eyes and shackle all the feet with iron fetlocks. Then, when they hear the crackling of the canes, however hard they try to bolt, they cannot do it. And by this means travellers keep safe at nights; both they and their beasts, from the lions and ouzons and other dangerous beasts that abound in these parts.

This desolate country, infested by dangerous wild beasts, extends for twenty days' journey, without shelter or food except perhaps every third or fourth day, when the traveller may find some habitation where he can renew his stock of provisions. Then he reaches a region with villages and hamlets in plenty and a few towns perched on precipitous crags. Here there prevails a marriage custom of which I will tell you. It is such that no man would ever on any account take a virgin to wife. For they say that a woman is worthless unless she has had knowledge of many men. They argue that she must have displeased the gods, because if she enjoyed the favour of their idols then men would desire her and consort with her. So they deal with their womenfolk in this way. When it happens that men from a foreign land are passing through this country and have pitched their tents and made a camp, the matrons from neighbouring villages and hamlets bring their daughters to these camps, to the number of twenty or forty, and beg the travellers to take them and lie with them. So these choose the girls who please them best, and the others return home disconsolate. So long as they remain, the visitors are free to take their pleasure with the women and use them as they will, but they are not allowed to carry them off anywhere else. When the men have worked their will and are ready to go forth, then it is the custom for every man to give to the woman with whom he has lain some trinket or token so that she can show, when she comes to marry, that she has had a lover. In this way custom requires every girl to wear more than a score of such tokens hung round her neck to show that she has had lovers in plenty and plenty of men have lain with her. And she who has most tokens and can show that she has had most lovers and that most men have lain with her is the most highly esteemed and the most acceptable as a wife; for they say that she is the most favoured by the gods.

And when they have taken a wife in this way they prize her highly; and they account it a grave offence for any man to touch another's wife, and they all strictly abstain from such an act. So much, then, for this marriage custom, which fully merits a description. Obviously the country is a fine one to visit for a lad from sixteen to twenty-four.

The natives are idolaters and out-and-out bad. They deem it no sin to rob and maltreat and are the greatest rogues and the greatest robbers in the world. They live by the chase and by their herds and the fruits of the earth. The country abounds with animals that produce musk, which in their language are called gudder. They are so plentiful that you can smell musk everywhere. I have already explained that a sac in the form of a tumour and filled with blood grows next to the beast's navel, and this blood is musk. But I must add that once in every moon the sac becomes overcharged with blood and discharges its contents. So it happens, since these animals are very plentiful here, that they discharge their musk in many places, so that the whole country is pervaded with the scent. The rascally natives have many excellent dogs, who catch great numbers of these animals; so they have no lack of musk.

The natives have no coinage and do not use the Khan's paper currency; but for money they use salt. They are very poorly clad, in skins, canvas, and buckram. They speak a language of their own and call themselves 'Tibet'.

This province of Tibet is of immense size and lies on the confines of Manzi and many other provinces. The natives are idolaters and notorious brigands. The province is so huge that it contains eight kingdoms and a great many cities and towns. In many places there are rivers and lakes and mountains, in which gold and musk dust is found in great quantity. There is also a great abundance of cinnamon. In this province coral fetches a high price, for it is hung round the necks of women and of idols with great joy. The province produces plenty of camlets and other cloths of gold, silk, and twist, and many sorts of spice that were never seen in our country. Here are to be found the most skilful enchanter and

*Or, more probably, 'in the form of great beads' (zoje), the reading of Z, which also mentions amber.