagery with which some of these dogs appear to have been labelled.

The Do Khyi resembles the Newfoundland in built and shape, but is slightly smaller and a great deal more active. He carries a very heavy coat, and is either black and tan or red in colour. He has a thick, bushy tail which he carries curled over his back and tremendous bone. Some of them have the peculiarity of a well-formed double clew claw on the hind leg which many possibly have been a provision of nature in past ages to help them over ice and snow. It is a very ancient breed, and it would appear possible, almost probable, that all the big, heavy dogs of today, such as the Newfoundland, St. Bernard, etc., originated from the Do Khyi.

The Tibetans, who own true-bred Do Khyi, do not easily part with them, so that unless one penetrates into Tibet, a matter of great difficulty, it is almost impossible to obtain true specimens of the breed in the East. It is a curious fact that the Tibetans, on the whole, are a peaceful, kind people, and great dog lovers. They do not appear to consider that the more or less permanent chaining of their watchdogs to walls is cruel. Most large houses and the monasteries there have one or two Do Khyi chained up near the entrance, and never let loose. When a stranger approaches, they bark savagely and strain with all their might at their chains in an effort to get at what they must think is an intruder. It is, as I say, a curious fact as the Tibetans are not a cruel people. They would appear to look on a chained dog as a piece of household furniture and do not think on the cruel side of it. They do not seem to realize that the dog, if well trained, could do its work just as well, possibly better, unchained.

As it is, the Do Khyi, perpetually tied up from puppyhood, have been intentionally trained to be savage. In fact, the value of the dog there might be said to count from the degree of ist is ferocity.

The Do Khyi is not an inherently savage dog, as will, I think, be borne out by owners of Do Khyi in this country. I believe I am correct in stating that all, or nearly all, The Do Khyis either brought to this country or bred here, have been entirely reliable, most affectionate, and with a charming mentality. Besides which, they possess both great beauty and intelligence.

There are only a few of these dogs in England now and they are becoming rather inbred, so it is hoped that some arrangement can be made to bring from Tibet another Do Khyi to help to stabilize this noble and ancient breed over there.

Comment: In the year 1875 the first Do Khyi is imported from Tibet to England, Europe. About the year 1928 exists a breedin program with Mrs. Irma Bailey in the Zoo of Whipsnade wich is lead over by Mr. Phillip Bates at ca. 1932. Gyamdruk was one of the first dogs of them. After 1945 there is lost the trace of the Whipsnade Do Khyi. It is a great pity that this genealogical tree die out, it was the first and only in western world, from original Tibetan Do Khyi foundet breeding stock. The first litter in Europe and western world was born in 12. February 1898 with Mr. Heck at the Zoo in Berlin, even this stock ist lost and die out in the desolate times before the First World War.

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