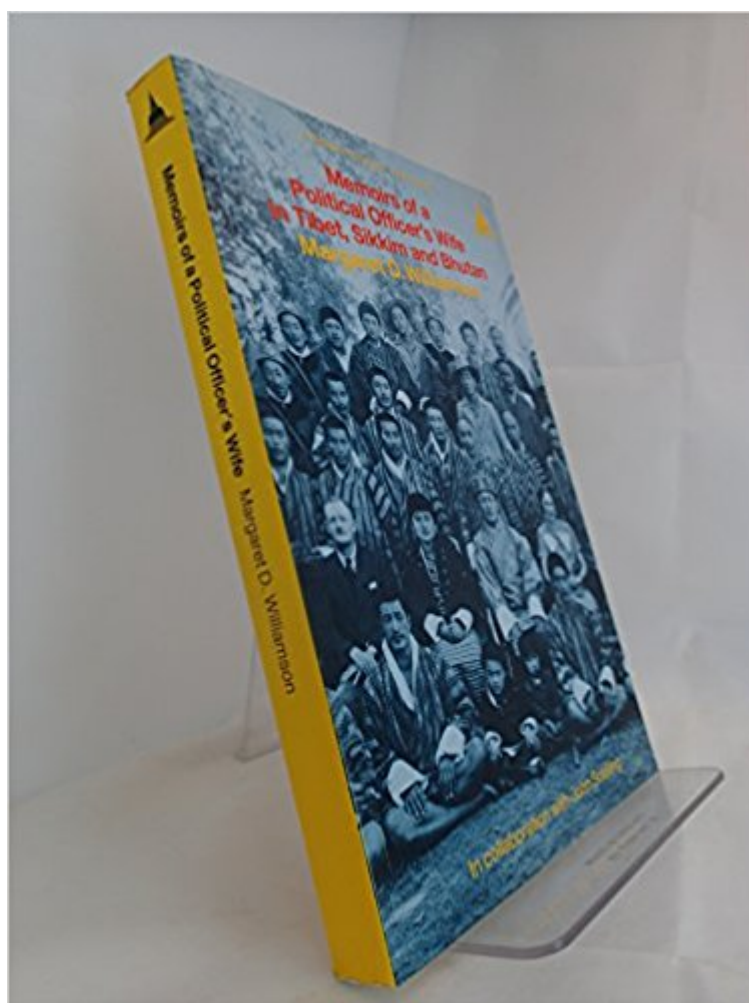


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Memoirs Of A Political Officer's Wife: In Tibet, Sikkim And Bhutan (Chronicles Of An Age Of Darkness)



Synopsis

Memoirs portraying life in Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan in the 1930s.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Under what circumstances should a bride on honeymoon learn to shoot a rifle? The answer? If she was marrying a Political Officer in 1933. In her book "Memoirs of a Political Officer's Wife in Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan" Margaret Williamson describes her two years spent travelling with her husband who was working on behalf of the British Government in this remote part of the world. To say she describes a world that is lost to us is an understatement. She describes Tibet when it was ruled over by the previous Dalai Lama who died in 1935. Long before the Chinese invaded. She talks of Sikkim a tiny state that was invaded by India as recently as the 1970s. It is only in Bhutan where life is still recognisable from the descriptions in this book. Her description of a long lost life style in this mostly barren part of the world together with her observations of colours, fabrics and the minutiae of life provides a colourful view of life at a political level in these countries. Her marriage lasted two short years, her husband was buried in Tibet where his grave was eventually washed away by floods. She remains convinced to the end that "if I were to be offered the chance of living that all too brief period over again, I would do so without a moment's hesitation - even if I knew at the same time what the final outcome would be" A fascinating view of life in the Himalayas in the 1930s where women travellers were the exception. And a way of life that is apart from anything we shall ever experience.

I'm researching a trip to Bhutan this fall, and have found that memoirs like this are few and far between. This book describes a world that is far gone--especially Tibet, where all vestiges of the Buddhist culture have been stamped out by the Chinese, except for a few carefully preserved sites for tourists. The book is fascinating for its picture of a culture that was totally accessible to a rather low level British foreign service officer--the Dalai Lama, the Bhutanese Royal Family welcome these well-meaning British into their midst with great ceremony and real friendship. The book itself suffers from a lack of immediacy, which I attribute to the fact that it was written many years later and undoubtedly based almost solely on diaries. I wish there were descriptions of the journeys themselves--the author speaks of crossing 17,000 foot passes as if they were a walk in the park---didn't the pack animals stumble, wasn't she ever out of breath? I would love to have read a description of a small village casually passed--were the children healthy? the people hostile or curious? Having said that, the book presents an interesting picture of a relatively benevolent British Empire reaching out to an independent Tibet--and Bhutan--untouched by the West.

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