

THE ALEXANDER SCOTT COLLECTION

IN the last number of the JOURNAL, announcement was made of the purchase of the Alexander Scott Collection of art objects from Tibet and Nepal. The collection as a whole sustains a high level of artistic merit and out of the three hundred and twenty-five objects comprising it, there are about fifty of quite exceptional interest.

Genuine examples of good Tibetan workmanship are rarely seen in western museums, and the utensils and other articles which find their way into public or private collections and which in that closed country have served in connection with religious rites, are usually brought surreptitiously across the Indian border and sold in the bazaars, or otherwise disposed of for money. Mr. Scott enjoyed unusual opportunities for acquiring such objects during the twenty-six years of his residence in Darjeeling. He moved freely among the people of all classes and even counted among his intimate acquaintances some of the Tibetan lamas whose taste in matters of Buddhist art was formed under the best conditions and whose knowledge of Tibetan history and tradition was reliable. Mr. Scott was a sympathetic student of the religious art of the Orient, and being himself an artist, approached the subject in the right direction. The objects in the Scott collection were chosen with reference to their artistic merit and to their bearing upon the religious traditions which are embodied in them. They will form a basis upon which a collection illustrating the culture of Tibet may be assembled as one of the features of the University Museum.

The collection consists almost entirely of metalwork. There are, however, at least four objects of a different class. One of these is the lama's apron, covered with carved bone tablets and beads; another is a drinking cup carved from a rhinoceros horn; the third is a crystal Buddha and the fourth and most remarkable is the ivory tablet illustrating the life of Buddha.

The fact that Tibet is a country closed to Europeans leaves us in ignorance about its archæology and in doubt as to how far a really native art was developed. However this may be, it is clear that most of the metalwork as well as the carvings was either made in India or derived its inspiration from Indian sources. Chinese influence, while not so strong as that of India, was also influential in shaping the artistic tradition of Tibet.

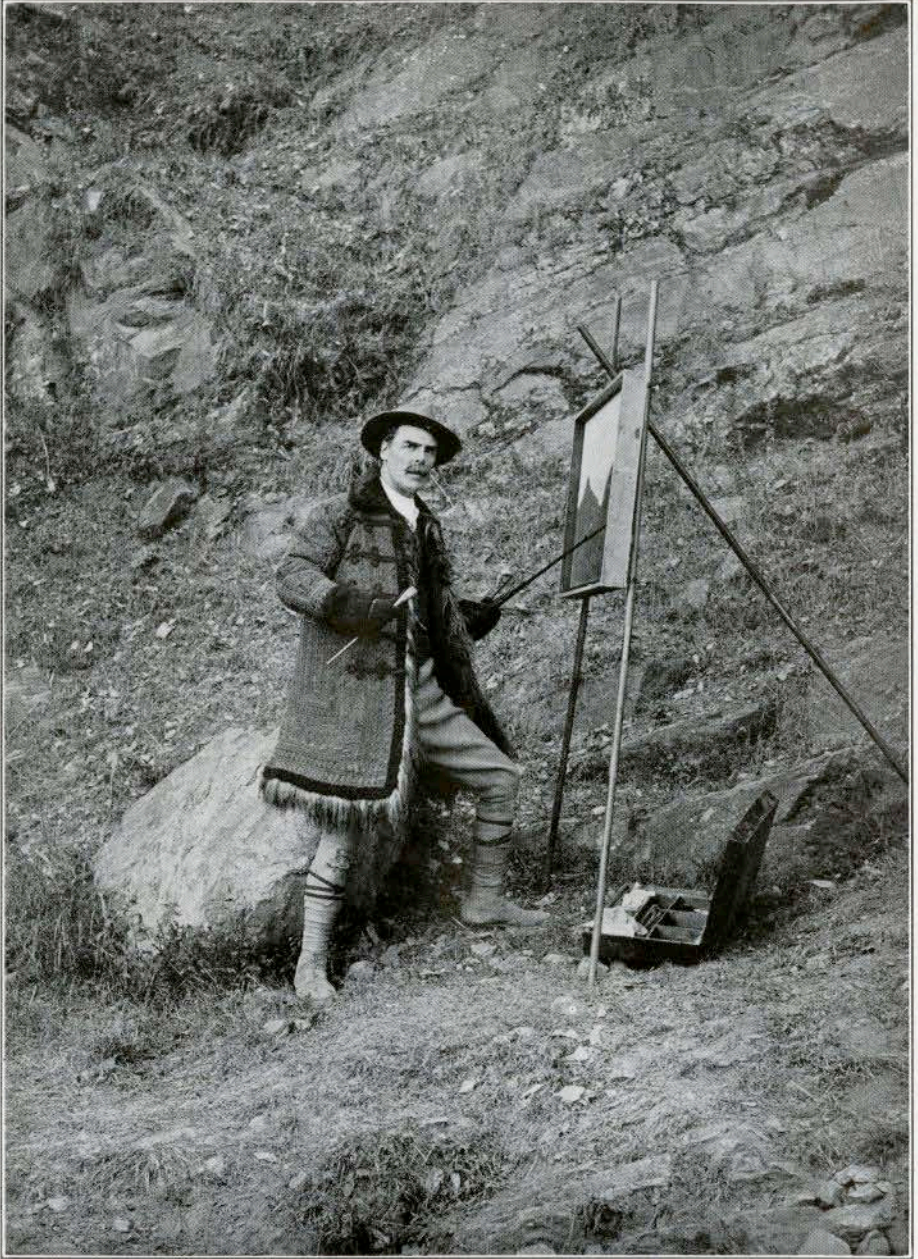


FIG. 27.—Alexander Scott, Esquire, at work in the Himalaya Mountains.

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Among Mr. Scott's acquaintance at Darjeeling was a Tibetan, Dousand Up, himself a lama and a man well versed in the history and traditions of his country. Accompanying the Scott collection is a package of notes, written by Dousand Up in English and in his own hand, describing various objects in the collection. These notes contain much information not usually accessible. A few of these will be given in the following pages in connection with the illustrations and without altering the style of their author. A letter from Mr. Scott referring to the author of these notes is of so much interest that I give it in full.

G. B. G.

PHILADELPHIA, April 20, 1914.

DEAR DR. GORDON:—

In response to your kind invitation to share the task with you of cataloguing and explaining my collection of statuettes, altar vessels and various objects from Tibet, I enclose a number of detailed and carefully considered explanations written for me by Lama Dousand Up of Darjeeling. He is a Tibetan and was educated for monastic life, but his ability in speaking and writing English brought him under the notice of the British authorities and he was given the position of Government Interpreter to the Law Courts of Darjeeling. His notes will show what a friendly interest he took in this collection. It was my practice on acquiring a new specimen to send it to him for description from the Buddhistic point of view. This he always did with enthusiasm for the reason, as he expressed it, of opening the eyes of the Christian to the beauties of his faith. Whilst of course his mind was centered on the religious significance of these objects, mine was more directed to their artistic interest and the history of the art which produced them. I therefore enclose two papers which I have written inviting attention to Buddhistic art as it appeals to me and to the wonderful ivory carving of the episodes in the life of Gautama-Sakya-Muni, together with some other objects of interest not included by Dousand Up in his catalogue. Trusting these may be of use for your MUSEUM JOURNAL,

Believe me

Yours very sincerely,

ALEX. SCOTT.